

# Archaeological trial-pit survey at Parsonage Farm, Parsonage Lane, Thaxted Road, Wimbish, Essex, CB10 2UZ

August 2018



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**commissioned by R.A.W Group**

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**CAT Report 1313**  
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## Contents

1	Summary	1
2	Introduction	1
3	Archaeological background	1
4	Aims	2
5	Results	3
6	Finds	6
7	Discussion	6
8	Acknowledgements	7
9	References	7
10	Abbreviations and glossary	7
11	Contents of archive	7
12	Archive deposition	8

Appendix 1	Context List	8
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Figures	after pg 8
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OASIS summary sheet

## List of photographs and figures

Cover: shot of TP5, photograph taken facing south-east

Photograph 1	TP1 after excavation. Photograph taken facing south-west.	3
Photograph 2	TP2 after excavation. Photograph taken facing north-west.	3
Photograph 3	Detailed shot of red-brick foundation of house (F1) in TP2. Photograph taken facing south-west.	4
Photograph 4	TP3 after excavation. Photograph taken facing south-east.	4
Photograph 5	TP4 after excavation. Photograph taken facing south-west.	5
Photograph 6	TP5 after excavation. Oil pipe visible beneath electric cables. Photograph taken facing south-east.	5
Photograph 7	TP6 after excavation, shows oil pipe turning west. Photograph taken facing south-east.	6

Fig 1	Site location.
Fig 2	Detailed plan of site showing trial-pit locations.
Fig 3	Feature and representative sections.

## 1 Summary

*An archaeological trial-pit survey was carried out at Parsonage Farm, Parsonage Lane, Thaxted Road, Wimbish for the purpose of ascertaining the level and extent of contamination on the site after a recent oil leak. The site lies within a medieval moated enclosure and is part of a scheduled monument.*

*Nothing of archaeological interest was uncovered, but this was largely due to the small size of the trial-pits. If any further, more substantial, work is carried out on this site then the prospect of encountering significant archaeological remains is high.*

## 2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This report presents the results of archaeological excavation and monitoring at Parsonage Farm, Parsonage Lane, Thaxted Road, Wimbish, which was carried out in August 2018. The work was undertaken by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) and was commissioned by R.A.W Group. The excavation and monitoring consisted of the hand-digging of a series of trial-pits in an attempt to ascertain the level and extent of contamination on the site after a recent oil leak.

In response to consultation, Historic England Inspector of Ancient Monuments (HEIAM) Deborah Priddy advised that as the site lies within a scheduled monument and in an area highlighted by the EHER as having a high potential for archaeological deposits, an archaeological condition should be implemented.

All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by CAT and agreed with the HEIAM (CAT 2018).

In addition to the WSI, all fieldwork and reporting was done in accordance with Historic England's *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (Historic England 2015), and with *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14 and 24). This report mirrors standards and practices contained in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs* (CIfA 2014a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (CIfA 2014b).

## 3 Archaeological background (Figs 1 and 2)

The following archaeological background utilises the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) held at Essex County Council, County Hall, Chelmsford, accessed via the Heritage Gateway.

Parsonage Farm is a medieval moated site and a scheduled monument (no. 1007841). The Historic England list entry for the site is summarised below:

*"The monument includes a moated site and three ponds situated on high ground 1.8km south-west of All Saints Church, Wimbish. The moat is sub-rectangular in shape and measures 90m north-south by 75m east-west.*

*Foundations of the original house are preserved on the island and incorporated into the foundations of the present house, which dates to the 19th century.*

*The site is mentioned in the Court Rolls of 1392 as Personeslane. The present house, outhouses, bridges and garden walls, which occupy the site at present, are excluded from the scheduling, although the ground beneath them, including the foundations of the original house, is included."*

There are around 6,000 moated sites known in England. They consist of wide ditches, often water-filled, that partly or completely enclose one or more parcels of land. These

artificial islands would contain domestic or religious buildings. The site name of Parsonage Farm may indicate a religious connection.

The peak period during which moated sites were built was between about 1250 and 1350. Moated sites form a significant class of monument and are important for the understanding of the distribution of wealth and status in the medieval countryside.

The current house on the island dates from the 19th century, but an extension was added to the building in 1999. The archaeological investigation in advance of, and during, the construction of this extension (Gadd 2000) exposed building remains in the form of several wall foundations, a metalled track and a number of pits and ditches. Most of these features dated to the 13th century and the report concluded that there was "continuous occupation of this site from that time to the present day".

In the fields immediately to the north of Parsonage Farm a series of cropmarks have been observed that suggest the presence of linear features, rectangular enclosures and a possible pond (EHER 18480). Whether these features are related to the moated site is unknown.

The farm buildings to the immediate south of the moated enclosure are largely 17th/18th century in date, and include a large listed aisled barn (Listed Building no. 1239242).

Based on known archaeological remains both on and adjacent to the site, it was judged there was a significant chance of further archaeology being encountered during the excavation of the trial-pits.

#### **4 Aims**

The archaeological monitoring was undertaken to identify and record any surviving archaeological deposits that may exist on the site, particularly in relation to the background detailed above.

## 5 Results (Figs 2 and 3)

During the investigation a CAT archaeologist hand-excavated six trial-pits. Throughout this procedure a specialist from R.A.W Group was on hand, checking the upcast soil for signs of oil contamination. If a trial-pit reached the natural horizon (L3, see below), a hole was bored into L3 with an augur to sample the natural soil and check it for contamination.

The trial-pits were excavated through three horizons. Modern turf/topsoil (L1, c 250-370mm thick) sealed a modern levelling layer/build-up of mottled brown/yellow silty-clay, which contained redeposited natural and common fragments of brick and peg-tile (L2, c 200-300mm thick). This in turn sealed the natural subsoil: a light yellow loamy clay (L3).

### TP1

This trial-pit measured 300mm x 300mm and was excavated immediately adjacent to the above-ground oil feed pipe in an attempt to ascertain its alignment below-ground. The pipe was not encountered, and three electric cables present within the first 300mm of the pit halted any further investigation. The only layer encountered in this pit was L1.



**Photograph 1** TP1 after excavation. Photograph taken facing south-west.

### TP2

This trial-pit was excavated to the north of TP1, against the south-east corner of the 19th-century house. It measured 900mm x 500mm in size. Four electrical cables were encountered within this trench, but despite this it was possible to reach a depth of 720mm (Fig 3). All three layers were encountered in this pit, and in its eastern section



**Photograph 2** TP2 after excavation. Photograph taken facing north-west.

the red-brick foundation (F1) of the adjacent building was observed, bonded in lime mortar.



**Photograph 3** Detailed shot of red-brick foundation of house (F1) in TP2. Photograph taken facing south-west.

### TP3

This trial-pit was excavated 5.5m to the north of TP2, once again adjacent to the 19th-century house. It measured 550mm x 450mm in size. One electrical cable was encountered within this trench, but it was possible to reach a depth of 580mm. All three layers were encountered in this pit (Fig 3), but there were no features.



**Photograph 4** TP3 after excavation. Photograph taken facing south-east.

#### TP4

This trial-pit was excavated 3.1m to the west of TP1, against the southern edge of the 19th-century house. It measured 500mm x 400mm in size. Two electrical cables were encountered within this trench, and the soil was extremely dry and solid. It was possible to hand-excavate to a depth of 580mm, but this was still within L2. An augur was then used, which ascertained the depth of L3 to be 800mm below ground-level (Fig 3). No features were encountered.



**Photograph 5** TP4 after excavation. Photograph taken facing south-west.

#### TP5

This trial-pit, along with TP6, was positioned 15m to the north-east of the 19th-century house, and was intended to locate the oil pipe that was assumed to run underneath the driveway to the south. The oil pipe was located (alongside another two electric cables) at a depth of 180mm. Only L1 was observed in this trial-pit.



**Photograph 6** TP5 after excavation. Oil pipe visible beneath electric cables. Photograph taken facing south-east.

### TP6

This trial-pit was 1.5m to the north of TP5, and was positioned to follow the line of the oil pipe. The pipe was again located, turning to the west, this time at a depth of 130mm below current ground-level. An augur-hole was excavated underneath the pipe (in order to test for contamination) to a depth of 310mm below current ground-level. Despite this, as in TP5, only L1 was observed in this trial-pit.



**Photograph 7** TP6 after excavation, shows oil pipe turning west. Photograph taken facing south-east.

## 6 Finds

The only finds recovered during the investigation were small brick and peg-tile fragments from L2, none of which were retained.

## 7 Discussion

These trial-pits failed to expose any significant features or finds, but this was largely due to their small size and proximity to known sources of modern disturbance (in the form of the 19th-century house and the oil pipe).

Previous work on the site has exposed significant medieval archaeology (Gadd 2000). It is therefore reasonable to expect that if any further, larger-scale, work was carried out within the confines of the moated enclosure then more archaeology of this nature would be uncovered.



## 8 Acknowledgements

CAT thanks Rory Griggs from R.A.W Group for commissioning and funding the work. The project was managed by C Lister and carried out by M Baister. Figures were prepared by M Baister and S Carter. The project was monitored for Historic England by Deborah Priddy.

## 9 References

Note: all CAT reports, except for DBAs, are available online in PDF format at <http://cat.essex.ac.uk>

Brown and Glazenbrook	2000	<i>Research and Archaeology: A Framework for the Eastern Counties 2 – Research Agenda and Strategy</i> . East Anglian Archaeology
CAT	2018	<i>Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for archaeological excavation and recording of trialpits at Parsonage Farm, Parsonage Lane, Thaxted Road, Wimbish, Essex, CB10 2UZ</i>
CAT	2018	<i>Health &amp; Safety Policy</i>
ClfA	2014a	<i>Standard and Guidance for archaeological watching briefs</i>
ClfA	2014b	<i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i>
DCLG	2012	<i>National Planning Policy Framework</i>
Gadd, D.A.G	2000	'Medieval Remains at Parsonage Farm, Wimbish' in <i>Essex Archaeology and History</i> <b>31</b> , 300-305
Gurney, D	2003	<i>Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England</i> . East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Papers 14 (EAA <b>14</b> )
Historic England	2015	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)</i>
Medlycott, M	2011b	<i>Research and Archaeology Revisited: A Revised Framework for the East of England</i> . East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Papers 24 (EAA <b>24</b> )

## 10 Abbreviations and glossary

CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
ClfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
context	specific location of finds on an archaeological site
EHHER	Essex Historic Environment Record
feature (F)	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain: can contain 'contexts'
HE	Historic England
HEIAM	Historic England Inspector of Ancient Monuments
layer (L)	distinct or distinguishable deposit (layer) of material
modern	period from c AD 1800 to the present
medieval	period from AD 1066 - 1500
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
OASIS	Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations, <a href="http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main">http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main</a>

## 11 Contents of archive

**Finds:** none retained

### Paper and digital record

One A4 document wallet containing:

The report (CAT Report 1313)

Original site record (feature and layer sheets, finds record, plans)

Site digital photos and log, architectural plans, attendance register, risk assessment

## 12 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is currently held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at Roman Circus House, Roman Circus Walk, Colchester, Essex, CO2 7GZ, but will be permanently deposited with Saffron Walden Museum (an accession code has been requested)

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### Distribution list

Rory Griggs, R.A.W Group  
Deborah Priddy, Historic England  
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Checked by: Philip Crummy

Date: 21.08.2018

## Appendix 1 Context list

Context Number	Finds Number	Context Type	Description	Date
F1	-	brick wall	brick wall of cellar, made with red bricks bonded in lime mortar. dimensions and bond unclear.	19th-century
L1	-	topsoil/turf	soft/friable, dry, dark brown/black sandy-silt. looser in flowerbeds, more compact beneath grass.	modern
L2	-	building-up/levelling	firm, dry, mottled medium brown/yellow silty-clay with common re-deposited natural, peg-tile and brick inclusions	modern
L3	-	natural	friable, dry, light yellow loamy clay	post-glacial

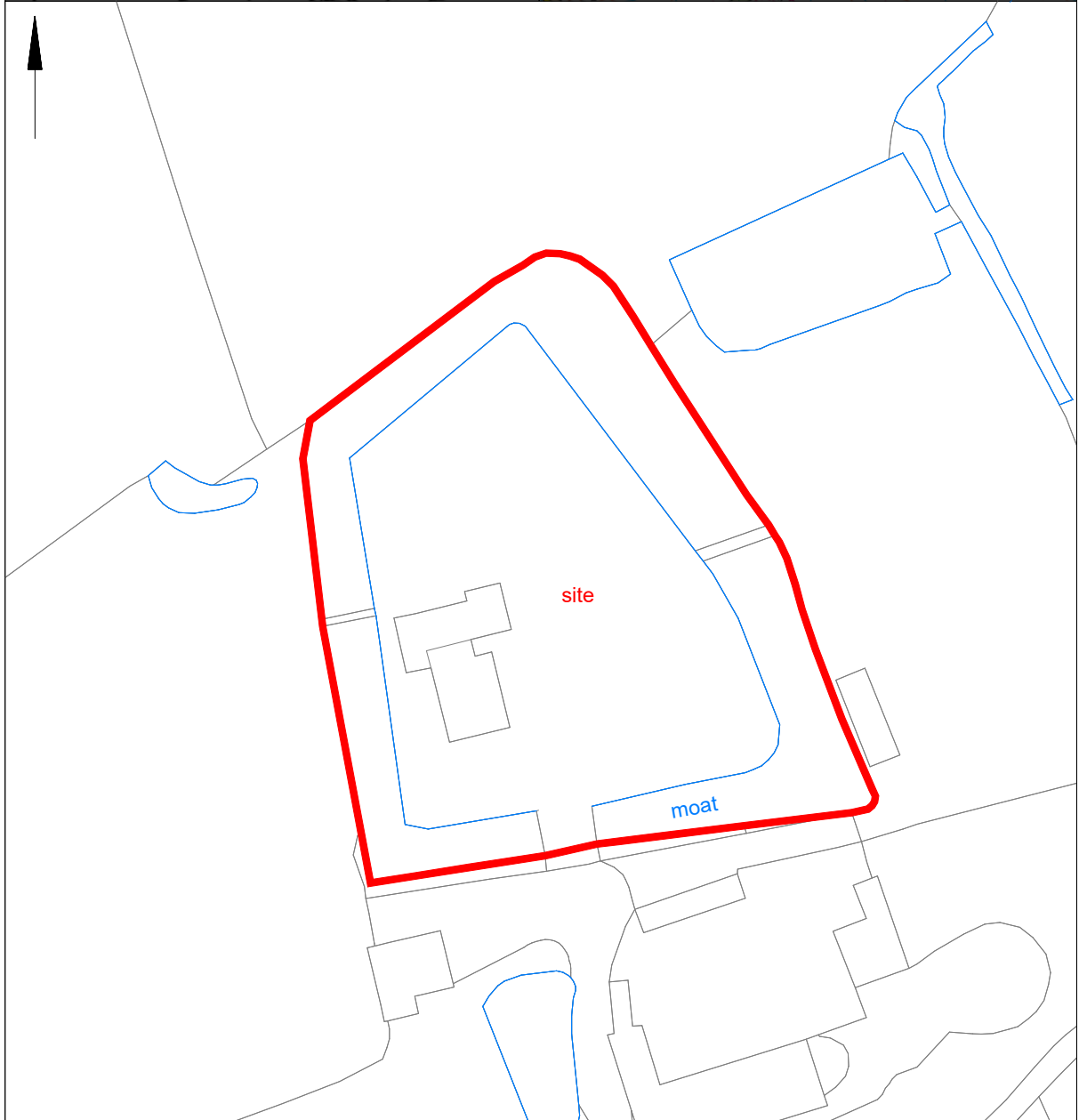
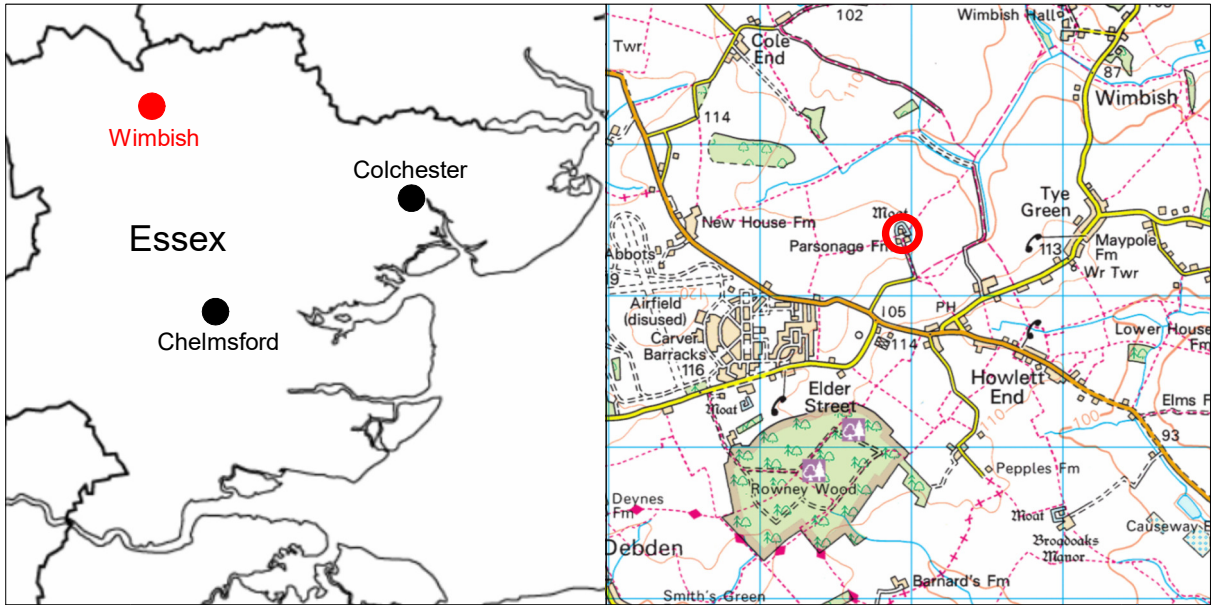


Fig 1 Site location.

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Fig 2 Detailed plan of site showing trial-pit locations.



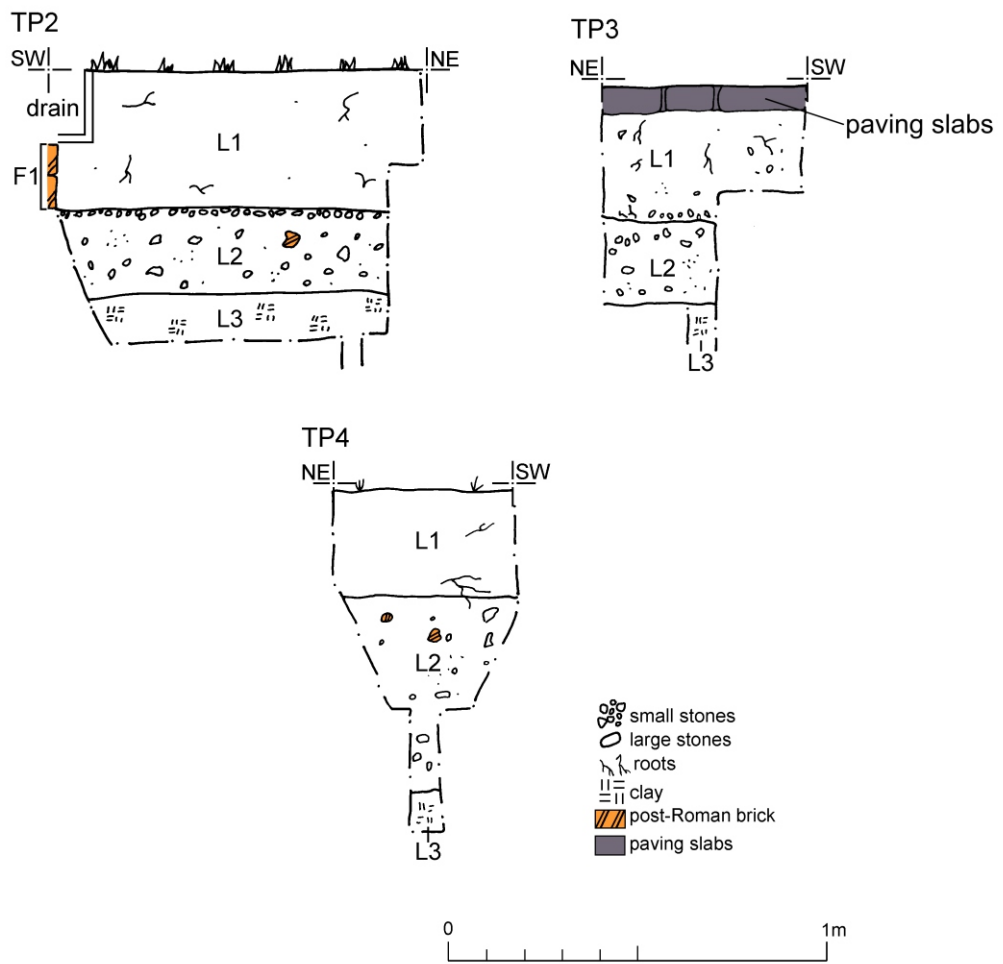


Fig 3 Feature and representative sections.

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**OASIS ID: colchest3-321047**

### Project details

Project name	Archaeological trial-pit survey at Parsonage Farm, Parsonage Lane, Thaxted Road, Wimbish, Essex, CB10 2UZ
Short description of the project	An archaeological trial-pit survey was carried out at Parsonage Farm, Parsonage Lane, Thaxted Road, Wimbish for the purpose of ascertaining the level and extent of contamination on the site after a recent oil leak. The site lies within a medieval moated enclosure and is part of a scheduled monument. Nothing of archaeological interest was uncovered, but this was largely due to the small size of the trial-pits. If any further, more substantial, work is carried out on this site then the prospect of encountering significant archaeological remains is high.
Project dates	Start: 03-08-2018 End: 22-08-2018
Previous/future work	No / Yes
Any associated project reference codes	18/06I - Contracting Unit No.
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Scheduled Monument (SM)
Current Land use	Residential 1 - General Residential
Monument type	MOAT Medieval
Significant Finds	BRICK Modern
Investigation type	""Test-Pit Survey"", ""Watching Brief""
Prompt	Scheduled Monument Consent

### Project location

Country	England
Site location	ESSEX UTTLESFORD WIMBISH Parsonage Farm
Postcode	CB10 2UZ
Study area	0 Square metres
Site coordinates	TL 57937 35438 51.994437522216 0.300681220105 51 59 39 N 000 18 02 E Point

### Project creators

Name of Organisation	Colchester Archaeological Trust
Project brief originator	HISTORIC ENGLAND
Project design originator	Chris Lister
Project director/manager	Mark Baister

Project supervisor Mark Baister  
 Type of sponsor/funding body Landowner

### Project archives

Physical Archive Exists? No  
 Digital Archive recipient Saffron Walden Museum  
 Digital Contents "Survey"  
 Digital Media available "Survey","Text"  
 Paper Archive recipient Saffron Walden Museum  
 Paper Contents "Survey"  
 Paper Media available "Context sheet","Notebook - Excavation',' Research',' General Notes","Photograph","Plan","Report","Section","Survey "

### Project bibliography 1

Publication type Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)  
 Title Archaeological trial-pit survey at Parsonage Farm, Parsonage Lane, Thaxted Road, Wimbish, Essex, CB10 2UZ  
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