

**An archaeological watching brief at  
All Saints' Church, Great Braxted, Essex  
November 2003**

**report prepared by  
Ben Holloway**

**on behalf of  
Great Braxted Parochial Church Council**

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## **Contents**

1	Summary	1
2	Introduction	1
3	Archaeological background	1
4	Aim	1
5	The foundation trenches	1
6	Results	2
7	Finds	3
8	Discussion	3
9	Archive deposition	4
10	Acknowledgements	4
11	References	4
12	Glossary	4
13	Site data	5
	Figures	after p 5
	EHCR summary sheet	

## 1 Summary

Observations were made at All Saints' Church, Great Braxted, Essex during groundworks for an extension to the church vestry. The articulated skeletal remains of seventeen individuals were disturbed during the excavation of the foundation trenches and Soakaway 1. As far as could be judged, all the burials were orientated east-west with the head end to the west. Evidence for coffins was almost non-existent and the burials could not be dated.

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief carried out on behalf of David Whymark Building Design and Conservation at All Saints' Church, Great Braxted, Essex (NGR TQ 8510 1545: Fig 1) during groundworks for an extension to the church.
- 2.2 The work was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between the 17th and the 27th of November 2003.
- 2.3 All fieldwork was done in accordance with a specification agreed with the Heritage Advice Management and Promotion (HAMP) group officer from Essex County Council. This report mirrors standards and practices contained in the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1999).

## 3 Archaeological background

All Saints' Church, Great Braxted is a Grade II\* listed building which was built in its original form c AD 1115. The nave and west half of the chancel remain from this period. At that time the church ended eastwards with an apse. The apse was later removed, and the chancel was squared off and extended to its present length early in the 13th century. Shortly after this, the western tower was added but never finished. The south porch was added in the 15th century (Rodwell & Rodwell 1977, 99).

Contained within the fabric of the church are bricks from Coggeshall abbey and a large amount of Roman building material which is likely to have been quarried from the Roman site at Rivenhall.

The church is surrounded by a graveyard, the use of which probably dates to the earliest phases of the church in the 12th century.

## 4 Aim

The aim of the watching brief was to preserve by record any archaeological deposits that were to be destroyed by the groundworks. Particular attention was paid to any possible evidence of earlier phases of the present church, burial positions, and coffin furniture.

## 5 The trenches

- 5.1 The new extension, located between the north wall of the nave and the west wall of the vestry, is approximately 3.5m wide and 4.5m long. Groundworks consisted of three foundation trenches (Trenches 1-3) for the main building, 0.6m wide and 1.2m deep, two service trenches (Service Trenches 1 and 2) and two soakaways (Soakaways 1 and 2) each with their own trench (Soakaway Trenches 1 and 2). Service Trench 1 was 500mm wide and between 555mm and 600mm deep; Service Trench 2 was 900mm wide and between 400mm and 600mm deep. The two soakaways were 1.3m deep and connected to the down pipes of the new building by trenches of the same dimensions as Service Trench 1 (see Fig 2). A mini-digger with a toothless bucket was used for all groundwork.

## 6 Results

### 6.1 The foundation trenches

- 6.1.1** The foundation trenches (Trenches 1-3) for the building extension were dug through a topsoil layer of a dark brown silty loam (Layer or L1 – approximately 32cm deep) which contained large amounts of peg-tile and other building material probably from the church, presumably from 18th-century alterations to the north transept and 19th-century restoration work on the church roof. L1 sealed a layer of subsoil (a mid grey/brown sandy silt L2, approximately 70cm deep). L2 then sealed natural layer of orange/yellow sand (L3).
- 6.1.2** During excavation, the articulated skeletal remains of fifteen individuals were uncovered (1a-1d, 2a-2c, 3a-3g). As a ditching bucket was used, most of the skeletal remains were badly disturbed when found and were partially emerging in the spoil heap; as a result they were not planned in detail but a single point location was taken for each one. Relevant details such as the type of bones and the burial position were noted (see Table 1). All skeletal remains were recovered between 0.9m and 1.2m below ground-level.

**Table 1: human remains from Trenches 1-3.**

Trench	Burial no	Bones recovered	Burial position	Other details
1	1a	Skull	Head to the west	Adult
	1b	Skull, parts of the vertebra and arms	Head to the east	Adult
	1c	Skull, ribs and vertebra	Head to the east	Adult
	1d	Skull, ribs, vertebra and parts of the arm	Head to the east	Adult
	1e	Partial leg bones	-	Adult
2	2a	Skull, vertebra and ribs	Head to the west	Adult
	2b	Skull	Head to the west	Adult
	2c	Skull	-	Adult
3	3a	Vertebra and ribs	Head to the west; appeared to be lying face down	Child or young adult
	3b	Skull, ribs and vertebra	Head to the west; appeared to be lying face down	Child or young adult
	3c	Skull and partial arm bones	Head to the west	Child or young adult
	3d	Ribs, vertebra and part of right shoulder and arm	Appeared to be lying face down	-
	3e	Skull, ribs and shoulder blade	Head to the west	Adult
	3f	Ribs, vertebra and part of left leg	Head to the west; appeared to be lying face down	Adult
	3g	Skull, vertebra	Head to the west	Adult

- 6.1.3** Only one piece of possible coffin furniture was found: an iron nail probably associated with burial 2b. No other coffin furniture or dating evidence was recovered from the burials.

### 6.2 The service trenches

The service trenches and the soakaways were cut through a topsoil layer of a dark brown silty loam (L1, approximately 32cm deep) which contained large amounts of peg-tile and other building material probably from the church. L1 sealed a mid grey/brown sandy silt subsoil L2. The natural layer of orange/yellow sand (L3) was only observed in

the excavation of the two soakaways. The other service trenches were not excavated deep enough to encounter the natural geology. No human remains were recorded during the excavation of the two service trenches.

### 6.3 The soakaways

No human remains were recorded during the excavation of Soakaway 2. During the excavation of Soakaway 1, the articulated skeletal remains of two individuals were disturbed (S1a and S1b). As in the foundation trenches, the burials were disturbed by the machine bucket and so were not planned in detail; they were, however, recorded in the same way as the skeletal remains encountered in the foundation trenches (Table 2). The skeletal remains of both individuals were recovered at 1.1m depth.

Part of a very degraded human mandible (S1c) was also recovered from Soakaway 1. S1c was located under the legs of skeleton S1b and was presumably disturbed by the burial of S1b.

**Table 2: human remains from Soakaway 1.**

Burial no	Bones recovered	Burial position	Other details
S1a	Skull, mandible, vertebra, left scapula	Head to the west	Adult
S1b	Tibia/fibia, patella of right leg, tibia of left leg	Head to the west	Adult
S1c	Part of mandible	Disarticulated	Adult disturbed by burial S1b

## 7 Finds

Except for the human remains, which were re-interred after they had been lifted, very little material was recovered from the excavation of the groundworks. Most of the material consisted of broken peg-tiles from the roof of the church and two iron small finds (a coffin nail possibly associated with burial 2b (find 1) and a post-medieval iron knife from the topsoil L1: see finds table below - find 2). Finds 2 and 3 can be dated to the post-medieval to modern period and are likely to be associated with work on the church in the 18th and 19th centuries.

**Table 3: finds (excluding human remains).**

Finds no	Layer no	Feature no	context	Description	Weight (g)
1	L2	-	Subsoil	iron coffin nail	10
2	L1	-	Topsoil	iron knife	40
3	L1	-	Topsoil	peg-tile (discarded)	104

## 8 Discussion

During the watching brief for the groundworks for the extension of the church vestry, the articulated skeletal remains of seventeen individuals were disturbed. Fifteen of these burials were cut by the foundation trenches, the remaining two by Soakaway 1 (Fig 2). None of the burials that were encountered were marked. Stone markers may have been removed at some date after the burial or the grave markers were originally made of wood and have degraded. The inhumations were presumably originally in coffins,

although only one piece of coffin furniture was found, ie an iron nail. It is impossible to date the disturbed burials as no datable material was recovered from the same context or layers as the remains. No earlier phases of the fabric of the church building were observed during the excavation of the groundworks.

All the human remains were handed to the churchwarden, Mr Copsey, for immediate re-interment within the cemetery.

## 9 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but it will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2003.292.

## 10 Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to the following for their help and co-operation:

Great Braxted Parochial Church Council for commissioning the work

Mr Copsey, All Saints' churchwarden

Mr Philpot, site foreman

Pat Connell of ECC for monitoring the work

The field work was carried out by Laura Pooley and Ben Holloway.

## 11 Reference

Rodwell, R, & Rodwell, K, 1977 *Historic churches: a wasting asset*, CBA Research Report, **19**

## 12 Glossary

context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
HAMP	Heritage Advice Management and Promotion group
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
medieval	period from AD 1066 to Henry the VIII
modern	period from the 19th century to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
post-medieval	after Henry VIII to around the late 18th century
Victorian	period from 1837 to 1901

## 13 Site data

### 13.1 Site context list

Location	Context	Description	Context date
Foundation trenches, service trenches	L1	Topsoil	modern/post-medieval
Foundation trenches, service trenches	L2	Subsoil	modern/post-medieval
Foundation trenches, service trenches	L3	Natural geology	Glacial/post-Glacial

### 13.2 Soil descriptions

Location	Context	Description
Foundation trench	L1	Dark brown silty loam occasional small stones, root/animal activity.
Foundation trench	L2	Mid grey/brown sandy silt some small stones, occasional roots.
Foundation trench	L3	Orange/yellow sand coarse gravel patches.

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#### Distribution list:

Great Braxted Parochial Church Council  
 David Whymark Building Design and Conservation  
 Pat Connell, Essex County Council Heritage Advice Management and Promotion (HAMP) group



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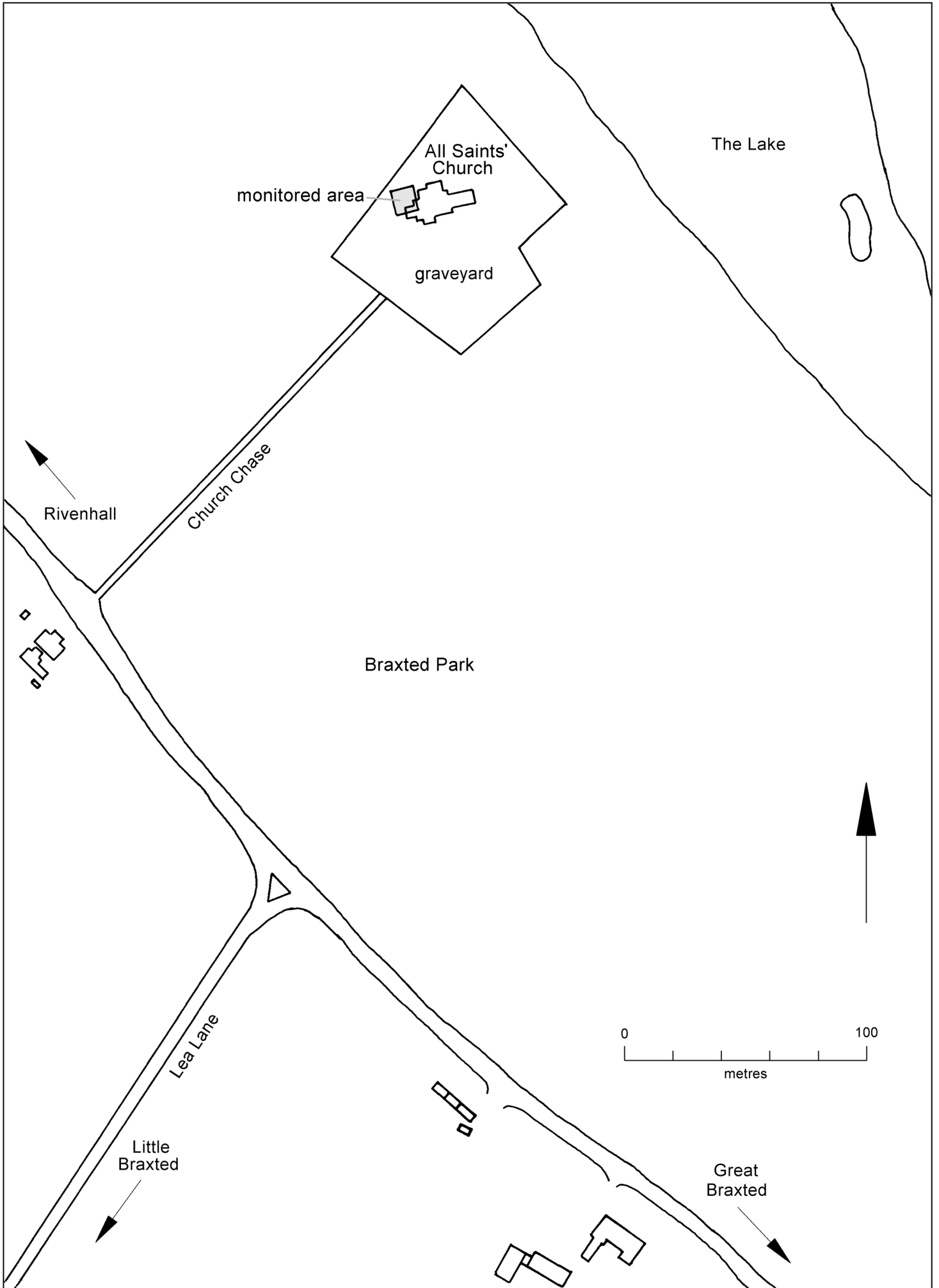


Fig 1 Location plan.



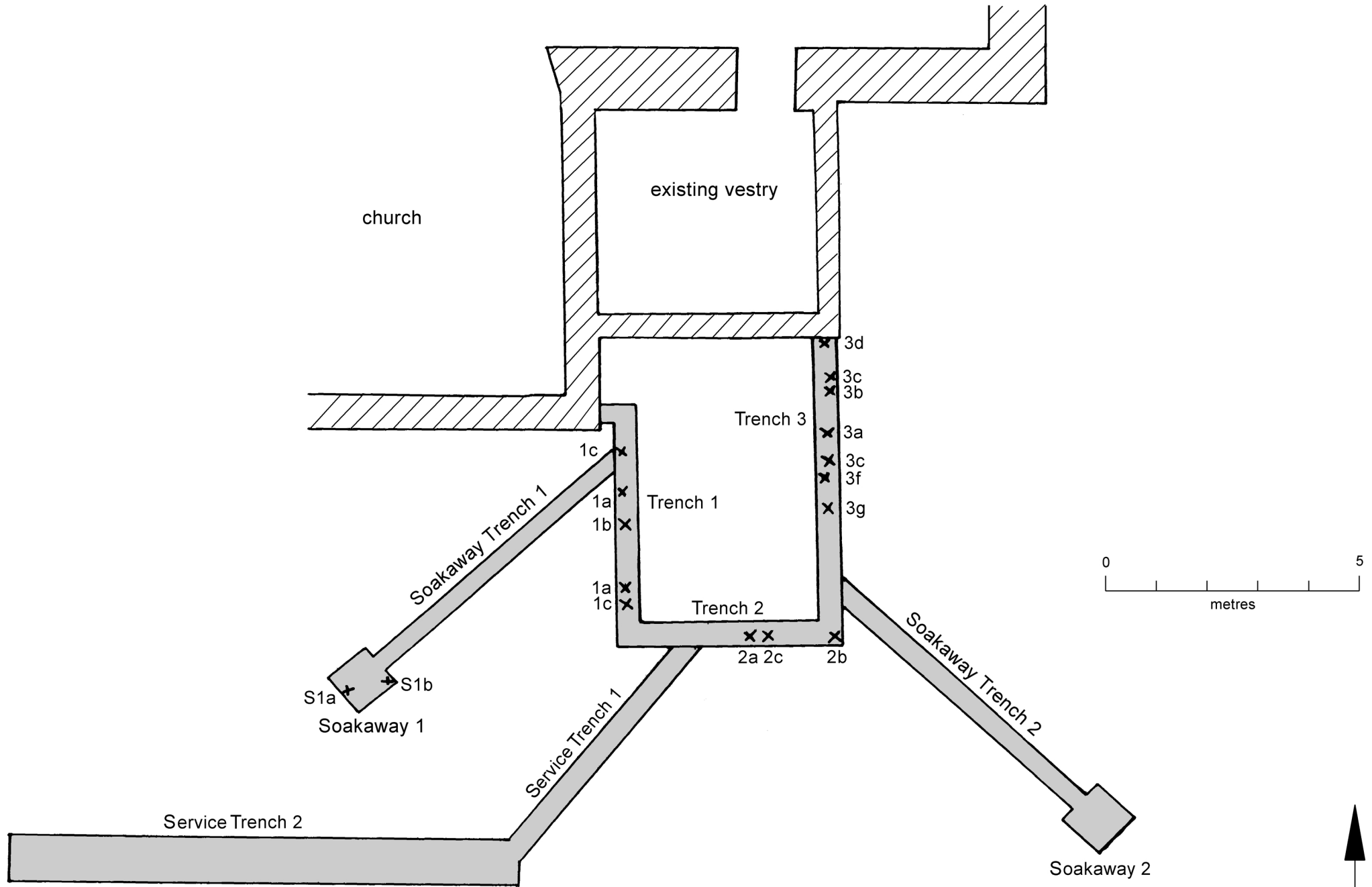
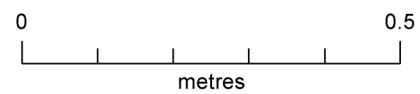
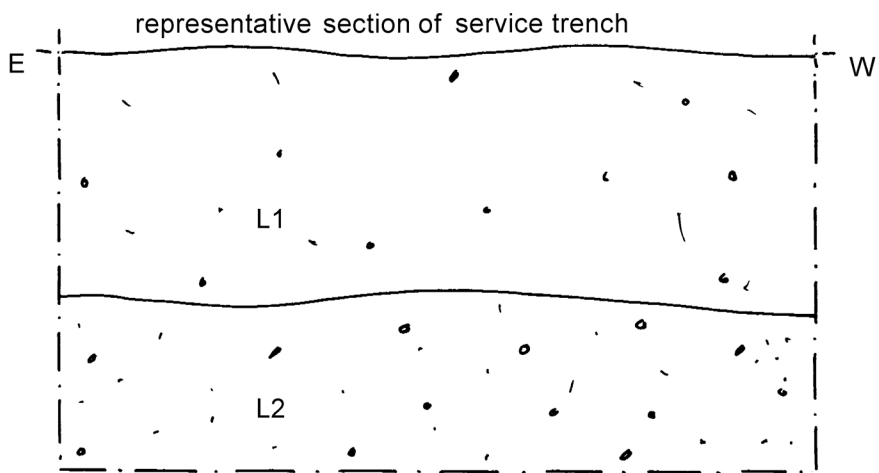
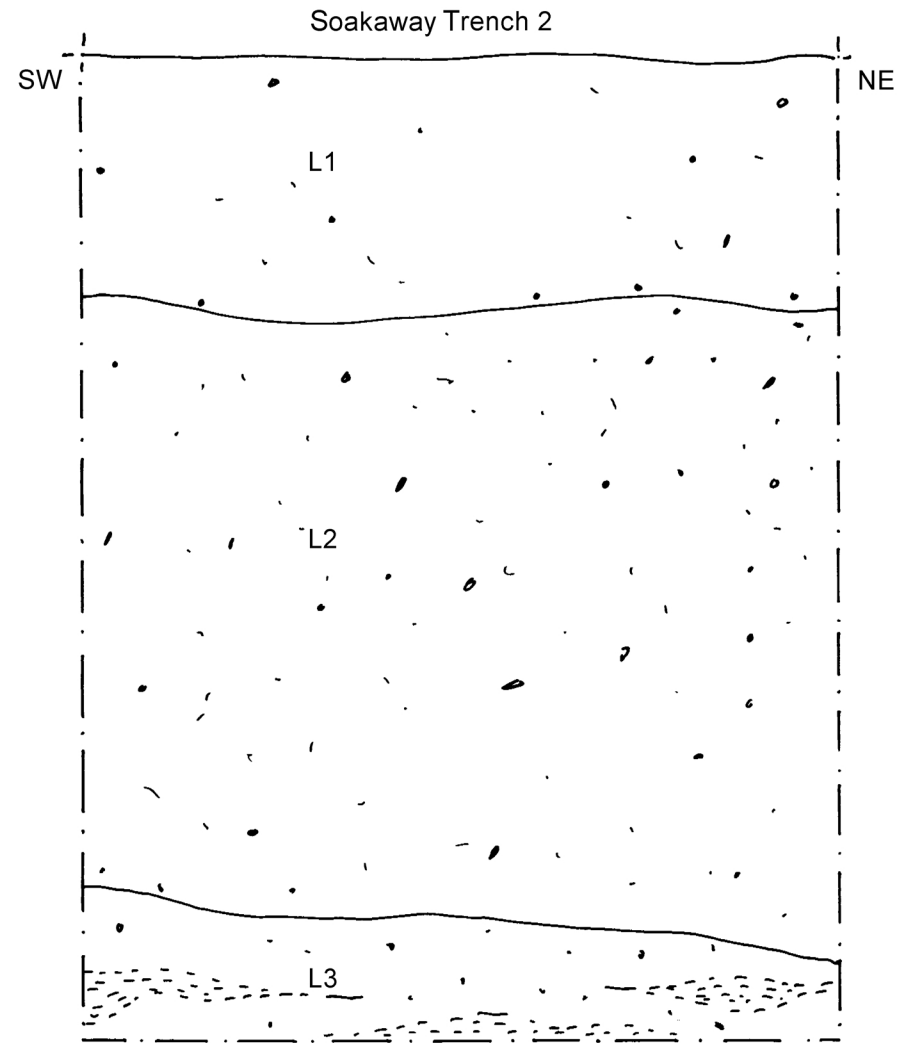
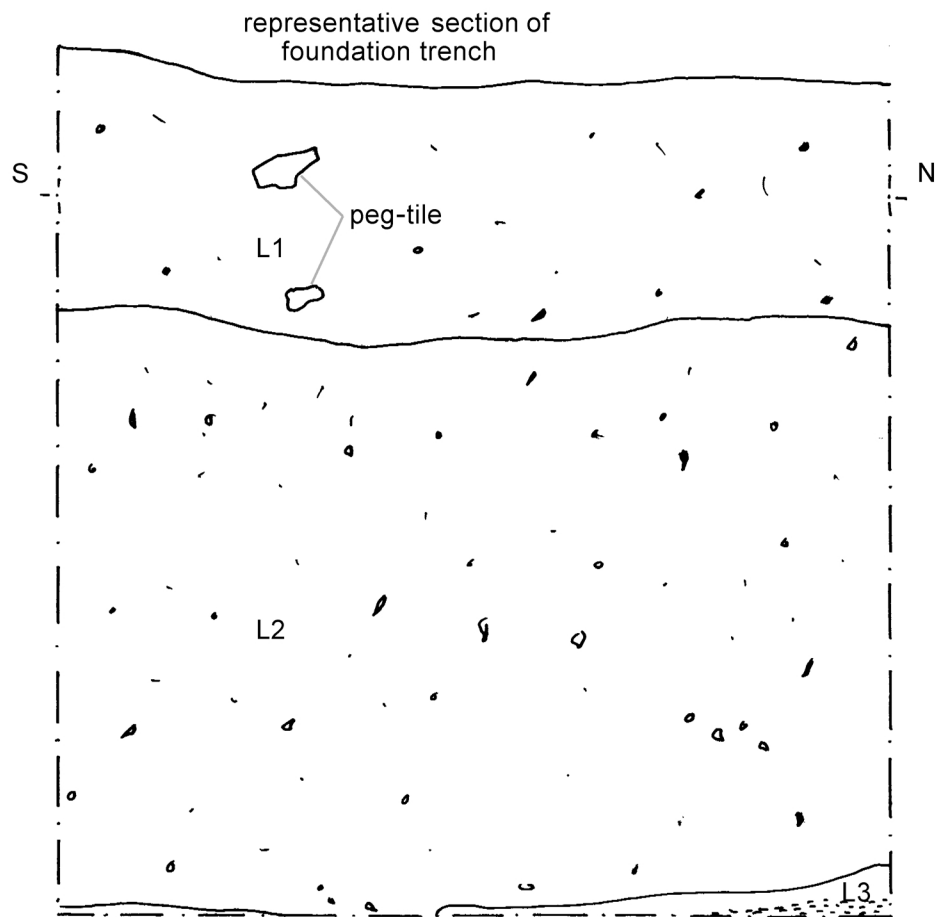


Fig 2 Location of trenches and soakaways, with burials S1-S2 and burials 1a-3g.



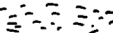
 = sand

Fig 3 Sections: foundation trench, service trench, Soakaway Trench 2.

**Essex Heritage Conservation Record/  
Essex Archaeology and History**

**Summary sheet**

<b>Site address:</b> All Saints' Church, Great Braxted, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Great Braxted	<b>District:</b> Maldon
<b>NGR:</b> TQ 8510 1545	<b>Site code:</b> Museum accession code 2003.292
<b>Type of work:</b> Watching brief	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> November 2003	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 128 square metres
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> PCC
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related EHCR nos:</b>
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 254 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods represented:</b> post-medieval/modern	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b>  <i>Observations were made at All Saints' Church, Great Braxted, Essex during groundworks for an extension to the church vestry. The articulated skeletal remains of seventeen individuals were disturbed during the excavation of the foundation trenches and Soakaway 1. As far as could be judged, all the burials were orientated east-west with the head end to the west. Evidence for coffins was almost non-existent and the burials could not be dated.</i></p>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> N/A	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Ben Holloway	<b>Date of summary:</b> January 2004