

- Works that impact on archaeology
- What's the first thing you should do?
- Archaeological appraisal
- Types of archaeological work
- Human remains
- Archiving and publication

You should always look at the impact on archaeology when you want to do repairs or make changes to your building.

We can help you choose the right level of archaeological recording for your project, and sort out what permissions you might need.

Download our guidance

- [Guidance on Archaeology in churches](#)



Works that impact on archaeology

You might come across archaeology when you're doing:

- Alterations, repairs or conservation work that will disturb your building's fabric (e.g. floors)
- Extensions
- Works on monuments, boundary walls and gates
- Removing or changing fixtures and fittings

- Excavating drainage, service or foundation trenches in the church or churchyard

[Back to top](#)

What's the first thing you should do?

You should:

[Get early advice from your DAC or cathedral archaeologist](#)

The need for you to include archaeological works in your project often becomes clear when you first ask about permissions.

The earlier you ask for advice, the better the chances of avoiding delays and expensive mistakes.

Contact your [diocese](#) or your [cathedral archaeologist](#) for help.

[Write a statement of significance](#)

You should explore the potential impact of your project on your church's archaeology in your [statement of significance](#).

This will help your Diocesan Advisory Committee give the right advice to your chancellor for your [faculty application](#).

Include details of any archaeological provisions.

[Back to top](#)

Archaeological appraisal

Your diocese's [archaeological adviser](#) or your [cathedral's archaeologist](#) will do an appraisal to judge the likely impact your project might have on your building's archaeology. This may form part of determining what sort of permissions you need.

The likely impact depends on:

- The area or depth of the work
- The position of the work in the church and churchyard
- The relationship of the work with any standing buildings
- The known history of your area (e.g. previous finds, documentary references, clues in the fabric of the church itself)

Once the appraisal is finished, the adviser or archaeologist will tell you if more archaeological work is needed.

[Back to top](#)

Types of archaeological work

There are several types of archaeological works that you might need to do before or during your project.

Your diocese's [archaeological adviser](#) or your [cathedral's archaeologists](#) will help you find professionals to do the work.

Desk-based assessment

After the appraisal, the next step is to read through all the existing archaeological information.

No holes will be dug, no plaster stripped.

If the information you get at the end is not enough, then you need to do a watching brief.

Watching briefs

A watching-brief means having an archaeologist on site during the work to double-check that nothing significant is disturbed.

This method is used for:

- Minor disturbances (e.g. trench for a new pipe, minor stone replacement, re-pointing)
- Situations where you want to avoid digging deep (e.g. small extensions on a "raft" foundation)

This method is not appropriate for larger works.

Archaeological evaluation

This might involve:

- A small trial excavation to test what you might find
- A geophysical survey: using a small electric current to find buried walls, foundations, or ditches
- A combination of both

Archaeological recording (buildings)

You might need to record the historic fabric of your church before, during and after any building works that involve:

- Replacing historic fabric
- Interfering with historic fabric
- Like for like replacement of materials (e.g. stone parapets, monuments, roof timbers, parts of wooden screens)

Recording methods could include:

- High quality photographs
- Hand-drawn records
- Photogrammetric records
- Dendrochronology (tree-ring dating)
- Carbon-14 dating
- 3D imaging

You might be able to get a grant to pay for this work [through us](#), the [Heritage Lottery Fund](#) or [Historic England](#).

Find out more about archaeological recording

[Archaeological excavation](#)

Because of the importance of your church building or site, you might have to hire archaeologists to do a normal excavation.

Don't see this as just an extra burden.

The information you will learn can have positive benefits. It will add to what you already know about the history and development of your church.

And it will help you with the future management of your building and its churchyard.

[Back to top](#)

Human remains

It's very likely that archaeologists will find human remains in your churchyard or your building.

It's important to try and keep them in their original place because of:

- Pastoral sensitivities
- Ethical sensitivities
- Theological sensitivities
- A desire to preserve information about the past

Find out more about dealing with [human remains](#)

[Back to top](#)

Archiving and publication

Your grant or permission might be conditional on you including in your project:

- The right level of archaeological analysis
- Archiving
- Publication (when appropriate)

This can amount to 50% on top of the cost of fieldwork. It's important to budget for this.

[Back to top](#)

Want more help?

Hire an archaeologist

[Search the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' online database](#)

Archaeological standards and guidelines

[Find out more about the types of archaeological investigations](#)

Also of interest



Human remains

[What should you do if you find articulated remains?](#)



Ruins

Find out how to manage a ruin in your churchyard

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/archaeology>