

**An archaeological evaluation
at Thistle Hall, Mope Lane,
Wickham Bishops, Essex
July 2009**

**report prepared by
Howard Brooks and Ben Holloway**

**on behalf of
Clarity Ecoworks Ltd**

CAT project ref.: 09/1f
ECC code: THWI 09
Colchester and Ipswich Museums accession code: COLIM 2009.12
NGR: TL 834 126 (c)



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CAT Report 519

October 2009

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1 Summary

Two evaluation trenches with a combined length of 125m were dug on the site of a proposed lake at Thistle Hall, to the west of Wickham Bishops village, in July 2009. Ten archaeological features were identified as a result, the most significant of which were two unaccompanied urned cremation burials and part of a probable World War 1 military training trench. The burials were poorly preserved because of plough damage. Neither can be closely dated but they are Late Iron Age to Roman in date (1st to mid 2nd centuries). The burials are likely to be part of a small cemetery which included a burial found in 1916 when some trenches were dug in the area. There is, however, some uncertainty about the exact find spot of this earlier discovery, although one of these trenches appears to have been found during the 2009 evaluation. The cemetery is likely to be associated with a settlement site identified during excavations in 1929-30 although, like the 1916 burial, the exact location of these investigations is problematic.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the archive report on an archaeological trial-trenching evaluation at Thistle Hall, Mope Lane, Wickham Bishops, Essex.

The site, an irregular triangle of land bordered by mature hedgerows and woodland, is located on the western side of Mope Lane to the west of Wickham Bishops village. At the time of the evaluation, the site was open ground with rough grass on which horses had previously been grazed. The centre of the site is at NGR TL 834 126.

The Historic Environment Management (HEM) team of Essex County Council (ECC) were consulted by Maldon District Council in November 2008 on an outline planning application (MAL/01240/08) for the construction of a fishing and wildlife lake. In response to consultation, the HEM team made the following recommendation in line with *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning* (DoE 1990):

'... The applicant should be required to conduct a field evaluation to establish the nature and complexity of the surviving archaeological deposits. This should be undertaken prior to a planning decision being made. This evaluation would enable due consideration to be given to the archaeological implications and would lead to proposals for mitigation of disturbance and/or the need for further investigation ...'

A brief detailing the required archaeological work was written by the HEM team officer (Medlycott 2008). All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by CAT in response to the HEM team brief and agreed with the HEM team (CAT 2009).

The archaeological work was commissioned by Mr John Hayward of Clarity Ecoworks Ltd, and was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on the 1st July 2009. Post-excavation work was carried out in July and October 2009.

In addition to the WSI, all fieldwork and reporting was done in accordance with CAT's *Policies and procedures* (CAT 2008), the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 2008a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IfA 2008b). The guidance contained in the documents *Management of research projects in the historic environment* (MoRPHE) and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14) was also followed.

3 Archaeological background (Fig 1)

This section is based on records held by the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) and the brief (Medlycott 2008).

The lake site lies in an area of archaeological potential (EHER nos 8221-8222), although the exact locations of the earlier discoveries are problematic. The EHER records the discovery of an Iron Age burial of La Tène date on Wickham Bishops Hill, which was exposed in 1916, 'during the digging of trenches' (Medlycott 2008). Two

grid-references are given for this site by Mr Balch, one of the excavators; one of these grid-references is immediately adjacent to the lake site. The other grid-reference indicates a site approximately 300m to the south of the lake site. Part of Wickham Bishops Hill was again excavated in 1929-30, and this time evidence of a Late Iron age settlement was revealed. The location of this investigation is also uncertain, with one grid-reference placing it within the lake site and the other (again given by Mr Balch), indicating a site some 300m to the south.

In addition, the purpose of the 1916 trenches is uncertain. It is possible that these were World War 1 military training trenches, which have been archaeologically excavated elsewhere in Essex (CAT Report 246). The OS 1st-3rd edition maps (1875-1920) show the area around the lake site as rough heathland, ie a suitable location for such activities. Thus it was apparent that the remains of an Iron Age settlement or cemetery, as well as World War 1 military training trenches, could be damaged by construction of the lake.

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 the construction of the fishing and wildlife lake. Specific attention was paid to possible evidence of prehistoric settlement and funerary activities.

5 Results of the evaluation (Figs 1-5)

This section gives an archaeological summary of the evaluation trenches 1-2 (T1-T2), with context and finds-dating information.

A mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless bucket was used to progressively strip the topsoil and upper soil horizons down to the uppermost surviving level of archaeological significance. All further investigation was carried out by hand.

Trench 1: summary (Fig 2)

T1 was a 1.6m-wide trench aligned east to west across the centre of the lake site. The eastern end of the trench was enlarged so as to measure 7.0m x 7.5m. T1 was excavated through a thin humic deposit of modern topsoil 100-150mm thick (L1). L1 sealed an accumulation layer (L2), a slightly leached-out silty clay 250mm thick, which sealed natural (L3), a yellow/orange coarse gravel and sand in an orange/brown clay matrix.

Four archaeological features were identified in the initial 1.6m-wide trench (F6-F9), with another in the enlarged eastern end (F10). Post-holes F6 and F7 may have been parts of a fence-line relating to the equestrian centre. Modern pit F8 contained modern pottery and glass fragments, indicating use as a rubbish dump.

The principal features of interest were two urned cremation burials (F9, F10), each of which consisted of a ceramic vessel containing cremated human bone, dated as Late Iron Age to Roman. The upper parts of the two vessels were missing, presumably removed by plough damage. There were no associated grave goods.

T1 – archaeological contexts and dating

Feature	Type	Dated finds	Period
F6	Post-hole	Brick	modern
F7	Post-hole	-	undated (?modern)
F8	Pit	Pottery, glass	modern
F9	Cremation burial	Pottery, cremated human bone	1st-2nd century
F10	Cremation burial	Pottery, cremated human bone	1st-2nd century

Trench 2: summary (Fig 2)

T2 was a 1.6m-wide trench aligned north to south across the centre of the lake site. It was excavated through a thin humic deposit of modern topsoil 100-150mm thick (L1). L1 sealed an accumulation layer (L2), a slightly leached-out silty clay 250mm thick, which sealed natural (L3), a yellow/orange coarse gravel and sand in an orange/brown clay matrix.

T2 contained five archaeological features (F1-F5), ie a modern stake hole with the base of a wooden stake *in situ* (F1), and three small pits (F2, F3, F4). F3 and F4 are undated, and may have been part of a fence-line (as with F6 and F7 in T1). F2 is similarly undatable, but the excavated fill contained a concentration of charcoal and fragments of burnt and scorched flint which may indicate a prehistoric date.

T2 also cut a linear feature (F5). The essential characteristics of this feature were its 'zig-zag' plan, and the barbed wire in its fill. This feature appears to be shallow, but its ground-plan and the presence of barbed wire argue strongly for it being a backfilled military training trench of World War 1 date (CAT Report 246).

T2 – archaeological contexts and dating

Feature	Type	Dated finds	Period
F1	Stake hole	Base of wooden stake	modern
F2	Pit	Burnt flint	prehistoric
F3	Pit	-	undated (?modern)
F4	Pit	-	undated (?modern)
F5	Possible World War 1 military training trench	Barbed wire, flint blade	WW1

6 Finds

6.1 Late Iron Age to Roman pottery

by Stephen Benfield

Pottery fabrics and recording

Parts of two Late Iron Age to Roman pottery vessels were recovered from two features (F9 and F10). The two vessels had been used as cremation urns. The pottery was recorded using the Roman pottery fabric type series devised for *CAR 10*. The pot forms were classified with reference to the Camulodunum (Cam) Roman pottery form type series (Hawkes & Hull 1947). The surviving parts of the vessels are very broken up and the edges and surfaces are degraded. Neither of the two vessels was in a condition which would allow them to be illustrated.

Description of the Late Iron Age to Roman pottery

T1, F9 (cremation burial)

Finds no 5 (572g)

115 sherds from the lower part and the shoulder of a vessel, probably a narrow-necked jar or flask, used as a cremation urn. The pot is very broken up. Most of the sherds are from the jar base and lower body. No rim sherds are present. The surviving parts of the jar base are very degraded, but it is flat with the sides of the body sloping up and outward from it. Four of the sherds can be identified as part of the shoulder. They have either part of the arc of a burnished line, or have a groove forming one edge of a bulge or cordon on their surface. Two of the sherds have both of these features and these two sherds also join together. The curve of the burnished arc indicates that these sherds come from part of the body of a pot which is at a fairly low angle. The low angle of these sherds could indicate that they are part of a separate lid. However, the presence of a cordon and the decorative burnished line indicate that they are more probably from the shoulder of a narrow-necked jar or flask. As such, all of the sherds recovered from the feature are probably part of one vessel. This type of flattened shoulder area is seen in narrow-necked jars or flasks of form Cam 231 (Hawkes & Hull 1947, plate LXXIX). The form Cam 231 appears in the Late Iron Age, but is much more common in the post-conquest Roman

period (CAR 10, 478). The sherds are slightly soft and quite sandy, with some pieces and streaks of burnt organic matter. The edges and surfaces of the sherds are degraded. Despite its degradation, the pot appears to have been wheel-thrown. The fabric colour is reddish-brown to grey-brown in the break with black surfaces, although most of the surface is missing (CAR 10, Fabric GX: other coarse wares, principally locally-produced grey wares). Vessel dated 1st to mid-late 2nd century.

T1, F10 (cremation burial)

Finds no 7 (250g)

Forty-six sherds from the lower part of a jar, or tall closed-mouth bowl, used as a cremation urn. The pot is very broken up. The sherds are from the base and lower body. No rim sherds are present. The base has a small, vertical-sided foot, flat across the underside of the base but with a slight lip or ring around the underside edge. There are some distinct turning grooves around the outside of the base. The pot is wheel-thrown. The fabric is slightly soft and quite sandy, with some pieces and streaks of burnt organic matter. The edges and surfaces of the sherds are degraded. The fabric is red-brown in the break with black surfaces. Some thicker sherds – from the base – have a dark core (CAR 10, Fabric GX: other coarse wares, principally locally-produced grey wares). Vessel dated 1st-2nd century.

Late Iron Age to Roman pottery discussion

The two pots are very broken-up and degraded and the upper parts are either entirely missing (F10) or represented by only a few small sherds (F9), so that identifying the vessel types is slightly speculative. However, the pottery recovered from F9 almost certainly represents a narrow-necked jar with a flattened shoulder area, probably of form Cam 231, dated 1st century (Late Iron Age) to mid-late 2nd century (Roman). While the low angle of the sherds identified as part of the shoulder of this pot might indicate that they are part of a lid, the decorative burnished line and the cordon, combined with the sandy fabric, make this unlikely. The pottery from F10 represents the lower part of a jar, or tall closed-mouth bowl, with a small, vertical-sided foot. The fabric of both pots belongs to a tradition of black-surface wares (BSW), which form a major element of the pottery of East Anglia in the Late Iron Age and the Roman periods (Martin 2003, 129-30). While black-surface wares persisted throughout the Roman period, they occurred in sandy Romanising fabrics in the 1st-2nd century, and the fabrics of the pots here appear to belong to this group. These Romanising wares were most common in the early Roman period of the 1st-mid 2nd century, but by the late 2nd century were much less important (Going 1987, table 9, fabrics 34 & 45).

6.2 Post-Roman pottery

by Howard Brooks

Introduction

This is the report on the small group of post-Roman pottery from this site, which consists of five sherds, with a total weight of 167g. Pottery fabric descriptions are after CAR 7.

Catalogue

T1, F8 (pit)

Finds no 3

Five sherds (167g) of English porcelain (Fabric 48b). Most of a cup, plain but with gilt-underlined blue band around exterior of rim. Unknown maker, quite good quality. No parallels on Museum of London web-site (reference below).

Date: late 18th or early 19th century.

6.3 Cremated human bone

by Adam Wightman with Ben Holloway

Cremated human bones were recovered from two contexts, ie cremation burials F9 and F10. The combined assemblage comes to a total of 114.5g. The human bones were identified and assessed in accordance with standards given in Bass 1995.

The material from F10 is highly fragmented, poorly preserved and only includes very small fragments of bone. This is likely to be a result of recent agricultural disturbance,

ie the upper part of the cremation deposit has been removed by plough damage. All that can be established from this deposit is a bone weight of 1.5g and the conclusion that the remains are human and not faunal.

A larger bone assemblage was recovered from F9, ie 113g of cremated bone. As with the material recovered from F10, the bone from F9 is somewhat fragmented as a result of truncation caused by plough damage. Despite this, a number of long-bones can be identified (femur and humerus), as well as fragments of possible scapula. The remainder of the material is highly fragmented and, as in F10, poorly preserved. Although none of the larger fragments were particularly diagnostic, the remains seem compatible with an adult individual.

6.4 Lithics

by Adam Wightman with Ben Holloway

Two flints were found in T2. The first, from pit F2, had been exposed to extreme heat which caused the surface to become scorched and crazed. This is consistent with domestic hearth material.

The second flint, a broken blade, was residual in the fill of F5 (World War 1 military training trench). It measures 25mm x 30mm at the break, although it would have been about 60mm in length when complete. Two blades appear to have been struck from the ventral surface. Although difficult to date closely, this residual piece suggests that there had been prehistoric activity in the immediate vicinity of the site.

7 Discussion

The majority of the features located during this evaluation are modern, and are likely to be associated with the equestrian centre. There are, however, three areas of interest: the flint; the two urned cremation burials; and the possible military training trench.

The presence of at least one flint indicates that there had been some activity here, albeit on a probably very limited scale, in this area in the prehistoric period.

The two urned cremation burials are dated Late Iron Age to Roman. As noted in the brief (Medlycott 2008), previous records indicate an Iron Age settlement site and a separate Iron Age burial site on Wickham Bishops Hill, although there is some uncertainty about the exact locations of both sites. Consequently site locations are shown on Figures 1-2 as either 'SMR' (Sites and Monuments Record: now called EHER) or as 'Balch', where recorded in a different position by Mr Balch. It is difficult to give a meaningful view on this problem, except to say that the SMR location of the Iron Age settlement site coincides with the eastern side of Sparkey Wood. It seems unlikely that this location can be correct, given the difficulty of excavating anywhere near trees and their root systems. Also, the SMR location for the Iron Age burials is very close to Thistle Hall itself, and, as that discovery is linked with the digging of trenches in 1916, this location is very suspect because trenches of this nature would probably not have been allowed so close to the building. At face value, the grid-references for the burial and settlement sites given by Mr Balch, who worked on the excavations (Medlycott 2008), do at least have the virtue of being away from the hall and out in open ground. For what it is worth, this writer (HB) takes the view that the Balch locations are more accurate.

The Balch location of the Iron Age settlement site is on the eastern edge of the lake site, and his location of the Iron Age burial site is 450m to the south. The close juxtaposition of the Balch location of the settlement site and the two 2009 cremation burials means that they may be considered to be one and the same site, although now dated Late Iron Age to Roman instead of Iron Age. The 2009 burials are located some 450m to the north of the Balch site of Iron Age burials. This indicates that there may be discrete groups of burials on Wickham Bishops Hill, laid out at different times throughout the Iron Age and Roman periods.

The essential characteristics of linear feature F5 in T2 are its 'zig-zag' plan, and the barbed wire in its fill. There can be little doubt that this is a modern military trench. This writer (HB) worked on the excavation of a similar, though larger, World War 1 trench at Usk in 1972. This was also on a zig-zag plan, and had barbed wire in its fill. Similar features have also been excavated by CAT during a watching brief on ordnance

disposal at the Colchester Garrison PFI site in 2002, where they were identified as World War 1 military training trenches (CAT Report 246, 1-2). The identification of F5 as a World War 1 military training trench is reinforced by the recorded 'digging of trenches' here in 1916, during World War 1 (Medlycott 2008).

F5 might be too small to be a military training trench (1.7m wide at the top, tapering to 0.6m wide at the base). Yet it is within the range of trench sizes seen at Colchester Garrison, where trenches generally tapered from 1.5m wide at the highest point to around 0.6m wide, sometimes less, at the base. At Colchester Garrison, the depths of the military trenches ranged from 1.4m to 1.1m (CAT Report 246, 9). Thus, despite its shallow depth - although it may have originally been deeper - its characteristic ground-plan and the presence of barbed wire in its fill make it highly probable that F5 is of modern military origin.

8 Acknowledgements

The Trust would like to thank Mr John Hayward of Clarity Ecoworks Ltd for commissioning and funding the work.

The project was managed by B Holloway, and monitored for the ECC HEM team by Maria Medlycott. The digital survey was by C Lister.

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

- | | | |
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10 Abbreviations and glossary

AOD	above Ordnance Datum
CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
ECC	Essex County Council
EHER	Essex Historic Environment Record, held by Essex County Council
faunal	animal
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
fill	the soil filling up a hole such as a pit or ditch
HEM	Historic Environment Management team of ECC
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists
Late Iron Age	2nd century BC to Roman conquest of AD 43
La Tène	previous description of the Middle Iron Age, from around 450 BC to Caesar's conquest of Gaul (58 BC)
lithics	flints
modern	19th to 21st centuries
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
post-medieval	the period dating from around AD 1530 to 1800
Roman	the period from AD 43 to around AD 430
RRCSAL	Report of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London
SMR	Sites and Monuments Record (now EHER)

11 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is currently held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but will be permanently deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums under accession code COLIM 2009.12.

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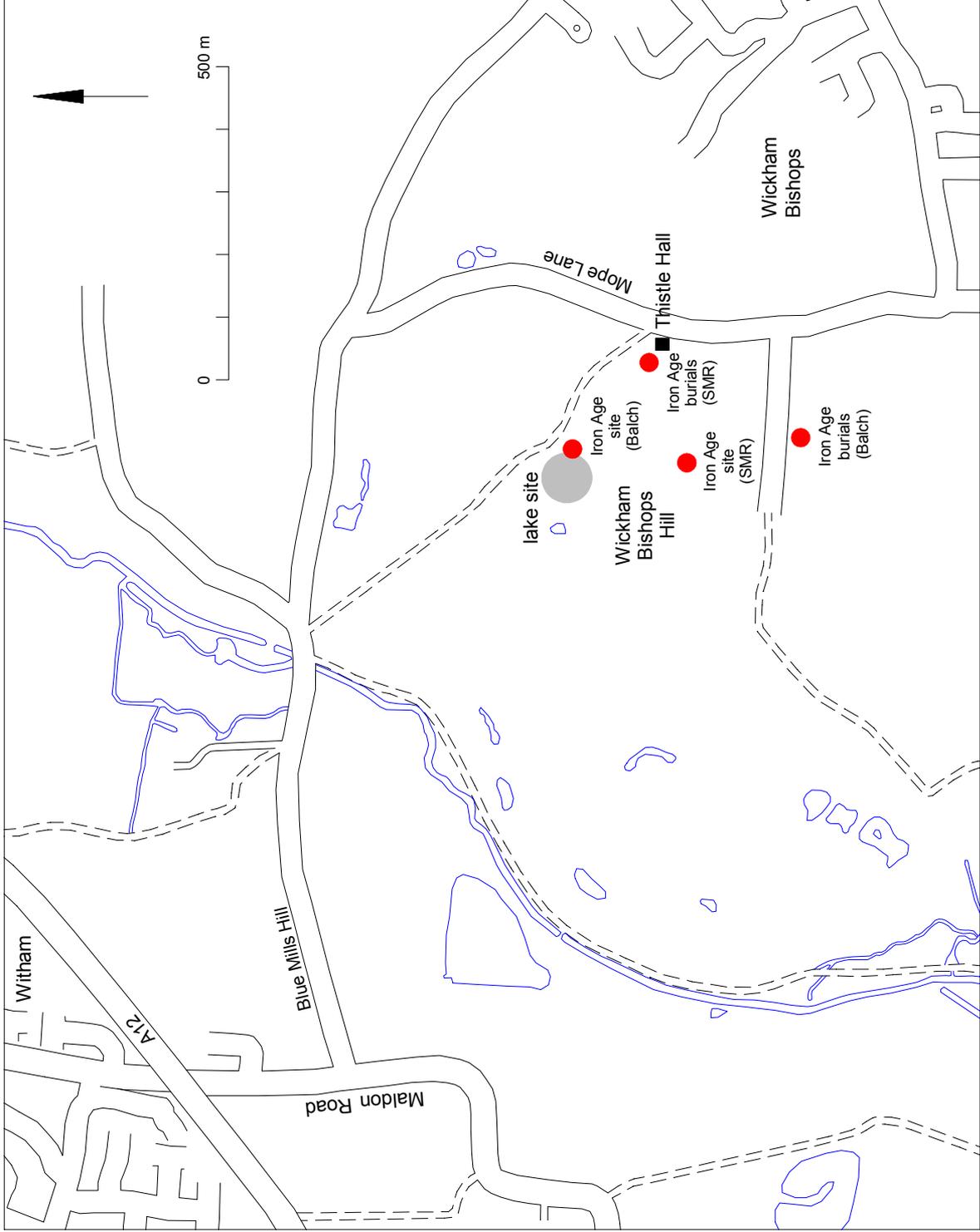
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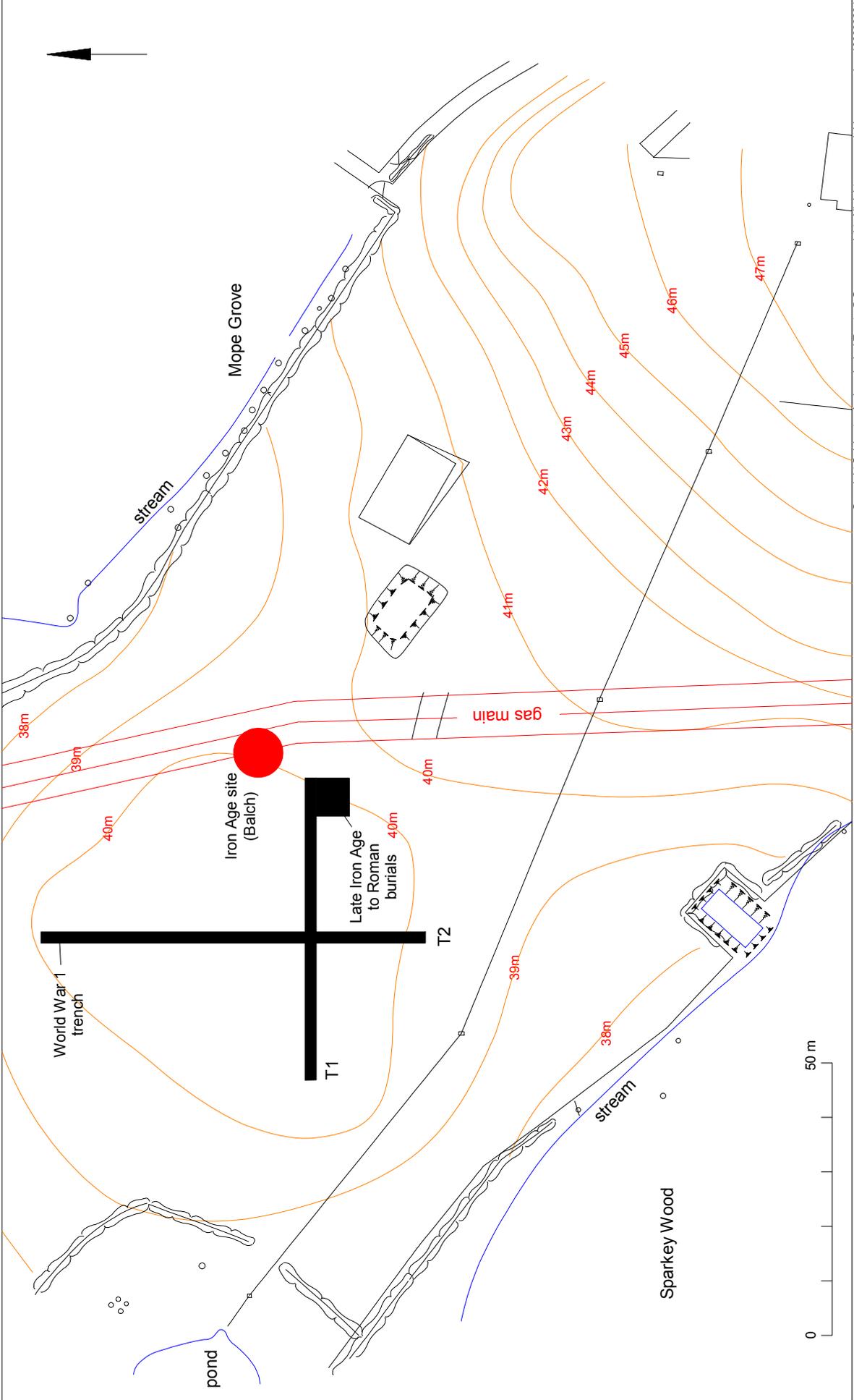
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Fig 1 Site location.



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Fig 2 Trench location plan.

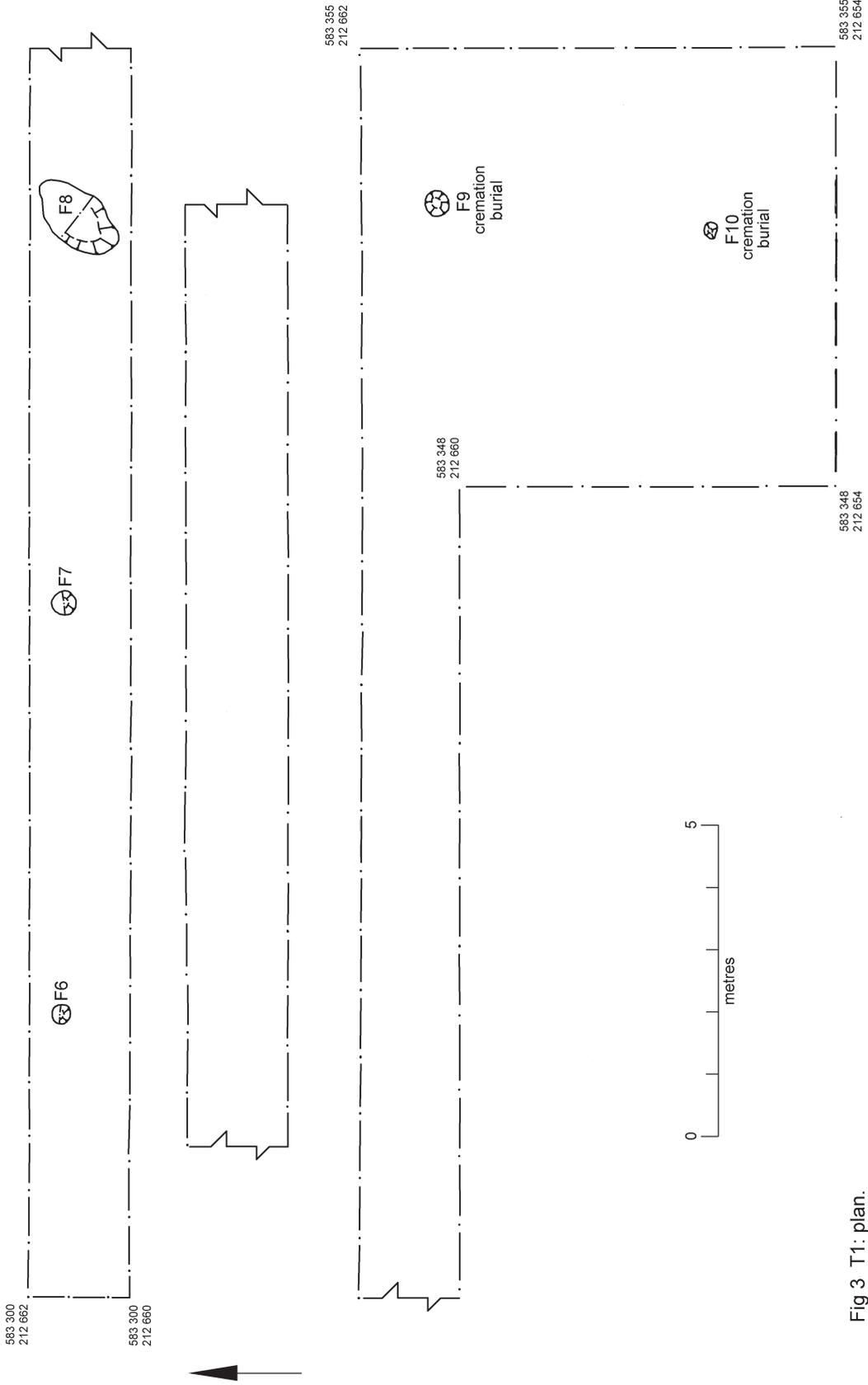


Fig 3 T1: plan.

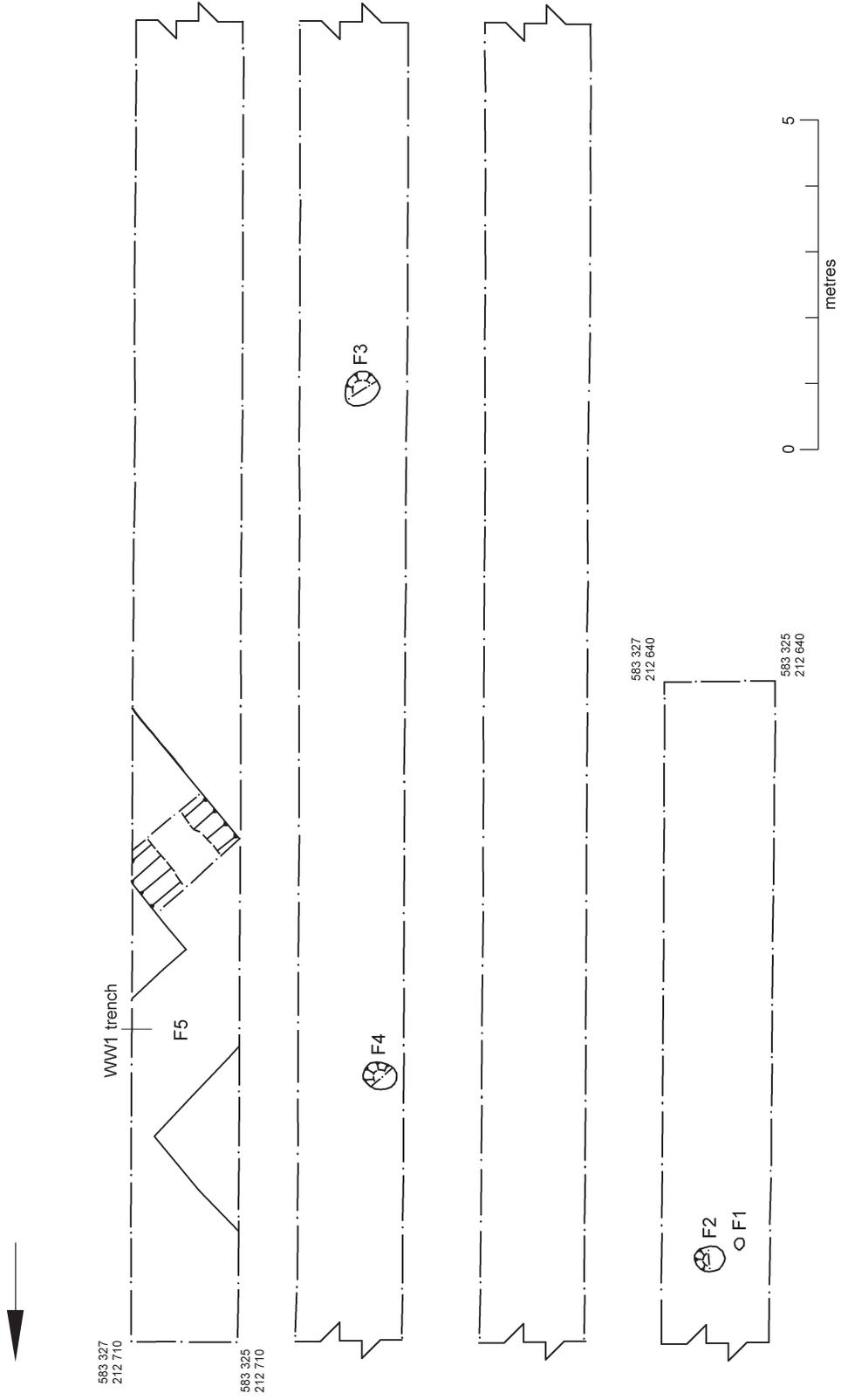


Fig 4 T2: plan.

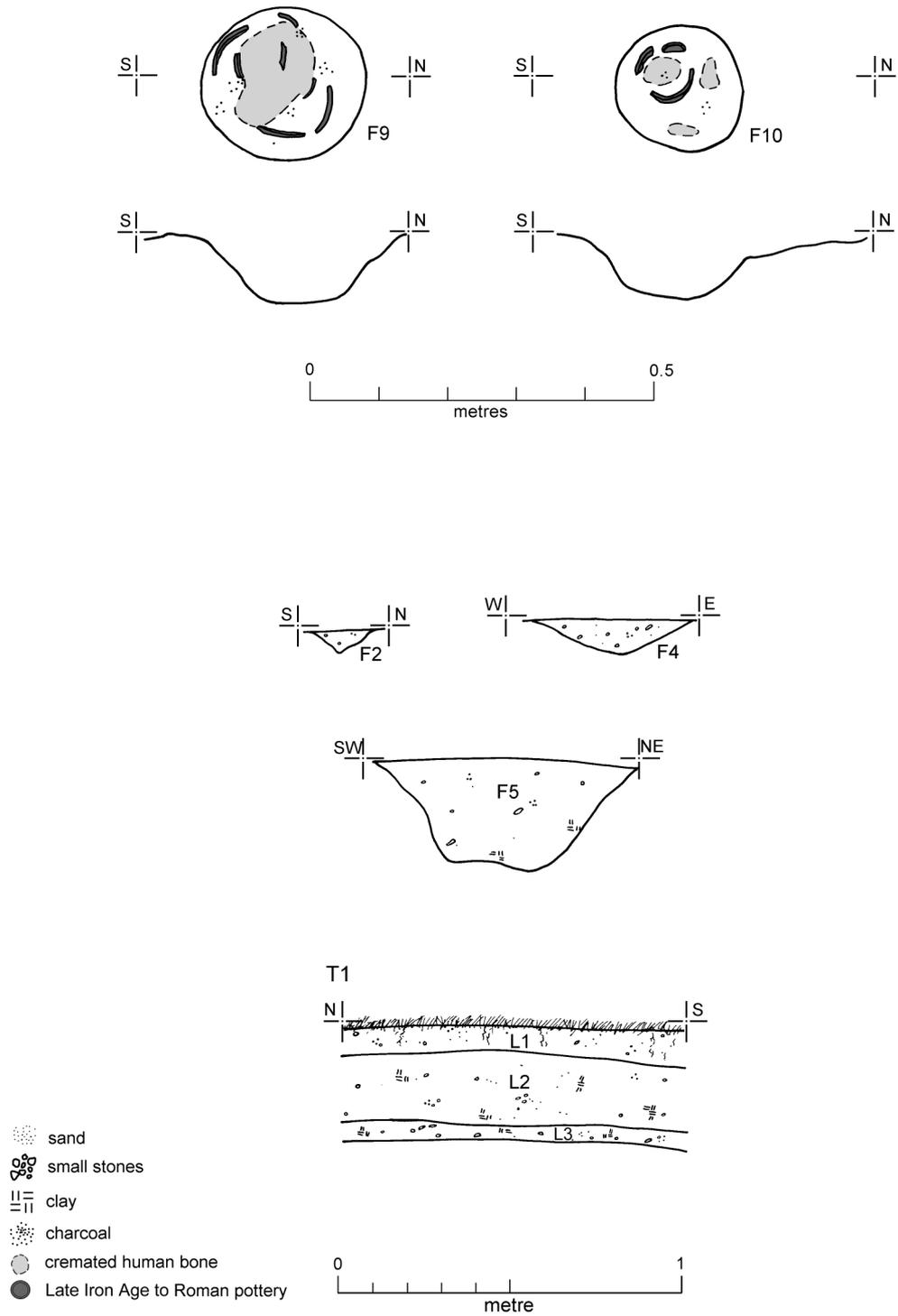


Fig 5 Cremation burials F9 and F10: plans and sections; F2, F4, F5: sections; T1: representative section.

Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

Summary sheet

Site address: Thistle Hall, Mope Lane, Wickham Bishops, Essex	
Parish: Wickham Bishops	District: Maldon
NGR: TL 834 126 (c)	Site codes: CAT project – 09/1f ECC – THWI 09 Museum accession – COLIM 2009.12
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: July 2009	Size of area investigated: Approximately 225m ²
Curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHER nos: 8221-8222
Final report: CAT Report 519 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Late Iron Age to Roman, World War 1, modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>Two evaluation trenches with a combined length of 125m were dug on the site of a proposed lake at Thistle Hall, to the west of Wickham Bishops village, in July 2009. Ten archaeological features were identified as a result, the most significant of which were two unaccompanied urned cremation burials and part of a probable World War 1 military training trench. The burials were poorly preserved because of plough damage. Neither can be closely dated but they are Late Iron Age to Roman in date (1st to mid 2nd centuries). The burials are likely to be part of a small cemetery which included a burial found in 1916 when some trenches were dug in the area. There is, however, some uncertainty about the exact find spot of this earlier discovery, although one of these trenches appears to have been found during the 2009 evaluation. The cemetery is likely to be associated with a settlement site identified during excavations in 1929-30 although, like the 1916 burial, the exact location of these investigations is problematic.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Keywords: Late Iron Age to Roman cremation burials, World War 1 trench	Significance: *
Author of summary: Howard Brooks and Ben Holloway	Date of summary: October 2009