

**An archaeological
watching brief
at the
Sixth Form College,
North Hill, Colchester, Essex**

July 2001

**on behalf of
Colchester Borough Council**

CAT project ref.: 01/7B
Colchester Museum accession code: 2001.126
NGR: TL 9928 2536



Colchester Archaeological Trust

12 Lexden Road,
Colchester,
Essex CO3 3NF

tel./fax: (01206) 500124

tel.: (01206) 541051

email: archaeologists@colchester-arch-trust.co.uk

CAT Report 148

Contents

1	Summary	1
2	Introduction	1
3	Archaeological background	1
4	Aims and objectives	1
5	Methods	2
6	Results	2
7	Discussion	3
8	Archive deposition	3
9	Acknowledgements	3
10	References	4
	Appendix 1: List of finds <i>by Stephen Benfield</i>	5
	Appendix 2: iron object <i>by N Crummy</i>	5
	Appendix 3: list of types of bottles found	5
	Figures	after p 5
	Summary sheet	

List of figures

Fig 1 Site location, scale 1:1250.

Fig 2 Site plan, scale 1:400.

1 Summary

A watching brief was carried out at the Sixth Form College, North Hill, Colchester, Essex. Roman layers consisting of Roman brick and mortar were reached in one small section of the site at 1.8m below ground-level. In the rest of the site, modern made-up ground was encountered, the result of terracing of the hill. A large spread of old glass and ceramic bottles was recorded just below the surface of the tennis court.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the report on an archaeological watching brief carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) at the Sixth Form College between the 12th and the 31st July 2001. The work was necessitated by the construction of a fire brigade access road which was given planning permission with a condition for a watching brief.
- 2.2 The site is located in Colchester town centre on the western side of North Hill, to the north of the main college building (Fig 1), at National Grid Reference TL 9928 2536. The site lies on a north-facing slope which has been terraced to form a tennis court and car park. The new access is to be created in the hard tennis court area and up a steep grassy slope to the south.
- 2.3 This report follows the standards set out in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1999) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1999).

3 Archaeological background

- 3.1 No previous archaeological excavation has taken place within the watching brief area. However, the Sixth Form College site lies just inside the town wall of the Roman town of *Colonia Claudia Victricensis* within Insula 9a. Remains of a Roman house under the main college building were discovered in 1865 and 1910 (Hull 1958, 93-7). A section was dug behind the town wall in 1938, revealing an internal tower.
- 3.2 A rescue excavation was carried out from 1984 to 1985 by the Colchester Archaeological Trust when the Gilbert School was about to be converted to the Sixth Form College. A large annexe was built to the south of the main school building (ie approximately 15m to the south-west of the current watching brief area). The excavation of the area of the new annexe revealed the men's quarters of a Roman legionary barrack-block situated toward the rear of the fortress, dating from the Roman invasion of AD 43. These barrack-blocks were then partly reused and partly built over when the *colonia* was built. Everything was destroyed during the Boudican revolt of AD 60/61. Evidence for post-Boudican occupation was sparse, but included the edge of one building and a small structure of probably 3rd- or 4th-century date. The site was probably primarily used for cultivation in the medieval and post-medieval periods, although in the south-east corner of the site there were two medieval industrial features (Shimmin 1992, 127-39).
- 3.3 A watching brief on building work for a new extension to the main school building was carried out in 1997. An early Roman military plinth was found which was probably part of the barrack-block (see section 3.2; Shimmin 1997).

4 Aims and objectives

The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological features, finds or deposits revealed by the groundworks.

5 Methods

- 5.1 The fieldwork was carried out by the author and David Knight between the 12th and 31st July. All soil was taken off with a JCB with a toothed ditching bucket unless otherwise stated.
- 5.2 A record of the position of the site excavations was made which has been reproduced as Figure 2. Sections were checked and sketches were made of layers. Artefacts were retrieved and entered onto a pro-forma CAT record sheet.

6 Results

12/7/01

The spoil heaps were checked after 300-400mm of surface material had been removed. The contractors dug up and set aside numerous glass bottles which had been dumped here at some time in the Victorian period or later, perhaps to help level the ground in order to create the tennis court (see Appendix 3). The only other finds from the spoil heap were modern pottery.

Two deeper holes were dug to test the ground:

Area 1 - at the southern edge of the stripped 'hammerhead' area which was dug to 700mm. The following soil-profile was observed:

Layer 1 or L1 - Tarmac, 0-80mm.

L2 - Hogging, 80-160mm.

L3 - Dark brown sandy loam topsoil containing modern pottery and glass bottles and modern brick, 160-280mm.

L4 - Similar topsoil to L3 but with less modern debris, just occasional modern brick, mortar flecks and animal bone, 280-700mm.

Natural ground was not reached.

Area 2 - at the more northerly end of the stripped 'hammerhead' area, which was dug to 1.3m. The following soil-profile was observed:

L1 - Tarmac, 0-80mm.

L2 - Hogging, 80-160mm.

L3 - Dark brown sandy loam topsoil containing glass bottles, 160-530mm.

L4 - Sandy stony layer with frogged bricks, 530mm-910mm.

L5 - Dark brown sandy loam 910mm-1.3m, similar to L3 but possibly representing the previous ground-surface as it is the same level as the surrounding ground-surface. Fragments of possible Roman brick were found at 1.3m depth.

Natural ground was not reached.

13/7/01

The whole tennis court area had been stripped to 700mm to L3 and L4. Natural ground had not been reached and neither had any archaeological layers. Bottles and modern pottery were still appearing in the bottom layer.

24/7/01, 25/7/01 and 26/7/01

Area 3 and Area 4

Two cuts into the steepest part of the slope were made for retaining walls for the new access road. For the purposes of this report, the easternmost trench, by some existing steps, is called Area 3, and the western trench is called Area 4. The trenches were dug to 2.2m width and between 500mm and 1.5m depth. They were dug partly through a tarmac car park and partly through grass. Two brick manholes were exposed in Area 4 and one brick manhole in Area 3. Obviously the manholes themselves and the drains connecting them had disturbed the ground.

There was no clear stratigraphy. Most of the fill was a grey/brown sandy silt with occasional stones. It contained modern brick and other debris all the way down to the bottom of the trenches. A few sherds of Roman pottery, *tesserae* and tile were retrieved, and there were frequent oyster shells. They appear to be cut into 'town fill' (material dumped on the slope when digging for the school or perhaps brought in from other areas of development within the town walls). There was also fill from the manhole and drain trenches.

26/7/01

Area 5

A trench had been started around the perimeter of the tennis court area. The north-western part was seen. An L-shaped trench had been dug which was 1.5m wide and 1.4m deep. A layer of oyster shells was recorded at the bottom of the southern section of the eastern trench. Roman tile was also retrieved, embedded in the oyster shells. This layer was either the start of the Roman ground-level or a disturbed layer sitting above it. No other features or finds were recorded.

31/7/01

Area 5

Area 5 had been extended to a depth of over 2m. On the eastern side of the trench, mortar and brick with *opus signinum* was seen at the bottom of the trench (1.8m-2.05m). This was near the area where oyster shells and tile had been found at 1.4m. A possible post-medieval nail was found higher up (Appendix 2).

The rest of the trench, which was dug around the northern edge of the tennis court, was not monitored.

7 Discussion

Due to terracing of the hill in the past to make up ground-levels and to create the tennis court, the excavations went through a great deal of modern made-up ground. However, Roman levels were reached at the northern end of the site where there had been less infilling. This consisted of Roman mortar and brick with *opus signinum* starting at 1.8m depth, and oyster shells and Roman brick were recorded from the layer above (see Appendix 1).

A large quantity of old glass and ceramic bottles had been dumped just below the surface of the tennis court. The date of this activity is not known but it probably took place to help make a flat terrace in the slope (Appendix 3).

8 Archive deposition

8.1 A copy of this report and the finds will be deposited permanently with Colchester Museum under accession code 2001.126.

8.2 The small amount of finds retained (2.5 kg) have been discarded.

9 Acknowledgements

The Colchester Archaeological Trust is grateful to the following for their help and co-operation:

Martin Winter, Archaeological Officer for Colchester Borough Council
Rose Builders and Contractors
the Roff Marsh Partnership
the Sixth Form College

10 References

- Crummy, P, 1997 *City of Victory*
- Hull, M R, 1958 *Roman Colchester*
- Shimmin, D, 1992 'Excavations at the Gilbert School, North Hill 1984-85', in *Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School, and other sites in Colchester 1971-85*, by Philip Crummy, Colchester Archaeological Report 6 (CAR 6)
- Shimmin, D, 1997 A watching brief at the Sixth Form College, North Hill, Colchester, CAT report

Kate Orr, August 2001

© Colchester Archaeological Trust 2001

Distribution list:

Martin Winter, Archaeological Officer for Colchester Borough Council
Essex Heritage Conservation Record, Essex County Council



Colchester Archaeological Trust

12 Lexden Road,
Colchester,
Essex CO3 3NF

tel./fax: (01206) 500124

tel.: (01206) 541051

email: archaeologists@colchester-arch-trust.co.uk

checked by: Philip Crummy
date: 24.08.01

athlon c:/reports/sixthcoll/rep148.doc

Appendix 1: list of finds

by Stephen Benfield

Finds bag no	Context	Finds description and date
1	Area 1, Layer 4	Roman tile, animal bone
2	Area 2, Layer 5	Roman tile, peg-tile
3	Area 3	Roman pottery (grey ware sherd), Roman tile, Roman <i>tessera</i> , oyster shell, animal bone, and Fe object
4	Area 3	Post-medieval/modern pottery (6 sherds), Roman tile, post-medieval brick, and animal bone
5	Area 5	Oyster shell, peg-tile, post-medieval brick
6	Area 5	Roman mortar and Roman brick/tile
7	Area 5	Curved Fe object, possibly post-medieval nail

Appendix 2: iron object

by N Crummy

Curved encrusted object, tapering to a broken point. Length 54 mm. This has the typical shape of a clenched nail. The section is circular, suggesting a date in the medieval period or later.

Appendix 3: list of types of bottles found at the Sixth Form College

The main group of finds were glass and ceramic bottles which were present all over the site at 250-700mm below ground-level. None were retained but a note was made of some of the names:

Glass bottles

H W Stevens - Colchester/Ipswich
 C Nicholls & Co Ltd, Colchester
 Percy Wicks, Military Road, Colchester
 Robert Douglas, Lothrie
 Mallinsons, Colchester
 (the above are all drinking bottles with glass stoppers)

Small perfume and ointment bottles, etc

Pattersons Camp Coffee, Glasgow
 Gartons HP Sauce
 G Foster Clark, Maidstone - Eiffel Tower Fruit Juice
 Scotts Emulsion
 Bovril

Clay bottles

H Blowers Ginger Beer, 18 Osbourne Street, Colchester

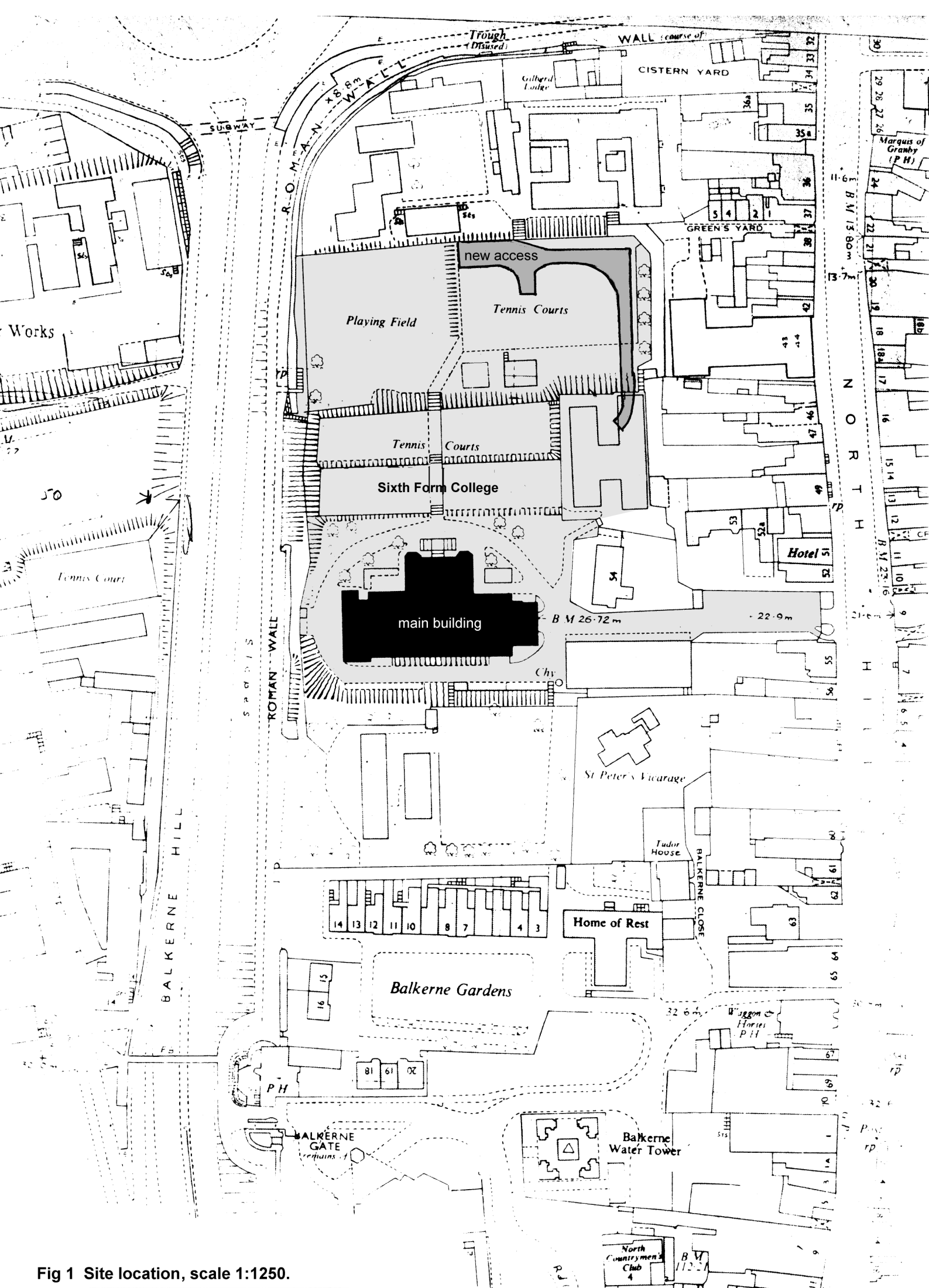


Fig 1 Site location, scale 1:1250.

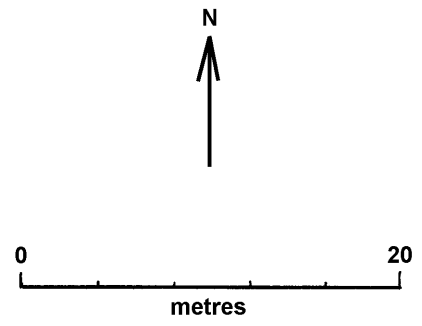
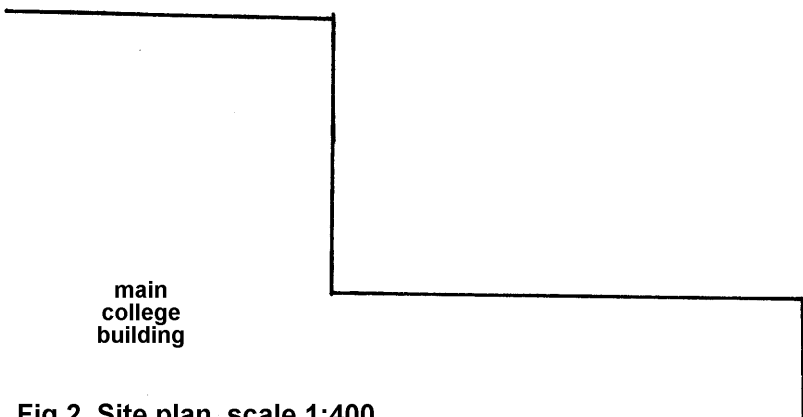
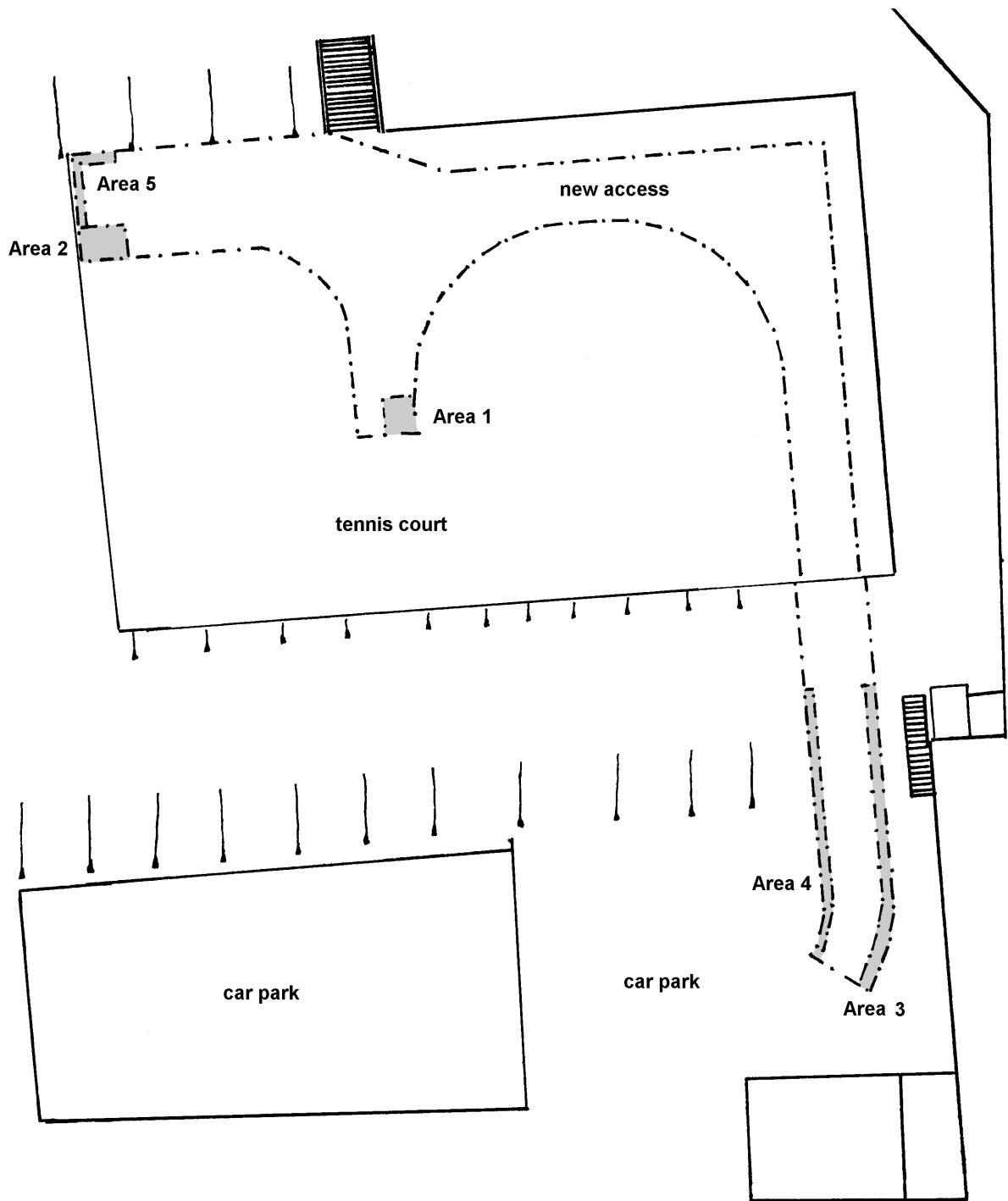


Fig 2 Site plan, scale 1:400.

**Essex Heritage Conservation Record/
Essex Archaeology and History**

Summary sheet

Site name/address: Sixth Form College, North Hill, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TL 9928 2536	Site code: 2001.126
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: July 2001	Size of area investigated: 60m x 50m
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museum	Funding source: Colchester Borough Council
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHCR nos:
Final report: CAT Report 148 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Roman and modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: Roman layers were reached in one small section of the site. This consisted of Roman brick and mortar starting at 1.8m below ground-surface. In the rest of the site, modern made-up ground was encountered, the result of terracing of the hill. A large spread of old glass and ceramic bottles was recorded just below the surface of the tennis court, in the north.</p>	
Previous summaries/reports: CAR 6, 127-39	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: August 2001