

**An archaeological watching brief
to the rear of 72 High Street,
Earls Colne, Essex
July 2003**

**report prepared by
Ben Holloway**

**on behalf of
AHP Builders Ltd**

CAT project ref.: 03/6c
Site code: ECHS03
NGR: TL 8583 2886
Braintree Museum accession code: BRNTM 2003.2



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EHCR summary sheet

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1 Summary

Observations were made during a watching brief to the rear of 72 High Street, Earls Colne, Essex, on the excavation of foundation beams for a new sorting office at the rear of the Post Office. Four features were observed, two of which were archaeological.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) to the rear of 72 High Street, Earls Colne, Essex on behalf of AHP Builders Ltd. The watching brief was carried out between the 2nd and the 23rd July 2003.
- 2.2 The site is centred at NGR TL 8583 2886 (Fig 1).
- 2.3 The foundation beams were dug by the contractors on the site with a mechanical excavator using a toothless ditching bucket. The foundations were excavated by layer, features being investigated and recorded before the next layer was removed.
- 2.4 All fieldwork was done in accordance with a specification agreed with the Heritage Advice Management and Promotion (HAMP) group officer from Essex County Council.
- 2.5 This report mirrors standards and practices contained in the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1999).

3 Archaeological background

Little is known about Earls Colne before the medieval period. Excavations by Fairweather in 1937 (Medlycott 1998, 11) uncovered substantial Roman building remains on the site of the priory which are thought to be the remains of a villa. There are references to Earls Colne in a number of Saxon wills (Reaney 1935) and a reference to a minster in 1045. Before the Norman conquest in 1066, the estate was held by Wulfwin; after the conquest, the manor was granted to Alberic de Vere and remained with his descendants the Earls of Oxford until the 16th century. A Benedictine priory was founded by the de Veres between 1101 and 1107, dividing the Earls Colne estate into two manors, the earldom and the priory, and at some point before 1309 the town was granted a market charter by the de Vere family, though the exact date is unknown. The town grew along the High Street, centred on the market. The development site falls within the area of the medieval growth of the town (Fig 2). Earls Colne remained a small market town into the 19th century when the Atlas Ironworks was founded, prompting further development of the town as the works expanded and housing was built to accommodate the employees of the ironworks (Medlycott 1998, 12).

4 Aim

The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological remains that were exposed during the excavation of the foundation beams for the new sorting office. This will allow the date, importance and condition of any remains to be assessed.

5 The foundation beams

Before the foundation beams were excavated, the site was stripped of hardcore, the remains of a modern garage which stood here, and the remains of modern topsoil and turf. During the stripping of the site, three features were observed. Feature or F1 was a post-medieval wall footing which was aligned parallel to the boundary wall at the south end of the site, F2 was a modern concrete pond backfilled with modern

material, and F3 consisted of brickwork flowerbeds which extended into the post-master's garden (Fig 2). Once the site had been stripped, the foundation beams were excavated. The beams were 700mm wide by 1m deep and were interconnected (see foundation plan, Fig 2). The foundation beams were excavated through three layers. Layer or L1, a layer of post-medieval topsoil 400mm thick, sealed a gravel subsoil L2 some 250mm thick, which in turn sealed L3, geological deposits of London Clay and coarse gravel 350mm thick (Fig 3). During the excavation of the foundation beams, one feature was recorded, ie F4, a post-medieval wall foundation (Fig 3). All of the finds recovered from the foundation trenches came from the post-medieval topsoil L1, and consisted of post-medieval and modern material (see section 6 below).

6 Finds

6.1 Finds list

Finds no	Layer	Feature	Description	Weight (g)
9	U/S	U/S	Ceramic ink bottle	231
9	U/S	U/S	Fe nails	31
7	L1	-	Modern pottery	363
4	L1	-	Glass bottles	420
4	L1	-	Modern/post-medieval pottery	203
4	L1	-	Fe nail	8
4	L1	-	Clay-pipe stem	3
6	-	F4	Unfrogged red brick	1744
1	L1	-	Glass bottles	818
1	L1	-	Fe nail	20
1	L1	-	Clay-pipe stems	11
1	L1	-	Moulded brick	424
1	L1	-	Modern pottery	1046

6.2 Discussion

6.2.1 Pottery

The pottery was recovered from the post-medieval topsoil L1 and consists of 23 sherds weighing 1846g in total. The assemblage is datable to the post-medieval and modern periods and breaks down as follows (pottery descriptions after Cotter 2000).

Fabric 48d	modern ironstone - 19th/20th century
Fabric 40	post-medieval red earthenware - 17th/18th century
Fabric 51	modern flowerpot - 20th century
Fabric 45m	modern stoneware - 19th/20th century

6.2.2 Other finds

As well as the pottery, a selection of other datable material was recovered from the foundation trenches. This material includes clay-pipe stems associated with the 18th century, modern glass bottles for CAMP COFFEE and UNGLESS & VIRET mineral waters, and post-medieval brick. As with the pottery, the material is all datable to the post-medieval or modern periods.

6.2.3 Small finds

SF 1 (2) L1.	Silver-plated tea spoon (modern)
SF 2 (3) L1.	Copper-alloy disc (modern)
SF 3 (5) L1.	Remains of a leather shoe/boot (Victorian?)
SF 4 (8) L1.	Bone toothbrush handle (Victorian?)
SF 5 (10) U/S.	Fe billhook blade (modern)

The small finds are all modern artefacts dating to the 19th and 20th centuries, and, as with the pottery and other finds, indicate modern domestic activity.

7 Discussion and interpretation

During the watching brief on the site, little archaeological material was recorded. Of the four features that were observed, only two were archaeological, ie F1 and F4. Both are post-medieval footings for outbuildings. The shape of F1 suggests that it may have been the footings of a privy (Fig 2). F4, a deeper and more solid mortar and peg-tile foundation, suggests a larger outbuilding, possibly a workshop. The finds from the excavation of the foundation beams are of a domestic nature consisting of post-medieval and modern pottery, glass and clay pipe. These suggest post-medieval/modern domestic rubbish/dump deposits that would be expected to be associated with yards and gardens. The nature of the features and the material that was recovered indicate that activity on the site took place during the post-medieval and modern periods. No material of any earlier period was recorded during the watching brief.

8 Acknowledgements

The Colchester Archaeological Trust would like to thank AHP Builders Ltd for commissioning and funding the work, and for their assistance on site. The project was monitored by Vanessa Clarke, HAMP officer for Essex County Council. The site work was carried out by Ben Holloway.

9 References

- Cotter, J P, 2000 *Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85, Colchester Archaeological Report 7*
- Medycott, M, 1998 *Historic towns project: Earls Colne, Essex County Council Planning*
- Reaney, P H, 1935 *Place names of Essex*

10 Glossary

context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
Fe	iron
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
HAMP	Heritage Advice, Management and Promotion group of ECC
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
medieval	period from AD 1066 to Henry the VIII
modern	period from the 19th century 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
U/S	unstratified
Victorian	period from 1837 to 1901

11 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but it will be permanently deposited with Braintree Museum under accession code BRNTM 2003.2.

12 Site data

12.1 Site context list

Location	Context	Description	Context date
Foundation beam	L1	Topsoil	modern/post-medieval
Foundation beam	L2	Subsoil	modern/post-medieval
Foundation beam	L3	Natural geology	Glacial/post-Glacial
South end of site	F1	Wall footing	post-medieval
Centre of site	F2	Concrete pond	modern
North end of site	F3	Brickwork flowerbed	modern
Foundation beam	F4	Wall footing	post-medieval

12.2 Soil descriptions

Location	Context	Description
Foundation beam	L1	Grey brown ashy silt, occasional small stones, root/animal activity.
Foundation beam	L2	Yellow brown clay/silt, some small stones, occasional roots.
Foundation beam	L3	Yellow/grey London Clay coarse gravel, small stones and sand patches.

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Distribution list:

AHP Builders Ltd
Essex Heritage Conservation Record, Essex County Council
Robert Rose, Braintree Museum



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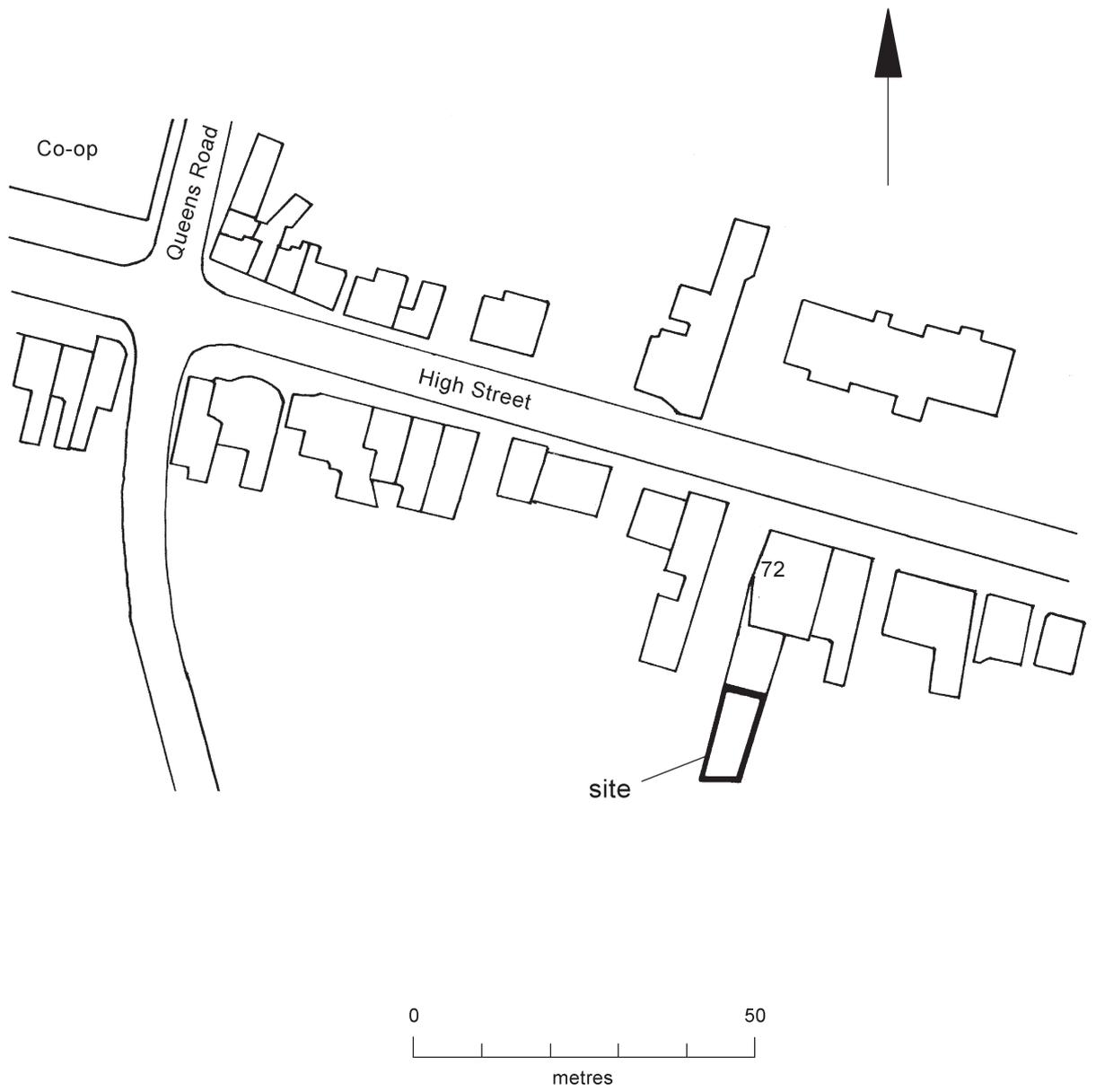


Fig 1 Site location.

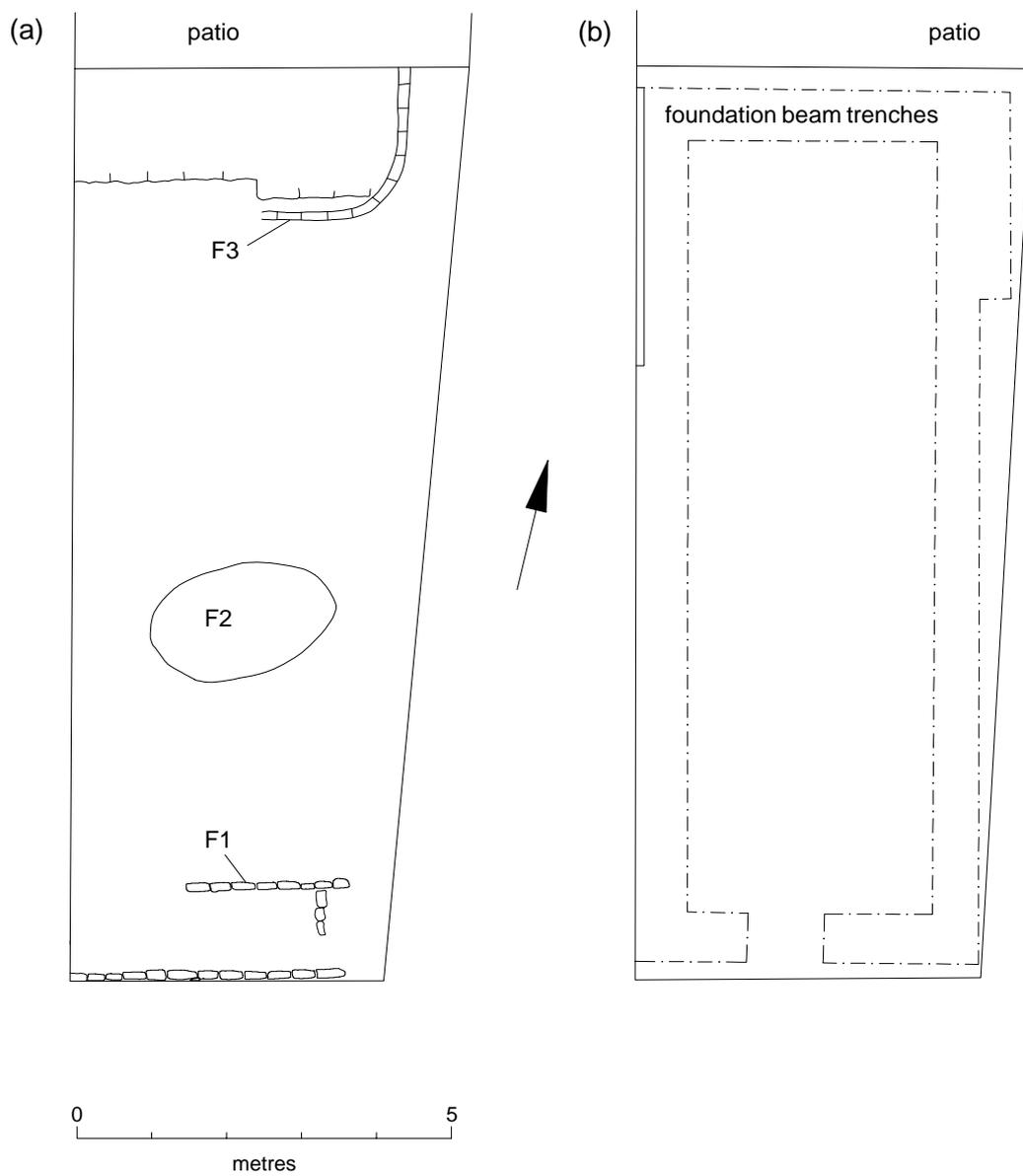
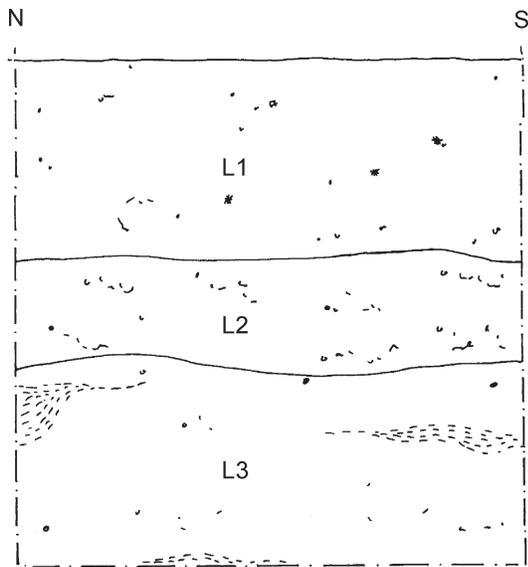
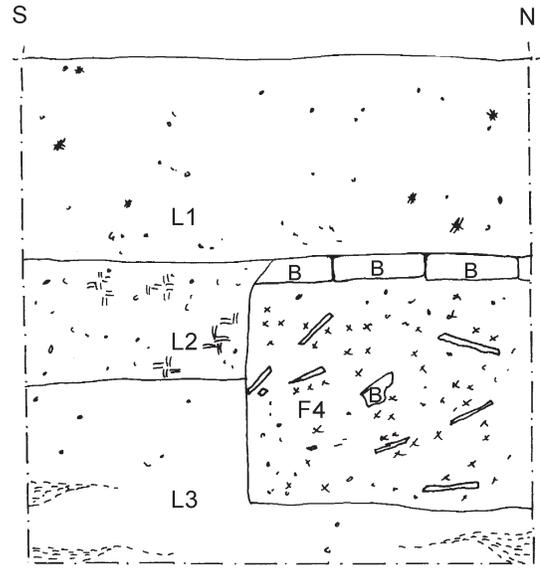
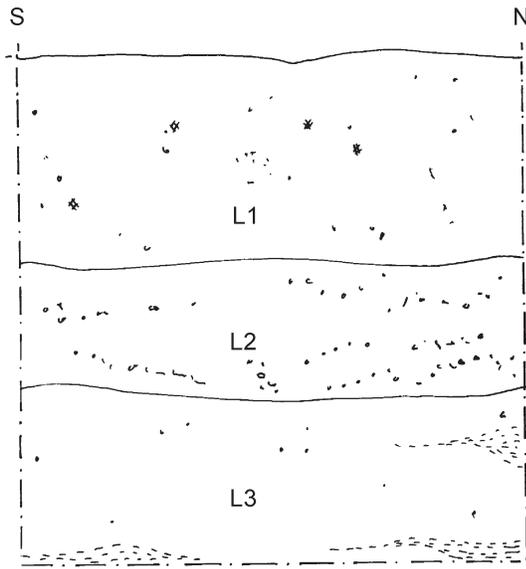


Fig 2 Site plan.
 (a) pre-excitation
 (b) after excavation of the foundation beam trenches.



key:

-  = clay
-  = charcoal
-  = mortar
-  = brick
-  = tile

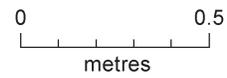


Fig 3 Representative sections of the foundation beam trenches.

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

Summary sheet

Site address: the rear of 72 High Street, Earls Colne, Essex	
Parish: Earls Colne	District: Braintree
NGR: TL 8583 2886	Site code: ECHS03
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: July 2003	Size of area investigated: 54m square
Location of finds/curating museum: Braintree Museum	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHCR nos:
Final report: CAT Report 242 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: post-medieval/modern	
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>Observations were made during a watching brief to the rear of 72 High Street, Earls Colne, Essex, on the excavation of foundation beams for a new sorting office at the rear of the Post Office. Four features were recorded, two of which were archaeological.</i>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Ben Holloway	Date of summary: July 2003