

**An archaeological excavation  
of a foundation trench at the drama block,  
St Helena School, Sheepen Road,  
Colchester, Essex  
June 2006**

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## 1 Summary

*An archaeological excavation of the foundation trench for an extension to the drama block at St Helena School was carried out in June 2006. The investigation revealed pits, ditches and a gully all dating from c AD 5-60, sealed by between 600mm and 750mm of topsoil. The type of pottery and the presence of animal bone, slag, daub and Roman tile suggest domestic and industrial use similar to that identified as a result of the previous investigations at Sheepen.*

## 2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological excavation and monitoring of the foundation trench at the drama block of St Helena School. The investigation was carried out in June 2006 by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT).
- 2.2 Scheduled ancient monument consent was applied for to extend the drama block to create a media centre. Following an archaeological evaluation carried out in 2005, planning consent was given for the extension with a condition for the foundation trench to be archaeologically excavated and monitored.
- 2.3 St Helena School is located between Sheepen Road and Colne Bank Avenue, south of the River Colne, 1.5km north-west of the site of the walled Roman town. It is centred at National Grid Reference TL 9895 2580. The drama block is located to the east of the main school block, in a flat grassed playing-field area, at 7m AOD.
- 2.4 All fieldwork was done in accordance with a specification submitted to the Essex County Council (ECC) Historic Environment Management (HEM) team officer and English Heritage by CAT.
- 2.5 This report mirrors standards and practices contained in the Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (CM 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (CM 2003), and the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological excavation* (IFA 1999) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IFA 2001). Other sources used are *Management of research projects in the historic environment* (MoRPHE 2006), and *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment* (EAA 3), *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy* (EAA 8), and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14).

## 3 Aim

The aim of the excavation was to record the location, extent, date and character of any surviving archaeological remains within the development site.

## 4 Archaeological background (Fig 1)

- 4.1 St Helena School lies on the eastern side of the site of the important Late Iron Age and early Roman settlement known as Sheepen (Scheduled Ancient Monument no 46). Extensive excavations there in the 1930s and 1970 produced evidence of workshops engaged in a range of industrial activities including metal-working, enamelling, pottery-making and leather-working (Hawkes & Hull 1947; Niblett 1985).
- 4.2 A late 1st-century temple was excavated by the Colchester Excavation Committee in 1935 on the site of St Helena School (Hull 1958, 224-34). The outer *temenos* wall of the temple precinct appears to lie underneath Sheepen Road.
- 4.3 A Roman timber-lined well was recorded in the 1930s to the south, within the grounds of Colchester Institute. A watching brief carried out at Colchester Institute in 2001 produced an assemblage of 1st-century AD Roman amphoras and mostly 1st-century AD pottery. Several pits were recorded, one of which was datable to the early Roman period. A short stretch of mortared Roman tiles, presumed to be a wall

or foundation to a Roman building, was found by the contractors after the watching brief had finished (CAT Report 131).

- 4.4 In November 2005, an archaeological evaluation by three test-pits was carried out at the drama block. This recorded several features including a ditch and a possible post-hole. Associated pottery suggests a date in the 1st century AD for the features (CAT Report 351).

## 5 Methods (Fig 2)

- 5.1 The foundation trench for the extension was excavated using a mechanical excavator with a flat ditching bucket to remove the topsoil. This was carried out under archaeological supervision. From this level, archaeological excavation proceeded by hand. On completion of hand-excavation and recording, the contractors backfilled the trench and subsequently re-dug it. This work was also monitored by an archaeologist.
- 5.2 Individual records of layers and features were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets. All exposed subsoil features, archaeological deposits or negative features were manually cleaned, planned using a total station, and examined in sufficient detail to allow their nature, date and importance to be assessed. Features were excavated and drawn in section at a scale of 1:10.
- 5.3 A register was compiled of finds. Finds were washed, marked and bagged according to context.
- 5.4 Standard 'record' shots of contexts were taken with a digital camera.
- 5.5 A metal-detector was used to check the spoil heaps.

## 6 Results (Figs 2-4, Table 5)

A foundation trench was excavated as part of the building process. The width of the trench was between 1.3m and 1.7m. It was wider at the north end to expose more of one of the features. A mechanical excavator removed 600-750mm of topsoil (Layer or L1) to expose a yellow brown clayey silt layer (L2) which contained some animal bone and pottery. All features exposed, apart from Feature or F1 and F11, were Late Iron Age/early Roman in date and were cut through L2. F1 was a sub-rectangular pit containing some plastic and a ring-pull in its fill. It was not in the correct position to be a 2005 test-pit (TP1) but it may be an earlier geotechnical test-pit. F11 was a ditch on a NE to SW alignment. Two sections dug through this feature showed that it was V-shaped and modern in date. The only other modern features were two drains.

In the northern part of the trench, a ditch with a dark fill and a seam of gravel along its western edge was recorded (F3). The fill of F3 was flecked with charcoal and daub and contained tile, iron objects, animal bone, pottery, slag and burnt flint. At the base of the feature, which was 650mm deep, the fill became wet as the water table was neared. The feature is dated by the 1st-century AD pottery which it contained and is presumed to be a field ditch or property boundary ditch. However, the ditch did not continue beyond the modern drain to the south. The only explanation would seem to be that the terminus of the ditch had been encountered.

To the south of F3 were four shallow pits (F2, F7, F9, F10). F2 and F9 contained abundant finds and were sealed by a dark blackish brown charcoally dump layer (L3). The dump layer contained one sherd of mid 3rd- to 4th-century pottery, the rest dating probably from c AD 5-60. Pit F7 did not contain any artefacts and may have been an undulation or tree-throw pit. Pit F10 had a charcoally fill and some tile flecks but no finds.

To the south of F9 and either cutting it or cut by it was a shallow ditch (F8) following a NW to SE course. F8 contained animal bone, pottery, iron, slag and daub, an early Roman military belt-mount, and a stud fragment, possibly also of early Roman military origin. F8 was also sealed by L3. It was disturbed by a modern drain on its southern side and did not continue to the south-east as it was not observed elsewhere. Another ditch (F4) was observed in the most southerly leg of

the trench. It appeared to be at right-angles with F8. However, the point of the probable intersection of the two features was not within the excavation area. The only artefact from the fill of F4 was a base sherd from a large flagon. To the north-east of F4, soil-stripping exposed a shallow cut feature filled by orange brown sandy silt with charcoal flecks (F6). The fill of F6 contained tile, daub, burnt flint, animal bone, pottery and one piece of cremated bone. The character of F6 is not easy to determine as it continued under the baulk to the west and was cut by F5 to the east. It may be part of the same feature recorded in TP2 of the 2005 evaluation, in which case it would be a large pit. F5 appeared to be a gully which had been cut through F6. There were charcoal flecks in its fill as well as pottery, CBM, animal bone and slag. Both F5 and F6 are somewhat enigmatic, having irregular edges and bases and an undefined southern edge.

No further features were exposed during the watching brief stage of the project.

## **7 Finds (Table 4)**

### **7.1 The pre-Iron Age pottery**

*by S Benfield*

There are two sherds of pre-Late Iron Age pottery from the excavation. These were residual in the lower fill of F6 (finds no 17). Both are flint-tempered body sherds, one about 6 mm thick and the other about 8 mm, and their combined weight is 16 g. The edges of the sherds are slightly abraded. The sherds are most probably of Late Bronze Age date. Previous excavations have recorded features and finds of the Late Bronze Age period at the Sheepen site (CAR 11, catalogue 66d).

### **7.2 The Late Iron Age and Roman pottery**

*by S Benfield*

#### **Introduction**

The excavation produced 344 sherds (5,983 g) of Late Iron Age and Roman pottery, almost all of which, by comparison with previous large assemblages from the Sheepen site, can be dated to the period c AD 5-60. Where possible, pottery fabrics were recorded using the Roman pottery fabric type series devised for CAR 10 in which all the fabrics are recorded as two-letter codes (Table 1). The CAR 10 pottery fabrics are almost entirely concerned with pottery of Roman date and do not cover pottery of Late Iron Age date or of Late Iron Age tradition adapting to Roman pottery techniques (Romanising wares). To include Late Iron Age and Romanising pottery fabrics additional to the CAR 10 fabric series, some new codes have been used. These are grog-tempered wares (Fabric GTW) and Romanising coarse wares (Fabric RCW). The additional fabrics are described below and full fabric names for each of the lettered fabric codes are given in Table 1. In addition, for some fabrics, reference has been made to the types described in the National Roman Fabric Reference Collection (NRFRC; Tomber & Dore 1998). These have been included in the table of Roman pottery fabrics used in this report (Table 1) as well as, where possible, the equivalent NRFRC code.

The vessel forms were recorded using the Camulodunum (Cam) Roman pottery form type series (Hawkes & Hull 1947; Hull 1958). Samian vessels were catalogued where possible using Dragendorff (Dr) form numbers or other common form type references following those used in Webster 1996. The pottery fabrics and the vessel forms present in each site context were recorded for each finds number (Table 2). The number of sherds was recorded for each fabric together with the weight and the estimated vessel equivalent (eve).

Fabric descriptions other than fabrics contained in CAR 10:

**Fabric GTW** Grog-tempered wares

Generally rather thick sherds, with patchy red-brown to dark brown surfaces. Fabric contains various quantities of crushed fired clay (grog) and is grey to dark brown.

**Fabric RCW** Romanising coarse wares

Sherd thickness is generally medium-thin. The fabric contains fragments of burnt organic matter, and grog may also be present. It sometimes has a tendency to

lamine. The fabric is generally grey-brown in colour with dark grey surfaces, although these can be pale brown to light grey, sometimes appearing abraded. This fabric group includes some black-surfaced wares (fabric BSW; Martin 2003, 129-35).

**Table 1: Roman pottery fabric codes and fabric names used in this report (after CAR 10 with additions), together with total weight in grams and the pottery forms recorded for each fabric type.**

Fabric code	Fabric name	Vessel forms or types recorded, (number of examples in brackets)	Weight (g)	National Roman Fabric Reference Collection fabric
AA	amphoras, all excluding Dressel 20 and Brockley Hill/Verulamium region amphoras		49	
AJ	amphoras, Dressel 20		15	BAT AM 1, BAT AM 2
BA	plain samian forms			
AR	Arretine samian	platter	7	LOY SA, PIS SA
SG	South Gaulish plain samian	Dr 27	4	LGF SA
BPW	butt-beaker parchment ware	?Cam 113	82	NOG WH 3
DJ	coarse oxidised and related wares	flagon	193	
DZ	fine oxidised wares	Cam 85	50	
TR	<i>terra rubra</i>	butt-beaker	43	
GA	BB1: black-burnished ware, category 1	Cam 279C	78	
GTW	grog-tempered wares	Cam 119, Cam 218, Cam 218C, ?Cam 229, ?Cam 256, butt-beaker	624	SOB GT
GX	other coarse wares, principally locally-produced grey wares	Cam 249, flask or jar	143	
HZ	large storage jars and other vessels in heavily-tempered grey wares	Cam 270B	1,530	
GT	large storage jars with prominent grog temper		59	
MQ	white-slipped fine wares and parchment wares	flagon	250	
RCW	Romanising coarse ware	Cam 119 (3), Cam 218, Cam 266	1,806	
TZ	mortaria, Colchester and mortaria imported from the Continent		124	
UR	<i>terra nigra</i> -type wares			
GAB TN1	Gallia-Belgica (Vesle Valley) <i>terra nigra</i> 1	Cam 2, Cam 8/24, Cam 56c	288	GAB TN 1
LTC	<i>terra nigra</i> -type wares, local traded coarse wares	Cam 21	21	
WPW	white pipeclay ware	Cam 161, Cam 163	617	NOG WH 1

**Table 2: Roman pottery fabrics, forms and quantity by finds number for each feature and layer. (Sx = archaeological section.)**

Feature or layer no	Finds no	Section	Fill location	CAR 10 fabric	Form	Sherd quantity	Wt (g)	Comments	Date
L3	6			AJ GA HZ(GT) RCW UR(GAB TN 1) WPW	Cam 8/24	14	194		pre-Flavian
L3	7			DJ GA GTW GX HZ RCW WPW	Cam 119, Cam 279C	13	299		one sherd mid 3rd-4th century, otherwise pre-Flavian
F2	4			BA(AR) DZ (TR) GTW GX HZ RCW UR(GAB TN 1) WPW	Cam 2 Cam 119, ?Cam 256	34	808	Fabric BA(AR) sherd from a large platter with slip coating only on upper surface	pre-Flavian
F2	5			GTW MQ RCW WPW		20	202		?Claudio- Neronian
F3	1	Sx 1	upper fill	DJ HZ RCW WPW	Cam 119	16	301		probably pre-Flavian
F3	2	Sx 1	lower fill	BA(SG) HZ RCW UR(LTC)	Dr 27, Cam 21, Cam 119	10	162	Fabric HZ, one sherd has circular motif with central dot, similar in appearance to an eye cut onto surface post-firing	probably pre-Flavian
F3	19	Sx 2	mid- upper fill	DJ GTW GX RCW TZ, HZ		9	315	Fabric TZ, probably a 1st-century import	pre-Flavian
F3	19	Sx 2	mid- upper fill	DJ GTW GX RCW TZ		7	204	Fabric TZ, probably a 1st-century import	pre-Flavian
F3	24	Sx 2		BPW GTW RCW	?Cam 113, Cam 218	7	68		pre-Flavian
F4	10			DJ		1	107	base sherd from a large flagon	probably 1st-early 2nd century
F5	9	Sx 1		GX		2	6		probably 1st-2nd century
F5	21	Sx 2		BPW?DZ(TR ) GTW GX RCW		15	137		pre-Flavian
F6	8	Sx 1		GTW RCW WPW		9	93		pre-Flavian
F8	12			AA DJ HZ MQ RCW	Cam 266	21	407		1st century
F8	15			AA BPW DJ DZ GTW HZ MQ RCW UR(GAB TN 1) WPW	Cam 56c Cam 85 Cam 218c	31	579		pre-Flavian
F9	17		lower fill	AJ BPW DZ DZ(TR) GTW HZ MQ RCW WPW	Cam 85 Cam 161 Cam 163 Cam 270B	136	2218		pre-Flavian
F11	26	Sx 2		GX	Cam 249	1	6		residual (pre-Flavian)

## Discussion

Apart from two sherds (possibly from the same vessel), both the forms and fabric types of all the closely datable pottery are entirely consistent with that of the large assemblages previously recovered from Sheepen (Hawkes & Hull 1947; Niblett 1985). These are dated c AD 5-60 (Niblett 1985, 3), and the pottery here can be dated accordingly. In respect of this and the summaries of the recorded vessel types and quantities of pottery contained in Tables 1-2, there is little that can be usefully added to this statement. While some of the pottery is of Late Iron Age type, or was current during that period, none of the groups of pottery from the features can be identified as specifically of Late Iron Age date. However, this is not unusual, as much of the identifiable Late Iron Age pottery, or probable Late Iron Age imports to the Sheepen site, are residual in features of post-conquest (Roman) date (Niblett 1985, 23 & 48). The two sherds which are of undoubted later date are from L3, which sealed some of the features. Both are Fabric GA (black-burnished ware, category 1). One of the sherds is a rim and shoulder from a Cam 279C jar, dated early-mid 3rd to 4th century (CAR 10, 480), while the other is a body sherd from a jar and possibly from the same vessel.

### 7.3 The post-medieval pottery

*by H Brooks*

There are only a few sherds of post-medieval pottery (weighing 28 g) and they all came from the fill of F11 (finds no 26). The pottery consists of three sherds of modern white glazed ironstone (CAR 7, Fabric 48d) dated 19th-20th century, and one sherd of internally glazed post-medieval red earthenware (CAR 7, Fabric 40) dated 17th-18th century.

### 7.4 The small finds and bulk ironwork

*by N Crummy*

The objects are ordered below by feature number and then by material. Other than a probable early Roman military belt-mount from F8, and a stud fragment, also from F8 and possibly also of early Roman military origin, no date can be offered for any of the pieces, although the corrosion on most suggests that all, bar one unstratified item, are of some antiquity and therefore probably Roman. The recovery of a Manning type 1a nail, in excess of 150 mm in length, is unusual (Manning 1985, 134).

SF 6. (4) F2. Tapering iron strip, possibly part of a tool or hinge fitting. Length 100 mm, maximum width 36 mm.

SF 4. (18) F3 Sx 2. Tapering copper-alloy shank or buckle tongue fragment. Length 18 mm, maximum width 7 mm.

SF 1. (13) F8. Copper-alloy belt-mount, bent at one end and with damaged sides; probably a Roman military piece. Length 29 mm, width 12 mm.

SF 3. (16) F8. Small curved and convex fragment of copper-alloy sheet with a slight flange on one edge; probably from the rim of a stud. Length 14 mm, width 16 mm.

SF 7. (15) F8. Fragment of iron sheet with mineral-replaced wood and random pieces of vegetable matter (?grass) adhering to one face. Maximum dimensions 50 by 43 mm.

(12) F8. Iron nail of Manning's type 1b (Manning 1985, 134). Length 54 mm.

(15) F8. Iron object with rounded terminal, tapering to a point at the other end. Length 58 mm, maximum width 18 mm.

SF 2. (14) F9. Badly corroded thick copper-alloy rectangular strip. Length 22 mm, width 12 mm.

(17) F9. Two iron nails of Manning type 1b (Manning 1985, 134). Lengths 54 mm (bent) and 57 mm (incomplete).



(25) F11 Sx 1. Large iron nail of Manning type 1a (Manning 1985, 134). Length 159 mm.

SF 5. (22). Unstratified. Fragment of a narrow copper-alloy strip, with a groove along one margin. Length 19 mm, width 8 mm. Probably post-medieval or modern.

## 7.5 The salt briquetage

by N Crummy

A single small piece of salt briquetage, with a maximum surviving area of only 56 by 22 mm, came from (17) F9. It is part of a rectangular trough used in the Late Iron Age and early Roman periods in the production of sea-salt at red hill sites on the Essex coast. It is 14 mm thick, has little vegetable tempering, and has fired to a regular brown colour throughout. This thickness and fabric is typical of the Type B briquetage which is rarely found in north-east Essex as its production centres on the red hills to the south of the county, around Canvey Island (Rodwell 1979, 149-53; Fawn *et al* 1990, 11).

In the Late Iron Age and early Roman period, the peak date range for salt-making activity, the River Colne was probably tidal as far as Sheepen, on which St Helena School lies. Other briquetage vessels and hearth furniture have been found in the vicinity, leading to suggestions that salt production took place not only along the coast but also within the *oppidum* of Camulodunum itself (Hawkes & Hull 1947, 346-7; Niblett 1985, 23). It has been further argued that Camulodunum owed some of its pre-eminence to trade in this valuable commodity (Rodwell 1979, 159-60). However, fragments of both vessels and hearth furniture are increasingly being recognised on inland sites, making the Sheepen material less likely to be evidence of production. The inland finds have long been the subject of study, and the find spot most distant from the coast may be Baldock, Hertfordshire (Rodwell 1979; Rigby & Foster 1986, 188; Barford 1990, 79-80; Sealey 1995). The most likely explanation for the recovery of this material inland is that salt was traded in the vessels in which it was made, although other suggestions have also been made, including the possibilities that raw salt-cakes might have been acquired at the coast to be refined inland, and that briquetage vessels were used as containers for fish preserved in salt, a likely secondary product of the red hills (Eddy 1982, 26; Hawkes & Hull 1947, 347; Fawn *et al* 1990, 33).

## 7.6 The structural clay (Table 3)

by N Crummy

The fragments of structural clay divide into five groups: 1) small fragments of standard daub, most with some evidence of burning; 2) small fragments with a vitrified external face; 3) hard-fired thick fragments with a smooth external face scorched to pale grey, two of which have also been in contact with heat intense enough for the clay to vitrify at one point; 4) thin fragments with two original faces, some retaining flanges along on edge; and 5) fragments of a soft fine friable sandy clay blackened, presumably by heat, on the external faces.

Group 5 pieces come only from F2, but the remaining groups are scattered throughout the features, suggesting that they came from a common source. The thin Group 2 pieces would have had a specific purpose, and some of them, at least, may be part of clay slabs used in kilns or hearths. Most of the fragments have been exposed to heat in varying degrees, some to intense heat, and all may have come from a kiln, perhaps a pottery kiln with the base set slightly below ground, an internal floor, and a superstructure, which would account for the different groups and the varying heat.

**Table 3: the structural clay.**

Finds no	Layer/ Feature	No of fragments	Weight (g)	Description
4	F2	7	367	3 are thick and are scorched on an original external smooth face and 1 of these pieces is slightly vitrified at one point. 1 thin piece has two original faces and a small flange on one edge
7	L3	10	194	
5	F2	15	284	7 pieces are thin with two original faces, and 1 of these has a double flange on each edge. 6 pieces are soft, friable, blackened externally
12	F8	1	107	1 with rough original face
17	F9	15	587	3 are thin with two original faces; 6 are vitrified on one face; 3 are thick and are scorched on one external smooth face, and 1 of these is also partially vitrified

## 7.7 List of all finds

Table 4: list of all finds ordered by context.

Context	Finds no	Description	Date	Weight (g)
F2	4	SF 6. Tapering iron strip, possibly part of a tool or hinge fitting	early Roman?	
F2	4	Pottery	Late Iron Age/Roman	808
F2	4	1 small jaw bone, 3 medium size teeth, 30 unidentifiable bone fragments	undated	137
F2	4	15 unidentifiable bone fragments	undated	71
F2	4	1 piece of burnt flint	prehistoric	27
F2	4	4 pieces of slag	Late Iron Age/Roman	331
F2	4	Daub	Late Iron Age/Roman	367
F2	4	8 pieces of slag	Late Iron Age/Roman	216
F2	5	Daub	Late Iron Age/Roman	284
F2	5	Pottery	Late Iron Age/Roman	202
F2	5	25 unidentifiable bone fragments	undated	150
F2	5	3 pieces of burnt flint	prehistoric	78
F2	5	10 pieces of slag	Late Iron Age/Roman	697
F2	5	2 <i>tegulae</i> , 1 <i>imbrex</i>	Roman	727
F3, Sx 1	1	Pottery	Late Iron Age/Roman	301
F3, Sx 1	1	2 <i>tegulae</i> , 1 <i>imbrex</i> , 4 pieces of Roman brick, 3 pieces of unidentifiable tile fragments	Roman	1,074
F3, Sx 1	1	1 small jaw bone, 10 unidentifiable bone fragments	undated	127
F3, Sx 1	1	4 pieces of slag	Late Iron Age/Roman	227
F3, Sx 1	2	Pottery	Late Iron Age/Roman	162
F3, Sx 1	2	Part of a small jaw bone, 3 teeth, 2 unidentifiable bone fragments	undated	33
F3, Sx 2	18	Tapering copper-alloy shank or buckle tongue fragment	early Roman?	
F3, Sx 2	19	Pottery	Late Iron Age/Roman	315
F3, Sx 2	19	2 unidentifiable bone fragments	undated	78
F3, Sx 2	19	1 <i>tegula</i>	Roman	136
F3, Sx 2	19	1 large jaw in pieces, possibly cow; 2 teeth; and 15 unidentifiable bone fragments	undated	448

F3, Sx 2	24	Pottery	Late Iron Age/Roman	68
F3, Sx 2	24	15 unidentifiable bone fragments	undated	214
F3, Sx 2	24	1 piece of burnt flint	prehistoric	12
F3, Sx 2	24	9 pieces of slag	Late Iron Age/Roman	242
F3, Sx 2	29	11 pieces of Roman tile	Roman	1,002
F4	10	Pottery	Late Iron Age/Roman	107
F5, Sx 1	9	Pottery	Late Iron Age/Roman	6
F5, Sx 1	9	1 <i>tegula</i>	Roman	73
F5, Sx 1	9	5 unidentifiable bone fragments	undated	42
F5, Sx 2	20	1 piece of slag	Late Iron Age/Roman	56
F5, Sx 2	20	1 fragment of Roman tile	Roman	28
F6, Sx 1	8	2 unidentifiable bone fragments	undated	50
F6, Sx 1	8	1 piece of burnt flint	prehistoric	11
F6, Sx 1	8	Pottery	Late Iron Age/Roman	93
F6, Sx 2	21	Pottery	Late Iron Age/Roman	137
F8	12	Pottery	Late Iron Age/Roman	407
F8	12	Daub	Late Iron Age/Roman	107
F8	12	4 various size jaw bones, 2 long thin incisors, 1 molar, 5 unidentifiable bone fragments	undated	212
F8	12	Iron nail	Roman?	
F8	13	SF 1. Copper-alloy belt-mount, probably a Roman military piece	early Roman	
F8	15	Iron object	Roman?	
F8	15	SF 7. Fragment of iron sheet with mineral-replaced wood	Roman?	
F8	15	Pottery	Late Iron Age/Roman	579
F8	15	3 small jaw bones, 1 very large tooth, 30 unidentifiable bone fragments	undated	324
F8	15	17 unidentifiable bone fragments	undated	299
F8	15	4 pieces of slag	Late Iron Age/Roman	235
F8	16	SF 3. Small fragment of copper-alloy sheet probably from the rim of a stud	Roman?	
F9	14	SF 2. Thick copper-alloy rectangular strip	Roman?	
F9	17	Two iron nails	Roman?	
F9	17	Pottery	Late Iron Age/Roman	2,218
F9	17	Daub	Late Iron Age/Roman	587
F9	17	2 small jaws (one possible a dog), 2 large jaws possibly cow, 50 unidentifiable bone fragments	undated	780
F9	17	Briquetage (part of a rectangular salt-making trough)	Late Iron Age or Roman	10
F9	17	14 pieces of slag	Late Iron Age/Roman	1,017
F11, Sx 1	25	1 thin, 6cm-long clay-pipe stem	18th century	8
F11, Sx 1	25	1 <i>tegula</i> , 1 tile fragment	Roman	584
F11, Sx 1	25	Large iron nail	Roman?	
F11, Sx 2	26	Pottery	Late Iron Age/Roman	6
F11, Sx 2	26	2 unidentifiable bone fragments	undated	14
F11, Sx 2	26	1 Victorian floor brick, 2 fragments of post-medieval brick, 8 fragments of unidentified tile	Victorian	1,670
F11, Sx 2	26	1 piece of stone	Victorian	113
F11, Sx 2	26	1 thin clay-pipe stem	18th century	7

F11, Sx 2	26	Post-medieval and modern pottery	17th-19th century	28
L1	23	1 fragment of Roman tile, 4 pieces of unidentified tile	Roman	196
L1	23	1 oyster shell	undated	8
L1	23	2 clay-pipe stems	post-medieval	12
L1	23	1 piece of slag	Late Iron Age/Roman	14
L3	6	1 Roman brick, 3 pieces of roof tile, 2 unidentifiable tile fragments	Roman	406
L3	6	Large jaw bone, 15 unidentifiable bone fragments	undated	533
L3	6	Pottery	Late Iron Age/Roman	194
L3	7	1 piece of <i>tegula</i>	Roman	141
L3	7	Pottery	Late Iron Age/Roman	299
L3	7	Daub	Late Iron Age/Roman	194
U/S	3	Long bone, possibly a cow	undated	580
U/S	22	SF 5. Fragment of a narrow copper-alloy strip	post-medieval or modern?	

## 8 Discussion

The pits and ditches/gullies revealed by the excavation are not unusual for this area. The 1970s excavation at the Sheepen site, on the playing fields to the south-west of St Helena School, recorded pre-conquest and early Roman post-holes, shallow scoops, rubbish-pits, palisade slots, a Roman road, and Roman ditches and gravel-pits. (Niblett 1985, 29-43). The type of pottery and the presence of animal bone, slag, daub and Roman tile suggest domestic use similar to that identified as a result of the previous investigations at Sheepen dating to c AD 5-60.

Structural clay (daub) was found scattered throughout the features and may have come from a kiln, perhaps a pottery kiln. Iron-smithing slag from several of the features is a waste product from metal-working in the vicinity.

The drama block lies just outside the precinct of a Roman temple (Temple 2, Crummy 1980, 248-53; Temple 1, Hull 1958, 224-33). The dating evidence from the 1935 excavation was meagre, but indicates a 1st-century AD date for its construction and its use into the 4th century.

The excavation at the drama block did not identify any features which could definitely be related to the temple; they are more likely to belong to the period before the temple was constructed.

The presence of a small amount of flint-tempered pottery and burnt flint suggests that the Late Iron Age site was preceded by some sort of activity in the Bronze Age. This accords with what has been found in previous excavations at Sheepen (CAR 11, catalogue 66d).

## 9 Acknowledgements

The Trust would like to thank Atkins Design and Engineering Solutions for commissioning the work and St Helena School for funding the work. The project was monitored by Pat Connell, the ECC HEM team officer. The excavation work was supervised by Kate Orr and carried out by W Clarke, L Driver, B Hurrell and C Lister. The monitoring was carried out by K Orr and L Pooley.

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## 11 Glossary and abbreviations

amphora	a large Roman storage jar for transporting wine or olive oil
AOD	Above Ordnance Datum, ie height above sea level
CBCAO	Colchester Borough Council Archaeology Officer
CBM	Ceramic Building Material, ie brick, tile and daub
context	specific location on an archaeological site, usually a feature or layer
EH	English Heritage
EHER	Essex Historic Environment Record, Essex County Council
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
Flavian	the period of the Flavian Roman emperors, AD 69-96
<i>imbrex</i>	a Roman roof tile connecting two <i>tegulae</i>
Iron Age	the period preceding the Roman conquest in Britain, c 700 BC to AD 43
Late Iron Age	75-50 BC to AD 43
modern	period from the mid 19th century to the present
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
<i>oppidum</i>	a Late Iron Age tribal centre defended by earthworks
post-medieval	period from c 1500 to the mid 19th century
Roman	the period from AD 43 to c AD 410
<i>tegula</i>	a Roman roof tile

## 12 Archive deposition

The finds and the digital and paper archive are held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but both will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2006.79.

## 13 Site data

**Table 5: list of all contexts.**

Context	Description	Datable Finds	Date
L1	Turf and medium brown loam topsoil	clay-pipe fragments, building material	post-medieval to modern
L2	Yellow brown clayey silt, containing animal bone and pottery; Roman land surface - features cut into this layer	pottery	Roman, 1st century?
L3	Upper fill of F2, F8, F9; very dark brown containing charcoal, daub, tile, pottery and animal bone	pre-Flavian and 3rd- to 4th-century pottery	later Roman, 3rd-4th century
L4	Natural sand and gravel		Glacial
F1	Small rectangular pit with an orangey brown sandy silt fill which appeared ancient but contained a ring-pull and some plastic - may be 2005 test-pit	ring-pull, plastic	modern
F2	Shallow pit sealed by L3, containing animal bone, burnt flint, CBM, daub, iron, slag	pottery	c AD 5-60
F3	Ditch or large pit:	pottery	c AD 5-60

	main (upper) fill - dark brown slightly sandy silt with frequent stones lower fill - wet, dark brown silt with clay patches A lens of gravel in the uppermost fill on the western side of the feature, with flecks of charcoal, daub and tile; containing iron, animal bone, tile, pottery, slag and burnt flint		
F4	Narrow and shallow ditch on a north-south alignment, filled by dark brown silty loam with medium-sized sub-rounded stones	pottery	1st to early 2nd century
F5	Shallow pit/ditch or gully filled by mid to light brown sandy silt; charcoal flecks; containing pottery, CBM, animal bone and slag - cut F6	pottery	c AD 5-60
F6	?Pit filled by orange brown sandy silt with charcoal flecks, containing tile, daub, burnt flint, animal bone and pottery; one piece of cremated bone - cut by F5	pottery	c AD 5-60
F7	Shallow pit, undulation or tree-throw pit, filled by dark silty loam with rare small stones	no finds except from surface cleaning	c AD 5-60
F8	Shallow ditch either cutting or cut by F9, sealed by L3, filled by mid to dark brown silty loam mottled with yellow brown silty loam, containing animal bone, pottery, iron, copper alloy, slag, daub	pottery	c AD 5-60
F9	Shallow pit cutting or cut by F8 and sealed by L3, filled by mid to dark brown silty loam with abundant daub fragments and charcoal staining; common small to medium-sized stones - also contained one piece of briquetage, iron, copper alloy, pottery and animal bone	pottery	c AD 5-60
F10	Small pit with mid brown moist clayey silt, charcoal flecks at the top	no finds	probably Late Iron Age/ Roman
F11	V-shaped, steep-sided ditch aligned NE-SW, filled by dark brown sandy silt	pottery and brick	modern

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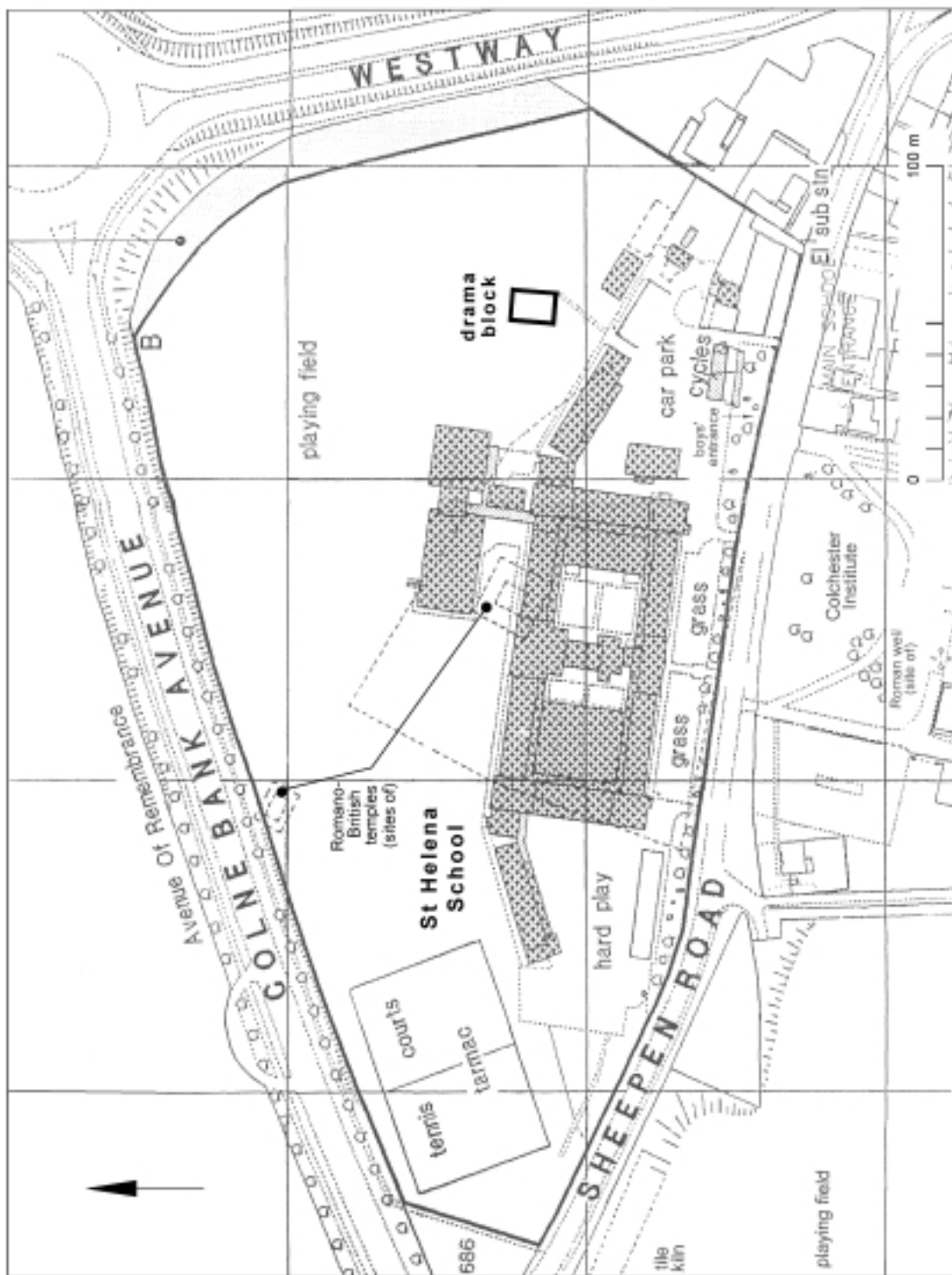
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Fig 1 Site location.

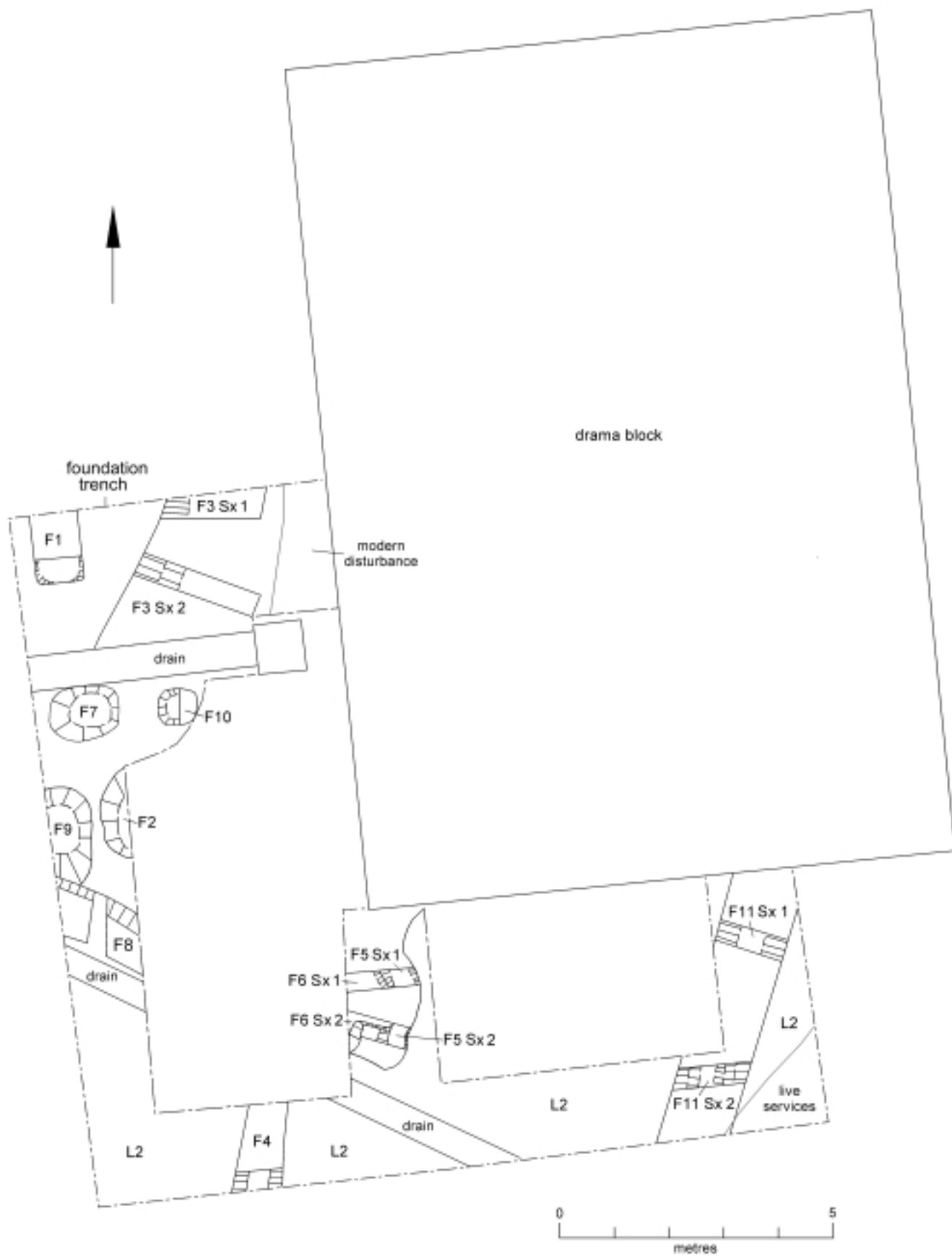


Fig 2 Plan of site, showing features.

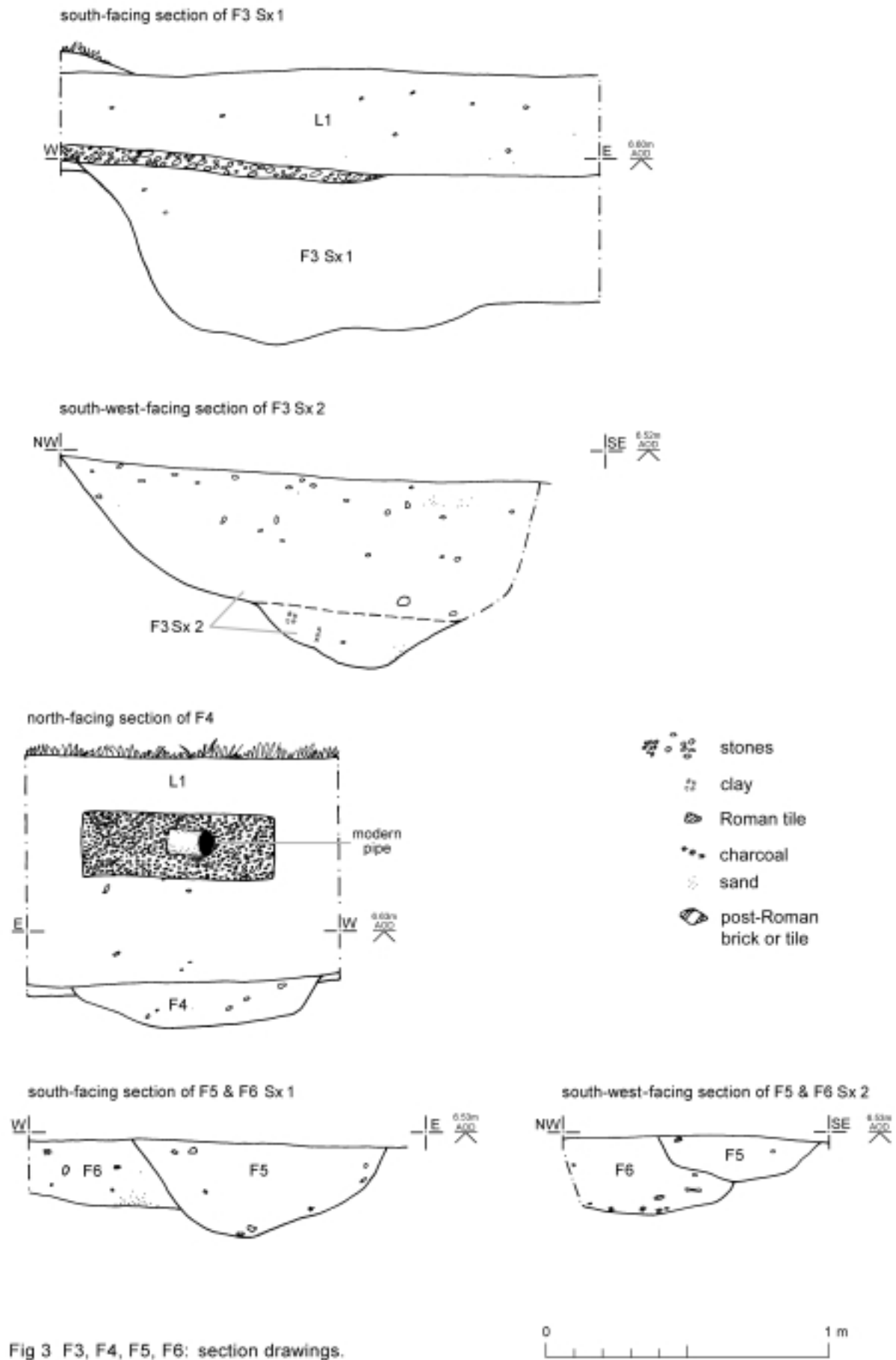


Fig 3 F3, F4, F5, F6: section drawings.

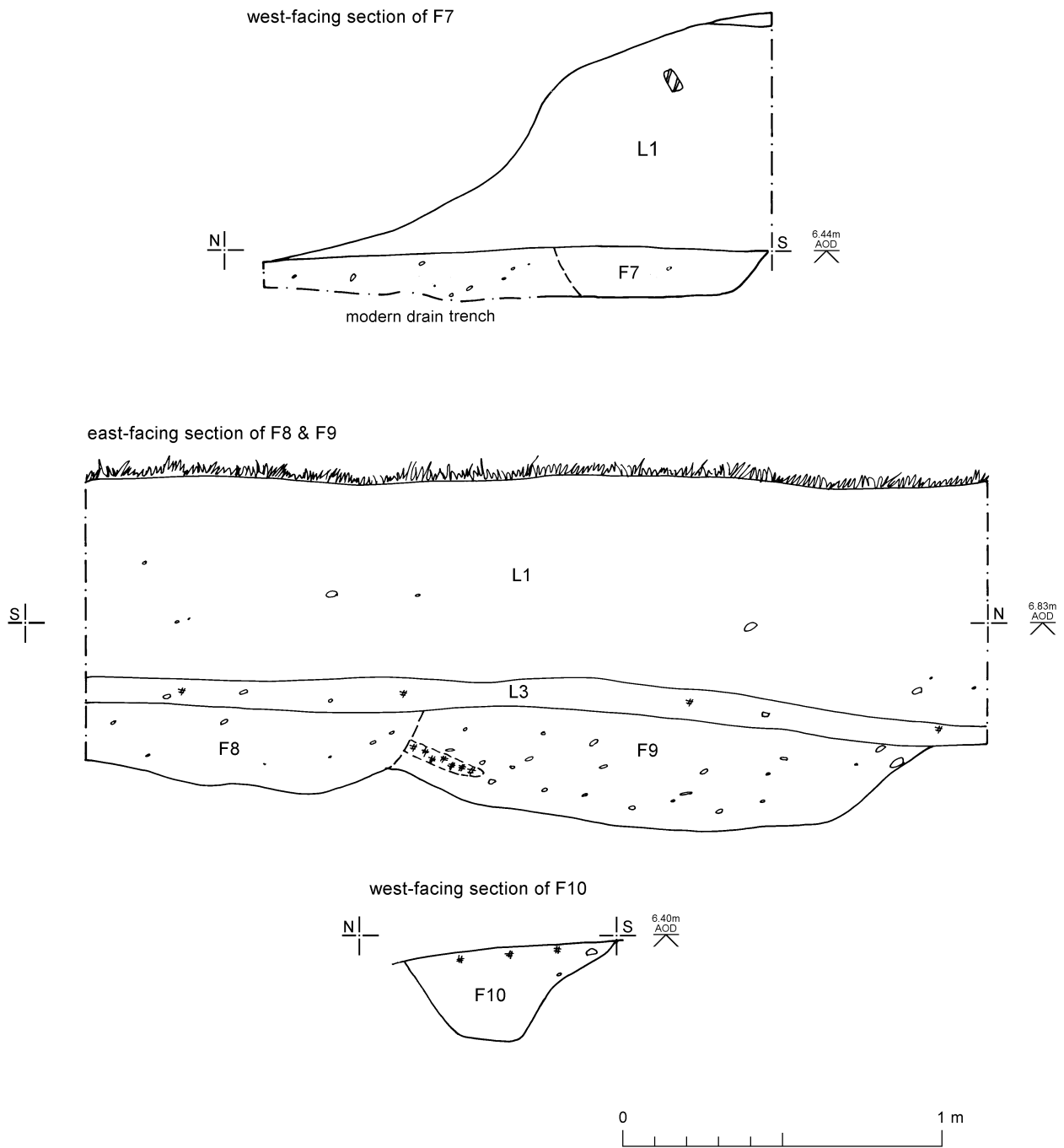


Fig 4 F7, F8, F9, F10: section drawings.

# Essex Historic Environment Record/ *Essex Archaeology and History*

## Summary sheet

<b>Site name/address:</b> the drama block, St Helena School, Sheepen Road, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester Borough
<b>NGR:</b> TL 9895 2580 (c)	<b>Site code:</b> 2006.79
<b>Type of work:</b> excavation of a foundation trench	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> June 2006	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 14m x 13m
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Atkins Design and Engineering Solutions
<b>Further work anticipated?:</b> No	<b>Related EHER nos:</b>
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 384 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods represented:</b> Roman, c AD 5-60	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b>  <i>An archaeological excavation and monitoring of the foundation trench for an extension to the drama block at St Helena School was carried out in June 2006. The investigation revealed pits, ditches and a gully all dating from c AD 5-60, sealed by between 600 mm and 750mm of topsoil. The type of pottery and the presence of animal bone, slag, daub and Roman tile suggest domestic and industrial use similar to that identified as a result of the previous investigations at Sheepen.</i></p>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> CAT Reports 131, 349 and 351	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Kate Orr	<b>Date of summary:</b> October 2006