



A BRIEF GUIDE TO CHURCH BUILDING WORKS WITH ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

England's historic parish churches have been used for Christian worship for up to 1,400 years. This continuity of use has protected and preserved them, so that the parish church is almost always the oldest building in a village or town, and together with its churchyard often forms an island of ancient remains within a constantly changing environment.

Works that might carry archaeological implications include:

- any alterations or repairs (including conservation work) that might disturb the fabric
- the removal or alteration of fixtures and fittings
- structural extensions
- the excavation of drainage, service or foundation trenches in the church or churchyard
- works upon monuments and boundary walls and gates

What to do if you think your works may have archaeological implications

When repairs or alterations to or in historic churches and/or churchyards are under consideration the potential for archaeological implications should always be borne in mind.

The potential impact should be explored in a Statement of Significance — see our guidance for more information:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/statements-significance-and-needs>.

Faculty petitions should always include adequate information, including details of necessary archaeological provision, to enable the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) and other bodies to give appropriate advice to the Chancellor.

Early advice

The need for archaeological provision in a proposed scheme of work often becomes apparent at the time when a preliminary enquiry is made. The earlier advice is sought, the greater the chance of avoiding delays and expense.

Guidance from that point through each of the stages outlined below is available by first contacting the DAC Secretary.

It is essential to ensure that each stage of the process is adequately documented by appropriately detailed written reports, which should be copied to the architect, the relevant Archdeacon, and the DAC.

Archaeological appraisal

The Diocesan Archaeological Adviser (DAA) will be able to judge the likely impact of disturbance of any significant buried deposits or fabric through a process termed an 'appraisal'.

The likely impact is dependent upon a number of factors. These include: the area and/or depth of the anticipated intervention; its position in the church and churchyard and relationship with any standing buildings; and the known history of the area, including previous finds, documentary references, and clues in the fabric of the church itself.

Once the appraisal is complete, the DAA will advise upon the archaeological implications of the proposed work. There may be no need for any further archaeological involvement; if there is, there are several categories of archaeological recording which may need to be carried out before and/or during the proposed work.

Advice on suitably qualified and competent archaeologists who have worked in the Diocese may be available from the DAA or DAC Secretary, alternatively one can find a list of individuals and organisations who can undertake such work in the Yearbook of the Institute of Archaeologists (IFA).

A list of organisations accredited by the IFA, the Registered Archaeological Organisations (RAOs), can be found here:

<http://www.archaeologists.net/>. This site also contains "Standards" for the following stages in the process.



Above: **Bath Abbey (Diocese of Bath & Wells)**

Desk-based assessment

The next step from an appraisal is a thorough desk-based review of all existing archaeological information relating to the area under consideration. As the term implies, this is essentially a documentary exercise, with any work on site limited to non-intrusive investigation. No holes will be dug, no plaster stripped. The information gained at this stage may be adequate but, if not, it will be necessary to proceed to the next stage of investigation.

Watching briefs

For minor disturbances such as a trench for a new pipe, or minor stone replacement or repointing, the recommended course of action is usually precautionary monitoring, often referred to as a "watching brief". This simply means having an archaeologist on site during the work to check that no significant historic deposits or features are being disturbed.

This procedure may also be appropriate for other types of disturbance, even as substantial as a small building extension, where this is being constructed on a 'raft' foundation to avoid deep digging.

Watching briefs may sometimes, but by no means always, be provided at a modest or even nil cost by local authority personnel or the DAA. In some circumstances it may be appropriate for an experienced amateur archaeologist to undertake this responsibility, but only with the prior approval of the DAC.

A watching brief is unlikely to be an adequate response to larger works, which may require an archaeological evaluation or excavation and recording.

Archaeological evaluation

Evaluation usually takes the form of a small trial excavation to test the nature of the historic deposits, or a non-destructive survey using geophysics for example by passing a small electric current underground to determine if walls, foundations, or ditches are present, or a combination of these methods.

The DAA can advise on suitable archaeological contractors who can carry out this work, providing if possible a choice of individuals or organisations who, on invitation by the parish, may then tender for the work as set out in the brief.

Archaeological recording (fabric)

Works which involve replacement of, or interference with, historic fabric may require recording before, during and after the work takes place.

This can also be the case in like-for-like replacement of materials, for example a stone parapet, a monument or a roof timber, or part of a wooden screen.

Recording can range from a high quality photographic record to a comprehensive programme using the latest techniques, such as hand-drawn or photogrammetric stone-for-stone recording and electronic surveys.

The recording of historic roof and bell frame structures often requires particular stringency, and may embrace such techniques as dendrochronology (tree-ring dating), carbon-14 dating and three-dimensional computer-aided imaging.

There may be grants available for such work, either through the grants administered by the Church Buildings Council (CBC), the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) or Historic England where the conservation or repair work is funded by these bodies.

Archaeological excavation

Occasionally, because of the evident importance of the church building or site, the requirement will be for archaeologists to undertake the work of a conventional excavation.

This should not be seen simply as an extra burden on parishes. Indeed, the knowledge learned through such work can be of positive benefit to a parish by adding to what is known about the history and development of the church, putting the building and parishioners into a much wider context and aiding in the management of the church and churchyard.

Human remains

It is very likely that an excavation (whether archaeological or otherwise) within a churchyard or within a church will reveal human remains.

While care should always be taken to avoid damage to all archaeological deposits, in the case of human remains the reasons for preservation in situ go deeper than simply a desire to preserve information about the past. Pastoral, ethical and theological sensitivities also need to be taken into account.

The Church of England has produced in collaboration with Historic England a guidance document on *Best Practice for Treatment of Human Remains from Christian Burial Grounds in England* (2017). To keep this guidance up to date and to aid everyone involved with this sensitive area, a national Advisory Panel on the Archaeology of Burials in England (APABE) has been set up by the Church and Historic England which can help interpret the guidance and give non-binding expert advice on this complex area. The above document and supplementary guidance produced by APABE can be found here: https://www.archaeologyuk.org/apabe/pdf/APABE_ToHREfCBG_FINAL_WEB.pdf.

Archiving and Publication

Permission and grants for works to historic churches that have archaeological implications are conditional upon an adequate level of analysis, archiving and (when appropriate) publication being built into the programme of work. As a rule of thumb this can amount to 50% on top of the costs for the fieldwork. It is important to budget for this.

