

Report on a watching brief: CAT Report 457

Site address: Colchester Community Stadium, Cuckoo Farm, off
Boxted Road, Colchester, Essex
Date of fieldwork: August-October 2007
NGR: TL 9926 2891
Location plan attached?: Yes (Fig 1)
Museum accession code: 2007.96
CAT project code: 07/8c

Summary

During an archaeological watching brief at the Colchester Community Stadium site, Cuckoo Farm, Colchester, no significant ancient deposits were located, although a series of post-medieval/modern field boundary ditches extended across the site.

Introduction (Fig 1)

An archaeological watching brief was carried out on behalf of Colchester Borough Council during groundworks for the Colchester Community Stadium at Cuckoo Farm, Colchester. It was undertaken by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) from August to October 2007.

The development site lies to the north of Colchester town centre and immediately south of the A12 trunk road. It comprises an area of 7.45 hectares of level, open, former arable land. The site is bounded on the south side by the former Severalls hospital. Boxted Road forms the western boundary and gives access to the site. The height of the modern ground-level in this area is approximately 49.2m above Ordnance Datum.

Details of the watching brief methodology can be found in the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for the site produced by CAT, which followed a brief written by the Colchester Borough Council archaeology officer (CBCAO) in August 2007.

Archaeological background

The site lies 2.1 miles (3.4km) north of the Roman and medieval walled town. This is beyond the known limits of Roman and medieval suburban development and cemetery areas.

Little previous archaeological investigation had taken place on the site itself. It was included in two archaeological desk-based assessments in 2000 and 2001 (CAT Reports 55 and 119). Extensive trial-trenching took place in the area to the south and east of the site in 1997 and 2001 (CAT Reports 2 and 159). In 2004, cropmarks to the east of the site were examined by Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd. Apart from modern field boundaries, little of archaeological significance was recorded during these investigations.

Aim

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

Methods

The development site included the stadium itself as well as extensive areas designated for car-parking, practice pitches and other facilities, mainly to the west of the stadium. Most of the topsoil-stripping had already taken place before the archaeological watching brief commenced and the topsoil was stockpiled on site. The piling had also largely been installed for the four main spectator stands.

The groundworks were monitored during intermittent site visits. This consisted mainly of field-walking the stripped surfaces and of examining foundation trenches in the stadium area.

Individual records of archaeological contexts, such as layers or features, were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets. Standard record shots of the site and of individual contexts were taken on a digital camera. Further details of the methods used can be found in the WSI and in the CAT document *Policies and procedures* (CAT 2006).

Results

Most of the site had already been stripped of topsoil down to the level of the natural subsoil (L2). This consisted of brownish-yellow sands and gravels with some pockets of pale brown cover loam. Where it survived, notably around the edges of the site, the overlying greyish-brown topsoil (L1) was 0.3m thick.

Over most of the area of the proposed stands of the stadium and of the main thoroughfares across the site, the natural subsoil had been sealed by a layer of modern rubble make-up 0.25-0.5m thick, which obscured any surviving archaeological features.

Post-medieval/modern field boundary ditches (Fig 1)

Examination of the stripped areas revealed a series of field-boundary ditches. The most marked of these extended from south-west to north-east across the eastern part of the site. It was traced over a distance of approximately 250m, including a well-preserved stretch across the site of the stadium pitch. This ditch (F2) survived 1.1-2m wide and had a dark greyish-brown, gravelly fill. It contained fragments of peg-tile, as well as much recent root activity.

In the north-east corner of the stadium pitch area, a probable ditch (F3) was observed immediately to the east of F2. Its extent was unclear as it extended beneath the layer of modern rubble on the site of the east stand. The fill of F3 contained coal fragments and was similar to that of F2. It was probably contemporary with, and extended off to the east of, F2.

In the north-east corner of the site, another ditch (F4), which extended from south-east to north-west, was uncovered for 5m. It was 2m wide and had a similar fill to F2, also including fragments of peg-tile. The ditches F2 and F4 were probably contemporary, with F4 extending off to the west from F2. Immediately south-west of F4 was a large patch of probable natural cover loam 7.5m across. Pressed into the top of this were several fragments of ceramic building material, including one fragment of Roman brick/tile, as well as some modern pottery and glass sherds.

Another ditch (F1) was observed roughly 95m to the west of F2 and parallel to it. It survived just over 1m wide and was traced for approximately 100m in the car-park area. Also in this area were the remains of a further ditch (F5), aligned north-west to south-east, which extended off to the west of F1. Several modern-looking, narrow, shallow linear features, aligned north-west to south-east, were observed immediately east of F1, close to the northern edge of the site.

Apart from some surface cleaning, the ditches were largely unexcavated. No finds of archaeological significance were retained from the site.

Conclusions

Significant archaeological remains were not located at the Cuckoo Farm stadium site. The position of the post-medieval/modern ditches uncovered on the site corresponded closely to the field boundaries marked on OS maps dating back to 1875, and also on George Gilbert's plan of 1846. The ditches were the remains of field-boundary ditches which date from at least as far back as the early 19th century, and which were presumably associated at one time with Cuckoo Farm. They survived in part until relatively recently, albeit truncated by the A12 bypass.

Archive deposition

The archive from the watching brief, including the site records and photographs, will be permanently deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums under accession code COLEM 2007.96.

Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to Colchester Borough Council for commissioning and funding the watching brief, and to Barr Ltd for their help on site. The work was monitored by Martin Winter of Colchester Borough Council.

Report author: Donald Shimmin

Report date: February 2008

References

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| CAT | 2006 | <i>Policies and procedures</i> , Colchester Archaeological Trust |
| CAT Report 2 | | An archaeological evaluation of the line of the Colchester Northern Approach Road. Stage 1: Turner Road to Boxted Road, unpublished CAT archive report, by Stephen Benfield, 1997 |
| CAT Report 55 | | A desk-based assessment of the archaeological remains around Cuckoo Farm, Colchester, unpublished CAT archive report, by Howard Brooks, 2000 |
| CAT Report 119 | | A desk-based assessment of the archaeological remains in and around Severalls Hospital, Colchester, unpublished CAT archive report, by Carl Crossan, 2001 |
| CAT Report 159 | | An archaeological evaluation on the route for Colchester Northern Approach Road Phase 3 (Severalls Hospital/Cuckoo Farm), Colchester, Essex, September-October 2001, unpublished CAT archive report, by Carl Crossan, 2001 |
| WSI | | Written Scheme of Investigation for archaeological attendance and recording (a watching brief) at Colchester Community Stadium, Cuckoo Farm, off Boxted Road, Colchester, Essex, September 2007, by Donald Shimmin, 2007 |

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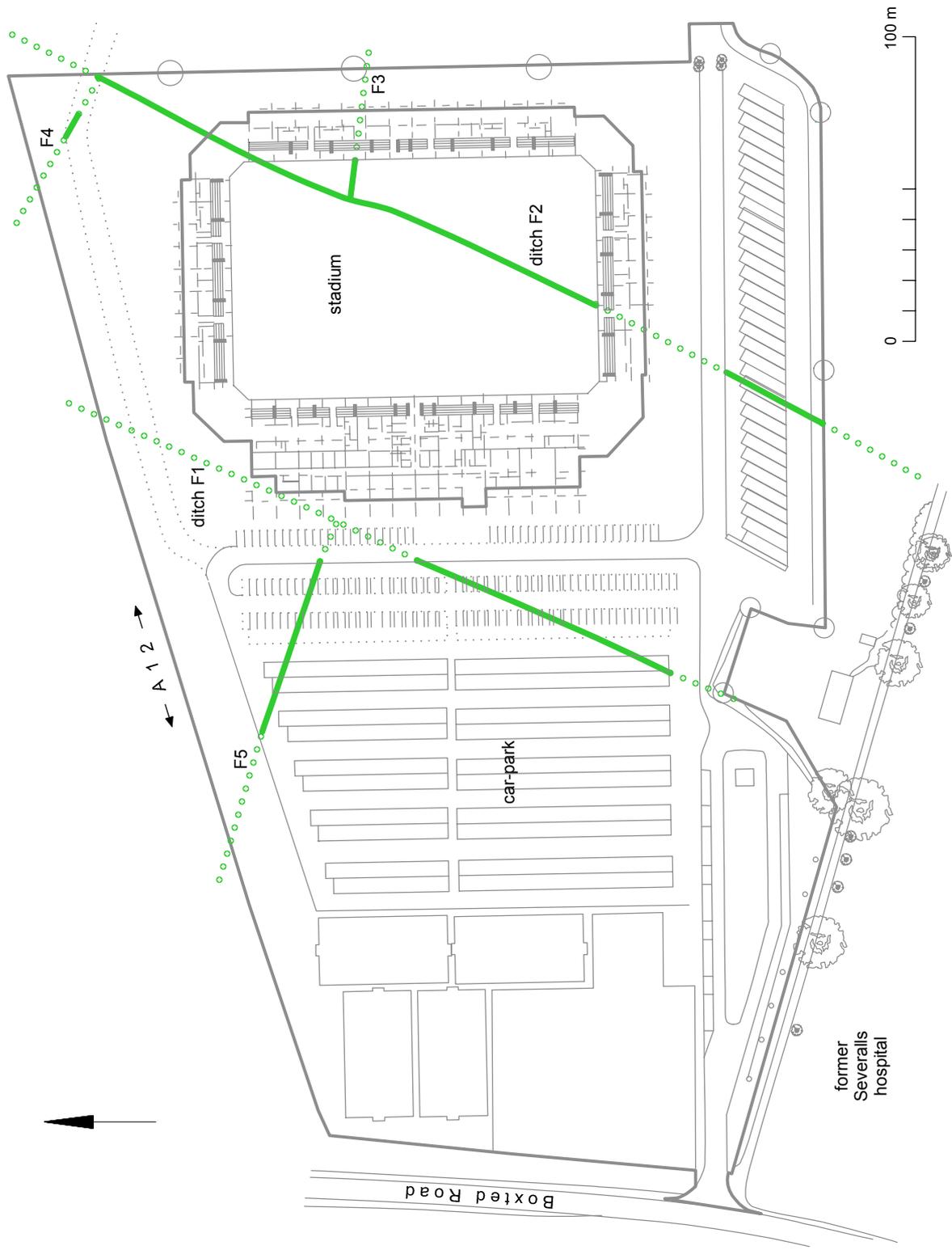


Fig 1 Site plan showing post-medieval/modern ditches F1-F5.

Essex Historic Environment Record/ *Essex Archaeology and History*

Summary sheet

Site address: Colchester Community Stadium, Cuckoo Farm, off Boxted Road, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 9926 2891	Site code: Museum accession code COLEM 2007.96
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: August-October 2007	Size of area investigated: 7.45 hectares
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums	Funding source: CBC
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHER and UAD nos:
Final report: CAT Report 457	
Periods represented: post-medieval/modern	
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>During an archaeological watching brief at the Colchester Community Stadium site, Cuckoo Farm, Colchester, no significant ancient deposits were located. A series of post-medieval/modern field boundary ditches extended across the site.</i>	
Previous summaries/reports: CAT Reports 55 and 119	
Author of summary: Donald Shimmin	Date of summary: February 2008