

**An archaeological watching brief at
37 Avenue Road, Witham, Essex
February-March 2005**

**report prepared by
Kate Orr**

**on behalf of
Vaughan and Blyth (Builders) Ltd**

CAT project ref.: 05/2c
Braintree Museums accession code: BRNTM 2005.2
NGR: TL 8219 1502 (c)
ECC HEM group site code: WH19



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1 Summary

Several monitoring visits were made to 37 Avenue Road, Witham, Essex during the groundworks for a small residential development. The watching brief produced largely negative results. Some probable modern disturbance was recorded within the topsoil at the rear of the site and also in the driveway strip, the sewer-trench and in plot 3. No finds or features were observed to suggest prehistoric, Roman, Anglo-Saxon or medieval occupation. None of the features were large or early enough to represent the remains of defensive ditches to Chipping Hill hillfort.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief carried out at 37 Avenue Road, Witham, Essex by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on behalf of Vaughan and Blyth (Builders) Ltd.
- 2.2 The watching brief was required as part of a planning permission to demolish the existing property and to construct three houses with garages (planning reference BTE/0571/03).
- 2.3 The site is located to the north-west of the town centre, on the eastern side of Avenue Road at NGR TL 8219 1502 (c). The rectangular plot covers an area of 65m x 30m.
- 2.4 The monitoring was carried out by CAT between the 9th February and the 29th March 2005. A brief was supplied by Essex County Council (ECC) Historic Environment Management (HEM) group who also monitored the project.
- 2.5 This report follows the standards set out in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (CM 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (CM 2003), the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IFA 1999) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IFA 2001). The guidance contained in the documents *Management of archaeological projects* (MAP 2), *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment* (EAA 3), *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy* (EAA 8), and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14) was also followed.

3 Archaeological background (Fig 2)

- 3.1 The development site lies 30m to the south-east of Chipping Hill. This slight spur of land appears to have been occupied throughout much of the prehistoric period. Chipping Hill Camp earthwork was a double-ditched hillfort, probably constructed in the Iron Age (EHER nos 8106-8110). There is also evidence of Roman activity in and around Chipping Hill.
- 3.2 Chipping Hill is also one contender for the site of Edward the Elder's *burh* at Witham, recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. In the later Anglo-Saxon period, Chipping Hill was again the focus of occupation with a royal holding, a sizeable population and a mill. It probably also had a market function.
- 3.3 Settlement probably continued at Chipping Hill in the medieval period, although a 'new town' had been developed along the Colchester-London road, where the present town centre is located. Medieval pottery has been recovered from a garden adjacent to the development site (EHER no 8436; Medlycott 1999).

4 Aim

The aim of the watching brief was to record the location, extent, date and character of any surviving archaeological remains and interpret them in association with the previously excavated deposits of the hillfort or medieval town. Particular attention was paid to:

- Evidence of occupation in the prehistoric and Anglo-Saxon periods
- Location of defensive ditches associated to the hillfort or Anglo-Saxon *burh*
- The range of objects that were in use, their status, presence of imports, etc
- Quality of environmental deposits surviving on the site.

5 Methods

- 5.1 Eight visits in total were made to the site by a CAT archaeologist. The area of the driveway was stripped of turf, topsoil and subsoil by the contractors, using a mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket. A sewer-trench was subsequently dug within the line of the stripped area. A service-trench was then dug parallel to the sewer-trench, within the stripped area. 100% of this work was monitored by CAT. The groundworks for the three houses were monitored intermittently after discussion with the HEM group officer. Foundation trenches were dug using a toothed bucket.
- 5.2 Individual records of layers and features were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets.
- 5.3 Section drawings were made at a scale of 1:20 and 1:50. No to scale plans were made.
- 5.4 A colour photographic record was made using a digital camera.

6 Results (Fig 2)

6.1 Driveway

The soil-stripping for the new drive was monitored on the 9th and 10th February. The area of the driveway was stripped of between 400mm of material to the rear of the site, to 550mm of material at the frontage. Natural ground was not reached. Two possible ditches appeared to be modern. A spread of modern brick fragments was found to be 200mm deep. Tree roots had caused disturbance, as had a modern cable. No features of archaeological interest were recorded.

6.2 Sewer-trench

A sewer trench was dug within the line of the driveway strip on the 11th February. This was excavated to between 500mm and 1.2m below the reduced ground-level.

At the front of the site (between approximately 0-24m away from the Avenue Road frontage), the stratigraphy was 'clean' and generally clearly defined. The soil profile was as follows:

200mm tarmac (already stripped off)

200mm of pale to mid brown sandy silt loam subsoil (Layer or L1) (mostly already stripped off)

500mm of yellowish clayey silt subsoil, possibly natural (L2)

at approximately 900mm below previous ground-level, L2 merged with a natural reddish brown coarse sandy gravel (L3)

Further back from the Avenue Road frontage, the soils were darker and less distinct and the soil profile was as follows:

400mm of topsoil (already stripped off)

100mm-300mm of pale to mid brown sandy silt loam subsoil (L1)

at between 500mm and 700mm below previous ground-level, L1 merged with a natural reddish brown coarse sandy gravel (L3).

No convincingly early features were found, but there were occasional interruptions that may be natural discolorations of the soil (Feature or F1 and F2). Two small pits (F3 and F4) were cut into natural gravel (L3) at the eastern end of the sewer-trench. They were filled by a mid brown silty loam, similar to the subsoil (L1) sealing the features.

6.3 Service-trench

On the 16th February, a service-trench was dug within the line of the driveway strip but to the north of the sewer-trench. This was dug to between 500mm and 700mm below the reduced ground-level. A 7.3m-wide seam of gravel in orangey brown sand was observed in the trench section (F5). This occurred between 14m and 22m from the Avenue Road frontage. The gravel appeared to have a camber and had the appearance of a metalled trackway running south-west to north-east. The surface of F5 was 600mm below the previous ground-level. However, no finds were retrieved from within the 'feature' and it may have been natural, given that very gravelly natural deposits were observed in the foundation trenches (see below).

6.4 Foundation trenches - plots 1, 2 and 3

Plot 1

Plot 1 was monitored on the 2nd March. The foundation trenches were 500mm wide and 1m deep. Where the cellar of the previous property was encountered, trenches had to be dug to 2m depth. Nothing of archaeological significance was recorded. Natural sand and gravel occurred at 500mm-600mm below ground-level. Part of plot 1 had already been dug out for the cellar of the previous property.

Plot 2

Plot 2 was monitored on the 7th and 8th March. The soil profile was similar to plot 1 and no archaeological features were observed.

Plot 3

Plot 3 was monitored on the 29th March. Turf and some topsoil had already been scraped off. Footings were up to 1.5m deep, from the reduced ground-level. A remnant of disturbed dark grey brown sandy silt topsoil sealed a light grey brown sandy silt subsoil with root disturbance. Natural gravel occurred at between 600mm and 1m below reduced ground-level. A large (6m plus-wide) pit-like feature was encountered in the south-eastern footings of plot 3 (F6). This feature was filled by clean orange/brown sandy clay silt with occasional root material and was sealed by 500mm of topsoil. There were no inclusions of any kind in the fill of F6 and there is a strong possibility that it may represent a large tree bowl.

7 Finds

One fragment of mineral or stone and one piece of peg-tile were retrieved from the spoil heap (find no 1). One piece of post-medieval pottery was collected from the surface of the site (find no 2). All of these finds have now been discarded.

8 Discussion

The watching brief produced largely negative results. Some probable modern disturbance was recorded within the topsoil at the rear of the site and also in the driveway strip, the sewer-trench and in plot 3. No finds or features were recorded to suggest prehistoric, Roman, Anglo-Saxon or medieval occupation. None of the features were large or early enough to represent defensive ditches to Chipping Hill hillfort.

9 Archive deposition

The site records, finds, associated papers and digital archive are currently held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF. These will be deposited permanently with Braintree Museum under cover of museum accession code BRNTM 2005.2.

10 Acknowledgements

The Trust would like to thank Vaughan and Blyth (Builders) Ltd for commissioning and funding the work. The fieldwork was carried out by Howard Brooks, Carl Crossan, Ben Holloway, Kate Orr and David Ross.

11 References

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|--------------|------|---|
| CM | 2002 | <i>Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i> |
| CM | 2003 | <i>Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums</i> |
| EAA 3 | 1997 | <i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 3 , ed by J Glazebrook |
| EAA 8 | 2000 | <i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy</i> , Eastern Anglian Archaeological Occasional Papers, 8 , ed by N Brown & J Glazebrook |
| EAA 14 | 2003 | <i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeological Occasional Papers, 14 , by D Gurney |
| IFA | 1999 | <i>Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief</i> |
| IFA | 2001 | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i> |
| MAP 2 | 1991 | <i>Management of archaeological projects</i> , 2nd edition (English Heritage) |
| Medlycott, M | 1999 | <i>Witham historic town project assessment report</i> |

12 Glossary

Anglo-Saxon	the period after the Roman occupation, in Britain AD 410-1066
<i>burh</i>	an Anglo-Saxon stronghold or fortification
CM	Colchester Museums
ECC	Essex County Council
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
HEM	Historic Environment Management group
Iron Age	the period preceding the Roman invasion, in Britain c 700 BC-AD 43
layer	distinct or distinguishable deposit of soil
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c 1500
modern	period from the 19th century onwards to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference

natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
peg-tile	rectangular thin tile with peg-hole(s) used mainly for roofing, first appear c 1200 and continue to present day, but commonly post-medieval to modern
post-medieval	after c 1500 to around the late 18th century
Roman	period from AD 43 to c AD 410

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Distribution list:

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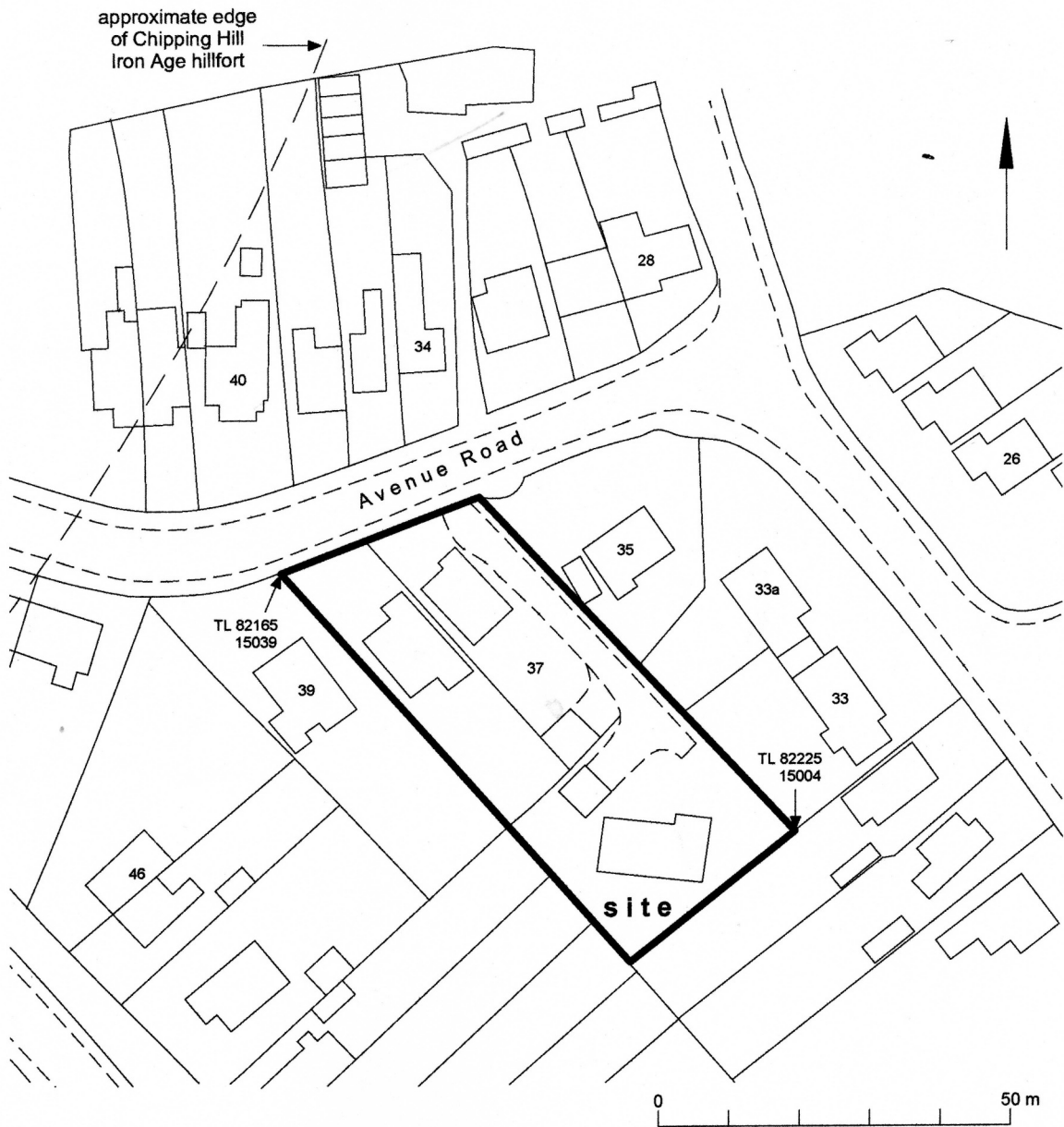


Fig 1 Site location plan.

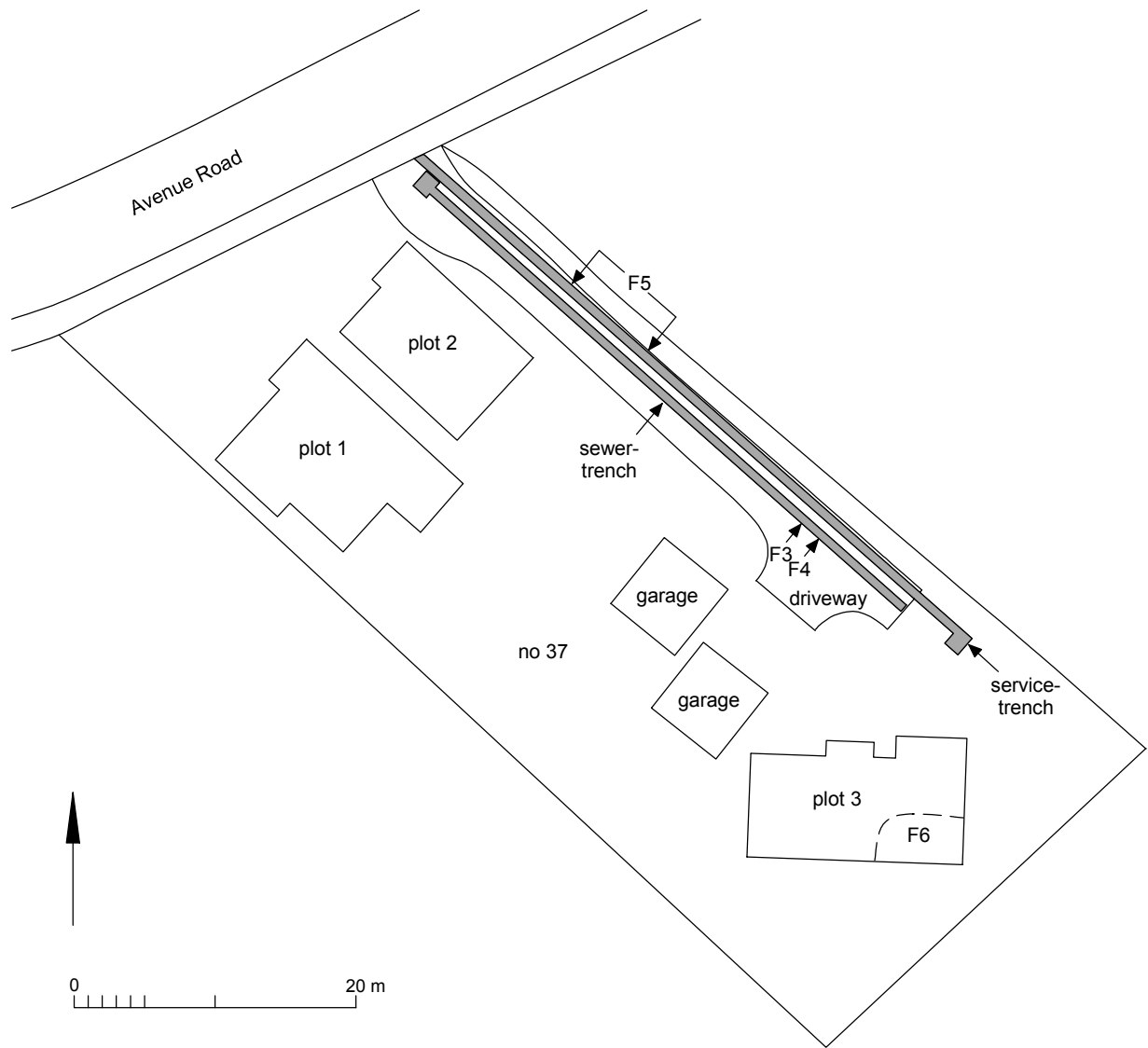


Fig 2 Plan of site, showing features.

**Essex Historic Environment Record/
Essex Archaeology and History**

Summary sheet

Site address: 37 Avenue Road, Witham, Essex	
Parish: Witham	District: Braintree
NGR: TL 8219 1502 (c)	Site code: WH19
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: February-March 2005	Size of area investigated: 30m x 65m
Location of finds/curating museum: Braintree Museum (accession code BRNTM 2005.2)	Funding source: Developers
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHER nos: 8106-8110 and 8436
Final report: CAT Report 316 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>Several monitoring visits were made to 37 Avenue Road, Witham, Essex during the groundworks for a small residential development. The watching brief produced largely negative results. Some probable modern disturbance was recorded within the topsoil at the rear of the site and also in the driveway strip, the sewer-trench and in plot 3. No finds or features were observed to suggest prehistoric, Roman, Anglo-Saxon or medieval occupation. None of the features were large or early enough to represent the remains of defensive ditches to Chipping Hill hillfort.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: June 2005