

# **An archaeological watching brief at 35 London Hill, Rayleigh, Essex September-October 2004**

**report prepared by  
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**on behalf of  
Mr and Mrs Gunner**

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## 1 Summary

*A watching brief was carried out on groundworks for the construction of an extension to the existing property for an indoor swimming-pool. The site lies at the west end of the upper garden terrace. On the north side of the site were deposits of clay which contained archaeological finds to between 1m and 1.2m deep. Part of the south edge and probable west end of the clay deposits were exposed which gave the impression of a large feature terminating on the west side of the site. The upper clay deposits (500mm-600mm) within this feature contained finds of modern to post-medieval date, with a small quantity of residual medieval and Roman finds. The lower deposits produced very little other than occasional peg-tile pieces and a small sherd of medieval pottery. It is not clear if the clay deposits represent a cut feature. It is possible that they are soil dump or infill associated with the terracing on the slope, though the stratigraphy and finds suggest that they represent more than one episode and could represent a sequential accumulation of layers filling a feature. Although at an angle to the garden terracing, the feature is approximately consistent with the line of the upper terrace further east. However, previous excavations along Bellingham Lane have located a large ditch considered to be part of an outer bailey. The clay-filled feature observed during the watching brief also shares the line of the bailey ditch and thus may represent a continuation of it.*

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief carried out in the garden of 35 London Hill, Rayleigh, Essex.
- 2.2 The watching brief was prompted by the proposal for an extension to the existing house for an indoor swimming-pool.
- 2.3 The property is located on the west side of London Hill (NGR TQ 802 909) adjacent to the surviving earthworks of Rayleigh castle, and immediately north of the area which has been identified as an outer bailey (Fig 1). The garden occupies much of the west side of London Hill, and consists of a series of north-east to south-west terraces on sloping land descending into a small valley to the north. The present house is situated on the upper terrace, and there are two further main terraces north of the house with a fourth smaller terrace just beyond. The larger terraces have a drop in ground-level of up to about 2m.
- 2.4 The monitoring was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between the 2nd September and 12th October 2004. A brief was supplied by Essex County Council (ECC) Heritage Advice Management and Promotion (HAMP) group.
- 2.5 The project was monitored by the ECC HAMP group.
- 2.6 This report follows the standards set out in *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (2003), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1999). The guidance contained in the document *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Paper, 14, 2003) was also followed.

## 3 Archaeological background

- 3.1 A number of scattered finds of the prehistoric and Roman periods have been recorded from the town of Rayleigh; however, there is little evidence as yet for any substantial settlement prior to the late Anglo-Saxon or early medieval period. The outstanding feature of the early town is the remains of Rayleigh castle (Fig 1), constructed some time between AD 1066 and 1086 for Swein of Essex (Medlycott 1998, 2). The visible remains of the castle consist of considerable earthworks of the former motte and bailey which are a scheduled ancient monument (SAM no 0039). The area to the south of this,

between Bellingham Lane and the existing castle bailey earthwork, has been identified as the site of an outer bailey. The bailey could still be traced in the back gardens of houses fronting onto Bellingham Lane at the beginning of the 20th century, though there is no longer a visible earthwork (Medlycott 1998, 8-9).

- 3.2** The position of a ditch considered as defining the outer bailey (Fig 1) has been located in excavations on the west side of Bellingham Lane (Milton 1987; Gobbold 1997). The exact course of the ditch is no longer known. However, a projection of the ditch in relation to the topography suggests a course which would meet the extant castle bailey ditch approximately in the area now occupied by the south-west corner of the garden of 35 London Hill.
- 3.3** It should be noted that excavation has taken place within the site of the supposed outer bailey close to the watching brief site (Fig 1). Excavations during 1969-70, approximately 20m south of the present site, revealed medieval features interpreted at the time as being the remains of an entrance to the bailey (Helliwell & Macleod 1981). A later archaeological evaluation trench, excavated by Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust (HAT) in 2000 in the same area as the 1969-70 excavation revealed only natural clay immediately below a thin topsoil, suggesting that substantial truncation had taken place in the intervening period (HAT 2000).

## **4 Aim**

- 4.1** The area of the new extension occupies part of a terrace which is cut back into the hill slope to a depth of up to about 2m. It was expected that, across much of the terrace width, shallow features would have been removed. However, it was still possible that the lower parts of any features of more substantial depth, such as would be represented by the outer bailey ditch, might survive.
- 4.2** The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological remains exposed during the construction of the new extension, and to ascertain the potential for the survival of any archaeological remains on the site.

## **5 Methods**

- 5.1** The method of investigation was that of a watching brief, whereby an archaeologist monitors the groundworks for the construction of the pool and pool building.
- 5.2** The groundworks consisted of cutting back part of the upper terrace bank along the property boundary (section 6.1), the stripping of the area forming the footprint of the new extension (section 6.2), excavation of footings for the pool building (section 6.3), reduction of levels for the pool surround (section 6.4), and finally the excavation of the swimming-pool cut itself (section 6.5).
- 5.3** The works were carried out using a small mechanical excavator using various toothless buckets.
- 5.4** At each stage, liaison was maintained with the ECC HAMP group monitoring officer and the contractors. This was principally to maintain, as far as possible, an appropriate strategy to investigate deposits on the site in relation to the requirements and schedule of the groundworks.
- 5.5** Four visits were made by a CAT archaeologist.
- 5.6** Individual records of features were entered on CAT pro-forma recording sheets. Section drawings of layers were made at a scale of 1:10 together with written descriptions of layers. A plan of the site was made using the contractor's plan of foundations (scale 1:50).
- 5.7** Finds were registered on CAT pro-forma record sheets and assigned find numbers according to context. Finds were washed, marked and bagged according to context.

- 5.8 Colour photographs of main features, sections, the general site and the site environs were taken with a digital camera.
- 5.9 A diary record was made after each visit.

## **6 Results of the archaeological observations**

- 6.1 The terrace bank was cut back but exposed only natural deposits (Fig 3, Sx 1). There was only a thin topsoil (50mm) over natural clay which merged into underlying sand at the base of the cut section at about 1.7m deep. This accords with the results of the recent HAT excavation 20m to the south (Fig 1; HAT 2000).
- 6.2 The topsoil was removed from the footprint of the new extension. This revealed a thin dark topsoil (60mm) containing quantities of modern finds, including modern window glass, peg-tiles and 19th- to 20th-century pottery. Along the south-east edge of the area and much of the south-west end, natural sand was exposed. The remainder of the area consisted of a pale brown clay, which contained archaeological finds of 19th- to 20th-century date, and at that point was considered to probably be redeposited soil from terracing.
- 6.3 The footings for the new building were excavated to 1.5m depth (Fig 3, Sx 2). Those along the north-east and north-west sides, cut through the area of the modern pale brown clay, were monitored. In these footings, clay deposits extended to the base of the excavated trench. Archaeological finds was present to a depth of about 1.0m-1.2m. So rather than a relatively thin redeposited terrace soil overlying natural deposits, as had been considered mostly likely (section 6.2), the pale brown clay formed part of a more substantial feature (Feature or F6) on the terrace (Fig 2). Much of the upper part of the footing trench consisted of a pale brown clay about 1m thick which, in section, could be differentiated into three layers (Layer or L2-L4). The upper 500mm (L2-L3) contained moderate to common peg-tile pieces, bone fragments, charcoal and pottery sherds of 19th- to 20th-century date. Among these were a very small quantity of small Roman and medieval pottery sherds and a piece of Roman tile. The lower 500mm (L3-L4) contained noticeably fewer finds, and these consisted almost entirely of pieces of peg-tile, though some possible brick fragments (undated) were noted in the section. Below the brownish clay layers, at between 1.0m and 1.2m, was a yellowish-brown clay (L5). This was at first thought to be a natural deposit, but two peg-tile pieces came from this layer including one large half-tile piece. The yellowish-brown clay sealed a moderately stony clay layer (L6) about 100mm thick. This overlay mottled grey and yellow brown sandy clay (L7 and L8) extending to the base of the footing trench. No finds were recovered from L6-L8. The section observed in the north-east footing trench indicated that the base of L4 was rising toward the base of the cut-back terrace bank to the south at a gradient of about 1:6-1:7. It should be noted that after this site visit, it became necessary for part of the north-west footing to be deepened, and the contractors reported natural sand at just over 2m deep.
- 6.4 For the pool surround, the whole of the interior of the building footprint was reduced by between 300mm and 500mm. For the area of F6, this was equivalent to L2-L3 (Fig 3). During this operation, a line of modern post-holes was recorded (F1-F5), two of which had concrete settings (Fig 2). The line of posts cut F6 which extended over all of the north-east corner of the building footprint. On the south side, F6 had a fairly consistent edge extending east-west and terminating short of the west side of the footprint which consisted only of natural sand deposits for its entire width.
- 6.5 The excavation for the pool involved the removal of up to a further 500mm of deposits forming F6. This material was equivalent to L3-L4 and L5 (Fig 3). The excavation also removed some of the underlying clean clay equivalent to L6-L8 (Fig 3) and the remainder of the lower clay deposits overlying the natural sand. This process was carefully watched but produced no finds. Only very rare charcoal flecks were seen appearing in all of the clay layers.

## 7 Finds

The recovered finds were all from the deposits forming the feature on the central part of the terrace, F6 (Fig 3; Sx 2, L2-L5). All come from the north-east area of the building footprint. The finds are a sample of datable finds from L2, and selected tile and all pottery from L3-L5. All finds other than those clearly identifiable as post-medieval/modern were collected. The use of machines to remove clay with little clear differentiation meant that the contexts of some of the finds were blurred. Medieval and post-medieval pottery was identified by Howard Brooks of CAT; pottery fabrics follow the Essex post-Roman pottery codes used in *CAR 7*.

**Table 1: collected finds list, date and context.**

find no	type	description/date	context (for layers see Fig 3, Sx 2)
1	pottery	1 sherd post-medieval red earthenware rim (17th-19th century), 1 sherd unclassified stone ware rim (15th-16th/17th century), 1 sherd Fabric 48D (19th-20th century), 2 sherds unidentified	F6, L2
1	brick/tile	1 Roman tile piece (Roman), 2 peg-tile pieces (probably post-medieval), 1 piece of brick (post-medieval to modern)	F6, L2
1	glass	1 piece deep green glass from bottle (post-medieval to modern)	F6, L2
3	pottery	1 sherd post-medieval red earthenware rim (17th-19th century), 1 sherd Fabric 48D (19th-20th century), 1 sherd grey ware (Roman or medieval)	F6, L2-L3
3	bone	animal tooth	F6, L2-L3
3	brick/tile	unidentified Roman or modern brick fragment	F6, L2-L3
4	pottery	1 sherd medieval coarse ware Fabric 40 (12th-13th century)	F6, L3-L4
4	brick/tile	7 pieces/fragments peg-tile (probably post-medieval)	F6, L3-L4
4	stone	slightly rounded/abraded buff-coloured sandstone lump	F6, L3-L4
2	brick/tile	2 peg-tile pieces; one piece is about half of a tile with a square mark for peg-hole incised at one end but not cut out (probably post-medieval)	F6, L5

## 8 Discussion

- 8.1** All the extensive extant garden terracing on the site is reported as being of 20th-century date (information supplied by the present owners). All indications from the watching brief suggest that the upper terrace is of sufficient size to have mostly or entirely removed any previously existing features in this area other than any pre-existing deep excavation.
- 8.2** The only deposits encountered which are potentially of archaeological significance are the clays in the central part of the upper terrace.
- 8.3** It is not clear if all of the layers from which finds were recovered are necessarily part of the same feature, but they are collectively referred to here as F6.

- 8.4** F6 extends across most of the area of the terrace exposed during the watching brief and reaches a depth of at least 1m-1.3 m in the north-east area of the site (Figs 2-3, Sx 2). It clearly runs beneath the west end of the existing property, which is a later extension to the original house (information supplied by the present owners).
- 8.5** It is not clear overall which layers recorded in section are to be attributed to F6 (Fig 3, Sx 2). It is certain that L2-L4 are all of archaeological origin and form a clay deposit which in appearance is relatively homogeneous. While distinct from L2-L4 and very clean in appearance, L5 is also either disturbed or of archaeological origin as two peg-tiles were recovered from this layer during machine-cutting of the footing trench. Also possibly archaeological is the thin stony clay layer L6. No finds were recovered from this layer; however, no stony layer was observed in the sequence of natural clay deposits revealed in the cutting back of the terrace bank (section 6.1). L7 and L8 appear to begin another sequence of relatively homogeneous mottled sandy clays similar to the lower deposits recorded in the terrace bank (section 6.1) and appear to be undisturbed natural. However, all the layers follow the line of the south edge of F6 against the natural sand. Overall, the shape of the feature, the sequence of layers and the distribution of recovered finds would suggest three main alternatives, ie that F6 consists only of L2-L4 with disturbance to L5, or that F6 consists of L2-L5/L6 with L6 as a possible accumulated layer at its base, or that F6 consist of all the deposits on the centre of the terrace (L2-L8 and below) overlying the natural sand.
- 8.6** The interpretation of F6 is problematic. There are two main alternatives, ie that F6 is mostly or entirely a product of the terracing on the site, either terrace dumps or a filled-in former terrace (section 8.7), or that F6 represents a large feature such as a ditch or quarry-pit (section 8.8).
- 8.7** Though the alignment of F6 (east-west) does not follow the garden terraces (aligned north-east to south-west), it does approximate to an upper terrace line shown on plans of the area (Fig 1). Also, a row of modern posts (F1-F5), which cut F6, share this same approximate alignment (Fig 2). The coincidence of these alignments could indicate a modern orientation of features of which F6 forms a part. The finds from F6 L2-L4 (Fig 3, Sx 2) are not necessarily incompatible with a relatively recent date for all these deposits, and, though it appears that F6 may well pre-date the house, it could represent terracing and terrace deposits of 19th- to 20th-century date.
- 8.8** F6 could form part of an extensive feature cut into natural clay (Fig 3, Sx 2, L2-L6 only) or a deeper feature cut into underlying natural. Given its size, this would most probably be either a quarry-pit or large ditch terminating at the edge of the extant bailey ditch earthwork. In relation to this feature, during previous excavation a large ditch was located which was considered to define an outer bailey (Milton 1987; Gobbold 1997). The approximate size and projected course of this feature would suggest that it could approximate to F6 (Fig 1). During the excavation at 23 Bellingham Lane, it was found that the outer bailey ditch had probably not been completely levelled until the 19th century at that point in its course (Gobbold 1997). This late date is not incompatible with the late date (19th-20th century) of the finds from the upper part of F6 (L2-L3). Also the remaining finds from L4 and L5 (principally peg-tiles) do not necessarily preclude an earlier (possibly much earlier) date for these deposits.
- 8.9** In summary, it is not possible on present evidence to determine with certainty what the feature F6 represents.

## **9 Archive deposition**

The paper and digital archive is held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but it will be permanently deposited with Southend Museum under accession code SOUMS 2004.10.

## 10 Acknowledgements

The Trust would like to thank the current owners of the property, Mr and Mrs Gunner, for commissioning and funding the work, and also Estuary Civil Engineering Ltd of Leigh-on-Sea, Essex for their co-operation on site.

The fieldwork was carried out by Stephen Benfield.

## 11 Abbreviations

CAR 7	2000	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report, 7, Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85, by John Cotter</i>
EHCR		Essex Heritage Conservation Record
HAT	2000	Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust Report 792, 'Land adjacent to Rayleigh Mill, an archaeological evaluation'

## 12 References

Gobbold, S	1997	'The outer bailey ditch at Rayleigh castle: observations at 23 Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh 1991', <i>EAH</i> , <b>28</b> , 290-92
Helliwell, L, & Macleod, D G	1981	<i>Rayleigh castle</i> , Rayleigh Mount local committee
Medlycott, M	1998	Rayleigh: historic towns project assessment report, Essex County Council, Planning - Archaeology section
Milton, B	1987	'Excavations at Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh, Essex', <i>EAH</i> , <b>18</b> , 39-44

## 13 Glossary

feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
layer	distinct or distinguishable deposit of soil
medieval	period from AD 1066 to Henry VIII
modern	period from the 19th century onwards to the present
motte and bailey	form taken by most early castles with an earth mound (motte) supporting a defensive tower and an attached defended settlement area (bailey).
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
peg-tile	rectangular thin tile with peg-hole(s) used mainly for roofing, first appear c 1200 and continue to present day, but commonly post-medieval to modern
post-medieval	after Henry VIII to around the late 18th century
Roman	period from AD 43 to c AD 410



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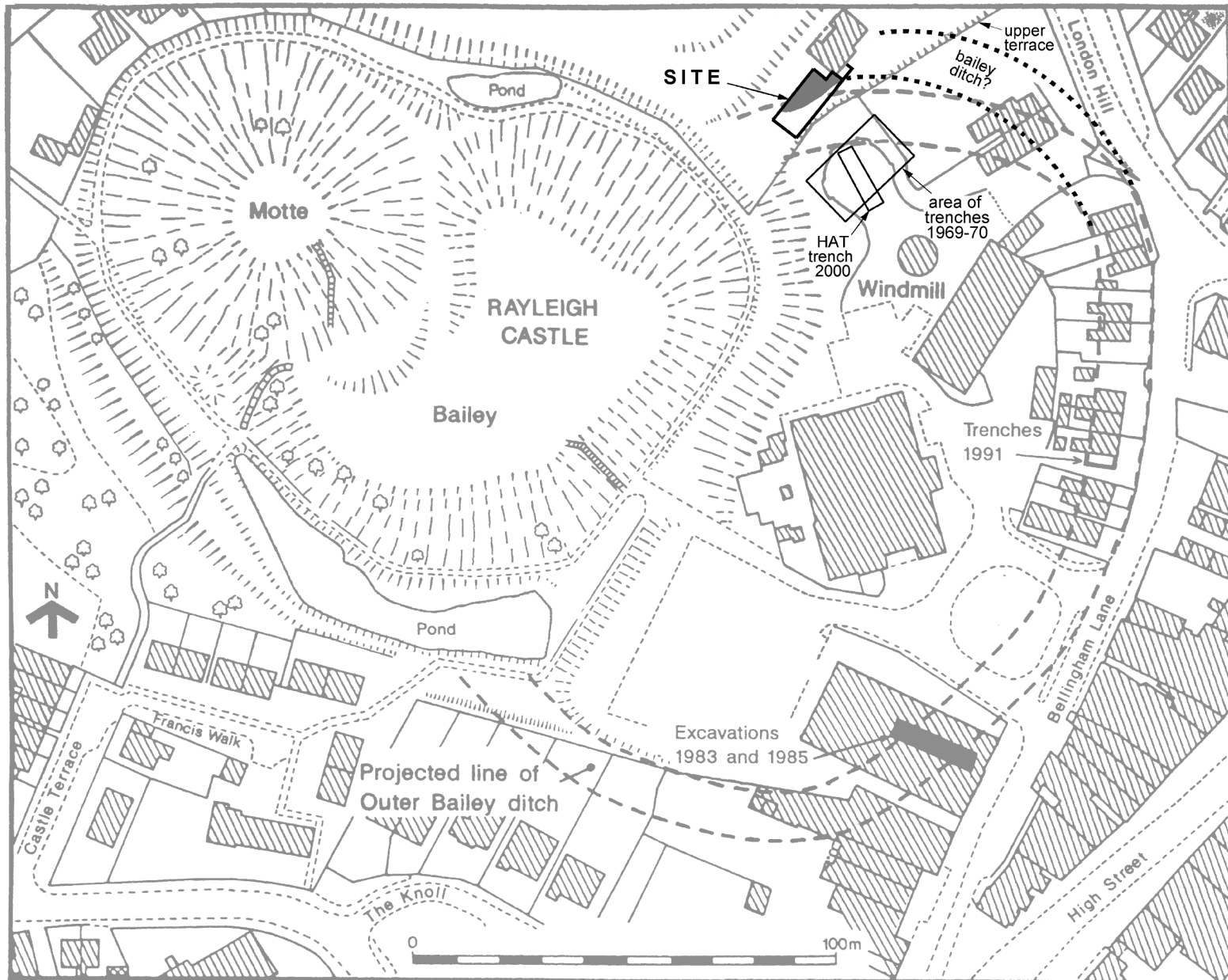


Fig 1 Site location and surrounding archaeology.

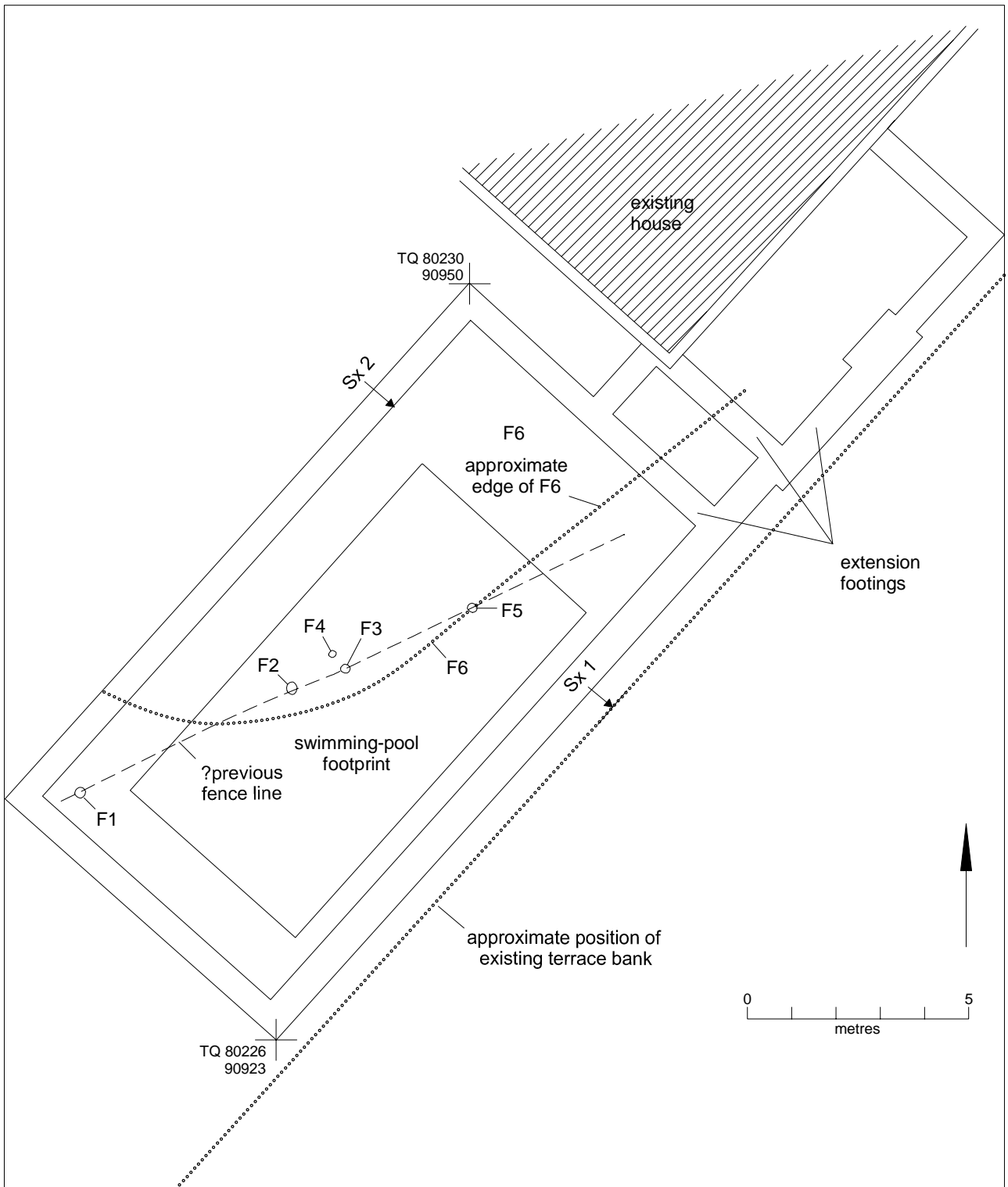
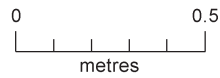
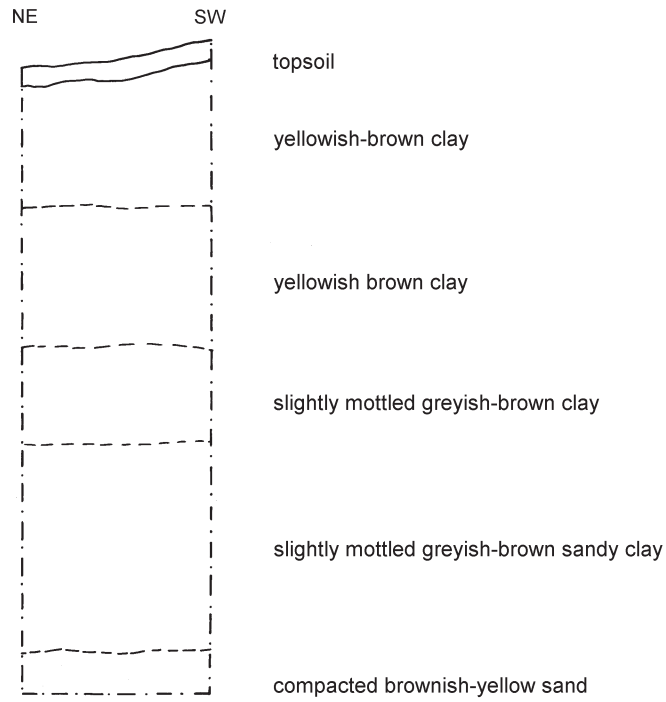


Fig 2 Plan of site showing all features and location of recorded sections.

Sx 1: terrace bank



Sx 2: north footing

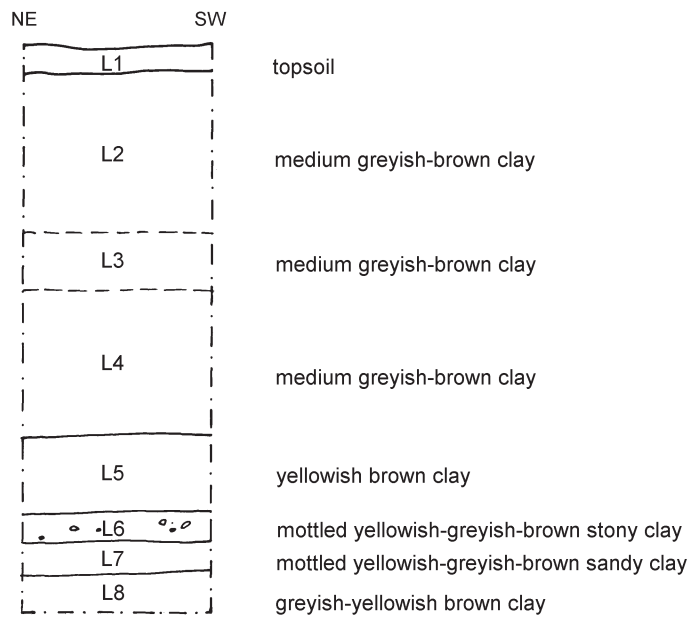


Fig 3 Sections.

**Essex Heritage Conservation Record/  
Essex Archaeology and History**

**Summary sheet**

<b>Site address:</b> 35 London Hill, Rayleigh, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Rayleigh	<b>District:</b> Southend
<b>NGR:</b> TQ 802 909	<b>Site code:</b> Museum accession SOUMS: 2004.10
<b>Type of work:</b> Watching brief and recording	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> September-October 2004	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 8m x 16m
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Southend Museum	<b>Funding source:</b> Private
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related EHCR nos:</b> 13575, 13567-13568 and SAM 0039
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 304 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods represented:</b> Roman, medieval, post-medieval, modern	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b>  <i>A watching brief was carried out on groundworks for the construction of an extension to the existing property for an indoor swimming-pool. The site lies at the west end of the upper garden terrace. On the north side of the site were deposits of clay which contained archaeological finds to between 1m and 1.2m deep. Part of the south edge and probable west end of the clay deposits were exposed which gave the impression of a large feature terminating on the west side of the site. The upper clay deposits (500mm-600mm) within this feature contained finds of modern to post-medieval date, with a small quantity of residual medieval and Roman finds. The lower deposits produced very little other than occasional peg-tile pieces and a small sherd of medieval pottery. It is not clear if the clay deposits represent a cut feature. It is possible that they are soil dump or infill associated with the terracing on the slope, though the stratigraphy and finds suggest that they represent more than one episode and could represent a sequential accumulation of layers filling a feature. Although at an angle to the garden terracing, the feature is approximately consistent with the line of the upper terrace further east. However, previous excavations along Bellingham Lane have located a large ditch considered to be part of an outer bailey. The clay-filled feature observed during the watching brief also shares the line of the bailey ditch and thus may represent a continuation of it.</i></p>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> None	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Stephen Benfield	<b>Date of summary:</b> December 2004