

EXCAVATIONS IN ULTING CHURCHYARD BY MAHG 25th / 26th MAY 2010

CHAPEL DEDICATED TO OUR LADY OF ULTING.

It is recorded that a chapel was built within the Ulting churchyard in the 15th Century and was demolished after the reformation. See Dr Janet Cooper -The Cult Of Our Lady of Ulting - Essex Journal 2003.

CHAPEL LOCATION.

The location of the chapel is unknown apart from a historical reference to it being to the West of the church. It is not known if it was separate or part of the church. If it had been entered via the church, such trace of a connecting doorway would have been lost, as the church West wall was rebuilt in the 19th Century .

Upon observing parch marks on the ground in 2007, Jim Page and Geoff Austin determined to locate the site of the chapel, and a resistivity survey was carried out by Dr. Tim Dennis from which a plan was prepared. From this plan 4 positions of interest were noted and a request put to the Diocese to allow excavation by Maldon Archaeological and Historical Group (MAHG). In Sept 2009 permission was given to excavate at 2 specific points (hereinafter UC1 and UC2) of limited extent and depth. By this time MAHG owned resistivity equipment for taking cross sections (pseudo sections) and this was used prior to excavation, both to give an insight into the likely findings at the 2 positions , and to investigate further afield. Geoff Austin was closely involved with us in this work.

UC1 - RESISTIVITY INVESTIGATION

The feature of most interest on the resistivity plan is a line running West from near the SW corner of the church. This had also been the line of the parch marks .It was thought possible that this could indicate the South wall of the chapel. Pseudo sections confirmed that a solid feature extended over 5 m from near the church to a point where 2 successive brick covered graves lie on almost the same line preventing further investigation. A pseudo section taken to the West of the graves shows no continuation of the feature, and therefore its original length can not be determined. Investigation of any connection to the actual church wall was prevented by brick paving .

Neither plan nor sections (so far) show any sign of matching North or West walls .

UC1 - EXCAVATION

The 2.5m x1.2m plan of trench UC1 straddled the feature , with the largest portion being within the hoped-for chapel. After removal of turf we found a thin uneven layer of very black topsoil. This overlay a pale grey-brown soil which had no observable lower limit, but which merged to become a loamy granular soil. This contained small stone and gravel , particularly in the southern part of the trench. The presence of artefacts showed the soil to be fill

The feature was uncovered from approximately 300mm deep downwards. It was later inspected by Dr. David Andrews, who stated that it was un-mortared with the stones and gravel having been rammed into a trench ,to form a foundation for a wall. Due to past disturbance the feature was misshapen, but we dug side extensions to the trench, which confirmed that the true line was as predicted. The irregularity was due to removal of part of the top (probably an attempt to dig a grave) and in addition, both sides had bulged out locally when ground alongside had been dug out .The roundish stones used were typically up to 40mm in size with a few up to say 70mm. The original width of the feature we estimate as approximately 550mm.

Above and to the South of the feature the soil contained a high but variable amount of stone and gravel and showed evidence of digging but without any discernable pattern .The stone/gravel was of the same types as formed the feature, and no doubt much originated there. The content varied from 5% to 90% , with an average of say 50%.

North of the feature the soil contained relatively little gravel and appeared fairly uniform. The only exceptions were firstly some localised layering at a shallow level (probable topping up), and secondly, close to the feature, as depth increased, patches of yellowish coarse sand appeared until when excavation ceased, it formed a continuous vertical band close to the feature.

Main excavation stopped at average 500mm deep, when it had become apparent that the soil on both sides was unrelated to the feature, having been excavated and refilled later, probably during grave digging.

Lastly we made a narrow sondage down the face of the feature which determined that at 640mm below ground level, it was seated on black silty soil. Such soil had not otherwise been encountered in the trench. The sondage was lengthened until the outer edge of the silt was found.

UC2. RESISTIVITY

This location was within an area of high resistivity which had been originally picked out as of interest on the plan. Such areas can mask underlying features but we ran several pseudo sections through the location, and these showed a shallow layer but with no apparent deeper feature.

UC2 . EXCAVATION

A trench of 1.5m x 0.5m was initially started and was partially widened later to allow retrieval of an artefact. Excavation was in pale grey - brown topsoil which extended down to a layer of dense fine gravel at approximately 400 mm. deep. A probe into the gravel showed it substantial enough to give the high resistivity readings on the plan. Artefacts were found within the gravel which showed that it had not been laid naturally.

FINDS

Finds were made in all soils and at all depths except within the yellowish sandy soil and the black silt in UC1. The range of finds was similar in both trenches. Most numerous and widespread were fragments of building materials, mainly from demolition, including brick, floor tile, roof tile, mortar (some shaped as plaster) and nails. Amongst these were a few worked flints and pot fragments. Several pieces of painted window glass were found in UC2 and one piece in UC1. These were provisionally dated as 15th -16th Century. A plain iron cross, approx. 250mm long was found in UC2.

Some of the building material probably comes from the lost chapel. The bricks and tiles have been inspected by Mrs Pat Ryan whose overall comment is as follows -

“The bits of brick are very fragmentary, but on the whole I think that they are likely to be Tudor /17th Century except for one fragment of a London stock type brick which is 19th Century. Some of the roof tile is slightly cambered and is likely to be post medieval. One piece is very flat and could be medieval in date “.

From her dating it can be seen that a wide period applies but relatively recent items (eg the London stock brick fragment) were in the top layer where they could have been spread during topping up of the ground level.

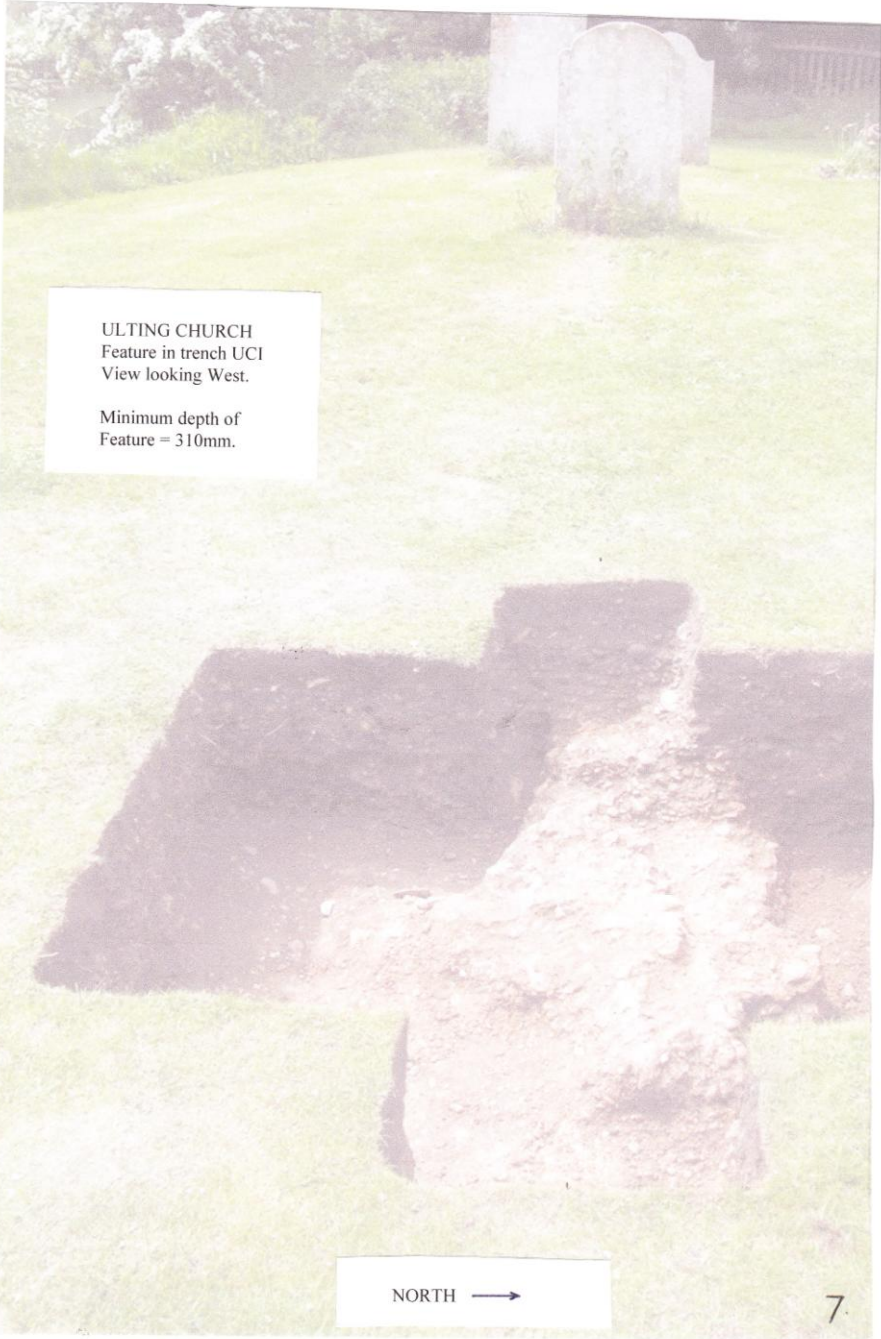
CONCLUSION

The structure found in UC1 is an interesting and important discovery. Whilst it might seem to belong to the chapel built on the West side of the church, foundations of this type are most typical of the 11th-13th centuries, and not the 15th century. It may be that the chapel made use of an earlier structure. The lack of any sign of corresponding walls may be because they have been robbed. The ground level at the time seems to have been similar to that of today. The ground on both sides has later been dug out and refilled, most likely for grave digging, so that no clue to its original purpose can be found.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our thanks to Dr David Andrews for his advice, to Pat Ryan for dating the finds and to John Strange for much practical assistance.

MAHG. DEC. 2010.



ULTING CHURCH
Feature in trench UCI
View looking West.

Minimum depth of
Feature = 310mm.

NORTH →

7.