

**An archaeological watching brief at  
Sheepen, Colchester, Essex  
November-December 2003**

**report prepared by  
Ben Holloway**

**on behalf of  
Colchester Borough Council**

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## **Contents**

1	Summary	1
2	Introduction	1
3	Archaeological background	1
4	Aim	1
5	The footpath	1
6	Results	2
7	Finds	2
8	Discussion	3
9	Archive deposition	3
10	Acknowledgements	4
11	References	4
12	Glossary	4
13	Site data	4

Figures after p 5

EHCR summary sheet

## **1 Summary**

Observations were made during a watching brief along the route of a new footpath crossing Sheepen and extending 700m across 'Hilly Fields' between Sussex Road and Sheepen Road in Colchester, Essex. No archaeological features were recorded during the construction of the new footpath.

## **2 Introduction**

- 2.1** This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief carried out on behalf of Colchester Borough Council at Sheepen, Colchester, Essex during the construction of a new footpath crossing Hilly Fields between Sussex Road (NGR TL 984 253) and Sheepen Road (NGR TL 988 275).
- 2.2** The work was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between the 13th November and the 4th December 2003.
- 2.3** All fieldwork was done in accordance with a specification agreed with the Archaeology Officer of Colchester Borough Council. This report mirrors standards and practices contained in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines for the standards and practice of archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1999) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996, updated 2002), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1999).

## **3 Archaeological background**

The new footpath crosses the scheduled ancient monument of Sheepen, one of the foci of the pre-Roman fortress Camulodunum, a late Iron Age settlement and industrial centre established by the British and maintained in the years after the Roman conquest (Scheduled Ancient Monument or SAM no 46). Extensive excavations in the 1930s and smaller-scale work in 1970 and later have produced evidence of workshops engaged in a range of industrial activities including metal-working, enamelling, pottery making and leather-working in the areas to the north of the site (Hawkes & Hull 1947; Niblett 1985). Two Roman temples (Essex Sites and Monuments Record or SMR nos 13126-13127) have also been recorded to the north of Sheepen, one of which (Temple 2) is located partially under the buildings of St Helena School.

In the post-medieval period, temporary siege works and fortifications were constructed by the Parliamentarian troops surrounding the Royalist force within the walled town during the 1648 siege of Colchester. These works crossed Hilly Fields and included a small fort (fort x in Crummy 1998). None of these siege works are visible today. The site of fort x is crossed by the new footpath.

## **4 Aim**

The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological remains that were exposed during the construction of the new footpath and to assess the quality and extent of any remains that were encountered.

## **5 The footpath**

The route of the new footpath was constructed in three sections. Sections 1 and 3 were excavated in strips 2.5m wide and between 150mm and 200mm deep. Section 2 of the route was not excavated as the ground-level over this section of the footpath route was being raised. The excavated sections of the path were dug by a JCB excavator using a toothless ditching bucket.

## 6 Results

Section 1 was excavated through modern topsoil (layer or L1) and into subsoil L3 to its finished depth of 150mm-200mm. Part of an existing modern footpath (L2) was observed during the excavation of this first section.

Section 3, as with Section 1, was excavated through modern topsoil L1 and in places subsoil L2 down to its finished depth of 150mm-200mm. In parts of Section 3, a layer of hogging (L4) was encountered. This hogging is likely to be associated with the time when the area was terraced and used as a sports field.

## 7 Finds

### 7.1 Contexts

The finds from the watching brief were recovered from L1 modern topsoil and were picked up or metal-detected from the spoil heap.

**Table 1: Bulk finds list.**

Finds no	Layer no	Feature no	Context	Description	Weight (g)
1	L1	-	Post-medieval topsoil	Pot	35
2	L1	-	Post-medieval topsoil	Pot	17
3	U/S	U/S	-	Iron nails	10
4	L1	-	Post-medieval topsoil	Pot	30
4	L1	-	Post-medieval topsoil	Peg-tile	38
5	L1	-	Post-medieval topsoil	Iron nails	15
7	L1	-	Post-medieval topsoil	Post-medieval pot	31
10	L1	-	Post-medieval topsoil	Post-medieval pot	24
13	L1	-	Post-medieval topsoil	Iron nails	20
14	L1	-	Post-medieval topsoil	Iron nails	18

### 7.2 The small finds and bulk iron

by Nina Crummy

The objects in this small assemblage all derive from post-medieval topsoil, and the majority are likely to be of post-medieval date. One of the nails may come from a horseshoe and, if so, could be medieval (context 13, no 1), but its head is damaged making the identification only tentative. The lead musket ball (SF 1) may relate to military activity during the civil war, and the button (SF 2) may also be military though it is probably later than 17th century. The function of the lead fitting (SF 5) is unclear. It is unlikely to have been used as a funnel as the perforation through the shank is too small and irregular to have allowed easy passage even to liquids. It does, however, bear some resemblance to simple medieval and early post-medieval iron, lead-alloy and copper-alloy candleholders (Egan 1998, 135-45; Ottaway & Rogers 2002, 2855-9).

SF 1. (6) L1. Post-medieval topsoil. Lead shot, diameter 17.5 mm, weight 22 g. The ball is indented where it has struck a right-angled object. Shot of this diameter was used in muskets (Credland 1983, 261).

SF 5. (12) L1. Post-medieval topsoil. Lead-alloy fitting, length 34 mm, consisting of an open socket (now flattened), and shaft of elliptical section. The original diameter of the socket was probably about 19 mm, the shank tapers from a maximum of 13 mm to one of 8 mm. The end of the shank is blunt and has a small central perforation, measuring 3 by 1 mm. The identification of this object is uncertain; it may be a crude candleholder.

SF 2. (8) L1. Post-medieval topsoil. Copper-alloy button with damaged integral rear loop for attachment; probably originally tinned. Diameter 17 mm, height 5 mm.

SF 3. (9) L1. Post-medieval topsoil. Cast copper-alloy object, broken at each end. Both ends are broken, one across a probable perforation, the other across a dished area. The central section is waisted. Length 27 mm, maximum width 17 mm, thickness 9 mm.

SF 4. (11) L1. Post-medieval topsoil. Small fragment of hard copper-bearing material, weight 13 g; either copper-ore, or waste debris from smelting.

SF 6. (15) L1. Post-medieval topsoil. Curved iron object, the ends thicker than the central section, which may be damaged. There is no obvious means of attachment. Length 69 mm, width at terminals 20-21 mm, width at centre 13 mm, average thickness 11 mm.

SF 7. (16) L1. Post-medieval topsoil. Fragment of a stout iron bar, each end slightly thickened; possibly a bolt or similar fitting. Length 72 mm, diameter 20 mm.

(4) L1. Post-medieval topsoil. Iron nail with flat round head, tip missing. Length 35 mm.

(5) L1. Post-medieval topsoil. Two iron nails, each with small round flat head and tip missing. Lengths 47 and 39 mm.

(13) L1. Post-medieval topsoil. 1) Iron nail with damaged head, tip missing; probably a horseshoe nail. Length 31 mm. 2) Iron nail with damaged head, tip missing. Length 48 mm. 3) Iron shank with thinner expanded end; probably not a nail. Length 33 mm.

(14) L1. Post-medieval topsoil. Iron nail shank fragment. Length 32 mm.

### 7.3 Other finds

Other finds recovered from the watching brief consist of pottery and peg-tile. Both Roman and post-Roman pottery are represented. There are three sherds of Roman pottery weighing 30g, consisting of Roman coarse grey ware of a type that is common throughout Colchester and the surrounding area. There are two sherds of post-Roman pottery, consisting of one sherd of post-medieval red earthenware and one sherd of a stoneware vessel. It is possible that this post-Roman pottery is associated with Civil War siege works of 1648 that were constructed at Sheepen.

## 8 Discussion

During the watching brief on the construction of the new footpath, no archaeological features were observed in the sections that were excavated. This is due to the shallow nature of the excavated sections (a maximum depth of 200mm), and also to the fact that the area has been heavily disturbed in the recent past with terracing and importation of topsoil. The finds that were recovered are mostly post-medieval in date and may be associated with the Parliamentary siege works constructed at Sheepen during the 1648 siege of Colchester in the Civil War.

## 9 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but it will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2003.269.

## 10 Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to Colchester Borough Council for funding the work and to Promac Surfacing for their co-operation on site.

The fieldwork was carried out by Laura Pooley, Kate Orr and Ben Holloway.

## 11 References

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## 12 Glossary

context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
medieval	period from AD 1066 to Henry VIII
modern	period from the 19th century onwards to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
post-medieval	after Henry VIII to around the late 18th century
Victorian	period from 1837 to 1901

## 13 Site data

### 13.1 Site context list

Location	Context	Description	Context date
Sections 1/3	L1	Topsoil	modern
Section 1	L2	Modern path	modern
Sections 1/3	L3	Subsoil	modern/post-medieval
Section 3	L4	Hogging	modern

### 13.2 Soil descriptions

Location	Context	Description
Sections 1/3	L1	Dark brown silty loam with occasional small stones, root/animal activity.
Section 1	L2	Black asphalt.
Sections 1/3	L3	Yellowish brown sandy silt.
Section 3	L4	Orange coarse sand with occasional gravel.

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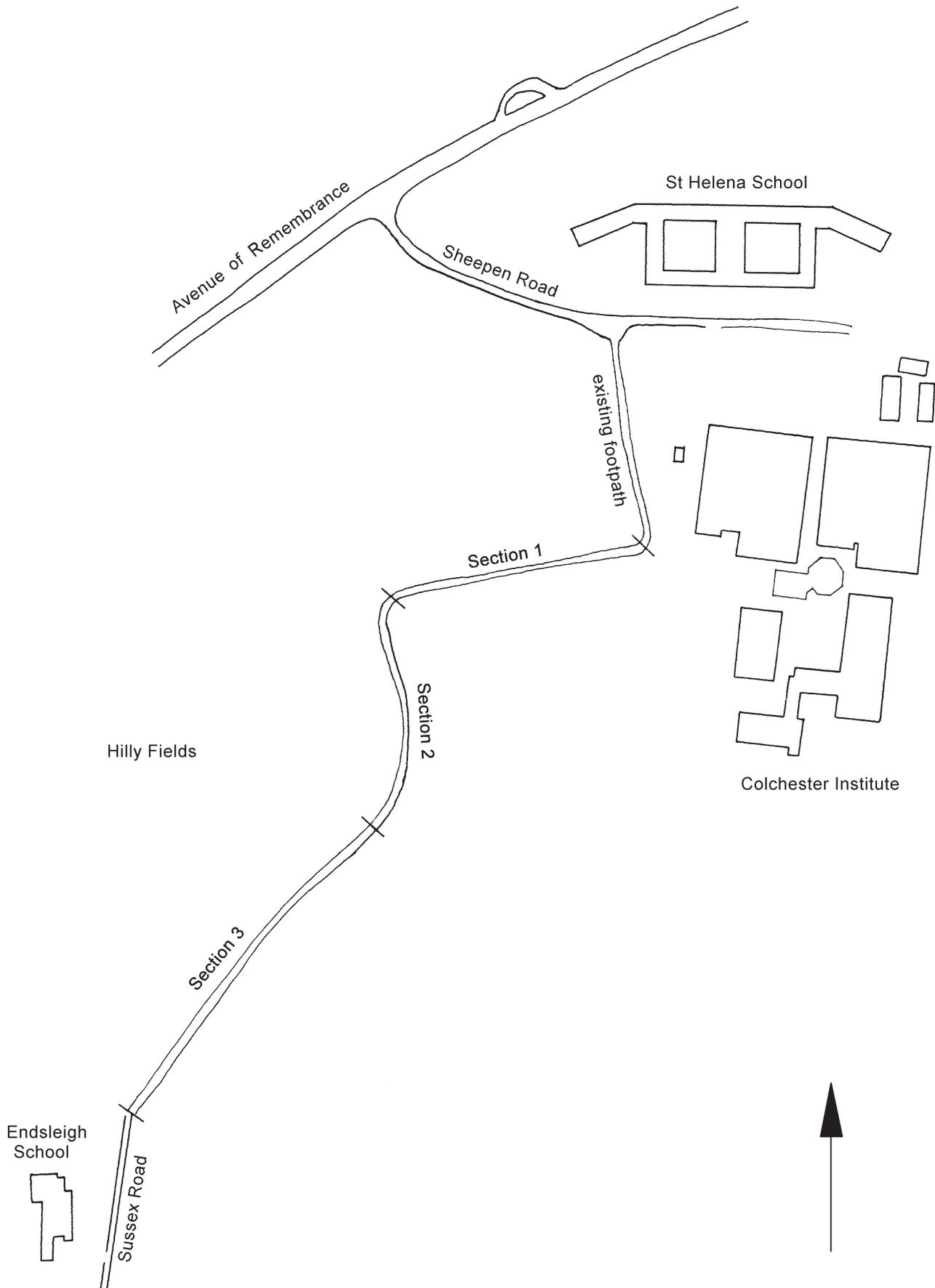


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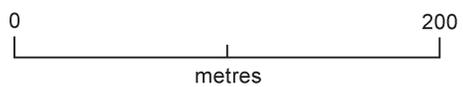
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**Fig 1 Site location, showing footpath.**



**Essex Heritage Conservation Record/  
Essex Archaeology and History**

**Summary sheet**

<b>Site address:</b> Sheepen, Colchester, Essex (footpath between Sussex Road and Sheepen Road)	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester
<b>NGR:</b> TL 984 253-TL 988 257	<b>Site code:</b> Museum accession 2003.269
<b>Type of work:</b> Watching brief	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> November- December 2003	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 1750 square metres
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Colchester Borough Council
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related EHCR nos:</b> 13126-13127, SAM no 46
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 259 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods represented:</b> post-medieval/modern	
<b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b> <i>Observations were made during a watching brief along the route of a new footpath crossing Sheepen and extending 700m across 'Hilly Fields' between Sussex Road and Sheepen Road in Colchester, Essex. No archaeological features were recorded during the construction of the new footpath.</i>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> N/A	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Ben Holloway	<b>Date of summary:</b> 20th January 2004