

Site: Drury Road (formerly Drury Farm Dairy)

NGR: TL 9832 2406

Reason for Watching Brief: redevelopment for housing

Architect: Roy Grimwade Architects. Contractor: Rose Builders. Owner: David Rose

Fieldwork By: C.Crossan and B.Harris

Report By: C.Crossan

Date: 21st June 2000

Summary: Negative, stratigraphy noted.

Report:

Formerly the Co-operative dairy, this large irregularly-shaped site lies to the east of the garage near the junction of Drury Road and Maldon Road. Part of the site fronts Drury Road (west of no.83) and the other side fronts Maldon Road (west of no.272), close to the suggested course of a Roman road between Gosbecks and the group radiating from the site of the Royal Grammar School. Redevelopment groundworks were phased over the course of a year, starting in June 1999 with foundations for flats and two houses on the west side watched by C.Crossan. The final phase, to the east of the Drury Road grocery shop, was visited in May 2000 by B. Harris.

First Phase (1999)

Maldon Road frontage

The first phase included plots 10 and 11 on the Maldon Road frontage, where the stratigraphy in the 60cm wide trenches was as follows:

- L1. Modern deposits, mainly concrete and tarmac, up to 45 cm deep.
- L2. Dark brown sandy loam with varying amounts of small stones, merging to L3 at overall depths of between 80cm and 1m. This appeared to be a long-term topsoil accumulation.
- L3. Natural coarse reddish brown sand with a high gravel content.

This part of the site contained many service trenches, some of which were associated with the electricity sub-station which at the time stood to the west of plot 11. The remaining plots fronting Maldon Road (plots 12 to 16) appear to have been built later in 1999 but were not observed as no notification was received from the developer.

New sub-station

Also built in the first phase was a new electricity sub-station in the centre of the site to replace the one fronting Maldon Road. The new sub-station trenches revealed 20cm of modern material above 30cm topsoil similar to L2 in plots 10 and 11.

Drury Road flats

Trenches for the Drury Road block of flats in the south-west quarter of the site were 45cm wide and typically 95cm deep. Here, the stratigraphy comprised:

- L1. Dark brown sandy loam topsoil, merging to L2 at a depths of 25 to 30cm.
- L2. Pale to mid brown fine sandy silt loam natural subsoil extending to an overall depth of 55cm.
- L3. Reddish brown natural sand with varying amounts of gravel (see below and fig 2).

Figure 2 shows the extent of the gravels exposed in foundations for the Drury Road flats. In view of the postulated Roman road in the vicinity of the site, it is tempting to jump to conclusions about stratigraphically early stoney deposits. This is particularly so when a stoney deposit exhibits an edge which roughly corresponds to the orientation of the suggested course of the road, as in L3 on the site of the flats. However, the natural subsoil over much of the site has a high gravel content and the stoney content here showed every indication of being part of this widespread natural deposit. Although gravels were present in abundance in certain areas no convincing evidence of early road metalling was found in Phase One of the development.

Final Phase

The watching brief resumed in 2000 when groundworking activity was noticed in the eastern part of the site.

The foundations for plots 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 were already part-concreted, leaving only the uppermost 40cm of the trench sections exposed. These sections variously contained modern rubble, clinker and topsoil, individual details of which may be found in the archived site notes. The only deep sections observed were those for plots 8 and 9, where a mid brown loam extended to a depth of 70cm, resting on reddish brown natural sand.

Attached:

- Figure 1. Site plan.
- Figure 2. Drury Road flats: trench plan.

Archive: site notes, architects layout plan, related papers.

Finds: none

Photographs: none