

**ST PETER'S CHURCH  
SOUTH WEALD  
ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING AND RECORDING**



**Essex County Council  
Field Archaeology Unit**

**MARCH 2011**



**ST PETER'S CHURCH  
SOUTH WEALD  
ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING AND RECORDING**

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**ST PETER'S CHURCH  
SOUTH WEALD  
ESSEX:**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING AND RECORDING**

Client: Fergusons Chartered Architects for St Peter's Parochial Church Council

NGR: TQ 57130 93869

Planning Application No.: BRW/59/2007

Site Code: SWSP10

Oasis No.: 83889

Dates of Fieldwork: 19th March to 23 September 2010

**SUMMARY**

Archaeological monitoring and recording was undertaken during groundworks for the construction of a new extension on the north side of Saint Peter's Church, South Weald. The monitored area covered 200 sq metres and included the footprint of the new building and its associated service trenches.

No evidence of any medieval or post-medieval church buildings was identified within the development area, nor any related to earlier occupation within the churchyard. The positions of eight graves were recorded along with two brick-built tombs. The recovered coffin furniture indicated a probable Victorian date for two of the graves, whilst brick fragments from a third point to a later post-medieval date for this burial. None of the other graves was dated. Human remains were not recorded and where ever possible were left *in situ*. Any remains disturbed by the building works were gathered together for later reburial.

Of the two brick-built tombs, one was constructed from unfrogged late 18th or early 19th century bricks and the other from frogged bricks that date from the mid 19th century onwards. In addition a copper alloy-studded timber fragment was recovered that was formerly part of a coffin from a disturbed burial of possible late 18th or early 19th century date. Also recovered were five fragments of unstratified worked stone that included a fragment of stone window mullion of probable medieval date.

The centre of the site had been heavily disturbed by the former 1981 extension and its subsequent removal prior to this redevelopment.





## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This report presents the results of a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording at St Peter's Church (TQ 57130 93869), conducted by Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) prior to the construction of an extension to the northern side of the church. The fieldwork was undertaken in response to a condition (BRW/59/2007) placed upon the development by Brentwood Borough Council following advice from Essex County Council Historic Environment Management team (ECC HEM), given in line with Planning Policy Guidance note 16 (DoE 1990), now replaced by Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment. The fieldwork was carried out in accordance with a brief issued by ECC HEM (2007) and a written scheme of investigation prepared by ECC FAU (2009), and was monitored by ECC HEM on behalf of the local planning authority.

Bound and digital copies of this report will be supplied to Fergusons Chartered Architects (including a copy for the Local Planning Authority and the Parochial Church Council), ECC HEM and the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER). A digital copy of the report will be uploaded on the online access to the index of archaeological investigations ([www.oasis.ac.uk](http://www.oasis.ac.uk)). Copies of the report and the site archive will be deposited at Chelmsford Museum.

## **2.0 BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Location, Geology and Topography (Fig. 1)**

St Peter's church and its churchyard are situated to the north of South Weald village centre, two miles to the west of Brentwood (TQ 57130 93869) (Fig. 1). The site is located on the southern border of Weald Country Park and is bounded to the south by Weald Road. A car park is situated to the east while the western boundary comprises a residential property. The surface geology is glacial clay overlain by mixed silty sandy clay subsoil.

### **2.2 History and Archaeology**

The following archaeological background is based on the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) held by Essex CC at County Hall, Chelmsford.

A late Iron Age hillfort (EHER 530) is located to the north of the site and is the only evidence of pre-Saxon settlement around the site (Isserlin 1995; Powell 1983). South Weald parish is

first documented in Domesday Book with two manors, one of which is thought to be located around the South Weald village area indicating a late Saxon presence (Rumble 1983).

During the medieval period South Weald grew into a small village focused on the church and Hall complex (EHER 19297). The church is grade II\* listed and dates from the 12th century (EHER 634, 635, 27451). The south aisle (the former nave) was built in the 12th century and a north aisle was added in the mid-13th century. The latter was rebuilt in the 15th century and the west tower was constructed around 1500 AD. The church was extensively remodelled during the 19th century. Work included refacing or rebuilding of the south aisle, the demolition of the north aisle and the construction of a new nave and chancel. In 1981 an extension was added to the northern side of the Victorian nave. This extension was demolished prior to the commencement of the archaeological fieldwork.

The existing church walls are built of flint-rubble with bands of freestone, the tower is ashlar and dressings are of limestone. The 19th century nave and chancel contain a number of reset features including 12th and 15th century doorways and 15th century windows. The churchyard wall contains 14th or 15th century mullion fragments.

### **3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The general aim of the archaeological monitoring was to record any surviving archaeological remains affected by the groundworks for the extension, with the specific objective to investigate any surviving evidence of the medieval and post-medieval church and churchyard, or any earlier occupation of the site.

### **4.0 METHOD**

Monitoring was undertaken on groundworks associated with the new extension. These comprised initial ground clearance and excavation of footings for the new building followed by the excavation of trenches for new sewer and gas pipes. The total observed area was approximately 200 square metres. Grave cuts were to be archaeologically planned without excavation. Wherever possible human remains were left *in situ*. Any remains unavoidably disturbed by the groundworks were gathered together for re-internment by the parish elsewhere in the churchyard.

Standard ECC FAU excavation, artefact collection and recording methodologies were employed throughout. ECC FAU is a Registered Archaeological Organisation with the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) and all work was carried out in accordance with IfA by-laws and guidelines (IfA 1997; 2008) and complied with Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England (Gurney 2003).

## **5.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS (Fig. 1)**

### **5.1 Preliminary Site Visit**

A site visit was undertaken on 7th August 2007 by Mark Atkinson of ECC FAU to monitor the digging of two test pits within the footprint of the proposed new building. Test Pit 1 was situated on the western side of an existing brick vault situated to the north-east of the 1981 extension and Test Pit 2 was located against the northern wall of the extension. The stratigraphy revealed within Test Pit 1 indicated that the ground level had been raised. An *in situ* 'body stone'-type gravestone was found at the west end of the trench buried beneath c. 0.5m of made ground, whilst buried masonry walling above the brick vault suggested ground here had been made up by c. 0.40m. A 1917 penny was found in the soil above the body stone indicating that the ground may have been raised in the early 20th century. Test Pit 2 revealed that the 1981 works had removed the topsoil around the extension and that the concrete foundation for this building extended to a depth of 1.3m. Human bones within the backfill indicate that earlier graves were disturbed during its construction.

### **5.2 Initial clearance**

During initial clearance of the site two brick-vaulted tombs (A and B) were partially uncovered and broken into by the contractor. Both were located beneath the former extension.

Tomb A was 2.35m long by 1.25m wide and c. 1.5m deep. Its walls were two bricks wide and constructed from frogged yellow stock bricks bonded together with lime-based mortar. The interior of the tomb was painted white with single black stripes down each of the four corners. The contents of the tomb were covered in spoil and not visible.

Tomb B was 2.5m long by 1.5m wide and c. 1.5m deep. Its walls were two bricks wide and constructed from orange-red un-frogged bricks bonded with lime-based mortar. Additional cement bonding suggested that the tomb had been repaired in modern times. Although the contents were partly covered by builders spoil pieces of a studded wooden coffin were visible

(Plate 1) along with a small stack of bones in the south-west corner that implied later disturbance.. Overlying the vault was a large piece of folded-up lead sheet, presumably either from a lead coffin or the roof of the church. Also recovered unstratified from the initial groundworks was a large piece of architectural stone from a former window mullion (Plate 2) .

### **5.3 Extension and footings**

The new extension/footings trench was on average about 1m deep including 0.20m of topsoil that had been removed from the internal area of the footprint. The overburden was shallower (0.5m, without topsoil) in the south near to the church, becoming deeper to the north (1.1m with topsoil). The central area of the site had been heavily disturbed by the former (demolished) extension with re-deposited modern material including brick rubble extending to the base of the trench. The foundations of the demolished building consisted of 'slabs' of poured concrete 0.5m wide and 1m deep. Elsewhere, mid greyish brown clay silt subsoil containing occasional flecks of brick and tile was sealed by 0.20m of topsoil and in places also by an intervening layer of re-deposited brown clay.

The outlines of four graves were observed in the base of the trench. Loose on the surface of Grave 1 in the north-east of the development area were a number of encrusted iron objects and nails which were retained for analysis (Plate 3). After cleaning the objects were revealed as a complete coffin handle, attached to its escutcheon and a fragment from a second handle both probably dating to the first half of the 19th century. Two fragments of post-medieval brick were recovered from the backfill of Grave 2.

In the west of the footprint was a partially exposed fragment of soft and decomposing timber, 0.37m long and 0.03m thick, covered in copper alloy studs (Plate 4) some of which were retained for analysis. Although clearly originally part of a coffin the timber did not appear to be *in situ*.

Three fragments of unstratified worked stone were recovered by the builder's during the excavation of the new footings. One of the fragments was possibly part of a grave kerbstone and another part of a gravestone. All three were photographed (Plates 5, 6 and 7) and sketched (in archive) but not retained.

## **5.4 Service trenches**

### **5.4.1 Sewage pipe trench**

An east to west aligned sewage pipe trench was excavated down to a depth of 1.6m from the present surface level, along the north side of the church. This service trench followed the line of an earlier sewage pipe trench excavated during the 1981 improvements. The drain pipe was present to a depth of 1.1m along the southern side of the trench.

Grave 3 was identified at the base of the trench, 1.6m below the present surface level. A coffin handle was retained and is reported upon below (6.3). Many bones, representing at least four individual skeletons, were exhumed. Their condition (disarticulated, with many of the bones appearing frayed at the ends) and presence within the backfill of the service trench shows that they had been disturbed by the 1981 groundworks.

### **5.4.2 Gas service trench**

A gas service trench measuring 0.4m wide by 0.9m deep, was excavated on a north-west to south-east alignment from the sewage pipe trench. Three undisturbed burials were present at the base of the trench. All were aligned east-north-east to west-south-west and contained a dark grey brown silty fill. None was excavated

A cylindrical piece of worked stone was uncovered within the topsoil during the excavation of the gas service trench (Plate 8). A notch at one end indicates that this was designed to adjoin to another piece of worked stone and probably originally part of a column.

## **6.0 FINDS by Joyce Compton**

Finds were recovered from three disturbed graves. All of the finds have been recorded by count and weight, in grams, by context. Full quantification details can be found in Appendix 1. The finds are described by category below.

### **6.1 Copper alloy studs**

A number of copper alloy studs, still fixed onto pieces of wood from the coffin, were collected from a fragmentary timber in the west of the site. These studs, in either copper alloy or iron, were mostly used to attach fabric to the outside of the coffin, but were also used to form decorative patterns. The South Weald studs have evidently been used for fixing cloth, since remains of a plain-weave fabric are trapped beneath the heads. A loose stud also retains a piece of fabric, pierced by the shaft. The nature and colour of the fabric cannot now be

determined, due to decay and staining from the surrounding clay soil. Fabric remains are also attached to the underside of one piece of coffin wood, which has studs on the upper surface and on one contiguous side; the piece is probably the remains of a coffin lid. The studs also have traces of gilding. Studs were very often painted black, especially if used with black fabric. A coffin from St Luke's, Old Street (Boyle *et al* 2005), has double borders of studs, very similar in form and size to those from South Weald. This cemetery was in use from the late 18th to early 19th centuries, and the South Weald studs are likely to be of the same date.

## **6.2 Iron nails**

One 2½" and two 3" iron coffin nails were recovered from Grave 1. All have mineralised wood attached to the shaft and around the head.

## **6.3 Iron coffin handles**

A complete coffin handle, attached to its escutcheon, and a handle fragment were recovered, from Grave 1. Both are encrusted with corrosion products, but mechanical removal of these has revealed some details. The handles are roughly semi-circular in plan with a flat back and a swollen grip, in the manner of drawer-handles. The grips of both examples carry simple decoration in the form of three moulded ribs rising from each side of a plain central point. There is a step which narrows the handle to one side of the main decoration, but the ribs appear to continue around the curve of the handle. The escutcheon has a prominent boss, presumably with suitably similar decoration although, unfortunately, corrosion products still obscure the detail. The robust style of the handles suggests a Victorian date, perhaps first half of the 19th century.

Excavation of the gas service trench produced an additional coffin handle from Grave 3, which was examined by H. Walker. It is complete, but like the previous examples highly corroded and no detail is discernable. The handle is D-shaped in plan with a flat back and may also be of Victorian date.

## **6.4 Brick**

Two brick fragments were recovered from Grave 2. One corner piece has a depth of 47mm and, using the typology in Ryan (1996, 94-6), a late 17th to early 18th-century date is suggested. The fragments are probably remnants from church renovations rather than from a brick burial vault.

## **6.5 Worked stone** by Trevor Ennis

Five pieces of worked stone (probably all limestone) were recovered. A 0.55m long fragment of limestone window mullion with small square holes for glazing bars on both sides (Plate 2) was recovered from the initial ground clearance. Three further fragments of worked stone were recovered from the excavation of the footings and a fourth from the excavation of the gas service trench. The first fragment was of unknown function. It was roughly rectangular in shape, 0.42m long by 0.24m wide, with a square cut-out on one side (Plate 5). The second fragment, possibly part of a grave kerbstone, measured 0.44m long by 0.12m wide and 0.15m high. It had flat surfaces, other than where broken, and a single beaded edge (Plate 6). The third fragment was 0.67m long by 0.26m wide and 0.33m high and appeared to be part of a broken gravestone (Plate 7). The fourth fragment was a cylindrical piece of architectural stone approximately 0.75m wide by 0.5m in diameter. The fragment had a notch at one end (Plate 8) and was probably one section from a column, perhaps formerly part of a monument or tomb.

All of the worked stone fragments were recovered from unstratified contexts. The stone window mullion may have come from a demolished part of the church and some of the other stone fragments from destroyed or broken grave-related features. None of the worked stone was dated. However, it is reasonable to assume that the fragment of window mullion is likely to be of medieval date, particularly as other fragments of stone mullion of 14th or 15th century date are known to have been incorporated into the church yard wall (HER 634).

All of the worked stone was photographed on site but not removed.

## **6.6 Recommendations**

Further work is not required on any of the finds. In accordance with the brief, the coffin furniture will be returned for re-burial in the churchyard. The brick fragments have been discarded.

## **7.0 DISCUSSION**

No remains of prehistoric, Roman, Saxon or medieval date were identified during the monitoring. One fragment of stone window mullion of probable medieval date was recovered unstratified from the initial ground clearance. The positions of eight graves were recorded along with two brick-built tombs. The recovered coffin furniture indicated a probable Victorian

date for Graves 1 and 3, whilst brick fragments from Grave 2 point to a later post-medieval date for this burial. None of the other graves was dated.

The studded timber fragment was probably part of an additional disturbed burial of possible late 18th or early 19th century date. Similar studding was noted on pieces of coffin timber observed within Tomb B. This tomb was constructed from unfrogged bricks of similar later 18th or early 19th century date. The internally painted Tomb A was most likely of Victorian date as it was constructed from frogged bricks which date from the mid-19th century onwards. Both tombs were located within the footprint of the 1981 extension, presumably sealed beneath the floor.

## **8.0 ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS**

The small number of dated burial features recorded within the development area all appear to date to the later 18th or 19th century. It is possible that some of the other graves are earlier but none was archaeologically investigated. No evidence of any medieval or post-medieval church buildings was identified within the footprint of the new development, nor any pertaining to earlier occupation within the churchyard. The centre of the site was heavily disturbed by the 1981 extension and its subsequent removal. Any human remains disturbed by the groundworks were retained for reburial elsewhere within the churchyard.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The ECC FAU would like to thank Fergusons Chartered Architects, in particular Mr. D. Ferguson, for commissioning the archaeological investigation on behalf of the Parochial Church Council for St Peter's, South Weald. The fieldwork was undertaken by Mark Germany, Trevor Ennis and Phillippa Sparrow of the ECC Field Archaeology Unit. The finds were analysed by Joyce Compton and Helen Walker. The report was prepared by Trevor Ennis and Phillippa Sparrow with illustrations by Andrew Lewsey. The project was managed by Patrick Allen and monitored on behalf of the Local Planning Authority by Adam Garwood of ECC HEM.



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## APPENDIX 1: FINDS DATA

Feature	Count	Weight	Description	Date
Grave 1	3	32	Iron nails, decayed wood attached, lengths 60mm and 71mm (Discarded)	Post-med.
	2	620	Iron coffin handle and escutcheon, single corroded mass; iron coffin handle fragment (Discarded)	Post med.
Grave 2	2	96	Brick fragments, regular-sided, a corner piece is 47mm deep (Discarded)	Post med.
Grave 3	1	209	Iron coffin handle, complete, 150mm in length, corroded (ID by H. Walker 05/10/10)	Post-med
Timber fragment	7	38	Copper alloy studs, head dia 12mm, six embedded in wood, one loose, traces of gilding on domed surfaces, cloth remains under studs (Discarded)	Post med.

## **APPENDIX 2: CONTENTS OF ARCHIVE**

**Site Name:** ST PETER'S CHURCH, SOUTH WEALD, ESSEX

**Site Code:** SWSP10

### **Index to the Archive**

File containing:

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Brief for evaluation
- 1.2 WSI for evaluation

#### **2. Research Archive**

- 2.1 Evaluation report
- 2.2 Finds report
- 2.3 CD Rom

#### **3. Site Archive**

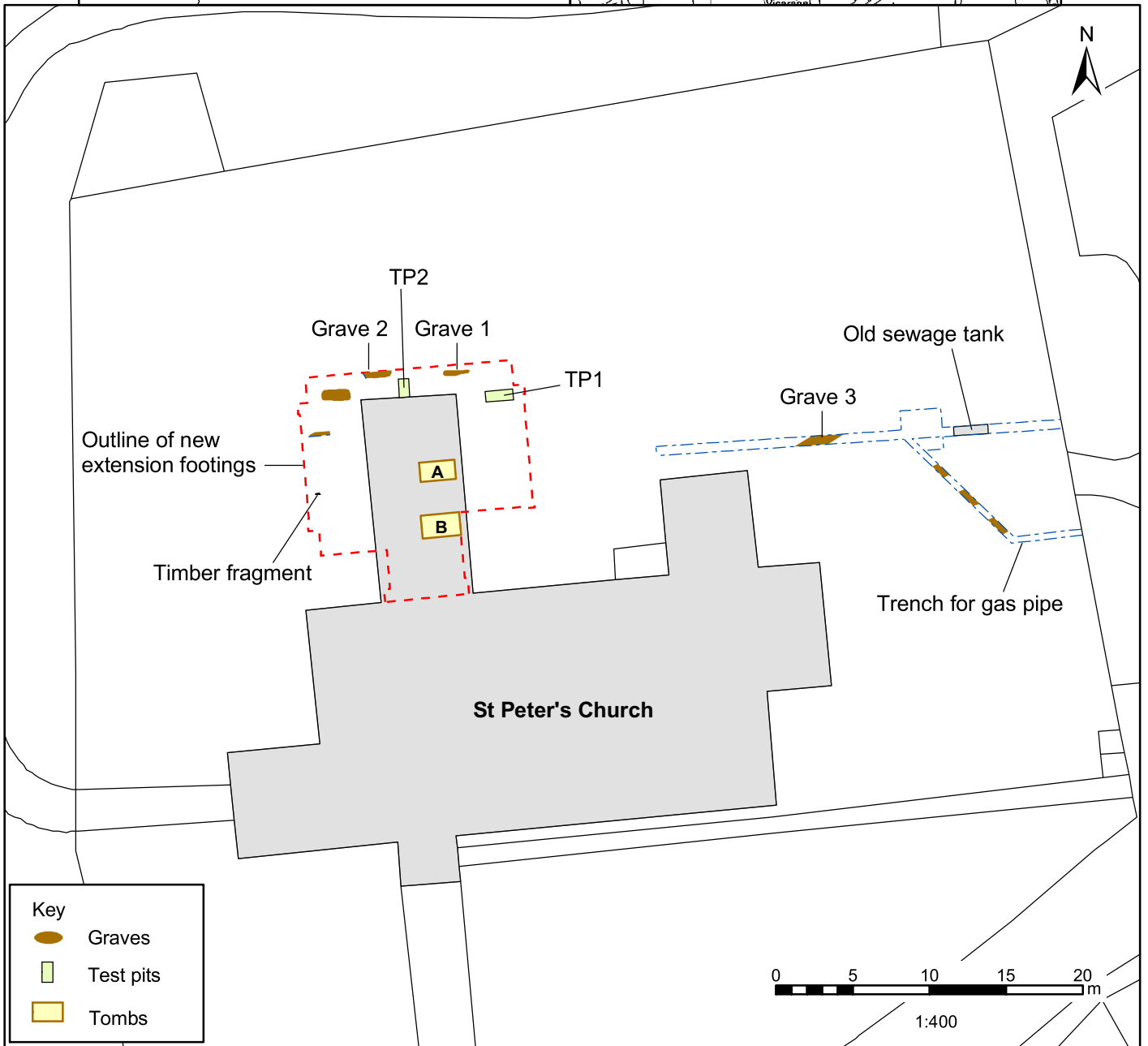
- 3.1 Context record register
- 3.2 Original context records 1 - 3
- 3.4 Plan register
- 3.5 Section register
- 3.6 2x A4 plan/section sheets
- 3.7 Photographic register
- 3.8 1 set of B/W prints and 1 set of colour contact prints + digital images on disk
- 3.9 Miscellaneous maps, notes and plans

#### **Not in Files:**

- 1 large plan drawing

### APPENDIX 3: ESSEX HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD SUMMARY

<b>Site Name/Address:</b> St Peter's Church, South Weald, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> South Weald	<b>Borough:</b> Brentwood
<b>NGR:</b> TQ 57130 93869	<b>Site Code:</b> SWSP10
<b>Type of Work:</b> Archaeological monitoring and recording	<b>Site Director/Team:</b> Mark Germany, Trevor Ennis and Phillippa Sparrow ECC FAU
<b>Dates of Work:</b> 19th March to 23 September 2010	<b>Size of Area Investigated:</b> 200 sq m
<b>Curating Museum:</b> Chelmsford	<b>Funding Source:</b> Parochial Church Council
<b>Further Work Anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related HER Nos.</b> 634, 635, 27451
<b>Final Report:</b> Summary in EAH	<b>OASIS Ref:</b> 83889
<b>Periods Represented:</b> Post-medieval	
<p><b>SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:</b></p> <p>Archaeological monitoring and recording was undertaken during groundworks for the construction of a new extension on the north side of Saint Peter's Church, South Weald. The monitored area covered 200 sq metres and included the footprint of the new building and its associated service trenches.</p> <p>No evidence of any medieval or post-medieval church buildings was identified within the development area, nor any related to earlier occupation within the churchyard. The positions of eight graves were recorded along with two brick-built tombs. The recovered coffin furniture indicated a probable Victorian date for two of the graves, whilst brick fragments from a third point to a later post-medieval date for this burial. None of the other graves was dated. Human remains were not recorded and where ever possible were left <i>in situ</i>. Any remains disturbed by the building works were gathered together for later reburial.</p> <p>Of the two brick-built tombs, one was constructed from unfrogged late 18th or early 19th century bricks and the other from frogged bricks that date from the mid 19th century onwards. In addition a copper alloy-studded timber fragment was recovered that was formerly part of a coffin from a disturbed burial of possible late 18th or early 19th century date. Also recovered were five fragments of unstratified worked stone that included a fragment of stone window mullion of probable medieval date.</p> <p>The centre of the site had been heavily disturbed by the former 1981 extension and its subsequent removal prior to this redevelopment.</p>	
<b>Previous Summaries/Reports:</b> None	
<b>Author of Summary:</b> T. Ennis	<b>Date of Summary:</b> March 2011



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Fig.1. Location of areas of archaeological monitoring



Plate 1. Tomb B looking west (0.5m scale)



Plate 2. Window mullion (0.5m scale)



Plate 3. Grave 1 with coffin nails in foreground (1m scale)





Plate 4. Studded timber fragment looking south (0.25m scale)



Plate 5. Worked stone (1m scale)





Plate 6. Possible grave kerbstone (1m scale)



Plate 7. Possible gravestone (1m scale)

Plate 8. Cylindrical fragment  
(0.5m scale)

