

**An archaeological watching brief on
cable trenches at the putting green
and outside Hollytrees Museum,
Upper Castle Park and outside
the Natural History Museum,
Colchester, Essex**

May 2002

**on behalf of
Colchester Borough Council**

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Essex Heritage Conservation Record summary sheet

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1 Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out on two areas of cable trenching in Upper Castle Park, Colchester, Essex: the putting green and outside Hollytrees Museum. Another length of cabling was monitored on the other side of the High Street, just outside the Natural History Museum. Residual Roman pottery and tile were recorded but no features of archaeological significance were observed, and it is thought that the trenches were not dug deep enough to impact archaeological deposits.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) during the excavation of trenches for cable-laying in two areas of Upper Castle Park and one area just outside the Natural History Museum. The work was carried out at the request of Colchester Borough Council, on the 13th, 15th and 27th May 2002.
- 2.2 The first two cable trenches (T1 and T2) were dug on the putting green which is located to the north-east of the castle keep and north of the play area, on a slight north-facing slope at National Grid Reference or NGR TM 0002 2540 (c). The third trench (T3) was dug to the north-east of Hollytrees Museum which is located 90m to the south-east of the castle keep, at NGR TL 9996 2527 (c) (Fig 1). The fourth trench (T4) was dug on the other side of the High Street, just outside the Natural History Museum, at NGR TL 9993 2521.
- 2.3 Scheduled Ancient Monument consent was given for the lengths of cable to be dug with the condition for an archaeological watching brief.
- 2.4 This report follows the standards set out in the Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1999, updated 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996, updated 2002), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1999).

3 Archaeological background (Fig 2)

- 3.1 The Castle Park is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument because of its archaeological significance. The annotated plan published in Crummy 1992 and reproduced here as Figure 3 is mainly the product of substantial archaeological investigations undertaken in the park by Wheeler and Hull in the 1920s.
- 3.2 In relation to the Roman town, the Hollytrees site is believed to stand at the south-west corner of Insula 23 with a north-south street underlying the western fringe of the property. The Roman temple dedicated to the Emperor Claudius survives in part below the castle. In the medieval period, the Hollytrees site lay just beyond the castle's inner bailey ditch. A 1998 gradiometer survey on the Hollytrees rear lawn produced a group of anomalies believed to be tree pits, perhaps associated with the documented tree planting by Charles Gray in the 18th century.
- 3.3 The modern putting green is situated within Insula 7 of the Roman town in an area where Roman houses with tessellated pavements have been excavated. A Roman building once identified as a mithraeum but now thought to have been a waterworks has been identified to the east of the play area (Hull 1958, 107-113). In the Norman period, the remains of the Roman temple were used as foundations for the castle. The ditch enclosing the outer bailey to the castle keep extends to the west of the site.
- 3.4 The church of All Saints is now the Natural History Museum. The earliest part of the church is the nave which dates from the late 12th century. The chancel dates from the 14th century and the west tower, with its knapped flintwork, was added two centuries later. The church was restored in the mid 19th century.

4 Aims and objectives

The aim of the fieldwork was to record any archaeological finds, features or deposits disturbed by the excavation of the cable trenches.

5 Methods

- 5.1 The work was undertaken by Howard Brooks, Kate Orr and Laura Pooley of CAT. The trenches were excavated by the contractor using a mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket. Changes in soil layers and features were recorded on pro-forma CAT record sheets. Features were cleaned by hand and recorded in section at a scale of 1:10.
- 5.2 Finds were retrieved and assigned finds bag numbers using pro-forma CAT record sheets. All finds were washed and bagged and then identified by specialists (see Appendix). All finds that were retained were marked, except for the animal bone and tile.

6 Results

6.1 T1 and T2 – the putting green (Figs 1 & 3)

6.1.1 An L-shaped trench (T1) was dug along the hedge and the wall and was 140m in length. It was 400mm wide and 500mm deep. 500mm of turf and grey-brown silty loam topsoil with tree-root activity (Layer or L1) was recorded along the length of the trench. This layer contained Roman pottery, brick and *tesserae* as well as medieval pottery, modern pottery and glass. The extreme western end of Trench 1 was dug to 900mm in depth and here L1 overlaid L2, a yellow-brown clayey silt with abundant gravel, starting at 500mm below ground-level and reaching to the bottom of the trench. L2 contained Roman tile.

6.1.2 500mm of turf and grey-brown silty loam topsoil with tree-root activity (L1) was recorded along the length of T2 as in T1, containing the same material. In some areas of T2, L1 topsoil came down onto a mid brown silty loam with some rubble and gravel (L3). In one area of T2 a layer of light brown-yellow silty sand was recorded under the topsoil, 250mm below ground-level (L4). Underneath L4, a dark brown sandy silt which included modern material (L5) was recorded to the bottom of the trench.

At the extreme southern end of T2, modern orange sand mottled with topsoil was recorded (L6), sealed by topsoil (L1). This layer contained lumps of concrete and an old telephone cable.

6.1.3 No features of archaeological significance were observed in T1 or T2.

6.2 T3 – Hollytrees (Figs 1 and 4)

A 40m-long trench (T3) was dug from the eastern side of Hollytrees Museum to the boundary of the sensory garden to the north-east. The trench, which was 400mm wide and 500-600mm deep, was dug through a flower bed, a path and the lawn. Dark brown sandy loam topsoil (L7) was recorded in the flower bed and under the turf and the asphalt of the path (L8) to a depth of approximately 500mm. This topsoil continued under the lawn, but root activity was recorded in places. Where the trench was dug to a depth of over 500mm, a light brown silty clay layer (L9) with charcoal and mortar flecks was visible below L7. L9 contained abundant peg-tile.

Two features were recorded in this trench. A spread of loose brick and peg-tile with mortar lumps and oystershell was recorded 9m north of the north face of Hollytrees where the lawn slopes down to the north (Feature or F1). The rubble started 200mm below ground-level and was mixed in with topsoil. It could have been dumped here to terrace the site or alternatively it could be rubble from a demolished building

nearby or from a wall to the former garden for the blind here. The bricks were fairly modern in appearance and the feature was right under the topsoil, so it probably does not represent a feature of any antiquity.

Twenty metres north of Hollytrees Museum, where the lawn flattens out, a spread of loose septaria rubble was recorded under the topsoil, 300mm below ground-level (F2). Although the stone was loose and unmortared, it did appear to have an edge and to be aligned NE-SW. This feature was cut into L10, a mottled light brown and mid brown sandy clayey silt with charcoal flecks. L10 and F2 had Roman pottery mixed in with them and no later artefacts. However, the feature is unlikely to be Roman as it is too close to the ground surface and the area has been heavily disturbed by modern landscaping.

6.3 T4 – the Natural History Museum (Fig 1)

A 12m-long trench was dug from the church door to just past the church gate, stopping short of the pavement to the High Street. The trench was only dug to a depth of 200mm and nothing was observed except for topsoil and pavement foundation.

7 Discussion

During the watching brief, no features of archaeological significance were observed in the putting green trenches or the Natural History Museum trench. The trench dug outside Hollytrees Museum produced evidence of modern landscaping or buildings plus a spread of loose septaria which is unlikely to be a Roman wall as it was too shallow (see Appendix). However, the septaria may have originally come from a nearby Roman building and was in a secondary context here. Roman tile and pottery was found in the topsoil of the putting green trenches, and this is as expected given the Roman buildings known in the immediate vicinity. Natural ground was not reached and the trenches were not dug deep enough to impact archaeological features

8 Archive deposition

The full archive is held at the Colchester Archaeological Trust, 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF and will be deposited with Colchester Museums within twelve months of the completion of the project under accession code 2002.105.

9 Acknowledgements

The Colchester Archaeological Trust is grateful to the following for their co-operation during the project:

Colchester Borough Council for funding the work
Geoff Welsh, Colchester Borough Council
Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council
Colchester Borough Council Service Team
Deborah Priddy, English Heritage Ancient Monument's Inspector

10 References

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- Cotter, John, 2000 *Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-86*, Colchester Archaeological Report **9**
- Crummy, P, 1992 *Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School, and other sites in Colchester, 1971-85*, Colchester Archaeological Report **6**
- Hull, R, 1958 *Roman Colchester*
- Shimmin, D, 1992 'Castle Park', in Crummy 1992, 368-73

11 Glossary

context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
Roman	the period from AD 43 to around AD 430
septaria	Roman building stone

12 Site data

Site context list

Trench	Context	Description	Context date
T1 and T2	L1	Turf and grey brown silty loam topsoil with root activity in places, and small to medium rounded and angular stones	modern
T1, west end only	L2	Mid brown clayey silt with abundant gravel	undated
T2	L3	Mid brown silty loam with some rubble and gravel	modern
T2, middle of trench	L4	Light brown/yellow silty sand	modern
T2, middle of trench	L5	Dark brown sandy silt, including modern material	modern
T2, extreme southern end	L6	Modern orange sand, mottled with L1 or L3, contains lumps of concrete	modern
T3	L7	Dark brown sandy loam topsoil with occasional small stones	modern
T3	L8	Asphalt and hogging for path	modern
T3	L9	Light brown silty clay with mortar and charcoal flecks and abundant peg-tile	post-medieval or modern
T3	L10	Light brown mottled with mid brown sandy clayey silt with charcoal flecks and Roman pottery	Roman?
T3	F1	Spread of brick and mortar rubble under and mixed in with the topsoil L7, including large frogless bricks and peg-tile	post-medieval
T3	F2	Spread of loose unmortared septaria under topsoil L7, cut into L10	post-medieval or modern

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Appendix: Report on the finds

by Howard Brooks

This is a mixed group of finds. Previous archaeological investigations in the Castle Park have shown that Roman layers are sometimes found very close to modern ground (within 45cm, to the west of the children's play area: Shimmin 1992, 370), but that elsewhere there is a deep covering of post-medieval topsoil over Roman deposits. Trenches cut through the Castle Park are therefore expected to find Roman material occurring residually in post-medieval or modern contexts. If undisturbed Roman contexts do survive, they could be anywhere below 450mm or so below modern ground.

This group of finds matches that pattern: ie Roman material in contexts dated by clay pipes or modern glass or pottery. None of them were really deep enough to be definite Roman contexts.

None of the finds are unusual or unexpected. The *tesserae* and the flue tile suggest the proximity of Roman tessellated pavements and a Roman hypocaust respectively, and the medieval pottery is all local Colchester-type ware. There are several pieces of flowerpot – not surprising in a park – and a fragment of a local ginger beer bottle.

Notes:

Roman tiles as in Black 1992. Post-Roman pottery types after Cotter 2000.

U/S = unstratified

Italics = Roman

i>

Table 1: List of finds by context.

Find bag no	Context	Quantity	Weight in g	Description	Date
1	Trench 1, L1	1	80	glass bottle base	post-medieval/modern
1	Trench 1, L1	4	74	animal bones	?
1	Trench 1, L1	1	53	<i>opus signinum</i> lump	Roman
1	Trench 1, L1	2	875	<i>tegula</i> flanges	Roman
1	Trench 1, L1	3	569	tile	Roman
1	Trench 1, L1	2	205	<i>imbrex</i>	Roman
1	Trench 1, L1	1	1012	brick	Roman
1	Trench 1, L1	2	117	peg-tile	post-medieval
1	Trench 1, L1	4	82	indeterminate tile	?
1	Trench 1, L1	1	3	unidentified sherd	?
1	Trench 1, L1	1	45	flowerpot (Fabric 51b)	19th-20th centuries
1	Trench 1, L1	1	202	amphora	Roman
1	Trench 1, L1	1	58	buff flagon	Roman
1	Trench 1, L1	2	14	grey ware	Roman
1	Trench 1, L1	1	6	white ware	Roman
2	Trench 2, L3	1	350	<i>tegula</i> flange	Roman
2	Trench 2, L3	1	216	<i>imbrex</i>	Roman
2	Trench 2, L3	2	50	red <i>tessera</i>	Roman
2	Trench 2, L3	2	26	tile piece – <i>tessera</i> ?	Roman
3	Trench 2, L1	2	20	clear bottle glass	very modern
3	Trench 2, L1	1	48	green glass bottle neck	post-medieval/modern
3	Trench 2, L1	1	24	animal bone	?
3	Trench 2, L1	2	224	tile	Roman
3	Trench 2, L1	1	18	red <i>tessera</i> ?	Roman?
3	Trench 2, L1	1	49	fragment of <i>tegula</i> flange?	Roman?

3	Trench 2, L1	1	127	strap handle in Fabric 21a Colchester-type ware	15th-16th centuries
3	Trench 2, L1	1	5	sherd Fabric 21a	15th-16th centuries
3	Trench 2, L1	2	32	grey ware sherds	Roman
3	Trench 2, L1	1	6	samian sherd	Roman
3	Trench 2, L1	1	13	modern stoneware (Fabric 45m) ginger beer bottle sherd with stamped MALL[...] and COLC[hester]	modern
3	Trench 2, L1	1	15	glass bottle stopper	Victorian?
3	Trench 2, L1	3	34	flowerpot (Fabric 51b) sherds	19th-20th centuries
3	Trench 2, L1	4	41	Fabric 48d sherds	19th-20th centuries
4	Trench 2, L4 or L5	1	355	Combed flue tile, 18mm thick (Black type B10)	Roman
4	Trench 2, L4 or L5	1	5	clay-pipe stem fragment	post-medieval
5	T2, U/S?			metal object	?
6	Trench 3, F2	1	236	stamped mortarium rim fragment	Roman
6	Trench 3, F2	1	383	<i>tegula</i> flange fragment	Roman
6	Trench 3, F2	1	202	brick	Roman
6	Trench 3, F2	1	211	<i>tegula</i> flat piece	Roman
6	Trench 3, F2	1	80	<i>imbrex</i>	Roman
7	Trench 3, L10	3	39	Roman sherds	Roman
8	Trench 3, U/S	1	66	pig jawbone (discarded)	?
8	Trench 3, U/S	1	13	grey ware sherd	Roman
9	Trench 3, F1	1	141	peg-tile with square hole	post-medieval (discarded)
9	Trench 3, F1	1	655	frogless brick 55mm thick	post-medieval (discarded)

Essex Heritage Conservation Record/ *Essex Archaeology and History*

Summary sheet

Site name/address: the putting green and Hollytrees Museum, Upper Castle Park and outside the Natural History Museum, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TM 0002 2540 (c), TL 9996 2527 (c), TL 9993 2521	Site code: 2002.105
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: May 2002	Size of area investigated: 140m, 40m, 12m
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Colchester Borough Council
Further seasons anticipated? None	Related EHCR nos:
Final report: CAT Report 191 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>An archaeological watching brief was carried out on two areas of cable trenching in Upper Castle Park: the putting green and Hollytrees Museum. Residual Roman pottery and tile were recorded but no features of archaeological significance were observed, and it is thought that the trenches were not dug deep enough to impact archaeological deposits. A length of cable trenching was also monitored outside the Natural History Museum opposite Castle Park, but this was only 200mm deep and only modern deposits were observed.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: CAT Report 132, CAT Report 190	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: August 2002