



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE
OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Patrimony Committee and Patrimony Sub-Committee

To ensure that Historic Churches Committees are aware of their responsibilities in relation to archaeological matters, Joseph Elders Archaeological Officer of the Cathedral and Church Buildings Division of the CofE, has kindly prepared the guideline below. Government Policy in relation to archaeology is set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16. The Patrimony Committee is happy to help HCCs should further assistance or advice be required. For example, the Patrimony Committee has a list of archaeologists who specialise in church related work.

Archaeology and churches

To quote from the *Directory on the Ecclesiastical Exemption: The Procedure for Determination, Section 27*, issued by the Department for Christian Life and Worship's Patrimony Subcommittee:

“The Committee may request the bishop to appoint a suitable adviser
to advise it on applications requiring specialist expertise

(for example those affecting organs, stained glass or archaeological remains)”.

The Directory also describes those works which would normally require permission from the Historic Churches Committee:

- (a) any works (including partial demolition, alteration, repair or extension but excluding total demolition) which would affect the character of the relevant structure as a building of special architectural or historic interest; or
- (b) any works affecting the archaeological importance of a relevant structure or archaeological remains existing within it or its curtilage;

It is therefore clear that archaeology is an important consideration for the Historic Churches Committees. Many (but not all, one thinks of Buckfast Abbey) Roman Catholic churches will be of relatively recent date, but it is a mistake to think that this means that archaeological considerations do not apply to them. There is no cut-off date for the application of archaeological techniques, and any alterations to a listed building, for example, may have archaeological implications. Many Roman Catholic churches have been built in stages over many years, often by important and famous architects. Changes to their fabric, architectural detail and liturgical arrangements, and the relationships between these, can be recorded by archaeologists, to preserve this information for the future. The Council for British Archaeology defines the archaeology of a church and churchyard thus: "...the complete historical study of the fabric and material remains of a church, above and below ground, in relation to its site, contents and historic setting and to its community".

The more completely we understand the history of a church, and sometimes its churchyard and the surrounding environment, the greater our appreciation becomes of why a particular place is unique and special. Understanding the building will also help towards responsible and cost-effective management, avoiding damaging and potentially expensive mistakes. It is also worth remembering

that although the church may be relatively new, the site on which it stands may be old, and there may be archaeological remains of earlier buildings or settlement there.

One important aspect of the archaeology of a church is human remains. Many Roman Catholic churches do not have burial grounds attached to them, but some do. In general, burials under 100 years old are not considered to be of archaeological interest, but older burials may well be so, and interest in 18th and 19th-century burials has grown recently due to the information which can be gained from this well-dated material about such things as lifestyle and health, the prevalence of diseases, and so on. Monuments are another area of interest, especially when they are still related to the burial.

Brief Bibliography:

These consider the issues in relation to Church of England legislation, but also have more general application.

Detailed guidance on the treatment of human remains is available from a document produced recently by English Heritage and the Church of England “Guidance for best practice for treatment of human remains from Christian burial grounds in England”, available at: <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/cathandchurchbuild/humanremains.html>

Guidance on archaeology and churches in general for parishes and the public is also available in the form of a booklet produced by the Church of England, called “Revealing the Past, Informing the Future; a guide to archaeology for parishes” available (£6.99) from Church House Publishing at: <http://www.chpublishing.co.uk/index2.asp>

For archaeologists and curatorial committees, there is Guidance Note 1, “Archaeological requirements for works on churches and churchyards” produced by the Association of Diocesan and Cathedral Archaeologists, available at: <http://www.britarch.ac.uk/adca/projects-issues.html>

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