

**Report on an archaeological watching brief at
the new play area and the park service yard,
Upper Castle Park, Colchester, Essex
April-June 2011**



**report prepared by
Adam Wightman**

**on behalf of
Colchester Borough Council**

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Colchester and Ipswich Museums accession code: COLEM 2011.46
NGR: TL 99922 25434 (c)



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CAT Report 603
September 2011

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1 Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by CAT in the Upper Castle Park, Colchester, Essex between April and June 2011. Seventeen monitoring visits were made during landscaping works associated with the laying out of the new play area and the park service yard, including the installation of a new access road, metal and concrete fences, hardstanding and services.

Archaeological remains dating to the Roman period were encountered within the area stripped for the new access road and in the base of two of the post-holes. Elsewhere, ground disturbance was confined to the dark grey/brown sandy-silt which overlies the archaeology and is interpreted as a modern topsoil with an underlying post-Roman dark earth.

Part of a Roman tessellated pavement was uncovered along the line of the new access road. The remains of a probable clay-block wall lay to the south. The pavement and wall were on the site of the former putting green. The pavement had been partly uncovered in 1927-9 but, now lying 0.3m below modern ground-level, it was significantly shallower than it had been in 1927-9 when the floor was at depth of '18 inches' (0.45m; Hull 1958, 91). This change suggests that the ground-level has been reduced in this part of the park, presumably when the putting green was made.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 2.1 This report describes the archaeological work carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on behalf of the Colchester Borough Council between April and June 2011.
- 2.2 An archaeological watching brief was carried out in the vicinity of the new play area and the park service yard in Upper Castle Park during the construction of a new access road, the redevelopment of the park service yard and the installation of fencing around its perimeter, and the installation of a new foul-water pipe. The work was undertaken with Scheduled Ancient Monument consent.
- 2.3 This report documents the groundworks which CAT archaeologists were called to inspect. Other landscaping work may have occurred without archaeological supervision based on the assumption that archaeological deposits were located below the depth of the groundworks.
- 2.4 The site is at NGR TL 99922 25434 (centre of investigations).
- 2.5 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.

3 Archaeological background (Fig 1)

Colchester Castle Park is protected as a scheduled ancient monument (Essex SAM no 1) due to the wealth of its Roman and medieval archaeology. Its most significant archaeological monument is the Roman temple dedicated to the emperor Claudius, the foundations of which survive below the Norman castle keep.

The watching brief was undertaken within Insula 7 and Insula 15 of the Roman town. Considerable archaeological fieldwork has been

undertaken in the park and in these two *insulae*, including by CAT (CAR 6 and CAT Reports 102, 190, 191, 286, 416, 422, 516 and 575). The following information is taken from CAT Report 191.

The modern putting green is situated within Insula 7 of the Roman town in an area where Roman houses with tessellated pavements have been excavated, as well as street metalling (Hull 1958, 85-91 and 106-145; CAR 6, 368-73). A Roman building once thought to have been a *mithraeum* but which is now interpreted as a waterworks has been identified in Insula 15, to the east of the former play area (Hull 1958, 107-113).

The ditch enclosing the outer bailey to the castle keep extends to the west of the site.

4 Aim

The aim of the watching brief was to record the location, date, character, and significance of any surviving archaeological remains encountered.

5 Results (Figs 1-2)

5.1 Introduction

The results of the watching brief have been divided into four sections which detail the four phases of groundworks monitored by CAT archaeologists. These four phases occurred sequentially during the project, with some overlap. Seventeen monitoring visits were made over nine days by CAT archaeologists during the two-month duration of the project. The four phases are: the new access road, the redevelopment of the park service yard, the installation of the fence posts, and the foul-water pipe and new kerb line.

5.2 The new access road

The removal of between 0.20m and 0.35m of topsoil for the construction of a 3.5m-wide and 125m-long access road to the park service yard began on the 14th June 2011 (Fig 1). Eight test-pits excavated along the proposed route of the new access road in February 2011 (TP1-TP8) did not reveal any archaeological remains or deposits in the upper 0.35m of topsoil (Fig 2). Therefore, monitoring visits were made during the groundworks instead of these being continuously monitored.

The stripping of the topsoil from the area of the new access road was undertaken using a tracked mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless bucket. For the most part, the dark grey/brown sandy-silt topsoil contained few Roman artefacts. The exception was where previous excavations had disturbed Roman deposits deeper down. A backfilled archaeological trench, excavated in 1927-9 (Plate 1), contained large quantities of Roman brick, tile and mortar (CBM; see section 6, finds no 1) and, to the north, an east-west aligned linear feature containing similar material may have been the trench for a service, perhaps a new electricity cable replacing the redundant cable which was uncovered to the north (Fig 2).



**Plate 1: backfilled archaeological trench
from excavations in 1927-9.**

Test-pits excavated by CAT in 2007 and 2011 on the site of the former putting green indicated that no archaeological remains or deposits exist in this area within a metre of the modern ground-level (CAT Reports 422 and 575; Fig 2). However, these test-pits were all located within the northern half of the putting green and not in areas where archaeological remains are known to survive. The removal of topsoil for the new access road in the southern half of the former putting green revealed archaeological remains at a depth of 0.3m below modern ground-level. In this area, a lighter soil was exposed and, within this lighter soil, a small area of tessellated floor roughly 0.4m² was exposed (Plate 2, Fig 2). This Roman tessellated floor had been uncovered during excavations undertaken in 1927-9 (Hull 1958, 91). The remains of a probable Roman clay-block wall were also identified just to the south of the tessellated floor (Plate 3, Fig 2).



Plate 2: the exposed area of tessellated floor.

The tessellated floor was constructed of red *tessera* cubes and was directly overlaid by 5mm-15mm of light grey/brown sandy-silt which is presumed to be the backfill from the 1927-9 excavations. Numerous loose *tessera* cubes (section 6, finds no 3), six fragments of Roman pottery and a sherd of medieval grey ware pottery (section 6, finds no 2) were recovered from the area of the floor. The approximate edges of the floor were defined by the excavation of a series of small holes no larger than 0.1m² to determine the presence or absence of *in situ* cubes (Fig 2). Elsewhere, the floor remained covered by soil. The remains of the probable clay-block wall to the south of the tessellated pavement were cleaned and planned prior to being covered over by the new access road. A geotextile material was placed over the tessellated floor and the remains of the probable clay-block wall before the road material was laid over the top.

No other archaeological remains or deposits were identified during the removal of the modern/post-Roman topsoil for the new access road, and the recovery of Roman finds was limited to the area of the tessellated floor and the remains of the probable clay-block wall.

5.3 The redevelopment of the park service yard

An area of approximately 450m² was reduced by 0.25m so that tarmac and gravel could be laid to create new areas of hardstanding and car-parking in the park service yard (otherwise known as the park 'nursery'). The excavated material was mostly modern topsoil and old surfacing materials such as gravel. A small area of light brown/yellow clayey-silt containing frequent charcoal flecks, Roman brick and a sherd of Roman grey ware pottery was uncovered in the south-western corner of the stripped area (Fig 2). However, this deposit was located just beneath the turf and also contained a tarmac chipping. The deposit was not *in situ* and was probably disturbed from deeper down during previous works in the park service yard. No other archaeological deposits or features were observed during the monitoring of these groundworks and nor were any other finds recovered.



Plate 3: the remains of the probable clay-block wall.

5.4 Fence posts

The installation of metal and wooden panel fencing between the new play area and the park service yard involved the monitoring of the excavation of post-holes for the new fence posts. The excavation of eighteen post-holes for metal fence posts and six post-holes for concrete fence posts was observed during five archaeological monitoring visits.

The post-holes for the metal posts were hand-excavated to a depth of between 0.60m and 0.70m and were approximately 0.25m in diameter. The post-holes were all excavated through the dark greyish-brown sandy-silt topsoil which contained rare fragments of brick and tile (mostly Roman but some post-Roman), animal bone and modern pottery and glass. The datable finds recovered during the monitoring of post-holes 1-7 were all Roman and included CBM, pottery fragments, animal bone, oyster shell and mortar (section 6, finds nos 4-8). A light brown/yellow sandy-clay with frequent oyster shell fragments was encountered at the bottom of post-holes 6 and 7. A similar deposit had been noted in test-pits TP3, TP5 and TP6 excavated in February 2011 (CAT Report 575). The deposit is most likely to be Roman.

The six post-holes for concrete posts near to the new entrance to the park service yard were of the same depth but slightly larger in diameter (approximately 0.4m) than the post-holes for the metal fence posts. The post-holes for the concrete posts were excavated through the same topsoil and at least three of them were located within the backfill of a new service trench (see below). No archaeologically significant deposits were encountered but a few Roman finds, including a pottery sherd from a relatively rare import type at Colchester, were recovered (section 6, finds no 9).

5.5 Foul-water pipe and new kerb line

A trench was dug to construct a new kerb along the eastern edge of the existing access road into the park service yard. The trench was 100m long and 0.2m deep. It was monitored on a number of occasions (Fig 2), but it was not deep enough to reach any archaeological deposits below the topsoil.

A shorter but substantially deeper trench was excavated from an existing foul-water pipe inspection chamber to the northern edge of the new play area in advance of the installation of a temporary toilet block. The trench was 15.0m long and roughly 0.5m wide. It varied in depth from 0.4m below modern ground-level in the south-east to roughly 0.8m in the north-west near to the inspection chamber. No archaeological deposits were observed in this trench. However, the conditions during the inspection of the trench were not ideal as dust, loose stones and areas of trench edge collapse had covered most of the base of the trench before the trench could be examined archaeologically.

6 The finds

by Stephen Benfield

Finds were recovered from the post-holes for new fence posts and from unstratified (U/S) contexts. These are listed below in Table 1. The pottery fabric codes refer to the Colchester fabric series for Roman pottery listed in *CAR 10* and for post-Roman pottery listed in *CAR 7*. The Roman pottery form numbers refer to the Camulodunum (Cam) pottery type series for Colchester (Hawkes & Hull 1947; Hull 1958).

Table 1: finds by context.

Finds no	Context	Finds	Spot-dating summary
1	U/S	CBM Roman brick/tile, 2@718g, <i>tegula</i> curved, combed flue tile Mortar 2@635g <i>opus signinum</i> , 80 mm thick, banded with thinner layers of pale	Roman, late 1st-4th century

Finds no	Context	Finds	Spot-dating summary
		brown lime mortar, pieces join, pitted curving surface, uneven, rough opposing surface	
2	U/S	Pottery Roman: Fabric GX, 6@37g, abraded; medieval: Fabric 20, 1@46g, base sherd of grey ware vessel	medieval, mid/late 12th-14th century
3	U/S	CBM Roman <i>tesserae</i> , 33@715g, one white fabric, one cut from <i>tegula</i> flange, others red/orange, no mortar on any	Roman
4	fence-post 1	Pottery Roman: Fabric KX, 1@6g, rim probably, Cam 278 (mid 2nd-3rd/4th century) CBM Roman brick/tile, 4@81g, inc. one <i>tessera</i>	Roman, mid 2nd century +
5	fence-post 3	CBM Roman brick/tile, 1@45g, abraded	Roman
6	fence-post 4	Pottery Roman: Fabric GX, 2@15g CBM Roman brick/tile, 2@347g, inc. abraded <i>tegula</i> Animal bone 1@6g	Roman
7	fence-post 5	CBM Roman brick/tile, 3@127g, inc. 2 poorly shaped/cut <i>tesserae</i>	Roman
8	fence-post 7	CBM Roman brick/tile, 2@44g, inc. one small (mosaic-sized) <i>tessera</i> with white mortar Mortar 3@28g <i>opus signinum</i> Shell 1@11g, oyster	Roman
9	U/S	Pottery Roman: Fabric CZ 1@2g, folded beaker (mid 2nd-mid 3rd century), Fabric CL(NE) 1@1g, beaker with barbotine decoration (late ?2nd-3rd century) CBM Roman brick/tile, 1@6g	Roman, late 2nd?-3rd century

Review

Almost all of the datable finds recovered are of Roman date. The Roman pottery consists mostly of sherds of sandy grey ware (Fabric GX) which are not closely dated. Some of these (finds no 2) are abraded. There is a rim from a jar probably of form Cam 278 (dated mid 2nd-3rd/4th century) in Fabric KX (finds no 4). There are also two fine ware sherds (both finds no 9). One of these is from a folded beaker in local (Colchester) colour-coated ware (dated mid 2nd-mid 3rd century). The other is an import from Central Gaul in black-slipped ware (Fabric CL(NE)) which is a relatively rare import type at Colchester. The sherd is from a beaker with part of a tendril in barbotine decoration. Products in this fabric first appeared in the mid 2nd century, generally (Tyers 1996, 138), but none is identified from contexts in Colchester that can be dated earlier than the 3rd century (CAR 10, 275).

All of the ceramic building material (CBM) is of Roman date. A few pieces could be identified as parts of *tegula* roof tiles. All are in an oxidised, red/orange-coloured fabric. No very thick pieces indicative of Roman brick were recorded, and most of the flat pieces of tile are probably parts of roof tiles. The largest single category of CBM, by number, is floor *tesserae*. Thirty-three were recovered as an unstratified collection (finds no 3), one of which was cut from a *tegula* flange and one of which is in a white/cream fabric, the others being red/orange. None of these had any mortar adhering to them. A single, small, mosaic-sized red *tessera* cube, which had been set into a floor as there is white mortar adhering to it, was recovered from the post-hole for fence-post 7 (finds no 8).

There are also several pieces of Roman *opus signinum* mortar (finds nos 1 & 8). One group of fragments consists of small pieces (finds no 8; fence-post

7), but two joining pieces are much thicker - up to 80 mm - and banded with layers of pale brown lime mortar (finds no 1; U/S). This thick, layered mortar may have come from a mortar floor or the floor base for a mosaic.

The only find of post-Roman date is a single unstratified pottery sherd found near to the tessellated floor (finds no 2). This is a large base sherd from a medieval grey ware vessel (Fabric 20) which can be dated to the mid-late 12th-14th century.

In addition, there is a single piece of animal bone (finds no 6) and one oyster shell (finds no 8).

7 Discussion

Archaeological remains dating to the Roman period were encountered within the area stripped for the new access road and in the base of two of the post-holes. Elsewhere, excavations were within the dark grey/brown sandy-silt which overlies the archaeology in Upper Castle Park and is interpreted as being a modern topsoil with an underlying post-Roman dark earth. There is very little distinction between these two dark soils and little stratification of finds within them due to the use of the land for cultivation and then as a landscaped garden and park. Within the area stripped for the new access road, a Roman tessellated floor and the remains of the probable clay-block wall were uncovered 0.3m below the modern ground-level on the site of the former putting green. This is notably shallower than expected, to judge from the test-pits excavated by CAT had shown the uppermost archaeological deposits within the area of the putting green. However, the tessellated floor had been previously uncovered during excavations in 1927-9 at a depth of 18 inches (0.45m) below modern ground-level (Hull 1958, 91). This suggests that the ground-level has been reduced slightly in this area, probably when the land was levelled to create the putting green, but that the soil overlying archaeological remains in this part of the park was relatively shallow even before the landscaping of the area. This should be considered before any future groundworks are undertaken in this area.

The tessellated floor and the remains of the probable clay-block wall are located within the southern part of Insula 7, just north of the east-west orientated Roman street dividing Insula 7 and Insula 15. The tessellated floor is at least 14ft (4.0m) north-south by 16ft (4.8m) east-west. It is incomplete on its western side (Hull 1958, 91). The red *tessera* cubes were laid in poor clay with no trace of a mortar bedding and a brick floor was located 6in (15cm) below the tessellated floor (Hull 1958, 91). The walls which surrounded the floor could not be traced in the trenches excavated in 1927-9, but it is possible that the remains of the probable clay-block wall identified during this watching brief are part of the southern wall associated with the pavement. These finds represent the fragmentary remains of a Roman building, most probably a house not 'of any great size or pretensions' (Hull 1958, 90).

The Roman deposits encountered in bottom of the post-holes are similar to those encountered during the test-pitting undertaken in February 2011 (CAT Report 575; Fig 2). Interpreting such deposits when they are only uncovered in small holes is problematical, but they do indicate that Roman deposits survive in this part of the park about 0.6m below modern ground-level.

8 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but it will be permanently deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums under the accession code COLEM 2011.46, in accordance with *Guidelines on the preparations and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester and Ipswich Museums* (CIMS 2008b).

9 Acknowledgements

The Trust is grateful to Colchester Borough Council for funding the work, and to Steve Collis, Ian Baalham and the Service Team of Colchester Borough Council for their assistance on site. The fieldwork was managed and undertaken by A Wightman assisted by B Holloway and D Shimmin.

10 References

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

- | | | |
|------------------------|-------|--|
| 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, 1971-85</i> , by J Cotter |
| CAR 10 | 2000 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 10: Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-86</i> , by R Symonds & S Wade, ed by P Bidwell and A Croom |
| CAT Report 191 | | An archaeological watching brief on cable trenches at the putting green and outside Hollytrees Museum, Upper Castle Park and outside the Natural History Museum, Colchester, Essex: May 2002, unpublished CAT archive report, by K Orr, 2002 |
| CAT Report 422 | | An archaeological evaluation by test-pitting on the putting green and in the nursery, Upper Castle Park, Colchester, Essex: April 2007, unpublished CAT archive report, by K Orr, 2007 |
| CAT Report 575 | | Two archaeological evaluations by test-pitting and an archaeological watching brief in Castle Park, Colchester, Essex: November 2010-February 2011, unpublished CAT archive report, by A Wightman with D Shimmin, 2011 |
| 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> |
| 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 |
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| 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) |
| Tyers, P | 1996 | <i>Pottery in Roman Britain</i> |

11 Glossary

CBC	Colchester Borough Council
CBM	ceramic building material
CIMS	Colchester and Ipswich Museums
context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
ECC	Essex County Council
EHHER	Essex Historic Environment Record, held by the ECC
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists
<i>insula</i>	an area or block within the grid pattern of a Roman town (plural <i>insulae</i>)
layer	distinct or distinguishable deposit of soil
medieval	period from AD 1066 to Henry VIII
modern	period from the 19th century onwards to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
post-medieval	after Henry VIII to around the late 18th century
Roman	period of assimilation of Britain as part of the Roman empire, c AD 43-410
<i>tesserae</i>	small ceramic cubes used for floors in Roman buildings (singular <i>tessera</i>)
U/S	unstratified, ie without any context

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Adams x c:/reports 11/castle park/report 603zz.doc

12 Appendix 1: contents of archive

One A4 document wallet containing;

1 Introduction

- 1.1 2 x application for Scheduled Monument Consent
- 1.2 1 x risk assessment

2 Site archive

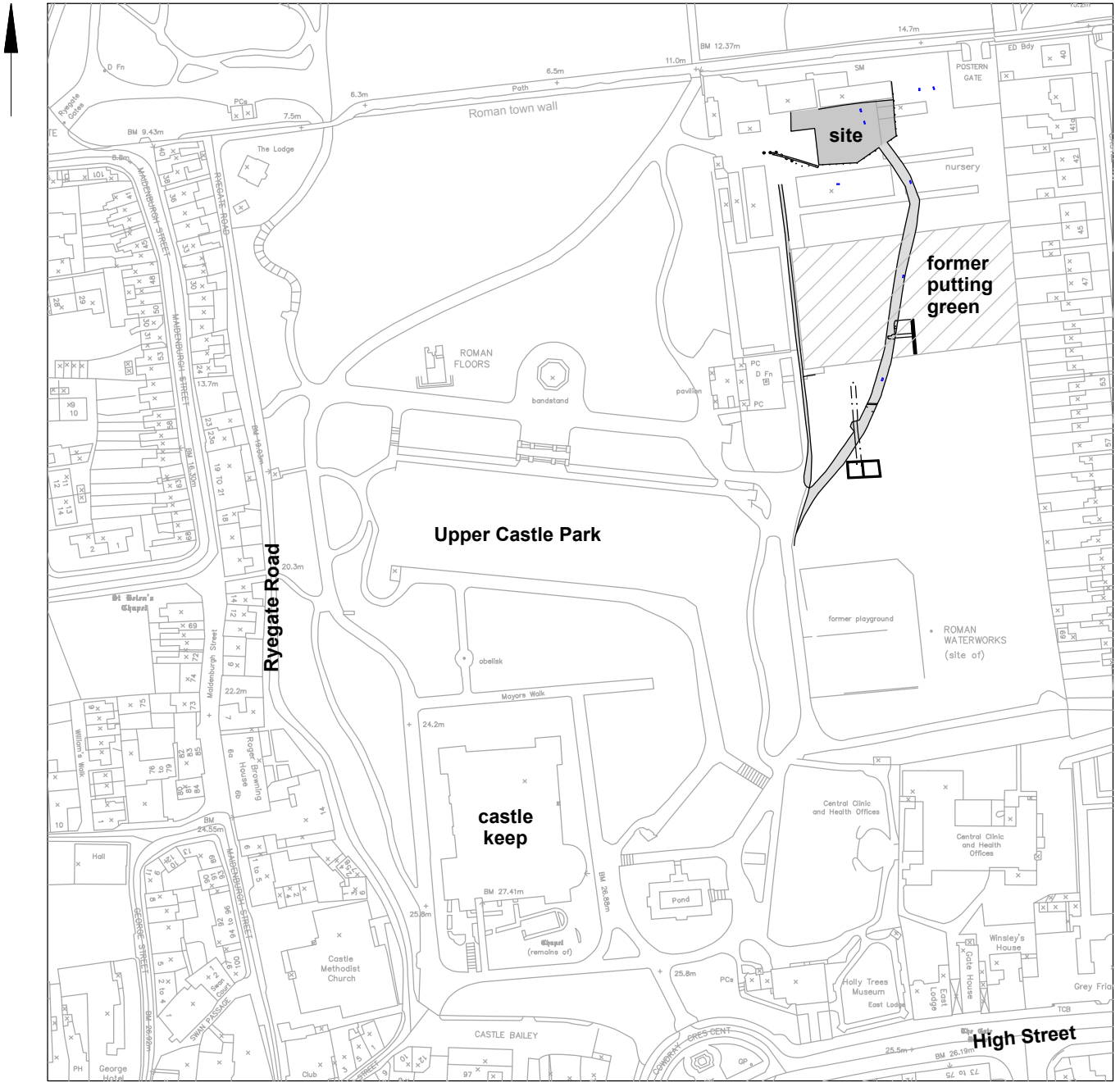
- 2.1 Digital photo. record
- 2.2 Rough site notes
- 2.3 Attendance register
- 2.4 Finds register
- 2.5 Site photographic record on CD
- 2.6 A3 plans showing the locations of survey points around Hollytrees Meadow

3 Research archive

- 3.1 Monitoring (client) report
- 3.2 Finds reports

The finds

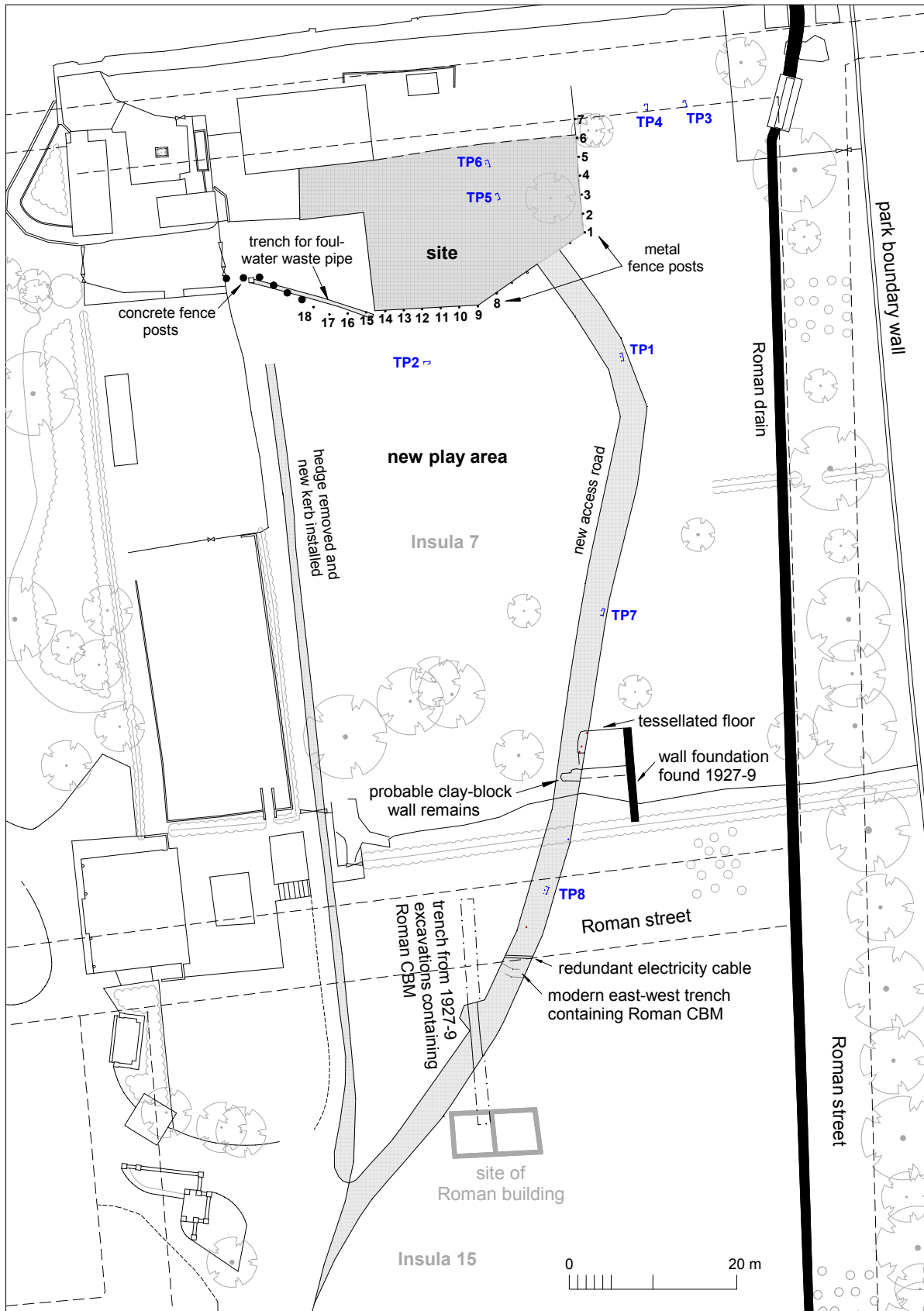
The finds occupy less than one box.



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Fig 1 Site location plan. (Areas affected by groundworks toned grey.)





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Fig 2 Site plan, showing the groundworks which were monitored, the archaeological remains observed and the 2011 test-pits (TP1-TP8). (Areas affected by groundworks toned grey; the darker grey indicates the site of the park service yard.)

Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

CAT Report 603

Site address: the new play area and the park service yard, Upper Castle Park, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 99922 25434 (c)	Site codes: CAT project - 11/4e Museum accession - COLEM 2011.46
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: April-June 2011	Size of area investigated: 8,000m ²
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums	Funding source: Colchester Borough Council
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHER and UAD nos: -
Final report: CAT Report 603 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Roman, medieval, post-medieval, modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results:</p> <p><i>An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by CAT in the Upper Castle Park, Colchester, Essex between April and June 2011. Seventeen monitoring visits were made during landscaping works associated with the laying out of the new play area and the park service yard, including the installation of a new access road, metal and concrete fences, hardstanding and services.</i></p> <p><i>Archaeological remains dating to the Roman period were encountered within the area stripped for the new access road and in the base of two of the post-holes. Elsewhere, ground disturbance was confined to the dark grey/ brown sandy-silt which overlies the archaeology and is interpreted as a modern topsoil with an underlying post-Roman dark earth.</i></p> <p><i>Part of a Roman tessellated pavement was uncovered along the line of the new access road. The remains of a probable clay-block wall lay to the south. The pavement and wall were on the site of the former putting green. The pavement had been partly uncovered in 1927-9 but, now lying 0.3m below modern ground-level, it was significantly shallower than it had been in 1927-9 when the floor was at depth of '18 inches' (0.45m; Hull 1958, 91). This change suggests that the ground-level has been reduced in this part of the park, presumably when the putting green was made.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: CAT Reports 422 and 575	
Keywords: Roman, tessellated floor, building, post-Roman, dark earth	Significance: *

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Date of summary:
September 2011