

**Stage 2 of an archaeological evaluation
at the rear of 95-96 High Street,
Colchester, Essex
July 2006**

**report prepared by
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**commissioned by
Roff Marsh Partnership
on behalf of
Slain Properties**

NGR: TL 9987 2524
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1 Summary

The second stage of an archaeological evaluation at the rear of 95-96 High Street, Colchester, Essex revealed further evidence of a large Roman foundation 1.55-1.65 m below the modern ground-level. The south face of the foundation was uncovered in one of the trenches. The foundation is part of the remains of a large Roman monumental arch leading into the precinct of the Temple of Claudius.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 2.1 The second stage of an archaeological evaluation was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on behalf of Slain Properties at the rear of 95-96 High Street on 24th July 2006. This was in advance of a proposed mixed residential and retail development of the site. The first stage of the evaluation took place on 30th January 2006 (CAT Report 360).
- 2.2 The site is in the town centre, on the north side of the High Street and on the east side of the unmarked road known as 'Crowther's Entry'. The evaluation trenches were dug at the rear of 96 High Street, in a vacant plot currently in use as a car-park.
- 2.3 Descriptions of the excavation and recording methods used may be found in the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for the site produced by CAT in May 2006.
- 2.4 This report follows the standards set out in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on Standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (CM 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (CM 2003), and the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IFA 1999) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IFA 2001). The guidance contained in the documents *Management of archaeological projects* (MAP 2), and *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment* (EAA 3), *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy* (EAA 8), and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14) was also followed.

3 Archaeological background

- 3.1 The site is located inside the walled area of the Roman town and in a sensitive archaeological area, being close to the sites of the southern edge of both the Roman precinct of the Temple of Claudius and the bailey of the Norman castle.
- 3.2 The High Street in the Roman and medieval periods was the main route through Colchester town with a continuous frontage of properties on both sides of the road. The site itself lies within Insula 22 of the Roman town, the principal feature of which was the Temple of Claudius, the remains of which lie directly under the Norman castle keep. The temple itself was central within its own sacred precinct (*temenos*). This enclosure was very large, with its southern edge now lying under the properties on the High Street, from Museum Street to Cowdray Crescent. Excavations in 1964 showed that foundations of the Roman masonry arcade forming the southern boundary of the precinct still survive to an extraordinary degree. Even after the depredations of Norman stone robbers, the Roman foundations were found to measure 15 feet in width (Hebditch 1971).
- 3.3 The 1964 excavations confirmed the results of work carried out in 1931 and 1953. The 1931 work is particularly pertinent as it revealed the remains of an impressive monumental arch on and adjacent to the site in question (Hull 1955; Hull 1958, 169-70; Urban Archaeological Database or UAD no 3105). Here Rex Hull uncovered standing Roman masonry less than 1 foot below the modern ground-level beneath 'Crowther's Entry'. This was the robbed top of the west side of a monumental arch which was centrally located on the south side of the precinct of the Temple of Claudius. To the east of the Roman masonry, on the present site, Hull found a massive foundation which was 28 feet wide and at least 5 feet thick. This was the foundation on which the arch was built. The foundation sloped slightly so that its flat

top surface was between 5 feet and 8 feet below modern ground. To the south of the foundation were two well-constructed Roman drains.

- 3.4** During stage 1 of the evaluation in January 2006, Roman masonry (Feature or F2) was revealed in a north-south trench (Trench or T1) at 2.0m below the modern ground-level (CAT Report 360). The masonry was traced for 5.7 m north-south, although no edges were found. The northern part of the foundation appeared to be deeper and was masked by later deposits. The depth below modern ground-level and the flat top of the exposed masonry suggest that this was the same as Hull's massive foundation and that the position of T1 coincided with the carriageway through the arch. The modern nature of the deposits sealing the Roman masonry suggests that the excavated layers may simply be the soils which were tipped back into Hull's 1931 excavation trench.

4 Aims

The aim of the evaluation was to establish and record the depth, extent and condition of the Roman monumental arch through the southern arcade wall of the precinct of the Temple of Claudius. This information could then be combined with existing knowledge of the site, in order to assess the likely impact of the proposed development on the archaeological remains.

5 Evaluation trenches (Fig 1)

- 5.1** The evaluation involved the excavation of two small trenches, one (T2) on the eastern side and the other (T3) on the western side of the site. They were located about halfway down the plot and were positioned over the southern part of the Roman monumental arch. Due to the confined nature of the site, they were set obliquely across the plot.
- 5.2** The trenches were dug on 24th July 2006 by a mechanical excavator with a toothless bucket. The modern surface and the overburden were progressively stripped until significant archaeological levels were reached. Only limited excavation and cleaning by hand as well as recording were possible, due to the hazards caused by the narrowness, depth, and soft, loose sides of the trenches.
- 5.3 Trench 2**
- 5.3.1** T2 was aligned north-west to south-east, and was 1.7 m long and 0.7 m wide. The southern end of T1 was relocated at the north-west end of T2.
- 5.3.2** A large Roman foundation (F2) was reached at a depth of 1.65 m (24.24 m AOD) below the modern ground-level. The surface of the foundation was flat and sloped slightly from north-west to south-east. Although the surface of F2 was smeared, and it was not possible to examine it in detail, it appeared to consist of a hard, pale brown mortar with large gravels, septaria fragments and occasional pieces of Roman brick/tile. Within the excavated area, there was no trace of an edge or face to the foundation.
- 5.3.3** The overburden sealing F2 was broadly comparable to that observed in the southern part of T1 (CAT Report 360). A thin layer of loose, pale brown mortar, with occasional pieces of Roman brick/tile and gravels, sealed F2 at the south-east end of the trench. This was sealed by a layer of dark greyish-brown fill (Layer or L7), over 1 m thick, with occasional fragments of brick and mortar, and gravels. These layers were probably the backfill of Hull's 1931 trench. They were overlaid by modern brick rubble make-up (L2) and the existing car-park surface (L1).
- 5.4 Trench 3**
- 5.4.1** T3 was aligned north-east to south-west, and was 1.5 m long and 0.65 m wide.
- 5.4.2** The Roman foundation (F2) was located at a depth of 1.55 m (24.25 m AOD) below the modern ground-level. The foundation had a well-defined southern face, aligned approximately east-west. This presumably formed the south edge of the arch, or at least the foundation for the arch. The surface of F2 was fairly flat, although a block had been robbed from the face from a lower course than from the rest of the foundation exposed in the trench.

- 5.4.3 A layer of loose, pale brown mortar up to 0.3 m thick sealed F2. The remaining overburden was also similar to that found in T2.

6 Finds

- 6.1 A quantity of finds, consisting mainly of Roman brick and tile, was recovered during the digging of T2-T3. These mainly came from the machine spoil and were thus unstratified.
- 6.2 Three large Roman brick fragments came from T2. All had traces of mortar, and at least one had mortar on a broken surface indicating that it had been reused. There were also two fragments of animal long bone as well as a piece of modern pottery.
- 6.3 A fragment from a very large, unmortared Roman brick, a *tegula* fragment, and two other Roman brick/tile fragments, came from T3. There was also a rectangular fragment in a pale buff fabric, which could have derived from a Roman herringbone floor similar to one found in North Station Road in 2002 (CAT Report 193).
- 6.4 The mortared brick fragments could have come from a large building such as the monumental arch. The other fragments could derive from roofs, floors, hearths or hypocausts.

7 Discussion

- 7.1 The large foundation (F2) uncovered in T1-T3 was probably the robbed remains of a monumental arch centrally located in the southern precinct wall of the Temple of Claudius.
- 7.2 The south face of the foundation was uncovered in T3, although it was not possible to examine the face in detail or to excavate to the south of it. On the basis of evidence from previous excavations, it seems likely that the arch was faced with tufa, which is an unusual building material to find in Roman Colchester. A west-east drain would be expected immediately to the south of the arch.
- 7.3 The 2006 trench positions probably all fall in the middle of the carriageway through the arch, which was probably a decorative monumental arch (Fig 2). On either side of the central carriageway were the rising sides of the arch. Hull excavated over the west side of the arch in 1931, and found it surviving only 1 foot below modern ground under the road surface immediately west of 96 High Street (ie in 'Crowther's Entry': Hull 1958, fig 86, 170). It is not known whether the east side of the arch survives, but, if it does, it should at least partially overlap the rear part of 95 High Street. However, no traces of the inner faces of the arch were found in the 2006 trenches. The relationship of the masonry found in the trenches to the level of Roman ground surface also remains unclear.
- 7.4 The results of the evaluation trenches have enabled the position and depth of the Roman monumental arch to be plotted more accurately, and thus the impact of any proposed redevelopment on the remains of the arch can be assessed with more confidence than was possible before.

8 Archive deposition

The evaluation archive, including the site records, photographs and finds, will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code COLEM 2006.32.

9 Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to Roff Marsh Partnership for commissioning the work on behalf of Slain Properties who funded the work. The project was monitored by Martin Winter, Colchester Borough Council Archaeology Officer.

10 References

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| IFA | 2001 | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i> |
| MAP 2 | 1991 | <i>Management of archaeological projects</i> , second edition (English Heritage) |
| WSI | | Written Scheme of Investigation for stage 2 archaeological evaluation rear of 95-96 High Street, Colchester, Essex, by Howard Brooks, May 2006 |

11 Glossary

AOD	above Ordnance Survey datum point based on mean sea level at Newlyn, Cornwall
CBCAO	Colchester Borough Council Archaeology Officer
context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made, usually an layer or a feature
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c AD 1500
modern	period from c 1850 onwards to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
post-medieval	period from c 1500 to c 1850
Roman	the period from AD 43 to AD 410 approximately
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database, maintained by Colchester Museums
U/S	unstratified, ie no context
WSI	Written Scheme of Investigation

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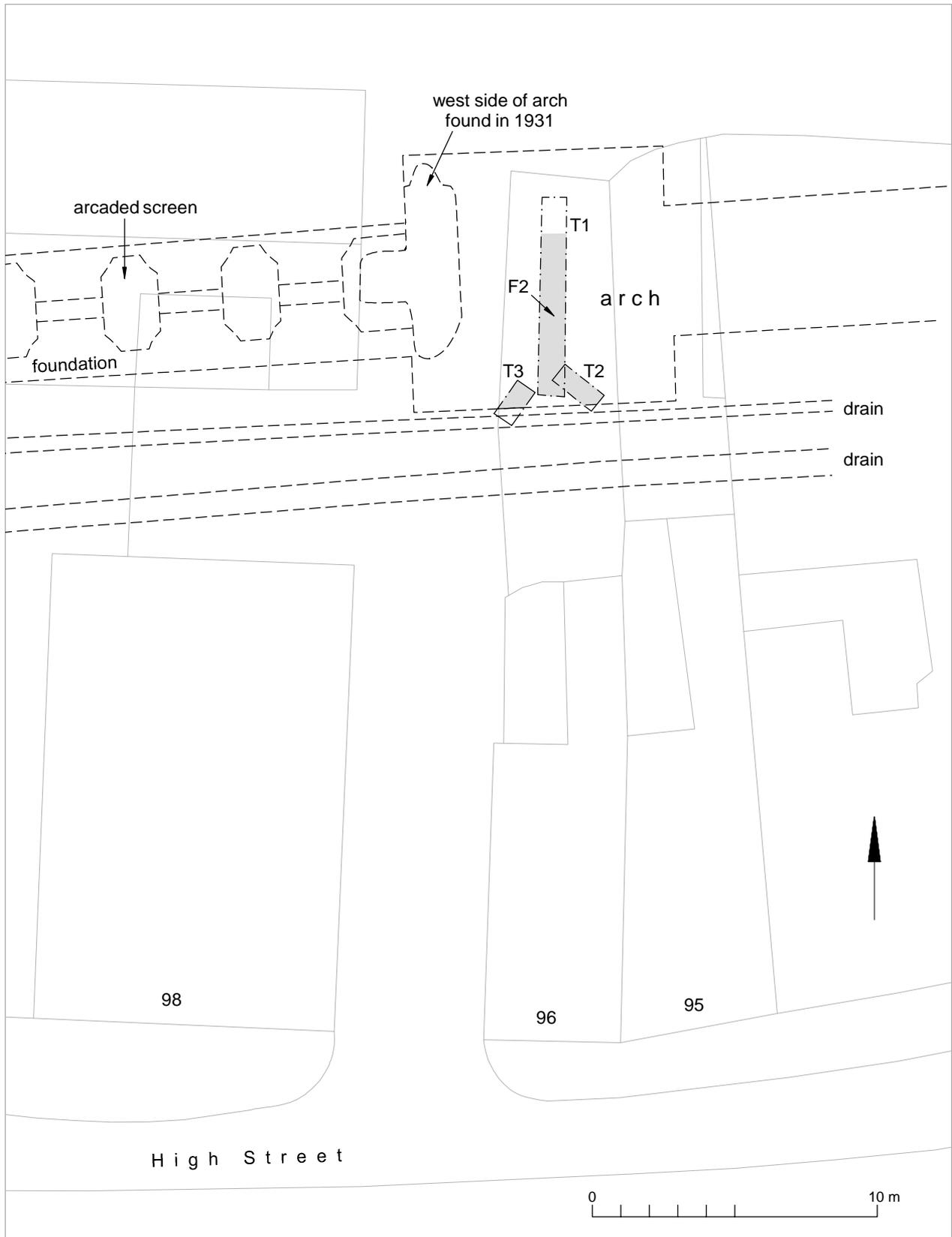
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Fig 1 T1-T3 in relation to the Roman arch and south precinct wall of the Temple of Claudius.

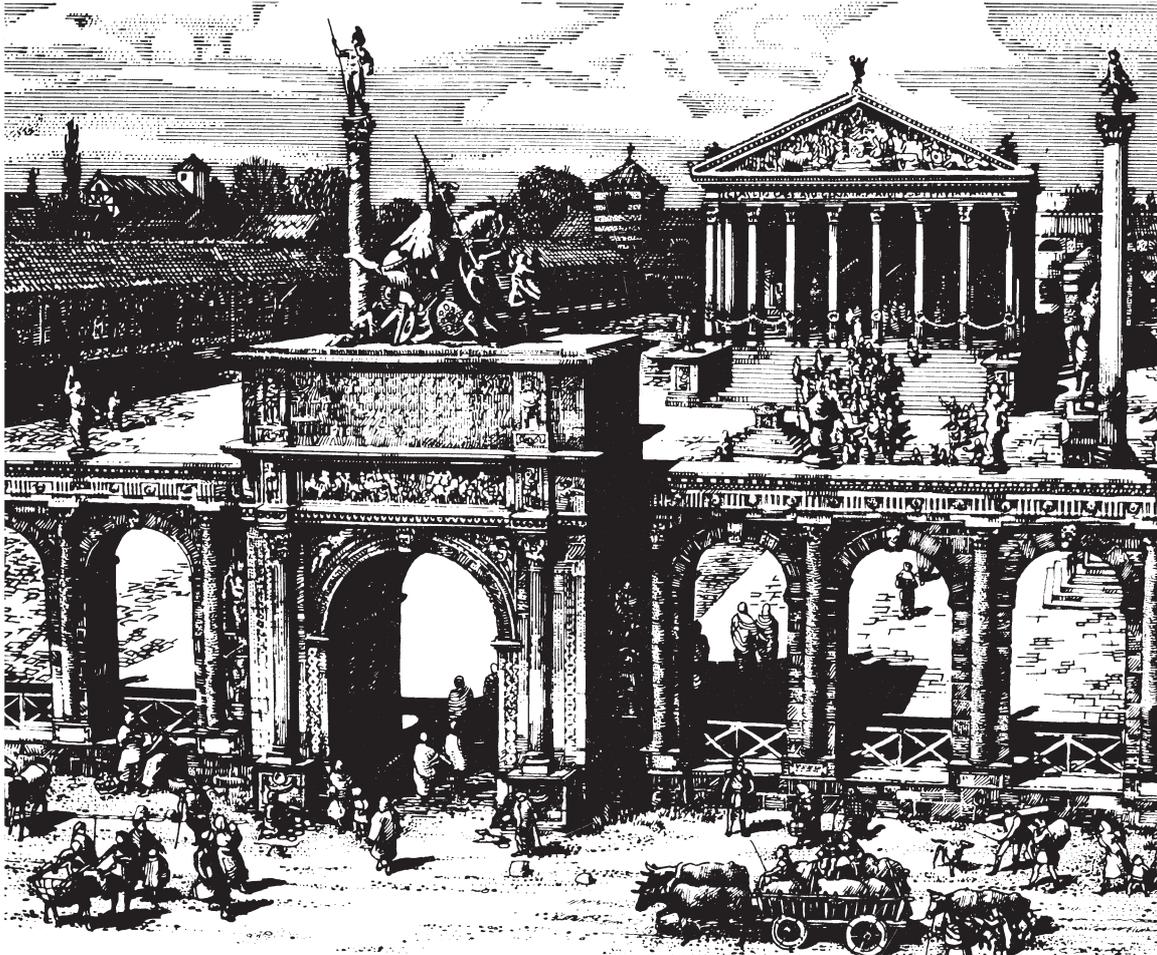


Fig 2 Imaginative reconstruction of the south side of the precinct of the Temple of Claudius, showing the monumental arch (drawing by Peter Froste).

**Essex Historic Environment Record/
Essex Archaeology and History**

Summary sheet

Site address: rear of 95-96 High Street, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: All Saints	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TL 9987 2524	Site code: Museum accession code 2006.32
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: 24th July 2006	Size of area investigated: 1.5 sq m
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Slain Properties
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHER nos: 3105
Final report: CAT Report 380 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Roman	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>The second stage of an archaeological evaluation at the rear of 95-96 High Street, Colchester, Essex revealed further evidence of a large Roman foundation 1.55-1.65 m below the modern ground-level. The south face of the foundation was uncovered in one of the trenches. The foundation is part of the remains of a large Roman monumental arch leading into the precinct of the Temple of Claudius.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: CAT Report 360	
Author of summary: D Shimmin	Date of summary: August 2006