

Old St Oswald's Church, Fulford

Archaeology Report – Cutting III

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ST03

St Oswald's Old Church, Fulford

CUTTING III (1981) (fig 000-000)

Introduction

This was excavated by PAR and LW to examine a further segment of the cobble foundation defined in Cuttings I and II; and in particular to determine whether it continued eastwards past the main north side of the nave.

The cutting was 3m W-E, by c2m wide; its north side was in orientation the same as the north limits of II; but its south limit was the north wall of the nave, not quite on the same orientation.

Phase III.1

The natural sandy clay was encountered at a similar level as in Cutting II, at c29.80m AOD; here, however, there was a clear weathering surface of yellow-brown sandy subsoil (338A and B); at the west end, as in the S-N section in fig 000 upper, a grave (331) and other disturbance had removed all the stratification down to 338. The southern edge of another grave to the north (33) had cut only part of the edge (?) (section W-E, fig 000 upper).

In the undisturbed main area, however, the lower part of a north-south ditch (337), clearly defined in the natural, into which it was cut over 10cm in a rounded base; and its profile was visible above natural for a further 10cm (see W-E section). The ground level from which the ditch was cut is uncertain, but probably from c30.25m AOD; so the ditch may have originally been c 60cm deep.

In the fill which had survived (337A) were a flint blade; oyster shell; two Roman sherds of shell-tempered ware, one a rim sherd; a piece of Roman roof-tile (*tegula*); a melon bead, also of Roman date; and a green-glazed sherd of Brandsby ^Wware, of 13th-14th-century date. The Roman finds suggest occupation or burial in the vicinity; the ditch may be Roman, but the medieval sherd should sound a caution, though it may be intrusive. The matrix of 337A was similar to the surrounding soil, 336, and stone-free but slightly darker. The ditch could be contemporary with the depression 217 in Cutting II, designated as phase I there; but they may be different dates. The function of either is unknown, but 337 could obviously be for drainage; if so, it may have been for an area of secular or religious (the latter burial or structural), in the area of the present church.

Phase III.2

Ditch 337 was cut by two cobble foundations 206 (followed from Cutting II, and a separate cobble foundation to the east (341).

The continuation of 206 was similar to the length seen further west, but in the more or less hurried circumstances in which Cutting III was done, it could be more carefully examined. In particular, the total removal of the stratification on its north side down to the natural, and the absence of graves close by, allowed its north elevation to be exposed. The surface of 206 was again fairly level at c30.50m AOD. Through[?out its] the length, the upper part projected to the north, spread or lumped [?dumped] (see west face profile, fig 000, upper); but not collapsed as in IIb, where the north edge of 206 was disintegrated.

Towards the east, the surface of the cobble mass had apparently been replaced by smaller gravel (344); or here perhaps the cobble top had been removed down to the second layer below. It should be noted that this area is below the masonry junction of the nave above; and while there may not be a causal relationship, the coincidence may be relevant to the interpretation of their respective function.

The second cobble foundation (341) was abutted to 206, but continued its line to the east. Its NW corner projected somewhat to the north beyond the north edge of 206, in a fairly sharp acute angle. its surface was similar to that of 206, but slightly lower, at c30.45m by the nave wall (see elevation in fig 000 lower); but at a similar level at c30.50m further east (see N-S section in fig 000 lower).

Its north face was not slumped, but survived as a fairly vertical face, as in the N-S section; this shows also that it is founded up to 10cm into the natural and down to the base of the ditch 337 (see pl 000). It was also clear that it was banded in seven zones of cobbles and clay and sand. This may have been true of 206, but was not so clearly apparent in Cuttings I and II (but see Cuttings IV and V below).

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The relationship between 341 and 206/344 was not clear, ie whether one was later than the other, or indeed of the same period, the join seeing the result of the meeting of the work ^{of} ~~of~~ two construction gangs. In 1981, PAR and LW assumed that 206/344 was primary, 341 being a later addition or replacement (in function); but in 1984 Duncan Hawkins suggested that 341 was primary, to which 206/344 was an extension. This is a weighty problem, to which we must return in our overall discussion below.

From 341 or 206/344 there was some spillage (342) northwards into the upper part of the phase III.1 ditch 337 (as on the plan, fig 000); this may be the result of removal of cobbles from 344, or from a further easterly part of 206; if this is true, it would favour the hypothesis that 341 was the later of the two cobble masses; but there is a gap in the eastern part of 341, caused partly by a later infant burial (see fig 000, lower); and this may have been responsible for the 'spillage'.

Phase III.3

This comprises the courses of the Tadcaster limestone north wall of the nave above the cobble foundations below. This is in two periods; we believe that the eastern part must be the earlier, as its chamfered string course is lower than that in the western part; the latter would in this case be higher because the ground level has risen c20cm, as is frequently found in churchyards. Our hypothesis is that the eastern masonry originally continued to the present NW corner of the nave, but the western part was rebuilt.

The eastern part, which we suggest ^{is} ~~is~~ earlier, is different also in that the chamfered string course is supported by one course; between that and the cobble foundation 341 was a layer of pebbles (343) which is likely to have been merely levelling material; further east, the later masonry was bedded directly on the cobble foundation 206, with two courses below the higher string course (including a possible graveslab).

The building debris from the eastern part extended north, as 335A and 335, to the north limit of the excavation (see N-S section in fig 000).

* * *

It must be pointed out that our hypothesis about the rebuilding of the west end of the nave north wall may be too simplistic; the NW corner may not be a rebuilding, but an extension from a western end further east; but this again must be deferred to overall appreciation of the structure.

Phase III.4

Above the builders' layer 335, there was a further deposit of buff-brown sandy soil (334), probably a medieval and later topsoil. A further accretion 332 is more mortary; probably from a later building or repair. This is capped by recent topsoil (330) and 1980 dump (329). There was further disturbance by concrete and drainage nearer to the nave wall. The infant burial cut, although appearing to cut the 1980 dump 329, probably appears so because of the concrete disturbance, but the burial is likely nevertheless to have been fairly recent.

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CUTTING III 1981

Context descriptions

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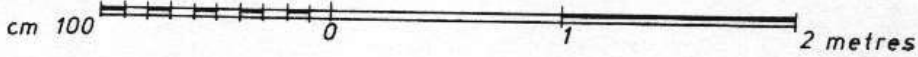
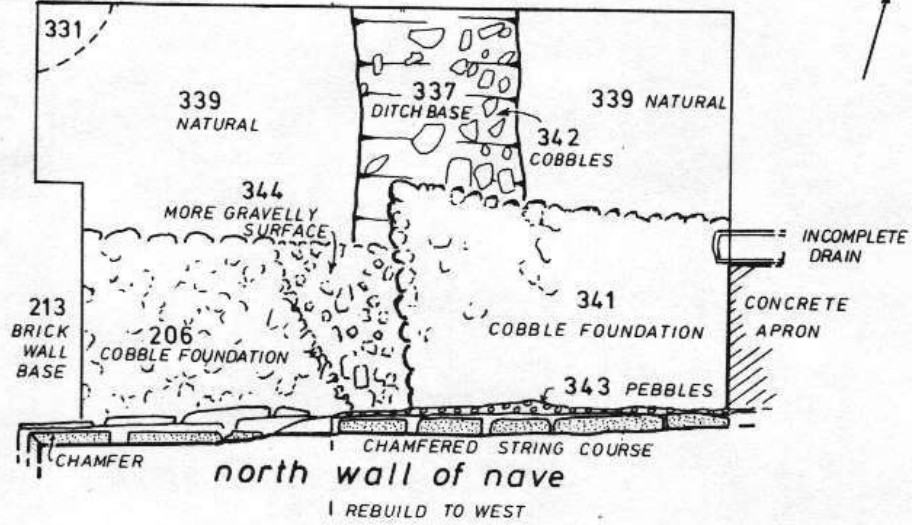
- 329 Recent dump (1980)
- 330 Dark soil, rooty and disturbed
- 331 Grave cut, ?recent
- 331A Fill of 331, disturbed soil
- 332 Buff-brown mortary soil
- 333 Grave cut, close to N edge
- 333A Fill of 333, disturbed mortary clayey soil
- 334 Buff-brown sandy soil
- 335 Tadcaster limestone pieces, pebbles, MOR - extends to S of grave 340c, but not as far as nave - builders' debris, possibly Norman, or later?
- 336 Buff-brown soil, the general, [?] partly undisturbed, original deep accumulating soil
- 337 Ditch, cutting c10cm into natural - profile not discernible above level shown on drawing of section
- 337A Fill - similar to 336, but darker; flint blade, oyster shell, two Roman sherds, ?shell-tempered; one is a rim sherd; Roman roof tile piece; melon bead; green-gl sh -
^ shed of ? late Saxon ? C11-12
 ?Brandsby
- x 338A Vest of 337) yellow-^b brown sandy, weathered surface
- 338B East of 337) of natural 339
- 339 Natural yellow-brown sandy clay
- 340 Infant burial (mainly to east)

- 340A Fill of 340 [?]
- 341 Cobble foundation; four courses of pebbles or cobbles, separated by three courses of clay and sand; cut down to and into natural; apparently ends at level of limit of excavation, as shown on section.
- Appeared to abut foundation 206, but much more deeply founded; but see 206 in Cutting II, whose depth may be greater; but actual abutting part of 206 is actually 344. In 1981 LW and PAR assumed that 206/344 were primary, and 341 secondary; but in 1984 Duncan Hawkins thought 341 was primary and 206 a western addition; to be considered. DH thought both could be pre-Norman
- 342 Cobbles extending to N from foundation 341 at level of its surface; probably no more than a spread from 341 in top of ditch 337; but may mark a path; and we even suggested in 1981 that it could be a foundation, for a porticus or something similar
- 343 Pebbles under stone foundation of north wall of nave, that part only to the east of the rebuild junction; projects slightly from foundation blocks; possibly a leveling bed for foundation above

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CUTTING III 1981 PLAN

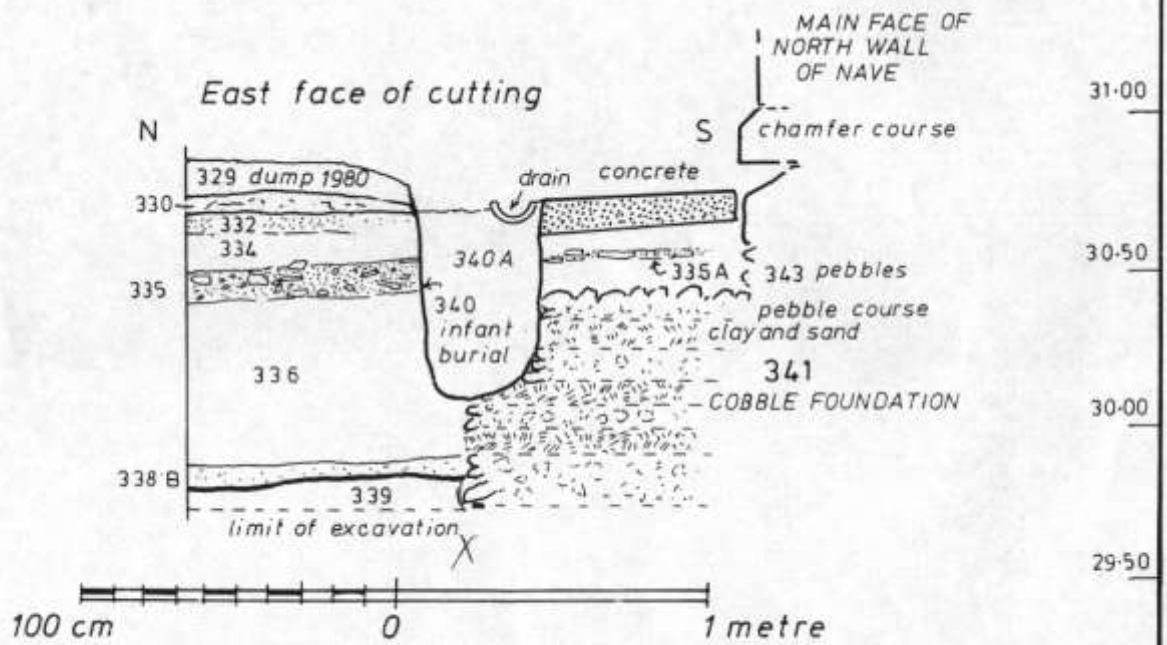
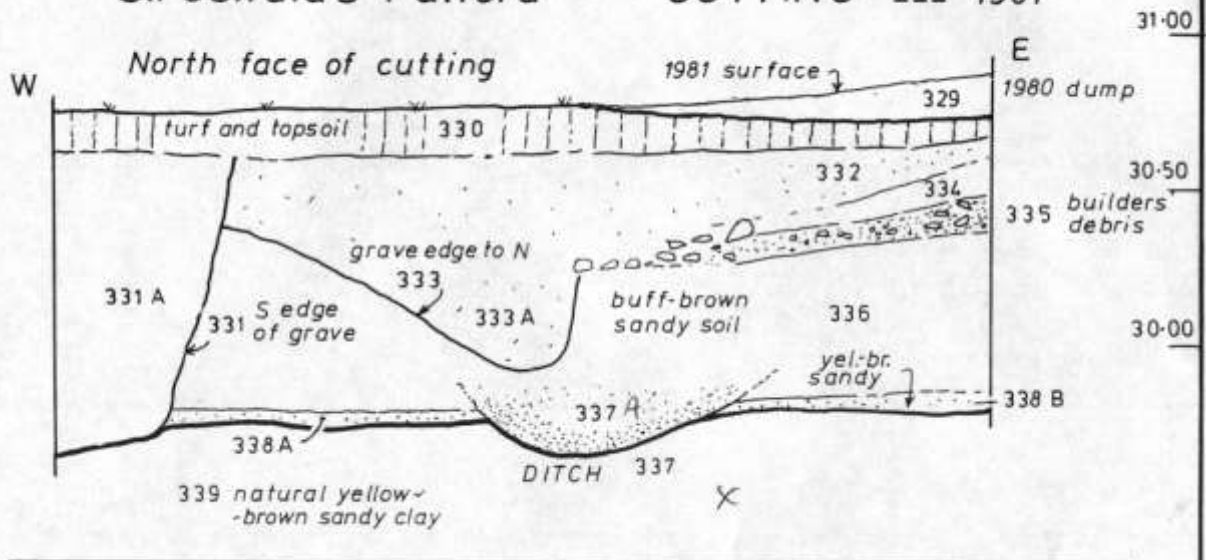
GRAVE DEEPEST PART



1981 LW PAR 1999

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1981 LW PAR 1999