

**LAND ADJACENT TO THE SARACEN'S HEAD HOTEL  
CHEQUERS LANE  
GREAT DUNMOW  
ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING**



**Essex County Council**

Field Archaeology Unit

November 2006

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING**

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	ECC Historic Environment Management
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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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**LAND ADJACENT TO THE SARACEN'S HEAD HOTEL CHEQUERS LANE  
GREAT DUNMOW  
ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING**

**Client:** Roger Carlton & Associates for Mr Pierce Campion

**Planning Application No.:** UTT/0317/05

**NGR:** TL 6271 2193

**Site Code:** GD 7

**FAU Project No.:** 1693

**OASIS No.:** essexcou1-20660

**Dates of Fieldwork:** 20-31 October 2006

**SUMMARY**

*Archaeological monitoring was carried out on groundworks for a new block of flats in a walled garden adjacent to the Saracen's Head Hotel, Great Dunmow. The monitoring followed a previous trial-trenching evaluation undertaken in 1999, which recorded deeply stratified medieval and post-medieval cess and rubbish pits sealed beneath 18th/19th-century garden soil and modern overburden up to 1.0m thick. The Essex County Council Historic Environment Management team initially required an area excavation to be carried out, but after consultation the archaeological requirement was reduced to monitoring after a change of foundation design to ground-beam foundations supported on piles. This change of design minimised disturbance of the medieval and post-medieval deposits.*

*The majority of the foundation trenches did not penetrate to medieval levels, but the eastern foundation trench exposed three features originally identified in the evaluation trenches; a medieval rubbish pit and two post-medieval cess pits. These features would have been located in the building plots behind nos. 10-16 High Street, which still includes listed buildings dating to the 15th- and 18th-centuries. Post-medieval or modern pits, probably dating to the 19th century or later, were also identified outside the evaluation trenches but within the footprint of the south wing of the new building.*

*Medieval features and deposits, as identified in the evaluation trenching, survive largely intact beneath the new building, with disturbance from deep piling estimated at less than 4% of its total area.*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Archaeological monitoring was carried out by the Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) on behalf of Mr Pierce Campion during the machine-excavation of foundation trenches for a block of flats on land adjacent to the Saracen's Head Hotel. The monitoring was carried out as a condition on planning consent (UTT/0317/05) following Planning Policy Guidance note 16 on archaeology and planning (DoE 1991).

The site had previously been subjected to an archaeological trial-trenching evaluation during an earlier planning proposal in 1999. The evaluation found deep deposits in the form of medieval and post-medieval cess and rubbish pits associated with backyard activity up to 1m below current ground level. Many of these features were deep and could not be fully excavated at the time. Full details may be found in the site evaluation report (Germany 1999). Based on these results, the Essex County Council Historic Environment Management team (ECC HEM) required an area excavation to be carried out in the north of the proposed new building, in the area of most intensive archaeological remains. However, following discussion between all parties, the archaeological requirement was changed to monitoring of foundation trenches after redesign of the foundations to ground-beams supported on piles. This change in design minimised disturbance to medieval remains and avoided the need to carry out costly archaeological excavations at a depth of between 1.0m and 2.5m, the depth of the deepest medieval and post-medieval pits.

The archaeological monitoring was carried out in accordance with an archaeological brief issued by the ECC HEM (2006) and the written scheme of investigation (WSI) prepared by the ECC FAU (2006). Copies of the report will be supplied to the client, his agent, Roger Carlton and Associates (to forward to the local planning authority), ECC HEM, and the Essex Heritage Environment Record (former SMR). A version of the report will be uploaded on the Online Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) (<http://ads.adhs.ac.uk/project/oasis>). The archive and copies of the report will be deposited at Saffron Walden Museum.

## **2.0 BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Location, Topography and Geology (Fig. 1)**

The site is located within a former walled garden to the south of the Saracen's Head Hotel and to the rear of Nos. 12-16 the High Street, in the medieval and post-medieval core of Great Dunmow (Fig. 1). Access to the site is gained from Chequers Lane via the main car park and former yard to the rear of the hotel. From the street, the land rises very gently to the south-west from 71.30m to

74.14m OD. The underlying natural geology varies from gravel to flint and clay and survives between from approximately 0.5 to 1.0m below present ground level.

## **2.2 Planning Background**

A planning application (UTT/0317/05) to construct an L-shaped block of nine flats within the former walled garden (Fig. 1) was approved by Uttlesford District Council Planning Department. On the advice of ECC HEM a full archaeological condition was placed on planning consent, due to the site's location within the historic core of the town and the results of the previous trial-trenching evaluation. Initially it was planned to dig deep strip foundations that would have had a high impact on the archaeological remains, and ECC HEM recommended excavation of a 12 x 17m area at the north end of the proposed new building, which the evaluation had identified as the densest area of archaeological remains. However, due to the problems of carrying out unusually deep excavations, and the cost of implementing this strategy, it was decided to use piled rather than strip foundations to minimise the impact on the archaeological remains. After discussion between all parties, the archaeological requirement was altered to monitoring of ground-beam trenches only. The ground beams are supported on 66 piles, each with a diameter of 350mm. Even allowing for a zone of disturbed ground round the piles, this represents disturbance of less than 4% of the footprint of the new building.

## **2.3 History and Archaeology**

A small Roman town covered an estimated 10-12 hectares of land in the south-western part of Great Dunmow. The High Street and Stortford Road are believed to mark the course of the Roman town ditch on the northern side of the settlement (Medlycott 1998). Excavations at Redbond Lodge (EHER 13864-69) to the south-west of the site identified a cemetery on the outskirts of the Roman settlement containing 1st and early 2nd century burials and a 4th century shrine (Wickenden 1988). A Middle Saxon structure was also found (EHER 13867), while pottery sherds of this date have been found in other parts of the town.

Settlement in the medieval period began at Church End, but, following the grant of a market charter in 1227, shifted to the High Street. Existing medieval timber-framed structures here date to the 14th and 15th centuries. The Saracen's Head was built in the 16th century and is Grade II listed (LBS 353296).

The trial-trenching evaluation (Germany 1999) found medieval pits and postholes associated with yard areas to the rear of building plots fronting onto the High Street. A 17th-century outside privy and cess pit was also recorded. The area behind the hotel was landscaped in the late 18th or 19th

century to form a walled garden, producing thick deposits of garden topsoil broken up by gravel pathways, recorded during the earlier evaluation of the site and the more recent monitoring works.

## **2.4 Evaluation Results (Figs 2 & 3)**

During the evaluation, three trenches (A-C) were dug within the walled garden, giving a 5% sample of the archaeological deposits inside the proposed footprint of the new building. Two others (D-E) were dug in the car park to the west. Several large (between 2 and 4m-wide) 13th-14th and 17th-century medieval and post-medieval cess pits, and some smaller storage/rubbish pits and post-holes were recorded below 0.6 to 1.0m of garden soil. Trench C and the northern half of trench B contained the most features of interest and it was here that further excavation was proposed for a second phase of work. Trenching outside the garden revealed pits and post-holes of post 19th century date.

## **3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The main aim of the work was to record the location, extent, date character, condition, significance and quality of the surviving archaeological remains, with particular emphasis placed on assessing any evidence for medieval and post-medieval structures, occupation and commercial activity, whilst preserving archaeological remains through the redesigned foundations.

## **4.0 METHOD**

The line of the foundation trenches was laid out and concrete piles inserted at 2.0-2.8m intervals. A mini-excavator was then used to remove the soil between the piles to a depth between 0.8 and 1.1m below existing ground level to contain reinforced concrete ground-beams. Initially the trenches were to be dug together and then left open for inspection before the concrete was poured. However, due to wet weather, the groundworks were carried out in two stages. The first stage was in the northern area, the results of which were recorded on the first site visit. Having poured the concrete, the remainder of the trenches were dug. On the second and final visit the area around the western arm of the new building was observed, but not the central, southern area, which had already been concreted and backfilled. Thus in reality only two-thirds of the trenching was properly observed during the monitoring.

Standard FAU excavation and recording procedures were followed where appropriate. Work conformed to the IFA's *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (IFA 1999),



and ALGAO's *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003) throughout the project, although features were mainly recorded from the top of the foundation trenches as access was hampered by the wet weather, narrow trenches, workmen, machinery and hazardous reinforcing rods from the tops of the piles. Digital and 35mm monochrome photographs were taken as part of the site record. The recent work adopted the site code used for the evaluation work, and continued the same context numbering system as before, beginning at context 112.

## **5.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS (Figs 2 & 3)**

The medieval and post-medieval features recorded in the trial-trenching evaluation were overlain by a thick layer of garden topsoil and overburden, between 0.6 and 1m deep (context 112). Finds from this layer dated it to the 18th century or later. In the northern end of the site the layer extended beyond the base of the modern foundation trenches, which were dug to a depth of 0.8m. This amorphous layer appeared to extend southwards for some distance, approximately 22m in the main part of the trench. In these parts the natural subsoil was below the base of the foundation trenches.

The eastern wall line, however, was dug deeper, up to 1.1m, to lay a tree-root retarding membrane, which meant the tops of some features were encountered just above the natural sand/gravel at the base of the trenches. In these cases, only the upper c. 0.1m of the feature was seen and the edges were indistinct against the topsoil. They appeared to be continuations of post-medieval pit 50 and medieval pit 58 investigated in trench B of the evaluation (Fig. 3). In the evaluation, pit 50 was at least 0.7m deep, and pit 58 at least 1.0m deep (neither was bottomed). The southern edge to a pit, possibly post-medieval pit 64 identified in the evaluation, was recorded more successfully where the topsoil/overburden became shallower (0.65m) further south. In the evaluation this had been obscured by one of three gravel paths that had been left *in situ* as baulks. This was assigned a new context number, cut 117 and the two fills (115 and 116) recorded from section. The top fill, 115, bore a close resemblance to fill 66 recorded in the evaluation. In the evaluation the pit was excavated to a depth of 1m, but was not bottomed.

A small group of inter-cutting pits were recorded at the south end of the foundation trench, in the area of evaluation trench A (Fig. 3). None of these was identified in the evaluation and, with their identical fills, the relationship of these pits could not be established. One of them, pit 119, was definitely modern in date as its fill contained modern china and plastic. The other pits, 120 and 123 had identical fills and are also likely to be modern. All cut natural subsoil and were sealed by 0.6m of topsoil. It is likely they are features associated with the recent garden.



A further pit was identified in the foundation trench in north-west corner of the western arm of the new building. Pit 125 contained small fragments of pegtile and is likely therefore to be of post-medieval date. Compared to the other features this was fairly shallow, cut only 0.35m into natural gravel, beneath 0.8m of topsoil. No other features were identified.

## **6.0 FINDS REPORT**

### **6.1 General Finds** by J. Compton

Small groups of finds were recovered from two contexts; these have been recorded by count and weight, in grams, by context. Full details can be found in Appendix 2. The finds are described by context below.

#### ***Layer 112 (topsoil)***

The finds from the topsoil comprise a part-brick and two roof tile fragments. The latter are not closely datable within the post-medieval period. The brick is broken at both ends but, following the brick typology in Ryan (1996, 94-6), the depth and the fabric indicate an 18th century date.

#### ***Fill 115 of pit 117***

Further brick and tile fragments (weight 62g) were recovered from the fill of pit 117. These are too small for close dating, but are likely to be post-medieval. The nail is hand-made and thus unlikely to be modern, and the condition indicates a post-medieval date rather than earlier. Animal bone fragments, weighing 38g, mainly comprise the proximal end of a rib from a large mammal and probably represent food waste.

Further work on any of the material will not be necessary and the finds need not be retained.

## **7.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Archaeological monitoring of foundation trenches in the walled garden of the Saracen's Head Hotel confirmed the existence of well-stratified medieval and post-medieval features. They were identified as typical backyard features to building plots on the High Street dated to the medieval town planning phase, and presumably relate to activity associated with existing frontage buildings (nos. 10-16) of medieval and post-medieval date. Many of these are listed buildings that pre-date the walled garden, which is likely to be a late 18th- or 19th-century development.

The relatively shallow depth of modern groundworks has had a low impact on the archaeological remains, as these lay mainly below the base of the foundation trenches, owing to the depth of garden topsoil across much of the site. The only features from the evaluation trenching to be re-identified were positioned along the eastern piling line that was dug to a depth of 1.1m rather than 0.8m. In other parts of the site, scattered modern and post-medieval pits were encountered, probably associated with cultivation/planting in the walled garden.

The ground beams have only a minimal impact on the significant archaeological deposits, and although the piling has an impact, the piling density of less than 4% is considered to be an acceptably low level of disturbance, so that the majority of the deeply stratified medieval and post-medieval remains are preserved beneath the modern building.

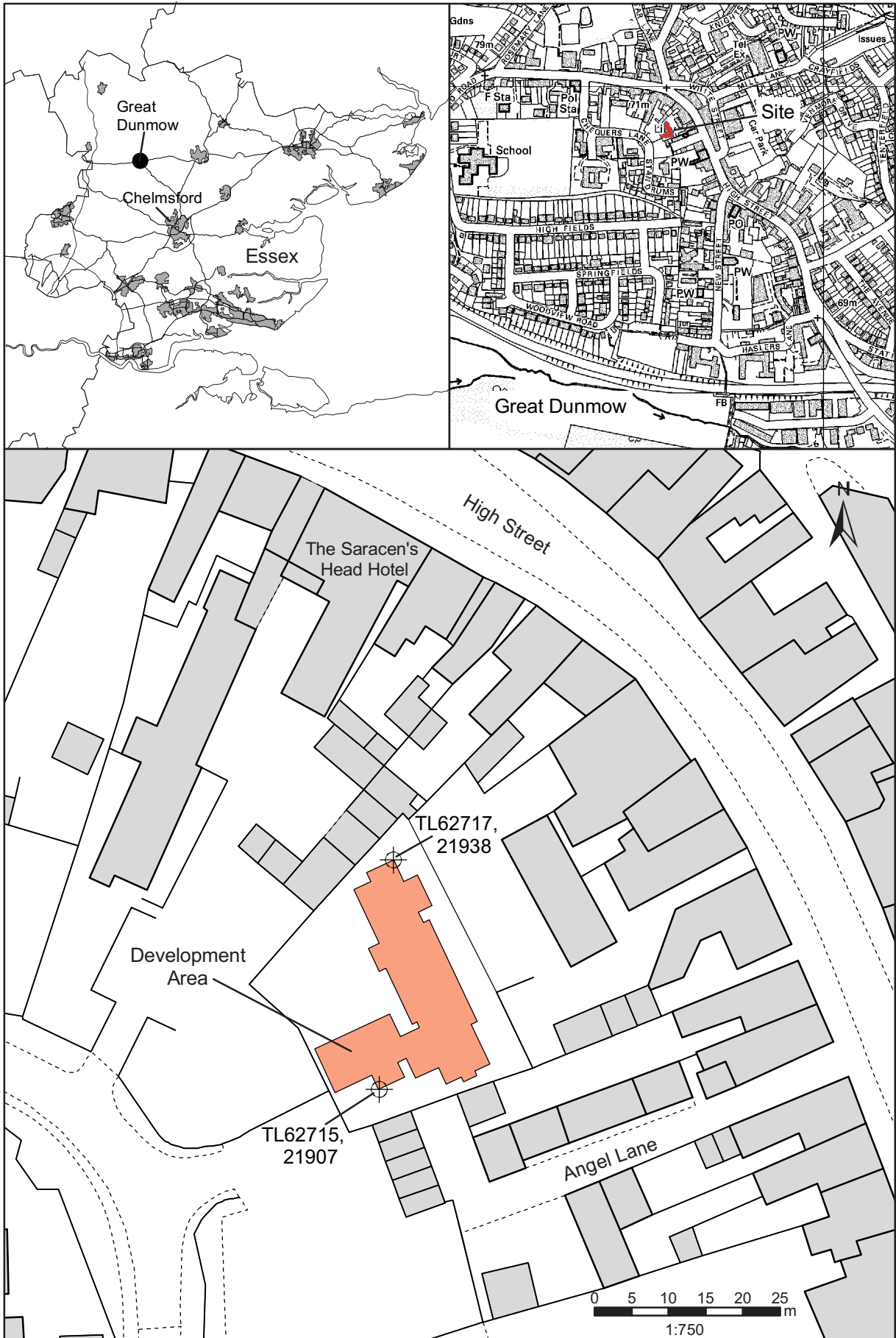
The development of Great Dunmow in the medieval and post-medieval periods is not fully understood. Much of the archaeological work has concentrated on the Roman town and backlands rather than the core of the medieval town (Medlycott 1999). The evaluation and monitoring works have clearly shown a high potential for archaeological deposits to survive behind the High Street, in areas that have not been affected by intensive land use.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Site visits and recording were undertaken by the author for Pierce Campion. Thanks are due to Roger Carlton and Kevin, the site foreman, for facilitating the works. Illustrations were prepared and drawn by Andrew Lewsey and the author. The project was monitored by Richard Havis of ECC HEM.

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Fig.1. Location plan

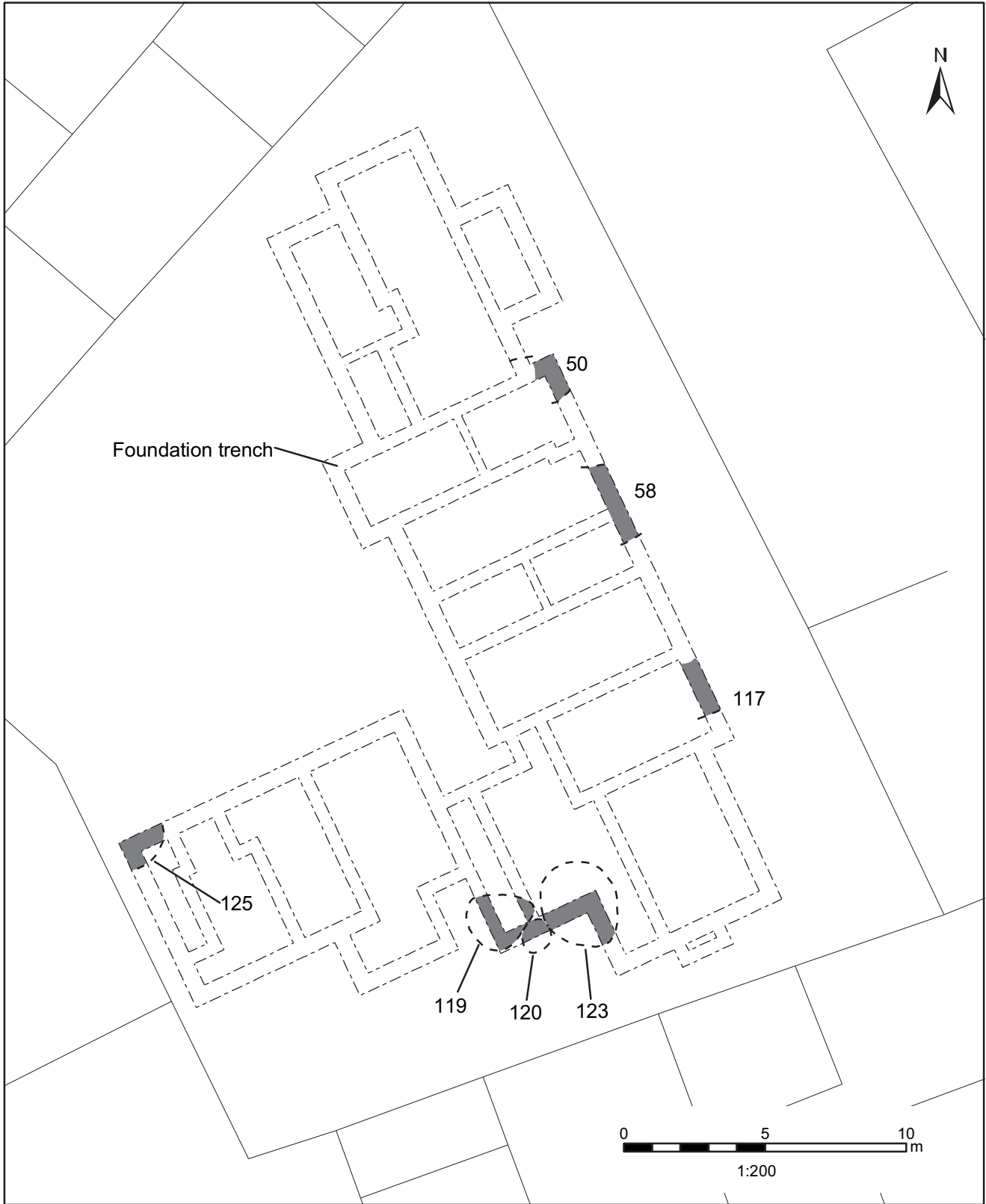


Fig.2. Detail of foundation trenches and observed features

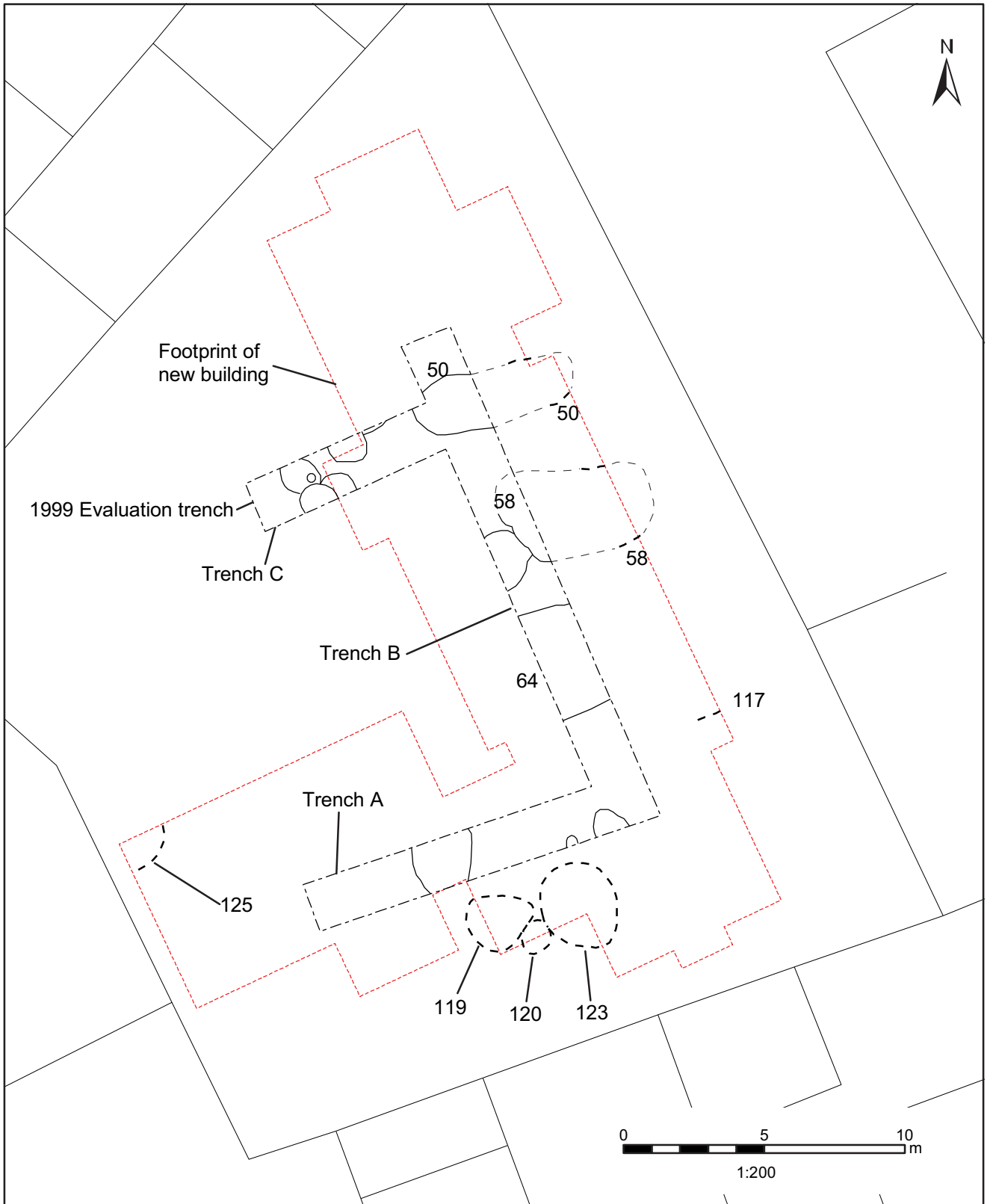


Fig.3. Monitoring results in relation to the 1999 evaluation

## Appendix 1: Context Data

Context numbers below 112 refer to equivalent or identical contexts recorded previously in the evaluation

<b>Context</b>	<b>Feature</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Date</b>
112	layer	Topsoil, equiv. to layers 25 & 53	Post-med/mod
113	layer	Dumped layer over pit 117	Post-med/mod
114	layer	Dumped deposit- redeposited nat. assoc with 113	Post-med/mod
115	fill	Upper fill of pit 117, equiv. to fill 66.	Post-med
116	fill	Lower fill of pit 117	Post-med
117	cut	Southern edge of cess pit 64 cutting natural clay.	Post-med
118	fill	Fill of modern pit 119	mod
119	cut	Modern pit to SW- garden feature?	mod
120	fill	Fill of pit 121, same as 119	Post-med/mod
121	cut	Pit to SW- garden feature?	Post-med/mod
122	fill	Fill of 123, same as 119	Post-med/mod
123	cut	Pit to SW- garden feature?	Post-med/mod
124	fill	Fill of shallow pit 125	Post-med
125	cut	Pit in NW corner	Post-med

## Appendix 2: Finds Data

<b>Context</b>	<b>Feature</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Weight</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Date</b>
112	Layer	1	895	Brick fragment, 110 x 50mm deep	18th C
		2	188	Roof tile fragments	Post med.
115	117	1	10	Iron nail, blacksmith-made	-
		5	38	Animal bone; rib fragments, proximal end, large mammal; fragments	-
		1	34	Brick fragment	Post med.
		1	28	Roof tile fragment	Post med.

## Appendix 3: Contents of Archive

**Index to the Archive** (to be included with the evaluation)

File containing:

- 1. Introduction**
  - 1.1 ECC HEM Brief
  - 1.2 ECC FAU Written Scheme of Investigation
- 2. Research Archive**
  - 2.1 Copy of report
  - 2.2 Report pdf-formatted
- 3. Site Archive**
  - 3.1 Photographic register
  - 3.2 Site photographic record (35mm monochrome prints & digital images)
  - 3.3 Site plans & drawings
  - 3.4 Trench and watching brief sheets



#### Appendix 4: EHER Summary Sheet

<b>Site Name/Address:</b> Land adjacent to the Saracen's Head Hotel, Great Dunmow, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Great Dunmow	<b>District:</b> Uttlesford
<b>NGR:</b> TL 6271 2193	<b>Site Code:</b> GD 7
<b>Type of Work:</b> Archaeological monitoring	<b>Site Director/Group:</b> Andrew Letch ECC FAU
<b>Dates of Work:</b> 20th & 31st October 2006	<b>Size of Area Investigated:</b> c.250m <sup>2</sup>
<b>Location of Finds/Curating Museum:</b> Saffron Walden	<b>Funding Source:</b> Pierce Campion
<b>Further Work Anticipated?</b> None	<b>Related EHCR Nos.:</b> HER 17459
<b>Final Report:</b> Summary in EAH	
<b>Periods Represented:</b> post-med & modern	
<b>SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:</b>	
<p><i>An evaluation undertaken by ECC FAU in 1999 established the existence of deep stratified medieval and post-medieval pits and postholes within the walled garden to the south of the Saracen's Head Hotel. Archaeological monitoring during the construction of new flats re-established the presence of a medieval storage/rubbish pit and two post-medieval cess pits during the cutting of ground-beam trenches discovered in the evaluation, part of domestic/commercial activity in plots behind the High Street. Post-medieval, probable 19th century and later, pits were also identified outside the evaluation area. Monitoring confirmed that the majority of groundworks did not penetrate to medieval levels, which are c.1m below later garden deposits .</i></p>	
<b>Previous Summaries/Reports:</b> Germany, M., 1999: <i>The Saracen's Head Hotel, Great Dunmow, Essex: Archaeological Evaluation by Trial Trenching</i> ECC FAU evaluation report 638 (unpub.).	
<b>Author of Summary:</b> A. R. Letch	<b>Date of Summary:</b> 29th November 2006