

## Report on a watching brief: CAT Report 388

**Site address:** 28 Hythe Quay, Colchester, Essex  
**Date of fieldwork:** 25th August 2006  
**NGR:** TM 0150 2472 (c)  
**CBC brief?:** No  
**Plans attached?:** Yes (Figs 1-2)  
**Museum accession code:** 2006.109  
**CAT reference code:** 06/8h

### Archaeological background:

The watching brief was carried out because the site occupies part of the area which is thought to be the location of the medieval quay (CAR 1, 47, fig 40). The Hythe area has been the port for Colchester probably since the Norman period. The name derives from an Old English word for landing place, and the area was originally known as 'New Hythe'. This appears to be with reference to an earlier landing place at Old Heath (*Ealdeheth* – the old landing place), located closer to the mouth of the River Colne, which New Hythe superseded. The earliest reference to Old Heath, implying the existence of the New Hythe, is in 1272. The Hythe parish church of St Leonard's is referenced in 1237, and the earliest reference to the Hythe itself appears to date from 1276 (CAR 1, 47). There are numerous references to private quays, wharfs and warehouses from the 14th century onwards, and by 1823 the quays at the Hythe extended along both sides of the river (CAT Report 232, 21). There is also the possibility of a Roman quay or bridge in this area, as a Roman road can be traced to within half a mile of the Hythe, from the direction of Mistley. The projected line of this road suggests a crossing point on the river close to the bottom of Hythe Hill. So far, the only archaeological investigation at the Hythe has been carried out on sites some way back from the present river frontage (Brooks 2000; Benfield 2004; Shimmin 2004; CAT Report 100), and no trace of the medieval quay or any Roman structures has yet been located at the Hythe.

### The archaeology as revealed by the test-pits: (Fig 1)

The site of the watching brief is a derelict plot occupying the west side of the river frontage just south of the Hythe bridge. The site itself was covered with demolition material, primarily brick rubble, from a previous quayside building or buildings. One visit was made during which all of the test-pits were excavated. The four test-pits (TP1-TP4) were entirely machine-excavated. Two (TP1-TP2) were located alongside the modern quay retaining wall, which is made of concrete. The test-pits ranged in size from 6.3 m long and 3.75 m wide (TP1) to 2.75 m long and 0.7 m wide (TP4).

#### Test-pit 1: (Fig 2)

TP1 was irregular-shaped and excavated to a depth of between about 2.8 m, alongside the quay and about 0.6 m further back from the river frontage. At between about 1.5 m and 3.7 m from the river was a series of substantial concrete structures which appeared to run parallel with the quay. It was not clear if these were parts of a single feature. The central section of the concrete structures was surmounted by the remains of a brick footing or wall, running parallel with the quay. This is probably the remains of a wall belonging to one of the former buildings on the site. At about 4.3 m back from the quay frontage there was a second large concrete structure. Only part of this feature was exposed, and it was at least 2 m wide and on an east-west axis parallel to the river.

On the river side of the concrete structures was a substantial wooden beam, the top of which was level with the visible extent of the concrete structure at about 1.2 m below the present ground surface. The beam could not be closely examined and it could only safely be viewed from the edge of the pit. Possibly of pine, it was about 250 mm broad, but did not appear to be as thick, and it was at least 2.5 m long. It may have been placed alongside the base of the concrete structure, although the concrete may have lipped over the edge of it. The material under the beam was modern, containing abundant brick rubble, and this extended back at least a short distance into the section below the edge of the concrete structure. This could be seen as some of this material was pulled loose by the working of the machine bucket and also collapsed from the sides. The brick rubble material

also entirely filled the area behind the quay wall to close to the base of the test-pit at 2.8 m. Two redundant iron tie-rods protruded from the timber. As the timber was not obviously attached to the concrete structure, the tie-rods presumably passed through the timber to be anchored either in the concrete (extending behind the timber) or in further timber below the concrete. This beam did not appear to be ancient timber preserved by waterlogging. None of the deposits at the level of the timber showed any sign of waterlogging. Also the timber seemed to be relatively fresh when scraped by the machine bucket; it splintered, showing a clean pale wood below the surface.

There were several iron tie-rods between the concrete structures and the modern quay retaining wall. The uppermost of these was a single rod located at a depth of 1.1 m. This appeared to pass through the concrete structures nearest to the quay into the second large concrete structure at the west end of the test-pit. This tie-rod could be seen to anchor the modern quay wall, and a large retaining nut could be seen at its end on the river side of the wall, where it passed through the front of the quay. At a slightly lower level, at a depth of 1.3 m, were the remains of two further iron tie-rods. These passed into the large timber beam, but did not appear to extend as far as the second large concrete structure. Their ends were loose within the fill behind the modern quay wall. They seemed to have been severed from a former quay wall for which they served a retaining function in the same way as the upper tie-beam for the present quay wall.

All the features were covered by demolition rubble and soil containing rubble. This fill extended all over and to the sides of all the features, and almost to the bottom of the greatest depth of excavation behind the quay wall. This material appeared to be fairly homogeneous and contained numerous unfrosted red bricks, dated to the 18th-early 19th century (Ryan 1996, 95; 18th-/early 19th-century red bricks). What appeared to be estuarine deposits (dark muddy soil) were encountered directly below this material behind the quay wall toward the base of the test-pit at about 2.8 m. A single sharpened timber stake of unknown date was recovered by machine from close to the base of the test-pit. This did not appear to have been upright in the estuarine deposits before the machine revealed it, and therefore was probably not *in situ*.

#### *Test-pit 2: (Fig 2)*

TP2 was also an irregular shape. The main section was dug into the quay parallel to the quay wall to a depth of about 1.2 m. Another section was excavated back away from the quay to follow an iron tie-rod, encountered at about 1.2 m down at the base of the test-pit. As in TP1, all the features were covered by demolition rubble and soil containing rubble, and this extended beyond the base of the test-pit. The tie-rod was not one single piece of metal, but was composed of two pieces jointed by a hook link at about 1.7 m back from the quay wall. It was found to pass into a large concrete structure, either a foundation or an anchor block, just over 5 m back from the quay wall. The top of this concrete structure was 0.6 m below the present surface. Where the tie-rod passed into the modern quay wall it could be seen to be anchoring the existing quay front back to the large concrete structure. It would appear that this tie-rod can be associated with the upper tie-rod (anchoring the present quay wall) encountered in TP1.

#### *Test-pit 3:*

TP3 was a rectangular pit, about 3.5 m long, excavated about 2.5 m back from the quay wall. This was excavated at an approximate right-angle to the river. The material excavated from the test-pit consisted entirely of brick rubble and soil containing rubble. This material extended beyond the base of the test-pit, which was 1.2 m deep. The only feature encountered was a brick foundation. This was located at the east end of the test-pit and the top of this feature was about 1.1 m below the present ground-level.

#### *Test-pit 4:*

TP4 consisted of a rectangular pit about 2.8 m long, at a right-angle to the river frontage, and located about 3 m back from the quay wall. The test-pit was excavated to 1.2 m below present ground-level. The test-pit was located alongside a large metal tank which was filled with sea water from the tidal river. The engineer on site suggested that this tank is a tidal-controlled feature concerned with controlling drainage into the river from Hythe Hill. The test-pit was excavated through brick rubble which extended to close to the base of the test-pit. At the base of the test-pit, what appeared to be estuarine deposits (dark muddy soil) were encountered. The only feature encountered was a length of an iron tie-rod. This was

located about 0.9 m below ground-level. The rod was formed of two lengths jointed by a hook link. This link is of the same type as that found on the tie-rod in TP2. Based on this, it appears that this tie-rod can be associated with the tie-rods encountered in TP1 and TP2, all anchoring the present quay wall.

## Discussion

There was no evidence of any medieval or Roman activity on the site, either as surviving structures or as loose finds such as pottery. Only one undated loose find was made. This was a wooden stake, or more probably the lower part of a wooden stake, which came from near the base of TP1, possibly from the top of the estuarine deposits close behind the quay wall. A large timber or wooden beam in TP1 is of interest because any earlier timber quay would have been constructed, in part if not entirely, of substantial timbers. However, no other substantial timbers were located on the site and the timber itself appeared to be of relatively recent date. It is possible that this timber was part of the timber-fronted quay illustrated in a drawing of Hythe bridge of c 1825 (*VCH 9*, plate facing p 296).

Much of the area, close behind the modern quay wall, is occupied by substantial modern features. These consist of concrete structures which were either foundations for walls or anchor blocks for iron tie-rods which stop the quay wall from collapsing toward the river. That one redundant set of these rods was encountered shows that the present concrete quay wall has replaced an earlier modern wall which used the same anchoring system. Between and over these features was demolition rubble containing abundant unfrosted bricks dated to the 18th-early 19th century. These bricks almost certainly derive from earlier buildings on and around the site and suggest that the concrete structures and quay wall tie-rods date to after that period and are relatively recent. The only other deposits encountered were what appeared to be estuarine deposits (muddy soil). These were seen at about 2.8 m immediately behind the modern quay wall and about 1.2 m at between 3-5 m back from the quay wall. Apart from a few isolated and unstratified post-medieval or modern items of pottery or glass, no datable finds were observed or retrieved.

The levels at which estuarine deposits or natural ground have been recorded close to the quay at the Hythe come from two of the test-pits here and an evaluation trench at 9-11 Hythe Quay (CAT Report 100). The two records from the test-pits are estuarine deposits about 2.8 m down close to the quay wall (TP1) and about 1.2 m down and about 3-4 m back from the quay wall (TP4), and natural soil at about 1.4 m below the modern surface some 70-80 m back from the river at 9-11 Hythe Quay (CAT Report 100, fig 3). The depths at which these layers occur are not directly comparable as 9-11 Hythe Quay is located partly on the rise of Hythe Hill. However, the levels indicate a quite rapid rise away from the present quay and river frontage.

The lack of finds or other evidence of any substantial medieval activity or structure on the waterfront at this site indicates that the quay must have been substantially rebuilt in the 19th or 20th century, since a quay is shown in this position on mid 19th-century maps (Monson map of Colchester of 1848).

## Bibliography

- |                |      |   |
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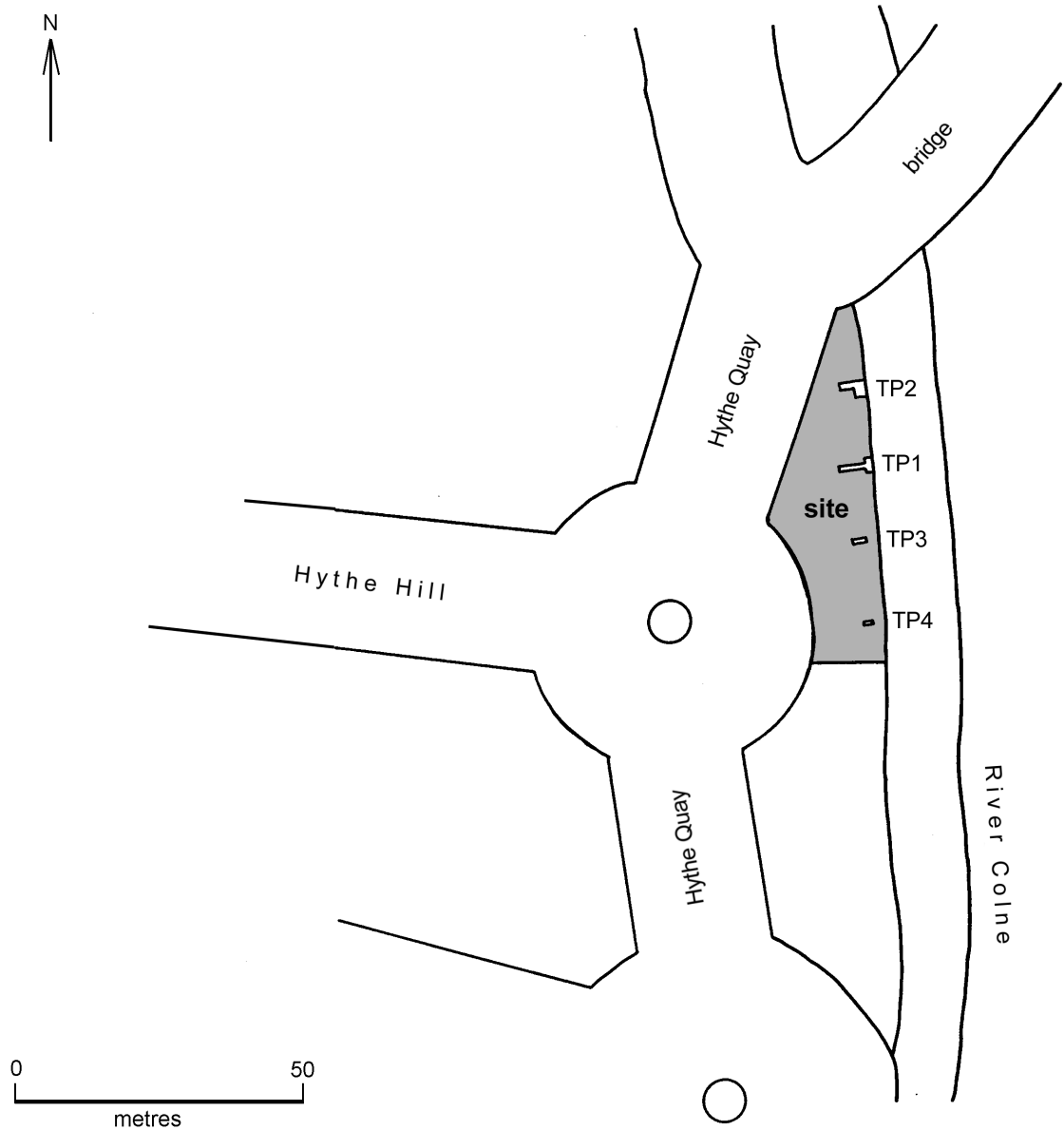


Fig 1 Site location and location of test-pits (roads not to scale).

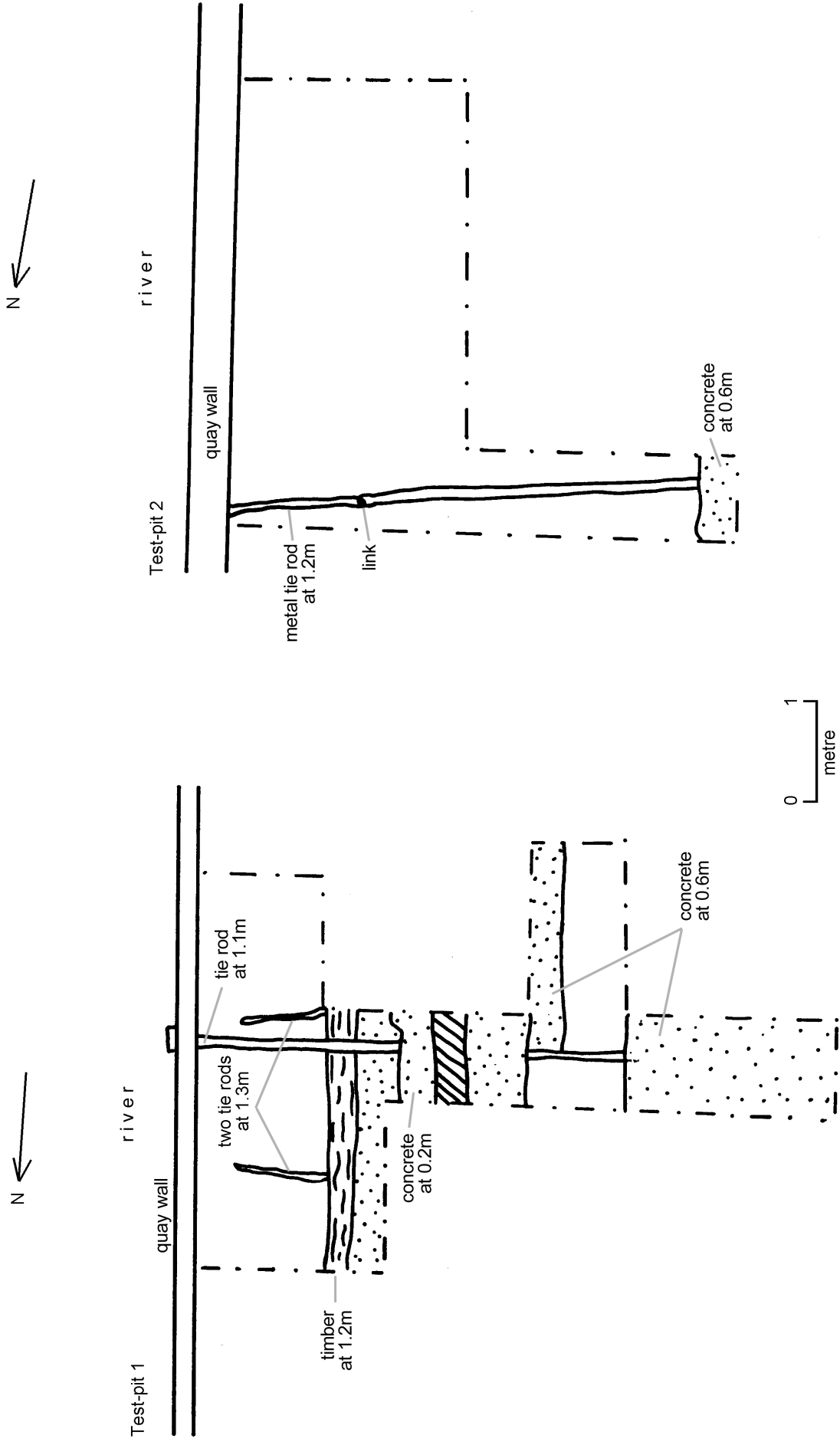


Fig 2 Test-pit 1 and test-pit 2: plans.

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

## Summary sheet

<b>Site address:</b> 28 Hythe Quay, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester Borough
<b>NGR:</b> TM 0150 2472 (c)	<b>Site code:</b> Museum accession code 2006.109
<b>Type of work:</b> Watching brief	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> 25th August 2006	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 4 test-pits ranging from 6.3 m long and 3.75 m wide to 2.75 m long and 0.7 m wide
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Developer - Mr F Magerou
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related EHER/UAD nos:</b> UAD event nos 3580, 47, 41; EHER nos 2428, 2534
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 388	
<b>Periods represented:</b> post-medieval and modern	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b>  <i>Four test-pits were machine-dug next to the retaining quay wall. The test-pits were mainly dug through brick rubble containing 18th- to early 19th-century bricks and post-medieval pottery. From the base of the first test-pit, a timber stake was retrieved. Metal tie-rods fixed into large concrete structures were exposed in three of the test-pits. The function of these was to prevent the quay wall falling toward the river. A large timber located at the base one of the concrete structures is possibly part of an earlier post-medieval timber quay. Estuarine clay was reached at 1.2 m and 2.8 m below ground-level in two of the test-pits. There was no evidence of Roman or medieval activity.</i></p>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> CAT Report 323 (desk-based assessment)	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Kate Orr	<b>Date of summary:</b> October 2006