

Colchester Archaeological Trust Ltd

A Watching Brief at

**St Mary's Arts Centre
Church Street, Colchester**

for Colchester Borough Council

CAT Report No. 35
June 1999

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NGR: TL 9925 2506

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Summary

Installation of a new drain exposed part of a brick and mortared rubble foundation below the north wall of St Mary's Church. The foundation appears to date to the 18th century rebuilding of the church.

Introduction

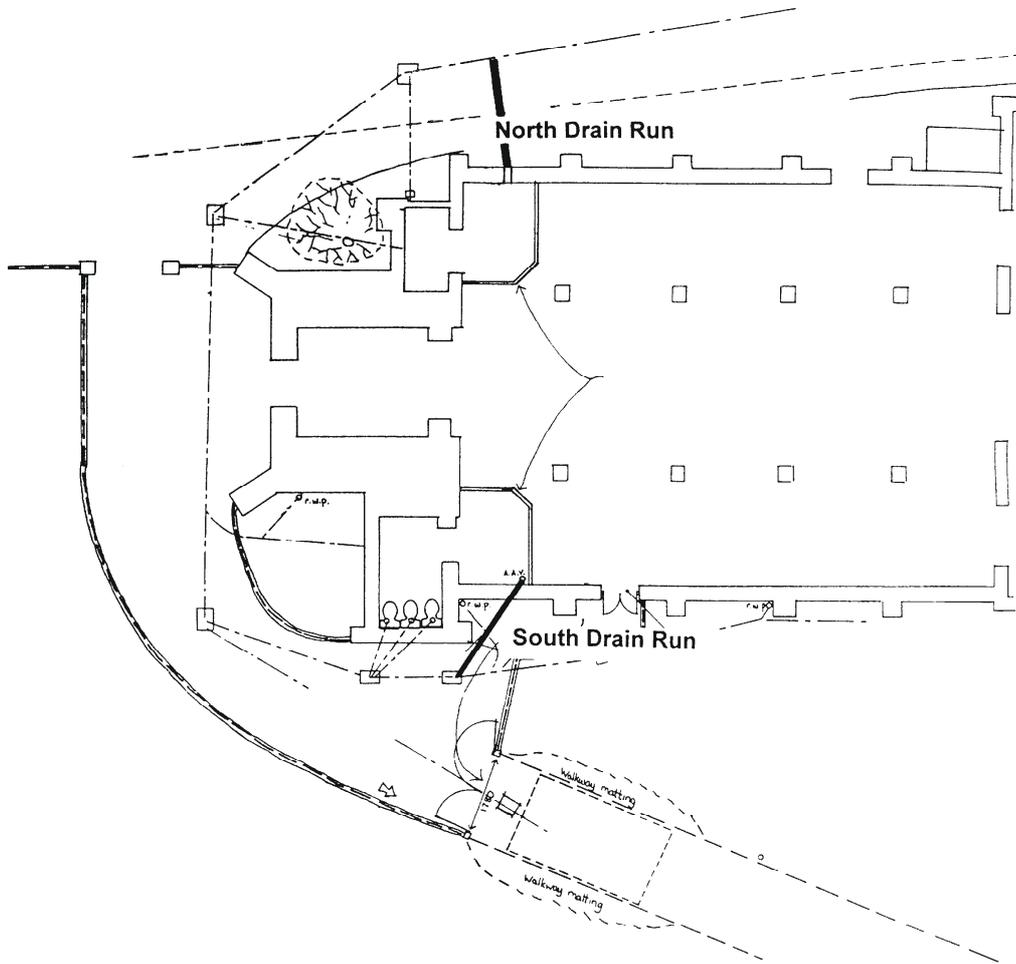
The watching brief follows on from a desk-based archaeological assessment commissioned by Colchester Borough Council in advance of drainage works for new toilets at St Mary's Arts Centre, formerly St Mary-at-the-Walls church (CAT Report No. 29, February 1999). The current report covers the resultant new drain connection from the north side of the church to an existing sewer in Church Street. A 40cm deep drain to the south is understood to have been laid at some time previously, but was not observed.

The trench stratigraphy

Figure 1 shows the link from new toilets in the north aisle of the nave to the main sewer in the centre of Church street. The trench (detailed in Fig.2) was dug to a depth of 40cm between points "A" and "B", falling to 80cm at point "C". The trench stratigraphy to either side of the street kerb line differed, and was as follows:

Church Street, north of the kerbstone foundation (Fig.2).

The 40cm deep section between the kerb and "B" was entirely modern, consisting of paving brick above successive layers of sand, tarmac, coarse concrete and brick hardcore. The deeper part of the trench, from "B" to the sewer at "C", revealed an underlying deposit of very mixed reddish brown sand and brown sandy loam, which was cut by the trench for a sewer laid in 1979. Too little of this deeper material was exposed to permit firm interpretation, although its mixed nature suggests that it is possibly the backfill of a pre-1979 trench, perhaps associated with an earlier sewer.



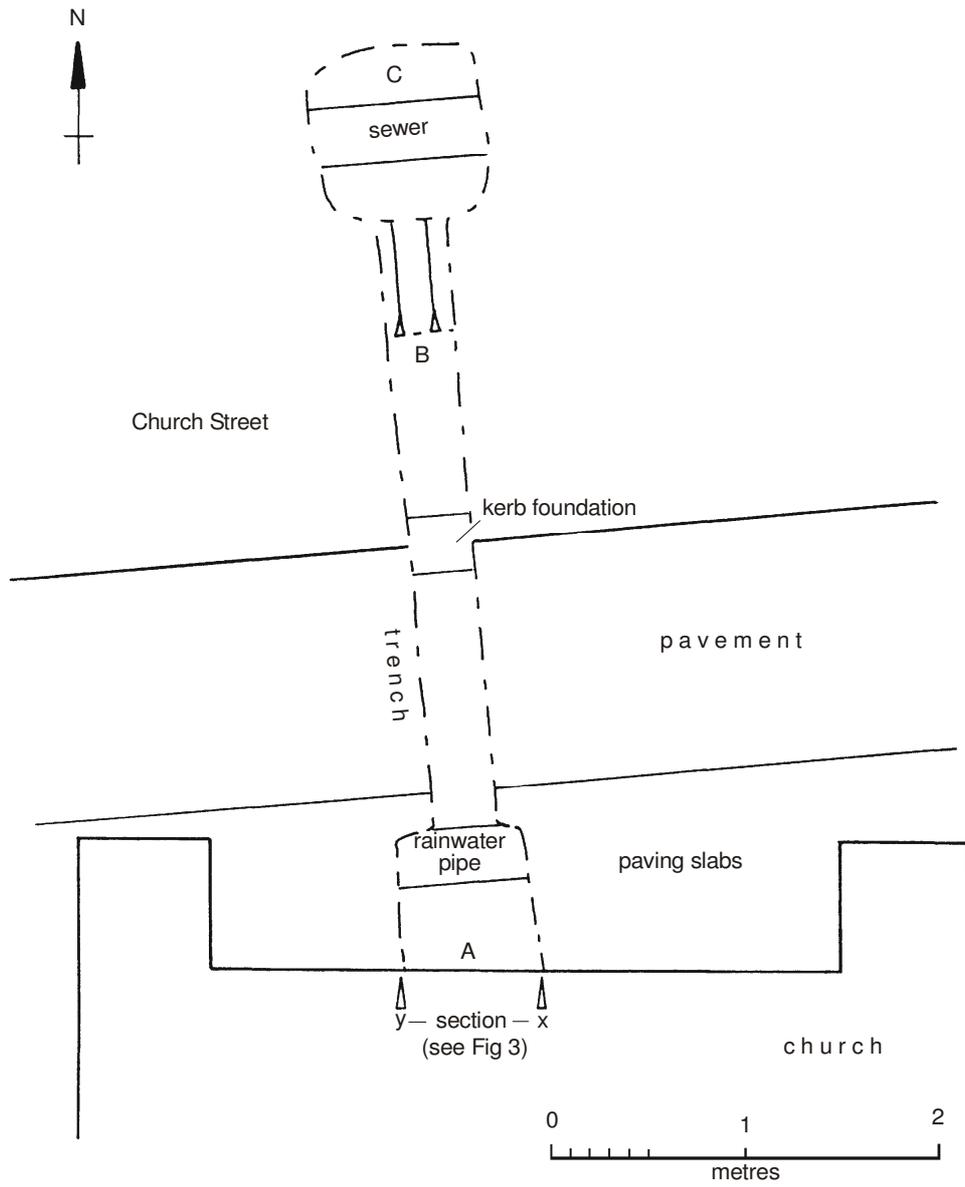


Fig 2 St Mary's Arts Centre, Church Street, Colchester - north drain: trench plan

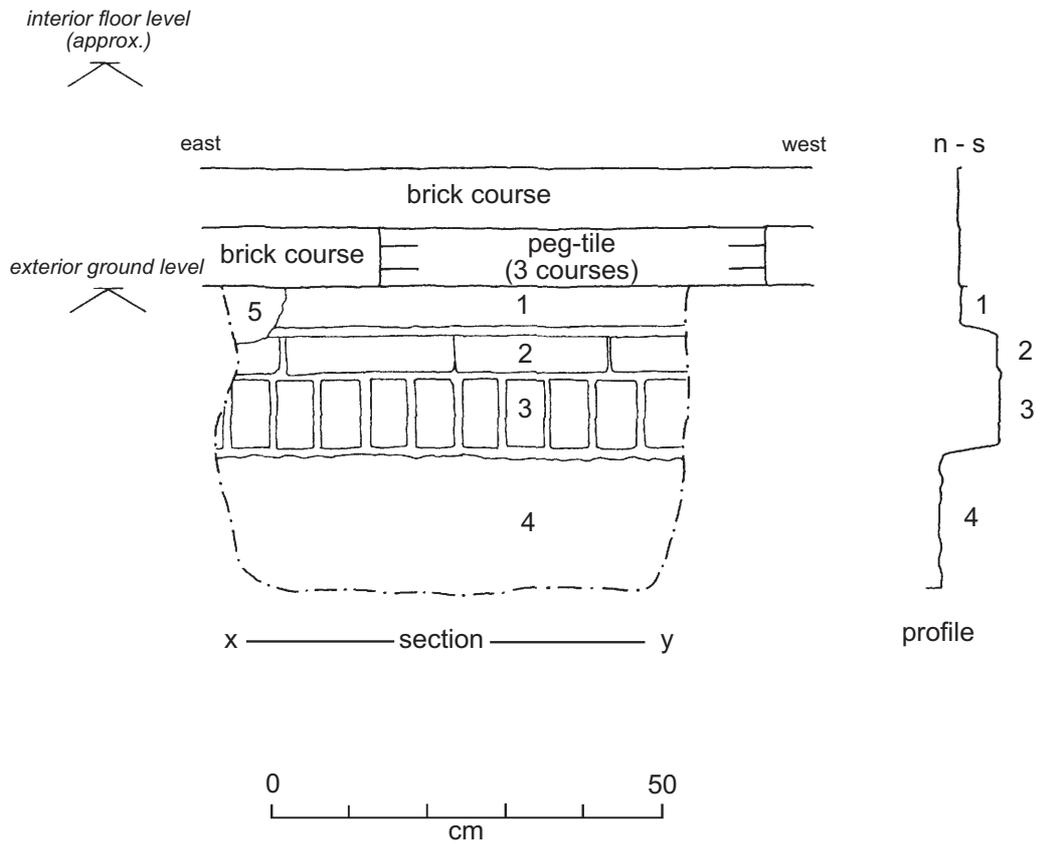


Fig 3 St Mary's Arts Centre, Church Street, Colchester - north wall: section and profile

South of the kerbstone foundation (Fig.2).

In the stretch between the kerb and the south wall of the church, paving slabs on a light mortar bed occupied the uppermost 15cm, sealing a modern deposit of dark greyish brown sandy loam which extended to the bottom of the trench. There were indications of a soil change at that point: although identical in colour and texture to the sandy loam above, the material partly revealed in the trench bottom was harder and was felt to be compacted to a greater extent than might be expected from trample resulting from the current work. Several large oyster shell fragments were also present in this soil, but not in the overlying sandy loam.

The north wall foundation of the church (Fig.3)

Exterior

Trenching exposed the uppermost 40cm of foundation for the north wall of the church. Illustrated in Figure 3 (section x-y), the foundation was composed of the following (numbered from ground level):

- (1) Stone slab
- (2) Red brick, 205mm long, exact height uncertain, width unknown, laid as stretchers.
- (3) Red brick, 90-95mm wide, 45mm high, laid on their sides as headers.
- (4) A rubble foundation of mortar with septaria, kentish ragstone, red brick and peg-tile fragments, also including Roman tile and occasional small shell fragments.
- (5) Mortar. Part of the modern mortar bed for paving slabs.

The stone slab (1) was flush with the exposed brick courses above ground level, while the lowest brick courses, (2) and (3), were recessed 5cm from the standing face of the wall. The rubble foundation, L4, projected about 8cm beyond L2 and L3 (Fig.3, profile).

Interior

The church floor level at the waste pipe exit point is approximately 30cm higher than the external ground level. Removal of a small area of the interior concrete floor revealed a large central heating pipe and modern rubble infill. The brick courses, (2) and (3) in the exterior section (Fig.3) were seen to extend through the width of the wall.

Discussion

Although no complete set of brick dimensions could be retrieved from the brick courses below the exterior ground level, their available measurements, colour and general form seem to be consistent with the early 18th century rebuilding of the church. The underlying rubble foundation, with its peg-tile inclusions, is probably also associated with this phase in the church's history.

The position of the stone slab (1) shown in profile in Figure 3 suggests that it is contemporary with the standing brickwork, which belongs to a further major rebuild finished in 1872.

Finds: none

Photographs: colour slides

Other archival material: original site notes and drawings

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