

Fig. 1: Location map (also showing sites examined by the P.E.M. between October 1983 and November 1984.

# Little Ilford, St. Mary the Virgin, 1984

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THE PASSMORE EDWARDS Museum (Romford Road, Stratford, London E15 4LZ) has, since its foundation, undertaken excavation and recording in the Metropolitan and South-West parts of Essex, as is reflected in its early *Collections*. Since 1973, the Museum has received an annual grant from the DoE (now HBMC for England) for rescue work in this area, and since 1st April 1983 from the GLC as part of the Greater London Archaeology Service. Archaeological work is undertaken in the five boroughs east of the River Lea and north of the River Thames by the Museum's Archaeology and Local History Section under Miss P. M. Wilkinson, Principal Assistant Curator.

## Introduction

During 1984 the Passmore Edwards Museum conducted work on numerous sites, including Ilford

(Pleistocene bones: London Borough of Redbridge); West Ham (London Borough of Newham); Barking (London Borough of Barking and Dagenham) and Romford (London Borough of Havering)(Fig. 1). This report describes the excavation conducted by the Museum between May-June and August-September 1984 in advance of floor replacement inside the church of St. Mary the Virgin, Little Ilford (Borough of Newham: TQ 4290 8528).

The Parish of Little Ilford (today within the London Borough of Newham) lies to the west of the River Roding, some six miles east of the City, on the other side of the river from Great Ilford, and half a mile south of the main road from London to

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LITTLE ILFORD, ST. MARY THE VIRGIN  
 1984 Excavations  
 Passmore Edwards Museum

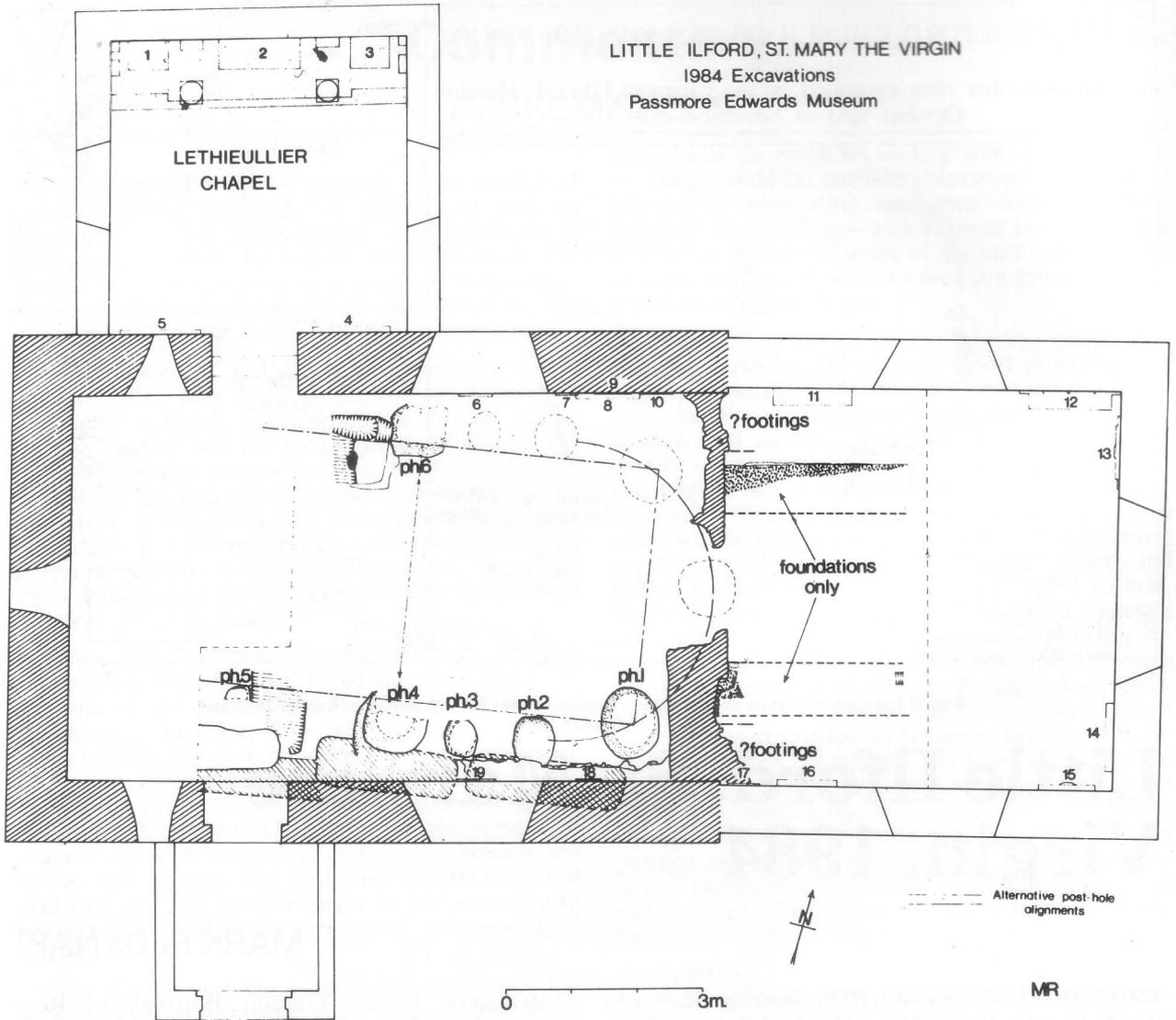


Fig. 2: Plan of the church, with the main periods represented.

Romford. The land lies approximately 8m (26ft) above sea level, dropping slightly towards the river. Little Ilford church lies on natural brickearth above dense bands of sand and gravel.

*Ilford* applied originally to the village, but during the 13th century it began to be called *Little Ilford* to distinguish it from the growing settlement of Great Ilford east of the river that also lay partly within the Forest of Essex. It seems to have developed little between the 11th and 19th centuries. In 1086 the recorded population was 10. By 1650, the parish contained only six or seven families south of the main road (with four to the north), and by 1801 there were only 15<sup>2</sup>.

The church of St. Mary the Virgin, while attracting interest in its surviving brasses, which are now set into the north wall of the nave, has escaped the attention of Victorian renovators and until recently received little detailed archaeological study. Previous reports have been based on the visible architectural details, which include three lancet windows and doors in the west of the nave, dated to the 12th century.

**Excavation results**

These are described chronologically.

- Victoria History for the County of Essex (V.C.H. Essex) Volume VI (1973) 164.

### Phase 1

One of the east-west burials excavated within the church had been cut by post-holes 1 and 2 of the subsequent church. This suggests burial taking place on this site before the erection of the timber structure of Phase 2.

### Phase 2 (late Saxon/Saxo-Norman)

Large post-holes, some 1m (3ft) in diameter, were uncovered inside the south wall of the nave, cutting into the firm natural gravels (Figs. 2 and 4). Probable locations for similar post settings to the south of the north wall of the nave had been removed by post-medieval features. Several observations can be made on the available evidence: 1) the slots and post-holes represent a late Saxon or post-Conquest timber post-built structure that preceded the earliest stone nave. 2) The fills of the post-holes are associated with 11th-early 12th century early medieval 'sand and shelly ware' cooking pots (C14 date on charcoal from fills pending). 3) Internal wall lines can be drawn, assuming opposed positions for post-holes 4 and 6, that present an alignment that varies by 5° to that of the stone nave. 4) This alignment respects that of three early pre-stone nave inhumations, which may be contem-

porary. 5) The mid-point of the misalignment of post-hole 1 conveniently fits onto an arc passing through the estimated mid-points for the north and south walls, suggesting an apsidal-ended single celled timber church. The Essex group of stone apsidal-ended churches of 11th century plan has recently been described as the work of a very localised school of builders<sup>3</sup>. The proposed Little Ilford dimensions are similar to this group, and the presence of a timber prototype to them may be considered a tenable interpretation.

### Phase 3

During the 12th century a stone church was constructed on the site of the timber building, with walls of chalk, flint and other stone above foundation trenches of rammed gravel. This gravel contained Roman material that may have been unwittingly derived from a Roman site (unknown but possibly local) by quarrying for gravel. Some Roman tile was incorporated into the standing wall structure.

The original plan of rectangular nave with small

3. R. Turner, 'Excavations at St. Mary's Church, West Bergholt, Essex, 1978' in 'Four Church Excavations in Essex', Essex County Council Occasional Paper No. 4 (1984) 59-60.

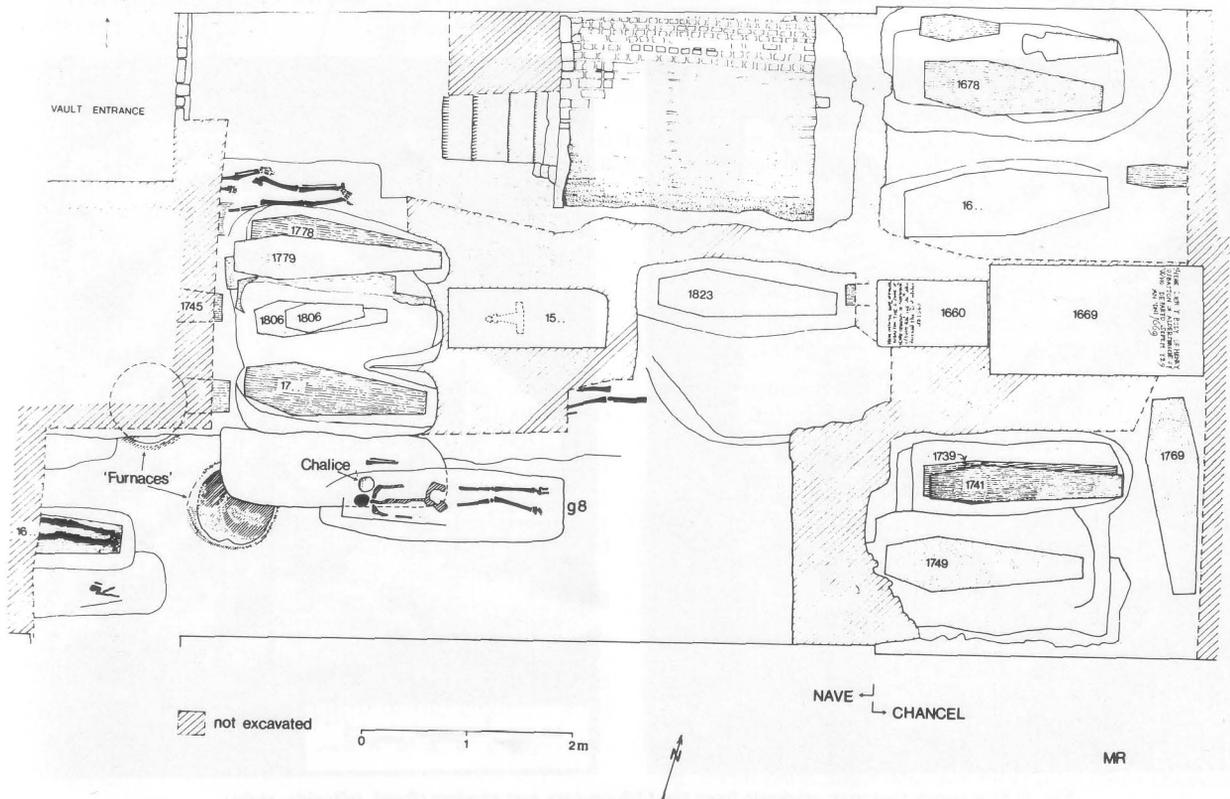


Fig. 3: Medieval (open) and post-medieval (stippled) burials.



**Fig. 4: Post-hole 1, looking south-east. The footings for the east wall of the nave are visible on the top left.**  
(Photo: M. Redknap)

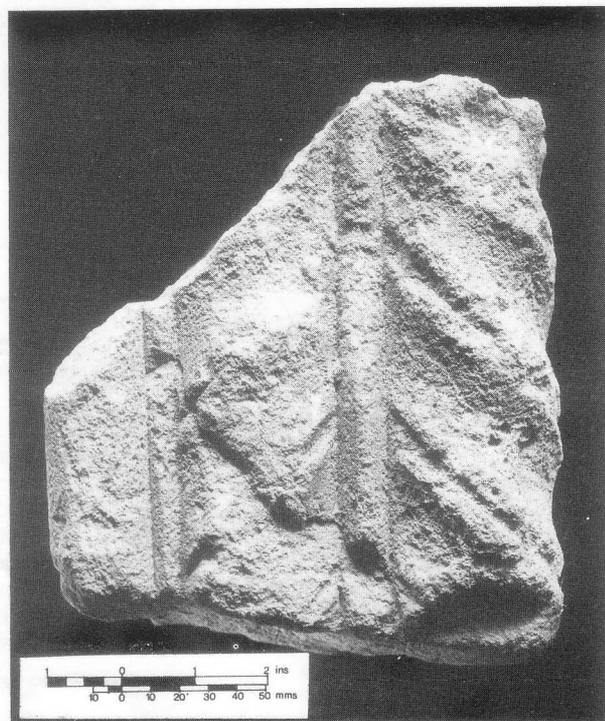
square chancel was never completed: although the foundations for the chancel were prepared, a final decision was made either to construct a larger (wider) chancel, as suggested by wider wall footings on the outer eastern side of the east wall of the nave (Fig. 2), or not to build a chancel at all. The latter possibility exists if the wider footings are interpreted as buttress footings: the east wall extended without interruption from north to south sides of the nave. All other footings for walls had been removed by subsequent burial.

A date for construction is suggested by the sandstone fragment of clustered column with cable relief (Fig. 5), similar to work on the west front of Iffley church near Oxford, dated c 1150<sup>4</sup>.

Medieval burial within the nave included one east facing grave (Fig. 3, g8) with chalice above the left shoulder. The practice of interring chalices, often without pattens, with priests, is well known, and a similar occurrence has recently been published from Little Oakley, Essex<sup>5</sup>.

Other medieval finds from the nave include 13th

4. R. Halsey, *pers. comm.*
5. M. J. Corbishley, 'Excavations at St. Mary's Church, Little Oakley, Essex 1977' in 'Four Church Excavations in Essex' *op. cit. fn. 3, 26.*



**Fig. 5: Stonework that may originate from the 12th century east window (front, left; side, right).**  
(Photo: G. Gray)



Fig. 6: The 16th/17th century tiled aisle, with early Tudor brass setting in centre foreground. The 12th century east wall of the nave runs left-right behind the brick vault.

(Photo: M. Redknap)

century grisaille glass with red-painted decoration. In 1259 William de la Pole, patron of the church, granted the advowson and one carucate of land in Ilford to Stratford Langthorne Abbey, which held it until 1538<sup>6</sup>.

#### The later phases

The memorial brass to Thomas Heron (d. 1517), son of Sir John Heron (Treasurer of the Chamber to Henry VIII), which depicts a schoolboy with ink-horn and pencase, is recorded as lying on the floor of the chancel<sup>7</sup>, providing a *terminus ante quem* for this part of the present church. No medieval activity could be identified except for the above mentioned chancel foundations. All other available evidence was of seventeenth century or later date, provided by the wall memorial to William Waldegrave (d. 1610) on the north wall of the chancel (Fig. 2, no. 12), by references in 1638 to the placing of the communion table in the centre of the chancel, with

6. V.C.H. Essex VI, 165.

7. *Ibid* 173.

8. *Ibid* 171.

benches all around, by one of the puritan rectors Morse (1607-15) or Cowdrey (1617-25)<sup>8</sup>, and by the discovery of ledger stones set in the chancel floor to the Commonwealth Rector Henry Osbaston (Fig. 7), buried facing the congregation, with a stone commemorating his son Fuller (d. 1660) at his feet.

The Osbaston stones lie immediately beneath the modern timber floor as part of a tiled central aisle and chancel area (Fig. 6) remarkable for the

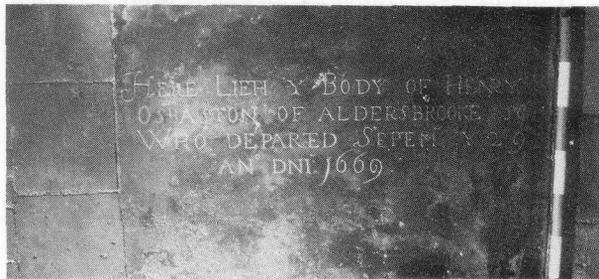


Fig. 7: East end of ledger stone over the grave of Henry Osbaston in the chancel. (Photo: M. Redknap)



**Fig. 8: The Lethieullier vault. Smart Lethieullier (d. 1760) lies second from left; John, his father (d. 1736/7) third from right.** (Photo: M. Redknap)

discovery not only of the original settings in the nave for the brass memorial to William (d. 1614) and Anne Hyde (d. 1630: Fig. 2, nos. 7 and 8), but also of a schoolboy indent similar to the surviving Thomas Heron brass, though smaller, which in the words of the antiquarian Smart Lethieullier 'either avarice, or an over-zealous aversion to some words on the inscription, has robbed'<sup>9</sup>.

### The Lethieullier Chapel

In about 1724 John Lethieullier, who acquired Aldersbrook Manor in 1693<sup>10</sup>, obtained a faculty to erect the family vault, with chapel above, at the church. Work on the vault may not have started until 1737, after his death<sup>11</sup>. Like many people, he left instructions regarding the disposal of his remains, directing that his body should 'be first opened' and then decently buried in a leaden coffin in Little

Ilford church with his late wife. He desired that his funeral should be late in the night without any pomp, and to be attended only by his relations and six pall bearers.

Recent renovation of the entrance to the vault, via steps descending from the west end of the nave, presented an opportunity to carry out thorough recording of the vault and its contents, thereby performing what Smart Lethieullier, John's son, advocated 200 years ago: 'if, by any means, the true owners of such forgotten monuments could be revived, and the original intent of preserving their memory restored, it were at least an entertaining, not to say a meritorious labour'<sup>12</sup> (Fig. 8). Smart, who had been born at Aldersbrook in 1701 (and baptised in the church), was a great collector of fossils and antiquities, and an early F.S.A.<sup>13</sup>. He

9. S. Lethieullier, 'Mr. Lethieullier's Observations on Sepulchral Monuments in a Letter to James West, Esq;' *Archaeologia* 2 (1791) 291-300, esp. 297.

10. For excavations there, see J. P. Camp, 'Rescue Excavations at Aldersbrook Manor, Essex, 1972-3' *Essex Archaeol and Hist* 8 (1976) 200-208.

11. C. H. I. Chown, 'The Lethieullier Family of Aldersbrook House. Part I' *Essex Review* 35 (1926) 203-20.

12. Lethieullier, *op. cit.* fn. 9, 291.

13. C. H. I. Chown, 'The Lethieullier Family of Aldersbrook House. Part II' *Essex Review* 36 (1927) 1-21.

published in the early volumes of *Archaeologia* and the *Philosophical Transactions*, and his numerous unpublished notes include extremely valuable manuscript accounts of Barking and the Roman remains at Wanstead Park (1715 and 1745).

### Burial practice

During the excavation, 1:1 tracings of all coffins, most of which were well preserved, were made. These will be used to produce, on paper, reconstructions to illustrate fitting arrangements and methods of packing. Many had been constructed of elm; once the insides of the coffins had been sealed with pitch or similar material, the bodies were packed in aromatic sawdust. The 17th and 18th century fittings, carpentry and construction usefully illustrate the art of the plumbers and upholsterers of the period: for example the coffin belonging to Francis Osbaston, High Sheriff of the County, (d. 1678), who lies with his sons Francis and Henry on the north side of the chancel (Fig. 3), is an early example of decorative 'skull and crossbones' design executed in dome-headed brass upholstery pins. One interesting example was found of an 18th century north-south burial (John Barlow, d. 1769; Fig.3).

### Conclusions

The discovery of a timber post-built late Saxon or Saxo-Norman church, possibly with an apsidal end, and its subsequent colourful development reflect the population size and pastoral demands of the parish.

Evidence was found for burial on the site before the existence of church buildings, and the finds, which include Roman material and a possible Saxon sherd, prompt future research.

### Acknowledgements

This report and the photographs, the copyright of which belong to the Passmore Edwards Museum, are published with the permission of Ian Robertson, Curator of the Passmore Edwards Museum. Grateful acknowledgement is made to the Greater London Council for providing most of the funding for the excavation, and to the staff of the Passmore Edwards Museum for all their assistance, in particular G. Gray, the Museum photographer and K. Walker, Assistant Curator, Conservation Section. This work was only possible with the backing and support of many organisations and people. In particular, I would like to thank the Church Authorities and the Rector of St. Mary's, John Whitwell, for their support, to Rhoda Brockington and the parishioners for their help and interest in the excavation, and all the diggers who have enthusiastically produced results. Special thanks are due to Julian Litten (Victoria and Albert Museum), Mark Bowis and Margorie Trusted (Victoria and Albert Museum) who have been exceptionally helpful in discussing burial practice and participating on site. The Reference Libraries for the London Boroughs of Newham and Redbridge have also been extremely helpful.

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## Excavations & Post-Excavation Work

**City**, by Museum of London, Department of Urban Archaeology. A series of long term excavations. Enquiries to DUA, Museum of London, London Wall, E.C.2 (01-600 3699).

**Croydon & District**. Processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collection every Tuesday throughout the year. Archaeological reference collection of fabric types, domestic animal bones, clay tobacco pipes and glass ware also available for comparative work. Hon. Curator, Croydon Natural History & Scientific Society Ltd., Museum Building, Croydon Biology Centre, Chipstead Valley Road, Coulsdon, Surrey. (01-660 3841 or 22 43727).

**Hammersmith & Fulham**, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group. Processing of material from Sandford Manor and Fulham High Street. Tuesdays, 7.45 p.m.-10 p.m. at Fulham Palace, Bishop's Avenue, Fulham Palace Road, S.W.6. Contact Keith Whitehouse, 86 Clancarty Road, S.W.6. (01-731 0338).

**Inner and North London Boroughs**, by the Museum of London, Department of Greater London Archaeology (Inner/North London). Several rescue sites in various areas. (01-242 6620).

**Kingston**, by Kingston upon Thames Archaeological Society. Rescue sites in the town centre. Enquiries to Marion Hinton, Kingston Heritage Centre, Fairfield Road, Kingston. (01-546 5386).

**North-East London Boroughs**, by Passmore Edwards Museum. Enquiries to Pat Wilkinson, Passmore Edwards Museum, Romford Road, E.15. (01-534 4545).

**South-West London Boroughs**, by Museum of London, Department of Greater London Archaeology (South-West London). Excavations and processing. Enquiries to Scott McCracken, St. Luke's House, Sandycombe Road, Kew. (01-940 5989).

**Southwark and Lambeth**, by Museum of London, Department of Greater London Archaeology (Southwark and Lambeth). Several sites from the Roman period onwards. Enquiries to Derek Seeley, Port Medical Centre, English Grounds, Morgan's Lane, SE1 2HT. (01-407 1989).

**Surrey**, by Surrey Archaeological Unit. Enquiries to David Bird, County Archaeological Officer, Planning Department, County Hall, Kingston, Surrey. (01-546 1050 x3665).

**Vauxhall Pottery**, by Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society. Processing of excavated material continues three nights a week. Enquiries to S.L.A.S., c/o Cuming Museum, 155 Walworth Road, S.E.17 (01-703 3324).

**West London Boroughs**, by West London Archaeological Field Group. Enquiries to 273A Brentford High Street, Brentford, Middlesex. (01-560 3880).

*The Council for British Archaeology produces a monthly Calendar of Excavations from March to September, with an extra issue in November and a final issue in January summarising the main results of field work. The Calendar gives details of extra-mural courses, summer schools, training excavations and sites where volunteers are needed. The annual subscription is £5.50 post-free, which should be made payable to C.B.A., 112 Kennington Road, S.E. 11. (01-582 0494).*