

**Historic building recording of  
a semi-sunken air-raid shelter  
at the former Brentwood Police Station,  
London Road, Brentwood,  
Essex, CM14 4QJ**

**May 2019**



**report prepared by  
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**commissioned by  
Helen Warren, CgMs Heritage,  
part of the RPS Group Ltd  
on behalf of  
Weston Homes**

CAT project ref.: 19/01b  
NGR: TQ 589 934 (c)  
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ECC code: BWBPS19  
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**CAT Report 1414**  
May 2019

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## 1 Summary

*A programme of historic building recording was carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust on an air-raid shelter at the former Brentwood Police Station, London Road, Brentwood, Essex in May 2019.*

*The shelter is a semi-sunken rectangular concrete structure covered with an earth bank. Located directly adjacent to La Plata House, it was clearly intended to provide shelter to the police officers accommodated there. Although it wouldn't have survived a direct hit, it would have shielded its occupants from any flying debris or shrapnel resulting from the intensive bombing Brentwood received during World War II.*

## 2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the archive report on a historic building recording of an air-raid shelter at the former Brentwood Police Station in advance of a programme of demolition. The recording work was commissioned by Helen Warren of CgMs Heritage, part of the RPS Group Ltd on behalf of Weston Homes and carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) in May 2019. The site is located in the centre of Brentwood on the south side of London Road at NGR TQ 589 934. The air-raid shelter detailed in this report is located to the south-west of the police station (Fig 1).

A planning application (planning ref. 16/01805/OUT) was submitted to Brentwood Borough Council in December 2016 proposing the demolition of the existing Police Station buildings (including the air-raid shelter), the conversion of La Plata House and the construction of up to 70 new dwellings.

In response to this application, the Place Services Historic Environment Advisor (HEA) recommended to the council that a Historic England Level 2 building survey be made of the air-raid shelter prior to its demolition. Planning permission was granted and included the following condition (part 18):

*“Prior to the demolition of each air raid shelter a full level 2 recording as identified in a Guide to Good Recording Practice...of the air raid shelter shall be carried out and submitted to and approved by the LPA.”*

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for the building recording was prepared by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT 2019) and agreed with the HEA. All work was carried out in accordance with this WSI.

All work was carried out according to standards and practices contained in the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (2014a), *Standard and guidance for archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures* (2014b), *Management of research projects in the historic environment* (Historic England 2015), *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14) and *Research and Archaeology Revised: A Revised Framework for the East of England* (EAA 24). In addition, the guidelines contained in *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice* (Historic England 2016) were followed.

### 3 Aims

The aim of the building recording was to provide a detailed record and assessment of the shelter prior to its demolition. The building recording was carried out to Level 2 (Historic England 2016) which is defined as:

*“...a descriptive record, made in similar circumstances to Level 1 but when more information is needed. It may be made of a building which is judged not to require a more detailed record, or it may serve to gather data for a wider project. Both the exterior and interior of the building will be seen, described and photographed. The examination of the building will produce an analysis of its development and use and the record will include the conclusions reached, but it will not discuss in detail the evidence on which this analysis is based. A plan and sometimes other drawings may be made but the drawn record will normally not be comprehensive and may be tailored to the scope of a wider project.”*

In particular the record considered:

- Plan and form of the site.
- Materials and method of construction.
- Date(s) of the structure.
- Original function and layout.
- Original and later fixtures and fittings.
- The significance of the site in its immediate local context.

### 4 Methodology

The following are included in this report:

- A documentary, cartographic and pictorial survey of the evidence pertaining to the history and evolution of the air-raid shelter.
- A large-scale block plan of the site.
- Annotated floor-plans and elevations of the shelter at a scale of 1:100.
- A description of the shelter. The description addresses features such as materials, dimensions, method of construction and phasing.
- A photographic record, comprising digital photographs of both general shots and individual features. Selected examples of the photographic record are clearly tied into the drawn record and reproduced as fully annotated photographic plates supporting the text. The photographic record is accompanied by a photographic register detailing location and direction of shot (Appendix 1).

## 5 Historical background (Fig 1)

The following historical background draws on cartographic sources, the Essex Records Office (ERO) and the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) accessed via Heritage Gateway ([www.heritagegateway.org.uk](http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk)). The Built Heritage Statement of the site was also consulted (CgMs 2018).

La Plata House, the oldest building standing on the site, was a house constructed in the late 18th - early 19th century (Fig 1). It was the subject of several extensions and alterations over the course of the 19th and early 20th century (CgMs 2018, 13).

The police station was constructed within the gardens of La Plata House in 1937, replacing Brentwood's previous police station in Coptfold Road (some 600m to the east). At this time La Plata House was converted by the police to provide accommodation (*ibid*).

During World War II, two air-raid shelters were constructed on the site. The largest of these is a semi-sunken shelter to the west of La Plata House; detailed in this report. The other shelter is a small brick-built surface shelter located at the north-east of the site; this is detailed in CAT Report 1400.

Being partially below-ground, the air-raid shelter does not appear on any mapping until a modern survey of the site was done as part of the planning application (Fig 1).

## 6 Building recording descriptive record (Fig 2)

The air-raid shelter is aligned north/south. The buried concrete structure measures 15.4m x 5m in size and covers around 53 square metres.

The shelter is entirely constructed of cast concrete with a flat concrete slab roof. It is covered by an earth bank, which rises 1.5m above current ground-level, with two projecting entrances/exits into the structure; one at the northern end and one at the southern (Photographs 1 and 2; and Fig 2). Until recently the shelter had several large trees growing on top and around it.



**Photograph 1** Northern entrance of air-raid shelter. Photograph taken facing south-west.



**Photograph 2** Southern (blocked) entrance into air-raid shelter. Photograph taken facing north-east.

The shelter is accessed via the entranceway to the north, down a flight of stairs. The interior of the shelter is divided by a brick wall which serves to separate the main area of the shelter into two rooms (Photograph 3). The brickwork of this dividing wall is laid in English-bond with the bricks measuring 210 x 100 x 70mm, and there is an entrance through the wall, supported by a concrete lintel, allowing access between the two sides of the shelter. In the north-east corner of the shelter, backing onto the entrance stairway, is a small room that would have originally been the W.C. (Photograph 4).



**Photograph 3** Interior of air-raid shelter, showing dividing brick wall. Photograph taken facing south-east.



**Photograph 4** Interior of air-raid shelter, showing separate room next to northern entrance. Photograph taken facing north-east.

All the doors within the shelter are vertically-planked, supported with battens and cross-battens on their rear (Photograph 6). There are two distinct types of door in the shelter; the ones to the north of the structure are constructed of larger planks than the ones to the south (Photographs 7). An inserted metal pipe provides ventilation to the structure via the northern entrance (Photograph 8 and Fig 2).

The interior of the shelter is featureless except for an inserted Belfast sink (that is not plumbed in) and a rudimentary desk constructed out of the remains of a wooden pallet (Photograph 5).



**Photograph 5** Interior of air-raid shelter, showing inserted sink and desk in south of structure. Photograph taken facing south-west.



**Photograph 6** Detail of southern door on interior of air-raid shelter, showing cross-battens on rear. Photograph taken facing south.





**Photograph 7** Detail of northern door on interior of air-raid shelter, showing cross-battens on rear. Photograph taken facing north.



**Photograph 8** Detail of inserted metal vent and pipe in north of air-raid shelter, adjacent to entrance. Photograph taken facing south-west.

## 7 Discussion

The semi-sunken air-raid shelter at Brentwood Police Station would clearly have been constructed for the use of police officers who were residing in La Plata House, immediately adjacent to the east (Fig 1). It is larger and significantly more substantial than the above-ground shelter recorded to the north of the site (CAT Report 1400) and would have provided correspondingly more protection to its larger number of occupants. Nevertheless, this shelter would not have, and was never designed to, withstand a direct hit. Nothing but the most substantial, completely subterranean, air-raid shelters, would have been capable of that. Instead, this shelter was designed to provide protection to its occupants from flying debris, shrapnel and, potentially, the collapse of nearby buildings. Being partially below-ground and covered with an earth bank would have enhanced its resistance to near misses and it is likely that, even if La Plata House had been destroyed, the occupants of the shelter would have had a good chance of survival.

The surviving features within the shelter; the Belfast sink, the rudimentary desk and the metal ventilating pipe, are all the result of later insertions into the structure. Presumably these features were all added at a date when the structure was no longer in use as an air-raid shelter. The current owner of the site attests that the shelter continued to be used by the police until relatively recently (*pers comm*), and that it even served as an office for a period of time. The presence of the sink and ventilation system could perhaps suggest that the shelter was at some point used as a dark room for the development of photos, although this is largely speculative.

A map in the Essex Record Office detailing air-raid precautions carried out in Brentwood during World War II has the police station highlighted with a symbol (Map 1). Unfortunately this map does not have a surviving key. The symbol may represent the location of a siren, which were often placed on police stations (Brown et al 1996, 75). Regardless, it implies that the shelters on this site were an important aspect of the town's air-raid defences.



**Map 1** 1938-39 map of Brentwood showing air-raid precautions. No key. Symbol on Police Station site highlighted in red. ERO C/W 4/11/1.

## 8 Acknowledgements

Colchester Archaeological Trust would like to thank CgMs Heritage, part of the RPS Group Ltd for commissioning and Weston Homes for funding the historic building recording.

The recording was carried out by Mark Baister and Robin Mathieson.

Figures are by Mark Baister and Robin Mathieson.

The report was edited by Philip Crummy, director of CAT.

The project was monitored by Helen Saunders for Essex County Council.

## 9 References

Note: all CAT reports, except for DBAs, are available online in .pdf format at

<http://cat.essex.ac.uk>

Brown, I., Burrige, D., Clarke, D., Guy, J., Hellis, J., Lowry, B., Ruckley, N., Thomas, R.	1996	<i>20th Century Defences in Britain: An introductory guide</i>
CAT	2019	<i>Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for an historic building recording of two-air-raid shelters on land at the former Brentwood Police Station and La Plata House, London Road, Brentwood, Essex CM14 4QJ</i> by Holloway, E.
CAT Report 1400	2019	<i>Historic building recording of an air-raid shelter at the former Brentwood Police Station, London Road, Brentwood, Essex, CM14 4QJ</i> March 2019 by Baister, M.
CIfA	2014a	<i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i>
CIfA	2014b	<i>Standard and guidance for archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures</i>
CgMs Heritage	2018	<i>Built Heritage Statement: Brentwood Police Station, London Road, Brentwood</i> by Warren, H.
EAA 14	2003	<i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> East Anglian Archaeological occasional papers 14 by Gurney, D.
EAA 24	2011	<i>Research and Archaeology Revisited: A Revised Framework for the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeological occasional papers 24 by Medlycott, M.
Historic England	2015	<i>MoRPHE: Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment</i>
Historic England	2016	<i>Understanding Historic Buildings. A guide to good recording practice</i>
MHCLG	2018	<i>National planning policy framework</i>

### Websites visited include:

[www.military-history.org/articles/air-raid-shelters.htm](http://www.military-history.org/articles/air-raid-shelters.htm)

## 10 Abbreviations and glossary

batten	a thin, rectangular piece of timber. Nailed to the outer face of rafters in roof construction, to support the roofing material (tiles, slate, etc). Also used to reinforce and support planked doors
CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
CIfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
EHHER	Essex Historic Environment Record, held by the ECC
ERO	Essex Records Office
English-bond	a brickwork bond created from alternate courses of headers and stretchers
HE	Historic Environment
header	a brick laid at right-angles to the face of the wall, i.e widthways
modern	period from the 19th century onwards to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
OASIS	<b>O</b> nline <b>A</b> cces <b>S</b> to the <b>I</b> ndex of <b>A</b> rchaeological <b>I</b> nvestigations, <a href="http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main">http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main</a>

## 11 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 Chelmsford Museum under accession number CHMER: 2019.001.

## 12 Contents of archive

### Paper and digital record

One A4 document wallet containing:  
The report (CAT Report 1414)  
Original site record (plans, elevations and notes)  
Site digital photos and log

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**Distribution list**

CgMs Heritage  
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checked by: Philip Crummy  
date: 28/05/2019

**Appendix 1:  
Full digital photographic record  
(images on accompanying CD)**

CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	021.JPG	Exterior of shelter. Photograph taken facing west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	022.JPG	Exterior of shelter. Photograph taken facing south-west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	023.JPG	Exterior of shelter. Photograph taken facing north-west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	024.JPG	Exterior of shelter, showing southern entrance. Photograph taken facing north-west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	025.JPG	Exterior of shelter showing southern entrance. Photograph taken facing north.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	026.JPG	Exterior of shelter showing northern entrance. Photograph taken facing south-west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	027.JPG	Exterior of shelter. Photograph taken facing south-east.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	028.JPG	Exterior of shelter showing northern entrance. Photograph taken facing west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	029.JPG	Interior of shelter showing dividing wall. Photograph taken facing south-east.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	030.JPG	Interior of shelter showing separate W.C. next to entranceway. Photograph taken facing north-east.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	031.JPG	Interior of shelter showing doorway into separate W.C. next to entranceway. Photograph taken facing north.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	032.JPG	Detail of door furniture on door leading into W.C.. Photograph taken facing north.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	033.JPG	Interior of shelter showing separate W.C. next to entranceway. Photograph taken facing north.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	034.JPG	Interior of shelter showing dividing wall. Photograph taken facing south-west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	035.JPG	Interior of shelter showing inserted desk and sink. Photograph taken facing south-west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	036.JPG	Interior of shelter showing southern door. Photograph taken facing south.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	037.JPG	Interior of shelter showing detail of latch on southern door. Photograph taken facing north-east.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	038.JPG	Interior of shelter showing detail of latch on southern door. Photograph taken facing south-east.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	039.JPG	Interior of shelter showing detail of latch on southern door. Photograph taken facing south-west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	040.JPG	Interior of shelter showing detail of inserted sink. Photograph taken facing west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	041.JPG	Interior of shelter showing detail of latch and battens on rear of southern door. Photograph taken facing south.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	042.JPG	Interior of shelter showing detail of battens on rear of southern door. Photograph taken facing south-east.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	043.JPG	Interior of shelter showing detail of desk constructed of pallets. Photograph taken facing south-west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	044.JPG	Interior of shelter showing detail of desk constructed of pallets. Photograph taken facing south-west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	045.JPG	Interior of shelter showing detail of inserted sink. Photograph taken facing north-west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	046.JPG	Interior of shelter showing dividing wall. Photograph taken facing north.

CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	Interior of shelter showing detail of concrete construction. Photograph taken facing west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	Interior of shelter showing detail of northern door. Photograph taken facing north-west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	Interior of shelter showing inserted ventilation grill and metal pipe. Photograph taken facing south-west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	Interior of shelter showing detail of inserted ventilation vent. Photograph taken facing south-west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	Interior of shelter showing inserted ventilation metal pipe. Photograph taken facing north-west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	Interior of shelter showing inserted ventilation grill and metal pipe. Photograph taken facing north-west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	Exterior of shelter showing northern entrance. Photograph taken facing south.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	Exterior of shelter. Photograph taken facing north-west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	Exterior of shelter. Photograph taken facing north-west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	Exterior of shelter. Photograph taken facing west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	Exterior of shelter. Photograph taken facing north-west.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	Exterior of shelter showing southern entrance. Photograph taken facing north-east.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	Exterior of shelter. Photograph taken facing north-east.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	Exterior of shelter, showing southern entrance. Photograph taken facing east.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	Exterior of shelter. Photograph taken facing north.
CHMER2019.001_BWBPS19_Photo	Exterior of shelter. Photograph taken facing south.

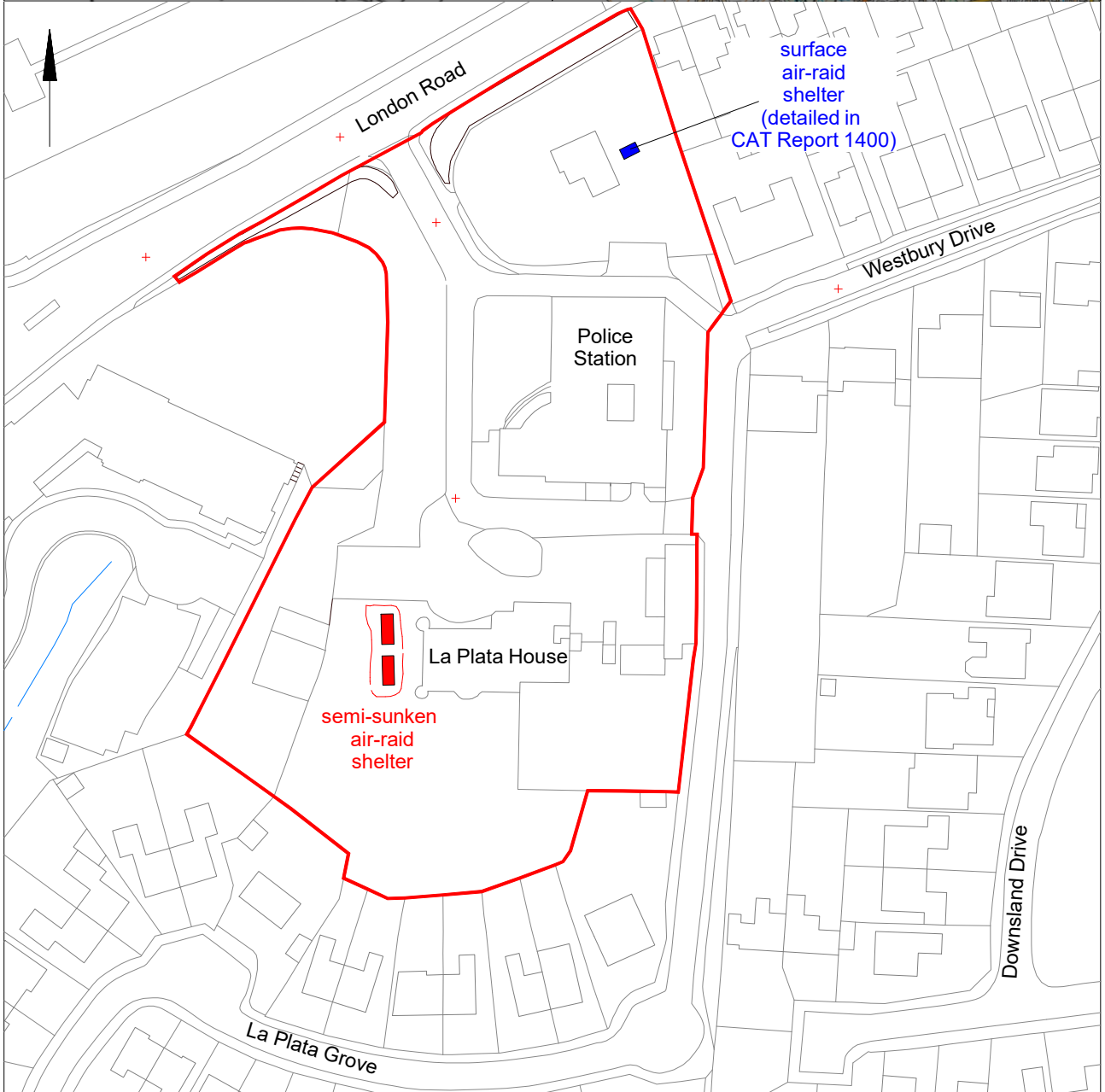
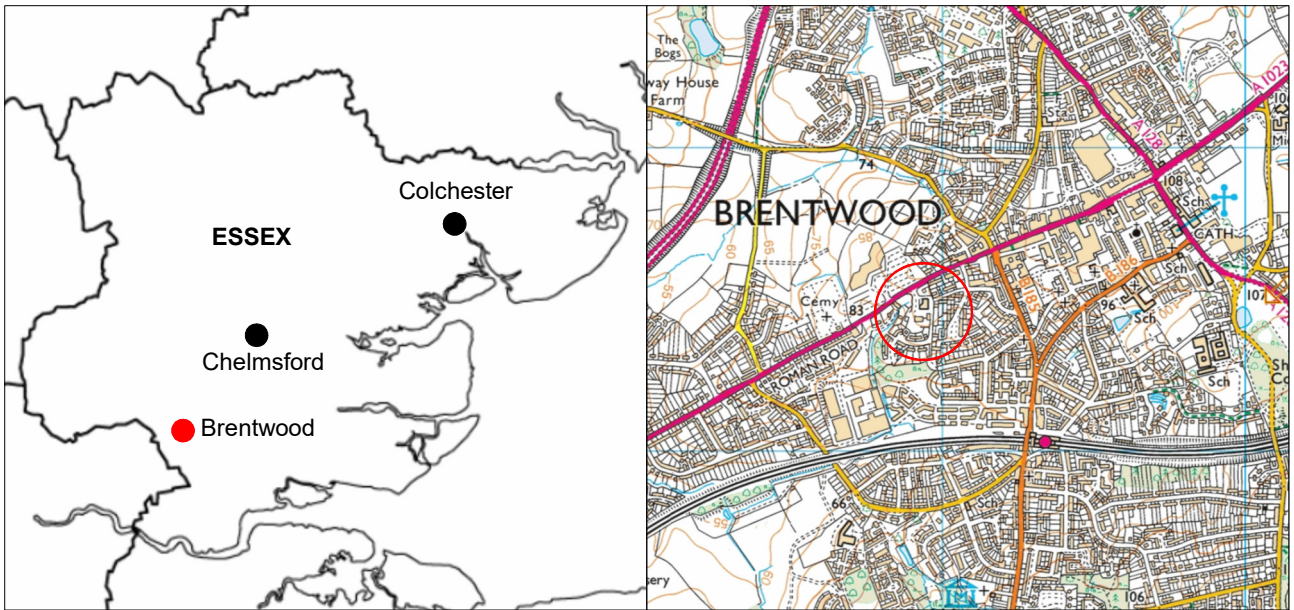


Fig 1 Site location.



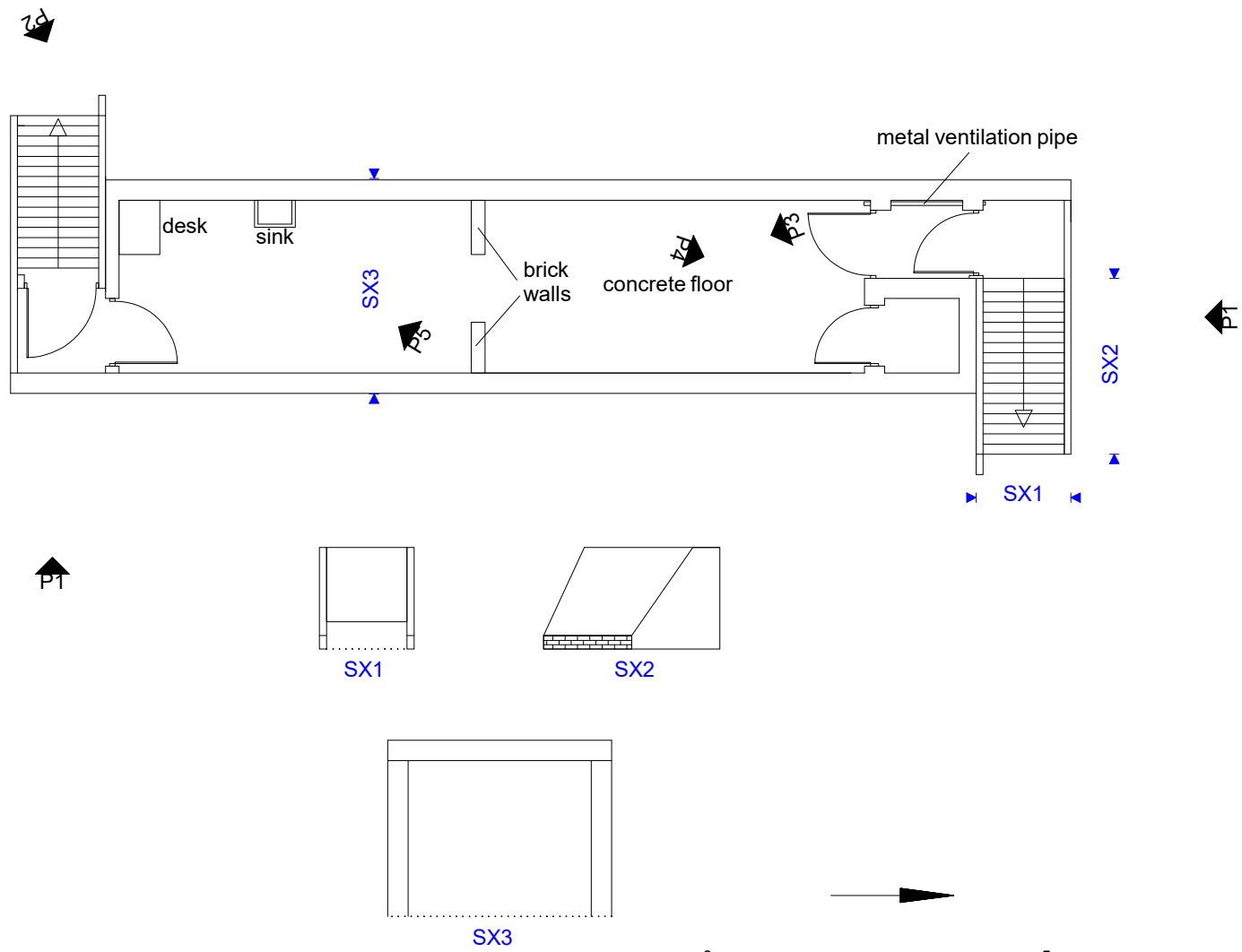


Fig 2 Floor plan and elevations of air-raid shelter. Location and direction of photographs reproduced in text shown.

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## Printable version

**OASIS ID: colchest3-353140**

### Project details

Project name	Historic building recording of a semi-sunken air-raid shelter at the former Brentwood Police Station
Short description of the project	A programme of historic building recording was carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust on an air-raid shelter at the former Brentwood Police Station, London Road, Brentwood, Essex in May 2019. The shelter is a semi-sunken rectangular concrete structure covered with an earth bank. Located directly adjacent to La Plata House, it was clearly intended to provide shelter to the police officers accommodated there. Although it wouldn't have survived a direct hit, it would have shielded its occupants from any flying debris or shrapnel resulting from the intensive bombing Brentwood received during World War II.
Project dates	Start: 01-05-2019 End: 29-05-2019
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	19/01b - Contracting Unit No.
Any associated project reference codes	16/01805/OUT - Planning Application No.
Any associated project reference codes	BWBPS19 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes	CHMER 2019.001 - Museum accession ID
Type of project	Building Recording
Site status	None
Current Land use	Other 2 - In use as a building
Monument type	AIR RAID SHELTER Modern
Significant Finds	DOOR Modern
Methods & techniques	"Measured Survey", "Photographic Survey", "Survey/Recording Of Fabric/Structure"
Prompt	National Planning Policy Framework - NPPF

### Project location

Country	England
Site location	ESSEX BRENTWOOD BRENTWOOD Former Brentwood Police Station
Postcode	CM14 4QJ
Study area	52 Square metres
Site coordinates	TQ 589 934 51.616462176318 0.295422515448 51 36 59 N 000 17 43 E Point

### Project creators

Name of Organisation	Colchester Archaeological Trust
Project brief originator	HEM Team Officer, ECC
Project design originator	Emma Holloway
Project director/manager	Chris Lister
Project supervisor	Mark Baister
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer

### Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	Chelmsford Museum
Digital Archive ID	2019.001
Digital Contents	"Survey","other"
Digital Media available	"Survey"
Paper Archive recipient	Chelmsford Museum
Paper Archive ID	2019.001
Paper Contents	"Survey","other"
Paper Media available	"Miscellaneous Material","Report","Section","Survey "

### Project bibliography 1

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Entered by	Mark Baister (mb@catuk.org)
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