

LOCAL GEOLOGICAL SITES

BRAINTREE DISTRICT



BraG14 Great Yeldham Brickworks (site of)

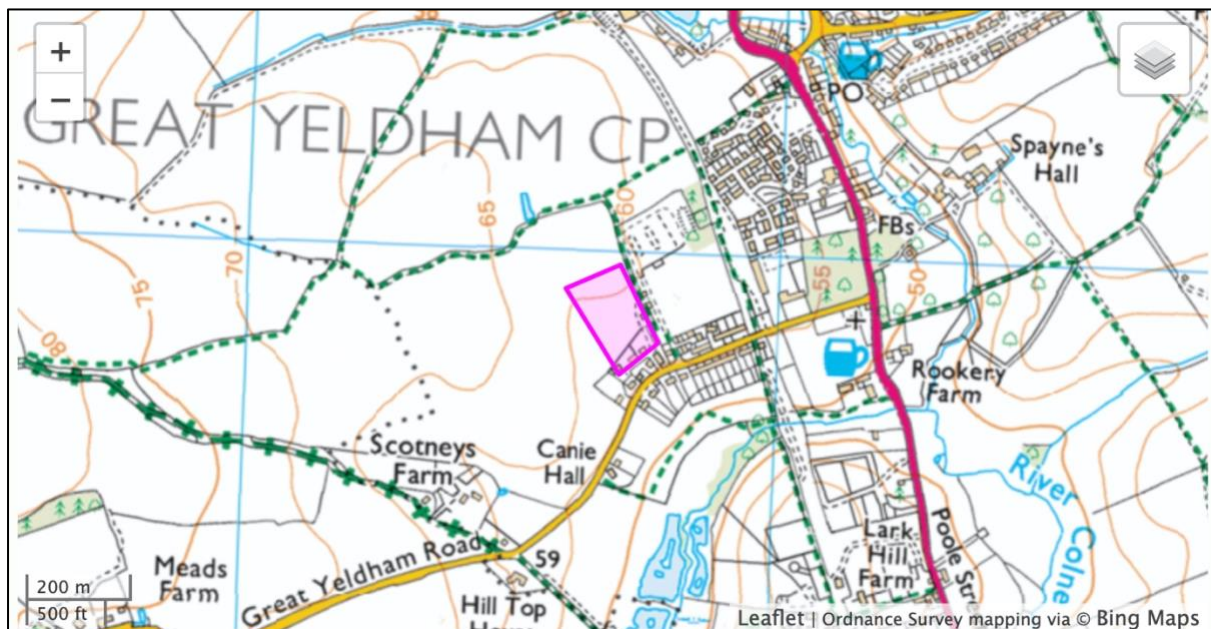
Site location: Site of former brickworks on the western side of Great Yeldham.

Grid Reference: TL 757 379

Status: On farming land next to public footpath to the east of a sportsground

Summary of the geological interest:

Site of nineteenth century brickworks (closed in 1920) where significant amounts of ice age mammalian fossils were found.



Site Assessment. Local Geological Sites (LoGS) in Essex are assessed using criteria based on DEFRA guidance. An assessment form is used which asks key questions under four value categories: scientific, educational, historical and aesthetic. This site has been assessed and qualifies under these criteria.

Scientific interest and site importance:

In the late nineteenth century workmen at a brickworks about 200 metres west of the former Great Yeldham railway station reported finding fossils of ice age mammals from the brickearth which included the bones of brown bear, rhinoceros and elephant. This discovery makes Great Yeldham one of the most interesting fossil localities in north Essex but, as the brickworks closed in 1920, very little is known about the geology of site, or the possible age of the fossils.

In 1896 a report in the journal *Essex Naturalist* described a visit to the works and to the nearby home of a Mr. Wade of Spaynes Hall who had formed a large collection of fossils from the brick pit. There were fragments of red deer antlers, bones of roe deer, teeth of brown bear, jaw bones of narrow-nosed rhinoceros, teeth of straight-tusked elephant, and teeth and bones of wild ox. Many of the fossils were subsequently donated to the Geological Museum in London (now part of the Natural History Museum). William Whitaker in the *Geological Survey Memoir* of 1878 describes an earlier visit

and remarks that some bones had been split open (?for the sake of their marrow) but there is no record of flint tools or any other evidence of human occupation at this site during the time these animal were alive.

The age of the fossils is difficult to determine but from the fauna present it is thought that they most probably date from the Purfleet interglacial period (Marine Isotope Stage 9) which makes them about 300,000 years old.

The site is now restored to arable farming land.

Reference: Whitaker 1878 (p.68), Holmes 1896 (p.115-118), Wymer 1985 (p.202), Ryan 1999 (p.115)



*Site of Great Yeldham Brickworks - looking SW
across field at TL757379 (photo D Potts 2024)*