

Colchester Archaeological Trust Ltd

Archaeological evaluation

**Land adjoining Birch Grove Golf Club
Layer Road, Colchester**

for the Birch Grove Golf Club



October 1998

Archaeological Evaluation

Land Adjoining Birch Grove Golf Club Layer Road, Colchester

NGR TL 9781 2145

Summary

An evaluation carried out in advance of a proposed golf course extension revealed a straight ditch-like feature of indeterminate but possibly early date (Trench 2, F1). The feature lies in the western corner of a large field from which nearby cropmark evidence of linear features and ring ditches has previously been recovered. Two earth mounds of unknown but possibly modern origin were noted and plotted in an adjacent wood.

Introduction

This archaeological evaluation was commissioned by the Birch Grove Golf Club and carried out in accordance with a brief prepared by Colchester Borough Council's Museums Service. The Borough's requirement for an evaluation was prompted by a proposal to extend the southern side of the existing golf course. In total, the area affected by the extension amounts to 1.55 hectares, of which 0.4 ha is currently an open field used for grazing and the remainder is wooded. Aerial survey has previously revealed cropmark evidence indicating the presence of probable archaeological features, including boundaries, linear features and ring ditches, over a large area of the field to the east and south-east of the land affected by the proposed extension (Fig. 1. Essex Sites and Monuments Record reference 11950).

Excavation

Since the arable land was not in a suitable condition for preliminary fieldwalking, trenches were opened at four points, each situated as near as practically possible to the locations indicated in the Borough Brief. The exploratory trenches were machine-dug, then selectively cleaned and examined by hand. Two trenches were situated on the arable land and two in the wooded area to the west. Their locations are shown on Figure 2.

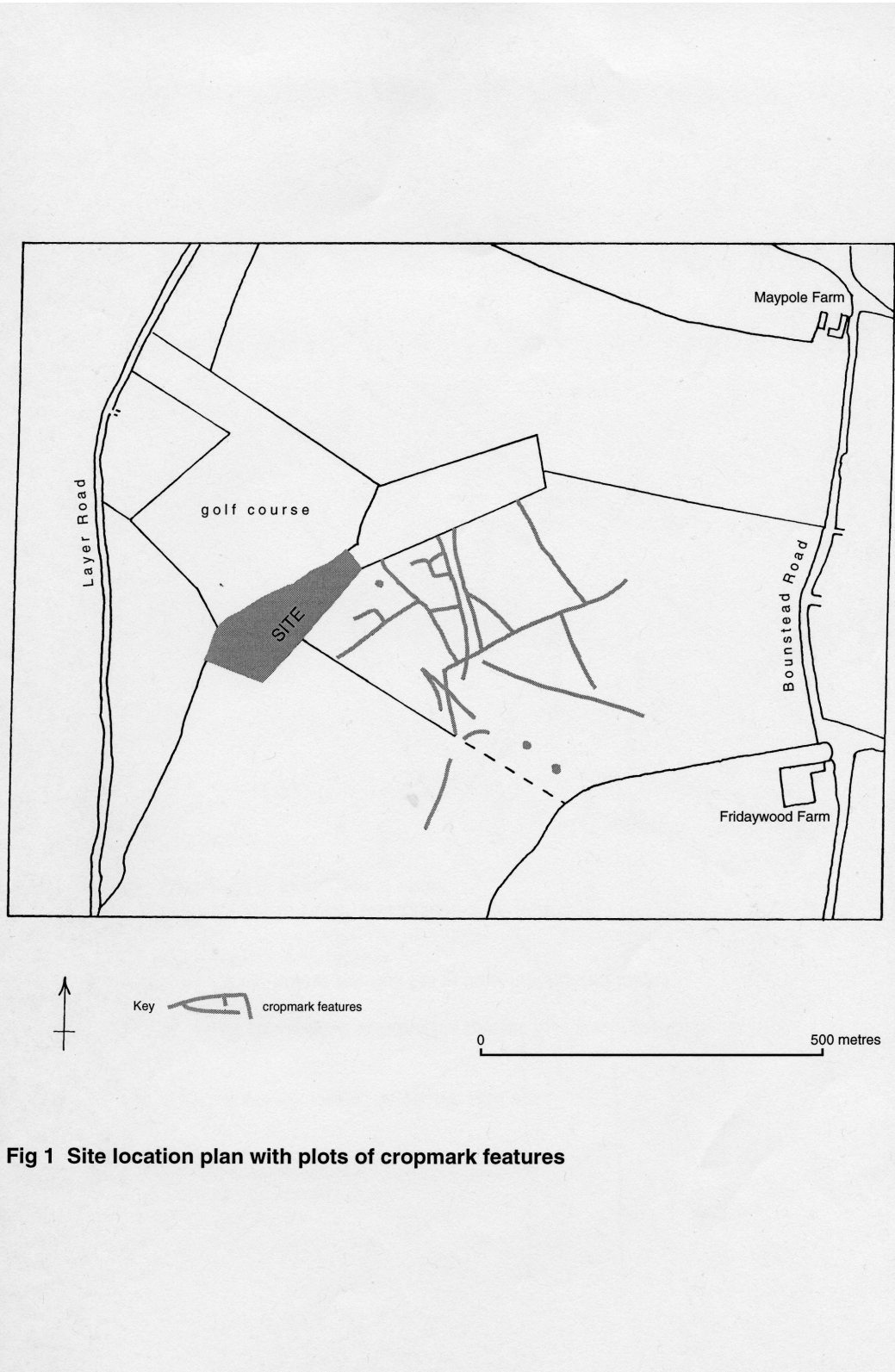


Fig 1 Site location plan with plots of cropmark features

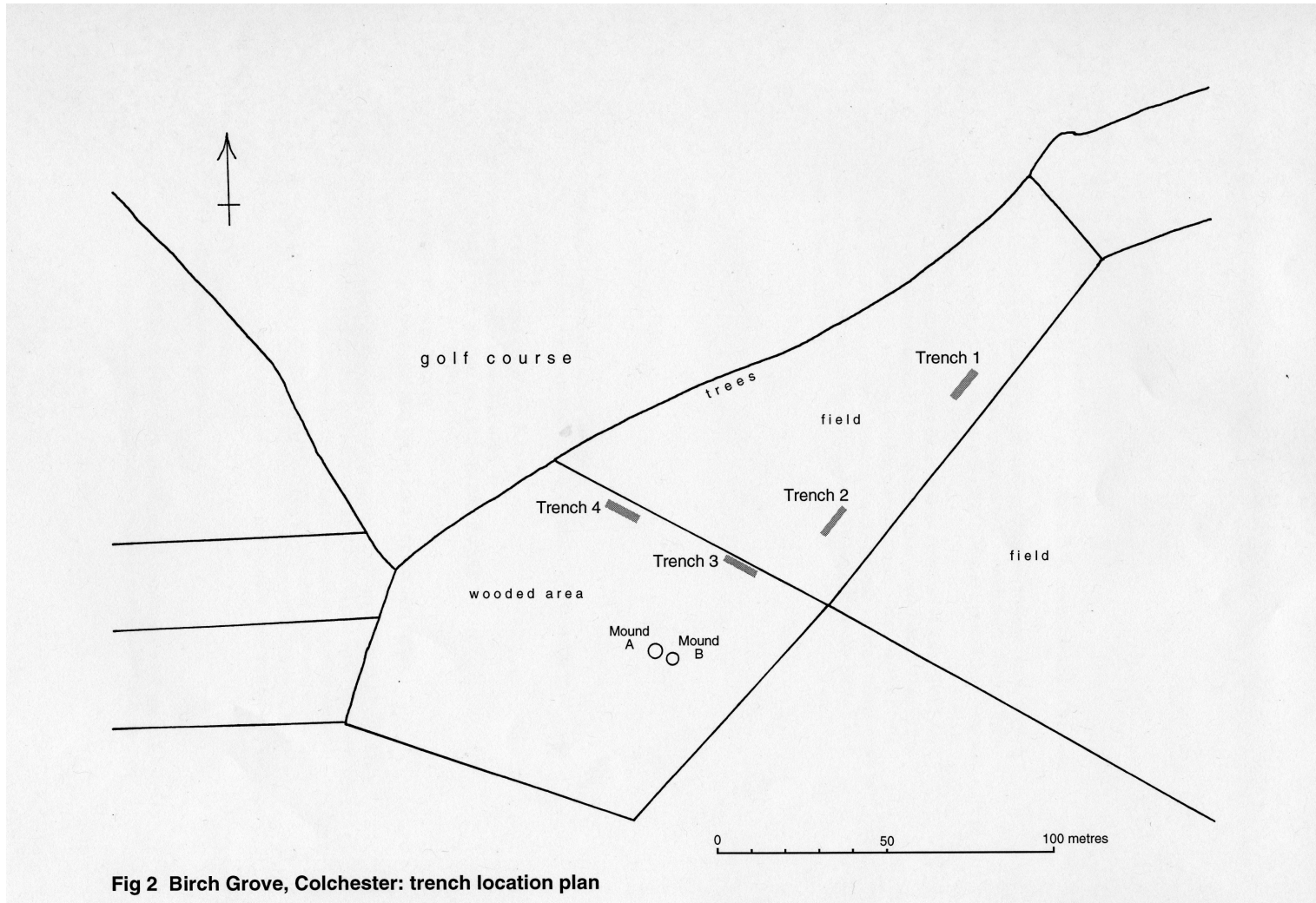


Fig 2 Birch Grove, Colchester: trench location plan

Trench 1

Length: 10metres

Width: 1.8m

Depth: 1.4m (n.e.), 0.6m (s.w.)

Stratigraphy:

L1. Dark greyish brown sandy loam. Topsoil. 25cm.

L2. Mid brown silt loam with rare small stones. Subsoil. To overall depths of between 0.35 and 0.5m.

L3. Pale greyish brown silt loam with rare small traces of carbonised wood, possibly decomposed roots. Subsoil. Generally present to an overall depth of up to 0.6m, rising in a south-westerly direction to a depth of 0.35m at a point 1.25m from the end of the trench.

Beneath L3 the following naturally-formed deposits were examined to a depth of 1.4m:

L4. Pale to mid yellowish brown silt loam. Natural. To an overall depth of up to 1m.

L5. Silt loam, similar to L4, but grey mottles. Natural. To an overall depth of 1.4m.

L6. Brownish yellow sand and gravel. Natural. Present beneath L5 at an overall depth of 1.4m at the north-east end of the trench, rising to 0.5m at the south-western end, where it was sealed by L2.

Trench 2 (Plan: Fig. 3)

Length: 10metres

Width: 1.8m

Depth: 0.5m

Stratigraphy:

L1. Dark greyish brown sandy loam. Topsoil. 25cm.

L2. Mid brown silt loam with rare small stones. Subsoil. To overall depths of 35 to 40 cm.

L3. Brownish yellow sand and gravel. Natural.

Two features were noted in the surface of L3:

F1. (Section: Fig. 3)

Sealed by L2.

A 1.45m wide linear feature with parallel sides extended across the trench on a NNE - SSE orientation. A small section of the pale greyish brown silt loam fill was removed, revealing a flat-bottomed ditch-like profile. Due to the limited area examined and in the absence of dateable finds no conclusive interpretation of this feature is possible. However, it was felt to be too regular in plan and profile to be a naturally-formed interruption. If a ditch, its relationship to L2 and the degraded nature of its fill would be quite consistent with an early origin for the feature.

F2.

Sealed by L2.

At the north-eastern end of the trench a small area of greyish-brown silty sand was excavated and found to be an irregular shallow depression, probably a natural pocket in the sand, L3.

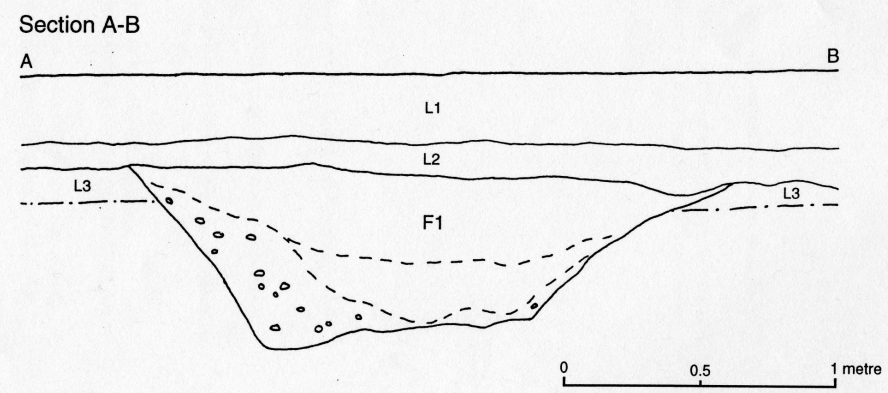
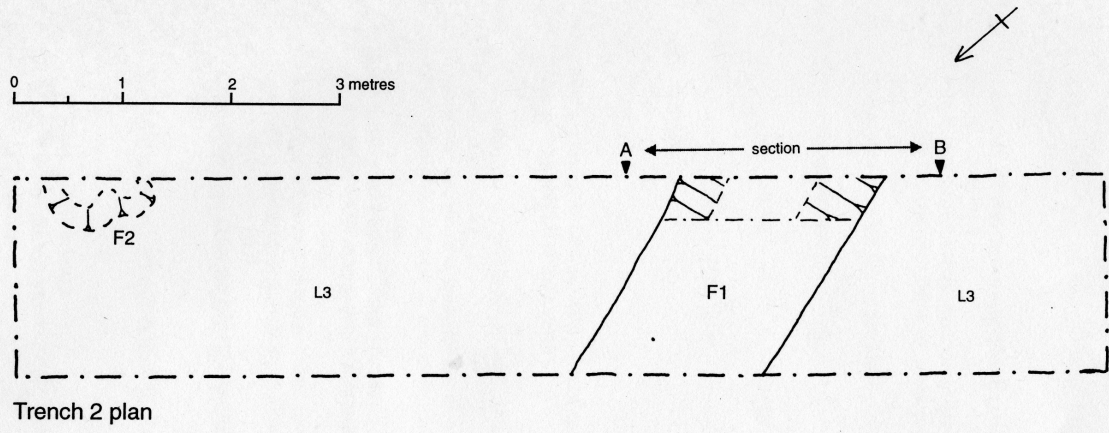


Fig 3 Birch Grove, Colchester: Trench 2 - plan and section of F1

Trench 3

Length: 10metres

Width: 1.8m

Depth: 33cm

- L1. Very dark greyish-brown sandy loam with a very high organic content. Woodland topsoil. 10cm thick.
- L2. Mid to dark brown loamy sand / sandy loam. An earlier degraded topsoil, similar to L2 in Trench 4. To overall depth of 30cm (s.e. end of trench), 15cm (n.w. end of trench).
- L3. Yellow to yellowish-brown sand and gravel. Natural.

No features were exposed in this trench.

Trench 4

Length: 10metres

Width: 1.8m

Depth: 75cm

This excavation lay on an incline, with a fall of approximately 1.15m from the south-east down to the north-west end of the trench.

- L1. Very dark greyish-brown sandy loam with a very high organic content. Woodland topsoil. 8cm thick.
- L2. Mid brown loamy sand / sandy loam with a low content (20%) of angular small stones. An earlier degraded topsoil, similar to L2 in Trench 3. To overall depth of approximately 25cm.
- L3. Pale brown loamy sand with a low content (5%) of angular small stones. The upper and lower horizons merge respectively with L2 and L4. Subsoil. To overall depth of approximately 35-40cm.
- L4. Pale grey silt loam with reddish brown mottles and rare small stones. Occasional small black carbonised roots. Natural. To overall depth of 70cm (s.e. end), 75cm (n.w. end).
- L5. Very similar to L4, but mainly reddish-brown silt loam with pale grey mottles. Natural.

One feature was revealed: a modern stone-filled land drain sealed by L1.

Wooded Area

The ground in the wooded area was inspected for earthworks in accordance with the second requirement of the Borough's Evaluation Brief (Section 5). Where not obscured by ground cover, the surface is uneven, with many small bumps and shallow depressions in evidence. Most, perhaps all, of the irregularities may result from the land's past use for military training purposes which is understood to have included the excavation and backfilling of dug-outs, latrine pits, etc. (personal communication, Mr Marston, Birch Grove Golf Club). Two relatively large grass-covered mounds were plotted: their locations are shown on Figure 2. Mound "A" is approximately 0.95m high and between 3.7 and 4.6m in diameter. Mound "B" is 0.65m high and between 2.9 and 3.7m in diameter.

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