

**Church of St Michael and All Angels,
Waddesdon, Buckinghamshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief (Interior works – Phase 2)
For the Incumbent and Church Wardens of
St Michael and All Angels**

by Andrew Mundin

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

WCB 17/52

February 2019

Summary

Site name: Church of St Michael and All Angels, Waddesdon, Buckinghamshire

Grid reference: SP 7403 1697

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 5th - 13th February 2019

Site supervisor: Andrew Munding, Pierre Manisse

Site code: WCB 17/52

Summary of results: Observations continued on the excavation of existing floor layers in the north aisle of the church. This included the servery and the demolition of the 20th century concrete base, which covered much of the aisle under the pew seating. Beneath 19th century layers, the top grave slabs of two burials, probably of 13th century date, were recorded *in situ*. No deposits predating the 19th century were threatened by the works.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum in due course.

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St Michael and All Angels, Waddesdon, Buckinghamshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

By Andrew Munding

Report 17/52e

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at the Church of St Michael and All Angels, Waddesdon, Buckinghamshire, HP18 0JP (SP 7403 1697; Fig.1). The work was commissioned by Ms Zoe Sawbridge of Acanthus Clews Architects, Acanthus House, 57 Hightown Road, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX16 9BE on behalf of the Incumbent and Church Wardens.

A faculty has been extended by the Diocese of Oxford to continue works to replace the flooring of the church. Several phases of watching brief have been undertaken on previous phases of this work, and this report deals with work required for renewing the flooring of the north aisle. These works have been carried out following an overarching specification supplied by the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor, Dr Julian Munby.

The investigation was carried out by Pierre Manisse and Andrew Munding between 5th and 13th February 2019. The site code is WCB 17/52. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum in due course.

This is the fifth report produced in regards to the works at the Church since 2017. Works in 2017 concentrated on investigation in the churchyard prior to drainage works (Munding 2017; Sanchez and Munding 2017). Observation of the drainage works was also undertaken before interior floor works began (Munding 2018a). Observations in the interior of the church generally found that much of the work did not penetrate beyond 19th century levels, though two areas in particular had interest. This included a backfilled remnant of a demolished crypt, probably dated to the 17th century, and part of an original structure of the north-east nave which had an *in-situ* medieval horizon and masonry, cut by a small group of later graves (Munding 2018b).

Location, topography and geology

Waddesdon lies 6.5km west of Aylesbury (Fig. 1). The Church is on the western side of the village, which straddles the A41. The Church stands in the centre of the churchyard, on a slight raised terrace, with access into the churchyard from the west and via the lychgate to the south. The underlying geology is mapped as Kimmeridge Clay and Amptill Clay (Mudstones) (BGS 1994). The bench mark on the south-west corner buttress of the church tower is 107.6m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).

Archaeological background

The Church of St Michael and All Angels (Listed Grade II*; 111780) dates from the 13th century and incorporates reordered pieces of late 12th-century architecture (RCHME 1912). A summary of the architectural development of the Church can be found in a previous report (Mundin 2108b). Much of the existing suspended floor, being removed during these regeneration works, dates from Victorian (late 19th century) times, though brickworks, ducts and vents as part of the underfloor system seem to be older, possibly pre-gas-fired systems, involving localized heat sources. This is likely to be late 17th-18th century in date (Mundin 2018b), with connecting flues observed in the east nave, and linking to the south east and north east ends of the aisles.

Previous reports have covered the findings of archaeological investigation since 2017 (Mundin 2017; Sanchez and Mundin 2017). The most significant findings have been the discovery of structural foundations predating existing bases of wall of the chancel (Mundin 2018a) and the north-east nave (Mundin 2018b).

Though concrete had previously been cast under the floor in part of the aisle in the 20th century, and the floorboard replaced, this was to be taken up and extended to the west to include the serverly. This follows works creating a new limecrete base for a stone pave floor. The current phase of archaeological observations were required to record layers that are being reduced, and to assess possible impact on underlying archaeological deposits should any be exposed.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected during the reduction of the floor in the church. The aims of the archaeological works for the works was:

- to minimize the impact of groundworks on any surviving remains of the earlier church;
- to determine the extent to which human remains survive in excavated areas, and generally observe the presence of burial vaults and graves; and
- to signal, before further groundworks proceed, the discovery and height of archaeological structural elements that could not be lifted or removed, and where further action would be required.

Inscribed memorials, for record were photographed prior to works and areas of archaeological and historical structural interest were discussed with the Church Architect prior to determining the impact of the new makeup levels. A photographic and drawn record of the deposits' placement, condition, and completeness was made. No *in situ* human remains were to be lifted (as agreed by the faculty), unless under threat of destruction. This area had not been investigated in previous phases due to the concrete under a void of the replacement church floor.

All reduction was undertaken by hand, after the concrete had been broken and removed. Observation focused on exposure of the southern section of the server area, to see if crypt brickwork was exposed.

Results (Fig. 3)

No brick crypts were identified in this portion of the floor, but groundworkers were generally aware of the presence of crypts and ledger slabs directly to the south in the western parts of the north aisle. Surfaces were covered to protect them during works. A possible heavily worn ledger slab (Pl. 1) was lifted during the excavation, but Victorian heating ducts lay directly underneath this slab which has obviously been replaced. A partially exposed exterior side of a brick crypt was observed in section, but there was no need to expose the interior and it remained intact (Pl. 2).

Plasterwork

Prior to the archaeological observations starting, the plaster of the interior wall of the north aisle was removed from the previous floor level to a height of 1.1m, to expose the facing of the stone construction (Pl. 3). This has been undertaken to allow any damp in the stone structure on this side of the church is dry. It also exposed the structural fabric which until now had been obscured internally and externally. The exposed face, which stretched from the west wall of the north aisle, exposed all the construction of the north aisle to its east end, which housed the north aisle chapel. This had successfully been achieved, with limited success achieved undertaking the same in the south aisle, where the plaster was more resistant to removal. The exposed stone courses were mostly laid regularly, in the north-west part and central areas, with no obvious infilling especially under the inserted 15th century window to the west. Nor were there any changes to either side of the north doorway, suggestive of an alternative jam or lintel. The same was true for the two 14th century windows to the east.

Just to the east of the second 14th-century window, there was a vertical change, where large quoin stones, creating a straight divide. This was at least four courses high, to the top of the exposure (Pl. 3). Towards the upper visible coursing, there was an uneven, undulating course, but not to indicate any inserted change or change of construction from above. The vertical divide seems indicative of a change in original construction of the north aisle, marking the original, east end of the 14th-century extent and the join with the 15th-century extension. This point is in line with the fifth column base of the south aisle, which created the five bays of the arcade, suggesting these developments were contemporary, in the 15th century. The stonework visible reverts to seven courses high, and is partly mortared, at least towards floor level, with a dark grey sandy mortar. It is possible this pointing is a later addition.

A second, vertical change is visible in the stonework further east, under the left side of the later 15th-century Perpendicular window. The other side of the wall, under the window on the right-hand side, is obscured by wainscoting from the north chapel surround. This change seems to reach floor level, and is assumed to be a blocked-in mason's doorway, probably in use during the changes to the church in the 15th century, allowing access to the east of the church and chancel when these were constructed. As the development was nearing completion the window was the last to be replaced, and the lower part of the opening in the wall finally constructed.

North aisle reduction

Prior to the archaeological observations starting, the mid-20th century cast concrete, which had been part of a repair after previous floor boards fell into the suspended floor, was completely removed to make the flooring and bedding, matching the composition of the newly established floor levels in the south aisle and the nave. At the start of reduction, approximately 0.15m of modern bedding soil, made up of dark yellow sandy silt, with brick, concrete, stone and occasional metal items was reduced. The metal finds were mostly straps and nails of ferrous metal, none closely datable but the layer as a whole was clearly modern.

As the eastern part of the north aisle was reduced, the southern part exposed the base of a brick channel that contained the Victorian pipework linking the radiators on the north aisle (Pl. 4). This stretched along the northern length of the arcade, with jointing points of brick channels perpendicular to either side of the north door (Fig. 3). Reduction in the north-west part of the north aisle (the servery) required minimal works as much of the area that adjoined the west wall was already at the required level. This point also contained much of the modern pipe work leading into the main body of the church from the boiler house. The only reduction saw a the brick sides of the duct dismantled and the sides of the perpendicular ducts that joined from the western nave. The western nave is known to contain a number of crypts (Mundin 2017), and there is further potential as other grave slabs here may represent more positions.

The bases of the brick structure were encountered lower than 0.49m, with the base at 0.53m from existing floor level. The surface of the bricks and the demolished sides were all that were noted of this structure. It was not necessary to excavate to find the base of these structures. This was at least contemporary with the dark brown sandy silt soil that covered the area to the north (168). This make up level was loosely compact, and slightly covered the interior wall facing, at the top of the foundation. Finds recovered from this fill included late 19th-century pottery, and clay tobacco pipe stems, readily identifiable and datable.

At a depth of 0.43m deep in section, immediately adjacent to the north aisle wall, were two stone slabs. These were both laid horizontally, though the western of the two was sloping slightly to the east (169), possibly due to this side sinking into the void of the grave underneath. The eastern slab was level, though its east end was not visible, with potentially up to 0.5m of its length being under the north chapel.

This eastern slab was a yellow rough limestone (170; Fig. 4, Pl.5), with a heavily worn and pitted surface, with the hint of a raised, stylized cross visible. The southern side of the slab was slightly pitched, with more remains of a stone surface between its north side and the wall. Disarticulated human long bones were noted in the small interval between the slab and the wall. The western slab was a smooth, slightly burnished, grey dense sandstone (169; Fig 4, Pl. 6). The upper faces of both slabs were patterned, in greatly contrasting styles. The style and form of both are not directly paralleled, and it seems to be very rare to find unrecorded slabs of these types within a church. The sandstone slab had a curved edge to the upper face, and a sloped, curved side, which made the slab 0.2m thick. The detailed pattern on the upper face of the slab was more raised than incised, creating what is known as a 'cross of glory'; a head motif above a central, vertical shaft, in a stepped base. This is a particular style recognised in Medieval crossed grave slabs, with recorded examples from this country from the 13th century until the 16th century. A 'knotted' pattern is placed centrally on its widest end, and could be described as a 'bracelet-derivative cross' (McClain 2010, 44), with open ends of its outer curve ending in trefoil designs. Other parts seem to utilize the trefoil pattern at the top of the shaft under the head motif. The foot is represented by a simple stepped base. The slab is cracked in two places, which probably happened when its original positioning was changed. Due to its date, it could have well represented a burial originally placed outside the church, only becoming interior to the church, when the 15th century extension was added.

Finds

Much of the excavated soil was deemed to have been laid as bedding when the concrete slab was laid in the 20th century. Even so, no immediately obvious 20th-century finds were noted. Broken brick, concrete fragments and stone, and occasional tile fragments, were noted. There were also a couple of metal nails and straps, but no pottery. From the dark brown silty soil (168) underlying the floor of the servery and overlying the tombs in the north-east part of the north aisle, pottery was recovered. Four, late-19th century, white porcelain blue transfer-printed pottery ('china') fragments were recovered. These were found with three fragments of thin diameter (>4mm) narrow-bore clay pipes. No bowls were noted. These were of a contemporary date to the pottery. No Medieval finds were encountered in this phase of works.

Conclusion

The watching brief successfully recorded the full reduction of the north aisle, and has shown that 20th-century works under the seating area of the north aisle did not have an adverse impact on levels underlying the 19th-century floor. The layering of a modern fill under the concrete does not suggest that earlier structures, such as the ducts and flues of the heating system have been lost, but nor has there been any evidence of surviving remains of the church structure. A very limited amount of disarticulated human bone hints at disturbance of remains possibly during the original creation of the suspended floor or repairs since the 17th century.

An unexpected addition was the grave slabs. There is more literature on the Medieval ‘cross slab’ monuments in the north of England (McClain 2010) than the south, but generally they seem to date to the 13th century. Though given this title, the designs attributed to this type of monument include a range of patterns, motifs and shapes (McClain 2010, 38). Although much of the patterning could be recorded on the wide end of the trapezoidal stone slab here, it must be said that the finer detail of the design has been lost to wear. Examples do exist of later cross slabs (15th and 16th century), but they are usually more decorative than the one represented here. Whether the differences in both the material and the design of these two slabs reflect chronology, or different origins, would require more examples for comparison, with so few others known in the south of the country.

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