

## Report on a negative watching brief: CAT Report 421

**Site address:** Balkerne Gate/Mercury Theatre, Balkerne Passage,  
Colchester, Essex  
**Date of fieldwork:** 17th-19th April 2007  
**NGR:** TL 99237 25183 (c)  
**CBC brief?:** Yes  
**Plans attached?:** Yes (Fig 1)  
**Museum accession code:** COLEM 2007.47  
**CAT project code:** 07/4e

### Archaeological background

The Balkerne Gate is the main west gate of the Roman town and it is the largest monument of its kind in Britain. It is protected as a scheduled ancient monument (SAM Ex 8; UAD ref. MON412). More information about excavations of the gate can be found in Hull 1958 and CAR 3.

A number of projects have been carried out in Balkerne Gardens recently. In 2005, five evaluation trenches were cut at the Mercury Flats before their demolition, four to the north of the new Mercury Flats and one to the south (ie on the Mercury Theatre side). All five trenches showed that the highest significant deposits were Roman in date, and lay at (no higher than) 1.50m below modern ground-level on the south side of the site, and between 0.70-1.00m below modern ground-level on the north side of the site. The archaeological remains which were exposed included two *in situ* Roman walls (one partially robbed), a Roman mortared structure (either a floor or a wall), and several Roman floor and dump layers (CAT Report 331).

In connection with the rebuilding of the Mercury Flats residential block, a watching brief was held on the laying of two pipe trenches. These revealed a number of Roman wall lines, floors, and gravel surfaces. Later, the site of the lift-shaft pit for the new Mercury Flats building was hand-excavated. A Roman wall and a gravel surface were identified. Finds were plentiful, and included a significant quantity of late Roman pottery. This shows that Balkerne Gardens has the potential to yield stratified late Roman deposits in the future (CAT Report 395).

### Aim

The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any surviving archaeological features within the electricity cable trench.

### Results (Fig 1)

This archaeological watching brief consisted of five visits over three days made during the digging of an electricity cable trench between the Balkerne Gate and the Mercury Theatre. The work was undertaken in order to set two small floodlights into the pavement at the entrance of the guardroom of the gate. Scheduled Monument Consent was given by the Secretary of State for the work. The service run was 30m long, of which the majority was set into the landscaped grass area directly behind the Roman town wall. The width of the trench was 150mm. The depth varied between 270mm and 400mm. The trench was only dug through topsoil except where it crossed the road, where tarmac and hoggin was encountered. Modern brick rubble and a few fragments of post-medieval and Roman pottery were exposed at the eastern end, by the Mercury Theatre. To conclude, the trench was not of sufficient depth to impinge on any archaeological remains.

### References

- CAT Report 331                      An archaeological evaluation at the Mercury Flats, Balkerne Gardens, Colchester, Essex, July-August 2005, unpublished CAT archive report, by Howard Brooks and Laura Pooley, 2005

CAT Report 395		Archaeological watching briefs and an excavation in Balkerne Passage and Balkerne Gardens, Colchester, Essex: June-November 2006, unpublished CAT archive report, by Howard Brooks, 2006
CAR 3	1981	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report 3: Excavations at Lion Walk, Balkerne Lane and Middleborough, Colchester, Essex</i> , by P Crummy
Hull, M R	1958	<i>Roman Colchester</i> , RRCSAL, <b>20</b>

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**Report date:** June 2007

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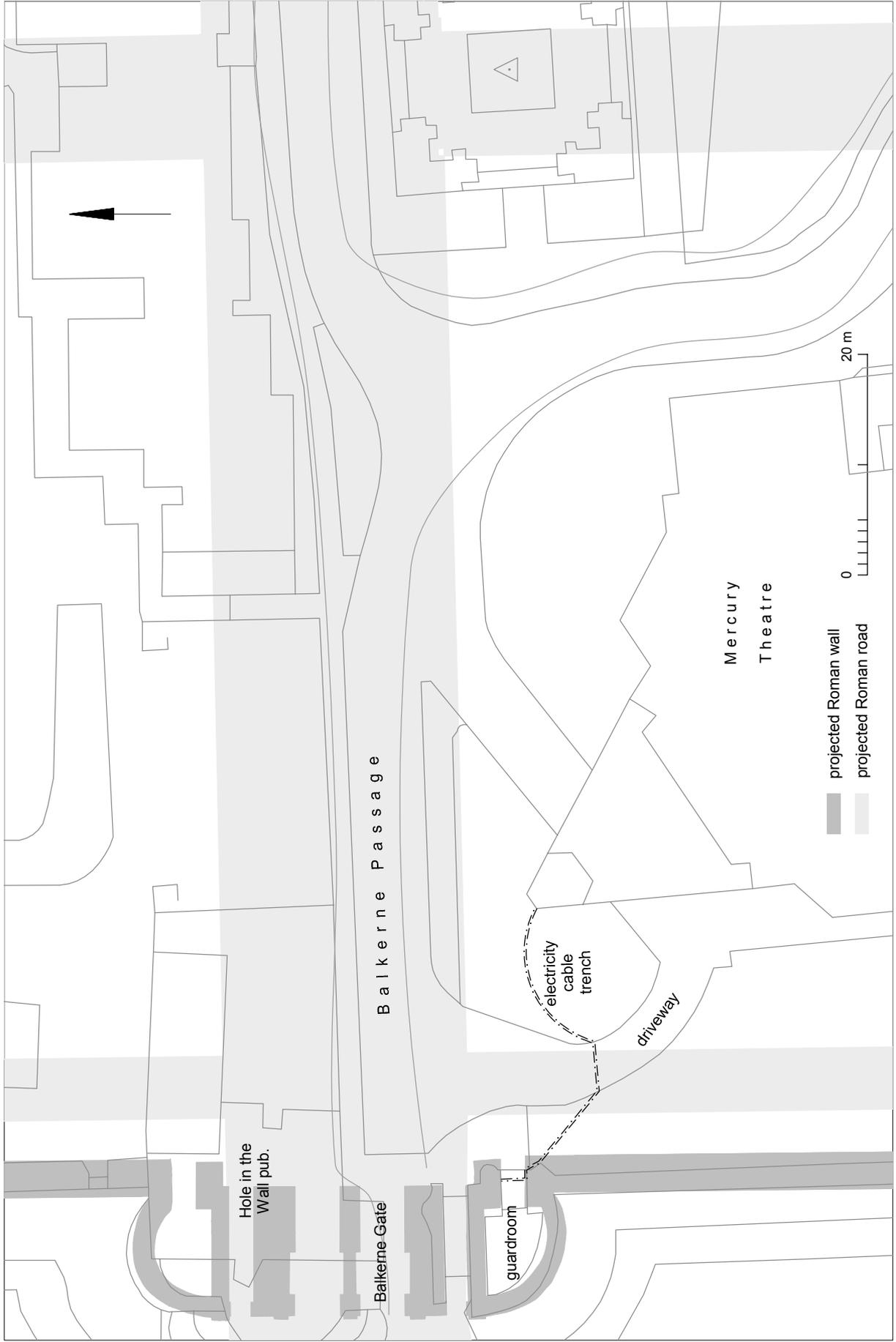


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Date: 25.06.07

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Fig 1 Trench location plan.

**Essex Historic Environment Record/  
Essex Archaeology and History**

**Summary sheet**

<b>Site address:</b> Balkerne Gate/Mercury Theatre, Balkerne Passage, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester
<b>NGR:</b> TL 99237 25183 (c)	<b>Site code:</b> Accession code COLEM 2007.47
<b>Type of work:</b> Watching Brief	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> April 2007	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> Electricity cable trench 30m long x 150mm wide
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester and Ipswich Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Colchester Borough Council
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related EHER nos:</b>
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 421 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods represented:</b> None	
<b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b> <i>The trench was only dug through topsoil except where it crossed the road, where tarmac and hoggin was encountered. Modern brick rubble and a few fragments of post-medieval and Roman pottery were exposed at the eastern end, by the Mercury Theatre. The trench was not of sufficient depth to impinge on any archaeological remains.</i>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> CAT Reports 331 and 395	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Kate Orr	<b>Date of summary:</b> June 2007