

ELM TREES

ASHDON

ESSEX

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MONITORING AND RECORDING**



**Essex County Council
Field Archaeology Unit
October 2006**

**ELM TREES
ASHDON, ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MONITORING AND RECORDING**

Prepared By: Mark Atkinson Position: Unit manager	Signature: Date:
Approved By: Patrick Allen Position: Project Manager	Signature: Date:

Document Ref.	1548rep
Report Issue Date	October 2006
Circulation	Mr & Mrs G. Crawley ECC Historic Environment Management Essex Historic Environment Record

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.

Please contact the Archaeological Fieldwork Manager, at the
Field Archaeology Unit,
Fairfield Court, Fairfield Road, Braintree, Essex CM7 3YQ
Tel: 01376 331470
Fax: 01376 331428

CONTENTS

	Page
SUMMARY	1
1. INTRODUCTION	2
2. BACKGROUND	2
2.1 Location and topography	
2.2 Geology	
2.3 Historical and Archaeological	
3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	3
4. METHOD	3
5. FIELDWORK RESULTS	4
5.1 Building clearance and foundations	
5.2 Service trenches	
6. FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL MATERIAL	5
7. CONCLUSIONS	6
Acknowledgements	7
BIBLIOGRAPHY	7
Appendices	
Appendix 1: Context data	
Appendix 2: Finds data	
Appendix 3: Archive index	
Appendix 4: EHER summary	
Figures	
Figure 1. Site location plan	
Plates	
Plate 1. House foundation trenches, looking west	
Plate 2. Detail of modern disturbance in house foundation trenches	

**ELM TREES
ASHDON, ESSEX**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING AND RECORDING

Client: Mr & Mrs G. Crawley
Planning ref: UTT/1165/05
FAU Project No: 1548
NGR: TL 596395
Site Code: ASET 06
OASIS Record: essexcou1 - 19667
Date of Fieldwork: 26 June & 7 September 2006

SUMMARY

Archaeological monitoring has been undertaken on preparation groundworks, excavation of foundation trenches and associated service trenches for a new house, replacing a 1970s bungalow which until recently occupied the site.

The site is bounded by extant ditches on two sides, which form a roughly square enclosure with the road and adjacent pasture. It has been postulated that these ditches are the remains of a Medieval moated settlement. In addition, previous observation of ground investigation holes identified charcoal deposits within the subsoil, from which it has been suggested that the site could have formerly been associated with brick-making, known to have been carried out in the wider vicinity.

The archaeological monitoring has established that much of the central and eastern parts of the site have been disturbed by modern occupation activity and that the incidence of ash and charcoal is likely to be associated with this. However, a single large archaeological feature, probably a pit of Medieval date, has been found in the north-west corner. This, together with the identification of the surviving below-ground vestiges of the rest of the enclosure circuit, adds weight to the possibility of Elm Trees being a Medieval moated homestead site.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report is a description and assessment of the results of archaeological monitoring of groundworks associated with the demolition of a former dwelling and the construction of a replacement house at Elm Trees, New House Lane, Ashdon, in Essex (Fig. 1).

Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) carried out the monitoring for the property owners, Mr and Mrs G. Crawley. The archaeological works were carried out in accordance with a design brief issued by the ECC Historic Environment Management team (ECC HEM). A copy of this report will be deposited with the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) and a further copy will be uploaded to the OASIS database (<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/oasis/index.cfm>). The site archive will be deposited at Saffron Walden Museum.

Both the fieldwork and the reporting have been carried out to professional standards and guidance issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1999) and the ALGAO standards for fieldwork (Gurney 2003).

The report is structured to describe the background to the project, followed by an assessment of the results of the fieldwork, then a discussion of the further archaeological potential and significance of the vicinity. Appendices include context and finds information, details of the archive contents and the EHER summary. All illustrations are placed together towards the back of the report.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Location and Topography (Fig. 1)

The site is on New House Lane, between Swards End and Red Oaks Hill, near Ashdon, in the north-west of the county, and some 3.5km to the east of Saffron Walden. It is bounded by the lane to the south and by ditched-and-hedged field boundaries to the north and east (Fig.1). The site is currently open to a meadow to the west, but was historically separated by a ditch. The roughly square-shaped 0.24ha site area is generally flat and level, though noticeably lower than the adjacent meadow.

The re-development of the site comprised the demolition and clearance of the existing 1970s dwelling and its replacement with a slightly larger, two-storey, house on the same location. In addition, garaging has been constructed in the east of the site and various service runs established along the eastern and northern margins.

2.2 Geology

The depth of the topsoil, where present, varied between 0.07-0.30m in thickness. The undisturbed natural geology of this vicinity is yellow chalky clay till.

2.3 History and Archaeology

Directly to the north are findspots of prehistoric worked flint artefacts, including a broken Neolithic hand axe (EHER 315, 316).

The substantial drainage ditches that define the northern and eastern boundaries of the roughly square site have been suggested to be the remains of a moated enclosure. Such moated settlement sites in north-west Essex are generally of medieval origin, usually 13-14th century. However, there is no known documentary, cartographic or archaeological evidence to substantiate this.

The Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) notes the site as lying within a field with the historic name 'brickfield' (EHER 148; Ryan 1999, 65). There is also 'Burnt-field Grove' nearby to the east, marked on modern mapping.

Most recently, observation of ground investigation test pits and boreholes by ECC FAU identified burnt material in the subsoil within the site area (Pocock 2005). No other artefacts or archaeologically significant deposits or cut features were observed and the origin of the burnt material was unclear. While this could relate either to occupation within a medieval moated enclosure or to later brick-making activity, a more recent date for its deposition was also considered possible (i.e. construction/occupation of 1970s dwelling).

3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The general aim of the project was to investigate and record any surviving archaeological remains encountered during groundworks within the development area.

4. METHOD

The project comprised of monitoring and recording ground reduction following the clearance of the former dwelling and of the machine-excavation of the new house and garage foundation trenches and service trenches. This was undertaken during intermittent observation by a professional archaeologist.

Exposed surfaces were cleaned and inspected for archaeological features, deposits and artefacts. Trench sections were cleaned as appropriate and inspected. A full written and

photographic record was also made of all significant deposits and features. Sketches were made of significant parts of sections, as appropriate. Standard FAU methodologies were employed with regard to the recording.

5. FIELDWORK RESULTS (Fig.1, Plates 1-2)

5.1 Building clearance and foundations

Inspection of the construction groundworks established that the vicinity of the former dwelling, roughly in the middle of the site, was heavily disturbed by its foundations. General disturbance was noted to a depth of 0.2m below the stripped/demolition surface, with substantial fragments of old concrete foundations exposed in the sides of the foundation trenches to a depth of 0.8m or more. The newly cut foundation trenches were 0.6m wide and an average of 1.2m deep; all were inspected. These also exposed mixed natural chalky clays with sand lenses and ovoid 'patches'. No archaeologically significant features, deposits or artefacts were identified.

To the east, observation of the clearance of a c.15m x 8m area for the garage established that this area had been heavily disturbed by the roots of rough scrub and self-seeded small trees that until recently occupied this location. Under 0.2m of a mixed modern deposit of soil, rubble and charcoal, approximately 0.35m of topsoil overlay the natural chalky till deposit. No archaeological remains were identified.

To the west of the house foundations, site clearance had exposed the surface of the in-filled boundary ditch that formerly separated the site from the adjacent pasture. This was filled with a dark brown silt similar to that of the surrounding and overlying topsoil, and contained occasional large 19th-20th century brick fragments. It is likely that the ditch had been backfilled in the modern period.

5.2 Service trenches

Monitoring of both electricity cable and drainage service trenches along the eastern and northern edges of the site, generally machine-cut 0.5m wide and at least 0.6m deep, did not reveal the presence of archaeological remains, except in the very north-west corner of the site. However, subsoil and overlying topsoil exposed in the trench along much of the northern site edge contained both lenses and scattered fragments of ash and charcoal. It is likely that this material derived from the disposal of fire-hearth waste into the open ditch, to the rear of, and contemporary with, the 1970s dwelling.

A single feature of archaeological significance was identified toward the west end of the service trench that ran along the northern edge of the site. As exposed in section, this appeared to be the remains of a large, vertically-sided, cut (context 003), at least 2.8m wide and in excess of 0.3m deep below a further 0.3m of topsoil. Only a few fragments of pottery and tile were retrieved from its *in situ* mid-brown silty clay fill (002). The incidence of charcoal fragments and flecks were also noted. A larger quantity of pottery, tile, animal bone and oyster shell was collected from side-cast material (001), alongside the trench, clearly deriving from the same source. There was no opportunity to manually excavate the remaining fill within the trench, as the electricity cable had already been laid prior to archaeological inspection. The collected pottery indicates a broadly medieval date for this pit-like feature.

6. FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL MATERIAL

6.1 Finds (by Joyce Compton)

Small groups of finds were recovered from two contexts; context 001 representing the unstratified side-cast material from cut feature 003 and context 002 material from its *in situ* fill. All of the material has been recorded by count and weight, in grams, by context. Full details can be found in Appendix 2. The finds are described by category below.

Pottery

Twenty-five sherds of pottery, weighing 126g, were recovered. These have been examined briefly by Helen Walker, as follows:

Finds from the side-cast deposit 001 comprise 14 sherds of medieval coarseware, at least some of which are Hedingham coarse ware; weight 50g. The remainder, 9 sherds, weight 64g, are sandy orange ware, some of which have traces of glaze.

The fill of cut feature 003 (context 002) produced two sherds, one of Hedingham coarse ware and one from a thumbled jug base in sandy orange ware, showing splashes of glaze on the underside; weight 16g. The assemblage mainly comprises body sherds and is broadly datable to the 12th to 16th centuries.

Roof tile fragments

Both contexts 001 and 002 produced roof tile fragments, total weight 152g. The fragments are very small and have no diagnostic features. Tiles are difficult to date empirically, but these may well be the same date as the pottery, i.e. 13th to 16th century.

Lava quern

A very small piece of lava was collected from side-cast material 001. This is an imported stone, used for quern stones from the Roman period onwards. This piece is likely to be medieval or late medieval.

Animal bone and Shell

A single piece of animal bone and two fragments of oyster shell were recorded. These probably represent disposal of food waste.

Further work is not required on any of the finds, due to the small quantities involved. All of the material should be retained.

6.2 Environmental remains

No suitable deposits with perceived significant environmental potential were identified and so no soil samples were taken.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Archaeological monitoring has established that much of the interior of the site has been heavily disturbed by its occupation and use in the late 20th century. It is likely that the ash and charcoal observed in both the ground investigation holes and the service trenches derives from the disposal of fire-hearth waste from the former house, by either discard in the surrounding ditch, or else digging-in to flower beds. Consequently, it appears very unlikely that this site has past associations with brick-making, known to have occurred in the surrounding vicinity.

More significantly, the presence of a probable Medieval rubbish pit adds some weight to the tentative identification of the site as a possible moated homestead settlement. Although no other archaeological remains were found across its interior, perhaps due to survival of deposits being limited to the less-disturbed peripheries, further consideration of the site boundaries is perhaps instructive. The extant northern boundary ditch, particularly immediately north of the Medieval pit, is relatively impressive, at c.4m wide and 1.5m deep. Indeed, where a drainage trench extended into this ditch, an earlier cut and fill were discerned, showing that the ditch was probably once even more substantial. Elsewhere, further east, the ditch is less substantial, probably due to silting and subsequently less cleaning-out. The western edge of the site, as denoted by the change in ground surface, the presence of a line of old trees and of an underlying backfilled ditch, clearly follows the line of

the former enclosure. A slight linear hollow, running east-west across the garden at the front of the site, probably marks the position of the south side of the enclosure. It therefore remains a distinct possibility that Elm Trees does indeed represent the remains of a Medieval moated settlement. Any concerted cleaning-out of the ditches in future could provide further opportunities to investigate this.

Acknowledgements

This work was commissioned by Glyn and Jan Crawley, whose assistance and co-operation throughout the fieldwork is appreciated. A. Robertson and M. Atkinson carried out the fieldwork, with reporting being undertaken by the latter. A. Lewsey prepared the illustrations. Richard Havis of ECC HEM monitored the work on behalf of Uttlesford DC planning department.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------|---|
| Brown, N. & Glazebrook, J. | 2000 | <i>Research and Archaeology: a Framework for the Eastern Counties, 2. research agenda and strategy</i> , E. Anglian Archaeol. Occ. Pap. 8 |
| Gurney, D. | 2003 | <i>Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England</i> , E. Anglian Archaeol. Occ. Pap.14 |
| Havis, R. | 2006 | <i>Archaeological Monitoring at Elm Trees, Ashdon</i> . ECC HEM brief, March 2006 |
| Institute of Field Archaeologists | 1999 | Standard and Guidance for archaeological watching brief (revised) |
| Pocock, M. | 2005 | <i>Elm Trees, Ashdon, Essex: Archaeological Observation of Ground Investigations</i> , ECC FAU rep. March 2006 |
| Ryan, P. | 1999 | <i>Brick in Essex: the clayworking craftsmen and gazetteer of sites</i> |

APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT DATA

Context	Type	Description	Date
001	Unstratified	Side-cast material deriving from fill 003	-
002	Fill	Mid-brown silty clay, 0.3m+ thick. Fill of 003	Medieval
003	Cut (pit?)	Vertically-sided cut, 2.8m wide, 0.3m+ deep. Observed in section	Medieval

APPENDIX 2: FINDS DATA

Context	Feature	Count	Weight	Description	Date
1	u/s	1	2	Animal bone; vertebra fragment	-
		2	6	Oyster shell fragments	-
		1	10	Lava quern fragment	?Medieval
		9	100	Roof tile fragments	Med/post med.
		23	112	Pottery; rim and body sherds, some glazed	Medieval
2	3	3	52	Roof tile fragments	Med/post med.
		2	14	Pottery; base and body sherds	Medieval

APPENDIX 3: ARCHIVE INDEX

SITE NAME : Elm Trees, New House Lane, Ashdon, Essex (ASET 06)

Index to the Archive

File containing:

- 1. Research Archive**
 - 1.1 Ground Investigation observation report
 - 1.2 ECC HEM brief
 - 1.3 ECC FAU written scheme of investigation
 - 1.4 Client/archive report
 - 1.5 Transfer of title agreement

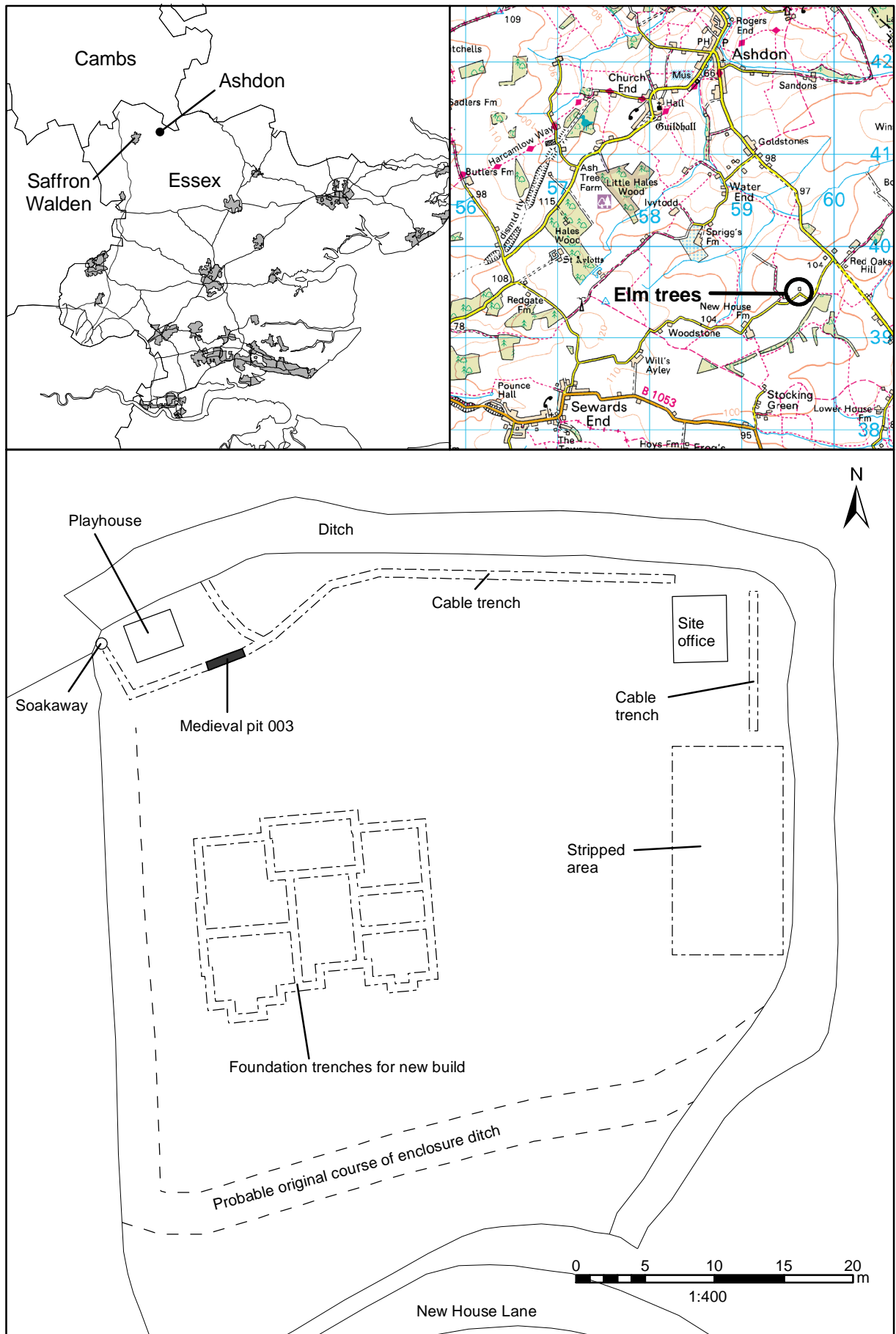
- 2. Site Archive**
 - 2.1 3 context sheets
 - 2.2 Photographic record (12 digital images and hard copies + 1 register sheet)
 - 2.3 Archive finds report
 - 2.4 Miscellaneous plans, maps, sketches and notes

Not in file:

- 1 (part) box of finds

APPENDIX 4: EHER SUMMARY SHEET

Site Name/Address: Elm Trees, New House Lane, Ashdon	
Parish: Ashdon	District: Uttlesford
NGR: TL 596395	Site Code: ASET 06
Type of Work: Monitoring	Site Director/Group: M. Atkinson; ECC Field Archaeology Unit
Date of Work: 26 June & 7 September 2006	Size of Area Investigated: Development area c.2400 sq m
Location of Finds/Curating Museum: Saffron Walden Museum	Funding Source: Mr & Mrs G. Crawley (owner occupiers)
Further Work Anticipated? No	Related EHER Nos:
Final Report: EAH round-up summary	
Periods Represented: Medieval, modern	
SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:	
<p>Archaeological monitoring was undertaken on site clearance and the excavation of foundation trenches and associated service trenches for a new house, replacing a 1970s bungalow which until recently occupied the site.</p> <p>The site is bounded by extant ditches on two sides and it has been postulated that these could be the remains of a Medieval moated settlement.</p> <p><u>Post-medieval/Modern</u></p> <p>It was established that much of the central and eastern parts of the site have been disturbed by modern occupation activity. The incidence of ash and charcoal in subsoil deposits is likely to be associated with this.</p> <p><u>Medieval</u></p> <p>A single large archaeological feature, probably a pit of Medieval date, was found in the north-west corner of the site.</p> <p>The northern boundary ditch survives to a width of c.4m and depth of 1.5m, while the eastern ditch is part-in-filled. The completely in-filled west ditch was observed during general site clearance, and the southern ditch is possibly represented by a slight E-W linear depression in the front garden.</p> <p>The site could therefore be the remains of a medieval moated homestead.</p>	
Previous Summaries/Reports: n/a	
Author of Summary: M. Atkinson (ECC FAU)	Date of Summary: October 2006



Mapping reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of HMSO. Crown copyright. Licence no.LA100019602.

Fig.1. Location plan



Plate 1. House foundation trenches, looking west



Plate 2. Detail of modern disturbance in house foundation trenches