

**An archaeological watching brief  
on a gas-pipeline trench  
along East Stockwell Street,  
Colchester, Essex  
September-November 2003**

**report prepared by  
Kate Orr**

**on behalf of  
Transco plc**

CAT project code: 03/8a  
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**Colchester Archaeological Trust**  
12 Lexden Road,  
Colchester,  
Essex CO3 3NF

*tel.:* (01206) 541051  
*tel./fax:* (01206) 500124  
*email:* [archaeologists@catuk.org](mailto:archaeologists@catuk.org)

**CAT Report 253**  
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## 1 Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out along the road line of East Stockwell Street, Colchester, Essex during trenching for the replacement of the gas main. The ground had been disturbed by the existing gas main and other services. However, near William's Walk, a wide robber trench was recorded extending east to west and filled by Roman building material. This had been dug to remove a wall foundation of a large Roman building. In one of the northernmost trenches, two mortar layers appear to represent floor bases from two phases of a Roman building.

## 2 Introduction (Figs 1 & 3)

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief carried out on service trenches which were dug for the replacing of a gas main, along the road line of East Stockwell Street, Colchester, Essex (see Fig 1). Seventeen small trenches (Trenches 1-18 or T1-T18, but no Trench 9) were dug along the roadway from the junction with the High Street (NGR TL 9978 2524), 230m north to 20 Stockwell (TL 9966 2545). The total trench length dug was approximately 50m and most of the trenches were subject to an archaeological watching brief.
- 2.2 The work was undertaken by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) from the 23rd September to the 11th November 2003 on behalf of Transco plc. The project was carried out according to the brief set out by Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council.
- 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 (Fig 2)

- 3.1 The gas-pipeline trenches were excavated along East Stockwell Street at the centre of the historic walled town. All trenches were in East Stockwell Street with one extending into Stockwell at the north end of the pipeline and one extending into the High Street at the south end.
- 3.2 The site lies within what was the Roman legionary fortress; however, nothing in this area has been found relating to its military usage. The line of the fortress ditch is believed to extend from east to west at the northern end of the new gas pipeline. When the fortress was converted to a *colonia*, streets were laid out on a grid system enclosing areas called *insulae*. The new gas-pipeline bisects Insulas 4, 12 and 20 of the Roman town. Mosaics, walls and tessellated pavements to Roman buildings have been recorded along East Stockwell Street (*CAR 9*, 8-15). Most of these buildings would have fronted onto the main east to west Roman street which is roughly in line with the High Street. Two other Roman streets extend east-west across the path of the gas-pipeline. A section of one of these streets was exposed in an excavation of 1964 (Dunnett 1971, 38-42; see Fig 1).
- 3.3 An excavation was carried out in 1989-90 by CAT on the eastern side of East Stockwell Street. Evidence for early Roman occupation was recorded, principally a wall of early colonial date. In the mid 2nd century AD, the levels of the site were raised to match that of the southern end of the *insula*, creating a level platform for a large public building of uncertain purpose, but possibly a public bath-house. Later Roman floor-levels were recorded at 350mm below modern ground-level and foundations at 2.5m (Benfield & Garrod 1992, 25-33).

- 3.4** It is known that East Stockwell Street was laid out in the Middle Ages, and does not follow the Roman street pattern (CAR 1, 49-52). A property known as 'The Gables', on the eastern side of East Stockwell Street, contains a north-south rubble wall and is likely to have been built on the site of an early medieval stone house, in the construction of which were re-used Roman building materials (CAR 1, 53 & 69). There is some evidence to suggest that Jews were living in the Stockwell area in this period (CAR 1, 69).
- 3.5** A number of the properties in this street are late medieval in date.

## **4 Aim**

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

## **5 Methodology (Fig 3)**

- 5.1** Seventeen trenches of variable sizes and depths were dug by contractors between the High Street and Stockwell to expose the joins of the existing gas main. A new pipe was then inserted into the existing pipe and pushed through.
- 5.2** The trenches were dug by contractors using a mechanical excavator with a toothed bucket along the pedestrianised road line of East Stockwell Street and into Stockwell and the pavement of the High Street. Intermittent monitoring visits were made.
- 5.3** The width of the trenches varied from 380mm to 900mm and the lengths were between 900mm and 7.9m. The trenches were dug to between 500mm and 1.35m deep.
- 5.4** Individual records of excavated contexts, layers, features and deposits were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets.
- 5.5** Section drawings showing features and layers were made at a scale of 1:10. Plans of features were not made due to the fact that the bases of the trenches were obscured by the existing gas main.
- 5.6** A photographic record was kept consisting of general site shots using a transparency camera and digital camera and shots of all archaeological features using a digital camera, all in colour.
- 5.7** Finds were registered on CAT record sheets and assigned find numbers and small find numbers according to context. Finds were washed, marked and bagged according to context.

## **6 Results**

**Trench 1** – outside nos 45-46 East Stockwell Street

7.9m x 700mm, 1.1m deep

Modern services crossed the trench at its southern end; however, the following soil profile was recorded in the northern part of the trench:

- L1 – tarmac and modern stone blocks of the road
- L7 – 280-360mm of compacted greyish brown silty sand with abundant small stones, mortar flecks, tile flecks, charcoal flecks and burnt tile
- L3 – 350mm of brown sandy silt with a few fragments of Roman tile, possibly an early medieval accumulation layer.

Feature or F1 was a wide robber trench, sealed by Layer or L7. F1 was filled with L3-type material and abundant mortar, *opus signinum*, Roman tile, septaria and rare Roman pottery. The robber trench was seen to be cutting through L3 to the north but was cut by a deep service trench to the south (F5). The robber trench appeared to be at least 3m wide. It was only seen in the west-facing section of the trench. To the south it

had been cut away by the existing gas-pipeline trench and a brick sewer. The feature is likely to extend further down, beyond the limit of excavation (Fig 4).

A copper-alloy coin was reportedly found by the contractors at the bottom of the northern half of the trench. Presumably this came from F1 (find no 2 is SF 2).

**Trench 2** – opposite no 2 East Stockwell Street and outside the Hippodrome

3.3m x 400mm, 900mm deep

The following soil profile was observed:

L1 – 50mm brick paving of modern pedestrianised road

L2 – 400mm concrete

L3 – 400-450mm brown sandy silt with a few fragments of Roman tile

There were no features recorded in this trench and, apart from the existing gas main, it was undisturbed by services.

**Trench 3** – opposite no 1 East Stockwell Street and outside the Hippodrome

1m x 850mm, 1.35m deep

The following soil profile was observed:

L1 – 50mm of brick road paving

L2 – 350mm of concrete

L3 – mid brown sandy silt with some occasional Roman tile

No features were recorded in this trench and, apart from the existing gas main, it was undisturbed by services.

**Trench 4** – outside the Hippodrome

1.05m x 500mm, 850mm deep

No features were recorded in this trench and the soil profile was identical to that of Trench 3.

**Trench 5** – opposite side of no 125 High Street and outside the Lamb Public House

1.1m x 650mm, 1.2m deep

The following soil profile was observed:

L1 – 50mm of brick paving

L2 – 350mm concrete

L3 – mid brown sandy silt

A brick inspection chamber or sewer (bricks 55mm thick) was seen in both east and west-facing sections, beneath L2.

**Trench 6** – opposite side of no 125 High Street and outside the Lamb Public House

900mm x 750mm, 1.1m depth

The following soil profile was observed:

L1 – 50mm of brick paving

L2 – 350mm of concrete

L3 – 500mm mid brown sandy silt

L8 – dark brown clayey silt ?Roman layer with oyster shells

One copper-alloy fitting (find no 1 is SF 1) was found within L8, 1m below modern ground-level.

**Trench 7** – end of East Stockwell Street and in the pavement of the High Street

10m x 500mm, between 900mm and 1.05m deep

The ground here had been very disturbed by modern pipes and therefore it was not possible to observe very much, but it appeared to have a similar soil profile to Trench 3.

**Trench 8 and Trench 10** – at the corner of East Stockwell Street and William's Walk  
Two small trenches between 1m and 1.5m long each were excavated. These trenches were filled in before they were seen by a CAT archaeologist but the contractors reported that the soil profile was similar to Trenches 2-5.

**Trench 11** – opposite no 12 East Stockwell Street and outside nos 39-42 East Stockwell Street

This long trench was filled in before it was seen by a CAT archaeologist.

**Trench 12** – outside nos 31-37 East Stockwell Street, on the corner of St Helen's Lane  
6.4m x 500mm, between 800mm and 1m deep

The following soil profile was observed:

L1 – 100mm of paving blocks

L2 – 200mm of concrete with pinkish red rough-cut modern stone at the southern end

L3 – mid brown silty sand with flecks of charcoal plus *opus signinum* and brick.

This trench had three pipe trenches running across it in an east to west direction (F2, F3 and F4).

**Trench 13** – outside nos 29-30 East Stockwell Street

1.2m x 700mm, between 500mm and 800mm deep

The following soil profile was observed:

L5 – 150mm of tarmac road surface

L3 – mid brown sandy silt

No features were recorded in this trench.

**Trench 14** – outside no 30 East Stockwell Street

1m x 1m

This trench was filled in before it was seen by a CAT archaeologist.

**Trench 15** – outside nos 28a-29 East Stockwell Street

600mm x 380mm, 620mm deep

The following soil profile was observed:

L5 – 100mm of tarmac

L2 – 300mm of concrete

L3 – mid brown sandy silt

No features were observed in this trench.

**Trench 16** – outside no 28 East Stockwell Street

1.7m x 600mm, 700mm deep

The following soil profile was observed:

L5 – 100mm of tarmac

L2 – 200mm of concrete and stone cobbles

L4 – modern pipe backfill; mixed yellow brown and grey brown silty sand with frequent small rounded stones and some loose tarmac.

**Trench 17** – corner of Stockwell and East Stockwell Street

1.7m x 500mm, 500mm deep

The following soil profile was observed:

L5 – 100mm of tarmac

L4 – modern pipe backfill material with modern brick fragments.

**Trench 18** – opposite no 18 East Stockwell Street, near the corner of Stockwell

5.4m x 900mm, between 700mm and 1.1m deep

The following soil profile was observed in the northern part of the trench:

L5 – 100mm of tarmac  
 L2 – 150-175mm of concrete  
 L11 – underlying the tarmac (L5) was a layer of mid brown loam with yellow/orange sand and densely-packed stones 4-5cm in size. This layer, which was 120-200mm thick, may have been a gravel surface. L11 is post-Roman but otherwise not datable.

Underlying L11, a series of thin horizontal sandy loam layers were recorded (L12-L20). In between these deposits, at 400mm and 850mm below modern ground-level, were two thin layers of mortar (L9 and L10). It is probable that these represent two Roman floor bases from two different building phases, with occupation or accumulation layers in between (Fig 4).

A brick inspection chamber (F6) was seen in the east-facing section only, cutting L11-L15 and L9.

An old gas pipe extended along the west-facing section.

## 7 Finds

### 7.1 Table 1: list of finds.

Find no	Small find no	Trench no and context	Weight in g	Description
1	SF 1	T1, L8		Copper-alloy fitting
2	SF 2	T1, F1		Copper-alloy coin
3		T18, U/S	10	Fragment of clay-pipe stem with base of bowl
4		T18, U/S - 400mm below modern ground-level	35	Animal bone fragments, with butchering marks

### 7.2 The small finds

by N Crummy

SF 2. (2) F1. Trench 1. Fragment of a copper-alloy/base silver *antoninianus* of Probus (AD 276-282), diameter 22 mm, weight 2.06 g. Reverse of Pax Aug, as RIC V.II (1933) no 178.

SF 1. (1) L8. Trench 6. Fragmentary remains of a copper-alloy/base silver low convex fitting. A small notch on the edge suggests that this is neither a boss, nor, reversed, a scale pan for use with a balance. It may be the lid of a small box, pivoting on a tiny hinge bar, as Egan 1998, figs 141-2. Date uncertain, but the alloy suggests it belongs to the Roman period.

## 8 Discussion

In Trench 1, a wide robber trench (F1) was recorded extending east to west, and containing Roman building material. This feature is likely to be another robbed-out wall of the Roman public building which was recorded by CAT in 1989 (Benfield & Garrod 1992, pp 25-33). The average width of the robber trenches recorded in the 1989 excavation was 2.5m.

Two mortar layers in Trench 18 (L9 and L10) appear to be floor bases from two phases of a Roman building. They are separated by 400mm of demolition debris and make-up layers.

A densely-packed layer of stones (L11) in Trench 18, immediately under the tarmac, may be a gravel surface of post-Roman date.

Some of the trenches were not excavated to a great enough depth to impact Roman remains. There had also been much disturbance from the gas-main and other services. There was no evidence for a Roman street. This may be for the reasons stated above or perhaps the trenches were not sited in the right places to intercept such a feature.

## 9 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is held by CAT at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex, but will be deposited permanently with Colchester Museums under the accession code 2003.211.

## 10 Acknowledgements

The Colchester Archaeological Trust would like to thank Transco plc for commissioning and funding the work. Site work was carried out by Kate Orr and Karly Weller of CAT.

## 11 References

- |                            |                    |  |
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| Colchester Borough Council | 1999, updated 2002 | <i>Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i>   |
| CAR 1                      | 1981               | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 1, Aspects of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Colchester</i> , by P Crummy  |
| CAR 6                      | 1992               | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 6, Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School, and other sites in Colchester, 1971-85</i> , by P Crummy                            |
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| Egan, G,                   | 1998               | <i>The medieval household</i> , Medieval finds from excavations in London, <b>6</b>  |
| IFA                        | 1999               | <i>Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief</i>  |

## 12 Site data

Context	Trench no	Description	Date
F1	T1	Robbed-out Roman wall foundation filled by mid brown sandy silt and abundant mortar, <i>opus signinum</i> , Roman tile, septaria and rare Roman pottery	?medieval robbing of Roman wall
F2	T12	Cut for pipeline trench filled by sandy loam with brick and tarmac	modern
F3	T12	Cut for pipeline trench filled by greyish yellow sand	modern
F4	T12	Cut for pipeline trench filled by sand, brick and tarmac	modern
F5	T1	Large cut for ceramic drain, cuts F1	modern
F6	T18	Brick inspection chamber or sewer in east-facing section of trench	modern
L1	most trenches	Stone cobbles or brick paving; surface to road	modern
L2	various trenches	Concrete sub-base to road	modern
L3	various trenches	Accumulation layer of mid brown sandy silt with occasional fragments of Roman tile	?medieval
L4	T16	Backfill cut for pipeline trench; mixed yellow brown and grey brown silty sand with frequent small rounded stones and some loose tarmac	modern
L5	various trenches	Tarmac road surface	modern
L6	T18	Light-mid brown sandy loam with abundant small stones and common brick and oyster shell fragments	undated
L7	T1	Compacted greyish brown silty sand with abundant small stones, mortar flecks, tile flecks, burnt Roman brick and charcoal flecks; seals F1	post-medieval
L8	T6	Dark brown clayey silt with frequent oyster shells: shells-accumulation layer	?Roman
L9	T18	Thin layer of pale yellow mortar; floor surface	Roman
L10	T18	Very compact brownish black sandy loam with abundant mortar; floor surface	Roman
L11	T18	Mid brown loam with yellow-orange sand and densely packed stones; a gravel surface	post-Roman
L12	T18	Dark brown sandy loam with abundant stones and brick fragments	post-Roman
L13	T18	Orange sand and gravel	post-Roman
L14	T18	Blackish brown sandy loam with common small stones and occasional brick fragments	Roman or post-Roman
L15	T18	Mid reddish brown sandy loam mixed with abundant brick fragments; make-up layer for floor (L9)?	Roman
L16	T18	Dark brown sandy loam with flecks of oyster shell, brick and common small stones; make-up layer for floor (L9)?	Roman

L17	T18	Light brown sandy loam with oyster shells, brick and mortar fragments; demolition debris?	Roman
L18	T18	Mid brown sandy loam and small stones, with oyster shells, brick and charcoal flecks; demolition debris?	Roman
L19	T18	Dark brown sandy loam with oyster shells, brick, charcoal, mortar flecks and stones; seals L10 - demolition debris?	Roman
L20	T18	Very compact black sandy loam with occasional mortar and common stones; floor under L10?	Roman

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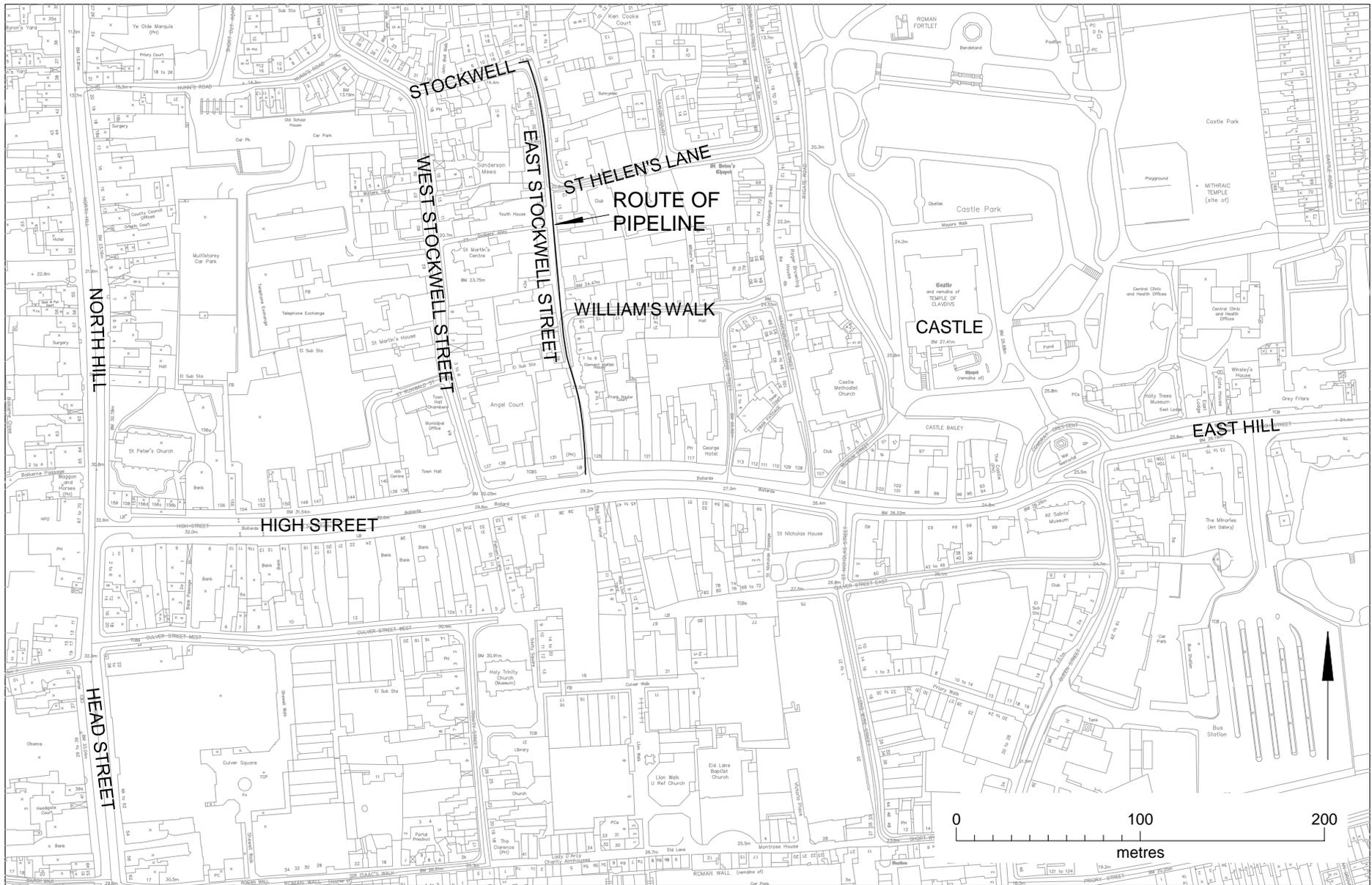


**Colchester Archaeological Trust**

12 Lexden Road,  
Colchester,  
Essex CO3 3NF

tel.: (01206) 541051  
tel./fax: (01206) 500124  
email: [archaeologists@catuk.org](mailto:archaeologists@catuk.org)

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Date: 02.02.04



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Fig 1 Site location.

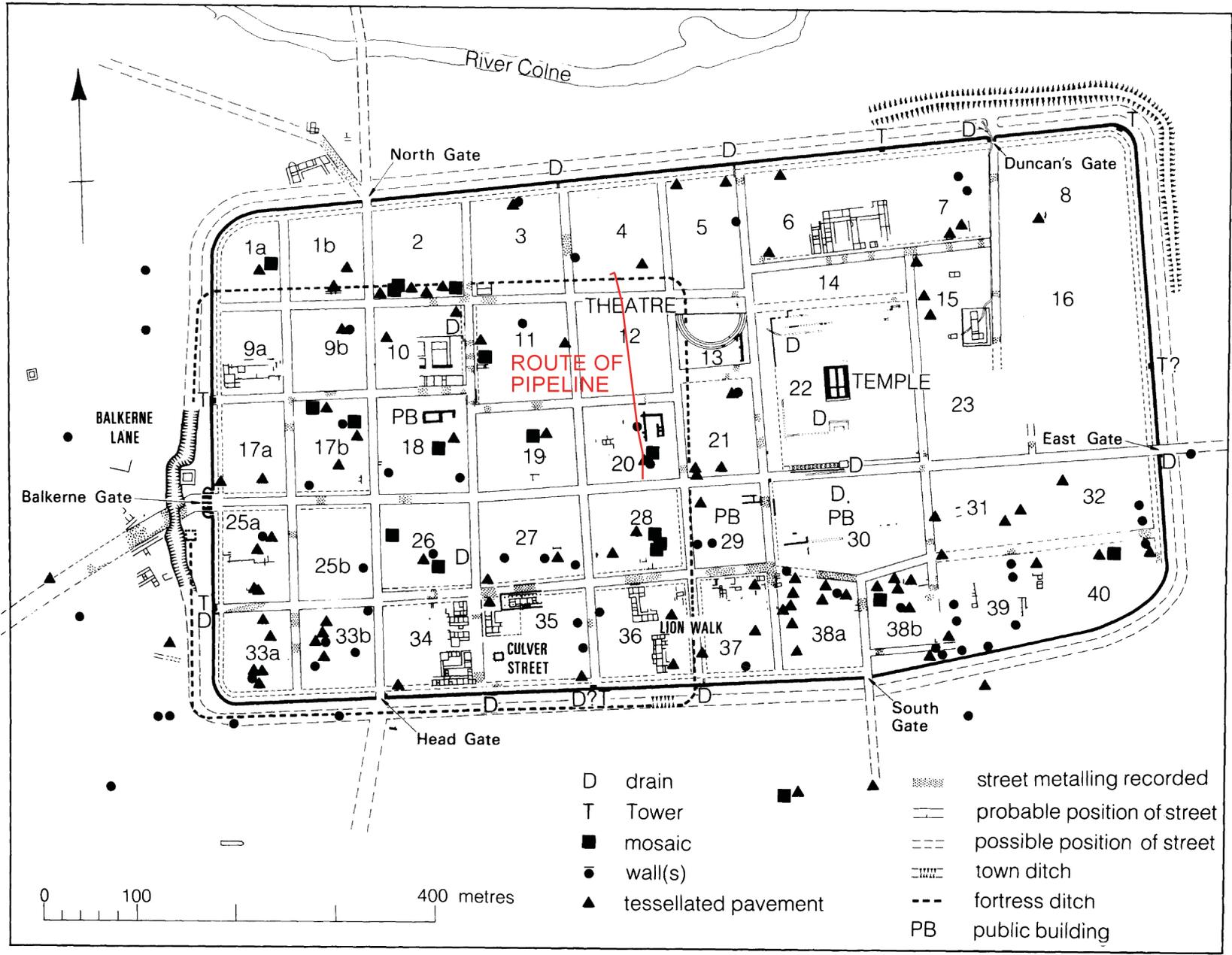


Fig 2 Roman Colchester in the 3rd and 4th centuries, showing the line of the new gas pipeline (adapted from CAR 6, fig 2.9).

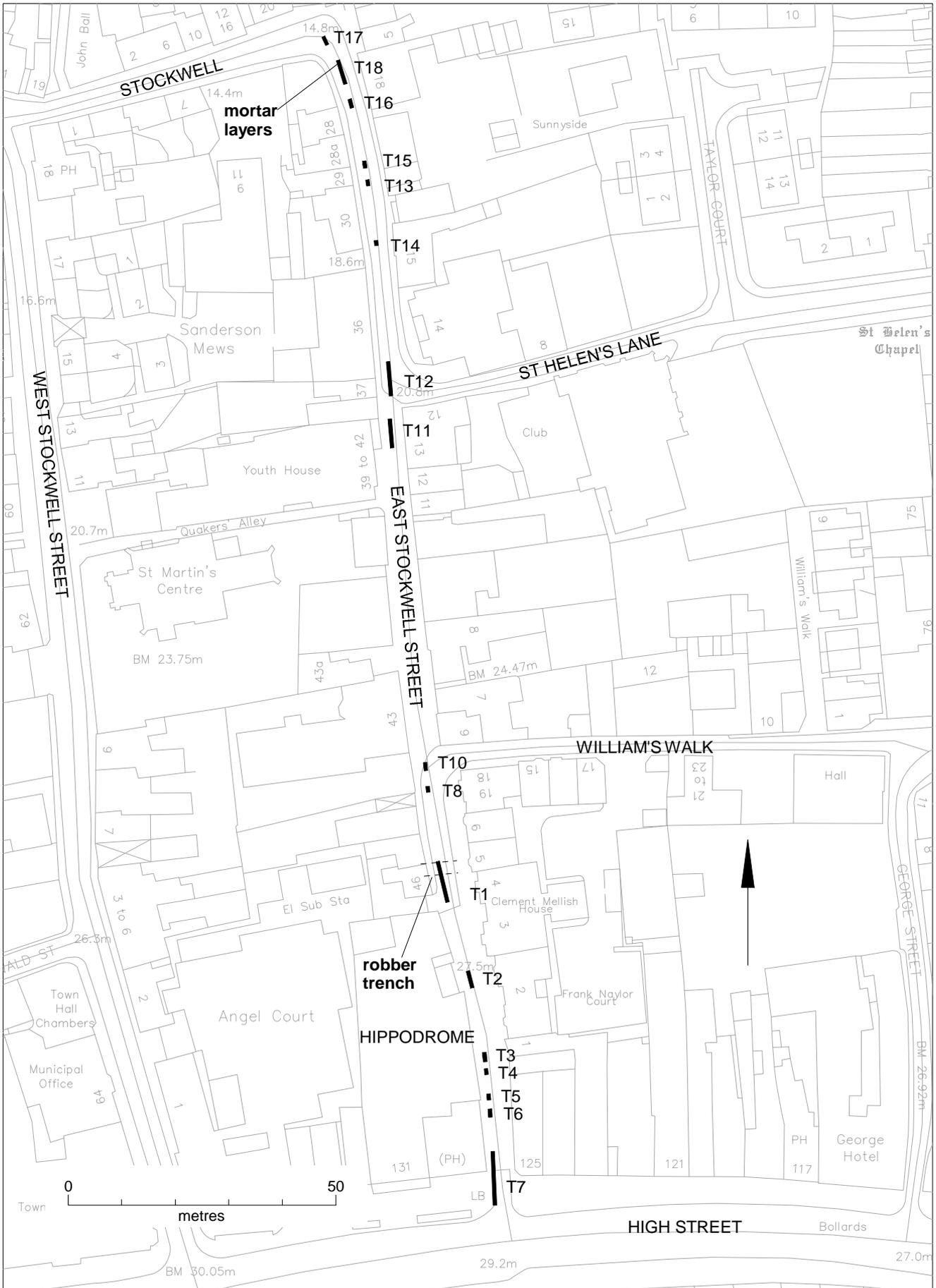
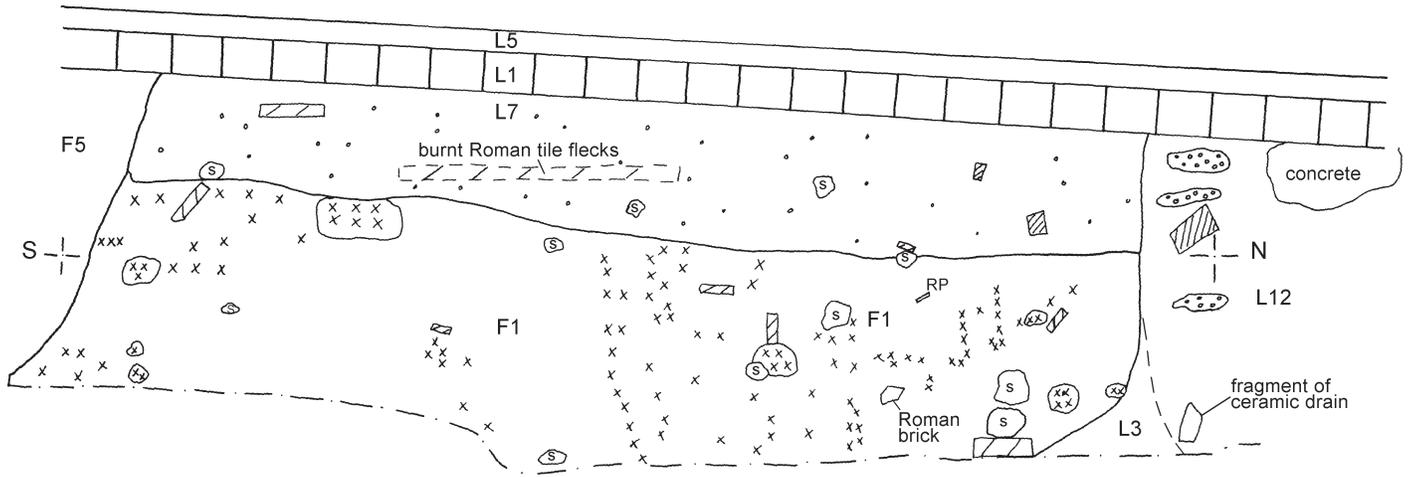


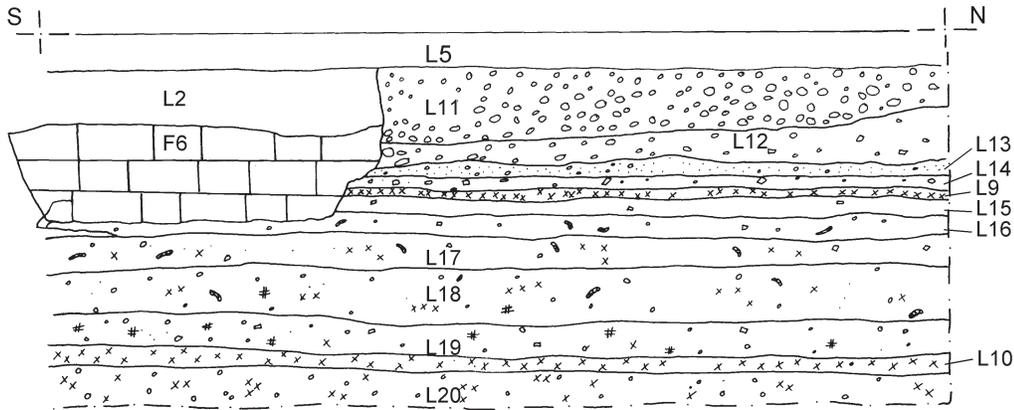
Fig 3 Location of gas-pipeline trenches.

east-facing section of F1, Trench 1



- Key:
- |                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| asphalt          | Roman pot                              |
| Roman tile/brick | pieces of mortar/ <i>opus signinum</i> |
| modern brick     | block of mortar/ <i>opus signinum</i>  |
| septaria         | stones                                 |

east-facing section of the northern half of Trench 18



- Key:
- |        |          |
|--------|----------|
| stones | charcoal |
| brick  | oyster   |
| mortar | sand     |

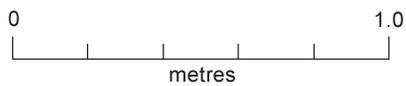


Fig 4 Trench 1: F1 - east-facing section (top), and Trench 18: east-facing section of northern half (bottom).

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

## Summary sheet

<b>Site name/address:</b> a gas-pipeline trench along East Stockwell Street, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester
<b>NGR:</b> TL 9978 2524-TL 9966 2545 (c)	<b>Site code:</b> Colchester Museums accession code 2003.211
<b>Type of work:</b> Watching brief	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> September-November 2003	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> Total of 50m of trenching
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Transco plc
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related EHCR nos:</b>
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 253 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods represented:</b> Roman, modern	
<b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b> An archaeological watching brief was carried out along the road line of East Stockwell Street, Colchester, Essex during trenching for the replacement of the gas main. The ground had been disturbed by the existing gas main and other services. However, near William's Walk, a wide robber trench was recorded extending east to west and filled by Roman building material. This robber trench had been dug to remove a wall foundation of a large Roman building. In one of the northernmost trenches, two mortar layers appear to represent floor bases from two phases of a Roman building.	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> None	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Kate Orr	<b>Date of summary:</b> February 2004