

# Archaeological trial-trenching evaluation at Colchester County High School for Girls, Norman Way, Colchester, Essex

March 2014



report prepared by Ben Holloway  
with a contribution by Stephen Benfield

on behalf of  
Colchester County High School for Girls

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NGR: TL 9794 2461  
Colchester and Ipswich Museum accession code: 2014.22



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**CAT Report 762**

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## 1 Summary

*The County High School for Girls (CHSG) is within both the oppidum of Camulodunum and the Roman town's western cemetery. Two evaluation trenches (total length, 16m) were positioned within the footprint of the proposed new sixth form block to be situated in what is now an open grassed square occupied by three re-locatable classrooms.*

*One archaeological feature was revealed by the evaluation: a Roman ditch dating to the later 1st century AD. The ditch was aligned at right-angles to the defensive triple-ditches seen on the school site in 1955, and was parallel to ditches seen on the St Benedict's School site in 1939 (ie, the Heath farm Dyke North). What is unclear is whether the 2014 ditch is merely an agricultural field ditch, or whether it is part of a wider defensive scheme including the Heath Farm Dyke and the triple-ditches on the CHSG site.*

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

This is the report on the archaeological trial-trenching evaluation carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) at Colchester County High School for Girls (CHSG), Norman Way, Colchester, Essex, on March 6th 2014. The archaeological work was commissioned by Iain Bramhill of Ingleton Wood on behalf of CHSG.

Proposed work is the construction of a new sixth form block. Site centre is TL 9794 2461.

Post-excavation work was carried out in March 2014.

### Archaeological background

This section is based on records held by the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) held at Essex County Council, County Hall, Chelmsford, and the Urban Archaeological Database held at Colchester and Ipswich Museum.

The site is on the edge of the Roman town's western cemetery, where numerous cremations and funerary monuments have been recorded since the nineteenth century (Hull, 1958). For a wider discussion of cemetery areas see *CAR 9* (1993).

The site is also located within the *oppidum* of Camulodunum, excavations within which have taken place since the 1930s (*CAR 11*, 1995). Excavations in the northern part of the school grounds in the 1930s revealed early Roman military ditches, which probably formed part of a small fort. Excavations in 1955 and 1956 prior to construction of the school revealed Roman ditches associated with timber structures. These have been interpreted as a rural farmstead, but they may be defensive. Several Roman cremations have been found nearby.

### Planning

A planning application was submitted to the LPA in January 2014 for the construction of a new VI form classroom facility that will replace three existing re-locatable classrooms. A discussion with Mr Martin Winter, the Colchester Borough Council Archaeological Officer (CBCAO) established that the development site is within an area of significant archaeological potential, and that archaeological work will be required prior to construction.

A brief detailing the required archaeological work (an evaluation by trial-trenching) was written by CBCAO (CBC 2014). All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a WSI (Written Scheme of Investigation) produced by CAT in response to the CBCAO brief and agreed with the CBCAO (CAT 2014).

In addition to the WSI, all fieldwork and reporting was done in accordance with local and national standards as detailed in IfA 2008a, IfA 2008b, CIM 2008a, CIM 2008b, MoRPHE, EAA 14, and EAA 24.

### 3 Aim

The aim of the evaluation was to record the character, extent, date, significance and condition of any archaeological remains likely to be disturbed by the proposed works, in particular the potential for archaeological remains as mentioned in section 2 above.

### 4 Evaluation results (Figs 2-4; Plates 1-3)

This section gives an archaeological summary of the evaluation trenches (T1-T2), with context and finds dating information.

The site is an area of grassed open ground to the south of the main school buildings and contains three re-locatable classrooms (two currently unused).

The evaluation trenches were excavated under archaeological supervision using a tracked excavator, through four layers: modern topsoil 200 mm thick (L1), and an imported make-up horizon (L2) 300 mm thick. L2 sealed a buried topsoil (L3) 150 mm thick, and L3 sealed a silty accumulation horizon 150 mm thick (L4). L4 sealed archaeological features and the natural horizon (L5).

A single archaeological feature was identified: a Roman ditch F1 in T2.

#### Trench 1: summary

T1, located on the northern site edge close to the site boundary, contained no archaeological features. An unnumbered modern water-pipe ran across the southern part of T1. Residual Roman pottery and brick/tile were recovered from the accumulation horizon L4.



Plate 1: T1, view S



**Plate 2: T1 representative section showing buried topsoil L3**

**Trench 2: summary**

T2, in the southern half of the site, contained Roman ditch F1. The modern water-pipe seen in T1 continued across T2. F1 was aligned NE-SW, at right angles to the alignment of the triple-ditches seen during the construction of the school in 1955, and was parallel to the two ditches observed in 1939 excavations to the east of Norman Way (the St Benedict's School site).



**Plate 3: Roman ditch F1 in T2, view SW**

**Trench 2: Archaeology**

context	description	date
F1	ditch	Roman, 1st century post-conquest

## 5 Finds (Tables 1-3) by Stephen Benfield

### Introduction

There was a small quantity of bulk finds: pottery, ceramic building material (CBM) and fired clay (FC) of Late Iron Age (LIA) and Roman date (Table 1). The finds come from two contexts in T1-2: L4 (T1) & F1(T2).

Finds type	qt	wt (g)
pottery	5	120
ceramic building material	5	236
fired clay	2	66

**Table 1. Type and quantities of finds**

The pottery was recorded using the *Camulodunum* (Colchester) pottery fabric series (*CAR 10*) (Table 2). All bulk finds are listed with a spot date in Table 3.

fabric code	fabric name	date range
BASG	South Gaulish Samian (plain)	M1-2C
GTW	Grog-tempered ware	L1C BC-M1C AD
GX	Other coarse wares, principally locally produced greywares	Roman
HZ(GT)	Large storage jars and other vessels in heavily-tempered wares (grog-tempered)	
		1C AD

**Table 2. Roman pottery fabric quantities**

ctxt	ctxt type	finds no.	find type	Fabric	no	wt/g	form	notes	spot date
T1 L4	accum	1	pot	BASG	1	24	dish/ bowl	abraded. footring	M-L1C
			pot	HZ(GT)	1	72	Storage jar	abraded. body sherd	1C
			pot	GTW	1	11		abraded. body sherd	E-M1C
			CBM	red, sandy	1	210	RBT	34 mm thick	Rom
T2 F1	ditch	2	pot	GX	1	7	jar/ bowl	rim sherd, sooted from use	Rom
			pot	GX	1	6		body sherd	Rom
			FC	silt	1	<1		abraded. fragment	
			FC	Silt/ fine sand	1	66		flat tile-like piece, moderately soft	LIA/Ro m
			CBM	red/ brown, sandy	4	26	RBT	three small pieces/flake s	Rom

**Table 3. Bulk finds by context**

### Finds discussion

Although only a small group, all the closely-dated finds are of Late Iron Age-Early Roman, or Roman date. Both contexts (F1 & L4) can be dated to the post-conquest (Roman) period as they each contain Roman finds. There is nothing among the assemblage which can be dated to the post-Roman period.

Potentially the earliest-dated finds are two sherds of pottery from L4 (T1) both of which contain grog-temper. The use of significant quantities of grog (crushed fired-clay) as a tempering agent in pottery is typical of LIA assemblages in south-eastern of England from the later 1st century BC-mid 1st century AD or slightly later. The layer also produced a sherd of South Gaulish samian which can be dated to the mid-late 1st century, and a piece of Roman brick or tile. Overall, the finds from this layer (L4) indicate an early Roman date with possible residual LIA material, which suggests comparison with the occupation at Sheepen (Colchester) dated c. AD 5-60 (Niblett 1985, 3). Abrasion noted on the pottery could suggest some extended history of deposition, or disturbance to the context as with ploughsoil.

The finds from the ditch F1(T2) are not so closely dated, although the pottery and CBM are of both of post-conquest (Roman) date. A moderately hard fired, brown coloured clay brick or tile piece appears more redolent of Iron Age material than hard fired, usually orange-red Roman brick and tile and may be residual, but is not closely dated.

## 6 Discussion

CHSG is in an area of intense archaeological activity. Excavations in 1939 to the west (on the St Benedict's School site) revealed parallel NE/SW aligned ditches and a potential early Roman fort. Observations during the construction of the school in 1955 identified a 'triple' ditch aligned NW/SE from which small amounts of Roman pottery were recovered (although no sections were excavated across them). Similarities to the Lexden Triple Dyke may imply a defensive function for these ditches.

The current evaluation has shown that a layer of debris and fresh topsoil were dumped (during school construction in 1955) over an older buried topsoil which probably represents the pre-1955 ground level.

Residual pottery recovered from L4 in T1 is 1st century Roman, and is post conquest (ie, dating after AD 43). This by itself indicates some early Roman activity on the CHSG site. Ditch F1 in T2 also contained post-conquest pottery, and shared a common alignment with the St Benedict's School ditches, and is more or less at right angles to the triple-ditches seen on the school site in 1955.

What is unknown, and remains to be proven by future work, is the extent to which the CHSG ditch is military or agricultural, and how it relates to the CHSG triple ditches and those on the St Benedict's School site (ie, the Heath Farm Dyke North).

## 7 Acknowledgements

CAT thanks Colchester County High School for Girls and funding the work and Iain Bramhill of Ingleton Wood for commissioning the work on their behalf. The project was managed by B Holloway, and fieldwork was carried out by BH and M Baister. The project was monitored by CBCAO Martin Winter.

Figures 1-4 are by MB, and Fig 5 by E Holloway.

## 8 References

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

CAR 9	1993	Colchester Archaeological Report 9: <i>Excavations of Roman and later cemeteries, churches and monastic sites in Colchester, 1971-88</i> . By Nina Crummy and Carl Crossan
CAR 10	1999	Colchester Archaeological Report 10: <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	2014	<i>A Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological evaluation at Colchester County High School for Girls, Norman Way, Colchester. Feb 2014</i>
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> .
EAA 14	2003	<i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 14, ed by D Gurney
EAA 24	2011	<i>Research and archaeology revisited: A revised framework for the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Papers 24, by Maria Medlycott
English Heritage	2006	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)</i>
Hull, M R	1958	<i>Roman Colchester</i> , Report 20 of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London
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>
Niblett, R	1985	<i>Sheepen: an early Roman industrial site at Camulodunum</i> , CBA Research Report 57

## 9 Abbreviations and glossary

CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
CBM	ceramic building materials (brick, tile, tessera).
context	specific location of finds on an archaeological site
ECC	Essex County Council
EHHER	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
NGR	National Grid Reference
Roman	the period from AD 43 to around AD 430
sealed	covered over, and therefore post-dated

## 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 Museum under accession code COLEM 2014.22.

It is understood that the School wishes to retain the finds for display.

## **11 Contents of archive**

### **Finds archive**

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

### **Paper archive**

1 A4 wallet containing:  
this report (CAT Report 762)  
original site record (context and finds sheets)  
section drawings  
trench sheets  
digital photo log  
digital photos on disc  
attendance record  
sundry papers

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### **Distribution list:**

Colchester County High School for Girls  
Martin Winter Colchester Borough Council Archaeological Officer (CBCAO)  
Essex Historic Environment Record, Essex County Council



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Date: 26.03.14

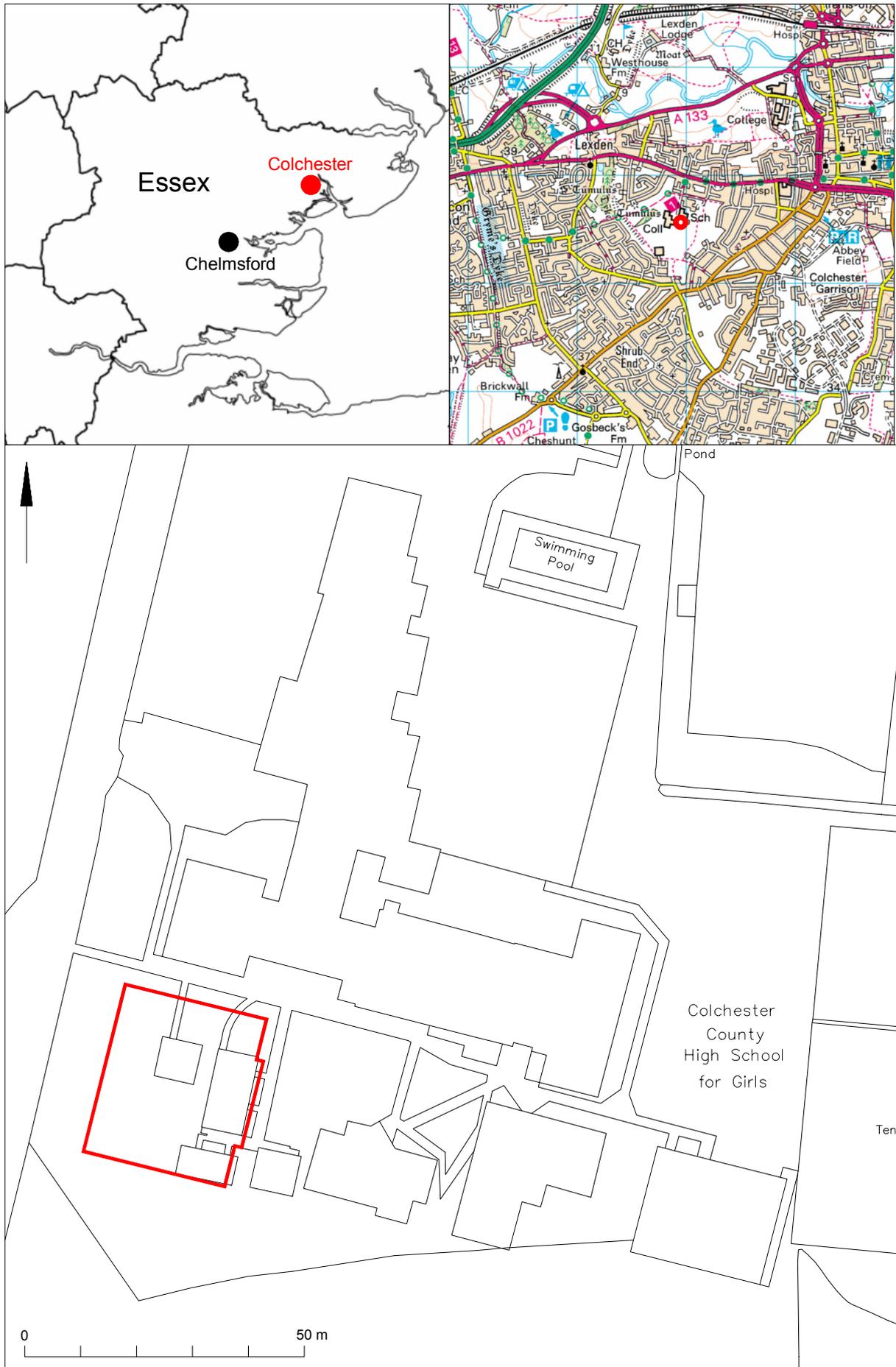
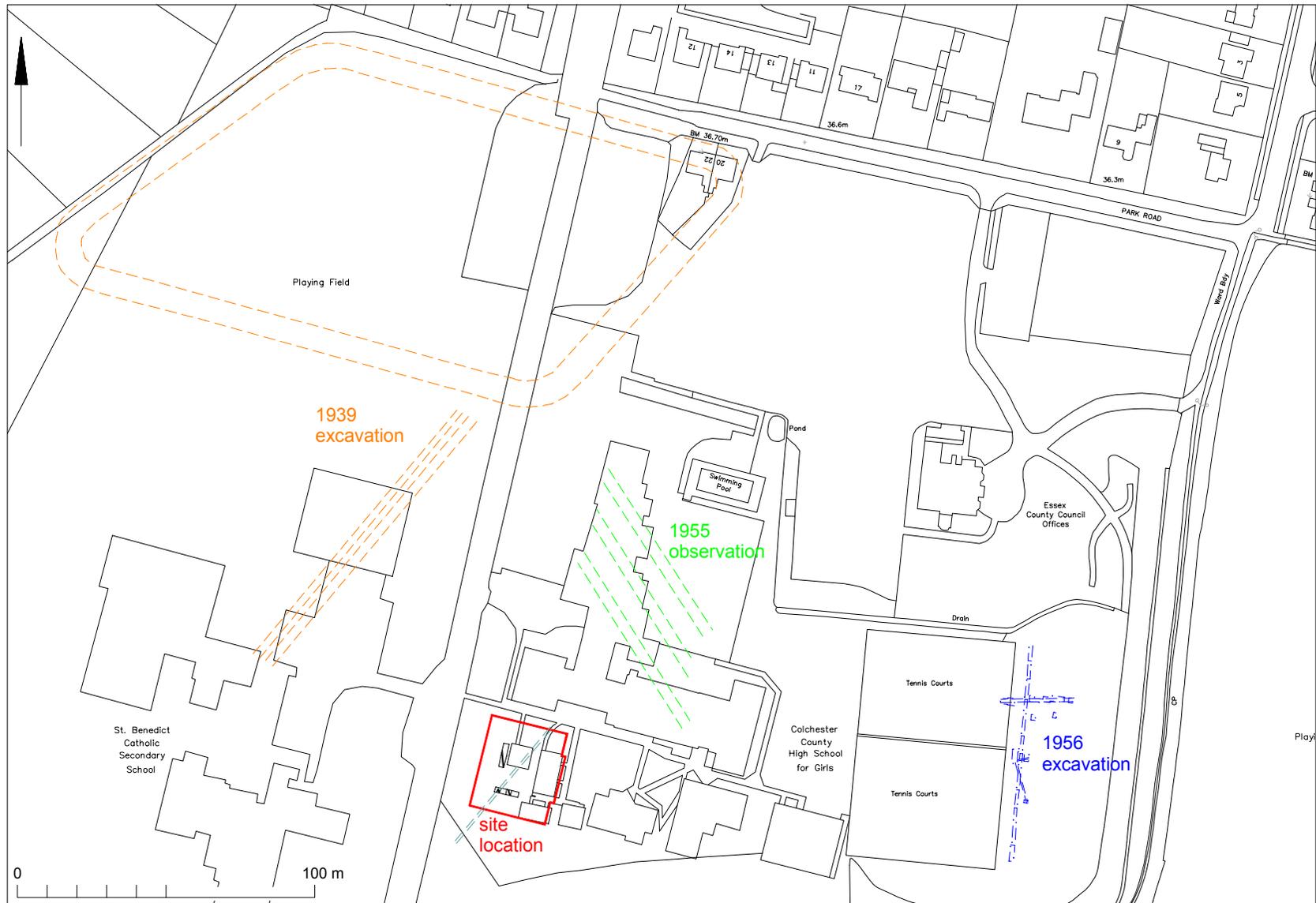
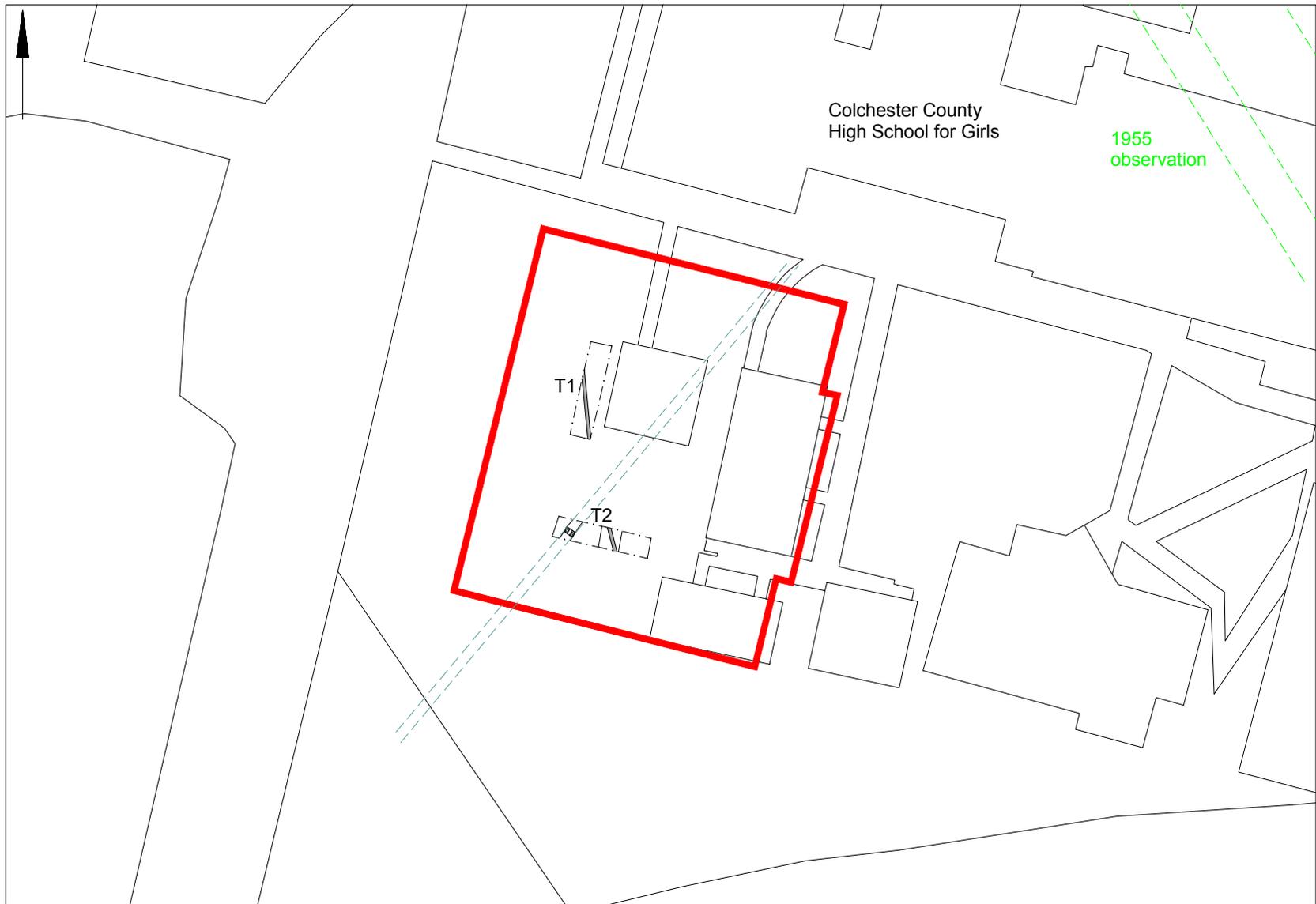


Fig 1 Site location.



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Fig 2 Site location in relation to previous archaeological work.



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Fig 3 Trench plan, showing Roman ditch F1.

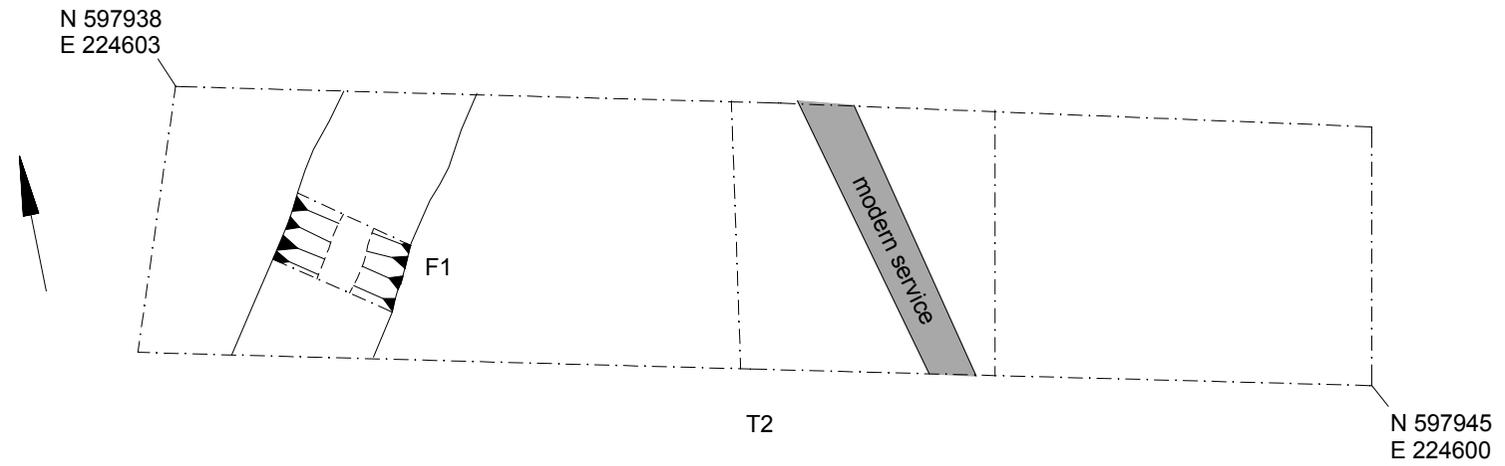
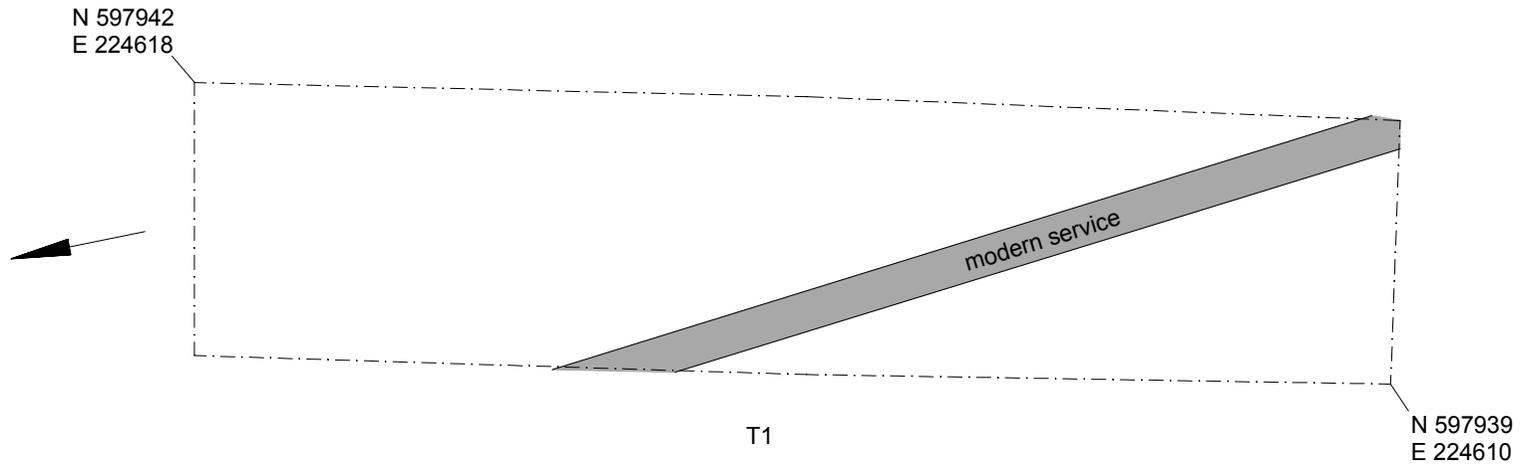


Fig 4 Detailed trench plans.

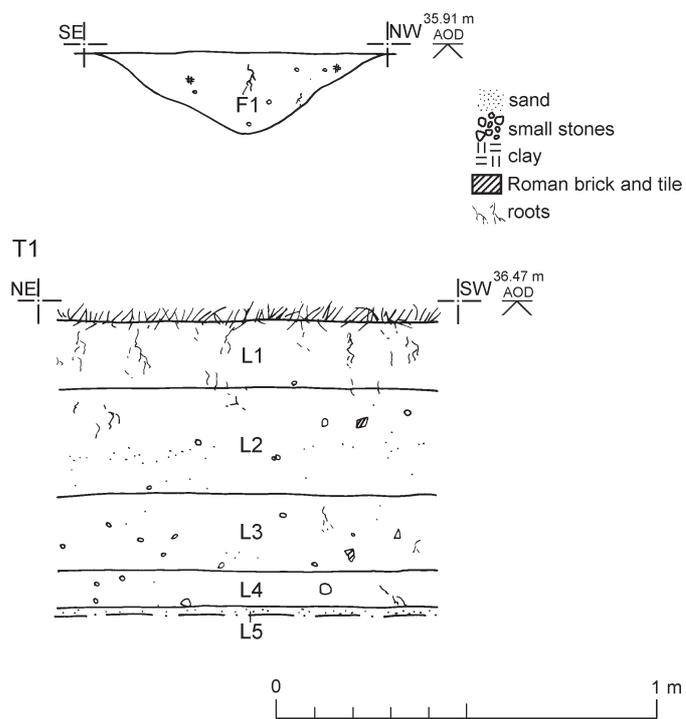


Fig 5 Feature section (F1) and representative trench section (T1).

## Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

### Summary sheet

<b>Address:</b> Colchester County High School for Girls, Norman Way, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester
<b>NGR:</b> TL 9794 2461	<b>Site code:</b> CAT project code – 14/02i
<b>Type of work:</b> Evaluation	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> 6th March 2014	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 16m of trenching
<b>Location of curating museum:</b> Colchester and Ipswich Museum accession code : 2014.22	<b>Funding source:</b> Developer
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> no	<b>Related EHER number:</b>
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 762	
<b>Periods represented:</b> Roman	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b>  <i>The County High School for Girls is within both the oppidum of Camulodunum and the Roman town's western cemetery. Two evaluation trenches (total length, 16m) were located within the footprint of the proposed new sixth form block to be situated in what is now an open grassed square occupied by three re-locatable classrooms.</i></p> <p><i>One archaeological feature was revealed by the evaluation: a Roman ditch dating to the later 1st century AD. The ditch was aligned at right-angles to the defensive triple ditches seen on the school site in 1955, and is parallel to ditches seen on the St Benedict's School site in 1939. An hypothesis to be tested by future excavation is that all three sets of ditches are related.</i></p>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> None	
<b>Monitor:</b> Martin Winter (CBC)	
<b>Keywords:</b> Roman	<b>Significance:</b> *
<b>Author of summary:</b> Ben Holloway	<b>Date of summary:</b> March 2014