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

report prepared by
Howard Brooks,
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)

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

tel.:  (01206) 541051
      (01206) 500124
email:  archaeologists@catuk.org

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, i.e. 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Associated finds</th>
<th>Context date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F2</td>
<td>large shallow cut feature (or two ditches?)</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>18th-19th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>topsoil</td>
<td></td>
<td>post-medieval/modern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>not necessarily later than 17th century, but could be later</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3</td>
<td>natural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L5</td>
<td>modern concrete</td>
<td></td>
<td>modern</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 materiel (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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Associated finds (finds nos in bold)</th>
<th>Context date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>topsoil</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>post-medieval/modern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>topsoil</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>not necessarily later than 17th century, but could be later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3</td>
<td>natural</td>
<td>2: Peg-tile fragment. Mill Green ware (Fabric 35), 2g, 13th-16th century.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L4</td>
<td>?pond fill</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>17th century or later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L5</td>
<td>modern concrete</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>modern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L6</td>
<td>demolition debris</td>
<td>(modern brick, mortar, concrete, slate - not retained)</td>
<td>modern</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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**

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

**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

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

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 that 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 Colchester Archaeological Report 7: Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85, by John Cotter
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Trench</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Associated finds (finds nos in bold)</th>
<th>Context date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F1</td>
<td>T3</td>
<td>modern brick footing, probably part of recent garage</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>modern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2</td>
<td>T1</td>
<td>large shallow cut feature (or two ditches?)</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>18th-19th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F3</td>
<td>T4</td>
<td>natural feature</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F4</td>
<td>T4</td>
<td>natural feature</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>T1, T2, T3, T5</td>
<td>topsoil</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>post-medieval/modern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>TT-T5</td>
<td>soil (typically 0.30m thick)</td>
<td>1: Metropolitan slipware (Fabric 40a), 17th- mid 18th century. Medieval grey ware sherd (Fabric 13 or 20), 12th-13th century.</td>
<td>not necessarily later than 17th century, but could be later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Trenches</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Date/Period</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3</td>
<td>T1-T5</td>
<td>Natural</td>
<td>13th-16th century</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L4</td>
<td>T2, T5</td>
<td>Pond fill (typically 0.55m thick)</td>
<td>17th century or later</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L5</td>
<td>T1, T4, T5</td>
<td>Modern concrete (between 0.20m and 0.35m thick)</td>
<td>Modern</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L6</td>
<td>T5</td>
<td>Demolition debris (typically 0.25m thick)</td>
<td>Modern</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L7</td>
<td>T4</td>
<td>Modern rubbish deposit (0.10m to 0.18m thick)</td>
<td>Modern</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© Colchester Archaeological Trust 2009

Distribution list:
Cowell and Cooper
Ray Chapman Associates
Mr Richard Havis, ECC HEM team
Essex Historic Environment Record

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

tel.: (01206) 541051
(01206) 500124
email: archaeologists@catuk.org

checked by: Philip Crummy
date: 19.02.09
Fig 1 Site location.
Fig 2  Trench plan.
Fig 3  T1-T5: detailed plans.
sand  
small stones  
large stones  
clay  
mortar  
post-Roman brick and tile  
charcoal  
flint  
tarmac  
roots

Fig 4 Sections.
**Essex Historic Environment Record**

**Essex Archaeology and History**

**Summary sheet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Site address:</strong></th>
<th>Cowell and Cooper, Weaverhead Lane, Thaxted, Essex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parish:</strong></td>
<td>Thaxted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District:</strong></td>
<td>Uttlesford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NGR:</strong></td>
<td>TL 6124 3116 (c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Site code:</strong></td>
<td>CAT project code - 08/11a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HEM code - TX 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Museum accession code - (pending)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of work:</strong></td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Site director/group:</strong></td>
<td>Colchester Archaeological Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date of work:</strong></td>
<td>February 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size of area investigated:</strong></td>
<td>Approximately 2,475m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curating museum:</strong></td>
<td>Saffron Walden Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funding source:</strong></td>
<td>Developer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Further seasons anticipated?</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Related EHER nos:</strong></td>
<td>1402, 8552, 14672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final report:</strong></td>
<td>CAT Report 501 and summary in EAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Periods represented:</strong></td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of fieldwork results:**

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.

**Previous summaries/reports:** none

**Keywords:** medieval ditch

**Significance:** *

**Author of summary:** Howard Brooks

**Date of summary:** February 2008