

**ABBAY LANE SEWER SCHEME
SAFFRON WALDEN
ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING
AND RECORDING**



Essex County Council

Field Archaeology Unit

March 2006

**ABBAY LANE SEWER SCHEME
SAFFRON WALDEN, ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING
AND RECORDING**

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**ABBAY LANE SEWER SCHEME
SAFFRON WALDEN**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING
AND RECORDING**

SUMMARY

Client: Anglian Water

NGR: TL 536383

Site Code: SW47

Project No: 1539

Date of Fieldwork: 06/08/04 - 23/02/05

Archaeological monitoring and recording was carried out on the construction of a new sewerage pumping station, sewer trench and exchange station in Abbey Lane due to its location within an area of known potential for the presence of Roman, Saxon and Medieval period remains.

No archaeological remains were identified within the areas impacted by the groundworks. In particular, no earlier road surfaces were in evidence despite Abbey Lane being of Medieval origin. In addition there was no evidence for the southward continuation of Roman, Saxon and Medieval remains of the type encountered during the 19th century excavations at nearby Gibson Way/Close.

Natural chalk was encountered only c.0.34m below the present tarmac road surface. It is likely that modern road construction and the insertion of services have disturbed and removed any remains that may have once been present. Within the groundworks for the exchange station, immediately to the north of the road, natural orange clay deposits survived at a depth of c.2.5m. It is conjectured that Abbey lane was originally built along a natural chalk terrace on the north slope of the Slade Valley, just above the floodplain deposits, and may mark the southern limit of Roman to early Medieval land-use for the purposes of settlement and burial.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning Background

The Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) carried out the monitoring work, on behalf of Anglian Water, under the terms of an archaeological condition placed on planning consent in accordance with Planning Policy Guideline 16 (PPG16). The condition was placed by following specialist advice from the Essex County Council Historic Environment Management team (ECC HEM), as the development site lies in an area of high archaeological potential (Medlycott 1998). The archaeological work followed a brief produced by ECC HEM (2005) and the written scheme of investigation (WSI) prepared by ECC FAU (2005).

Archaeological monitoring and recording was carried out on the construction of a new pumping station and sewer trench in Abbey Lane (TL 536383).

1.2 Report and Archive

Copies of this report will be supplied to Anglian Water, the ECC Historic Environment Management (HEM) and Record (HER) sections. A version will be uploaded to the Online Access Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) (<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/project/oasis>). The project archive will be deposited at Saffron Walden Museum (Appendix 1).

1.3 Abbreviations used in the Report

ECC (Essex County Council), EHER (Essex Historic Environment Record), FAU (Field Archaeology Unit), HEM (Historic Environment Management), HER (Historic Environment Record), IFA (Institute of Field Archaeologists), NGR (National Grid Reference), WSI (Written Scheme of Investigation).

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location, Geology and Topography

The development was located in Abbey Lane, just to the west of the town centre of Saffron Walden and adjacent to the United Reformed Church. The site occupies the north-facing slope of the Slade valley. The surrounding vicinity gently slopes down to the north with solid geology comprising a friable fine grained chalk.

2.2 Historical and Archaeological Background

The archaeological background for this and other parts of Saffron Walden has previously been given extensive discussion by Bassett (1982) and summarised/reviewed by Medlycott (1999). In view of this, only a summary of the most pertinent information is presented here.

The vicinity of the sewer scheme has the potential to contain Roman, mid-late Saxon, early medieval and post-medieval archaeological remains. In the area to the south-west of Abbey Lane, in the vicinity of Gibson Way and Gibson Close, a multi-period site was excavated during the nineteenth century (HER 451-458). Roman features and artefacts were recorded, including cremation burials and at least seven possibly late Roman inhumation burials. Over 200 mid- to late Saxon period inhumations were also discovered, with cemetery activity apparently continuing as late as the 12th century. Pottery evidence suggests further site use into the 13th century. Bassett has further speculated that pits, reportedly below the Saxon graves, could be early Saxon sunken featured building remains (1982, 11).

More generally, Saffron Walden, as a town, is a medieval development; founded in the 11th century around the castle. The medieval remains found at Gibson Way/Close, however, probably relate to an earlier Saxon-Norman settlement in the Slade valley, alongside the cemetery. The Abbey Lane vicinity was brought into the planned medieval settlement with its enclosure within the *magnum fossatum* (aka the Repell, or Battle Ditches), a defensive enclosure, in the second quarter of the 13th century. It is possibly this event that brought about its abandonment as a place of settlement and burial. Abbey Lane itself was a major thoroughfare heading westward out of the medieval town, exiting through a presumed gateway in the *magnum fossatum* some 100m west of the URC site. Roadside occupation does not appear to have extended this far west until the post-medieval period.

As part of this late roadside development, a Congregational church was established just to the north of the sewer scheme site, on the north side of Abbey Lane, in 1694. It was replaced by the still-extant United Reform Church in 1811 to which a school (now the Salvation Army Hall) was added in 1861. The land on the north, west and east sides of the church was used as a graveyard in the 18th and 19th centuries. Burial ceased in the 1870s.

Recent archaeological investigations within the former graveyard of the United Reform Church have identified probable Roman soil horizons surviving below 18th and 19th century made-ground and burial activity the latter of which also contained residual medieval pottery (Pocock 2005).

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Archaeological work was carried out to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance, and quality of any surviving archaeological remains threatened by the groundworks.

Specific research aims included:

- Identification of deposits associated with the Saxon settlement
- Identification of deposits associated with the Saxon cemetery
- Identification of deposits associated with the early medieval occupation
- Identification of structures of medieval or post medieval date
- Identification of industrial or domestic occupation of either medieval and/or post medieval date

4.0 METHODS

The monitoring was undertaken during key stages of the groundworks, comprising excavation of the pumping station pit and service link crossing Abbey Lane (Fig 1). Further monitoring was undertaken on the exchange station adjacent to number 8a Abbey Lane. Observation encompassed extraction of soils until natural was exposed or the required depth of the trench was reached. The pipeline between these installations was tunnelled and was therefore not monitored. The work was carried out according to regional standards in field archaeology, and all fieldwork methods and recording conformed to the codes of practice and guidance issued by the IFA (1999) and adhered to ALGAO guidelines (Gurney 2003). Standard ECC FAU recording and excavation methods were used. A digital photographic record was maintained throughout the project.

5.0 RESULTS

Monitoring identified no archaeological remains surviving within the areas impacted by the groundworks. The pumping station and service link situated on Abbey Road penetrated the modern road surfacing that overlay a compacted layer of hardcore consisting of construction debris; brick fragments and gravels of varying sizes. The hardcore sealed natural chalk bedrock that was present c.0.34 metres below the road surface. Reduction of the ground level by removal of topsoil/ subsoil/ overburden has previously taken place; but the degree to which this had impacted both the potential archaeological remains and the natural chalk bedrock is still unclear. It is likely that any archaeological features and deposits that may have once been present, such as medieval road surfaces, no longer survive beneath Abbey Lane due to their truncation by modern road and services construction.

A 2.0 by 2.0 metre shaft was excavated to a depth of 2.5 metres below the current ground surface to expose the existing ceramic sewerage pipe and house the exchange station adjacent to 8a Abbey Lane. The upper 2.0 metres of the shaft comprised a dense sequence of construction cuts and disturbed soils associated with modern services. The construction cut for the sewerage pipe extended beyond this upper band of activity and encompassed much of the basal area of the shaft. However, a small area of natural survived in plan and section on the western edge of the construction cut. This consisted of clean orange silty clay inter-dispersed with large flint nodules fragmented by machine excavation.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

No significant archaeological remains were identified during the monitoring of the sewer scheme construction groundworks in Abbey Lane. There was no evidence for the southward continuation of Roman, Saxon and Medieval remains of the type encountered during the 19th century excavations at Gibson Way/Close, or for the survival of buried soil horizons as found in the URC graveyard. Nor were any Medieval or later road surfaces identified below the modern rubble bedding and tarmac of Abbey Lane itself.

Modern road construction, together with the insertion of a range of services has brought about significant truncation and disturbance along this part of the Slade valley slope. It is likely that this has resulted in the removal of any archaeological remains that may have once been present within the areas monitored. However, the relatively high natural encountered may also suggest that this location retains its near-original valley topography. It is conjectured that Abbey Lane utilises a natural terrace of the Slade valley and historically demarcated the divide between different land-uses of the valley slope – with settlement and burial on higher ground to the north and marginal activities, such as animal grazing, in the floodplain to the south.

However, the small-scale of the observed works does not allow confident prediction of widespread absence or removal of archaeological remains through truncation. The survival of significant remains elsewhere along Abbey Lane cannot be discounted.

7.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The ECC Field Archaeology Unit thanks Anglian Water for commissioning and funding the archaeological investigation. The co-operation of Barhale is acknowledged. Matthew Pocock conducted the fieldwork. Digital illustrations were compiled by Andrew Lewsey. Mark Atkinson of ECC FAU managed the project. Richard Havis of ECC HEM team monitored the project.

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- | | | |
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| Pocock, M. | 2005 | <i>United Reform Church/Salvation Army Hall, Abbey Lane, Saffron Walden, Essex: archaeological evaluation by trial trenching</i> . ECC FAU Rep. 1420 |

APPENDIX 1: ARCHIVE INDEX

SITE NAME; Abbey Lane Sewer Scheme (SW47)

Index to the Archive

- **One A4 folder containing:**

- 2 copies of the client report
- 1 copy of the design brief
- 1 copy of the written scheme of investigation
- 1 proposed development plan
- Watching brief record sheets
- Plan and section drawings
- Disc with digital copies of report, drawings and photographs

APPENDIX 2: EHCR SUMMARY SHEET

Site name/Address: Abbey Lane, Sewer Scheme	
Parish: Uttlesford	District: Saffron Walden
NGR: TL 536383	Site Code: SW47
Type of Work: Monitoring	Site Director/Group: ECC FAU
Date of Work: 09/01/06	Size of Area Investigated:
Location of Finds/Curating Museum: Saffron Walden	Funding source: Anglian Water
Further Seasons Anticipated?: No	Related HCR Nos.: N/A
Final Report: Yes	
Periods Represented: None	
<p>SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS: Archaeological monitoring and recording was carried out on the construction of a new sewerage pumping station, sewer trench and exchange station in Abbey Lane due to its location within an area of known potential for the presence of Roman, Saxon and Medieval period remains.</p> <p>No archaeological remains were identified within the areas impacted by the groundworks. In particular, no earlier road surfaces were in evidence despite Abbey Lane being of Medieval origin. Nor was there evidence for the southward continuation of Roman, Saxon and Medieval remains of the type encountered during the 19th century excavations at nearby Gibson Way/Close.</p> <p>Natural chalk was encountered only c.0.34m below the present tarmac road surface. It is likely that modern road construction and the insertion of services have disturbed and removed any remains that may have once been present. Within the groundworks for the exchange station, immediately to the north of the road, natural orange clay deposits survived at a depth of c.2.5m. It is conjectured that Abbey lane was originally built along a natural chalk terrace on the north slope of the Slade Valley, just above the floodplain deposits, and may mark the southern limit of Roman to early Medieval land-use for the purposes of settlement and burial.</p>	
Previous Summaries/Reports: None	
Author of Summary: Matthew Pocock	Date of Summary: 09/03/2006

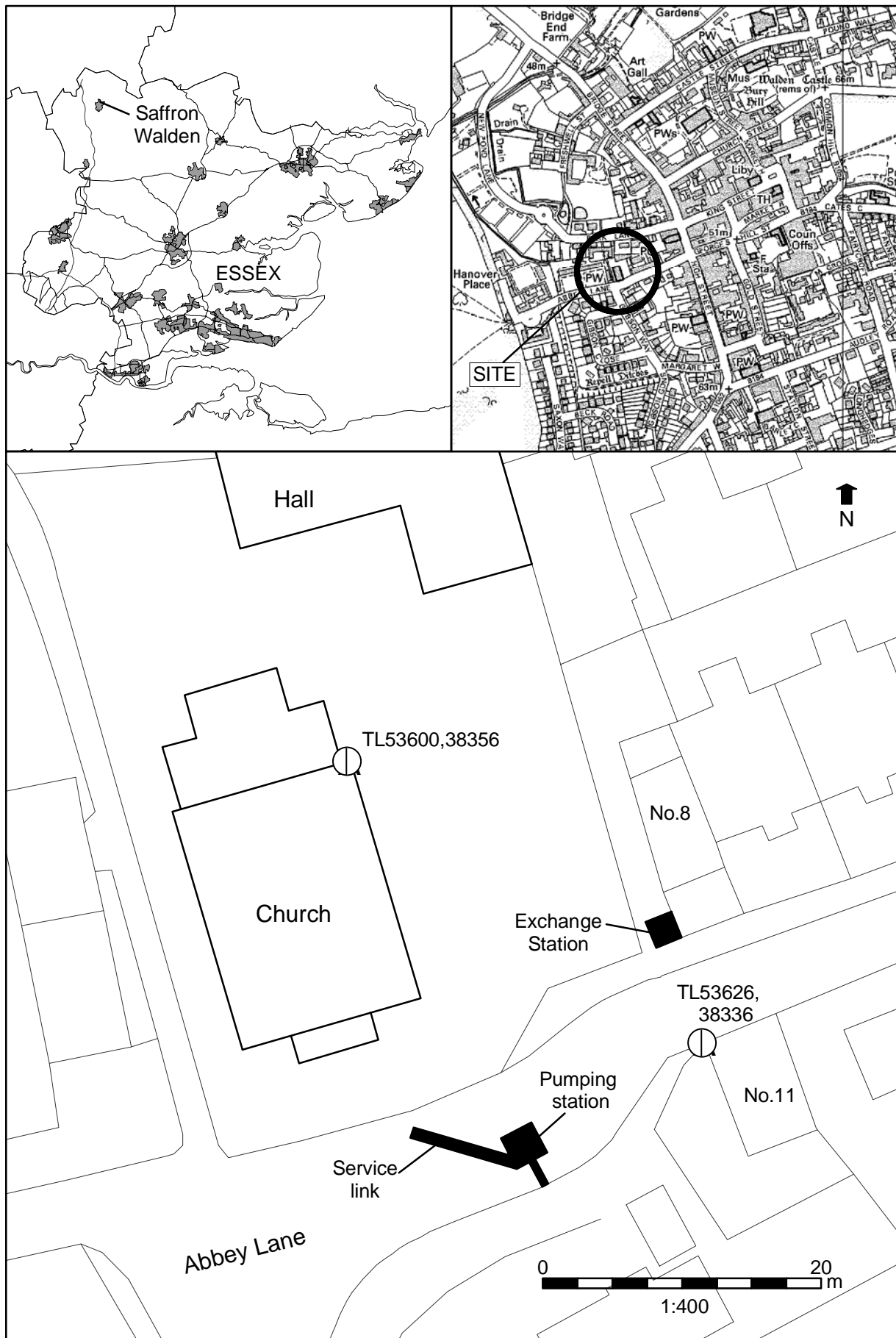


Fig.1. Site location