

Report on a negative watching brief

Site address: Colchester Garrison athletics track, Circular Road North,
Colchester, Essex
Date of fieldwork: 8th-23rd October 2007
NGR: TL 99512 24510 (c)
CBC brief?: No
Plan attached?: yes (Figs 1-2)
Site code: CAT code 07/10a;
Colchester and Ipswich Museums accession code 2007.112
CAT report no: CAT Report 452

1 Summary

This site lies in a known Roman cemetery area. A watching brief on trenches dug for the installation of lighting around the Colchester Garrison athletics track revealed only post-medieval and modern dumped soils. No Roman burials were found.

2 Introduction

This is the report on an archaeological watching brief on the construction of new lighting at the Colchester Garrison athletics track, which is located on the east side of Circular Road North, to the south of the existing all-weather hockey pitch (CGG56), on the western edge of the Abbey Field (Fig 1). Military building CGG01 is located to the north of the athletics track.

The new lighting works comprised the excavation of eighteen trenches to hold the bases of lighting columns (approximately 0.6m deep), and of the cable trenches linking the bases, including a supply trench extending north towards the northern edge of the Abbey Field.

The work was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT), with project management by RPS Planning, on behalf of RMPA Services/W S Atkins.

3 Archaeological and historical background

The archaeological context of the athletics track itself, as situated within a Roman cemetery, is reasonably well understood. At least 28 cremation burials were found during its construction and within the area immediately to the north in 1925 (Hull 1958, no 200, p 296; UAD event no 1099). Trial-trenching and excavation for the all-weather hockey pitch immediately to the north of the site by CAT in 2000 recovered 73 more cremation burials, some only 300mm below existing ground-level (CAT Report 97; CAT Report 138 revised). Seven more burials (five inhumation and two cremation) were recorded to the immediate west of Circular Road North to the west in 2004-5, with a further 360 closer to Butt Road (CAT Report 361). Finally, excavation of the site of the Abbey Field car-park to the immediate south of the site in 2007 revealed a further seven cremation burials against a Roman trackway that appears to border the southern edge of this cemetery area (CAT Report 424).

4 Method

All work was carried out in accordance with the a the *Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for an archaeological watching brief during construction of new lighting for the athletics track at Abbey Field, Colchester Garrison, November 2005* (RPS 2005). Other relevant standards for fieldwork and post-excavation work are described in that document.

Sample sketches were made of some of the exposed trench section and these are in the site archive.

5 Aim

The aim of the watching brief was to recover sufficient evidence to characterise the nature, date, function and importance of the archaeological remains uncovered by

the contractor's work. Specifically, in this case, the location and nature of cemeteries, and details of their boundaries and relation to roads, fields and other parcels of land, the presence of buildings, tombs and other structures (funerary and otherwise) within cemetery areas, and an improved understanding of burial ritual, specifically the nature and location of cremation pyres or *busta*.

6 Brief report

The watching brief was carried out during the contractor's excavation of eighteen trenches to hold the bases of lighting columns around the track (numbered T1-T15), three trenches to hold a separate set of lighting columns around the grandstand (T17-T19), and a cable trench to connect T17, T18 and T19 (T16-T20).

The following layers were recorded: L1, modern concrete slab; L2, crushed brick foundation for L1; L3, post-medieval and modern topsoil; L4, natural ground; L5, post-medieval dumped soil containing flower-pot fragments and slate; L6, modern compacted make-up layer with tarmac pieces; L7, loose and redeposited sandy gravel; L8, original topsoil; L9, compact stony dumped layer; L10, subsoil; L11, dumped soil; and L12, modern ashy deposit.

The foundation pads were 1.10m x 1.10m in size (with varying depths, given below). Now follows a description of the archaeological sequence in each trench.

- T1:** Ground-level 34.40m AOD (projected): L1 (0.20m), over L2 (0.20m), over L3 (0.10m to top of L4 at limit of excavation (loe)). Total depth to natural = 0.5m.
- T2:** Ground-level 34.29m AOD: L3 (0.10m), over L5 (0.20m to top of L4 at loe). Total depth to natural = 0.3m.
- T3:** Ground-level 34.29m AOD: L3 (0.10m), over L5 (0.20m to top of L4 at loe). Total depth to natural = 0.3m.
- T4:** Ground-level 34.27m AOD: L3 (0.12m), over L5 (0.20m to top of L4 at loe). Total depth to natural = 0.32m.
- T5:** Ground-level 34.56m AOD: L3 (0.15m), over L5 (0.25m), over L6 (0.40m to top of L4 at loe). Total depth to natural = 0.8m.
- T6:** Ground-level 34.49m AOD: L3 (0.10m), over L7 (0.25m), over L8 (0.15m), over L9 (0.20m), over L10 (0.40m to top of L4 at loe). Total depth to natural = 1.10m.
- T7:** Ground-level 34.13m AOD: L3 (0.10m), over L7 (0.08m), over L8 (0.10m), over L9 (0.10m), over L10 (0.70m to top of L4 at loe). Total depth to natural = 1.08m.
- T8:** Ground-level 34.10m AOD: L3 (0.20m), over L7 (0.10m), over L8 (0.12m), over L10 (0.70m to top of L4 at loe). T8 finds: L10, 1 peg-tile fragment. Total depth to natural = 1.12m.
- T9:** Ground-level 34.06m AOD: L3 (0.10m), over L7 (0.30m), over L5 (0.12m), over L10 (0.70m to top of L4 at loe). Total depth to natural = 1.22m.
- T10:** Ground-level 33.95m AOD: L3 (0.10m), over L7 (0.25m), over L8 (0.10m), over L11 (0.60m), over L12 (0.30m to top of L4 at to loe). Total depth to natural = 1.35m.
- T11:** Ground-level 34.22m AOD: L3 (0.10m), over L7 (0.25m), over L8 (0.10m), over L10 (0.70m to top of L4 at loe). Total depth to natural = 1.15m.
- T12:** Ground-level 34.23m AOD: L3 (0.18m), over L7 (0.08m), over L8 (0.14m), over L10 (0.60m to top of L4 at loe). Total depth to natural = 1.0m.
- T13:** Ground-level 34.18m AOD: L3 (0.10m), over L10 (0.80m to top of L4 at loe). Total depth to natural = 0.9m.
- T14:** Ground-level 34.38m AOD: L3 (0.10m), over L10 (0.70m to top of L4 at loe). Total depth to natural = 0.8m.
- T15:** Ground-level 34.59m AOD: L3 (0.10m), over L10 (0.40m to top of L4 at loe). Total depth to natural = 0.4m.

It was generally much more difficult to identify specific layers in the narrow cable trenches (T16, T20) than it was in the larger lighting-pole foundation trenches (T1-T15, T17-T19).

- T16:** This was the cable trench extending west and then south-west from T4, to connect with T20. Typically 0.60m deep and 0.35m wide. Layers were very mixed, with L3 topsoil and L5 ash dominating. They became cleaner and sandier 10m west of T4, and then very mixed dark grey brown sandy loam with crushed tarmac and gravel (= L6). Total depth to natural = 0.6m+.
- T17:** This was one of the three foundation trenches connected by T20. Ground-level 35.21 AOD: very mixed layers – approximately 1m of redeposited sandy loams with brick and tarmac pieces, then 0.60m of natural L4 to loe.
- T18:** Ground-level 34.65m AOD: very mixed dark grey/brown sandy loam with ash (= L5), gravels, crushed tarmac (= L6) to a depth of 0.50m, then mixed orange/brown sandy gravel with tarmac and brick fragments to depth of 1.30m below ground-level, then 0.20m of natural L4 to loe at 1.60m below ground-level.
- T19:** This was one of the three foundation trenches connected by T20. Ground-level 34.59m AOD: same stratification as T18, except that there was more crushed brick (ie L2) and tarmac fragments. The loe on L4 at 1.40m below ground-level.
- T20:** This was the cable trench connecting T17, T18, and T19. Very mixed layers along the whole length of the trench. Dark grey/brown loam with crushed brick, tarmac, gravel and concrete, corrugated iron, chicken wire, and slate. A large quantity of brick and concrete around the middle of T20 may be associated with a demolished building which stood here.

7 Finds catalogue

Post-Roman pottery fabric references are after *CAR 7*.

T8, L10

finds number 1

1 peg-tile fragment, 28g.

T16, L3

finds number 4

1 box tile fragment, 50g.

T20, U/S

finds number 5

1 fragment Roman brick, 35mm thick, 354g. Discarded.
ceramic arm and leg from child's doll, 33g.

Between T2-T3, L5

finds number 2

5 sherds of Fabric 48d, 147g. 19th-20th century.
cranberry-coloured glass fitting, from a table setting?, 278g.
octagonal green glass ink bottle, 65g. 19th-20th century.
square green glass ink bottle, slightly damaged, 75g.
top and sherd from green glass ?medicine bottle, 11g.

Between T3-T4, U/S

finds number 3

ceramic ink bottle in what is technically a stoneware, 101g. Probably 20th century.
octagonal clear glass ink bottle, 73g. 19th-20th century.
clear glass medicine bottle, 64g. 19th-20th century.
clear glass medicine bottle, 133g. 19th-20th century.
green glass medicine bottle, 132g. 19th-20th century.

Between T4 and T5, L3

finds number 7

2 pieces of peg-tile or thin Roman *tegula*, 114g.
1 piece Fabric 51a flower-pot, 28g.

Between T5-T6, L3

finds number 6
 2 Roman brick fragments, 147g. Discarded
 1 peg-tile fragment? or thin Roman *tegula*, 21g.
 1 Roman sherd. ?Amphora, 14g.

Between T7-T8, U/S

finds number 8
 2 Roman brick fragments, 62g. Discarded.
 1 sherd Fabric 48d marmalade jar, 4g. Discarded.
 1 Roman sherd, 5g. Discarded.

Between T8-T9, U/S

finds number 9
 2 pieces peg-tile, 46g. Discarded.

Between T12-T13, L3

finds number 11
 2 Roman brick/tile fragments, 125g.
 1 sherd of Fabric 42 Border ware colander, 1g.
 1 sherd Fabric 40 PMRE, 16g.
 1 sherd Fabric 48d, 19th-20th century, 13g.
 1 ?peg-tile fragment, 37g.

Between T13-T14, L3

finds number 12
 2 Roman sherds, including one ?lid, 13g
 2 Roman brick fragments, 152g. Discarded.
 1 sherd Fabric 13; this looks like a Middleborough kiln product, 15g.
 1 sherd Fabric 40 (PMRE) handle, 16g.

8 Comment

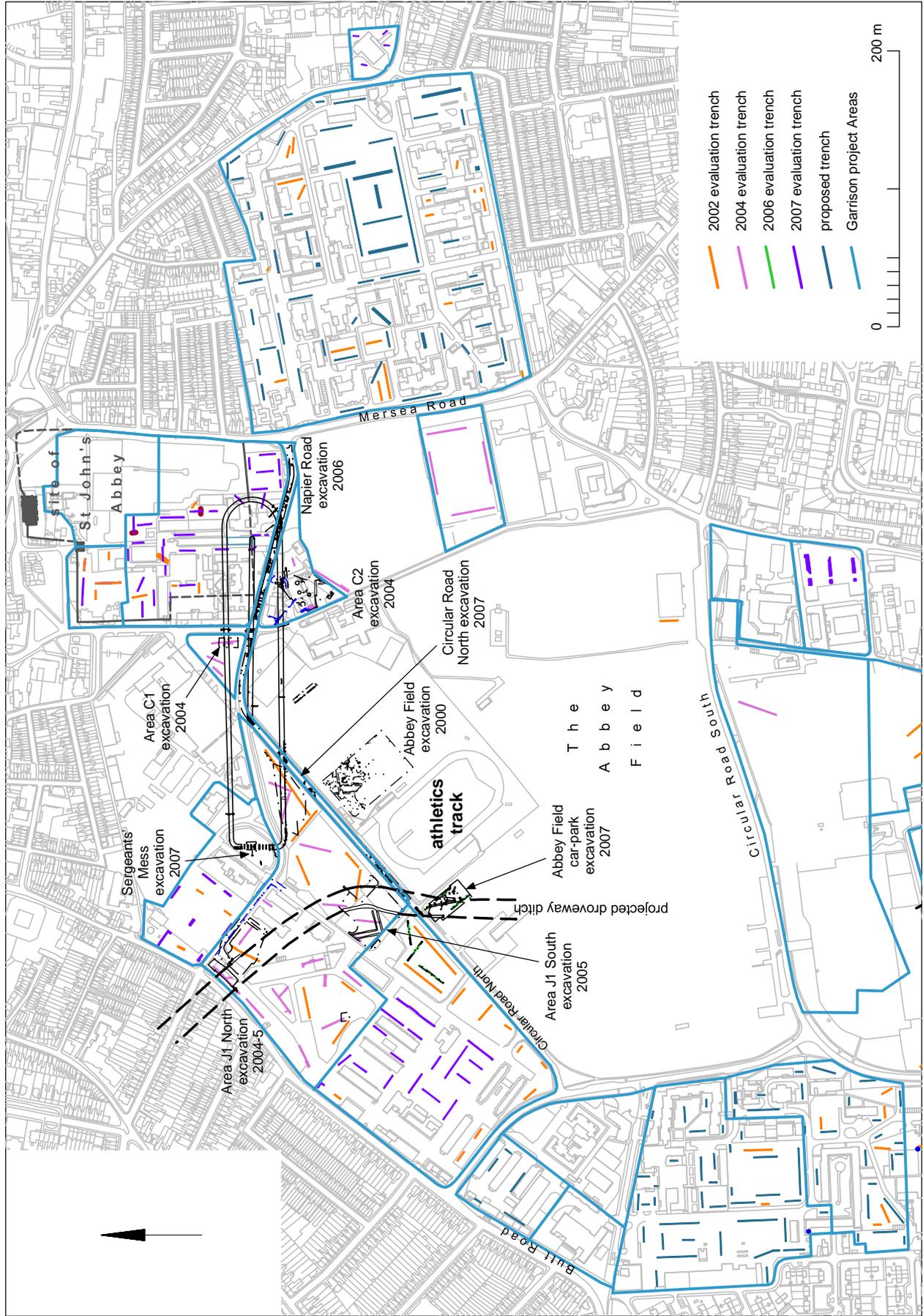
The depths at which natural ground (in this case gravel) was encountered suggest that the northern area of the site (around T1-T4 and T15) was the least disturbed, with gravel located at between 0.3m and 0.5m below ground-level. To the south, gravel was encountered between 0.6 and 1.4m below ground-level with the deepest areas at the south-east and south-west edges of the track.

The ubiquity of modern debris such as concrete and tarmac makes it clear that the majority of the observed stratigraphy is modern and redeposited, ie dumped here. It is possible that the bulk of this material was used to raise ground-level, although during this process some cut and fill may also have occurred.

No significant archaeological horizons were exposed. It may be that there are Roman burials beneath the limit of excavation of some of the pads and cable trenches on this site, buried below the redeposited soils, but the limited amount of ground disturbance here was not conducive to exposing them. Alternatively, given the 0.6m-plus depth of modern deposits over the site, it is possible that preparation works for the site in 1925 led to the removal of Roman burials on the line of these works, particularly as previous excavations to the north demonstrated that burials were sometimes only 300mm below ground-level.

9 Abbreviations

AOD	above Ordnance Datum
NGR	National Grid Reference
RRC SAL	Report of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries (London)
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database



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Fig 1 Site location.

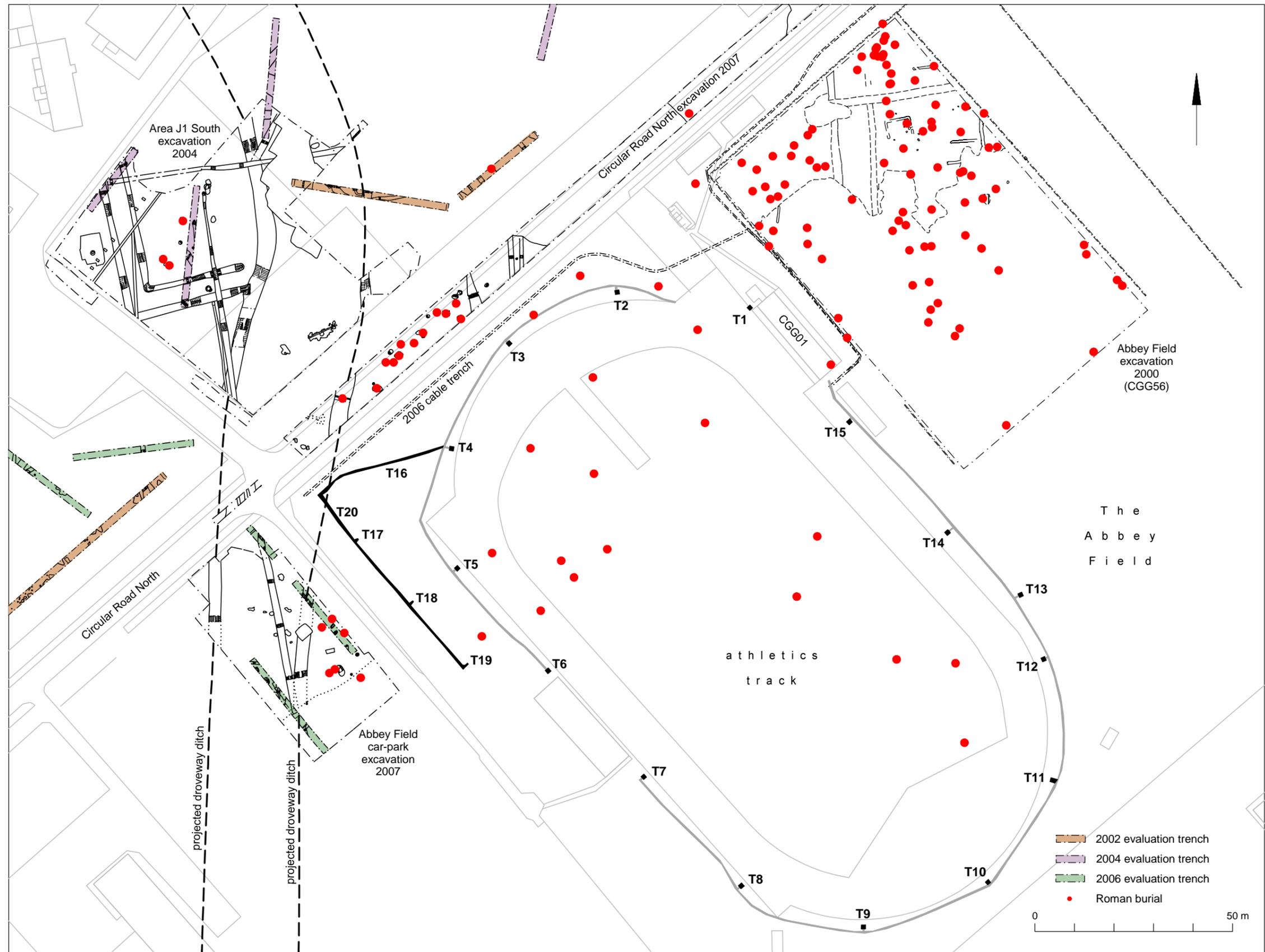


Fig 2 Location of trenches.

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

Summary sheet

Site address: Colchester Garrison athletics track, Circular Road North, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 99512 24510 (centre)	Site code: Museum accession code 2007.112
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: 8th-23rd October 2007	Size of area investigated: approximately 500m of trench with bases of lighting columns
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related UAD nos:
Final report: CAT Report 452 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: post-medieval, modern	
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>This site lies in a known Roman cemetery area. A watching brief on trenches dug for the installation of lighting around the Colchester Garrison athletics track revealed only post-medieval and modern dumped soils. No Roman burials were found.</i>	
Previous summaries/reports: -	
Author of summary: Howard Brooks	Date of summary: January 2008