

**Archaeological investigations
on land to the east of Brook Street,
Colchester, Essex
May 2011-November 2012**

**report prepared by
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**on behalf of
Mersea Homes**

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Fig 1 Site plan, showing the positions of the watching briefs (2011 and 2012) and the 2011 trial-trenches (2011 T1-2011 T2) in relation to the 2004 evaluation trenches (Trench 1-Trench 12).

Summary

Archaeological investigations took place on land to the east of Brook Street, Colchester, Essex in advance of redevelopment. The investigations consisted of the two machine-dug trial-trenches and monitoring of groundworks. No significant archaeological remains were uncovered, although some modern features were exposed.

Introduction (Fig 1)

Archaeological investigations took place on land to the east of Brook Street, Colchester, Essex in advance of the redevelopment of the site. The investigations were commissioned by Mersea Homes and were carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between May 2011 and November 2012.

The site occupies a large area east of Brook Street and north of Barrack Street. It lies approximately 0.5 km south-east of the Roman and medieval walled town. It covers an area of approximately 2.8 hectares and is centred on NGR TM 0070 2485. Planning permission was granted for a residential development with new access road, open spaces and car-parking. The modern ground-level slopes roughly from south-west to north-east.

The archaeological investigations followed an earlier archaeological evaluation by CAT on the site in July 2004 (CAT Report 281). The excavation and recording methods used in the current investigations were outlined in a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for the site, which was produced by CAT in October 2006 (CAT 2006a). The WSI also set out proposals for post-excavation work, the production of a report, an archive and, if necessary, publication texts. It followed a brief written by Colchester Borough Council's Archaeological Officer (CBCAO).

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 archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 2008a), *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2008b) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IfA 2008c). 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), *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14), and *Research and archaeology revisited: a revised framework for the Eastern Counties. Research agenda and strategy* (EAA 24), was also followed.

Archaeological background (Fig 1)

The archaeological potential of the site was assessed in a CAT desk-based assessment (CAT Report 233). The more significant and relevant entries listed in CAT Report 233 are summarised briefly below:

- An 1889 findspot of Iron Age (or possibly Anglo-Saxon) urns is shown on the 1952 OS 1:2500 map, in the middle of Brook Street, immediately to the west of the site.
- The site lies to the east of the historic walled town in an area which had been a medieval suburb. The earliest detailed maps of Colchester (starting with Speed's map of 1610) show houses fronting onto Barrack Street and possibly the southern end of Brook Street.
- The medieval leper hospital and graveyard of St Mary Magdalen was situated on the west side of Brook Street (UAD nos 3157 and

3176). This site was excavated by CAT in 1989, 1991 and 1995. The hospital and evidence of its transition to a post-medieval almshouse were recorded, along with the hospital chapel and many human burials (Crossan 2004).

- The Siege Map of 1648 shows the line of the siege ditch passing across the site from north to south (CAT 1998). This defensive feature and a series of forts were constructed by the Parliamentarians besieging the town during the Civil War (VCHE 9, 73-6). The Siege Map, however, is not drawn to scale and the location of the ditch cannot be fixed definitely.
- The whole of the eastern half of the development site is named as a 'Brick Field' on the 1840 Tithe Map for the parish of St Botolph's and was probably a brick-manufacturing site. It was also variously known as 'Sand Field' and 'Brick Kiln Field' and, therefore, may also have been a sand quarry (CAT Report 233, 5). However, no brickworks are shown here on any maps from 1610 onwards.
- Part of the western side of the development site has been cut away to create level ground which would affect the survival of any archaeological remains. The area also contains a hollow of unknown origin which may be a clay-extraction pit associated with the probable brickworks to the north-east. Part of this part of the site has also been built over with modern houses (now demolished).

An archaeological evaluation, consisting of eleven trial-trenches, was carried out in the western half of the site by CAT in 2004 (CAT Report 281). Several pits and a ditch of 14th- to 16th-century date were recorded near the corner of Brook Street and Barrack Street, on the higher ground. The pits resembled domestic rubbish-pits and they probably related to properties fronting onto Barrack Street to the south. Evidence of sand-quarrying was found on the higher ground, and of clay-quarrying on the lower ground to the east. Some archaeological features may have been destroyed by this quarrying activity as well as by a landfill pit and a car-park further east. The Civil War Siege ditch was not positively identified.

Aims

The aims of the investigations were to record the depth and extent of any archaeological remains uncovered during the fieldwork, and to assess the date and significance of these remains.

Methods (Fig 1)

The archaeological investigations took place on several different occasions. Initially a watching brief was undertaken during machine-stripping for an access road from Brook Street in the north-western part of the site, on the 12th May 2011. This was followed by the machine-digging of two trial-trenches (2011 T1, 2011 T2) in the western part of the site on the 6th December 2011. Finally, a watching brief was carried out from the 18th October to the 15th November 2012 during the machine-digging of trenches for foul-water drains in the eastern part of the site.

The 2011 watching brief involved monitoring the machine-stripping for the access road up to a depth of approximately 1.5 m below the modern ground-level. The stripped area measured approximately 25 m long by 10 m wide, but splayed out slightly towards the junction with Brook Street.

The 2011 trial-trenching consisted of two east-west trenches. The more southerly (2011 T1) was 80 m long. The other trench (2011 T2) was 70 m long. It was intended to be 140 m long, but had to be shorter due to the presence of stockpiled materials, as well as significant amounts of infill, over the eastern part of the area to be trenched. The trenches were approximately 1.6 m wide and were dug using a mechanical excavator with

a toothless ditching bucket. Machining continued until any deposits of possible archaeological significance were uncovered. Where no such deposits were exposed, machine-excavation continued until the natural subsoil was reached.

The 2012 watching brief involved monitoring the machine-digging of trenches for foul-water drains and associated manholes. The trenches varied slightly in depth but were roughly 3 m deep and 1 m wide. The manholes were approximately 3.5 m deep and 2.0 m in diameter. The trenches were dug from west to east. The watching brief was carried out by a CAT archaeologist during intermittent site visits.

Throughout the investigations, CAT staff were given time to investigate, clean and record the archaeological deposits uncovered, and to collect up any 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 usually drawn at 1:20 and section drawings were made at 1:10. Standard record photographs of individual contexts and general site shots were taken on a digital camera. Further information on the recording methods used can be found in the WSI and in the CAT document *Policies and procedures* (CAT 2006b).

Results

In the western part of the site, the natural subsoil (L3) was reached at a depth of roughly 600-800 mm below the modern ground-level. It was largely yellowish sand and gravel. In places, this was sealed by thin deposits of brownish silty clay, interpreted as hillwash. In the eastern part of the site, the depth and nature of the natural subsoil was more varied. This area had been much affected by modern activity, including the digging of large pits and the accumulation of thick dumped deposits. Deposits of natural sand and gravel were uncovered in places in this part of the site but, elsewhere, the subsoil was pale brownish-yellow clay, with occasional sandy patches.

Post-medieval and modern deposits (Fig 1)

No significant ancient remains were uncovered during the 2011-2012 work and there was no definite evidence for the Civil War Siege ditch of 1648. Features were sparse and those that were uncovered were probably all modern in date. The results of the fieldwork are summarised briefly below.

2011

During the machine-stripping in 2011 for the access road from Brook Street, the natural subsoil of sand and gravel (L3) was reached at a depth of approximately 600-800 mm. It was sealed by dark greyish-brown modern topsoil (L1). A large area of modern disturbance extended across the whole eastern part of the strip. It cut into the natural subsoil and was filled with a dark greyish-brown loamy deposit mixed with patches of yellowish sand. This feature was at least 1.5 m deep and contained modern finds. It lay approximately 16-25 m back from the Brook Street frontage. It extended from approximately the eastern edge of the former row of modern houses on the site eastwards, and was perhaps related to the demolition of these properties.

The two east-west trial-trenches (2011 T1, 2011 T2) dug in the western part of the site in 2011 had broadly similar sequences of deposits. Over most of 2011 T1 and 2011 T2 there were extensive deposits of dark greyish-brown modern topsoil (L1), approximately 400 mm thick. This sealed a thin greyish-brown layer (L2), approximately 150-200 mm thick, which was probably mainly disturbed subsoil. Below L2 was the natural subsoil (L3) at a depth of approximately 600 mm, and this was largely sand and gravel. It was sealed by thin deposits of hillwash in the eastern part of 2011 T1.

2012

In 2012, in the western part of T1, there was a large area of modern disturbance. This extended between approximately 6 m and 28 m from the western end of the trench. It probably included one of the 2004 archaeological evaluation trenches (Trench 9). There were also remains of modern foundations and drain runs, which were presumably associated with the former modern property nearby. In the eastern half of T1, a modern feature was uncovered approximately 54 m from the western end of the trench. It was 2 m wide and had a dark greyish-brown fill. It contained finds such as brick, slate, coal and glass, indicating a 19th- or 20th-century date, although it remained largely unexcavated. The feature looked like a field-boundary ditch, aligned roughly south-west to north-east. However, as it does not seem to be marked on modern maps and was not located in the adjacent archaeological evaluation trenches (Trench 6 and Trench 11) in 2004, it may be a pit. Further east, one of the 2004 evaluation trenches (Trench 6) was re-exposed.

An area of modern disturbance was also uncovered in the western part of T2. This included two modern north-south foundations, approximately 13 m and 16.5 m respectively from the western end of the trench. These were probably associated with the recently-demolished row of modern houses on the site. Further east, one of the 2004 evaluation trenches (Trench 1) was re-exposed.

The machine-digging of trenches for foul-water drains in 2012, in the eastern part of the site, took place in an area which had been much affected by post-medieval and modern activity. This included the digging of large quarry-pits and the deposition of thick layers of modern dumped material, as well as more recent remediation work. At the western end of this stretch of pipeline, the trench for the manhole and the short length of trench immediately to the west had been disturbed by a large modern feature. The latter was at least 3.5 m deep, and was probably the backfilled trench for an existing north-south modern sewer.

Immediately to the east of this feature, a layer of greyish-brown topsoil (L1), approximately 400 mm thick, sealed a thin layer of brownish disturbed subsoil (L2), 200-300 mm thick. The latter sealed the natural subsoil (L3), which was mainly brownish-yellow clay. The topsoil (L1) was probably modern in date, but it was sealed in places by an extensive layer of dark grey modern dump, approximately 1.5 m thick.

Further east, the topsoil L1 appeared to have already been stripped off. The natural subsoil (L3) in this area lay at or close to the modern ground-level and was usually sand and gravel. It was capped in places by thin spreads of modern dump.

Finds

No finds were retained during the archaeological investigations.

Conclusions

The 2011-2012 archaeological investigations were limited in extent, but provided additional coverage of the site. They followed an earlier archaeological evaluation in the western part of the site in 2004 (CAT Report 281).

No significant archaeological remains were uncovered on the site in 2011-2012. In particular, there was no definite evidence for the Civil War siegeworks, which the Siege Map of 1648 suggests crossed the site from north to south (CAT 1998). Assuming that the map is fairly accurately plotted, it is unclear why the siege ditch was not located. Possibly it was masked by modern disturbance, associated with the former row of houses, on the western side of the site. Alternatively it may lie further east, where it could have been destroyed by later quarrying.

The recent archaeological investigations on the site have largely provided negative evidence; ie they suggest that significant archaeological remains are absent on the site. As the ground-level over most of the site has now been raised appreciably and the groundworks as yet to be undertaken will be relatively shallow, it is unlikely that the latter will impact on archaeological remains, should any survive.

Abbreviations and glossary

| | |
|---------------|--|
| AOD | above Ordnance Survey datum point based on mean sea level at Newlyn, Cornwall |
| CAT | Colchester Archaeological Trust |
| CBC | Colchester Borough Council |
| CBCAO | Colchester Borough Council's Archaeological Officer |
| CIMS | Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service |
| context | specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made; usually a layer or a feature |
| DBA | desk-based assessment |
| EHES | Essex Historic Environment Record, held at Essex County Council, County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex |
| feature | an identifiable context, such as a pit, a wall or a post-hole |
| IfA | Institute for Archaeologists |
| Iron Age | period from c 700 BC to AD 43 |
| 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 |
| post-medieval | period from c 1500 to c 1850 |
| Roman | period from AD 43 to c AD 410 |
| UAD | Urban Archaeological Database, maintained by Colchester and Ipswich Museums |
| U/S | unstratified, ie without a well-defined context |

References

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

| | | |
|----------------|-------|---|
| CAT | 1998 | Souvenir map of the Siege of Colchester 1648 (Colchester Archaeological Trust) |
| CAT | 2006a | Written Scheme of Investigation for archaeological watching brief at land to the east of Brook Street, Colchester, Essex, October 2006, by K Orr |
| CAT | 2006b | <i>Policies and procedures</i> (Colchester Archaeological Trust) |
| CAT Report 233 | | A desk-based assessment of the archaeological remains in and around the development site to the east of Brook Street, Colchester, Essex: June 2003, CAT archive report, by M McDonald, 2003 |
| CAT Report 281 | | An archaeological evaluation at land east of Brook Street, Colchester, Essex: July 2004, CAT archive report, by K Orr, 2004 |
| CIMS | 2008a | <i>Guidelines on standards and practice 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) |
| Crossan, C | 2004 | 'Excavations at St Mary Magdalen's Hospital, Brook Street, Colchester', in <i>Essex Archaeology and History</i> , 34 , 91-154 |
| EAA 3 | 1997 | <i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. resource assessment</i> , ed by J Glazebrook |

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|--------|-------|---|
| EAA 8 | 2000 | <i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. research agenda and strategy</i> , ed by N Brown and J Glazebrook |
| EAA 14 | 2003 | <i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> , ed by D Gurney, ALGAO East |
| EAA 24 | 2011 | <i>Research and archaeology revisited: a revised framework for the Eastern Counties. Research agenda and strategy</i> , ed by M Medlycott, ALGAO East |
| IfA | 2007 | <i>Archaeological archives: a guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation</i> |
| IfA | 2008a | <i>Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation</i> |
| IfA | 2008b | <i>Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief</i> |
| IfA | 2008c | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i> |
| MoRPHE | 2006 | <i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment</i> (English Heritage) |
| VCHE 9 | 1994 | <i>A history of the County of Essex, 9: the Borough of Colchester</i> , ed by J Cooper, The Victoria History of the Counties of England |

Acknowledgements

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Archive deposition

The archive from the investigations, including the site records and photographs, will be permanently deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums under accession code COLEM 2004.274, in accordance with *Guidelines on the preparation 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 contents of the archive include:

- an A4 cardboard wallet containing the site record sheets; site plans, sections and notes; copies of the the WSI and of CAT Report 281; sundry other plans and papers; and a CD containing digital material, including the site photographs.

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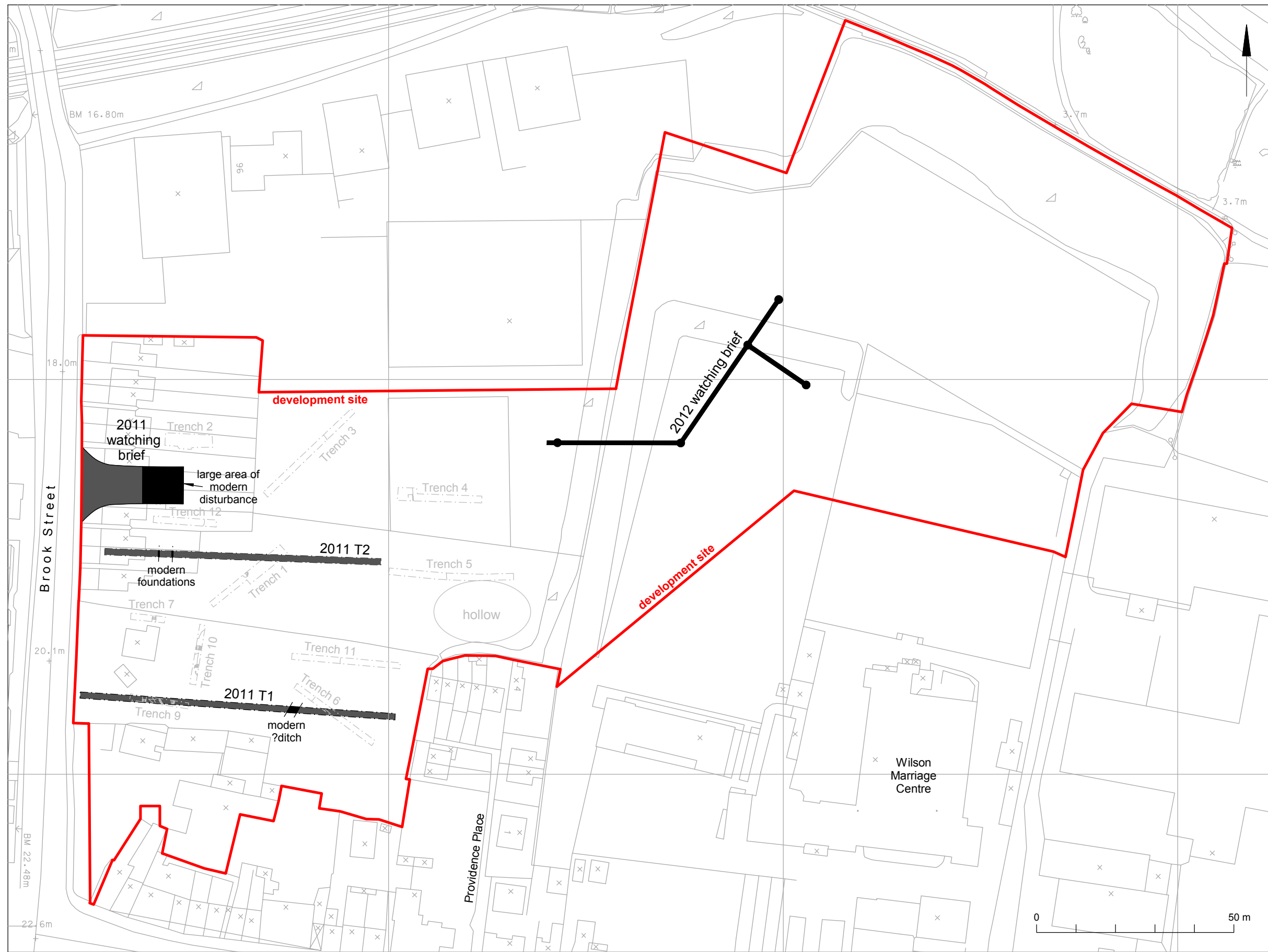
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Fig 1 Site plan, showing the positions of the watching briefs (2011 and 2012) and the 2011 trial-trenches (2011 T1-2011 T2), in relation to the 2004 evaluation trenches (Trench 1-Trench 12, shown pale grey).

Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

Summary sheet

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|---|--|
| Site address: land to the east of Brook Street, Colchester, Essex | |
| Parish: Colchester | District: Colchester Borough |
| NGR: TM 0070 2485 (c) | Site codes: Museum accession - COLEM 2004.274 CAT project - 12/10e |
| Type of work: Trial-trenching and two watching briefs | Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust |
| Date of work: May 2011-November 2012 | Size of area investigated: approximately 2.8 hectares |
| Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums | Funding source: Mersea Homes |
| Further seasons anticipated? No | Related EHER and UAD nos: UAD nos 3157 and 3176 |
| Final report: CAT Report 673 and summary in <i>EAH</i> | |
| Periods represented: modern | |
| Summary of fieldwork results: <i>Archaeological investigations took place on land to the east of Brook Street, Colchester, Essex in advance of redevelopment. The investigations consisted of the two machine-dug trial-trenches and monitoring of groundworks. No significant archaeological remains were uncovered, although some modern features were exposed.</i> | |
| Previous summaries/reports: CAT Reports 233, 281 | |
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| Author of summary: Donald Shimmin | Date of summary: January 2013 |