

**An archaeological evaluation at the
First Eastern National bus station,
Queen Street, Colchester, Essex
May-June 2003**

**report prepared by
Ben Holloway**

**on behalf of
Colchester Borough Council**

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1 Summary

As part of the Queen Street regeneration project, a new Visual Arts facility (VAF) is planned for a location within the northern part of the current First Eastern National bus station, Queen Street, Colchester, Essex.

At a preparatory meeting between the Archaeology Officer of Colchester Borough Council, archaeological advisors to the developer group and the Colchester Archaeological Trust or CAT (as contractors), it was reported that the location and the footprint for the VAF had not yet been decided, so that the necessary extent of targeted field evaluation could not yet be specified. However, it was noted that the existing information concerning the post-Roman layers, and thus the depth of burial of underlying Roman levels, in the general area was limited and in a few cases contradictory or otherwise unclear. Since this basic information would be needed, more or less irrespective of the eventual design details for the VAF, a commission was issued for CAT to excavate four evaluation trenches, located (under the constraints of active public use) so as to improve our understanding of the area stratigraphy. The commission specified that, once coherent Roman levels (including closely associated demolition layers) were reached, excavation should cease, to avoid unnecessary disturbance at this stage.

The archaeological material recorded during this phase of evaluation ranged from Roman through post-medieval and into the modern periods. The majority of the features investigated were post-medieval. Excavation ceased as soon as Roman floors or demolition deposits were reached. The primary objective of these preliminary trenches was achieved, ie the broad confirmation of the nature, distribution and depth of the post-Roman layers.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report of an archaeological evaluation carried out by trial-trenching by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) at the First Eastern National bus station, Queen Street, Colchester, Essex, on behalf of Colchester Borough Council. The evaluation area is centred at NGR TM 0000 2515. Fieldwork was carried out between the 19th May 2003 and 4th June 2003.
- 2.2 Four evaluation trenches were excavated under archaeological supervision, with a JCB with a breaker using a toothless ditching bucket. Dark earth was removed to the first archaeological layer using the excavator.
- 2.3 All fieldwork was carried out in accordance with a specification agreed with the Archaeology Officer of Colchester Borough Council.
- 2.4 This report mirrors standards and practices contained in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines for the standards and practice of archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1999, updated 2002) and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological field evaluation* (1999).

3 Archaeological background

- 3.1 The site is located within the south-east angle of the Roman town wall (Fig 1). During the 20th century, several archaeological excavations have been undertaken in the vicinity of the bus station. The following are relevant to the evaluation.
- 3.2 At the southern end of the evaluation area, a mosaic pavement was uncovered in Lewis's garden in 1923 (the site which is currently occupied by the bus station; Urban Archaeological Database or UAD no 321). During further excavations in 1955 and 1958 (UAD 3069 and 3070; Richardson 1961), evidence of five rubble foundations of Roman buildings were recorded. Two periods of building were represented. The first structure was associated with the first half of the 2nd century; this building was then demolished and replaced at around AD 150, and the later structure appears to have been occupied into the 4th century. Two of the houses had hypocausts. From within the demolition and robbing material, painted wall-plaster and red, white and grey *tesserae* were recovered. Later in 1959, a sewer-trench was dug between the 1955 and 1958 sites (UAD 3365; Richardson 1961). The trench showed stretches of wall foundation and a tessellated floor, both on an east-west alignment.

- 3.3** At the northern end of the evaluation area, excavations in 1966 at the rear of no 5 Queen Street by the then Colchester Excavation Committee (now CAT)(UAD 3065; Dunnett 1971) identified a Roman building with rubble foundations that had at least three structural phases. The later of these phases incorporated a hypocaust overlaid with a coloured mosaic floor. The suggested date for the building is 2nd century, and the nature of the building suggests that it was for public rather than private use.
- 3.4** To the east of the current evaluation area, a watching brief was carried out in 1970 by the Colchester Excavation Committee during the groundworks for the Queen Street multi-storey car park (UAD 3484). Observations were made during the excavation of foundation stanchions. Roman structural remains were recorded and appeared to extend beyond those identified in the excavation in Lewis's garden.
- 3.5** Most recently, evaluation trenches were dug by CAT in 1990 (UAD 3577; Crossan 1990). Five trenches were excavated to assess the depth, nature and preservation of any archaeological remains. The remains of a Roman house were recorded; one of the wall foundations had been completely robbed out and the associated floor-level destroyed. A Roman infant burial in a tile-covered grave, accompanied by a small beaker, was also recorded.

4 Aim

The aim of the archaeological evaluation was to locate and record the depth, condition, date, importance and state of preservation of any archaeological strata or other deposits within the area of the evaluation.

5 The trenches (Fig 5)

Three of the four evaluation trenches (Trenches A-C) were located in the bus station and dug using a JCB with a breaker and a toothless ditching bucket. Trench D was excavated by hand in the rear garden of the Minorities art gallery. Trenches A, B and D each measured 5 x 1m. Trench C measured 9 x 1m. The positions of the trenches are shown on the trench location plan (Fig 2). In all trenches, excavation stopped at the top of identified Roman deposits.

5.1 Trench A

Trench A was located at the northern edge of the bus station car park. The car-park tarmac surface (L1) was cut using a disc cutter, then the trench was excavated by a JCB. The trench was cut through 470mm of rubble and concrete hardcore, levelling and base material of the car-park surface (L2, L3, L4; Fig 4) until dark earth/topsoil (L5) was uncovered.

The (L5) topsoil continued for 600mm. The top of the Roman layers were encountered at the end of the dark earth layer. Six features were recorded in Trench A. These were a post-medieval cobbled surface (F1), possibly a yard with a brick gutter (F3), the base of a red-brick wall (F2), a Roman *opus signinum* floor (F10; Fig 3), a post-medieval pit (F7) which cut the *opus signinum* floor F10, and a post-hole (F11), which also cut the floor F10. Finds from Trench A came from the dark earth (L5), the post-medieval pit (F7), and from the cobbles (F1). They included pottery, fragments of clay tobacco pipe, tile, and *tesserae* which are most likely to derive from the surface of the *opus signinum* floor F10.

5.2 Trench B

Trench B was located on the eastern edge of the evaluation area, as was Trench A, in the bus station car park. The surface of the car park was cut and excavated in the same way as in Trench A. As in Trench A, 430mm of rubble and concrete hardcore levelling and base material for the car park surface (L2, L3, L4; Fig 4) were machined through until dark earth/topsoil (L5) was encountered. The topsoil L5 continued for 1.18m until Roman layers were identified. The Roman layer L10 appeared to be demolition debris and consisted of compacted mortar and *opus signinum* lumps along with tile and *tesserae*. No features were identified in Trench B; however, the dark earth (L5) directly sealed the Roman demolition (L10). The depth and the material recovered from the layer including whole beer bottles and

post-medieval pottery suggests backfilled material from a previous excavation in the area of the current evaluation.

5.3 Trench C

Trench C was located at the southern end of the evaluation area, on the pavement. The trench was placed to try and locate known Roman structural remains previously recorded in excavations in Lewis's garden in the 1950s (Richardson 1961). As with Trenches A and B, the tarmac (L1) was cut and the trench excavated using a JCB through 300mm of base material for the pavement surface (L6). Once the tarmac (L1) and the base material (L6) had been removed, it was apparent that most of the trench was undiggable because all that remained were the concrete foundation piles of the former Queen Street multi-storey car park. Features F4, F5 and F9 (Fig 3) were within and sealed by 300-600mm of modern demolition debris (L7). The only area of the trench which could be investigated further was at the extreme west of the trench. In this area a mixture of redeposited material containing concrete lumps and modern brick and dark earth, some 550mm thick, was removed to expose what remained of the Roman layers. Three archaeological features were recorded in Trench C. These were a post-medieval red brick wall (F6), the remains of a robbed-out Roman wall line (F12), and a post-hole (F13) cutting the robber trench. Material recovered from the trench was very mixed, containing Roman and post-medieval pottery and building materials from the majority of the contexts.

5.4 Trench D

Trench D was located on the northernmost edge of the evaluation area in the garden of the Minories. The trench was hand-dug, firstly by removing the turf and excavating through 300mm of topsoil (L12). Then it was dug through a compacted gravel layer between 100mm and 250mm thick (L13; possibly the remains of the driveway of East Hill House), and lastly through 450mm of dark earth, a buried topsoil (L14; Fig 4). Roman layers were encountered at 1m. The Roman material, as in Trench B, appears to represent building demolition (L15). The latter included large amounts of painted wall-plaster and a large spread of Roman pottery (see sections 6.3 and 6.4). Three features were recorded in Trench D: these were a pit cutting the demolition material (L14) and two linear features (F15, F16) which possibly represent robbed-out wall foundations associated with the demolition material (L15; Fig 3).

6 Finds

6.1 Finds list

See site archive.

6.2 Post-Roman pottery

A total of 142 sherds of post-Roman pottery was recovered during the evaluation at a total weight of 2.46kg. All of the pottery is datable to the post-medieval and modern periods and breaks down into the following fabric groups (*CAR 7*).

Fabric 48d modern china 19th/20th century
Fabric 45f Westerwald stoneware 19th/20th century
Fabric 42 Border ware mid 16th/17th century
Fabric 46 tin-glazed earthenware late 16th-mid 18th century
Fabric 40 post-medieval red earthenware 17th/19th century
Fabric 21a Colchester ware
Fabric 20 medieval sandy grey ware
Fabric 20 medieval sandy orange ware
Fabric 51 modern flower pot 20th century
Fabric 41 Tudor green ware

The post-medieval pottery comes from a number of contexts, all of which were of a very mixed nature: in most cases, from dark earth or topsoil contexts such as L14 and L5. The pottery was also recovered from a post-medieval pit F7 and from modern backfill L8. The majority of these contexts contained modern pot fragments but also residual earlier pottery, the earliest being the medieval sandy orange ware (Fabric 20) which dates to the 14th century.

6.3 Roman pottery

by Stephen Benfield

There were 254 sherds of Roman pottery recovered during the evaluation at a total weight of 2.27kg. All of the pottery is datable to between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD. It breaks down into the following fabric groups (*CAR 10*).

Fabric GB black-burnished ware (Cam 39)
Fabric KX black-burnished ware type in pale grey (Cam 278)
Fabric CZ Colchester colour-coat ware
Fabric GX coarse ware (predominantly grey wares)
Fabric WA silvery micaceous grey ware
Fabric KX black-burnished ware (Cam 37a)
Fabric EE marbled ware (sl; *CAR 10*, 251)
Fabric EC Colchester colour-coat ware (pre-Flavian)
Fabric CH oxidised Hadham ware
Fabric CL Central Gaulish and Rhenish-type fine colour-coat ware (folded beaker)
Fabric EA Nene Valley colour-coat ware
Fabric BA decorated/plain samian ware (Drag 35/36)
Fabric WB grey slipped ware
Fabric UX Romano-Saxon grey ware
Fabric BX decorated/plain samian
Fabric HD shell-tempered and calcite-gritted ware

The Roman pottery which was recovered during the evaluation covers a wide range of dates from the 1st to the 3rd centuries. Though there are a few later sherds of 4th-century material (Romano-Saxon grey ware, Fabric UX and shell-tempered calcite-gritted ware, Fabric HD), the majority of the pottery is datable to the 2nd and 3rd centuries. The later pottery has been recovered from the demolition debris (L15/L10), possibly indicating when the building was demolished. The pottery assemblage is made up of mainly coarse grey wares with some examples of finer vessels such as Nene Valley colour-coat, black-burnished ware and decorated samian ware. The pottery from the evaluation trenches indicates domestic activity continuing into the mid-late 3rd century.

6.4 Painted wall-plaster

There were 32 fragments of painted wall-plaster recovered during the evaluation, and all of the plaster came from the building demolition material L15 in Trench D. The plaster that was recovered consisted of small pieces of 1-6cm squared. The plaster was all painted in single colours; there were no decorated or border examples. The plaster fragments were flat, and therefore likely to be from coloured panels within a room rather than from moulded cornices or columns. Some of the pieces of plaster had surviving fragments of another colour adhering to the surface, indicating that whilst in use the room had been redecorated at least once.

6.5 Other finds

As well as the pottery and wall-plaster, a large amount of other material was recovered during the evaluation (see finds list in the site archive). This material included Roman tile, animal bone, modern glass, large amounts of clay tobacco pipe, iron nails, *tesserae*, coal and slag waste, some complete beer bottles, and the base of a paraffin lamp.

The *tesserae* recovered from the evaluation are of three types: red tile measuring 200mm x 200mm x 100mm, white stone measuring 250mm x 150mm x 100mm, and grey stone measuring 250mm x 150mm x 100mm. The *tesserae* came from the dark earth L5 and the post-medieval pit F7. It seems likely that they are associated with the *opus signinum* floor-base F10, although there was also some *tesserae* recovered from the demolition material (L15/L10) in Trenches B and D. The presence of the *tesserae* in the demolition material may indicate that this demolition material is sealing a floor layer.

The clay tobacco pipes were recovered from post-medieval topsoil L5 and the post-medieval pit F7. The assemblage consists of undecorated bowls and stems. The shape and angle of the bowls date the tobacco-pipe assemblage to the 18th century. The beer bottles were recovered from a modern topsoil (L5) in Trench B. The bottles are marked IND COOPE ALLSOPP LTD and DANIELL & SONS

BREWRIES LTD, and one bottle has no brewer's mark but has WAR GRADE stamped on the top of the stopper. The bottles date to the first half of the 20th century and were possibly deposited as part of the backfill of an earlier excavation (see section 5.2 above).

6.6 Small finds report

by Nina Crummy

The objects in this small assemblage range in date from late Roman to modern. The earliest item is a late Roman copper-alloy coin, possibly an unofficial issue. The size and regularity of the flan suggest that it dates to the mid or late 4th century. Two very small unidentifiable fragments of copper-alloy sheet were found in the same layer (L15).

The fragment of Purbeck marble veneer is probably residual Roman, though the Purbeck beds were also exploited in the medieval period to provide decorative architectural features, such as pilasters, in ecclesiastical buildings. The bone needle is almost certainly also residual Roman; a very similar example was found in a late Roman context at Balkerne Lane (*CAR 2*, fig 70, 1982).

Three small copper-alloy pins from L14 are typical finds of the later medieval and early post-medieval period, being the principal means of fastening clothing at that time (Egan & Pritchard 1991, 281-6). The copper-alloy strip from the same context is of uncertain function, though its change of section at one end suggests it may be from a mechanism of some kind. A worked stone object from the same layer is probably a post-medieval hone.

If the modern levelling (L4) which produced the cast-iron cobbler's last does not contain material brought in from elsewhere, then the last itself is a useful indication of the craft activities which took place in the area before the construction of the bus station and multi-storey car park. Documentary evidence may enable it to be linked to a particular craftsman.

Catalogue

- SF 4. (40) L15. Copper-alloy coin, diameter 13 mm. The flan is quite regular but damaged at one point. Late Roman, probably mid-late 4th century.
- SF 3. (41) L15. Two small copper-alloy sheet fragments. Maximum dimensions 12 by 8 mm, 7 by 5.5 mm.
- SF 6. (26) L13. Post-medieval compacted gravel. Weathered fragment of Purbeck marble veneer. No original edges survive. One surface was probably polished; it is slightly smoother than the other, which has parallel rilling on one side. Maximum dimensions 107 by 77 mm, 27 mm thick.
- SF 1. (3) L5. Post-medieval dark earth. Bone needle, tip missing. The head is flat and spatulate, the eye is rectangular. Length 88 mm.
- SF 9. (35) L14. Post-medieval buried topsoil. Small copper-alloy pin, Colchester Type 1 (*CAR 5*, 7-8). Length 36 mm.
- SF 10. (47) L14. Post-medieval buried topsoil. Small copper-alloy pin, Colchester Type 1 (*CAR 5*, 7-8). Length 28 mm.
- SF 8. (34) L14. Post-medieval buried topsoil. Small copper-alloy pin shank. Length (bent) 22 mm.
- SF 2. (30) L14. Post-medieval buried topsoil. Strip of copper-alloy, rectangular in section for most of its length, but tapering to plano-convex at one end. At the other end the strip has been bent sharply away and upwards. Length 76 mm, maximum width 4 mm, 2 mm thick.
- SF 5. (29) L14. Post-medieval buried topsoil. Circular-section fragment of worked sandstone; both ends are broken and one end is narrower than the main part. The sides are slightly faceted, and there are tool marks at the point where the section has been cut down. Length 85 mm, maximum diameter 39 mm. sibly a hone.
- SF 7. (9) L4. Modern levelling. Cast-iron cobbler's last with rounded toe, probably for a female shoe. The tang is square in section. Length 252 mm, maximum width 82 mm, height 192 mm.

7 Discussion and interpretation

The majority of the material recovered during the evaluation is either post-medieval or modern in origin. The work has, however, provided useful information about the depth and the condition of archaeological remains, both Roman and modern.

In Trench A, both post-medieval and Roman material was recorded. The cobbled surface (F1) appears to date to the 18th century and is likely to be the remains of a yard, presumably associated with East Hill House. The *opus signinum* floor-base F10 has coloured *tesserae* both in the dark earth above it and in the fill of the post-medieval pit F7 which cut it, suggesting that it was the base for a mosaic floor within a building.

The building demolition material from Trenches B and D (L10/L15) contained flue tile along with red, white and grey *tesserae*. The material in Trench B was sealed by an unusual depth of dark earth with modern material being recorded on top of the Roman layer. This dark earth (L5) contained a large amount of modern material including modern china pottery and the IND COOPE & ALLSOPP LTD beer bottles. The unusual depth of the dark earth combined with the modern material recovered from it suggest that the evaluation trench was sited over a modern dump deposit. In Trench D, demolition material was also sealed by a post-medieval topsoil, though not the depth of material encountered in Trench B. The Roman demolition material contained large amounts of painted wall-plaster as well as collapsed clay-wall material. There was also a large amount of pottery in the demolition material (L15) dating to the 3rd century. This pottery combined with the copper-alloy coin recovered from the demolition layer help date the time of the demolition (see SF 4, section 6 above). The material in the demolition material (L15), the abundance of decorated wall-plaster and the large pottery assemblage indicate the inside of a building. The red *tesserae* would also seem to indicate that the demolition material is sealing Roman floor layers which may have been tessellated. The *tesserae* and the painted wall-plaster suggest a well-appointed house, the interior of which was redecorated at least once.

Trench C was mainly cut through modern disturbance, ie the foundation piles of the former Queen Street multi-storey car park which was built in the early 1970s and demolished in the early 1990s. The Roman material appeared to be robbing material associated with the houses that had been recorded in the 1955 and 1958 excavations by Richardson. The uppermost level of the robber trench indicates a likely maximum depth for the hypocaust recorded in 1955 and 1958, although most of the Roman remains recorded in the previous work in the area, including the hypocaust, had either been destroyed or covered over by the foundations of the former multi-storey car park in 1970.

The material that has been recorded during the evaluation appears to relate to what is known about the east end of the town from previous archaeological work in the area and documentary evidence, ie that houses were occupied into the 3rd century, later becoming abandoned and turned over to common land and horticulture, and not being developed again until the post-medieval and modern periods.

8 Acknowledgments

The Trust would like to thank Colchester Borough Council for commissioning and funding the work. The project was monitored by Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council, and Simon Collcutt of Oxford Archaeological Associates.

Site work was carried out by Ben Holloway, David Ross, Emma Spurgeon, Jess Dorman and Mike Ripley.

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10 Glossary

context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain contexts'
hypocaust	underfloor heating system
medieval	period from AD 1066 to Henry the VIII
MOD	metres above Ordnance Survey datum
modern	period from the 19th century onwards to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
post-medieval	after Henry VIII to around the late 18th century
Roman	the period from AD 43 to around AD 430
<i>tesserae</i>	tile or stone cubes used in mosaics and tessellated floors
UAD	urban archaeological database held by Colchester Museums

11 Archive deposition

The finds and paper archive are held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but both will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2003.152.

12 Site data

12.1 Site context list

Location	Context	Description	Context date
Trenches A-C	L1	tarmac	modern
Trenches A-B	L2	hogging	
Trenches A-B	L3	make-up layer	modern
Trenches A-B	L4	rubble/concrete hardcore	modern
Trenches A-B	L5	dark earth/topsoil	post-medieval/modern
Trench C	L6	sand base for L1	modern
Trench C	L7	backfill	modern
Trench C	L8	backfill	post-medieval/modern
Trench C	L9	dark earth/topsoil	post-medieval/modern
Trench B	L10	building demolition	Roman
Trench D	L12	turf/topsoil	modern
Trench D	L13	compacted gravel band	post-medieval/modern
Trench D	L14	dark earth	post-medieval
Trench D	L15	building demolition	Roman

12.2 Soil descriptions

Location	Context	Description
Trenches A-C	L1	black asphalt mixed with coarse aggregate
Trenches A-B	L2	orange sand clay, frequent large stones, very compacted
Trenches A-B	L3	concrete crust make-up surface for the bus station car park
Trenches A-B	L4	mid brown clay silt, contains brick and concrete lumps
Trenches A-B	L5	dark brown silt, contains brick fragments, charcoal and coal fragments
Trench C	L6	fine yellow white sand
Trench C	L7	dark brown clay silt mix of Roman and modern tile
Trench C	L8	light brown/yellow clay
Trench C	L9	dark brown silt edge of 1950s excavation trench
Trench B	L10	mid brown sandy silt, frequent <i>opus signinum</i> and mortar patches
Trench D	L12	mid-dark brown sandy silt, frequent small stones, root activity
Trench D	L13	mid brown sandy silt, very compacted gravel
Trench D	L14	dark brown sandy silt, frequent coal and ash lumps
Trench D	L15	yellow brown clay silt, lots of wall-plaster, mortar and <i>opus signinum</i> lumps, occasional charcoal flecks

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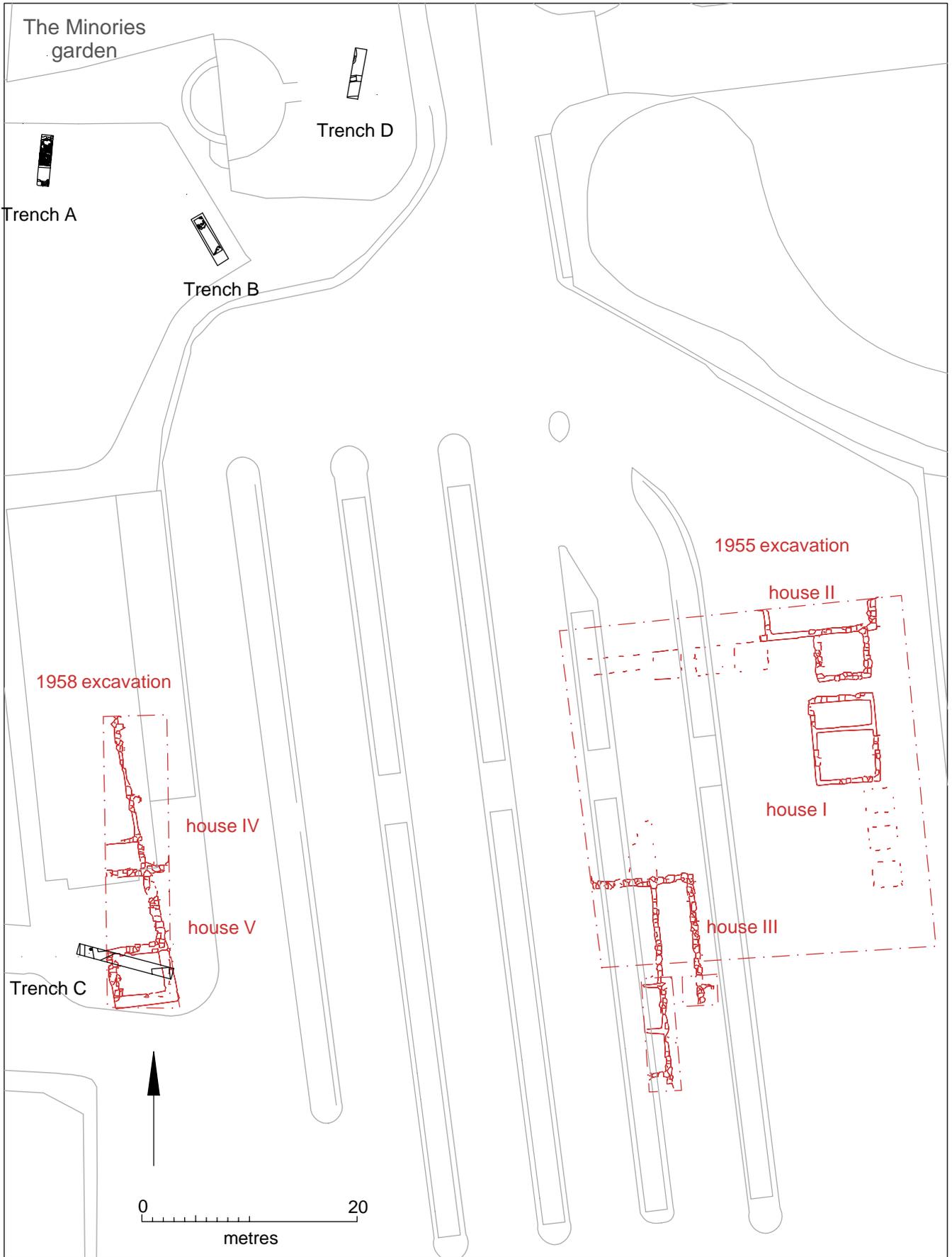
email: archaeologists@catuk.org

checked by: Philip Crummy
date: 08.09.03



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Fig 1 Site location.



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Fig 2 Detailed trench location plan showing the 1955 & 1958 excavation trenches in red. (Roman house numbers as in Richardson 1961).

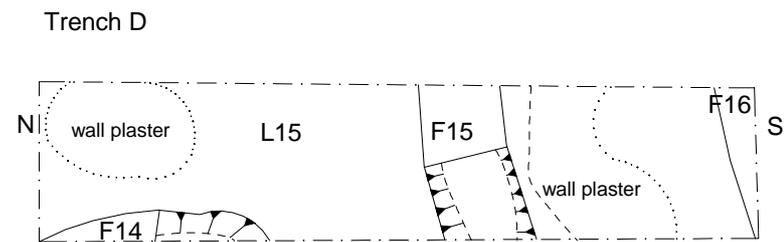
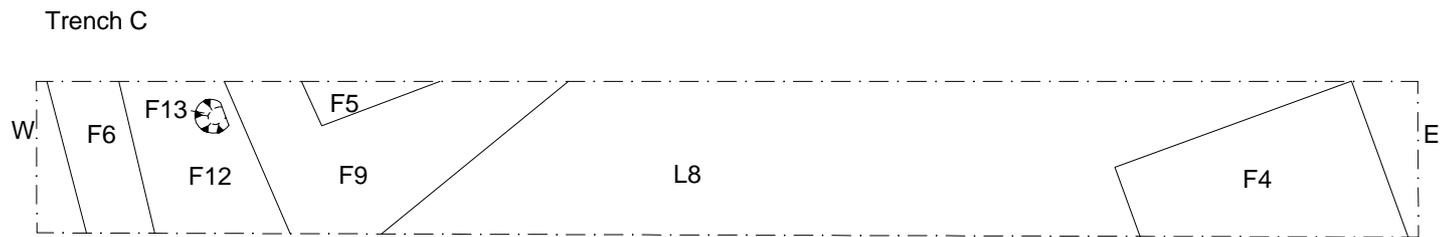
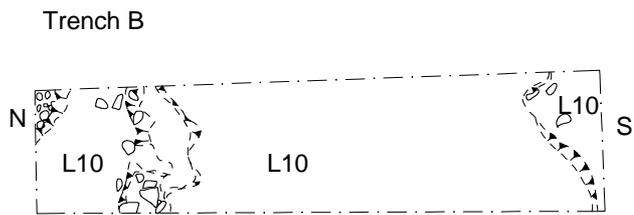
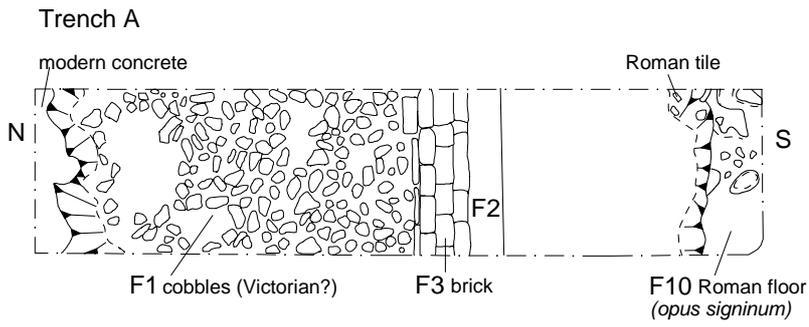
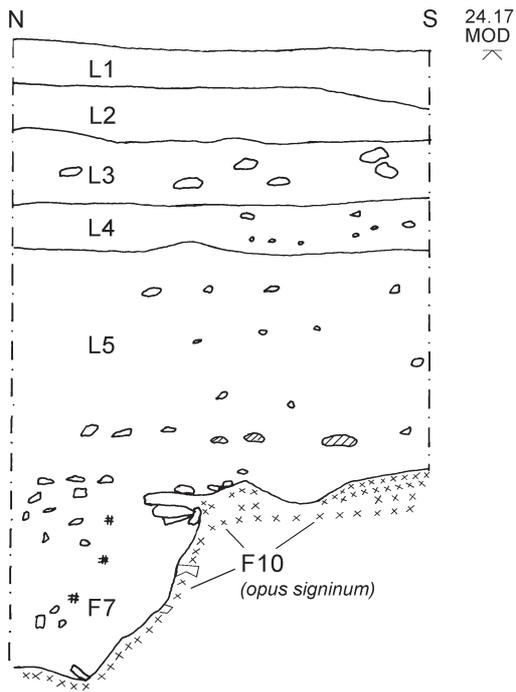
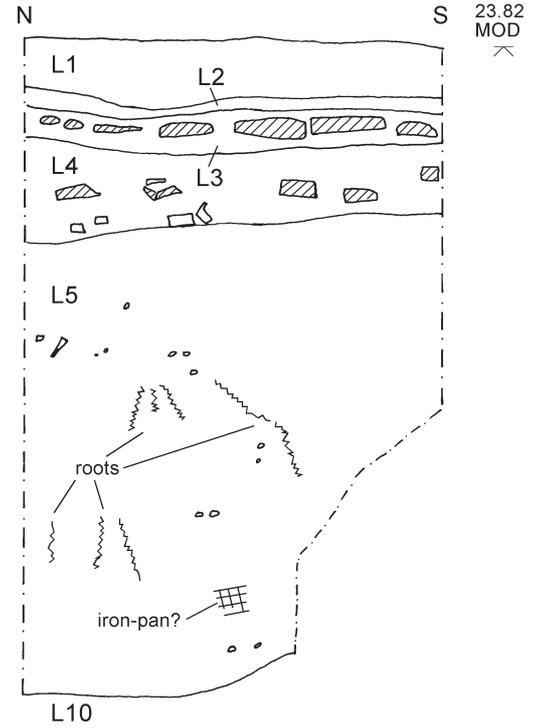


Fig 3 Trenches A,B,C,D: plans.

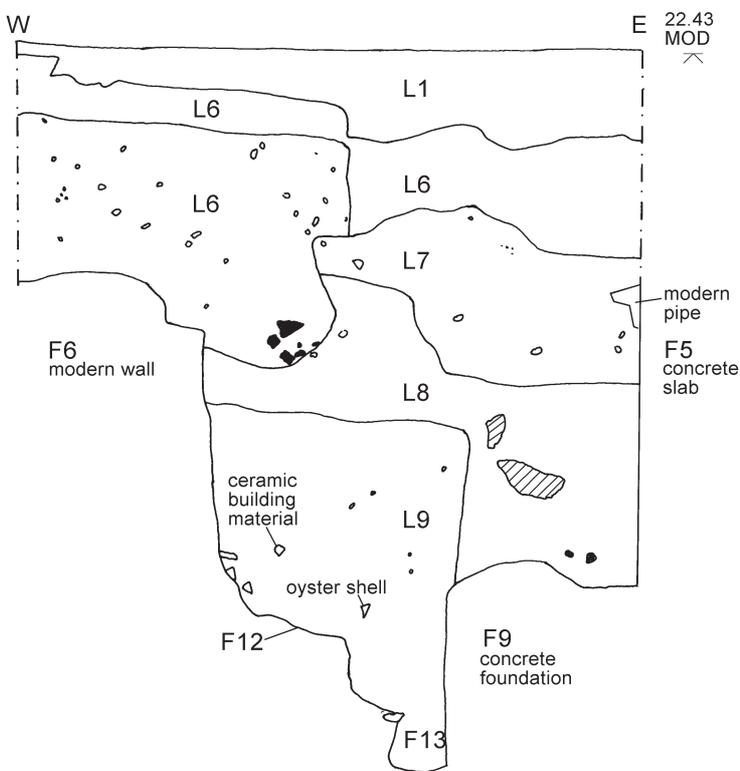
Trench A: south-east corner.



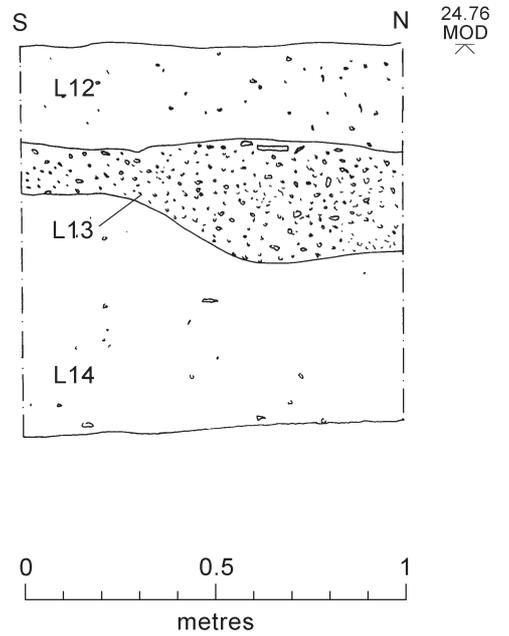
Trench B: south-east corner.



Trench C



Trench D

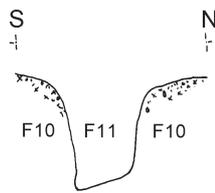


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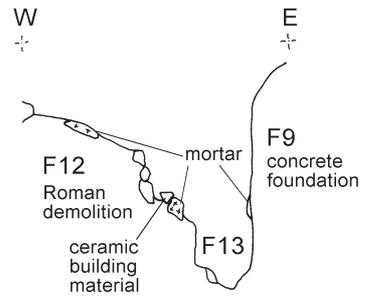
-  = modern concrete/plaster
-  = modern brick
-  = charcoal

Fig 4 Trenches A, B, C, D: representative sections.

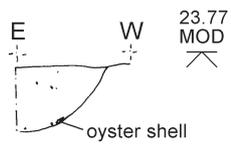
F10, F11: profile



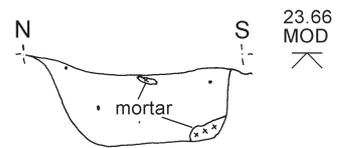
F9, F12, F13: profile



F14: section



F15: section



F16: profile

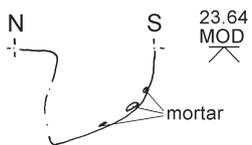


Fig 5 Feature sections/profiles: F9, F10, F11, F12, F13, F14, F15, F16.

Essex Heritage Conservation Record/ *Essex Archaeology and History*

Summary sheet

Site address: First Eastern National bus station, Queen Street, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TM 0000 2515	Site code: Museum accession code 2003.152
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: May-June 2003	Size of area investigated: 50m square
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? None planned	Related EHCR nos:
Final report: CAT Report 234 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: LIA/early Roman-post-medieval/modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>Four evaluation trenches were dug at the First Eastern National bus station, Queen Street, Colchester, Essex in preparation for the design of a new visual arts facility which is planned as part of the Queen Street regeneration project. The archaeological material recorded on the site ranged from Roman through post-medieval and into the modern periods. The majority of the recorded features were of post-medieval date, although Roman building demolition and floor layers were also observed.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Ben Holloway	Date of summary: 21st July 2003