

**VANGE WICK (EAST) RESERVOIR
ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
BY TRIAL TRENCHING**



Essex County Council

Field Archaeology Unit

March 2006

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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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CONTENTS

	Page
Summary	1
1.0 Introduction	3
1.1 Planning Background	3
1.2 Report and Archive	3
1.3 Abbreviations used in the Report	3
2.0 Background	3
2.1 Location, Geology, Topography	3
2.2 Historical and archaeological background	3
3.0 Aims and Objectives	5
4.0 Methods	6
5.0 Results	6
5.1 Trial Trenching	6
5.2 Geo-archaeological Survey	7
6.0 Finds and Environmental material	9
7.0 Conclusions	10
8.0 Assessment of results	11
9.0 Acknowledgements	12
10.0 Bibliography	12

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Fieldwork Data	13
Appendix 2: Finds Data	15
Appendix 3: Contents of Archive	16
Appendix 4: Essex Historic Environment Record Sheet	17

FIGURES

1. Location	18
2. Deposit model	19

**VANGE WICK (EAST) RESERVOIR
ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION BY
TRIAL TRENCHING**

SUMMARY

Client: Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

NGR: TQ 732 858

Site Code: BAVW06

Project No: 1571

Date of Fieldwork: 13th to the 20th of February

Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit carried out a trial trenching evaluation on behalf of the RSPB under an archaeological condition placed on a planning application for the construction of a reservoir adjacent to the sea wall at Vange Wick. The proposed reservoir aims to improve the wetland habitat for birds and other wildlife.

Trial trenching identified archaeological remains comprising boundaries of several smaller post-medieval fields that were utilised by Vange Wick Farm for the grazing sheep until the 19th century. These have been incorporated into a larger area for cultivation by 1841 and are no longer visible on the surface as they have been levelled and ploughed. Drainage channels identified within an earlier walkover survey conducted by the ECC Historic Environment Branch survived as shallow depressions within the topsoil, c.0.30 m wide. These likely constitute more modern drainage attempts that may also have been softened by plough action. No further archaeological evidence was present to substantiate earlier development of the marshland in this area.

Hand augering, undertaken in conjunction with the trial trenching identified estuarine deposits overlying London Clay at c.2.76 m below current ground level. No palaeosols (old-soil), buried land surfaces, cut features or peat deposits indicative of archaeological horizons survived at depths that would be impacted by the reservoir. A minor deposit containing carbonised plant remains was observed in a localised area of the investigation and likely formed organic material sealed within a hollow of the London Clay c.2.76 m below the ground surface.

The results of this evaluation indicate that the current proposals for the RSPB reservoir will not impact upon significant archaeological remains.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning Background

The Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) carried out the evaluation on behalf of the RSPB, under the terms of an archaeological condition placed on planning consent in accordance with Planning Policy Guideline note 16 (PPG16). The condition was placed following specialist advice from the Essex County Council Heritage Environment Management team (ECC HEM). The archaeological work followed a brief produced by ECC HEM (Connell 2005) and a written scheme of investigation (WSI) prepared by ECC FAU (2006).

1.2 Report and Archive

Copies of this report will be supplied to the client and to the National Monuments Record in Swindon. A version will be uploaded to the Online Access Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) (<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/project/oasis>). Copies of the project archive will be deposited at Southend-on-Sea Borough Museum.

1.3 Abbreviations used in the Report

ECC (Essex County Council), FAU (Field Archaeology Unit), HEM (Historic Environment Management), IFA (Institute of Field Archaeologists), NGR (National Grid Reference), RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds), WSI (Written Scheme of Investigation).

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location, Geology and Topography

The development area is situated on Vange Marsh to the south of Vange Creek (NGR TQ 732 858). Vange Marsh lies on the alluvial plain of the Thames estuary and solid geology consists of London Clay overlain by tidal flat deposits. Currently the land is pasture, relatively flat and used for grazing, though some areas have previously been ploughed. Ground surface heights range between 1.89 and 2.08m OD. The proposed development comprises construction of a reservoir adjacent to the creek, beyond the sea wall, within the scope of the Thames Gateway South Essex Greengrid partnership scheme (Fig 1).

2.2 Historical and Archaeological Background

The archaeological background for this and other parts of the Essex coastal marshland, has previously been given extensive discussion by Medlycott and Gascoyne (unpublished) and

Rippon (2000). In view of this, only a summary of the most pertinent information is presented here.

Essex holds an abundance of archaeological evidence for the exploitation of its coastal marshland from the Mesolithic, now buried under many metres of alluvium, to present day. During the Neolithic the coastal regions of Essex began to approximate the present days, and environmental evidence suggests that the upper dryland slopes started to be cleared of the dominating lime and oak (Hunter 1999). Further archaeological remains suggesting activity beyond this initial stage of landscape management have not yet been exposed.

During the Bronze and Iron Ages, geological and environmental evidence suggests the inter-tidal zone was unsuitable for permanent settlement. Archaeological evidence consists of wooden structures comprising platforms of brushwood and timber together with hurdle bridges and lengths of trackway, all of which may now be present below the current water levels. By the latter stages of the Bronze Age tangible archaeological remains indicate settlement and agriculture expanding along the higher ground of creeks and estuarine terraces, making use of the surrounding resources for grazing, predominantly of sheep, and cultivation of salt tolerant crops such as camelina (oil-seed), barley, flax or oats.

The transition between the Iron Age and Roman periods brought with it an expansion of settlement activity and the extensive production of salt, a marshland industry that has its origins in the middle Bronze Age (Fawn et al 1990). Features known as Red Hills are believed to represent the remains of salt production. Salt production seems to centre on the Blackwater and Colne estuaries of North East Essex (Rippon 2000), further Red Hills survive along a significant portion of Thames estuary and the quiet waters of its creeks though due to coastal erosion or rise in sea levels these are less frequent.

Reclamation of the marsh does not seem to have taken place during the Roman period and salt production seems to have virtually disappeared by the mid to late Roman period, moving inland as sea levels rise and alternative processes and resources become available (Rippon 2000, p.142-143)

The Saxon period sees evidence for seaborne activity along the Thames estuary together with a cluster of Minster, royal *vill* and burh sites, though this activity has as uncertain but potentially substantial influence on the marshland. The middle Saxon sees numerous fish traps constructed in the Blackwater estuary, a feature that was also likely present around the Thames. By the late Saxon period the coastal marshes appear to have principally been used for sheep-pasturage and known occupational remains beyond the major settlement at

Mucking are currently scarce. The location and extent of Medieval settlement is equally difficult to establish. There are two potential settlement indicative place names associated with the Essex marshes 'cote' and 'wick'. Wicks were dairies, cheese-making sheds or shepherds huts from which Vange Wick may derive. Vange Wick Farm no longer survives but 1st to 4th Edition Ordnance Survey maps indicate it was located south of the proposed works. The surrounding landscape would likely have been utilised by the farm for related material requirements. These structures along with further evidence of occupation post dating the Roman period often lay on top of Red Hill deposits (Fawn et al 1990).

The Domesday book (Rumble 1983) records flocks of sheep raised on the marshland pastures supplying wool for the surrounding towns but does not indicate whether the marshes began to be reclaimed or embankments put in place. The construction of sea defences and reclamation of the marsh is thought not to occur until between the 12th and 14th centuries, though precise dating is difficult until the 16th century when documentary evidence begins to appear. However, extensive areas of saltmarsh remained un-banked and used as sheep pasture until the whole area was embanked certainly by the post-medieval period, c.1777. The marshland seems to have been predominantly used for grazing sheep throughout antiquity, though economic factors have occasionally brought about a rise in favour towards cattle in the 17th century. At times areas have been given over to cultivation, specifically during the 19th and 20th centuries.

London was extremely influential over the marshes in recent times and documentary evidence shows the city received the produce of the farmland, marshland pastures, fisheries, decoy ponds and oyster beds situated along this estuarine system. In return, barges brought manure to fertilise the fields. This indicates that widely-established and varying activity would once have existed associated with these industries, though as with many periods of antiquity on the marsh known/ recorded evidence is as yet limited.

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Generally, the aim of the work was to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains within the reservoir area.

The specific aims of the investigation were to:

- establish a date for the surface drainage features which cross the field.

- establish a date for the reclamation of the marsh in the area of proposed works.
- establish if sealed horizons of archaeological potential will be impacted by the proposed works.

4.0 METHODS

The investigation consisted of eleven, 2 x 30 metre, trial trenches placed within the extent of the proposed 1.62 ha reservoir (Fig 1). This comprised a 4 % sample of the area with a further 1% as a contingency in order to examine areas in more detail where necessary.

Machine stripping was carried out to ECC FAU standards under archaeological supervision using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. All spoil heaps were examined for archaeological material. A full photographic record documented the investigation and plans and sections were drawn at the appropriate scale to provide interpretive evidence.

The progressive submergence and re-emergence of low-lying land associated with the rise and fall of the sea levels means early archaeological sites can be sealed by sediments of peat, mud and clay. This can lead to the remains surviving at depth and within various horizons of the estuarine clays.

A geo-archaeological survey was undertaken in conjunction with the trial trenching to identify potential archaeological remains surviving at depth and to access depositional horizons pertaining to the development the estuarine system and the surrounding marsh land. Hand augering was carried out centrally within each trench with samples recovered at intervals of c.0.5 m to a depth of c.3 m. Where significant deposits were encountered, additional auger holes were undertaken to establish their extents.

Standard ECC FAU recording and excavation methods were used. All fieldwork methods and recording conformed to the codes of practice and guidance issued by the IFA (1999) and adhered to regional guidelines (Gurney 2003).

5.0 RESULTS

5.1 Trial trenching

Trench depth ranged between 0.40 to 0.52m consisting of a rich friable topsoil 0.08-0.12m thick overlying an average of 0.26m of subsoil. In several of the trenches, there was

evidence of plough disturbance that comprised the uppermost 0.08m of the subsoil. Subsoil was principally of a sterile nature but chalk fleck inclusions provided evidence that it had been imported and likely dates to the reclamation of the marsh. However, no artefacts to date the deposit were recovered. Estuarine clays defined the limit of each trench c.1.56m OD.

Trial trenching exposed two post-medieval ditches; 404 within Trench 4 and 606 in Trench 6. These were aligned north-south and east-west respectively. Ploughing has removed all surface remains of the boundaries. It seems these ditches denote a previous layout of several smaller fields that have been recently been amalgamated to form one large grazing area.

The preceding archaeological desk-top and walkover survey (Medlycott and Gascoyne, unpublished) identified a series of dark green crop marks and slight depressions in the grass suggesting surface drains spaced roughly 20m apart. These linear features ran north-west/south east towards the creek and the trial trenching targeted several of them. The investigation was unable to dispute or confirm their function as surface drainage. The features survived as no more than shallow depressions within the topsoil, an average of 0.30 m in width, softened by grazing activity and potentially by ploughing. Further sub-surface archaeological features associated with past land use were not present.

5.2 Geo-archaeological survey

A total of thirteen auger holes were made, the results of which are summarised below. The investigation predominantly identified the build-up of estuarine deposits overlying London clays enabling correlations between samples and a model to be generated (Fig 2). A full gazetteer of auger hole results can be found in Appendix 1

Ground surface heights ranged from between 1.86 and 2.33m OD with topsoil averaging depths of between 0.08 and 0.19m. Below this survived subsoil of which the upper 0.12m had been disturbed by modern intrusive ploughing, leaving between 0.10 and 0.21m of undisturbed subsoil overlying the uppermost estuarine clay deposits at 1.56m OD. The upper clay was a mixed mid brown-grey material with orange and blue/grey mottling from rooting throughout. Below was darker grey brown clay at an average of -0.46m OD that sealed moist, firm London Clay at -0.80m OD.

The only visible organic remains were localised and comprised carbonised plant fragments within a dark organic silty clay band > 0.05m in thickness sandwiched between the London Clay and estuarine clays. The augering results suggest this material survives in a natural hollow within the clays (Fig 2). The deposit was observed within the central and northern auger hole undertaken within Trench 3 at a depth of c.-0.80mOD or 2.36m below the ground surface. A further auger hole at the southern end of the trench established that the deposit did not continue. It seems likely that throughout the area similar pockets of organic material may survive where hollows have been created in the clays. These likely represent low potential for archaeological remains of significance. No further pockets of this organic deposit were identified within the evaluated area.

6.0 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL MATERIAL

By Joyce Compton

Small groups of finds were recovered from a total of three contexts, across two of the excavated trenches. All of the material has been recorded by count and weight, in grams, by context. Full details can be found in Appendix 2. The few datable finds are post-medieval. The assemblage is described by category below.

Pottery

Two small sherds of pottery were recovered. A body sherd from a post-medieval or modern flowerpot was retrieved from the fill of ditch 404 in Trench 4. The rim sherd from a press-moulded platter or dish was found in the fill of ditch 606 in Trench 6. The vessel rim has a scalloped edge and internal yellow slip with brown feathered decoration. This type of vessel was most common during the 18th and early 19th centuries.

Brick and tile

Two pieces of roof tile and two small fragments of brick, weighing a total of 82g, were recovered from Trench 4. The brick and one laminated piece of roof tile were found in the topsoil. The fill of ditch 404 produced a second larger piece of roof tile. All of the fragments are post-medieval.

Animal bone

The topsoil in Trench 4 produced a tibia shaft from a large mammal. Numerous elements from the skeleton of a single juvenile sheep/goat were recovered from the fill of ditch 606 in Trench 6. Most regions of the skeleton are represented. Few of the bones had fused and there were a number of loose epiphyses present. The remains suggest the burial, or more likely, the accidental death, of a very young animal.

Since the finds recovered are all likely to be relatively recent, no further work is required and nothing needs to be retained.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

Trial Trenching

The archaeological evaluation supports historical evidence of post-medieval activity on the marsh but has identified no significant archaeological remains of greater antiquity. The subsoil remains undated but provides evidence for the importation of soils to facilitate a stage in reclamation of the marshland. This probably post-dates the construction of the sea wall embankment thought to occur in the 18th century. The two post-medieval field boundary ditches exposed within Trenches 4 and 6 represent sub-division of the landscape opposing the current field layout. Neither appear on the earliest available detailed tithe map of 1841 (D/CT374B) or subsequent editions of OS maps. Documentary evidence cannot confirm when they were construction but both seem to have been backfilled at similar times prior to 1841. Survival of sheep remains from one of these ditches suggests that at this time they were still being grazed on the land. Backfilling and modern ploughing has removed all surface signs of these features.

After 1841, several fields seem to have been merged to create larger expanses of land, probably for cattle or cultivation. Cultivation of the land is more likely as there is evidence of ploughing and no animal bones were recovered beyond those found in the backfilled ditch.

No further archaeological evidence was present to substantiate earlier development or reclamation of the marshland in this area. Features that were visible on the surface seem to represent relatively recent drainage attempts and do not survive as more than shallow depressions within the topsoil.

Augering identified that estuarine clays, deposited due to rising and falling sea levels around coastal Essex overlay London clay, which was present at an average depth of - 0.80 m OD, c.2.76 m below the ground surface. Organic remains were recovered from a localised area around Trench 3 at a depth of c.2.36 m below the current ground surface and beyond the impact depth of the proposed works. The deposit likely occupied a hollow within the clays, an interpretation supported by development of the deposit model (Fig 2).

8.0 ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS

Documentary evidence suggests that Vange Wick farm was constructed after 1777. The name implies that it was linked to the dairy industry, likely producing the hard cheese from sheep's milk that Essex was renowned for. Archaeological evidence suggests that management of the land during the early stages of the farm comprised establishment of small fields coupled with the construction of several small stock management enclosures, two of which still survive as earthworks in the corners of adjacent fields. Sheep grazed in the fields until a date approaching 1841 and the farm resisted the rise in favour of cattle and cultivation seen from the 17th century onwards. However, prior to 1841 the farm may either have expanded operations or more likely reverted to growth of salt resistant crops, a product that would require open areas of land. Cultivation may have continued into the latter part of the 19th century when a rise in grain prices could have meant the farm fell on hard times and the area left fallow for a period. Finally, the agricultural depression in the early 20th century likely signalled the end of Vange Wick Farm at a time when small farms were being amalgamated and much of the marsh land reverted to pasture. Now there are no above ground physical remains of Vange Wick Farm or associated occupation. However, It is likely that approaching the farm the frequency of archaeological features and deposits will increase and help further define the development of the area.

Unfortunately the investigation was unable to further the current understanding or provide a date for any stage of reclamation of the marsh land and no archaeological remains of greater antiquity were exposed relating to prehistoric salt production and associated features or deposits.

Augering uncovered no palaeosols, buried land surfaces, cut features or peat deposits at depths that would be impacted by the proposed works. Similar pockets of the organic remains identified may survive throughout the area but only a basic survey was undertaken and hand augering provided insufficient information to confirm wider archaeological or historical potential or significance.

The investigation did not establish the presence of sealed ancient channels or a previous course of Vange Creek. There is potential for an appropriate sedimentological and pedological study, but further archaeological work is unnecessary as evidence suggests low potential for archaeological remains in the immediate vicinity.

9.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The ECC Field Archaeology Unit thanks the RSPB for funding of the project. The co-operation of Miss Muriel Clarke is acknowledged. Pat Connell and Richard Havis of ECC HEM monitored the investigation on behalf of the local planning authority. Patrick Allen managed the project. Matthew Pocock carried out the fieldwork with assistance from Dave Smith, Adrian Turner, and Chris Down. Andrew Lewsey produced the digital illustrations. All finds were processed by Phil McMichael and assessed by Joyce Compton.

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APPENDIX 1: FIELDWORK DATA

Table of archaeological contexts;

Trench Number	Context Number	Type	Description	Level (m OD)	Depth (m)
4	404	Cut	Ditch	1.85	0.30
4	405	Deposit	Fill of 404		
6	606	Cut	Ditch	1.83	0.36
6	607	Deposit	Fill of 606		

Within each trench topsoil and subsoil were respectively assigned a context number of 01 or 02 together with the trench number as a prefix code, i.e. in Trench 2, topsoil would have been 201 and subsoil 202. While essentially archaeological contexts, these have been omitted from the table above. Depths can be calculated using the augerhole results below. Both were of consistent nature across the site and descriptions are within the results section of the report.

Concise augerhole results;

Trench Number	Auger Position		Topsoil (Ground surface) (m OD)	Subsoil (m OD)	Orange/Brown Clay (m OD)	Grey/Brown Clay (m OD)	Blue/Grey Clay (m OD)
	X axis	Y axis					
1	573114.7	185809.4	2.08	1.89	1.68		-0.25
2	573123	185757	1.86	1.74	1.53	-0.04	
3	573148	185775.5	1.92	1.8	1.64	-0.44	-1.44
4	573162.5	185745	2.02	1.92	1.74	-0.76	
5	573198	185769	2.06	1.94	1.82	-0.39	
6	573203	185742	2.07	1.95	1.72	-0.76	-1.26
7	573247.5	185746	1.94	1.86	1.64		0.1
8	573202	185710	2.05	1.95	1.78	-0.41	-0.91
9	573234	185702	1.97	1.88	1.71		-0.47
10	573197	185682	1.87	1.78	0.47	-0.53	
11	573219.9	185664.4	1.89	1.76	1.59	-0.41	

N.B.

The deposit model has been produced using Surfer for Windows Version 6

Contour and surface plots were produced from irregularly spaced data by using the geostatistical gridding method of *Kriging*: this is a combination of three types of mathematical modelling the variogram model, the drift type and the nugget effect.

Trench co-ordinates;

Trench 1	X= 573106.3	Y= 185820.1
	X= 573126.0	Y= 185797.5
Trench 2	X= 573122.4	Y= 185772.6
	X= 573122.4	Y= 185742.6
Trench 3	X= 573148.6	Y= 185793.7
	X= 573148.6	Y= 185763.7
Trench 4	X= 573148.5	Y= 185745.4
	X= 573178.5	Y= 185745.4
Trench 5	X= 573183.7	Y= 185769.3
	X= 573213.7	Y= 185769.3
Trench 6	X= 573203.8	Y= 185758.5
	X= 573203.8	Y= 185728.5
Trench 7	X= 573233.2	Y= 185746.5
	X= 573263.2	Y= 185746.5
Trench 8	X= 573187.8	Y= 185710.7
	X= 573217.8	Y= 185710.7
Trench 9	X= 573234.7	Y= 185718.8
	X= 573234.7	Y= 185688.8
Trench 10	X= 573197.3	Y= 185697.3
	X= 573197.3	Y= 185667.3
Trench 11	X= 573231.3	Y= 185675.0
	X= 573209.3	Y= 185654.6

APPENDIX 2: FINDS DATA

Finds by context

Context	Feature	Count	Weight	Description	Date
401	Topsoil	1	78	Animal bone; tibia shaft, large mammal	-
		3	20	Brick and tile fragments	Post med.
405	404	1	62	Roof tile fragment	Post med.
		1	4	Pottery; body sherd, flowerpot	Post med.
607	606	62	76	Animal bone; juvenile sheep/goat – skull, rib and vertebra fragments, scapula, glenoid cavity, humerus, tibia, metapodials x 4, astragalus and feet bones, molar, various epiphyses	-
		1	4	Pottery; rim sherd, press-moulded dish, internal yellow slip with brown feathered decoration	Post med.

APPENDIX 3: CONTENTS OF ARCHIVE

SITE NAME; Vange Wick (East) Reservoir, Essex

Index to the Archive

File containing:

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Brief for Evaluation
- 1.2 Specification for Evaluation

2. Research Archive

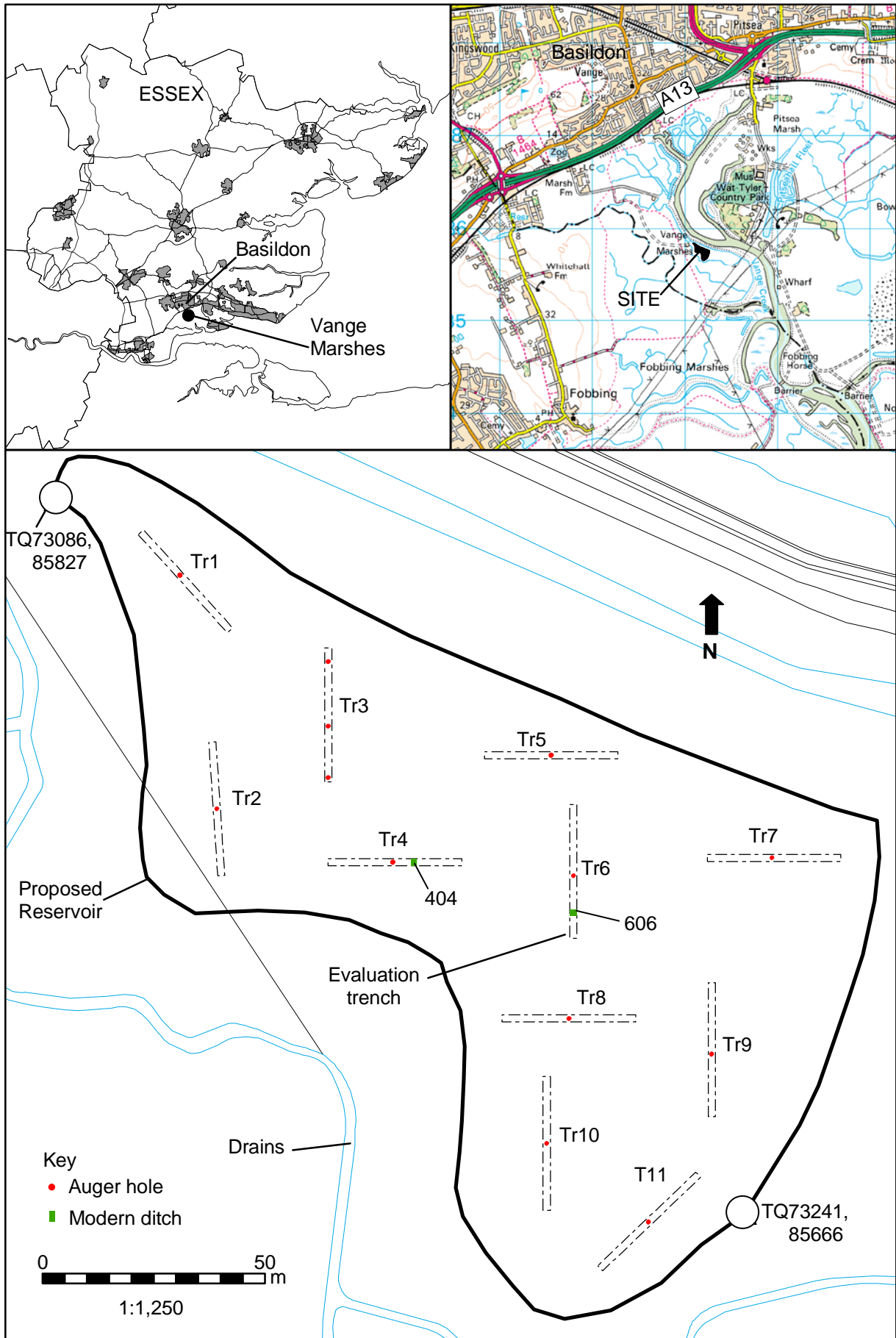
- 2.1 Published Report
- 2.2 Client Report
- 2.3 Analytical Reports
 - 2.3.1 Finds Report
- 2.4 Catalogues
 - 2.4.1 Context Finds Record
 - 2.4.2 Finds Catalogue
 - 2.4.3 Environmental Catalogue
- 2.5 Computer Disk

3. Site Archive

- 3.1 Context Index
- 3.2 Context Record Register
- 3.3 Original Context Records
- 3.4 Soil Sample Register
- 3.5 Soil Sample Record Sheets
- 3.6 Levels Register
- 3.7 Sample Register
- 3.8 Survey Data
- 3.9 Photographic Register
- 3.10 Site Photographic Record
- 3.11 Miscellaneous maps and plans

APPENDIX 4: EHER SUMMARY

Site name/Address: Vange Wick (East) Reservoir, Essex	
Parish: Basildon	District: Basildon
NGR: TQ 732 858	Site Code: BAVW06
Type of Work: Archaeological evaluation by trial trenching	Site Director/Group: M.Pocock ECC FAU
Date of Work: 13th to the 20th of February	Size of Area Investigated: 11 trenches covering an area of 1.62 ha
Location of Finds/Curating Museum: Southend-on-Sea	Funding source: RSPB
Further Seasons Anticipated?: Uncertain	Related HCR Nos.: N/A
Final Report: Yes	
Periods Represented: Post Medieval	
SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:	
<p>Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) carried out the evaluation on behalf the RSPB prior to construction of a reservoir on land to the south of Vange Creek, on Vange Marshes, Essex.</p> <p>Trial trenching identified archaeological remains comprising boundaries of several smaller post-medieval fields that were utilised by Vange Wick Farm for the grazing sheep until the 19th century. These have been incorporated into a larger area for cultivation by 1841 and are no longer visible on the surface as they have been levelled and ploughed. Drainage channels identified within an earlier walkover survey conducted by the ECC Historic Environment Branch survived as shallow depressions within the topsoil, c.0.30 m wide. These likely constitute more modern drainage attempts that may also have been softened by plough action. No further archaeological evidence was present to substantiate earlier development of the marshland in this area.</p> <p>Hand augering, undertaken in conjunction with the trial trenching identified estuarine deposits overlying London Clay at c.2.76 m below current ground level. No palaeosols (old-soil), buried land surfaces, cut features or peat deposits indicative of archaeological horizons survived at depths that would be impacted by the reservoir. A minor deposit containing carbonised plant remains was observed in a localised area of the investigation and likely formed organic material sealed within a hollow of the London Clay c.2.76 m below the ground surface.</p> <p>The results of this evaluation indicate that the current proposals for the RSPB reservoir will not impact upon significant archaeological remains.</p>	
Previous Summaries/Reports: N/A	
Author of Summary: Matthew Pocock	Date of Summary: March 2006



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Fig.1 Trench locations

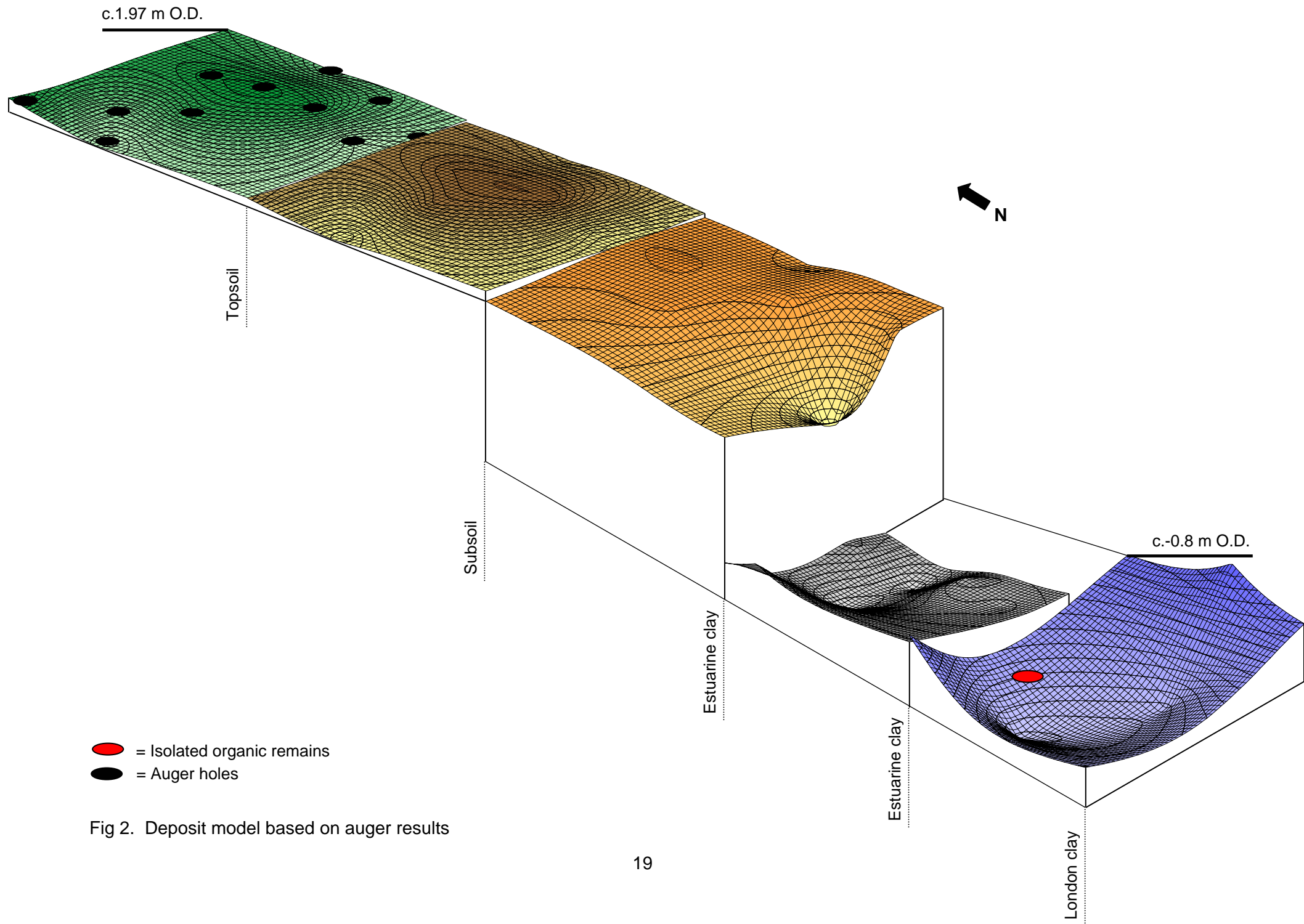


Fig 2. Deposit model based on auger results