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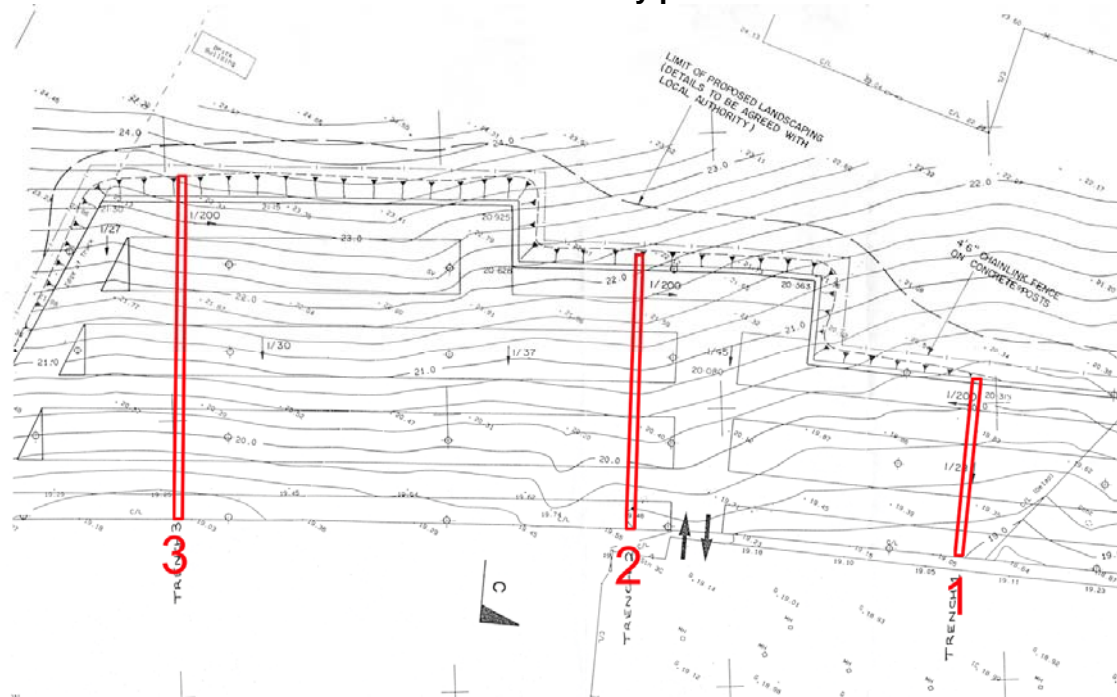
Colchester

North Station Car Park Extension Phase 1

TL 988266

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Evaluation. Post-medieval kiln furniture? Early pit



Background

The site for the proposed car park extension lies on the north side of the Colne Valley, approximately 400m from the river and 1200m from the Roman and medieval walled town. Observations and excavations over the past century and a half point to the presence of a Roman extra-mural suburb in the North Station Road area with 1st to 2nd century cemeteries beyond in the region of the railway cuttings and station. Sites in the general vicinity include Roman occupation and burials at TL 992263, a cemetery at TL 996264, amphora cremations at TL 994264 and tile kilns at TL 983264.

The area affected by the proposed car park extension totals approximately 14,000m² is disused allotment land and 3,800m², and is currently public recreation ground. Phase 1 of the archaeological evaluation focused on the allotment area.

Summary of field results

Three 1.55m-wide trenches, totalling 145m in length, were excavated by machine to varying depths. Their locations are shown on the plan above.

Trench 1: Length: 32.5m. Depth: 0.75m (north), to 1.45m (south).

Up to 0.3m of redeposited topsoil sealed a modern spread of very dark grey-brown clay loam with a high content of mortar, also occasional brick and slate fragments. These deposits covered a grey-brown clay loam which was featureless other than for very rare inclusions of peg-tile fragments. The lower horizon of this material extended to overall depths of between 0.4m (north) and 0.95m (south) where it merged with the natural yellowish brown clay. A 2.5m-wide pit, 22m from the southern end of the trench, was examined and found to be of relatively modern origin.

Trench 2: Length: 50m. Depth: generally 0.6m - 0.7m with probe to 1.15m at the southern end.

The horizon between obviously modern and earlier topsoils was not discernible for the greater part of the length of this trench due to the machining technique employed and the rarity of datable inclusions. A short section cleaned by hand at the southern end of the trench indicated that 0.15m of modern topsoil sealed an earlier topsoil, the latter distinguishable by the presence of rare minute fragments of brick or tile. Elsewhere the overall depths of topsoils did not exceed 0.25m, below which was a yellowish brown clay subsoil, with grey-brown clay loam mottles much disturbed by root and worm activity. A fragment of intensely fired tile, possible a piece of post-Roman kiln furniture, was found at the interface between the topsoil and mottled subsoil at a point 30m from the southern end of the trench. Modern disturbances were limited to a water-pipe installation and a grit-filled drain, part of a series of east-west oriented drainage trenches also found at intervals in Trench 3.

Trench 3: Length: 62.5 m. Depth: 0.65m, with probe to 1m at southern end.

The stratigraphy in this trench was broadly similar to that in Trench 2 except for an increased cover of topsoil which extended to depths of between 0.35m and 0.45m. Rare fragments of peg-tile were noted in the lower levels of the topsoil. Part of a shallow pit, at least 1.5m width, was uncovered 38m from the southern end of the trench. Although it contained no datable material, the nature of its fill and stratigraphical relationships suggest it to be of relatively early date.

Conclusions, Phase 1:

The area examined represents a 2 per cent sample of the allotment land likely to be affected by ground-works for the proposed car park. The results at this stage indicate that this part of the site is of low archaeological value, containing little evidence of activity prior to the post-medieval period. However, the current sample ratio is low and limited further investigation in this area would be desirable to establish whether the find of possible kiln furniture in Trench 2 is significant. This can be completed as a secondary aim of the Phase 2 evaluation.

Interim recommendations

We recommend that any planning consent granted should be subject to the following conditions:

- i) An archaeological evaluation shall be carried out on that part of the site which is currently in use as a public recreation area. If the evaluation should reveal remains of archaeological significance a scheme for their preservation; either physically or *in situ*, or by excavation and recording, shall be agreed in writing between the applicants or developers of the site, or their successors in title, and the local planning authority before the commencement of any construction works.
- ii) On commencement of construction works regular access shall be afforded to any person authorised by the local planning authority for the purpose of inspection and preparation of archaeological records.