

**An archaeological
watching brief and recording
at Brightlingsea Quarry,
Moverons Lane,
Brightlingsea, Essex
March-April 2002**

**on behalf of
Alresford Sand and Ballast Co**

**report prepared by
Howard Brooks**

CAT project ref.: 02/2f
Colchester Museums accession code: 2002.54
NGR: TM 0765 1838 (centre)



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

tel.: (01206) 541051
tel./fax: (01206) 500124
email: archaeologists@colchester-arch-trust.co.uk

CAT Report 214
October 2002

Contents

1	Summary	1
2	Introduction	1
3	Archaeological background	1
4	Aim	1
5	Methodology	1
6	Results	2
7	Finds	
7.1	Prehistoric pottery <i>by N J Lavender</i>	3
7.2	The worked flint <i>by H E Martingell</i>	4
7.3	Finds list	5
8	Discussion	6
9	Acknowledgements	6
10	Archive deposition	6
11	Monitoring	6
12	References	7

Figures after p 7

EHCR summary sheet

List of figures

- Fig 1 Location of North Field and South Field.
- Fig 2 Cropmarks in North Field and South Field.
- Fig 3 North Field: cropmarks and recorded ditches.
- Fig 4 F1, F2, F7: plans and sections.
- Fig 5 F3, F4: plans and sections.
- Fig 6 F5, F6: plans and sections.
- Fig 7 Flint scraper (F2).

1 Summary

Monitoring and recording of topsoil-stripping over an area of 3.3 hectares in the North Field at Brightlingsea Quarry, Moverons Lane, Brightlingsea, Essex revealed field-ditches containing Neolithic pottery and several discrete features including a disturbed Beaker burial. Middle Bronze Age and Roman material was recovered from the ploughsoil. Some features were heavily truncated by machine-stripping of the site.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 1.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological monitoring and recording project at Brightlingsea Quarry, Moverons Lane, Brightlingsea, Essex (National Grid Reference TM 0765 1838 centre).
- 1.2 Proposed work is mineral extraction, which was preceded by a topsoil-strip over an area of 3.3 hectares in the 'North Field' (see Fig 1 for location).
- 1.3 The project was carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) according to a scheme agreed with Essex County Council Heritage Advice, Management and Promotions (ECC HAMP) group. This scheme involved:
 - cleaning/excavation/recording of archaeological features exposed in areas already stripped
 - detailed walkover of stripped area to identify archaeological features (which can then be excavated as appropriate)
 - monitoring of future topsoil strips
- 1.4 Fieldwork took place in March and April 2002, and post-excavation work in May, July, September and October 2002.
- 1.5 The project was monitored by ECC HAMP.

3 Archaeological background

The site lies in something of an archaeological hot spot (Fig 1). The two fields in question, ie the North Field (east of 'The Link' woodland) and the South Field (east of 'The Long Plantation'), are in an area of cropmarks which includes at least two prominent sub-rectangular enclosures, a number of ring-ditches, two trackways, and numerous field boundaries (Fig 2: Essex Heritage Conservation Record or EHCR 2234). Some of the cropmarks overlay one another, showing that they are of several periods. The excavated Bronze Age ring-ditch and the burial site at Moverons Pit are 600m west and 350m south-west of the site respectively (EHCR 2142: Clarke 1990; Clarke 1991).

4 Aim

The aim of the archaeological project was to identify, excavate and record any archaeological features or deposits exposed in the topsoil strip. This would enable their date, importance and condition to be assessed.

5 Methodology

The stripped areas were examined by detailed walkover. Where archaeological features were visible, they were marked and then excavated. This involved half-sections of the pits and sections across the ditches including all junctions. All digging was by hand. Features were recorded on standard CAT pro-forma sheets, plans were drawn at scale on 'permatrace', and photographs were taken on digital camera.

6 Results (Figs 2-6)

6.1 The recorded features comprised ditches and pits.

6.2 Ditches

6.2.1 The longest ditch was Feature or F3/F5, which was recorded over a length of 260m as it crossed the stripped area north to south. This ditch corresponds precisely with a cropmark feature which does not continue into the South Field. Neolithic pottery was recovered from ditch F3/F5 at three out of the seven excavated sections (sections or Sxs 3, 5 and 6).

6.2.2 It is generally assumed that those ditches which join or cross ditch F3/F5 at right angles are contemporary parts of the same field system. If that is so, then east-west ditches F4 and F9 are contemporary. One other (unnumbered) cropmark ditch which appears to meet F3/F5 at right angles was not seen on site. Together, these ditches form a clear rectilinear field system. The implication of finding Neolithic pottery in the fill of the ditches is clear: the ditches were silting up in the Neolithic period.

6.2.3 There appears to be an addition to this early field system. Two ditches joined F3/F5 at oblique angles (F6, F8). The junctions between these features and F3/F5 were excavated, and Roman pottery was recovered. At a simple level, this would indicate that in the Roman period, ditches were tacked onto an existing field-ditch. Assuming that these ditches were field-drains, this presupposes that the older field system had been maintained (cleaned out) and that the Roman ditches were added to a functioning field-drainage system; there would be no point in joining active drains to a completely filled-in ditch.

6.2.4 There is a complication here, of course. If the older field-drains had been kept cleaned out, then no Neolithic pottery could have remained in them. Scouring out would have removed any pottery or other debris which had found its way into the ditches. A simple solution would be that the original ditches were quite large, and became slightly silted up over time, but were still functioning as drains in the Roman period. Admittedly, the ditches look rather slight on the site plan (Fig 3), but they have been badly affected by machining and it is only ditch F3/F5 where excavated at Sx 6 (Fig 6) which gives the most reliable indication of their original scale.

6.3 Pits (Fig 4)

Three pits were excavated, ie F1, F2 and F7.

6.3.1 F1 was very small, presumably the bottom of a larger pit truncated by machining. It contained a single Neolithic sherd.

6.3.2 F2 was a flat-bottomed pit whose apparent shallowness is misleading; like F1, much of this was probably machined off. F2 produced Beaker sherds (probably from a single vessel), 45 burnt flints, and a large quantity of struck flints including a possible axe thinning/sharpening flake, two scrapers, and two small cores (specialist reports in section 7 below). A feature of this size and shape with a Beaker vessel immediately suggests a Beaker burial. The absence of a body can be easily explained by the acid subsoil on this site, which would dissolve human remains, while the more durable ceramic material (and flints) would survive. The fact that the Beaker sherds were found spread throughout the fill implies that the burial had been disturbed at a later date.

6.3.2 F5 was a regular, steep-sided pit. Finds included a burnt flint (presumably prehistoric) an animal bone and an oystershell. However, the very regular nature of this feature sets it down as a pit dug during a recent geotechnical survey of the site.

7 Finds

7.1 Prehistoric pottery

by N J Lavender¹

7.1.1 A small quantity of prehistoric pottery (99 sherds, 249g) was recovered from four contexts. The material has been recorded using a system devised for prehistoric pottery in Essex (details in archive). Fabrics are identified on the basis of type, size and frequency of inclusions. Fabrics present in this assemblage are:

- B Flint, S-M 2
- C Flint, S-M with occasional L 2
- D Flint, S-L 2 poorly sorted
- P Sparse, very fine sand; occasional S flint

Where:

Size of inclusions:

S = less than 1mm diameter

M = 1-2mm diameter

L = more than 2mm diameter

Density of inclusions:

1 = less than 6 per cm²

2 = 6-10 per cm²

3 = more than 10 per cm²

7.1.2 Neolithic

Much of the pottery is in flint-tempered fabrics. The only diagnostic sherd is a Mildenhall type rim sherd from context F5. Given the proximity to the early Neolithic ring-ditch excavated in 1984-5 (Clarke & Lavender in prep), the presence of material of this date is not surprising and may indicate Neolithic activity over much of the Brightlingsea peninsula.

7.1.3 Beaker

50 sherds from context F2, weighing a total of 110g, were Beaker, possibly from a single vessel. These were all in fabric P, and nine sherds were decorated. The scheme comprises concentric comb-impressed lozenges. Other comb-impressed lines, almost certainly horizontal, appear to divide the scheme into zones. Unfortunately, the small sherds were quite abraded and no re-fitting has been possible.

Some sherds bear closely-spaced fingernail impressions. This is a device often seen on Peterborough Ware. Its use on beakers is often to break up a vertical decorative scheme (Brown 1995), and this appears to be its function here. Beakers using this decorative technique include one from Brandon, Suffolk (Clarke 1970, no 852) and two from the Orsett Cock, Essex (Brown 1987).

7.1.4 Middle Bronze Age

A single large sherd from topsoil layer L1 is of different character to the rest of the pottery and appears to come from a large straight-sided urn or jar. It is possible that it is part of a Middle Bronze Age (MBA) bucket urn. The presence of the MBA activity is attested by the cemetery excavated in 1989-90 and other clusters of ring-ditches in the area (Clarke & Lavender in prep).

7.1.5 Discussion

Early Neolithic and Bronze Age pottery has been found during previous excavations and evaluations (Clarke & Lavender in prep; Brown 1996), so that the discovery of similar material during this latest work is not unsurprising. The Essex Heritage Conservation Record has no record of Beaker pottery from Brightlingsea, although a small quantity of Early Bronze Age material was recorded during the 1996 evaluation. Beaker settlements are rare and difficult to identify. It seems likely that the present finds are derived from a disturbed burial.

¹ Essex County Council Field Archaeology Group, Old Court, Fairfield Road, Braintree, Essex

7.2 The worked flint

by H E Martingell²

- 7.2.1 Scatters of knapped flints cover the Brightlingsea peninsula. Hundreds have been recovered, most of them from the surface, but some from excavated features. Generally they indicate a Neolithic, Bronze Age or Iron Age utilisation of the landscape. Every new collection of artefacts, therefore, adds to this information and confirms or extends the understanding of what was happening here in the prehistoric era (Clarke & Lavender in prep).

The earliest worked flint in this collection is a patinated axe thinning flake, and it is probably Mesolithic. It suggests the reshaping of an axe that has become damaged. Of the three scrapers, the most interesting one is a scraper of probable Neolithic date (**no 1** in catalogue: Fig 7). It has steep abrupt retouch across the distal end, and the support was subsequently flaked round to produce a denticulate edge, at the same time thinning the piece. In conversation with Dr Jacobi, he suggested that it could have been used as a wedge, and on examining the scraper retouch surface a small abraded area can be seen. This crushing could have occurred during wedging. The other Neolithic scraper (**no 2**) is a fragment of a 'horse-shoe type'. At least one other of this type has been found at Brightlingsea before (Clarke & Lavender in prep). The third scraper (**no 3**) is made on a conveniently split pebble. It has good retouch across one edge, which is worn quite smooth. The simple nature of this piece would be in keeping with Late Bronze Age/Iron Age artefacts, and along with two core fragments also probably Iron Age in date, are additions to earlier finds from this field. These earlier finds were Iron Age pottery and flint from a nearby pit. The remaining pieces are predominantly waste flakes, four of them having areas of retouch.

The Brightlingsea land surface has been much disturbed over the years, by gravel extraction and farming. It is safer, therefore, to consider these worked flints within the context of occupation in specific areas rather than using them to date features.

7.2.2 Catalogue

F2, bag 3

Bag of knapping waste and three retouched pieces

No 1 1 scraper on secondary flake, retouched around distal end

No 2 1 scraper fragment, good tertiary, 'horse-shoe' type?

5 cores and core fragments

6 fragments

5 thinning/trimming flakes

2 primary flakes

20 secondary flakes

tertiary flakes

3 blades secondary

2 flaked fragments

1 flake, tertiary, slight patination. Axe thinning/sharpening flake?

1 retouched flake.

2 small cores, Iron Age?

1 flake, tertiary, Iron Age?

F5, bag 5

1 flake secondary

F5, bag 6

1 flake, large, fragment, light grey flint with slight patination

1 flake, tertiary, fragment

²

23 Sandwich Close, Braintree, Essex

F5, bag 10

No 3 1 scraper with later denticulate flake removals, tertiary good, may be adapted for wedge

2 flakes, trimming, secondary (off same piece as below)

2 flakes, trimming, tertiary (off same piece as above)

1 flake tertiary, light grey flint

L1, bag 8

1 flake tertiary, thin section, area of fine retouch worn smooth

1 flake secondary

total: 69 pieces

7.2.3 Summary list

3 scrapers

4 retouched flakes

2 flaked fragments

3 blades

44 waste flakes

cores and core fragments

6 fragments

total: 69 pieces

7.3 Finds list, with phasing comments

by Howard Brooks

Bag no	Context	Context type	Description	Finds date
01	F1	Pit	large sherd	Neolithic
02	F2	Pit	50 Beaker sherds	Beaker
03	F2	Pit	45 burnt flints (780g)	prehistoric
03	F2	Pit	1 burnt sandstone fragment (21g)	?
03	F2	Pit	flint: 58 pieces; knapping waste and 3 retouched pieces	prehistoric
04	F3 Sx 1	Ditch	1 large septaria piece	
05	F5 Sx 2	Ditch	flint: 1 secondary flake	prehistoric
06	F5 Sx 3	Ditch	flint: 2 flakes	prehistoric
09	F5 Sx 5	Ditch	tiny sherd	Neolithic
10	F5 Sx 6	Ditch	flint: 6 flakes, including 1 Neolithic scraper	inc Neolithic
10	F5 Sx 6	Ditch	18 Neolithic sherds inc Mildenhall-type rim sherd	Neolithic
06	F5 Sx 3	Ditch	2 struck flints?	prehistoric?
07	F5 Sx 3	Ditch	1 struck flint?	prehistoric?
07	F5 Sx 3	Ditch	small sherd	Neolithic
12	F7 upper fill	Ditch	large group of oystershells	Roman?
13	F7 lower fill	Ditch	animal tooth fragment	
14	F7 lower fill	Ditch	1 burnt flint	prehistoric
15	F7 lower fill	Ditch	tiny Fe scrap	?
11	F8 Sx 1/F5 Sx 7	Ditch	2 burnt flints	prehistoric
11	F8 Sx 1/F5 Sx 7	Ditch	8 Roman grey ware sherds	Roman
11	F8 Sx 1/F5 Sx 7	Ditch	2 dark fabric sherds	LIA?
08	L1	Topsoil	flint: 2 flakes	prehistoric?
08	L1	Topsoil	large sherd, MBA bucket urn	MBA
08	L1	Topsoil	1 samian sherd	Roman
08	L1	Topsoil	1 Roman brick fragment	Roman
08	L1	Topsoil	1 peg-tile	post-medieval

8 Conclusions

Early Neolithic and later Bronze Age pottery has been found during previous excavations and evaluations in this area (Clarke & Lavender in prep; Brown 1996). However, the importance of the Neolithic material at Brightlingsea is that it comes from field-ditches. Neolithic field systems are known or inferred at a number of sites in England, such as Fengate (Pryor 1978), West Heslerton (Powlesland 1986), and in the Abingdon area (Holgate 1988, 123-4), but they have not previously been identified in Essex.

Continuity of activity after the Neolithic period is shown by the disturbed Beaker burial and by the ploughsoil find of a large sherd from a Middle Bronze Age urn, which is presumably derived from a funerary context not evident on site. Stronger evidence of local MBA activity is provided by the cemetery excavated in 1989-90 (350m south-west of this site) and by other local clusters of ring-ditches in the area (Clarke & Lavender in prep).

The date of the struck flint is consistent with the ceramic dating of the features to the Neolithic/Bronze Age, but includes pieces of probable Mesolithic and Iron Age date, thus lengthening the chronological span of activity here and indicating Iron Age activity here which is not apparent in the ceramic evidence.

Roman period activity on site is confined to the apparent addition of Roman ditches to an older field system. There is no contemporary settlement evidence.

Whilst the broad outline of activity at Brightlingsea is apparent from the features and finds described above, it is almost entirely based on field-ditches and funerary material; there is no settlement evidence beyond the truncated ?Neolithic pit and a single Roman samian sherd (which is not necessarily settlement-derived).

9 Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Mr Peter Orrock of Alresford Sand and Ballast Co for commissioning the work, and to Hester Cooper-Reade of Essex County Council Field Archaeology Group for permission to reproduce details from an evaluation report (incorporated in Figs 1 and 2).

Thanks to Pat Connell of ECC HAMP for advice and site visits and for plans supplied.

Initial site visits were undertaken by Laura Pooley. Site work was carried out by Nigel Rayner and Pauline Skippins, assisted by Ben Holloway, Chris Lister and Simon Rulton.

10 Archive deposition

The finds and paper archive are currently held at CAT headquarters at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex, but will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2002.54.

11 Monitoring

The project was monitored by ECC HAMP.

12 References

- Brown, N, 1987 'Prehistoric pottery', in 'Excavations at Barrington's Farm, Orsett Cock, Thurrock, Essex 1983', by B Milton, *Essex Archaeology and History*, **18**, 16-34
- Brown, N, 1988 'A Late Bronze Age Enclosure at Lofts Farm, Essex', *Proceedings Prehistory Soc*, **54**, 249-302
- Brown, N, 1995 *North Shoebury: settlement and economy in south-east Essex 1500 BC-AD 1500*, *East Anglian Archaeol*, **75**, 77
- Brown, N, 1996 'Prehistoric pottery', in *Moverons Pit, Brightlingsea, Essex: archaeological evaluation*, ECC Report 207
- Clarke, C P, 1990 'Brightlingsea, Moverons Pit', *Essex Archaeology and History*, **21**, 128
- Clarke, C P, 1991 'Brightlingsea, Moverons Pit', *Essex Archaeology and History*, **22**, 152
- Clarke, C P, & Lavender, N, in prep The Brightlingsea survey report
- Clarke, D L, 1970 *Beaker pottery of Great Britain and Ireland*, *Gulbenkian Archaeol Series*, **1-2**
- Holgate, R, 1988 *Neolithic settlement of the Thames Basin*, *Brit Archaeol Report*, *British Series*, **194**
- Powlesland, D, 1986 'Excavations at Heselton, North Yorkshire 1978-82', *Archaeological Journal*, **143**, 53-173
- Pryor, F M M, 1978 *Excavation at Fengate, Peterborough, England: the second report*, *Royal Ontario Museum Archaeol Monograph*, **5**

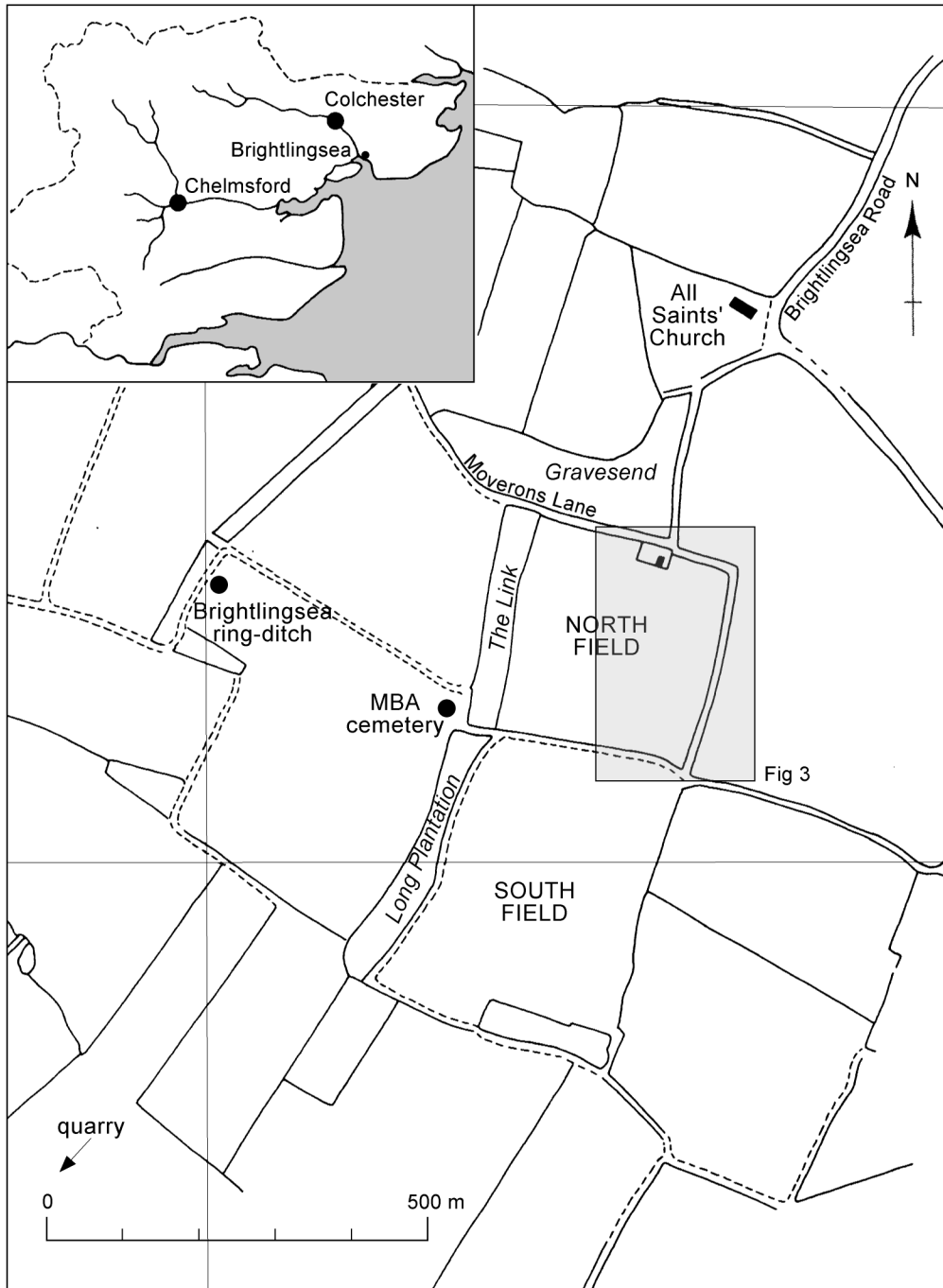
© Colchester Archaeological Trust 2002

Distribution list:

Mr Peter Orrock of Alresford Sand and Ballast Co
Essex Heritage Conservation Record, Essex County Council
Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council
Nick Lavender, Essex County Council Field Archaeology Group

Checked by: Philip Crummy
Date: 14.10.02

Adams c:/reports02/brightlingsea/report214.doc



© Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Licence number 100039294.

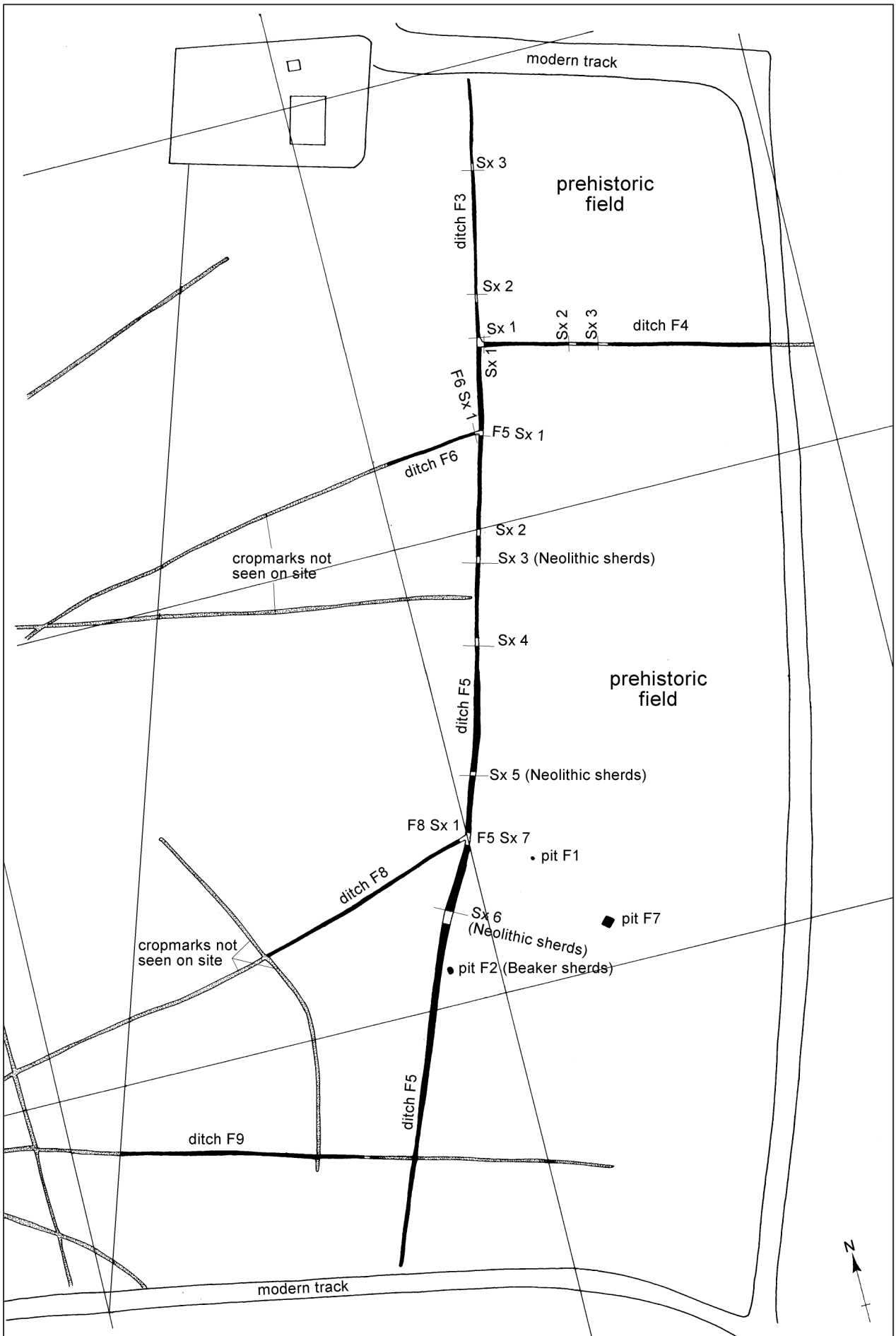
Fig 1 Location of North Field and South Field (areas of woodland in italic).



© Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Licence number 100039294.

Fig 2 Cropmarks in North Field and South Field (courtesy Essex County Council Field Archaeology Group).





© Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Licence number 100039294.

Fig 3 North Field cropmarks and recorded ditches.



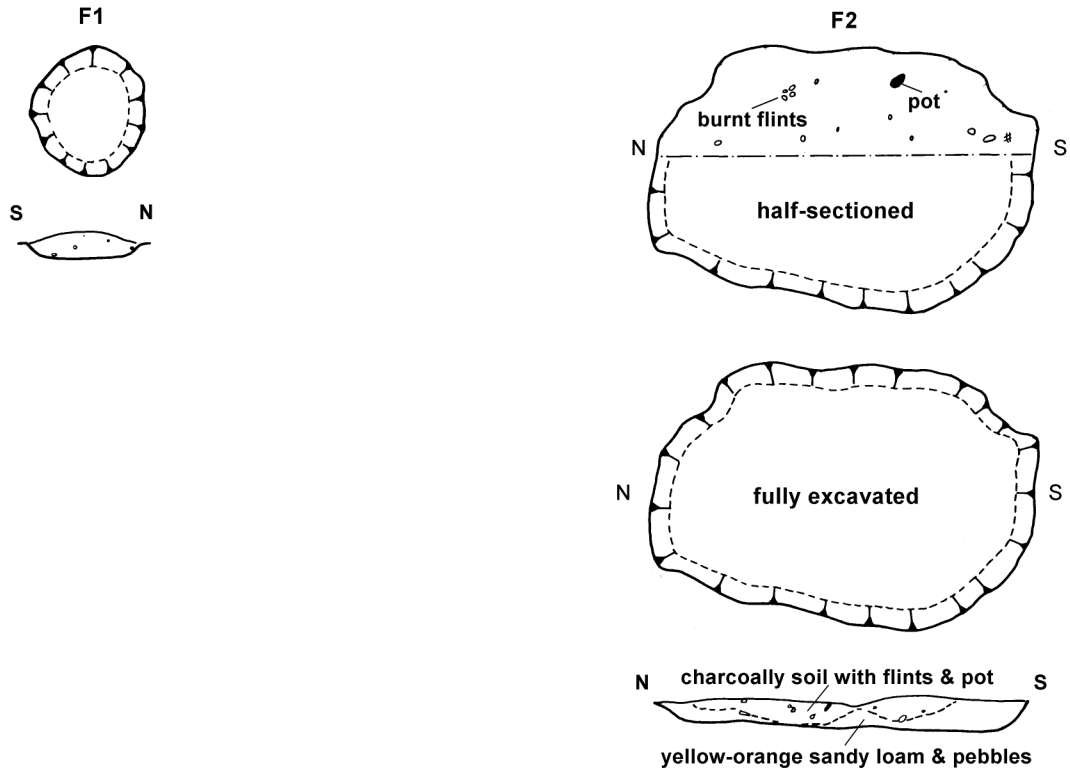


Fig 4 Features F1, F2, F7: plans and sections.

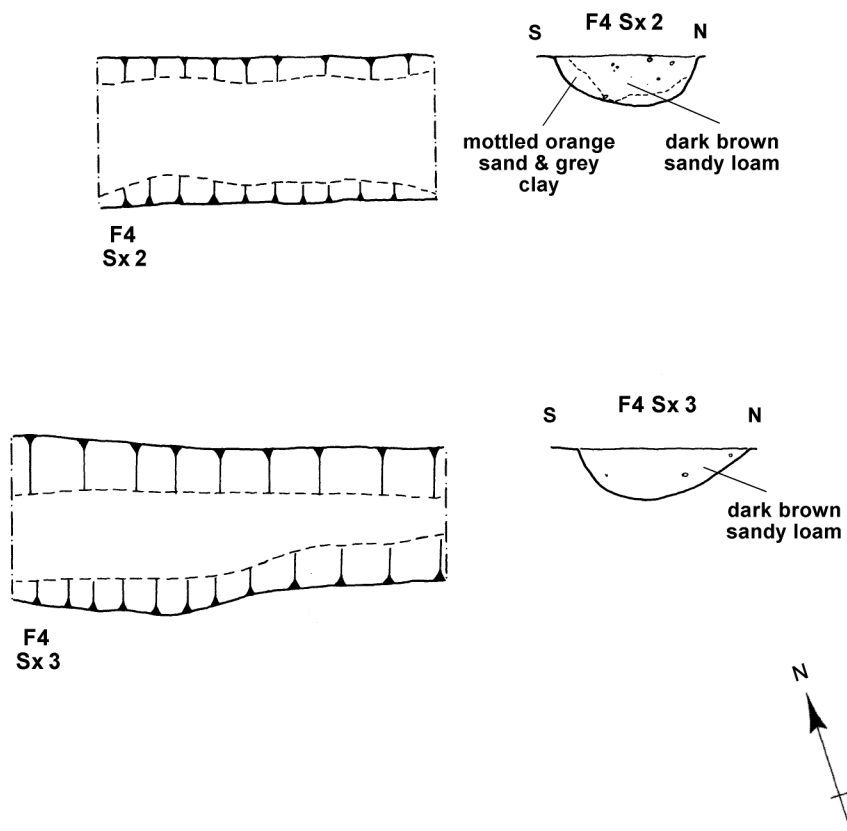
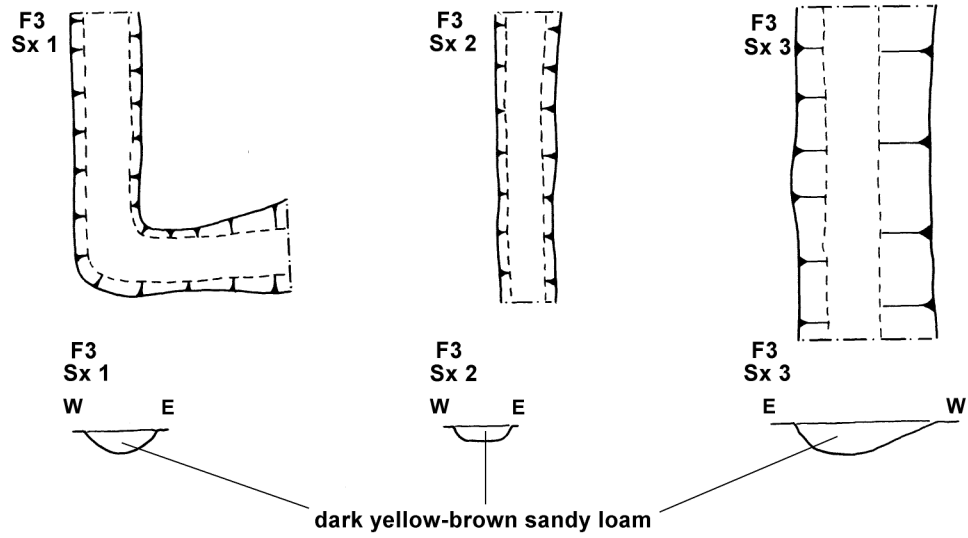


Fig 5 Features F3, F4: plans and sections.



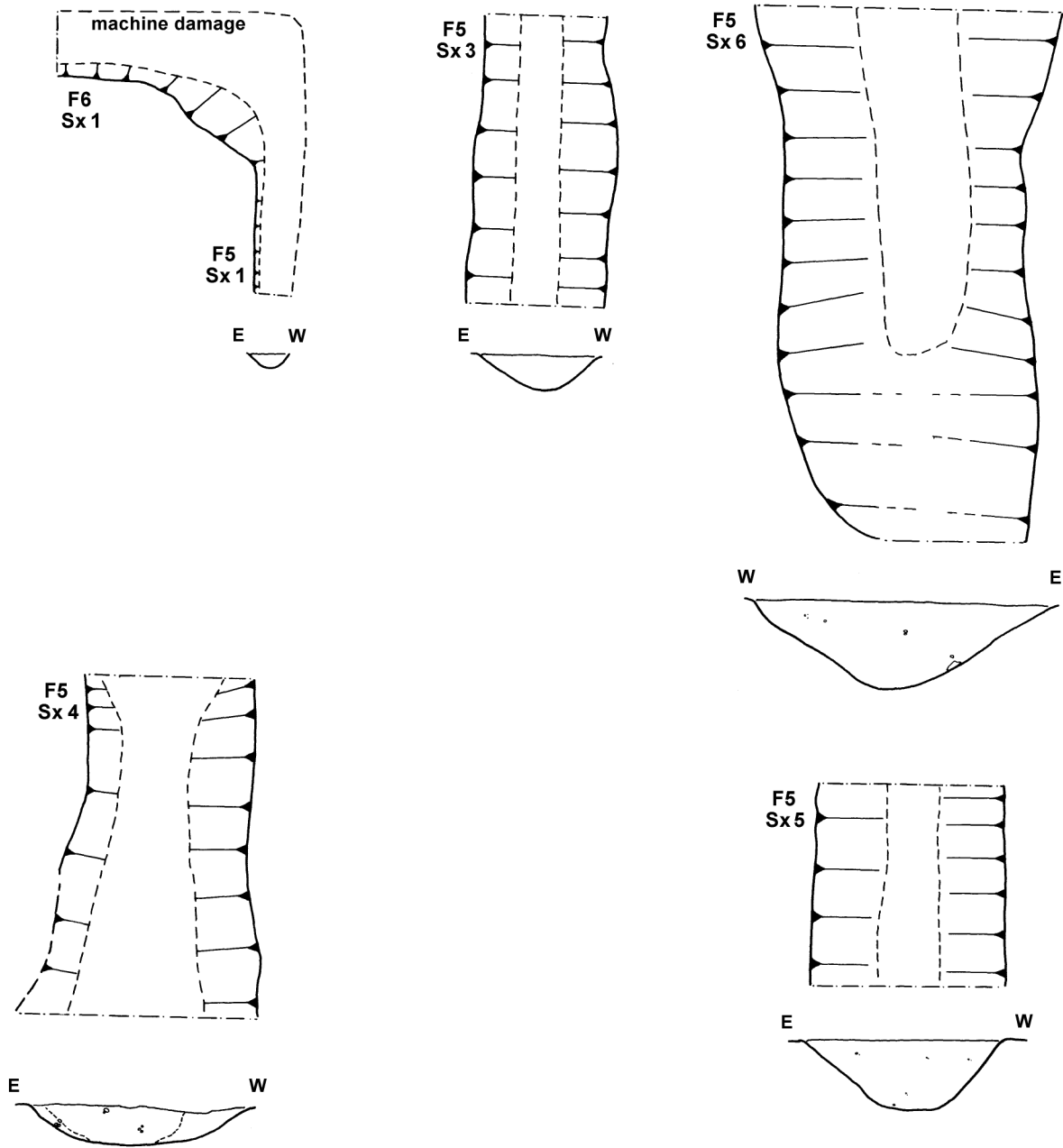
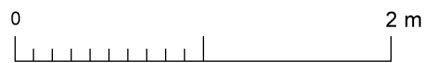


Fig 6 F5, F6: plans and sections.



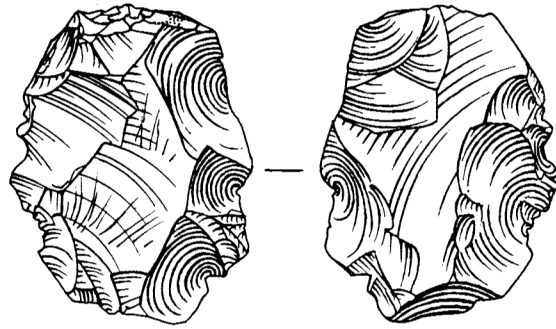


Fig 7 Flint scraper (F2).



Essex Heritage Conservation Record/ *Essex Archaeology and History*

Summary sheet

Site address: Brightlingsea Quarry, Moverons Lane, Brightlingsea, Essex	
Parish: Brightlingsea	District: Colchester
NGR: NGR TM 0765 1838 (centre)	Site code: Museum accession code 2002.54
Type of work: Watching brief and recording	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: March and April 2002	Size of area investigated: 3.3 hectares
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? Yes	Related EHCR nos: 2142, 2234
Final report: CAT Report 214 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Neolithic, Beaker, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman	
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>Monitoring and recording of topsoil-stripping over an area of 3.3 hectares in the North Field at Brightlingsea Quarry, Moverons Lane, Brightlingsea, Essex revealed field-ditches containing Neolithic pottery and several discrete features including a disturbed Beaker burial. Middle Bronze Age and Roman material was recovered from the ploughsoil. Some features were heavily truncated by machine-stripping of the site.</i>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Howard Brooks	Date of summary: 10th October 2002