

**An archaeological watching brief
at North Primary School, John Harper
Street, Colchester, Essex**

April/May 2012

**report prepared by
Ben Holloway & Howard Brooks**

**on behalf of
Essex County Council
Infrastructure Delivery Team**

HEM project code: CCNP12
CAT project ref.: 12/3b
Colchester & Ipswich Museums accession code: COLEM 2011.90
NGR: TL 9919 2584 (c)



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

tel.: (01206) 541051
(01206) 500124
email: archaeologists@catuk.org

CAT Report 649
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EHER summary sheet

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1 Summary

There was a Roman suburb containing high-status buildings with tessellated and mosaic floors in the area now occupied by the HSBC Bank and the Victoria Inn on North Station Road, Colchester. The North Primary School is within that Roman suburb.

An archaeological evaluation in November 2011 had identified a Roman deposit containing 2nd-century Roman pottery, tile, and oyster shell stratified beneath approximately 600mm of topsoil and made-ground.

A watching brief during foundation work for a new classroom (the north class base) in 2012 identified a Roman ditch and a large modern pit.

This report relates to observations made during monitoring of the foundation trenches for the north class base only. Future monitoring will be reported separately, or as a revised version of this report.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief at North Primary School, John Harper Street. The school is half a mile north of the town centre, and west of North Station Road (TL 9919 2584). The site is a grassed sports pitch to the west of the main school buildings.

The Historic Environment Management (HEM) team of Essex County Council was consulted by Essex County Council in November 2011 on an outline planning application for additional class bases and all-weather sports pitch. In response to consultation, the HEM team made the following recommendation in line with DoE Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the historic environment (PPS5):

'No development, or preliminary groundworks 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.'

The first stage of work here was the 2011 evaluation, which has been reported on in CAT Report 624. Following the evaluation, and taking into account the results, HEM decided that the appropriate next stage would be detailed monitoring and recording (a watching brief), as detailed in a brief written by HEM team officer (Adrian Gascoyne: HEM 2012). All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a WSI (Written Scheme of Investigation) produced by CAT in response to the HEM brief and agreed with the HEM team (CAT 2012).

The archaeological work was commissioned by Mr Neil Pendrigh of Essex County Council Infrastructure Delivery Team, and was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) in April and May 2012. Post-excavation work was carried out in May and June 2012.

In addition to the WSI, all fieldwork was in accordance with the CAT *Policies and procedures* (CAT 2008), Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practice for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (CIMS 2008a), and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (CIMS 2008b), and the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2008a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IfA 2008b). The guidance contained in the documents *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE: English Heritage 2006), and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14) was also followed.

3 Archaeological background

This section is based on records held by The Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER).

North Primary School is located outside the walls of the Roman town of *Colonia Victricensis*. It is within a suburb of the Roman town around a Roman road that led

northwards out of the town, in an area where archaeological work has demonstrated the existence of high status buildings.

Around 50 m south east of the site, a large Roman house was discovered during construction work for the Midland (now HSBC) Bank at 26 North Station Road (CAR 6, 346). A Roman mosaic pavement was found 60m to the south east of the site in 1880, less than 1 metre below the ground surface. Another pavement was found in front of the Victoria Inn in 1929 (CAR 6, 346), and in 2001 an archaeological evaluation adjacent to the pub revealed part of a previously unknown mosaic, 600mm below modern ground level (CAT Report 163). On the other side of North Station Road, to the rear of the Globe Hotel, another high status building was recorded (CAT Report 248).

Local ground conditions (possibly wet ground near the river) to the west of the school are favourable for the preservation of archaeological deposits including organic material and palaeo-environmental evidence. However, an archaeological watching brief undertaken during the construction of a previous extension, along the southern boundary of the school, showed that the ground in this part of the site had been raised substantially, such that most of what was disturbed consisted of modern made-up layers. Natural ground was not reached and the contractor's excavations did not extend to a great enough depth to impact any archaeological deposits that may be present on the site (CAT Report 284).

An archaeological evaluation by five test pits carried out in November 2011 (CAT Report 624) showed that there was a Roman horizon at 1.0m to 1.2m bgl under the school sports pitch (west of the school). This deposit contained pottery, brick/tile debris, oyster shell and charcoal flecking. Of main interest was a fragmentary wall, which was a part of a building which formed part of the Roman suburb.

4 Aim

The aim of the watching brief was to establish the character, extent, date, significance and condition of any archaeological remains and deposits likely to be affected by proposed works at North Primary School. Specific attention was paid to the Roman deposits and features identified in the 2011 evaluation.

5 Report on watching brief (Figs 1-2)

The proposed expansion of North Primary School includes two new class-bases and an all-weather sports pitch. This report is on the monitoring of the north class-base only (April and May of 2012). Any further monitoring work will be reported as an addendum to this report, or as a separate report, in consultation with HEM team.

Visits were made at regular intervals to observe and record the excavation of the class-base foundations (see Fig 2), and the associated reduction of site levels. The foundation trenches (0.60m wide and 1.20-1.40m deep) were excavated through the playground surface (tarmac), which sealed a loosely-consolidated asphalt layer which was evidently an earlier playground surface (L1). L1 sealed well-compacted hardcore and crush sub-base (L2). At the west end of the foundation trench, an accumulated layer (L3) sealed natural clay and gravel (L4). At the east end of the foundations, L3 had been removed the modern sub-base directly sealed the natural.

Archaeological features were confined to the western west end of the foundations, and consisted of a Roman ditch F1 (aligned E-W), and large pit F2. Ditch F1 contained two sherds which have been dated by Stephen Benfield to the 2nd century AD. Pit F2 contained large quantities of modern-looking ash, clinker and coal.

The absence of features at the eastern end of the foundations may be due to level reduction on the eastern side of the site.

6 Discussion

Given the alignment of ditch F1 (approximately at right-angles to the suspected course of the Roman road running north from the North Gate of the Roman town), it is reasonable to suggest that it may have been a boundary connected with the Roman suburbs around what are now the HSBC Bank and Victoria Inn.

Pit F2 is modern in date and its contents are consistent with hearth and furnace waste from the operation of the school.

The monitoring project is currently on-going, and further monitoring visits will be required for the excavation of the south class base foundations (expected to be in July/August 2012).

7 Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by Neil Pendrigh (Essex County Council Infrastructure Delivery Team). Site work was managed and carried out by Ben Holloway. The project was monitored for HEM by Adrian Gascoyne.

8 References

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|------------------|-------|---|
| CAR 6 | 1992 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 6: Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School, and other sites in Colchester 1971-85</i> , by Philip Crummy |
| CAT | 2012 | Written Scheme of Investigation for archaeological monitoring and recording at North Primary School, John Harper Street, March 2012. |
| CAT | 2008 | <i>Policies and procedures</i> |
| CAT Report 163 | 2001 | <i>An archaeological evaluation at North Station Road (adjacent to the Victoria Inn), Colchester, Essex, August 2001</i> . Unpublished CAT client report, by Kate Orr. |
| CAT Report 193 | 2002 | <i>An archaeological watching brief at North Station Road (Victoria Inn), Colchester, Essex, February-May 2002</i> . Unpublished CAT client report, by Kate Orr. |
| CAT Report 248 | 2003 | <i>An archaeological evaluation at the Globe Hotel, North Station Road, Colchester, Essex, October 2003</i> . Unpublished CAT client report, prepared by Kate Orr, December 2003 |
| CAT Report 284 | 2004 | <i>An archaeological watching brief at North Primary School, John Harper Street, Colchester. November 2003-April 2004</i> . Unpublished CAT client report, prepared by Kate Orr, September 2004 |
| CAT Report 624 | 2011 | <i>An archaeological evaluation by test-pitting at North Primary School, John Harper Street, Colchester: November 2011</i> . Unpublished CAT client report, prepared by Ben Holloway, December 2011 |
| CIMS | 2008b | <i>Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester and Ipswich Museums</i> (CBC) |
| CIMS | 2008a | <i>Guidelines on standards and practice for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i> (CBC) |
| EAA 14 | 2003 | <i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 14, ed by D Gurney |
| English Heritage | 2006 | <i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment</i> (MoRPHE) |
| HEM | 2012 | <i>Detailed archaeological monitoring and recording at the North Primary School, John Harper Street, Colchester</i> . February 2012 (Brief, by A Gascoyne). |
| IfA | 2008b | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i> |
| IfA | 2008a | <i>Standard and guidance for archaeological watching brief</i> |

9 Glossary and abbreviations

bgl	below (modern) ground level
CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
CBC	Colchester Borough Council
CIMS	Colchester and Ipswich Museums
context	specific location on an excavation, usually relates to finds
cut	an excavation of unspecified purpose
HEM	Historic Environment Management team of Essex County Council
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists
modern	19th century to the present
Roman	the period from AD 43 to c AD 430

10 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is currently held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at Roman Circus House, off Circular Road North, Colchester, CO2 7GZ, but will be permanently deposited with Colchester & Ipswich Museum (accession 2011.90).

11 Contents of archive

Finds

1 museum box containing all finds.

Paper record

One A4 wallet containing:

- Brief and WSI
- Copy of Report 624
- Original site record sheets
- Photo log
- Attendance record
- Disc with digital photographs

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Distribution list:

Neil Pendrigh, ECC Infrastructure Delivery Team
Adrian Gascoyne, ECC HEM officer
Essex Historic Environment Record, Essex County Council



Colchester Archaeological Trust

12 Lexden Road,
Colchester,
Essex CO3 3NF

tel.: (01206) 541051

(01206) 500124

email: archaeologists@catuk.org

Checked by: Philip Crummy

Date: 18.06.12



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Fig 1 Watching brief location in relation to the Roman road (grey tone) and excavated Roman buildings (green).



Fig 2 Foundations of north class base.

Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

Summary sheet

Site address: North County Primary School, John Harper Street, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 9919 2584 (centre).	Project codes: CAT - 12/3b HEM - CCNP 12
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: April/May 2012	Size of area investigated: 10m x 30m approx
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums accession - COLEM 2011.90	Funding source: Developer (Essex County Council)
Further seasons anticipated? Yes (more watching brief)	Related EHER and UAD nos: -
Final report: CAT Report 649, and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Roman and modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results:</p> <p>There was a Roman suburb containing high-status buildings with tessellated and mosaic floors in the area now occupied by the HSBC Bank and the Victoria Inn on North Station Road, Colchester. The North Primary School is within that Roman suburb.</p> <p>An archaeological evaluation in November 2011 had identified a Roman deposit containing 2nd-century Roman pottery, tile, and oyster shell stratified beneath approximately 600mm of topsoil and made-ground. A watching brief during foundation work for a new classroom (the north class base) in 2012 identified a Roman ditch and a large modern pit. This report relates to observations made during monitoring of the foundation trenches for the north class base only. Future monitoring will be reported separately, or as a revised version of this report.</p>	
Previous summaries/reports: CAT Report 624	
Keywords: Roman ditch	Significance: */**
CBC Monitor: Martin Winter	
Author of summary: Ben Holloway & Howard Brooks	Date of summary: June 2012