

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT THE
COLCHESTER INSTITUTE PLAYING FIELD AND
TENNIS COURTS AND THE COLCHESTER
BOROUGH COUNCIL CAR PARKS, SHEEPEN
ROAD COLCHESTER**

COLCHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

FIELD PROJECTS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT THE COLCHESTER INSTITUTE PLAYING FIELD AND TENNIS COURTS AND THE COLCHESTER BOROUGH CAR PARKS, SHEEPEN ROAD COLCHESTER, NOVEMBER 1996.

COLCHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST FIELD PROJECTS

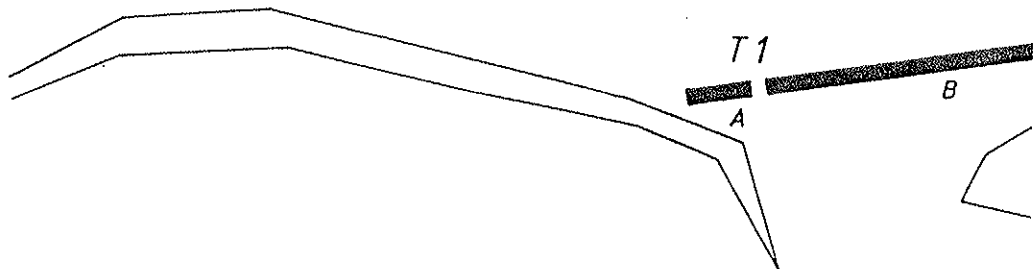
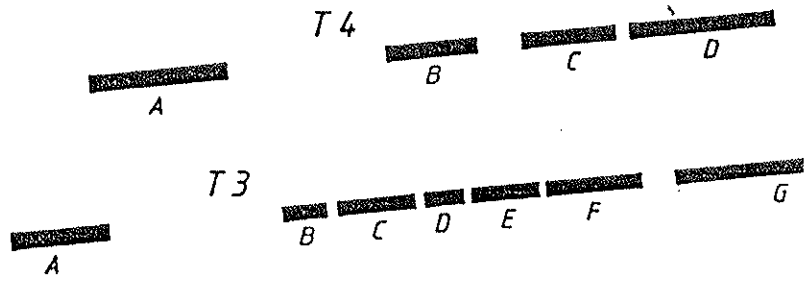
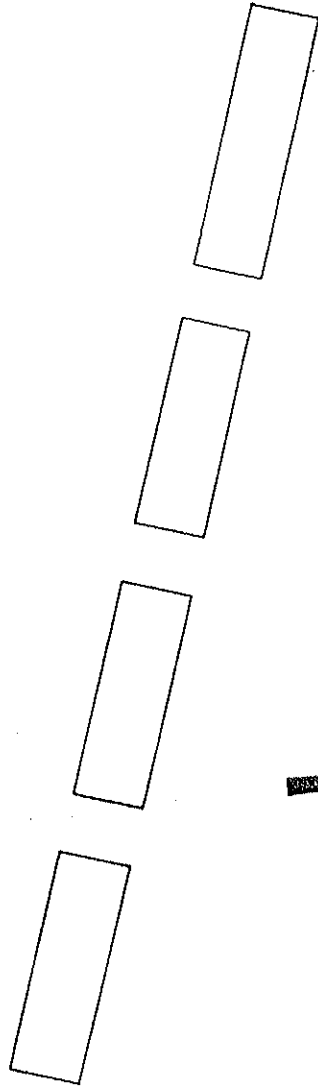
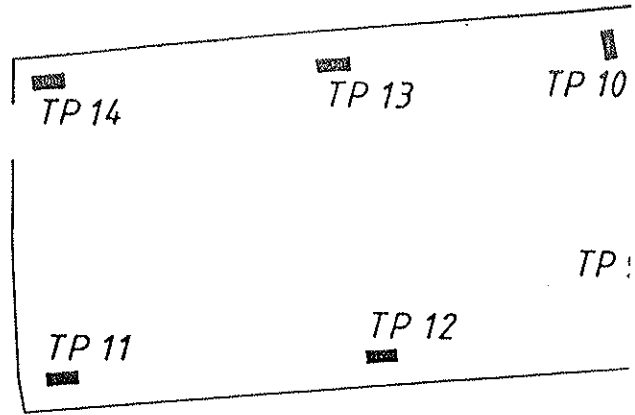
SUMMARY

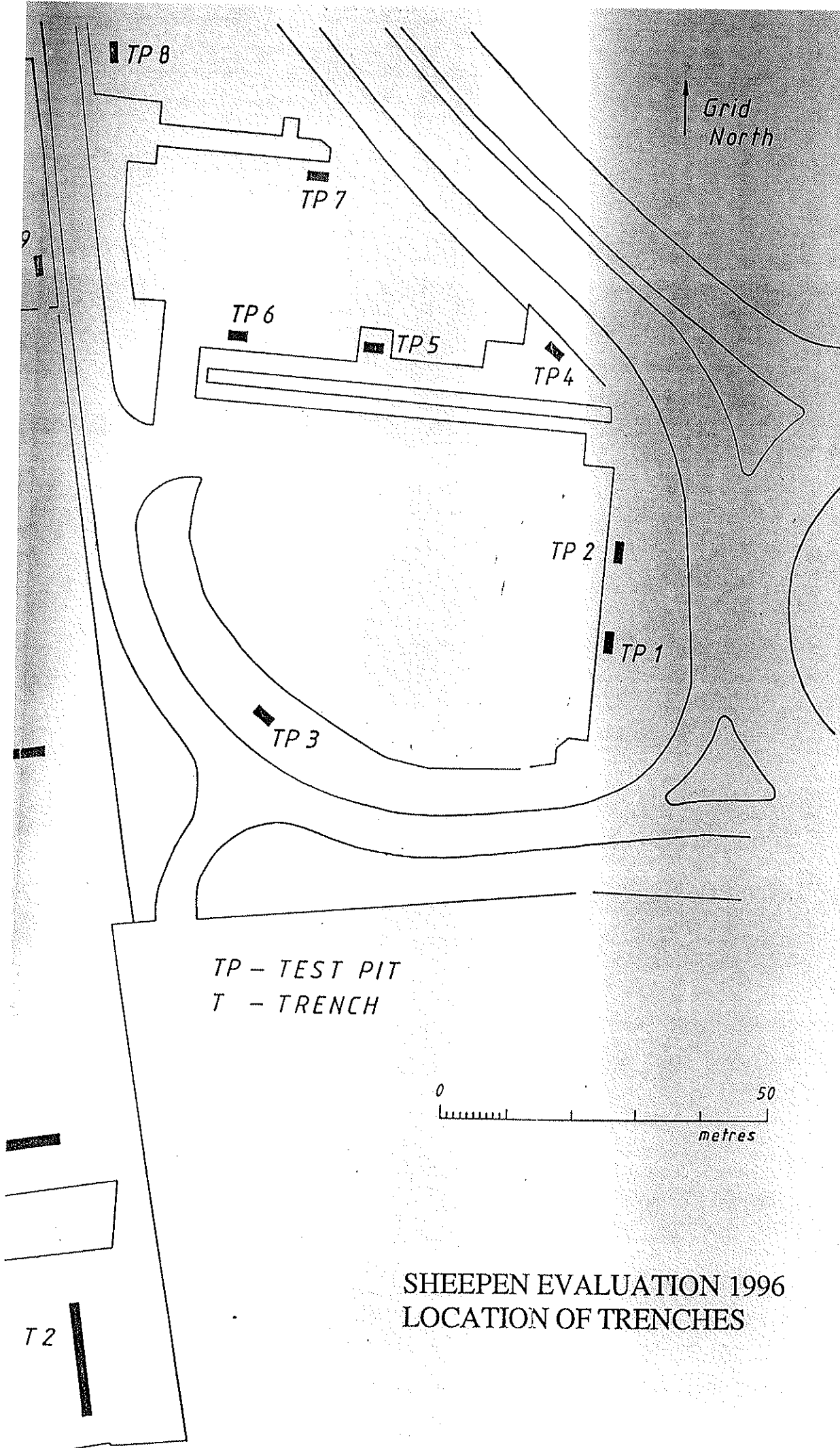
The eight test pits in the Colchester Borough Council lorry and car parks revealed no clear deposits or finds of archaeological significance to depths of around 2.0 metres below present ground levels [between about 4.0-6.0 metres O.D.]. However a water deposited sandy clay layer at the base of some of the pits [TP 5 & 6 at between 4.0 & 5.0 metres O.D.] could possibly be of medieval origin and contain preserved organic material.

Six test pits placed in the former tennis courts of the Colchester Institute produced a small quantity of residual Roman material (two pottery sherds spanning the 1st-early 3rd centuries in date range and a small number of tile fragments). No deposits or substantial finds of clear archaeological significance were encountered to depths of about 2.0 metres below the present surface [between 6.0-5.5 metres O.D.]. However in TP 9,10 & 12 a silt and sandy clay layer occurring at about 6.0 metres O.D. contained some preserved organic material in the form of wood/timber one piece of which appears to be a structural timber of medieval date. The wood occurs at about 2.0 metres below present surface levels [5.6-5.8 metres O.D.].

The trenches on the Colchester Institute playing fields [T1,3 & 4] demonstrated clear Roman deposits in water-logged levels occurring at about 1.2 metres below present ground surface in each trench. Levels for this in O.D. are T1 6.5 metres, T3 5.5 metres and T4 5.3 metres. These remains consist of both individual material finds and a small number of features. Finds include pottery ranging over the 1st-3rd centuries, tile fragments, bone, charcoal, wood and structural timber, and oyster shell spreads. The features comprise a group at the east end of T1A with a probable ditch and a spread of degraded mortar at the east end of T4D which contains fragments of red painted wall plaster.

The trench into the slope at the southern extremity of the site [T2] showed possible Roman levels occurring quite close to the present surface over the central area of the trench. This consisted of a spread of Roman tile fragments with a small amount of Roman pottery dating to the 1st-2nd century about 0.7 metres below the current ground surface [between 10.0-8.0 metres O.D. down the slope].





SHEEPEN EVALUATION 1996
LOCATION OF TRENCHES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION AND FINDINGS

1. TEST PITS IN THE COLCHESTER BOROUGH COUNCIL CAR AND LORRY PARKS

DESCRIPTION

Eight 3.0 x 1.2 metre test pits [TP 1 - 8] were dug using a three ton excavator and ditching bucket to between 1.7 and 2.3 metres deep. One located in the north car park [TP 8] four in the lorry park and surrounding verges [TP 4 - 7] and three in the verges surrounding the south car park [TP 1 - 3]. The pits could not be entered for inspection and observation was made from the side of the pit of the soils as they were excavated. One of the sections of each pit was recorded. No finds were selected for retention from this area.

All the test pits demonstrated clear and substantial modern build-up of between 1.0 and 1.5 metres below present surface levels, the maximum depth of this being just over 2 metres [TP 3]. These dump and make-up levels of sandy loams, sands and gravels contained medium to high levels of brick and concrete, occasionally tarmac, wood and small amounts of pottery dating from the 19th - 20th centuries.

This modern material sealed a fine dark or grey brown damp sandy loam [TP 2,4,5,6,7, & 8] which where penetrated was between 0.5 and 1.0 metres in depth [TP 4,5,6, & 8]. The only exceptions to this were TP 2 which was not excavated below modern levels (due to the location of a water pipe) and TP 3 at the southern end of the site where it is possible that the depth of modern disturbance could have removed it. No dating evidence was recovered from this material or below it, although an apparently similar layer in test pits on the Colchester Institute tennis courts produced a fragment of unfrosted brick [TP 10] and a pottery sherds dating from the 18th - 19th century [TP 10 & 11].

Below this layer at between 1.6 and 1.8 metres is a wet gravel lens [TP 5,6 & 8] up to 0.2 metres thick overlying wet yellow brown sandy clay. In TP 4 this lens appeared to be absent. These layers did not produce any dateable material. However a piece of timber from possibly the same layer in test pits on the Colchester Institute tennis courts could be of medieval date. The lowest level of TP 3 in contrast to the other test pits consisted of a clean black damp sandy silt with white sand speckles at a depth below 2.0 metres and directly sealed by 19th - 20th century rubble.

SUMMARY

Substantial modern make-up and dumping was encountered in all of the test pits for between 1.0-1.5 metres (up to 2.0 m TP3) below present surface levels [5.0-6.0 metres O.D.]. This generally seals a probable modern agricultural soil which occurs to a depth of about 4.0 metres O.D. Beneath this an undated sandy gravel lens seals ?water deposited sandy clay which may be as early as medieval in date and occurring a depths of between 4.0-5.0 metres O.D. across the site.

2. TEST PITS IN THE COLCHESTER INSTITUTE TENNIS COURTS

DESCRIPTION

Six 3.0 x 1.2 metre test pits [TP 9 - 14] were dug around the perimeter inside the former tennis courts using a three ton excavator and ditching bucket to between 2.0 and 2.4 metres deep. Two were located in the corners at the east end [TP 9 & 10] and west end [TP 11 & 14] and one each mid-way along the north and south sides [TP 12 & 13]. The pits could not be entered for inspection and observation was made from the side of the pit of the soils as they were excavated. One of the sections of each pit was recorded.

Finds of brick fragments and pottery from TP 9,10 & 12 suggest that there is between 1.0 and 1.5 metres of demonstrable modern accumulation below the present surface levels of slightly varying layers of sandy loams. These levels also produced a small quantity of residual Roman material, tile fragments from all of the test pits except TP 10 and single small sherds of pottery from TP 9 & 14 dating from the 1st-early third centuries.

Below this the stratigraphy generally becomes more gravely especially towards the north and west [TP 11,13 & 14] and soils tending towards silts and sandy clays to the east over gravels at about 1.5 metres [TP 9 & 10]. The impression is of a generally rising gravel base from east to west. No conclusively dateable materials were recovered from these levels though the increasing wetness preserved some timber at about 2.0 metres in TP 9,10 & 12. The largest piece from TP 12 is clearly worked, and could be an upright from wattle and daub walling as there is a probable retaining notch for a horizontal lath on one face. This would tend to suggest that the timber is medieval in date.

SUMMARY

The modern surfaces for the tennis courts seal modern soils of probable agricultural origin to between 6.5-6.0 metres O.D. which contain a small amount of residual Roman material in the form of tile fragments and pottery sherds. Below this are wet gravels, silts and sandy clays. The silt and clay possibly of water deposited origin occur at between 6.0-5.5 metres O.D. and contain some organic preservation in the form of wood/timber, one piece of which is of possible medieval date.

3. TRENCHES IN THE COLCHESTER INSTITUTE PLAYING FIELDS

DESCRIPTION

Four main trench lines were excavated using a JCB digger with ditching bucket 1.5 metres in width totalling a length of about 180 metres. However field drains and soak-aways along their line enabled about 150 metres of these trenches to penetrate to depths greater than 1.0 metres from present ground level. Trenches 1 & 2 could be entered for inspection but 3 & 4 could only be observed from the side of the trench. Short lengths of section were recorded except for T 2 where the whole west face was sketched.

TRENCH 1 [T1]

This was aligned east - west at the southern end of the playing fields. The sections revealed a modern dark brown sandy loam topsoil extending along the entire length of the trench to depths of between 0.3 and 0.5 metres.

This sealed a thin gravel lens of about 0.1 metres thickness which overlay damp yellow brown sands up to 0.4 metres thick. No dating evidence was recovered from this material.

From depths of between 0.7 and 1.0 metres the sands became paler and were interspersed with thin bands of black silt. These levels were quite wet. The lowest levels toward the centre of T 1A (between 0.8 & 1.0 metres) showed slightly dirty yellow orange sand over a thin clay lens below which was another silt lens on gravel at about 1.0 metres. However at the east and west ends the gravel was slightly deeper at between 1.6 and 1.2 metres respectively. These lower silts frequently contained preserved timber which appeared to be unworked brushwood.

The eastern half of T 1A revealed three features in the gravels at its base. The two most easterly [F1 & F2] appeared to be black silt filled channels running north-south and of natural origin. One sherd of Roman pot of probable 1st century date was recovered from F1. To their west a black silt and gravel filled feature running south west-north east across the trench [F3] appeared to have a clearly defined edge. A small amount of Roman pottery was recovered from this feature dating to the 2nd century and a fragment of Roman tile. This feature would appear to be archaeological in origin, possibly a ditch.

Immediately to the west of this was an inverted near complete Roman pot of probable 1st-2nd century date, together with a scatter of animal bone fragments and charcoal. No cut for a feature was visible around it and it appeared to have been partially covered by the sand and clay lens.

SUMMARY

Modern topsoil occurs to depths of between 7.5-7.2 metres O.D. This seals a thin gravel lens over undated yellow brown sands which lie between 7.2-6.9 metres O.D. Beneath this are banded wet silts, sands and clay. These contain increasing amounts of organic material (wood) with depth. Roman pottery, animal bone and charcoal were found associated with three features at the eastern end of the trench [T1A]. One of these features appears to be a possible ditch [F3], at a depth of about 6.5 metres O.D. (between about 1.0 -1.2 metres below present ground level).

TRENCH 2 [T2]

The trench was aligned north-south into the slope at the southern extremity of the site. The whole length was sealed by modern topsoil to a depth of about 0.5 metres.

At the southern end a length of about 5 metres was excavated down to gravel at a depth of about 1.5 metres below the present surface. Over the first 2 metres grey brown patchy sandy loam [L1] containing some small brick fragments and residual Roman pottery sealed lighter coloured material of the same nature. Below this mixed banded dirty gravels steadily rose to be truncated by the topsoil at between 5 & 6 metres along the trench. These sealed a clean pale yellow brown silty sand which also appeared to be rising up.

At this point the machine cut was raised to about 0.7 metres as a distinct spread of Roman tile coated in a concreted sandy midden deposit was encountered between 6 and 10 metres along the trench from the southern end. The rim and spout of a mortaria of 1st century date were recovered from this material. Also a piece of slate was found lying on the surface of this layer, however it could have been deposited there by the machine. From about 7 metres from the south end of the trench this layer was sealed by a dark brown stony sandy loam up to 0.5 metres thick which overlay gravels occurring at between 0.8-0.9 metres depth at the north end of the trench.

SUMMARY

Modern topsoil, with some residual Roman material, sealed an archaeological deposit in the middle of the trench containing a substantial quantity of Roman tile with some pottery the surface of which sloped down between 10.0-8.0 metres O.D. It is not clear if this deposit is Roman in date. The truncated nature of some of the layers may suggest former terracing of the slope.

TRENCH 3 [T3]

This trench was cut as a series of individual lengths [A - G] avoiding drainage pipes east-west across the centre of the playing field area.

The modern dark brown loamy topsoil varies in thickness but is generally about 0.4 metres deep. This frequently seals coarse orange gravels (in places covered by a lens of grey sandy silt) and grey gravelly sands to a depth of between 0.6 and 0.8 metres from the present surface. At the west end of the trench [T3A] there is a considerable accumulation of dark brown silts to about 1.2 metres in depth from which a clay pipe fragment (18th century +) was recovered at 0.7 metres down in the section.

Below these levels are wet banded grey sands, sandy clays and dark brown silt lenses occurring at between 0.8 and 1.2 metres below present ground surface. These contain preserved organic matter, most obviously brushwood branch fragments and twigs, increasing in quantity with depth.

Trench 3B produced Roman pottery datable to the 2nd -3rd centuries and fragments of Roman tiles from these levels at a depth of about 1.2 metres.

SUMMARY

Modern topsoil occurs to a depth of about 6.3 metres O.D. and seals undated sands and gravels to between 5.5-5.9 metres O.D. Below this banded wet sands and silts contain increasing amounts of preserved organic material, mostly brush wood. At about 5.5 metres O.D. are finds of Roman pottery dating to the 2nd-3rd centuries and fragments of Roman tile (about 1.2 metres below present ground level).

TRENCH 4 [T4]

Trench 4 was opened to supplement T3 which had been effectively shortened by the frequent need to avoid modern drainage pipes. As with T3 the trench had to be opened as a series of trench lengths [A - D]. Trench 4C could not be properly recorded and was abandoned as it filled with water before observation could be made.

The stratigraphical structure of this area is very similar to Trench 3. Modern dark brown loamy topsoil containing 19th-20th century pottery [T4D] varies between 0.2 and 0.5 metres deep and seals grey brown silts which at the west end occur up to 1.1 metres below present ground level but to the east are shallower with a base at between 0.6-1.1 metres down. This material generally seals a coarse orange gravel layer up to 0.2 metres in thickness.

Beneath the gravel is a clear dark brown layer of wet silts which where clearly observable was about 0.2 metres thick [T4D] with a base at 1.2 metres below present surface, though to the west [T4A] it could be in excess of 0.4 metres. Organic material in the form of brushwood fragments was preserved within this layer in T4A occurring at a depth of 1.5 metres there.

Wet banded silts, grey sands and yellow brown sandy clays occurred at about 1.2 metres down at the east end of the trench [T4D] and overlay brown highly organic 'peaty' soil occurring at about 1.4 metres below present surface.

These lower layers at about 1.2 metres below present ground levels contained quantities of Roman material as well as preserved organic remains, mostly in the form of brushwood. Several pottery sherds dating from 1st-2nd centuries were recovered from T4B & T4D, and at about 1.2 metres depth a large spread of decayed mortar at the west end of T4D contained fragments of red painted wall plaster. There were spreads of rotted oyster shell in the base of T4B, again at 1.2 metres, together with Roman tile fragments, animal bone and some mortar. Trench 4C also produced Roman tile frags. and bone with cut marks.

SUMMARY

Modern topsoil occurs to a depth of about 6.3-6.0 metres O.D. and seals undated silts the base of which layers lies between about 5.0-5.4 metres O.D. Below this wet banded sands, silts and sandy clays contain increasing amounts of preserved organic material, mostly brushwood. Within these lower layers are finds of Roman material which occur from about 5.3 metres O.D. (about 1.2 metres below present ground level). The Roman pottery sherds date from the 1st-2nd centuries and are associated at these levels with spreads of oyster shell in T4B, Roman tile fragments and a substantial spread of decayed mortar containing some Roman red painted wall plaster at the east end of T4D.

FINDS LISTING RETAINED OR SIGNIFICANT FINDS

TEST PITS

(No finds retained from Colchester Borough Council lorry and car parks test pits)

TP 9	Pottery sherd (discarded) Dressel 20 Roman tile frags (discarded)	Roman 1st-3rd
TP 11	Roman tile frags (discarded)	
TP 12	Timber 50 x 14 x 11 cm Worked on all long sides Slot on one side 6 x 3 cm 10 cm up from cut base. Roman tile frags (discarded)	?Medieval
TP 13	Roman tile frags (discarded)	
TP 14	Pottery sherd	Roman 1st

TRENCHES

T1 F1	Pottery sherd	Roman 1st
F3	Pottery sherds Samian Drag 18/31 and platter base. Roman tile frag.	Roman 2nd
T2 L1	Near whole pot in sandy grey ware Pottery sherds Grey ware base & ?Flagon	Roman?1st-2nd Roman
	From spread of material in centre of trench: Mortaria sherds ?CAM 195A Roman tile fragments Slate frag. on surface (discarded)	Roman 1st-2nd.
T3 B	Mortaria CAM 498 Mortaria Samian Drag.45 Roman tile frags. Large wood stump 25 x 25 x 25 cm Bright blue material in crevices. Unworked.	Roman 2nd-3rd Roman 2nd-3rd
T3 C	Roman tile frag.	
T4 A	Large animal bone (at 0.95 m depth) Brushwood 2-4 cm dia up to 20 cm long.	

T4 B	Roman tile frags. Small light brown mortar lumps Bowl sherds CAM 243 Oyster shell spreads (rotted) Animal bone	Roman 1st-2nd
T4 C	Roman tile frags. (large) roof tile Animal bone frags (one with cut mark) Light brown mortar lump	
T4 D	Pottery base sherds sandy grey ware Amphorae sherd prob. Dressel 20 Roman tile frag. Painted wall plaster (red) Large light brown mortar lump .	Roman Roman 1st-3rd Roman

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