

# **An archaeological watching brief at 24 Castle Road, Colchester, Essex**

**September 2000-October 2001**

**on behalf of  
Colchester Borough Council**

CAT site code: 00/9b  
Colchester Museum accession code: 2000.107  
NGR: TM 0008 2548  
Planning application no: F/COL/97/0848



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**CAT Report 158**

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Essex Heritage Conservation Record (EHCR) summary sheet

## **Plate and figures**

Plate 1 F1, looking north-east.

Fig 1 Site location, scale 1:1250.

Fig 2 Plan of site showing features, scale 1:100.

Fig 3 Section drawing of service trench T2, scale 1:20.

## 1 Summary

*An archaeological watching brief was carried out at 24 Castle Road, Colchester, Essex. Roman finds and features were recorded, including an opus signinum Roman floor surface and a collapsed wall to a building at the front of the house.*

## 2 Introduction

2.1 This is the report on a watching brief carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) at 24 Castle Road, Colchester, Essex on behalf of Colchester Borough Council between September 2000 and October 2001.

2.2 The site is located on the eastern side of Colchester, to the north of the High Street and the east of the castle (Fig 1). The site is centred at National Grid Reference TM 0008 2548. It comprises a 12m x 30m plot where the previous house has been demolished. The watching brief took place during groundworks associated with the building of a replacement house which was given consent under planning application no F/COL/97/0848 with a condition for an archaeological watching brief.

2.3 This report follows the standards set out in the Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1999) and *Guidelines on the preparations 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 situated inside the walls of the Roman town of *Colonia Claudia Victricensis*, within Insula 8. Part of the defences in this insula were excavated by CAT in 1978, north-east of Duncan's Gate (CGC 1978; *CAR 6*, 860) and during a watching brief at Castle Road/Roman Road (*CAR 6*, 821).

3.2 Remains of a Roman pavement and floors made of flagstones have been found under Castle Road (Hull 1958, 219, nos 40 and 41).

3.3 The site lies within the grounds of what was Greyfriars friary, a 13th-century foundation whose main buildings were on the north side of the High Street. By the time of the dissolution of 1538, the friary owned a block of land which was bordered by the castle, the High Street, and the north and east town walls (Cooper 1994, 306).

## 4 Aims and objectives

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

## 5 Methods

5.1 Fieldwork was undertaken by professional archaeologists from CAT. The demolition of the previous house at 24 Castle Road in 2000 was not observed. The topsoil-stripping was observed in September 2000 by Howard Brooks (Brooks 2000; see Appendix 2). The service trenches at the front (west) of the new house were observed by Ben Holloway in September 2001. The house foundations were not observed. The foundation for the garden wall was monitored by Kate Orr in October 2001.

5.2 A record was made of the location of areas monitored which has been reproduced as Figure 2.

5.3 The sides of the trenches as well as the spoil heaps were examined. Records were made of layers and features. The sides of the services trenches were drawn in section, one of which has been reproduced as Figure 3.

5.4 Finds were retrieved and bagged according to context, and a register of finds was made. Pottery was marked (see Appendix 1).

- 5.5 Plans were made of the *opus signinum* floor and of the collapsed Roman wall (Fig 2).
- 5.6 Digital photographs were taken of the *opus signinum* floor (Feature 1 or F1).

## 6 Results

### 6.1 Topsoil-stripping - September 2000

After the demolition of the house, topsoil was stripped off. A rough irregular floor made of *opus signinum* (F1) was revealed at a depth of between 400mm and 640mm at the Castle Road end of the site. It was cut by a modern-looking pit from which a probably residual Roman sherd was recovered. There were no wall lines associated with the floor. The remaining floor was irregular in shape, and 1.6m long (Fig 2).

### 6.2 Service trenches - September 2001

Four trenches (T1-T4) were dug; these were 400mm wide, 600mm deep, and between 4.3m and 1.75m long. The trenches were monitored to the west of the new house, on the Castle Road side. Sand and soil had been redeposited over the ground, and the service trenches were dug into this. Thus the ground-level was the same as it had been before (see section 6.1).

Redeposited sand and soil, containing concrete, modern brick and plastic mixed with some mortar, septaria, and Roman tile and pottery, formed the top 600mm of all of the four trenches.

At the southern end of T2 was a layer of *opus signinum*, mortar and oyster shells at the bottom of the trench (Fig 3). This was on the same level as the floor (F1); it had been found during topsoil-stripping and therefore must be part of it (see section 6.1). Half-way along the trench at the same level as the *opus signinum* floor was F2, a layer of septaria (Roman building stone) and mortar running south-west to north-east. This is interpreted as the remains of a collapsed Roman wall.

### 6.3 Foundation to garden wall - October 2001

The excavations of footings for a boundary wall around the eastern and northern boundary of the property were monitored. Trenches were dug, 500mm wide and between 600mm and 770mm deep. A dark brown clayey sandy loam topsoil was observed; deeper down this became lighter in colour and less sandy. The layer extended to the bottom of the trench in most places and contained a small amount of Roman tile.

## 7 Discussion

- 7.1 An *opus signinum* Roman floor surface and a collapsed wall to a building were revealed by the groundworks between 400mm and 640mm below ground-level.
- 7.2 Sherds of Roman grey ware pottery were found in the service trenches.
- 7.3 The Roman features seen were limited to the front of the house. However, the house foundations were not monitored and therefore it is not known if these features extend to the east.

## 8 Archive deposition

A copy of this report, the digital photographs on disk and the finds will be deposited with Colchester Museum under accession code 2000.107.

## 9 Acknowledgements

The Colchester Archaeological Trust is grateful to the following for their co-operation at various stages during the project:

Martin Winter, Archaeological Officer for Colchester Borough Council  
Tim Snow Architects  
AHP Builders Ltd

## 10 References

- Brooks, H, 2000 Watching brief report for 24 Castle Road, CAT Report 94
- Cooper, J, 1994 *Victoria County History of Essex: Colchester* (vol 9)
- Crummy, P, 1992 *CAR 6*, Colchester Archaeological Report 6, *Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School and other sites in Colchester 1971-85*
- Hull, M R, 1958 *Roman Colchester*

Kate Orr, October 2001

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Checked by: Howard Brooks  
Date: 09.10.01



**Plate 1 F1, looking north-east.**

## Appendix 1: list of finds

All finds were discarded apart from the pottery.

Find bag no	Trench no	Description	Weight (g)	Date
1	2	animal bone	68	undated
1	2	concrete	166	modern
1	2	brick	101	modern
1	2	grey ware sherd	2	Roman
2	1	septaria stone	94	Roman
2	1	<i>opus signinum</i> and mortar	38	Roman
2	1	grey ware sherd	7	Roman
3	4	3 grey ware sherds including base of a BB2 Cam 37-type bowl	105	Roman - early 2nd to mid-late 3rd century
3	4	septaria stone	347	Roman
3	4	tile	88	Roman
4	garden wall	tile including part of an <i>imbrex</i> (roof-tile)	380	Roman

**Appendix 2: copy of the report Brooks 2000**



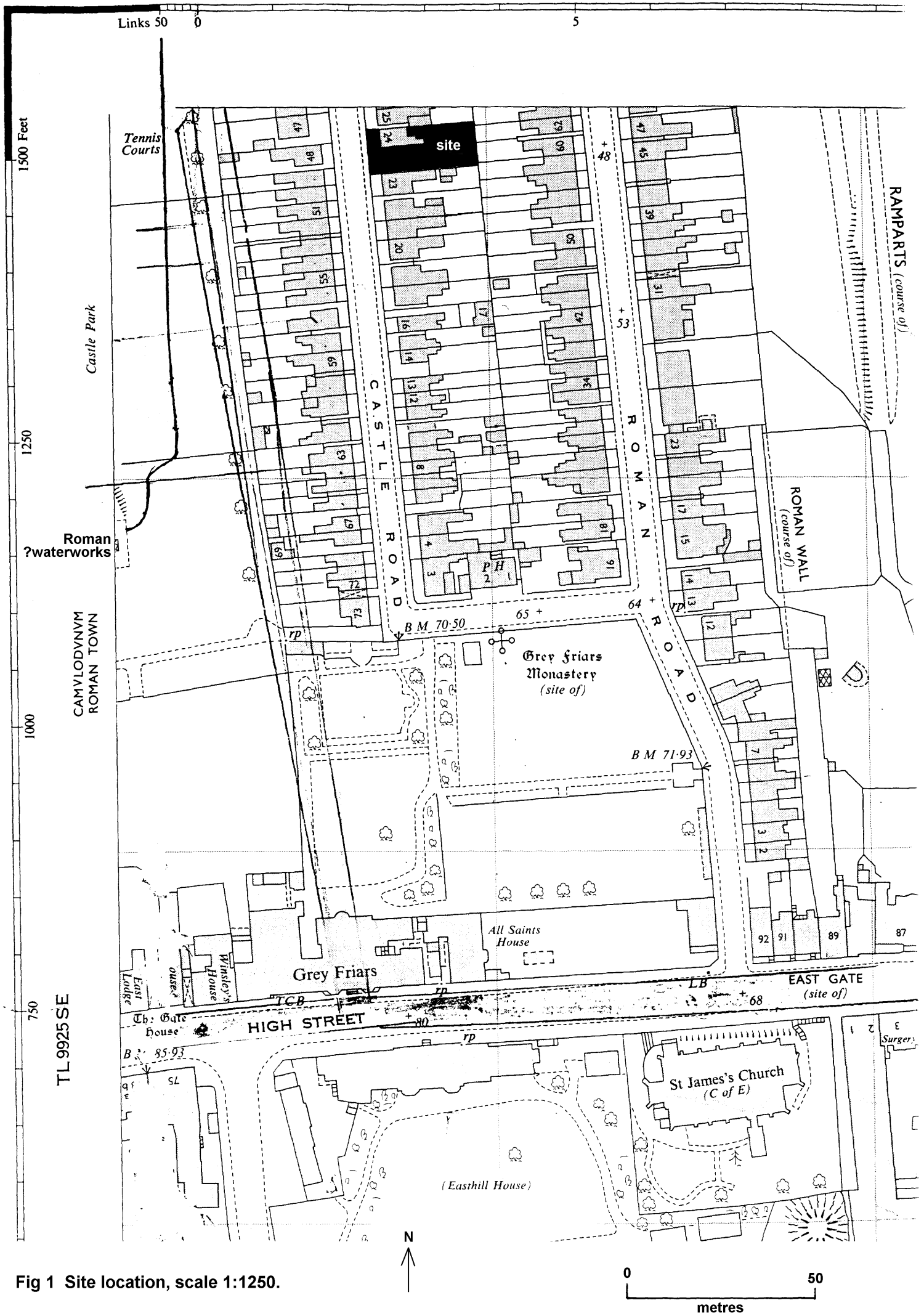


Fig 1 Site location, scale 1:1250.

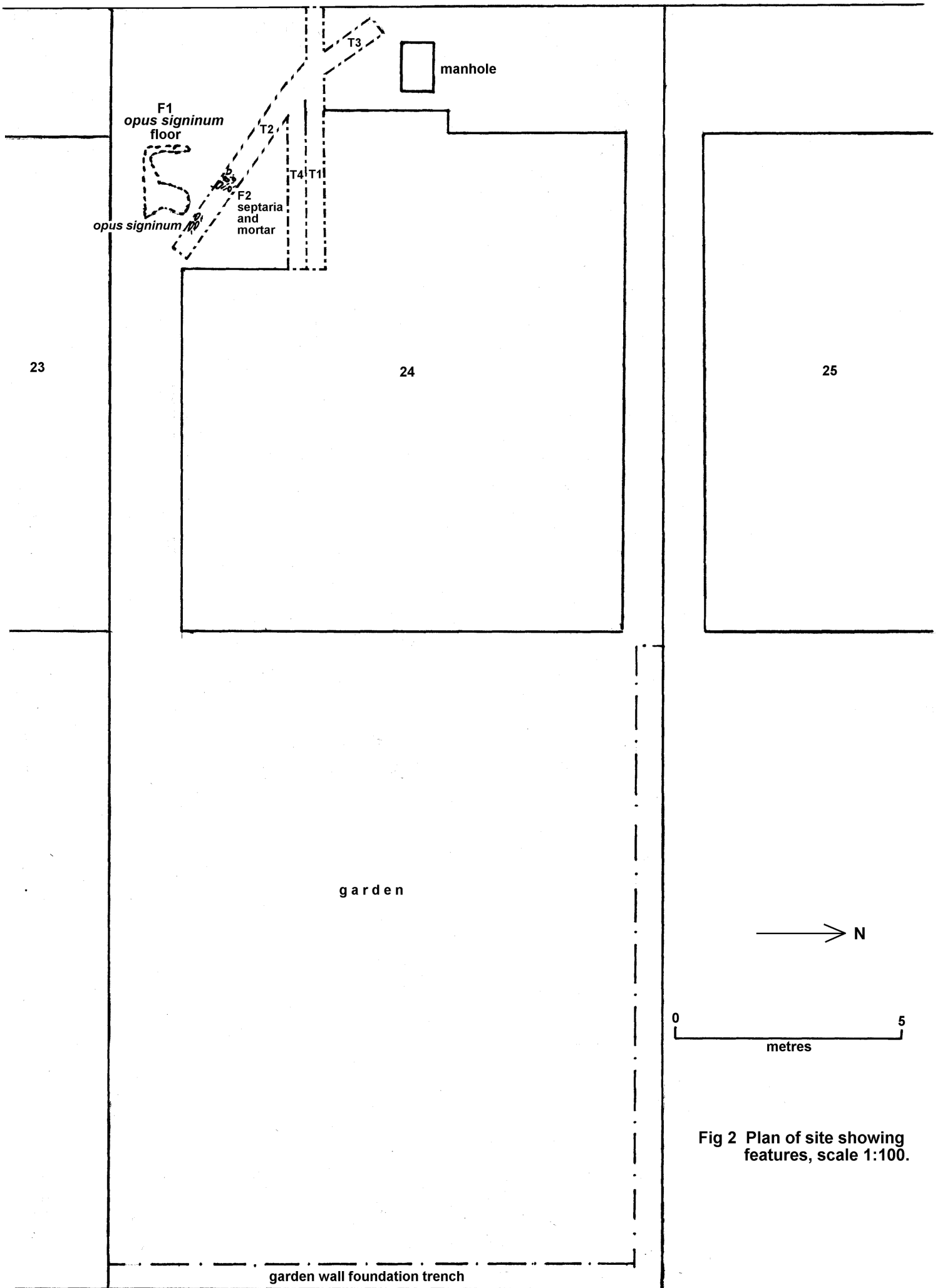


Fig 2 Plan of site showing features, scale 1:100.

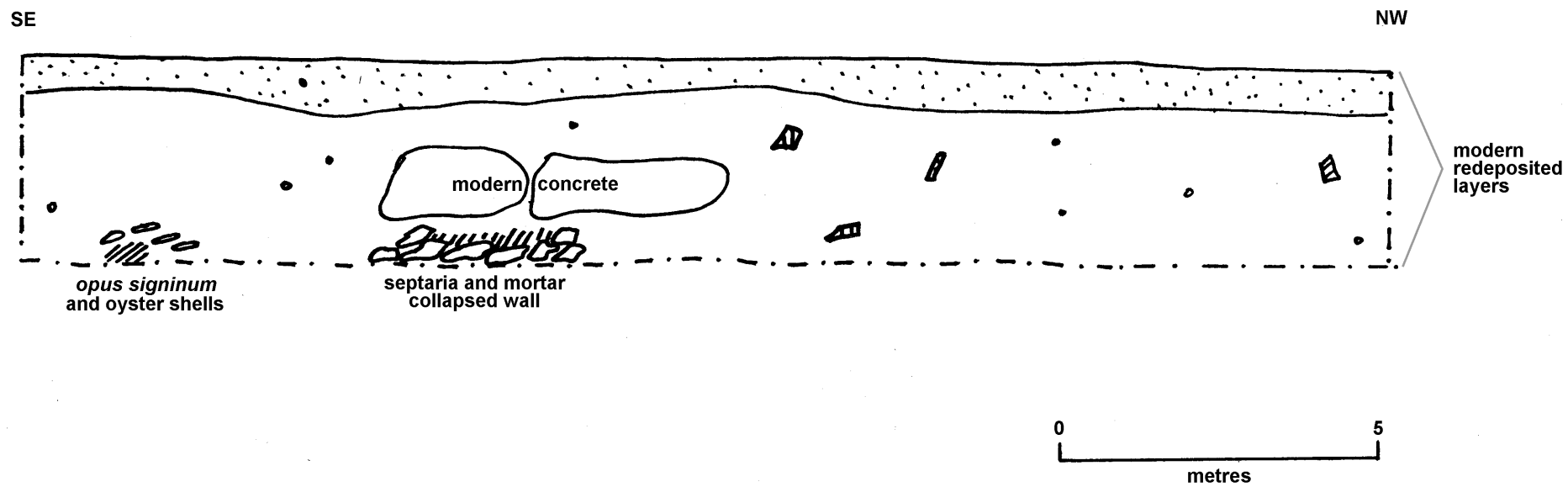


Fig 3 Section drawing of service trench T2, scale 1:20.

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

**Summary sheet**

<b>Site name/address:</b> 24 Castle Road, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester Borough
<b>NGR:</b> TM 0008 2548	<b>Site code:</b> 2000.107
<b>Type of work:</b> Watching brief	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> September 2000-October 2001	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> approx 30m x 12m
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester Museum	<b>Funding source:</b> Colchester Borough Council
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related EHCR nos:</b>
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 158 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods represented:</b> Roman	
<b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b>  The watching brief recorded Roman finds and features, including an <i>opus signinum</i> Roman floor surface and a collapsed wall to a building at the front of the house.	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> CAT report of boreholes at the same site 1999	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Kate Orr	<b>Date of summary:</b> October 2001