

**YOUR CHURCH AND ITS ARCHAEOLOGY**

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## YOUR CHURCH AND ITS ARCHAEOLOGY

The Church of England owns more ancient buildings than any other organisation in Britain. As such it has a special responsibility for the upkeep of a substantial part of the national heritage.

Many churches occupy sites of great archaeological interest and many more, particularly because of their long history and the changes made to them, contain both visible and 'hidden' irreplaceable archaeological material. When new works are proposed, particularly those which disturb the ground or any ancient fabric, it is essential that the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor (DAA) be called in at the earliest opportunity.

Works which are likely to be particularly sensitive in respect of archaeology include

- new buildings and extensions (which may affect burials, or expose earlier phases of the church building)
- french drains (which will affect the relationship between the church fabric and the archaeological deposits surrounding it)
- underpinning (which will expose wall foundations)
- service trenches and soakaways (which will impact upon archaeological deposits within the churchyard)
- masonry and roofing repairs (which may expose parts of the standing fabric)
- works to floors (which may expose earlier phases of floor surface and other structural features, as well as burials within the church)
- conservation of funerary monuments (which may expose earlier decorative schemes)
- plaster repairs and redecoration (which may affect wall paintings hidden beneath)

This note briefly explains what is meant by archaeology, how remains can be damaged by new works and what to do if this is likely to occur. It is intended in particular for those contemplating or planning works requiring faculty, including incumbents, PCC members, fabric committees and architects.

### What is Archaeology?

Archaeology is the study of past human activity through the physical remains of the past. It also uses records of evidence that may no longer physically exist, and other historical documentation. As well as buried remains a great deal of archaeological evidence survives above ground within the fabric of a building. Some features are easily recognised - a buried flagstone floor or a blocked window, for example. Others can only be detected by careful investigation. Objects associated with these features are important but, contrary to popular belief, objects on their own are usually of far less value than those whose context is recorded and understood. It is important to remember that archaeology is just as concerned with the study of standing buildings as with the deposits that underlie them. Excavation is only one of the techniques used, and recording of standing fabric may often also be required.

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The key to the understanding of archaeological remains is stratigraphy - the position of deposits or structures relative to each other. By working out the sequence of formation or construction, archaeologists can begin to piece together the evolution of the church. These relationships are, however, often fragile and great care is needed to ensure that they are not needlessly damaged.

### The importance of archaeology to the parish

Most parish churches show some evidence of changes in design, structure and fabric which reflect the evolution of Christian worship and liturgy, as well as development and changes in the communities using them. Churches are not museums, and change is inevitable, but parishes do have a responsibility to ensure that the fabric, furnishings and archaeology of their churches are handed on to the care of the next generation in the best possible condition.

The church and its churchyard will often represent a unique source of information in which the history of architecture, craftsmanship, social change and worship are inseparable. They are a source of unique and irreplaceable data, and **which should therefore be preserved *in situ* for further study wherever possible.** This presumption of preservation *in situ* should be a prime consideration in the design and planning of works. Damaging impacts need to be identified as early in the process as possible and averted unless there are demonstrably over-riding reasons for the destruction of archaeological remains. It should be noted that in some instances the DAC may wish to recommend to the Chancellor that a petition for faculty should be refused on the grounds that the proposed works would have an unacceptable detrimental effect upon significant archaeological deposits or structures.

### The context for archaeological work

The context for archaeological work in any particular church or churchyard will be provided by the Statement of Significance. Those preparing Statements of Significance should consider the church's archaeological value and potential, taking into account previous studies of the site. The *Victoria County History*, the county volumes of Pevsner's *Buildings of England*, the Listed Building descriptions (shortly to be made available on-line via the English Heritage website) and the County Sites and Monuments Record/ Historic Environment Record may all be useful sources of information. The Diocesan Archaeological Advisor may be able to provide advice on this aspect of preparing a Statement of Significance. The Council for the Care of Churches is currently (January 2007) drafting guidance on the preparation of Conservation Management Plans for major churches.

Archaeology undertaken within the context of Faculty jurisdiction will tend to be organised along comparable lines to that applying in the secular planning process. In some instances planning permission will be required as well as a faculty, and both the local authority archaeologist and the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor will need to be involved. Contact details are given at the end of this document.

Where formal permission for works to a church is given, either as Faculty or as Planning Consent, archaeological work will normally be secured by means of a Condition, such as the following:

*'No works shall take place until the applicant/petitioner has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological works in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant/petitioner and approved by the Planning Authority/DAC'.*

### Minimising damage and destruction

Damage to archaeological remains can be caused by any action which digs into the ground or below the floor surface, or which alters the fabric of the church. Replacing of soil and remaking of building fabric with old materials will not solve this problem, because it is the original relationships of archaeological remains which are important. Once disturbed, information is lost.

Most damage is likely to arise from major structural repairs, new drainage or heating systems, new extensions or buildings, and churchyard alterations. Smaller projects can also have serious archaeological implications, and it should be remembered that **important remains of great age can lie very near to the surface.**

When planning new work, it is important to try and obtain detailed information on the extent of any digging or disturbance. Any excavation below the floor of the church, or within the churchyard, is likely to have archaeological consequences. **Accurate details of the total depth and extent of below-ground disturbance should therefore be provided to the DAC when proposals are submitted.** In some cases it may be necessary to commission a small-scale investigation (called an evaluation) from a suitably qualified archaeologist to assess the extent and importance of archaeological remains. This can identify the least damaging ways of carrying out a project (for example, by designing foundations so as to minimise impact upon the archaeology) and will help avoid unexpected discoveries during the main works programme. Evaluations involving physical interventions such as trial trenching will themselves require a Faculty.

### Archaeological recording

If disturbance to archaeological remains is unavoidable, it is essential that arrangements for recording are made. If the disturbance is likely to be small, it *may* in exceptional circumstances be possible for the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor to visit and make necessary records. Such precautionary archaeological attendance, often referred to as a 'watching brief', will only be appropriate where preliminary assessment indicates that the proposed works will have low archaeological impact. In Leicestershire there is a network of Parish Archaeological Wardens who may be able to visit and record on behalf of the Leicester Diocesan Archaeological Adviser, through whom such attendance will need to be arranged, but there is no such system in operation within Coventry Diocese. There is no charge for this service, but adequate notice **must** be given.

For larger projects, it is sometimes possible to obtain grants, but the parish will usually have to **pay for the costs of archaeological recording.**

Such recording is labour-intensive, and must be carried out by trained professional archaeologists. Provision will also need to be made for processing of finds and records, preparation of a summary report, conservation of artefacts, and deposition of the archive (the permanent record) and reports with recognised repositories (e.g. in the Diocesan archive or the County Historic Environment Record). This post-excavation work is an integral and essential part of the archaeological programme. In short, **archaeology can be expensive.**

The parish will not be expected to pay for academic research or unnecessary excavations, only for providing a permanent record of the remains which are to be destroyed or exposed by any new works. However, the archaeological report will need to describe the programme of work and its results within its context, and will therefore need to include at least a summary account of the archaeology and structural history of the church and its immediate environs.

**There are therefore good financial reasons for seeking the least archaeologically disruptive solution to any problem, and for obtaining early advice on archaeological matters.**

Arrangements for archaeological excavation and recording should normally be subject to contract and must be built into both time and cost schedules. Advice about commissioning archaeological work is provided below.

### **Caring for archaeological finds**

Generally speaking, objects recovered from excavations and other works in and around churches are the property of the landowner - usually the churchwardens and the incumbent. Most material recovered from archaeological investigation is of intellectual rather than monetary value: it is important as part of a record of the remains damaged or destroyed. The retention of records and artefacts from archaeological recording can present numerous problems. Objects will often require conservation and secure storage arrangements; records need appropriate environmental conditions and handling procedures if they are to last for long. The best arrangement is usually for the archive, including finds, to be donated to the appropriate museum.

### **Human remains**

The excavation and disposition of human remains requires special attention. The Church of England and English Heritage have published *Guidance for Best Practice for Treatment of Human Remains Excavated from Christian Burial Grounds in England* (2005), which addresses this complex area. The guidance starts from the premise that human remains should always be treated with dignity and respect, and burials should not be disturbed

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without good reason, although it is recognised that the demands of the modern world are such that it may be necessary to disturb burials in advance of development. It is also recognised that human remains and the archaeological evidence for the rites which accompanied their burial are important sources of scientific information. The document is available to download from the websites of English Heritage ([www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)) and the Church of England ([www.cofe.anglican.org](http://www.cofe.anglican.org)).

Removal of named burials requires specific formal procedures details of which can be obtained from the DAC Secretary. 'Unknown' graves and disarticulated bones are likely to be encountered during works in and around churches and it is important that great care is taken. Where there is the likelihood of such graves being disturbed any exhumations should be monitored and if necessary undertaken by archaeologists.

It cannot be assumed that an absence of gravestones indicates an absence of human remains. The practice of marking graves with stones is rare before the mid seventeenth century, and in most churchyards burials are likely to have begun several centuries earlier. Earlier burials may often have been in relatively shallow graves.

In some circumstances early human remains may be of very great demographic or pathological interest, and expert study will need to be undertaken as part of the archaeological programme. In most cases, human skeletal material will eventually be re-interred in an appropriate location within the church or churchyard.

## **Regulation and commissioning of archaeological work**

Archaeological work is regulated by a process of briefs and specifications which provides a formal written description of the works required, and which can be used to monitor the process and demonstrate that work undertaken is fit for purpose. The normal procedure is for the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor to write a brief which sets out the need for the work and specifying what needs to be done. The church (or its architect) then approaches an archaeological contractor with the brief to obtain a proposal, or specification (a description of the works to be undertaken in order to meet the brief, and the methodology proposed, as well as a costing) for approval by the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor. The brief and proposal together make up a 'Written Scheme of Investigation' (WSI). Where the work is small-scale a full WSI may not be needed, but at the minimum there must be a written agreement which sets out what needs to be done in sufficient detail to permit monitoring. The Diocesan Archaeological Advisor will probably wish to visit whilst archaeological works are in progress.

Professional archaeologists are appropriately qualified and experienced. The Diocesan archaeological advisor will need to be convinced of the suitability of archaeologists undertaking work. Members of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) subscribe to a Code of Conduct and undertake to carry out work which conforms to national Standards and Guidance. IFA maintains a Register of Archaeological Organisations (RAO) scheme. Registered Archaeological Organisations are managed by full Members of IFA and are committed to ensuring that all work undertaken conforms to these same Standards. Those commissioning archaeological work may wish to satisfy themselves that the organisation concerned has the relevant skills and experience in respect of church archaeology.

Once archaeological arrangements have been determined, it is important that close communication is maintained between the parish, the main contractors, the architect, the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor, and the archaeological contractors. It is important that all concerned are notified of any changes in the programme.

### **Integrating archaeological work with the faculty process: DAC requirements**

At the informal consultation stage, before firm proposals are available, it is unlikely that the archaeological impact of the proposals can be fully assessed. However, archaeology will need to be considered in drawing up the Statement of Significance (see above). The DAA will be able to advise on ways of minimising impacts on the archaeology, for example by identifying areas likely to be of lesser sensitivity, and identifying actions which are likely to be problematic or unacceptable on archaeological grounds. This advice may be given in the context of a DAC site visit, although the DAAs of each diocese are willing to be consulted at any point. Once the preferred position of a development has been determined, an evaluation *may* be necessary to determine the nature, extent and importance of archaeological deposits in greater detail, in order for the DAC to be able to advise the Chancellor at the subsequent Faculty application stage, and to inform any further archaeological work that may be necessary. Evaluation results may also be used to inform foundation design so as to minimise disturbance of archaeological deposits. It should however be noted that an evaluation will itself require Faculty – a brief should be obtained from the DAA and a written specification obtained from a suitably qualified archaeological contractor (as described above), and this specification, once approved by the DAA, should accompany the application for faculty for the evaluation.

At the formal faculty petition stage for the development (i.e. the 'main' faculty), the results of any evaluation (where one has been requested) should be submitted with the faculty petition, along with **full** details of the extent of disturbance to below-ground deposits and standing fabric. Failure to provide this information may delay determination of the petition, as the DAC may feel that it has inadequate information upon which to base its recommendation.

It may also be appropriate at this stage to have obtained a brief from the DAA and a written specification from a suitable archaeological contractor for approval by the DAA. Implementation of the archaeological programme will be secured as a condition of faculty by means of the wording quoted above. The DAA will wish to monitor the work (both the work on site and the subsequent programme of analysis leading to report production and archive deposition) on behalf of the DAC, to ensure that the work conforms to the brief and specification, and to approve any variation in the programme which may arise from unexpected discoveries. It should be emphasised however that by following the procedures outlined in this document the risk of encountering the unexpected, and the consequent increases in damage to the archaeological resource and additional costs to the parish will be substantially reduced.

## **Summary of advice**

1. Consider the archaeological implications of all proposals at an early stage, and seek advice from the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor.
2. Determine whether an alternative scheme might avoid the disturbance of archaeological remains. If archaeological remains cannot be avoided, make provision for archaeological recording. This may involve: -
  - a) Evaluation (testing) of archaeological remains
  - b) A 'watching brief'
  - c) archaeological excavation/recording - an appropriate professional body ('archaeological contractor') will need to be contracted.

The Diocesan Archaeological Advisor (and if Planning permission is required, the Local Planning Authority archaeologist) will need to be involved in determining the scope of archaeological work, writing an appropriate brief, approving the archaeological specification, and monitoring its implementation.

3. Make sure adequate information concerning archaeological remains and the extent to which the scheme is likely to impact upon them is presented to the DAC when formally seeking advice (Don't forget the effects of service trenches, for gas, water &c).
4. Make sure that good communication is maintained between all parties through the duration of the project

**The Diocesan Archaeological Advisor (DAA)** is able to advise on any of the above information. He or she can **not** normally carry out detailed recording, evaluation or excavation projects. For this sort of work it is necessary to contact an archaeological contractor who will provide a quote for such work. Details of such contractors can be obtained from the Institute of Field Archaeologists, SHES, University of Reading, Whiteknights, PO Box 227, Reading, RG6 6AB. (tel 0118-378-6446, fax 0118-378-6448, e-mail [admin@archaeologists.net](mailto:admin@archaeologists.net), website [www.archaeologists.net](http://www.archaeologists.net) )

Help and advice can also be obtained from local authority conservation officers and the following:

**(for those parts of Coventry Diocese outside Coventry City)**

Planning Archaeologist  
Museum Field Services  
The Butts  
Warwick CV34 4SS  
Tel 01926-412734

**(for those parts of Leicester Diocese outside the City of Leicester)**

Archaeological Officer  
Historic and Natural Environment Team  
Leicestershire County Council  
Room 500, County Hall  
GLENFIELD  
Leics LE3 8TE.  
Tel: 0116 2658322



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### **(For those parts of Coventry Diocese within Coventry City)**

City Archaeologist  
City Development Directorate,  
Floor 5, Civic Centre 4,  
Much Park St,  
Coventry CV1 2PY.  
Tel 024 7683 1271

### **(for those parts of Leicester Diocese with the City of Leicester)**

The City Archaeologist  
Urban Design Group  
Regeneration and Culture  
Leicester City Council  
New Walk Centre (A7)  
Welford Place  
Leicester, LE1 6ZG  
Tel: 0116 2527282

### **Diocesan Archaeological Advisors:**

(Coventry Diocese)  
Jonathan Parkhouse  
County Archaeologist  
Museum Field Services  
The Butts  
Warwick CV34 4SS  
Tel 01926-412276  
Fax 01926-412974  
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Michael Hawkes  
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This note is underpinned by more detailed guidance developed by the Association of Diocesan and Cathedral Archaeologists and available at <http://www.britarch.ac.uk/adca/>