

An archaeological watching brief at
Holmwood Grove,
London Road, Copford, Essex

December 2000-February 2001

on behalf of
Mersea Homes

CAT project reference: 00/12a
NGR: TL 9825 2410
Planning application number: F/COL/99/1153
Colchester Museum accession code: 2001.44



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CAT Report 129

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1 Summary

A watching brief at Holmwood Grove, Copford, Essex, next to Stane Street Roman road, found two undated ditches crossing the site from east to west. It is not known whether these are contemporary with the Roman road or are much later field boundaries or drainage features.

2 Introduction

- 2.1** This is the report on an archaeological watching brief carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) for Mersea Homes between the 5th of December 2000 and the 14th of February 2001.
- 2.2** The development site is located in the village of Copford, approximately 7km to the west of Colchester town at National Grid Reference TL 9825 2410. The site is bounded to the south by London Road, to the west by Dorothy Curtice Court, to the east by no 20 London Road, and to the north by a path and fence to a grass field. The site was previously a grass field.
- 2.3** This report follows the standards set out in the Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1996) and *Guidelines on the preparations and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1994).
- 2.4** Colchester Borough Council granted planning permission in July 1999 for the erection of six detached houses under application number F/COL/99/1153. One of the conditions was for an archaeological watching brief to be carried out.

3 Archaeological background

- 3.1** Mesolithic flints, including three hand-axes, have been found 250m to the north-east of the development site (SMR 11867).
- 3.2** The site lies adjacent to London Road. This roughly follows the line of Stane Street, a Roman road which runs from Colchester to Coggeshall (SMR 11705). Stane Street runs to the south of London Road, so it was unlikely that the Roman road would be encountered within the development site; however, Roman settlements are often found strung out along Roman roads.

- 3.3** As well as being on a main Roman thoroughfare, the site occupies an area that was inhabited and farmed in the Iron Age and Roman periods. To the north-east, east, south and south-east are cropmarks of possible Roman or Iron Age enclosures and trackways (SMR 11948, 11890, 11900, 11938). A possible Roman villa has been recorded along Hall Road to the south of the site and north of Copford Hall (SMR 11901-11903). A tumulus of unknown date has also been recorded approximately 500m to the south of the development site (SMR 11822).
- 3.4** The remains of a mound of a windmill stand 200m to the west of the development site. This post-medieval windmill was demolished in 1900 (SMR 11887).
- 3.5** In the medieval period, the village centre was at Copford Green and around the church and the hall to the south. There may have been some ribbon development along London Road, and in fact a timber-framed late medieval building which used to be a smithy stood opposite the development site until recently (P Crummy pers comm, and see Fig 3). However, we have no evidence for medieval dwellings on the development site itself and assume that it was agricultural land at this time.
- 3.6** On the OS 1st edition 1875-76 map the site is shown as fields (Fig 3).

4 Aims and objectives

The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological features, finds or deposits revealed by the groundworks.

5 Methods

- 5.1** Ten visits were made and three out of six of the house plots were monitored, plus a drainage trench along London Road and part of the main sewer-trench. Spoil heaps were checked for finds. A small area was observed in the north while topsoil was being stripped. Changes in soil layers within the trenches were recorded and finds were retrieved. Features were recorded on CAT pro-forma record sheets and sketches were made. A record of digital photographs was made.
- 5.2** The foundation trenches were excavated by machine and were monitored archaeologically before being filled with concrete. However, the CAT field officer was not present during the actual excavation of most of the trenches. The CAT field officer entered the foundation trenches to inspect them wherever possible. However, most foundation trenches were dug to a greater depth than 1.2m depth, making them too dangerous to enter.

5.3 The sewer-trenches were excavated by machine to 2m-3m and were 1.5m wide. It was possible to enter some lengths of the sewer-trench after they had been partially backfilled. The CAT field officer was not able to inspect all the sides of the sewer-trench as they had already been backfilled or they were shored up soon after the trench was dug.

6 Results

05/12/00

Approximately 300mm-500mm of turf and dark brown clayey silt topsoil had already been stripped off the entire site (Layer 1 or L1). All depths given are from the reduced ground-level and not from the original ground-level except for the drainage trench.

Plot 1

This plot is in the south-western corner of the site, approximately 16m north of London Road. The following soil layers were observed at the southern end:

L2 - mid-brown sandy clay with root activity, depth 0-570mm.

L3 - ?natural orangey-brown sandy clay with small frequent stones, depth 570mm-680mm.

L4 - natural grey clay, depth 680mm-1.45m.

No features were observed. The only finds were two oyster shells from either L2 or L3 which have been discarded.

06/12/00

Plot 1

The eastern side of Plot 1 was monitored and the following soil layers were observed:

L2 - light brown clay, depth 0-580mm.

L3 - natural grey clay, depth 580mm-800mm.

L4 - natural band of sand, depth 800mm-910mm.

L5 - natural grey clay, depth 910mm-1.2m.

There were no features or finds.

07/12/00

Plot 3

The northern side of Plot 3 was monitored; this is in the south-east corner of the site. A large ditch (Feature 1 or F1) was observed running east to west. This was seen in both sections of two interior foundation trenches and was cut by the northern exterior trench. The ditch was 1.6m-1.9m wide and 1.07m-1.2m deep. It had probably been deeper but

had been truncated by topsoil stripping. The ditch was cut into a chalky light brown clay and was filled with looser mid-brown clay (Plate 1).

The ditch was 25m north of London Road. There were no artefacts and therefore dating is impossible (Fig 2).

08/12/00

No more foundations had been dug out, and the area of Plot 2 was being cleared but had not been excavated.

Turf and topsoil were being stripped off the northern area during the visit. No features were visible. The spoil heaps were checked for finds but nothing was found.

11/12/00

Plot 2

Plot 2 is next to Plot 1 at the southern end of the site. The foundations had all been dug out and were monitored. At the southern end of the plot, a possible ditch was observed running from east to west in the sections of two interior foundation trenches (Fig 4). The ditch was 1.94m wide and 1.04m deep. It was cut into mottled light brown and grey clay and was filled with mid-brown looser clay. The trench was 24m north of London Road, and it is thought to be a continuation of the ditch (F1) seen in Plot 3 as it is on the same alignment (Fig 2). No finds were retrieved.

16/01/01

Sewer-trench

A sewer-trench was dug along the line of what will be the access road into the site. The width of the sewer-trench was 1.5m and the depth was 2m-3m. It was cut from south to north through the middle of the site. Approximately 10m of the length of the trench was monitored, including the second inspection chamber. The rest had either been shored up or already backfilled.

A possible ditch (F2) which was 700mm deep was noticed 37.3m north of London Road. It was seen in the west-facing section of the sewer-trench but not the east-facing section (Plate 2 and Fig 2). The section was frozen which made it difficult to scrape. This possible ditch was not on the line of the other ditch found in Plot 3 (F1). A lack of finds makes it impossible to date.

18/01/01

Sewer-trench (Fig 2)

Approximately 15m of the length of the trench was monitored, from the second inspection chamber where it changed direction to the north-west.

The following soil profile was observed:

L2 - ?natural very undisturbed mid-brown clay, depth 0-800mm.

L3 - natural light brown-cream chalky, wet clay, depth 800mm to the beyond the bottom of the trench.

No features or finds were observed.

13/02/01

Drainage trench (Fig 1)

Two visits were made on the 13th February, the second visit being after the 4m x 600mm drain trench had been cut along the northern carriageway of London Road. The trench was dug opposite the entrance of Hall Road at 1.6m depth. The following stratigraphy was recorded:

L1 - tarmac and compacted hardcore, thickness 350mm rising with the camber to 500mm.

L2 - reddish-brown coarse gravelly sand, probably contemporary with L1, thickness 100mm.

L3 - natural pale to mid-brown loamy sand with approximately 30% grit and small stones. This layer continues down beyond the limit of the trench.

There were no finds and no significant features, only two drains and an electricity trench. There were no intermediate layers between the two modern layers and natural ground. Presumably any archaeological features had been stripped when the road was laid.

14/02/01

Drainage trench (Fig 1)

The drainage trench was extended 5.4m north across the footpath and verge. The section was cut by four large mains trenches. In the grass verge the following soil stratigraphy was observed:

L1 - grass and topsoil, depth 0-300mm.

L2 - natural pale to mid-brown loamy sand with approximately 30% grit and small stones. This continues down beyond the limit of the trench (same as L3 in the road trench).

There were no significant features or finds.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Two ditches (F1 and F2) were recorded running east to west across the southern part of

the development site. F1 was seen in Plot 2 and Plot 3 but curiously not picked up in Plot 1. F2 is only a possible ditch seen in the sewer-trench. There were no finds from either of the features and therefore it is impossible to date them. As these ditches are aligned to Stane Street they could have been constructed at the same time, perhaps as field boundaries or settlement enclosure ditches. There are no cropmarks in this field; however, this may be due to grass cover rather than arable. Alternatively the ditches could be field boundaries or drainage ditches of later date. They do not appear to correspond to any field boundaries showing on the OS 1st edition 1875-76 map or later maps, so they are probably earlier than the late 19th century in date (Fig 3).

- 7.2** Apart from these features, which were to the south of the site, the watching brief was negative. There were no finds apart from two oyster shells from Plot 1.
- 7.3** With the permission of Martin Winter, the Colchester Borough Council's Archaeology Officer, it was decided to terminate the watching brief early due to negative results. Archaeological features were considered to be less likely further back from the Roman road, and therefore Plots 4-6 and the northern section of the sewer-trench were not monitored.

8 Archive deposition

A copy of this report and site notes will be deposited permanently at Colchester Museum under accession code 2001.44.

9 Acknowledgements

The Trust is grateful to the following for their co-operation during the course of the fieldwork:

Darren Cock, Mersea Homes

Martin Winter, Colchester Borough Council's Archaeology Officer

Kate Orr, March 2001

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Plate 1 Ditch (F1) in Plot 3, looking south-west.



Plate 2 Possible ditch (F2) in sewer-trench, looking west.



Fig 1 Site location, scale 1:1250.

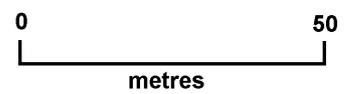
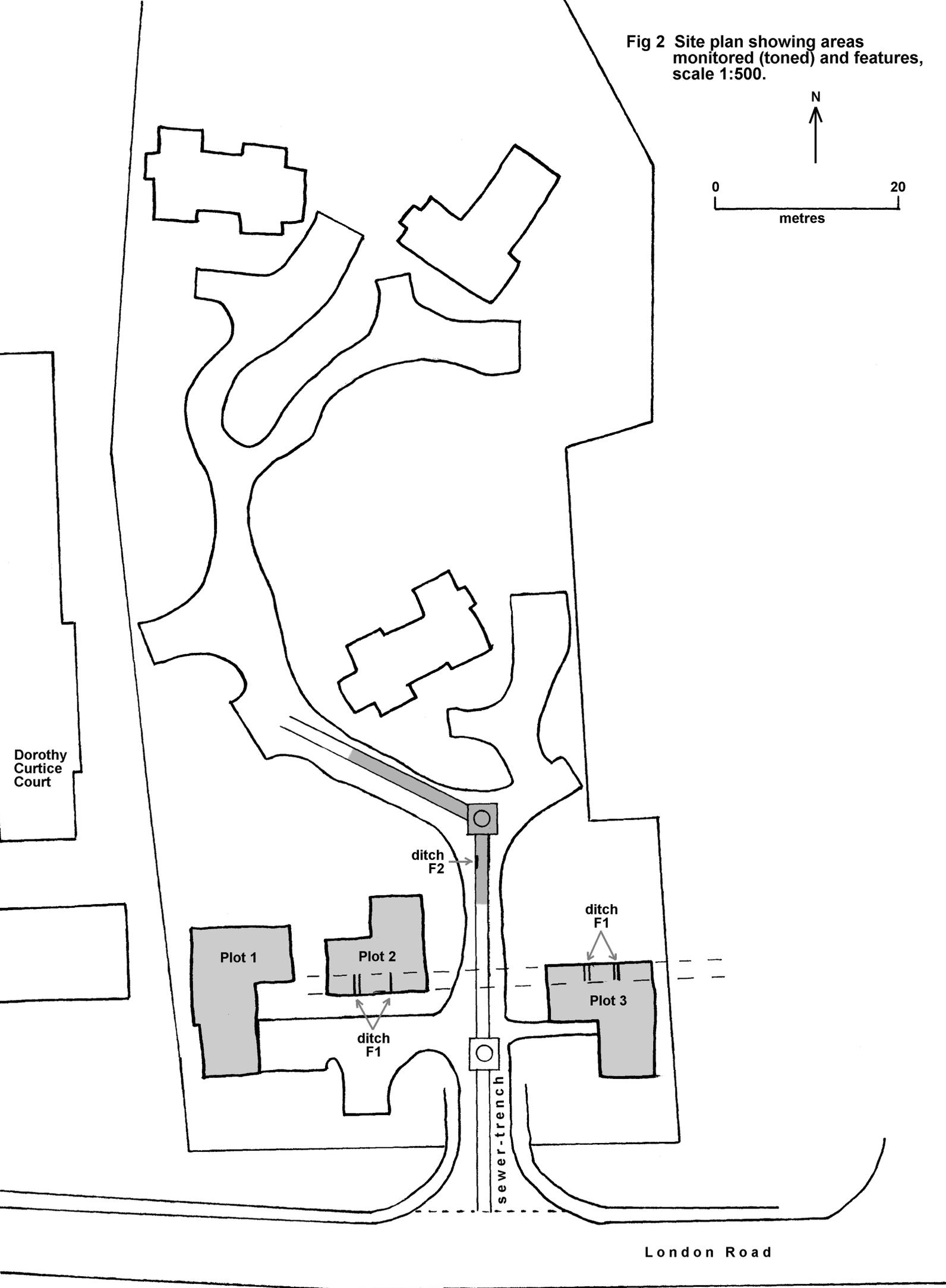
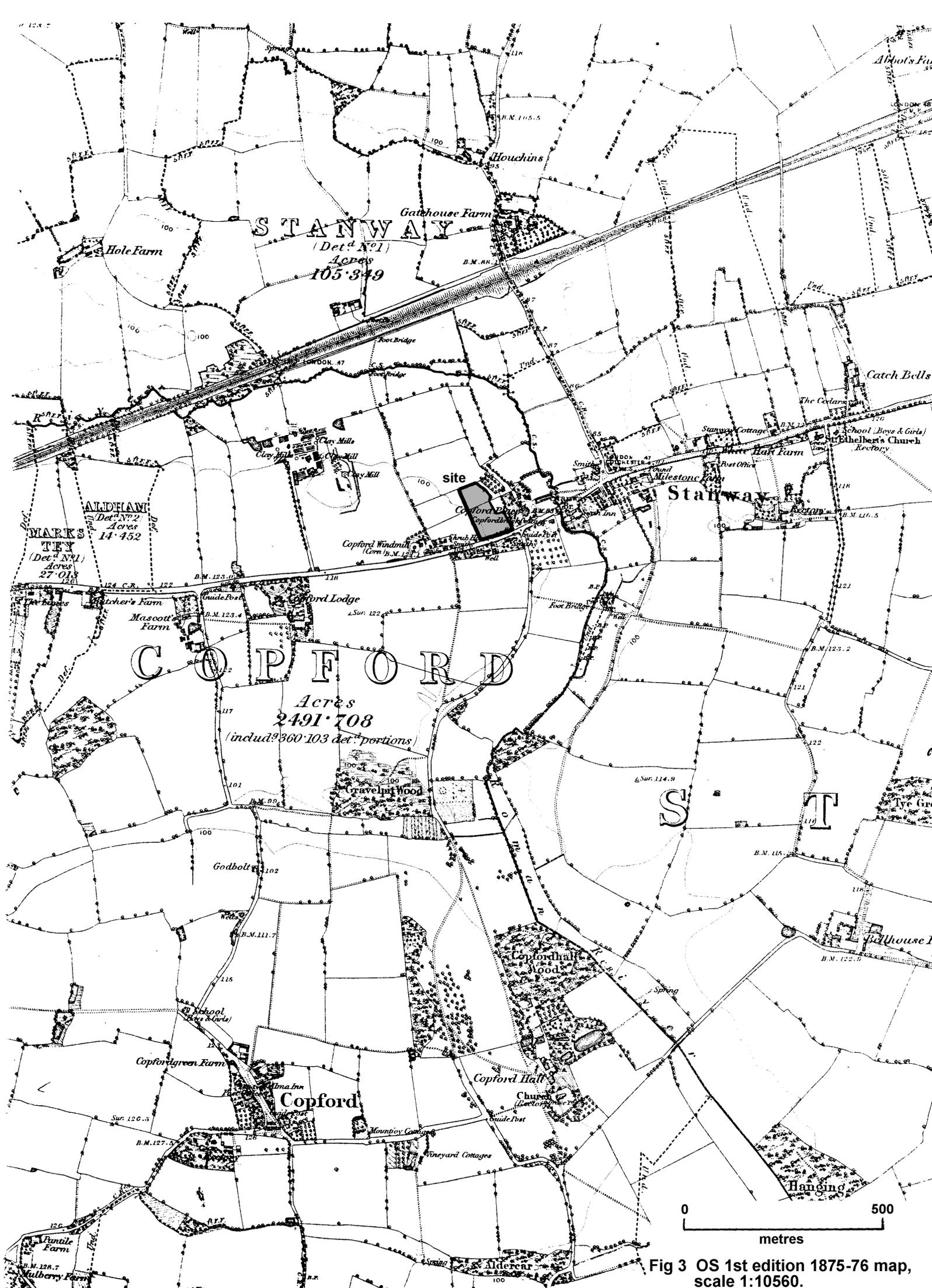


Fig 2 Site plan showing areas monitored (toned) and features, scale 1:500.





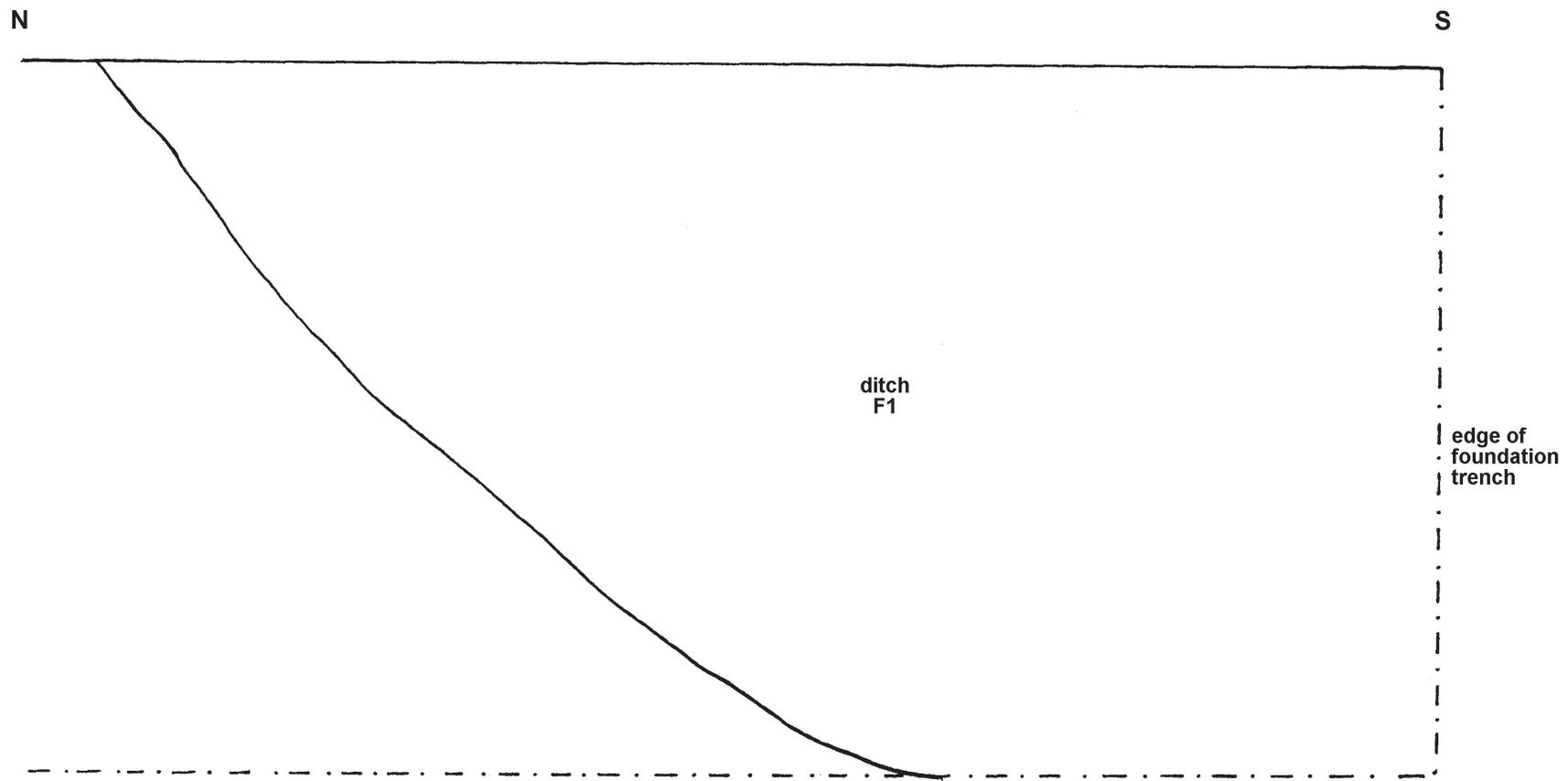
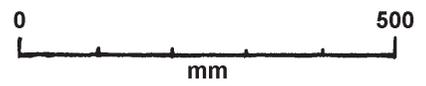


Fig 4 Section drawing of ditch F1 in Plot 2, scale 1:10.



**Essex Sites and Monuments Record/
Essex Archaeology and History**

Summary sheet

Site name/address: Holmwood Grove, London Road, Copford, Essex	
Parish: Copford	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TL 9825 2410	Site code: 2001.44
Type of work: watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: December 2000-January 2001	Size of area investigated: 55m x 50m plus
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museum	Funding source: Mersea Homes
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related SMR nos:
Final report: CAT Report 129	
Periods represented: None	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: Two ditches were recorded running east to west across the southern part of the site, 25m and 37m north of London Road (which roughly follows the line of Stane Street Roman road). There were no finds from either of the features, and therefore it is impossible to date them. These ditches could have been constructed at the same time as Stane Street as they are aligned to it, perhaps as field boundaries or settlement enclosure ditches. Alternatively they could be field boundaries or drainage ditches of later date. They do not appear to correspond to any field boundaries showing on the OS 1st edition 1874-76 map or later maps, so they are probably earlier than the late 19th century in date. Apart from these features, which were to the south of the site, the watching brief was negative.</p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: March 2001