

**LAND AT THE REAR OF 38 HIGH STREET  
BILLERICAY  
ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL TRENCHING**



**Essex County Council  
Field Archaeology Unit**

**February 2012**

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***As part of our desire to provide a quality service, we would welcome any comments you may have on the content or the presentation of this report.***

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# LAND AT THE REAR OF 38 HIGH STREET

## BILLERICAY

## ESSEX

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL TRENCHING

**Client:** Mr Roger Green

**Site Code:** BL 20

**Planning Application no:** 10/00213/FUL

**NGR:** TQ 6753 9471

**FAU Project No:** 2332

**OASIS No:** 119262

**Date of Fieldwork:** 31st January & 1st February 2012

#### **SUMMARY**

*Post-medieval remains were found at the back of no. 38 High Street, Billericay during the excavation of two archaeological trial trenches within the footprint of a new mixed use building. The remains took the form of a large pit dated to c.1800 and two 17th-century postholes. Residual medieval pottery sherds were found in a garden feature to the east, suggesting that earlier deposits/features may survive in the vicinity, where not disturbed by post-medieval and later activities.*

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

An archaeological trial trench evaluation was undertaken by Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) within the footprint of a new building to the rear of nos. 38 and 40 High Street, Billericay. The work was commissioned by the developer, Mr Roger Green, and carried out in accordance with a brief issued by the Essex Historic Environment Management team (ECC HEM 2011), who monitored the works on behalf of the local planning authority, Basildon District Council.

Copies of the report will be supplied to the client and the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) at County Hall, Chelmsford. The archive will be stored with Chelmsford Museum. An OASIS online record has been created at <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/oasis/index.cfm>.

## **2.0 BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Site location and description**

No. 38 is situated midway along the eastern side of Billericay High Street, between the modern Argos store (nos. 32-36) and Ravens Bakery (no. 40), just before the Chapel Street turning (TQ 6753 9471). Access to the rear of the property is provided by a narrow road between the bakery and the Chequers PH (fig. 1).

The rear of the property was previously used as yard space and car-parking and was occupied by a shed, open ground and areas of hardstanding that were bordered by mature trees to north and south. The rear of no. 40, into which the new development will extend (fig. 1), is currently occupied by a garage and raised hardstanding which will be demolished as part of the works. The natural ground level slopes downwards from the rear of the boundary to the south-east.

During the evaluation, building work was being carried out on both properties following the construction of new extensions to both buildings and refurbishment works within no. 38.

### **2.2 Planning background**

An application to erect a new mixed use structure was submitted to Basildon District Council in February 2010 (10/00213/FUL). In response to this application, the Heritage Environment Management team of Essex County Council (ECC HEM) recommended a full archaeological condition be placed on the application due to its location within the historic core of the medieval and post-medieval town. The condition was based on guidance contained in Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment and states:

*No development or preliminary groundwork's of any kind shall take place until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved by the local planning authority.*

### **2.2 Archaeological background**

The following archaeological background utilises the Essex Historic Environment Record (HER) and the ECC HEM Design Brief (2011).

'Byllrica' as it is referred to in 1291, was founded in the thirteenth century by Cistercian monks of Stratford Langthorne Abbey. A medieval market is believed to have been in existence by 1253, sited in the triangle between the High Street and Chapel Street (EHER

18415). Chapel Street is named after a chapel that was built in 1345 opposite the proposed development site.

The market place had been infilled by the post-medieval period. A late 16th/early 17th-century ditch was found opposite the site during an evaluation behind no. 51 High Street (EHER 14419). Further details of the archaeology and development of the town are to be found within the Historic Essex Towns Survey (Medlycott 1999).

No. 38 High Street is a grade 2-Listed timber-framed building dated to the late 16th century with 18th-century adaptations. According to the List description, one of the beams has the date of 1577 carved on it (EH 112333). No. 40 is also grade 2-Listed, but is slightly later in date, according to its description, which describes it as 17th century with 18th century features (EH 112334).

Late 19th century Ordnance Survey maps show the rear of 38 as gardens with an L-shaped range of structures at the eastern of the new development.

### **3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The main aim was to assess the presence or absence, date, nature and extent of archaeological deposits and features across the site and their importance. Since the proposed development lies to the rear of the High Street, there was potential for surviving medieval and post medieval occupation relating to back land or industrial usage (i.e. workshops, rubbish pits, etc) behind the street frontage.

### **4.0 METHODOLOGY**

The trial trenches were located within the footprint of the proposed new building, which has a T-shaped plan-form and ground plan of c.18 x 12m. In the HEM Brief, the trenches were designed to mimic this plan, with one trench orientated west to east and another north to south, with each trench 10m long and 1.5m wide.

Prior to the start of the trial trenching, the modern shed behind no. 38 was demolished and the mature trees substantially cut-back, but the area to the rear of no. 40, containing a modern fence, garage and hardstanding, was still in use (see cover plate). After consultation

with the monitoring officer, the length of Trench 2 was extended up to the present boundary to make up for the loss of length to Trench 1, which had become shorter to the south by 4m.

Archaeological features and deposits were recorded on pro-forma FAU trench sheets. Scale plans and sections were drawn and finds collected. Photographs were taken in digital format, a representative selection of which is reproduced at the back of the report as plates 1-4. The remainder can be found in the archive.

## **5.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS**

Once the concrete hardstanding around the former shed had been broken up, a mechanical excavator was used to excavate the trenches, which were dug to depth of c.1m onto the natural subsoil, at the level where archaeological remains were identified (fig. 2).

A rich greyish brown silty sand topsoil was recorded to a depth of 0.34m across the site, overlying a thick (0.8m) layer of brownish grey gravelly silty sand containing tile and other post-medieval material representing made ground at the rear of the property (fig. 3). Natural soil varied in form from an orange silty sand, to a more clayey silt. The topsoil and subsoil were greatly disturbed by tree roots and old ceramic drainage pipes.

Trenches 1 and 2 form one L-shaped trench (fig. 2) but are described separately. Further information on the individual contexts recorded can be found in Appendix 1.

### **5.1 Trench 1 (plate 1)**

The western part of Trench 1 was occupied by pit 2, which was investigated in the adjoining Trench 2 (see section 5.2). Beyond the pit, to the east, were a modern ceramic pipe and a shallow (0.16m), quite crudely-formed linear slot, feature 7, probably a planting trench from the 19th-century garden. This feature, located below subsoil and cutting natural, extended southwards beyond the edge of excavation and was filled with soil similar to subsoil 10. The fill (context 8) provided an array of finds, particularly a sherd of residual medieval Mill Green ware, but also a 17th century clay pipe stem and 18th or early 19th century pottery sherds. Such mixed dating suggests the material derives from the disturbed subsoil above.

### **5.2 Trench 2 (plate 2)**

Feature 2, a large post-medieval pit, was partially-excavated at the southern end of Trench 2 beneath topsoil. The pit was oval in shape and lay on a west-east alignment, extending



westwards beyond the edge of the trench and eastwards into Trench 1 and had dimensions of over 5m in length and 3m in width (fig. 2). The fills (context 1) were very mixed and contained good quantities of post-medieval pottery and peg-tile. A slot was excavated on the western side (plate 2) that established a shallow, stepped edge to the north and steep sides to the south. The feature was excavated to 1.2m from ground level, at which point excavation ceased. Towards the base of the slot several sherds of clean, unabraded industrial slipware pottery were collected which were closely datable to c.1800.

The southern edge of the pit cut through two shallow postholes (fig. 2), which were c.0.7m in diameter and 0.3m deep and filled with a grey silty material that contained large amounts of charcoal. Posthole 4 (plate 4) was fully-excavated and dated to the 17th century or later by a sherd of brown-glazed post-medieval earthenware pottery. The same pottery was also found on the southern edge of pit 2, where it had been displaced by tree roots.

Posthole 6 was located close to the western side of the trench, which meant that only the eastern edge was exposed and excavated. No finds were collected but the dimensions, fill-type and relationship with pit 2 were the same as posthole 4 and it is likely they have a contemporary date.

## **6.0 FINDS REPORT** by Helen Walker

Finds were recovered from three contexts, comprising the fills of three separate features. All of the material has been recorded by count and weight, in grams, by context. Full quantification details can be found in Appendix 2. The finds are described by category below.

### **Pottery**

Pottery is the most numerous find with a total of eighteen sherds weighing 176g, recovered from all three contexts. The earliest find comprises a single sherd of Mill Green ware, dating from the mid 13th to mid 14th centuries, from context 8, the fill of feature 7. It is from the shoulder of a jug and shows the typical white slip-coating beneath an oily mottled-green glaze, through which lines of combing have been scored, although the combing is at an oblique angle, and not vertical, which is the more common decorative style. There is also a sherd of Mill Green-type ware from the same context, comprising a plain base sherd, which has a similar fabric to that of Mill Green ware, but is harder, and more likely to be late medieval in date, spanning the 14th to 16th centuries.

All the remaining pottery is post-medieval; there are a number of sherds of glazed post-medieval red earthenware most likely dating to the 17th to 18th centuries, featured material comprising the beaded rim from a bowl, and fragments from a cylindrical mug with a rich brown glaze, sherds of which occur in both pits 2 and 4 suggesting these features were infilled at the same time. Pit 2 also produced sherds of Metropolitan slipware, this is a type of post-medieval red earthenware decorated with slip-trailed motifs, produced at Harlow and other centres in Essex, and during its peak period of production between c.1630 and c.1670 was widely traded, but production carried on for local consumption over a much longer period of time, perhaps continuing to the mid-18th century. The rather simple and perfunctory decoration on these examples suggests an 18th century, rather than a 17th century date is more likely.

Pit 2 produced a sherd of Nottingham/Derbyshire stoneware, distinctive because of its lustrous brown glaze and showing rouletted decoration. It dates between the 18th and 20th century.

Most fills produced Creamware, a cream-coloured earthenware manufactured between the mid-18th and earlier 19th centuries. Most of the sherds are plain but of some interest are fragments from a cylindrical mug (from pit 2) showing 'industrial slipware' decoration, consisting of stripes and asterisks in different coloured slips applied over an ochre-coloured background (see Table 1). The design is fairly unusual, it dates to c.1800 and is the latest closely datable material to be found. Given that Creamware is present in features 2 and 7, it is possible they are of around this date.

### **Ceramic building materials**

Roof tile is the only ceramic building material encountered; it was present in all three contexts and comprises six fragments weighing 322g. Two fragments show single pegholes and of those with measureable thickness, all have a depth between 12 and 14mm indicating a later medieval or post-medieval date.

### **Clay pipe**

A single clay pipe stem (wt 4g) was recovered from feature 7; it has a relatively large diameter and bore suggesting an early date of perhaps the 17th century, although without the bowl of the clay pipe, a close date cannot be obtained.

### **Animal bone**

Animal bone occurred only in pit 2, from where four fragments weighing 57g were recovered. These comprise rib, long bone fragments and the lower mandible from a sheep/goat jaw.

### **Metalwork**

Metalwork was recovered only from pit 2 and comprises a fragment of copper-alloy sheet with two perforations (wt 5g) and an L-shaped piece of iron (wt 29g), both of which are either post-medieval or modern. In addition, feature 7 produced a small lump of iron-rich slag (wt 17g).

### **Glass**

Glass comprises three pieces weighing 14g from two contexts. Pit 2 produced two fragments of bottle glass, which are both opaque and iridescent, dating from the 18th century or later. Feature 7 produced a small fragment of window glass, which is transparent but with some iridescence and a greenish tinge.

### **Comments on the assemblage**

The presence of Mill Green ware, although residual, indicates some medieval activity in the vicinity. The remaining pottery shows evidence of occupation between perhaps the middle years of the 17th century until the earlier 19th century. The non-pottery finds impart little information and all have been discarded.

## **7.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Trial trenching at the back of 38 High Street confirmed the presence of medieval and post-medieval activity behind the street frontage. A thick layer of made ground and archaeological features indicative of post-medieval occupation of the site were found close to the eastern end of no.38 in Trench 2, comprising two small 17th century postholes (features 4 and 6) and a large pit dated to c.1800 (feature 2), located just below the topsoil. Garden slot 7 was excavated further to the east, in Trench 1.

The features excavated represent back land activity from the 17th-19th centuries associated with the existing standing buildings, in the form of a probable 17th century fence-line, a c.1800 rubbish pit and contemporary garden activity. All features contained quantities of post-medieval tile and pottery and there is remarkably little modern disturbance on the site.

Medieval pottery found further to the east in pit 7 is residual and indicates activity from this period in the vicinity.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thanks are due to Roger Green for commissioning the work and also Dave the machine driver and to the builders working on nos. 38 and 40. The evaluation was undertaken by the author and Lukasz Miciak of ECC FAU. Illustrations were prepared by the author and produced by Andrew Lewsey. The project was managed by Adrian Scruby and monitored by Richard Havis of ECC HEM on behalf of the local planning authority.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- |         |      |  |
|---------|------|--|
| DCMS    | 2010 | <i>Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning in the Historic Environment</i>                                   |
| ECC HEM | 2011 | <i>Brief for Archaeological Trial Trenching at the Rear of 38 High Street, Billericay</i> (ECC HEM unpub.) |

## Appendix 1: Context data

Context	Type	Description	Trench	Date
1	deposit	redeposited subsoil mixed with large lenses of sand and tile on S side. Fill of pit 2	1 & 2	c.1800
2	cut	large oval rubbish pit excavated to depth of 1.1m below topsoil	1 & 2	c.1800
3	deposit	fill of 4: brownish-grey sand silt. Charcoal flecks	2	17th c.
4	cut	posthole	2	17th c.
5	deposit	fill of 6: brownish-grey sand silt. Charcoal flecks	2	17th c.
6	cut	posthole	2	17th c.
7	cut	planting slot	1	c.1800
8	deposit	single fill of 7: compact greyish-brown sand silt	1	c.1800
9	topsoil	dark blackish-brown soft silty sand	1 & 2	post-med
10	subsoil	light brownish-grey gravelly silt sand	1 & 2	post-med

## Appendix 2: Finds data

**Table 1: Pottery data**

Context	Feature	Count	Wt (g)	Description	Date
1	2	5	76	Post-medieval red earthenware, all with either an internal or all over glaze; forms comprise a beaded bowl rim and an upright rim with a band of horizontal grooves around the neck and an all over brown glaze, probably from a cylindrical mug, cross-fits with context 3	17th C or later
		2	47	Metropolitan slipware comprising a thickened upright rim perhaps from a bowl, showing an all over glaze and a slip-trailed motif on and just below the rim, not complete enough to show pattern, the second is from a thick-walled internally glazed bowl or jar showing a very simple motif on the internal comprising four slip-dots arranged roughly in a circle	c.1625 to mid 18th C
		1	5	Nottingham/Derby stoneware showing rouletted decoration	18th to 20th C
		2	5	Creamware: plain joining sherds from a flat base	Mid 18th C to c.1830
		3	12	Creamware joining sherds from a cylindrical vessel, probably a mug with an ochre coloured background showing 'industrial slipware' decoration comprising alternating vertical blue and white slip stripes below a row of brown asterisks around the neck, delineated by single brown bands	c.1800

Context	Feature	Count	Wt (g)	Description	Date
3	4	1	2	Post-medieval red earthenware, upright rim, showing the thickening for a handle attachment just below the rim, all over brown glaze, cross-fits with context 1	17th C or later
8	7	1	6	Mill Green ware, sherd from shoulder of jug showing typical white slip-coating below an oily mottled green-glaze and combed decoration, although the combing is at an oblique angle rather than vertical	Mid-13th to mid-14th century
		1	11	Mill Green-type ware unglazed base sherd, abraded	14th to 16th C
		1	6	Post-medieval red earthenware/flowerpot, perhaps part of a footing base	?18th to 20th C
		1	6	Creamware, base sherd from a plate or dish	Mid 18th to c.1830
		<b>18</b>	<b>176</b>		

**Table 2: Tile data**

Context	Feature	Count	Wt (g)	Description	Date
1	2	2	72	Pegtile fragments, one showing peghole, abraded surfaces	Later med or post-med
3	4	2	161	Pegtile fragments, one showing sub-square peghole, thickness between 12 and 14mm	Later med or post-med
8	7	2	89	Pegtile fragments, thickness between 12 and 13mm	Later med or post-med
		<b>6</b>	<b>322</b>		

**Table 3: Clay pipe data**

Context	Feature	Count	Wt (g)	Description	Date
8	7	1	4	Clay pipe stem, relatively wide diameter and bore, 10mm and 3.5mm respectively suggesting an early date	17th C

**Table 4: Animal bone data**

Context	Feature	Count	Wt (g)	Description
1	2	4	57	Rib, long-bone fragments and part of the lower mandible from a sheep/goat jaw

**Table 5: Metalwork data**

Context	Feature	Count	Wt (g)	Description	Date
1	2	1	5	Copper sheet fragment with two perforations	Post-med/modern
		1	29	Iron object, L-shaped otherwise no discernable form	Post-med/modern

Context	Feature	Count	Wt (g)	Description	Date
8	7	1	17	Iron-rich slag	-
		3	51		

**Table 6: Glass**

Context	Feature	Count	Wt (g)	Description	Date
1	2	2	13	Bottle glass fragments, both opaque and iridescent	18th C or later
8	7	1	1	Window glass, transparent but with some iridescence, greenish tinge	Post-med/ modern
		3	14		

### Appendix 3: Contents of Archive

**Site name: Land at the rear of 38 High Street, Billericay, Essex**

**Project no: 2332**

**Site code: BL 20**

#### Index to the Archive:

Document wallet containing:

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Client/archive report
- 1.2 Unbound version of report
- 1.3 CD containing digital photographs & copy of report, pdf-formatted

#### 2. Site Archive

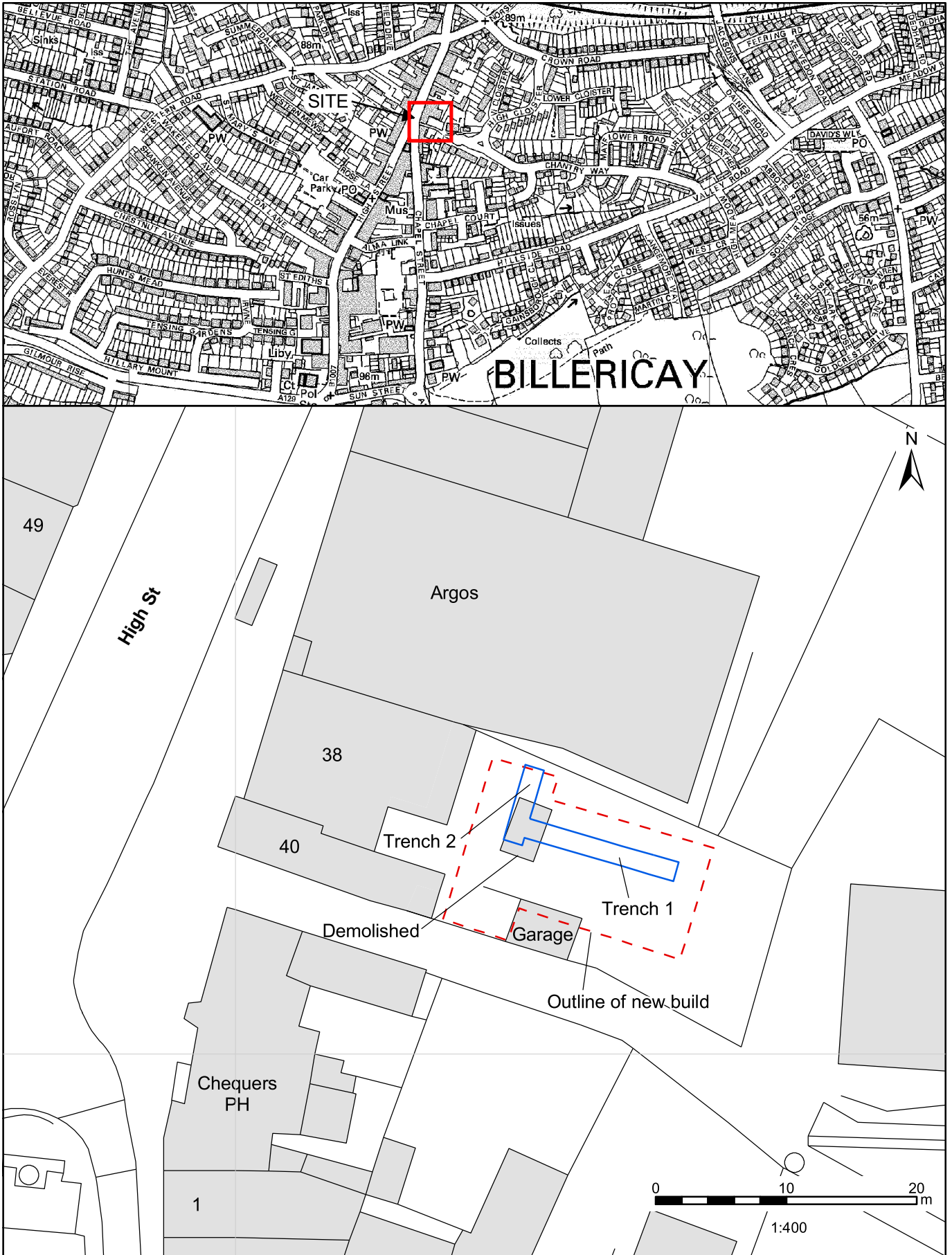
- 2.1 Trench sheets
- 2.2 Plans and sections
- 2.3 Photographic record (digital images & photographic register)

All finds have been discarded

#### Appendix 4: EHER Summary Sheet

<b>Site Name/Address:</b> Land at the rear of 38 High Street, Billericay, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Billericay	<b>District:</b> Basildon
<b>NGR:</b> TQ 6753 9471	<b>Site Code:</b> BL 20
<b>Type of Work:</b> Archaeological Evaluation	<b>Site Director/Team:</b> Andy Letch ECC FAU
<b>Dates of Work:</b> 31st January & 1st February 2012	<b>Size of Area Investigated:</b> Two trenches: T1: 13m x 1.5m; T2: 6m x 1.5m
<b>Curating Museum:</b> Chelmsford Museum	<b>Funding Source:</b> Mr Roger Green
<b>Further Work Anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related HER Nos.</b> None
<b>Final Report:</b> Summary in EAH	<b>OASIS Ref:</b> 119262
<b>Periods Represented:</b> Post-medieval	
<p><b>SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:</b></p> <p>An archaeological trial trench evaluation was undertaken at land to the rear of 38 High Street, Billericay, in advance of the construction of a new mixed-use building. Two trenches were excavated within the footprint of the proposed structure. The trenches revealed post-medieval activity.</p> <p>The trenches contained a thick layer of made ground containing post-medieval brick and tile indicating that the ground level was raised here in the post-medieval period. A large rubbish pit, closely dated to c.1800, was located at the west end that cut two closely-set 17th-century postholes, representing a former fenceline. A shallow 19th century planting slot was found to the east, representing garden activity shown on early OS mapping.</p> <p>The majority of the finds date to the post-medieval period, however a small quantity residual finds including sherd of medieval Mill Green ware also collected representing earlier activity in the vicinity.</p>	
<b>Previous Summaries/Reports:</b> None	
<b>Author of Summary:</b> A Letch	<b>Date of Summary:</b> 14th February 2012





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Fig.1. Location of trial trenches

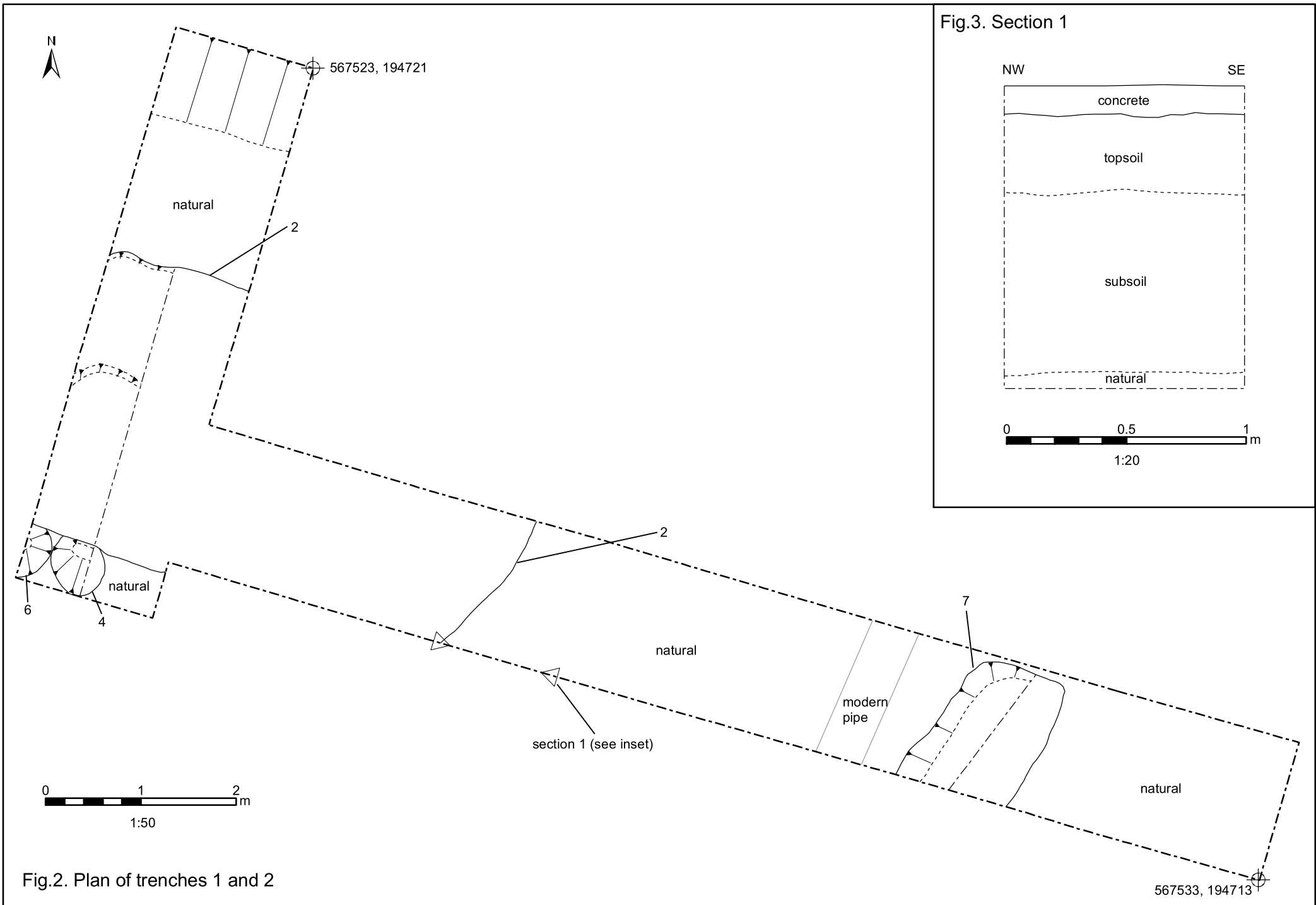


Fig.2. Plan of trenches 1 and 2

Fig.3. Section 1



Plate 1 Trench 1 viewed to east (2m scale)



Plate 2 Trench 2 viewed to south (2m scale)



Plate 3 Pit 20 in section, viewed to west (2m scale)



Plate 4 Posthole 4 viewed to south (25cm scale)