

Report on a watching brief: CAT Report 474

Site address: St Botolph's Street, Colchester, Essex
Dates of fieldwork: 11th February-9th April 2008
NGR: TL 9990 2490-9989 2503
Plans attached?: Yes (Figs 1-3)
Museum accession code: COLIM 2008.11
CAT project code: 08/2b

Summary

Archaeological remains uncovered during the digging of a trench for a gas main in St Botolph's Street included Roman street metalling and part of the medieval South Gate into the town.

Introduction (Fig 1)

An archaeological watching brief was carried out on behalf of National Grid during the digging of a trench for a replacement gas main in St Botolph's Street. It was undertaken by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) from February to April 2008.

The trench was dug by the contractors, Morrison. It extended for approximately 130m along the western side of St Botolph's Street. The line of the trench lies on a south-facing slope, with the modern ground-level dropping from 20.1m above Ordnance Datum at the northern end of the street to 15.8m above Ordnance Datum at the southern end.

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* (CIMS 2008a), and also those in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2008a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IfA 2008b). The guidance contained in English Heritage's *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE 2006), and in the documents *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.

Archaeological background

Little archaeological evidence had previously been discovered in St Botolph's Street. Ancient street metalling of probable Roman date was observed under the western side of the street approximately 12m and 56m south of the South Gate in 1934 and 1933 respectively (Hull 1958, 10).

The surviving remains of the South or St Botolph's Gate were removed in 1817 or 1818 (Hull 1958, 58). Little is known about these remains and to what extent they were Roman or post-Roman in date. Part of a possible Roman foundation for the gate was observed by Wire in 1848 (*ibid*, 212-13). A short distance to the north of the gate, traces of a foundation and an arched drain constructed of Roman brick/tile were observed in 1934-5 (*ibid*, 215).

Metalling from the north-south street leading to the South Gate from inside the walled town was revealed in 1967 approximately 75m north of the gate, under what is now Peacocks store (Dunnett 1971, 103).

There is an underground west-east watercourse towards the southern end of St Botolph's Street (CAT Report 432, 4).

Aims

The aim of the watching brief was to record the depth and extent of any archaeological remains uncovered during the digging of the pipe trench, and to assess the date and significance of these remains.

Methods (Fig 1)

The contractors started work at the southern end of St Botolph's Street on the 11th February 2008. The replacement gas main was usually laid alongside and to the east of an existing main. Thus the western side of the trench dug to house the replacement main had typically been dug out before in modern times, while the eastern side was cut through undisturbed deposits. The trench was laid from south to north in St Botolph's Street, with occasional east-west offshoots to link up with other mains.

The trench varied in width and depth. It was typically 0.55m wide, but was up to 1.1m wide in places, and was usually about 1.2m in depth. It was dug by a mini-digger with a toothless bucket.

Individual records of archaeological contexts, such as layers or features, as well as finds, were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets. Section drawings were made at 1:10. A small selection of the section drawings are included in this report (Fig 3); the remainder are available in the site archive. Standard record shots of the deposits in the trench as well as general shots of the trench and street were taken with a digital camera. Further details of the methodology used can be found in the CAT document *Policies and procedures* (2006).

Results

Natural sand and gravel subsoil (L8) was not located in the trench in the southern half of St Botolph's Street. In the northern half, it was reached in several places in the bottom of the trench. Outside the walled town it was observed at depths of 1.1-1.35m below the modern street-level (Sx 1 in Fig 3), while immediately to the north of Short Wyre Street, inside the walled area, it was 0.8m deep.

Roman street metalling (L5; Figs 1 & 3)

Street metalling was recorded in or near the bottom of the trench, especially in the northern 60m or so of the street outside the walled town. It was approximately 0.2-0.25m thick and was reached at 0.9-1.2m below the modern street-level. It was seen most clearly outside 5-10 St Botolph's Street (Sx 1 in Fig 3).

The upper part of the gravel metalling (L5) was black in colour while the lower part was greyish-brown with an olive hue. The black colour seemed to be the result of staining rather than a different phase of metalling, and it proved difficult to distinguish between different layers or phases of metalling within L5. The metalling sealed a thin layer of make-up (L7), 0.1m thick, which in turn sealed the natural subsoil (L8). No finds were definitely recovered from L5 or L7 although, on stratigraphical grounds, it is likely that they were Roman in date.

A disturbed layer of gravel metalling or make-up was observed immediately north of Short Wyre Street inside the walled town. This was up to 0.2m thick and was reached at only 0.5-0.6m below the modern street-level. It sealed natural sand (L8) and was possibly also of Roman date.

The metalling (L5) was sealed by a mixed, dark greyish-brown deposit (L4; Sx 1 in Fig 3), which was 0.1-0.5m thick. This deposit was found over much of the length of the trench, although it varied in texture. At the southern end of the trench, for example, it was over 0.5m thick and was black in colour with abundant ashy and cindery inclusions. It was typically reached at a depth of about 0.7m below the modern street-level. The deposit L4 is probably a post-Roman topsoil, often termed 'dark earth' (*CAR 3*, 92), which has been extensively re-worked and redeposited as a result of cultivation, pit-digging, the dumping of refuse and other activities.

Medieval South Gate (F4; Figs 1-3, Plate 1)

Approximately 8m south of Short Wyre Street, part of a large foundation (F4) was uncovered in the bottom of the trench. It extended for 1.3m north-south and was 1.05-1.15m below the modern ground-level. It was constructed of large blocks of septaria and some pieces of peg-tile set in a pale brown mortar. It sealed or was cut into natural sand (L8).

The foundation was cleaned up but remained unexcavated and undamaged during the pipe-laying. It appeared to survive as two layers or courses of stone, or about 0.2m, deep. The upper course survived only as a line of three north-south septaria blocks extending out about 80mm from the western section. The southernmost of these blocks was laid on a large piece of peg-tile. The lower stone-and-mortar layer extended across the width of the trench and included some very large septaria blocks.



Plate 1 Foundation F4, viewed from the east.

The foundation was probably part of the medieval remodelling of the South or St Botolph's Gate. The peg-tile in F4 would be consistent with a date of around 1400 for the foundation, as there was extensive repair and refurbishment of the town wall at this time.

There was no definite evidence for the Roman wall or gate seen in the trench. This may indicate that the trench passed through a carriageway in the Roman gate. Perhaps the length of wall, of which foundation F4 was a part, blocked the western carriageway of a two-arched Roman gateway, reducing it to a single carriageway in the medieval and later periods. A similar interpretation has been suggested for the Head Gate (Crummy 2007, 15). The South Gate is shown with a single archway in Norden's plan published in Speed's *Atlas of England and Wales* in 1610, although this could be a conventional symbol rather than a realistic representation.

The foundation F4 was sealed by an extensive deposit of robbing or demolition debris (F2; Sx 2b in Fig 3), which was 0.35-0.5m thick. This dark greyish-brown deposit contained fragments of mortar, septaria, Roman brick/tile, and peg-tile. The edges of F2 were not well-defined, but it extended for at least 1.6m to the north of F4.

Approximately 0.7m to the north of F4, a large stone-and mortar fragment (F3; Fig 2) protruded for 0.1m out from the eastern section of the trench. The fragment measured 0.5m north-south and was 0.25m thick. It lay just under 1m below the modern street-level. It appeared to be of similar construction to F4, and to be enveloped in robbing/demolition debris (F2). It was probably a redeposited fragment deriving from the South Gate.

A glazed potsherd in post-medieval red earthenware, of probable 17th- or 18th-century date, was recovered during the cleaning of F4. It possibly derives from the demolition or robbing debris F2. No other dating evidence was

recovered from F2 or F3, although they presumably date from the time of the demolition of F4, which was probably in 1817-18 (Hull 1958, 58).

Further traces of probable demolition debris (L9) were observed in the bottom of the trench to the south of F4. This was most marked between 1m and 3m south of F4. It was at least 0.25m thick and 0.9-1.15m+ below the modern street-level. It differed from F2, consisting largely of pale brown mortar fragments and flecks, with fragments of peg-tile, septaria, and some Roman brick/tile and greensand. The mortar was sandy and looked medieval rather than Roman. Further to the south, L9 was cut by pits and service trenches. The mortar rubble L9 probably derives from the South Gate, although it could have come from a structure elsewhere, perhaps one on the St Botolph's Street frontage.

Another mortared feature (F1; Fig 1) was uncovered approximately 30m to the south of F4. This consisted of pale brown mortar, 0.2m thick, containing occasional fragments of septaria and peg-tile. It was aligned north-south and survived for 1.5m in the eastern section of the trench. It lay 0.85m below the modern street-level. It looked like a shallow stone-and-mortar foundation or plinth rather than a layer of demolition debris.

This probable foundation was reminiscent of the medieval and early post-medieval foundations excavated at Angel Yard, High Street, Colchester (Shimmin & Carter 1996, 42-62). It lay 3.5m east of the present St Botolph's Street frontage, although comparable examples have also been found beneath the pavement and the High Street outside Angel Yard (*ibid*, 42, 44, 62-3).

The ?foundation F1 sealed an extensive dump/make-up layer (L6), which was uncovered in the bottom of the trench. This was at least 0.2m thick, and contained a large quantity of peg-tile fragments.

Post-medieval/modern make-up layers (L3; Fig 3), 0.35-0.6m thick, were recorded in the upper part of the trench along most of its length. These were mainly greyish-brown deposits, although the demolition debris F2 was sealed by a layer of brownish-yellow sand, 0.15m thick, and a few other thin layers of sand were also noted. There were also several bands of brick rubble, mortar and gravel, some of which may have formed surfaces, although well-defined layers of post-Roman metallurgy were not observed.

These layers were cut by numerous modern service trenches. They were sealed by modern concrete make-up (L2), 0.15-0.25m thick, and in places reinforced concrete, which underlay the existing tarmac road surface (L1) which was 0.15m thick.

Finds

A small quantity of finds was recovered in the course of the watching brief. Where appropriate, these were cleaned, marked and bagged according to context. The finds are listed in the appendix, and further details are available in the site archive.

Conclusions

Significant archaeological deposits were uncovered in the gas-main trench, despite the amount of modern ground-disturbance in St Botolph's Street. These included remains of the South Gate of the town, although these were medieval rather than Roman in date. The remains were possibly from a remodelling or blocking of part of the gate, perhaps in c 1400. There was also evidence of the demolition of the gate, probably in 1817-18. Street metallurgy of probable Roman date was found leading up to the gate.

Archive deposition

The archive from the watching brief, including the detailed site records, photographs and finds will be permanently deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums under accession code COLIM 2008.11, in accordance with *Guidelines on the preparations and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester and Ipswich Museums* (CIMS 2008b) and *Archaeological archives: a guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation* (IfA 2007).

Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to Morrison for commissioning and to National Grid for funding the watching brief, and to the workmen from Morrison for their help and patience on site. The project was monitored by Martin Winter, Colchester Borough Council Archaeology Officer.

Report author: Donald Shimmin

Report date: September 2010

References

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

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Glossary

AOD	above Ordnance Survey datum point based on mean sea level at Newlyn, Cornwall
CBCAO context	Colchester Borough Council Archaeology Officer specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made; usually a layer or a feature
dark earth	post-Roman topsoil; probably the result of long-term cultivation, refuse-disposal and pit-digging.
feature	an identifiable context, such as a pit, a wall or a post-hole
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists
<i>imbrex</i>	curved Roman roof tile
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c AD 1500
modern	period from c 1850 onwards to the present
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
peg-tile	rectangular roof tile of medieval or later date
post-medieval	period from c 1500 to c 1850
Roman	the period from AD 43 to c AD 410
septaria	calcareous, clay concretions found on the Essex and Suffolk coast
<i>tegula</i>	flanged Roman roof tile
<i>tesserae</i>	small ceramic cubes used to make Roman tessellated and mosaic floors
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database, maintained by Colchester and Ipswich Museums
U/S	unstratified, ie without a well-defined context

Appendix: list of finds by context

All weights are in grammes. Roman pottery fabric codes follow those used in *CAR 10* (identifications by Stephen Benfield). Post-Roman pottery fabric codes follow those used in *CAR 7* (identifications by Howard Brooks). The animal bone fragments were identified by Adam Wightman, and more information on these is available in CAT Report 498.

Table 1: finds list.

Con-text	Finds no	Quantity	Description	Weight (g)	Comments
F1	3	1	peg-tile fragment	44	
F2	5	5	peg-tile fragments	857.5	1 with peg-hole; 4 with mortar adhering
		1	animal bone fragment	46.2	<i>Ovis</i> tibia, with evidence of <i>Canid</i> gnawing
		1	iron ?nail fragment	33.0	
L6	4	2	peg-tile fragments	66.0	
U/S	1	6	animal bone fragments	485.0	<i>Bos</i> mandible with cut marks, metacarpal and radius
U/S	2	1	<i>imbrex</i> fragment	176.0	with mortar adhering
U/S	6	4	peg-tile fragments	179.1	
		1	<i>tessera</i>	27.1	with mortar adhering
		1	clay tobacco-pipe stem fragment	7.6	
		1	Roman potsherd	12.1	Fabric GX body sherd, with traces of mortar adhering

		1	post-Roman potsherd	12.6	glazed post-medieval red earthenware (Fabric 40) body sherd, probably dates to 17th or 18th century
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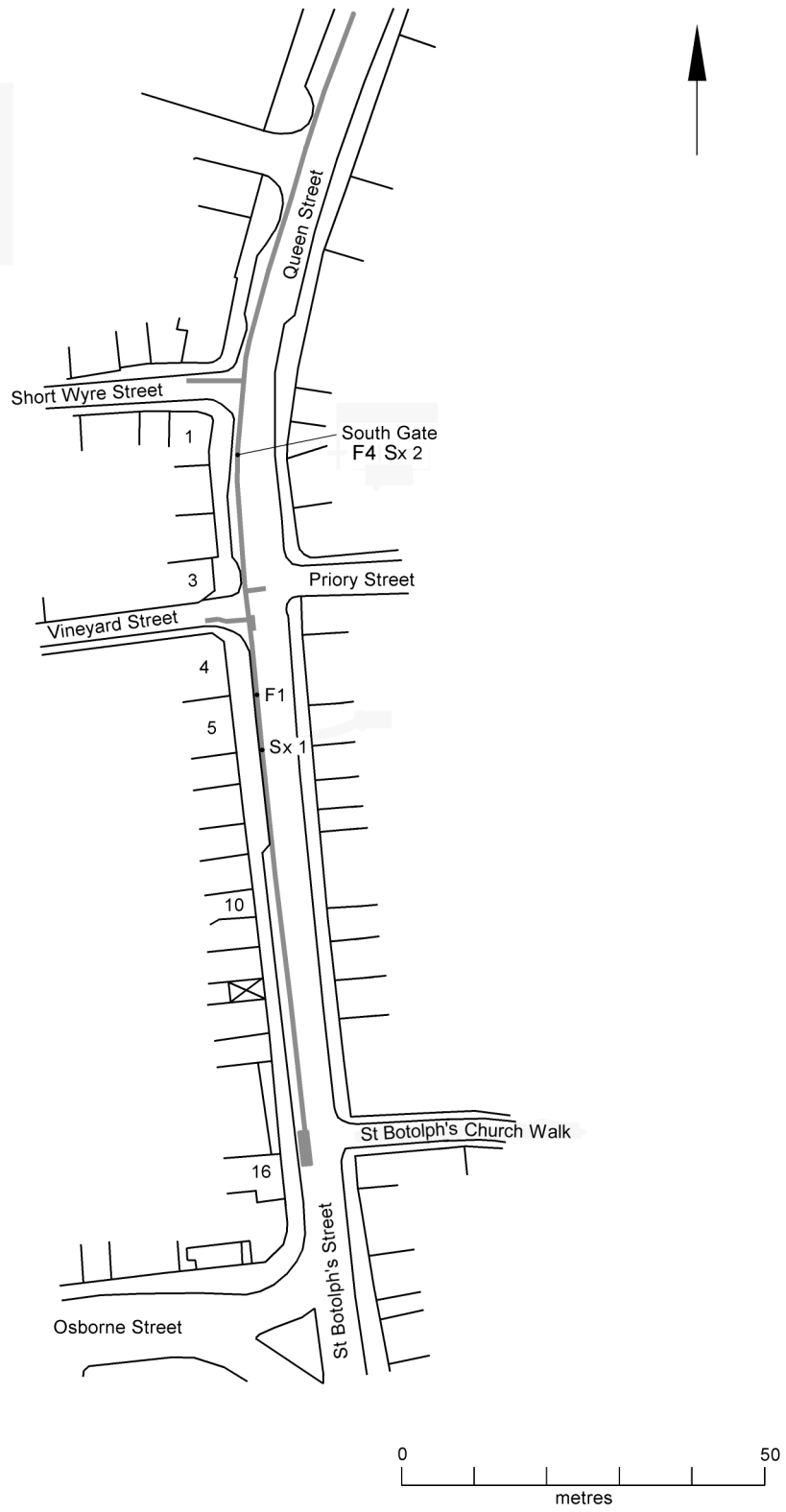


Fig 1 Site location plan, showing the course of the gas-main trench.

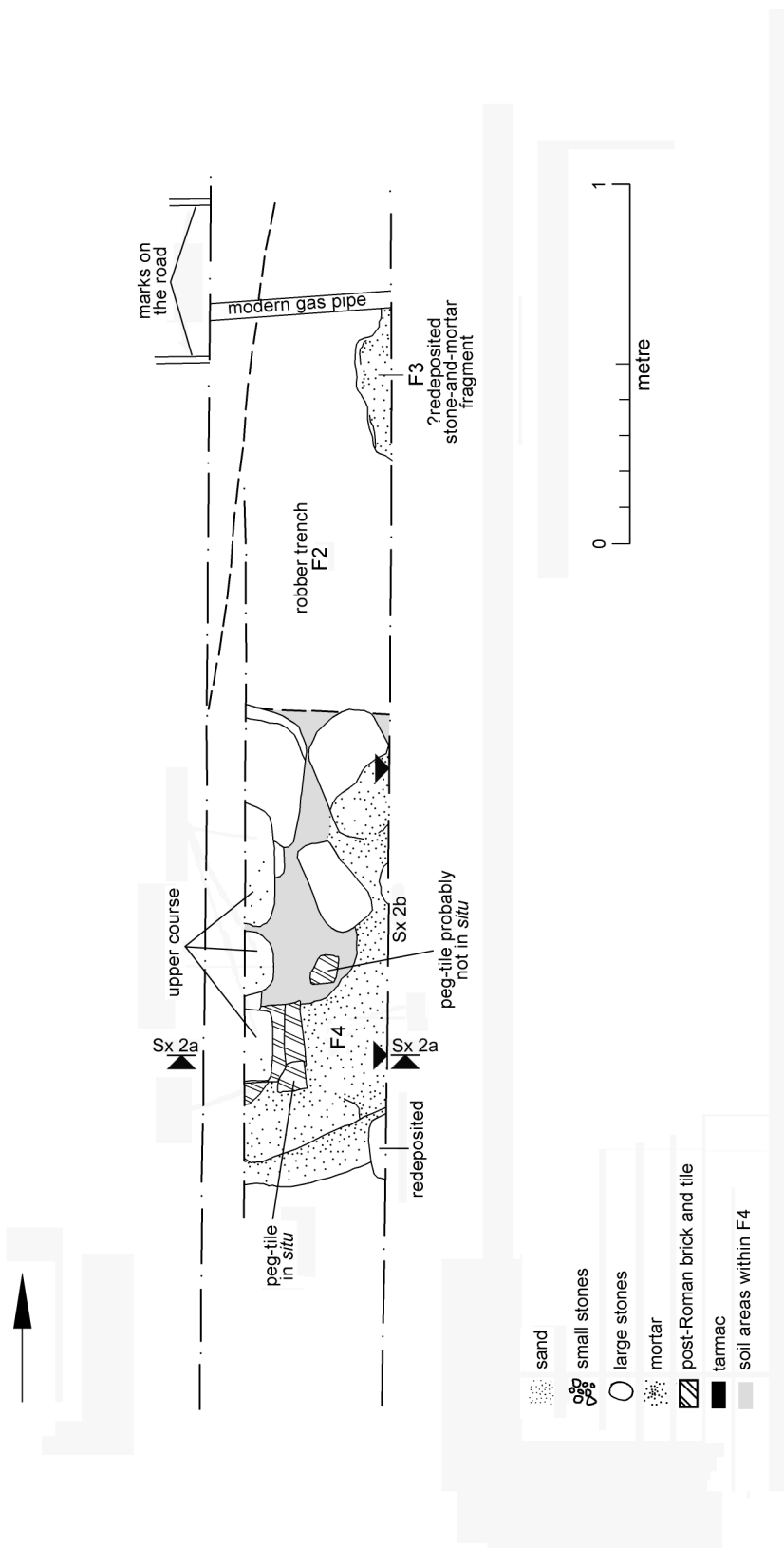


Fig 2 Plan of the medieval foundation (F4) of the South Gate.

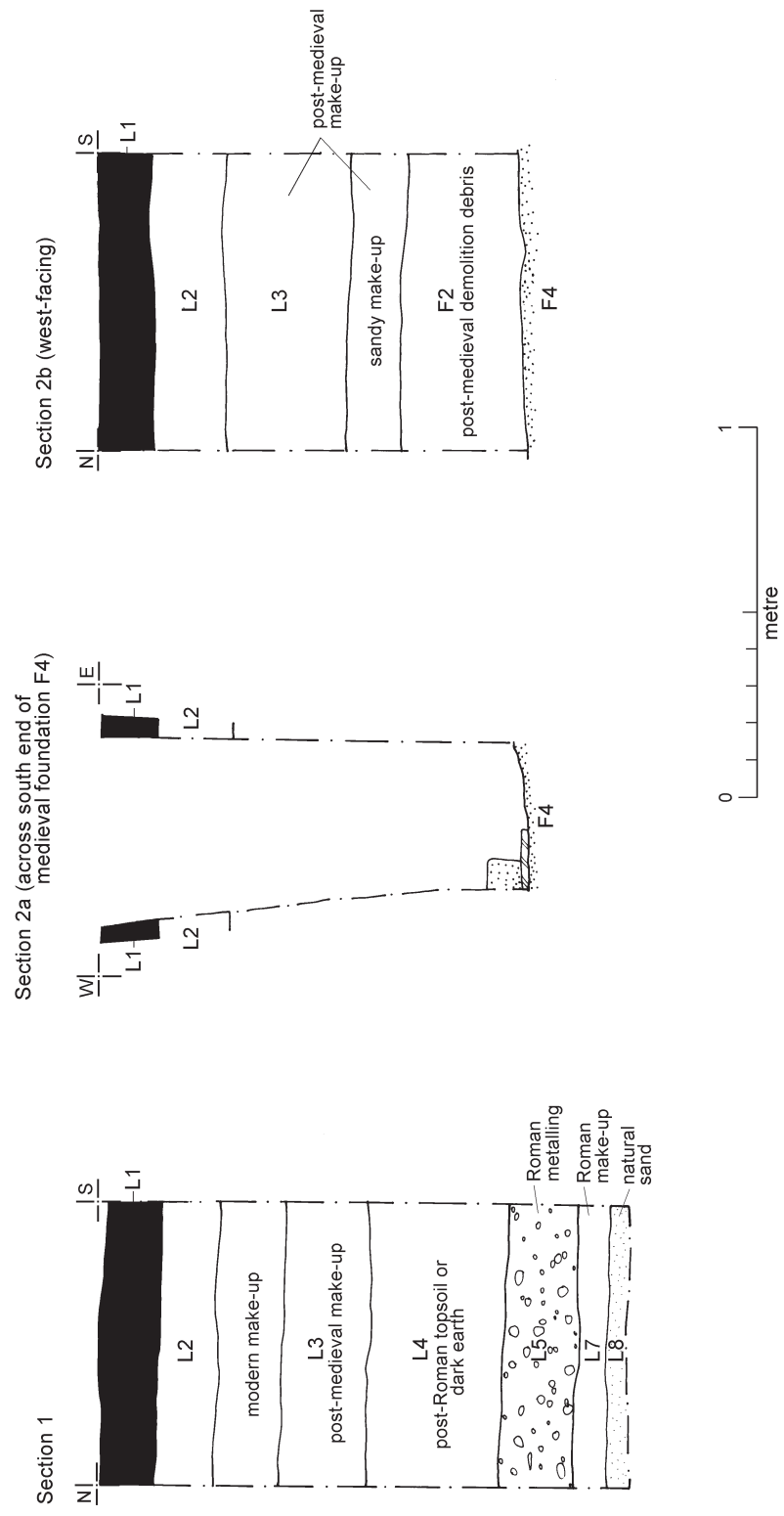


Fig 3 Sections 1-2.

Essex Historic Environment Record/ *Essex Archaeology and History*

Summary sheet

Site address: St Botolph's Street, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: St Botolph	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 9990 2490-9989 2503	Site codes: Museum accession code - COLIM 2008.11 CAT project - 08/2b
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: February-April 2008	Size of area investigated: 130 m-long trench
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums	Funding source: National Grid
Further seasons anticipated? Yes	Related EHER and UAD nos:
Final report: CAT Report 474 and summary in EAH	
Periods represented: Roman, medieval, post-medieval	
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>Archaeological remains uncovered during the digging of a trench for a gas main in St Botolph's Street included Roman street metalling and part of the medieval South Gate into the town.</i>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Keywords: South Gate, medieval, foundation, street metalling, St Botolph's Street	Significance: *
Author of summary: Donald Shimmin	Date of summary: September 2010