

Report 2170



nau archaeology

Archaeological Monitoring of the Earls Colne CSO Scheme, Essex

ECAW09



Prepared for
anglianwater



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October 2009



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Contents

<i>Summary</i>	1
1.0 Introduction	1
2.0 Geology and Topography	1
3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background.....	3
4.0 Methodology	4
5.0 Results.....	6
5.1 Directional Drilling Pit MH4	6
5.2 Directional Drilling Pit MH5.....	6
6.0 The Finds	7
6.1 Ceramic Building Material.....	7
7.0 Conclusions	8
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	8
<i>Bibliography</i>	8
Appendix 1a: Context Summary	9
Appendix 1b: OASIS Feature Summary	9
Appendix 2a: Finds by Context	9
Appendix 2b: OASIS Finds Summary	9

Figures

Figure 1	Site location
Figure 2	Plan and section of Directional Drilling Pit MH4
Figure 3	Plan and section of Directional Drilling Pit MH5

Plates

Plate 1	The site, looking west
Plate 2	Directional Drilling Pit MH4
Plate 3	Directional Drilling Pit MH5

Location: Earls Colne
District: Braintree
Grid Ref.: TL 8610 2870
HER No.: ECAW09
Client: Anglian Water
Dates of Fieldwork: 25 August 2009

Summary

A small-scale archaeological monitoring project was undertaken by NAU Archaeology on the Anglian Water CSO scheme to create a new storm drain within the historic village of Earls Colne, Essex. Two directional drilling pits were monitored and there was scope for hand digging of any archaeological remains found.

In the event, no archaeological features were observed within the directional drilling pits, although some fragmentary bricks were found within the subsoil. These bricks may be derived from the destruction of the nearby Earls Colne priory during the Dissolution in the 16th century.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The development was situated at the eastern side of the historic village of Earls Colne, Essex, and consisted of the insertion, by directional drilling, of a new storm drain. The drain stretched from Church Hill along part of The Avenue towards the site of the Earls Colne Priory (Fig. 1; Plate 1).

The Historic Environment Management Team of Essex County Council was consulted by Anglian Water regarding the proposed pipeline scheme in January 2009 (Enquiry Number AW/0001/09). The relevant document setting out the Historic Environment Management Team's requirements is the Brief for Archaeological Excavation and Monitoring on the Earls Colne CSO Scheme (Teresa O'Connor, January 2009).

The Brief specified that archaeological monitoring would be required during topsoil stripping for the directional drilling pits along the length of the pipeline. Where archaeological remains were identified after topsoil stripping had been completed, these remains were to be subject to excavation prior to the insertion of the pipe.

A Project Design was prepared in response to an invitation from Kevin Whybrow of Anglian Water Services detailing how NAU Archaeology proposed to implement the requirements stipulated by the Brief (Ref BAU2170/DW).

The site archive is currently held by NAU Archaeology and on completion of the project will be deposited with Braintree Museum, following the relevant policy on archiving standards.

2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site is situated in an area of underlying Boulder Clay with areas of glacial sand and gravel (such as Kesgrave Sands and Gravels), below this the underlying solid geology is of London Clay (Hodge *et al.* 1984).

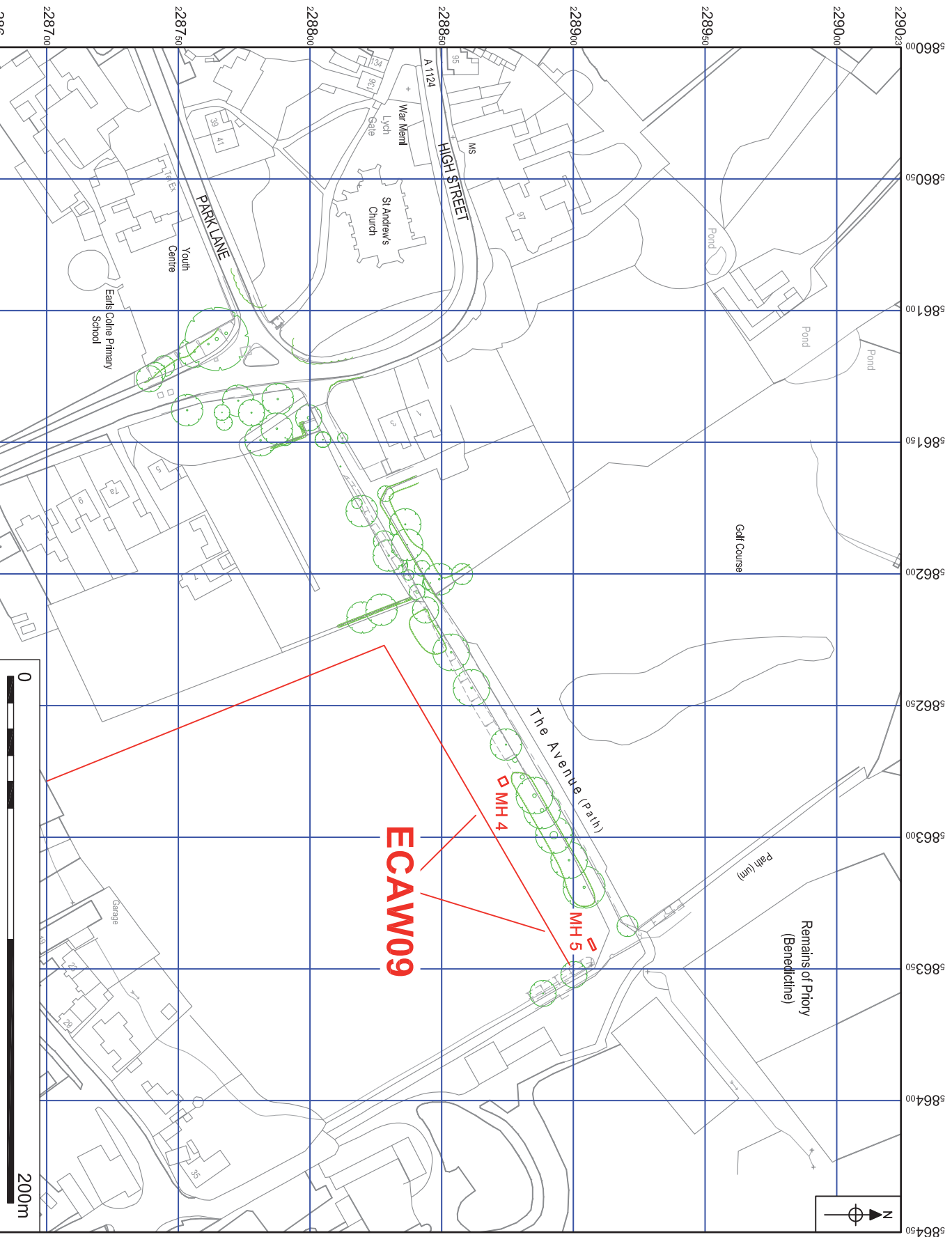


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:2000



Plate 1. The site, looking west.

Where natural deposits were observed on the site they consisted of a light mottled brown fine silty sand with gravel. The topsoil varied in thickness between 0.35m and 0.60m and consisted of a friable mid-grey-brown silty fine sand. This topsoil had been subject to recent disturbance and contained small flecks and fragments of coke, coal, clinker and recent iron fragments. The subsoil was a firm, light brown, silty fine sand.

There was enough sand in the upper deposits to allow for relatively good drainage of the site. The surrounding landscape can be characterised as being one of low-lying gentle slopes, with a height of 34m OD at the western end of the pipeline descending gradually to 29m at the eastern end.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The medieval town of Earls Colne developed in a ribbon-like pattern that linked the two focal points of the town, the market place on High Street and the priory to the east. The priory is a Scheduled Monument (SM 20642) and was founded at the beginning of the 12th century. The priory was dissolved in 1536 and the majority of the buildings were demolished in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Excavations in 1937 on the site of the priory revealed the underlying foundations of a possible Roman villa (Braintree District Council 2007).

A manor house belonging to the Earls of Oxford was also located close to the priory, and was built as a replacement for an earlier medieval manor house also situated close to the priory.

The market place on High Street was linked to the priory by a track known as The Avenue, which was tree-lined in the 19th century, and was likely to have always formed the link between the two focal points of the medieval town.

The start of the pipeline is located within Church Hill. Excavations on the western side of Church Hill, opposite the graveyard, have revealed evidence for 16th- and 17th-century occupation, including ditches, pits, metalled surfaces and a possible kiln or oven. Artefactual evidence suggests antler-working also took place.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The objective of this excavation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence or absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the directional drilling pits.

The Brief required that topsoil stripping for each of the directional drill pits along the proposed pipeline route be subject to archaeological monitoring. All topsoil stripping operations were carried out under constant supervision by an experienced archaeologist. Guidelines set out in the document *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003) and the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (IfA 2008) were followed. The machine excavation was carried out with a hydraulic 360° excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket, which was provided by Barhale, who were the principal contractor on the site.

Directional drilling pits MH1, MH2 and MH3 were all situated in areas of modern built up ground and so were not subjected to archaeological monitoring. Directional drilling pits MH4 and MH5 were monitored and are reported on below. These two pits measured 2.8m by 2.8m and 4.0m by 1.2m respectively.

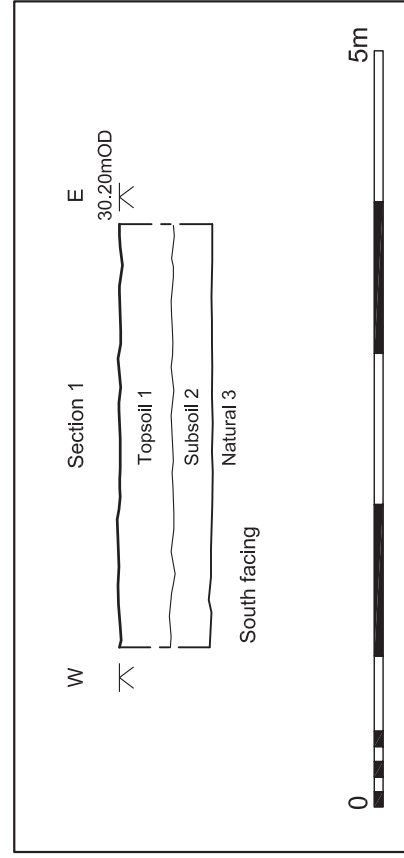
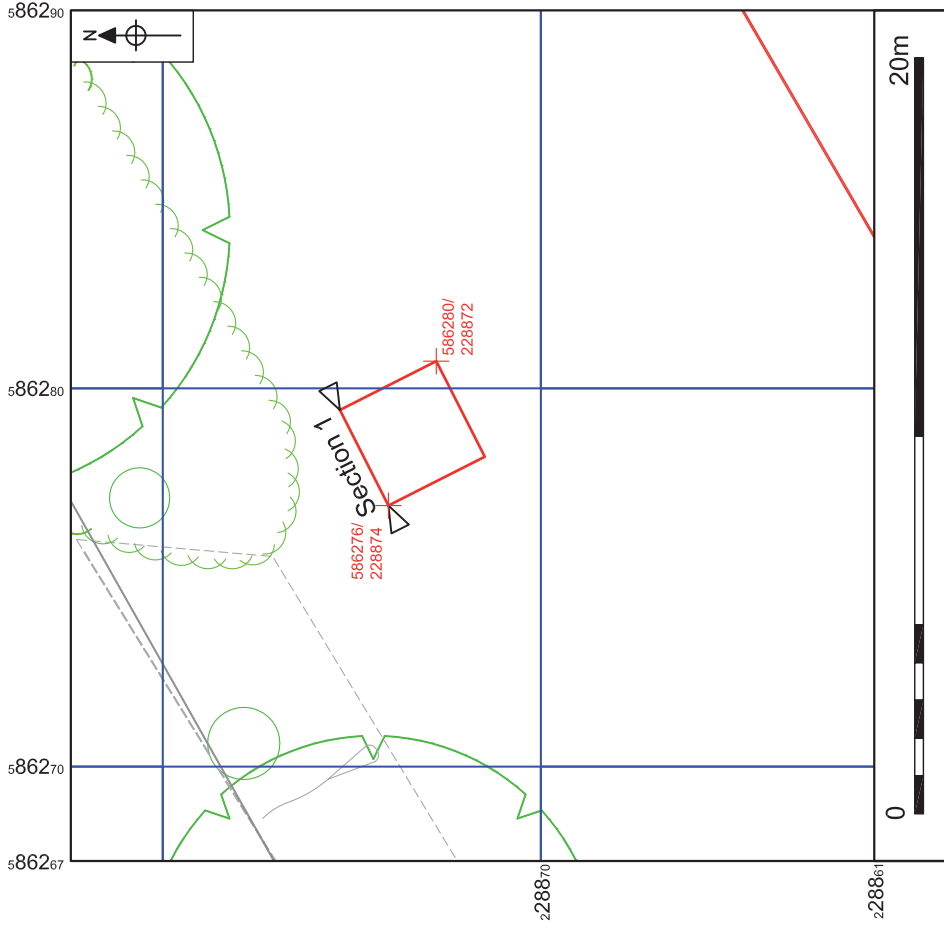
The spoil and exposed surfaces was scanned with a metal-detector. A few modern nails and fragments of iron were found metal-detecting, but were discarded on site due to their recent age.

No environmental samples were taken, due to the lack of suitable deposits.

Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and the trenches recorded with a digital camera.

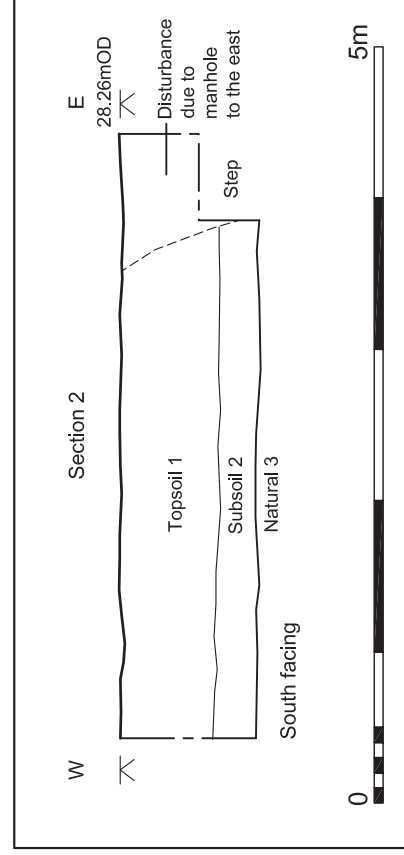
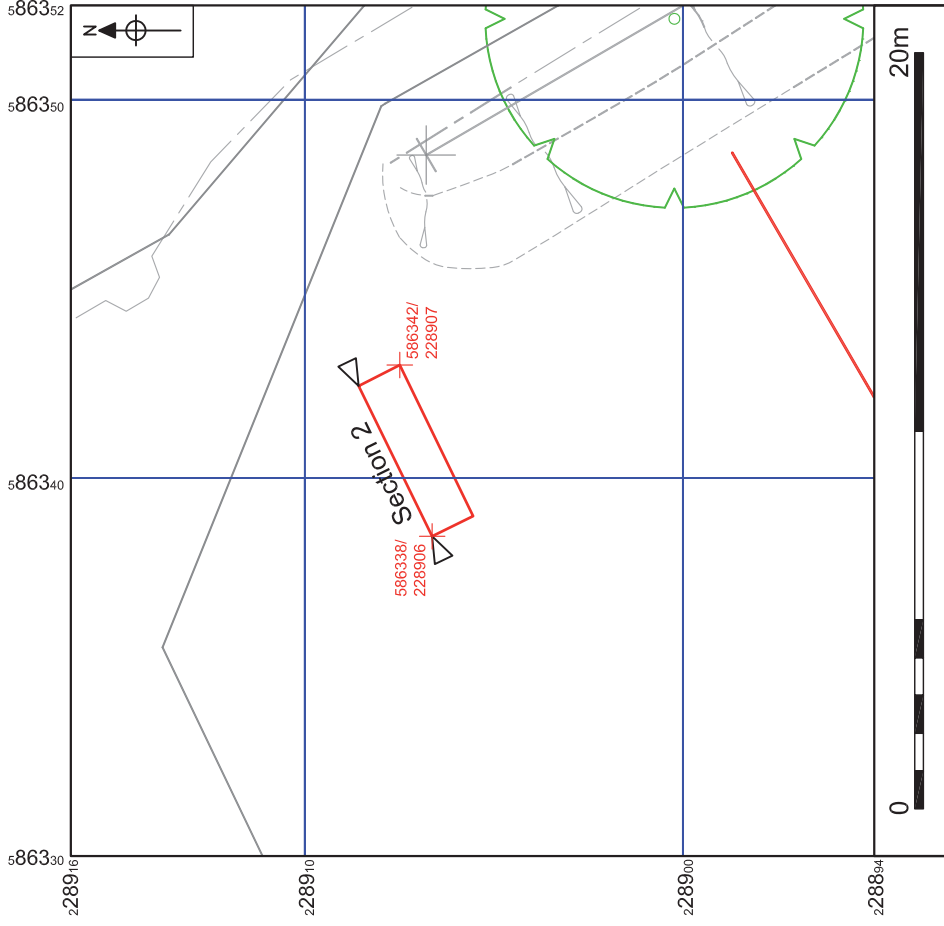
A level was taken from a nearby Ordnance Survey spot-height situated at Church Hill, and additional levels were taken from Anglian Water's survey.

The weather was hot and dry. The access to the site was excellent and the operatives of Barhale were very helpful in the completion of the work.



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Figure 2. Plan of MH4 and section 1. Scale 1:200 and 1:50



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Figure 3. Plan of MH5 and section 2. Scale 1:200 and 1:50

5.0 RESULTS

5.1 Directional Drilling Pit MH4

This slot measured 2.8m by 2.8m and was situated 3m to the south of the historic path known as The Avenue which stretched from the village towards the site of the priory (Fig. 1). The topsoil (01) and subsoil (02) were removed in spits down to the natural fine silty sand and gravel ((03), Fig. 2). The topsoil was 0.35m at this point and the subsoil was 0.25m (Plate 2).

No archaeological finds, features or deposits were present in the trench.



Plate 2. Directional Drilling Pit MH4.

5.2 Directional Drilling Pit MH5

This slot measured 4.0m by 1.2m and was also situated 3m to the south of The Avenue (Fig. 1). It was located at the eastern end of the area close to the site of the Earls Colne priory. The topsoil (01) and subsoil (02) were removed in spits down to the natural fine silty sand and gravel ((03), Fig. 2). The topsoil was 0.60m at this point and the subsoil was 0.30m (Plate 3).

Several fragmentary medieval bricks were collected from the subsoil (02).

The eastern end of the drilling pit had been truncated by the cut for the manhole which was located just to the east of the drilling pit. This truncation can clearly be seen in Plate 3.



Plate 3. Directional Drilling Pit MH5.

6.0 THE FINDS

6.1 Ceramic Building Material

By Sarah Percival

Five incomplete brick fragments weighing 1,674g were found in subsoil (02). Two fragments are of pale buff orange fabric with sparse iron ore inclusions in a sandy matrix, including a large irregular shaped brick perhaps from a window frame or similar. Two fragments each 38mm thick with orange margins and a grey core have wiped surfaces and a sanded base. The bricks are made of sandy fabric with rounded quartz inclusions. A fifth fragment in silty fabric with sparse large rounded quartz is 37mm thick and has pale orange margins and blue grey core. All the brick is probably of earlier post-medieval date.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

The archaeological monitoring of the two directional drilling pits revealed no archaeological features or deposits. The few early post-medieval bricks found within the subsoil in drilling pit MH5 may be derived from the priory complex which is situated immediately to the east of the site (SM 20642; HER 8620). These bricks were found loose within the subsoil (02) and may result from the destruction of the priory complex following the Dissolution of the priory in the 16th century. The destruction of the surviving priory buildings may have happened several hundred years after the Dissolution.

The lack of features in the two directional drilling pits may simply be due to their relatively small size or it could indicate that this land was unsuitable for occupation throughout much of history. When the area was finally exploited it would appear to have been used as grazing land on the edge of the settlement and priory precinct.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the field was used as a camp during the Second World War and this probably accounted for the obvious disturbance within the topsoil of the field; as well as the nails, occasional fragments of wire and scrap iron were observed. There may also have been a considerable amount of landscaping in the modern period.

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork was undertaken by the author, with mechanical excavation undertaken by the operatives of Barhale. The finds were processed by Lucy Talbot and reported on by Sarah Percival. The illustrations were prepared by David Dobson after initial digitising by the author. The site was monitored by Teresa O'Connor and an HER search prepared by Laura Belton of the Historic Environment Management Team of Essex County Council.

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Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description	Period
1	Deposit	Topsoil	–
2	Deposit	Subsoil	–
3	Deposit	Natural	–

Appendix 1b: OASIS Feature Summary

Period	Feature type	Quantity
Post-medieval (1540 to 1900)	CBM	5

Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Quantity	Weight (g)	Period
2	Ceramic Building Material	5	1,674	Post-medieval

Appendix 2b: OASIS Finds Summary

Period	Material	Quantity
Post-medieval (1540 to 1900)	CBM	5