

**An archaeological watching brief
on the installation of
tennis court floodlights
at St Helena's School,
Sheepen Road,
Colchester, Essex**

March 2002

**on behalf of
WS Atkins Property Services
and
CIK Construction**

CAT project ref.: 02/3d
Colchester Museum accession code: 2002.90
NGR: TL 987 259



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Contents

1	Summary	1
2	Introduction	1
3	Archaeological background	1
4	Aim	1
5	Results	1
6	The finds	2
7	Discussion and interpretation	3
8	Acknowledgements	3
9	References	4
10	Glossary	4
11	Archive deposition	4
12	Site data	4

Figures after p 5

EHCR summary sheet

List of figures

Fig 1 Site and trench location plan.

Fig 2 T1 and T5: sections.

Fig 3 T6 and T7: sections.

1 Summary

Observations were made during an archaeological watching brief on the digging of cable trenches around the tennis courts at St Helena's School, Sheepen Road, Colchester, Essex. The trenches were being dug for new floodlights and their power cables. Two features were observed in the trenches, only one of which was certainly archaeological. There was a large number of loose finds, principally Roman tile and late Iron Age/Roman pottery of a type which has been found in adjacent Sheepen excavations.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief which was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on the digging of cable trenches around the tennis courts at St Helena's School, Sheepen Road, Colchester, Essex between the 11th and the 26th March 2002. Scheduled Ancient Monument consent was given before works began on the site.
- 2.2 Trenches were dug by the contractors around the perimeter of the existing tennis courts prior to the laying of new cables for floodlights (two points on the perimeter are at National Grid Reference TL 987 259 and TL 986 258). The eight floodlight trenches were located along the north and south sides of the tennis courts as follows: four trenches on the north side and four on the south side. The five associated power cable trenches were located along each side of the tennis courts and between the courts and the school.
- 2.3 All fieldwork was done in accordance with a specification agreed with the Archaeological Officer of Colchester Borough Council.
- 2.4 This report follows the standards and practices contained in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines for the standards and practice of archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1999, updated 2002).

3 Archaeological background

The development site is situated outside the walls of the Roman town, and approximately 500m north-west of the Roman north gate. The present St Helena's School lies on the edges of the settlement at Sheepen, one of the foci of the pre-Roman *oppidum* of Camulodunum. Roman remains which have been recorded in the vicinity of the site include wells and pottery kilns, settlement evidence, and two temples (Essex Sites and Monuments Record 13126-13127). One of the temples (temple 2) is located partially under St Helena's School buildings. Large parts of Sheepen were excavated in the 1930s, and these excavations are recorded in Hawkes and Hull 1947 and summarised in Hull 1958. An excavation which was located slightly south of the school for the construction of the (now disused) playing fields uncovered evidence of light industrial activity, and is described in Niblett 1985.

4 Aim

The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological finds, features and deposits that were exposed during the excavation of the floodlight and cable trenches, to allow the date, importance and condition of any archaeological remains to be assessed.

5 Results (Fig 1)

A series of eight trenches for floodlight bases and five cable trenches were dug around the tennis courts at St Helena's School. The eight trenches for the floodlight bases were located as follows: four trenches on the north side of the tennis courts

(Trenches or T1-T4) and four on the south side (T5-T8). The trenches were each 1.20m square and 1.50m deep. These trenches were dug using a mechanical excavator with a toothed bucket. Of the five cable trenches (TA-TE), four (TB-TE) were located along each side of the tennis courts connecting the lighting trench TA to the power supply in the school building. The cable trenches were each 150mm wide and 500mm deep and were dug using a 'case' excavator and a toothed rabbit bucket.

5.1 The floodlight base trenches (T1-T8)

5.1.1 The four floodlight trenches along the north side of the tennis courts (T1-T4) each measured 1.20m x 1.20m and were excavated to a depth of 1.50m. As the trenches were excavated, four layers were observed:

Layer or L1 - the turf playing-field surface.

L2 - light brown sandy silt with small stones, tile and charcoal flecks.

L3 - a dark grey silty clay, most likely an alluvial deposit associated with the flood plain of the River Colne.

L4 - the natural a yellow/orange clay and coarse gravel (Figs 2-3).

No archaeological features were observed in any of the four trenches on the north side of the tennis courts.

5.1.2 The four floodlight trenches along the south side of the tennis courts (T5-T8) each measured 1.20m x 1.20m and were excavated to a depth of 1.50m. Three layers were observed in the trenches on the south side of the tennis courts, the same as the first three layers in the trenches on the north side:

L1 - turf playing-field surface.

L2 - light brown sandy silt with small stones, tile and charcoal flecks.

L4 - natural.

The grey alluvial layer L3 which was present in the trenches on the north side was not observed in the trenches on the south side. There was one feature (Feature or F1) in T5, a small pit containing *tegula* roof-tile which had been cut by the concrete foundations for the fence posts that support the fence around the tennis courts. A tunnel (F2) was cut in T6 to allow cable access under a footpath. This tunnel also produced a large amount of *tegula* tile, possibly from another pit similar to F1 in T5.

5.2 The cable trenches (TA-TE)

As well as these eight trenches for the floodlight bases, five cable trenches were dug along the sides of the tennis court and to the school building. The trenches were each 150mm wide and 500mm deep. Two layers were observed:

L1 - a turf playing-field surface.

L2 - light brown silt containing frequent small stones with tile and charcoal flecks.

No archaeological features were observed in any of the cable trenches.

6 The finds

Pottery examined by Stephen Benfield and Howard Brooks

6.1 Finds from the trenches excavated at St Helena's School can be divided into two main groups: ceramic building materials (CBM) and pottery. The CBM is Roman and is comprised largely of *tegula* roof-tile, mainly from F1 and F2. The pottery divides into two groups: the late Iron Age/early Roman and the post-medieval and modern. As well as the CBM and the pottery, there are also lava quernstone and a number of other finds which are listed below.

6.2 Finds list

Finds	Quantity	Weight (kg)
CBM	117	26.567
late Iron Age/Roman pottery	58	1.807
post-medieval/modern pottery	8	0.193
lava quernstone	4	10
flue-tile	1	0.015
cow (Bos) tooth	1	0.010
clay pipe	1	0.003
Fe object	1	0.085

- 6.3** The 58 sherds of late Iron Age/early Roman pottery which were recovered from the evaluation trenches at St Helena's School represent forms that are comparable to those found at the Sheepen site (Hawkes & Hull 1947). This pottery is datable to between *circa* AD 5 and *circa* AD 60/61, and includes amphora sherds of type Dressel 20 and a handle from type CAM 186, sherds from a large double-handled collared flagon, mortaria sherds of type CAM 191B, a number of grog- and sand-tempered grey ware sherds, and two sherds of samian ware.

The eight post-medieval and modern sherds which were recovered from the evaluation trenches at St Helena's School are a mixture of fabrics that include Fabric 48d (modern ironstone), Fabric 40 (post-medieval red earthenware), Fabric 45m (modern stoneware), Fabric 45f (German stoneware, ie Westerwald), and a Fabric 42 (border ware) base with the inscription STY on it. This pottery is datable to between the 17th and the 19th centuries (Cotter 2000).

7 Discussion and interpretation

7.1 Features

Two features were identified in the floodlighting trenches F1 was a pit in T5 cutting L2 on the south side of the tennis courts (T5 section; Fig 2). F1 contained large amounts of *tegula* roof-tile, and it had been cut on the north side by the foundations for the fence posts that support the fence around the tennis courts.

The other feature identified during the watching brief was F2 in T6, cutting L2 (also on the south side of the tennis courts - T6 section; Fig 3). F2 was a tunnel cut by the contractors to allow cable access under a footpath on the west side of T6. As the tunnel was excavated, large amounts of *tegula* roof-tile were recovered. These may derive from a feature, possibly a pit, similar to F1 in T5.

7.2 Loose finds

As well as the finds from the features F1 and F2, a large amount of loose material was recovered from all of the eight floodlight trenches and the five cable trenches. The finds all came from L2 and are described in the finds list (see section 6). The recovered finds are comparable with material from the excavations at Sheepen (Hawkes & Hull 1947; Niblett 1985). The finds from this site confirm the known pre-Roman and Roman activity in this area. In addition, the mainly unstratified and mixed nature of the Iron Age, Roman and modern finds indicates the extent and amount of modern activity on the St Helena's School site since the construction of the Avenue of Remembrance and the building of the school beside it.

8 Acknowledgments

The project was managed by Howard Brooks and the site work was carried out by Ben Holloway, Chris Lister, Kate Orr and Laura Pooley. The project was monitored by Martin Winter, Archaeological Officer for Colchester Borough Council. The Trust would like to thank the following for their assistance during the work:

WS Atkins Property Services
CIK Construction
Ruddocks Electrical Engineers
St Helena's School

9 References

- Cotter, J, 2000 *Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85, CAR 7*
- Hawkes, C F C, & Hull, M R, 1947 *Camulodunum, first report on the excavations at Colchester 1930-39*, Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London Report, **24**
- Hull, M R, 1958 *Roman Colchester*, Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London Report, **20**
- Niblett, R, 1985 *Sheepen: an early Roman industrial site at Camulodunum*, Council for British Archaeology Research Report, **57**

10 Glossary

CBM	ceramic building material
context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
SMR	Sites and Monuments Record
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
Roman	the period from AD 43 to around AD 430

11 Archive deposition

The paper archive is held at Colchester Archaeological Trust, 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but it will be permanently deposited at Colchester Museum under accession code 2002.90.

12 Site data

12.1 Site context list

Trenches	Context	Description	Context date
T1-T8 and TA-TE	L1	Turf	Modern
T1-T8 and TA-TE	L2	Topsoil	Modern
T1-T4	L3	Alluvial clay	Unknown
T1-T8	L4	Natural	Glacial/post-glacial

12.2 Soil descriptions

Trenches	Context	Description
T1-T8 and TA-TE	L1	Turf; grey brown sandy loam containing occasional small stones.
T1-T8 and TA-TE	L2	Light brown sandy silt, containing frequent small stones and occasional tile and charcoal flecks.
T1-T4	L3	Dark grey silty alluvial clay.
T1-T8	L4	Yellow orange clay, coarse gravel, natural.

Ben Holloway, April 2002

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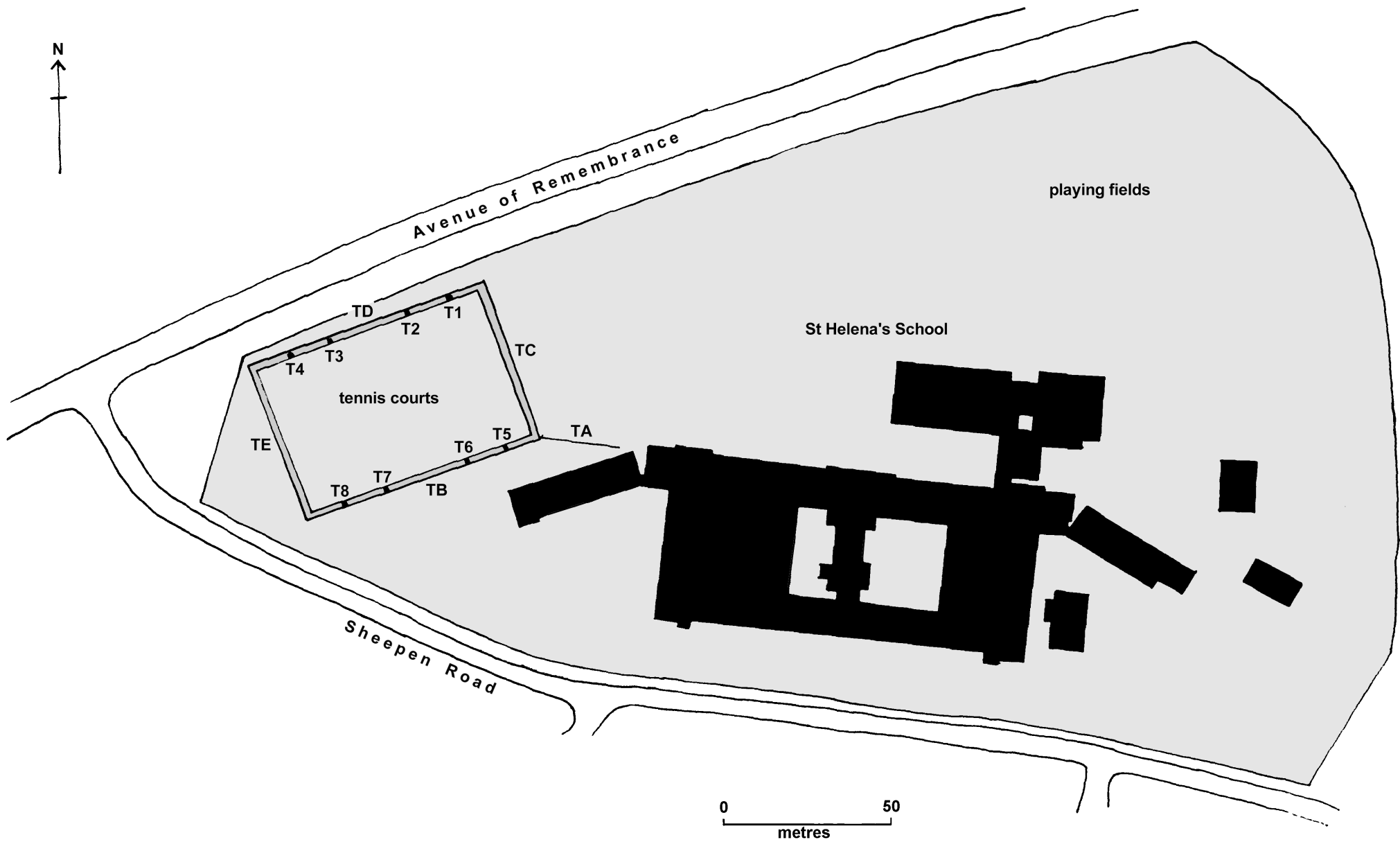


Fig 1 Site and trench location plan.

T1-T8 = floodlight trenches

TA-TE = cable trenches

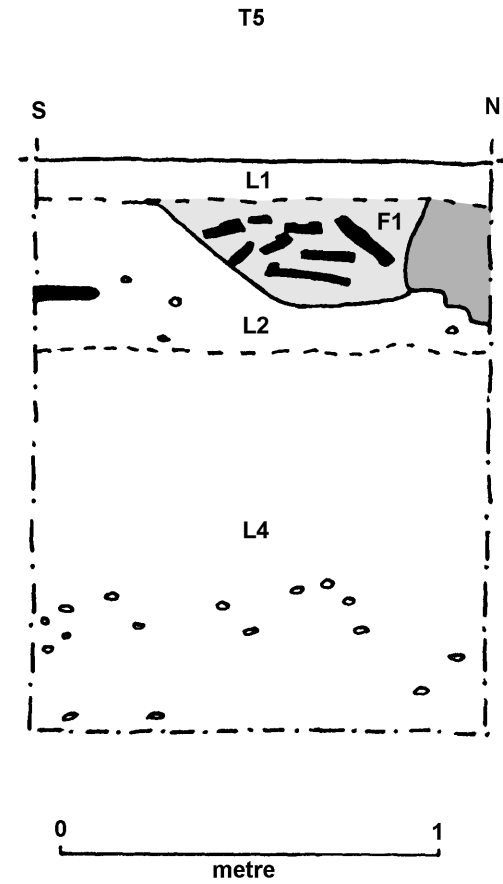
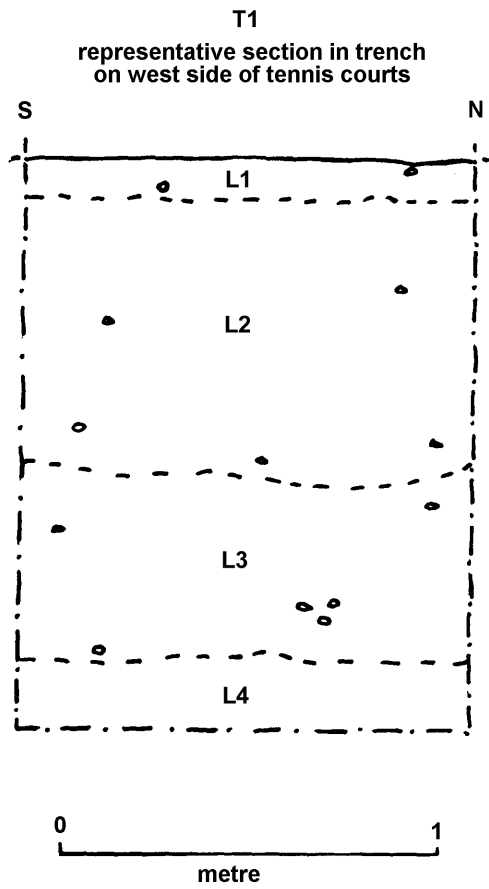


Fig 2 T1 and T5: sections.

concrete tennis court base
 Roman tile

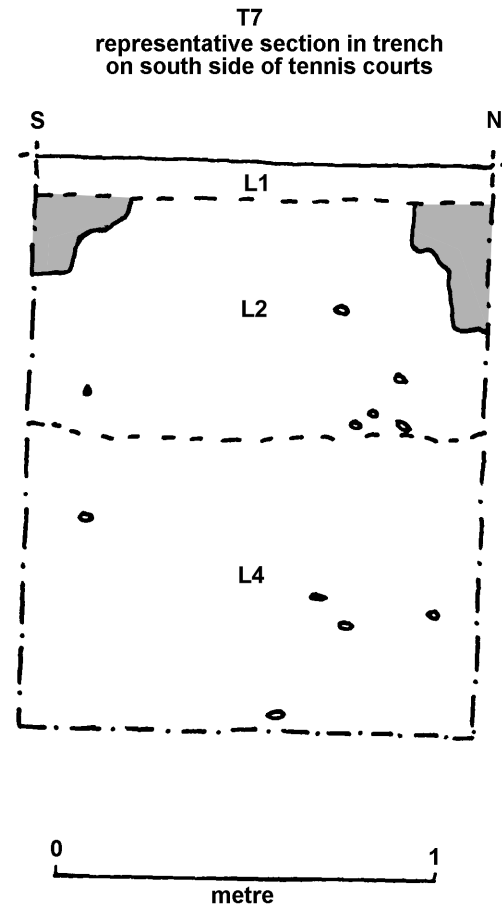
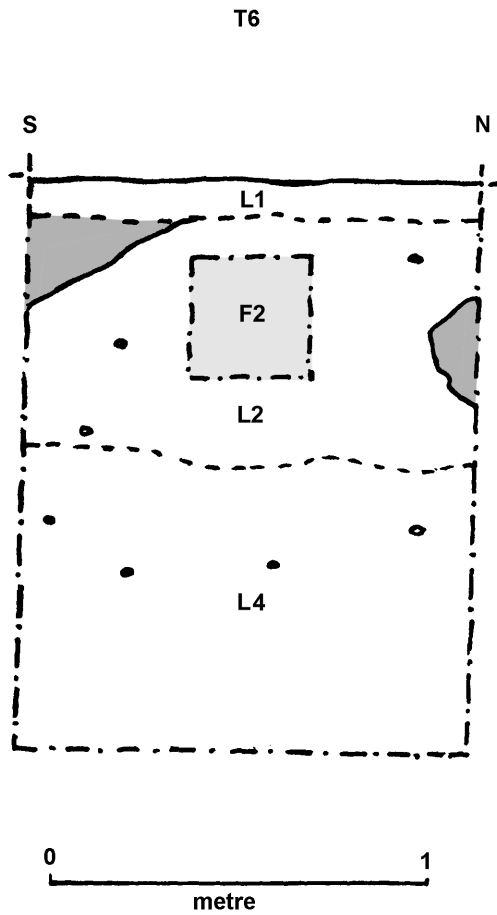


Fig 3 T6 and T7: sections.

concrete tennis court/footpath base

Essex Heritage Conservation Record/ *Essex Archaeology and History*

Summary sheet

Site address: St Helena's School, Sheepen Road, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 9870 2584	Site code: 2002.90
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: March 2002	Size of area investigated: 50m square
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related SMR nos: 13126-13127
Final report: Summary in EAH	
Periods represented: Late Iron Age/early Roman to post-medieval/modern	
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>Observations were made during an archaeological watching brief on the digging of cable trenches around the tennis courts at St Helena's School, Sheepen Road, Colchester, Essex. The trenches were being dug for new floodlights and their power cables. Two features were observed in the trenches, only one of which was certainly archaeological. There was a large number of loose finds, principally Roman tile and late Iron Age/Roman pottery of a type which has been found in adjacent Sheepen excavations.</i>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Ben Holloway	Date of summary: April 2002