

**An archaeological watching brief on
geotechnical test-pits at
Colchester Garrison
in Essex
March 2003**

**report prepared by
Carl Crossan**

**on behalf of
Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd**

CAT project ref.: 03/3B
NGR: TL 992 232 (centred)
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1 Summary

A watching brief was carried out on seven 1.2m-deep test-pits which were dug by ground engineers in various locations at Colchester Garrison in Essex. No archaeologically significant features were recorded. A residual fragment of Roman brick was recovered from modern topsoil in woods adjoining Somme Road.

2 Introduction

This report contains a record of the soil stratigraphy observed during a watching brief undertaken by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on a series of pits dug by ground-engineering consultants Norwest Holst in March 2003. In total, this phase of geotechnical survey work involved twelve boreholes and ten test-pits at various locations in Colchester Garrison. Of these, five test-pits and two hand-dug starter pits for one borehole were selected for archaeological monitoring. The pit location numbers (Test-pit or TP310, Borehole or BH309 etc) quoted below correspond to those used in the engineers' investigation.

3 Archaeological background

This small watching brief is part of an on-going series of archaeological investigation and monitoring operations prompted by a major PFI redevelopment scheme for Colchester Garrison. The scheme affects a large expanse of MoD-owned property to the south of the town centre, within which the main areas of archaeological interest span the Bronze Age to the Roman and medieval periods.

The observed pits were located in areas where the results of general survey and exploratory excavation currently include evidence of late Bronze Age/early Iron Age occupation, elements of an early Iron age landscape, and extensive late Iron Age and Roman field systems. A Roman villa/farmstead was discovered at Kirkee McMunn Barracks in 1994 (Shimmin 1998) and a rectangular enclosure south of Lordswood Road is possibly a late Iron Age burial site (CAR 11, map fig 6.1). The archaeology and history of the garrison land are discussed in detail in the CAT desk-based assessment (CAT Report 97) produced in October 2000. The results of recent fieldwork are presented and reviewed in the 2002 CAT Reports 184, 197, 203, 205, 206 and 207.

4 Aim

The aim of monitoring was to ensure that any archaeologically significant features or finds observed during the digging of the pits would be fully recorded, in order to augment the results from earlier investigations in the respective areas.

5 Methods

The watching brief was conducted in accordance with the standards set out in Colchester 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 Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standards and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1999).

6 Results

6.1 Borehole starter-pits

Two 32cm-diameter pits, 1.7m apart, were hand-dug in a grassed area east of the Musket Club car park, off Lordswood Road. Their locations are indicated on Figure 1 as BH309A and BH309B. The pits, which were dug to a depth of 1.2m, were situated close to the likely course of an early enclosure ditch as plotted from aerial photographs of cropmarks taken shortly before the development of the area (Fig 1).

The observed soil stratigraphy is described below.

BH309A (NGR: TL 9841 2255)

Layer or L1 Dark greyish brown sandy silt loam. Modern turf and topsoil
(0 to 10cm overall depth)

L2 Mixed, mainly a greyish brown sandy silt loam with varying amounts of sandy gravel. A wooden setting-out post was found lying horizontally in this material at an overall depth of 45cm. Modern make-up, similar to L2 in BH309B
(10cm to 50cm overall depth)

L3 Reddish brown coarse silty sand with high content of gravel. Natural subsoil
(from 50cm to 1.2m depth limit of excavation).

BH309B (NGR: TL 9841 2255)

L1 Dark greyish brown sandy silt loam. Modern turf and topsoil
(0 to 12cm overall depth)

L2 Mixed, mainly a greyish brown sandy silt loam with varying amounts of sandy gravel. Modern make-up, similar to L2 in BH309A
(12cm to 35cm overall depth)

L3 Mixed, similar to L2, but more uniform and with a siltier texture. Occasional darker horizontal lenses were noted in the lowest 30cm of this material. Make-up or feature fill, date uncertain
(35cm to 1.1m overall depth)

L4 Reddish brown coarse silty sand with high content of gravel. Natural subsoil
(from 1.1m to 1.2m depth limit of excavation).

6.2 Test-pits (Fig 2)

The test-pits, all 3m long x 90cm wide, were dug to a depth of 1.2m using a machine which was fitted with a toothless digging bucket.

TP302 - field north of Berechurch Hall Road (NGR: TL 9920 2204)

L1 Greyish brown sandy silt loam. Ploughsoil
(0 to 25cm overall depth)
merging to:

L2 Reddish brown sand with occasional pale brown silt loam lenses. Natural subsoil
(from 25cm to 1.2m depth limit of excavation)

TP310 - Roman Way (NGR: TL 9941 2270)

L1 Greyish brown sandy loam. Topsoil
(from 0 to 20cm overall depth)

L2 Mixed, mainly mid brown sandy silt loam with occasional paler sand silt and small gravelly lenses
(from 20cm to 75cm overall depth)

L3 Reddish brown sand. Natural subsoil
(from 75cm to 1.2m depth limit of excavation)

TP331 - woods west of Somme Road (NGR: TL 9942 2356)

L1 Mid greyish brown sandy loam. Topsoil
(from 0 to 30cm overall depth)

L2 Mid brown sandy loam with low content of small stones. Earlier topsoil accumulation
(from 30cm to 70cm overall depth)

L3 Reddish brown coarse sand. Natural subsoil.
(from 70cm to 1.2m depth limit of excavation)

TP336 - west of Reed Hall sports field (NGR: TL 9890 2347)

- L1 Very mixed, mainly modern brick and concrete demolition debris beneath a thin layer of topsoil
(from 0 to between 15cm and 40cm overall depth)
- L2 Pale reddish yellow loamy sand with a medium content of small stones and rubble embedded from L1. Possibly heavily disturbed cover loam
(extending to 50cm overall depth)
- L3 Reddish brown coarse stoney sand. Natural subsoil
(from 50cm to 1.2m depth limit of excavation)

TP342 - Sobraon Barracks (NGR: TL 9919 2371)

- L1 Tarmac and ballast. Modern
(from 0 to 12cm overall depth)
- L2 Greyish brown loamy sand. Subsoil
(from 12cm to 40cm overall depth)
- L3 Reddish brown sand with occasional small gravel pockets. Natural subsoil
(from 40cm to 1.2m limit of excavation).

7 Finds

The only find of any antiquity was a 710g fragment of Roman brick from modern topsoil (L1) in TP331.

8 Discussion

No features of clear archaeological significance were observed in these trenches. However, it is worth noting the difference in the level of natural sand in the two pits at the Musket Club site. In pit BH309A, the sand was exposed at an overall depth of 50cm. In BH309B, situated only 1.7m away, the sand lay at 1.1m. The individual pits were too small to establish the nature or date of the intrusion responsible for the reduced level in BH309B, although it is quite likely to be due to modern activity since the results from the 2002 trenches to the west (Fig 1; CAT Report 207, 39) indicate that construction of the Musket Club and supermarket involved a high degree of ground disturbance.

Little can be deduced from the Roman brick fragment in TP331 since it was recovered from modern topsoil. The nearest known Roman building lies 600m to the south-east (Shimmin 1998), although Roman graves have been recorded within 250m to the north of this findspot (CAT Report 97, 12).

9 Acknowledgements

The Trust would like to thank Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd, both for commissioning the watching brief and for their assistance with and interest in the work. Thanks are also due to Andrew Melling and Alan Miller of Norwest Holst for their co-operation in the field.

10 References

- | | | |
|----------------|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CAR 11 | | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 11</i> , Camulodunum 2, by C F C Hawkes and Philip Crummy, 1995 |
| CAT Report 97 | 2000 | An archaeological desk-based assessment of the Colchester Garrison PFI site by Kate Orr |
| CAT Report 184 | 2002 | An archaeological evaluation by fieldwalking and geophysical survey at Colchester Garrison PFI site by Howard Brooks |
| CAT Report 197 | 2002 | An archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching on Area C at Colchester Garrison PFI site, Colchester, Essex by Howard Brooks |
| CAT Report 203 | 2002 | An archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching on Area E/F at Colchester Garrison PFI site, Colchester, Essex by Howard Brooks |
| CAT Report 205 | 2002 | An archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching on Area KR at Colchester Garrison PFI site, Colchester, Essex by Howard Brooks |
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| Shimmin, Don | 1998 | 'A late Iron Age and Roman occupation site at Kirkee and McMunn Barracks, Colchester', in <i>Essex Archaeology and History</i> , 29 , 260-69 |

11 Archive deposition

The archive will be deposited permanently with Colchester Museums where it will be held under museum accession code 2002-8.

Distribution list:

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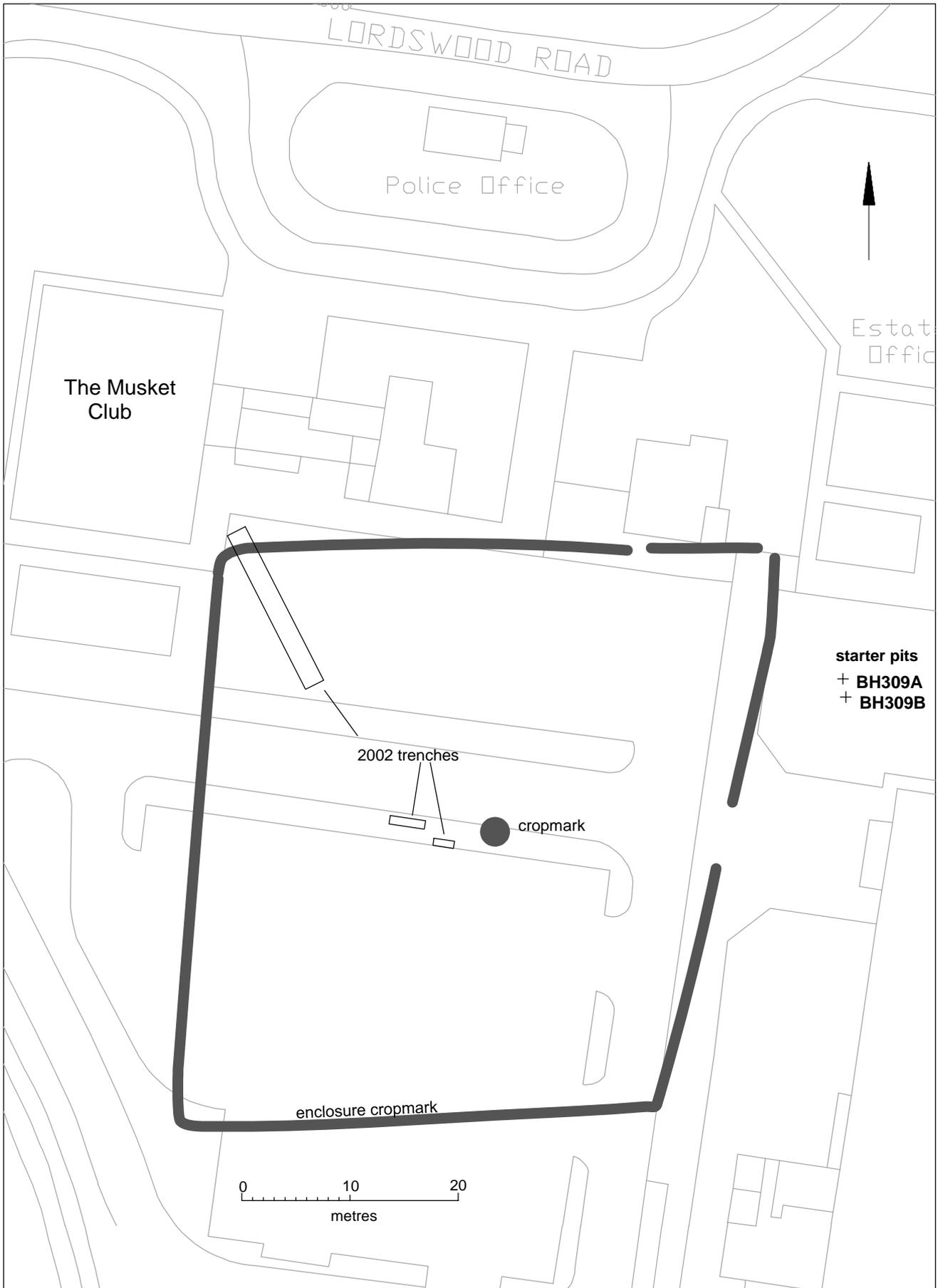


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Fig 1 Musket Club: borehole starter-pit locations.

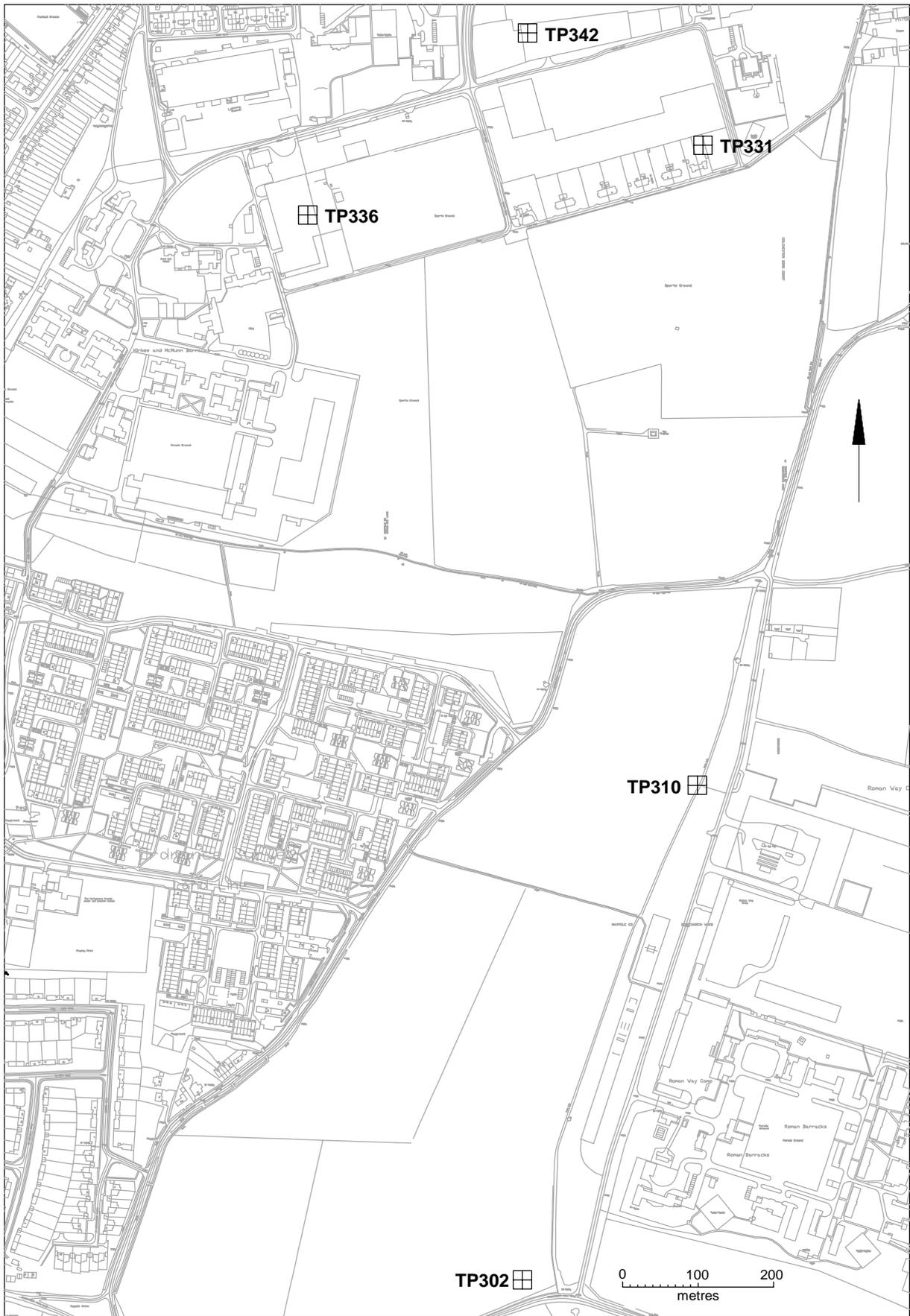


Fig 2 Test-pit location plan.

**Essex Heritage Conservation Record/
Essex Archaeology and History**

Summary sheet

Site name/address: various locations, Colchester Garrison in Essex	
Parish: n/a	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 992 232 (centred)	Site code: 2002-8
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: March 2003	Size of area investigated: 14sq m
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd
Further seasons anticipated? Yes: excavation	Related EHCR nos: 11927
Final report: CAT Report 222 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: none (negative)	
Summary of fieldwork results: A watching brief was carried out on seven 1.2m-deep test-pits which were dug by ground engineers in various locations at Colchester Garrison in Essex. No archaeologically significant features were observed. A residual fragment of Roman brick was recovered from modern topsoil in woods adjoining Somme Road.	
Previous summaries/reports: CAT Reports 184, 197, 203, 205, 206, 207	
Author of summary: Carl Crossan	Date of summary: 18th March 2003