

Holy Trinity Church, Cookham
Berkshire

Archaeological Watching Brief

Oxford Archaeological Unit
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HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, COOKHAM, BERKSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



Background

Holy Trinity Church, Cookham, Berkshire is of late Saxon foundation, enlarged in the Norman period and again in the 16th century. There was considerable rebuilding in mid Victorian times, and the original heating system is believed to have been installed early this century.

The OAU was commissioned to undertake a watching brief, during the widening of an existing heating duct under the floor of the nave, and continuing outside the north wall to the existing boiler house.

This site was first visited on 26 February 1992. The trench was oriented N-S and situated opposite the south porch. The trench outside the N wall had already been widened, capped and backfilled. The contractors had recovered some large fragments of a possible tomb slab, re-used to cap the original heating trench. A similar slab, set into the floor of the Lady Chapel, within the church, is dated to the 16th century.

Work within the church had only just begun, so a second visit was made on the following day, when the work was completed.

A 1:20 plan was made of the floor of the trench, and a 1:20 section of the east side.

Results

Extending 2.2 m from the inside of the north wall was a wooden floor (1), supported on brick piers (3). This abutted the main floor of the nave, comprising 0.02 m thick clay tiles laid on a bed of bricks (2).

Underneath the present floor were dumpings of make up (6), (7) and (8), comprising gravel, mortar, small stone and tile fragments.

This was cut through by a pipe trench (9), orientated E-W, part of the earlier heating system.

The make up layer (8) was also cut at the S end of the trench by the brickwork (18) and its construction backfill (17).

Underneath the make up layers was a layer of dark brown silty loam with 30% gravel and inclusions of mortar and stone (14). This continued below the bottom of the trench.

The Vault

Immediately inside the N wall and extending 3 metres southwards was a brick and mortar vault. The upper part of the west side

had been partially demolished by the original duct trench, and the new trench has removed some more.

Although measurement of the interior dimensions was impractical, the vault was estimated at 2.5 metres square, with a shallow barrel ceiling. The inside was partially backfilled with rubble, earth, mortar and scattered bones.

One lead coffin was partially visible. Lying loose on the top was a lead name plate, inscribed 'Abbe Hall, Died 29th NOVEMBER, 1808, AGED 76 YEARS.' The plate was retrieved, photographed and replaced.

The Graves

Three graves (10), (11) and (16) were partially revealed, all orientated E-W and cut into layer (14).

Each grave revealed traces of a badly decayed wooden coffin. Fragments of coffins (10) and (16) were recovered, decorated with closely spaced, round-headed Cu Alloy nails ([] Nos 2, 3 and 4).

A heavily corroded Fe coffin handle [1] was retrieved from the vicinity of grave (11) but it cannot be positively linked to coffin (13).

Interpretation

The earlier original heating duct had evidently cut through the W side of the vault (4) and the graves (10), (11) and (16). The loose bones dumped within the vault, and those recovered from the new trench, probably come from these graves.

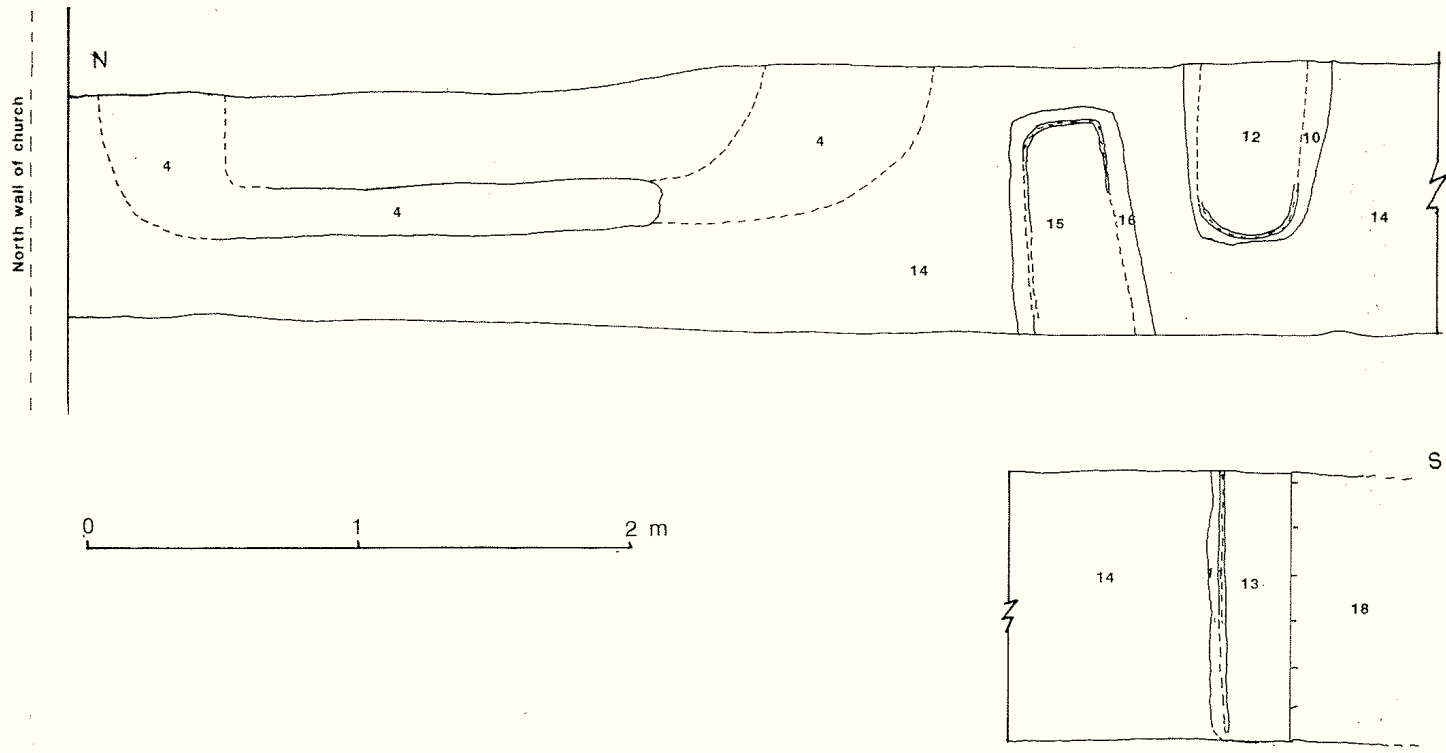
As the nameplate was lying loose on the lead coffin, it is possible that it belonged to one of the wooden coffins, rather than the lead one.

The brick vault and the make-up layers are contemporary. The three graves are sealed by, and therefore earlier than, the vault and make-up layers. The decoration on two of the coffins and the nameplate suggest they are early 19th century in date and the vault and existing floor are therefore mid-Victorian or later. No dating evidence was recovered from layer (14) but it is probably medieval make up.

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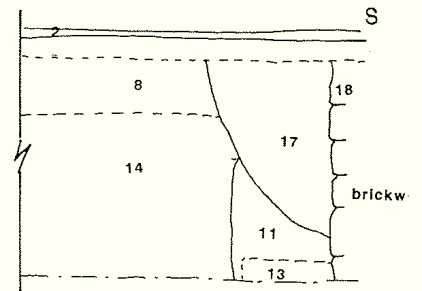
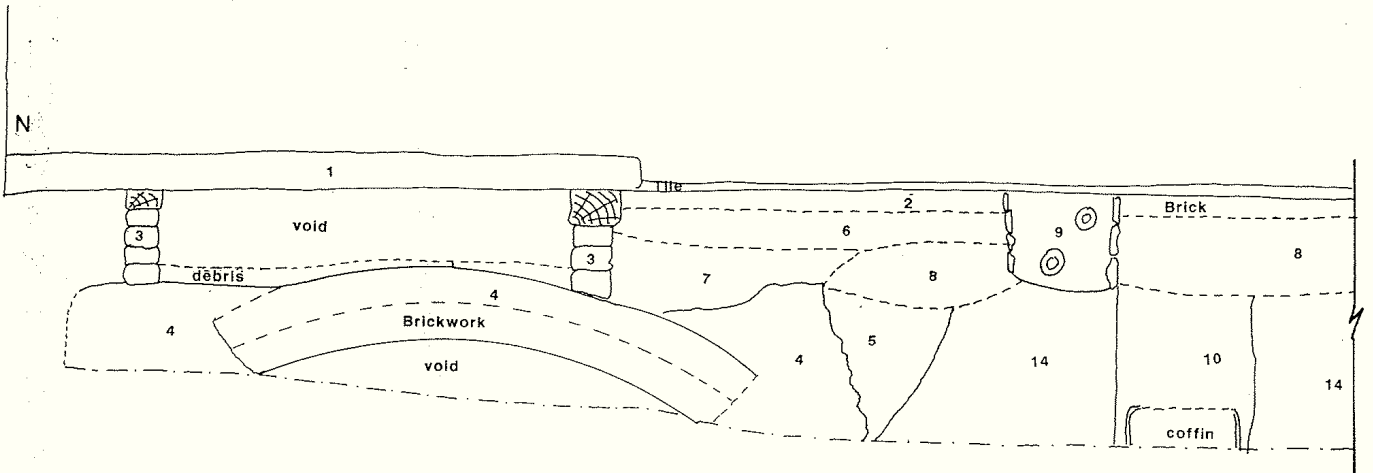
The brickwork (18) is probably a further part of the original heating system trench.

Cookham Holy Trinity Church CHTC 92 Plan no. 1 Scale 1:20

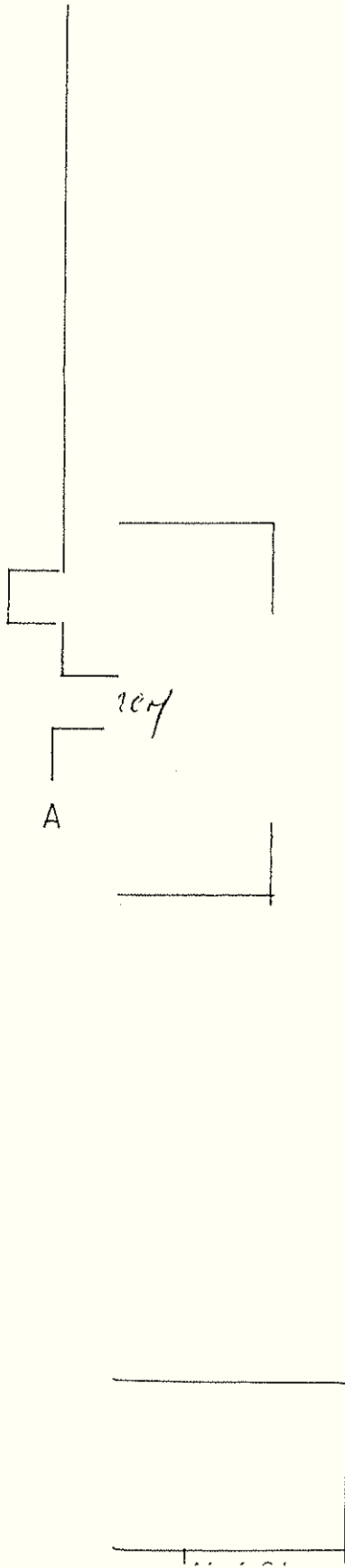


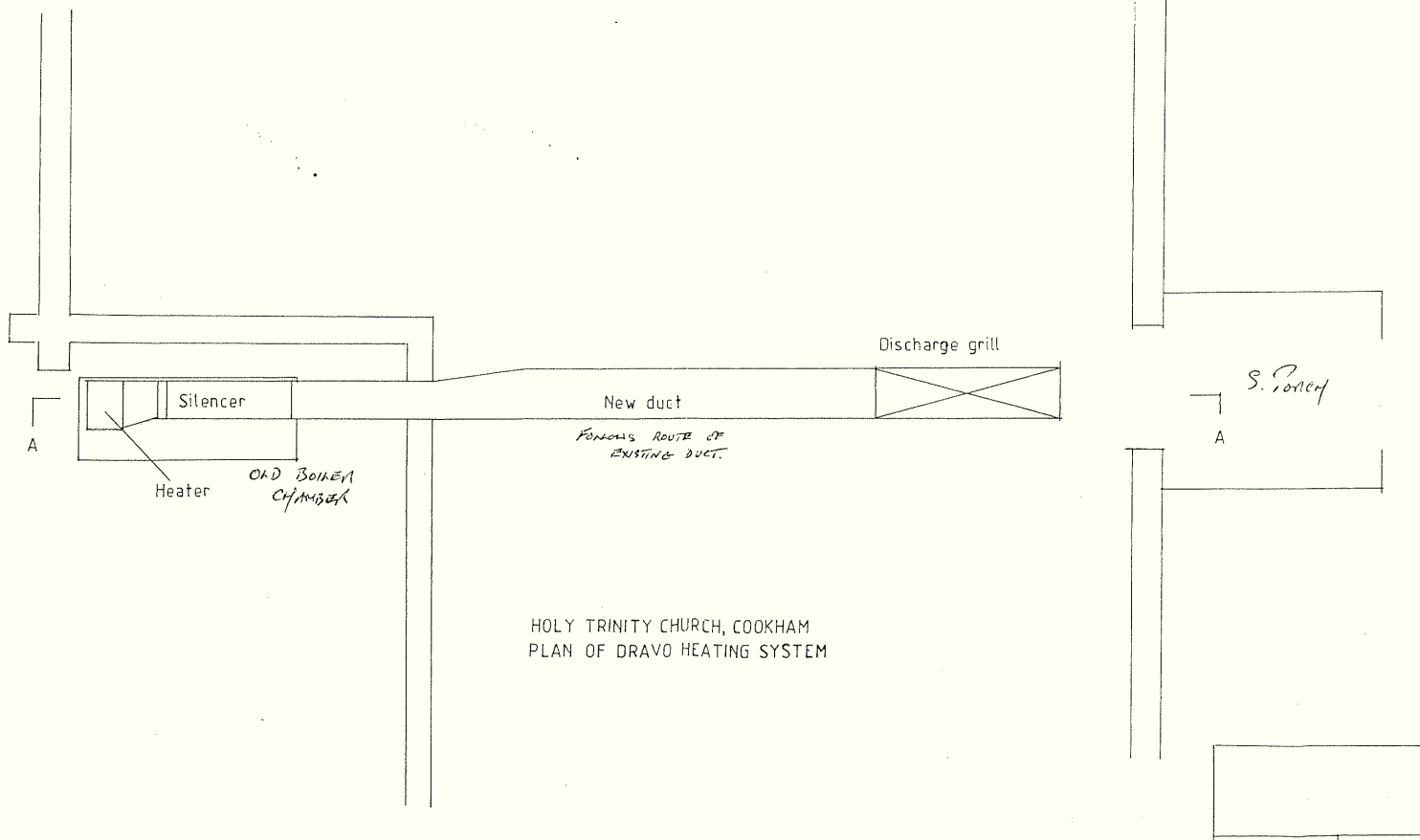
Cookham Holy Trinity Church CHTC 92 Section no.1 Scale 1:20

North wall of church



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HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, COOKHAM
PLAN OF DRAVO HEATING SYSTEM