

**Leez Priory, Hartford End  
Great Leighs, Essex**

**Scheduled Monument Ref: EX12607/1**

**Archaeological Report on Test Pit Excavation  
in former farmyard area**

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(August 2016)

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**Site details for HER**

Name: Leez Priory, Hartford End, Great Leighs, Essex, CM3 1JP

Client: Country House Weddings

Local planning authority: Chelmsford CC

Planning authority: Historic England

Works carried out: Two small test pits in former farmyard and two small sections into base of nearby ditch with the works related to a proposal to construct two accommodation blocks in the former farmyard.

Date of fieldwork: 24 August, 2016

HER Ref: tbc

Scheduled Monument Ref: EX12607/1

Listed Building Refs: 112643 (Grade 1)

OASIS Ref: johnnewm1-260037

Grid ref: TL 7012 1848

## Contents

### Summary

1. Introduction & background
2. Monitoring methodology
3. Results

Table 1: Context list

4. Conclusion

## Figures

Fig. 1: Site location

Fig. 2: Location of test pits and ditch sections

Fig. 3: Test pit plans (Sue Holden)

## List of appendices

Appendix I- Selected images

Appendix II- OASIS data form

*Summary: Leez Priory, Hartford End, Great Leighs, Essex (TL 7012 1848) Monitoring of two small test pits in a former farmyard area where it is proposed to erect two accommodation blocks revealed a wall foundation and related brick floor of probable later medieval to 16<sup>th</sup> century date in one test pit and a pit of recent date in the other one. In addition sections in an existing nearby ditch revealed 400mm of humic material and silt (John Newman Archaeological Services for Country House Weddings).*

## 1. Introduction & background

1.1 Country House Weddings commissioned John Newman Archaeological Services (JNAS) to prepare the required written scheme of investigation and undertake the archaeological monitoring of two small test pits at Leez Priory, Hartford End, Great Leighs required under the relevant Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) issued by Historic England. The two test pits were opened in an area of former farmyard with a concrete surface where it is proposed that two accommodation blocks should be erected (see Fig. 2). In addition two small sections were excavated to test the base of a nearby ditch with a view to running a drainage pipe along this ditch from the proposed accommodation blocks.

1.2 Leez Priory is located in the parish of Great and Little Leighs to the south west of Braintree and north of Chelmsford in central Essex and on the southern side of a small water course, the River Ter (see Fig. 1). In this part of central Essex settlement is characterised by small villages in a generally scattered settlement pattern with the landscape criss-crossed by small lanes and roads and farms and cottages located around small greens or adjacent to route ways. Leez Priory is on the parish boundary between Little Leighs and Felsted in a somewhat isolated location. Soils in the area are generally clay loams of the Hanslope association over chalky till.

1.3 In summary the Augustinian Priory of Leighs, or Leez, was founded c1200 and was a relatively wealthy house still valued at £114 at its suppression when it was seized by Henry VIII before being granted to Sir Richard Rich, an eminent Tudor lawyer and courtier. Sir Richard, later Lord Rich, converted the priory into one of the major Tudor mansions in the country unusually keeping much of the priory church whose fabric was incorporated into his great house. The mansion flourished through the later 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries but by the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century was sold to the Governors of Guys Hospital, London following the decline of the aristocratic owners and much of the structure was then demolished as its status declined to that of a tenanted farm house. Through the life of the priory, and probably into the ensuing country mansion period, the setting of the site within the valley of the River Ter was exploited and is evidenced by the various fish ponds upstream to the west of the main site and now surviving as earthworks.

1.4 The site for the proposed accommodation blocks some is 50m south of the main monastic and Tudor period country house complex and is separated from them by a brick wall of Post medieval date and a number of trees. At present the proposed site is covered by a concrete yard surface which slopes down from south to north. The aim of opening the test pits was to establish how thick the concrete surface is and to examine the deposits below this surface. As noted above in addition two small sections were excavated into the base of a large east-west aligned ditch to the east of the former farmyard area.

## 2. Monitoring methodology

2.1 The SMC required continual supervision of the test pits and this and the ditch sections were undertaken in a one day period under very hot sunny and dry conditions. The concrete yard surface was cut at the two agreed locations and then the yard surface was broken up before removal of the fragments by hand and the hand excavation and cleaning of the shallow deposits below. In addition a small sondage was excavated to test the exposed clay in test pit 1 and two bricks were removed from the floor surface in test pit 2 and another sondage was opened to examine the deposits below. The latter sondage was also designed to allow a test bore to be undertaken under the same SMC. The ditch sections were also hand excavated. Once the pits and sections were open they were recorded in plan and a number of digital images were taken (see Appendix I) and finally a site meeting was held with Ms D Priddy from Historic England to review the findings.

## 3. Results

3.1 Both test pits (see Figs. 2 & 3) revealed 140mm of concrete and in pit 1 towards the northern edge of the yard natural light brown slightly chalky clay was revealed at a depth of 260mm in its north-eastern quarter. Across the remainder of test pit 1 what appeared to be a pit (0002) was exposed covering the south-western part and while this feature was not investigated a piece of brick of recent date was found in its upper fill and two wood fragments were also visible and one of these had a nail of probable late Post medieval date in its upper surface. Above the natural light brown clay in the north-eastern quarter of the test pit a number of medium and large flint cobbles were also revealed and it seems likely that these represent the remnants of a cobbled yard surface of uncertain date.

Test pit	Context No	Type	Description	Date
1	0001	U/S	Stray finds in sub-soil, all small tile and brick fragments	Late Pmed
1	0002	Pit	Pit defined across south-western quarter of TP, not excavated but brick and wood fragments were visible in its upper fill	Late Pmed
2	0003	Wall foundation	Mortared flint wall foundation on north-south alignment with small peg tile fragments, at least 400mm wide	Possibly late med/early Pmed
2	0004	Floor	Red brick floor surface abutting western side of 0003, bricks 10in x 5.50in x 2.50in (254mm x 140mm x 64mm)	Probably late med/early Pmed

Table 1: Context list

3.2 In test pit 2 below the 140mm of concrete yard removal of 50mm to 100mm of sub-soil by hand revealed a red brick floor surface (0004) abutting a north-south orientated mortared flint wall foundation, with a few peg tile fragments, along its eastern side at a depth of 260mm. Two bricks were removed from the floor surface 0004 and below the floor natural clay appeared to be present at an overall depth of 560mm though the ingress of ground water made a conclusive examination difficult. From one of the bricks removed from the floor a complete set of dimensions could be recorded and these are 10in. x 5.50in. x 2.50in.; it was also evident that this brick was worn on at least one edge suggesting possible re-use in the floor surface with, perhaps, an earlier unknown use.

3.3 While the bricks in the floor (0004) revealed in test pit 2 are difficult to date bricks of a similar large size were recorded by the author at Langley Abbey in Norfolk and it is useful to quote the comments made on these examples-

‘The measurements for both bricks (at 11in. x 5.50” x 2.75” and 10” x 5” x 2.50” from Langley Abbey) would be unusual at any period. Bricks longer than 10in. are generally early (13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> C) but these so called ‘great bricks’ are usually below 2in. in thickness.’ (Anderson, 2010, p8).

Therefore it seems likely that the bricks forming the floor (0004) are later than 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century in date and this view is supported by an additional comment based on the inspection of one sample brick that their size and fabric is consistent with an ‘early to mid-16<sup>th</sup> century date’ (pers. comm. David Andrews). The only other finds seen in the upcast spoil from the test pits were small fragments of brick and peg tile of probable later medieval to Post medieval date.

3.4 To the east of the former farmyard two 700mm long and 350mm wide sections were excavated into the base of a large east-west orientated ditch and both sections revealed 400mm of humic material and silt above the natural light brown clay base to the ditch. No finds were recovered from these small sections.

## 4. Conclusion

4.1 In the former farmyard the two small test pits can only give an indication of what is present but test pit 2 did reveal evidence for a structure of probable later medieval to early Post medieval date with a brick floor (0004) made up of ‘great bricks’ abutting a mortared wall foundation (0003) while test pit 1 revealed a pit (0002) of more recent date. In addition a cobbled yard surface of uncertain date appears to have been formerly present across at least some of the yard area. While the use of these ‘great bricks’ in the floor (0004) revealed in test pit 2 indicate an early to mid-16<sup>th</sup> century date for the floor there is a possibility they were re-used to create the floor. However this dating would be consistent with Lord Rich taking over Leez Priory and re-modelling it to be a substantial country house with associated outbuildings. With regard to the possible re-use it is also useful to note that a previous phase of

monitoring works at Leez Priory noted the re-use of ceramic building material in the construction of land drains (Newman, 2010, p7).

4.2 The two small sections in the ditch to the east of the former farmyard revealed straightforward deposits with 400mm of humic material and silt above natural clay.

## Refs.

- |             |      |  |
|-------------|------|--|
| Anderson, S | 2010 | 'Pottery, Clay Tobacco Pipes and CBM' in 'Ménage at Langley Abbey, Langley with Hardley, Norfolk- Archaeological Monitoring Report' JNAS, OASIS ref. johnnewm1-77473 |
| Newman, J   | 2010 | 'Leez Priory, Hartford End, Great Leighs, Essex- Archaeological Monitoring Report' JNAS, OASIS ref. johnnewm1-120310   |

*Acknowledgements: JNAS would like to thank Jason and Brian and everyone from Country House Weddings for their close cooperation and hospitality, to Sue Holden for preparing the report figure and to David Andrews for his comments regarding the brick).*

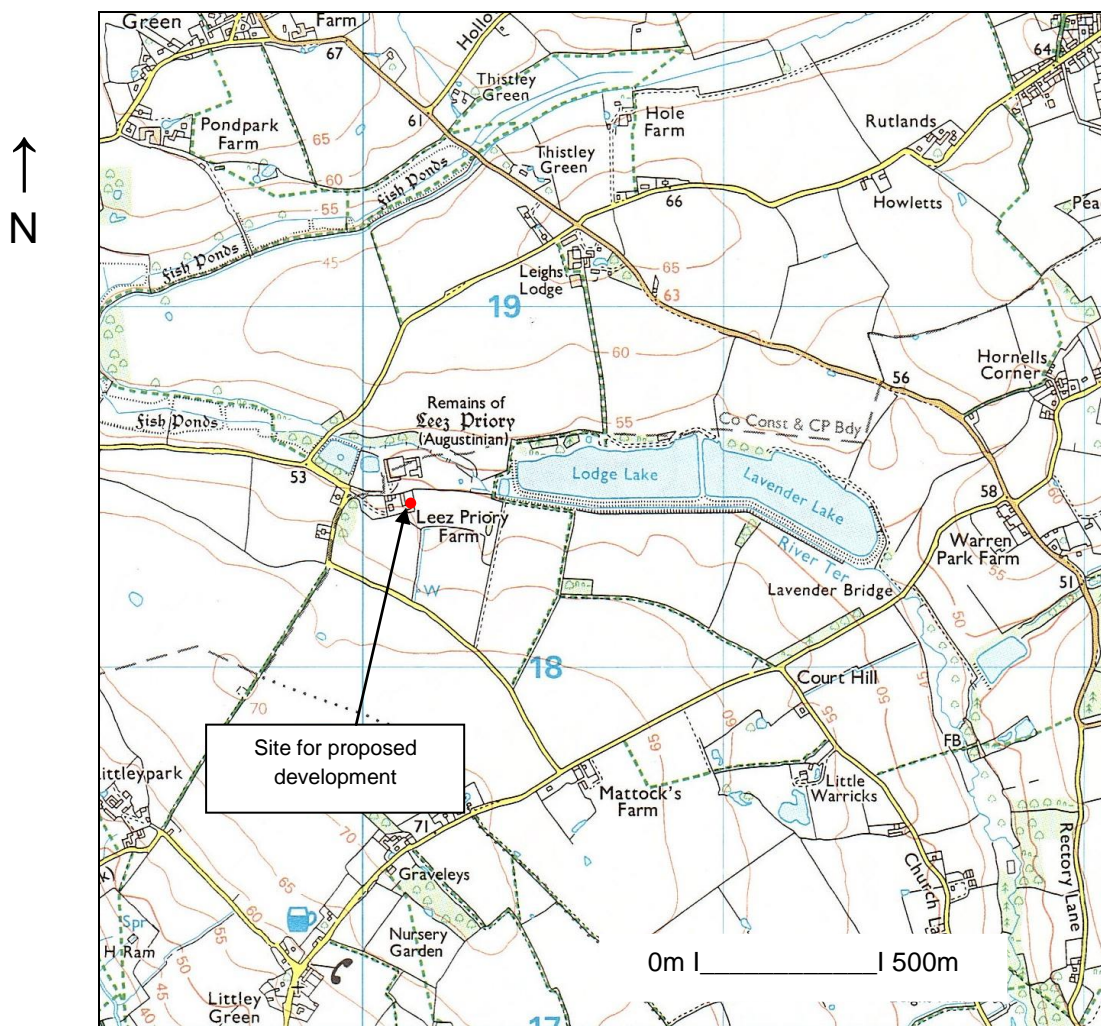


Fig. 1: Site location  
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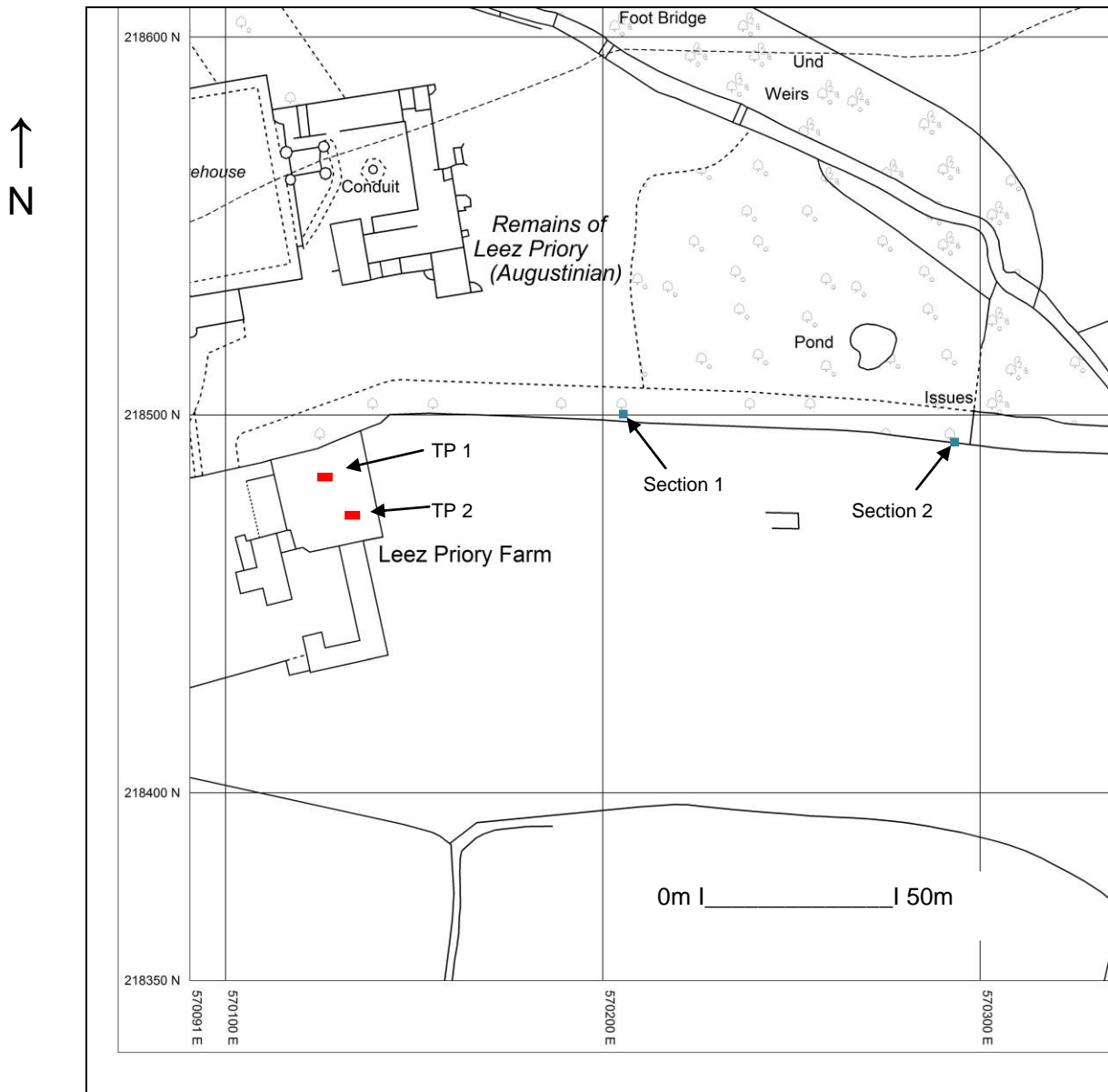
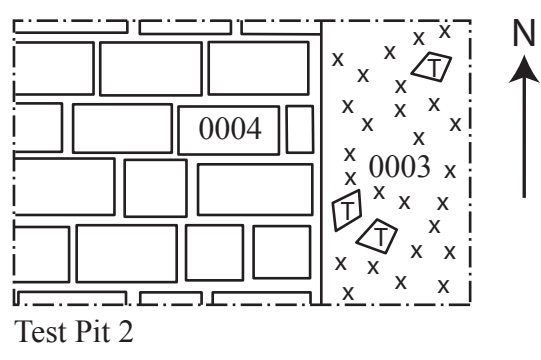
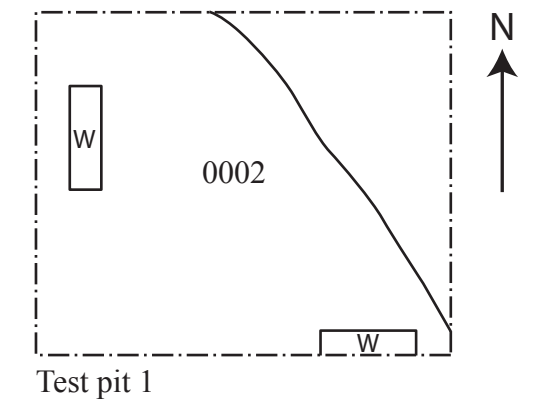


Fig. 2: Location of trial pits (red) in proposed new build area and sections (blue) into base of existing ditch

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W wood  
 T tile  
 XXX mortar

0 1m

A horizontal scale bar with a black segment on the left and a white segment on the right, labeled '0' at the left end and '1m' at the right end.

Fig. 3: Test pit plans.

## Appendix I- Images



General view of yard area from northwest



Test pit 1 from south



Test pit 2 from east



Test pit 2 from south



View along ditch to east of yard



Ditch section 1



Ditch section 2

## OASIS ID: johnnewm1-260037

### Project details

Project name	Leez Priory, Hartford End, Great Leighs, Essex- Archaeological Monitoring Report
Short description of the project	Leez Priory, Hartford End, Great Leighs, Essex (TL 7012 1848) Monitoring of two small test pits in a former farmyard area where it is proposed to erect two accommodation blocks revealed a wall foundation and related brick floor of probable later medieval to 16th century date in one test pit and a pit of recent date in the other one. In addition sections in an existing ditch revealed 400mm of humic material and silt.
Project dates	Start: 24-08-2016 End: 24-08-2016
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	112643 - LBS No.
Any associated project reference codes	EX12607/1 - SM No.
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Listed Building
Site status	Scheduled Monument (SM)
Current Land use	Other 15 - Other
Monument type	WALL Medieval
Monument type	FLOOR Medieval
Monument type	PIT Post Medieval
Significant Finds	BRICK Medieval
Significant Finds	BRICK Post Medieval
Significant Finds	TILE Post Medieval
Investigation type	""Watching Brief""
Prompt	Scheduled Monument Consent
Project location	
Country	England
Site location	ESSEX CHELMSFORD GREAT AND LITTLE LEIGHS LEEZ PRIORY, HARTFORD END
Postcode	CM3 1JP
Study area	6 Square metres

Site coordinates	TL 7012 1848 51.838486223408 0.469602283156 51 50 18 N 000 28 10 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 53m Max: 54m
Project creators	
Name of Organisation	John Newman Archaeological Services
Project brief originator	English Heritage/Department of Environment
Project design originator	John Newman
Project director/manager	John Newman
Project supervisor	John Newman
Type of sponsor/funding body	Landowner
Project archives	
Physical Archive recipient	Left in situ
Physical Contents	"Ceramics"
Digital Archive recipient	Essex CC HER
Digital Contents	"Ceramics"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography","Text"
Paper Archive recipient	Essex CC HER
Paper Contents	"Ceramics"
Paper Media available	"Plan","Report"
Project bibliography	
1	
Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
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