

**An archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching
at Colchester Royal Grammar School,
6 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex
February 2010**

**report prepared by
Ben Holloway and Howard Brooks**

**on behalf of
Colchester Royal Grammar School**

CAT project ref.: 10/2a
Colchester and Ipswich Museums accession code: COLIM 2010.6
NGR: TL 98686 24834 (c)



Colchester Archaeological Trust
12 Lexden Road,
Colchester,
Essex CO3 3NF

tel.: (01206) 541051
(01206) 500124
email: archaeologists@catuk.org

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1 Summary

The site lies in an extensive area of Roman cemeteries, north of one of the Roman roads which meet at a junction (the site of which is now under the Colchester Royal Grammar School), and immediately south of the Roman 'walled cemetery' which was discovered in the school grounds in the 1940s.

Two small evaluation trenches within the footprint of a proposed extension to the sixth form block revealed a possible robber trench and two modern features. When plotted against the position of the main Roman road from Colchester to London and the Roman walled cemetery, this evaluation should have exposed the Roman road gravel, but did not.

There are two reasons why the road gravel may be absent here. First, the walled cemetery and road may have been plotted too far to the north, and perhaps should now be projected approximately 4m to the south. In this position, the line of the northern side of the road would pass south of the evaluation trenches, and the possible robber trench in T1 would be close to the position of the south wall of the walled cemetery (ie it would represent the robbed-out south wall foundation of the cemetery). Second, and more likely, the road gravel has been removed by gardening or landscaping activities, or perhaps by archaeological excavation in the school grounds.

No Roman burials were revealed during this evaluation.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 2.1 This is the archive report on the archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) in the grounds of and on behalf of the Colchester Royal Grammar School, 6 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex, on the 16th February 2010.
- 2.2 The site is located west of Colchester town centre and is centred at NGR TL 98686 24834. The site is immediately adjacent to and south of Lexden Road, and within the grounds of the Grammar School (Fig 1). The trial-trenches were placed in a grassed garden area to the north of the sixth form block, which is to be extended.
- 2.3 A planning application will eventually be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for the construction of a single-storey extension to the sixth form block.
- 2.4 A brief describing the required archaeological work (CBC 2010) was produced by Mr Martin Winter, the Colchester Borough Council Archaeological Officer (CBCAO). In response to this brief, CAT produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI; CAT 2010), essentially a description of our proposed evaluation methodology, which was approved by the CBCAO.
- 2.5 This report mirrors standards and practices contained in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 2008a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IfA 2008b), and Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (CIMS 2008a) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester and Ipswich Museums* (CIMS 2008b). Other sources used are *Management of research projects in the historic environment* (MoRPHE) and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14).

3 Archaeological background (Fig 2)

The site is located within an extensive area of Roman cemeteries. Large parts of this area have been the subject of various excavations dating back to the mid 19th century. The grounds of the Grammar School were trenched in the 1920s by an enthusiastic teacher from the Grammar School who discovered the course of the main Roman road from Colchester to London and other minor Roman roads, and also confirmed that the grounds of the Grammar School were an important focus of Roman funerary activity (Hall 1946; Hull 1958, 4-5).

In the vicinity of and within the grounds of the Grammar School, a number of Roman cremations, inhumations and tombstones have been discovered (Hull 1958, 292-6). This includes the peculiar rectangular walled cemetery with its indications of high-status cremations and inhumations which was found in the 1940s immediately north of and adjacent to the main Roman road from Colchester to London, in the garden of Gurney Benham House (Hall 1946; Hull 1958, 254). There is a full discussion of all cemetery areas in this part of Colchester in *CAR 9*.

In 2005, a Roman temple-tomb was excavated by the CAT, 71m south-east of the current site, when an extension for a science lab. was being built (CAT Report 345).

4 Aim

The aim of the evaluation was to locate, identify and assess the quality of any surviving archaeological remains. This information would then enable an informed decision to be taken on the preservation or otherwise of any deposits and the need for further work and/or mitigation. This follows the guidelines provided for in *Planning Policy Guidance 16: Archaeology and Planning* (DoE 1990).

5 Results

Evaluation trenches (Figs 1-5)

Two evaluation trenches were cut in positions shown on Figure 1 (T1-T2). A mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless bucket was used to progressively strip the underlying strata down to the uppermost archaeologically significant level. All further investigation was carried out by hand. This section gives a summary of the excavated sequence and finds information from each trench.

T1: summary (Figs 3, 5)

T1 was excavated through these superimposed layers: L1, a 200mm-thick layer of modern topsoil; L2, a 240mm-thick layer of made ground containing peg-tile (not retained); and onto the top of L3, a natural sand and coarse gravel.

The trench revealed two features, ie F1 and F2. F1 was a linear trench, the fill of which contained mortar flecks. There were no dated finds from F1 but, given its alignment and position in relation to the walled cemetery, F1 is interpreted as a possible robber trench representing the robbed-out south wall foundation of the walled cemetery.

F2 was a post-hole, the fill of which contained pieces of modern plastic.

T1 – archaeological contexts and dating.

context	type	dated finds	period
F1	?robber trench	none	undated: could be Roman or medieval
F2	post-hole	modern plastic (not retained)	modern

T2: summary (Figs 4, 5)

T2 was excavated through these superimposed layers: L1, a 250mm-thick layer of modern topsoil; L2, a 400mm-thick layer of made ground containing peg-tile (not retained); and onto the top of L3, a natural sand and coarse gravel.

The only feature in this trench was a large modern pit F3. This had a disturbed fill, and, although its origin is unknown, it is a reasonable speculation that a tree or bush has been removed from this spot.

T2 – archaeological context and dating.

context	type	dated finds	period
F3	pit	peg-tile, modern pottery	modern

6 Finds

by Howard Brooks and Adam Wightman

T1

F1

Finds number 1

1 long-bone fragment from unidentified large mammal, 28g

T2

F3

Finds number 2

1 ?Roman tile fragment, 42g

2 peg-tile fragments, 44g

1 sherd flower pot (Fabric 51b), 19th-21st centuries, 5g

7 Discussion

This site is located in a part of town where Roman roads, cemeteries and associated funerary monuments have been examined or excavated over a number of years. In theory, each new discovery should add further detail to an existing plan of such roads and monuments. In practice, new discoveries rarely fit exactly in with previous records, and some adjustment of road lines and other discoveries is usually necessary.

This was the case with this evaluation. The two trenches should have revealed the main Roman Colchester to London road identified in the grounds of the Grammar School in 1924 by teacher A F Hall. In fact, no road gravel was observed in the two 2010 trenches. Two options are suggested. First, the road did lie in the expected position, but the road metalling has since been removed. There are several agencies which may have been responsible for this, ie landscaping or gardening activities, or even archaeological excavations carried out by teachers such as Hall. Second, the road has been incorrectly plotted. Given the discovery of a possible robber trench in T1, indicating that archaeological features may survive here, then the second option is perhaps the stronger. However, this is not an easy option; given the proximity of Gurney Benham House, one would expect an accurate plot to have been made, and the road position as shown by Hull (Hull 1958, 4) cannot be adjusted radically without uncomfortable adjustments of other parts of the road system and known buildings.

The conclusion is that this evaluation was not extensive enough to allow a firm decision to be made on the exact position of the main Roman road from Colchester to London or the walled cemetery. Resolution of these problems must await future larger-scale investigations in the grounds of the Grammar School.

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 COLIM 2010.6.

9 Acknowledgements

The Trust would like to thank the Colchester Royal Grammar School for commissioning and funding the evaluation.

The fieldwork was conducted by B Holloway and digital survey by C Lister and B Holloway. The project was monitored by Martin Winter on behalf of Colchester Borough Council.

10 References

Note: all CAT reports, except for DBAs, are available online in .pdf format at <http://cat.essex.ac.uk>

CAR 9	1993	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report 9: Excavations of Roman and later cemeteries, churches and monastic sites in Colchester, 1971-88</i> , by Nina Crummy, Philip Crummy and Carl Crossan
CAT	2010	<i>Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological evaluation at Colchester Royal Grammar School, 6 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex</i> , January 2010
CAT Report 345		A Roman temple-tomb at Colchester Royal Grammar School, Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex: August-September 2005, unpublished CAT archive report, by H Brooks, 2006
CBC	2010	<i>Brief for archaeological evaluation: Colchester Royal Grammar School, Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex</i> , January 2010 (Colchester Borough Council Museums Services)
CIMS	2008a	<i>Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i>
CIMS	2008b	<i>Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester and Ipswich Museums</i>
DoE	1990	<i>Planning Policy Guidance 16: Archaeology and Planning</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
Hall, A F	1946	'A Roman walled cemetery at Colchester', <i>Archaeological Journal</i> , 101 , 69-90
Hull, M R	1958	<i>Roman Colchester</i> , RRCSAL, 20
IfA	2008a	<i>Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation</i>
IfA	2008b	<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)

11 Glossary

CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
CBC	Colchester Borough Council
CIMS	Colchester and Ipswich Museums
context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made; usually a layer or a feature
CRGS	Colchester Royal Grammar School
ECC	Essex County Council
EHER	Essex Historic Environment Record, held by the ECC
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists
layer	distinct or distinguishable deposit of soil
medieval	period from AD 1066 to Henry VIII
modern	period from the 19th century onwards to the present
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
Roman	the period from AD 43 to AD 410, approximately
RRCSAL	Report of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database, held by Colchester and Ipswich Museums

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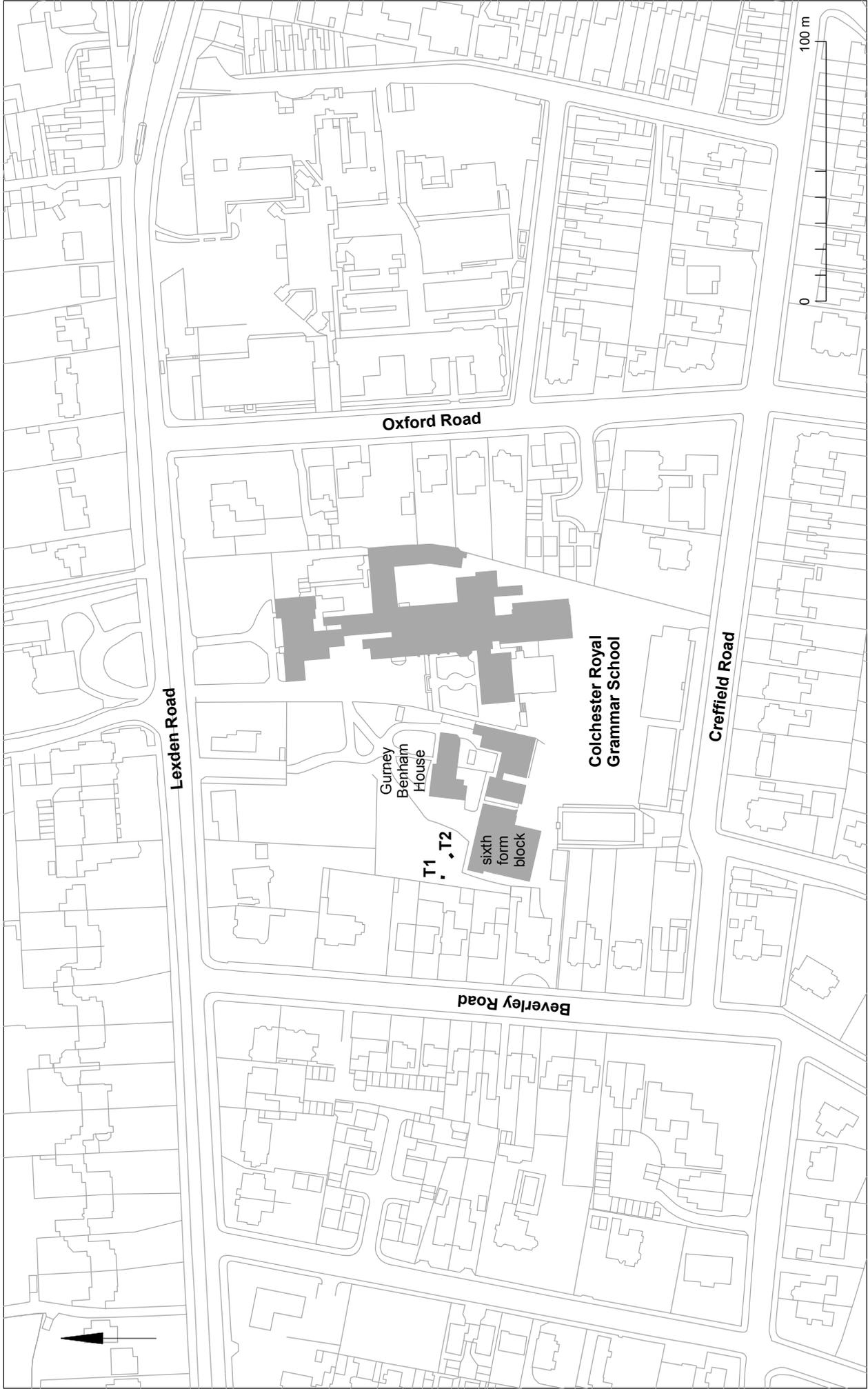
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Colchester,
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tel.: (01206) 541051
(01206) 500124

email: archaeologists@catuk.org

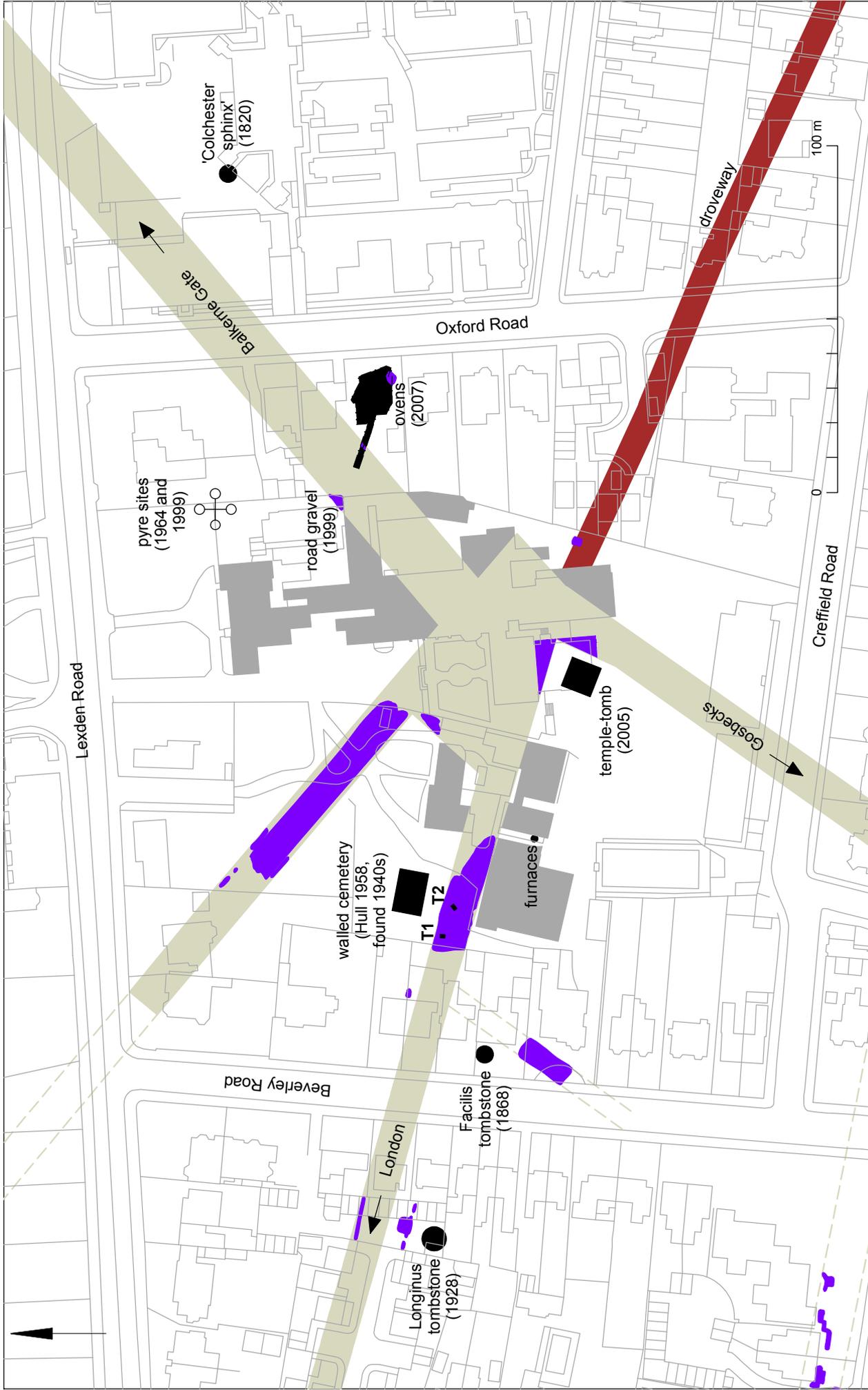
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Fig 1 Site location, showing location of school buildings and trenches T1 and T2.



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Fig 2 Site location in relation to previous discoveries of Roman roads and funerary monuments.

Key: ■ projected droveway ■ school buildings ■ observed gravel ■ key sites ■ projected roads

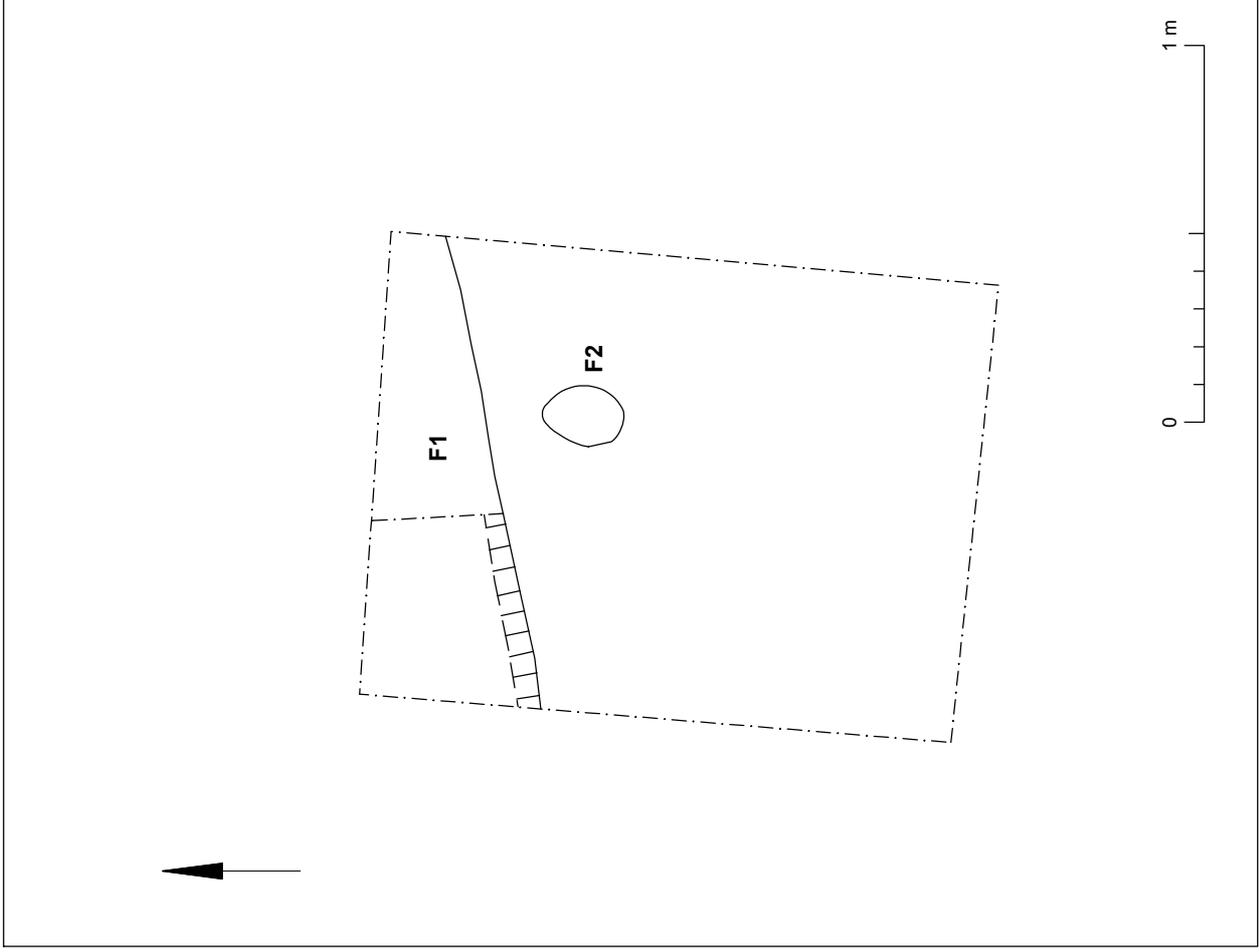


Fig 3 Trench 1: plan.

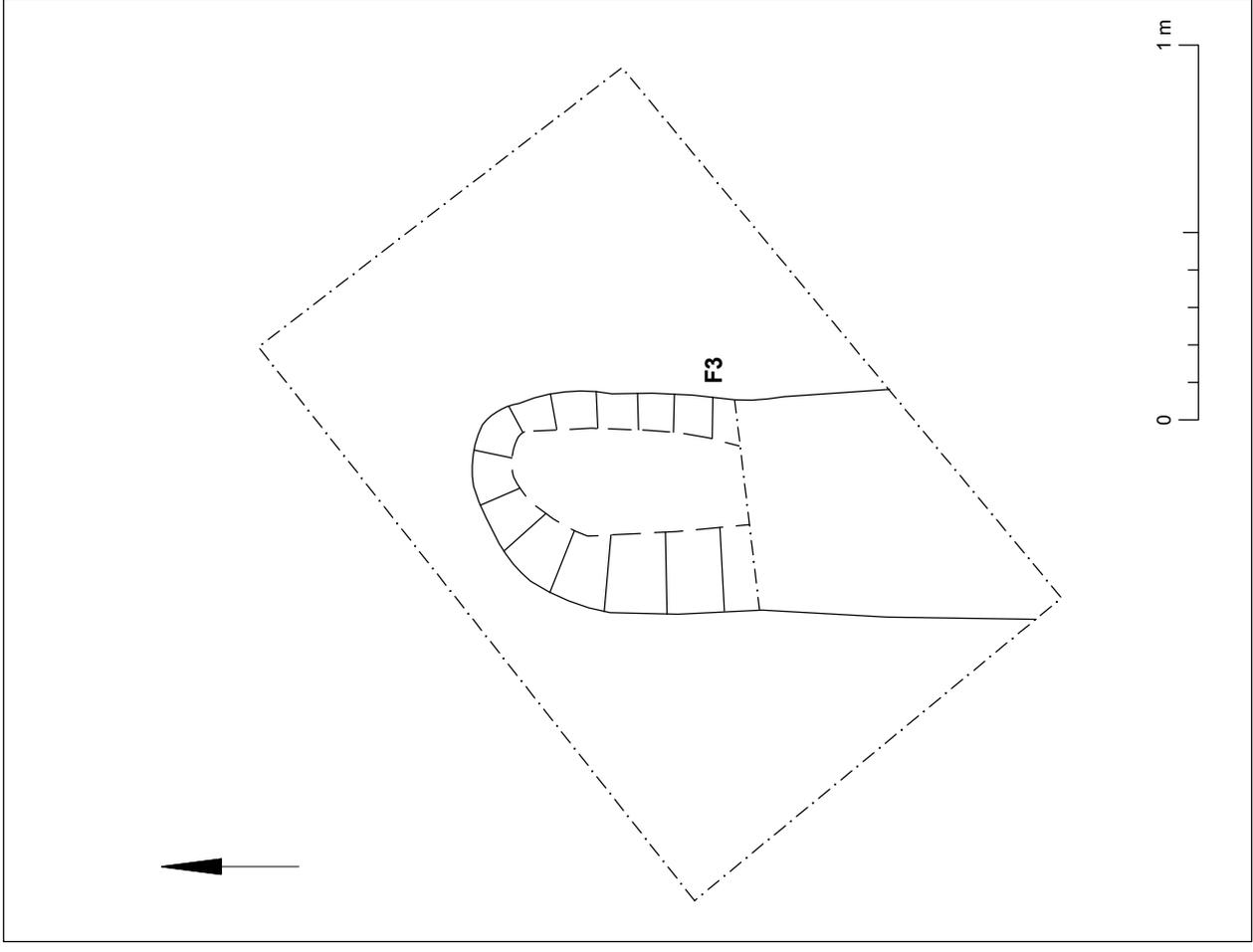
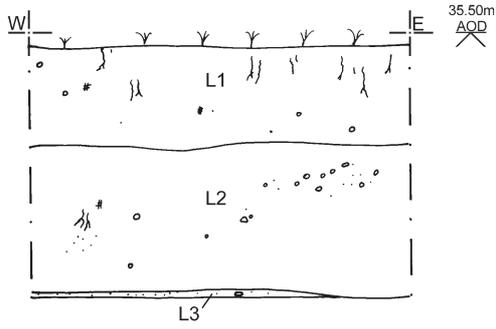
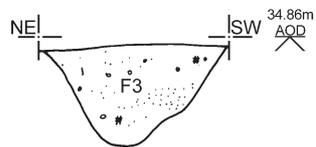
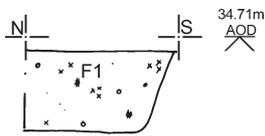
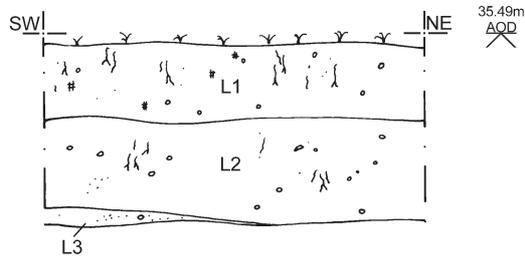


Fig 4 Trench 2: plan.

T1



T2



 small stones

 mortar

 charcoal

 sand



Fig 5 Sections.

Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

Summary sheet

Site address: Colchester Royal Grammar School, 6 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 98686 24834 (c)	Site code: CAT project – 10/2a
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: 16th February 2010	Size of area investigated: 2 trenches, each 2m long and 1.8m wide
Curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums (accession code COLIM 2010.6)	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? Undecided	Related UAD nos: -
Final report: CAT Report 538 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: uncertain	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results:</p> <p><i>The site lies in an extensive area of Roman cemeteries, north of one of the Roman roads which meet at a junction (the site of which is now under the Colchester Royal Grammar School), and immediately south of the Roman 'walled cemetery' which was discovered in the school grounds in the 1940s.</i></p> <p><i>Two small evaluation trenches within the footprint of a proposed extension to the sixth form block revealed a possible robber trench and two modern features. When plotted against the position of the main Roman road from Colchester to London and the Roman walled cemetery, this evaluation should have exposed the Roman road gravel, but did not.</i></p> <p><i>There are two reasons why the road gravel may be absent here. First, the walled cemetery and road may have been plotted too far to the north, and perhaps should now be projected approximately 4m to the south. In this position, the line of the northern side of the road would pass south of the evaluation trenches, and the possible robber trench in T1 would be close to the position of the south wall of the walled cemetery (ie it would represent the robbed-out south wall foundation of the cemetery). Second, and more likely, the road gravel has been removed by gardening or landscaping activities, or perhaps by archaeological excavation in the school grounds.</i></p> <p><i>No Roman burials were revealed during this evaluation.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	

Keywords: Roman, road, walled cemetery	Significance: *
Authors of summary: B Holloway and H Brooks	Date of summary: March 2010