

# Colchester Archaeological Trust



**CAT Report 2139**  
**issued February 2025**

**Archaeological test-pit evaluation in the  
south wing of Darcy House, St Osyth Priory,  
St Osyth, Essex, CO16 8GW: January 2025**



**CAT project ref.: 2024/12b**  
**EHHER code: EEX60871**

**Archaeological test-pit evaluation in the  
south wing of Darcy House, St Osyth Priory,  
St Osyth, Essex, CO16 8GW: January 2025**

**NGR: TM 12136 15722 (centre)**

**Scheduled Monument number: 1002193**

**Scheduled Monument Consent number: S00246770**

**Historic England Inspector of Ancient Monuments (HEIAM): Dr Jess Tipper**

**Planning district: Tendring**

**Planning ref.: 22/00662/LBC & 23/00707/LBC**

**ECC monitor: Teresa O'Connor**

**CAT project ref.: 2024/12b**

**CAT Report 2139**

**EHER code: EEX60871**

**OASIS id: colchest3-530198**

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**Commissioned by Matthew Bynoe  
On behalf of City & County**

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## 1 Summary

*An archaeological test-pit evaluation was carried out in the south wing of Darcy House, St Osyth Priory, St Osyth, Essex, in advance of floor alterations in the house. St Osyth's Priory is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (NHLE 1000237 and 1002193). The two test-pits (TPs) were located within a part of wing that was rebuilt in the mid-16th century and adjacent to the 13th-century vaulted rooms. Test-pit 1 cut through a brick floor and sub-base dating to the refurbishment of Darcy House c 1900 and into a post-medieval demolition layer. Test-pit 2 cut through a tiled floor and sub-base, probably also dating to c 1900, and into a post-medieval layer beneath.*

## 2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the report for an archaeological evaluation carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on 21st January 2025 in the south wing of Darcey House, St Osyth Priory, St Osyth, Essex. The work was commissioned by Matthew Bynoe of City & Country as part of a wider scheme to convert the historic buildings of St Osyth's Priory into a function/wedding venue.

As the site lies within a Scheduled Ancient Monument (NHLE Nos. 1000237 and 1002193) and listed building (NHLE 1337159), the works required scheduled monument consent under Section 3 (control of works) of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (as amended). Scheduled monument consent was granted, ref. S00246770, with the condition (ii) that required a programme of archaeological test-pit evaluation to be undertaken.

All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a *Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI)* prepared by CAT (2024) and agreed in advance with Historic England as part of the Scheduled Monument Consent.

In addition to the Scheduled Monument Consent and WSI, all fieldwork and reporting was undertaken in accordance with:

- *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (Historic England 2015),
- Professional standards of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, including its *Code of Conduct* (CIfA 2020a-b, 2022, 2023a-b),
- East of England Regional Research Frameworks at <https://researchframeworks.org/eoe/>
- Relevant health and safety guidelines and requirements (CAT 2025).

### 3 Archaeological and geological background

The following archaeological background includes extracts from the CAT Report Library (<http://cat.essex.ac.uk/>) and Essex Historic Environment Records (EHER) held at Essex County Council, County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex (accessed via <http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk>).

The town of St Osyth is recorded as *Cicc* in the Domesday Book of 1086 and is said to be the location of a 7th-century nunnery founded by Saint Osyth, from whom the modern town is gets its name. The proposed development is located to the north-east of the priory remains.

St Osyth Priory (NHLE No. 1002193) is a medieval priory that was founded in the 1120's by Richard de Belmeis, Bishop of London, as a house for Augustinian Canons. It became an abbey dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul, and Osyth sometime before 1161. The park associated with the priory was most likely gained around 1268, when a charter was granted to the abbey allowing some hunting rights. The abbey was suppressed and surrendered to the crown in 1539.

In 1553, Thomas Darcy gained possession of the abbey and was responsible for making many structural changes. Many of the medieval buildings were demolished, including the abbey church, and impressive modifications were made to the remaining buildings to create a substantial residence. New buildings were also constructed, and the formal walled garden created. Over the next 400 years, the priory and park had considerable reworking, remodelling and modernisation, as well as additional buildings added. In the late 19th century gravel extraction began within the park and continued into the 20th century.

The area of the ruins of the priory and garden are scheduled (SM No. 24, NHLE 1002193 and EHER 4) and the park is a Registered Park and Garden (NHLE 1000237). St Osyth Priory and park contains 22 structures which are listed, including Darcy House (NHLE 1337159).

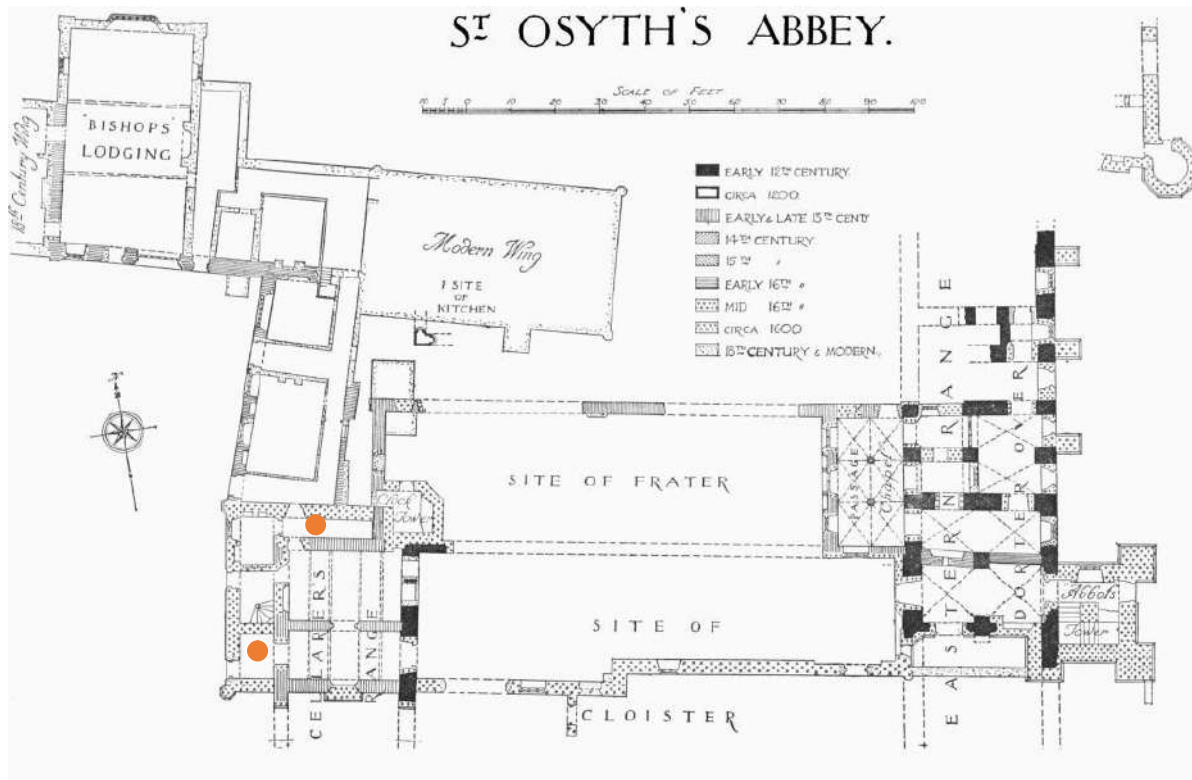
The following are excerpts about Darcy House are taken from a *Historic Building Report* of St Osyth Priory (Smith 2011, 22-23).

*The northern end of this range was constructed as part the Bishop's Lodging created by Abbot Vyntoner. The southern section originally formed part of the northern end of the cellarer's range of the priory. It was rebuilt largely in brick for Lord Darcy in the mid-16th century.*

*This whole range is shown as a roofless ruin in an engraving of 1819.*

*Internally the southern end of this range retains a number of vaulted rooms with chamfered ribs and pointed arched doorways which date from the 13th century. The upper floors were rebuilt in the 1860s. The northern section of this range is still shown as partially roofed in views of the priory published in*

1847 and 1895. It was reroofed and refitted for Sir John Johnson in around 1900 and all the internal fittings are of this date.



**Image 1** A plan of the historic phases of St Osyth's Priory with the location of the test-pits indicated by the orange circles. The plan shows that both test-pits are located outside of the 13th-century vaulted rooms and inside the rooms added in the mid-16th century. This plan was downloaded from British History Online.

## 4 Aims

The aims of the archaeological evaluation was to record the extent of any surviving archaeological deposits and to assess the archaeological potential of the site to allow the Inspector of Ancient Monuments to determine if further investigation is required. In particular, the test-pitting sought to investigate early floors in the building.

## 5 Results (Figs 2-3)

Two test-pits (TPs), each 1m<sup>2</sup>, were hand-excavated by a CAT archaeologist.

### Test-pit 1

TP1 was excavated to an initial depth of 0.47-0.5m through brick floor F2 (0.07m thick) and sub-base L3 (0.24-0.36m thick) onto the top of demolition deposit L4. Subsequently, a 0.25m<sup>2</sup> slot was

excavated through L4 in the north-west corner of the test-pit. The base of this slot reached c 0.75m below current ground level (bcgl). Demolition deposit L4 (0.32-0.35m thick) sealed silty sand layer L5 (recorded at a depth of c 0.75m bcgl) which was identified at the base of the slot but not excavated. Visual inspection of the top of L5 revealed numerous coal fragments. Floor F2 comprised unfrogged 19th-century bricks laid, un-mortared, in a stretcher bond pattern. This floor probably dates to c 1900 when the building was refurbished. At some point the brick surface had been painted black.

Context	Finds no.	Type	Description	Date
F2	4	Brick floor	Unfrogged bricks, un-mortared, in a stretcher bond, c 0.07m thick, sealing L3.	Post-medieval, c 1900
L3	-	Sub-base for F2	Friable, dry sand, with occasional small to large (up to c 0.15m) pieces of limestone and CBM fragments. Seals L4. 0.24-0.36m thick.	Post-medieval, c 1900
L4	-	Demolition deposit	Small to large (up to c 0.2m) angular pieces of limestone, mortar and CBM. 0.32-0.35m thick. Seals L5.	Post-medieval
L5	-	Silty sand	Friable, dark grey silty sand with frequent coal fragments.	Post-medieval

**Table 1** Test-pit 1 context list.



**Photograph 1** Test-pit 1, showing F2, L3 and L4, looking east.



**Photograph 2** Test-pit 1, showing the slot through L4 and L5 beneath, looking north.

### Test-pit 2

TP2, which was flanked on its west side by an oak doorstep, was initially excavated to a depth of c 0.25m cutting through concrete floor L1 (0.1-0.2m thick), tiled floor F1 (0.03m thick) and sub-base L2 beneath (c 0.12m thick). Excavation continued to a depth of c 0.7m bcgl in a 0.5m by 1m slot in the north half of the test-pit. Sub-base L2 sealed a layer of silty sand (L6, at least 0.55m thick as the base was not reached) which contained post-medieval CBM fragments and animal bone.

Tiled floor F1 was made of post-medieval floor tiles decorated with a dark green glaze, and probably also dates to c 1900 when the building was refurbished. Unfortunately, the floor was severely damaged when L1 was removed as part of this project. This is because the concrete had been laid directly on top of the tiles and as it was broken up the tiles fractured, meaning that none were recovered complete enough to allow dimensions to be recorded.

Context	Finds no.	Type	Description	Date
L1	-	Concrete floor	Likely to have been the base for a now disused water tank. Seals F2. 0.1-0.2m thick.	Modern
F1	3	Tile floor	Dark green glazed floor tiles, 0.03m thick, laid on the sub-base L2.	Post-medieval, c 1900
L2	-	Sub-base	Sub-base for tiled floor F1. Yellow and white mortar. L2 seals L6. 0.25-0.5m thick.	Post-medieval, c 1900
L6	2	Silty sand	Dry slightly compacted dark grey-brown silty sand with occasional mortar flecking. Sealed by sub-base L2. Observed thickness 0.55m.	Post-medieval

**Table 2** Test-pit 2 context list.



**Photograph 3** Test-pit 2, showing L1, F1 and L2, looking west.



**Photograph 4** Test-pit 2, close-up of tiled floor F1, looking west.



**Photograph 5** Test-pit 2 slot, showing accumulation deposit L6, looking north.

## 6 Finds

### 6.1 Ceramic building material

by Dr Matthew Loughton

The evaluation uncovered a small assemblage of ceramic building material (henceforth CBM) at 10 fragments with a weight of 6,088g (Table 3). The mean fragment weight is 609g. This material was recovered from two features and two layers (Table 3). Fragments of post-medieval floor tiles decorated with a dark green glaze came from floor F1, although unfortunately there were no complete or semi-complete tiles to recovered to indicate dimensions of the tiles. A 19th-century pale yellow coloured unfrogged brick with dimensions of 228mm x 115/110mm x 67mm came from floor F2. The surface of the brick had been painted black. An unfrogged brick with dimensions of ?mm x 120mm x 55mm, dating to the early post-medieval period came from L5. Finally, undatable brick fragments were recovered from L6. Table 4 summarizes the dating evidence for the contexts which contained dateable CBM.

Context	Feature type	No.	Weight(g)	MSW (g)
F1	Tile floor	6	1,940	323
F2	Brick floor	1	2,898	2,898
L5	Silty-sand layer	1	1,154	1,154
L6	Silty-sand layer	2	96	48
<b>Total</b>		<b>10</b>	<b>6,088</b>	<b>609</b>

**Table 3** Quantities of CBM from specific contexts.

Context	Description	CBM	Date Approx.
F1	Glazed floor tile	BR, FLOOR TILE	Post-medieval
F2	Brick floor	BR (UNFROGGED)	19th century
L5	Silty-sand layer	BR (UNFROGGED)	Post-medieval
L6	Silty-sand layer	BR	Post-medieval

**Table 4** Approximate dates for the individual contexts.

### 6.2 Animal bone

by Alec Wade

Six pieces of animal bone weighing a total of 208g were found during the evaluation. The pieces derived from two layers, L4 a demolition deposit, and L6, an accumulation layer. The identified species included dog from L4, where a single rib fragment was recovered that was in very good condition. The remaining bone, all from L6, was in a much poorer and fragmentary condition. The identified species

comprised sheep or goat (no distinction being possible due to a lack of diagnostic features) and cow. It is also likely that the remaining, less diagnostic bone, was also cow based upon size and general morphology. Two pieces from this layer showed cut or chop marks from butchery, a cow femur with fine marks resulting from filleting and a vertebra that displayed evidence of carcass splitting.

Context	Finds no.	No. of pieces	Weight (g)	Species	Comments
L4	5	1	4	Dog? (Canis familiaris)	One rib fragment.
L6	2	1	10	Sheep/goat (Ovis/capra)	One upper molar.
		1	112	Cow (Bos taurus)	One femur diaphysis. Missing proximal and distal joints. Multiple fine short slice marks, mostly transverse and found approximately one-third of the way above the missing distal end (anterior, lateral). At the proximal end are longer diagonal slice marks (medial) and one that is scoop-like.
		2	64	Cow or horse sized	One thoracic vertebrae fragment. May have been trimmed on both left and right sides due to carcass sectioning. One diaphysis fragment.
		1	18	Unidentified	One tibia diaphysis fragment. Juvenile cattle?
Total		6	208		

**Table 3** Animal bone listed by context.

### 6.3 Stone and shell

by Laura Pooley

A large lump of septaria (2.3kg) covered in mortar was recovered from L2 (finds no.1) with a single oyster shell (7.1g) from L2 (finds no.2).

## 7 Conclusion

Archaeological evaluation inside the south wing of Darcy House, St Osyth Priory, Essex, consisted of two test-pits (TPs) located within a part of wing that was built in the mid-16th century (see Image 1) but adjacent to 13th-century vaulted rooms. The excavation of both test-pits revealed modern and post-medieval contexts.

Brick floor F1 and sub-base L3 in TP1 are probably associated with the refurbishment of the building in c 1900 for Sir John Johnson (Smith 2011, 23). Demolition deposit L4 could be associated with the

dereliction of the building in the 19th century, as seen in contemporary images (Smith 2011, 22). Therefore, evidence from TP1 demonstrates that the proposed new flooring (requiring excavation of c 0.425m) will only impact 19th-century layers, which were recorded to a depth of 0.75m below current ground level.

In TP2, post-medieval tiled floor F1 and sub-base L2 probably belong to the c 1900 refurbishment of Darcy House with L6 below producing bricks of a post-medieval date. Layer L6 could also be associated with the dereliction of the building in the 19th century (Smith 2011, 22) but produced less demolition material than L4 in TP1. Therefore, evidence from TP2, shows that the proposed new flooring (requiring excavation of c 0.395m) will remove the 19th-century tiled floor F1 and its base, and cut into the post-medieval accumulated soil beneath.

It is interesting that no medieval deposits were identified within the test-pits. It is possible that they were buried at a greater depth or that they have been previously truncated by the 16th century building phase. It has not been possible to work out the height of the medieval ground surface to compare it to archaeological horizons revealed by the evaluation, but this could be an aim of any future archaeological work within and around the south wing. Ground level of the test-pits is very slightly higher than the external ground level outside the south wing of Darcy House.

## 8 Acknowledgements

CAT thanks Matthew Bynoe for commissioning and funding the work. The project was managed by A Wightman and C Lister, fieldwork was carried out by B Holloway, D Spenner and C Hodges. Figures are by E Holloway. The project was monitored for Historic England by Dr Jess Tipper and for ECC by Teresa O'Connor.

## 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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## 10 Abbreviations and glossary

CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
ClfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
context	specific location of finds on an archaeological site
ECC	Essex County Council
ECCHEA	Essex County Council Historic Environment Advisor
ECCPS	Essex County Council Place Services
EHED	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 (layer) of material
medieval	period from AD 1066 to 1540
modern	period from AD 1901 to the present
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
OASIS	Online AccesS to the Index of Archaeological InvestigationS, <a href="http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main">http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main</a>
post-medieval	period from AD 1540 to 1901
section	(abbreviation sx or Sx) vertical slice through feature/s or layer/s
ws	written scheme of investigation

## 11 Contents of archive

**Finds:** One box (sample of floor brick and tiles only).

**Digital:**

CAT Report 2139

CAT written scheme of investigation

Digital photographs

Site data

Survey data

## 12 Archive deposition

The 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 (finds) and the Archaeology Data Service (digital archive).

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**Distribution list:**

Matthew Bynoe, City & Country

Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Historic England

Historic Environment Advisor, Essex County Council Planning Services

Essex Historic Environment Record

## Appendix 1 CBM list

Cxt	Feature type	Find no.	NR	GR.	MSW	Discard	Typology	Sub-type	L.	BR.	TH.	Frog. L	Frog. Width	Hack/skintling/pres. marks	Mortar	Burnt	Overfired	Vitrified surf.	Vesiculated	Bubbles/melted	Firing marks	Waster	Abraded	Modif.	Comments	Start Date	End Date
F1	Tiled floor	3	1	351	351		FLOOR TILE		?	?	30				X										DARK GREEN COPPER FLECKED	1400	1800
F1	Tiled floor	3	1	228	228		BR									X									BR	1400	1800
F1	Tiled floor	3	4	1361	340		FLOOR TILE		?	?	37/35				X										LARGER, PATCHY DARK GLAZE, 2 KEPT	1400	1800
F2	Brick floor	4	1	2,898	2,898		BR	UN-FROGGED	228	115/110	67														REGULAR EDGE, PALE YELLOW, PATCHY BLACK PAINT ON SURFACE	1800	1900
L5	Silty-sand	5	1	1,154	1,154	X	BR	UN-FROGGED	?	120	55				X										YELLOW MORTAR	1400	1800
L6	Accumulated deposit	2	1	30	30	X	BR																		OR	1400	1800
L6	Accumulated deposit	2	1	66	66	X	BR																		PY/CR	1400	1800

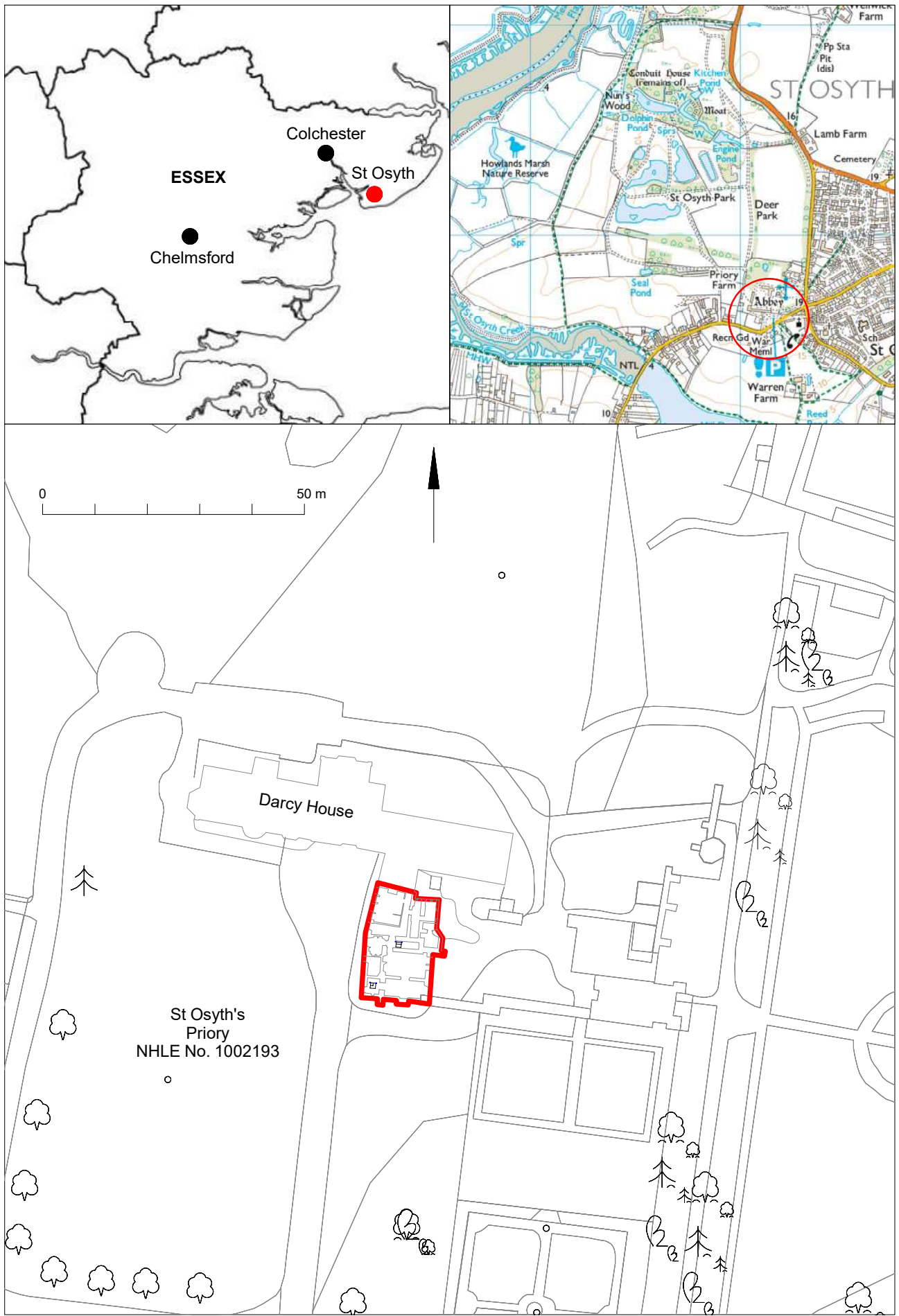
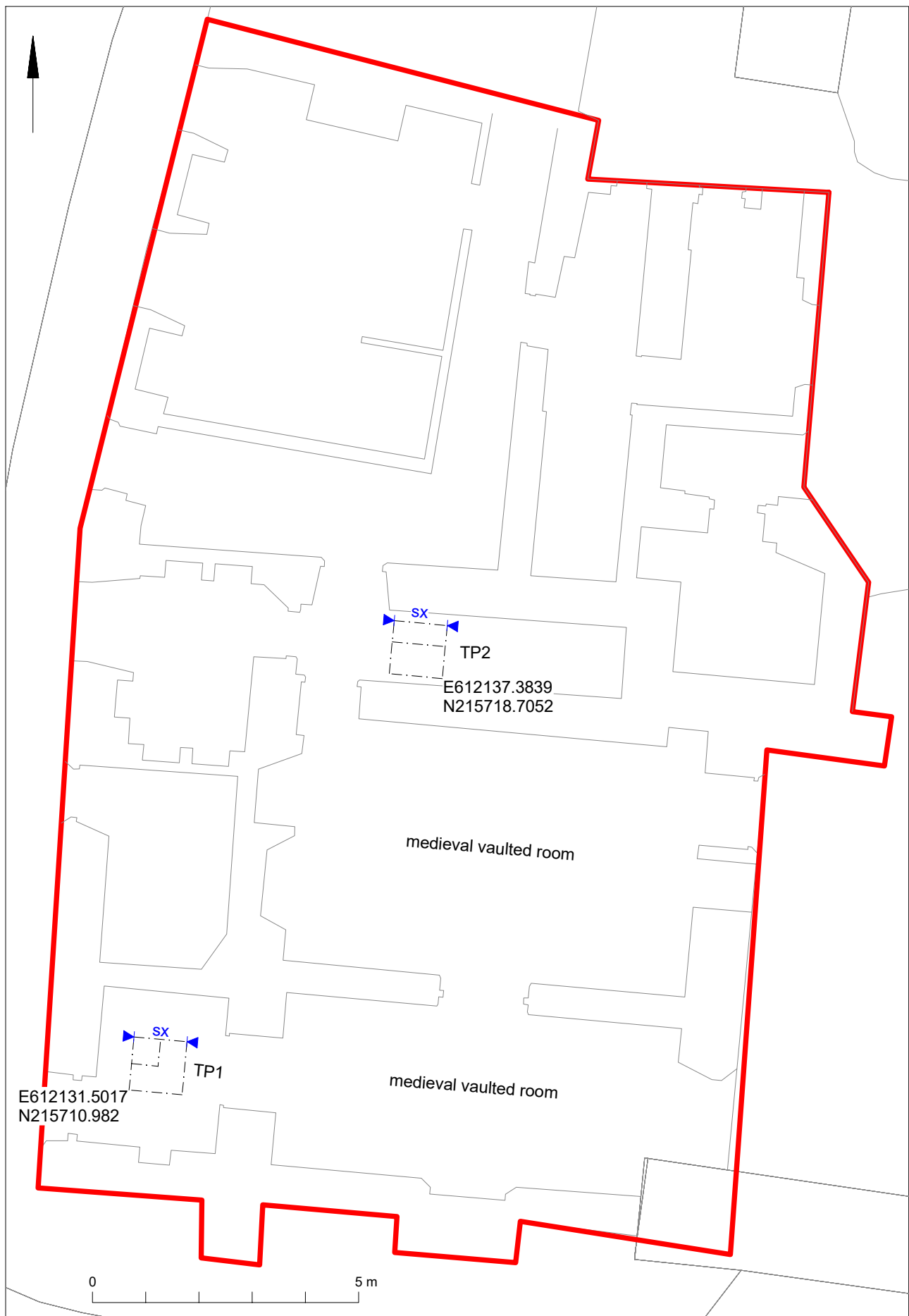


Fig 1 Site location.



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Fig 2 Results. Extent of Darcy House south wing shown as a red line.

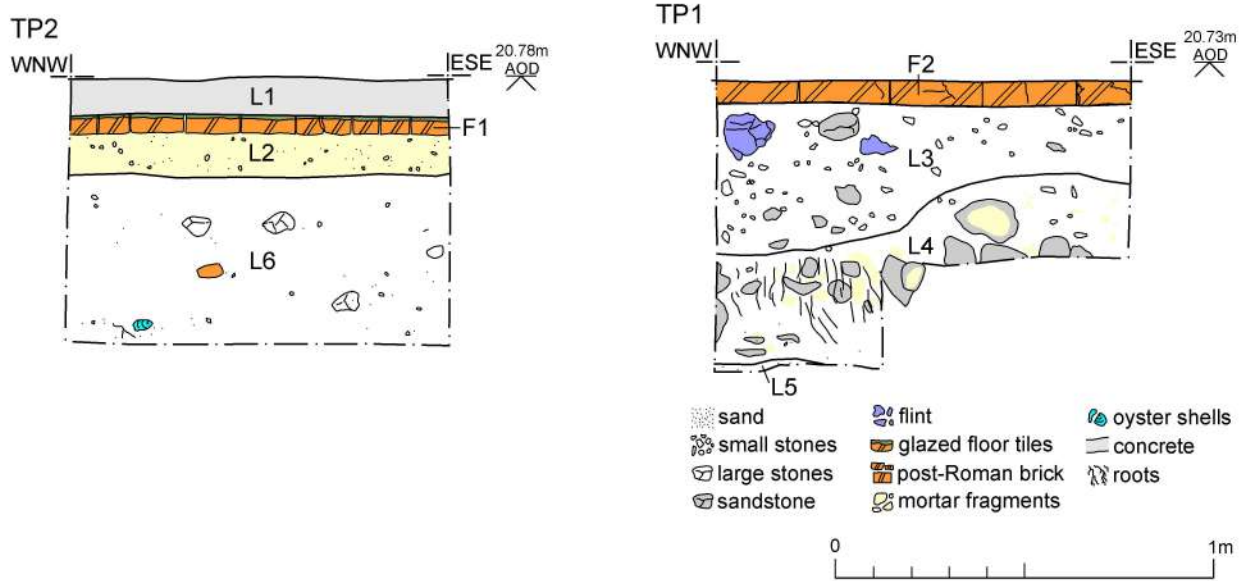


Fig 3 Representative sections.

# OASIS Summary for colchest3-530198

OASIS ID (UID)	colchest3-530198
Project Name	Archaeological evaluation in the south wing of Darcy House, St Osyth Priory, The Bury, St Osyth, Essex, CO16 8GW: January 2025
Sitename	South Wing of Darcy House, St Osyth's Priory, The Bury, St Osyth, Essex, CO16 8GW
Sitecode	EEX60871
Project Identifier(s)	2024/12b
Activity type	Evaluation
Planning Id	
Reason For Investigation	Scheduled monument consent
Organisation Responsible for work	Colchester Archaeological Trust
Project Dates	21-Jan-2025 - 21-Jan-2025
Location	South Wing of Darcy House, St Osyth's Priory, The Bury, St Osyth, Essex, CO16 8GW NGR : TM 12136 15722 LL : 51.79988706410008, 1.07523894252946 12 Fig : 612136,215722
Administrative Areas	Country : England County/Local Authority : Essex Local Authority District : Tendring Parish : St. Osyth
Project Methodology	Archaeological evaluation (two test-pits) carried out as specified in the scheduled monument consent and wsi.
Project Results	An archaeological test-pit evaluation was carried out in the south wing of Darcy House, St Osyth Priory, St Osyth, Essex, in advance of floor alterations in the house. The two test-pits (TPs) were located within a part of wing that was rebuilt in the mid-16th century and adjacent to the 13th-century vaulted rooms. Test-pit 1 cut through a brick floor and sub-base dating to the refurbishment of Darcy House c 1900 and into a post-medieval demolition layer. Test-pit 2 cut through a tiled floor and sub-base, probably also dating to c 1900, and into a post-medieval accumulation layer beneath.
Keywords	Floor - POST MEDIEVAL - FISH Thesaurus of Monument Types Floor - POST MEDIEVAL - FISH Thesaurus of Monument Types
Funder	Private or public corporation developer
HER	Essex HER - unRev - STANDARD
Person Responsible for work	Adam Wightman, Chris Lister
HER Identifiers	HER Monument No - EEX60871
Archives	Physical Archive - to be deposited with Colchester & Ipswich Museum Sevice (Colchester Collection); Digital Archive - to be deposited with Archaeology Data Service Archive;