

**An archaeological watching brief at
1 Rawstorn Road,
Colchester, Essex.
October 2011**

**report prepared by
Stephen Benfield**

**commissioned by
Harding Homes**

CAT project code: 11/8d
Colchester Museums accession code: 2011.52
NGR: TL 99074 2500 (centre)



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SUMMARY SHEET

Archaeological watching brief at 1 Rawstorn Road, Colchester, Essex.

Parish: St Mary's	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 99074 2500 (centre)	Accession Code: 2011.52
Type of Work: watching brief	Site Director/Group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of Work: 19th-20th October 2011	Size of Area observed: footing trenches within an area approximately 8 m x 7 m
Location of Finds/Curating Museum: Colchester & Ipswich Museum	Funding Source : Developer (Harding Homes)
Further Seasons Anticipated? Yes	Periods Represented: Roman(?), modern

SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:

Introduction

A planning application for a new residential development on a site with frontages at both 1 Rawstorn Road and 33-35 Manor Road led to a requirement for archaeological work (Notice of Planning Decision: 110820: CBC, May 3rd 2011). The first stage of the work, an evaluation in 2011, was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by CAT (2011) and approved by Colchester Borough Council Archaeological Officer Mr Martin Winter.

This is the report on the second stage of work – a watching brief carried out (19th-20th October 2011) on behalf of Harding Homes on the footings for a new house site on the Rawstorn Road frontage (TL 99074 2500: Fig 1).

Archaeological background

This is based on a published summary of (Hull 1958 Appendix G, 292-96), and on records of archaeological projects held by CAT. The site lies in the western extramural area of the Roman town, and to the south of the Roman road to London which entered the town through the Balcerne Gate. Previous work in this area has uncovered parts of Roman buildings and late Roman inhumation burials as well as parts of small streets or lanes which allowed access to the buildings (CAT Report 613). The 2011 archaeological evaluation on this site (a trench on the Rawstorn Road frontage: Fig 1, T1) revealed modern features, but no significant archaeological remains (CAT Report 613).

Results of the watching brief

The dimensions of the footings trenches varied, but were mostly approximately 60 cm wide and 110 cm deep. The lower part of the trenches (ie, below 70-80 cm) was generally cut into undisturbed natural sand. The upper parts of the sides of the footing trenches, to between 30-50 cm below the site surface, revealed a dark, sandy loam L2, containing a range of modern and post-medieval finds including ceramic building material (CBM). Parts of pits were visible in some trenches on the southern edge of the site, including a large pit (F5) at the northeast corner of the new footings. All finds associated with the pits were modern, and there was no clear indication that any pit was other than modern. Large parts of the sections of the southern footing trench were obscured by shuttering, and so could not be observed (although this shuttering was in place because of significant collapse due to unconsolidated pit fills, and

so little of archaeological significance was likely to remain).

In the centre of the plot for the new building an east-west footing trench cut through a gravel surface (F4). This was best observed in the north section of this trench (Fig 2) but was also present in the south section, although here it was partly cut away by a later pit. In the northern section the gravel extended unbroken over a distance of approximately 5m, ending approximately 1m short of the east end of the trench. To the west, the gravel ended at the edge of a feature (F6) which was either a small pit or possibly a ditch on the western side of the gravel. For most of its length, the top of gravel F4 lay at between 40-50 cm below the site surface, but towards the western end it was at only about 30 cm below the site surface. At that point the gravel was about 15 cm thick, but it was more commonly about 10 cm thick. There was very little dating evidence for this gravel surface. The only find from it was a sherd of Roman Samian ware (*finds no 2*) from the base of a Central Gaulish bowl dated c AD 120-200.

The gravel surface sealed two undated layers: a pale brown sandy loam approximately 20 cm thick (a foundation layer for the gravel surface?), and below this a pale silt, approximately 10 cm thick (natural?) which sealed natural sand. In the centre of the north section was a small narrow feature (probably a stake-hole) sealed by the sandy loam.

Discussion

The gravel surface is clearly of interest, but is not closely datable. That it is sealed by up to 50 cm of dark topsoil suggests that it is not a modern feature. Also, the nature of the pale brown sandy loam directly beneath the gravel surface is indicative of an early (rather than post-medieval or modern) date. At the moment, the gravel surface cannot be more accurately described or dated, but, given the fact that the single find of pottery from it is 2nd century Roman, a Roman date must be the most likely. Although this might have been a localised surface, gravel metalled lanes or small streets of Roman date have been discovered during previous excavations close to this site, at both the former St Mary's Hospital site (now called Balkerne Heights: Benfield forthcoming), and at Crouch Street (CAT Report 434). That the gravel extended farther to the east in the northern section of the footing trench than in the south section could indicate a linear spread of gravel with a maximum width of c 5m, and aligned southwest-northeast (although it should be noted that the gravel was not visible in a footing trench to the north-east). This orientation is similar and possibly parallel to that of the main Roman road to London (to the north), and similar to the Roman lane discovered at Crouch Street (CAT report 434). If the gravel is of Roman date, then at least its upper part can be dated to the second century or later.

References

CAT 2011, *Written Scheme of Investigation for archaeological trial-trenching at 33-35 Manor Road and 1 Rawstorn Road, Colchester, Essex. August 2011.*

CAT Report 434, *Crouched Friars: the medieval church structure and its associated cemetery, 38-40 Crouch Street, Colchester: January-April 2007.* Unpublished CAT client report, prepared by Stephen Benfield & Howard Brooks, August 2007.

CAT Report 613, *Archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching at 1 Rawstorn Road, Colchester, Essex: August 2011.* Unpublished CAT client report, prepared by Ben Holloway, September 2011.

Benfield, S., forthcoming, *Excavations at the former St Mary's Hospital site, Colchester*

Hull, M R, 1958, *Roman Colchester*, Report 20 of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries in London

Previous Summaries/Reports: CAT Report 613

Key words: ?Roman gravelled lane

Significance: **

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Date of summary 18th June 2012

Monitor: Martin Winter (Colchester Borough Council)

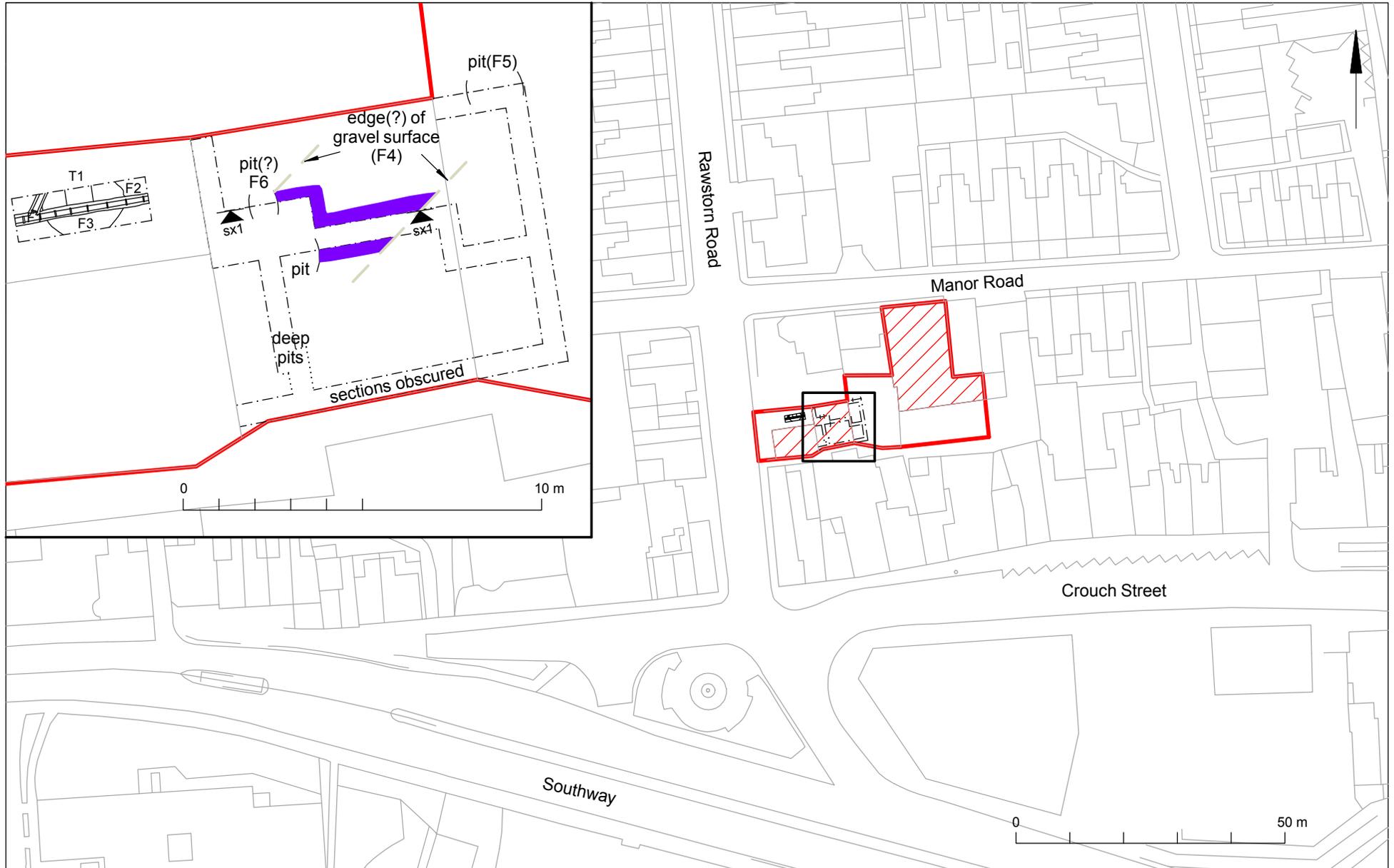


Fig 1 Site location with inset showing gravel surface (F4).

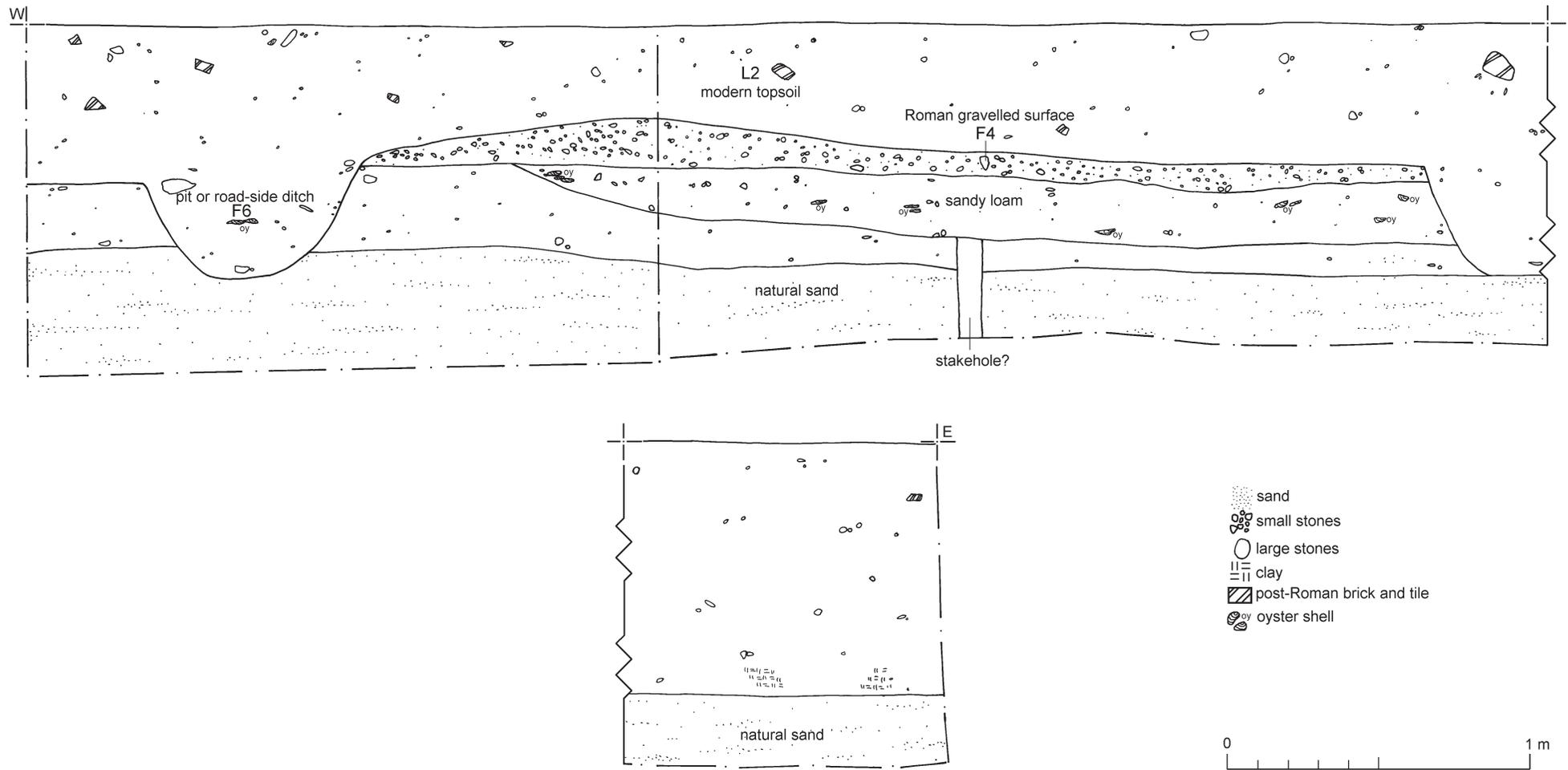


Fig 2 Section.