

Archaeological evaluation on land behind Chesterfords Community Centre, Newmarket Road, Great Chesterford, Essex, CB10 1NS

October 2017



by Dr Elliott Hicks

with contributions by Stephen Benfield and Lisa Gray
figures by Ben Holloway and Emma Holloway

fieldwork by Ben Holloway with Nigel Rayner and Elliott Hicks

commissioned by Emma Briggs, Montessori Group

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CAT Report 1188
November 2017

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1 Summary

An archaeological evaluation (three trial-trenches) was carried out at land behind Chesterfords Community Centre, Newmarket Road, Great Chesterford, Essex in advance of the construction of a new pre-school. Archaeological evaluation at this site revealed three undated pits, an undated gully, an undated ditch and a ditch of probable Roman date which may represent the boundary of the Eastern cemetery of the Roman town.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the archive report for an archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching on land behind Chesterfords Community Centre, Newmarket Road, Great Chesterford, Essex which was carried out on 25th to 26th October 2017. The work was commissioned by Emma Briggs of Montessori Group in advance of the construction of a new pre-school adjacent to the Chesterfords Community Centre, and was carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT).

In response to consultation with Essex County Council Place Services (ECCPS), Historic Environment Advisor Richard Havis advised that, in order to establish the archaeological implications of this application, the applicant should be required to commission a scheme of archaeological investigation in accordance with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (DCLG 2012).

All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a *Brief for trial-trenching evaluation*, detailing the required archaeological work, written by Richard Havis (ECCPS 2017), and a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by CAT in response to the brief and agreed with ECCPS (CAT 2017).

In addition to the brief and WSI, all fieldwork and reporting was done in accordance with English Heritage's *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (English Heritage 2006), and with *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14 and 24). This report mirrors standards and practices contained in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (CIfA 2014a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (CIfA 2014b).

3 Archaeological background

The following archaeological background draws on the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) held at Essex County Council, County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex.

The proposed development site lies c 150m to the east of the pre-Flavian (AD 43-60) Roman fort at Great Chesterford built during a time of Roman conquest, military expansion, the Boudiccan revolt and Roman retribution (Medlycott 2011b, p. 18). Despite this, it appears to have been rather short-lived with the ditches backfilled in the post-Boudiccan period (AD 60-70) (*ibid*). As well as the fort ditch, sections of Roman road running north/south and east/west have been investigated with further ditches suggesting possible internal divisions.

The development site is also located on the eastern edge of the later 4th-century walled Roman town (Scheduled Monument 24871). Within the recently published 'The Roman Town of Great Chesterford' (*ibid*) the town wall is projected to run along the western edge of Newmarket Road. The town wall was still visible at the beginning of the 18th century but was practically non-existent by the mid-20th century after it had been robbed for road-mending materials (*ibid*, p. 49). A plan of the town walls was published in 2011 using a combination of archaeological evidence (excavation, geophysics and aerial photography) and educated guesswork (*ibid*, p. 51, Fig 3.26). In plan it was an oval circuit built in the 4th century with an external ditch, enclosing an

area of about 15ha (*ibid*, pp. 51, 182-4, 195-6). Where seen, the foundations of the wall comprised rammed chalk or ragstones and mortar, with the wall itself constructed of flint, rubble, stone and mortar with courses of brick. Antiquarian records state that the standing wall averaged 3.6-4m wide, although as seen during Brinson's 1940s excavations the northern wall foundations averaged 2.7m wide (*ibid*, p. 49-51). Internally, six principal roads and a number of smaller lanes divided the town into twenty-one insula, within which was a central market place, possible octagonal temple and c 20 buildings.

The development site is located within the eastern extra-mural settlement, although as stated by Medlycott, as the walls date to the mid- to late 4th century, at least part of the extra-mural settlement may originally have been an integral part of the main town (*ibid*, p. 57). Evidence from this area is scarce but two of the roads identified by geophysics within the town head in this direction, with one probably continuing eastwards towards the Roman temple (c 720m ENE of the development site) (*ibid*, p. 61).

Archaeological investigations close to the development site suggest that the area was largely used as a cemetery with isolated pockets of occupation (*ibid*). These investigations include (see Fig 1 for locations; Gazetteer numbers from Medlycott 2011b):

- Gazetteer 59: Excavated in 1846 and not precisely located but probably on or close to the modern recreation ground immediately southwest of the development site. Excavations uncovered a large number of Roman burials and urned cremations accompanied by accessory pots. The urns were recorded at 0.15-0.9m below ground level at the time (*ibid*, p. 233)
- Gazetteer 68: Levelling for a new bowling green in 1972 produced a large quantity of human bone as well as some animal bone and samian. A subsequent trench 6m long by 1m wide on the site revealed two rectangular graves, an area of flint and a post-hole (*ibid*, p. 61). Burial 1 was a male, 35-40 years old, buried in coffin with a Nauheim-style brooch, and burial 2 was a woman, 20-30 years old, buried on a bed of fine shingle (*ibid*, p. 237)
- Gazetteer 69: To the west of Gazetteer 68 the EHER records that 'Foundations were found in this field', but no further details are known (*ibid*, p61).

The current planning application was supported with a heritage statement which included the results of a geophysical survey over the development site. The geophysical survey failed to clarify the nature of any surviving archaeological features (Archer Buildings Consultancy Ltd 2017).

4 Aims

Archaeological evaluation was undertaken to ascertain the extent of any surviving archaeological deposits that may exist on site, to determine whether further investigations were required.

5 Results (Figs 2-3)

Three trial-trenches were excavated within the development site. Two layers were recorded. Modern topsoil (L1, c 0.3-0.35m thick, soft, moist dark yellow/brown sandy-loam with occasional large chalk nodules and frequent chalk fleck inclusions) sealed naturally-deposited soils (L2, loose to soft, moist, medium yellow/orange/brown sandy-silt with small, medium and large chalk nodules, small, medium and large flint nodules and chalk fleck inclusions, encountered at a depth of c 0.3-0.35m below current ground level).

Trench 1a (T1a): 15m long by 1.8m wide

Undated pit F1 measured 0.75m in width and 0.28m in depth.

Trench 1b (T1b): 15m long by 1.8m wide

Possible Roman ditch F2 was aligned WNW-ESE and measured 1.03m in width and 0.1m in depth. Undated pit F3 measured 1.91m in width and 0.27m in depth. Undated pit F6 was uncovered. The precise dimensions of this feature could not be determined as it extended beyond the limit of excavation, but the exposed feature measured 0.58m in width and 0.19m in depth.



Photograph 1 T1b trench shot – looking west northwest

Trench 2 (T2): 30m long by 1.8m wide

Undated gully F4 was aligned N-S and measured 0.68m in width and 0.17m in depth.



Photograph 2 T2 trench shot – looking northeast

Trench 3 (T3): 30m long by 1.8m wide

Undated ditch F5 was aligned NNE-SSW and measured 1.28m in width and 0.26m in depth.

6 Finds

by Stephen Benfield

Only a very few finds were recovered. All of these are associated with two trenches (T1a and T1b). The finds are catalogued and described by context and finds number below. The small size and abraded nature of most of the finds makes identification and close-dating difficult. Given the proximity of previously recorded human burials (inhumations) to the site a single piece of bone recovered was examined by Adam Wightman and his comments are incorporated in this report.

Finds were recovered from two features, both located in T1b. A very small sherd of pottery of probable Roman date was recovered from the fill of ditch F2 (finds no. 2). The nature of this sherd would indicate it is residual in this context. The corroded shaft of a small iron nail and piece of bone also came from the fill of this ditch. The bone is almost without doubt animal, probably sheep. It can be noted that the bone itself is in a moderately good condition, although it does not appear to be recent is of some age. The only other stratified find comes from the fill of pit F3 (finds no. 3). This is a small piece of corroded iron and is not closely-dated.

The largest single find is a piece of abraded brick (c 45 mm-50 mm thick) from the topsoil layer L1 (finds no 1) which is probably Roman. A small piece of very hard brick/tile was also recovered from L1 (finds no. 4). This might be a piece of peg-tile (current from the medieval period onward) but is not closely dated.

Trench 1a (T1a)

Topsoil L1 (1)

Ceramic building material: Piece from the end of a brick (c 45-50 mm thick), abraded, orange sandy fabric with some dark red inclusions and pale silt/clay inclusions. Presumed Roman but not closely dated.

Trench 1b (T1b)

Ditch F2 (2)

Pottery: Small sherd (1 g), some abrasion to surfaces, sandy dark grey fabric, presumed Roman.

Metal (iron): Corroded shaft from an iron nail (45 mm), possibly near complete length but with head missing.

Bone: Single piece (6 g) in relatively good condition, broken at both ends, almost certainly animal and most probably part of a sheep tibia.

Pit F3 (3)

Metal (iron): Single small, corroded piece (4 g) lgth. 25 mm, wth. 10 mm, thck. 4 mm (not closely-dated)

Other: Two small pieces of natural stone recovered as thought possibly to be pottery (discarded).

Topsoil L1 (4)

Ceramic building material: Single, small abraded piece (6 g) in very hard sandy orange fabric. Possibly peg-tile (common from the 14th century onwards) but not closely dated.

7 Environmental assessment

by Lisa Gray MSc MA ACIfA Archaeobotanist

Introduction – aims and objectives

One sample was presented for assessment taken from a ditch provisionally dated as Roman.

The aims of this assessment are to determine the significance and potential of the plant macro-remains in the sample, consider their use in providing information about diet, craft, medicine, crop-husbandry, feature function and environment.

Sampling and processing methods

A 40 litre sample was taken and processed by Colchester Archaeological Trust. It was processed using a Siraf-type flotation device. Flot was collected in a 300-micron mesh sieve then dried.

Once with the author the flot was scanned under a low powered stereo-microscope with a magnification range of 10 to 40x. The whole flots were examined. The abundance, diversity and state of preservation of eco- and artefacts in each sample were recorded. A magnet was passed across each flot to record the presence or absence of magnetised material or hammerscale.

Identifications were made using uncharred reference material (author's own and the Northern European Seed Reference Collection at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London) and reference manuals (such as Beijerinck 1947; Cappers *et al.* 2006; Charles 1984; Fuller 2007; Hillman 1976; Jacomet 2006). Nomenclature for plants is taken from Stace (Stace 2010). Latin names are given once and the common names used thereafter.

At this stage, to allow comparison between samples, numbers have also been estimated but where only a very low number of items are present they have been counted. Identifiable charred wood >4mm in diameter has been separated from charcoal flecks. Fragments this size are easier to break to reveal the cross-sections and diagnostic features necessary for identification and are less likely to be blown or unintentionally moved around the site (Asouti 2006, 31; Smart and Hoffman, 1988, 178-179). Charcoal flecks <4mm diameter have been quantified but not recommended for further analysis unless twigs or roundwood fragments larger than 2mmØ were present.

Results

Sample	Finds No.	Sample description	volume (L)Bulk sample	Flot volume (ml)	Charred Grain			>4mmØCharred wood	<4mmØCharred wood	Charred plant tissue	Dried waterlogged Seeds			Modern root/rhizomes	Terrestrial mollusca	Ceciliodes
					a	d	p	a	a		a	a	d			
1	5	F2 Roman? Ditch	40	20	1	1	2	-	2	-	1	1	3	3	3	3

Table 1 Plant remains

Key: a = abundance [1 = occasional 1-10; 2 = moderate 11-100; and 3 = abundant >100]
d = diversity [1 = low 1-4 taxa types; 2 = moderate 5-10; 3 = high]
p = preservation [1 = poor (family level only); 2 = moderate (genus); 3 = good (species identification possible)]

The plant remains (Table 1)

This sample produced a small charred assemblage consisting of charcoal flecks, low numbers of poorly preserved barley (*Hordeum* sp.), possible oat (*Avena* sp.) grains and a poorly preserved pea/vetch (*Pisum/Vicia* sp.) cotyledon. Low numbers of dried waterlogged seeds of the ruderals black bindweed (*Fallopia convolvulus*) and fool's parsley (*Aethusa cynapium*).

Fauna

Seeds of terrestrial snails, particularly those of and *Ceciliodes acicula* (Müller) were present.

Artefactual remains

No artefacts were present

Discussion

Biases in recovery, residuality, contamination

The likelihood of bioturbation and stratigraphic movement in this sampled context is clear in the presence of modern root/rhizome fragments and terrestrial snails, particularly *Ceciliodes acicula* (Müller). This snail burrows well below the ground surface (Kerney & Cameron 1979, 149). Where roots, worms and snails are present in a sample with a small number of dried waterlogged seeds and charred plant remains it is possible that these durable charred plant remains survived being moved between contexts by human action and bioturbation so cannot be properly interpreted unless radiocarbon dates are gained from the plant macro-remains themselves. (Pelling *et al.* 2015, 96).

Quality and type of preservation

Charred and desiccated plant macro-remains were found in these samples. No plant remains were preserved by mineralisation or waterlogging.

Charring of plant macrofossils occurs when plant material is heated under '...reducing conditions...' where oxygen is largely excluded (Boardman and Jones 1990, 2) leaving a carbon skeleton resistant to biological and chemical decay (English Heritage 2011, 17). These conditions can occur in a charcoal clamp, the centre of a bonfire or pit or in an oven or when a building burns down with the roof excluding the oxygen from the fire (Reynolds, 1979, 57).

The desiccated plant remains were seeds that had no internal structure surviving and very tough testas. Plant remains like this can survive changing preservation conditions and survive many years, but their actual date could only be determined by radiocarbon dating because these seeds are small enough to be moved in the soil by bioturbation.

Potential and significance of these samples to provide information about food, crop-processing, craft, medicine, trade, feature function and environment

The charred plant-remains are of the type likely to be found in Roman contexts but, due to the possibility of stratigraphic movement, unless the charred plant remains are radiocarbon dated not much more can be inferred about them.

Recommendations for further work

No further archaeobotanical work is recommended on these samples unless radiocarbon dating of the charcoal is required, for which identifications will have to be made. Further whole-earth bulk sampling may reveal more charred and possibly mineralised plant remains.

8 Discussion

Archaeological evaluation at this site revealed three undated pits, an undated gully, an undated ditch and a ditch of probable Roman date. In view of the proximity of the site

to two Roman burials uncovered some 20m southeast in 1972, and to several burials and cremation urns discovered some 115m further to the southeast in the mid-19th century (Medlycott 2011b, pp. 61, 237, 233), it is possible that the ?Roman ditch might have formed a boundary defining the eastern cemetery area of the Roman town postulated by Medlycott (*ibid.*, pp. 233-7). The fact that the feature was not detected in T3, however, suggests that it terminates prior to this point, and serves to qualify such speculation.

9 Acknowledgements

CAT thanks Emma Briggs and the Montessori Group for commissioning and funding the work. The project was managed by C Lister, fieldwork was carried out by B Holloway with N Rayner and E Hicks. Figures are by Ben Holloway and Emma Holloway. The project was monitored for Essex County Council by Richard Havis.

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

- | | | |
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| ClfA | 2014b | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i> |
| DCLG | 2012 | <i>National Planning Policy Framework</i> |
| ECCPS | 2017 | <i>Brief for trial trenching evaluation land behind Chesterfords Community Centre, Great Chesterford</i> |
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11 Abbreviations and glossary

CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
CBM	ceramic building material, ie brick/tile
ClfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
context	specific location of finds on an archaeological site
ECC	Essex County Council
ECCHEA	Essex County Council Historic Environment Advisor
ECCPS	Essex County Council Place Services
EHER	Essex Historic Environment Record
feature (F)	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain: can contain 'contexts'
layer (L)	distinct or distinguishable deposit (layer) of material
modern	period from c AD 1800 to the present
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c 1500
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
OASIS	Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations, http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main
peg-tile	rectangular thin tile with peg-hole(s) used mainly for roofing, first appeared c AD1200 and continued in use to present day, but commonly post-medieval to modern
post-medieval	from c AD 1500 to c 1800
residual	something out of its original context, eg a Roman coin in a modern pit
section	(abbreviation sx or Sx) vertical slice through feature/s or layer/s
wsi	written scheme of investigation

12 Contents of archive

Finds: None retained

Paper and digital record

One A4 document wallet containing:

The report (CAT Report 1188)

ECC evaluation brief, CAT written scheme of investigation

Original site record (feature and layer sheets, finds record, plans)

Site digital photos and log, architectural plans, attendance register, risk assessment

13 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 Saffron Walden Museum under accession code: SAFWM 2017.117.

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Distribution list:

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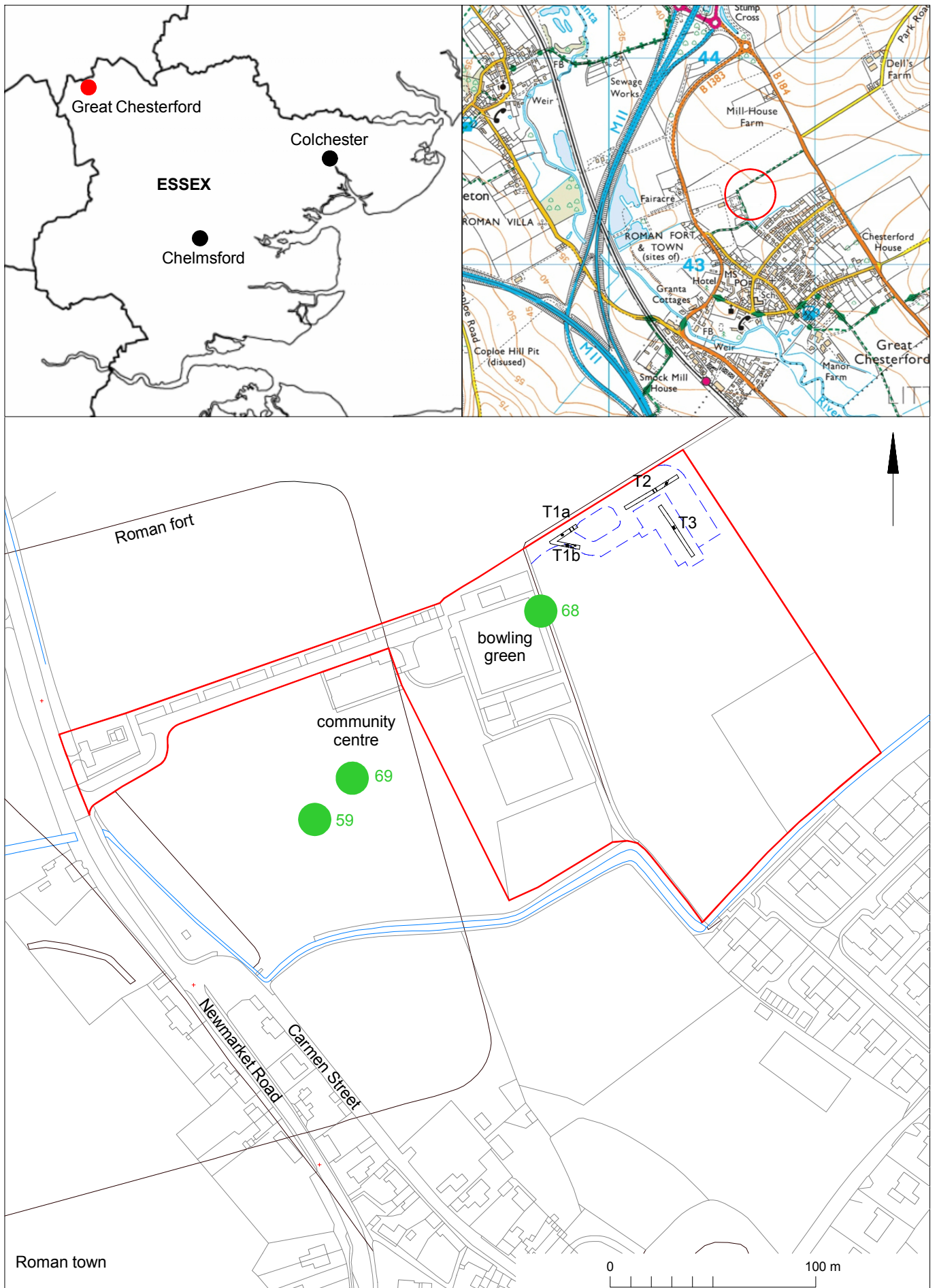
email: lp@catuk.org

Checked by: Philip Crummy

Date: 31.9.2017

Appendix 1 Context list

Context Number	Finds Number	Feature Type	Description	Date
L1	1	Topsoil	Soft, moist dark yellow/brown sandy-loam with occasional large chalk nodules and frequent chalk fleck inclusions	Modern
L2	4	Natural	Loose to soft, moist, medium yellow/orange/brown sandy-silt with small, medium and large chalk nodules, small, medium and large flint nodules and chalk fleck inclusions	Post-glacial
F1	-	Pit	Medium yellow/orange/brown sandy-silt with occasional chalk fleck inclusions, occasional small stones and occasional medium to large flint nodules	Undated
F2	2, 5	Ditch	Loose, soft, dry medium orange/brown sandy-silt	?Roman
F3	3	Pit	Soft, moist, dark yellow/brown sandy-loam	Undated
F4	-	Gully	Firm, moist, medium brown sandy-silt with occasional medium to large stones and occasional charcoal fleck inclusions	Undated
F5	-	Ditch	Medium yellow/brown sandy-silt with occasional small stones and occasional medium to large flint nodules	Undated
F6	-	Pit	Firm, dry, medium brown sandy-silt	Undated



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Fig 1 Site location

 location of Medlycott 2011 Gazetteer sites (see p2 for details)

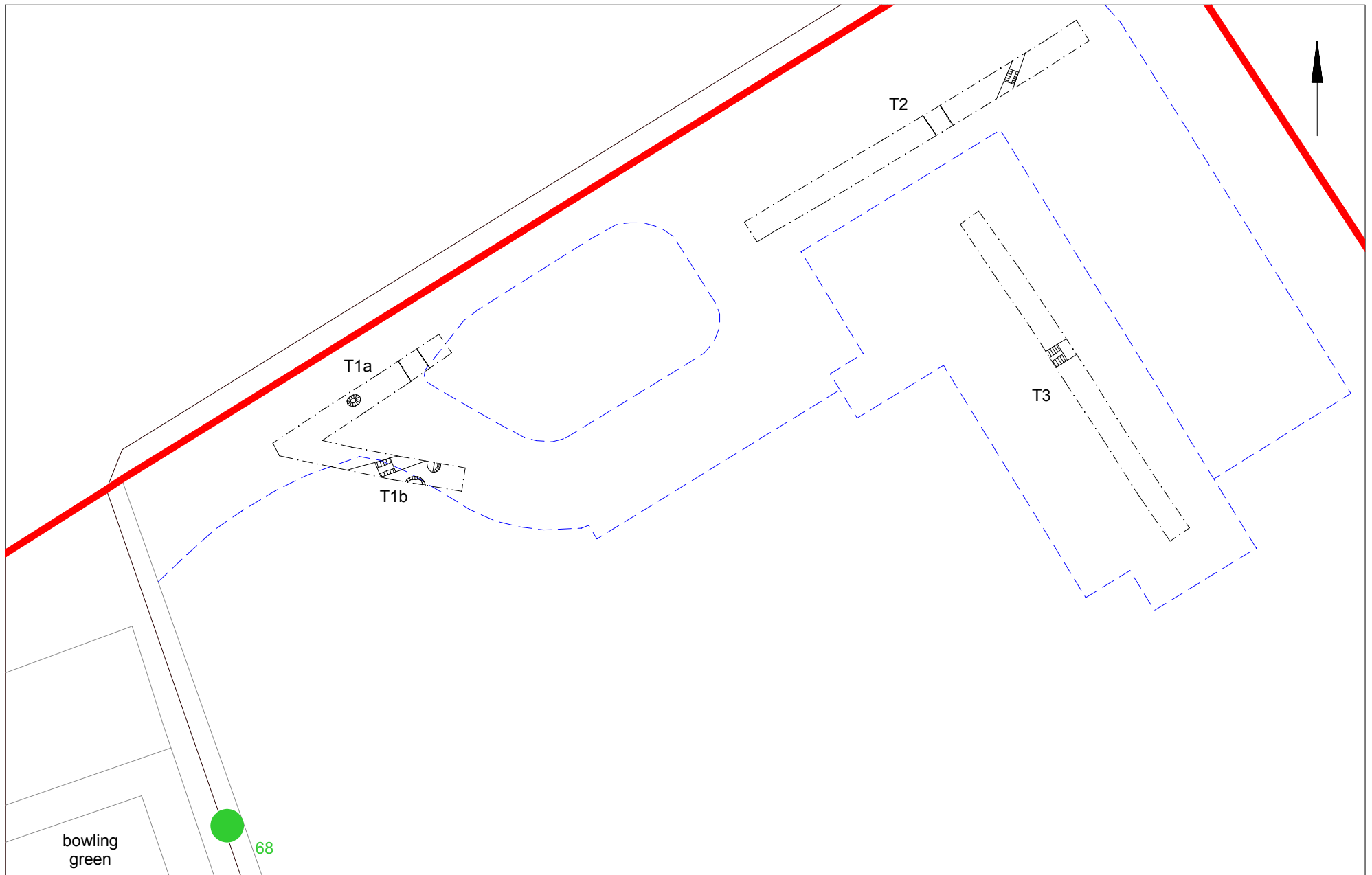


Fig 2 Results

● location of Medlycott 2011 Gazetteer sites (see p2 for details)

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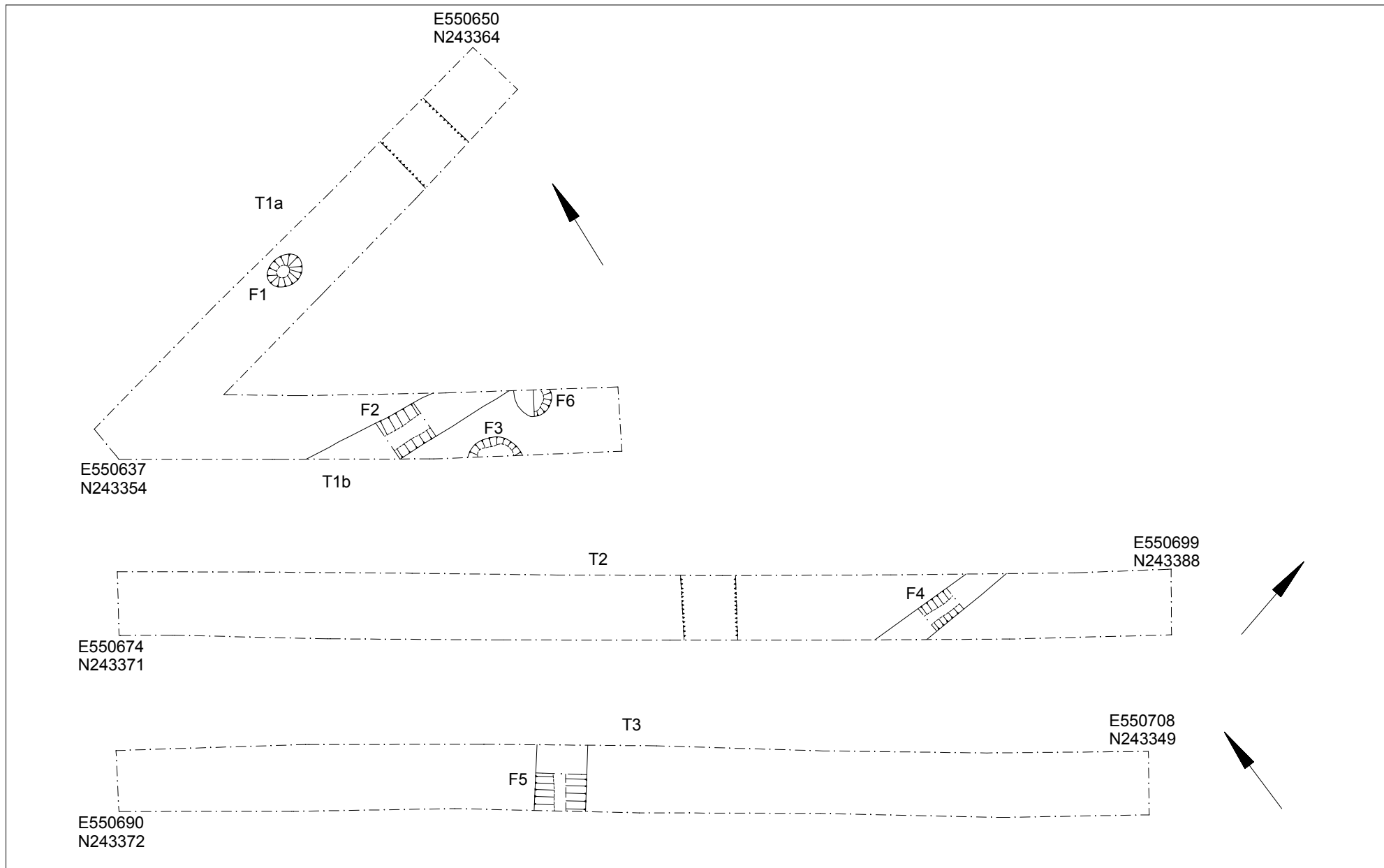


Fig 3 Trench plans

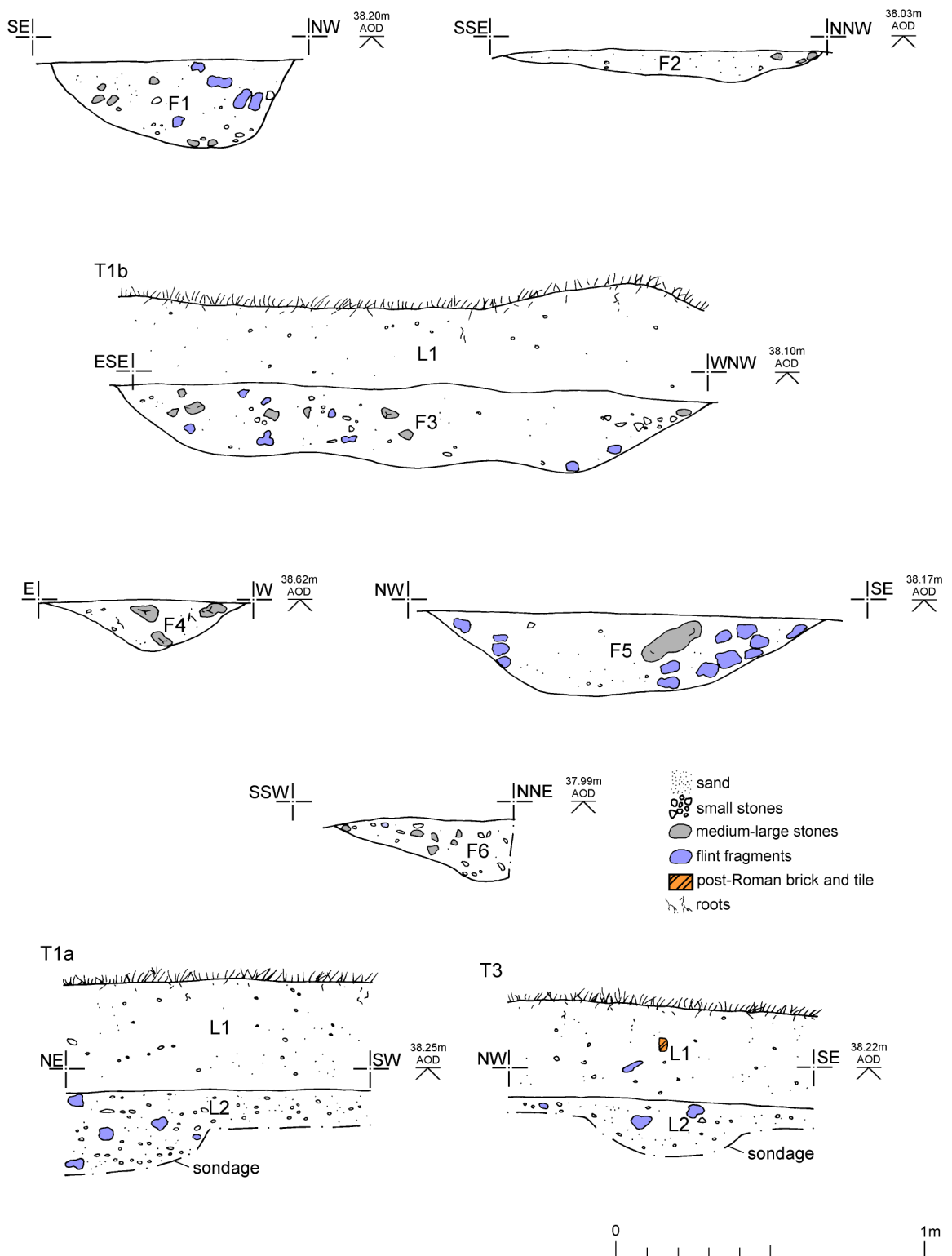


Fig 4 Feature and representative sections.

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OASIS ID: colchest3-299114

Project details

Project name	Archaeological evaluation land behind Chesterfords Community Centre, Newmarket Road, Great Chesterford, Essex, CB10 1NS
Short description of the project	An archaeological evaluation (three trial-trenches) was carried out at land behind Chesterfords Community Centre, Newmarket Road, Great Chesterford, Essex in advance of the construction of a new pre-school. Archaeological evaluation at this site revealed three undated pits, an undated gully, an undated ditch and a ditch of probable Roman date which may represent the boundary of the Eastern cemetery of the Roman town.
Project dates	Start: 25-10-2017 End: 26-10-2017
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	17/10I - Contracting Unit No.
Any associated project reference codes	UTT/17/2228/FUL - Planning Application No.
Any associated project reference codes	GC67 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes	SAFWM: 2017.117 - Museum accession ID
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Cultivated Land 4 - Character Undetermined
Monument type	PIT Uncertain
Monument type	GULLY Uncertain
Monument type	DITCH Uncertain
Monument type	PIT Roman
Significant Finds	CBM Roman
Significant Finds	POTTERY Roman
Significant Finds	IRON NAIL Uncertain

Significant Finds	ANIMAL BONE Roman
Significant Finds	CBM Uncertain
Methods & techniques	"Sample Trenches"
Development type	Public building (e.g. school, church, hospital, medical centre, law courts etc.)
Prompt	Planning condition
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)

Project location

Country	England
Site location	ESSEX UTTLESFORD GREAT CHESTERFORD land behind Chesterfords Community Centre, Newmarket Road
Postcode	CB10 1NS
Study area	3.5 Hectares
Site coordinates	TL 50677 43309 52.067182166858 0.198477474705 52 04 01 N 000 11 54 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 37.77m Max: 38.61m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Colchester Archaeological Trust
Project brief originator	HEM Team Officer, ECC
Project design originator	Laura Pooley
Project director/manager	Chris Lister
Project supervisor	Ben Holloway
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer

Project archives

Digital Archive recipient	Saffron Walden Museum
Digital Archive ID	SAFWM: 2017.117
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography", "Survey"
Paper Archive recipient	Saffron Walden Museum
Paper Archive ID	SAFWM: 2017.117
Paper Media available	"Context sheet", "Drawing", "Miscellaneous Material", "Photograph", "Report"

Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
------------------	---

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