

# **An archaeological watching brief at 8 High Street, West Mersea, Essex**

**December 2000**

**on behalf of  
Colchester Borough Council**



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**CAT Report 118**

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CAT Report 118  
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Figure

## **Figure**

Fig 1 Site location.

## 1 Summary

A negative watching brief on building work at 8 High Street, West Mersea, Essex.

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the report on an archaeological watching brief carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) for Colchester Borough Council on the 12th December 2000.
- 2.2 The development site is located on the southern side of West Mersea, to the south-east of the Church of St Peter and St Paul, at National Grid Reference TM 0100 1242. The site is bounded to the north, east and west by other houses and to the south by the garden and the sea. The plot lies at the top of a steep slope towards the sea.
- 2.3 This report follows the standards set out in the Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1996) and *Guidelines on the preparations and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1994).

## 3 Planning background

Colchester Borough Council has granted planning permission for the erection of one detached dwelling, under application number COL/98/0904. One of the conditions was for an archaeological watching brief to be carried out. The previous house on the site, which was built in the 1960s, had been demolished. The new house to be built on the site is to be slightly larger and mainly built on the old foundations.

## 4 Archaeological background

- 4.1 A Palaeolithic hand-axe has been found on the mud to the south-east of the development site (SMR 1911). Neolithic stone axes have been recorded to the south-west of the site on the mud (SMR 2177). Another hand-axe has been found approximately 100m to the north of the development site (SMR 2110). Ancient land surfaces have been recorded in this part of West Mersea, and it may be that, to the south, what is now the inter-tidal zone was occupied in the Prehistoric period.

- 4.2** The area was occupied in the Roman period, as is evidenced by Roman building material including mosaic pieces and tessellated pavements found extensively in the area to the west of the church (SMR 2188, 2191 and 2214). A Roman building was excavated in 1977 by CAT to the south of the church on Coast Road (*CAR 6*, 852) (SMR 12501). A possible Roman tomb was found in 1896 (SMR 0038), approximately 150m to the north-east of the development site. Another Roman tomb containing a child cremation was found nearby (SMR 2109). A lamp and a coin found 200m to the south-west of the site may possibly indicate the site of a Roman landing-place (SMR 2176).
- 4.3** There is evidence for a Saxon minster at West Mersea, which presumably existed on or near the site of the Church of St Peter and St Paul.
- 4.4** The earliest surviving part of the Church of St Peter and St Paul is the tower, which was built in the 11th century. Much of the church was rebuilt in the 14th and 15th centuries. The ragstone walls contain Roman brick and tile taken from the remains of surrounding Roman buildings (SMR 2274).
- 4.5** A small Benedictine priory is said to have existed near the church (SMR 2187). Human remains found by workmen whilst building a new bungalow may have been part of the priory graveyard (SMR 12546).
- 4.6** Saxon and medieval settlement focusing around the church and along the main street would also be expected in this area.

## **5 Aims and objectives**

The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological features, finds or deposits revealed by the ground works.

## **6 Methods**

- 6.1** One site visit was made on the 12th December, when the new foundation trenches to the south of plot had been dug and before most of them had been concreted. The sides and bottom of the trenches were examined where possible.
- 6.2** The new foundations on the eastern side of the plot had not been dug when the visit was made, but, due to the lack of archaeological remains visible on the first visit, no further visits were made.

## 7 Results

The soil profile consisted of modern orangey brown sand with some root activity. A layer of asphalt 930mm below ground-level was noted in two of the trenches.

## 8 Conclusion

No finds or features were exposed. This was due to the fact that the plot had already been built on in the 1960s. Soil had been imported at this time to terrace the site, and this made-up ground was all that was evident in the trenches.

## 9 Archive deposition

A copy of this report will be deposited permanently at Colchester Museum under accession code 2000.205.

## 10 Acknowledgements

The Trust is grateful to Mr Andrew Guest of the Architecture and Design Partnership Ltd for his co-operation during the course of the fieldwork and for providing the site plan, and to Martin Winter, Archaeological Officer for Colchester Borough Council.

## 11 References

- CAR 6 *Colchester Archaeological Report 6, Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School, and other sites in Colchester 1971-85, by Philip Crummy (1992)*
- Colchester Borough Council, 1996 *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester*
- Colchester Borough Council, 1996 *Guidelines on the preparations and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums*
- Essex County Council Sites and Monuments Record (CAT copy)
- Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994 *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief*

Kate Orr, January 2001

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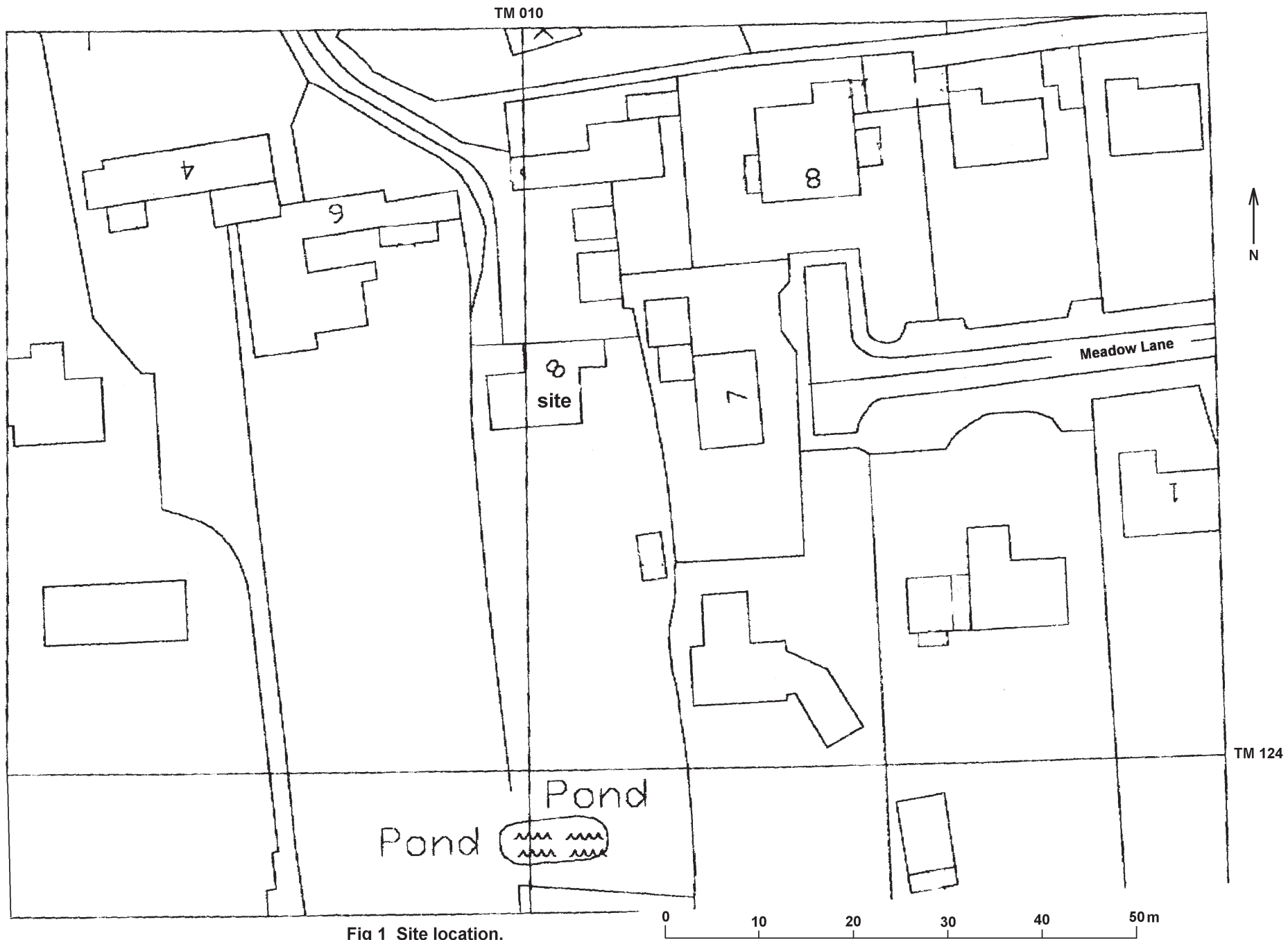


Fig 1 Site location.