

**An archaeological watching brief at the  
Colchester County High School for Girls,  
Norman Way, Colchester, Essex  
May-November 2005**

**report prepared by  
Kate Orr**

**commissioned by  
SEH French Ltd**

**on behalf of  
the Colchester County High School for Girls**

NGR: TL 980 246 (c)  
CAT project ref.: 05/5a  
Colchester Museums accession code: 2005.49  
ECC HEM team site code: CCHS 05



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**CAT Report 348**  
November 2005

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EHER summary sheet

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## 1 Summary

*The watching brief was carried out during groundworks for a new music and careers block at the Colchester County High School for Girls. The site lies within the Late Iron Age and Roman dyke system, and previous archaeological discoveries in the area include roads, cemeteries and earthworks associated with the early settlement of Colchester. At least two of the the ditches of a 'triple-ditched dyke' recorded in the school grounds in 1955 should have been uncovered within the footprint of the new building and in soakaway 2, but were not visible. F4 in soakaway 1 looked substantial but was not in line with any of the ditches recorded in 1955. Either the 'triple-ditched dyke' turns a corner and therefore does not continue into the watching brief site area or it does not actually exist. The groundworks did, however, expose some smaller cut features which, by their depth, the colour of their fills, and their lack of later material, appeared to be ancient.*

## 2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief carried out at the Colchester County High School for Girls, Norman Way, Colchester by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on behalf of the school.
- 2.2 The watching brief was required as part of planning permission for the construction of a new music and careers block (planning reference CC/COL/0104/04).
- 2.3 The site is located to the west of the town centre, at the southern end of Norman Way, at NGR TL 980 246 (c). The new building has a floor plan of 55m x 25m. The watching brief covered the footings for the new building plus two soakaways.
- 2.4 The monitoring was carried out by CAT between the 23rd May and the 8th November 2005. A brief was supplied by Essex County Council (ECC) Historic Environment Management (HEM) team who also monitored the project.
- 2.5 This report follows the standards set out in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (CM 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (CM 2003), the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IFA 1999) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IFA 2001). The guidance contained in the documents *Management of archaeological projects* (MAP 2), *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment* (EAA 3), *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy* (EAA 8), and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14) was also followed.

## 3 Archaeological background (Fig 1)

- 3.1 The site lies within the Late Iron Age and Roman dyke system and approximately 1.3km to the west of the walled Roman town. Previous archaeological discoveries in the area include roads, cemeteries and earthworks associated with the early settlement of Colchester.
- 3.2 Some archaeological finds have previously been made within the grounds of the school itself. These are summarised below by the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) numbers:
  - EHER no 11881 – a Romano-British amphora burial
  - EHER no 11882 – an early Roman curving ditch, possibly the corner of a fort, to the north of the main school building
  - EHER no 12630 – a 'triple-ditched dyke' beneath the main school building, recorded in plan in 1955 by Rex Hull. The ditches were 4m wide (CAR 11, 127)
  - EHER no 12631 – a deep pit, post-holes and unstratified 2nd-century pottery beneath the southern end of the school.

## 4 Aim

The aim of the watching brief was to record the location, extent, date and character of any surviving archaeological remains. Particular attention was paid to any potential Late Iron Age or Roman remains.

## 5 Methods

- 5.1 Eight visits were made to the site by a CAT archaeologist. The area of the footprint of the new building was stripped of turf by the contractors, using a mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket. This stripping was monitored by an archaeologist. Subsequently, footings were dug for the new building; these were 450mm wide, and between 900mm and 1.1m deep. All of these trenches, bar one, were observed. Access was allowed to the two soakaways after they had been dug.
- 5.2 Individual records of layers and features were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets.
- 5.3 Section drawings were made at a scale of 1:10. No to scale plans were made.
- 5.4 A colour photographic record was made using a digital camera.

## 6 Results (Fig 2)

Throughout the site, approximately 500mm of greyish brown slightly sandy silt topsoil (Layer or L1) sealed yellowish brown slightly sandy silt (L2). L1 and L2 were very dry near to where a line of trees had been previously. Contractors reported that 800-900mm of material had been imported to level out the site. However, L1 and L2 did not have the appearance of deliberately made-up ground and there were tree roots growing through. At between 750mm and 1m below ground-level, natural sand and gravel (L3) was encountered.

Four pits or ditches were recorded cutting the natural ground and were seen in section only (Feature or F1-F4). None of the features contained any artefacts. A round-bottomed pit or ditch was observed in the easternmost foundation trench, in both sections (F1). F1 was at least 1.1m wide and 500mm deep and was filled by light yellowish brown dry silty fill. One small *tessera* was found during cleaning near F1.

A small flat-bottomed pit (F2) was recorded in a foundation trench in the south of the new block. This was filled by dry, very light brown silt with gravel inclusions.

To the east of F2, a small round-bottomed ditch (F3) was seen in both sections; it was 1m wide and 350mm deep. It was filled by dry medium brown sandy loam.

In soakaway 1, a shallow ditch or pit (F4) was observed in the north-facing corner. The feature was just over a metre wide at its widest point but appeared to have been severely truncated. It was filled by light brown silty sand. There was no sign of the feature continuing in the opposite section.

A piece of Roman brick and a fragment of daub were recovered from near the centre of the new building.

## 7 Discussion (Figs 1-2)

At least two of the ditches of the 'triple-ditched dyke' (EHER no 12630) should have been uncovered within the footprint of the new building and in soakaway 2 but were not visible. F4 in soakaway 1 looked substantial but was not in line with any of the ditches recorded in 1955. Either the 'triple-ditched dyke' turns a corner and therefore does not continue into the watching brief site area or it does not actually exist. The groundworks did, however, expose some smaller cut features which, by their depth, the colour of their fills, and their lack of later material, appeared to be ancient.

## 8 Archive deposition

The site records, finds, associated papers and digital archive are currently held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF. These will be deposited permanently with Colchester Museums under museum accession code 2005.49.

## 9 Acknowledgements

The Trust would like to thank SEH French Ltd for commissioning the work and the Colchester County High School for Girls for funding the work. The fieldwork was carried out by Kate Orr.

## 10 References

- |        |      |   |
|--------|------|---|
| CAR 11 | 1995 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 11: Camulodunum 2</i> , by CFC Hawkes and P Crummy  |
| CM     | 2002 | <i>Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i>  |
| CM     | 2003 | <i>Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums</i>  |
| EAA 3  | 1997 | <i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, <b>3</b> , ed by J Glazebrook                         |
| EAA 8  | 2000 | <i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy</i> , Eastern Anglian Archaeological Occasional Papers, <b>8</b> , ed by N Brown & J Glazebrook |
| EAA 14 | 2003 | <i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeological Occasional Papers, <b>14</b> , by D Gurney  |
| IFA    | 1999 | <i>Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief</i>   |
| IFA    | 2001 | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i>   |
| MAP 2  | 1991 | <i>Management of archaeological projects</i> , 2nd edition (English Heritage)   |

## 11 Glossary

CM	Colchester Museums
ECC	Essex County Council
EHHER	Essex Historic Environment Record, Essex County Council
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
HEM	Historic Environment Management team, Essex County Council
Iron Age layer	the period preceding the Roman invasion, in Britain c 700 BC-AD 43
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
Roman	period from AD 43 to c AD 410

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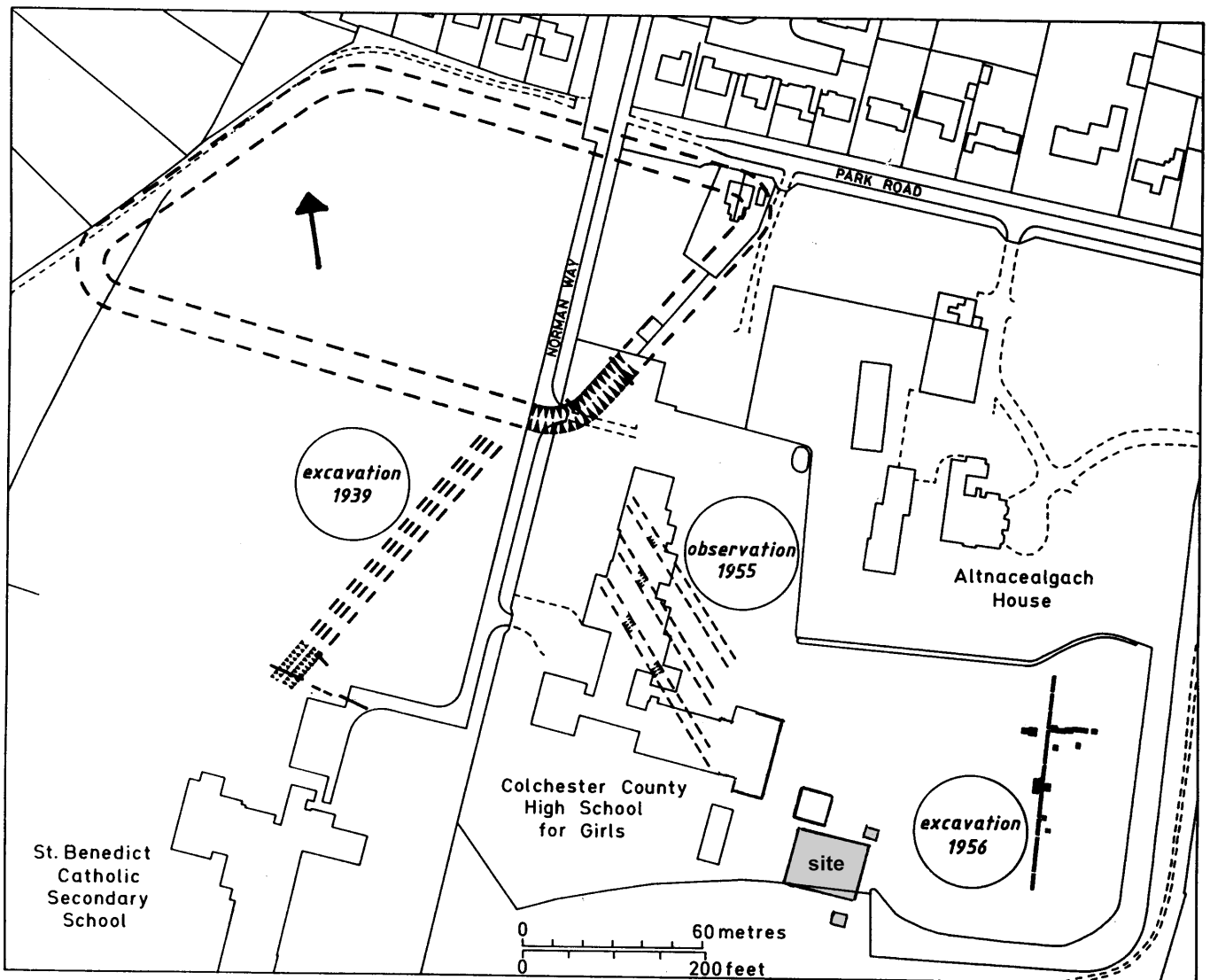
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Fig 1 Site location, showing previously recorded archaeological features (adapted from CAR 11, 125).

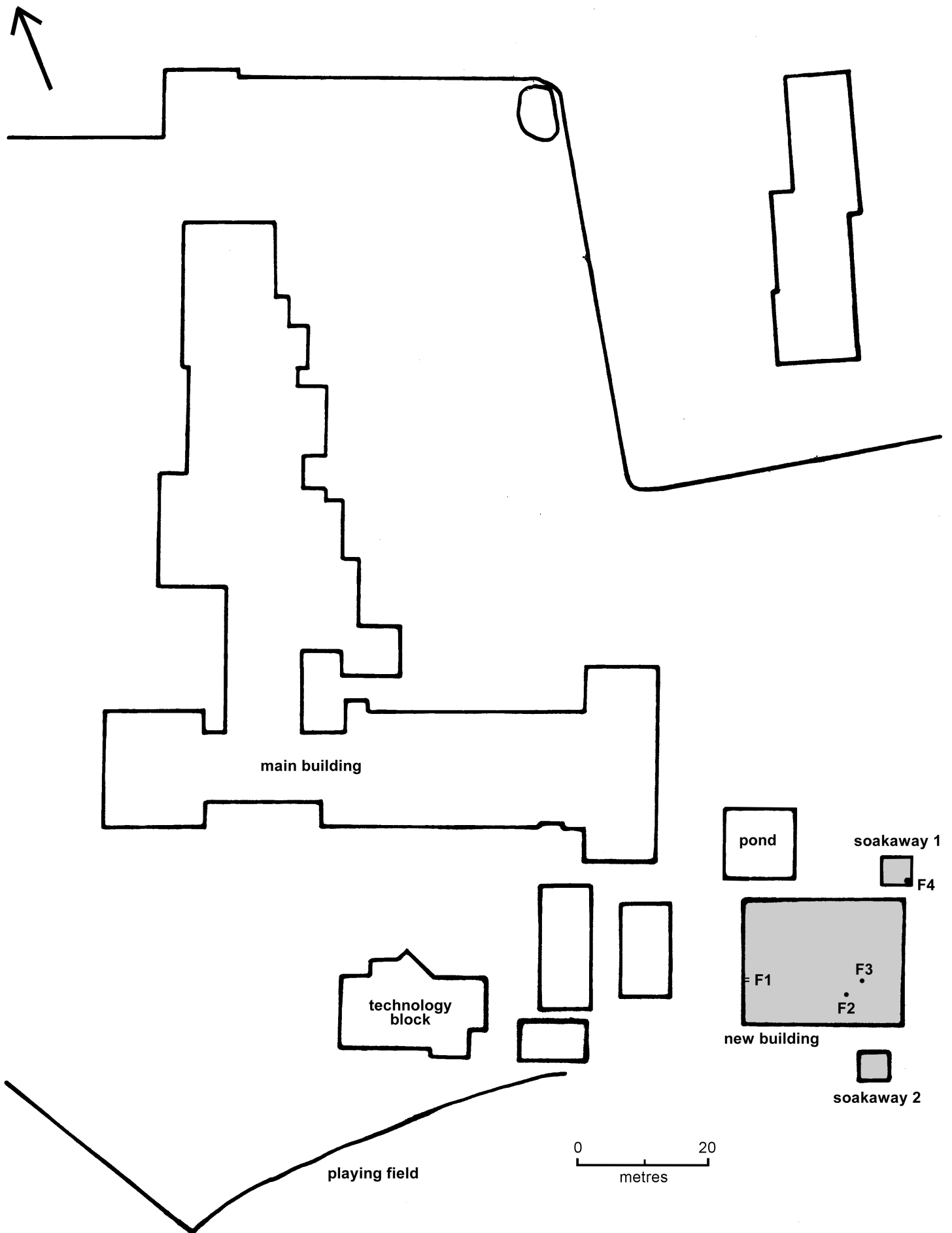


Fig 2 Plan of site, showing features.



**Essex Historic Environment Record/  
Essex Archaeology and History**

**Summary sheet**

<b>Site address:</b> Colchester County High School for Girls, Norman Way, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester Borough
<b>NGR:</b> TL 980 246 (c)	<b>Site code:</b> CCHS 05
<b>Type of work:</b> Watching brief	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> May-November 2005	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 55m x 25m building plus two soakaways
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester Museums (accession code 2005.49)	<b>Funding source:</b> Colchester County High School
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> Yes: phase 2 building work	<b>Related EHER nos:</b> 11881, 11882, 12630, 12631
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 348 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods represented:</b> undated features, possibly Iron Age or Roman	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b>  <i>The watching brief was carried out during groundworks for a new music and careers block at the Colchester County High School for Girls. The site lies within the Late Iron Age and Roman dyke system. Previous archaeological discoveries in the area include roads, cemeteries and earthworks associated with the early settlement of Colchester. At least two of the ditches of a 'triple-ditched dyke' recorded in the school grounds in 1955 should have been uncovered within the footprint of the new building and in soakaway 2 but were not visible. F4 in soakaway 1 looked substantial but was not in line with any of the ditches recorded in 1955. Either the 'triple-ditched dyke' turns a corner and therefore does not continue into the watching brief site area or it does not actually exist. The groundworks did, however, expose some smaller cut features which, by their depth, the colour of their fills, and their lack of later material, appeared to be ancient.</i></p>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> None	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Kate Orr	<b>Date of summary:</b> November 2005