

**SEARCHING FOR THE  
KNIGHTS TEMPLAR  
AT COPMANTHORPE**

**A report on the work of the  
South Ainsty Archaeological Society  
2004–2006**

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&  
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## CONTENTS

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	Page
1. Figure list.....	ii
2. Introduction.....	1
3. The Knights Templar.....	2
4. Documentary evidence.....	3
5. Other sources.....	6
Maps	
Aerial photographs	
Finds	
6. Fieldwork.....	13
Fieldwalking	
Geophysics	
Excavation	
7. Conclusions.....	15
8. Future Work.....	16
9. Acknowledgements.....	16
10. Bibliography.....	17
Appendix 1   Excavation Report	Chris Fenton-Thomas
Appendix 2   Tile Report	Sandra Garside-Neville
Appendix 3   Palaeoecology Report	Palaeoecology Research Services

## FIGURE LIST

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- Figure 1 Robert Cooper's *Map of the Ainsty* 1833
- Figure 2 Suppression document of 1307/08 (The National Archives. Doc E142/18)
- Figure 3 Extract from estate plan of 1779 (York Reference Library)
- Figure 4 OS 1st edition 6" map 1851
- Figure 5 Aerial photograph of site (© English Heritage; NMR 12217/13, 11/1/1992)
- Figure 6 Composite aerial photograph plot (© English Heritage)
- Figure 7 Ampulla
- Figure 8 Trading weight
- Figure 9 Limestone block ploughed up in preceptory field
- Figure 10 Medieval tile collected from preceptory field
- Figure 11 Glazed medieval floor tile
- Figure 12 Carved stone head
- Figure 13 11th-century stone head
- Figure 14 School children's visit
- Figure 15 Community Archaeology

## INTRODUCTION

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Copmanthorpe lies to the west of York, within the territory of the Ainsty and very near the Streete, or Roman Road, which ran between Tadcaster and York (Fig 1). In the past it was a typical, small Ainsty village but has expanded dramatically in recent years. One of the big unanswered questions about the township is the exact location of the small Knights Templar preceptory and its physical extent.

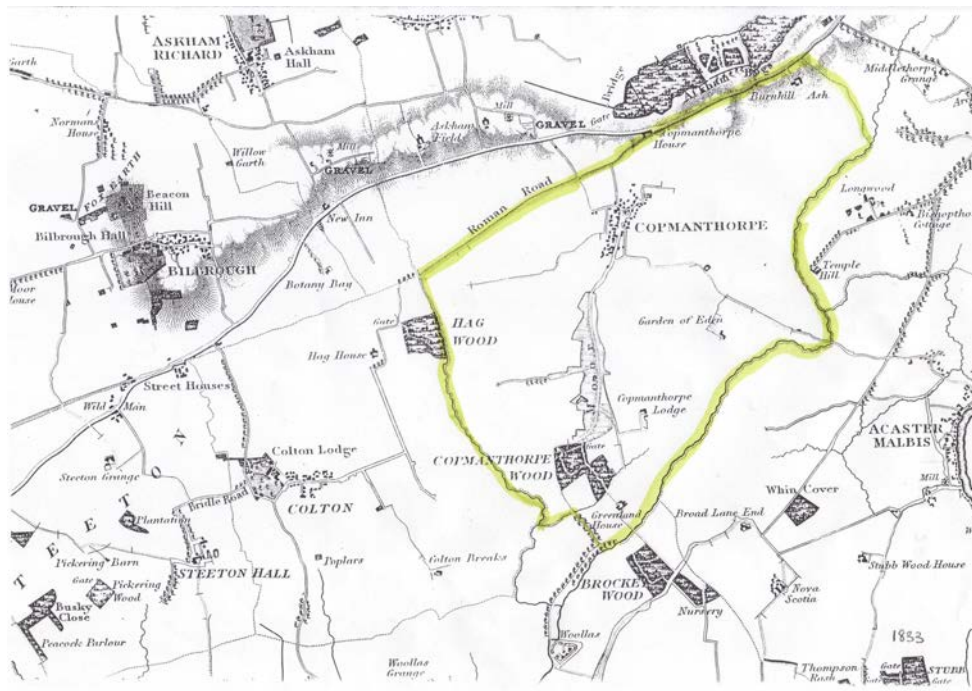


Figure 1 Robert Cooper's *Map of the Ainsty* 1833

The presence of a preceptory (or farm) of the Knights Templar at Copmanthorpe is recorded in documents dating back to the 13th century. It was not until the mid-19th century however that a definite site was identified when the OS marked it on their map of 1851. The map shows a pond and a small enclosure at the location. No physical remains have ever been identified in modern times that can be associated conclusively with the Templars, although it must be remembered that the Templars' estate covered several hundred acres according to the documentary sources. When archaeological aerial photography in the 1970s noted extensive soil marks at the location identified by the OS, it was assumed that these represented the remains of the main farm complex.

The South Ainsty Archaeological and Historical Society (SAAS) was formed in 2004, and with a large number of members resident in Copmanthorpe, the preceptory site was an obvious focus of

attention. The site is not a scheduled ancient monument, so an approach was made to the farmer to ask whether he would be amenable to members carrying out exploratory work. Fieldwalking and geophysical work were carried out over the winter of 2004/05. Large quantities of tile and some medieval pottery were recovered, although the geophysics results were inconclusive.

At the same time, the Society's Programme Secretary, Marjorie Harrison, began to research the documentary history of the Templars at Copmanthorpe, drawing on some earlier work by the Secretary, Phil Batman. The decision was taken under the then Chair, John Lister, to apply for a grant from 'Awards for All' to carry out a trial excavation at the site. This application was successful and the sum of £5000 was received in December 2005, with the proviso that it had to be spent within a year. John Lister reluctantly stood down due to ill health, so in March 2006 Catrina Appleby was elected Chair and assumed directorship of the proposed excavations.

This report summarises the results of the research carried out by the Society to date (December 2006); SAAS hopes to continue fieldwork in 2007 and beyond.

## **THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR**

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In the early 12th century, two Orders with similar aims were established. The First Crusade had identified a need for safe houses for pilgrims en route to the Holy City and also during their stay in Jerusalem. The Knights of St John, based at their church of St John in Jerusalem, were established by 1113 for that purpose and became known as the Knights Hospitallers. The Knights of the Temple had different aims; they pledged to provide protection for pilgrims on their journey and sought recognition in 1127. Their headquarters were at the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. Both were religious orders and attracted many donations of land and money both in England and abroad.

The Knights Templar founded preceptories to farm and manage their land, that had been donated or purchased. These were viable economic holdings, which were well managed and brought in wealth that enabled the order to further its work in the Holy Land. By the end of the 12th century there were about 34 of both Templar and Hospitaller foundations in England and Wales, some coinciding with the preaching of the second and third crusades in the 1140s and 1190s. Almost 50 more were established during the 13th century. The Yorkshire estates of the Knights Templar were valued at a quarter of their possessions in England at the beginning of the 14th century when the Order was threatened.

A preceptor and a small number of knights, along with others of a lower social status, would have managed an estate and outlying land. They lived in common and observed vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as in any other monastic order, but were not enclosed.

## DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

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Sources for the early history of Copmanthorpe are sparse and an attempt was made to establish the founding date of the preceptory. A charter, made by William Ros in 1258, confirmed the gift of land in the vill by his father, Robert Ros who died in 1227. Robert gave land elsewhere to the Templars between 1206 and 1212 and so we can guess at a date of c 1210. William de Malbis was also mentioned as a founder in later evidence, given at the suppression. Both William and Robert were strongly associated with the crusades.

Apart from a single court case of 1252 and an entry in Kirkby's Inquest (1285), no other evidence has been found for the preceptory itself until the suppression of the Templar order by the king in 1308. This threw up several documents which really begin to enhance the story. An inquiry into the lands held by the Knights shows that they had the manor in Copmanthorpe, about 300 acres of land, and a windmill; the documents include an inventory of the chapel, kitchen, and grange and granary (Fig 2).

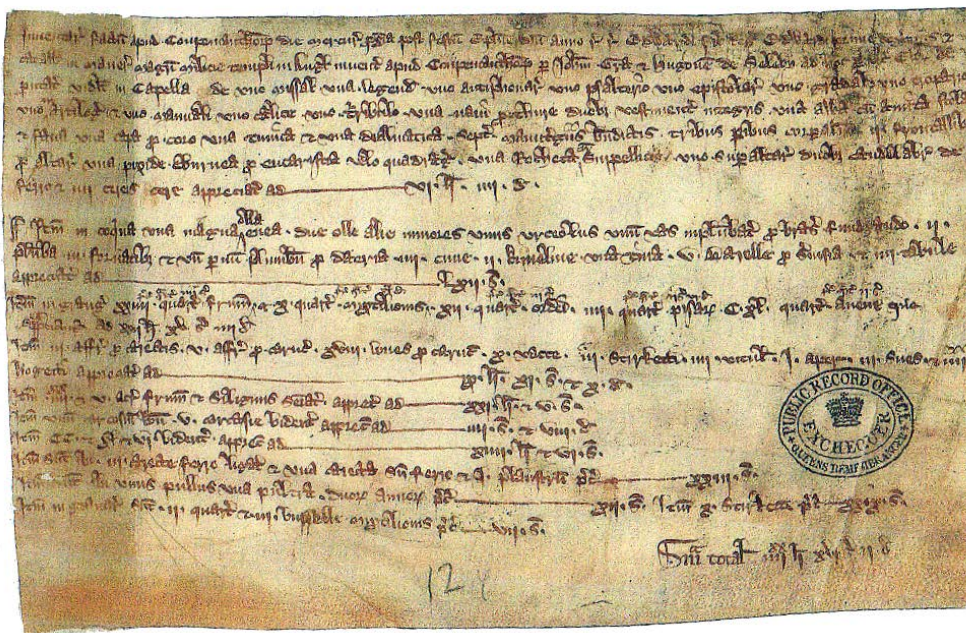


Figure 2 Suppression document of 1307/08 (The National Archives. Doc E142/18)

**Document dated 10 January 1307/8**

Inventory made at Copmanthorpe on the Wednesday next after the Feast of Epiphany in the first year of the reign of our lord King Edward the son of King Edward, concerning the goods and chattels found at Copmanthorpe in the Manor of the Master of the Order of Knights Templar in England, by John Gra and Hugh of Selby, deputed for this purpose by the Sheriff of York, that is to say;

*In the Chapel; as to one missal [mass book], one legend [saint's life], one antiphoner [book of anthems], one psalter, one epistolary [service book containing the epistles], one gradual [service book], one troper [book of tropes], one book of martyrs and one manual [service book], one censer [incense-carrier], one boat for incense, two complete vestments, one alb with amice, stole and maniple, one cape for singing, one tunic and one dalmatic [vestment], seven blessing towels, three pairs of corporal cloths, 2 frontals for the altar, one ivory pyx to hold the eucharist in Lent, one rochet [gown] with surplice, one portable altar, 3 iron candelabra & 4 ceres [candles],*  
valued at **£6 0s 4d**

*Item, in the kitchen; one great brass pot, two other lesser pots, one pitcher, one leaded vessel for preparing malt, 2 leads in ovens and one small lead for the dairy, 4 kives [tubs for brewing], 2 kinnels [vats], one tun, 5 barrels for ale and 4 tables,*  
valued at **62s**

*Item, in the grange; 24 quarters of wheat (a quarter being priced 4s) and 10 quarters of maslin [mixed corn] (a quarter being priced 40d), 12 quarters of barley (a quarter being priced 3s), 4 quarters of peas (a quarter being priced 2s 6d), 140 quarters of oats (priced 2s),*  
valued at **£22 15s 4d**

*Item, 3 draught animals for carts, 5 draught animals for carts, 18 oxen for carts, 10 cows, 3 stirkes [bullocks], 4 calves, 1 boar, 3 sows, 4 hogs,*  
valued at **£9 11s 10d**

*Item, 4 score and 5 acres sown with wheat and rye,*  
valued at **£21 5s**

*Item, one ox carcass, 5 sheep's carcasses,*  
valued at **4s 8d**

*Item, 246 sheep,*  
valued at **£14 6s**

*Item, there are 3 iron bound carts [carts with wheels with iron rims] there, and one cart without iron, and one wagon,*  
valued **23s**

*Item, there are one cock and one hen of two years old there,*  
valued **12s**

*Item, 10 heifers,*  
valued **29s**

*Item, in the granary there are 2 quarters and 3 bushels of maslin,*  
valued **7s**

*Sum total* -----  
**£80 16s 2d**

A later inventory of 1311 – some time after the king had seized the preceptory – listed the goods in the hall. It is from this that we can see a very basic, plainly furnished property, the preceptor and any other knights and servants living in a small complex with a hall, chapel and kitchen, and although not described as such, this must have been the inner court designed to separate the religious life from the secular. The outer court held a large granary and barn. Other housing for the animals, carts and equipment listed in the inventory is not shown but must have been there. The stock included ten oxen belonging to the king *en route* for Scotland.

The preceptory at Copmanthorpe was linked to land holdings at Naburn, Stamford Bridge, and the Castle Mills in York. The outlying land may have been managed from Copmanthorpe but the extent of their involvement in the Castle Mills is unclear.

The king hung on to the property but before 1329 it was granted to the Knights Hospitallers; they leased it to Walter Fauconberg, who held a large amount of land in the vicinity of Copmanthorpe. The buildings may have survived for some time as the centre of a farmhold. The church was still in existence in 1411, referred to in visitation evidence as ‘le Tempyll juxta Copmanthorpe’ and being used illegally by a priest. It was said to be built of stone with a bell tower, but in need of repair. This is good evidence of at least one substantial building – others, if timber-framed, may have left little trace. The property was kept as a compact holding until the Reformation when it was again taken in hand by the crown.

Two 19th-century documentary sources talk of landscape evidence but do not clearly identify where the features lay: James Raine writing in 1858 said ‘some traces of their mansion may still be seen’, and Bulmer’s Directory for 1890 says of Temple Field, ‘mounds which may still be seen in the field, probably mark the site’; this latter conflicts with the OS evidence.

The documentary evidence thus tells us that there was a small preceptory at Copmanthorpe, a basic farming operation with agricultural buildings, and a complex of hall, kitchen and church occupied by the Templar managers and their servants. It probably functioned for about 100 years from 1210 until 1308. Although some evidence pointed to a site on the parish boundary, further exploration was needed in order to identify the area most appropriate for excavation.



## OTHER SOURCES

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### Maps

The earliest known map of Copmanthorpe is an estate plan of 1779 based on an earlier survey of 1722 (Fig 3). This shows a profusion of small enclosures called Temple Garths and Temple Lees, in addition to Temple Field, one of the large, open fields of Copmanthorpe, but makes no mention of the preceptory.

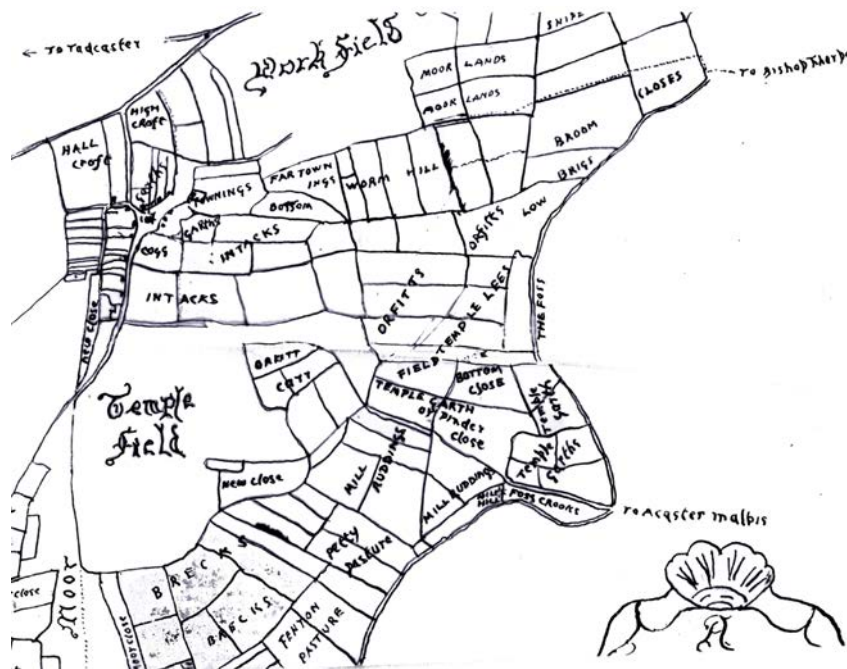


Figure 3 Extract from estate plan of 1779 (York Reference Library)

Although Robert Cooper's map of York & the Ainsty, published in 1833, does not identify the site, it shows how the small enclosures seen on the 1779 plan relate to the village – they lie well away, near a stream which defines both parish and township boundary. This kind of marginal land on the outside edge is very typical of donations to religious houses: land that was not yet cleared or cultivated, or was underused, was not worth much to the donor but could be transformed by the will and energy of a religious house needing to create wealth for a greater cause.

The supposed site of the preceptory at Copmanthorpe was first formally identified on the OS 1st edition 6" map surveyed in 1846/7 and published in 1851 (Fig 4). The same map also identifies a large field to the north-west as 'Temple Field', and it is this field to which Bulmer refers (see above). This land constitutes part of what is termed 'the moor' and may simply have been part of the estate. Temple Hill Farm lies to the east of the Foss, in Bishopthorpe township, and although it has been suggested

that perhaps the site lay there, the documentary references all state that the preceptory itself was in Copmanthorpe township. The Foss is an ancient boundary and has not moved. The Templars' holding was in the region of 300 acres (c 121 hectares) and so may have included land in neighbouring townships. The concentration of Temple names at the site marked by the OS suggests this was thought by local people to be the settlement site. The oral tradition has continued down to the 20th century, with names such as Temple Garth being applied to modern developments.

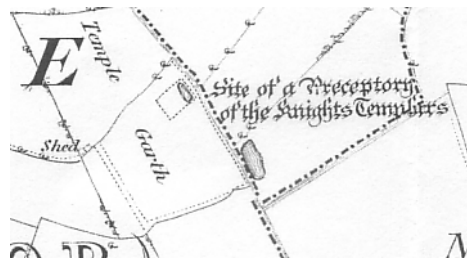


Figure 4 OS 1st edition 6" map 1851

The OS map of 1851 has several points of note. The first is that it shows the field layout in the mid-19th century, which correlates well with that shown on the 18th-century estate map. Successive OS editions show the gradual removal of field boundaries to create the large field seen today. The map also depicts a small linear pond lying parallel to the Foss with a small enclosure to the west of it. It is these features that the OS appears to associate with the text 'Site of a preceptory of the Knights Templar'. The enclosure, which was removed in the second half of the 19th century (it is not marked on the 1892 OS edition), was one of the few features firmly identified by the excavation.

The OS 1st edition map also shows a small 'shed' at the west corner of the field; this is absent from the 2nd edition.

When considering the wider setting of the preceptory, it is interesting to note that the field on the other side of Temple Lane, opposite to where the modern track runs in, is called 'Mill Hill'. It is also noted as the site of a windmill on the 1779 map. Sites of a suitable elevation for a windmill are rare in the area, so its location close to the preceptory site may be significant. The Templars worked a mill (see above) and one might have expected a location closer to the village centre for a manorial mill.

### ***Aerial photographs***

The supposed preceptory site was first identified on aerial photographs in the 1970s, but appeared principally as soilmarks rather than cropmarks (Fig 5). It has been photographed by several people including English Heritage staff, Anthony Crawshaw, and Peter Addyman. Figure 6 is a composite



Figure 5 Aerial photograph of site (© English Heritage; NMR 12217/13, 11/1/1992)

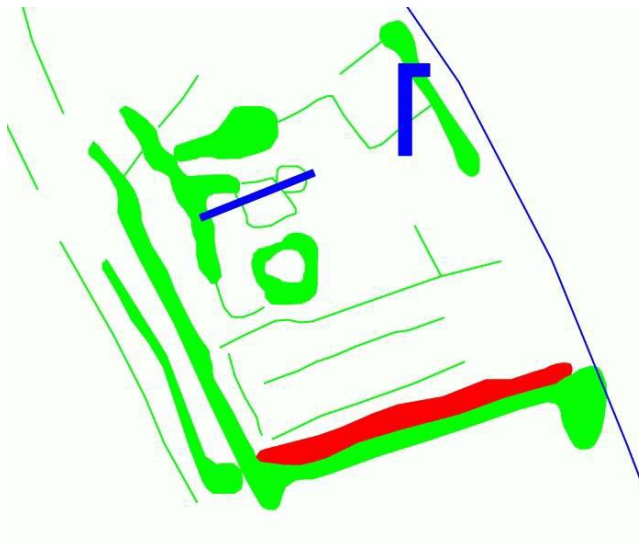


Figure 6 Composite aerial photograph plot (© English Heritage)

plot of all the available photography that was very kindly plotted by English Heritage. This includes not only the modern oblique photographs taken for archaeological purposes but also the RAF vertical photos from the 1940s. These show a variety of earthworks in the field including ridge and furrow, the pond, and some areas of what may be standing water (the best photos were taken in January 1946).

The correspondence between the OS location for the preceptory and the soilmarks led to the inevitable conclusion by local archaeologists that this was indeed the correct location, although this had never been tested by fieldwork.

### *Finds*

One of the first pieces of fieldwork carried out by the Society was fieldwalking on the preceptory site. This produced a variety of material, including tile, a few sherds of medieval pottery, and the usual selection of Victorian rubbish. At this stage it was assumed that the tile was also Victorian or C20 in date, so the results were inconclusive.

During a visit to the farmer, his wife produced two items that had been recovered from the field. The first was a medieval lead pilgrim's bottle, or ampulla, of an unusual barrel shape (Fig 7). These items, often carried on a cord around the neck or waist, were used to hold holy water brought back from the Holy Land. A retired knight, who had been on Crusade, would almost certainly have carried one. Such a bottle probably dates from the 12th or 13th century.



Figure 7 Ampulla

The second item was a shield-shaped lead object with a rampant lion or bear on it, identified by Dave Evans of the Portable Antiquities Scheme as a trading weight (Fig 8). These were carried by merchants to check the weight of goods being purchased; this one weighs slightly over 8oz. Such weights are often found near roads and market sites. They were used throughout the medieval period.



Figure 8 Trading weight

Early in 2006 the Society held a ‘finds’ evening, inviting local people to bring items for identification. A local metal detectorist came along, bringing a selection of metal objects. The majority of these were modern, but amongst them were two small silver coins found on the preceptory field. These were clearly medieval in date, and initial examination suggested they might be from the early 14th century. The finder was encouraged to take them to the Yorkshire Museum, where they were examined and then sent to the British Museum as potential Treasure Trove. A report was prepared by Barrie Cook of the British Museum who identified them as being silver half pennies of Henry VI. They were part of what is described as the Annulet issue and were minted in Calais between 1422 and 1427. These coins indicate a continued presence at the site into the 15th century, supporting the documentary evidence.



Figure 9 Limestone block ploughed up in preceptory field

During fieldwalking, two or three well-dressed blocks of local Calcarian limestone were located in the field, turned up by the plough (see Fig 9). These suggest a stone building at this location, and during a conversation with Dr Peter Addyman, he remembered numerous visible blocks of limestone when he flew over the site in the 1970s.



Figure 10 Medieval tile collected from preceptory field

During the excavations, the principal item recovered was a large quantity of tile (Fig 10). This material came not only from the trenches but also from the surface of the field. A selection of this material has been examined by tile specialist Sandra Garside-Neville (see Appendix 2). Medieval roof tiles form the main component, but a few pieces of medieval brick were also recovered, and two pieces of glazed floor tile (Fig 11). The presence of both dressed limestone and roof and floor tiles suggests we are dealing with a high-status medieval building at this location.



Figure 11 Glazed medieval floor tile

Moving slightly further afield, during our discussions we were alerted to the fact that some ‘stone heads’ had been found in the past in Copmanthorpe village. After some enquiries, arrangements were made to look at these ‘heads’ with Andrew Morrison and Katherine Bearcock of the Yorkshire Museum. The first was of particular interest as it appears to be the head of a soldier, since it has a helmet on (Fig 12). Carved from local Calcarian limestone, the head has been very finely worked using a claw chisel. Such chisels were commonly used by the French masons working on the Minster in the 12th and early 13th century. The forked beard is typical of 12th-century carvings. The head would originally have been painted, and slight traces can be seen down the left side. The head was almost certainly a corbel (a block of stone designed to support a roof timber). The head was discovered during the demolition of the manor house in Copmanthorpe in the 1960s, where it had been turned round and built into the back of an inglenook fireplace. There are slight traces of burning down one side of the head, presumably as a result of this reuse. The fireplace itself was located in an extension of probably the 14th or 15th century to the original manor house.



Figure 12 Carved stone head

No direct association can be made between the head and the Templar site, but it clearly came originally from a substantial building and was reused after the date of the break up of the preceptory. The form certainly has resonance with the knights and it is difficult to suggest another likely source for the item.

The other two heads are rather different: these, one large and one smaller, are probably 11th century in date. The larger one, which is of limestone, could be an 18th-century copy designed for use as a garden feature, but the smaller one, which is of sandstone, is characteristically Romanesque, with

bulbous eyes and a large chin (Fig 13). This was probably a voussoir (part of an arch) or a drip stop. Ironically, this is now part of a garden feature. The origin of these is unknown and they are too early in date to be associated with the Templars.

A walk around Copmanthorpe village reveals several walls built of well-dressed limestone and other architectural fragments. These seem out of place and it has been suggested that these might have been robbed from from the preceptory site. We hope to survey these in the near future. the preceptory site. We hope to survey these in the near future.



Figure 13 11th-century stone head

## **FIELDWORK**

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### ***Fieldwalking***

Fieldwalking was carried out on the preceptory field in early 2005. The material collected consisted mainly of medieval tile, but some sherds of medieval pottery were recovered, along with the usual Victorian and modern material. Material was also collected at random during the excavation in September 2006. The distribution of material has not been plotted but there appears to be a marked concentration in the area to the north of the soilmarks; this is slightly higher ground. Systematic fieldwalking on a grid will allow this to be tested.



## ***Geophysics***

Two geophysical surveys have been carried out in the field. The first, a resistivity survey in February 2005, was undertaken by Rod Mackey and Kate Dennett over part of the area of the soilmarks. The results were disappointing, in that no clear anomalies were recorded. This might be a consequence of the layers of damp silt identified during the excavation (see below and Appendix 1).

Later in 2005, further resistivity work was carried out by members of the Society under the supervision of the then Community Archaeologist, Eliza Gore. This work was on the higher ground to the north of the soilmarks and produced two or three rectilinear anomalies. These were not well-defined and it was felt that the soilmarks provided a better target for excavation. In the light of the excavation results, further geophysics may be attempted on the rectilinear anomalies to see if they can be enhanced/refined.

## ***Excavation***

Trial excavation of the supposed preceptory site was carried out over four days from 15 to 18 September 2006. The excavation was directed by Catrina Appleby, with site supervision undertaken by Chris Fenton-Thomas of *On Site Archaeology*, and Claire Coulter. The excavation was blessed with good weather and some 20 to 30 people came to dig each day and as many again came to visit. A visit was also made by children from the local school (Fig 14). The excavation was a good example of ‘community archaeology’, with people of all ages and abilities able to experience ‘digging’, the majority for the first time (Fig 15).



Figure 14 School children’s visit

The results of the excavation were somewhat disappointing (see Appendices 1 & 3), in that the remains were found to have been heavily truncated by ploughing. No features were identified that can be associated with the Templar preceptory. However, we were able to demonstrate that a significant number of the features visible on the aerial photographs are the result of damp silt layers, presumably deposited during flooding episodes. The work has thus ‘proved the negative’ and means future work can be focused elsewhere in the field.

## CONCLUSIONS

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The research carried out by the Society over the past two years has considerably enhanced our knowledge of the preceptory site, even if its exact location remains as yet elusive. The documentary research has confirmed the preceptory’s location in Copmanthorpe township and an approximate date can now be given for its foundation. The inventories record the buildings and their contents, and we know the chapel was still in use in the early 15th century. The various finds from the field all support the documentary evidence, suggesting substantial stone buildings in the medieval period. The excavation has demonstrated that the features previously thought to be the remains of the site are probably later in date or natural in origin. Examination of the topography of the site and the distribution of finds suggests that the main buildings may lie to the north of the recent excavation.



Figure 15 Community Archaeology

## FUTURE WORK

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The Society would like to continue work on the preceptory field, in order to locate, if possible, the site of the buildings. All work is dependent on the continued cooperation and goodwill of the farmer. The work will probably involve laying out a grid on the area to the north of the recent excavation, which can be used for both fieldwalking and geophysics. We may try different geophysical techniques to see if the ground is more responsive to these. The results can then be coordinated and correlated.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Society would like to thank all those who helped in any way with the Knights Templar project. In particular, we would like to thank: 'Awards for All' for their generous grant; David Forth for allowing us access to the field; Dave MacLeod and Emma Pickford of English Heritage for the aerial photo transcription; John Oxley, the City Archaeologist for maps and encouragement; Dan Hull for his amazingly accurate surveying; Portakabin (especially David Smith and Linda Walker) for their generous loan of a cabin; Colliers Plant Hire and Robert Schofield for their help with the machining; Nick Pearson of *On Site Archaeology* for organisational help; Chris Fenton-Thomas for being such a great site supervisor; Claire Coulter for generously giving up her weekend to help supervise; Sandra Garside-Neville for her work on the tile; John Carrot of Palaeoecology Research Services for examining the pond sample; Rod Mackey and Kate Dennett for the initial geophysical survey; Andrew Morrison and Katherine Bearcock for their help with the heads; and finally, thanks to Eliza Gore, the former Community Archaeologist for all her help and support; to John Lister, former Chair of the Society, without whose enthusiasm the excavation would never have happened; and to all those who came and visited the site, either to dig or to lend moral support.

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