

d r a f t

**An archaeological watching brief
at the former Cooks shipyard and gasworks,
Wivenhoe, near Colchester, Essex
March 2006-November 2007**

**report prepared by
Kate Orr**

**commissioned by
CgMs Consulting
on behalf of
Taylor Wimpey**



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1 Summary

Over an 18-month period, a watching brief was carried out on groundworks for a residential development on a former shipyard and gasworks in Wivenhoe. It was possible that remains of medieval waterfront activity and post-medieval ship-building activity might be exposed. Timbers from the 19th-century shipyard were exposed but otherwise the site proved to have been extremely disturbed in modern times. Foundations to one of the gasworks buildings were exposed and there was also much contamination in the area of the gasworks.

2 Introduction (Figs 1-2)

- 2.1** This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief carried out at the former Cooks shipyard and gasworks, Wivenhoe, near Colchester. Taylor Wimpey were granted planning permission to erect houses, flats, offices, and a fisherman's store with WC and to refurbish the wet dock, jetty, slipway and waterfront (planning ref.: O/COL/01/1799). Wivenhoe is located 6 km to the south-east of Colchester, on the tidal reach of the River Colne. The development site is on the north-eastern bank of the river, accessed via Brook Street and St John's Road, and is centred on National Grid Reference TM 040 214. The watching brief was only carried out on a selected area of the development site, as defined by the written scheme of investigation (see section 2.4). This comprised the area to the north, east and west of the wet dock (parcels D, E and F respectively).
- 2.2** The work was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between the 2nd March 2006 and the 16th November 2007. The watching brief was commissioned by CgMs on behalf of Taylor Wimpey. A preparatory visit was made on the 27th February.
- 2.3** Previously the watching brief site consisted of a shipyard with an old gasworks to the north. Both sets of buildings had been demolished by the time the watching brief began, but concrete slipways and the floor slabs of demolished buildings were still visible. The site covers an area 70m x 60m and the height AOD varies between 3m and 3.4m.
- 2.4** All fieldwork was done in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI) written by Steven Weaver of CgMs and agreed with Martin Winter of Colchester Borough Council. This report conforms to standards and practices contained in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on the standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (CM 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (CM 2003), and the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IFA 1999) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IFA 2001). The guidance contained in the documents *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE), and *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment* (EAA 3), *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy* (EAA 8), and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14) was also followed.

3 Archaeological and historical background

- 3.1** A Neolithic arrowhead and a bronze spearhead have been found in the parish. These artefacts and some linear features suggest prehistoric settlement. The medieval church of St Mary, in the centre of the old town, has Roman tile and brick in its fabric, indicating a Roman building in the vicinity (EHER no 2538). The place name, Wivenhoe, meaning Wifa's ridge or spur of land, suggests early Anglo-Saxon settlement (*VCH 10*, 274-81).
- 3.2** Wivenhoe's port, in the south-west corner of the parish, developed into a small town. The port was an important part of Colchester port from the 16th century until the late 19th century, when the river was no longer navigable for larger ships upstream from

Wivenhoe to the Hythe. In 1584, the lord of Wivenhoe manor was entitled to levies on ships for anchorage in the port, driftwood, and 'royal fishes'. Water transport connected Wivenhoe with London (*VCH 10*, 274-81).

- 3.3** What is now known as Cooks shipyard was one of two shipyards in Wivenhoe, the other having been upstream. In 1840 it was owned by the Husk family and it predominantly manufactured small craft. By the end of World War 2, the shipyard was under new ownership and had expanded to include a large shed, four slipways, a further covered slipway for larger vessels and a wet berthing basin (Ellis 2003). James W Cook and Co Ltd purchased the yard, plus an additional 10 acres adjoining, in 1947. Initially only Cooks' work was undertaken, consisting of repair of barges, tugs and tankers and the construction of yachts and small boats. Capacity was, however, sufficient for additional outside work to be undertaken. By the 1960s, the yard facilities comprised five slipways, eight building berths, a 200 foot-long fitting-out basin and a variety of cranes (Ellis 2003). In 1972 James W Cook and Co Ltd was taken over by the Ocean Steamship Company and ships of increasingly large size were manufactured at the yard. In 1986, James W Cook and Co Ltd went into liquidation.
- 3.4** A gas company in Wivenhoe was formed in 1861, and was still trading in 1937. The gasworks were sited on St John's Road.

4 Aim

The aim of the fieldwork was to record and interpret any archaeological features or finds which were disturbed by the groundworks. Particular attention was paid to establishing the location and extent of any medieval waterfront activity and any post-medieval ship-building activity.

5 Methods (Fig 2)

- 5.1** An archaeologist from CAT made visits during the contractor's groundworks to carry out a watching brief. Groundworks included trenches dug for removal of contamination, an exploratory trench, piling, ground-beam trenches, drain trenches and manholes as well as trenches for sheet piling and tie beams. Twenty-four visits were made in total.
- 5.2** All the groundworks were carried out by contractors using a mechanical excavator. A toothed bucket was mainly used due to the concrete slabs and the rubble beneath which had to be removed.
- 5.3** Potential archaeological deposits which were exposed were cleaned by hand, although water and contamination in the trenches meant that this was not always possible. Individual records of layers were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets.
- 5.4** Section drawings were made at a scale of 1:10 or 1:20. A plan was made at a scale of 1:100.
- 5.5** Finds were registered on CAT pro-forma record sheets and assigned finds numbers according to context. Finds were washed, marked and bagged according to context.
- 5.6** Colour photographs were taken with a digital camera.

6 Results (Figs 2-5)

2nd March 2006 (Fig 3)

A trench was dug to a depth of 2m in order to remove contamination from the old gasworks site. The top 900mm of material consisted of modern made-up ground containing modern bricks and other material. Brick foundations for the former gasworks building were seen. At 900mm below ground-level, a seam of black oily contaminated ground was observed. This sealed grey brown clay which continued to the base of the trench. The clay layer contained some brick fragments higher up but lower down appeared to be natural alluvium. Tar residues from the layer above were seeping into the clay. It was not possible to enter the trench so the sides could not

be cleaned. However, no obvious archaeological features were present in the trench.

16th, 24th, 27th and 29th March 2006 (Figs 4-5 and Plate 2)

An exploratory trench was dug alongside the wet dock, on its eastern side. This was 1.2-1.3m deep, 48.2m long and 2.2m wide. The sections of the trench were examined and the following profile recorded. The top 400mm consisted of loose asphalt mixed with stone and sand. Below this was a 300mm-thick layer of moist brown sand containing frequent stones. This sealed a layer of light greyish yellow sand. All these layers were modern and rather mixed. At the extreme southern end of the trench, at 800-900mm below ground-level, a layer of wood was observed in the east-facing section of the trench. This wood was partially water-logged and mainly consisted of small twigs but also included one larger timber lying on its side. This wood lay in a grey clay matrix. Below this and continuing to the base of the trench was a grey clay which was very sticky in consistency. This clay had the appearance of natural alluvium but the presence of an unfrosted brick (finds no 1) within it gives a post-medieval or early 19th-century date to this deposit. The trench filled up with water at high tide. Along the base of the trench, within the grey clay deposit, were seven partially water-logged timbers (Timber 1-Timber 7). Timber 1, at the southern end of the trench, was circular and lay horizontally on an east-west alignment. Timbers 2 and 3 were fragments of circular timbers lying horizontally within a clay-filled linear cut. The cut corresponded with the area of water-logged wood seen in the section and may be associated with it. Further north were the stumps of two upright square timbers (Timbers 4 and 5). A piece of clay pipe (finds no 2) was found in the clay next to Timber 4. Approximately half-way along the trench, in the east-facing section, was a second clay-filled cut containing another timber (Timber 6). This timber was horizontal but had been cut away and both the cut and the timber were seen in section only. Just to the north was another linear clay-filled cut on an east-west alignment. This contained a circular timber (Timber 7) which was lying horizontally (Plate 2). The northern half of the trench did not contain any timbers. Timbers 1-7 were only partially water-logged and did not appear to be of any great antiquity. The clay pipe and brick found in the clay matrix which contained the timbers makes it likely that they belong to the post-medieval period or the early 19th century. They may have been parts of a timber wharf to the shipyard.



Plate 2: section of exploratory trench by the wet dock showing Timber 7, March 2006; view north-west.

29th and 31st March 2006

Piling for Parcel D on the north side of the wet dock was monitored, but the upcast consisted of clay sludge and nothing of significance could be seen. Before the piling rig was brought in, a layer of crushed concrete approximately 400-600mm thick was laid down in order to create a stable base for the piling rig to sit on.

12th April 2006

Ground-beam trenches were being dug for Parcel D to the north of the wet dock. These were approximately 1m deep and only disturbed made-up ground which included the layer of crushed concrete brought in for the piling rig to sit on.

4th May 2006

A visit was made but no groundworks had been carried out since the last visit.

24th May 2006

The excavation for a manhole was monitored to the north-west of the wet dock. The trench was 1.8m deep and was dug through 400mm of brick rubble. This had been laid on top of 800mm of sand and gravel interleaved with black ashy layers. At 1.2m below ground-level the soil became packed with peg-tile and mortar and this layer continued to the base of the trench. There was no contamination here. An existing brick manhole was exposed on the northern side of the trench.

12th, 13th, 14th and 22nd June 2006

Groundworks for a storm-drain trench and manhole to the north of Parcel D and on the line of the new access road were monitored. The drain trench was 2.2m deep, 1m wide and located in the area of the previous gasworks. The trench was dug mainly through modern made-up contaminated ground. At 1.8m below ground-level, grey clay (the natural estuarine alluvium) was encountered. Two timber stakes were seen on the spoil heap and a third was still *in situ* in the trench by the time of the monitoring visit. One of the stakes from the spoil heap was collected by the author (finds no 5).

27th June, 3rd and 11th July 2006

Three visits were made during the excavation of a storm-drain trench and sewer trenches on the line of the new access road. However, these were outside the area of the watching brief and therefore no records were made.

10th August and 19th September 2006

Two visits were made but no groundworks were taking place.

10th and 17th July, 7th August 2007

Groundworks resumed after a delay in the programme of several months. Sheet piling was being inserted around the wet dock and to the east and west of it during these visits. This involved contractors digging a continuous trench 1.7m wide and 600mm deep for the sheet-piling machine to sit in. The sheet piles were then pushed in by the machine by means of vibrations. On the 10th July, the area to the west of the wet dock was monitored. The sheet piling had already been inserted and the whole area had been reduced down to nearly 2m below ground-level. One metre-wide trenches had subsequently been dug down into this reduced level. These were dug to insert the steel tie beams which were to secure the sheet piling. The ground reduction had only stripped away modern material. The spoil heap was inspected and found to contain modern glass and ceramic bottles, plastic, unfrosted brick, oyster shells and wood. Two leather shoe soles were also retrieved (finds no 3). On the 17th July, sheet piling to the east of the wet dock was monitored. The open trench for the sheet-piling machine was monitored and seen to have been dug only through crushed concrete, laid down in 2006. On the 7th August, after the sheet piling to the east of the wet dock had been inserted, the author monitored some trenches which were opened up to their rear to insert tie beams. Again these were dug through made-up ground.

9th November 2007

Piles and ground-beams had already been constructed for Parcels F and D, to the west and north of the wet dock respectively.

16th November 2007

A final visit was made after piles had been drilled for the most southerly plots in Parcel E, on the east side of the wet dock, most of which lay outside the watching brief area. The ground-beam trenches had not been dug. However, a large trench had been excavated around all the piles, which was between 750mm and 850mm deep. This had mainly been dug through the crushed concrete which had been laid down before the piling rig was brought in.

7 List of finds

(Brick and pottery were identified by Howard Brooks of CAT.)

Finds no	Context	Description	Date	Weight (in g)
1	Lower clay layer of exploratory trench	1 piece of unfrosted brick	post-medieval, pre-1850	836.0
2	Lower clay layer of exploratory trench, by Timber 4	1 fragment of clay pipe stem	post-medieval	4.7
3	U/S from spoil heap created by sheet piling work west of the wet dock	2 leather shoe soles	?19th century	53.0
4	From trench for sheet piling east of wet dock	Neck and part of handle of a Frechen ware vessel	?18th-19th century	118.0
5	U/S spoil from storm drain trench and manhole to the north of Parcel D	One timber stake	?	?

8 Discussion

No remains of medieval waterfront activity and post-medieval ship-building activity were exposed by the groundworks. It may be that the earliest ship-building took place upstream, at the other shipyard. Similarly the medieval quay may have been sited upstream. Timbers from the 19th-century shipyard were recorded, but otherwise the site proved to have been extremely disturbed in modern times and there was a substantial depth of modern made-up ground. Below the modern make-up, natural alluvial clay was exposed in some places. Foundations to one of the gasworks buildings were revealed and there was also much contamination in that area.

9 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 Colchester and Ipswich Museums under accession code COLEM 2006.24.

10 Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to CgMs for commissioning the work and to Taylor Wimpey for funding it. The project was monitored by Martin Winter of Colchester Borough Council. The fieldwork was carried out by S Benfield and K Orr.

11 References

- | | | |
|----------|------|--|
| CgMs | 2006 | <i>Written Scheme of Investigation, former Cooks shipyard and gasworks, Wivenhoe</i> , by Steven Weaver |
| CM | 2002 | <i>Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i> |
| CM | 2003 | <i>Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums</i> |
| EAA 3 | 1997 | <i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 3 , ed by J Glazebrook |
| EAA 8 | 2000 | <i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 8 , ed by N Brown & J Glazebrook |
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| MoRPHE | 2006 | <i>Management of research projects in the historic environment</i> (English Heritage) |
| VCH 10 | 2001 | 'Wivenhoe: introduction', <i>A History of the County of Essex: Volume 10: Lexden Hundred including Dedham, Earls Colne and Wivenhoe</i> , 274-81 |

12 Glossary

Anglo-Saxon	the period following the Roman occupation, c AD 410-1066
CM	Colchester and Ipswich Museums
context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
ECC	Essex County Council
EHHER	Essex Historic Environment Record, held by ECC
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
modern	period from the 19th century onwards to the present
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
Neolithic	the New Stone Age, c 4,000-2,000 BC
post-medieval	the period from c AD 1500 to around c AD 1900
Roman	the period between AD 43 and c AD 410
U/S	unstratified, ie no context

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Date: 21.12.07

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Fig 1 Site location (extract from 1958 OS map).

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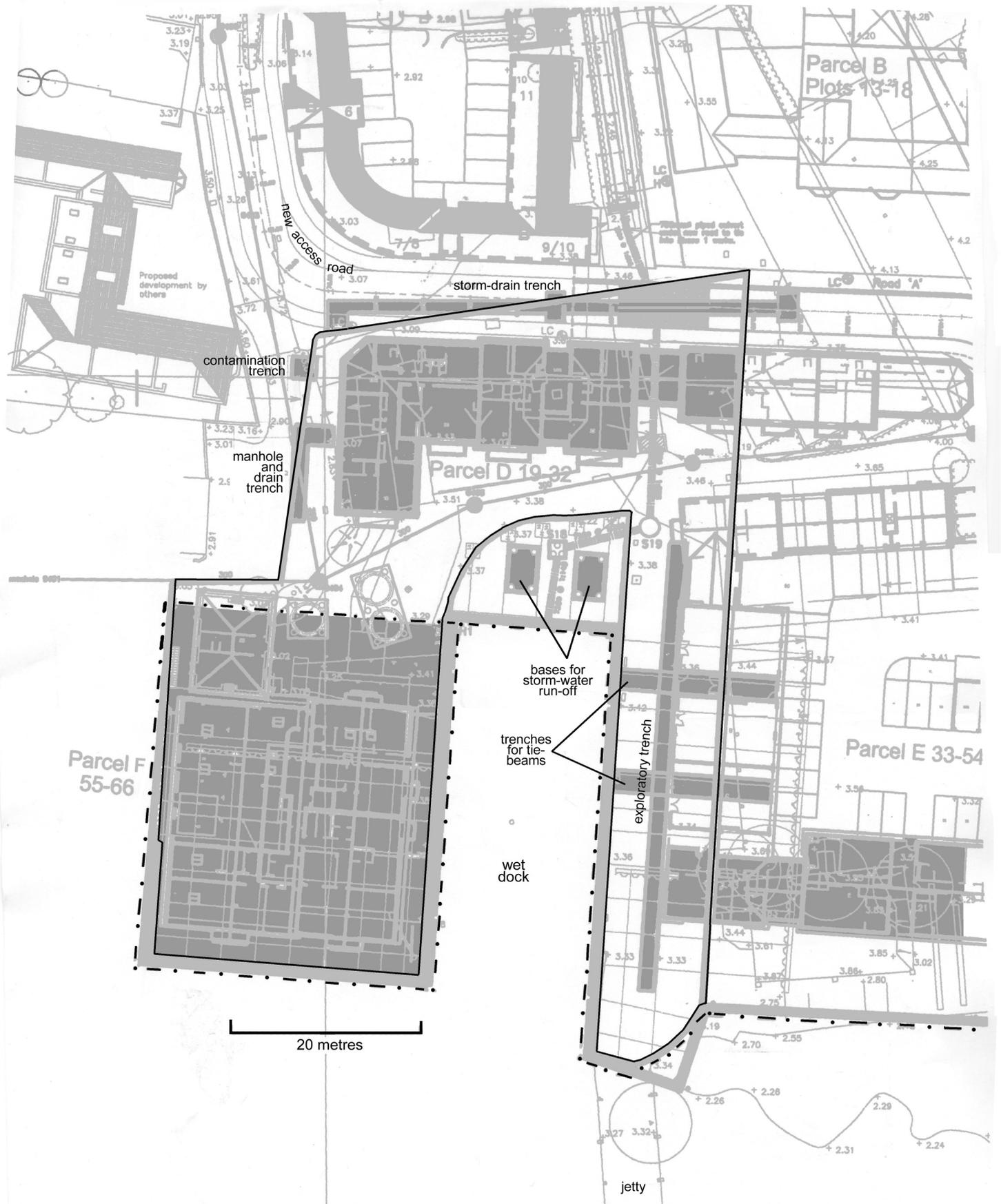


Fig 2 Plan of site, showing areas monitored.

- watching brief area
- - - sheet piling
- +3.33 AOD height in metres
- groundworks monitored

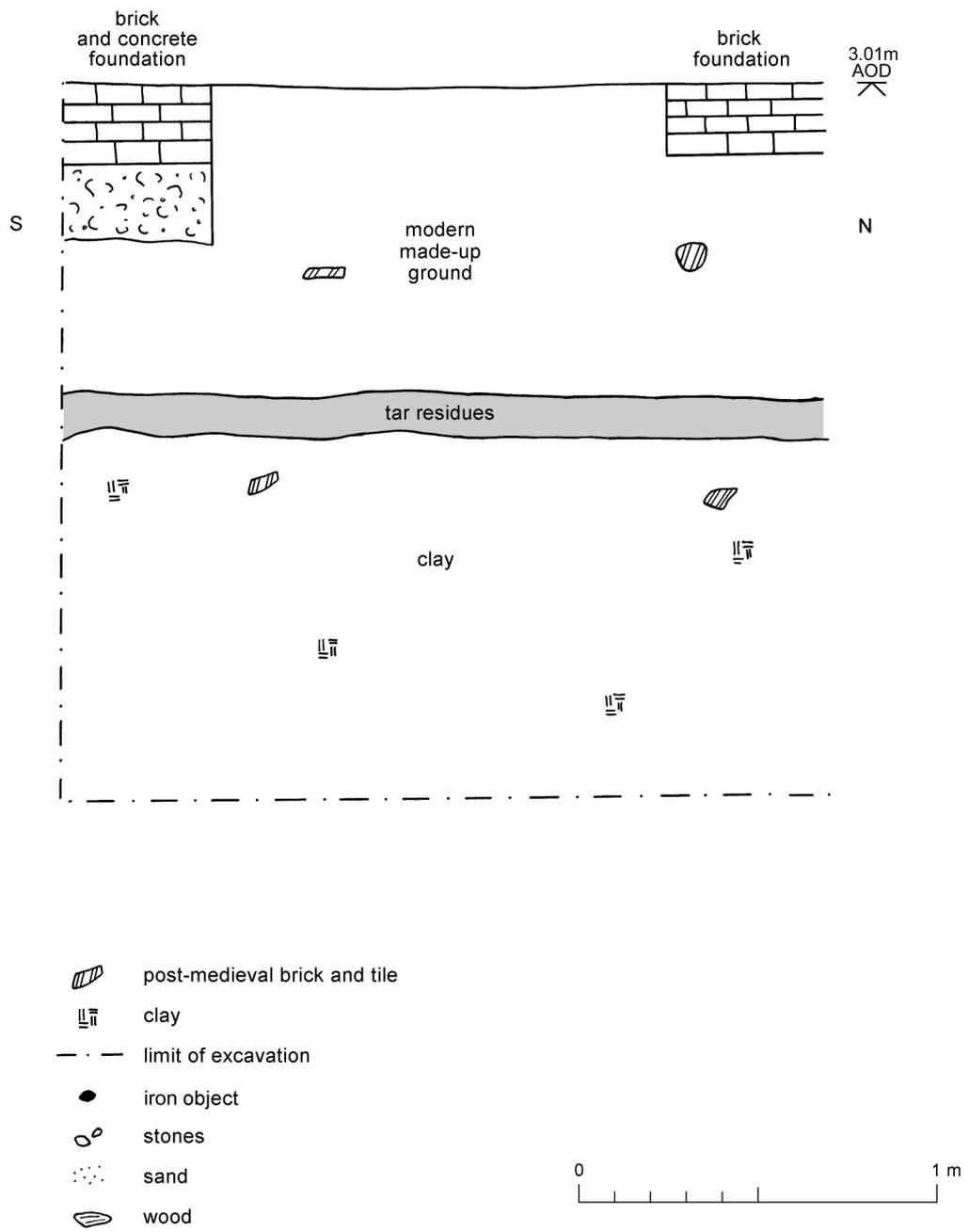


Fig 3 East-facing section of trench dug to remove contamination.

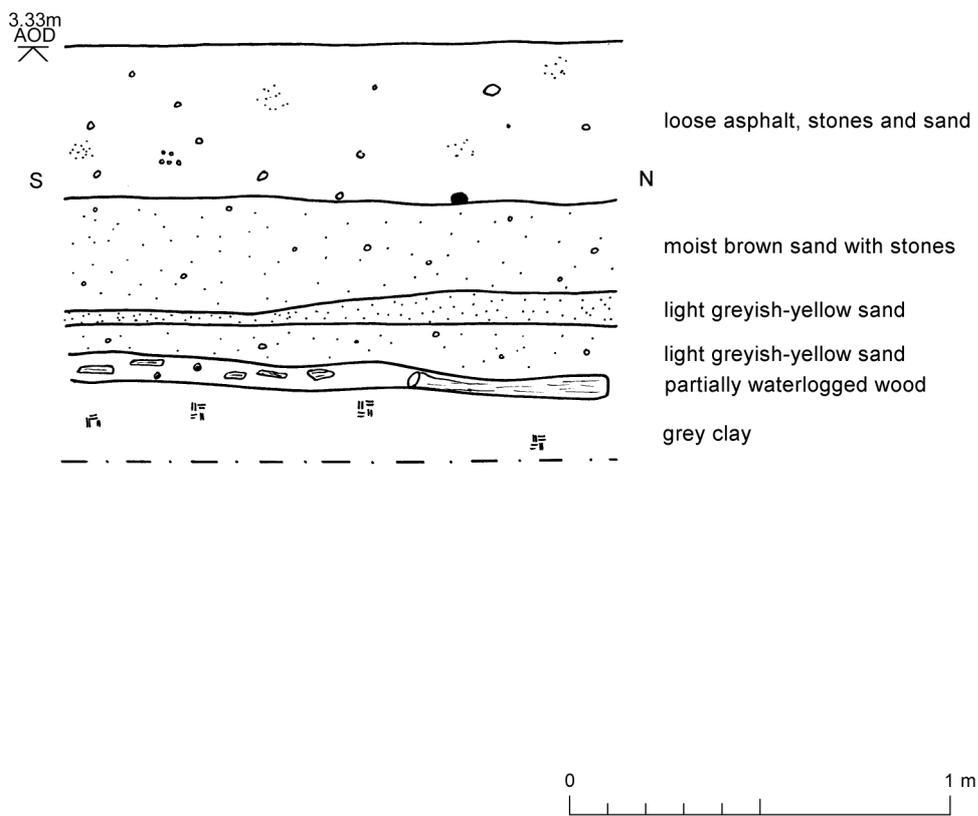


Fig 4 East-facing section of exploratory trench.

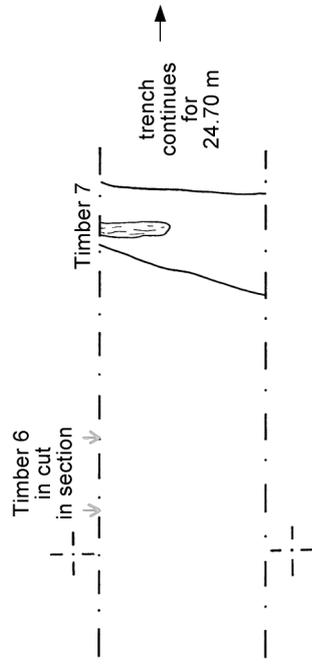
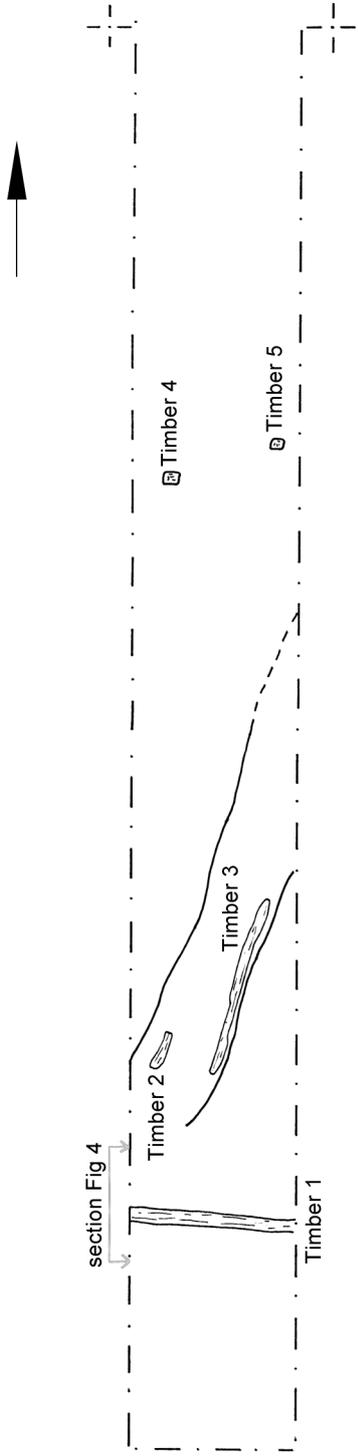


Fig 5 Plan of exploratory trench, showing timbers.

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

Summary sheet

Site address: the former Cooks shipyard and gasworks, Wivenhoe, near Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Wivenhoe	District: Colchester
NGR: TM 040 214 (c)	Site code: Museum accession code COLEM 2006.24
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: March 2006-November 2007	Size of area investigated: 70m x 60m
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHER nos: 2538
Final report: CAT Report 448 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: 19th century	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>Over an 18-month period, a watching brief was carried out on groundworks for a residential development on a former shipyard and gasworks in Wivenhoe. It was possible that remains of medieval waterfront activity and post-medieval ship-building activity might be exposed. Timbers from the 19th-century shipyard were exposed but otherwise the site proved to have been extremely disturbed in modern times. Foundations to one of the gasworks buildings were exposed and there was also much contamination in the area of the gasworks.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: December 2007