

Report on a negative watching brief

Site address: East Mill, East Street, Colchester, Essex
Date of fieldwork: 3rd August-6th September 2005
NGR: TM 0760 5337
CBC brief?: Yes
Sketch attached?: Yes (Fig 1)
Museum Accession: 2005.105
Report no: CAT Report 336

Archaeological background:

East Mill is situated to the east of the walled town of Colchester, by the River Colne. It is on the north side of East Street which was the major Roman and medieval road leading east from Colchester. In 1928, a trench was dug at the bottom of East Hill which exposed a section of cambered road 1m below ground-level, just to the north of the present road (Urban Archaeological Database or UAD no 586). A decorated Roman pavement was reportedly found at the bottom of East Hill, 1m below ground-level (UAD no 391). East Mill was in existence from at least 1311 when it was one of a series of watermills along the River Colne (*VCH 9*, 261). This area, by the East Bridge, was a flourishing suburb in medieval and later times, as shown by the buildings on John Speed's map of 1610. Several properties of the medieval period survive to this day (eg the Rose and Crown Inn and the Siege House). The locals used the river for industrial activities such as tanning and fulling. The watermill was almost completely rebuilt between 1885 and 1893, and its warehousing was extended (*VCH 9*, 261); this is confirmed by the 1898 2nd edition OS map which shows the current building. The mill was converted into an hotel in 1979, and has been converted to apartments with new flats being built to the rear (CAT Report 314). The area to the rear of the site was the subject of an archaeological evaluation in 2005 (CAT Report 314).

The site is low-lying and has the potential for preserving waterlogged wood and leather.

Brief report:

The 2005 watching brief was carried out during the excavation of foundation beams for two building footprints and their associated drain runs and soakaways (the area outlined on Fig 1). The footings and the soakaways were excavated into natural glacial deposits (L3) and were dug through a modern/post-medieval dark earth (L1) and a light yellow brown silty subsoil (L2). The drain runs were shallow, stopping at the interface between L1 and L2. No artefacts were associated with the L2 subsoil although some very occasional charcoal flecks were noted during the excavation of the footings and soakaways. The 'dark earth' across the watching brief area contained a large amount of modern and post-medieval debris. This material was made up exclusively of peg-tile, brick fragments and amounts of small animal bone. The nature of the material observed is consistent with rubbish deposition that would be expected from activity in the yards of the post-medieval properties that front on to East Street. No features were observed during the course of the watching brief.

Finds:

Peg-tile, brick fragments and quantities of small animal bone were observed but were not retained. The material was consistent with that of post-medieval midden and rubbish-pits.

References:

CAT Report 314 An archaeological evaluation and watching brief at East Mill, East Street, Colchester, Essex, unpublished CAT archive report, by Kate Orr, 2005
VCH 9 1994 *The Victoria County History of Essex*, 9

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