

**An archaeological evaluation
at Cowell and Cooper,
Weaverhead Lane,
Thaxted, Essex
February 2009**

**report prepared by
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with Adam Wightman and Chris Lister**

**commissioned on behalf of
Cowell and Cooper
by Ray Chapman Associates**

CAT project ref.: 08/11a
HEM team project code: TX 18
NGR: TL 6124 3116 (c)
Saffron Walden Museum accession code: (pending)



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CAT Report 501
February 2009

Contents

1	Summary	1
2	Introduction	1
3	Archaeological background	1
4	Aim	2
5	Results	2
6	Finds	4
7	Discussion	5
8	Archive deposition	5
9	Acknowledgements	5
10	References	5
11	Glossary	6
12	Context list	6

Figures after p 8

EHER summary sheet

List of figures

- Fig 1 Site location.
- Fig 2 Trench plan.
- Fig 3 T1-T5: detailed plans.
- Fig 4 Sections.

1 Summary

This site lies on the edge of the historic core of the medieval town of Thaxted. An archaeological evaluation by five trenches revealed two archaeological features and two natural features. The only significant feature was a shallow cut in T1 which may have been either a late medieval ditch adjacent to a post-medieval ditch (a plot boundary?), or a post-medieval cut feature with some residual late medieval material.

Medieval potsherds found in residual contexts may indicate some use of this area in the medieval period, possibly for cultivation.

There was no evidence of commercial activity or of the manufacture of cutlery.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological evaluation on the premises of Cowell and Cooper, Weaverhead Lane, Thaxted, Essex carried out on behalf of Cowell and Cooper by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between February 5th and February 6th 2009.
- 2.2 The site is a former industrial site now occupied by a factory and two houses. The site measures approximately 2,475 m², and is located at NGR TL 6124 3116 (centre).
- 2.3 A planning application was made in January 2008 to Uttlesford District Council (UTT/0085/08) to build 14 dwellings. As the site lies on the edge of the historic core of the medieval town of Thaxted, Essex County Council's Historic Environment Management team recommended to Uttlesford District Council that a full archaeological condition should be placed on the planning consent. Recommended work was described in a HEM team brief written in April 2008 and entitled *Archaeological trial-trenching and excavation at Cowell and Cooper, Weaverhead Lane, Thaxted* (Havis 2008).
- 2.4 The archaeological work recommended in the brief was a two-stage project consisting of a trial-trenching evaluation followed, if required, by a later stage of excavation. The decision on the necessity of carrying out the later excavation stage rests with the HEM team, who will consider this question after receipt of this report on the evaluation stage.
- 2.5 This report mirrors standards and practices contained in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 2001a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IfA 2001b). Other sources used are *Management of archaeological projects* (MAP 2), and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14).

3 Archaeological background

This section is based on records held by the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) and on *Thaxted: historic towns project assessment report* (Medlycott 1999).

The site lies immediately east of the north-eastern corner of the historic core of the medieval town of Thaxted, which was granted a market in 1205. Within a hundred years of that date, the town had become a major centre of the cutlery industry (Medlycott 1999; EHER nos 1402, 8552, 14672).

Documentary evidence shows the town's rapid expansion in the 14th century. In a list of trades carried on by tenants of the Manor of Thaxted, 79 people, ie over one-third of the adult male population, were cutlers (Medlycott 1999).

The site is shown in Medlycott (1999) as lying on the edge of the historic core of medieval and post-medieval Thaxted. The Chapman and André map of 1777 shows ribbon development principally along the NW- SE axis of Town Street, Watling Street, and Newbiggen Street. There is no cartographic evidence that the current site was occupied at that time, and it appears to have been in the backlands of the town. In this location, it is very likely that it was used for some form of cultivation.

Excavations found extensive surviving medieval deposits at Orchard Close to the south of this site (Havis 2008).

4 Aim

The aim of the evaluation was to establish the character, extent, date, significance and condition of any archaeological remains and deposits likely to be affected by redevelopment. Special attention was to be paid to evidence for:

- i. the date and nature of the initial and subsequent settlements in this part of Thaxted
- ii. the layout of plots and tenements
- iii. the presence or absence of industrial or commercial activity
- iv. cutlery production
- v. medieval or post-medieval ribbon development

5 Results (Figs 2-4)

Trench 1 – contexts and dating

Context	Description	Associated finds	Context date
F2	large shallow cut feature (or two ditches?)	Modern ironstone (Fabric 48d), 19th-20th century. Peg-tile fragments. Glass sherd from brown 18th- or 19th-century bottle. Peg-tile and post-medieval brick fragments. Raeren ware (Fabric 45c), late 15th-late 16th century. Sandy orange ware (Fabric 21), 13th-16th century.	18th-19th century
L1	topsoil	-	post-medieval/ modern
L2	soil	(in T2): Metropolitan slipware (Fabric 40a), 17th-mid 18th century. Medieval grey ware sherds (Fabric 13 or 20), 12th-13th century. Colchester-type ware or Mill Green ware, 13th-16th century.	not necessarily later than 17th century, but could be later
L3	natural		
L5	modern concrete	-	modern

Trench 1 interpretation

T1 was cut through concrete L5, underneath which was modern topsoil L1 sealing L2, a post-medieval (17th-century or later) topsoil layer. Sealed by L2 and cutting natural L3 was what appeared (in its northern section, ie Sx 1) to be a large late post-medieval or modern ditch F2 extending obliquely across the trench in a north to south direction. Its fill was very organic and silty. However, when sectioned in the southern part of the trench (Sx 2), its southern edge was seen to be sealed by redeposited natural. The most significant dating material (a sherd of 19th- to 20th-century ironstone) came from L2 in this section. F2 therefore appears to have been a large but not very deep pit or perhaps two ditches of slightly different dates (15th-16th century in Sx 1, 18th-19th century in Sx 2).

The investigation of two small, dark features to the south of F2 was abandoned due to the flooding of the trench from persistent rain and melting snow (with HEM team officer's consent).

Trenches 2 and 5 – contexts and dating

Context	Description	Associated finds (finds nos in bold)	Context date
L1	topsoil	-	post-medieval/modern
L2	topsoil	1: Metropolitan slipware (Fabric 40a), 17th-mid 18th century. Medieval grey ware sherds (Fabric 13 or 20), 12th-13th century. Colchester-type ware or Mill Green ware, 13th-16th century.	not necessarily later than 17th century, but could be later
L3	natural	-	-
L4	?pond fill	2: Peg-tile fragment. Mill Green ware (Fabric 35), 2g, 13th-16th century.	17th century or later
L5	modern concrete	-	modern
L6	demolition debris	(modern brick, mortar, concrete, slate - not retained)	modern

Trenches 2 and 5 interpretation

These two adjoining trenches will be discussed together.

In order to avoid blocking an important access route (and also because of the presence of numerous drains and a soakaway), T2 was re-sited (with HEM team officer's consent) to the south, and joined onto T5.

The shallow stratigraphy revealed in T2 was rural rather than urban in nature. Modern topsoil L1 (typically 0.3m deep) sealed post-medieval topsoil L2 (up to 0.33m deep and containing broken brick or land-drain fragments), which sealed natural L3 (clay with gravel).

T5 was dug through tarmac top and hogging (also L5) onto post-medieval topsoil L2, which sealed natural L3.

Towards the western end of T2 and in T5 there was an apparent change in the natural L3 (hence the dividing line shown on Fig 2). A slot was hand-dug through what was thought to be natural and, when it produced finds, it was labelled L4. A machine-dug sondage put through L4 reached true natural gravel (true L3).

The reason for this apparent difference and for the existence of L4 may be that a large willow tree once stood at the side of a pond near the southern end of T5. L4 in T5 may represent the silting of the pond. Dating material from it includes a peg-tile fragment which is probably post-medieval and a sherd of Mill Green ware (probably residual), dating to between the 13th and 16th centuries. The peg-tile probably gives the more accurate date, with the Mill Green ware being residual.

There were no cut features in either T2 or T5.

Trench 3 – contexts and dating

Context	Description	Associated finds	Context date
F1	modern brick footing, probably part of recent garage	-	modern
L1	topsoil	-	post-medieval/modern
L2	soil	(in T2): Metropolitan slipware (Fabric 40a), 17th-mid 18th century.	not necessarily later than 17th century, but could be later
L3	natural	-	-

Trench 3 interpretation

T3 had a solid piece of modern wall foundation (F1) sealed by topsoil L1 and just under the surface at the southern end of the trench. The centre of the trench

appeared to be occupied by a water-main, so this area was left unexcavated. F1 cut post-medieval demolition debris L6, which sealed post-medieval soil L4.

Natural was reached in the northern end of T3, but no archaeological features were revealed.

Trench 4 – contexts and dating

Context	Description	Associated finds	Context date
F3	natural feature	-	-
F4	natural feature	-	-
L2	soil	(in T2): Metropolitan slipware (Fabric 40a), 17th- mid 18th century.	not necessarily later than 17th century, but could be later
L3	natural		
L5	modern concrete	-	modern
L7	modern rubbish deposit	(burnt bottles and cans - not retained)	modern

Trench 4 interpretation

T4 was cut through concrete (L5). The trench assumed a slightly strange shape due to the way in which the extremely thick reinforced concrete broke up.

At the western end of T4b, it was not possible to excavate to natural because a large tree had dried the ground out. The lost metres were made up by extending T4b to the west, and cutting through a thick layer of modern rubbish L7 (0.10m to 0.18m thick) and then topsoil L1 (0.01m thick) until natural L3 (clay and gravel) was reached.

The only two features in this trench were both of natural origin (F3, F4).

6 Finds

by Howard Brooks

Post-Roman pottery fabric descriptions are after Cunningham 1985 and CAR 7.

Catalogue

T1

F2 Sx 1

Finds number 3

1 sherd of sandy orange ware (Fabric 21), 5g. 13th-16th century.

1 sherd of Raeren ware (German stoneware, Fabric 45c), 4g. Late 15th-late 16th century.

6 peg-tile fragments, 410g.

1 natural flint lump, 150g.

F2 Sx 2

Finds number 4

1 sherd of modern ironstone (Fabric 48d), 5g.

1 brown glass sherd from 18th- or 19th-century bottle, 5g.

13 peg-tile fragments (one with circular peg-hole), 447g.

2 post-medieval brick fragments, 252g.

1 partial, square-sectioned iron nail, 11g.

1 oyster-shell fragment, 8g.

1 animal bone, 33g.

2 ?natural flint lumps, 66g.

T2

L2

Finds number 1

1 sherd of Metropolitan slipware (Fabric 40a), 20g. 17th-mid 18th century.

1 sherd of medieval grey ware (Fabric 13 or 20), 5g. 12th-13th century.

2 sherds of Mill Green ware (Fabric 35: including a handle fragment), 18g. 13th-16th century.

T5

L4

Finds number 2

1 peg-tile fragment, 68g.

1 sherd of Mill Green ware (Fabric 35), with greenish glaze, 2g. 13th-16th century.

1 prehistoric flint flake, 2g.

7 Discussion

The site lies in the backlands of medieval Thaxted, a little over 100m north of the medieval settlement along Town Street. Land in such a location is unlikely to have been unused, and an agricultural function may be inferred. The discovery of five sherds which may pre-date the occupation of this site (as represented by F2 in T1) would support this hypothesis, the sherds possibly being small-scale 'manure scatter'.

The only significant feature revealed by the evaluation was F2 in T1. The two excavated sections across this feature produced two differently-dated groups of finds. From the west side (ie Sx 1) came a group of 15th- to 16th-century material, and from the east side (ie Sx 2) came a group of 18th- to 19th-century material. It was not possible at the time of the evaluation to determine whether this was one feature, ie a large shallow pit with a range of finds, or two separate features, perhaps two parallel ditches. If F2 were two parallel ditches, then it would be possible that they were boundary ditches, perhaps the boundaries of plots of the late medieval and post-medieval town. One factor which may argue against this is the fact that the projected west edge of F2 came within 4m of the east edge of Guelph's Lane, thus defining a very narrow plot. Even if the ditch were to curve away to the east, it is difficult to see how it could have defined a plot of much more than 6m deep (west to east).

The modern feature - the wall footing in F1 in T3 - is not considered to be significant.

8 Archive deposition

The paper archive is currently held by CAT at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex, but will be permanently deposited with Saffron Walden Museum (accession code pending).

9 Acknowledgements

CAT would like to thank Cowell and Cooper for commissioning and funding the work, via Roy Chapman Associates. Site work and EDM plots by A Wightman and C Lister.

The project was monitored by Mr Richard Havis for the Essex County Council Historic Environment Management team.

10 References

Note: all CAT reports, except for DBAs, are available online in .pdf format at <http://cat.essex.ac.uk>.

- | | | |
|-----------------|------|---|
| CAR 7 | 2000 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 7: Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85</i> , by John Cotter |
| Cunningham, C M | 1985 | 'A typology for post-Roman pottery in Essex', in <i>Post-medieval sites and their pottery: Moulsham Street, Chelmsford</i> , by C M Cunningham and P J Drury, Chelmsford Archaeological Trust Report 5 and CBA Research Report 54, 1-16 |

EAA 14	2003	<i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 14 , ed by D Gurney
Havis, R	2008	<i>Archaeological trial trenching and excavation at Cowell and Cooper, Weaverhead Lane, Thaxted</i> , Essex County Council Historic Environment Management team brief, April 2008
IfA	2001a	<i>Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation</i>
IfA	2001b	<i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i>
MAP 2	1991	<i>Management of archaeological projects</i> , second edition (English Heritage)
Medlycott, Maria	1999	<i>Thaxted: historic towns project assessment report</i> , Essex County Council Planning Department

11 Glossary

context	on an excavation site, a specific location, especially of finds
EHER	Essex Historic Environment Record, maintained by Essex County Council
feature	something excavated – a wall, a floor, a pit, a ditch, etc
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists
manure scatter	domestic debris collected with farmyard manure and then spread on fields
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c AD 1500
modern	period from c AD 1800 to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
post-medieval	after c AD 1500 to c AD 1800
residual	an earlier find in a later context (eg a Roman coin in a Victorian pit)

12 Context list

Context	Trench	Description	Associated finds (finds nos in bold)	Context date
F1	T3	modern brick footing, probably part of recent garage	-	modern
F2	T1	large shallow cut feature (or two ditches?)	3 : Sandy orange ware (Fabric 21), 13th-16th century. Raeren ware (Fabric 45c), late 15th-late 16th century. Peg-tile fragments. 4 : Modern ironstone (Fabric 48d). Glass sherd from brown 18th- or 19th-century bottle. Peg-tile and post-medieval brick fragments.	18th-19th century
F3	T4	natural feature	-	-
F4	T4	natural feature	-	-
L1	T1, T2, T3, T5	topsoil	-	post-medieval/modern
L2	T1-T5	soil (typically 0.30m thick)	1 : Metropolitan slipware (Fabric 40a), 17th- mid 18th century. Medieval grey ware sherds (Fabric 13 or 20), 12th-13th century.	not necessarily later than 17th century, but could be later

			Colchester-type ware or Mill Green ware, 13th-16th century.	
L3	T1-T5	natural		
L4	T2, T5	?pond fill (typically 0.55m thick)	2: Peg-tile fragment. 1 sherd Mill Green ware (Fabric 35), 13th-16th century.	17th century or later
L5	T1, T4, T5	modern concrete (between 0.20m and 0.35m thick)	-	modern
L6	T5	demolition debris (typically 0.25m thick)	(modern brick, mortar, concrete, slate - not retained)	modern
L7	T4	modern rubbish deposit (0.10m to 0.18m thick)	(burnt bottles and cans - not retained)	modern

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Distribution list:

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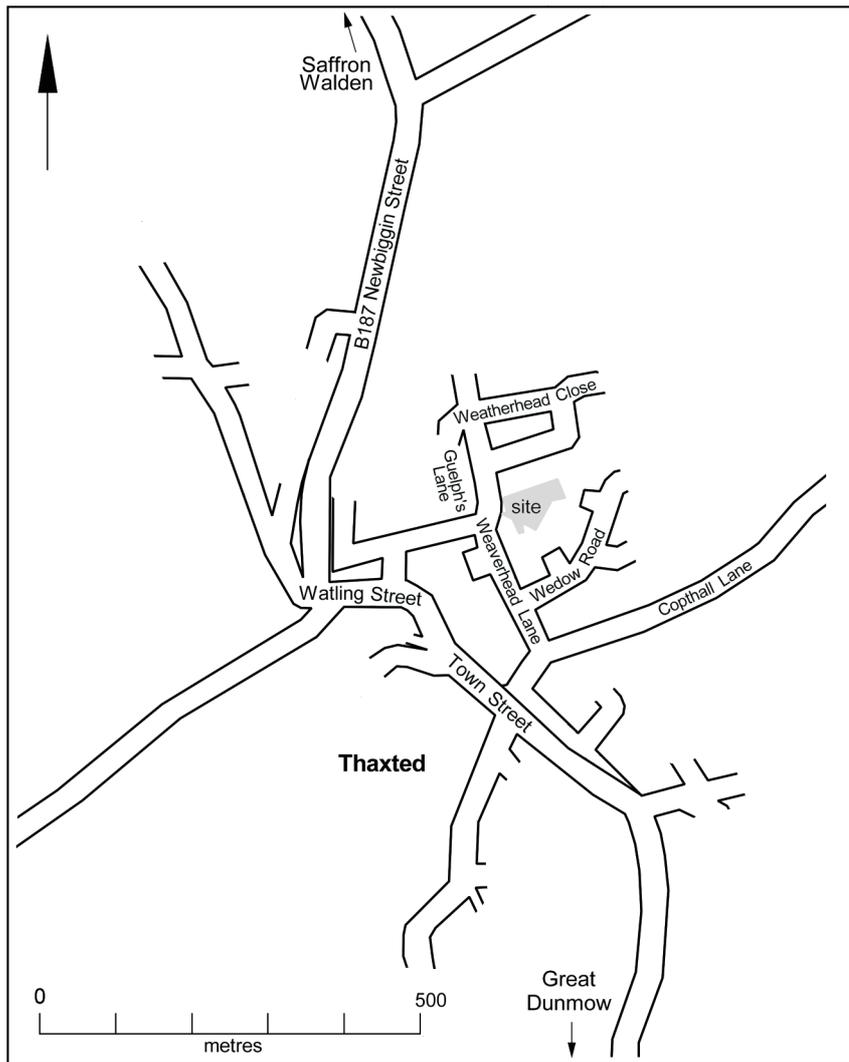
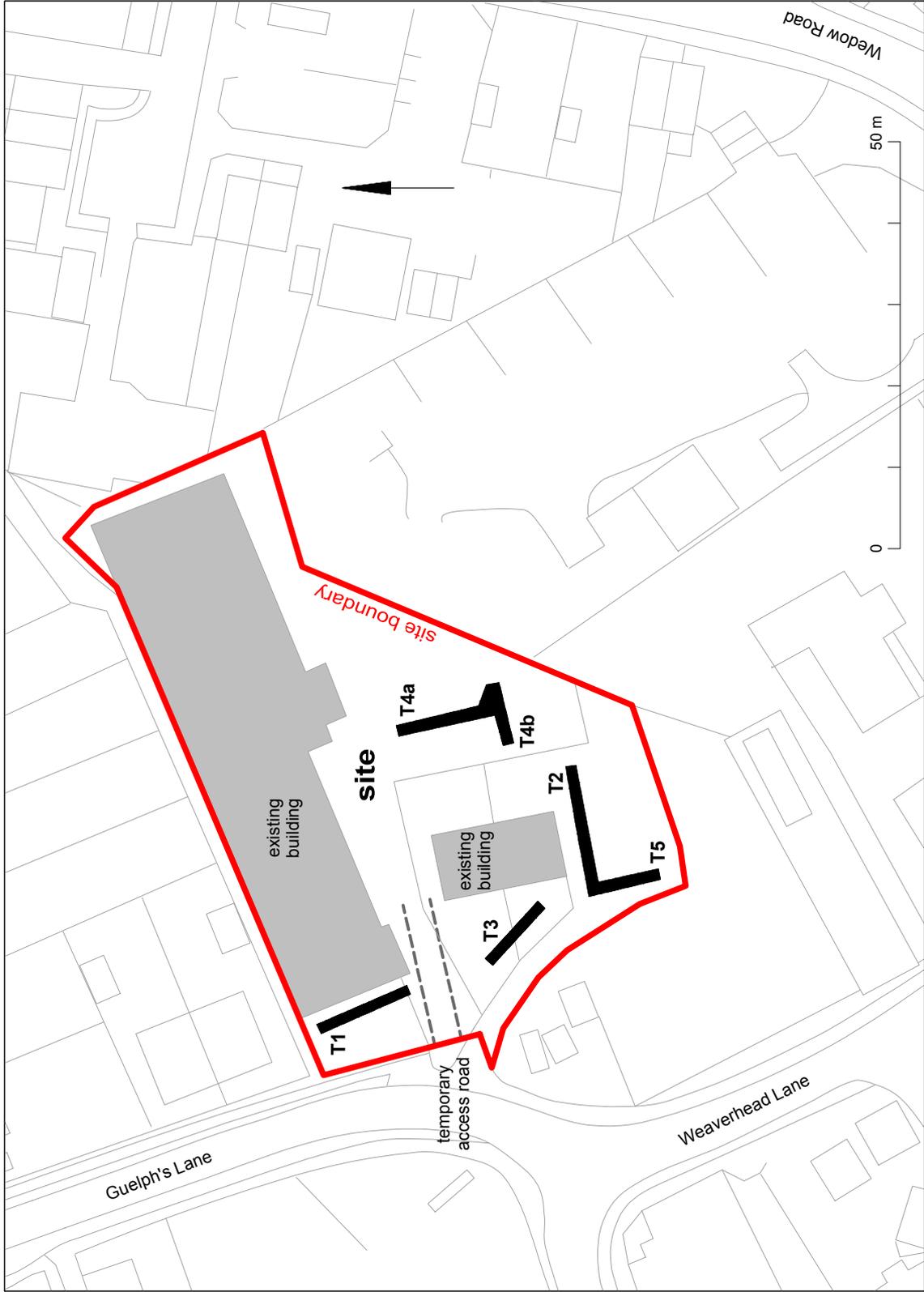
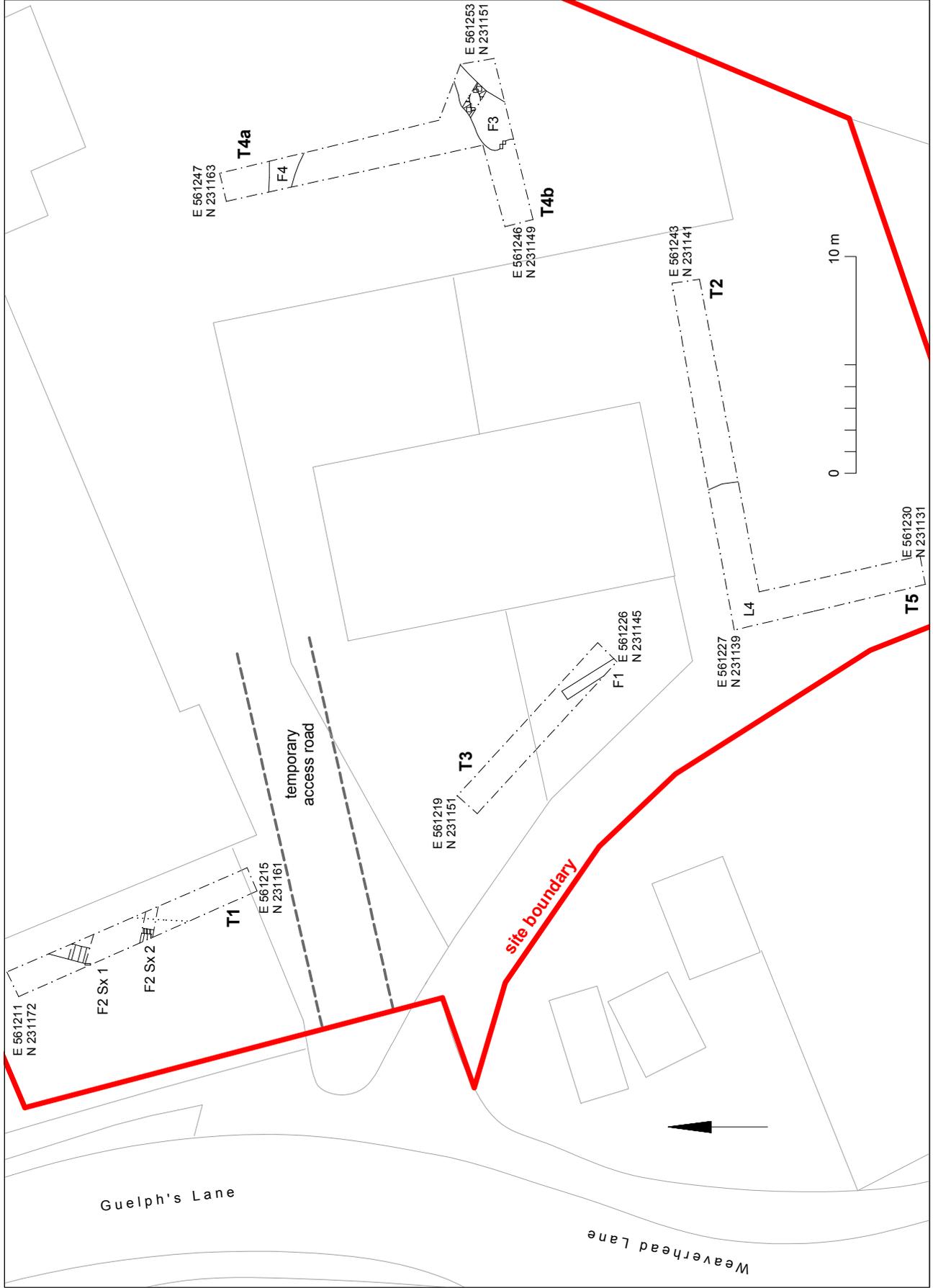


Fig 1 Site location.



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Fig 2 Trench plan.



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Fig 3 T1-T5: detailed plans.

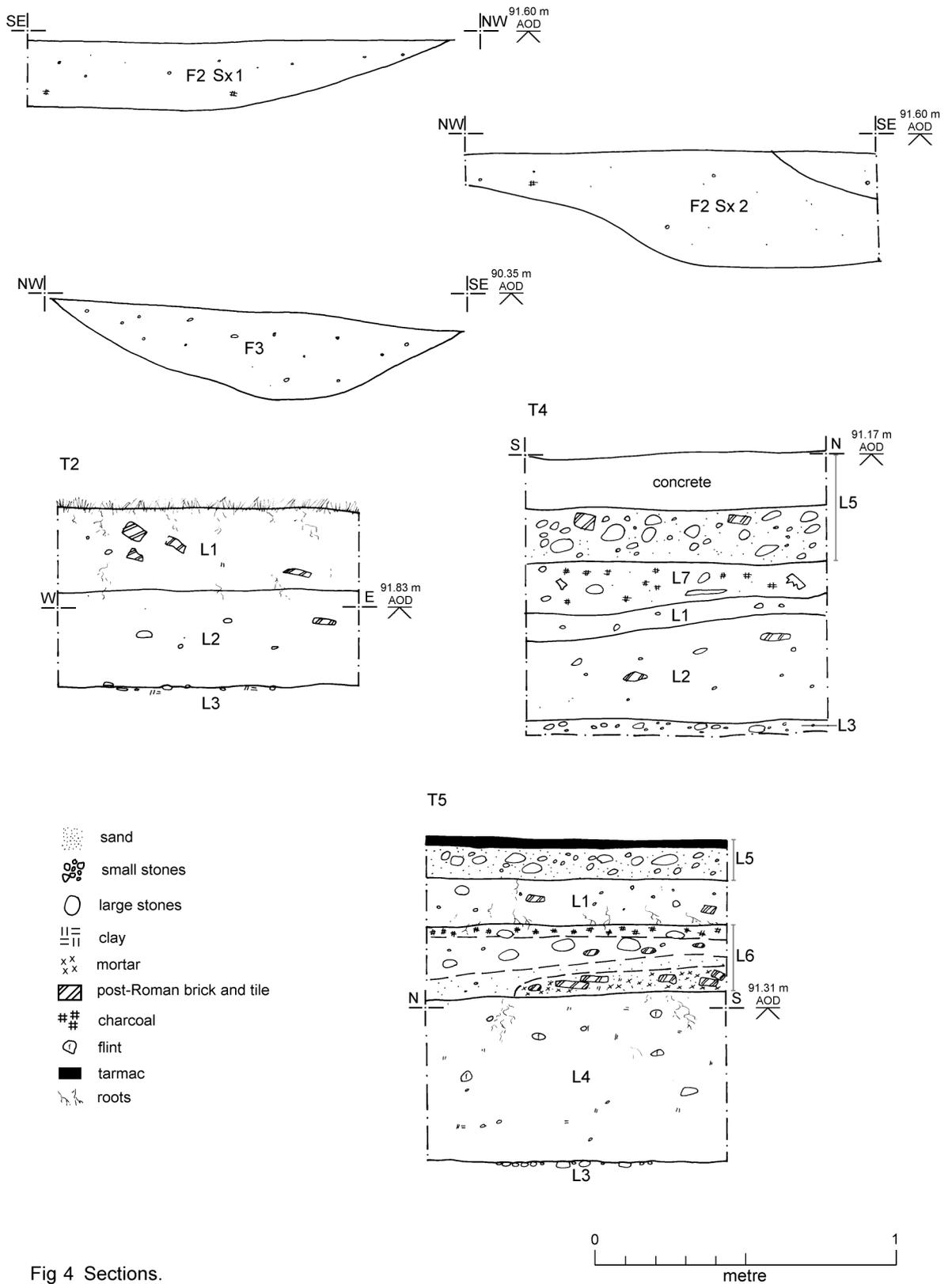


Fig 4 Sections.

Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

Summary sheet

Site address: Cowell and Cooper, Weaverhead Lane, Thaxted, Essex	
Parish: Thaxted	District: Uttlesford
NGR: TL 6124 3116 (c)	Site code: CAT project code - 08/11a HEM code - TX 18 Museum accession code - (pending)
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: February 2009	Size of area investigated: Approximately 2,475m ²
Curating museum: Saffron Walden Museum	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHER nos: 1402, 8552, 14672
Final report: CAT Report 501 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: none	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>This site lies on the edge of the historic core of the medieval town of Thaxted. An archaeological evaluation by five trenches revealed two archaeological features and two natural features. The only significant feature was a shallow cut in T1 which may have been either a late medieval ditch adjacent to a post-medieval ditch (a plot boundary?), or a post-medieval cut feature with some residual late medieval material.</i> <i>Medieval potsherds found in residual contexts may indicate some use of this area in the medieval period, possibly for cultivation.</i> <i>There was no evidence of commercial activity or of the manufacture of cutlery.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: none	
Keywords: medieval ditch	Significance: *
Author of summary: Howard Brooks	Date of summary: February 2008