

Report on a watching brief: CAT Report 567

Site address: St Botolph's Priory, Colchester, Essex
Date of fieldwork: 15th April-13th May 2010
NGR: TL 9998 2495
Figures attached?: Yes (Figs 1-2)
Museum accession code: COLIM 2010.30
CAT project code: 10/3c

Summary

Gravestones and a well of probable 18th- to 19th-century date were uncovered during an archaeological watching brief at St Botolph's Priory, Colchester, Essex.

Introduction (Fig 1)

An archaeological watching brief was carried out in the grounds of St Botolph's Priory on behalf of Colchester Borough Council during landscaping work. This work involved the relocation of the war memorial, the creation of new paths and the removal of some trees and shrubs. The watching brief was undertaken by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) in April and May 2010.

The site is located a short distance to the south of the historic town wall, on a slight south-facing slope (Fig 1). The modern ground-level drops from 18.9 m AOD in the north-western corner of the site to 13.4 m AOD in the south-eastern corner. There is an underground west-east watercourse immediately to the south of the site. The site consists of the ruins of the medieval priory, which is a Grade I listed structure, set in an open grassed area. It lies immediately to the north of St Botolph's Church, which was built in 1836 and is a Grade II listed building. Most of the area is designated a scheduled ancient monument (Essex SAM no 26301). The western part of the site falls within the Town Centre Conservation Area. The churchyard in the north-western corner of the site has been used for burial into recent times.

This report follows the standards set out in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (CIMS 2008a), and also those in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2008a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IfA 2008b). The guidance contained in English Heritage's *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE 2006), and in the documents *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment* (EAA 3), *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy* (EAA 8), and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14), was also followed.

Archaeological background

Exploratory excavations within the priory church in 1991 (Urban Archaeological Database or UAD no 3174) uncovered evidence of a Roman building, which was probably part of an extra-mural settlement rather than a Roman church or 'martyrium' (Crummy 2001, 150).

St Botolph's Priory was founded in 1104, probably on or near a pre-existing church (*ibid*, 149). The priory church took some time to complete and it was not dedicated until 1177. Only the walls of the nave of the priory church remain standing. The nave was used as the parish church after the Dissolution in 1536 until the Siege of 1648, when it was left a ruin. Trial-trenching to the north-east of the standing remains in 1986 revealed traces of the north transept (Shimmin 1986; UAD no 3165). Two burials of probable medieval date were located to the north of the transept. Further details of the east end of the church, including a

possible crypt and more burials, were uncovered during excavations in 1991 (Crummy 2001, 150).

It is unclear to what extent the other priory buildings were re-used following the Dissolution. Limited evidence of these was uncovered to the south of the priory church during exploratory excavations in 1987 (*Col arch* 2, 15). During the 19th century, buildings began to encroach significantly onto the former precinct of the priory. This continued in the 20th century with the development of the Britannia Works factory until its closure in 1982 and demolition in 1987. The war memorial appears on the 1921 OS 1:2,500 map in its original location between the priory church ruins and St Botolph's Church. The memorial was moved during the current works to the north-western corner of the churchyard.

Aims

The aim of the watching brief was to record the depth and extent of any archaeological remains uncovered during the landscaping work, and to assess the date and significance of these remains.

Methods (Fig 2)

The landscaping work involved the contractors using a mechanical digger to dig two small trenches (T1-T2) and to strip topsoil from several other areas. In the north-western corner of the churchyard a trench (T1) for the concrete base of the repositioned war memorial was dug 600 mm deep. A trench (T2) for a base for benches was dug approximately 350 mm deep nearby. A path was also added in this part of the site, although this was largely laid on top of the existing surface.

A quadrangle was laid out between the priory remains and St Botolph's Church. Initially the war memorial and its base were removed. The latter was 550 mm deep and was set on a layer of sand. Then the area was stripped to a depth of approximately 200 mm. A hard surface border approximately 3 m wide was subsequently laid around a grassed rectangular central area. Paths were also added in the south-eastern part of the site. Other improvements included the upgrading of furniture, which necessitated some minor ground disturbance. The removal and management of trees and shrubs was also carried out. Most of the spoil from the groundwork was retained on site.

The contractors gave CAT staff time, during intermittent site visits, to investigate, clean and record any archaeological remains uncovered, and to collect up the human bone and other finds unearthed. Individual records of archaeological contexts, such as layers or features, as well as finds, were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets. Plans were drawn at 1:20 and section drawings were made at 1:10. Standard record shots of the site and of individual trenches and contexts were taken with a digital camera. Further details of the recording methods used can be found in the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for the site, which was produced by CAT in March 2010, and in the CAT document *Policies and procedures* (CAT 2006). The WSI also set out proposals for post-excavation work, the production of a report, an archive and (if necessary) publication texts, and followed a brief written by Colchester Borough Council's Archaeological Officer (CBCAO).

Results

Over much of the site, a thick layer of topsoil or dark earth (L1) was encountered. This was at least 0.6 m thick and, where excavated, was of post-medieval and modern date. The natural subsoil was not reached during the watching brief.

As expected, human remains were found during the work, particularly in the churchyard in the north-west corner of the site. However, only loose fragments were uncovered and no *in situ* burials were disturbed. The bone was collected up and subsequently reburied on site.

Part of a headstone (F1; Fig 2 & Plate 1) survived *in situ* in T1 in the north-western corner of the site. It was aligned north-south and extended into the section. The upper part of the headstone had been broken off and there was no

inscription present. The headstone was 70 mm thick, and probing in the section indicated that it was 670 mm wide. It extended below the bottom of the trench. The top of the headstone lay only 100 mm below the modern ground-level and part of it was cut away by the contractors prior to concreting. The headstone was presumably set at the western end of a grave, all trace of which above ground has disappeared. It was probably of 19th-century date.



Plate 1 Headstone F1, viewed from the south-west.

In the north-western corner of the quadrangle between the priory remains and St Botolph's Church, the top of a well (F2; Fig 2) was uncovered during stripping. It was constructed of brick and had an internal diameter of approximately 1 m. There was a domed brick capping 0.35 m high, with a circular gap, 0.5 m across, in the middle. This was covered by a stone slab, which measured 640 x 570 mm and had 'WELL' inscribed on its upper surface. The top of the slab lay approximately 150 mm below the modern ground-level. The bricks in the capping were slightly larger than those in the well itself. It was not possible to examine these in detail or confirm whether they were unfrogged. The smaller bricks were possibly 18th century or even earlier in date, while the bricks in the capping were probably 19th century in date. On the day F2 was recorded, the water table lay approximately 2 m below the modern ground-level. The well could have served properties on the St Botolph's Street frontage. However, there were structures shown to the south of the priory church in the maps published in Speed (1610) and Morant (1748), and perhaps F2 was associated with buildings in this area. It seems likely that F2 went out of use around the time that St Botolph's Church was built in 1836. Another well (or perhaps soakaway) was situated in the south-eastern corner of the quadrangle. This had an inspection cover but was not examined in detail.

Following the removal of a shrub in the eastern part of the churchyard, the remains of a low grave monument (F3; Fig 2 & Plate 2) were exposed. This consisted of a stone slab, which measured 1.93 m by 1.17 m and was aligned east-west. It was set on at least two courses of brick. On the slab were the remains of a marble kerb, which measured 1.62 m by 0.8 m. Within the kerb were several loose gravestone fragments, which were not in their original positions and were placed flat. One of these was a weathered headstone which read:

'TO THE MEMORY OF
MARY THE WIFE OF
CAPT JESSE JONES
WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE
THE [?] DAY OF AUGUST 18[52]
AGED [61] YEARS
SINCERELY LAMENTED'

This monument has since been consolidated and the headstone incorporated into the plinth.



Plate 2 Grave monument F3, viewed from the south.

Finds

The unstratified bone was collected up and retained on site. It was subsequently reburied in a shrub bed close to the repositioned war memorial. A small quantity of other finds was recovered during the watching brief, mainly from L1. Where appropriate, these were cleaned, marked and bagged according to context. The finds are listed in the appendix.

Archive deposition

The archive from the watching brief will be permanently deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums under accession code COLIM 2010.30, in accordance with *Guidelines on the preparations and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester and Ipswich Museums* (CIMS 2008b) and *Archaeological archives: a guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation* (IfA 2007). The archive includes a wallet containing the context sheets, site plans, copies of the WSI and CBCAO brief, and correspondence with the client; a CD containing digital material including the site photographs; and a small museum box containing the finds.

Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to Colchester Borough Council for commissioning and funding the watching brief, and to the contractors, Jackson, for their help on site. The project was monitored by Martin Winter, Colchester Borough Council Archaeology Officer.

Glossary

AOD	above Ordnance Survey datum point based on mean sea level at Newlyn, Cornwall
CBCAO	Colchester Borough Council's Archaeological Officer
context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made; usually a layer or a feature
dark earth	post-Roman topsoil; probably the result of long-term cultivation, refuse-disposal and pit-digging
feature	an identifiable context, such as a pit, a wall or a post-hole
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists

<i>imbrex</i>	curved Roman roof tile
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c AD 1500
modern	period from c 1850 onwards to the present
martyrium	a building, a tomb, or a piece of ground associated with an important Christian
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
peg-tile	rectangular roof tile of medieval or later date
post-medieval	period from c 1500 to c 1850
Roman	the period from AD 43 to c AD 410
<i>tegula</i>	flanged Roman roof tile
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database, maintained by Colchester and Ipswich Museums
U/S	unstratified, ie without a well-defined context

References

Note: all CAT reports (except DBAs) are available online in .pdf format at <http://cat.essex.ac.uk>

CAR 10	1999	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report 10: Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-86</i> , by R P Symonds and S Wade, ed by P Bidwell and A Croom
CAT	2006	<i>Policies and procedures</i> , Colchester Archaeological Trust
CIMS	2008a	<i>Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester (CBC)</i>
CIMS	2008b	<i>Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester and Ipswich Museums (CBC)</i>
<i>Col arch 2</i>	1988	<i>the Colchester archaeologist, 2</i>
Crummy, P	2001	<i>City of Victory: the story of Colchester - Britain's first Roman town</i>
EAA 3	1997	<i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 3 , ed by J Glazebrook
EAA 8	2000	<i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 8 , ed by N Brown & J Glazebrook
EAA 14	2003	<i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 14 , ed by D Gurney
English Heritage	2006	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment</i>
IfA	2007	<i>Archaeological archives: a guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation</i>
IfA	2008a	<i>Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief</i>
IfA	2008b	<i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i>
Morant, P	1748	<i>The history and antiquities of the most ancient town and borough of Colchester</i>
MoRPHE	2006	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment</i> (English Heritage)
Shimmin, D	1986	'Exploratory excavations at St Botolph's Priory, Colchester 1986', unpublished CAT archive report
Speed, J	1610	<i>The theatre of the Empire of Great Britain</i>

Appendix: list of finds by context

All weights are in grammes. Roman pottery fabric codes follow those used in *CAR 10*.

Table 1: finds list.

Trench	Context	Finds no	Qty	Description	Weight (g)	Comments
T1	L1	1	2	<i>imbrex</i> fragments	198	
			1	<i>tegula</i> fragment	261	
			1	post-medieval glazed floor tile fragment	245	pale yellow glaze; 31 mm thick; the fragment including the breaks were coated in mortar
			2	peg-tile fragments	114	
			1	slate fragment	36	
			1	Roman pot sherd	30	Fabric GX
			15	post-medieval/modern pot sherds	473	including stoneware and earthenwares
			3	post-medieval/modern glass sherds	192	
			3	clay-pipe stem fragments	15	2 with spurs, 1 with E[L?] stamped in relief on the sides of the spur; bore diameter 3 x 2 mm
			T2	L1	2	5
1	post-medieval/modern glass sherds	43				
2	peg-tile fragments	184				
2	clay-pipe bowl fragments	11				1 with broad flutes on the lower part of the bowl, late 18th/early 19th century
3	clay-pipe stem fragments	7				1 with spur; bore diameter 3 x 2 mm
-	L1	4	1	modern wine glass fragment	47	from stripping in NW corner of quadrangle
-	L1	5	1	sherd from Roman samian cup	10	Fabric BA (CG); from stripping of quadrangle
-	U/S	3	1	small modern glass bottle	83	100 mm high, brown glass liqueur bottle

Report author: Donald Shimmin

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Distribution list:

Reg Patterson, Regeneration Project Officer, Colchester Borough Council
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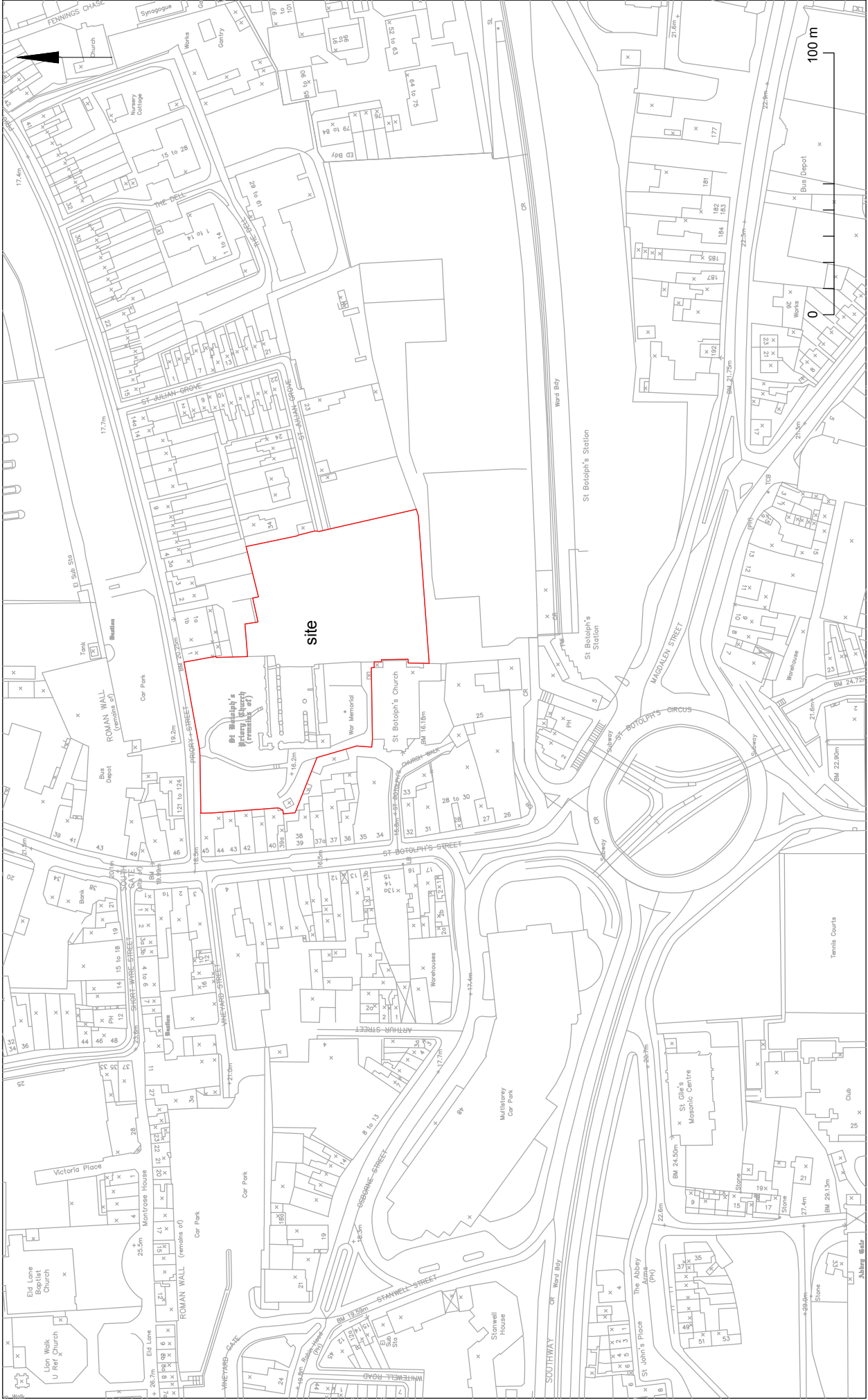
12 Lexden Road,
Colchester,
Essex CO3 3NF

tel.: (01206) 541051
(01206) 500124

email: archaeologists@catuk.org

Checked by: *Philip Crummy*
Date: 01.10.10

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Fig 1 Site location.

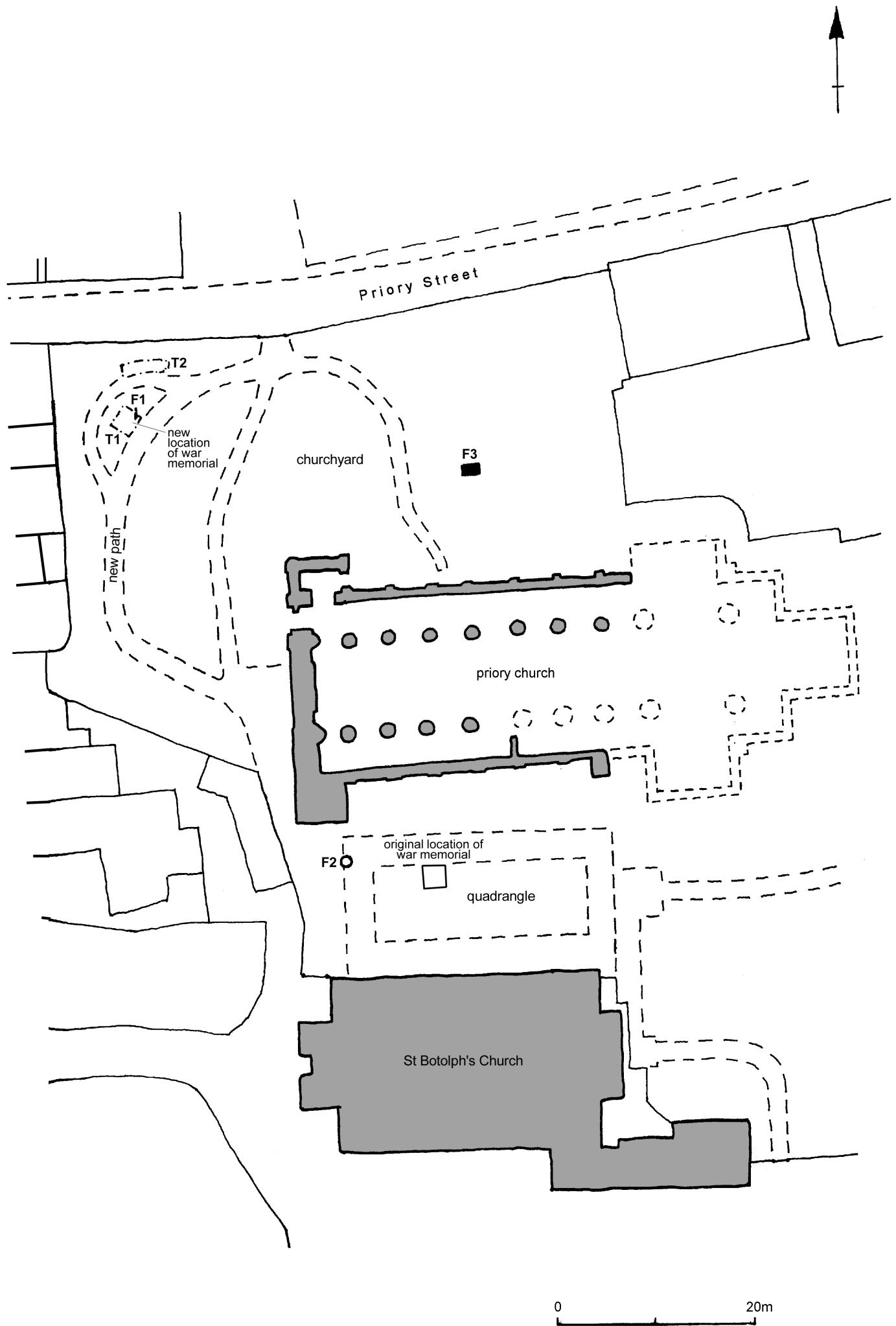


Fig 2 Site plan.

Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

Summary sheet

Site address: St Botolph's Priory, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: St Botolph's	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TL 9998 2495	Site codes: Museum accession code - COLIM 2010.30 CAT project code - 10/3c
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: April-May 2010	Size of area investigated: approx 500 sq m
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums	Funding source: CBC
Further seasons anticipated? Yes	Related EHER and UAD nos: UAD nos 3165, 3174; UAD nos 3167 and 3884 cited in the brief
Final report: CAT Report 567 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: post-medieval/modern	
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>Gravestones and a well of probable 18th- to 19th-century date were uncovered during an archaeological watching brief at St Botolph's Priory, Colchester, Essex.</i>	
Previous summaries/reports: -	
Keywords: St Botolph's Priory, gravestone, well, human bone	Significance: *
Author of summary: Donald Shimmin	Date of summary: October 2010