An archaeological evaluation
at 14 Vineyard Street,
Colchester, Essex
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**report prepared by
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Summary
A small exploratory trench dug through the floor of 14 Vineyard Street revealed the southern side of an east-west orientated ditch situated 18m beyond the town wall. The location and datable finds from the fill suggest that this is the outer side of Roman Colchester's town ditch.

Introduction
This report is one of a series describing the results from recent excavations of archaeological exploratory trenches in the Vineyard Gate area of Colchester. To date, 21 locations have been investigated within a region bounded to the north by the Vineyard Street stretch of the town wall and to the south by Osborne Street. The subject of this report is a single trench inside the vacant shop at 14 Vineyard Street. The trench location is shown in Figure 1.

Historical background
Colchester's status as England's oldest recorded town owes its origin to events 2,000 years ago when the regional tribal stronghold of Camulodunum became the prime target for the Roman invasion of AD 43. The victorious Roman army established Britain's first military fortress in the western part of the area now occupied by the walled town centre. In the years that followed, the fortress was developed into a major town which was destroyed during the Boudican revolt of AD 60/1. After the suppression of the uprising, the town was rebuilt and provided with the town wall that we know today. Roman settlement spread well beyond the limits of the walled town; suburbs have been recorded outside the north and west gates and cemeteries along the lines of the main approach roads. The Roman town survived for about 400 years until the start of the Anglo-Saxon period in the early to mid 5th century century. In the following centuries, the town was sparsely occupied and its Roman buildings were left to decay and collapse.

Colchester re-established itself as a major provincial town and trading centre in the medieval period. The century following the Norman conquest saw the construction of the castle, an ambitious undertaking with the largest Norman keep in Europe, together with the monastic houses of St John's abbey and St Botolph's priory to the south outside the town wall. The main gateway in this region of the town was the south gate, which stood at the junction of St Botolph's Street and Short Wyre Street. This was the closest gateway to Hythe quay and would have served as a main entry and exit point for goods traffic on the one-mile route between the walled town centre and the medieval quayside. Medieval and later activity in the locality are reflected in the earlier street names, which often related to local drinking houses and trade. Vineyard Street, known in the 14th century as Beres Lane, later became Blackboy Lane (1678) and then Brickyard Street (19th century). Arthur Street and Osborne Street are named after Arthur Osborne, a local mid 19th-century brewery owner.

Archaeological background
Archaeologically, this region of Colchester is of interest because it adjoins the town's southern defences and lies close to the site of a major Roman gateway.

A recent study divided the area broadly into three zones (Johnson *et al* 2003). The high ground in front of the town wall can be seen as a defensive zone containing the Roman and medieval town ditches. Beyond the defences are two zones subject to settlement; one on higher ground in Vineyard Street and one on the lower slopes to the south where relatively wet ground conditions may have influenced the nature of past development activity. The only substantial archaeological excavation to have previously

taken place within the area was prompted by the breach of the town wall in the 1970s to form the Vineyard Gate service entrance to the Lion Walk precinct. A section dug through the town defences encountered a series of Roman and medieval ditches up to 5m deep, with a possible medieval street to the south and remains of post-medieval and later buildings over the backfilled ditch (*CAR* **3**, sheet 6a, sx 55). In Osborne Street, systematic investigation has previously occurred only on the south side of the street, where an excavation in advance of the construction of the NCP multi-storey car park revealed floors belonging to a Roman building at the eastern end of the site (Shimmin 1994). These lay at about 3m depth, below the well-preserved remains of medieval wicker-lined drains which were followed by a series of later medieval and post-medieval buildings belonging to a plot extending back from the St Botolph's Street frontage. At the Stanwell Street end of the site, the excavations exposed the floors of a 16th- to 17th-century timber-framed building which had been destroyed by fire, probably during the 1648 siege of Colchester during the Civil War. Roman tessellated floors and cremation burials appear among records of chance discoveries made in the Osborne Street area in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Since these were recorded with varying degrees of precision, their exact locations are in the main uncertain (Johnson *et al* 2003).

Results

The figures at the end of this report include an annotated plan and section drawing of the trench. Numbers preceded by an 'L' or 'F' are ground layers and features which were individually identified, investigated and recorded. A guide to terms used may be found in the glossary.

Trench 1 (plan, Fig 2; section, Fig 3)
Location: inside vacant shop at 14 Vineyard Street
NGR: TL 99860 25003
Trench dimensions: 2m x 1m
Surface level: 19.98m OD

The uppermost 350mm consisted of modern concrete floors (L1, L2) and hardcore (L3). Beneath this material was a layer of dark earth (L4) which extended to an overall depth of 700mm. Finds from the dark earth indicate a post-medieval to early modern date for this soil. Below the dark earth was a 400m- to 500mm-thick deposit of dark brown silt loam (L5) which contained Roman pottery, *tegulae* (roof tile) and box-flue tile fragments, together with a dumped deposit of oyster shell at the northern end of the trench. L5 continued down to the top of natural sand and gravel (L6), which was exposed at an overall depth of 1.1m in the southern end of the trench. In the central and northern part of the trench, the natural (L6) had been cut by an east-west linear feature (F1). The fill of F1 was removed to an overall depth of 1.3m, at which point excavation ceased for safety reasons. A 700mm-deep auger probe into the F1 fill at the northern end of the trench showed no soil change, which suggests that the feature extends to an overall depth of at least 2m from the surface. Datable finds from the fill of F1 were exclusively Roman.

Discussion and conclusions

The major feature identified in this trench was F1 which is almost certainly the southern (outer) side of the defensive ditch which lay beyond the Roman and medieval town wall. The datable finds from limited excavation of the fill indicate that the ditch cutting located here is Roman (rather than a later medieval recut). Although the ditch appeared to be sealed by L5, the soil definition at that level was poor and it is possible that L5 actually forms the uppermost level of ditch fill.

Finds
The main categories of finds from the trench were pottery, building materials and animal bone, all of which are undergoing specialist analysis. The pottery sherds and loose building materials variously belong to the Roman, medieval and later periods.

Acknowledgements

Glossary and abbreviations

box flue tile	type of tile used to form flues in Roman heating systems
CBC	Colchester Borough Council
context	specific location on an excavation, usually relates to finds
cut	an excavation of unspecified purpose
make-up	material dumped to raise ground-level
medieval	the period from AD 1066 to Henry VIII
modern	19th century to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
OAA	Oxford Archaeological Associates
OD	Ordnance Survey datum point based on mean sea level at Newlyn, Cornwall
post-medieval	after Henry VIII and up to Victoria
prehistoric	pre-Roman, or more generally the years BC
residual	something out of its original period context (eg, a Roman coin in a modern pit)
Roman	the period from AD 43 to *c* AD 430
Anglo-Saxon	the period from *c* AD 430 to AD 1066
tegula/tegulae	a type of Roman roof-tile

References

CAR **3**	1984	*Colchester Archaeological Report* **3**: *Excavations at Lion Walk, Balkerne Lane and Middleborough, Colchester, Essex,* by P Crummy
Johnson, A P, Petchey, M R, & Collcutt, S N	2003	*St Botolph's quarter regeneration schemes, Colchester, cultural heritage (archaeology) statement, part 1: background and existing situation*, Oxford Archaeological Associates Ltd
Shimmin, D	1994	'Excavations at Osborne Street, Colchester', in *Essex Archaeology and History*, **25**, 46-59

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St Botolph's Street

No 14

trench

Vineyard Street

0   10 m
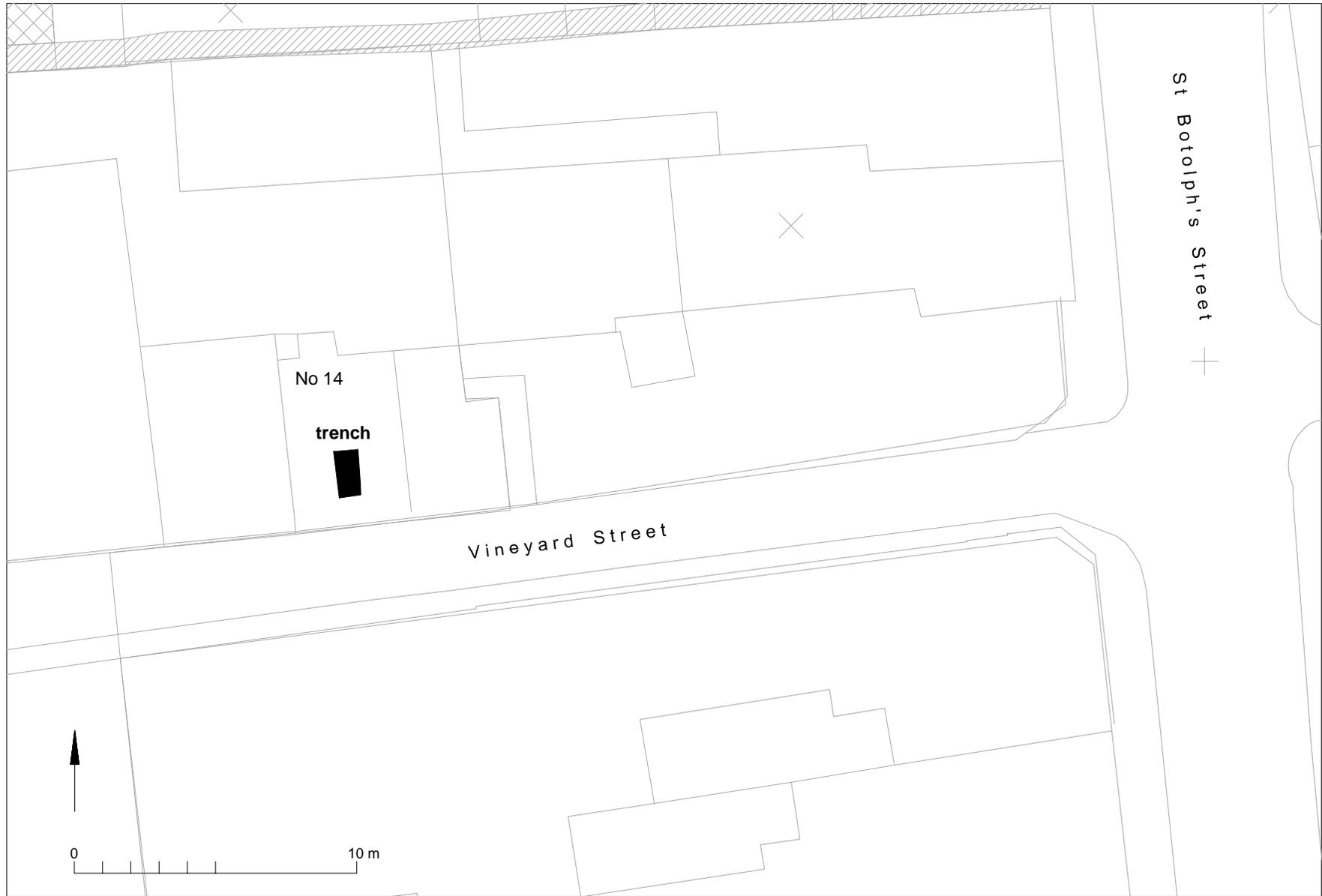
Fig 1 Trench location plan.

Roman
ditch
F1

L1

natural
L6

0   1 m
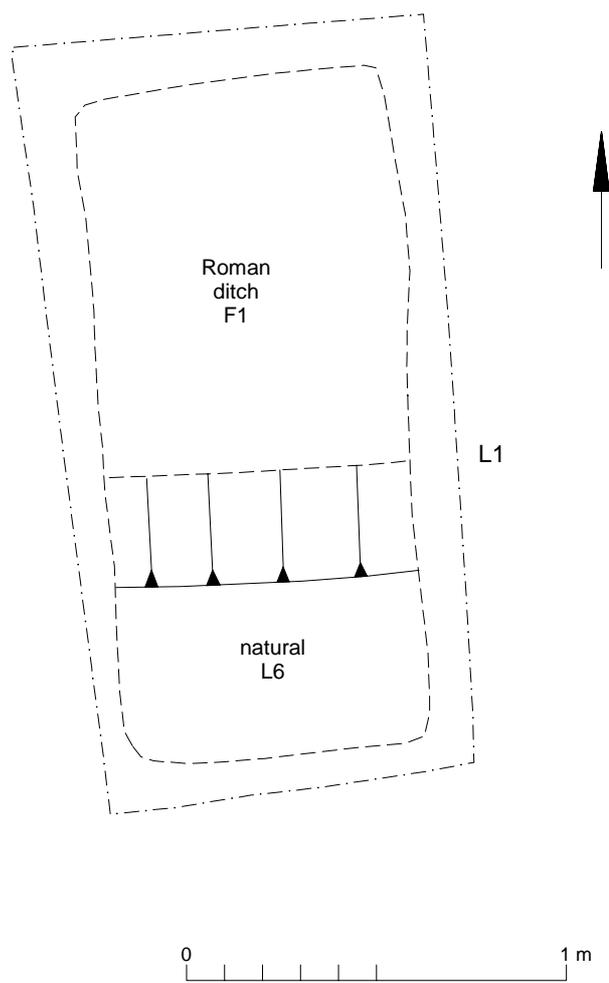
Fig 2 Trench 1: plan.
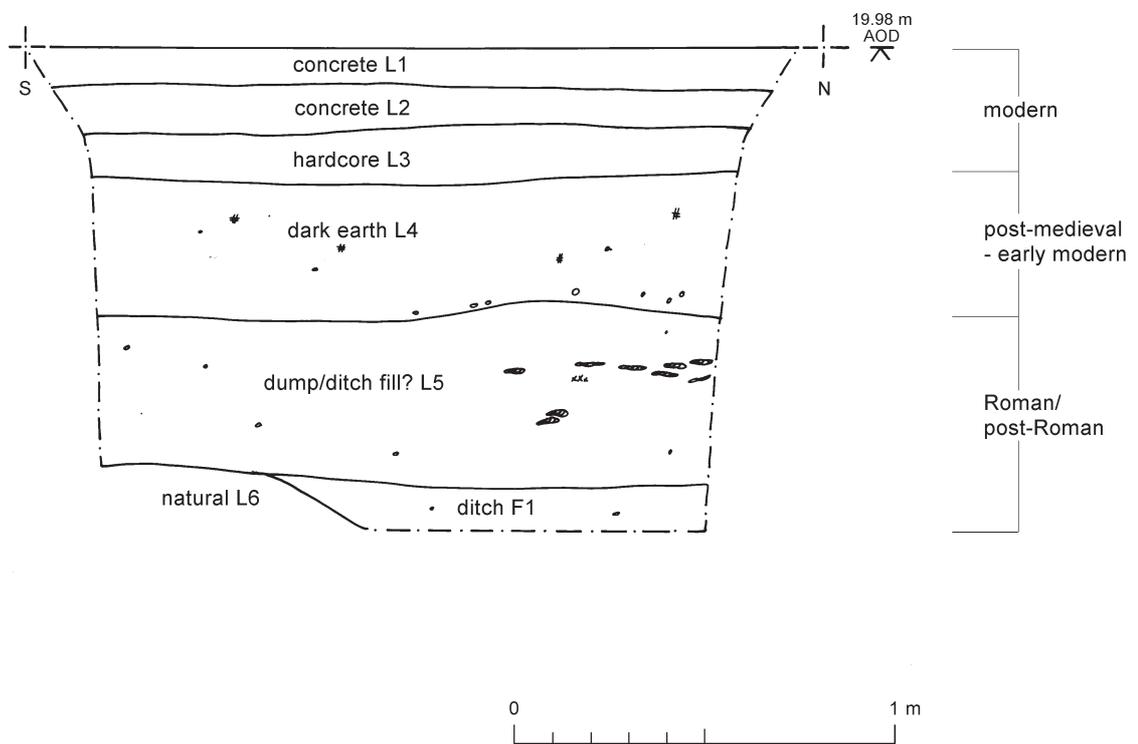
Fig 3 Trench 1: east-facing section.