



YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST



**ALL SAINTS CHURCH, KIRKBY OVERBLOW,
HARROGATE, NORTH YORKSHIRE**

WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

by I.D. Milsted

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YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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Cover: Floor reduction works in progress

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Abbreviations

YAT York Archaeological Trust

AOD Above Ordnance Datum

ABSTRACT

Floor reduction works at All Saints' Church, Kirkby Overblow, revealed graves and a sub-floor deposit associated with an earlier version of the church predating a destructive fire of 1780. Evidence for re-build sequence of the church was found in the exposed footings of the arcade, and a fragment of probable Anglo-Scandinavian decorative stonework was recovered from the nineteenth century sub-floor deposits.

1. INTRODUCTION

A watching brief was maintained during ground reduction works inside the nave of All Saints', Kirkby Overblow. These works were preparatory to the installation of a new sub-floor heating system, replacement floor surfaces and new seating. Archaeological observations were maintained between 2nd and 8th February 2010.

2. METHODOLOGY

The internal layout of the nave included three areas of nineteenth century pews separated by sandstone paved aisles (Figure 2). The pews were positioned on timber deck flooring suspended above a void, whilst the aisle surfaces were laid on loose brick rubble and the remains of earlier sub-floor heating systems. The pews and floor were removed and the stone flags lifted, and then all sub-floor deposits removed to a depth of 0.40m below the original floor level. The attending archaeologist maintained an observational role during these works, and recorded archaeological features as they were exposed.

3. LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Kirkby Overblow is a village approximately 6 miles north-west of Wetherby. The village sits on a gritstone escarpment overlooking Wharfedale (Geological Survey 1974) and the church of All Saints' is located at the southern end of the village (Figure 1).

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The village, and its church, have pre-conquest origins, appearing as 'Cherchebi' ('church village') in Domesday (www.kirbyoverblow.com), from which 'Kirkby' is derived. 'Overblow' is thought to relate to iron-smelting, and the modern version of the village name is first

recorded in 1211 (Ibid). The current church fabric includes a 14th century north transept but otherwise is mainly of post-medieval date (Pevsner, 288), with the nave re-constructed in 1780-81 and the chancel in 1803 (www.kirkbyoverblow.com). A further programme of renovation occurred in 1872 (ibid). The re-building of the nave followed a major fire (Bruce Noble pers. com.) which presumably destroyed much of the original fabric. A supposed 'Saxon doorway' is set beneath a window in the external face of the nave north wall (Pevsner, 288), which if accurate would represent the oldest surviving fabric.

5. RESULTS

The earliest identified deposit, 1026, was a compact, mixed mid brown and mid-light yellow brown clay silt with occasional small stones. This extended across the entire exposed area and was interpreted as a possible earth floor, or more likely a sub-floor deposit for a floor that had been subsequently removed.

1026 was cut by one confirmed grave, 1023, and two probable graves, 1020 and 1018 (Figure 2), all of which were identified at the depth limit of excavation. Grave cut 1023 was aligned east-west and contained an adult inhumation, 1022, which was encountered by the groundworks team during ground reduction and partially exposed by the attending archaeologist to confirm articulation. 1022 was recorded before being covered over, and was supine, with the right arm extended by the side and the left arm flexed at the elbow so the left hand lay across the pelvis area. There was no evidence of a coffin or fittings, and the arms were both 'rolled inwards' within a cut only just wide enough for the burial, suggesting that the body had been buried in a tightly wrapped shroud (Plates 1 & 2). The backfill, 1021, was a loose, mid brown clayey silt barely distinguishable from 1026.

Cuts 1020 and 1018 contained fills 1017 and 1019, both friable dark brown clay silts. Their size and orientation (Figure 2, Plate 3) strongly suggested that they were graves, but neither were excavated as they lay beyond the depth limit of excavation.

Cut through backfill 1019 was 1009, the construction cut for pier footing 1008 (Figure 2). The footing 1008 consisted of two roughly dressed limestone blocks measuring 0.42m by 0.84m by 0.20m thick, mortared on a plinth of roughly-dressed limestone fragments up to 0.30m across (Plates 4 & 5). This created a foundation measuring 1.20m x 0.85m across and at least 0.50m deep upon which was placed a polygonal base that forms the lowest above-floor element of a pillar in the single arcade within the church (Figure 2). The two large blocks had small mortice holes cut into their upper surfaces which had held the joists of the timber floor,

and may well have originated from the earlier fabric of the church, although no evidence was found to confirm this.

The other exposed pier footings, 1011, 1007 and 1005 were constructed in a similar manner to 1008 (Figure 2, Plates 6-8) and were all cut into 1026. Also cut through 1026 was 1012, a low structure running across the base of the north nave wall for the length of the trench (Figure 2, Plate 9). This structure was 0.25m wide and 0.12m high, and was interpreted as a possible wall bench or a footing for the floor beneath the pews. The upper surface bore mortar impressions of a further course which had subsequently been removed, and was interrupted at a point 5.15m east from the tower by a 0.30m wide opening with a rendered lining, 1014 (Plate 10). This led into a channel running through brickwork behind the plaster wall face, and was interpreted as a flue opening for an early heating system. Cut through pier footing 1006 was a brick and concrete lined opening leading to a brick-lined channel heading south beyond the limit of excavation (Figure 2, Plate 7). This structure, 1015, exhibited signs of heat-damage and was also interpreted as a flue forming part of a former heating system.

In the area beneath the stone-paved aisles a series of brick-built dwarf walls had been placed to carry the floor and the space in between filled with loose brick rubble, 1003, some of which had also been used to partially fill in the void beneath the timber floors (Plates 11 & 12). This material was removed along with the brick walls, exposing the features described above. In the area of the main aisle, a disturbed deposit of loose-friable mid-dark grey sandy silt was observed. This deposit, 1024, contained moderate amounts of disarticulated human bone and was interpreted as a disturbance associated with the construction of the stone aisle floor, 1002. It was noted that the only identified burials were observed either side of this disturbance, under the timber floor, 1001, suggesting that other burials were once present across the entire area.

6. DISCUSSION

The graves and compacted sub-floor deposit clearly pre-date the present arcade, and therefore represent the sole physical evidence for the nave as it was prior to the 1780 fire and subsequent re-building programme. The presence of earlier, internal burials was previously only suspected as there were no grave markers in the floor (Bruce Noble, pers. comm.). It is not possible to date these burials, but the long history of the church suggests the probability that medieval burials will be present lower down.

The sub-floor deposit suggests that the original floor lay 0.40m below the level of the current one, but no evidence was found of other earlier structural elements of the nave, and it must be supposed that these lie beneath the present north wall and also beyond the area exposed during the groundworks. It is very probable that the stonework exposed in the arcade footings was re-used from the earlier fabric. Although no definite evidence for this was discovered, many of the stones had been crudely finished, possibly suggesting that they had been re-dressed prior to their re-use. None were removed during the current project, making a full analysis impossible.

The bricks used in the dwarf walls beneath the timber and stone floors removed during this project were machine made and were post-1850 in date, suggesting very strongly that the floor had been re-laid after the late eighteenth century re-build, with the renovation campaign of 1872 the most likely candidate. The early heating system may well have been inserted at this point, fed by an external boiler house which was located in the angle of the nave and north transept, and now the location of the oil tank (Bruce Noble, pers. comm.).

Perhaps of most significance for the history of All Saints', however, was the recovery of a carved architectural stone fragment from the sub-floor rubble 1003 (Plate 13). This was retained and has been provisionally identified as a piece of Anglo-Scandinavian ornamental structure dating to the late 10/early 11th century. Fragments of this date are often associated with parish churches that have early origins (Hall, 179). On the basis of this initial interpretation, therefore, given the known early history of All Saints' church, it is strongly recommended that further work be undertaken to further identify this fragment, which if confirmed would represent a significant addition to the corpus of known Anglo-Scandinavian stone work in this region.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Figure 1 Site location

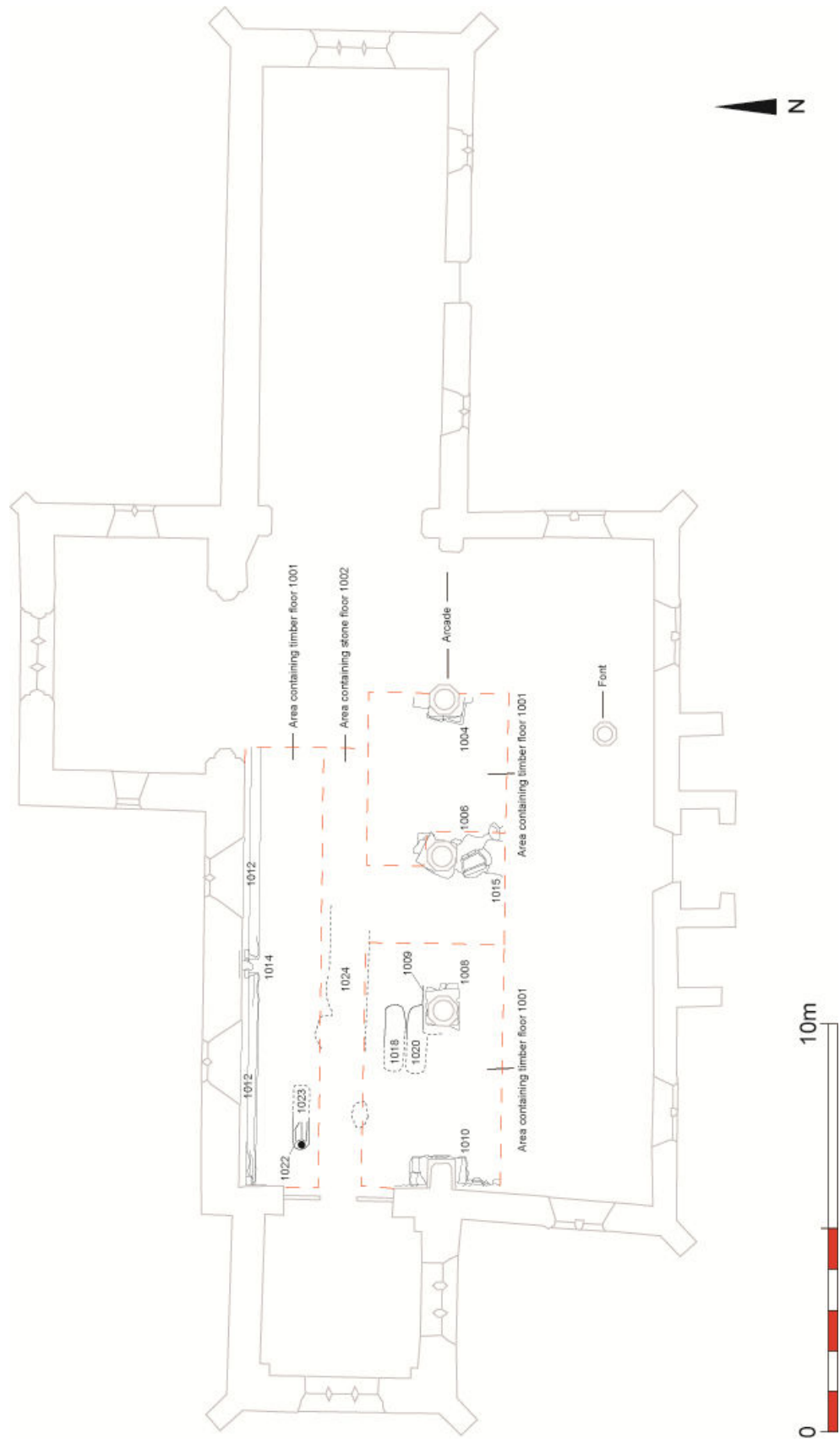


Figure 2 Works area with recorded features. Adapted from client's plan.



Plate 1 Inhumation burial 1022 looking south



Plate 2 1022 detail, looking west



Plate 3 Possible graves 1018 (left) and 1020 (right), looking east



Plate 4 Pier footing 1008 looking north



Plate 5 Pier footing 1008 looking south



Plate 6 Pier footing 1004 looking east



Plate 7 Pier footing 1006 with later flue 1015 looking east



Plate 8 Pier footing 1010 looking west



Plate 9 Structure 1012, looking west



Plate 10 Flue feature 1014 looking north



Plate 11 General view looking south-west, showing pier footings and sub-floor deposit 1003



Plate 12 Looking north-east: dwarf walls and sub-floor deposit 1003 with footing 1004



Plate 13 Anglo-Scandinavian stone fragment