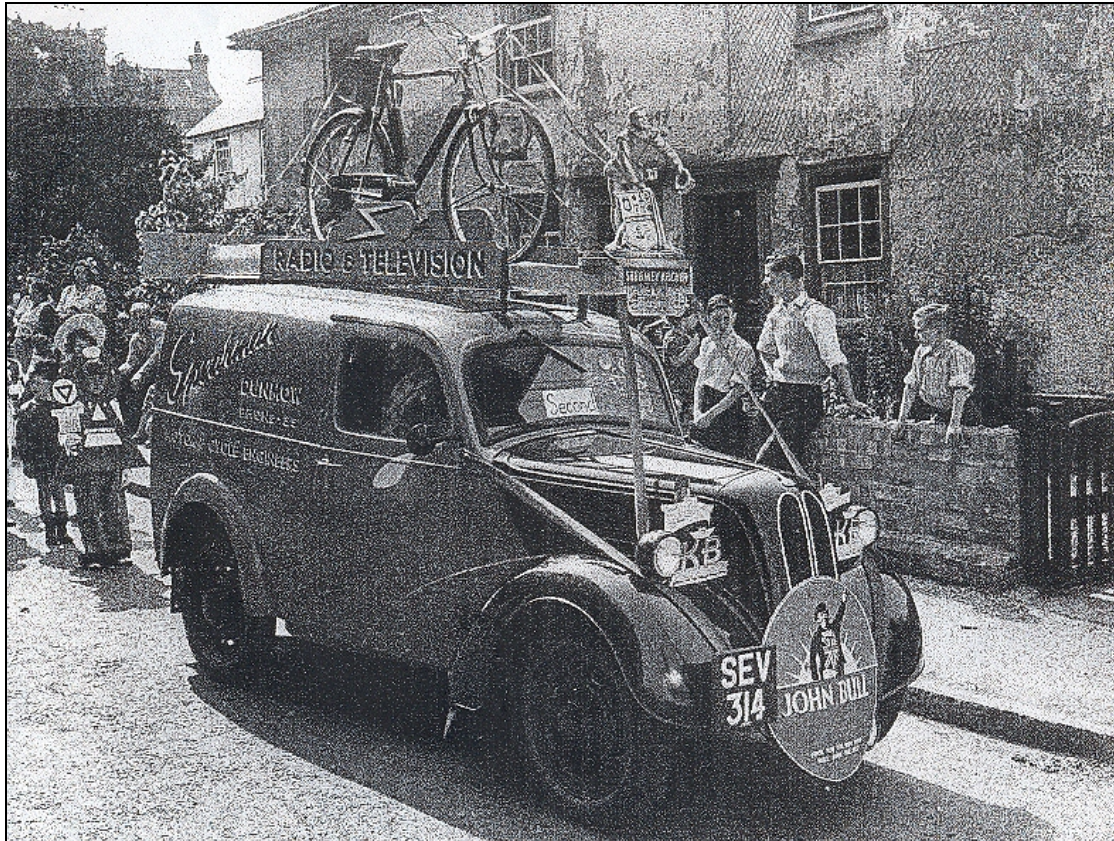


**SALTBOX SQUARE, THE DOWNS
GREAT DUNMOW
ESSEX**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION



Essex County Council
Field Archaeology Unit

January 2005

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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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**SALTBOX SQUARE, THE DOWNS
GREAT DUNMOW
ESSEX**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

Client: Radland Homes

Planning Application No.: UTT/0421/04

NGR: TL 6256 2241

Site Code: GDSS 04

FAU Project No.: 1440

Dates of Fieldwork: 9th-13th December 2004

SUMMARY

Foundations and associated features to a group of Victorian timber-framed terraced houses, arranged around a central yard, were observed during an excavation at Saltbox Square, Great Dunmow. No earlier features of archaeological significance were identified.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological excavation was undertaken by Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) prior to construction works at Saltbox Square. The work was funded by Radland Homes and carried out in accordance with a brief issued by the Heritage Environment Management team of Essex County Council (ECC HEM), who also monitored the work.

Copies of the report will be supplied to the client, Essex County Council Heritage Environment Management team (ECC HEM) and the ECC Heritage Environment Record (former SMR). The archive will be held at Saffron Walden Museum.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location, Topography and Geology

Saltbox Square is situated on high ground known as 'the Downs' on Rosemary Lane, at approximately 69.64m OD. From the site, the grounds slopes away to the east and south to the park and town centre. The area is residential, containing 19th century development

possibly contemporary with the Dunmow Infants School (fig. 1), founded in 1844. Surrounding contemporary structures appear to be timber-framed with rendered white-washed facades and sash windows.

Radland Homes latterly used the development area as a site compound whilst constructing several houses to the rear, known as 'Pondfields'. Since then it has been used for car parking by local residents. The underlying natural geology here is a mixture of clay and gravel.

2.2 Planning Background

An initial planning application was submitted to Uttlesford District Council in March 2004 to construct four houses. After discussion, the District Council reduced the number to three (UTT/0421/04) and a full archaeological condition was recommended by ECC HEM. The three houses will form a block along the street frontage, approximately 7.5 by 14.5m in area, with car parking at the rear.

2.3 History and Archaeology

The site is situated to the north-west of the historic Roman and medieval town and north-east of the former Roman road to Colchester, now the main Stortford Road.

Cartographic evidence (fig. 2, Chapman and Andre 1777) shows a possible medieval windmill in the proximity of the development area in the 18th century (HER 1316). This had disappeared by the mid-19th century (Tithe map 1840, not shown). However, an area to the rear of Saltbox Square is still known as 'Mill Field'.

Late 19th century mapping (fig. 3, OS First Edition, 1881) although not clear, appears to show a small block of houses on the site, likely to be Saltbox Square. According to the brief these were small one-up-one-down worker's houses, possibly forming an artisan quarter (Havis 2004). The New Series OS map, c. 1925, shows Saltbox Square in detail (fig.4). A slightly oblong block of eight houses on three sides can be seen, formed around a central yard open to the north. A separate block to the rear of the yard, also shown, contained a washroom and WC (S. Radland pers comm.). Most houses are of equal size and have front gardens. However, the two on the south-western arm and a third in the eastern corner, appear smaller. Those to the south-west also lack gardens (fig. 4).

The site name's derivation is unknown. However, during the 19th century it was usual to have large communal saltboxes in built-up areas, providing salt for cooking and preserving

meat and it is possible that the place name refers to this in some way. Smaller saltboxes were also kept inside by the fireplace to keep the salt dry. Alternatively, saltbox design was a form of colonial form of vernacular architecture popular in the eastern states of 19th century America. Characteristically, saltbox houses are timber-framed and weatherboarded with pitched roof and centrally-mounted chimney. They are set on two levels at the front with a single storey to the rear, beneath a catslide roof. The catslide roof equates with the hinged lid of a saltbox. The design may have gone over with the early settlers and have either British or European roots. Saltbox houses were built by the New England colonists from the middle of the 17th century. During the proceeding centuries the design spread to become a popular form today (Ibach 2002).

In the early stages of WWII the houses of Saltbox Square were filled with evacuee families from London. During the 1950s they were demolished before redevelopment plans were approved. The plans were rejected and the plot remained largely unused until now.

2.4 Building Description

The photograph of Saltbox Square on the front cover was taken during the Dunmow carnival sometime in the 1940s or 50s, and was provided by the client. This evidence, plus cartographic evidence and conversations with neighbours and passers-by, show the houses were basic one-up-one-downs, with small kitchens behind, facing onto the yard. Each was timber-framed and rendered, supported on a brick plinth, with a single sash window on each of the two floors. The front doors had flat moulded overdoors and architraves and the roofs were low-pitched and slated. Small garden plots faced onto the pavement, divided by narrow brick walls and a brick boundary wall along the road frontage. The photograph shows paint and plaster peeling away from the facade, exemplifying their poor condition at the time. This was probably a factor in their demolition.

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

In accordance with the brief (Havis 2004), the investigation aimed to excavate and record any archaeological deposits located within the footprint of the new building that may be disturbed by construction works. More specifically, this included evidence for the presence of the windmill or any associated medieval remains, and the clarification of the nature of the 19th century housing-particularly with reference to possible colonial 'saltbox' construction.

4.0 METHOD

The footprint of the site was marked out and overburden removed under archaeological supervision, using a mechanical excavator fitted with a 1m wide toothless bucket. A test pit was also dug to the north-east of the site to record the level of natural subsoil.

Remains of 19th century foundations were recorded and sub-soil deposits investigated for earlier remains. Standard FAU methodologies were used to record archaeological deposits and features in drawn and written form. Photographs were taken in 35mm monochrome and colour transparency film.

5.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS (figs. 5 and 6)

Approximately 0.15m of modern rubble overburden was removed across most of the site to reveal 19th century brick foundations corresponding to the layout of the front part of Saltbox Square as shown on earlier mapping (fig. 4). A further area of 1.5m was stripped to the north and east, beyond the original area, to confirm the internal layout. The west wall of the terrace is extrapolated on the plan of the site, which lay just outside the area of excavation (fig. 5). To the south-east, 0.3m of dark garden soil was removed onto a sandy clay gravel subsoil. The back yard area was identified to the north, beyond the rear wall of the front block. Coincidentally, this wall line equates to the proposed south wall of the development. No earlier archaeological features or artefacts were recorded, including those relating to medieval activity in the area.

For ease of reference, the excavation results are described in relation to the former house foundations.

5.1 Exterior

Plinth walls, stepped at the base, survived in truncated form up to six courses high, constructed from unfrogged soft red bricks with sharp arisses and few inclusions. The individual bricks were fairly large, with dimensions of 215-20 x 102 x 60mm ($8\frac{1}{2}-\frac{3}{4} \times 4 \times 2\frac{3}{8}$), coursed in English bond within a rich lime mortar. Truncation had removed any indications of structural features such as thresholds.

External evidence for garden divisions was found in the form of thin partition walls connected to post-holes abutting the frontage. The subsoil was generally more disturbed and mixed in

the front gardens. A slightly darker-stained linear feature was interpreted as a hedgeline and a sandy concentration as the bedding to a garden path. Part of the road frontage boundary wall was revealed in a slot just outside the area of excavation, although the majority of it lay slightly outside the excavation area. A square brick drain and earthen ware outflow pipe was recorded in the east corner. The former yard area to the rear was easily recognised by its rich dark soil and collection of fire rakings, broken glass and bones, none of which were retained due to their clearly modern date. Any other features had presumably been removed during the 1950s demolition.

5.2 Interior

A mid orange brown sand silt layer (context 4) was recorded inside the structure and interpreted as a layer of redeposited natural, used as a floor make-up. A test pit was dug into the layer and here natural gravel sand (context 6) was found 0.3m below the bottom of modern overburden at c.68.60m OD (fig. 6) A small slot was also dug against the inside wall to assess foundation depth and the existence of any construction cut. The foundations continued downwards for another 0.2m but no construction cut was seen on either side of the wall.

Thin internal walls divided each house into front and back rooms, both of which would have been small by the standards of today. The average front room measures 3 x 3.6m internally, and the back room, or kitchen, 1.3 x 3m. Although the room pattern is consistent, their size and arrangement vary. The bases to two pairs of chimneys and fireplaces to the front four houses were recorded, along the partition walls between properties (fig. 5). Areas of crushed brick and mortar corresponded to the bases of fireplaces were recorded. No floors or thresholds were observed in any of the house interiors.

6.0 FINDS REPORT

6.1 General Finds by Joyce Compton

Two sets of finds were examined; unstratified modern pottery and glass, and sample bricks from the 19th century structure (context 2). All were recorded by count and weight, in grams, and the bricks were also measured. Full details can be found in Appendix 2.

The glass and pottery are typical products of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The glass sherd is derived from a mineral water bottle, but the details of the firm and the maker of the bottle are lacking. The central motif appears to be C and perhaps I intertwined, but

even this is incomplete. The pottery is consistent with breakages from a domestic kitchen assemblage, comprising white earthenwares, some with blue transfer-print design, and part of a stoneware dish with brown glaze. A body sherd from a yellow and blue striped Mocha ware dish has a feathery 'tree' design created by dropping blue paint onto the wet glaze, so that the paint runs into the glaze.

A clay pipe stem fragment was also present, but this is not closely datable within the post-medieval period.

The bricks are plain, unfrogged and well-formed, in a standard size of 220mm long by 100mm wide by 60mm deep. There are faint pressure marks on the long edges, made when pressing the wet clay into a mould and then stacking the bricks ready for firing. Using the brick typology in Ryan (1996, 94-6), it can be seen that these are late 18th or early 19th century Red bricks.

The finds have all been discarded following recording, and no further work is required.

7.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

During the excavation, a considerable part of the ground plan to the 19th century houses of Saltbox Square was recorded, confirming the layout seen in the New Series OS map (fig. 4). The houses were small and crammed together to utilise a small amount of space. This is reflected in the room layout and the fact that the smaller of the eight houses were not provided with front gardens. As conversations with local passers-by verified, in living memory at least, these were basic houses, built cheaply and inhabited by the town's poorer families.

The structure is apparently of one phase, partly built from red bricks of late 18th or early 19th character. A more exact date may be the middle of the 19th century: between the publication of the 1840 Tithe map and the 1881 OS First Edition. It is likely to be contemporary with surviving Victorian buildings located nearby, which exhibit similar characteristics in appearance and build.

It seems unlikely that the design of Saltbox Square was influenced by and named after the 'saltbox houses' of America. Regardless of other factors, this is because the houses at Saltbox Square would require back rooms twice the floor depth to those recorded to achieve

a structure capable of carrying the catslide roof so characteristic of this building type. It is therefore more probable that the first floor simply carried over the back room, or the back room had a single-pitched lean-to roof. Instead the Square was probably named after a local saltbox, probably kept in the yard. Further research might produce more evidence on the Square's origins and provide a more accurate construction date.

No significant archaeological deposits, features or finds pre-dating Saltbox Square were found during the excavation. Nor was anything found to establish whether or not the windmill had medieval origins, and the absence of medieval artefactual evidence suggests no activity of this date in the immediate vicinity. However, plenty of information was gained of the layout and form of the 19th century houses that once stood here. No signs of industry associated with an artisan quarter were found and photographic evidence from the 1940s/50s shows no evidence of workshops at the front, although at their time of construction, believed to be in the mid 1840s, workshops may have existed. Such workshops would be sited at the front, with family accommodation on the first floor and to the rear.

Low-quality 19th century worker's housing invariably disappears leaving little record. Therefore the excavation at Saltbox Square is valuable in recording/assessing the conditions in which some poorer members of Essex society inhabited until recent times.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Site visits and recording were undertaken by the author. The front cover photograph and New Series OS map were provided by the client, Mr. Steve Radford. The project was monitored by Richard Havis of ECC HEM.

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| Ryan, P. | 1996 | <i>Brick in Essex: from the Roman conquest to the Reformation</i> (ECC, Chelmsford) |



Fig.1 Site Location

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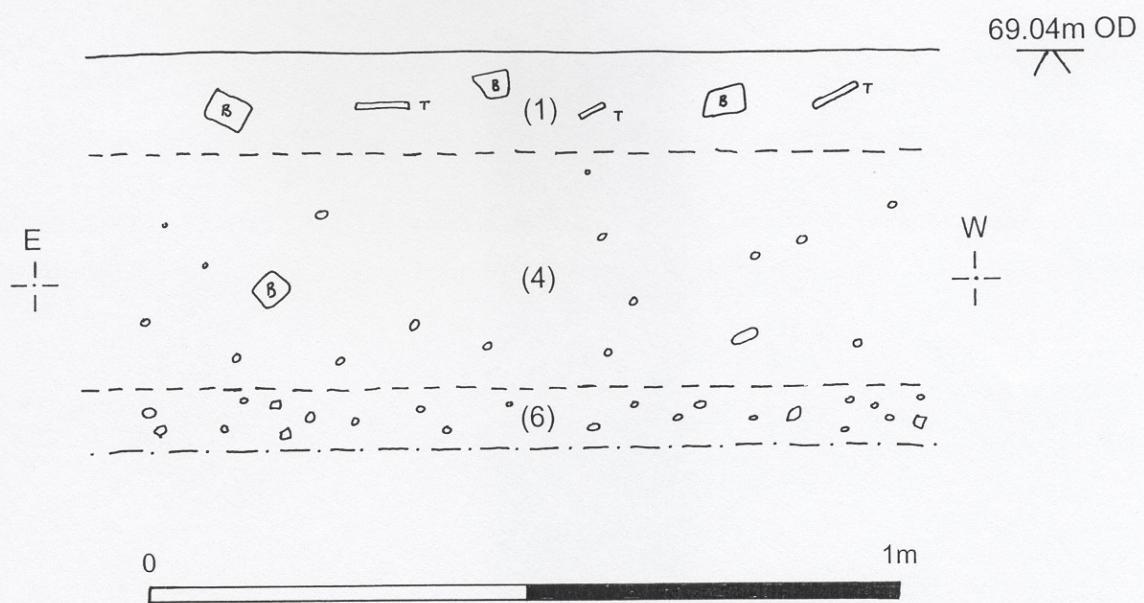
Fig. 2 Extract from Chapman and Andre map, 1777



Fig. 3 Extract from First Edition OS map, 1881



Fig. 4 Extract from New Series OS map, c.1925



- B Brick
- T Tile

Fig. 6 Section 1, North-facing

Appendix 1: Context Data

Context	Feature	Description	Date c.
1	Layer	Modern overburden over majority of site	20th
2	Masonry	All internal & external brick walls and features	19th
3	Layer	Topsoil to NE of building & along SE boundary. Former garden soil	19th
4	Layer	Made ground inside building. Formerly context 5?	19th
5	Layer	Undisturbed sand silt subsoil/natural outside of building	-
6	Natural	Gravel sand natural	-

Appendix 2: Finds Data

Context	Count	Weight	Description	Date
Unstrat.	1	40	Bottle glass, dark green body sherd, embossed with -RATED WAT--S; central panel has C and (poss) I entwined	19th/20th C
	1	1	Clay pipe stem	Post med.
	7	170	Pottery; dish rim sherd, whole profile, and base sherd, English stoneware; plate rim sherd, blue transfer-printed; body sherd from a Mocha ware dish, with blue feathery 'tree' design; handle and body sherds, white earthenware	19th/20th C
Plinth wall	3	7140	Complete bricks, plain, measuring 225x100x60mm; 215x100x60mm and 220x100x60mm	Late 18th to early 19th C

Appendix 3: Contents of Archive

Index to the Archive

File containing:

- 1. Introduction**
 - 1.1 Brief & WSI
- 2. Research Archive**
 - 2.1 Copy of report
 - 2.2 Report on 3.5" disk, pdf-formatted
- 3. Site Archive**
 - 3.1 Photographic register
 - 3.2 Site photographic record (35mm monochrome prints & colour slides)
 - 3.3 Site plans & drawings
 - 3.4 Context sheets

Appendix 4: EHER Summary Sheet

Site Name/Address: Saltbox Square, The Downs, Great Dunmow, Essex	
Parish: Great Dunmow	District: Uttlesford
NGR: TL 6256 2241	Site Code: GDSS 04
Type of Work: Excavation	Site Director/Group: Andrew Letch ECC FAU
Dates of Work: 9-13th December 2004	Size of Area Investigated:. 109m ²
Location of Finds/Curating Museum: Saffron Walden	Funding Source: Radland Homes
Further Work Anticipated? None	Related EHCR Nos.: HER 1316
Final Report: Summary in EAH	
Periods Represented: 19th century	
<p>SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:</p> <p><i>Brick foundations and associated features were recorded during excavations in advance of residential development. They were identified as belonging to Saltbox Square, a group of timber-framed terraced houses believed to have been constructed in the mid 19th century and demolished in the 1950s. They may have initially been established as small artisan houses, although no industrial evidence was found to support this. Latterly they provided cheap workers housing.</i></p> <p><i>The derivation of the name Saltbox Square is speculative, but suggests the location of a salt box here. In the 19th century these were provided to serve local residential areas. As well as having a culinary function, salt was an important preservative for meat before refrigeration was introduced. However, in architectural terms, 'saltbox houses' were a colonial design incorporating a catslide roof reminiscent of a saltbox cover.</i></p> <p><i>No features or artefacts were found relating to earlier occupation, including evidence for a medieval windmill and possible related structures known to have existed in the vicinity.</i></p>	
Previous Summaries/Reports: None	
Author of Summary: A. R. Letch	Date of Summary: 20th January 2005