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**ALL SAINTS CHURCH, MAIN STREET,
AUGHTON, EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE**

WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

by I.D. Milsted

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CONTENTS

	Page
SUMMARY	1
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. METHODOLOGY	1
3. LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY	1
4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	2
5. RESULTS.....	3
6. LIST OF SOURCES.....	6
7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	6
8. BIBLIOGRAPHY	6
APPENDIX 1: SITE PLANS	7

Figures

1. Site location.....	7
2. Site plan	7
3. Eastern area detailed plan	8

Plates

Cover: View of All Saints' Church, looking south-east

1. Eastern area, looking north.....	8
2. Wall 1004 in plan.....	9
3. Wall 1004 looking west	9
4. Wall 1005 in plan.....	10
5. Wall 1005 looking south-east.....	10
6. Wall 1007 in plan.....	11
7. Wall 1007 looking ENE	11
8. Disturbed material from wall 1004	12

9.	Northern wall of current chancel with remains of arch	12
10.	Wall line of 1005.....	13
11.	Wall line of 1007.....	13
12.	Wall 1009 in plan.....	14
13.	West facing elevation of north aisle west wall	14
14.	Removed plinth stone from aisle wall foundation	15
15.	Elevation of foundation after removal of plinth stone	15
16.	Foul water drain trench looking WNW	16
17.	Soak-away trench looking WNW	16
18.	Soak-away trench looking ESE.....	17
19.	NNE facing section of soak-away trench	17

Abbreviations

YAT York Archaeological Trust

AOD Above Ordnance Datum

SUMMARY

Excavations for service trenches at All Saints' Church, Aughton revealed the wall-lines of the former chancel and a possible earlier north aisle. No in-situ or disarticulated human bone was observed.

1. INTRODUCTION

A watching brief was observed during ground works at All Saints' Church, Aughton between 6th and 8th June 2012. These ground works comprised the machine excavation of a water service trench, a foul water drain and a soak-away in the graveyard, all connecting with a newly installed WC in the north aisle of the church.

2. METHODOLOGY

The water service trench and foul water drain were 0.50m wide, and were mechanically excavated under archaeological supervision with a toothless ditching bucket to a depth of 0.60m BGL. The water service trench ran west from the eastern wall of the church yard, turning north-west to pass to the north of the north aisle, and entered the church through the western wall of the north aisle (Figure 2, Plate 1). The foul water drain ran west from the aisle wall into the soak-way, located in the north-western part of the church yard. The soak-away measured 13.5m x 0.75m and was mechanically excavated with a toothless bucket to a depth of 0.60m BGL. All features and deposits were recorded using standard YAT recording procedures.

The drain and water trench were connected to the WC by piercing the foundation of the north aisle west wall below ground level. Once exposed, the elevation of the foundation and wall was recorded prior to the removal of a single block of limestone to admit the necessary ducting.

3. LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

All Saints' Church is located at SE 7012 3860, at the extreme western end of Aughton, a small village on the eastern side of the Derwent valley some 10.5km north-east of Selby (Figure 1). The church is accessed via a gate and grassed track.

The churchyard is positioned on drift deposits of clayey gravelly sands of the Skipwith Sand group, and on solid geology of Sherwood sandstone. It is located on slightly higher ground on the margin of the alluvial corridor associated with the River Derwent

(maps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyviewer, accessed 18/07/2012). The church yard slopes downwards markedly on the western side, possibly reflecting this change in the drift geology. The church yard is bounded to the west and south by farmland forming the Derwent Ings, to the north by the wooded earthworks of a motte and bailey castle and to the east by the earthworks of a former manor house.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The sand and gravel drift deposits in the southern Vale of York derive from material laid in the post-glacial period when much of this area lay beneath 'Lake Humber'. As the area gradually drained it became forested and the focus of prehistoric activity from the Mesolithic period onwards (Whyman and Howard, 12-19). The slow change from hunter-gathering to settled agriculture is reflected in the evidence for increasing settlement activity in the area into the Iron Age, including the settlements known from Naburn and cemeteries and settlement known from Skipwith (Whyman and Howard, 24-5), both near to Aughton. Located close to the east bank of the River Derwent, Aughton occupies a position with potential for prehistoric remains to survive.

Aughton is mentioned in Domesday (<http://domesdaymap.co.uk/place/SE7038/aughton/>, accessed 18/07/12) and therefore has a likely pre-conquest origin. The church has extensive Norman fabric, including a well-preserved chancel arch containing beak-head detail. The tower is 16th century, and the north aisle, which is built in brick rather than limestone, may be contemporary or slightly later (Pevsner, 268). According to Pevsner, the chancel was rebuilt in 1839 and 'reduced to its present length and inferior appearance in 1963', the effect of which was to leave half a brick-built arch clearly visible in the north wall.

The church is associated with the Aske family, and in particular with Richard Aske (d.1536) who was executed for his role in the Pilgrimage of Grace (<http://www.aughtonchurch.co.uk/moment.htm>, accessed 18/07/12). The site of a moated manor house to the east of the church is also associated with the Aske family (Pevsner, 268), and is recorded from 1386 (<http://www.aughtonchurch.co.uk/moment.htm>). The earthworks to the north of the church are the remains of an 11th century motte-and-bailey castle that was abandoned in favour of the manor house in the 13th century (<http://www.aughtonchurch.co.uk/castlehill.htm>). The peculiarly isolated modern position of the church may reflect the 'drift' of the village away from its original manorial focus towards the nearest road, in this case the B1226 Hankins Lane, 1.6km east of the church. A similar phenomenon may be observed at Skipwith, 4.3km WSW of Aughton.

5. RESULTS

5.1 OBSERVED DEPOSITS AND FEATURES

Natural deposits were not encountered during any part of the ground works. The earliest observed deposit was 1001, a firm orange-brown sand with occasional cobbles, charcoal flecks and CBM fragments, interpreted as a subsoil and observed from 0.30m BGL across most of the church yard except in the soak-away, where it was seen at 0.35m and then 0.40m as the ground sloped downwards to the west and the overlying topsoil (1000) became slightly deeper (Plates 16-19). At 0.60m BGL in the soak-away, the subsoil 1001 was observed to become slightly paler and more mottled with charcoal, clayey patches and occasional crushed limestone fragments, which may represent worm-sorting and bioturbation of the subsoil.

Cut into the subsoil 1001 in the eastern part of the graveyard were the remains of three walls (Figures 2 and 3, Plates 3-11). All three were substantial and clearly faced, allowing for a confident assessment of their alignment despite the confines of the narrow trenches. The eastern-most wall, 1007, was the most substantial, measuring 1m across and observed from the topsoil/subsoil interface at 0.30m BGL. 1007 was aligned north-south and constructed from squared blocks of limestone up to 300mm across with limestone rubble was an in-fill (Plates 6 and 7). Approximately 3m to the WNW, another wall, 1005, was observed at the same depth. This was aligned east-west, measured 0.80m wide and was constructed in the same way as wall 1007 (Plates 4 and 5). Taken together, they are interpreted as the truncated remains of the northern and eastern walls of the former chancel that was shortened in the 1960s (Plates 10 and 11).

Approximately 3m north-west of wall 1005, another wall, 1004, was observed. This had survived less well than the others, but appeared to be of a similar size and construction technique, being 0.80m wide and aligned approximately north-south (Plates 2 and 3). Unlike the other walls, this had a clear robbing trench (cut 1003, fill 1002 – a yellow-white deposit of crushed mortar and limestone with fragments of 16th century + bricks), potentially suggesting a different demolition date to that of the chancel walls. Wall 1004 was provisionally interpreted as a possible boundary wall, or a former north aisle associated with the earlier chancel. This is discussed further below in section 5.2.

At the north-west corner of the north aisle, a very ephemeral deposit of limestone fragments, 1009, was observed at 0.60m BGL (Figure 2, Plate 12). This appeared to form a linear feature aligned north-south and 0.40m wide that is tentatively interpreted as a possible

former west wall of an earlier north aisle and therefore a parallel for wall 1004, but it must be stressed that the remains were very fragmentary.

The only other observed feature was a modern brick and concrete cellar, 1010, in the exterior angle of the north aisle and the tower (Figure 2, Plates 13 and 16). This had been constructed flush with the foundations of the north aisle from 0.18m below the current ground level, obscuring all of the foundation save a single plinth course of chamfered limestone that had been covered by a modern concrete path around the church (Plate 13). One of the chamfered blocks was removed to pass the ducting into the new W/C (Plates 14 and 15); this block measured 0.45m x 0.37m x 0.12m deep and exhibited no visible tooling. It is likely that it was re-used in the foundation of the 16th century north-aisle, but whether it derives originally from an earlier version of this structure is unknown.

5.2 DISCUSSION

Given the varied dates of the surviving church fabric, it is no surprise that earlier versions of the building should survive, particularly given the documented shortening of the chancel (Pevsner, 268). It is possible, given Aughton's presence in Domesday, that a pre-conquest church was replaced by the Norman structure, although no evidence was revealed during this watching brief to support this assertion.

The walls uncovered in the eastern side of the church yard are substantial enough to be structural, and given their arrangement are held to represent the remains of the Norman east end. It seems likely that the current north aisle, built in brick and suggested to be 16th century by Pevsner, replaced an earlier aisle, as the interior arcade is medieval, but the date of this earlier aisle is unknown. It seems reasonable, however, on the basis of walls 1004, 1005 and 1007, to suggest that the original Norman church had an aisle, which was clearly longer than the current one. The remains of a 16th century brick-built arch in the north wall of the current chancel may represent a 'missing' eastern bay of the earlier aisle, re-built in the same brick when the current, shorter aisle, was constructed. No evidence for interior surfaces was found, so it must be assumed that current ground level broadly reflects that of 1000 years earlier, and that the wall remains are foundations.

The differential survival of these walls may help to further clarify the sequence of demolition. Wall 1004, the putative eastern wall of the Norman north aisle, had clearly been removed in 2.6m wide robbing trench that contained substantial quantities of 16th+ century brick (Jane McComish, pers com), along with limestone rubble. It is tempting to link this robbing event with the construction of the current north aisle and therefore suggest that the latter was a direct replacement for an earlier version, although it is perfectly possible that wall 1004 was

robbed at a later date, possibly during the chancel re-build of 1839. However, this alternative interpretation makes it more difficult to interpret wall 1004, which if one accepts the ephemeral 1009 as the remains of a western counterpart, seems to be best understood as part of an earlier aisle.

Walls 1005 and 1007 seem unambiguously to form the northern and eastern walls of an earlier, larger chancel. The area defined by these walls was completely clear of grave markers, supporting the idea that this space represents the chancel that was demolished in the 1960s. Neither chancel walls had been robbed-out in the same manner as wall 1004; rather, they seemed merely to have been reduced and levelled over. This would fit with the idea of a modern demolition, where the need to rob and re-use earlier stone was not the priority it would have been four centuries earlier. It is not clear from the results of this watching brief the extent to which the 1839 re-build recorded by Pevsner altered the outline of the Norman east end, and so while it seems very likely that walls 1005 and 1007 are Norman foundations, it is still possible that they are not.

A notable absence throughout the ground works was the presence of any burials, or indeed any disarticulated human bone. Any burials within the earlier chancel may have been cleared during demolition, but in any case the water trench only passed through the north-east corner of this structure, so avoiding any possibly surviving burials. West of the chancel, the absence of burials or human bone north of the north aisle may be explained by whole sale clearance during the construction of the current aisle. This argument may be extended to the area north and west of the tower, as this was also constructed in the 16th century following the Aske family's involvement in the Pilgrimage of Grace. It seems harder to argue for 16th century clearance further west into the area of the soak away, but it may be that as a family church in a small village there was not a significant density of burial in this area. It is also possible that an 'over-restoration' of the church in 1891 (Pevsner, 268) may provide the context for the clearance of burials, if there were any.

The discovery of the chancel, and potentially an earlier north aisle, is of local significance given the history of the church and the Aske family. The site, being generally level and relatively empty of grave markers, would benefit from a geophysical survey should the opportunity arise.

6. LIST OF SOURCES

<http://maps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyviewer/>

<http://www.aughtonchurch.co.uk>

<http://domesdaymap.co.uk>

All websites accessed 18/07/2012

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Whyman, M., and Howard, A., 2005, *Archaeology and Landscape in the Vale of York*, York Archaeological Trust, York

APPENDIX 1: FIGURE AND PLATES

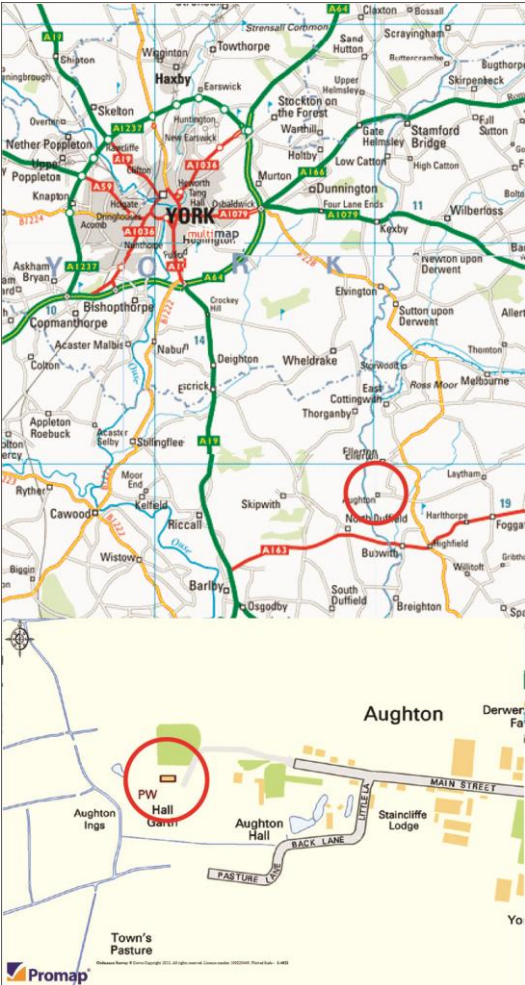


Figure 1 Site location

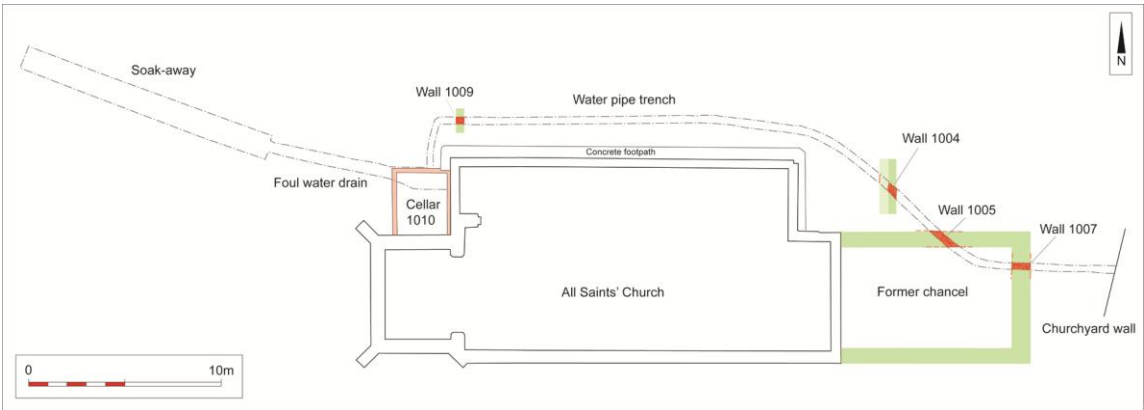


Figure 2 Site plan, derived from architect's drawing, showing location of walls in red and putative wall lines in green

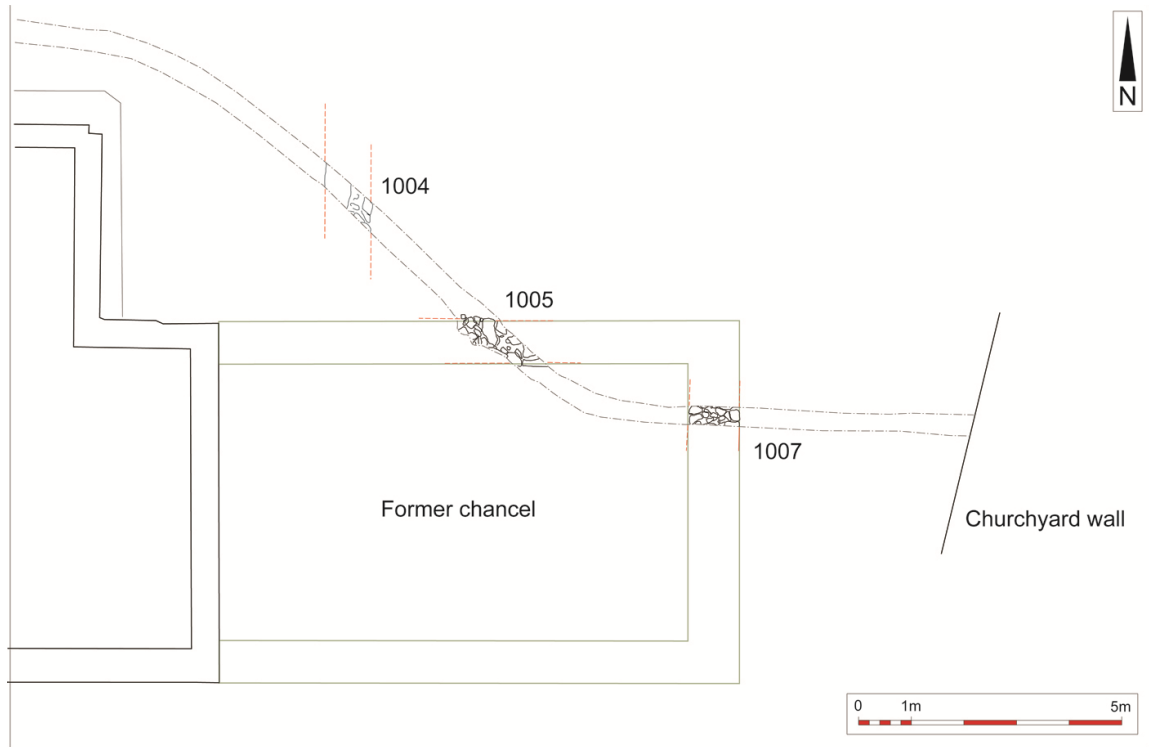


Figure 3 Detailed east end plan, showing walls and putative wall lines



Plate 1 Eastern area, looking north with water supply trench



Plate 2 Wall 1004, south to top of image



Plate 3 Wall 1004, looking west



Plate 4 Wall 1005 in plan, north to top of image



Plate 5 Wall 1005, looking south-east



Plate 6 Wall 1007 in plan, north to top of image



Plate 7 Wall 1007, looking ENE



Plate 8 Disturbed material from wall 1004



Plate 9 Northern wall of chancel, showing remains of 16th century arch



Plate 10 Looking west along line of wall 1005, showing northern wall-line of former chancel

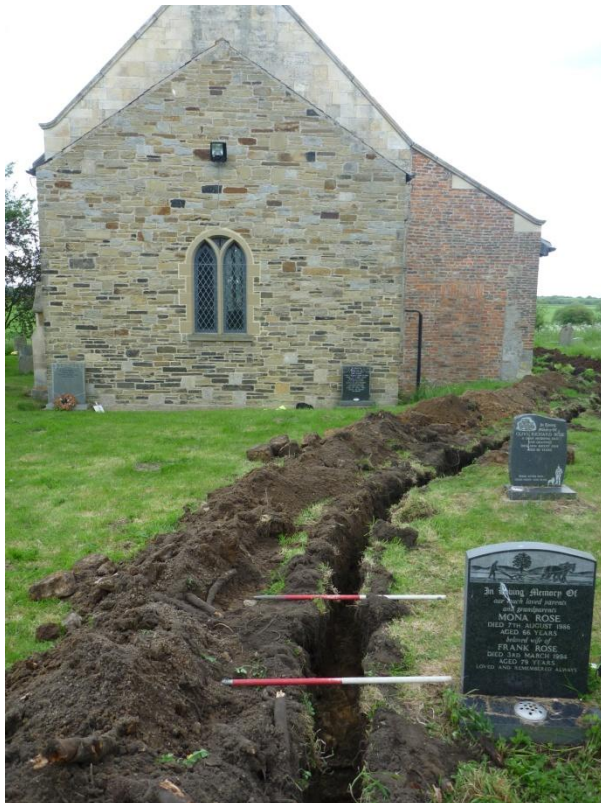


Plate 11 Looking west, showing line of wall 1007, the eastern wall-line of former chancel



Plate 12 Wall 1009, looking north



Plate 13 West facing elevation of the north aisle wall and foundation



Plate 14 Plinth stone removed from aisle wall foundation



Plate 15 Aisle wall foundation after removal of plinth stone



Plate 16 Foul water trench, looking WNW, showing remains of cellar 1010



Plate 17 Soak-away trench, looking WNW



Plate 18 Soak-away trench, looking ESE



Plate 19 NNE facing section of soak-away trench