

**Archaeological evaluation
by trial-trenching
at Colnebank House,
30 St Peter's Street,
Colchester, Essex
September 2009**

**report prepared by
Howard Brooks and Ben Holloway**

**on behalf of
the Royal Mail Group Ltd**

CAT project ref.: 09/9a
Colchester and Ipswich Museums accession code: COLIM 2009.53
NGR: TL 99651 25590 (c)



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CAT Report 526
October 2009

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1 Summary

The site (now a disused office complex) is located 40m to the north of the north wall of the Roman town, and on the south bank of the River Colne.

An archaeological evaluation by four trial-trenches exposed foundations and surfaces which are probably part of the 19th-century silk mill. The mill buildings date from 1826 and were demolished in 1967.

The excavated sequence consisted primarily of modern strata which sealed river silts containing residual Roman brick and tile. River gravels were reached below the river silts at depths of between 2.1m and 2.5m below current ground-level.

2 Introduction

This is the archive report on the archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on a 0.2 ha site at Colnebank House, 30 St Peter's Street, Colchester, Essex, on the 9th and 16th of September 2009. Site centre is at NGR TL 99651 25590. The evaluation was commissioned and sponsored by the Royal Mail Group Ltd.

A brief describing the required archaeological work (CBC 2009) was produced by Mr Martin Winter, the Colchester Borough Council Archaeological Officer (CBCAO). In response to this brief, CAT wrote a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), essentially a description of our proposed evaluation methodology, which was approved by CBCAO (CAT 2009).

This report mirrors standards and practices contained in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 2008a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IfA 2008b), and Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (CIMS 2008a) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester and Ipswich Museums* (CIMS 2008b). Other sources used are *Management of research projects in the historic environment* (MoRPHE) 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).

3 Archaeological background

The site lies outside the walled area of the historic Roman and later town of Colchester (*CAR 3*; *CAR 6*; Hull 1958; Crummy 1997), but within the Late Iron Age *oppidum* of Camulodunum (Hawkes & Hull 1947; *CAR 11*).

The site has not been subject to any form of previous archaeological investigation. However, local discoveries of archaeological material are listed on the Urban Archaeological Database (UAD), and there have been various archaeological investigations of nearby sites. The main ones are listed briefly below.

Fragments of Roman samian were uncovered in 1940 during the excavation of an air-raid shelter immediately to the east of the site (CBC 2009). An archaeological evaluation by ASC Ltd in January 2008, also just east of the site, at the former Colchester Borough Council (CBC) depot at Middle Mill, revealed shallow pits with Roman building material, and 1.55m-thick alluvial deposits, but no evidence of structures (UAD no 4167). A more recent excavation by CAT, on the south side of St Peter's Street, adjacent to Claudius Court and approximately 40m to the south-west of Colnebank House, revealed a Roman metalled road aligned north-south, and the probable position of a previously-unrecorded gateway in the town wall (*The Colchester Archaeologist*, 21, 2-5).

To the west of St Peter's Street, major excavations in the 1970s revealed a substantial area of Roman suburbs at Middleborough, outside the Roman north gate (*CAR 3*).

There is little evidence of medieval activity in the immediate vicinity of the site. Cartographic evidence indicates that the site remained undeveloped in the post-medieval period, and remained so until 1826 when a silk mill was constructed here by Stephen Brown & Co. The mill buildings were demolished in 1967, and Colnebank House was built by the Royal Mail soon afterwards (CBC 2009).

4 Aim

The aim of the evaluation was to establish the character, extent, date, significance and condition of any archaeological remains likely to be affected by the redevelopment of the Colnebank House site.

5 Results

Evaluation trenches (Figs 1-3)

Four evaluation trenches were cut in positions shown on Figure 1 (Trenches 1-4, or T1-T4). After the breaking out and removal of the hard-standing, a mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless bucket was used to progressively strip the underlying strata down to the uppermost archaeologically significant level. All further investigation was carried out by hand. This section gives a summary of the excavated sequence and finds information from each trench.

Trench 1: summary

T1 was positioned to the north of Colnebank House, and was the nearest trench to the River Colne. It was excavated through three superimposed layers: L1, a rough layer of poorly-consolidated, 100-150mm-thick tarmac hard-standing; L2, gravel and crushed brick hardcore approximately 250mm thick; and L3, a 1.5m-thick layer of alluvial silts which contained residual Roman brick and tile, and shell fragments. L3 sealed the natural yellow/orange coarse river gravels (L4), the top of which was between 2.5m and 2.7m below ground-level. The water table was also at this level (ie the top of L4).

The trench revealed three modern foundations (collectively numbered F4). From the 1876 OS map¹ showing the ground-plan of the mill, it would appear that foundation F4 was part of an ancillary building, perhaps the 'smithy'.

T1 – archaeological context and dating.

Feature no	Type	Dated finds	Phase
F4	foundation	brick (not retained)	modern

Trench 2: summary

T2 was located between Colnebank House and its boundary with the former CBC depot. It was excavated through three superimposed layers: L1, a rough layer of poorly-consolidated, 100-150mm-thick tarmac hard-standing; L2, gravel and crushed brick hardcore approximately 250mm thick; and L3, a 1.5m-thick layer of alluvial silts which contained residual Roman brick and tile, and shell fragments. L3 sealed the natural yellow/orange coarse river gravels (L4), the top of which was between 2.5m and 2.7m below ground-level. The water table was also at this level (ie the top of L4).

The only feature in this trench was a modern concrete slab (F5). The plan of the mill on the 1876 OS map suggests that F5 was part of the foundations of an ancillary building. Alternatively, the slab may be of more recent origin, possibly part of a raft foundation belonging to Colnebank House.

At the southern end of the trench, the concrete slab was broken through, revealing a layer of crushed hardcore which sealed the alluvial silts (L3) seen in T1.

¹ many thanks to Martin Winter of CBC for access to this map, which is not reproduced here.

T2 – archaeological context and dating.

Feature no	Type	Dated finds	Phase
F5	concrete slab	brick (not retained)	modern

Trench 3: summary

T3 was located in the south-eastern corner of the site, along the north side of the boundary with St Peter's Street. It was excavated through three superimposed layers: L1, a rough layer of poorly-consolidated, 100-150mm-thick tarmac hard-standing; and L2, gravel and crushed brick hardcore approximately 250mm thick. L2 sealed a concrete slab foundation (F6).

The plan of the mill on the 1876 OS map suggests that F6 belonged to an unnamed building associated with the mill (a ?warehouse). It is also possible that the slab was of more recent origin, perhaps part of a raft foundation belonging to Colnebank House.

Unlike the concrete slab in T2, F6 was intact along the whole length of T3. This means that its thickness and the nature of any underlying strata could not be established. However, it is likely that the underlying stratigraphic sequence matched that observed in T1 and T2 (ie L3 sealing L4).

T3 – archaeological context and dating.

Feature no	Type	Dated finds	Phase
F6	concrete slab	brick (not retained)	modern

Trench 4: summary

T4 was located in the south-western corner of the site, along the north side of the boundary with St Peter's Street. It was excavated through three superimposed layers: L1, a rough layer of poorly-consolidated, 100-150mm-thick tarmac hard-standing; L2, gravel and crushed brick hardcore approximately 250mm thick; and L3, a 1.5m-thick layer of alluvial silts which contained residual Roman brick and tile, and shell fragments. L3 sealed the natural yellow/orange coarse river gravels (L4), the top of which was between 2.5m and 2.7m below ground-level. The water table was also at this level (ie the top of L4).

T4 contained three modern features: a brick foundation (F1); a highly-compacted gravel surface (F2); and a concrete stanchion (F3). Brick foundation F1 extended along the whole length of the trench on its northern side. The plan of the mill on the 1876 OS map indicates that F1 had been part of the mill's office building. Similarly, surface F2 appears to correspond with the yard area surrounding the mill. Finally, F3 was a modern stanchion almost certainly associated with Colnebank House.

T4 – archaeological contexts and dating.

Feature no	Type	Dated finds	Phase
F1	brick foundation	brick (not retained)	modern
F2	compacted surface	-	modern
F3	concrete stanchion	-	modern

6 Finds

The only retained find was a residual fragment of a Roman *tegula* roof tile (weight 216g) from the alluvial silt horizon L3 in T4. Other small fragments of brick (probably Roman) and oyster shell were observed but not collected.

7 Discussion

The four trenches revealed only foundations or surfaces relating to the 19th-century silk mill or to Colnebank House. Although it can be argued that the identification of parts of the silk mill is of some local interest, this material is not of any great archaeological significance.

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 COLIM 2009.53.

9 Acknowledgements

The Trust would like to thank the Royal Mail Group Ltd (Mr James Hall) for commissioning and funding the evaluation.

The fieldwork was conducted by C Lister and B Holloway. The project was monitored by Martin Winter on behalf of Colchester Borough Council.

10 References

Note: all CAT reports, except for DBAs, are available online in .pdf format at <http://cat.essex.ac.uk>

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|----------------------------|-------|--|
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| Hull, M R | 1958 | <i>Roman Colchester</i> , RRCSAL, 20 |

IfA	2008a	<i>Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation</i>
IfA	2008b	<i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i>
MoRPHE	2006	<i>Management of research projects in the historic environment</i> (English Heritage)

11 Glossary

CIMS	Colchester and Ipswich Museums
context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made, usually a layer or a feature
EDM	electronic distance measuring
EHER	Essex Historic Environment Record, held by the ECC
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists
layer	distinct or distinguishable deposit of soil
medieval	period from AD 1066 to Henry VIII
modern	period from the 19th century onwards to the present
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
post-medieval	after Henry VIII to around the late 18th century
residual	out of context, ie Roman coin in Victorian pit
Roman	the period from AD 43 to AD 410, approximately
RRCSAL	Report of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London
<i>tegula</i>	flat Roman roof tile with upright flanges along both sides
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database, held by Colchester and Ipswich Museums

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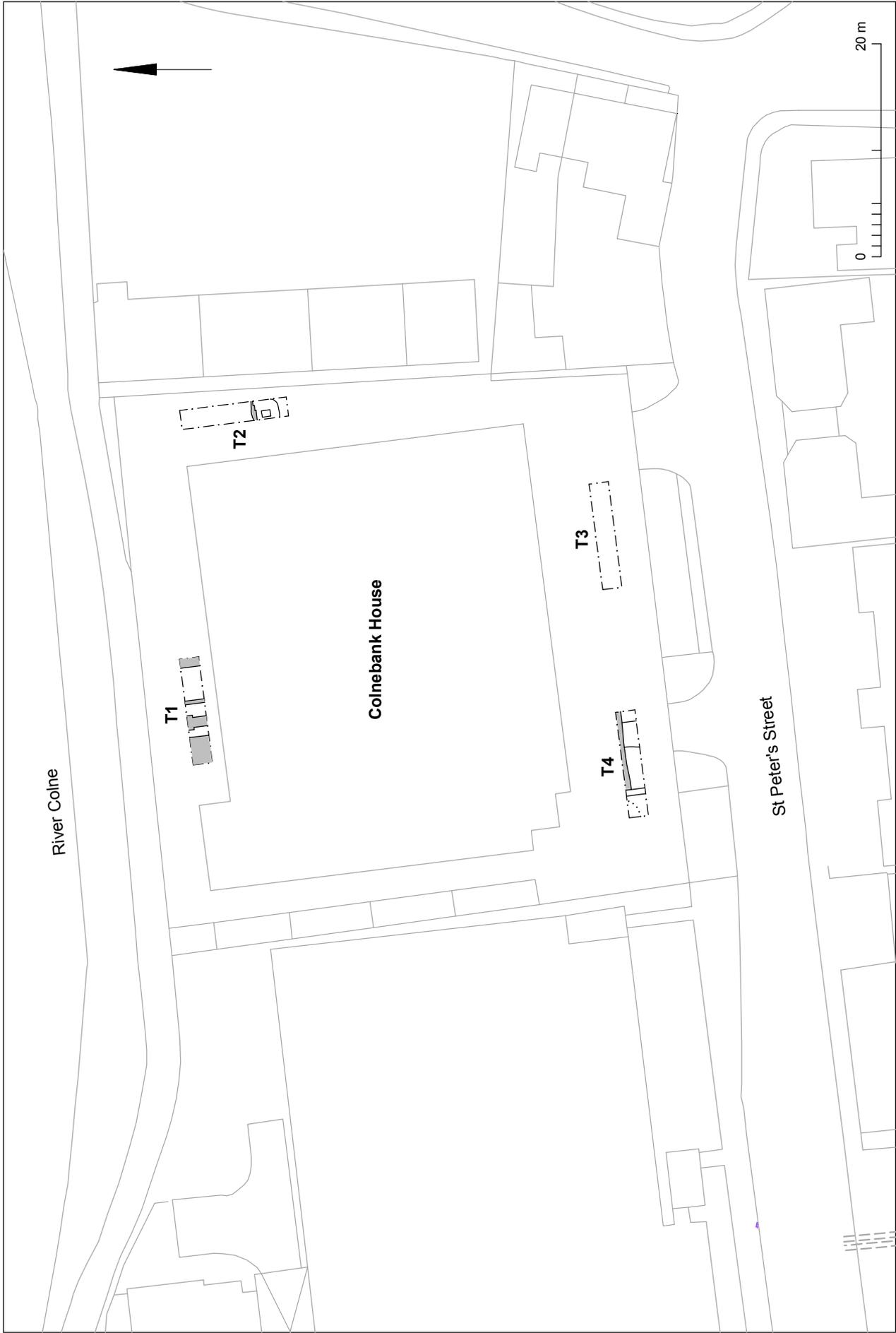
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Fig 1 Site location.



Fig 2 T1-T4: plans (foundations toned grey).

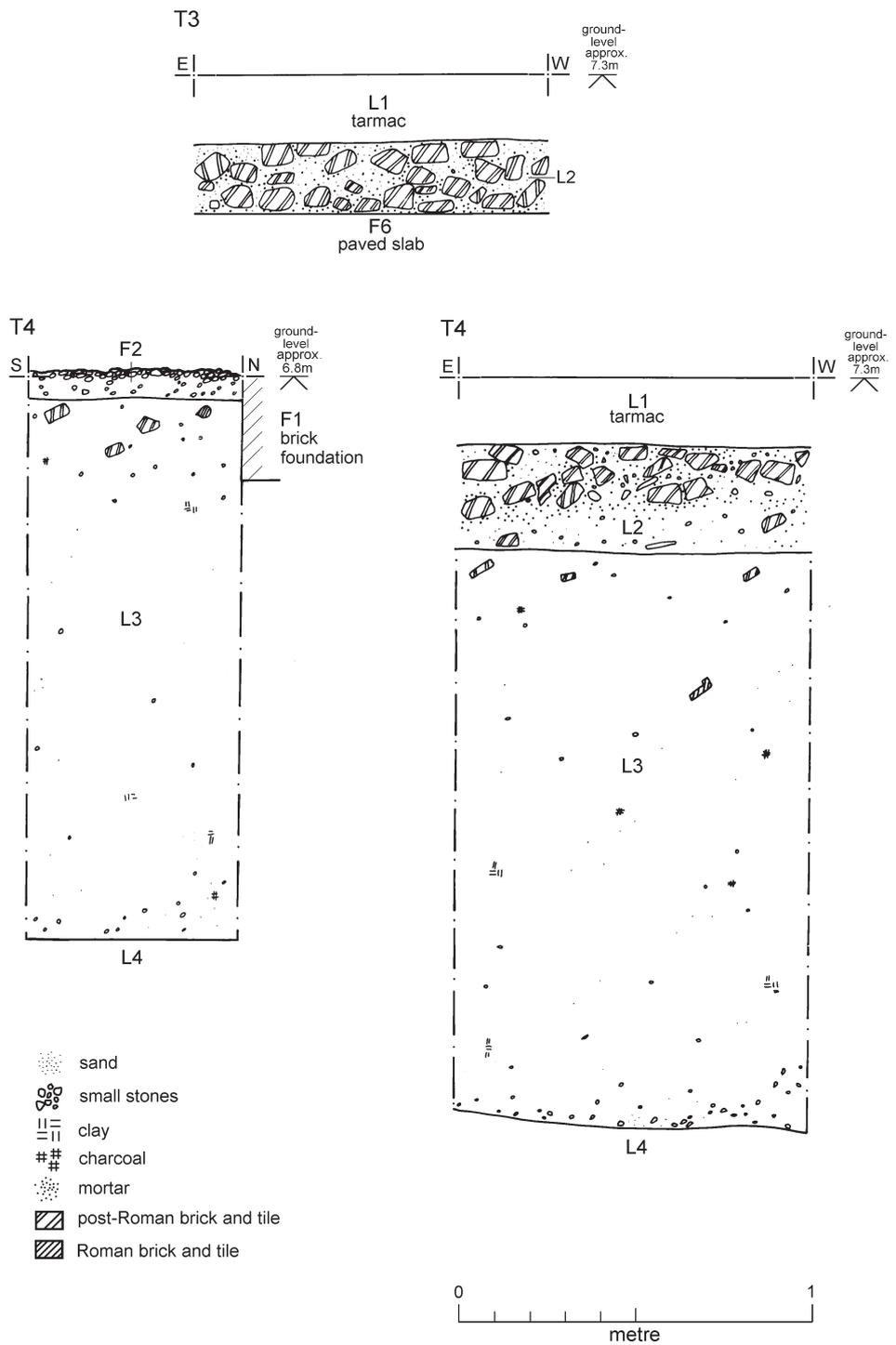


Fig 3 Sections.

Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

Summary sheet

Site address: Colnebank House, 30 St Peter's Street, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 99651 25590 (c)	Site codes: CAT project – 09/9a Museum accession – COLIM 2009.53
Type of work: Excavation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: 9th and 16th September 2009	Size of area investigated: 0.2 ha
Curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums	Funding source: Landowner
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related UAD no: 4167
Final report: CAT Report 526 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Roman, medieval, post-medieval, modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>The site (now a disused office complex) is located 40m to the north of the north wall of the Roman town, and on the south bank of the River Colne.</i> <i>An archaeological evaluation by four trial-trenches exposed foundations and surfaces which are probably part of the 19th-century silk mill. The mill buildings date from 1826 and were demolished in 1967.</i> <i>The excavated sequence consisted primarily of modern strata which sealed river silts containing residual Roman brick and tile. River gravels were reached below the river silts at depths of between 2.1m and 2.5m below current ground-level.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: none	
Keywords: -	Significance: neg
Authors of summary: H Brooks and B Holloway	Date of summary: October 2009