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Early church and burials found at Lincoln castle

Archaeologists digging under Lincoln Castle have made contact with the remains of a previously unknown church that is at least 1,000 years old. Initially finding a cemetery with several skeletons, they came across two stone walls. Further investigation revealed more burials, including at least one stone coffin, and the remains of a Late Saxon stone church.



Beryl Lott, historic environment manager for Lincolnshire County Council, said: “This is a very exciting discovery. Our knowledge of the site between the end of Roman period and when the castle was built is very scant. While the discovery was totally unexpected, it is well known that other Roman walled towns often contained some form of high-status use during the Anglo-Saxon period. This will greatly increase our knowledge not just of the castle, but of uphill Lincoln as well. It’s a major find and we look forward to future developments.”

The church has popped up in an unexpected place. Lincoln’s earliest church, St Paul in the Bail, was in the area of the Roman forum, probably built in the 7th century, but a body buried in its dedication grave was removed in the 10th century for burial somewhere else. This might be the church built by Blaecca, chieftain of Lincoln at that time. The Late-Saxon cathedral built 300 years later has always been assumed to be under the present minster, but the church under the castle is certainly showing signs of being an important high status church. Further historical research as well as the on-going archaeological work may give clues to whether it might be a Saxon minster, or belong to an adjacent monastery or palace.

One of the most intriguing findings is the bones of a person laid inside a niche in the wall foundation. The bones were originally wrapped in a finely woven textile – the tiny impressions of the cloth could be seen on the mortar of the wall. This looks like a “votive deposit” and may be the relics of a holy person placed inside the wall to dedicate the building. Archaeologists will use radiocarbon dating to try and refine the date of the remains, which from the stratigraphy and associated artifacts already uncovered they expect to be 10th century or earlier.



Re-written from <http://www.pasthorizonspr.com/index.php/archives/05/2013/early-church-and-burials-found-at-lincoln-castle>