

Report on a watching brief: CAT Report 411

Site address: 3 Church Street, Colchester, Essex
Date of fieldwork: 15th January 2007-14th February 2007
NGR: TL 99340 25130
CBC brief?: Yes
Location plan attached?: Yes (Fig 1)
Museum accession code: 2007.9
CAT project code: 07/1c

Introduction and archaeological background

The watching brief took place during nine visits to observe underpinning work along the external east and south faces of 3 Church Street (Trenches A-F, I), and in the cellar (Trenches G, J). Figure 1 here gives the location of the observed areas (further details are in the archive). All measurements here are below ground-level unless otherwise explained or otherwise obvious.

The site is located on the north side of Church Street, 55m west of Head Street. It is also located in Insula 25b of the Roman town. Archaeological exploration of this *insula* has been very limited (Hull 1958, 192-3; *CAR 6*, fig 2.9, 15).

A watching brief in 2003 on the laying of an electricity cable along the Church Street footpath and also through the gardens of the North Countryman's Club on Church Street (adjacent to 3 Church Street) revealed nothing of archaeological significance; this was mainly because the trench was only 0.6m deep (CAT Report 221).

Report

15/01/07

Initial site visit. Two trenches (Trenches A and B on archive plan) had just been opened, and showed modern infill (dark soil) to approximately 0.4m below modern ground-level.

16/01/07

Trench B now dug down almost to its full depth of 2.9m. Down to 1.2m was very dark brown, predominantly topsoil fill, with a ceramic drain-pipe at 1.2m. From 1.2 to 2.4m was medium brown Roman clay deposit, slightly topsoily for its first 0.2m. This is almost certainly derived from the demolished clay walls of Roman buildings which had stood in the immediate area. At 2.4m was a nobbly, thin band of red burnt clay, up to 0.05m thick. This is almost certainly the Boudican destruction horizon from AD 60/1. From 2.4m to trench bottom was a predominantly sandy deposit with a slight clay admixture.

There were three sherds from this trench, from a deposit which should be the lowest horizon of this trench (Finds no 1).

18/01/07

Trench C (maximum dig depth 2.45m) now mostly excavated. As in the previous two trenches, this showed modern topsoil fill to 1.2m, with a piece of modern slate at that depth where a ceramic drain-pipe was seen before (perhaps the two are part of the same main). Below 1.2m, there was the same Roman clay layer as before.

In this trench, it is clear that the present building (shown on Ordnance Survey 1st edition map of 1875 as 'Savings Bank') was built in a pit, because there is a clear 0.2m-wide construction trench on the outer face of the building. Its fill was the same as the modern fill above 1.2m.

22/01/07

Trench D, first seen on Church Street side. This showed modern topsoil fill to 1.4m. Trench E, with the same sequence of layers as in Trench B. It showed modern fill to 1.2m, then Roman clay to 2.0m. At 2.00m and below, there was very stiff brown clay, probably a Roman clay floor.

29/01/07

Trench F, with the same sequence of layers as in Trench B.

Trench G, the pit dug through the cellar floor, showed a good section of Roman deposits, which included this sequence (depths are in metres below cellar floor):

0.00 to 0.34m: modern concrete floor with base;
0.34m to 0.44m: Roman clay dump;
0.44m to 0.62m: brown mortar floor with a burnt surface;
0.62m to 0.77m: dirty brown dumped material;
0.77m to 0.87m: a clean pale brown clay layer (a floor);
0.87m to 1.5m: dirty sand.

This section was drawn and photographed (sketch in archive). An unstratified Roman wine flagon was retrieved (Finds no 2).

9/02/07

Trench H was dug outside in the centre of southern side. It showed modern topsoil fill to 1.2m, then brown clay, the same as in Trench B.

12/02/07

Site visit at just after 4.00 pm – archaeologist missed the contractors.

13/02/07

Trench in cellar (Trench I) just begun, nothing to see yet.

14/02/07

A second trench dug in cellar (Trench J) revealed the same stratification as seen on 29/01/07 in Trench G.

Comment

The watching brief was carried out on small trenches which were individually dug to allow underpinning of the existing building. With regard to those trenches outside and on the south and east sides of the building, conditions were not good for observing archaeological remains. Despite this, a basic stratigraphical sequence was seen here: down to 1.2m, modern soils and modern drains; from 1.2m to 2.4m, a layer of brown clay which is almost certainly the dumped clay seen on other Colchester sites; at 2.4m down, a layer containing a few pieces of red burnt clay which may well be the Boudican horizon, ie a sequence of burnt deposits resulting from the Boudican revolt in AD 60/1; and below 2.4m, a sandy clay mixture.

Inside the building, strata were exposed much more clearly in two trenches dug through the south-western corner of the cellar (in the south-eastern corner of the building). Here, a 10cm-thick, pale brown mortar floor with a burnt surface was seen at a depth equivalent to the Boudican material outside the building. They may both be Boudican in date. A further 0.15m below the mortar floor was a clean clay layer which, at this depth, must be fortress period, ie it must belong to a building dating to the AD 40s. A very stiff brown clay layer seen in Trench E may be an equivalent layer; the absence an observed equivalent layer elsewhere may be due to the difficulty of seeing this context at the bottom of deep trenches, rather than to its absence.

Below the fortress-period clay floor, the layer of dumped sand – with the equivalent layer seen outside – may be fortress-period make-up for the clay floor above it.

Report author: Howard Brooks

Report date: February 2007

References

- | | | |
|----------------|------|---|
| CAR 6 | 1992 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 6: Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School, and other sites in Colchester 1971-85</i> , by P Crummy |
| CAT Report 221 | | An archaeological watching brief on an electricity cable-trench through the North Countryman's Club gardens and along the Church Street footpath, Colchester, Essex, February 2003, unpublished CAT archive report, by Laura Pooley, 2003 |
| Hull, M R | 1958 | <i>Roman Colchester</i> , RRCSAL, 20 |

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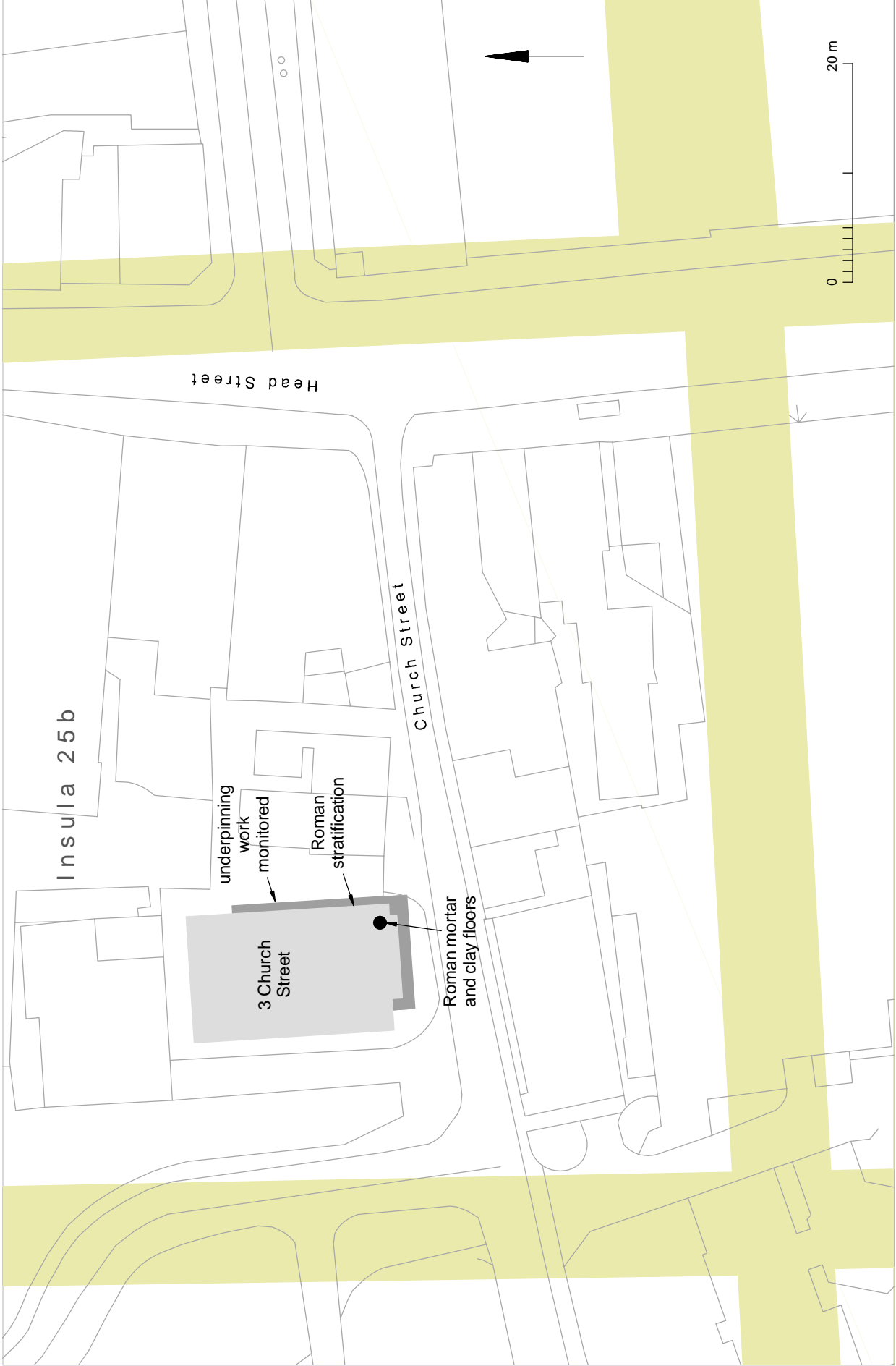
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Fig 1 Location of 3 Church Street in relation to Insula 25b and Roman streets (shown in yellow).

Essex Historic Environment Record/ *Essex Archaeology and History*

Summary sheet

Site address: 3 Church Street, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 99340 25130	Site code: Museum accession code COLEM 2007.9
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: 15th January-14th February 2007	Size of area investigated: Equivalent of trench 30m long and 0.5m wide on south and east face of building.
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHER and UAD nos:
Final report: CAT Report 411 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Roman	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>The stratigraphical sequence seen outside the building was: down to 1.2m, modern soils and modern drains; from 1.2m to 2.4m, a layer of dumped brown Roman clay; at 2.4m down, a Boudican horizon; below 2.4m, a sandy clay mixture. Inside the building, stratification was clearer. Here, a 10cm-thick, pale brown mortar floor with a burnt surface was seen at a depth equivalent to the Boudican material outside the building. A further 0.15m below the mortar floor was a clean clay layer which, at this depth, must be a fortress-period clay floor. A very stiff brown clay layer seen in one of the external holes may be an equivalent layer. Below the fortress-period clay floor, the layer of dumped sand – with the equivalent layer seen outside – may be fortress-period make-up for the clay floor above.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Howard Brooks	Date of summary: February 2007