St Michael’s Church Parish Rooms, Church Lane, Warfield, Berkshire

An Archaeological Recording Action

for The Warfield Churches

by Andy Taylor and Steve Preston

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code MCW 03/60

October 2006
Summary

Site name: St Michael’s Church Parish Rooms, Church Lane, Warfield, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 8800 7217

Site activity: Archaeological Recording Action

Date and duration of project: 27th April–17th July 2006

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Andy Taylor

Site code: MCW 03/60

Area of site: c.40 sq m

Summary of results: Several late post-medieval burials were summarily recorded during removal of overburden to the foundation formation level. The full depth of overburden above the natural geology was not exposed nor removed. Some of the burials were placed within brick crypts. No deposits or graves of medieval date were observed though sherds of medieval pottery were recovered.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Reading Museum, accession code REDMG:2003.306, given that permission is given to deposit the finds.

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford 22.10.06
Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological recording action carried out St Michael’s Church Parish Rooms, Church Lane, Warfield, Berkshire (SU 8800 7217) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Derek Hart of Latimer Contracting Ltd, The Old Inn, London Road, Postcombe, Thame, Oxfordshire, OX9 7ED on behalf of The Warfield Churches, Warfield Churches Office, Church Lane, Warfield, Berkshire, RG42 6EG.

Planning permission has been gained from Bracknell Forest Borough Council (app no 02/00108/LB) for the construction of a single-storey extension of c.40 sq m to the parish rooms and to refurbish a listed building. A Faculty (no. 5159) has also been gained from the Diocese of Oxford. Both consents are subject to a condition relating to archaeology. A building recording will be reported on separately.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment’s Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the Borough Council’s and Oxford Diocese’s policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Fiona MacDonald, Principal Archaeologist with Berkshire Archaeology, advisers to the Borough on matters relating to archaeology, and Mr Julian Munby, the Diocesan Archaeological Adviser. The fieldwork was undertaken by Andy Taylor, Steve Ford and Ceri Falys between the 27th April and 17th July 2006 and the site code is MCW 03/60. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Reading Museum (accession code REDMG:2003.306) given that permission is granted to deposit the artefacts.

Location, topography and geology

The existing parish rooms are located along much of the southern boundary of the churchyard (Fig. 2) and the extension is to be added on the north-western corner of the building. The churchyard is no longer used for burial purposes with a low density of tombs and headstones present dating from the late 18th to early 20th centuries. A number of headstones were removed or relocated in the 20th century. The churchyard is generally flat, but slopes down immediately alongside the parish rooms, and lies at an approximate height of c.61m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology comprises London Clay (BGS 1981), which was observed during the evaluation phase of the site.
Archaeological background

The site lies within the churchyard of the parish church which was documented in Domesday Book (1086) and has features within the existing fabric dating from the 13th century (Ford 1987, 114). The parish church is usually regarded as lying close to the centre of the historic core of a village, certainly by medieval times, but less so for the dispersed settlement of Saxon times. It is possible that burial deposits relating to the medieval use of the church might be encountered. Evaluation trenching (Ford 2004) had shown that, as expected, this area of the churchyard has been used for burial until the late 19th century. No earlier graves could be identified. The natural geology was present at a depth of about 0.35m–0.6m below the base of the trenches and as it was possible that further partial remains of earlier burials could be present. No deposits reflecting other, earlier uses of the site for non-burial activity were encountered, although a few sherds of domestic medieval pottery were recovered.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the recording action was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits and burials affected by the new construction work. The previous evaluation (Ford 2004) had provided information on the levels at which human remains were encountered and a foundation design for the new extension was employed to minimise the impact on these. As some components of the foundations were to be situated at a level close to that of the remains found during the evaluation, it was considered that a watching brief would be required during groundworks should human remains be encountered.

This was to involve examination of areas of topsoil stripping, ground reduction and the digging of trenches for foundations and services.

Specific aims were to;

- excavate by hand those burials which will be damaged by or destroyed by the groundworks; and
- record the positions of adjacent graves which will otherwise not be affected.

Medieval or earlier burials were to be fully excavated by hand and fully recorded, then removed for analysis (on receipt of the appropriate licences). Later burials and their furniture would be recorded to a lower standard and retained on site for appropriate reburial.

The Excavation

Shortly before commencement of the groundworks two brick crypts (Fig. 3. Tomb 100 and Tomb 102) which lay within the footprint of the new building, were opened by grave diggers operating on behalf of the funeral
directors to be re-interred elsewhere in the churchyard. Both contained human remains of late 19th and early 20th century date.

Tomb 100 was a brick crypt with a vaulted brick roof. It comprised a double line of uniform machine-made bricks in a stretcher pattern which were mortared. It was encased in concrete and originally entered by a passage way from the west (blocked). This contained four bodies in various states of preservation including the survival of flesh and hair. The bodies were contained within wooden coffins, three of which were encased in lead. The upper burial (1) was in a wooden coffin on top of the vault of the main crypt which lay some 0.4m below ground level; this was a female. The coffin’s name plate was retained by the incumbent. Below were three lead coffins with wood interiors. The first of these (2) contained bones only. The second contained a semi-decomposed burial (3) with a date plate for 1905. The third (4) was that of a well preserved female.

Tomb 102 was a similar structure built of brick but with much less preservation of the inhumations. The coffins, originally resting on iron brackets had rotted and fallen to the base of the vault which now contained a jumble of bones.

The main site works on site began with the digging of a trench for redirecting the overhead power cables underground. This measured 0.45m–0.50m wide and was dug to a depth of 0.60m. Stratigraphy consisted of 0.10m of turf/topsoil overlying 0.50m of subsoil. The subsoil layer contained occasional fragments of disarticulated human bone, as would be expected in a site of this nature, as well as pieces of modern brick and tile, glass and flowerpots (not retained). The disarticulated human bone fragments were reburied within the trench.

A similar trench was dug to re-route the gas supply. Two burials were identified in this trench in the section immediately adjacent to the church, although neither was exposed in its entirety (Fig. 3). The first comprised feet and legs with the reminder continuing outside the trench. The second only revealed the skull with the rest of the skeleton below the dig level of the trench. The trench in this area also showed an increase in the frequency of disarticulated human bone.

The reduced dig over the area of the extension comprised the removal of 0.20m of topsoil and 0.60m of subsoil/gravesoil by machine fitted with a toothless grading bucket under archaeological supervision. This further exposed the brickwork of tomb 100, (Plate 1) and tomb 102 previously emptied of coffins before the main works began (see above). Also in this area another brick-lined tomb (101) was observed, of similar brick, also cemented except for the base which was corbelled and unmortared (Plate 2). The majority of the interior of the fill of this grave was removed by machine. Upon hand excavation a skull was located at the western end of the
grave. Fragmentary remains of the arms, mandible and hyoid bone were the only further skeletal remains present within this grave.

**Finds**

**Pottery**

Three sherds of medieval pottery were retrieved from the cable trench, close to the western chimney of the parish rooms, all were of commonplace domestic wares similar to those found in the evaluation. All the sherds were unstratified.

*Medieval Sandy ware*, 11th–14th century? Dense sub-rounded white and clear quartz up to 0.5 mm. Early medieval pottery types similar to this are found along a considerable length of the middle Thames Valley and its hinterland, and the problem of differentiating between the numerous different wares has been noted in the past (Mellor 1994, 84). 1 sherd, 8g.

*Border Ware*, 1550–1700 (Pearce 1992). Generic term for the late 15th/early 16th century pottery industry of the Hampshire/Surrey border area. The range of fabrics comprised fine, sandy whitewares with an off-white to buff fabric and with yellow, green olive or brown glaze, and fine redwares with clear green to olive or brown glaze. The manufacture of whitewares ceased during the 18th century. Produced a wide range of late medieval and early post-medieval vessel types. 2 sherds, 24g.

**Conclusion**

The main phase of groundworks revealed three partial human burials along with a quantity of disarticulated human bone present throughout. Preliminary works had summarily recorded the removal of burials from two brick tombs of 19th and early 20th century date. Sherds of medieval pottery were recovered as unstratified finds to add to those recovered from the evaluation phase, but no medieval features or graves were observed.

**References**

Ford, S, 2004, St Michael’s Church Parish Rooms, Church Lane, Warfield, Berkshire, an archaeological evaluation, Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 03/60, Reading.
**APPENDIX 1: Feature details**

<table>
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<td>150, 151</td>
<td>Grave, partial skeleton</td>
<td>?19th century</td>
<td>Brickwork</td>
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<td>Tomb</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduced Dig</td>
<td>102</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tomb</td>
<td>19th Century</td>
<td>Brickwork</td>
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St Michael’s Church, Parish Rooms, Church Lane, Warfield, Berkshire, 2006
Archaeological recording action

Figure 1. Location of site within Warfield and Berkshire.

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site within Warfield.

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Figure 3. Areas observed within site.
Scale 1:500
Plate 1. Vaulted brick crypt 100 looking west. Scales 2m, 1m

Plate 2. Tomb 101 looking west, scales 2m, 1m