

Colchester Archaeological Trust



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issued October 2025

**Archaeological monitoring and recording at
Merly House, 21 West Lodge Road, Colchester, Essex,
CO3 3NL: July 2025**



CAT project ref.: 2022/09j
CHER code: ECC4905

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CO3 3NL: July 2025**

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**Planning district: Colchester
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**commissioned by Nicky Joshua, Landscape Design
on behalf of the homeowner**

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1 Summary

Archaeological monitoring and recording was carried out at Merly House, 21 West Lodge Road, Colchester, Essex during groundworks for new entrances and walls. The development site lies within the Late Iron Age/Roman Lexden cemetery area. Excavations undertaken in 2002-5 at Handford Place, directly to the east, revealed 68 Roman burials while an in situ cremation burial and three disturbed cremation burials were uncovered during groundworks carried out to the rear of 21 West Lodge Road in 2004. Groundworks during the current phase of development revealed a pit containing most of an early Roman jar and some cremated human remains, representing a disturbed cremation burial.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the report for archaeological monitoring and recording at Merly House, 21 West Lodge Road, Colchester, Essex which was carried out during 23rd-28th July 2025. The work was commissioned by Nicky Joshua of Landscape Design on behalf of the homeowner and was carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) during groundworks for new entrances and walls.

As the site lies within an area highlighted by the CHER as having a high potential for archaeological deposits, an archaeological condition was recommended by the Colchester City Council Archaeological Advisor (CCCAA). The recommended archaeological condition was based on the guidance given in the *National Planning Policy Framework* (MHCLG 2025).

All work was carried out in accordance with a *Brief for Archaeological Monitoring at 21 West Lodge Road, Colchester, CO3 3NL* written by Dr Simon Wood (CCCAA 2022). A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by CAT (2022) in response to the brief and agreed with the CCCAA in advance of the groundworks.

In addition to the project Brief and WSI, all fieldwork and reporting was undertaken in accordance with:

- *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (Historic England 2015),
- Professional standards of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, including its *Code of Conduct* (CIfA 2020a-b, 2022, 2023a-b),
- East of England standards and frameworks published by East Anglian Archaeology (Brown & Glazebrook 2000; Gurney 2003; Medlycott 2011) and the recent review updates on <https://researchframeworks.org/eoe/>
- Relevant health and safety guidelines and requirements (CAT 2025).

3 Archaeological background (Fig 2)

The following archaeological background draws on the Colchester Archaeological Trust report archive and the Colchester Historic Environment Record (CHER/ECC numbers, which are accessible via Colchester Heritage Explorer (<https://colchesterheritage.co.uk/map>)).

The development site is situated within the Late Iron Age *oppidum* of Camulodunum, to the south-west of the Roman walled town, and just outside of an area of Roman cemeteries termed 'the western cemetery' by Hull (1958), but more generally known as the Lexden cemetery (MCC7525-9 & MCC7647). The Lexden cemetery area encompasses a number of Iron Age and Roman burial grounds on both sides of Lexden Road (the main Roman road leading from the walled town towards London and Braughing) leading out of Balcerne Gate as far west as The Avenue (Hull 1958 & CAR 11). Numerous Roman cremations, inhumations and tombstones have been discovered in the immediate vicinity, a full discussion of which can be found in CAR 9 (see too Hull 1958). Of particular note is a high-status rectangular walled cemetery which lay immediately north of and adjacent to the nearby Roman road (Hall 1946). In 2005 CAT excavated the remains of a Roman temple tomb at the Colchester Royal Grammar School (CAT Report 345; MCC2791).

A number of Roman burials have been found on the site. In 2004, an *in situ* cremation burial and three disturbed cremation burials were recorded during archaeological monitoring of groundworks for a new swimming pool, garage and kitchen extension. The *in situ* burial included two urns which contained coins and a bronze speculum hand-mirror found along with the cremated bone (CAT Report 293; MCC2955-8).

The burials at 21 West Lodge Road form part of the cemetery group evaluated and then excavated by CAT at the adjacent Handford Place (1 Queens Road) during 2002-5 (CAT Reports 210 & 323; MCC2814 & MCC3052). Sixty-eight Roman burials – both cremations and inhumations – were excavated from foundation trenches for the housing development. In two examples, parts of broken pots had been placed to cover lamps, which suggests the lamps were lit before the graves were backfilled. Twenty of the cremation burials contained one or more ancillary vessels alongside the urn/box, for example, dishes, flagons and small beakers. These vessels may have contained food and drink. The earliest cremations are mid-1st- to 2nd-century in date, and some are pre-Boudican. The cremation cemetery appears to have been in continuous use until the 3rd or 4th century. There was very little evidence of activity on the site during later periods. In the 19th century, various large trenches up to 1m deep were dug at the site, removing some of the cremation burials and disturbing several inhumation burials. It is possible that these excavations were carried out by antiquarian George Joslin, who lived opposite Handford House.

4 Aims

The aim of the archaeological monitoring was to identify and record any archaeological remains revealed by the groundworks.

5 Results (Figs 2-3)

The following groundworks were carried out by a mechanical excavator under the supervision of a CAT archaeologist:

- foundation trench for a new wall, 17.3m long, 0.7m wide and 0.9m deep;
- four foundation pads for the gateposts measuring 1.3m by 1.5m and 0.9m deep.

Groundworks occurred through modern topsoil (L1, 0.37-0.61m thick) and into natural sands (L2).

Pit F1 was >1.7m by >0.7m and 0.53m deep. It produced two sherds of residual Roman pottery (including one derived from a southern Spanish Baetican olive oil amphora), a sherd of modern Staffordshire-type white earthenware, and fragments of Roman tile, medieval/post-medieval peg-tile and modern frogged brick.

Pit F2 was largely recorded in section. It was c 0.5m by >0.24m and 0.28m deep. The feature produced sherds of a broken and slightly deformed early Roman jar along with a small quantity of cremated human remains.



Photograph 1 Pit F1, looking west north-west.



Photograph 2 Pit F2, looking west north-west.



Photograph 3 Foundation trench, looking north.



Photograph 4 Foundation pad, looking north-west.



Photograph 5 Foundation trench, looking south-west.



Photograph 6 Foundation pad and trench, looking south.

6 Finds

6.1 Pottery and ceramic building material

by Dr Matthew Loughton

Monitoring uncovered a small assemblage of pottery and ceramic building material (henceforth CBM) at 50 sherds with a weight of 1.5kg and 0.33 vessels according to the rim EVE (Table 1). The mean sherd weight is 31.2g. This material was recovered from two features (F1 and F2) and one layer (L1).

Ceramic material	No.	Weight (g)	MSW (g)	EVE
Pottery	39	997	25.6	0.33
CBM	11	564	51.3	-
All	50	1,561	31.2	0.33

Table 1 Summary of the pottery and CBM.

Roman pottery

Roman pottery was classified according to the fabric groups outlined in *CAR 10* (1999) (Table 2) and vessel types via the Colchester (*Camulodunum*), henceforth CAM type series (Hawkes & Hull 1947; Hull 1958; *CAR 10* 1999, 468-487). The pottery was recorded by sherd count, the number of rims, handles, and bases, and weight, for each fabric group. The number of vessels was determined by rim EVE (estimated vessel equivalent).

There was a small assemblage of Roman pottery amounting to 33 sherds with a weight of 875g and EVE of 0.33 (Table 3). The mean sherd weight is 26.5g. This material was recovered from two features and one layer, although most came from pit F2 (Table 4). A sherd (26g) from a southern Spanish Baetican olive oil amphora (Dr. 20) was recovered from pit F1. Pit F2 produced a large part of a slightly deformed (kiln second?) early Roman Cam 266 jar (EVE:0.28) in fabric GX. This vessel has no traces of use, such as sooting or burning, and its unworn condition suggests that it was either a cremation urn or a funerary offering. Finally, a large part of lid (Cam 513/EVE:0.05) in fabric WC was retrieved from topsoil L1, and it is possible that this was also used in a funerary context to seal a cremation vessel.

Fabric code	Fabric description	Fabric date range guide
BAET	Inland Baetican (Guadalquivir) amphorae	30 BC-AD270
GX	Other coarse, principally locally-produced grey wares	Roman
WC	Miscellaneous grey and pale grey wares	Roman

Table 2 Roman pottery fabrics recorded.

Fabric code	Fabric description	No.	Weight (g)	MSW (g)	EVE
BAET	Inland Baetican (Guadalquivir) amphorae	1	26	26.0	0.00
GX	Other coarse, principally locally-produced grey wares	31	714	23.0	0.28
WC	Miscellaneous grey and pale grey wares	1	135	135.0	0.05
Total		33	875	26.5	0.33

Table 3 Summary of the Roman pottery.

Context	Feature type	No.	Weight(g)	MSW (g)	EVE
F1	Pit	2	28	14.0	0.00
F2	Pit	30	712	23.7	0.28
L1	Topsoil	1	135	135.0	0.05
Total		33	875	26.5	0.33

Table 4 Quantities of Roman pottery by context.

Post-medieval and modern pottery

Post-medieval and modern pottery was recorded according to the fabric groups from *CAR 7* (2000) and consisted of one sherd (1g) of modern Staffordshire-type white earthenware (fabric F48D) from pit F1 and five sherds (121g) from a modern red earthenware flowerpot (fabric F51B) from topsoil L1.

Ceramic building material (CBM)

There was a small assemblage of CBM consisting of 11 fragments with a weight of 564g and MSW of 51.3g from modern contexts F1 and L1. This material consisted of a variety of Roman roof tiles, medieval/post-medieval peg-tile and modern frogged brick.

Conclusion

Table 5 summarizes the dating evidence for the contexts which contained dateable pottery and CBM. Pit F2 dates to the early Roman period while pit F1 and the topsoil L1 are modern.

Context	Description	Roman pottery	Medieval/post-medieval pottery	CBM	Date Approx.
F1	Pit	BAET (DR20) GX	F48D	Roman tile, frogged brick, peg-tile	Modern
F2	Pit	GX (CAM 266)	-	-	Early Roman
L1	Topsoil	WC (CAM 513)	F51B	Roman imbrex, modern brick	Modern

Table 5 Approximate dates for the individual features and layers.

6.2 Miscellaneous finds

by Laura Pooley with animal bone identified by Adam Wightman

A fragment of post-medieval/modern bottle glass along with pieces of animal bone and coal/coke were recovered from F1. A modern iron nail, fragments of animal bone and a large lump of unworked stone came from L1. All the finds have been recorded in Table 6 below and discarded.

Context	Finds no.	Description
F1	2	Glass: Fragment of olive-green bottle glass, 4.8g, post-medieval/modern. Animal bone: Two fragments (one fragment of large mammal long bone, one unidentifiable fragment), 10.8g. Coal/coke: Two fragments, 4.8g.
L1	1	Iron nail: Incomplete with head missing, round-sectioned shank bent at 90° and includes mineralised wood, 16.4g, probably modern. Animal bone: Four fragments from a large mammal long bone, 6.5g. Unworked stone: Large lump of greensand stone, 1662g.

Table 6 Miscellaneous finds by context.

7 Cremated human remains

by Julie Curl

Introduction and methodology

One bag of bone was submitted for recording and analysis from F2. The bag was sorted by sieving to fragments above 10mm, 9-5mm, 2-4mm and fragments below 2mm to quantify and analyse. Greatest lengths were measured for the larger pieces in the assemblage. Fragments were carefully examined for features to determine age and sex, pathologies or injuries.

Quantification, provenance and preservation

One cremation was recorded, amounting to 129 elements, totalling 12.8g, was recovered from one sample of bone, which is quantified by feature in Table 7. In addition, a few small pieces of flint, one small fragment of fired ceramic material (3mm long) and a fragment of charcoal were found in the bag. Preservation is fairly poor with few large fragments recovered and a low number of fragments over 10mm in length bone surviving.

Sample number	Finds No	Type	>10mm	5-9mm	2-4mm	<2mm	Level	Warping	Cracked	Condition	Max lengths	Total Qty	Total Wt (g)	HSR	Faunal Species
1	-	-	26	53	34	16	White, sandy white	*	*	Heavily fragmented	29 27 25	129	12.8g	18+	none

Table 7 Summary of the burnt bone assemblage from F2.

Analysis results and discussion

Size of Cremation

The size of a cremation depends on the individual (age, sex, body mass, bone density), maintenance of the pyre, the extent of bone recovery from the pyre site and during excavation, as well as on the rate of bone preservation (McKinley 1993). The weight for this cremation is 12.8g. In comparison to average archaeological cremations which is in the range 57g – 3000g (McKinley 2000), and in comparison to a modern cremation of 1000g – 3600g (McKinley 2000), the bone recovered is well below the low weight for archaeological cremations.

Average weights for cremations compared to the West Lodge Road remains					
Cremations	Low weight	Low to Medium weight	Medium weight	Med-High weight	High weight
Average Archaeological	57g	Up to 750g	Up to 1500g	Up to 2250g	Up to 3000g
Average Modern	1000g	Up to 1400g	Up to 1800g	Up to 2700g	Up to 3600
21 West Lodge Road	12.8g	-	-	-	-

Table 8 Quantification comparisons between average archaeological, modern and the remains from 21 West Lodge Road.

Cremations in containers are normally larger than cremations in pits and finely crushed and un-urned cremations tend to be smaller due to poor preservation. The West Lodge Road cremation is below the low weight range compared to both archaeological and especially modern cremations, even for un-urned deposits.

Fragmentation

The fragmentation of bone resulting from the cremation process may be increased by funerary practices such as raking and tending of the pyre, collection of bone at the pyre site, deliberate crushing prior to burial, as well as a result of post-depositional processes, excavation and processing (McKinley, 1989).

There is little variation in fragment size with the bulk of the bone, in terms of fragment count, with remains in all but the smallest fragment size groups. The maximum size in the cremation from West Lodge Road was 27mm and 29mm. Many archaeological cremations produce fragments of approximately 30mm or less, so the fragments in the sample from the West Lodge Road assemblage are not uncommon. The amount of fragmentation seen from this site is quite typical of un-urned cremations.

Colour

The colour of cremated bone depends on a range of factors including the maximum temperature reached, the length of the cremation process, the type and amount of fuel, the quantity of oxygen, the amount of body fat as well as on the degree of uniformity of exposure to the heat across the body. A correlation has been found between the temperature attained and colour changes. Cremated bone can exhibit a large range of heat-induced colour variation from normal coloured (unburnt), to black (charred: c 300°C), through hues of blue and grey (incompletely incinerated: up to c 600°) to fully oxidised white (> c 600°C) (McKinley 2004). All of the bone fragments from West Lodge Road are heavy burnt and fully oxidised to a white to sandy white colouring.

Surface Changes

Surface changes such as warping, cracking and fissuring are characteristics of cremated bone and are produced during the process of dehydration undergone by bone exposed to heat. The pattern of heat-induced bone changes in colour and texture can be exploited to infer the technological aspects of the ritual, the condition of the body at the time when the cremation process took place and the nature of post-depositional disturbance (Shipman et al.1984).

Approximately 40 to 50% of the bone in this assemblage showed some warping, twisting, cracking and fissures, which is expected with fragments that were burnt at higher temperature and fully oxidised. It is likely that if the average fragment size was larger then more warping and cracking would be evident.

Elements and species identified

Only human skeletal remains were positively identified. Of these, 18 of the 129 fragments of bone could be identified to the element, with three vertebrae fragments, fragments of one ulna, one tibia, one femur, eight skull fragments and four molar fragments. The remaining fragments could not be identified to precise elements but appeared to be from limbs and other fragments; it is most likely that these fragments are all from the human cremation.

Age, sex and pathologies

The heavy fragmentation and small sample of bone meant that it was not possible to determine age or sex from any elements in this assemblage. No pathologies or injuries were identified.

Conclusions

This is a very small and fragmented assemblage with several human cremated elements positively identified in the remains. The heavy fragmentation and limited size of the assemblage results in little information being obtainable. It is most likely that this had been an un-urned cremation and perhaps buried in a cloth or leather bag, the lack of urn can result in the loss of a lot of the cremation and further fragmentation.

8 Conclusion

Previous archaeological investigations around the site have established that it is located within a large cemetery area which was in use from the Late Iron Age through until the 3rd or 4th centuries (CAR 9, 257-75; CAR 11, 164-69). From 2003 to 2005, excavations in the grounds of the former Handford House, directly to the east, revealed 68 Roman burials: 9 inhumation burials, two *busta* and 57 cremation burials (35 of which were urned) (CAT Report 323). Also, in 2004, two Roman cremation burials and two possible cremation burials were uncovered during groundworks for a swimming pool, kitchen extension and a garage to the rear of 21 West Lodge Road (CAT Report 293).

Current groundworks to the front of the property have revealed a pit containing the disturbed remains of an early Roman cremation burial containing fragments of a jar and pieces of human bone. Analysis of the human bone has revealed that the burial was probably an un-urned cremation meaning that the jar was probably part of a funerary offering. Part of a lid from topsoil L1 may also have been disturbed from a Roman funerary context.

9 Acknowledgements

CAT thanks Nicky Joshua of Landscape Design and the homeowner for commissioning and funding the work. The project was managed by C Lister and A Wightman, fieldwork was carried out by N Rayner and T Lawrence. Figures are by E Hicks. The project was monitored for CCC by Dr Simon Wood and Dr Richard Hoggett.

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Note: all CAT reports, except for DBAs, are available online in PDF format at <http://cat.essex.ac.uk>

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11 Abbreviations and glossary

CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
CCC	Colchester City Council
CCCHEA	Colchester City Council Historic Environment Advisor
CHER	Colchester Historic Environment Record
ClfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
context	a single unit of excavation, which is often referred to numerically, and can be any feature, layer or find.
feature (F)	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain: can contain 'contexts'
Late Iron Age	the period from 100 BC to AD 43
layer (L)	distinct or distinguishable deposit (layer) of material
medieval	the period from AD 1066 to 1540
modern	the period from 1901 to the present
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
OASIS	Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations, http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main
post-medieval	the period from AD 1540 to 1901
Roman	the period from AD 43 to 410
section	(abbreviation sx or Sx) vertical slice through feature/s or layer/s
ws	written scheme of investigation

12 Contents of archive

Finds: All modern finds discarded, all Roman finds returned to homeowner at their request, and the human remains will be reburied in Colchester Cemetery.

Digital record

CAT Report 2195

CCC brief; CAT ws

Digital photographs

Survey data

Site data

13 Archive deposition

The 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 the Archaeological Data Service (digital record).

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Distribution list:

Nicky Joshua, Landscape Design

Homeowner

Dr Richard Hoggett, Colchester City Council

Colchester Historic Environment Record

Appendix 1 Context list

Context number	Finds number	Feature/layer type	Description	Date
L1	1	Topsoil	Friable, dry dark grey sandy-silt with CBM flecks. 0.37-0.61m thick.	Modern
L2	-	Natural	Firm, dry medium yellow/brown sand with 40% stones. Encountered at 0.37-0.61m below current ground level (bcgl).	Post-glacial
F1	2	Pit	Friable, dry dark brown silt with CBM pieces and 1% stones. Extended beyond the limit of excavation (LOE); >1.7m by >0.7m and 0.53m deep.	Modern
F2	3, <1>	Disturbed cremation burial	Friable, dry medium brown/grey sandy-silt. c 0.5m by >0.24m and 0.28m deep. Irregular U-shaped profile.	Early Roman

Appendix 2 Pottery list

Context	Feature type	Find no.	Number	Weight (g)	Mean Sherd Weight (g)	Discard	Rim	Handle	Base	Burning	Wire cut base	Drag marks	Overfired	Deformed	Kiln second	Organic Residue	Abraision	Fabric Group	Typology	Function	EVE	Diam	Vessel Height	Vessel Diam.	Base Diam.	Whole/nearly whole pot	Comments	Start Date	End Date
F1	PIT	2	1	2	2.0	X												GX										43	425
F1	PIT	2	1	1	1	X												F48D										1800	2000
F1	PIT	2	1	26	26.0	X												BAET	DR20	AMPHORAE								20/30	270
F2	PIT	3	30	712	23.7		1	0	2		X			X	X			GX	CAM 266	JAR	0.28	160	21	200	75	X	LARGE PART OF JAR, FRESH NO SIGN OF WEAR OR USE, PRESUMABLY FUNERARY/ CREMATION POT	43	80
L1	TOPSOIL	1	5	121	24	X												F51B										1800	2000
L1	TOPSOIL	1	1	135	135.0		1	0	0				X					WC	CAM 513	LID	0.05	180				X	LARGE PART OF LID, OFF FABRIC GREY, SANDY WITH WH/CR STREAKS & INCS. POSS CREMATION LID?	43	425

Appendix 3 CBM list

Context	Feature type	Find no.	Number	Weight (g)	Mean Sherd Weight (g)	Discard	Typology	Sub-type	Comments	Start Date	End Date
F1	PIT	2	3	60	20	X	PT			1200	1600
F1	PIT	2	2	310	155	X	BR	FROGGED		1825	2000
F1	PIT	2	3	36	12	X	BR			1800	2000
F1	PIT	2	1	65	65	X	RT			43	425
L1	TOP SOIL	1	1	33	33	X	RI			43	425
L1	TOP SOIL	1	1	60	60	X	BR			1550	1900

Appendix 4 Summary catalogue of the cremated and unburnt bone

Sample number	Finds No	Type	>10mm	5-9mm	2-4mm	<1mm	Level	Warp	Crack	Condition	Max	Total quantity	Total weight (g)	HSR	Faunal Species	MNI	Element range	Comments
1	-	-	26	53	34	16	White, sandy white	*	*	Fragmented	29, 27, 25	129	12.8g	Min 18	0	1	Vertebrae, ulna, tibia, femur, skull fragments, molar fragments, misc fragments	All bone probably part of human cremation

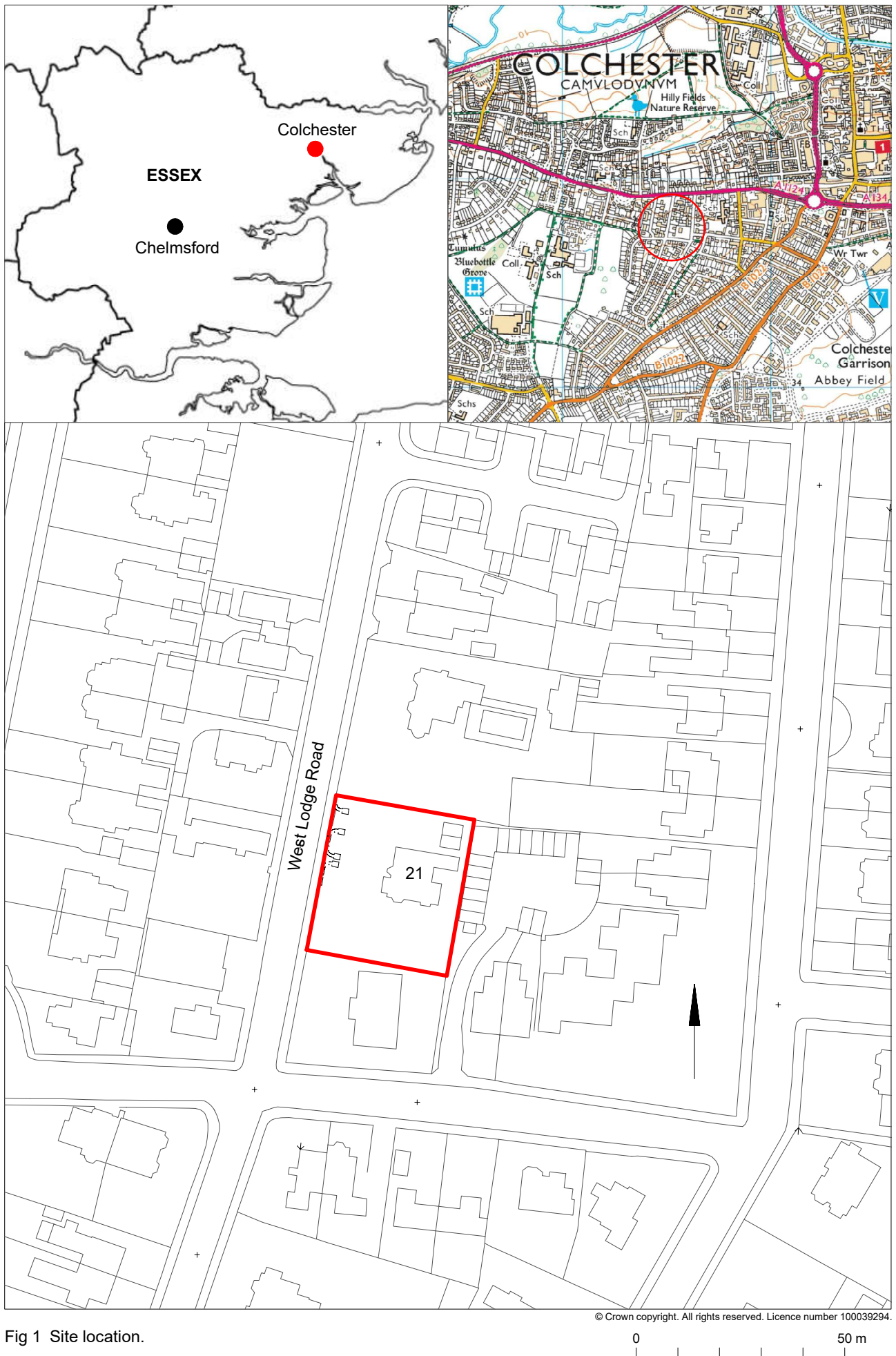


Fig 1 Site location.

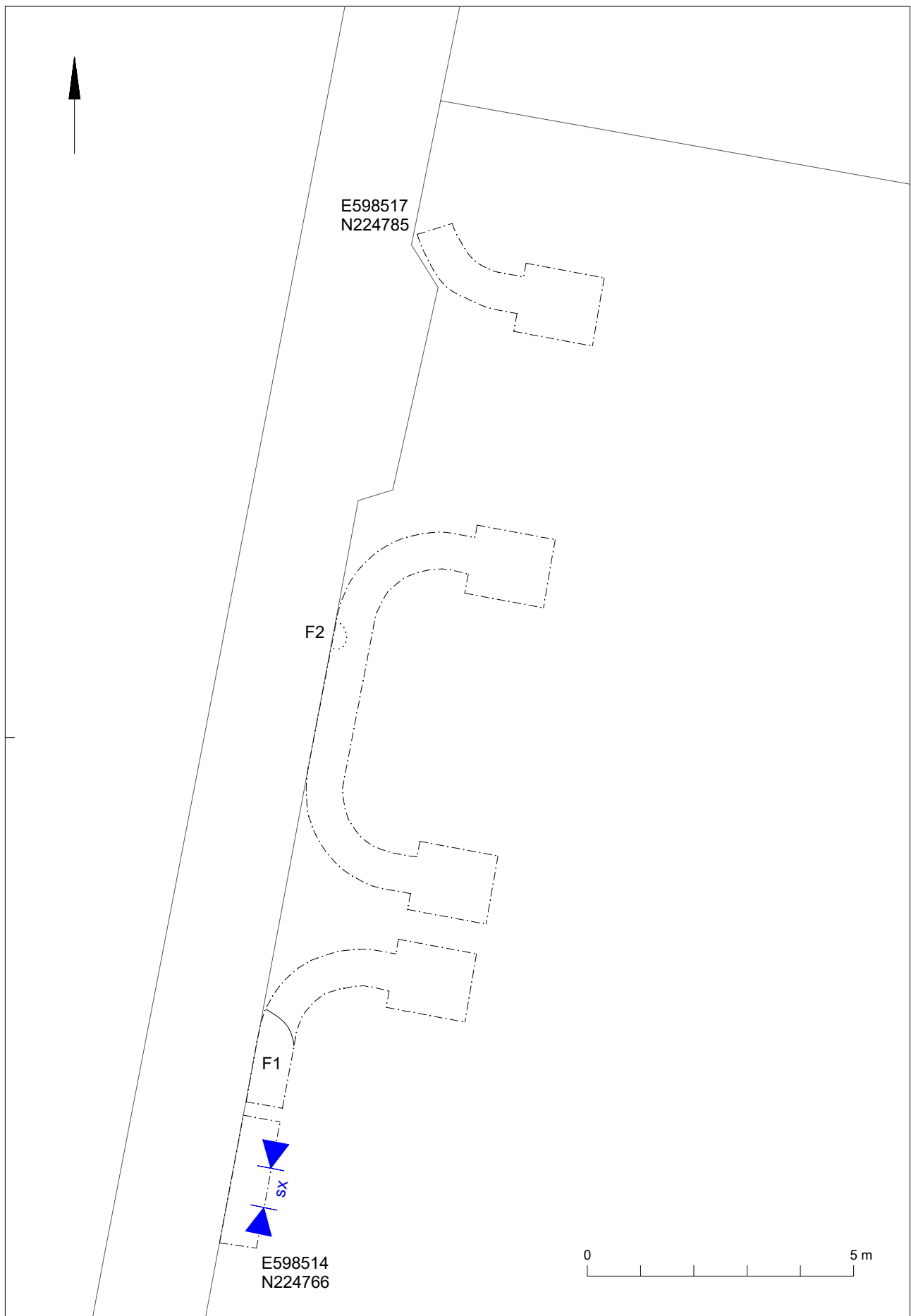


Fig 2 Results.

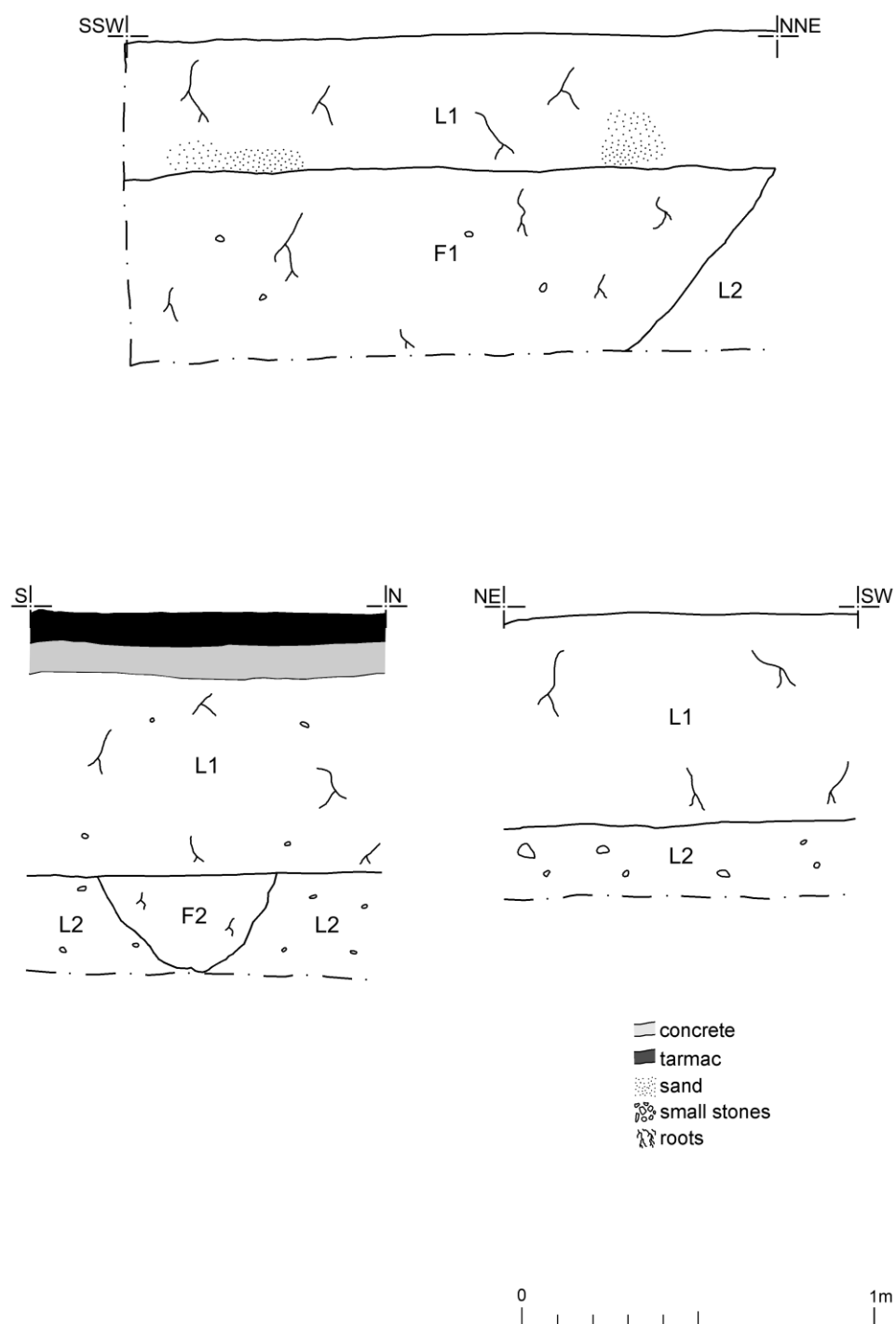


Fig 3 Feature and representative sections.

Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

Summary sheet

Address: 21 West Lodge Road, Colchester, Essex, CO3 3NL	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 98538 24771 (centre)	Site code: CAT project ref.: 2022/09j CHER ref.: ECC4905 OASIS ref.: colchest3-509742
Type of work: Archaeological monitoring and recording	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: 23rd-28th July 2025	Size of area investigated: 0.12 ha
Location of curating museum: Archaeology Data Service	Funding source: Homeowner
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related CHER/SMR number: MCC2955-8
Final report: CAT Report 2195	
Periods represented: -	
Summary of fieldwork results: Archaeological monitoring and recording was carried out at Merly House, 21 West Lodge Road, Colchester, Essex during groundworks for new entrances and walls. The development site lies within the Late Iron Age/Roman Lexden cemetery area. Excavations undertaken in 2002-5 at Handford Place, directly to the east, revealed 68 Roman burials while an <i>in situ</i> cremation burial and three disturbed cremation burials were uncovered during groundworks carried out to the rear of 21 West Lodge Road in 2004. Groundworks during the current phase of development revealed a pit containing most of an early Roman jar and some cremated human remains, representing a disturbed cremation burial.	
Previous summaries/reports: n/a	
CBC/CCC monitor: Dr Simon Wood & Dr Richard Hoggett	
Keywords: -	Significance: -
Author of summary: Dr Elliott Hicks	Date of summary: 22/10/2025

Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for archaeological monitoring at Merly House 21 West Lodge Road Colchester, Essex, CO3 3NL

NGR: TL 98538 24771 (centre)

District: Colchester

Parish: Colchester

Planning reference: 221506

Commissioned by: Nicky Joshua (Landscape Design)

Client: Homeowner

Curating museum: Colchester/ADS Archaeology

CHER number: tbc

CAT project code: 2022/09j

OASIS project number: colchest3-509742

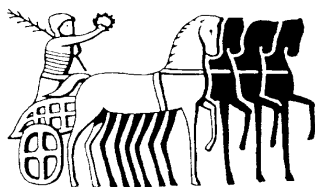
Contracts manager: Chris Lister

Fieldwork manager: Adam Wightman

Post-excavation manager: Laura Pooley

CBC monitor: Dr Simon Wood

This WSI written: 30/09/2022



COLCHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST,
Roman Circus House,
Roman Circus Walk,
Colchester,
Essex, CO2 7GZ

tel: 01206 501785 (option 1)

email: services@catuk.org

Site location and description

The proposed development site is located c 1.15km southwest of the historic core of Colchester town centre at Merly House, 21 West Lodge Road, Colchester, Essex. (Fig 1). The site is centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) TL 98538 24771.

Proposed work

The project involves the removal of existing vehicular gates, hedge and trees to be replaced by new entrances, walls, railings, trees and hedges.

Archaeological background

The following archaeological background draws on the Colchester Archaeological Trust report archive and the Colchester Historic Environment Record (CHER/ECC numbers; accessible via Colchester Heritage Explorer (<https://colchesterheritage.co.uk/map>)).

The development site is situated within the Late Iron Age *oppidum* of Camulodunum, to the southwest of the Roman walled town and just outside of an area of Roman cemeteries termed 'the western cemetery' by Hull (1958), but more generally known as the Lexden cemetery and the area of Colchester Royal Grammar School (MCC7525-9 and MCC7647). The Lexden cemetery area encompasses a number of Iron Age and Roman burial grounds on both sides of Lexden Road (the main Roman road leading from the walled town towards London and Braughing) leading out of Balcerne Gate as far west as The Avenue (Hull 1958 and CAR 11). A number of Roman cremations, inhumations and tombstones have been discovered in the immediate vicinity (Hull 1958), a full discussion of which can be found in CAR 9. Of particular note is a high-status rectangular walled cemetery which lay immediately north of and adjacent to the nearby Roman road (Hall 1946) and in 2005 CAT excavated the remains of a Roman temple tomb at the Colchester Royal Grammar School (CAT Report 345, MCC2791).

Numerous burials have been found within the vicinity of the site. Of particular note are burials recorded at the current site during monitored of the groundworks for a new swimming pool, garage and kitchen extension in 2004. One *in situ* cremation burial and three disturbed cremation burials were recorded. The *in situ* burial included two Roman urns which included coins and a bronze speculum hand-mirror found inside with the cremated bone (CAT Report 293, MCC2955-8).

The burials at 21 West Lodge Road form part of the cemetery group evaluated and then excavated by CAT at the adjacent Handford Place (1 Queens Road) between 2002-5 (CAT Reports 210 & 323, MCC2814 & 3052). Sixty-eight Roman burials, both cremations and graves, were excavated from foundation trenches for the housing development. In two examples, parts of broken pots had been placed to cover lamps, which is good evidence for the lamps having been lit before the graves were backfilled. Twenty of the cremation burials contained one or more ancillary vessels alongside the urn/box, for example, dishes, flagons and small beakers. These may have held food and drink. The earliest cremations are mid 1st to 2nd century in date and some are definitely pre-Boudican. The cremation cemetery appears to have been in continuous use till the 3rd or 4th century. There was very little evidence of activity on the site from later periods. In the 19th century, various large trenches up to 1m deep were dug which removed some of the cremation burials and disturbed several inhumation burials. It is possible that these are the excavations of antiquarian George Joslin who lived opposite Handford House.

Planning background

A planning application (221506) was made to Colchester Borough Council in June 2022 for a proposing the *removal of existing vehicular gates, hedge and trees. Construction of new vehicular and separate pedestrian gated entrances, new walls, railings, tree and hedge planting.*

As the site lies within an area highlighted by the CHER as having a high potential for archaeological deposits, an archaeological condition was recommended by the Colchester Borough Council Archaeological Advisor (CBCAA). The recommended archaeological condition is based on the guidance given in the *National Planning Policy Framework* (MHCLG 2021).

Requirement for work

The required archaeological work is for an archaeological monitoring of all groundworks (including services and landscaping). Details are given in a Project Brief written by CBCAA (CBC 2022).

Specifically:

The monitoring is being undertaken to identify and record any surviving archaeological deposits that may exist on site.

If unexpected remains are encountered the CBCAA will be informed immediately and the CBCAA will decide if amendments to the brief are required to ensure adequate provision for archaeological recording.

In the exceptional circumstances that important, well-preserved mosaic floors (or similar remains) are discovered, which cannot otherwise be avoided by the development (and satisfactorily preserved in situ), a contingency will be required for the block-lifting of these archaeological remains, e.g. well-preserved mosaic remains and for subsequent conservation and presentation. A decision about the need for conservation and lifting of important archaeological remains will be made in consultation with specialist stakeholders (e.g. Historic England, Colchester Museum and Norfolk Museums Service, Conservation and Design Services).

The method and form of development will also be monitored to ensure that it conforms to the previously agreed locations and techniques upon which the brief is based. Any variations will be discussed with the CBCAA immediately.

General methodology

All work carried out by CAT will be in accordance with:

- professional standards of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, including its *Code of Conduct* (CIfA 2014a-c)
- East of England Standards and Frameworks published by East Anglian Archaeology (Gurney 2003, Medlycott 2011) and the recent review updates on <https://researchframeworks.org/eoe/>
- relevant Health & Safety guidelines and requirements (CAT 2022)
- the Project Brief issued by the CBCAA (CBC 2022).

Professional CAT field archaeologists will undertake all specified archaeological work, for which they will be suitably experienced and qualified.

Notification of the supervisor/project manager's name and the start date for the project will be provided to CBCAA one week before start of work.

Unless it is the responsibility of other site contractors, CAT will study mains service locations and avoid damage to these.

At the start of the project (when the WSI is written) an OASIS online record <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/project/oasis/> will be initiated and key fields completed (Activity type, Location and Reviewers/Admin areas). At the end of the project all parts of the OASIS online form will be completed for submission to EHER. This will include an uploaded .PDF version of the entire report.

A unique HER event number will be obtained from the CBCAA prior to the commencement of fieldwork. The curating museum will be notified of the details of the project and the event code, which will be used to identify the project archive when depositing at the end of the project.

Staffing

The number of field staff for this project is estimated as follows: One CAT Officer for the duration of the groundworks.

Monitoring methodology

There will be sufficient on-site attendance by CAT staff to maintain a watch on all contractors' ground works to record, excavate or sample (as necessary) any archaeological features or deposits. The investigation will involve monitoring of all groundworks and inspection of upcast soil.

All topsoil removal and ground reduction will be done with a toothless bucket.

If archaeological features or deposits are uncovered, time will be allowed for these to be planned and recorded.

If any features or deposits uncovered are to be destroyed by the proposed development, time will be allowed for these features to be excavated by hand. This includes a 50% sample of discrete features (pits, etc), 10% of linear features (ditches, etc) and 100% of all complex features and burials (see Human Remains policy below).

Fast hand-excavation techniques involving (for instance) picks, forks and mattocks will not be used on complex stratigraphy.

A metal detector will be used to examine spoil heaps, and the finds recovered.

Individual records of excavated contexts, layers, features or deposits will be entered on pro-forma record sheets. Registers will be compiled of finds, small finds and soil samples.

Site surveying

Normal scale for archaeological site plans and sections is 1:20 and 1:10 respectively, unless circumstances indicate that other scales would be more appropriate.

The site grid will be tied into the National Grid. Corners of excavation areas and trenches will be located by NGR coordinates.

Environmental sampling policy

The number and range of samples collected will be adequate to investigate the site, with particular focus on palaeoenvironmental remains including both biological remains (e.g. plants, small vertebrates) and small sized artefacts (e.g. smithing debris). Samples will be collected for potential micromorphical and other pedological sedimentological analysis. Environmental bulk samples will be 40 litres in size (assuming the context is large enough).

Sampling strategies will address questions of:

- the range of preservation types (charred, mineral-replaced, waterlogged), and their quality
- concentrations of macro-remains
- and differences in remains from undated and dated features
- variation between different feature types and areas of site

CAT has an arrangement with Val Fryer / Lisa Gray whereby any potentially rich

environmental layers or features will be appropriately sampled as a matter of course. Trained CAT staff will do any processing and the flots passed to Val Fryer / Lisa Gray for analysis and reporting.

Should any complex, or otherwise outstanding deposits be encountered, VF/LG will be asked onto site to advise. Waterlogged 'organic' features will always be sampled. In all cases, the advice of VF/LG and/or the Historic England Regional Advisor in Archaeological Science (East of England) on sampling strategies for complex or waterlogged deposits will be followed, including the taking of monolith samples.

Human remains

CAT follows the policy of leaving human remains *in situ* unless there is a clear indication that the remains are in danger of being compromised as a result of their exposure or unless advised to do so by the project osteologist or CBCAA.

CBCAA will be notified immediately if any human remains are encountered during the monitoring.

If circumstances indicated it were prudent or necessary to remove remains from the site during the monitoring, the following criteria would be applied; if it is clear from their position, context, depth, or other factors that the remains are ancient, then normal procedure is to apply to the Department of Justice for a licence to remove them and seek advice from the project osteologist. Human remains removed from site for analysis this may involve radiocarbon dating (see finds section).

Following Historic England guidance (2018) if the human remains are not to be lifted, the project osteologist should be available to record the human remain *in situ* (i.e. a site visit). Conditions laid down by the DoJ license will be followed. If it seems that the remains are not ancient, then the coroner, the client, and the CBCAA will be informed, and any advice and/or instruction from the coroner will be followed.

Photographic record

Will include both general and feature-specific photographs, the latter with scale and north arrow. A photo register giving context number, details, and direction of shot will be prepared on site, and included in site archive. Digital site photographs will be taken and archived as per Historic England guidelines (2015a).

Finds

All significant finds will be retained.

All finds, where appropriate, will be washed and marked with site code and context number. CAT may use local volunteers to assist the CAT Finds Officer with this task.

Most of our finds reports are written internally by CAT Staff under the supervision and direction of Philip Crummy (Director) and Laura Pooley (Post-excavation Manager). This includes specialist subjects such as:

ceramic finds (pottery and ceramic building material): Matthew Loughton
animal bones: Alec Wade (or Adam Wightman, small groups only)
small finds, metalwork, coins, etc: Laura Pooley
non-ceramic bulk finds: Laura Pooley
flints: Adam Wightman
environmental processing: Bronagh Quinn
project osteologist (human remains): Megan Seehra

or to outside specialists:

animal and human bone: Julie Curl (*Sylvanus*)
environmental assessment and analysis: Val Fryer / Lisa Gray
archaeometallurgy: David Dungworth
radiocarbon dating: SUERC Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory, Glasgow
conservation/x-ray: Laura Ratcliffe (LR Conservation) / Norfolk Museums Service,
Conservation and Design Services

Other specialists whose opinion can be sought on large or complex groups include:

flint: Tom Lawrence
prehistoric pottery: Stephen Benfield / Nigel Brown / Paul Sealey
Roman pottery: Stephen Benfield / Paul Sealey / Jo Mills / Gwladys Monteil
Roman brick/tile: Ian Betts (MOLA)
Roman glass: Hilary Cool
small finds: Nina Crummy
other: EH Regional Adviser in Archaeological Science (East of England).

All finds of potential treasure will be removed to a safe place, and the coroner informed immediately, in accordance with the rules of the Treasure Act 1996. The definition of treasure is given in pages 3-5 of the Code of Practice of the above act. This refers primarily to gold or silver objects.

Requirements for conservation and storage of finds will be agreed with the appropriate museum prior to the start of work, and confirmed to CBCAA.

A contingency will be made in the budget for scientific assessment/analysis if suitable deposits are identified. This can include soil micromorphological and geochemical analysis of floors and dark earth deposits and/or absolute dating (such as archaeomagnetic and radiocarbon). The Historic England Regional Science Advisor will be consulted for advice.

Results

Notification will be given to CBCAA when the fieldwork has been completed.

An appropriate archive will be prepared to minimum acceptable standards outlined in *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (Historic England 2015b).

The report will be submitted within 6 months of the end of fieldwork, with a copy supplied to CBCAA as a PDF.

The report will contain:

- Location plan of the groundworks in relation to the proposed development. At least two corners of the site will be given 10 figure grid references.
- Section/s drawings showing depth of deposits from present ground level with Ordnance Datum, vertical and horizontal scale.
- Archaeological methodology and detailed results including a suitable conclusion and discussion and results referring to Regional Research Frameworks (Medlycott 2011 and the recent review updates on <https://researchframeworks.org/eoe/>)
- All specialist reports or assessments
- A concise non-technical summary of the project results.

An EHER summary sheet will also be completed within four weeks and supplied to CBCAA.

Results will be published, to at least a summary level (i.e. round-up in *Essex Archaeology & History*) in the year following the archaeological field work. An allowance will be made in the project costs for the report to be published in an adequately peer reviewed journal or monograph series.

A PDF copy of the full report will be uploaded by CAT to the OASIS website and the Colchester Archaeological Trust's Online Report Library (<http://cat.essex.ac.uk/>), both of which are publicly accessible.

Archive deposition

It is a policy of Colchester Borough Council that the integrity of the site archive be maintained (i.e. all finds and records should be properly curated by a single organisation), with the archive available for public consultation.

If finds are retained from the site the full archive will be deposited in Colchester Museums *unless otherwise agreed in advance*. (A full *copy* of the archive shall in any case be deposited). If there are no finds a full digital archive will be deposited with ADS Archaeology.

By accepting this WSI, the client agrees to deposit the archive, including all artefacts, at Colchester & Ipswich Museum.

The requirements for archive storage will be agreed with the curating museum.

If the finds are to remain with the landowner, a full copy of the archive will be housed with the curating museum and provision must be made for additional recording (e.g. photography, illustration and analysis) as appropriate.

The archive will be deposited with Colchester & Ipswich Museum or an alternate repository (approved by COLEM and CBCAA) within 3 months of the completion of the final publication report, with a summary of the contents of the archive supplied to CBCAA. Digital archives will be curated with the Archaeology Data Service, or similar accredited digital archive repository, that safeguard the long-term curation of digital records.

The CBCAA will be notified of the archiving timetable throughout the project and once deposition has occurred.

A digital / vector drawing of the site be given to the CBCAA for integration into the HER.

Education and outreach

The CAT website (www.thecolchesterarchaeologist.co.uk) and social media sites are updated regularly with information on current sites. Copies of our reports (grey literature) can be viewed on the website and downloaded for free. Staff regularly give lectures to groups, societies and schools (a fee may apply). CAT also works in partnership with Colchester Archaeological Group (providing a venue for their lectures and library) and the local Young Archaeologists Club.

CAT archaeologists can be booked for lectures and information on fees can be obtained by contacting the office on 01206 501785 (option 1).

Monitoring

CBCAA will be responsible for monitoring progress and standards throughout the project, and will be kept regularly informed during fieldwork, post-excavation and publication stages.

Notification of the start of work will be given to CBCAA one week in advance of its commencement.

Any variations in this WSI will be agreed with CBCAA prior to them being carried out.

CBCAA will be notified when the fieldwork is complete.

The involvement of CBCAA shall be acknowledged in any report or publication generated by this project.

References

Note: all CAT reports, except for DBAs, are available online in PDF format at <http://cat.essex.ac.uk>

Brown, D	2011	<i>Archaeological Archives: A guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation</i>
CAR 9	2nd ed 1993	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report 9: Excavations of Roman and later cemeteries, churches and monastic sites in Colchester, 1971-85</i> , by N Crummy, P Crummy and C Crossan. Colchester: Colchester Archaeological Trust Ltd.
CAR 11	1995	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report 11: Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-86</i> , by R Symonds & S Wade. Colchester: Colchester Archaeological Trust Ltd.
CAT	2022	<i>Health & Safety Policy</i>
CAT Report 210	2002	<i>An archaeological evaluation at Handford House, 1 Queens Road, Colchester, Essex</i> , by Kate Orr, 2002
CAT Report 293	2005	<i>An archaeological watching brief at Merly House, 21 West Lodge Road, Colchester, Essex: March-June 2004</i> , by K Orr
CAT Report 323	2010 updated 2021	<i>A Roman cemetery in Colchester's western suburbs: excavations at Handford House, 1 Queens Road, Colchester: 2003 and 2004-2005</i> , by K Orr
CAT Report 345	2005	<i>A Roman temple-tomb at Colchester Royal Grammar School, Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex: August-September 2005</i> , by H Brooks
CBCAA	2022	<i>Brief for Archaeological Monitoring at 21 West Lodge Road, Colchester</i> . By S Wood
ClfA	2014a	<i>Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief</i> . Revised June 2020
ClfA	2014b	<i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i> . Updated Oct 2020
ClfA	2014c	<i>Code of Conduct</i> . Revised Oct 2021
Digital Curation Centre (DCC)	2013	<i>Checklist for Data Management Plan v. 4.0</i>
Gurney, D	2003	<i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> . East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Papers 14 (EAA 14).
Hall, A F.	1946	'A Roman walled cemetery at Colchester', <i>Archaeological Journal</i> , C1
Historic England	2015a	<i>Digital Image capture and File Storage: Guidelines for best practice</i> . By S Cole & P Backhouse
Historic England	2015b	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)</i>
Historic England	2018	<i>The Role of the Human Osteologist in an Archaeological Fieldwork Project</i> . By S Mays, M Brickley and J Sidell
Hull, M R.	1958	<i>Roman Colchester</i> , RRCSAL, 20
Medlycott, M	2011	<i>Research and archaeology revisited: A revised framework for the East of England</i> . East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Papers 24 (EAA 24)
MHCLG	2021	<i>National Planning Policy Framework</i> . Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Emma Holloway



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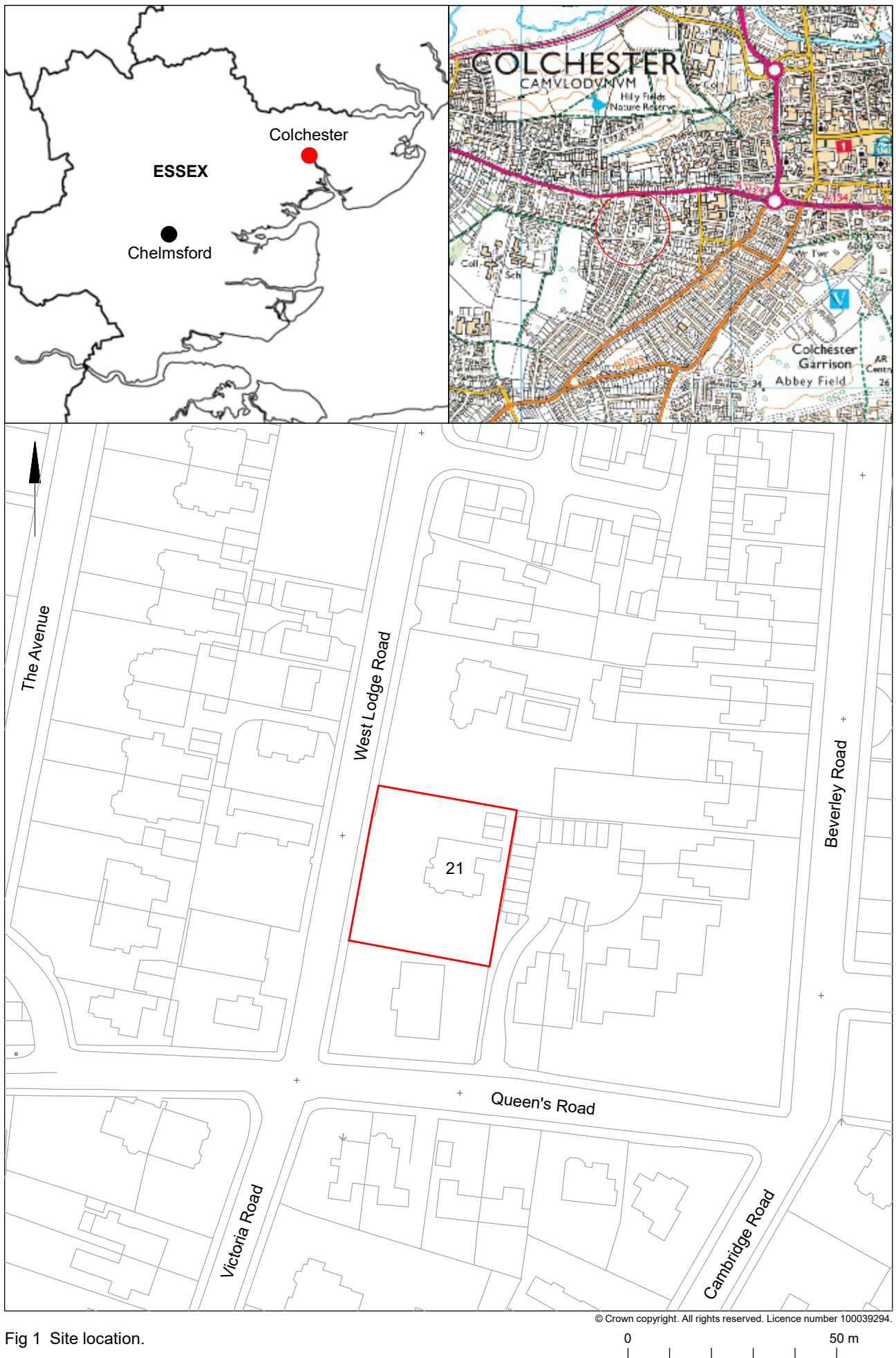


Fig 1 Site location.

OASIS Summary for colchest3-509742

OASIS ID (UID)	colchest3-509742
Project Name	Archaeological monitoring and recording at Merly House, 21 West Lodge Road, Colchester, Essex, CO3 3NL: July 2025
Sitename	Merly House, 21 West Lodge Road, Colchester, Essex, CO3 3NL
Sitecode	ECC4905
Project Identifier(s)	2022/09j
Activity type	Watching Brief
Planning Id	221506
Reason For Investigation	Planning: Post determination
Organisation Responsible for work	Colchester Archaeological Trust
Project Dates	23-Jul-2025 - 28-Jul-2025
Location	Merly House, 21 West Lodge Road, Colchester, Essex, CO3 3NL NGR : TL 98538 24771 LL : 51.8861322559705, 0.883493523180223 12 Fig : 598538,224771
Administrative Areas	Country : England County/Local Authority : Essex Local Authority District : Colchester Parish : Colchester, unparished area
Project Methodology	Archaeological monitoring and recording of all groundworks as specified in the project brief and wsi.
Project Results	Archaeological monitoring and recording was carried out at Merly House, 21 West Lodge Road, Colchester, Essex during groundworks for new entrances and walls. The development site lies within the Late Iron Age/Roman Lexden cemetery area. Excavations undertaken in 2002-5 at Handford Place, directly to the east, revealed 68 Roman burials while an in situ cremation burial and three disturbed cremation burials were uncovered during groundworks carried out to the rear of 21 West Lodge Road in 2004. Groundworks during the current phase of development revealed a pit containing most of an early Roman jar and some cremated human remains, representing a disturbed cremation burial.
Keywords	Cremation Burial - ROMAN - FISH Thesaurus of Monument Types Jar - ROMAN - FISH Archaeological Objects Thesaurus Lid - ROMAN - FISH Archaeological Objects Thesaurus Human Remains - EARLY MEDIEVAL - FISH Archaeological Objects Thesaurus
Funder	Private individual
HER	Colchester Borough Council - unRev - STANDARD
Person Responsible for work	Chris Lister, Adam Wightman
HER Identifiers	HER Event No - ECC4905
Archives	Digital Archive - to be deposited with Archaeology Data Service Archive;