

Archaeological monitoring at Old Hall Marshes, Old Hall Lane, Tollesbury, Essex, CM9 8TP

September 2019



by Dr Elliott Hicks

figures by Chris Lister, Ben Holloway and Sarah Carter
fieldwork by Adam Wightman

commissioned by Kieran Alexander (RSPB)

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CAT Report 1475

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Contents

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

Figures after p5

OASIS summary sheet

List of photographs and figures

Cover: site shot

Photograph 1 Western scrape fully-excavated, looking southeast 3

Fig 1 Site location

Fig 2 Monitoring results

Fig 3 Representative section

1 Summary

Archaeological monitoring was carried out at Old Hall Marshes, Old Hall Lane, Tollesbury, Essex during the creation of new wetland scrapes and other amendments to the reserve. In spite of being located in an archaeologically-sensitive area, no significant archaeological deposits or material were encountered.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the archive report for archaeological monitoring at Old Hall Marshes, Old Hall Lane, Tollesbury, Essex during 4th to 16th September 2019. The work was commissioned by Kieran Alexander of RSPB during the creation of new scrapes and other amendments to the reserve, and was undertaken by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT).

In response to consultation with Essex County Council Place Services (ECCPS), Historic Environment Advisor Maria Medlycott 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 the *National Planning Policy Framework* (MHCLG 2019).

All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a *Brief for archaeological monitoring and excavation at Old Hall Marshes, Old Hall Lane, Tollesbury*, detailing the required archaeological work, written by Maria Medlycott (ECCPS 2019), and a written scheme of investigation (WSI) prepared by CAT in response to the brief and agreed with ECCPS (CAT 2019).

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 excavation* (ClfA 2014a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (ClfA 2014b).

3 Archaeological background

The following archaeological background draws on the Brief and the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) held at Essex County Council, County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex (accessible to the public via <http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk>).

The Old Hall Marshes are of national significance as a rare example of an intact historic grazing marsh located between Salcott Creek and Tollesbury Fleet, to the southeast of Salcott village. Coastal grazing marshes are a major heritage asset, part of the special landscape character of many parts of the English coast. Essex County Council, often working in partnership with English Heritage, has arranged detailed surveys of those reserves to enhance the approach to their management (Gascoyne & Medlycott 2014).

Reclamation of the Old Hall Marsh area (marsh 41) is thought to have been underway in a piecemeal fashion by the late 16th century, but the process accelerated over the following decades and reached its full extent by the mid 18th century. The sea walls have undergone a number of alterations. The marsh has large fleets, water filled creeks, relict salt marsh surface and raised causeways that cross the marsh. There are nine or more mounds, which are perhaps the remnants of red hills, midden sites, two surviving duck decoy ponds, one of which is scheduled, and remains of barns, a decoy house and a house. The marsh is crossed by a number of counter walls, which appear as raised earthworks. The borrow dykes are crossed by causeways in places (ECC 48467).

Buried land surfaces have been recorded on several grazing-marsh sites, these generally are recorded as a result of erosion of the marsh edge and as a consequence are most visible in the inter-tidal zone, but occasionally have also been recorded during excavations. The buried land surfaces range in date from the Neolithic to the Roman period.

Approximately 426 red hills have been recorded around the Essex coast, and this number is increasing as a consequence of aerial survey and excavation. Red hills are sites where salt was extracted by evaporation from sea water, using clay pans over hearths. They are conspicuous sites, either because of their associated red earth deposits or because they form slight mounds in flat landscapes. The earliest excavated examples appear to date to the Middle Bronze Age (Germany 2004, 192-5), but the majority have their origins in the Late Iron Age and Roman periods. Some were re-used during the medieval period (for an overview, see Fawn *et al* 1990). At the Stanford Wharf Nature Reserve, Oxford Archaeology undertook a large-scale archaeological investigation in advance of the development of a new deep-sea London Gateway container port. An area of approximately 30 hectares was investigated with large areas extensively excavated (HER 47049). Although the artefactual evidence recovered was limited, two large Romano-British salt-production sites with associated buildings were uncovered (Biddulph *et al* 2012). Key evidence included channels dug to catch salt water, briquetage trays and supports, evaporation hearths and traces of red hills.

Two red hills lie very close to the proposed scrapes, one of which is actually situated between the new scrape areas (see Fig 2). Areas of earthworks, thought to be red hills are plotted to the southeast of the site (ECC 11556, ECC 16707 and ECC16192).

CAT carried out a watching brief in 2003 to the west of the current site for the excavation of a 100m ditch as part of water control system enhancements. No features or finds of archaeological significance were recorded during the works. It was noted that the ground appeared to be undisturbed except for the previous removal of the topsoil (CAT Report 249). Archaeology South East undertook monitoring work in 2015 during enhancement work, but no archaeological remains that pre-dated marsh improvement were identified. Post-medieval and modern drainage, particularly in the form of ceramic and gravel filled underdrainage, was present across the site. It was noted, however, that the area was thought to have been subject to levelling in the 1960s (ECC 16192, ASE Report 8438).

4 Aim

Archaeological monitoring was undertaken to excavate and record any archaeological deposits which were exposed by the groundworks.

5 Results (Figs 2-3)

During 4th-16th September 2019, a CAT archaeologist oversaw the reduction of an area measuring 4931.3m² by approximately 0.44-0.50m to form a new wetland scrape. The initial stripping of the eastern section of the area, which was located nearest to a known red hill, was directly monitored, and when the groundworks were completed, on 16th September, a CAT archaeologist returned to inspect the site.

Excavations occurred through topsoil (L1, c 0.04-0.08m thick, loose, dry medium brown silt with frequent rooting) into natural (L2, very hard, dry medium grey/brown/blue clay).

There were no archaeological features.



Photograph 1 Western scrape fully-excavated – looking southeast

6 Finds

by Dr Matthew Loughton

The layer L1 (1) produced one fragment of medieval/post-medieval brick with a weight of 25g and one small sherd of Roman coarse grey ware pottery (fabric GX) with a weight of 1g.

7 Discussion

Groundworks at this site did not reveal any previously unknown red hills, and nor did they expose any other archaeological features. A single, very small sherd of Roman pottery and a fragment of medieval or post-medieval brick were recovered, however, attesting to limited activity at the site during these periods. The field has been altered for agricultural purposes, and it is likely that this involved levelling the marshland to create pasture. The very thin layer of topsoil across the site and absence of any plough scaring on the underlying natural suggest that the site has never been used as arable farmland.

8 Acknowledgements

CAT thanks Kieran Alexander of RSPB for commissioning and funding the work. The project was managed by C Lister, fieldwork was carried out by A Wightman. Figures are by C Lister, B Holloway and S Carter. The project was monitored for ECCPS by Maria Medlycott.

9 References

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

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------|---|
| ASE Report 8438 | 2015 | <i>Tollesbury Wick Nature Reserve, Wyke Lane, Tollesbury. Archaeological Monitoring Report</i> , by E Heppell |
| Brown, N & Glazebrook, J | 2000 | <i>Research and Archaeology: A Framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy</i> . East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Paper 8 (EAA 8) |
| Fawn, AJ, Evans, K, McMaster, I & | 1990 | <i>The Red Hills of Essex: salt-making in antiquity</i> . Colchester Archaeological Group |

Davies, GMR		
CAT	2019	<i>Health & Safety Policy</i>
ClfA	2014a	<i>Standard and Guidance for archaeological evaluation</i>
ClfA	2014b	<i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i>
Germany, M	2004	'Middle Iron Age red hill at Tollesbury Creek, Tollesbury, Essex', <i>Essex Archaeology and History</i> 34 , 192-195.
ECCPS	2019	<i>Brief for archaeological monitoring and excavation at Old Hall Marshes, Old Hall Lane, Tollesbury</i> , by M Medlycott
Gascoyne, A & Medlycott, M	2014	<i>Essex Historic Grazing Marsh Project</i> . ECC
Gurney, D	2003	<i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> . East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Papers 14 (EAA 14).
Historic England	2015	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)</i>
Historic England	2018	<i>The Role of the Human Osteologist in an Archaeological Fieldwork Project</i> , by S Mays, M Brickley and J Sidell
Medlycott, M	2011	<i>Research and archaeology revisited: A revised framework for the East of England</i> . East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Papers 24 (EAA 24)
MHCLG	2019	<i>National Planning Policy Framework</i> . Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
Biddulph, E, Foreman, S, Stafford, E, Stansbie, D & Nicholson, R	2012	<i>London Gateway: Iron Age and Roman salt making in the Thames Estuary. Excavation at Stanford Wharf Nature Reserve, Essex</i> . Oxford Archaeology Monograph 18

10 Abbreviations and glossary

Bronze Age	period from c 2500 – 700 BC
CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
ClfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
context	a single unit of excavation, which is often referred to numerically, and can be any feature, layer or find.
ECC	Essex County Council
ECCHEA	Essex County Council Historic Environment Advisor
ECCPS	Essex County Council Place Services
EHHER	Essex Historic Environment Record
feature (F)	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain: can contain 'contexts'
Iron Age	period from 700 BC to Roman invasion of AD 43
layer (L)	distinct or distinguishable deposit (layer) of material
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c 1500
modern	period from c AD 1800 to the present
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
Neolithic	period from c 4000 – 2500 BC
NGR	National Grid Reference
OASIS	Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations, http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main
post-medieval	from c AD 1500 to c 1800
Roman	the period from AD 43 to c AD 410
section	(abbreviation sx or Sx) vertical slice through feature/s or layer/s
wsi	written scheme of investigation

11 Contents of archive

Finds: none retained

Paper record

One A4 document wallet containing:
 The report (CAT Report 1475)
 Original site records (layer sheets)
 Photographic thumbnails and log
 Inked sections

Digital record

The report (CAT Report 1475)
Photographs, photographic thumbnails and log
Graphics files

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 Colchester Museum.

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Distribution list:

Kieran Alexander (RSPB)
ECC Place Services Historic Environment Advisor
Essex Historic Environment Record, Essex County Council

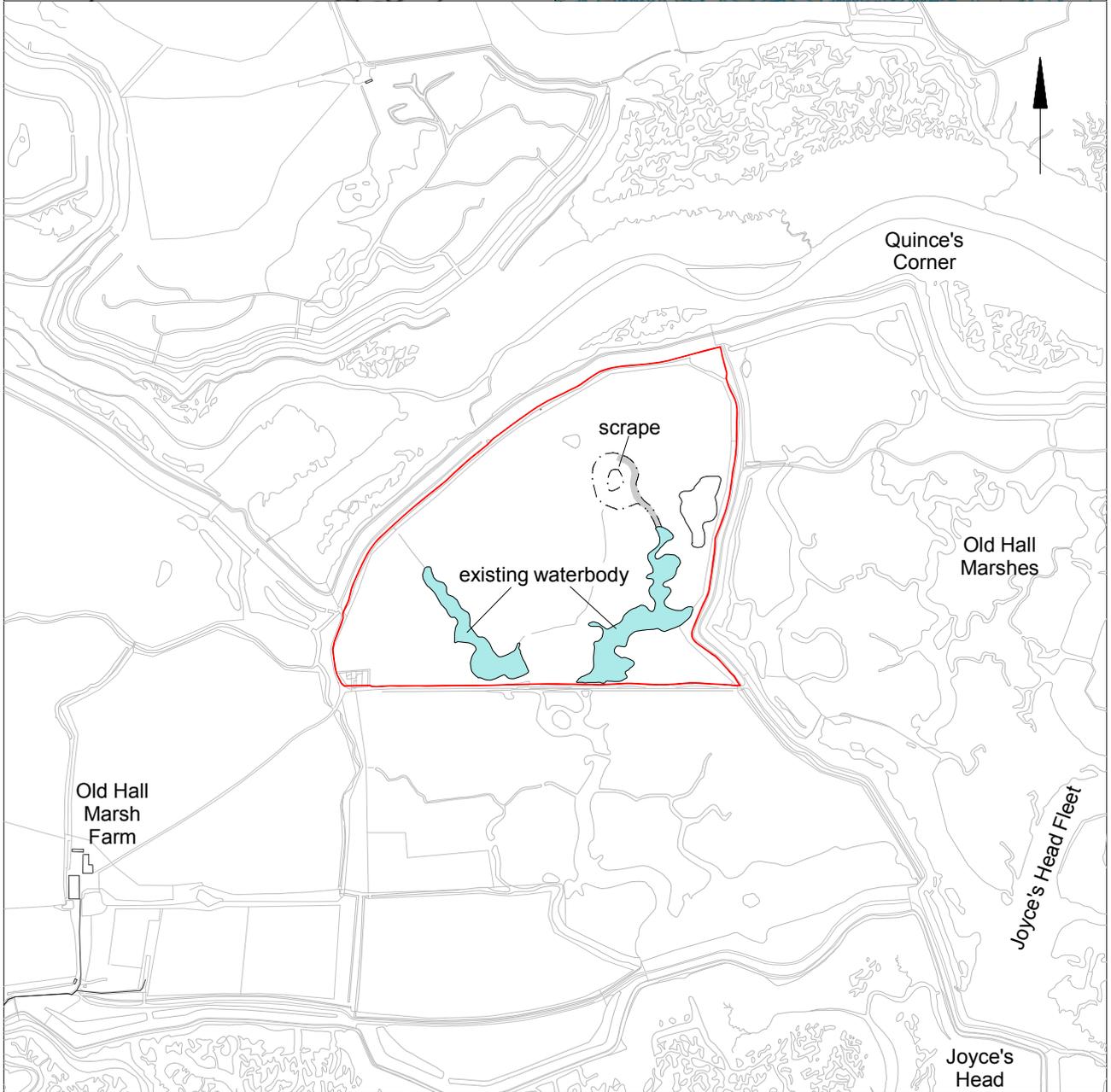
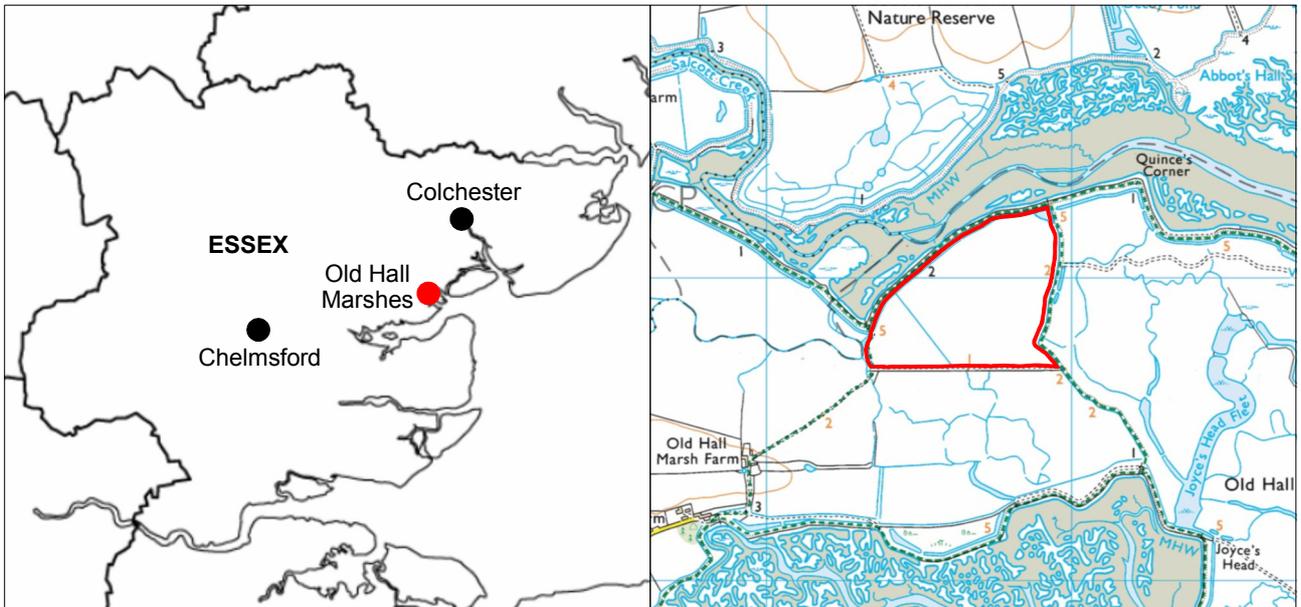


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Date: 27.09.2019



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Fig 1 Site location.



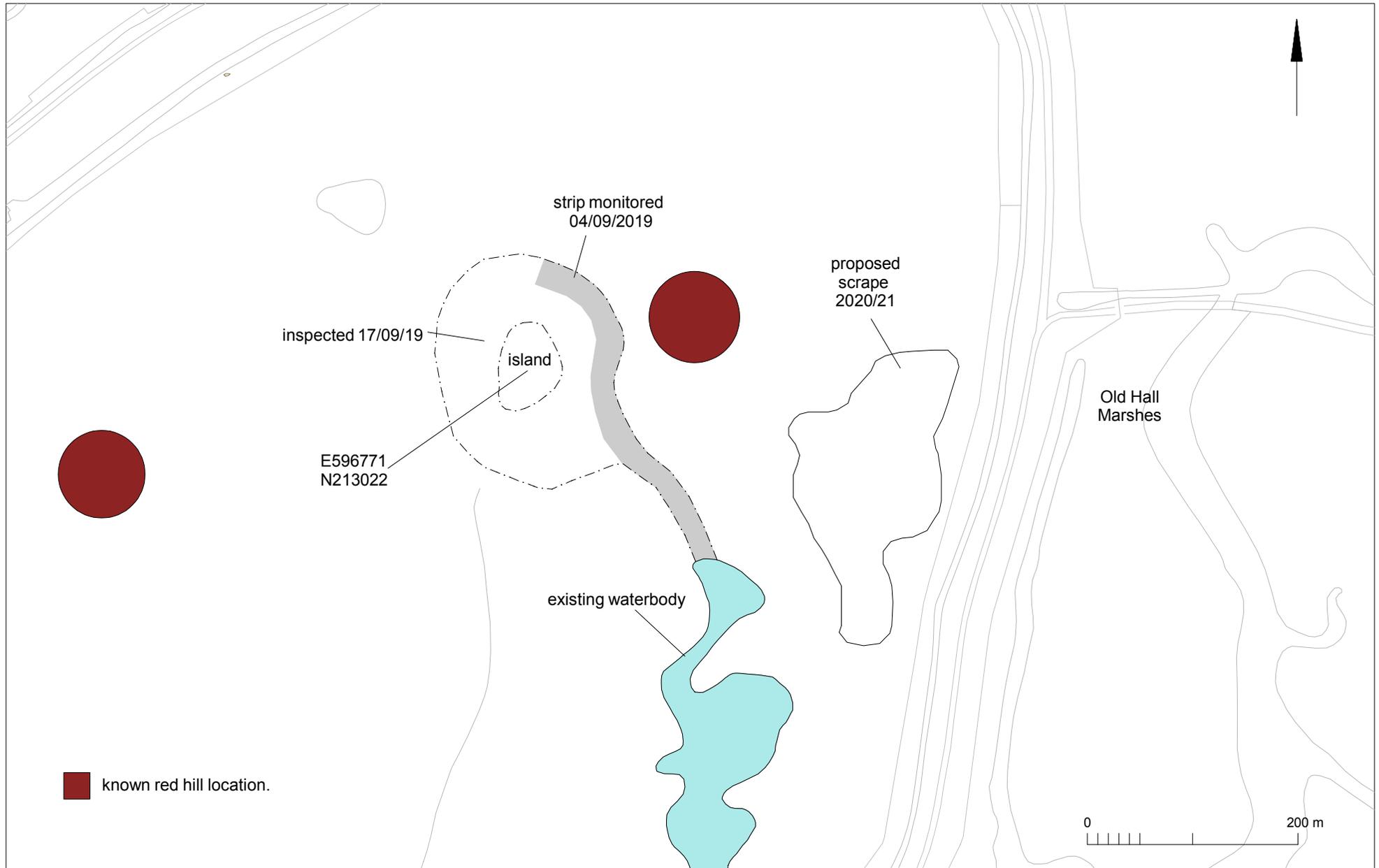


Fig 2 2019 monitoring results.

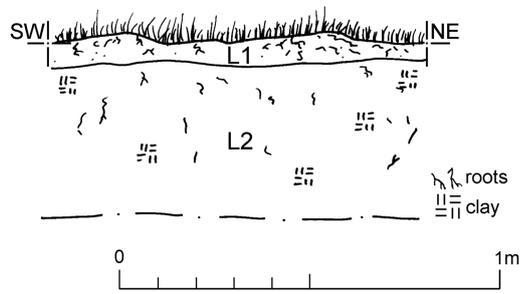


Fig 3 Representative section.

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OASIS ID: colchest3-350684

Project details

Project name	Archaeological monitoring and excavation at Old Hall Marshes, Old Hall Lane, Tollesbury, Essex, CM9 8TP.
Short description of the project	Archaeological monitoring was carried out at Old Hall Marshes, Old Hall Lane, Tollesbury, Essex during the creation of new wetland scrapes and other amendments to the reserve. In spite of being located in an archaeologically-sensitive area, no significant archaeological deposits or material were encountered.
Project dates	Start: 04-09-2019 End: 16-09-2019
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	2019/05b - Contracting Unit No.
Any associated project reference codes	TOOH19 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes	colchest3-350684 - OASIS form ID
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	National Nature Reserve
Current Land use	Coastland 4 - Saltmarsh
Significant Finds	POTTERY Roman
Significant Finds	BRICK Medieval
Significant Finds	BRICK Post Medieval
Investigation type	""Watching Brief""
Prompt	National Planning Policy Framework - NPPF

Project location

Country	England
Site location	ESSEX MALDON TOLLESBURY RSPB Old Hall Marshes, Old Hall Lane, Tollesbury
Postcode	CM9 8TP
Study area	23.24 Hectares
Site coordinates	TL 97400 12656 51.777170801008 0.861807778372 51 46 37 N 000 51 42 E Point

Project creators

Name of Organisation Colchester Archaeological Trust
 Project brief originator HEM Team Officer, ECC
 Project design originator Emma Holloway
 Project director/manager Chris Lister
 Project supervisor Adam Wightman
 Type of sponsor/funding body Other Charitable Trust
 Name of sponsor/funding body RSPB

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists? No
 Digital Archive recipient Colchester Museum
 Digital Archive ID TOO19
 Digital Media available "Images raster / digital photography","Text"
 Paper Archive recipient Colchester Museum
 Paper Archive ID TOO19
 Paper Media available "Context sheet","Drawing","Photograph","Report"

Project bibliography

1

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