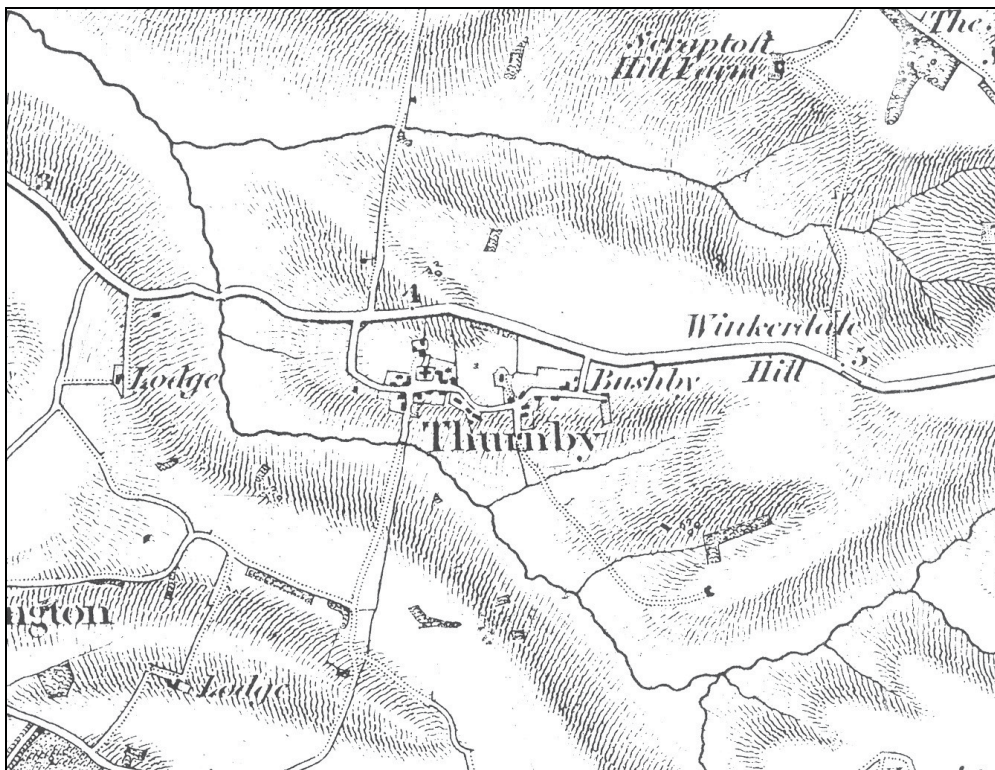


Archaeological Observation at
St Luke's Church,
Thurnby, Leicestershire



Report 0607

February 2006

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Contents

- Summary
- 1. Introduction
- 2. Location
- 3. Archaeological and Historical Background
- 4. Observation
- 5. Conclusions
- Acknowledgements
- Bibliography
- Appendix A: List of Contexts

List of Figures

- Cover: Detail from 1st edition 1 inch to 1 mile Ordnance Survey map of 1835
- Fig. 1: Site location, plan and section
- Fig. 2: Ground reduction looking east
- Fig. 3: Wall foundation masonry 10
- Fig. 4: Service trench

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Summary

Archaeological observation was carried out at St. Luke's Church, Thurnby, Leicestershire during construction of an extension against the north wall of the church and the associated service trenches. Foundations of concrete and masonry relating to the 19th century north aisle rebuild were recorded, suggesting that little if any of the previous structure remained after rebuilding. A partial skeleton, coffin remains and disarticulated human bone were also found.

1. Introduction

1.1 Planning permission has been granted by Harborough District Council for an extension to provide a utility room and toilet facilities, with an associated service trench, at St Luke's Church, Thurnby, Leicestershire. The planning consent was not subject to archaeological conditions, but the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor (DAA) recommended that a programme of archaeological works be undertaken under the Faculty authorising the development (ref. L062/2004).

1.2 A programme of fieldwork, consisting of archaeological observation and recording of all groundworks in accordance with a Proposal for Fieldwork prepared by Ian Greig and approved by the DAA, was commissioned from the Warwickshire Museum Field Archaeology Projects Group and carried out between September and November 2005. This report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be deposited with Leicestershire Museum under accession number X.A9.2006 (Warwickshire Museum site code TL05).

2. Location

2.1 The site is located at St Luke's Church, Thurnby, at national grid reference SK 647 039. The extension is in the churchyard, against the northern wall of the church, and the service trench crossed the churchyard to the west of the church.

2.2 The underlying geology of the site is Anglian glaciofluvial deposits: sand and gravel (British Geological Survey 2005).

3. Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 There is no mention of Thurnby in the Domesday book. It is likely that the land belonged to the nearby manor of Stoughton (VCH 1945, 4).

3.2 By around 1143 a church was in existence in Thurnby with the advowson held by Leicester Abbey until the Dissolution of the monasteries. The Crown then held the advowson until it was granted to the Beaumont family before 1681 (VCH 1945, 7). It remained with the descendants of the Beaumont family through the manor of Stoughton (VCH 1945, 13,7) until the 20th century, when it passed through several hands before coming into the possession of the Martyr's Memorial and Church of England Trust in 1957.

3.3 The present church has some elements from the 12th century, including four piers which support the tower and are thought to indicate that the original structure was cruciform. Other features likely to be 12th-century are found re-used within modern reconstruction, such as the decorated arch voussoirs found in the porch. Some rebuilding of the church took place as early as the 13th century, and there are

Fig. 1: Site location, plan and section

surviving structural elements, such as the three-bay arcades, which are of this date. The middle stage of the tower also seems to be 13th-century with the upper stage added in the mid-14th century (VCH 1945, 8).

3.4 In the 19th century a significant amount of restoration to St Luke's Church took place. In 1870-3 the chancel, which had been removed in the 1770s, was replaced. At the same time the north aisle was virtually rebuilt and the exterior stonework was restored using Mountsorrel granite. The south porch was also rebuilt incorporating three gargoyles of probable 15th-century date (VCH 1945, 8,9).

4. Observation

4.1 Ground reduction for the new extension was carried out over an area approximately 4.4m x 9.5m to a depth of c.1.0m below the level of the churchyard using a small mechanical excavator (Fig. 1). Detailed observation was hampered over much of the area due to significant rainfall. Foundation trenches were observed immediately butting the church wall; these were to a further depth of 0.5-0.6m. A service trench was also observed running west from the new extension through the churchyard. No geological natural was reached during the works observed. Human remains disturbed by the work were retained on site for re-burial by the church authorities.

4.2 The ground reduction in the area of the new extension revealed topsoil over part of the site to a depth of c.0.13m (1). Below this was a layer of mid-brown silty loam (7), a disturbed churchyard soil containing a few disarticulated human skeletal remains. A degraded wooden coffin (11) and a partial skeleton (12) were aligned with a line of burials in the adjacent part of the churchyard.

4.3 Several of the other recorded contexts contained fragmentary human remains. Context 6, a yellowish brown sand mixed with brown silty loam, was probably the fill of a grave cutting (7). Context (8) was a light brown silty sand, and (9) was a layer of yellowish brown sand. Although distinct in texture they may simply represent variations in the disturbed churchyard soil, though it is possible they could be grave fills. Context 8 could, alternatively, be the backfill of a construction trench from the Victorian rebuilding of the north aisle. The sandy texture suggests these layers were derived from the underlying natural sand.

4.4 The removal of the soil and modern concrete against the wall of the current church revealed part of its foundations. The upper layer of the foundation comprised a single course of masonry (10), mostly of sandstone with occasional slate (Figs. 1, 3). Observation of the foundation trench excavation adjacent to the church wall showed that the masonry (10) was set on concrete. This suggests that structural improvements were made below ground during the Victorian rebuilding of the north aisle, and that little if anything of the original north aisle construction remains *in situ*. Observation of the foundation trench was curtailed at the point when it could be determined with reasonable confidence that no further structural features were likely to be encountered.

4.5 Modern churchyard landscape features were recorded in section: the existing footpath along the north side of the church (2); turf (3) to the north and, to the south of the path, the garden soil beneath the hedge running parallel to the north wall of the church (4).

4.6 It is understood the concrete floor of the temporary shed (14) which previously butted the north wall remains and forms part of the floor of the new building.



Fig. 2: Ground reduction looking east



Fig. 3: Wall foundation masonry 10



Fig. 4: Service trench

4.7 The service trench running westwards from the new extension to Church Lane was observed after its completion (Fig. 4). It was *c.*0.75m deep, widening from 0.5m at the base up to *c.*1m at the top due to slumping. Only topsoil and disturbed churchyard soil (13) was visible, and no significant archaeological deposits or finds were recovered.

5. Conclusions

5.1 All the observed foundation elements were 19th-century, and correspond to historical records about the Victorian rebuilding of the north aisle in 1870-3. The presence of concrete as the lowest element of the present foundation indicates that the rebuilding was comprehensive, and included strengthening or replacement of the original foundations. No archaeological finds, features or structural elements were noted that could be related to earlier building phases, suggesting that little if any of the original aisle structure survives.

5.2 The only other finds were coffin fragments, a disturbed partial skeleton and human bone fragments, as is to be expected in a churchyard.

Acknowledgements

The Warwickshire Museum would like to thank Mike Evans, churchwarden, for commissioning the work on behalf of the Parochial Church Council, and the Diocesan Archaeology Advisor, Mike Hawkes, for his assistance. The fieldwork was carried out by Caroline Rann, who also wrote the report with illustrations by Candy Stevens. It was edited by Ian Greig and checked by Nicholas Palmer.

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Appendix A: List of Contexts

Context No. Description

1	Topsoil
2	Footpath
3	Turf
4	Layer (garden soil beneath hedge)
5	Same as 7
6	?Grave fill
7	Disturbed graveyard soil
8	?As 7
9	?As 7
10	Masonry (19th century foundation of north aisle)
11	Remains of coffin
12	Partial skeleton
13	Disturbed graveyard soil
14	Concrete floor of old shed