

Old St Oswald's Church, Fulford

Archaeology Report – Cutting IV

STO.4

St Oswald's, Fulford

CUTTING IV

Following the cuttings at St Oswald's in 1980 and 1981, by the York Archaeological Trust and by Rahtz and Watts, two years elapsed before more work, either on site or on the records. In 1984 Duncan Hawkins, then an undergraduate in the Department of Archaeology in the University of York, expressed an interest in the use of the records for a dissertation, a part of his final assessment'. He made fair copies of the drawings and ordered the context records; and wrote a provisional report. In the course of the work, he had reason to question the conclusions reached by Rahtz and Watts in interim reports in 1981, notably the structural relationship between the segments of cobble foundations in Cuttings I and II around the west end of the church.

Hawkins was also interested in the extension of the cobble foundations further west. He made a resistivity survey, and made an extra cutting (IV), 2 x 1.5m. He found two extra segments of cobble foundation (413 and 422), which he interpreted as respectively a continuation of the E-W foundation previously defined, and the possible return to the south. The area dug was badly cut about by graves and other features, so interpretation is problematic; nor did Hawkins complete all the area to natural. He did, however, draw a plan and a section of the west side of the cutting (redrawn as fig 000) and wrote a text and context tables. All his records were finally edited and incorporated in this report in 1999-2000.

Cutting IV discussion

Foundation 413 is roughly in line with the long E-W run of
X foundation (206) found further east, in Cutting IIc; separated from it by
1.30m of unexcavated ground. It is here, however, fragmentary, badly
disturbed by graves; it was observed, however, that it was in two or
X three layers of cobbles, with some packing of red/yellow clay in a matrix
of yellow-black sandy soil.

Foundation 422 was similar in character, with three or four layers
of cobbles; Hawkins interpreted this as the N-S return of 413/206; the
latter is seen as the foundation of the north wall of a church earlier
than the present building; and 422 could be a remnant of its west wall.
Its minimum original width would be 1.20m, c 25cm wider than the
postulated north wall 206; but extra width may have been needed at the
west end, especially in the light of the instability of the ground here
(see general discussion).

Any definite conclusion is, however, vitiated by the subsequent
grave digging after the postulated demolition of the earlier church. Two
graves (418, 420) still exhibited decayed residues of wooden coffins
(419, 421), c 30cm wide N-S, and of plain rectangular plan. Since these
were encountered at a depth of only c 70cm, Hawkins suggested that they
should be pre-1836, when the Public Health Act enforced a rule that
burial should be six feet deep. No expert examination of the wooden
coffins or their contents were attempted by Hawkins. It is rather
surprising that graves were so dense in this area, compared to the area
of Cutting IIc, where none was encountered; though excavation here was
superficial, the foundation 206 seemed to be intact. It would appear
that there was some physical barrier or regulation that allowed burial
only beyond the area of the gap between Cuttings II^c and IV.

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Cutting IV

Context details

(summary of Hawkins table; only starred items are shown in fig 000)

- *401 Post-1980 turf; modern finds
- *402 Post-1980 topsoil; modern finds
- 403 1980 dump; light brown sandy
- 404 1980 dump; dark grey-brown; tile and brick
- *405 1980 dump; similar
- 406 1980 primary dump; dark orange-brown
- *407 Pipe trench, pre-1980?
- *408 Fill of 407, dark soil, fragments of plastic pipe, dated 1972
- *409 Pre-407 and pre-1980, former topsoil; N part dark brown, tile, MOR, human bone scraps
- *410 Ditto, S part
- *411 Mixed dark soil and clay; grave upcast, N part
- *412 Ditto, S part
- *413 Cobbles set in sandy yellow-black soil with patches of red/grey clay; 2-3 layers of cobbles; four ?Roman tile fragments
- *414 Disturbed yellow-black soil, clay, and loose pebbles; disturbed top of 422
- 415 Sandy yellow clay; ?grave fill
- *416 Grave cut, cutting 422 foundation
- *417 Blackish soil, fill of 416
- *418 Grave cut, cutting foundation 422
- *419 Dark orange clay, fill of 418; parts of decayed wooden

coffin with decorated metal traces; fragments of human bone

- #420 Grave cut, cutting 413 foundation
- #421 Dark orange-black, fill of 420; fragments of decayed wooden coffin and traces of ?cloth
- #422 Cobbles set in sandy yellow-black soil, with patches of red-grey clay; 3-4 layers of cobbles; three ?Roman tile fragments; ^{cobbles} disturbed and cut on N and S sides
- #423 Cut by north side of 422; possibly robbing cut
- 424 Fill of 423, similar to 427
- 425 Cut for foundation 413 construction
- 426 Cut for foundation 42
- #427 Yellow-brown sandy clay, very disturbed, all or partly grave fill, from deep former subsoil; sherds of glazed York White Ware; glass (?)
C16-C17 sherd, tile, nails
- #428 Orange-brown sandy clay, natural

