

# **An archaeological evaluation at Beeleigh Abbey, Maldon, Essex July 2003**

**report prepared by  
C Crossan**

**on behalf of  
Mr C Foyle**

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Essex County Council Heritage Conservation Branch code: BA 2003.3  
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**Colchester Archaeological Trust**  
12 Lexden Road,  
Colchester,  
Essex CO3 3NF

*tel.:* (01206) 541051  
*tel./fax:* (01206) 500124  
*email:* [archaeologists@catuk.org](mailto:archaeologists@catuk.org)

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## **1 Summary**

*Beeleigh Abbey is a Premonstratensian house founded in the late 12th century. A 2.4m x 0.8m evaluation trench was manually excavated within the east side of the site of the abbey cloister, in an area which will be affected by new service-trenches associated with the proposed remodelling of a modern kitchen extension. Modern ground-disturbance was found to have removed all earlier horizontal stratigraphy down to natural subsoil, which lay at a depth of 0.5m. One deeper feature, a 0.7m-wide east-west trench with post-medieval or modern backfill, was of uncertain purpose. If a robber-trench, its location does not fit well with the known structural elements of the abbey.*

## **2 Introduction**

- 2.1** This is the archive report on an archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching which took place in July 2003 at Beeleigh Abbey, Maldon, Essex.
- 2.2** The evaluation was prompted by the proposed remodelling of a kitchen extension which was built in 1912. Although no significant structural changes are envisaged, the work will include the excavation of new external service-trenches on the east side of the area originally which was enclosed by the abbey cloister.
- 2.3** Following a brief for evaluation written by the Heritage Advice Management and Promotion (HAMP) group of Essex County Council, a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was produced by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) and accepted by HAMP in June 2003.
- 2.4** The work was carried out by CAT in accordance with the standards set out in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996, updated 2002) and the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) *Standard and guidance for an archaeological evaluation* (1999).

## **3 Archaeological background**

Beeleigh Abbey was a Premonstratensian house founded in the late 12th century. The abbey church and a number of the monastic buildings were destroyed after the Dissolution, leaving the chapter house, parlour and dorter standing. There are 17th-century timber-framed additions and an early 20th-century kitchen extension (RCHM 1922). Since 2001, excavations by the Maldon Archaeological and Historical Group have revealed 14th- to 16th-century buildings in the field to the west of the abbey (Clark 2002). Other recent observations (noted in the original HAMP evaluation brief) include a burial in a service-trench to the north-east of the standing abbey buildings and indications of modern ground-disturbance in the main drive.

## **4 Aims**

- 4.1** The overall aim of the evaluation was to establish and record the character, extent, date, significance and condition of any archaeological remains likely to be affected by the proposed service-trenches.
- 4.2** A specific aim in placing the trench was the possibility of intercepting the course of the cloister walk wall (Fig 1).

## **5 Methodology**

A trench 2.4m x 0.8m was excavated by hand and recorded using the methods detailed in the Written Scheme of Investigation, a copy of which is included in the appendix to this report. The only change from the original WSI proposals was the adoption of ECC context forms, instead of CAT context recording sheets.

## 6 Results (Figs 2-3)

6.1 The numbers quoted below are context numbers.

6.2 Removal of the garden turf and topsoil (1) revealed a 10 to 12cm-thick modern gravel surface (2) which extended across the entire trench. The gravel (2) sealed a north-south drainpipe-trench (3), a clay-rich deposit (6), and a shallow depression with a soft fill which included small fragments of lime mortar (4). Underlying 6 and 4 was a 25cm-thick deposit of compact sandy silt loam (7) occupying a cut which clipped the edge of an east-west trench (5). Beneath 7 lay a 70cm-wide east-west trench (8) which was stratigraphically the earliest of the features found in the evaluation. The remaining deposits 9, 10 and 11 shown in the section illustration (Fig 3) are natural sands and clays.

## 7 Finds

### 7.1 Pottery

Identification by Howard Brooks (after Cotter 2000).

con-text	quantity	weight (g)	Fabric	description	date
2	1	2	48d	ironstone	19th-20th century
2	1	2	48d	ironstone	19th-20th century
2	1	5	35	Mill Green ware	mid 13th century
2	1	45	45m	stoneware	19th-20th century
4	1	2	45m	stoneware	19th-20th century
7	1	2	48d	ironstone	19th-20th century
7	1	14	48d	ironstone	19th-20th century

### 7.2 Brick and tile

Small fragments of peg-tile were recovered from all the contexts except 6 and the natural deposits. These are listed with thickness and weight measurements in the site archive. Small pieces of red brick were found in 2, 4, 7 and 8. In only one instance (7) was the piece sufficiently large to establish its height (55mm). Context 5 contained three small fragments of yellow brick weighing 90g.

### 7.3 Iron

Corroded nails and small fragments of iron were found in the following contexts:

context	quantity	description	length (mm)	weight (g)
1	1	nail	150	83
1	1	nail	52	11
1	1	nail	53	6
1	1	nail	52	14
6	1	nail	47	15
6	1	fragment	-	15
6	1	fragment	-	28
7	1	nail	28	4
7	1	nail	50	17
7	1	nail	30	8

### 7.4 Slag

Two lumps of slag were found: one (48g) from 6, and another (61g) from 7.

### 7.5 Other finds

The site archive also contains details of very small quantities of animal bone and glass fragments. These were all recovered from modern contexts and therefore have not been subject to further analysis.

## 8 Conclusions

The trench revealed modern ground-disturbance represented by contexts 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7 to a depth of 0.5m overall, which at the sampled location was sufficient to have removed all earlier horizontal deposits down to natural subsoil.

Stratigraphically, the two earliest contexts were 5 and 8. The material in 5 contained glazed drainpipe fragments and is clearly of modern origin. Context 8 contained only three small pieces of peg-tile and brick and is of post-medieval or modern date. The purpose of 8 is uncertain. If structural, ie dug to remove a medieval foundation, its position in relation to the frater seems too far south for it to be the cloister wall.

The one find of clear antiquity was the small sherd of mid 13th-century Mill Green ware which was residually present in the modern gravel layer (2).

If representative, the results suggest that the area immediately west of the kitchen has been subject to a significant level of modern disturbance which is likely to have removed earlier features within 0.5m of the surface.

## 9 Acknowledgements

The Colchester Archaeological Trust is grateful to Mr C Foyle for commissioning and funding this evaluation. Thanks are also due to Dr David Andrews of the ECC HAMP group for initiating and monitoring the work and Melanie Isted of Purcell Miller Tritton Partnership for her assistance in programming the excavation.

The excavation and recording were carried out by Liam King and supervised by Howard Brooks of CAT.

## 10 References

- |               |      |  |
|---------------|------|--|
| Clarke, W J R | 2002 | <i>Report on the third phase of excavations at Beeleigh Abbey</i> , Maldon Archaeological and Historical Group Report, MDBA 04/1 |
| Cotter, J     | 2000 | <i>Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85</i> , Colchester Archaeological Report 7                           |
| RCHM          | 1922 | <i>An Inventory of the historical monuments of Essex: vol II</i>   |

## 11 Glossary

context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made, eg a feature or layer
EHCR	Essex Heritage Conservation Record, Essex County Council
feature	an identifiable thing such as a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor
modern	the period from c AD 1700 to the present day
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit
post-medieval	the period from c AD 1500 to c AD 1700

## 12 Archive deposition

The evaluation archive, consisting of site context records, plans, photographs and related papers, will be deposited with Colchester Museums where they will be held permanently under cover of museum accession code 2003.191.

### 13 Site data

context number	description	interpretation	context date
1	mid greyish brown silt loam	turf and topsoil layer	modern
2	mid greyish brown silt loam with a high content of grit and gravel	firm gravel surface	modern
3	cut, with a fill of mid greyish brown silt loam	drainpipe trench	modern
4	depression with a mixed fill, mainly mid brown and yellowish brown loam with tile and common lime mortar fragments	shallow pit	modern
5	cut, with a fill of mid-greyish brown sandy clay loam containing common small round stones and occasional fragmens of tile, brick and glazed drainpipe	trench, possibly for drainpipe	modern
6	reddish-yellow sandy clay loam deposit	uncertain	modern
7	cut, with a fill of dark grey sandy silt loam containing common small round stones and occasional fragments of coal, tile and brick	uncertain	modern
8	cut, with a fill of pale greyish-brown sandy clay loam	trench	post-medieval or modern
9	yellowish-brown clay	natural	-
10	gravelly sand	natural	-
11	sand	natural	-

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**Distribution list:**

Mr C Foyle  
 Dr David Andrews, HAMP group, Essex County Council  
 Ms M Isted, Purcell Miller Tritton Partnership  
 Essex Heritage Conservation Record, Essex County Council



Colchester Archaeological Trust  
12 Lexden Road,  
Colchester,  
Essex CO3 3NF

tel.: (01206) 541051  
tel./fax: (01206) 500124  
email: [archaeologists@catuk.org](mailto:archaeologists@catuk.org)

Checked by: Philip Crummy  
Date: 12.08.03

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**Plate 1 The finished trench, view north.**

## **Appendix**

Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological evaluation at Beeleigh Abbey, Maldon, Essex

Submitted to Heritage Advice Management and Promotions section of Essex County Council on behalf of Mr C. Foyle, June 2003

### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This is a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for an archaeological evaluation by excavation at Beeleigh Abbey, Maldon, Essex (NGR: TL 84000 07700).
- 1.2 This WSI has been written by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) in response to a brief produced by the Essex County Council Heritage Advice, Management and Promotions (HAMP) group.
- 1.3 The proposed development involves the internal remodelling of an existing kitchen extension. The work will include new external service trenches in an area which was originally within the east side of the abbey cloister.
- 1.4 This WSI sets out proposals for the conduct of an evaluation in the area to be affected by the new service trenches. The scope of the evaluation covers on-site excavation, followed by post-excavation work, the production of an archive and (if necessary) publication texts.
- 1.5 Any variations in this WSI will be agreed beforehand with HAMP.

### **2 Archaeological background**

- 2.1 A grade 1 listed building, Beeleigh Abbey was a Premonstratensian house founded in the late 12th century.
- 2.2 Recent small-scale observations of service trenches in the abbey grounds, together with the agricultural usage of the property, suggest that significant ground disturbance may be expected.

### **3 Aim**

- 3.1 The overall aim of the fieldwork will be to establish and record the character, extent, date, significance and condition of any archaeological remains likely to be affected by the proposed service trenches.
- 3.2 A specific aim in determining the trench location is the need to intercept the likely course of the cloister walk wall, as indicated in WSI Figure 1.

### **4 Methodology**

- 4.1 A north-south trench, approximately 2.4m long and 0.8m wide, shall be excavated as near as possible to the location shown in WSI Figure 1. The exact trench location dimensions and depth will be established after consultation with the architects and site manager, and with due regard to aims set out in Section 3.
- 4.2 The trench will be excavated by hand. Fast excavation techniques involving (for instance) picks, forks and mattocks will not be used on complex stratigraphy.
- 4.3 Individual records of excavated contexts, layers, features or deposits will be entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets. Registers will be compiled of finds and samples.
- 4.4 The normal recording scale will be feature plans at 1:20 and sections at 1:10.
- 4.5 A metal detector will be used to check spoil heaps and any suitable strata, and the finds recovered. This will not normally be done on demonstrably modern strata.
- 4.6 The photographic record will consist of general site shots, and shots of all archaeological features and deposits. Standard 'record' shots of contexts will be taken on a digital camera. Colour transparencies will be used for overall site shots and *all* important contexts.



- 4.7 Following the initial trial trenching, a meeting shall be held on site to assess the requirements for further work, if any.
- 4.8 The excavation shall be reinstated in consultation with the architect and site manager.

## 5 General

- 5.1 All works will be undertaken by professional archaeologists employed by CAT. The officer(s) will have a level of experience appropriate to the work.
- 5.2 Prior to excavation, CAT will seek information about existing service locations from the site architects.
- 5.3 All the latest Health and Safety guidelines will be followed on site. CAT has a standard safety policy, which will be adhered to.
- 5.4 A site code will be obtained through HAMP. For purposes of deposition of the archive, a museum accession code will be obtained through Colchester Museums. All codes will be quoted in any reports arising from the work.
- 5.5 The *Code of conduct* and the relevant *Standard and guidance* note of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) will be followed.

## 6 Finds

- 6.1 If any human remains are exposed, the coroner will be informed at once, and HAMP and the client will be notified. All human remains will be left and recorded *in situ*. A Home Office license to remove the remains will be sought if this is the appropriate course of action. Due attention will be paid to Health and Safety.
- 6.2 All finds of archaeological relevance will be retained. Policies for later disposal of any finds will be agreed with HAMP and the site owner.
- 6.3 All finds, where appropriate, will be washed.
- 6.4 A policy of marking for pottery and other finds will be agreed with Colchester Museum. Marking will include the site code and context number.
- 6.5 The site archive will be presented to Colchester Museums in accordance with their requirements.**
- 6.6 All finds of potential treasure will be removed to a safe place, and the coroner informed immediately, in accordance with the rules of the Treasure Act 1996. The definition of treasure is given in pages 3-5 of the Code of Practice of the above act. This refers primarily to gold or silver objects.
- 6.7 Finds work will be to accepted professional standards and adhere to the Institute of Archaeologists' published booklet *Guidelines for finds work*.
- 6.8 A list of specialist available for consultation is given at the end of this WSI.

## 7 Results

- 7.1 Notification will be given to HAMP when the fieldwork has been completed.
- 7.2 The full report, including full reports on artefacts will be submitted within a length of time not exceeding 12 months from the end of fieldwork, with two copies supplied to EHCR, and Colchester Museum.
- 7.3 This report will include:
- The aims and methods adopted in the course of the watching brief
  - Location plan of the trenches, with 10-figure grid references at two points on the trenches
  - A record of the depth of deposits including present ground level.
  - Watching brief methodology & results with a suitable conclusion & discussion.
  - All specialist reports and assessments.
  - A concise non-technical summary of the project results.
- 7.4 An appropriate archive will be prepared to minimum acceptable standards outlined in *Management of Archaeological Projects: 2*.

- 7.5 Within four weeks of the end of fieldwork, HAMP will be supplied with a summary of the project suitable for inclusion in the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). A summary will be supplied even if the project has a negative result.
- 7.6 If, after discussion with HAMP, the results are considered worthy of publication, a report (at least at a summary level), will be submitted to *Essex Archaeology and History*.

## **8 Archive deposition**

- 8.1 The full archive will be deposited at Colchester Museums within 2 months of completion of final publication report on the project, and confirmed to HAMP. All requirements for archive storage as required by Colchester Museums.
- 8.2 Finds (and other retained materials) will be bagged and boxed in the manner recommended by Colchester Museums.
- 8.3 Plans will be presented on hanging strips to fit Colchester Museums storage systems.
- 8.4 Photographic archive is to be presented as follows: colour slides in hanging strips or in folders of archival quality, original digital data on discs, hard copies of digital photos on high quality paper, or as otherwise requested by Colchester Museums.
- 8.5 A summary of the contents of the archive shall be supplied to HAMP at the time of deposition at the museum.

## **9 Monitoring**

- 9.1 HAMP will be responsible for monitoring progress and standards throughout the project, and will be kept regularly informed during fieldwork, post-excavation and publication stages.
- 9.2 HAMP will be notified when the fieldwork is about to start, and when it is complete.
- 9.3 Any variations of the WSI shall be agreed with HAMP in writing prior to them being carried out.
- 9.4 The involvement of HAMP shall be acknowledged in any report or publication generated by this project

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Colchester Archaeological Trust  
12 Lexden Road,  
Colchester,  
Essex CO3 3NF

tel.: (01206) 541051  
tel./fax: (01206) 500124  
email: [archaeologists@catuk.org](mailto:archaeologists@catuk.org)

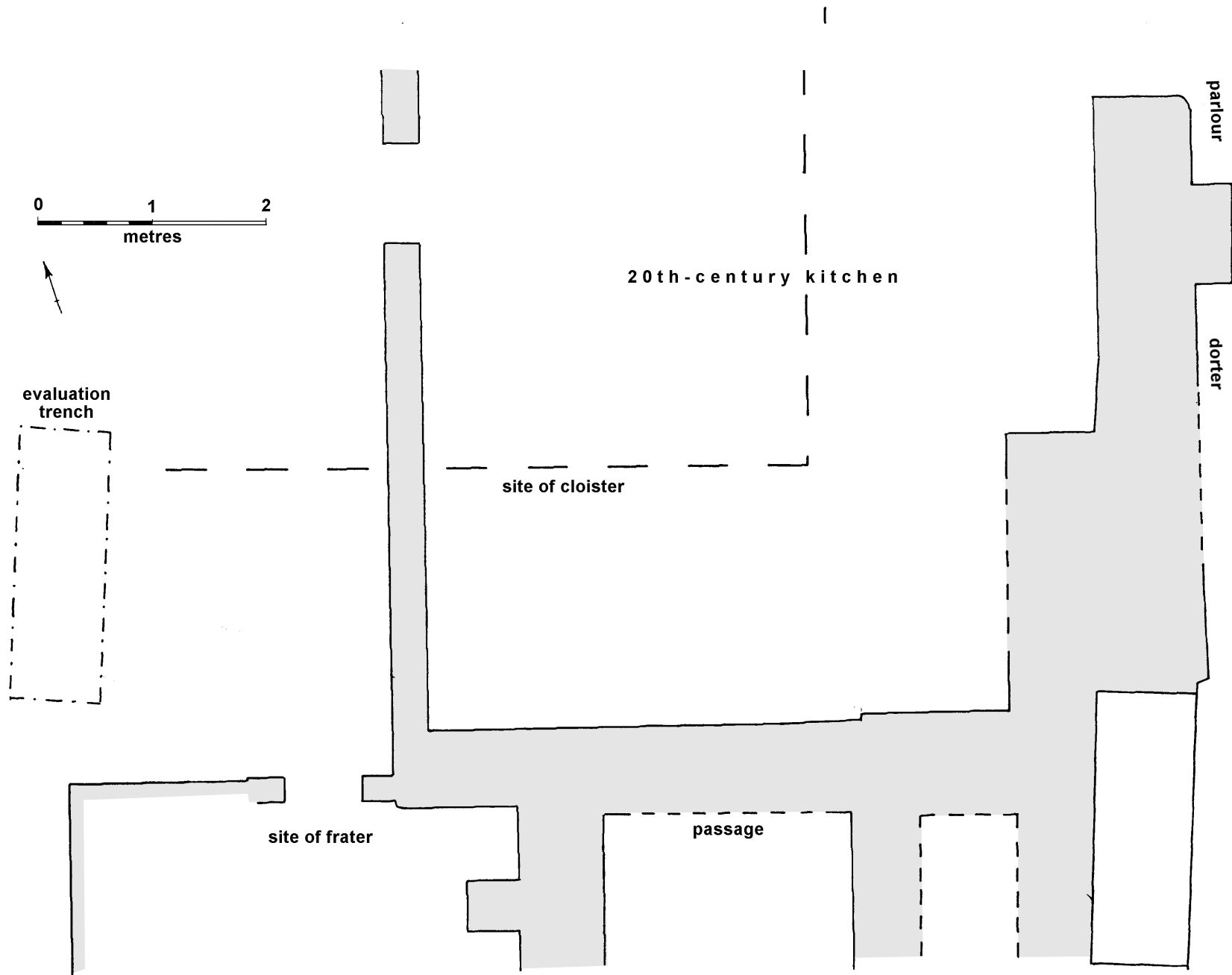
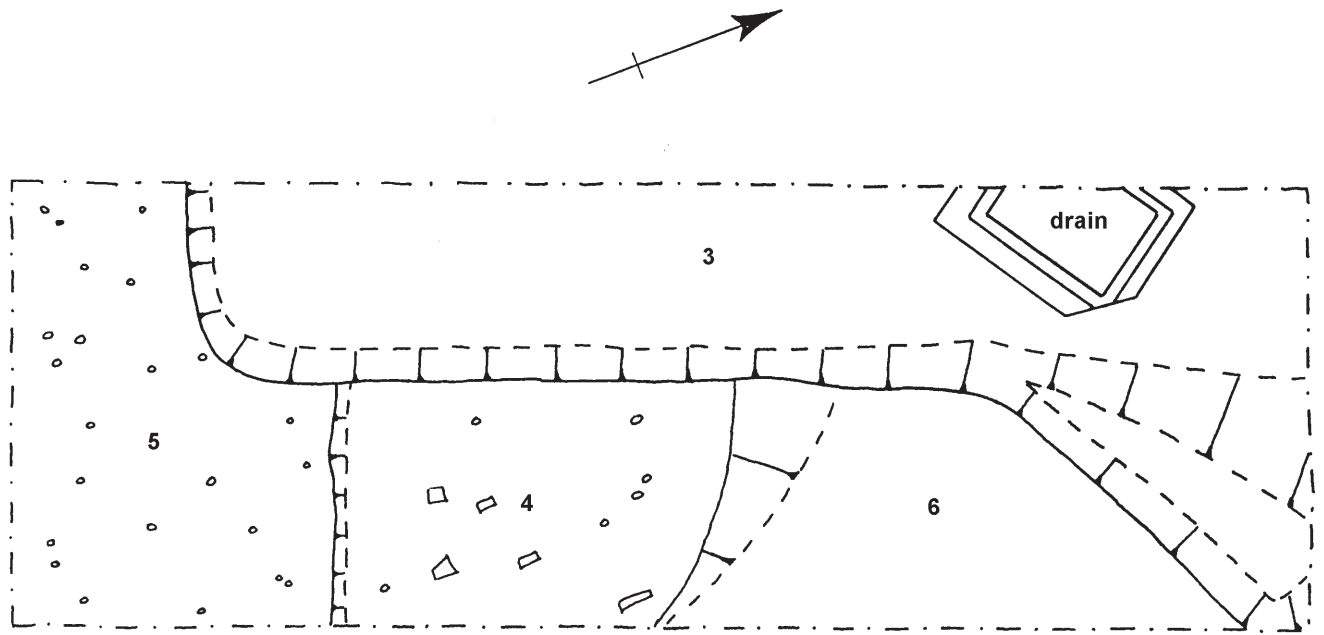
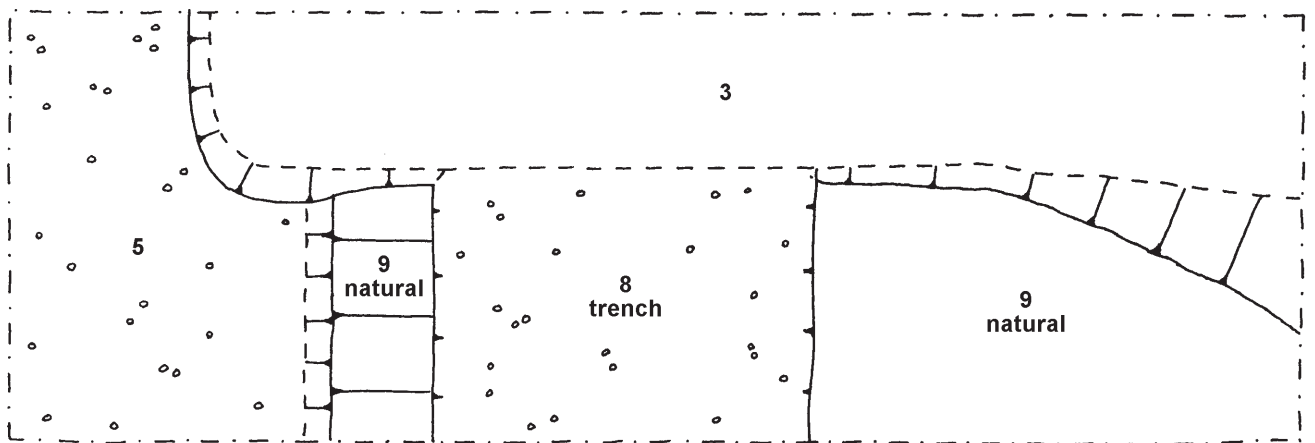


Fig 1 Trench: location plan.



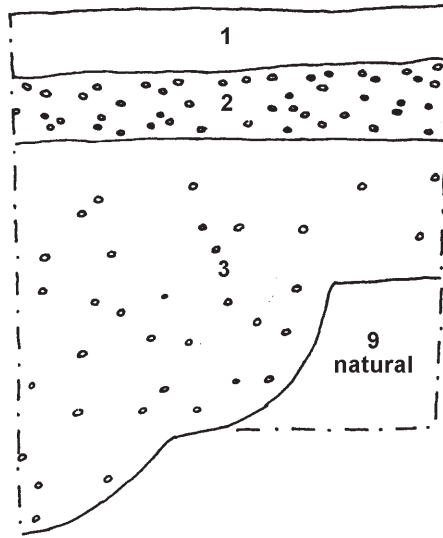
A



B

Fig 2 Trench: plans.

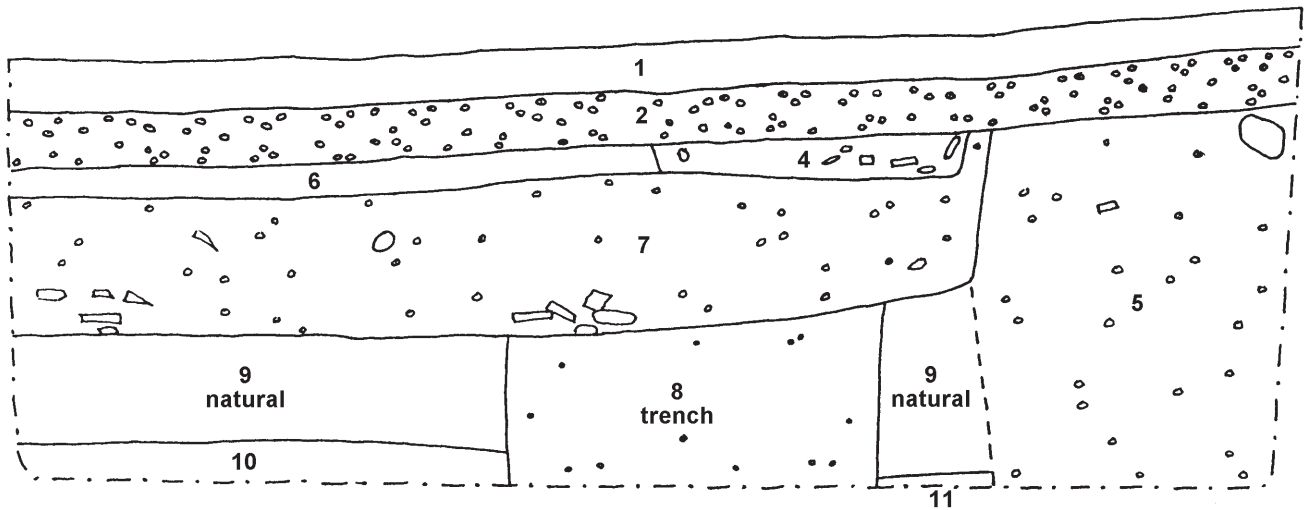
W+ 9.59m OD +E



north section

N+ 9.63m OD

+S



east section



Fig 3 Trench: sections.

# Essex Heritage Conservation Record/ *Essex Archaeology and History*

## Summary sheet

<b>Site name/address:</b> Beeleigh Abbey, Maldon, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> St Peter's	<b>District:</b> Maldon
<b>NGR:</b> TL 84000 07700	<b>Site code:</b> HAMP: BA 2003.3 CAT: 03/7c Colchester Museums: 2003.191
<b>Type of work:</b> Evaluation	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> July 2003	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 2.4m x 0.8m
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Mr C Foyle (owner)
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related EHCR nos:</b>
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 241 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods represented:</b> post-medieval, modern	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b>  <i>Beeleigh Abbey is a Premonstratensian house founded in the late 12th century. A 2.4m x 0.8m evaluation trench was manually excavated within the east side of the site of the abbey cloister, in an area which will be affected by new service-trenches associated with the proposed remodelling of a modern kitchen extension. Modern ground-disturbance was found to have removed all earlier horizontal stratigraphy down to natural subsoil, which lay at a depth of 0.5m. One deeper feature, a 0.7m-wide east-west trench with post-medieval or modern backfill, was of uncertain purpose. If a robber-trench, its location does not fit well with the known structural elements of the abbey.</i></p>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> None	
<b>Author of summary:</b> C Crossan	<b>Date of summary:</b> July 2003