

# Investigation of Henry Laver's postulated route of the Roman road from Colchester to Mersea Island

## CAT Report 478

**Site address:** Abberton Reservoir, Abberton, Colchester, Essex  
**Date of fieldwork:** 20th May 2008  
**NGR:** NGR TL 5998 2191 (c)  
**CBC brief:** Yes  
**Figures attached:** Yes (Figs 1-3)  
**CAT project code:** 08/5c  
**Museum accession:** COLEM 2008.61

### Archaeological background

The evaluation site lies 5 miles to the south of Colchester town centre, to the west of the village of Abberton (Fig 1). The site in question has long been suspected to be the course of a Roman or possible earlier road/trackway associated with the walled Roman town of Colchester or the earlier Iron Age *oppidum*, leading to Mersea Island (Laver 1889, 131). There has been little archaeological activity and no discoveries recorded in the evaluation area, although deposits of Roman pottery and tile have been recorded some 1700m to the west of the evaluation site (EHER nos 11575-11576).

### Brief report

A single evaluation trench measuring 15m in length was excavated under archaeological supervision using a 360° tracked machine.

The trench bisected the projected line of an existing track that is of suspected Roman origin. The evaluation trench was cut through modern topsoil (L1), which directly sealed natural geological material, a thick heavy clay matrix (L2; Fig 3).

Two features were identified within the evaluation trench, ie a modern field-drain (F2) and a trackway (F1; Fig 2). The track was 4m wide and formed of roughly compacted gravel and medium- to large-sized cobbles. Within the lower make-up of the track, crushed brick and salt-glazed pipe fragments were recorded. The brick fragments were frogged, indicating that the earliest possible date for deposition is mid 19th century. This would suggest that the track was constructed in the post-medieval/modern period and was possibly a farm-track.

It is possible that F1 replaced an older track, which has been removed (although no material pre-dating the post-medieval period was observed in the evaluation). Also noted in the evaluation was a lack of any accumulation material. This, in conjunction with the fact that modern topsoil directly sealed natural layers, suggests that material has been removed from here, possibly at the time of works associated with the construction of the main reservoir.

The investigation was commissioned by Northumberland Water and Essex and Suffolk Water, and monitored by Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council.

### Finds

Finds that were recovered consisted of post-medieval and modern brick; none of this material was retained. No Roman material was recovered from the evaluation.

### References

Laver, H, 1889 'Roman roads near to, and those radiating from Colchester', *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society*, 3, N.S., 79, 123 ff

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**Report date:** June 2008

**Distribution list:**

Northumberland Water and Essex and Suffolk Water  
Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council  
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Fig 1 Trench location.

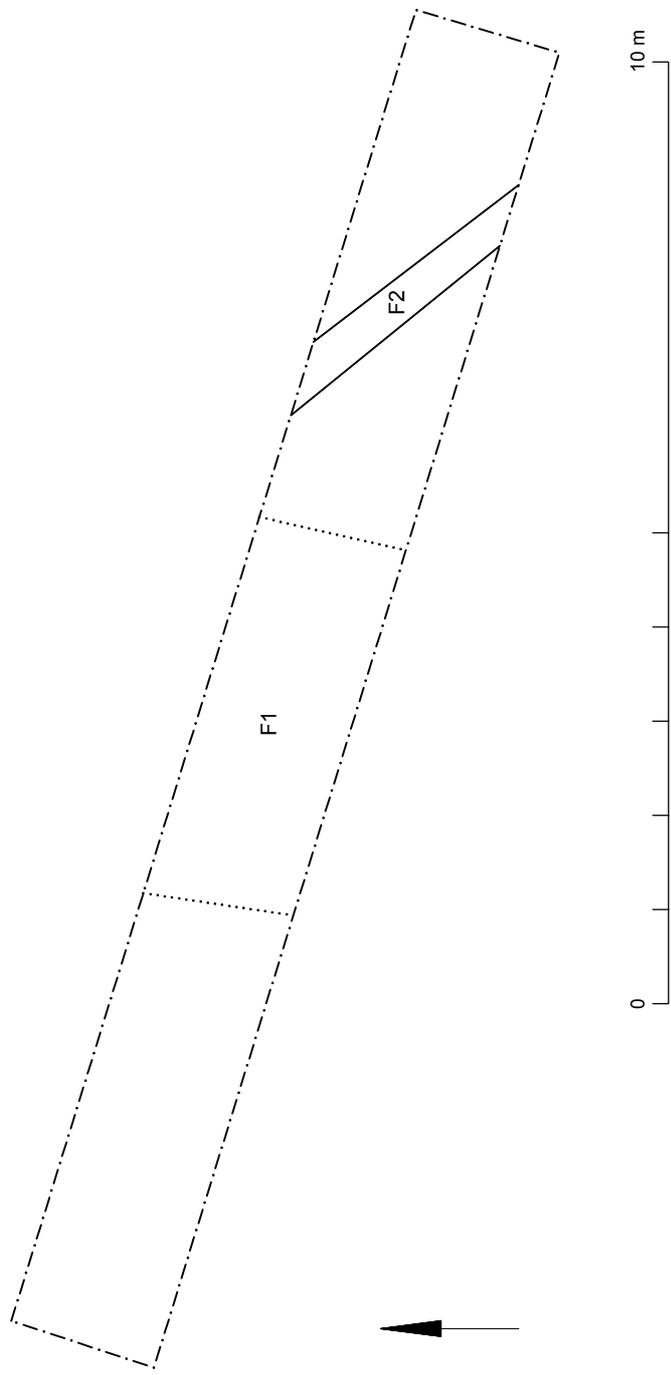


Fig 2 Plan of trench.

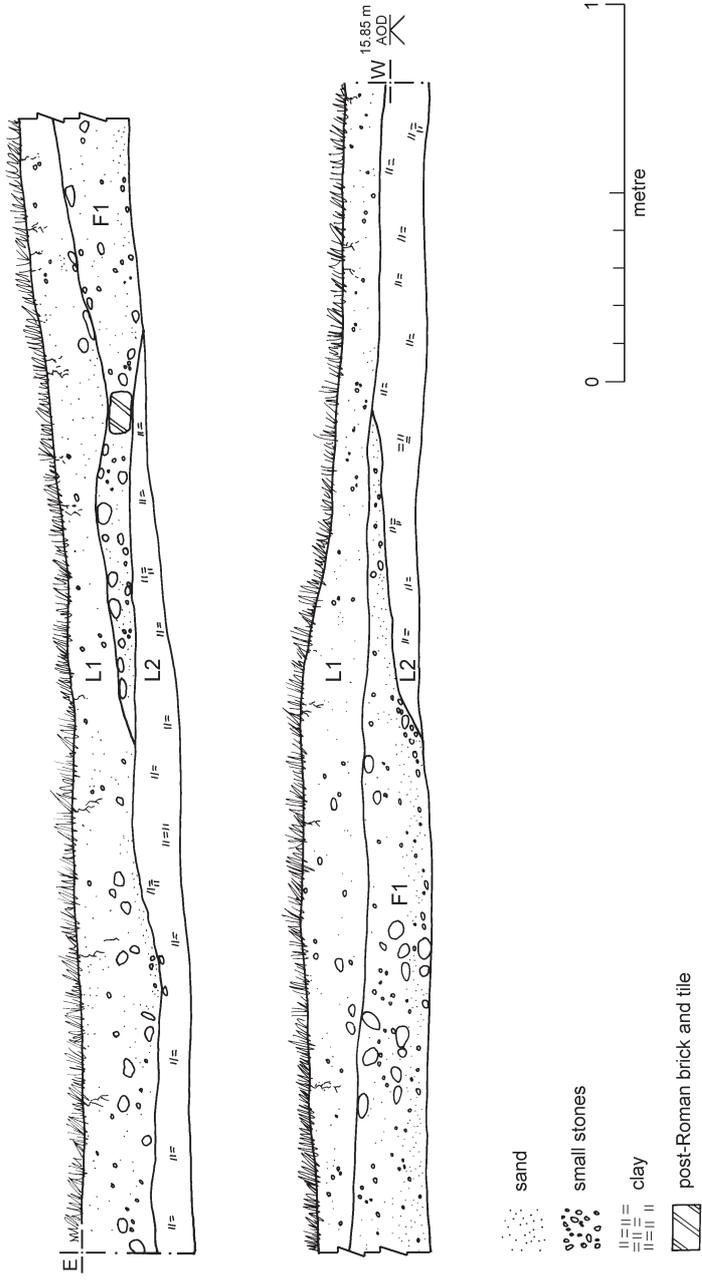


Fig 3 Section.

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

**Summary sheet**

<b>Site address:</b> Abberton Reservoir, Abberton, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Abberton	<b>District:</b> Colchester
<b>NGR:</b> TL 5998 2191 (c)	<b>Site code:</b> CAT project code: 08/5c Museum accession code COLEM 2008.61
<b>Type of work:</b> Evaluation	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> May 2008	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 24m sq area strip
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester and Ipswich Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Developer
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related EHER nos:</b> 11575-11576
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 478	
<b>Periods represented:</b> post-medieval and modern farm-track and field-drain	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b>  <i>A single trench was positioned to bisect the projected line of an existing track that is of suspected Roman origin. Two features were identified, ie a modern field-drain and a track. The track was 4m wide and formed of roughly compacted gravel and medium- to large-sized cobbles. Within the lower make-up of the track, crushed brick and salt-glazed pipe fragments were recorded. This would suggest that the track was constructed in the post-medieval/modern period and was possibly a farm-track.</i>  <i>Finds that were recovered consisted of post-medieval and modern brick; none of this material was retained. No Roman material was recovered from the evaluation.</i></p>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> None	
<b>Keywords:</b> -	<b>Significance:</b> neg
<b>Author of summary:</b> Ben Holloway	<b>Date of summary:</b> June 2008