

**A Preliminary Appraisal  
of the Archaeological Remains  
in  
and around  
Colchester Garrison**

**August 1997**



**Colchester Archaeological Trust**

# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This is a preliminary appraisal of the archaeological remains in and around Colchester Garrison. It was commissioned on behalf of clients by Mouchel International Consultants, and was compiled by Colchester Archaeological Trust in July and August 1997.
- 1.2 The main aim of the appraisal is to present a plot of the known archaeological material in and around Colchester Garrison. This material consists principally of Roman and later burials, defensive earthworks (dykes), and other material such as pottery kilns and Roman roads (see accompanying figure). The main body of the appraisal consists of a list of the discoveries (section 2 below).
- 1.3 Apart from a discussion of some of the individual discoveries (where appropriate), there is also a brief discussion of the distribution and importance of the various types of archaeological remains (section 3). However, this is not intended to be a detailed discussion of the remains. This could only be dealt with by a full *Desk-Based Assessment* of the archaeological remains, which may be appropriate at a future date. A list of sources consulted (section 4), and a glossary of terms used (section 5) are attached.

## 2 List of archaeological remains (as shown on accompanying figure)

### *Scheduled Ancient Monuments* (plotted as double red line)

- 1 *Grounds of St John's Abbey*  
This is the only scheduled ancient monument in the study area (accompanying figure, number 1). No below-ground work is allowed without prior written consent from the Secretary of State or his agent. Apart from the Abbey Gate, and parts of the perimeter wall, this once-great monastic house has disappeared. The position of the church is not precisely known, though a wall was seen in the 1980s which might be part of it (accompanying figure, number 39). Human remains, certainly medieval burials associated with the Abbey have been recorded several times (12, 39?).

### *Roman and later Burials* (plotted blue)











- 2 Essex County Hospital area.. The County Hospital (1819-20) was one of the first buildings to be erected on Lexden Road. Eleven burials are recorded from here (but there may have been many more). The "Colchester Sphinx", now in the Castle Museum, was found here. Philip Crummy has recently discussed the cemeteries (1993 - see list of sources consulted ), and this was his "Area A".



North



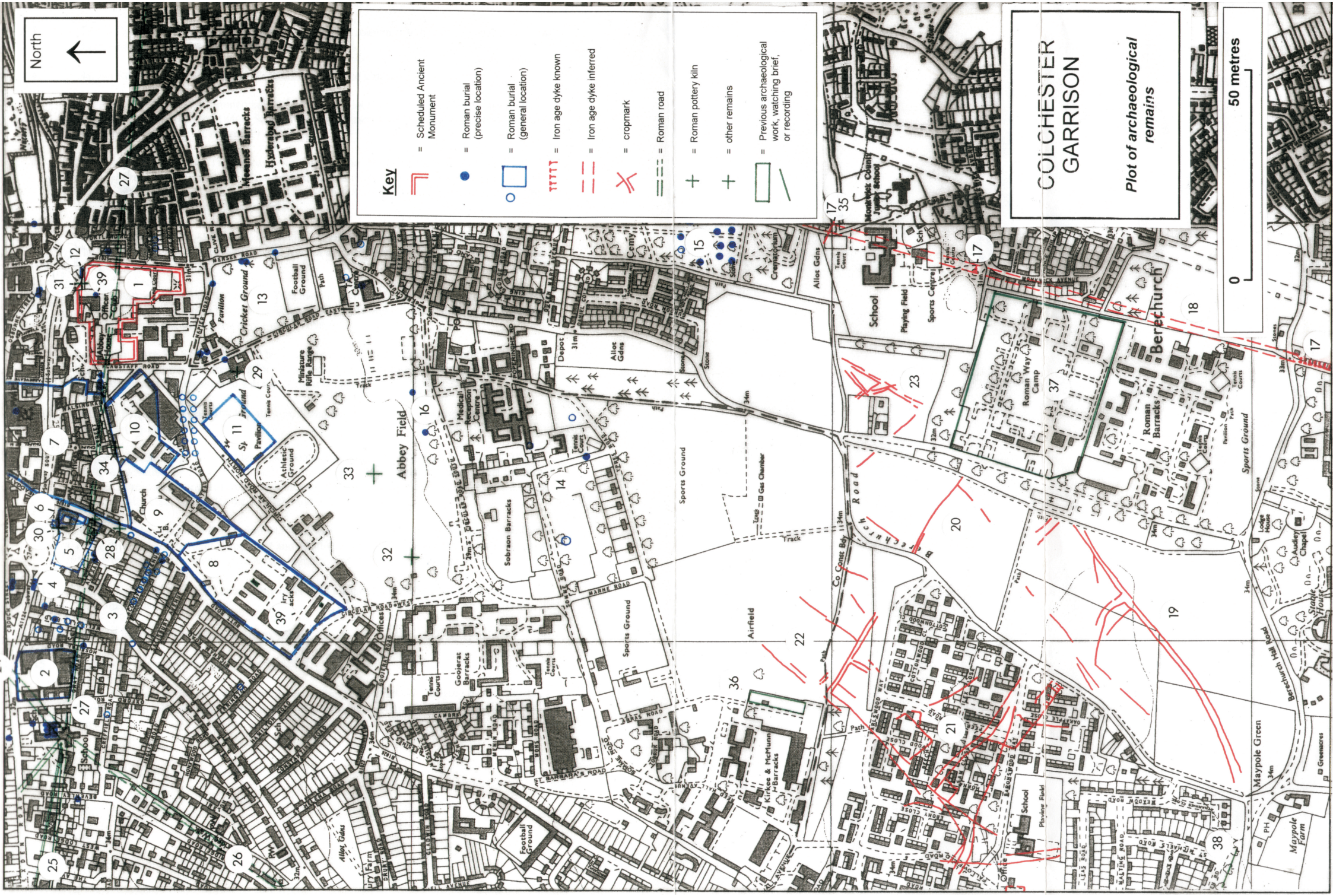
**Key**

-  = Scheduled Ancient Monument
-  = Roman burial (precise location)
-  = Roman burial (general location)
-  = Iron age dyke known
-  = Iron age dyke inferred
-  = cropmark
-  = Roman road
-  = Roman pottery kiln
-  = other remains
-  = Previous archaeological work, watching brief, or recording

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*Plot of archaeological  
remains*

0 50 metres





- 3 Maldon Road area. This is part of Crummy's "Area B", most of which is beyond the study area. Many isolated burials not listed individually here.
- 4 Maldon Road 1971 excavation site. Eighteen burials. See Crummy 1993, 236-244.
- 5 Butt Road pit. This was a commercial sand pit where a local man (William Wire) recorded in excess of 200 burials in the 1840s. Some of these were associated with pottery and glass vessels, and personal jewellery. (Crummy 1993 Area I).
- 6 Butt Road excavation site. This site was excavated by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (1976-9, 1986, 1988) in advance of the construction of a new police station. Over 730 burials were recorded. Along with the burials recorded in the 1840s (5, above), this demonstrates the density of burials close to the Roman town.
- 7 Crummy 1993 Area D. At least twenty burials recorded, but there were certainly far more here. The low number probably reflects the low level of archaeological activity when the area was being developed.
- 8 Cavalry Barracks. No recorded burials. This may lie near the fringes of the Roman cemeteries, but the density of burials to the east on Abbey Fields leads one to suspect that burials must have been found here, but not recorded. (Crummy Area E).
- 9 Le Cateau Barracks. Several hundred burials are recorded. Workmen, apparently referring to the digging of the foundations trenches for the barracks (1873-74) said that they cut through hundreds of pots like currants in a drain. (Crummy Area F).
- 10 Artillery barracks. At least 100 burials were found during the 1903-5 enlargement of the barracks. (Crummy G).
- 11 Abbey Field (Sports ground). At least 28 burials were found in 1925 when this part of Abbey Field was levelled for a Sports Ground (Crummy H). It is reasonable to postulate that the actual number of recorded burials is well below the number which *should* exist on Abbey Field - judging by the density here, and under the Artillery and le Cateau barracks.
- 12 St John's Abbey Grounds Excavation site. This site was excavated in advance of the construction of the present Mersea Road roundabout and Southway (1971-85). Thirty-four Roman burials were found, as well as the remains of an early church and over thirty medieval burials.
- 13 Mersea Road/Circular Road area. Many individual burials are recorded, but not listed individually here.
- 14 Sabraon Barracks. Three burials are recorded.
- 15 Colchester Cemetery. Ten burials are recorded.
- 16 Abbey Fields south. Many isolated burials (including SMR 11893-4). Judging by the density of burials around Abbey Field, there may have originally been a much higher density of burials here.



***Iron Age Defensive Earthworks (Dykes)*** (plotted red).

- 17 Berechurch Dyke recorded position. SMR 11633
- 18 Berechurch Dyke projected course. SMR 11633

***Cropmarks*** (plotted red).

- 19 Maypole Green area. SMR 11927
- 20 East of Berechurch Road. SMR 11927
- 21 Peerswood Road Area (these now built over). SMR 11839
- 22 Airfield area. SMR 11921
- 23 West of Monkwick School. SMR 11921

***Roman roads*** (plotted green).

- 24 To Balcerne Gate.
- 25 To London
- 26 To Gosbecks
- 27 To Hythe waterfront?

***Roman pottery kilns*** (green cross).

- 28 Butt Road (3 kilns)
- 29 Under NAAFI (now Arena Leisure Centre).

***Other archaeological remains*** (green crosses).

- 30 Roman church adjacent to Butt Road cemetery
- 31 Bronze Age pottery from St John's Abbey grounds
- 32 Bronze Age pottery, Abbey Fields (SMR 11876)
- 33 Iron Age pottery, Abbey fields (SMR 11877)

***Previous archaeological recording and recording*** (green line or area).

- 34 Hoard of Roman silver coins found near Artillery Folly hoard (1960s)
- 35 Excavation across line of Berechurch Dyke by A.F. Hall ( in 1944). This helped to fix the line of the dyke (18).
- 36 Kirkee & McMunn Barracks 1994 watching brief and recording work. Widespread Roman features including ditches, an oven, a timber structure and a hypocaust. Material was broadly of 2nd-3rd century date.
- 37 Roman Way Camp 1994. Watching briefs and recording. Prehistoric pottery and flint.
- 38 Maypole Green Evaluation 1996. Negative.
- 39 Cavalry Barracks. Negative watching brief (1997).



### 3 *Discussion*

- 3.1 It is appropriate to briefly consider the nature of the archaeological remains around the garrison.
- 3.2 At the north end, around the Abbey Gate and Officers' Club area, the remains are naturally dominated by the Abbey. The perimeter wall still survives, along with the magnificent Abbey Gate, but the remainder of the abbey is invisible above ground. Nevertheless, the archaeological remains associated with the Abbey are undoubtedly of the greatest importance - that is why they are scheduled. A piece of possible church wall and human remains have been seen (39), and the 1970s excavation, which exposed the early St John's Church and its associated burials (12), demonstrates the importance of the Abbey's archaeological remains.
- 3.3 The northern fringe of the garrison area is also dominated by Roman remains. There is a major Roman road junction under the Grammar School, from which roads radiate out to London (25), to the Roman site at Gosbecks Farm (26), through the Balcerne Gate (24), and possibly eastwards to the Hythe quay (27), clipping through St John's Abbey Grounds. There are also a few Roman pottery kilns (28, 29) one under the NAAFI (now the Arena Leisure Centre). These are typically found on the outskirts of a Roman town - away from the population centre.
- 3.4 Roman burials are (numerically) far and away the commonest archaeological find in the garrison area (2-16). The Colchester cemeteries have recently been discussed (Crummy 1993), so only a few general points will be made here. First, the density of burials is demonstrated by the very high numbers recorded at Butt Road (approximately a thousand - 5, 6), and at Le Cateau and the Artillery Barracks (9,10). Their importance is underlined by the presence of an early Christian church (also at Butt Road - 30), and their distribution is clearly shown by the fact that they spread right down over the Abbey Fields as far as the Sabraon Barracks (14) and Colchester Cemetery (15). The apparent patchiness of the distribution of recorded burials (e.g. hundreds at Le Cateau, but none at the Cavalry Barracks) may have more to do with the willingness of builders to report discoveries (and the diligence of local antiquarians chasing up and recording the discoveries) than the actual distribution of burials. It may be true that the Cavalry Barracks, the Sabraon Barracks and the Colchester Cemetery are on the outskirts of the Roman cemetery, but the rest of the Abbey Fields would seem to be firmly within it.
- 3.5 The Berechurch Dyke (17, 18) clips through the south-eastern edge of the study area. This, of course, was part of the defences of the impressive pre-Roman fortress of *Camulodunum*. The dyke protects an approach from the south east, in other words, the Roman Barracks and Roman Way Camp are **inside** the defended area. Conventional thinking is that there were probably several isolated farmsteads or settlements within *Camulodunum* (sites have already been identified at Sheepen and Gosbecks), but there may be more awaiting discovery within this area. The cropmarks (19-23) may mark some of the fields of settlements, or (conversely) they may all be later (i.e. Roman or even later) and not specifically associated with *Camulodunum*. Only excavation can precisely determine their date and function.
- 3.6 A few recent archaeological watching briefs have shed a little light on other aspects of the area's archaeological potential. A watching brief at Roman Way Camp produced prehistoric flints and pottery (37), and another at Kirkee & McMunn Barracks produced Roman buildings and ditches in an area where they were previously unknown (36). Are these Roman remains associated with the cropmarks (19-23)?

## 4 *List of sources consulted*

This study was compiled mainly from records held at Colchester Archaeological Trust headquarters at 12, Lexden Road, Colchester, including the Colchester District SMR. In addition, the following works were consulted.

- Crummy, P., 1992, *Colchester Archaeological Report 6. Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School, and other sites in Colchester 1971-85.*
- Crummy, P., 1993, *Colchester Archaeological Report 9. Excavations of Roman and later cemeteries, churches and monastic sites in Colchester, 1971-88.*
- Hawkes, C.F.C. & Crummy, Philip, 1995, *Colchester Archaeological Report 11. Camulodunum II.*
- Hull, M.R., 1958 *Roman Colchester*
- The Colchester Archaeologist* 1 (1987)

## 5 *Glossary of terms used*

burial	either cremation (bones in a pot) or inhumation (body laid out or in coffin)
dyke	pre-Roman defensive earthwork, originally with ditch on outer side, and usually topped by a timber palisade.
hypocaust	Roman underfloor heating system
prehistoric	before Roman period - i.e. the years BC
Roman	traditionally AD 43 to around 410.
SMR	Essex County Sites & Monuments Record (Colchester District)