

Archaeological monitoring and excavation at Hanson Quarry, Maldon Road, Birch, Essex

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1 Summary

A programme of archaeological monitoring and excavation was carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust at Hanson Quarry, Maldon Road, Birch, Essex in April 2018.

The level of disturbance from the demolished WWII airbase on the site was less in this phase of excavation than it had been in previous, adjacent phases. This allowed the positive identification of a Late Iron Age/early Roman field system, of which only one ditch had been observed previously.

Also uncovered during the archaeological work was a large Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pit, possibly a waterhole, that contained pottery and the broken end of a Neolithic polished axe. The axe is clearly residual in the context and is probably the result of ritual deposition.

Overlaying the LIA/ER field system to the north of the site was a series of shallow medieval cultivation channels.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the archive report on monitoring and excavation carried out at Birch Pit, Maldon Road, Birch, in advance of a new stage of mineral extraction. The archaeological work was commissioned by Hanson Aggregates, and carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) in April 2018. Birch Pit is located 6km to the south-west of Colchester, north-east of Palmer's Farm, at NGR TL 9217 1937 (Fig 1). Birch Pit consists of approximately 19.6 hectares of land that was formerly part of a World War II United States Army Air Force base.

The requirement for archaeological work was prompted by a western extension of the existing quarry. In March 2018, the Essex County Council (ECC) Historic Environment Advisor (HEA) was consulted on a continuation of planning consent for mineral extraction first granted in 1995.

All archaeological work was carried out according to standards and practices contained in the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (2014), *Management of research projects in the historic environment* (Historic England 2015), *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14) and *Research and Archaeology Revised: A Revised Framework for the East of England* (EAA 24).

3 Aims

The aim of the archaeological monitoring was to determine the location, extent, date, character and significance of any surviving archaeological remains that would be impacted by the extraction of minerals. This included any remains that continued from, or related to, features observed during previous phases of monitoring.

4 Methodology

The new extraction area was stripped down to archaeological horizons using a machine with a toothless ditching bucket, monitored by a CAT archaeologist. Initially three large bunds of topsoil were left dividing the site. After the exposed features between the bunds had been recorded, the bunds were stripped down to the archaeological horizon and any further features recorded.

5 Archaeological background (Figs 1 - 3)

The following archaeological background draws on the CAT report archive, as well as the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) and the Colchester Historic Environment Record (CHER), both accessed via the Heritage Gateway.

The archaeological background of the area around Birch Pit has been extensively summarised in the many CAT Reports produced since planning consent for mineral extraction was first granted in 1995. Prior to the 1990s, little was known of the archaeological remains in the area immediately surrounding Birch Pit. The initial archaeological work followed an environmental impact assessment carried out in 1992 (CAT Report 8).

Aerial photographs show a large number of undated, but pre-modern, cropmarks representing activity to the north of Birch Pit. Some 0.8 km to the north-east of the site is a cropmark complex containing a large sub-rectangular enclosure with associated tracks or droveways and a system of fields (EHER 11548, 11577, 11582, 11924). Close to these sites, but within the boundaries of the permissible northern quarrying area, there are several smaller cropmark sites (CAT Report 8, appendix). Neolithic and early Mesolithic flints have also been recorded about 2 km to the east of the site (Spencer & Dennis 1988).

The most significant archaeological remains identified by the 1992 assessment were two surface scatters of Roman finds to the north-east of Palmer's Farm (CAT Report 8, appendix). A small quantity of medieval pottery was also recovered. In 1997 further work was carried out on one of the areas of Roman finds (CAT Report 8, 4 and Fig 2). In 1998 geophysical survey and trial-trenching was carried out in the same area, and revealed a number of Roman features below the ploughsoil (CAT Report 23).

Multiple phases of archaeological work have been undertaken in response to previous quarry expansions (Fig 3).

In 1995, a small Roman oven was excavated on the east side of the quarry close to Brake's Farm (NGR TL 9333 2002; CAT archive 6/95b).

In 2001, evaluation trenching in advance of a northern extension to the quarry revealed features of Bronze Age and Roman date (CAT Report 141). Excavation in this area in 2003 revealed a Bronze Age cemetery consisting of three ring-ditches associated with sixteen urned and un-urned cremation burials. Also uncovered was part of a Roman field system (Fig 3; CAT Report 289).

In 2005, excavation at the Birch airfield compost site (on the former USAAF airbase) revealed features of Late Iron Age/early Roman and Roman date (CAT Report 326).

From 2004 - 2008, excavation prior to extensions to the western side of the quarry (Fig 3; CAT Report 383, CAT Report 485, CAT Report 523) revealed features of prehistoric, Roman, medieval and post-medieval date. The main period of activity was during the Late Iron Age, Roman, medieval and early post-medieval periods. No clear traces of any buildings were found, but the remains of ditches revealed enclosures divided by tracks or droveways. A Roman oven was situated within the area of one enclosure, and a small number of cremation burials were situated to the east of the enclosures. A few features dated to the Late Bronze Age, including one large pit which was possibly a waterhole. In addition, there were a small number of features of post-medieval and modern date.

In 2012, further monitoring and excavation during topsoil-stripping, adjacent to areas excavated in 2007 and 2008, revealed only two features: a post-hole containing pot sherds dated to the Late Bronze Age or early Iron Age, and a post-medieval or modern ditch. Most of the stripped area was disturbed by the construction and removal of the World War II airbase (CAT Report 671).

In 2013, continued monitoring and excavation during topsoil-stripping, adjacent to the area excavated in 2012, revealed twenty-two archaeological features. The significant remains included a 'placed deposit' (a Late Bronze Age jar without cremated bone) and seventeen pits and post-holes containing Late Bronze Age pot sherds. Other features were mostly post-medieval field ditches which are visible as extant on 19th-century Ordnance Survey maps. As before, much of the site had been disturbed by the construction and subsequent removal of the World War II airbase (CAT Report 738).

In 2014 and 2015, monitoring and excavation during topsoil stripping, adjacent to the area excavated in 2013, revealed thirty-one archaeological features. These varied in date from prehistoric to modern (and included features associated with the WWII airfield). The most significant features were three 'four-post' structures dated to the early Iron Age. As with other recent phases of monitoring, the site, particularly to the north and north-west, was heavily disturbed by the construction and subsequent demolition of the World War II airbase (CAT Report 807).

6 Monitoring and excavation results (Figs 4 and 5)

This phase of excavation covered an area of 1.069 ha. The extent of the site was machined down through the modern ploughsoil, a dark brown sandy silt (L1), onto the natural subsoil (L2). L1 varied in depth across the site, but on average was 500mm thick.

The natural subsoil (L2) was not uniform across the site. To the west of the site, it was a yellow clay with common chalk inclusions, against which archaeological features were relatively easy to identify. In the centre and east of the site this natural clay was covered by a natural layer of silty brown clay. This layer varied in colour from dark brown in the centre of the site to light brown in the east. Where this silty clay was dark brown, it was almost identical to the fill of the archaeological features, making them extremely hard to identify, particularly in very wet or sunny weather conditions. As a result some of the ditches crossing the centre of the site are marked on the plans as extrapolated, as they were unclear on the surface (Fig 4).

As has been observed in previous monitored areas (see above), the construction and subsequent removal of the World War II airbase resulted in significant areas of disturbance on the site. However, in comparison with previous years, the disturbance was less pronounced in this phase, and was mainly concentrated to the north-east (Fig 4).

As well as disturbance related to the airbase, the remains of a road were uncovered aligned north-west to south-east across the site (Fig 4). This road was last observed during archaeological monitoring carried out in 2008 (CAT Report 523) and it is visible on the 1st edition OS map (Fig 5). It predates the construction of the World War II airbase, and was probably removed during the airbase's construction.

Despite the various areas of disturbance detailed above, 36 features were identified during the monitoring. They included 17 ditches and 19 pits (1 of which was of natural origin). Also identified to the north of the site were a series of sporadically surviving agricultural-related linear features, of which 12 were investigated (Fig 4).

Multiple archaeological features were encountered, ranging from prehistoric to modern. They are detailed below.

Prehistoric

Four features were identified as dating from the prehistoric period. Two pits (F55 and F72) contained small fragments of pottery only datable as generically prehistoric.

A small pit (F74) also dates from the LBA/EIA, and contained several sherds of diagnostic pottery, including a large body sherd decorated with finger-tip rustication (see Finds below).

F42 was a 2m wide sub-square, large, steep-sided pit, which also dates from the LBA/EIA (Photographs 1 and 2). It had a flat base and a ledge on its eastern side, possibly to allow access. It contained a significant assemblage of pottery of LBA/EIA date, as well some burnt flints, burnt animal bone and a piece of puddingstone. Interestingly, the feature also contained half of a polished flint axe. The implications of this Neolithic find in a LBA/EIA pit are examined in Finds (see below) and the discussion.



Photograph 1 F42 half sectioned. Photograph taken facing south-east.



Photograph 2 F42 fully excavated. Photograph taken facing east.

Late Iron Age/early Roman

Thirteen features were identified as dating from the Late Iron Age/early Roman (LIA/ER) period. All of these features (F37, F38, F46, F47, F48, F49, F50, F53, F54, F56, F66, F68 and F70) form part of a field system aligned north-west to south-east. This field system is cut by several later features. As a result of this and the excavation site being initially divided by several bunds (see methodology above), the six ditches comprising this field system were assigned 13 numbers during the excavation (Fig 4).



Photograph 3 F46 sx1. One of several ditches forming the LIA/ER field system. Photograph taken facing south-east.

F66, unlike the rest of the ditches, is aligned south-west to north-east. It may form the corner of a field with F50/F70 north of the site (Fig 4). This can be proven or disproven during the next phase of monitoring and excavation (when the quarry is extended to the north).

Medieval

Two small, shallow pits were identified as dating from the medieval period (F75 and F76) and contained small amounts of pottery.

Also dating from this period was a ditch aligned east-west in the south of the site (F69).

Also identified as being from this period of activity were a series of agricultural linears/cultivation channels to the north of the site (Photograph 4 and Fig 4). These features were aligned north-east to south-west and were visible clearly cutting across the LBA/EIA field system. They varied in width and depth (Fig 7) between 320mm and 560mm wide and 80 and 120mm deep, and were 550mm and 850mm apart. Several fragments of medieval pottery were recovered from the fill of these features despite the fact they were relatively shallow. Because of the soil conditions and their relative lack of depth, these features were not always visible and were only observed in this small area in the north of the site (Fig 4). A long section was dug across these features where they were most clear in plan.



Photograph 4 Series of medieval agricultural linears aligned north-east to south-west across the north of the site. Photograph taken facing north.

Post-medieval/modern

Four boundary ditches were identified as dating from this period (F40, F43, F61 and F75). Two of the ditches (F43 and F61) were very substantial and are visible on the 1st edition OS Map (Fig 5). Another large ditch (F71) does not appear on that map and contains a sherd of residual medieval pottery suggesting it may be slightly earlier in date than the other ditches. F40 is probably a continuation of F71 and terminates in the centre of the site, presumably at a field boundary now invisible in the archaeological record (Fig 4).

7 Finds

by Stephen Benfield

Introduction

The excavation of a number of features produced finds of prehistoric, Roman and medieval date. Of particular interest is a pit (F42) containing parts of several late prehistoric (Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age) pottery vessels and the butt end of a polished Neolithic flint axe. Small quantities of Late Iron Age/early Roman pottery were associated with a rectilinear field system and pottery of medieval date was recovered from a series of probable cultivation channels/beds. All of the finds are listed and described by context in the finds appendix (Appendix 2).

Prehistoric

Pottery

The assemblage consists of 95 sherds with a combined weight of 1046g. It consists of hand-made flint-tempered and sand-tempered pottery. The majority of the pottery comes from a single pit (F42), while most of the remainder consists of small sherds, residual in later dated features. Most of this pottery can be associated with the post-Deverel-Rimbury tradition of the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, broadly dating to the early 1st millennium BC. While diagnostic material is scarce, the group from pit F42 is of Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age date (c 800-600 BC). One decorated (rusticated) sherd from this context can be confidently dated to the Early Iron Age (c 700/600-400 BC). The pottery fabrics used to record the pottery broadly follow the fabric series devised by Brown (1988) which has commonly been used for quantifying prehistoric assemblages in Essex.

Pit F42

Pit F42 is a 2m wide sub-square pit about 0.80 m deep located on the north-west of the site. The fill contained parts of a minimum of at least four pottery vessels, but the assemblage of sherds might represent half a dozen or so different pots. In total there are 75 sherds weighing 892g (Table 1). Three jars represented by parts of the lower half (base) were clearly deposited as part pots. The fabrics of the pots and sherds are flint-tempered, sand & flint-tempered and sand-tempered. In general the flint is well embedded and moderate to common in abundance. It is not always clear if the sand element is natural to the clay or an added tempering material. However, much of the pottery can be described as sand and flint-tempered and only one or two small sherds have no flint, although this might be a product of their small size.

Fabric	Fabric description	No.	Wt/g.
B	Flint small-medium, common	25	320
C	Flint small-medium common, with occasional large flint	18	54
E	Flint and sand-tempered	27	502
G	Sand-tempered, common small sand	1	2
H	Sand-tempered, moderate small sand	4	14

Table 1 Pottery from F42 by fabric

Only one rim sherd is present (Fig 8.1) while there are sections of the lower wall and base edge from three pots (Fig 8.4-6). One base (Fig 8.4) has light, vertical scratches on the body wall made by drag from wiping the surface. A small sherd has part of what is probably a small finger-tip dimple, possibly from a row of dimples around the shoulder (Fig 8.2) and another sherd suggests some form of cordon (Fig 8.3). Otherwise the remainder of the pottery recovered is plain and undecorated. One of the pot bases (Fig 8.5) has a smoothed dark-grey surface. Non-joining sherds from this or a similar second pot are also smoothed and are burnished on the neck interior, a finish that suggests it may have been a fine ware vessel. The part of the pots that can be reconstructed indicate that all of the vessels are jar or deep bowl forms and, apart from the burnished pot(s), there is no indication of a fineware element in the form of fine bowls or cups. The two pot shoulders represented (including the rim Fig 8.1) are both rounded.

In terms of date, the pottery clearly belongs to the post-Deverel-Rimbury (PDR) tradition, but closely dating the pottery to either the Late Bronze Age (LBA) or Early Iron Age (EIA) period is more problematic. The LBA period is taken here to date to c 1000-700 BC and the LIA to c 700-400 BC. The range of forms is limited, mostly confined to jars and with few diagnostic pieces as most of the sherds come from lower wall and base edges. The underside of the bases themselves are missing. The occurrence of visible sand in some of the sherd fabrics and the possible decoration on one or two sherds could indicate an Early Iron Age (EIA) date, possibly in the initial Iron Age period (c 700-600 BC). However, at an enclosure at Springfield Lyons (Chelmsford, Essex) which has a large assemblage of pottery dated to the LBA, a tendency toward more sandy fabrics is noted among the pottery from the upper ditch fills (Brown 2013, 108-110). Also, some of the pottery there is described as 'later post-Deverel-Rimbury 'decorated' material' (*ibid* 110), which might in other circumstances be classified as 'Earliest' or Early Iron Age. In relation to Birch, the dimple decoration seen on one sherd and the presence of a probable small plain(?) cordon on another are both features that occur among assemblages attributed to the LBA (Brown 1995) as well as the EIA. Overall, a date in either the LBA or EIA could be argued depending on the criteria used regarding form and fabric. This highlights the current difficulty in confidently assigning some PDR pottery to either side of this technological base period division. At present a date either toward the end of the Late Bronze Age or early in the Iron Age (c 800-600 BC) is preferred.

Illustrated pottery

Fig 8.1 F42 (14) Rim from a jar/bowl; simple, flat-topped, slightly flaring rim, rounded shoulder; single finger tip(?) impression/indentation below the rim but probably accidental and does not appear to be part of any decoration. Dark surface (almost entirely abraded off) oxidised fabric. Moderate small and medium flint in a sandy fabric (Fabric E).

Fig 8.2 F42 (22) Abraded sherd with part of a small finger-tip dimple impression at one edge, oxidised surfaces, dark grey fabric core. Sand including burnt flint sand/temper (Fabric E). Note: might include natural flinty sand with pieces burnt in firing.

Fig 8.3 F42 (14) Small slightly abraded sherd, indications of cordon on body, dark fabric & surfaces. Sand with rare burnt flint (Fabric E).

Fig 8.4 F42 (17) Part of lower wall and base edge from a large jar recovered as joining sherds in close proximity and representing a large sherd broken in the pit. Clouded, part oxidised surface with dark grey fabric. Moderate small and medium flint in a sandy fabric (Fabric E)

Fig 8.5 F42 (10) Part of lower wall and base edge from a relatively finely finished jar/bowl, recovered as joining sherds in close proximity and representing a part pot broken in the pit. Dark grey fabric and smoothed/lightly burnished dark surfaces. Common small-medium flint with little visible sand sand free fabric and occasional chalk fragment (Fabric B).

Fig 8.6 F42 (7 & 17) Part of lower wall and base edge from a large jar, two joining sherds, vertical scratches on body from light scoring or wiping. Slightly clouded, oxidised surface with dark grey-brown fabric and interior. Sparse small-medium flint with some sand sand (Fabric E).

Other prehistoric pottery

The remainder of the prehistoric pottery assemblage consists of 20 sherds of hand made flint-tempered and sand-tempered pottery with a combined weight of 154g (Table 2).

Fabric	Fabric description	No.	Wt/g.
B	Flint small-medium, common	4	15
C	Flint small-medium common, with occasional large flint	4	21
D	Flint small-large, poorly sorted	1	6
E	Flint and sand-tempered	5	68
F	Sand-tempered with occasional large flints	2	4
H	Sand-tempered, moderate small sand	1	10
I	Sand-tempered, common small-medium sand	2	28
M	Grog, often with some sand or flint	1	2

Table 2 Other prehistoric pottery by fabric (not F42)

Most of this pottery consists of small, relatively undiagnostic sherds, the majority (over 70% by count and weight) containing some flint-temper. The majority was recovered as residual sherds from later-dated features. While some sherds might date to the Iron Age, the majority are likely to date from within the broad post-Deverel-Rimbury tradition of the early 1st millennium BC spanning the LBA and EIA period, dated to c 1000 BC-400 BC. There are two small rims. One from F47 has a moderately coarse, flint-tempered fabric and is slightly flaring with a simple rounded rim top (Fig 8.8). The other, from F46, is a small sherd with a flattened rim top and external lip, again in a moderately coarse, flint-tempered fabric (Fig 8.7).

Of particular interest is a large body sherd from pit F74 which is decorated with finger-tip rustication (Fig 8.9). The fabric is sand and flint-tempered with sparse fine flint, some of which may be flint sand that has calcified during firing. The fabric suggests a date in the early-mid 1st millennium BC and an EIA date appears most likely. A much more coarsely flint-tempered pot shoulder, also with finger-tip rustication, was recovered during an earlier phase of work from the fill of a post-hole that formed part of an Iron Age four post structure (CAT Report 807, 7 & fig 7 no. 1). The possibility that that sherd might be Neolithic Peterborough ware was acknowledged at the time but on balance, an EIA date was preferred. The hard, sandy fabric of the similarly decorated sherd here appears to make it very unlikely to be Peterborough ware and lends weight to the fact that, while relatively uncommon in Essex, some of the EIA pottery here is decorated with rustication. Vessels with finger-tip and broader, pinch rustication of EIA date have been recovered from Marks Warren in north-east London (Brudenell 2011, fig 14 no. 14 & fig 16 no. 23) and from several sites in Essex and East Anglia - for example at Lofts Farm (Brown 1988, 272 & fig 17 no. 83) and Valley Belt, Trowse on the Norwich Southern By-pass (Percival 2000, fig 138 P92). In Essex this rusticated pottery is commonly associated with assemblages containing carinated bowls of EIA Darmsden-Linton style (Brown 1988, 272, Brudenell 2011, 30). One quite heavily rusticated sherd is illustrated among Darmsden-Linton pottery from Beacon Green (Maldon), Essex (Brown 1992, fig 6 no. 28); however, so far no bowls typical of Darmsden-Linton type have been recognised among assemblages from Birch Quarry.

Fig 8.7 F46 (12) Rim sherd, flattened top with irregular external lip, oxidised brownish-orange (Fabric C)

Fig 8.8 F47 (16) Rim sherd from a bowl, everted simple rounded, slightly flared; common small-medium flint-temper in dark grey fabric (Fabric B).

Fig 8.9 F74 (43) Large sherd, sand-tempered with some fine flint, internal horizontal(?) smoothing marks; sherd decorated with angled finger-tip impressions, single and paired; orange-red & grey surfaces, grey fabric core (Fabric E). Note: might include natural flinty sand with pieces burnt in firing.

Lithics *by Adam Wightman*

The lithic assemblage recovered during the 2018 phase of archaeological investigations in Birch Quarry comprised a total of 14 worked flints. They were recovered from six LIA/ER ditches (F38, F46, F49, F50, F53 and F68), a prehistoric pit (F72), a sub-square LBA/EIA pit (F42) and one post-medieval/modern ditch (F65).

The flakes from the post-medieval/modern ditch F65 and the LIA/ER ditches are considered to be residual in their contexts, as is the butt end of a polished axe recovered from F42 (see below) which is probably Neolithic in date and was found in a pit containing sherds of Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age pottery.

Three of the flakes have been retouched, but none are typologically diagnostic tool types. All three are retouched hard hammer flakes, one of which has two probable retouched notches on one lateral edge. They are likely to date to the Neolithic or Bronze Age. The remaining worked flints are all unmodified flakes, the majority of

which are short, thick and have been detached using a hard hammer without any preparation of the platform. These characteristics, combined with the absence of any blades, suggest that majority of the assemblage is likely to date to the Late Neolithic or Bronze Age.

The fragment of polished axe from F42 is almost certainly Neolithic in date and associated with the clearance of woodland which was taking place in this period. It would have originally been mounted onto a wooden handle and held in place by leather and fibre thongs (Butler 2005). The pit from which it was recovered was fully excavated, but only the butt end of the axe (80mm long) was present. It is likely that the axe broke at the point where it was hafted in the handle. The flint is a mottled mid-brown colour and is probably not local to East Anglia. In plan the axe appears to have had convex edges tapering to a narrow curved butt (Fig 9). In cross section the axe is lenticular or double convex and appears to have faceted sides (Type C of Field & Woolley's (1984) commonly used typology for Neolithic axes). However, without the whole axe being present, it is difficult to say for certain that the edges near the butt end have not simply been ground down to blunt them rather than having deliberately created side facets (in which case the axe would be a Type B rather than C). The axe fragment is polished on both sides and it is assumed that the axe was polished over its entire surface. However, the grinding was not sufficiently deep to remove all of the flaking scars and it is possible that the very end of the butt was left in a flaked state to create friction when hafting making it more secure (Butler 2005).

ctxt	finds no.	artefact type	cortex %	soft/hard hammer	modification
F38	5	flake	35	hard	
		flake (retouched)	40	hard	semi-abrupt retouch, left lateral, dorsal
		flake	0	hard	
F42	6	polished axe fragment	0		
F46	12	flake (retouched notches)	50	hard	two possible retouched notches, left lateral, ventral
F49	19	flake	35	?soft	
		?flake	15		
		flake	0		
F50	20	flake/waste piece	0		
F53	23	flake	30	hard	
F65	34	flake	60	hard	
F72	40	flake (retouched)	10	hard	semi-abrupt, right lateral, ventral & dorsal
		flake	80	hard	
F68	37	flake	0	?soft	

Table 3 Worked flints recovered from archaeological features.

Fired clay

Of a small number of pieces of fired clay, the majority come from the prehistoric pit F42 (7 pieces, weighing 80g). The remainder consists of a single small piece (1g) from pit F55 and one from pit F74 (10g) both of probably prehistoric date.

Heat altered (burnt) stone

While not of itself closely datable, the heat-affected stone (burnt stone) is strongly associated with the prehistoric activity, notably in pit F42. Almost all of this burnt stone is flint, much of which is calcified and crazed or part calcified and reddened, with just one piece of sandstone/quartzite recovered from pit F55. Of a total of 27 pieces of burnt stone (weighing 792g), the great majority, 21 pieces (692g), come from pit F42. A few pieces come from ditches in the rectilinear field system (F46 & F54) and a single piece from F55, a pit cut by one of the ditches of this field system.

Stone

A small piece of conglomerate (pudding) stone was recovered from the fill of the prehistoric pit F42 (13) (Photograph 5). This is an irregular piece (weight 526g) with small-medium flint pebbles (pinkish, red-brown, grey and black in colour) in a white matrix. There is no indication of any working. Although occasionally used for saddle querns, with an Iron Age example from Little Waltham, Essex (Major 2004), and more commonly used for the manufacture of rotary quern stones in the 1st century AD, the piece here is possibly an erratic.



Photograph 5 F42 (13) piece of conglomerate (pudding) stone.

Pit F42 and placed finds in prehistoric features at Birch

The presence of a piece of a Neolithic polished flint axe in pit F42 is of interest and can be compared to a number of other objects from Birch quarry that had been placed in pits. The axe appears very unlikely to be an accidental residual inclusion from the surrounding soil and otherwise must represent the placed deposit of an object that was probably at least 1500 years old at the time of burial. Other finds from the feature (apart from pottery) include a piece of puddingstone, together with a few fragments of burnt bone (probably all animal), fired clay and some burnt flints. Aside from the axe piece, the finds could be interpreted as an incidental rubbish deposit given their nature, the mix of material, lack of clear placement and their limited quantity in relation to the size of the pit.

Clear placed deposits dated to the Late Bronze Age have been recovered from other features in previous stages of archaeological work at the quarry. During the 2008 excavation (Fig 3), a complete bronze pin with a disc head was recovered from a pit (F340) and a complete fired clay drum-shaped loom weight/weight was recovered from another pit (F360) (CAT Report 523). During a later stage of excavation in 2013, one pit (F4) located among a group of pits and post-holes contained a Late Bronze Age pottery jar. The pot had been deliberately placed in the pit and the absence of any bone showed that it was not a burial (CAT Report 738). It can be noted that Middle Bronze Age urned cremation burials of Ardeigh-type were been located in the north-east quarry area (CAT Report 289) and a ring ditch, probable of similar date, was located to the east of the current excavation area (Cat Report 383). In addition to the placed deposits from pits, a large group of Late Bronze Age pottery was recovered from the fill of a feature interpreted as a waterhole (F238) excavated in 2007. This pottery should probably also be regarded as a deliberate deposit (CAT Report 485).

Ritual activity involving placed deposits, often consisting of material with little or no obvious intrinsic value, have been recognised from other settlement sites in the Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age period. For example there is a range of placed finds that include antlers, animal bone, querns, flint nodules and metal (copper-alloy) found in pits at a site at Westcroft Road, Carshalton, Surrey (Proctor 2002). There it is suggested that this material invokes the relation of the community to these items as resources on which they depend for survival and success; although it is acknowledged that the specific meaning behind these rituals is difficult to access.

The polished axe piece is unusual in regard to many of these placed deposits in that it is clearly ancient in relation to the context; although the special position ancient objects can occupy in the past can be seen at Colchester with the inclusion of a Bronze palstave in the rich Late Iron Age burial at Lexden (Foster 1986, 78-80). The stone axe here, presumably discovered and curated for an unknown length of time, represents an object that must have been recognised as having been crafted and special, probably associated with a mythical past or other world. The intrinsic mysterious aspects of the axe piece probably imbued it with a special property considered to be right for this particular deposit. The piece of puddingstone from the feature also appears likely to be a deliberate inclusion, possibly referencing the economic sustenance of the site as this stone type was used on occasion at that time to produce saddle querns (Major 2004); although again its unusual nature alone might have been considered appropriate for inclusion in the pit.

Late Iron Age and Roman

Closely-dated finds of the Late Iron Age and Roman period consist of a few pottery sherds, primarily recovered from a rectilinear system of field ditches (F37, F47, F48, F50, F68) and (apart from one sherd dated as medieval – see below) are the latest-dated finds associated with these features. A single residual sherd of reduced coarseware (Fabric GX) came from an area of disturbance associated with WWII airbase (F32) and another was residual in a later cultivation channel (F59). Most of the sherds are of small size (average sherd weight 4.3 g). The grog-tempered sherds appear typical of Late Iron Age 'Belgic'-type pottery, current from the late 1st century BC-mid 1st century AD while the coarseware sherds can be identified as typical of Roman pottery rather than the medieval coarseware pottery also present on the site, but are not closely dated within the Roman period.

Fabric	Fabric description	No.	Wt/g.
GTW	Late Iron Age 'Belgic'-type grog-tempered ware	4	18
GX	Other coarse wares, principally local greywares	4	16

Table 4 Late Iron Age and Roman pottery by fabric

Medieval

The only closely-dated finds of medieval date are pottery and a few sherds of this period were recovered from a number of features. Sherds of both medieval sandy greyware (Fabric 20) and medieval sandy orange ware (Fabric 21) are present (Table 5). Only plain body and base edge sherds are represented and the pottery is broadly dated as c late 12th-14th/15th century, although the majority is probably of late 12th/13th-14th century date. Sherds of medieval greyware are associated with two of several features interpreted as cultivation channels (F51 & F58) and are the latest closely dated finds from the channels. A single sherd recorded was from the LIA/ER ditch F50 (which is intrusive or misidentified – although it does appear to be medieval). Also, one or two sherds were also recovered from pits F75 & F76 and ditches F69 & F71.

Fabric	Fabric description	No.	Wt/g.
20	Medieval sandy greywares/coarsewares (general)	8	109
21	Medieval sandy orange wares (general)	3	20

Table 5 Medieval pottery by fabric

Medieval/post-medieval-modern

Ceramic building material

There is a small quantity of ceramic building material (CBM) consisting of a total of 24 pieces weighing 910g. Just under half of these (11 pieces) are small and abraded and weigh less than 8g, with most weighing 1g or less. These are not closely identifiable or closely datable. 4 of these pieces, all weighing between 1g-2g, come from the fill of cultivation channels (F57, F59, F60 & F61). The latest closely-dated finds associated with this group of channels are sherds of medieval pottery and it can be noted that the pieces of CBM are mostly small enough to be intrusive into these contexts.

Identifiable CBM pieces consist of peg-tile and brick. Peg-tile pieces, weighing approximately 20g, come from two late-dated ditches – 4 pieces from F40 (sx 2) and 1 from F65. These are not closely-dated but can be generally dated as late medieval date or later. The ditch F65 also produced pieces of brick, almost certainly of probably post-medieval or modern date. Another piece of brick, dated as post-medieval, was recovered from ditch F71.

Other finds

Several types of finds were recovered, mostly as one or two pieces, from medieval or later features and are briefly listed. The exception to this is a small group of oyster shells recovered from one of the cultivation channels.

Shell: A significant number of pieces of oyster shell were associated with one of the cultivation channels (F51 (21)). In total there are 71 pieces (weight 130 g) from this feature. One or two pieces were also recovered from ditches F54 (24) & F71 (37).

Nails: Two small iron nails were recovered from the post-medieval ditch F65 (34).

Coal: A small piece (8g) comes from the fill of ditch F40 (9).

Charcoal: Two pieces come from one of the cultivation channels (F51 (21)).

Faunal remains including cremation material/burnt bone

by Julie Curl

Methodology

Five bags of bone were submitted for recording and analysis. Normally sieving would be carried out for burnt material, but fragments were sufficiently large enough to sort manually. Greatest lengths were measured for the larger pieces in the assemblage.

Quantification, provenance and preservation

Three features, pits F42 and F55, and a cultivation channel F51, yielded bone fragments that amounted to 8.5g and consisted of twenty-one pieces. These are quantified by feature number and context in Table 6. Those from F42 were associated with pottery fragments of Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age date.

Preservation is reasonable, with many large fragments over 10mm in length bone surviving, although no particularly large fragments. Some small fragments below 4mm are present, but none of 1mm or less. Two fills from F42 produced burnt fragments, which were heavily burnt to fully oxidised and white in colour.

Analysis results and discussion

The only bone identifiable to species is of animal origin, the remaining bone is only identifiable as mammal, with much of that probably of animal origin, with sheep/goat and pig identified.

Pit F42 (17) produced identifiable fragments of pig or boar molar, which have been heavily burnt, leaving them white in colour. Other fragments of burnt bone from F42 (14) had also been heavily burnt, but these are only identified as 'mammal'. With the burnt remains in this assemblage from pig, these animals have quite a high fat content, resulting in sustained burning. It is possible that the animals carcass was cooked and the remains of the roasted animal were then burnt for disposal.

Bone from pit F55 (27) included part of the shaft of a sheep/goat metacarpal, other fragments showed no diagnostic features.

Feature	Finds no.	Count	Weight	Identification	Comments
F42	14	2	1g	Mammal	Burnt grey to white colour
F42	15	2	2g	Mammal	Largely unburnt, largest GL=39mm
F42	17	9	1.5g	Pig/boar	Four fragments of porcine molar, burnt to a white colour
				Mammal	Five fragments, one unburnt
F51	21	2	2g	Mammal	Unburnt
F55	27	6	2g	Sheep/goat	Metacarpal shaft fragment, unburnt
				Mammal	Five fragments, unburnt

Table 6 Quantification of the cremated material by context number, count and weight.

Conclusions

It appears that the assemblage contains only animal remains, including some burnt material that may represent discarded food debris.

It is possible that pit F42 may have contained some human cremated bone associated with the ceramic material, but none was identifiable from the remains. The pig/boar burnt remains may have been food included in a cremation, but it is possible that the waste in pit F42 was only burnt food waste.

Environmental Report
By Val Fryer

Introduction and method statement

Excavations at Birch Quarry were undertaken by the Colchester Archaeological Trust Ltd (CAT) as part of an ongoing programme of investigations. The work recorded pits of possible prehistoric date, although only two features were securely dated to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age periods. Samples for the retrieval of the plant macrofossil assemblages were taken from six pit fills (F33, F34, F35, F42, F73 and F74).

The samples were bulk floated by CAT, with the flots being collected in a 300 micron mesh sieve. The dried flots were scanned under a binocular microscope at magnifications up to x16 and the plant macrofossils and other remains noted are listed in Table 7. Nomenclature within the table follows Stace (2010). All plant remains were charred. Modern seeds, roots, arthropod remains and fungal sclerotia were also recorded.

Sample No.	4	6	1	2	3	5
Feature No.	F42	F74	F33	F34	F35	F73
Context No.	8	44	1	2	3	42
Feature type	?Store pit	Pit	Fire pit	Fire pit	Fire pit	Pit
Date	LBA/EIA	LBA/EIA	?Prehist.	?Prehist.	?Prehist.	?Prehist.
Plant macrofossils						
Small Poaceae indet.					xcf	
Charcoal <2mm	xxx	xx	xxxx	xxxx	xxx	xx
Charcoal >2mm	xx	x	xxxx	xxxx	xx	x
Charcoal >5mm	xx		xxx	xx	x	x
Charcoal >10mm	xx		xxx	xx	x	
Charcoal >20mm			xxx	xx		
Charred root/stem				x		
Indet. seed/fruit			x			
Other remains						
Black porous material			x			
Burnt/fired clay			x		x	x
Burnt stone	x					
Marine mollusc shell	x					
Mineralised soil concretions			xxx			
Sample volume (litres)	40	20	10	10	20	10
Volume of flot (litres)	<0.1	<0.1	0.1	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1
% flot sorted	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

x = 1 – 10 specimens xx = 11 – 50 specimens xxx = 51 – 100 specimens xxxx = 100+ specimens
LBA/EIA = Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age Prehist = prehistoric

Table 7 Quantification of environmental remains.

Results

All six assemblages are small (i.e. circa 0.1 litres in volume or less) and are primarily composed of charcoal/charred wood. Some ecofacts (particularly within sample 1 (fire pit F33)) are heavily coated with mineral concretions and small grits. However, it would appear that much of the charcoal is from ring-porous species, although occasional pieces of diffuse porous material are also noted. Much of the charcoal within sample 1 has a flaked appearance, which may be indicative of very high temperature combustion. Conversely, the charcoal from storage pit F42 (sample 4) appears very rounded and abraded, possibly suggesting that it had been exposed to the elements for some considerable period prior to incorporation within the pit fill. Other plant macrofossils are exceedingly scarce. Sample 3, from fire pit F35, contains what appears to be a single small grass (Poaceae) fruit, and sample 1 includes a hemispherical object, which may potentially be an indeterminate fruit fragment or part

of a legume. A single piece of charred root/stem is noted within the assemblage from fire pit F34 (sample 2)

Other remains are also scarce. Small pellets of orange/red burnt or fired clay are noted within three assemblages, and small splinters of heat shattered stone are present within sample 4. The latter also includes a small piece of marine mollusc shell, but it is thought most likely that this is intrusive within the assemblage.

Conclusions and recommendations for further work

In summary, due to the limited nature of the assemblages, it is difficult to reach any particular conclusions about how the pits may have been used. Fire pits have been noted at a number of sites of prehistoric date, but rarely is it possible to define a function. Suggestions range from culinary or domestic through to industrial or pastoral, but without corroborative evidence, it is generally very difficult to be more specific. Storage pits (particularly those used for grain storage) often have very specific assemblages, as the pits were fired on an annual basis to cleanse them ready for the next harvest. However, the current assemblage from pit F42 does not fit within this model. It is, perhaps, most likely that the assemblages are all largely derived from scattered waste from the fire pits, but again, this cannot be proved categorically.

As none of the assemblages contain a sufficient diversity of material for further analysis, no further work is recommended.

8 Discussion

Compared to adjacent phases of monitoring and excavation at the quarry (Fig 3, carried out in 2008 and 2015; see CAT Reports 523 and 807) the phase of work detailed in this report has revealed a higher density of features than the surrounding areas.

Although ditches observed in previous areas have continued into this site (both post-medieval ditch F43 and LBA/EIA ditch F49 were observed in 2015 as F8 and F6 respectively) there are several ditches excavated on this site that were not identified in previous years despite appearing to continue into the earlier phases of excavation (Fig 4).

The primary reason for this discrepancy is probably the disturbance caused by the construction and subsequent demolition of the World War II airbase. This was more pronounced in previous monitoring phases (see Archaeological Background) and must have masked or removed any trace of the ditches now presumed to have existed in these areas. Another factor that probably contributed towards this is the natural subsoil, which in places (as described on pg 4) made identification of features very difficult, particularly in dry or wet weather conditions.

The large Late Bronze Age pit F42 has no parallels in this phase of work, but can be compared to features observed in previous phases of excavation at the quarry. As mentioned in Finds (pg 12), the presence of a fragment of a Neolithic polished axe in this feature is unlikely to be coincidental, and almost certainly represents a placed deposit. Placed deposits dating from the Bronze Age have been found in earlier phases of excavation at Birch Quarry, including bronze pins, loom weights and intact pots (see Finds pg 12 for more detail).

Stylistically, F42 also bears some comparison to a pit (F238) uncovered during the 2007 phase of monitoring. F238 was a large, flat-based feature with steeply-sloping sides, which was interpreted as a waterhole and contained a substantial amount of Late Bronze Age pottery (CAT Report 485, 6). In all these elements, it is quite similar to F42. However it is c 800mm wider, and almost 1m deeper. F42 may indeed be a waterhole but, if so, it is considerably smaller than the example found in 2007.

Given its size, shape and the apparent ritual deposition, F42 seems unlikely to have been excavated intentionally as a rubbish pit. Other alternatives that account for its size and depth include a quarry pit, or possibly, a storage pit, although as noted in the environmental analysis (pg 17) storage pits tend to have very distinct fills, which this feature lacks.

The north-west to south-east aligned field system observed during this excavation almost certainly must have originated in a single phase. Despite several of the ditches solely producing LBA/EIA pottery (see finds above), it is considered quite likely that this field system is Late Iron Age/Early Roman (LIA/ER) in origin.

This is partially due to the finds recovered; a number of the ditches contained LIA/ER pottery. If we are to assume that all the ditches are part of one field system and contemporary (as appears to be the case given their identical alignment), then LIA/ER is the phase to which they seem most likely to belong, with all other pottery being residual (or, as in the case of a single medieval sherd in F50, intrusive).

The other factor in dating these ditches is the previously-observed archaeological remains at Birch Quarry. No evidence of Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age field systems has been uncovered during the 23 years of Birch Quarry's operation (although several ring-ditches, cremations and discrete features of these periods have been uncovered).

In contrast, significant evidence has been uncovered for Late Iron Age/Early Roman field systems, particularly during the 2005-2008 excavations to the east (Fig 3; CAT Reports 383, 485 and 523). Given that the field system in the current excavation is on a similar alignment to those seen in 2005-2008, assigning them to the same time period seems logical.

The medieval cultivation channels/agricultural linears uncovered on the site are reminiscent of ridge-and-furrow ploughing. However, their relatively small size and close proximity to each other (pg 6) makes interpreting them as such difficult. It is possible that the linears observed represent two different, alternating, phases of ploughing although this is difficult to prove. It seems more likely they were dug by hand, although they are probably still agricultural in origin.

This phase of excavation at Birch Quarry uncovered several different periods of archaeological features, the most prominent of which was a field system associated with the LIA/ER settlement identified to the east (CAT Report 485). Although representing somewhat of a hinterland, this latest phase of work shows that the agricultural landscape surrounding the settlement extended at least this far.

F42, like some other isolated prehistoric features found in previous excavations at Birch Quarry, highlights the culture of ritual deposition in the Late Bronze Age. The regular discovery of Bronze Age features in various excavations at Birch Quarry, including three ring-ditches with sixteen associated cremations to the north-east of the quarry (CAT Report 289), suggests there was a Bronze Age settlement in proximity to the current site that has yet to be identified.

Hopefully the increased visibility of features will continue and the impact of the WWII airbase will decrease as the quarry is expanded further.

9 Acknowledgements

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The site work was managed by Mark Baister. Fieldwork was carried out by Mark Baister, Adam Tuffey, Sarah Carter, Elliot Hicks, Nigel Rayner, Alec Wade and Robin Mathieson.

Figures are by Mark Baister, with assistance from Adam Tuffey.

Sections are by Sarah Carter.

The project was monitored by Teresa O'Connor for Essex County Council.

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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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11 Abbreviations and glossary

Bronze Age	period from 2000 to c 700 BC
CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
ECC	Essex County Council
CIfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
context	specific location of finds on an archaeological site
EHER	Essex Historic Environment Record, held by the HCC
feature (F)	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain: can contain 'contexts'
HE	Historic Environment
Iron Age	period from c 700 BC to AD 43
layer (L)	distinct or distinguishable deposit (layer) of material
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c 1500
modern	period from the 19th century onwards to the present
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
OASIS	O nline A ccess to the Index of Archaeological Investigation S , http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main
post-medieval	period from c AD 1500 to c 1800
Roman	period from AD 43 to c 410
WSI	Written Scheme of Investigation

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 Colchester and Ipswich Museums under accession code COLEM 2018.48.

13 Contents of archive

Paper and digital record

One A4 document wallet containing:

The report (CAT Report 1263)

Original site record (plans, elevations and notes)

Site digital and black and white photos and log, attendance register, risk assessment

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Distribution list

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Appendix 1 Context list

Context Number	Finds Number	Context Type	Fill Description	Date
F32	-	area of disturbance	friable/firm, dry/moist, medium grey/brown silty-clay	modern
F33	-	fire pit	friable, dry/moist, dark black clayey-silt with abundant charcoal inclusions	undated
F34	-	fire pit	friable, dry/moist, dark black clayey-silt with abundant charcoal inclusions	undated
F35	-	fire pit	friable, dry/moist, dark black clayey-silt with abundant charcoal inclusions	undated
F36	-	ditch	friable/firm, dry, medium grey/brown clayey-silt	post-medieval
F37	4	ditch	friable/firm, dry, medium yellow/grey/brown clayey-silt with occasional small subrounded stone inclusions	Late Iron Age/early Roman
F38	5	ditch	firm, dry, light/medium grey clayey-silt with rare small irregular stone inclusions	Late Iron Age/early Roman
F39	-	small pit	firm, moist, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with rare charcoal flecks	undated
F40	9	ditch	firm, dry, light grey clayey-silt with rare small stone inclusions	post-medieval
F41	-	natural feature	soft, moist, medium orange/brown silty-clay, with rare stone and chalk inclusions	post-glacial
F42	6, 7, 8, 10, 13, 14, 15, 17, 22	storage pit / watering hole	soft, moist, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with occasional charcoal flecks and mottling	Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age
F43	-	ditch	friable, dry, very dark black sandy-silt	post-medieval
F44	-	pit	firm, dry/moist, medium grey clayey-silt	undated
F45	-	pit	firm, dry/moist, medium grey clayey-silt	undated
F46	11, 12, 41	ditch	firm, moist, medium yellow/grey/brown clayey-silt with rare small stone inclusions and frequent chalk and manganese flecks	Late Iron Age/early Roman
F47	16	ditch	firm, moist, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with flecks of charcoal and daub	Late Iron Age/early Roman
F48	18	ditch	firm, moist, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with flecks of charcoal and daub	Late Iron Age/early Roman
F49	19	ditch	firm, moist, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with flecks of charcoal	Late Iron Age/early Roman
F50	20	ditch	firm, moist, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with charcoal flecks and occasional small stone inclusions	Late Iron Age/early Roman
F51	21	cultivation channel	firm, dry, medium grey/brown clayey-silt	medieval
F52	-	pit	soft, moist, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with rare small stone inclusions	undated
F53	-	ditch	firm, slightly moist, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with rare small stone inclusions	Late Iron Age/early Roman
F54	24, 25, 26	ditch	friable/firm, dry, medium yellow/brown clayey-silt with occasional small stone inclusions	Late Iron Age/early Roman

F55	27	pit	friable/firm, dry, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with common charcoal flecks and occasional small stone inclusions	prehistoric
F56	28	ditch	firm, moist, medium grey/brown clayey-silt	Late Iron Age/early Roman
F57	29	cultivation channel	friable, dry, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with common flecks of CBM	medieval
F58	30	cultivation channel	friable, dry, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with common flecks of CBM	medieval
F59	31	cultivation channel	friable, dry, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with common flecks of CBM	medieval
F60	32	cultivation channel	friable, dry, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with common flecks of CBM	medieval
F61	33	cultivation channel	friable, dry, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with common flecks of CBM	medieval
F62	-	cultivation channel	friable, dry, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with common flecks of CBM	medieval
F63	-	cultivation channel	friable, dry, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with common flecks of CBM	medieval
F64	-	cultivation channel	friable, dry, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with common flecks of CBM	medieval
F65	34	ditch	firm, moist/wet, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with charcoal and brick flecks	post-medieval
F66	35, 36	ditch	firm, dry, medium yellow/brown clayey-silt	Late Iron Age/early Roman
F67	-	shallow pit	friable, moist, medium orange/grey/brown clayey-silt with charcoal flecks	undated
F68	37	ditch	friable, moist, medium orange/grey/brown clayey-silt with charcoal flecks	Late Iron Age/early Roman
F69	38	ditch	firm, moist, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with rare small stone inclusions	medieval
F70	-	ditch	firm, moist, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with manganese flecks	Late Iron Age/early Roman
F71	39	ditch	friable/firm, moist, dark grey/brown clayey-silt with oyster and brick flecks	post-medieval
F72	40	pit	soft/friable, moist, medium yellow/grey/brown clayey-silt	prehistoric
F73	-	pit	soft, wet, dark brown/black clayey-silt with abundant charcoal flecks	undated
F74	43	pit	soft, wet, dark brown/black clayey-silt with charcoal and daub flecks	Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age
F75	45	pit	firm, moist, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with rare charcoal and occasional chalk flecks	medieval
F76	46	pit	firm, moist/wet, medium grey/brown clayey-silt with charcoal flecks	medieval
F77	-	pit	firm, wet, medium orange/brown clayey-silt	undated
F78	-	pit	firm, moist, medium orange/brown clayey-silt	undated

L1	-	ploughsoil	friable, dry, dark brown sandy-silt	modern
L2	23	natural	firm, dry/moist, medium/light yellow/brown silty-clay with occasional chalk inclusions	post-glacial

Appendix 2: Birch Quarry 2018 – Finds listing

Pottery fabrics

Fabric	Fabric description
<i>Prehistoric:</i>	
A	Flint small, well sorted, common
B	Flint small-medium, common
C	Flint small-medium common, with occasional large flint
D	Flint small-large, poorly sorted
E	Flint and sand-tempered
F	Sand-tempered with occasional large flints
G	Sand-tempered, common small sand
H	Sand-tempered, moderate small sand
I	Sand-tempered, common small-medium sand
M	Grog, often with some sand or flint
<i>Roman:</i>	
GTW	Late Iron Age 'Belgic'-type grog-tempered ware
GX	Other coarse wares, principally local greywares
<i>Medieval:</i>	
13	Early medieval sandy wares
20	Medieval sandy greywares/coarsewares (general)
21	Medieval sandy orange wares (general)

Key: BS=heat altered (burnt) stone; CBM=ceramic building material; FC=fired clay; S/Q=sandstone/quartzite; <=>=bulk sample

Ctxt	type	Find no	Find type	period	Fabric	Form	No	Wt/g	EVE	Abr	Spot date
F32	hollow	1	pot	Rom	GX	very small greyware sherd and a sherd fragment	1	1			Rom
F37	ditch	4	pot	Rom	GTW	Base edge sherd and small sherd/fragment	2	2		A	Late 1st century-mid 1st century AD
F38	ditch	5	flint	preh		Worked flint - flakes	3				preh
F38	ditch	5	pot	preh	D	Base, small sherd (flat) appears to have rather dense flint on underside	1	6			LBA
F40 sx2	ditch	9	CBM PT	med+		Piece from peg-tiles	4	70			Late med/p-med
F40 sx2	Ditch	9	coal				2	8			
F42	pit	10	pot	preh	B	Base from a relatively fine jar/bowl, flat base, moderate flint & sand, occasional chalk fragment, dark fabric and smoothed dark surfaces, possibly burnished inside rim (21 sherds + c 20 very small sherd fragments) (Fabric E/B)	21	230			LBA/EIA
F42	pit	10	pot	preh	E/B	Body sherd with some scored lines, oxidised surface, joins with 17	1	12			LBA/EIA
F42	pit	13	stone		Putting	Conglomerate -puddingstone, irregular	1	526			Nat?

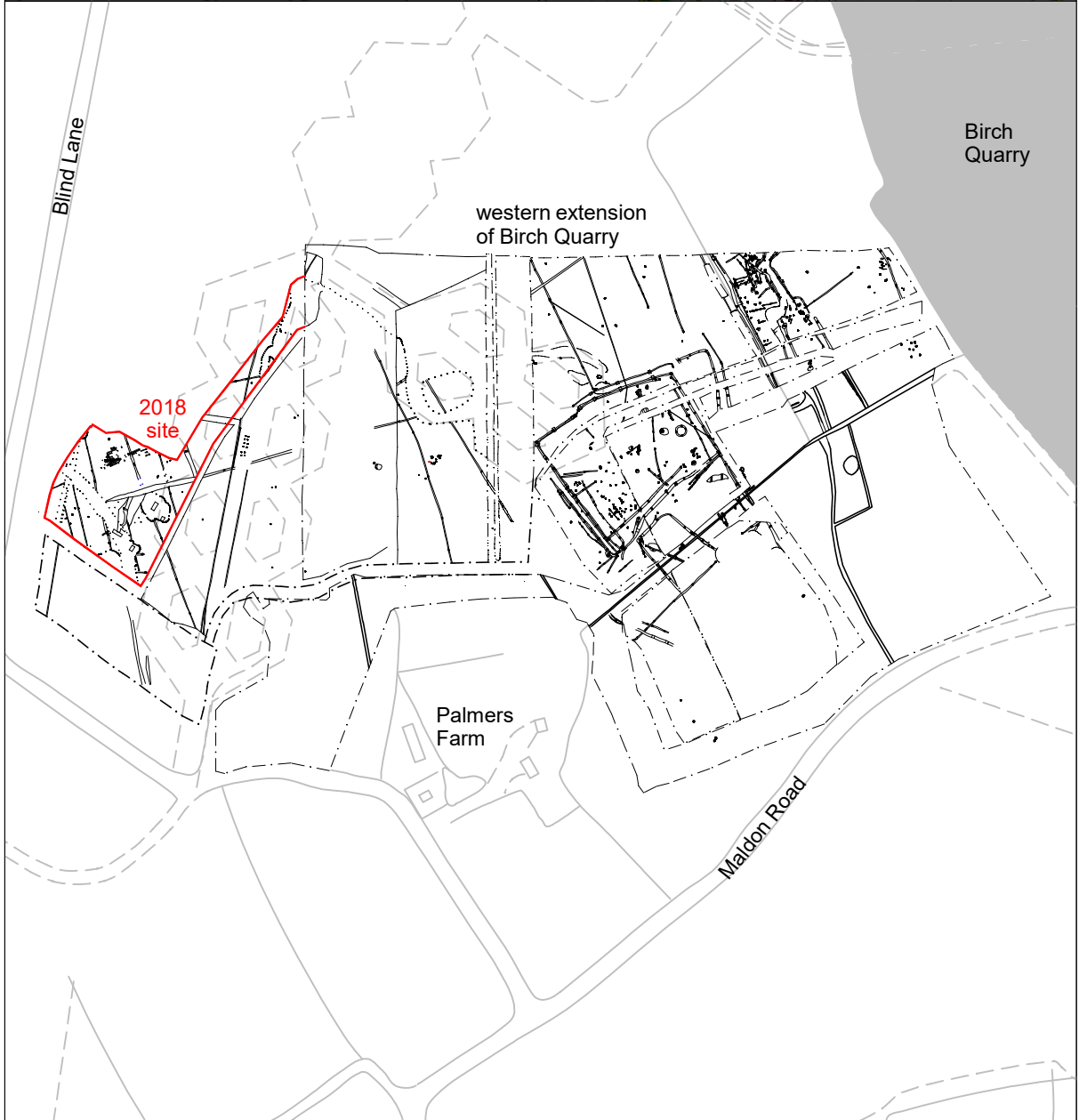
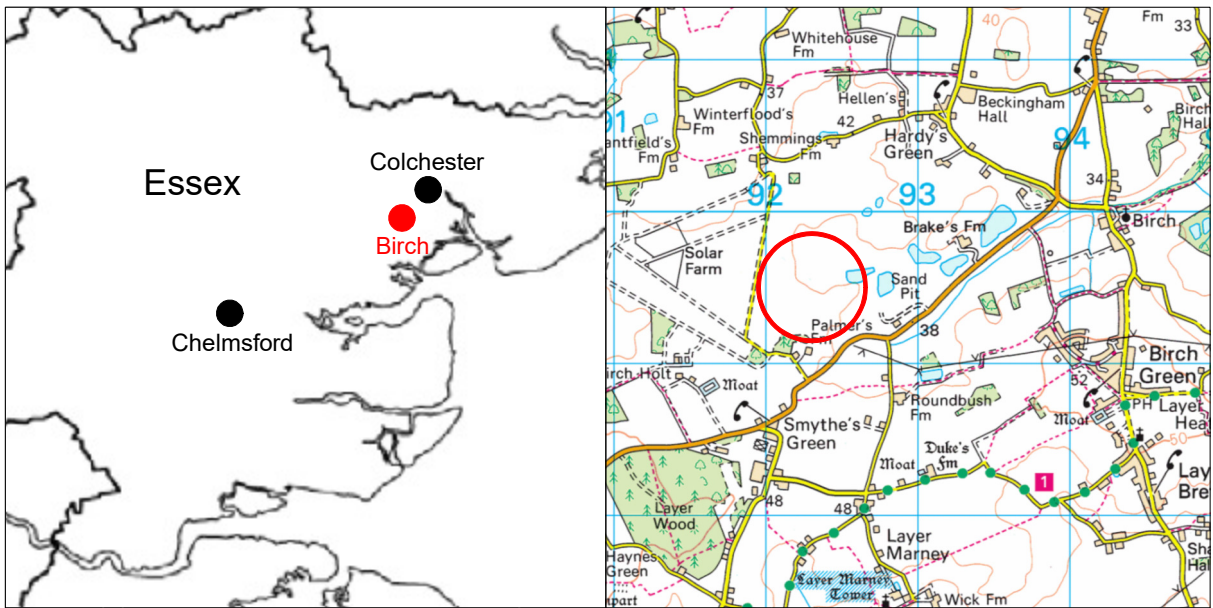
Ctxt	type	Find no	Find type	period	Fabric	Form	No	Wt/g	EVE	Abr	Spot date
					stone	piece, no indication of working, small-medium flint pebbles (pinkish, red-brown, grey & black) in white matrix – although commonly used in the 1st century for querns this is possibly an erratic piece(?)					
F42	pit	14	BS		flint	Irregular shatter pieces, heat altered, part calcified	4	52			preh
F42	pit	14	pot	preh	B/E	Rim from a jar/bowl, simple, flat-topped, slightly flaring, rounded shoulder, dark surface (almost entirely abraded off) oxidised fabric	1	26		A	LBA/EIA
F42	pit	14	pot	preh	B/E	Common-sparse flint in sandy fabric, misc sherds, some abrasion	4	36			LBA/EIA
F42	pit	14	pot	preh	E	Small slightly abraded sherd, indications of cordon on body, dark fabric & surfaces	1	6			
F42	pit	14	pot	preh	H	Misc small sherds	4	14			
F42	pit	15	bone			Pieces of calcified (white) burnt bone	2	2			Not closely dated
F42	pit	15	FC	preh		Silty, orange-brown fired clay, abraded lump, some pale silt inclusions	1	36		A	
F42	pit	15	flint			Small broken piece with plunge fracture on edge	1				
F42	pit	15	pot	preh	B	Includes single large jar/bowl, large sherd recently broken and small sherd pieces, common small-medium flint	4	90			LBA/EIA
F42	pit	15	pot	preh	E/G	Sand-tempered, abraded, some rare flint	1	8		A	
F42	pit	15	pot	preh	C	Dark surfaces & fabric	1	6		A	
F42	pit	15	pot	preh	B/E	Misc small sherds	4	10			
F42	pit	17	bone			Small pieces/fragments of burnt (calcified) bone, one other small bone piece	8	2			Not closely dated
F42	pit	17	BS		flint	Irregular shatter pieces, mostly white, calcified, crazed; one reddened & part calcified	10	456			Preh
F42	pit	17	FC			Sandy fired clay, one piece with 2 small fragments, irregular fragments, dark interior, some area oxidised orange-red probably from near surface	3	14		(A)	
F42	pit	17	pot	preh	E	Base sherd with some vertical scored lines, oxidised surface, dark grey fabric and interior, joins with 7 (Fabric E/B)	1	44			LBA/EIA
F42	pit	17	pot	preh	C	Neck (rounded) & body sherds from burnished jar/bowl, smoothed/burnished inside and out, dark brownish-grey	7	30			LBA/EIA

Ctxt	type	Find no	Find type	period	Fabric	Form	No	Wt/g	EVE	Abr	Spot date
						exterior dark grey fabric and interior, moderate flint, few other inclusions (must be an open vessel to allow interior smoothing/burnish)					
F42	pit	17	pot	preh	C	Misc very small fragments most if not all probably from pot represented by 7 sherds	9	8			
F42	pit	18	bone			Small piece of burnt (calcified) bone	1	1			Not closely dated
F42	pit	22	BS		flint		2	114			Preh?
F42	pit	22	FC			Irregular broken pieces of fired clay, one sandy, orange, the other sandy, orange red & dark grey	2	16			
F42	pit	22	flint			Poss core piece	1				Preh?
F42	pit	22	pot	preh	E	Small abraded sherd with part of a small finger-tip dimple impression at one edge, oxidised surfaces, dark grey core (Fabric poss E/H – poss burnt flint is naturally occurring flint sand - Fabric I)	1	8			LBA/EIA
F42	pit	6	Axe - polished	preh	flint	Butt-end from a polished flint axe	1				Neo
F42	pit	6	BS		flint	Irregular shatted piece, calcified, crazed	1	34			
F42	pit	6	CBM			Sandy, orange-red, brick/tile	1	6			Not closely dated – p-med?
F42	pit	6	FC	preh		Oxidised (cube-like) piece, flat surface, possibly pot but quite thick, sandy fabric, one flat surface, moderately hard	1	14			
F42	pit	6	pot	preh	C	Base edge sherd	1	10			
F42	pit	6	pot	preh	G	Small sherd	1	2		A	
F42	pit	6	pot	preh	E	Misc small sherds	4	20			
F42	pit	7	pot	preh	E	Base from large jar/bowl, flat base, moderate-sparse flint & sand, part oxidised surfaces, dark grey core (joining sherds) (Fabric E/B)	8	258			LBA/EIA
F42	pit	7	pot	preh	E/B	Other sherd, possibly from same jar/bowl but may not be	1	74		(A)	LBA/EIA
F42	pit	8<>	BS		flint		4	36			
F46	ditch	11	pot	preh	F	Small abraded sherd pale orange fabric	1	2			Preh (LBA-EIA)
F46	ditch	12	BS		flint		1	14			preh
F46	ditch	12	flint	preh		Worked flint - flake	1				preh
F46	ditch	12	pot	preh	C	Small rim sherd, flattened top with irregular external lip	1	4			LBA/EIA
F46	ditch	12	pot	preh	C	Sherds from two pots, one small base sherd with extra gritting underneath, the	2	16			LBA/EIA

Ctxt	type	Find no	Find type	period	Fabric	Form	No	Wt/g	EVE	Abr	Spot date
						other a shoulder/neck sherd from a plain jar/bowl					
F46	ditch	12	pot	preh	A/E	Small sherd with common fine flint & sand	1	2			LBA/EIA
F46	ditch	12	pot	preh	E	Abraded, oxidised fabric	2	2		A	LBA/EIA
F46	ditch	12	pot	preh	J	Small sherd, dark sandy fabric with burt out surface void, one sherd and frags	1	2			MIA?
F46	ditch	12	pot	preh	I	Abraded, oxidised fabric	1	6		A	IA?
F47	ditch	16	pot	Rom	GX	Small thin greyware (black surface ware) sherd, probably Roman rather than medieval	1	1			Rom
F47	ditch	16	pot	preh	B	Rim sherd from a bowl, everted simple rounded, slightly flared; common small-medium flint-temper in dark grey fabric	1	8			LBA/EIA
F47	ditch	16	pot	preh	B	Two small fragments probably from the rim sherd	2	1			Preh (LBA/EIA)
F48	ditch	18	pot	LIA	GTW	Base edge sherd, abraded	1	12		(A)	Late 1st century-mid 1st century AD
F49	ditch	19	flint	preh		Worked flint – flake pieces	3				preh
F50	ditch	20	flint	preh		Worked flint - flake	1				preh
F50	ditch	20	pot	med	20	Single broken body sherd	1	12			C 13th-14th century
F50	ditch	20	pot	Rom	GTW	Abraded sherd, oxidised, bead/cordon on body, grog-tempered, probably LIA/Early Rom	1	4			Late 1st century-mid 1st century AD
F51	Cultivation channel	21	charc			Two small pieces and smaller fragments	2				
F51	Cultivation channel	21	pot	med	20	Base edge from a cooking pot, moderately fine sandy fabric, grey & orange clouded surfaces, some abrasion	1	44			C 13th-14th century
F51	Cultivation channel	21	pot	med	20	moderately fine sandy fabric, some abrasion	1	8			C 13th-14th century
F51	Cultivation channel	21	shell			Oyster shell (19 larger pieces, 52 smaller pieces/fragments)	71	130			
F51 sx1	Cultivation channel	21	ABone			Two small pieces of bone, slightly abraded, presumed animal bone	2	2		(A)	Not closely dated
F53	ditch	23	flint	preh		Worked flint - flake	1				preh
F54 sx2	ditch	24	BS		flint	Irregular shatter pieces, heat altered, not calcified	2	26			Preh?
F54 sx2	ditch	24	pot	preh	E	Flint & sand-temper, fabric suggests EIA	1	2			Preh EIA
F54 sx2	ditch	24	shell			Broken land-snail shell	1	1			
F54 sx2	ditch	25	CBM			Small piece/fragment of sandy, orange-red, brick/tile	1	1			Not closely dated – p-med?
F54 sx2	ditch	25	pot	preh	F	Small sherd with some prominent flint,	1	2			LBA/EIA

Ctxt	type	Find no	Find type	period	Fabric	Form	No	Wt/g	EVE	Abr	Spot date
						but with sand-temper also, probably LBA-EIA (Fabric E or F)					
F54 sx2	ditch	26	pot	preh	H	Has a hand-made feel and probably later (middle-late) Iron Age	1	10			Preh MIA-LIA
F55	pit	27	ABone			Small pieces of bone, presumed animal bone	6	4			Not closely dated
F55	pit	27	BS		S/Q	Sandstone/quartzite, irregular shatter piece	1	16			Preh?
F55	pit	27	FC			Small piece of abraded pottery or more likely fired clay	1	1		A	
F55	pit	27	pot	preh	M?	Small, abraded orange-buff sherd with some flint and possibly grog, V shaped mark/pattern in surface, not clear if this is decoration or a burnt-out organic inclusion	1	2		A	preh
F56	ditch	28	(nat)			Small pieces of iron-pan material (discarded)					
F56	ditch	28	CBM			Small piece of sandy, orange-red, brick/tile	1	6			Not closely dated – p-med?
F57	Cultivation channel	29	CBM			Small piece of abraded orange-red brick or fired clay	1	1		A	Not closely dated
F58	Cultivation channel	30	pot	med	20	Small abraded sherd, probably medieval rather than Roman	1	1		A	Med (C 13th-14th century)
F59	Cultivation channel	31	CBM			Small piece of abraded orange-red brick or fired clay	1	2		A	Not closely dated
F59	Cultivation channel	31	pot	Rom	GX	Abraded thick greyware sherd	1	6		A	Rom
F60	Cultivation channel	32	CBM			Small piece of abraded orange-red brick	1	2		A	Not closely dated P-med?
F61	Cultivation channel	33	CBM			Small piece of abraded orange-red brick or fired clay	1	2		A	Not closely dated
F65	ditch	34	CBM			Abraded orange-red brick(?) pieces	4	32		A	P-med?
F65	ditch	34	CBM BR			Shatter pieces from a broken brick, red (slightly harsh) sandy fabric, some chalk, small flint stones & chalky clay inclusions	7	362			p-med-modern
F65	ditch	34	CBM PT	med+		Peg-tile piece, slightly abraded	1	20		(A)	Late med/p-med
F65	ditch	34	flint	preh		Worked flint - flake	1				preh
F65	ditch	34	nails		fe	Two small nails (moderated corrosion), tips broken away, 40 mm & 45 mm long	2				Prob med/p-med
F66	ditch	36	pot	preh	I	Thick sherd sand-tempered, suggest iron Age date c mid-late 1st millennium AD; slightly abraded	1	22		(A)	Preh probably IA
F66	ditch	36	pot	preh	C	Small sherd	1	1			preh

Ctxt	type	Find no	Find type	period	Fabric	Form	No	Wt/g	EVE	Abr	Spot date
F68	ditch	37	pot	Rom	GX	Abraded greyware (black surface ware) sherd, possibly early-mid Roman	1	8			Rom (c 1st-2nd century?)
F69	ditch	38	pot	med	21	Slightly abraded, orange-brown fabric with large sand temper (Fabric 21 but sand-temper similar to the earlier dating Fabric 13)	1	2		(A)	C late 12th-14th century
F71	ditch	37	shell			Oyster shell	2	8			
F71	ditch	39	CBM BR			Brick corner, slightly abraded, c 50 mm thick; orange-red fabric with some small chalk and milky quartz/flint sand, orange-buff surfaces, fairly regular – size suggest c late 16-early 18th century	1	406		(A)	p-med
F71	ditch	39	pot	med	21	moderately fine sandy fabric, oxidised brownish-orange some abrasion (Fabric 20 or 21)	1	14			C 13th-14th century
F72	pit	40	flint	preh		Worked flint - flakes	2				preh
F74	pit	43	FC			Small piece, moderately fine brownish-orange fabric, some sand, slightly curving? original surface	1	10		(A)	
F74	pit	43	pot	preh	E	Large sherd, sand-tempered with some fine flint, decorated with angled finger-tip impressions, single and paired, orange-red & grey surfaces, grey fabric. See similar decorated shoulder from pot previous phase (2015) but in flint-tempered fabric (dated there as EIA) CAT Report 807 Holloway, B., & Brooks, H., <i>Archaeological monitoring and excavation, Stage 7 and 8 western extension, Hanson Quarry, Maldon Road, Birch, Essex, 7 & fig 7</i>	1	62			EIA
F74	pit	43	pot	preh	B	Abraded, oxidised fabric	1	6		A	LBA/EIA
F74	pit	44<>	BS		flint		2	44			
F75	pit	45	pot	med	20	Hard, sandy fabric, relatively fine sand, includes base edge sherds	2	26			C 13th-14th century
F76	pit	46	pot	med	20	Body sherd just above base edge & small base edge sherd	2	18			C 13th-14th century
F76	pit	46	pot	med	21	Relatively hard and appear possibly medieval rather than prehistoric, there inclusions are milky quartz sand rather than burnt flint	1	4			C 13th-14th century




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Fig 1 Site location.



Fig 2 Site location (in red) in relation to nearby archaeological work.

 = concentrations of Roman surface finds (CAT Report 8)

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0 500 m



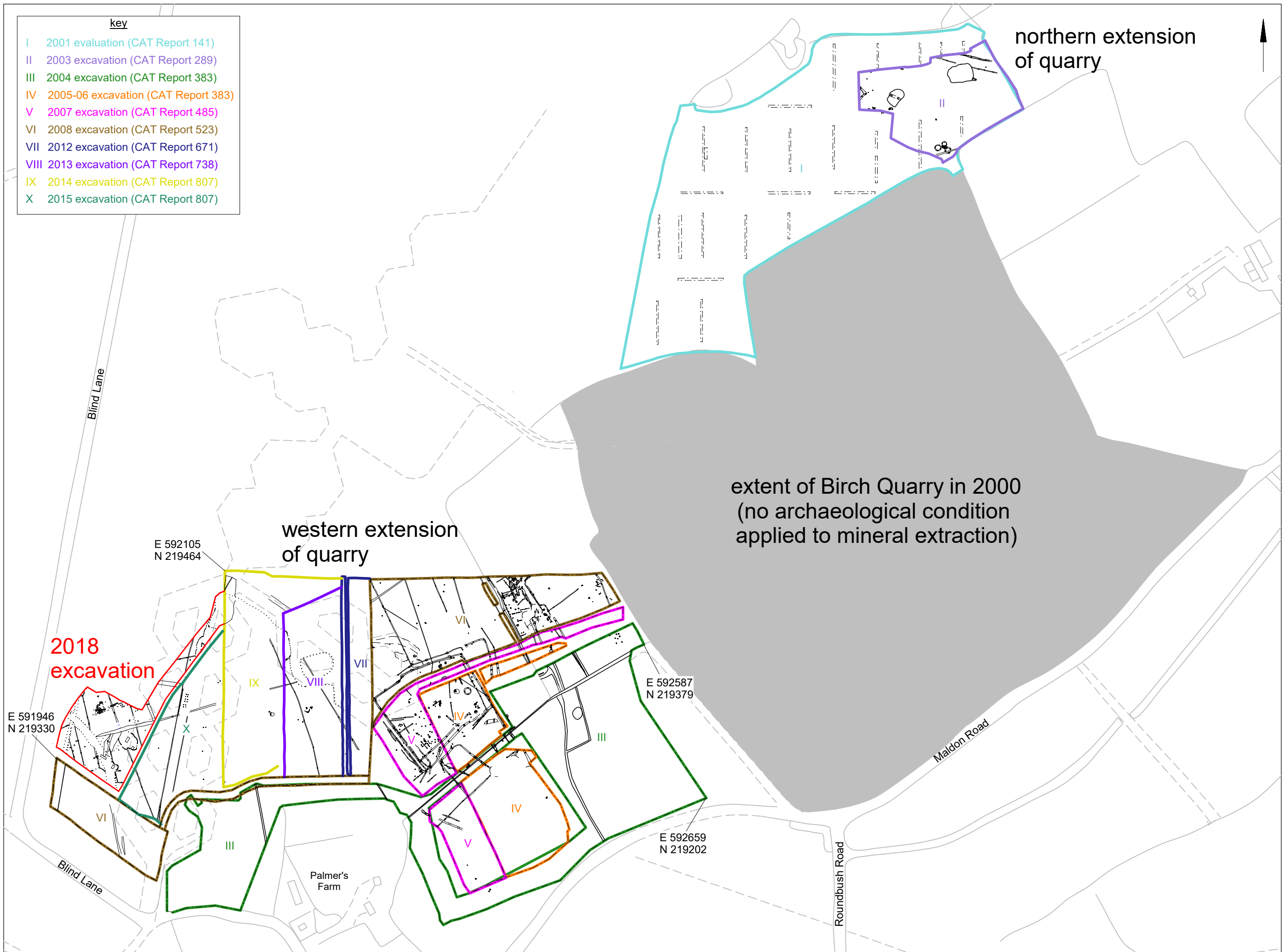


Fig 3 Site plan showing previous archaeological work at Birch Quarry alongside current (2018) phase of excavation.

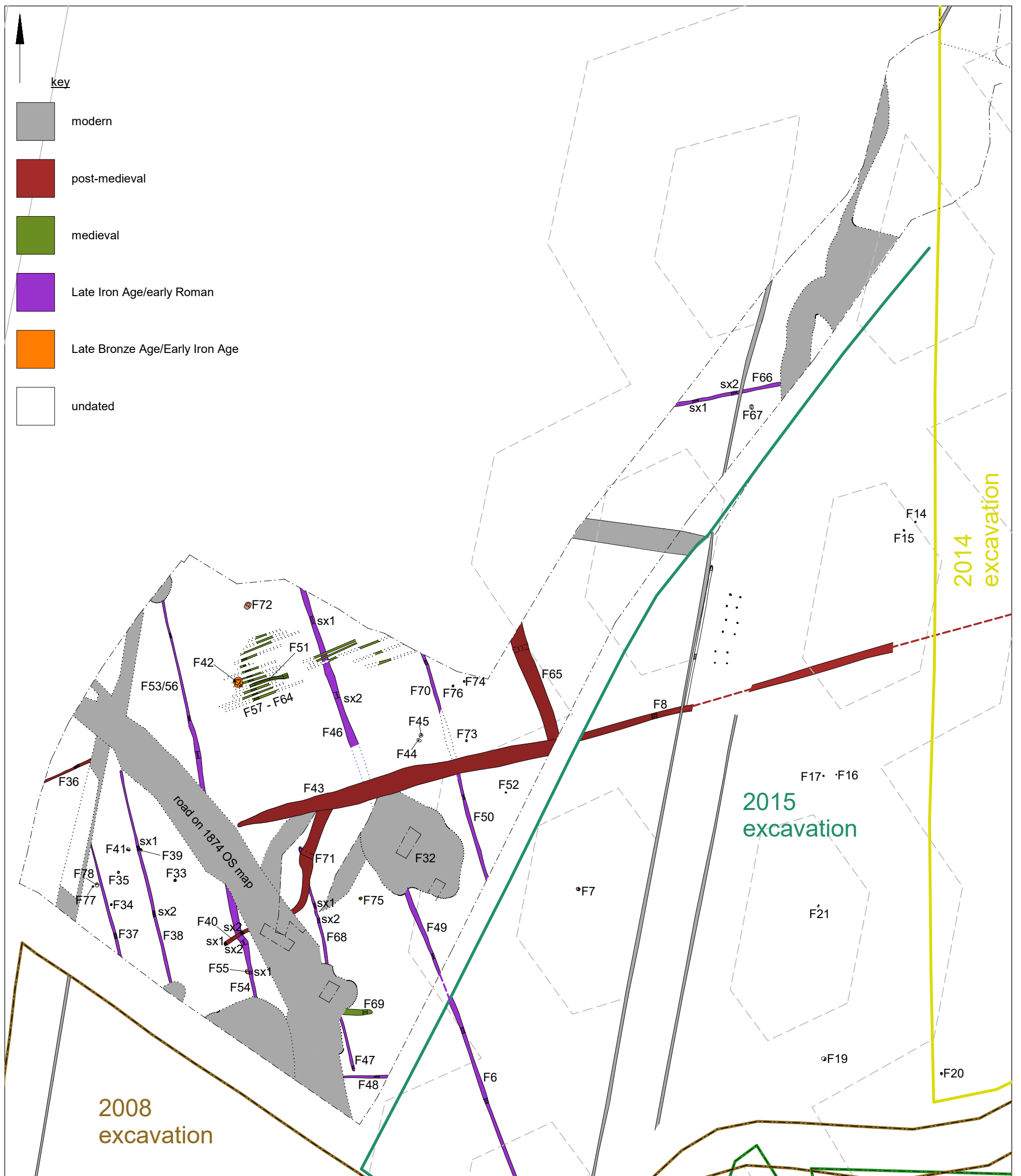


Fig 4 Detailed plan of 2018 archaeological excavation with phasing.

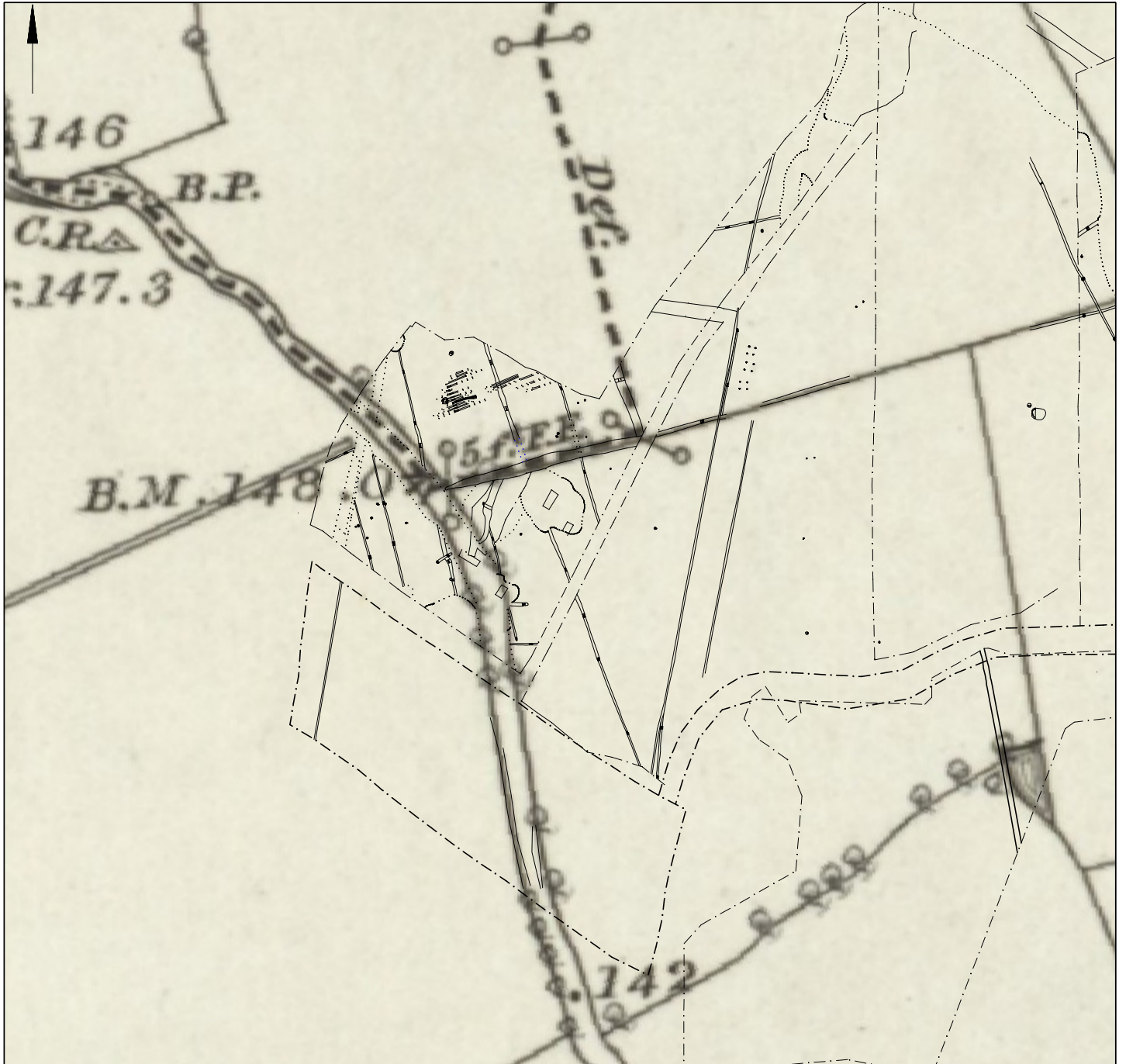


Fig 5 Excavation overlaid on the 1st edition 6-inch 1874 Ordnance Survey map.

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0 100 m

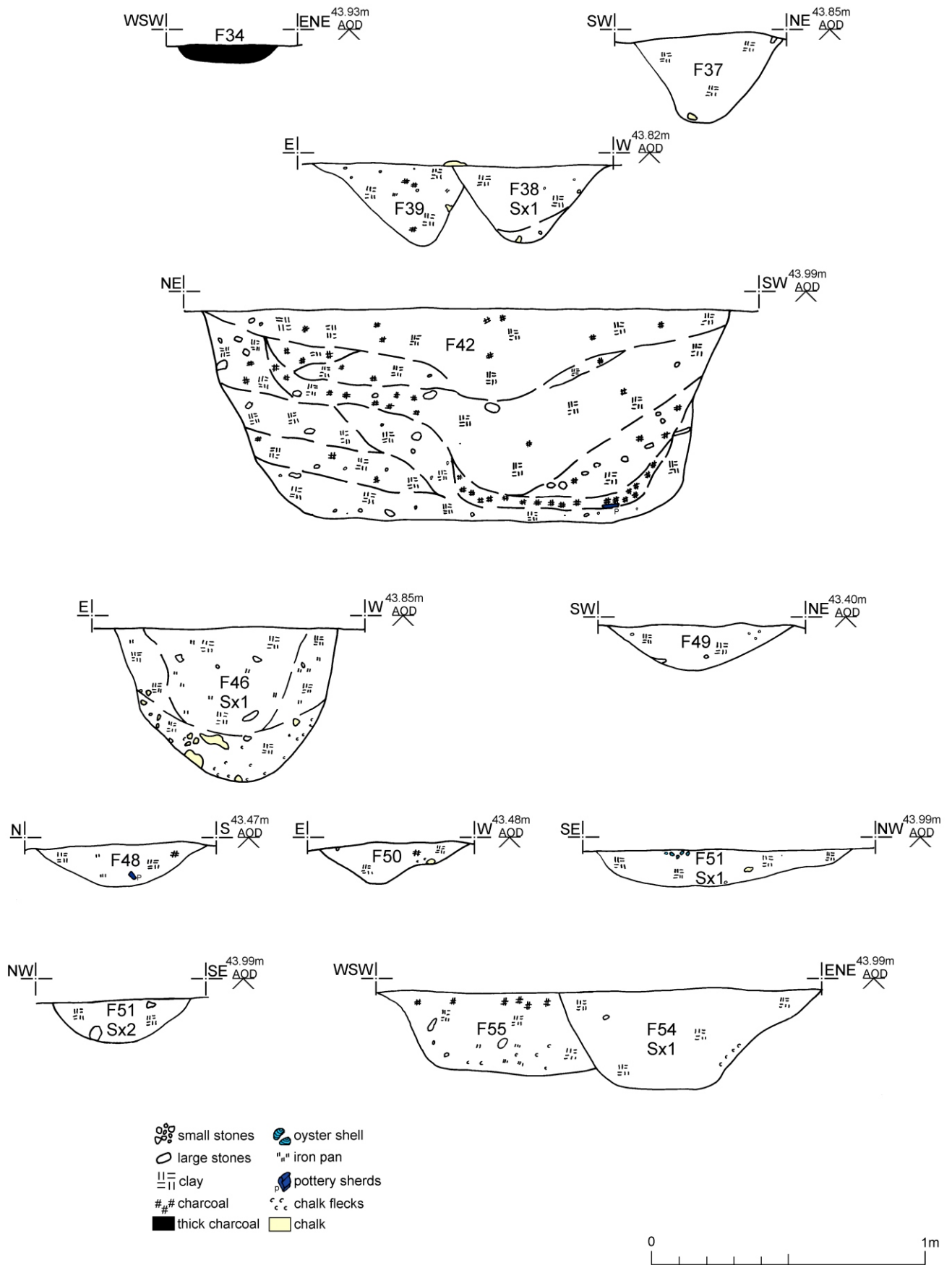


Fig 6 Feature sections.

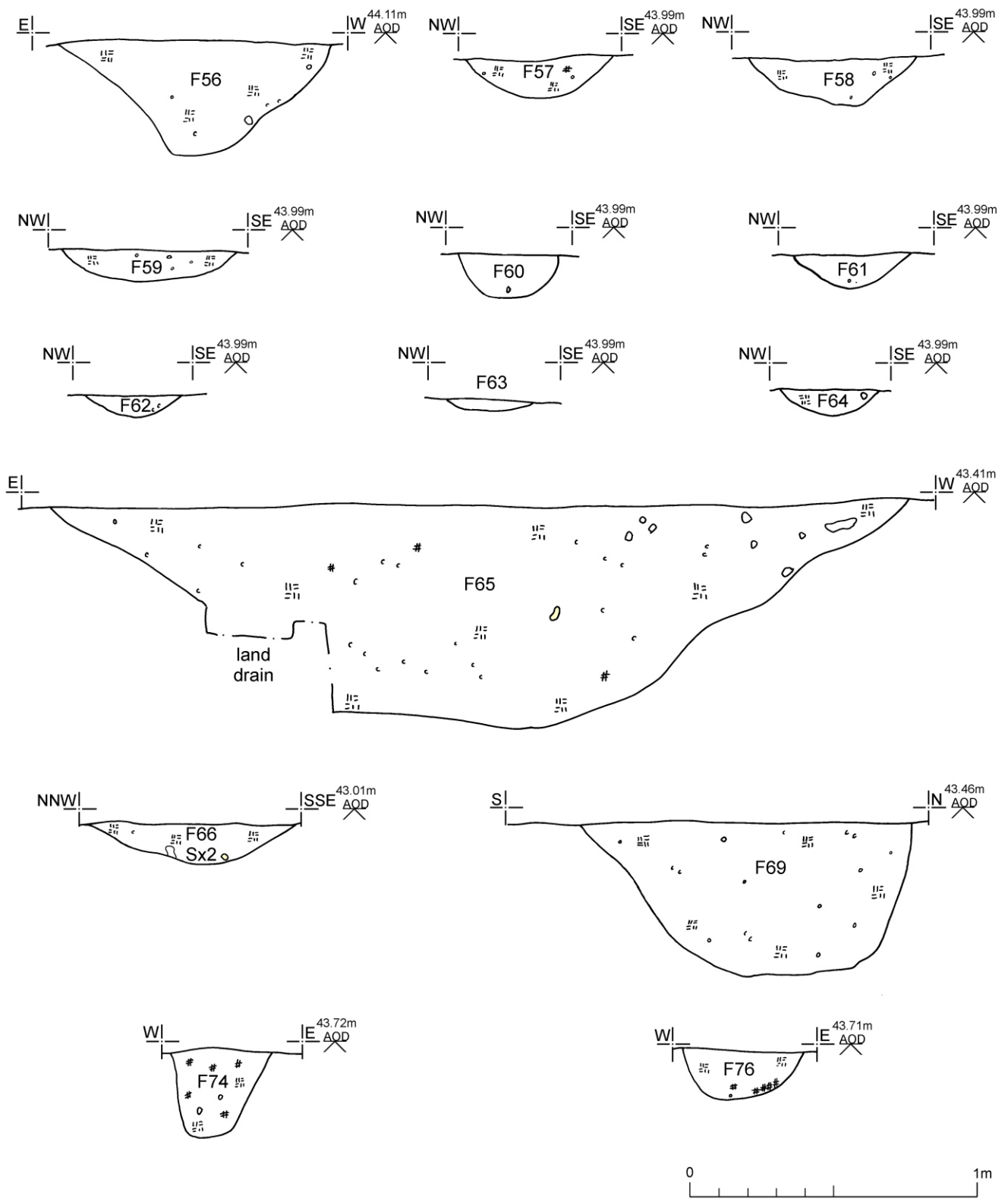


Fig 7 Feature sections.

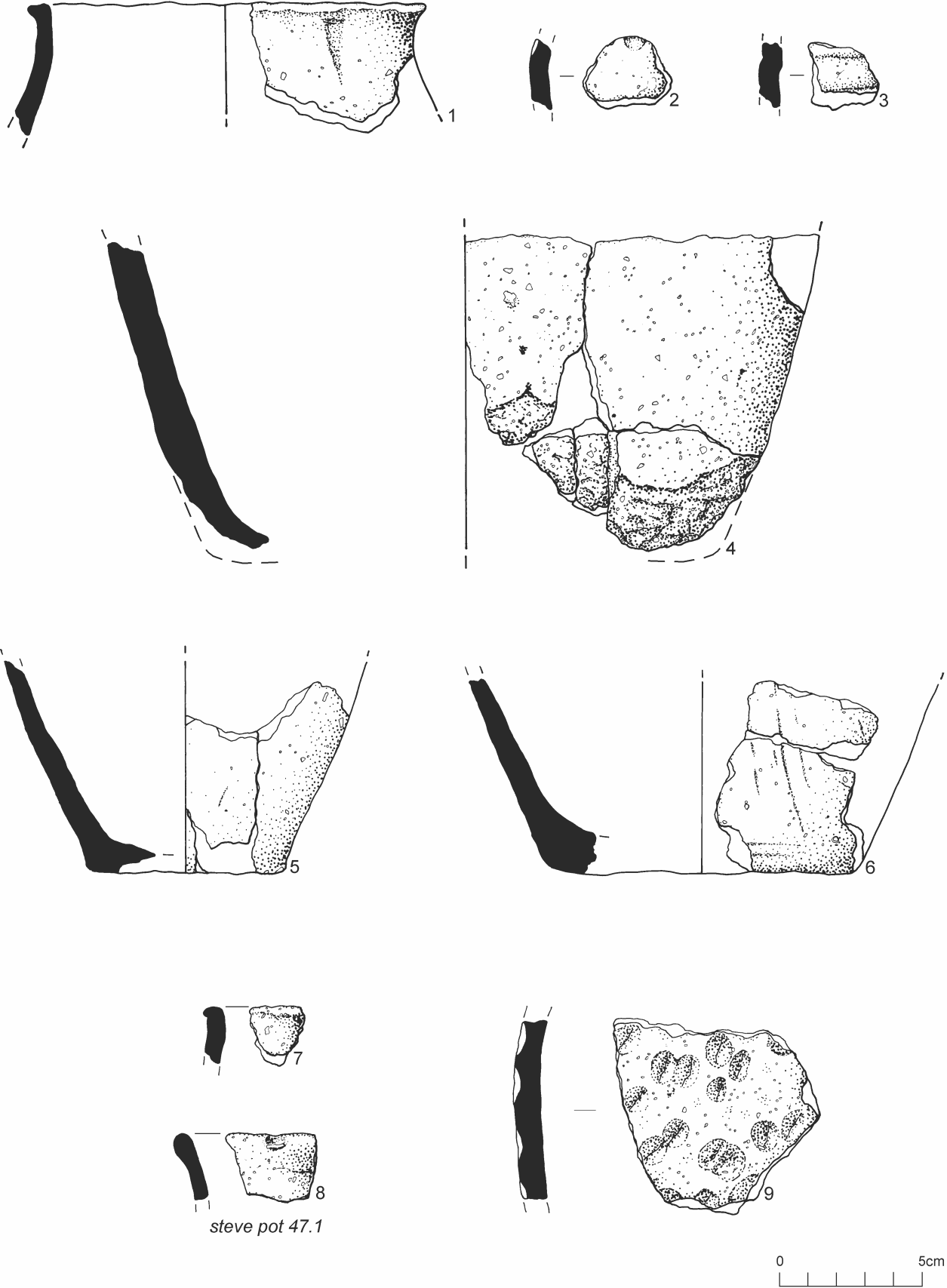


Fig 8 Prehistoric pottery from F42 (1-6), F46 (7), F47 (8) and F74 (9).

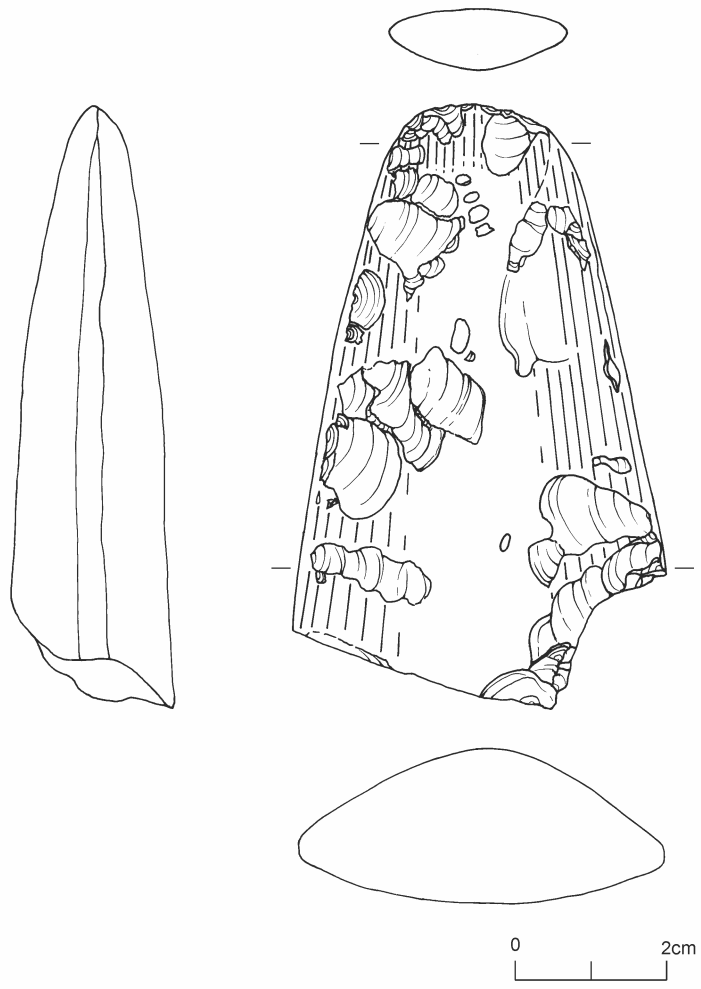


Fig 9 Neolithic polished axe fragment from F42.

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OASIS ID: colchest3-321923

Project details

Project name	Archaeological monitoring and excavation at Hanson Quarry, Maldon Road, Birch, Essex April 2018
Short description of the project	A programme of archaeological monitoring and excavation was carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust at Hanson Quarry, Maldon Road, Birch, Essex in April 2018. The level of disturbance from the demolished WWII airbase on the site was less in this phase of excavation than it had been in previous, adjacent phases. This allowed the positive identification of a Late Iron Age/early Roman field system, of which only one ditch had been observed previously. Also uncovered during the archaeological work was a large Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pit, possibly a waterhole, that contained pottery and the broken end of a Neolithic polished axe. The axe is clearly residual in the context and is probably the result of ritual deposition. Overlaying the LIA/ER field system to the north of the site was a series of shallow medieval cultivation channels.
Project dates	Start: 04-04-2018 End: 10-07-2018
Previous/future work	Yes / Yes
Any associated project reference codes	18/04b - Contracting Unit No.
Any associated project reference codes	BIBQ18 - Sitecode
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	None
Current Land use	Industry and Commerce 5 - Mineral extraction
Monument type	DITCH Late Iron Age
Monument type	PIT Late Bronze Age
Monument type	CULTIVATION MARKS Medieval
Significant Finds	POLISHED AXEHEAD Neolithic
Significant Finds	SHERDS Late Bronze Age
Significant Finds	SHERDS Roman
Investigation type	"Full excavation", "Full survey", "Open-area excavation"
Prompt	Planning condition

Project location

Country	England
Site location	ESSEX COLCHESTER BIRCH Hanson Quarry
Postcode	CO5 9XB
Study area	10648 Square metres
Site coordinates	TL 9197 1927 51.838470737393 0.786851766491 51 50 18 N 000 47 12 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 42.36m Max: 43.97m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Colchester Archaeological Trust
Project brief originator	HEM Team Officer, ECC
Project design originator	Chris Lister
Project director/manager	Mark Baister
Project supervisor	Mark Baister
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient	Colchester Museum
Physical Archive ID	2018.48
Physical Contents	"Animal Bones","Ceramics","Worked stone/lithics"
Digital Archive recipient	Colchester Museum
Digital Archive ID	2018.48
Digital Contents	"Survey","other"
Digital Media available	"Survey","Text"
Paper Archive recipient	Colchester Museum
Paper Archive ID	2018.48
Paper Contents	"Survey"
Paper Media available	"Context sheet","Miscellaneous Material","Photograph","Plan","Report","Section"

Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Archaeological monitoring and excavation at Hanson Quarry, Maldon Road, Birch, Essex April 2018
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Baister, M.

Other bibliographic details	CAT Report 1295
Date	2018
Issuer or publisher	Colchester Archaeological Trust
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Description	A4 bound report with clear plastic front and black opaque cardboard back.
URL	http://cat.essex.ac.uk/summaries/CAT-1295.html
Entered by	Mark Baister (mb@catuk.org)
Entered on	10 July 2018

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