

**An archaeological watching brief  
on a replacement gas-main  
in St Botolph's Street,  
Colchester, Essex  
September-October 2004**

**report prepared by  
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**on behalf of  
Transco plc**

CAT project ref.: 04/9a  
Colchester Museums accession code: 2004.348  
NGR: TL 9990 2490



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**CAT Report 296**  
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## 1 Summary

*An archaeological watching brief was carried out at the southern end of St Botolph's Street, Colchester, Essex during the replacement of a Transco gas-main. No features of archaeological significance were observed.*

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief carried out at St Botolph's Street, Colchester, Essex by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT). The watching brief was carried out during the groundworks to replace a gas-main. Three trenches of varying depths and dimensions were dug (trenches T1-T3).
- 2.2 The watching brief site is located to the south-east of the town centre, on the western side of St Botolph's Street, near the St Botolph's roundabout. It is centred at National Grid Reference TL 9990 2490.
- 2.3 Five visits were made by a CAT archaeologist between the 19th September and the 18th October 2004.
- 2.4 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

- 3.1 The watching brief site is situated 150m outside the Roman town wall, near the course of a possible Roman street which projected south from the south gate (*CAR 3*, 15). Portions of tessellated pavement and mosaic pavement from a Roman building have been found very close by, in Osborne Street (Hull 1958, 244; Shimmin 1994, 47-8) and, possibly, cremation burials (Hull 1958, 294).
- 3.2 The site is also situated just outside what was the precinct of the 12th-century Augustinian priory of St Botolph's. Remains of the priory church survive 50m to the north-east of the watching brief site.
- 3.3 During excavations by CAT at Lion Walk in 1972, the insubstantial remains of an early post-medieval building were recorded just outside the town wall (Building 33; *CAR 3*, 84), and there were possible traces of a medieval gravelled street to the south (*ibid*, 91). These represent almost the only evidence for the development of post-Roman extra-mural settlement in the area.
- 3.4 An excavation was carried out by CAT in Osborne Street in 1994, prior to the building of the multi-storey car-park there. Floors from a probable late 1st- or 2nd-century Roman building were uncovered in a trench near the junction with St Botolph's Street. These were sealed by a series of well-preserved wicker-lined drains and fences of late 12th- to 14th-century date (Shimmin 1994, 46).
- 3.5 Evaluation trenches were dug this year by CAT on land between Osborne Street, St Botolph's Street and Vineyard Street (the 'Vineyard Gate' development site: CAT Report 269; CAT Report 297; CAT Report 298). Trenches in properties along the length of Osborne Street produced striking evidence of changes in ground-level over the last 2000 years. In the central part of the street, Roman clay floors, slots and post-holes were found to survive to within a metre of the modern surface, with later Roman pits and tips of refuse on higher ground to the west. In contrast, on lower ground near the eastern end of Osborne Street, the water table prevented excavation to the earliest levels. Trenches here were dug to depths of up to 3.5 metres, reaching only a short way into the medieval levels. Although difficult to excavate, the waterlogged ground conditions resulted in the survival of well-preserved timbers and leatherwork belonging to the medieval and post-medieval periods.

## 4 Aim

The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological remains that were exposed during the work and to assess the quality and extent of any remains that were encountered.

## 5 Methods

- 5.1 The three trenches (T1-T3) were dug by contractors using a mechanical excavator with a toothed bucket. A CAT archaeologist made periodic visits during this work.
- 5.2 Sketch plans were made of the trenches.
- 5.3 A photographic record was made using a digital camera.

## 6 Results (Fig 2)

### 6.1 Trench 1

The first trench (T1) was dug near the St Botolph's roundabout in a paved area, at the junction with Osborne Street. Each arm of this U-shaped trench was approximately 2m wide and its greatest depth was 2m below ground-level. Its length was approximately 6m. The gas-main pipe exposed was approximately 500mm wide and most of the trench had been cut through the backfill for this pipe. The trench was criss-crossed by modern services and the ground through which the trench cut was very disturbed. From the side of the trench, the following soil profile was observed: 400-500mm of modern concrete, sand, rubble and tarmac overlying 1m of dark earth merging into a silty greenish cassy-looking layer at the base of the trench. A few animal bones and some oyster shell had been retrieved by contractors from the bottom of the trench (these were later discarded). The base of the trench filled up with water and had to be pumped.

### 6.2 Trench 2

This trench (T2) was placed 13.5m north of T1, outside no 16 St Botolph's Street, within the highway. This trench was 3.5m long, 1.4m wide and 1.2m deep. A similar profile to T1 was observed. As well as the gas-pipe, electricity cables and drains were in evidence. The trench also cut a brick soakaway.

### 6.3 Trench 3

A third trench (T3) was dug adjoining T2 to the south, outside no 17 St Botolph's Street. T3 was 1m wide, 5.5m-6m long and 1.3m deep. Approximately 400mm of tarmac and ground-level was seen to overlie dark earth containing modern brick fragments. This layer was very waterlogged. A drainpipe and an electricity cable crossed the trench.

## 7 Discussion

The trenches did not impact archaeologically significant layers. Even the deepest trench, at 2m, did not appear to extend below post-medieval dark earth. This accords with the results from the Vineyard Gate evaluation (see section 3.5 above), where trenches in this area were dug to 3.5m depth and did not reach beyond medieval layers. All three trenches cut through ground which was heavily disturbed by modern services. This, combined with the depth of the trenches, made detailed recording problematic.

## 8 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but it will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2004.348.

## 9 Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to Transco plc for funding the work and for allowing access to the site. The fieldwork was carried out by Catriona Bell and Kate Orr.

## 10 References

- |                |      |   |
|----------------|------|---|
| CAR 3          | 1984 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 3, Excavations at Lion Walk, Balkerne Lane, and Middleborough, Colchester, Essex</i> , by Philip Crummy                   |
| CAT Report 262 |      | <i>Archaeological monitoring of the Phase 1 borehole programme at Vineyard Gate, Colchester, Essex</i> , unpublished CAT archive report, by Don Shimmin, 2004 |
| CAT Report 269 |      | An archaeological evaluation at Vineyard Gate, Colchester, Essex: interim results, unpublished CAT archive report, by Carl Crossan and Ben Holloway, 2004     |
| CAT Report 297 |      | An archaeological evaluation at the rear of 17-18 Osborne Street, Colchester, Essex, unpublished CAT archive report, by Carl Crossan, 2004                    |
| CAT Report 298 |      | An archaeological evaluation at the rear of 12 and 13 St Botolph's Street, Colchester, Essex, unpublished CAT archive report, by Carl Crossan, 2004           |
| Hull, M R      | 1958 | <i>Roman Colchester</i> , RRCSAL, <b>20</b>   |
| Shimmin, D     | 1994 | 'Excavations at Osborne Street, Colchester', in <i>Essex Archaeology and History</i> , <b>25</b> , 46-59  |

## 11 Glossary

extra-mural feature	outside the walls an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c AD 1500
modern	period from c 1850 to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
post-medieval	the period from c AD 1500 to c 1850
Roman	the period from AD 43 to AD 410 approximately.
tessellated pavement	a floor made up of small plain ceramic or stone cubes set into mortar

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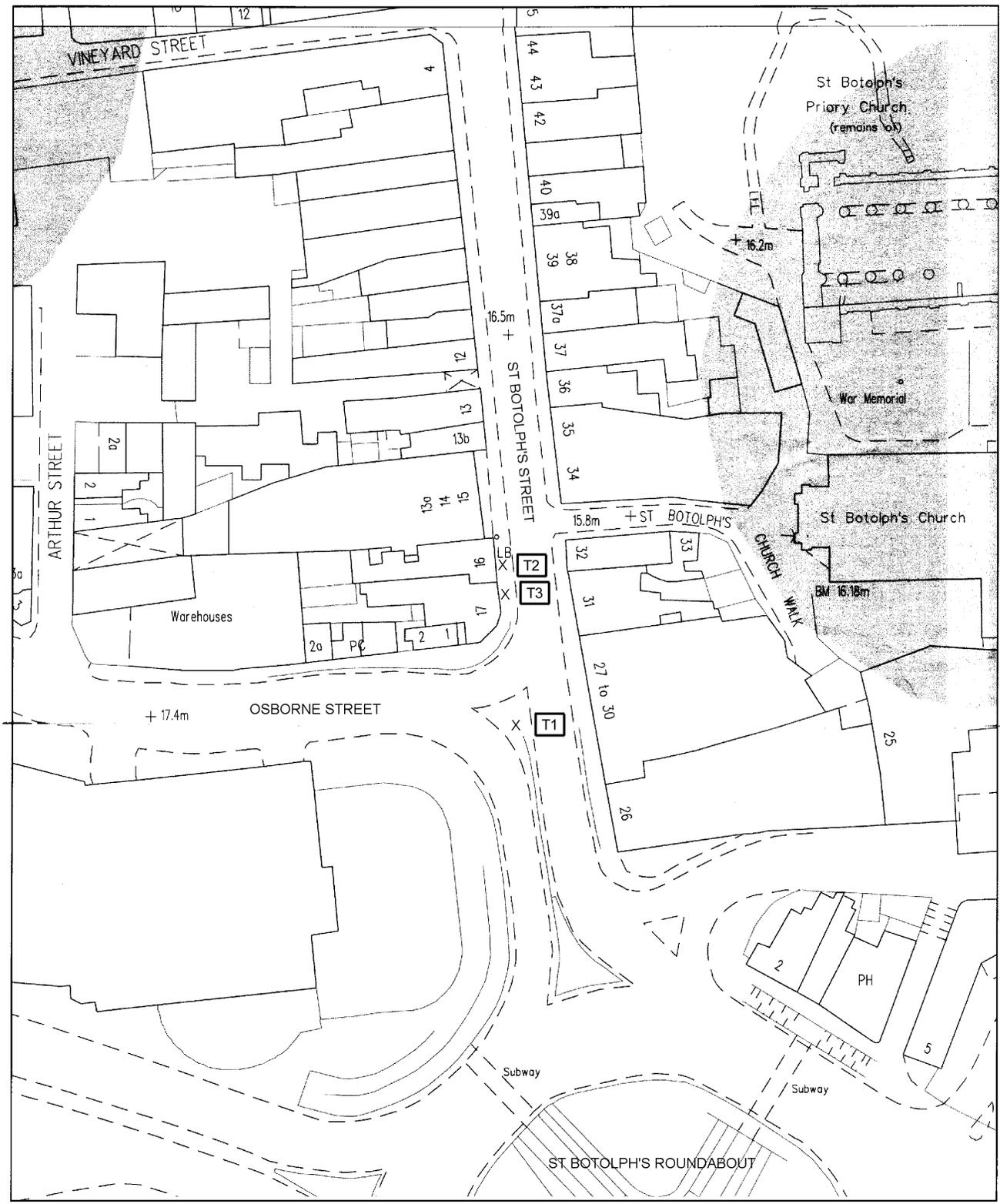
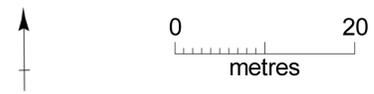


Fig 1 Site location.

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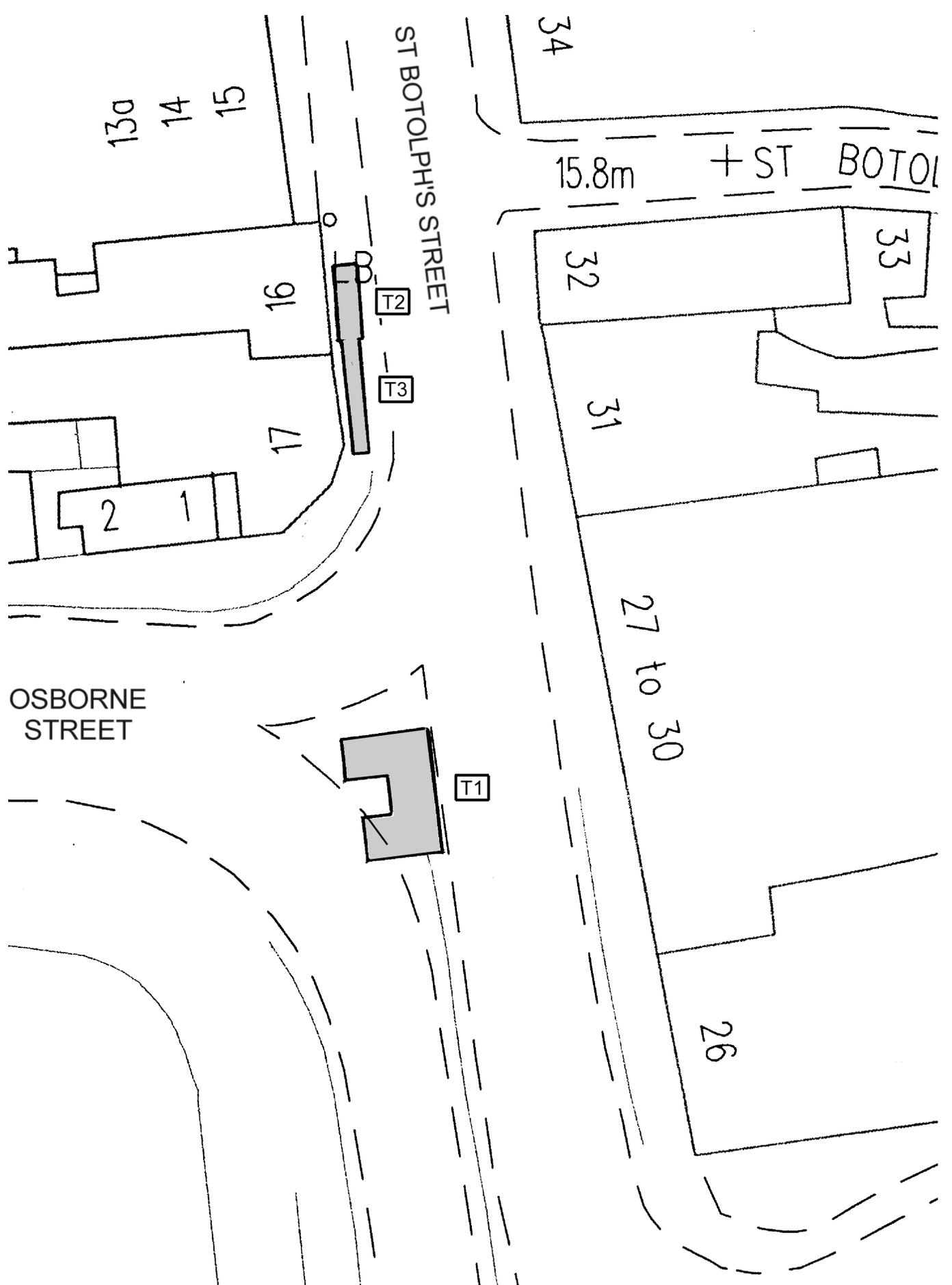


Fig 2 Location of trenches T1 - T3.

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

**Summary sheet**

<b>Site address:</b> St Botolph's Street, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester
<b>NGR:</b> TL 9990 2490	<b>Site code:</b> Museum accession code 2004.348
<b>Type of work:</b> Watching brief	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> September-October 2004	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 3 small trenches
<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 296 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods represented:</b> post-medieval and modern	
<b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b> <i>An archaeological watching brief was carried out at the southern end of St Botolph's Street, Colchester, Essex during the replacement of a Transco gas-main. No features of archaeological significance were observed.</i>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> CAT Reports 262 and 269	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Kate Orr	<b>Date of summary:</b> December 2004