

**ASHEN HOUSE FARM
DOCTORS LANE
ASHEN
ESSEX**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING



**Essex County Council
Field Archaeology Unit**

AUGUST 2007

ESSEX HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD SUMMARY SHEET

Site Name/Address: Ashen House Farm, Doctors Lane, Ashen, Essex	
Parish: Ashen	District: Braintree
NGR: TL 7473 4232	Site Code: ANAF 07
Type of Work: Archaeological Monitoring	Site Director/Group: T. Ennis, ECC Field Archaeology Unit
Date of Work: 1-15 June 2007	Size of Area Investigated: 38 sq m
Location of Finds/Curating Museum: Braintree	Funding Source: Gordon D.S. Burles Chartered Architect, acting for the landowners, Mr and Mrs Coutts.
Further Work Anticipated?: No	Related HER Nos.: 6980
Final Report: Essex Archaeology and History annual round-up	
Periods Represented: Post-medieval	
<p>SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:</p> <p>Archaeological monitoring was undertaken at Ashen House Farm, Ashen during ground-works for the construction of a new sitting room extension and a conservatory. The monitoring was carried out as a condition on planning consent BTE/1782/02 and a Scheduled Monument consent authorised by the DCMS, on the advice of Debbie Priddy, English Heritage's Inspector of Ancient Monuments for Essex. A copy of this summary will be submitted to the Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS No.: essexcou1-28373) (http://ahds.ac.uk/project/oasis).</p> <p>Ashen House Farm is a Scheduled Monument (SM 20768) consisting of a moated enclosure, fish pond and leat (Fig. 1). The moated enclosure and the fishpond are probably medieval in date, as moated manors and farmhouses were a notable feature of the medieval landscape in Essex. Set within the moated enclosure, Ashen House is a Grade II listed building dating to c.1540, part-rebuilt in the later 17th or 18th century, with 19th century and modern additions (Essex Historic Environment Record 6980).</p> <p>The new sitting room extension measures 6.2 x 4.2m and the conservatory 5.0 x 2.5m. The sitting room was located at the south end of the existing house and the conservatory at the north-east corner (Fig. 2). Prior to the cutting of foundation trenches piles were sunk in the areas both of the sitting room and the conservatory. The piling operation was monitored but no archaeological deposits or finds were identified.</p> <p><u>Sitting Room</u></p> <p>The groundworks for the sitting room comprised the excavation of a foundation trench 0.7m wide and 1.0m deep for its outer walls, and a north-south trench through its centre (Fig. 2). The southern foundation trench was wider to accommodate a bay window. Where undisturbed, the sequence of deposits exposed in the foundation trenches (Fig. 2, sections 1 and 2) consisted of 0.2m of turf and topsoil (1) sealing a 0.62m-thick layer of mid greyish brown clay-silt (2), probably subsoil rather than a levelling layer. Beneath this was a 0.15m-deep layer of grey to brownish grey silty clay (3), representing disturbance of the underlying brown flinty clay natural. In the foundation trench against the south wall of the house, a shallower topsoil, 0.12m, sealed a mixed chalky gravelly clay layer 0.2m deep, representing disturbance from construction of the house, overlying the subsoil layer 2. Extensive root disturbance was noted in the eastern trench, which was aligned with an existing hedge.</p> <p>Extending from beneath the south-west corner of the existing house was the stub of a truncated foundation (6) (Fig. 2). The surviving part of this foundation consisted of 13 courses of bricks, one brick wide, bonded with buff mortar containing small white flecks</p>	

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(Plates 1 and 2). The bricks were all unfrogged and measured 240 x 110 x 55mm. The foundation was trench-built and a construction cut was visible in section on its eastern side, cutting the subsoil and bottoming out at the top of the natural clay. Pat Ryan, the expert on bricks in Essex, suggests that the bricks and mortar used in the wall could be 16th-century in date. The foundation would originally have extended for 5m to the south, with its line represented by a vertical-sided robber trench (4) (Fig. 2, section 1). The eastern side and southern end of the robber trench were both visible in section, and it terminated just short of the southern limit of the sitting room. The backfill of the robber trench, visible along both sides of the western foundation trench, comprised mixed brown clay silt (5) with fragments of roof tile and mortar flecks, but contained no datable material. No equivalent foundation or robber trench was found extending from the south-east corner of the existing house. The south end of the wall line appears to have formed the south-eastern corner of a structure extending to the west.

Remnants of a north-south brick drain (7), disturbed by the machine excavation, were recorded in the western corner of the bay foundation trench (Fig. 2, section 2; Plate 3). The drain was 0.34m wide and 0.34m high and may have originally extended some 0.8m into the trench. It comprised four courses of brick laid upon a bed of yellow-brown sand. The base of the drain comprised one brick laid across, with the walls formed of two courses of bricks laid lengthways, and the top of the drain formed by a one brick laid across on edge. The bricks were regular, appeared to be unfrogged and measured approximately 240 x 110 x 60mm. They were bonded with cream mortar containing small white and black inclusions. The sand and drain were laid in the bottom of a steep-sided construction cut (9) backfilled with mixed grey brown clay silt (8).

Conservatory

The foundation trenches for the northern part of the conservatory were 0.65m wide by 0.9m deep. The foundation trench for the southern, narrower, part of the conservatory was 1.8m wide and encompassed the complete footprint. Where undisturbed, the sides of the foundation trenches revealed 0.2m of topsoil over at least 0.7m of greyish brown clay-silt, the equivalent of subsoil layer 2 in the sitting room area. In parts these were disturbed by modern drainage and service trenches. A 1.5m-wide cut, directly below the topsoil, containing mixed clay silt with roof tile fragments and chalk and mortar flecks, was noted adjacent to the house in the northern foundation trench, but no dating evidence was recovered. The ground beneath the southern, narrower part, of the conservatory was heavily disturbed and comprised concreted brick foundations (probably associated with a lean-to structure removed prior to the archaeological monitoring) and loose deposits of gravel, clay and bricks (both frogged and unfrogged).

Interpretation

The brick wall 6 and robber trench 4 represent the remains of a demolished structure, probably the east wall of a building that extended westwards from the south end of the existing house. The wall was deeply founded but relatively narrow, suggesting that it may have supported a timber-framed superstructure. It is likely that the structure was an outbuilding of 16th-century date, possibly related to the original construction of the house in c.1540. There is unfortunately no historical map evidence to provide a context for the structure. The earliest map to show distinct structures, the Tithe Map of 1839 (ERO D/CT 10b), shows the house and surrounding area in its present-day layout, so the structure must have been demolished by this date. The drain (7) was probably constructed in the 18th century.

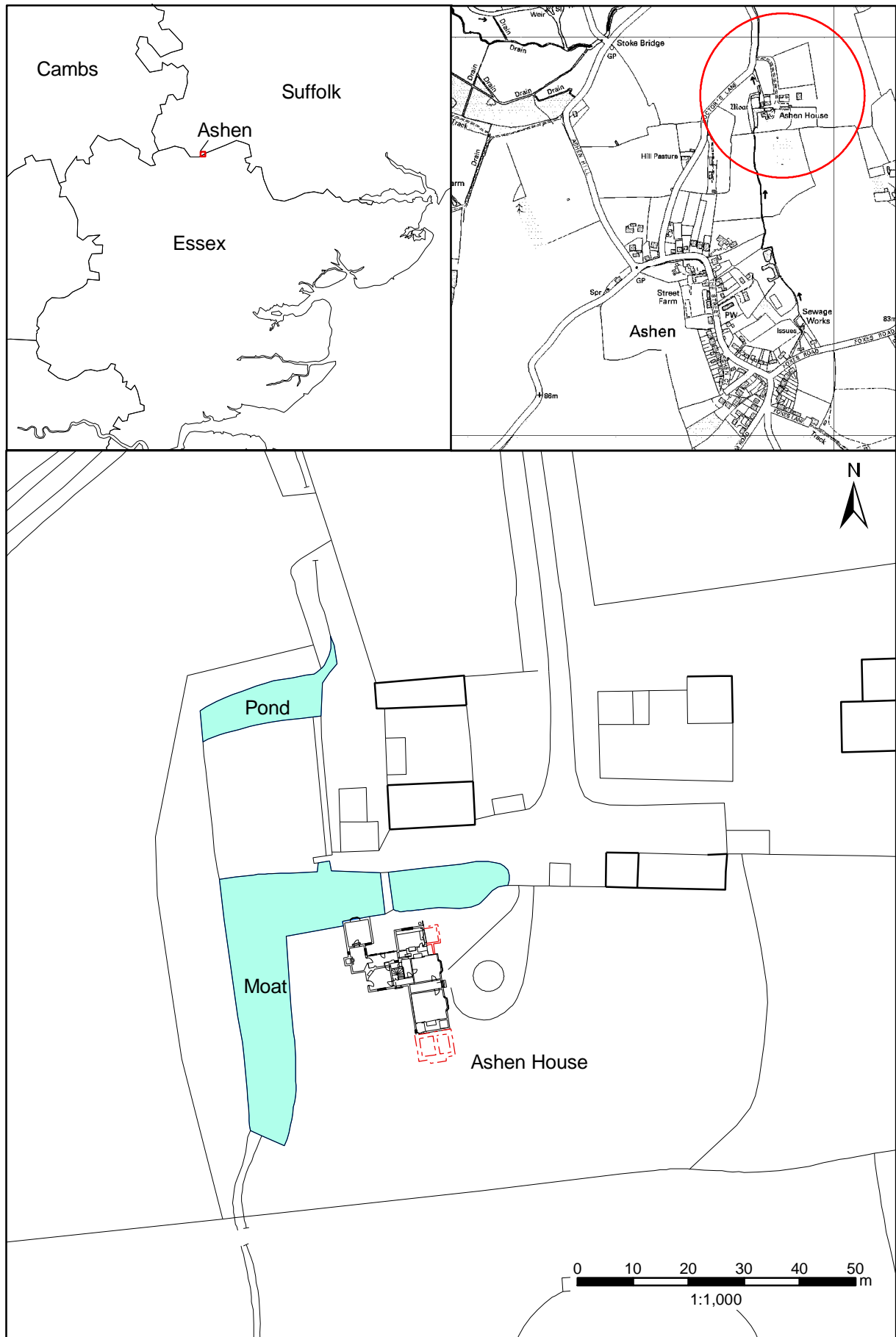
Previous Summaries/Reports: None**Author of Summary: T. Ennis****Date of Summary: August 2007**

APPENDIX 1

Context Data

All dimensions given in metres.

Context	Area	Type	Description	Period
1	Sitting room	Topsoil	Dark grey clay silt, 0.2m thick	-
2	Sitting room	Layer	Mid greyish brown clay silt, 0.62m thick	-
3	Sitting room	Layer	Mid grey to brownish grey clay silt, 0.15m thick	-
4	Sitting room	Robber trench	Linear cut, N-S aligned, 4.9m x 0.6m+ x 0.7m+ deep	Post-med
5	Sitting room	Fill of 4	Mixed brown clay silt with tile and mortar fragments	Post-med
6	Sitting room	Wall	N-S aligned, 0.24m wide x 0.75m high, bonded with buff mortar	Tudor
7	Sitting room	Drain	N-S aligned, 0.8m+ long x 0.34m wide x 0.34m high, bonded with cream mortar	18th century
8	Sitting room	Fill of 9	mixed grey brown clay silt, flecks of chalk, mortar and brick and tile	18th century
9	Sitting room	Construction cut	Linear, N-S aligned, 0.77m+ wide x 0.67m deep	18th century



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Fig.1. Location plan

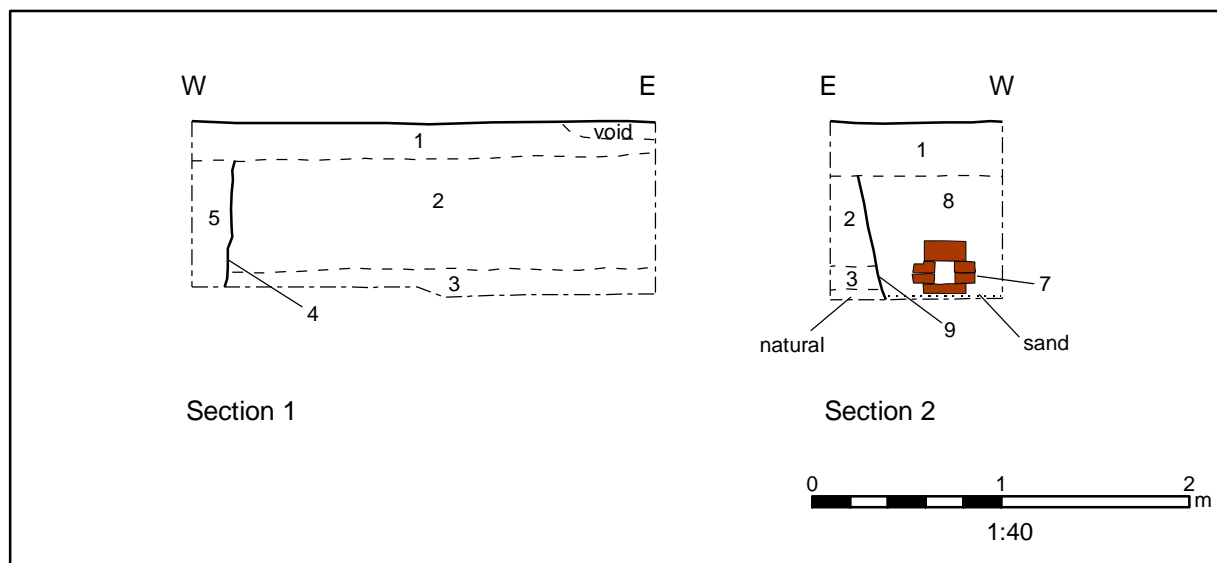
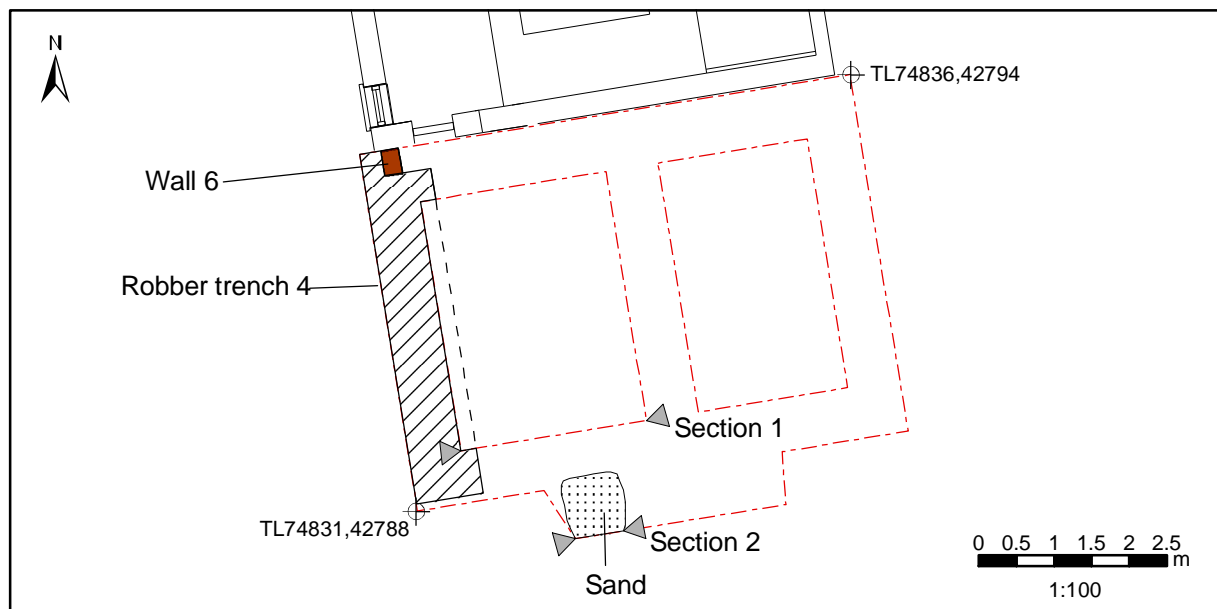
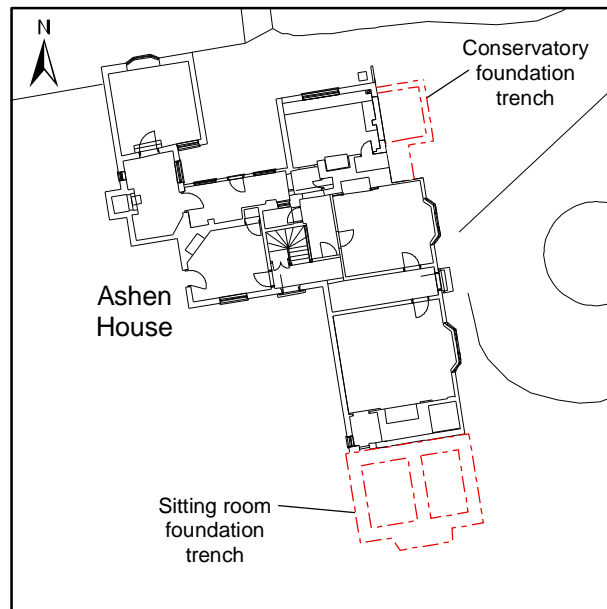


Fig.2. Trench plan and sections



Plate 1. Brick wall 6 looking north, 1m scale



Plate 2. Brick wall 6, detail, 6" (150mm) ruler scale



Plate 3. Brick drain 7, looking south, 1m scale



Plate 4. General view of the western trench of the sitting room