

INKPEN (BR)

Saint Michael's Church, Inkpen, Berkshire

Archaeological Assessment

**Oxford Archaeological Unit
September 1990**

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Introduction

A planning application has been submitted for the erection of a new room abutting the west end of St. Michael's Church, Inkpen. The west end of the churchyard is a series of terraces with one terrace situated where the proposed building work is to take place. This terrace slopes down slightly from south to north and is higher to the east. The intention for the construction of the building is that the terrace would be lowered to a uniform level. This would involve some 0.1 m to 1.20 m of material being removed including cutting into the side of the higher terrace to the south. The building would then be a piled foundation.

The Archaeological Officer for Berkshire County Council has expressed the view that the excavation of spoil for the terrace would best be done by archaeologists so that any archaeological deposits would be recorded adequately.

In view of the cost of detailed excavation of possible archaeological deposits it was decided that an assessment should be carried out in the first instance.

Strategy

Two small assessment trenches were hand excavated. Each trench was 2.0 m long by 1.0 m wide. Trench 1 was set against the north edge of the proposed development area while Trench 2 was against the southern edge cutting into the higher terrace side. The long axis of both trenches was orientated north-south. The trenches were positioned c. 7.5 m from the west end of the church.

Trench 1 was excavated all over to a minimum depth of 400 mm and in places to 600 mm. The minimum depth was slightly below the proposed terrace level.

Trench 2 was excavated to a minimum depth of 0.50 m with a maximum depth of 1.20 m in the south-west corner. While the maximum depth was slightly below proposed terrace level the rest was left above this level, due to the presence of burials.

Results

The position of four grave cuts were found within the area of Trench 1. None of these were completely excavated although one was excavated down to the top of a wooden coffin. Partly sealing the grave cuts, and cut by one, a layer of rubble was found under the turf. This layer is possibly associated with the 19th century renovation work on the church. The only other deposit encountered was a layer of light orange brown sand cut by three graves. This layer of sand was at least 400 mm thick (seen in the side of one grave).

Within Trench 2 the cuts of at least six graves were seen. Three of the graves had remnants of wooden coffins (with 19th century

name plates) and a coffin handle was found in the fill of another cut. Again a rubble layer, similar to that in Trench 1, was found under the turf sealing two graves and cut away by a further two graves. The only other deposit located was a grey-brown compact silt loam cut away on three sides by graves leaving an area 160 x 450 mm in size.

Conclusions

This area of the churchyard whilst containing no recent marked burials has in the past been used extensively for burial practice. From the observations in Trench 1, near the lowest point of the present terrace, the level of burial is below the proposed base level of soil removal for the building work. In Trench 2 while some grave cuts again do exist down to below this level, higher graves do exist. It was not possible to ascertain whether these were later burials in a family grave with earlier burials below or whether archaeological deposits may have survived below.

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Watching brief

