

**An archaeological watching brief
at the Central Clinic,
High Street,
Colchester, Essex
September 2007-March 2008**

**report prepared by
Howard Brooks and Patrick Spencer**

**on behalf of
Knight Developments**

CAT project ref.: 07/9e
NGR: TM 0002 2532
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1 Summary

The site lies in Insulas 15/23 and 24 of the Roman town, and partially within a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Essex SAM no 1).

An evaluation in 2006 identified Roman buildings on this site, lying on either side of the Roman gravel street dividing Insulas 15/23 and 24 (CAT Report 372).

A watching brief was held in 2007-8 on the removal of the footings of the Central Clinic main buildings, and on other works associated with the construction of new residential accommodation on the site.

The gravel surface of the Roman street was located at three points, but otherwise no significant strata were revealed.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 2.1 This is the report on an archaeological watching brief carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on behalf of Knight Developments Ltd at the Central Clinic site, High Street, Colchester, Essex. Site work took place intermittently between September 2007 and March 2008. Post-excavation work leading to the production of this report took place in January 2008 and May 2008.
- 2.2 The site lies on the north side of the High Street in Colchester. To the west and north of the site are the grounds of the Castle Park, and to the east is the former Grey Friars Community College. Site centre is at NGR TM 0002 2532. The site was recently occupied by the main buildings of the Central Clinic, which consisted of a tower block with a range of single-storey buildings to its west.
- 2.3 An archaeological evaluation on the site in 2006 established the survival of Roman remains on this site and measured their depth below modern ground-level (CAT Report 372).
- 2.4 At a meeting between the site owners and developers Knight Developments, English Heritage (EH), Colchester Borough Council (CBC) Archaeological Officer and CAT, it was suggested that Knight Developments should explore the possibility of building on a raft to avoid disturbance to the underlying archaeological deposits. For engineering reasons, and because this option would have been more destructive of the archaeological deposits than a piled construction, it was decided that it was not possible to pursue this option.
- 2.5 An application for Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) to carry out the building work and accompanying archaeological work was submitted in November 2006. This was supported by a *Mitigation Strategy* which proposed an archaeological watching brief over the development work. A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) giving details of the proposed methodology of the watching brief was submitted to CBC and EH. The work detailed in the WSI was subject to the granting of SMC to Knight Developments.
- 2.7 All fieldwork was done in accordance with the WSI, and was monitored by the Colchester Borough Council Archaeological Officer (CBCAO).
- 2.8 This report conforms to standards and practices contained in the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IFA 2001a), *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IFA 2001b), 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), and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14).

3 Archaeological background

- 3.1 The Central Clinic site lies in the east central part of the Roman town, straddling two blocks or *insulae*; the gravel street dividing Insulas 15/23 and 24 extends north to south through the site. To the north of the site lies Castle Park, with its Norman castle keep and earthworks, and remains of the Roman town, and to the east is the

site of the medieval Greyfriars monastery, until recently the Grey Friars Community College.

- 3.2** The site lies partially over the south edge of the scheduled area Essex SAM 1 (Colchester Castle and Upper Castle Park). The boundary of the scheduled area bisects the site, so that the northern half of the site is in the scheduled area and the southern half is outside it.
- 3.3** The archaeological background to this site has been explored in a desk-based assessment (CAT Report 324). Below (sections 3.4-3.5) is a summary of the previous archaeological investigations on the Central Clinic site.
- 3.4** In 1963, a trench 189 feet long and 5 feet wide was dug across the south face of the proposed new central clinic site. The work was carried out by Brian Blake, on behalf of the Colchester Excavation Committee. In the absence of a site plan, the trench position is presumed to have been more or less parallel with and quite close to the south face of the now-demolished Central Clinic main buildings. The trench was dug down (an unspecified depth) to natural sand and gravel subsoil. The report says that 'vestigial' traces were found of the north-south Roman gravel street dividing Insulas 15/23 and 24, but no other Roman remains. Early medieval pottery at the east end of the trench perhaps indicates the proximity of the Greyfriars site (CM 1963-4, 9; Urban Archaeological Database or UAD no 3128).
- 3.5** An evaluation by five trenches was carried out in May 2006 (CAT Report 372). The north-south gravel street separating Insulas 15/23 and 24 was well preserved on the north side of the site, but heavily truncated on the south side. As was expected in the Roman town, there were Roman structures on both sides of the street, presumably town-houses. The remains of these included three wall lines, patches of tessellated and mortar floors, and areas of gravelling of yards or paths. Over most of the site, the highest significant archaeological horizon was a layer of Roman clay which is probably the debris resulting from the demolition of Roman buildings. The Roman remains were heavily truncated by post-medieval and modern pits and service trenches, especially on the south side of the site of the Central Clinic main buildings.

4 Aim

The aim of the watching brief was to record the location, date, character, and significance of any surviving archaeological remains.

5 Results (Fig 2)

Recording of exposed archaeological strata was subject to the usual safety concerns, so in all cases the strata have been recorded from site level, rather than by standing in the trenches to create section drawings.

The results given here relate to the eight positions where it was possible to record the stratigraphy as it was exposed in the trenches produced by the grubbing-out of the footings. These positions (Sections 1-8) are marked as Sx 1-Sx 8 on Figure 2. As far as was possible, the layer numbers used in this report are the same as those used in the 2006 evaluation:

L3 post-medieval and modern topsoil
L4 post-Roman topsoil
L5 Roman demolition debris
Natural (not seen in 2006)

26th September 2007(HB)

Removal of the footings of the south-western corner of the Central Clinic single-storey building. The footings were quite large, up to 1m deep and 500mm wide, and consisted of brickwork on a concrete slab. The footings were all within the 1.5m blanket of topsoil (L3) which the 2006 evaluation showed covers this part of the site. Occasionally the contractor's mechanical plant brought up slightly sandier soil from levels below the topsoil.

3rd October 2007 (PS)

Removal of the footings of the western and north-western sides of the Central Clinic main buildings. The trenches excavated to remove the footings reached depths ranging from 1.20 to 1.90m below ground-level. This was deep enough to expose subsoil (L4 or L5) at depths ranging from 1.0 to 1.50m beneath the topsoil (L3). Four sections were examined (section or Sx 1-Sx 4).

Section 1

In this section, topsoil L3 consisted of 1.5m of dark slightly sandy grey-brown loam, with small flint pebbles, and some brick and mortar fragments, and charcoal flecks.

The bottom of the topsoil L3 was at a depth of approximately 1.5m below ground-level. Below this, the top 49-55cm of a layer equating to L4 was exposed. This was a brownish-yellow sand, with small rounded to sub-angular stones (flint). Worm holes extending from this layer into L3 indicate the possible movement of soil between the two. The boundary between L3 and L4 was indistinct and gradational. The colour of L4 might reflect relative proximity to natural gravel and sand. However, no natural ground was observed directly.

Section 2

This exposed three layers:

1. 'Crush', 0 to 32-40cm thick: reddish-brown medium to coarse sand with small to large flint nodules. Some brick and mortar fragments, all intermixed with dark grey loam. This deposit was topped by grass.
2. L3, approximately 1m thick: slightly sandy dark grey-yellow loam. Some mortar fragments, and some brick/tile fragments. Lenses of brownish-yellow fine sand. Small sub-angular to rounded stones, mainly flint, but some quartzite. Some oyster shell and mortar fragments. Charcoal flecks. Finds (finds no 21) from L3 included animal bone, Roman and post-medieval pot sherds, and a peg-tile fragment.
3. L5, approximately 20cm exposed, base not seen: dirty-yellow fine sand, with some small sub-angular stones. No finds were retrieved.

Section 3

The upper part of L4 included a concentration of oyster shells. This was directly overlaid by L3 at 1.2m below ground-level. This concentration was approximately 90cm long and approximately 30cm deep. However, its lower edge could not be clearly distinguished.

Section 4

This exposed three layers:

1. Concrete, 10cm thick.
2. 'Crush', 15-20cm thick: medium sand, with abundant tile and mortar fragments.
3. L3, 83 to 85cm thick: dark yellow-brown sandy loam with brick/tile fragments. Some mortar, charcoal flecks, and abundant small angular to rounded stones. A few lenses of yellow-brown/reddish sand with small stones.

A brick structure was revealed by the removal of a concrete beam lying parallel to the west end of the north retaining wall which separates the clinic site from the grounds of Castle Park to the north. This structure consisted of six courses of unfrosted bricks, was 55cm deep and approximately 50cm wide, and its top was 70cm below surface level. This was probably part of the foundation of the retaining wall.

8th October 2007 (PS)

Removal of footings along the north side of the Central Clinic main buildings. In this area, topsoil L3 was exposed to a depth of approximately 50cm below ground-level. Finds from L3 included pieces of concrete, ceramic pipe, brick, mortar, and modern glass. This range of finds demonstrates that there has been recent disturbance to this topsoil horizon, or else it is all recently dumped (ie like L9 in the 2006 evaluation). One section was exposed (section or Sx 5).

Section 5

This section comprised 1.1 to 1.2m of stony dark grey-brown topsoil (L3), containing mortar and brick fragments. Roman pottery (finds no 24) was recovered from the nearby spoil heap.

Removal of footings immediately west of the tower block exposed three sections (section or Sx 6-Sx 8).

Section 6

The upper fill was truncated and covered by loose debris, newly extracted.

1. L3, 1.0 to 1.07m thick: dark yellowish-grey silty loam with small to medium stones (angular to rounded). Roman tile fragments.
2. L4, 30 to 41cm thick (base not seen): dirty yellow-brown slightly sandy clay/loam. Many moderate to small, sub-angular to rounded stones (mainly flint). Inclusions of oyster shell, broken tile, charcoal flecks. Some of the overlying L3 had been brought down by worm action.

The stony deposit (no 2 in list above) is certainly part of the body and surface of the north-south street dividing Insulas 15/23 and 24 of the Roman town (CAT Report 372). This was seen in 2006 evaluation trench T2, where it was numbered F2. Here, it was slightly less stony in character than where it was recorded in Section 7 and Section 8 (below).

A layer rich in oyster shells (1.25-1.27m long, approximately 4cm deep) was found at 1.2m below ground-level. As elsewhere on this site, L3 loam graded imperceptibly into L4. Here, however, L4 became perceptibly more yellow with depth (ie as it merged into L5). Finds obtained from L3 (finds no 25) included Roman pot sherds and pieces of Roman tile. One grey body sherd had a crudely carved semi-circular side, with the opposite side broken; this might have been a counter.

Section 7

This was exposed approximately 5m north of Section 6.

1. L3, approximately 65cm thick (but its upper parts probably removed): Dark yellowish to brown sandy silt. Small to medium stones, subangular to rounded. Charcoal flecks. Inclusions of tile fragments and oyster shells. This is probably part of the body of the Roman street; it was unclear whether it was *in situ* or disturbed.
2. L4, 45 cm exposed: Moderate dirty yellow, slightly sandy clayey silt. Small stones.

A sherd of samian ware (finds no 26) was found in the spoil.

Section 8

This revealed a gravel surface.

1. L3, 1.40-1.47m thick: dark grey-brown loam, small to medium stones (sub-angular to rounded), tile, *opus signinum*, oyster shell. An amphora body sherd (finds no 28) was extracted at approximately 1m depth.
2. Surface, 1.5 to 2cm thick where observed: numerous small to moderate flint and quartzite pebbles, partly covered by fine gravel. Roman tile (finds no 27) lying flat on surface. Oyster shell fragments.
3. Sandy silt, 21cm exposed: firm medium brownish-yellow sandy silt. Small angular to sub-angular stones. No finds were retrieved.

As was the case in Section 6 (above), the gravel-covered silt (no 2 in list above) is certainly part of the north-south street between Insulas 15/23 and 24 (CAT Report 372). This was seen in 2006 evaluation trench T2, where it was numbered F2.

3rd March 2008 (NR)

A cycle store was being constructed against the western boundary (Fig 2). The southern 7m x 7m of the footprint involved ground reduction. Three slots aligned north to south were excavated to a depth of 1.50m at their northern end and 1.0m at their southern ends. Stratification was as follows: the top 0.50m to 0.70m was mixed

greyish brown loam with fragments of brick and peg-tile. This layer probably dates from the time of the construction of the Central Clinic, and equates to L9 of the 2006 evaluation. From 0.5m or 0.7m to 0.8m below ground-level was a dark grey-brown loam with an occasional oyster shell fragment. This was probably the post-medieval topsoil cover L3 dating to the period before the construction of the Central Clinic. Roman tile and septaria fragments were observed but not retrieved. Yellowish brown sand was seen at 0.8m below ground-level and below. This was presumably natural ground.

4th-6th March 2008 (NR)

Continued ground reduction of cycle store base, as on 3rd March. Nothing other than L3 seen, except for a small concentration of loose Roman tile and septaria pieces approximately in the centre of the garage, at a depth of 1.50m below ground-level.

6 Finds

Notes:

Medieval and later fabric codes are after *CAR 7*; Roman fabric codes are after *CAR 10*.

Finds numbers used here continue the series started for the 2006 evaluation.

(D = discarded.)

Table 2: list of finds.

Finds no	Context	Description
21	topsoil L3	2 animal bone fragments, 18g. D 1 peg-tile fragment with circular peg hole, 52g. D 1 post-medieval red earthenware (Fabric 40) rim sherd, 27g 1 post-medieval red earthenware body sherd (Fabric 40), 18th-19th century, 18g 2 Roman grey ware rim sherds, 74g 1 Roman grey ware base sherd, 19g 2 Roman grey ware body sherds, 7g 1 Roman amphora sherd, 30g
22	U/S	1 samian ware rim sherd, 3g 1 Roman grey ware rim sherd, 10g
23	U/S	1 green glass bottle fragment, 18th-19th century, 18g 2 clay tobacco-pipe stem fragments, 6g. 1 Frechen ware (Fabric 45d) flagon neck, 17th century, 23g 1 post-medieval red earthenware (Fabric 40) body sherd, 17th-18th century, 19g 2 Colchester-type ware (Fabric 21a) body sherds, 26g 1 Roman black-burnished ware rim sherd, 8g 1 Roman grey ware sherd, 4g
24	U/S	1 base sherd of black-burnished ware, 39g
25	topsoil L3	2 Roman <i>tegula</i> flat tile pieces, 135g. D 1 Roman ?amphora sherd, 41g 2 Roman grey ware sherds, 21g
26	U/S	1 samian ware rim sherd, 10g
27	on surface of Roman street numbered F2 in 2006 evaluation	1 Roman brick fragment, 140g
28	L3, above Roman street surface	1 Roman amphora body sherd; Dressel 20 type, current from 1st to early 3rd century, 94g

7 Discussion

The basic stratigraphical sequence on this site consists of various recent topsoil layers overlying either the remains of demolished Roman structures or the Roman gravel street which bisects the site.

The deposits recorded in the 2006 evaluation were seen again in the 2007-8 watching brief. The only point of real interest is that gravel surfaces or patches were seen in three positions coinciding with the expected line of the gravel street, the course of which, although only patchily recorded in 1963, had already been fixed by the 2006 evaluation.

There were a few finds, mainly residual Roman pottery. The only find of note was a fragment of Roman brick lying on the surface of the Roman street.

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 and Ipswich Museums under accession code COLEM 2006.54 (the same accession number was used for finds from the 2006 evaluation).

9 Acknowledgements

The Trust would like to thank Knight Developments for commissioning and funding the work, and to all Knight Developments staff for their help (in particular, Peter Swarbrick, Andrew Knights and Cyril Wilkins).

The fieldwork was carried out by H Brooks (HB), Patrick Spencer (PS) and Nigel Rayner (NR).

10 References

- | | | |
|----------------|---------|---|
| CAR 6 | 1992 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 6: Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School, and other sites in Colchester, 1971-85</i> , by P Crummy |
| CAR 7 | 2000 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 7: Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85</i> , by John Cotter |
| CAR 10 | 1999 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 10: Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester 1971-86</i> , by R P Symonds and S Wade, ed by P Bidwell and A Croom |
| CAT Report 324 | | A desk-based assessment of the archaeological remains around the Central Clinic, East Lodge Court, High Street, Colchester, by Howard Brooks, 2005 |
| CAT Report 372 | | An archaeological evaluation at the Central Clinic, High Street, Colchester, Essex, May 2006, by Howard Brooks, 2006 |
| CM | 1963-64 | <i>Colchester Museum Report, 1963-1964</i> |
| 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 14 | 2003 | <i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 14, ed by D Gurney |
| IFA | 2001a | <i>Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief</i> |
| IFA | 2001b | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i> |

11 Abbreviations

AOD	Above Ordnance Datum
CBC	Colchester Borough Council
EH	English Heritage
NGR	National Grid Reference
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database, record of archaeological discoveries maintained by CBC
U/S	unstratified, ie without any context

12 Glossary

context	specific place, or location of finds
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, or a wall; can contain 'contexts'
layer	distinct or distinguishable deposit of soil
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c AD 1500
modern	period from the 19th century onwards to the present
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
<i>opus signinum</i>	pink Roman mortar used mainly in floors
peg-tile	post-medieval roof tile
post-medieval	from c AD 1500 to around the late 18th century
post-Roman	period after c AD 410
Roman	when Britain was part of the Roman Empire, c AD 43-410

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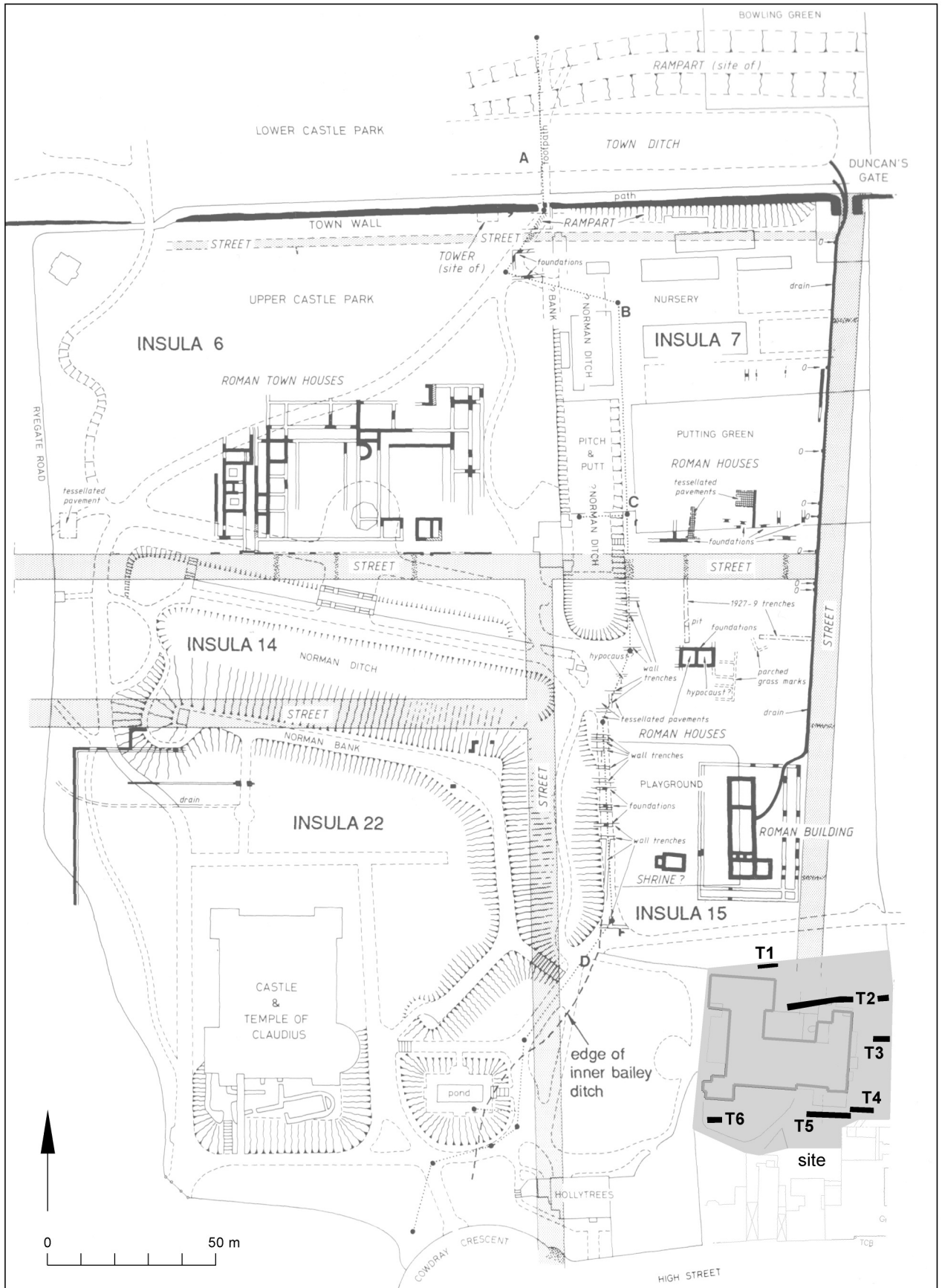
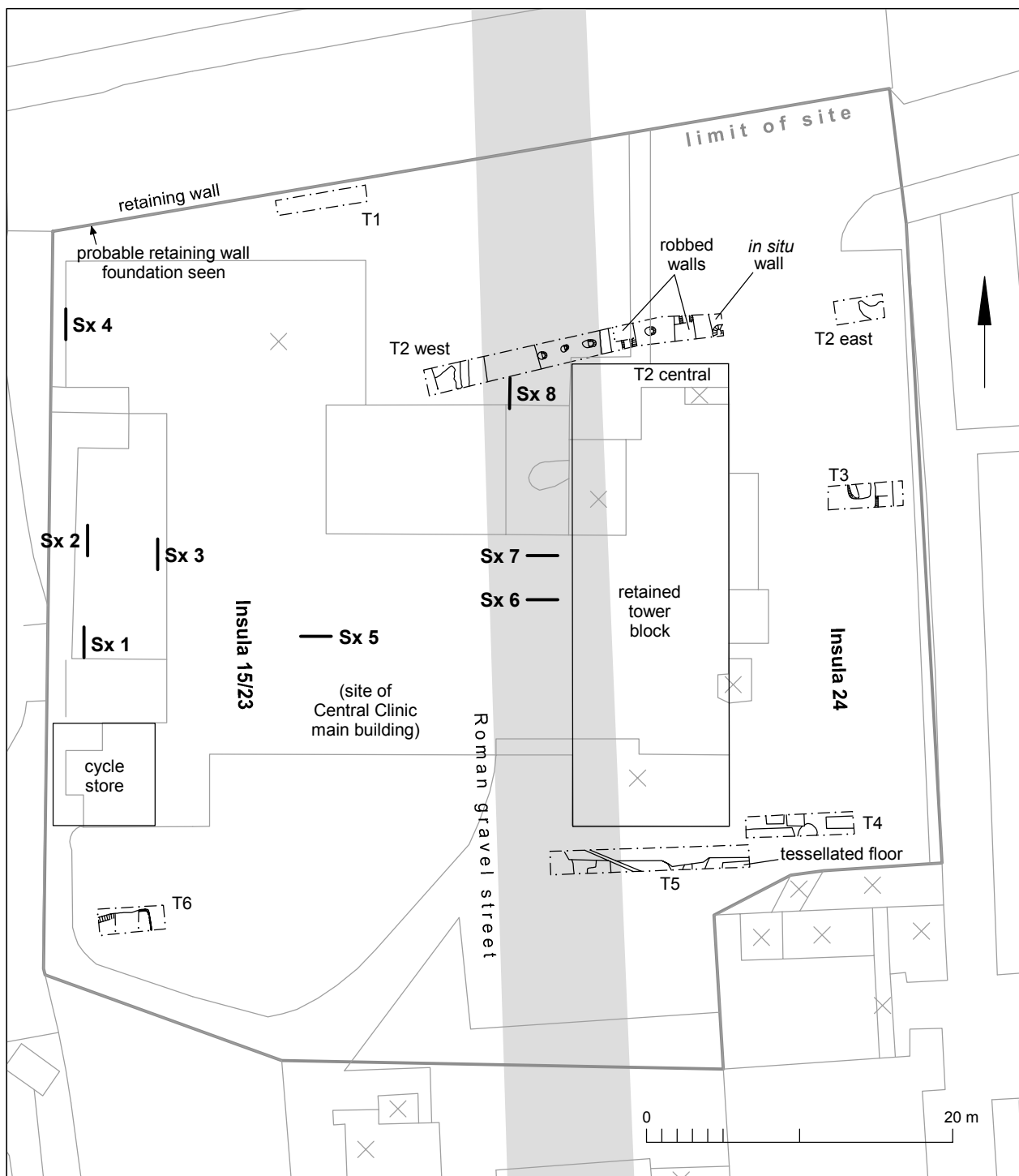


Fig 1 Site location showing 2006 evaluation trench positions, with detail of the Roman remains in Castle Park (after CAR 6, 369).



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Fig 2 Site plan, showing location of Roman street and sections observed 2007-2008.

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

Summary sheet

Site address: Central Clinic, High Street, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TM 0002 2532	Site code: CAT project code: 07/9e COLEM accession code 2006.54
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: September 2007-March 2008	Size of area investigated: approximately 0.3 ha
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? Possibly a small future watching brief	Related UAD no: 3128
Final report: CAT Report 473 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Roman	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>The site lies in Insulas 15/23 and 24 of the Roman town, and partially within a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Essex SAM no 1).</i> <i>An evaluation in 2006 identified Roman buildings on this site, lying on either side of the Roman gravel street dividing Insulas 15/23 and 24 (CAT Report 372).</i> <i>A watching brief was held in 2007-8 on the removal of the footings of the Central Clinic main buildings, and on other works associated with the construction of new residential accommodation on the site.</i> <i>The gravel surface of the Roman street was located at three points, but otherwise no significant strata were revealed.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: CAT Reports 324 and 372	
Keywords: Roman, street, tessellated floor	Significance: *
Author of summary: Howard Brooks	Date of summary: May 2008