

**An archaeological watching brief at  
Greyfriars Community College,  
East Hill, Colchester, Essex  
January-March 2006**

**report prepared by  
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**on behalf of  
W S Atkins**

CAT project ref: 06/1e  
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NGR: TM 0007 2527 (c)



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**CAT Report 369**  
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Fig 1 Site location, showing the three watching brief areas.

## 1 Summary

*A watching brief on small-scale building works exposed post-medieval and modern remains, but nothing of archaeological significance.*

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief at the rear of Greyfriars Community College, High Street, Colchester, Essex. The watching brief was commissioned and paid for by W S Atkins.
- 2.2 The site is located close to the town centre at National Grid Reference TM 0007 2527 (centre).
- 2.3 The investigation was prompted by a proposal to carry out various minor building works, mainly to improve access (Fig 1).
- 2.4 This report follows standards and practices contained in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on the standards and practices of archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (CM 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (CM 2003), and the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IFA 1999) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IFA 2001). The guidance contained in the documents *Management of archaeological projects* (MAP 2), *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

- 3.1 The site lies within the north-east corner of the walled town, close to the site of Roman Colchester's main east-west street. The temple of Claudius stood 200m to the west and the east gate lay 140m to the east. This is a relatively unexplored area, and little is known of the nature of early occupation and the development of the *insulae* (street blocks) in this part of the Roman town.
- 3.2 The site takes its name from the friary which was established by 1237 and dissolved in 1538 (Urban Archaeological Database or UAD no 13136). At the time of the dissolution, the friary included a hall, infirmary house, chambers, kitchen, bakery, brewery, gardens and four acres of land within the precinct walls. In 1622, a gatehouse still stood in Friars Street or Frere Street (now part of the High Street), with buildings set back from the frontage. Nothing of the medieval establishment appears to have remained by 1847 (*VCH 9*, 306-7). Human skeletons found at Greyfriars are believed to have derived from medieval graves (UAD no 3833).
- 3.3 Fieldwork at Greyfriars Community College in recent years was undertaken during the replacement of a car-park boundary wall situated 80m to the north of the present site. Here a preliminary trial-trench of limited depth and a subsequent watching brief on the works produced no archaeologically significant features (CAT Reports 219 and 264). An evaluation in advance of the installation of a lift shaft in 2004 revealed part of a Roman tessellated pavement at 1.1m below modern ground level (CAT Report 290). This tessellated floor was found immediately south of Area 2 of the current work (Fig 1).

## 4 Aims

The aims of the fieldwork were to establish the depth and nature of any archaeologically sensitive features or deposits affected by the proposed building work.

## 5 Results

### 5.1 Area 1 (A1)

Resurfacing of the yard immediately behind the front gate. The removal of the modern tarmac cover revealed a mid brown sandy silt of recent origin (Layer or L1). There was no intrusive work into this layer. Maximum depth of disturbance here 0.2m.

### 5.2 Area 2 (A2)

Trench below a proposed disabled access to rear of building. A post-medieval layer (L2), probably make-up for the recent concrete surface, sealed a post-medieval brick footing (Feature or F1) running north to south, and also sealed the material (L3) lying between the footing and the outer walls of the current building. Maximum depth of disturbance here 0.6m.

In a separate trench within Area 2, the current work exposed the top of a modern and heavily-built network of pipes leading to a manhole cover (F2), cutting post-medieval layer L4. Current work only went down to 0.6m below modern ground, so the depth of this pipework and manhole was not established, nor the damage which it will inevitably have caused to underlying strata.

### 5.3 Area 3 (A3)

Trench for lighting cables in the car-park, dug 0.6m deep and 0.4m wide. Modern topsoil (not numbered) was stripped off to reveal a post-medieval soil horizon (L5) containing residual Roman brick and *tesserae*, lying over a lower topsoily horizon (L6) with unfrosted brick, peg-tile and clay pipe. The adjacent car-park has been terraced flat, and it is possible that L5 represents soil excavated from the car-park and dumped on the current bank.

## 6 Finds

**Table 1: list of finds by context.**

Medieval fabric description is after *CAR 7*.

Find no	Context	Description	Date
1	Area 3 L5	samian ware sherd, 10 g	Roman (residual in this context)
1	Area 3 L5	rim of unglazed Fabric 21a bowl, 47 g ( <i>CAR 7</i> , fig 94.153)	15th-16th century
1	Area 3 L5	internally sooted chimney pot fragment, 188 grammes	post-medieval
1	Area 3 L5	peg-tile fragment, no hole, 58 grammes	medieval or post-medieval
1	Area 3 L5	3 plain red Roman <i>tesserae</i> , 73 grammes	Roman (residual in this context)

## 7 Discussion

The contractor's works only penetrated to 0.6m below modern ground-level, revealing post-medieval strata at that depth. In 2004, a Roman tessellated floor was discovered at 1.1m below modern ground, at a point south of Area 2 (Fig 1; CAT Report 290). It would

therefore appear that the current work was too shallow to affect significant archaeological strata.

The loose Roman *tesserae* from Area 3 were found approximately 10m away from the position of the tessellated floor found in 2004. It would seem likely that the *tesserae* are ultimately derived from a separate tessellated floor in the same Roman building.

## 8 Acknowledgements

The investigation was commissioned and funded by W S Atkins (thanks to Colin Henderson). Thanks to site contractors Frederick J French for assistance, and the staff of Greyfriars Community College.

Site work was carried out by Will Clarke. Report by Howard Brooks from WC's notes. The project was monitored by Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council.

## 9 References

- |                |      |  |
|----------------|------|--|
| CAR 7          | 2000 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 7: Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85</i> , by J Cotter  |
| CAT Report 219 |      | An archaeological evaluation at the car-park of Greyfriars Community College, Castle Road, Colchester, Essex, January 2003, unpublished CAT archive report, by Kate Orr, 2003                |
| CAT Report 264 |      | An archaeological watching brief at Greyfriars Adult Community College car-park, Colchester, Essex, January-February 2004, unpublished CAT archive report, by Kate Orr, 2004                 |
| CAT Report 290 |      | An archaeological evaluation at the rear of Greyfriars Community College, High Street, Colchester, Essex, October 2004, unpublished CAT archive report, by Carl Crossan, 2004                |
| CM             | 2002 | <i>Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i>   |
| CM             | 2003 | <i>Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums</i>   |
| EAA 3          | 1997 | <i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, <b>3</b> , ed by J Glazebrook                    |
| EAA 8          | 2000 | <i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, <b>8</b> , ed by N Brown & J Glazebrook |
| EAA 14         | 2003 | <i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, <b>14</b> , by D Gurney   |
| IFA            | 1999 | <i>Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief</i>  |
| IFA            | 2001 | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i>  |
| MAP 2          | 1991 | <i>Management of archaeological projects</i> , 2nd edition (English Heritage)  |
| VCH 9          | 1984 | <i>The Victoria History of the County of Essex</i> , <b>9</b> , Colchester, ed by J Cooper   |

## 10 Glossary

context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
EHHER	Essex Historic Environment Record, Essex County Council
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
medieval	the period from 1066 to c 1500
modern	the period from c 1800 to the present
post-medieval	The period from c 1500 to c 1800
Roman	the period from AD 43 to around AD 430
<i>tessera(e)</i>	individual floor cube(s) from a Roman mosaic floor (decorated or plain)
tessellated	floor made of <i>tesserae</i>
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database, a compilation of archaeological data on England's historic towns; the Colchester database is maintained by Colchester Museums

## 11 Archive deposition

The site records and finds are currently held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF. These will be deposited permanently with Colchester Museums, under cover of museum accession code 2004.48.

## 12 Site context list

Table 2: lists of archaeological contexts.

Context	Description	Context date
<b>Area 1</b>		
L1	Under modern tarmac cover. Mid- to dark-brown sandy silt with fragments of post-medieval brick, peg-tile, clay tobacco pipe	post-medieval/modern
<b>Area 2</b>		
L2	Under modern concrete. Mid- to dark brown sandy silt, very compact, with modern brick, peg-tile, clay tobacco pipe.	post-medieval/modern
L3	Sealed by L2. Infill between modern wall lines. Same as L2, but with frequent creamy mortar fragments	post-medieval/modern
L4	Cut by pipework F2. Hard dark greyish brown sandy silt with post-medieval brick and clay pipe.	
F1	Unfrogged brick footing	post-medieval
F2	Modern pipework	modern
<b>Area 3</b>		
L5	Sealed by very recent topsoil adjacent to car-park. Topsoil layer with post-medieval brick and tile, and residual Roman <i>tesserae</i> . Redeposited layer?	modern
L6	Lower topsoil horizon with unfrogged brick and clay pipe	post-medieval

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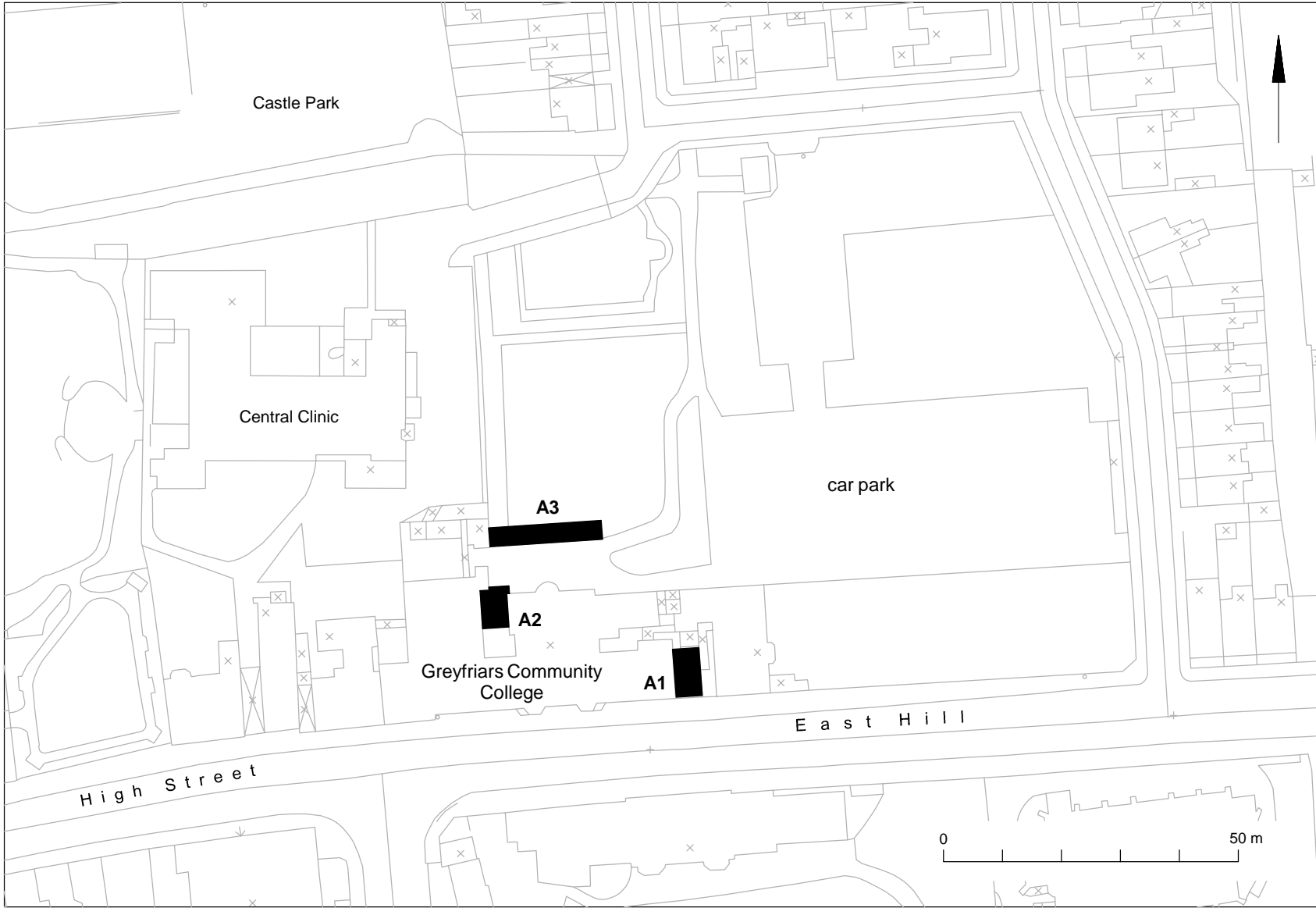


Fig 1 Site location, showing the three watching brief areas.

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**Essex Historic Environment Record/  
Essex Archaeology and History**

**Summary sheet**

<b>Site address:</b> Greyfriars Community College, East Hill, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester Borough
<b>NGR:</b> TM 0007 2527 (c)	<b>Site code:</b> Museum accession code 2006.48
<b>Type of work:</b> Watching brief	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> January-March 2006	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> three small trenches
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Developer
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> no	<b>Related UAD nos:</b> 3833, 13136
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 369 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods represented:</b> post-medieval, modern	
<b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b> <i>A watching brief on small-scale building works exposed post-medieval and modern remains, but nothing of archaeological significance.</i>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> None	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Howard Brooks	<b>Date of summary:</b> May 2006