

**An archaeological watching brief at
St Leonard's church,
Hythe Hill, Colchester, Essex
June 2009**

**report prepared by
Chris Lister**

**on behalf of
Dorvell Construction**

CAT project ref.: 09/6c
Colchester and Ipswich Museums accession code: COLEM 2009.37
NGR: TM 0127 2472



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CAT Report 517
July 2009

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Fig 1 Site plan, showing the location of the trenches for foundation pads.

1 Summary

An archaeological watching brief on trenches for foundation pads for the strengthening of the northern graveyard wall at St Leonard's church revealed nothing of archaeological significance.

Human remains found in four of the trenches for foundation pads were reburied on site.

2 Introduction

2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief on the excavation of thirteen trenches for foundation pads for the strengthening, by brick buttresses, of the northern graveyard wall at St Leonard's church, Hythe Hill, Colchester, Essex, carried out on behalf of Dorvell Construction by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on the 30th June 2009.

2.2 Thirteen trenches for foundation pads, measuring 1m by 1m by 0.4m deep, were hand-excavated by contractors immediately behind each existing brick buttress of the graveyard wall.

2.3 The site is at NGR TM 0127 2472.

2.4 This report mirrors standards and practices contained in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (CIM 2008), *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (CIM 2008), and also in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2008a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IfA 2008b). Other sources used are *Management of research projects in the historic environment* (MoRPHE), and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14).

3 Archaeological background

The church dates from at least as early as 1237, although it is probably considerably older (CAR 1, 47), with most of the surviving work of 14th- and 15th-century date. The church is a large and complex structure, with a fully aisled nave and chancel and a west tower. St Leonard's was one of the first churches to suffer damage in the Siege of Colchester in 1648, and it was also shaken by the earthquake of 1884.

The graveyard is disused, and has a few 19th-century monuments, most of which are in a poor state of repair. Burial has probably been intensive, and Manning recorded that '... the proportions of the tower are sadly marred by the fact of the soil of the churchyard having been raised to the level of the old west door by the burials of successive generations ...' (Manning 1884).

Two test-pits were excavated against the inner face of the south retaining wall of the graveyard by CAT in March 2000 (CAT Report 68). No archaeological features were recorded, although there was a quantity of loose human bone that was reburied in the excavated pits at the end of the work.

4 Aim

The aim of the watching brief was to record the character, extent, date, significance and condition of any archaeological remains and deposits affected by the groundworks.

5 Results (Fig 1)

Each of the thirteen trenches for foundation pads were hand-dug by contractors around the rear of the existing brick buttresses. These were excavated to a depth of

400mm through dark brown silty topsoil with no apparent difference in any of the trenches. Significant root activity was present in the majority of the holes along with the occasional sherd of modern pottery.

6 Finds

Human bone, including fragments of cranium but mainly broken long bones, was found in four of the trenches. This was concentrated in adjacent trenches in two areas along the wall (see Fig 1). The human remains were reburied in the base of the trenches from which they had been removed. No other finds were recorded.

7 Discussion

Very little can be said about this watching brief. As the depth of the trenches for foundation pads was only 400mm, it was highly unlikely that graves would be encountered during the groundworks. The positioning of the trenches, right up against the wall, would again result in missing any graves. Observation of nearby standing gravestones indicates that burial was in rows between the church and the wall, but that these were all contained within an area marked out by large trees and not adjacent to the wall itself. It is likely that the gravestones against the west wall of the graveyard were moved from elsewhere.

The human bone that was exposed from the trenches for foundation pads most probably derives from earlier graves truncated by the final phases of burial in the graveyard before the 1852 Burial Act led to the establishment of municipal cemeteries, ie in Colchester in Mersea Road.

8 Archive deposition

The paper archive is currently stored by CAT at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex, but will be permanently deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums under accession code COLEM 2009.37.

9 Acknowledgements

CAT would like to thank Dorvell Construction for commissioning and funding the work, and for their help on site. Site work was by C Lister.

10 References

- | | | |
|---------------|-------|--|
| CAR 1 | 1981 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 1: Aspects of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Colchester</i> , by P Crummy |
| CAT Report 68 | | <i>A report on test-pits dug in the churchyard of St Leonard's church, Hythe Hill, Colchester, Essex, March 2000</i> , unpublished CAT archive report, by H Brooks, 2000 |
| CIM | 2008a | <i>Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i> |
| CIM | 2008b | <i>Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester and Ipswich Museums</i> |
| EAA 14 | 2003 | <i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 14, ed by D Gurney |
| IfA | 2008a | <i>Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief</i> |
| IfA | 2008b | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i> |
| Manning, F J | 1884 | 'St Leonard's Church, The Hythe', <i>Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society</i> , 4, new series, 161-71 |
| MoRPHE | 2006 | <i>Management of research projects in the historic environment</i> (English Heritage) |

11 Glossary

EHER	Essex Historic Environment Record, maintained by Essex County Council
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c AD 1500
modern	period from c AD 1800 to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
post-medieval	after c AD 1500 to c AD 1800

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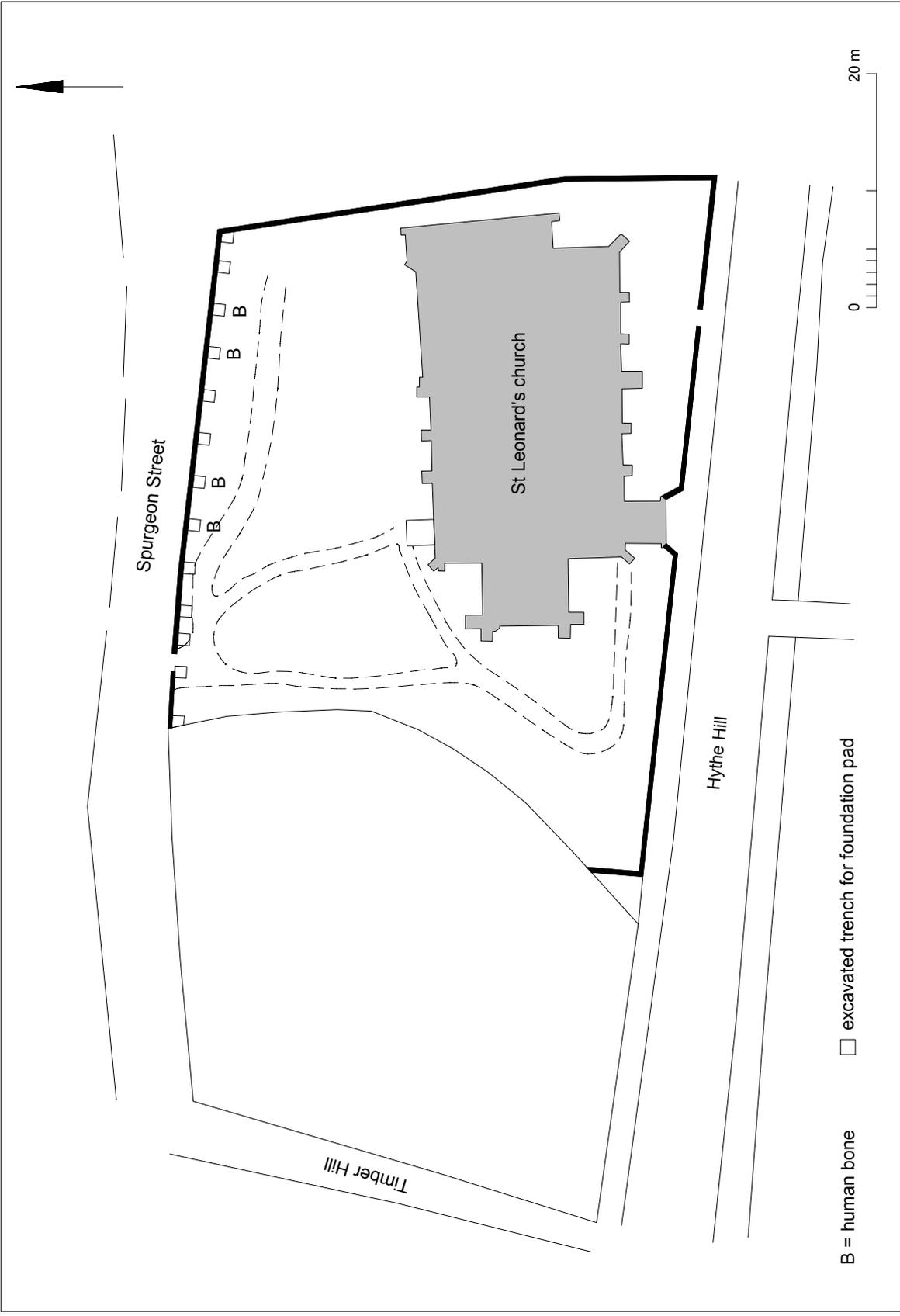
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Fig 1 Site plan, showing the location of the trenches for foundation pads.

Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

Summary sheet

Site address: St Leonard's church, Hythe Hill, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TM 0127 2472	Site codes: CAT project code - 09/6c Museum accession code - 2009.37
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: June 2009	Size of area investigated: Approximately 13m ²
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? Yes	Related EHER numbers: n/a
Final report: CAT Report 517	
Periods represented: None	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: An archaeological watching brief on trenches for foundation pads for the strengthening of the northern graveyard wall at St Leonard's church revealed nothing of archaeological significance. Human remains found in four of the trenches for foundation pads were reburied on site.</p>	
Previous summaries/reports: CAT Report 68	
Keywords: church, burials	Significance: neg
Author of summary: Chris Lister	Date of summary: July 2009