Archaeological evaluation at Walnut Tree Way, Colchester, Essex, CO2 9DQ

April 2021



by Laura Pooley

with contributions by Dr Matthew Loughton and Adam Wightman figures by Emma Holloway and Laura Pooley

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commissioned by Gary Livermore on behalf of Kier Group

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CAT Report 1655 May 2021

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1 Summary

An archaeological evaluation (eight trial-trenches) was carried out on land at Walnut Tree Way, Colchester, Essex in advance of the construction of a new pupil referral unit at the Paxman Academy. The development site is located close to the Colchester to Gosbecks Roman road and in an area of known cropmarks. Evaluation revealed modern brick foundations along with five ditches and three features which could either be ditches or natural glacial channels. Also excavated were four tree-throws and eight natural silt patches/tree-throws. Finds were scarce, but residual pottery sherds from a redeposited soil layer and a tree-throw show some limited activity on or close to the development site in the Bronze Age.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the report for an archaeological evaluation carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on land at Walnut Tree Way, Colchester, Essex. The evaluation was commissioned by Gary Livermore of Kier Group and took place from 13th to 15th April 2021 in advance of construction of a pupil referral unit at the Paxman Academy.

In response to consultation with Essex County Council Place Services, Historic Environment Advisor (ECCHEA) Richard Havis advised that in order to establish the archaeological implications of this application, the applicant should be required to commission a scheme of archaeological investigation in accordance with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (MHCLG 2019).

All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a *Brief for trial trenching* written by Richard Havis (ECCPS 2021), and a written scheme of investigation (WSI) was prepared by CAT in response to the brief and agreed with ECCPS (CAT 2021).

In addition to the brief and WSI, all fieldwork and reporting was done in accordance with *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (Historic England 2015), and with *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA **14** and **24**). This report mirrors standards and practices contained in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (CIfA 2014a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (CIfA 2014b).

3 Archaeological background (Fig 1)

The following archaeological background draws major published sources for Colchester including the CAT report archive, and on the Colchester Historic Environment Record (CHER) accessed via the Colchester Heritage Explorer (www.colchesterheritage.co.uk).

The proposed development sites lies within an area of known cropmarks, with aerial photographic evidence of a series of features comprising a trackway, enclosure, pits and other linears (CHER MCC7706). These cropmarks are plotted in Fig 1, but owing to discrepancies in the rectification of the aerial photographs two different plots are presented, one held by the Historic Environment Record at Essex County Council and the other published in *CAR* 11, Fig 6.1. Based on the HER plot two linears, possibly a trackway, would pass through the northern end of the development site. However, the plot in *CAR* 11 shows only a single linear plotted further to the north.

The site also lies within the *oppidum* of Camulodunum in close proximity to the Gosbecks Iron Age and Romano-British site to the south (MCC7470, NHLE 1002180). The Gosbecks to Colchester Roman road is projected to cross the southeastern edge of the Paxman Academy (MCC2529), which is immediately to the southeast of the current development site (see Fig 1).

A desk-based assessment of the archaeological and historical assets on and around the development site was produced by CAT in July 2017 (CAT Report 1124). The following summary is taken from that report:

The school lies in an area of high archaeological importance. It is inside the oppidum of Camulodunum, and approximately 1km north-east of the major Late Iron Age and early Roman 'small town' at Gosbecks, with its Roman temple and theatre, and network of fields and living sites. In addition to this, a Roman road crosses the school site, and although this is a short distance to the south of the site, aerial photographs indicate that a smaller road branches off of it and intersects with the northern corner of the school grounds.

Alderman Blaxill School was demolished in 2017 and replaced by the Paxman Academy buildings. Prior to the demolition, Colchester Archaeological Trust undertook trial-trenching along Paxman Avenue in order to determine the location and state of preservation of the Gosbecks to Colchester Roman road. This evaluation identified mixed evidence to indicate the survival of the road and was interpreted as an indication that this section of the road had little or no nearby settlement. This in turn may have contributed to a poorly-defined or at least poorly-maintained section that has proven difficult to identify (CAT Report 1167, ECC4075).

4 Aim

The aim of the archaeological evaluation was to record the extent of any surviving archaeological deposits and to assess the archaeological potential of the site to allow the ECCHEA to determine if further investigation is required.

5 Results (Figs 2-3)

Eight trial-trenches were machine-excavated under the supervision of a CAT archaeologist. Trenches 1-7 were cut through modern topsoil (L1, 0.3-0.4m thick) and a layer of redeposited soil (L2, 0.15-0.4m thick) into natural (L3, encountered at a depth of 0.55-0.75m below current ground level (bcgl)). Trench 8 was cut through modern crush (L4, 0.25-0.4m thick) and redeposited soil (L2, 0.15-0.35m thick) into natural (L3, 0.5-0.6m bcgl). In places, the modern crush was up to 0.6m thick and cut into natural.

Trench No.	Depth of layers
T1	L1, 0.35-0.4m thick; L2, 0.2-0.35m thick; L3, 0.6-0.7m bcgl.
T2	L1, 0.35m thick; L2, 0.28-0.3m thick; L3, 0.63-0.65m bcgl.
Т3	L1, 0.35m thick; L2, 0.25-0.35m thick; L3, 0.6-0.7m bcgl.
T4	L1, 0.35m thick; L2, 0.25-0.4m thick; L3, 0.6-0.75m bcgl.
T5	L1, 0.3-0.32m thick; L2, 0.23-0.3m thick; L3, 0.6m bcgl.
T6	L1, 0.32-0.4m thick; L2, 0.15-0.23m thick; L3, 0.55m bcgl.
T7	L1, 0.35-0.4m thick; L2, 0.2-0.28m thick; L3, 0.6-0.65m bcgl.
Т8	L4, 0.25-0.3m thick, but in places up to 0.6m thick; L2, 0.2-0.35m thick; L3, 0.5-0.6m bcgl.

Table 1 Depths of layers by trench

Finds were scarce across the development site with residual Bronze Age pottery recovered from redeposited soil L2 (T2 and T7) and tree-throw F19, along with a piece of peg-tile also from L2.

Trench 1 (T1): 30m long by 1.8m wide

Three ditches, F17, F20 and F21, were located in the northwestern end of the trench and all were aligned northeast to southwest. Ditch F17 was U-shaped with steep, sloping sides and a flat base, c 1m wide by 0.32m deep. Ditches F20 and F21 were also U-shaped and of a similar width to F17 at c 0.93m and c 0.9m, but both were shallower at 0.14m and 0.15m deep respectively.



Five natural features/tree-throws (F4, F5, F6, F10 and F11) were excavated to the southeast.

Photograph 1 Trench 1, looking southeast

Trench 2 (T2): 20m long by 1.8m wide

Linear F1 was a slightly irregular linear feature aligned NNE-SSW which could be a ditch or a natural glacial channel. In profile it was generally U-shaped, 0.9-1.1m wide, with smooth sides and rounded base (0.34m deep) at the southern edge of the trench, but became shallower with irregular sides and base further north.

Ditch F2 was aligned NE-SW. It was a U-shaped feature with sloping sides and a flat base, c 1.16m wide by 0.36m deep.

Natural feature or tree-throw F3 was also excavated.

Trench 3 (T3): 20m long by 1.8m wide

Ditch F15 was aligned south to north-northwest and appeared to be curvilinear in appearance, although the presence of tree-throw F16 on the edge of the feature may have obscured the precise orientation. It was V-shaped, c 0.8m wide and 0.3m deep.

Linear feature F18 was aligned roughly north to south. It was slightly irregular and shallow to the north, but with a regular U-shaped profile to the south. It was c 1.2m wide by 0.32m deep, and could be a ditch or a natural channel.

Tree-throws F16 and F19, along with natural silt patch F14, were also excavated, with a single fragment of Bronze Age pottery recovered from the fill of F19.

Trench 4 (T4): 20m long by 1.8m wide

Brick foundations (F7), a drain and a large piece of concrete had been cut into subsoil and sealed by the modern topsoil. A small square building is shown here on recent satellite mapping of the site.



Photograph 2 Trench 3, looking southwest



Photograph 3 Trench 4, looking northeast



Photograph 4 Trench 5, looking southeast



Photograph 5 Trench 7, looking northeast

Trench 5 (T5): 20m long by 1.8m wide

Natural feature/tree-throw F9 was excavated.

Trench 6 (T6): 20m long by 1.8m wide

Burnt-out tree-throw F8 was an irregular feature with undulating and partially scorched base and charcoal flecking throughout.

Trench 7 (T7): 17.5m long by 1.8m wide

Trench 7 was reduced to 17.5m long (from 20m) due to the presence of a modern service at the northeast end of the trench. Natural linear F12 was excavated along with burnt-out tree-throw F13, an irregular feature with undulating base and frequent charcoal flecks throughout.

Trench 8 (T8): 20m long by 1.8m wide

There were no features in T8.

6 Finds

6.1 Pottery and ceramic building material

by Dr. Matthew Loughton

The evaluation uncovered a small collection of pottery and ceramic building material (henceforth CBM) of nine sherds with a weight of 63g and 0.10 vessels according to the rim EVE. The mean sherd weight is only 7g. This material was recovered from two contexts, tree-throw F19 and subsoil L2.

Tree-throw F19 (finds no. 4)

One small sherd of handmade flint-tempered pottery (fabric HMF) with a weight of 4g. The sherd is fully oxidised (orange-coloured) with sparse fine- to medium-angular flint and is possibly of Bronze Age date.

Subsoil L2 (finds nos. 1-2)

Seven sherds of handmade flint-tempered pottery (fabric HMF) with a weight of 47g. These sherds have a brown oxidised surface and a very dark black core and are tempered with common coarse sub-angular flint alongside some finer flint. These sherds are from a plain collared urn rim (EVE: 0.10/diameter 140mm) which dates to the Early to Middle Bronze Age. One sherd of medieval/post-medieval peg-tile with a weight of 12g was also recovered.

6.2 Flint and stone

by Laura Pooley & Adam Wightman

Two pieces of natural flint from F17 (finds no. 5) and a piece of natural sandstone from F14 (finds no.3) have been discarded.

7 Conclusion

Archaeological evaluation on land at Walnut Tree Way revealed modern brick foundations along with five ditches and three features which could be either ditches or natural glacial channels. Also excavated were four tree-throws and eight natural silt patches/tree-throws. All of the features were undated with the only finds recovered being residual pottery sherds from tree-throw F19 and redeposited soil L2, showing some limited activity on or near to the development site in the Bronze Age.

Cropmark plots from aerial photographs of the development site have previously identified two parallel ditches, possibly a trackway, that could potentially pass through the northern end of the development site (see Fig 1). The only features identified in the evaluation that could correspond to this cropmark are ditches F17, F20 and/or F21 in Trench 1, but none align well

with the HER cropmark plot and, as shown by the plot in *CAR* **11**, the cropmarks could be located further to the north anyway. Therefore, the identification of any of these ditches as the same as that shown on the cropmarks is extremely tentative. A cropmark on the northeastern edge of the development site appears to correspond to natural silt patch F14 in T3, indicating that this cropmark is of natural origin.

8 Acknowledgements

CAT thanks Gary Livermore and Kier Group for commissioning and funding the work. The project was managed by C Lister, fieldwork was carried out by N Rayer with A Ronn, M Seehra, A Wade and A Wightman. Figures are by E Holloway and L Pooley. The project was monitored for Essex County Council by Richard Havis.

9 References

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

CAR 11	1995	Colchester Archaeological Report 11: Camulodunum 2, by CFC Hawkes and Philip Crummy. Colchester Archaeological Trust Ltd.
CAT	2021	Health & Safety Policy
CAT	2021	Written scheme of investigation (WSI) for an archaeological evaluation at Walnut Tree Way, Colchester, CO2 9DQ
CAT Report 1124	2017	A desk-based assessment of the archaeological and historical sites on and around Alderman Blaxill School, Walnut Tree Way, Colchester, CO2 9BU
CAT Report 1167	2017	Archaeological evaluation at Alderman Blaxill County Secondary School, Paxman Avenue, Colchester, Essex, CO2 9DQ: September 2017.
CIfA	2014a	Standard and Guidance for archaeological evaluation. Updated 2019.
ClfA	2014b	Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials. Updated 2019.
CIfA	2014c	Code of Conduct. Updated 2020.
ECCPS	2021	Brief for trial trenching at Walnut Tree Way, Colchester
Gurney, D	2003	Standards for field archaeology in the East of England. East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Papers 14 (EAA 14)
Historic England	2015	Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)
Medlycott, M	2011	Research and archaeology revisited: A revised framework for the East of England. East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Papers 24 (EAA 24)
MHCLG	2019	National Planning Policy Framework. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

10 Abbreviations and glossary

Bronze Age	period from <i>c</i> 2500 – 700 BC
CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust

ECC Essex County Council

ECCHEA Essex County Council Historic Environment Advisor

ECCPS Essex County Council Place Services
CHER Colchester Historic Environment Record
CIfA Chartered Institute for Archaeologists

context specific location of finds on an archaeological site

feature (F) an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain: can contain 'contexts'

layer (L) distinct or distinguishable deposit (layer) of material

medieval period from AD 1066 to c 1500 modern period from c AD 1800 to the present

natural geological deposit undisturbed by human activity

NGR National Grid Reference

OASIS Online AccesS to the Index of Archaeological InvestigationS,

http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main

post-medieval from c AD 1500 to c 1800

section (abbreviation sx or Sx) vertical slice through feature/s or layer/s

wsi written scheme of investigation

11 Contents of archive

Finds: part of one box (pottery only)

Paper record

One A4 document wallet containing: The report (CAT Report 1655)

CBC evaluation brief, CAT written scheme of investigation

Original site record (sections) Site digital photos and log

Digital record

The report (CAT Report 1655)

CBC evaluation brief, CAT written scheme of investigation

Site digital photographs, thumbnails and log

Graphic files Site data Survey data

12 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is currently held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at Roman Circus House, Roman Circus Walk, Colchester, Essex CO2 7GZ, but will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museum under project ref. ECC4619.

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Distribution list:

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Checked by: Philip Crummy

Date: 30.4.2021

Appendix 1 Context list

Trench	Context	Finds no.	Context type	Description	Date
All	L1	-	Topsoil	Soft moist dark grey/brown silty clayey loam and inclusions of: stone 1%	Modern
All	L2	1, 2	Subsoil	Soft moist medium grey/brown clayey silt sand and inclusions of: stone 1%	Undated
All	L3	-	Natural	Firm dry light/medium orange/brown sandy silt and inclusions of: stone 2%	Post-glacial
Т8	L4	-	Crush	Soft moist dark grey/brown silty clayey loam and inclusions of: stone 1%	Modern
T2	F1	-	?Ditch/ natural	Firm medium orange/grey/brown sandy silt and inclusions of: stone 1%	Undated
T2	F2	-	Ditch	Loose/soft dry light grey/brown sand silt and inclusions of: stone 1%	Undated
T2	F3	-	Natural/ tree-throw	Loose/soft dry light grey/brown sand silt and inclusions of: stone 5%	Post-glacial/ undated
T1	F4	-	Natural/ tree-throw	Soft dry light/medium grey/brown sandy silt	Post-glacial/ undated
T1	F5	-	Natural/ tree-throw	Friable dry light/medium grey/brown sandy silt	Post-glacial/ undated
T1	F6	-	Natural/ tree-throw	Medium grey/brown sandy-silt with rare small stones	Post-glacial/ undated
T4	F7	-	Brick foundations	Brick foundations, concrete and services	Modern
T6	F8	-	Tree-throw	Soft moist light/medium yellow/grey/brown/ black sandy silt with charcoal flecks and inclusions of: stone 1%	Undated
T5	F9		Natural/ tree-throw	Soft moist light/medium yellow/grey/brown silt and inclusions of: stone 1%	Undated
T1	F10	-	Natural/ tree-throw	Friable dry light/medium grey/brown sandy silt	Post-glacial/ undated
T1	F11	-	Natural/ tree-throw	Friable dry light/medium orange/grey/brown sandy silt	Post-glacial/ undated
T7	F12	-	?Ditch/ natural	Soft moist light/medium grey/brown sandy silt and inclusions of: stone 1%	Undated
Т7	F13	-	Tree-throw	soft moist medium yellow/grey/brown/black sandy silt with charcoal flecks and inclusions of: stone 1%	Undated
T3	F14	3	Natural silt patch	Loose/soft dry light brown sand silt with charcoal flecks and inclusions of: stone 5%	Post-glacial
T3	F15	-	Ditch	Light brown/grey sandy-silt with inclusions of: stone 5% in base	Undated
T3	F16	-	Tree-throw	Loose/soft dry light grey sand silt with charcoal flecks and inclusions of: stone 5%	Undated
T1	F17	5	Ditch	Soft moist medium yellow/grey/brown sandy	Undated

				silt with charcoal flecks and inclusions of: stone 1%	
Т3	F18	-	?Ditch/ natural	Soft/friable moist light/medium orange/grey/ brown silty clay and inclusions of: stone 1%	Undated
Т3	F19	4	Tree-throw	Soft/friable moist light/medium orange/grey/ brown silty clay and inclusions of: stone 1%	Undated
T1	F20	_	Ditch	Loose/soft dry light grey/brown sand silt with charcoal flecks and inclusions of: stone 2%	Undated
T1	F21	-	Ditch	Loose/soft dry light grey/brown sand silt and inclusions of: stone 2%	Undated

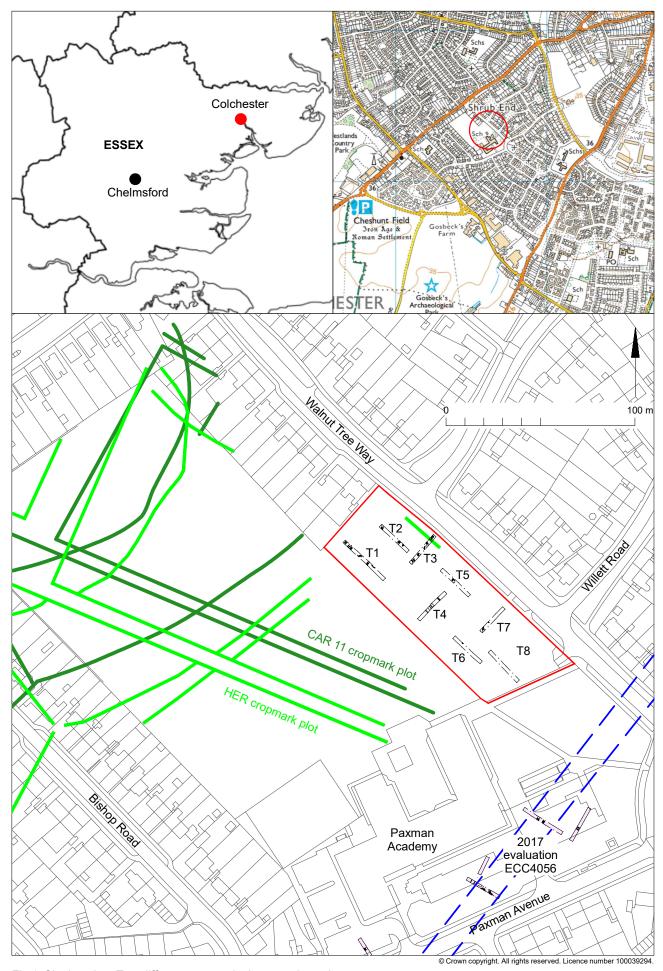
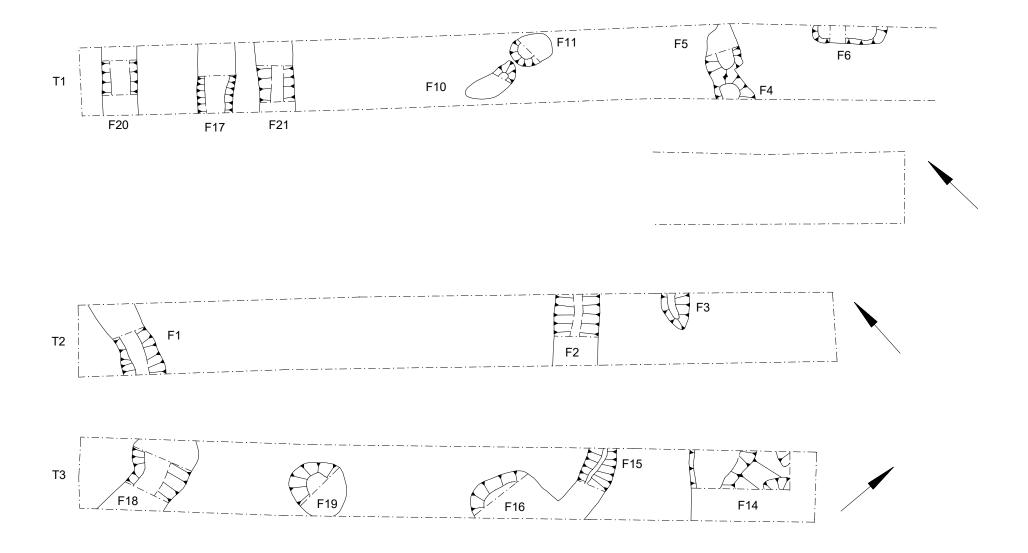


Fig 1 Site location. Two different cropmark plots are shown in green, with the projected route of the Roman road dashed blue





5 m

Fig 3 Trench plans: T1, T2 and T3

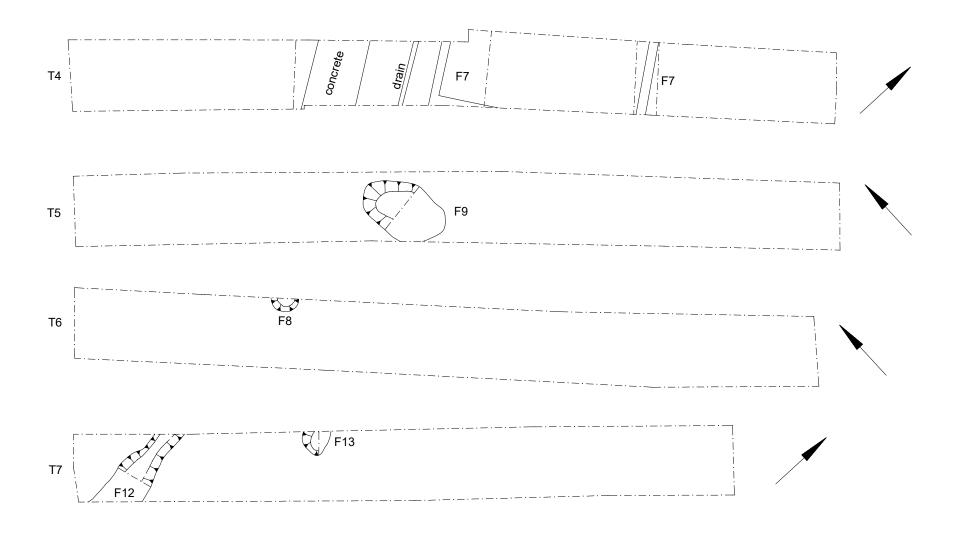


Fig 4 Trench plans: T4, T5, T6 and T7

0 5 m

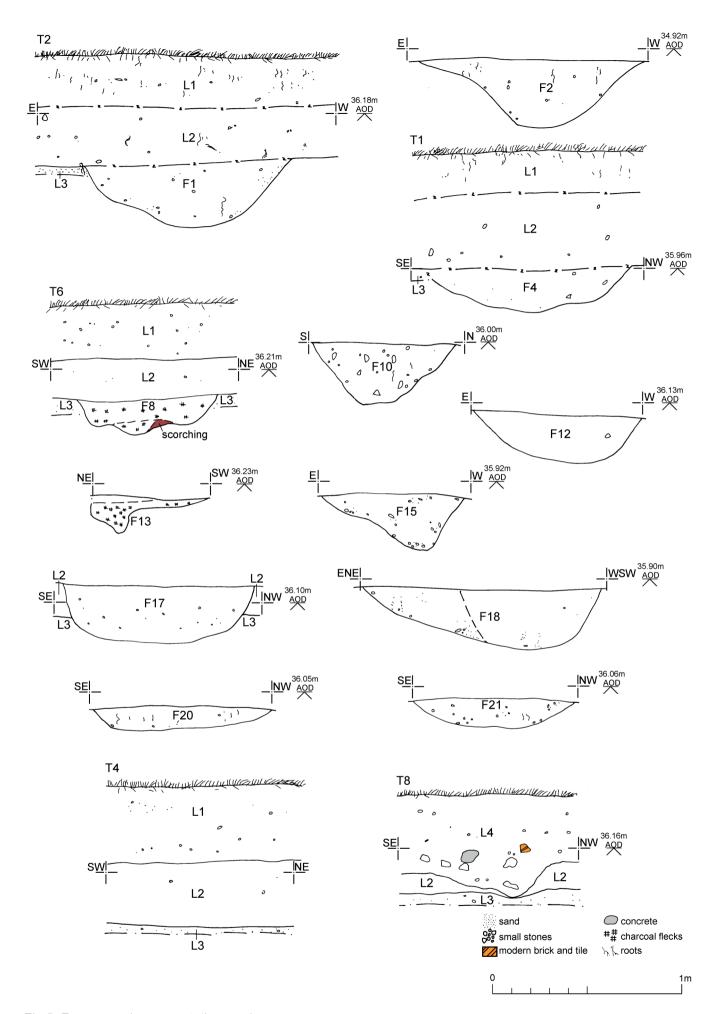


Fig 5 Feature and representative sections.

OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM: England

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OASIS ID: colchest3-417005

Project details

An archaeological evaluation at Walnut Tree Way, Colchester, Essex, CO2 9DQ. Project name

Short description of the project

An archaeological evaluation (eight trial-trenches) was carried out on land at Walnut Tree Way, Colchester, Essex in advance of the construction of a new pupil referral unit at the Paxman Academy. The development site is located close to the Colchester to Gosbecks Roman road and in an area of known cropmarks. Evaluation revealed modern brick foundations along with five ditches and three features which could either be ditches or natural glacial channels. Also excavated were four tree-throws and eight natural silt patches/tree-throws. Finds were scarce, but residual pottery sherds from a redeposited soil layer and a tree-throw show some limited activity on or close to the

Project dates

Start: 13-04-2021 End: 15-04-2021

Previous/future work

No / Not known

Any associated project reference codes

21/03a - Contracting Unit No.

Any associated project reference CC/COL/06/21/PRE - Planning Application No.

Any associated

ECC4619 - HER event no.

project reference

Type of project

Field evaluation

Site status None

Current Land use Other 14 - Recreational usage DITCH Late Prehistoric Monument type TREE-THROW Bronze Age Monument type Monument type **DITCHES** Uncertain

Monument type TREE-THROWS Uncertain Significant Finds POTTERY Bronze Age Methods & """Sample Trenches"""

techniques

Development type Large/ medium scale extensions to existing structures (e.g. church, school, hospitals, law courts, etc.)

Prompt Planning condition

Project location

Country England

ESSEX COLCHESTER COLCHESTER Walnut Tree Way Site location

Postcode CO2 9DQ 0.6 Hectares Study area

TL 9761 2334 51.873045686327 0.870946317637 51 52 22 N 000 52 15 E Point Site coordinates

Height OD / Depth Min: 35.8m Max: 36.04m

Project creators

Name of Colchester Archaeological Trust

Organisation

HEM Team Officer, ECC

Project brief originator

Chris Lister

Project design originator

Chris Lister

director/manager

Project supervisor Adam Wightman Developer

sponsor/funding

Type of

Project archives

Physical Archive Colchester Museum

recipient

Physical Archive ECC4619

Physical Contents "Ceramics"

Digital Archive Archaeological Data Service

recipient

Digital Archive ID ECC4619 "other" Digital Contents

Digital Media

"Images raster / digital photography", "Survey", "Text"

available Paper Archive

Colchester Museum

recipient

Paper Archive ID ECC4619 Paper Contents "other"

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