

**An archaeological watching brief in the car park of  
Grey Friars Adult Community College,  
Colchester, Essex  
January-February 2004**

**report prepared by  
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**commissioned by  
W S Atkins  
on behalf of  
ECC**

CAT project ref.: 04/1E  
Colchester Museums accession code: 2004.95  
NGR: TM 0010 2535



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**CAT Report 264**  
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## 1 Summary

A watching brief was carried out during the excavation of a trench to replace a stretch of wall which forms the north boundary of the car park of Grey Friars Adult Community College. The trench did not disturb any features of archaeological interest. Unlike the evaluation trench of 2003 (CAT Report 219), the trench did reach natural ground. Therefore any features relating to the medieval friary or earlier buildings should have been exposed if they survive here. It may be that the site of the friary buildings does not extend as far north as the northern edge of the car park.

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief carried out in the car park of Grey Friars Adult Community College, High Street, Colchester, Essex during works to replace a stretch of Victorian brick wall along Castle Road. The watching brief was prompted by a proposal by Essex County Council to replace a 33m length of the brick wall with a new wall on fresh foundations.
- 2.2 The site is located within the walled part of the town and close to the town centre at National Grid Reference TM 0010 2535. The section of wall being rebuilt forms the northern boundary of the walled car park, to the north of the buildings of Grey Friars Adult Community College. The car park occupies a slight north-facing slope between the High Street and Castle Road and is surfaced with tarmac.
- 2.3 The work was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between the 23rd January and the 5th February 2004.
- 2.4 All fieldwork was done in accordance with a specification submitted by CAT which followed the brief supplied by 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

- 3.1 The site lies in the north-east corner of the walled town, within what was an *insula* (Insula 24) in the Roman period. This was a street block situated a short distance to the east of the Temple of Claudius, fronting the Roman town's main street and close to the east gate. This *insula* is a relatively unexplored area and very little is known of the nature of Roman activity within the *insula* (Hull 1958). In the vicinity there may well be a previously unknown Roman street lined with buildings, possibly with mosaic or tessellated floors. Remains are likely to be well preserved as the area was open land after the Roman period and has not been developed.
- 3.2 The college takes its name from the friary, which was established here by 1237 and dissolved in 1538 (Urban Archaeological Database or UAD no 13136). At the time of its dissolution, the friary included a hall, infirmary house, chambers, kitchen, bakery, brewery, gardens and four acres of land within the precinct walls. In 1622, a gatehouse still stood in Frere Street (now part of the High Street) with buildings set back from the frontage. Nothing of the medieval establishment appears to have remained by 1847 (*VCH* 9, 306-7). Human skeletons found at Grey Friars are believed to be medieval graves (UAD no 3833).
- 3.3 An archaeological evaluation trench dug in the car park by CAT in 2003 revealed a depth of modern topsoil and probable post-medieval layers down to 1.5m depth. Natural ground was not reached (CAT Report 219).

#### 4 Aim

The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological remains exposed during the construction of the new wall and to assess their quality and extent.

#### 5 Methods

- 5.1 One 450mm-wide trench was dug by contractors along the existing wall line. The depth of the trench was 1.9m. It was dug in sections, shored, and then filled with concrete.
- 5.2 Five visits were made by a CAT archaeologist. It was not possible to enter the trench whilst unshored, although it was possible to inspect the parts of the trench sides not obscured by shoring panels.
- 5.3 Individual records of layers and features were entered on CAT pro-forma recording sheets. Section drawings of layers were made at a scale of 1:10. A plan of the trench was made at 1:20
- 5.4 Finds were registered on CAT record sheets and assigned find numbers according to context. Finds were washed, marked and bagged according to context.
- 5.5 Colour photographs of features were taken with a digital camera and a slide camera.
- 5.6 Spoil heaps were checked for metal artefacts.

#### 6 Description of stratigraphy

The following soil profile was recorded within the trench:

Layer or L1 - 65mm of tarmac with a 65mm-thick sub-base

L2 - a 1.2m-thick layer of mid-dark brown slightly clayey silt with flecks of mortar plus one piece of post-medieval pottery; occasional peg-tile was present throughout this layer. Most of this layer would appear to be a modern build-up of material against the Victorian wall, the pavement on the other side of the wall being 900mm below the tarmac level.

L3 - light brown sandy silt subsoil starting 1.4m below the level of the car park.

L4 - light brown natural sand: this soil profile continued the whole length of the trench until the eastern section. Here the ground was looser and sandier and had the appearance of being modern made-up ground. The trench also intersected part of the evaluation trench which was dug last year (CAT Report 219).

#### 7 Finds

The only finds collected were from L2. Only one fragment of peg-tile was collected. Post-medieval pottery was identified by Howard Brooks of CAT; fabric numbers refer to Cotter 2000.

**Table 1: Finds from L2 (find no 1).**

Description	Date	Weight in g
Peg-tile	medieval to modern	91
Brick fragment	Roman	165
Post-medieval red earthenware pottery (Fabric 40)	17th-18th century	8

## 8 Discussion

The trench did not disturb any features of archaeological interest, although, unlike the evaluation trench of 2003, the trench did reach natural ground. Therefore any features relating to the medieval friary or earlier buildings should have been exposed if they survive here. It would appear that the friary buildings did not extend this far north.

## 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 2004.95.

## 10 Acknowledgements

The Trust would like to thank W S Atkins Consultants Ltd for commissioning and Essex County Council for funding the work, and Grey Friars Adult Community College for allowing access to the site. The fieldwork was carried out by Kate Orr.

## 11 References

- |                |      |   |
|----------------|------|---|
| CAT Report 219 | 2003 | An archaeological evaluation in the car park of Greyfriars Community College, Castle Road, Colchester, Essex, unpublished CAT archive report, by Kate Orr, 2003 |
| Cotter, J      | 2000 | <i>Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85</i> , Colchester Archaeological Report <b>7</b>   |
| Hull, M R      | 1958 | <i>Roman Colchester</i> , RRCSAL, <b>20</b>   |
| VCH <b>9</b>   | 1984 | <i>The Victoria History of the County of Essex</i> , <b>9</b> , ed by J Cooper  |

## 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

**Table 2: list of contexts.**

Context	Description	Context date
L1	Tarmac and sandy rubble sub-base	modern
L2	Mid to dark brown slightly clayey silt with occasional peg tile and flecks of mortar	modern
L3	Light brown sandy silt subsoil	modern/post-medieval
L4	Light brown natural sand	natural

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### **Distribution list:**

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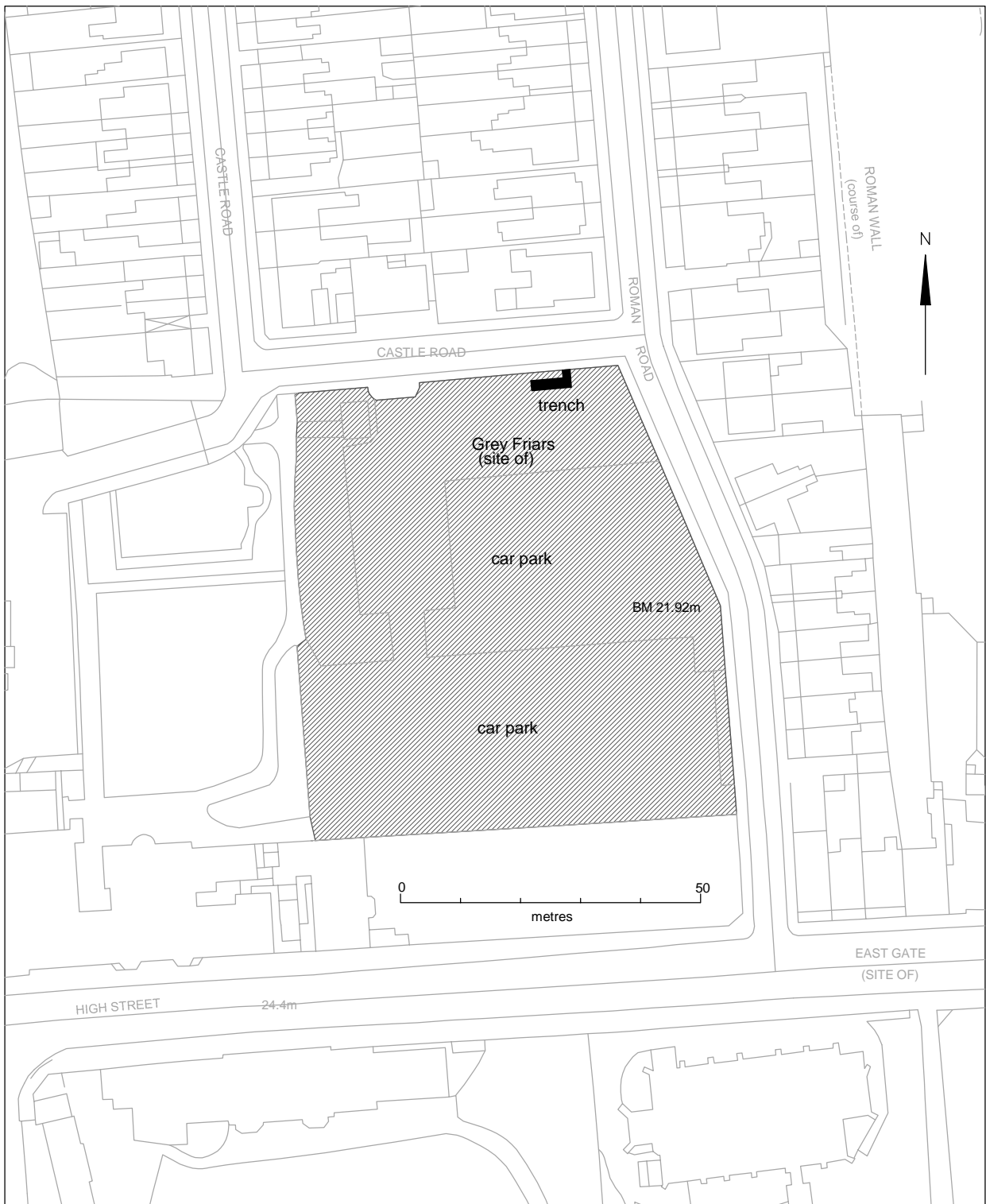


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Fig 1 Site location.

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

## Summary sheet

<b>Site address:</b> the car park, Grey Friars Adult Community College, High Street, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester
<b>NGR:</b> TM 0010 2535	<b>Site code:</b> Museum accession code 2004.95
<b>Type of work:</b> Watching brief	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> January-February 2004	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 33m long, 455mm wide trench
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Essex County Council
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related EHCR nos:</b> UAD nos 13138 & 3833
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 264 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods represented:</b> None	
<b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b> <i>A watching brief was carried out during the excavation of a trench to replace a stretch of wall which forms the north boundary of the car park of Grey Friars Adult Community College. The trench did not disturb any features of archaeological interest. Unlike the evaluation trench of 2003 (CAT Report 219), the trench did reach natural ground. Therefore any features relating to the medieval friary or earlier buildings should have been exposed if they survive here. It may be that the site of the friary buildings does not extend as far north as the northern edge of the car park.</i>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> CAT Report 219	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Kate Orr	<b>Date of summary:</b> March 2004



