

An archaeological watching brief to the rear of 21 Nunns Road, Colchester, Essex

March 2001

**on behalf of
Colchester Borough Council**

CAT project ref.: 01/3B
Colchester Museum accession code: 2001.43
NGR: TL 9945 2543



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CAT Report 122

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Figure

Summary sheet

Figure

Fig 1 Site location.

1 Summary

Observations were made during and after groundworks for an extension to the rear of 21 Nunns Road, Colchester, Essex. The watching brief has shown that no archaeological deposits were impacted during this work. It is likely that archaeological deposits exist at a deeper level on the site, but the contractor's trenches were not deep enough to reach them.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the report on an archaeological watching brief carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on the 12th and 13th of March 2001, at the request of Colchester Borough Council. The work was necessitated by the construction of a small (3m x 6m) extension to the rear of 21 Nunns Road, Colchester, Essex. 21 Nunns Road is a red-brick Victorian building which appears to have been built as a house and is to be converted into a doctors' surgery.
- 2.2 The site is located near the bottom of North Hill, on the southern side of the road, to the rear of 21 Nunns Road. To the south of the site is a car park for the existing doctors' surgery (Fig 1). The site is located at National Grid Reference TL 9945 2543.
- 2.3 This report follows the standards set out in the Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1999) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1999).

3 Archaeological background

- 3.1 The site is located on or near the ditch defining the edge of the Roman fortress of *Colonia Claudia*. It is within Insula 2 of the later Roman town and just north of a Roman street. Roman mosaics and tessellated pavements have been found very near this site, including two mosaics excavated in 1906 and 1925 to the rear of 17 and 18 North Hill (Hull 1958, 77-80 and plate 15). A tessellated pavement was also found in 1847 in what is now the surgery car park adjacent to the site.
- 3.2 In 1977, CAT excavated two more tessellated pavements behind 17 and 18 North Hill which is just to the south-west of the site. These pavements were found at 1m below ground-level. Part of the mosaic excavated in the early 20th century was also exposed (Crummy 1992, 355).
- 3.3 A watching brief was carried out opposite the site in September 1999 by CAT (CAT Report 50). The ground was lowered by 2.65m-2.95m to create a car park. Roman deposits were found at 2.05m below ground-level and a Roman tessellated pavement was recorded at 2.65m below ground-level.
- 3.4 Another watching brief carried out in May 1999 by CAT at 5 Nunns Road found residual Roman and later finds in the topsoil (Crossan 1999).

4 Aims and objectives

The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological features, finds or deposits revealed by the groundworks.

5 Methods

- 5.1 The fieldwork was carried out by the author. The first visit, on the 12th of March, was made during the removal of concrete and tarmac from the site. The second visit, on the 13th of March, was made after the 150mm of topsoil had been stripped off and the raft foundations had been dug out but not concreted. The size of the area excavated was 3m x 6m. The width of the raft foundations was 380mm and their depth 300mm (450mm from ground-level).
- 5.2 A record of the position of the site excavations was made which has been reproduced on Figure 1. Soil types were noted and artefacts retrieved.

6 Results

6.1 The following profile was observed:

Layer 1 - tarmac, thickness 30mm.

Layer 2 - concrete, thickness 55mm rising to 130mm on the western side.

Layer 3 - gravel and sand sub-base, thickness 30mm.

Layer 4 - dark brown mixed sandy loam topsoil containing modern brick, peg-tile, mortar, animal bone, oyster shell fragments and charcoal flecks. Thickness 200mm-400mm.

Layer 5 - mottled light brown and dark brown silty clay containing modern tile and frequent medium stones. This layer is a modern make-up layer, only observed in the western end as it was dug to a greater depth. A copper-alloy belt stiffener of probable medieval date was found within this layer (see Appendix).

No features were observed.

6.2 The following artefacts were retrieved:

Find no 1 - Cu alloy belt stiffener of probable post-medieval date, Layer 5.

Find no 2 - animal bone, Layer 4.

Find no 3 - modern brick fragment, Layer 5.

Find no 4 - oyster shell, Layer 5.

Find no 5 - modern mortar and post-medieval peg-tile, Layer 4.

All finds were discarded apart from find no 1 which was looked at by a specialist (see Appendix), and this will be sent to Colchester Museum for conservation.

7 Discussion

7.1 The raft foundations cut through modern tarmac, concrete and gravel sub-base and topsoil to approximately 450mm below ground-level. No features of archaeological significance were revealed. The site had obviously been disturbed by two drains which crossed the site diagonally (Fig 1) and also by modern building activity and the laying of the concrete and tarmac. The only find of interest was the belt stiffener which was from a modern layer.

7.2 It is highly likely, given the archaeological finds made in the immediate vicinity, that there are Roman wall foundations or floor surfaces below the site. However, the groundworks did not go deep enough to impact them.

8 Archive deposition

A copy of this report and the copper-alloy find will be deposited permanently with Colchester Museum under accession code 2001.43.

9 Acknowledgements

Colchester Archaeological Trust is grateful to the following for their help and co-operation during this project:

Martin Winter, Archaeological Officer for Colchester Museums

G & H Groundworks Contractors

S R Collins Buildings Contractors

10 References

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- Crossan, C, 1999 An archaeological watching brief at 5 Nunns Road, Colchester
- Crummy, P, 1992 *Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School, and other sites in Colchester 1971-85*, Colchester Archaeological Report 6
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- Hull, M R, 1958 *Roman Colchester*

Kate Orr, April 2001

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Appendix: Report on the metal find

A copper-alloy find (no 1) from 21 Nunns Road by Nina Crummy

A copper-alloy rectangular stiffener from a leather strap, probably a belt. The edges are very slightly bevelled on the upper side. The plate measures 30mm by 17mm, with a rivet for attachment at either end, and a central depression for a decorative fitting, probably enamel. The underside retains traces of leather from the strap, and the top is encrusted with mineral-preserved organic deposits, grass or straw. The date of this object is uncertain, but the form of the rivets, which appear to have been inserted from the underside, then sheared off to leave them projecting slightly above the surface, would be very unusual in the Roman or medieval periods, and a post-medieval date seems most likely.

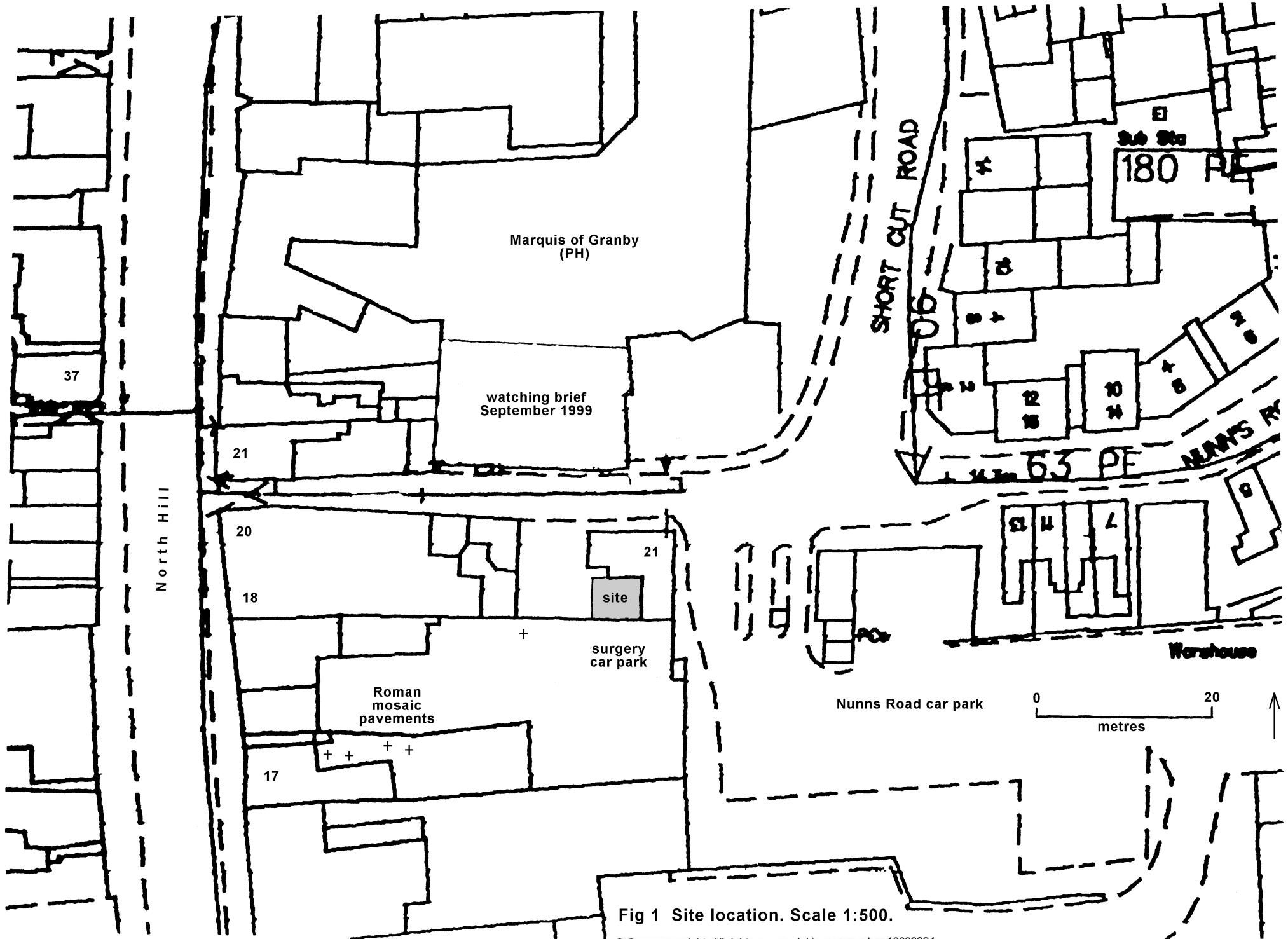


Fig 1 Site location. Scale 1:500.

**Essex Heritage Conservation Record/
Essex Archaeology and History**

Summary sheet

Site name/address: rear of 21 Nunns Road, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TL 9945 2543	Site code: 2001.43
Type of work: watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: 12th and 13th March 2001	Size of area investigated: 3.75x 6.5m
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museum	Funding source: Colchester Borough Council
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHCR nos:
Final report: CAT Report 122	
Periods represented: Modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: Observations were made during and after groundworks for an extension to the rear of 21 Nunns Road. The watching brief has shown that no archaeological deposits were impacted during this work. It is likely that archaeological deposits exist at a deeper level on the site, but the contractor's foundation trenches (450mm depth) were not deep enough to reach them.</p>	
Previous summaries/reports:	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: April 2001