

# 90-96 Victoria Road, Chelmsford, Essex

## An Archaeological Evaluation Assessment



Matthew Collins

CAMBRIDGE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT  
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE



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*An Archaeological Evaluation Assessment*

**Matthew Collins**  
*Illustrations by Bryan Crossan*

**Cambridge Archaeological Unit**  
University of Cambridge  
Department of Archaeology

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## **1. Summary**

*An archaeological trenched evaluation was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) on land at 90-96 Victoria Road, Chelmsford, Essex in advance of the areas redevelopment. The trenches showed the site to be heavily truncated by previous building work, and the only archaeological evidence identified consisted of a probable Victorian plough soil and plough scars.*

## 2. Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> April 2013 on land at St. Mary's House, 90-96 Victoria Road, Chelmsford, Essex. The evaluation, commissioned by Amlin Insurance Plc, was carried out in advance of the redevelopment of the site and aimed to establish the presence, date, state of preservation and significance of any archaeological remains. This report details the results of the evaluation, together with an assessment of the archaeological evidence in relation to the regional research framework, (Brown & Glazebrook 2000).

The evaluation was carried out and this report was produced in accordance with an archaeological specification written by the CAU (Dickens 2013) in response to a brief issued by Essex County Council Historic Environment Team (EHET). (Bennett 2013).

### *2.1 Location, Topography and Geology*

The Proposed Development Area (PDA) centres on TL 70767/07131 and extends over *c.*3200m<sup>2</sup> (0.32 ha). The site is currently occupied by three office buildings dating to the late 1970's and early 1980's, Caxton House, St. Mary's House and The Courtyard. It is bounded to the north by Victoria Road and the railway line; to the east by buildings fronting onto Victoria Road; to the south by Cottage Place, a car-park and office buildings and to the west by car-parks, (see Figure 1). The site is located on undulating ground varying in height from 27.80m OD (at the eastern end of Trench 1) to 29.11m OD (at the western end of Trench 5) and the underlying geology is Head Brickearth.

### *2.2 Archaeological Background*

The archaeological and historical background for the PDA and surrounding area was recently detailed in an archaeological desktop assessment (Dickens & Timberlake 2012) and the relevant parts are specified below.

The PDA lies outside of the known foci of local prehistoric activity, although stray and residual artefacts dating to this period have been identified nearby, including worked flints recovered during the excavation of the Legg Street Car Park (Barker 2005) 65m to the southeast of the PDA (EHER 15315). This excavation also identified residual Roman pottery and several medieval and post-medieval rubbish and quarry pits, suggesting the possibility for similarly dated activity within the PDA.

As with the prehistoric period, the PDA lies some distance to the north of the recognised centre of Romano-British activity within Chelmsford, with the fort and 'mansio' precinct lying approximately 1km to the south. However the PDA is within 300m of a Roman road, and the presence of residual Roman pottery from nearby excavations indicates there is a possibility of encountering Romano-British archaeology within the site.

Map evidence dating from 1591 suggests the PDA was within an area of agricultural fields until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when the locality was utilized for gardens, workshops, stables and other agricultural activities (Hawkins 2004). The site was subsequently extensively developed in the 1940's, although none of the buildings related to that development now survive above ground due to the site redevelopment in the 1970's and early 1980's, (Dickens & Timberlake 2012). However, it is probable their foundations and other related remains may be encountered within the PDA.

### *2.3 Methodology*

Five archaeological trenches totalling 50.3m in length (a 3.1% sample of the area) evaluated the PDA. These were placed in the available open spaces around the current office buildings taking into account the confines of the site and the location of known services, (see Figure 2).

All five trenches were placed within areas covered by tarmac or concrete and were CAT scanned prior to excavation. The concrete/tarmac and underlying deposits were removed under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist by a wheeled 15-ton 360° machine (a 'Rubber Duck') using a combination of a toothed bucket (for the tarmac and concrete) and toothless ditching bucket. The removed overburden and all exposed features were scanned by metal detector for artefacts and a digital photographic record taken. Excavation of archaeological features was carried out using hand-tools and ambiguous natural features were also tested. The recording followed a CAU modified MoLAS system (Spence 1990) whereby feature, F. were assigned to stratigraphic events and number [fill] or [cut] to individual contexts. The evaluation trenches were planned at 1:50 and individual sections drawn at 1:10.

All work was carried out strict accordance with statutory Health and Safety legislation and with the recommendations of FAME (Allen & Holt 2010) and in accordance with a site specific risk assessment and the CAU Health and Safety Policy. The EHET assigned site code and event number is CF 72.

### *2.4 Archive*

A total of two contexts from one feature were excavated and recorded and artefacts including Victorian pottery, tile, animal bone and tobacco pipe were recovered and catalogued. The documentary records and accompanying artefacts have been assembled into a catalogued archive in line with Appendix 6 of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991) and are currently being stored at the CAU offices.

## **3. Results**

Within the five evaluation trenches no archaeological features were identified. However, a layer of probable surviving plough soil containing Victorian artefacts including pottery, tile, tobacco pipe and animal bone was present within Trenches 3 and 4. This layer, consisting of mid brown sandy silt, was left *in-situ* in Trench 3 and partially hand excavated revealing a relatively shallow depth which increased

towards the northern end of the trench as the natural Head Brickearth sloped downwards. The layer was fully machined out in Trench 4 in order to investigate the underlying ground. It was shown to have a depth of upto 0.80m (see Figure 3) in this trench and contained moderate quantities of Victorian and more modern artefacts. Cutting into the underlying Head Brickearth were a number of plough scars likely dating to the Victorian or modern period as brick and tile fragments were present within them.

Trench 1, in contrast, was heavily disturbed by modern activity, with a live service present in the eastern half together with a drain culvert. Also present were a number of large brick filled pits (see Figure 3) likely relating to the clearing of the site in the late 1970's and early 1980's.

Due to the presence of a thick layer of reinforced concrete, and the confines of the site, Trench 5 was shorter than originally planned. However it demonstrated that this part of the site has been heavily truncated, with the concrete and underlying hardcore laid directly onto the Head Brickearth. Trench 2 identified a similar pattern, where the hardcore and tarmac had been laid directly onto the underlying geology with no evidence of any earlier deposits. This trench was also truncated by a live service and modern drains.

Trench 1		
General Description	Orientation	E-W
Trench 1 contained several modern brick/rubble filled pits and a live service. No archaeological features or deposits were present.	Avg. Tarmac Depth (m)	0.30
	Avg. Made-Ground Depth (m)	0.48
	Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)	0.36
	Width (m)	2.00
	Length (m)	17.80

Trench 2		
General Description	Orientation	E-W
Trench 2 contained a live service and a modern drain. No archaeological features or deposits were present.	Avg. Tarmac Depth (m)	0.30
	Avg. Made-Ground Depth (m)	0.20
	Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)	N/A
	Width (m)	2.00
	Length (m)	10.00

Trench 3								
General Description				Orientation		N-S		
Trench 2 contained a modern wall and a partially preserved Victorian layer containing moderate quantities of pottery, tile, animal bone and tobacco pipe.				Avg. Tarmac Depth (m)		0.30		
				Avg. Made-Ground Depth (m)		0.20		
				Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)		N/A		
				Width (m)		2.00		
				Length (m)		10.00		
Feature No.	Feature Type	Context No.	Cut/Fill	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Artefacts	Archaeological Period
100	Layer	200	F	-	-	-	BN, PT, TL, TP	Victorian
100	Layer	201	C	N/A	N/A	0.15m	-	

<b>Trench 4</b>		
<b>General Description</b>	<b>Orientation</b>	E-W
Trench 4 contained a similar Victorian layer as that seen in Trench 3. Also present were two probable plough scars. No other archaeological features or deposits were present.	<b>Avg. Tarmac Depth (m)</b>	0.10
	<b>Avg. Concrete Depth (m)</b>	0.14
	<b>Avg. Made-Ground Depth (m)</b>	0.30
	<b>Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)</b>	0.80
	<b>Width (m)</b>	2.00
	<b>Length (m)</b>	9.50

<b>Trench 5</b>		
<b>General Description</b>	<b>Orientation</b>	N-S
Trench 5 contained no archaeological features or deposits.	<b>Avg. Concrete Depth (m)</b>	0.30
	<b>Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)</b>	0.20
	<b>Width (m)</b>	2.00
	<b>Length (m)</b>	3.00

#### **4. Discussion**

The evaluation has shown the undulating nature of the site has led to varying degrees of truncation across the PDA. For instance, the evidence from Trenches 2 and 5 suggests the western half of the PDA was levelled, removing any earlier deposits. In contrast, the Trenches 3 and 4 suggest pockets of earlier plough soil survive within the eastern half of the PDA. However, the lack of earlier features or deposits below this layer, together with the absence of residual artefacts such as worked flint suggest the area saw limited use prior to relatively modern times.

Overall, this evaluation suggests prior to the post-medieval period, the area of the PDA saw limited utilisation, although it does remain possible evidence for archaeological activity has been lost due to the high level of truncation across parts of the site.

#### **5. Acknowledgements**

The archaeological evaluation was commissioned by Amlin Insurance Plc. Monitoring was undertaken on behalf of EHET by A, Bennett. Alison Dickens was CAU project manager. Jonathan Moller (CAU) undertook the surveying and Lizzie Middleton and Matt Jones assisted the author on site.



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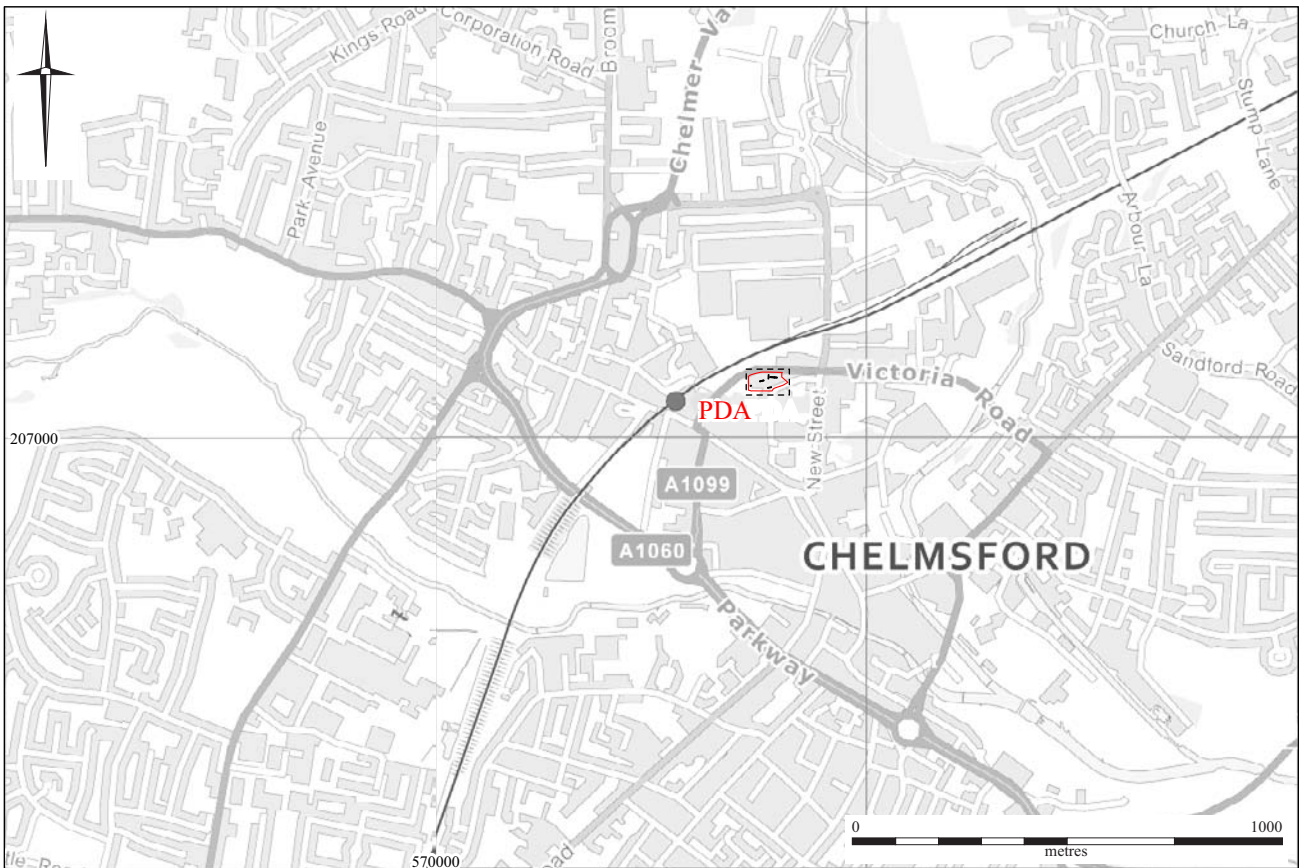
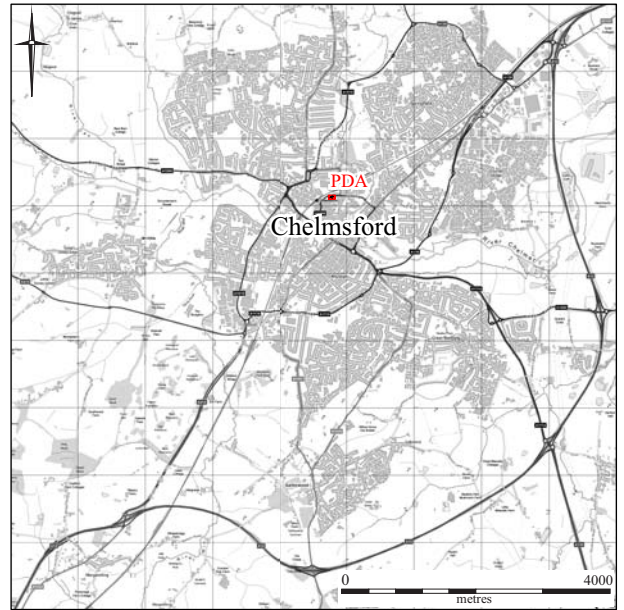
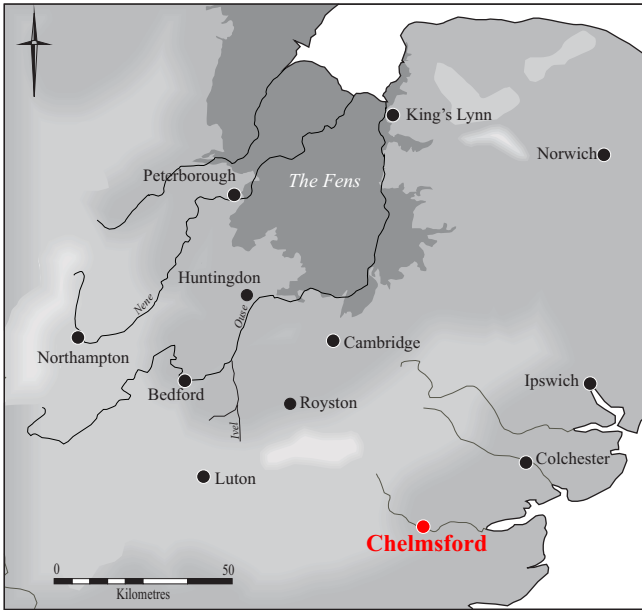


Figure 1. Location Plan.



Figure 2. Trench Plan.



Figure 3. Photograph of Trench 1 looking West (above) and Trench 2 looking East (below).



Figure 4. Photograph of Trench 3 looking North (above) and Trench 4 looking North (below).

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### Project details

Project name	90-96 Victoria Road, Chelmsford An Archaeological Evaluation Assessment
Short description of the project	An archaeological trenched evaluation was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) on land at 90-95 Victoria Road, Chelmsford, Essex in advance of the areas redevelopment. The trenches showed the site to be heavily truncated by previous building work, and the only archaeological evidence identified consisted of a probable Victorian plough soil and plough scars.
Project dates	Start: 23-04-2013 End: 24-04-2013
Previous/future work	No / No
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	Local Authority Designated Archaeological Area
Current Land use	Industry and Commerce 2 - Offices
Monument type	PLOUGH SOIL Post Medieval
Significant Finds	POT Post Medieval
Methods & techniques	"Sample Trenches"
Development type	Urban commercial (e.g. offices, shops, banks, etc.)
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)

### Project location

Country	England
Site location	ESSEX CHELMSFORD CHELMSFORD 90-96 Victoria Road, Chelmsford
Postcode	CM1 1RD
Study area	3200.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	TL 70767 07131 51 0 51 44 10 N 000 28 24 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 28.00m Max: 29.00m

**Project creators**

Name of Organisation	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Project brief originator	Local Planning Authority (with/without advice from County/District Archaeologist)
Project design originator	Alison Dickens
Project director/ manager	Alison Dickens
Project supervisor	Matthew Collins
Type of sponsor/ funding body	Landowner
Name of sponsor/ funding body	Amlin Insurance Plc

**Project archives**

Physical Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Physical Archive ID	CM 72
Physical Contents	"Animal Bones","Ceramics"
Digital Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Digital Archive ID	CM 72
Digital Contents	"none"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography","Survey","Text"
Paper Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Paper Archive ID	CM 72
Paper Contents	"none"
Paper Media available	"Context sheet","Drawing","Map","Report","Section","Survey ","Unpublished Text"

**Project bibliography****1**

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