

Colchester Archaeological Trust Ltd

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## **Watching Brief Report**

### **The Old Poultry Market Site North Station Road, Colchester**

for the Blackwater Housing Association

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CAT Report 38

July 1999



## **A Watching Brief at the Old Poultry Market site, North Station Road, Colchester**

NGR: TL 9931 2570

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### **Summary**

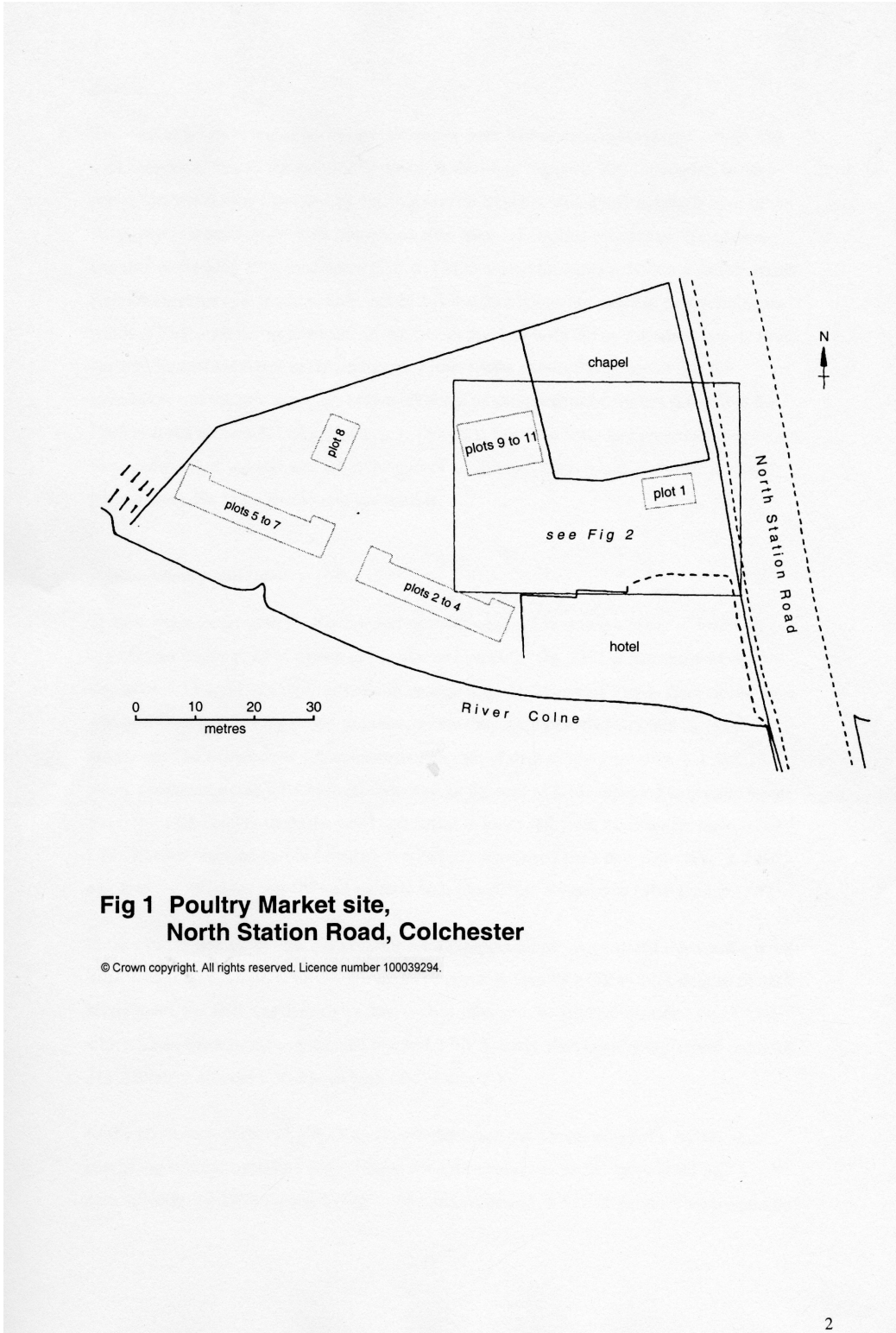
This 0.28-hectare site lies on the west side of North Station Road, close to the North Bridge and approximately 400 metres beyond the north gate of the walled town. In 1998, an evaluation revealed a Roman wall foundation near the present road frontage, also evidence of post-medieval buildings at the frontage and centre of the site. The 1999 watching brief on redevelopment work recorded a parallel Roman foundation at the site frontage, along with further plots of post-medieval structures. The Roman foundations lie 30 metres from the bank of the Colne and are the southernmost of a series of discoveries since the 19th century which indicate the existence of a Roman extra-mural suburb to the north of the river.

### **Introduction**

In May 1998, Roman and post-medieval features were exposed in the course of an archaeological evaluation commissioned by the Anglia Housing Group in advance of redevelopment at the former Poultry Market site in North Station Road (see Appendix). This report covers the resultant watching brief on the contractor's excavations for new foundations and drains, which took place between January and April 1999.

### **The results**

The redevelopment involved clearance of the existing commercial buildings, followed by construction of eleven new homes on piled foundations. The initial pile-drilling work was subject only to spot inspection with a more intensive watch on the excavation of ground-beam slots and the deeper drain runs. Detailed records of trench stratigraphy may be found in the museum archive. The principal observations were as follows:



**Fig 1 Poultry Market site,  
North Station Road, Colchester**

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## *Roman*

The earliest levels revealed by the ground works were Roman, represented by a NNW-SSE wall foundation (F91), the location of which is shown in Figure 2. The foundation lay in a part of the site frontage crossed by existing service trenches which had largely destroyed the stratigraphic relationships in its immediate area. Situated 6m east of a Roman foundation exposed in the May 1998 evaluation (Fig. 2; F5), it shared the same orientation and mortared Kentish ragstone construction, although in this instance it was not possible to determine the width of F91 since the western side of the foundation had been cut by a modern trench. From the very limited surviving early stratigraphy it was only possible to establish that the foundation was cut into a greyish brown silt loam of similar appearance to L6 found in the 1998 evaluation Trench 1 (Appendix, p 3: Trench 1, L6). The latter had previously been more thoroughly examined and was felt to be part of a substantial dump laid to elevate the local ground level. No floor levels were discernible.

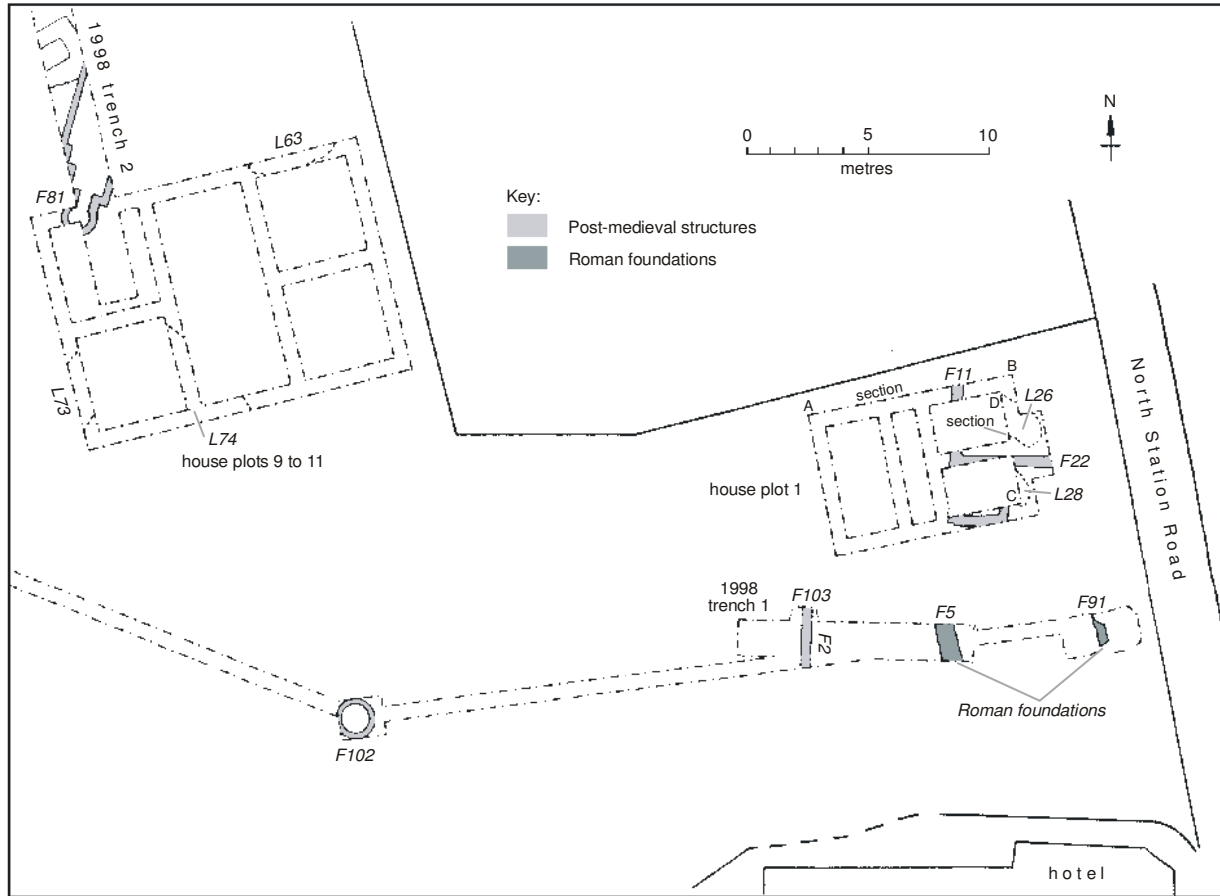
## *Post-medieval and later*

Ground-beam trenches in the eastern part of building plot 1 revealed a group of wall foundations constructed of mortared peg-tile and septaria (Fig. 2). The better-preserved examples (F11 and F22) are illustrated in section (Fig. 3). Traces of similar foundations were also observed in adjoining plot 1 trenches, where they were heavily disturbed by later intrusions. The foundations cut an extensive deposit of dark sandy loam (Fig. 3, L13/L23), which contained a clay tobacco-pipe stem and, in the case of L13, appeared to contain a pipe bowl of *c* 18th-century date (the bowl was found in loose soil from the machine removal of L13). Further west, a peg-tile foundation noted in excavations for a new drain (Fig. 2, F103) adjoined the mortared peg-tile and septaria wall foundation revealed in 1998 Trench 1 (F2).

In the central area of the site, excavations for an inspection pit encountered the top of a brick-lined well (Fig. 2, F102) at an overall depth of 90cm. Sealed by a 60cm-thick deposit of dark sandy loam, the well was densely packed with similar soil. Its internal diameter was 1.25m with a 22cm-thick lining constructed of *c* late 17th- to early 18th-century unfrosted red brick, 215-220mm x 105mm x 50-53mm high (8½" x 4" x 2").

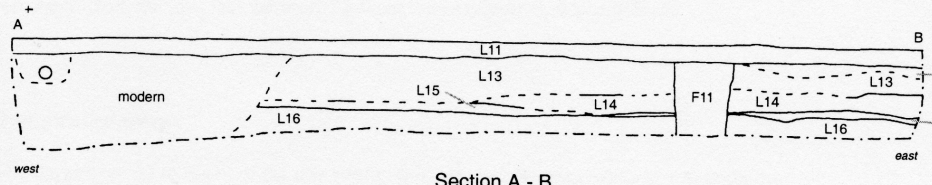
At the north-west corner of plots 9 to 11, ground-beam trenches uncovered a further small part of the circular oven-like projection to the 17th-century or earlier brick building discovered in the 1998 Trench 2 (Fig. 2, F81 and Appendix, p 6). All the brickwork examined



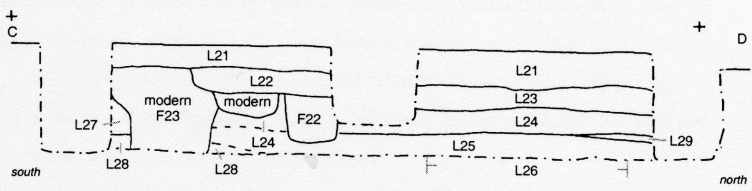


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**Fig 2 Poultry Market site: principal features**



Section A - B



Section C - D

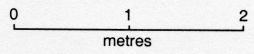


Fig 3 House plot 1: sections

on this occasion was trimmed to form the 30cm-thick curving wall, which exhibited signs of burning on its inner face. The building was sealed by a thick deposit of dark sandy loam which for the most part extended beyond the bottoms of the trenches for plots 9 to 11. However, in places to the east and south of the brick building, the surface of an underlying mid greyish brown sandy loam (Fig. 2, L63, L73, L74) was exposed at the very limit of excavation. Small fragments of peg-tile, mortar, oyster shell and charcoal were present in varying amounts in the surface of all three layers, and a post-medieval body sherd was recovered from the interface between L63 and the overlying dark sandy loam.

### **Site stratigraphy**

The uppermost 50 to 80cm of the site stratigraphy nearest the road frontage was composed of modern surfacing above post-medieval to modern dark sandy loam. This applies to the layers L11, L12 and L13 in section A-B (Fig. 3), L21, L22 and L23 in section C-D (Fig. 3), and probably the greater part of L2 in the evaluation Trench 1 (Appendix: fig. 2). In plot 1, a sherd of Fabric 13 sandy orange ware found at the lower interface of the continuous silty clay loam represented by L14 (section A-B) and L23 (section B-C) established that it could not pre-date the 11th century, although it may have been deposited considerably later. The exposed soils underlying these levels were very different in character but could not be satisfactorily dated due to an absence of suitable inclusions. In the plot 1 sections A-B and B-C (Fig. 3), these indeterminate soils are as follows:

L15, L29: Very dark greyish brown silt loam with minute charcoal flecks and occasional lenses of sand.

L16, L25, L27: Dark brown silt loam.

L26, L28: Pale yellow silty clay loam, extensively burnt red, within which the clay was in places reduced to a soft friable consistency.

Elsewhere on the site, drainage and 40 to 80cm-deep ground-beam trenches exposed dark sandy loams which were of post-medieval and possibly earlier date.

### **Archive**

The site archive, consisting of all detailed notes, plans, section drawings, photographs and processed finds will be deposited with Colchester Museum under cover of museum accession code no 1999-6.



## **Acknowledgements**

The watching brief was commissioned by the Blackwater Housing Association in conjunction with J.R. Trodd Builders. Special thanks are due to the site agent, Dennis Everitt, for his constant co-operation in the course of the watching brief.



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July 1999