

Searching for Skipwith 2024



Dr Jon Kenny

Jon Kenny – community archaeology

Contents

- 1. Introduction.**
- 2. Geophysical Surveys:**
 - a. Quakers Graveyard.**
 - b. East Paddock.**
 - c. Garth Field.**
 - d. West Paddock.**
 - e. Church Field, including West Farm.**
 - f. Fluxgate Gradiometer survey in Moat Field.**
 - g. Fluxgate Gradiometer and Earth Resistance Survey at South Moor Field.**
 - h. Discussion.**
- 3. Test Pit Surveys.**
- 4. Coring in the Church Field.**
- 5. Conclusions.**
- 6. References.**
- 7. Appendix 1 – Test Pit Finds Detail.**
- 8. Appendix 2 – Images from the Project.**

1. Introduction.

The “Searching for Skipwith” project took place from 2024 into early 2025. It was managed by the Archaeology Subgroup of Skipwith Heritage Group and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Dr. Jon Kenny MCIfA provided professional guidance, educational support, and delivery.

The project expanded upon archaeological research conducted at Moat Field in Skipwith, located opposite the parish church, between 2021 and 2023. During this period, evidence was uncovered of a moated manor house. This structure is believed to have been a central point of manorial influence in the village from the 1200s to the 1600s (Kenny and Worrall, 2025).

An estate map from 1769, which is displayed in the Escrick Park estate office, provides evidence of the medieval township's former structure (see Fig 1 below). The map depicts many of the tofts and crofts (homes for the villagers), the parish church, the new manor house, the core of the medieval three-field system, a windmill, the common area, and a woodland. This map was utilized by the Victoria County History (British History Online) to create a simplified outline map of Skipwith township, illustrating the changes in township structure as it transitioned from the feudal system to enclosed farming practices (see Fig 2 below).

The "Searching for Skipwith" project aimed to create a more detailed model of the township, specifically the village. The Victoria County History map did not include the detailed depiction of the village found in the estate map of 1769, a tithe map from 1841 and later Ordnance Survey Maps from 1851 and 1891. Using this detailed information, the project employed landscape archaeology methodologies to further investigate. This involved:

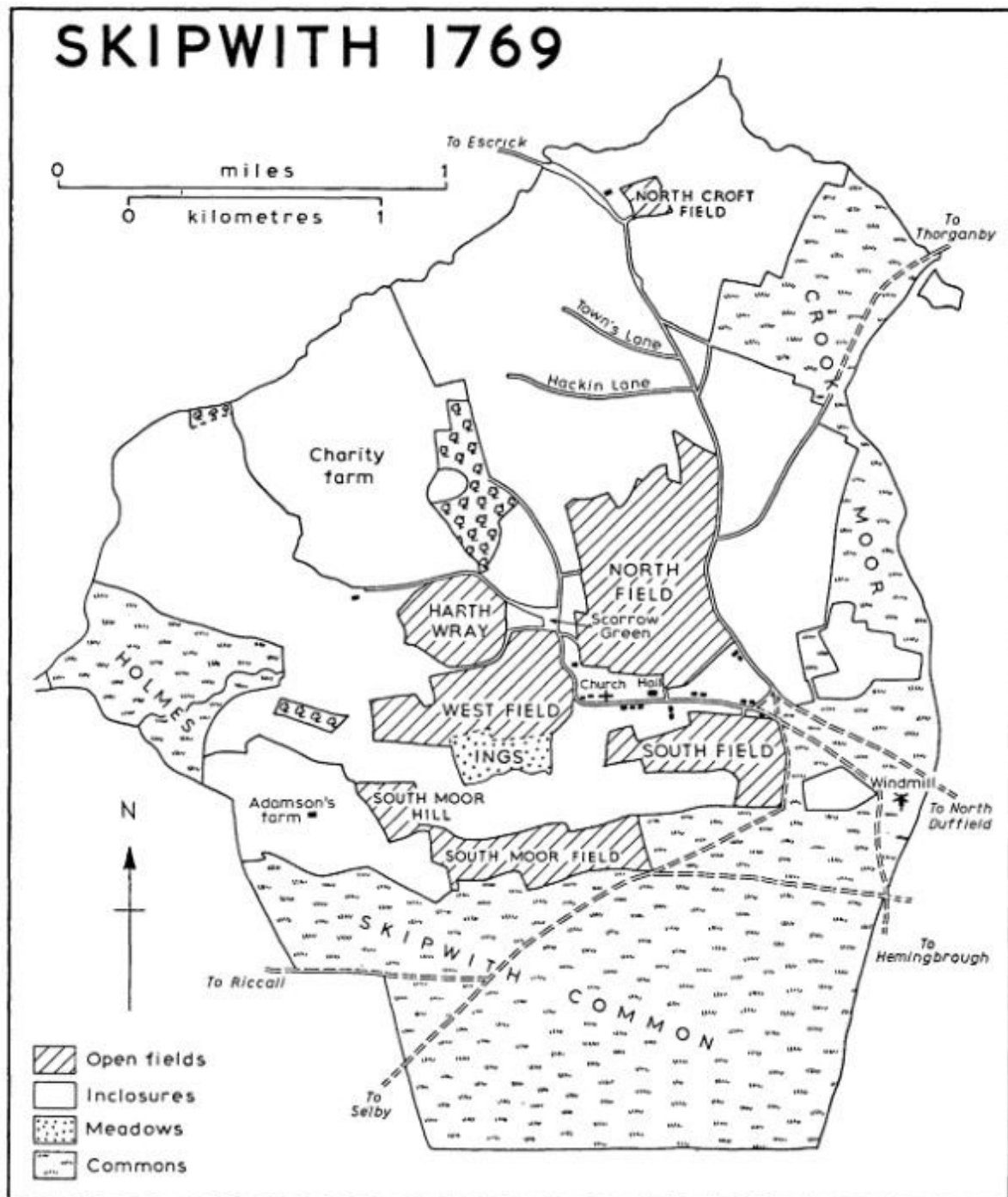
- Conducting geophysical surveys of the tofts and crofts indicated on the map that no longer contain houses. The aim was to identify both the medieval structures of the village and, in some instances, the locations of farms dating from the later village periods (1700s and 1800s).
- Utilizing LiDAR survey data to examine the relationships between the village and surrounding fields, watercourses, village, manor houses, and church.
- Implementing test pitting in the gardens of village plots currently occupied by modern housing. This method seeks to uncover potential medieval housing sites (though unlikely) and profile the dates and development of the village through the recovery of pottery, which is a traditional application for test pitting.
- Core samples were taken from the watercourse located in the paddock north of the church to investigate whether it was a man-made feature designed to drain runoff from the fields to the moat around the medieval manor or to the stream in a shallow valley south of Skipwith, flowing westward from the village.



Figure 1: Detailed estate map hanging in the Escrick Park Estate Office (Escrick Park Estates).

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the Skipwith Heritage Group and in particular the Archaeology subgroup for their unstinting support over the year or so of the project. Big thanks also go to Nigel Atkinson for his role as the project manager throughout. None of the project could have worked without a large group of 50 volunteers plus the members of the book club and art workshops. All coming together to make this a positive and rewarding project that also allowed us to develop our understanding of the village of Skipwith and its surrounding township.



SKIPWITH 1769

Figure 2: Map derived from the above estate map drawn by the Victoria County History, Showing the structure of the Skipwith township in 1769.

2. Geophysical Surveys.

The geophysical surveys aimed to find evidence of buildings no longer standing in plots shown on the 1769 Estate Map (see Figures 3 and 4). We theorised these areas might have been village crofts used for storage or dwellings. The 1769 map still labels some plots as Crofts and depicts poorly defined buildings.

The geophysical survey conducted in the moat field aimed to find evidence of a roughly circular *fossa* ditch encircling the church. This potential ditch or *fossa* was archaeologically identified to the west of the church, beneath a private house, during excavations carried out by Fern Archaeology in 2006. Our objective is to determine whether the *fossa* extended around the current location of the church. If confirmed, this could indicate the presence of a boundary ditch surrounding an earlier Minster on the site, as suggested by Pickles (2018) (see Figure 4 below).

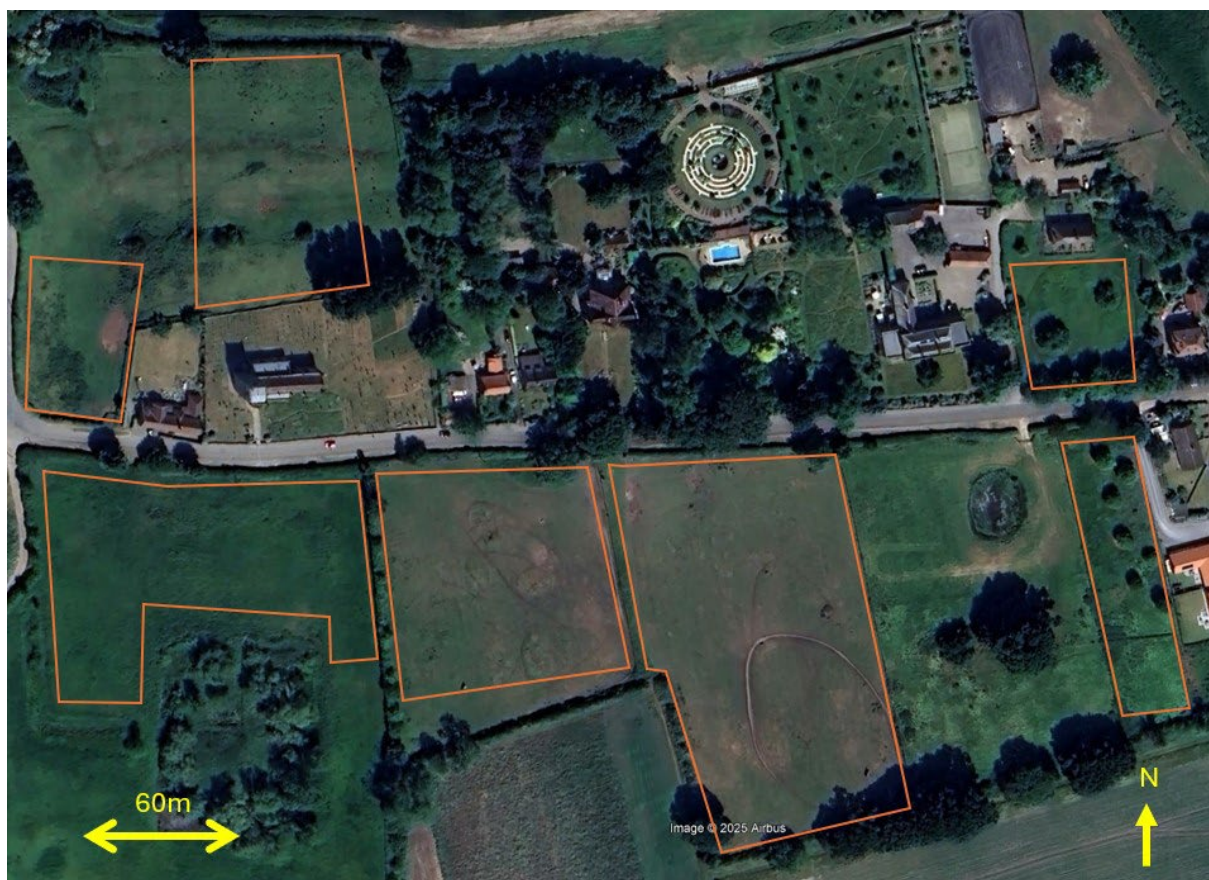


Figure 3: Village Map showing areas surveyed.

Outlined in orange.



Figure 4: Section of 1769 map with geophysical survey areas marked in orange. The possible circular ditch and vague building / structure plots are marked in red. The excavated section of ditch appears on the west side of the circular suggested ditch.

The 1769 Estate Map does not depict everything, unlike later Ordnance Survey maps. It does not show the moated site or indeed appear to show the 'new' manor house location. The proposed building / structure locations suggested in the crofts may also represent something different too.

a. Quakers Graveyard.

The Quakers Graveyard plot was used for a meeting house and burials from 1662 to 1782, after which the burial ground moved to East Cottingwith. A 1769 map, created while the meeting was still active, may show two buildings running north to south. These could be former village houses repurposed as a Friends meeting house and a separate graveyard building (see Fig 5 below).

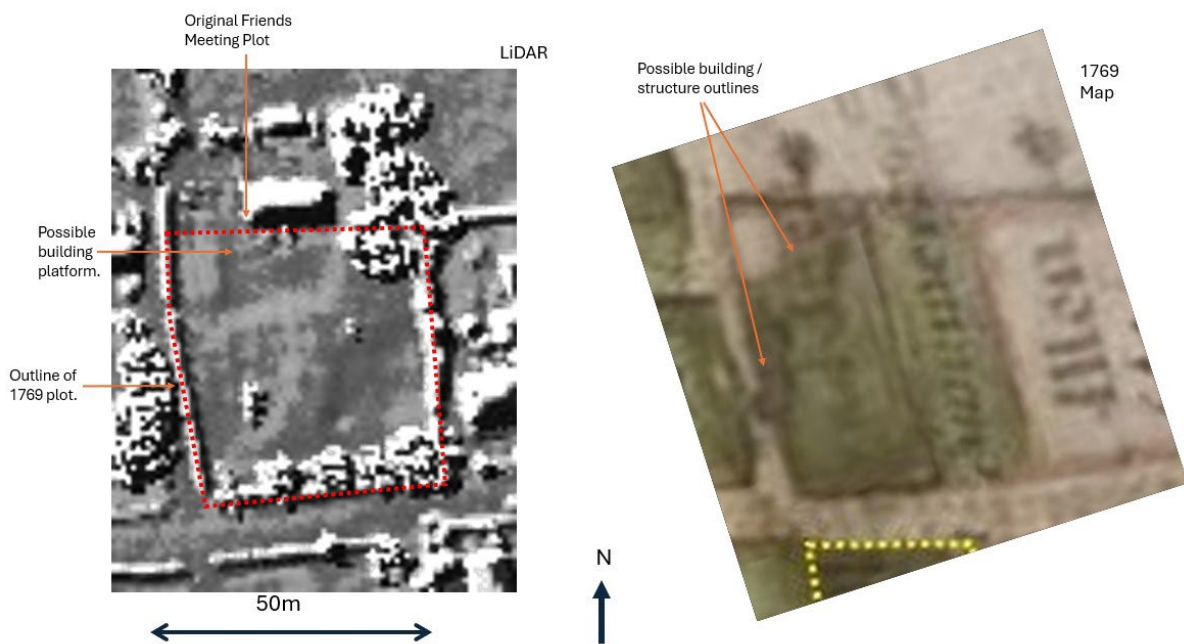
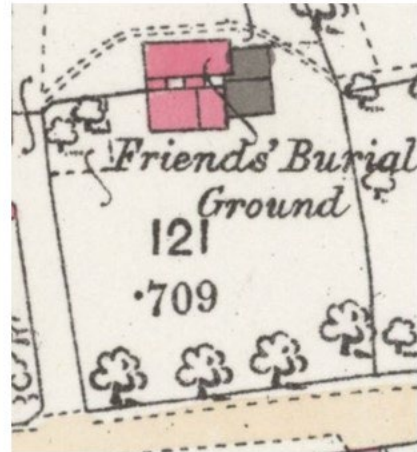


Figure 5: LiDAR and 1769 map compared showing limits of the 1769 plot and possible buildings or structures on the site.

The 1800s Ordnance Survey maps show changes to the Quaker Burial ground (Fig 6 below), including the removal of structures from the 1769 map and their replacement with today's double cottages. The linked cottages may be adapted Quaker buildings, suggesting the north-south aligned structures in the LiDAR (Fig 5 above) could be remains of an earlier building platform.



Figure 6: The 1851 (6 inch) and 1891 (25 inch) Ordnance Survey maps of the Friends (Quakers) Burial Ground. The buildings on the site have been replaced by a set of two cottages that still stand. These must have been built between 1769 and 1851.



Geophysical Resistivity survey was undertaken by a volunteer team led by Jon Kenny and supported by Alan Powell. Two earth resistance rigs were used, a Geoscan RM15 and an RM85 (see Figure 7 below). The weather conditions were dry leading to some over range readings.



Figure 7: Dr Jon Kenny and Jan Mitchell using the RM15 Rig.

The results of the earth resistance survey in the Quakers Field are shown in figures 8 and 9 below. Figure 8 shows the geophysical plot overlaid onto a LiDAR image; Figure 9 shows the same plot interpreted by the team.

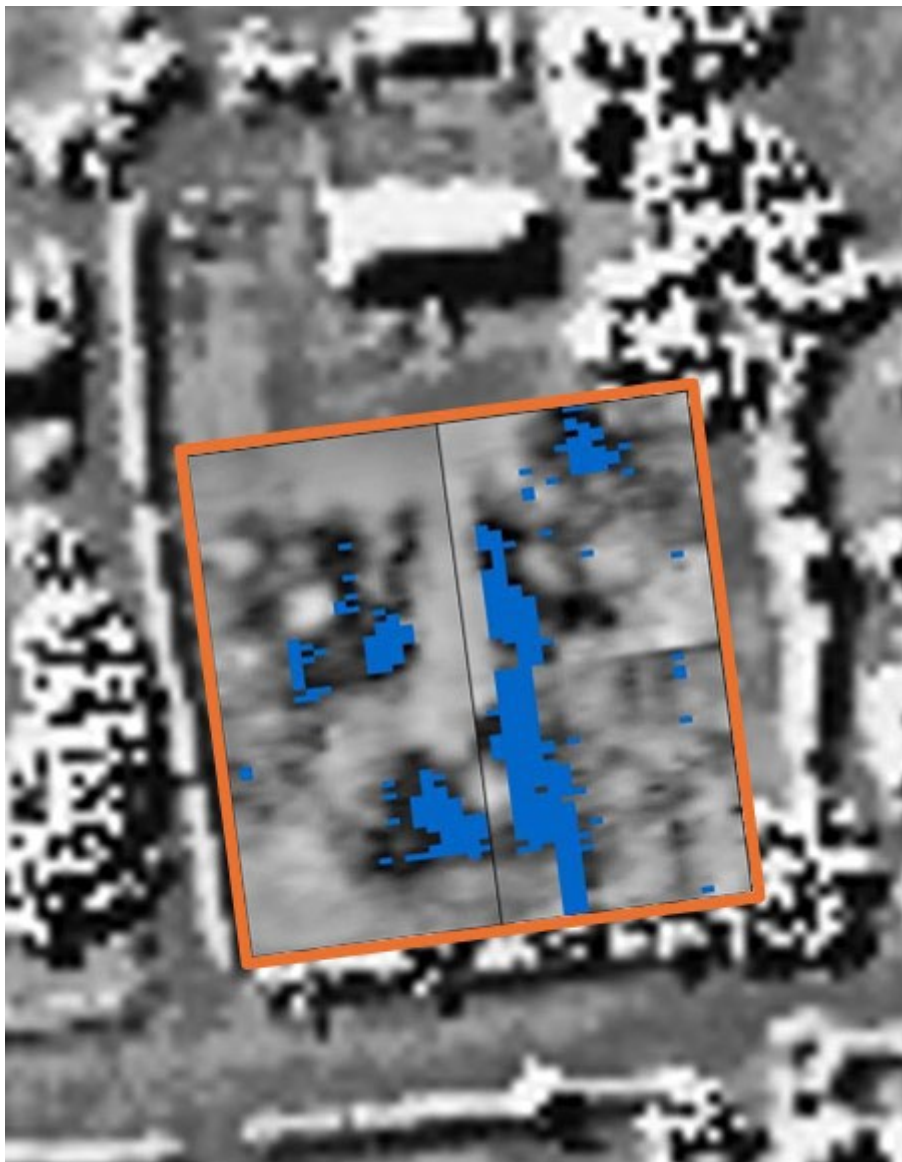


Figure 8: Geophysical survey (within the orange square) overlaid onto a LiDAR image of the Quaker Field.

The survey shows a high resistance feature to the east of the field that may represent an earlier building. This appears to be aligned south – north and may be the site of an earlier (maybe medieval house) that could then have been used as the Quaker meeting house. Later replaced by the house(s) in the 1851 OS map (see Figure 6 above). A lower resistance track appears to run past the building plot in a dog leg (marked in green in figure 9 below) taking you from the village main street up to the present-day buildings. A high resistance strip runs north south next to the path that may indicate a back filled, grubbed out, hedgerow line. The field as we see it today appears on the 1769 map (figure 5 above) and looks to be divided in two by a hedgerow. On the eastern side of this hedgerow

a cluster of aligned higher resistance 'rectangles' may represent the Quaker burials themselves (see Figure 9 below).

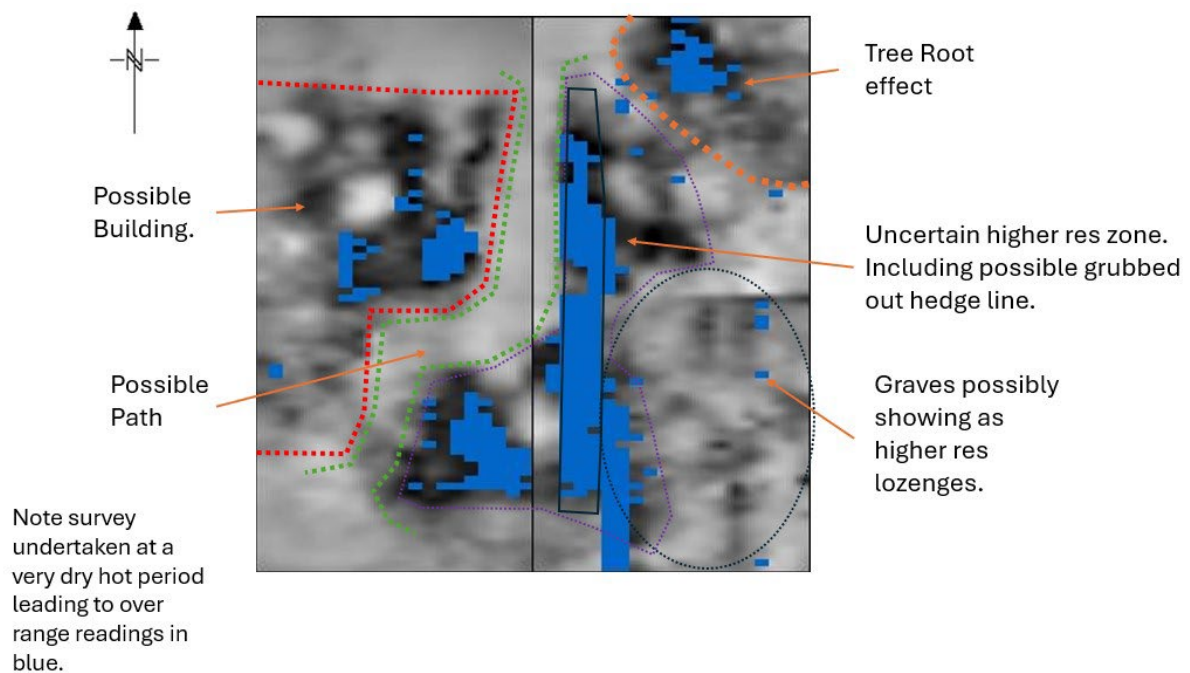


Figure 09: Interpretation of Earth Resistance survey of Quaker Field undertaken over 4x20m squares using Geoscan RM15 and RM85 instruments.

b. East Paddock

The area referred to by the Geophys team as the East Paddock is a section of a larger Croft indicated on the 1769 map (see Figure 10 below). The estate map has a darker mark on the map that may suggest a building or row of buildings running north south. These might be remnants of a medieval toft that went with the croft. We hoped that our geophysical survey would bring out any building platform in that part of the paddock.

Figure 10: Section from 1769 estate map showing 'East Paddock' as part of a larger croft. A very vague mark, outlined in red, may be a row of buildings.

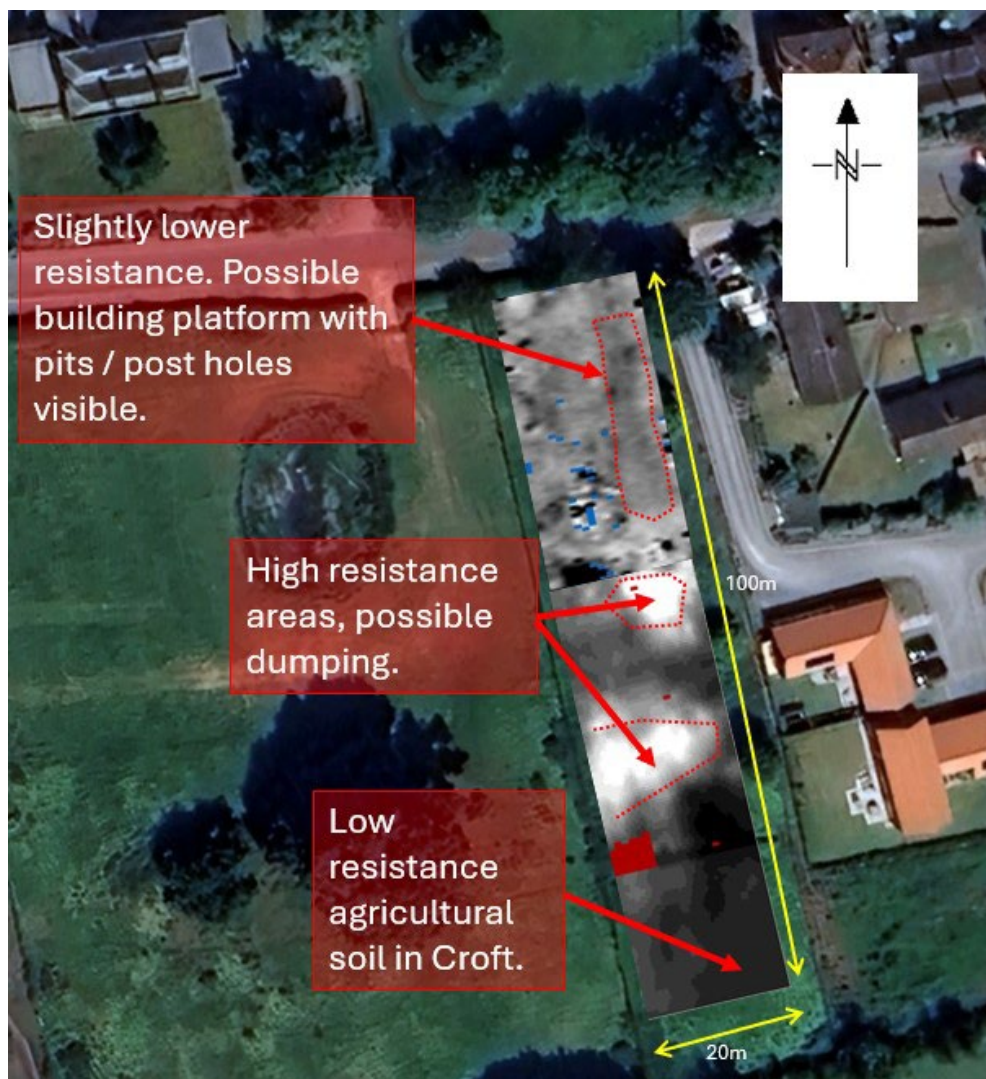


The data from the East Paddock was once again collected by two teams of volunteers, operating a Geoscan RM 15 and an RM85. Part of the eastern end of the paddock had recently been lost to development, which may have already destroyed some of the building platform. We surveyed five 20m x 20m squares in a 100m transect along the eastern end of the paddock (see Figure 11 and 12 below). A faint higher resistance area some 30m by 7m suggests possible building remains, including possible pits that may have a structural function. Two high resistance areas to the south of this map may represent areas of dumping following demolition of a house and associated buildings or a row of cottages. The southern end of the area surveyed is much lower resistance and may represent an agricultural soil.



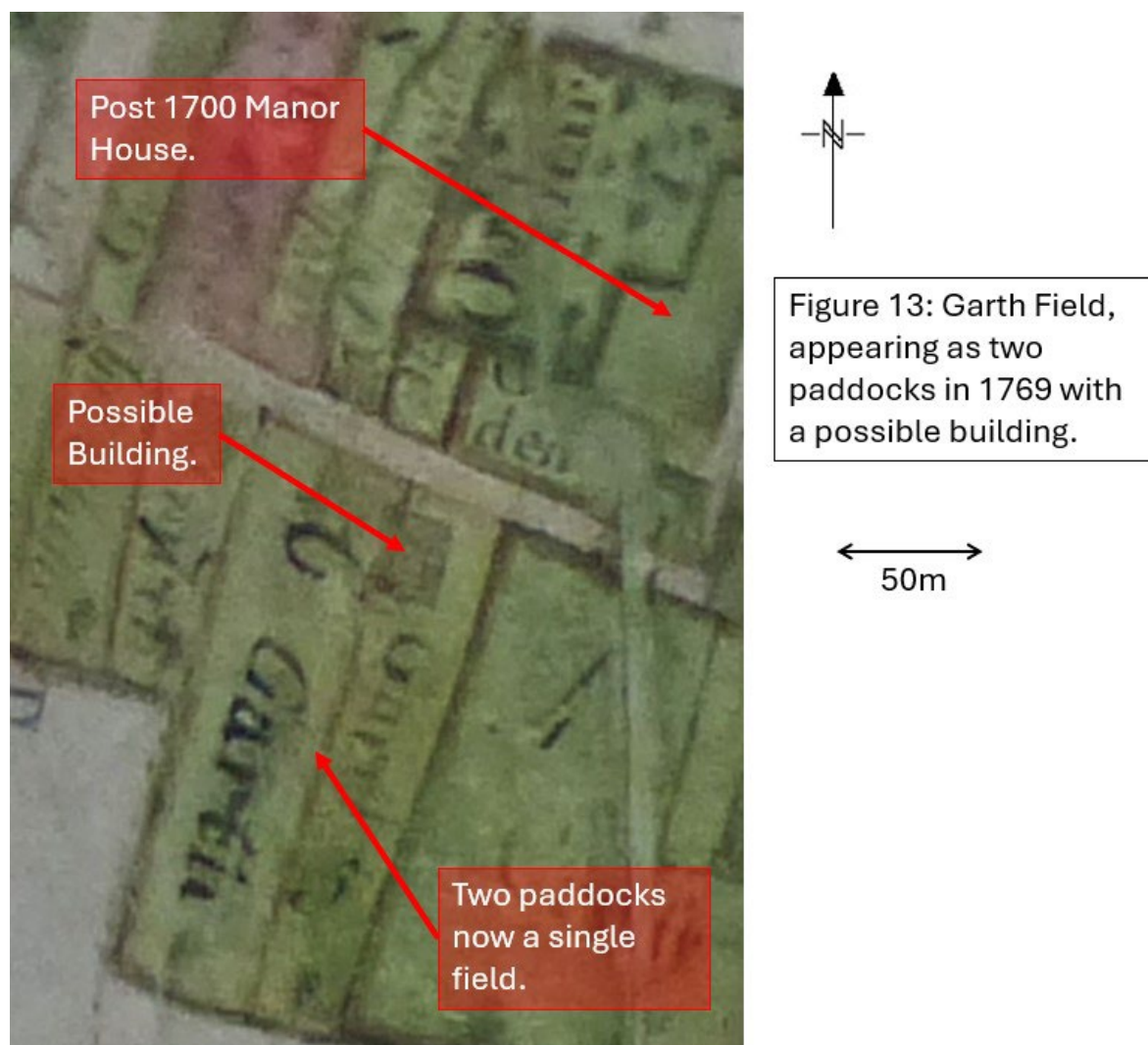
Figure 11 above: Survey in East Paddock under way.

Figure 12 below: Interpretation of the results in the East Paddock.



c. The Garth Field.

The area referred to by the geophysics teams as Garth Field sit in the centre of a series of paddocks running south of Skipwith Main Street, located opposite the present-day manor house. The large paddock (Garth Field) is divided in two in the 1769 map (see figure 4 above and figure 13 below). Each strip shows another dark coloured patch that may be the presence of buildings in 1769.



The survey of the Garth field was again approached using two earth resistance instruments, a Geoscan RM 15 and an RM85. The survey was hampered by very dry conditions and the need to accommodate the grazing of horses in the field (all of the paddock tenants were very helpful and accommodating). The two surveys were undertaken from the south end and north end (road end) of the paddock, they did not meet but we hope we managed to cover enough of the field to give us insight or at least support the observations from the 1769 map (see Figure 14 below).

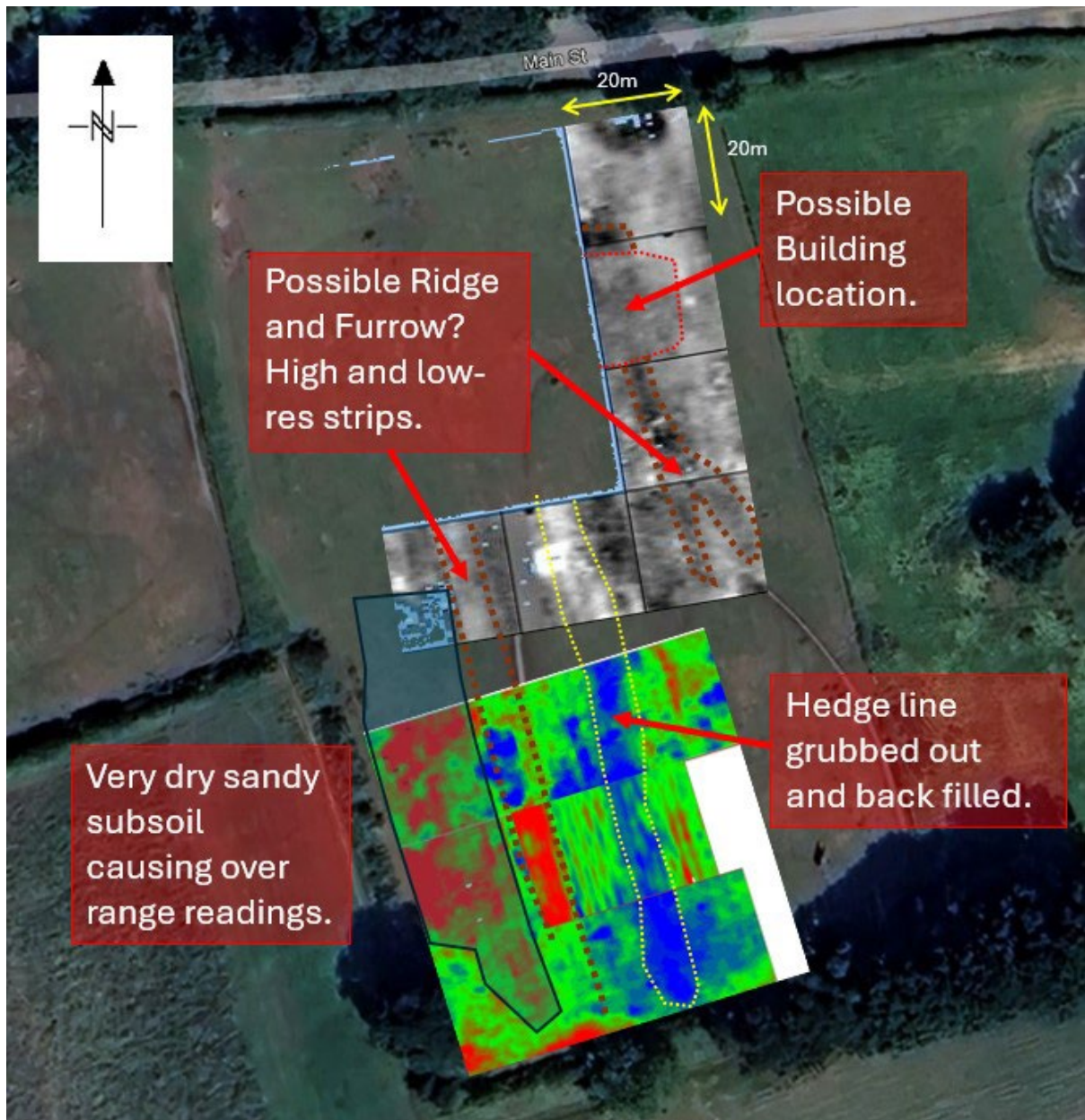


Figure 14: Interpretation of the earth resistance surveys in the 'Garth Field'.

The interpretation of the surveys in the Garth Field do suggest that a building stood in the northeast corner of the field, although the whole anomaly was not revealed. The hedge line delimited in yellow in Fig 14 is quite apparent, being much less resistant (damper) than the surrounding sandy subsoil. There is a possibility that the field was big enough to have ridge and furrow running north – south across it, marked in brown. A light dusting of snow a few years ago also suggests ridge and furrow in an image taken by Deborah Barton the tenant of the East Paddock (see Figure 15 below).



Figure 15: View across the ‘Garth Field’ looking south showing possible old ploughing or ridge and furrow.

d. West Paddock

The paddock at the extreme west end of the set of paddocks (before the moat field) was jokingly called by the volunteer team the 'Lump Field'. That was because a gentle lump, possibly a relict periglacial sand dune sits, in the middle of the paddock. The 1769 Estate map shows that the present-day field was divided into three in the late 1700s. The present-day field (see figure 16 below) appears to have been 'straightened up' as well as being made into one single field.



Figure 16: The West Paddock or 'Lump Field' showing earlier divisions and a possible building in the northeast corner.

The survey in the field was undertaken by two volunteer teams using Geoscan RM 15 and RM 85 instruments. A large section of the field was covered using five 20m by 20m grids. We were not however able to survey the most easterly of the three paddocks into which the 1769 field was divided. This was the paddock that contains the possible building mark on the 1769 map, so we cannot be certain of that mark on the map.

The interpretation shown in figure 17 below allows us to see the possible line of a field boundary, grubbed out and back filled. Actually, higher resistance this time suggesting it is back filled with light clean sand with low humic content.

Of interest in the field this time are a collection of lower resistance sub-circular features that appear to be pits. Tree bowls or possibly large posts settings, back filled with humic material. There is a possibility that the collection of features may be post holes and that these relate to a timber made structure, possibly an early Norman or Anglian structure. Our earlier research into the history of the village township suggest that the influential E'stoteville family held the manor, eventually even taking the name de Skipwith circa 1100 (Kenny and Worrall 2025). The moated manor site some 30m to the west of the features

was probably constructed in the mid-1200s by the Wake family or the d'Avaranche family. This raises the question where did the E'stotevilles / De Skipwiths hold manorial courts?

We also know that the church was likely to have been a Minster in the 700s and 800s (Pickles 2018). This early activity may have encouraged the Anglian secular Lords to have a hall nearby. All we know currently is that the Lord holding Skipwith before the Norman invasion in 1066 was called Gam (British History Online / Victoria County History).

If the features do suggest a structure, it was very large. As much as 18m by 12m, larger than the recent excavations at Skipsea for instance (see Figure 18 below) which measured 16m by 5m, significantly smaller.

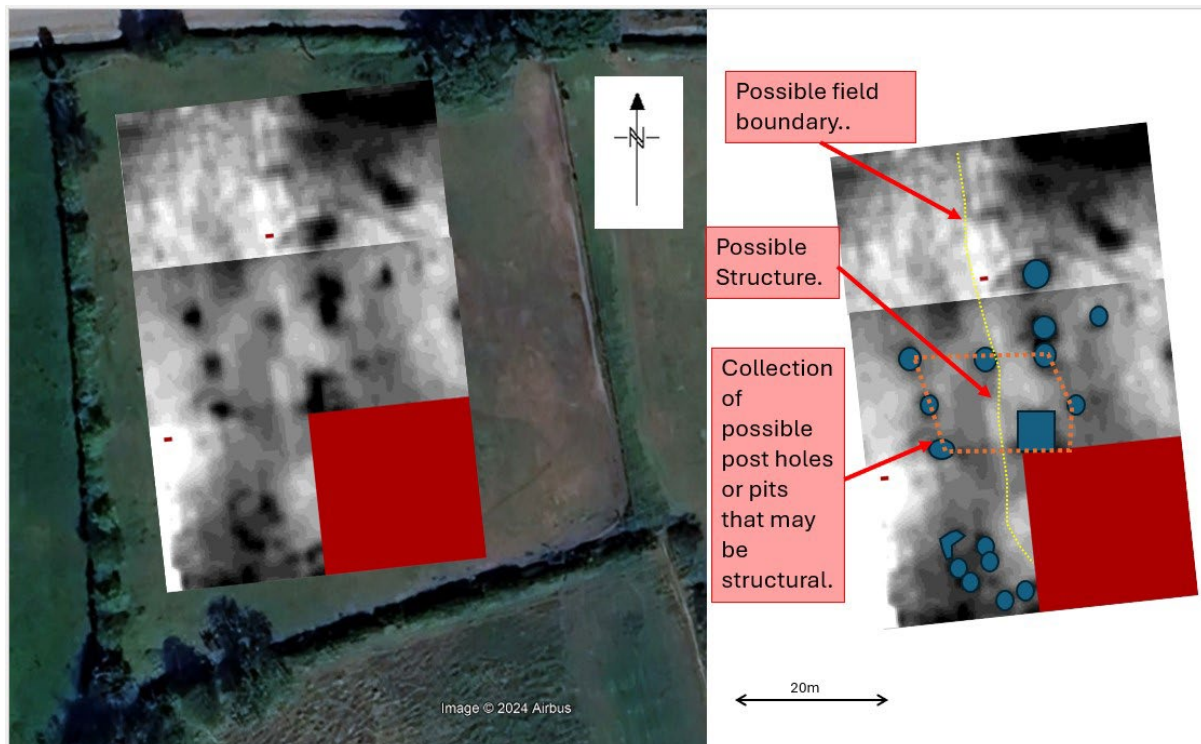


Figure 17: Geophysical survey in the West Paddock and interpretation.



Figure 18: Post hole hall at Skipsea, excavated by University of York 2024.

e. Church Field, including West Farm.

Our project interest in the field to the north of the church lay in a number of features that can be viewed in the ground or are illustrated on LiDAR (see figure 19 below). The field wraps around the church to the north and west of the church yard and a cottage immediately west of the church yard. Noticeable on the LiDAR (Fig 19) there are strips of ridge and furrow and a water course running east to west through the field.

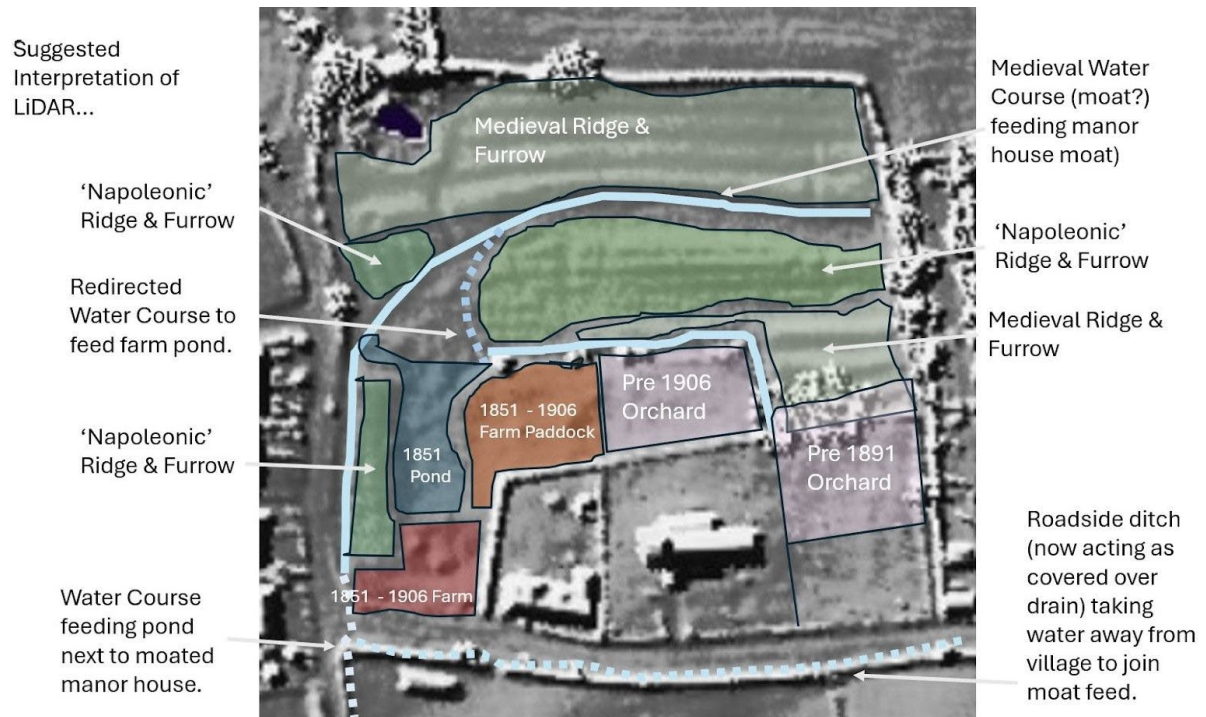


Figure 19: LiDAR image of the fields north and west of Skipwith Church. Showing ridge and furrow and paddocks surrounding the church yard during the 1800s.

The ridge and furrow in the LiDAR image appears to be broad medieval sections running east and west and smaller patches of narrow ridge and furrow that may represent the bringing of more land into cultivation during the late 1700s early 1800s, sometimes referred to as 'Napoleonic Ridge and Furrow'. Also visible in the LiDAR are paddocks that were used as orchards in the 1800s and marked in red a now demolished farm (West Farm) to the west (in red in figure 19). The LiDAR suggests that the water course running east to west then arcs to flow south along the boundary of the field. This earlier water course appears to be redirected to feed a farm pond north of West Farm. Comparison with the 1851 first edition 6-inch Ordnance Survey map demonstrates how much more space is now given over to the church yard that has expanded considerably over almost 200 years.



Fig 20: 1841 Tithe Map of Skipwith showing the layout of graveyard, orchards and the farm with a pond to its north. The water courses were not included in the map. The present-day extent of the graveyard is marked on the map in yellow.

The objective of the geophysical survey was to try better understanding the water course that ran through the field and appears to have been taking water away from the southern end of the North Field of the medieval township. Our intention was to show that this water course could be seen as part of a moat complex including the moated site. Or should it be seen as a separate dyke system intended to drain the Village and the North Field without causing flooding in the village.

We undertook three geophysical surveys (see figure 21 below). Two were undertaken as north – south transects across the church field (see figure 22 below). The third survey was undertaken to see how clearly the remains of the ‘West Farm’ would appear (see figure 23 below).

The surveys were once again undertaken using Geoscan RM15 and RM85 instruments. Northern parts of the survey were affected by the very dry conditions, while the water course was relatively wet, masking details.



Figure 21: Earth Resistance survey on the site of the 'West Farm'.

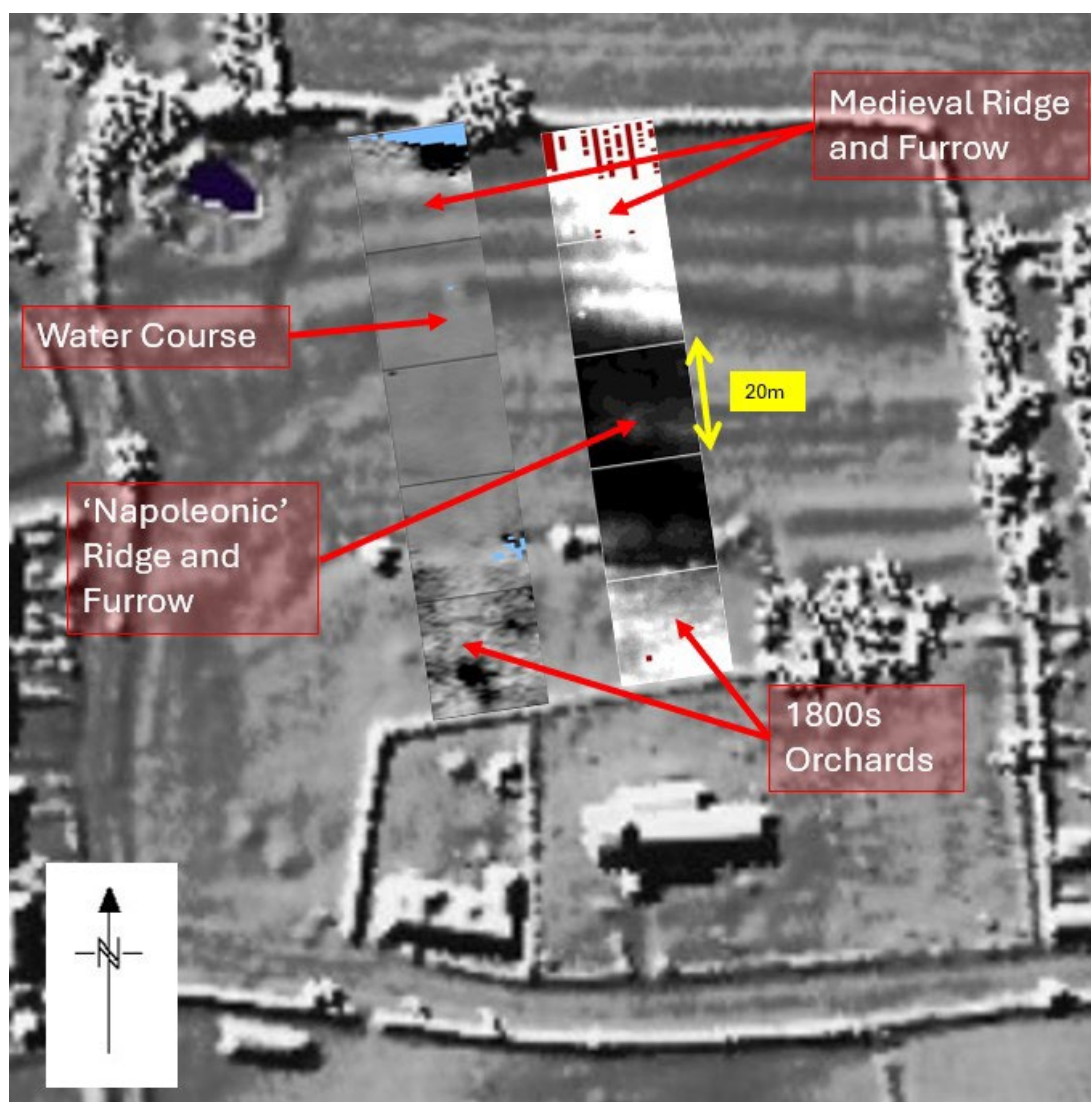


Figure 22: Earth resistance mapped onto LiDAR image of the Church Field.

The interpretation shown in Figure 22 above shows much the same as we can identify on the LiDAR plot. The impression that the team took from working our way across the landscape was that the water course was deliberately formed and would have been at least 2m wide. It has now silted up, almost entirely, and is most striking during wet conditions when standing water fills the shallow valley in which the water course is located. The channel may well be a diked and straightened natural stream given the shallow valley that contains it.

The third survey was intended to seek remains of the West End farm. This has changed over the years. A farm building appears on the corner plot on the 1769 estate map. This may go on to be the cottage next door to the church today. Viewing Ordnance Survey maps from 1851 to 1950 (see figure 23) changes in the layout of farm buildings and the nature of the pond can be observed. The farm was demolished between 1906 and 1950.

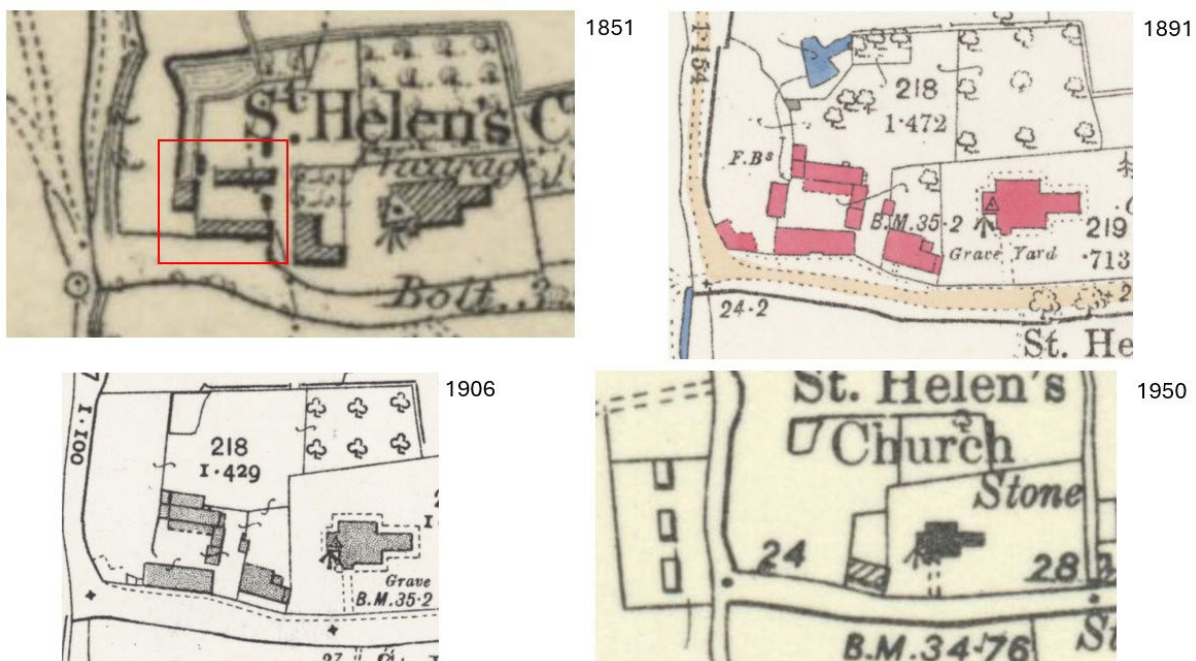


Figure 23: Ordnance Survey maps showing the development of the farm at the west end of the main road in Skipwith.

The survey of the west end appears to be rather blurred by demolition material. The more amorphous high resistance overlying the field to the west and northwest of the farm (see fig 24 below). The very low resistance sections of the survey represent the arm of the pond that seems to extent right down to the farm building in the 1851 map (see Fig 23 above) and the farmyard area. Outlines of some of the farm buildings present in 1891 and mostly in 1906 are also visible. The building aligned North to South has the pond arm running up to it in 1851, appears in 1891 and has been demolished by 1906.

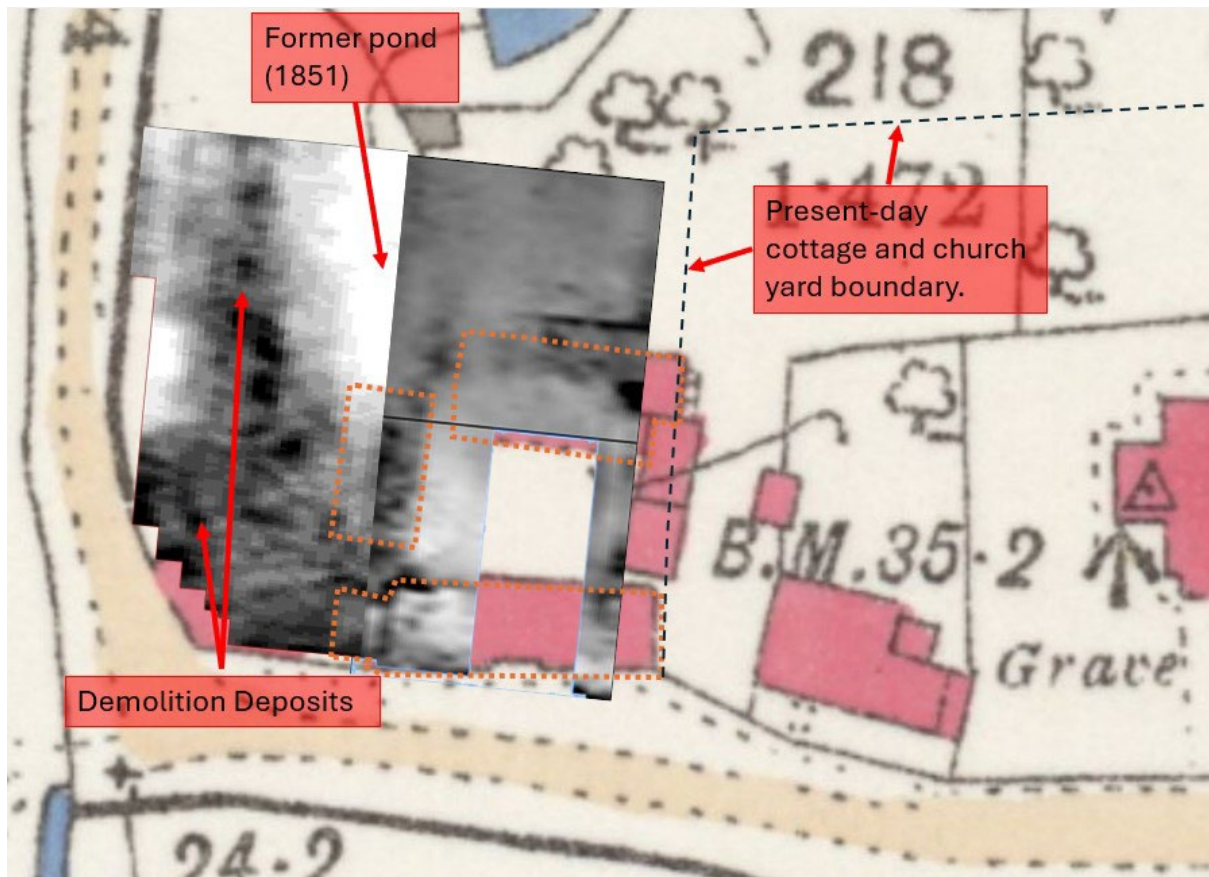


Figure 24: Earth Resistance survey overlaid onto 1891 Ordnance Survey Map of the farm on the west in of Skipwith Main Street.

f. Fluxgate Gradiometer survey in Moat Field.

The moat field, south of the church and the farm on the west end of the main street, had been surveyed using earth resistance back in 2022 (Kenny and Worrall 2025). The results were not absolutely conclusive but suggested a continuation of a ditch enclosing the site of the church and possible evidence for a gate house on the outside of the moated site. As part of the *Searching for Skipwith* project we decided to add a magnetometry survey to our evidence in this field. Magnetometry can produce different results and can also cover more ground in the time available. *Skipwith Heritage Group* contacted *Fridaythorpe, Fimber and Wetwang Archaeology Project* (FFWAP) who have magnetometry equipment, funded in part with the intention of assisting other community groups, such as ours.

A team of 8 volunteers used two FM265 instruments to survey the site on a day long visit in October 2024. The results are shown in Figures 25 and 26 below.



Figure 25: Magnetometry Survey in the Moat Field.

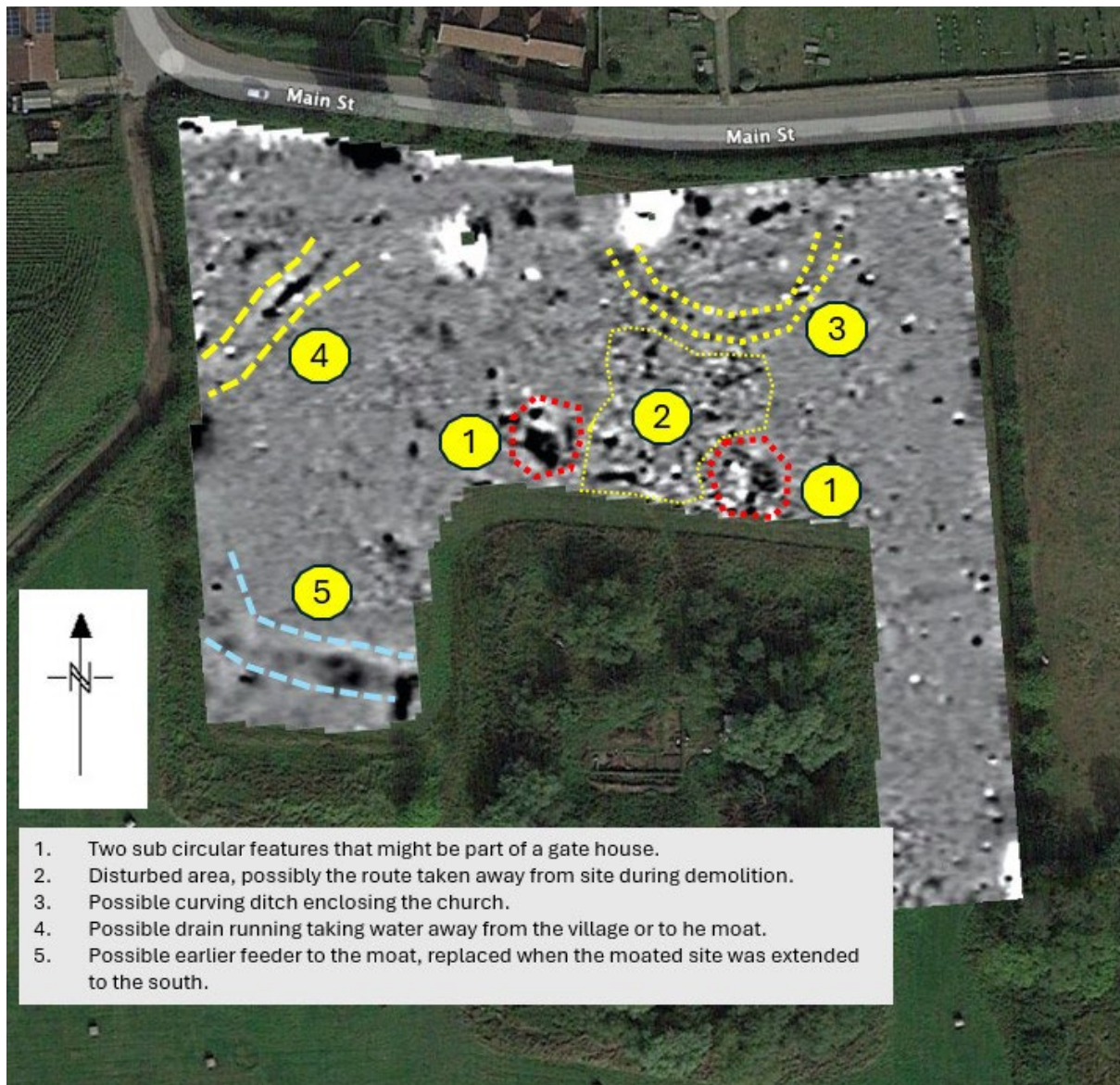


Figure 26: Interpretation of some of the features appearing on the magnetometer Survey.

The magnetometer survey appears to show the curving enclosure ditch that may have surrounded the church in the pre-Norman period when it may have been a Minster (marked as 3, in figure 26). The ditch has been excavated at the back of the cottage west of the church, it was conjectured that it dated from before 1066 and was back filled circa 1250. The same time roughly at least that the moated site was built (Fern 2006). This potential ditch should be further investigated through excavation in a later project.

A disturbed stripe of 'noise' runs north away from the moated site (marked as 2 in figure 26). This may be the result of the activity in the demolition phase of the moated site in the 1600s. Possibly sticking out at either side of this disturbance there are two sub circular features (marked as 1 in figure 26) that may be the ends of a gate house. The earth resistance survey undertaken in 2022 suggested bean slot like features in this area too. Making this another area of interest for excavation in a further field project.

In the northwest corner of the magnetometer survey a feature running southwest to northeast appears to be a ditch that aligns with the now culverted drain running along the hedge down into the shallow valley to the south. This may be taking water away from the village but presumably through a sluice system in the area also allowing water to be run down into the moat.

Marked as 5 in figure 26 is a possible ditch that may be the original external pond / moat that feeds the house moat. This change in the feeding point of the house moat may reflect a rebuild to the house around 1400. This rebuild suggests that the house platform was extended some 5 meters southwards. This change may have also required a realignment of the point at which water fed into the moat. Indeed, recent observation seemed to show water running out from the moat into the outer pond (McCool 2025 *pers com*). Although there is now no sluice to control this, we have to query whether the moated house also has a spring under it somewhere.

g. Fluxgate Gradiometer and Earth Resistance Survey at South Moor Field.

The last survey of the project was undertaken in early 2025. We moved some 600m from the moated site in the village to investigate South Moor Field (See figure 27 below). The purpose of our investigation was to look for evidence for a Roman farm stead or even villa which had been suggested by unpublished coring by the coal board some years ago. Material observed in the cores in this part of South Moor Field have been suggested to be Roman in origin. Aerial photography has shown field boundaries to the south and a large enclosure to the west (see figure 28 below). But nothing in the area of interest.



Figure 27: Map showing Survey area in South Moor Field.

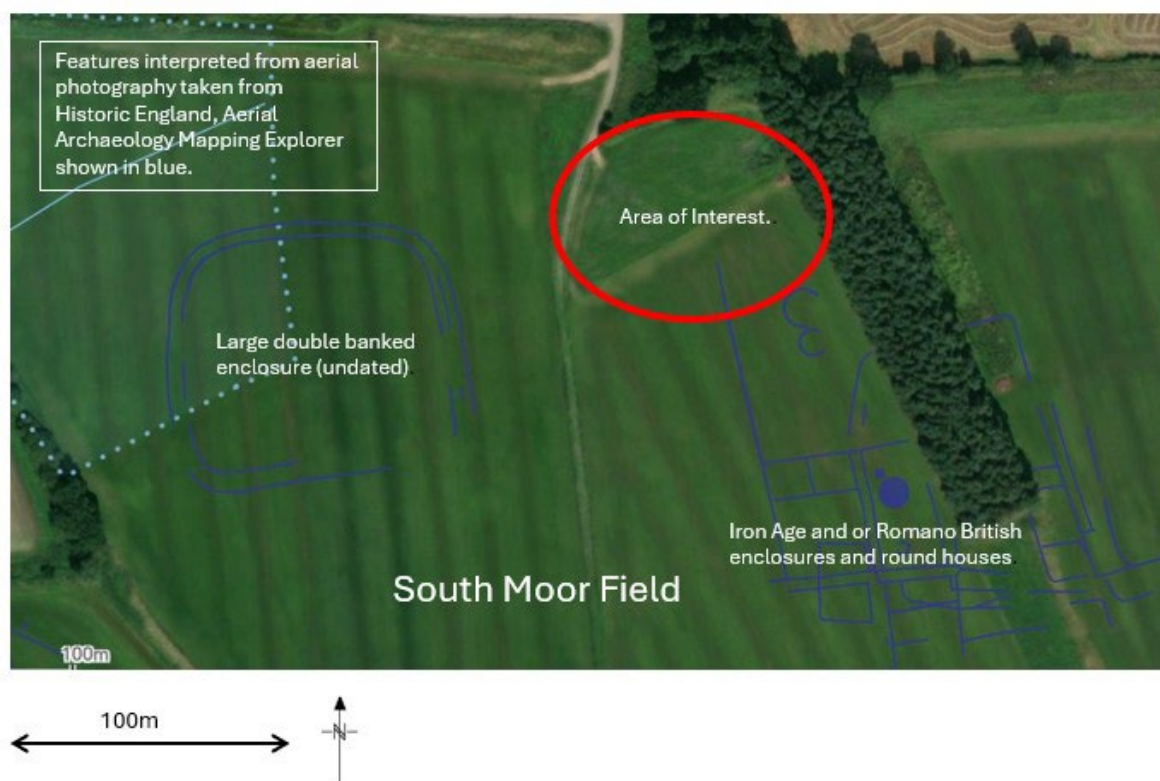


Figure 28: Map showing Area of Interest and archaeological features interpreted from Aerial Photography (Historic England).

A team of 5 volunteers undertook the magnetometer survey. In March 2025 we undertook a long 20m wide transect of 120 in length, across an area of set aside land and progressed out to the west to hopefully take in the large double banked feature. The survey was supervised by the author and Phil Jones a volunteer from Pontefract Archaeology.

The Magnetometer results are shown in Figure 29 below. The results were very disappointing and seem to reflect the sandy subsoils in the area. The only feature that showed up was the track way that runs north south across the field (clearly visible in the aerial images).

Following that rather disappointing survey we decided to try earth resistance. This survey was undertaken in April by a group of 6 volunteers. We matched the magnetometer grid but this time we could only survey the set aside land as a crop had been sown to the west (see Figure 30 below). The survey grid measured 20m by 50m. Readings were taken every 1m in transect and along each line. This was undertaken to speed up the process.

The results in Figure 30 do demonstrate clear anomalies, basically the areas that hold more water are in purple and blue while those in orange and red are higher resistance. The resistance survey results show a probable paleo channel running northeast down towards the stream that drains away west. This is the lowest resistance area on the plot.

To the east is an area of very similar resistance in purple and blue suggesting a fairly homogenous field deposit. Of more interest in the centre of the survey is a high resistance feature, in red, that is about 20m in width. This high resistance feature may be a natural dry strip running alongside the paleo channel or might possibly be of human origin.

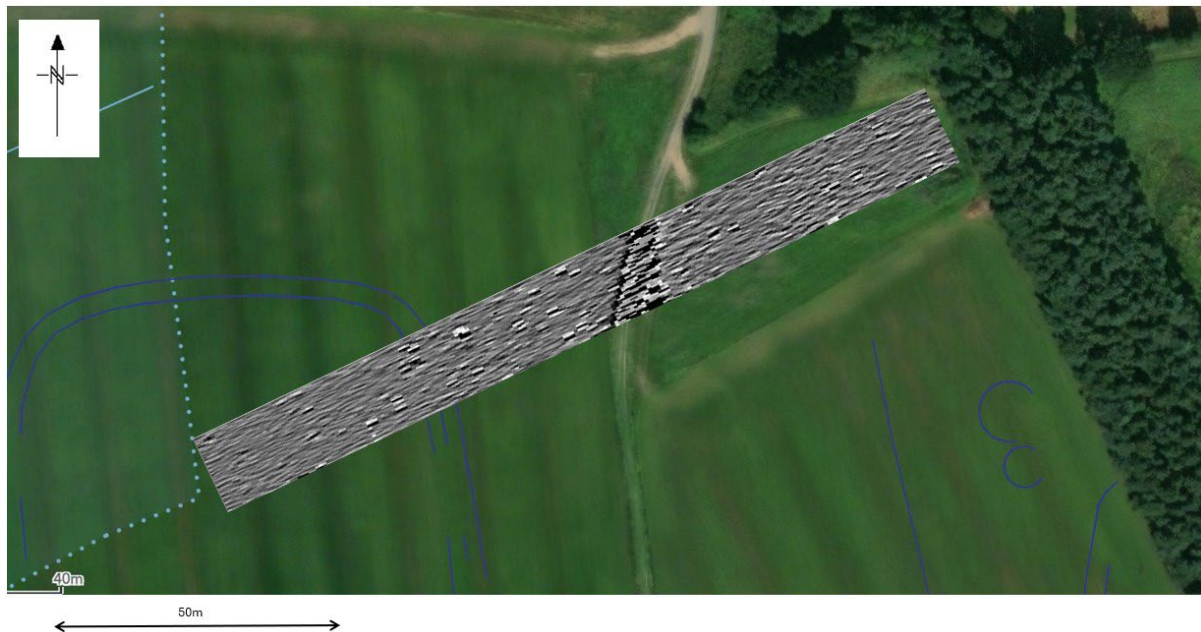


Figure 29: Magnetometer Plot imposed onto map showing archaeological features shown on aerial photography as crop marks.

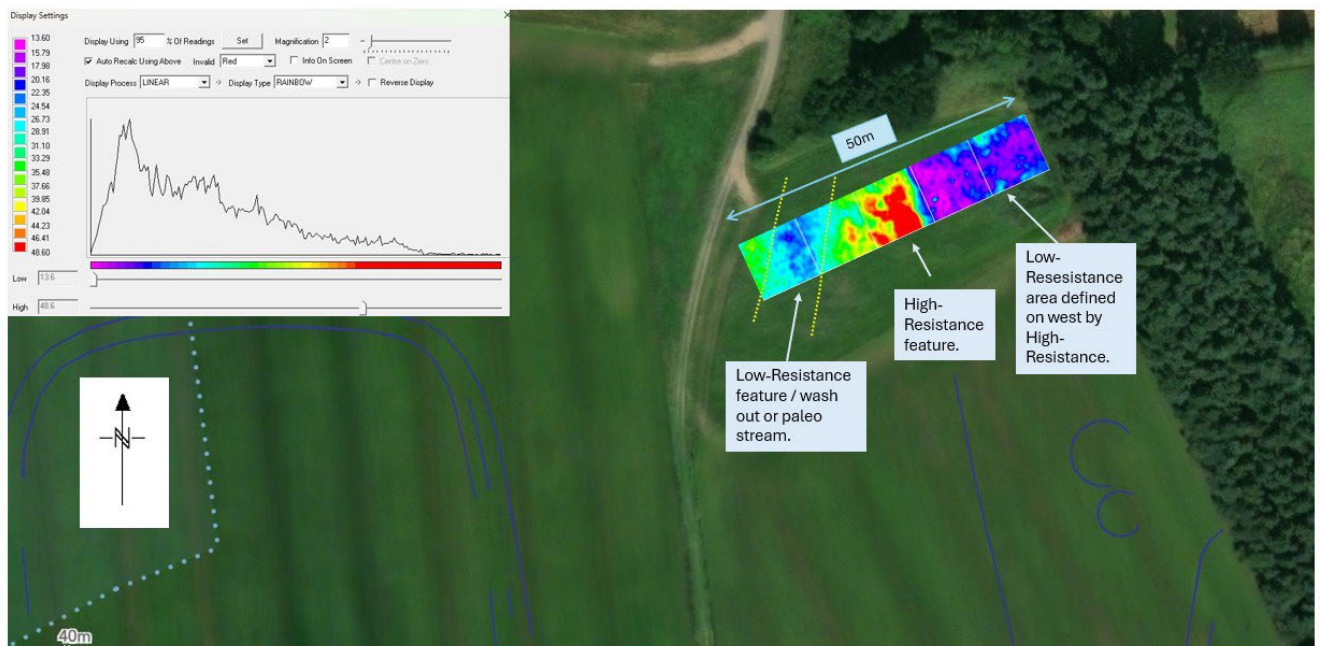


Figure 30: Earth Resistance plotted onto Aerial Photography.

The features that showed on the earth resistance may all be natural in origin. We may like to investigate the red area by simply sinking a test pit in the area and seeing what may be causing the high resistance. But that will have to be part of another project.

h. Discussion.

The geophysical surveys conducted along the main street of the village aimed to validate the historical evidence provided by maps dating from 1769 onwards. These maps indicate that numerous elements of the village's medieval structure remain visible today. The Victoria County History team has made significant progress in outlining the overall structure of the township. However, they have yet to provide detailed information concerning the specific layout of the village itself.

Today, the village is mostly linear with small hamlets at each end. Our geophysical surveys focused on the village core, including the church, the moated manor, and the post-1700 manor. These surveys added data about areas between and opposite the church and manor house. As shown in figure 27, the medieval village core contains around 24 tofts (houses) and crofts (land strips for self-support). Villagers also farmed surrounding strips of land to generate income for taxes and tithes.

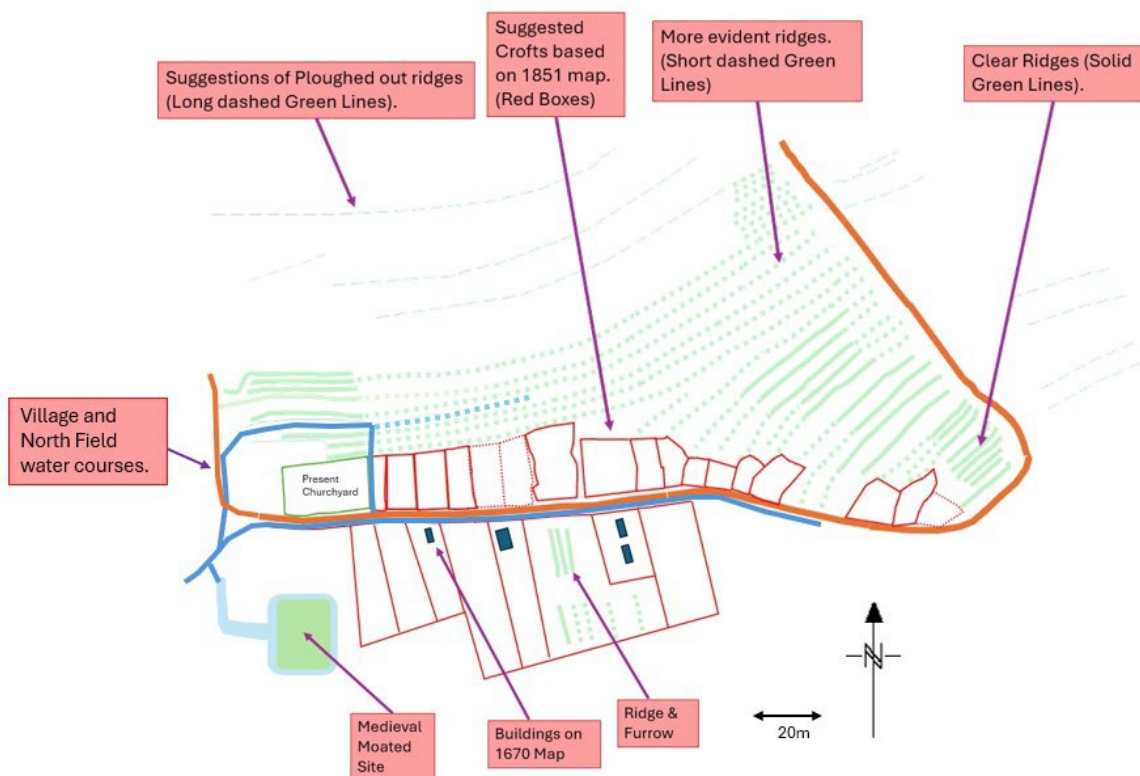


Figure 31: Map drawn based on maps since 1769, LiDAR and geophysical data to model the core of the medieval village at Skipwith.

Geophysical surveys, along with LiDAR data, indicated the presence of the great North Field. The ridges and furrows visible in the Church Field suggest that significant parts of the field were absorbed into the village. This likely occurred around 1700, when a new manor house was built on the north side of the main road. It appears tenants were moved from at least seven tofts and crofts to make way for the construction of the manor house and later a vicarage.

Evidence for the former field section can be found by examining the LiDAR of that village area (see Figure 28) and tracing between the clear ridges (marked in solid green).

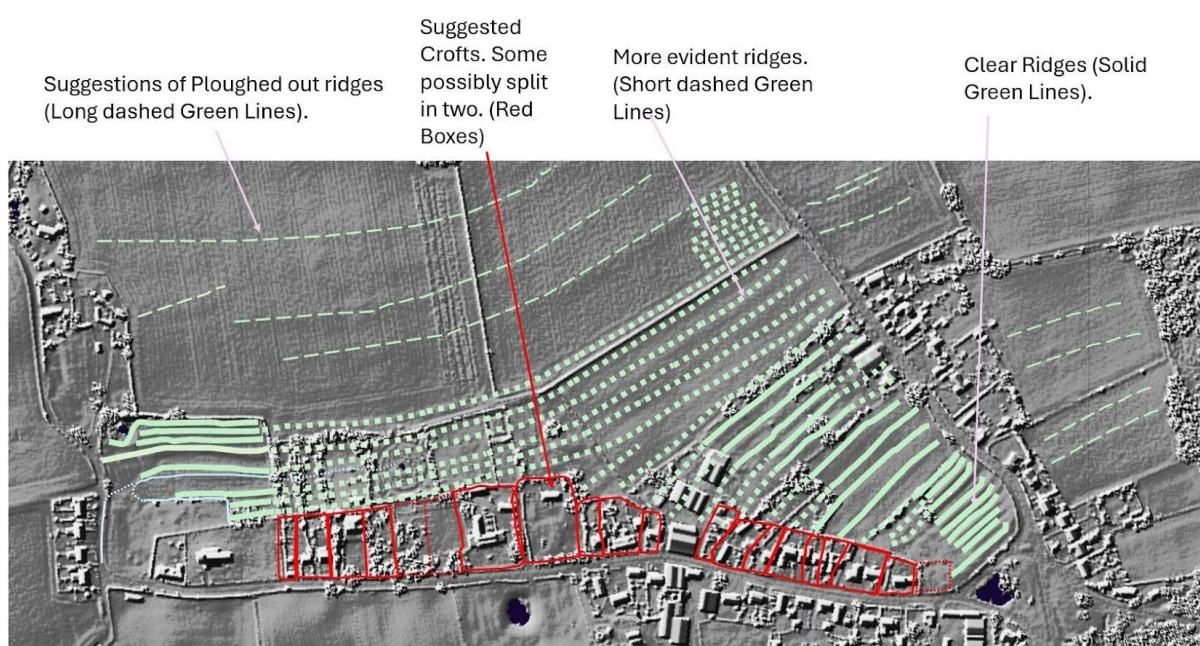


Figure 32: LiDAR image with the ridge and furrow traced through from the two areas where it is still visible at either end of the village. Note how much the central area from church yard to 1700s manor house are extended.

The dike system draining the field to the north and the village is complex (see Fig 27 above). It resembles a network of moats/dikes rather than a single house with a moat and fishpond. Such complexity is common in the lowlands of the Vale of York and Humber headlands. Skipwith requires dikes for water drainage during wet periods. In medieval times, manor houses also had moats for display and social purposes, beyond practical water management.

3. Test Pit Surveys.

The purpose of undertaking test pits through the village in Skipwith was to try building a pottery profile that may encourage some clearer understanding of the origin date of the village. We know from archaeological investigations at the church that the church at least came into being in the late 600s or early 700s (Hall, Kendall and Briden 2007). This early church may have been a Minster church, serving a number of townships in the area (Pickles 2018). Place name evidence is very varied for Skipwith but is ‘without doubt’ of Old English derivation (*wic*) combining with the Old Norse (*sceap*) for sheep. Suggesting a sheep farm sitting next to the Minster (Survey of English Place Names).

But where was this sheep farm located? Near to the Minster (which we can locate), or possibly at the hamlets at either end of the present-day village Little Skipwith or near the present green and pond? By finding pottery in gardens through the village we hoped to build up a profile and possibly locate settlement before the Normans arrived.

Why use Test Pits?

Test Pits can be understood as a method of field walking an area that has been built on. Instead of walking across a plot of land under cultivation after it has been ploughed or harrowed picking up finds brought to the surface and plotting the finds onto maps. A built-on area like a village isn’t of course, regularly ploughed and much is inaccessible because houses are located there. It is still possible to investigate the gardens between the houses. In this case you can search downwards in a test pit rather than just looking at the surface. So, you are still getting a good slice of the garden. The most useful find type is pottery, that can be dated and if you have a good collection of test pits results can be plotted onto maps. In this way you have a potential distribution of dated finds across a map.

Carenza Lewis (2014) from Lincoln University has shown how Test Pitting can work in numerous rural areas in Cambridgeshire. The process is useful both as a research method but also very useful in community archaeology because it brings together lots of different people in a community. Either undertaking excavations in their gardens themselves or allowing volunteers to undertake a test pit for them.

Methods

A set of 15 test pits were recruited across the village of Skipwith (see figure 30 below). The test pit sites were located more at either end of the village (Little Skipwith and the area around the present day green and pond). If the test pitting were to be built on in future projects we might seek to do more pits in the central parts of the village. Each site contributed one or two 1m x 1m test pits, excavated down to the natural deposits, generally between 80cm and 1m in depth. Each test pit was excavated in 20cm spits that were assigned a letter. Some of the test pits only got down to spit B but others got as far as D (80cm). A kit for recording the test pits had been put together by a previous HLF supported project at neighbouring North Duffield which were kindly leant for the process.



Figure 33: The test pit at The Drovers Arms (perfect spot for a test pit!)



Figure 34: Location of the 15 Test Pits across Skipwith.

Results

The distribution of pottery across the 15 test pits can be seen in figure 30 above. They are well distributed despite a gap in the centre of the village. The pottery is the key find type, because it can help us to date the development of the village. Our pottery distributions show some interesting distributions when plotted according to date.

Many other find types were located across the test pits, all of which were what would be expected in domestic village living. Animal bone (some with butchery marks), Ceramic Building Materials, Tobacco Pipe fragments, Charcoal, Metalwork and chinker and slag in the area shown to have had a smithy located there.

There was no prehistoric pottery or worked flint. No pottery dating to the Romano British or Early Medieval were located within the village test pits. We do of course know that there has been prehistoric, Romano British and Early Medieval activity in the area, evidenced most clearly by the Church.

Northern Gritty Ware

This pottery type was located in three of the test pits (see Figure 31 below). They were the three closest pits to the centre of the village, running east from the moated manor and church along the main road for some 500m. This pottery type can be seen as the indicator for the Norman Feudal system really taking hold in the countryside. This suggests the growth of the medieval, feudal, village along the main road, as proposed in Figure 27 above, but I fact stretching further east than indicated on that map.

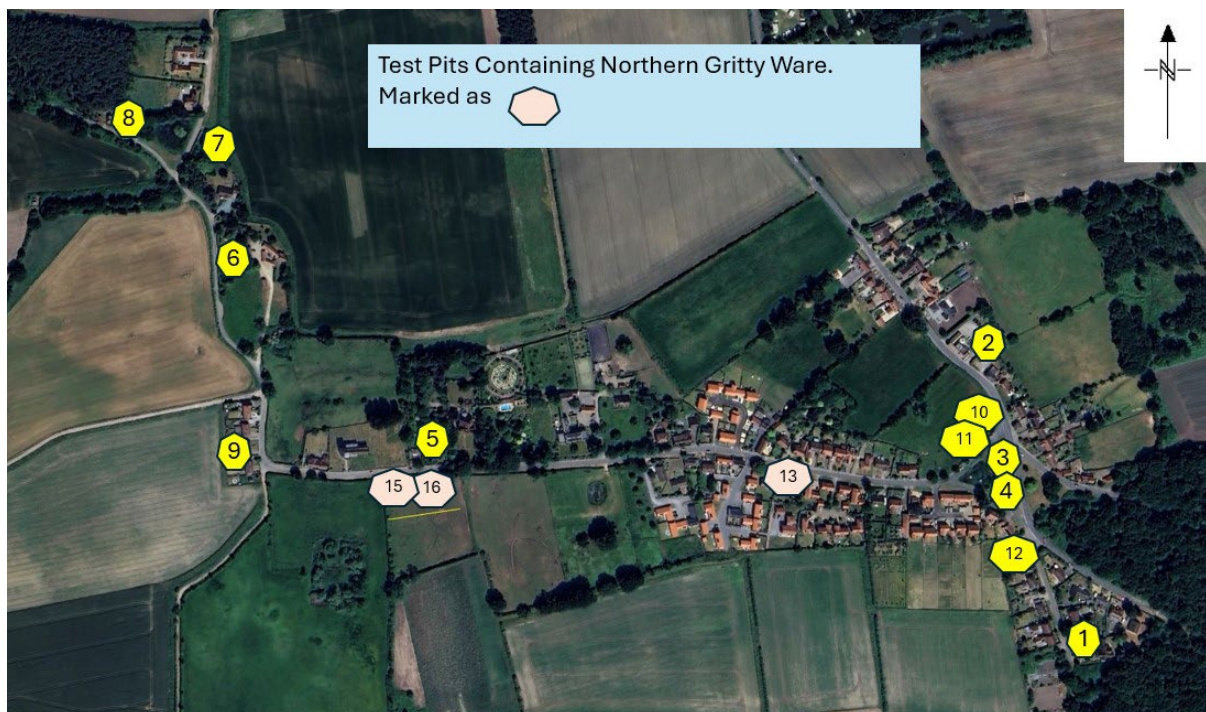


Figure 35: Test Pits containing Northern Gritty Ware.

Medieval Pottery

A variety of medieval pottery types are represented as sherds distributed across our test pits. 8 of the 15 test pits contained medieval pottery. The distribution is shown in Figure 32 and stretches all the way across Skipwith village. This distribution suggest that the hamlet of Little Skipwith was in occupation during the medieval period as was the area around, but not on, the village green at the east end of the village. See the distribution in Figure 32 below.



Figure 36: Distribution of Medieval Pottery.

The lack of medieval pottery in test pits 10 and 11 may be a function of the smithy remains on those pits. The brick made floors of the smithy were located preventing excavation to a greater depth. The floor of the smithy was an encouraging find and would certainly make an interesting excavation project in the future (see Fig 33 below).



Figure 37: Smithy floor in Test Pit 11.

Pottery from the 1800s and 1900s.

Perhaps unsurprisingly the distribution of recent pottery types, produced over the last 200 years was almost universal (see Figure 34 below). The only test pit to contain no pottery at all was number 4, on the village green at the east end of the village. This pit suggested that the green had previously been used as a hard standing. There was no evidence deeper down to suggest that the area had been used for agriculture but had possibly been related to common grazing or the use of the village pond.

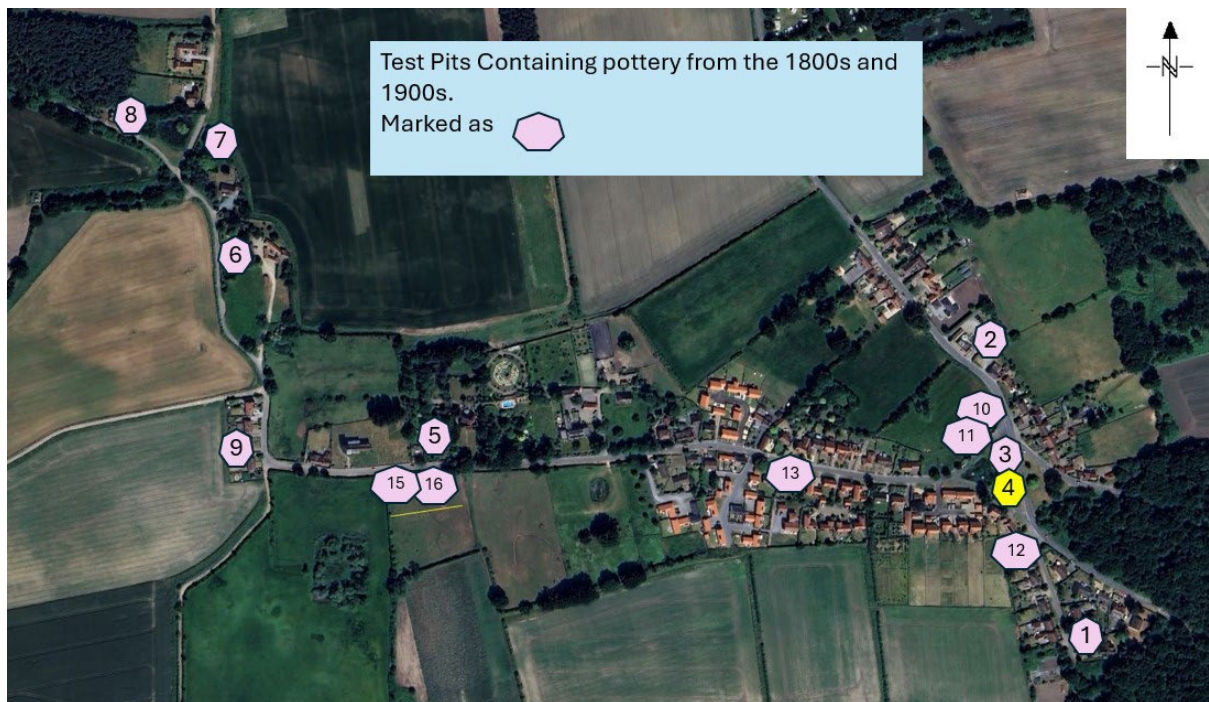


Figure 38: Distribution of Pottery from the 1800s and 1900s.

4. Coring in the Church Field.

In addition to the geophysical surveys and test pitting programme the research group felt that they would like to study the water course in the Church Field in more depth. The geophysical survey had not defined the water course as clearly as we had hoped, so we decided to spend a day core sampling a transect across the water course. This we hoped would help us to ascertain the depth of the course.

The team used a Dutch Auger utilising the coring attachment rather than the grab facility. This allowed us to extract long circular cores of the soil we were investigating (see figure 35 below).



Figure 39: A soil core extracted by the Dutch Auger.

The results of the auguring are shown in figure 36 and 37 below.

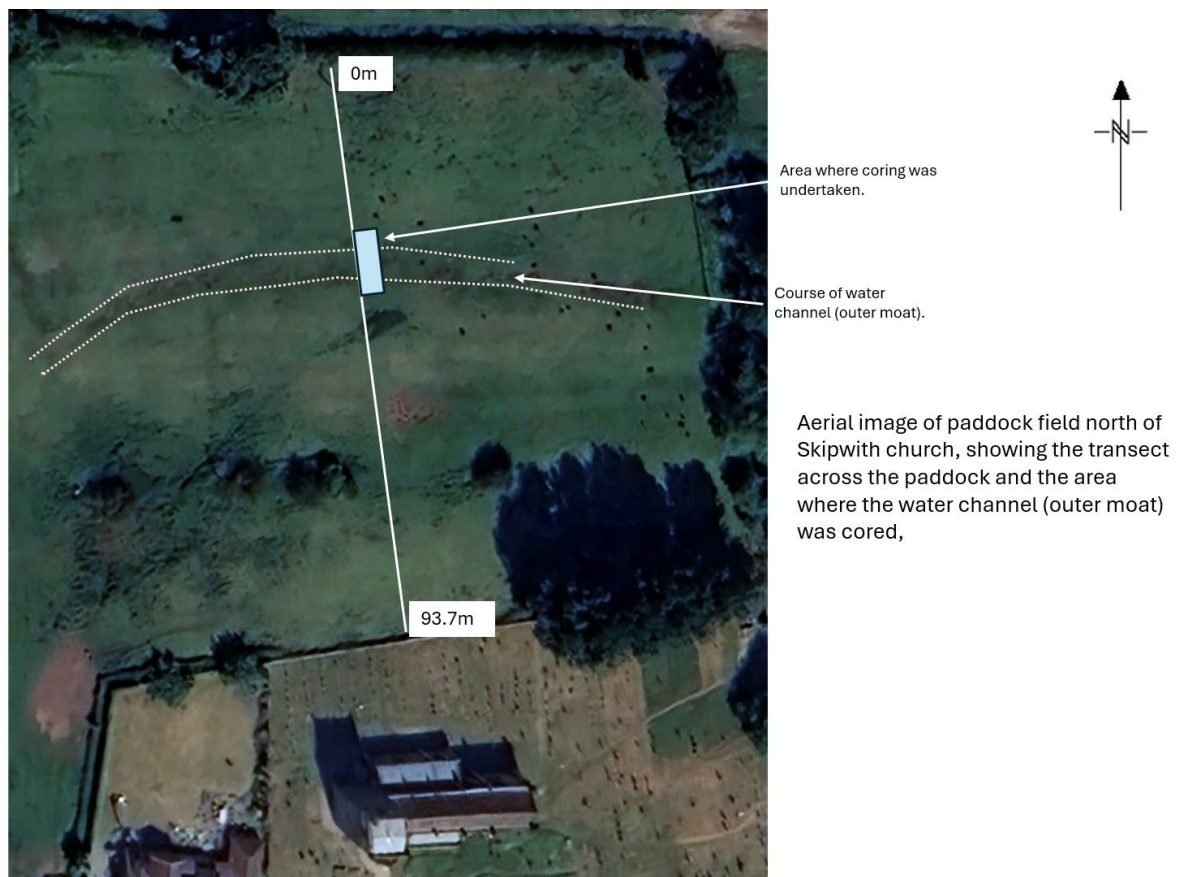


Figure 40: Transect across the Church Field.

The coring transect located the two sides of the water course. Core 1 (see figure 37 below) at the north side of the water course, took us down through the medieval plough soil until it hit natural sands at a depth of about 1m. On the south side of the transect, Core 2, the deposits were more complicated, representing a low-lying area that had been brought into use to grow crops for at least a short period. The narrow ridge and furrow suggests 'Napoleonic Ridge and Furrow' that is more narrow and straighter than medieval.

The two cores sampled in the centre of the water course (Cores 3 & 4) found a deep silted up deposit. This suggests that the channel was some 4 to 5 meters in width and some 1.5 meters deep. This suggests a well-cut deliberate channel that could be interpreted as an outer moat.

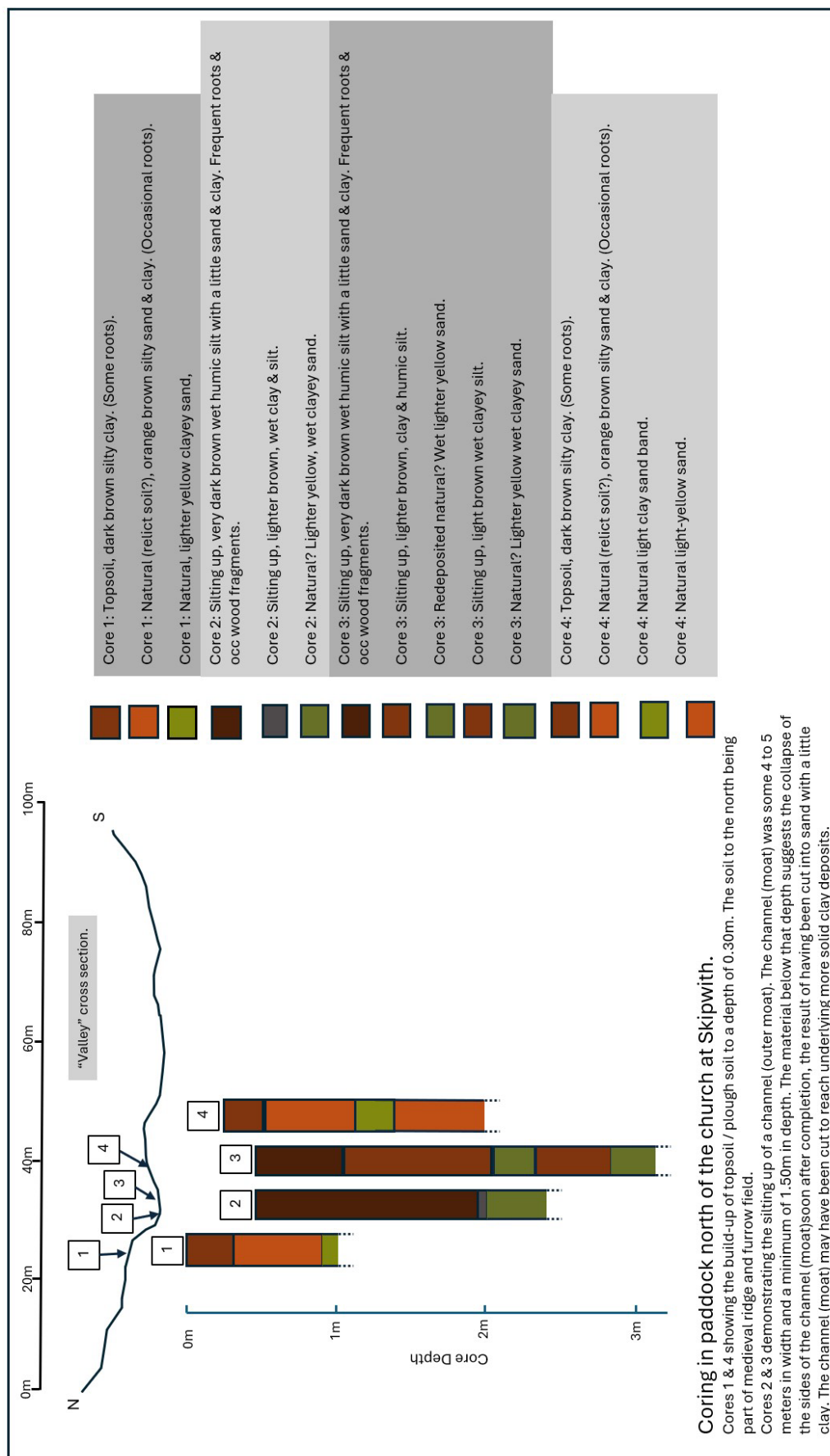


Figure 41: Results of the Coring Transect.

Conclusion

The coring added to our understanding of the water course in the church field. It appears to have been fed from the Great North Field and may have run up to a spring some 200 meters away. The depth and width of the water course may allow for the interpretation of the moat around the medieval manor house as part of a more complex of water courses that might be viewed as a moat complex.

5. Conclusions.

This report outlines the archaeological goals of the *Searching for Skipwith* project. Beyond archaeology, the project included starting a historical book and film club, running art workshops inspired by Skipwith's archaeology and history, engaging young people with learning difficulties through Applefields (SEND) School in York, and forming an archaeology club (DIGiT) for school leavers with learning difficulties. Further details are provided in our Heritage Lottery Fund report at the project's conclusion.

What then were our archaeological aims.

- To learn more about the origins of Skipwith Village.
- To better understand the medieval structure of Skipwith village.
- To better understand the relationship between the moated manor site and Skipwith Village.
- Has the medieval structure of Skipwith changed since the 1500s?

Origins of Skipwith

Archaeological investigations reveal that the church originated in the late 600s or early 700s (Hall, Kendall and Briden 2007). It may have served as a Minster church for several townships (Pickles 2018).

The place name evidence for Skipwith is diverse, yet it is conclusively derived from Old English (*wic*), combined with the Old Norse term (*sceap*) for sheep. This indicates that Skipwith was historically a sheep farm located adjacent to the Minster (Survey of English Place Names).

Evidence of a settlement with a Lord named Gam prior to the Norman invasion is documented in the Domesday Book of 1086.

Our investigations traced the medieval village to the current main street. At the west end was a church dating back to the Anglo-Saxon conversion in Northumbria. Around 1250, a moated manor house appeared opposite the church. Geophysical surveys suggest a precursor may have been east of the moated site. Further research is needed.

The presence of Northern Gritty Ware along the main road in Skipwith (opposite the current manor house) indicates that the village may have developed or expanded in that area under the influence of the Norman Lords.

The Medieval Village Structure

Maps from 1769 and LiDAR surveys suggest a structure for Skipwith. Around 1400, when the moated manor was redeveloped, village tofts and crofts extended about 600 meters along the main street, likely thinning towards the east. This could accommodate around 30 households, plus more in Little Skipwith and east of the village green. This aligns with the estimated 46 households from the 1672 hearth tax.

The 1769 estate map indicates buildings in the southern crofts near the current manor. Geophysical surveys suggest Skipwith village was denser before 1700, where large houses, a vicarage, and the manor house now stand.

Relationship between Moated Manor House and the Village

The moated manor house now appears isolated from the village. However, if village tofts and crofts extended along the south side of the main road, it would seem more integrated in the medieval period. Visible from the church, both secular and religious institutions reminded villagers of their obligations.

Our geophysical survey in the moat field suggests there might be a gate house just north of the house moat. This façade would have faced the parish church. Further investigation is needed to confirm this.

The medieval connection between church and lordly seat might have evolved over time. Further investigation into the church's structure is necessary. Was there a vallum ditch around the church until the early 1200s, possibly due to its original role as a Minster church?

East of the moated manor, at the area's highest point, there may have been a large wooden hall for Anglo-Saxon lords like Gam.

Our surveys show that understanding the medieval manor requires considering its broader context. The manor was not only visible to villagers and dignitaries visiting the church, but it was also connected to the village via the drainage system. This reveals that the moat was integral to a complex drainage network, suggesting a moat complex rather than isolated moats protected as a national monument.

Has the medieval structure of Skipwith changed since the 1500s?

Skipwith has evolved from a medieval village with surrounding fields into something quite different. Over the last 20 years, it has changed rapidly again. Since around 1500, the medieval moated manor, redeveloped in 1400, was in decline. By the mid-1600s, it was barely habitable. The feudal system shifted, and larger farms emerged both in the village and its fields. Many households in the tofts and crofts were abandoned or converted into farms, as small farmers were bought out by bigger ones.

By 1769, only three houses remained opposite the new manor built after 1700, with all others disappearing by then. This created fashionable views for the expanding manor house that replaced the medieval one.

6. References.

Fern, C. (2006) *Report on an archaeological watching brief to the rear of Church Cottage, Skipwith, North Yorkshire*, unpublished report.

Hall, R.A., T. Kendall, and C. Briden (2007), *St Helen's Church, Skipwith, North Yorkshire: Report on an archaeological excavation*. York Archaeological Trust.

Kenny, J. and B. Worrall (2025), *Skipwith Moated Site: Community archaeological investigations in 2022 and 2023*. Amazon Kindle.

Pickles, T. 2018. *Kingship, Society and the Church in Anglo-Saxon Yorkshire*, Oxford University Press.

Appendix 1 – Test Pit Finds Detail.

Skipwith Test Pitting 2023 & 2024

Pit No	Spit	Metal Work	Clinker	CBM	Pot Rom	Pot EM	N Grit	Pot Med	Pot PostMed	Pot 1800s & 1900s	Pot UnID	Glass Mod	Slag	Tob Pipe	
1 A	1	2						3	1	28				1	
1 B	1							1		39		8		3 Butons	
1 C	1									60		1		1 Spoon Frag	
2 A	2									1					
2 C	2							1		3					
3 B	3	4								8					
4 A	4											9		5	
4 B	4														Gravel & Tarmac shavings
5 A	1	1								2					Gravel & Tarmac shavings
5 B	1	10								9		3			
5 C	1	7								3				2	
6 A	2	1								7					
6 B	3							1		12		2			
6 C	2								1						
7 A	4	26								8		6			
7 B	1	2								6				1	
8 A	7	12						1		10		15			
8 B	1	4								10		4		1	
8 C		9						2		2					
9 A		2								8		1			
10 B		5								1				2	
10 C	1	30								4		1		3	
11 B	5	3							1	3				1 Lime Stone Frag	
12 A										8				1	
12 B		2							2	15	2	1		4	
12 C		1						1		2				3	
13 B		2							2	3		2			Bakolite Pipe Stem
13 C	3	4						1	1	12		4			
13 D		4							1	1		1			
13 E							1		1		2			2	
14 Unused															
15 A		2						1							
15 B		2					1		4					2	
15 C	1							1		7					
15 D	3	1						2			1				
16 A	1							1	1	11				2	
16 B							1			3					
Katie fieldwalking								6	2	13		1			

Appendix 2 – Images from the Project

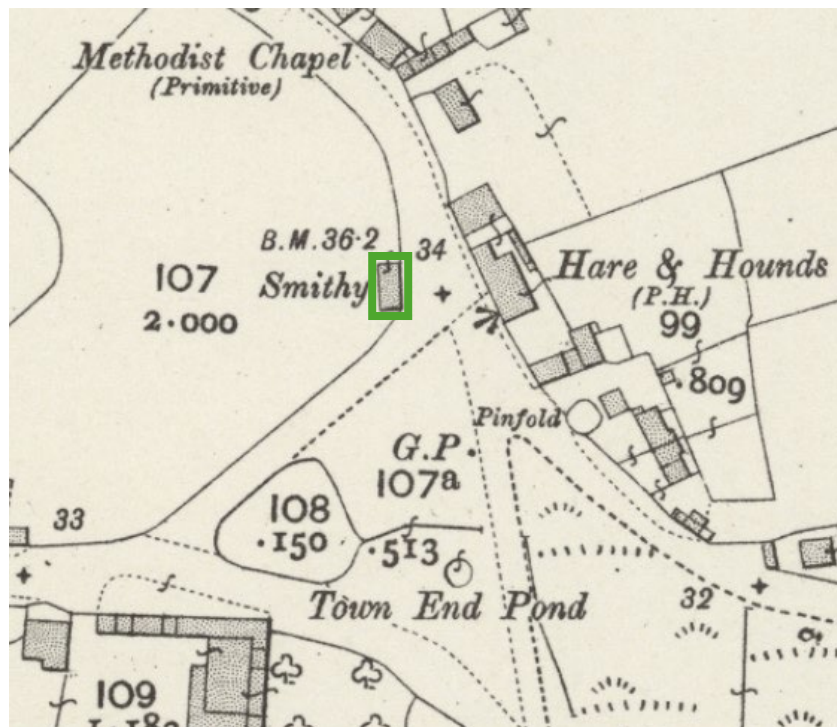


Map showing location of Test Pits.



The Test Pitting Team at the location of a Smithy.

Test Pits 10 & 11.



Ordnance Survey Map (25 inch) (National Library of Scotland)

Smithy marked in green.



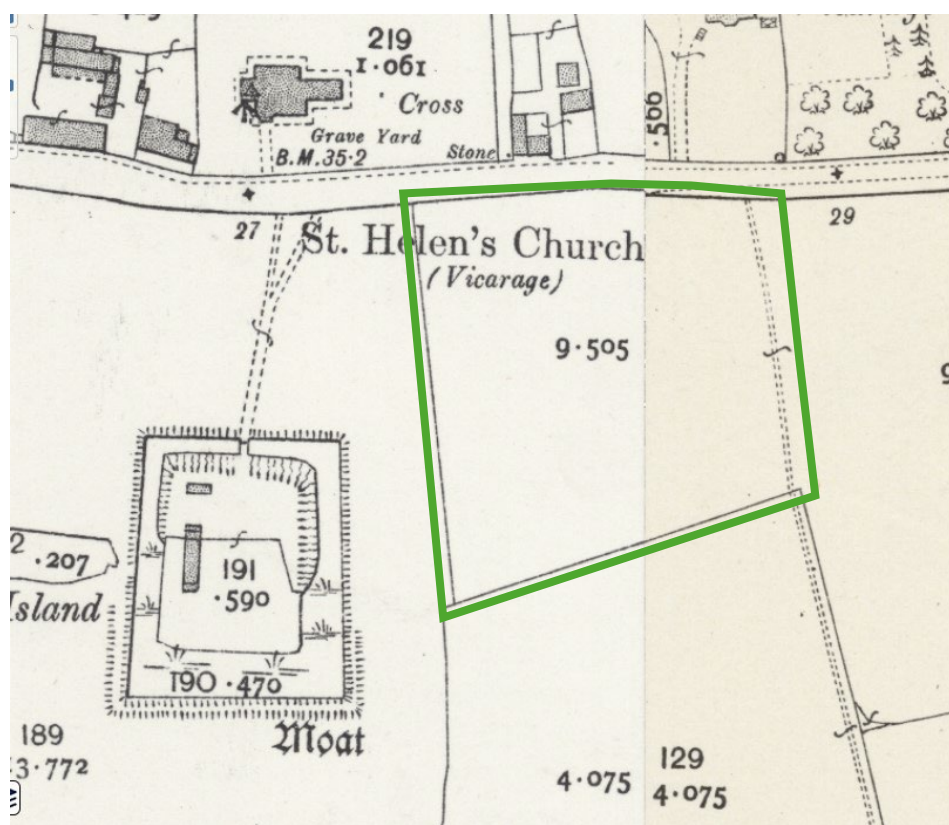
Young people helping with the test pit on the Smithy site.



Test Pit 11 at the Smithy site.
Showing brick floor from the Smithy.



Test Pit 15 underway in the West Paddock or 'Lump Field'.



Ordnance Survey Map (25 inch) (National Library of Scotland)

West Paddock or 'Lump Field' marked in green.



The Team at work on Test Pit 8.

Cottage west of Scarrow Green in Little Skipwith.



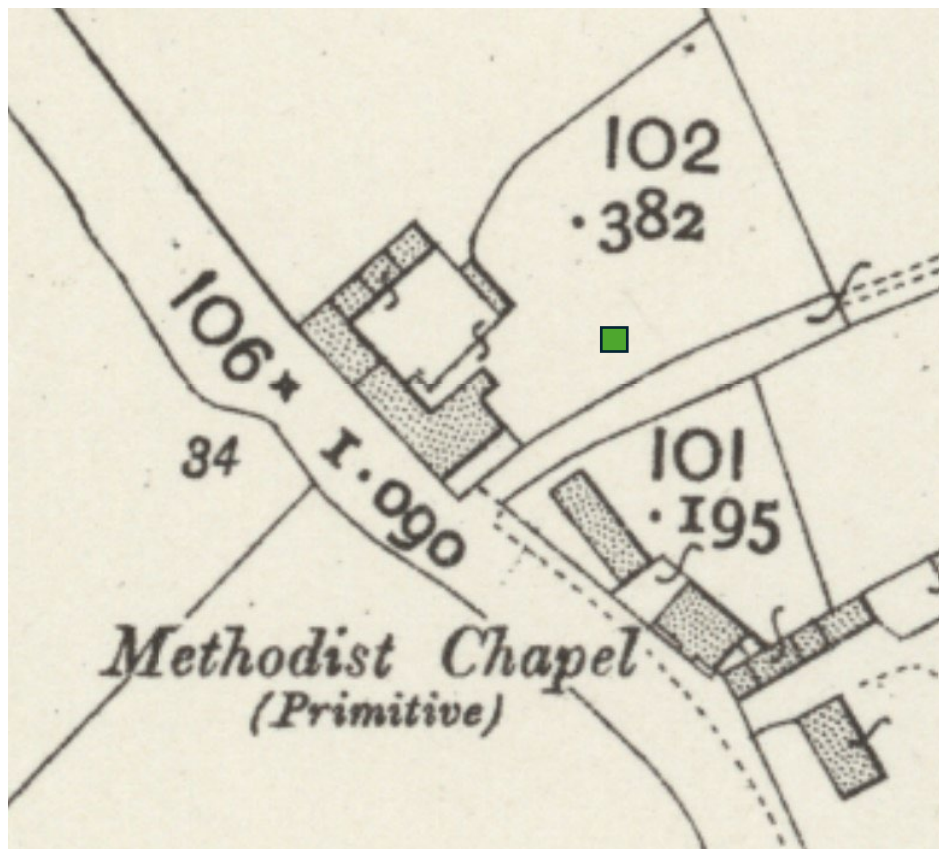
Ordnance Survey Map (25 inch) (National Library of Scotland)

Cottage west of Scarrow Green marked as green rectangle.



The Team at the Pub!

Working on Test Pit 2.



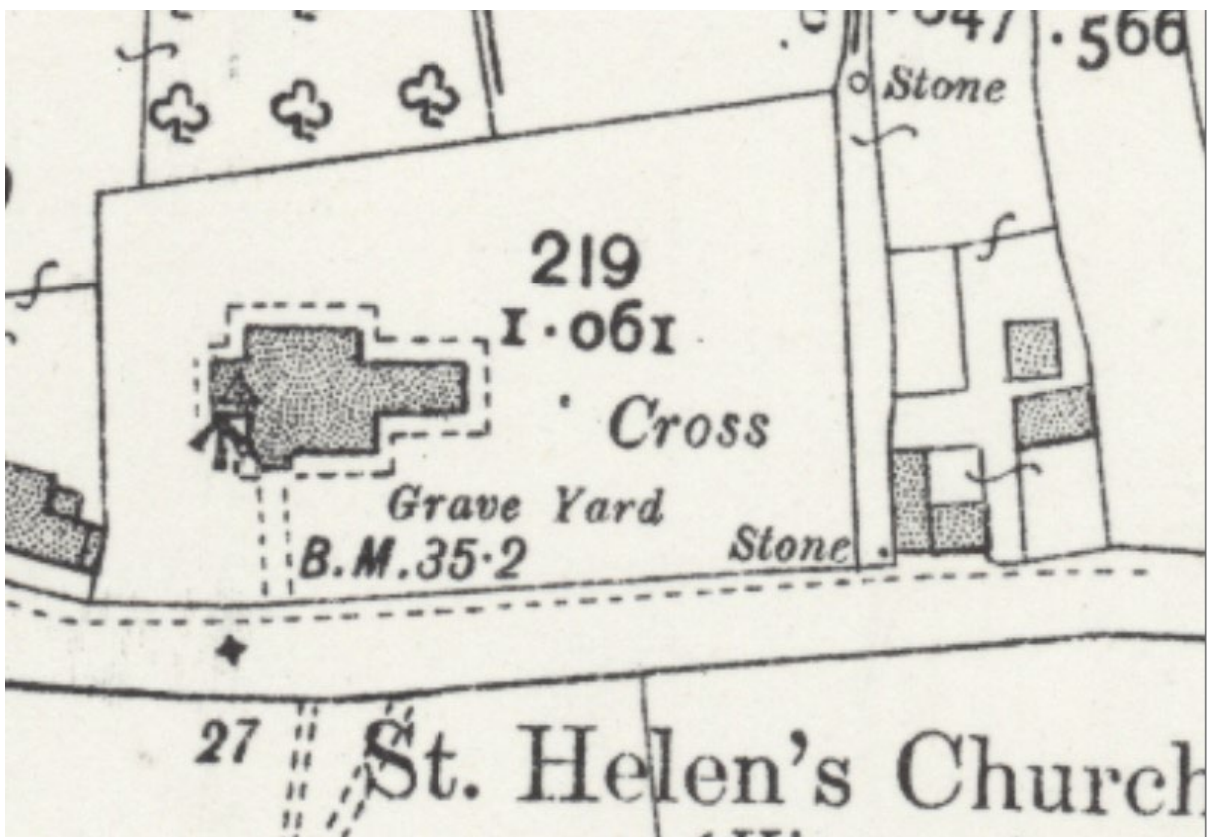
Ordnance Survey Map (25 inch) (National Library of Scotland)

Test Pit 2 in present day beer garden marked by green rectangle.



Test Pit Team have a tour of Skipwith Parish Church.

Led by Steven Lonsdale.



Ordnance Survey Map (25 inch) (National Library of Scotland)

St Helens Church, Skipwith.



A visit from the Project Artist, Sue Clayton.

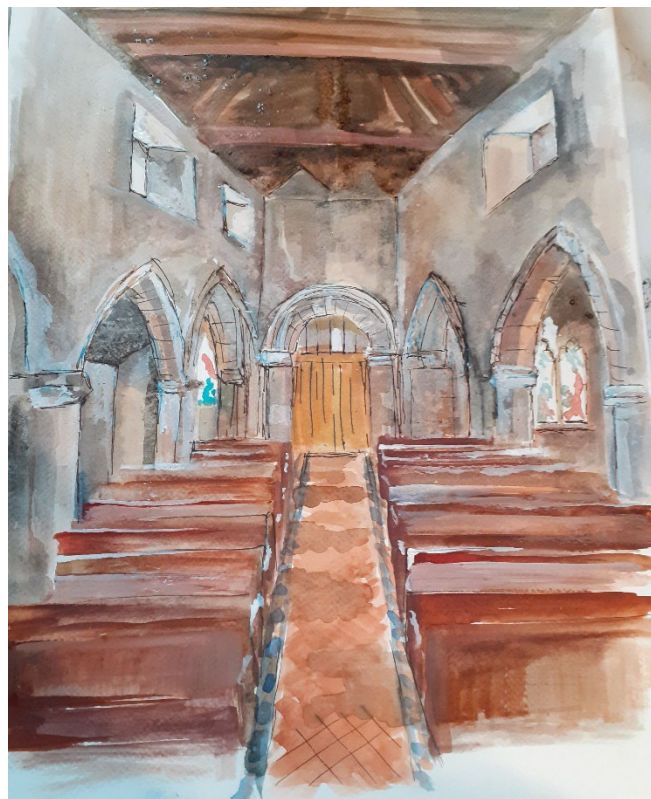
Sue led a series of art workshops inspired by the investigations of the Searching for Skipwith team.



Sue in action! At one of the workshops held at St Helens Church.



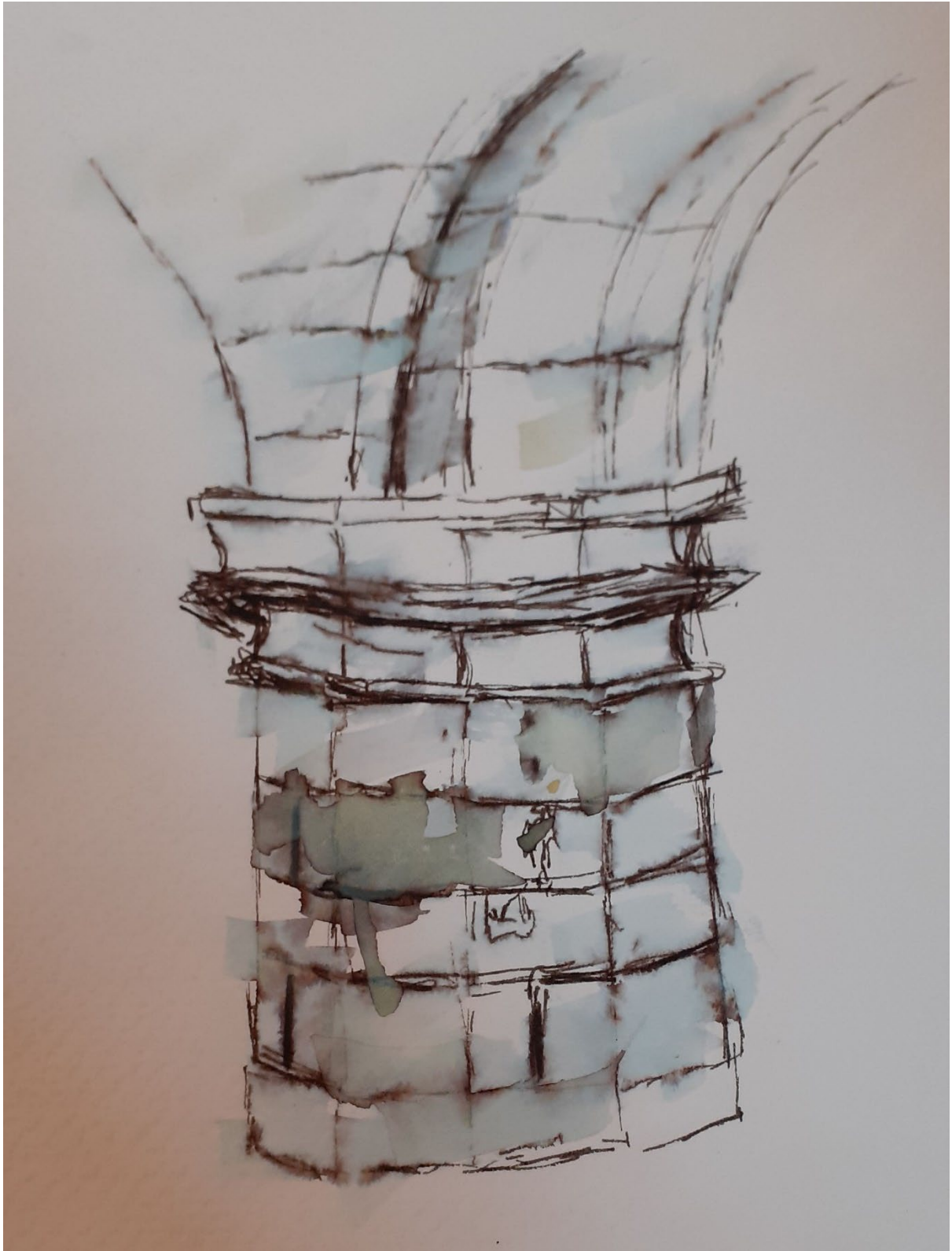
Artists at Work!



Looking west towards the Tower.



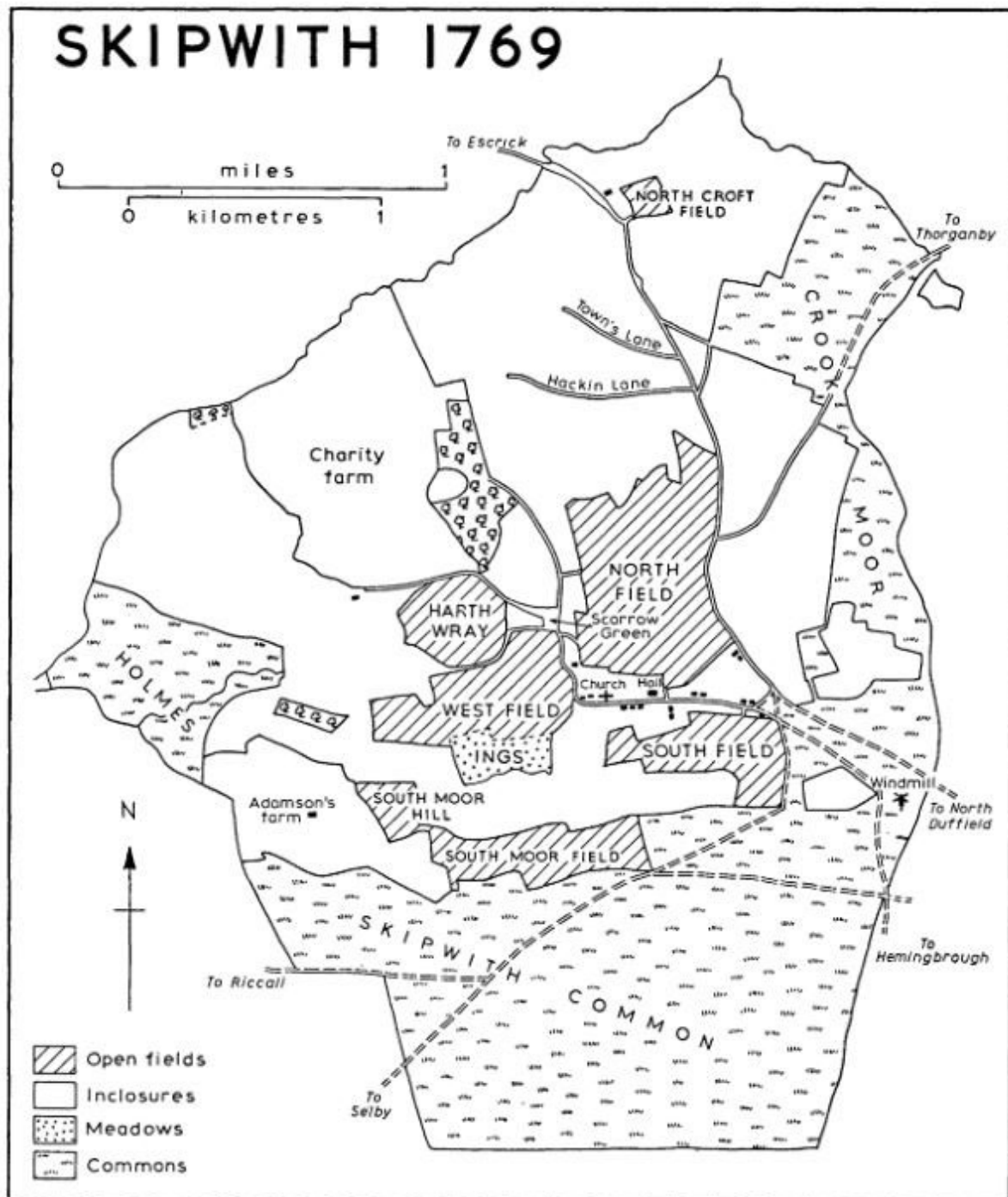
Inspired by the architecture.



Not bad for a first time go..



Thinking of mapping the Medieval Township.



SKIPWITH 1769

The map by the Victoria County History that inspired an artistic representation.



The variety of ridge and furrow strip fields. Feeding the village and paying their taxes and tythes.



A Geophysics Workshop with Dr Jon Kenny to start our work.



Remembering the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund.



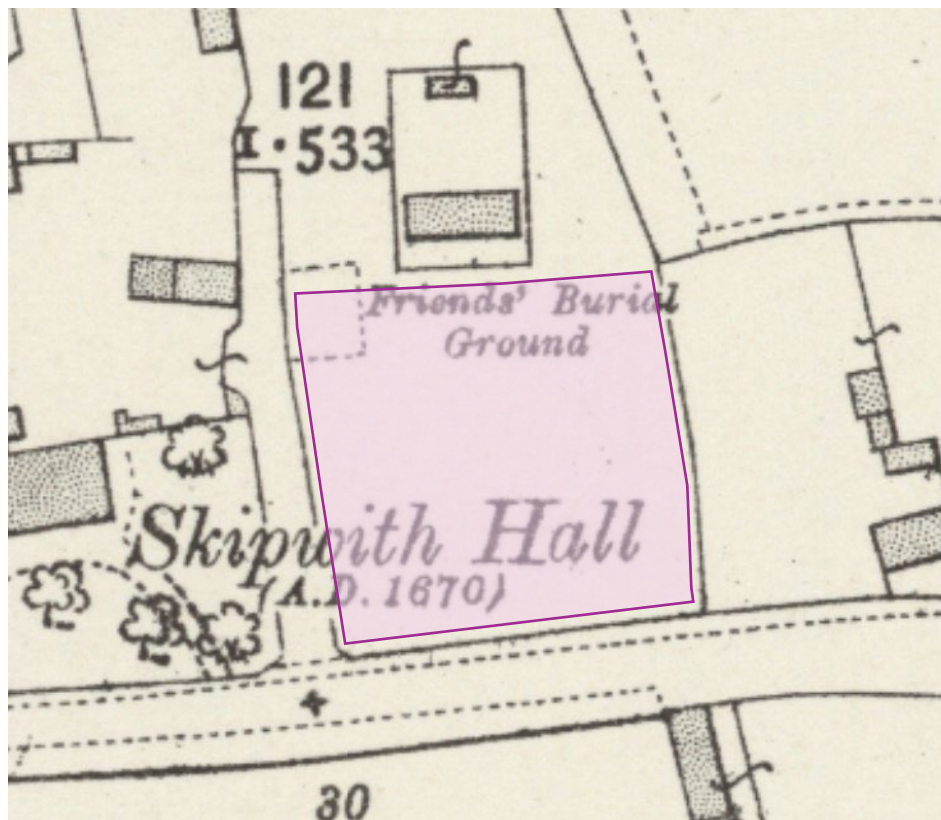
This time Jon gives the church tour!



Two Earth Resistance meters at work in the Quakers field.



Thanking our sponsors in the Quakers Graveyard Field.



Ordnance Survey Map (25 inch) (National Library of Scotland)

Area surveyed parked in pink.



Alan Powell (on the right) helped immeasurably with the Earth Resistance surveys through the summer of 2024. He brought with him the meter from Strensall which doubled our speed.



Surveying around a tree!



The Geoscan RM15 in action.



Laying out the grid in the East Paddock.

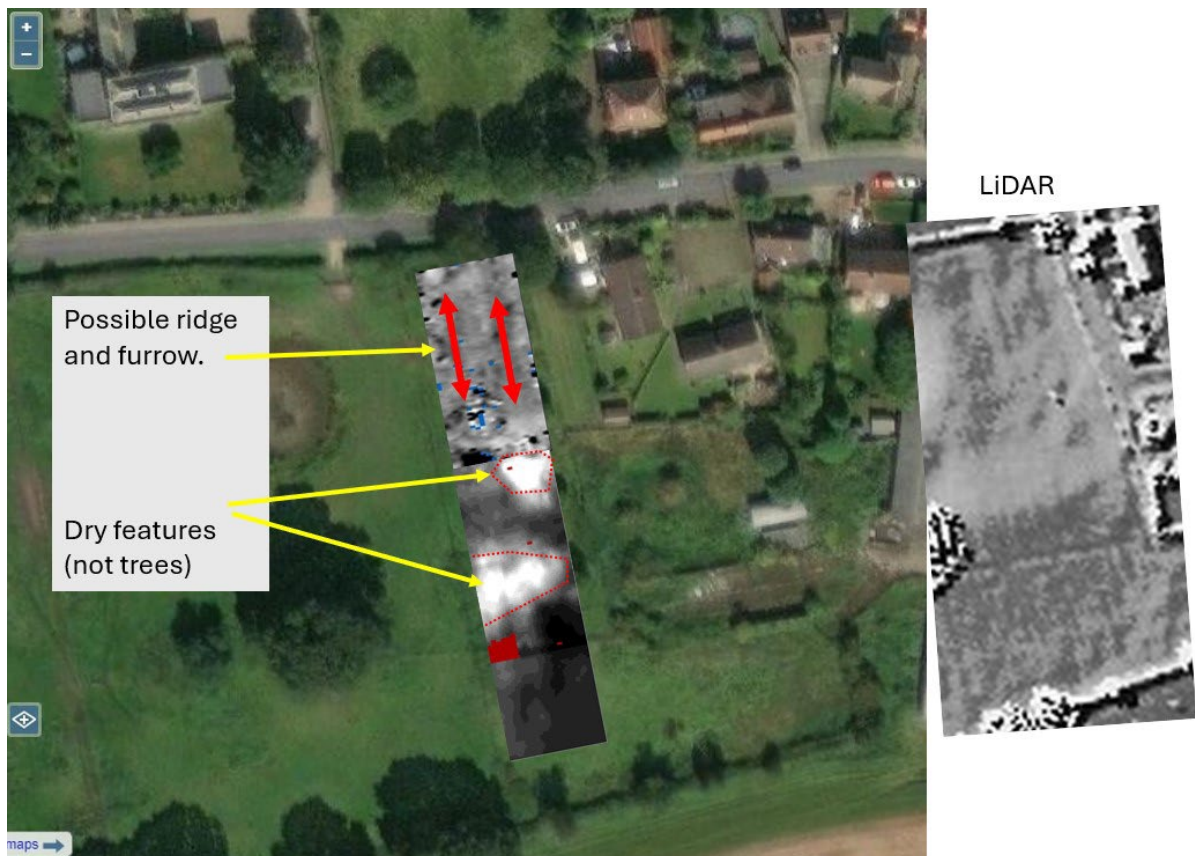


We were trying to locate houses or cottages located on the paddocks opposite Skipwith Hall (appearing on the 1769 map).

Outlined in Red.



Surveying the East Paddock.



Possible interpretations including a LiDAR image.

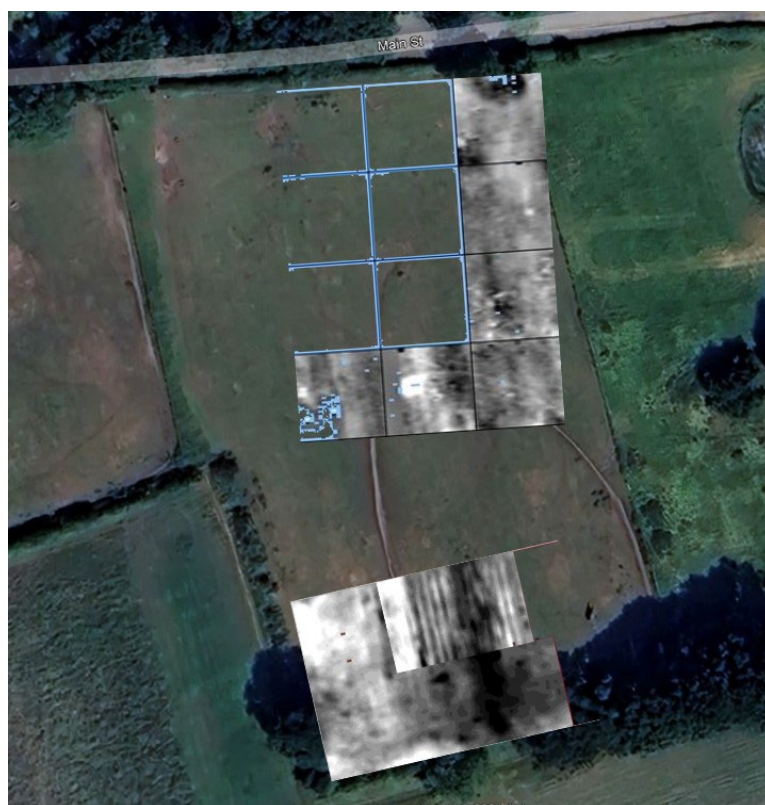
Were we seeing ridge and furrow? (See page 13 above).



Surveying the 'Garth Field'.

The Hall and the East Paddock are in the background.

Surveying was tough in a very dry summer.

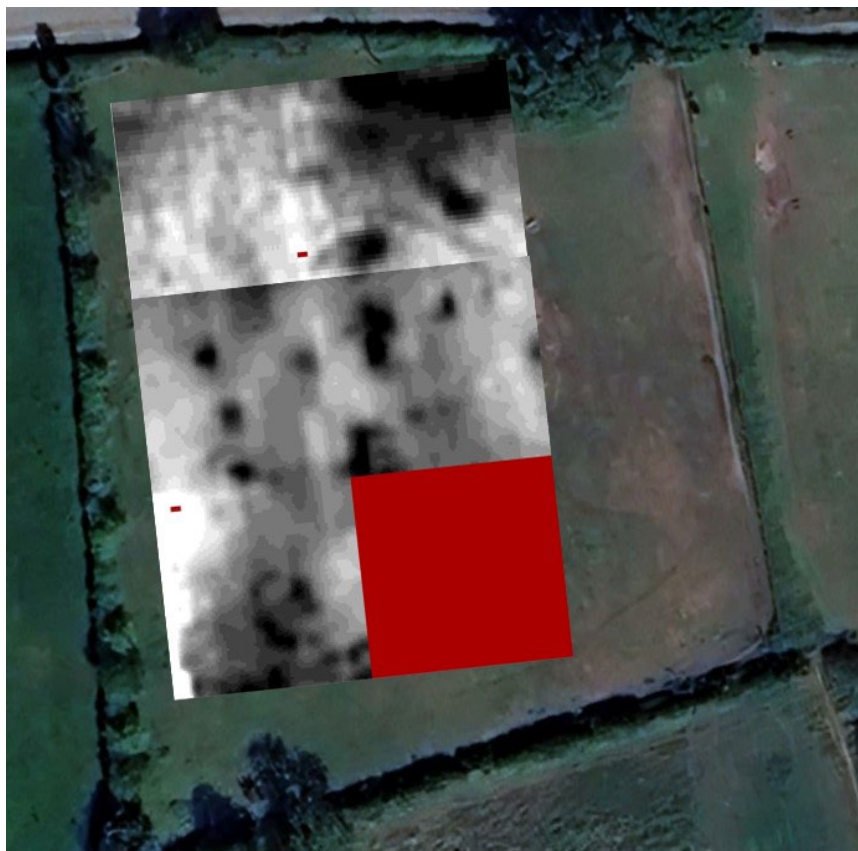


Results in the Garth Field.

(see page 15 above)



Earth Resistance in the 'Lump Field'.



Could those features be structural?



Our helpers in the Paddocks.





We were glad to inspire the members of DiGIT

An archaeology group for young people with learning difficulties.

They were especially inspired by the Ragnarök stone in the church!





And a Scanned version of the stone itself.
(Tony Hunt and Andy Hickie)





Building a model Medieval Village with the archaeology class at Applefields. The local SEND school in York.



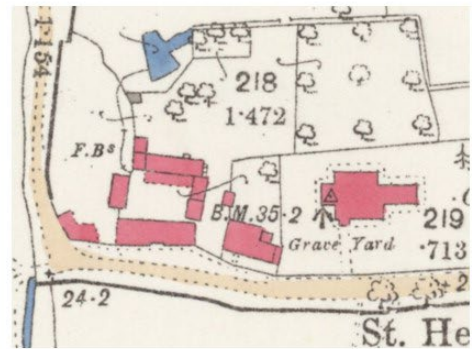


Geophysics in the Church Field.

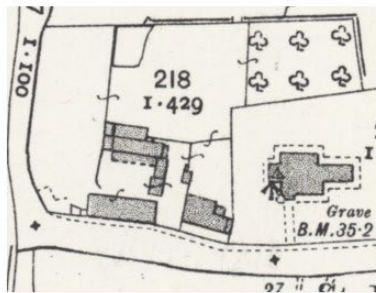




1851



1891



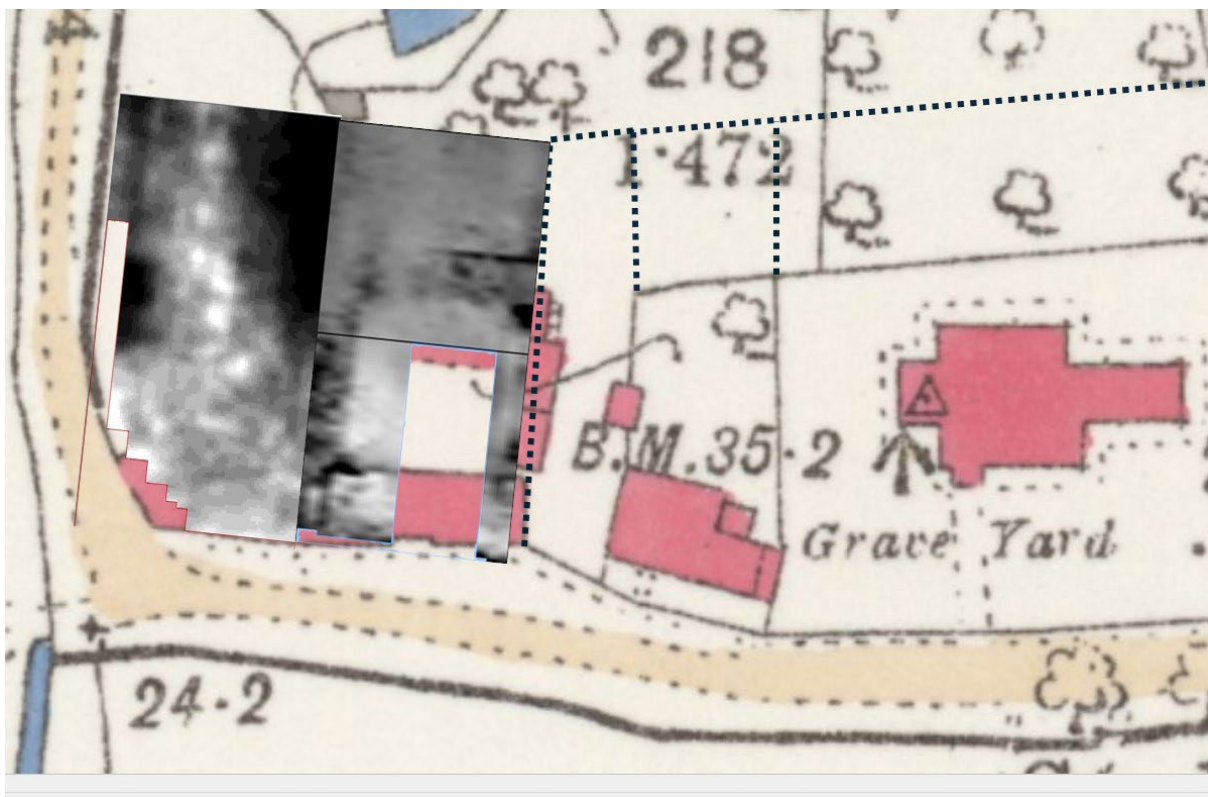
1906



1950

The changing farm in the West end of the Church Field.

Geophysics overlaid onto the 1891 map.

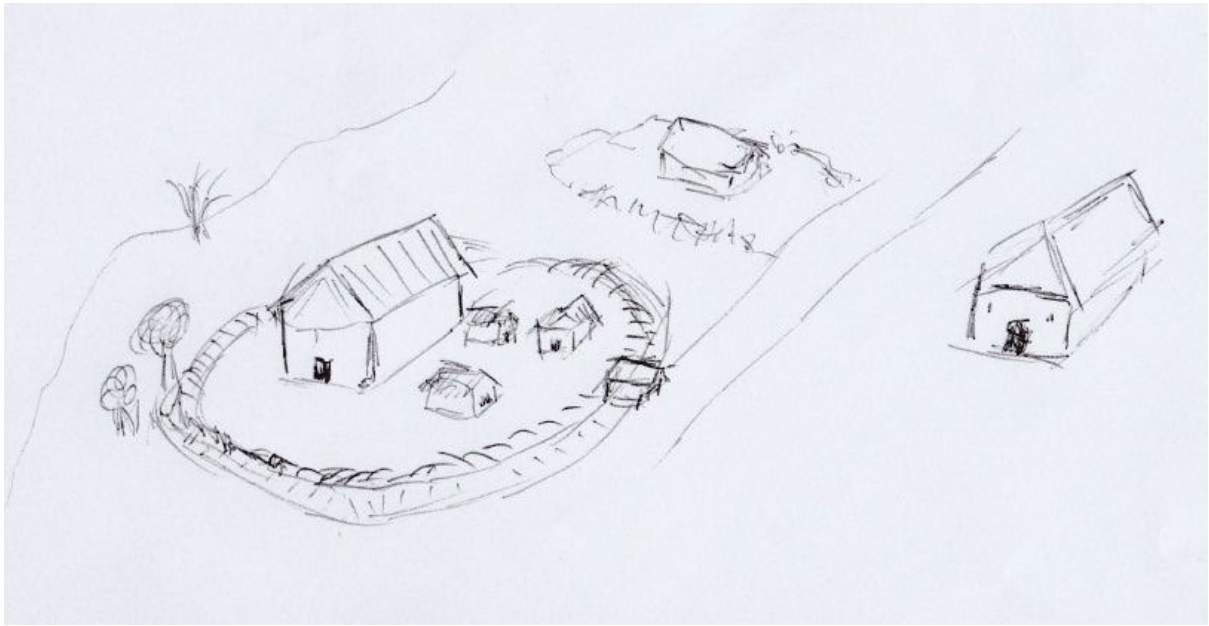




The team from Fridaythorpe, Fimber, Wetwang Archaeology Project undertaking a Magnetometry survey in the Moat Field.



And visiting the church of course.



Early Medieval Skipwith?

Before the church tower we see today was built circa 950AD.

**A minster surrounded by a ditch to the left and a lordly Hall in the
'Lump Field'. Archaeological Flights of Fancy.**



Test Pit 9.



Getting to the Root of Test Pit 5.



TEST PIT SKIPWITH!

As Part of the

Searching for Skipwith Project

Skipwith Heritage Group is undertaking test pits in Skipwith to search for evidence of the medieval village or even the very beginnings of our village.

The Test Pits will only be 1 metre by 1 metre in plan and we will do them over the late May Bank Holiday.

You are very welcome to join in, do a test pit in the garden if you live in the village yourself or allow two of our volunteer team to do the work.

We will be doing two test pits in the new recreation area just north of the village green. If your children want to have a go you are welcome to bring them along to do some digging. You will need to stay so bring a chair or picnic blanket. Visitors will be welcome just to take a look.

All of our work is being supervised by Dr Jon Kenny and experienced community archaeologist. Contact Jon on jkcomarc@gmail.com

We are starting the weekend with an introductory workshop about what we are hoping to learn and how test pits work on the Saturday 25th May at the Village Hall at 10am.

So, if you want to know more come along for a chat and to hear more.



Advertising our Test Pits before May Bank Holiday 2024.



The End.