

**An archaeological watching brief
during the construction of a new toilet block
on the High Street, Colchester, Essex
October 2006**

**report prepared by
Laura Pooley**

**on behalf of
Colchester Borough Council**

CAT project ref.: 06/10c
Colchester Museums accession code: 2006.124
NGR: TL 99622 25223



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

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

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EHER summary sheet

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1 Summary

A trench, 3.75m long, 2.5m wide and 1.4-1.5m deep, was dug in advance of the construction of a new toilet block outside Angel Court, High Street, Colchester, Essex. The area had been disturbed by many modern service trenches but two medieval/post-medieval features were identified in the trench. These were part of a floor/path and a cut feature of uncertain type. It is possible that both of these features are associated with the remains of St Runwald's church.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief carried out on the High Street, Colchester, Essex, outside Angel Court. The watching brief was carried out during groundworks for the construction of a toilet block which can be raised above ground-level every evening for use by members of the public. It is located at National Grid Reference TL 99622 25223. The watching brief was commissioned by Colchester Borough Council and carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) from 20th to 27th October 2006.

All fieldwork was carried out in accordance with a specification agreed with the Archaeology Officer of Colchester Borough Council. This report mirrors standards and practices contained in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines for the standards and practice of 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 archaeological projects* (MAP 2), *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 Aims and objectives

The aim of the watching brief was to identify, record, excavate and 'preserve by record' all surviving archaeological features, layers and deposits exposed during the groundworks.

4 Archaeological background

In 1986 and 1989, CAT carried out an excavation at Angel Yard on the High Street, Colchester, before it was redeveloped into Angel Court for use as Council offices. These excavations were located immediately to the north-east of the site of the toilet-block trench and '...revealed parts of two substantial Roman houses...' ¹ which shared a party wall and dated from the mid 2nd century. A probable late 3rd-century dispersed coin hoard was recovered from post-Roman topsoil or 'dark earth' immediately above demolition levels from the more northerly house. The dark earth was subsequently cut by pits of mainly 11th- to 14th-century date.

Evidence indicated a rapid expansion of building backwards from both the High Street and West Stockwell Street frontages in the 14th century and included foundations, ovens and hearths from several wings, which faced onto narrow alleyways and enclosed gravel yards. By c 1500, the western part of the site had largely been cleared and the area cobbled over, while the eastern wings continued in use and were in

¹ located within Insula 20 of the Roman town

part rebuilt, and the yard re-gravelled. In the first half of the 17th century, the frontage of 133-134 High Street was rebuilt as a three-storey timber-framed structure divided into two shops.²

Also located close to the new toilet block was St Runwald's church (Fig 1). As Rodwell and Rodwell describe it: '...The church formerly occupied an island in the middle of the High Street, opposite the end of West Stockwell Street; it had an interesting and chequered history which was terminated by demolition in 1878. The building is known from old photographs ... and ... descriptions. The form of the original church can be ascertained with some certainty: it comprised a rectangular nave, with opposing doorways (and possibly a west door as well), and a square chancel. The proportions of the building, the thickness of its walls (described as 'nearly three feet') and the dedication, would all accord well with a foundation of the later Anglo-Saxon period...'³

5 Results (Figs 1-2)

A large trench, 3.75m long, 2.5m wide and 1.4-1.5m deep, was machine-excavated by the contractors. It was dug through approximately 0.20m of modern concrete pavement, 0.40m of a modern rubble make-up layer, 0.60m of a silty/sandy subsoil or disturbed natural layer, and 0.20m of natural sand. A number of modern service pipes were recorded across the trench and had caused great disturbance over much of the area. However, in the south-east corner of the trench, part of a post-medieval floor or path was identified, consisting of red unfrosted bricks (F2), near the bottom of the trench. A medieval/post-medieval cut feature (F1) of uncertain type was identified in the north-facing section (Fig 2). This feature measured approximately 1.2m wide and 0.65m deep, and was filled with a mid brown silty sand, charcoal, peg-tile, septaria chips, oyster shells, Roman tile and mortar.

6 Finds

No finds were kept for identification or recording.

7 Discussion (Fig 1)

Given the close proximity of the toilet-block trench to the site of St Runwald's church, it is probable that both of the medieval/post-medieval features recorded during the watching brief are associated with the church. In particular, the large 1.2m-wide cut feature could possibly be a robber trench associated with the demolition of a north-south wall of the church, especially as the walls themselves appear to have measured approximately 1m in width. However, it is uncertain if the walls were completely removed during demolition or if parts of the foundations still survive underground. The exact location of the church is not sufficiently accurately known to match the remains in the toilet-block trench with the remains of the church.

8 Acknowledgements

The Trust would like to thank Colchester Borough Council for commissioning the work and the site contractors CS Mason Contracts Ltd for their help during this project.

² The preceding passage is taken from Shimmin & Carter 1996, 35
³ Rodwell & Rodwell 1977, 33

9 References

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| CM | 2002 | <i>Guidelines for the standards and practice of archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i> |
| CM | 2003 | <i>Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums</i> |
| EAA 3 | 1997 | <i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 3 , ed by J Glazebrook |
| EAA 8 | 2000 | <i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 8 , ed by N Brown and J Glazebrook |
| EAA 14 | 2003 | <i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 14 , ed by D Gurney |
| IFA | 1999 | <i>Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief</i> |
| IFA | 2001 | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i> |
| MAP 2 | 1991 | <i>Management of archaeological projects</i> (English Heritage) |
| Rodwell, W, & Rodwell, K | 1977 | <i>Historic churches: a wasting asset</i> , CBA, Research report, 19 |
| Shimmin, D, & Carter, G | 1996 | 'Excavations at Angel Yard, High Street, Colchester, 1986 and 1989', in <i>Essex Archaeology and History</i> , 27 , 35-83 |

10 Glossary

EHER	Essex Historic Environment Record, held by Essex County Council
medieval	from AD 1066 to Henry VIII
modern	19th and 20th centuries
NGR	National Grid Reference
post-medieval	after Henry VIII and to the end of the 19th century
Roman	the period from AD 43 to c AD 410
septaria	local stone used as building material by Romans

11 Archive deposition

The finds, paper and digital archive are held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2006.124.

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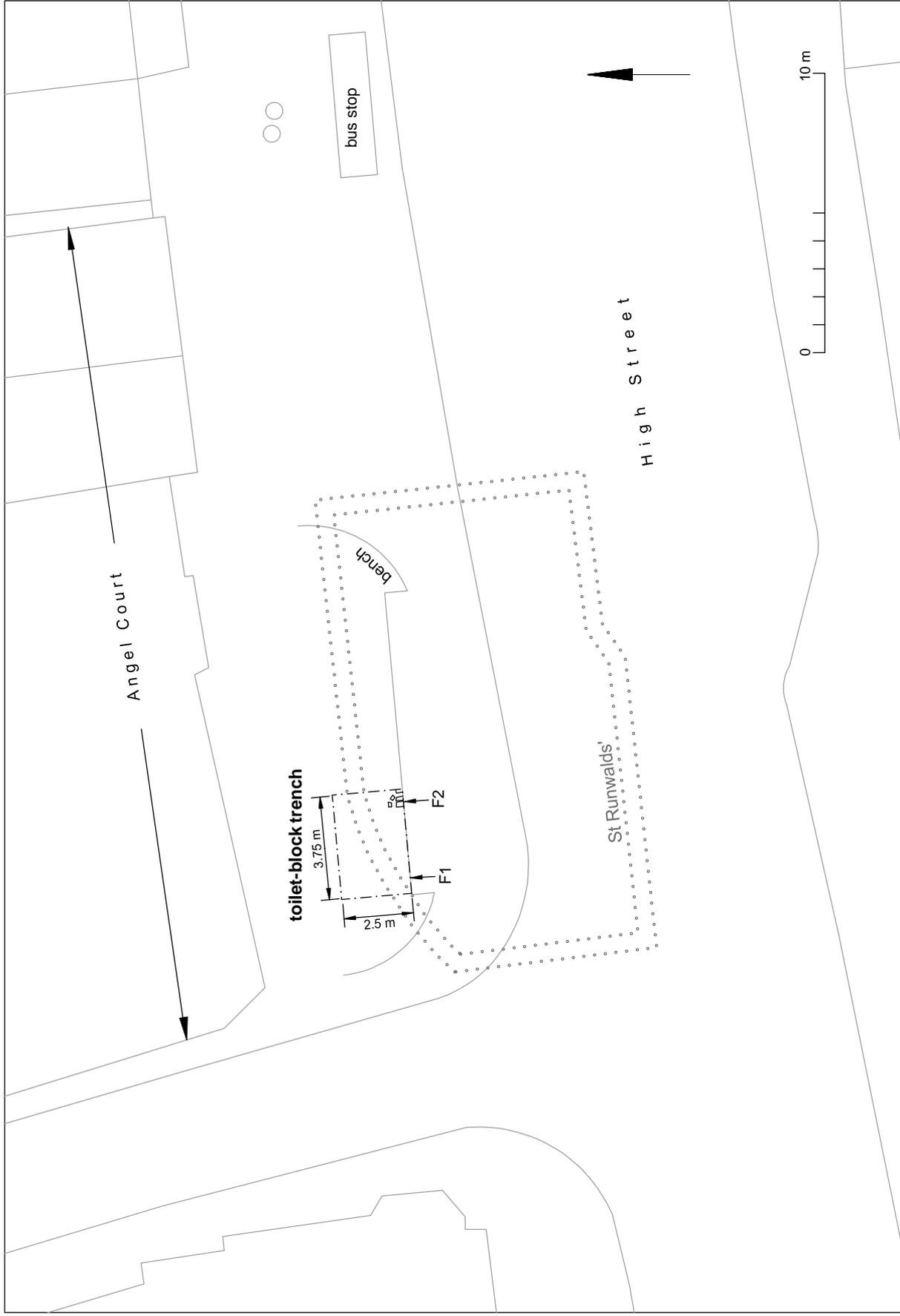


Colchester Archaeological Trust
12 Lexden Road,
Colchester,
Essex CO3 3NF

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

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Fig 1 Site location and probable footprint of St Runwalds' church.

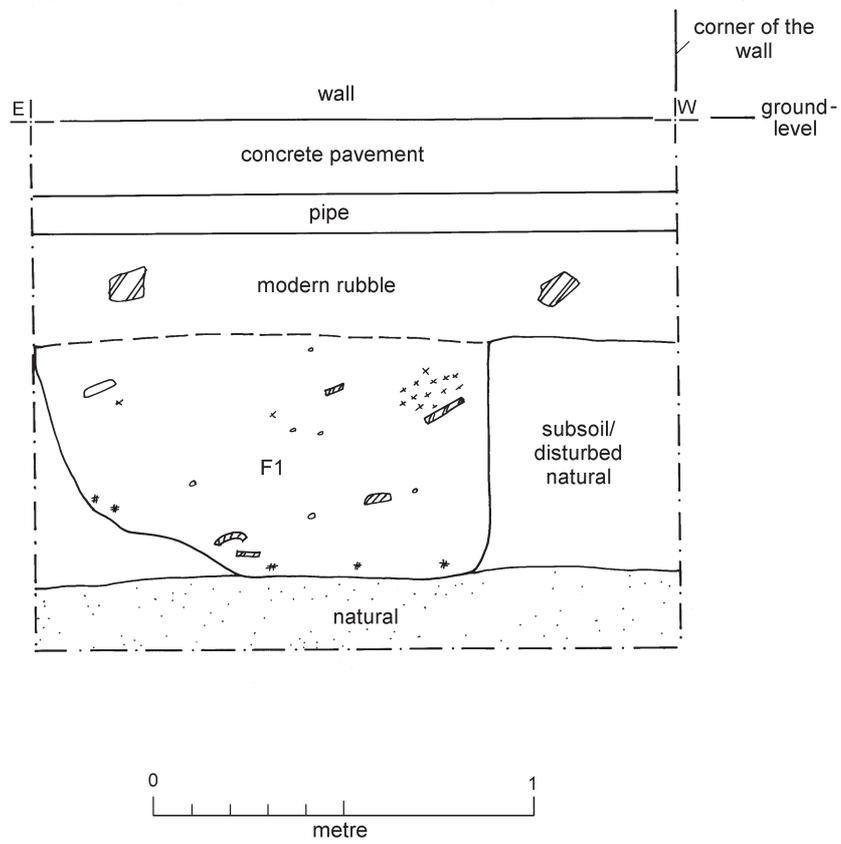


Fig 2 Section.

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

Summary sheet

Site address: outside Angel Court (136-137), High Street, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 99622 25223	Site code: Museum accession code 2006.124
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: 20th-27th October 2006	Size of area investigated: 3.75m long, 2.5m wide and 1.4-1.5m deep
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Colchester Borough Council
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHER nos:
Final report: CAT Report 396 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: medieval/post-medieval and modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>A trench, 3.75m long, 2.5m wide and 1.4-1.5m deep, was dug in advance of the construction of a new toilet block outside Angel Court, High Street, Colchester, Essex. The area had been disturbed by many modern service trenches but two medieval/post-medieval features were identified in the trench. These were part of a floor/path and a cut feature of uncertain type. It is possible that both of these features are associated with the remains of St Runwald's church.</i></p>	
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