

**A watching brief at  
St Nicholas' Church,  
Little Wigborough,  
Essex  
February 2005**

**report prepared by  
Carl Crossan**

**on behalf of  
the Parochial Church Council,  
St Nicholas' Church, Little Wigborough**

CAT project ref.: 05/1b  
NGR: TL 9810 1453  
Colchester Museums accession code: 2005.27



**Colchester Archaeological Trust**  
12 Lexden Road,  
Colchester,  
Essex CO3 3NF

*tel.:* (01206) 541051  
*tel./fax:* (01206) 500124  
*email:* [cc@catuk.org](mailto:cc@catuk.org)

**CAT Report 308**  
February 2005

## **Contents**

1	Summary	1
2	Introduction	1
3	Site location	1
4	Methods	1
5	Results	1
6	Findings	3
7	Archival deposition	3
8	Acknowledgements	3

Figures after p 4

EHCR summary sheet

## **List of plates and figures**

Plate 1 Trench, looking west.

Plate 2 Trench, looking north.

Fig 1 Trench plan.

Fig 2 Elevation: west side of trench and base of standing wall.

## 1 Summary

*A trench was dug by contractors to investigate the cause of subsidence in the north-west corner of the nave of the 15th-century church of St Nicholas, Little Wigborough. The 1.55m-deep trench exposed intact stone foundations beneath the north and west return walls. At the junction with the tower, the stone foundation had been removed and replaced with modern brickwork as part of the reconstruction works following the 1884 Essex earthquake. No early floors were found. Two layers of modern tile flooring and underlying mortar occupied the uppermost 25cm, beneath which was a disturbed soil which extended to the natural subsoil.*

## 2 Introduction

This report contains a structural record of an exploratory trench excavated at the 15th-century church of St Nicholas, Little Wigborough, to establish the cause of subsidence in the north-west corner of the nave. The archaeological recording was carried out by an archaeologist from the Colchester Archaeological Trust on the 8th and 9th February 2005.

## 3 Site location

St Nicholas' Church is adjacent to Copt Hall, Little Wigborough, at National Grid Reference TL 9810 1453.

## 4 Methods

Following the removal of the font, one trench was manually excavated by Bakers of Danbury against the interior north-west corner of the nave. The trench was dug to a maximum depth of 1.55m and an adjoining area of the nave floor was stripped of tiles.

## 5 Results (trench plan: Fig 1; elevation: Fig 2; Plates 1-2)

### The floors

The floor in this region of the nave is modern and consists of 15cm-square terracotta tiles bedded on a stiff cement screed which is typically 5.5cm thick. Where stripped, it was found to lie on an earlier surface of modern 2.5cm-thick, 15cm-square terracotta tiles. These were laid on a lime mortar with peg-tile, brick and slate inclusions. The modern floors and mortar occupied the uppermost 25cm of the trench. Beneath this was a mixed deposit composed mainly of dark brown clay loam with common minute fragments of shell and mortar (Layer or L2 in Fig 2). Although there were no discernible cuts in this material, the Bakers operatives found it to be slightly softer and easier to dig on the southern side of the trench. This softer region was the source of a small quantity of redeposited human bone (section 6), which suggests at least one intrusion which may have disturbed a grave. L2 appeared to extend to the top of the yellowish-brown clay subsoil which was encountered at an overall depth of 1.3m.

### The walls

At the north-west corner of the nave, the inner face of the standing wall continued to 25cm below floor-level, where it was found to rest on a mortared stone foundation (Feature or F3), the top of which typically projects 18cm beyond the wall face. The foundation was constructed of variously-sized stones including septaria, flint and ragstone, and was more heavily mortared in the uppermost 15cm. The bottom of the foundation extends 25cm into the clay subsoil and lies at an overall depth of 1.55m

below floor-level. In the area of the junction between the west nave wall and the north side of the tower, the original stone foundation had been removed and replaced with modern brickwork. Structurally, this is in two parts, coded F1 and F2 in Figures 1 and 2. The face of the upper part (F1) is more or less flush with the adjoining stone standing wall to the north and continues above floor-level. Below floor-level, F1 extends to 58cm depth where it sits on a footing (F2) which projects 22cm beyond the east face of F1. At the north side of the interface between the two, F1 overhangs F2 by 14cm as indicated in Figure 2. F2 extends to at least 1.14m below floor-level. The nature of the solid material below that point in the corner of the trench was uncertain. F1 and F2 were constructed of identical orange-red bricks each measuring 22 x 10 x 6.5cm (8<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 4 x 2<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> ins). These are assumed to be contemporary and associated with the reconstruction works following the 1884 Essex earthquake.



Plate 1 The trench, looking west.



Plate 2 The trench, looking north.

## **6 Finds**

*Pottery comment by Howard Brooks and Stephen Benfield of CAT*

Finds from the excavated soil beneath the floor (L2) included several fragments of redeposited adult human bone and one small piece of studded coffin ornamentation. These were found in the southern half of the trench where L2 was of relatively softer consistency. Pottery from about 50cm below floor-level included one overfired medieval grey ware bodysherd (10g) and one grey ware rim (26g) of uncertain but possibly Roman date. The pottery was retained and will be included in the museum archive. The human remains and other items were left on site for reburial.

## **7 Archive deposition**

The site records, finds, associated papers and digital archive are currently held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF. These will be deposited permanently with Colchester Museums under cover of museum accession code 2005.27.

## **8 Acknowledgements**

The Trust is grateful to the following for their assistance in the course of the recording work:

the Parochial Church Council, St Nicholas' Church  
English Heritage  
David Whymark Building Design and Conservation  
Essex County Council  
The Morton Partnership  
Bakers of Danbury

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### **Distribution list:**

David Andrews, Essex County Council  
David Whymark Building Design and Conservation  
Ed Morton, The Morton Partnership  
Nick Royle  
Trudi Hughes, English Heritage  
Arthur McCullam, English Heritage  
Simon Wood, Bakers of Danbury  
Essex Heritage Conservation Record, Essex County Council



**Colchester Archaeological Trust**  
12 Lexden Road,  
Colchester,  
Essex CO3 3NF

*tel.:* (01206) 541051  
*tel./fax:* (01206) 500124  
*email:* [archaeologists@catuk.org](mailto:archaeologists@catuk.org)

*Checked by:* Howard Brooks  
*Date:* 21.02.05

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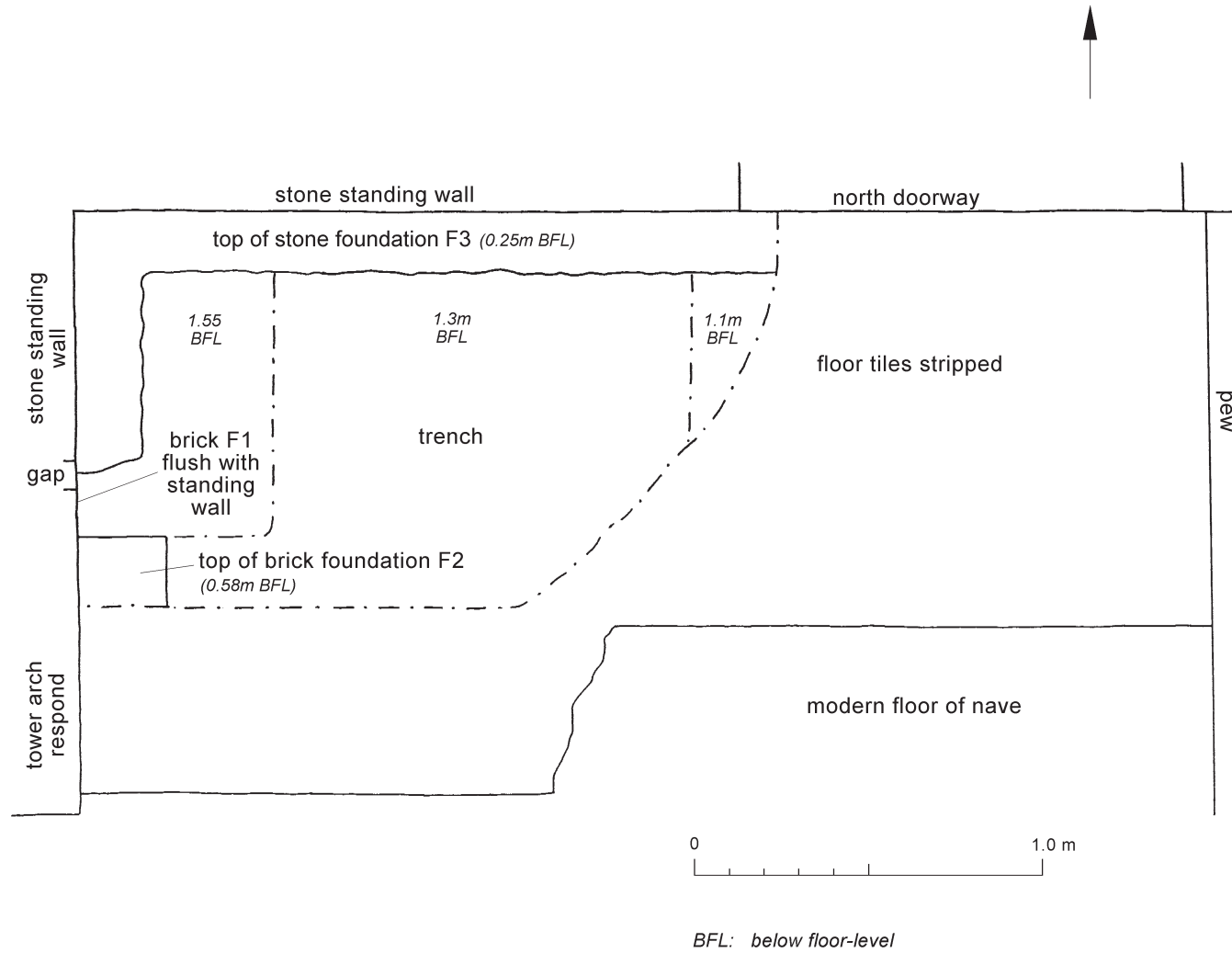


Fig 1 Trench plan.

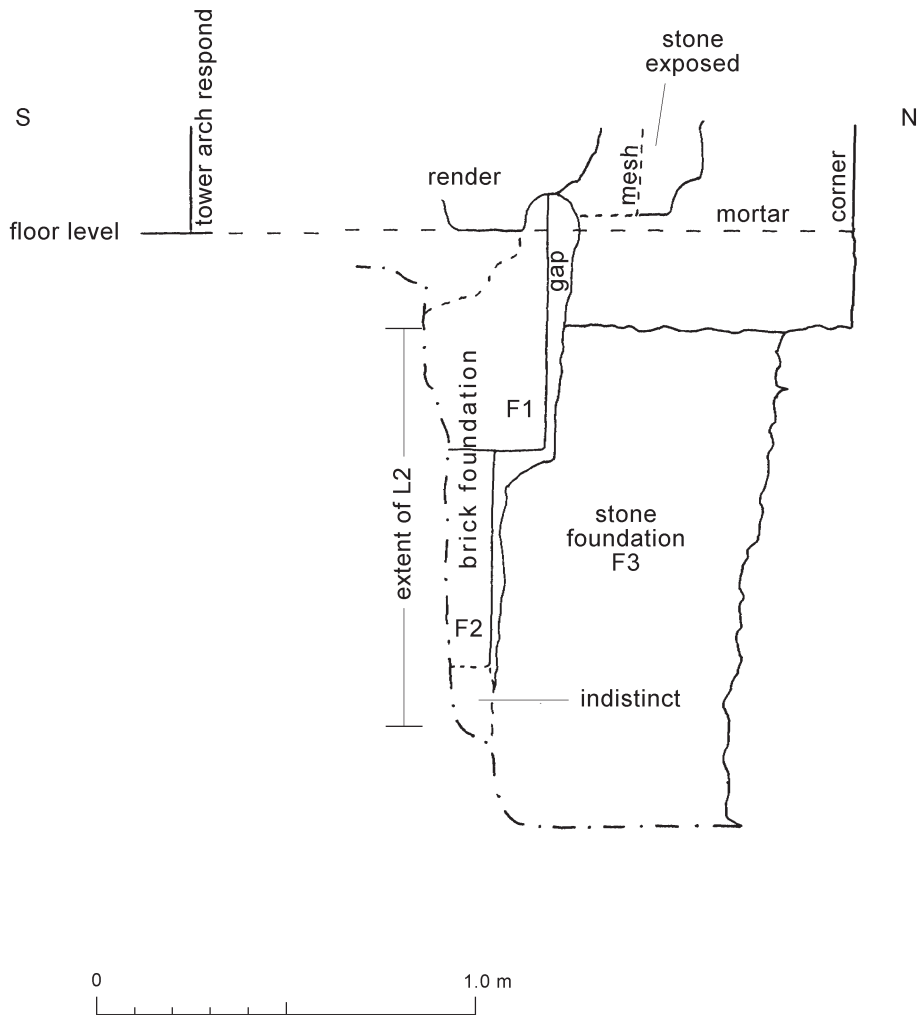


Fig 2 Elevation: west side of trench and base of standing wall.



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

**Summary sheet**

<b>Site name/address:</b> St Nicholas' Church, Little Wigborough, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Little Wigborough	<b>District:</b> Colchester Borough
<b>NGR:</b> TL 9810 1453	<b>Site code:</b> 2005.27
<b>Type of work:</b> watching brief	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> February 2005	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> approx 2 square metres
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> St Nicholas' Church PCC
<b>Further work anticipated?:</b> currently under consideration	<b>Related EHCR nos:</b>
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 308	
<b>Periods represented:</b> late medieval-modern	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b>  <i>A trench was dug by contractors to investigate the cause of subsidence in the north-west corner of the nave of the 15th-century church of St Nicholas, Little Wigborough. The 1.55m-deep trench exposed intact stone foundations beneath the north and west return walls. At the junction with the tower, the stone foundation had been removed and replaced with modern brickwork as part of the reconstruction works following the 1884 Essex earthquake. No early floors were found. Two layers of modern tile flooring and underlying mortar occupied the uppermost 25cm, beneath which was a disturbed soil which extended to the natural subsoil.</i></p>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b>	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Carl Crossan	<b>Date of summary:</b> February 2005