



ESSEX ARCHAEOLOGY CONFERENCE

Recent Research &
Discoveries in Essex

3 October 2026

PLACE
SERVICES



Essex County Council



Essex Archaeology Conference: Recent Research & Discoveries in Essex

3rd October 2026

09:00-17:10

Essex Record Office, Wharf Road, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 6YT

Since the last conference in 2008, responsibility for the management of the Historic Environment of Essex has changed with the creation of Place Services in 2012 to provide archaeological advisory services and maintenance of the Essex Historic Environment Record, coinciding with the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework. In addition, there has been a significant amount of archaeological fieldwork undertaken in Essex, and this day conference is an opportunity for individuals and organisations to provide an update on the latest historic environment research and discoveries in our county.

Place Services are hosting the upcoming conference at the Essex Record Office. We are working in partnership with The Essex Society for Archaeology and History who will be funding the publication of the conference.

Tickets for the conference will be £40 per person and can be purchased on the Place Services website at www.placeservices.co.uk/conservation-courses/.

Lunch will be provided as part of the ticket price. Tea/coffee will be provided on arrival and at lunch.

Lunch Menu

Lunch will be provided as part of the ticket price. Upon booking, please choose from the options below and inform us of any allergies and/or dietary requirements.

Classic

- 1 round of sandwiches: Cheese & Pickle, Chicken Salad, Ham Salad, Cheese & Ham, on White & Wholemeal bread
- 2x vegetarian quiches, varied fillings
- 2x mini sausage rolls
- Homemade cake & 2x fresh fruit kebabs
- *Contains Egg/Dairy/Mustard/Gluten*

Afternoon Tea

- 1 round of sandwiches: Smoked Salmon with Cream Cheese, Cheddar & Cucumber, Ham & Dijon Mustard, Chicken Salad, on White & Wholemeal bread
- Scone filled with clotted cream & strawberry jam
- Homemade chocolate brownie & homemade lemon drizzle
- Fresh strawberries
- *Contains Egg/Dairy/Mustard/Gluten*

Gluten/Dairy Free Afternoon Tea

- 2 white gluten free rolls with fillings of your choice – please specify when ordering. Dairy free spread used as standard
- Gluten free vegan brownie
- Gluten free/dairy free lemon drizzle
- Fresh strawberries
- *Contains Egg*

Vegetarian

- 1 spinach, avocado, cucumber & parmesan wrap with mayonnaise
- 2x vegetarian quiches, varied fillings
- 2x spring rolls
- Homemade cake & 2x fresh fruit kebabs
- *Contains Dairy/Gluten/Egg/Mustard/Soya*

Vegan

- 1 humous, roasted pepper and lettuce wrap
- 2x spring rolls
- 2x Indian samosas
- Homemade vegan brownie & 2x fresh fruit kebabs
- *Contains Gluten/Sesame/Soya*

Spicy

- 1 chicken tikka wrap with salad, yoghurt & mint dressing
- 2x vegetable samosas
- 2x spicy chicken bites
- Homemade cake & 2x fresh fruit kebabs
- *Contains Egg/Dairy/Mustard/Gluten/Soya*

Programme

- 09:00- 09:30** **Registration**
- 09:35** **Conference Introduction and a Place Services update**
Tim Murphy, Place Services
- 09:45** **ESAH at 175 – where next?**
Philip Wise, President, Essex Society for Archaeology and History
- 10:00** **Enhancing Essex’s Historic Environment Record**
Alice Cattermole
- 10:25** **Fuels in the Funerary Process**
Dr Lucy Allott, UCL Archaeology South-East
- 10:50** **Recent excavations on the A12**
Ailsa Westgarth, Headland Archaeology
- 11:15** **Break**
- 11:30** **Middle Pleistocene environments and landscapes between Witham and Mark’s Tey: New evidence**
Professor Martin Bates, University of Wales Trinity Saint David
- 11:55** **Beautiful Bodies? A late Iron Age burial with toilet equipment from Coleman’s Farm Quarry, Essex in context**
Charlotte Burn and Michael Marshall, Museum of London Archaeology
- 12:20** **The Roman Essex Landscape: New aspects of its settlement and utilisation**
Maria Medlycott
- 12:50** **Lunch:** There will be an opportunity to view stands of various organisations in the breakout rooms
- 13:30** **Revisiting Colchester: New Discoveries and Public Engagement, 2008-2025**
Adam Wightman, Colchester Archaeological Trust
- 14:15** **Late Saxon rural settlements in the Essex landscape**
Thea Botha, UCL Archaeology South-East
- 14:55** **Break**
- 15:15** **Medieval charcoal production and early post-medieval brick kilns, Great Horkesley**
Graeme Clarke, Oxford Archaeology

- 15:40** **Weeley Barracks: Waiting for Napoleon's war on the Essex coast**
Nick Cox, Oxford Archaeology
- 16:05** **Industrial Archaeology & Heritage in Essex**
Tony Crosby, Essex Industrial Archaeology Group
- 16:40** **Essex Timber Frame Buildings**
David Andrews
- 17:10** **Close**

10:00 Enhancing Essex's Historic Environment Record

Alice Cattermole, Place Services

The Essex Historic Environment Record (HER) brings together information about Essex's historic environment in a comprehensive database with linked mapping held in a Geographic Information System. The Essex HER is a dynamic and constantly evolving resource and covers all subjects and periods of human history and prehistory, from the Palaeolithic through to the modern day.

Over the last two years Place Services has undertaken a programme of systematic HER enhancement, ensuring that all of the information in the HER is accurate and accessible. The project team has systematically enhanced and summarised over 40,000 existing records and integrated new information from over 12,000 records formerly held at the National Monuments Record. All of the linked mapped data has also been enhanced and updated.

This work ensures that as HERs gain statutory status via the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, the Essex HER is fit for purpose and contains high-quality, reliable information for anyone who is interested in Essex's past.

Alice Cattermole

Alice is a freelance Heritage Consultant based in the East of England. Alice is an experienced project manager with particular expertise in heritage data management. She has worked for numerous HERs across the UK and recently wrote the UK HER Manual. Alice manages the Essex HER Enhancement Project for Place Services overseeing the work of the team and providing quality assurance.

10:25 Fuels in the Funerary Process

Dr Lucy Allott, Archaeology South-East

Drawing on data from excavations across Essex this paper will consider the environmental evidence from funerary features with specific focus on wood fuels in cremation burials. The bulk of archaeological evidence spans the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age (e.g. Stane Park, Stanway) to the Early Saxon period (e.g. Springfield Lyons) although there is scope for this to be extended, as demonstrated by the Oxford Archaeology discovery of cremated bone at Langford that has been dated to the Mesolithic (Gilmour and Loe 2015). The paper will present the results of current research that seeks to draw out nuances within the charcoal data to move beyond the obvious dominance of oak as a funerary fuel. It will seek to recognise patterns and consider the significance of the less abundant taxa, and in doing so will examine spatial and temporal distributions of the data. Issues regarding dating and recognition of funerary features will be considered to help define directions and targets for future research.

Dr Lucy Allott

After completing a PhD on palaeoenvironments and vegetation using archaeological wood charcoal in South Africa, Lucy began working for Archaeology South-East in 2005. Dr Allott specialises in analysis of archaeological charcoal, wood and plant macrofossils and particularly enjoys working with colleagues and external specialists to draw together multiproxy data to produce detailed environmental reports. Recent work at Whitechapel in London, provides a good example of this with involvement of many different specialists in pollen, insects, dendrochronology, wood technology, charcoal, plant macrofossils and geoarchaeology which has enabled an exploration of the conditions and influences on post-Medieval occupants of the site.

10:50 Recent excavations on the A12

Ailsa Westgarth, Headland Archaeology

Findings from the recent archaeological works alongside the A12. This was an opportunity to study a slice of landscape through successive phases of archaeological investigation works, in advance of the proposed A12 upgrade. This revealed a rich tapestry of human activity within the landscape. A series of Geophysical survey, trial trench evaluations and excavations have found evidence of occupation and land use dating from the Neolithic to the modern period, including Bronze Age cremation burials, Iron Age settlement and burial practises, Roman and Medieval agricultural use. Does this evidence suggest that the A12 corridor has been an integral route way throughout most of human history?

Ailsa Westgarth

Ailsa is a Project Manager at Headland Archaeology. She has worked in commercial archaeology across Scotland, the Midlands, south-east and northern England.

Her archaeological experience has included a wide variety of site and project types spanning all periods from the Middle Palaeolithic to modern industrial activity. Key sites have included a section of Hadrian's Wall, a large late Saxon cemetery in Oxfordshire and a multi period settlement site in Edinburgh.

Ailsa also has experience working within large construction projects on the strategic planning and delivery of Social Value and Community Benefit contractual clauses as detailed by the Social Value and Public Procurement Acts.

11:30 Middle Pleistocene environments and landscapes between Witham and Mark's Tey: New evidence

Professor Martin Bates, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Evaluating stratified Pleistocene sediments for Palaeolithic archaeology as part of development led assessment and mitigation programs has become more common in the last 10 years. It is now common for geoarchaeological investigations to be undertaken in conjunction with conventional evaluation for later Prehistoric and Historic archaeology. However, the undertaking of significant phases of mitigation for Palaeolithic archaeology is still uncommon on many projects. The reasons for this disconnect between evaluation and mitigation are perhaps many and include misconceptions of what constitutes a successful investigation, a lack of standardised methodology for undertaking evaluation of sites, a lack of specialist Palaeolithic and Pleistocene geoarchaeologists in the contract units and a fundamental lack of specialist knowledge by consultants about the Palaeolithic resource. Linked to these issues are practical issues concerning accessing what are often deeply buried sequences between 2 and 8m below the ground surface (in most cases).

The issues confronting us as practitioners are investigated in this talk by reference to work the author has undertaken (with many others) alongside the line of the A12 in Essex between Witham and Marks Tey over the last 15 years. These works have demonstrated the complex nature of the Pleistocene deposits of the region and are used to illustrate the key problems facing the practicality of undertaking Palaeolithic archaeological survey in Essex and elsewhere in southern England.

Professor Martin Bates

Professor Bates is a geoarchaeologist who has had 3 threads to his career; teaching, research and contract archaeology. He has been active in contract archaeology in southern England since the early 1990's and has played key roles in a number of major infrastructure projects in the past including HS1, Terminal 5, Shellhaven port development, Sizewell C Power Station and Crossrail. Ongoing projects include developing the Palaeolithic strategy for the proposed Lower Thames Crossing road and tunnel. Presently he is involved in a number of research projects. The archaeology of submerged landscapes is an on-going area of interest and he is part of a team looking at submerged landscapes in the southern North Sea, around the Bay of Firth and the Loch of Stenness in Orkney and Cardigan Bay in West Wales. Professor Bates is the project geoarchaeologist on the Europe's Lost Frontiers project; examining submerged landscapes of the southern North Sea. Additionally, he is the project geoarchaeologist for the Ice Age Island project in Jersey and co-leads a new multi-disciplinary research excavation at La Cotte de St. Brelade in Jersey. He is also working as project geoarchaeologist in Tanzania and Qatar. Professor Bates has also worked as a geoarchaeologist on projects in Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Iran.

11:55 Beautiful Bodies? A late Iron Age burial with toilet equipment from Coleman's Farm Quarry, Essex in context

Charlotte Burn and Michael Marshall, Museum of London Archaeology

Recent archaeological fieldwork, undertaken by MOLA at Coleman's Farm Quarry, near Witham, has recovered evidence for Late Iron Age enclosures and burials. The most remarkable burial is a richly furnished Aylesford-Swarling type cremation, dating to the early 1st century AD and containing two deposits of human remains, imported pottery, brooches, a mirror, a three-piece toilet set and a comb. The toilet equipment is especially notable as it represents one of the most complete sets yet recovered from any grave in Iron Age Britain, comprised of a mixture of traditional, cutting-edge and rare types of grooming tool. Decorated Iron Age mirrors belong to a lived insular tradition, most often recovered from burials, but in the south-east, they largely disappeared after the 1st century BC. This example was buried a generation or more later, at around the time that Roman-style mirrors were becoming more common in the area. The toilet set belongs to a tradition that was gaining popularity in the area in the late Iron Age, perhaps encouraged by cross-channel connections with communities on the Continent. The comb belongs to a group that is very rare in Britain and this is the first example from a secure archaeological context in England. The burial and its contents will be placed in its regional and national context and its implications for the changing treatment of bodies, both living and dead, will be explored.

Charlotte Burn

Charlotte is an experienced pottery specialist and carries out the recording, analysis, and reporting for Roman assemblages from London. She has also expanded her expertise into Iron Age pottery and regional pottery from both periods, including Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Essex and Oxfordshire.

Charlotte began working in the field team at MOLA in 2011 and became a Roman pottery trainee in 2013. She was part of the team who recorded and analysed the 2.9 tonnes of pottery from the Bloomberg London excavations. She has experience working with pottery assemblages that require scientific analysis such as thin-section and Organic Residue Analysis (lipids and derived C14 dates).

Michael Marshall

Michael Marshall is an artefact specialist and finds team leader at MOLA. He has been working in developer funded archaeology since 2010 and his main area of expertise is Iron Age and Roman archaeology.

12:20 The Roman Essex Landscape: New aspects of its settlement and utilisation

Maria Medlycott

The presentation will build on the previous understanding of the Essex landscape by analysing the results of the many excavations that have taken place since 2008. In particular it will look at the density of Roman occupation in Essex, the interconnectedness of settlements and farms, spatial distribution within farms, including the location of burials and industrial areas. This will consider whether this relates to status and scale of the individual holding, changes to landscape over time, in particular the impact of newly-founded towns on their rural hinterland, the agricultural economy and the new discoveries associated with the salt industry along the coast. The intention will be to provide future researchers with a 'state-of-the-nation' understanding of our current knowledge of the Essex landscape, together with type-sites, to enable them to see whether new discoveries fit within the current understanding or present a different aspect of the settlement of Roman Essex, future research aims will also be identified.

Maria Medlycott

Maria is an archaeologist of 39 years professional experience, specialising in landscape history, both urban and rural. She was formerly a Senior Historic Environment Consultant at Place Services providing historic environment advice to local planning authorities, as well as working on historic environment and landscape projects for a range of public and private clients. Maria wrote the previous Roman chapter for the 2008 conference, she also led and edited the 2011 Regional Research Frameworks for the East of England.

13:30 Revisiting Colchester: New Discoveries and Public Engagement, 2008-2025

Adam Wightman, Colchester Archaeological Trust

Since the last Essex Archaeology conference in 2008, archaeological work in and around Colchester has continued at pace. Developer-led projects, targeted research, and new scientific analyses have generated a wealth of evidence that has significantly deepened our understanding of Camulodunum and its later history. Recent investigations have shed light on the origins of the oppidum, the layout and growth of the legionary fortress and colonia, funerary practices, and the transformation of the built environment from the Roman period through to the modern day.

This paper will present an overview of the key discoveries made between 2008 and 2025, drawing largely on excavations and specialist studies undertaken by the Colchester Archaeological Trust. Following the structure of previous Colchester reviews, it will highlight major themes including town origins, burial, public buildings, and urban infrastructure. It will consider how modern scientific techniques and specialist analyses have provided new insights into the lives of Colchester's inhabitants.

Finally, the paper will reflect on the role of public engagement in shaping the legacy of these discoveries. Through the Roman Circus Visitor Centre, exhibitions, lectures, an open-access online report library, and community projects, Colchester's archaeology has been made accessible to a wide audience. In this way, the past seventeen years of work have not only advanced research but also strengthened the connection between Colchester's heritage and its community.

Adam Wightman

Adam Wightman (MA, MCIfA) is Director of Archaeology at the Colchester Archaeological Trust, where he leads the charity's fieldwork, research, and public engagement activities. He has overseen major excavations in and around Colchester for over 20 years and is particularly interested in how discoveries are shared with both academic audiences and the wider community. Through the Roman Circus Visitor Centre, public lectures, and exhibitions, he works to make Colchester's heritage accessible and relevant. His current research focuses on recent excavations and their contribution to understanding Colchester's long history.

14:15 Late Saxon rural settlements in the Essex landscape

Thea Botha, UCL Archaeology South-East

The archaeological evidence for later Saxon rural settlements has been conspicuously sparse until relatively recently, comprising only a few well-known ‘thegnly’ sites such as Wicken Bonhunt and Springfield Lyons and farmsteads found at Stansted Airport. However, recent fieldwork has identified a number of new such sites that are beginning to provide clearer insights into their form, if not their function or status. These more recent discoveries – principally at Harlow Innovation Park, Westcombe Park Heybridge, Rivenhall End Witham and Colchester Road Coggeshall – will be explored, with their significance for the improved understanding of the Late Saxon rural landscape considered. The issues of detection and recognition and the problems of identifying function and status will be discussed along the way.

Thea Botha

Before joining Archaeology South-East in 2023, Thea completed an archaeology degree at both the University of Exeter and University of Malta then worked for CFA Archaeology Ltd for two and a half years as an archaeologist participating in fieldwork projects across England. Thea specialises in stratigraphic analysis and enjoys collating data with colleagues to further refine interpretation and dating of archaeological features and sites. The excavations at Powers Farm, Little Waltham and at Rivenhall End, Witham have been recent highlights, giving Thea the opportunity to explore and interpret complex multi-phase archaeological remains, the latter in particular providing new insights into Late Saxon/early Medieval settlement types in Essex.

15:15 Medieval charcoal production and early post-medieval brick kilns, Great Horkesley

Graeme Clarke, Oxford Archaeology

Archaeological investigations within the once-forested environment of *Cestrewald*, located a few kilometres to the north of Colchester, have periodically unearthed charcoal-making pits—or pit kilns—dating from the Iron Age, Romano-British and earlier medieval periods; charcoal being a key fuel for iron production. A further group of these features, recently excavated in fields surrounding Great Horkesley Manor east of Nayland Road, has been securely radiocarbon dated to the c.12th–13th century AD. During the early post-medieval period, this area continued to be a focus for industry with the establishment of several brick-built kilns. Probably dating from the 16th century, the excavated group of at least three brick kilns and one possible tile kiln may represent a precursor to the Great Horkesley Brickworks which operated west of Nayland Road until the 1870s.

Graeme Clarke

Graeme graduated from the University of Edinburgh in 1998 with a degree in Archaeological Science. Graeme has worked with Oxford Archaeology for the past 17 years, recently as a Post-Excavation Project Officer and now as a Post-Excavation Project Manager. He has had involvement in many commercial fieldwork projects across East Anglia and this has led to a keen interest in the region's history and prehistory. In the last few years he has spent time undertaking analysis and preparing publications on various excavations including the early medieval salt-making industry of King's Lynn, medieval charcoal-making in Great Horkesley, Essex, a Middle Anglo-Saxon estate centre at Buckden, Cambridgeshire, and investigations into the archaeology of urban sites in Norwich and Ipswich.

15:40 Weeley Barracks: Waiting for Napoleon's war on the Essex coast

Nick Cox, Oxford Archaeology

During 2021 and early 2022, Oxford Archaeology carried out excavations in a field on the outskirts of Weeley ahead of a new residential development, with a clue to its hidden past provided by its previous name *The Barracks*.

Research had shown that over 4,000 officers, soldiers and their families were stationed at the site between 1803 and 1815, waiting and preparing for a possible French invasion.

The archaeological team went on to discover not only the outline of the camp, but also many personal objects that told the stories of soldiers who were stationed there.

Working with the local community who shared information, memories and stories helped bring the site back to life. Veterans from Operation Nightingale ('Operation Sharpe') also worked alongside the Oxford Archaeology team and added their experiences of military life - some former soldiers used to belong to the same regiments that were stationed at the site in the early 19th century.

The excavation of the Napoleonic era barracks is significant as it represents the first time a temporary military barracks of this type has been investigated archaeologically, the results of which have been significantly enhanced by historical research.

Nick Cox

Nick Cox is a Project Officer for Oxford Archaeology. He graduated from Bradford University in 2008 and has since worked continuously in commercial field archaeology, predominantly in the south and east of England.

16:05 Industrial Archaeology & Heritage in Essex

Tony Crosby, Essex Industrial Archaeology Group

This presentation will begin with an update on the ECC Industrial Surveys since 2008 (or just before) and discussing some of the outcomes: recommendations regarding Listings, Conservation Area enhancements and Local Heritage Lists, both the successful ones and those of significance not implemented. Reference will also be made to published articles which summarise some of the key findings from the surveys, and to the up-dates in the EIAG newsletter on further sites discovered since the Surveys such as Industrial Housing linked to Marconi. Examples of recent work on industrial sites by Essex County Council (Beaumont Quay, Wickham Bishops Viaduct, ECC Mills, etc.) and by voluntary societies such as on windmills in Thaxted, Stansted, and Upminster will be covered. The presentation will then move onto the formation of EIAG in 2013 and its impact so far – commenting on planning applications, supporting grant applications, producing publications, holding Industrial Heritage Fairs and other events such as the John Booker anniversary, plus supporting events held by other groups. It will highlight the continuing excellent work of other societies such as Bata Heritage, Silver End Heritage, and the Halstead Society, and of the industrial museums in the County. Looking to the future, there is the need for further Thematic Surveys, especially 20th century industries which are rapidly changing, and the research which is in progress at present. The lack of coverage of the industrial period in the Regional Research Frameworks will also be outlined.

Tony Crosby

In the 1990s Tony studied Industrial Archaeology at the Ironbridge Institute. Since graduating he has undertaken historic surveys of industries and individual buildings on industrial sites in Hertfordshire and Essex. Tony has published several articles in *Industrial Archaeology Review*, other history journals and has contributed to four books. He has recently stepped down as a Council member of the Association for Industrial Archaeology, having been a former Chairman of the AIA. He is currently Chairman of the Essex Industrial Archaeology Group and Council member of the Essex Society for Archaeology and History. Tony retired from the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2013 where he was a policy advisor on industrial, maritime and transport heritage.

16:40 Essex Timber Frame Buildings

David Andrews

Over the last 50 years, the vernacular architecture of Essex has been extensively researched. It has been revolutionised by Cecil Hewett's understanding of carpentry joints and more recently by tree-ring dating, which has made it possible to create a reliable chronological framework for change over time. This talk will present the picture which has emerged, from excavated evidence for timber buildings through to the variations on the medieval open hall house to the new developments that took place in the early modern period.

David Andrews

David Andrews worked for 30 years as an archaeologist and conservation officer at Essex County Council.

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