

**An archaeological watching brief
at St Leonard's Church, Lexden Road,
Colchester, Essex
October 2007-February 2008**

**report prepared by
Kate Orr and Howard Brooks**

**on behalf of
St Leonard's Church PCC**

CAT project ref.: 07/10g
Colchester and Ipswich Museums accession code: 2007.114
NGR: TL 9713 2509



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EHER summary sheet

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Fig 1 Site location plan, showing watching brief monitoring areas.

1 Summary

An archaeological watching brief on the new southern extension to St Leonard's Church revealed nothing of archaeological interest.

Human remains found loose on the site and in the beam slot for the south wall of the extension were retained for reburial.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief on the extension to St Leonard's Church, Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex carried out on behalf of St Leonard's Church Parochial Church Council (PCC) by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between October 2007 and February 2008.
- 2.2 The new extension, measuring a maximum of 13m to the south of the church and 11m wide, was to be built partially over the site of the old south porch.
- 2.3 Prior to CAT involvement, a specialist contractor had been employed to move the tombstones which would be affected by the new building work. It was the intention that the footings trenches for the new build would avoid the graves below the relocated tombstones.
- 2.4 Planning consent F/COL/06/0990 carried a condition for an archaeological watching brief, which is reported on here.
- 2.5 The extension is at NGR TL 9713 2509.
- 2.6 The site work and report were done according to a brief issued by the Colchester Borough Council Archaeology Officer (CBCAO) and to a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) written by CAT and agreed with CBCAO.
- 2.7 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* (CM 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (CM 2003), and also in the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IFA 2001a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IFA 2001b). Other sources used are *Management of archaeological projects* (MAP 2), and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14).

3 Archaeological background

The current church is 19th century in date and succeeded an earlier, medieval church which is believed to have stood to the north of the present structure in the area now occupied by the graveyard.

The earlier church is thought to have been established in the 12th century. It was demolished around 1820 (EHER nos 11807-11808).

A Roman burial was recorded immediately north of the churchyard on Lexden Road in 1904 (UAD no 1167).

A 3.3m-long evaluation trench excavated within the footprint of the proposed extension in the summer of 2006 by Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit revealed no archaeological features or finds.

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 planned groundworks.

5 Results (Fig 1)

31/10/07

Visit by KO after the contractors, Bakers of Danbury, had opened up a small trial-trench on the south-east side of the churchyard next to the Church Lane steps. This was to test the area of the proposed temporary holding place for burials. The trench was 1.85m long, 0.40m wide and 1m deep. Observed stratification was turf sealing orange brown silty sand, with very little in it except a couple of pieces of human rib bone which were retained for reburial. The soil became sandier further down.

07/11/07

Visit by KO while the contractors were widening the path on the western side of the church. They had to cut into the bank. No burials were disturbed. KO observed undisturbed sandy loam. Two large pieces of dressed ?limestone were removed from the bank where they had been used as revetment supports for the bank; they presumably came from the demolition of the earlier church, and have been in the churchyard since the 1820s.

29/11/07

No visit, but soil-stripping on the area of the footprint of the new extension apparently took place ten days before but CAT had not been informed. The contractors said that nothing was exposed during the work.

04/12/07

Visit by KO after the south porch had been demolished and the area of the footprint of the new extension had been reduced. This reduction varied because of the north- and east-facing slopes of the graveyard. Crushed concrete was laid along the southern half of the reduced area in order to create a flat base for the piling rig. Piles had been put in by the time of KO's visit. The piles were apparently 5m deep. The contractors reported that they missed the graves, as was the intention. Ground-beams had not yet been dug. Nothing could be seen in the exposed sections. The northern part of the footprint of the new extension had been reduced down to natural sand, but this was the area of the demolished south porch and modern rubble had been piled on top of natural sand. KO also looked at the area dug for the loading bay on Church Lane where the church steps used to be, but nothing was seen there.

13/12/07

Visit by KO. Ground-beam trenches had been dug between piles on the north side of the extension, but nothing was seen. Sandy natural lay underneath topsoil or modern rubble.

18/12/07

Visit by KO. There was not much more to see since the last visit (see above). The east-west drain had been inserted in the middle of the footprint of the extension footprint.

20/12/07

Contractors telephoned to say they had found a skull in the deepest ground-beam trench. KO went to the site to look at the skull, which seemed to be slightly out of position in relation to the position of the overlying tomb.

The upper part of the body was exposed and removed (and retained for reburial). The burial was 6 ft below ground-level, with the head to the west.

07/02/08

ES finished removal of the body exposed on 20/12/07.

Other human bones were seen in section at the extreme north-west corner of the site of the southern part of the new extension, but these were left *in situ*. Coffin wood was also seen in section, and this was also left undisturbed.

6 Finds

A few fragments of loose human bone uncovered by the building work were retained for reburial. No other finds were retrieved.

7 Discussion

The intention that the footings of the new extension would avoid known graves worked well on the whole. In only one case were human remains found directly under a proposed wall line. These remains were lifted, and it is understood that they will be reburied underneath the appropriate relocated tombstone.

It is perhaps curious that nothing else was seen in this watching brief, and that there was a lack of loose finds. Map evidence may be helpful here. The Ordnance Survey maps of 1877 and 1881¹ show the plot of land in which the church is located, and, which is of interest here, that there was hardly any space between the south wall of the church and the south boundary of the plot. To the south of the boundary is land which was, according to the map symbols, open parkland.

By contrast, the 1897 Essex 1:2500 O.S. sheet quite definitely shows that the church boundary had by now been moved to the south to incorporate a piece of the former parkland, presumably at a time when extra land was needed to allow for the expansion of the graveyard. Parkland is archaeologically sterile, in the sense that there are no houses generating domestic waste and no ploughed land onto which domestic refuse can be dumped (in the manure). So, the land recently taken into the churchyard by 1898 was archaeologically 'clean', which may explain why nothing of archaeological interest was found during this watching brief.

8 Archive deposition

The paper archive is currently held by CAT at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, but will be permanently deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums under accession code COLEM 2007.114.

9 Acknowledgements

CAT would like to thank St Leonard's Parochial Church Council for commissioning and funding the work. Thanks also to Tim Venn Architects for plans supplied, and to Bakers of Danbury for help on site. Site work was by Kate Orr (KO) and Emma Spurgeon (ES). The project was monitored by Mr Martin Winter for Colchester Borough Council.

10 References

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| CM | 2002 | <i>Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i> |
| CM | 2003 | <i>Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester 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 | 2001a | <i>Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief</i> |
| IFA | 2001b | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i> |
| MAP 2 | 1991 | <i>Management of archaeological projects</i> , second edition (English Heritage) |

¹ as viewed on the Old Maps website: <http://www.old-maps.co.uk/IndexMapPage2.aspx> on 25/06/08

11 Glossary

EHER	Essex Historic Environment Record, maintained by Essex County Council
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c AD 1500
modern	period from c AD 1800 to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
post-medieval	after c AD 1500 to c AD 1800
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database, maintained by Colchester Borough Council

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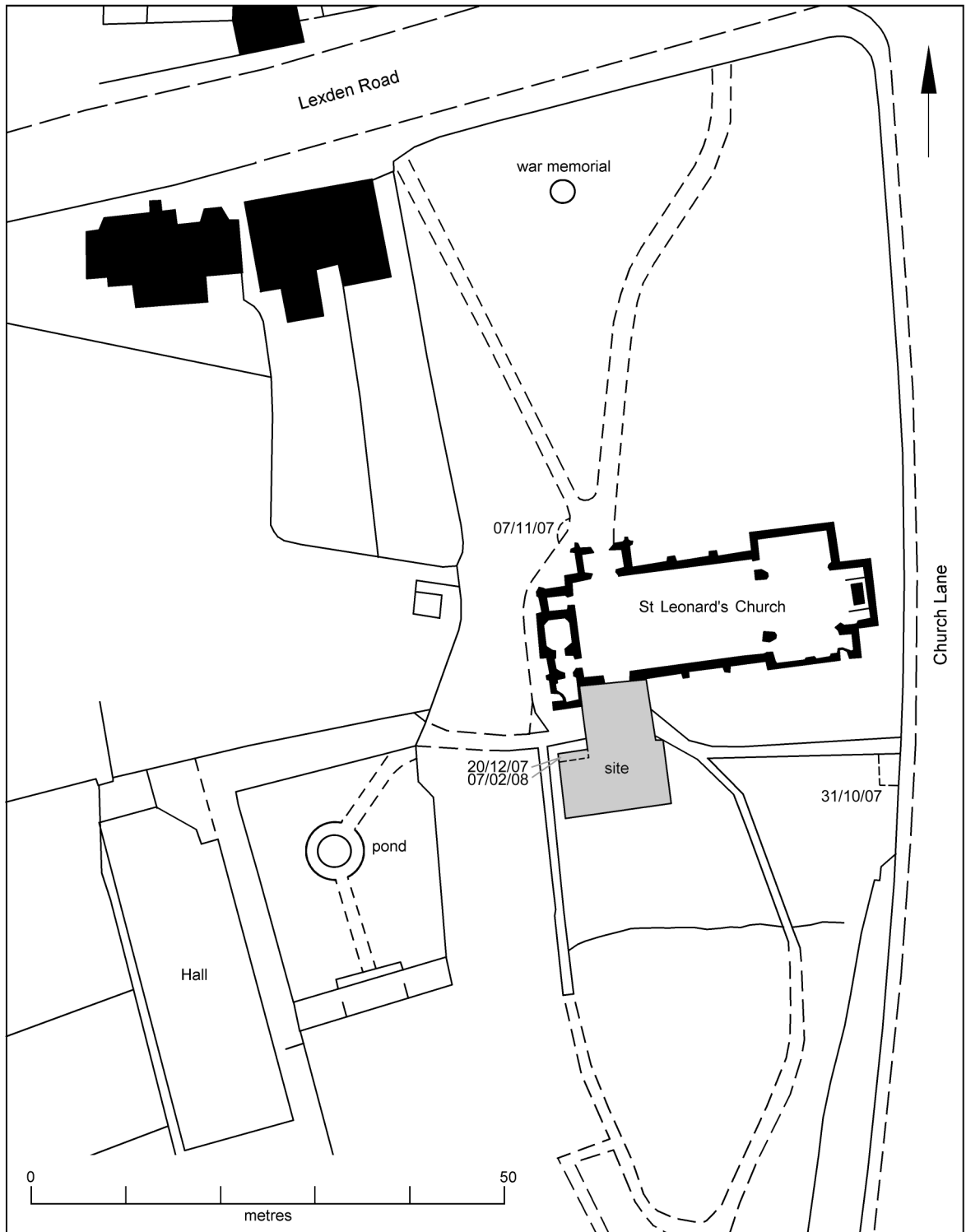


Fig 1 Site location plan, showing watching brief monitoring areas.

**Essex Historic Environment Record/
Essex Archaeology and History**

Summary sheet

Site address: St Leonard's Church, Lexden Road, Colchester	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 9713 2509	Site code: CAT project code 07/10g Museum accession code 2007.114
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: October 2007-February 2008	Size of area investigated: Approximately 150m ²
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related UAD and EHER nos: UAD no 1167 EHER nos 11807-11808
Final report:	CAT Report 482
Periods represented:	None
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>An archaeological watching brief on the new southern extension to St Leonard's Church revealed nothing of archaeological interest. Human remains found loose on the site and in the beam slot for the south wall of the extension were retained for reburial.</i>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Keywords: church, burials	Significance: neg
Author of summary: Howard Brooks	Date of summary: July 2008