

# Archaeological investigation by trial-trenching and excavation at The Sweyne Park School, Sir Walter Raleigh Drive, Rayleigh, Essex, SS6 9BZ

March 2021



by **Mark Baister**

with contributions by Howard Brooks and Laura Pooley  
figures by Mark Baister

fieldwork by Mark Baister with Ziya Eksen

**commissioned by Matthew Mackenzie**  
**On behalf of Morgan Sindall**

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**CAT Report 1640**  
March 2021

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## 1 Summary

*An archaeological evaluation (one trial-trench) was carried out on land at The Sweyne Park Secondary School, Rayleigh, Essex, in advance of the construction of a new school block. Six prehistoric features were excavated, originating from two distinct phases of activity. Towards the south end of the trench was a ditch aligned north-west/south-east, containing Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age pottery. The centre of the trench contained a group of features centred around a Late Iron Age curvilinear ditch, including several postholes. These features together may represent the western extent of a roundhouse. Reinforcing this interpretation is the recovery of several large fragments of fired clay, interpreted as being from a wattle-and-daub structure.*

## 2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the report for an archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching on land at The Sweyne Park Secondary School, Rayleigh, Essex which was carried out on 3rd-4th March 2021 by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT). The work was commissioned by Matthew Mackenzie on behalf of Morgan Sindall in advance of the construction of a new school block.

In response to consultation, Essex County Council Historic Environment Advisor (ECCHEA) Alison Bennett 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* (MHCLG 2019).

All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a *Brief for Archaeological Investigation at The Sweyne Park School, Sir Walter Raleigh Drive, Rayleigh*, detailing the required archaeological work, written by Alison Bennett (ECCHEA 2021), and a written scheme of investigation (WSI) prepared by CAT in response to the brief and agreed with the ECCHEA (CAT 2021).

In addition to the brief and WSI, all fieldwork and reporting was done in accordance with *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (Historic England 2016) 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* (ClfA 2014a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (ClfA 2014b).

## 3 Archaeological background

The following archaeological background draws on the Brief and the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) held at Essex County Council, County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex (accessible to the public via <http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk>).

The Historic Environment Record shows the presence of multi-period occupation in the vicinity of the school site.

Approximately 711m north-west of the site at the former Park School, Rawreth Lane, investigations have shown the presence of a Saxon burial ground with over 146 cremations and a small number of inhumations recorded (EHER 45134). Features discovered also included a series of pits, gullies and ditches thought to be associated with the burials. Artefacts recovered from the burials included pottery, metalwork and glass beads which were dated to approximately 525-600AD. Underlying the Saxon cemetery was a scatter of prehistoric pits and post-holes dating from the Early to Middle Iron Age (Ennis 2005; EAA 127).

Approximately 440m south-east of the site lies location of the former church and chapel of St Mary. Masonry and encaustic tiles date the church and chapel as medieval and indicate the presence of medieval occupation nearby (EHER 13502).

The Domesday Book demonstrates that there was a village at Rayleigh at the end of the Saxon period. The Swein of Essex built his castle there at some point between 1066 and 1086, making it one of the earliest Norman castles in the country (Rumble 1983, EHER 13586-7). During the medieval period Rayleigh flourished into a town (EHER 13575). The town appears to have remained as a small market town with a small but stable population until the beginning of the 20th century when the introduction of the railway led to its growth as a commuter town for London.

Further detailed information on Rayleigh can be gained from the Historic Towns Report (Medlycott 1999).

#### 4 Aim

The aim of the archaeological evaluation was to record the extent of any surviving archaeological deposits and to assess the archaeological potential of the site to allow the ECCHEA to determine if further investigation is required.

#### 5 Results (Figs 2-3)

One trial-trench was machine-excavated under the supervision of a CAT archaeologist. The trial-trench was 38m long and 1.8m wide, and aligned north-east to south-west (Fig 2). A full context list can be found in Appendix 1.



**Photograph 1** Representative section of trench, showing layers. Photograph taken facing north-west.

A total of six layers were recorded. The trench was excavated through a modern topsoil (L1, c 0.20m thick) which overlaid a modern makeup layer containing large amounts of concrete, tarmac and modern brick fragments (L2, c 0.20-0.45m). Below this was a buried topsoil (L3, 0.45-0.75m) which sealed a subsoil (L4, 0.75-1.15m). Present in the northern end of the trench was a thin interface layer below this subsoil (L5, 1.15-1.25m), which in turned sealed the natural clay (L6, encountered at a depth of between 1.00-1.25m below the current ground level [bcgl]). In the southern end of the trench L5 was not present, and the trench was shallower.

The northern end of the trench contained several modern services, including a large water main, so several baulks were left in place to avoid impacting them (Fig 2).

In the centre of the trench a collection of associated features were uncovered centred

around a Late Iron Age shallow curvilinear ditch (F1). F1 was aligned north-east/south-west and lay partially beneath the western limit of excavation. At its southern end F1 turned sharply to the south-east, terminating in the centre of the trench. In total F1 was 8.4m long and between 0.28m-0.63m wide, varying in depth between 0.09-0.18m.



**Photograph 2** Group shot of F1, F2, F3, F5 and F6. Photograph taken facing north-east.

Further excavation of this feature was not possible due to the depth of the trench and safety concerns.

Postholes F3, F5 and F6 were uncovered immediately to the east of F1, and are presumably associated with it. F3 and F5 were similar, both measuring 0.18-0.21m x 0.15m in size and 0.05-0.06m in depth. F6 was larger, measuring 0.51 x 0.40m in size and 0.21m in depth. F6's profile also varied from the other two; the central posthole having shallower shelves on either side (Fig 3). F3 and F5 contained no finds, but a sherd of Late Iron Age pottery was recovered from F6 (see Finds below).

Also present within this area of the trench was F2, a pit cut through F1 (Fig 2). F2 measured 0.42 x 0.63m in size and was 0.27m deep.

Some 6.5m south of this collection of features was the Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age ditch F4. Aligned north-west/south-east across the trench, this ditch was 1.56m wide and excavated to a depth of 0.58m.



**Photograph 3** Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age ditch F4. Not fully excavated. Photograph taken facing south-west.

## 6 Finds

### 6.1 The prehistoric pottery

by Howard Brooks

#### Introduction

This is a small group of prehistoric material consisting of 8 sherds (total weight, 26.5g) from three contexts. The sherds are all small, undecorated and mostly undiagnostic, so identification is based on fabric types rather than form or decoration. Earlier prehistoric sherds are referred to Nigel Brown's (1988) classification, and later sherds to the classification in *Colchester Archaeological Report 10*, as refined by Stephen Benfield for Crummy, Benfield *et al* (2007), and by Dr Matt Loughton in current pottery reports.

#### Descriptions

Context	Finds number	Sherd count	Sherd weight	Description	Provisional date
F1 sx1	1	1	4.1g	Small body sherd, 14mm thick. Pale orange brown core. The surfaces may survive as different coloration: one side slightly more orange, and the other more grey/brown. Grog tempered. Orange grogs up to 2mm, some grey and very pale brown/buff grogs, generally smaller. Generally in the category of <b>CAR 10</b> GTW (Late Iron Age 'Belgic' grog-tempered ware) or possibly GTWO (ditto, oxidised)	Late Iron Age (based on grog temper)
F1 sx3	2	4	7.15	Four pieces, probably from same undecorated body sherd, 9mm thick. Dark grey fabric with medium to fine flint temper (mostly 0.5mm - 1mm size, some smaller, one is 3.25mm) in core and on surfaces. One (inner?) surface chocolate brown, the other dark grey. Brown (1988) Fabric B.	Based on flint temper - Bronze Age to Middle Iron Age.
F4	4	1	2.4g	Fine flint-tempered body sherd, 5m thick Core grey, inner surface dark grey, outer surface pale brown to a depth of 1.5mm. Flint tempering is prominent and large on surface- up to 3.5mm, generally 0.5-1mm - but much less obvious (and smaller) in core. Brown (1988) Fabric B.	Based on flint temper - Bronze Age to Middle Iron Age.

F4	4	1	9.7g	Earliest sherd here. Fragment of rim or cordon from a Bronze Age urn. Measurement is difficult because I'm not sure we have the inner surface here, but up to 16mm thick. Strong contrast in colour between orange brown surface and very dark grey core. There is a slight 'mica' twinkle to the dark grey core, but temper is otherwise difficult to distinguish (sand?). Outer colour runs over two sides of this sherd, indicating it may be from the junction of the vessel wall and a cordon, (or a rim?). Possible impressed decoration on outer surface, but difficult to be sure. Brown (1988) Fabric L?	Fabric and form - Bronze Age
F6	5	1	3.2g	Grog-tempered sherd. No certain surfaces, so further description is difficult. Grogs are darker than in Finds No 1 - mostly dark brown, 1mm-2mm. One edge slightly more orange, possibly suggesting a surface, but this would make the sherd 23mm thick - most unlikely. Generally in the category of CAR 10 GTW (Late Iron Age 'Belgic' grog-tempered ware) or possibly GTWO (ditto, oxidised)	Late Iron Age (based on grog temper)

### Comment

These sherds encompass a date range of Bronze Age to Late Iron Age. It is tempting to make too many assumptions from what is actually a small group of abraded sherds. Having said that, a few points can be made.

1) The Bronze Age urn fragment from ditch F4 on the southern end of the trench does not match any of the other sherds. So it probably represents the earliest phase of activity here. It can be noted in passing that urns such as these are often the containers for cremation burials. So, speculatively, a Bronze Age burial urn somewhere in the vicinity has been disturbed, and a fragment has ended up as a residual sherd in ditch F4 (which is dated later by the flint-gritted pottery).

2) A second phase of activity is represented by the flint-gritted sherds. The flint-gritting should predate the Middle Iron Age, on the basis that sandier fabrics were coming into fashion at that time. Therefore a Later Bronze Age or Early Iron Age date may be suggested for this period. Ditch F4 is of this period (with the residual urn sherd).

3) A third period is represented by the grog-tempered sherds. Although grog-tempering is not unknown in earlier periods, it is far more commonly a Late Iron Age type. Gully F1 and post hole F6 are of this period (with residual flint-gritted sherds in F1).

## **6.2 The fired clay** *by Howard Brooks*

### **Introduction**

This is a group of 12 pieces of fired clay, weighing 390gm from F2 (Finds no 3). Pale orange/brown fabric. Core is generally the same colour as the surfaces, though in a few pieces it is slightly greyer. Some flint and grog inclusions. A surface only survives on 3 pieces. There is no sign of perforations of type one might expect in loom weights, so that can be ruled out as a diagnosis.

Several pieces show signs of wattle holes, but on only one piece are they definite, and the wattle diameters can be measured at 10mm, 12mm, and 15mm. If the space between wattle hole and surface were the same on both faces, then this piece (and presumably most of this group) came from a slab of wattle and daub very close to 4cm thick.

What was the wattle and daub from? A small structure such as an oven or kiln might show more signs of burning, and might be appreciably more curved than these pieces. The simplest explanation is that these are fragments of a wattle and daub wall from an adjacent structure.

## **6.3 Burnt (heat-altered) stone** *by Laura Pooley*

A small fragment of burnt flint (4g) came from pit F2 (finds no.3). The fragment was cracked and burnt a deep red.

A fragment of burnt stone (186g) and two pieces of burnt flint (72g) also came from ditch F4 (finds no. 4). The burnt stone was a fragment of cracked pebble which had been burnt a pinky-red, and the flints were both cracked and crazed and burnt various shades of grey and white.

The burnt (heat-altered) stone has been recorded here and discarded.

## **7 Conclusion**

The features observed and finds recovered during this evaluation clearly suggest the presence of settlement activity on, or close to, the site.

Specifically, two phases of prehistoric activity appear to be located within the evaluation trench. Ditch F4, in the south of the trench, was backfilled in the Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age, and also contained a residual sherd of a Bronze Age cremation vessel, suggesting a phase of earlier burial activity in the vicinity.

The remainder of the excavated features (F1, F2, F3, F5, and F6) appear to form an associated group around the curvilinear ditch F1. The finds recovered from these features date them as Late Iron Age in origin, and the recovery of fired clay used in wattle and daub walls suggests the presence of a nearby structure.

Given the evidence detailed above, it would be reasonable to assume that the curvilinear ditch F1 and the associated postholes comprise the western side of a roundhouse structure, with the terminus of F1 in the centre of the trench forming the western extent of an entranceway (Fig 2).



The discovery of both a sizeable prehistoric landscape feature and part of an apparent roundhouse during this evaluation is notable. It serves to suggest that the surrounding area may contain substantially more in the way of prehistoric remains than had first been assumed.

Whether any of the remains from this evaluation are associated with the prehistoric activity uncovered beneath the Saxon cemetery some 700m to the north-west is uncertain. Such questions, as well as the positive identification of the surmised roundhouse as postulated above, can only be proved or disproved by further archaeological investigation.

## 8 Acknowledgements

CAT would like to thank Matthew Mackenzie for commissioning and Morgan Sindall for funding the work. The project was managed by C Lister, fieldwork was carried out by M Baister with Z Eksen. Figures are by M Baister. The project was monitored for ECC by Alison Bennett and Richard Havis. The text was reviewed and edited by Philip Crummy, director of CAT.

## 9 References

Note: all CAT reports, except for DBAs, are available online in PDF format at

<http://cat.essex.ac.uk>

- |   |       |  |
|---|-------|--|
| Brown, N & Glazebrook, J  | 2000  | <i>Research and Archaeology: A Framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy.</i> East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Paper <b>8</b> (EAA <b>8</b> )                                      |
| Brown, N.   | 1988  | A Late Bronze Age enclosure at Lofts Farm, Essex, in <i>Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society</i> , Volume 54, 249-302  |
| CAR <b>10</b>   | 1999  | Robin Symonds and Sue Wade, Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-86, <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 10</i>  |
| CAT   | 2021  | <i>Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for an archaeological investigation by trial-trenching and excavation at The Sweyne Park School, Sir Walter Raleigh Drive, Rayleigh, Essex, SS6 9BZ</i> By E Holloway |
| CAT   | 2020  | <i>Health &amp; Safety Policy</i>  |
| ClfA  | 2014a | <i>Standard and Guidance for archaeological evaluation</i>   |
| ClfA  | 2014b | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i>  |
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| ECCPS   | 2021  | <i>Brief for archaeological Investigation at The Sweyne Park School, Sir Walter Raleigh Drive, Rayleigh</i> by A Bennett   |
| Eddy, M R & Petchy, M R   | 1983  | <i>Historic Towns in Essex: An Archaeological Survey of Saxon and Medieval towns, with guidance for their future planning</i> , Essex County Council   |
| Ennis, T  | 2005  | <i>Former Park School, Rawreth Lane, Rayleigh, Essex. FAU Report 1361</i> (Excavation Report)  |
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| Historic England (HE)   | 2016  | <i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)</i>  |
| Medlycott, M  | 1999  | <i>Rayleigh Historic Town Project Assessment.</i> Essex County Council   |
| Medlycott, M  | 2011  | <i>Research and archaeology revisited: A revised framework for the East of England.</i> East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Papers <b>24</b> (EAA <b>24</b> )  |
| MHCLG   | 2019  | <i>National Planning Policy Framework.</i> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government   |
| Rumble, A (ed.)   | 1983  | <i>Domesday Book - Essex</i> , Phillimore: Chichester  |

## 10 Abbreviations and glossary

CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
ClfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
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, <a href="http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main">http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main</a>
post-medieval	from c AD 1500 to c 1800
Prehistoric	the period prior to the Roman invasion of Britain, i.e. pre AD 43
section	(abbreviation sx or Sx) vertical slice through feature/s or layer/s
wsi	written scheme of investigation

## 11 Contents of archive

**Finds:** 1 finds box

### **Paper record**

One A4 document wallet containing:

The report (CAT Report 1640)

ECC evaluation brief, CAT written scheme of investigation

Original site record (trench sheets, sections)

Site digital photos and log

Inked sections

### **Digital record**

The report (CAT Report 1640)

ECC evaluation brief, CAT written scheme of investigation

Site digital photographs, thumbnails and log

Graphic files

Survey data

## 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 Southend Museum under project ref. RLSPS21.

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### **Distribution list:**

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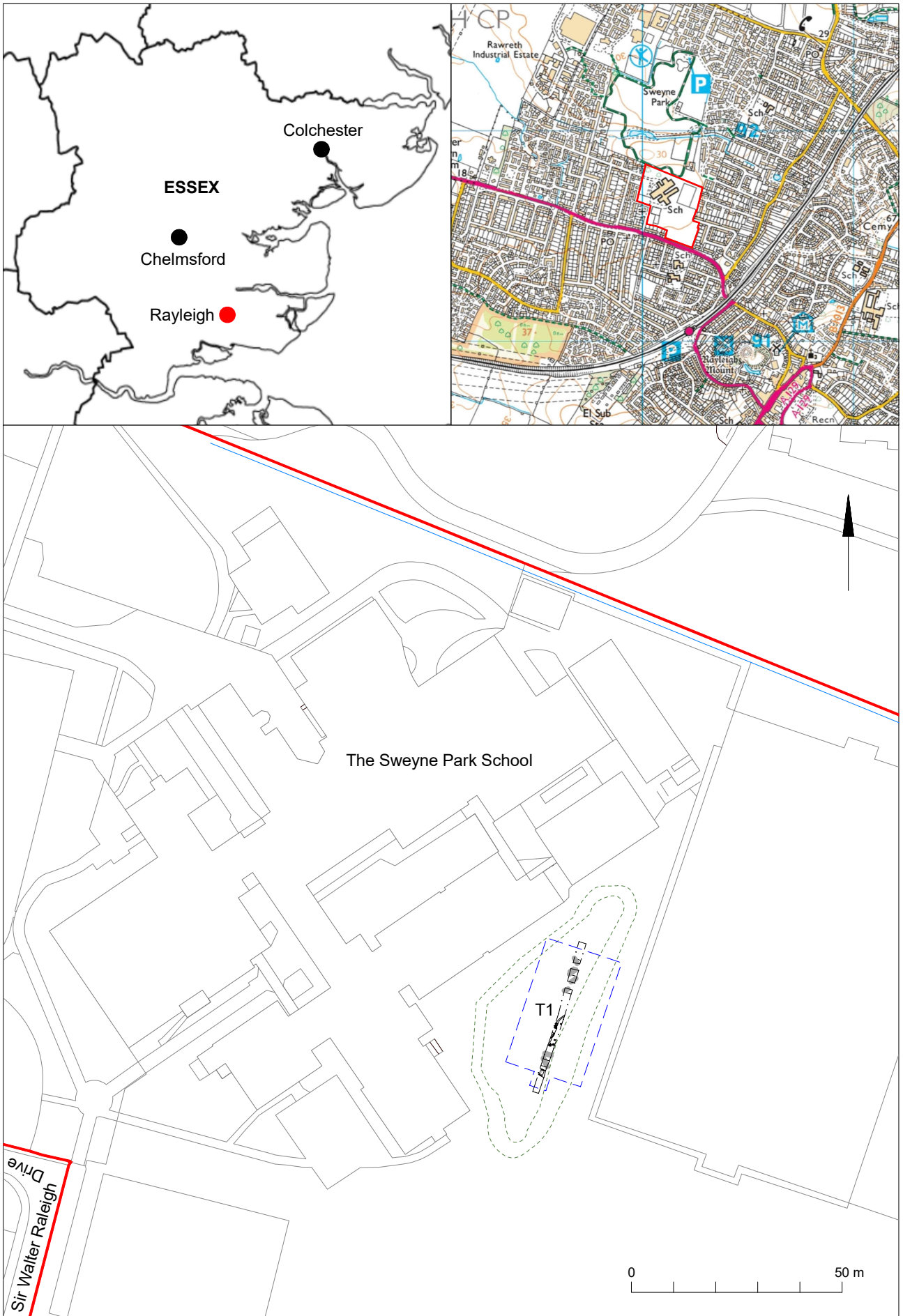
email: [mb@catuk.org](mailto:mb@catuk.org)

Checked by: Philip Crummy

Date: 17/03/2021

## Appendix 1 Context list

Context number	Trench number	Finds number	Context type	Fill description	Date
L1	T1	-	Topsoil	soft dark grey/brown sandy silt and inclusions of: stone 10%	Modern
L2	T1	-	Build-up layer	firm moist medium yellow/brown sandy silt containing modern CBM fragments along with tarmac and concrete	Modern
L3	T1	-	Buried topsoil	firm moist medium/dark grey/brown sandy silty loam	Modern
L4	T1	-	Subsoil	firm moist medium orange/brown sandy silty clay	Undated
L5	T1	-	Interface layer	firm moist medium grey sandy silty clay	Undated
L6	T1	-	Natural	firm moist yellow/brown clay	Post-glacial
F1	T1	1, 2	Curvilinear ditch	firm moist medium grey/brown clayey silt	Late Iron Age
F2	T1	3	Pit	firm moist medium grey/brown clayey silt	?Late Iron Age
F3	T1	-	Post-hole	firm moist medium/dark grey/brown clayey silt with charcoal flecks and daub flecks	?Late Iron Age
F4	T1	4	Ditch	friable moist/wet light/medium grey/brown clayey silt	Late Bronze Age- Early Iron Age
F5	T1	-	Post-hole	firm moist medium grey/brown clayey silt	?Late Iron Age
F6	T1	5	Post-hole	firm moist medium grey/brown clayey silt	Late Iron Age



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Fig 1 Site location and trench layout in relation to proposed development (dashed blue lines).

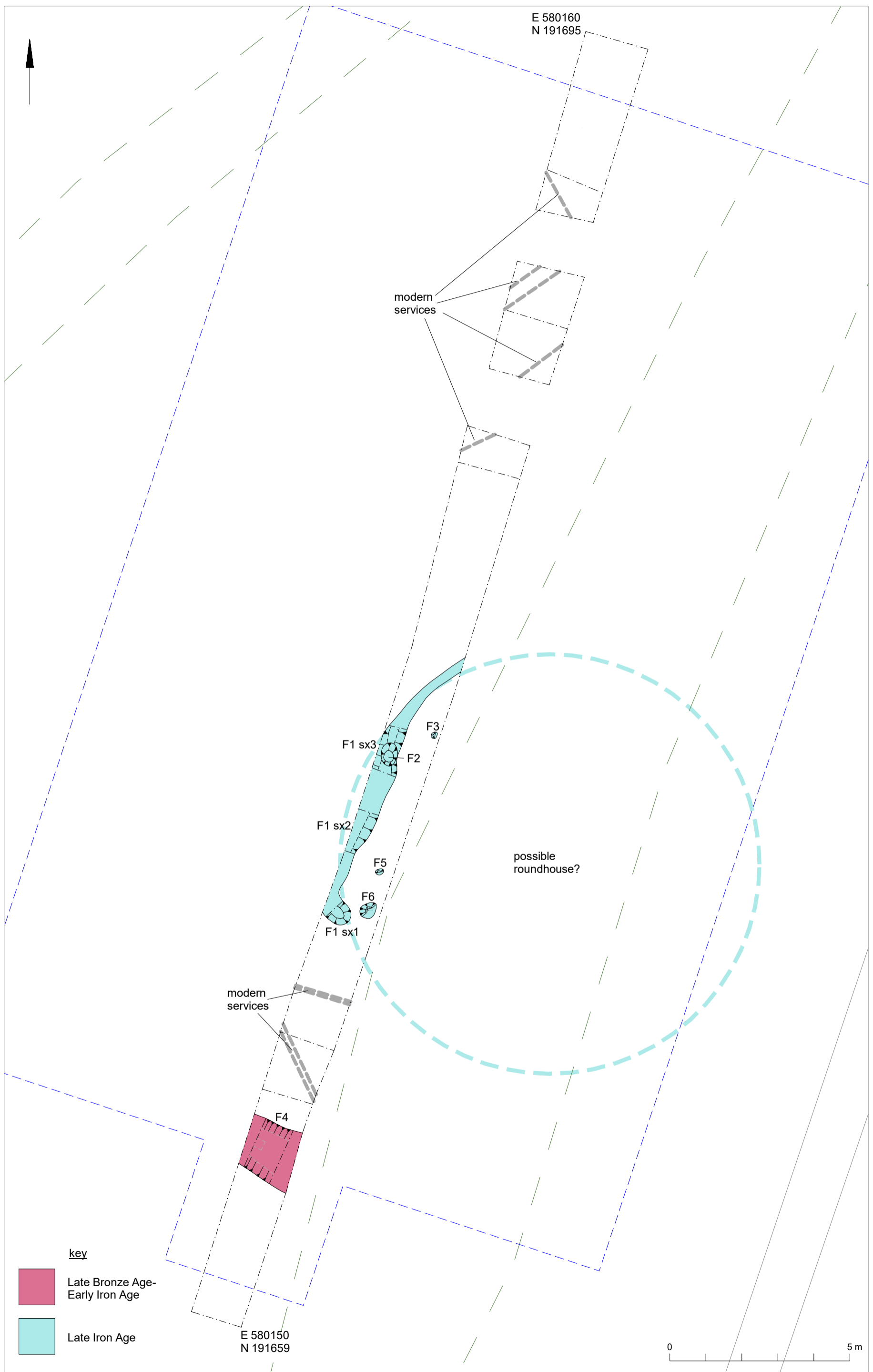


Fig 2 Detailed evaluation results in relation to proposed development (dashed blue lines). Extrapolated extent of possible roundhouse highlighted.

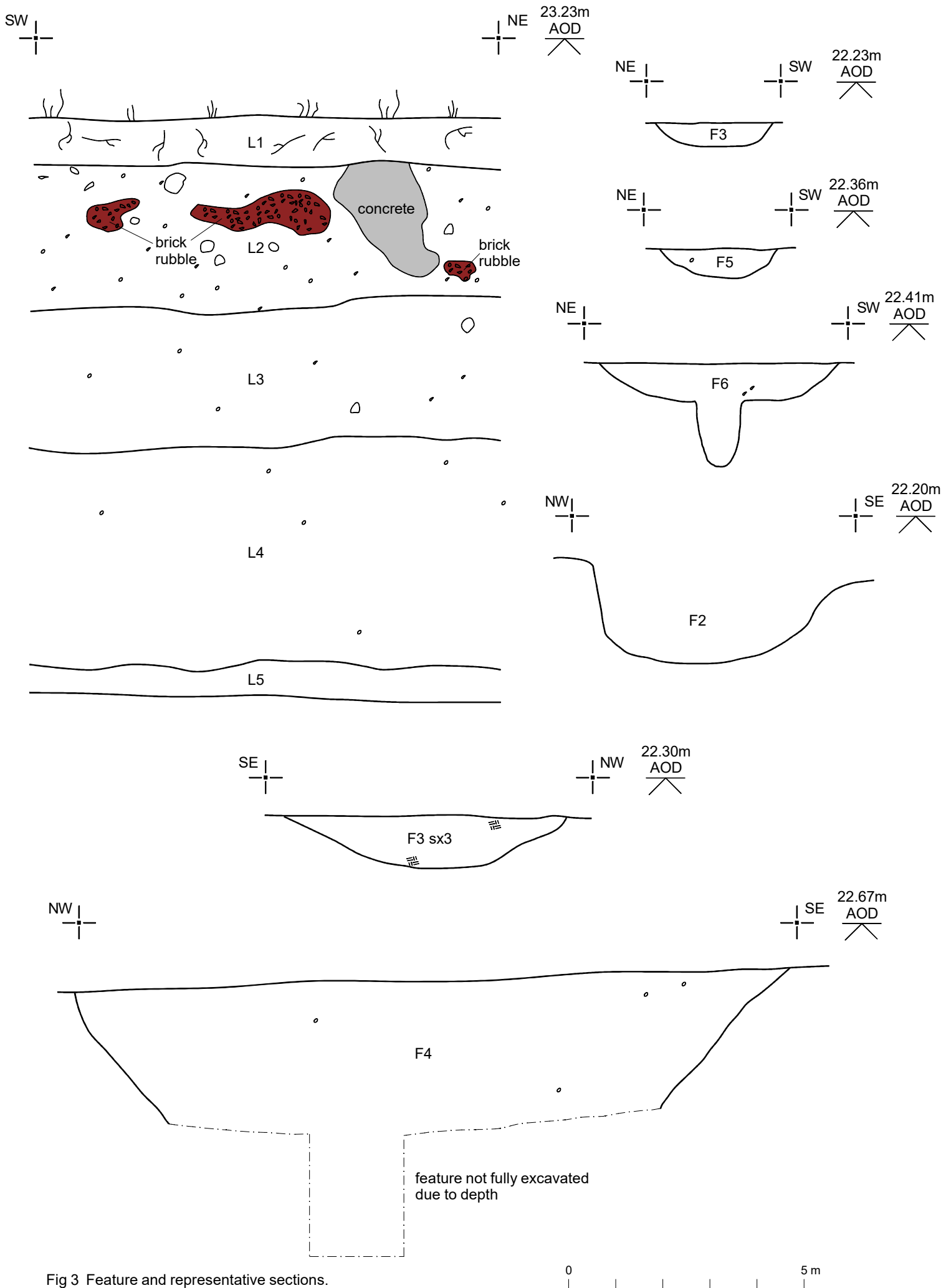


Fig 3 Feature and representative sections.

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**OASIS ID: colchest3-415303**

### Project details

Project name	Archaeological trial-trenching and excavation at The Sweyne Park School, Sir Walter Raleigh Drive, Rayleigh, Essex, SS6
Short description of the project	An archaeological evaluation (one trial-trench) was carried out on land at The Sweyne Park Secondary School, Rayleigh, Essex, in advance of the construction of a new school block. Six prehistoric features were excavated, originating from two distinct phases of activity. Towards the south end of the trench was a ditch aligned north-west/south-east, containing Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age pottery. The centre of the trench contained a group of features centred around a Late Iron Age curvilinear ditch, including several postholes. These features together may represent the western extent of a roundhouse. Reinforcing this interpretation is the recovery of several large fragments of fired clay, interpreted as being from a wattle-and-daub structure.
Project dates	Start: 04-03-2021 End: 17-03-2021
Previous/future work	No / Yes
Any associated project reference codes	20/00897/CM - Planning Application No.
Any associated project reference codes	2021/02b - Contracting Unit No.
Any associated project reference codes	RLSPS21 - HER event no.
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Community Service 1 - Community Buildings
Monument type	RING DITCH Late Iron Age
Monument type	DITCH Late Bronze Age
Monument type	POSTHOLE Late Iron Age
Significant Finds	FIRED CLAY Late Iron Age
Significant Finds	POTTERY Late Iron Age
Significant Finds	POTTERY Late Bronze Age
Methods & techniques	""Targeted Trenches""
Development type	Public building (e.g. school, church, hospital, medical centre, law courts etc.)
Prompt	National Planning Policy Framework - NPPF
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)

### Project location

Country	England
Site location	ESSEX ROCHFORD RAYLEIGH The Sweyne Park School, Sir Walter Raleigh Drive, Rayleigh, Essex
Postcode	SS6 9BZ
Study area	68.4 Square metres
Site coordinates	TQ 80155 91685 51.594633514293 0.601264380068 51 35 40 N 000 36 04 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 1m Max: 1.25m

### Project creators

Name of Organisation	Colchester Archaeological Trust
----------------------	---------------------------------



Project brief originator	HEM Team Officer, ECC
Project design originator	Emma Holloway
Project director/manager	Chris Lister
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer
Name of sponsor/funding body	Morgan Sindall

### Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	Southend Museum
Digital Archive ID	RLSPS21
Digital Contents	"Survey"
Digital Media available	"Database", "Survey", "Text"
Paper Archive recipient	Southend Museum
Paper Archive ID	RLSPS21
Paper Contents	"Ceramics", "other"
Paper Media available	"Miscellaneous Material", "Notebook - Excavation", ' Research', ' General Notes', "Photograph", "Plan", "Report", "Section", "Survey "

### Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Archaeological investigation by trial-trenching and excavation at The Sweyne Park School, Sir Walter Raleigh Drive, Rayleigh, Essex, SS6 9BZ March 2021
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