

**Archaeological monitoring
at firstsite:newsite
and in Queen Street,
Colchester, Essex
April 2006**

**report prepared by
Kate Orr**

**on behalf of
Colchester Borough Council**

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Colchester Museums accession code: 2006.40
NGR: TM 00072 25075 (centre) and NGR TL 99950 25145 (centre)



Colchester Archaeological Trust
12 Lexden Road,
Colchester,
Essex CO3 3NF

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

CAT Report 385
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EHER summary sheet

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- Fig 2 Sewer trench, east-west-aligned part, south-facing section; and the new bus shelter: TP2, north-east-facing section.

1 Summary

Monitoring was carried out on a sewer trench dug at firstsite:newsite within the southern part of the former bus station and on three test-pits dug for a bus shelter in Queen Street. The deeper groundworks reached a layer of late Roman demolition or robbing debris. None of the groundworks were deep enough to expose any Roman structural remains that might account for the demolition debris. Within the sewer trench, the demolition debris was sealed by dark earth (where it had not already been disturbed by the existing sewer trench). In the test-pits in Queen Street, the Roman levels were sealed by 1m of modern material, with no intervening post-Roman layers.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 2.1** This is the archive report on two archaeological watching briefs. The first was carried out during the digging of a sewer trench at firstsite:newsite which is within the southern part of the former bus station. The L-shaped sewer trench was 65m in length and was centred on NGR TM 00072 25075. Prior to its excavation, three test-pits were dug by engineers along its length. These pits were monitored by an archaeologist. The second watching brief took place outside the bus station in Queen Street, on three test-pits dug prior to the construction of a new bus shelter. This was outside no 21 (Roman House), which is centred on NGR TL 99950 25145.
- 2.2** The work was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between the 3rd and 24th April 2006.
- 2.3** The site of the sewer trench is on level ground at 22.08m above Ordnance Datum (AOD). The site of the new bus shelter is at approximately 24m AOD.
- 2.4** All fieldwork was done in accordance with a specification agreed with Philip Wise, Curator of Archaeology of Colchester Museums. The specification followed a brief prepared by the Curator of Archaeology of Colchester Museums with advice from Oxford Archaeological Associates (Simon Collcutt). This report mirrors standards and practices contained 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 an archaeological watching brief* (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 research projects in the historic environment* (MoRPHE 2006), *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 sewer trench was dug in an area of exceptional archaeological potential, being located within Insula 39 of the Roman town and next to a scheduled ancient monument known as the 'south-east corner of Roman town in East Hill House gardens'. A combination of chance finds of tessellated pavements (eg Urban Archaeological Database or UAD no 321), together with archaeological investigations in advance of the construction of the Mulberry Tree Family Centre to the east (UAD no 3033) and of the bus station (UAD nos 3069-3070), have revealed fragmentary traces which suggest an essentially residential area of the Roman town. This appears to comprise a number of houses of probable 2nd-century AD date, some probably large and well-appointed with hypocaust (underfloor) heating, painted wall-plaster and tessellated floors (CAR 6, 15 and 323).
- 3.2** Recent archaeological investigations in East Hill House garden and playing field to the east of the sewer trench included a series of nine evaluation trenches excavated by CAT in 2004 (CAT Report 305). Roman levels were found to lie at depths of

- between 15 cm and 60 cm. The archaeological evidence for this area has recently been summarised by Oxford Archaeological Associates Ltd (Johnson *et al* 2003).
- 3.3** Within the area affected by the sewer trench, the following archaeological features may be anticipated: to the south, the northern tail of the rampart, observed in the former bus station (UAD no 3577); an east-west street (UAD no 117); and layers of demolition debris and house foundations (see for example UAD nos 3069-3070).
- 3.4** The test-pits in Queen Street were located at the junction of Insulas 30, 31 and 38b of the Roman town in an area again thought to contain Roman houses rather than public buildings.

4 Aim

The aim of the archaeological investigations was to identify and record any archaeological remains that were exposed.

5 Methods (Fig 1)

- 5.1** The first watching brief started with the monitoring of three test-pits which were excavated by engineers along the line of an existing storm water sewer trench (Test-pit or TP1-TP3) at firstsite:newsite. After this, the existing storm water sewer trench was re-excavated in order to install the new sewer pipe. For ease of recording, the sewer trench was divided into three lengths: from east to west A-B and B-C (45m), and from south to north C-D (20m). A mechanical mini-excavator with a toothless ditching bucket was used for the works. Limited excavation was carried out by hand in the manhole trench once modern overburden and post-Roman 'dark earth' had been stripped off mechanically.
- The second watching brief took place during the digging of three test-pits (TP1-TP3) in the pavement outside no 21 Queen Street, prior to the construction of a new bus shelter.
- 5.2** Potential archaeological deposits which were exposed were cleaned by hand. Individual records of features and layers were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets (Table 4).
- 5.3** Two section drawings were made at a scale of 1:10.
- 5.4** Finds were registered on CAT pro-forma record sheets and assigned finds numbers according to context (Table 1). Finds were washed, marked and bagged according to context.
- 5.5** Colour photographs of the trench and test-pits were taken with a digital camera.

6 Results (Figs 1-2)

6.1 The sewer trench

Three test-pits (TP1-TP3), 1.5m wide and between 1m and 2m long, were excavated along the line of the existing storm water sewer at firstsite:newsite. The pits were cut through 600mm of modern surface and sub-base: L1, reinforced concrete, underlaid by L2, a hogging, hardcore and asphalt sub-base, and L3, concrete rubble. Between the sewer pipe and the modern deposits was a layer of redeposited dark earth (L6), the backfill of the existing sewer trench. This material contained oyster shell and brick flecks and occasional peg-tile. The top of the sewer (F1/F2) was encountered at between 1.2m and 1.4m depth. No archaeological features were noted in plan or in section.

An L-shaped trench was subsequently dug along the existing sewer run in order to lay the new sewer. The trench was 1m wide and 1.4m-1.6m deep. The existing sewer pipe was exposed along the northern and western sides of the trench. The same profile was observed as within the test-pits. It was not always clear whether the dark earth lying below the modern surface was undisturbed dark earth (L6) or redeposited dark earth (L4). Where it covered the existing sewer trench, this material was obviously backfill to that trench, but on the south and east sides of the new sewer trench this was not clear. In the southern part of the new manhole trench,

undisturbed dark earth (L4) was definitely identified. This was in an area which was just outside the existing manhole and therefore undisturbed. In length B-C and within the manhole trench, where the trench was dug deeper than 1.35m, a layer of light brown clayey silt with yellow mortar, flecks of charcoal, oyster shell and tile was exposed (L5) underneath the dark earth. L5 is interpreted as a layer of Roman demolition or robbing debris from Roman houses. Finds included Roman pottery, animal bone and brick/tile. Within the southern side of the manhole trench, this layer and the base of the dark earth were removed by hand. No features were observed.

6.2 Test-pits in Queen Street (Figs 1-2)

Three small test-pits (TP1-TP3) were dug by contractors in the pavement of Queen Street, outside no 21 (Roman House), prior to the construction of a new bus shelter. The test-pits were narrow and the two deepest (TP1 and TP2) were 1.1m deep. Concrete paving slabs with a solid concrete sub-base overlaid a thick, mixed layer of modern demolition debris (L8) containing modern brick, tile and mortar. This is interpreted as demolition debris from the previous building on the site of no 21. L8 sealed the concrete stump of a modern foundation (F3). Modern pipes and cables were exposed in all three test-pits. At 1m below ground-level, a layer of Roman demolition debris (L7) was exposed. This was light yellowish brown sandy silt similar to L5 in the sewer trench, and contained oyster shell, tile and mortar.

7 Finds

7.1 Table 1: finds list.

Finds no	Context	Description	Date	Weight (in g)
1	L4, in length B-C of sewer trench	Roman pottery	Roman	407
1	L4, in length B-C of sewer trench	Roman tile and <i>tesserae</i>	Roman	840
1	L4, in length B-C of sewer trench	Animal bone	undated	101
1	L4, in length B-C of sewer trench	Oyster shell	undated	79
1	L4, in length B-C of sewer trench	Iron nail, 53mm long	undated?	
2	L5, manhole trench	Roman pottery	Roman	318
2	L5, manhole trench	Animal bone	undated	40
2	L5, manhole trench	Roman tile - part of an <i>imbrex</i>	Roman	217
2	L5, manhole trench	Oyster shell	undated	140
2	L5, manhole trench	Stone	undated	17
2	L5, manhole trench	Iron nail	undated	6
3	L4, manhole trench	Copper-alloy coin (Small find no 1 - lost)	Roman	
4	L6, in length C-D of sewer trench	Peg-tile?	medieval or post-medieval	152
4	L6, in length C-D of sewer trench	Roman tile including <i>tegula</i>	Roman	394
5	L4, manhole trench	Soil column sample of the dark earth	not dated	

7.2 The Roman pottery

by Stephen Benfield

Introduction

There is only a small quantity of Roman pottery, ie 33 sherds (728 g). The pottery fabrics were recorded using the Roman pottery fabric type series devised for *CAR 10* in which the fabrics are identified by two-letter codes (Table 2). In addition, for some fabrics, reference has been made to the National Roman Fabric Reference Collection (Tomber & Dore 1998; Table 2).

The vessel forms were recorded using the Camulodunum (Cam) Roman pottery form type series (Hawkes & Hull 1947; Hull 1958). Samian vessels were catalogued where possible using Dragendorff (Dr) form numbers or other common form type references following those used in Webster 1996. The pottery fabrics and the vessel forms present in each site context were recorded for each finds number (Table 3). The number of sherds was recorded for each fabric together with the weight and the estimated vessel equivalent (eve).

Table 2: Roman pottery fabric codes and fabric names used in this report (after *CAR 10* with additions), together with total weight in grams and the pottery forms recorded for each fabric type.

Fabric code	Fabric name	vessel forms or types recorded, (number of examples in brackets)	weight (g)	National Roman Fabric Reference Collection fabric
BA	plain samian forms			
CG	Central Gaulish plain samian	Dr 33?	4	LEZ SA 2
CZ	Colchester and other red colour-coated wares	beaker	10	COL CC 2
DJ	coarse oxidised and related wares	flagon	183	
DZ	fine oxidised wares		14	
GB	BB2: black-burnished ware, category 2	Cam 37A Cam 40B	58	COL BB 2
GX	other coarse wares, principally locally-produced grey wares	Cam 268, Cam 270B, rusticated jar	455	
KX	black-burnished ware (BB2) types in pale grey ware	Cam 278	4	

Table 3: Roman pottery by finds number for each layer.

layer no	finds no	<i>CAR 10</i> fabric	form	sherd quantity	wt (g)	comments	date
L4	1	BA(CG) DZ GB GX KX	Cam 40B Cam 268 Cam 270B Cam 278	21	419	Fabric GX 2, includes 2 sherds from a jar shoulder with rustication; the fabric is rather thick and sandy, vessel is possibly partly hand-formed (<i>CAR 10</i> , Fabric GX, pots 406, 536 & 537 and Fabric WA pot 137)	early 2nd to mid-late 3rd century
L5	2	CZ DJ GB GX	Cam 37A Cam 268	12	309	lower body sherd	early 2nd to mid-late 3rd century

Discussion

The closely datable pottery from both L4 and L5 is entirely of early 2nd- to 3rd-century date, although of course it is possible that some of the less datable pieces could fall outside this range. Two sherds from L4 (finds no 1) are of some interest.

These are joining sherds from the shoulder of a rusticated vessel, either a beaker or a jar. The sherds are rather thick (6 mm), in slightly soft sandy fabric that includes sparse large grains up to 2 mm across. There is some indication of an uneven finish on the inside of the sherds, suggesting that the vessel could have been partly hand-made. Rustication is not a particularly common decoration on Roman vessels from Colchester, *CAR 10* having illustrations of only four partial pots of this type; including one beaker of form Cam 108 and two jars with rustication on the shoulder (*CAR 10*, Fabric GX, pots 406, 536 & 537 and Fabric WA, pot 137). More recently a complete jar with a rusticated shoulder has been recovered from a cremation burial at the Colchester Garrison (Area J North, F242, finds no JN658; CAT report in prep). This was accompanied by a hooked lid of form *CAR 10*, Fabric CH Type 91 which is dated ?late 3rd to 4th century.

7.3 The post-Roman pottery

by H Brooks

Only one sherd of post-Roman pottery was recovered, from L5 (finds no 2). This is a small body sherd (weighing 4 g) of medieval sandy grey ware (Fabric 20) or medieval sandy orange ware (Fabric 21) that can only be dated as 13th-16th century. Fabrics based on *CAR 7*.

8 Discussion

The deeper groundworks reached a late Roman layer of demolition or robbing debris which contained 3rd-century pottery. It is known from other investigations within the Roman town wall that this demolition debris often seals Roman structural deposits, but none of the groundworks went deep enough to expose such remains. Within the new sewer trench, this demolition or robbing debris was sealed by dark earth (where it had not already been disturbed by the existing sewer trench). The dark earth is commonly encountered in Colchester as in some other Roman urban centres. The date of the formation of 'dark earth' in Colchester is problematic, but the evidence suggests that it formed after the 12th century (Crummy 1984, 92).

In the test-pits for the bus shelter, the Roman levels were sealed by 1m of modern material, with no intervening post-Roman layers. This indicates ground reduction in this area.

No features of archaeological significance were recorded at either site because the groundworks stopped short of the earlier horizons.

9 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 2006.40.

10 Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to Colchester Borough Council for commissioning and funding the work and to Philip Wise, Curator of Archaeology of Colchester Museums, who monitored the project. The watching brief was carried out by Carl Crossan, Ben Holloway and Kate Orr.

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12 Glossary

context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
<i>imbrex</i>	a Roman roof tile, linking two <i>tegulae</i>
modern	period from the 19th century onwards to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
post-medieval	the period from c AD 1500 to around c AD 1900
prehistoric	the period before written records, ie until AD 43 in Britain
Roman	the period between AD 43 and c AD 410
<i>tegula</i>	a Roman roof tile
<i>tessera</i>	one of many tile cubes used for tessellated and mosaic flooring
U/S	unstratified

13 Site data

Table 4: list of contexts.

Context	location	Description	Associated artefacts	Date of context
<i>Sewer trench and test-pits at firstsite:newsite</i>				
L1	All trenches	Reinforced concrete		present day
L2	All trenches	Hogging, hardcore and asphalt sub-base		present day
L3	All trenches	Concrete rubble sub-base		present day
L4	Manhole trench	Dark earth - thick layer of dark brown sandy silt sealing layer of Roman demolition or robbing debris; contained occasional flecks of charcoal, oyster shell, brick, tile and mortar	Roman pottery, Roman tile, animal bone	post-Roman (looked similar to L6)
L5	Manhole trench	Light brown clayey silt containing flecks of charcoal, oyster shell and tile - Roman demolition or robbing debris	Roman tile and pottery, shell, animal bone and mortar	late Roman
L6	In TP1-TP3 and new sewer trench above existing sewer	Thick layer of dark brown sandy silt; looked similar to L4 - redeposited dark earth, backfill of existing storm water sewer trench	Peg-tile	modern
F1	TP1-TP3 of the new sewer trench	Concrete capping for existing sewer pipe		modern
F2	TP1-TP3 of the new sewer trench	Crown of existing sewer pipe		modern
<i>Test-pits for a bus shelter in Queen Street</i>				
L7	TP1 and TP2, pavement outside 21 Queen Street	Yellow brown sandy silt with oyster shell, mortar and tile flecks	Roman tile	Roman demolition or robbing debris, similar to L5
L8	TP1 and TP2, pavement outside 21 Queen Street	Very mixed disturbed sandy silt with peg-tile and brick, plus mortar flecks; sandy pockets - sealed F3	Peg-tile and brick	modern demolition debris from former building on site of no 21
F3	TP2, pavement outside 21 Queen Street	Concrete stump of modern foundation		modern - previous building

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Distribution list:

Philip Wise, Curator of Archaeology for Colchester Museums
 Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council
 Essex Historic Environment Record, Essex County Council



Colchester Archaeological Trust

12 Lexden Road,
Colchester,
Essex CO3 3NF

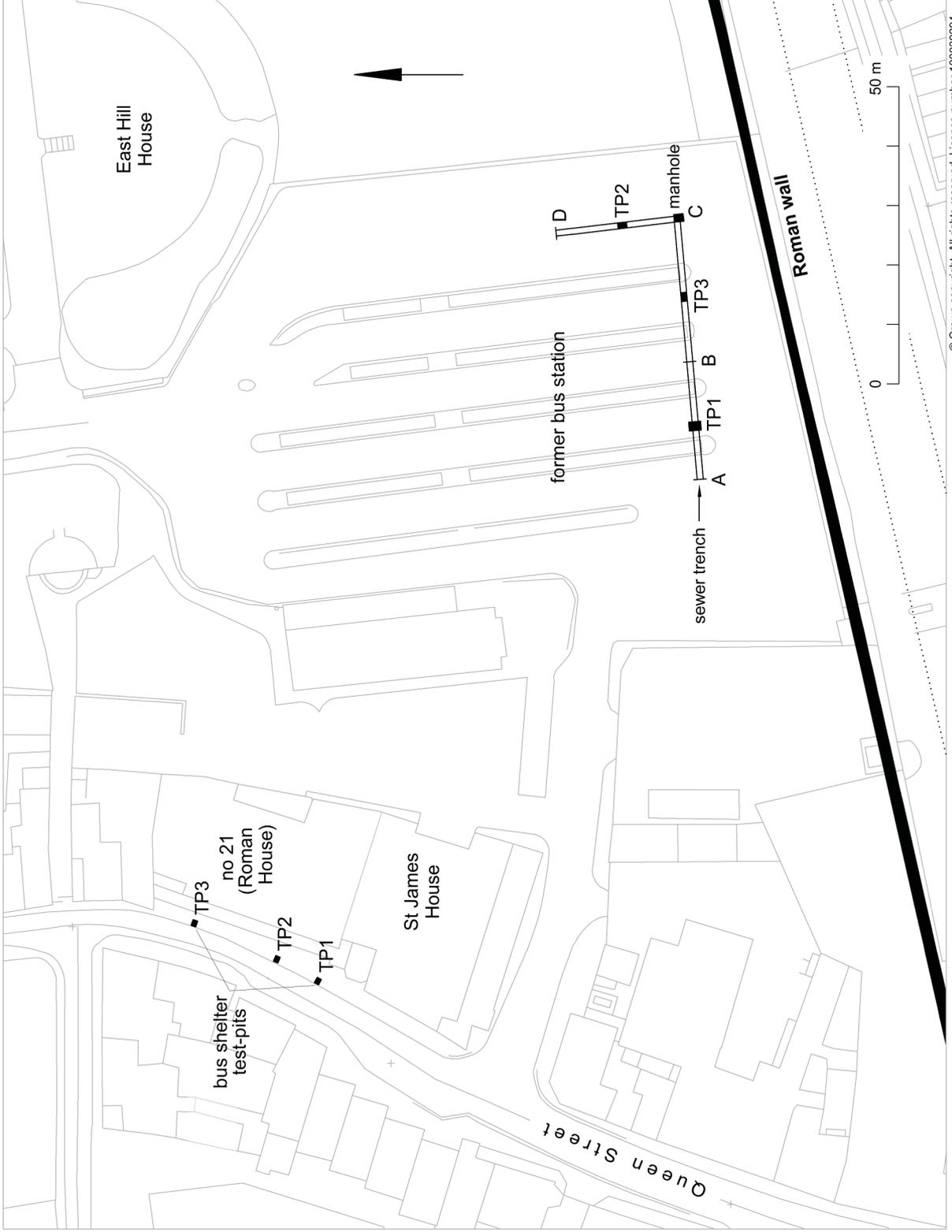
tel.: (01206) 541051

tel./fax: (01206) 500124

email: archaeologists@catuk.org

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Date: 13.10.06

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Fig 1 Location of sewer trench and of test-pits for the new bus shelter.

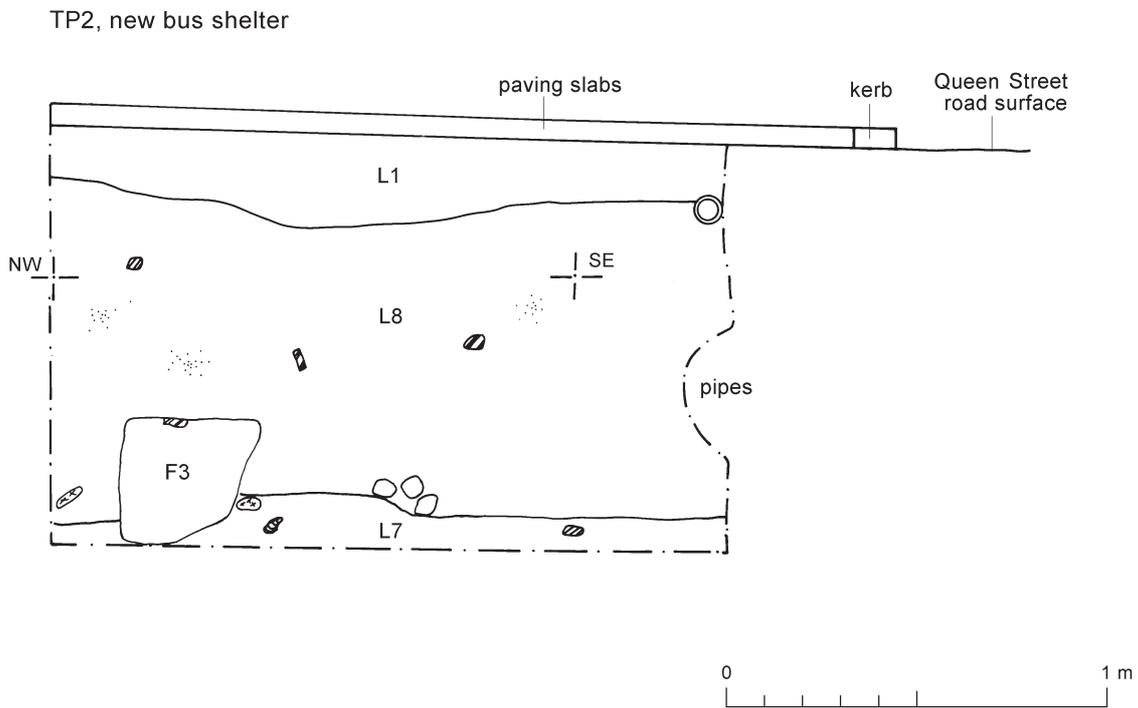
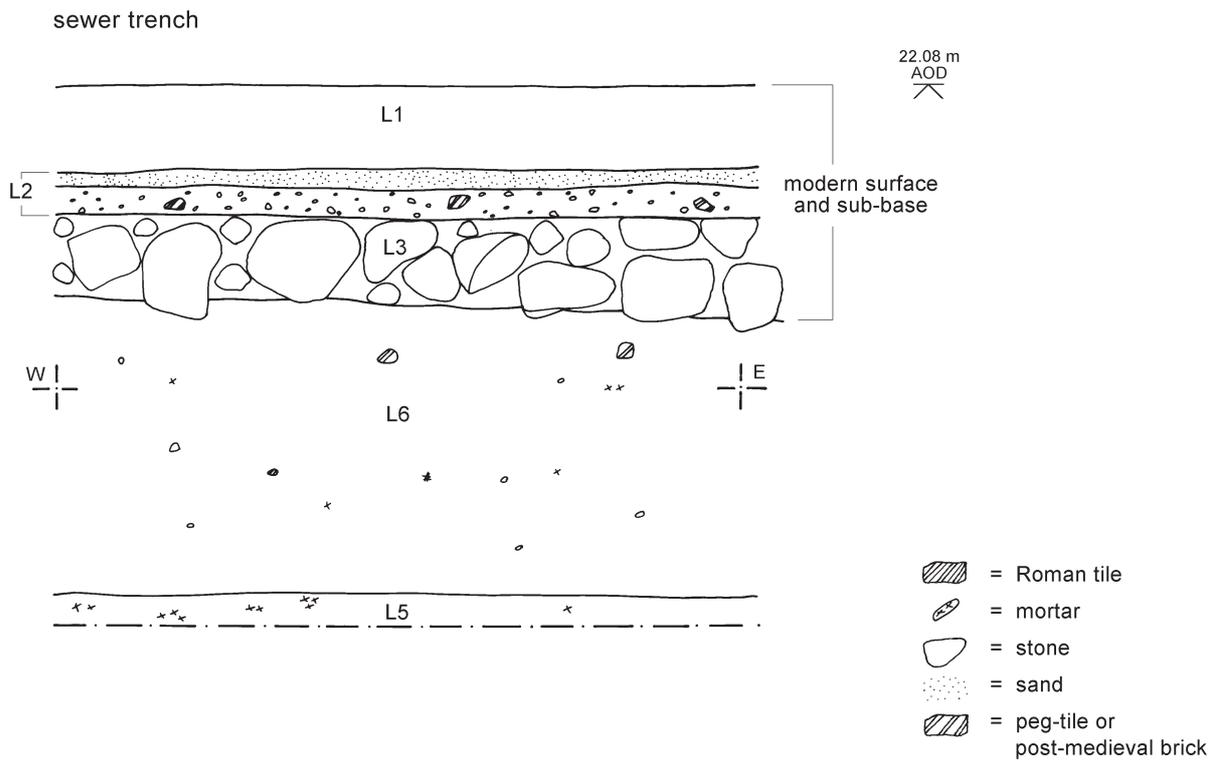


Fig 2 Sewer trench, east-west-aligned part, south-facing section; and the new bus shelter: TP2, north-east-facing section.

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

Summary sheet

Site address: a sewer trench at firstsite:newsite and test-pits for a bus shelter in Queen Street, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TM 00072 25075 (centre) and TL 99950 25145 (centre)	Site code: Museum accession code 2006.40
Type of work: Monitoring	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: April 2006	Size of area investigated: 65m-long sewer trench plus six small test-pits
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Colchester Borough Council
Further seasons anticipated? Yes	Related EHER/UAD nos: UAD nos 117, 321, 3033, 3069, 3070, 3577
Final report: CAT Report 385 and summary in EAH	
Periods represented: Roman	
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>Monitoring was carried out on a sewer trench dug at firstsite:newsite within the southern part of the former bus station and on three test-pits dug for a bus shelter in Queen Street. The deeper groundworks reached a layer of late Roman demolition or robbing debris. None of the groundworks were deep enough to expose Roman foundations which these remains are thought to seal. Within the sewer trench, this demolition debris was sealed by dark earth (where it had not already been disturbed by the existing sewer trench). In the test-pits in Queen Street, the Roman levels were sealed by 1m of modern material, with no intervening post-Roman layers.</i>	
Previous summaries/reports: CAT Report 305	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: October 2006