

An archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching on land at Lady Knights Barn & Yard, Pentlow Lane, Pentlow, Essex

March 2015



report prepared by
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Commissioned by
Edward Chapman

CAT project ref.: 15/03a
Historic Environment code: PLLK15
NGR: TL 81804 46116 (centre)



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CAT Report 824
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Summary

In March 2015 the Colchester Archaeological Trust undertook an evaluation on the site of a 15th-century barn at Lady Knights Barn and Yard, part of the historic farm complex at Pentlow Hall Farm, Pentlow, Essex. The historic barn, which burned to the ground in the 1990's, survived only as the partial remains of the brick plinths on which the timber-framed barn was raised up in the 16th/17th century. An evaluation trench excavated in advance of the construction of a new dwelling identified a foundation for a later cross-wall associated with the historic barn, as well as the surviving brick plinth of the medieval barn.

Introduction (Figs 1 & 2)

This is the archive report on the archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) at Lady Knights Barn and Yard, Pentlow Lane, Pentlow, Essex (NGR TL 81804 46116) (Fig 1). The site is situated within the historic farm complex at Pentlow Hall Farm on the western side of Pentlow Lane.

The proposed development comprises the removal of all commercial storage/hardstanding from the site, the restoration of an outbuilding and the construction of a single dwelling with associated landscaping works.

The proposed dwelling is located upon the site of a demolished mid-20th-century lean-to barn and a Grade II listed 14th/15th century timber-framed barn known as Lady Knights Barn (HER 27886). Lady Knights Barn formed part of a larger farm complex associated with the medieval church and hall complex of Pentlow. It was burnt down in the 1990's. The 12th-century church (EHER 27888) and 15th-century manor house (EHER 27883) both survive on the opposite side of Pentlow Lane.

Part of the proposed dwelling is located within the footprint of a demolished late-20th-century lean-to barn. The modern ground level is considerably lower in the area of the modern barn. As a consequence, parts of the surviving brick and stone plinth walls of Lady Knights Barn were observable following the demolition of the modern barn. An archaeologist from CAT visited the site prior to the excavation of the trial-trench to record, photograph, and plan the observable remains of the historic barn (Fig 2).

The work was undertaken in accordance with a brief produced by the Historic Environment Advisor Teresa O'Connor (2015) and a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by CAT (2015).

Building record

A site visit was made prior to the excavation of the trial trench in an attempt to obtain as much information about the barn as possible from the physical remains.

Although the footprint of the historic barn was discernible, very little original fabric survived. What remained were the brick plinths that the timber frame would have sat on and these were obscured in many places by the application of concrete block work revetments and repairs. The footprint of the barn (as indicated by the visible brick plinths) measured 7.6m wide by 31m long and was aligned north-west to south-east (Fig 2). Where visible, the plinths were of unfrogged red brick laid in English bond, with rough dimensions of 220mm x 110mm x 55mm, although the earliest bricks were hand-made and varied in size. Frequent repairs had been made to the plinth and the brickwork is a patchwork of original fabric and later brickwork.

Of particular interest was the exposed south-east corner, which was formed from rounded brickwork and indicates there was a moulded brick offset (Plate 1). This indicates both an aesthetic and a practical architectural aspect to the barn, although this was probably part of a later extension (referred to in the list entry), rather than a feature of the original barn.

As no remains of the barn survived above ground, the list entry is included here in an attempt to convey the nature of the barn:

Barn. Circa 1400 under built C16. Timber framed and weather-boarded. Half-hipped corrugated asbestos roof. C20 lean-to to front and rear. 10 bays, two of which may be extensions. Jowled storey posts. Heavy arched braces to cambered tie beams with spandrel strutting. Late side purlin roof. Bridled scarfs to chamfered top plates. Good quality.

Early map evidence for the barn suggests it had two midstreys. The Ordnance Survey 2nd edition of 1886 (Illustration 1) shows two different-sized structures projecting from the south-west side of the barn, indicating the barn was used for threshing. The 10 bay size indicated by the list entry is also interesting as this would have been a very large barn in the 15th century. It is more likely that the outer bays (as suggested by the list entry) were later additions, although, at 8 bays, this would still have been a very large barn. The extra bays were probably added in the late 18th or early 19th-century when grain production was at a high during the 'Golden Age' of British farming. This in turn suggests that the two midstreys were also a later addition rather than original features.



Plate 1: South-east corner of the brick plinth, showing the rounded corner, facing north-west.

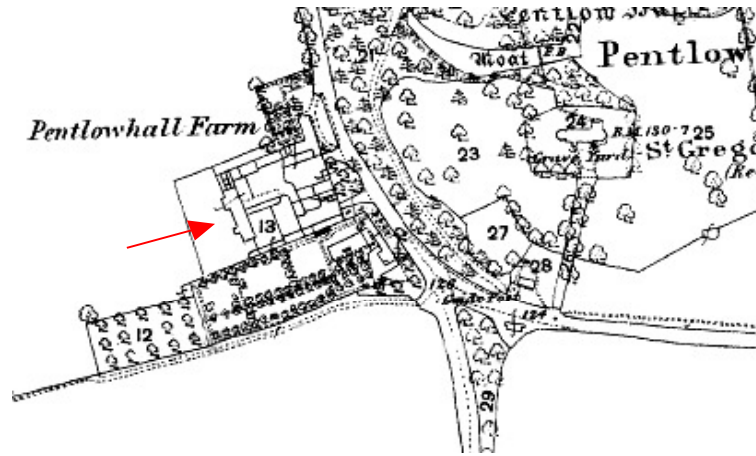


Illustration 1: 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map, showing the presumed midstreys on the south-west side of Lady Knight Barn (red arrow).

Results of the trial-trenching (Figs 2 & 3)

A single trial-trench was excavated under archaeological supervision using a tracked excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket. The trench was L-shaped, 1.8m wide and totalled 19m in length. It was located within the footprint of the proposed dwelling so that it overlapped the surviving north-eastern plinth wall of Lady Knights Barn (Fig 2).

The concrete floor of the 20th-century lean-to barn was laid on a thick layer of sand, gravel and crushed concrete/brick (L1), which, in turn, directly overlaid the orange silty-clay natural (L2). Based on the height of the surviving plinth wall and the height of the natural clay to the west of the foundation, it was apparent that the ground level in this area had been reduced by approximately 0.8m prior to the construction of the modern barn (Plate 3). No archaeological deposits survived the reduction of the ground level and no features were observed cut into the natural clay (Plate 2).

To the south-west of the surviving plinth wall, the modern concrete floor of Lady Knights Barn overlaid crushed concrete, brick and sand (L1), which, in turn, overlaid a medium brown clayey-silt (L3) (Fig 3). L3 contained small charcoal and brick/tile flecks, but no datable finds. L3 overlaid the orange silty-clay natural clay (L2). No historic floor surfaces within the footprint of the timber-framed barn were observed in the evaluation trench.

A wall foundation (F2) aligned north-west to south-east was identified in the footprint of the historic barn. This foundation was constructed from soft red unfrosted bricks, broken into rough halves, with surviving dimensions of 65mm x 110mm. The bricks were laid two courses deep in a very loose lime mortar. F2 had been laid directly onto the surface of the natural clay (L2). The wall would have been perpendicular to the external wall of the historic barn and is likely to be from an internal division within the barn, probably dating to the early 19th century, based on the brick type.

The external face of the historic barn's plinth wall (F1) was fully exposed by the removal of the late 20th-century barn. To the west of the wall, both the soil layer L3 and the natural clay L2 appeared to abut the plinth with no evidence for a foundation trench. The base of the plinth was c 200mm below the top of the natural clay. It is possible that the internal face of the plinth was constructed tight up against the edges of the foundation trench. The surviving plinth was c 500mm high and 480mm wide. The bricks were bonded with lime mortar. The centre of the wall appeared to contain more mortared flint nodules

than the external faces and the angled bricks present on the external face did not appear to continue through the wall (possibly suggesting that they fulfilled a decorative function) (Plate 4). The mortar was similar throughout the wall and it was not possible to discern different phases of construction.

The landowner holds the belief that the barn was originally built on a flint and mortar foundation and was subsequently raised onto a brick plinth. This view is echoed by the list entry text.

No trace of the midstreys inferred from the map evidence was observed during the archaeological fieldwork.



Plate 2: Trial-trench, facing south-east



Plate 3: The surviving plinth wall of Lady Knights Barn, facing south-west



Plate 4: The external face of the plinth wall.

Discussion

The archaeological investigations identified a thin layer of soil beneath the modern concrete floor of Lady Knights Barn, but no earlier barn floor surfaces. The remains of a NE-SW aligned brick wall inside Lady Knights Barn indicates that the barn contained internal divisions. To the east of the historic barn footprint, the ground level had been reduced prior to the construction of a 20th-century lean-to barn and no soil layers or archaeological features have survived.

The inclusion of the flint nodules in the core of the barn's plinth is interesting as it raises the question of whether or not there was an earlier phase of foundation wall prior to the barn being raised up in the

16th/17th century. If this is the case then there is a possibility that other medieval barns with brick plinths in this part of Essex may have had earlier foundations of a similar nature.

Acknowledgements

CAT would like to thank Edward Chapman for commissioning the project. The site work was undertaken by Adam Wightman, Mark Baister, Robin Mathieson and Chris Pryah. Emma Holloway illustrated the sections.

The project was monitored by Teresa O'Connor for the Essex County Council Historic Environment team.

References

Note: all CAT fieldwork reports are available online in .pdf format at <http://cat.essex.ac.uk>

- | | | |
|--------------|------|---|
| CAT | 2015 | Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological evaluation on land at Lady Knights Barn and Yard, Pentlow Road, Pentlow, Essex, by C Lister |
| O'Connor, T. | 2015 | Brief for Archaeological trial Trench evaluation on land at Lady Knights Barn and Yard, Pentlow Lane, Pentlow |

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Appendix 1: contents of archive

One A4 document wallet containing:

1 Introduction

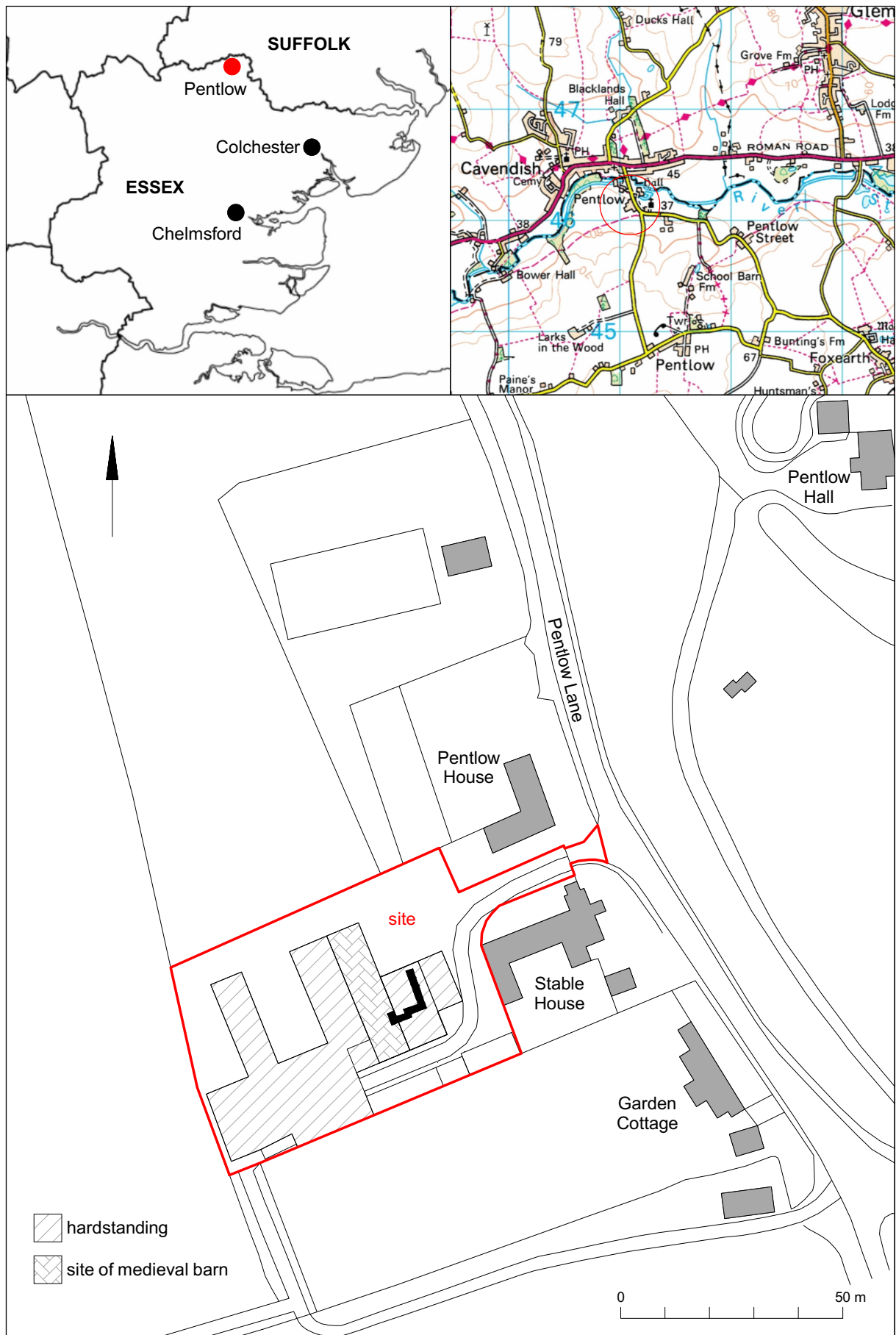
- 1.1 Copy of the evaluation brief issued by ECC
- 1.2 Copy of the WSI produced by CAT
- 1.3 Risk assessment
- 1.4 1 x A4 site plans provided by developer
- 1.5 2 x A3 site plan provided by developer

2 Site archive

- 2.1 Site digital photographic record
- 2.2 Attendance register
- 2.3 Context sheets (L1-L3, F1-F2)
- 2.4 Finds register
- 2.5 Site photographic record on CD
- 2.6 1 x permatrace with representative section

3 Research archive

- 3.1 Monitoring (client) report
- 3.2 Finds report



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Fig 1 Site plan showing the location of the evaluation trench.

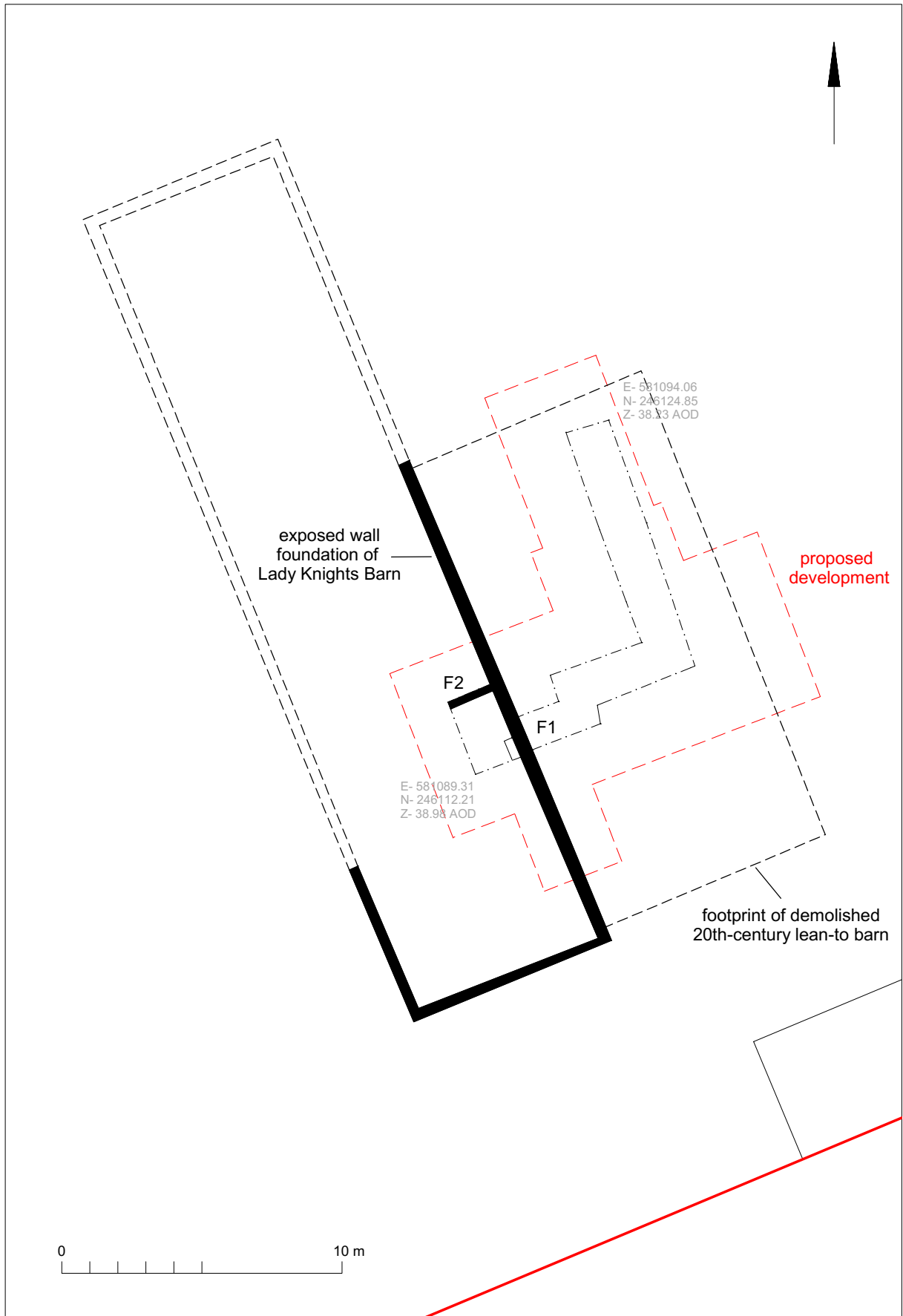


Fig 2 Results.

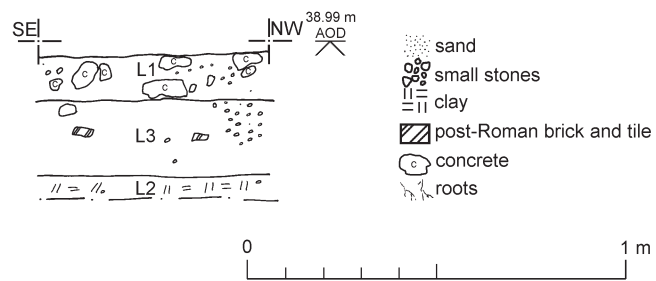


Fig 3 Representative trench section.

Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

Summary sheet

Address: Lady Knights Barn and Yard, Pentlow Lane, Pentlow, Essex	
Parish: Pentlow	District: Braintree
NGR: TL 81804 46116 (centre)	Site codes: CAT project – 15/03a ECC – PLLK15 Museum accession – pending
Type of work: Evaluation by trial-trenching	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: 17th March 2015	Size of area investigated: 0.0135 ha (new building footprint)
Location of curating museum: Braintree Museum	Funding source: Developer (Mr E Chapman)
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHER numbers: 27883, 27886, 27888
Final report:	CAT Report 824
Periods represented:	medieval/post-medieval
Summary:	
<p><i>In March 2015 the Colchester Archaeological Trust undertook an evaluation on the site of a 15th-century barn at Lady Knights Barn and Yard, part of the historic farm complex at Pentlow Hall Farm, Pentlow, Essex. The historic barn, which burned to the ground in the 1990's, survived only as the partial remains of the brick plinths on which the timber-framed barn was raised up in the 16th/17th century. An evaluation trench excavated in advance of the construction of a new dwelling identified a foundation for a later cross-wall associated with the historic barn, as well as the surviving brick plinth of the medieval barn.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: none	
Keywords: medieval/post-medieval barn	Significance: *
Author of summary: Adam Wightman	Date of summary: April 2015