

Colchester Archaeological Trust



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issued August 2023**

**Archaeological monitoring at
St Mary's Church of England Primary School,
Castle Street, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB1 1BQ:
July 2023**



**CAT project ref.: 2023/06a
ECC code: SWSM23**

**Archaeological Monitoring at
St Mary's Church of England Primary School,
Castle Street, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB1 1BQ:
July 2023**

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report prepared by Bronagh Quinn

fieldwork by Bronagh Quinn

**commissioned by Kim Calder,
White Rose Garden Rooms
on behalf of St Mary's C of E Primary School**

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1 Summary

Archaeological monitoring was carried out at St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Castle Street, Saffron Walden, Essex during groundworks for the construction of a new car park, external stairway and multi-use education area. The southern half of the site lies within the northern boundary of the Saffron Walden Conservation Area Zone 1, with previous archaeological work at the school revealing an undated ditch which may be part of the medieval town's defensive ditch. Monitoring revealed a significant depth of modern layers and post-medieval/modern made-ground covering the three areas of groundworks. Ground reduction did not go below these layers in two of the three areas, and there were no archaeological remains in the third area.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the report for archaeological monitoring at St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Castle Street, Saffron Walden, Essex which was carried out on 26th and 27th July 2023. The work was commissioned by Kim Calder of White Rose Garden Rooms on behalf of St Mary's Church of England Primary School and was carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) during groundworks for a new car park, an external stairway and a multi-use education area.

As the site lies within an area highlighted by the EHER as having a high potential for archaeological deposits, an archaeological condition was recommended by the Historic Environment Advisor (HEA). This recommendation was for a programme of archaeological monitoring and was based on the guidance given in the *National Planning Policy Framework* (MHCLG 2019).

All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a *Brief for Archaeological Monitoring on St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Castle Street, Saffron Walden* (ECCPS 2023), and a *Written scheme of investigation (WSI)* (CAT 2023).

In addition to the brief and WSI, all fieldwork and reporting was done in accordance with *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (Historic England 2016), 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* (CIfA 2014a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (CIfA 2014b).

3 Archaeological background

The following archaeological background includes extracts of the ECC Brief (ECCPS 2023) and Essex Historic Environment Records (EHER) held at Essex County Council, County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex (accessed via <http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk>).

The Geology of Britain viewer (1:50,000 scale¹) shows the bedrock geology of the site is Lewes nodular chalk formation (chalk with subsidiary calcareous mudstone and flint). Close to the rear of the school there are superficial deposits of head (poorly sorted and poorly stratified, angular rock debris and/or clayey hillwash and soil creep, mantling a hillslope and deposited by solifluction and gelifluction processes).

Saffron Walden is sited in the north of Uttlesford district. It lies about 2km to the east of the River Cam at the point where the important Lea/Stort/Cam river route cuts a gap through the East Anglian Heights (a chalk ridge).

The remains of a motte and bailey castle is located at the highest point, 68m OD, on the top of the chalk promontory known as Bury Hill (HA 1009307), which is located to the immediate south of the current site. This promontory is flanked on either side by the streams known as The Kings

¹ British Geological Survey – <https://geologyviewer.bgs.ac.uk/?>

Ditch and the Madgate Slade; these converge to the west of the town to form the Slade (ECC 1999, 3). After the Norman Conquest, Saffron Walden was granted to the de Mandevilles, becoming the centre of their Essex and Suffolk estates. They had the castle built in the late 11th century (EHER 411).

The Castle comprises three distinct units (EHER 411): 1) the keep which consists of a large square tower of at least three storeys with clasping buttresses, 2) the inner bailey, an ovoid area encompassing c 1.25ha enclosing the keep and domestic buildings, and 3) the outer bailey, an elongated oval area which enclosed the inner bailey and the rest of Bury Hill promontory which contained the town. The church was laid out on the axis of the enclosing banks (St Mary the Virgin EHER 511). Various excavations have taken place on both the defences and town interior (EHER 408).

In the late medieval period, Saffron Walden became the second richest town in Essex, becoming the major English centre for the production of the Saffron Crocus used to produce dyestuffs. The first market was apparently located immediately east of the High Street, between Church Street and Castle Street and probably extended a little to the west of the High Street, its limits being probably extended by Myddylton Place.

Prior to the construction of a new pre-school building at St Mary's School in 2010, an archaeological evaluation was carried out by Pre-Construct Archaeology. This site is located within the north-east corner of the current area for monitoring. A single undated ditch was recorded as cutting through the natural chalk in a test sondage in the south-eastern end of T2 (EHER 47388; Humphrey 2010). This ditch may be part of the medieval town's defensive ditch but there were no finds to date it (EHER 408). The evaluation also noted eight different layers of made-ground which sealed the ditch.

4 Aim

The aim of the archaeological monitoring was to identify, excavate and record any archaeological contexts revealed during groundworks.

5 Results (Figs 2-4)

A full context list can be found in Appendix 1.

Car Park

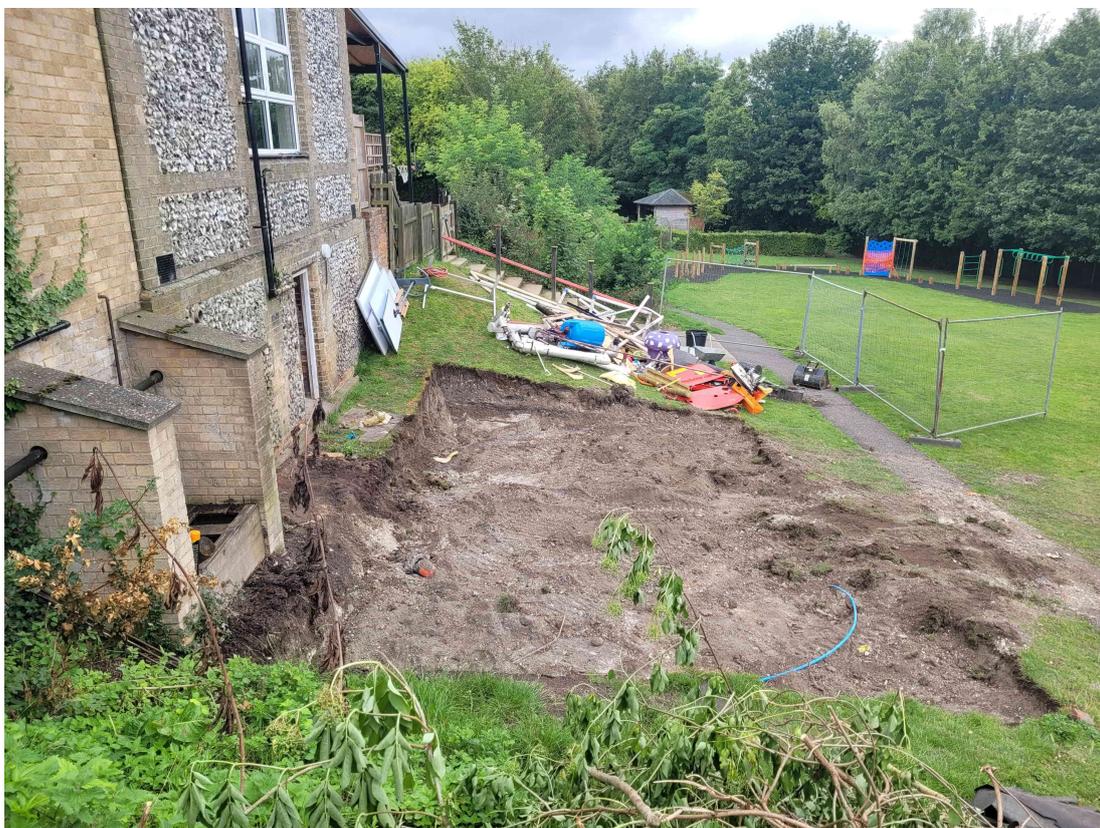
An area measuring approximately 253m² was machine-excavated under the supervision of a CAT archaeologist. Issues with spoil management meant that this area was stripped in sections. The site was stripped to a depth of c 0.21-0.50m below current ground level (bcgl) through modern layers. Modern imported topsoil (L1, c 0.20-0.49m thick) sealed a layer of orange hardcore (L2, c.0.01m thick) over a layer of black tarmac/hardcore material (L3). L1 was thicker along the southeastern edge of the strip as it went up-hill towards the school buildings. This stratigraphy matches that of the 2010 evaluation (Humphrey 2010) where L3 was recorded to be 0.25m thick. Satellite images show an area likely to be the extent of L3 (see Fig 1), and local residents spoke of an old car park being on this site within living memory (pers comms). There were two modern services.

Multi-use education area

An area measuring 53m² was machine-excavated under the supervision of a CAT archaeologist to a depth of 0.2-0.8m bcgl, getting deeper in the southern half of the strip. Modern compost (L4, c.0.3m thick, only present in an old flower bed in the south-eastern corner of the strip) sealed imported modern topsoil L1 (c.0.15m thick) over a post-medieval/modern made-ground (L4, 0.15-0.3m thick) which sat on top of what appears to be natural geology (L6). There were three modern services present but no archaeological remains.



Photograph 1 Car park strip, showing L3 covering the area, the spoil heap and two modern service trenches, looking south-west.



Photograph 2 Multi-use education area strip, looking south-west.

External staircase

An area measuring 7.5m² was machine-excavated under the supervision of a CAT archaeologist. It was dug through modern imported topsoil L1 (0.2-0.41m thick) into post-medieval/modern made ground L5.



Photograph 3 Staircase strip, looking south-south-east.

It was decided that further monitoring of service trenches would not be necessary as they would only cut through imported topsoil (L1) and layers of made ground (L5).

6 Finds

There were no archaeological finds.

7 Conclusion

Archaeological monitoring at St Mary's Church of England Primary School did not reveal any archaeological remains. However, as ground reduction for the car park and staircase did not reach natural, there is a chance that archaeological remains could still be found beneath the modern layers and layers of post-medieval/modern made-ground.

8 Acknowledgements

CAT thanks Kim Calder of White Rose Garden Rooms and St Mary's Church of England Primary School for commissioning and funding the work. The project was managed by C Lister, A Wightman and L Pooley, fieldwork was carried out by B Quinn. Figures are by B Quinn and S Veasey. The project was monitored for ECC by Katie Lee-Smith.

9 References

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

Brown, N & Glazebrook, J	2000	<i>Research and Archaeology: A Framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy.</i> East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Paper 8 (EAA 8)
CAT	2023	<i>Health & Safety Policy</i>
CAT	2023	<i>Written Scheme of Investigation for archaeological monitoring at St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Castle Street, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB10 1BQ</i>
CIfA	2014a	<i>Standard and Guidance for archaeological watching briefs</i>
CIfA	2014b	<i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i>
ECC	1999	<i>Saffron Walden, historic towns assessment report.</i> Essex County Council Historic Environment Branch
ECCPS	2023	<i>Brief for archaeological monitoring on St Marys church of England Primary School, church Street, Saffron Walden,</i> by K Lee-Smith
Historic England	2015	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)</i>
Humphrey, R	2010	<i>An archaeological evaluation at St Marys church of England Primary School, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB10 1BQ.</i> Pre-Construct Archaeology
Medlycott, M	2011	<i>Research and archaeology revisited: A revised framework for the East of England.</i> East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Papers 24 (EAA 24)
MHCLG	2019	<i>National Planning Policy Framework.</i> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

10 Abbreviations and glossary

CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
ECC	Essex County Council
ECCHEA	Essex County Council Historic Environment Advisor
ECCPS	Essex County Council Place Services
EHF	Essex Historic Environment Record
CIfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
context	a single unit of excavation, which is often referred to numerically, and can be any feature, layer or find.
feature (F)	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain: can contain 'contexts'
layer (L)	distinct or distinguishable deposit (layer) of material
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c 1500
modern	period from c AD 1800 to the present
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
OASIS	O nline A ccess to the I ndex of A rchaeological I nvestigations, http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main
post-medieval	from c AD 1500 to c 1800
section	(abbreviation sx or Sx) vertical slice through feature/s or layer/s
wsi	written scheme of investigation

11 Archive deposition

Digital record: This project falls within the CIfA definition of a sterile project (<https://www.archaeologists.net/selection-toolkit/sterile-projects>), and as such the preserved archaeological archive will take the form of a single digital document that incorporates all the relevant elements from the project archive. This document will be uploaded to OASIS and released into the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) library, from where it will be curated by the ADS. The single digital document will include the report, brief, wsi, photographs and original site data (for example context sheets, section drawings).

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Distribution list:

St Mary's Church of England Primary School
Historic Environmental Advisor, Essex County Council Place Services
Essex Historic Environment Record

Appendix 1 Context list

Context	Finds No.	Context type	Description	Date
L1	-	Imported topsoil	Dry, friable, mid grey/brown loamy silt with rare stones.	Modern
L2	-	Hard core	Layer of orange sands and gravel.	Modern
L3	-	Tarmac/hardcore	Layer of tarmac and hardcore.	Modern
L4	-	Compost	Layer of compost	Modern
L5	-	Made ground	Mid grey sandy-silt with fragments of post-medieval/ modern brick and tile	Post-medieval/ modern
L6	-	Natural	Chalky natural	Post-glacial

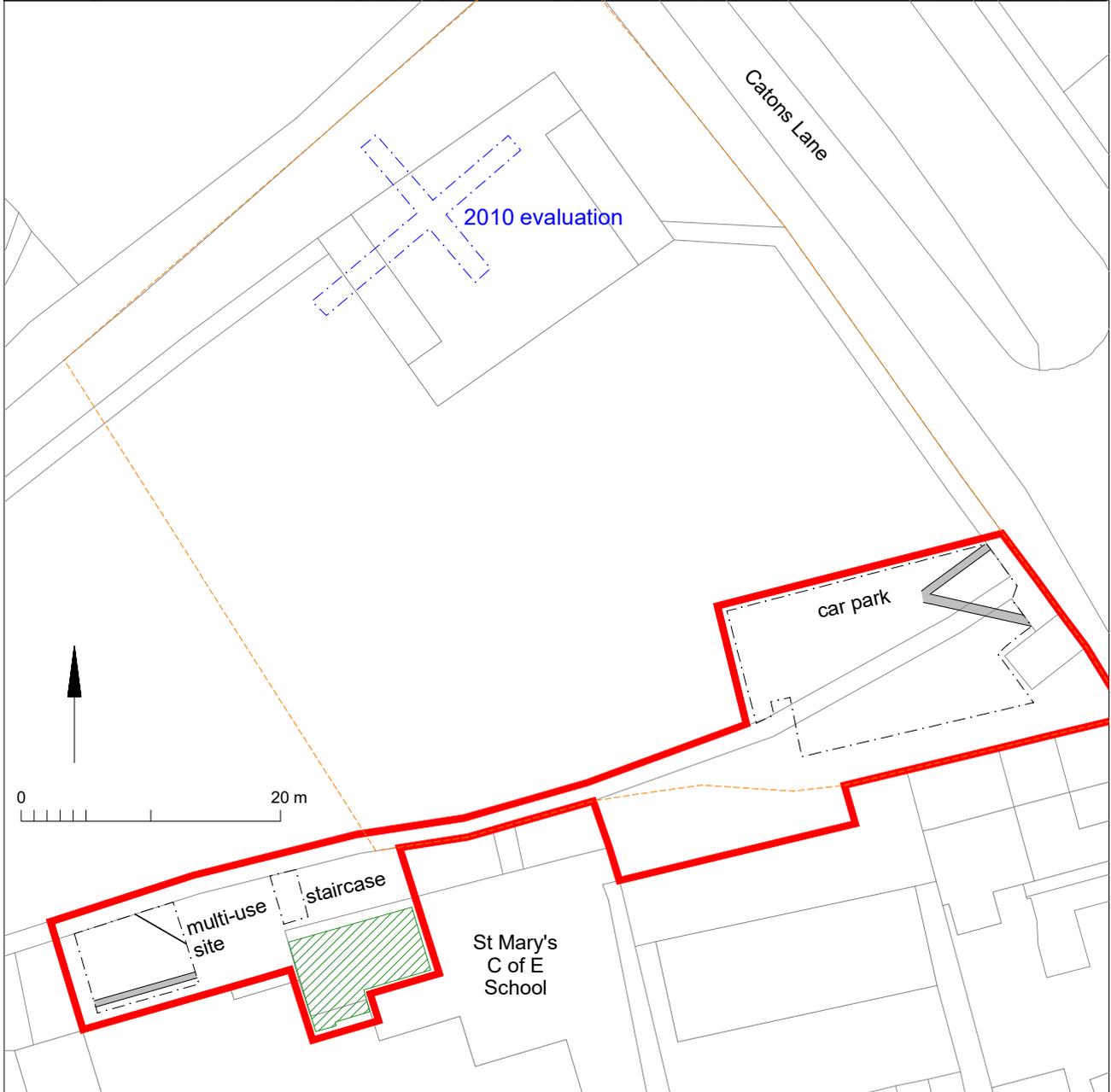
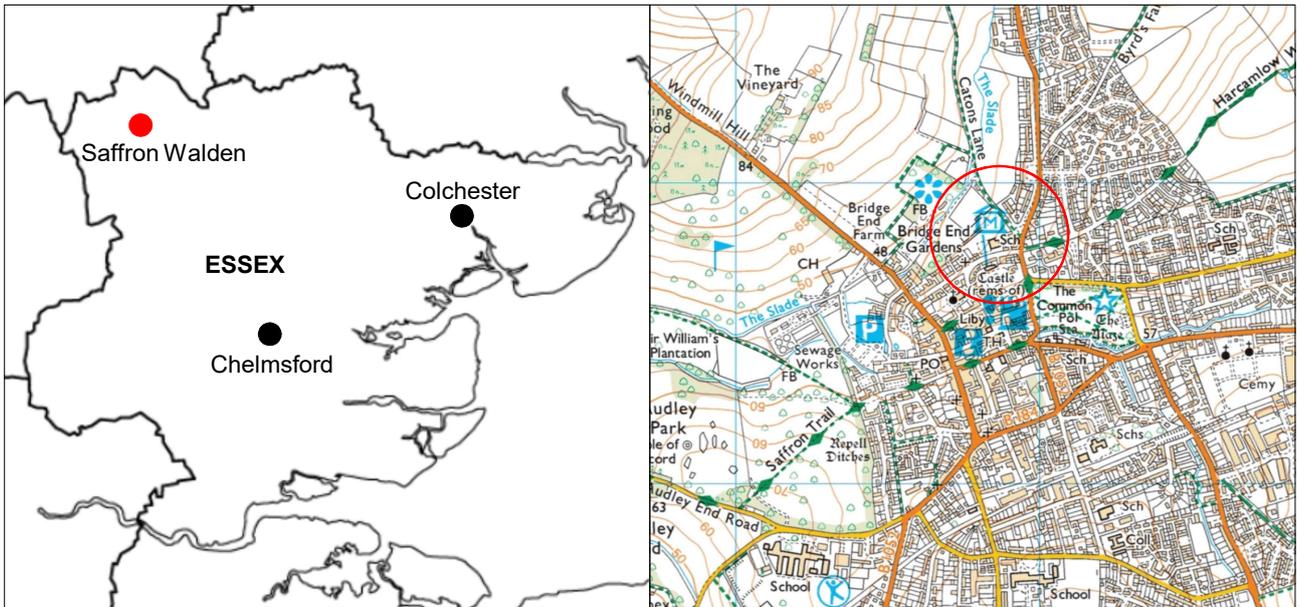
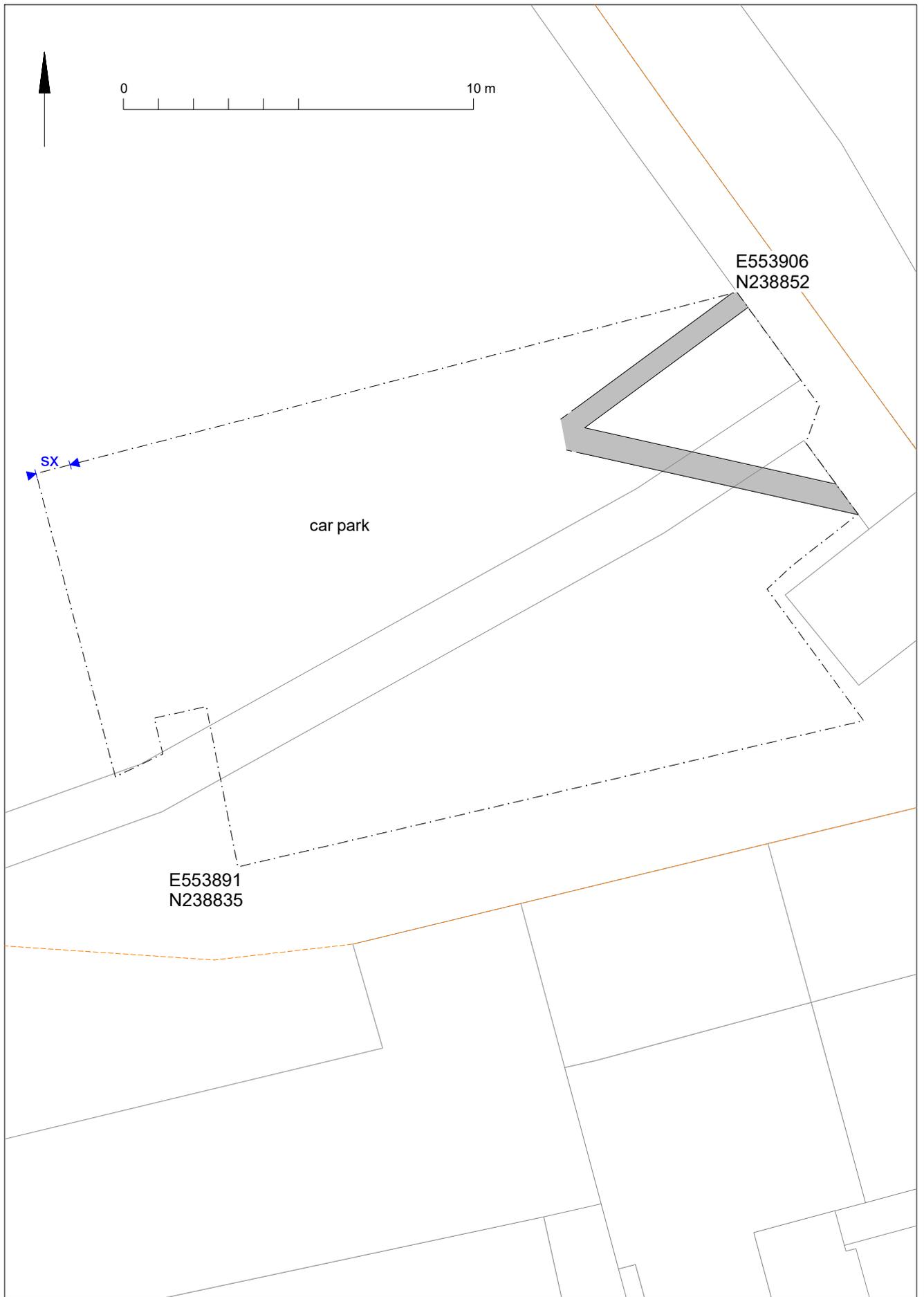


Fig 1 Site location. Suspected extent of L3 dashed in orange. Area highlighted in green was not excavated.



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Fig 2 The car park results (modern services in grey).



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Fig 3 The multi-use area and external staircase results (modern services in grey).

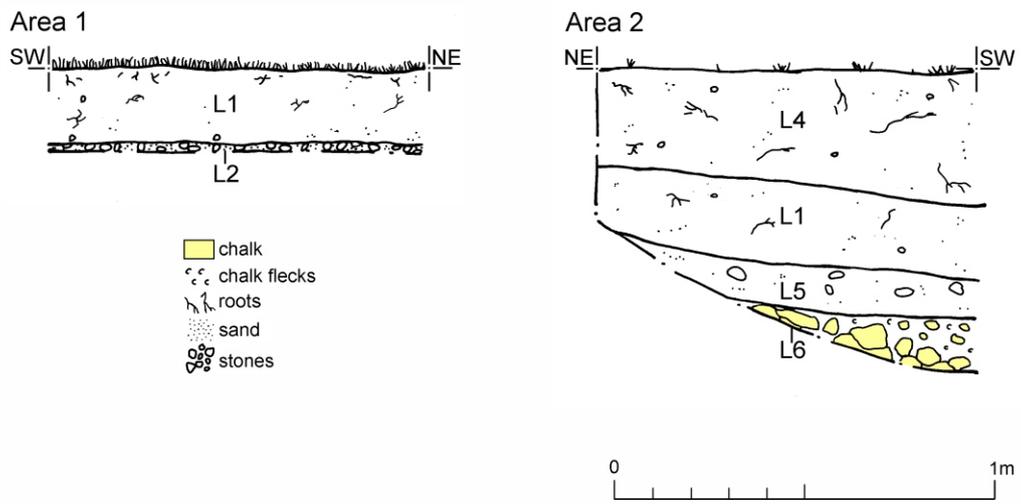


Fig 4 Representative sections.

OASIS Summary for colchest3-516298

OASIS ID (UID)	colchest3-516298
Project Name	Archaeological monitoring at St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Castle Street, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB10 1BQ: July 2023
Sitename	St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Castle Street, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB10 1BQ
Sitecode	SWSM23
Project Identifier(s)	2023/06a
Activity type	Watching Brief
Planning Id	UTT/23/0960/FUL
Reason For Investigation	Planning: Post determination
Organisation Responsible for work	Colchester Archaeological Trust
Project Dates	26-Jul-2023 - 27-Jul-2023
Location	St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Castle Street, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB10 1BQ NGR : TL 53890 38836 LL : 52.0265942666281, 0.241633112488987 12 Fig : 553890,238836
Administrative Areas	Country : England County : Essex District : Uttlesford Parish : Saffron Walden
Project Methodology	Archaeological monitoring of all groundworks as specified in the project brief and wsi.
Project Results	Archaeological monitoring was carried out at St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Castle Street, Saffron Walden, Essex during groundworks for the construction of a new car park, external stairway and multi-use education area. The southern half of the site lies within the northern boundary of the Saffron Walden Conservation Area Zone 1, with previous archaeological work at the school revealing an undated ditch which may be part of the medieval town's defensive ditch. Monitoring revealed a significant depth of modern layers and post-medieval/modern made-ground covering the three areas of groundworks. Ground reduction did not go below these layers in two of the three areas, and there were no archaeological remains in the third area.
Keywords	
Funder	Private or public corporation St Mary's School
HER	Essex HER - unRev - STANDARD
Person Responsible for work	Chris Lister, Adam Wightman
HER Identifiers	HER Event No - SWSM23
Archives	