

**An archaeological watching brief  
on land adjacent to  
50 Rosebery Avenue,  
Colchester, Essex  
May/June 2003**

**report prepared by  
C Crossan**

**on behalf of  
Highfield Homes Ltd**

NGR: TM 0035 2500  
CAT project ref.: 03/4B  
Planning consent no: F/COL/03/0238  
Colchester Museums accession code: 2003.187



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**CAT Report 236**  
July 2003

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## 1 Summary

*The site lies in a small eastward-inclined valley 180m beyond the south-east corner of Colchester's town wall, on land adjacent to 50 Rosebery Avenue, Colchester, Essex. The ground-level was reduced by up to 1.4m in preparation for the construction of flats with piled foundations. During the watching brief, substantial deposits of modern and post-medieval soils up to the 1.4m depth of excavation were recorded. Ground water leaking into the southern part of the excavation probably emanated from St Botolph's brook. Although now underground, maps indicate that the brook in this area was an open watercourse until at least the mid-19th century.*

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust on ground-reduction operations in advance of redevelopment on land adjacent to 50 Rosebery Avenue, Colchester, Essex (Fig 1).
- 2.2 The watching brief was commissioned by Highfield Homes Ltd in response to a condition on planning consent no F/COL/03/0238 for the construction of three flats on the site.
- 2.3 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* (1999, updated 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996, updated 2002), and the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1999).

## 3 Archaeological background

The site lies 180m beyond the south-east corner of Colchester's Roman and medieval town wall in an eastward-inclined valley between the higher ground of Priory Street and Magdalen Street. Roman urns have been recorded in a probable cremation cemetery situated approximately 140m to the north-west (Hull 1958). Other Roman graves have variously been noted on the south side of East Hill and in Rosebery Avenue (Hull 1958). To the west is the site of the 12th-century church and monastic buildings of St Botolph's priory, England's first Augustinian institution. The priory buildings stood close to St Botolph's brook, in grounds which extended east for an unknown distance.

## 4 Aim

The aim of the watching brief was to ensure that any archaeologically significant ground features or finds affected by the construction work would be fully recorded.

## 5 Methodology

- 5.1 The contractor's groundworks were subject to regular inspections by an archaeologist between 28th May and 2nd June 2003.
- 5.2 Observation concentrated on the large-scale stripping and levelling which involved ground-reduction of between 0.8m (north) and 1.4m (south) within the L-shaped footprint of the new building, which has piled foundations (Fig 2).

## 6 Results

The exposed stratigraphy consisted of two distinct layers, described below as L1 and L2.

#### **L1**

A mix of materials, composed mainly of a very dark greyish brown sandy loam with varying amounts of brick and concrete fragments, also occasional sand and gravelly lenses. This was clearly modern and associated with the two properties, nos 48 and 49 Rosebery Avenue, which formerly occupied the site. The depth of this material varied from 0.4m at the northern end to 0.8m at the southern (road frontage) end of the excavation, where brick and concrete predominated.

#### **L2**

A very dark greyish brown sandy loam with a low content of small stones. Occasional small fragments of peg-tile were noted at all levels of this material, including the lowest limit of excavation.

The reduced ground-level was wet and muddy when inspected, due in part to rain, but also as a result of leakage from an underground watercourse in the south-west corner of the stripped area.

### **7 Finds**

No finds of any antiquity were recovered in the course of the watching brief.

### **8 Conclusions**

Of the excavated materials described in section 6, the modern layer L1 was dumped and seems to be a mixture of infill and levelling. Layer L2, which appears to be post-medieval to modern in date, is more likely to have accumulated over a period of time, although spells of deliberate deposition have probably contributed to its depth. The overall conclusion from these observations is that there has been a substantial build-up of soils in this low-lying location. In this respect it is worth noting that engineers' boreholes are understood to have reached approximately 4m before reaching natural subsoil (pers comm Mr M Glibbery of Highfield Homes Ltd, 2003).

The source of the water leakage onto the site is probably St Botolph's brook. The stretch of the brook from St Botolph's priory to the East Hill/Brook Street junction appears as an open stream on John Speed's 1610 map of Colchester (the earliest surviving map of the town) and continues to be shown as such by later cartographers to at least 1848, when Monson's Colchester map indicates an uninterrupted stream course from St Botolph's priory as far as Brook Street. By 1875, the stretch west of Ernulph Walk (formerly part of Childwell Alley) appears to have been covered (OS 6" sheet XXV11, 1875). The remaining length to the east of Ernulph Walk was still visible on the OS 1921 revision and this was probably only finally covered over with the c mid 20th-century construction of Rosebery Avenue.

### **9 Acknowledgements**

The Trust is most grateful to Mark Glibbery and David Prior of Highfield Homes Ltd for their co-operation in the course of the watching brief.

### **10 Archive deposition**

The original site record, report and associated papers will be deposited permanently with Colchester Museums under accession code 2003.187.

### **11 References**

Hull, M R, 1958 *Roman Colchester*, RRCSAL, 20, 258

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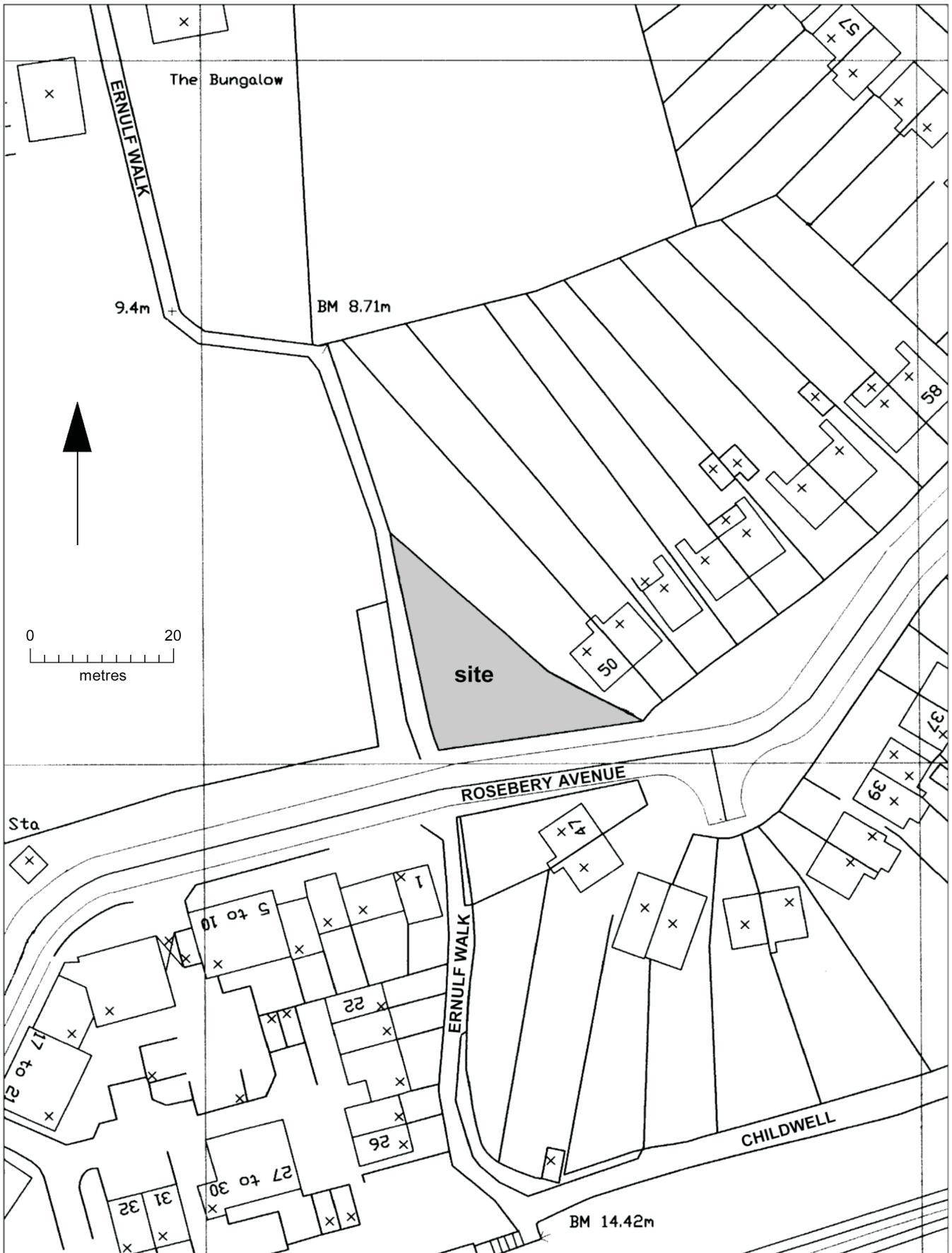
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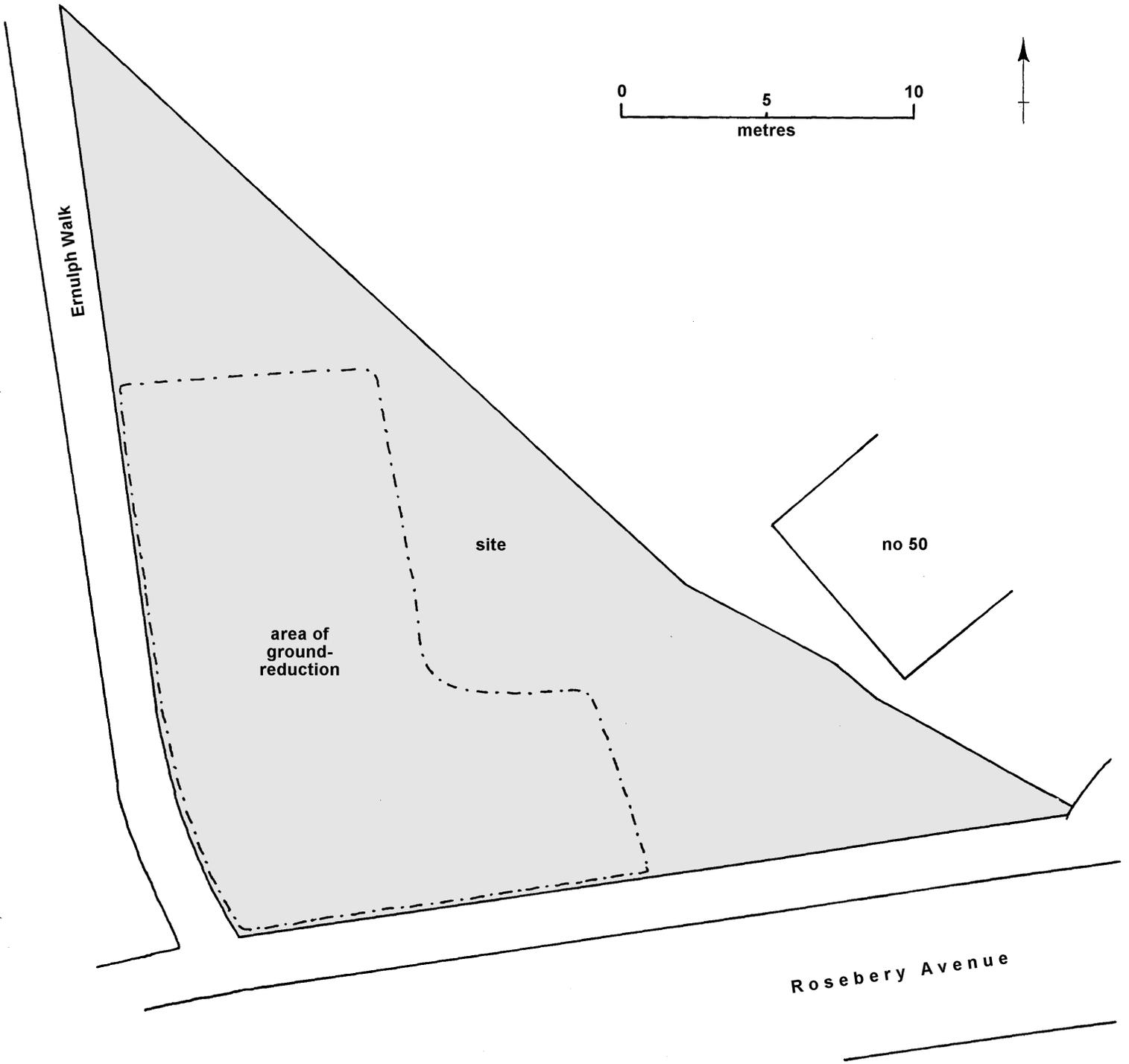
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Fig 1 Site Location.



**Fig 2 Site plan.**

**Essex Heritage Conservation Record/  
Essex Archaeology and History**

**Summary sheet**

<b>Site name/address:</b> land adjacent to 50 Rosebery Avenue, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b>	<b>District:</b> Colchester
<b>NGR:</b> TM 0035 2500	<b>Site code:</b> 2003.187
<b>Type of work:</b> Watching brief	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> May/June 2003	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 220 sq m
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Highfield Homes Ltd
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related EHCR nos:</b>
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 236	
<b>Periods represented:</b> post-medieval to modern	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b> The site lies in a small eastward-inclined valley 180m beyond the south-east corner of Colchester's town wall. The ground-level was reduced by up to 1.4m in preparation for the construction of flats with piled foundations. During the watching brief, substantial deposits of modern and post-medieval soils up to the 1.4m depth of excavation were recorded. Ground water leaking into the southern part of the excavation probably emanated from St Botolph's brook. Although now underground, maps indicate that the brook in this area was an open watercourse until at least the mid-19th century.</p>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> None	
<b>Author of summary:</b> C Crossan	<b>Date of summary:</b> 23.07.03