

Archaeological monitoring at the Church of St James the Great, East Hill, Colchester, Essex, CO1 2QL

October 2021



by Megan Seehra

with contributions by Dr Matthew Loughton
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commissioned by Lucy Mason
on behalf of PCC St James and St Paul, Colchester

NGR: TM 00171 25223 (centre)

CAT project ref.: 2021/03m

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OASIS ref.: colchest3-418054



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CAT Report 1731

November 2021

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1 Summary

Archaeological monitoring at the Church of St James the Great in East Hill, Colchester was carried out during groundworks to update the current composting toilet. The site is a Grade II listed building, and has its origins possibly as far back as the 12th century. It is also within the Colchester Roman town wall. Six burials were uncovered, four of which consisted of stone monuments only. The other two revealed the remains of two adults. Disarticulated human bone was also recovered from two layers with at least nine individuals represented, including foetal remains and two juveniles.*

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the report on an archaeological monitoring at Church of St James the Great in Colchester, Essex which was carried out between the 19th and 22nd October 2021. The work was commissioned by Lucy Mason on behalf of the PCC of St James and St Paul Colchester in during groundworks for the installation of a new pumping station adjacent of the rear extension to the church, and the installation of a new rising main pipe through the churchyard. All archaeological monitoring was carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT).

The Brief was issued back in 2019 by Jess Tipper who was both the CBCAA and the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor at the time. By the time they were ready to do the work Jess had moved on and the WSI was sent to Rik Hoggett (interim CBCAA) and David Andrews (DAA) for approval. Then the fieldwork was monitored by Simon Wood (current CBCAA). We will need to send the report to both Simon Wood and David Andrews for approval.

As the site lies within a known burial ground there was a high probability of encountering human remains. The Colchester Borough Council Archaeological Advisor (CBCAA) and the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor (DAC) therefore recommended that archaeological monitoring of all groundworks should be undertaken. This recommendation was based on the guidance given in the *National Planning Policy Framework* (MHCLG 2019).

All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a *Brief for Archaeological Investigation*, detailing the required archaeological work, written by Dr Jess Tipper in his then role as both CBCAA and DAA (CBCAA 2019). A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI, CAT 2021) prepared by CAT in advance of the groundworks and was approved by interim CBCAA Dr Richard Hoggett and DAA David Andrews. Fieldwork and reporting has been monitored by new CBCAA Dr Simon Wood and DAA David Andrews.

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 2016), 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 excavation* (CIfA 2014a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (CIfA 2014b).

3 Archaeological background

The following archaeological background draws on the major published sources for Colchester archaeology and the Colchester Historic Environment Record (accessed via Colchester Heritage Explorer (<https://colchesterheritage.co.uk/map>)).

The Church of St James the Great is Grade II* listed (NHLE 1307051; CHER MCC402). The church was first mentioned in the mid-13th century, with architectural evidence suggesting a 12th century or earlier origin. It has been much altered over the centuries, particularly in the 19th century. Sited within a churchyard of medieval or earlier origins (CHER MCC403), Rodwell & Rodwell (1977) stated that 'The graveyard is fairly small, in

relation to the size of the church; it is quite pleasant and well kept. There are several C18 tombstones of interest and a certain amount of clearance and re-sitting of headstones has taken place in the past'.

The Church of St James the Great is also located within Insula 32 of the Roman walled town (CHER MCC9314), close to the East Gate (CHER MCC2113), with the Roman wall (CHER MCC859) forming the eastern boundary of the churchyard.

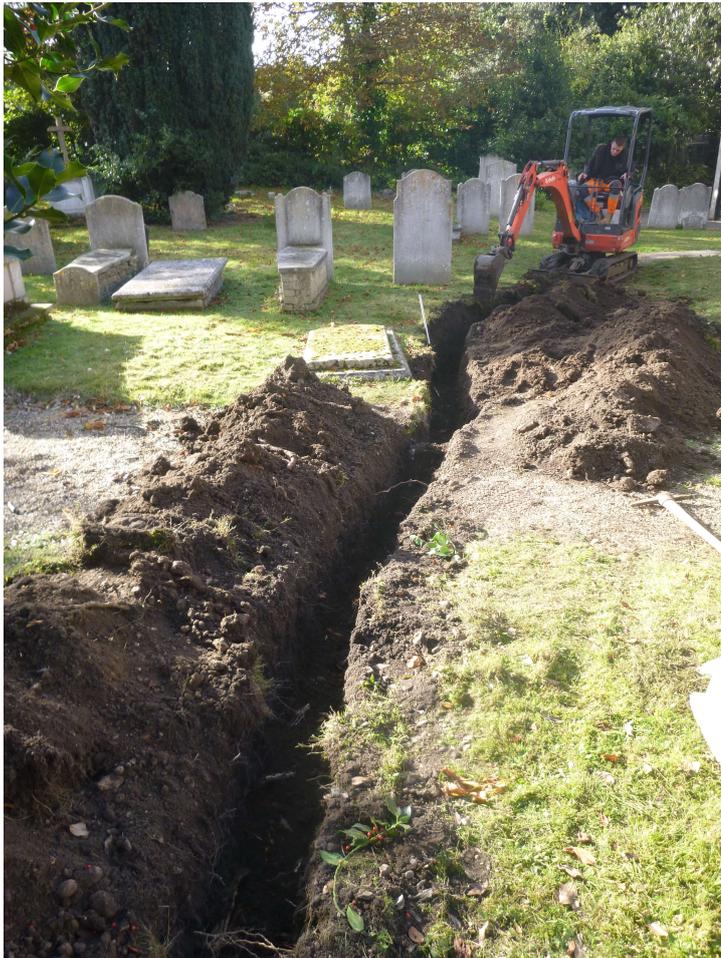
4 Aim

The aim of the monitoring project was to record all archaeological remains, particularly burials, that were impacted by the groundworks.

5 Results (Figs 2-3)

All archaeological groundworks were carried out by a mechanical excavator under the supervision of a CAT archaeologist. In situ burials were uncovered, planned and photographed but were not lifted. Disarticulated human remains were recorded, photographed and immediately reburied.

A pipe trench approximately 69m long and 0.5m wide was excavated around west and south side of the church (Fig 2). A chamber pit c 1.7m x 1.9m was also excavated in the south-east corner of the site. The pipe trench was dug to a depth of 0.60-0.65m and the chamber pit to 1.3m.



Photograph 1 Working shot of pipe trench south of church, looking west.



Photograph 2 Chamber pit with vault F1 and F2, looking west.

Excavations revealed four layers and six features, with a significant amount of disarticulated human bone.

A turfed topsoil (L1, 0.6m thick) covered graveyard burial soil (L2, c 0.6m thick), both of which contained all the disarticulated human bone. Both layers also contained a mix of mortar, CBM, coffin furniture and pottery fragments. Further details can be seen in the finds section below. Modern tarmac and crush (L3) covered L1 on the west side of the church only and was c 0.3m thick. Natural orange sands (L4) was seen from 0.5m deep on the west side of the church. Full context details can be found in appendix 1.

The first tomb (F1) was found in the chamber pit 1.05m below current ground level (bcgl). Only a small corner of the vault was uncovered, but revealed that it consisted of red brick covered with flagstones. The brick exposed was 0.12m in width and 0.06m thick.

The second tomb (F2) was less than 1m north of F1, and was also found in the chamber pit (1.1m bcgl). It was c 1.7m in length and less than 1m of the width of the vault was uncovered. This vault was also constructed of red brick with flagstone capping.

F3 was the only fully exposed burial from this site. It consisted of a raised coffin-shaped body stone (monument type 0500, Mytum 2000) with a partially-surviving headstone at the west end of the body stone. It was on an east/west orientation, with the head at the west end. The body stone was partially covered with limestone. It was 0.2m bcgl, was approximately 1.7m in length and 0.55m in width.



Photograph 3 Body stone and partial headstone (F3), looking west.



Photograph 4 Plan of inhumations F4 and F5.



Photograph 5 Plan of inhumation F6.



Photograph 6 Working shot of pipe trench west of church, looking north.

Graves F4 and F5 were both on an east/west orientation, with the heads at the west end. There was no coffin furniture, however the bone had survived well. The narrow trenches revealed partial legs of one skeleton in each grave. F4 was 0.25m wide, and F5 was 0.35m wide. Both were revealed 0.5m bcgl (L3).

Only a skull was revealed for the final grave, F6, also on an east/west orientation with the skull at the west end. Red brick/tiles were placed either side of the skull parallel to the body, indicating the grave was lined. There was no lid or capping present though. The skeletal remains were found 0.53m bcgl (L3), and the total width was 0.28m.

6 Finds

6.1 Ceramic finds

by Dr Matthew Loughton

Thirteen sherds of pottery weighing 328g with an EVE of 0.34 (Table 1) were recovered during monitoring. This material was recovered from one feature and two layers (Table 1) and consists of a variety of Roman, medieval, post-medieval and modern pottery (Table 2).

Context	Description	No.	Weight (g)	EVE
F4	Grave	1	10	0.00
L1	Topsoil	6	205	0.22
L2	Graveyard burial soil	6	113	0.12
Total		13	328	0.34

Table 1 Quantities of pottery by context.

Fragments of residual Roman and medieval pottery were recovered from grave F4 and layers L1 and L2. Layer L1 also contained a modern English stoneware jar (fabric F45M) and a bowl or pancheon in Border ware (fabric F42) dating to the 16th-17th century came from L2. None of the pottery was retained.

Context	Roman	Post-Roman	Overall date Approx.
F4, grave	GB	-	?
L1, topsoil	BAET (DR20), GB (Cam 278), GX	F21, F45M (Jar)	19th-20th century
L2, accumulation	BASG (Drag 15/17), GX	F21, F42 (Bowl/pancheon)	Post-medieval

Table 2 Approximate dates for individual contexts.

6.2 Human bone

by Megan Seehra

A quantity of disarticulated and articulated human bone was recovered from five contexts from this site. As the remains were immediately reburied after excavation this assessment is purely based on photographs of the remains, and is therefore limited. In particular, estimations of sex, stature and pathologies were difficult to identify, and mostly not possible. Estimation of age-at-death was made using epiphyseal fusion (Buikstra & Ubelaker 1994), and rough measurements of complete juvenile long bones (Schaefer *et al* 2009). Minimum number of individuals (MNI) was carried out using the proximal of distal ends of the most prevalent long bone present in the context. Disarticulated fragments were counted but not weighed.

Three inhumations (F4, F5, F6) were found during excavations. Unfortunately due to the narrow trenches, very little of the skeleton was uncovered. All three were of east/west

orientation, with the head at the west end. All three were also supine in position.

F4 was very fragmented, likely occurring during excavation. The only skeletal elements seen were left and right mid-shaft femurs. The individual was possibly of adult age (over 18 years old).

F5 was less than 1m north of F4, but was not disturbed. Proximal tibial heads and partial shafts were seen in the left and right tibiae, fibulae and patellas. This individual was thought to be of adult age.

F6 was just under 2m south of F4. Only the skull was uncovered, however the individual appears to be in a cist burial. This was evidenced by brick/tiles placed either side of the skull, parallel to the body. This individual is possibly of adult age.

A total of 443 disarticulated fragments were recovered from L1 and L2. They were loosely sorted into skeletal element, the results of which can be seen in Chart 1. A table of skeletal element by context can be seen in Appendix 3.

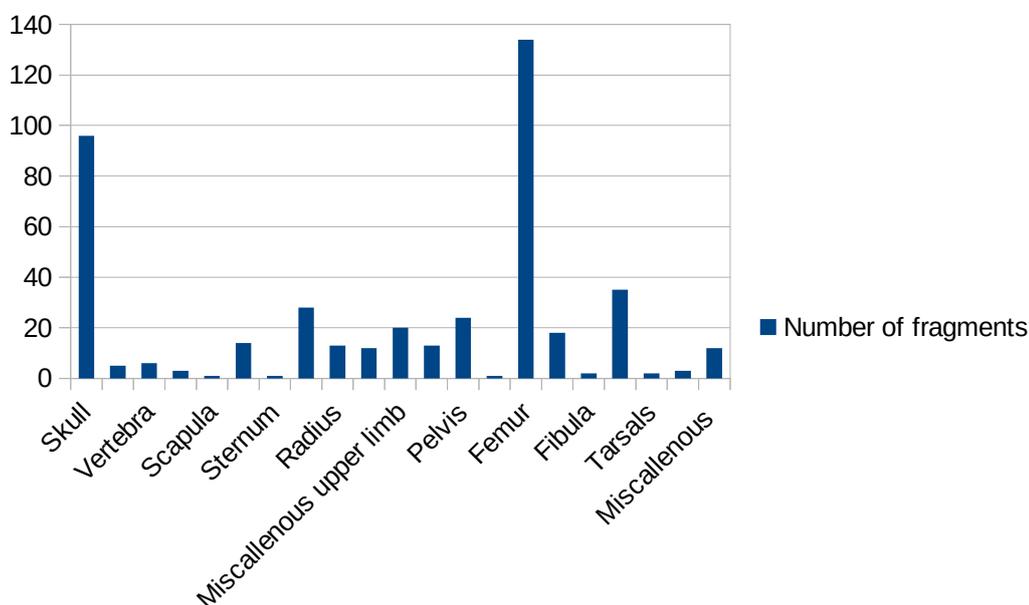


Chart 1 Number of disarticulated fragments counted by skeletal element.

The MNI determined for all disarticulated material was nine individuals, although is likely much higher. Six of these were estimated to be of adult age. Three of these were estimated to be prenatal/juvenile; 20-30 weeks (prenatal), 7-12 years old and 10-12 years old.

Based on surviving greater sciatic notches of two pelvises, there was at least one ?female and one ?male identified among the four adults.

Antemortem tooth loss, dental calculus and possible enamel hypoplasia was noted among the few mandible and maxilla fragments surviving in the disarticulated material. No other pathologies were could be determined from the photographs.

7 Conclusion

Due to the site's location and context, it is no surprise burials were found during the archaeological monitoring. Although fragmented due to being disarticulated, bone condition and survival was very good. Unfortunately due to a lack of finds associated with

the burials, they cannot be dated to a particular period. As all the burials were found at similar depths, it is likely they all date to the same period. The proximity to the current ground level suggests the burials may be from medieval or post-medieval in date. Similar features to that of F1 and F2 have been found at a recent archaeological evaluation at St Nicholas Square, Colchester. These brick features were thought to be brick-lined tombs from the 18th and 19th centuries, intended to house stacked family burials (CAT Report 1625). As F1 and F2 were not excavated we cannot be completely certain they are the same, but they are very similar in composition, so it is suggested F1 and F2 were likely also burial-lined tombs. The exact date of F3 is unknown, but is also likely post-medieval.

8 Acknowledgements

CAT would like to thank Lucy Mason for commissioning and the PCC of St James and St Paul's for funding the work. The project was managed by C Lister and A Wightman, fieldwork was carried out by N Rayner. Figures are by L Pooley and E Holloway. The project was monitored for Colchester Borough Council by Dr S Wood and for the Diocesan Advisory Committee by Dr D Andrews.

9 References

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

- | | | |
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12 Abbreviations and glossary

Adult	an individual who is aged 18 years old and over
AOD	A bove O rdnance D atum
articulated	human bone that has not been disturbed and is still identifiable as a skeleton, or partial skeleton
CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
CBC	Colchester Borough Council
CBCAA	Colchester Borough Council Archaeological Advisor
CBM	ceramic building material, ie brick/tile
CHER	Colchester Historic Environment Record
CIfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
context	specific location of finds on an archaeological site
DAA	Diocesan Archaeological Advisor
DAC	Diocesan Advisory Committee
disarticulated	human bone that has been disturbed from its original burial and context
feature (F)	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain: can contain 'contexts'
?female	possibly identified as female
immature	bone that has not finished growing or fusing
inhumation	a burial of the deceased
juvenile	an individual who is under the age of 18 years old
layer (L)	distinct or distinguishable deposit (layer) of material
?male	possibly identified as male
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c 1500
MNI	M inimum N umber of I ndividuals
modern	period from c AD 1800 to the present
NGR	N ational G rid R eference
OASIS	O nline A ccess to the I ndex of A rchaeological I nvestigations, http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main
Pathology	the causes and effects of diseases
post-medieval	from c AD 1500 to c 1800
prenatal	before birth
Roman	the period from AD 43 to c AD 410
section	(abbreviation sx or Sx) vertical slice through feature/s or layer/s
WSI	W ritten S cheme of I nvestigation

13 Contents of archive

Finds: None retained. All human remains were either left *in situ* or reburied immediately within the churchyard.

Paper record

One A4 document wallet containing:

The report (CAT Report 1731)

CBC evaluation brief, CAT written scheme of investigation

Original site record (layer sheets, finds sheet, sections)

Site digital photos and log

Digital record

The report (CAT Report 1731)

CBC evaluation brief, CAT written scheme of investigation

Site digital photographs, thumbnails and log

Graphic files

Survey data

13 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 accession code ECC4617.

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Distribution list:

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Appendix 1 Context list

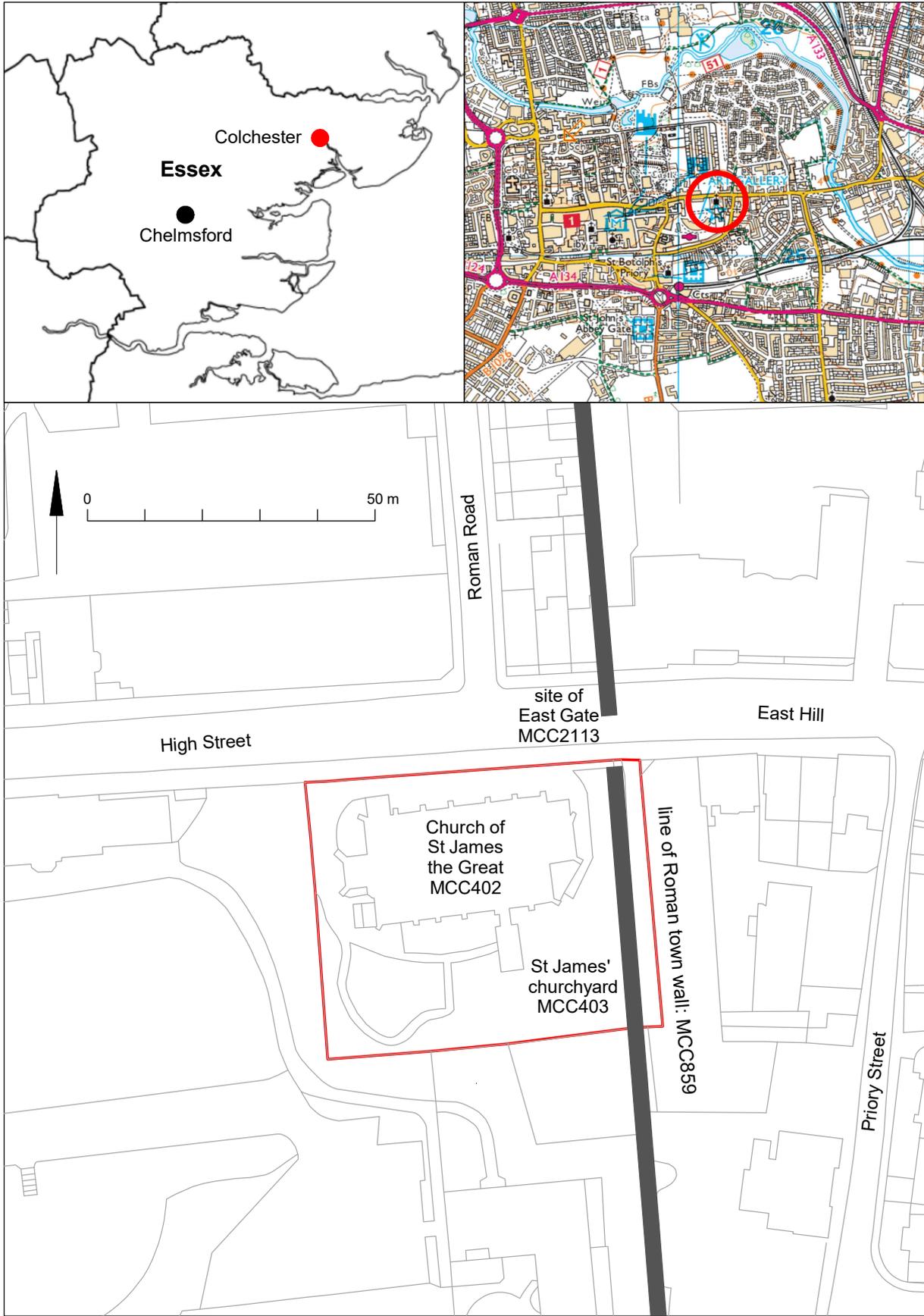
Context number	Finds numbers	Type	Description	Date
L1	3, 4, 5, 6, 7	Turfed topsoil	soft moist medium/dark grey/brown sandy loam with oyster flecks, brick flecks, tile flecks	Modern
L2	1, 2	Graveyard burial soil	firm dry medium yellow/grey/brown sandy loam with charcoal flecks, oyster flecks, brick flecks, tile flecks	Post-medieval
L3	-	Tarmac and crush	firm dry medium yellow/orange/grey/brown sandy loam	Modern
L4	-	Natural	loose moist medium yellow/orange/brown sand	Post-glacial
F1	-	Tomb burial	firm dry medium grey/brown sandy loam with oyster flecks, brick flecks, tile flecks	Medieval-post-medieval
F2	2	Tomb burial	soft moist dark grey/brown sandy loam	Medieval-post-medieval
F3	-	Body stone monument	coffin-shaped body stone with partial headstone. Monument type 0500	Medieval-post-medieval
F4	8	Inhumation burial	soft moist medium grey/brown sandy silt	Medieval-post-medieval
F5	-	Inhumation burial	soft moist medium grey/brown sandy silt	Medieval-post-medieval
F6	-	?Cist burial	soft moist medium grey/brown sandy silt	Medieval-post-medieval

Appendix 2 Pottery list

Cxt	Feature type	Find no.	IN	GR.	MSW	Discard	Rim	Handle	Base	Stamp	Reading	Interpret.	Stamp. Ref	Graf Pre-F	Graf Post-F	Reading	Wmd	Soot	Pitting	Burn	Overfired	Kiln second	Residue	Resin Lin.	Gritted	Abraded	Modif.	Mark	Repair hole	Hole	Disc	Disc diam.	Polishing	Fabric Grp	Typology	EVE	Diam.	Comments	Date
F004	INHUMATION	8	1	10	10	X	0	0	1									X														GB					AD 100/125-275/300		
L001	TOPSOIL	5	1	20	20	X	1	0	0																						GB	CAM 278	0.09	200		AD 117-250/260			
L001	TOPSOIL	5	2	10	5	X																									GX					ROMAN			
L001	TOPSOIL	6	1	143	143	X														X											BAET	DR20				ROMAN			
L001	TOPSOIL	6	1	11	11	X																									F21				Traces glazec.	1200-1550			
L001	TOPSOIL	6	1	21	21	x	1	0	0																						F45M	JAR	0.13	80		19TH-20TH CENTURY			
L002	ACCUMULATION	1	3	32	11	X	1	0	0																						GX	?	0.08	220		ROMAN			
L002	ACCUMULATION	1	1	35	35	X	0	1	0																						F21					c.1200-1550			
L002	ACCUMULATION	1	1	19	19	X	0	0	1																						BASG	DRAG 15/17				AD 43-100			
L002	ACCUMULATION	1	1	27	27	X	1	0	0																						F42	BOWL/PANCHEON	0.04	340		16TH-17TH CENTURY			

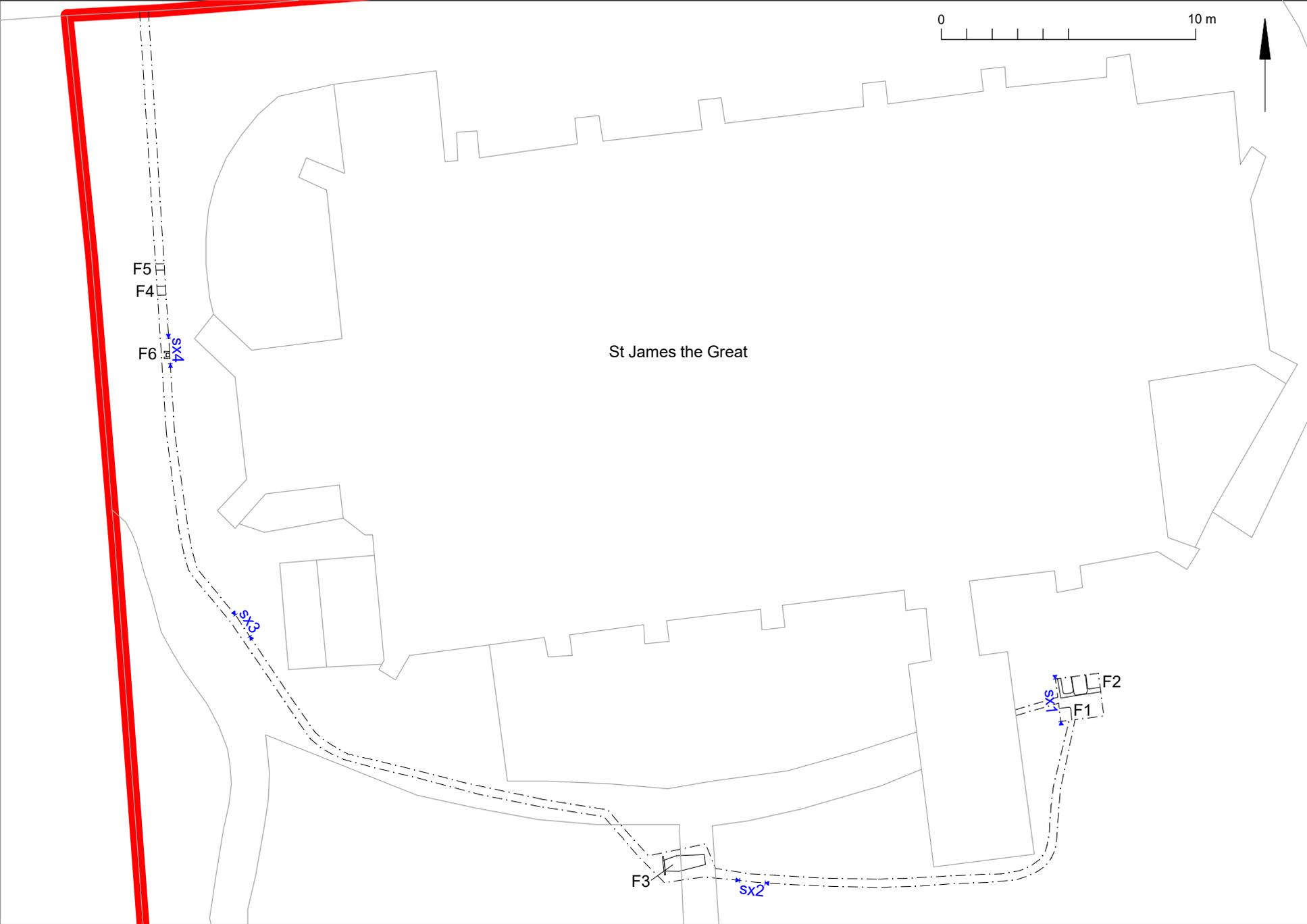
Appendix 3: disarticulated human bone: skeletal element by context

Skeletal element	No. fragments (L1)	No. fragments (L2)
Skull	33	63
Mandible	3	2
Vertebra	3	3
Clavicle	2	1
Scapula	1	0
Rib	4	10
Sternum	0	1
Humerus	16	12
Radius	3	10
Ulna	1	11
Misc. upper limb	4	16
Metacarpals	5	8
Pelvis	6	18
Sacrum	1	0
Femur	84	50
Tibia	10	8
Fibula	2	0
Misc. lower limb	12	23
Tarsals	2	0
Metatarsals	1	2
Misc.	11	1
TOTAL:	204	239



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Fig 1 Site location.



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Fig 2 Results

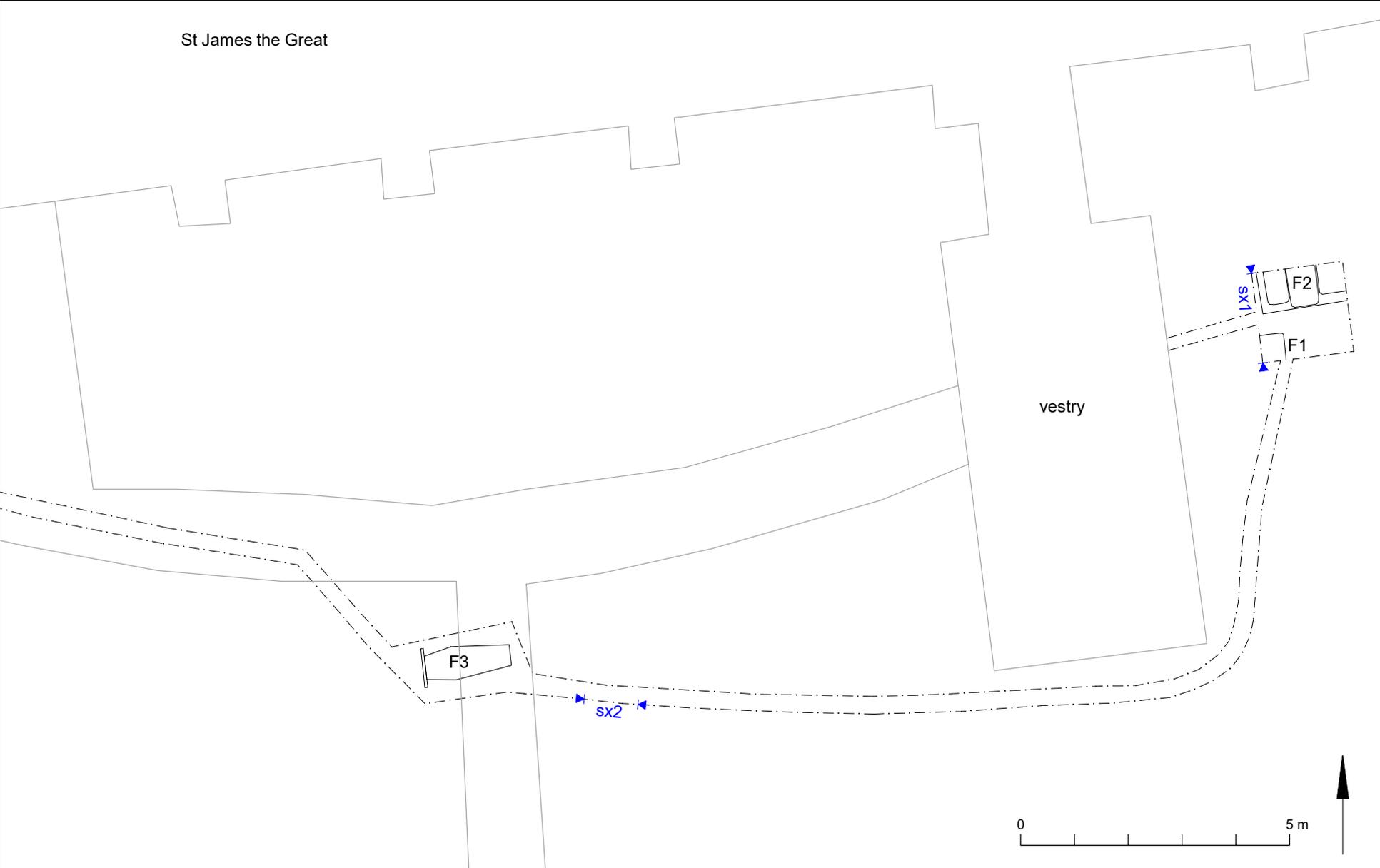


Fig 3 Results: F1, F2 and F3

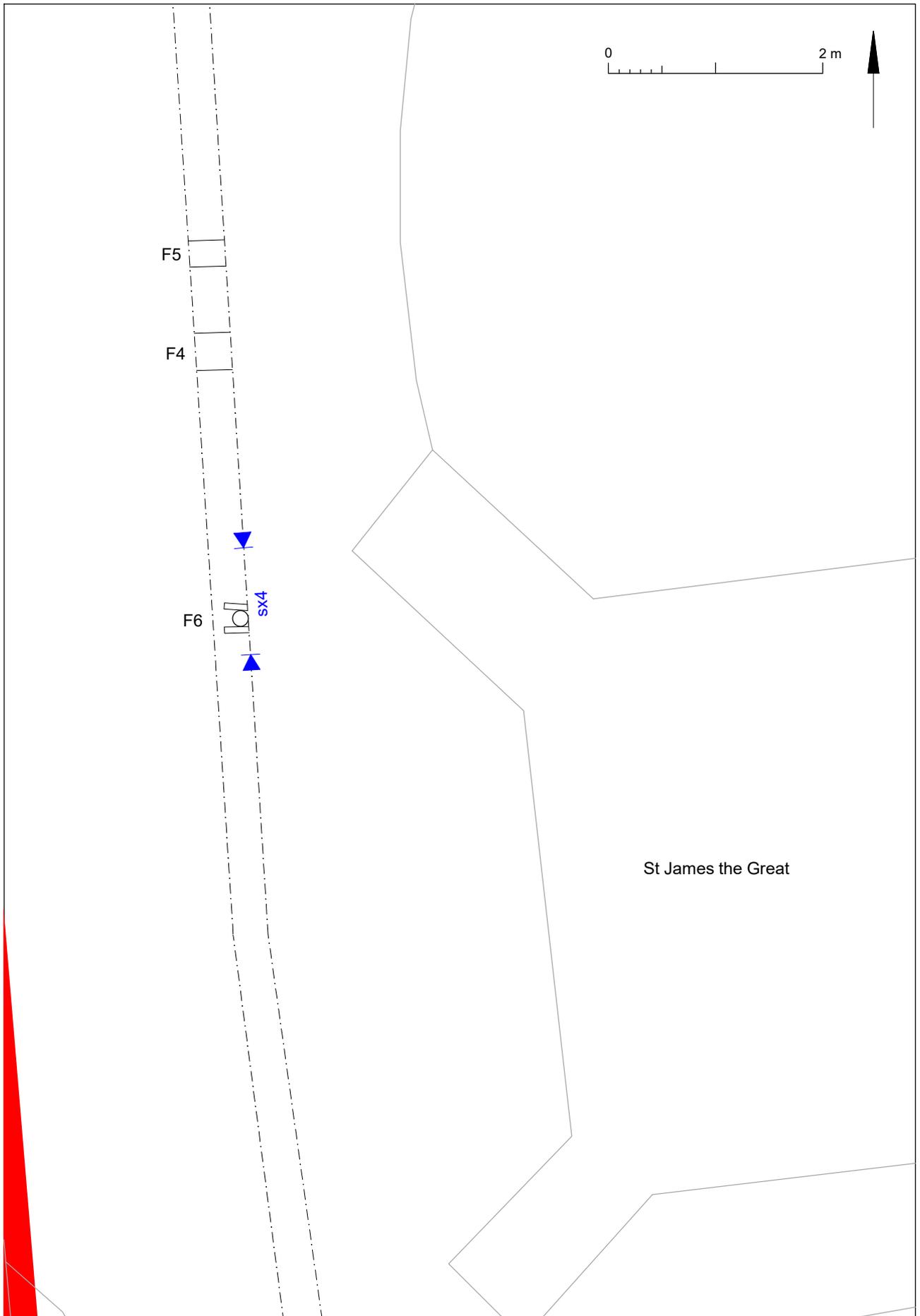


Fig 4 Results: F4, F5 and F6

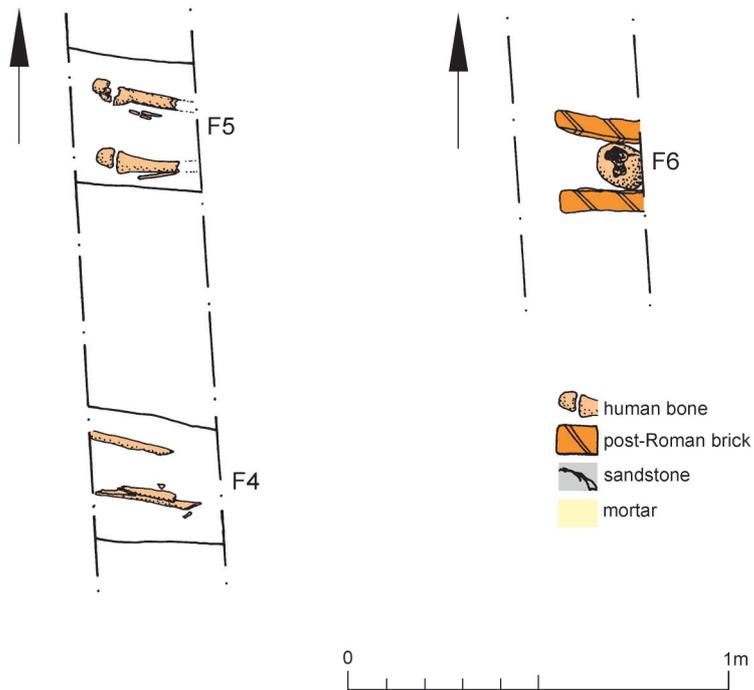
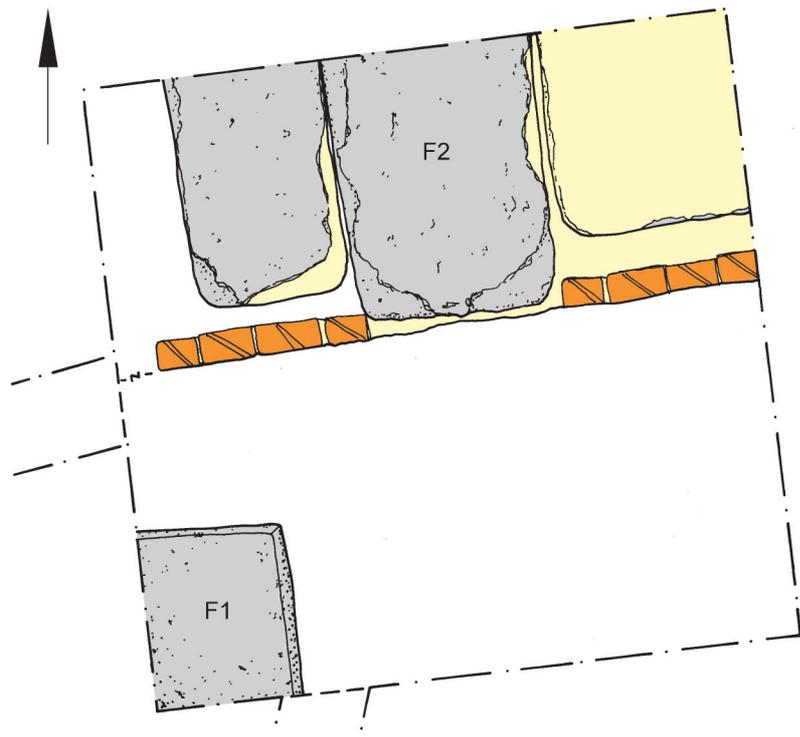


Fig 5 Plans of the chamber pit and burials within the pipe trench.

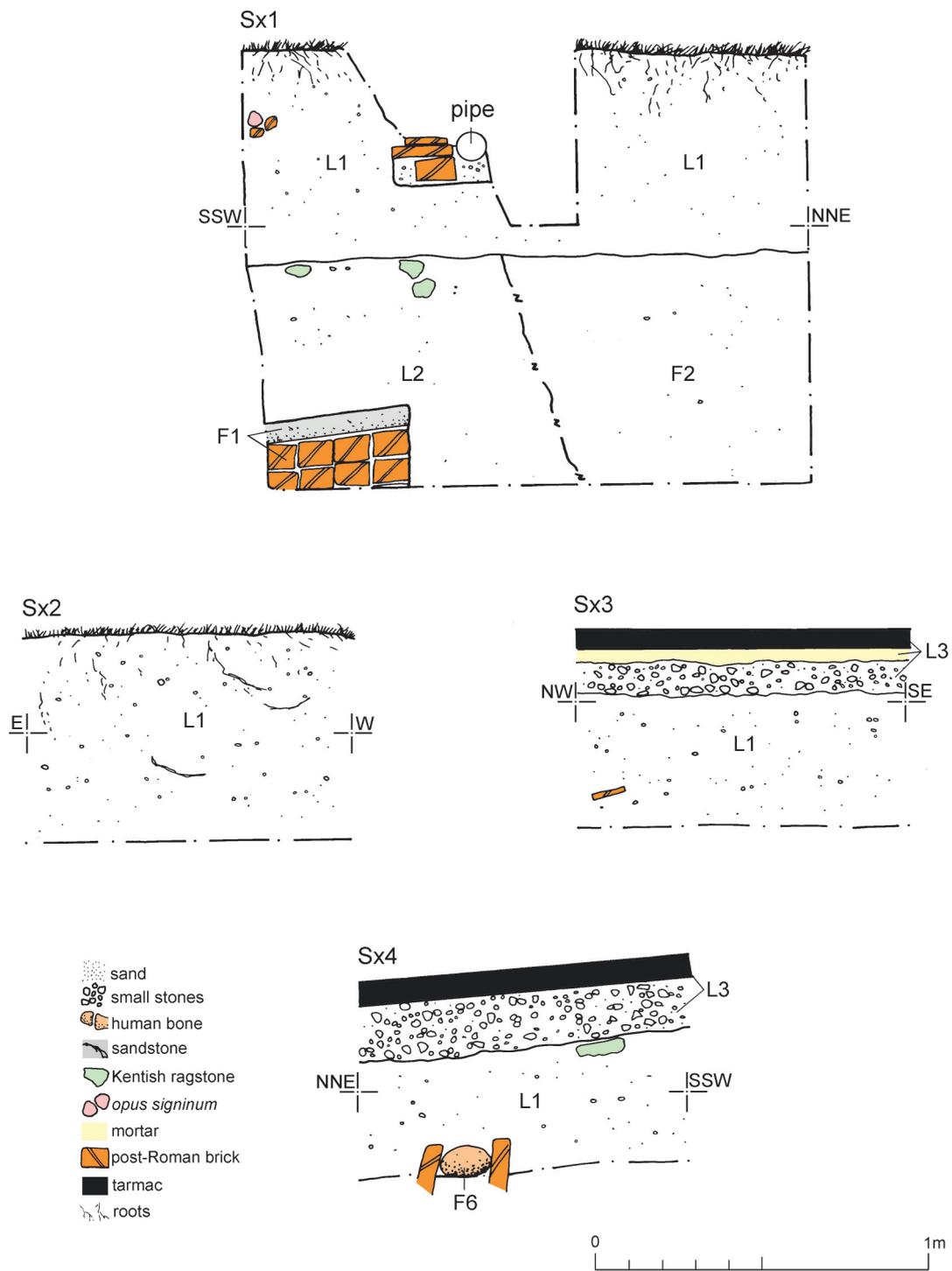


Fig 6 Sections.

Summary for colchest3-418054

OASIS ID (UID)	colchest3-418054
Project Name	Archaeological investigation at the Church of St James the Great, East Hill, Colchester, Essex, CO1 2QL
Activity type	WATCHING BRIEF, EXCAVATION
Project Identifier(s)	2021/03m, ECC4617
Planning Id	
Reason For Investigation	Planning: Post determination
Organisation Responsible for work	Colchester Archaeological Trust
Project Dates	19-Oct-2021 - 22-Oct-2021
Location	Church of St James the Great, East Hill NGR : TM 00171 25223 LL : 51.8896074572217, 0.907451404669453 12 Fig : 600171,225223
Administrative Areas	Country : England County : Essex District : Colchester Parish : Colchester, unparished area
Project Methodology	Archaeological monitoring at the Church of St James the Great in East Hill, Colchester was carried out ahead of the updating of the current composting toilet with associated groundworks. The site is a Grade II* listed building, and has its origins possibly as far back as the 12th century. All archaeological groundworks were carried out by a mechanical excavator under the supervision of a CAT archaeologist. In situ burials were uncovered, planned and photographed but were not lifted. Disarticulated human remains were recorded, photographed and immediately reburied.

Project Results	Archaeological monitoring at the Church of St James the Great in East Hill, Colchester was carried out during groundworks to update the current composting toilet. The site is a Grade II* listed building, and has its origins possibly as far back as the 12th century. It is also within the Colchester Roman town wall. Six burials were uncovered, four of which were in stone tombs or coffins; the other two revealed the remains of two adults. Disarticulated human bone was also recovered from two layers with at least nine individuals represented, including foetal remains and two juveniles.
Keywords	COFFIN - UNCERTAIN - FISH Thesaurus of Monument Types INHUMATION - UNCERTAIN - FISH Thesaurus of Monument Types BURIAL VAULT - UNCERTAIN - FISH Thesaurus of Monument Types
HER	Colchester Borough Council - unRev - STANDARD
HER Identifiers	
Archives	Documentary Archive - to be deposited with Colchester & Ipswich Museum Service (Colchester Collection) Digital Archive - to be deposited with Archaeology Data Service Archive