

**Archaeological monitoring and recording at  
the Sixth Form College,  
North Hill, Colchester, Essex  
February 2005**

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**on behalf of  
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CAT project code: 05/2b  
Colchester Museums accession code: 2005.25  
NGR: TL 9929 2451 (centre)



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**CAT Report 309**  
April 2005

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Front cover: Trench 2, view south towards the main college building.

## 1 Summary

Roman floors were recorded during archaeological trenching 3m from the west edge of the Sixth Form College tennis courts in 2003, one 'tessellated' and the other plain mortar<sup>1</sup>. These were the floors of a building, presumably a house, which stood here in the Roman period, in *Insula* 1 of the Roman town.

In 2005, the opportunity arose to test whether the floors continued to the east, and a trench (Trench 2 or T2) was excavated into the west edge of the tennis courts. A floor identical to the plain mortar floor of 2003 was found in T2, as well as indications that a tessellated pavement had stood here, but had been demolished some time in or after the Roman period. A trench dug in the medieval period to quarry away the Roman stone foundations (a 'robber trench') was on a similar line to one found in the 2003 trench. This combination of wall and floors makes it quite certain that the 2005 remains are part of the same Roman house as that found in 2003.

In addition to the archaeological work, monitoring was carried out on various geotechnical exercises. These consisted of another two trenches in the tennis courts (T1, T3), two trenches in the north-west corner of the site (T4, T5), and three window samples in the tennis courts (WS1-WS3) with three more outside the tennis courts to the south (WS4-WS6). The results of the monitoring are either discussed in the text below, or tabulated at the end of the report.

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the report on the archaeological excavation of one trench (T2) on the two tennis courts at the Sixth Form College, North Hill, Colchester, Essex and on the monitoring of geotechnical trenching and sampling by RSA Geotechnics on and around the tennis courts. The centre of the project was at NGR TL 9929 2451 (Fig 1).
- 2.2 Site work was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between February 7th and February 15th 2005. Post-excavation was carried out between February 9th and April 15th 2005.
- 2.3 All fieldwork and reporting was done in accordance with Colchester Archaeological Trust's *Policies and procedures* (1999), Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines for the standards and practice of archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1999, revised 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1999, revised 2003), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1999a) and *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (1999b).

## 3 Archaeological background (Figs 1-2)

- 3.1 The Sixth Form College (formerly the Technical College and then the Gilbert School) occupies a site which represents a sizeable proportion of the north-west corner of the walled Roman town. Within the town, metalled streets extending north-south and west-east defined blocks of land (*insulae*) which are now numbered *Insulas* 1-40. The college site straddles *Insulas* 1 (formerly 1a and 1b), 9a, 9b, 17a and 17b (CAR 6, 15).
- 3.2 The lines of the streets defining the *insulae* are not always well known. Discoveries of street metalling confirm that the line of the west-east street separating *Insulas* 9 and 17 extends west-east, south of the main college building. However, two aspects of the street arrangement within the college grounds remain unclear. First, the exact position of the street separating *Insulas* 1 and 9<sup>2</sup>, and second, whether *Insulas* 1 and 9 are actually subdivided at all (*ibid*).
- 3.3 The southern half of the college site (as far north as the tennis courts) also lies within the area of the Roman legionary fortress, founded c AD 44 (CAR 3, 3; CAR 6, 7-10).

<sup>1</sup> These discoveries are described in CAT Report 260

<sup>2</sup> Especially since it was not found in the 2003 evaluation, where trenches 1, 2 and 5 should have intercepted it (CAT Report 260)

The northern edge of the fortress should lie under the south edge of the tennis courts, with the fortress rampart to its south (coinciding mainly with the grassy slope south of the tennis courts).

- 3.4** Nearly all of the *insulae* would have been occupied by Roman houses. In fact, a large part of a just such a house was recorded on the main college building site in 1865 and 1910. These houses are likely to have been constructed in the 2nd or 3rd century AD, as they featured painted walls, and tessellated and possibly mosaic floors (EHCR nos 12433-12437; Hull 1958).
- 3.5** In January 2001, an evaluation within the footprint of the new IT block was conducted by Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit, and between 1.4m and 2m of topsoil covering demolition deposits of a Roman building was recorded (ECC FAU Report 830).
- 3.6** In 2003, five evaluation trenches were dug by CAT in the college grounds in preparation for the proposed 'mid-site' development. The majority of the archaeological features recorded were of Roman date, and included tessellated and mortar floors as well as the robbed-out foundations of a large house. These features were covered by between 600mm and 1.1m of topsoil, which suggests that the site was turned over to agriculture or horticulture after the Roman house had gone out of use (CAT Report 260).
- 3.7** Further details of the archaeological background to the college site can be found in CAT Report 247.

#### **4 Aim**

The aim of was to record the depth, location, nature, condition, date, and importance of any archaeological remains exposed in the trenching or sampling (by monitoring), and to expose, excavate and record, as far as was reasonably practicable, the remains of the Roman house under the tennis courts (by excavation).

#### **5 The archaeological sequence**

In this section, the various wall, floors, and layers investigated on the site will be described. Together, these make up the 'archaeological sequence'.

##### **5.1 Trench 1 (Figs 2, 4)**

Trench or T1 was placed north-south centrally within the eastern side of the tennis courts. The target depth was 1.2 m below the surface of the tennis courts.

Four contexts were identified (Layer or L1 to L4). L1 and L2 were respectively the tarmac top and the orange gravel underlay of the tennis courts (total combined thickness 320mm). Below L2 was a layer of dark grey-brown topsoil (L3), generally 250mm thick. Since this directly overlay the Roman L4, it was clearly a post-Roman deposit. It is difficult to say if L3 is entirely medieval in origin, as opposed to medieval and post-medieval. This is because there has clearly been some terracing on this site, and it is not known whether (or to what extent) the post-medieval layers have been truncated. Judging by the soil colour, which was quite dark, L3 should be interpreted as being a medieval and post-medieval topsoil horizon.

Under L3 was L4, which contained much Roman mortar, brick fragments and painted wall-plaster. This layer indicates robbing of Roman buildings on this spot either in the Roman or (more likely) the medieval period. The top of L4 was located at the south end of T1 at 0.75m below site level, and a sondage was dug into it to a depth of 1.2m. The limit of excavation in this trench was generally the top of L4. A drop in the top of this layer of over 30cm in the length of T1 demonstrates that L4 dipped away appreciably to the north. This is presumably also the case with any underlying archaeological horizons.

L4 represented the lower limit of the investigation.

## 5.2 Trench 2 (Figs 2, 3, 4)

Trench or T2 was an L-shaped trench on the western edge of the tennis courts, totalling 75.6m<sup>2</sup>. The general level of excavation required for the geotechnical investigation was 1.0m, with occasional deeper excavations to 1.7m. Within the initial 1m dig, the four horizons initially identified in T1 were also identified in T2 (ie L1-L4).

The T2 stratification differed from that in T1 insofar as L3 topsoil was a single stratum in T1, but it was split into two in T2 by L12 (a post-medieval brown clay horizon). The number L3 was retained for the (medieval) topsoil horizon below the clay, and the upper (post-medieval) topsoil was numbered L13.

The limit of the initial excavation therefore coincided with L4, as in T1. L4 was a blanket of mortar rubble covering most of the trench bottom. The number of *tesserae* found in L4 (2) or unstratified during machining (12) must indicate that a tessellated pavement has been robbed away from this spot. L4 can therefore be identified as the debris resulting from the demolition of a Roman structure. What is unclear is when the robbing happened; it may be either Roman-period robbing of floors to recover *tesserae*, or medieval-period robbing when the wall footings were also being robbed out.

The only cuts below the general 1m-deep excavation level were as follows:

- a deep trench cut along the whole length of the east edge of T2 (revealing Feature or F4-F6)
- three machine-cut sondages into L4, to reveal the extent of the floor F1
- four individual cuts at pile positions (revealing L11 in three, and wall F3 in one)

These cuts revealed stratification of an earlier Roman date than the supposed robbed-out floor (above). Starting with the deep cut along the east side, and working clockwise, the strata revealed are described below.

### T2 – north end

Whereas topsoil L3 generally sealed demolition debris L4, in the north part of T2, L4 was absent and L3 sealed L11, a mid brown clay which is often found in the Roman sequences in Colchester. This last deposit is usually interpreted as being material derived from the demolition of the clay walls of a previous structure, with the material being spread out and used as foundation for a later floor. This seems the sensible interpretation here, since it lies over earlier floor F5. This floor was in the tradition of tessellated pavements, in the sense that it consisted of red brick pieces in a mortar base<sup>3</sup>, but the pieces were irregularly shaped ('crazy' tessellation). A more detailed examination of the floor was prevented by the depth of the trench here (1.7m). Adjacent to the floor was the top of a septaria-in-mortar wall foundation (F6). It seems clear that the wall and floor were of one period, because the floor surface had sunk slightly (due to settlement of the underlying strata), but the edge of the floor had received some support from the wall foundation, which was not so affected by settlement. This effect has been seen before in Colchester, most clearly in the Roman house recorded at the Middleborough site (Brooks & Crummy 1984, 164). There is a close similarity between floors F5 and F1, and this may be taken as evidence of their contemporaneity.

### T2 – south end

A major feature here was the robber trench F2. This was cut from a point in topsoil layer L3. Although, in this particular section, L3 is defined as a medieval and post-medieval topsoil, elsewhere on site there is a split into a lower (medieval) topsoil (L3) and a higher (post-medieval) topsoil (L13). It seems clear that F2 was cut from the medieval part of L3, and so must be medieval in date<sup>4</sup>.

The stone robbers have removed an E-W wall line. On the surface, L4 demolition debris layer may be a contemporary robbing episode, and the presence of *tesserae* in L4 may indicate that a tessellated pavement has been robbed out from here.

In section, stratification was different on either side of the robber trench. To its north, the sequence was L3 over L4 over brown clay L11, much the same as most of

<sup>3</sup> Not actually seen in this case

<sup>4</sup> There are no finds to support this

the northern part of T2. South of the robber trench, L3 lay over demolition debris L4, which in turn lay over clay layer L7. This was streaked with patches of chalky white and light brown mortar which may derive from a robbed-out structure. L7 sealed gravel in clay layer L8, which sat on floor surface F4. The floor was smooth and pink, not 'bitty' in appearance like *opus signinum*. L7 and L8 have the appearance of being material dumped over a redundant floor surface (F4), in preparation for the construction of a new floor at a higher level. This later floor may be F1 or its equivalent. A sherd of samian ware was recovered from L8. A detailed examination was hindered by trench depth here.

The 2005 site was extended south to find the south edge of floor F1, which coincides precisely with a robbed-out wall line observed in 2003.

### 5.3 Machine-cut sondages in T2

The most easterly sondage was cut through L4. It revealed mortary rubble below (probably also L4) and the south edge of robber trench F2. It was the intention to hand-dig to trace the floor F1, but no further work was done here.

The central sondage was cut through L4 and L5, revealing L6. Once cut, this sondage was cleaned and further excavated by hand. L5 was a crumbly brown mortar horizon. This was not really apparent immediately south of F2, but showed more strongly in section. It was not a convincing floor layer, yet the presence of some peagrit on its surface suggests that it had some solidity. The presence of *tesserae* in the overlying L4 suggests that a tessellated pavement has been robbed out here. Perhaps L5 was part of its foundation.

L5 lay over L6. This was a mid-brown clay layer on top of floor surface F1. In this position, it would normally be derived from the demolished clay walls of a building whose floor was F1. Two small sondages were cut through L6 to reveal the underlying floor F1. The easterly of the two small sondages was the most easterly position on the site where F1 was confirmed.

Floor F1 was sealed by L6. In constructional detail, the floor was identical to F5 (above), but with smaller ceramic pieces. There was no sign of a similar floor north of F2, so the room must have ended along the line of F2. The north edge of F1 was detected by the south sondage, which was machine-dug.

### 5.4 Trenches 3, 4 and 5

These are described in sections 12.1-12.3 below.

### 5.5 Individual cuts at pile-cap positions in T2

These unnumbered cuts were all cut through L4, and into the underlying brown clay L11. No strata lower than L11 were exposed. The only point of interest was that the floor F5 was not shown in the cut immediately to its west; perhaps this was just a little too shallow.

### 5.6 Window samples in and south of tennis courts (WS1-WS6)

Results are tabulated below in section 12.4.

## 6 Finds

### 6.1 The Roman pottery

by Stephen Benfield (CAT)

Roman pottery fabric codes refer to those devised for and used in *CAR 10*, and pottery forms refer to the Camulodunum (Cam) type series (Hawkes & Hull 1947; Hull 1958).

Only a very small quantity of Roman pottery (15 sherds weighing 299 grammes) was recovered from the site (Table 1). The pottery is essentially all of 2nd- to 3rd-century date and primarily consists of sherds from jars and bowls in reduced wares, these being black-burnished ware category 2 (BB2 or *CAR 10*, Fabric GB) and grey wares (*CAR 10*, Fabric GX). There is only one fine ware sherd, part of a Central Gaulish samian bowl of form Dr 31. Only one context (L4 in T2) produced more than one sherd, and the pottery from this layer made up most of the Roman pottery

recovered, with sherds from 9 different vessels out of a total from all contexts of approximately 12 vessels.

**Table 1: Roman pottery vessels by fabric and context.**

Fabric BA (CG): Central Gaulish plain samian, Fabric DJ: coarse oxidised and related ware, Fabric GB: black-burnished ware category 2 (BB2), Fabric GX: other coarse wares, principally locally-produced grey wares, Fabric WA: silvery micaceous grey wares.

Weights are in grammes.

find	trench	layer	fabric	form	weight (in g)	comments	date
1	T1	L3	GB	Cam 37	36.3	sherd, round rim, plain body	late 2nd to mid-late 3rd century
3	T2	L4	DJ		5.2	sherd, prob from a flagon	Roman ?1st-2nd century
3	T2	L4	GB	chamfered bowl, prob Cam 37	8.9	sherd, base edge, burnished line decoration	early 2nd to early 3rd century
3	T2	L4	GB	chamfered bowl, prob Cam 37	29.7	sherd, base edge	early 2nd to mid-late 3rd century
3	T2	L4	GB	Cam 40A	9.7	sherd, rim	early 2nd to mid-late 3rd century
3	T2	L4	GX	prob Cam 268	53.4	3 rim sherds from a jar	mid 2nd-late 3rd/early 4th century
3	T2	L4	GX	prob Cam 268	16.3	rim sherd from a jar	mid 2nd-late 3rd/early 4th century
3	T2	L4	GX		16.4	rim sherd from a bowl/jar	Roman
3	T2	L4	GX		23.7	rim sherd from a bowl	Roman
3	T2	L4	WA	poss Cam 299	18.6	rim sherd from a bowl	early-mid 2nd to 4th century
5	T2	L8	BA (CG)	Dr 31	35.2	sherd, rim and wall	mid-late 2nd century
6	T2	L9	GX		31.3	body sherd, flaked into two pieces	Roman

## 6.2 The painted wall-plaster

by Howard Brooks (CAT)

A number of fragments of painted wall-plaster was recovered from T1<sup>5</sup>. They consist of the yellow, pink, and plain red colours usually found in Roman strata in Colchester (catalogue below, Table 2). As they are all from L3 and L4, they are presumably fragments of the painted walls of a house equivalent to that robbed out in T2.

**Table 2: painted wall-plaster.**

context	colour	no of pieces	weight (in g)	area (in cm <sup>2</sup> )
T1, L3	pink	2	14	7.5
T1, L4	pink	3	94	38.0
T1, L4	red	2	15	9.0
T1, L4	yellow	3	189	61.0
T1, L4	no surface	2	118	

<sup>5</sup> No painted wall-plaster was recovered from Trench 2

### 6.3 The Roman glass

by Howard Brooks (CAT)

A single sherd of glass (weight 6 grammes) was recovered from L4 in T2, the Roman demolition debris layer. This was a colourless, mould-blown sherd from the body of a small vessel, probably a cup or beaker. There is a slight angle or carination at the shoulder, suggesting more similarity to a Hofheim type as described by Cool and Price (CAR 8, 65-7), rather than a cylindrical or conical beaker (*ibid*, 68-9).

### 6.4 Other stratified finds

Apart from the painted wall-plaster and glass (above), a number of other stratified finds were collected (listed here, Table 3).

**Table 3: other stratified finds.**

trench	bag no	context	quantity	wt (in g)	description
T1	1	L3	1	2	animal bone
T1	1	L3	1	197	Roman tile ( <i>imbrex</i> )
T1	1	L3	1	436	Roman tile (box tile)
T1	2	L4	1	20	burnt flint (prehistoric?)
T1	2	L4	3	60	Roman tile fragments
T2	3	L4	3	72	Roman <i>tesserae</i>
T2	7	L4	2	1367	Roman <i>tegula</i> with scored underside

### 6.5 Unstratified finds

*Tegula* and *imbrex* fragments, oyster shell and *tesserae* were collected. These have been given to the Sixth Form College for teaching material (listed below, Table 4).

**Table 4: unstratified finds.**

trench	bag no	context	quantity	wt (in g)	description
T2	9	U/S	2	1,099	Roman brick fragments
T2	9	U/S	1	24	Roman oyster shell
T2	9	U/S	4	30	animal bones
T2	9	U/S	14	358	Roman <i>tesserae</i>
T2	9	U/S	1	717	septaria lump
T2	9	U/S	2	471	Roman brown mortar lumps
T2	9	U/S	2	2,035	<i>opus signinum</i> lumps
T2	9	U/S	5	2,009	Roman <i>imbrex</i> fragments
T2	9	U/S	3	1,067	Roman <i>tegula</i> fragments
T5	8	U/S	1	2,000	Roman Purbeck marble flagstone

## 7 Discussion and interpretation

The basic sequence of archaeological deposits recorded in T2 is comparable to that found on other sites in the Roman town (despite the fact that the pottery dating of this site is not too precise). Working from latest to earliest, the suggested site history is presented below.

### Post-medieval

A deep topsoil layer (L3) suggests that the area was open ground in recent centuries. There has been some dumping of material (L12, L14) in the post-medieval period, mainly on the northern edge of the site (ie downslope). None of this is particularly well dated; it may have been connected with the construction of the Technical College in the 1920s and any associated landscaping.

## Medieval

There is a lower topsoil layer (L13) over most of the site<sup>6</sup>, and deep topsoil layers were logged in Trenches 3-5. These deposits suggest that the area was open land in medieval times. Apart from that, stone robbers dug trench F2 and removed a Roman wall footing. Although there is no specific dating evidence for this act, robber trenches are generally medieval in date in Colchester, and there seems no reason to suggest otherwise here. There is also a blanket of demolition debris L4 lying over most of the site, containing *tesserae* and Roman pottery. The presence of *tesserae* strongly suggests that a Roman tessellated pavement has been demolished here. What is not quite so clear is when this demolition happened; it could be either a Roman or a medieval event<sup>7</sup>.

## The Roman buildings (Figs 3-5)

The 2005 discoveries must be considered in relation to the tessellated and mortar floors discovered in 2003. In fact, there is a very good correlation between the discoveries of the two seasons of fieldwork. It is already clear that a large Roman house stood here, and at least five rooms have now been identified, as follows.

### *North corridor*

A narrow, irregularly tessellated floor was observed on the north edge of T1 (F5) in 2005. This lay north of a septaria-and-rubble wall foundation (F6). The depth of the trench prevented a more detailed examination of these features, but they seem to represent the floor and wall of a narrow corridor aligned west to east.

### *Courtyard*

There is an 8m-wide gap between the south wall of the north corridor (F6) and the wall line defined by the 2003 robber trench F8 and the 2005 robber trench F2. However, there was no surviving floor here. There are two possible explanations for this: either there was no floor here to begin with, and this area was a courtyard or garden, or there was a tessellated pavement here, but it has been removed<sup>8</sup>. The first explanation is probably the stronger, since Roman houses in Colchester are often of the courtyard type, with rooms ranged around a central open courtyard (see *CAR 6*, 32, fig 3.7).

### *South corridor*

A west to east robber trench (F8 in 2003) defined the line of a wall foundation on the south edge of the courtyard. The same wall line continued as 2005 robber trench F2. This wall line was at least 9.3m long. Its robber trench was drawn in section on the east side of T2, and its eastern terminus lay beyond the excavation area. Another wall lay parallel to F8/F2. The 2003 robber trench F5 and the south edge of the 2005 floor F1 mark the line of another robbed-out wall. The two wall lines extend on each side of a floor found in both 2003 (F7) and 2005 (F1). This floor consisted of irregularly shaped *tesserae* in a pink mortar base, a sort of 'crazy' tessellation. The general configuration of the floor and walls makes it a convincing corridor shape.

### *The south room*

This room was located only in the 2003 evaluation area. It had a regular tessellated floor.

## Other aspects of site dating

The description above presents a rather two-dimensional view of the main Roman building. However, it is clear that there other periods of activity on the house site: one later, and either one or two earlier. The later phase is certainly part of the same house, but it is difficult to know whether the earlier ones represent earlier phases of the main house, or separate and earlier structures. Dating evidence for all the building phases will be discussed below

<sup>6</sup> Though not recorded separately from L3 where there was not a clear division

<sup>7</sup> The pottery from L4 is all Roman

<sup>8</sup> A great number of loose *tesserae* were found in 2005

#### *The later activity*

The number of loose *tesserae* recovered from the debris layer L4 indicates that a tessellated floor has been removed from a nearby spot, in either the Roman or (more likely) in the medieval period. This missing floor may have been set on L5. L6 was dumped down over the floor of the previous house to make up the levels for the new floor. If we are correct in thinking that the missing floor was a tessellated pavement, then the likelihood is that it was the same period of housing as the floors exposed in December 2003 to the west of the tennis courts. There are fragments of *imbrex*, *tegulae* and box tiles on the site, showing that the roof was tiled, and that there was a hypocaust somewhere close by.

Dating note: associated pottery dates suggest the missing tessellated floor dates to the 3rd century AD.

#### *The earlier activity*

There are two features which are definitely or probably earlier than the floor F1. The first is the north-south-extending Roman tile-in-mortar plinth F3. This was seen in the pile-cap hole in the north-west corner of the southern half of T2. Its top is below the floor-level of F1, and therefore it is assumed to be an earlier period of building. There were no associated contexts except for L11, which looked like a demolished *opus signinum* floor. This butted up to the east face of F3.

The second potentially earlier structure is represented by the mortar floor F4, on the basis that it is lower down in the sequence than the floor F1 (at 14.45m, it was 0.13m lower than F1). Except for the difference in height, there is no reason why it should not be contemporary with floor F1, except that there would need to be a missing north-south wall line to separate the two rooms (the floors were different).

Dating note: associated pottery is the samian sherd from L8 above floor F4, mid to late 2nd century AD. The suggested date for this early floor is therefore mid 2nd century AD.

## 8 Acknowledgements

The Trust would like to thank the staff of the Sixth Form College, RSA Geotechnics, and John Chick for their assistance on site, and Mr Bob Ward of Roff Marsh Partnership for commissioning the work on behalf of the Sixth Form College.

The project was managed by Philip Crummy and the site work was carried out by Howard Brooks.

The project was monitored for Colchester Borough Council by Martin Winter and Philip Wise of Colchester Museums.

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## 10 Glossary

Cam	<i>Camulodunum</i> (Hawkes & Hull 1947)
CAR	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report</i>
CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
CBC	Colchester Borough Council
context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
cut	hole
ECC FAU	Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit
EHCR	Essex Heritage Conservation Record
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain ‘contexts’
hypocaust	underfloor heating system
<i>imbrex</i>	Roman roof tile in half tube shape (plural <i>imbrices</i> ), fits over <i>tegulae</i>
<i>insula</i>	literally ‘island’: Roman town ‘block’ as defined by gravel streets
l.o.e.	limit of excavation
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
<i>opus signinum</i>	pink, waterproof, Roman mortar
Roman	the period from AD 43 to around AD 430
sondage	exploratory modern hole
<i>tegula</i>	flat, ceramic Roman roof tile (plural <i>tegulae</i> )
tenter	a cloth-maker’s wooden frame for stretching fabrics
<i>tessera</i>	square, red, ceramic cube used in Roman floor surface
tessellated pavement	a plain red mosaic floor, consisting of <i>tesserae</i> in a mortar base
U/S	unstratified (a find the context of which is unknown)

## 11 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2005.25

## 12 Site data

### 12.1 Observations in Trench 3 (south-east corner of tennis courts)

Context depth	Description	Date
0-2 m	dark grey brown topsoil	post-medieval
2-3 m	dark brown topsoil	medieval?
3 m	natural sand	

### 12.2 Observations in Trench 4 (west of temporary buildings near new IT block)

Depth	Description	Date
0 -2m	turf, dark grey/brown topsoil	post-medieval to modern
2 -3m	brown topsoil	medieval?

### 12.3 Observations in Trench 5 (west of temporary buildings near new IT block)

Depth	Description	Date
0 -2m	turf, dark grey/brown topsoil.	post-medieval to modern
2 -3m	brown topsoil with much Roman brick, septaria	medieval?
3.2m	machine scraped on top of possible Roman wall	Roman

### 12.4 Observations on window samples (WS1-WS6) carried out by RSA Geotechnics Ltd<sup>9</sup>

Depth	WS1	WS2	WS3	WS4	WS5	WS6
0-1m	Tarmac tennis court top and make-up. Topsoil	Tarmac tennis court top and make-up. Topsoil	Tarmac tennis court top and make-up. Topsoil	Topsoil	Topsoil	Topsoil
1-2m	Topsoil	Demolition debris at 1.7m	Demolition debris at 1.7m	Roman demolition debris	No reading (brick jammed in tube)	Topsoil
2-3m	Clay at 2.5m (dumped Roman clay?). Sand (natural?) @ 3m	-	Roman mortar layer at 2.5m. Gravel 2.5-2.7m. Clay at 2.7m (presumably Roman). Natural sand @ 2.9m	Clay (Roman) to 2.2m. Natural? @ 2.2m	2.0-2.2m demolition debris. Roman clay @ 2.2-2.3m	Clay with septaria bits 2.0-2.9m. 2.9-3.0m clay mortar mixture
3-4m	-	-	-	-	-	3.0-3.4 as above. Natural? sand @ 3.4m

<sup>9</sup> Position of samples WS1 and WS2 east to west along north edge of tennis court; WS3 in centre of tennis court; WS4-WS5 west to east along south edge (outside tennis courts), with WS6 upslope south of WS4 and WS5 and close to tarmac playground

## 12.5 List of contexts

context	trench	description	seals	finds	date
L1	T1, T2	tarmac surface	L2	-	modern
L2	T1, T2	gravel foundation for L1	L3, L13	-	modern
L3	T1, T2	topsoil	L4	Roman pot, tile, painted wall-plaster	post-medieval
L4	T1, T2	mortary demolition debris	L5, L11	Roman pot, glass, <i>tesserae</i> , tile, animal bone, painted wall- plaster	medieval?
L5	T2	crumbly mortar - stripped floor?	L6	-	Roman
L6	T2	clay demolition debris	F1	-	Roman
L7	T2	clay dump	L8	-	Roman
L8	T2	gravelly clay on floor F4	F4	samian	Roman
L9	T2	crumbled <i>opus signinum</i> in clay	l.o.e.	Roman pot	Roman
L10	T2	mixed layer over Roman wall	F3	-	modern?
L11	T2	clay dump	l.o.e.	-	Roman
L12	T2	clay dump in topsoil layer	L3	-	post-medieval
L13	T2	upper topsoil	L12	-	post-medieval
L14	T2	gravelly clay	?	-	post-medieval
F1	T2	Roman floor – crazy tessellated	l.o.e.	-	Roman
F2	T2	robber trench	L5, F1	-	medieval
F3	T2	Roman tile-in-mortar wall	l.o.e.	-	Roman
F4	T2	Roman pink mortar floor	l.o.e.	-	Roman
F5	T2	Roman floor – crazy tessellated		-	Roman
F6	T2	Roman septaria in mortar wall		-	Roman
F7	T2	cut		-	modern
F8	T2	concrete slab in bottom of F7	L10	-	modern

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**Distribution list:**

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Essex Heritage Conservation Record, Essex County Council

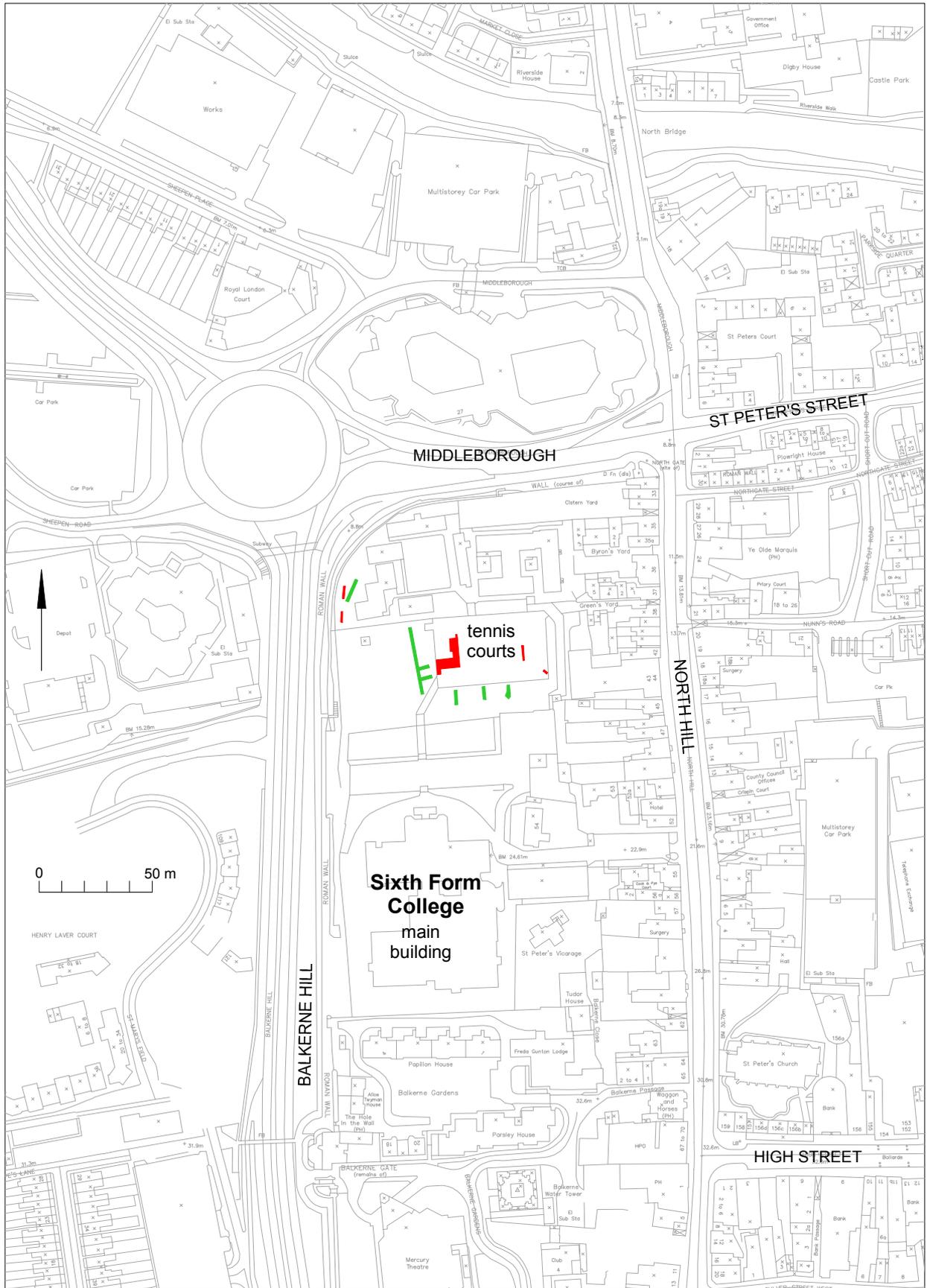


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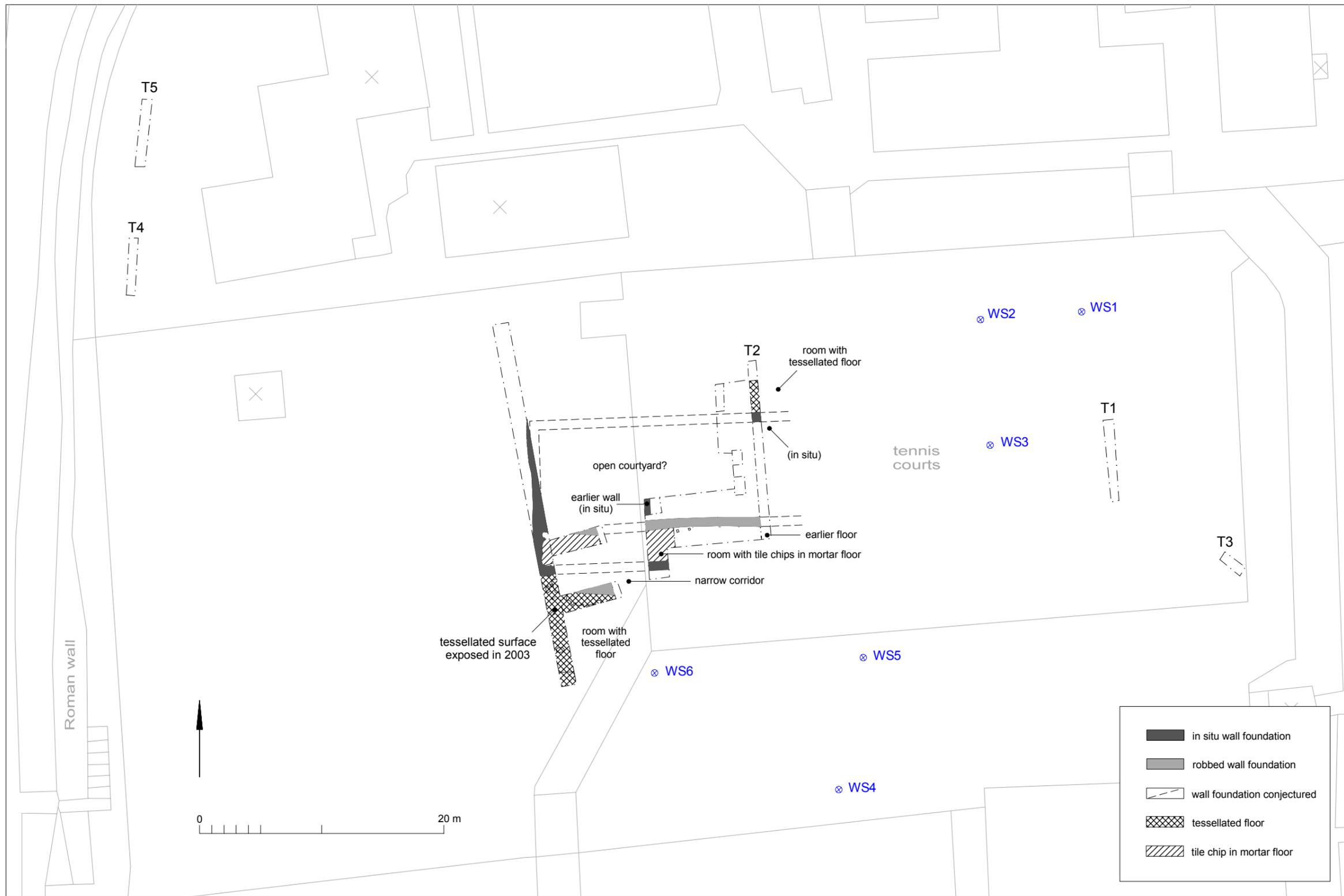
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▬ 2003 trench     ▬ 2004 trench

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Fig 1 Site location.



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Fig 2 Location of trenches and window samples, with interpretation of the Roman house under the tennis courts.

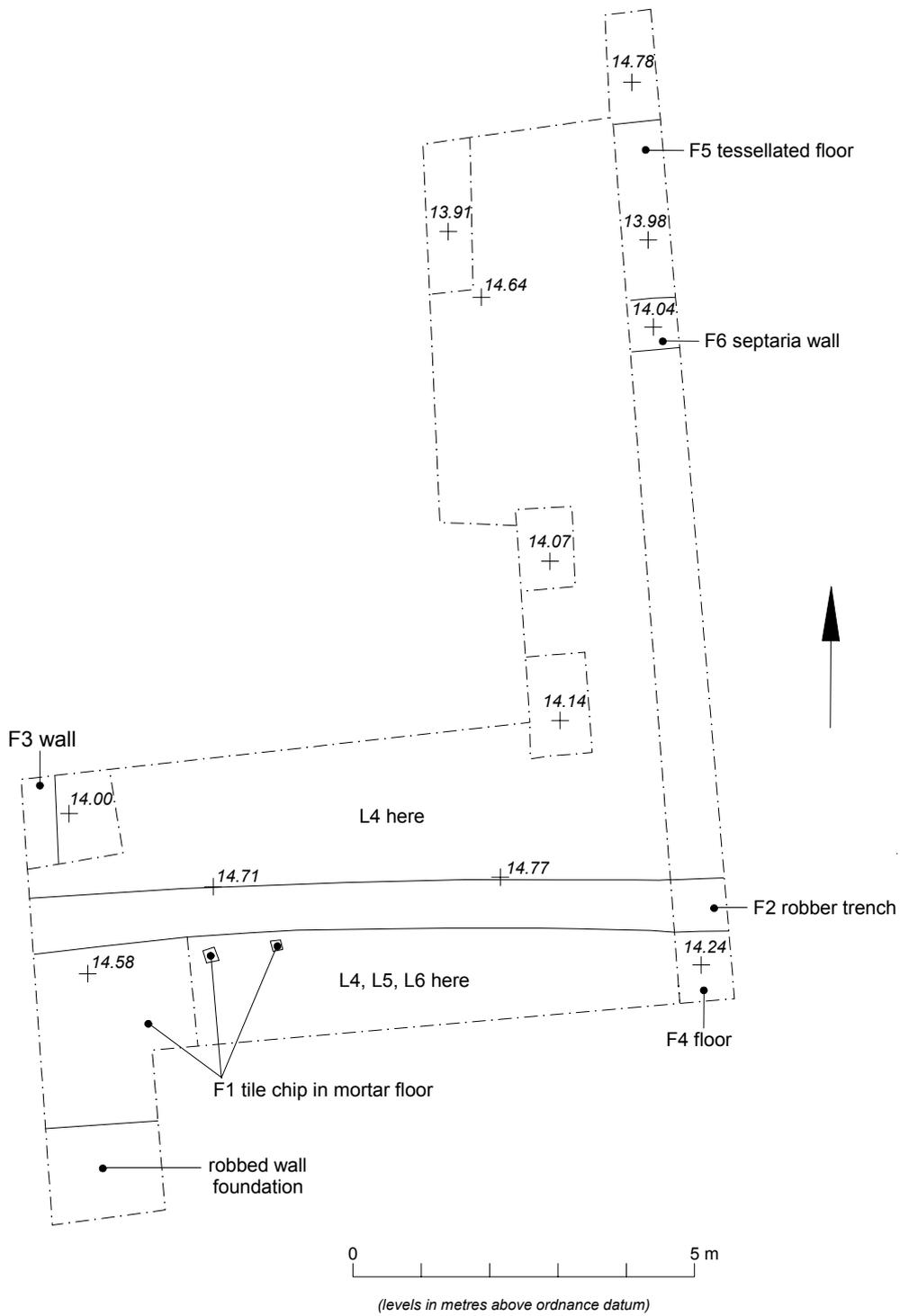
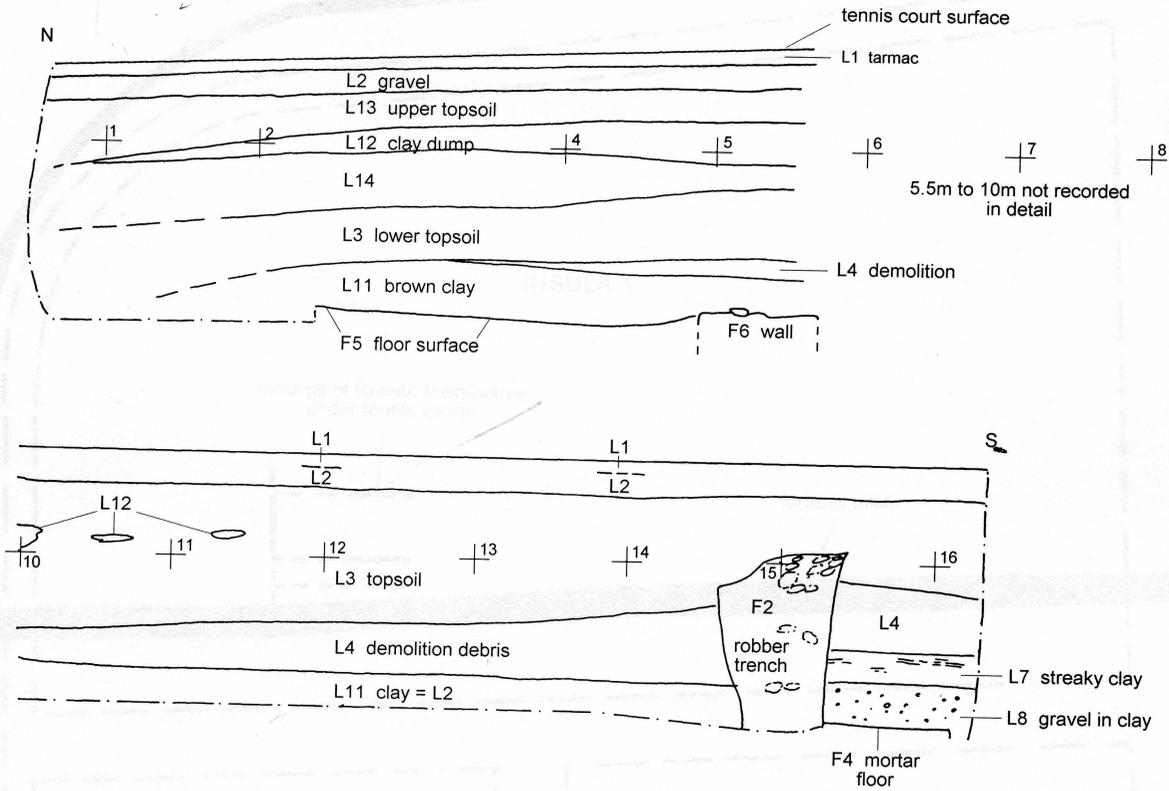
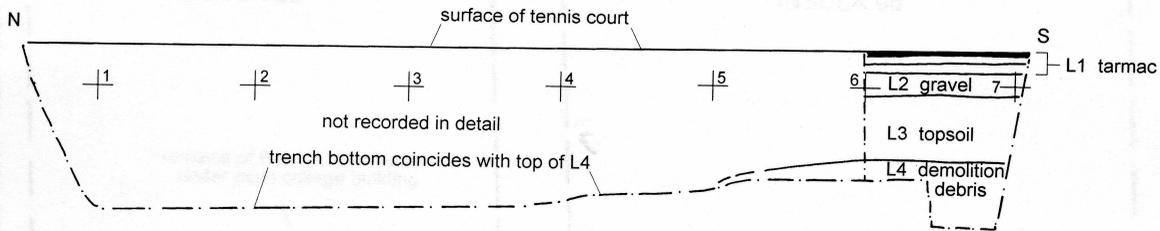


Fig 3 Trench 2: plan.

Section 1: east side of Trench 2



Section 2: east side of Trench 1



Section 3: south side of Trench 2

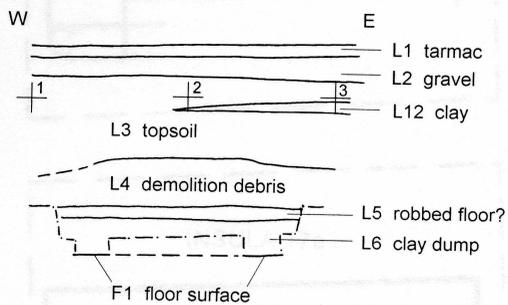


Fig 4 Trenches 1 and 2: sections.



north gate

Roman town wall

INSULA 1

remains of Roman town-house  
under tennis courts

fortress ditch

INSULA 9a

INSULA 9b

remains of Roman town-house  
under main college building

gravel street

INSULA 17a

INSULA 17b

remains of Roman barrack building



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

## Summary sheet

<b>Site address:</b> Sixth Form College, North Hill, Colchester, Essex (tennis courts)	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester
<b>NGR:</b> TL 9929 2451	<b>Site code:</b> Museum accession code 2005.25
<b>Type of work:</b> Monitoring and excavation	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> February 2005	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 2 trenches (= 75.6m <sup>2</sup> ) and watching brief over wider area
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Developer
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> possibly	<b>Related EHCR nos:</b> 12433-12437
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 309 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods represented:</b> Roman, medieval	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b></p> <p><i>Roman floors were recorded during archaeological trenching 3m from the west edge of the Sixth Form College tennis courts in 2003, one 'tessellated' and the other plain mortar. These were the floors of a building, presumably a house, which stood here in the Roman period in Insula 1 of the Roman town.</i></p> <p><i>In 2005, the opportunity arose to test whether the floors continued to the east, and a trench (Trench 2 or T2) was excavated into the west edge of the tennis courts. A floor identical to the plain mortar floor of 2003 was found in T2, as well as indications that a tessellated pavement had stood here, but had been demolished some time in or after the Roman period. A trench dug in the medieval period to quarry away the Roman stone foundations was on the identical line to one found in the 2003 trench. This combination of wall and floors makes it quite certain that the 2005 remains are part of the same Roman house as that found in 2003.</i></p> <p><i>In addition to the archaeological work, monitoring was carried out on various geotechnical exercises. These consisted of another two trenches in the tennis courts (T1, T3), two trenches in the north-west corner of the site (T4, T5), and three window samples in the tennis courts with three more outside the tennis courts to the south.</i></p>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> CAT Reports 247 and 260; Bennett 2002; Bennett 2003	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Howard Brooks	<b>Date of summary:</b> 18th April 2005