

Archaeological monitoring (Phase 3) at Old Hall Marshes, Old Hall Lane, Tollesbury, Essex, CM9 8TP

August 2022



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**commissioned by Kieran Alexander
on behalf of the RSPB**

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CAT Report 1838

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1 Summary

Archaeological monitoring was carried out at Old Hall Marshes, Old Hall Lane, Tollesbury, Essex during phase 3 groundworks for the creation of new wetland scrapes and other amendments to the reserve. Despite being located within a historic grazing marsh and close to a number of Red Hills (salt-production sites), no archaeological remains were encountered.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the report for archaeological monitoring carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) for Phase 3 investigations at Old Hall Marshes, Old Hall Lane, Tollesbury, Essex on the 16th August 2022. The work was commissioned by Kieran Alexander on behalf of the RSPB and took place during the creation of new scrapes and other amendments to the reserve.

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). This follows Phases 1 and 2 archaeological monitoring carried out by CAT in 2019 and 2021 as part of the same project (CAT Reports 1475 and 1725).

All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with the original 2019 brief (*Brief for archaeological monitoring and excavation at Old Hall Marshes, Old Hall Lane, Tollesbury*), which was written by Maria Medlycott and detailed the required archaeological work for the whole project. The written scheme of investigation (WSI) was prepared by CAT in 2019 in response to the brief, and was agreed with ECCPS before the first phase of work (CAT 2019).

All fieldwork and reporting was done in accordance with the brief and WSI, along with *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (Historic England 2016), and *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, 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 (ECC48467).

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 (ASE) 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 under-drainage, was present across the site. It was noted, however, that the area was thought to have been subject to levelling in the 1960s (ECC16192, ASE Report 8438).

Monitoring for Phases 1 and 2 (CAT Report 1475 and 1725) on the site did not reveal any previously unknown red hills, nor did they expose any other archaeological features, although a single, very small sherd of Roman pottery and a fragment of medieval or post-medieval brick were recovered.

4 Aims

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

5 Results (Figs 2-3)

An area covering approximately 225m² was mechanically excavated under the supervision of a CAT archaeologist.

The area was located directly adjacent to an area monitored in 2021 (see CAT Report 1725), and was reduced by c 0.4m through topsoil (L1, c 0.25-0.4m thick, solid mid-grey silty-clay) into natural (L2, hard light grey and orange-brown mottled clay).

No archaeological features or finds were present.



Photograph 1 Representative section, view east.



Photograph 2 Site shot, view north.

6 Finds

There were no archaeological finds.

7 Conclusion

As seen during previous phases of monitoring at Old Hall Marshes, no archaeological features or finds were uncovered during Phase 3 groundworks.

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 Ronn. Figures are by S Veasey and E Holloway. 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>

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|--|-------|--|
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| CAT Report 249 | 2003 | <i>An archaeological watching brief during enhancements to the water control system at the RSPB nature reserve, Old Hall Marshes, Tollesbury, Essex: October 2003</i> by K Orr |
| CAT Report 1475 | 2019 | <i>Archaeological monitoring (Phase 1) at Old Hall Marshes, Old Hall Lane, Tollesbury, Essex, CM9 8TP: September 2019</i> by E Hicks |
| CAT Report 1725 | 2021 | <i>Archaeological monitoring (Phase 2) at Old Hall Marshes, Old Hall Lane, Tollesbury, Essex, CM9 8TP: September 2019</i> by M Seehra |
| CifA | 2014a | <i>Standard and Guidance for archaeological evaluation</i> |
| CifA | 2014b | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i> |
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| Gurney, D | 2003 | <i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England.</i> East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Papers 14 (EAA 14). |
| Historic England | 2016 | <i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)</i> |
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| 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. |

10 Abbreviations and glossary

Bronze Age	period from c 2500 – 700 BC
CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
CIfA	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
EHER	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
Iron Age (Late)	Late Iron Age (LIA), period from c 100 – 50 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	O nline A ccess to the I ndex of A rchaeological I nvestigations, 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
wsj	written scheme of investigation

11 Contents of digital archive

CAT Report 1838
ECC Brief, CAT WSI
Digital photographs and log
Graphics files
Site data
Scans of original site section drawings
Survey data

12 Archive deposition

The 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 Archaeological Data Service.

Distribution list:

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

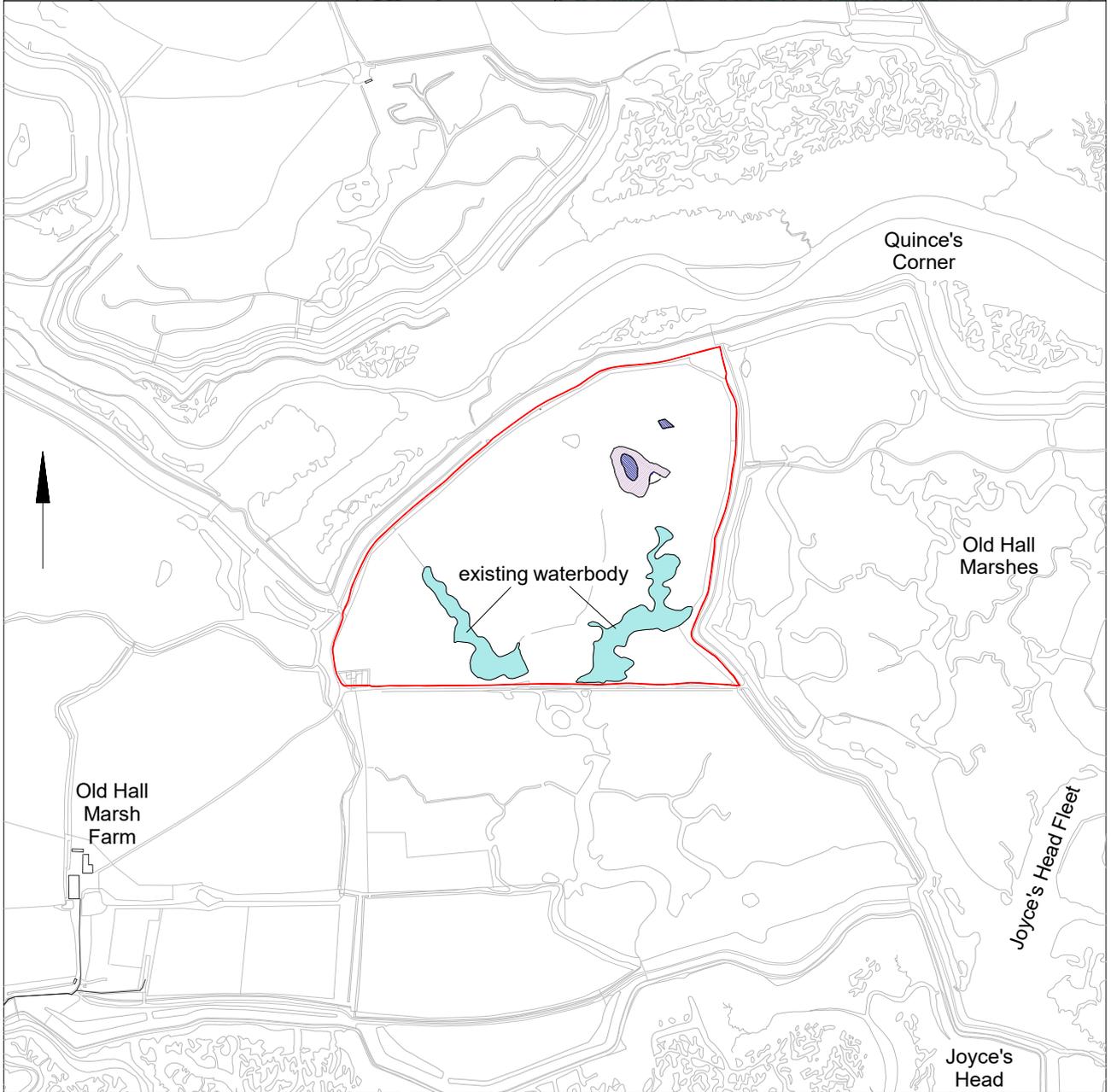
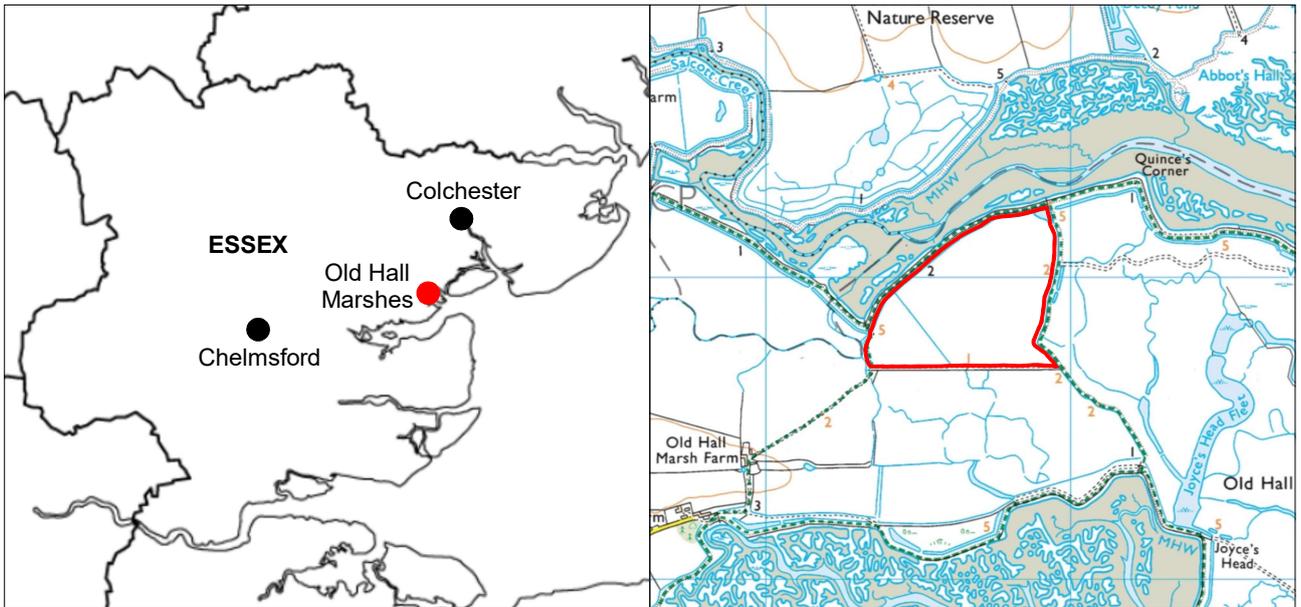


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Fig 1 Site location.



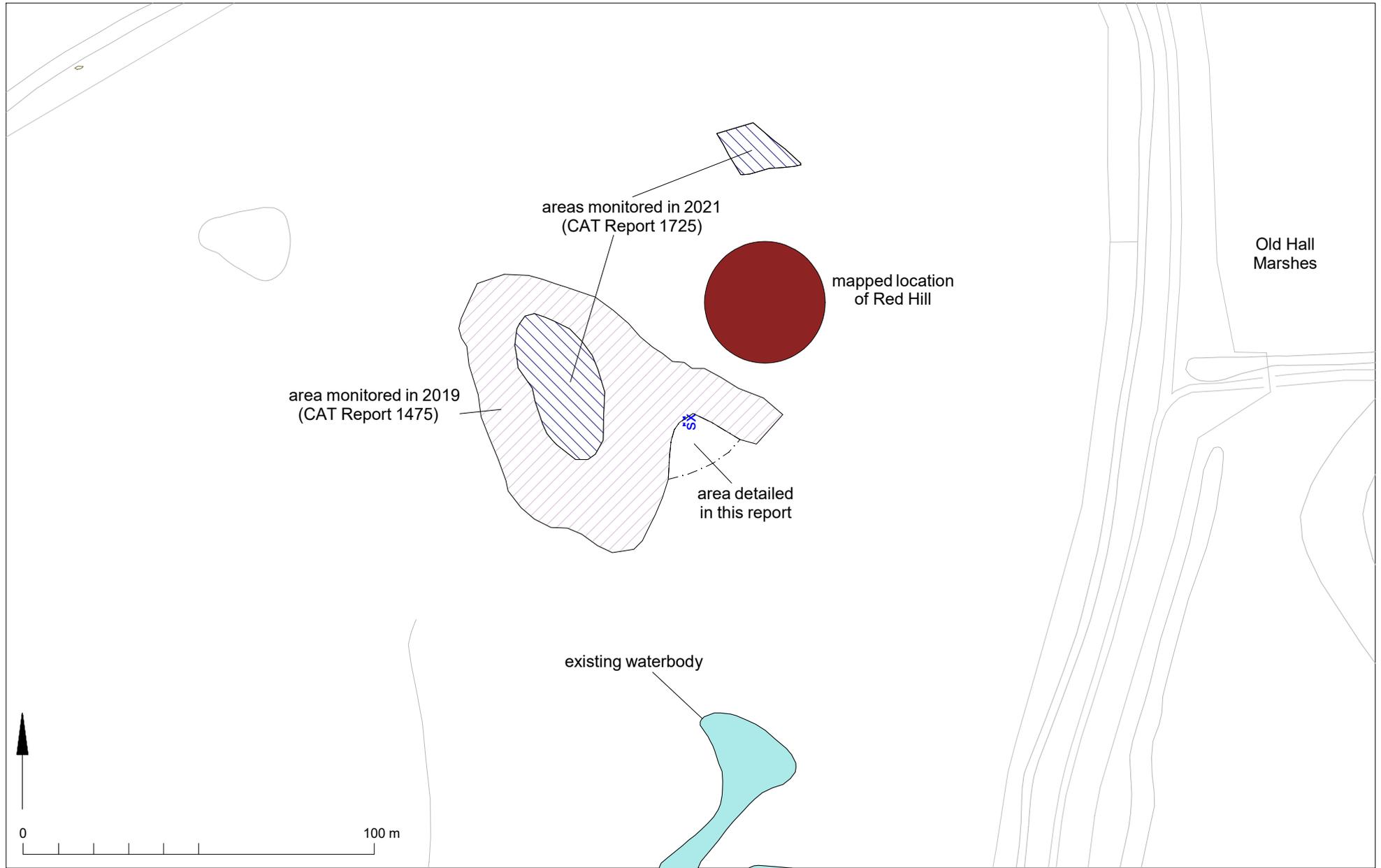


Fig 2 Monitoring results.

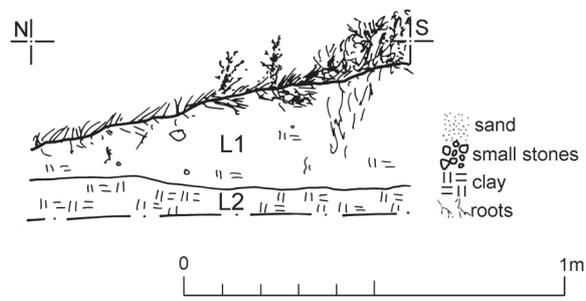


Fig 3 Representative section.

Summary for colchest3-509167

OASIS ID (UID)	colchest3-509167
Project Name	Watching Brief at Old Hall Marshes, Old Hall Lane, Tollesbury, Essex, CM9 8TP
Sitename	Old Hall Marshes, Old Hall Lane, Tollesbury, Essex, CM9 8TP
Activity type	Watching Brief
Project Identifier(s)	2021/07f
Planning Id	MAL/18/01395
Reason For Investigation	Planning: Post determination
Organisation Responsible for work	Colchester Archaeological Trust
Project Dates	16-Aug-2022 - 16-Aug-2022
Location	Old Hall Marshes, Old Hall Lane, Tollesbury, Essex, CM9 8TP NGR : TL 97400 12656 LL : 51.777746762793, 0.860075393533683 12 Fig : 597400,212656
Administrative Areas	Country : England County : Essex District : Maldon Parish : Tollesbury
Project Methodology	Monitoring of all groundworks as per the Brief and WSI
Project Results	Archaeological monitoring was carried out at Old Hall Marshes, Old Hall Lane, Tollesbury, Essex during phase 3 groundworks for the creation of new wetland scrapes and other amendments to the reserve. Despite being located within a historic grazing marsh and close to a number of Red Hills (salt-production sites), no archaeological remains were encountered.
Keywords	
Funder	
HER	Essex HER - unRev - STANDARD
Person Responsible for work	A, Ronn, S, Veasey
HER Identifiers	
Archives	Digital Archive - to be deposited with Archaeology Data Service Archive;