

**An archaeological watching brief at  
24-26 Mersea Road, Colchester, Essex  
December 2002-June 2003**

**report prepared by  
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**on behalf of  
Rose Builders**

NGR: TM 99933 24612  
CAT project ref.: 02/12b  
Colchester Museums accession code: 2003.4



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## 1 Summary

*A watching brief was carried out during the digging of test-pits, ground-reduction and excavation of foundations involved in works to demolish and rebuild nos 24 and 25 and to repair the listed building no 26, Maldon Road, Colchester, Essex. A brick-lined well and four pits of probable post-medieval or modern date were recorded. Peg-tile, animal bone and part of a post-medieval glass bottle were the only finds. The ground appeared to be very disturbed with at least 500mm of post-medieval or modern deposits overlying natural sand. No evidence was recorded of any Roman or Anglo-Saxon burials, although it appears that the ground had previously been lowered and that any such remains may have been destroyed as a result.*

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) at 24-26 Mersea Road, Colchester, Essex, which is situated at National Grid Reference TM 99933 24612.
- 2.2 The work was necessitated by a planning application (no F/COL/02/1433) for the demolition and rebuilding of two properties, nos 24 and 25, and the repair of property no 26 which is a listed building.
- 2.3 The site is located to the south-east of Colchester town centre, on the eastern side of Mersea Road. The 18m x 36m plot was formerly occupied by dilapidated properties comprising 24-26 Mersea Road and their yard, which is on a west-facing slope. One of the premises was formerly a public house.
- 2.4 All fieldwork was done in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation supplied by CAT which in turn follows a brief written by the Archaeology Officer of Colchester Borough Council.
- 2.5 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 watching brief* (1999).

## 3 Archaeological background (Fig 1)

- 3.1 The development site is situated close to a Roman cemetery, located to the west of Mersea Road (Crummy *et al* 1993, 262).
- 3.2 The site also lies within the Mersea Road Anglo-Saxon cemetery which has been identified mainly through finds of grave goods (Crummy 1981, 14-17). Three iron spearheads and an iron shield boss dating from the 5th-7th centuries were found during the construction of 10 Mersea Road in 1897. A second shield boss was discovered before 1873. The weapons were undoubtedly from inhumations although no human remains are recorded. Other finds believed to be from the area were accessed by Colchester Museums in 1926 (EHCR nos 13229 & 13230; UAD no 1113). These principally include beads, buckles, a bone comb and a brooch, which are likely to have been originally deposited with burials. Many of the shield bosses and other weapons from the Joslin collection are likely to come from Mersea Road. In addition to these finds there is a 6th- to 7th-century pot containing a cremation which was found on the Mersea Road frontage of Meanee Barracks in 1938.
- 3.3 St John's abbey precinct lies directly opposite the site on the other side of Mersea Road. The abbey was built by the Benedictine Order by 1115 but burnt down in 1133. The rebuilt abbey was partly demolished after the Dissolution. Remaining parts were destroyed during and after the Siege of Colchester of 1648. Some of the precinct wall, the gatehouse and the former church of St Giles' still survive. Human remains, certainly medieval burials associated with the abbey, have been recorded several times in this area (Crummy *et al* 1993, 203-221).

## 4 Aim

The aim of the archaeological watching brief was to record any features or finds disturbed by the groundworks. Particular attention was paid to the possible presence of Roman or Anglo-Saxon inhumations, particularly grave goods.

## 5 Methods

- 5.1 The watching brief was of an intermittent nature. Ten visits were made by a professional CAT archaeologist between December 2002 and June 2003.
- 5.2 The trenches were excavated by a mechanical excavator with a toothed bucket.
- 5.3 Individual records of layers and features were made.
- 5.4 Sketch plans of the test-pits and foundation trenches and the features within were made.

## 6 Results (Fig 2)

16/12/02 - six test-pits (TP1-TP6) were dug by the contractors on the ground floor of nos 25 and 26 and one was dug in the yard to the rear of no 25. Most of the test-pits were no more than 500mm deep and had been cut through Layer or L3, a mid brown sandy loam made-up layer containing fragments of peg-tile and animal bone. The deepest one (TP6, in the yard) was dug to a depth of 950mm: 400mm of mid brown sandy loam (L3) sealed yellow natural sand (L4). A modern pit (Feature or F6), which had a similar fill to L3 above, was showing in the southern section. No archaeological features were observed.

14/03/03 – a visit was made but no groundworks were being carried out.

15/05/03 – two exterior foundation trenches were observed on the north and western sides of no 25. Backfilled cellars were exposed. 100mm of L1 sealed natural sand L4. There was one find, the neck of a post-medieval 'onion' bottle which is thought to derive from L1.

16/05/03 - a visit was made but no groundworks were being carried out.

22/05/03 – a visit was made after the northern part of the site had been reduced. A negligible amount of material had been stripped from the north-west corner to make it level with the Mersea Road pavement. 200mm had been taken off the south-west corner, 500mm from the south-east and 800mm from the north-eastern area. The reduced area was covered by loose soil and trample, making it difficult to see archaeological features. The following soil profile was observed in cross-section in the north-eastern corner:

L1 – modern spread of small brick and mortar fragments – 200mm  
L2 – dark greyish brown sandy loam – 100mm  
L3 and L4 – mixed mid brown sandy loam with natural sand – 250mm  
L4 – natural sand.

27/05/03 – new foundation trenches dug at the southern side of the site were monitored. They were 500mm wide and 750mm deep (from the reduced level). The sides were very smeared and there were several modern intrusions including drains. Natural sand (L4) occurred between 0-300mm below the reduced ground-level. Sandy loam (L3) was observed sealing L4 in places.

Two features were recorded:

F1 – an undated pit, approximately 1m wide, filled by mid-brown sandy loam similar to L3 above.

F2 – another undated pit or two inter-cutting pits, over 1m wide, with nearly vertical sides. This feature was filled by the same material as F1 and contained animal bone.

28/05/03 – Further foundation trenches were monitored to the north of those of the previous day. The same soil sequence was recorded. Three features were observed in the foundation trenches:

F3 – a brick-lined well, constructed of unfrosted red bricks 220mm long x 70mm deep x 110mm wide. The well was filled by brick rubble and was sealed by L1.

F4 – a pit with a mixed fill of mid brown loamy sand with darker and paler brown flecks. This also was sealed by L1, and most of the feature extended beyond the limit of excavation.

F5 – an undated rectilinear feature with vertical sides, filled by L3 material and sealed by L1.

29/05/03 – a visit was made but no groundworks were being carried out.

02/06/03 – a visit was made after new foundation trenches had been dug in the north-western part of the site. Trenches were dug, between 600mm and 1m wide and between 600mm and 800mm deep. Yellowish brown sandy loam mixed with modern demolition debris of brick, mortar and charcoal was encountered (L1 mixed with L3). There was also disturbance from a modern pipe-trench aligned NW to SE.

05/06/03 – new foundation trenches in the north-eastern corner were inspected. A similar soil matrix was recorded as on the previous day except that natural sand (L4) was seen in the bottom of the trenches at a depth of 900mm.

## 7 Discussion

During the watching brief, a brick-lined well and four pits of probable post-medieval or modern date were recorded. Peg-tile, animal bone and part of a post-medieval glass 'onion' bottle were the only finds. The ground appeared to be very disturbed with at least 500mm of post-medieval or modern deposits overlying natural sand.

No evidence was recorded of any Roman or Anglo-Saxon burials, although it appears that the ground had previously been lowered and that any such remains may have been destroyed as a result.

## 8 Acknowledgements

The Colchester Archaeological Trust would like to thank Rose Builders for commissioning and funding the work.

The site work was carried out by Carl Crossan, Ben Holloway and Kate Orr. The project was monitored by Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council.

## 9 References

Crummy, P, 1981 *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Colchester*, Colchester Archaeological Report 1

Crummy, P, Crummy, N, & Crossan, C, 1993 *Excavations of Roman and later cemeteries, churches and monastic sites in Colchester, 1971-88*, Colchester Archaeological Report 9

## 10 Glossary

Anglo-Saxon context	the period from the 5th-11th centuries approximately specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
EHCR	Essex Heritage Conservation Record, maintained by Essex County Council
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
post-medieval	the period from c 1500 to the late 18th century
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database, maintained by Colchester Museums

## 11 Archive deposition

The finds and archive are held by Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but both will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2003.4. No finds were retained.

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### Distribution list:

Rose Builders

Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council  
Essex Heritage Conservation Record, Essex County Council



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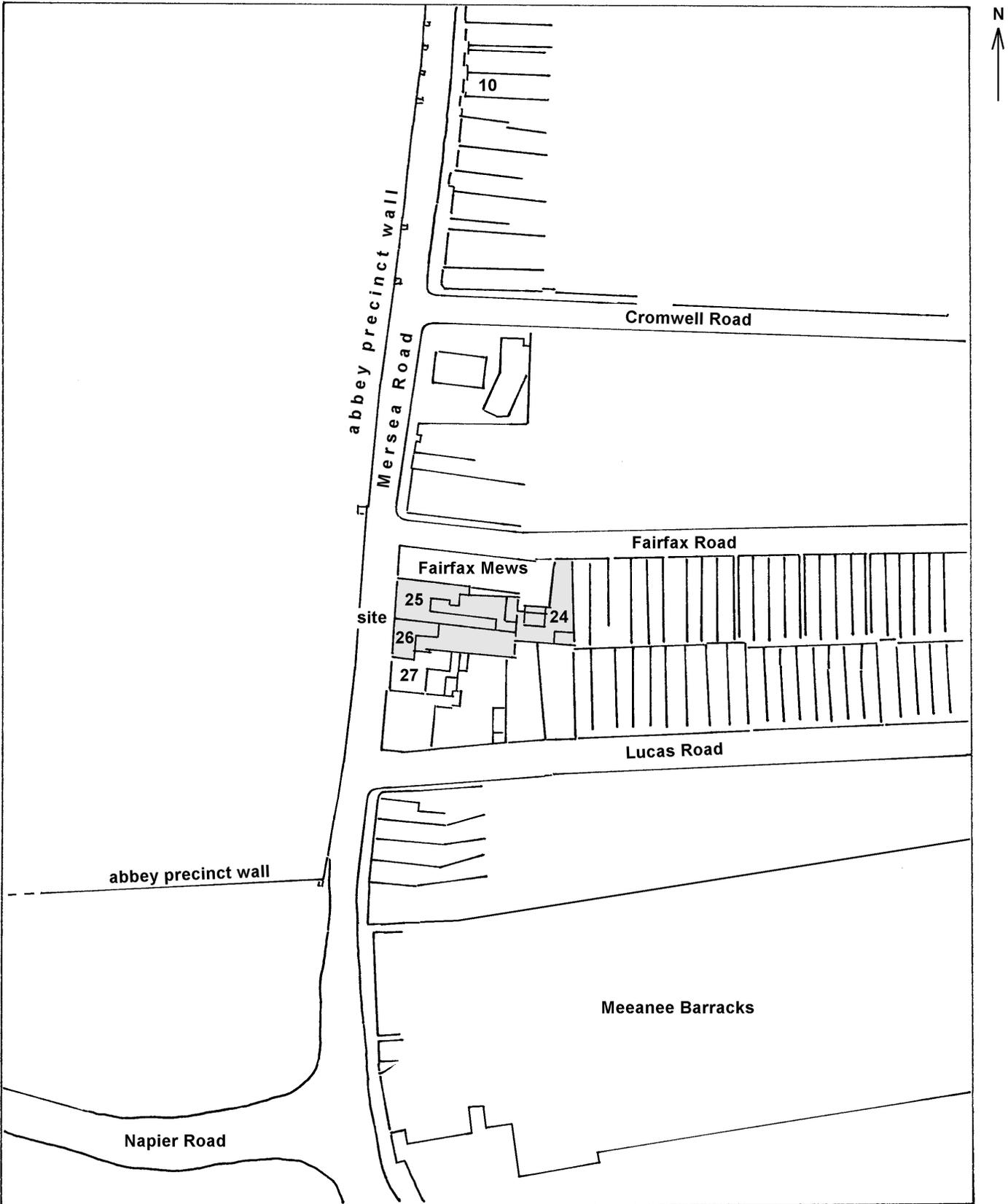


Fig 1 Site location, scale 1:1250.

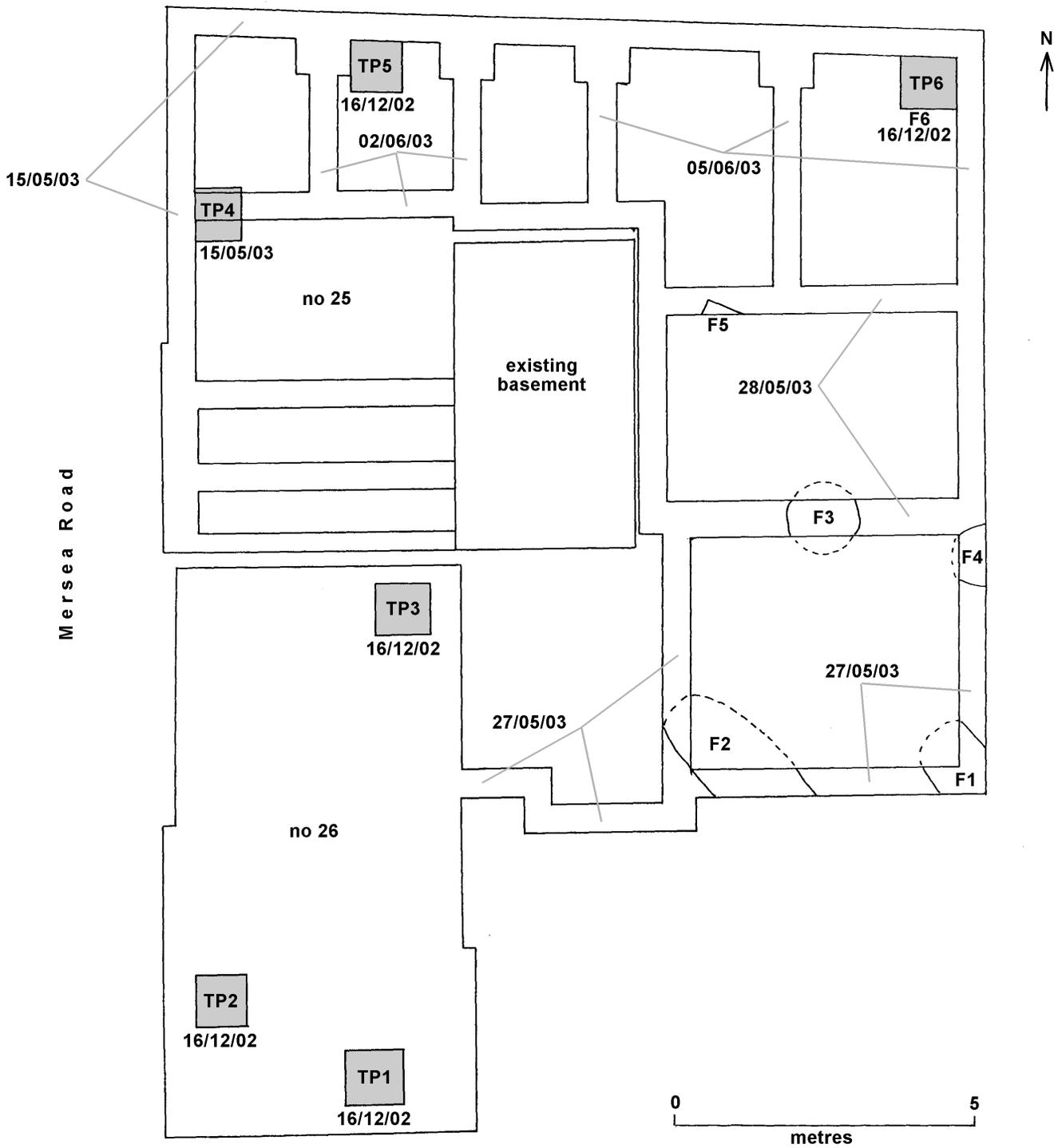


Fig 2 New foundation trenches: plan, showing the areas monitored and the dates on which the monitoring took place - scale 1:100.

# Essex Heritage Conservation Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

## Summary sheet

<b>Site name/address:</b> 24-26 Mersea Road, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> -	<b>District:</b> Colchester
<b>NGR:</b> TM 99933 24612	<b>Site code:</b> 2003.4
<b>Type of work:</b> Watching brief	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> December 2002-June 2003	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 18m x 36m
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Developer
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related EHCR nos:</b> 13229, 13230
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 243 and summary in EAH	
<b>Periods represented:</b> post-medieval, modern	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b>  <i>A watching brief was carried out during the digging of test-pits, ground-reduction and excavation of foundations involved in works to demolish and rebuild nos 24 and 25 and to repair the listed building no 26, Maldon Road, Colchester, Essex. A brick-lined well and four pits of probable post-medieval or modern date were recorded. Peg-tile, animal bone and part of a post-medieval glass bottle were the only finds. The ground appeared to be very disturbed with at least 500mm of post-medieval or modern deposits overlying natural sand. No evidence was recorded of any Roman or Anglo-Saxon burials, although it appears that the ground had previously been lowered and that any such remains may have been destroyed as a result.</i></p>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> None	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Kate Orr	<b>Date of summary:</b> August 2003