

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING AT ALL SAINTS CHURCH, CRONDALL, 1997

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ABSTRACT

In 1997 an oil supply pipeline was cut through the graveyard and a new heating system inserted in All Saints Church, Crondall. The work was subject to an archaeological watching brief which showed that the graveyard had been extended over 17th-century buildings and produced evidence for one, and possibly two, earlier phases of the church and for the reuse of Roman tile in the 12th-century fabric.

INTRODUCTION

All Saints Church, Crondall, Hampshire (SU 796 485) is located on the south-west corner of Crondall village and, being sited on rising ground, is clearly visible from a wide area of the surrounding countryside. The base geology is Upper Chalk, but the church itself is built, at least in part, on an overlying pocket of Clay-with-flints.

In the spring of 1997, work commenced on the installation of a new heating system. This involved excavating a narrow pipeline service trench from the main entrance of the churchyard to the church itself and subsequently cutting a further system of trenches within the building, to connect the new radiator system.

The archaeological watching brief was carried out at the request of the Diocesan Archaeologist, Dr David Bird, and this report covers the results of observations made during a number of visits over a period of several weeks.

Background

The existing church is large and consists of a two-bay chancel and four-bay aisled nave, which

are generally considered to date to c AD 1170. The original 12th-century central tower was replaced in 1659 by the present brick-built structure, which stands on the north side of the eastern end of the chancel.

All Saints is the mother church of the Hundred of Crondall, which was held by King Alfred in the late 9th century, but by the Prior and Convent of St Swithun's throughout the medieval period. The Domesday Book records the existence of a church, worth 20s, at Crondall; presumably a precursor to the existing building, and which the church guide claims, on unstated grounds, was built of timber.

THE CHURCHYARD (Fig. 1)

As already mentioned, the first phase of works involved digging a pipeline trench from the main entrance of the churchyard to the west side of the tower, a distance of some 91 m. The trench initially followed the line of the existing brick pathway, but deviated from this just over one-third of the way along its length. It then crossed the grass of the original graveyard to skirt the north-west corner of the tower and to enter the building under the door on the west side of the tower. The trench itself was approximately 48 cm wide and 60 cm deep and was only left open for a short period of time.

Along the entire length of the trench, the section showed that the top 60 cm of soil had been extensively disturbed and that virtually no stratigraphy remained intact. The only exception to this being the occasional thin layer of ash, mainly occurring near the surface between points C and D. Otherwise, fragments of brick, tile, bone and rela-

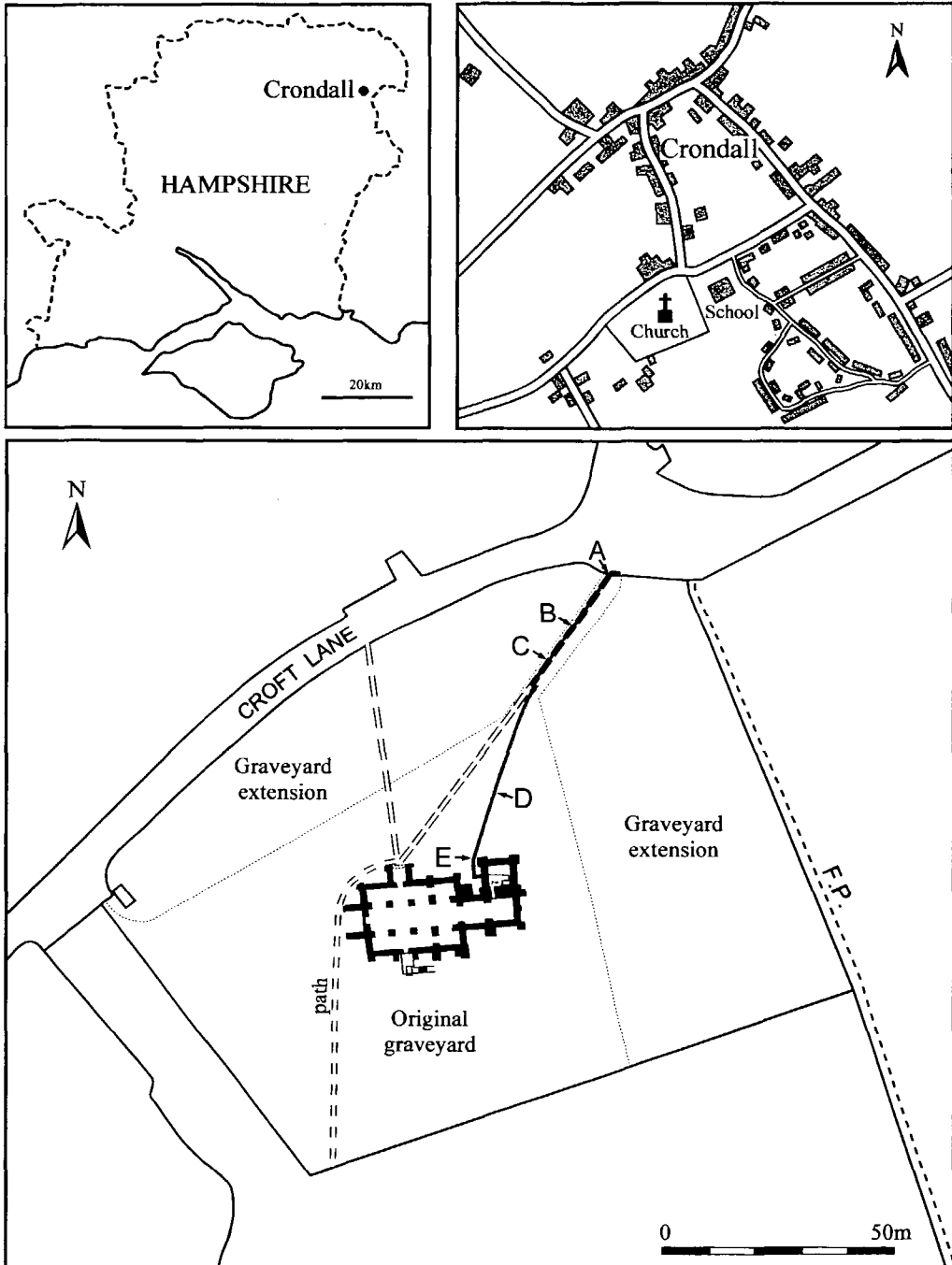


Fig. 1 Crondall Church: location plan. A-E indicates the line of the pipeline trench

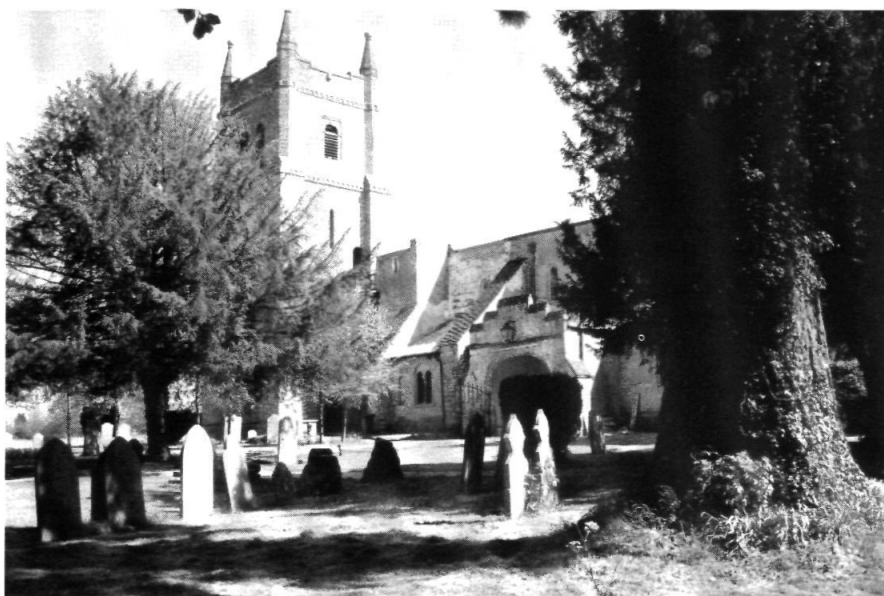


Fig. 2 Crondall Church from the north west

tively modern pottery occurred scattered randomly through the level.

Below this upper level, only a few intact features were noted, the first of which lay between B and C and consisted of a rammed chalk surface (floor) which was exposed at the bottom of the trench at a depth of 60 cm. The surface produced bone, ash and one body sherd of 17th-century green-glazed pottery. The chalk layer seems likely to have been connected with the buildings that are shown on the Tithe Map (Fig. 3) and which were demolished in 1879, to make way for the northern extension to the graveyard. Since no walls were present, the surface may well represent the remains of a yard lying to the rear of one of the original properties.

Nearer to the church, in the original graveyard and between points D and E, the bottom of the trench exposed a number of grave cuts. These must have been of some antiquity since the cuts did not continue into the section, which again indicated that the upper 60 cm of soil had been extensively disturbed. It was, however, noticeable that this section of the pipeline trench also produced numbers of oyster shells and sherds of

globular wine bottles, which presumably represents rubbish from some activity carried out in or around the church.

At point E, where the trench passed close to the tower, the base of the brickwork was exposed and resting on footings consisting of large irregular clunch and sandstone blocks. No other features were visible in this area.

A metal detector survey was carried out on the spoil from the trench and produced a number of items including a medieval thimble (Fig. 7), a musket ball, clippings of roofing lead, culminating with a number of modern low-denomination coins.

THE CHURCH (Fig. 4)

While it was not possible to examine the installation works for the boiler inside the tower, the remaining works in the nave were, with one exception, monitored closely. These works consisted of cutting a number of trenches approximately 50–60 cm wide and 60 cm deep, through the concrete floor, which had been laid in 1957.



Fig. 3 Extract from the Tithe Map of 1846 showing buildings demolished in 1879 to make way for the northern extension to the graveyard

The first trench to be recorded, was dug parallel to the north wall of the nave and within 16 cm of the base of one of the Norman columns (Fig. 4, F-G). This showed that the base of the column itself, while surrounded by modern concrete, actually rested on a pad of clunch boulders. This pad extended slightly to either side of the column. On the south side, however, the pad extended further, but appeared to end just beyond the southern edge of the pipeline trench. The blocks were not mortared in any way, but appeared to have been rammed together into a footing trench, the edges of which had been lost through later disturbance. It is, therefore highly unlikely that this feature represents anything more than a footing for the column. It was, however, interesting to see

in the section, that the pad had been capped by a layer of orange coloured tiles. These, given their size, colour, texture and position are almost certainly Roman in date and were probably collected from the site of a nearby villa – perhaps that at Barley Pound – for reuse in the church in the 12th century.

Between points G and H, the section showed no visible features, consisting of the modern concrete floor, underlain by a layer of brick hardcore, in turn underlain by a layer of disturbed sandy soil containing fragments of bone and tile. Just to the west of point G, a small test hole was dug and clean natural clay was found at a depth of 1.01 m from the floor surface. Soil from the test hole produced a 19th-century button from a depth of 70

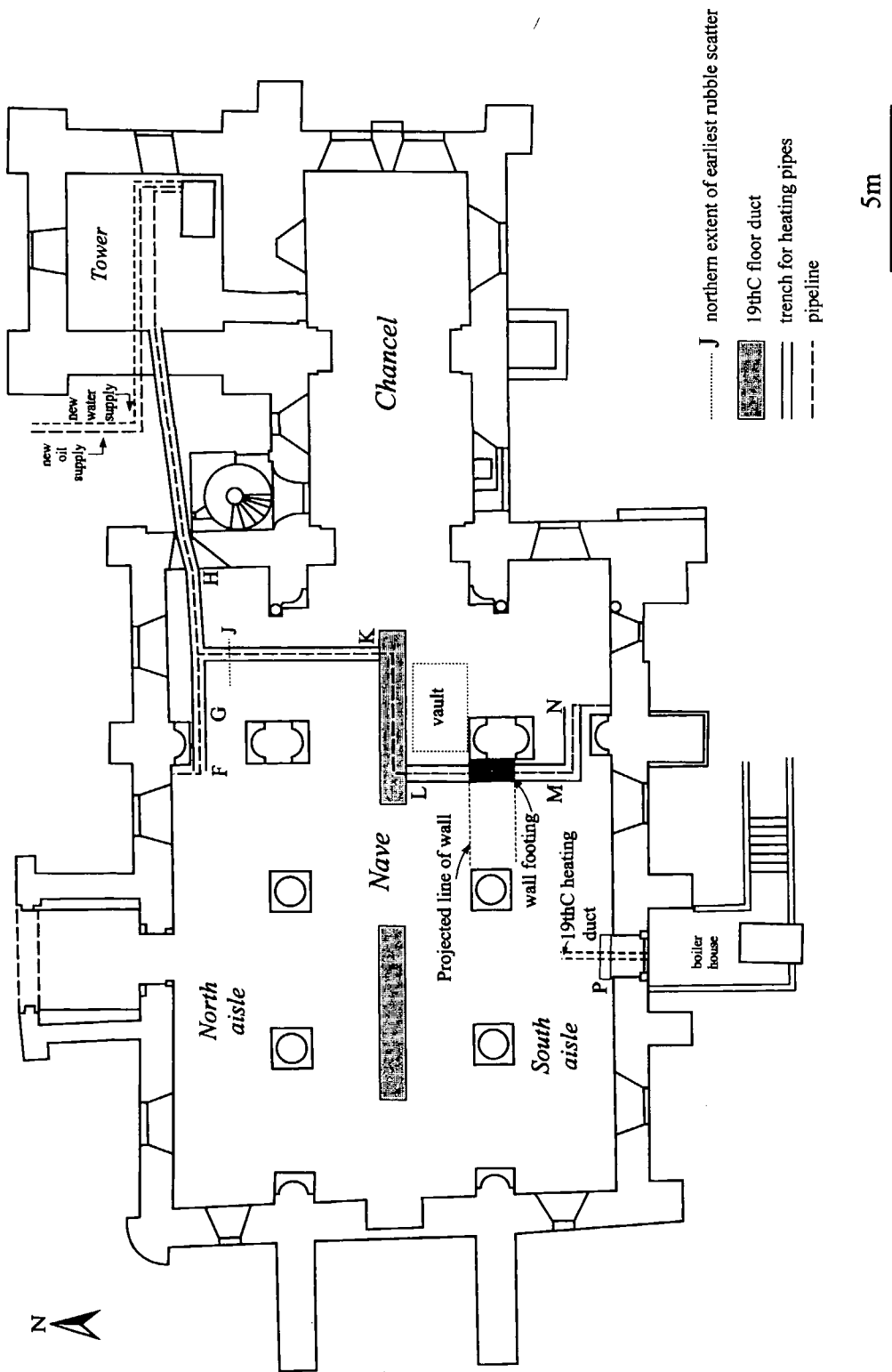


Fig. 4 Crondall Church: plan showing location of pipeline trenches (based on a plan by M A Jeffries FRICS)

cm, which seems to indicate major disturbance to this whole soil layer, at some stage in that century – perhaps during the restoration works of 1846 or 1871.

At point H, the contractors cut a hole through the footings of the Norman wall which consisted of flint nodules bedded irregularly in clay. The footings were checked to a depth of 70 cm below modern floor level, but continued on down to an unknown depth.

Between points J and K, the same basic stratigraphy as between G and H continued unchanged. However, a very small test hole just to the south of point J, indicated that what had originally appeared to be a layer of natural clay, encountered at a depth of 60 cm, was in fact only 12 cm thick. It overlay a band of flint nodules that were mixed with large flecks of sandy mortar and small fragments of clunch, one of which showed possible tooling marks. The Diocesan Archaeologist was consulted and it was decided that, since the pipeline works were not in danger of disturbing this layer, no further investigation was justified. The exact nature of the layer, therefore, remains unknown and it may either represent the demolition of an earlier structure, capped with clay, or alternatively be a natural Clay-with-flints deposit that has in some way become contaminated, perhaps by a pit. Only further work would settle this point, though the former interpretation seems most likely at present.

At point K, the contractors uncovered a short length of brick wall. This probably represents the remains of a vault, which had largely been destroyed by the insertion of the central 19th-century floor duct. From the size of the bricks ($9 \times 4 \times 2\frac{1}{2}$ in) with no frogging, the vault appears to be 17th/18th century in date. In any event, very little was left intact and only a short section of east-west walling was recorded. The original footing trench cut for the vault was still visible as a band of dark infill running to the north of the wall itself. This backfill produced a carefully redeposited skull, pelvis and pair of long bones, which must have come from an earlier burial disturbed by the builders of the vault and re-interred by them.

To the south of point K, across the 19th-century floor duct, the contractors located a second, and

this time intact, vault, which was not seen by the authors. Accordingly, the pipeline was diverted westwards down the nave to avoid this structure.

Without doubt, the most significant archaeological feature was encountered in section L–M, where a very substantial mortared flint wall footing was found running beneath and along the line of the Norman arcading (Figs 5 & 6). This wall footing was approximately 1.4m wide and, on probing below the base from each side, was found to continue down to a depth of about 93cm below the modern floor level. Either side of the wall were the slight remains of what may have been the original construction trenches (labelled DC, CCF and CWF), which at the lowest level contained charcoal. It is, however, also possible that, rather than being footing trenches, these levels represent earlier deposits cut during the construction of the flint and mortar wall itself. In either event, later footing works, clearly associated with the construction of the Norman column had largely destroyed these deposits. These latter footings consisted of a packing of clunch and flint set into sandy mortar. The southern pad, underlying the column had proved somewhat inadequate, since a crack is visible in the masonry of the column above it. The pad to the north is rather more enigmatic, since it does not actually underlie the column itself. It is perhaps the result of a miscalculation by the Norman builders as to the exact position of the central tower, which this large column was intended to support. In any event, the column shows a different design on its north and south faces, which again hints at a change of plan during the initial construction works.

The substantial mortared flint wall footing, which was very different to the 12th-century wall footing exposed at point H, showed every sign of continuing along the line of the south aisle. It is, therefore, very probably the remains of an earlier church, perhaps demolished when the existing church was constructed. While nothing was found that could date the feature, it seems likely to belong to the late Saxon or more probably the early Norman period.

A final point to note in this section is that the brickwork, shown set into the concrete and hardcore layers, belongs to the existing heating system, which is now being replaced. The pipeline for the

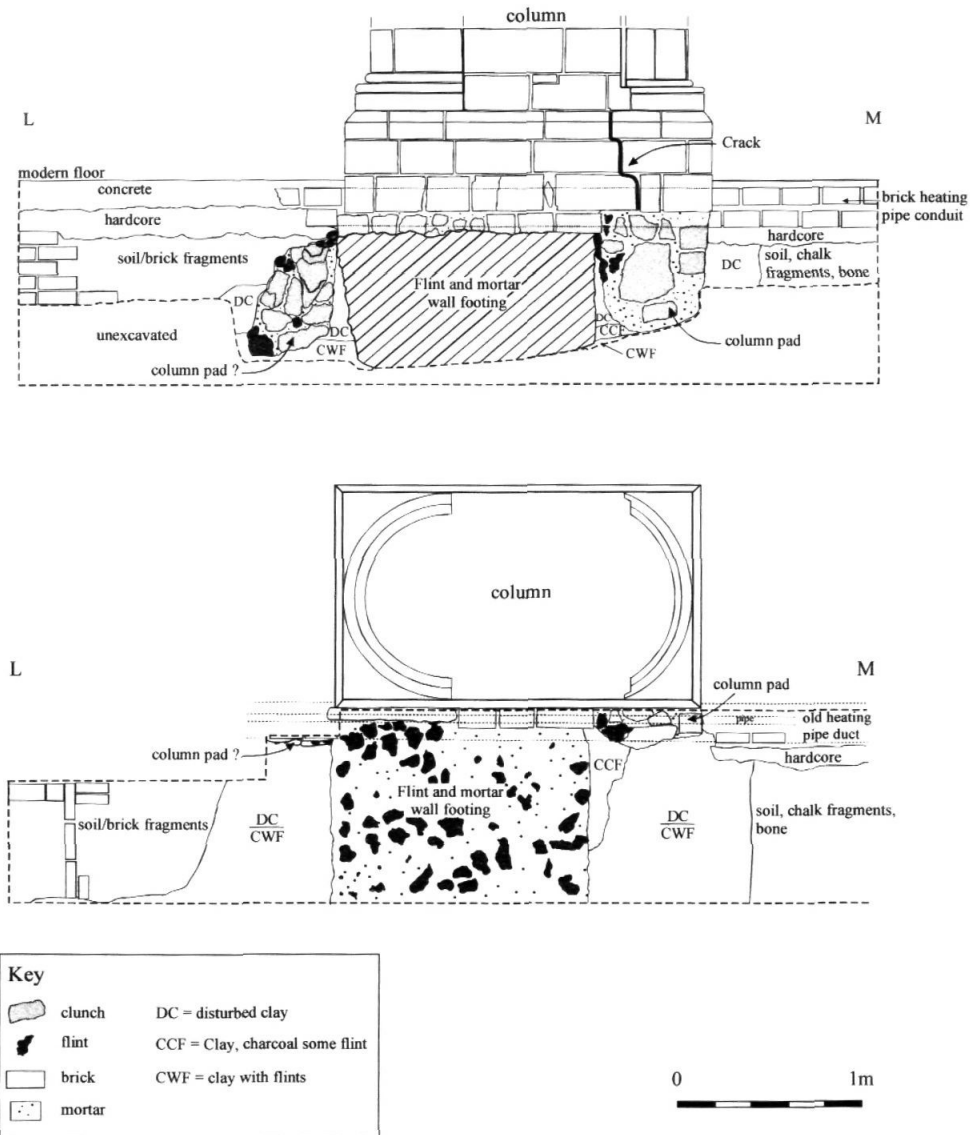


Fig. 5 Crondall Church: plan and section of wall footing

replacement system was deliberately laid on a pad over the top of the mortared flint wall footing, so as to avoid further disturbance to the archaeological levels.

From points M–N, the section reverted to the normal disturbed soil level capped by hardcore and concrete and no further archaeological fea-

tures were noted, with the slight exception that the extreme northern extent of the clunch column pad was just visible on the southern edge of the trench.

The contractors dug a small additional trench at point P, which revealed nothing more than a brick duct for the 19th-century heating system.



Fig. 6 Crondall Church: mortared flint wall footing from the south

CONCLUSIONS

The most important result from monitoring the pipe trenches was the location of the substantial mortared flint wall footing underlying the southern arcade. Parallels for this discovery can be found elsewhere, in churches such as Yateley (Hinton & Oake 1983) and St Peters at Barton-on-Humber (Morris 1983), where smaller 11th-century churches were demolished to make way for larger aisled churches, with the base of the earlier walls being reused as footings for the new aisle columns. Something very similar must have happened at Crondall and this presumably as a result of an expansion of population at that time.

The plan of such an earlier church must, of course, remain an open question, though it is interesting that no footings were encountered along section J-K, possibly indicating that the earlier

church was cruciform in shape, as suggested by Jefferies (1990).

Whether or not the layer of flint, clunch and sandy mortar exposed in the test hole near point J, relates to a still earlier church, remains an open question. What is certain is that it lies at a much lower level than the top of the flint and mortar wall footing, and is therefore unlikely to be directly associated with it. Given that the wall footing may well be 11th century in date, then the layer at point J should pre-date it. It might just be worth noting that no Roman pottery was found anywhere in or around the church and that, accordingly, the level is most unlikely to belong to that period. However, given the very small area exposed, it is unsafe to reach any definite conclusions.

The discovery of Roman tiles incorporated in one of the column bases is interesting, but perhaps not surprising, given the number of villas known to have existed in the general area.

No evidence was found for any Saxon timber church, as suggested in the church guide, though the disturbed nature of the deposits would have removed all traces, at this level, of such a structure, if it ever existed. The surprising lack of evidence for graves within the trenches is probably equally the result of disturbance in the 19th century.

It is, of course, most unfortunate that apparently no recording work was carried out in 1957, when the entire wooden floor of the church was removed and replaced by the existing concrete. It would have been comparatively simple to recover the plan of the earlier structure, which must have been exposed during the course of that work. In the event, the only record appears to be a brief note in the *Farnham Herald*, which is mostly concerned with the discovery of two vaults of 17th/18th-century date.

SMALL FINDS

Found in the churchyard pipeline trench

A bronze thimble (Fig. 7) of the 'acorn cap' type, typical of the form used from the mid-14th century until the beginning of the 16th century (sometimes also referred to as 'skep' type). The in-



Fig. 7 Crondall Church: medieval thimble

dentations were punched by hand, in vertical lines up the sides of the thimble and in concentric circles over the top, finishing short of the crown, like a tonsure. This form remained virtually unchanged until the flat topped Nuremburg thimbles came into use in the 16th century.

Other finds included: one musket ball, part of a clay tobacco pipe, clippings of roofing lead, four bronze buttons, a small bore cartridge case and assorted nails and fragments of metal.

Found inside the church

A single body sherd of coarse ware with horizontal rilling on the outside found in the disturbed soil level between points J-K (Fig. 4). The fabric is sandy and buff coloured on the inside and dark grey on the outside. Probably early Norman in date.

The only other find was a four-hole disc trouser button dating at the earliest to the last decade of the 18th century. Earlier buttons, although of infinite variety, were attached to the fabric by a shank.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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