

**Archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching
at A Barber & Son, 10 William's Walk,
Colchester, Essex
March 2008**

**report prepared by
Ben Holloway**

**on behalf of
Mr Keith Lewis (A Barber & Son)**

CAT project ref.: 08/3e
Colchester and Ipswich Museums accession code: COLEM 2008.53
NGR: TL 9971 2535 (c)



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1 Summary

An archaeological trial-trenching evaluation of a site in Insula 13 of the Roman town found modern strata and footings lying over a considerable depth of post-medieval soils. The highest significant archaeological horizons were Roman in date, and were found at depths ranging from 1.3m to 2.1m below present site level (ie the builder's yard surface).

A quantity of Roman brick and tile and other building material in residual contexts in the post-medieval soils were the only indication found of a Roman building. A small area of compacted gravel is likely to represent the north-south Roman street between Insula 12 and Insula 13. Historic maps indicate that this was an area of gardens in the post-medieval period. That fact, combined with the gradual infilling of buildings over the 18th to 20th centuries, would explain the depths of soil and the modern footings observed here.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological evaluation in the yard of A Barber & Son at 10 William's Walk, Colchester, Essex carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on the 27th March 2008.
- 2.2 The evaluation site lies in Colchester's modern town centre, within a block; its boundaries are formed by St Helen's Lane to the north, Maidenburgh Street to the east, William's Walk to the south and East Stockwell Street to the west. The site is currently used as a builder's yard and car-parking for A Barber & Son.
- 2.3 A description of the evaluation methodology may be found in the Written Scheme of Investigation in the project archive.
- 2.4 The site is centred at NGR TL 9971 2535.
- 2.5 This report follows the standards set out in 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), and the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IFA 2001a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IFA 2001b). The guidance contained in the documents *Management of archaeological projects* (MAP 2), 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) was also followed.

3 Archaeological background (Fig 1)

The site lies in the north-east corner of the site of the legionary fortress and on the western edge of Insula 13 of the Roman town, and close to the site of the Roman theatre in the same insula. There was, therefore, high potential for the discovery of a Roman street and building remains on the site.

Observations by CAT in the mid 1980s identified the substantial foundations of the Roman theatre (CAR 6, 385-6). The foundation of the outer wall had survived well, although it had been damaged by modern service cuts. There is a possibility that the western corner of the theatre foundations may extend into the evaluation area.

The focus of post-Roman activity appears to have been limited to the street frontage. However, there may be significant pitting and the possibility of identifying ancillary structures associated with the properties which fronted onto these streets.

4 Aim

The aim of the evaluation was to establish and record the depth, extent, date, significance and condition of the archaeological remains surviving on the site. This information could then be combined with the existing knowledge of the site and surrounding area to enable Colchester Borough Council's Archaeological Officer to assess the likely impact of proposed development.

5 Results

5.1 Trench 1 (Figs 1-3)

T1 was excavated in the centre of the of the evaluation site. The trench was excavated in two parts to avoid a known service. The removal of 150-200mm of yard surface (L1, a matrix of compacted crushed hardcore and gravel) revealed a thick layer of post-medieval and modern accumulation material (L2). This accumulation material continued for a depth of 1.4m and, at the west end of the trench, sealed a compacted gravel surface (F6). In the eastern end of T1, the accumulation sealed the remains of a post-medieval wall (F5) and a deep layer of Roman accumulation material (L3). Geological sands and gravels (ie natural) were not observed in T1. Excavation of T1 was halted at 1.8m below ground-level.

5.2 Trench 2 (Figs 1-3)

T2, like T1, was excavated in the centre of the area to be evaluated . As with T1, it was dug through the matrix of compacted crushed hardcore and gravel (L1) into a post-medieval/modern accumulation layer (L2). This accumulation material was cut by two modern pits (F3, F4). These appear to be associated with the builder's yard. F3 is probably the infilled remains of a slit-trench related to possible Second World War air raids (Keith Lewis, pers comm). Excavation was halted at 1.1m below ground-level as the fill of F3 was uncompacted and unstable.

5.3 Trench 3 (Figs 1-3)

T3, in the north-east corner of the evaluation site, was excavated through the same compacted gravel and hardcore material (L1) as observed in T1 and T2. Then it cut through the post-medieval/modern accumulation material (L2), on to a layer of deeply-buried Roman accumulation material at 1.5m below ground level. Sealing this Roman horizon was a modern foundation (F2). This may represent the remains of a boiler house which heated greenhouses on the northern edge of the site (Keith Lewis, pers comm). As in T1 and T2, natural was not encountered. Excavation was halted at 2.1m below ground-level.

5.4 Trench 4 (Figs 1-2, 4)

T4 was positioned in the south-east corner of the evaluation site. As in T1-T3, T4 was excavated through L1 (loosely compacted gravel and hardcore), into a deposit of post-medieval/modern accumulation material (L2), which sealed Roman accumulation material (L3). A single feature was identified within T4. On the southern edge of the trench, a linear feature was identified (F1), possibly post-Roman robbing. F1 contained septaria chippings and high levels of mortar, suggesting that a substantial Roman wall had been removed in the post-Roman period. The Roman accumulation layer (L3) observed across the evaluation site was also present in T4. Natural was not reached in T4. Excavation was halted at 2.2m below ground-level.

6 Finds

6.1 Bulk finds are listed in the archive. Included below are reports on the Roman pottery, post-Roman pottery and tile, and the small finds.

6.2 The Roman pottery

observations by Stephen Benfield

There was a limited assemblage of Roman material from the evaluation, ie a total of five sherds with a combined weight of 330g. Description of assemblage fabrics is after *CAR 10*. The majority of the material was associated with the Roman accumulation material (L3) and consisted of Fabric GX grey wares dating from the

1st to the 4th centuries. Other material associated with L3 includes a Dressel 7/11 amphora (1st-2nd century) and a CAM 268 bowl rim sherd datable to the mid 3rd-later 4th century. A single rim sherd of a CAM 305 grey slipped ware (Fabric WB) flange bowl datable to the late 3rd-4th century was recovered in association with the gravel surface (F6). The assemblage appears to date the deposits to the 3rd-4th centuries although it does contain examples of earlier pottery.

6.3 The post-Roman pottery

observations by Howard Brooks

The post-Roman pottery assemblage consisted of two sherds (combined weight of 267g). Description of assemblage fabrics is after *CAR 7*. The assemblage consisted of a single sherd of post-medieval red earthenware (Fabric 40, 17th/18th century), possibly a fragment of a chimney pot, and a single sherd of modern ironstone (Fabric 48d, 19th/20th century). The material is associated with the post-medieval/modern accumulation material (L2) identified in all the trenches.

6.4 Tessera

Two *tessera* cubes were recovered from the evaluation. Both are associated with Roman contexts, ie one with the road surface (F6) in T1 on the western edge of Insula 13, and the other with Roman accumulation/demolition material (L3) in T4. These *tessera* cubes would be an unusual find on the theatre site, as previous observation shows that it had plain mortar floors. The small number of *tesserae* recovered suggests that they may be intrusive in the demolition material; equally their location on the western and southern edges of Insula 13 may suggest that they are from structures associated with adjacent Insulas 12 and 21 to the west and south.

6.5 Small finds

by Nina Crummy

A fragment of lava quern (SF 1) may be of Roman, medieval or early post-medieval date, as quernstones of Mayen lava, sourced from the Eifel Hills in Germany, were imported over a very long period. A piece of gastropodic limestone veneer, probably Purbeck marble from Dorset, is similarly impossible to date closely, as the stone was used in both the Roman and medieval periods for decorative veneers and other architectural features, being prized for its colour when highly polished.

SF 1. (3) L2. Two fitting fragments from the lowerstone of a Mayen lava quern. The grinding surface is worn smooth; the underside is quite regular. Weight 439g.

SF 2. (6) F6. Fragment of gastropodic limestone veneer, probably Purbeck marble. Only one edge is polished smooth, the other surfaces are irregular breaks. Maximum dimensions 87 by 67 by 35 mm.

7 Conclusions

The highest significant archaeological horizon on this site was generally the top of the deeply-buried Roman layer (L3). Although it is difficult to make definitive statements about this horizon (it was not sampled to any great extent on this site due to it being too deeply buried for safe working), experience of evaluation and excavations on Roman sites across the centre of Colchester allows us to identify this as a layer of probable Roman demolition material, derived from the demolition of Roman buildings which once stood here.

The site lies on the western edge of Insula 13. The compacted gravel surface identified in T1 appears to represent the street. While little is known about the extent to which Insula 12 was built up, Insula 13 is better known being the site of the Roman theatre. T3 was positioned as close as possible to the remains of this building, but nothing definite was seen of it. However, excavation was halted at 2.1m below ground-level, and it may be that the deeply-buried layer of Roman demolition material observed in this trench was associated with the theatre. Similarly the possible robbing identified in T4 appears to provide further evidence of building remains in Insula 13, possibly in this case in the form a foundation somehow related to the theatre.

Overlying the Roman demolition layer was a deep topsoil layer (L2). In view of its stratigraphical position, it would be logical to interpret this as a post-Roman and medieval topsoil which accumulated on the top of the Roman deposits. However, the presence of fragments of clay tobacco-pipe, peg-tile and 19th- to 20th-century pottery shows that it was laid down in the post-medieval/modern periods, or, at the very least, was heavily disturbed in that period.

This layer of post-medieval topsoil was overlaid by crushed modern rubble and compacted gravel forming the base of the existing yard surface (L1).

Historic maps of the town centre show the evaluation site as gardens associated with the properties fronting onto East Stockwell Street into the first half of the 20th century. This lack of buildings and the practice of horticulture would account for the accumulation of such a thick deposit as L2. The modern dump deposits observed in F3 and F4 were associated with the current use of the site as a yard.

8 Archive deposition

The evaluation archive, including the site records, photographs and finds, will be permanently deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums under accession code COLEM 2008.53.

9 Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to A Barber & Son (Mr Keith Lewis) for commissioning and funding the evaluation. Site work was directed by Ben Holloway and carried out by Nigel Rayner. The project was monitored by Martin Winter of Colchester Borough Council.

10 References

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|--------|-------|--|
| 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 |
| CAR 7 | 2000 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 7: Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85</i> , by J Cotter |
| CAR 10 | 1999 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 10: Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-86</i> , by R P Symonds and S Wade, ed by P Bidwell and A Croom |
| CAT | 2008 | <i>WSI for archaeological investigation by trial-trenching at A Barber and Son, 10 William's Walk, Colchester</i> |
| CM | 2002 | <i>Guidelines on standards and practices for 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 |
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| IFA | 2001a | <i>Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation</i> |
| IFA | 2001b | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i> |
| MAP 2 | 1991 | <i>Management of archaeological projects</i> , 2nd edition (English Heritage) |

11 Glossary

AOD	above Ordnance Survey datum point (Newlyn sea level)
CM	Colchester and Ipswich Museums
context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made, usually a layer or a feature
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor
greensand	a form of sandstone, also known as Kentish Ragstone
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c AD 1500
modern	period from c 1850 onwards to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
post-medieval	period from c 1500 to c 1850
Roman	the period from AD 43 to AD 410 approximately
septaria	conglomerate consisting of nodules of calcium rich clay (marl)
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database, held by Colchester and Ipswich Museums

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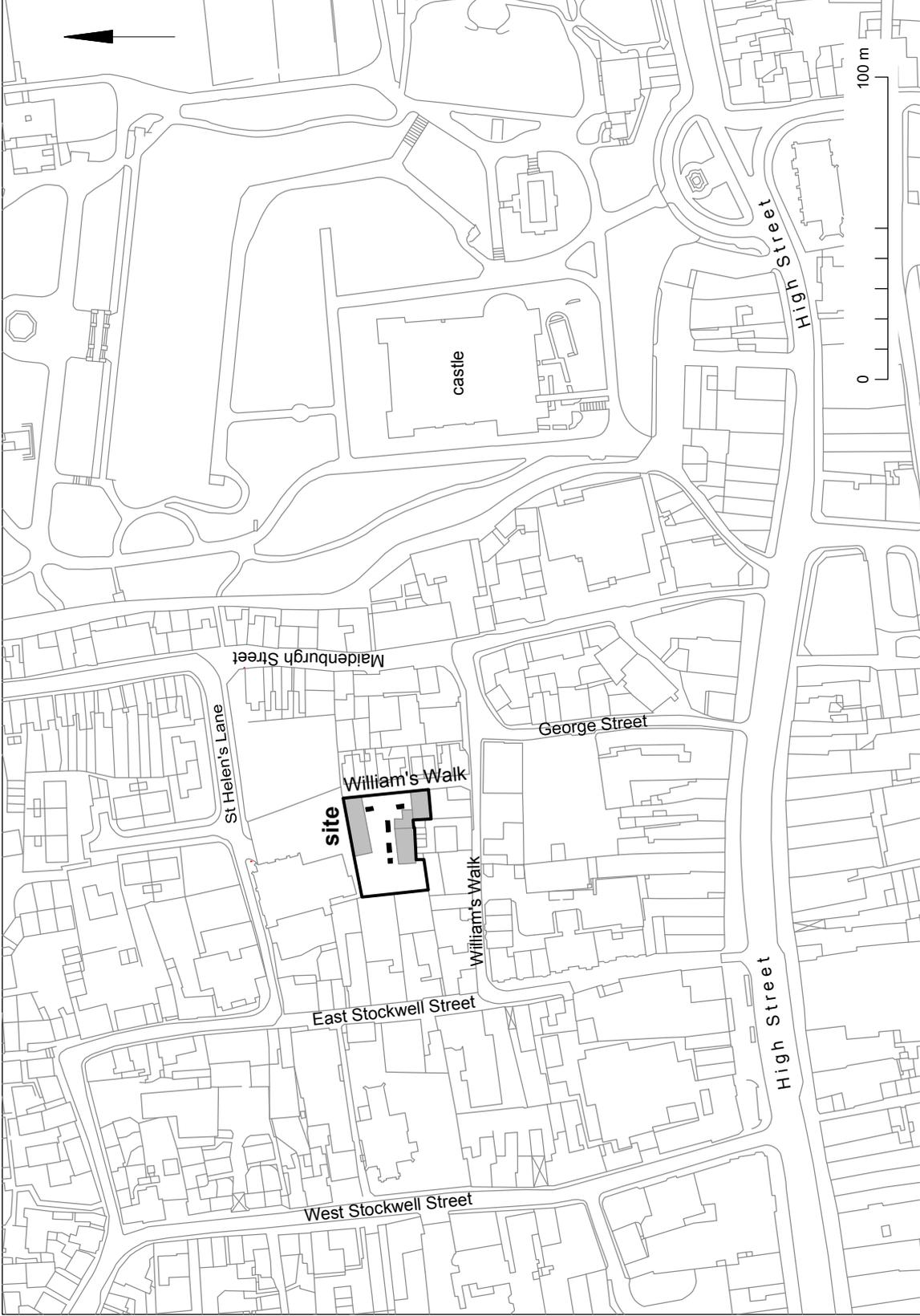
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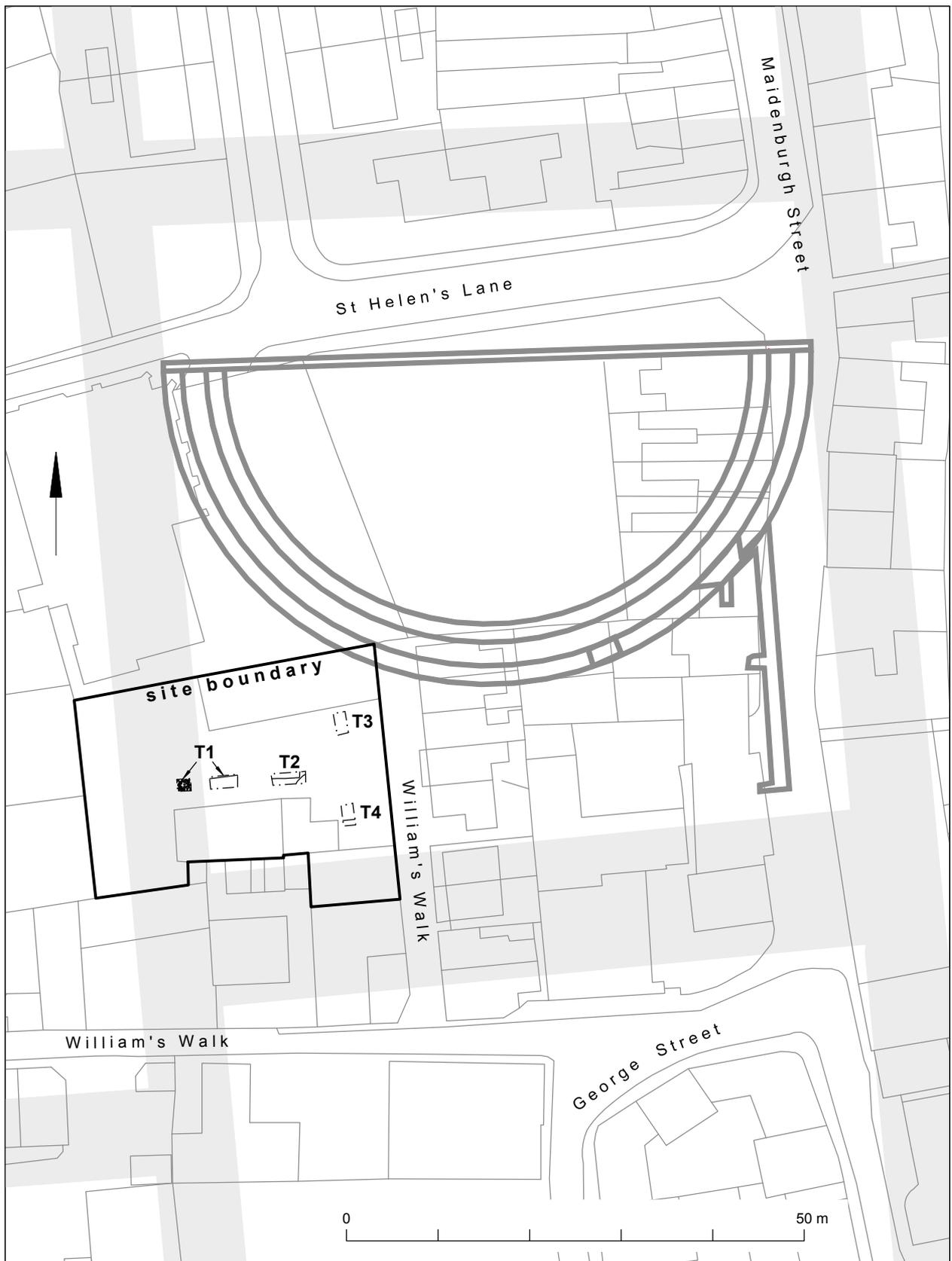
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Fig 1 Site location.

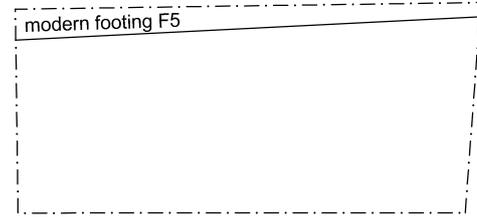
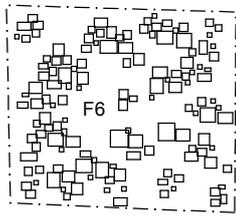


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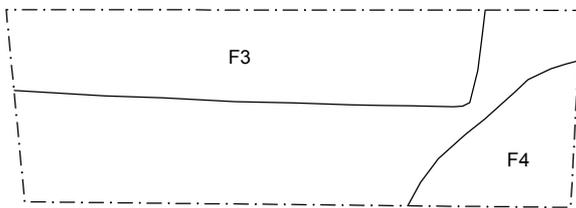
— projected Roman theatre wall ■ projected Roman road

Fig 2 Trench location plan.

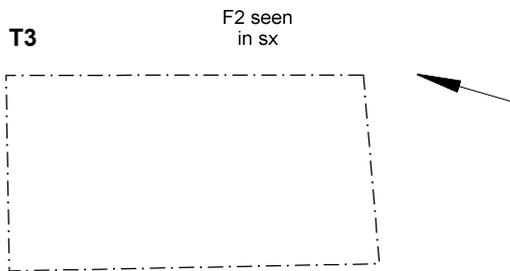
T1



T2



T3



T4

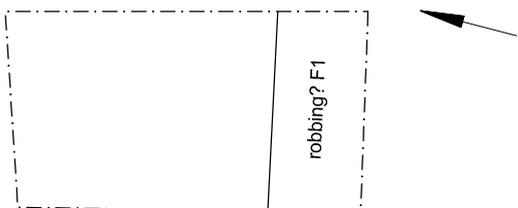
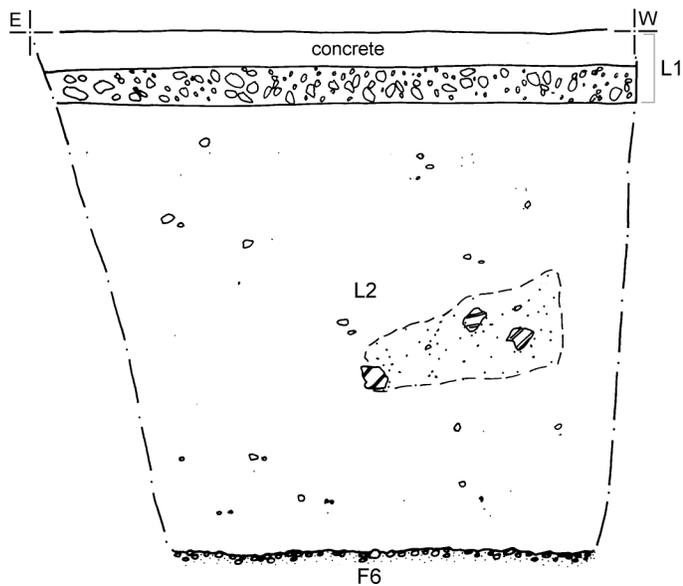
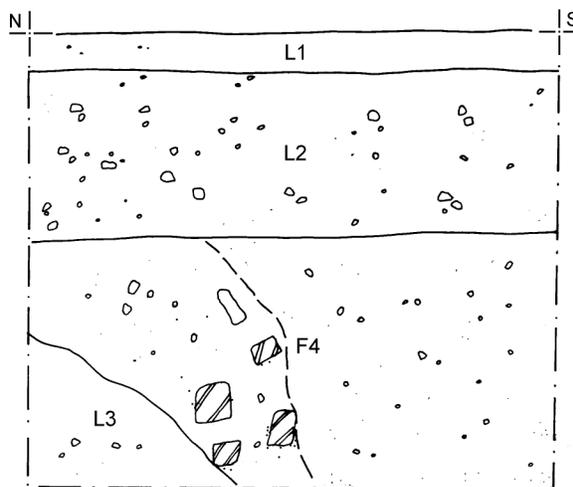


Fig 3 T1-T4: plans.

T1



T2



- sand
- small stones
- large stones
- mortar
- ▨ Roman brick and tile
- ▧ post-Roman brick and tile

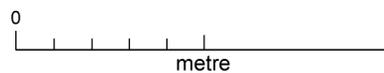


Fig 4 T1-T2: sections.

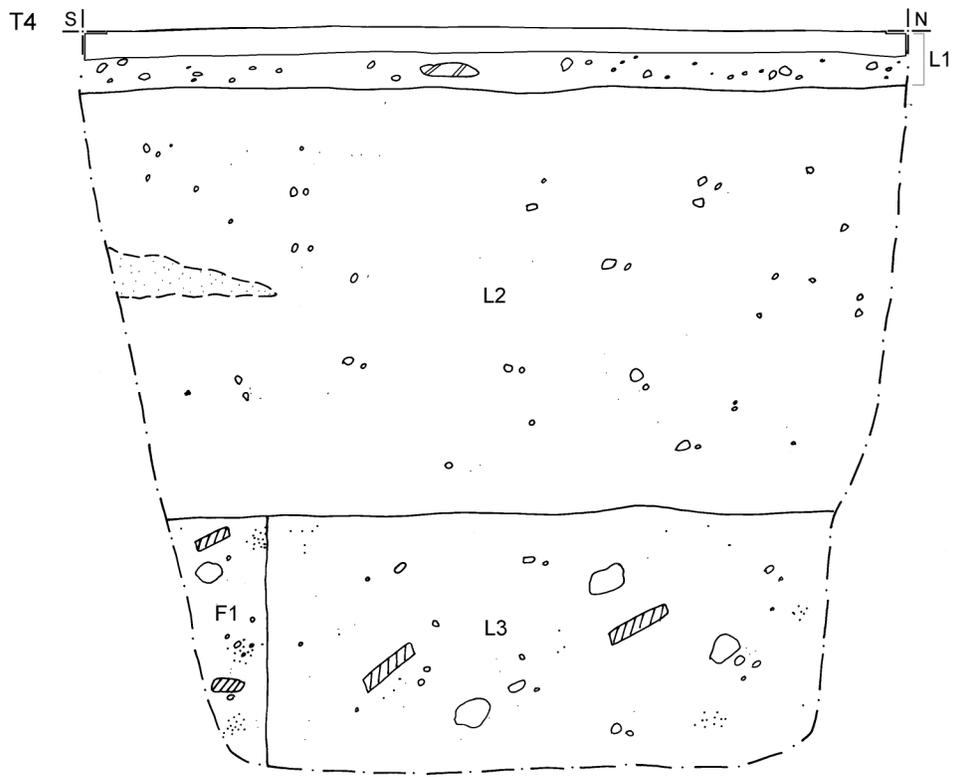
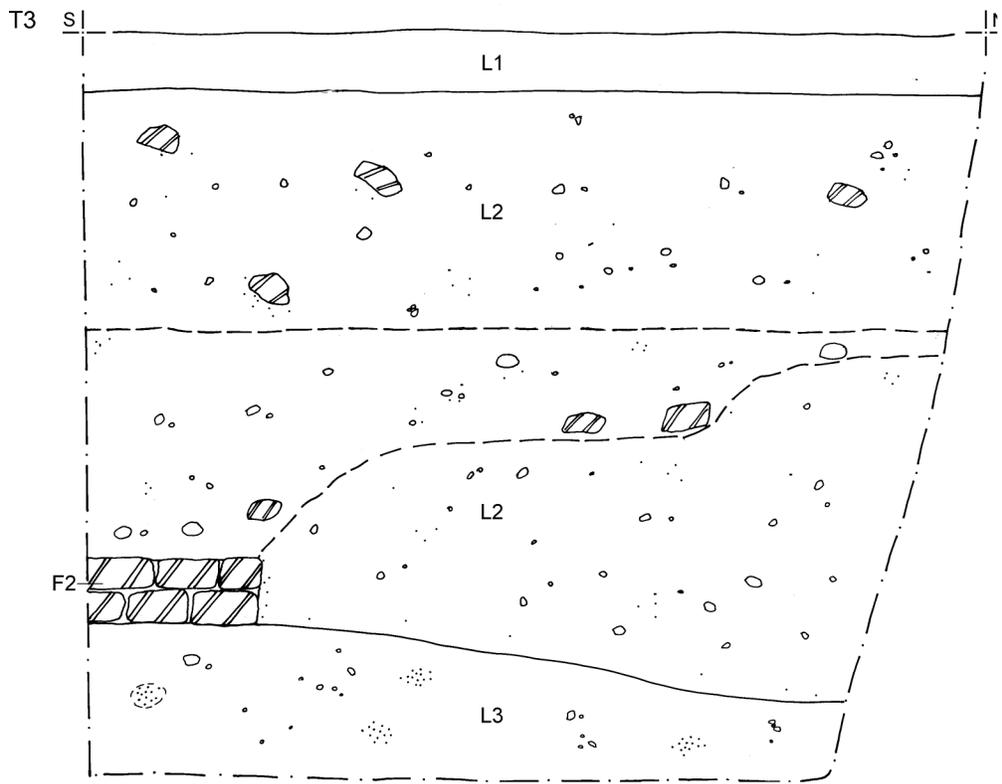
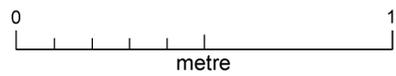


Fig 5 T3-T4: sections.



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

Summary sheet

Site address: A Barber & Son at 10 William's Walk, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TL 9971 2535 (centre)	Site code: CAT project ref.: 08/3e Museum accession code: COLEM 2008.53
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: 27th March 2008	Size of area investigated: 24m sq in four trenches
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums	Funding source: Owner
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHER/UAD nos:
Final report: CAT Report 471 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods Represented: Roman, post-medieval/modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: An archaeological trial-trenching evaluation of a site in Insula 13 of the Roman town found modern strata and footings lying over a considerable depth of post-medieval soils. The highest significant archaeological horizons were Roman in date, and were found at depths ranging from 1.3m to 2.1m below present site level (ie the builder's yard surface).</p> <p>A quantity of Roman brick and tile and other building material in residual contexts in the post-medieval soils were the only indication found of a Roman building. A small area of compacted gravel is likely to represent the north-south Roman street between Insula 12 and Insula 13. Historic maps indicate that this was an area of gardens in the post-medieval period. That fact, combined with the gradual infilling of buildings over the 18th to 20th centuries, would explain the depths of soil and the modern footings observed here.</p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Keywords: theatre, Roman	Significance: *
Author of summary: Ben Holloway	Date of summary: April 2008