

**An archaeological watching brief
at the rear of
Mercantile House,
Sir Isaac's Walk/St John's Street,
Colchester, Essex**

June 2002

**on behalf of
Colchester Borough Council**

CAT project code: 02/6a
Colchester Museums accession code: 2002.119
NGR: TL 99575 24985



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CAT Report 202
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Fig 2 Site plan, showing features in lift-shaft pit; scale 1:20.

1 Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out during the digging of a trench for a lift-shaft at the rear of Mercantile House, Sir Isaac's Walk/St John's Street, Colchester, Essex, and part of a late medieval brick culvert and wall with buttress were observed. These constitute evidence of settlement in the area at this time.

2 Introduction

2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on the 19th and 24th June 2002 on behalf of Colchester Borough Council. The site is located in the town centre to the rear of Mercantile House (Sir Isaac's Walk), at the western end of Centurion House (29-30 St John's Street). The site is centred on NGR TL 99575 24985 (Fig 1).

2.2 The watching brief was necessitated by the digging of a lift-shaft for use by the shops in Centurion House.

2.3 This report mirrors standards and practices contained in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines for the standards and practice of archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1999) 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 (Fig 2)

The site of the lift-shaft is about 25m south of the town wall and about 10m south of the sites of the defensive ditches of the Roman legionary fortress and later Roman and medieval towns. It lies on St John's Street, in an area likely to have been occupied by houses and gardens since the 14th century if not before (VCH, 250).

4 Aim

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

5 Methods

The site work was carried out by Howard Brooks and Kate Orr CAT. Stairs down from the Sir Isaac's Walk side of the building to the St John's Street level were removed and the lift-shaft pit was dug below. The site was accessed from St John's Street. Two visits were made and a sketch plan of features was made. Finds were retrieved.

6 Results

6.1 The first visit was made after some of the concrete floor surface and underlying brick rubble had been removed to a depth of 1m below ground-level for the lift-shaft. A 'hole' in the ground lined with bricks was observed which is thought to be a culvert. The contractors then took off the remaining concrete and brick rubble to the east of the culvert to see in which direction it lay. A second visit was made to the site. No evidence of the culvert was found but a brick wall with a buttress was exposed on the eastern side of the lift-shaft trench. The bricks to both features were 45mm thick and 105mm wide, which makes them likely to be 15th or 16th century.

6.2 One base of a stoneware vessel with a leg and one glazed stoneware body sherd were found by contractors and placed to one side. Both were modern (Fabric 45M) and unstratified (fabrics after Cotter 2000).

- 6.3 Neither the Roman town ditch or later Roman buildings and streets were exposed by the groundworks.

7 Discussion and interpretation

- 7.1 The wall and culvert which were observed during the watching brief are probably associated with a 15th- or 16th-century house. Speed's map of 1610, which is the earliest known map of Colchester, shows a row of buildings outside the town wall in this area. Presumably one of these buildings had a water supply which incorporated the culvert.
- 7.2 There was no evidence of any earlier remains of archaeological significance.

8 Acknowledgments

The Colchester Archaeological Trust would like to thank Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council, who monitored the project, and contractors Tending Construction Ltd for their assistance on site. The project was commissioned and funded by Colchester Borough Council.

9 References

- Cotter, J, 2000 *Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-1985*, Colchester Archaeological Report 7
- VCH *Victoria County History of Essex: Colchester, IX*, ed by Janet Cooper, 1984

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 2002.119

Kate Orr, August 2002

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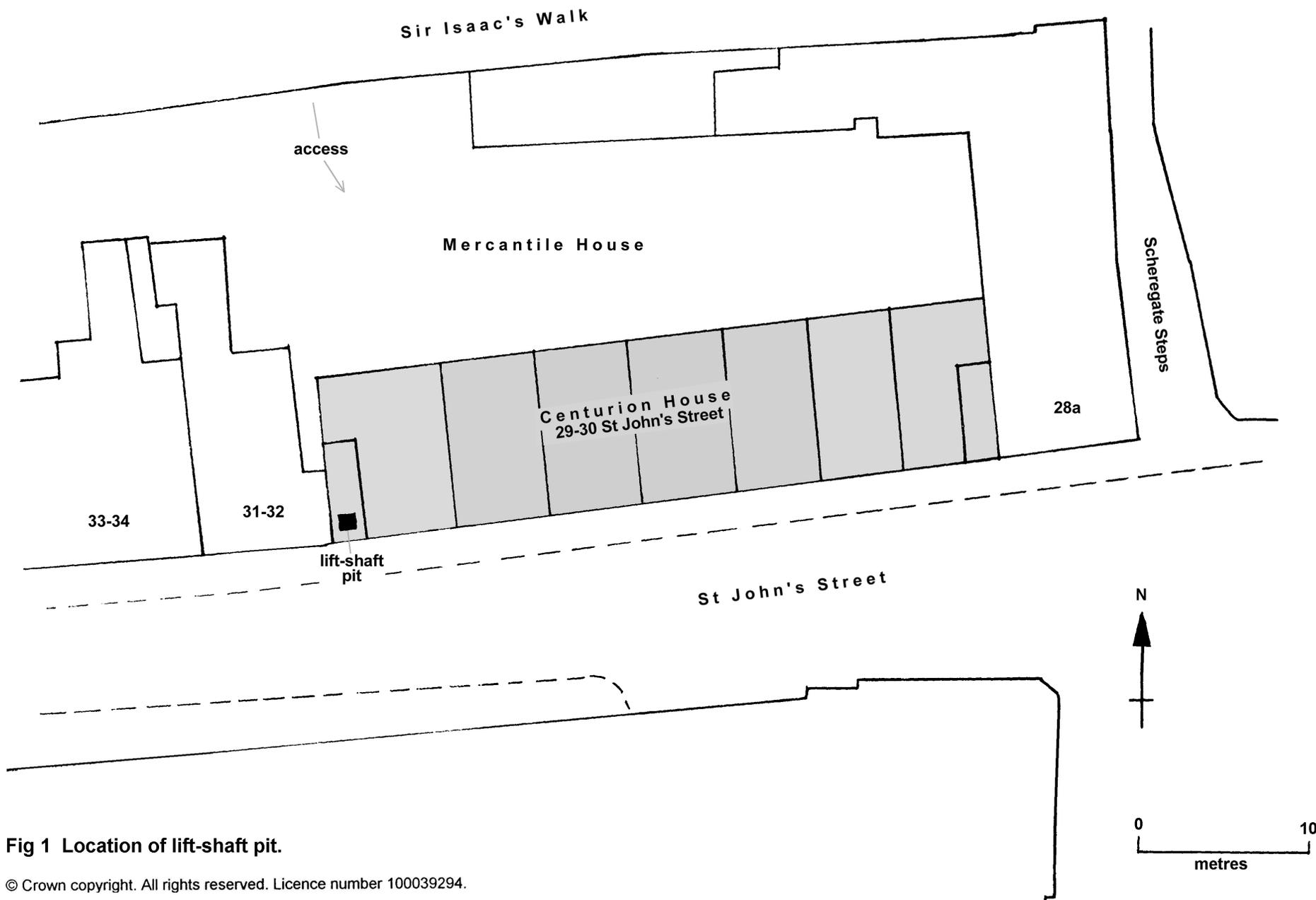
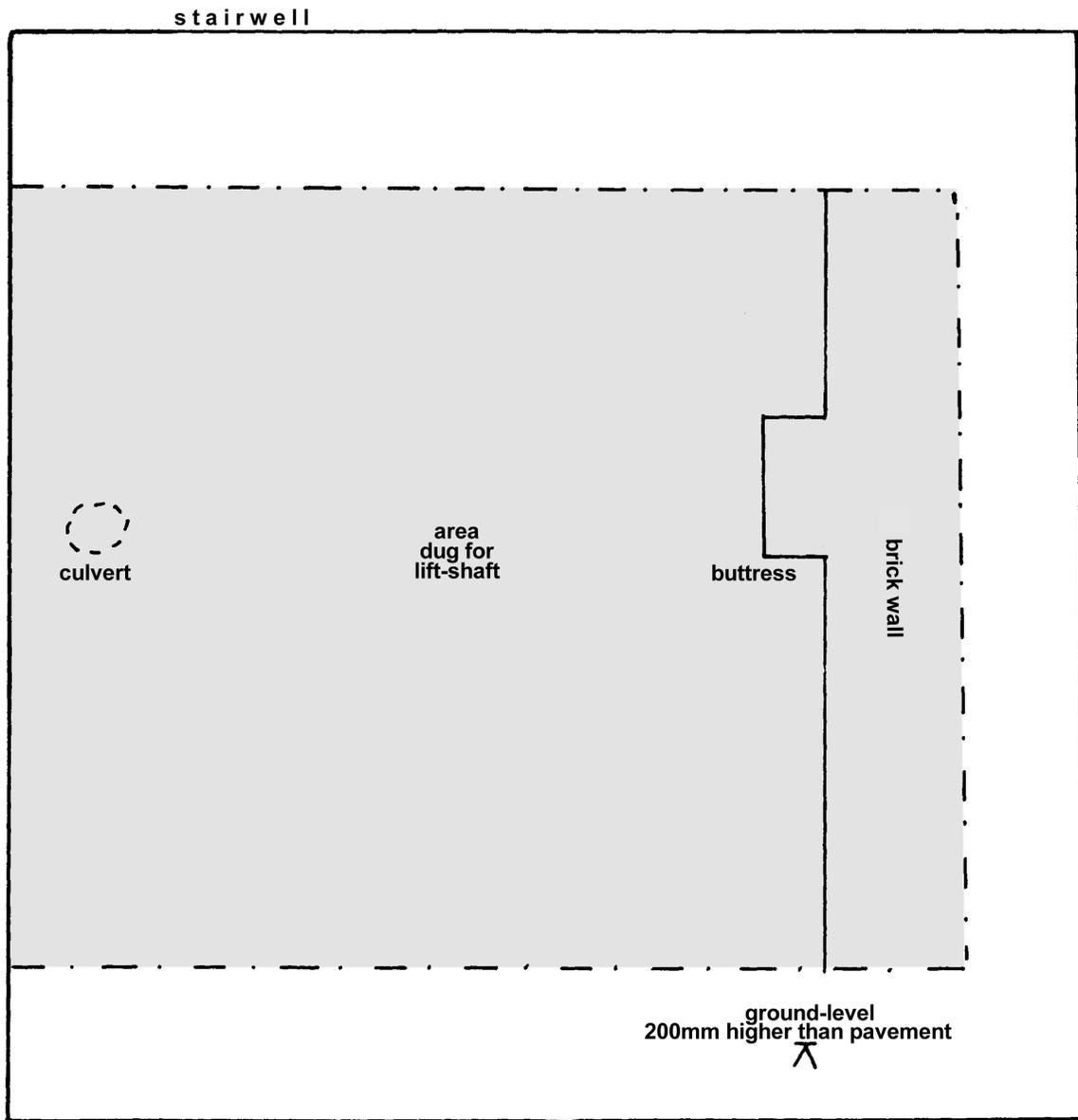


Fig 1 Location of lift-shaft pit.



St John's Street pavement



Fig 2 Site plan, showing features in lift-shaft pit; scale 1:20.

Essex Heritage Conservation Record/ *Essex Archaeology and History*

Summary sheet

Site address: rear of Mercantile House, Sir Isaac's Walk/St John's Street, Colchester, Essex.	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 9975 2485	Site code: Museum accession code 2002.119
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: June 2002	Size of area investigated: approximately 3m x 3m
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Colchester Borough Council
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHCR nos:
Final report: CAT Report 202 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: late medieval	
Summary of fieldwork results: An archaeological watching brief was carried out during the digging of a trench for a lift-shaft, and part of a late medieval brick culvert and wall with buttress were observed. These constitute evidence of settlement in the area at this time.	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: August 2002