

**20 KING STREET  
SAFFRON WALDEN  
ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION**



**Essex County Council  
Field Archaeology Unit  
January 2005**

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SAFFRON WALDEN  
ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION**

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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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SAFFRON WALDEN,  
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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION**

**SUMMARY**

Client: Coalhouse Properties Ltd  
Planning applications: UTT/0296/04 and UTT/0297/04/CON  
FAU Project No.: 1419  
NGR: TL 53753847 (Centred)  
Site Code: SW 44  
Date of Fieldwork: 15 - 19 November 2004

*An archaeological excavation was carried out on the site of proposed housing at 20 King Street, Saffron Walden. An area 10 x 14m was initially to be examined but the presence of high voltage electrical cables reduced this area to two 3 x 14m trenches. A baulk of 4m was left unexcavated between the areas.*

*The western most area was heavily disturbed, presumably by the construction of a modern building, which formerly stood on the site, and no archaeological remains were identified. The eastern area, however, contained several medieval layers and two rubble filled pits which may have been foundations associated with the 13th century market place. The artefacts recovered were all domestic in nature.*

*The outer bailey ditch which was thought to run through the site was not identified, despite excavating down to the natural chalk. Due to the amount of disturbance on the site the watching brief phase was not carried out.*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This report presents the results of an archaeological excavation at 20 King Street, Saffron Walden. Coalhouse Properties Ltd submitted a planning application for a residential development on the site. The local planning authority, advised by the Heritage Advice, Management and Promotion team (HAMP) of Essex County Council, placed an archaeological condition, in line with Planning Policy Guideline 16 (DoE 1990), on the development. Subsequently Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) were commissioned to undertake an archaeological excavation on the footprint of the building and a watching brief on subsidiary groundworks. After the commencement of the fieldwork the decision was taken with the agreement of HAMP not to proceed with the watching brief phase of the work. This report presents the results of the excavation. The archive will be deposited at Saffron Walden Museum

## **2.0 BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Location and Geology** (Figure 1)

Saffron Walden is situated in the district of Uttlesford in the northwest of Essex, close to the county borders with Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. The uppermost geology comprises chalk, with a possible band of alluvium to the south of the site.

The development area is situated within the area of the medieval market town (Medlycott 1999). Buildings fronting onto the medieval High Street stand to the west and the site is bounded by King Street to the south. Gardens and retaining walls mark the northern and eastern limits of the site. Terracing is present, with a noticeable difference (up to 2m) in ground levels between the excavation area and adjacent plots to the north. In general the site slopes gradually southward.

### **2.2 Archaeological and Historical Background**

Saffron Walden (Essex Sites and Monuments Record (ESMR) 0408) had its origins in the mid-late Saxon period and developed into a prosperous market town during the medieval period. By the later medieval period (13th-15th centuries) the town had become a major centre for the cloth trade, and was famous for the production of the saffron dyestuffs from which its name derives. There is some evidence of earlier settlement of prehistoric, Iron Age and Roman date in the general area.

The castle, around which the town developed, is believed to have been founded in the 11th century by the de Mandevilles. Following an initial phase of urban development in the 12th century, which was bounded by an outer bailey ditch, further expansion in the early to mid 13th century included the creation of a rectilinear street-plan in an area to the south of the castle bailey. This was enclosed by a large defensive ditch, which still partially survives as an earthwork to the south of Gibson Close, known as the Repell or Battle ditches (ESMR 0443). This expansion may have been associated with the grant of a new charter in 1236.

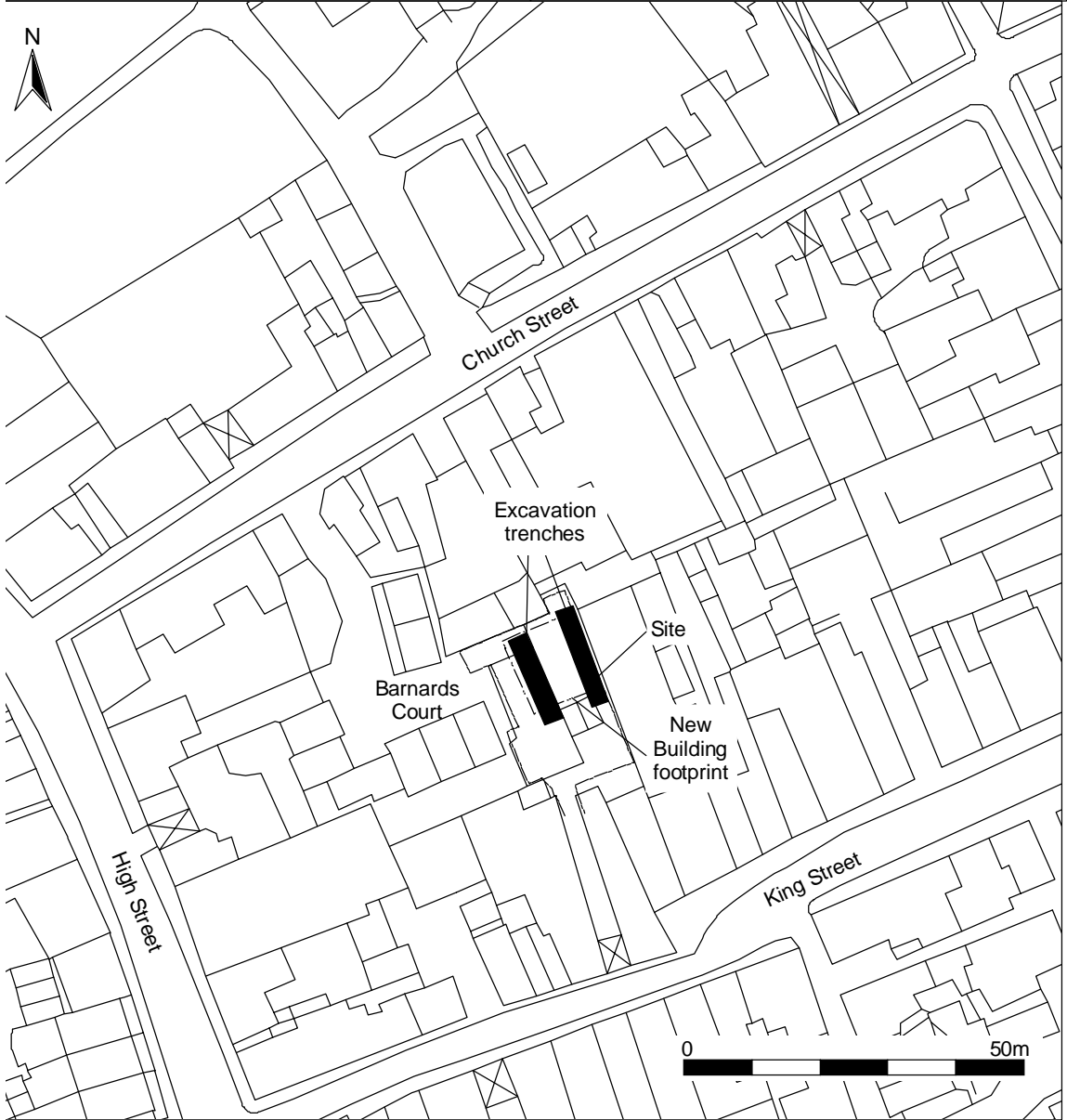


Fig.1. Site location

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Saffron Walden has a large number of surviving late medieval buildings, but archaeological investigation has added relatively few well-dated sequences to improve our knowledge of the medieval town. This is due partly to the small scale of much of the archaeological work, and partly also to recent disturbance or truncation of medieval strata. Little is known archaeologically in the immediate area of the development, as an evaluation at 1 Park Lane (Garwood 1996) showed that any medieval strata would have been truncated by 19th century cellars. Any survival of medieval levels in the development area would therefore be significant, as the archaeological record would supplement the good record of standing buildings and historical sources in the town (Clarke 1997).

The development area is situated at the north-western edge of the 13th century market place and the 12th century outer bailey ditch is projected to run through it. The outer bailey ditch has previously been excavated immediately to the west in Barnards Court (Bassett 1982, 64 –66). The excavated sections of the ditch indicate that it ran approximately east-west and was 6.5m wide and at least 4.5m deep.

### **3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The main aim of the excavation was to locate, identify and record any surviving archaeological remains and clarify the nature and extent of modern disturbance to the site.

More specific aims included the identification of the outer bailey ditch, identification of deposits associated with medieval occupation or industrial use and the identification of structures of either medieval or post-medieval date.

### **4.0 METHOD**

The building footprint was excavated using a 3-ton mini-digger fitted with a toothless bucket, under archaeological supervision. A baulk approximately 4m wide was left down the centre of the site due to the presence of high voltage electricity cables. After the removal of approximately 0.5m of overburden the exposed surface was then examined for any archaeological remains. The remains were then hand excavated and the area recorded. Two sondages were then excavated, within the stripped areas, by machine, to the top of the undisturbed natural chalk to verify the absence of the outer bailey ditch. Sections of these trenches were recorded. All plans were drawn at 1:20 and sections at either 1:10 or 1:20. A photographic record comprising of colour slides and monochrome prints was maintained and levels were taken across the site. The IFA standards and by-laws and ALGAO's Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England (Gurney 2003) were adhered to during the fieldwork.

## **5.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS (Figure 2)**

The site had been cleared of topsoil, buildings and rubble prior to the commencement of the archaeological investigation. Due to the presence of high voltage electricity cables the area of excavation was reduced to two wide trenches measuring approximately 3m wide and 14m long. These have been labelled as Area 1 for the western and Area 2 for the eastern. Further context information can be found in Appendix 1.

### **5.1 Area 1**

This area lay along the western edge of the proposed building footprint. This area was under a modern, semi-basemented, building until recently and was heavily disturbed. A sondage was machine excavated to a depth of 1.5m where undisturbed chalk was encountered. No archaeological features were identified in this area and no finds were collected.

### **5.2 Area 2**

Lying along the eastern edge of the proposed building footprint this area was not as disturbed as area 1. A series of layers and several pits of archaeological significance were recorded in this area. At the northern end of the area, pits 13, 15 and 17 were possibly natural in origin as they each contained a single sterile fill. At the southern end of the trench several layers and two pits were identified. The upper most layer 1, a mid brown grey clay silt, contained charcoal fragments and pottery dating from the late 15th to mid 16th century and probably represented the remains of household waste. Below layer 1 the stratigraphy is far less clear with clay silt layers 3, 4, and 9 probably representing localised dumps of domestic waste. Only layer 3 contained any dateable material and this was a single piece of 13th to 14th century courseware pottery. They all contained charcoal fragments and varied in colour from light grey (layer 3) through light brown (layer 4) to pale yellow (layer 9).

Pits 5 and 12 are probably contemporary with the lower layers. Both pits were filled with large pieces of unworked flint and pit 5 contained a single piece of 13th to 14th century pottery. It seems clear that these pits were not solely for rubbish disposal but that they served another function. The inclusions of large flints suggest that these pits may have been solid foundations for structures. Similar types of rubble foundations were also identified at excavations at 33 – 35 High Street, Saffron Walden (Clarke 1997).

All the features and layers in this area were cut by two modern brick wall footings, which ran the length of the area. After recording all of the features, a sondage was machine-dug the length of the area until natural chalk was encountered at a depth of 1m to verify the absence of the outer bailey ditch.



## **6.0 FINDS**

Small groups of finds were recovered from six contexts. The pottery and animal bone recovered is described below. Other of finds include two iron nails, one each from layers 1 and 4, and two oyster shells from layer 1. Despite the paucity of the finds they do seem consistent with a domestic assemblage. All finds have been recorded by count and weight, in grams, by context, and details are provided in Appendix 2.

### **6.1 Medieval Pottery** by H Walker

A very small amount of medieval and later pottery, 13 sherds weighing 558g, was excavated. The most interesting medieval find comprises fragments from a Hedingham ware ring-and-dot-stamped jug. This is the most typical style of Hedingham ware and has a long date range of the early 13th century to perhaps the early 14th century. For an illustration of a complete example of this type of jug see Rackham (1972, pl.33). The Hedingham ware industry was based in and around Sible Hedingham and its products are a common find in north Essex, Cambridgeshire and other parts of East Anglia. Also belonging to the 13th to 14th centuries are sherds of medieval coarse ware, including a bowl rim and fragments from other decorated jugs in sandy orange ware fabrics.

Some late medieval pottery dating to the 15th to 16th centuries is also present. Featured sherds include a bung-hole from a cistern in a fine sandy orange ware fabric typical of the Saffron Walden area. Cisterns were used for the brewing and storage of ale and beer, which during this period was carried out on a household basis. There is also a sherd from a Raeren stoneware drinking jug. These were imported in huge quantities from Rhineland Germany during the late 15th to mid 16th century and are a common find on sites of this date.

### **6.2 Animal Bone** by J Compton

Animal bone was recovered from five contexts, amounting to 27 pieces weighing 329g. Almost all of this came from layer 1 and the elements present, along with evidence of butchery, indicates food waste. Amounts are too small for further comment, but identification of taxa and skeletal elements are presented in Appendix 2.

## **7.0 DISCUSSION AND ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS**

Modern buildings and services have heavily truncated much of the site. However along the eastern limits some archaeological features do survive. These all seem to be associated with domestic activity with the possible exception of pits 5 and 12 which may be foundations for structures associated, or fronting onto, with the medieval market place. From these two pits it is not possible to say what the presumptive structures were but it seem likely that they were domestic in nature. The layers are likely to be the remains of medieval rubbish disposal to the rear of properties. Although fragmentary, the survival of these features and deposits demonstrates the potential for medieval remains surviving elsewhere to the rear of the street frontage. This survival, however, is highly dependant on the post medieval and modern disturbance.

The outer bailey ditch which was projected to run through this area, having been previously located to the west at Barnards Court, was not uncovered during the excavations. It may be that the ditch runs further to the south, partially under the standing buildings, which would mean that the projected line of the ditch is incorrect or that the ditch terminates between the areas excavated in Barnards Court and the development area. However, a large ditch was observed to the east of the site in 1911 – 12 (Bassett 1982, 19) which would suggest that the ditch does not terminate but indeed lies further to the south.

### **Acknowledgements**

This project was commissioned and funded by Coalhouse Properties Ltd. Especial thanks are due to Mr S Jones of Coalhouse Properties who operated the mini-digger and provided assistance throughout the project. The monitoring officer was Mr R. Havis of HAMP on behalf of the local planning office. Mr M. Atkinson managed the project and A Turner and C Down assisted the author on site. P. McMichael processed the finds and H Walker assessed the pottery. J. Compton assessed the animal bone and miscellaneous finds and A. Lewsey prepared the illustrations.

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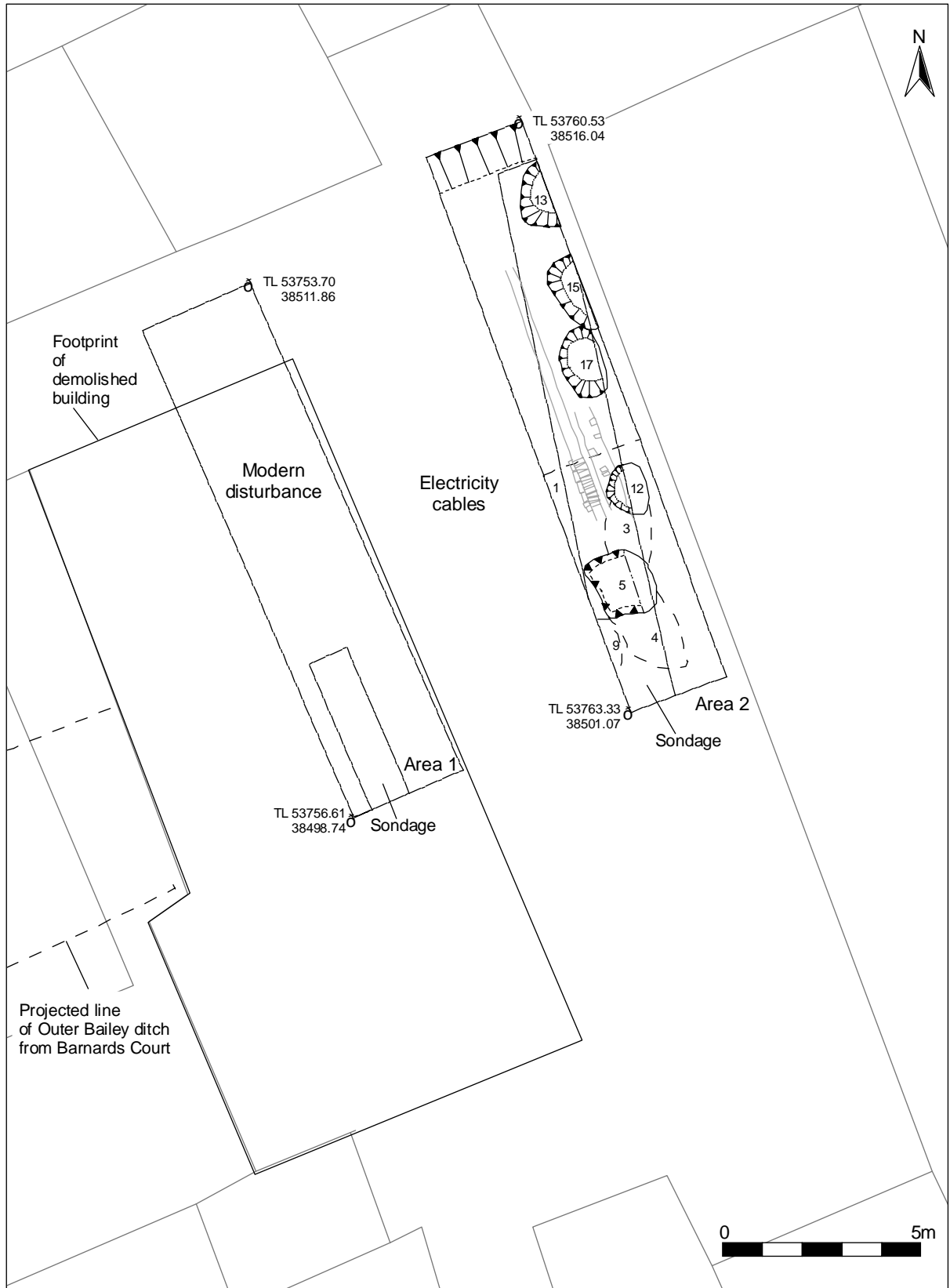


Fig.2. Detail of excavation trenches

## APPENDIX 1 – CONTEXT DATA

All dimensions are given in metres

Context	Type	Fill of	Length	Breadth	Depth	Date
1	Layer	-	8	3	0.35	L 15th to M 16th C
2	Topsoil	-	-	-	-	-
3	Layer	-	1.7	1	0.2	13th to 14th C
4	Layer	-	2.5	1.5	0.15	-
5	Pit	-	1.26	1.53	0.57	13th to 14th C
6	Fill	5	1.26	1.5	0.49	13th to 14th C
7	Natural	-	-	-	-	-
8	Fill	5	1.26	1.45	0.08	-
9	Layer	-	1.5	0.5	0.17	-
10	U/S	-	-	-	-	-
11	Fill	12	1.9	1.9	0.25	13th to 14th C
12	Pit	-	1.9	1.9	0.25	13th to 14th C
13	Pit		1.5	0.9	0.75	-
14	Fill	13	1.5	0.9	0.75	-
15	Pit		2.1	0.75	0.8	-
16	Fill	15	2.1	0.75	0.8	-
17	Pit		1.8	1.1	0.6	-
18	Fill	17	1.8	1.1	0.6	-

## APPENDIX 2 – FINDS DATA

All weights are given in grams

### General finds data

Context	Feature	Count	Weight	Description	Date
1	Layer	1	22	Iron nail	-
		23	288	Animal bone; rib, mandible, metapodial and vertebra fragments, large mammal, some with chop marks; cattle phalanx and molar fragment; metacarpus, proximal end, sheep/goat; tibia shaft, medium-sized mammal	-
		2	16	Oyster shell, two valves	-
		1	46	Roof tile fragment, with peg-hole	Post med.
		6	136	Pottery; rim, body and handle sherds, inc. bung-hole fragment	Medieval/Lat emedieval
3	Layer	1	1	Animal bone sliver	-
		1	18	Pottery; rim sherd, sooted externally	Medieval
4	Layer	1	4	Iron nail	-
		2	18	Animal bone; sheep/goat mandible, plus four molars; fragment	-
6	5	1	22	Animal bone; skull fragment	-
		1	164	Pottery; handle stump	Medieval
10	u/s	3	220	Pottery; rim, handle and body sherds, all same vessel	Medieval
11	Layer	2	20	Pottery; body sherds, one glazed	Medieval

### Pottery data

Context	Feature	Count	Weight	Description	Date
1	Layer	2	27	Medieval coarse ware including externally glazed sherd	Late 15th to
		3	84	Sandy orange ware including squared jar rim and bung-hole from a cistern	mid 16th C
		1	25	Raeren stoneware jug handle	
3	Layer	1	18	Medieval coarse ware everted bowl rim, sooted externally	13th to 14th C
6	5	1	164	Sandy orange ware lower handle attachment from large jug showing slip-painting under a partial splash glaze	13th to 14th C
10	u/s	3	220	Hedingham ware large unabraded fragments from rim-and-dot stamped strip jug with twisted rod handle c.1225-1300/25 (Cotter 2000, 91)	c.1225- 1300/25
11	Layer	1	11	Medieval coarse ware body sherd	13th to 14th C
		1	9	Sandy orange ware green-glazed sherd from jug, with combed wavy line decoration, burnt after breakage	
		<b>13</b>	<b>558</b>		

## **APPENDIX 3: ARCHIVE INDEX**

**SITE NAME: 20 King Street, Saffron Walden (SW 44)**

### **Index to the Archive**

File containing:

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Brief for Evaluation
- 1.2 Written Scheme of Investigation for Evaluation

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

- 2.1 Client Report
- 2.2 Medieval Pottery report
- 2.3 General Finds report

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

- 3.1 1x Context Register
- 3.2 18 x Context Sheets
- 3.3 1 x Section Register
- 3.4 1 x Plan Register
- 3.5 1 x Levels Register
- 3.6 2 x Photographic record sheets
- 3.7 13 x Black and White Prints
- 3.8 13 x Colour Slides

#### **Not in File**

- 3 x Permatrace Plan and Section Sheets
- 1 Box of finds

## APPENDIX 4: EHCR SUMMARY SHEET

<b>Site Name/Address:</b> 20 King Street, Saffron Walden	
<b>Parish:</b> Saffron Walden	<b>District:</b> Uttlesford
<b>NGR:</b> TL 53753847 (Centred)	<b>Site Code:</b> SW 444
<b>Type of Work:</b> Excavation	<b>Site Director/Group:</b> Andrew Robertson ECC FAU
<b>Date of Work:</b> 15 November 2004 until 19 November 2004	<b>Size of Area Investigated:</b> Approximately 72m <sup>2</sup>
<b>Location of Finds/Curating Museum:</b> Saffron Walden Museum	<b>Funding Source:</b> Coalhouse Properties Ltd.
<b>Further Work Anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related EHCR Nos:</b>
<b>Final Report:</b> EAH Summary?	
<b>Periods Represented:</b> medieval; modern	
<b>SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:</b>	
<p>An archaeological excavation was carried out on the site of proposed housing at 20 King Street, Saffron Walden, with two 3 x 14m trenches. A baulk of 4m was left unexcavated between the areas due to the presence of electrical cables.</p> <p>The western most area was heavily disturbed, by a modern building, which formerly stood on the site, and no archaeological remains were identified. The eastern area, however, contained several medieval layers and two rubble-filled pits, which may have been foundations associated with, or fronting onto, the 13th century market place. The artefacts recovered are all domestic in nature and included 13th to 14th century pottery and animal bone.</p> <p>The outer bailey ditch, which was thought to run through the site, was not identified despite excavating down to the natural chalk.</p>	
<b>Previous Summaries/Reports:</b>	
<b>Author of Summary:</b> Andrew Robertson	<b>Date of Summary:</b> January 2005