

Report on an archaeological watching brief: CAT Report 570

Site address: Old Library, Town Hall, West Stockwell Street, Colchester, Essex
Date of fieldwork: 5th-19th October 2009
NGR: TL 9959 2526
Figures attached?: Yes (Figs 1-2)
Museum accession code: COLIM 2009.66
CAT project code: 09/9e

Summary

A large quantity of disarticulated human bone was collected for re-burial during an archaeological watching brief in St Runwald's graveyard at the rear of the Old Library, Town Hall, West Stockwell Street, Colchester, Essex. The remains of two headstones, one 18th century and the other undated, were also uncovered.

Introduction (Fig 1)

An archaeological watching brief was carried out at the rear of the Town Hall on behalf of Colchester Borough Council during the construction of disabled access facilities. These included steps, paving and a stair-lift, as well as the remodelling of the frontage wall, gate and railings. The watching brief was undertaken by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) in October 2009.

The site is located near the centre of the historic town, close to the High Street, and within the Town Centre Conservation Area. It lies at the southern end of the graveyard of St Runwald's church (which no longer survives) and immediately to the north of the Old Library, which was built in 1894. This building is situated at the rear of the Town Hall, which was constructed in 1898 and is a Grade I listed building. The site is accessed from West Stockwell Street and lies on a north-facing slope. The ground-level within the graveyard also slopes slightly from west to east.

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 (Fig 1)

There are no records of previous archaeological investigations on the site. It lies a short distance to the north-east of the excavations at the former Cups Hotel in 1973-4 (*CAR 6*, 328-38; now nos 138-144 High Street) and to the west of the excavations at Angel Yard in 1986 (Shimmin & Carter 1996, 35-83) (Fig 1). The site lies within the north-eastern part of the site of the Roman legionary fortress, and in the eastern part of Insula 19 within the later *colonia*.

The site lies immediately to the north of the site of the medieval Moot Hall, built in c 1160 (Crummy 2001, 151). St Runwald's church was situated in the High Street, at the west end of Middle Row (Fig 1). It was probably a pre-Conquest foundation, although the layout of this part of the town at that time is

unclear (CAR 1, 53). The Moot Hall was demolished in 1843 to make way for a larger town hall, which in turn was replaced in 1898 by the existing one. St Runwald's church was demolished in 1878.

Little is known about the early history of St Runwald's graveyard and whether it was once more extensive. It appears to be shown on the plan in Morant (1748) and is clearly marked on early Ordnance Survey maps, such as that of 1876. The graveyard was probably in use until the mid 19th century. A number of 18th- and 19th-century gravestones survive in the graveyard; some *in situ* and some repositioned (mostly laid flat).

Aims

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

Methods (Fig 2)

The contractors used a mini-digger with a toothless ditching bucket to excavate a 3 m-wide strip along the southern edge of the graveyard, adjacent to the Old Library. The strip was dug to a depth of approximately 300-500 mm from west to east. At the eastern end of the site, a trench was excavated for the base of the stair-lift. This was approximately 3 m north-south by 3.5 m east-west and 1.65 m deep. The modern ground-level at the eastern end of the graveyard was approximately 0.9 m higher than the level of the pavement in West Stockwell Street.

The machine-stripping and -trenching was monitored continuously by CAT, and was followed up with several site visits until the groundwork was completed. The contractors gave CAT staff time to investigate, clean and record any archaeological remains uncovered, and to collect up the human bone and other finds unearthed. Individual records of archaeological contexts, such as layers or features, as well as finds, were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets. Plans were drawn at 1:20 and section drawings were made at 1:10. Standard record shots of the site and of individual contexts were taken with a digital camera. Further details of the recording methods used can be found in the CAT document *Policies and procedures* (CAT 2006).

Results

Over much of the site there was a layer of modern topsoil (L1), up to 0.45 m thick. This sealed an extensive, rather mixed deposit of greyish-brown topsoil/dump (L2), over 1 m thick. The lower part of this layer was soft and probably included the backfill of graves, although individual grave cuts were not visible during machining. Modern finds were found throughout L2, as well as some earlier material. This included a small quantity of Roman pottery, among which were rim sherds of shelly ware and Mayen ware, both of late Roman date. The natural subsoil was not reached during the watching brief.

Parts of two headstones (F2 & F3; Fig 2) were uncovered *in situ* in the eastern part of the site. They were both aligned north-south. The upper parts of the headstones had been broken off. The headstone F2 was 60 mm thick, 480 mm wide, and survived 780 mm high. It lay approximately 250 mm below the modern ground-level. The lower 270 mm of the headstone had been left undressed. The upper 510 mm was dressed and the surviving part of the east face bore an inscription, which read:

L C
1757
S C
1764

The headstone F3 was 100 mm thick, 630 mm wide, and survived 600 mm high. It lay only 50 mm below the modern ground-level. It was undressed and no inscription was present. Both headstones were retained in the graveyard.

The headstones were presumably set at the west ends of graves, all above-ground traces of which have disappeared. The proximity of F2 to the West Stockwell Street frontage suggests that the latter was cut back into the graveyard at some point. Also, the discrepancy between the modern ground-level in the graveyard and that in the street perhaps indicates that the southern end of West Stockwell Street has been terraced. If so, then this probably occurred in the 19th century.

The lower part of the fill (L2) of the trench for the stair-lift, approximately 1.4-1.65 m below the modern ground-level, was loose and soft, and contained voids. This was probably due to the effects of settlement of the backfill of graves following the decay of the underlying wooden coffins, including those associated with F2 and F3. Investigation of a void at a depth of 1.65 m below the modern ground-level in the northern part of this area revealed well-preserved human bone from an *in situ* inhumation. The bone lay immediately below the proposed level of the concrete slab for the stair-lift. It was covered over and left undisturbed.

As expected, well-preserved disarticulated human bone fragments were found frequently during the groundwork. Apart from the grave referred to in the preceding paragraph, no *in situ* burials were encountered. The disarticulated human bone came mainly from L2 and was occasionally found in clusters. In two cases, in the eastern part of the site, the clusters of bone had clearly been placed in small circular pits (F1 & F4; Fig 2). Pit F1 was 0.75 m in diameter, 0.35 m deep and lay only 0.2 m below the modern ground-level. Pit F4 was 0.6 m in diameter, 0.25 m deep and lay 0.45 m below the modern ground-level. Among the finds from F1 and F4 were coffin fittings, such as iron handles and nails.

These pits were presumably dug and filled with the human remains unearthed during earlier phases of building work on the site, probably the construction of the Old Library in 1894.

Finds

It was not practical to re-bury on site the large quantity of human-bone fragments recovered during the watching brief. In the licence for the removal of human remains issued by the Ministry of Justice on the 7th October 2009, one of the conditions states: 'The remains shall be reinterred, as soon as practicable, and in any event no later than within two years of the date of disinterment, in a burial ground in which interments may legally take place. In any intervening period they shall be kept safely, privately and decently'. It is, therefore, hoped to re-bury them, together with associated coffin furniture, at a suitable location in the near future.

A small quantity of other 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.

Archive deposition

The archive from the watching brief will be permanently deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums under accession code COLIM 2009.66, 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). The archive includes a wallet containing the context sheets, site plans, and correspondence with the architect; a CD containing digital material including the site photographs; and a museum box containing the finds.

Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to Colchester Borough Council for commissioning and funding the watching brief, and to the contractors, Cadman Group, for their help on site.

Glossary

amphora	large Roman pottery storage jar, used especially for oil and wine
AOD	above Ordnance Survey datum point based on mean sea level at Newlyn, Cornwall
context	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
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c AD 1500
modern	period from c 1850 onwards to the present
mortarium	Roman mixing bowl, with grit-roughened interior
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
post-medieval	period from c 1500 to c 1850
Roman	the period from AD 43 to c AD 410
samian	glossy Roman fine reddish pottery, used mainly as tableware
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database, maintained by Colchester and Ipswich Museums
U/S	unstratified, ie without a well-defined context

Report author: Donald Shimmin

Report date: December 2010

References

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

<i>CAR 1</i>	1981	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report 1</i> and CBA Research Report 39: Aspects of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Colchester, by P Crummy
<i>CAR 5</i>	1988	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report 5: The post-Roman small finds from excavations in Colchester 1971-85</i> , by N Crummy
<i>CAR 6</i>	1992	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report 6: Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School, and other sites in Colchester, 1971-85</i> , by P Crummy
<i>CAR 10</i>	1991	<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	2006	<i>Policies and procedures</i> , Colchester Archaeological Trust
CIMS	2008a	<i>Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i> (CBC)
CIMS	2008b	<i>Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester and Ipswich Museums</i> (CBC)
Crummy, P	2001	<i>City of Victory: the story of Colchester - Britain's first Roman town</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 & J Glazebrook

EAA 14 2003 *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England, East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 14*, ed by D Gurney

IfA 2007 *Archaeological archives: a guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation*

IfA 2008a *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief*

IfA 2008b *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials*

Morant, P 1748 *The history and antiquities of the most ancient town and borough of Colchester*

MoRPHE 2006 *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment*, English Heritage

Shimmin, D, & Carter, G 1996 'Excavations at Angel Yard, High Street, Colchester, 1986 and 1989', in *Essex Archaeology and History*, **27**, 35-83

Appendix: list of finds by context

All weights are in grammes. Roman pottery fabric codes follow those used in *CAR 10*. The clay tobacco-pipe and dress-pin types follow those used in *CAR 5*.

Table 1: finds list.

Context	Finds no	Qty	Description	Weight (g)	Comments
F1	4	10	modern pot sherds	25.1	incl. stoneware and earthenwares
		2	post-medieval/modern vessel glass sherds	84.4	
		1	post-medieval/modern window-glass fragment	2.0	
		3	clay pipe stem fragments	7.8	
		1	clay pipe bowl fragment	1.6	rouletting round rim
	12	1	iron coffin handle	138.4	155 mm long
		2	large iron nails/fittings	192.4	120 & 130 mm long, probable coffin fittings
		2	small iron nails	23.1	complete, 40 & 51 mm long, probable coffin nails
	13	1	copper-alloy and wooden objects	7.8	coffin fitting, wood fragment with 3 copper-alloy studs
	F4	9	4	post-medieval/modern pot sherds	274.9
2			post-medieval/modern glass sherds	24.4	
15		1	iron coffin handle	112.2	150 mm long
16		1	copper-alloy fragment	16.0	cylindrical, 48 mm long, 9 mm diameter
L1	1	2	Roman amphora sherds	841.2	rim sherd and body sherd with handle stub, both coated in mortar
		1	Roman samian rim sherd	2.4	
		5	post-medieval/modern pot sherds	61.5	
		1	post-medieval/modern glass sherd	16.7	small omphalos base
	3	1	iron coffin handle fragment	150.9	140 mm long
L2	5	1	Roman pot sherd	3.6	Fabric GX

	26	modern pot sherds	361.6	incl. complete small stoneware ink pot, 48 mm high
	6	post-medieval/modern vessel glass sherds	137.1	
	1	post-medieval/modern window glass fragment	1.6	
	19	clay pipe stem fragments	69.4	1 with WW in relief on sides of foot and traces of oak leaves rising from foot on both seams, 19th century
	2	clay pipe bowl fragments	17.1	1 Type 9, c 1700-40; 1 with S[?] in relief on sides of spur, oak leaves rising on front seam, 19th century
7	1	Roman pot sherd	31.6	Fabric HD, rim sherd, 4th century
	3	modern pot sherds	74.7	
	1	late medieval/post-medieval floor tile	596.7	110 mm sq x 25 mm thick, traces of greenish-brown glaze, especially on one edge
	1	post-medieval/modern vessel glass sherd	17.3	
	9	clay pipe stem fragments	40.7	
	4	clay pipe bowl fragments	59.2	3 late 17th-century bowls with rouletting round rim (Type 6, Type 7 & Type ?7); 1 mid 19th-century bowl, with SR in relief on sides of spur, narrow flutes, alternating twigs and oak leaves rising from both sides of both seams
	1	iron nail	25.0	80 mm long, almost complete, probable coffin nail
8	1	decorated Roman samian sherd	31.4	
	1	Roman pot sherd	30.4	Fabric HG, rim sherd, late 4th century
	3	modern pot sherds	311.5	incl. complete small stoneware ink pot, 43 mm high
	3	post-medieval/modern vessel glass sherds	630.0	incl. 2 large onion bottle omphalos base sherds
	3	clay pipe stem fragments	12.3	
	2	clay pipe bowl fragments	25.5	1 with SC in relief on sides of foot, probably Type 12, c 1780-1820; 1 with rouletting round rim & line incised across base of foot, Type 6, c 1660-80
10	1	Roman grey ware storage jar sherd	182.3	
	1	Roman mortarium sherd	115.8	
	7	post-medieval/modern pot sherds	124.3	
	1	clay pipe stem fragment	2.0	
	4	clay pipe bowl and stem/ bowl fragments	42.4	1 with rouletting round rim & circular stamp on base of foot, Type 2 c 1600-1640; 1 burnt, with WB, each letter surmounted with a crown, on sides of foot, Type 8 c 1680-1710; 2 damaged/ undatable

	11	2	modern pot sherds	5.2	
	14	1	iron fragment	37.4	approx 40 x 35 mm, probable coffin fitting
	17	1	copper-alloy dress pin	0.4	40 mm long, Type 2
U/S	18	2	modern pot sherds	73.7	
U/S	19	1	iron coffin handle fragment	87.9	140 mm long

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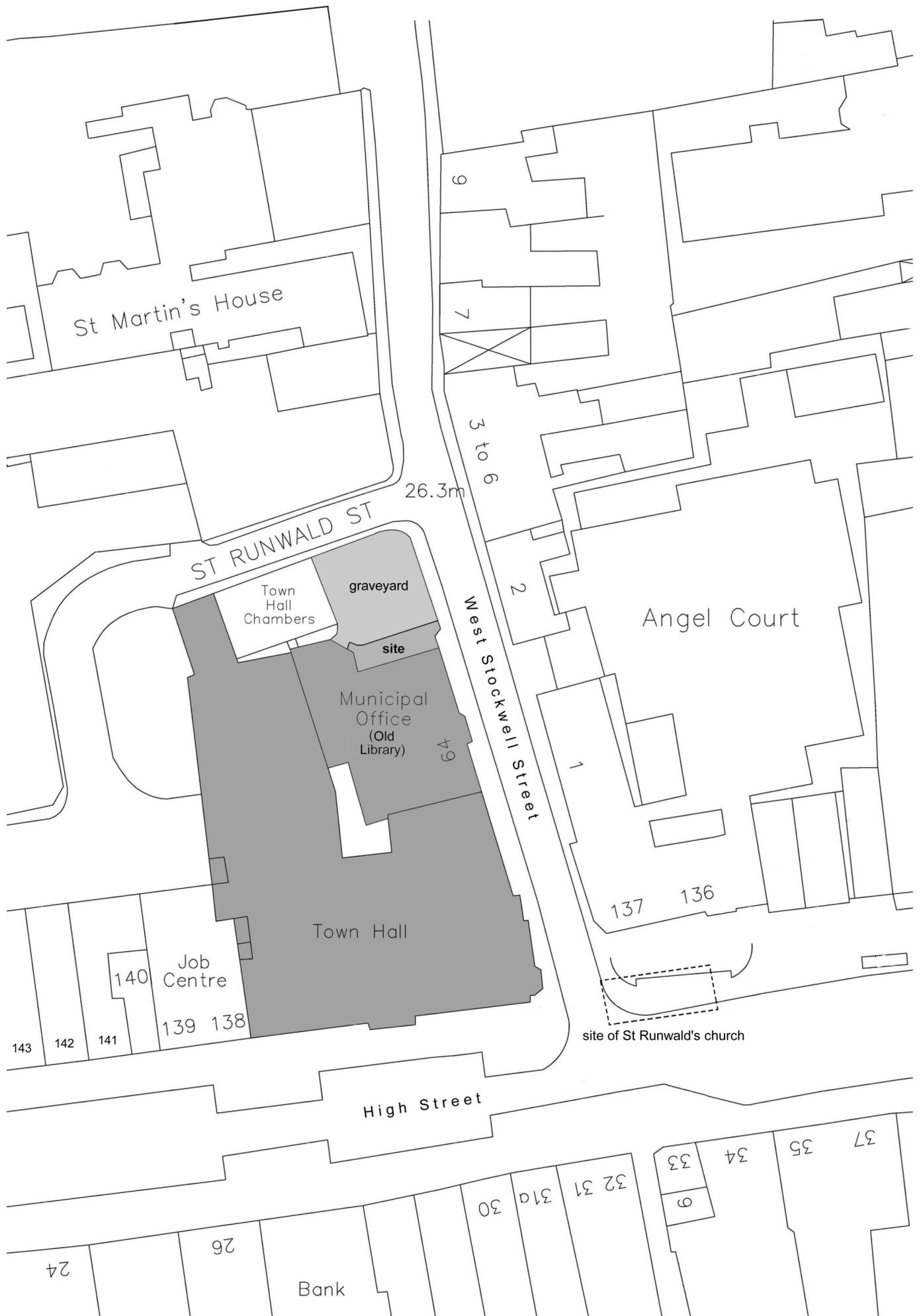


Fig 1 Site location.



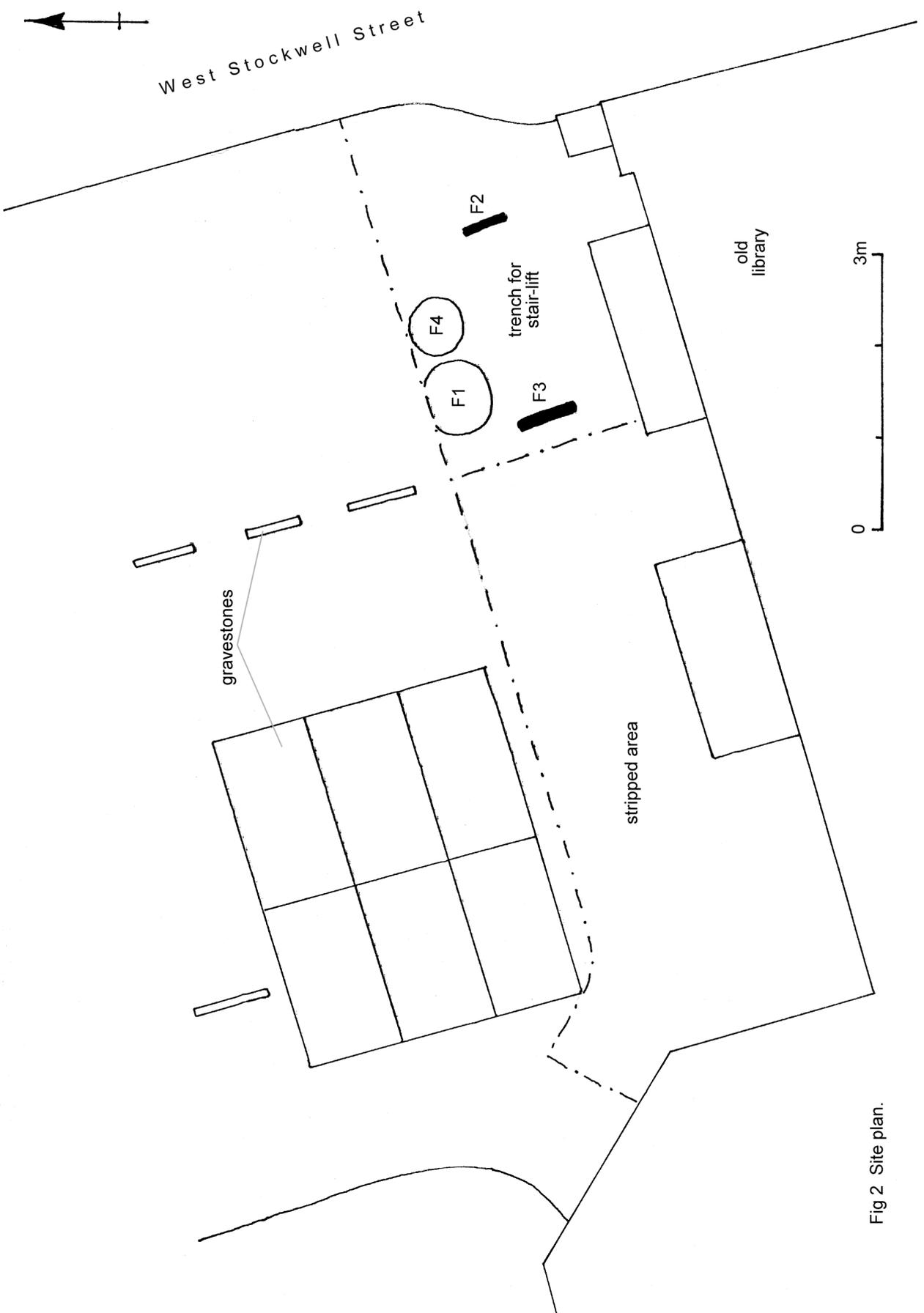


Fig 2 Site plan.

Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

Summary sheet

Site address: Old Library, Town Hall, West Stockwell Street, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TL 9959 2526	Site codes: Museum accession code - COLIM 2009.66 CAT project code - 09/9e
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: 5th-19th October 2009	Size of area investigated: 30 sq m
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums	Funding source: CBC
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHER and UAD nos:
Final report: CAT Report 570 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: post-medieval/modern	
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>A large quantity of disarticulated human bone was collected for re-burial during an archaeological watching brief in St Runwald's graveyard at the rear of the Old Library, Town Hall, West Stockwell Street, Colchester, Essex. The remains of two headstones, one 18th century and the other undated, were also uncovered.</i>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Keywords: gravestone, human bone, St Runwald's, graveyard, West Stockwell Street, town hall	Significance: *
Author of summary: Donald Shimmin	Date of summary: December 2010