

**An archaeological evaluation  
by test-pitting at North Primary School,  
John Harper Street, Colchester, Essex  
November 2011**

**report prepared by  
Howard Brooks and Ben Holloway**

**on behalf of  
Essex County Council  
Infrastructure Delivery Team**

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NGR: TL 9919 2584 (c)



**Colchester Archaeological Trust**

12 Lexden Road,  
Colchester,  
Essex CO3 3NF

*tel.:* (01206) 541051  
(01206) 500124

*email:* [archaeologists@catuk.org](mailto:archaeologists@catuk.org)

**CAT Report 624**  
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## 1 Summary

*There was a Roman suburb including high-status buildings with tessellated and mosaic floors in the vicinity of the HSBC bank (formerly the Midland bank), the Victoria Inn and the Globe hotel (now the Mirchi Rasoi restaurant) on North Station Road in Colchester. The North Primary School lies close to the site of this Roman suburb. In advance of the proposed construction of new classroom bases and the laying of an all-weather sports pitch, six test-pits (TP1-TP6) were excavated in the playing field to the rear (west) of the school. Stratified beneath approximately 600mm of topsoil and made ground was a Roman deposit containing 2nd-century Roman pottery, tile, and oyster shell. Natural ground was reached at between 1.0m and 1.2m in four of the test-pits. In the other test-pit (TP4), a consolidated mortar spread was found at 1.0m below modern ground-level. It was not possible to determine whether the mortar spread was part of a Roman floor or a wall foundation.*

## 2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the archive report on an archaeological investigation by test-pitting at North Primary School, John Harper Street, Colchester, Essex. The school is half a mile north of the town centre, and west of North Station Road. Site centre is NGR TL 9919 2584. The site is a grassed playing field to the west of the main school building. The work was undertaken in advance of the construction of new classroom bases and an all-weather sports pitch.

The Historic Environment Management (HEM) team of Essex County Council (ECC) were consulted by Essex County Council in November 2011 for pre-planning guidance for the construction of the proposed classrooms and the all-weather sports pitch. In response to the consultation, the HEM team recommended an initial programme of test-pitting in order to inform the future archaeological mitigation strategy for the site.

A brief detailing the required archaeological work (HEM 2011) was written by the HEM team officer (Adrian Gascoyne). All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a WSI (Written Scheme of Investigation) produced by CAT in response to the HEM brief and agreed with the HEM team (CAT 2011).

The archaeological work was commissioned by Mr Neil Pendrigh of Essex County Council Infrastructure Delivery Team, and was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on 30th November 2011. Post-excavation work was carried out in December 2011.

In addition to the WSI, all fieldwork and reporting was done in accordance with the Colchester Archaeological Trust's *Policies and procedures* (CAT 2008), Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practice for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (CIMS 2008a) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester and Ipswich Museums* (CIMS 2008b), and the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 2008a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IfA 2008b). The guidance contained in the documents *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE) and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14) was also followed.

### 3 Archaeological background (Fig 1)

This section is based on records held by the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER).

North Primary School is located outside the town wall of the Roman town of *Colonia Victricensis*. It lies within a suburb of the Roman town along a Roman road which led northwards out of the town from the north gate, in an area where previous archaeological work has identified the sites of high-status Roman buildings.

About 50m south-east of the site, the remains of a large Roman house were discovered immediately north of Victoria Chase during construction work for the Midland (now HSBC) bank at 26 North Station Road (CAR 6, 346). A Roman mosaic pavement had been found 60m to the south-east of the site in 1880, less than 1m below the ground surface. Another mosaic pavement was found in front of the Victoria Inn (10 North Station Road; not within area shown on Fig 1) in 1929 (CAR 6, 346), and in 2001 an archaeological evaluation adjacent to the Victoria Inn revealed part of a previously unknown mosaic pavement, 600mm below modern ground-level (CAT Report 163). On the other side of North Station Road, to the rear of the Globe hotel (71 North Station Road), the remains of another high-status Roman building have been recorded (CAT Report 248).

Local ground conditions (possibly wet ground near the river) to the west of the main school building are favourable for the preservation of archaeological deposits including organic material and palaeo-environmental evidence. However, an archaeological watching brief undertaken during a previous extension to the school, along its southern boundary, showed that the ground in this part of the site had been raised substantially, so that most of what was disturbed consisted of modern layers. Natural ground was not reached and the contractor's excavations did not extend to a great enough depth to impact any archaeological deposits that may survive on the site (CAT Report 284). The ground-level on the eastern side of the school site is likely to have been built up similarly, although the area of the proposed all-weather sports pitch to the west is less well understood, because no recent investigation results are available for this area.

### 4 Aim

The aim of the evaluation was to establish the character, extent, date, significance and condition of any archaeological remains and deposits likely to be affected by proposed works at North Primary School. Specific attention was paid to the potential for Roman archaeological horizons, as mentioned in section 3 above.

### 5 Results of the evaluation (Figs 1-3)

This section gives an archaeological summary of the test-pits TP1-TP6, with context and finds dating information. Methodology is as described in the WSI (CAT 2011). Each test-pit was approximately 1m square.

**Table 1: list of contexts.**

Context	Test-pit	Description
F1	TP4	Mortar spread
L1	TP1-TP6	Turf and topsoil
L2	TP1-TP5	Make-up
L3	TP1-TP5	Post-Roman accumulation
L4	TP1-TP3, TP5	Natural

### **TP1: summary**

Sited in the north-western corner of the playing field, TP1 was excavated through three horizons (L1-L3), revealing a fourth (L4). L1, a modern turf and topsoil (250mm thick), contained a significant amount of redeposited sand lenses, ash and clinker. A thin lens of loosely consolidated clinker may represent a former playground surface. L1 sealed a modern make-up horizon L2 (200mm thick) containing modern brick and gravel lenses. L2 sealed L3 (600mm thick), post-Roman accumulation material with residual Roman pottery and tile. L3 sealed Roman deposit L4 (at 1.1m below modern ground-level). L4 was a light silt with substantial amounts of pottery, tile and oyster shell, and moderate charcoal flecking indicative of nearby Roman occupation. There were no archaeological features in TP1.

### **TP2: summary**

Sited in the north-eastern part of the playing field, TP2 was excavated through the same stratigraphic sequence as TP1 (ie L1-L3, and revealing Roman horizon L4 at 1.1m below ground-level).

### **TP3: summary**

Located on the eastern edge of the playing field, TP3 was excavated through the same stratigraphic sequence as TP1-TP2 (ie L1-L3, and revealing Roman horizon L4 at 1.1m below ground-level).

### **TP4: summary**

Located in the south-eastern corner of the playing field, excavation of the northern side of TP4 was hindered by the presence of a modern storm-water drain. On the southern side, the same stratigraphy was seen as in TP1-TP3, although there was no consolidated clinker deposit in L2. Rather than Roman occupation horizon L4, a consolidated mortar spread F1 was exposed at 1.0m below ground-level. The small size of the test-pit made it difficult to interpret F1; it may have been the remains of a mortar floor or, perhaps, part of a wall foundation. Whichever is the case, F1 was part of a Roman structure which was presumably part of the Roman suburb around what is now the HSBC bank to the east.

**Table 2: TP4 archaeological context and dating.**

<b>Context</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Date</b>
F1	Consolidated mortar spread (?floor or ?wall foundation)	Roman

### **TP5: summary**

Located in the south-western corner of the playing field, TP5 was excavated through the same stratigraphy as TP1-TP4, consequently revealing Roman deposit L4 at its base (at a depth of 1.1m). However, there was no consolidated clinker deposit in L2. A disused concrete land-drain was observed in the eastern edge of TP5.

### **TP6 arboreal test-pit: summary**

This was approximately the same size as TP1-TP5, but not excavated by CAT. Its excavation was monitored, but it did not penetrate the full depth of the topsoil (L1).

## **6 Finds**

*by Stephen Benfield*

Small quantities of finds dated to the Late Iron Age-early Roman, Roman and post-medieval to modern periods were recovered from these layers: TP2 (L4), TP3 (L3) and TP5 (L4). The bulk finds consist of pottery and ceramic building material (CBM). All of the finds are listed by finds number and context for each

test-pit in Table 4 below and an overall spot-date for the finds from each context is provided.

The Late Iron Age and Roman pottery fabrics refer to the Colchester Roman pottery fabric series (Hawkes & Hull 1947; *CAR 10*) and vessel forms to the Colchester Camulodunum (Cam) pottery type series (Hawkes & Hull 1947; Hull 1958). The post-Roman pottery was recorded with reference to the Colchester post-Roman fabric series (*CAR 7*). The pottery fabrics recorded are listed in Table 3 below.

The recovery of sherds of Late Iron Age-type grog-tempered pottery (Fabric GTW) from two contexts, ie TP2 (L4) and TP3 (L3), is notable, as limited excavation on part of a Roman building to the south of the current site did not produce any pottery of this early date (CAT Report 163, section 7.2; CAT Report 193, appendix A).

**Table 3: list of pottery fabrics.**

Fabric code	Fabric name
<i>Roman:</i>	
AJ	amphoras (Dressel 20)
DJ	coarse oxidised and related wares
GTW	Late Iron Age grog-tempered wares
GX	other coarse wares, principally locally-produced grey wares
HZ	large storage jars and other vessels in heavily-tempered grey wares
RCW	Romanising coarse wares
<i>Post-medieval:</i>	
40	post-medieval red earthenwares (general)

**Table 4: list of finds by finds number and context for each test-pit with finds spot-date.**

Test-pit	context	finds no	finds	finds spot-date
TP2	L4	2	<p><b>Pottery</b> Roman: Fabric AJ 3@320g, includes a rim from a Dressel 20 (rim form dated Claudio-Neronian to early Flavian; see Peacock &amp; Williams 1986, fig 65 - after Martin Kilcher 1983); Fabric DJ, 10@98g sherds from 3 pots (dated mid 1st-2nd/3rd century); Fabric GTW, 1@46g (dated mid-late 1st century BC-mid 1st century AD); Fabric RCW, 1@12g (dated mid-late 1st century AD); Fabric GX, 1@11g, rim from a bowl, possibly form Cam 241/242 (dated mid-late 1st/early 2nd century(?)).</p> <p><b>CBM</b> Roman: <i>tegula</i>, 1@ 366g; flue tile, 1@470g – thick tile (30 mm) with lattice scoring, probably a flat or flanged tile rather than box flue; other brick/tile, 3@136g</p>	Roman, pottery mid-late 1st century
TP3	L3	3	<p><b>Pottery</b> Roman: Fabric GTW, 1@24g, shoulder cordon from a jar/deep bowl (dated mid-late 1st century BC-mid 1st century AD); Fabric RCW, 1@9g (dated mid-late 1st century AD); Fabric GX, 1@4g lid (dated Roman - probably 1st-2nd/3rd century). Post-medieval: Fabric 40 (glazed), 1@36g (dated late 16th/17th-18th century)</p> <p><b>CBM</b> 2@9g, 2 small pieces of brick/tile, undated</p>	post-medieval/modern, pottery dated late 16th/17th-18th century

Test-pit	context	finds no	finds	finds spot-date
			<b>Slag</b> 1@6g, light with vitrified surface, possibly coal slag (dated as probably post-medieval to modern)	
TP5	L4	1	<b>Pottery</b> Roman: Fabric DJ, 2@50g, includes a piece from a thick handle (48g) with single central groove in a pink fabric and a buff smooth surface; this might be an amphora but is probably from a large flagon (dated mid 1st-2nd/3rd century, possibly mid 1st-early 2nd century); Fabric HZ, 1@149g, rim from large storage jar form Cam 270B (dated 1st-2nd/3rd century) <b>Stone</b> Septaria, 1@49g	Roman, pottery dated mid 1st-2nd/3rd century, possibly 1st-early 2nd century

## 7 Discussion

The test-pits showed that there is a Roman deposit (L4) at 1.0m to 1.2m below ground-level on the site of the playing field in the western part of the North Primary School grounds. This deposit contains pottery, brick/tile debris, oyster shell and charcoal flecking which probably derives from the demolition of the building of which Roman floor/wall foundation F1 was a part. The Roman horizon was sealed beneath approximately 0.6m of modern topsoil and made ground, which included, in TP1-TP3, a consolidated clinker layer which may have been an earlier playground surface.

There have been sufficient discoveries of Roman structural remains (including mosaic floors) in the vicinity of the HSBC bank (originally the Midland bank), the Victoria Inn, and the Globe hotel (now the Mirchi Rasoi restaurant) on North Station Road to identify a suburb including high-status buildings, of which the building now identified at the North Primary School site was undoubtedly part.

## 8 Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to Neil Pendrigh (Essex County Council Infrastructure Delivery Team) who commissioned the project and to Essex County Council who funded it. Site work was managed by B Holloway and carried out by B Holloway and M Baister. The project was monitored for the HEM team by Adrian Gascoyne.

## 9 References

**Note: All CAT reports (except for DBAs) are now published online at <http://cat.essex.ac.uk> in .pdf format.**

- |        |      |  |
|--------|------|--|
| CAR 6  | 1992 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 6: Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School, and other sites in Colchester 1971-85</i> , by P Crummy           |
| CAR 7  | 2000 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 7: Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester 1971-1985</i> , by J Cotter                                       |
| 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    | 2008 | <i>Policies and procedures</i>   |
| CAT    | 2011 | Written Scheme of Investigation for archaeological test-pitting at North Primary School, John Harper Street, November 2011, by B Holloway                  |

CAT Report 163		An archaeological evaluation at North Station Road (adjacent to the Victoria Inn), Colchester, Essex: August 2001, unpublished CAT archive report, by K Orr, 2001
CAT Report 193		An archaeological watching brief at North Station Road (Victoria Inn), Colchester, Essex: February-May 2002, unpublished CAT archive report, by K Orr, 2002
CAT Report 248		An archaeological evaluation at the Globe Hotel, North Station Road, Colchester, Essex: October 2003, unpublished CAT archive report, by K Orr, 2003
CAT Report 284		An archaeological watching brief at North Primary School, John Harper Street, Colchester, Essex: November 2003-April 2004, unpublished CAT archive report, by K Orr, 2004
CIMS	2008a	<i>Guidelines on standards and practice for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i> (CBC)
CIMS	2008a	<i>Guidelines on standards and practice for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i> (CBC)
EAA 14	2003	<i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, <b>14</b> , ed by D Gurney
Hawkes, C F C, & Hull, M R	1947	<i>Camulodunum, first report on the excavations at Colchester 1930-39</i> , RRCSAL, <b>14</b>
HEM	2011	<i>Archaeological test-pitting at the North Primary School, John Harper Street, Colchester, November 2011</i> (brief, by A Gascoyne)
Hull, M R	1958	<i>Roman Colchester</i> , RRCSAL <b>20</b>
IfA	2008a	<i>Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation</i>
IfA	2008b	<i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i>
MoRPHE	2006	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment</i> (English Heritage)

## 10 Glossary and abbreviations

CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
CBC	Colchester Borough Council
CBM	Ceramic Building Material, ie brick and tile
CIMS	Colchester and Ipswich Museums
context	specific location on an excavation, usually relating to finds
ECC	Essex County Council
EHHER	Essex Historic Environment Record
HEM	Historic Environment Management team of Essex County Council
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists
medieval	the period from AD 1066 to Henry VIII
modern	19th century to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
post-medieval	after Henry VIII and up to Queen Victoria
Roman	the period from AD 43 to c AD 430
RRCSAL	Report of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database held by CIMS
U/S	unstratified, ie without any context

## 11 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is currently held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but will be permanently deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums under accession code 2011.90.

## **12 Contents of archive**

### **Finds**

1 x museum box containing all finds

### **Paper record**

1 x A4 wallet containing:

brief and WSI

copy of CAT Report 624

original site record sheets

photographic log

attendance record

disk with digital photographs

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### **Distribution list:**

Neil Pendrigh, ECC Infrastructure Delivery Team

Adrian Gascoyne, ECC HEM team officer

Essex Historic Environment Record, Essex County Council



**Colchester Archaeological Trust**

12 Lexden Road,  
Colchester,  
Essex CO3 3NF

*tel.:* (01206) 541051

(01206) 500124

*email:* [archaeologists@catuk.org](mailto:archaeologists@catuk.org)

*Checked by:* Philip Crummy

*Date:* 23.12.11

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- CAT test-pits, 1 x 1m
- arboreal test-pit, 0.6 x 1.5m

Fig 1 Site location.

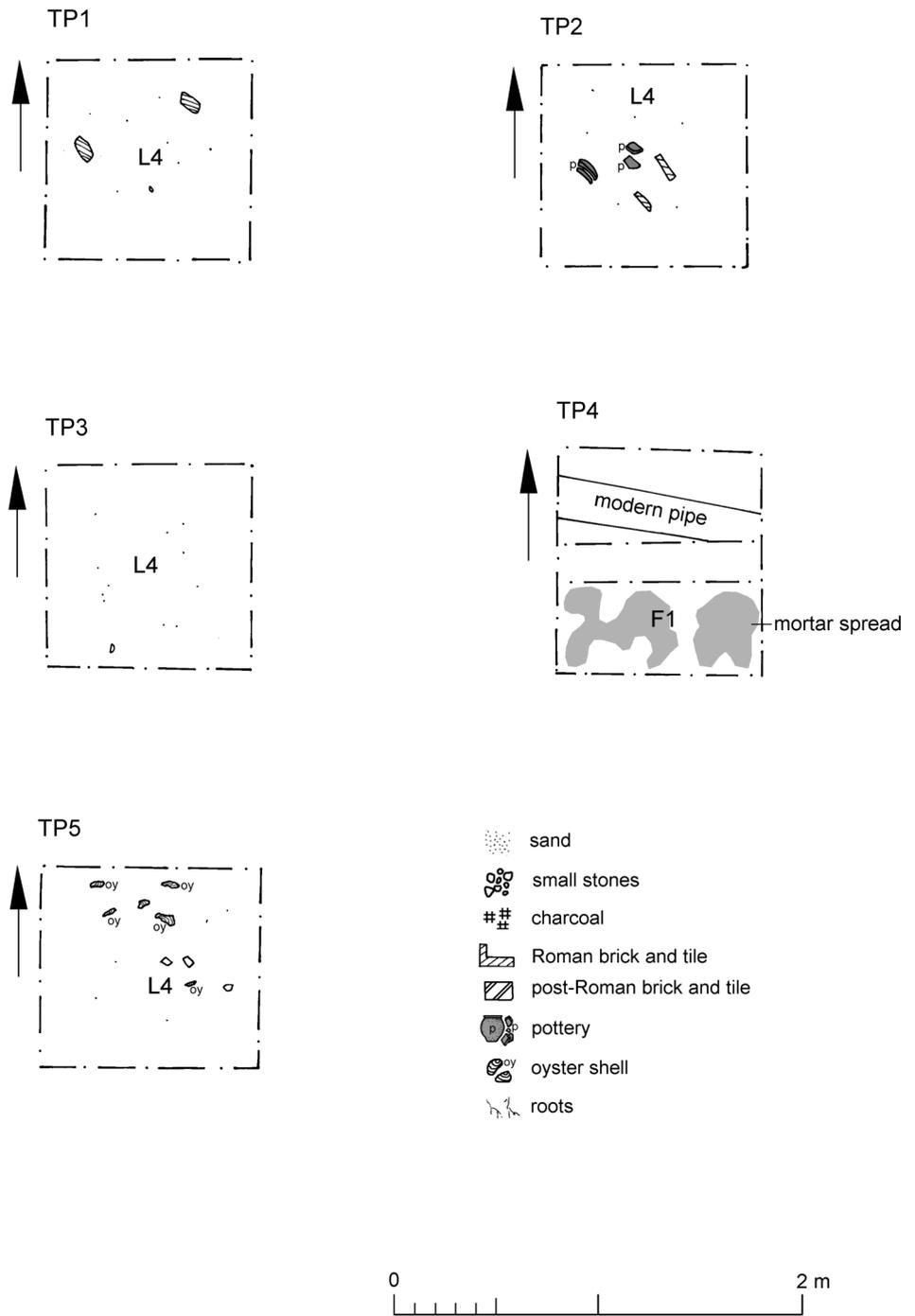


Fig 2 TP1-TP5: plans.

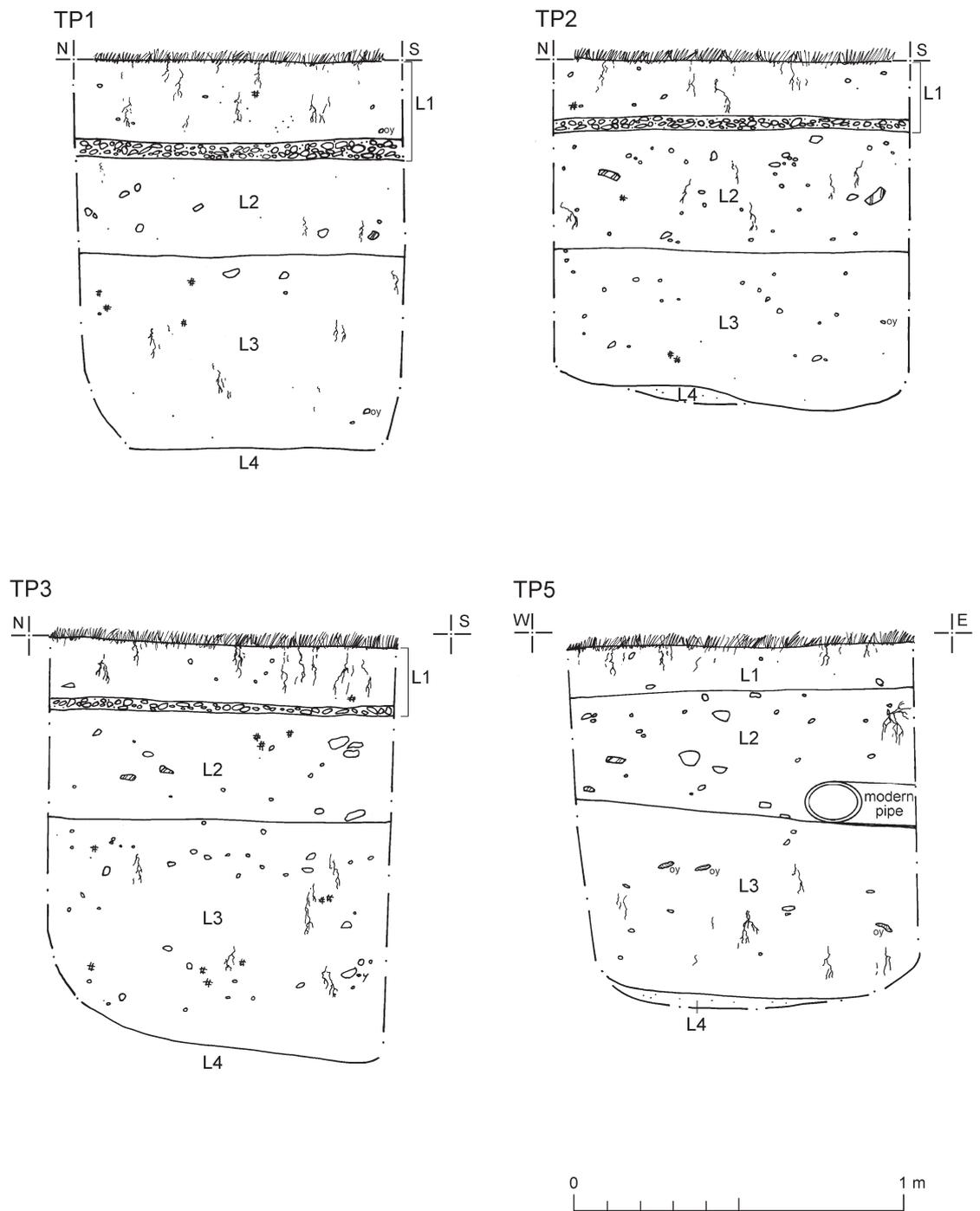


Fig 3 TP1-TP3 and TP5: sections.

# Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

## Summary sheet

<b>Site address:</b> North Primary School, John Harper Street, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester
<b>NGR:</b> TL 9919 2584 (c)	<b>Project codes:</b> CAT - 11/11d HEM - CCNP11 Museum accession - COLEM 2011.90
<b>Type of work:</b> Evaluation by test-pitting	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> November 2011	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 5 test-pits in area approximately 48 x 32m
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester and Ipswich Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Essex County Council
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related EHER and UAD nos:</b> -
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 624 and summary in EAH	
<b>Periods represented:</b> Roman, post-medieval and modern	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b>  <i>There was a Roman suburb including high-status buildings with tessellated and mosaic floors in the vicinity of the HSBC bank (formerly the Midland bank), the Victoria Inn and the Globe hotel (now the Mirchi Rasoi restaurant) on North Station Road in Colchester. The North Primary School lies close to the site of this Roman suburb. In advance of the proposed construction of new classroom bases and the laying of an all-weather sports pitch, six test-pits (TP1-TP6) were excavated in the playing field to the rear (west) of the school. Stratified beneath approximately 600mm of topsoil and made ground was a Roman deposit containing 2nd-century Roman pottery, tile, and oyster shell. Natural ground was reached at between 1.0m and 1.2m in four of the test-pits. In the other test-pit (TP4), a consolidated mortar spread was found at 1.0m below modern ground-level. It was not possible to determine whether the mortar spread was part of a Roman floor or a wall foundation.</i></p>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> none	
<b>Keywords:</b> Roman, occupation, floor or wall foundation	<b>Significance:</b> *
<b>Author of summary:</b> Howard Brooks and Ben Holloway	<b>Date of summary:</b> December 2011