

# Archaeological monitoring and recording at Duncan's Gate, Castle Park, Colchester, CO1 1UN

September 2017



report and figures by  
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fieldwork carried out by  
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commissioned by  
**Colchester Borough Council**

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**CAT Report 1171**  
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## 1 Summary

*A programme of archaeological monitoring was carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust at Duncan's Gate, Castle Park, Colchester in September 2017. The monitoring focused on the conservation of collapsed masonry to the south of the gate, which has been interpreted as the remains of the gate tower.*

*The cleaning of the collapse prior to the reattachment of several tile courses allowed a section be recorded, providing for the first time an accurate depth of the collapsed masonry. Also recorded were two layers of loose soil associated with the construction of the modern retaining wall around the collapse.*

## 2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the report on archaeological monitoring at Duncan's Gate, Castle Park, Colchester, Essex, detailing conservation work carried out on the gate. The work was commissioned by Colchester Borough Council, and carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) in September 2017. Duncan's Gate is a partially-ruined Roman gateway on the north-east corner of Colchester's town wall (scheduled monument NHLE no. 1003772), located at NGR TL 9992 2555. To the south of the gate is an area of collapsed masonry that is the remains of the upper part of the gate tower (Hull 1958).

As a scheduled monument, Historic England (HE) advised Colchester Borough Council that a programme of archaeological monitoring during the conservation works to the collapsed masonry and gate would be required. This recommendation is based on the guidance given in the National Planning Policy Framework (DCLG 2012).

All work was carried out according to standards and practices contained in the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (2014a), *Standard and guidance for archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures* (2014b), *Management of research projects in the historic environment* (MoRPHE), *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14) and *Research and Archaeology Revised: A Revised Framework for the East of England* (EAA 24). In addition, the guidelines contained in *Understanding Historic Buildings, A guide to good recording practice* (Historic England 2016) were followed.

## 3 Aims

The aim of the monitoring was to provide a detailed record of any archaeological contexts or structural evidence exposed during the conservation works.

#### 4 Historical and archaeological background

A detailed historical and archaeological background on Duncan's Gate exists in a Historic Building Recording report, carried out by CAT in 2016 (CAT Report 1022). It is summarised below:

*"Duncan's Gate is located on the north-east corner of the Roman Town Wall. The wall was built around the town in the later 1st-century AD following the revolt led by Boudica. It is constructed of a core of layered septaria and mortar with coursed septaria and tile on each face.*

*Above ground, the survival of the wall is very patchy. Some sections are in relatively good condition, with large areas of intact facing surviving (such as around Balkerne Gate to the west of the town). The majority of what is standing, however, has been refaced or completely rebuilt in brick and stone.*

*The collapsed masonry to the south of Duncan's Gate are the remains of a gate tower or turret that has fallen and been preserved in situ adjacent to the remains of the gate. It is extremely fragile and has deteriorated in recent years, and now requires conservation (although it has been conserved in the past).*

*The gate was discovered by Dr P M Duncan (after which it was named), in 1853 while he was following the line of a Roman drain (or cloaca) running from what was later known as the mithraeum to the town ditch (Duncan 1858, 210-28). Duncan notes that during the excavation of the gate several human bones, horse bones, charred wood and remains of weapons were uncovered. He goes on to suggest that this evidence of "fire and violence" is directly associated with the destruction of the gate.*

*The gate was next investigated in 1927-9 by the Colchester Excavation Committee, overseen by M. R. Hull (Hull 1958, 36-41). He observed that Duncan's excavation had removed all archaeological layers directly adjacent to the sides of the gate and "across the whole south face of the gate". He began his own investigation by completely emptying Duncan's trenches.*

*Like Duncan, Hull found evidence of burning within the gateway. He was more detailed in his recording, describing two distinct layers of charcoal with a layer of road metalling between them. He postulated that this is evidence of two distinct incidents of fire at the gate.*

*Unlike Duncan, Hull recovered no evidence of animal bones, human bones or any remains of weapons – but still agreed with Duncan's assessment that the gate had been destroyed, and the tower collapsed, by fire. Hull did observe (in section) "very black earth" beneath the collapsed masonry to the south of the gate, noting that neither he nor Duncan disturbed it, and that if it were ever to be moved its contents would be of great interest.*

*It seems likely from the descriptions of these two previous excavations that the earth beneath the collapsed masonry contains the only remaining intact stratigraphic sequence on the site although, as neither Hull nor Duncan recorded the exact location or extent of their excavations, it is difficult to be certain.*

*Although not discussed in the Hull's report (save for one photograph), after the excavations of 1927-9 the gate and collapsed masonry was the subject of significant conservation."*

## 5 Monitoring results and discussion (Figs 2-3)

The conservation works on the collapsed masonry primarily consisted of the repair of a modern retaining wall, and the re-attachment of recently fallen courses of tiles. Prior to this, to allow successful re-bonding of the tile courses, the exposed core of the masonry was cleaned by CAT archaeologists (Fig 3 and Photograph 1).



**Photograph 1** Section of collapsed masonry after cleaning. L4 and L5 visible. Photograph taken facing south-west.

This cleaning allowed the width of the collapsed masonry to be measured (at its northern end). It varied from 244mm (at the edge of the masonry) to 569mm (in the centre).

During the cleaning, behind where the retaining wall would have stood, two layers were encountered. L4 was a 310-360mm thick loose dry medium/dark brown sandy silt, with occasional inclusions of brick and tile. Roman pottery sherds and fragments of animal bone were recovered from this layer. The Roman pottery sherds (3 sherds, weight 16 g) are all greyware (Fabric GX) body sherds and are simply dated as Roman. The animal bone (5 pieces, 88 g) include part of a sheep tibia, a femur from a juvenile - probably a pig, a humerus from a medium-large mammal and two other undiagnostic bone fragments.

Below this layer was L5, which was similar in all respects, except it was lighter in colour, a more light/medium brown. No finds were recovered from L5.

Neither of the layers encountered appear to be the “very black earth” described by Hull as being present beneath the collapse. It seems far more likely they originate from the construction of the retaining wall, and the consolidation of the collapsed masonry in the early 20th century. The Roman pottery recovered from L4 is residual in its context (as was the pottery recovered from the test-pit excavated in 2016 – see CAT Report 1022). The “dark earth” Hull described is probably further underneath the collapse, and cannot be exposed without undermining and causing structural issues to the masonry.

Although original Roman lime mortar was observed bonding tiles in section (Photograph 2), most of the tile that was to be re-attached to the collapsed masonry was entirely encased in modern concrete. This presumably means that this part of the remains had been reconstructed during the conservation work in 1920s, and may not accurately represent the original extent of the collapse.



**Photograph 2** Detail of collapsed masonry after cleaning. Original Roman mortar highlighted in section. Photograph taken facing south-west.

The recently-fallen tile courses were in a poor state of repair, and most could not be accurately reattached to each other or the collapsed masonry, apart from the two largest fragments (Photograph 3). It was evident where most of the fallen tile courses had fallen from, but due to the damage they had received it was not possible to attach them seamlessly (Photographs 4 and 5).



**Photograph 3** Detail of tile courses that were successfully reattached together after falling.



**Photograph 4** Masonry during conservation work, showing partial reattachment of tile courses. Photograph taken facing south-west.



**Photograph 5** Masonry during conservation work, showing partial reattachment of tile courses. Photograph taken facing south-east.

The resulting reconstruction, after the retaining wall was fully rebuilt, is intended to be as accurate as possible, while also adequately protecting the remaining intact Roman material in the centre of the collapse (Photographs 6 and 7).



**Photograph 6** Collapsed masonry after complete conservation.  
Photograph taken facing south-west.



**Photograph 7** Collapsed masonry after complete conservation.  
Photograph taken facing south-east.

As well as monitoring the conservation of the collapsed masonry, the restoration of the standing gate was also monitored. The elevations of the gate remain the same as in CAT Report 1022.

One discovery of note was that cleaning of vegetation at the base of the western side of the gate revealed a concrete drainage channel (Fig 2 and Photograph 8). This is not visible in any photographs from Hull's report (Hull 1958, Plates VI and VII), and presumably must have been added to the gateway sometime after the conservation carried out in the early 20th century.





**Photograph 8** Concrete drainage channel adjacent to the western side of Duncan's Gate. Photograph taken facing south-west.

## 6 Acknowledgements

Colchester Archaeological Trust would like to thank Colchester Borough Council for commissioning and funding the monitoring.

The monitoring was carried out by Mark Baister and Gareth Morgan.

Figures are by Mark Baister.

The project was monitored by Dr Jess Tipper for Colchester Borough Council, and Sarah Poppy for Historic England.

## 7 References

Note: all CAT reports, except for DBAs, are available online in .pdf format at

<http://cat.essex.ac.uk>

CAT Report 1022	2016	<i>Historic Building recording and test-pit evaluation at Duncan's Gate, Colchester, CO1 1UN, July 2016</i> by M Baister
CIfA	2014a	<i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i>
CIfA	2014b	<i>Standard and guidance for archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures</i>
DCLG	2012	<i>National planning policy framework</i>
Duncan, P.M	1858	Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society vol 1, pgs 210-28: <i>The Roman cloca at Colchester; its discovery and description</i>
EAA 14	2003	<i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> East Anglian Archaeological occasional papers 14 by Gurney, D.
EAA 24	2011	<i>Research and Archaeology Revisited: A Revised Framework for the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeological occasional papers 24 by Medlycott, M
Historic England	2015	<i>MoRPHE: Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment</i>
Historic England	2016	<i>Understanding Historic Buildings. A guide to good recording practice</i>
Hull, M.R.	1958	<i>Roman Colchester</i>

## 8 Abbreviations and glossary

CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
CBC	Colchester Borough Council
CIfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
context	specific location of finds on an archaeological site
EHHER	Essex Historic Environment Record, held by the ECC
HE	Historic Environment
layer (L)	distinct or distinguishable deposit (layer) of material
modern	period from the 19th century onwards to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
OASIS	<b>O</b> nline <b>A</b> ccess to the <b>I</b> ndex of <b>A</b> rchaeological <b>I</b> nvestigations, <a href="http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main">http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main</a>
residual	something out of its original context, eg a Roman coin in a modern pit
Roman	the period from AD 43 to c AD 410
section	(abbreviation sc or Sx) vertical slice through feature/s or layer/s

## 9 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is currently held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at Roman Circus House, Roman Circus Walk, Colchester, Essex CO2 7GZ, but will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museum (under accession code COLEM 2017.131).

## 10 Contents of archive

**Finds:** none retained

**Paper and digital record**

One A4 document wallet containing:

The report (CAT Report 1171)

Original site record (layer sheets, finds record, plans, sections)

Site digital photos and log, attendance register, risk assessment

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### Distribution list

Sarah Poppy, Historic England

Dr Jess Tipper, CBCAA

EHER



### Colchester Archaeological Trust

Roman Circus House

Circular Road North,

Colchester,

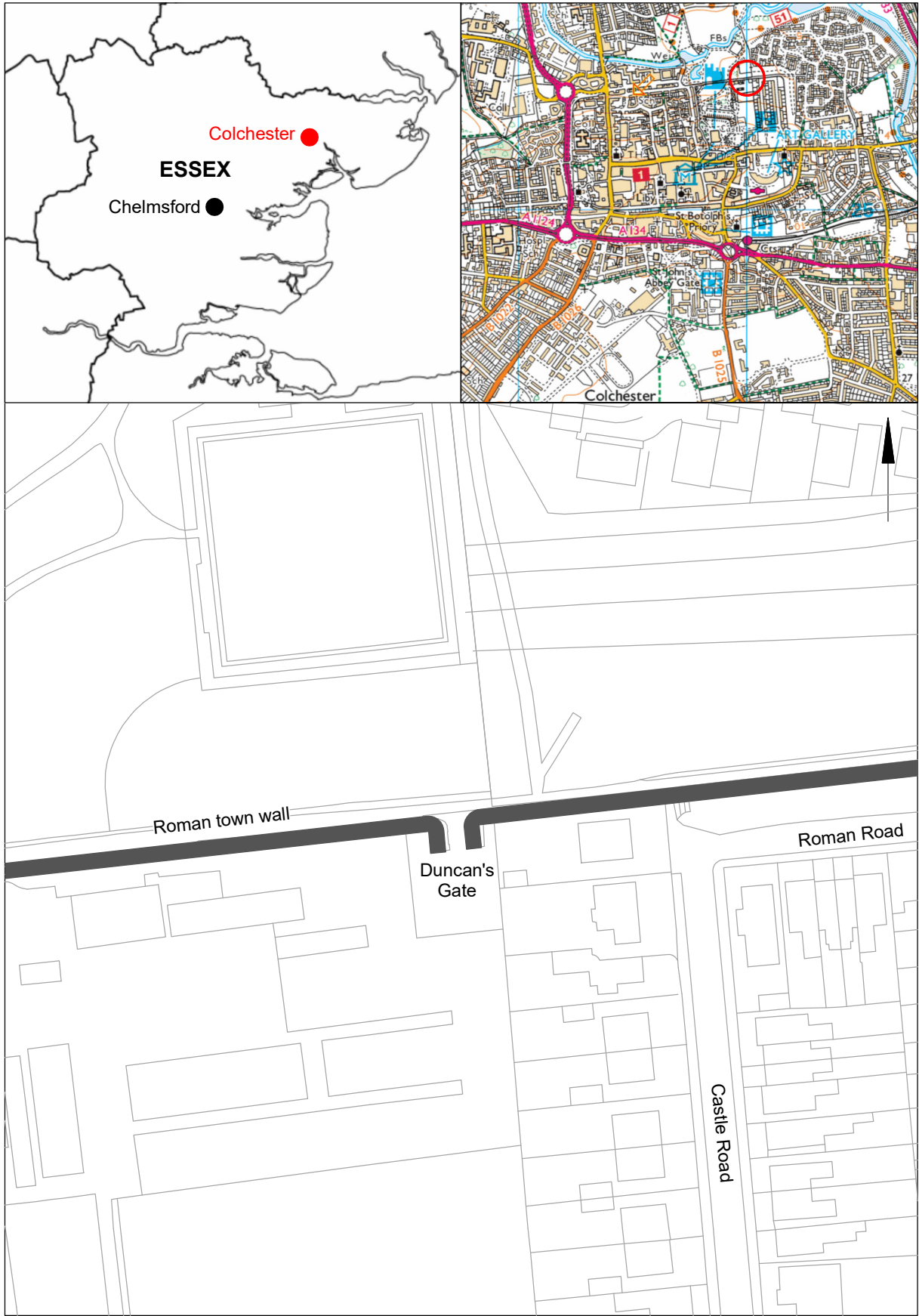
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checked by: Philip Crummy

date: 05/10/2017



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Fig 1 Site location.



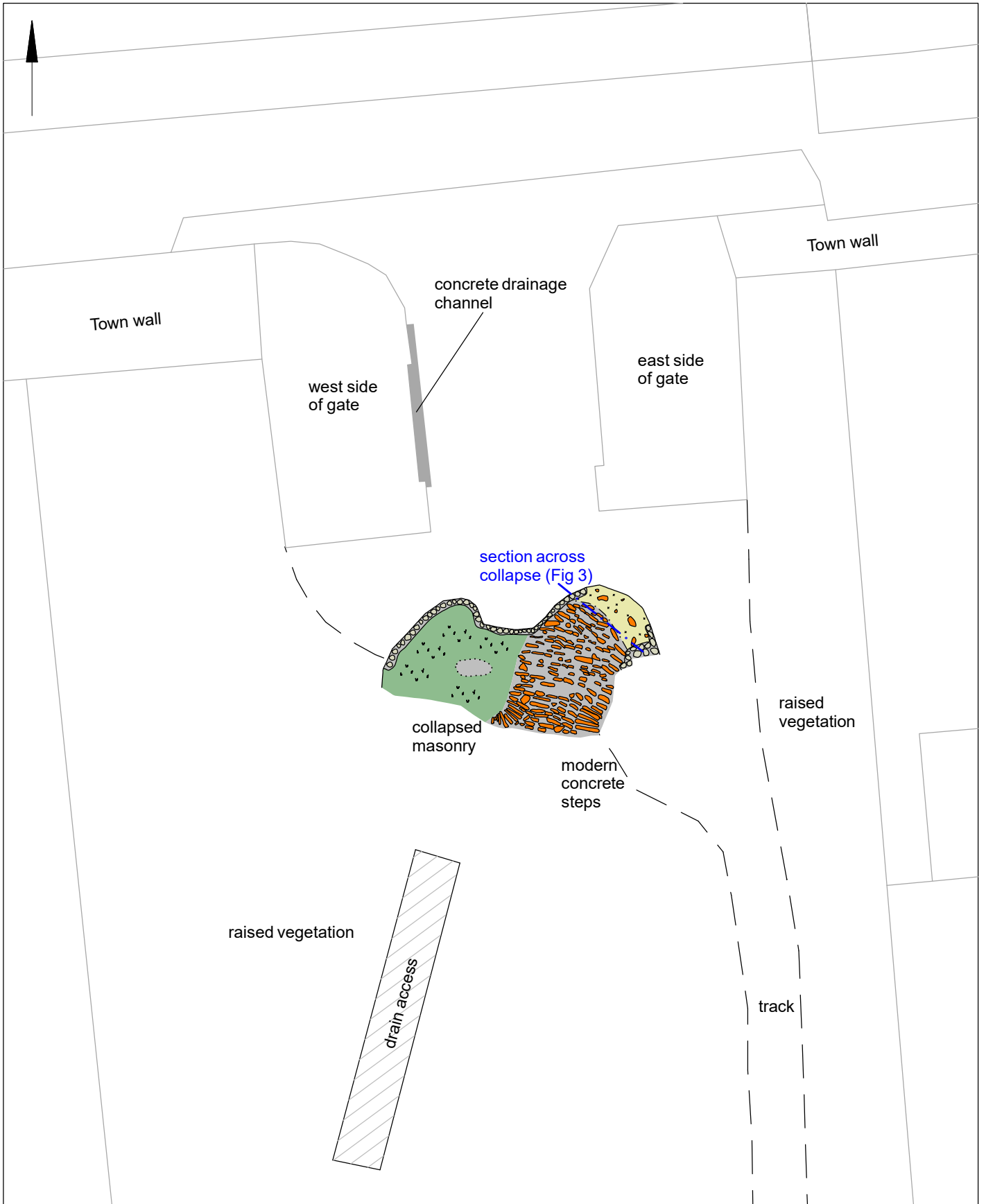


Fig 2 Plan of site.

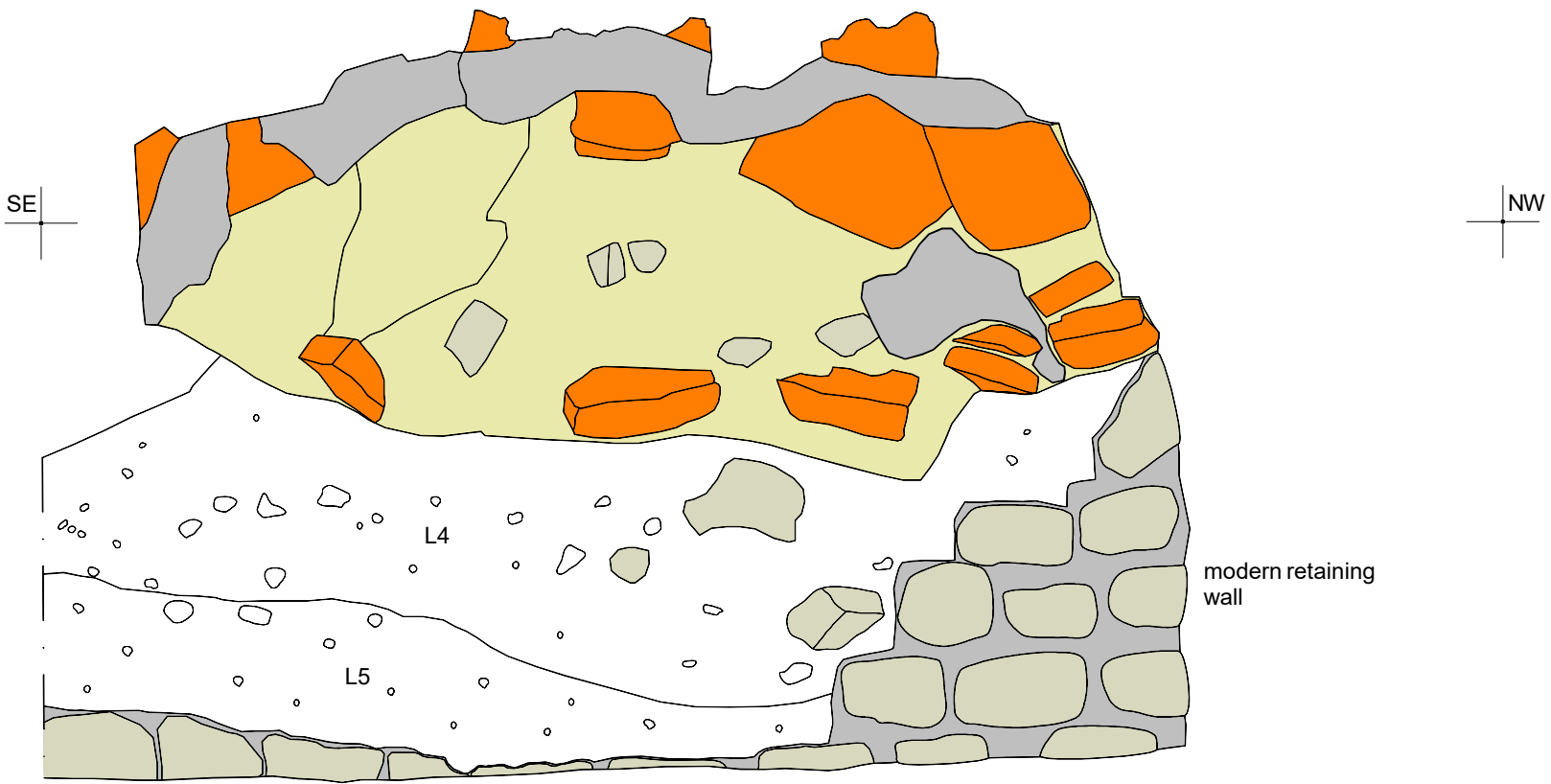


Fig 3 Section of collapse after cleaning, prior to restoration.



key

- concrete conservation  
(laid in 1920s)
- lime mortar (original Roman)
- stone
- tile
- septaria

# Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

## Summary sheet

<b>Address:</b> Duncan's Gate, Castle Park, Colchester, <b>CO1 1UN</b>	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester
<b>NGR:</b> TL 9992 2555 (centre)	<b>Site code:</b> CAT project ref.: 17/09d CHER ref: ECC4086 OASIS ref: colchest3-296227
<b>Type of work:</b> Archaeological monitoring	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> September 2017	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 302 square metres
<b>Location of curating museum:</b> Colchester museum accession code: 2017.131	<b>Funding source:</b> Colchester Borough Council
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related CHER/EHER number(s):</b> CHER: MCC859
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 1171	
<b>Periods represented:</b> Roman, Modern	
<b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b> A programme of archaeological monitoring was carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust at Duncan's Gate, Castle Park, Colchester in September 2017. The monitoring focused on the conservation of collapsed masonry to the south of the gate, which has been interpreted as the remains of the gate tower.  The cleaning of the collapse prior to the reattachment of several tile courses allowed a section be recorded, providing for the first time an accurate depth of the collapsed masonry. Also recorded were two layers of loose soil associated with the construction of the modern retaining wall around the collapse.	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> CAT Report 1022	
<b>CBC monitor:</b> Jess Tipper <b>HE monitor:</b> Sarah Poppy	
<b>Keywords:</b> town wall, gate, tower	<b>Significance:</b> *
<b>Author of summary:</b> Mark Baister	<b>Date of summary:</b> October 2017

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**OASIS ID: colchest3-296227**

### Project details

Project name	Archaeological monitoring and recording at Duncan's Gate, Castle Park, Colchester, CO1 1UN
Short description of the project	A programme of archaeological monitoring was carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust at Duncan's Gate, Castle Park, Colchester in September 2017. The monitoring focused on the conservation of collapsed masonry to the south of the gate, which has been interpreted as the remains of the gate tower. The cleaning of the collapse prior to the reattachment of several tile courses allowed a section be recorded, providing for the first time an accurate depth of the collapsed masonry. Also recorded were two layers of loose soil associated with the construction of the modern retaining wall around the collapse.
Project dates	Start: 06-09-2017 End: 13-09-2017
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	17/09d - Contracting Unit No.
Any associated project reference codes	ECC4086 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes	2017.131 - Museum accession ID
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Scheduled Monument (SM)
Current Land use	Other 8 - Land dedicated to the display of a monument
Monument type	GATEWAY Roman
Significant Finds	POT Roman
Investigation type	"Field observation", "Watching Brief"
Prompt	Conservation/ restoration

### Project location

Country	England
Site location	ESSEX COLCHESTER COLCHESTER Duncan's Gate, Castle Park
Postcode	CO1 1UN



Study area 65.62 Square metres  
 Site coordinates TL 9992 2555 51.892065027618 0.905740934309 51 53 31 N 000 54 20 E Point

### Project creators

Name of Organisation Colchester Archaeological Trust  
 Project brief originator CBC Archaeological Officer  
 Project design originator Chris Lister  
 Project director/manager Mark Baister  
 Project supervisor Mark Baister  
 Type of sponsor/funding body Borough Council

### Project archives

Physical Archive Exists? No  
 Digital Archive recipient Colchester Museum  
 Digital Archive ID 2017.131  
 Digital Contents "Survey"  
 Digital Media available "Images raster / digital photography","Survey","Text"  
 Paper Archive recipient Colchester Museum  
 Paper Archive ID 2017.131  
 Paper Contents "Survey"  
 Paper Media available "Context sheet","Correspondence","Diary","Drawing","Miscellaneous Material","Notebook - Excavation',' Research',' General Notes","Photograph","Plan","Report","Survey "

### Project bibliography 1

Publication type Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)  
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URL <http://cat.essex.ac.uk/summaries/CAT-1171.html>

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