

**Archaeological test-pitting at
Priory Place, Grange Lane, Little Dunmow,
Essex, CM6 3HY**

December 2015



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with contributions by Stephen Benfield and Val Fryer
and illustrations by Emma Holloway and Chris Lister

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1 Summary

An archaeological investigation by test-pitting was carried out in advance of the construction of a manège on the site of a former medieval fishpond associated with Little Dunmow Priory. Despite the potential for waterlogged deposits, no significant archaeological features or finds were identified. Environmental sampling indicates that the fishponds had become overgrown and subjected to later episodes of wetting and drying.

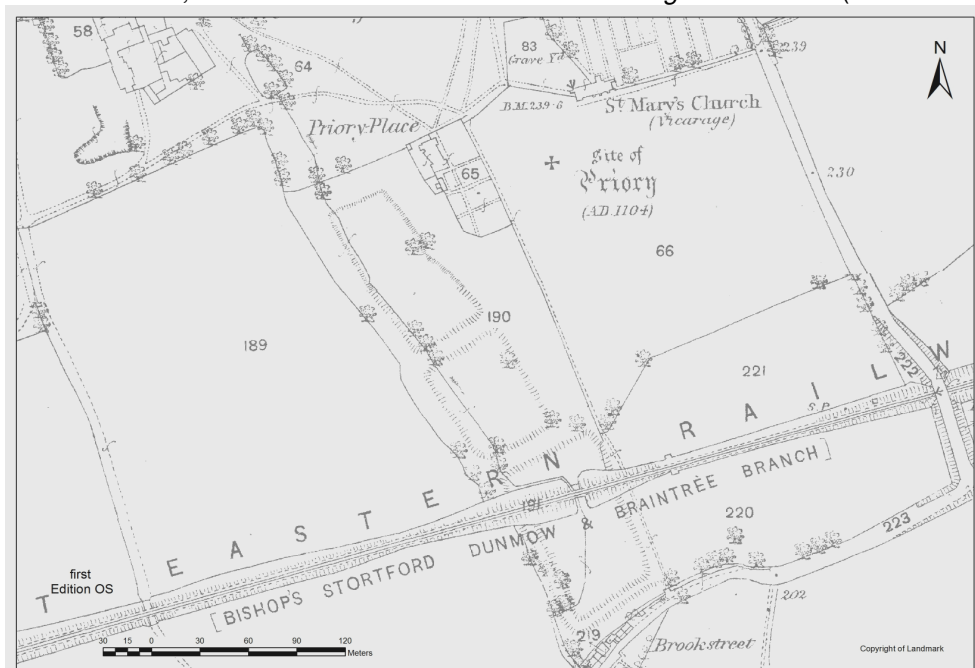
2 Introduction (Fig 1, Map 1)

This report presents the results of an archaeological investigation by test-pitting at Priory Place, Grange Lane, Little Dunmow, Essex which was carried out on the 2nd December 2015. The work was commissioned by Alun Design in advance of the construction of a manège, and was undertaken by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT).

In response to consultation with Essex County Council Place Services (ECCPS), Historic Environment Advisor Richard Havis advised that in order to establish the archaeological implications of this application, the applicant should be required to commission a scheme of archaeological investigation in accordance with paragraphs 128, 129 and 132 of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (DCLG 2012).

All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a *Brief for Archaeological Test-pitting*, detailing the required archaeological work, written by Richard Havis (ECCPS 2015), and a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by CAT in response to the brief and agreed with ECCPS (CAT 2015).

In addition to the brief and WSI, all fieldwork and reporting was done in accordance with English Heritage's *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE) (English Heritage 2006), 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 field evaluation* (ClfA 2014a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (ClfA 2014b).



Map 1 First edition OS map showing Priory Place and the location of the fishponds to the north and south of '190'. The area investigated by test-pitting is located immediately to the south of '190'.

3 Archaeological background

The following archaeological background draws on the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) held at Essex County Council, County Hall, Chelmsford.

EHER shows that the site lies in an area of high archaeologically potential - the medieval Little Dunmow Priory (HER 1244). The development lies inside one of the former fishponds (HER 1242) on the western side of the priory complex (Map 1). They comprised a chain of four adjoining rectangular basins, formerly fed by the stream. Now partially backfilled, these features are likely to contain highly sensitive waterlogged deposits preserving information relating to the Priory and its economy.

4 Results (Fig 1-2)

Five 1m-square test-pits (TP1-TP5) were dug by hand to formation level (600mm below current ground level).

TP1

Modern topsoil (L1, 240mm thick) sealed a redeposited lens of natural clay (L2, 120mm thick), which sealed a silt horizon (L3). Natural clay (L4) was sealed by L3.

TP2, TP3 and TP5

Modern topsoil (L1, 250-300mm thick) sealed natural clay (L4). A sondage was excavated in TP3 to a depth of 1m ensure that L4 was actually natural. It was.

TP4

Modern topsoil (L1, 200mm thick) sealed a silt horizon (L3), which sealed natural clay (L4).

No archaeological features or waterlogged deposits were identified in any of the test-pits.

5 Finds

by Stephen Benfield

Small quantities of broken tile pieces (probably peg-tiles), were recovered from Layer 1 (L1) & Layer 3 (L3) in four of the test-pits (TP1, TP3, TP4 and TP5). Almost all of the pieces come from L1. The only other find is a piece of oyster shell from L1 (TP4). The tile fabrics are a fine or medium sand, one or two pieces have a grey core toward the centre of the tile, but otherwise they are orange or reddish-orange in colour throughout. Thickness varies from 9mm-14mm, most are at least 10mm thick. There is one corner piece (L1, TP1) which has some white mortar around the edge of the upper surface, and one piece has part of what is probably a small peg-hole in one edge (L1, TP5). One piece from L3 (TP4) is slightly different to the others in that there are clearly small stone inclusions in the fabric, although the larger of these appear to have been in the upper surface where some are represented by voids. The underside is finely sanded and there are a few vitrified splashes. The tile is about 15 mm thick. It seems likely that this tile piece is also from a peg-tile, but this is not certain.

Of themselves the peg-tiles pieces cannot be closely dated, and there are no other closely-dated finds associated with them. They can almost certainly be associated with the buildings on the Priory site, which as a religious establishment may have had tiled roofs from its foundation in the early 12th century. However, it can be noted that this type of roof tile only begins to become common in London in the late 12th-13th century (Egan 1998) and in Essex mostly dates to after the 13th century (Ryan & Andrews 1993). They continue to be used in quantity, with little or no change, throughout the late medieval and post-medieval period. Apart from one piece of unusual appearance from L3 (TP4) the tile is probably of late medieval or post-medieval date.

6 Assessment of plant macrofossils and other remains

by Val Fryer, Environmental Archaeologist (January 2016)

Introduction and method statement

Test pitting through deposits within the medieval fish ponds at Little Dunmow recorded two accumulations or silting levels of medieval or post-medieval date. Samples for the retrieval of the plant macrofossil assemblages were taken from Test Pits 1 and 4, and two were submitted for assessment.

The samples were bulk floated by CAT and the flots were collected in a 300 micron mesh sieve. Although waterlogged/de-watered macrofossils were present, all were moderately robust and the flots were air dried to facilitate transport and storage. The dried flots were scanned under a binocular microscope at magnifications up to x 16 and the plant macrofossils and other remains noted are listed in Table 1 (nomenclature follows Stace 2010). Most plant remains were preserved in a waterlogged/de-watered state (denoted within the table by a lower case 'w' suffix), although occasional charred macrofossils were also noted. Modern roots, moss fronds and arthropod remains were also recorded.

Results

Only two charred cereal grains are present, one within each assemblage. Both are probably of wheat (*Triticum* sp.), but the specimen from sample 2 is very poorly preserved. Other charred macrofossils are exceedingly scarce, but the assemblage from sample 2 also includes a single stinking mayweed (*Anthemis cotula*) seed and a small fragment of charcoal/charred wood. All other plant remains are preserved in a waterlogged/de-watered state. Seeds of ruderal weeds and wetland plants are especially common within the assemblage from sample 1, but both assemblages also include a limited range of tree/shrub macrofossils. Taxa noted include orache (*Atriplex* sp.), hemp-nettle (*Galeopsis* sp.), dead-nettle (*Lamium* sp.), nightshade (*Solanum* sp.), stinging nettles (*Urtica dioica*), sedge (*Carex* sp.), rush (*Juncus* sp.) celery leaved crowfoot (*Ranunculus sceleratus*), bramble (*Rubus* sect. *Glandulosus*) and elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*). Other plant macrofossils are scarce. Other remains also occur very infrequently, although both assemblages do include waterlogged/de-watered arthropod remains. Sample 1 also includes a number of shells of common terrestrial and marsh/freshwater obligate snails, with taxa noted including *Carychium* sp., *Discus rotundatus*, *Punctum pygmaea*, *Cochlicopa* sp., *Lymnaea* sp. and *Pisidium* sp.

Conclusions and recommendations for further work

In summary, the assemblage from test pit 1 would certainly appear to be derived from a deposit of water-lain material, although it is suggested that the feature had already fallen out of regular use when the remains accumulated. The pond was almost certainly situated within an area of rough grassland/pasture and it appears to have been little maintained, being overgrown by both shrubs and marginal plants. The base of the pond was almost certainly muddy, and although a low density of anthropogenic material is recorded, it would appear that the feature was largely abandoned and undisturbed. The assemblage from test pit 4 is similar, but as fewer macrofossils are recorded, further interpretation is not possible. However, whereas the material within test pit appears to have been waterlogged since deposition, it is suggested that the remains within test pit 4 had been subjected to regular periods of drying and re-wetting, as they are less well preserved.

Although the assemblage from sample 1 does contain a sufficient density of material for quantification (i.e. 100+ specimens), analysis of a single sample in isolation would add little to the overall interpretation of the site. Therefore, no further work is currently recommended. However, if future interventions are anticipated, it is suggested that additional samples should be taken to gain a better understanding of both the local environment and the day-to-day functioning of ponds.

Sample no	1	2
Context no	1	3
Layer no	3	3
Test Pit no	1	4
Cereals		
<i>Triticum</i> sp. (grain)	xc	
Cereal indet.		xc
Herbs		
<i>Anthemis cotula</i> L.		xc
<i>Atriplex</i> sp.	xw	
<i>Carduus</i> sp.	xw	
<i>Chenopodium ficifolium</i> Sm.	xcfw	
<i>Galeopsis</i> sp.	xw	
<i>Lamium</i> sp.	xw	xw
<i>Potentilla</i> sp.	xw	
<i>Ranunculus acris</i> / <i>repens</i> / <i>bulbosus</i>		xw
<i>Rumex</i> sp.	xw	
<i>Solanum nigrum</i> L.	xw	
<i>Stellaria media</i> (L.) Vill	xw	
<i>Urtica dioica</i> L.	xxxw	xw
Wetland plants		
<i>Carex</i> sp.	xw	
<i>Eleocharis</i> sp.	xw	
<i>Juncus</i> sp.	xw	xw
<i>Lemna</i> sp.	xw	
<i>Ranunculus scleratus</i> L.	xw	
Tree/shrub macrofossils		
<i>Rubus idaeus</i> L.		xcfw
<i>R</i> sect <i>Glandulosus</i> Wimmer & Grab	xxxw	xxw
<i>Sambucus nigra</i> L.	xxxw	x
Other plant macrofossils		
Charcoal <2mm		x
Characeae indet	xw	
indet leaf frags		xw
indet seeds	xw	xw
waterlogged root/stem	xxx	xx
Other remains		
Ostracods	x	
Small coal frag	x	
Waterlogged arthropod remains	xxx	x
Mollusc shells		
Woodland/shade-loving species		
<i>Aegopinella</i> sp.	x	
<i>Carychium</i> sp.	xx	
<i>Discus rotundatus</i>	xx	
<i>Punctum pygmaeum</i>	x	
<i>Vitrea</i> sp.	x	
Zonitidae indet	x	
Open country species		
<i>Vallonia costata</i>	x	
<i>V. exentrica</i>	xcf	
<i>Vertigo pygmaea</i>	x	
Catholic species		
<i>Cochlicopa</i> sp.	x	
<i>Nesovitrea hammonis</i>	x	
<i>Trichia hispida</i> group	x	
Marsh/freshwater obligate species		
<i>Lymnaea</i> sp.	x	
<i>Pisidium</i> sp.	x	
Sample volume (litres)		
Volume of flot (litres)	<0.1	<0.1
% flot sorted	100%	100%

Key to Table 1

x = 1 – 10 specimens xx = 11 – 50 specimens xxx = 51 – 100 specimens xxxx = 100+ specimens
c = charred w = waterlogged/de-watered cf = compare

7 Discussion

The excavation of five test-pits produced little of archaeological significance. Three were excavated through modern topsoil directly onto natural clay. Silt horizons were identified in TP1 and TP4 to the north and west of the proposed manège but no waterlogged deposits were identified. This lack of silting may suggest that the former fishponds were subjected to more recent landscaping, probably when the area was levelled prior to its use as a paddock and tennis court. The remains of one of the fishponds are still apparent to the north of the site, where it appears to have been incorporated into an ornamental pond.

Environmental sampling indicates that the fishponds had become overgrown and subjected to episodes of wetting and drying

8 Acknowledgements

CAT thanks Alun Design for commissioning and funding the work. The project was managed by B Holloway and fieldwork was carried out by BH, A Wade and R Mathieson. Site plans were prepared by C Lister. The project was monitored for ECC by Richard Havis.

9 References

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

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-------|---|
| CAT | 2015 | <i>Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for archaeological test-pitting at Priory Place, Grange Lane, Little Dunmow, Essex, CM6 3HY</i> |
| CIfA | 2014a | <i>Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation</i> |
| CIfA | 2014b | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i> |
| DCLG | 2012 | <i>National Planning Policy Framework</i> . Dept of Communities and Local Government. |
| EAA 14 | 2003 | <i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 14. Ed. D Gurney |
| EAA 24 | 2011 | <i>Research and archaeology revisited: A revised framework for the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Papers 24, by Maria Medlycott |
| ECCPS | 2015 | <i>Brief for Archaeological Test-pitting at Priory Place, Grange Lane, Little Dunmow, Essex</i> |
| Egan | 1998 | <i>The medieval household, Daily living c 1150-c 1450</i> (Museum of London) |
| English Heritage | 2006 | <i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment</i> (English Heritage) |
| Ryan, P, & Andrews, D | 1993 | 'A brick and tile typology for Cressing Temple' in Andrews, D., ed, <i>Cressing Temple, A Templar and Hospitaller manor in Essex</i> , (Essex County Council Planning Department), 93-103 |
| Stace, C | 2010 | <i>New Flora of the British Isles</i> . 3rd edition. Cambridge University Press |

10 Abbreviations and glossary

CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
ClfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
context	specific location of finds on an archaeological site
ECCPS	Essex County Council Place Services
EHER	Essex Historic Environment Record
feature (F)	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain: can contain 'contexts'
layer (L)	distinct or distinguishable deposit of soil
modern	period from c AD 1800 to the present
medieval	from 1066 to around 1500
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
post-medieval	from around 1500 to 1800
WSI	Written Scheme of Investigation

11 Contents of archive

Finds: none retained

Paper and digital record

One A4 document wallet containing:

The report (CAT Report 901)

ECC Evaluation Brief, CAT Written Scheme of Investigation

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 CAT at Roman Circus House, Roman Circus Walk, Colchester, Essex, CO2 7GZ, but will be permanently deposited with Saffron Walden Museum under accession code SAFWM: 2015.65.

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Distribution list

Alun Design

Richard Havis, Essex County Council

EHER



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Date: 12/01/2016

revision 25/02/2016

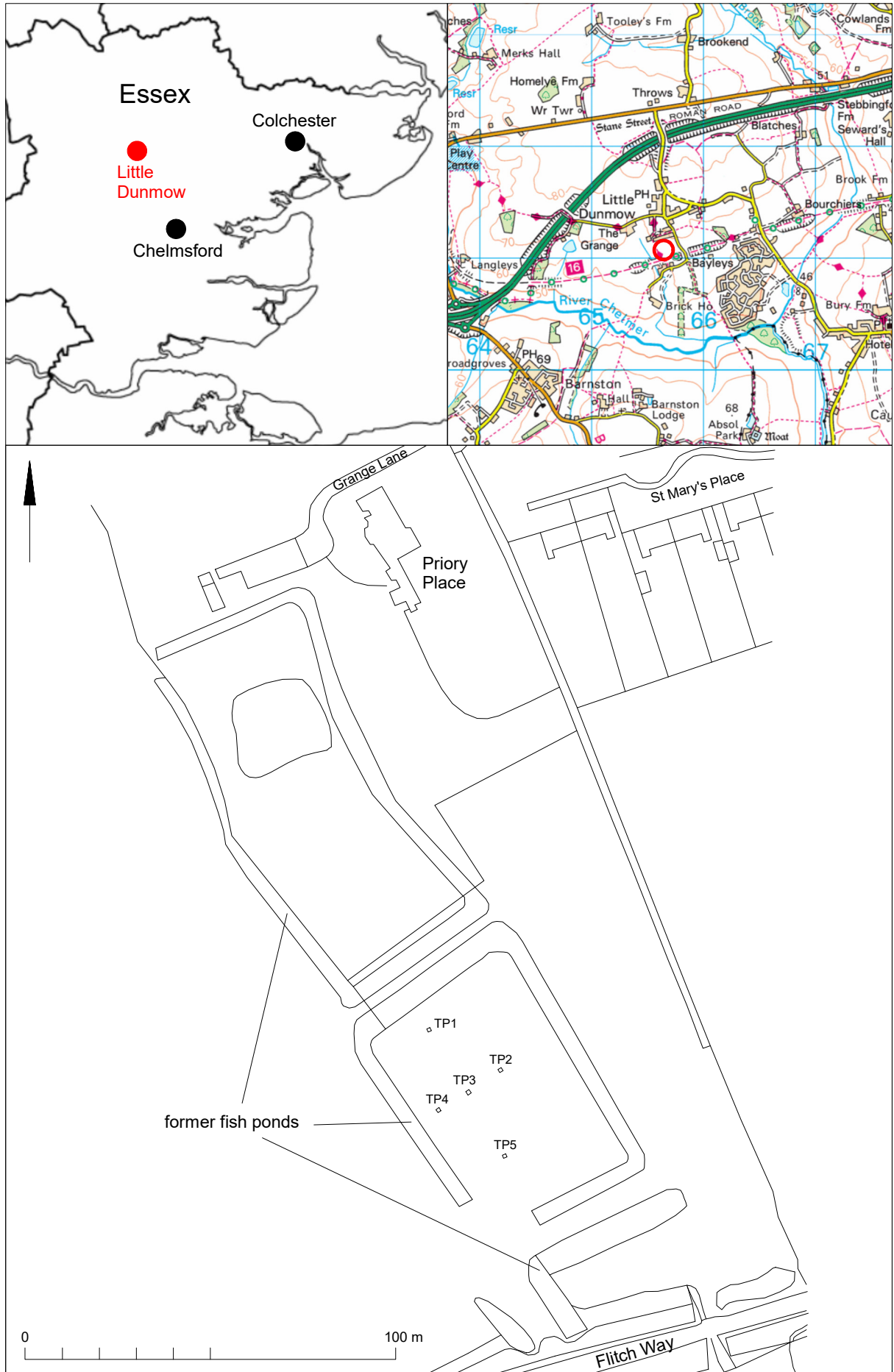


Fig 1 Site location and test-pit results.

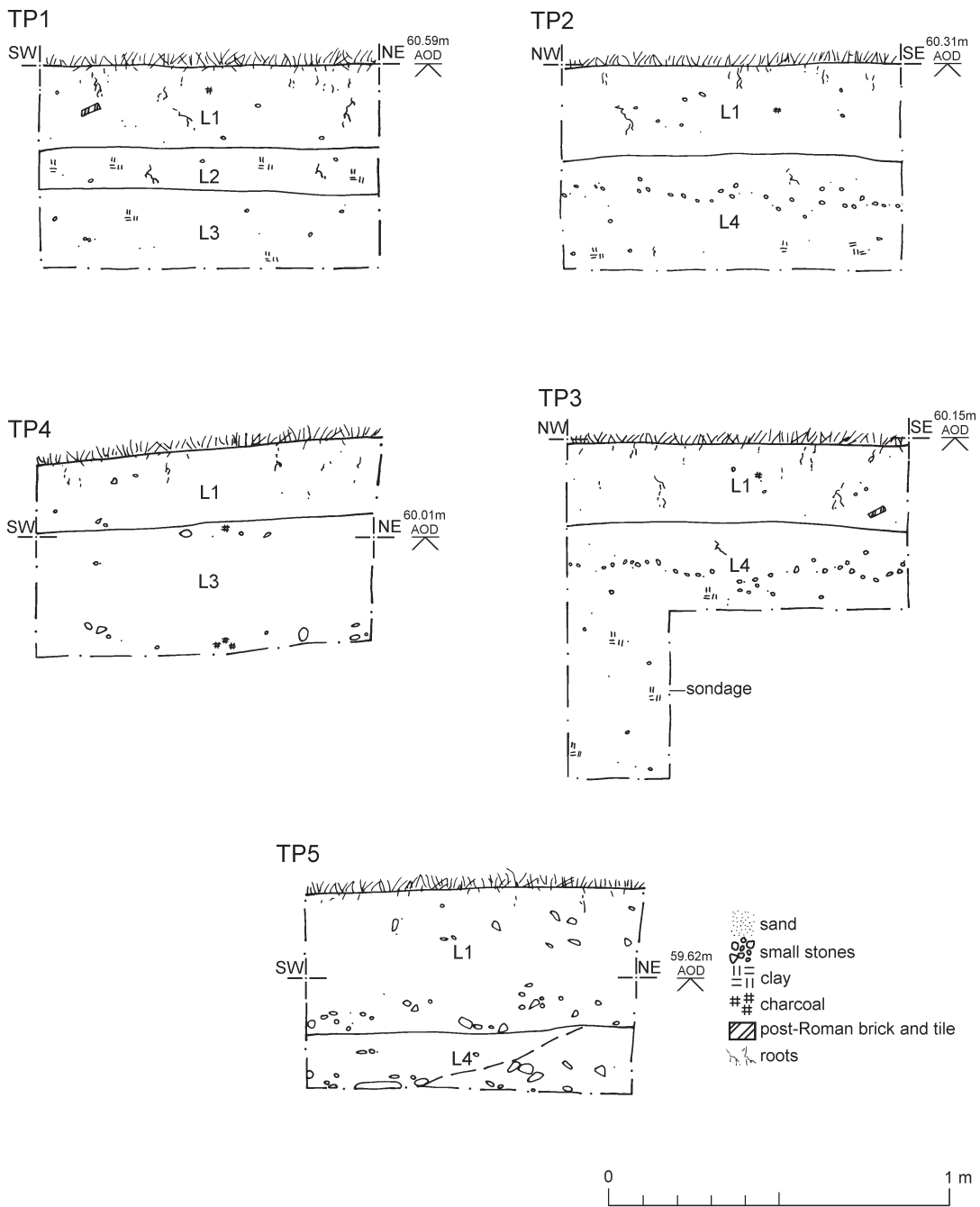


Fig 2 Sections.

Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

Summary sheet

Address: Priory Place, Grange Lane, Little Dunmow, Essex, CM6 3HY	
Parish: Little Dunmow	District: Uttlesford
NGR: TL 65536 21049 (c)	Site code: CAT project ref.: 15/11b ECC project code: LDPP15 OASIS ref: colchest3-230596
Type of work: Test-pitting	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: 2nd December 2015	Size of area investigated: Five 1m square test-pits
Location of curating museum: Saffron Walden museum accession code SAFWM: 2015.65	Funding source: Owner
Further seasons anticipated? no	Related UAD/SMR number: EHER 1242, 1244
Final report: CAT Report 901	
Periods represented:	
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>An archaeological investigation by test-pitting was carried out in advance of the construction of a manège on the site of a former medieval fishpond associated with Little Dunmow Priory. Despite the potential for waterlogged deposits, no significant archaeological features or finds were identified. Environmental sampling indicates that the fishponds had become overgrown and subjected to later episodes of wetting and drying.</i>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
CBC monitor: Richard Havis	
Keywords: -	Significance: -
Author of summary: Laura Pooley	Date of summary: January 2015