

**An archaeological
watching brief
at Simon's Lane,
Magdalen Street,
Colchester, Essex**

May-July 2001

**on behalf of
Higgins Homes Ltd**

NGR: TM 0044 2484
CAT project code: 01/5g
Planning application no: F/COL/00/1244
Colchester Museums accession code: 2001.103



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CAT Report 200
September 2002

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Essex Heritage Conservation Record summary sheet

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1 Summary

During the watching brief on groundworks for the road line and sewers at Simon's Lane, Magdalen Street, Colchester, Essex, no finds, features or deposits of archaeological significance were observed. The site's previous use as a coalyard and scrapyards had caused serious ground disturbance, and a large amount of modern rubbish was encountered in the top layers.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on a watching brief carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) for Higgins Homes Ltd on land at Simon's Lane to the north of Magdalen Street, Colchester, Essex in May-July 2002.
- 2.2 The site is located approximately 1km east of the town centre on the northern side of Magdalen Street and south of Simon's Lane, centred at National Grid Reference or NGR TM 0044 2484. It comprises a 1.5 hectare plot which was formerly used for the storage of coal and as a scrapyards. The land slopes down from south to north. Proposed work is for residential development with associated parking, garaging and landscaping (Fig 1). This is the subject of planning application F/COL/00/1244 which was given consent with a condition for an archaeological watching brief to be carried out.
- 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, updated 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996, updated 2002), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1999).

3 Archaeological background

- 3.1 Magdalen Street in the medieval period was the main route from the town centre to the port at the Hythe, with a continuous frontage of houses on both sides of the road. No previous archaeological discoveries have been recorded from the development area itself.
- 3.2 An Anglo-Saxon cruciform brooch, a stone mould and a medieval pilgrim's badge were found at the rear of the YMCA to the west of the site (Philip Wise and Richard Shackle pers comm).
- 3.3 Smashed Roman pottery and tile were found during a watching brief in Brook Street, on the northern side of the railway embankment (Brooklands, CAT project code 1994/7a).

4 Aims and objectives

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

5 Methods

- 5.1 The watching brief covered the digging of the storm sewer and foul sewer as well as some of the road-stripping. The foundations for the houses were not monitored due to the absence of finds on previously monitored areas of the site. Fieldwork was undertaken by Howard Brooks and Kate Orr.
- 5.2 The manholes for the sewers were dug to a depth of between 1.6m and 2.2m and the drains were dug to a lesser depth, but it was not usually possible to see to the bottom of the trenches due to shoring. It was not possible to enter the trenches after they had been dug.
- 5.3 The groundworks were carried out by the contractors using a mechanical excavator with a toothed ditching bucket.

- 5.4 A record was made of the areas monitored which has been reproduced as Figure 2.
- 5.5 Section drawings of layers were made at a scale of 1:10.
- 5.6 Spoil heaps were checked and a metal detector was also used to check the spoil heaps; however, due to the abundance of scrap metal in the topsoil, this proved to be of little value.

6 Results

6.1 The fieldwork

6.1.1 Clearance of scrap metal from the surface

On the 24th May 2002, a visit was made by Howard Brooks while concrete and scrap metal was being cleared off the site. Kate Orr monitored all subsequent work.

6.1.2 The foul sewers and manholes

On the 3rd July 2002, the groundworks for manhole F24 at the western end was monitored. They were dug to 2.2m depth and 3.3m width, although the actual cut for the pipe was 1m wide. Only the top 750mm was visible as the trench had already been shored up. 300mm of brick and concrete rubble overlaid 450mm of mottled yellow and dark brown sandy loam with modern brick flecks, stones and oystershells, clay bottles and metal scrap. Under this was natural yellow sand.

On the 9th July 2002, the area between F24 and F23 along the foul sewer-drain was monitored. The first 250mm consisted of modern asphalt, glass, brick and concrete rubble mixed with grey sandy silt. This overlaid 250mm of dark brown sandy silt, a modern made-up layer with rare charcoal and brick flecks and one clay pipe. Below this was a 200mm-thick layer of mid-brown sandy silt mottled with the darker layer above. This in turn sits on the natural orange brown sand at 700mm below ground-level.

6.1.3 The storm sewer and manholes

On the 13th July 2002, the western end of the storm sewer and a large manhole S5 was monitored. 850mm of dark sandy silty make-up with asphalt and modern brick was recorded overlying natural yellow sand and starting at 850mm below ground-level.

On the 17th July 2002, the storm sewer between the large manholes S4 and S5 was monitored. The soil profile was similar to before.

On the 18th July 2002, a visit was made to monitor the manhole S4 but it had already been filled in by the time of the visit.

On the 20th July 2002, a visit was made to monitor the storm sewer between S3 and S4 but it had already been filled in by the time of the visit.

On the 23rd July 2002, the large manhole S2 was monitored. It was dug to a depth of 1.6m. 560mm of dark brown sandy silt containing modern material overlaid 900mm of slightly lighter brown sandy silt mottled with yellow sand. This contained occasional flecks of tile but otherwise was undisturbed. Natural yellow sand and gravel was recorded at 1.45m below existing ground-level.

On the 24th July 2002, the storm sewer between manholes S1 and S2 was monitored. The same dark made-up layer containing modern rubbish was observed. Below this was a layer of yellow sand which was mottled with the darker silty sand down to about 950mm below ground-level. This layer contained a few flecks of charcoal and tile. Within this sand a layer of peg-tile was recorded near S1 on the north side of the trench, 950mm below ground-level. This spread extended for 1m horizontally and also contained one oystershell. Otherwise the layer seemed relatively undisturbed.

6.1.4 The road line

On the 27th and 30th July 2002, the hammerhead turning area of the new road was monitored after soil-stripping. The road was dug to 8m width. Between 400mm and 800mm was stripped off the existing ground-level. Topsoil with modern brick and glass and occasional pieces of modern china (Fabric 48D; fabric codes after Cotter 2000) was observed. These finds were not retained.

6.2 Finds

All finds were post-medieval or modern and most were unstratified. All finds have been discarded.

Table 1: List of finds by context.

Context	Weight in g	Description	Date
Storm sewer U/S, between manholes S1 and S2	179	fragments of peg-tile	post-medieval or modern
Storm sewer U/S, between manholes S1 and S2	43	1 oystershell	undated
Storm sewer U/S, near manhole S2	490	1 ceramic ginger beer bottle	19th century
Foul sewer U/S	639	1 green glass bottle, from 'Nicholl & Co Ltd, East Hill Brewery' (Colchester)	19th century
Foul sewer U/S	705	1 clear/greenish glass bottle, 'OT Ltd, London'	19th century
Foul sewer U/S	710	animal bones including pig, dog and cow	undated

7 Discussion and interpretation

The groundworks for the road line and sewers did not impact any archaeological deposits. The site's previous use as a coalyard and scrapyards had caused serious ground disturbance and a large amount of modern rubbish was encountered in the top layers. Natural ground was not reached till nearly a metre below existing ground level in most areas and up to nearly 1.5m in others. The intermediate layers all contained post-medieval peg-tile to a greater or lesser extent, which dates the layers no earlier than the medieval period. Except for peg-tile, there was no evidence of medieval activity, and Anglo-Saxon finds and features were also absent.

8 Acknowledgments

The Trust would like to thank Higgins Homes Ltd for funding the work. The project was monitored by Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council.

9 Glossary

context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity

10 Archive deposition

The paper archive is held at Colchester Archaeological Trust, 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but it will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2001.103.

11 Reference

Cotter, John P, 2000 *Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85, Colchester Archaeological Report 7*

Kate Orr, September 2002

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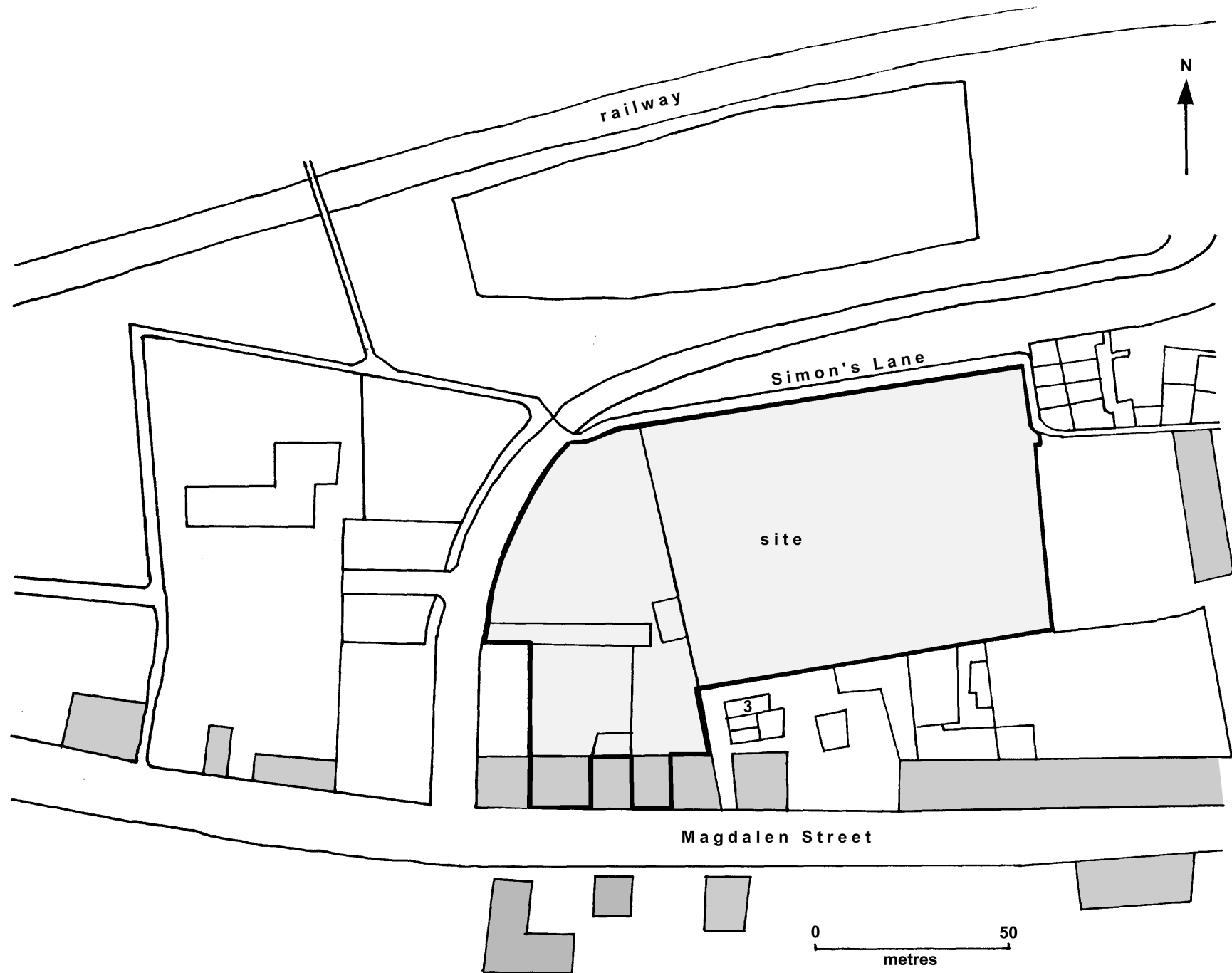


Fig 1 Site location.

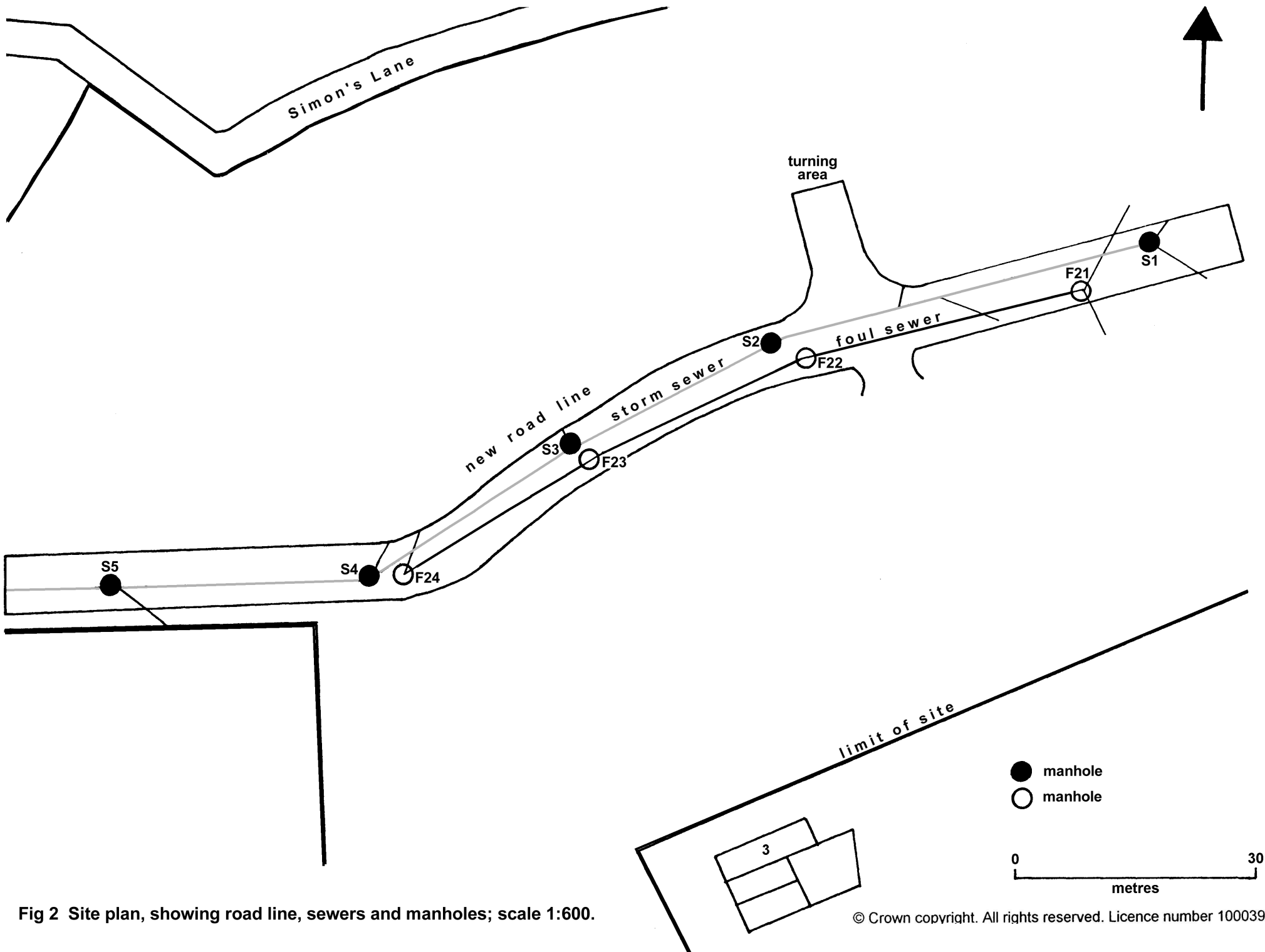


Fig 2 Site plan, showing road line, sewers and manholes; scale 1:600.

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

Summary sheet

Site name/address: land at Simon's Lane, Magdalen Street, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TM 0044 2484	Site code: 2001.103
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: May-July 2001	Size of area investigated:
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHCR nos:
Final report: CAT Report 200 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Modern	
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>During the watching brief on groundworks for the road-line and sewers at Simon's Lane, Magdalen Street, no finds, features or deposits of archaeological significance were observed. The site's previous use as a coalyard and scrapyards had caused serious ground disturbance, and a large amount of modern rubbish was encountered in the top layers.</i>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: September 2002