

**MONT HOUSE  
STANSTED MOUNTFITCHET**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
EVALUATION BY TRIAL TRENCHING**



**Essex County Council**

**Field Archaeology Unit**

**MAY 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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**MONT HOUSE**  
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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL**  
**EVALUATION BY TRIAL TRENCHING**

**SUMMARY**

**Client:** Prime Crest Ltd

**NGR:** TL 515 252

**Site Code:** SMMH06

**Oasis Accession Number:** essexcou1-13888

**Project No:** 1614

**Date of Fieldwork:** 19th to the 21st April

*Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) carried out an evaluation by trial trenching on behalf of Prime Crest Ltd under an archaeological condition placed on planning consent for development of residential properties on land associated with Mont House, High Lane, Stansted Mountfitchet. The proposed development lies on a valley slope opposing Stansted Mountfitchet Castle.*

*19th century cartographic evidence shows that the grounds of Mont House were not as extensive as they are now or have been in recent centuries. It seems clear that towards the end of the 19th century the grounds were extended and with this a series of three terraces were constructed against the valley slope. Elements of the terracing still survive in the northern part of the development area. Residual medieval pottery came from the embanked soil that formed the terraces.*

*The trial trenches were primarily located around the central terrace. Heavy rooting had disturbed much of the area and trenches generally confirmed evidence of recent removal of trees and other large vegetation. Archaeological remains comprised modern garden structures and isolated pits. Sample excavation of these remains recovered residual material dating to between the 17th and 19th century. These features and deposits were associated with the recent 20th century occupation of Mont House and either overlay or cut into the embanked material that formed each terrace edge.*

*Prior to the construction of Mont House the area was cultivated and occupation does not appear to have extended to this point along High Lane until the construction of Mont House. However, a date for the construction of property was not established within the scope of this investigation. It is clear terracing has caused truncation to the valley slopes by up to 1m. However, it is likely that any features or deposits of significant size would have survived if present. It is therefore concluded that no significant remains of earlier dates had ever been present within the site*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Planning Background**

The Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) carried out the evaluation on behalf of Prime Crest Ltd under the terms of an archaeological condition placed on planning consent in accordance with Planning Policy Guideline note 16 (PPG16). The condition was placed on planning application UTT/0076/05 by Uttlesford District Council Planning Department following specialist advice from the Essex County Council Historic Environment Management team (ECC HEM), as the development site lies in an area with potential to contain archaeological remains. The application is for residential development comprising five new houses, associated garages and an access road on land once associated with and adjoining Mont House adjacent to High Lane, Stansted Mountfitchet.

The archaeological work followed a brief produced by the Essex County Council Historic Environment Management team (ECC HEM 2006) and the 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, ECC HEM and the Essex County Council Historic Environment Record (ECC HER). A version will be uploaded to the Online Access Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) (<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/project/oasis>). The project archive, including two copies of the report, will be deposited at Saffron Walden Museum.

## **2.0 BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Location, Geology and Topography**

Stansted Mountfitchet is a village just inside the border of Essex with Hertfordshire, 30 miles north of London and north of Bishops Stortford.

The proposed development area is located in the grounds of Mont House, situated alongside High Lane, north of Brewery Lane and north-west of the scheduled monument of Stansted Mountfitchet castle. The castle sits atop a promontory flanked to the north-west and south-east by converging valleys. Stansted Mountfitchet village centre occupies the mouth of these two valleys.

Mont House and its associated grounds lie on the north-western valley slope opposite the castle remains. The ground rises from the road frontage in the west to the site boundary in the east. The drift Geology comprises gravels overlain by glacial silts towards the base of the valley slope.

The land proposed for development covers an area of 0.57ha and comprises landscaped gardens originally associated with Mont House but more recently split between and shared with several nearby properties. The area is predominantly grassed, though large trees, shrubs, meandering garden paths and low walls sub-divide and bound the plot. The northern half of the development area has been terraced to counter the steep natural slope. The southern half rises gently from Brewery Lane to merge with the terraced area.

## **2.2 Historical and Archaeological Background**

The proposed development lies 250m to the north-west of the scheduled medieval motte and bailey castle (EHER 4551), though no archaeological investigation of the castle has taken place beyond non-intrusive geophysical survey and observation of illicit machine trenching in 1979. Artefacts recovered from within and around the castle (EHER 4552, 18557) allude to previous activity on the hill top from as early as Roman period. The surrounding landscape may reflect similar early settlement.

The castle most likely formed the focus for settlement during the 11th century when it is thought to have been constructed with investment by the Mountfitchet family. It was destroyed in 1215, at a time when it was held by Richard de Mountfitchet, and was not rebuilt. This may have had an adverse effect on any associated settlement present at the time.

Little archaeological work has been carried out in the area of the associated village, though it is likely that High Lane, a continuation of Lower Street, forms one of the original streets. Several listed buildings dating between the 17th and 19th century, occupy either side of Lower Lane and it was possible that tenement plots together with associated structures and activity might be found within the proposed development.

The plan of Mont House and its associated grounds has been documented in early edition ordinance survey maps dating from the 19th century. The maps show a structure occupying a rectangular plot of land with its longest edge facing High Lane. This plot is about half the size of the current grounds. Backing the property are open fields. Recently, Mont House was declared an unsafe structure and on the 3 July 2005 subject to an arson attack. The

grounds have remained untended for several years, though recently a number of trees and shrubs have been uprooted. No further information is known about the construction and development of the house and its grounds.

## **3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **3.1 General Objectives**

Generally, the aim of the work was to ‘preserve, by record, the archaeological deposits that will be destroyed by the housing development’ (ECC HEM 2006).

### **3.2 Research Objectives**

The research objectives for the project were in line with those laid out in *Research and Archaeology: a Framework for the Eastern Counties, 2. research agenda and strategy* (Brown and Glazebrook 2000).

The main research aim was to record archaeological evidence that would contribute to further understanding of the date, form, and function of early medieval to post-medieval settlement characteristics, development, and associated activity.

The specific objectives of the investigation were to identify:

- The presence and nature of Roman remains
- The presence and nature of medieval and post-medieval deposits
- Medieval and post-Medieval structural evidence
- Medieval and post-Medieval property boundaries
- Evidence of back-land craft/industrial activity
- Evidence of dating, trade, distribution networks and socio-economic factors from the artefactual assemblages

## **4.0 METHODS**

The archaeological investigation comprised mechanical excavation of 10 trenches positioned to evaluate any archaeological remains within the proposed development areas. Trenches were located along the line of the access road and within the footprints of the new houses (Fig 1).

All mechanical excavation was carried out under archaeological supervision using a JCB fitted with a toothless bucket.

All surfaces were sufficiently cleaned to ensure that any features present were visible and spoil heaps were examined for archaeological material. Archaeological features and deposits were excavated using hand tools and finds were collected and bagged by context. A full photographic record was maintained throughout the investigation. Plans and sections were drawn at the appropriate scale to document the remains.

The work was carried out according to regional standards in field archaeology. 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 Terracing (Figs 2 and 4)

Generally, the trial trenching found the natural gravels and glacial silts to be closer to the surface than expected. Trenches averaged a depth of between 0.12 and 0.42m and revealed that the natural was overlain by a grey/brown silty subsoil which in turn was sealed by topsoil.

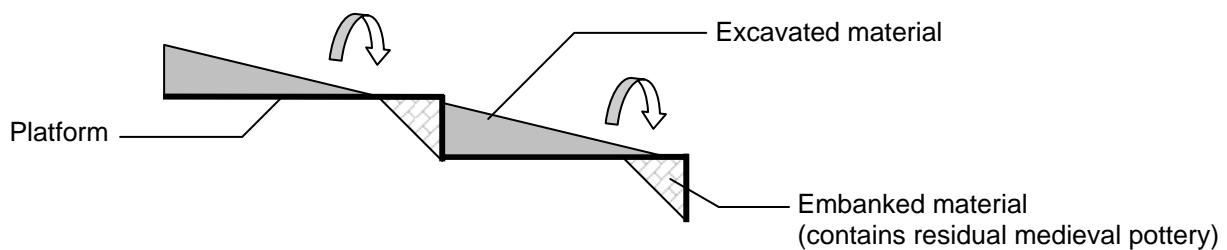
Adjacent to High Lane the natural comprised glacial silts that were encountered at a depth of 75.68m OD. These apparently overlay the coarse mixed gravels that become predominant further up the slope. Subsoil survived intermittently. In many trenches subsoil was completely absent, where as in Trench 5 it survived at an depth approaching 0.75m. The topsoil was dark, humic and friable. It ranged between 0.08 and 0.18m in depth and its characteristics were comparable across much of the area.

The southern and northern halves of the site are markedly different topographically. At the northern end of the site three terraces survive that form broad platforms against the east-west valley slope.

The platform adjacent to the road is the widest at almost 20m and ground surface levels range around 78m OD. Mont House lies within this lower terrace, cut through the valley slope in order to access High Lane.

The central platform approaches 15m in width and surface heights are around 80m OD. Trenches 1 to 5 were located on and over this central platform. The upper terrace was covered in dense vegetation and, as such, observations were restricted.

The platforms have been constructed by excavation of the valley slope and embankment of that material, as shown below. The embanked material has predominantly derived from the subsoil 2, though it also comprised natural gravels 3.



Trench as 3 and 5 give good indications of the effect terracing has had on the valley slope. Trench 3 was heavily rooted but in spite of this a thin layer of subsoil was observed, overlain by 0.12m of topsoil. Clearly the area had been significantly reduced in height, potentially causing truncation to any archaeological remains that would have been present. Trench 5 incorporated the edge of the terrace and the result of the reduction and embankment of deposits could be seen (Fig 4). It appears that terracing has caused up to 1m of truncation to some areas of the valley slope. Residual pottery fragments were recovered from the embanked material 27 in Trench 5. These dated to between the 12th and 14th centuries.

## 5.2 Archaeological Remains

The remains of a structure was exposed in Trenches 1 and 2 (Fig 3). This comprised a series of rough chalk and sand surfaces 7, 13 and 16, coupled with robbed-out internal and external walls 5, 14, 32 and 33. Two post-holes 11 and 12 survived which presumably represent internal supports. It is unclear whether the structure was associated with Mont House or with a neighbouring property, but it is likely that it was a green house or similar garden structure. A pathway, 4 and 17, constructed of pea grit and small gravels, ran north/south alongside the structure.

In Trench 4 a single isolated pit 21 survived, that cut the embanked subsoil 23. Artefacts recovered from the fill of 21 dated to between the 17th and 19th century. Trench 5 comprised modern features. Feature 25 appeared to represent either the foundation cut for a narrow retaining wall that had since been removed or a service trench that similarly has been

robbed. Feature 24 was shallow and filled with topsoil. It and may have represented a gully aligned north-south that predated the terracing.

Very few archaeological remains survived at the southern end of the site. The entire area was heavily rooted and had clearly been recently landscaped. Surviving features included pathways and low retaining walls of 20th century date. Prior to the archaeological investigation several large trees had been uprooted and evidence of this was recognised in several of the trenches. Archaeological remains comprised a single post-medieval pit 28 isolated in Trench 9 and a small undated gully 30 aligned north-south in Trench 11. Significantly, gully 30 was filled with subsoil that looks to have derived from the levelling of terraces in this area.

## **6.0 FINDS**

**by Joyce Compton**

Small groups of finds, all fragmentary, were recovered from nine contexts. All of the material has been recorded by count and weight, in grams, by context. Full details can be found in Appendix 2. The medieval pottery was identified by Helen Walker.

Almost all of the finds are post-medieval in date, probably spanning the 17th to early 20th centuries. These comprise roof tile and brick fragments, bottle glass and pottery. The latest (modern) pieces came from the fill of robber cut 32 and from the subsoil 2. The presence of slate and clinker fragments also suggests a relatively recent date.

Pottery which might indicate earlier activity in the vicinity was, however, recovered from two contexts, albeit residual. A sherd of sandy orange ware, with a date range of 13th to 16th century, was retrieved from the subsoil. Layer 27 produced three small sherds of medieval pottery; two sherds of medieval Harlow ware and one of medieval coarse ware.

The fragmentary nature of the finds, and their relatively recent date, precludes the necessity for further work. The small sherds of modern pottery, the slate, glass and clinker have been discarded following recording. The remainder of the assemblage need not be kept beyond the archiving stage.

## **7.0 CONCLUSIONS**

The trial trenching was primarily located around the central terrace and archaeological remains comprised modern garden structures and isolated pits containing residual material dating to between the 17th and 19th century. These features and deposits were associated with the 20th century occupation of Mont House and either overlay or cut into the embanked material that formed the terrace edge. No archaeological remains were found relating to the early development of Mont House or the prior land-use. Heavy rooting had disturbed much of the area and the majority of trenches confirmed evidence of recent removal of trees and other large vegetation. Modern garden landscaping has removed all trace of the terraces at the southern end of the development area.

No pre-19th century remains were recorded. However, residual pottery sherds dating to between the 12th and 14th century from were found mixed in with the embanked subsoil that made up the front edge of the central platform.

## **8.0 ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS**

19th century maps show that the grounds of Mont House were not as extensive as they are now or have been in recent centuries. It seems clear that towards the end of the 19th century the grounds were extended and with this a series of three terraces approximately 10-15m wide were constructed against the valley slopes, elements of which still survive in the northern part of the development area.

The lower terrace represents the area occupied by the house and its original grounds. It is here that any associated occupational remains would likely have survived. Unfortunately, the southern end of this lower terrace was heavily landscaped in recent years and trenching identified no significant or datable archaeological features or deposits. The evaluation did not extend onto the northern end of the lower terrace.

It is clear that the terracing has caused heavy disturbance to the valley slopes. Areas of the slope have been truncated by up to one metre. However, it is likely that any features or deposits of significant size would have survived if ever present. It appears that occupation did not extend this far along High Lane until the construction of Mont House itself, perhaps around the 17th century. Prior to this the slopes are likely to have been cultivated, hence the survival of small sherds of residual medieval pottery mixed with the embanked subsoil.

A secure date for the construction of Mont House was unable to be obtained within the scope of the investigation and this would only have been achievable by investigation of the building itself.

## **9.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The ECC Field Archaeology Unit thanks Prime Crest Ltd for their assistance and funding of the project. Patrick Allen managed the project, Matthew Pocock carried out the fieldwork. Andrew Lewsey produced the digital illustrations; all finds were processed by Phil McMichael and assessed by Joyce Compton. Richard Havis of the ECC HEM monitored the evaluation on behalf of the local planning authority.

## **10.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- |                           |      |  |
|---------------------------|------|--|
| Brown N &<br>Glazebrook J | 2000 | Research and Archaeology: a Framework for the Eastern<br>Counties, 2. research agenda and strategy, East Anglian<br>Archaeol. Occ. Paper 8 |
| ECC FAU                   | 2006 | Written Scheme of investigation for Mont House,<br>Stansted Mountfitchet   |
| ECC HEM                   | 2006 | Archaeological Trenching and Excavation at Mont<br>House, Stansted Mountfitchet  |
| Gurney D                  | 2003 | Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England,<br>East Anglian Archaeol. Occ. Paper 14  |

## APPENDIX 1: FIELDWORK DATA

### Context information

Context No.	Trench No	Type	Description	Depth/ Thickness (m)
1		Layer	Topsoil	0.08 – 0.26m
2		Layer	Subsoil	up to 1 metre
3		Layer	Natural	Unknown
4	2	Surface	Pea grit and small gravel path	0.06
5	2	Cut	Foundation trench fro a robbed out wall	Unexcavated
6	2	Deposit	fo 005 - backfill	Unexcavated
7	1 and 2	Surface	Chalk surface heavily disturbed by rooting	Unexcavated
8	1	Cut	Foundation trench fro a robbed out wall	Unexcavated
9	1	Deposit	fo 008 - packing	Unexcavated
10	1	Deposit	fo 033 - backfill	Unexcavated
11	1	Posthole	Filled by slumped 009	Unexcavated
12	1	Posthole	Filled by slumped 009	Unexcavated
13	1	Surface	Sandy floor surface	Unexcavated
14	1	Cut	Foundation trench fro a robbed out wall	Unexcavated
15	1	Deposit	fo- 014 - backfill	Unexcavated
16	1	Surface	Compacted chalk floor	Unexcavated
17	1	Surface	Pea grit and small gravel path - same as 004	Unexcavated
18	1	Cut	Foundation trench for a robbed out wall	Unexcavated
19	1	Deposit	fo 018 - packing	Unexcavated
20	1	Deposit	fo 032 - backfill	Unexcavated
21	4	Pit	Sub circular pit sealed by topsoil and filled by 022	0.18
22	4	Deposit	fo 021 - backfill	0.18
23	4	Layer	Banked subsoil mix	0.52
24	5	Cut	Linear of unknown function filled by 001	0.04
25	5	Cut	Robbed out foundation trench or service trench cutting the topsoil and filled by 026	0.34
26	5	Deposit	fo 025 - backfill	0.34
27	5	Layer	Banked subsoil mix	0.78
28	9	Pit	Circular, flat base, steep sided sealed by topsoil filled by 029	0.48
29	9	Deposit	fo 028 - backfill	0.48
30	11	Cut	Shallow linear of unknown function filled by 002	0.16
31	10 and 11	Layer	Glacial silts overlying gravel at eastern edge of site.	Unknown
32	1	Cut	Robber cut	Unknown
33	1	Cut	Robber cut	Unknown

### Trench co-ordinates

Trench 1	X = 551512.992	Y = 225325.345
	X = 551513.233	Y = 225314.979
Trench 2	X = 551512.992	Y = 225325.345
	X = 551519.187	Y = 225325.489
Trench 3	X = 551504.002	Y = 225312.070
	X = 551502.610	Y = 225292.118
Trench 4	X = 551514.949	Y = 225303.026
	X = 551514.241	Y = 225289.070
Trench 5	X = 551509.123	Y = 225281.599
	X = 551517.952	Y = 225279.826
Trench 7	X = 551487.942	Y = 225264.961
	X = 551498.021	Y = 225264.760
Trench 8	X = 551487.942	Y = 225264.961
	X = 551487.833	Y = 225255.644
Trench 9	X = 551502.081	Y = 225265.265
	X = 551499.467	Y = 225246.094
Trench 10	X = 551515.720	Y = 225248.838
	X = 551512.759	Y = 225234.962
Trench 11	X = 551502.266	Y = 225235.705
	X = 551512.759	Y = 225234.962

## APPENDIX 2: FINDS DATA

Context	Feature	Count	Weight	Description	Date
2	Subsoil	3 1 1	86 2 16	Roof tile fragments Pottery; rim sherd, ?plate, white earthenware with blue edging (Discarded) Pottery; body sherd, sandy orange ware	Post med. Modern 13th to 16th C
7	Layer	1 2	12 140	Slate fragment (Discarded) Brick fragments	- Post med.
10	33	1 2	116 56	Brick fragment Roof tile fragments	Post med. Post med.
13	Layer	1	18	Bottle glass body sherd, dark green (Discarded)	Post med.
20	32	1 2	2 244	Pottery; rim sherd, ?plate, white earthenware with blue transfer-printing (Discarded) Pottery; rim and base sherds, dish - same large vessel, brown earthenware, dark brown glaze	Modern Modern
22	21	3 1 3	10 8 42	Coke/clinker (Discarded) Tile fragment Pottery; body sherds, PMRE, inc flower-pot	- Post med. 17th to 19th C
27	Layer	1 2 1	24 6 2	Roof tile fragment Pottery; body sherds, medieval Harlow ware Pottery; body sherd, medieval coarse ware	Post med. 13th-14th C 12th to 14th C
29	28	1 1 2	6 10 12	Roof tile fragment Pottery, base sherd, plate, porcelain Pottery; body sherds, PMRE	Post med. 18th-19th C 17th to 19th C
35	Finds	1	26	Roof tile fragment	Post med.

## **APPENDIX 3: CONTENTS OF ARCHIVE**

### **SITE NAME; Mont House, Stansted Mountfitchet**

#### **Index to the Archive**

File containing:

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Brief for Evaluation
- 1.2 Written scheme of investigation

#### **2. Research Archive**

- 2.1 Client Report
- 2.2 Analytical Reports
  - 2.2.1 Finds Report
- 2.3 Catalogues
  - 2.3.1 Context Finds Record
  - 2.3.2 Finds Catalogue
- 2.4 Computer Disk

#### **3. Site Archive**

- 3.1 Context Index
- 3.2 Context Record Register
- 3.3 Original Context Records 1 to 35
- 3.4 Drawing Registers
  - 3.4.1 Plans Register
  - 3.4.2 Sections Register
- 3.5 Levels Register
- 3.6 Survey Data
- 3.7 Photographic Register
- 3.8 Site Photographic Record
- 3.9 Miscellaneous maps and plans

The finds occupy less than one box.

## APPENDIX 5: EHER SUMMARY

<b>Site name/Address:</b> Mont House, Stansted Mountfitchet	
<b>Oasis Accession Number:</b> essexcou1-13888	
<b>Parish:</b> Uttlesford	<b>District:</b> Uttlesford
<b>NGR:</b> TL 515 252	<b>Site Code:</b> SMMH06
<b>Type of Work:</b> Trial Trenching (sample)	<b>Site Director/Group:</b> M.Pocock of the ECC FAU
<b>Date of Work:</b> 18th to the 21st April 2006	<b>Size of Area Investigated:</b> 283 square metres
<b>Location of Finds/Curating Museum:</b> Saffron Walden	<b>Funding source:</b> Developer (Prime Crest Ltd)
<b>Further Seasons Anticipated?:</b> Yes	<b>Related HER Nos.:</b> n/a
<b>Final Report:</b> Yes	
<b>Periods Represented:</b> Medieval and post-medieval	
<b>SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:</b>	
Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) carried out evaluation by trial trenching on behalf of Prime Crest Ltd under an archaeological condition placed on planning consent for development of residential properties on land associated with Mont House, Stansted Mountfitchet (UTT/0076/05). The proposed development lies on the valley slope opposing Stansted Mountfitchet Castle alongside High Lane with access via Brewery Lane (TL 515 252).  19th Century maps show that the property boundaries of Mont House were not as extensive as they are now or have been in recent centuries. It seems clear that towards the end of the 19th Century the grounds were extended and with this a series of three terraces were constructed against the valley slope. Elements of the terracing still survive in the northern part of the development area.  The lower terrace represents the area occupied by the house and its original grounds. It is here that any associated occupational remains would likely have survived. Unfortunately, the southern end of this lower terrace was heavily landscaped in recent years and trenching in this area identified no significant or datable archaeological features or deposits. The evaluation did not extend onto the northern end of the lower terrace.  Primarily the trial trenches were located around the central terrace. Heavy rooting had disturbed much of the area and generally trenches confirmed evidence of recent removal of trees and other large vegetation. Archaeological remains comprised modern garden structures and isolated pits. Sample excavation of these remains recovered residual material dating to between the 17th and 19th century. These features and deposits were associated with the recent 20th century occupation of Mont House and either overlay or cut into the embanked material that formed each terrace edge. No archaeological remains were found alluding to early development of Mont House.  Artefacts of medieval date were found mixed in with the embanked subsoil that made up the front edge of the central platform. The un-abraded nature of the pottery recovered suggested that it has not moved far but sherd size implies activity was not extensive or intensive.  It is clear that the terracing has caused heavy. Areas of the slope have been truncated by up to a metre. However, it is likely that any features or deposits of significant size would have survived if	

present.

It appears that occupation did not extend this far along High Lane until the construction of Mont House itself perhaps around the 17th century. Prior to this the slopes are likely to have been cultivated hence the survival of small sherds of residual medieval pottery mixed with the embanked subsoil.

Mont House was unable to be obtained within the scope of the investigation and this would only have been achievable with a record being made of the building.

**Previous Summaries/Reports:** None

<b>Author of Summary:</b> Matthew Pocock	<b>Date of Summary:</b> May 2006
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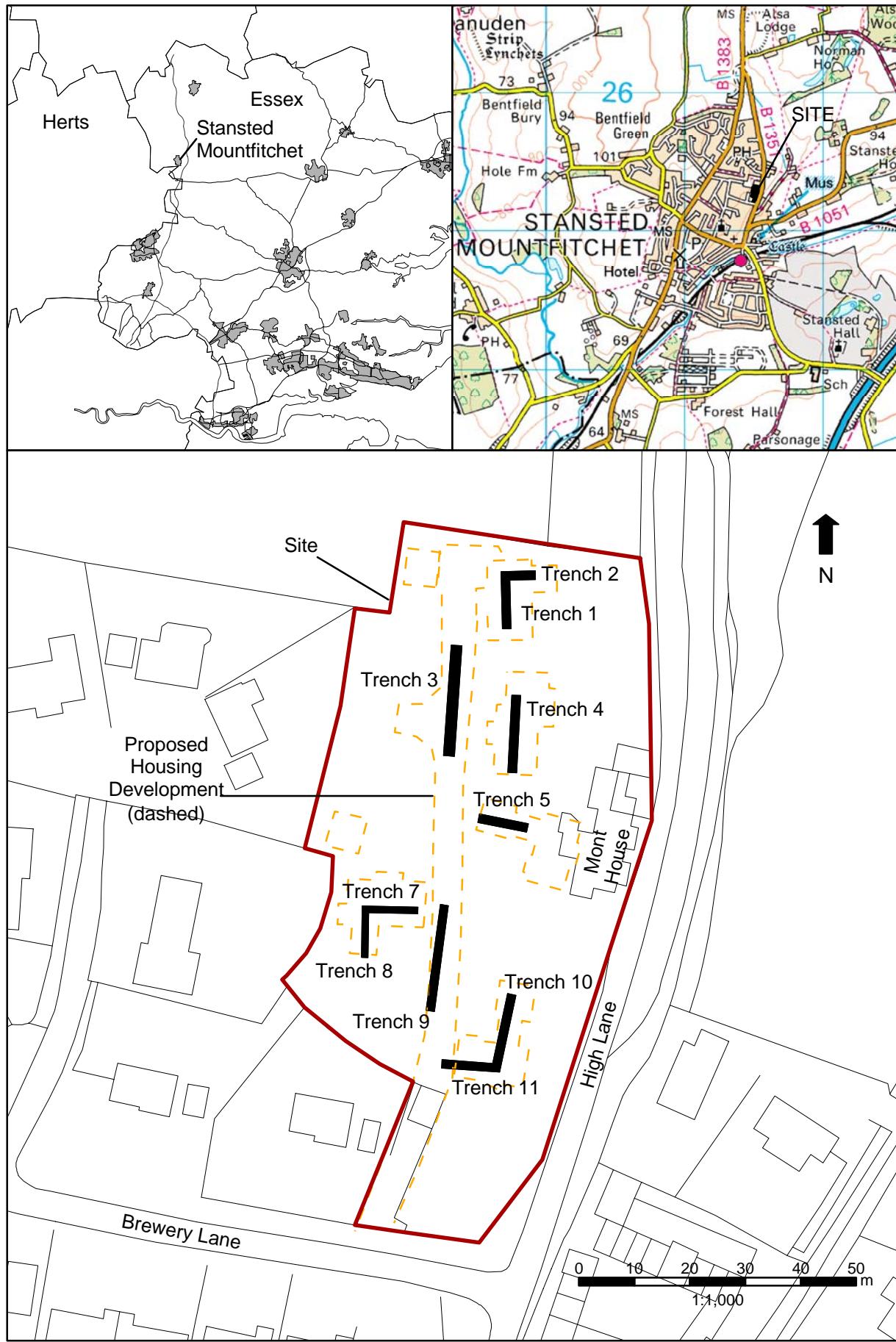


Fig.1. Location plan

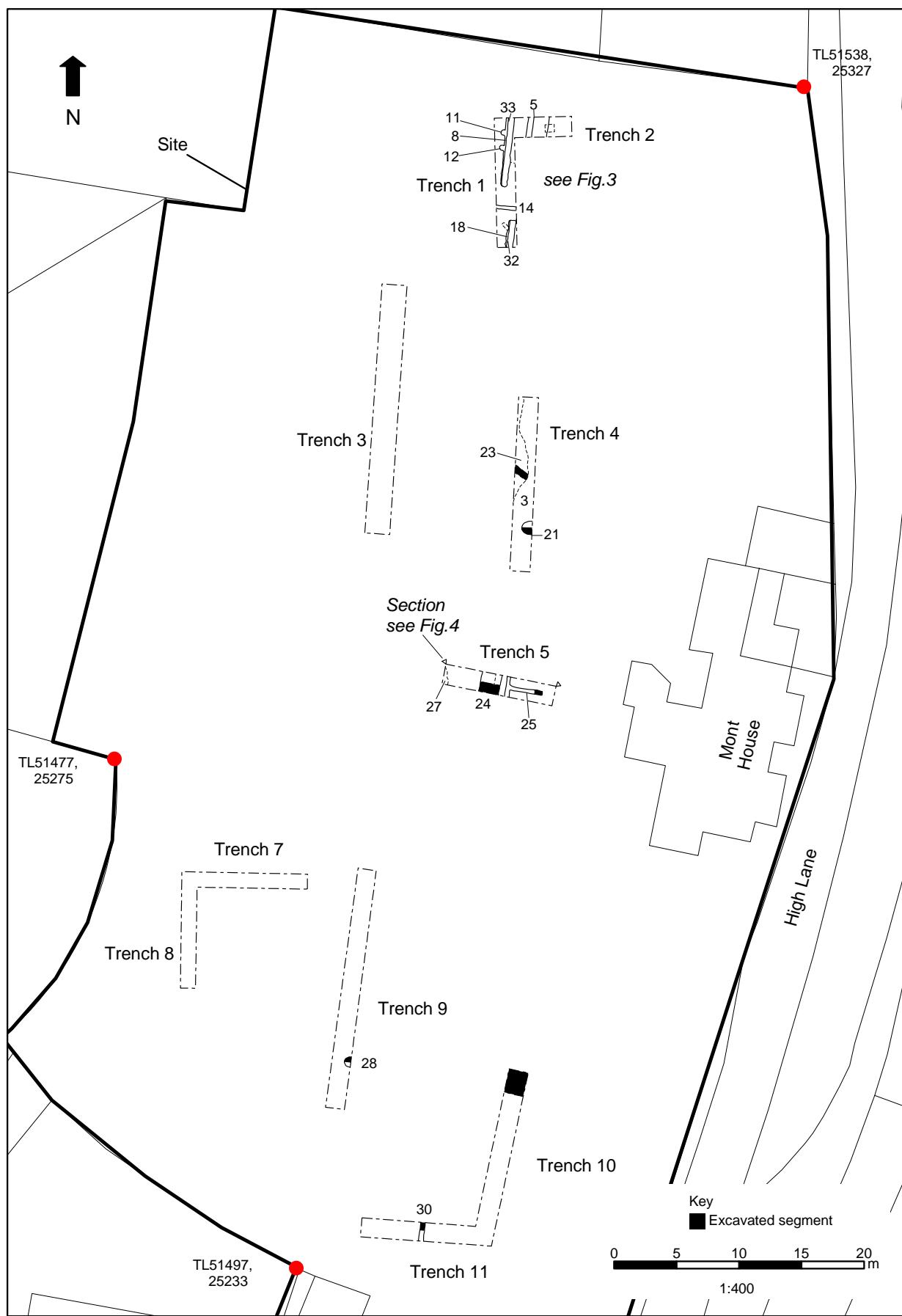


Fig.2. Trench plan showing all features

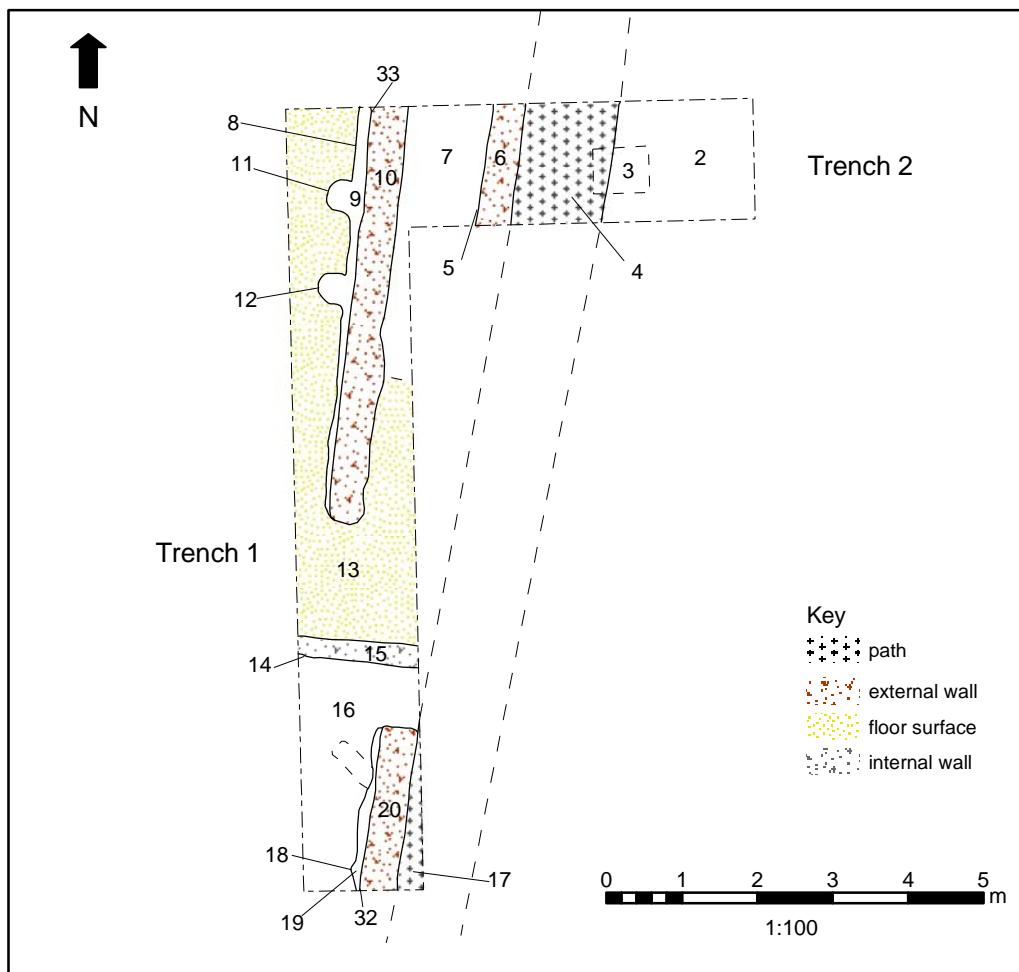


Fig.3. Trenches 1 & 2

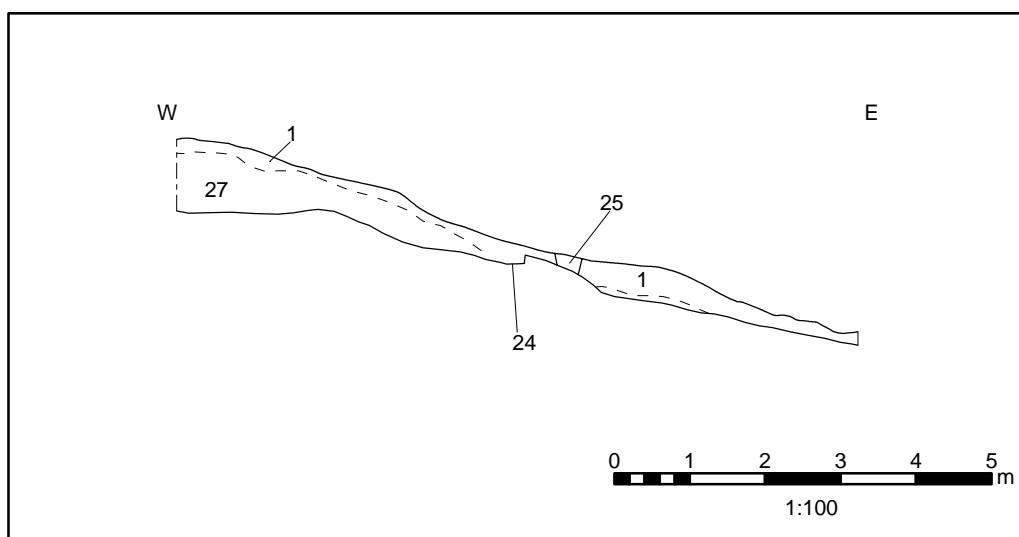


Fig.4. Section, trench 5