

**Archaeological evaluation at
Colchester Garrison Athletics Facility,
Abbey Field, Colchester,
Essex**

January 2012



**report prepared by
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on behalf of PJB Architects Ltd
and RMPA Services**

CAT project code: 12/1a
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CAT Report 634
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1 Summary

Two evaluation trenches were excavated in an area of open ground between the all-weather pitch and the athletics track at the Garrison Athletics Facility, in advance of the construction of a new sports pavilion. Substantial deposits of topsoil were observed to a depth of 600mm. Archaeological features were encountered at 650-700mm below ground level.

Archaeological activity consisted of an undated linear feature, a ditch containing Roman tile and a pit with a single Anglo-Saxon pottery sherd.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the archive report on an archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching at Colchester Garrison Athletics Facility, Abbey Field, Colchester, Essex.

The site is located south of Colchester town centre, immediately south and adjacent to Circular Road North, in an area known as Abbey Field. This block of land forms a major open space of 29 hectares and consists of mixed parkland and open air sports facilities located at NGR TL 9946 2433 (centred).

An application for a new sports pavilion (F/COL/11/2172) was registered with the local planning authority on 22nd November 2011. In response to consultation, the Colchester Borough Council Archaeological Officer (CBCAO) made the following recommendation, in line with DoE Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the historic environment (PPS5):

'No development, or preliminary groundwork of any kind shall take place until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work and recording in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant, and approved by the planning authority.'

A brief detailing the required archaeological work was written by the CBCAO (Winter 2011). The archaeological work was commissioned by Mr Keith Rush of PJB Architects Ltd, on behalf of RMPA Services, and was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on 18th of January 2012. All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by CAT in response to the CBCAO brief and agreed with the CBCAO.

In addition to the WSI, all fieldwork and reporting was done in accordance with the Colchester Archaeological Trust's *Policies and procedures* (CAT 2008), and CBC's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (CIMS 2008a), *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (CIMS 2008b) and also those in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IFA 2008a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IFA 2008b). The guidance contained in English Heritage's *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE 2006), and in the documents *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) was also followed.

3 Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of the archaeological evaluation were to establish the extent, date, character, condition, and significance of any surviving archaeological features or

deposits likely to be affected by ground-works associated with the new pavilion. Particular emphasis was placed on the potential for uncovering Roman burial features.

4 Archaeological background

The site is located within an area of great archaeological sensitivity and potential, being located within a known Roman cemetery area. Large Roman cemeteries are known from the south and west sides of Colchester, with the main distribution covering a broad area extending east from St Clare Road for 2.5 km, across Abbey Field as far south as the former Sobraon Barracks, and south-east to the modern Mersea Road cemetery. A detailed description and discussion of Colchester's Roman cemeteries may be found in *Roman Colchester* (Hull 1958) and more recently in *CAR 9* (Crummy *et al* 1993).

Roman burials have been recorded in the vicinity of the Garrison Athletics Facility throughout the 20th century. In 1925, twenty-eight cremation burials were recorded when this part of Abbey Field was originally levelled for sports pitches (EHER 12384). A further cremation burial was found in 1931 when goalposts were being erected (Colchester Museum Report 1932). The top of this burial was only 10cms below the surface. A Roman kiln and rubbish pit was found on the site of the NAAFI, now the Arena Leisure Centre, in 1946 (EHER 13232). Early in 2000, prior to the conversion of an existing grassed pitch to an all-weather surface, excavation revealed a total of 72 Roman burials (CAT Report 138). A north-south ditch-defined track was also plotted running approximately through the middle of this distribution. Further concentrations of Roman burials were excavated in 2004 and 2005, during the Garrison Urban Village development, at Areas C2 (66 burials) and J1 North (360 burials). These were a mixture of inhumations and cremations (CAT Report 412).

5 Results (Figs 1-4)

Table 1 below gives grid co-ordinates for the ends of each trench, trench length, and heights above Ordnance Datum for modern ground-level and the level of natural subsoil. Next, a summary and list of contexts is given for each trench. This is followed by a general discussion of the archaeology in section 7.

Table 1: Trench co-ordinates and heights above OD for modern ground-level and natural subsoil (T1-T4 2004, T5-T6 2011).

Trench no	Terminal co-ordinates	Trench length	OD level on ground-level	OD level on natural
T1	NW: 599470.69, 224344.25 SE: 599475.16, 224338.64	7m	32.25 34.21	33.55 33.53
T2	NW: 599481.00, 224324.90 SE: 599485.44, 224319.40	7m	34.20 34.17	33.41 33.37

Two trenches, both 7m long, were excavated (T1-T2; Fig 1). T1 was positioned north-west to south-east within the footprint of the proposed pavilion, with T2 located 14m to the south-east. Using a mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless bucket under archaeological supervision, a c 650mm thick layer of topsoil (L1) was removed from T1 and T2. This revealed the natural geology (L2), which was a medium orange sand. L2 was then cleaned by hand and investigated for archaeological features.

T1: summary

Archaeological activity consisted of two ditches (F2 and F4) and a natural feature (F3). Ditch F2 was located at the south-east end of the trench, partially beneath the trench edges. Consequently a complete profile was not obtained, although enough of the feature was excavated to show that it has an east to west alignment. It had a depth of 26cm. A single piece of Roman CBM was recovered from the fill. F4 was an undated ditch, 80cm wide and 14cm deep, aligned north-east to south-west. The leached fill and irregular profile of the natural feature F3 indicate that this is probably a tree-throw pit.

Table 2: T1 contexts and finds data.

Context no	Type	Dated finds	Phase
F2	ditch	tile	Roman
F3	natural pit	--	-
F4	ditch	--	undated

T2: summary

T2 contained a single archaeological feature (F1). This was a sub-circular pit, roughly 90cm in diameter, with a depth of 21cm. Finds recovered from the fill included Roman CBM and a single sherd of Anglo-Saxon pottery.

Table 2: T2 context and finds data.

Context no	Type	Dated finds	Phase
F1	Pit	Pot, tile	Roman

6 Finds

by Stephen Benfield

Introduction

Only a very few finds were recovered. These come from two features (F1 & F2) and one layer (L2). The finds consist of pottery, ceramic building material (CBM) and building stone and are listed by context below.

The nature of the finds makes close dating difficult. The piece of building stone from L2(2) is greensand and from this location at the Garrison would, possibly, derive from the Roman circus which was probably constructed in the 2nd century AD (Crummy 2008, 28). The two pieces of CBM recovered from F1(1) and F2(3) are probably also Roman, although a post-medieval or modern date cannot be entirely excluded.

Of significant interest is a large pottery rim sherd from F1(1) described below. This is from a large jar in a grey organic-tempered fabric with a simple upright rim. The vessel is probably hand-made but finished on a slow wheel or turn-table. This, together with the fabric and vessel form suggests that the pot is probably Anglo-Saxon. This type of organic-tempered fabric, Saxon vegetable-tempered ware (Fabric 1), was current during the period of the 5th-7th/8th centuries and had probably ceased to be made by the late 9th century (CAR 7, 24-25). Other pottery of this type has been recovered from sites in Colchester, most notably associated with sunken huts at Lion Walk and Culver Street (CAR 7, 25) and with burials on the south side of the town in and around the northeast area of the Colchester garrison (CAR 1, 14-19). More recently Anglo-Saxon pottery of this type has also been recovered from the site of the former Hyderabad Barracks (Benfield & Brooks forthcoming)

F1

Finds number 1

Pottery

Rim sherd (44g) from a large, shouldered jar with simple, upright rim. Appears hand-made but finished on a slow wheel or turntable. Grey fabric with common small burnt out voids from organic fragments in surfaces and abundant dark, burnt organic matter in fabric section. Fabric appears unusually light in weight for the size of the sherd and although quite hard, can be marked with a finger nail. The fabric and form suggest this sherd is most probably Anglo-Saxon (CAR 7 Fabric 1). Vessel appears similar to that illustrated in CAR 1 (fig 5 no. 9). Sherd thickness 10-12 mm, rim diameter difficult to measure accurately but probably in the region of 190-200 mm. Dated Anglo-Saxon, 5th-7th/8th or 9th century.

CBM

Brick/tile 1@66g, edge piece in red, fine sandy fabric. Sanded surface. Probably Roman, although a modern date might also be possible.

F2

Finds number 3

CBM

Brick/tile 1@6g, small abraded piece in orange, fine sandy fabric. Probably Roman.

L2

Finds number 2

Stone

Greensand 1@3300g, rough, triangular-shaped piece with single uneven, flat face. Roman, probably part of the fabric of the Roman circus. Dated 2nd century AD or later.

7 Discussion

The features identified in the evaluation do not immediately appear to be associated with the surrounding Roman cemetery. Only one of the features, F2, can be postulated as Roman. As F2 is a ditch, it is likely that this feature is a field boundary, part of a rectilinear field system seen frequently on Colchester Garrison. Similar east-west aligned ditches were observed during the 2000 excavation of the hockey pitch (CAT Report 138) and are believed to pre-date the cemetery. An alternative explanation for this ditch is as part of an enclosure surrounding a group of burials, as was found in the 2000 excavation. If this is the case, then the majority of T1 must have been outside of the enclosure, as it would be expected to encounter burials within the enclosure and no such features were recorded. The undated ditch, F4, with its north-east to south-west orientation, may well date to the Iron Age or earlier. The most interesting feature excavated was the pit, F1. The Anglo-Saxon pottery recovered from the fill provides further evidence for post-Roman Colchester and may be an indication of Anglo-Saxon settlement in the vicinity.

The lack of burials encountered in the evaluation is surprising considering the number of inhumations and cremations previously excavated in the immediate area. The distribution pattern of known burials (Fig 2) seems to indicate that the trenches were located in a less dense area of the cemetery. However, as Crossan points out (CAT Report 138, Fig 3), this is not a true representation of their distribution but a result of a fixed excavation depth where natural was only exposed at the northern end of the site. Close scrutiny of Fig 2 shows that the excavated burials are generally isolated from each other by as much as 3-4m, easily missed by evaluation trenches, as was the case in the 2000 evaluation for the all-weather pitch, where the excavation of two 20m trenches produced only one cremation burial (CAT Report 54). It is therefore likely that more Roman burials will be encountered during the construction of the new pavilion.

8 Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by Keith Rush of PJB Architects Ltd on behalf of Oliver Hornett, RMPA Services.

The project was managed by Ben Holloway, and the site work was carried out by Ben Holloway and Mark Baister. Graphics are by Chris Lister and Emma Spurgeon. The project was monitored for Colchester Borough Council by Martin Winter.

9 References

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

CAR 1	1981	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report 1, Aspects of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Colchester</i> , by P Crummy
CAR 7	2000	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report 7, Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester 1971-85</i> , by J Cotter
CAR 9	1993	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report 9, Excavations of Roman and Later cemeteries, churches and monastic sites in Colchester, 1971-88</i> , by N Crummy, P Crummy and C Crossan
CAT	2008	<i>Policies and procedures</i>
CAT Report 54	2000	<i>An archaeological evaluation at the Garrison sports ground, Circular Road North, Colchester</i> , H Brooks
CAT Report 138	2001	<i>Archaeological excavations at the Garrison sports pitch, Circular Road North, Colchester, Essex (Abbey Field)</i> , C Crossan
CAT Report 412	2011	<i>Archaeological investigations on the 'Alienated Land', Colchester Garrison, Colchester, Essex May 2004-October 2007</i> , by L Pooley, P Crummy, D Shimmin, H Brooks, B Holloway, and R Masefield
CAT Report 628	Forth-coming	'Post-Roman pottery' by S Benfield and H Brooks, in <i>Excavations at Hyderabad Barracks (GAL Area A1) 2011</i> . H Brooks and B Holloway
CIMS	2008a	<i>Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i>
CIMS	2008b	<i>Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums</i>
Crummy, P	2008	'The Roman Circus at Colchester' in <i>Britannia</i> , Volume 39, 15-31
EAA 3	1997	<i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers 3, ed by J Glazebrook
EAA 8	2000	<i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers 8, ed by N Brown and J Glazebrook
EAA 14	2003	<i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers 8, ed by D Gurney
English Heritage	2006	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)</i>
Hull, M R	1958	<i>Roman Colchester</i>
IfA	2008a	<i>Standard and guidance for an archaeological field evaluation</i>
IfA	2008b	<i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i>
Winter, M	2011	<i>Brief for an archaeological evaluation: Colchester garrison athletics facility, Colchester, Essex</i>

10 Glossary and abbreviations

CAR	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report</i>
CBCAO	Colchester Borough Council Archaeology Officer
CBM	ceramic building materials (brick, tile)
context	specific location on an excavation site, and location of finds

ditch	a linear cut, usually to define the edge of a field
EHER	Essex Heritage Environment Record, held by Essex County Council
Iron Age	7th century BC to Roman invasion of AD 43
modern	19th and 20th centuries
NGR	National Grid Reference
OD	Ordnance Datum
pit	a hole dug principally for the disposal of rubbish
prehistoric	pre-Roman, or generally the years BC
Roman	the period from AD 43 to c AD 430
Anglo-Saxon	the period from c AD 430 to AD 1066
SF	small find

11 Archive deposition

The finds, paper and digital archive are held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2012.5.

12 Contents of Archive

One A4 document wallet containing;

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Copy of the evaluation brief issued by CBC
- 1.2 Copy of the WSI produced by CAT
- 1.3 Risk assessment
- 1.4 Method statement
- 1.5 1 x A3 site plan provided by developer

2 Site archive

- 2.1 Site digital photographic record
- 2.2 Attendance register
- 2.3 Context sheets (F1-F4, L1-L2)
- 2.4 Trench sheets (T1-T4)
- 2.5 Finds register
- 2.6 Site photographic record on CD
- 2.7 1 x A3 section sheet

3 Research archive

- 3.1 Monitoring (client) report

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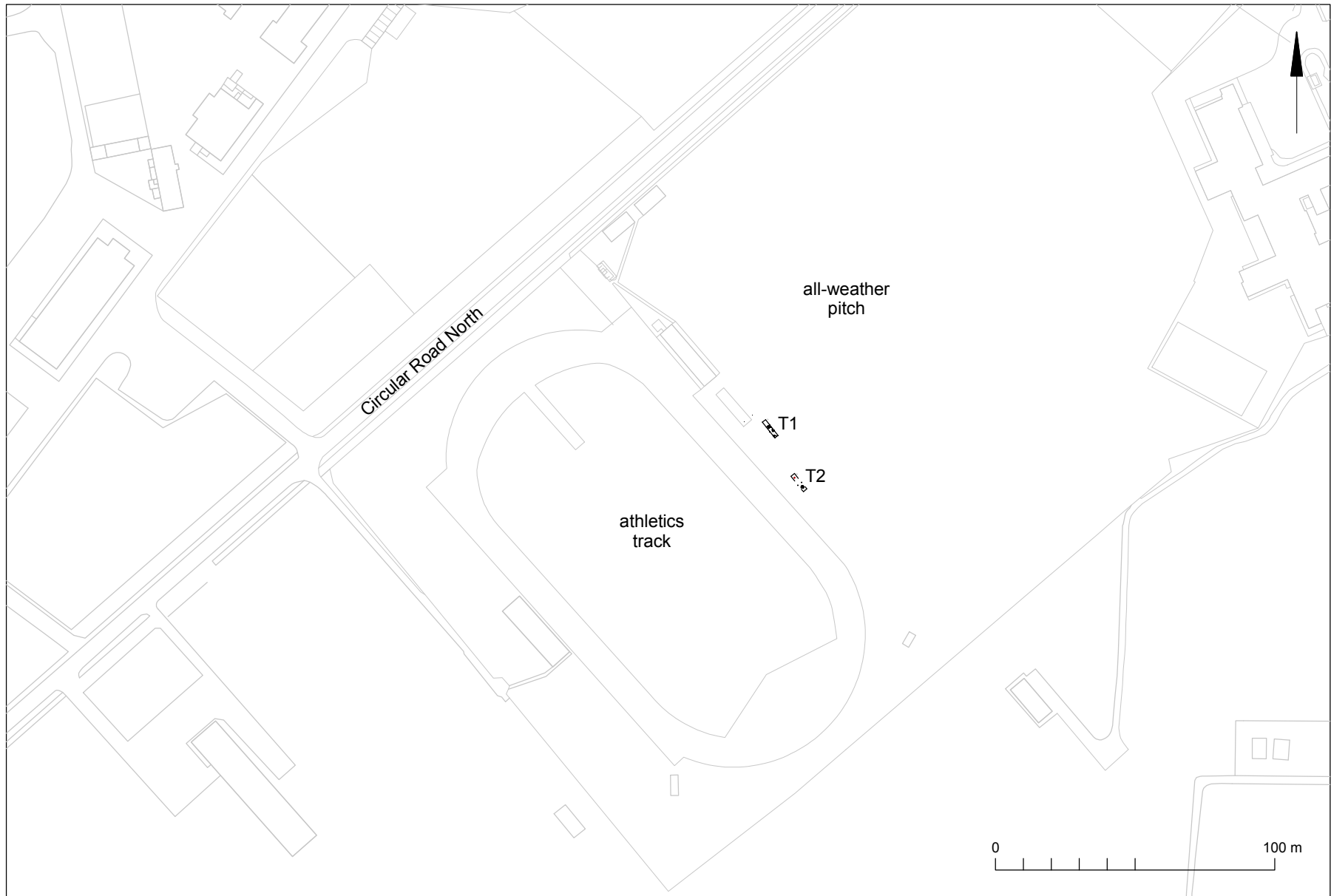
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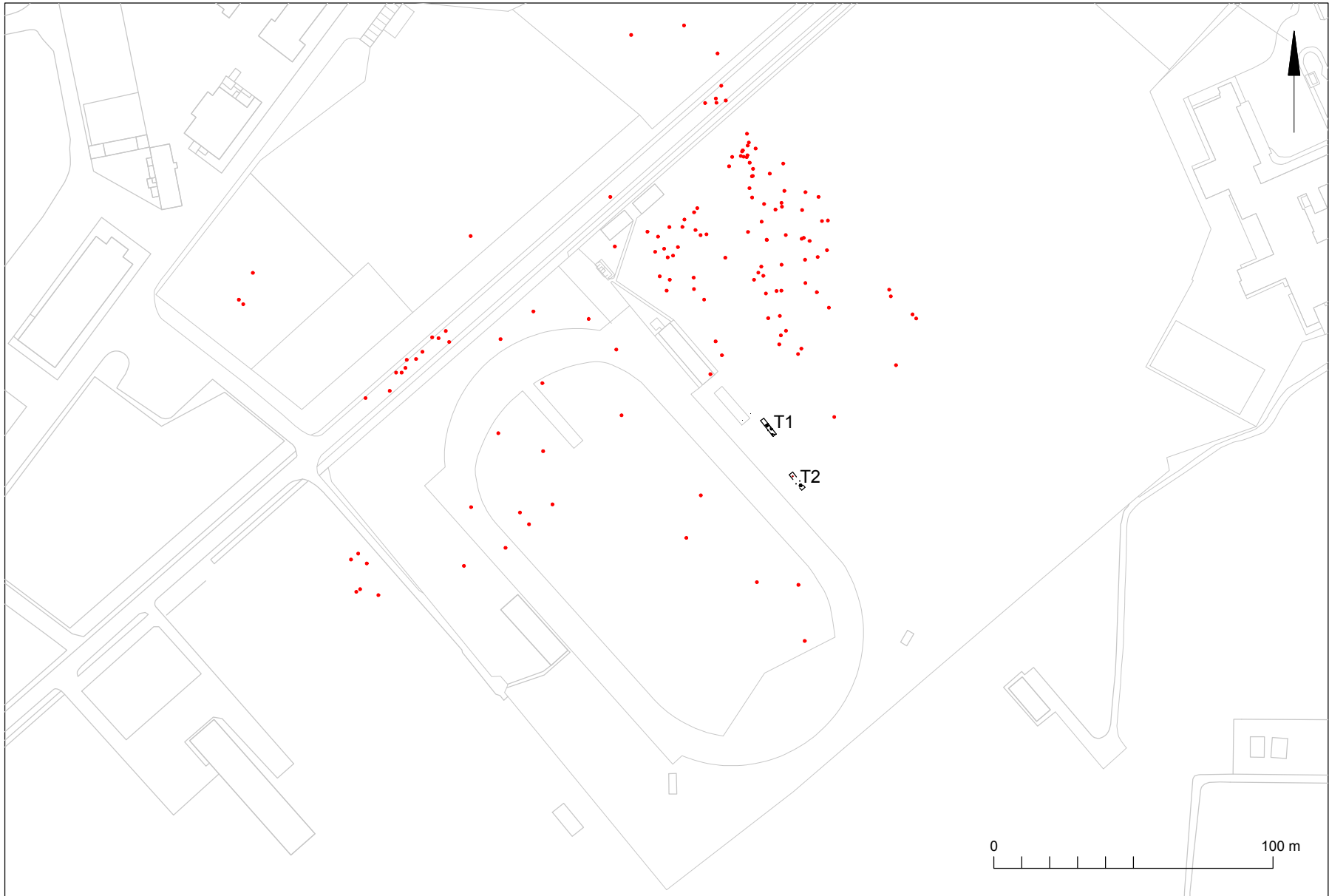
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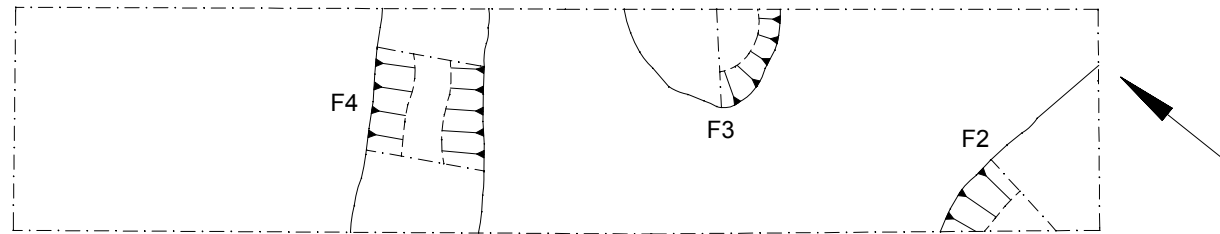
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Fig 1 Site and trench locations.

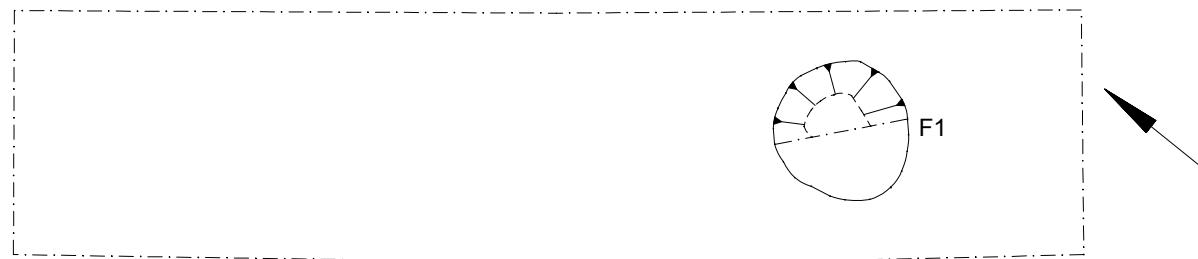


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Fig 2 Trenches in relation to previously excavated burials (shown as red dots).



T1



T2

Fig 3 T1 detailed plan (above), T2 detailed plan (below).



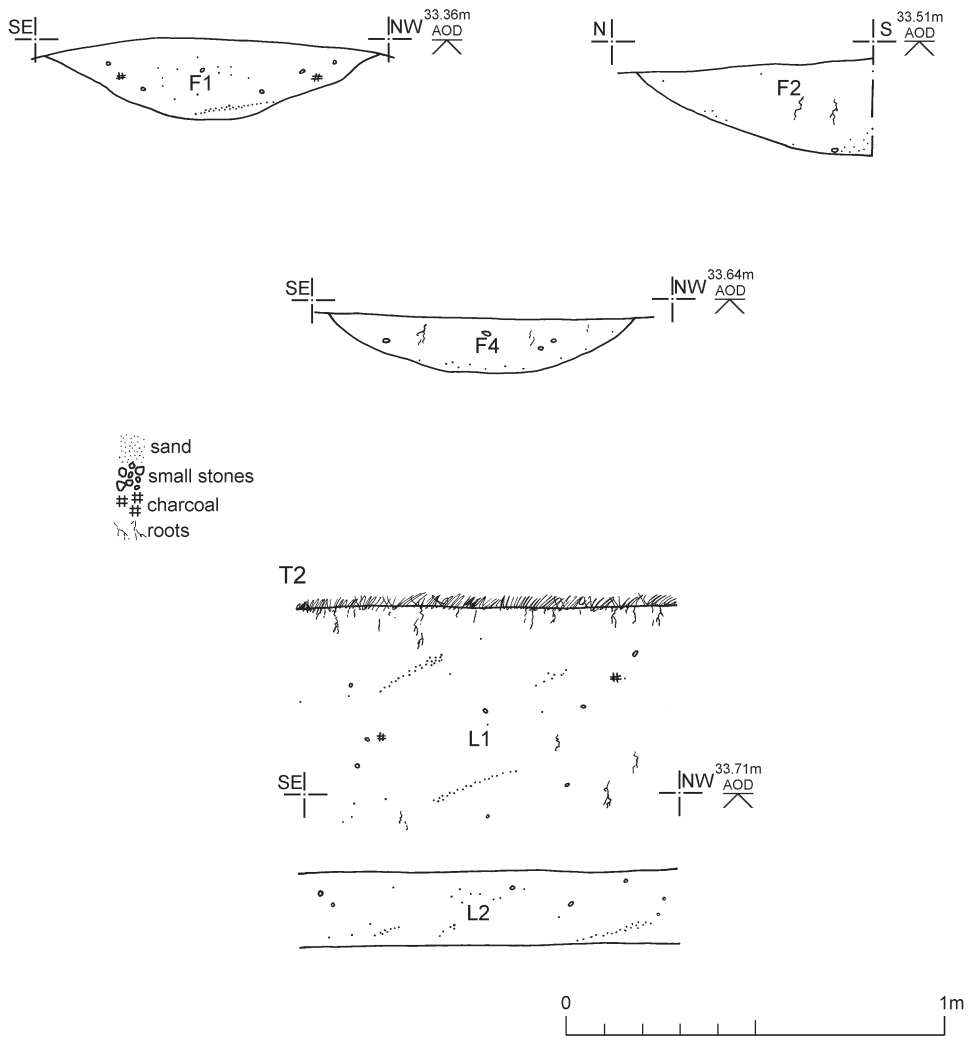


Fig 4 F1-2 and F4: sections. T1: representative section.

Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

Summary sheet

Site address: Colchester Garrison Athletics Facility, Abbey Field, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 9946 2433 (c)	CAT Project code: 12/1a
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: January 2012	Size of area investigated: 2 trenches (total length 14m)
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester & Ipswich Museums	Funding source: Developer
Monitored by: Martin Winter of Colchester Borough Council	
Further seasons anticipated? Yes	Related EHER nos: 13232, 12384
Final report: CAT Report 634	
Periods represented: Roman, Anglo-Saxon	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>Two evaluation trenches were excavated in an area of open ground between the all-weather pitch and the athletics track at the Garrison Athletics Facility, in advance of the construction of a new sports pavilion. Substantial deposits of topsoil were observed to a depth of 600mm. Archaeological features were encountered at 650-700mm below ground level. Archaeological activity consisted of an undated linear feature, a ditch containing Roman tile and a pit with a single Anglo-Saxon pottery sherd.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: CAT Reports 54, 138 and 412	
Keywords: Roman, Anglo-Saxon	Significance: *
Author of summary: Chris Lister and Ben Holloway	Date of summary: February 2012