

**ST FRANCIS PLACE
CONVENT HILL
BOCKING
BRAINTREE
ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION BY
TRIAL TRENCHING
PHASE 1**



**Essex County Council
Field Archaeology Unit**

June 2006

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CONVENT HILL
BOCKING**

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**ST FRANCIS PLACE
CONVENT HILL, BOCKING
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION BY TRIAL TRENCHING
PHASE 1**

Client: Granville Group
FAU Project No.: 1644
NGR: TL 7635 2443
Planning Application Nos.: BTE/1326/04
Site Code: BOCFC06
Date of Fieldwork: 8th June 2006
OASIS Ref: essexcou1-15469

SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation, consisting of three trenches, was carried out on the first phase of a residential development at St Francis Place, Convent Hill, Bocking. The site was heavily terraced and landscaped. The presence of a significant depth of modern overburden in all of the trenches resulted in only small test pits being dug rather than the full trench length being excavated.

The trenches showed that there was approximately 1m of modern redeposited material on top of the original ground surface. The approximate depth to the undisturbed natural was between 1m and 3.5m. The only feature of interest was a hollow concrete structure along the eastern edge of the site. This was either hexagonal or octagonal in plan and was approximately 5m in diameter. It was partially backfilled, but brick-built roof supports could be seen inside it. The function of this structure is unclear, but it is clearly modern in origin.

No archaeological features or finds were identified in any of the trenches. The amount of terracing and landscaping makes it unlikely that significant archaeological remains survive and the proposed development is unlikely to have a significant impact on the buried ground surface. It is anticipated that basic recording of the concrete structure will be required during the site clearance/ reduction.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report contains the results of an archaeological evaluation carried out as the first part of a planning consent for the construction of residential dwellings at St Francis Place, Convent Hill, Bocking, Braintree (Fig. 1). The evaluation consisted of trial trenching in the northern area of possible archaeological potential. The investigation was designed to determine the presence, nature, date and survival of any archaeological remains in the proposed development area.

Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) carried out the evaluation for the Granville Group. The project was carried out in accordance with a brief prepared by the Historic Environment Management (HEM) Team of Essex County Council, who also monitored the work. The site archive will be deposited at Braintree Museum. A copy of this report will be deposited with the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER), a further copy will also be uploaded to the OASIS database (ref: essexcou1-15469) and a summary will appear in the journal *Essex Archaeology and History* (EAH).

This report initially describes the background to the project, followed by the fieldwork results and the finds report. An overall discussion, with a brief assessment of the results, is at the end. The appendices include trench data, details of the archive contents and the EHER summary. All illustrations are placed together towards the back of the report.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. Planning

A planning application (BTE/1326/04) for the construction of residential dwellings was submitted to Braintree District Council. The HEM Team of Essex County Council, due to the perceived archaeological potential of the proposed development area, advised that a full condition should be attached to any future planning consent.

2.2 Location and Topography

The first phase of this proposed development lies within a 4641 sq m plot of land bounded to the west by Convent Hill, to the east by fields, to the north by residential properties and to the south by the car park and gardens of St Francis Place Nursing Home (Phase 2) (TL 7635 2443) (Fig.1).

The site is currently a south facing grassy slope with a flat plateau at the northern end. It has some mature trees dotted around the plateau and is edged along the north and west sides by a large hedge. The area, both phases 1 and 2, has clearly been terraced and landscaped.

2.3 Geology

The modern land surface was formed by the terracing and landscaping of the site, presumably during the construction of the nursing home. The present ground level is between 0.4 and 1.2m above the original level of topsoil, which was identified in several trench sections.

The drift geology of the site was generally pale brown boulder clay, although in the trench along the eastern edge of the site the geology was seen to be orangey brown sandy gravel.

2.4 History and Archaeology

The general area is known to contain archaeological remains dating from the late prehistoric periods through to the 20th century. The Roman Road from Chelmsford to Long Melford (EHER 6253) runs along the western side of the site. Several Iron Age and Roman finds have been made in the general vicinity, including a brooch (EHER 8575) and several Roman coins (EHER 6343, 6462 and 6473).

To the south of the site Bradford Street, in Bocking, was part of a bi-focal medieval village, along with Church Street, and contains standing buildings dating to the 16th century. The Convent of St Francis that stands immediately to the south of Phase 2 dates to the 19th century and is grade II listed (Medlycott 1998).

No known archaeological investigations have previously taken place within the boundaries of the development area.

3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The archaeological work was undertaken to determine whether archaeological features survive within the proposed development area and to assess the nature of any archaeological deposits.

The main aim of the work was to locate, identify and record any surviving remains, with more specific aims seeking to:

- Record any evidence of Iron Age or Roman activity alongside the Roman road.
- Record any evidence of post-medieval or earlier settlement at the north end of Bocking.

4. METHOD

A mechanical excavator equipped with a flat-bladed bucket was used to open three trenches under archaeological supervision. The original retirement was for a 4% sample of the total development area, however due to the depth of overburden only the ends of each trench was excavated, as stated in the WSI.

Standard ECC FAU methodologies were employed with regard to excavation and recording. The machine-excavated surface of the trenches was sufficiently cleaned to ensure that any features present were visible. Archaeological features and deposits were excavated using hand tools. All features exposed within the trenches were recorded using the FAU's context recording system. Linear features were sampled by at least one excavated segment and discrete features were 50% excavated. All artefacts from the excavated features were collected to aid dating and characterisation. Surveying and planning was tied to the Ordnance Survey National Grid using GPS. A photographic record consisting of colour slide and black and white print was maintained throughout the course of the investigation.

Both the fieldwork and the reporting have been carried out to professional standards and guidance issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA 1999) and the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers for the East of England (ALGAO) (Gurney 2003).

5. FIELDWORK RESULTS (Fig.1)

Three intended trenches were positioned to provide a representative sample of the potential archaeological remains across phase 1, the northern end of the development area. All of the trenches originally measured 30m by 2m. Due to the depth of the overburden all of the trenches were reduced in length, with the agreement of both the client and the HEM monitoring officer, with only the ends of the trenches excavated, in general.

Further information on the trenches is presented in Appendix 1. All pertinent trench plans (Fig 1) are situated at the rear of the report.

The geological deposit was seen to mainly be pale brown clay silt, with orange brown sandy gravel in trench 1, along the eastern side of the site. The average depth of the modern topsoil across the site was 0.2m with approximately 0.7m of redeposited clay below this. These dumped layers covered the original ground level, which consisted of between 0.3m to 2.5m of topsoil containing brick and tile and in places c. 0.2m of mid brown silty clay subsoil.

5.1 Trench 1

Located along the eastern edge of the proposed development area, this trench was aligned north-south. Approximately three quarters of the trench was excavated with local extensions, primarily to establish the extent of a concrete structure that was encountered. The southern end was situated on the slope that led down to the nursing home. It was excavated onto the natural geology at a depth of c. 1m. No original topsoil was identified below the modern overburden, indicating that the original ground surface had been stripped.

10m from the southern limits of the trench a hollow concrete structure, which was cut into the slope, was identified. It was either octagonal or possibly hexagonal in shape and had a diameter of approximately 5m. In the centre of the roof was a square opening into the chamber below. The chamber, although partially infilled, was approximately 2m deep, with brick pillars supporting the roof. No further detail of the chamber could be seen. To the north of the structure the trench was excavated to a depth of c. 2m and the undisturbed natural was not encountered.

Other than the concrete structure, no archaeological remains were identified in the trench and no finds were collected

5.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was orientated east-west across the centre of the site. Due to the depth of the overburden the trench was only test-pitted at either end. At the western end of the trench the undisturbed natural geology was encountered at a depth of 1.6m. The original topsoil was identified in the section at a depth of 1.1m. The eastern end of the trench was cut to a depth of 3.5m deep before the undisturbed natural was identified. The top of the original topsoil was identified at a depth of 1m. It was c.2.5m deep and contained quantities of modern brick and tile.

No archaeological remains were identified and no finds were collected from this trench.

5.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 ran north-south along the western boundary of the site, parallel to Convent Hill. Again, due to the depth of overburden, only the northern and southern limits of the trench were excavated. The southern part of the trench lay on a slope that ran down to the nursing home. The southern end of the trench was excavated down to the natural clay geology, 7m from the southern end the overburden reached a depth in excess of 1.4m and excavation was halted. No original topsoil was identified in this end of the trench indicating that it had been removed prior to the brick and tile filled clay had been deposited. The northern end of the trench was excavated onto the undisturbed

natural geology at a depth of 1.8m. The original topsoil was identified in the section at a depth of c. 0.8m, with clay overburden overlying.

No archaeological remains were identified in this trench and no finds were collected.

6. FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL MATERIAL

No finds were collected from any of the trial trenches and no environmental samples taken.

7. DISCUSSION

The depth of disturbance identified on the site suggests that no significant archaeological remains predating the modern period are likely to have survived on the site due to the landscaping. The concrete structure identified in trench 1, although interesting, is likely to be of modern origin. It is possible that the structure is an infilled water tank, although other functions such as a WW II or Cold War structure should not be discounted. The extents and shape of the structure should be planned and photographed, as should the inside if possible and its function determined.

It is clear from the depth of over burden that the site has been extensively terraced to the south, which suggests that little in the way of archaeological remains are likely to survive in the adjacent Phase 2 area.

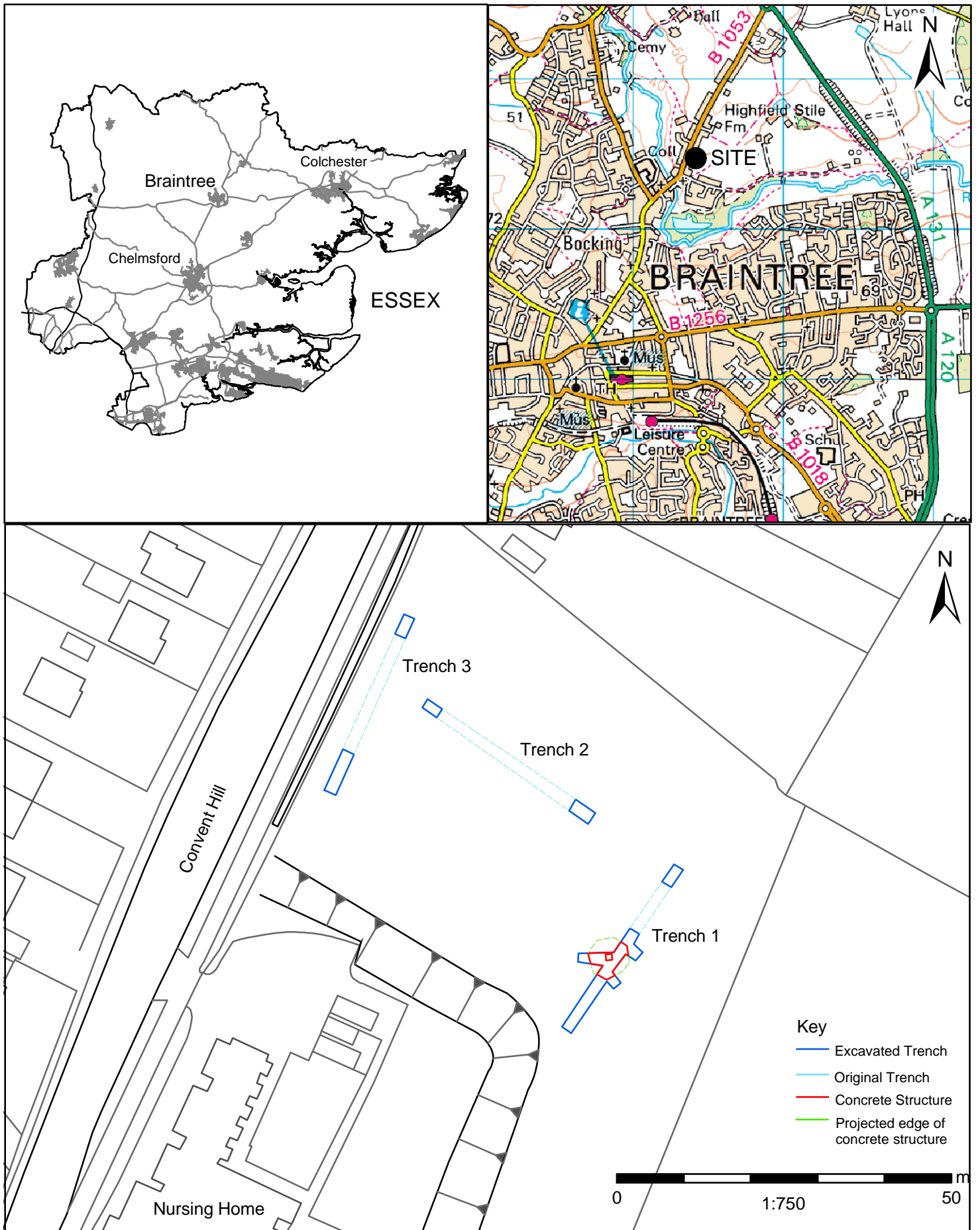
It is anticipated that the Local Planning Authority will require a basic survey and photographic record of the concrete structure once it is exposed. It is likely that a further requirement will be to monitor the ground reduction in the area of the structure.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was commissioned by the Granville Group, and thanks are due to Mr J Northwood for his assistance. The project was conducted by Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit. Digitising of plans and digital illustration was undertaken by Andy Lewsey. The project was managed by Patrick Allen of ECC FAU. Richard Havis of the ECC HEM Team monitored the evaluation. The fieldwork was carried out by the author.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ECC HEM 2006 *Archaeological Trial trenching at the Franciscan Convent, Broad Road, Bocking* ECC HEM Brief
- ECC FAU 2006 *Written Scheme of investigation. Archaeological Evaluation by Trial Trenching. St Francis Place, Convent Hill, Bocking, Braintree, Essex.* ECC FAU WSI
- Gurney, D. 2003 *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England, East Anglian Archaeol. Occ. Pap. 14*
- Medlycott, M. 1998 *Bocking. Historic Towns Assessment Report.* ECC Planning



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Figure 1 - Location plan

APPENDIX 1: TRENCH SUMMARY

Trench No	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Area (m ²)	Features
1	18 (S end) 2 (N end)	1.9	1 (S end) 2 (N end)	38	Yes
2	2 (E end) 2 (W end)	1.9	1.8 (E end) 3.6 (W end)	7.6	No
3	7 (S end) 3 (N end)	1.9	1.1 (S end) 1.8 (N end)	19	No

APPENDIX 2: ARCHIVE INDEX

SITE NAME: BOCFC06

Index to the Archive

File containing:

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Brief for Evaluation/Watching Brief
- 1.2 Specification for Evaluation/Watching Brief.

2. Research Archive

- 2.1 Evaluation Report

3. Site Archive

- 3.1 Photographic Register x 2
- 3.2 Site Photographic Record (6 x B+W Prints; 6 x colour slides)
- 3.3 Site Plans and Sections and notes(1 x A5 sheet)

No finds

APPENDIX 3: EHER SUMMARY SHEET

Site Name/Address: St Francis Place, Convent Hill, Bocking, Braintree	
Parish: Bocking	District: Braintree
NGR: TL 7635 2443	Site Code: BOCFC 06
Type of Work: Evaluation by Trial Trenching	Site Director/Group: A Robertson ECC Field Archaeology Unit
Date of Work: 8th June 2006	Size of Area Investigated: Development area 4641 ² m
Location of Finds/Curating Museum: Braintree	Funding Source: Granville Group
Further Work Anticipated? Yes	Related EHCR Nos: 6253
Final Report: EAH Summary.	
Periods Represented: Modern	
<p>SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:</p> <p>An archaeological evaluation, consisting of three trenches, was carried out on the first phase of a residential development at St Francis Place, Convent Hill, Bocking. The site was heavily terraced and a landscaped. The depth of modern overburden in all of the trenches resulted in only small test pits being dug rather than the full trench being excavated.</p> <p>The trenches showed that there was approximately 1m of modern redeposited material on top of the original ground surface. The approximate depth to the undisturbed natural was between 1m and 3.5m. The only feature of interest was a hollow concrete structure along the eastern edge of the site. This was either hexagonal or octagonal in plan and was approximately 5m in diameter. It was partially backfilled but brick-built roof supports could be seen inside it. It is unclear as to the function of this structure but it is modern in origin.</p> <p>Other than the concrete structure, no archaeological features or finds were identified in any of the trenches. The amount of terracing and landscaping makes it unlikely that significant archaeological remains survive.</p>	
Previous Summaries/Reports: N/A	
Author of Summary: Andrew Robertson (ECC FAU)	Date of Summary: June 2006

ADDENDUM EHER SUMMARY SHEET

Site Name/Address: St Francis Place, Convent Hill, Bocking, Braintree, Phase 1	
Oasis reference: Essexcou1-15469	
Parish: Bocking	District: Braintree
NGR: TL 7635 2443	Site Code: BOCFC 06
Type of Work: Monitoring and Recording	Site Director/Group: M.Pocock (ECCFAU)
Date of Work: 13/07/06	Size of Area 36 square metres Investigated:
Location of Finds/Curating Braintree Museum:	Funding Source: Granville Group
Further Work Anticipated? Yes	Related EHER Nos: 6253
Final Report: EAH Summary	
Periods Represented: Modern	
SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:	
<p>In June 2006 Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) carried out an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching. The investigation revealed a concrete structure within Trench 1 and a basic record of its position was made. Consequently, further work was considered appropriate to establish the extent and nature of the structure (Robertson, 2006). A basic survey and photographic record was undertaken on the 13th of July when ground reduction of the area took place.</p> <p>Initially excavation expanded the area exposed during the evaluation to establish the full extent of the feature. Once fully exposed, excavation continued along its south east edge to establish its depth and method of construction. The structure was then breached to reveal the internal dimensions and deposits.</p> <p>The investigation revealed a circular brick built 'tank', 6.7m in diameter with recent embellishments comprising a concrete floor, lid and internal brick supports. The structure truncated natural sandy gravels to a depth of 2.21m and was sealed by 0.81m of re-deposited clay (Fig 1).</p> <p>The original structure comprised a red brick wall with stretcher bond that had a hard yellow sandy matrix. The wall was a single brick thick. Its internal face was rendered and possibly painted with a lead based paint. The floor of the structure was made up from compacted brick and rubble. The construction cut was approximately c 0.2m larger than the structure and the intervening space was back filled with rubble and compacted hardcore/ concrete, similar to the floor.</p> <p>At a later date poor quality concrete made with waste aggregates has been laid over the original floor and six yellow brick pillars have been erected to hold iron beams on which a concrete lid has been poured, presumably over shuttering that has subsequently been removed. There are no pipes or service runs that exit the structure. The only access is from a square hole that remains in the concrete lid. Scattered over the floor are bottles, paint tins, pots, pans, shoes other assorted modern debris.</p> <p>The structure probably functioned as a storage tank for liquid, possibly water, as there was no noticeable smell of diesel or slurry/ cess. It was likely utilised either by Highfield Stile Farm, situated c.250m to the north-east or by the convent itself. It does not appear on any known maps of the area.</p>	
Previous Summaries/Reports:	
Robertson, A. 2006 Archaeological Evaluation by Trail Trenching – Phase 1, St Francis Place, Covent Hill Bocking	
Author of Summary: Matthew Pocock (ECCFAU)	Date of Summary: July 2006

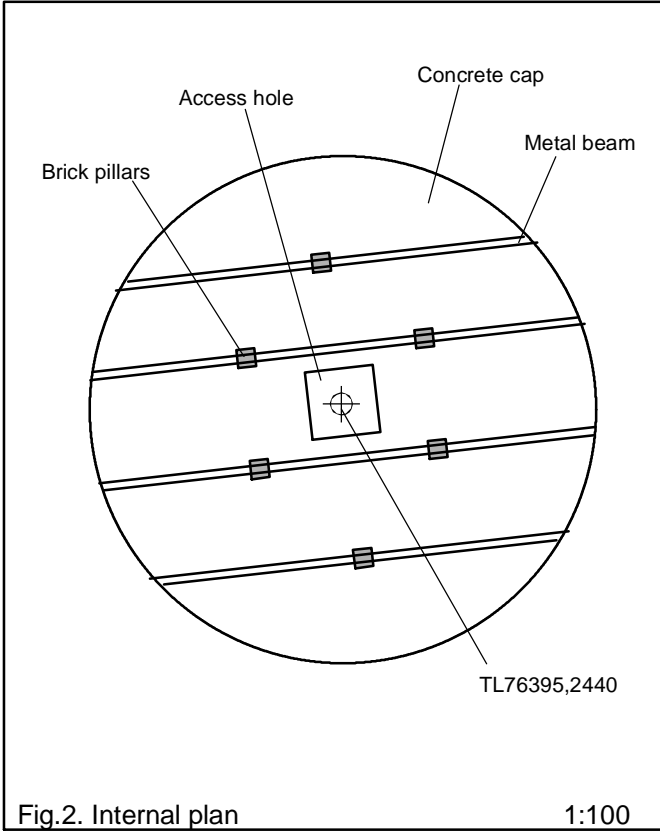


Fig.2. Internal plan

1:100

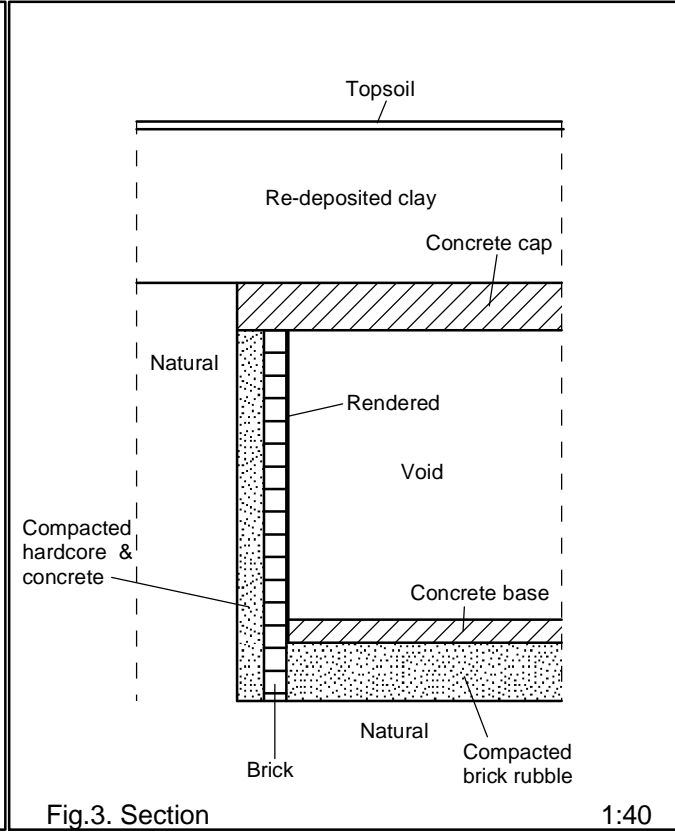
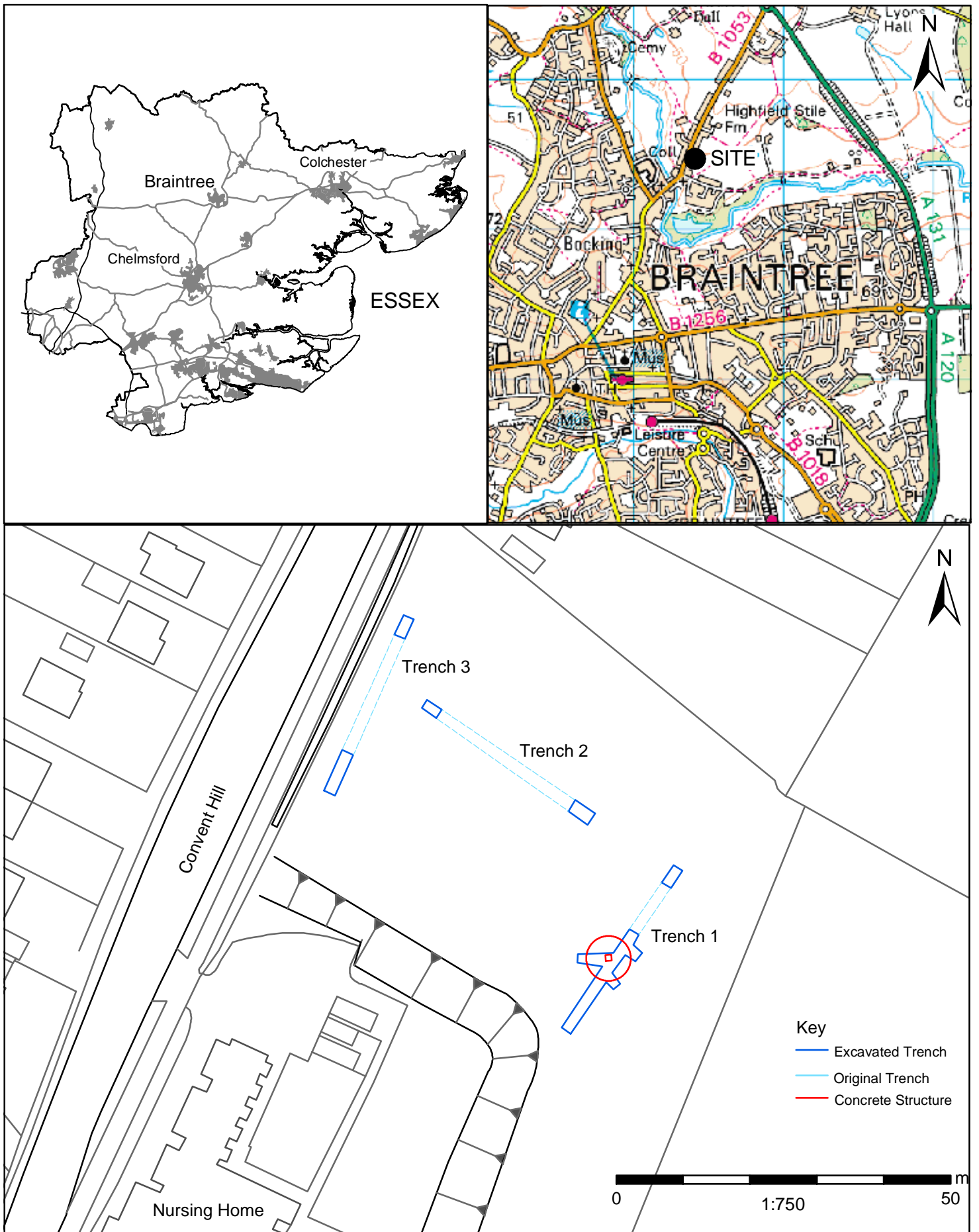


Fig.3. Section

1:40



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Figure 1 - Location plan