

**A building recording survey of the former  
Garrison Riding School,  
Le Cateau Barracks, Cavalry Road,  
Colchester, Essex  
February 2011**



**report prepared by  
Chris Lister**

**on behalf of  
GPG No.5 Limited**

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**Colchester Archaeological Trust**  
12 Lexden Road,  
Colchester,  
Essex, CO3 3NF

*tel.:* (01206) 541051  
*tel./fax:* (01206) 500124  
*email:* [archaeologists@catuk.org](mailto:archaeologists@catuk.org)

**CAT Report 585**

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## EHER summary sheet

## 1 Introduction

This report provides a written and photographic record of the former Garrison Riding School to the north of Cavalry Road, Le Cateau Barracks, Colchester, Essex (EHER 46846). It is intended to fulfil a condition of planning permission for conversion and restoration submitted to Colchester Borough Council. The written report is accompanied by a CD containing a full photographic record of digital images (Appendix 1). The building was surveyed during February 2011 when the accompanying photographs were taken.

## 2 Summary (Figure 1)

The former Garrison Riding School is located amongst the remains of the decommissioned Le Cateau Barracks, itself part of the much larger Colchester Camp. As a Grade II listed building the Riding School is one of a very few number of buildings that has not been demolished during the redevelopment of the area.

Le Cateau Barracks and the Garrison Riding School is the last surviving example of the new layout of cavalry barracks first developed at Aldershot in the 1850s, for large-scale training. Although several original features have been replaced by later alterations, this has not particularly affected the function and layout of the building. As the majority of these changes evolved with the use of the building for the purpose for which it was constructed, they can be seen to be inconsequential. The additional structures built against the Riding School itself also have little impact upon the function or interpretation of the building as a whole.

## 3 Historical background

Prior to the Crimean War (1853-56) the army presence in Colchester was always temporary, with soldiers billeted in tents or occasionally wooden huts in response to individual military crises, such as the Napoleonic wars. At the end of the Crimean War it was decided that Colchester Camp was to be put on a permanent footing and by 1864 had doubled in size through the completion of two new brick-built cavalry barracks. The simply named Cavalry Barracks was signed off by General Sir John Burgoyne, Inspector General of Fortifications, in 1861 with Le Cateau Cavalry barracks following shortly after.

A riding school was to be included in this development for exercising and practising manoeuvres. This was based upon a model prepared in the Inspector General's office in 1862, which specified that riding schools needed to be three times as long as they were broad and high enough so that the lance could be carried. A spectators' gallery was to be included for superior officers to review the progress of the troops.

## 4 Cartographic survey (Figures 1-4)

The Victorian development of the army barracks in Colchester is well documented through the evolution of the Ordnance Survey maps of the period, and the Riding School appears on all of these.

On the 1st and 2nd editions of the Ordnance Survey maps (Figs 2 and 3), the Riding School is depicted as an elongated rectangle with a smaller projection on its northeast end. It is shown as being on the north-east side of the Cavalry Barracks to which it belongs with the Royal Horse Artillery Barracks next to it to the north-east. (The latter was built c 1875 and subsequently renamed the Le Cateau Barracks after the Battle of Le Cateau which took place in 1914). The third edition Ordnance Survey map of 1921 (Figure 4) shows an extension adjoining the north-west facing wall of the Riding School. This extension is not the one present at the time of the

survey and it is not possible to say for certain from the map evidence when it was removed. Later 20th-century maps depict the Riding School as the first edition, a solid rectangle with an extension to the north-east, whilst modern mapping accurately shows the building as it stands today with an extension at the south-western end of the north-west facing wall. It is quite possible that these two additional structures were contemporary with each other and combined to form (from a mapping point of view) an enlarged version of the original building, until the removal of the north-eastern structure restored clarity to the mapping.

## 5 Descriptive record (Figures 5-7)

The former Garrison Riding School is constructed of red brick laid in Flemish bond with alternating red and yellow voussoir brick dressing above the doors and windows. It is a single storey rectangular construction (47.2m by 16.65m) except for a projection at the north-east end which, despite being lower in height than the main structure, is a two storey three-window range annexe (3.4m by 7.45m). This has an artificial slate covered hipped roof, six windows obscured by plywood (internal inspection shows these to be plate glass sash windows each with three lights – the upper sash being divided by a glazing bar) with sandstone sills, and two wooden doors on the ground level, one on either side of the window range. The doors and window frames are painted a dark green. Above the apex of the hipped roof is an oculus with alternating pairs of yellow and red brick voussoirs. Plywood covers the opening of this oculus but beneath is a louvred panel. At the east corner there is an external stairway of seventeen sandstone steps with winders leading to a doorway accessing the upper level of the annexe. This stairway has an iron railing with wire mesh welded to the banisters painted in the same green as the doors and windows. To the right of the annexe is a large wooden double door painted in a shade of turquoise. This opens outwards and has a concrete lintel. Above the lintel replacement brickwork can be distinguished. The area around the annexe and the double door are block paved in a herringbone pattern.



Plate 1. North-east end, three window range annexe with oculus above.

The south-east facing wall has fourteen bays with fifteen full-height buttresses. Each bay has an identically sized upper segmental-arched window surmounted by a shallow arch of alternating pairs of yellow and red brick voussoirs. The window frame is of white painted wood with a wooden mullion and transom quartering the window. Each quarter is further divided by two vertical glazing bars into three lights. The upper window lights are inward-opening hopper lights. All of the windows are covered by a horizontal diamond-patterned iron mesh painted white. Six of the windows on this side (those closest to the north-east end) have only the upper sets of lights and these are fixed, unable to be opened. Below the transom are instead two green painted louvre panels. The lights above are covered in the same iron mesh as the other windows; only here it is painted the same green as the wooden louvres below. All of the windows have a sandstone sill.



*Plates 2 and 3. South-east wall – differences between windows.*

Each bay has an airbrick inserted at the base and the fourth bay from the north-east end has a wooden sign, white letters on a blue background reading “RIDING SCHOOL AND STABLES COLCHESTER GARRISON SADDLE CLUB”. Projecting from the corner formed by the northeast and south-east walls is an iron mount fixed approximately 1m below the guttering.

The south-west end of the Riding School has three bays with four buttresses. The outer bays each have a large wooden double door painted in the same shade of turquoise as the door in the north-east end. The one nearest the south corner opens inwards. Above the transom is a Roman arch surrounded by alternating pairs of yellow and red brick voussoirs. The interior of this arch is obscured by modern plywood. The external brick edges of the doorway are of rounded brick rather than square-cut. The door near the west corner is both taller and wider. It is painted in the same shade of turquoise as the other and is surmounted by a concrete lintel. This set of doors opens outwards. Above the lintel replacement brickwork can be observed to form a rough arched shape. The height of this replacement brickwork is equivalent to the apex of the voussoirs over the other door. Both doors have a trapezoidal-shaped fan of blue/black stable bricks in front of them. The central bay has a tall Roman arched window with the same voussoir pattern as the smaller door. The interior of this window is blocked sheets of corrugated iron – no trace of any window frame of any period remains. At the foot of this bay are three irregularly spaced brick projections perpendicular to the wall itself. Near to the apex of the roof line an iron hoop on a long shank projects from the brickwork.



*Plate 4. South-west end.*

The north-west wall is identical to the south-east in number of buttresses and windows. There are no half-louvred windows on this side, although the second window from the west corner has been infilled with wooden boards as have the upper lights from the window closest to the west corner. Two iron mounts (one at the corner of the north-west and north-east walls; the other on the fifth buttress from the west corner) are present at the same height as that of the one on the east corner. The third to sixth bays from the north corner show traces of either white paint or whitewash. A single storey brick structure adjoins the north-west wall straddling the three bays closest to the west corner. There is visible keying in of this structure's brickwork to that of the buttress of the main building. The structure has a low-pitched slate roof and outward opening wooden double doors to the north-east. The doors are covered in plywood but it is possible to make out the same turquoise paint as covers the doors in the south-west end. A probable second doorway is in the south-west end although this has been in-filled with horizontal wooden planks, again painted turquoise. Both doorways have a concrete lintel. Two rectangular windows covered with plywood are present in the north-west wall, each have a concrete lintel and a wooden sill. Replacement brickwork is distinguishable to the sides of these windows.



*Plate 5. North-west wall showing additional structure.*

The main roof of the Riding School is of artificial slate and has a monitor roof straddling the ridgeline for approximately 85% of its length. The sides of the monitor roof are made up of wooden louvres, thirty five to a side and painted in the same turquoise as the double doors. The height of the Riding school, including this monitor roof, is 11.25m.

Access to the interior of the riding school was only possible through the left-hand door to the annexe and the double door in the north-east end. Access through the annexe was into a small rectangular room (4m by 3m) with cream painted walls, two sash windows and an inward opening door leading into the Riding School itself. This was a robustly constructed wooden door, painted in the same dark green as the external doors, with a small rectangular glass window. The door is positioned exactly in the centre of the north-eastern wall and has a wooden lintel. Replacement brickwork was distinguishable around the doorframe and particularly above it, as was a shallow brick arch. It was not possible to gain access to the rest of the ground floor of the annexe, however plan evidence suggests this was taken up by a smaller room (3m by 2.5m) accessible only through the external door to the right of the annexe. The interior of the Riding School (45.75m by 15.2m) is block paved in a herringbone pattern extending approximately 16m from the north-east end. Where this ends the floor becomes stone chippings. A wooden batten approximately 3m off the ground extends around three of the walls. Below this the brickwork is equally divided into two painted horizontal bands, the upper cream and the lower, a pale yellow. Above the batten the walls are white, although other colours (predominantly pale yellows and creams) are visible in places. The doors in the south-west end are covered in plywood, but it is possible to see the concrete lintel and rough brickwork above the larger of the two. Iron rings are intermittently placed along the northwest wall at 1.6m above ground level. Above the centrally positioned doorway in the north-east end are three large arched openings. Through these can be seen the upper level of the annexe, all one room with three sash windows as below. Above the central arch the louvred oculus can be seen. The roof is supported upon thirteen iron trusses carrying iron purlins, which in turn support wooden plank rafters. The louvres of the monitor roof are open to the interior of the building.



Plate 6. The spectators' gallery with oculus above.

## 6 Discussion

It is clear from both the cartographic evidence and the visual survey that the former Garrison Riding School has undergone several alterations and additions since it was originally constructed in the early 1860's. Original features are indicated by the red and yellow voussoirs surmounting the doors and windows of both the annexe and the main body of the building. Where the doorways are larger and surmounted by concrete lintels it is obvious that these doorways are not original. The distinguishable arched pattern of replacement bricks above the lintels strongly suggests that, rather than being additional doorways, these replace existing entrances probably identical in size and shape as the one at the south corner. Whether these alterations were necessary because of structural reasons is not possible to say, although there appears to be no indication of cracking or weakening in any areas of the fabric of the building. Considering that these two replacement doorways are in line with each other and that the original doorway has no opposite entrance, it is likely that they were altered for function rather than necessity. The fact that one of the doorways in the south-west end is a later replacement indicates that the stable bricks present at the base of each doorway are a later addition.

The alteration to the centrally located doorway opening into the ground floor of the annexe could indicate that an open archway rather than a door was originally present. The current doorway is narrower than the arch above it and the original opening (whether doorway or open arch) would have been aesthetically pleasing in relation to the three open archways above it.

That the annexe itself is contemporary to the main body of the Riding School is attested to by the presence of the voussoir bricks around the doors and windows and the Ordnance Survey 1st edition map. The upper storey of the annexe with its three large archways looking out over the Riding School floor is clearly what was specified in the 1862 plan from the Inspector General's office. The length of Riding School and annexe combined also fits the requirement that a riding school be three times as long as it is broad.

The presence of the six half-louvred windows in the south-east wall is curious. These may represent a subsequent phase and it should be noted that the upper lights of these windows do not open, unlike every other window.

The iron mounts found on both corners of the north-east end and on one of the buttresses on the south-west side are difficult to interpret. It is likely that they were flag mounts and are probably original. However, none of the other buttresses show

indications of such fixtures ever being present and the lack of symmetry could suggest a later date. There is no indication as to what purpose the iron hoop at the apex of the south-west end served. The iron rings fixed to the interior of the Riding School are probably original.

The herringbone block paving around the entrances to the annexe and inside the main building is a modern alteration dating to when the Riding School was occupied by a civil engineering contractor and used as a vehicle and materials depot. The stone chippings laid on the remainder of the Riding School floor also date to this period – the original surface would have been of sand or earth. The air bricks at the base of each bay in the longitudinal walls are certainly not original and, again, probably date to period when vehicles were stored in the Riding School. The dark green paint applied to the doors and windows of the annexe, the external stair rail and the six louvres on the north-east side windows also date to this period. The turquoise paint applied to the monitor roof louvres and the three main doors cannot be original as two of the doors are from a subsequent phase of the building (the same paint is also used on the doors of the structure at the south-west corner). The interior paintwork is also unlikely to be original. No indication of any original artificial light source survives; instead electric lights provided the Garrison Saddle Club with illumination.

The structure adjoining the south-west corner and the one to the north-east of this (suggested by both map evidence and the presence of paint on the external wall) are clearly additions to the original building. Neither had a connecting door to the Riding School and it is likely they served a function as storage buildings. The structure to the north-east would appear to date from before 1921 with the one to the south-west being later. The south-west structure itself would appear to have undergone alterations at some point. The windows were replaced and the doorway at the south-west end in-filled with wooden planks.

## 7 Acknowledgments

Colchester Archaeological Trust would like to thank RG Carter for commissioning and funding the work and Weston Architects for providing initial survey drawings. The survey work was carried out by Chris Lister.

## 8 References

Dietz, P. 1986 *Garrison: Ten Military Towns*, London  
Douet, J. 1998 *British barracks 1600-1914*, English Heritage

## 9 Abbreviations and glossary

CAT Colchester Archaeological Trust  
EHER Essex Historic Environment Record  
NGR National Grid Reference

## 10 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is currently held by the Colchester Archaeological trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but it will be permanently deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums (accession code not yet allocated).

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**Distribution list**

GPG No. 5 Limited

RG Carter

Alistair Day, Principal Planning Officer, Environmental and Protective Services CBC



**Colchester Archaeological Trust**

12 Lexden Road,  
Colchester,  
Essex, CO3 3NF

*tel.:* (01206) 541051

*tel./fax:* (01206) 500124

*email:* [archaeologists@catuk.org](mailto:archaeologists@catuk.org)

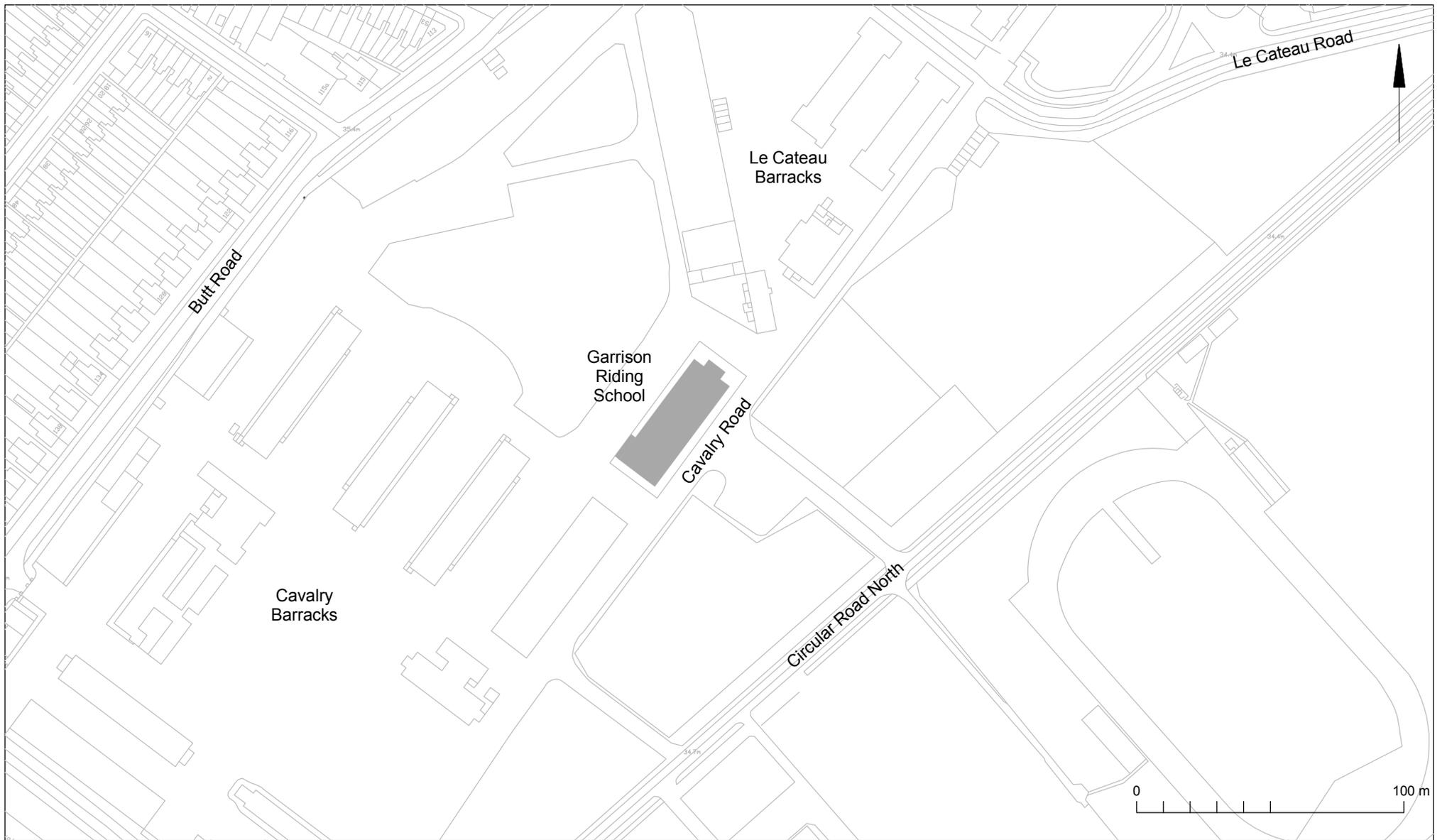


Fig 1 Location plan.



Fig 2 OS 1st edition 1887-1876, Riding School shown circled.

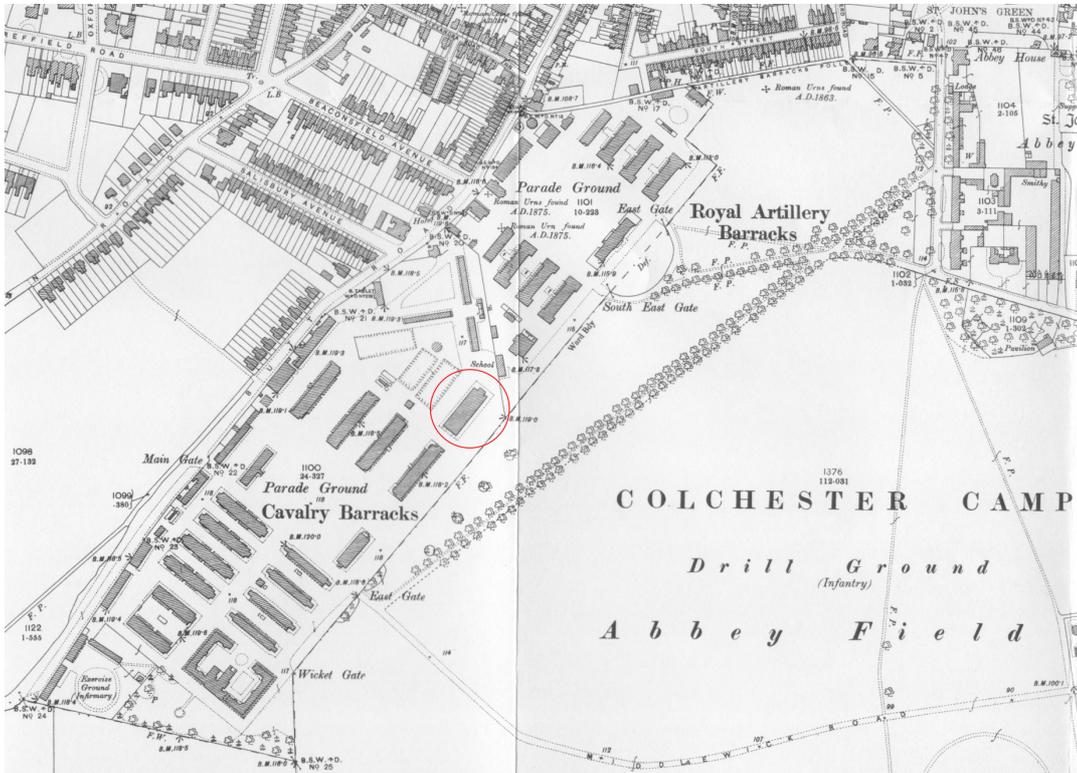


Fig 3 OS 2nd edition 1893-c 1904, Riding School shown circled.



Fig 4 OS 3rd edition 1921, Riding School shown circled.

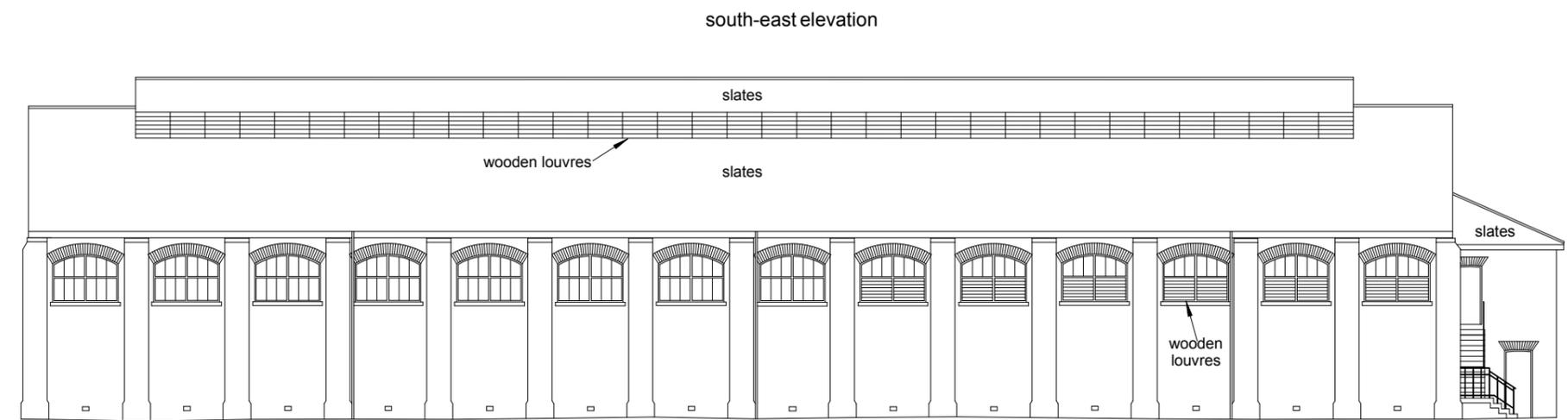
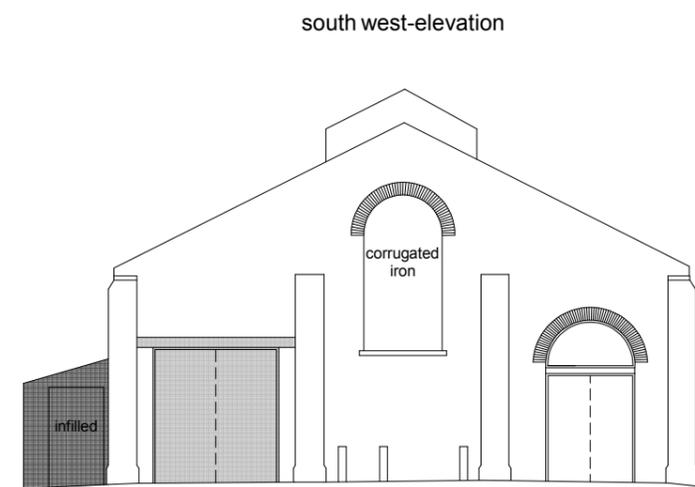
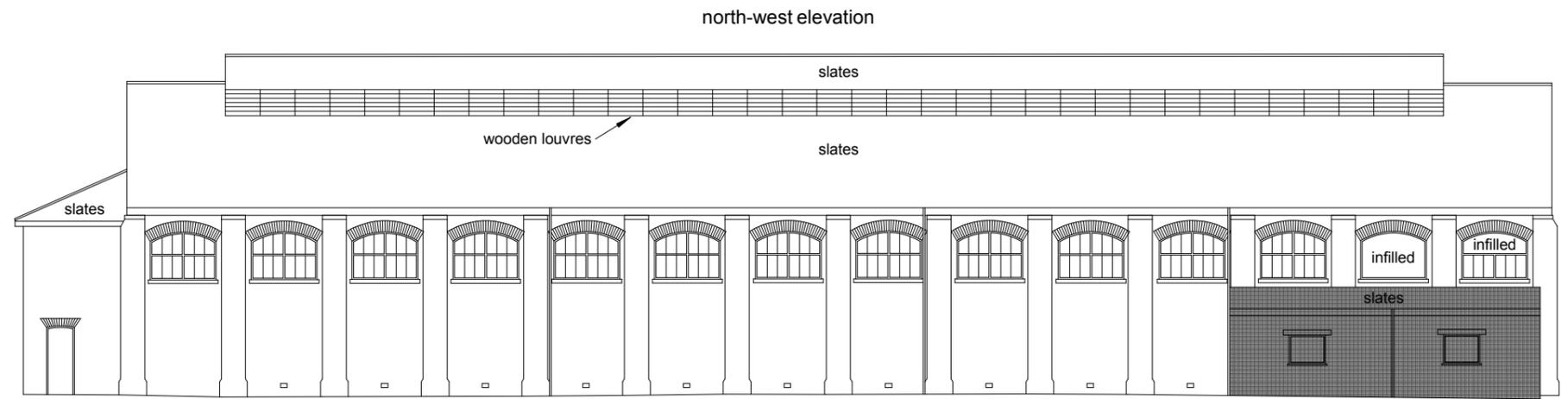
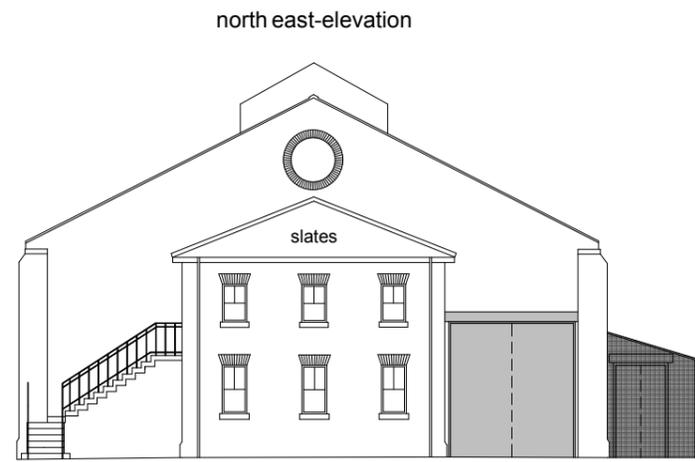


Fig 5 Elevations of former Garrison Riding School.

Alterations to original building.
  Additions to original building.



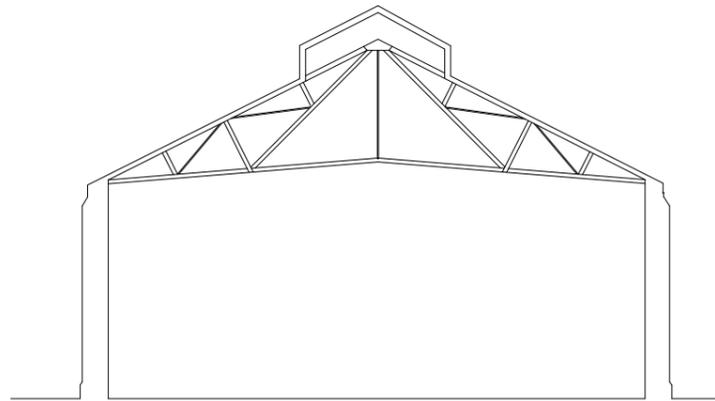


Fig 6 Cross sections of former Garrison Riding School.

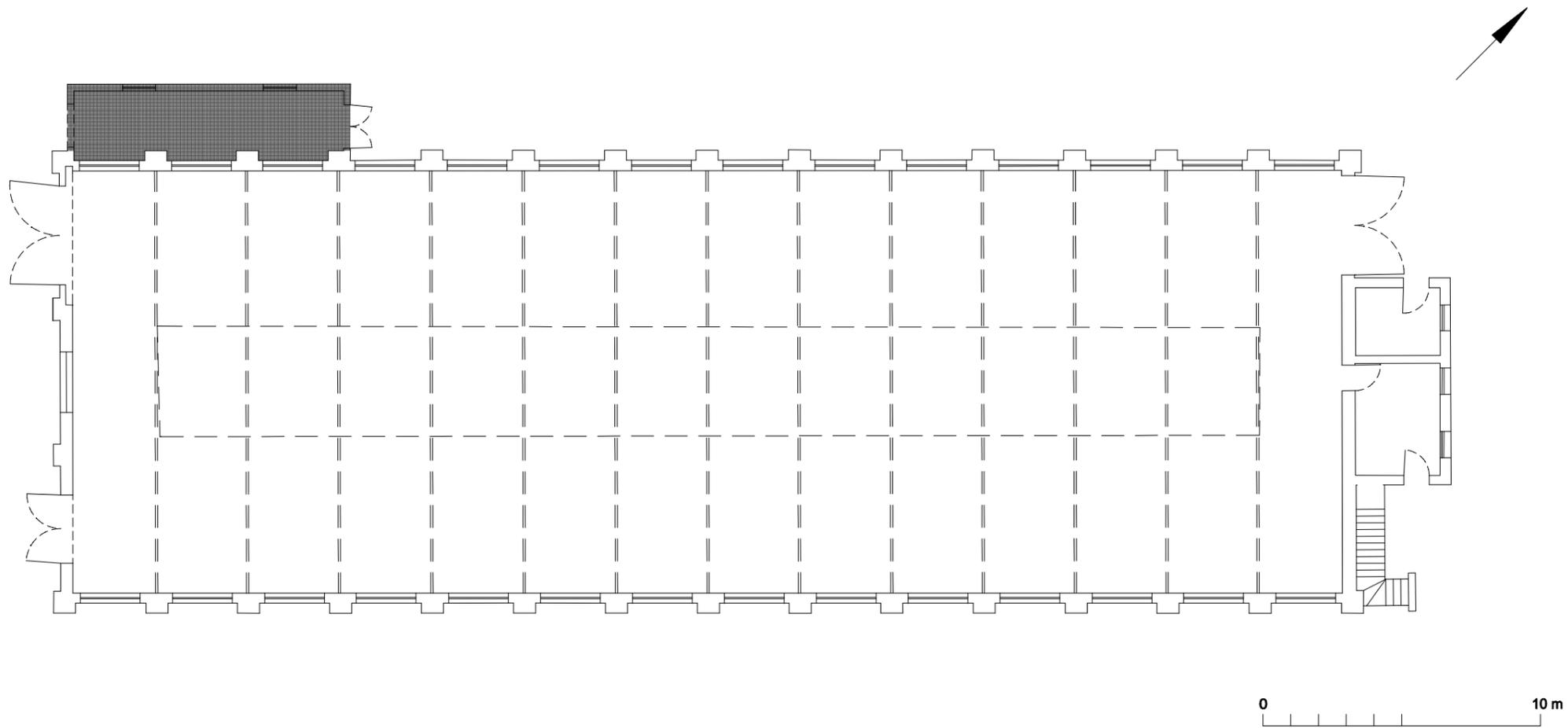


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■ Additions to original building.

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

**SUMMARY SHEET**

<b>Site Address:</b> Cavalry Road, Le Cateau Barracks, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b>
<b>NGR:</b> TL 9922 2438(centre).	<b>Site Code:</b> to be allocated
<b>Type of Work:</b> Building recording	<b>Site Director/Group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of Work:</b> February 2011	<b>Size of Area Investigated:</b>
<b>Location of Finds/Curating Museum:</b> Colchester and Ipswich Museums	<b>Funding Source:</b> Developer
<b>Further Seasons Anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related EHER No's:</b> 46846
<b>Final Report:</b> Summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods Represented:</b> Nineteenth century military structure	
<p><b>SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:</b></p> <p><i>The former Garrison Riding School is located amongst the remains of the decommissioned Le Cateau Barracks, itself part of the much larger Colchester Camp. As a Grade II listed building the Riding School is one of a very few number of buildings that has not been demolished during the redevelopment of the area.</i></p> <p><i>Le Cateau Barracks and the Garrison Riding School is the last surviving example of the new layout of cavalry barracks first developed at Aldershot in the 1850s, for large scale training. Although several original features have been replaced by later alterations, this has not particularly affected the function and layout of the building. As the majority of these changes evolved with the use of the building for the purpose for which it was constructed, they can be seen to be inconsequential. The additional structures built against the Riding School itself also have little impact upon the function or interpretation of the building as a whole.</i></p>	
<b>Previous Summaries/Reports:</b> None	
<b>Author of Summary:</b> Chris Lister	<b>Date of summary:</b> 28 <sup>rd</sup> February 2011