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**Excavations at St. Andrew's Church, Churchdown,
Gloucestershire, 2000**

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Excavations at St. Andrew's Church, Churchdown, Gloucestershire, 2000

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With contributions by Jane Timby and Hilary Cool

Introduction

In August and September 2000 an archaeological excavation was carried out at St. Andrew's Church, Churchdown, prior to the construction of a new church centre on the south side of the church at O.S. Nat. Grid SO 88361981 (Fig. 1). An earlier evaluation had established the presence of a pond which may have originated in the medieval period (Nichols 2000). The excavation was originally intended to determine the date of the earliest deposits within the pond but the stripping for the footprint of the development revealed other archaeological features, cutting the natural sands, in the south-east corner of the site (Fig. 2). The site was stripped to the level at which the archaeological features were visible in plan. From the pottery finds the features were tentatively dated to two periods.

Late Saxon Features

A posthole and two ditches were dated to the late Saxon period (10th to 11th century). Posthole [123] was 0.80 m in diameter by 0.26 m deep. It contained animal bone and a single sherd of pottery of Saxon date. Parallel ditches [102] and [104] were oriented approximately E–W. Ditch [102], with its eastern terminus within the site, was at least 8.0 m long, up to 0.9 m wide and between 0.15 and 0.45 m deep. It contained three sherds of Saxon pottery, a residual fragment of Roman tile, fragments of animal bone and two copper-alloy objects. Ditch [104] was at least 13.00 m long, up to 1.40 m wide and 0.42 m deep. It contained five sherds of Saxon pottery, a residual sherd of prehistoric pottery, two fragments of Roman ceramic building material and fragments of animal bone. A third ditch, [109], on the same alignment as [102] and [104], may be contemporary but contained no finds. All three ditches were cut by the eastern edge of the pond and by medieval ditch [107].

Medieval Features

Two ditches, two pits and a posthole were dated to the late 12th to 13th century. Ditch [113] was curvilinear, at least 10.00 m long and up to 2.60 m wide and 1.27 m deep. It contained pottery of mainly the 11th to 12th centuries with some Malvernian ware giving a date towards the later 12th to 13th century. Roman ceramic building material, flint and animal bone were also retrieved from the fill. The ditch was cut by features [107] and [115]. Ditch [107] was oriented approximately N–S and was at least 17.80 m long, up to 2.20 m wide and 0.85 m deep. It contained Malvernian ware of 12th- to 13th-century date, residual Saxon pottery and Roman tile, flint and animal bone.

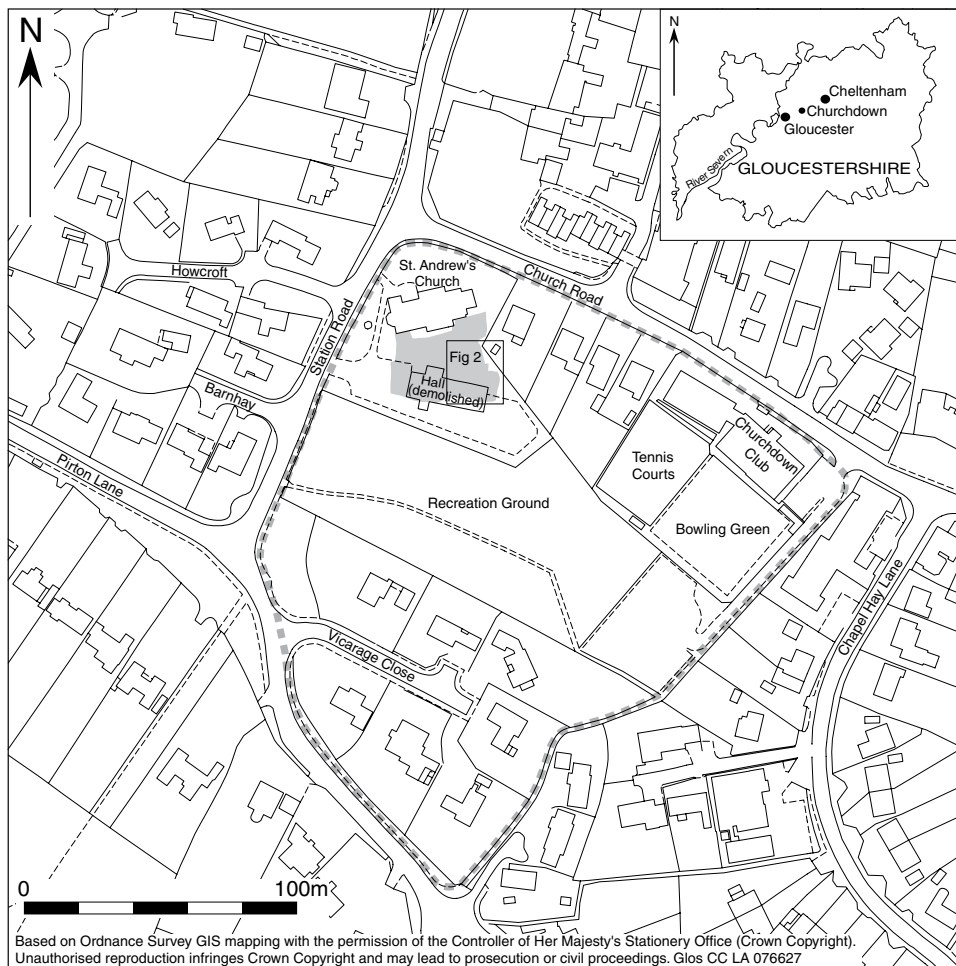


Fig. 1. Location of the excavated area (shaded); the dashes indicate the boundary of Chapel Hay.

Pit [115], measuring 3.9 by 3.4 m, was 1 m deep and contained pottery of late 12th- to 13th-century date, along with residual sherds and ceramic building material of Roman date and fragments of animal bone. It was interpreted as a large medieval pit of uncertain function. Feature [133] was also probably a pit. Measuring 2.6 m long, 1.2 m wide and 0.7 m deep, it contained pottery of late 12th- to 13th-century date along with residual late Saxon pottery and a late Saxon copper-alloy strap-end. A shallow posthole [129] measuring 0.72 by 0.69 m and 0.07 m deep was also dated to the late 12th to 13th century.

Undated and Modern Features

Five undated features, a number of modern intrusions and the eastern edge of the large pond were also recorded. Although the pond had been infilled during the modern period, there was limited

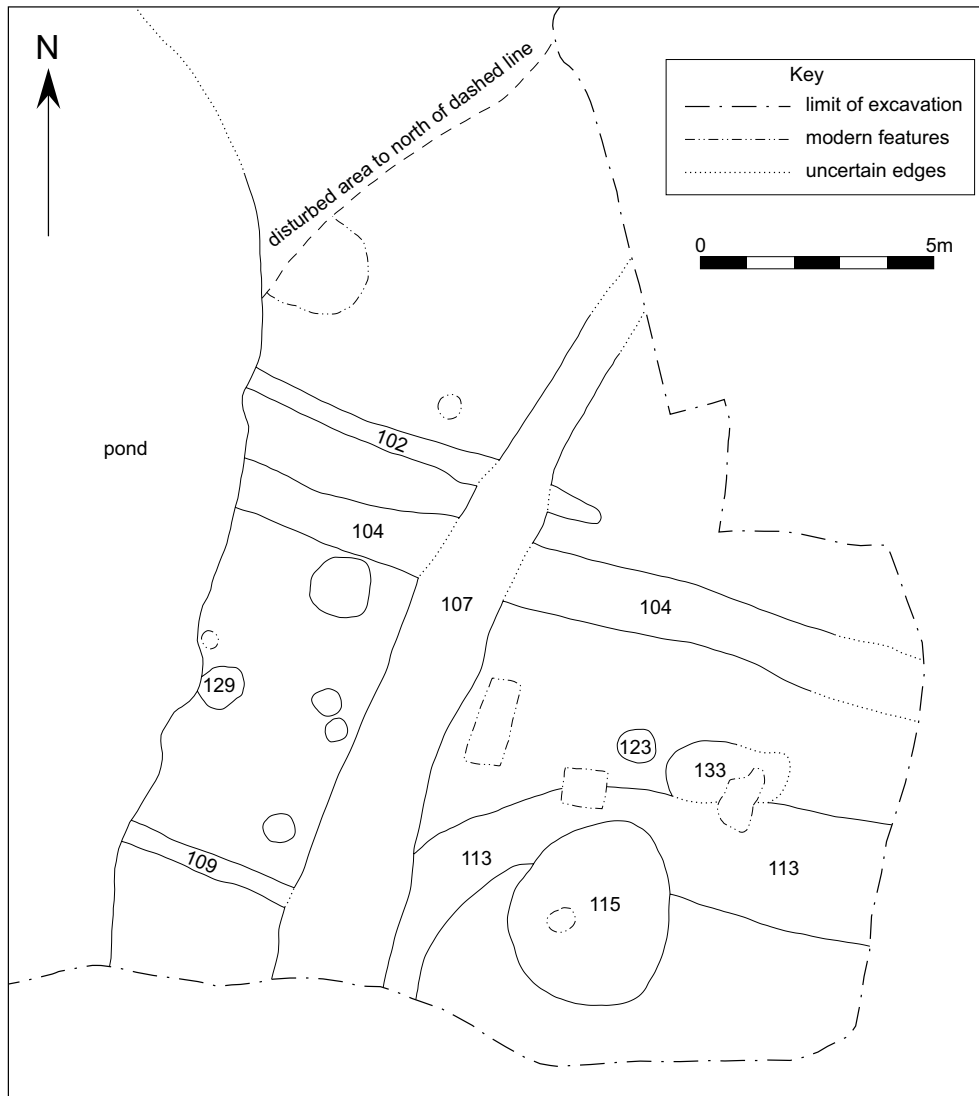


Fig. 2. Plan of features in south-east corner of site.

ceramic evidence that it had been in existence in the medieval period and that deposits at its edge may have derived from medieval silting. Similar deposits were absent from the base of the pond possibly due to post-medieval dredging or recutting.

POTTERY AND TILE by Jane Timby

A small assemblage comprising 109 sherds of pottery (1,581 g) and 38 pieces of ceramic building material was recovered. Where applicable Gloucester Unit type fabric (TF) codes were used for the post-Roman material (see Vince 1983). The earliest pottery piece, a worn sherd from ditch

[104], has possible thumb-pressed indentation and may be early Bronze Age in date. Also present are eight redeposited Roman sherds including Central Gaulish samian, Severn Valley ware (SVW OX), Dorset black burnished ware (DOR BB1) and local grey and oxidised ware.

The pottery assemblage includes a total of at least 23 Saxon sherds, which fall into three groups: organic-tempered; sandy; and late Saxon limestone-tempered (Gloucester fabric TF41a). The organic wares are of three types: abundant organic matter in a fine micaceous paste; sandy with sparse organic material; and a fine-medium sandy fabric. Nineteen fragmentary sherds of TF41a are present, mostly redeposited, and all from jars. Only eight sherds might potentially date the context in which they were found: ditches [102] and [104] and posthole [123].

Medieval sherds account for about 60% of the assemblage (sherd count). Wares include Gloucester fabrics TF41b, TF43 and TF44 (Minety ware), Malvernian wares (TF40 and TF52), Worcester glazed jug (TF90) and a hand-made sandy ware jar from the Hereford/Worcester area (TF42).

Although a modest group the assemblage is diverse with some interesting components. As middle-late Saxon material is relatively rare in the county as a whole, the Saxon material raises the profile of the group, although the sherds are small and could all be redeposited. On the basis of the pottery, the earliest features appear to be ditches [102] and [104] and posthole [123]. Ditch [102] contained two sherds of TF41a and one sandy ware (SXSA) perhaps suggesting a 10th- to 11th-century date. Parallel ditch [104] and posthole [123] appear to be contemporary.

Ditch [107] produced a mixed assemblage of 11 sherds with examples of organic sandy ware (SXORGSa), TF41a, TF41b, TF42 and TF40. The single sherd of Malvernian ware (TF40) provides a later 12th- to 13th-century *terminus post quem*. Ditch [113] had similarly mixed material and it is difficult to determine the relationship between it and [107] on ceramic grounds. The pottery includes Roman SVW OX, Saxon SXORGSa, a spouted pitcher in TF41b, and sherds of TF43, TF44 and TF40. Most of the group supports a later 11th- to early 12th-century date but the Malvernian ware, if not intrusive, pushes it into the later 12th to 13th century. Similarly pits [115] and [133] and posthole [129] have sherds of TF40 representing the latest material present. The pond contains a mixture of Roman and medieval material through to modern.

The ceramic building material includes 18 Roman fragments amongst which are roofing tile (*imbrices* and *tegulae*), flat tile (*pilae*) and combed box flue. At least three partially glazed medieval ridge tiles probably of Malvernian origin, flat roofing tile (medieval/post-medieval) and hand-made brick are also present.

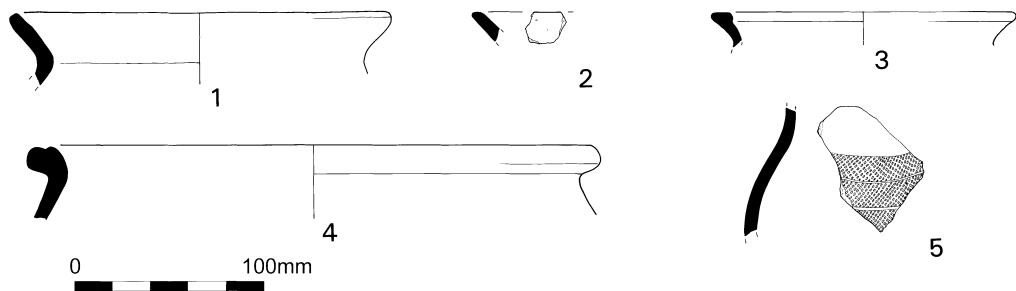


Fig. 3. Pottery.

Catalogue of illustrated sherds (Fig. 3)

1. Hand-made jar, TF41a. Ditch [104] (103).
2. Hand-made jar, TF41a. Posthole [123] (124).
3. Wheel-made jar, TF43. Ditch [113] (114).
4. Lid-seated jar, TF41b. Pit [133] (134).
5. Pitcher with rare roller-stamped decoration and patchy external light green glaze, TF44 (Minety ware). Pond [16] (27).

COPPER-ALLOY OBJECTS by Hilary Cool

All three of the copper-alloy objects found in stratified contexts were probably associated with the late Saxon occupation on the site. A mount and a stud are not intrinsically datable but were found in a ditch fill associated with pottery of that date. A strap-end has affinities with a zoomorphic form popular during the 8th to 10th centuries (Wilson and Blunt 1961, 97, appendix C). The majority of these tend to have an ovoid outline (see Peers and Radford 1943, fig. 11). The Churchdown strap-end comes from a rarer variant with a narrower body such as that from Ixworth, Suffolk (Hinton 1974, 22 no. 16), and an unprovenanced example in the British Museum (Wilson 1964, 128 no. 12). Examples of this variant have not tended to be found in closely dated contexts, but they are believed to have been in use during the 9th or early 10th century. As the Churchdown example was found in a pit, [133], which also contained late 12th- to 13th-century pottery, it is undoubtedly residual in this context.

The aperture for the strap decorated by the Churchdown strap-end is 2.5 mm wide. The extant rivets show that it has not been distorted, thus indicating the width of the original strap. This is of some interest as it has been suggested that the narrowness of the apertures in most zoomorphic late Saxon strap-ends indicates that they were attached to textile belts or girdles (Wilson and Blunt 1961, 97). The strap for the Churchdown object, by contrast, could well have been of leather. Certainly this would have been a more appropriate material, for such a narrow and relatively heavy strap-end would undoubtedly have distorted a narrow textile strip.

Catalogue of copper-alloy objects (Fig. 4)

1. Strap-end. Cast in one piece with upper (broad) end split to take strap. Traces of unidentifiable organic matter within recess. Upper end has double cusped terminal with dome headed-rivet in each lobe. Decoration on front and sides divided into three zones. Upper zone has groove parallel to each edge with transverse grooves between it and edge forming a blocked frame. Central 'D'-sectioned zone bounded by two transverse grooves on upper margin and two transverse cast cordons at lower end. Lower rectangular-sectioned zone cast to form zoomorphic terminal, details obscured by corrosion and iron staining but originally probably sharp and well-defined. Small moulded protuberances probably represent 'ears'; 'eye' area badly damaged but traces of circular features visible; nostrils well-defined by two small circular recesses. 'V'-shaped groove runs back from nostrils and down sides between eye and ear. Length 38.0 mm, maximum width 9.5 mm.
2. Mount. Rectangular sheet with chipped edges. Circular (damaged) perforation off-centre at one end. On one side small circular depressions at opposite end to perforation and some transverse polishing marks. Dimensions 18.5 mm × 9.0 mm, thickness 0.5 mm.
3. Stud. Corroded cylindrical head; short pointed shank. Length 12.5 mm, head diameter 7.0 mm.

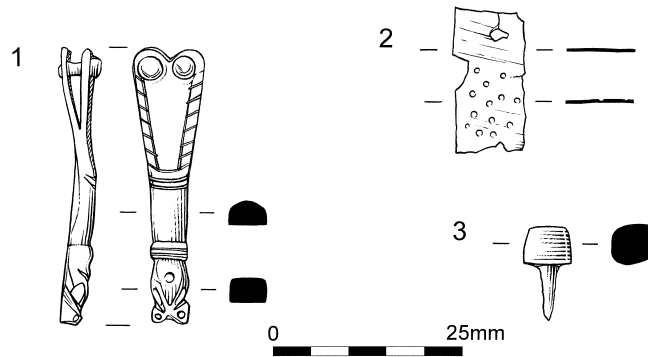


Fig. 4. Copper-alloy objects.

Discussion

St. Andrew's Church, built in 1903 and 1904 (Verey and Brooks 2002), stands in the north-west corner of a former close known as Chapel Hay (Tithe Award 1840). It has long been speculated that the area contains medieval deposits and according to local legend a chapel once stood there and 12th-century water pipes crossed the site (Smithe 1876; 1888–9). An excavation carried out in the 1920s in the north-east corner of Chapel Hay, at the United Services Club (now Churchdown Club), revealed Romano-British and 'post-Norman' finds and approximately forty burials (Murray 1923). The dating of the burials, to the 13th and 14th centuries, may not be accurate, based as it was on now discredited interpretations of skull types and on the E–W orientation of the majority of the graves rather than on any associated finds.

Next to St. Andrew's Church no features predating the Saxon period were identified. Residual pottery and ceramic building material of prehistoric and Romano-British date provide evidence for activity on or near the site in those periods. Few conclusions can be drawn from the single sherd of prehistoric pottery, but the Romano-British finds from both the church and the club suggest the presence of a building of this date nearby.

The dating evidence for a late Saxon phase is tentative, resting only on eight sherds of limestone-tempered ware (TF41a) found in three features containing no pottery of a later date. However, two other facts support this evidence. First, the presence of a comparatively large assemblage of residual Saxon pottery and the late Saxon strap-end within features of a later date suggests a certain level of Saxon activity on the site. Second, the E–W orientation of the two late Saxon ditches and of a third undated ditch may indicate that the features are contemporary and part of a pattern of ditches for drainage or property division.

The late Saxon and medieval features at St. Andrew's Church appear to represent agricultural use of the site and, on the evidence of the pits and postholes, associated settlement. The linear features from both periods follow a similar rectilinear alignment, perhaps implying a continuity of settlement from the late Saxon to the medieval period. Although finds of Saxon pottery are becoming more common from sites across the county, *in-situ* Saxon deposits are still rare and there are few excavated parallels, particularly in the Severn Valley, for similar rural settlements of late Saxon date. The best parallel would appear to be Church Road, Bishop's Cleeve (Wessex Archaeology 1999), where ditches, interpreted as field boundaries, display a similar degree of continuity from the late Saxon to the medieval period.

Acknowledgements

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The site archive and finds from the evaluation and excavation will be deposited with Gloucester City Museum and Art Gallery under accession number GLRCM 2001/28. The site archive contains a detailed report on the excavation and includes full details on the pottery assemblage.

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