



YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST REPORT

SITE ADDRESS	St. Mary's Church, Bishophill Junior, York		
CLIENT NAME	St. Mary's Church PCC		
YAT PROJECT #	5339	YAT REPORT #	2010/47
MUSEUM ACCESSION #	n/a	GRID REFERENCE	SE 6000 5148
PLANNING REFERENCE #	n/a	AAI OPS NOTICE #	10004

INTRODUCTION

Between 17th March and 13th April 2010 York Archaeological Trust undertook a watching brief at St Mary's Church, Bishophill Junior, York (Figure 1). The objective was to record any deposits, features or buried structures of archaeological interest exposed during works at the church. Much of the work was structural and within the church and was observed and recorded separately from the works reported on here. This report mainly concerns the archaeology exposed during the excavation of a trench for a new foul water outflow from a new toilet area within the church but the results from a short stretch of trench dug for a new electric cable are also described (Figure 2). All of the trenches were generally 0.3 to 0.5m wide and between c.0.6m deep adjacent to the church and c.3.3m deep in the road outside the churchyard. Recording took the form of written and measured sketches supplemented by a number of colour digital photographs. An archaeologist was present at all times during any excavation within the current limit of the churchyard and this work was done under Church of England Faculty 192/09

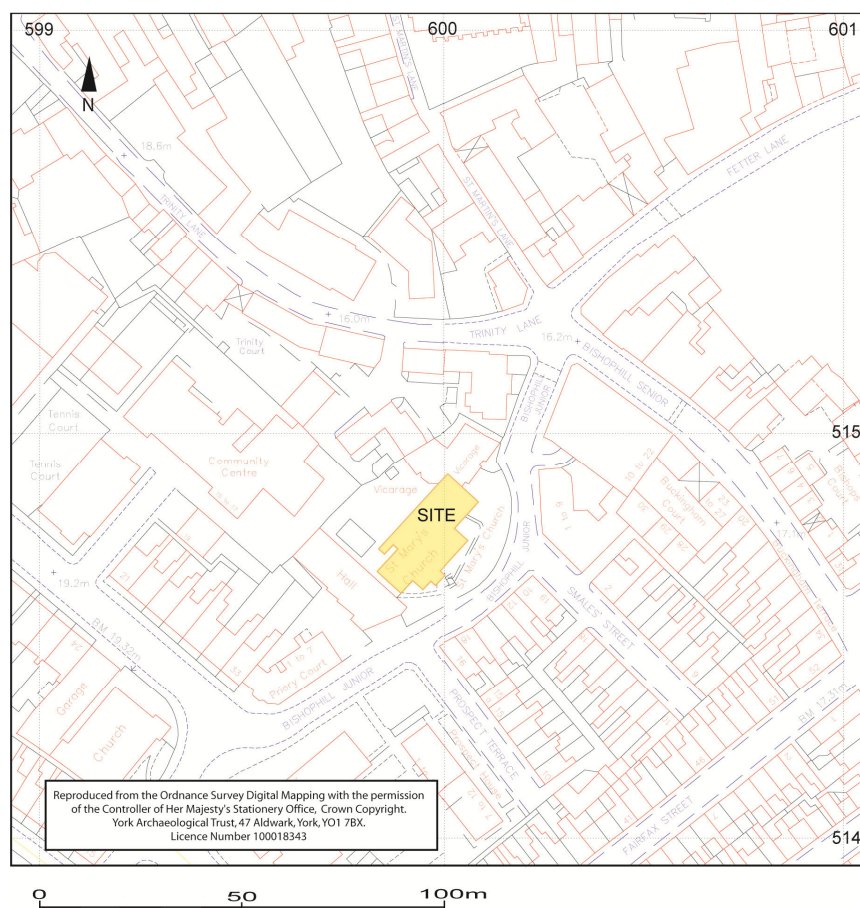


Figure 1 Site location

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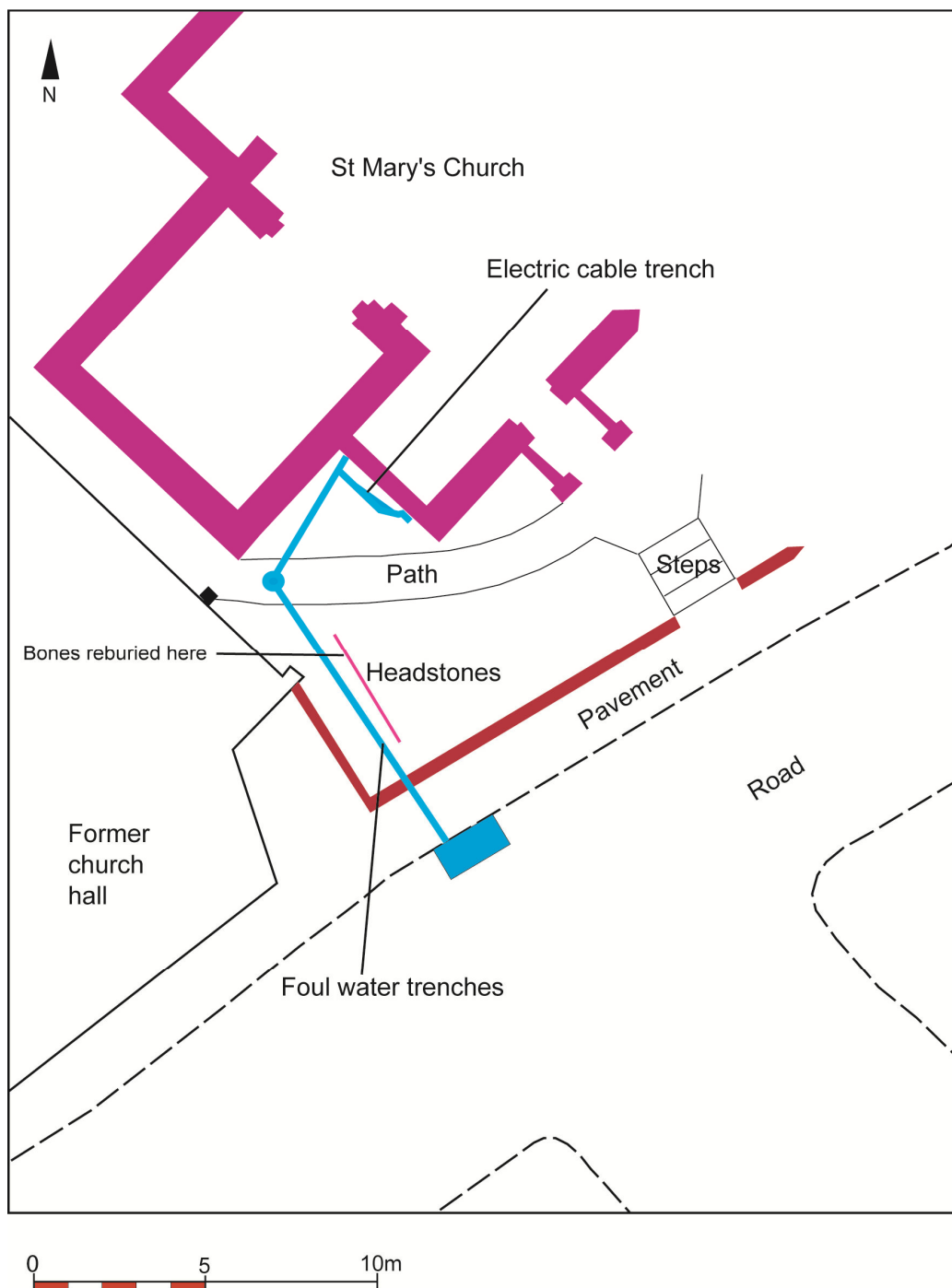


Figure 2 Location of observed trenches

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RESULTS

Initially, a trench c.2m x 1m was excavated in the roadway to locate the foul water sewer running along Bishophill Junior. On the Prospect Terrace side of the trench this sewer in the form of a brick culvert (1000) was located at a depth of c.3m below the road surface. It appeared to have been constructed by the tunnelling method but it was not possible to confirm this. The very limited exposure of this culvert meant that no details of it could be established. On the St Mary's Church side of the trench, the lowest context noted, between 2.6 and at least 3.2m below ground level (BGL), was a light brown slightly clayey silt containing frequent fragments of sandstone slates (1001). Overlying this there was a 0.4m deep layer of dark brownish-grey very slightly clayey silt containing moderate quantities of disarticulated human bone (1002). This layer also produced a green-glazed jug handle of the 13th century and a sherd of Roman grey ware; these were not retained. Between 0.8m and 2.2m BGL there was a deposit of dark brownish-grey very slightly clayey silt with occasional flecks of white mortar (1003) and at c.2.1m BGL, a human skull. Overlying Context 1003 was a 0.5m deep layer of mid greyish-brown silt with moderate patches of medium brown sand and occasional flecks of white mortar (1004). This was sealed by a firm, mid brown silt with frequent fragments of brick / tile and pale brown / white mortar and occasional limestone fragments (1005). Above this was a horizontal band of stone setts (1006), probably an earlier road surface. The uppermost context was the current road surface of tarmac (1007).



Plate 1 Foul water excavation in roadway, looking north-east

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A trench c.0.4m wide was then dug from the road excavation to the current graveyard wall. In this trench the earliest deposit noted, between 0.6m and at least 1.6m BGL, was a dark brownish-grey very slightly clayey silt with occasional brick / tile and flecks of white mortar (1008). This deposit appeared to butt a brick wall (1009) running parallel to the graveyard wall but located 1.8m to the south-east, almost below the pavement kerb. It was 0.3m wide, up to 1.1m high and its top lay c.0.5m below the pavement surface. Overlying it was a 0.2m deep layer of dark brown silt with moderate flecks of pale brown mortar and very occasional brick / tile (1010) and this was sealed by a 0.2m deep deposit of mid brown silt with moderate pebbles and brick / tile and occasional pale brown mortar (1011). Above this was a levelling deposit of tarmac pieces and mid brown silt with occasional brick / tile (1012) and the current pavement surface of tarmac (1013).



Plate 2 Sewer trench dug through pavement towards churchyard wall

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The next stage involved the digging of a trench, again c.0.4m wide, through the graveyard. This was initially aligned south-east / north-west and passed between part of the graveyard boundary wall and a row of four headstones dating from the 19th century before turning through 90 degrees to run south-west / north-east. It met the stonework of the church at the exterior of the intersection of the tower and the south-east aisle. Towards the graveyard wall this trench was up to 0.9m deep but it was only c.0.5m deep close to the church. No clear stratigraphy was observed along this section of trench the only deposit recorded being a friable, dark, slightly orange, greyish-brown sandy silty clay with moderate pebbles and occasional fragments of brick / tile (1014).



Plate 3 Part of the north-west / south-east sewer trench within the graveyard, looking north-west

During the excavation of the trench in the graveyard no articulated bones were noted but around 100 fragments of disarticulated bone were recovered. These were placed in a covered box and on completion of the trench digging a small rectangular pit was dug in the base of the trench and the

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bones reinterred (See Fig X) in accordance with the wishes of the local priest and Annexe S8 of the Church of England / English Heritage 2005 publication "Guidance for best practice for treatment of human remains excavated from Christian burial grounds in England".



Plate 4 Fully excavated electric cable trench, looking north-west

The final work undertaken was the observation of a short stretch of trench dug almost adjacent to the exterior of the liturgical west wall of the south aisle. This trench was c.0.35m deep and was c.0.6m deep where it met the foul water trench and c.0.9m deep at its opposite end where the cable was to enter the church. At the north-west end of the trench the lowest deposit noted, between 0.2m and at least 0.6m BGL, was a dark brown very slightly clayey silt with moderate bricks and occasional tile (1015). Sealing this was an horizontal surface of Yorkstone slabs (1016) which were c.0.05m thick. This had been covered by the modern topsoil which was a very dark brownish-grey very slightly sandy silt (1016). In the central part of the trench the lowest deposit, between 0.2m and at least 0.7m BGL, was a mixture of dark brown very slightly clayey silt and light to mid brown silt with moderate bricks and very small flecks of white / pale brown mortar and occasional tile (1017). The overlying sequence was the same as at the north-western end of the trench. At the south-east

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end of the trench the earliest deposit, seen between 0.5m and at least 0.9m, was a loose, mid brown silt (1018). Above this was a dark brown very slightly clayey silt with moderate patches of light brownish-yellow sticky clay (1019). The overlying sequence of contexts was the same as seen in the central and north-western parts of the trench.

CONCLUSIONS

There are some significant findings from this watching brief, mainly associated with the trench dug in the roadway to locate the sewer. Context 1001, at the base of the trench, contained significant quantities of sandstone roofing tile. Due to its depth this may be Roman in date and derived from the collapse of the roofs of buildings, suggesting that the main Roman sequence will be below this deposit, that is at a depth greater than 3.2m BGL. This is of interest since in the vicinity of Trinity Lane Roman structures have been discovered a little over a metre down and may indicate the presence of another Roman terrace in addition to the one already documented in the Fetter Lane / Bishophill Senior area, but further work in this area would be needed to confirm or clarify this.

It was not possible to ascertain whether the skull seen in the side of the trench belonged to an intact burial, and the skull was left in-situ, but the soil in which it rested did appear to be graveyard-type soil and it therefore seems to confirm that the extent of St Mary's graveyard was greater in the past than at present as suggested by historic maps of the area and a recent watching brief at the former St Mary's Church Hall, where moderate quantities of disarticulated human bone were recorded.

Within the existing graveyard no intact burials were encountered although moderate amounts of human bone were recovered and reburied. Nothing of great archaeological significance was noted from the trenches within the graveyard, although the electric cable trench did produce evidence that the path from the south door did take a different route at some time in the past.

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