

# A Roman cemetery east of Lexden Dyke: archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching at 'High Trees', St Clare Road, Colchester, Essex

December 2013



report prepared by Ben Holloway

on behalf of Pomery Planning Consultants

CAT project ref.: 13/11d

NGR: TL 9740 2511

Colchester and Ipswich Museums accession code: 2013.61



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**CAT Report 745**  
December 2013

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## 1 Summary

*This site is in an area of high archaeological potential. It is within the oppidum of Camulodunum (and east of the Lexden Dyke, one of the oppidum's lines of defence) and also within the area of the Late Iron Age and early Roman Lexden Cemetery. Four evaluation trenches (total length 60m) were positioned within the footprint of three proposed new buildings and a new access road.*

*There were twenty-one archaeological features: six Roman inhumation graves, Roman and undated ditches, and post-medieval and modern pits. The spacing of the Roman inhumations may indicate that the Lexden Cemetery (previously known only for cremation burials) also contained family burial groups which may have been separated by ditches.*

*Loose prehistoric flints indicate that there was some passing activity here in the Neolithic/Bronze Age.*

*Later features included pits, drains and a dump of building material associated with the house and the cultivation of the gardens.*

*The full extent and nature of the burials and their relationship to the previously known cemetery can only be elaborated by further archaeological work.*

## 2 Introduction, planning and archaeology background (Fig 1)

- 2.1 This is the archive report on the archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) at 'High Trees', St Clare Road, Lexden, Colchester, Essex on behalf of Pomery Planning Consultants.
- 2.2 The site, part of the gardens of 'High Trees' is open, grassed and interspersed with trees. Proposed works involve the construction of three new dwellings, with associated garages and infrastructure.
- 2.3 The site is centred at NGR TL 9740 2511.
- 2.4 **Archaeological background.** This section is based on records held by EHER and UAD. The development site is located within an area of high archaeological potential, on the western side of the Late Iron Age oppidum of Camulodunum, which was defined by a system of defensive dykes. One of these, Lexden Dyke, runs roughly north-south in Lexden Park, immediately to the west of the properties on the western side of St Clare Road (CAR 11, 34-45). The site also lies within the Late Iron Age/Roman Lexden cemetery, which was in use from the 1st century BC to the 3rd or 4th century AD (CAR 9, 261, CAR 11, 164-9). To the south of this site and near the corner of St Clare Road and Fitzwalter Road is the scheduled Lexden Tumulus. This was excavated in 1924 and produced a rich Late Iron Age cremation burial dating to c 15-10 BC (Foster 1986).
- 2.5 Because of the archaeological potential of the site, and based on guidance given in National Planning Policy Framework (DCLG 2012), the Colchester Borough Council Archaeological Officer (CBCAO) recommended an archaeological evaluation of the site before start of development.
- 2.6 The required archaeological work was an evaluation by trial-trenching (as detailed in a *Brief* written by CBCAO: CBC 2013). This was commissioned by Robert Pomery of Pomery Planning Consultants and was carried out by CAT on December 3rd-4th 2013. Post-excavation work was carried out in December 2013.
- 2.7 All site work and reporting was in accordance with a WSI (Written Scheme of Investigation) produced by CAT in response to the CBCAO brief and agreed

with the CBCAO (CAT 2013), and in addition, followed industry standards as detailed in IfA 2008a, IfA 2008b, CIM 2008a, CIM 2008b, and EAA 24

### 3 Aim

The aim of the evaluation was to record the character, extent, date, condition and significance of any archaeological remains likely to be disturbed by the proposed works.

### 4 Evaluation results (Figs 2-4)

This section gives an archaeological summary of the evaluation trenches (T1-T4), with context and finds dating information.

The evaluation trenches were excavated under archaeological supervision using a tracked excavator. Two layers were removed by machine: a modern topsoil (L1), 200mm thick, sealing a silt/clay accumulation horizon (L2) 50-100mm thick. L2 sealed natural sands and gravel (L3) in whose surface the archaeological features were visible.

The most important of the twenty-one archaeological features were Roman inhumation burials (at least six). There were also Roman and later gullies or ditches, and post-medieval pits.

#### Trench 1: summary

T1, located on the northern site edge to the south of 'High Trees' itself, contained six archaeological features: two Roman inhumation burials (F5, F6), undated pits F3 and F7, Roman post-hole (F4), and a modern ditch (F8). F5 was partially excavated. Coffin nails were noted in its fill (it may be assumed there are more in the unexcavated fill, and in adjacent F6)

Context	Description	Date
F3	pit	undated
F4	post-hole	Roman
F5	inhumation burial (partially-excavated)	Roman
F6	inhumation burial (unexcavated)	Roman
F7	pit	undated
F8	ditch	modern



**Plate 1: T1, view east. F4 in foreground, partially-excavated grave F5 centre, and unexcavated grave F6 to rear.**

### Trench 2: summary

T2, located on the eastern site edge, contained four archaeological features: undated pit (F9), Roman ditch (F11), and modern gullies or ditches (F10, F12).

Context	Description	Date
F9	pit	undated
F10	gully	modern
F11	ditch	Roman
F12	ditch	post-medieval

### Trench 3: summary

T3, located on the eastern site edge, contained eight archaeological features: four Roman inhumation burials (F13-15, and F21), a Roman ditch (F18), post-medieval pits (F16, F20), and post-medieval ditch (F19). Ditch F19 was not quite alignment of ditch F10 means it is probably not the continuation of ditch F10 in T2 to the north.

Context	Description	Date
F13	inhumation burial (partially-excavated)	Roman
F14	inhumation burial (partially-excavated)	Roman
F15	inhumation burial (unexcavated)	Roman
F16	pit	post-medieval
F17	(= back edge of F13)	-
F18	linear (ditch)	Roman
F19	linear (gully)	modern
F20	pit	post-medieval
F21	inhumation burial (unexcavated)	Roman



**Plate 2: T3, view west. Partially-excavated burials F13 and F14 (bottom left). Beyond is post-medieval pit F16. Unexcavated burials F21 and F15 to right of F14/F16**

### Trench 4: summary

T4, located on the southern site and closest to Lexden Dyke, contained two undated archaeological features: ditch F2 and pit F1. There was also a modern drain probably associated with the former grass tennis court (this was

left unexcavated). There was also a spread of modern material (unnumbered)).

Context	Description	Date
F1	pit	Undated
F2	ditch	Undated

## 5 Finds

by Stephen Benfield

### Introduction

A small quantity of bulk finds was recovered from seven contexts in three trenches (T1-3). The more closely-dated finds are of later prehistoric date (probably Neolithic-Bronze Age), Roman, medieval and post-medieval/modern date. Finds types are listed by material in Table 1 and are listed and described by context in Table 3. The pottery was recorded using the Colchester Roman and post-Roman fabric series (*CAR 7* & *CAR 10*) are the fabrics recorded are listed in Table 2.

Finds type	qt	wt (g)
pottery	12	74
CBM	26	991
fired clay	2	8
worked flint	2	14
burnt stone	2	49
quernstone	2	6
stone	3	114
slag	1	35
<b>totals</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>1291</b>

Table 1. Type and quantities of finds

Fabric code	Fabric name
<i>Roman:</i>	
DJ	Coarse oxidised and related wares
GX	Other coarse wares, principally locally-produced grey wares
<i>Post-Roman:</i>	
21a	Colchester-type wares
48d	Staffordshire-type white earthenwares
51a	Late slipped kitchenware

Table 2. Pottery fabrics list

context	finds no	finds description	finds spot dating
T1 F05	06	<b>Pottery: Roman</b> (1@ 9 g) heavily abraded, probably Roman, Fabric DJ (M1-2/3C) <b>Post-Roman:</b> (1@ 11 g) Fabric 40 (17-18/19C) <b>CBM: Roman</b> (1@ 22 g); <b>Post-Roman</b> (1@ 35 g) orange-red brick (18-19/20C) <b>Burnt stone:</b> (2@ 49 g) (un dated)	Probably 18-19/20C with residual Roman
T2 F11	08	<b>Pottery: Roman</b> (1@ 3 g) Fabric GX abraded, (Roman) <b>CBM: Roman</b> (1@ 103 g) edge piece from a brick or tile (Roman)	Roman
T2 F12	07	<b>Pottery: Post-Roman</b> (1@ 4 g) orange sandy sherd with trace of possible white	Medieval-post-medieval/modern;

context	finds no	finds description	finds spot dating
		slip decoration on corner, probably Fabric 21A (13-15C) <b>CBM: Post-Roman</b> (3@ 82 g) peg-tile (medieval-post-medieval/modern)	probably post-medieval-modern
T3 F13	02	<b>Pottery: Roman</b> (3@ 15 g) Fabric GX, one sherd abraded, (Roman) <b>CBM: Post-Roman</b> (10@ 143 g) peg-tile (medieval -post-medieval/modern) <b>Fired clay:</b> (2@ 8 g) abraded (un dated) <b>Slag:</b> (1@ 35 g) un identified light, porous slag	Probably post-medieval-modern (16/17-19/20C) with residual Roman
T3 F13	02	<b>Quernstone:</b> (2@ 6 g) imported (Mayen, Germany) lava quernstone, abraded (Roman-medieval)	Probably residual Roman
T3 F14	01	<b>Pottery: Roman</b> (3@ 24 g) Fabric GX, probably all from the same pot, (Roman)	Roman
T3 F16	04	<b>Pottery: Post-Roman</b> (2@ 8 g) Fabric 48D (19-20C), Fabric 51A (19-20C) <b>CBM: Roman</b> (1@ 94 g) burnt(?) black, probably Roman brick; <b>Post-Roman</b> (2@ 80 g) peg-tile (medieval-post-medieval/modern) <b>Flint:</b> (2@ 14 g) broad flake with flaking scars across dorsal face, flaking scar on ventral face and small flake scars around edge, area of retouch on distal edge; small thick flake(?) or shatter piece with cortex and small flake removal forming a shallow notch with internal edge wear probably from use (later prehistoric) <b>Stone:</b> (2@ 81 g) septaria (local mudstone)	19-20C with residual prehistoric and Roman
T3 F20	05	<b>CBM: Roman</b> (3@ 201 g) <i>tegula</i> flange and two other pieces, slightly abraded (Roman); <b>Post-Roman</b> (5@ 266 g) peg-tile (medieval-post-medieval/modern) with one piece of probable brick (orange-red) (18-19/20C) <b>Stone:</b> (1@ 33 g) septaria (local mudstone), abraded	Probably 18-19/20C with residual Roman

**Table 3 Types of finds by context and find number**

### Finds discussion

The earliest dated finds are worked flints, F15 (T3) which can be broadly dated as later prehistoric (Neolithic-Bronze Age). Two pieces of burnt flint, F5 (T1) might also be of similar date as burnt flints are commonly associated with prehistoric occupation, but are not closely dated and here might possibly result from Roman cremation pyres in the area. All of these finds are residual in later dated contexts.

There is a small quantity of Roman finds, consisting of pottery sherds and tile or brick pieces. Almost all of the contexts which produced archaeologically significant finds included Roman material. None of the pottery is closely dated within the Roman period. Some of the pottery and tile/brick pieces are abraded and all are residual finds from later dated contexts. A piece of imported lava quernstone, F13 (T3) is also almost certainly of Roman date, although these querns were also imported in the mid-late Saxon and medieval period. Apart from F11 (T2) which produced one small piece of Roman pottery and brick/tile, all of the Roman finds are associated with later dated finds and are residual in the contexts from which they were recovered.

Finds of post-Roman CBM, notably peg-tile pieces are associated with most of the contexts. The peg-tiles are not closely dated but most likely date to after the 13th century as they were probably not common in Essex prior to that period (Ryan & Andrews 1993). A few pieces of more closely dated pottery and brick fragments found with some of these tiles indicate they are of post-medieval or possibly modern date, suggesting that most if not all of the contexts with peg-tile are probably post-medieval or modern. A piece of possibly late medieval (13th-15th century) pottery was recovered from F12 (T2), but otherwise the post-Roman pottery from the site is of post-medieval (17th-18th/19th century) date (F5 (T1)) or is of modern (19th-20th century) date (F16 (T3)).

## 6 Discussion

There are two distinct groups of dated material here. First, the post-medieval and modern material. This includes post-medieval pits F16, F20, and ditches F8, F10, and F19. These features are related to the use of the house and garden, and are of no particular interest.

Much more interesting and important are the Roman inhumation burials. The Lexden cemetery was known previously as a cremation cemetery, but this evaluation has shown that there were inhumation burials here too. Six inhumation burials were found (T1 and T3), None of the burials were fully excavated – they have been left *in situ* to be fully excavated in future. There were a few outlines of possible inhumations at the western end of T3 (this will also need to be clarified at a future date).

Dating evidence is slim. There were no finds from the three unexcavated burials (F5, F15, F21), and of the three partially-excavated examples only F14 produced exclusively Roman material (one Roman sherd). The other two partially-excavated burials (F6, F13) produced a mixture of Roman sherds and tile, with two pieces of post-Roman brick or tile. As we are inside a known Roman cemetery here, it is a reasonable conclusion that the finds are intrusive, and that the burials are Roman. This conclusion is supported by the fact that two of the inhumations contained coffin nails, which are so typical of Roman inhumation burial (F5, F13).

Rather than the burials being spread across the four trenches, they are in fact in clusters, which may represent family groups. In connection with this, it is an attractive notion that the Roman ditches F11 and F18 are ditch/banks separating out these family plots. It is equally likely that some of the other features are burial-related, particularly Roman post-hole F4 (a grave marker?). Other features may be offertory deposits.

## 7 Acknowledgements

CAT would like to thank Mr Robert Pomery for commissioning and funding the work. The project was managed by B Holloway, and fieldwork was carried out by BH and M Baister. The project was monitored for CBC by Martin Winter.

## 8 References

**Note: all CAT fieldwork reports are published online at <http://cat.essex.ac.uk>**

- |              |      |   |
|--------------|------|---|
| <i>CAR 7</i> | 2000 | Colchester Archaeological Report 7: <i>Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85</i> , by John P Cotter  |
| <i>CAR 9</i> | 1993 | Colchester Archaeological Report 9: <i>Excavations of Roman and later cemeteries, churches and monastic sites in Colchester, 1971-88</i> , by Nina Crummy, Philip |



		Crummy and Carl Crossan
CAR 10	1999	Colchester Archaeological Report <b>10</b> : <i>Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-86</i> , by R P Symonds and S Wade, ed by P Bidwell and A Croom
CAR 11	1995	Colchester Archaeological Report 11: <i>Camulodunum II</i> , by C F C Hawkes and P Crummy
CAT	2013	<i>A Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological evaluation at High Trees, St Clare Road, Colchester</i>
CBC	2013	<i>Brief for an archaeological Evaluation, 'High Trees', St Clare Drive [sic], Lexden, Colchester, Essex.</i> CBC brief by Martin Winter
CIM	2008a	<i>Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i> - Colchester and Ipswich Museums
CIM	2008b	<i>Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service.</i>
DCLG	2012	<i>National Planning Policy Framework</i> (Dept of Communities and Local Government).
EAA 24	2011	<i>Research and archaeology revisited: A revised framework for the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Papers <b>24</b> , by Maria Medlycott
Foster, Jennifer	1986	<i>Lexden tumulus: Re-appraisal of a Late Iron Age burial from Colchester, Essex.</i> <i>British Archaeological Reports British Series</i>
IfA	2008a	<i>Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation</i>
IfA	2008b	<i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i>
NPPF	2012	<i>National Planning Policy Framework.</i> Dept of Communities and Local Government,
Ryan, Pat, and Andrews, David	1993	'A brick typology for Cressing Temple', 93-104 in Andrews, David (ed) <i>Cressing Temple: a Templar and Hospitaller estate in Essex.</i> ECC Planning Dept..

## 9 Abbreviations and glossary

Bronze Age	the time of first use of metals, circa 2500- 700 BC
CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
CBM	ceramic building materials (brick, tile, tessera).
context	specific location of finds on an archaeological site
EHER	Essex Historic Environment Record, held by Essex County Council
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
fill	the soil filling up a hole such as a pit or ditch
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists
Iron Age	period from 700 BC to the Roman invasion of AD 43
Late Iron Age	from around 200 BC to AD 43
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
Neolithic	the time of the first farmers, circa 4500 – 2500 BC.
Roman	the period from AD 43 to around AD 430
UAD	Urban archaeological database

## **10 Archive deposition**

The paper and digital archive is currently held by CAT at Roman Circus House, Circular Road North, Colchester, Essex CO2 7GZ, but will be permanently deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums under accession code COLEM 2013.61.

## **11 Contents of archive**

### **Finds archive**

1 Museum box containing all retained finds (CBM, pottery, flints, etc)

### **Paper archive**

1 A4 wallet containing:

- this report
- original site record (context and finds sheets)
- section drawings
- trench sheets
- digital photo log
- attendance record
- sundry papers
- digital photos on disc

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### **Distribution list:**

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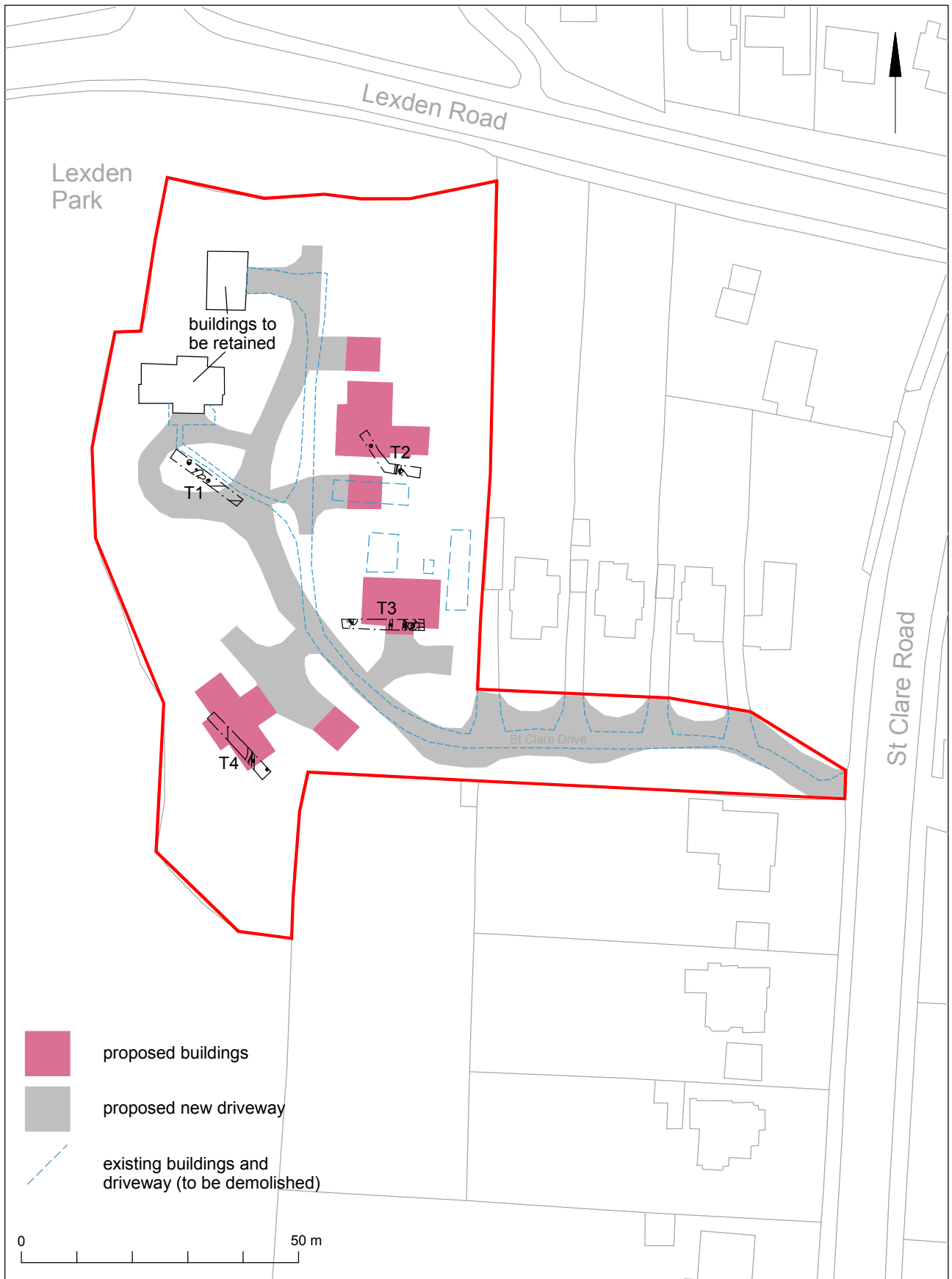
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Fig 1 Site location in relation to Colchester.



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Fig 2 Evaluation results.

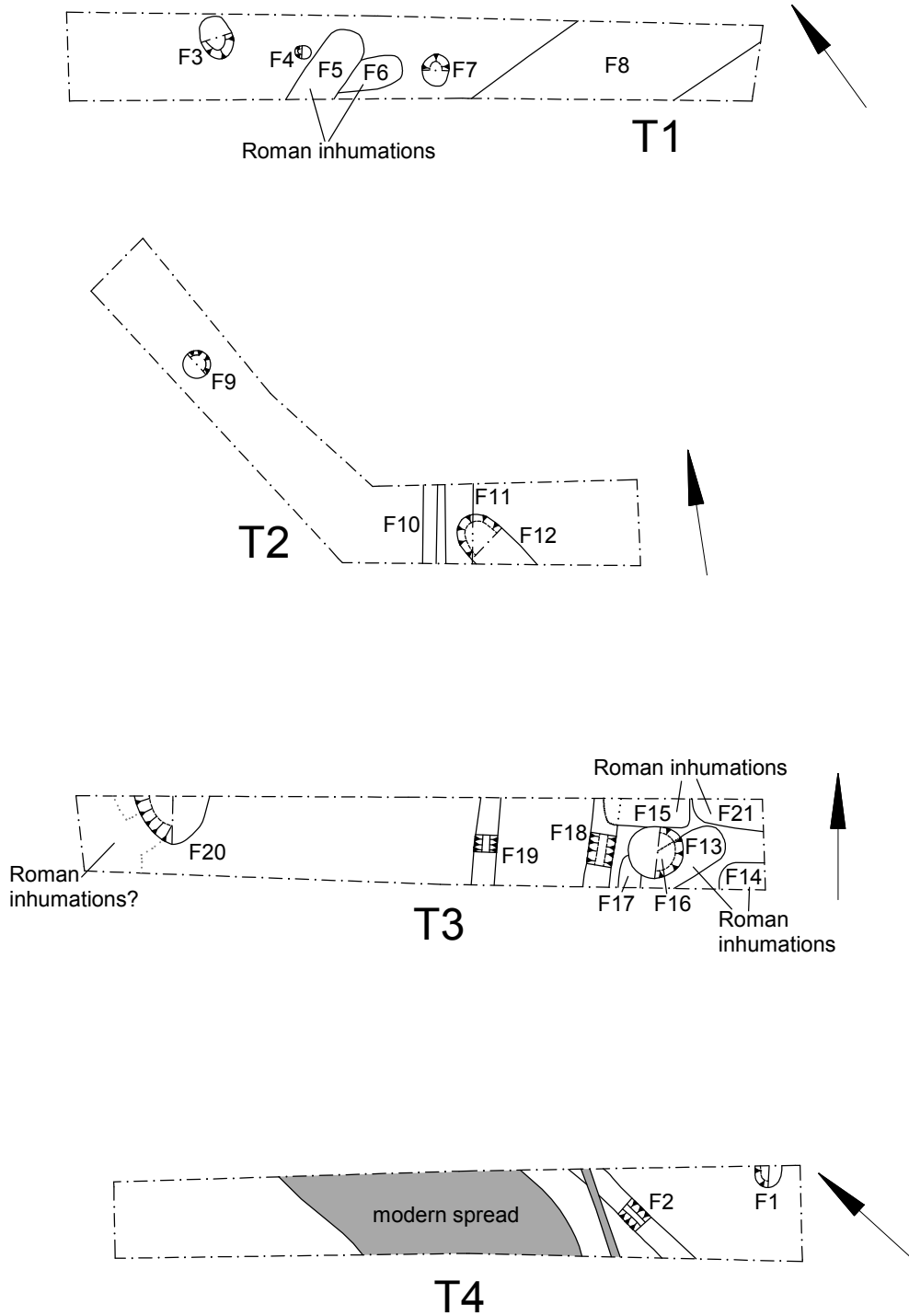


Fig 3 Detailed trench plans.



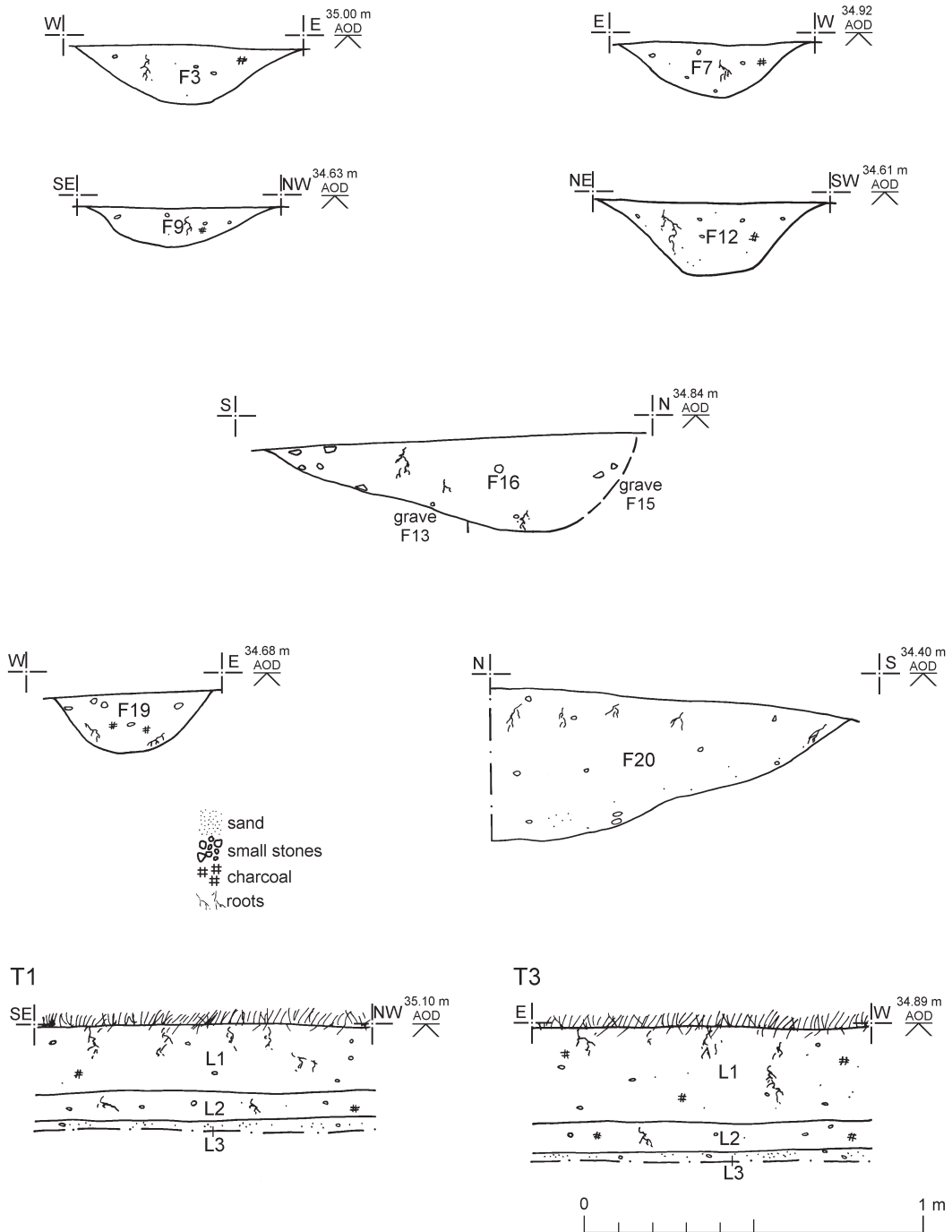


Fig 4 Feature sections (F3, F7, F9, F12, F16 and F19-20). Representative trench sections (T1 and T3).

# Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

## Summary sheet

<b>Address:</b> 'High Trees', St Clare Road, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester
<b>NGR:</b> TL 9740 2511 (c)	<b>Site codes:</b> CAT project – 13/11d Museum accession - 2013.61
<b>Type of work:</b> Evaluation	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> 3rd-4th December 2013	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 60m of trenches
<b>Location of curating museum:</b> Colchester and Ipswich Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Developer
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> Yes	<b>Related EHER number:</b>
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 745, and summary in EAH	
<b>Periods represented:</b> Roman	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b></p> <p><i>This site is in an area of high archaeological potential. It is within the oppidum of Camulodunum (and east of the Lexden Dyke, one of the oppidum's lines of defence) and also within the area of the Late Iron Age and early Roman Lexden Cemetery. Four evaluation trenches (total length 60m) were positioned within the footprint of three proposed new buildings and a new access road.</i></p> <p><i>There were twenty-one archaeological features: six Roman inhumation graves, Roman and undated ditches, and post-medieval and modern pits. The spacing of the Roman inhumations may indicate that the Lexden Cemetery (previously known only for cremation burials) also contained family burial groups which may have been separated by ditches.</i></p> <p><i>Loose prehistoric flints indicate that there was some passing activity here in the Neolithic/Bronze Age.</i></p> <p><i>Later features included pits, drains and a dump of building material associated with the house and the cultivation of the gardens.</i></p> <p><i>The full extent and nature of the burials and their relationship to the previously known cemetery can only be elaborated by further archaeological work.</i></p>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> -	
<b>CBC monitor:</b> Martin Winter	
<b>Keywords:</b> Roman inhumation burial	<b>Significance:</b> **
<b>Author of summary:</b> H Brooks	<b>Date of summary:</b> December 2013