

## Report on a watching brief CAT Report 354

**Site address:** St John's Street and Crouch Street, Colchester, Essex –  
gas-main replacement trenches  
**Date of fieldwork:** 20th October 2005-5th February 2006  
**NGR:** TL 9932 2496-TL 9990 2490  
**CBC brief?:** No  
**Location plan attached?:** Yes (Fig 1)  
**Museum accession code:** 2005.126  
**CAT ref.:** 05/10c

### Archaeological background:

The work was carried out in areas just outside the Roman town wall, where archaeological remains have been previously recorded. A Roman street projecting south from the south gate (*CAR 3*, 15) and portions of tessellated pavement and mosaic pavement from a Roman building have been found in Osborne Street (Hull 1958, 244; Shimmin 1994, 47-8).

Excavations by CAT at Lion Walk in 1972 uncovered the insubstantial remains of an early post-medieval building, 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 represented almost the only evidence for the development of post-Roman extra-mural settlement in the area.

Evaluation trenches were dug last year by CAT on land between Osborne Street, St Botolph's Street and Vineyard Street ('Vineyard Gate'; CAT Report 269). 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.

The pipe trenching was predicted to encounter some of these remains, plus a Roman road leading out of the town from Head Gate.

### Brief report:

Transco undertook gas-main replacements along Crouch Street and St John's Street. This involved contractors machine-excavating two trenches within the public highway which were typically between 1m and 1.7m in depth. An approximately 360m-long and 600mm-wide trench was excavated from just beyond the junction of Stanwell Street and St John's Street up to no 1 St John's Street. The final piece of groundworks was a shorter trench (5m long and over 1m wide) dug outside the old Odeon cinema on Crouch Street. The section in between was not excavated.

The typical profile in St John's Street was tarmac with a stone and asphalt sub-base overlying dark brown silty sand with brick and occasional peg-tile. As far as 1m below ground-level, the fill looked blueish black and modern and contained asphalt and concrete. Below this level, the soil was slightly lighter and sandier but still containing modern or late post-medieval brick and tile. Numerous pipes were exposed. A very small amount of Roman pottery and tile was found residually within modern layers. The only feature observed was a section of cobbled surface 900mm below ground-level, seen outside 26a St John's Street. This is assumed to be the old (possibly medieval) road surface of St John's Street before it was tarmaced. Below the cobbles was a soil layer containing peg-tile which extended to the base of the trench. This was one of the few areas within this trench that had not been previously disturbed by earlier pipe-laying.

The trench outside the Odeon was 1.7m deep. It was excavated to locate the existing gas pipe and therefore was dug through backfill. The trench was cut through tarmac, hogging and concrete. Beneath these modern deposits, a dark brown clay silt with brick and tile fragments sealed a metalled/cobbled surface. The surface was 900mm below ground-level. Underneath the surface was 700mm of dark brown clay silt with tile fragments and occasional oyster shell. Like the cobbled surface recorded in St John's Street, this may be a remnant of a medieval road surface.

## Finds

Find no	Context	Description	Date
1	Base of trench (1.2m down) outside Gellar Butchers (35 St John's Street) and 26a St John's Street	grey ware sherds	Roman
2	Within modern material - base of trench (1.2m down) outside Gellar Butchers (35 St John's Street) and 26a St John's Street	tile	Roman
3	Unstratified; within modern material - base of trench (1.2m down) outside Gellar Butchers (35 St John's Street) and 26a St John's Street	pottery	post-medieval

## References

- CAT Report 269 An archaeological evaluation at Vineyard Gate, Colchester, Essex, 2004: interim results, unpublished CAT archive report, by Carl Crossan and Ben Holloway, 2004
- CAR 3 1984 *Colchester Archaeological Report 3: Excavations at Lion Walk, Balkerne Lane, and Middleborough, Colchester, Essex*, by Philip Crummy
- Hull, M R 1958 *Roman Colchester*, RRCSAL, 20
- Shimmin, D 1994 'Excavations at Osborne Street, Colchester', in *Essex Archaeology and History*, 25, 46-59

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**Report date:** March 2006

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Fig 1 Trench location.