

**An archaeological watching brief at  
St Helena School car-park,  
Sheepen Road, Colchester, Essex  
July-August 2007**

**report prepared by  
Kate Orr**

**commissioned by  
Atkins Design and Engineering Solutions  
on behalf of St Helena School**

NGR: TL 98987 25786 (c)  
CAT project ref.: 07/7b  
Colchester and Ipswich Museums accession code: 2007.77



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## 1 Summary

A watching brief was carried out on groundworks to reconstruct the car-park on the eastern side of the school grounds. This involved removing the old tarmac surface, creating a new path and cycle storage compound, and digging trenches for lighting cables. The groundworks largely only affected modern and post-medieval layers and therefore did not expose any archaeological features. In one lighting-cable trench, the Roman ground-surface was exposed but no archaeological features were observed.

## 2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 2.1 This is the report on an archaeological watching brief in the car-park of St Helena School, Sheepen Road, Colchester, Essex. The site is within the scheduled ancient monument area of Camulodunum (Essex SAM no 46). The school applied for scheduled ancient monument consent to reconstruct the car-park to create a new footpath, cycle storage compound and lighting. After an archaeological evaluation was carried out earlier this year (CAT Report 414), English Heritage advised the Secretary of State that an archaeological watching brief should take place.
- 2.2 St Helena School is located approximately 1.5km to the north-west of Colchester town centre. The car-park occupies a fairly level block of land on the east side of the school grounds at 7.2m-7.8m AOD. The site is bounded by another property, and the school buildings and playing field. It is centred on NGR TL 98987 25786.
- 2.3 The watching brief was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between July and August 2007. It was commissioned by Atkins Design and Engineering Solutions on behalf of St Helena School. All work was carried out according to a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) agreed with Martin Winter of Colchester Borough Council.
- 2.4 This report follows the standards set out in the 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), and 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 Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE), and *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

- 3.1 The site lies on the northern side of the site of the important Late Iron Age and 1st-century Roman settlement known as Sheepen (Essex SAM no 46). Extensive excavations there in the 1930s and in 1970 and later have produced evidence of workshops engaged in a range of industrial activities including metal-working, enamelling, pottery- and tile-making and leather-working, enclosed within fenced compounds (Hawkes & Hull 1947; Niblett 1985). Sheepen was a major commercial centre, situated by the River Colne and receiving goods from the Continent. Large quantities of 1st-century imported Roman amphoras have been found at the Colchester Institute nearby (CAR 11, 73-77; CAT Report 131).
- 3.2 A late 1st-century temple was excavated by the Colchester Excavation Committee in 1935 on the site of St Helena School (Hull 1958, 224-34). The foundation of the outer *temenos* wall of the temple precinct appears to lie underneath Sheepen Road.
- 3.3 In November 2005, an archaeological evaluation by three test-pits was carried out at the drama block of St Helena School. This recorded several features including a ditch and a possible post-hole. Associated pottery suggested a date in the 1st century AD for the features (CAT Report 351).

- 3.4** An archaeological excavation and monitoring was subsequently carried out during the excavation of footings for the extension to the drama block in June 2006. The investigation revealed pits, ditches and a gully all dating from AD 5-60, sealed beneath 600 to 750mm of topsoil. The type of pottery and the presence of animal bone, slag, daub and Roman tile suggest domestic and industrial use similar to that identified as a result of the previous investigations at Sheepen (CAT Report 384).
- 3.5** In February 2007, an evaluation by trial-trenching was carried out in the car-park on the eastern side of St Helena School. Several Roman features were revealed including a foundation of the 1st-century temple located on the site (CAT Report 414).

## **4 Aim**

The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any surviving archaeological deposits that might be disturbed during the groundworks.

## **5 Methods (Fig 2)**

- 5.1** An archaeologist from CAT made visits during the contractor's groundworks to carry out a watching brief. Groundworks consisted of stripping off turf and topsoil in soft areas, stripping tarmac and sub-base in car-parking areas, creating a base for a cycle storage compound, stripping topsoil for a new path, and digging trenches for lighting cables. Eleven visits were made in total.
- 5.2** All the groundworks were carried out by contractors using a mechanical excavator. A toothless bucket was mainly used, except for where tarmac and sub-base and concrete foundations were being removed.
- 5.3** Potential archaeological deposits which were exposed were cleaned by hand.

## **6 Results (Fig 2)**

- 6.1** Four visits were made while contractors were stripping off the previous car-park surface and sub-base down to a depth of approximately 300mm. Turf and topsoil areas at the edge of the car-park were also stripped down to a depth of 300mm. Nothing other than modern deposits were recorded during this phase.
- 6.2** Five visits were made during the digging of trenches for lighting cables. The trenches were approximately 400mm deep (below the reduced ground-level) and did not disturb any archaeological deposits. During this phase, the concrete slab for the cycle storage compound was constructed. Part of this area had previously housed a greenhouse and the groundworks did not extend deeper than the foundations of this structure.
- 6.3** Two visits were made during works to create a path around the eastern and northern perimeter of the site. This involved the removal of turf and topsoil. This ground-reduction did not extend deeper than the topsoil. Trenches were dug on either side of the path for lighting cables. These trenches were 600-700mm deep and were mainly dug through topsoil. Some of the deeper trenches did expose a light yellowish brown silty layer which is the Roman ground-surface. No features were exposed.

## **7 Discussion**

The groundworks for the reconstruction of the car-park largely only affected modern and post-medieval layers and therefore did not expose any archaeological features. In one lighting-cable trench, the Roman ground-surface was exposed but no archaeological features were discerned.

## 8 Archive deposition

The archive, including the site records, will be permanently deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums under accession code COLEM 2007.77.

## 9 Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to Atkins Design and Engineering Solutions for commissioning the work and to St Helena School for funding it. Site work was carried out by K Orr. The project was monitored by Martin Winter of Colchester Borough Council and Pat Connell, Essex County Council Historic Environment Management team officer.

## 10 References

- |                            |      |   |
|----------------------------|------|---|
| CAR 11                     | 1995 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 11: Camulodunum 2</i> , by C F C Hawkes & P Crummy  |
| CAT Report 131             |      | <i>An archaeological watching brief at Colchester Institute, Colchester, Essex, January-March 2001</i> , unpublished CAT archive report, by Kate Orr, 2001  |
| CAT Report 351             |      | <i>An archaeological evaluation of St Helena School drama block, Sheepen Road, Colchester, Essex, November 2005</i> , unpublished CAT archive report, by Kate Orr, 2005                               |
| CAT Report 384             |      | <i>An archaeological excavation and monitoring of footings at the drama block of St Helena School, Sheepen Road, Colchester, Essex, June 2006</i> , unpublished CAT archive report, by Kate Orr, 2006 |
| CAT Report 414             |      | <i>An archaeological evaluation at St Helena School, February 2007</i> , by Laura Pooley, 2007  |
| 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> , East Anglian Archaeology, 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 Archaeology, Occasional Papers, <b>14</b> , ed by D Gurney   |
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| 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>   |
| MoRPHE                     | 2006 | <i>Management of research projects in the historic environment</i> (English Heritage)   |
| Niblett, R                 | 1985 | <i>Sheepen: an early Roman industrial site at Camulodunum</i> , CBA, Research Report, <b>57</b>   |

## 11 Glossary

AOD	above Ordnance Survey datum point (at Newlyn sea level)
CM	Colchester and Ipswich Museums
context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made, usually a layer or a feature
EHER	Essex Historic Environment Record, held by Essex County Council
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor
HEM	Historic Environment Management team, Essex County Council
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists

modern	period from c 1850 onwards to the present
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
post-medieval	period from c 1500 to c 1850
Roman	the period from AD 43 to AD 410
RRC SAL	Report of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database, held by Colchester and Ipswich Museums
U/S	unstratified, ie no context

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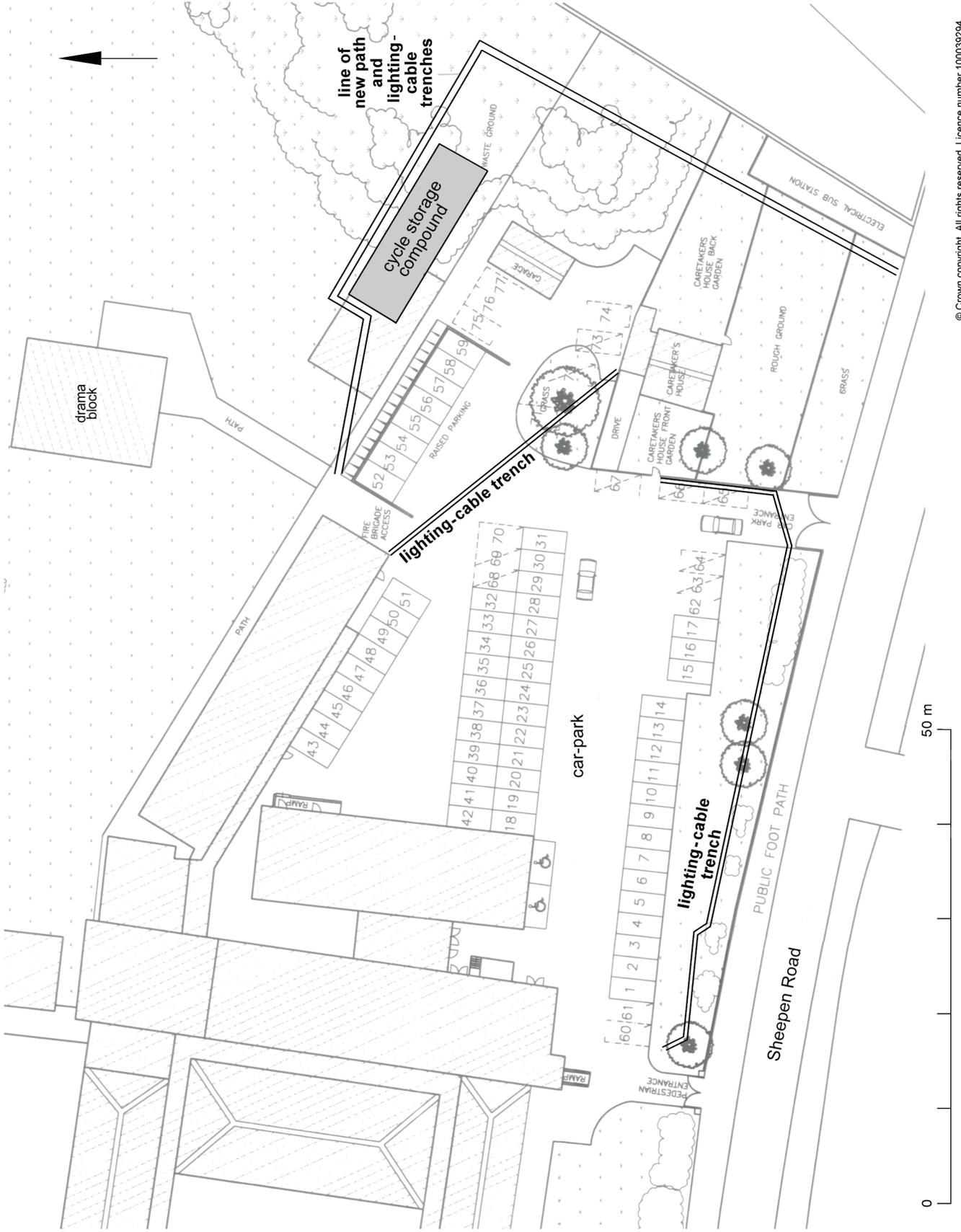


Fig 1 Plan of car-park, showing areas monitored by the watching brief.

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

**Summary sheet**

<b>Site address:</b> St Helena School car-park, Sheepen Road, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester Borough
<b>NGR:</b> TL 98987 25786 (c)	<b>Site code:</b> Museum accession code 2007.77
<b>Type of work:</b> Watching brief	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> July-August 2007	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> car-park area = approx 60m x 50m
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester and Ipswich Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> St Helena School
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related UAD nos:</b> -
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 451 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods represented:</b> Roman, post-medieval and modern	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b>  <i>A watching brief was carried out on groundworks to reconstruct the car-park on the eastern side of the school grounds. This involved removing the old tarmac surface, creating a new path and cycle storage compound, and digging trenches for lighting cables. The groundworks largely only affected modern and post-medieval layers and therefore did not expose any archaeological features. In one lighting-cable trench, the Roman ground-surface was exposed but no archaeological features were observed.</i></p>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> CAT Reports 351, 384 and 414	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Kate Orr	<b>Date of summary:</b> December 2007