



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

An archaeological watching brief on floor alterations at St Michael and All Angels Church, Maxstoke, Warwickshire

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Summary

Alterations to the floor at the west end of the church nave showed the pre-existing floor to be Victorian and later. An 18th- to 19th-century date may be advanced for the gallery over as its distinctive brick foundations were briefly exposed. An early 14th-century line-impressed floor tile was recovered from amidst later floor material.

Background

It was a condition of an ecclesiastical faculty that works to alter the south-western portion of the nave of the Grade II* listed St Michael and All Angels Church, Maxstoke, B46 2QW (Birmingham Diocese) should be archaeologically monitored. Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd was accordingly asked by the parish and their architect to monitor the works of taking up selected floors following the dismantling of a modern font. The church lies in the hamlet of Maxstoke at the centre of its churchyard at a road junction between Coleshill and Fillongley at NGR: SP 2359 8686. The ruins of Maxstoke Priory, to which it was originally closely related, stand adjacent (Priory Farm). There is a former cross in the southern half of the churchyard and a former vicarage site lies adjacent on the east.

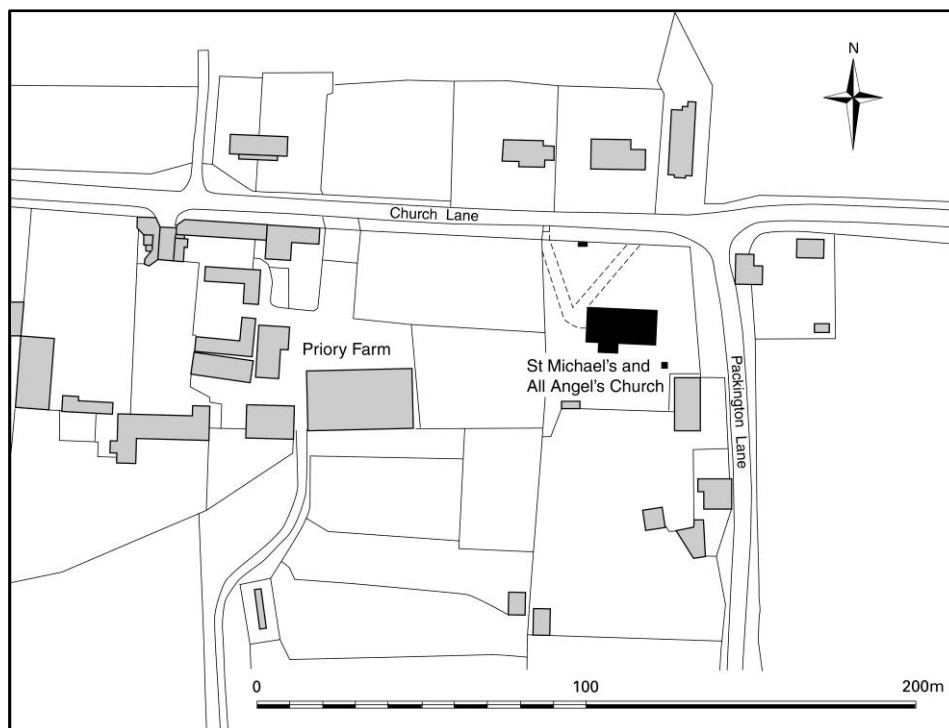


Fig 1: Site location. Andy Isham, after Mike Potter, Architect, with thanks.

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The church of St Michael and All Angels is a 14th-century sandstone building measuring c60' x 26' (21.9m x 9.5m) with a small brick-built vestry added on the south side before 1874 (Holliday 1874, plate 1). Salzman (1947) who classed the vestry as 'modern' said the same of the square bell-turret and the font inside the church. He also notes a western gallery with an 18th-century front. He dates the church to around 1340.

In Holliday's time (1874), there appears to have been a tradition also that the entire church dated to the post-Dissolution period, built from the ruins of the dissolved Priory next door, but he was convinced that this idea was wrong and a construction date around 1340 is now generally agreed. There may have been an earlier, Norman church on the site.

The earliest view of the church is in the background of a 1729 engraving by the Buck Brothers who illustrated the ruins of the adjacent Maxstoke Priory. In that view, from the north-west, the parish church is simply a plain rectangular building with a small bell-cote at the west end, three nave windows and a west window shown.

The current National Heritage List (no 1365128) summarises knowledge about the church thus (note that the description of the font is that of an earlier one, noted by Salzman in 1947 as disused and lying in the churchyard):

Church. Early C14, C18 and mid C19. Squared and irregularly coursed sandstone. Plain-tiled roof. Nave and chancel under continuous roof. West wall has a window of 2 trefoil lights with reticulated tracery to the head in 2-centred chamfered arch. Embattled bell turret, C19, of sandstone ashlar. West doorway, C15. Hollow moulding to 4-centred arch. South wall, 3 windows each of 2 trefoil lights with reticulated tracery in chamfered 2-centred arch. East window of 4 trefoil lights with reticulated tracery to 2-centred chamfered arch with label and mask stops. North wall has similar fenestration and a doorway in a 2-centred chamfered arch, now blocked. Interior: C18 coved ceiling and modillion cornice. Galleried west end on Doric columns of stone. Panelled parapet with dentil cornice. Font is C18. Stone. Round bowl on baluster stem. Pulpit, C18. Square with chamfered corners on later base. Sides with inlay. Chest, C17. Oak with iron fittings. Possibly the chancel to a planned chapel ante portas of the priory of Augustinian Canons founded by William de Clinton in 1336.

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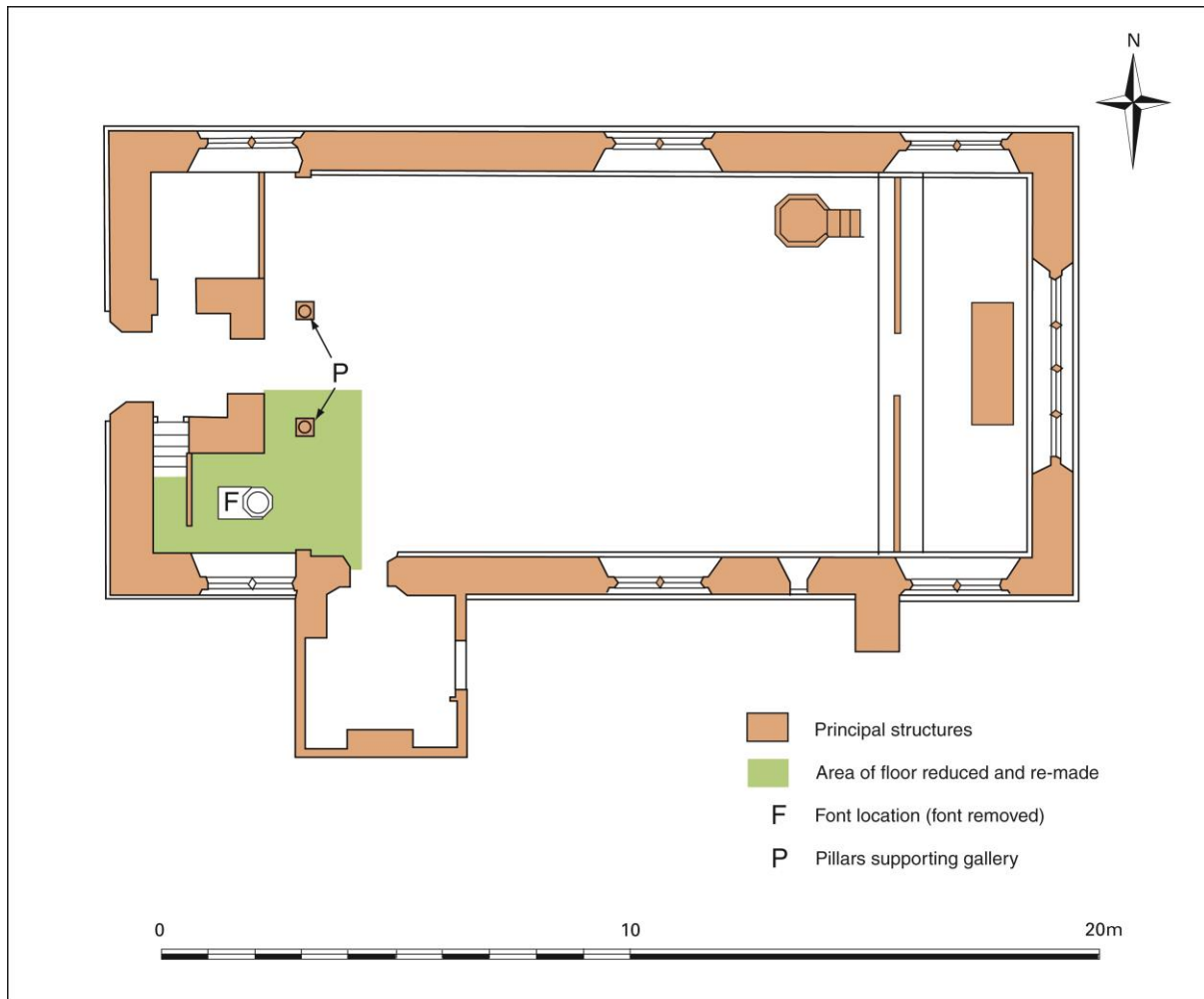


Fig 2: Plan of St Michael and All Angels; Andy Isham, after Mike Potter, Architect, with thanks.

Fieldwork and results

The polychrome floor which lay around the existing stone font was taken up, leaving the cementitious floor base as a working surface. The font was then dismantled and removed for reassembly elsewhere. The screed was then broken up.

The font (described by Salzman in 1947) as 'modern' was found to be based upon a single course of poorly-laid red brick, comprising mainly brick-bats, around a rubble-filled void in the centre into which a lead pipe had drained the water from christenings through the sub-floor.

The tile floor had clearly post-dated the font installation, of which it had taken account in its laying out.

It is worth noting that there are potentially three fonts in existence deriving from this church. The last is that which has just been taken out. There is also a disused 18th-century font noted by Salzman (1947) to lie in the churchyard, but which confusingly is noted, erroneously, in the National Heritage List entry (above) as being part of the Listed building.

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In addition Holliday (1874, 84) notes a Norman font, supposedly moved from the nearby Priory church at the Dissolution, which ended up in Stoneleigh Parish Church. If it came from Maxstoke at all, however, it seems more likely to have come from the parish church, not the monastic church, given its public-facing purpose not monastic. Its origin remains conjectural.

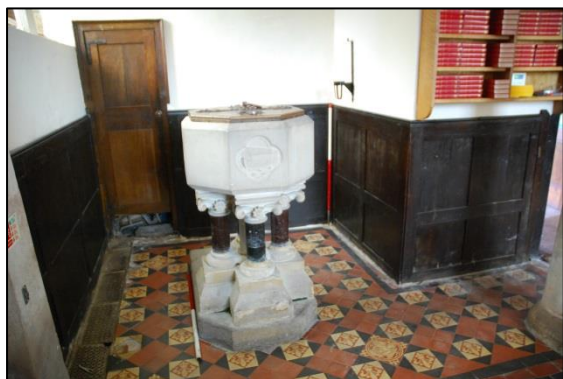


Fig 3: Polychrome floor with font in situ; scales 1m



Fig 4: brick font base, rubble soakaway; scale 1m

The tiles around the font had been laid on two 10mm-thick applications of a cementitious screed, the cement content strongly indicative of a 20th-century date. These in turn had been spread upon a layer of ash, mortar and broken brick in a matrix of coarse sand.

The polychrome floor being removed comprised plain red, yellow and black ceramic tiles of a type commonly found in Victorian and Edwardian domestic hallways, and laid in a simple geometric pattern around repeating geometric fleur-de-lys patterned encaustic examples. Together they surrounded four 'centrepiece' 19th-century encaustic tiles depicting the four evangelists – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, which lay within a slightly thicker, single, cementitious base layer and were placed close to the corners of the former font location.

The evangelist tiles, each measuring 8 ½" x 8 ½" x 1" (213mm x 213mm x 25mm) were stamped on the rear 'W. Godwin, Lugwardine, Herefordshire'. William Godwin began the Hereford Tile Manufactories at Lugwardine in 1851, joined swiftly by his brother Henry who began production of encaustic tiles the following year, in imitation of medieval designs. In 1863 a new factory opened in Withington. Henry left and set up in competition on his own in 1878, taking most encaustic tile manufacture with him (Austwick and Austwick 1980, 75-6). It is likely that the tiles here at Maxstoke therefore belong to that early period of William and Henry's co-operation at Lugwardine, 1851-63. However, their use here is likely to be from old stock, utilised during the 20th-century. They exhibit very little wear.



Fig 5: The winged lion, emblem of St Mark – evangelist tile; scale 30cm

Most of the church circulation routes are floored in a large red-firing quarry tile measuring 13" x 13" in plan and 2" thick (350mm x 350mm x 50mm). They are laid at 45-degrees to the principal axis of the church and are probably later 18th century or early 19th century in date. The area of floor-replacement also cut into these tiles where they led from the central aisle through to the vestry on the south side of the church. Underneath them was the same layer of ash, mortar and broken brick in a matrix of coarse sand encountered under the polychrome floor, where no further disturbance was necessary.

A small area of this mixed layer beneath the floors was cleaned by hand around a stone pillar which supports the gallery at the west end of the nave. This briefly exposed an amorphous mortared plinth in brick, somewhat inexpertly-laid, utilising brick-bats as well as whole examples, and very much off-centre to the pillar which it supports. It measures c80cm north-south x c50cm east-west. Its depth is not known, but it comprises at least two courses of brick. Adjacent to it is a linear brick foundation which suggests perhaps that there may formerly have been some further partition, panelling, or even simply a rail extending east along the nave on the inside of the entrance-way. Alternatively (and perhaps more likely) it may simply be one side of an 18th- to 19th-century brick burial vault under the central aisle and predating its tiled floor.

The bricks of both features are of 18th-19th century type, plain, soft and orange-fired, but without the clean, machine-made lines of the high Victorian period and later.



Fig 6: Brick base of the gallery pillar with the linear brick base on which the scale lies, looking south; scale 1m



Fig 7: The brick base to the gallery pillar, showing how off-centre it is, looking north; scales 1m and 30cm

A 14th-century line-impressed floor tile

A single part-tile was recovered from the mortar, ashy sand below the tiled floor which derives from a medieval type rarely published. This is an earlier 14th-century line-impressed type, deeply - and to some extent, awkwardly incised in a rudimentary manner, with little of the finesse seen on later tiles of the midland tiling traditions of the 14th-15th centuries. While other medieval tiles can be seen re-set into the chancel floor at Maxstoke, they (by contrast) are the product of 19th century excavations on the adjacent priory site. This tile is the first to be known to derive from the parish church.

Published line-impressed tiles are rare, not least from Warwickshire, and no parallel for this example has been found in local, regional or national literature (Holliday 1874, Chatwin 1936, Eames 1980). It bears no resemblance to products from the known Warwickshire tile kilns of Stoke (Coventry), Warwick or Polesworth.



Fig 8: The 14th-century line-impressed tile fragment; scale 5cm

The tile fragment measures (>110mm) x (>105mm) x 26mm. It is incomplete in both of its plan-dimensions. It has warped slightly in the kiln, probably under the weight of layers of other tiles, which would have been stacked on their sides, edge to edge. It carries a slight bevel along the extant edges.

The fabric is fired a dark red with grey un-oxidised patches, showing folds from its mixing in the mould and it contains ill-sorted quartz grains and occasional small pebbles. It has split and cracked in places during firing. The line-impression hand-made stamp is deeply and evenly-cut, suggesting it was quite new when used. The white, yellow-firing, pipe-clay slip which covered the entire tile and

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filled the line-impressions, is quite worn on the uppermost parts of the tile surface, so the tile lay in a pavement in use for some time.

The pattern is such that the tile probably belongs to a larger nine-tile layout of a repeating ring of stylised flowers of four or more petals. Within the ring the tile is damaged, but a more geometric centrepiece might be suggested as this area contains at least two straight lines. In the spandrel formed by the ring, at the corners of the nine-tile layout, appears to have been a stylised leaf pattern, most akin to an oak-leaf. The edges are chased to leave a continuous wavy line.

While this basic pattern in a line-impressed type has not previously been met with, the nine-tile floral repeat is known amongst 14th-15th century two-colour tiles across Coventry and Warwickshire. This rather rudimentary line-impressed version may be an early 14th century version or a local variant by a less-than-expert local tiler working specifically for the Maxstoke market of (perhaps at most) church, priory and castle.

Conclusions

The works to take up and relay the floor around a modern font have not disturbed any significant sub-floor deposits and no significant archaeological features have been lost. Elements of the floor re-used include some distinctive Herefordshire-made 19th-century encaustic tile forms depicting the evangelists.

The work briefly exposed some relatively inexpertly-laid post-medieval brick foundations to a pillar supporting the gallery. Further brick structures exposed may relate to an intramural burial vault.

A previously-unknown line-impressed and quite rudimentary tile of probable early 14th-century date was recovered. It may have been made specifically for a group of Maxstoke patrons, its type being unknown (or at least unpublished) elsewhere.

Bibliography

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St Michael and All Angels, Maxstoke

Appendix

OASIS data

Project Name	An archaeological watching brief on floor alterations at St Michael and All Angels Church, Maxstoke, Warwickshire
OASIS ID	iainsode1-349131
Project Type	Watching Brief
Originator	Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd
Project Manager	Iain Soden
Previous/future work	No
Current land use	Church building
Development type	Conservation
Reason for investigation	Condition of Faculty
National grid reference	SP 2359 8686
Start/end dates of fieldwork	21 March-1 April 2019
Archive recipient	Warwickshire Museum
Study area	25 sq m



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

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