

**An archaeological watching brief at
Notcutts Nurseries,
Station Road, Ardleigh, Essex
March 2005**

**report prepared by
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**commissioned by
EDF Energy Networks Ltd**

**on behalf of
Alfred McAlpine Infrastructure Services Ltd**

CAT project ref.: 05/1a
NGR: TM 0550 2900
Colchester Museums accession code: 2005.15



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CAT Report 310
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1 Summary

A watching brief was carried out at Notcutts Nurseries, Station Road, Ardleigh, Essex, during the excavation of a cable trench. The site lies within one of the largest cropmark complexes in East Anglia. The only feature of archaeological significance recorded was a single ditch of indeterminate date.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 2.1 This report was commissioned by EDF Energy Networks Ltd on behalf of Alfred McAlpine Infrastructure Services Ltd who received Scheduled Monument consent to insert a mobile 'phone cable in a trench across Notcutts Nurseries' land. The trench was excavated and the cable was inserted by a sub-contractor for EDF Energy Networks Ltd and the watching brief was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on the 21st and 22nd of March 2005. The cable route lies partly within a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM no 199) and the work thus required Scheduled Monument consent.
- 2.2 Ardleigh lies approximately 7km north-east of Colchester, on the edge of the Tendring plateau. Ardleigh village is situated at the head of Salary Brook at between 30m and 35m AOD. Drift geology of the area consists of sands and gravels (Brown 1999, 1). The cable route is centred on National Grid Reference or NGR TM 0550 2900. The land is under grass and tree cover.
- 2.3 The cable trench was 198m long and extended from the meter cabinet south of the railway line in a south-south-west direction to the east of Notcutts Nurseries. It joined up with a cable connected to a transformer to the south.
- 2.4 The project was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) by CAT which was approved by English Heritage. This report and the fieldwork followed the standards set out in the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1999), and Colchester Museums' *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (2003). Other sources were *Management of archaeological projects*, 2nd edition (MAP 2), and East Anglian Archaeology 3, East Anglian Archaeology 8 and East Anglian Archaeology 14.

3 Archaeological background

The soils around Ardleigh are conducive to cropmark formation and the area has one of the greatest concentrations of cropmarks in Essex (Priddy 1981).

Early Bronze Age ring-ditched burials have been recorded immediately to the north of Notcutts Nurseries. Cropmark complexes showing prehistoric field systems, trackways, pits and enclosures show on aerial photographs to the north and north-west. Late Roman inhumations have been excavated just to the north.

Some cropmarks have been excavated to the east and south-east of Notcutts Nurseries. These represent Early and Middle Bronze Age ring-ditches and a landscape of Late Iron Age field systems and trackways; there is evidence that ditched enclosures were added in the early 1st century and the settlement continued until the 2nd century, based around agriculture and pottery production.

To the south (around Elm Park), an early Bronze Age beaker burial has been excavated. Late Iron Age ('Belgic') graves and pottery plus some early Iron Age pottery have also been recorded. A Late Iron Age ritual 'cauldron pit' was dug possibly at the time of the Roman invasion. This area also features Late Iron Age and early Roman ditches and pits and further Roman kilns.

The field where the cable was laid has been out of arable cultivation for several decades and therefore has not produced cropmarks.

More information can be obtained from the desk-based assessment produced by CAT in January 2005 (CAT Report 307).

4 Aim

The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological remains that were exposed during the excavation of the cable trench and to assess the quality and extent of any remains that were encountered.

5 Methods

- 5.1 The cable trench was 198m long, 230mm wide, and varied between 500mm and 600mm in depth. It was dug through a grass field and a wooded area. The trench was excavated by contractors using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. This work was continuously monitored by an archaeologist. The base of the trench was cleaned by hand to expose any archaeological features.
- 5.2 Individual records of layers and features were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets.
- 5.3 The cable trench was planned using a total station. A section drawing was made at a scale of 1:10.
- 5.4 A photographic record was made using a digital camera.

6 Results (Figs 1-2)

- 6.1 The cable trench was dug through modern topsoil (Layer or L1) and post-medieval subsoil (L2). Natural (L3) was reached in most parts of the trench. This varied between yellowish brown sand and gravel in the northern part of the trench, orange sand in the middle section, and buff-coloured silt in the southern section. The soil was largely undisturbed, as would be expected on agricultural land that has not been developed.
- 6.2 Only two features were exposed. One modern linear (Feature or F2) was recorded running at right angles to the trench and containing fragments of coal. A ditch (F1) was the only feature of archaeological significance to be observed. This 1.4m-wide feature was recorded in the northern stretch of the trench and was aligned east-west. On excavation it was found to be 450mm deep and to have a rounded base. The fill of F1 was a light brown sandy silt. The trench was widened slightly to enable the feature to be excavated. Unfortunately F1 provided no dating evidence; however, it appeared to be ancient rather than modern and was sealed by L1 and L2.
- 6.3 Two sherds of Roman pottery were found along the length of the trench.
- 6.4 Table of finds (Roman pottery identified by Stephen Benfield of CAT)

Find no	Context	Description and date	Weight (in g)
1	L2	Fragment of rim of a 1st- to 2nd-century AD bowl or jar	7.4
1	L2	Fragment of modern flowerpot	24.4
2	F2 modern linear	Fragment of modern brick and one piece of coal	11.1
3	L2	Fragment of late Iron Age or early Roman storage jar with some grog and organic temper	50.9

7 Discussion

The ditch F1 may well have been part of the prehistoric field system which has been seen from the air as cropmarks on the adjacent fields. The lack of other features recorded may be due to an absence of archaeological features on this particular site or, more likely, the narrowness of the cable trench limiting visibility.

8 Archive deposition

The finds, paper and digital archive is held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but it will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2005.15.

9 Acknowledgements

The Colchester Archaeological Trust would like to thank Alfred McAlpine Infrastructure Services Ltd for funding the work and EDF Energy Networks Ltd for commissioning the work and arranging access.

10 References

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11 Glossary

AOD	Above Ordnance Datum, ie height above sea level
Belgic	a culture named after the 'Belgae' tribe who inhabited southern Britain in the 1st century BC and are characterised by wheel-thrown pottery, defended settlements and well-furnished graves
Bronze Age cropmarks	period from c 2500 BC to c 700 BC darker marks seen in arable fields from the air, often caused by archaeological features
ECC	Essex County Council
EHCR	Essex Heritage Conservation Record, Essex County Council
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain contexts
Iron Age	the period from c 700 BC to AD 43
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c AD 1500
NGR	National Grid Reference
post-medieval	period from c AD 1500 to c 1850
prehistoric	the period before written record, ie till AD 43 in Britain
Roman	period from AD 43 to c AD 410

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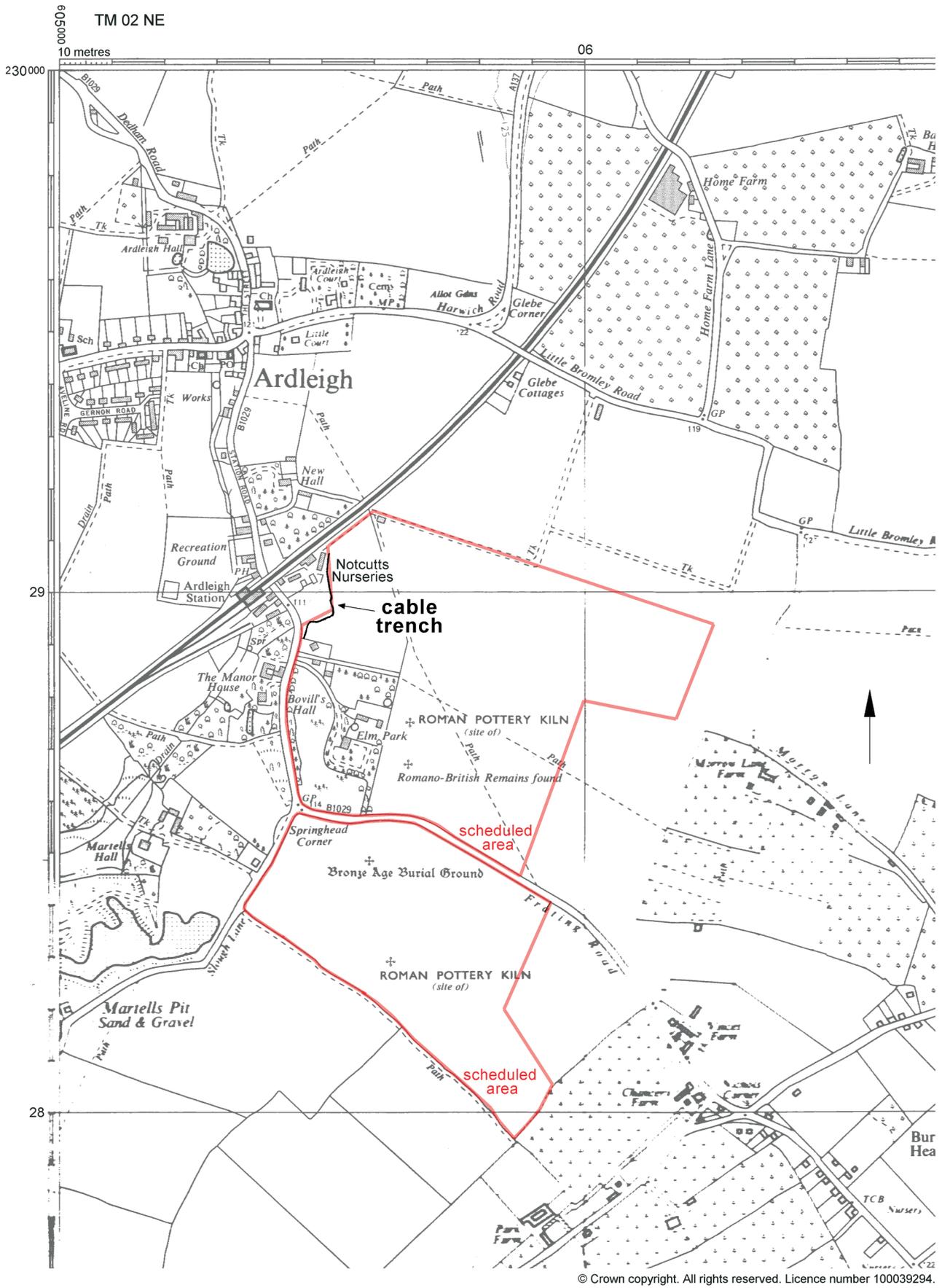
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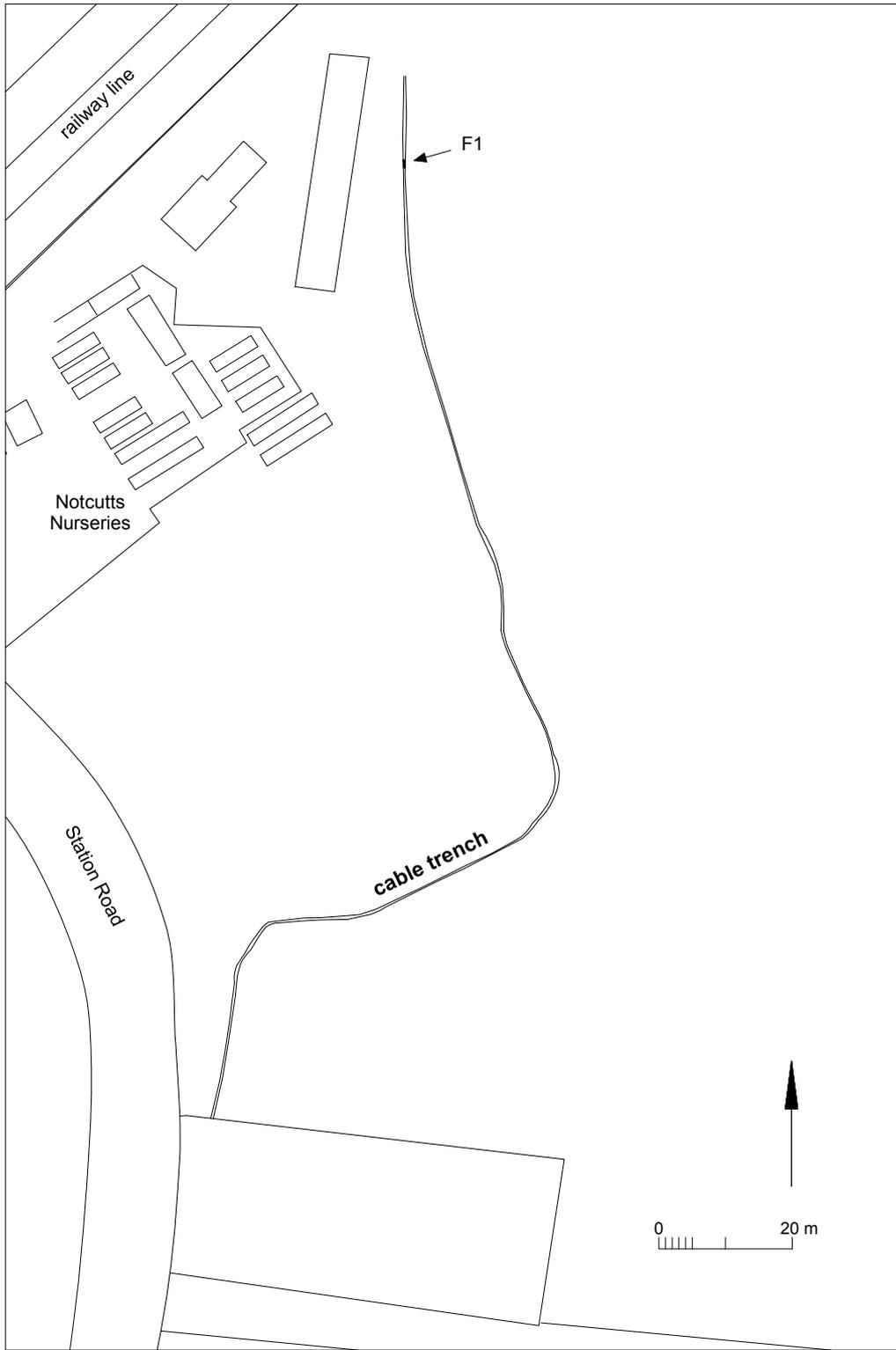
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Fig 1 Trench location plan.



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Fig 2 Plan of trench.

Essex Heritage Conservation Record/ *Essex Archaeology and History*

Summary sheet

Site address: Notcutts Nurseries, Station Road, Ardleigh, Essex	
Parish: Ardleigh	District: Tendring
NGR: TM 0550 2900	Site code: Museum accession code 2005.15
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: March 2005	Size of area investigated: 198m-long cable trench
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Alfred McAlpine Infrastructure Services Ltd
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHCR nos:
Final report: CAT Report 310 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Roman	
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>A watching brief was carried out at Notcutts Nurseries, Station Road, Ardleigh, Essex, during the excavation of a cable trench. The site lies within one of the largest cropmark complexes in East Anglia. The only feature of archaeological significance recorded was a single ditch of indeterminate date.</i>	
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Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: April 2005