

The Almshouses, Winkleigh, Devon: Proposed Drain – Archaeological comment

South West Archaeology Ltd. 12.05.21

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Project Background

South West Archaeology Ltd. was approached by a private client (the Client) to undertake a site visit for a proposed drain for The Almshouses, Winkleigh, Devon. This work being undertaken in order to confirm the merits of undertaking any archaeological mitigation as part of proposed conditions for a faculty permission to improve the drainage adjacent to the north facing elevation of the Almshouses, which is located within All Saint's Churchyard.

Site Location

The site is located within the southern limits of All Saints Churchyard, in the area immediately abutting a private residence (The Almshouses). The site is broadly level, and there are no marked graves near the proposals.

The Almshouses

The Almshouses forms part of a Grade II Listed group with the adjoining Church House, both appear to have been heavily altered in the 20th century, but were reputedly built in the 16th century. Both buildings are virtually blind to the north (churchyard), with the Almshouses having only two windows looking out into the churchyard. The topography of Winkleigh is such that the ground falls away steeply to the south of the Churchyard and the current churchyard level is at first floor level (or higher) of The Almshouses, this has in part contributed to issues of damp, which the current owners are seeking to resolve.

Site Visit

All Saints Churchyard was visited on 12th May 2021 by Dr. S. Walls, MCIfA. An open investigatory trench was seen to run along the northern elevation of The Almshouses, with the spoil from the excavations immediately adjacent. A quantity of 19th-20th century pottery, roof tile fragments and bottle and window glass were noted as having been excavated from within the trench. The trench was on average about 0.4m deep and 0.4m wide, the exposed stratigraphy consisting of mid to dark brown silt-clay topsoil, no other deposits were evident within the limited scope of the excavations.

The ground in the churchyard has clearly raised further since The Almshouse and Churchhouse were constructed, with the current ground level having been abutting and deteriorating the upper cob portion of The Almshouses northern elevation. At about 0.3m below this current ground level the Almshouse build is of stone construction, this is likely to have been the highest the former churchyard would have been historically. Therefore the proposals will not encounter any archaeological features or deposits, as they will only be within these modern topsoil/made-ground layers.

Archaeological Potential

The land use history of the site as an active churchyard means the archaeological potential of the site is high. However the proposed works will clearly all be within the existing modern churchyard topsoils and are unlikely to encounter or disturb any deposits of archaeological significance. It is therefore considered that there is **Neutral** impact on the archaeological resource and that no further archaeological investigations or mitigation are warranted for the proposed works. If for some reason the designs need to significantly altered to be more intrusive, then a watching brief may be appropriate, but it is envisaged that this would only be needed should excavations be at least 0.2-0.3m below the current proposals depth (i.e. 0.7-0.8m below the current ground level).

Conclusion

In this instance given the nature and depth of the proposed drain there are no archaeological impacts and no further archaeological mitigation will be necessary for the installation of the drain.



FIGURE 1: THE SITE, WITH APPROXIMATE LOCATION OF THE DRAIN INDICATED IN RED (©GOOGLE MAPS).



FIGURE 2: THE SITE, VIEWED FROM THE EAST (1M SCALE).