

CRAYKE EXCAVATIONS 1983

Students from the Department of Archaeology, University of York, are conducting an excavation to the east of the churchyard at Crayke. The reasons for this investigation are outlined in this leaflet.

The parish of Crayke is rich, both archaeologically and historically. There is evidence for considerable Prehistoric and Roman activity, but it is the Anglo-Saxon period (roughly from the 5th to the 11th century) that has attracted the most attention, as there is evidence for a monastery of the Community of St. Cuthbert at Crayke. This evidence consists primarily of 2 references in a 10th century source, the Historia de Sancto Cuthberto. The first states that Crayke was granted to Cuthbert by King Ecgfrith of Northumbria in 685, while the second refers to the stopover of the body of St. Cuthbert in 882 on its way from Lindisfarne to Chester-le-Street and, ultimately, Durham. There is little reason to discount these references, making Crayke one of a select and little understood group of pre-Danish monasteries.

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1926 The archaeology of Crayke has been limited but tantalising. In levelling for a tennis court uncovered an important group of finds (see map), including a possibly 7th century pendant, an 8th century metalwork hoard, and a 9th century stone cross fragment, the last of which adds support to the presence of a monastery at Crayke. However, more relevant for our purposes is a trench (number 1 on map) dug in 1956 during a series of excavations. In it were found 16 skeletons below 14th century occupation material. There was no direct dating for the skeletons, though their presence outside the modern churchyard confirms their antiquity. The excavator, Mr. Hildyard, suggested they might possibly have formed part of a monastic cemetery.

The aim of the present excavation is to examine this cemetery further to establish its date and whether it could be monastic. Dr. Keith Manchester will help us answer these questions by examining the skeletons to assess their sex and age at death. Just as importantly, the excavation will help us find the extent of the cemetery, whether it was marked by any sort of boundary, and whether previous churches were always on the site of the present one. All these questions are of great interest to the church archaeologist.

THE SIXTEEN SKELETONS WERE 15 MALE 1 FEMALE.

1937
20/2
1926