

**LAND ON THE EAST SIDE OF
HOWBRIDGE HALL ROAD,
WITHAM, ESSEX**

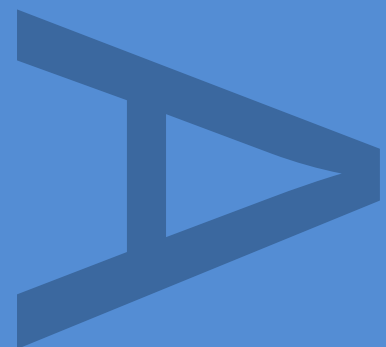
**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MONITORING**

**LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY:
BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

PCA REPORT NO: 11373

SITE CODE: WHHH13

FEBRUARY 2013



PRE-CONSTRUCT ARCHAEOLOGY

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING AT LAND ON THE EAST SIDE OF
HOWBRIDGE HALL ROAD, WITHAM, ESSEX**

Local Planning Authority: Braintree District Council

Central National Grid Reference: TL8188 1284

Site Code: WHHH13

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Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd, February 2013

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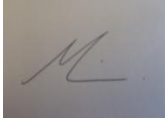
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ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING

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Abstract

A programme of archaeological monitoring has been undertaken on land to the east of Howbridge Hall Road, Witham, Essex, in preparation for the construction of the 'Witham South' primary electricity substation. The work was commissioned by A.F. Howland Associates on behalf of Freedom Group, and was undertaken between the 7th and 15th of January 2013. With the exception of a modern field boundary formed by a ditch and associated hedgeline, no archaeological features, deposits or artefacts were encountered.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document reports the results of a programme of archaeological monitoring undertaken on land on the eastern side of Howbridge Hall Road, Witham, Essex. This work was carried out between the 7th and 15th of January 2013, and was undertaken in preparation for the construction of the 'Witham South' primary electricity substation.
- 1.2 The work was commissioned by A.F. Howland Associates on behalf of Freedom Group in order to mitigate the impact of development by recording all archaeological remains within the area of the proposed substation, access road and service areas.
- 1.3 A written scheme of investigation (WSI) for archaeological monitoring within the proposed development area was prepared by Mark Hinman of Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd. (December 2012) in response to a decision by Braintree District Council in August 2010 that planning permission would be granted on the condition that any archaeological remains present on the site were adequately investigated and recorded (decision refs: 05/00899/FUL and 10/00816/FUL).
- 1.4 This WSI highlighted the potential of the site to contain archaeological remains dating from the late prehistoric period onwards on the basis of known archaeological sites with a 1km radius, and because the site's location on a former river terrace less than 1km from the River Blackwater would have made it a favourable location for agriculture and settlement (Hinman 2012).
- 1.5 The site is located c. 1.4km south of Witham town centre and occupies arable land to the immediate east of Howbridge Hall Road. The site covers approximately 0.1 ha; centred on National Grid Reference TL 8188 1284.
- 1.6 The work reported upon here was designed to contribute to an understanding of the character, condition, date and extent of any archaeological remains within the development area, and to provide a comprehensive appraisal of the significance of any remains within a local, regional and national context as appropriate. This has been achieved by confirming that no archaeologically significant remains exist within the bounds of the site. Correspondingly, these results are of only local significance.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 2.1 The site overlies deep river terrace deposits of clay capped by gravel (A.F. Howland Associates 2012); with existing ground level at c. 16m above Ordnance Datum (henceforth m OD).
- 2.2 The topography of the site is broadly flat, with existing ground level varying between c.16.2 and 16.5m OD, sloping very slightly from west to east.
- 2.3 The site is bounded by Howbridge Hall Road to the west; by an active drainage ditch and hedgeline to the south; and was demarcated on its northern and eastern sides during the fieldwork by temporary fencing, beyond which were open arable fields.
- 2.4 Geotechnical boreholes excavated by A.F Howland Associates (2012) demonstrate that the surface geology comprises deep deposits of clay, capped by sand and sandy gravel.
- 2.5 The topsoil had an average depth of 350mm across the site, and caps a deposit of subsoil, measuring up to 220mm deep towards the site's southern boundary, and increasing to 450mm towards the northern boundary. This subsoil is a light to mid-orange brown very clayey sand, and was heavily waterlogged during the fieldwork. This subsoil overlies firm very clayey course flint and quartz gravels. These undisturbed geological gravels are referred to here as 'natural', and were typically recorded at c.15.7m OD (i.e. approximately 0.7m below current ground level).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Essex County Council (henceforth ECC) maintains a database of known sites of archaeological or historical significance known as an Historic Environment Record (HER) or Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). The ECC SMR assigns record numbers for a range of sources of evidence including previous archaeological fieldwork, features identified from cartographic or aerial photographic sources, and chance finds of archaeological artefacts. Numerous SMR records exist for the area surrounding the current site, the nearest and hence most relevant of which are:
- 3.2 SMR 46865: Early Iron Age pits and post-medieval features recorded during an archaeological trial trenching evaluation c.600m to the northwest of the current site on Holst Avenue.
- 3.3 SMR 8468: Two roughly parallel linear features that may represent the remains of an undated former track or road located c.280m to the west of the current site, identified from cropmarks (such cropmarks resulting from differences in the underlying soil conditions that either enhance or inhibit the growth of plants, with the result that the layout of buried archaeological features such as ditches, walls and banks may become visible, especially when seen from the air).
- 3.4 SMR 18272: Cropmarks showing undated linear features located c.100m to the east of the site, and running roughly parallel to those recorded as SMR 8468.
- 3.5 SMR 8888 and 8411: Two groups of cropmarks lying approximately 600m to the southeast of the site and comprising a ring-ditch (possibly representing the remains of a Bronze Age burial mound), circular enclosures (possible prehistoric house structures) and linear features (likely to represent former field boundaries of prehistoric or later date).
- 3.6 In addition, a series of archaeological investigations including fieldwalking and trial trenching near Maltings Lane, Witham, c.760m to the northwest of the current site revealed multiple phases of occupation during the Later Bronze Age, Late Iron Age, Roman, Saxon and medieval periods (SMRs 16463-16465, 18503-18506, 17423).
- 3.7 Taken together, this previous work suggested that the current site had moderate to high potential to contain archaeological remains.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The ground reduction during the excavation was carried out under archaeological supervision using a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a 2m wide toothless ditching bucket. Topsoil and subsoil deposits were removed in spits down to the level of the undisturbed natural geological deposits where potential archaeological features could be observed and recorded. Stripped topsoil and subsoil were stored separately for later reinstatement.
- 4.2 Prior to this work appropriate service plans for the area were consulted. No buried services exist within the site, though project members were made aware of a high pressure gas main located c.40m to the north of the area of investigation.
- 4.3 In accordance with the approved WSI (Hinman 2012), the original intention had been to remove all of the topsoil and subsoil across the entire site, but extreme waterlogging of the subsoil and underlying natural gravels meant it was not possible to transport removed soil to the designated spoil heaps using dumper trucks. As a result, following the removal of the topsoil and subsoil from approximately the southernmost third of the site, the excavation continued via a 4m wide trench, so that topsoil and subsoil could be side-cast into separate temporary spoil heaps (see Figure 2 and Plate 2). Owing to the lack of any materials or features of archaeological significance, it was decided on the 10th January in consultation with Teresa O'Connor of the Essex County Council Historic Environment Management Team, that excavation should be halted at this stage.
- 4.4 The limits of excavations, heights above ordnance datum (m OD), and the locations of archaeological features and interventions were recorded using a Leica 1200 GPS rover unit with RTK differential correction, giving three dimensional accuracy of 20mm or less.
- 4.5 Deposits or the removal of deposits judged by the excavating archaeologist to constitute individual events were each assigned a unique record number (often referred to within British archaeology as 'context numbers') and recorded on individual pre-printed forms. Archaeological events recognised by the deposition of material are signified in this report by round brackets (thus), whilst events constituting the removal of deposits are referred to here as 'cuts' and signified by square brackets [thus]. The record numbers assigned to cuts and deposits are entirely arbitrary and in no way reflect the chronological order in which events took place. Artefacts recovered during excavation were assigned to the record number of the deposit from which they were retrieved, although in the case of the current project the only finds were of 20th-century date and were thus recorded but not retained.

- 4.6 Metal detecting was carried out during the stripping operation and archaeological features and spoil heaps scanned by metal detector periodically. Only objects of relatively modern date were found, and were not retained for accession.
- 4.7 Given the lack of significant archaeological remains, other aspects of the fieldwork methodology as outlined in the WSI, such as the production of scaled drawings and the taking of samples for micro- and macro-botanical remains, were not required.
- 4.8 High resolution digital photographs were taken throughout the fieldwork (see Plates 1-3), and were used to keep a record of the excavation process and soil reinstatement.

5 RESULTS

- 5.1 Removal of the topsoil and subsoil revealed just two archaeological features: a ditch oriented east-west – feature [1] - measuring 1.1m wide by c. 0.35m deep with a shallow concaved base and ‘U’-shaped profile (the ambiguity as to the exact depth of this feature resulting from the high water table at the time of the excavation); and the remains of a former hedgeline [3] running parallel and approximately 1.2m to the south of this ditch (see Figure 2 and Plate 2). The only deposit within ditch [1] was a very firm dark grey silty sandy clay (2) which contained a fragment of modern brick and a large piece of a mass-produced glass bottle. The two features were thus interpreted as a former agricultural field boundary running perpendicular to Howbridge Hall Road and formed by a drainage ditch and hedge. The brick and glass fragment demonstrate that the ditch was abandoned during the 20th-century, and it is likely that the boundary was created in the post-medieval or modern periods, though the possibility that it has earlier antecedents cannot be ruled out.
- 5.2 The earliest Ordnance Survey map for this area was produced in 1874 at a scale of 25” to 1 mile, and shows this field boundary aligned broadly east to west, and extending from Howbridge Hall Road (shown but not named as such on this map) to join a property boundary to the immediate north of Oliver’s Farm (see Figure 3). All subsequent Ordnance Survey maps show this field boundary until the 1:2500 scale map of 1954 (not reproduced here), by which time the boundary has been removed. This cartographic evidence strongly suggests that ditch [1] and the associated hedgeline [3] are modern or post-medieval in origin.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER WORK

- 6.1 The archaeological monitoring of the current site encountered no significant archaeological remains within the area of the proposed development. This result will be formerly communicated to the relevant planning authorities, thereby discharging the archaeological condition placed on planning consent by Braintree District Council (decision reference: 05/00899/FUL and 10/00816/FUL). Given the lack of archaeological data no further work is required, but a short note detailing the site location and the absence of archaeological material will be submitted for inclusion in a compendium of recent fieldwork within an appropriate local archaeological journal such as Essex Archaeology and History.

7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 7.1 PCA would like to thank Andrew Barks and Barney Horne at A.F. Howland Associates, Ken Golding at Freedom Group, and Teresa O'Connor of the Essex County Council Historic Environment Management Team. Thanks are also due to Josephine Brown of the PCA CAD Department for preparing the figures, and to the staff of Wormal Plant Hire for the soil stripping and reinstatement.

8 REFERENCES

A.F. Howland Associates. 2012. Preliminary Borehole Logs for Howbridge Hall Road, Witham.

Hinman, M. 2012. Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Monitoring at Land on the East Side of Howbridge Hall Road, Witham, Essex. Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd.

Ordnance Survey maps

Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25" map of 1874. Essex Sheet XLV.1

Ordnance Survey 1:2500 scale map. Sheet TL8112 (1954)

APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT INDEX

Context	Cut	Type	Category	Period	Finds
1	1	Ditch	Field boundary/ drainage ditch	Modern	
2	1	Ditch	Abandonment deposit	Modern	Modern brick and glass
3	3	Hedge	Field boundary	Presumed modern from associated ditch	
4	3	Hedge	Post-abandonment	Presumed modern from associated ditch	None

APPENDIX 2: OASIS FORM

OASIS ID: preconst1-141675

Project details

Project name Howbridge Hall Road, Witham, Essex

Short description
of the project A programme of archaeological monitoring has been undertaken on land to the east of Howbridge Hall Road, Witham, Essex, in preparation for the construction of the 'Witham South' primary electricity substation. The work was commissioned by A.F. Howland Associates on behalf of Freedom Group, and was undertaken between the 7th and 15th of January 2013. With the exception of a modern field boundary formed by a ditch and associated hedgeline, no archaeological features, deposits or artefacts were encountered.

Project dates Start: 07-01-2013 End: 15-01-2013

Previous/future
work No / No

Any associated
project reference
codes WHHH13 - Sitecode

Type of project Recording project

Site status None

Current Land use Cultivated Land 3 - Operations to a depth more than 0.25m

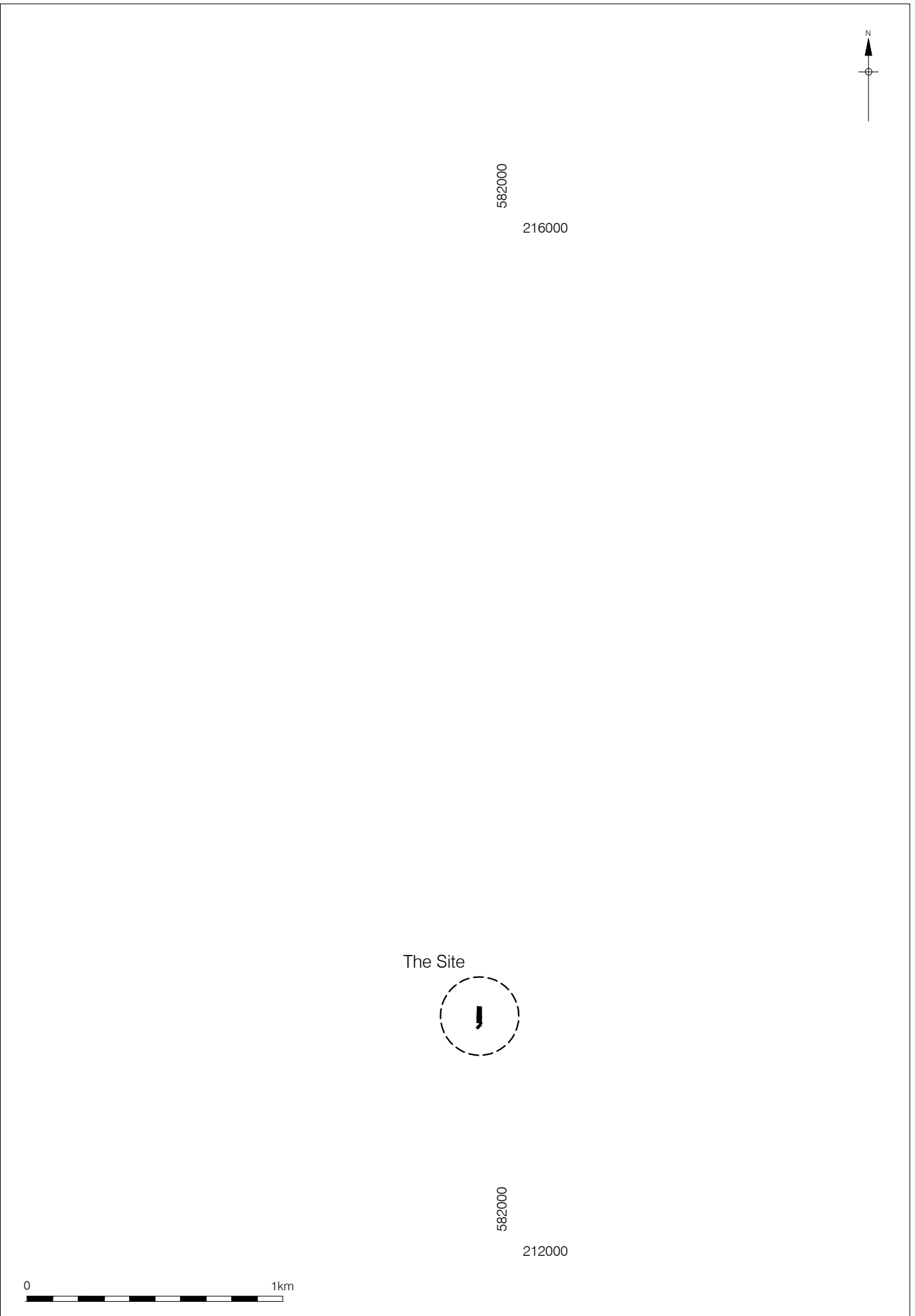
Monument type NONE None

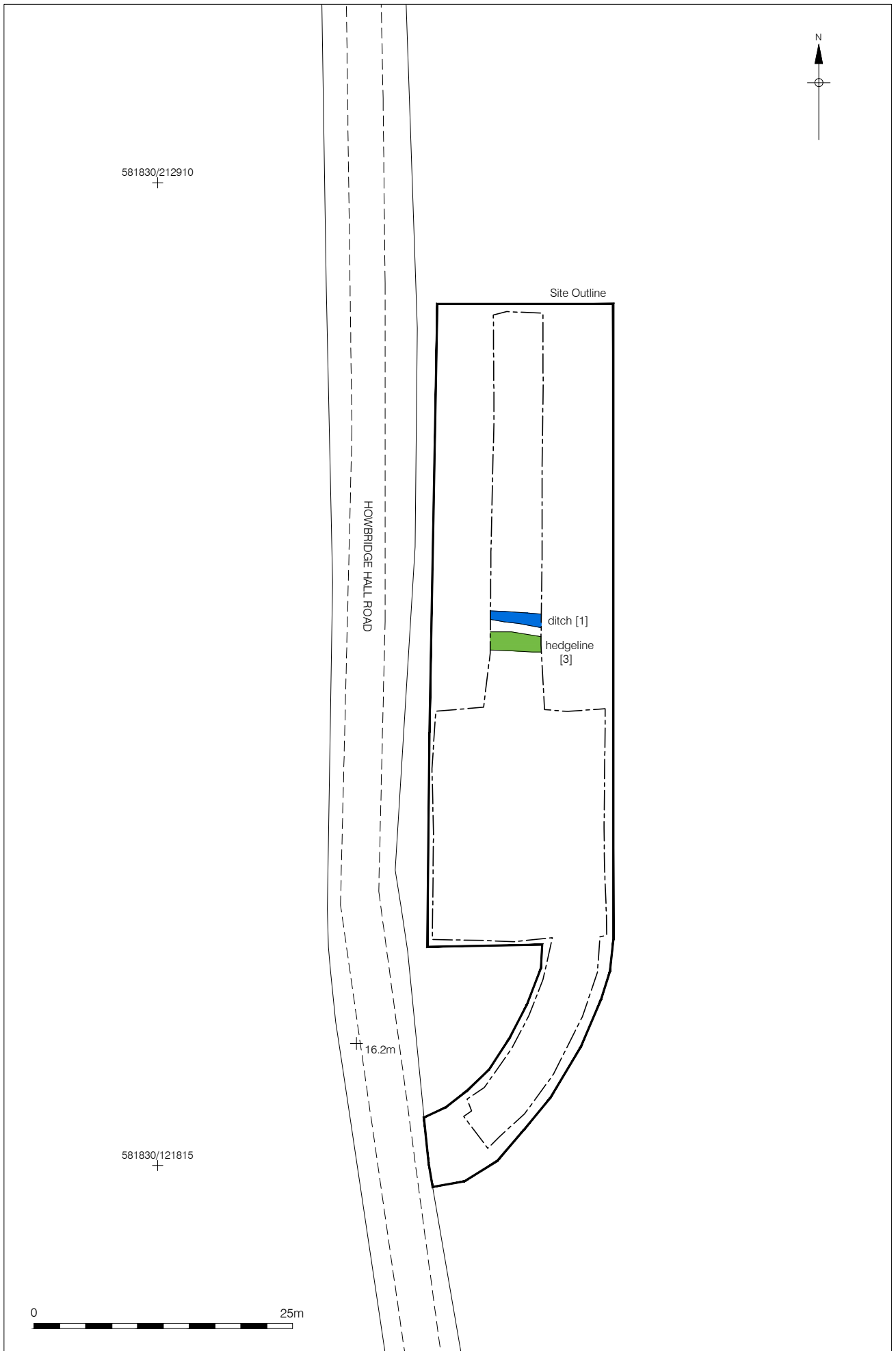
Significant Finds NONE None

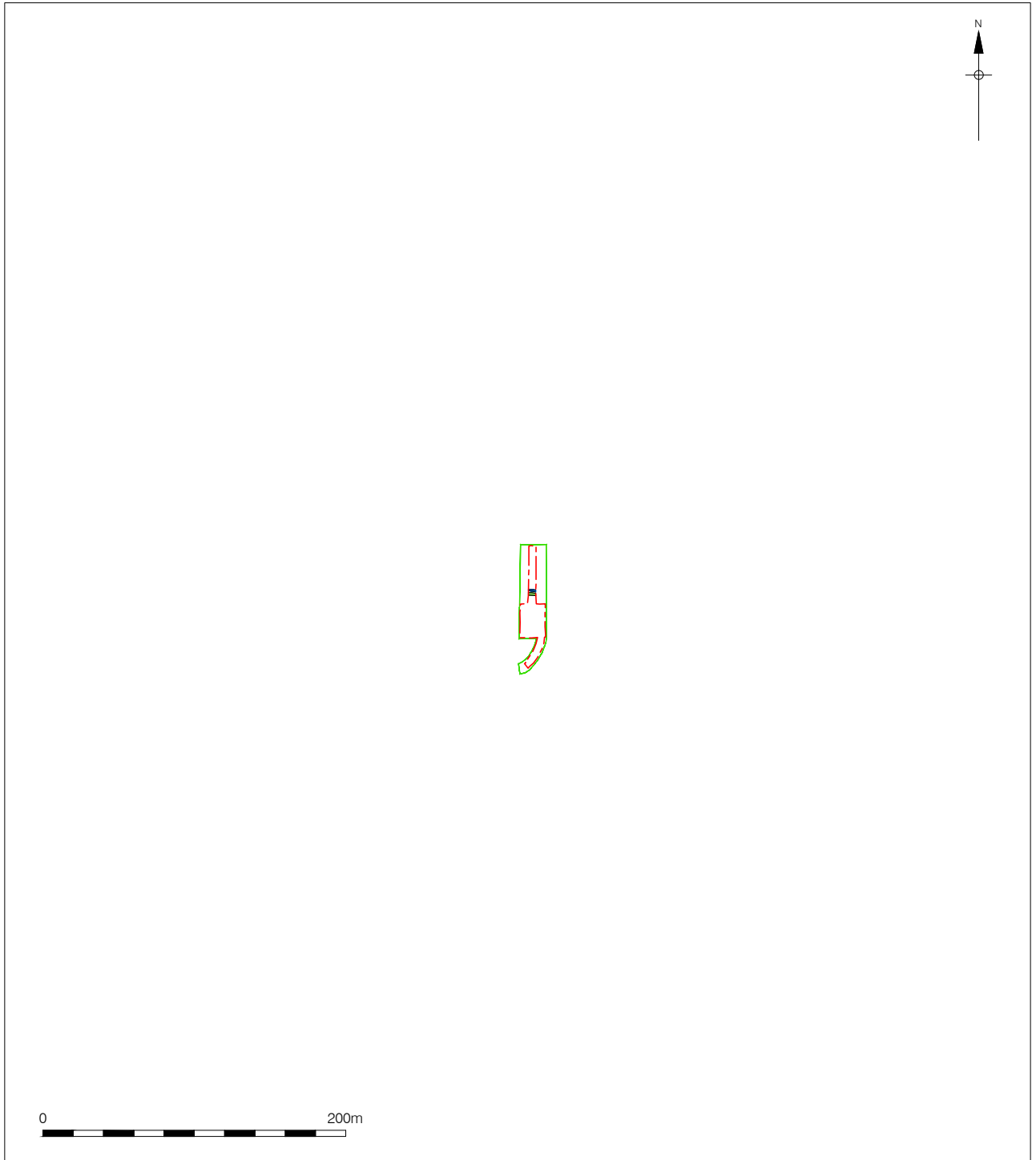
Investigation type "Full excavation"

Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS
Project location	
Country	England
Site location	ESSEX BRAINTREE WITHAM Howbridge Hall Road
Postcode	CM8 3HY
Study area	0.10 Hectares
Site coordinates	TL 8188 1284 51 0 51 47 02 N 000 38 13 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 15.70m Max: 15.70m
Project creators	
Name of Organisation	PCA
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	Mark Hinman
Project director/manager	Mark Hinman
Project supervisor	Daryl Stump
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer
Project archives	
Physical Archive Exists?	No

Digital Archive recipient	Braintree Museum
Digital Archive ID	WHHH13
Digital Contents	"Survey"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography", "Survey", "Text"
Paper Archive recipient	Braintree Museum
Paper Contents	"Survey"
Paper Media available	"Report"
Entered by	Mark HINMAN (m.hinman@pre-construct.com)
Entered on	23 January 2013







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28/01/13 JS

Figure 3
Ordnance Survey, 1874
1:4,000 at A4

APPENDIX 3: PLATES

Plate 1: Site prior to stripping operations looking south.



Plate 2: Soil stripping operations showing ditch [1] and hedgeline [3] in foreground.



Plate 3: Site following reinstatement of sub- and topsoil.



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