

Phase 2 of archaeological monitoring and excavation at Hanson Quarry, Maldon Road, Birch, Essex

September 2018



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Cover: extract from Chapman and André's map of Essex, 1777

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1 Summary

The second part of archaeological monitoring and excavation carried out during 2018 at Hanson Quarry, Maldon Road, Birch, Essex, was undertaken in September 2018 prior to the commencement of mineral extraction, and investigated an area measuring 0.51 ha. The 2018 excavations represent the latest phase of a series of archaeological investigations undertaken at this site by Colchester Archaeological Trust over much of the past two decades. Located on the most westerly area of land surveyed during the excavations at Birch Quarry, the archaeological deposits uncovered during the investigation were primarily extensions of ditches revealed during the first phase of the 2018 excavations. Additionally, a pit yielded an Early Iron Age assemblage of pottery similar to other pits uncovered during the first phase of this investigation, suggesting that the site of an Early Iron Age settlement may be located nearby.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the archive report on monitoring and excavation carried out at Birch Pit, Maldon Road, Birch, in advance of a new stage of mineral extraction. The archaeological work was commissioned by Hanson Aggregates, and carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) during 10th-20th September 2018. Birch Pit is located 6km to the south-west of Colchester, north-east of Palmer's Farm, at NGR TL 9217 1937 (Fig 1). It consists of approximately 19.6 hectares of land that was formerly part of a Second World War United States Army Air Force base.

The requirement for archaeological work was prompted by a western extension of the existing quarry. In March 2018, the Essex County Council (ECC) Historic Environment Advisor (HEA) was consulted on a continuation of planning consent for mineral extraction first granted in 1995.

All archaeological work was carried out according to standards and practices contained in the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (2014), *Management of research projects in the historic environment* (Historic England 2015), *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England (EAA 14)* and *Research and Archaeology Revised: A Revised Framework for the East of England (EAA 24)*.

3 Archaeological background

The following archaeological background draws on the CAT report archive, as well as the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) and the Colchester Historic Environment Record (CHER), both accessed via the Heritage Gateway.

The archaeological background of the area around Birch Pit has been extensively summarised in the many CAT Reports produced since planning consent for mineral extraction was first granted in 1995. Prior to the 1990s, little was known of the archaeological remains in the area immediately surrounding Birch Pit. The initial archaeological work followed an environmental impact assessment carried out in 1992 (CAT Report 8).

Aerial photographs show a large number of undated, but pre-modern, cropmarks representing activity to the north of Birch Pit. Some 0.8 km to the northeast of the site is a cropmark complex containing a large sub-rectangular enclosure with associated tracks or driveways and a system of fields (EHER 11548, 11577, 11582, 11924). Close to these sites, but within the boundaries of the permissible northern quarrying area, there are several smaller cropmark sites (CAT Report 8, appendix). Neolithic and early Mesolithic flints have also been recorded about 2 km to the east of the site (Spencer and Dennis 1988).

The most significant archaeological remains identified by the 1992 assessment were two surface scatters of Roman finds to the northeast of Palmer's Farm (CAT Report 8, appendix). A small quantity of medieval pottery was also recovered. In 1997 further work was carried out on one of the areas of Roman finds (CAT Report 8, 4 and Fig 2). Geophysical survey and trial-trenching was carried out in 1998 in the same area, and revealed a number of Roman features below the ploughsoil (CAT Report 23).

Multiple phases of archaeological work have been undertaken in response to previous quarry expansions (Fig 3).

In 1995, a small Roman oven was excavated on the east side of the quarry close to Brake's Farm (NGR TL 9333 2002; CAT archive 6/95b).

Evaluation trenching in advance of a northern extension to the quarry undertaken in 2001 revealed features of Bronze Age and Roman date (CAT Report 141). Excavation in this area in 2003 revealed a Bronze Age cemetery consisting of three ring-ditches associated with sixteen urned and un-urned cremation burials. Also uncovered was part of a Roman field system (Fig 3; CAT Report 289).

In 2005, excavation at the Birch airfield compost site (on the former USAAF airbase) revealed features of Late Iron Age/early Roman and Roman date (CAT Report 326).

During 2004-8, excavation prior to extensions to the western side of the quarry (Fig 3; CAT Report 383, CAT Report 485, CAT Report 523) revealed features of prehistoric, Roman, medieval and post-medieval date. The main period of activity was during the Late Iron Age, Roman, medieval and early post-medieval periods. No clear traces of any buildings were found, but the remains of ditches revealed enclosures divided by tracks or droveways. A Roman oven was situated within the area of one enclosure, and a small number of cremation burials were situated to the east of the enclosures. A few features dated to the Late Bronze Age, including one large pit which was possibly a waterhole. In addition, there were a small number of features of post-medieval and modern date.

Monitoring and excavation during topsoil-stripping undertaken in 2012 adjacent to areas excavated in 2007 and 2008 revealed only two features: a post-hole containing pot sherds dated to the Late Bronze Age or early Iron Age, and a post-medieval or modern ditch. Most of the stripped area was disturbed by the construction and removal of the World War II airbase (CAT Report 671).

In 2013, further monitoring and excavation during topsoil-stripping, adjacent to the area excavated in 2012, revealed twenty-two archaeological features. The significant remains included a 'placed deposit' (a Late Bronze Age jar without cremated bone) and seventeen pits and post-holes containing Late Bronze Age pot sherds. Other features were mostly post-medieval field ditches which are depicted on 19th-century Ordnance Survey maps. As before, much of the site had been disturbed by the construction and subsequent removal of the World War II airbase (CAT Report 738).

Monitoring and excavation during topsoil stripping carried out in 2014 and 2015 adjacent to the area excavated in 2013 revealed thirty-one archaeological features. These varied in date from prehistoric to modern (and included features associated with the WWII airfield). The most significant features were three 'four-post' structures dated to the early Iron Age. As with other recent phases of monitoring, the site, particularly to the north and northwest, was heavily disturbed by the construction and subsequent demolition of the World War II airbase (CAT Report 807).

An additional phase of monitoring and excavation carried out earlier in 2018 immediately to the west of the 2015 excavation area exposed 36 archaeological features ranging in date from the prehistoric period to the post-medieval period,

including a medieval plough-and-furrow field system. Half a Neolithic flint axe head was also recovered from a Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pit and was thought to have been ritually deposited in the pit (CAT Report 1295).

4 Aim

The main aim of the archaeological excavation was to excavate and record any archaeological remains likely to be destroyed by the mineral extraction.

5 Results (Figs 2-5)

An area measuring 0.51 ha was stripped under the supervision of a CAT archaeologist. The area was reduced through ploughsoil (L1, c 0.36-0.4m thick, dark brown sandy-silt) onto natural (L2, yellow clay with common chalk inclusions or medium brown silty-brown clay).

Early Iron Age

Early Iron Age pit F80 was 0.68m wide and 0.34m deep.



Photograph 1 Pit F80 sx – looking southeast

Post-medieval

Post-medieval ditch F65 was aligned NNW-SSE and measured 2.48m wide and 0.43-0.49m deep. The feature was partially excavated during the first phase of the monitoring.



Photograph 2 Ditch F65 sx 2 oblique view – looking northwest

Undated

Pit F79 was 0.87m wide and 0.13m deep.

Uncertain

The terminus of Late Iron Age / early Roman ditch F66, originally excavated during the first phase of the monitoring, was recorded as F82. It was 0.6m wide and 0.11m deep.

The terminus of Late Iron Age / early Roman F46, originally excavated during the first phase of the monitoring, was recorded as F81. It was 0.88m wide and 0.16m deep.

6 Finds

6.1 Ceramic finds

by Dr Matthew Loughton

The watching brief produced a small collection of prehistoric pottery, ceramic building material and baked clay (Table 1). The prehistoric pottery was classified into fabric groups on the basis of the type of inclusions (flint, sand, grog, organic), their size, frequency and sorting, using the scheme developed by Brown (1988) to record prehistoric pottery from Essex. The vessel forms were recorded according to the classification scheme developed by Barrett (1980) and Brown (1988). The pottery was recorded by sherd count, the number of rims, handles and bases, and weight, for each fabric group. The number of vessels was determined by rim EVREP (estimated vessel representation) and rim EVE (estimated vessel equivalent).

Ceramic material	No.	%	Weight (g)	%	MSW/g	No. Rim	Rim EVE	Rim EVREP
Prehistoric (fabric E)	20	62.5	82	11.1	4	3	2	0.14
Ceramic Building Material (CBM)	11	34.4	656	88.6	60	-	-	-
Baked clay	1	3.1	2	0.3	1	-	-	-
All	32		740		23	3	2	0.14

Table 1 Details on the main types of ceramics and pottery

Prehistoric Pottery

There were 20 sherds of prehistoric pottery with a weight of only 82g from two vessels (rim EVREP/0.14 rim EVE) (Table 1). The mean sherd weight is only 4g. Apart from one small sherd with a weight of 2g from ditch F65, all the remaining prehistoric pottery came from pit F80. All the sherds are tempered with frequent fine to medium-sized flint and some sand (fabric group E). Most of the sherds are heavily oxidised although in some sherds the interior is black and only the surface is oxidised. The inner faces of some sherds also show areas of grey/black heat discolouration. All the sherds are undecorated and the rare rims and shoulders indicate the presence of two fineware tripartite angular bowls with flared rims (Class IV, form K). The tripartite bowl is a diagnostic vessel type for the Early Iron Age 'Darmsden-Linton' pottery group, which is found in eastern England and is dated by Cunliffe to either the 8th-4th or 5th-3rd centuries BC (Cunliffe 2010, 98 fig. 5.4, 102-103, 642 fig. A:130) while more recent evidence suggests dates of 600-350 BC (Sealey 2013, 37). Darmsden-Linton style pottery is known from an increasing number of sites in Essex (Sealey 2012, 40) and tripartite bowls have been reported throughout the county with a bias to the southern half (Sealey 1996, 46-47 fig. 1). Several sites around Maldon and Witham, approximately 10 km south-west of Birch Quarry, have produced Early Iron Age tripartite bowls (Sealey 1996, fig. 1). For example, the assemblage of pottery from the Maldon *Burh*, 'Beacon Green', Essex, which is dated to the 6th century BC, contained several tripartite angular bowls in fabric E (Brown in Bedwin 1992, 15-17 fig. 5 nos. 2-7). The upper fill of the well from Lofts Farm, Essex, produced a large assemblage of tripartite angular bowls and this material is broadly dated to the 8th-5th century BC (Brown 1988, 267 fig. 16 nos. 55-61, 271-272). At Slough House Farm, Essex, a small assemblage of early Darmsden-Linton pottery from the 7th or 6th century BC, included two tripartite angular bowls (Brown 1998, 134 fig. 96 nos. 41-42, 136). Finally, a large

collection of Darmsden-Linton pottery was uncovered at the Stansted airport site, Essex, and associated with radiocarbon dates of cal. 760-520 BC and 518-384 BC (Sealey 2013, 40-42 figs. 2-3).

Ceramic building material

There was a small collection of CBM mostly of medieval and post-medieval date except for one small piece of Roman RBT from pit F80. All the medieval and post-medieval CBM, which includes some pieces of peg-tile, came from ditch F65.

CBM code	CBM type	No.	Weight (g)	MSW/g
<i>Roman</i>				
RBT	Roman brick/tegula	1	28	28
Total		1	28	28
<i>Post-Roman</i>				
PT	Peg tile	5	90	18
Total		5	90	18
?				
?		4	6	1
Total		4	6	1
Grand Total		11	656	60

Table 2 CBM by period and type

Baked clay

There was one small piece of baked clay (?) with a weight of 2 g (Table 1). This was recovered from ditch F65.

Conclusion

An Early Iron Age date during the 8th to 5th century BC can be suggested for the pottery from pit F80. This would correspond well with the dating of the assemblages of prehistoric pottery previously uncovered from the Birch Quarry site which has generally been dated to the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (CAT Reports 383, 485, 523, and 738).

Feature	Feature Type	Prehistoric	CBM	Overall date approx.
F65	Ditch	EIA (one sherd)	Medieval/post-medieval	Medieval/post-medieval
F80	Pit	EIA	Roman (one sherd)	EIA with Roman disturbance

Table 3 Feature dating summary

6.2 Other finds

by Laura Pooley and Adam Wightman

Only one piece of worked flint was recovered during this phase of work. It came from F65 (49) and was a secondary hand hammer flake.

A single fragment of burnt sandstone pebble (82.9g), possibly part of a pot-boiler, came from pit F80 (50).

Two sherds (19.3g) of dark green post-medieval bottle glass came from F65 (47).

7 Environmental Assessment

by Lisa Gray MSc MA ACIfA Archaeobotanist

Introduction – aims and objectives

One sample was presented for assessment. The aims of this assessment are to determine the significance and potential of the plant macro-remains in the samples,

consider their use in providing information about diet, craft, medicine, crop-husbandry, feature function and environment.

Sample	Finds No.	Feature No.	Feature	Date	Volume (L)
7	31	F80	Pit	Prehistoric	40

Table 4 Sample details

Sampling and processing methods

This sample was taken and processed by Colchester Archaeological Trust and was completely processed using a Siraf-type flotation device. Flot was collected in a 300 micron mesh sieve then dried.

Once with the author the flot was scanned under a low-powered stereo-microscope with a magnification range of 10 to 40x. The whole flots were examined. The abundance, diversity and state of preservation of eco- and artefacts in each sample were recorded. A magnet was passed across each flot to record the presence or absence of magnetised material or hammerscale.

Identifications were made using uncharred reference material (author's own and the Northern European Seed Reference Collection at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London) and reference manuals (such as Beijerinck 1947; Cappers *et al* 2006; Charles 1984; Fuller 2007; Jacomet 2006). Nomenclature for plants is taken from Stace (Stace 2010). Latin names are given once and the common names used thereafter. Low numbers of non-charcoal charred plant macro-remains were counted. Uncharred plant remains, fauna and magnetic fragments were given estimated levels of abundance unless, in the case of seeds, numbers are very low in which case they were counted.

At this stage numbers given are estimates but where only one item is present that has been noted. Identifiable charred wood >4mm in diameter has been described as that. Charred wood <4mm diameter are described as 'flecks'. Samples this size are easier to break to reveal the cross-sections and diagnostic features necessary for identification and are less likely to be blown or unintentionally moved around the site (Asouti 2006, 31; Smart and Hoffman, 1988, 178-179). Fragments smaller than this and larger than 2mmØ were scanned in case any fragments of twig or roundwood survived.

Results

All that was present in this sample were fragments of charcoal and modern root/rhizome. No faunal or artefactual remains were found.

Sample	Finds no.	Feature no.	Bulk sample size (L)	Flot volume (L)	Estimated density*	Charred		Uncharred
						Charcoal >4mmØ	Charcoal <4mmØ	Root/rhizome fragments
						a	a	
7	31	F80	40	0.30	1	2	3	

Table 5 Contents of flots

*(estimated charred plant macro-remains per litre of sample excluding charcoal flecks)

Key to Table 4:

a = abundance [1 = occasional 1-10; 2 = moderate 11-100; and 3 = abundant >100];

d = diversity [1 = low 1-4 taxa types; 2 = moderate 5-10; 3 = high];

p = preservation [1 = poor (family level only); 2 = moderate (genus); 3 = good (species identification possible)]

Discussion

Biases in recovery, residuality, contamination

Nothing with regards biases in recovery, residuality or contamination was highlighted for any of these samples at the time of writing.

Quality and type of preservation

The only archaeobotanical remains in this sample were charcoal fragments. Charring of plant macrofossils occurs when plant material is heated under ‘...reducing conditions...’ where oxygen is largely excluded (Boardman and Jones 1990, 2) leaving a carbon skeleton resistant to biological and chemical decay (Campbell *et al* 2011, 17). These conditions can occur in a charcoal clamp, the centre of a bonfire or pit or in an oven or when a building burns down with the roof excluding the oxygen from the fire (Reynolds, 1979, 57).

No plant remains were preserved by mineralisation (Green 1979, 281) or silicification (Robinson and Straker 1990), which means that there is no archaeobotanical evidence for the cess disposal or slow-burning aerated fires.

Potential and significance

The only possibly useful items in this sample are the charcoal fragments that may be useful for radiocarbon dating if suitable taxa are identified.

Recommendations

No further work is recommended on this sample unless charcoal identification is required for selection for radiocarbon dating. If further archaeological intervention is to take place at this site it is useful to note that more charred plant remains are likely to be found.

8 Discussion

The second phase of the 2018 excavations revealed little that was new. Rather, the remains revealed during this investigation were largely extensions of ditches uncovered during the first phase of the 2018 excavations. The dating evidence retrieved from these features was also consistent with that recovered during this earlier phase, albeit with a general absence of material dated to the Late Iron Age.

It was found that the field system which was the predominating feature traced during the first phase of 2018 excavations did not extend north into the area surveyed during

the second phase. The excavation of the terminus of ditch F46 (F81) at the southern extremity of the site suggests that the northern extent of this field system was located in this area. It was also found that ditch F66 did not link up with ditch F50/F70 of this field system, as had been speculated.

Finally, it might be mentioned that the considerable assemblage (twenty sherds) of Early Iron Age pottery recovered from pit F80 mirrored the pottery assemblages yielded by Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pits F42 and F74 during the first phase of the 2018 excavations. Taken together, these features are suggestive of an Early Iron Age settlement in the vicinity, possibly with the series of Early Iron Age structures uncovered to the east during excavations undertaken during 2014-5 (CAT Report 807), or potentially to another area which has yet to be investigated.

9 Acknowledgements

CAT thanks Hanson Aggregates for commissioning and funding the work. The project was managed by C Lister, fieldwork was carried out by B Holloway and A Tuffey. Figures are by M Baister, B Holloway and E Holloway. The project was monitored for ECCPS by Teresa O'Connor.

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

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CAT Report 383	2007	<i>Archaeological investigations at Birch Pit western extension, Maldon Road, Colchester, Essex: 2004 and 2005-6</i> , by S Benfield
CAT Report 485	2008	<i>An archaeological excavation at Birch Pit, Stage 3 western extension, Maldon Road, Birch, Colchester, Essex: July-August 2007</i> , by S Benfield and E Spurgeon
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11 Abbreviations and glossary

Bronze Age	period from c 2500 – 700 BC
CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
CBM	ceramic building material, ie brick/tile

CHER	Colchester Historic Environment Record
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
Mesolithic	period from c 10,000 – 4000BC
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
peg-tile	rectangular thin tile with peg-hole(s) used mainly for roofing, first appeared c AD1200 and continued in use to present day, but commonly post-medieval to modern
post-medieval	from c AD 1500 to c 1800
prehistoric	pre-Roman
residual	something out of its original context, eg a Roman coin in a modern pit
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

12 Contents of archive

Finds: none retained

Paper record

One A4 document wallet containing:

The report (CAT Report 1345)

CAT written scheme of investigation

Original site record (feature and layer sheets, finds record, section drawings)

Inked section drawings

Site digital photographic thumbnails and log

Digital record

The report (CAT Report 1345)

CAT written scheme of investigation

Site digital photographs, photographic thumbnails and log

Graphics

Survey data

13 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 under accession code COLEM: 2018.48.

Distribution list:

Hanson Aggregates
Teresa O'Connor, ECC Place Services Historic Environment Advisor
Essex Historic Environment Record, Essex County Council



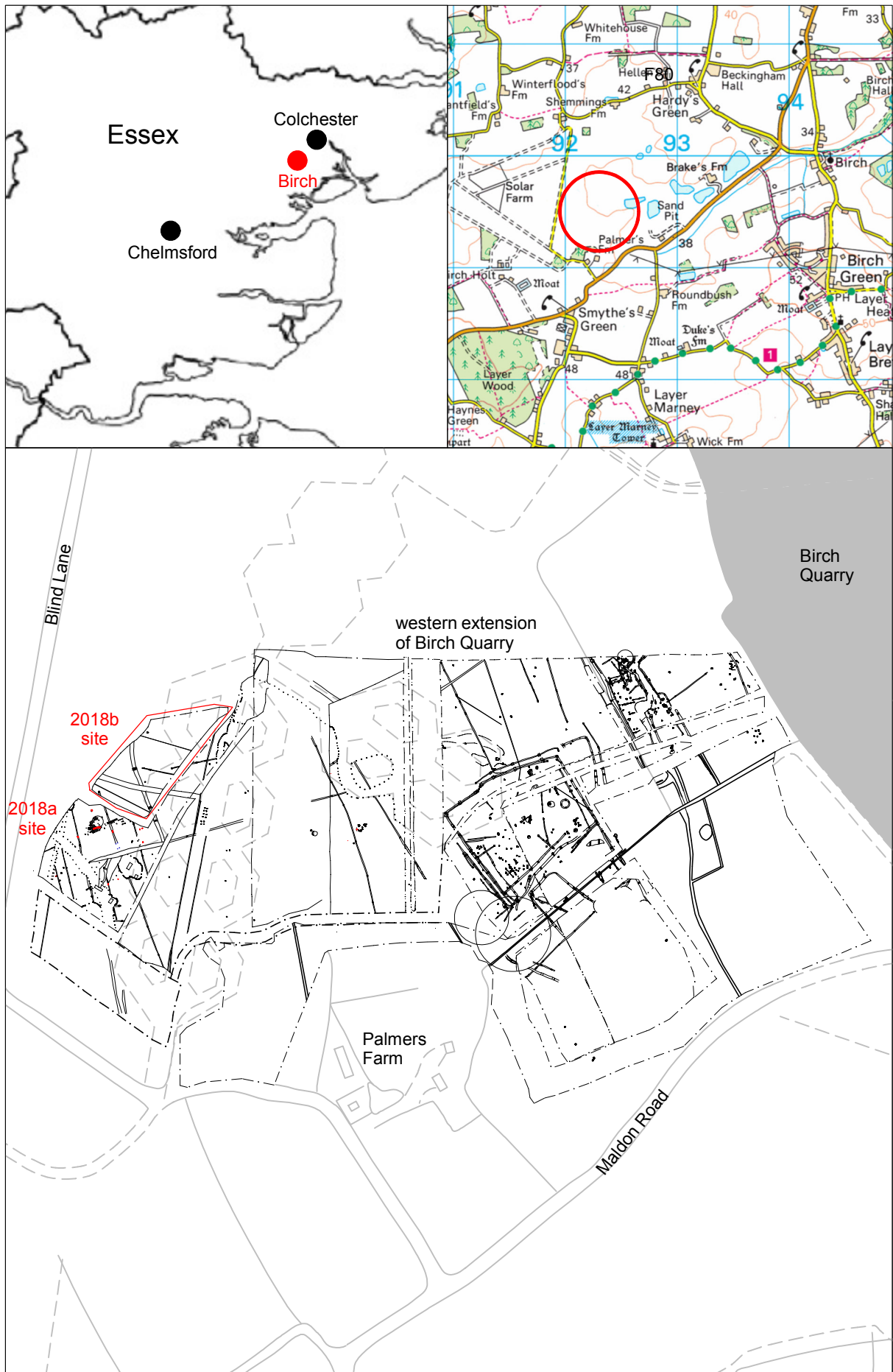
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Fig 1 Site location.



Fig 2 Site location (in red) in relation to nearby archaeological work.

 = concentrations of Roman surface finds (CAT Report 8)

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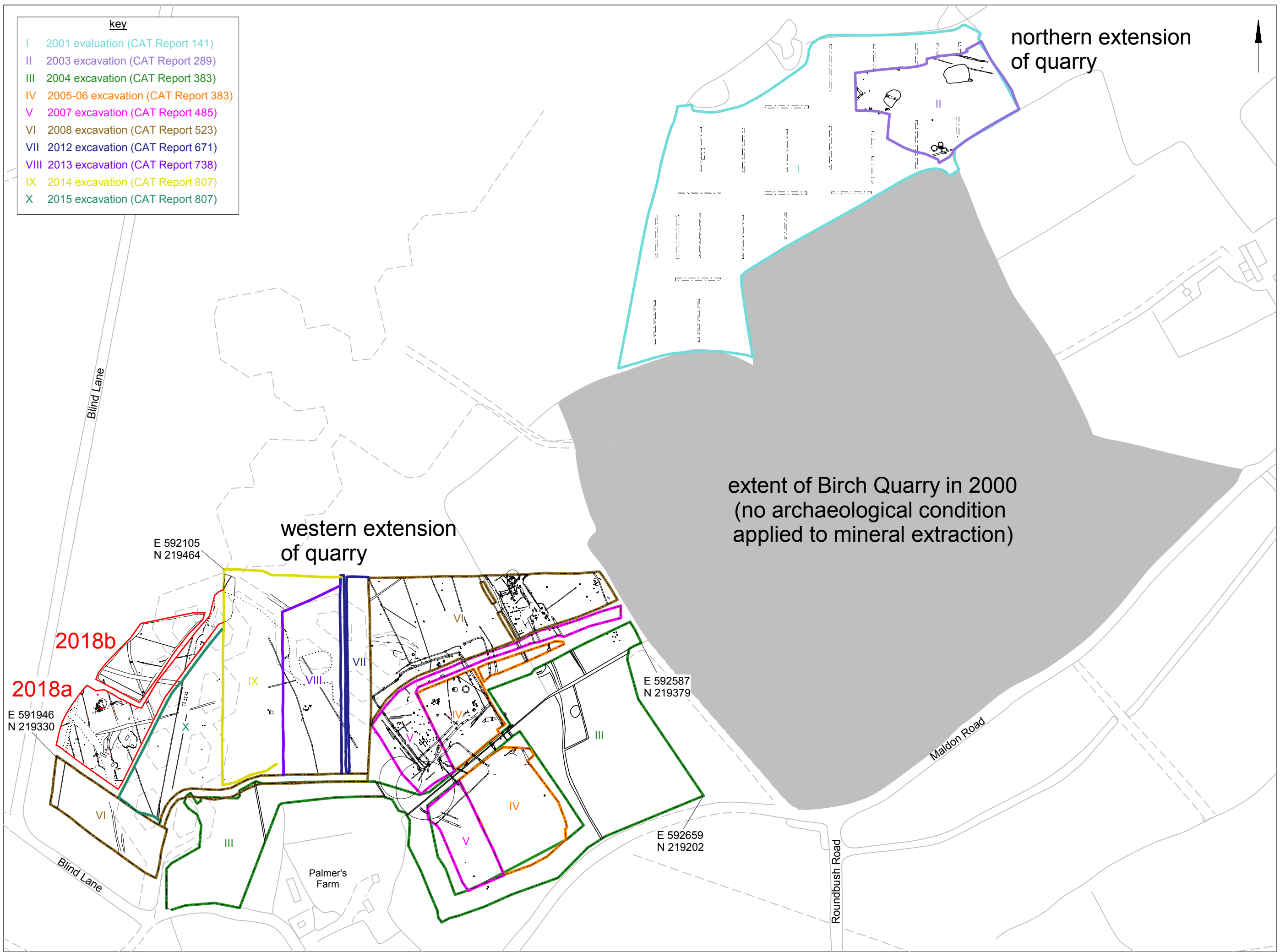


Fig 3 Site plan showing previous archaeological work at Birch Quarry alongside current (2018) phase of excavation.

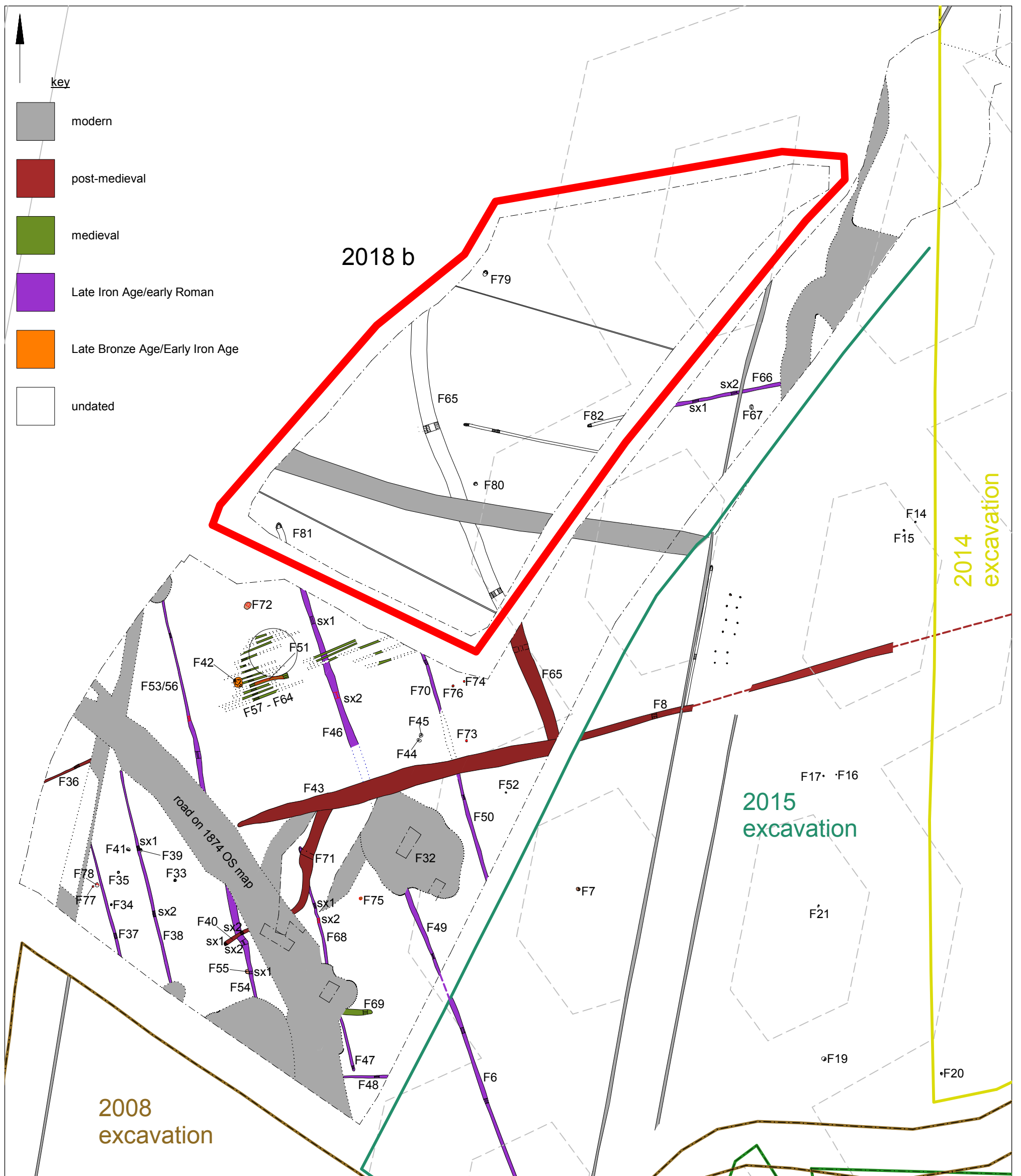


Fig 4 Detailed plan of 2018 archaeological excavation with phasing.

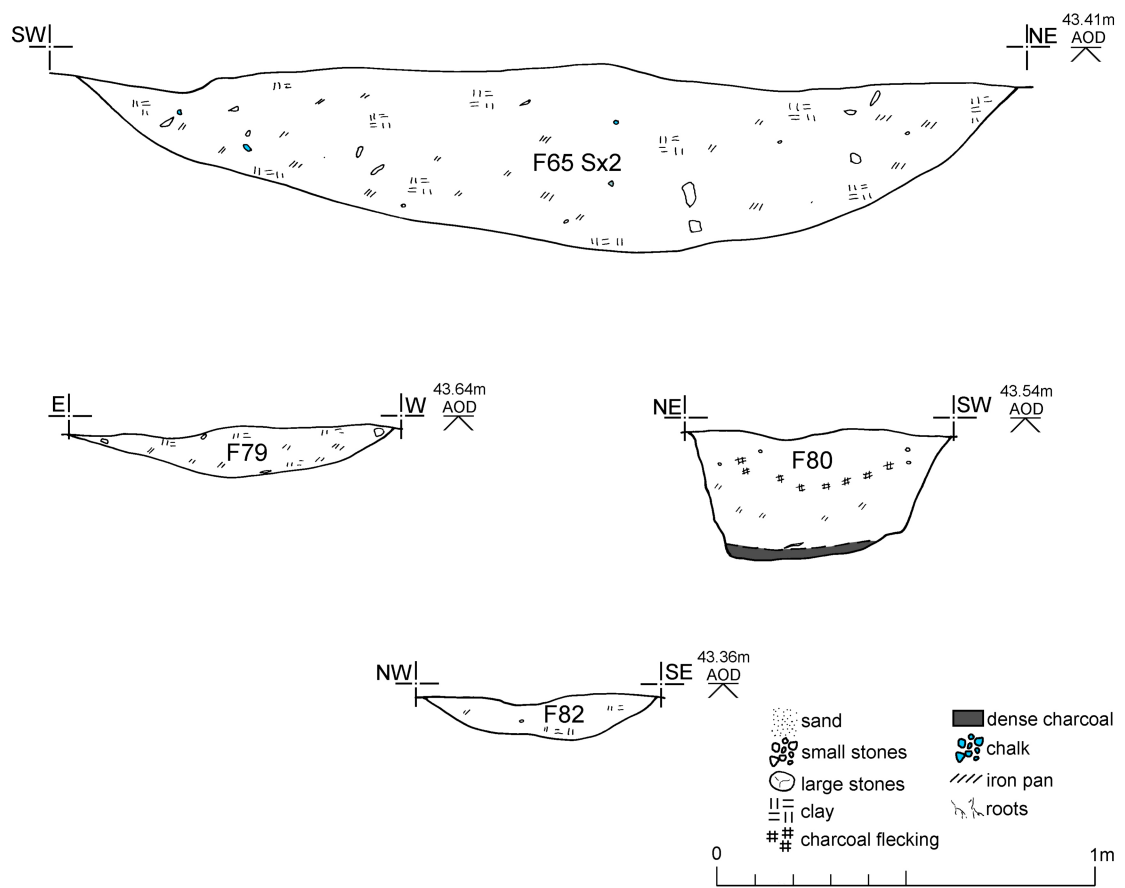


Fig 5 Feature sections.

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OASIS ID: colchest3-342151

Project details

Project name	Phase 2 of archaeological monitoring and excavation at Hanson Quarry, Maldon Road, Birch, Essex: September 2018
Short description of the project	The second part of archaeological monitoring and excavation carried out during 2018 at Hanson Quarry, Maldon Road, Birch, Essex, was undertaken in September 2018 prior to the commencement of mineral extraction, and investigated an area measuring 0.51 ha. The 2018 excavations represent the latest phase of a series of archaeological investigations undertaken at this site by Colchester Archaeological Trust over much of the past two decades. Located on the most westerly area of land surveyed during the excavations at Birch Quarry, the archaeological deposits uncovered during the investigation were primarily extensions of ditches revealed during the first phase of the 2018 excavations. Additionally, a pit yielded an Early Iron Age assemblage of pottery similar to other pits uncovered during the first phase of this investigation, suggesting that the site of an Early Iron Age settlement may be located nearby.
Project dates	Start: 10-09-2018 End: 20-09-2018
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	18/09c - Contracting Unit No.
Any associated project reference codes	BIBQ18 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes	COLEM: 2018.48 - Museum accession ID
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	None
Current Land use	Industry and Commerce 5 - Mineral extraction
Monument type	PIT Early Iron Age
Monument type	DITCH Post Medieval
Monument type	DITCH Late Iron Age
Monument type	DITCH Roman
Monument type	PIT Uncertain

Significant Finds	POTTERY Early Iron Age
Significant Finds	CBM Roman
Significant Finds	PEG-TILE Medieval
Significant Finds	PEG-TILE Post Medieval
Significant Finds	BAKED CLAY Uncertain
Significant Finds	FLINT Late Prehistoric
Significant Finds	BURNT STONE Uncertain
Significant Finds	GLASS Post Medieval

Project location

Country	England
Site location	ESSEX COLCHESTER BIRCH Birch Quarry
Postcode	CO5 9XB
Study area	0.51 Hectares
Site coordinates	TL 92043 19402 51.839631054901 0.787983444171 51 50 22 N 000 47 16 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 42.87m Max: 43.61m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Colchester Archaeological Trust
Project brief originator	HEM Team Officer, ECC
Project design originator	Chris Lister
Project director/manager	Ben Holloway
Project supervisor	Ben Holloway
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	Colchester Museum
Digital Archive ID	COLEM: 2018.48
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography", "Survey"
Paper Archive recipient	Colchester Museum
Paper Archive ID	COLEM: 2018.48
Paper Media available	"Context sheet", "Drawing", "Photograph", "Report"

Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Phase 2 of archaeological monitoring and excavation at Hanson Quarry, Maldon Road, Birch, Essex: September 2018
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Hicks, E.
Other bibliographic details	CAT Report 1345
Date	2019
Issuer or publisher	Colchester Archaeological Trust
Place of issue or publication	Colchester
Description	A4 loose-leaf ring-bound
URL	http://cat.essex.ac.uk
Entered by	Dr Elliott Hicks (eh2@catuk.org)
Entered on	28 March 2019

OASIS:

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