

**St Mary & All Saints Church,
Droxford ('the Church')**

**Report of Archaeological
Advisor on the
opening of the Crypt in the
North Chapel on 24 February
2015**

Author: Michael Chandler

www.friendsofdroxfordchurch.org.uk



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Overview/Summary

1. In late 2014 the Church organ, situated in the North Chapel, was dismantled. This resulted in an opportunity to open up the Church crypt, which was known to be situated under the North aisle.
2. On 23 May 1973 the entrance to the Crypt had been blocked off by concrete blocks and the space above the steps leading down to the Crypt filled with rubble. The workmen who carried out this work still live locally to Droxford and there is a record of the materials used and cost of the works in the Church ledgers (Extract from Church Ledgers below). In addition, on 01 June 1973 an article appeared in the Hampshire Chronicle, which summarised the work carried out and provided some historical background (Hampshire Chronicle Article below).
3. Investigation of the Crypt was proposed and funded as part of the Development Phase of the HLF/GPOW award in September 2014. On instruction from the Churchwardens (Ann Symes and Sheila Matthisson) agreement was reached with the Church Architect (Julian Livingstone) that the Crypt could be re-opened and contractors (MT Cole & Son) were engaged to carry out this work on Tuesday 24 February 2015, commencing at 9.00am. The work was completed by 4.00pm the same day.
4. In attendance for much of the time was Michael Chandler (Archaeological Advisor). Also in attendance for the first two hours was Dick Whinney (Archaeological Advisor for Portsmouth Diocese) and John Symes (Chair of the Friends of Droxford Church Committee).

Extract from Church Ledgers – 23 May 1973

To remove area of tiling to North Aisle, base of organ, to dig out and cart away all chalk and earth where collapsed, to entrance of tomb. To build up entrance of tomb with Concrete blocks, to fill in above and up steps to tomb with xxx ? xxx brick rubble. To cement over top at floor level:

25 18" x 9" Concrete Blocks, £3.96
2 1/2 Barrows Sand, £1.04
Jebmix (vint), 10p
1 1/2 xxx ? xxx Cement, £1.32
1vd Rubble Picked, £1.50
12 Building Bricks, 36p."

Eighteenth Century Vault at Droxford

There was a glimpse into the past at St. Mary's and All Saints' Church, Droxford, last week when a vault dating back to the time of Queen Anne was accidentally opened.

The first indication was when a floor tile in the 13th-century north aisle and chapel disappeared, leaving a small cavity. The aisle is now used as the choir vestry, behind the organ.

Looking through the hole, church officials were able to see steps leading down into darkness, and when workmen from the local building firm of Leonard Westbrook and Sons enlarged the hole, it was found to lead down to a vault beneath the aisle, containing three lead-covered coffins. It appeared that the timbers covering the top of the steps had rotted away after centuries of use, allowing the earth covering to subside, taking the floor tile with it.

The presence of the vault was not unsuspected. Church records indicate its presence, and so do tablets on the wall above the vault. These indicate that 'near this place lies the body of Susanna Nourse, widow of Peter Nourse. D.D., Rector of this Parish, who died March 27th, 1746, aged 62 years'; 1746 was the year of Culloden. Peter Nourse was Rector of Droxford from 1701 until 1722, taking the post ten years after Dr. William Hawkins, son-in-law of Isaak Walton. Mr Nourse was also Prebendary of Winchester and Chaplain-in-Ordinary to Queen Anne.

Tablets also indicate the presence of two of his daughters in the vault. 'Mary Myngs, widow, died July 10th, 1805, aged 96, and in the same vault the remains of her sister Elizabeth Nourse, aged 86'.

One slight puzzle remains. Only one of the three coffins bore a plaque, which was inscribed: 'Mary Ange, January 14th, 1785, aged 64 years'.

After examination and confirmation of the contents of the vault, the entrance was bricked up, the area of the steps filled with rubble and the floor concreted over.

Account of Findings

1. Work commenced with the raising of the capstone (an inverted gravestone). The space above the steps leading down to the entrance to the Crypt was filled up to floor level with rubble and this was carefully excavated and removed, revealing the steps. No objects of any archaeological significance or associated with Droxford Church were found in the rubble.
2. Once the rubble had been removed the block wall was revealed and this was also carefully dismantled and removed.
3. The Crypt itself was then revealed, being approximately seven feet wide by seven feet deep and five feet high at its highest point. It is built of red brick with a vaulted ceiling.

4. Three coffins were found laid in an east/west orientation. Two of these were positioned face-up whilst the third, nearest the north wall, was on its side. All three coffins appeared to be made from lead. The coffins were positioned on two brick plinths laid in a north/south orientation on the floor of the Crypt.
5. A number of iron handles and escutcheons were found associated with the coffins, together with the plaque, as referred to in the Hampshire Chronicle article of 01 June 1973. Attached to the back of some of the iron handles were remnants of wood, which may indicate that the lead coffins were originally placed in wooden cases to which the handles were attached. It is thought that the Crypt has at times in the past been flooded and it is quite conceivable that the wooden outer cases would have largely rotted away as a result.
6. On three of the walls of the Crypt small shelves made of plaster had been attached, probably intended to hold candles. In two of these coins were found (a 1971 2pence piece and a 1971 1pence piece): presumably left there by the workmen in 1973.
7. The remains of the rubble on the floor of the Crypt between the coffins was cleared, revealing several more iron handles. Finally, a large piece of marine plywood was placed over the entrance to the Crypt at floor level and weighted down with heavy stones, to ensure that the area would be safe and secure pending a decision as to what further action will be taken with regard to the Crypt.
8. All artefacts removed from the Crypt have been stored carefully pending further examination. It was not possible to look inside the coffins and the appropriate authorities will be consulted as to how to proceed with regard to the examination of the coffins and their contents.
9. As stated in the Hampshire Chronicle article, there is some doubt as to the identity of the three occupants of the coffins in the Crypt. This is being further investigated.

Photographs taken throughout the day

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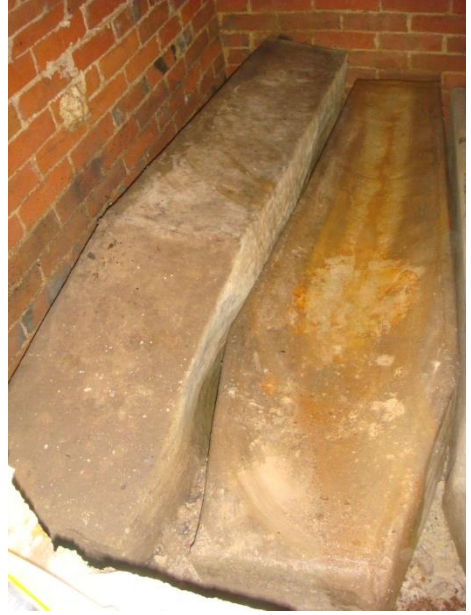
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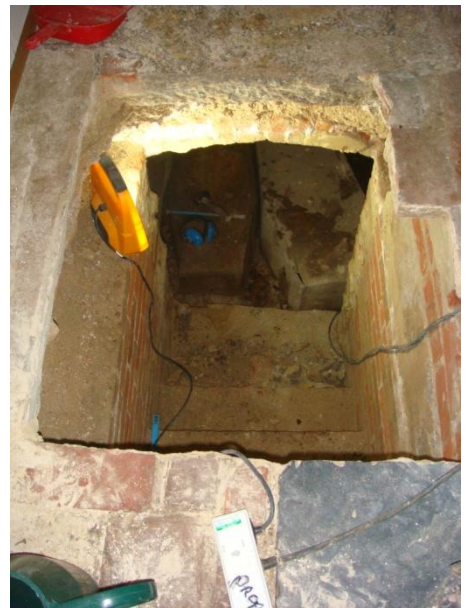
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Michael Chandler
Archaeological Advisor