

Archaeological monitoring of Fence Construction between B-Ground and the former Arena Leisure Centre, Circular Road East, Colchester, CO2 7SZ

February-April 2019



by Dr Pip Parmenter

figures by P Parmenter and S Carter

fieldwork by M Baister and S Carter

commissioned by RPS Heritage on behalf of RMPA Services

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Historic England application reference: S00215050

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CAT Report 1502

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CAT WSI
OASIS Summary

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Photograph 1 T3 showing Layers 1 - 4

Fig 1 Site location showing monitored areas

Fig 2 Feature and representative sections

1 Summary

Archaeological monitoring was carried out at Colchester Garrison B-Ground to the west side of the former Arena leisure centre, Circular Road East, Colchester, during groundworks for the erection of a new fence. The fence posts were positioned to avoid cavea wall structures associated with the known alignment of the Colchester Roman Circus. A small amount of Roman building material was recovered from the new fence postholes during the monitoring. No features were uncovered.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This report presents the results of archaeological monitoring at to the immediate west of the former Arena Leisure Centre, Circular Road East, Colchester, Essex, which was carried out during November 2019. The work was commissioned by RPS Heritage on behalf of RMPA Services and was undertaken during groundworks for the erection of a new western boundary fence of the Arena site. The work was undertaken by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT).

The northern extent of the new fence crosses the site of the Roman Circus Scheduled Monument, and Scheduled Monument Consent was sought and approved by Debbie Priddy (ref: SM00215050), Assistant Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Historic England East of England Office, on the condition that all groundworks were supervised by CAT (ref: SM00215050).

All fieldwork and reporting was done in accordance with English Heritage's *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (English Heritage 2006), and with *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England (EAA 14 and 24)*. This report mirrors standards and practices contained in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs (ClfA 2014a)* and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials (ClfA 2014b)*.

3 Archaeological background

The following archaeological background draws on the major published sources for Colchester archaeology, and also the Colchester Historic Environment Record (CHER) and the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER).

The area surrounding the Arena site (including parts of 'B-Ground' at Abbey Field) has been the subject of several large-scale archaeological investigations in the past, the results of which have been detailed in the WSI (RPS 2016) and are briefly summarised below. More details can be found in CAT Reports 97, 412, 424, 628 and 843.

Neolithic and Bronze Age

Neolithic and Bronze Age features (mainly pits) have been uncovered during archaeological investigations as part of the Garrison Alienated Land project within in Areas C1 (north), C2 (east), J1 and H (northwest) and Flagstaff Road (north) (CAT Report 412 and 1033).

The Area C1 pits contained both Mildenhall Ware and Peterborough Ware, and may have been transitional between the middle/late Neolithic traditions (CAT Report 412). A pit in Area C2 contained Beaker pottery typical of the late 3rd to early 2nd millennium BC (RPS 2015).

Late Bronze Age pits were identified in Areas J1 and H (CAT Report 412 and 1033), in the northern zone of St John's Abbey (UAD event 3019) and Alienated Land Trench WBT4 at Flagstaff Road (CAT Report 412). A pit/posthole of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age date was also found during work at Circular Road North to the west of Abbey Field (*ibid*).

No evidence of Neolithic or Bronze Age activity has been found at the Arena site itself.

Iron Age and the *Oppidum*

The Arena site falls within the eastern area of the Late Iron Age *oppidum* of Camulodunum (CAT Report 97). The only above-ground traces of this *oppidum* are the linear banks and ditches of its surrounding defensive dyke system. The closest of these is located some 0.6km away from the Arena site, in the south-east corner of the residential development of the former Hydrabad and Meeanee Barracks (Area A1, CAT Report 628).

The *oppidum* has two main centres of activity. Gosbecks Farm, the site of a late Iron Age and Roman rural farmstead, is 3.5km southwest of the Arena. Sheepen, an industrial and trading centre, is 1.5km to the northwest.

Apart from these two large centres, it is likely that there were a number of smaller domestic and farming sites in the *oppidum*. One of these farms was identified by field boundary paddocks and other features at Kirkee & McMumm Barracks in 1994 with another identified in 2010 at the former Goojerat Barracks (CAT Report 588). Late Iron Age cremation urns were found to the east of Kirkee McMunn Barracks in 2003 (CAT Report 292, Area 6) and in the southern and southeastern areas of Abbey Field in 1904-5 (UAD 1246, 1248).

Iron Age activity immediately around the Arena site is limited. Three minor ditches in Area C1 are undated but pre-date the Roman circus and may belong an Iron Age or early Roman field system. Two mid-to-late Iron Age parallel driveway ditches and some related pitting were identified in Area J in 2004 and found to extend into the Circular Road North excavation and the Athletics track car park excavations in 2007 (CAT Report 412).

Roman

The plateau of flat ground c 400m south of the Roman town, which includes the northern extent of the Arena site, contains internationally-important Roman archaeology in the form of a stone-built monumental Roman circus discovered in 2004. The circus is currently unique in Britain and has been investigated over multiple archaeological sites, including Areas B1b, C1, C2 and J, as well as at the Circular Road North and Napier Road excavations (CAT Report 412). Smaller-scale research excavations have taken place identifying a section of the starting gates (in 2007), and an excavation in 2013 outside Roman circus House exposed a section of the northern *cavea* wall, which has been covered with a viewing platform and is now on display.

The circus was approximately 450m in length and 70m wide with a central barrier (*spina*). Elements identified to date include the stands, known as the '*cavea*', with internal and external walls, entrances on the north and south *caveas*, a racetrack dirt surface, a segment of the semi-circular end of the circus, eight starting gates, and elements of the '*spina*' including fragments of a turning post at the western end, a monument base in the centre of the *spina* at the modern cross roads of Flagstaff/Circular Road East with Napier Road/Circular Road North, and tank-like pits or cisterns within the east and west ends of the *spina*. In Areas B1b, C1 and C2, a metal trackway was identified around the circus.

The circus appears to have been pulled down in the late Roman period, with rubble spreads to the exterior of the outer wall observed in excavations.

Apart from the circus, the only other archaeology previously encountered within the Arena site is a Roman pottery kiln discovered by a construction team in 1946 whilst

excavating the foundation for the current building (Hull, 1958, 249). It was plotted as being at the south-east side of the main building.

Numerous Roman burials and burial related features have been located within the area immediately surrounding the Arena site: Area C2, Napier Road and Napier Road carpark (over 100), Area J1 North (over 400) and H (over 300), and Abbey Field (over 100) (CAT Reports 97, 412, 1033, Hull 1958). Sixty-eight burials came specifically from the closest site, Area C2. Eleven of these burials were ring-gully defined former barrows, containing cremations. This style of burial suggests both possible Germanic and military associations. Given this evidence, it was considered possible that burial activity might extend into the development site. However, the presence of a Roman kiln would be atypical on a cemetery site, and could suggest a distinct separation of activities. Alternatively there could be a chronological difference in the use of this space (e.g. the kiln pre-dated the cemetery).

The area to the south of the Arena is part of the rural hinterland south of the Roman town and the circus. To the south-east of the Arena, a small farmstead/villa lies within the playing fields of a new primary school (Area E). Archaeological evaluation identified an enclosure and small building in the playing field, with subsequent excavation of the footprint of the new school revealing a large Roman quarry, further enclosure/field boundaries and several cremations burials, including a bustum burial (CAT Report 778).

Saxon

In the late 19th century and in 1926, a number of early Anglo-Saxon (5th-7th century) burials were uncovered from Hyderabad Barracks (c 300m east of the Arena) and on land to the north of the barracks and east of Mersea Road. This burial ground extended south into the northwest corner of the former Hyderabad Barracks. Three of the graves contained Anglo-Saxon weapons (spear heads with iron shield bosses) and were associated with at least four ring-ditches of probable barrows, similar in form to the late 3rd-century Roman examples at Area C2, Napier Road and Circular Road North. The remaining inhumations in Area A1 were not securely dated, although a late Roman to Anglo-Saxon date seems likely.

Later Anglo-Saxon evidence was identified 1972 when a small Anglo-Saxon church of St John was excavated before the construction of St Botolph's roundabout.

Medieval

The principal medieval site in the area is St John's Abbey which lies to the northeast. However, a desk-based archaeological assessment (RPS 2015) indicates that the Arena site probably lay within farmland at this time.

The only medieval archaeology located immediately within the vicinity of the Arena site consists of extensive robber trenches above the circus foundations. The circus foundations were evidentially systematically robbed during the medieval period, with greensand (perhaps from the circus) still observable in the remains of St John's Abbey wall to the north. As well as the robber trenches themselves, spreads of mortar and demolitions layers appear to be associated with this activity.

Post-medieval

The Parliamentarian siege of Colchester in 1648 involved the construction of several large fortifications surrounding the town, the exact lines of which have never been established (a contemporary map suggests alignments, but its reliability is questionable). During the excavations in Area A1 and Area E (in 2011 and 2013 respectively), large post-medieval ditches were uncovered that could form part of the siegeworks surrounding the town. Uncovering elements of the 1648 siegeworks within the site is considered less likely (as none were identified in Area C2) but not impossible.

Post-medieval pits and ditches were exposed during the excavations at Areas C1, C2, Napier Road and Circular Road North. This spread of 17th-19th century features is likely to continue into the Arena site.

Modern

Cartographic sources show that the development site was located within the southeast corner of an agricultural field during the 17th to 18th centuries, and by the later 19th century was located within the northern area of Colchester Garrison's Abbey Field. The NAAFI (the Arena building) was constructed in 1946 (CAT Report 97) and demolished this year.

Military features located on the adjacent Area C2 included Second World War trenches, concrete air-raid bunkers, a communication trench (which linked the bunkers) and a pit containing a stash of carefully stacked Home Guard petrol bombs ('Molotov Cocktails').

Phase 1a archaeological evaluation at the former Arena Leisure Centre (CAT Report 843)

In 2015 eleven trial-trenches were excavated across The Arena as part of the Phase 1a (pre-determination trenching) archaeological investigation of the development site.

No features or finds of a pre-Roman date were identified aside from a residual piece of worked flint with retouch typical of the later prehistoric period.

Numerous features of Roman date were encountered. Up to 11 potential inhumations (not fully excavated) were identified within six of the 11 trenches. Of particular interest were a copper-alloy neck ring associated with two human molars, possibly from an inhumation burial within ditch F2 (now south of the proposal site). In addition were a series of north-south and east-west aligned field boundaries (ditches) respecting the alignment of the Roman circus and several pits.

Two post-medieval ditches and two pits were also present and appeared to be related to the agricultural exploitation of the site. No specifically military features were encountered other than services associated with the NAAFI/Arena building.

4 Aim

Archaeological monitoring was undertaken to excavate and record any archaeological deposits which were exposed by the groundworks.

5 Results (Figs 1-2)

A CAT archaeologist monitored the following groundworks:

- a) the excavation of fence post holes roughly 300mm in diameter and between 500 and 800mm deep.
- b) the reduction of an area 500mm wide and 40m long, by 15cm to allow for a gravel weed trap.
- c) the removal of ten trees in the southern part of the site and the digging of twenty tree holes.

In addition to this, CAT archaeologists dug by hand three larger post-holes (TP1, TP2 and TP3) situated within the Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Four layers were recorded. The post holes, tree holes and the and the weedtrap all contained a modern soft, moist, grey/brown loamy sand topsoil (L1) which was roughly 200mm thick and had infrequent stone inclusions. In the post holes and the tree holes this overlay a subsoil (L2) which was a soft, moist brown loamy sand, upto 500mm thick with 5% stone inclusions and in the post holes and Tps 1, 2 and 3, this overlay the

natural geology (L3) which was a soft, moist, yellow/orange sandy silt. However, in TP1 and TP3 another layer (L4), a dry friable light grey/brown silty sand was observed.

Six sherds of ceramic building material were recovered from subsoil L2. Five of these were Roman, and one was medieval/post-medieval. As well as these, two large pieces of limestone and modern finds including shoe leather and glass were recovered.



TP3 showing Layers 1- 4

6 Finds

Ceramic and Pottery finds

Dr. Matthew Loughton

The WB produced six sherds of ceramic building material with a weight of 928 gr. all from the subsoil L2. This consists of five sherds of Roman brick with a weight of 754 gr. and one piece of Medieval-Post Medieval peg-tile with a weight of 174 gr.

Non-Ceramic Finds

By Laura Pooley

Several finds came from L2 during monitoring. They included: two large pieces of limestone (1.6kg, finds no. 1); 57 fragments of leather shoe, some with *in situ* hobnails (508g, finds no.3); and two fragments from a modern glass bowl (283g, finds no.4). Neither piece of limestone was worked and they are probably pieces of building stone. The leather appears to have come from at least three work/army boots of probable 19th-early 20th century date, and the fragments of clear glass bowl are likely to be of a similar early 20th century date. All have been discarded.

7 Conclusion

In spite of being located in an archaeologically-sensitive area, no finds or features of any significance were encountered during the monitoring of groundworks for the new boundary fence.

8 Acknowledgements

CAT thanks Rob Masefield of RPS Heritage for commissioning and RMPA Services for funding the work. The project was managed by C Lister and carried out by M Baister and S Holloway. Figures were prepared by P Parmenter and S Carter. The project was monitored for Historic England by Debbie Priddy.

9 References

Note: all CAT reports, except for DBAs, are available online in PDF format at <http://cat.essex.ac.uk>

- | | | |
|------------------|--------------|---|
| Brown, D | 2007 | <i>Archaeological Archives: A guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation</i> |
| CAT | 2014 | <i>Health & Safety Policy</i> |
| CAT | 2019 | <i>Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for continuous archaeological monitoring and recording at Castle Park Café and lower toilets, Upper Castle Park, High Street, Colchester, Essex, CO1 1UN</i> |
| CAT Report 97 | 2000 | <i>An archaeological desk-based assessment of the Colchester Garrison PFI site</i> |
| CAT Report 292 | 2005 | <i>The Colchester Garrison PFI project, Colchester, Essex: a report on the 2003 excavation of Areas 2, 6 and 10, August-November 2003</i> |
| CAT Report 412 | 2011 | <i>Archaeological investigations on the 'Alienated Land', Colchester Garrison, Colchester, Essex: May 2004-October 2007</i> |
| CAT Report 588 | 2012 | <i>Stage 2 archaeological excavation, Alienated Land Area L/N (Goojerat Barracks), Colchester Garrison, Colchester, Essex: June-July 2010</i> |
| CAT Report 628 | 2016 | <i>A Late Iron Age dyke, Roman and Anglo-Saxon burials, a Roman coin hoard, and a Civil War fort: Stage 1b archaeological evaluation and Stage 2 excavation at Colchester Garrison Alienated Land Area A1 (former Meeanee & Hyderabad Barracks) Colchester, Essex: October-December 2010, January-March and July-September 2011</i> |
| CAT Report 778 | 2015 | <i>Roman buildings, burials and enclosures west of Mersea Road, Colchester: Stage 3 archaeological excavation at Colchester Garrison Alienated Land Area E (GAL E)</i> |
| CAT Report 843 | 2015 | <i>Archaeological trial trenching at the Arena Leisure Centre, Circular Road East, Colchester, Essex Phase 1a: pre-determination trenching. April-May 2015</i> |
| CAT Report 1033 | forth-coming | <i>Working title: Archaeological excavation (Stage 2) on Colchester Garrison 'Alienated Land' Area H, off Butt Road, Colchester, Essex: September 2012 – February 2013.</i> |
| CAT Report 1246 | | |
| CAT Report 1248 | | |
| CAT Report 1360 | 2018 | <i>Heritage Impact Assessment for Café in the Park, Castle Park, High Street, Colchester, CO1 1TS, by C Lister</i> |
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MHCLG	2018	<i>National Planning Policy Framework</i>
RPS	2016	<i>Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for stage 1b archaeological trial-trenching evaluation at The Arena, Circular Road East, Colchester: December 2016</i>

10 Abbreviations and glossary

Anglo-Saxon	period from c 500 – 1066
CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
CBC	Colchester Borough Council
CBCAA	Colchester Borough Council Archaeological Advisor
CBCPS	Colchester Borough Council Planning Services
CBM	ceramic building material, ie brick/tile
CHER	Colchester Historic Environment Record
ClfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
context	specific location of finds on an archaeological site
EHER	Essex Historic Environment Record
feature (F)	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain: can contain 'contexts'
layer (L)	distinct or distinguishable deposit (layer) of material
modern	period from c AD 1800 to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
OASIS	O nline A cces S to the I ndex of A rchaeological I nvestigations, http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main
Roman	the period from AD 43 to c AD 410
section	(abbreviation sx or Sx) vertical slice through feature/s or layer/s
ws	written scheme of investigation

11 Contents of archive

Finds: n/a

Paper record

One A4 document wallet containing:

The report (CAT Report 1502)

Scheduled Monument Consent letter; CAT written scheme of investigation

Original site record (feature and layer sheets, sections)

Site digital photos and log

Inked section drawings

Digital record

The report (CAT Report 1502)

Scheduled Monument Consent letter; CAT written scheme of investigation

Graphics

Site digital photos and log

12 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is currently held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at Roman Circus House, Roman Circus Walk, Colchester, Essex, CO2 7GZ, but will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museum.

Distribution list

Robert Masfield

Jess Tipper, Colchester Borough Council Planning Services

Essex Historic Environment Record



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Date: 03/11/2019

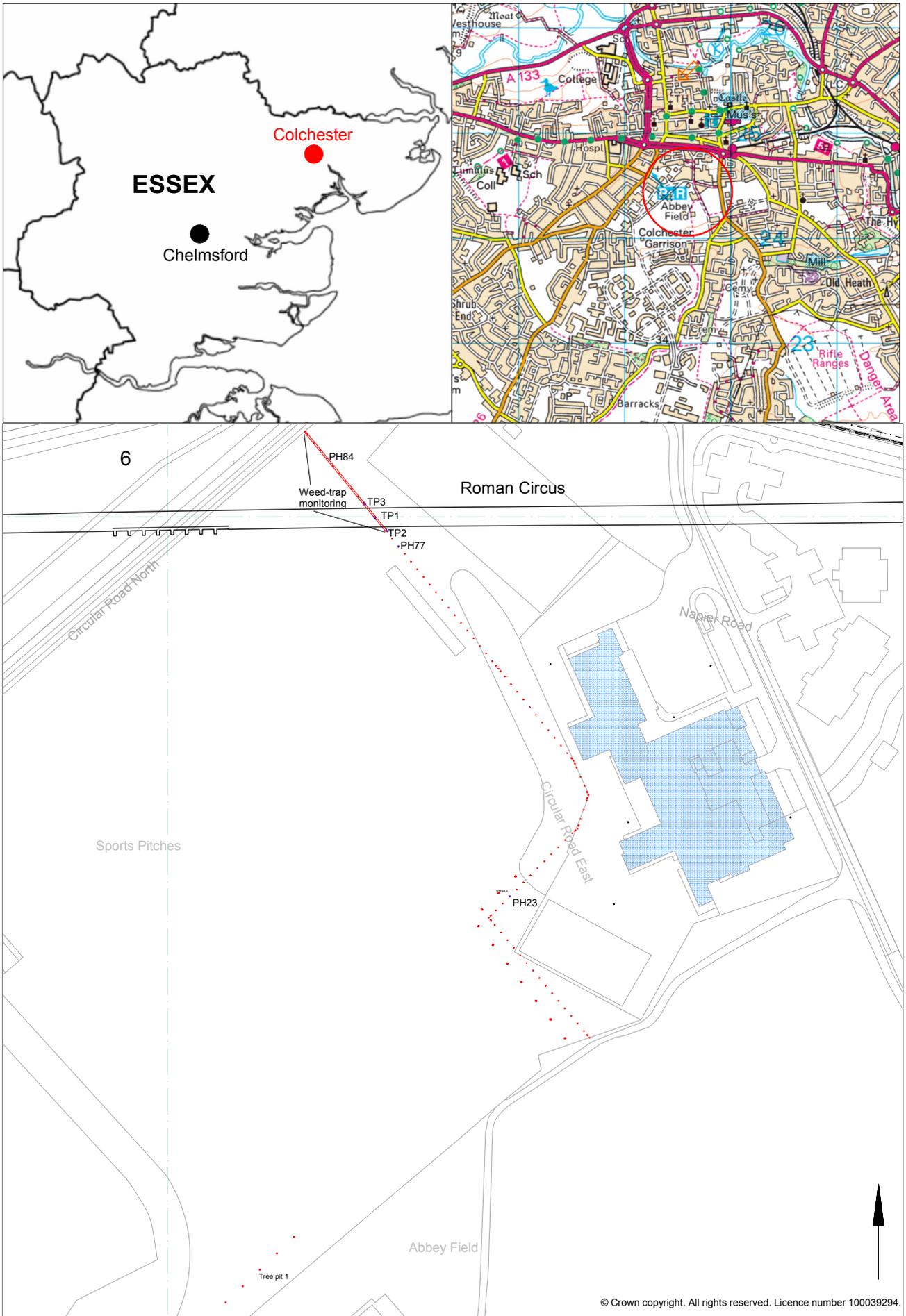


Fig 1 Site location with monitored post holes and tree pits shown in red

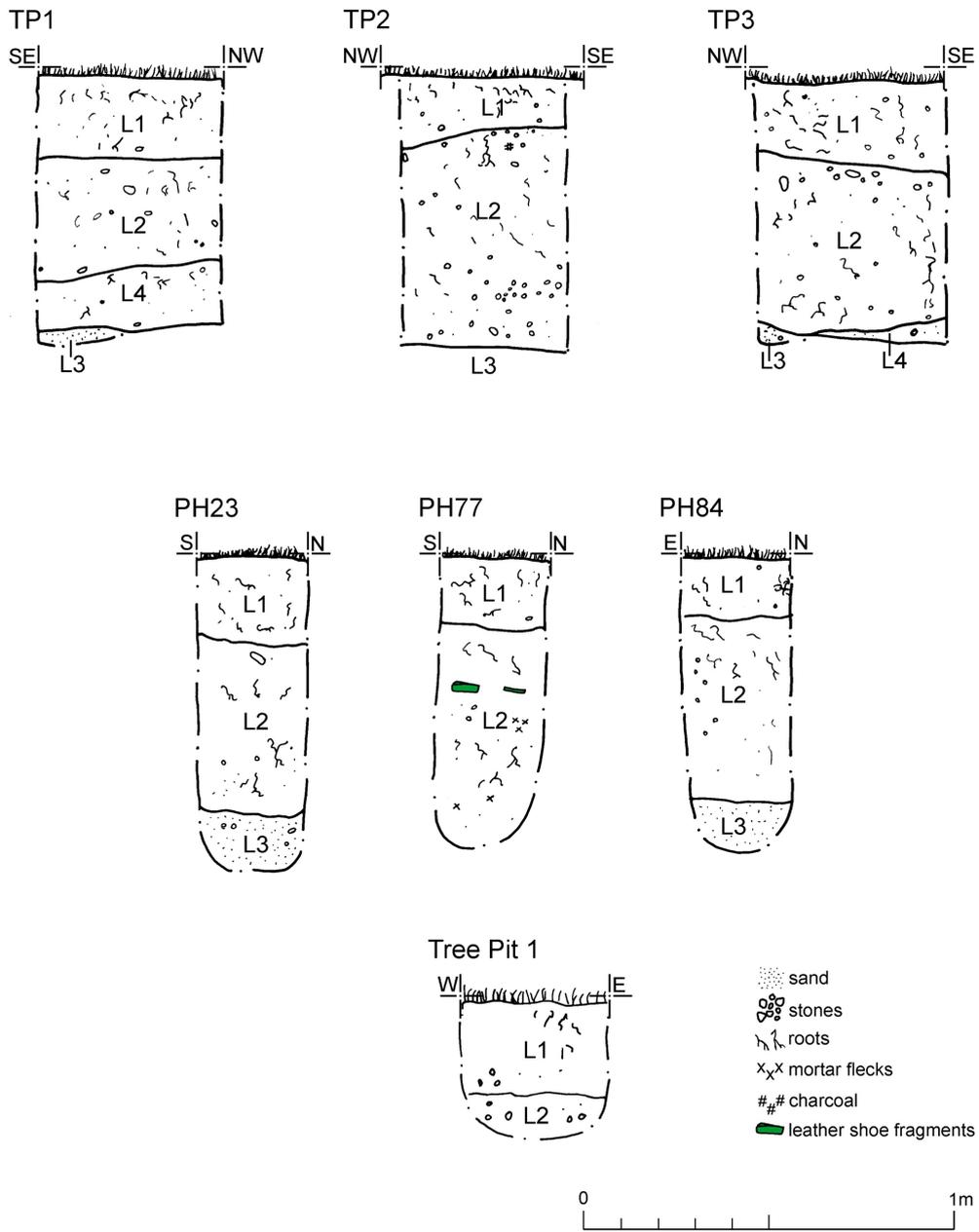


Fig 2 Post hole and tree pit sections.

Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

Summary sheet

Address: Archaeological monitoring at the former Arena Leisure Centre, Circular Road East, Colchester, CO2 7SZ	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 99584 24473 (centre)	Site code: CAT project ref.: 19/10e CHER ref: ECC4400 OASIS ref: colchest3-375981
Type of work: Watching Brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: November 2021	Size of area investigated: -
Location of curating museum: Colchester museum	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? Not known	Related CHER/SMR number: Roman Circus SM no.35614
Final report: CAT Report 1502	
Periods represented: Roman, modern	
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>Archaeological monitoring was carried out at the former Arena leisure centre, Circular Road East, Colchester, during groundworks for the erection of a new fence to the west. A small amount of Roman building material was recovered from the new fence postholes during the monitoring. No features were uncovered.</i>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
CBC monitor: Jess Tipper	
Keywords: -	Significance: -
Author of summary: Dr Pip Parmenter	Date of summary: November 2019

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OASIS ID: colchest3-375981

Project details

Project name Archaeological Monitoring at the former Arena Leisure Centre

Short description of the project Archaeological monitoring was carried out at the former Arena leisure centre, Circular Road East, Colchester, during groundworks for the erection of a new fence to the west. A small amount of Roman building material was recovered from the new fence postholes during the monitoring. No features were uncovered.

Project dates Start: 05-11-2019 End: 25-11-2019

Previous/future work Yes / Not known

Any associated project reference codes 19/10e - Contracting Unit No.

Type of project Recording project

Site status Scheduled Monument (SM)

Current Land use Other 13 - Waste ground

Monument type - None

Significant Finds - None

Investigation type "Watching Brief"

Prompt Scheduled Monument Consent

Project location

Country England

Site location ESSEX COLCHESTER COLCHESTER Former Arena Leisure Centre

Postcode CO2 7SZ

Study area 30 Square metres

Site coordinates TL 99584 24473 51.882514231982 0.900240985447 51 52 57 N 000 54 00 E Point

Project creators

Name of Organisation Colchester Archaeological Trust

Project brief originator HISTORIC ENGLAND

Project design originator Chris Lister

Project director/manager Chris Lister
Project supervisor Mark Baister
Type of sponsor/funding body Landowner

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient Colchester Museum
Physical Contents "Leather", "Worked stone/lithics"
Digital Archive recipient Colchester Museum
Digital Contents "none"
Digital Media available "GIS", "Images raster / digital photography", "Spreadsheets", "Text"
Paper Archive recipient Colchester Museum
Paper Contents "none"
Paper Media available "Context sheet", "Drawing", "Miscellaneous Material", "Notebook - Excavation", "Research", "General Notes", "Photograph", "Plan", "Report", "Section"

Entered by Pip Parmenter (pp@catuk.org)
Entered on 3 December 2019

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