

2015

# St Nicholas' Church



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# The History of St Nicholas' Church, Angmering

The village of Angmering is mentioned as early as the Domesday Book, where it is referred to as 'Angemare' or 'Langemare'. Originally the local area was divided into three parishes, each with its own church, representing East Angmering, West Angmering and Bargham. Of these three churches only St Margaret's (West Angmering) is still in operation and little remains of the village's second church, that of St Nicholas (East Angmering). This eastern parish church would once have been a central element of Angmering village life, but all that remains of the buildings today are small amounts of foundation stone buried beneath the grassy area known as St Nicholas' Gardens.

St Nicholas' almost certainly had its foundation during the Saxon period, sometime prior to 1066. Little is currently known of its early beginnings but by the 12<sup>th</sup> century it would seem that the early phase of the church had been replaced by a typical Norman style of construction, similar to that of churches still standing in villages such as Sompting and Rustington.

The church was in use for some 400 years, during which the buildings underwent several phases of adaptation and addition. However by the late 16<sup>th</sup> century the church was closed and eventually demolished, with the stone likely being recycled into local building projects. Interment records allow us to trace the active use of St



St Nicholas' Church Drawn from Bedwin's plans - © Bob Turner

Nicholas' until 1559; but from this point the East Angmering church falls from use as the three local parishes merge and St Margaret's is adopted as the sole Angmering church. Anything of value would have been transferred to St Margaret's and the ground on which St Nicholas' once stood was transformed into a rector's garden.

Following the church's demolition, the site of St Nicholas' cycled through various uses. In 1838 the site was recorded as a garden and by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was being used as a playing field for the village school. Most recently the land has been bought by Arun District Council (ADC) and designated by Angmering Parish Council (APC) as a site of recreation for the village.

## Bedwin's 1974 Excavation

The site of St Nicholas' church lay undisturbed, preserved in local memory, from the 16<sup>th</sup> through to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It wasn't until 1974, when proposed building work threatened to destroy the site, and the remains of the church, that archaeologist Owen Bedwin undertook an examination of the site.

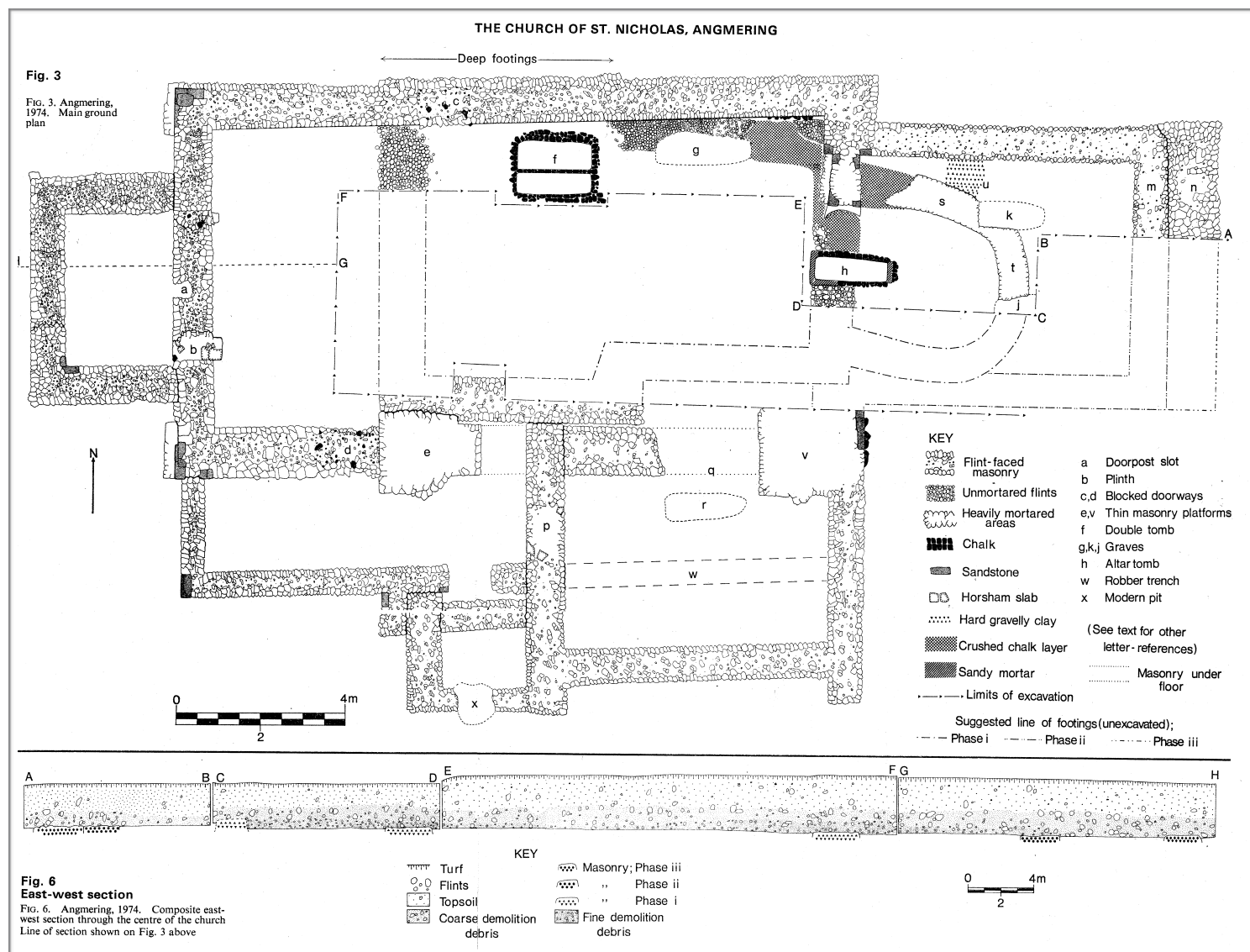
During this project Bedwin focused on establishing an overall floor plan for the church, and began to develop a timeframe of its phases of construction and change. However Bedwin's excavation was carried out using archaeological methods of its time, with the trenches being

placed through a combination of onsite observations, old maps and records intermixed with a little bit of luck (Bedwin, 1974). Today, thanks to developments in technology, archaeology can map the church to a much finer degree of accuracy. There are also several areas of the site where questions still need to be resolved, such as the relationship between the Norman and Saxon Chancel walls, on the south side of the church.

As such in 2012 Worthing Archaeological Society (WAS) was approached by the APC to discuss the possibility of a renewed archaeological

examination of St Nicholas' Church. The project would initially undertake a geophysical survey to map the area using modern technology, outlining the possible structure of the church. Following this, WAS, in combination with the parish council,

would carry out a community research excavation with the express aims of defining the layout of the church, and extending the 1974 excavation to provide an up-to-date understanding of the church ready for presentation.



The 1974 Excavation Plan of St Nicholas' Church, Angmering (Bedwin, 1974)

## The Project Objectives, 2015

1. To provide a community based archaeological project, where the local community will have the opportunity to gain hands-on practical experience of archaeology.
2. To establish using modern archaeological methods the layout and development phases of the church, for publication and local presentation.
3. To build on Bedwin's previous excavation and address questions still unresolved.
4. Investigate the geophysical anomalies observed to the north of the church's foundations.

# The 2015 Project Plan

## Intentions

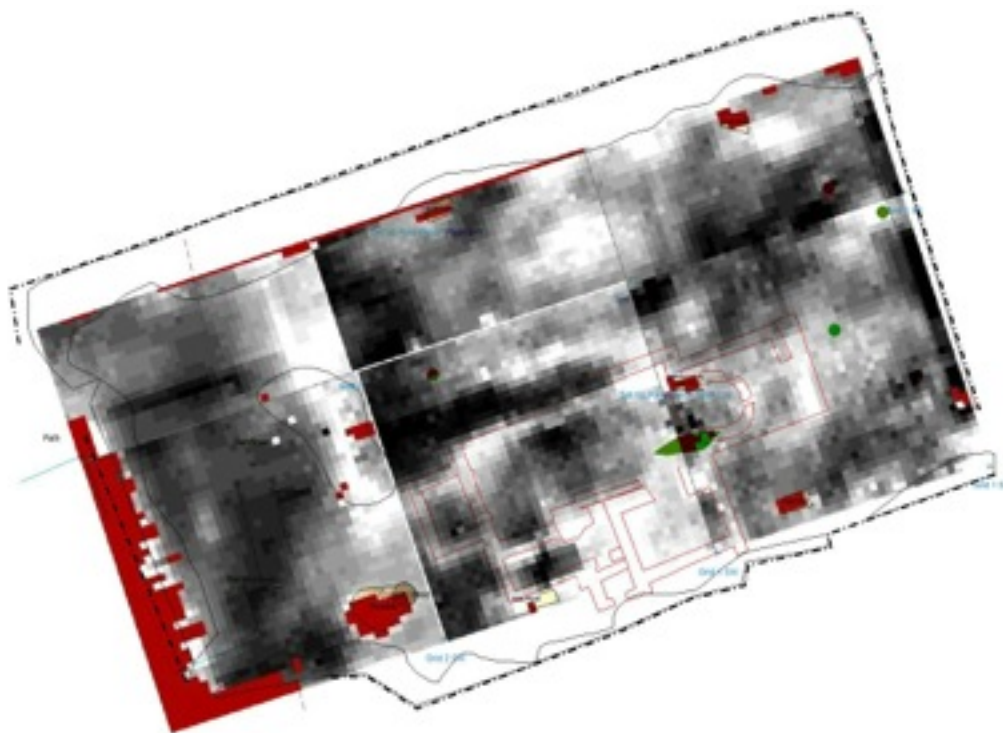
Long term the APC would like to extend the recreational role of St Nicholas' gardens. As part of this they will look to draw more detailed attention to both the garden's history and heritage. Therefore the 2015 St Nicholas' Church Excavation will attempt to rediscover the 'footprint' of the medieval church. Once the layout has been established it has been suggested that the church's floor plan be permanently marked in some form. Such a marker would have the dual purpose of providing a permanent, visible reminder of the church, for both locals and visitors, as well as acting as a guide for the placement of flora, minimising the damage of root systems to the preserved archaeology.

This project will also have a strong community objective. Both St Wilfred's and St Margaret's school will spend time on site, as will members of the local Home Schools association. Each school group will have the opportunity to work alongside archaeologists on site and take part in a range of activities to experience the process of archaeology. In addition, places on site, along with training, will be offered to members of the local community.

Ultimately the project intention will be to increase archaeological knowledge of the church and to devise an effective method to present this local heritage, in some manner on site and possibly as part of a heritage centre.



WAS set up for the dig - June 2015



Results of the Geophysical Survey

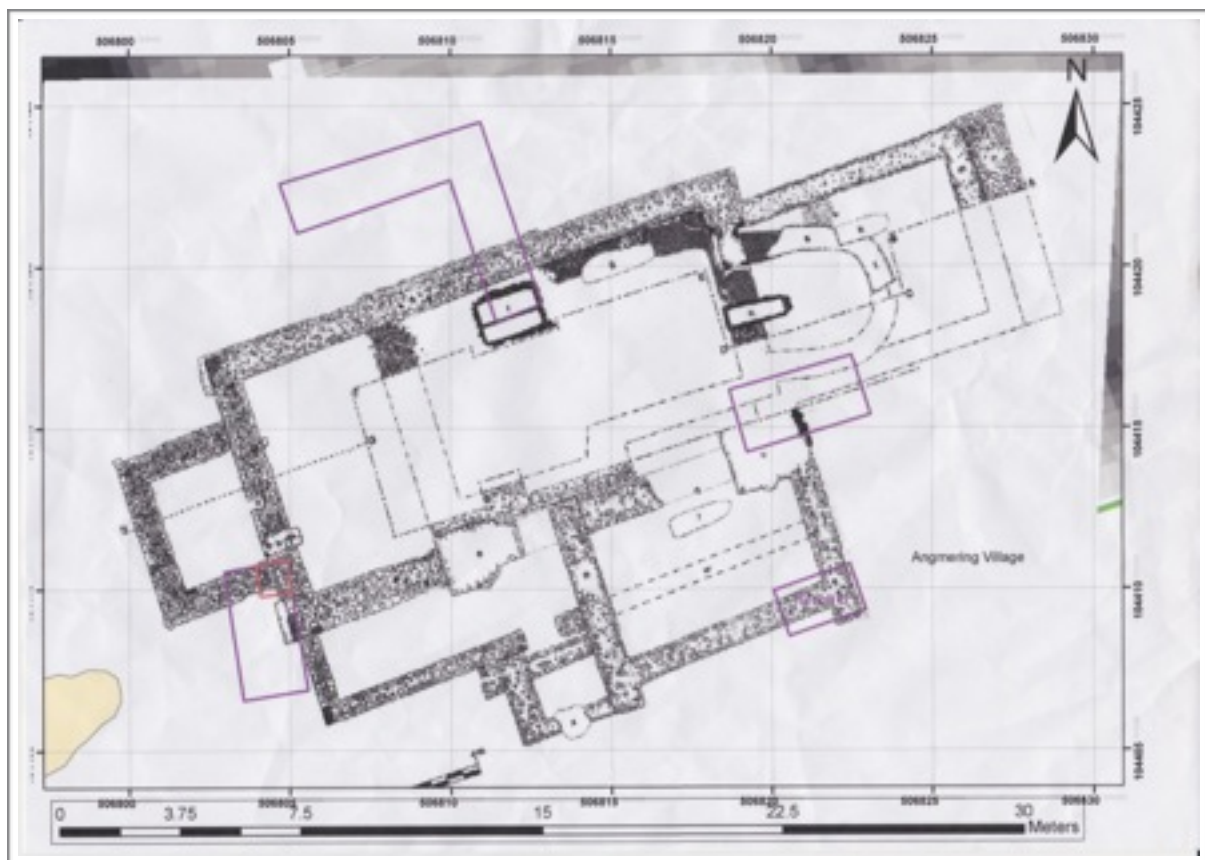
## Methodology

During the 1970's the site of St Nicholas' Church was almost completely excavated. This excavation was extensive, however due to recording methods of the time there is no way to accurately plan out the church's foundations, from the original site records. As such the first phase of the project will see the completion of a geophysical survey, using a method called resistivity. This type of survey involves running an electrical current through the soil and measuring the levels of resistance to that current. In soils which contain a lot of moisture the resistance will be minimal. In contrast, soils with large, dry sections of masonry will register much higher levels of resistance. By taking frequent, systematic readings across the field a pattern of electrical resistance will be formed and the outline of the church will be roughly plottable.

However, such results, while they give an excellent archaeological reference point, will not satisfactorily answer the primary research questions of the project. As such, in addition to the survey a methodical, research excavation will be carried out as phase two. This excavation will look to rediscover the church plan drawn by Bedwin's team, define the relationship between the Norman and Saxon chancel walls as well as explore an anomaly defined by the geophysical survey to the north of the main church plan.

## Trench Layout

Prior to the opening of the site the planned area of excavation underwent a few slight amendments. The original trenches were located based on the geophysical survey but due to physical obstructions on site, such as the flower beds and central tree, the location of trenches A and C needed to be slightly altered. The final planned layout of trenches A,B,C and D for the 2015 excavation is shown below.



The final plan for trenches A,B,C and D - 2015

## Trench Objectives

### Trench A

Trench A will be placed in order to establish the SW corner of a feature labelled by Bedwin as the church porch. This trench will help to locate in real space Bedwin's 1974 excavation plan.

### Trench B

This trench will look to establish the SE corner of Bedwin's tower feature. In combination with trenches A and C this trench will be used to rediscover the 'footprint' of St Nicholas' Church.

### Trench C

This trench will firstly try to establish the northern wall of the church, working from the resistivity survey and Bedwin's plans. Secondly the trench will examine an anomaly identified from the geophysical survey to the north of the Norman church wall.

### Trench D

Trench D will be placed in order to examine the area around the south side of the chancel. This is an area previously unexamined by Bedwin, but anomalies are evident in the extrapolations drawn as part of the 1974 site records plan. As such the primary focus of this trench will be to define the relationship between the Norman and Saxon chancel walls.



Andy and Jacqui open Trench A



Henry, Brendan and Helen open trench C



Will, John and Theresa open Trench D

# Results of Excavation

## Trench A

With the help of the local community, including all of the school children involved in the St Nicholas project, trench A was dug to a depth of 70 cm. The church walls in this trench were located using a sondage (a smaller trench dug within an existing trench) at a depth of 60cm. Three intersecting structural walls were found in trench A, all constructed of flints placed within mortar.

These wall lines are seen on Bedwin's original excavation map and are listed by him as being;

- ❖ The south wall of the porch.
- ❖ The N/S wall which defines the western end of the Norman church nave.
- ❖ The E/W southern wall of the Norman nave.



2015 Trenches overlaying Bedwin's 1974 excavation plan.

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Masonry wall found in trench A using a sondage.

Each of these sections of masonry wall were constructed into each other, which would suggest that they were all part of one phase of the churches development. During the excavation a small hole was discovered within one of the walls in this trench which was not mentioned in Bedwin's excavation report. This hole was built into the wall, rather than having been made due to some form of destruction and would appear to have been the foundation for a structural post included within the wall itself. This is not an uncommon structural technique. Internal wall posts can be used as part of structures built on to slopes to give the wall extra support, particularly if the wall is a crucial load bearer. There were also small amounts of white wall plaster found on the walls within this trench suggesting that the church itself would have once been well decorated.



Small support structure post-hole— Trench A

### Trench B

This was the second trench which the school groups helped to excavate and was dug to a depth of 60cm. The walls were found at a depth of 50 cm and were formed like those in trench A of flints set into mortar. As the dig progressed the trench was extended slightly to the east in order to locate the return of the wall towards the nave and chancel. This part of the church was listed by Bedwin as being the church tower and its roughly square shape and the possible buttress observed in the plans of the 1974 excavation explains why. However its location, to the south of the church, is unusual and the walls found by the 2015 team are arguably very small to have supported a substantial structure such as the tower.

### Trench C



Chalk blocks of a tomb in Trench C

The first objective of this trench was to establish the northern wall of the Norman church nave. This was done relatively quickly with the wall being discovered at 30cm, running, as expected N/S. The wall just like those located in trenches A and B was constructed of mortar and flint and was just under 100cm wide. The interior face of the wall was lined with a fine, white plaster which was lucky for the archaeologists. As part of the 1974 excavation a double tomb was found in this area though no depth was recorded. It was hoped that trench C would locate the double tomb in order to help relocate Bedwin's excavation plans. However the tomb was not found within the expected depth. It was only because of the plaster that the trench was dug further to see how far the it extended. It was in



The double tomb uncovered in Trench C.

shaped chalk blocks. Bedwin's 1974 trench edge was found during the excavation and demonstrates that his dig would have only seen the double tomb and a few blocks of the next tomb, which could have easily been taken as part of the double tomb wall. The southern tomb would have been constructed at a later date than the double tomb found by Bedwin's team, as it clearly cuts through the double tombs southern most wall.

The second objective of this trench was to investigate the anomalies identified from the geophysics survey. This anomaly was however very quickly identified. As the first turfs of the trench were lifted the top of the anomaly, a large drainage system with an accompanying water chamber which paralleled the northern wall of the church, could clearly be seen.

### Trench D

This was the trench which changed almost daily throughout the excavation. The original trench layout was dug to a depth of 96cm and revealed the southern wall of the Norman nave and the outline of the Norman chancel wall. Within these walls the excavations uncovered a very well preserved masonry floor level which included a clear imprint of a large flagstone shaped tile. To the south of this level a dressed-stone lined hole was uncovered which was thought to be the remains of the piscina. To the west of the masonry floor was a small partition wall leading to a coarser

this small sondage that the first hint of the tomb walls appeared.

The double tomb was uncovered to the south of the northern nave wall. It was below the level of the Norman floor and constructed of chalk blocks laid regularly to build two chambers with a thin dividing wall. In addition a second tomb was discovered in this trench which was not previously recorded by Bedwin. This tomb was located directly to the south of the double tomb and was constructed in the same manner using



The southern tomb cutting the double tomb - Trench C



The Norman and Saxon chancel walls - Trench D

rubble layer which would appear to have been a level for another of floor. Beneath this level the smaller masonry blocks of the Saxon chancel wall were found curving away from the straight Norman chancel. It was between these two phases of the chancel that the skeletal remains of an infant were found. The individual was tiny and the bones incredibly fragile. From the arch of the skull the baby would appear to have been full term or very close to, possibly a still born. The child had been placed with care but within a rubble layer. This would suggest that the child had been laid to rest at some time during the building work which redeveloped the chancel of the church during the Norman period, something which may not have been officially allowed.

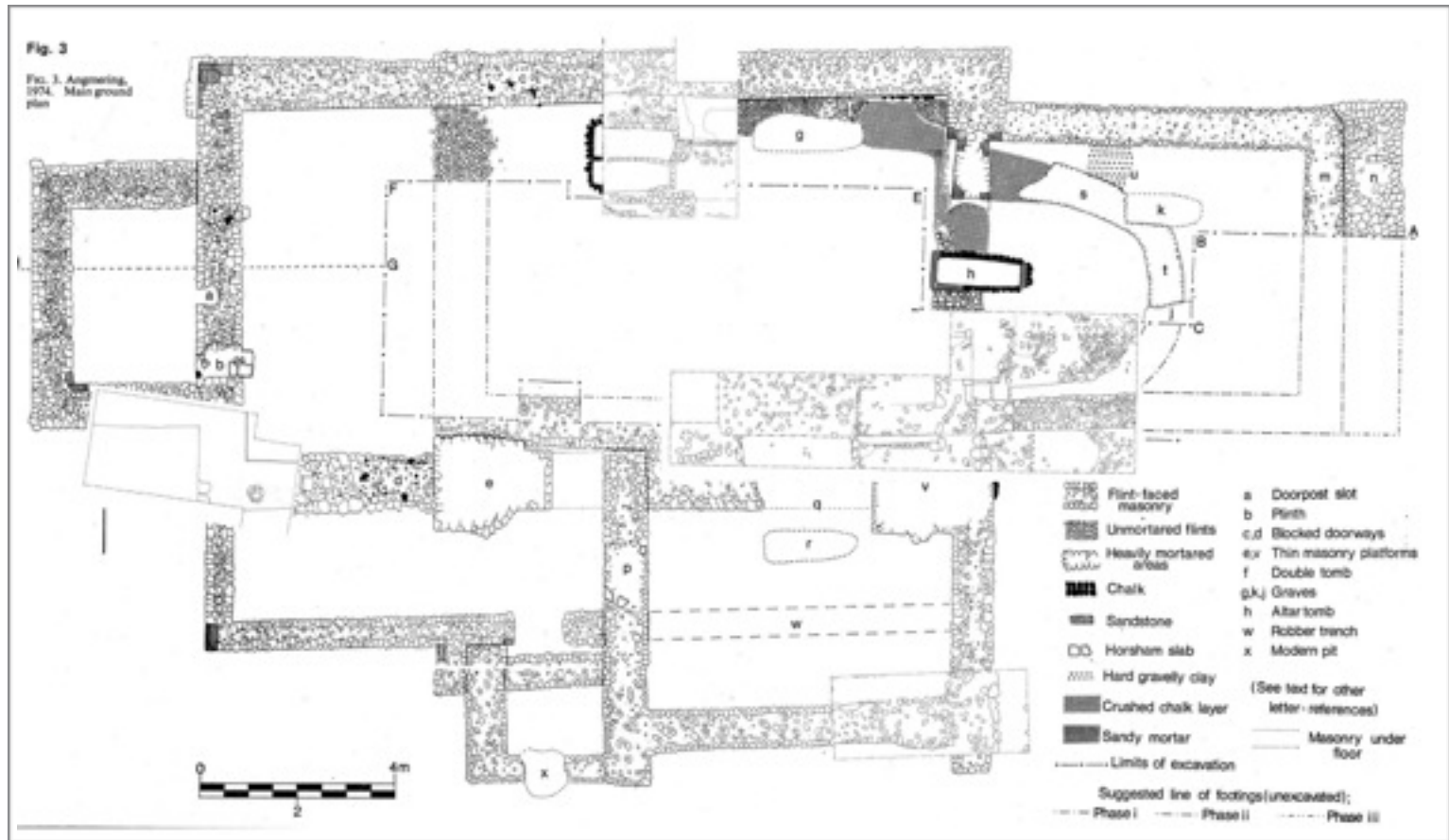


2015 Interpretation of St Nicholas' Church - © Bob Turner

## St Nicholas' Church Site Interpretation

Overall the 2015 excavation at St Nicholas Gardens was very successful. The team began the dig in early June with clear objectives, all of which were achieved, and are now written up in the full archaeological report. Primarily the excavation was able to clearly establish the footprint of the medieval church, a project begun by Bedwin and extended by WAS along with the Angmering community. The anomalies spotted on the geophysical survey were also investigated and resolved. However the truly exciting aspect of the project is WAS's ability to now add to the work carried out by Bedwin. In 1974 the southern side of the Norman and Saxon chancel was only extrapolated using the walls excavated to the north. The relationship between these walls always seemed a little usual and now the 2015 team can draw in the true construction lines for this section of the church. Similarly the excavation of trenches A and B have resulted in a new interpretation of the tower. As the above drawing demonstrates the tower is now thought to have been located on the west side of the church as is more usual for this type of building. The walls in trench A were much more substantial and include extra supports which would be needed in an elevated structured

positioned on a sloping gradient. In contrast it was agreed that the walls in trench B were not what would have been expected to support a tower structure, and its position on the southern side of the church, at the lowest point of the site gradient made it an unlikely position to choose when constructing a key element such as a tower.



2015 Trenches overlaying Bedwin 1974 Excavation Plan

## Finds

Throughout the dig the finds team were kept busy with a constant stream of artefacts arriving at the tent from across the site. Due to the Bedwin excavation in 1974 few of the finds were recovered from undisturbed contexts, but there was great variety in terms of their type and age. The finds team were able to identify pottery shards from the 12/13th century through to modern times, pieces of metal work, such as a small cross and a lovely horse shoe shaped button, coins from many periods, including one from the reign of Edward I, painted wall plaster, stained glass and lots and lots of clay pipes.

The finds team are still working to process and catalogue the wealth of material



Gill and Liz working in the finds tent.



A small selection of the Finds

gathered at St Nicholas' Gardens and a further finds report will be produced alongside the formal archaeological report.

## The Angmering Community

A fundamental asset to the 2015 St Nicholas' Excavation was the participation and enthusiasm of the local community. The archaeologists on site were very capably assisted by a number of individuals from the local community as well as the local schools. All those involved were paired with an archaeologist and were truly fantastic. Working mainly in trenches B, C and D these new archaeologist helped to uncover both the previously excavated and un-excavated archaeology, and they did a tremendous job!

## Here are some of the experiences recorded by those who dug with W.A.S in June.

"As a new member it was great to feel included from the off! I had a great time, apart from the sunburn, digging on a site in my own village. Pete and Amie ran the dig superbly and had it very well planned, which meant we didn't waste any time not knowing what to do. I was impressed by how well everyone worked together as a team even when those, like me, were newbies to WAS. It was a shame that I did not have more days to give but unfortunately I had to work more than I had hoped. I am very much looking forward to digging with the team again soon and can't wait for the lecture in October on the findings."

Charly



Charly and Jacqui working in Trench C

"My sister and I had a great time at the dig, first we were given a full tour of the site and told all about the history of it. Then we were shown the finds in the tent, starting with finds from the Victorian times and then going down the eras. After that we were shown the wall next to the tent and told all about what it might have been. It's amazing how a wall can stay hidden underground for so long and no one notice it. We then looked through the spoils piles to see what we could spot, I found some glass and my sister found a piercer for piecing hide. Overall it was a great dig, ten out of ten."

By Harry Buller, age 10.



Helen gives a tour of the site

"I recently joined WAS hoping to start taking part in a lifelong ambition to become involved in archaeology again - my last dig was 35 years ago when a student! I arrived at Angmering on the Saturday morning bright and early with my husband looking forward to the day but a bit nervous about how I would cope. Straight away we were made to feel very welcome. The day started with an informative overview of the site by the site

directors Pete and Amie giving clear understanding of what was going on. Being our first day Pete then took us on a separate tour to explain the site in more detail. He was so enthusiastic and interesting and answered all questions clearly - really enjoyed that opportunity to learn the objectives of the dig and it made it more interesting when we started work. Amie then settled us in our own



Ian gives a tour of the site

trench with clear instructions and tools to work with. The hours flew by - it was fascinating and absorbing work. Any finds we made were set aside and I was most excited to find a bone - sadly animal.....I was very impressed by the knowledge and skills of all the volunteers on the site - they took time to help and teach us and we enjoyed it so much we returned on the Sunday and are now planning to do more digs and some workshops to help 'get us up to speed' for the future."

Hilary and David Lyon

## Schools on Site

In addition to the local community, WAS welcomed students from the local Home School Club along with St Wilfred's and St Margaret's primary schools. The students helped the archaeologists for either a morning or an afternoon, three days a week, taking part in a range of archaeological activities as well as playing a crucial role in uncovering this central part of Angmering history. The activities, as detailed below, aimed to give each visiting student the opportunity to experience the archaeological process, from the digging and discovery of artefacts to the processing, cataloguing and interpretation of the site and finds.

The activities included;

- \* Excavation - For 10 to 15 minutes of their visit the students were paired with an experienced archaeologist, who showed them the process of archaeological excavation. The students worked primarily in trenches A and B, however a few were moved into trench C during the first week, and helped to uncover the tops of the church walls. During these sessions the students found a large mix of artefacts from shards of pottery to clay pipes, marbles and slate pencils.
- \* Spoil Heap Hunting - No matter how experienced the archaeologists are some of the artefacts we would like to collect are very tiny and can be missed during the first phase of excavation. As such the local Angmering students helped WAS archaeologist, Henry Wakefield, to look through the spoil heap around trench A. They all did a great job and added many more artefacts to the finds tent that would



Finds Washing



Home School Students digging for finds



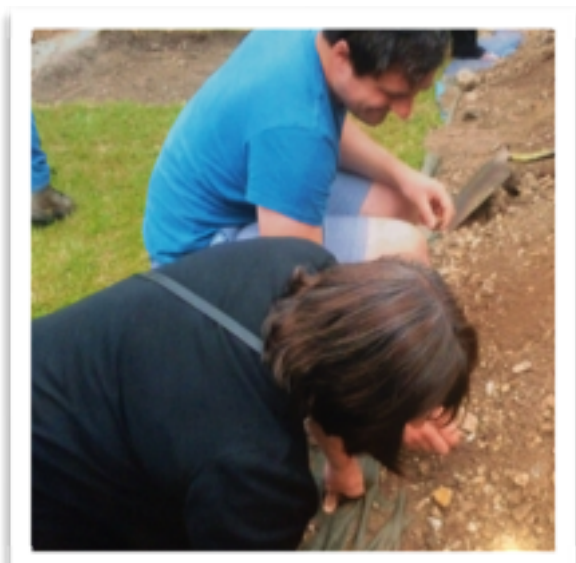
Chris and team metal detecting



Making a Roman floor patten



Toby and AJ spoil heap hunting



Matt and Sandy spoil heap hunting

other wise have been missed.

**\*Metal Detecting** - Similar to the spoil heap hunting the metal detecting, run by WAS archaeologist Chris Lane, got the students to hunt for artefacts possibly missed from the main excavation. The session allowed the students to have a go using the metal detector on the spoil brought out of the surrounding trenches in which many of them found coins.

**\*Finds Washing** - On any archaeological site one of the first stops for any recovered artefact is to visit the finds washing station. Here the finds are given a quick clean up so that the finds team can have a proper look at them and try to identify what the objects could be. The students from all of the schools helped the archaeologists to begin this finds routine and washed a good portion of the finds which were discovered by both themselves and the other archaeologists on site.

**\*Finds** - In the finds tent all visiting students were introduced to the finds team and given the chance to have a look at some of the other finds which had been recovered from the site of St Nicholas' Gardens. In addition the finds team showed them a range of artefacts from many time periods both replica and real.

**\*Finds Drawing** - The students were also given the opportunity to have a go at drawing a range of artefacts in a session run by WAS archaeologist Bob Turner. All archaeology must always be recorded, for once the trenches are replaced and time has gone past only the record will remain to preserve the memory of the site. Drawing the artefacts to show their size, shape and, importantly, any damage or decoration is a key element of these records.

## Conclusions

The Angmering excavation of 2015 was a true success, with all objectives being met and the community involvement being fantastic. Archaeologically the WAS team were able to identify the layout of St Nicholas' Church in relation to Bedwin's 1974 excavation and to further define areas such as the southern nave including the phases of its construction. In addition WAS extended the dig to examine the possible feature observed on the geophysical survey resolving the anomaly, even though it turned out to be fairly modern in origin. Lastly the excavation demonstrated that the tower feature of the Norman church would once

have stood to the west of the site instead of the south something which can be observed in similar churches such as St Margaret's which stands just over the modern road to the west of the gardens.

In terms of the community involvement for this project WAS could not have asked for better. We had six fantastic days with the local schools in which all students helped to uncover many aspects of the church along with lots and lots of artefacts. We also had the help of a group of volunteer diggers from the local community all of whom would be very welcome to come and dig with us again!!! And lastly this project had the support of the wider community. From day one the site had a constant stream of visitors all of whom showed their interest and support for the project.



St Nicholas' Church following the 2015 excavation - © Bob Turner

As such from Worthing Archaeological Society thank you to the Angering community for the help, support and welcome during the St Nicholas' Church excavation 2015.