

**An archaeological evaluation
on St John's Green
(south of Southway),
Colchester, Essex
April 2007**

**report prepared by
Ben Holloway**

**on behalf of
Colchester Borough Council**

CAT project code: 07/3d
Colchester and Ipswich Museums accession code: 2004.10
NGR: TL 9976 2484 (TP1)
TL 9976 2484 (TP2)



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1 Summary

The site lies 170m to the south of Colchester's Roman and medieval town wall. Two small test-pits (TP1-TP2) were cut into the grass verge south of Southway and adjacent to the Abbey Arms public house. TP2 revealed a gravel surface at a depth of 0.70m. The date of the surface is uncertain, but it may be associated with similar material, possibly Roman, previously noted in nearby evaluation works. The surface had been cut on its northern edge by a post-medieval feature. Post-medieval and modern features were also identified in TP1.

2 Introduction

This report is one of a series describing the results of archaeological evaluation by trial-trenches and test-pits in the Vineyard Gate area of Colchester (the area between the Roman town wall in the Vineyard Street car-park, and the relief road Southway). To date, 22 locations have been investigated (CAT Reports 269, 363, 364, 432).

The subject of this report is two test-pits excavated in the grass verge south of Southway and adjacent to the Abbey Arms public house. The test-pit locations are shown in Figure 1.

Section 3 here is taken from Johnson *et al* 2003.

3 Archaeological background (Fig 1)

Archaeologically, this region of Colchester is of interest because it adjoins the town's southern defences and lies close to a major gateway.

A recent study divided the area broadly into three zones (Johnson *et al* 2003). The high ground in front of the town wall can be seen as a defensive zone containing the Roman and medieval town ditches. Beyond the defences are two zones subject to settlement: one on higher ground in Vineyard Street and one on the lower slopes to the south, where relatively wet ground conditions may have influenced the nature of past development. The only substantial archaeological excavation to have previously taken place within the area was prompted by the breach of the town wall in the 1970s to form the Vineyard Gate service entrance to the Lion Walk precinct. A section dug through the town defences encountered a series of Roman and medieval ditches up to 5m deep, with a possible medieval street to the south and remains of post-medieval and later buildings over the backfilled ditch (CAR 3, Sheet 6a, Sx 55). In Osborne Street, systematic investigation has previously occurred only on the south side of the street, where an excavation in advance of the construction of the NCP multi-storey car-park revealed floors from a Roman building at the eastern end of the site (Shimmin 1994). These lay at about 3m depth, below the well-preserved remains of medieval wicker-lined drains which were followed by a series of later medieval and post-medieval buildings belonging to a plot extending back from the St Botolph's Street frontage. At the Stanwell Street end of the site, the excavations exposed the floors of a 16th- to 17th-century timber-framed building which had been destroyed by fire, probably during the Civil War siege of Colchester in 1648.

Roman tessellated floors and cremation burials appear among records of chance discoveries made in the Osborne Street area in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Since these were recorded with varying degrees of precision, their exact locations are, in the main, uncertain.

4 Results

Test-pit 1 (TP1) (plan and section: Fig 2)

Location: grass verge to the south of Southway east of the Abbey Arms public house.

NGR: TL 9976 2484

Trench dimensions: 1m x 1m

Surface level: 22.23m OD

The uppermost 0.10m consisted of modern topsoil, a highly-compacted dark brown silt (L1). Beneath this was a layer of modern make-up composed of a lightly-compacted grey ashy silt with common brick and tile fragments (L5). This sealed a further deposit of modern material (L2) containing brick and plastic fragments (discarded). The more recent modern material continued to an overall depth of 0.65m, where L2 was found to seal the remains of a concrete slab path laid into a concrete base (F5). F5 appears to indicate ground-level at the time that Southway was constructed, with L1, L5 and L2 being deposited during construction to create an embankment alongside the roadway. Directly sealed by F5 was a remnant topsoil material (L6). This material was also highly compacted and contained large quantities of peg-tile and brick fragments. Sealed by L6 was a post-medieval pit (F6). This feature contained animal bone, peg-tile and clay tobacco-pipe fragments. The pit feature cut a layer of post-medieval demolition dump of mortar, peg-tile fragments (L7) and natural glacial sands and gravels (L8). The excavation of the trench stopped when the natural geological deposits were encountered at an overall depth of 1m below ground-level.

The excavation did not extend into the geological material (L8); however, a 0.30m-deep auger probe extended into the natural (ie to an overall depth of 1.3m below ground-level) produced cores of natural sands and gravels. It was noted that the lower auger cores were more water-saturated.

Test-pit 2 (TP2) (plan and section: Fig 2)

Location: grass verge to the south of Southway, east of the Abbey Arms public house (east of TP1).

NGR: TL 9976 2484

Trench dimensions: 1m x 1m

Surface level: 22.27m OD

The uppermost 0.16m consisted of modern topsoil, a highly-compacted dark brown silt (L1) which sealed a modern service trench (F1) containing a lead water-pipe. This feature cut L2, a deposit of modern dump material also seen in TP1, and a compacted deposit containing brick and plastic fragments (discarded). L2 sealed a post-medieval pit (F3) which contained large quantities of post-medieval building material including a deposit of masonry (F4). Pit F3 cut a layer of redeposited natural sand (L3), which contained a large quantity of post-medieval material including peg-tile and brick fragments. The redeposited natural deposit sealed a loosely-compacted gravel surface (L4). There was no dating material from L4, which directly sealed natural glacial sands and gravels (L8). The excavation of the trench stopped when the natural geological deposits were encountered at an overall depth of 0.85m below ground-level.

The excavation did not extend into the geological material (L8). However, a 0.30m-deep auger probe extended into the natural (ie to an overall depth of 1.15m below ground-level) produced cores of natural sands and gravels. As in TP1, the lower auger cores were more water-saturated.

5 Finds

Finds included pottery, building materials and animal bone, mostly of modern or post-medieval date. Modern material such as plastic was discarded, and the remaining material was quantified (section 11 below). Pottery is reported on separately below.

The pottery

by Howard Brooks

Introduction

This is the report on the post-Roman pottery from the two test-pits on Southway. Fabrics present are as follows (after Cunningham 1985 and *CAR 7*): Fabric 13 (early medieval sandy ware); Fabric 21a (Colchester-type ware); Fabric 40 (post-medieval red earthenware or PMRE); Fabric 45 (modern stoneware); and Fabric 48d (modern ironstone).

Catalogue

TP1

L1, Finds no 4

1 residual Roman sherd, 4g.
1 body sherd Fabric 13 (26g).
1 body sherd Fabric 40 (PMRE), 8g. 17th/18th century.
3 sherds modern ironstone (Fabric 48d), 12g.
Group date 19th-20th century.

L2/L5/L6, Finds no 6

1 residual Roman sherd, 3g.
1 body sherd Fabric 40 (PMRE), 17g.
1 sherd modern stoneware (Fabric 45), 10g.
8 sherds modern ironstone (Fabric 48d) including some very modern pieces, 46g.
2 sherds from a large unglazed ceramic drain, 244g.
Group date 20th century.

TP2

L2, Finds no 1

2 residual Roman sherds, 14g.
1 base sherd Fabric 21a, 27g.
2 body sherds Fabric 40 (PMRE), 13g.
Group date 17th-18th century.

L3, Finds no 3

2 residual Roman sherds, 9g.
3 sherds Fabric 21a – one is a lid fragment; later style painting, 15th-16th century.
1 internally glazed handle sherd (Fabric 40), 42g.
Group date 17th-18th century.

F3, Finds no 8

1 sherd from a handle in Fabric 21a, 26g.

6 Discussion and conclusions

The finds were overwhelmingly post-medieval and modern in date. The upper layers of the test-pits contained a variety of very modern pieces, including fragments of modern drains and an electrical resistor, plus a few residual Roman sherds. This would indicate a very modern (ie 20th-century) date for these horizons, which were presumably dumped when Southway was built. Finds from the lower horizons indicate a slightly earlier, but still post-medieval, date for the last time that those soil layers were disturbed.

The most significant archaeological feature was a gravel surface (L4) found at a depth of 0.70m in TP2. Gravel surfaces, probably representing yards or working surfaces, have previously been identified at similar depths in evaluation trenches across the Vineyard Gate area to the north of Southway and around the upper part of Arthur Street (CAT Report 269). These surfaces, although they were possibly Roman, were equally difficult to date because associated finds were sparse or non-existent.

The coarse construction of the surface in TP2, the fact that it had been cut by post-medieval pitting, and the close proximity of St John's abbey, may favour a medieval rather than Roman date for F4, but this cannot be proven.

The other features in the test-pits were all either post-medieval or modern in date and appear to be domestic in nature, ie refuse or ash-pits. They are probably associated with buildings which used to stand on Stanwell Street before they were demolished to make way for the construction of Southway. The accumulated material that sealed these post-medieval features was almost exclusively modern (containing discarded finds included plastic, modern brick and pottery). This accumulated material was presumably deposited during the construction and the subsequent landscaping of Southway in the early to mid 1970s.

7 Archive deposition

The finds, paper and digital archive are currently held by CAT at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex, but will ultimately be deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums under accession code 2004.10.

8 Acknowledgements

The investigation was funded through Colchester Borough Council, commissioned by Colchester and Ipswich Museums (Philip Wise) and Oxford Archaeological Associates (Simon Colcutt). The fieldwork was managed by B Holloway and carried out by D Ross and A Wightman.

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10 Glossary and abbreviations

CBC	Colchester Borough Council
context	specific location on an excavation, usually related to finds
cut	an excavation of unspecified purpose
make-up	material dumped to raise ground-level
medieval	the period from AD 1066 to Henry VIII
modern	19th century to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
OAA	Oxford Archaeological Associates Ltd
OD	Ordnance Survey datum, based on mean sea level at Newlyn, Cornwall
post-medieval	after Henry VIII and up to the 19th century
residual	something out of its original period context (eg a Roman coin in a modern pit)
Roman	the period from AD 43 to c AD 430

11 Bulk finds list

This list does not include finds reported on above in section 5.
(D) = discarded

Context number	Finds number	Finds description	Weight (g)	Date
L2	1	Animal bone	53	post-medieval/modern
L2	1	Pot	58	post-medieval
L2	1	Iron nail (D)	38	modern
L2	1	Stone fragments	938	modern
L2	1	Clay pipe	5	post-medieval
L2	1	Oyster shell	57	post-medieval
L2	1	Glass	7	modern
L2	1	Slag/clinker	155	post-medieval/modern
L2	1	Peg-tile/brick	3238	post-medieval/modern
F3	2	Animal bone	38	post-medieval
F3	2	Peg-tile	580	post-medieval
F3	2	Brick	1,721	post-medieval
F3	2	Stone fragments	83	post-medieval
L3	3	Shell	86	post-medieval
L3	3	Peg-tile	871	post-medieval
L3	3	Animal bone	116	post-medieval
L3	3	Pot	179	post-medieval
L3	3	Brick	789	post-medieval
L3	3	Iron nail (D)	39	modern
L1	4	Pot	55	post-medieval/modern
L1	4	Glass	17	modern
L1	4	Iron nails (D)	24	modern
L1	4	Peg-tile	481	post-medieval
F6	5	Clay pipe	7	post-medieval

F6	5	Animal bone	156	post-medieval
F6	5	Peg-tile	250	post-medieval
L2/L5/L6	6	Glass	20	modern
L2/L5/L6	6	Iron nails (D)	19	modern
L2/L5/L6	6	Clay pipe	6	post-medieval
L2/L5/L6	6	Pot	323	post-medieval/modern
L7	7	Animal bone	19	post-medieval
F3	8	Peg-tile	650	post-medieval
F3	8	Pot	29	post-medieval
F3	8	Animal bone	12	post-medieval

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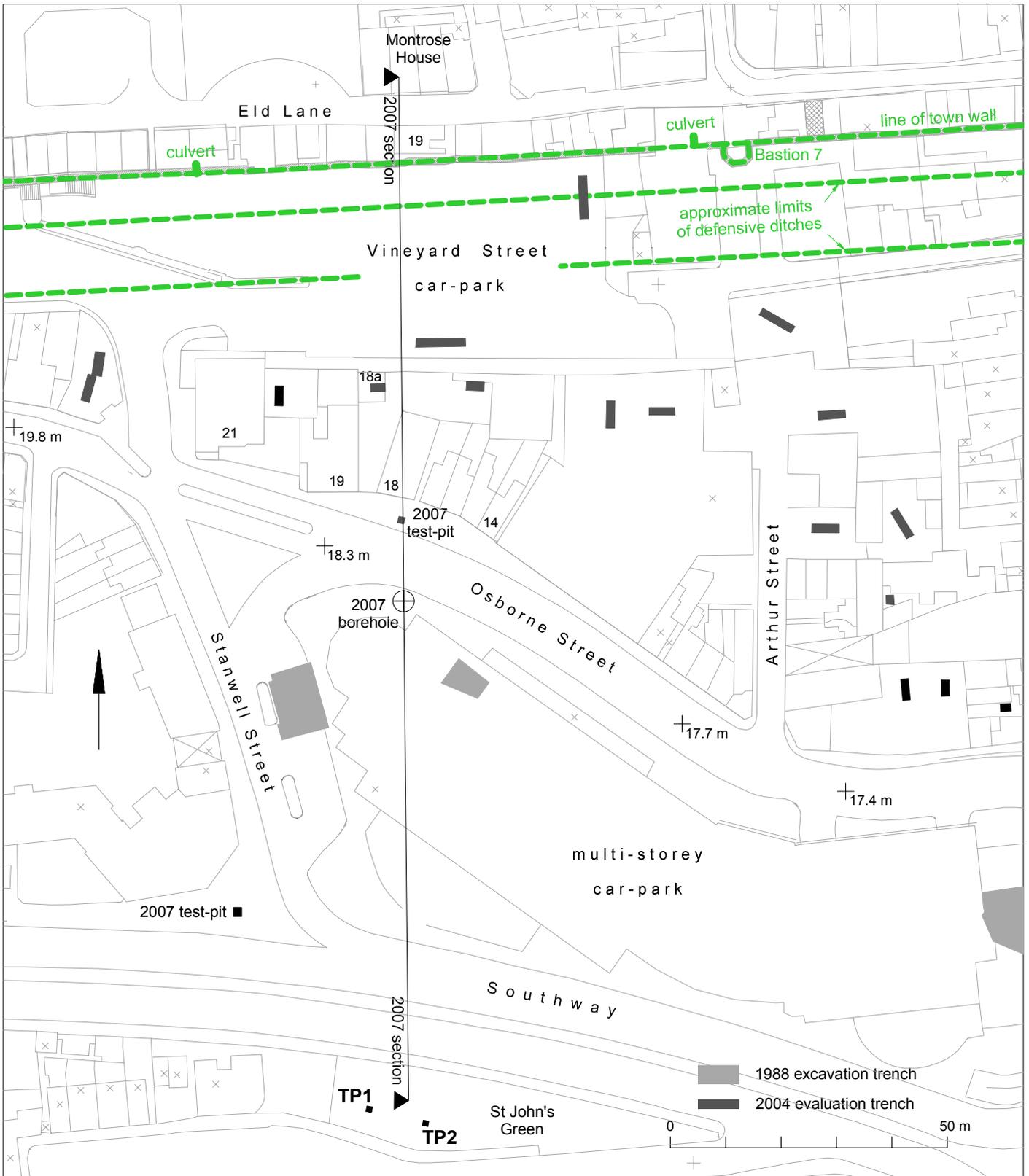
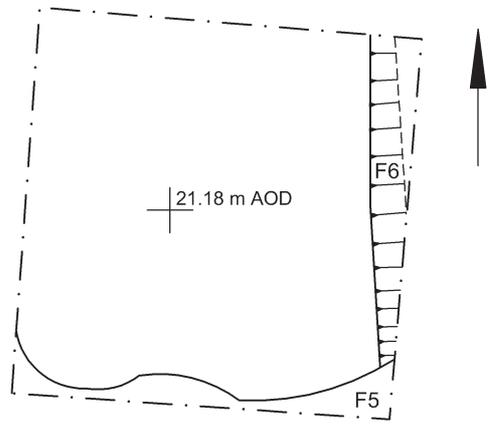
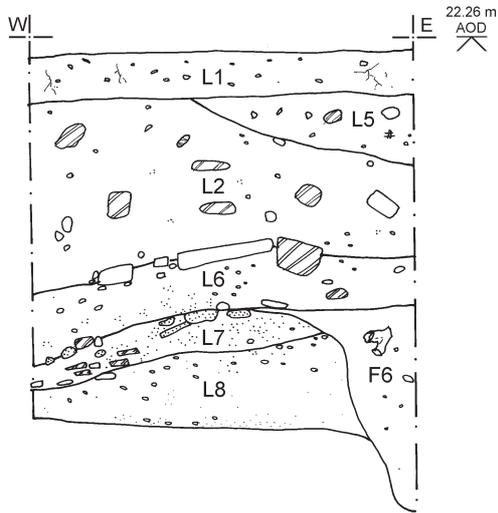
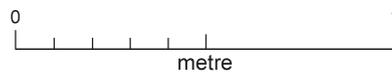
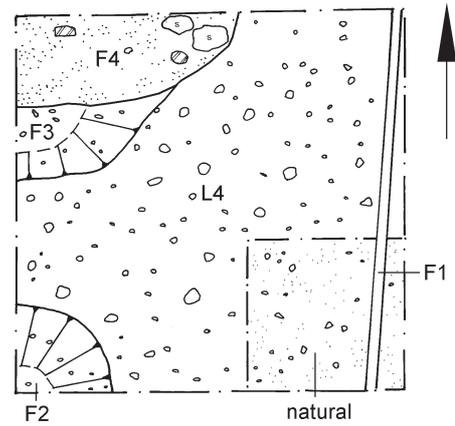
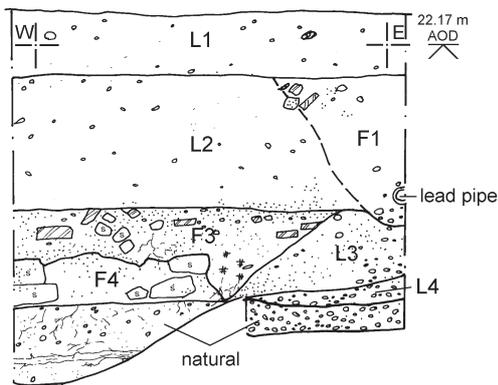


Fig 1 TP1 and TP2: location.

Test-pit 1



Test-pit 2



- | | | | |
|--|---------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| | sand | | post-Roman ceramic building material |
| | small stones | | animal bone |
| | medium-large stones | | mortar |
| | septaria | | root activity |
| | charcoal | | |

Fig 2 Section and plan: TP1 and TP2.

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

Summary sheet

Site address: St John's Green (south of Southway), Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TL 9976 2484 (TP1) TL 9976 2484 (TP2)	Site code: COLEM accession code 2004.10
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: April 2007	Size of area investigated: Two 1m x 1m trenches
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related UAD nos:
Final report: CAT Report 460 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: ?Roman, post-medieval, modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>The site lies 170m to the south of Colchester's Roman and medieval town wall. Two small test-pits (TP1-TP2) were cut into the grass verge south of Southway and adjacent to the Abbey Arms public house. TP2 revealed a gravel surface at a depth of 0.70m. The date of the surface is uncertain, but it may be associated with similar material, possibly Roman, previously noted in nearby evaluation works. The surface had been cut on its northern edge by a post-medieval feature. Post-medieval and modern features were also identified in TP1.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Howard Brooks	Date of summary: March 2008