

**SUNDAY MARKET SITE
MALDON ROAD
WITHAM
ESSEX:
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**



Essex County Council

**FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT
December 2010**

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CONTENTS

	<i>Page No.</i>
SUMMARY	1
1. INTRODUCTION	2
2. BACKGROUND	2
3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	3
4. METHOD	3
5. FIELDWORK RESULTS	4
6. FINDS	5
7. CONCLUSION AND ASSESSMENT	7
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	8
BIBLIOGRAPHY	8

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: TRENCH CO-ORDINATES

APPENDIX 2: FIELDWORK DATA

APPENDIX 2: FINDS

APPENDIX 3: ARCHIVE INDEX

APPENDIX 4: OASIS SUMMARY SHEET

FIGURES

1. Site location
2. Trenches 1 - 5
3. Sections 1 - 3

PLATES

1. Trench 1, looking south
2. Posthole 4, Trench 1, looking west-south-west.
3. Trench 2, looking west
4. Ditch 6, Trench 2, looking south.
5. Trench 3, looking south
6. Cobbled surface 21, Trench 3, looking east.
7. Natural linear 12, Trench 3, looking east.
8. Trench 4, looking east-south-east.
9. Natural feature 13, Trench 4, looking north-east.
10. Trench 5, looking south-west.

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SUMMARY

Client: Bloor Homes
FAU Project No.: 2247
OASIS Ref.: 78801
Planning Application No.: 10/00431/OUT
Site Code: WHMR10
Dates of Fieldwork: 21/06/10 – 23/06/10

An archaeological trial-trench evaluation was undertaken as part of a planning condition prior to the construction of 32 residential houses. The main objective of the investigation was to locate and date a track known to run through the site toward the River Blackwater from Maldon Road.

The track was located and can be demonstrated to be modern (its surfacing material contained tarmac). The finds from a boundary ditch, known from historic mapping to cross the site, date it to the 19th century. One post-medieval post-hole was also recorded. A modern cobbled surface, occurring just below the turf line, and a pit are likely to be related to the recent use of the site as a market venue, while a drainage pipe and gully represent general modern landscape management.

The evaluation also revealed residual evidence of Mesolithic flint-knapping at this location. A Mesolithic microlithic flint core and two flakes were found in the same context as one sherd of undiagnostic prehistoric pottery and a non-prehistoric flint, within an apparently natural feature. This prehistoric evidence is of limited archaeological significance due to its residual nature within a single natural feature, though it shows that Mesolithic activity in the Brain Valley was not restricted to the Ivy Chimneys and Chipping Hill sites in Witham.

That part of the wider development area to the south of the current site is likely to contain similar types and densities of below-ground archaeological remains and natural features.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of a programme of archaeological trial trenching at the Sunday Market Site, Witham (TL 8268 1367), conducted by Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) prior to the construction of 32 residential dwellings. The fieldwork was undertaken in response to a condition (10/00431/OUT) placed upon the development by Braintree District Council following advice from Essex County Council Historic Environment Management team (ECC HEM), given in line with Planning Policy Guidance note 16 (DoE 1990), now replaced by Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment. The fieldwork was carried out in accordance with a brief issued by ECC HEM (2010) and a written scheme of investigation provided by ECC FAU (2010), and was monitored by ECC HEM on behalf of the local planning authority.

Bound and digital copies of this report will be supplied to Bloor Homes (including a copy for the Local Planning Authority), ECC HEM and the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER). A digital copy of the report will be uploaded on the online access to the index of archaeological investigations (www.oasis.ac.uk). The site archive and copies of the report will be deposited at Braintree Museum.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location, Geology and Topography (Figure 1)

The site is located on the south-eastern edge of the built-up area of Witham and is bounded to the west and north-west by a housing estate, to the south and east by the A12 and to the north-east by open grassland to the south of the River Brain (NGR TL 8268 1367). The current land-use is open and rough grassland, which slopes gently down to the north, towards the Brain. The local underlying geological deposits consist of London Clay Formation clay, silt and sands overlain by river terrace sands and gravels.

2.2 History and Archaeology

Archaeological evidence of human activity in Witham dates back to the prehistoric period, with the main prehistoric focus, an Iron Age 'hillfort' located at Chipping Hill, c.1.5km to the north-west of the site. The location of the site along an ancient river terrace above the floodplain within close proximity to the river would have been favourable in prehistoric times for settlement.

The main focus of occupation shifted to the Ivy Chimneys and Maltings Lane area during the Roman period and remained the focus throughout the Saxon period. However, by the medieval

period Maltings Lane appears to have been a largely agricultural area to the south-west of the medieval town. The town continued to expand into the post-medieval period, but the site has remained on the periphery.

Field-walking, evaluation and excavation at Maltings Lane to the west of the site (c. 1km) has uncovered a landscape that reveals near-continuous evidence of settlement and activity from the Late Bronze Age to the medieval period (Heppell and Atkinson 2009; Robertson 2004; Brooks 1995). Cropmarks forming circular and rectangular enclosures have been identified to the north of the site (HER 8867) while analysis of aerial photographs has revealed a possible pond and double-ditched trackway to the south (HER 8185).

The desk-based assessment highlighted the lack of previous archaeological investigation within the development area (Heppell 2010). Historic mapping depicts a lane running from Maldon Road across the site towards the river; the date of the lane is unknown but may be of some antiquity (Fig. 1).

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the archaeological evaluation was to assess the nature, character, date, preservation and extent of any underlying archaeological remains, while the specific objective was to fully investigate the former lane running across the site.

4.0 METHOD

The site was investigated by five trial trenches totalling 248 sq m, 4% of the total development area (Fig. 1). The topsoil and subsoil were stripped using a tracked excavator with a toothless ditching bucket. All identifiable archaeological deposits were investigated and recorded.

The archaeological fieldwork was carried out in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation* (IfA 1999) and the Association of Local Government Officers' *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003). The ECC FAU uses its own single-context recording system.

5.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS

The evaluation trenches revealed three natural features, a post-medieval ditch and post-hole and modern features including a land drain, service trench, a pit, a cobbled surface and a track. A small quantity of undiagnostic prehistoric pottery and struck flint was recovered from natural feature 13, with the remaining finds recovered from post-medieval ditch 6, post-hole 4 and natural feature 15. Trench locations and descriptions can be found in Appendix 1, all feature descriptions are presented in Appendix 2 and finds data is detailed in Appendix 3.

The natural geology varied across the site, and within each trench. Bands of gravel were interspersed with slightly sandy silt deposits, similar to the subsoil, and clayey-silt deposits. As such two of the trenches were slightly overcut, though this did not have a negative impact upon the identification of archaeological finds and features.

The light yellow, grey-brown, slightly clayey sandy silt subsoil was an average thickness of 0.25m. It was present in all trenches, though within trench 4 it only appeared in the western seven metres. A natural slope was revealed in trench 4, perhaps indicating that the natural topography of the site restricted the formation, or increased the erosion, of the subsoil in particular areas.

The mid brownish grey clayey silt topsoil was an average 0.3m thick in all trenches but trench 4, where it was 0.5m deep at the western end of the trench and 0.25m deep at its eastern end.

5.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 2; Plate 1)

Trench 1 was located parallel to the western site boundary. A modern drain was aligned roughly north-east to south-west in the southern half of the trench. A single post-hole (4) was located close to the centre of the trench and contained one fragment of post-medieval ceramic tile and an iron nail (Plate 2).

5.2 Trench 2 (Fig. 2, Plate 3)

Trench 2 extended eastwards from the centre of trench 1. The northward continuation of the modern drain found in trench 1 was present in the westernmost end of the trench, to the west of ditch 6 which was aligned north to south and contained modern glass, ceramic tile and an iron object (Fig. 3; Plate 4). This ditch is thought to correspond with the boundary shown on the 3rd edition Ordnance Survey map (1915-1924). Cobbled surface 21 was present in the easternmost 5m of the trench, to a depth of 0.12m, located below the turf and above the topsoil.

5.3 Trench 3 (Fig. 2, Plate 5)

Trench 3 was located to the east of trenches 1 and 2. A modern service was present in the northern end of the trench and cut through the subsoil. Cobbled surface 21 (0.12m deep), located above the topsoil and below the turf, extended for a distance of 6m from the northern end of the trench (Plate 6). A natural, slightly irregular, linear feature (12) was located in the southern end of trench 3. Its naturally deposited silty fill (11) contained no finds (Plate 7).

5.4 Trench 4 (Fig. 2, Plate 8)

Trench 4 contained one natural linear feature (13) toward its western end (Fig. 3; Plate 9). Its slightly sandy silt fill (14) contained one sherd of prehistoric pottery, several flakes of Mesolithic flint working debris and a core. Further east, a natural depression (15) within the gravel at the base of the trench contained a silty naturally deposited fill (16) which yielded two pieces of post-medieval ceramic tile.

The top of the natural geological deposit displayed a considerable slope down to the western end of the trench. At the top of the slope, in the eastern end of the trench, the natural was overlain by slumping layers 17, 18, 19 and 20 which were also partially above natural depression 15 (Fig. 3).

5.5 Trench 5 (Fig. 2; Plate 10)

This trench was targeted upon the track identified in the desk-based assessment (Heppell 2010) to cross the site. The track was indeed identified to be present in its south-western end, slightly further south than predicted. However, as with cobbled surface 21 in trenches 2 and 3, it was located beneath a thin layer of turf and above the topsoil. The track contained a large amount of rubble and tarmac indicating a modern date of construction, while a late 20th century ceramic tile was recovered from the topsoil immediately beneath the track.

A modern pit (7) was located in the north-eastern end of trench 5. Its upper fill (8) contained a large amount of decaying turf and no finds.

6.0 FINDS

By Helen Walker

Finds were recovered from a total of five contexts. All of the finds have been recorded by count and weight, in grams, by context. Full quantification details are tabulated (Appendix 2) and the finds are described by category.

6.1 Pottery

One small sherd of prehistoric pottery was recovered from feature 13 (fill 14). It has a coarse flint tempering and cannot be closely dated (Nick Lavender pers. comm.).

6.2 Worked flint

By Hazel Martingell

A total of four worked flints, all from feature 13 (fill 14), was studied. One was a good Mesolithic 'pyramid'-shaped blade core. The blades removed from this core would have been the blanks for making microliths, Mesolithic arrowheads. There were also two secondary flakes (the flakes having an area of cortex, the outer surface of the flint nodule) indicating they were knapped from near the surface of the flint nodule. One of these flakes probably came from the blade core. The fourth piece was a small flaked block, which may not be prehistoric in date.

There are many sites with worked flint adjacent to the River Blackwater. From within the area of Witham, the site at Ivy Chimneys, three Microliths of Late Mesolithic date were recovered (Healey 1986); and from Colemans Farm, Rivenhall, a Mesolithic tranchet adze, microliths and microlith fragments have also been recovered (Simon Brice pers. comm., farm owner).

It is probable that more Mesolithic sites will be discovered in this area in the future. The Blackwater Valley would have been a favoured area during prehistoric times, the landscape provided ideal habitation for man and animals and the gravel terrace supplied an endless quantity of flint cobbles.

6.3 Tile

Four fragments of roof tile were recovered (from features 4, 6 and 15), datable from the later medieval to post-medieval periods. A part-tile in a buff-coloured fabric was recovered from topsoil context 1 and was found beneath a modern track. It is curved and extremely thick-walled, measuring 38mm in thickness. It may be a ridge tile or possibly a tile from a covered drain and is likely to be post-medieval or modern.

6.4 Ironwork

Two pieces of ironwork were recovered, a possible nail from post-hole 4 and a ?wire loop from ditch 6. Neither could be dated, but occur with post-medieval or modern finds.

6.5 Other finds

Fragments of modern bottle glass were recovered from ditch 6. A broken quartz pebble, which is probably natural, and a fire-cracked flint were recovered from feature 13 (fill 14), the same context in which the Mesolithic flints were found, and may also have been used during the prehistoric period.

6.6 Comments on the assemblage

By far the most interesting finds are the Mesolithic flints and pottery sherd from feature 13 indicating prehistoric activity in the area. The remaining finds are post-med or modern and have been discarded. No further work on the finds is required.

7.0 CONCLUSION AND ASSESSMENT

The archaeological trial-trench evaluation revealed limited evidence of prehistoric, post-medieval and modern activity. The main objective of the evaluation was to investigate the former lane running across the site. A modern track, containing tarmac, was identified in the south-western end of trench 5, and is more than likely to be the remains of the lane. No evidence relating to any earlier origin or use of the track was present.

The majority of the other recorded archaeological features represent the further post-medieval and modern use of the site. Ditch 6 marks a land boundary that is depicted on the 3rd edition Ordnance Survey map (1915-1924) and cobbled surface 21 is likely to be a relatively expansive deposit which presumably relates to the former use of the site as a market.

The earliest archaeological remains comprised residual Mesolithic worked flint retrieved from a natural, irregular linear feature (13), which also contained later prehistoric undiagnostic pottery. The Mesolithic flints recovered indicate that small-scale flint-knapping occurred within the evaluated site area, though no further conclusions as to the nature and extent of the activity can be drawn. It is possible that further Mesolithic material is preserved within buried natural features in the land to the south of the site, though the frequency of such finds might be expected to decline further away from the river.

Given that the prehistoric material is judged to be residual in later, probably natural, features the overall archaeological potential of the site is relatively low, despite its low disturbance by post-medieval and modern activity. However, a similar range and density of below-ground remains may

be expected to occur across the remainder of the site, beyond the confines of the evaluation trenches.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The ECC FAU would like to thank Bloor Homes, in particular Mr. T. Bluff, for commissioning and funding the archaeological investigation.

The archaeological fieldwork was undertaken by Phillippa Sparrow, Trevor Ennis and Andrew Lewsey. The finds were processed by Phillippa Sparrow, analysed by and reported upon by Helen Walker and Hazel Martingell. The figures were drawn by Andrew Lewsey. The site was monitored by Teresa O'Connor of ECC HEM on behalf of the LPA.

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APPENDIX 1: TRENCH CO-ORDINATES

The trenches were 30m long and 1.65m wide. The coordinates for each trench refer to the opposite ends of the central axis.

Trench No.	NGR Co-ordinates	Alignment	Depth (m)
1	TL 82670.5/13707.5 & 82670.5/213677.5	North - South	0.55
2	TL 82670.5/13692.5 & 82701.3/13692.5	East – West	0.80
3	TL 82718.5/13697.7 & 82718.5/13667.7	North – South	0.60
4	TL 82657.5/13644.0 & 82687.5/13644.0	East – West	W end: 0.75 E end: 0.28
5	TL 82722.1/13649.8 & 82705.0/13625.1	NE – SW	0.80

APPENDIX 2: FIELDWORK DATA

All dimensions are given in metres.

Context	Feature	Trench	Type	Measurements	Description
1	-	All	Topsoil	Across site	Mid brownish grey clay silt. Firm.
2	-	All	Subsoil	Across site	Light brown to light greyish brown clay silt. Firm
3	4	1	Posthole	0.41m x 0.40m x 0.14m	Circular posthole. Irregular sides and concave base. Mid brownish grey clay silt fill.
5	6	2	Ditch	1.5m+ x 1.78m x 0.55m	Cut subsoil, below topsoil. N-S aligned. Regular edges with flattish base. 1st ed OS. Mid – dark brown grey clay silt.
8	7	5	Pit	2.88 x 1.39 x 0.32m+	Modern circular pit. Dark brown sandy silt and decaying turf.
9					Light grey yellow brown slightly sandy silt. Probably natural windblown deposit – very shallow (0.05m)
10					Modern clay. No finds. Damp. Orange.
11	12	3	Linear/natural feature	1.5m+ x 1.1m x 0.25m	Fairly irregular E-W aligned linear. Flattish base. Mid greyish yellowish brown clayey silt. Some pea gravel and pebbles. No finds. Fill appears to be natural probably windblown/surface run-off deposit.
14	13	4	Linear/natural feature	3.1m x 1.07m x 0.42m	Aligned roughly E-W though irregular. Irregular gravelly base and steep sides. Light grey yellow brown slightly sandy silty fill – probably natural infilling.
16	15	4	Natural depression	4.7m x 1.6m+ x 0.2m	Irregular in plan, shallow, depression in the natural gravel of this trench. Light grey brown sandy silt fill contained CBM.
-	17	4	Layer	1.74m x 1.65m+ x 0.38m	Slumping deposit at side of natural slope, light grey brown silty gravel. No finds.
-	18	4	Layer	1.05m+ x 1.65m+ x 0.25m	Light grey brown silty sand and gravel. Naturally deposited gravel
-	19	4	Layer	0.75m x 1.65m x 0.38m	Dark brown black silty and gravel. Naturally deposited gravelly layer
-	20	4	Layer	0.99m x 1.65m+ x 0.13m	Mid orange sand and gravel. Naturally deposited gravel – probably slumping of slope.
-	21	3	Cobbled surface	c. 21m x c. 6m x 0.12m	Overlies modern drain. Modern surface present in topsoil.

APPENDIX 3: FINDS

Context	Feature	Count	Weight	Description	Date
1	Topsoil in Tr. 5	2	2012	Ridge tile: joining fragments from very thick-walled, buff coloured ?ridge tile (discarded)	Post-med or modern
3	4	1	18	Roof tile fragment (discarded)	Later med or post-med
		1	5	Iron object, possibly a nail (discarded)	-
5	6	1	16	Roof tile fragment (discarded)	Later med or post-med
		1	19	Iron object, perhaps a wire loop (discarded)	-
		4	50	Bottle glass, green and clear fragments, modern (discarded)	19th to 20th C
14	13	1	6	Prehistoric pottery, either a body sherd or a simple everted rim, but with a very abraded rim edge	Prehistoric
		1	59	Quartz pebble with broken edge (discarded)	-
		1	11	Fire-cracked flint (discarded)	-
		4	54	Struck flints, three of which are Mesolithic comprising a blade core and two flakes	Mesolithic
16	15	2	65	Roof tile fragments (discarded)	Later med or post-med

APPENDIX 4: ARCHIVE INDEX

WHMR10 SUNDAY MARKET SITE, MALDON ROAD, WITHAM, ESSEX: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Index to the Archive

File containing:

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Brief for evaluation
- 1.2 WSI for evaluation

2. Research Archive

- 2.1 Evaluation report
- 2.2 Finds report
- 2.3 CD Rom (containing digital images and pdf versions of the report, finds reports, WSI and brief)

3. Site Archive

- 3.1 Trench record sheets
- 3.2 Context record register
- 3.3 Original context records 1 - 21
- 3.4 Plans register
- 3.5 Sections register
- 3.6 Levels register
- 3.7 Photographic register
- 3.8 Photograph contact sheet
- 3.9 Miscellaneous maps and plans

Not in Files:

- Site drawings (3 permatrace sheets)
- 1 box of finds

APPENDIX 5: ESSEX HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD SUMMARY

Site Name/Address: Sunday Market Site, Maldon Road, Witham, Essex	
Parish: Witham	District: Braintree
NGR: TL 8268 1367	Site Code: WHMR10
Type of Work: Archaeological Evaluation	Site Director/Team: Phillippa Sparrow ECC FAU
Dates of Work: 21/06/10 – 23/06/10	Size of Area Investigated: five 30m x 1.8m trenches
Curating Museum: Braintree Museum	Funding Source: Bloor Homes
Further Work Anticipated? Yes	Related HER Nos. None
Final Report: Summary in EAH	OASIS Ref: 78801
Periods Represented: Prehistoric, post-medieval and modern	
SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:	
<p>An archaeological evaluation, comprising five 30m-long trenches, was undertaken as part of a planning condition prior to the construction of 32 residential houses. A specific objective of the investigation was to locate and date a track known from historic mapping to run through the site toward the River Blackwater from Maldon Road.</p>	
<p><u>Prehistoric</u></p> <p>Residual evidence of Mesolithic flint-knapping at the site was identified. A Mesolithic microlithic flint core and two flakes were found in the same context as one sherd of undiagnostic, prehistoric pottery and a non-prehistoric flint, all within an apparently natural feature.</p>	
<p><u>Post-medieval & Modern</u></p> <p>The track was located and can be demonstrated to be modern as its surfacing material contained tarmac. The finds from a boundary ditch, also known from historic mapping to cross the site and also located by the trenching, date it to the 19th century. A single post-medieval post-hole was also recorded.</p> <p>A relatively expansive modern cobbled surface, located across the northeastern part of the site and occurring just below the turf line, and a shallow pit are likely to be related to the recent use of the site as a market venue. A drainage pipe and gully represent general modern landscape management.</p>	
Previous Summaries/Reports: None	
Author of Summary: P. Sparrow	Date of Summary: 30th November 2010