



DAC Guidance Archaeology and churches

Churches are eloquent reminders of the richness of the country's heritage. Many have survived in towns and the countryside from the medieval period, and a few from before the Norman Conquest. Some occupy sites of considerable antiquity, perhaps predating the foundation of the church itself. Of all groups of historic monuments they may be considered the most durable, having been in constant use since their foundation.

Unlike most other monuments, however, churches remain in active use as places of worship. Yet alterations could destroy for ever the historical and archaeological evidence for their development. A balance must be struck between works carried out to improve the functioning of the church and retaining the historical features of the building which make it so valuable.

WORK WHICH MAY AFFECT THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF A CHURCH

It should be noted that "archaeology" denotes the historic interest and character of the fabric of a building. Archaeological evidence for the development of the church may be contained within the above-ground fabric as well as in buried archaeological deposits. Thus even relatively minor work could affect important archaeological evidence. However, it is usually more major works which have the potential to damage the historical evidence for the church development.

For example:

- Stripping or scraping wall plaster could inadvertently destroy hidden wall paintings.
- Re-flooring the church could disturb or destroy earlier floors.
- Laying new heating pipes could cut through and destroy previously intact archaeological layers.
- Cutting new drains around the outside of churches could remove important physical links between the standing church and buried structures with which it may once have been associated.

IS A FACULTY NECESSARY?

All works which are likely to affect the historic fabric of the church or buried archaeological deposits will require a faculty, including those described above.

In the case of more minor works where there is doubt if features of historic interest may be affected, the DAC is happy to give appropriate advice.

PRELIMINARY STAGES

Some churches and many categories of work will not have archaeological implications. However, wherever it is possible that archaeological deposits or features may be disturbed, it is important to identify the potential of the site at an early stage.

* Contact the DAC for a preliminary discussion about the proposed works and their possible effects on the site. The DAC and its archaeological expert will be able to give general advice about formal consents which will be needed and organisations to be consulted.

* Contact the local authority archaeologist (usually the County Archaeologist) for your area. He or she will be able to make an initial assessment of the archaeological potential of the site and whether there are archaeological features which may be damaged by the proposed works.

FURTHER STUDY

For a particularly sensitive site, the County Archaeologist may recommend that a documentary study, often known as a desktop study, should be carried out. This may include a programme of building recording, particularly if structural works are proposed to the church, in order to understand the building and the potential effects of any alterations or repairs.

Depending upon the results of this study, and in the case of works which will disturb archaeological deposits below ground level or cut into historic fabric, a limited field evaluation may then be required.

Field evaluation consists of trial excavation to test for the presence of archaeological features and to determine their archaeological potential. It is usually a quick and relatively inexpensive exercise.

Sometimes a geophysical survey will be requested which can establish the presence of archaeological features buried in the walls or below ground by using sophisticated remote sensing techniques but without disturbance to the fabric or to the ground.

To carry out the desktop study or field evaluation the parish will need to engage the services of a freelance archaeologist or of an archaeological body approved by the DAC. The names of such people and organisations can be obtained from the County Archaeologist or through the DAC's archaeological expert.

The desktop study or field evaluation report should contain recommendations for a strategy to mitigate the effects of the proposals upon the historical and archaeological elements of the site (for example, by redesign of the proposals to avoid damage to historical features, or to allow for preservation in situ).

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

If either a desktop study or a field evaluation have taken place, the information should be supplied to the DAC with the other details of the faculty application. With adequate information, the DAC can determine whether historical or archaeological features may be affected by the proposed works.

Where it judges that there is likely to be unacceptable harm to features of archaeological importance, the DAC will request that substantial changes are made to the proposals; otherwise it would be unable to recommend the faculty application.

In the case of major proposals on an archaeologically important site, the DAC may request a full excavation of all or part of the site affected before development commences, to ensure that a full and accurate record is made of archaeological features and to facilitate future development.

If, on the other hand, it can be agreed that disturbance of archaeological features may be permitted in the course of carrying out the works, the DAC may still recommend certain conditions to ensure that a proper archaeological record is made before work takes place. For example, it may be required that a detailed record is made of any archaeological features which are revealed in the course of construction works. This type of operation is commonly known as a watching brief.

If such archaeological conditions are imposed the PCC should keep the DAC informed of progress, supplying the name of the archaeological organisation to be employed and the extent and timescale for the work. All such works should be monitored and controlled by the local authority archaeologist who will write a brief setting out the particular requirements for the work.

LEGAL MATTERS

It is important to ensure that there is a proper contract between the PCC and the archaeological organisation. This should cover the brief, the extent and timescale of the work, the cost of the work (including fees and VAT), health and safety matters, dealing with artefacts, disposing of spoil, making good, reporting and publication, and ownership of artefacts and copyright. Advice should be sought from the Registrar, and an independent consultant archaeologist should also advise. (However, do not rely on a county archaeologist if the same person will be carrying out the archaeology!)

REPORT AND PUBLICATION

After the completion of any required on-site archaeological recording and work, a report must be prepared setting out the results of this work. As a minimum, a summary report must be submitted to the County Archaeologist for inclusion in the archaeological database for the county, known as the Sites and Monuments Record. A copy should also be sent to the DAC for its records.

If an archaeological excavation has been carried out, or if important discoveries were made in the course of a watching brief, the results must always be published in some form so that they can be made available to a wider audience. (The nature of such publication will depend on the scale of the excavation and the results, but may take the form of an article in an

archaeological journal or a self-contained work such as a monograph.) The implications of publishing the results of archaeological work should always be discussed with the local authority archaeologist and the appointed archaeological contractor at an early stage.

THE FACULTY PROCESS

It is important to note that the faculty system includes measures designed to protect the archaeological aspect of churches, and that it allows for consultation and involvement by external archaeological bodies.

For practical details of how to apply for a faculty please refer to the DAC leaflet Applications for Faculties, obtainable from the DAC office (details below).

To obtain the DAC certificate, you will in the final stage need details of your proposals and these should cover the points above. A photograph to illustrate the setting is always of great help. Once you have both a PCC resolution and a DAC certificate, you can submit your formal faculty petition.

FINANCE

The aim of the staged approach outlined in this guidance leaflet is to assist in minimising the potential costs to parishes. It is obvious though that there can be serious financial implications when archaeology is undertaken. These implications must be carefully allowed for when a project budget is prepared.

The budget will need to cover the costs of all the possible stages outlined above, from initial evaluation, through survey and study or field evaluation reports, excavation, legal contracts to final report and publication.

Regrettably, there is no readily available source of grant-funding, but the DAC will assist with enquiries in individual cases.

MORE INFORMATION

Much more information on this subject and other matters relating to the care and development of the church building can be found at www.churchcare.co.uk

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