

**PRIORY HALL
COLCHESTER ROAD
HALSTEAD
ESSEX**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



Essex County Council
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT
April 2011

**PRIORY HALL
COLCHESTER ROAD
HALSTEAD
ESSEX**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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Document Ref.	2382rep.doc
Report Issue Date	April 2011
Circulation	Hallmark Developments (inc. copy for the LPA)
	ECC HEM
	Essex Historic Environment Record

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**PRIORY HALL
COLCHESTER ROAD, HALSTEAD
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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

SUMMARY

Client: Hallmark Developments
FAU Project No: 2382
OASIS Ref: 96203
Planning Application No: 08/01714/FUL & 10/00509/FUL
Site Code: HS5
Dates of Fieldwork: 8th – 10th March 2011

An archaeological trial trench evaluation was undertaken across the grounds of Priory Hall, formerly the Halstead Grammar School, prior to its redevelopment to a mixture of residential housing elderly care facilities. The site sloped steeply down from the north-east to the south-west and displayed evidence of previous landscaping. The two historic school buildings that occupy the site were also subject to a standing building recording survey and are reported upon separately.

Trenches 1-4 contained no archaeological features or deposits. A thick layer of modern made-ground was encountered within trench 1 and the western half of trench 2 and might have been the surface of a compound laid during the construction of an 1960s extension to the school or might be the result of general landscaping.

Trench 5 contained a curvilinear ditch and a small pit, neither of which contained finds. A ditch in the south-western end of trench 8 ran parallel to the Colchester Road and a gully (13) in the southern end of trench 7 ran perpendicular. These features are likely to represent historic land division prior to the use of the site as a school, but their lack of artefacts leaves them undated.

A modern cess pit (5) was located in the south-western end of trench 6 and contained the only significant artefact collected – a highly abraded and therefore residual sherd of 17th to 19th century pottery.

This trial-trench evaluation has established the low archaeological potential of the site, with no significant remains found that predate the modern period. It is judged that the site lay outside the historic settlement core of Halstead and was therefore in agricultural use prior to the construction of the school in 1909.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of a programme of archaeological trial trenching at Priory Hall, Colchester Road, Halstead, conducted by the Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) prior to the redevelopment of the site to contain 25 two-bedroom houses, 33 one- and two-bedroom apartments, use of the school house for one dwelling, the conversion and extension of Priory Hall to form six apartments and an ancillary clubhouse for the elderly, and the erection of a 70-bed care home with a day centre and two two-bedroom cottages with amended parking and landscaping. The fieldwork was undertaken in response to a condition (08/01714/FUL & 10/00509/FUL) attached to the planning consent for the development by Braintree District Council following advice from Essex County Council Historic Environment Management team (ECC HEM), given in line with Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment. The fieldwork was carried out in accordance with a brief issued by ECC HEM (2011) and a written scheme of investigation produced by ECC FAU (2011), and was monitored by ECC HEM on behalf of the local planning authority.

The two historic buildings, the 1909 school building and its associated 'caretaker's' house, were recorded as a further requirement of consent and are reported upon separately.

Bound and digital copies of this report will be supplied to Hallmark Developments (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 with Braintree Museum.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location, Geology and Topography (Fig. 1)

Priory Hall is located some 500m north-east of Halstead town centre and is situated on the north-west slopes of the River Colne valley. The development area is sited on the north side of Colchester Road, which runs from the town centre, across the River Colne at Blue Bridge, to Earls Colne and Colchester (Fig 1, NGR TL8206 3055). The natural geological deposits of the area comprise Kesgrave formations sand and gravels overlying London Clay (BGS).

The grounds of Priory Hall are bounded by residential properties to the west and a sports ground to the east. Priory Hall is located in the central southern area of the site and the caretaker's house is situated to the south-east and fronts onto Colchester Road. It has fallen into disuse over the past five years and the 1960s extension has recently been demolished. The surrounding grounds

comprise playing fields, areas of tree planting, car-parking and driveways, and tennis/netball courts. The vicinity surrounding and including the school has been reduced, levelled and landscaped in the past - probably when the various phases of school buildings were built.

2.2 History and Archaeology

The following archaeological background makes use of the desk-based assessment previously produced for the site by ECC FAU (Heppell 2006), the Historic Town Assessment for Halstead (Medlycott 1998) and the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER).

Evidence from limited archaeological investigation and aerial photograph analysis for the wider Halstead area is suggestive of exploitation of the Colne valley for farming and settlement from the Neolithic period onwards (Germany 2005; Heppell 2006). However, there are no known Iron Age, Roman or Saxon remains on the site or in the vicinity of Priory Hall.

The Domesday survey (1086) indicates that Halstead was settled by the Saxon period although there are no known remains of this period. The medieval focus of the developing town was around St Andrews church, Chipping Hill and Market Hill/High Street which lie to the west of the development site. There are no known references to medieval remains outside what could be considered the urban core of Halstead and within 1km of Priory Hall. The site does, however, lie on Colchester Road, the route of which is likely to have been established since at least the later medieval period. Colchester Road links Halstead to Earls Colne using a crossing point of the river at Blue Bridge. This crossing point has been previously known as Ashforde Bridge and Coggeshall Bridge (Potts 2003, 6). It would seem reasonable to suggest that the route of the road has remained much the same as that of the present day.

The later 18th and early 19th centuries saw the establishment of a cottage industry producing woollen cloth in the town, employing some 300-400 people (Potts 2003, 76). The population doubled between 1801 and 1861, largely due to the employment opportunities at the new Courtauld's Silk Factory, constructed in 1828 (EHER 9441).

Priory Hall itself was opened as Halstead Girls Grammar School in 1909, extended in the 1960s and became part of the Ramsey Comprehensive School in 1975. Latterly it was used by the ECC Adult Education and Youth Service. The purpose-built 1909 Grammar school building is considered to be of local significance, due to both its prominent location and its importance to the educational history of the town, and relationship to wider national trends in education (Heppell 2006).

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 Aims

The aim of the archaeological excavation was to preserve, by record, any archaeological features or deposits that would be destroyed by the construction of the new buildings and to establish the location, extent, and character of any surviving archaeological remains within the proposed development area.

3.2 Objectives

3.2.1 A specific objective of the project was to pay specific attention to evidence related to potential land-use/occupation activity of all periods along the Colchester Road frontage.

4.0 METHOD

The archaeological work comprised the excavation of eight archaeological trial trenches, totalling 461 sq metres of the available investigable land (1.5 ha). The trenches were excavated using an 8-tonne tracked 360° mechanical excavator with a broad toothless ditching bucket under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist. Several of the proposed trench locations presented in the WSI were altered due to site constraints and trench 8 was shortened to 27m in length due to the presence of services at its south-western end.

The ECC Field Archaeology Unit adhered to *IfA* standards and by-laws (*IfA* 1997), and especially the *IfA's Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavations* (*IfA* 1999), and *ALGAO's Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003) throughout the project. The ECC FAU is a registered archaeological organisation with the *IfA*.

5.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS

The evaluation trenches were spread across the site, excluding the areas immediately surrounding the school building, caretaker's cottage and in the vicinity of the electricity substation which were heavily covered with mature trees and contained utility services. Any buried archaeological remains in these areas would have been severely disturbed by root disturbance, landscaping and modern service trenches.

A total of five features were encountered - two ditches, a gully, a small pit and a probable cess pit. The site sloped considerably down from the north-east to the south-west with the highest point

65.54m AOD at the eastern end of trench 4 and the lowest at 60.31m AOD at the south-western end of trench 8.

The natural geology comprised sandy gravel with bands of sandy silt and silty clay overlain in trenches 1, 5, 7 and 8 by a varied sandy gravel subsoil. Trenches 2, 3 and 4 did not contain subsoil. The majority of the trenches were located in areas of open lawn within the school except for trenches 5 and 6, which were located in the area of the tennis courts. Ground reduction prior to laying the tennis court surface removed all of the topsoil and subsoil in trench 6. The topsoil was present to an average thickness of 0.4m in all trenches except 5 and 6.

Trench locations and descriptions can be found in Appendix 1. All feature descriptions are presented in Appendix 2. Trench and feature illustrations, together with selected photographic plates, can be found at the back of the report.

5.1 Trenches 1 & 2 (Fig. 2; Plates 1 & 2)

Trenches 1 and 2 formed an L-shape in the north-west corner of the site. Trench 1 was located parallel to the western boundary and contained no archaeological features or deposits. A layer of made-ground was present beneath the topsoil and above the subsoil throughout the entire length of the trench and up to 16.2m from the eastern end of trench 2. Modern brick fragments, chalk, coal, charcoal and small pieces of china indicate a modern date of deposition, and as such none of the finds were retained. The made ground might represent 20th-century landscaping or alternatively could have been laid as a compound area during the construction of the 1960s school building extension. Trench 2 displayed a high degree of root disturbance towards its middle and a modern path cut through the topsoil close to the centre of the trench.

5.2 Trench 3 (Fig. 2, Plate 3)

Trench 3 was located to the east of trench 2. No archaeological features or deposits were encountered within it.

5.3 Trench 4 (Fig. 2 Plate 4)

Trench 4 was located in the north-east corner of the site and again contained no archaeological features or deposits.

5.4 Trenches 5 and 6 (Fig. 2)

Trenches 5 (Plate 5) and 6 (Plate 6) were located within the area of the former tennis courts. The tennis court tarmac surface was laid directly onto the natural sandy gravel, indicating that this area of the site had been reduced and levelled prior to the creation of the tennis courts. Terraces cut

into the current ground surface were visible prior to trenching, and effectively stepped the slope down from the north to the south in the eastern half of the site, providing an even surface for the tennis courts and their surrounding area. Both trenches became gradually deeper towards the south-west thereby displaying the former lie of the land prior to terracing and levelling.

A small undated pit (1; Plate 7) was located close to the north-eastern end of trench 5 at the foot of a slope. A possibly curvilinear ditch (3; Plate 8), aligned roughly west to east, was present in the south-western end of the trench and contained no finds within its extremely gravelly fill (4).

A large probable unlined cess pit (5; Plate 9) was situated in the south-western end of trench 6. It contained a sequence of eight fills (6-12, 15), was cut through the subsoil and yielded only one small sherd of highly abraded and therefore probably residual 17th-19th century pottery from its third fill (15).

5.5 Trench 7 (Fig. 2)

Trench 7 was located in the south-eastern corner of the site and contained one undated shallow gully (13; Plate 10), aligned north-west to south-east, close to its southern end which yielded no finds (Plate 11).

5.6 Trench 8 (Fig. 2; Plate 12)

Trench 8 was located in front of the original school building, closest, and at a slight angle to, Colchester Road. A modern pit filled with sand was cut through the topsoil in the centre of the trench and a Victorian lead service pipe was present in the south-western end of the trench above a gradually sloping ditch (16). Ditch 16 was aligned north-east to south-west and contained a naturally deposited sandy silt fill (17) with no finds.

6.0 FINDS by Helen Walker

A single find was recovered, a rather abraded sherd of Post-Medieval Red Earthenware (wt 4g) from context 15, a fill of pit 5. It is thick-walled with an internal glaze and most likely dates between the 17th and 19th centuries. This find has been discarded.

7.0 CONCLUSION AND ASSESSMENT

The archaeological trial trenching revealed two undated ditches, an undated gully, an undated pit and a modern cess pit. Ditch 16 (trench 8) and gully 13 (trench 7) were aligned along the same axis; the ditch ran north-east to south-west, parallel to Colchester Road with the gully aligned

perpendicular. They contained very different fills, though their alignment might suggest that they were contemporary and that the road was in existence when they were dug. Both the ditch and the gully were cut into the natural sandy gravel therefore suggesting that they were not drainage features but may have represented land division.

Ditch 3 (trench 5) appeared to be curvilinear in plan and therefore might not be associated with ditch 16 and gully 13. The cess pit (5) was probably associated with the early 20th century use of the school. The only find from it was highly abraded and therefore probably residual and cannot be used to date the pit.

All of the features, except the cess pit, were sealed by the subsoil which might indicate they are of some age; however the subsoil contained no finds and could not be dated. The paucity of finds across the site is presumably a factor of low site activity throughout its history.

The results of this trial-trench evaluation demonstrate the low archaeological potential of the site, with no significant remains found that predate the modern period. It is judged that the site lay outside the historic settlement core of Halstead and was therefore in agricultural use prior to the construction of the school in 1909. As such, further archaeological excavation is unlikely to shed further light on the pre-20th century use of the site.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The ECC FAU would like to thank Hallmark Developments for commissioning and funding the archaeological investigation and particularly Mr. B. Brown and Mr. M. Beavan for their assistance.

The archaeological fieldwork was undertaken by Phillippa Sparrow and John Hewitt. The finds were processed, analysed by and reported upon by Helen Walker. 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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- Potts, D. 2003 *A Look Back at Halstead*, Lavenham Press

APPENDIX 1: TRENCH CO-ORDINATES

The coordinates for each trench refer to the opposite ends of the central axis.

Trench No.	NGR Co-ordinates		Alignment	Dimensions (m)		
				Length	Width	Depth
1	N S	TL 82014 30588 TL 82005 30550	North - South	40	1.6	1.4
2	W E	TL 82013 30588 TL 82052 30579	West - East	40	1.6	0.9
3	NW SE	TL 82077 30586 TL 82117 30588	North-west – South-east	35	1.6	0.6
4	W E	TL 82077 30586 TL 82117 30588	West - East	40	1.6	0.54
5	NE SW	TL 82124 30573 TL 82104 30550	North-east – South-west	30	1.6	0.69
6	NE SW	TL 82128 30539 TL 82106 30519	North-east - South-west	30	1.6	0.96
7	N S	TL 82126 30500 TL 82120 30454	North - South	46	1.6	0.66
8	W E	TL 82045 30482 TL 82072 30484	West - East	27	1.8	0.75

APPENDIX 2: FIELDWORK DATA

All dimensions are given in metres.

Context	Trench	Type	Dimensions (LxWxD)	Description	Date
1	5	Pit	0.8m x 0.58m x 0.21m	Cut of small oval pit orientated NW-SE. Irregular sides and concave base.	Undated
2	5	Fill	0.8m x 0.58m x 0.21m	Fill of pit 1. Light brown silty clay. Friable.	Undated
3	5	Ditch	0.8m+ x 1.44m x 0.52m	Cut of linear ditch aligned NW-SE. Steep sides and uneven base.	Undated
4	5	Fill	0.8m+ x 1.44m x 0.52m	Only fill of ditch 4. Light grey loose gravel.	Undated
5	6	Pit	1.6m+ x 5m x 1m+	Cut of large pit, probably cess pit due to smell. Slightly stepped sides and base not reached due to depth of excavation.	Post-medieval/modern
6	6	Fill	1.6m+ x 5m x 0.12+	Lowest reached fill of pit 5. Mid grey orange sandy gravel. Rare charcoal. Loose.	Post-medieval/modern
7	6	Fill	1.6m+ x 5m x 0.21m	Second fill of pit 5. Mid grey orange sandy clay. Firm.	Post-medieval/modern
8	6	Fill	1.6m+ x 5m x 0.4m	Fourth fill of pit 5. Mid grey brown loose sandy gravel.	Post-medieval/modern
9	6	Fill	1.6m+ x 5m x 0.27m	Fifth fill of pit 5. Bright orange loose sandy gravel.	Post-medieval/modern
10	6	Fill	1.6m+ x 5m x 0.17m	Sixth fill of pit 5. Mid grey brown loose to firm sandy silt.	Post-medieval/modern
11	6	Fill	1.6m+ x 5m x 0.18m	Seventh fill of pit 5. Mid grey brown loose sandy gravel.	Post-medieval/modern
12	6	Fill	1.6m+ x 5m x 0.28m	Uppermost fill of pit 5. Dark brown grey firm sandy silt with gravel and charcoal flecks.	Post-medieval/modern
13	7	Gully	1.6m+ x 1.25m x 0.16m	Cut of irregular shaped gully aligned roughly NW-SE. Very shallow and gradually sloping sides with rounded base.	Undated
14	7	Fill	1.6m+ x 1.25m x 0.16m	Only fill of gully 13. Mid orange brown loose sandy gravelly silt.	Undated
15	6	Fill	1.6m+ x 5m x 0.4m	Third fill of pit 5. Mid grey orange loose gravel. One sherd of pottery.	Post-medieval/modern
16	8	Ditch	0.6m+ x 3.2m+ x 0.49m+	Cut of possible ditch. Aligned NE-SW. Gradually sloping sides Base not reached due to depth of excavation.	Undated
17	8	Fill	0.6m+ x 3.2m+ x 0.49m+	Only fill of ditch 16. Light grey brown loose silty sand.	Undated

APPENDIX 3: ARCHIVE INDEX

HS5 PRIORITY HALL, COLCHESTER ROAD, HALSTEAD, 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

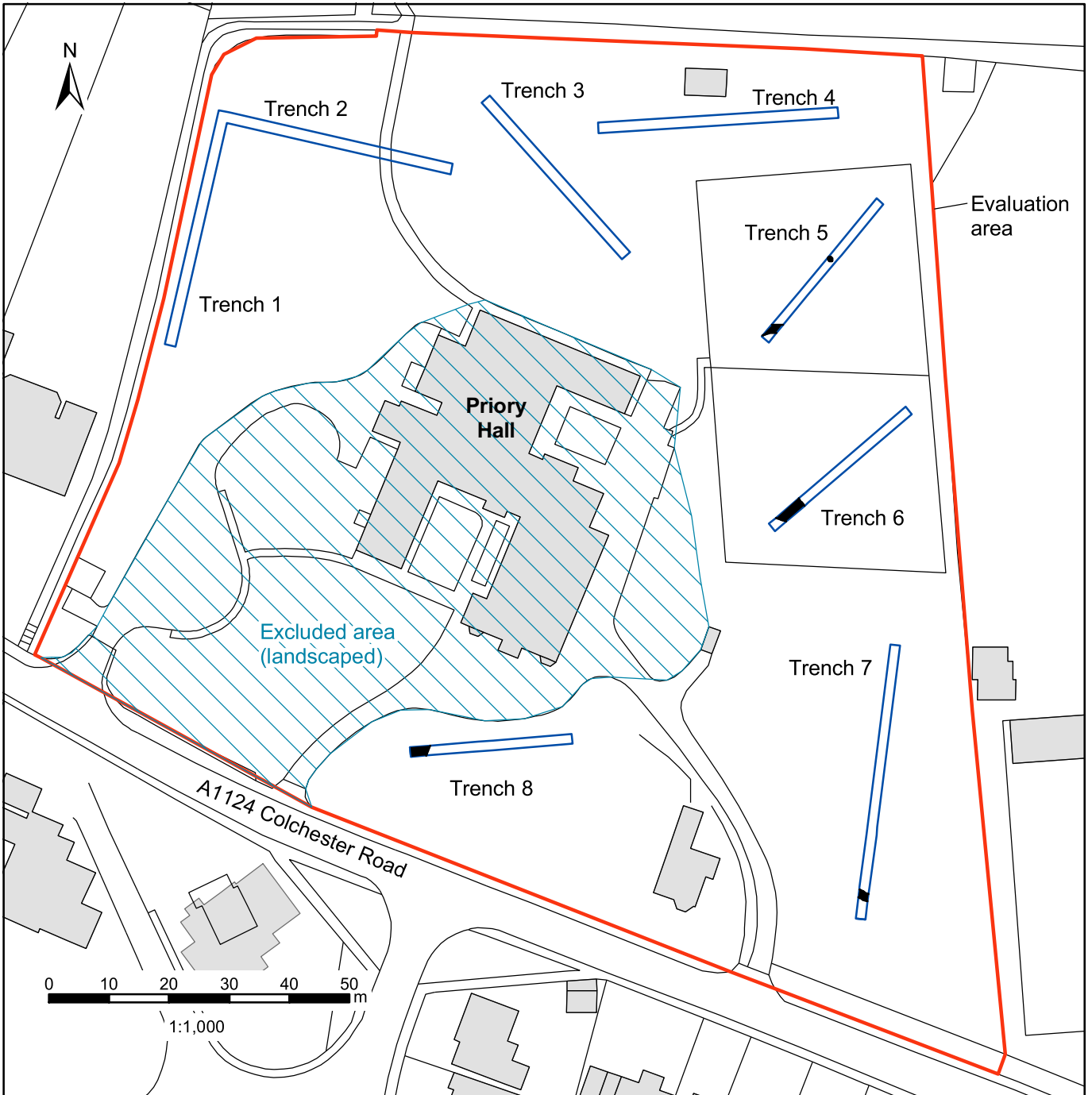
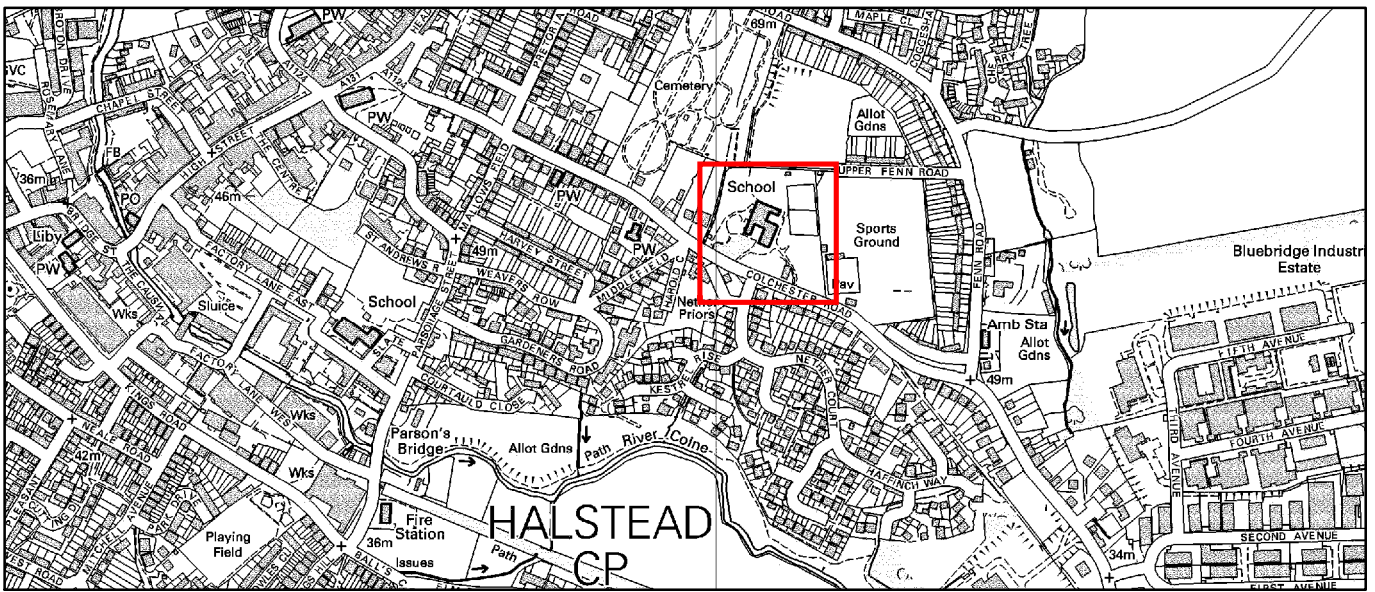
- 3.1 Trench record sheets 1 - 8
- 3.2 Context record register
- 3.3 Original context records 1 - 17
- 3.4 Plans register
- 3.5 Sections register
- 3.6 Levels register
- 3.7 Photographic register
- 3.8 Photograph contact sheet & prints
- 3.9 Miscellaneous maps, plans and notes

Not in Files:

Site drawings (2 permatrace sheets)

APPENDIX 4: ESSEX HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD SUMMARY

Site Name/Address: Priory Hall, Colchester Road, Halstead	
Parish: Halstead	District: Braintree
NGR: TL 8206 3055	Site Code: HS5
Type of Work: Archaeological Evaluation	Site Director/Team: Phillippa Sparrow, ECC FAU
Dates of Work: 8th – 10th March 2011	Size of Area Investigated: 461 sq m of 1.5ha site
Curating Museum: Braintree Museum	Funding Source: Developer
Further Work Anticipated? No	Related HER Nos. None
Final Report: Summary in EAH	OASIS Ref: 96203
Periods Represented: Post-medieval and modern	
SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:	
<p>An eight-trench archaeological evaluation was undertaken as part of a planning condition prior to the redevelopment of the site to contain a mixture of residential houses and a nursing home. The main objective was to investigate any activity alongside Colchester Road. The site sloped steeply down from the north-east to the south-west and displayed evidence of previous landscaping associated with the construction of the 1909 Grammar School for Girls.</p> <p>Trenches 1-4 contained no archaeological features or deposits. A thick layer of modern made-ground was encountered within trench 1 and the western half of trench 2 and might have been the surface of a compound laid during the construction of an 1960s extension to the school or might be the result of general landscaping.</p> <p>Trench 5 contained a curvilinear ditch and a small pit, neither of which contained finds. A ditch in the south-western end of trench 8 ran parallel to the Colchester Road and a gully (13) in the southern end of trench 7 ran perpendicular. These features are likely to represent historic land division prior to the use of the site as a school, but their lack of artefacts leaves them undated.</p> <p>A modern cess pit (5) was located in the south-western end of trench 6 and contained the only significant artefact collected – a highly abraded and therefore residual sherd of 17th to 19th century pottery.</p> <p>This trial-trench evaluation demonstrated the low archaeological potential of the site, with no significant remains being found that predated the modern period. It is judged that the site lay outside the historic settlement core of Halstead and was therefore in agricultural use prior to the construction of the school in 1909.</p>	
Previous Summaries/Reports: Heppell, E. 2006 <i>Priory Hall, Halstead, Essex: Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment and Site Inspection</i> , ECC FAU rep.1618	
Author of Summary: P. Sparrow	Date of Summary: 31 March 2011



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Fig.1. Location of archaeological evaluation trenches

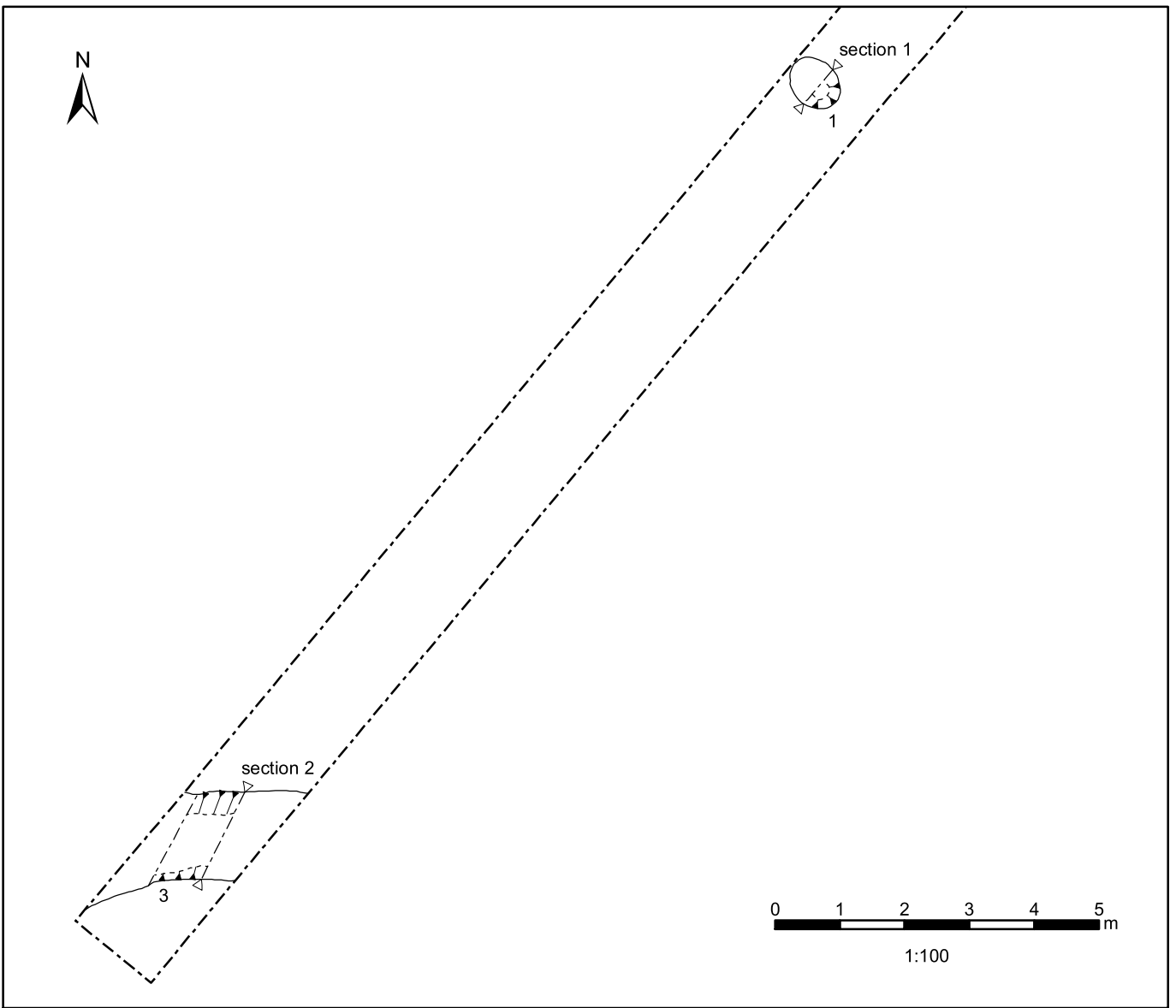


Fig.2. Features within trench 5

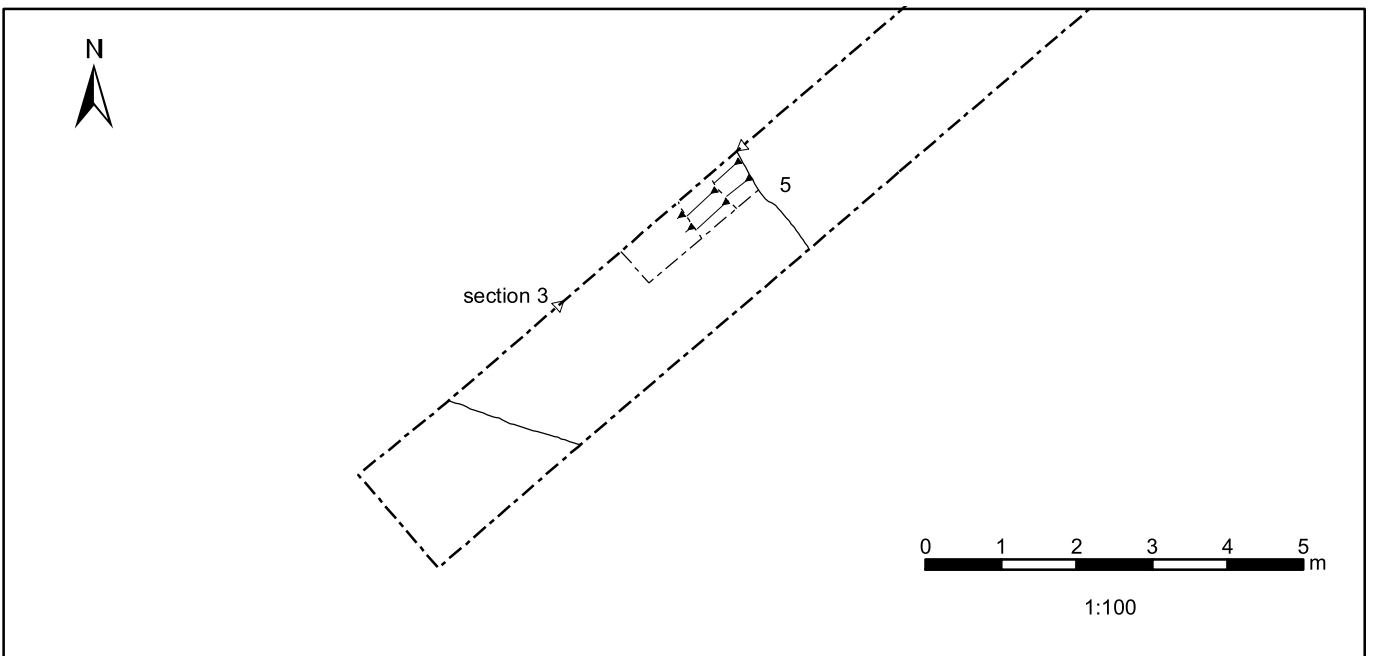


Fig.3. Features within trench 6

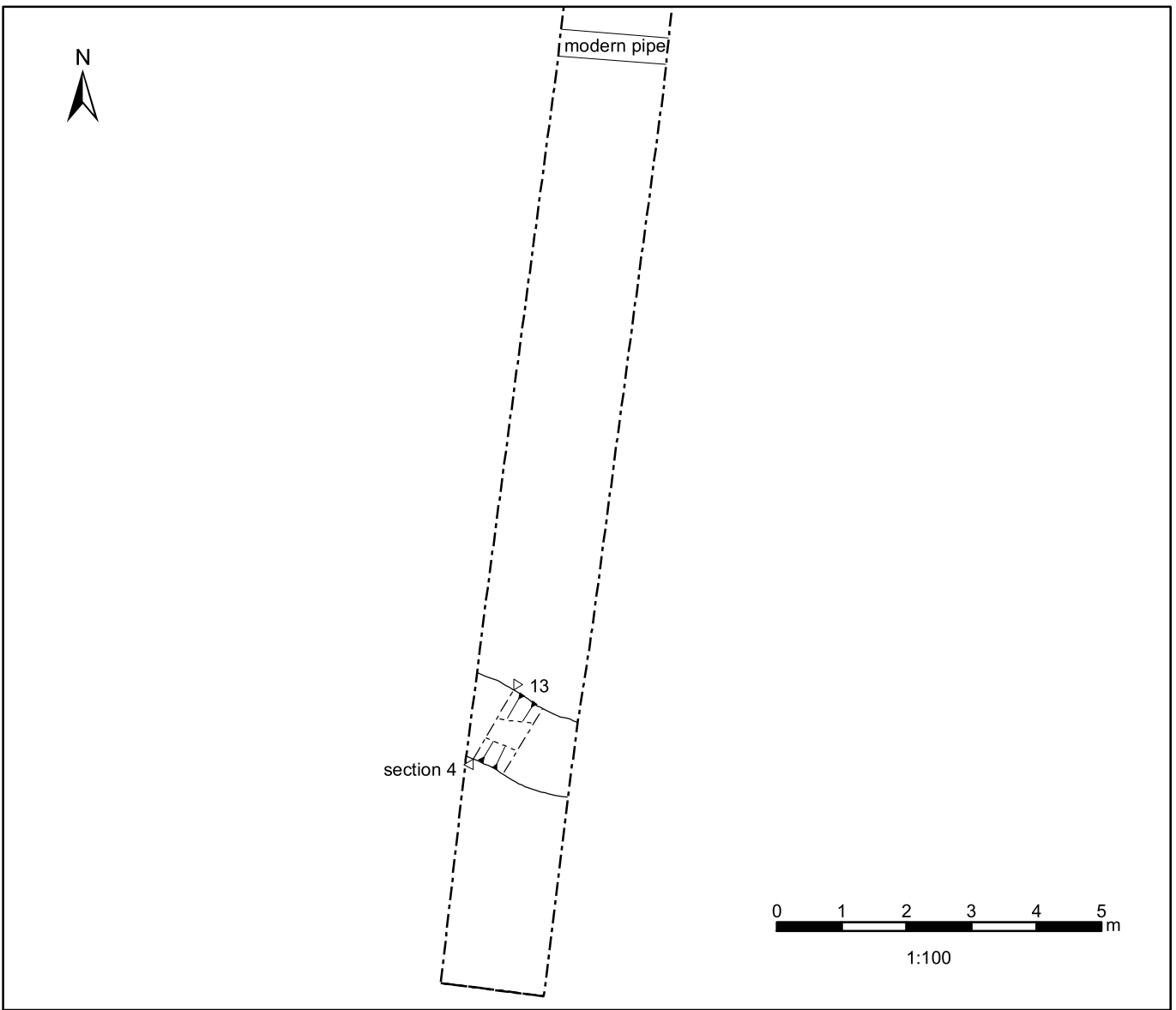


Fig.4. Features within trench 7

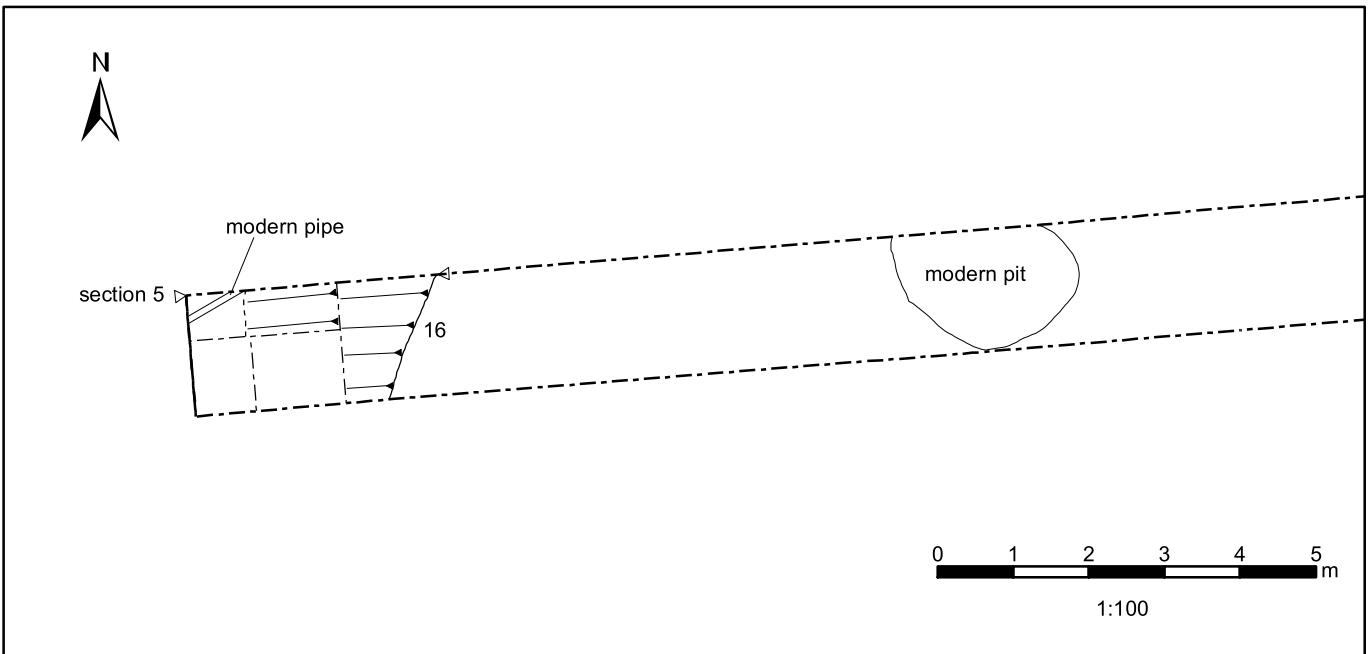
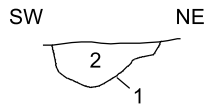
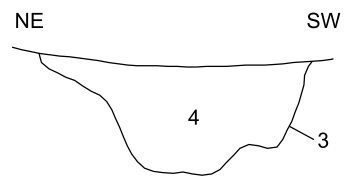


Fig.5. Features within trench 8

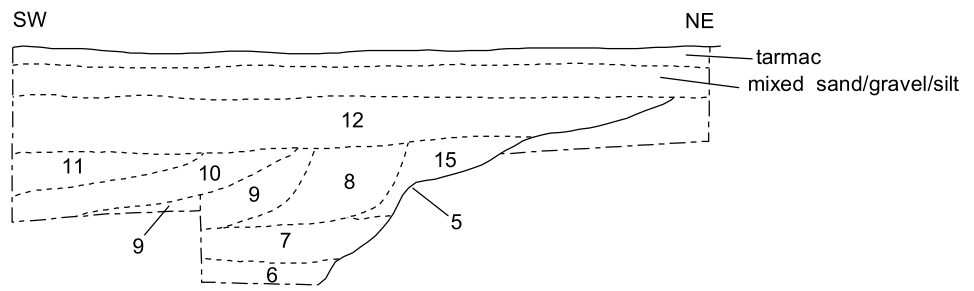
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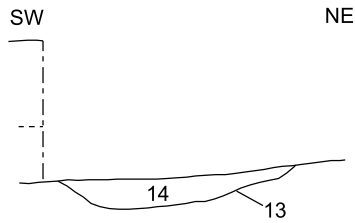
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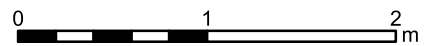
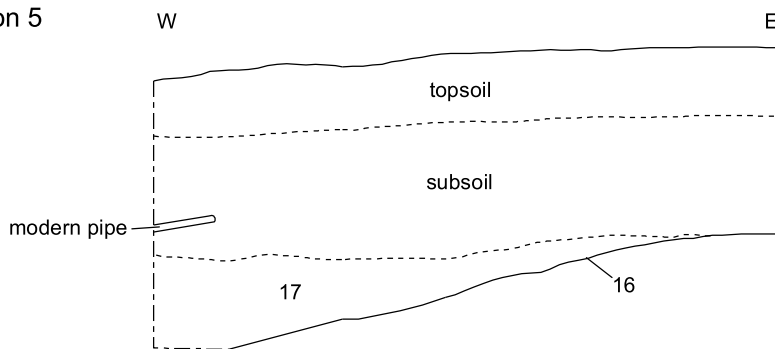
Section 3



Section 4



Section 5



1:40

Fig.6. Sections 1 - 5



Plate 1. Trench1 looking north. 2m scale



Plate 2. Trench 2 looking west. 2m scale



Plate 3. Trench 3 looking south-east. 2m scale



Plate 4. Trench 4 looking west. 2m scale



Plate 5. Trench 5 looking north-east. 2m scale



Plate 6. Trench 6 looking north-east. 2m scale



Plate 7. Pit 1 in trench 5, looking north-west. 0.5m scale



Plate 8. Ditch 3 in trench 5, looking south-east. 1m scale



Plate 9. Pit 5 in trench 6, looking north-west. 1m scale



Plate 10. Gully 13 in trench 7, looking north-west. 1m scale



Plate 11. Trench 7 looking north. 2m scale



Plate 12. Trench 8 looking west. 2m scale