

**An archaeological watching brief at
North Primary School,
John Harper Street, Colchester, Essex
November 2003-April 2004**

**report prepared by
Kate Orr**

**on behalf of
Essex County Council**



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Colchester Museums accession code: 2003.246
ECC HAMP code: CCNP 03
NGR: TL 9925 2582 (c)



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EHCR summary sheet

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Plate 1 Front cover: raft foundations for new extension, view north-east.

Fig 1 Site location.

1 Summary

A watching brief was carried out during groundworks for an extension to North Primary School. No finds or features of archaeological significance were recorded. The ground had been raised substantially, and therefore most of what was disturbed consisted of modern made-up layers. Natural ground was not reached, and the contractor's excavations did not extend to a great enough depth to impact any archaeological deposits.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief carried out at North Primary School, John Harper Street, Colchester, Essex. The watching brief was carried out during the groundworks for an extension measuring 7.5m x 16m. Planning permission was given with a condition for the implementation of a programme of archaeological work (planning application no CC/COL/0043/03). The extension will be used for a new classroom and toilets.
- 2.2 The school is located on the northern side of Colchester, to the west of North Station Road, at NGR TL 9925 2582 (c). The extension was built on the south side of the main building in a tarmac area which was previously used as a playground. A sewer-trench and manholes were dug around the perimeter of the new development.
- 2.3 The monitoring was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between the 7th of November 2003 and the 7th of April 2004.
- 2.4 All fieldwork was done in accordance with a specification agreed with the HAMP Officer of Essex County Council. This report mirrors standards and practices set out in *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (2003) and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1999). The guidance contained in Gurney 2003 was also followed.

3 Archaeological background

- 3.1 The school is located outside the walls of the Roman legionary fortress and later Roman town of *Colonia Victricensis*. The site lies within a suburb of the Roman town, in an area where archaeological work has demonstrated the existence of high status buildings. Some 50m south-east of the site, a large Roman house was discovered immediately north of Victoria Chase during construction work for the HSBC bank at 26 North Station Road (CAR 6, 346; EHCR 12514.)
- 3.2 A mosaic pavement was found 60m south-east of the site of the extension in 1880. This was on the south side of Victoria Chase, less than a metre below ground-level (TEAS 1884; EHCR 12517). A tessellated pavement was discovered in front of the Victoria Inn in 1929 (CAR 6, 346; EHCR 12623). The remains of Roman suburbs were excavated in 1979 before the construction of the Royal London building, some 300m to the south at Middleborough (Brooks & Crummy 1984, 155-209).
- 3.3 An archaeological evaluation carried out by CAT in summer 2001, adjacent to the Victoria Inn, revealed part of a previously unknown mosaic, 600mm below ground-level. This was adjacent to an unusual Roman sunken structure, possibly a tank, made of *opus signinum*. The sunken structure (which showed evidence of being surrounded by a stone wall) contained a large amount of broken pieces of painted wall-plaster as well as a later 4th-century coin. These and other features found here represent the remains of at least one 2nd- or 3rd-century house. This occupied a Roman suburb in present day Middleborough, near the Roman road leading north out of the town (CAT Report 163).
- 3.4 CAT carried out a watching brief on a site adjacent to the Victoria Inn in 2002, during which more evidence of a high status Roman residence that had been rebuilt at least once was recorded. The evidence consisted of robbed out and demolished walls, and part of two mosaics as well as tessellated and brick herringbone floors. The site is thought to have been in use from the early 2nd to the late 3rd century AD. The top of the

- uppermost floors started 350mm below ground-level and Roman demolished walls were still continuing to over 1m below ground-level (CAT Report 193).
- 3.5** On the other side of North Station Road, to the rear of the Globe Hotel, two archaeological trial-trenches were excavated by CAT in 2003. Two phases of Roman building were recorded. The size of the foundations of the later building indicated a high status public building of at least two storeys (CAT Report 248).
- 3.6** The North Primary School building is Victorian and shows on the OS 2nd edition 1:2500 map (1897).

4 Aim

The aim of the investigation was to record the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of all surviving archaeological remains.

5 Methods

- 5.1** Groundworks were carried out using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. Firstly the footprint of the new extension was stripped of approximately 400mm of tarmac and hardcore. On the south, east and west edges of the stripped area, trenches were subsequently dug to a depth of between 350mm and 450mm to reach the raft formation level. Raft trenches therefore extended to between 750mm and 850mm below ground-level. They measured between 1m and 2m in width. A sewer-trench and manholes were then excavated around the outside of the footprint of the new classroom. The deepest part of the sewer-trench was 1.5m below ground-level.
- 5.2** Nine monitoring visits were made by an archaeologist. All the soil-stripping was monitored as well as the trenches for the rafts. Intermittent visits were made during the excavation of the sewer-trench and manholes on the eastern side of the extension.
- 5.3** Individual records of layers and features were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets.
- 5.4** A plan of the footprint of the new building was made at a scale of 1:50. Sketch section drawings were made of two of the raft foundation trenches.
- 5.5** A photographic record was made using a digital camera.

6 Results

6.1 The extension (Plate 1)

Tarmac of 100mm thickness was stripped off the site (Layer or L1). Underlying the tarmac was 500mm of modern brick rubble (L2). Below this, a 100mm thick layer of mid brown clayish loam was encountered, with inclusions of asphalt and modern demolition debris (L3). There was a layer of asphalt, 70mm thick (L4), 700mm below ground-level. This appears to be the previous level of the playground. This in turn was underlaid by a thin layer of modern demolition rubble (L5). At the base of the deeper raft foundation trenches, at 800mm below ground-level, a mid brown loam layer mixed with grey clay and modern demolition material was observed (L6). Natural ground was not reached.

6.2 The sewer-trenches and manholes

Sewers and manholes on the eastern side of the extension were monitored. The deepest part of the sewer was dug close to the eastern edge of the new building (at 1.5m depth). Here more building rubble was encountered below the tarmac surface. There was no trace of the previous playground level (L4). Natural ground was not reached. A dark brown sandy silt loam containing peg-tile continued to the base of the

trench (L7). Further east, the trench did not contain any building rubble; all that was encountered was L7 soil.

7 Discussion

No finds or features of archaeological significance were recorded by the groundworks to the new extension or the services. The ground had been raised substantially, and therefore most of what was disturbed consisted of modern made-up layers. This is borne out by a one-metre difference in ground-level either side of the southern boundary wall. Natural ground was not reached, and the contractor's excavations did not extend to a great enough depth to impact archaeological deposits.

8 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 2003.246.

9 Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to North Primary School and Barnes Webster and Sons Ltd for allowing access to the site; Essex County Council for funding the work; and Stanley Bragg Architects for commissioning the work. The fieldwork was carried out by Kate Orr, Karly Weller and Laura Pooley.

10 References

- | | | |
|------------------------|------|---|
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| <i>CAR 3</i> | 1984 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 3, Excavations at Lion Walk, Balkerne Lane, and Middleborough, Colchester</i> , by P Crummy |
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| CAT Report 163 | | An archaeological evaluation at North Station Road (adjacent to the Victoria Inn), Colchester, Essex, unpublished CAT archive report, by Kate Orr, 2001 |
| CAT Report 193 | | Report on an archaeological watching brief at North Station Road (adjacent to the Victoria Inn), Colchester, Essex, unpublished CAT archive report, by Kate Orr, 2002 |
| CAT Report 248 | | An archaeological evaluation at the Globe Hotel, North Station Road, Colchester, Essex, unpublished CAT archive report, by Kate Orr, 2003 |
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| <i>TEAS</i> | 1884 | 'Discovery of a Roman pavement at Colchester', in <i>Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society</i> , II , 189-90 |

11 Glossary

EHCR	Essex Heritage Conservation Record, held by Essex County Council
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
HAMP	Heritage Advice, Management and Promotion Group, Essex County Council
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
modern	period from c 1850 to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
<i>opus signinum</i>	a type of mortar used by the Romans containing crushed tile
Roman	the period from AD 43 to AD 410 approximately
tessellated pavement	a Roman floor made of small pieces of plain stone or tile set into mortar

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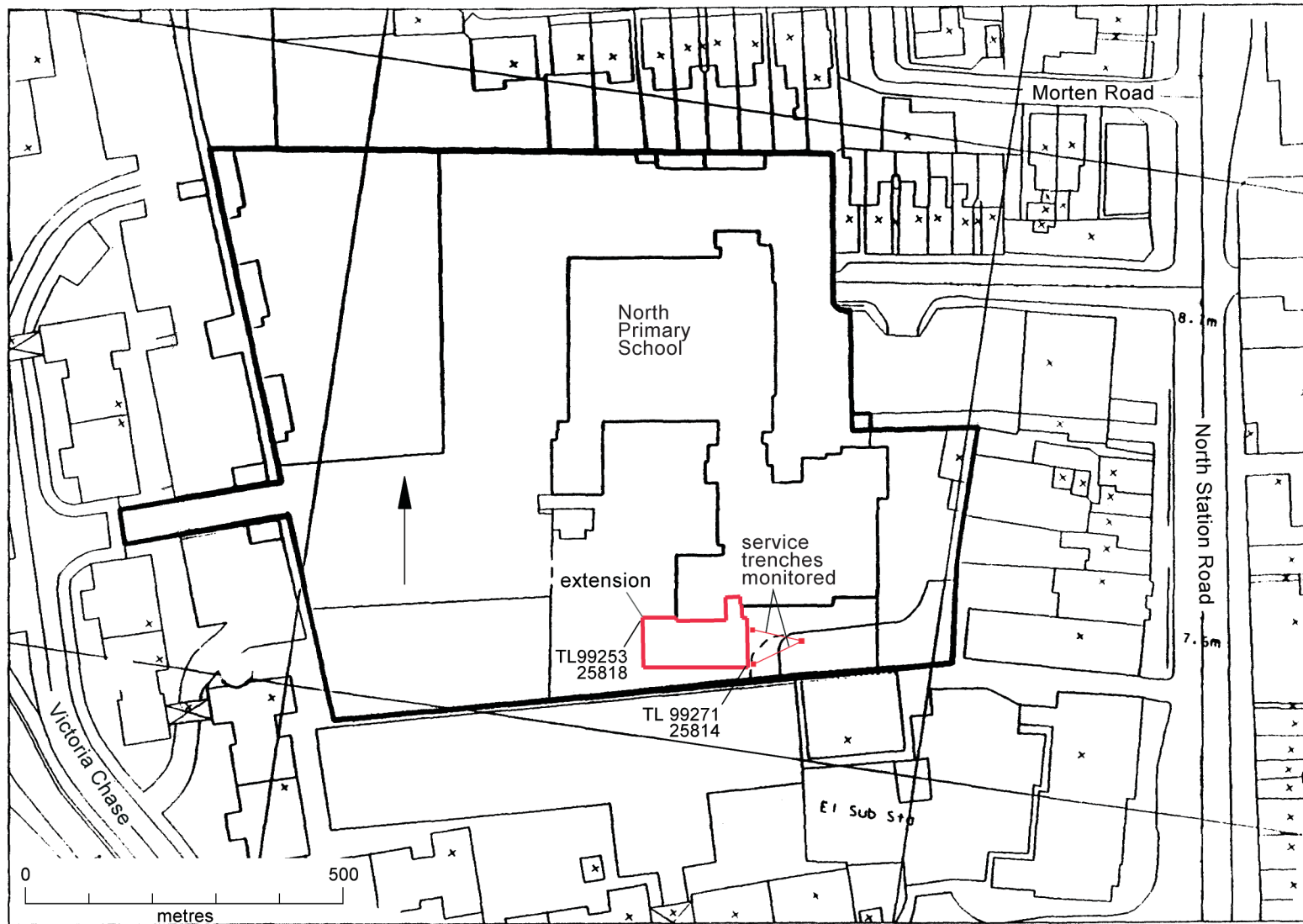


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Fig 1 Site location.

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

Summary sheet

Site name/address: North Primary School, John Harper Street, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TL 9925 2582 (c)	ECC HAMP group site code: CCNP 03
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: November 2003-April 2004	Size of area investigated: 16m x 7m extension
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Essex County Council
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHCR nos: 12514, 12517, 12623
Final report: CAT Report 284	
Periods represented: None	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>A watching brief was carried out during groundworks for an extension to North Primary School. No finds or features of archaeological significance were recorded. The ground had been raised substantially, and therefore most of what was disturbed consisted of modern made-up layers. Natural ground was not reached, and the contractor's excavations did not extend to a great enough depth to impact any archaeological deposits.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: K Orr	Date of summary: September 2004