

An archaeological watching brief at Short Cut Road, Colchester, Essex November 2007

**report prepared by
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**on behalf of
Parkland Developments**

CAT project ref.: 07/11a
NGR: TL 9944 2544
Colchester and Ipswich Museums accession code: COLEM 2007.5



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1 Summary

A watching brief on a site in Insula 2 of the Roman town confirmed the results of an earlier evaluation, ie that significant archaeological horizons (in this case, of Roman date) were deeply buried below post-medieval and modern deposits. The Roman deposits probably derive from the demolition of Roman buildings on this site.

A post-medieval brick footing was probably the foundation of a Victorian brick-built house on the Northgate Street frontage.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the report on an archaeological watching brief carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at Short Cut Road, Colchester, Essex on November 8th-9th and 16th 2007 on behalf of Parkland Developments.
- 2.2 Planning permission had been given for construction of a new residential development. The site is at NGR TL 9944 2544.
- 2.3 The site lies in Insula 2 of the Roman town, and on the northern edge of Colchester's modern town centre. Its north, east and south boundaries are on Northgate Road, Short Cut Road and Nunn's Road respectively. The Roman town wall lies a short distance to the north. The watching brief described here focused on the building plot on the Northgate Street frontage.
- 2.4 Following an archaeological evaluation in January 2007 (CAT Report 406), a mitigation strategy was written on behalf of Parkland Developments for consideration by the assistant Colchester Borough Council Archaeology Officer (ACBCAO). This mitigation strategy considered the effect of the development on the archaeological remains, and recommended a watching brief on part of the site. Following the submission of and agreement over the mitigation strategy, a written scheme of investigation (WSI - CAT 2006) was submitted to and agreed with the ACBCAO.
- 2.5 All fieldwork was done in accordance with the WSI, and monitored by the ACBCAO. This report conforms to standards and practices contained in 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), and 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). Other guidelines followed include English Heritage's *Management of Archaeological Projects 2* (MAP 2) and those published in EAA 3, EAA 8 and EAA 14.

3 Archaeological background

- 3.1 The site lies in Insula 2 of the Roman town, and also within the historic core of the later town of Colchester which has been the subject of archaeological excavation for many years (Hull 1958; Crummy 1997).
- 3.2 The Roman town wall extends east to west on the far side of Northgate Street, approximately 10m north of the north edge of this site.
- 3.3 Recent archaeological work in this area includes an excavation on the other side (the east side) of Short Cut Road in 1975 (CAT site code DTC 1975), when the remains of Roman buildings were detected, deeply buried below post-medieval dark earth and the foundations of brick houses (CAR 6, 801).
- 3.4 A watching brief in 1999 on the site now occupied by 18-26 Nunn's Road (immediately west of the current site) found that Roman deposits survived beneath the road at a depth of 2.05m below ground-level as 'islands', which are the result of subsequent activity cutting into the Roman deposits. A considerable amount of Roman building demolition material was seen at a depth of approximately 2.60m below ground-level; this included tile, mortar, septaria and *tesserae*. A small area of a possible crude surface was also recorded. Beneath the eastern site section (ie facing the west edge of the 2007 evaluation site, and to the south-west of the current

site), two small patches of *in situ* Roman tessellated floor surface were uncovered by amateur archaeologists at 2.65m below ground-level. This shows the potential for archaeological stratigraphy to survive in this part of town (CAT Report 50).

- 3.5** At 21 North Hill, excavation following evaluation revealed Roman, medieval and later activity (UAD nos 3572 and 3584).
- 3.6** An archaeological trial-trenching evaluation in January 2007 found modern strata, drains and footings lying over a considerable depth of post-medieval soils. The highest significant archaeological horizons were generally Roman in date, and were found at depths ranging from 1.3m to 1.8m below ground-level (ie the car-park surface). A significant quantity of Roman brick and tile and other building material found in residual contexts in the post-medieval soils shows that Roman buildings once stood here. They were presumably demolished by the medieval period at the latest, as is usually the case in Colchester. Historic maps indicate that this was an area of gardens in the post-medieval period (CAT Report 406).

4 Aim

The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any surviving archaeological deposits that might be disturbed during building operations.

5 Results (Figs 2-4)

8th-9th and 16th November 2007

The watching brief was carried out on the plot on the Northgate Street frontage, since this was the area of the site where the Mitigation Strategy had identified the greatest potential for the proposed footings trenches to impact on the archaeological remains. For the purposes of description, the plot was split into a number of trenches, ie T1-T6. The principal stratified sequences are described here (by period).

Modern

T1, L1: concrete surface approximately 0.2 m-0.25m thick.

T1, L2: hardcore layer under L1, 0.6m thick (full of building rubble material).

Victorian

T2, L6: layer full of demolition material - Roman, post-medieval, and Victorian brick and tile, stones, and mortar.

Post-medieval

T1, F1: two deep wall foundations, of a ?cellar. Made of red unfrogged brick; cutting all the earlier deposits in T2; approximately 1.5m wide and 2.2m deep (going further down). The dating is not very secure.

T3, F2: building foundation wall made of red unfrogged brick, timber beam and layer of thin tiles - the rest of the upper part of the wall was truncated by a layer of probable Victorian date (not recorded).

T1, L3: layer of post-medieval topsoil, 0.6m-0.65m thick; contained post-medieval tile fragments, charcoal, clay (daub), occasional oyster shell - probably equivalent to L7 in T2.

T1, L4: layer with Roman material (tile, mortar, *opus signinum*) - probably equivalent to L8 in T2. The dating is not certainly either medieval or (more plausibly) post-medieval.

T2, L6: layer full of demolition material - Roman, post-medieval, and Victorian brick, stones, mortar.

T2, L7: layer of post-medieval topsoil containing post-medieval and Roman brick, stones - probably equivalent to L3 in T1.

T2, L8: layer full of post-medieval and Roman tile, pieces of stone, mortar, *opus signinum*, clay (daub) - probably equivalent to L4 in T2.

Medieval

T1, L4: layer with Roman material (CBM, mortar, *opus signinum*) - probably equivalent to L8 in T2. The dating is not certain, either medieval or (more plausibly) post-medieval.

Roman

T1, L5: layer with large amount of building demolition material, approximately 2.1m below the current surface.

T2, L9: layer with large amount of building demolition material.

6 Finds catalogue

All medieval and later pottery fabric descriptions are after *CAR 7*.

L6

Finds no 2

1 piece of septaria with mortar on its surface, 1,160g.

1 piece of limestone, 152g.

1 fragment of post-medieval glass, 29g.

1 fragment of Roman tile, 115g.

L7

Finds no 3

1 large fragment of Roman brick, 31mm thick, 962g.

1 piece of septaria, 735g.

L8

Finds no 1

1 piece of white lime mortar, 208g.

1 Roman red *tessera* cube, 16g.

1 small Roman tile fragment, 74g.

1 small Roman tile fragment with white lime mortar adhering, 135g.

1 fragment of Roman brick, 345g.

1 glazed post-medieval red earthenware (PMRE, Fabric 40) sherd, 38g.

1 Roman grey ware sherd, 72g.

8 medieval sherds (Fabrics 13 and 20), 12th-13th century, 154g.

7 Discussion

This watching brief confirmed the results of the earlier evaluation, ie that significant archaeological horizons (in this case, of Roman date), were deeply buried below post-medieval and modern deposits. These Roman deposits (L5 and L9) contained Roman brick and tile and probably derive from the demolition of Roman buildings on this site (in Insula 2 of the Roman town). In T2, the top of demolition deposit L5 was at 1.05m below modern ground-level, at approximately 10.25m AOD. In T1, the modern strata had been truncated, and the top of the Roman demolition deposit L9 was at 10.10m AOD.

The post-medieval brick footing F2 exposed in T3 was probably the foundation of a brick-built house shown on the Northgate Street frontage on the 1876 Ordnance Survey map of Colchester town centre (sheet XXVII.12.4).

8 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 and Ipswich Museums under accession code COLEM 2007.5.

9 Acknowledgements

The Trust would like to thank Parkland Developments (Mr Jon Nash) for commissioning and funding the work.

The fieldwork was carried out by M Górnjak.

10 References

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|----------------|------|--|
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11 Abbreviations

AOD	Above Ordnance Datum
NGR	National Grid Reference
U/S	unstratified, ie without any context

12 Glossary

feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
layer	distinct or distinguishable deposit of soil
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c AD 1500
modern	period from the 19th century onwards to the present
post-medieval	from c AD 1500 to around the late 18th century
post-Roman	period after c AD 410
Roman	period of assimilation of Britain as part of the Roman Empire, c AD 43-410

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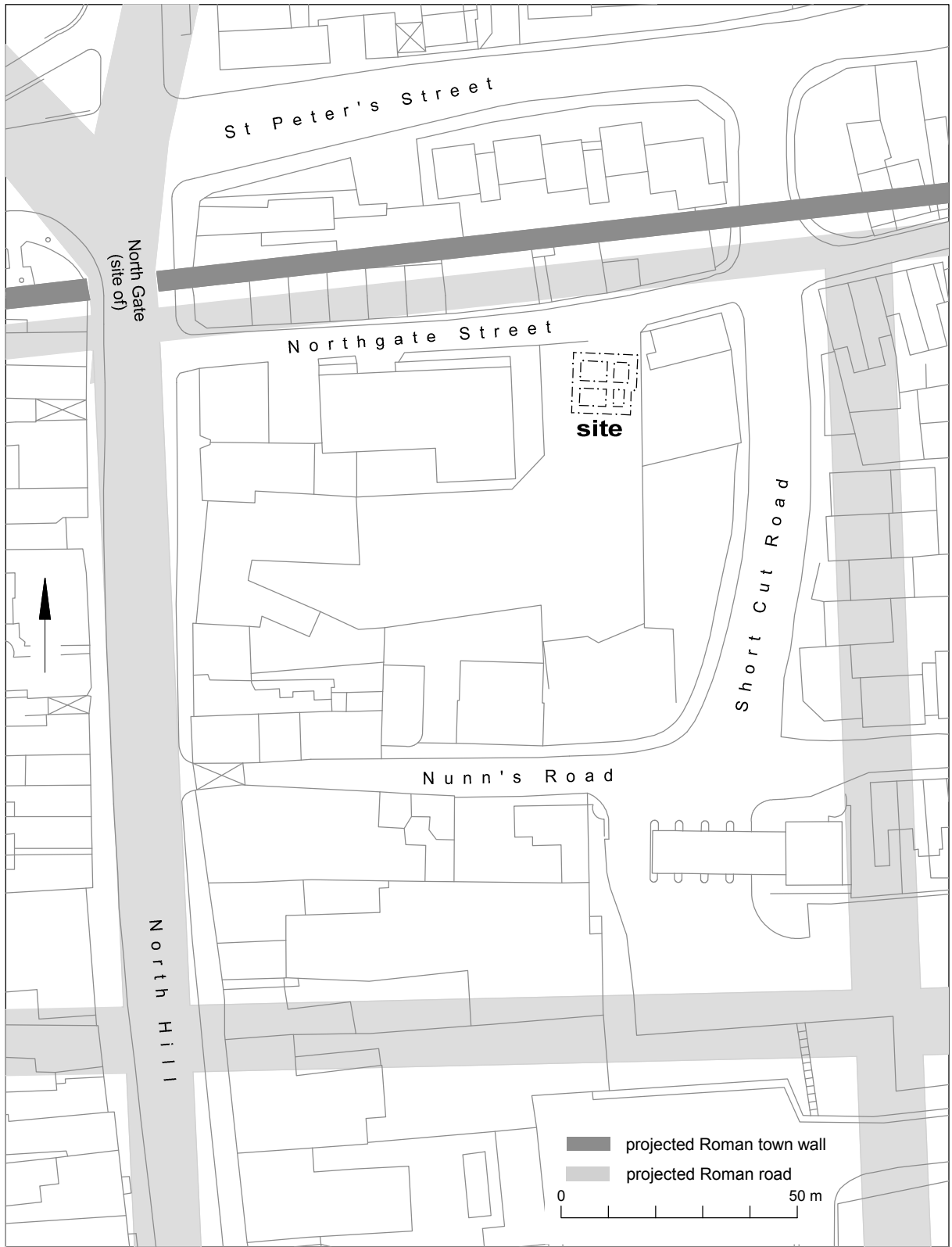


Fig 1 Site location.

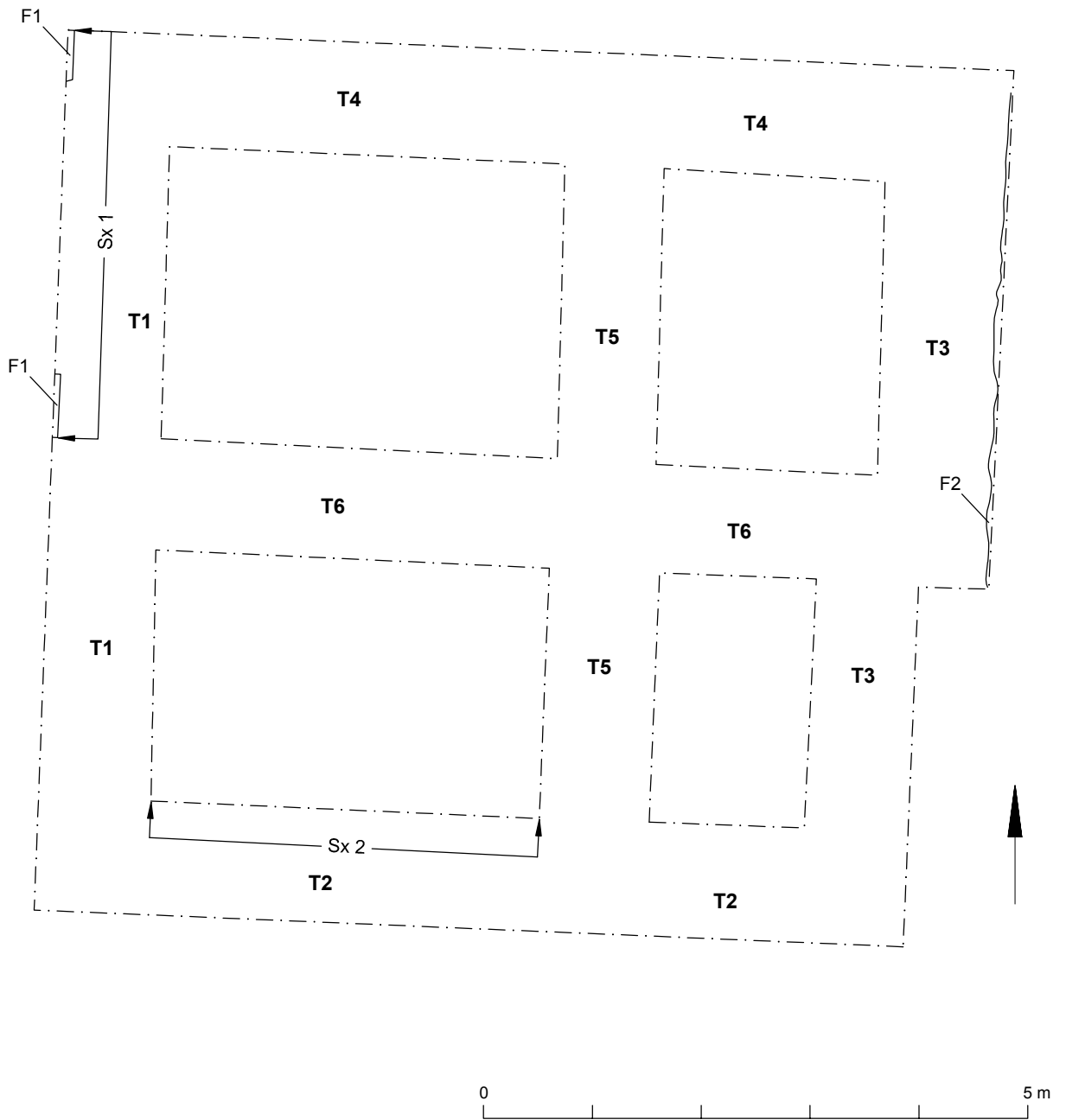


Fig 2 Plan of trenches.

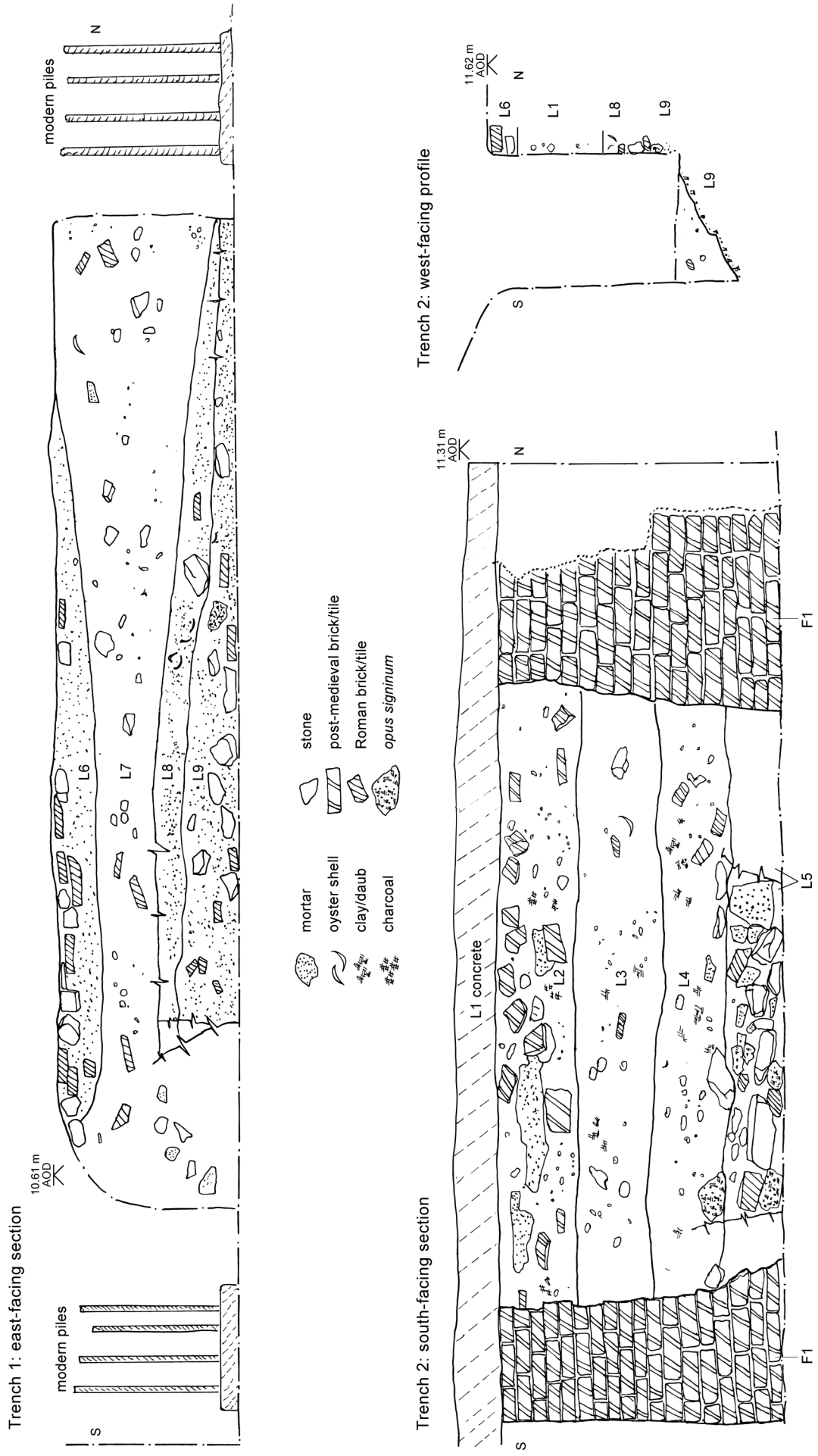


Fig 3 Sections.

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

Summary sheet

Site address: Short Cut Road, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TL 9944 2544	Site code: COLEM accession code 2007.5
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: November 2007	Size of area investigated: 8 x 9m area (0.12ha site evaluated previously)
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related UAD nos: 3572, 3584
Final report: CAT Report 459 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Roman, ?medieval, post-medieval, modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>A watching brief on a site in Insula 2 of the Roman town confirmed the results of an earlier evaluation, ie that significant archaeological horizons (in this case, of Roman date) were deeply buried below post-medieval and modern deposits. The Roman deposits probably derive from the demolition of Roman buildings on this site.</i> <i>A post-medieval brick footing was probably the foundation of a Victorian brick-built house on the Northgate Street frontage.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: CAT Report 406	
Author of summary: Howard Brooks	Date of summary: March 2008