Archaeological evaluation on land off Greenhills, Ashen Road, Ashen, Essex, CO10 8LG

May 2017



by Dr Elliott Hicks and Laura Pooley

with contributions by Stephen Benfield and Lisa Gray figures by Ben Holloway and Sarah Carter

fieldwork by Alec Wade with Harvey Furniss and Elliott Hicks

on behalf of Mr and Dr Robinson

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Colchester Archaeological Trust

Roman Circus House, Roman Circus Walk, Colchester, Essex, CO2 7GZ

tel.: 01206 501785 email: lp@catuk.org

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environmental report added August 2017

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1 Summary

An archaeological evaluation (four trial-trenches) was carried out at land off Greenhills, Ashen Road, Ashen in advance of the construction of two replacement dwellings. A single medieval ditch and residual pottery indicates activity in the area in the late 11th-12th century. This may have been associated with the medieval watermill, Benedictine monastery at Clare or the medieval moated site at Claret Hall. Two flints of a Late Neolithic-Bronze Age date also suggest activity in the area in the prehistoric period.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the archive report for an archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching at land off Greenhills, Ashen Road, Ashen, Essex which was carried out on 12th May 2017. The work was commissioned by Mr and Dr Robinson in advance of the construction of two replacement dwellings, and was undertaken by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT).

In response to consultation with Essex County Council Place Services (ECCPS), Historic Environment Advisor Teresa O'Connor advised that in order to establish the archaeological implications of this application, the applicant should be required to commission a scheme of archaeological investigation in accordance with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (DCLG 2012).

All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a *Brief for archaeological evaluation*, detailing the required archaeological work, written by Teresa O'Connor (ECCPS 2017), and a written scheme of investigation (WSI) prepared by CAT in response to the brief and agreed with ECCPS (CAT 2017).

In addition to the brief and WSI, all fieldwork and reporting was done in accordance with English Heritage's *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (English Heritage 2006), and with *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA **14** and **24**). This report mirrors standards and practices contained in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (CIfA 2014a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (CIfA 2014b).

3 Archaeological background

The following archaeological background draws on the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) held at Essex County Council, County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex.

The proposed development lies along the floodplain of the River Stour, close to the 16th century listed building of Mill Farmhouse (NHLE no. 1338006), which would have been associated with a watermill. The watermill may have been medieval in date and the mill pond on the historic maps abutted the rear boundary of the proposed site. There is further evidence for medieval occupation and activity along this stretch of the river with the remains of a Benedictine monastery at Clare to the east and a medieval moated site at Claret Hall to the south.

To the west lies a cropmark complex that is a designated scheduled monument (NHLE no. 1019142) and is considered to indicate prehistoric funerary monuments. These types of monuments often occupied certain topographic locations along the rivers, one that is shared with the location of the proposed development lying just above the floodplain on relatively flat ground. Further cropmarks (circular enclosures, possibly ring-ditches) are also known to the east (HER 9827)

In addition there is evidence to indicate a Roman route crossing the Stour in this area and historic mapping shows that the footbridge close to the rear boundary of the site has been in existence since the 1st edition OS and may be much earlier in origin.

The potential for survival of evidence related to the prehistoric use of the floodplains for ritual purposes, as well Roman and medieval activity, associated with the river is high, and these may be disturbed or destroyed by the proposed development.

4 Results (Figs 2-3)

Four trial-trenches were machine excavated under the supervision of a CAT archaeologist. For safety reasons, and with the approval of the ECC monitor, the T-shaped trench proposed in the WSI became three individual trenches (T1, T3 and T4).

Five layers were recorded. Modern topsoil (L1, c 0.07-0.16m thick, medium/dark brown/black silt) sealed modern made ground (L2, c 0.52-0.68m thick, medium orange/grey/brown silty-clay with frequent charcoal, daub and modern brick and tile inclusions; at base of layer soft, dry, dark grey/brown sand with modern brick, tile, plastics, asbestos and stone inclusions). Layer L2 had been laid over the site to raise ground level to prevent flooding.

Beneath L2 was a thick layer of silting (L3, c 0.7-0.85m thick, medium grey/brown silty-clay), sealing a layer of medium orange/brown sandy/silty-clay (L4, c 0.32-0.70m thick, possibly colluvium or natural interface), which sealed natural yellow/brown silty-clay (L5, encountered at a depth of c 1.5-2m below current ground level). Fifteenth century pottery, plus residual 11th-12th century pottery and prehistoric flint, was recovered from L3, indicating a later medieval date. No dating evidence was recorded from L4 but it must be earlier than medieval ditch F1 (late 11th-mid/early 12th century) which was cut into it (see below). It is possible that silty-clay layers L3 and L4 were deposited over the site during periods of severe flooding.

Trench 1 (T1): 8m long by 1.5m wide

Trench 1 was excavated through L2 (*c* 0.55m thick), L3 (*c* 0.8m thick) onto the top of L4. A small sondage was excavated through L4 (c. 0.7m thick) to reveal the depth of natural (L5) at *c* 2m below current ground level (bcgl).

A single medieval (late 11th-early/mid 12th century) ditch was cut into L4. Aligned NW-SE it measured at least 1.1m across and 0.5m deep. Excavation of the feature ceased before it could be fully excavated as safe working depths would have been exceeded.

Trench 2 (T2): 12m long by 1.8m wide

Trench 2 was excavated through L1 (*c* 0.15m thick) and L2 (*c* 0.5-0.6m thick) into L3. Two small sondages were excavated in each end of the trench. They showed that L3 measured 0.85m thick. Beneath L3 was L4 (*c* 0.3-0.4m thick) which sealed natural (L5, at 1.98m bcgl). A modern drain had been cut through L2. There were no significant archaeological remains.

Trench 3 (T3): 7.5m long by 1.8m wide

Trench 3 was excavated through L1 (c 0.08m thick), L2 (c 0.65m thick) and L3 (c 0.8m thick) which sealed natural (L5, c 1.5-1.6m bcgl). There were no significant archaeological remains.

Trench 4 (T4): 1m long by 1m wide

Trench 4, a test-pit, was excavated through L1 (c 0.1m thick), L2 (c 1m thick), L3 (c 0.8m thick) and L4 (c 0.1m thick) which sealed natural (L5, c 2m bcgl). There were no significant archaeological remains.



Photograph 1 T2, looking ENE



5 Finds

by Stephen Benfield

Introduction

A small quantity of finds of prehistoric and medieval date were recovered, these consist of two worked flints and a small quantity of medieval pottery. Two animal bones were also recovered from a context containing medieval pottery. The finds are listed and described in Table 2 and the pottery fabrics, which refer to the Essex (Colchester) medieval fabric type series (*CAR* 7), are listed in Table 1.

Fabric code	Fabric Date
12B	Early medieval shelly wares – slightly sandy shelly ware
13	Early medieval sandy wares (general)
21	Medieval sandy orange wares

Table 1 Pottery fabrics

Ctxt	Ctxt	Find	Type/description	Finds
F1	type Ditch	no. 1	Medieval pottery: (6 sherds, 106g) Fabric 12B (1 sherd, 4g) dense irregular shell inclusions, blacked (sooted) external surface (11th/late 11th-12th century). Fabric 13 (5 sherds, 102g) rim and shoulder sherd from a cooking pot, slightly everted rim with angled, thumbed top, pale red-brown sandy fabric, sooting on the rounded shoulder and on the rim edges (11th-12th century – <i>c</i> late 11th-early/mid 12th century); two other body sherds in sandy fabric, one sandy grey fabric with grey-buff surface, other sandy with clouded grey and red-brown surface; also two small sherds in sandy oxidised fabric (11th-12th century). Animal bone: (2, 270g) horse metatarsal, recently broken (7 pieces) and cow calcaneus.	spot date 11th-12th century, probably late 11th- early/mid 12th century
L3	Silt layer	2	Medieval pottery: (3 sherds, 132g) Fabric 13 (2 sherds, 8g), base edge of a bowl or cooking pot, sandy fabric dark grey surface (12th-early 13th century). Fabric 21 (1 sherd, 124g) pulled handle and small part of vessel body in sandy orange fabric with oxidised surface and splash glaze, probably from a Pipkin (c 15th century – CAR 7, 143)	c 15th century
L3	Silt layer	3	Medieval pottery: (4 sherds, 6g) Fabric 13, small sherds, slightly abraded, sandy red-brown or part oxidised fabric, grey surface (11th-12th century – possibly 12th/late 12th century) Flint (1, 1g) small blade, end from a snapped blade – dated Late Mesolithic-Early Neolithic	Probably c 12th century
L3	Silt layer	4	Flint (1, 14g) flake with striking platform with retouched notch at distal end with two other retouched shallow recess/notch like areas – dated later prehistoric, probably Late Neolithic or Bronze Age	Prehistoric (L Neo-BA)

Table 2 Finds by context

Two prehistoric flints were recovered from L3, one the end of a snapped blade (3) can be dated as Late Mesolithic-Early Neolithic. The other is a flake with a striking platform and a retouched notch in the distal edge (4); there are also areas of retouch forming two shallow recess or notch-like areas and retouch extends along the distal edge. The retouch has been applied from both the dorsal and ventral faces. The flake is not closely dated but is broadly later prehistoric and a Late Neolithic or Bronze Age date is probably most appropriate.

Medieval pottery was recovered from ditch F1 and from the soil layer L3. The earliest of the most closely dated of this pottery comes from F1 (1). A large rim sherd from a round shouldered cooking pot with thumbed rim in a sandy oxidised fabric (Fabric 13) was recovered from the fill and this is likely to be of Norman date (c late 11th-early/mid 12th century). Another sherd from this feature is in a slightly sandy shell-tempered fabric (Fabric 12B) which appears in Colchester from the mid-late 11th century and is current throughout the 12th century (CAR 7, 35-6). Both these vessels have external sooting from use as cooking pots. A few other sandy oxidised, or part oxidised sherds from this ditch can also be classified as Fabric 13 current in the 11th-12th/early 13th century. Two pieces of animal bone were recovered from the ditch fill, one a significant length from the upper part of a horse metatarsal (recently fragmented) and a piece from an upper calcaneus bone from a cow.

Small sherds of sandy oxidised or part oxidised pottery were also recovered from L3 (2 and 3) these can also be classified as Fabric 13, although the small, slightly abraded sherds from L3 (2) have dark grey surfaces (tending toward later medieval greywares – Fabric 20) and might date to the late 12th or 13th century rather than earlier. A large sherd from a late medieval pot was also recovered from L3 (2). This is a pulled handle, with part of the pot body surface attached (the interior surface of the pot body is missing) and which is likely to come from a Pipkin. The sherd is in a sandy orange fabric (Fabric 21A) and in Colchester pipkins in this fabric are associated with contexts dated to the 15th-early 16th century (*CAR* **7**, 143).

6 Environmental report

by Lisa Gray MSc MA ACIfA Archaeobotanist

Introduction - aims and objectives

Two samples were presented for assessment. They were taken from two Medieval silt layers.

The aims of this assessment are to determine the significance and potential of the plant macro-remains in the samples, consider their use in providing information about diet, craft, medicine, crop-husbandry, feature function and environment.

Sampling and processing methods

Twenty litres of soil was sampled and processed by Colchester Archaeological Trust. All samples were processed using a Siraf-type flotation device. Flot was collected in a 300-micron mesh sieve then dried.

Once with the author the flots were scanned under a low powered stereo-microscope with a magnification range of 10 to 40x. The whole flots were examined. The abundance, diversity and state of preservation of eco- and artefacts in each sample were recorded. A magnet was passed across each flot to record the presence or absence of magnetised material or hammerscale.

Identifications were made using uncharred reference material (author's own and the Northern European Seed Reference Collection at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London) and reference manuals (such as Beijerinck 1947; Cappers *et al.* 2006; Charles 1984; Fuller 2007; Hillman 1976; Jacomet 2006). Nomenclature for

plants is taken from Stace (Stace 2010). Latin names are given once and the common names used thereafter.

At this stage, to allow comparison between samples, numbers have also been estimated but where only a very low number of items are present they have been counted. Identifiable charred wood >4mm in diameter has been separated from charcoal flecks. Fragments this size are easier to break to reveal the cross-sections and diagnostic features necessary for identification and are less likely to be blown or unintentionally moved around the site (Asouti 2006, 31; Smart and Hoffman, 1988, 178-179). Charcoal flecks <4mm diameter have been quantified but not recommended for further analysis unless twigs or roundwood fragments larger then 2mmØ were present.

Results (Table 3)

The plant remains

No waterlogged or mineralised plant remains were found. Flecks of charcoal too small to identify were found in each sample. No other charred plant remains were present other than low numbers of fragments of indeterminate plant tissue.

Low numbers of uncharred seeds of stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica* L.) were found in both samples and low numbers of orache (*Atriplex* sp.) seeds were found in sample 1.

Sample	Finds No.	Sample description	lk sample volume (L)	ot volume (ml)	Cha pla tiss			Dried waterlogged Seeds		Modern root/rhizomes	Comments		
Sa	ᇤ		Bulk	Flot	а	d	р	а	а	d	р	а	-
1	5	L4, silt layer, probably medieval	10	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	Uncharred stinging nettle (<i>Urtica dioica</i>) and orache (<i>Atriplex</i> sp.) seeds
2	6	L4, silt layer, probably medieval	10	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	Uncharred stinging nettle seed

Table 3 Environmental results

Key: a = abundance [1 = occasional 1-10; 2 = moderate 11-100; 3 = abundant >100]

Fauna

No faunal remains were found in either samples.

Inorganic remains

No inorganic artefactual remains were found in any sample.

Discussion

Biases in recovery, residuality, contamination

Nothing with regards biases in recovery, residuality or contamination was highlighted for any of these samples. On microscopic examination uncharred modern root/rhizome fragments were present in both samples. This can indicate the potential for bioturbation so it is possible that the uncharred seeds are intrusive.

d = diversity [1 = low 1-4 taxa types; 2 = moderate 5-10; 3 = high]

p = preservation [1 = poor (family level only); 2 = moderate (genus), 3 = good (species identification possible)]

Quality and type of preservation

No plant remains were preserved by waterlogging or mineralisation. The uncharred plant remains could be dried- waterlogged or intrusive.

Significance of the samples and recommendations for further work

These two samples were very unproductive. No further work is recommended on them.

7 Discussion

Archaeological evaluation on land off Greenhills, Ashen revealed a single medieval ditch probably dating from the late 11th-early/mid 12th century. The ditch is aligned NW/SE and likely formed a field boundary against the River Stour (55m NW). Both the ditch and residual medieval sherds in L3 indicate activity in the vicinity in the late 11th-12th century. This activity could be related to the possible medieval watermill to the NW of the development site, the Benedictine monastery at Clare or the medieval moated site at Claret Hall. Fifteenth century pottery from L3 suggests that this layer is of a later medieval date and, as ditch F1 cut into L4, L4 must be earlier than the 11th-12th century. Both layers could possible be associated with periods of severe flooding on the development site.

As a result of the great depths of layers L2-L3 none of the trenches were excavated beyond a safe-working depth of 1.2m. Only in T1 was this deep enough to reveal ditch F1 cut into L4. Trenches T2-T4 were all excavated approximately half-way through L3, with only the small sondages revealing glimpses of L4 and L5. Therefore it is uncertain if any significant archaeological remains have survived beneath L3 in any of these three trenches. Medieval ditch F1 and the two residual flints from L3 (dated to the Late Neolithic to Bronze Age) certainly prove that some earlier activity was occurring on the development site.

8 Acknowledgements

CAT thanks Mr & Dr Robinson for commissioning and funding the work. The project was managed by C Lister, fieldwork was carried out by A Wade with H Furniss and E Hicks. Figures are by B Holloway and Sarah Carter. The project was monitored for ECCPS by Teresa O'Connor.

9 References

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

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CIfA	2014b	Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation,

		conservation and research of archaeological materials
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10 Abbreviations and glossary

Bronze Age period from c 2500 – 700 BC
CAT Colchester Archaeological Trust
ClfA Chartered Institute for Archaeologists

context specific location of finds on an archaeological site

ECC Essex County Council

ECCHEA Essex County Council Historic Environment Advisor

ECCPS Essex County Council Place Services EHER Essex Historic Environment Record

feature (F) an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain: can contain 'contexts'

layer (L) distinct or distinguishable deposit (layer) of material

medieval period from AD 1066 to c 1500 modern period from c AD 1800 to the present

natural geological deposit undisturbed by human activity

NGR National Grid Reference

OASIS Online AccesS to the Index of Archaeological InvestigationS,

http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main

post-medieval from c AD 1500 to c 1800

prehistoric pre-Roman

residual something out of its original context, eg a Roman coin in a modern pit

Roman the period from AD 43 to c AD 410

section (abbreviation sx or Sx) vertical slice through feature/s or layer/s

wsi written scheme of investigation

11 Contents of archive

Finds: small bag containing all finds

Paper and digital record

One A4 document wallet containing:

The report (CAT Report 1101)

ECC evaluation brief, CAT written scheme of investigation

Original site record (feature and layer sheets, finds record, plans)

Site digital photos and log, architectural plans, attendance register, risk assessment

12 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is currently held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at Roman Circus House, Roman Circus Walk, Colchester, Essex CO2 7GZ, but will be permanently deposited with Braintree Museum under accession code: requested.

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Distribution list:

Mr and Dr Robinson ECC Place Services Historic Environment Advisor Essex Historic Environment Record, Essex County Council



Colchester Archaeological Trust

Roman Circus House, Roman Circus Walk, Colchester, Essex, CO2 7GZ

tel.: 01206 501785 email: lp@catuk.org

Checked by: Philip Crummy Date: 25.5.2017

Appendix 1 Context list

Context number	Finds number	Context type	Description	Date
F1	1	Ditch	Firm, moist, medium grey-brown silty-clay with frequent charcoal and daub inclusions	11th-12th century
L1		Topsoil	Soft, moist, medium to dark brown/black silt with 1% tile/brick and 1% stone	Modern
L2		Made-ground	Hard, dry, medium orange-grey-brown silty- clay with charcoal, daub and modern brick and tile inclusions	Modern
L3	2, 3, 4, 5(S)	Silting	Medium grey-brown silty-clay with 5% stone inclusions	?medieval, 15th century
L4	6(S)	Silting/ colluvium	Medium orange-brown sandy/silty-clay	Cut by F1
L5		Natural	Light yellow-brown silty-clay	-

⁽S) sample

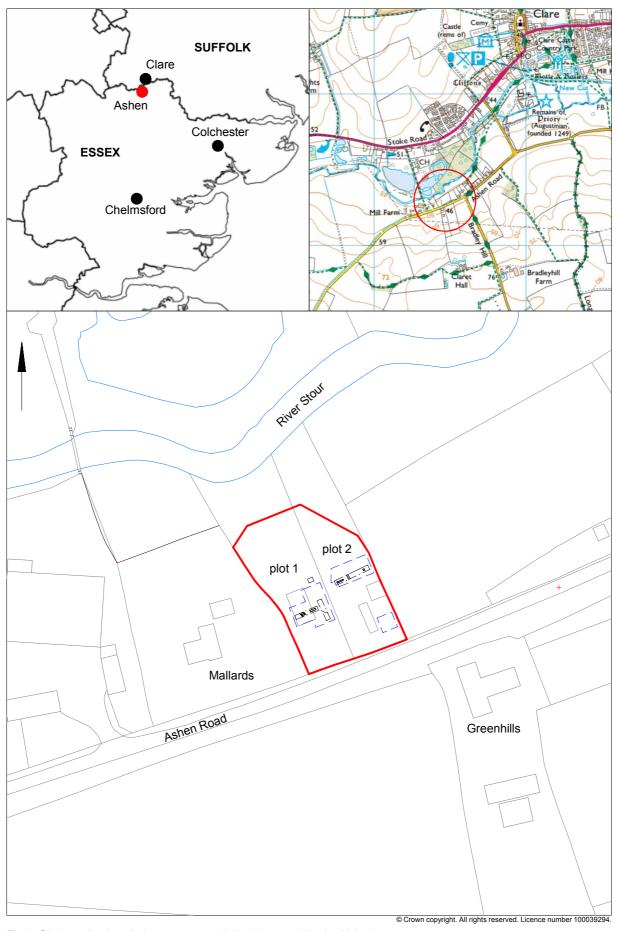
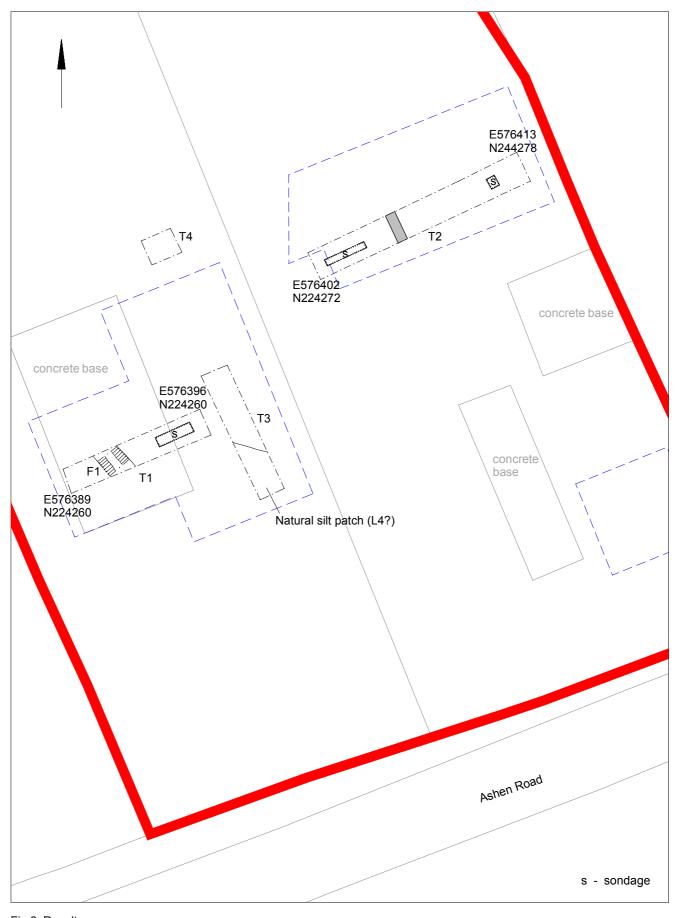


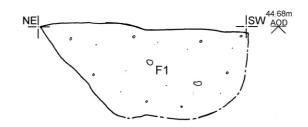
Fig 1 Site location in relation to proposed development (dashed blue)





10 m

Fig 2 Results



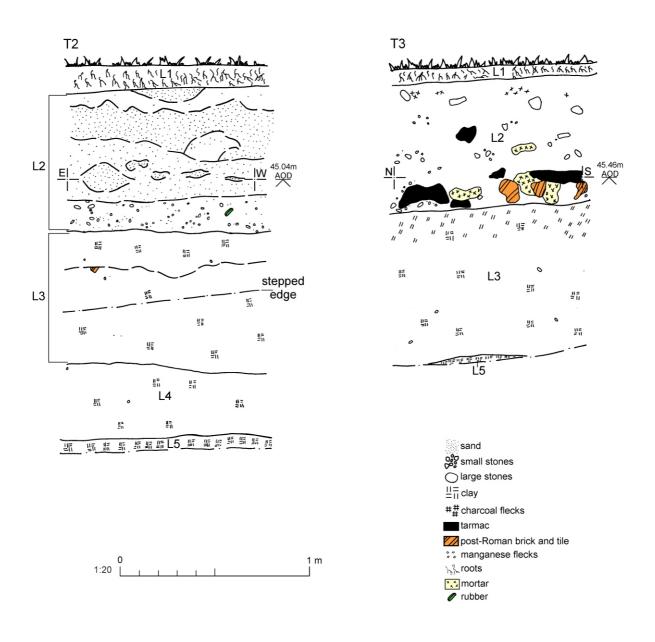


Fig 3 Feature and representative sections

OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM: England

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OASIS ID: colchest3-281231

Project details

Project name Archaeological evaluation on land off Greenhills, Ashen Road, Ashen, Essex, CO10 8LG

Short description of the project

An archaeological evaluation (four trial-trenches) was carried out at land off Greenhills, Ashen Road, Ashen in advance of the construction of two replacement dwellings. A single medieval ditch and residual pottery indicates activity in the area in the late 11th-12th century. This may have been associated with the medieval watermill, Benedictine monastery at Clare or the medieval moated site at Claret Hall. Two flints of a

Late Neolithic-Bronze Age date also suggest activity in the area in the prehistoric period.

Project dates Start: 12-05-2017 End: 12-05-2017 No / Not known

Previous/future

Any associated

project reference codes

17/04b - Contracting Unit No.

Any associated project reference codes 15/01255/OUT - Planning Application No.

Any associated

ANAR17 - HER event no.

project reference codes

Field evaluation Type of project

Site status None

Current Land use Residential 1 - General Residential

Monument type DITCH Medieval Significant Finds POTTERY Medieval Significant Finds FLINT Late Prehistoric Methods & "Sample Trenches"

Development type Rural residential Planning condition

Position in the After outline determination (eg. As a reserved matter)

planning process

Project location

Country England

Site location ESSEX BRAINTREE ASHEN land off Greenhills, Ashen Road

Postcode CO10 8LG Study area 0.18 Hectares

Site coordinates TL 76400 44268 52.06817744744 0.573909250874 52 04 05 N 000 34 26 E Point

Height OD / Min: 43.69m Max: 44.46m

Depth

Project creators

Name of Colchester Archaeological Trust

Organisation Project brief

HEM Team Officer, ECC

originator Project design

Laura Poolev

originator

Chris Lister

Project director/manager

Project supervisor Ben Holloway

Type of sponsor/funding

body

Owner

Project archives

recipient

Physical Archive Braintree Museum

Physical Archive requested

Physical Contents "Ceramics"

Digital Archive Braintree Museum

Digital Archive ID requested

Digital Contents "Stratigraphic", "Survey"

Digital Media available

"Images raster / digital photography", "Survey"

Paper Archive Braintree Museum

recipient

Paper Archive ID requested

Paper Contents "Stratigraphic", "Survey"

Paper Media available

"Context sheet","Miscellaneous Material","Photograph","Plan","Report","Section"

Project bibliography 1

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