

Report on a watching brief CAT Report 349

Site address: St Helena School, Sheepen Road, Colchester, Essex –
new electricity mains supply cable trench
Date of fieldwork: 17th-26th October 2005
NGR: TL 9890 2583
CBC brief?: No
Location plan attached?: Yes (Fig 1)
Museum accession code: 2005.127

Archaeological background:

The site lies on the eastern side of Sheepen, a Late Iron Age settlement and industrial centre established by the Catuvellauni tribe and maintained in the years after the Roman conquest (Scheduled Ancient Monument no 46). Extensive excavations in the 1930s and smaller-scale work in 1970 and later have produced evidence of workshops engaged in a range of industrial activities including metal-working, enamelling, pottery-making and leather-working in the areas to the west of the site (Hawkes & Hull 1947; Niblett 1985). A late 1st-century temple was excavated by the Colchester Excavation Committee in 1935 on the site of St Helena School (Hull 1958, 224-34). The outer '*temenos*' wall of the temple precinct appears to lie underneath Sheepen Road and may be crossed by the cable trench.

A Roman timber-lined well was found in the 1930s to the north within the grounds of Colchester Institute. A watching brief carried out at Colchester Institute in 2001 produced an assemblage of 1st-century AD Roman amphoras and mostly 1st-century AD pottery. Several pits were recorded, one of which was datable to the early Roman period. A short stretch of mortared Roman tiles, presumed to be a wall or foundation to a Roman building, was found by the contractors after the watching brief had finished (CAT Report 131).

Brief report:

Scheduled Monument Consent was given for a trench to be dug along part of the southern boundary of the school. This was for the purpose of installing a new electricity mains supply cable. The approximately 100m-long trench stretched from the south-eastern boundary of the school, along a grass bank adjoining Sheepen Road, to the 'boys' entrance' at the front of the school building. The trench was dug to 700mm depth and 300mm width using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. The Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) carried out a watching brief on this work.

600-700mm of topsoil (Layer or L1) sealed a dry light brown silt subsoil (L2) which contained tile flecks. L2 rose up slightly to the west. Roman pottery, Roman tile, peg-tile and occasional animal bone came from L1 and the interface with L2. Contractors retrieved a 3rd-century Roman coin from the western end of the trench. No features were observed. The presence of a small amount of Roman material is to be expected and indicates Roman activity on the site. It is suspected that the trench was not deep enough to expose Roman or Iron Age features as it was dug through a grassy verge which was slightly higher than the school car-park. The only features of note were reinforced concrete foundations, said by the caretaker to be the remains of air-raid shelters which once stood to the east and west of the main school entrance.

Finds

Roman vessel form numbers follow those of the Camulodunum (Cam) Roman pottery type series (Hawkes & Hull 1947; Hull 1958). Late Iron Age and Roman pottery fabrics used follow those devised for *CAR 10* with the addition of the fabric Late Iron Age grog-tempered ware which has been given the letter code GTW by Stephen Benfield of CAT. Fabric WPW/NOG WH1 follows Tomber & Dore 1998.

Late Iron Age and Roman pottery fabric codes and the corresponding fabric name used in this report:

Fabric code	Fabric name
EC	Early Colchester colour-coat ware
GTW	Late Iron Age grog-tempered ware
GX	Other coarse wares, principally locally-produced grey wares
HZ	large storage jars and other vessels in heavily-tempered grey wares
UR	<i>terra nigra</i> -type wares
WPW/NOG WH 1	White pipeclay ware/North Gaulish (Gallo-Belgic) white ware 1

Table 1: list of finds.

Find no	Layer	Description (pot fabric code)	Weight (in g)	Spot date for pottery
1	L1/L2 – eastern end of trench	pottery – 1 sherd of colour-coat ware (Fabric EC), pre-Flavian; 3 sherds of grey wares (Fabric GX)	25.2	early Roman
1	L1/L2 – eastern end of trench	glazed pottery	3.5	post-medieval
1	L1/L2 – eastern end of trench	animal bone	10.5	undated
2	L1/L2 – middle of trench	pottery – fragment of base of Gaulish flagon (Fabric WPW /NOG WH 1), imported, mid 1st century AD; 3 sherds of large grog-tempered storage jar Cam 271 (Fabric HZ), 1st century AD; 1 sherd of a platter Cam 14/28 (Fabric UR (LTC)), pre-Flavian; 3 sherds of grey wares (Fabric GX (RCW)), 1st century AD, ?pre-Flavian	254.3	Roman – early post-conquest/ pre-Flavian
2	L1/L2 – middle of trench	glazed pottery	2.2	post-medieval
2	L1/L2 – middle of trench	brick and tile		Roman (not kept)
3	L1/L2 – mid to western end of trench	copper alloy coin – Illegible radiate <i>antoninianus</i> , diameter 16.5 mm		Roman AD 250-280
4	L1/L2 – western end of trench	animal bone	4.0	undated
4	L1/L2 – western end of trench	clay-pipe bowl	24.0	post-medieval
4	L1/L2 – western end of trench	piece of organic material, probably nut shell	2.8	undated – probably recent

References:

- CAR 10** 1999 *Colchester Archaeological Report 10: Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-1986*, by R P Symonds and S Wade, ed by P Bidwell and A Croom
- CAT Report 131 *Report on an archaeological watching brief at Colchester Institute, Sheepen Road, Colchester*, unpublished CAT archive report, by Kate Orr, 2001
- Hawkes, C F C, & Hull, M R 1947 *Camulodunum. First report on the excavations at Colchester 1930-39*, RRCSAL, **14**
- Hull, M R 1958 *Roman Colchester*, RRCSAL, **20**
- Niblett, B R K 1985 *Sheepen, an early Roman industrial site at Camulodunum*, CBA Research Report, **57**
- Tomber R, & Dore, J 1998 *The national Roman fabric reference collection – a handbook*, MOLAS Monograph, **2**

Report author: Kate Orr
Report date: November 2005

© Colchester Archaeological Trust 2005

Distribution list:

Deborah Priddy, English Heritage
David Clement, DC Construction
Roy Poulter, Atkins Design & Engineering Solutions
Martin Winter, archaeology officer for Colchester Borough Council
Essex Historic Environment Record, Essex County Council

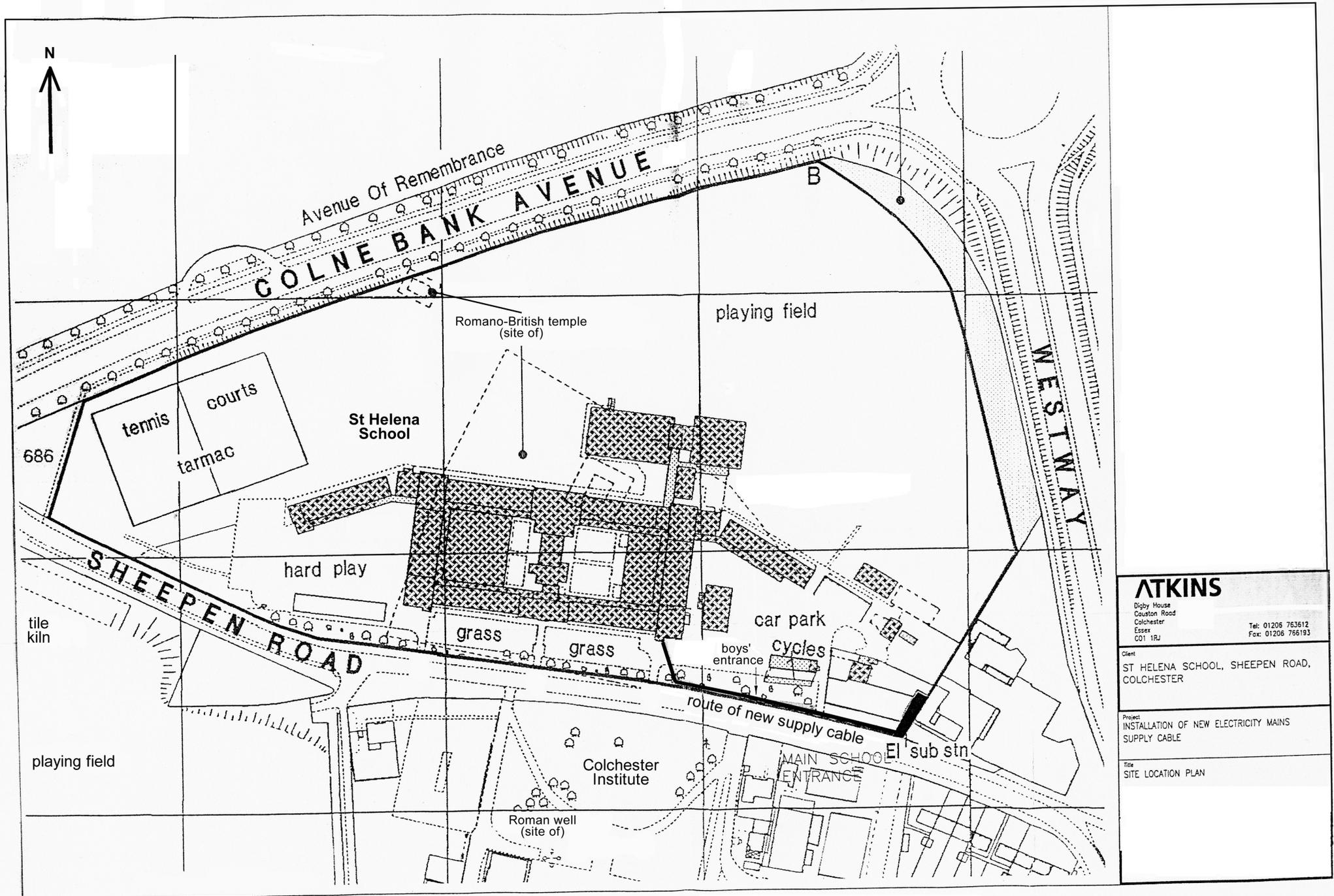


Colchester Archaeological Trust
12 Lexden Road,
Colchester,
Essex CO3 3NF

tel.: (01206) 541051
tel./fax: (01206) 500124
email: archaeologists@catuk.org

Checked by: Philip Crummy
Date: 24.11.05

adams c:/reports05//report349.doc



ATKINS	
Digby House Coulston Road Colchester Essex CO1 1RJ	
Tel: 01206 763612 Fax: 01206 766193	
Client ST HELENA SCHOOL, SHEEPEN ROAD, COLCHESTER	
Project INSTALLATION OF NEW ELECTRICITY MAINS SUPPLY CABLE	
Title SITE LOCATION PLAN	

Fig 1 Location of new supply cable.