

Archaeology in Churchyards

Guidance Note

Archaeological Watching Briefs

Will a watching brief be needed?

If you are undertaking a project which requires a Faculty and is likely to disturb the ground in a church or churchyard, then it is possible that you may require an archaeological presence when you undertake below-ground work. Here are a few questions which it may be useful to ask concerning the project and the site.

Is the church or the churchyard more than about a hundred years old?

If so then the DAC is likely to recommend that an archaeologist is present during all below-ground disturbance. Remember that a new church may be in an old churchyard.

Is the church on the site of, or near, known archaeological remains?

It may be that earlier work on the site has turned up archaeological remains or that the church is within, or adjacent to, a known site. If so then, an archaeological presence is likely to be needed.

Is the work required likely to penetrate archaeological levels?

This is more difficult to answer as the depth at which archaeological features appear varies considerably from site to site. However, it is reasonable to assume that the top 20-30cms (8-12 inches) are unlikely to contain surviving significant archaeological remains. Recent work (eg, the raising of a floor level) may increase the archaeologically sterile layer but the DAC will need information confirming this.

Do you need advice?

There is a separate DAC information sheet on how to find a suitable professional archaeologist for watching briefs or excavation. However, if you need advice on what is likely to be required, this can probably be provided by the DAC through its Care of Churches Officer or its Archaeological advisor.

Getting Archaeological Information

From the DAC.

If you are undertaking a project which requires a Faculty and is likely to disturb the ground in a church or churchyard which is more than about a hundred years old (and remember that a new church may be in an old churchyard) then it is likely that you may require an archaeological presence when you undertake the work. The DAC can advise you on the degree of archaeological work which it is likely that you will require as a condition of Faculty, bearing in mind that the ultimate decision in these matters rests with the Diocesan Chancellor, not the DAC. It is, however, the parish who will need to find a suitable archaeologist to undertake the work.

Finding an archaeologist.

There are a large number of archaeological contractors available to you. When choosing one you need to bear a number of things in mind. Archaeological contractors vary from very large organisations capable of running excavations on major infrastructure projects like Crossrail or Heathrow Terminal 5 to the small local contractors employing just one or two people. For most Faculty-related archaeology you do not need the facilities (and accompanying costs for specialists, admin overheads and transport) which a large unit has to cost into its charges. So you will probably find a small concern more cost effective – but you need to make sure that they have some experience in working in churches and churchyards and can meet any conditions laid down by the Faculty. Web sites listing archaeological contractors are shown below.

Further information

A summary of the sort of archaeological work which may be involved in church work is to be found on the website of Church Archaeological Services, a small local firm specialising in church work (www.churcharchaeology.co.uk).

If your project involves planning permission from the Local Authority, then you may find it useful to look at the Brief Guide to Archaeology and Planning to be found on the website of the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust (www.ggat.org.uk – navigate to the Archaeological Planning page). GGAT Planning section provides advice to Local Authorities so, if relevant, your planning application will pass across their desks.

The GGAT site also contains a link to the list of archaeological contractors maintained by the Institute of Archaeologists – www.archaeologists.net and click on ‘find an organisation’. These are mainly the larger organisations. Other lists of contractors include: <http://www.bajr.org/whosewho/contractor.asp> and www.britarch.ac.uk/info/contract.asp. You will need to look at the individual websites of any of these you choose to find out their specialities and other details.