

Site: 4A East Hill, Colchester

NGR: TL 0020 2523

Reason for Watching Brief: Redevelopment (two houses)

Architect: - Contractor: Malcolm Hunt Owner: Malcolm Hunt

Fieldwork By: CC and HB

Report By: CC

Date: 20th November 2000

Summary

The property lies 30m beyond the site of Colchester's East Gate. No early ground features were revealed by works for two new houses. The site frontage had been subject to extensive post-medieval to modern ground disturbance. Unstratified human skull fragments were recovered from terracing at the rear and a structural record was made of a complex of freshly-exposed post-medieval brickwork at the side of 5 East Hill.

Report:

This watching brief follows on from an inspection of four test pits dug by the developer in June 2000 and described in CAT Report 81 (attached). Also attached is an earlier report on an evaluation carried out here in 1990.

The groundworks included reducing the entire front half of the site to the level of the East Hill pavement, terracing the rear half of the site and creating an access to Priory Street by removing a section of the stone wall which extends south beyond the rear yard of 5 East Hill. Progress was erratic and ground observation conditions were often less than ideal due to the amount of freshly redeposited material spread about the site. Site visits took place at intervals between late June and late September 2000.

A large part of the East Hill frontage had previously been cut back to street level (CAT Report 81). Natural sand was noted almost at pavement level, rising in a southerly direction.

At the rear of the site, terracing involved a reduction of 1.4m in the levels adjoining the southern boundary. This revealed a section (not illustrated) in which 30cm of modern topsoil sealed an apparently dumped deposit, up to 55cm thick, which contained small clusters of brick, peg-tile and window glass fragments. Beneath this was a pale brown loamy sand (layer 3 in figure 1) with a distinct content of mortar "dust". Later site observation suggested that this material may have overlain natural sand.

Human skull fragments were recovered by the contractor and are understood to have been found in dark soil removed from the upper (southern) part of the site. The remains appeared to be from an adult and consisted of parietal and occipital fragments with fused sutures. These were left in the hands of the contractor for reburial on site.

A brick-lined well said to be almost 30m deep was uncovered in the southern part of the site. The approximate location is shown in figure 1. No further details are available since the find spot was covered by a spoil heap when reported by the contractor.

East Boundary

At the side of 5 East Hill the groundworks cut into the lower part of the building, revealing a patchwork of materials. In the elevation, Figure 2, the freshly exposed walling consisted of the following:

- [1] Rubble-faced wall, mainly flint and septaria, with very rare fragments of soft red brick, 2" thick.
- [2] Red brick, 9" x 4 1/2" x 2 1/2"
- [3] Coursed red brick, 9" x 4 1/2" x 2 1/2" thick.
- [4] Red brick, 8 x 4 x 1 1/2".
- [5] Infill of brick fragments. The bricks were 4" wide, 2 1/2" thick, length unknown.
- [6] Brick fragments laid on their sides. Brick dimensions: 4" x 1 1/2" thick
- [7] Red bricks, 2 1/2" thick x 4 1/2" wide roughly coursed and laid as headers.
- [8] Mixed broken red brick, variously 3 1/2" x 1 1/2" thick, 2" thick and 2 1/2" thick, roughly mortared and coursed, with occasional stones.
- [9] Broken brick, 1 1/2" x 4, roughly coursed.
- [10] Same as 7, with occasional stretchers.
- [11] Same as 8.
- [12] Stone slab.
- [13] Stone moulding, with profile as shown inset in fig.2.

When originally exposed, the curved side of an oven-like brick feature represented by [4] projected 25cm from the wall. This was later cut, exposing the brick rubble infill [5]. No frogged brick was discernible among the scatter of rubble broken away from the side of the building.

At the south-east corner of the site, the boundary wall with 5 East Hill, [1] in fig.2, was breached to create an access into Priory Street. Its construction was the same as elsewhere with additionally occasional small fragments of peg-tile in evidence.

Discussion

Apart from the structural record of the side of 5 East Hill, very little was recovered from the site inspections. Generally, the few available sections were more informative than ground surface observation since surface spills and trampled soil obscured even trial trenches dug and filled shortly before the start of work on site. The front of the development area has clearly been heavily cut back in the past. Where it was possible to inspect a fresh section at the rear boundary, the uppermost 85cm consisted of post-medieval to modern dump and topsoil, with an abrupt change to mortar deposits and clean sand which may indicate a degree of earlier disturbance by terracing at the higher southern level. Over the site as a whole there was a loose surface scatter of re-used Roman building material, some quite clearly from the current boundary wall breach. Oyster shell was also noted among recently redeposited material.

Figure 1. Site plan.

Figure 2. Elevation: 5 East Hill.

Archive: site notes and sketches

Finds: none

Photographs: 18 colour digital, ref: 4east001.jpg - 4east009.jpg, 4easth001.jpg - 4easth009.jpg

EAST HILL

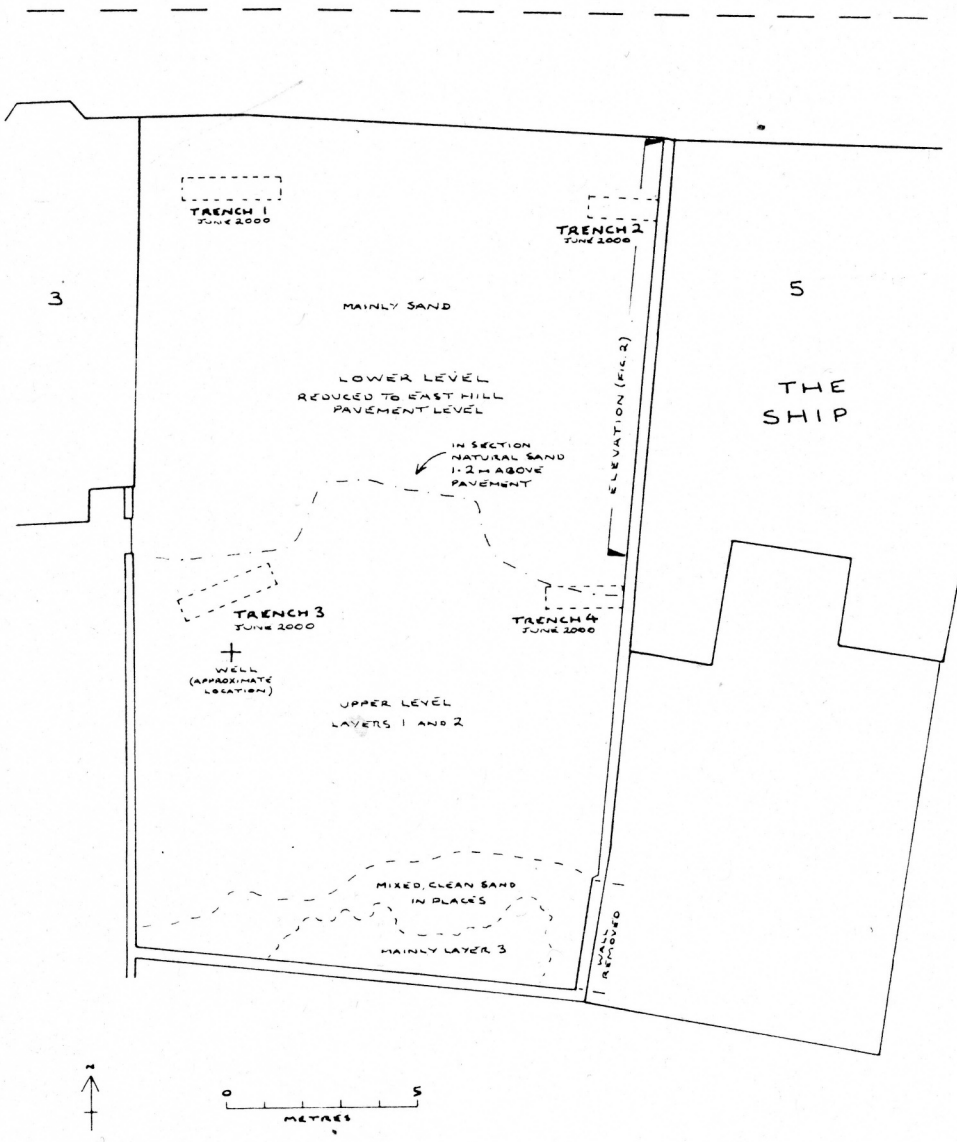


FIGURE 1: LOCATION PLAN

NORTH

SOUTH

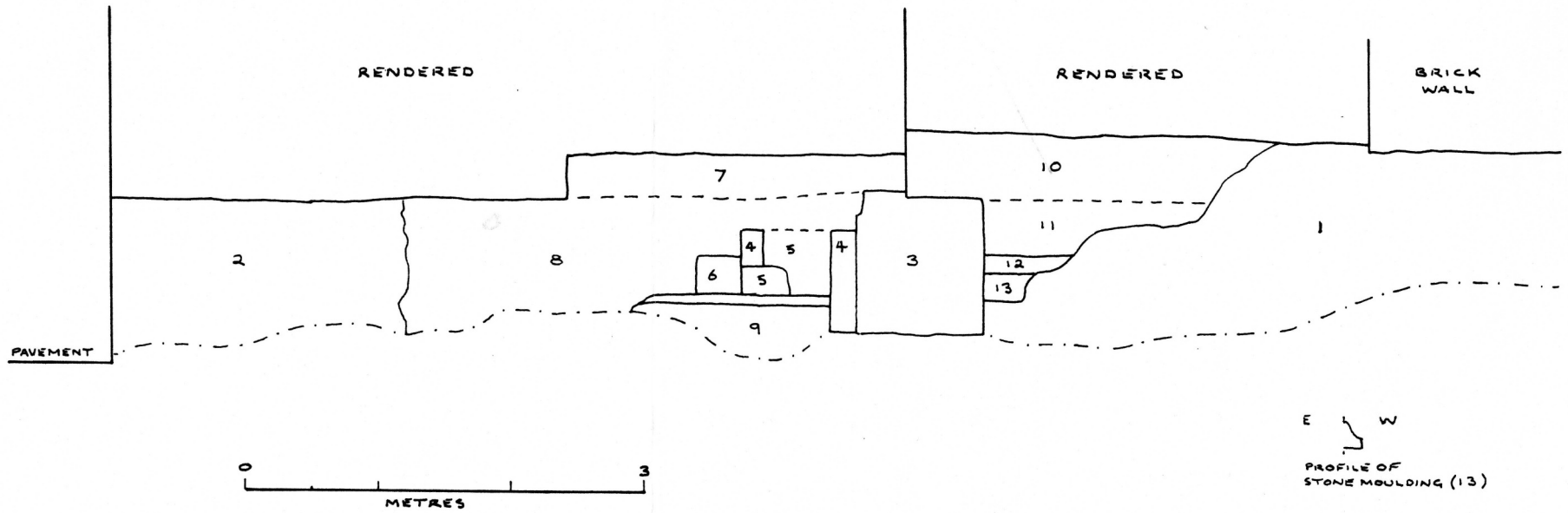


FIGURE 2. ELEVATION: SIDE OF 5 EAST HILL