

**An archaeological evaluation
on land adjacent to 9 Walters Yard,
Colchester, Essex
April 2009**

**report prepared by
Ben Holloway and Howard Brooks**

**on behalf of
Ellisdale Builders**

CAT project ref.: 09/4c
NGR: TL 9955 2537 (c)
Colchester and Ipswich Museums code: COLEM 2009.25



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1 Summary

This site is on the eastern side of Insula 11 of the Roman town.

An archaeological trial-trenching evaluation established that the highest significant archaeological horizons were Roman in date, and were at depths ranging from 1.0m to 1.4m below present ground-level. The Roman horizons were overlaid by a considerable depth of post-medieval and modern strata.

As would be expected in the Roman town, the post-medieval soils contained a quantity of Roman brick and tile and other building material derived from the robbing of Roman buildings in the vicinity.

A robber trench marked the position of the wall of a Roman building (robbed out in the medieval period) which stood in the north-eastern quarter of the insula, and an adjacent fragment of compacted clay represented the floor of a Roman building probably pre-dating the robbed wall.

Historic maps indicate that this was an area of gardens in the post-medieval period. That fact, combined with the gradual infilling of previous garden areas with new buildings during the 18th-20th centuries, would explain the depths of modern and post-medieval soils identified on the site.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological evaluation on a parcel of land adjacent to 9 Walters Yard, Colchester, Essex.
- 2.2 The evaluation was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on behalf of Ellisdale Builders on the 29th April 2009.
- 2.3 The site lies within the historic 'Dutch Quarter' in Colchester town centre, and is accessed from an alleyway (ie Walters Yard) which leads off West Stockwell Street. The 10 x 10m square site is currently vacant, and is overgrown with weeds and small shrubs.
- 2.4 The site is centred at NGR TL 9955 2537.
- 2.5 Fieldwork and post-excavation methodology were set out in a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI: CAT 2009) agreed with Colchester Borough Council Archaeological Officer, and were done in accordance with in CAT's *Policies and procedures* (CAT 2008), Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (CIM 2008a) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester and Ipswich Museums* (CIM 2008b), the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 2008a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IfA 2008b). The guidance contained in the documents *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* by English Heritage (MoRPHE) and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14) was also followed.

3 Archaeological background (Fig 1)

The site lies close to the northern edge of the site of the legionary fortress and on the eastern edge of Insula 11 of the later Roman town. There is a clear potential for the discovery of Roman buildings here.

A Roman tessellated pavement (Hull 1958, plate XLI, find no 23), and a wall foundation (CAR 6, fig 2.9, p 15) have been recorded close to this site. The discovery of Roman pits and a Roman mortar floor during the construction in 1980 of a block of Borough Council flats (UAD no 3279) indicates that other Roman structural remains may survive in the immediate vicinity.

Post-Roman activity appears to have been limited to the houses fronting onto West Stockwell Street, particularly nos 57 and 58. Therefore pits and possibly ancillary structures associated with these buildings may be expected on the present site, which coincides with their back gardens.

4 Aim

The aim of the evaluation was to establish the depth below modern ground-level of the highest significant archaeological horizon, and to establish, as far as was safely practicable, the character, extent, date, significance and condition of any archaeological remains and deposits likely to be affected by proposed works.

5 Results (Figs 1-3)

The evaluation trench was excavated in the centre of the site. The removal of 600mm of modern topsoil (L1) revealed a thick layer of post-medieval and modern accumulation material 200mm in thickness (L2). A modern pit (F2) cut L2, and probably L1, although the homogeneous nature of L1 made this difficult to establish. L2 also sealed a post-medieval wall foundation (F1), which was also cut by pit F2.

L2 sealed a buried soil horizon (L3). This was a dark, slightly humic layer which contained peg-tile and was therefore a post-medieval horizon. L3 sealed a Roman demolition horizon (L4).

At the north end of the evaluation trench, L3 sealed a compacted clay floor (F4), and a robber trench (F3) dated by pottery to the 12th or 13th century. This robber trench marked the position of a Roman wall. This may have been a wall of the building associated with the clay floor F4, but it is more likely to have been the wall of a later structure. The reasoning behind this conclusion is that Roman town-houses of the 2nd or 3rd centuries, with mortared stone footings, more commonly had tessellated floors rather than clay floors, so the clay floor is probably that of an earlier structure on the same spot.

Natural ground (ie sands and gravels) was not reached in this evaluation. This was because excavation was halted at 1.4m below ground-level for two reasons: first, for safety; second, because the principal project aim was to establish the depth below ground-level of the highest significant archaeological horizon (which was, in this case, Roman strata at 1.40-1.4m below ground-level).

6 Finds

Bulk finds are listed in the archive. Included below are reports on the Roman pottery, post-Roman pottery, the Roman *tessera*, and the small finds.

6.1 The Roman pottery

by Stephen Benfield

Roman pottery consisted of a single sherd associated with Roman clay floor F4. This was an 8g sherd of Fabric DJ, a locally-produced oxidised ware (fabric description is after *CAR 10*). This sherd dates the clay floor F4 to the 1st-3rd centuries.

6.2 The post-Roman pottery

by Howard Brooks

Introduction

This is the report on a group of 12 sherds (weighing 378g) of post-Roman pottery. The finds will be deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums under accession code COLEM 2009.25.

Description of pottery

Fabrics present are as follows (after *CAR 7*): Fabric 20 (medieval sandy grey ware); Fabric 40a (Metropolitan slipware); Fabric 42 (Border ware); and Fabric 45f (Westerwald ware).

Comment

The largest group of pottery (6 sherds of Fabric 20) is from F3, a medieval robber trench. Fabric 20 has a date-range of later 12th or 13th century, which accords well with the normal date-range for the medieval robbing of Roman walls. The other post-

medieval material, from modern topsoil (finds no 5) and associated with a post-medieval wall (finds no 3), is not particularly significant.

Catalogue

F1 (post-medieval wall)

Finds no 3

Fabric 20, 1 sherd, 2g

Fabric 42, 1 sherd, 12g

Fabric 45f, 1 sherd, 10g

Group date: 17th or early 18th century

F3 (medieval robber trench)

Finds no 4

Fabric 20, 6 sherds, 270g

Group date: later 12th or 13th century

L1 (modern topsoil)

Finds no 5

Fabric 40a, 1 sherd, 22g

Fabric 42, 1 sherd, 56g

Fabric 45f, 1 sherd, 6g

Group date: 17th or early 18th century

6.3 The tessera

A single red *tessera* cube measuring 250mm x 250mm x 200mm was recovered from Roman demolition horizon L4. This *tessera* has undoubtedly been robbed out of a nearby Roman tessellated floor (several of which are reported in this vicinity: see section 3, above).

6.4 The small find

by Emma Spurgeon

Melon bead, L4 (finds number 6), SF 1

Turquoise frit melon bead. Melon beads are usually found in 1st- to 2nd-century contexts, having been introduced into this country at the conquest (CAR 2, 30). Similar examples were found during the Lion Walk excavation (CAR 2, fig 32, 520-21). Diameter 17.3 mm, length 13.4 mm.

7 Conclusions

The highest significant archaeological horizon identified by this evaluation was the top of the deeply-buried Roman layer (L4). Although it is difficult to make definitive statements about this horizon, as it was not sampled because it was too deeply-buried for safe working, the discovery of similar layers in evaluations and excavations on Roman sites in Colchester allows us to identify it as a layer resulting from the demolition of Roman buildings which once stood here.

The site lies in the north-east quarter of Insula 11. After allowing for footways on both sides of the streets, it lies 24m south of the northern frontage of the *insula* and 34m west of the eastern frontage. Given the usual arrangements inside *insulae*, this means that the uppermost Roman remains either belong to a large house occupying the north-east corner of the *insula* or a long narrow house extending southwards from the northern frontage. The compacted clay surface F4 is, therefore, certainly part of a 1st- to 3rd-century building on this site, and most probably part of a 2nd- or 3rd-century Roman town-house in Insula 11. It was possibly a part of the Roman building, the mortar and tessellated floors of which have previously been identified nearby (see section 3, above).

Overlying the Roman demolition layer was a buried topsoil layer (L3). In view of its stratigraphical position, it would be logical to interpret this as post-Roman and medieval topsoil which accumulated on top of the Roman deposits. However, the presence of fragments of peg-tile demonstrates that it is a post-medieval context, or perhaps an earlier horizon disturbed in the post-medieval period.

Historic maps of the town centre show the evaluation site as gardens associated

with the properties fronting onto West Stockwell Street, and it has remained as open ground to the present day.

Continuing use of the evaluation site as back gardens in the post-medieval period would account for the accumulation of such a thick deposit as L1. The modern pit F2 was probably cut into the gardens rear of properties fronting onto West Stockwell Street, and probably pre-dates the development of Walters Yard and the current property divisions.

8 Archive deposition

The evaluation archive, including the site records, photographs and finds, will be permanently deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums under accession code COLEM 2009.25, in accordance with *Archaeological archives: a guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation* (IfA 2007).

9 Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to Ellisdale Builders (Mr Dean Pearce) for commissioning and funding the evaluation on behalf of their client. The project was monitored by Martin Winter of Colchester Borough Council. Site work was directed by B Holloway.

10 References

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|-----------|-------|--|
| CAR 2 | 1983 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 2: The Roman small finds from excavations in Colchester 1971-9</i> , by N Crummy |
| CAR 6 | 1992 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 6: Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School, and other sites in Colchester, 1971-85</i> , by P Crummy |
| CAR 7 | 2000 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 7: Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85</i> , by J Cotter |
| CAR 10 | 1999 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 10: Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-86</i> , by R P Symonds and S Wade, ed by P Bidwell and A Croom |
| CAT | 2008 | <i>Policies and procedures</i> |
| CAT | 2009 | <i>WSI for archaeological investigation by trial-trenching at land adjacent to 9 Walters Yard, Colchester</i> |
| CIM | 2008a | <i>Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i> (CBC) |
| CIM | 2008b | <i>Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester and Ipswich Museums</i> (CBC) |
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| Hull, M R | 1958 | <i>Roman Colchester</i> , RRCSAL, 20 |
| IfA | 2007 | <i>Archaeological archives: a guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation</i> |
| IfA | 2008a | <i>Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation</i> |
| IfA | 2008b | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i> |
| MoRPHE | 2006 | <i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment</i> (English Heritage) |

11 Abbreviations and glossary

- | | |
|---------|--|
| CBC | Colchester Borough Council |
| CIM | Colchester and Ipswich Museums |
| context | specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made, usually a layer or a feature |

feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists
<i>insula</i>	Latin for 'island', but used by Romans to describe part of a town in the sense of the modern American 'block'
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c AD 1500
modern	period from c 1850 onwards to the present
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
post-medieval	period from c 1500 to c 1850
robber trench	trench resulting from the removal of a Roman stone wall
Roman	the period from c AD 43 to AD 410
RRCSAL	Report of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London
strata	layers
tessellated	(floor or pavement) made of plain-coloured cubes (tesserae)
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database, held by Colchester and Ipswich Museums

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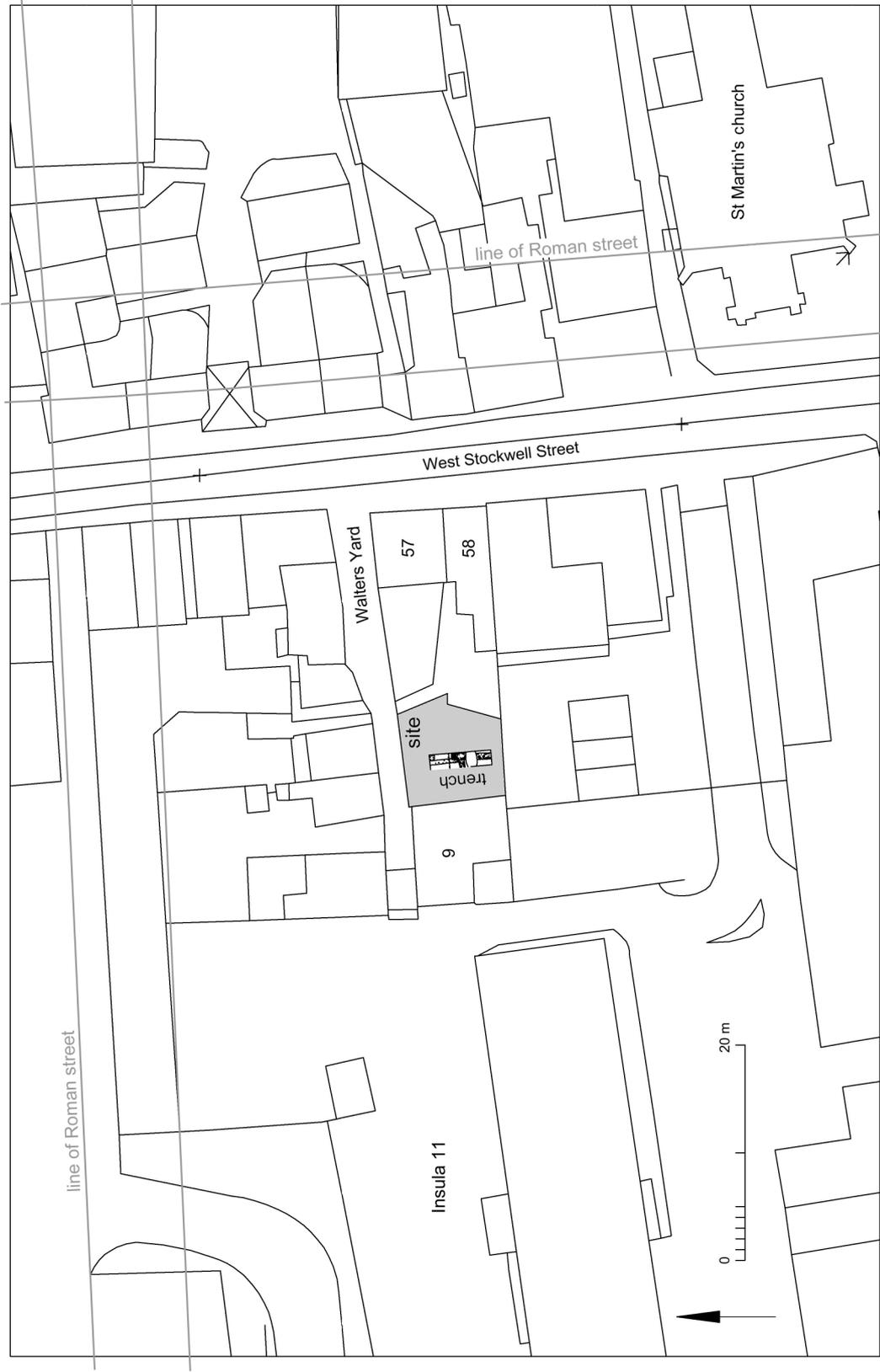


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Fig 1 Site and trench location.

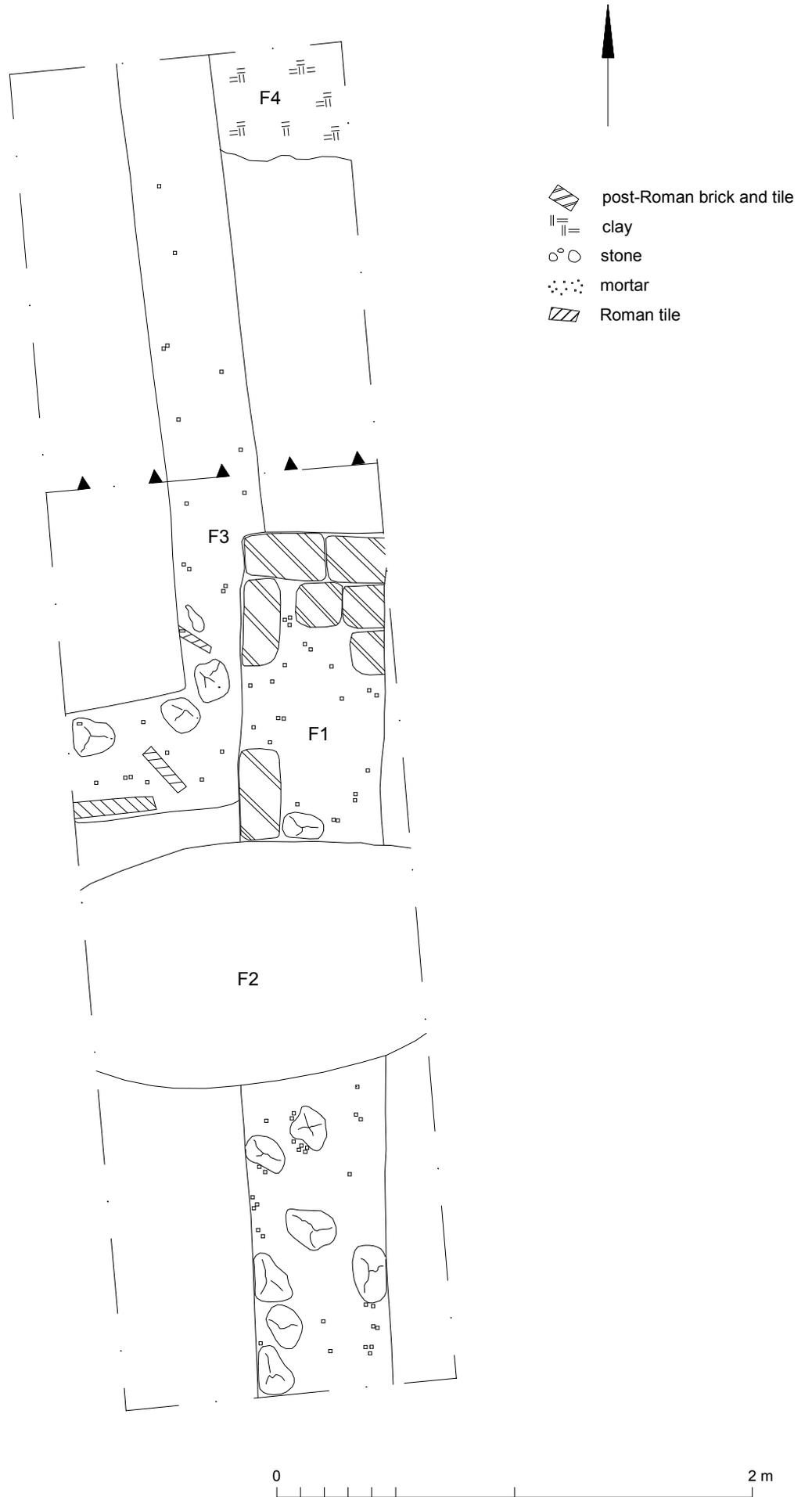
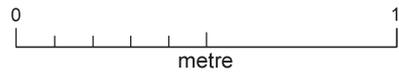
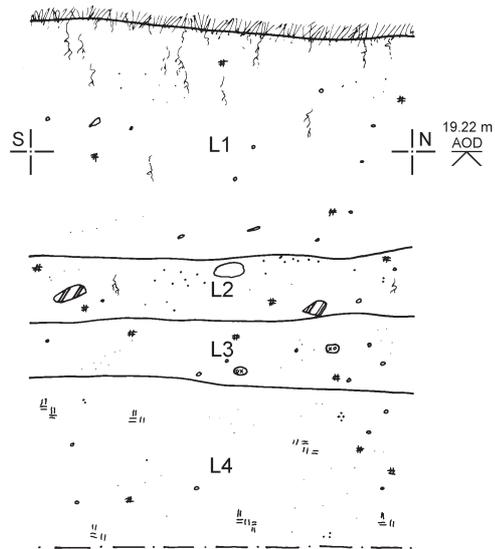


Fig 2 Trench plan.



- | | | | |
|---|--------------|----|---------------------------|
| ⋯ | sand | ## | charcoal |
| ⊙ | small stones | ▨ | post-Roman brick and tile |
| ○ | large stones | ⋯ | mortar |
| | clay | ⊗ | opus signinum |
| | | √ | roots |

Fig 3 Section.

Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

Summary sheet

Site address: land adjacent to 9 Walters Yard, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 9955 2537 (c)	Site code: CAT project code: 09/4c Museum accession code: COLEM 2009.25
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: 29th April 2009	Size of area investigated: Approximately 10m ²
Curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? Yes, probably	Related UAD no: 3279
Final report: CAT Report 512 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Roman, medieval, post-medieval, modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>This site is on the eastern side of Insula 11 of the Roman town. An archaeological trial-trenching evaluation established that the highest significant archaeological horizons were Roman in date, and were at depths ranging from 1.0m to 1.4m below present ground-level. The Roman horizons were overlaid by a considerable depth of post-medieval and modern strata. As would be expected in the Roman town, the post-medieval soils contained a quantity of Roman brick and tile and other building material derived from the robbing of Roman buildings in the vicinity. A robber trench marked the position of the wall of a Roman building (robbed out in the medieval period) which stood in the north-eastern quarter of the insula, and an adjacent fragment of compacted clay represented the floor of a Roman building probably pre-dating the robbed wall. Historic maps indicate that this was an area of gardens in the post-medieval period. That fact, combined with the gradual infilling of previous garden areas with new buildings during the 18th-20th centuries, would explain the depths of modern and post-medieval soils identified on the site.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Keywords: Roman clay floor, medieval robber trench, post-medieval pit	Significance: *
Author of summary: Ben Holloway	Date of summary: May 2009