

**FORMER OFFICERS MESS SITE
MESS ROAD
SHOEBURYNESSE GARRISON
ESSEX
ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING**



**Essex County Council
Field Archaeology Unit**

June 2012

FORMER OFFICERS MESS SITE
MESS ROAD, SHOEBURYNESSE GARRISON, ESSEX:
ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING

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FORMER OFFICERS MESS SITE
MESS ROAD, SHOEBURYNNESS GARRISON, ESSEX:
ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING

Client: Garrison Developments LLP

NGR: TQ 9386 8449

Site code: SHOM 10

FAU Project No: 2422

OASIS No: 87012

Dates of Fieldwork: Intermittent visits between August 2011 & March 2012

SUMMARY

Archaeological monitoring was carried out during the redevelopment of the Officers Mess site at the former Shoeburyness Garrison. A range of construction contractors' groundworks were monitored on the north-western side of the existing building, including footings for new extensions, service trenches and wall footings. General removal of hardstanding and reinstatement of gardens was observed to the south-east.

The Officers Mess site lies within the area of a scheduled monument known as the 'Danish Camp' (SM 29444). An archaeological evaluation in 1998, on open ground just to the west of the Officers Mess, revealed a Middle Iron Age settlement as well as Bronze Age, Roman and medieval remains. Roman coins and pottery were also found during building work to the Officers Mess in the 1930s. A preceding small test-pit evaluation identified only deposits and features of 19th and 20th century date contemporary with the construction and/or occupation of the Officers Mess, along with three residual sherds of medieval pottery.

The monitoring of construction groundworks recorded high levels of disturbance across the site in the form of earlier service trenches, modern pits and tree roots. A single undated ditch/gully, that probably predated the construction of the Shoeburyness garrison, was recorded along with a number of 19th century brick-lined 'bunkers', of uncertain function, which were presumably contemporary with the early occupation of the Officers Mess.

INTRODUCTION

A programme of archaeological monitoring was undertaken by Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) during the redevelopment of the former Officers Mess site at Shoeburyness Garrison, as part of its residential conversion. The work was commissioned by Garrison Developments LLP and carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation produced by ECC FAU (2011) and approved by Southend Borough Council and English Heritage.

As part of the conversion, the Officer's Mess was divided into 11 residential units, with new extensions and car parking areas alongside Mess Road and gardens at the front, facing the estuary. Apart from the footings for the new extensions, the interiors of which the previous test-pits had partially investigated, boundary walls and major service runs to the new units were monitored. Groundworks at the front of the building (south-east side) created minimal disturbance, where fences were erected, hardstanding removed and the ground level only slightly reduced to enable turf to be laid down to form gardens.

The aim of the work was to further investigate and record the presence, nature and survival of below-ground archaeological remains within the Officers Mess site as it was judged that there was potential for archaeological remains due to the location of the site within the 'Danish Camp' scheduled monument (fig. 1).

Copies of the report will be supplied to the client, Southend Borough Council, English Heritage and the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) at County Hall, Chelmsford. The archive will be deposited with Southend Museum. An OASIS online record has been created at <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/oasis/index.cfm> and a digital version of this report will be accessible via the ADS website grey literature library; <http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/>.

1.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Site location and description

The former MoD Shoeburyness Garrison complex is located c.5km east of Southend town centre and just east of Shoeburyness town centre (fig.1). The Officers Mess building is located along the south-eastern edge of the former Garrison complex, and immediately alongside the estuary foreshore at the mouth of the Thames (NGR TQ 938845). Much of the garrison site has already been redeveloped and converted to residential use in recent years.

The former Officers Mess building is in a derelict condition as a result of a fire that gutted the interior and destroyed most of the roof, although its thick brick walls remain standing. Its immediate surrounds were overgrown prior to the redevelopment (plate 1), particularly between the building and Mess Road which marks the western boundary of the site. Long grass, overgrown bushes and a few substantial trees occupied this space, along with a large redundant fuel oil tank and scattered fire debris deriving from the building itself.

2.2 Planning background

An application to convert the former Officers Mess into eleven self-contained dwellings, along with the construction of five extensions onto the north-western elevation was submitted to Southend Borough Council (SBC) in September 2010 (10/01809/FULM). The scheme also included the construction of car parking spaces, vehicular access, services and walls that define garden areas to the front and rear of the building.

In response to the application, a preliminary phase of archaeological evaluation was requested by English Heritage and Southend Borough Council. A series of archaeological test-pits were duly dug within the areas of the proposed positions of the new building extensions, located where structural engineer's ground investigation was required (fig.1). Permission to dig within the scheduled area was obtained from English Heritage, which granted Scheduled Monument Consent in November 2010.

As the test-pit evaluation indicated a relatively low potential for the presence and survival of below-ground remains within the areas of the site to be impacted by development (see section 2.3 below), English Heritage and Southend Borough Council determined that a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording during construction works was appropriate mitigation. This work was again carried out with Scheduled Monument Consent.

2.3 Archaeological background

A detailed account of the archaeological and historical background of the wider Garrison and Old Ranges site can be found in a 1997 desk-based assessment produced by Gifford and Partners Ltd (Martin and Perkins 1997). Only the most pertinent information to the Officers Mess site is summarised below.

The site is located within a prehistoric defended settlement known as the 'Danish Camp' which is judged to be of national importance and is therefore a designated Scheduled Monument (SM 29444). The inland extents of the camp is defined by two surviving sections of a once-substantial perimeter bank/rampart located to the north and west of the Officer's

Mess. It is likely that other earthwork remains were reduced when the site became a complex of military barracks and weapons ranges during the 19th century. The south-eastern extents of the camp have been lost to erosion and gradual widening of the river mouth.

The 'Danish Camp' is so named after an entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles which records that in AD892 the Danes re-grouped at a fort near Shoebury after being forced from their base at Benfleet by the Saxon army. Although it is possible that this relates to the earthwork enclosure at Shoeburyness, only two sherds of Anglo-Saxon pottery have been found in the vicinity (English Heritage Scheduled Monuments Record 1999).

A geophysical survey was carried-out across a number of locations within the garrison complex in 1998 (Perkins 1999). Detailed magnetometer survey across what was at the time lawn and paddocks in front of the Commandants House (Survey Area B) identified a range of anomalies variously interpreted as service runs, flag pole footings and railway line. A number of other 'strong discrete anomalies' were noted to be feasibly modern, but could equally have been archaeological.

The interior of the 'Danish Camp' was investigated in 1998 (Perkins 1999). A fairly extensive trial trench evaluation within Survey Area B (Trenches A-Q) identified the presence of a dense, multi-phase, array of well-preserved Iron Age features that included remains of four roundhouse gullies, two post-built structures, boundary ditches, hearths and other post-holes. The main phase of occupation was judged to date to the Middle Iron Age. However, the occupation of the site evidently continued beyond the Iron Age; a Romanised structure was identified in the south-west corner of the settlement during the 1998 evaluation. Medieval and post-medieval features were also found to be present.

Most pertinently, settlement remains of Iron Age date were encountered in the Area B evaluation trenches closest to the Officers Mess (Trenches A and H). It is therefore likely that further such below-ground remains are, or were once, present within this site. Based on this evidence, the 1997 report included Area B and the vicinity around the Officer's Mess as showing demonstrated archaeological potential (Martin and Perkins 1997). Indeed, Roman pottery and coins were previously found during construction works at the Officers Mess in the 1930s.

The 1998 Area B evaluation produced significant quantities of artefactual material indicative of an Iron Age settlement site, particularly pottery, worked flint and oyster shell. Smaller quantities of animal bone, tile, baked clay and briquetage were also retrieved.

Despite its fire damage, the Officers Mess is a Grade II listed building (LB No. 427553) and therefore a building of recognised historical importance. It began life in c.1825 as a coastguard station, being added to from 1852 to 1898 as part of the Horseshoe Barracks. The barracks were adapted and modified throughout the life of the Shoeburyness Garrison, but ceased active military use in the 1970s (Perkins 1997). Further consideration of the building is included in the 1997 assessment (Martin and Perkins 1997). The redundant building was the subject of arson in August 2009.

The recent test-pit evaluation (Letch 2010) investigated the below-ground archaeological potential of the locations of the five proposed building extensions on the west side of the Officers Mess. The results demonstrated that variable thicknesses of deposits, together with cut features, all of 19th and 20th century date, overlay and truncated the undisturbed natural deposit. Although no prehistoric or Roman remains were encountered within the test-pits, three residual sherds of medieval pottery were retrieved, which may indicate activity of this date at this vicinity. Despite the absence of prehistoric, Roman and medieval remains in the test-pits, it was judged likely that remains of these dates may be present elsewhere within the site and potentially at relatively shallow depth below the present ground surface if and where later disturbance and truncation was less severe.

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the archaeological monitoring was to record the presence, nature, date, survival and importance of any below-ground remains within the areas impacted by the construction groundworks of the Officers Mess redevelopment.

The specific objectives of the investigation were to:

- Identify and record any Iron Age and Roman remains relating to the foundation and occupation of the 'Danish Camp' enclosure
- Identify and record remains relating to the subsequent land-use of the vicinity
- Identify and record remains relating to the construction and early use of the Coastguard Station and Officers Mess Building(s).

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The following construction works were the subject of archaeological monitoring:

- Excavation of wall foundation trenches of the five kitchen extensions (in plots 1, 4 5, 6 and 10)
- Excavation of major service trenches
- Excavation of foundation trenches for plot boundary walls
- General ground reduction

All such groundworks were inspected during intermittent site visits by an archaeologist. The general depth and nature of all deposits and features of all dates exposed were recorded and spoil checked for artefacts. Where significant archaeological remains were encountered, the contractors' works were temporarily halted and the remains investigated and recorded. Where necessary, and safe to do so, hand cleaning and excavation was undertaken. Standard ECC FAU excavation, artefact collection and recording methodologies were employed throughout. The FAU uses its own recording system to record all archaeological deposits and features.

The archaeological work was carried out in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (IfA 2008) and the Association of Local Government Officers' *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003). The ECC FAU is a registered archaeological organisation with the Institute for Archaeologists.

5.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS

Much of that part of the site to the west of the historic Mess building was crossed by the various foundation and service trenches excavated for the redevelopment scheme. In many areas these exposed earlier service trenches and concrete bases as well as a large amount of tree root disturbance. The substantial storm drain trench provided a good cross-section across the north-south length of the site, but few trenches were observed running the other way between the Mess building and the road.

The locations and extents of all monitored groundworks are indicated on fig.1. Further context details are presented in Appendix 1.

5.1 Building extensions

The wall foundation trenches for the five kitchen/breakfast room extensions were excavated to a width 0.4m and to depths of between 1.1 and 1.4m depending on the stability of the ground.

Plot 1, previously investigated in test-pit 1, exposed a 0.5m deep topsoil that was heavily disturbed by tree roots above a thin (0.15m) gravel layer. Natural sand and gravel was encountered at 0.65m below ground level. The west end of trench was dug to a depth of 2m to remove a modern pit containing very loose fills in danger of collapse.

Those in **Plots 4-6 and 10** were machine-excavated to a depth of 1.2m through ground generally heavily-disturbed by modern service pipes, concrete bases, tanks and previous excavations. Where undisturbed, a brown subsoil survived at 0.4m below ground level and natural sand and gravel survived at a depth of 0.7m. The Plot 4, extension, previously investigated in test-pit 2, was disturbed by modern pipes. Plot 5, previously investigated in test-pit 3, contained a concrete base and general modern disturbance (plate 1). Plot 6 (test-pit 4) was disturbed by conifer roots, modern pipes, a brick-lined diesel tank and another concrete base. Plot 10 (plate 2) contained modern service pipes, though was found to be relatively undisturbed in test-pit 5.

In summary, no archaeologically significant features or deposits were identified within the locations of the five building extensions. No pre-Victorian artefacts were observed to be present, even residually, either.

5.2 Service trenches

Excavation of the substantial **storm drain** that ran between plots 3 and 8 provided a 48m-long and 1.9m-deep section through deposits in the middle of the site (plate 3). The south-west ends of three small underground structures of 19th/20th century date, indicated as 'bunkers' in fig. 2, were exposed. The bunkers formed a row of three small underground structures constructed from single-skin yellow London stock brick walls aligned with the road frontage. The features, all of which had been backfilled, lay beneath a mixed layer of modern material. The largest of these lay towards the western end of the trench and was almost 5m wide (plate 4). The other two, located midway and towards the north-east end of the trench were each 2m wide (fig. 2). The south-east walls of each feature lay along the line of the storm drain and were therefore removed during machining. The full extents of these features is unknown and their depths vary from 1.4m to over the limit of excavation at 1.7m. Large

pieces of late 19th century 'Willow Pattern' pottery were collected from their construction cuts.

There was a similar level and type of modern disturbance to that observed in the Plot 4-6 building extension trenches, plus some large modern pitting. Topsoil and brown subsoil were disturbed to a depth of between 0.4 and 0.9m, down to where the undisturbed natural deposit was encountered.

The drainage trench for plot 6 into the new storm drain showed shallow undisturbed topsoil and subsoil deposits, but increased disturbance towards the centre of the site (toward the storm drain).

5.3 Boundary walls

Relatively few of the boundary wall foundation trenches separating the different residential plots were observed.

The wall trench between Plots 3 and 4 was 0.6m wide and c.1.15m deep, and was cut into natural gravel (plate 5). A modern cut feature was partially observed under the former concrete driveway to the Mess. It contained a mixed brown silt and re-deposited gravel with rare chalk fragments. It was not bottomed and no indication of overall extent, function or date was obtained.

The wall trench between Plots 7 and 8 was undisturbed between the two existing buildings and revealed topsoil and subsoil deposits overlying narrow ditch 31 (figs. 2 & 3, plate 6). This ditch was found at a depth of c.1.1m below ground level and ran on a NE-SW alignment. No dating evidence was retrieved from its fill, but it is likely to predate the Officers Mess and may be contemporary with archaeological remains discovered in the evaluation on the other side of Mess Road. No evidence of its continuation was found in the building extension foundation trenches either side, which were heavily-disturbed.

The main back wall along mess road was positioned along the line of previous service trenches and so only high levels of ground disturbance and modern material was observed here.

Other than ditch 31, no significant archaeological features or deposits were identified within the boundary wall trenches observed. No pre-Victorian artefacts were retrieved.

5.4 General ground reduction

Ground reduction was carried out on the southern side of the Officer's Mess (fig. 2) but was limited to removing c.0.25m of tarmac and rubble bedding or else modern topsoil to prepare the ground for laying turf. No archaeological deposits or features were therefore exposed.

6.0 FINDS

Few finds were found during the watching brief, and none of any archaeological importance. Large sherds of ubiquitous late 19th century Staffordshire 'Willow pattern' ware ceramics were collected in the vicinity of the underground structures. All of the retrieved material has been discarded.

7.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The construction groundworks associated with the redevelopment of the Officers Mess site has afforded a good opportunity to investigate the below-ground archaeological potential of the area immediately north-west of the Mess building. However, the shallowness of general ground reduction on the south-east side of the building was not conducive to archaeological exploration and the below-ground potential for the presence and survival of remains is still untested here.

Despite the site being located within the designated area of the scheduled monument and in close proximity to the proven presence/survival of Iron Age and Roman remains only a short distance to the west, no archaeological features, deposits or artefacts of demonstrably prehistoric, Roman or Medieval date were encountered within the groundworks observed. This work has further amplified and qualified the results of the preceding test-pitting in that it has demonstrated that only very small areas of the site appear to have escaped substantive disturbance and truncation by later 19th and 20th century garrison-related land use. The discovery of the single ditch fragment, albeit undated, in an undisturbed part of the site indicates that such earlier remains probably did once occupy this part of the settlement enclosure. However, the lack of residual artefacts present in the modern deposits may hint that its Iron Age and Roman occupation was not very dense here and could perhaps even been an open, non-occupation, area within the enclosure. The absence of Saxon period remains emphasises the historic misnomer of the 'Danish Camp'.

Virtually all of the observed deposits and features in the groundworks relate to the 19th and 20th century use of the site as part of the military garrison and, more specifically, presumably to the construction and use of the Officers Mess building itself. Widespread ground disturbance, truncation and deposition has occurred during the life of the building, particularly with new underground services being inserted during episodes of modernisation and adaption of its function and the growth of vegetation to maturity, primarily trees, in its grounds. The presence of underground structures, referred to in this report as 'bunkers' for want of a better term and in the absence of any indications of function, is perhaps the most archaeologically/historically significant result of the monitoring work. Seemingly contemporary with the use of the Mess and clearly purposefully laid out in relation to it, these structures undoubtedly performed some ancillary function - perhaps as cold stores, coal bunkers or something similar? While some above-ground outbuildings, walls and water pumps are depicted on historic OS mapping, these underground bunkers are not. Consideration in relation to historic room function of the building may help to clarify their purpose.

In overview, the redevelopment of the Officers Mess site, has not adversely impacted upon the below-ground archaeological resource. But then neither has it provided a more developed understanding of the Iron Age and Roman occupation/use of the 'Danish Camp' enclosure and subsequent land-use of the vicinity prior to its development as a military garrison.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Paul Denny of Garrison Developments for commissioning the work. The co-operation and assistance of Tony Richards, Project Manager, and site construction personnel is also gratefully acknowledged. The fieldwork was undertaken by the author. Illustrations were produced by Andrew Lewsey. The project was managed by Mark Atkinson and monitored by Deborah Priddy of English Heritage.

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Appendix 1: Context data

(number sequence continued from 2010 test-pit evaluation)

Context	Type	Description	Depth/ thickness
28	Topsoil	Mid grey brown loose sandy silt, disturbed by tree roots	0.25-0.5m
29	Subsoil	Friable brown gravelly clay silt sand	0.22m
30	Fill of 31	Loose brown gravelly silt sand, similar to context 29	-
31	Feature	E-W aligned ditch or gully recorded in section. 0.6m-wide. Undated.	0.26m

Appendix 2: Contents of Archive

Site name: Former Officers Mess site, Mess Road, Shoeburyness Garrison, Essex

Project nos: 2422

Type of work: Archaeological Monitoring

Site code: SHOM 10

Index to the Archive:

One document wallet containing:

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Copy of scheduled ancient monument consent
- 1.2 FAU written scheme of investigation
- 1.3 Client/archive report (bound & unbound)
- 1.4 CD-rom containing digital photographs & copies of reports, etc; pdf-formatted

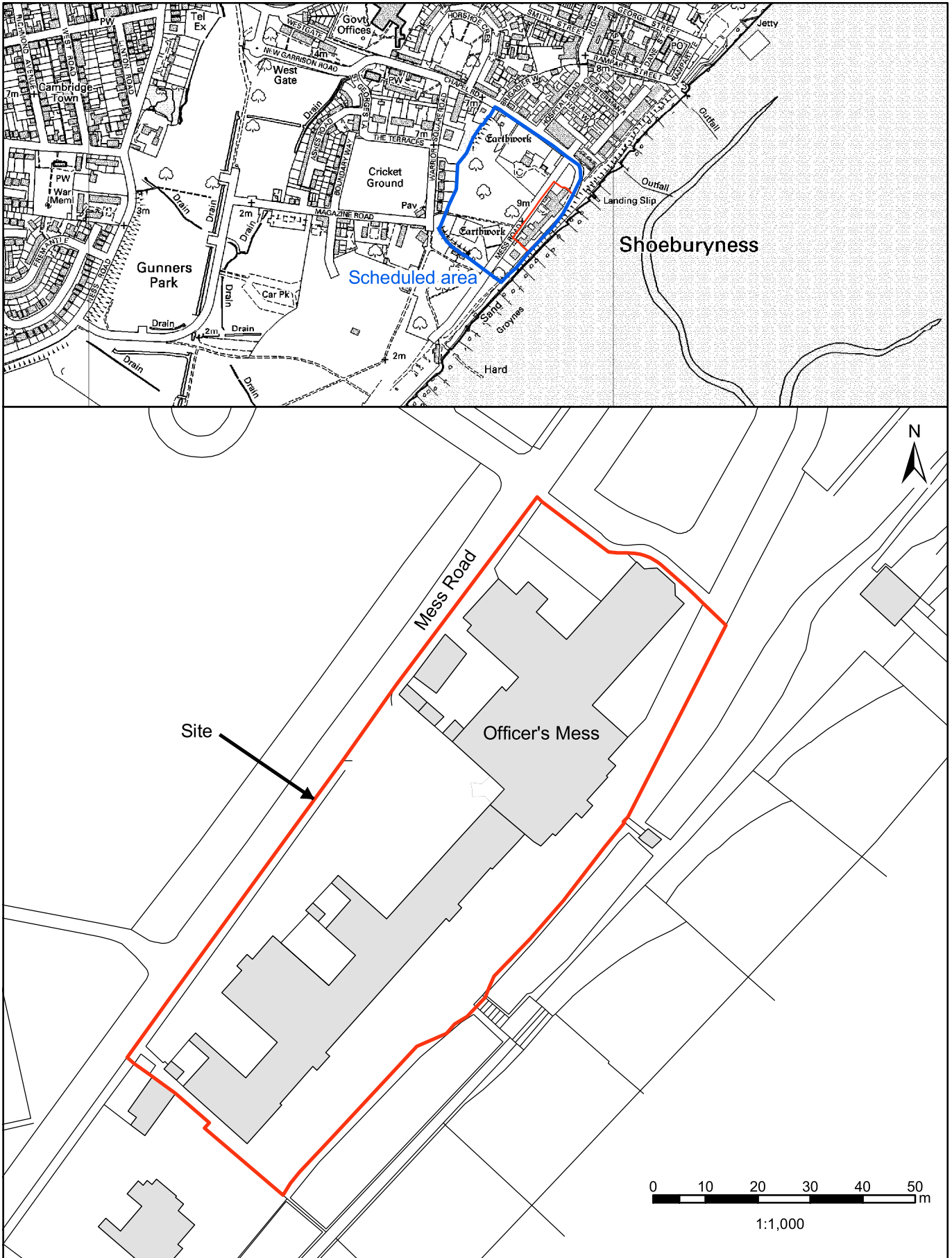
2. Site Archive

- 2.1 Monitoring recording form
- 2.2 Section drawing
- 2.3 Photographic register
- 2.4 Photographic record (digital prints)
- 2.5 Site notes and annotated survey drawings

No finds retained in the archive.

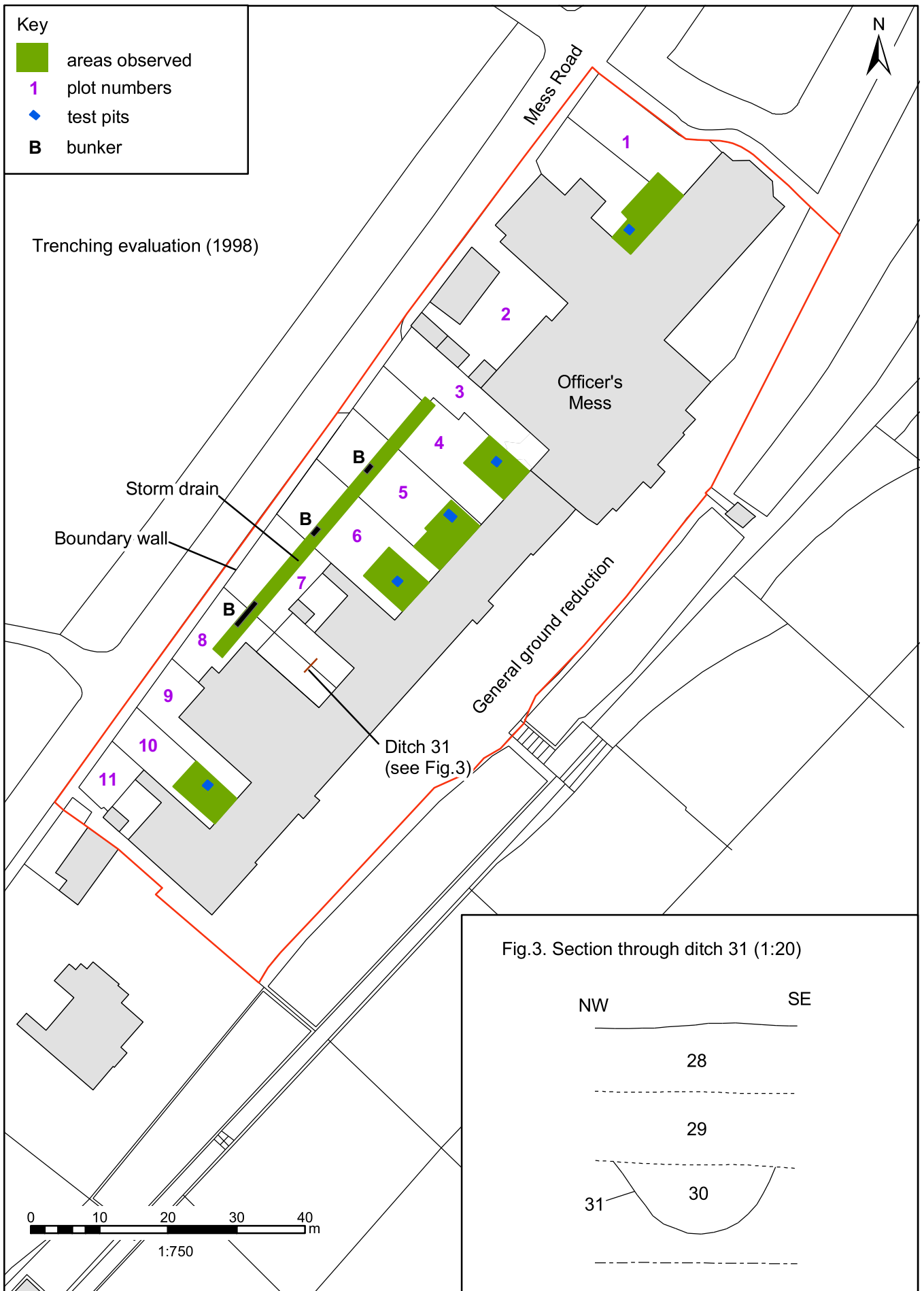
Appendix 3: EHER Summary Sheet

Site Name/Address: Officers Mess site, Mess Road, Shoeburyness	
Parish: Shoeburyness	District: Southend
NGR: TQ 9386 8449	Site code: SHOM 10
Type of Work: Archaeological monitoring	Site Director/Team: Andy Letch ECC FAU
Dates of Fieldwork: visits between August 2011 & March 2012	Size of Area Investigated: 6500m ² (size of site)
Curating Museum: Southend	Funding Source: client
Further Work Anticipated? No	Related EHER Nos. (SAM 29444)
Final Report: Summary in EAH	
Periods Represented: Victorian & modern	
<p>Summary of Fieldwork Results:</p> <p>A range of construction contractors' groundworks were monitored on the north-western side of the existing building, including footings for new extensions, service trenches and wall footings. General removal of hardstanding and reinstatement of gardens was observed to the south-east but was of insufficient depth to expose any remains.</p> <p>Despite being within the 'Danish Camp' and just west of the 1998 evaluation in 1998 that revealed Middle Iron Age settlement and Bronze Age, Roman and medieval remains, no such remains were found within the site. No residual artefacts of this date were retrieved from later deposits either.</p> <p>Extensive 19th-20th century ground disturbance, truncation and deposition was noted across the site, with earlier service trenches, modern pits and tree roots presumably being associated with the historic Mess building. A single undated ditch/gully, that probably predated the construction of the Shoeburyness Garrison, was recorded as were a number of 19th century brick-lined underground 'bunkers', of uncertain function, which were presumably contemporary with the early occupation and related to the functioning of the Officers Mess.</p>	
<p>Previous Summaries/Reports:</p> <p>Letch, A. 2010. <i>Archaeological Test-Pit Evaluation at the Former Officers Mess Site, Mess Road, Shoeburyness Garrison, Essex</i> (FAU rep. 2303)</p>	
Author of Summary: Andy Letch	Date of Summary: 07 June 2012



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Fig.1. Site location plan



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Fig.2. Areas of archaeological monitoring



Plate 1. Plot 5 extension post-excitation, viewed to north-east



Plate 2. Excavation of plot 10 extension, viewed to south-east



Plate 3. Excavation of storm drain trench, viewed to north-east



Plate 4. Large 'bunker' viewed at south-west end of storm drain trench



Plate 5. Boundary wall trench between plots 3 and 4



Plate 6. Boundary wall trench between plots 7 and 8