

**132 NEWLAND STREET
WITHAM
ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
BY TRIAL TRENCHING**



**Essex County Council
Field Archaeology Unit
MAY 2005**

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WITHAM
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**132 NEWLAND STREET,
WITHAM,
ESSEX**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

SUMMARY

Client: Quilter Savill Associates
Planning application: BTE/0406/04
FAU Project No.: 1493
NGR: TL 8190 1425 (Centred)
Site Code: WH 20
Date of Fieldwork: 4th May 2005

An archaeological evaluation was carried out on the site of proposed development at 132 Newland Street, Witham. An area measuring 3 x 2.5m was excavated along the Newland Street frontage.

No cut archaeological features were identified but a former topsoil layer containing 14th – 15th century pottery was recorded below modern rubble and consolidation layers. The earliest layer recorded was an alluvial deposit containing no finds.

The area of the site was undeveloped during the medieval period as it lies in close proximity to the river Brain and is susceptible to flooding.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation at 132 Newland Street, Witham. A planning application was submitted to the local planning authority for a residential and commercial development on the site. The local planning authority, advised by the Historic Environment Management team (HEM) of Essex County Council, placed an archaeological condition, in line with Planning Policy Guideline 16 (DoE 1990), on the development. Subsequently Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) were commissioned to undertake an archaeological evaluation on the footprint of the building. The archive will be deposited at Braintree Museum

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location and Geology (Fig 1)

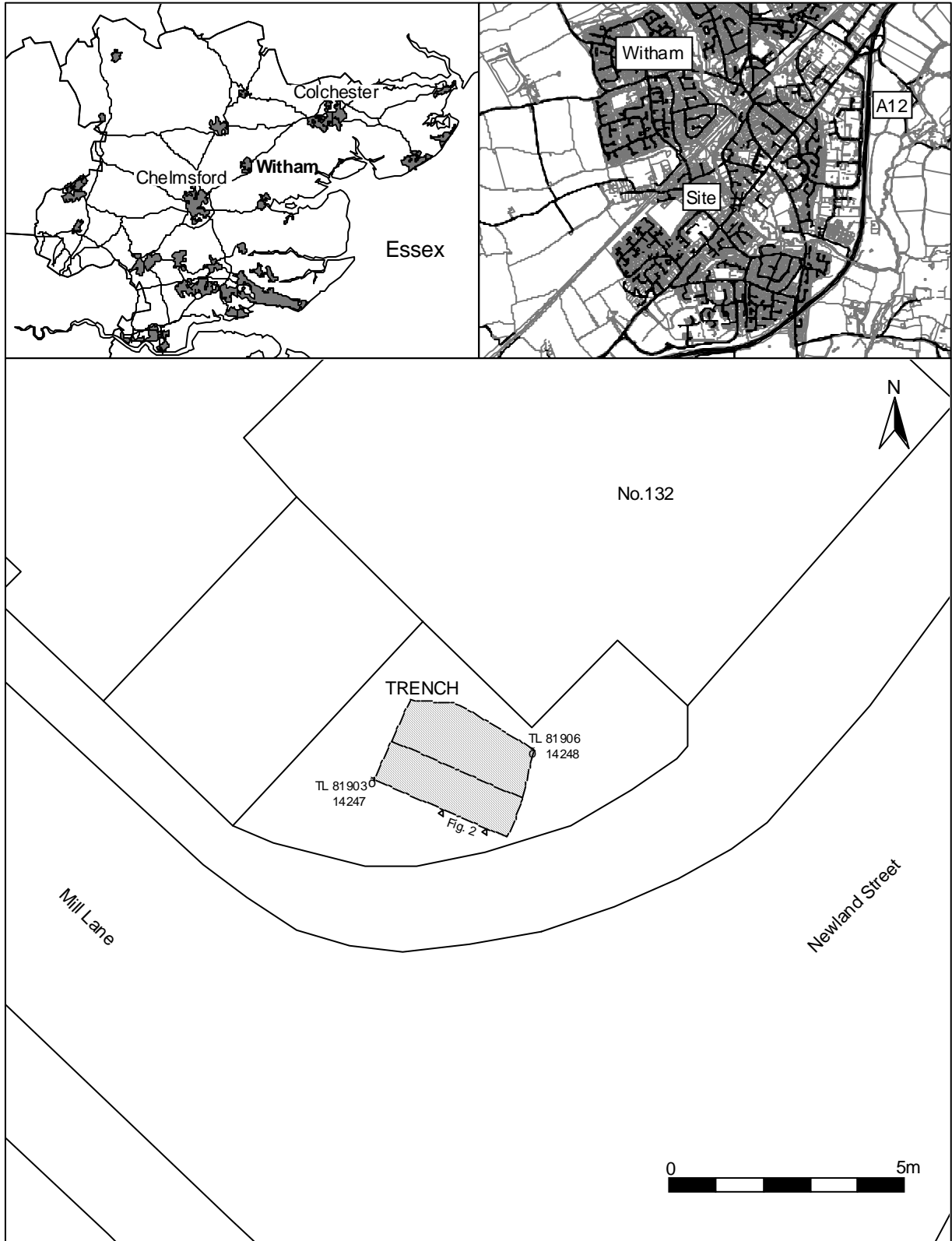
Witham is situated in the district of Braintree in the centre of Essex, it lies immediately to the west of the A12. The underlying geology of the area is chalky till and the observed surface geology is a dark brown alluvial deposit.

The development area is situated at the south-western end of the medieval market town (Medlycott 1998) and lies at the junction of Newland Street and Mill Lane. Newland Street, which forms the southeastern frontage to the site, was the medieval focus for the town. Immediately to the south of the site is the crossing for the river Brain. In general the site slopes gradually southward.

2.2 Archaeological and Historical Background

The present town of Witham is based around the 13th-century market town, although the area of the town seems to have been settled / occupied since at least the Bronze Age. The site is located in proximity to several major prehistoric, Roman and Saxon sites and at the south-western edge of the later medieval town. Although the land to the south – west of the river Brain seems to have been developed during the 12th-century, the focus for the later medieval town was Newland Street and its market; both of which date to the early 13th-century. Both the 12th-century and 13th-century developments lay along the line of the Roman and medieval London to Colchester road.

As well as several large excavations in the general vicinity of the site, Maltings Lane (Robertson 2004), Ivy Chimneys (Turner 2001), Chipping Hill Camp and Witham Lodge earthwork (Rodwell 1993), a number of smaller excavations have been carried out along Newland Street itself. Almost directly opposite the present site at 143 – 147 Newland Street (Garwood 1996) a number of late medieval rubbish pits and a boundary ditch were uncovered.



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Fig.1. Trench location

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the excavation was to establish the character and extent of activity at the southwestern limit of the medieval town.

4.0 METHOD

A trench that lay towards the Newland Street frontage of the building footprint was excavated using a JCB fitted with a toothless bucket, under archaeological supervision. The trench was initially excavated to the top of an archaeological layer, approximately 0.65m below the present ground surface, and recorded. Half of the trench was further excavated by machine to a depth of 1.3m, and a representative section of the trench was recorded. All plans were drawn at 1:20 and sections at 1:10. A photographic record comprising of colour slides and monochrome prints was maintained and levels were taken across the site. The IFA standards and by-laws and ALGAO's Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England (Gurney 2003) were adhered to during the fieldwork.

5.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS (Figs 1 and 2)

The site had been cleared of buildings and concrete hard standings prior to the commencement of the archaeological evaluation. Due to the presence of foul-water sewers and gas mains the area of the trench was reduced to 3m long by 2.5m wide along the Newland Street frontage. Further context information can be found in Appendix 1.

The top 0.63m of the trench comprised modern rubble and consolidation layers. Below these was a 0.15m thick layer of dark brown silty clay that contained 14th – 15th century pottery, animal bone and oyster shell (1). It is likely that this layer represents an old topsoil. Below the topsoil layer was dark brown alluvial silt (2) that did not contain any finds. No cut features were identified in the trench.

6.0 FINDS by Joyce Compton

Finds were recovered from a single context (1), representing a soil layer. The material has been recorded by count and weight, in grams. Full quantification details are provided in Appendix 2.

Six sherds of late medieval pottery, weighing 50g, were recovered and these were identified by Helen Walker. All are body sherds in coarse fabrics, except for a small sherd of Cambridgeshire sgraffito ware, which probably derived from a jug. The pottery has been assigned a broad 14th to 15th-century date.

A plain copper alloy lace-end was recovered. These were commonly used in the medieval and post-medieval periods to prevent laces from fraying. This example is likely to be contemporary with the pottery.

A small amount of animal bone, weighing 118g, was collected. The bones are derived from food animals, although no signs of butchery were apparent.

7.0 DISCUSSION AND ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS

It is clear from the build up of modern deposits that the site has been truncated by modern development which would have removed any post-medieval remains from the site. However, the lack of post-medieval artefacts suggests that there may have been no development of this date on the site; due in part to the proximity of the site to the river Brain which is susceptible to flooding.

Although the site was probably not developed during the medieval period, the amount of finds recovered possibly indicate that the area was utilised. The buried topsoil was identified as lying at an approximate height of 16.46m O.D, although it is likely that this has been truncated by modern development, the finds recovered probably represent casual discarding of domestic rubbish along the riverside.

It is unlikely that 13th-century and later developments of Witham extended this far south – west even though the other side of the river was developed since the 12th-century (Rodwell 1993). However, the area still retains a moderate archaeological potential especially in seeking to understand activity on marginal land within medieval towns.

Acknowledgements

This project was commissioned and funded by Quilter Savill Associates. Especial thanks are due to Mr J. Savill who provided assistance throughout the project. The monitoring officer was Ms V. Clarke of HEM on behalf of the local planning office. Mr P. Allen managed the project and D. Smith assisted the author on site. C. Down processed the finds and H Walker assessed the pottery. J. Compton assessed the animal bone and miscellaneous finds and A. Lewsey prepared the illustrations.

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- | | | |
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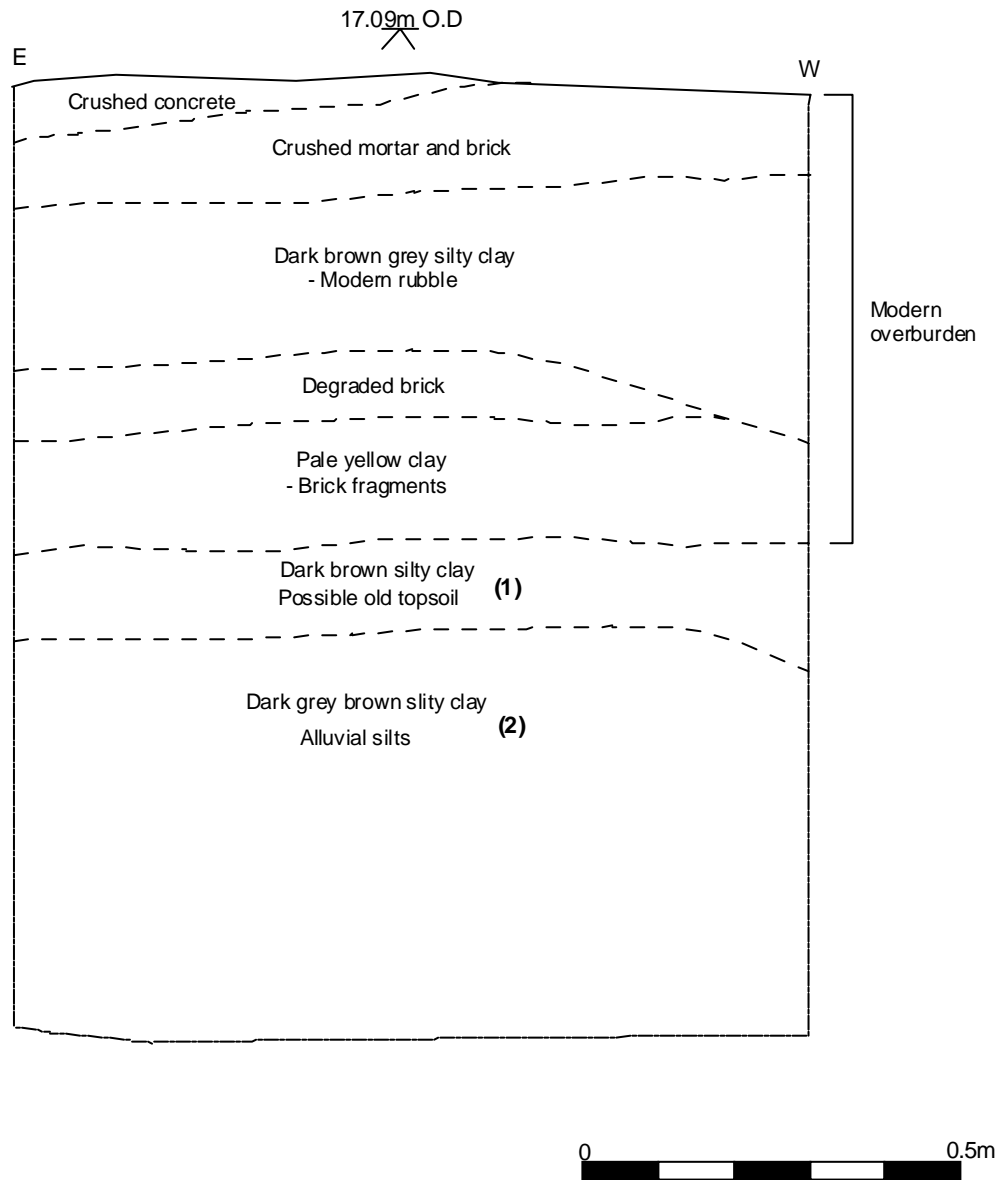


Fig.2. Representative trench section

APPENDIX 1 – CONTEXT DATA

All dimensions are given in metres

Context	Type	Length	Breadth	Depth	Date
1	Layer	3	2.5	0.15	14th to 15th C
2	Layer	3	1.2	0.55+	-

APPENDIX 2 – FINDS DATA

All weights are given in grams

Context	Feature	Count	Weight	Description	Date
1	Layer	1	-	Copper alloy lace-end	Med/post med.
		9	118	Animal bone; sheep/goat mandible and molars; long bone shafts, medium-sized mammal; long bone condyle, unfused. Large mammal; fragments	-
		6	50	Pottery; body sherds, medieval coarse ware, buff ware, sandy orange ware and Sgraffito ware	14th to 15th C

APPENDIX 3: ARCHIVE INDEX

SITE NAME: 132Newland Street (WH20)

Index to the Archive

File containing:

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Brief for Evaluation
- 1.2 Written Scheme of Investigation for Evaluation

2. Research Archive

- 2.1 Client Report
- 2.2 Medieval Pottery report
- 2.3 General Finds report

3. Site Archive

- 3.1 1 x Trench sheet
- 3.2 1 x A5 Plan sheet
- 3.3 1 x A5 Section sheet
- 3.4 2 x Photographic record sheets
- 3.5 1 x Black and White Print
- 3.6 1 x Colour Slide

Not in File

- 1 Box of finds

APPENDIX 4: EHCR SUMMARY SHEET

Site Name/Address: 132 Newland Street, Witham	
Parish: Witham	District: Braintree
NGR: TL 81903 14247	Site Code: WH 20
Type of Work: Evaluation	Site Director/Group: Andrew Robertson ECC FAU
Date of Work: 4th May 2005	Size of Area Investigated: Approximately 7.5m ²
Location of Finds/Curating Museum: Braintree Museum	Funding Source: Quilter Savill Associates.
Further Work Anticipated? No	Related EHCR Nos:
Final Report: EAH Summary?	
Periods Represented: medieval; modern	
SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS: An archaeological evaluation was carried out on the site of proposed development at 132 Newland Street, Witham. An area measuring 3 x 2.5m was excavated along the Newland Street frontage. No cut archaeological features were identified but a buried topsoil layer containing 14th – 15th century pottery was recorded below modern rubble and consolidation layers. The earliest layer recorded was an alluvial deposit containing no finds. The area of the site was undeveloped during the medieval period as it lies in close proximity to the river Brain and is susceptible to flooding.	
Previous Summaries/Reports:	
Author of Summary: Andrew Robertson	Date of Summary: May 2005