A late medieval and post-medieval farm complex at Fyfield Road, Chipping Ongar

By K. Heard

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A LATE MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL FARM COMPLEX AT FYFIELD ROAD, CHIPPING ONGAR

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A LATE MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL FARM COMPLEX AT FYFIELD ROAD, CHIPPING ONGAR

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Fieldwork at Fyfield Business and Research Park, Fyfield Road, Chipping Ongar produced slight evidence for occupation during the Bronze Age, Late Iron Age/Early Roman and medieval periods. In the late 15th to 16th century, a substantial timber building was constructed within a ditched enclosure. This probably marked the beginning of sustained occupation of the site and the origins of a roadside property known in the 19th century as Boarded Barns Farm. During the post-medieval period, additional farm buildings were constructed and modifications were made to the farm complex and surrounding yards, gardens and fields. Boarded Barns Farm was demolished at the end of the 19th century and its site was partially occupied by new cottages. Other parts of the farm complex were landscaped and returned to cultivation.

INTRODUCTION

A trial-trench evaluation and subsequent open-area excavation were carried out in 2016–17 by Archaeology South-East (ASE) at the Fyfield Business and Research Park, Fyfield Road, Chipping Ongar (ASE 2016; ASE 2017). The fieldwork was conducted in advance of a housing-led development.

The development site was located c. 1km north-east of Chipping Ongar, on the B184 road to Great Dunmow (NGR: TL 55734 05014; Fig. 1). It occupied a roughly square plot of c. 9.5ha. The entire site was sampled during the trial-trench evaluation (ASE 2016), but archaeological remains were found only in two adjacent trenches in the western part of the site, behind Boarded Barns Cottages and close to the site entrance on Fyfield Road. This led to the excavation of a roughly rectangular area measuring c. 2000m² (Fig. 1).

FIG. 1: Site location

The underlying solid geology of the site is London Clay. This is overlaid by superficial deposits of chalky till with outwash sands and gravels, silts and clays, of the Lowestoft Formation (BGS 2017).

This is an area of low, rolling hills ranging in height from 45m to 65m. The site occupies a ridge of relatively high ground, flanked by the Cripsey Brook to the west and the River Roding to the east;
these rivers flow southwards towards Chipping Ongar and Brentwood. A minor (unnamed) tributary of the River Roding flowed along the southern boundary of the site.

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The property known currently as Boarded Barns Farm is located adjacent to the eastern boundary of the development site, c. 300m south-east of the excavation area. The Grade II Listed farmhouse, dating to the 17th century or earlier, is a timber-framed building of two storeys with red, plain tiled roofs and three red brick chimney stacks (LB 1168705). Associated buildings (also Grade II Listed) include a timber-framed ostlery, granary and kennels (LB 1124051; 16th century or earlier), a timber-framed stable block with red pantile roof (LB 1168743; late 18th century), a range of outbuildings (stables, barn and stallion shed) of timber-framed and brick construction (LB 1306869; 18th/early 19th century) and another stable block, timber-framed with a red pantile roof (LB 1337518; 18th/early 19th century).

The current Boarded Barns Farm was originally called *New Barns Farm*. The earliest extant plan of the farm was made in 1774, when it was in the ownership of John Westbrook (Essex Record Office, no date (a)). The land between New Barns Farm and the Ongar to Fyfield road (within which the excavation site was located) was not part of the holding and was therefore not shown in detail, but the name of the owner was recorded as *Stoakes*.

On Chapman and André’s 1777 map of Essex, New Barns Farm is shown at the end of a curving track leading off the Ongar to Fyfield road (Fig. 2). The course of this track is followed by the current access road through the middle of the Business and Research Park. At the junction of the track and the main road (in the area of the archaeological excavation and Boarded Barns Cottages), the 1777 map shows a roadside property called Boarded Barns, consisting of three buildings in an irregular enclosure with a probable orchard to the east. The same two properties, are shown in less detail on the First Series Ordnance Survey map of 1805.

*FIG 2: Historic maps; Chapman and André’s map of Essex, 1777; Sale plan of New Barn and Boarded Barns Farm, 1862; 1st Edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey map, 1874; 3rd Edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey map, 1896*

The Shelley parish tithe apportionment of 1839 listed the owner of both Boarded Barns Farm and New Barns Farm as the Reverend John Bramston Stane (of Forest Hall in High Ongar), and the occupier of both farms as James Clark (ESAH 2011). Boarded Barns was described as a farmhouse with adjoining yard, orchard and garden, and seven fields, all located east of the Ongar to Fyfield road.
Road (Table 1). The farm had a total acreage of c. 44 acres, while neighbouring New Barns Farm had c. 98 acres and was one of the largest farms in the parish at that time. The tithe apportionment recorded that Boarded Barns had arable and pasture fields, reflecting the mixed farming that was practiced throughout the parish; in 1837 there were estimated to be 330 acres of arable, 188 acres of meadow and pasture, and two acres of woodland, as well as an enclosed common of 13 acres (Powell 1956, 203).

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TABLE 1: Boarded Barns Farm in the Shelley tithe apportionment

The 1851 census recorded that James Clark (born 1791, Tilbury, Essex) continued to occupy New Barns Farm, with Ann Clark (born 1799, St George, Middlesex) and Caroline Clark (born 1831, Shelley, Essex).

New Barns Farm and Boarded Barns Farm were part of the Reverend Stane’s Forest Hall Estate. Stane died in 1857 (his will was proved in May of that year, but provides no details of his properties in Shelley parish) and the estate was inherited by his son of the same name, who put it up for sale in 1862. The sale catalogue reveals that the combined acreage of Boarded Barns Farm and New Barns Farm was 169 acres, of which one-third was pasture and two-thirds arable (Essex Record Office, no date (b)).

A plan attached to the sale catalogue shows the Boarded Barns Farm complex in some detail (Fig. 2). It includes a large building (or range of buildings), irregular in plan, adjacent to the road. There was a yard to the rear, with access from the road. On the other side of the yard were two rectangular buildings, the larger of which is estimated to have been over 20m long; the plan provides no indication of the use of these buildings, although one of them was presumably the farmhouse, and the others barns, stables or other types of outbuildings. There was a large pond in a D-shaped enclosure to the south of the roadside building, and a large, rectangular hedged field/enclosure to the east of the
building complex. Together, these areas probably constituted the ‘yard, orchard and garden’ recorded in the 1839 tithe apportionment.

The Forest Hall estate was acquired over a period of four years by J.L. Newall, who continued to rent out its eight farms to tenant farmers. White’s Directory of Essex for 1863 listed farmer James Clark at Boarded Barns; this was presumably the man of the same name (or a descendant, perhaps) recorded at Boarded Barns and New Barns in the 1839 tithe apportionment, and at New Barns Farm in the 1851 census. Notably, White’s Directory did not have a separate entry for New Barns Farm, suggesting that by the 1860s the two farms had been combined, or at least functioned as a single economic unit.

By contrast, the Post Office Directory of Essex for 1874 listed farmer William Read Bretton (probably formerly of Mott’s Farm, elsewhere in Shelley) at New Barns but did not include a separate entry for Boarded Barns; perhaps by that time the farm names were interchangeable.

The First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1874 (Fig. 2) provides a more detailed plan of Boarded Barns, following the sale of the Forest Hall estate in 1862. The most obvious change in the layout of the farm since 1862 was the loss of the rectangular field/enclosure to the east of the farm buildings. Most of the enclosure was subsumed into a larger, irregular field to the north and east of the building complex. The west end of the former field/enclosure was included in a new arrangement of small plots (probably gardens or orchards) to the rear of the farm. Another probable garden is shown to the south of the farm buildings, subdivided by paths.

The buildings represented on the 1874 map were the same as those shown in 1862, with minor differences in plan. Notably the irregular, roadside building was shown clearly as two distinct but adjoining structures forming an L-shaped range. Significantly, the larger of the two rectangular buildings represented in 1862 was shown in 1874 as a row of four adjoining structures, perhaps a row of cottages. Individually, these were slightly larger than nearby Church Lane Cottages – Grade II Listed buildings of 16th century or earlier date (LB 1168749). The Second Edition Ordnance Survey map of c. 1881 shows a similar layout of farm buildings and adjoining grounds, with some minor changes to the way in which the grounds were subdivided.

At some time between the early 1880s and 1896, Boarded Barns Farm was demolished and the farm pond was backfilled. On the Ordnance Survey map of 1896 (Fig. 2), the former garden in the south-western part of the farm was occupied by an attached pair of houses (still extant, next to the entrance to the Fyfield Business and Research Park) called Boarded Barns Cottages. The site of the former farm buildings was within the large field to the north and east of Boarded Barns Cottages.
Following the demolition of Boarded Barns Farm, the name transferred to the former New Barns Farm, although it seems as though the two names had been interchangeable for some years. The Forest Hall estate was broken up in 1919.

Chemical manufacturing company Messrs May and Baker purchased Boarded Barns Farm in 1946 and used it as an agricultural research station, incorporating one of the listed farm buildings in their new complex. Other farm buildings and the fields not occupied by the research station were sold in 1954. In the 1990s, the entire site was sold, becoming the Fyfield Business and Research Park (Acanthus 2014), itself closing c. 2014.

FIELDWORK RESULTS

Archaeological features (principally ditches, pits and the slight remains of buildings and other structures) were concentrated in the southern half of the excavated area (Fig. 1). Many of the features were intercutting but, in general, were not deeply stratified. Evidence was found for activity in the Bronze Age, Late Iron Age/Early Roman and medieval periods, but most of the features related to occupation of the site during the post-medieval period.

The results of the fieldwork are described under site-specific period headings; these periods have been derived mainly from the dating of finds (especially the pottery), but also through the creation of relative chronologies where stratigraphic relationships existed, and with reference to cartographic evidence for the post-medieval periods.

Geology and soil types

Natural strata varied across the excavated area, but were consistent with deposits recorded by the British Geological Survey (BGS 2017), consisting of chalky till overlaid, in the central, northern and eastern parts of the site, by deposits of outwash sand. No evidence survived for natural soil profiles or ancient land surfaces, these having been removed by subsequent activity, particularly post-medieval/modern ploughing. Generally, the natural strata were sealed by a ploughsoil with an average thickness of 0.30m. All archaeological deposits and features were recognised below the ploughsoil, overlying or cutting the natural strata.

Periods 1 and 2: Prehistoric to Early Roman activity

A small assemblage of residual prehistoric struck flint hinted at transitory use of the area in the Mesolithic or Early Neolithic period. However, the earliest archaeological features at the site dated to the Late Bronze Age. Remains comprised two pits, one of which produced fifty-
four sherds (741g) of fairly large and unabraded pottery consistent with the post-Deverel-Rimbury tradition (c. 1150–800 BC) as well as a poorly dated north-west to south-east orientated ditch (Fig. 1).

Late Iron Age to Early Roman activity within the excavated area consisted of two ditches probably representing a shifting boundary (Fig. 1). The absence of contemporary features (such as buildings or pits) on either side of the boundary, suggests agricultural land use. For further details of the prehistoric and Roman activity the reader should refer to the full archive report (ASE 2017)

**Period 3.1: Medieval (14th century)**

A small amount of pottery (notably shell-tempered ware) found residually in later deposits suggests some activity in the area of the site during the 11th to early 13th century. Stratigraphic evidence for the use of the site during the medieval period was slight and difficult to interpret and was confined to the south-east corner of the excavated area (Fig. 3). Evidence comprised a shallow undated pit, a ditch and a narrower probable structural feature on the same east–west orientation. The ditch produced seventeen sherds (304g) of pottery with an overall date of mid-13th–14th century and a *TPQ* of 1300. After a period of silting it was re-cut on a similar orientation, to a maximum width of 0.75m and surviving depth of 0.15m. There was no associated dating evidence.

**FIG. 3: Medieval features (Period 3.1) and late medieval to early post-medieval features (Period 3.2)**

The narrower structural feature was interpreted as a possible beam slot (for a timber base-plate) or the cut for a timber drain/gutter. It measured 0.38m wide x 0.11m deep with a distinctive profile, having near vertical sides breaking sharply into a flat base. It contained a small sherd (<2g) of pottery dated 11th–early 13th century.

It is unclear if the structural feature and ditch were contemporary features, although that seems probable. If so, it is possible that the structural feature represents part of the foundation cut for the north wall of a timber-framed building and that the ditch was an associated drainage feature, such as an eaves-drip gully.
Small amounts of residual medieval pottery (mid-13th to 14th century) were found in the fills of other features, notably enclosure ditch ENC1 (Period 3.2).

**Open Area 4 (OA4)**
There was no conclusive evidence for land use to the north of the ditch, although a general absence of contemporary features strongly suggests that this was open ground, perhaps fields (OA4). The shallow, undated pit, was tentatively associated with this period because its fill deposit was similar to that of the medieval ditch.

**Period 3.2: Late medieval to early post-medieval (15th–mid 16th century)**
The earliest clear evidence for occupation of the site dated to the 15th to mid-16th century, and consisted principally of part of a substantial building (B1) inside a ditched enclosure (ENC1; Fig. 3). There was presumably an external bank to the enclosure, although subsequent truncation had removed any evidence for this.

**Enclosure ditch ENC1**
The curving ditch was up to 4m wide x 1.20m deep, with moderately steep sides (shallower in the upper part of the profile) and a narrow, concave base). It extended beyond the limits of excavation to the north-west and south-west. Primary fills produced a moderate amount of pottery (44 sherds, 680g) with a TPQ of 15th to mid-16th century, but including some residual 13th/14th-century sherds. Subsequent infilling occurred gradually during the period of use of the ditch, and some of these deposits contained large quantities of finds, suggesting that the ditch was used for the disposal of household waste. The finds were more frequent on the south-eastern side of the enclosure and might have derived from nearby building B1.

The pottery assemblage (183 sherds, 5051g) from usage fills of the ditch had a similar date range to that from primary deposits, although with a TPQ in the early 16th century. The pottery was principally of a domestic nature, with a preponderance of jars that might have been used for cooking or storage. Building material consisted mainly of ceramic roof tile fragments, some of which had mortar adhering to broken edges, indicating probable reuse as hard-core in rubble foundations or similar structures. Other artefacts included part of an iron knife blade, an incomplete rowel spur and parts of two horse shoes. Bones of horse, pig and cattle were present, but no sheep/goat. Other kitchen waste included shells of oyster and mussel, and waterlogged plant remains such as grape, plum/damson/bullace,
raspberry/bramble and elder. Charred grains included hulled barley, wheat and oat (wild or cultivated species). Six charred legumes, large enough to be cultivated pulses, could be identified only as bean/vetch/pea.

**Building 1**

Building B1 was located in the north-east corner of enclosure ENC1. The evidence for the building consisted principally of a row of three large, rectangular postholes partially defining the north-east end of the building, and the base of an associated brick-built feature (G9), of uncertain function, at its north-west corner. The remainder of the building was less well defined by relatively small and irregular postholes, and there was no evidence at all for the south-east wall. This suggests that the building had very shallow foundations that were destroyed during subsequent site clearance, or that it was built on timber ground beams. Similarly, no evidence survived for internal floors/surfaces.

Brick-built feature G9 (Plate 1) was the best-preserved element of B1, and provided the only potential dating evidence for the building. It was a three-sided, rectangular brick structure, open to the south-east, with overall dimensions of 1.32m x 0.86m and a maximum surviving height of 0.14m. The bricks were red, hand-made and relatively thin, measuring 207–220mm x 100–108mm x 40–45mm, which could indicate a date as early as c. 1480, although an early to mid-16th-century date is most likely. The bricks were laid on bed in alternate header and stretcher courses. Generally, the structure was not well made, with only minimal use of mortar. The walls were wider (0.32m) on the south-west and north-west sides, but only 0.22m wide on the north-east side. They mostly survived to two courses, with three courses remaining at the north-east corner of the structure. The interior of the structure was filled with loose brick rubble and flint nodules. It is likely that this was the base of an upstanding structure that had been demolished to just below the contemporary ground level.

**PLATE 1: Brick structure G9, part of Building B1**

The function of G9 is unclear, and it is not certain that it was an original feature of B1. It might have been the foundation of an external chimney stack and hearth, but it was perhaps too small for that purpose and (if B1’s interpreted footprint is correct) would have been unusually placed at the corner of the building. An alternative interpretation is that it was the support for an external staircase.
**Open Area 6 (OA6)**

The area outside ENC1 was open land, probably in agricultural use (OA6). Although there was no clear evidence for agriculture, two shallow, parallel, undated ditches might have been cultivation or drainage features. The ditches were parallel with the north-east side of enclosure ENC1 and perpendicular to the nearby road.

Pottery from the primary fills of enclosure ditch ENC1 suggest that sustained occupation of the site began in the 15th- to mid-16th century, and this is supported by the probable date of the bricks from feature G9, part of B1. It is likely that this settlement had earlier origins than nearby New Barns Farm (modern Boarded Barns Farm), where the farmhouse dates to the 17th century or slightly earlier (LB 1168705).

**Period 3.2 discussion**

Map regression suggests that B1 was the north end of the larger rectangular building (or building range) on the south side of the Boarded Barns farm complex, depicted on maps from at least 1862, and probably as early as 1777 (Fig. 2).

Although only part of the associated enclosure fell within the excavated area and its original extent is unknown, it is likely that it had a similar footprint to the D-shaped enclosure shown on the 1862 sale plan (Fig. 2). The enclosing ditch ENC1 might have incorporated the pond shown on that plan.

**Period 4.1: Post-medieval (late 17th century to c. 1862)**

During the post-medieval period, building B1 was retained but enclosure ditch ENC1 was deliberately backfilled. Pottery evidence (supported by a clay tobacco pipe and a glass wine bottle fragment), suggests that this occurred in the late 17th or early 18th century. A rectangular building (B3) was constructed to the north-east of B1, partially over the infilled enclosure ditch. Another building (B2) was probably constructed in the post-medieval period, although its origins might have been slightly earlier, during Period 3.2. A large open space between the buildings was presumably the principal farmyard (OA7) while a smaller area (OA8) south-east of B1 might have had a more domestic function. A substantial east–west ditch was dug, dividing former Open Area OA6 into two fields, OA9 and OA14. Isolated in
situ posts or postholes within the farm complex represented timber structures of unknown function (Fig. 4).

FIG. 4: Post-medieval features (Periods 4.1 and 4.2)

**Building B2**

B2 was represented principally by a shallow, L-shaped ‘robber’ trench, defining the corner of a rectangular building that extended beyond the limits of excavation to the north-west and was perpendicular to the nearby road. Some near-complete peg tiles, laid horizontally on the base of the trench, were probably part of a bedding/levelling course for a brick or timber foundation. Their dimensions are typical of tiles made in Essex during the 14th–17th century (Ryan and Andrews 1994, 97), although in this context they might have been salvaged from an earlier building. The trench was backfilled with soil and crushed mortar that contained frequent small to large fragments of brick and roof tile. The brick fragments are in fabrics that have been broadly dated 18th–mid-19th century.

A pair of large timber posts, approximately 2.5m apart on the northeast corner of the building, probably indicated the position of a doorway. Although much decayed, the south-west doorpost was rectangular in section, measuring 200 x 160mm (8 x 6 inches). Associated post packing included two large brick fragments in a fabric dated to the 18th or 19th century. The north-east doorpost (which probably also formed the corner of building B2) was removed when the building was demolished, leaving a sub-circular post socket up to 0.50m wide.

No internal features or floors/surfaces were identified inside B2, these having been destroyed when the building was demolished, or during subsequent landscaping or cultivation.

**Building B3 and associated features**

B3 was a relatively small, rectangular building (approximately 10 x 3m) constructed after enclosure ditch ENC1 had been backfilled. The building is known only from map evidence; there was no direct archaeological evidence for a building at this location, such as foundation trenches or earth-fast posts. This suggests either that B3 had very shallow foundations that were removed by subsequent truncation, or that it was constructed on timber ground beams. A T-shaped arrangement of two drainage ditches was probably associated with the use of
building B3. One possible explanation is that B3 was a cattle byre, and the ditches were for the flow of waste away from the building. Pottery from the ditch terminus had a $TPQ$ of 1800. A large, rectangular pit was also within the footprint of B3 and might have been associated with the use of the building. It might originally have housed a sunken tank and was backfilled with greyish brown clayey silt containing occasional small fragments of roof tile, animal bone and iron nails.

**Boundary ditch**

Brick fragments from the primary silting at the east end of the ditch indicated an 18th/19th century date. The same fill also contained small twigs and branches, presumably derived from an adjacent hedgerow. The ditch separated two large open areas, presumably fields (OA9 and OA14).

**Period 4.1 discussion**

The major elements of the Period 4.1 farm complex can be identified on the plan attached to the 1862 sale catalogue (Fig. 2). Building B1, retained from Period 3.2, was the earliest of the three buildings found or inferred within the excavation area. Possibly dating from the 15th century, it stood for approximately 400 years and must have been a substantial structure, maybe even the original farmhouse.

Building B2 was built in an area that had previously been in agricultural use (OA6). It was part of an irregular building range next to the road, shown on maps from at least the late 18th century (Fig. 2).

Building B3 was not represented in the archaeological record, but its location can be inferred from map evidence. This was the smallest of the three buildings (or building ranges) that made up the Boarded Barns Farm complex, and was presumably a barn, cattle shed or similar agricultural building.

The linear features associated with this phase coincided in part with the boundary features shown on the 1862 plan. Similarly, OA14 corresponded to the ‘Orchard’ listed in the 1839 tithe apportionment and OA9 corresponded to field number 91 described in the apportionment as ‘Barn Field.’
Period 4.2: Post-medieval (c. 1862 –1880s)

Comparison of the 1862 plan of Boarded Barns Farm with Ordnance Survey maps of 1874 (Fig. 2) and c. 1881 shows that there were no changes to the layout of the farm buildings following the sale of Boarded Barns Farm in the 1860s, and it is assumed that buildings B1, B2 and B3 continued in use during Period 4.2. However, alterations were made to the surrounding yards and gardens, and some of these changes were reflected in the archaeological record (Fig. 4).

The most significant change was the loss of OA14, the probable orchard to the east of the farm complex. This was accomplished by backfilling the boundary ditch, so that former open areas OA9 and OA14 could be combined into a single field OA10. At the same time, part of the west end of the orchard was enclosed by a ditch and hedge ENC2 to create new open spaces OA11 and OA12 (probably a yard and garden) to the east of the farm buildings. This ditch corresponded with a hedged boundary shown on the Ordnance Survey maps of 1874 (Fig. 2) and 1881, defining the eastern extent of the grounds of Boarded Barns farmhouse.

Backfilling of boundary ditch

A large amount of domestic refuse was found in the backfills of the Period 4.1 boundary ditch, especially at its western end, closer to the farm complex. It included 125 sherds (1699g) of 19th-century pottery (TPQ 1830s/40s), mostly in pearlware, modern white earthenware and yellow ware and consisting mainly of table wares (as opposed to kitchen wares) such as bowls, dishes, and a mug. There is also part of a chamber pot. The pottery is generally of good quality, but some wares are more downmarket — these include vessels with mocha decoration, sometimes known as ‘cottage ware’. Thirty-seven fragments of glass were recovered, mostly from wine bottles dated 1775–1900, but including one piece from a cylindrical bottle dated 1650–1800. Metalwork includes strips or sheets of iron (uncertain function) and iron nails. Part of a 19th-century whetstone was recovered, and a piece of clay pipe stem dated 1750–1900. In comparison to these finds, only a negligible amount of animal bone and oyster shell was recovered. This suggests that the ceramics, glass and metalwork came from the clearance of buildings following the sale of the farm, rather than from midden deposits in the farmyard.

Enclosure ditches ENC2 and ENC3
The area enclosed by hedged boundary ENC2 was sub-divided by linear ditch ENC3. This occurred after an initial period of infilling of ditch ENC2, and probably after the associated hedge had been removed. ENC3 probably corresponded with a boundary shown on the 1874 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 2), defining the northern side of an enclosure (probably a garden, with defined walkways) to the south-east of building B1.

**Period 4.2 discussion**

The archaeological record supports cartographic evidence for changes in land use and layout at Boarded Barns Farm during the period 1862–1874, probably associated with the acquisition of the farm by Mr Newall in the mid-1860s. Large amounts of pottery, glassware and other domestic items used to partially backfill the Period 4.1 boundary ditch might have derived from household clearance following the change of occupier from James Clark (1863) to William Bretton (1874).

Map evidence suggests that OA7, the yard at the centre of the farm buildings complex, was sub-divided between 1862 and 1874 – no archaeological evidence for this boundary was found. Similarly, an apparent boundary shown on the 1874 map, running between buildings B2 and B3 and separating farmyard OA7 from adjoining field OA10, left no archaeological trace.

**Period 5.1: Late Victorian (1880s –1896)**

Map evidence (Fig. 2) shows that Boarded Barns Farm was demolished between c. 1881 and 1896. This event was represented archaeologically by some large, rubble-filled pits, and extensive dumps of building debris within a large open area OA13 (Fig. 5).

**FIG. 5: Late Victorian features (Period 5.1)**

*Open Area 13 (OA13)*

Six large pits were dug in the area of the former farm complex, in some cases truncating the remains of earlier (Periods 4.1 and 4.2) features. Pit fills included large amounts of roof tile, with some brick fragments and flint nodules/cobbles, the flints probably deriving from former yard surfaces. Extensive dumps of demolition rubble, mostly roof tile fragments sealed (and in some cases slumped into) these pits, as well as sealing earlier features such as the insubstantial remains of buildings B1 and B2. In some areas, the demolition layers were
directly on top of natural strata, indicating that there was comprehensive and wholesale
demolition and clearance of farm buildings and associated surfaces.

**Period 5.2: Modern (Early 20th century); not illustrated**
Following the demolition of Boarded Barns Farm and the construction of Boarded Barn Cottages, landscaping returned much of the ground occupied formerly by the farm complex to agricultural use. The land remained under cultivation throughout much of the 20th century, either as part of the newly named Boarded Barns Farm (formerly New Barns Farm) or as part of the agricultural research station founded after the Second World War. At the time of the archaeological fieldwork, the field was under grass, possibly reflecting a change in land use that occurred when the former research station was sold in the 1990s.

**DISCUSSION**

The excavation has produced some evidence for activity within the site area during the Late Bronze Age (Period 1) and Late Iron Age/Early Roman period (Period 2), making a small addition to the limited data that exist for early occupation in this part of Essex. The Period 2 ditches might have related to agricultural activity within the estate of the Roman villa (EHER ref: 9919) located c. 600km to the north-east.

There was slight evidence for medieval occupation within the area of the site. The full extent of medieval activity is not known. However, it is clear that the focus of occupation was to the south of the excavated area. The 14th century was a time when many rural settlements in Essex (and the wider East Anglian region) were being abandoned. Various reasons that have been proposed for this, including famine and poor weather during the period AD 1315–22 (Astill and Grant 1988), the outbreak of the Black Death in 1349 (Poos 1991) and the social and economic effects of the Peasant’s Revolt of 1381.

It is unclear whether occupation at this site continued without interruption into the late medieval period. In the 15th- or earlier 16th century a building (B1) was constructed inside a ditched enclosure (ENC1), approximately 25m north-west of the Period 3.1 remains, in an area that had not obviously been occupied during the medieval period. It is tempting to suggest therefore that the enclosed settlement was part of an entirely new foundation (Period 3.2).
The excavation has shed some light on the subsequent development of Boarded Barns Farm (Periods 4.1 and 4.2) and its eventual demolition (Period 5.1). The evidence for the actual farm buildings, associated structures and adjoining gardens and yards is sketchy, but some general observations can be made.

None of the identified buildings had substantial foundations and it is likely that they were built on shallow masonry footings or were timber-framed on horizontal ground beams. Although B1 was defined partially by some substantial postholes, it was not constructed entirely of earth-fast posts. There was little evidence for brick construction, and brick fragments made up a relatively small proportion of the building material assemblage. Many of the brick fragments recovered might, from their dimensions and wear patterns, have been used for flooring rather than walling. Brick was used as a walling material at the base of rectangular structure G9, built against the external wall of B1. Although the function of G9 is unclear, it might have been the foundation for a chimney or an external staircase. The remains of a levelling course of reused roof tiles in the base of a shallow foundation trench for B2 indicates some use of tile as a bedding material, although it is unknown if this supported a timber or masonry foundation. The large quantity of roof tiles (both peg tiles and pantiles) found in demolition deposits across the site indicates that tile was used extensively as a roofing material, although possibly as a replacement for original thatched roofs.

The artefactual evidence, notably the pottery assemblage, tells us something about the occupants and their standards of living. Tudor wares, mainly from enclosure ditch ENC1 and probably derived from building B1, were mostly locally produced and of a domestic nature – jugs and jars used for cooking and storage. More specialised vessels might have been employed in typical farmhouse activities such as beer making, dairying or other specialised processes. Later 18th century pottery included some tea-wares, at a time when tea was still an expensive commodity and this suggests a household of middling status. The 19th-century pottery assemblage contained more tablewares, including some expensive foreign imports that also hint at higher social position.

The archaeological project has shed some light on a lost farmstead, which until recently was known only from cartographic and documentary sources. It has been shown that Boarded Barns Farm had its origins in the 15th- or 16th century, close to a site that been occupied
since at least the 14th century. The farm was probably in continuous use for about 400 years, with at least one of the farm buildings (B1) in existence for the whole period of occupation. Even after it had been demolished, the name of the farm was transferred to a nearby property.

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Fig. 2

Chapman and André's map of Essex, 1777

Sale plan of New Barn and Boarded Barns Farm, 1862

First Edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey map, 1874

Period 4.1 Post-medieval

Period 4.2 Post-medieval