

YORK



ARCHAEOLOGICAL
TRUST

**EAST END DRAIN REPAIRS,
RIPON CATHEDRAL,
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**REPORT ON AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF**



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CONTENTS

	ABSTRACT	
1.	INTRODUCTION	
2.	METHODOLOGY	
3.	RESULTS	
4.	CONCLUSIONS	
5.	REFERENCE	
6.	LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS	

List of Figures

Figure 1.	Site and trench location	3
Figure 2.	West facing section	4
Figure 3.	South facing section	4
Figure 4.	East facing section	4

ABSTRACT

On December 10th - 11th 2001 York Archaeological Trust maintained a watching brief at Ripon Cathedral, North Yorkshire. The works observed comprised the excavation of a new sewage pipe trench 0.56m wide, up to 1.36m deep and c. 6.20m in length adjacent to the south-eastern corner of the cathedral. The purpose of the watching brief was to record any features of archaeological interest, and to ensure the collection of any human bones disturbed by the excavation works, for reburial on site. One side of a probable brick burial vault and a cemetery soil containing a single articulated skeleton were the only archaeological features of interest.

1. INTRODUCTION

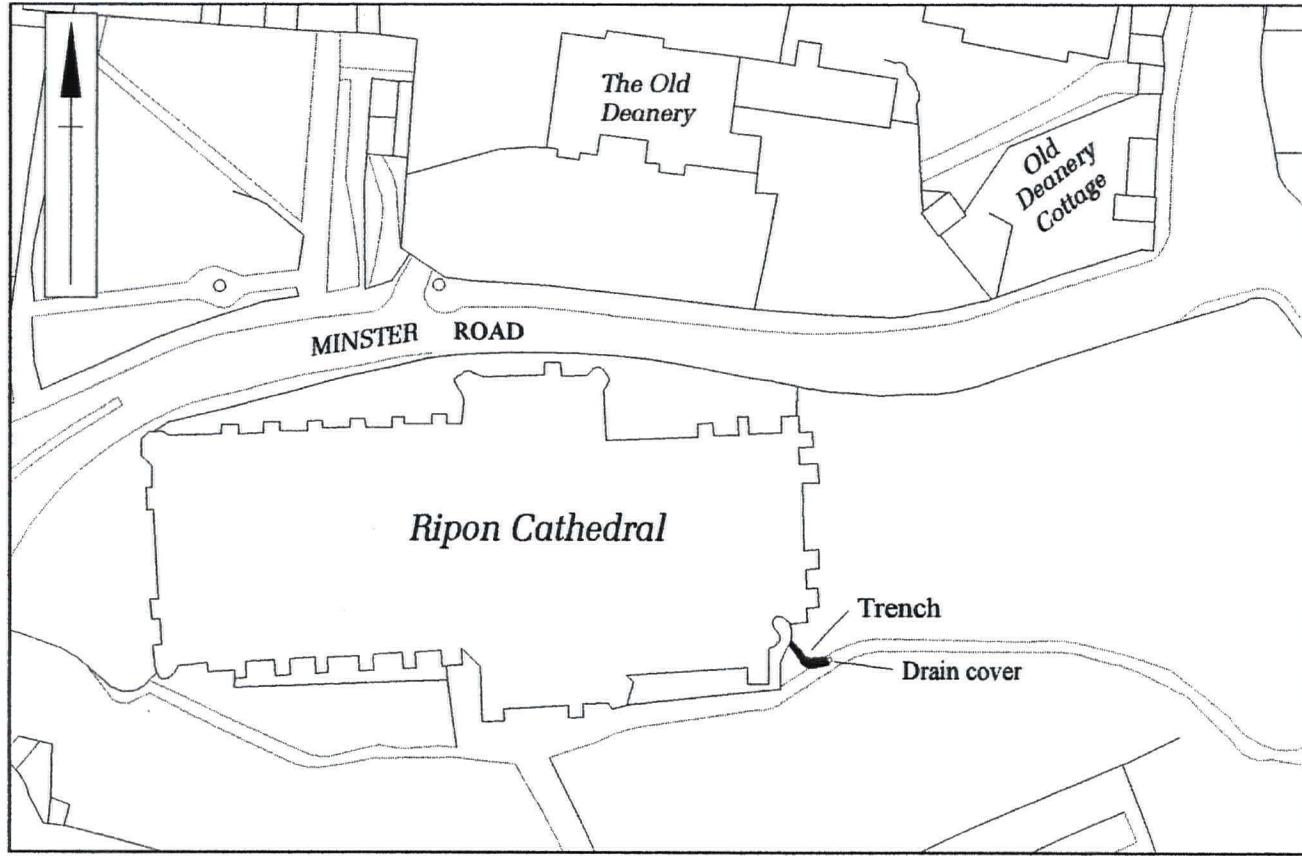
On the 10th and 11th of December 2001 York Archaeological Trust maintained a watching brief at Ripon Cathedral, North Yorkshire, (NGR: SE 314 711). The drain from the cathedral toilets had become totally blocked directly beneath the tomb of a former bishop of Ripon (Thomas Wortley Drury who died in 1926). Rather than disturb the bishop's remains it was planned to excavate a pipe trench around the western and southern sides of the bishop's tomb. The trench was roughly L shaped, and terminated at a brick lined manhole just to the south of the tomb.

2. METHODOLOGY

The watching brief consisted of observing the excavation of a trench 0.56m wide, up to 1.36m deep and c. 6.20m long close to the east end and chapter house of Ripon Cathedral (Figure 1). All human remains disturbed by the works were carefully collected and stored prior to reburial within the northern end of the trench. No finds were retained. The works were requested by the Dean and Chapter of the cathedral, through their archaeological consultant Dr Richard Hall, and were carried out in accordance with scheduled monument legislation. The excavation works were undertaken by Mr. P. Harriott.

All site notes and plans were transferred into electronic format and are currently stored by York Archaeological Trust under the project code 0899 prior to deposition with Harrogate Museum under their accession code HARGM:11049.

The solid geology of the area is Lower Magnesian Limestone (British Geological Survey Ten-Mile Map, Sheet No. 2 1957) laid down in the Permian period. This is overlain by glacial sands, gravels and clays laid down by retreating glaciers or ice sheets. Rescue excavations in the crypt of the cathedral in 1974 revealed the natural deposits to be sands and sandy gravels (Hall 1977, 61).



0  50 metres

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Figure 1 Site and trench location

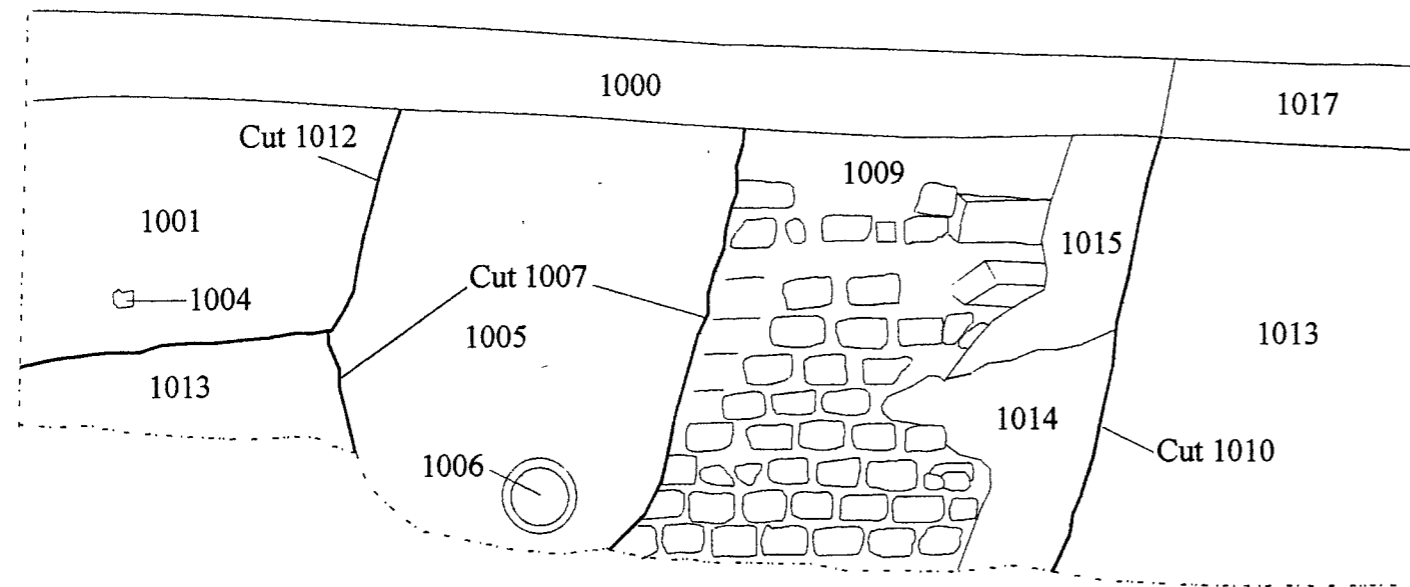


Figure 2 West facing section

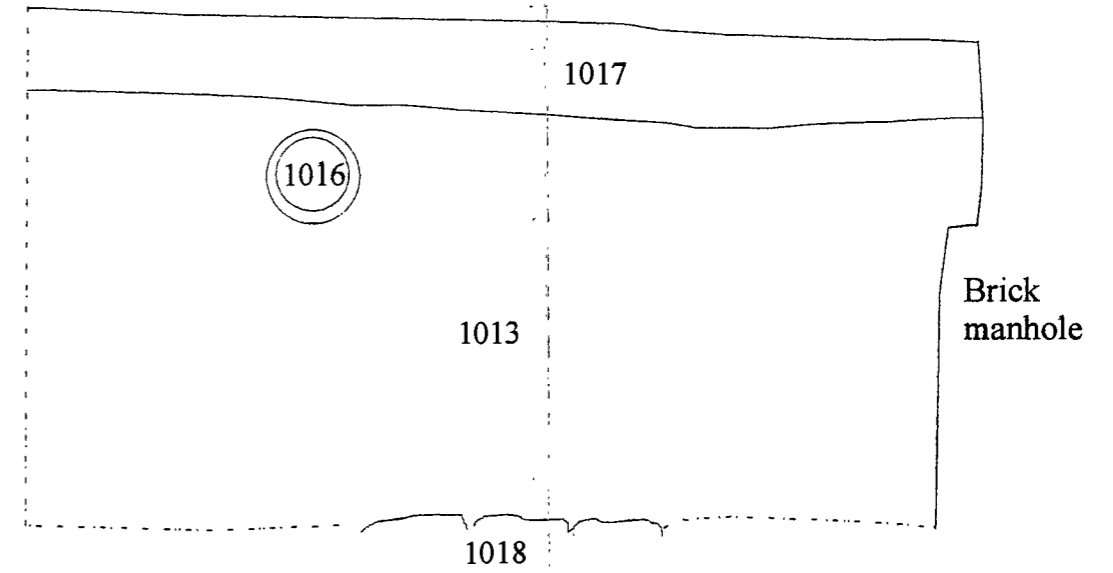


Figure 3 South facing section

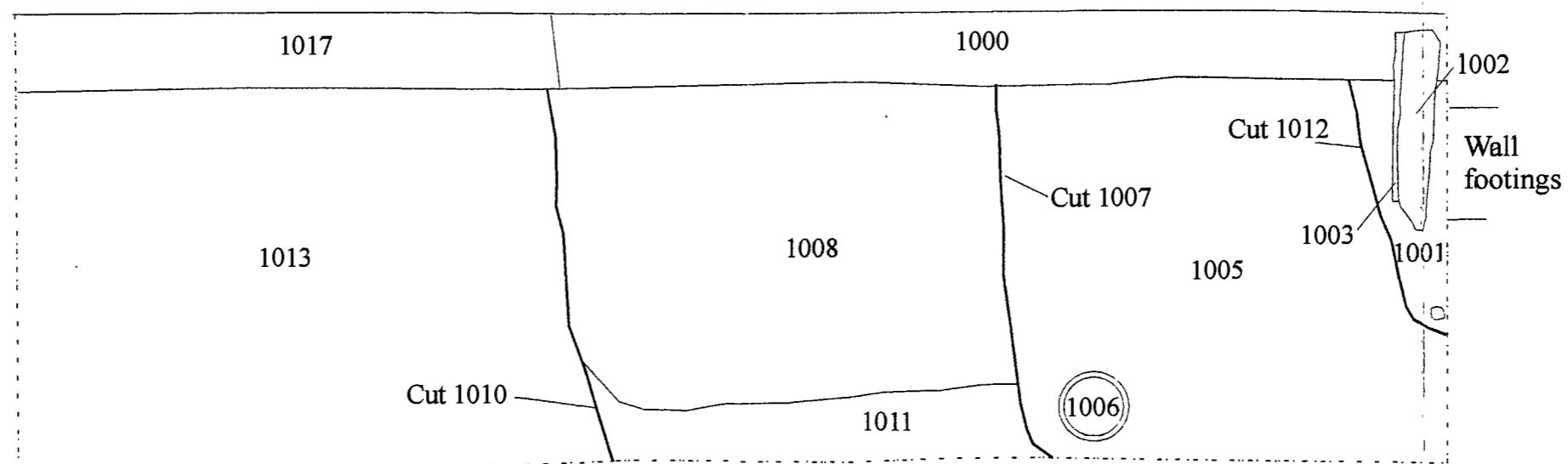


Figure 4 East facing section



3. RESULTS (Figures 2, 3 and 4)

The earliest archaeological deposit seen was present in the base of the east-west aligned portion of the trench, and consisted of large rounded cobbles set in pink clay with frequent gravel (context 1018). This was not excavated and is thus difficult to interpret. It could represent a structure of some kind, such as a wall foundation, or could be the upper surface of natural clay in the area. The latter seems the more likely explanation. If this is undisturbed natural soil, it gives an indication of the depth at which the earliest church here might be found.

Sealing context 1018 was a layer of mid brown silty-clay with occasional pebbles and moderate re-deposited human bones (Context 1013). This deposit represents a cemetery soil that has been constantly re-cut. Within context 1013 there was an extended adult inhumation, laid supine, with the arms fully extended. The upper portion of the body was disturbed by the machining, but the pelvis/legs were recovered by hand excavation. The burial was at c 0.60m below ground level.

The cemetery soil (1013) was truncated by a construction cut (context 1010). The shape of the cut in plan was impossible to determine within the confines of the trench; its northern side had been truncated by a later cut, and it continued below the maximum depth of excavation, so the profile of the base is also unknown. Its southern side was almost vertical. Within the cut was a brick structure (context 1009) with a curved side which was only partially visible in the western facing section of the trench. Eleven courses of brickwork were visible, but the brickwork continued below the maximum depth of excavation. The bricks were laid as coursed headers bonded with white, lime-based mortar. The bricks were 0.11m wide and 0.17m high, but the length of the bricks could not be measured. The exact function of the structure is unknown, but it probably represents a burial vault. It was impossible to determine if this was associated with the nearby grave of Bishop Drury or was of earlier date. Following its construction, the construction cut 1010 was backfilled with a number of deposits. In the eastern facing section the earliest backfill visible was re-deposited natural soil consisting of pink-light brown sandy clay with frequent gravel and occasional human bone fragments which were clearly charnel (context 1011). This was sealed by context 1008, which was dark brown silty-clay with frequent pebbles and moderately frequent re-deposited human remains scattered randomly throughout the context. In the western facing section the earliest backfill was re-deposited natural consisting of dark red clay with frequent gravel and occasional re-deposited human bones (Context 1014). This was sealed by a deposit of yellow mortar and large sandstone blocks on average 0.27 x 0.20 x 0.17m in size (context 1015). Three of the blocks were worked architectural fragments. One was a small fragment from an ashlar block, one was a chamfered block 0.40m x 0.29m x 0.35m in size, and the third was from a jamb with a rebate and chamfer which was 0.29m x 0.29m x 0.25m in size. None of these blocks were retained.

Truncating the above feature was a linear cut 0.90m wide and 1.15m deep, with vertical sides and a flat base, which ran diagonally across the base of the trench (context 1007). Within the cut was a ceramic waste-pipe 0.12m in diameter (context 1006). This was the waste-pipe from the cathedral toilets, which had become blocked. Sealing the pipe was a backfill of dark brown silty clay with frequent pebbles and mortar, and moderate brick fragments (context 1005). This context contained abundant charnel remains, predominantly long bone fragments, all of which were badly broken and crushed. The charnel occurred mainly between 0.70 and 0.90m below the present ground level, but fragments of human bone were found randomly throughout the entire deposit.

Context 1005 was truncated to the north by a linear cut 0.80m deep and 0.90m wide with a vertical southern side and flat base (context 1012). This cut contained a copper pipe, context 1004, (relating to the water meter of the cathedral) and a backfill dark brown moist silty-clay with occasional pebbles and occasional human bone fragments (context 1001).

Above context 1001 was a vertical wooden post and associated copper pipe (context 1003 and 1002 respectively), both sawn off at ground level. These were the remains of a stand-pipe which was removed relatively recently (cathedral grounds-man pers. com.).

A modern ceramic pipe (context 1016) was observed 0.30m below ground level to the immediate south of Bishop Drury's grave. It was unclear what this pipe was draining.

The most recent deposits observed were turf and topsoil consisting of dark brown clayey silt (context 1000), which occurred to the west of Bishop Drury's grave, and concrete up to 0.20m thick with gravel above (context 1017) which occurred to the south of the grave and formed the present footpath surface.

4. CONCLUSIONS

A single feature of archaeological significance was discovered during the works. This was a brick built probable burial vault of unknown age. All of the modern features contained abundant re-deposited human remains. A total of eight bags, 0.30 x 0.33m in size, was filled with human bones from contexts 1001, 1005, 1008, 1011, and 1014. No grave cuts were visible within the cemetery soil (1013), implying that it had been constantly re-worked. A single articulated burial was found within this context, in addition to a further two bags, 0.30 x 0.33m in size, of re-deposited human remains which were recovered. All of the human remains were re-buried at the north end of the new drain trench.

If context 1018 is the upper surface of natural clay, it indicates that any remains of Wilfridian date lay only 1.20m below the surface here; and that subsequent activity seems to have been heavily disturbed by more recent burials.

5. REFERENCE

Hall, R.A. 1977, Rescue Excavations in the Crypt of Ripon Cathedral, *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, Volume 49, 59-63

6. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

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