

**An archaeological watching brief at
the Castle public house, 92 High Street,
Colchester, Essex
February-March 2004**

**report prepared by
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**on behalf of
GBA Designs Ltd**

CAT project ref.: 04/1F
Colchester Museums accession code: 2004.96
NGR: TL 99897 25235



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1 Summary

Observations were made during groundworks for an extension to the Castle public house. A spread of Roman building material was encountered and, during piling, a hard obstacle was encountered at 1.5m below ground-level which may represent part of the remains of the Roman arcade which enclosed the temple precinct.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief carried out at the Castle public house, 92 High Street, Colchester, Essex. The watching brief was carried out during the groundworks for a new extension. Planning permission for the single-storey trade extension on the eastern side of the public house was given with a condition for an archaeological watching brief (planning application no F/COL/03/0214). The new extension measures 7m x 8.5m (47 square metres) and has piled foundations with raft above.
- 2.2 The development site is in the town centre, on the north side of the High Street. It is centred at National Grid Reference TL 99897 25235. The new extension was built to replace a smaller earlier structure which has recently been demolished.
- 2.2 The work was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between the 3rd February and 2nd March 2004.
- 2.3 All fieldwork was done in accordance with a specification agreed with the Archaeology Officer of Colchester Borough Council. This report mirrors standards and practices contained in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines for the standards and practice of archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1999) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996, updated 2002), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1999).

3 Archaeological background

- 3.1 The development site lies within the historic walled town (Fig 1).
- 3.2 Within the Roman *colonia*, a series of streets was laid out to create a number of *insulae*. The development site occupies Insula 22 of the Roman town (Crummy 1992, 8-15). The High Street in the Roman and medieval periods was the main route through Colchester town centre, with a continuous frontage of properties and buildings on both sides of the road. The principal feature of Insula 22 was the temple of Claudius, the foundations of which were used for the base of the keep of Colchester castle.
- 3.3 The temple itself was central within the sacred precinct. This precinct (*temenos*) was enclosed by an open arcade, the southern part of which lies under the modern properties on the High Street, from Museum Street to Cowdray Crescent, ie in all probability under the development site. Observations in 1933 and 1953 just to the west of the development site revealed a massive stone foundation, 4.57m wide, forming the platform for an arcade, pierced by a gateway at a point almost opposite where the entrance to the temple once stood (Hull 1955, 24-61; Hull 1958, 169 & 171). Later in the Roman period, the arcade was blocked to form a continuous wall. Excavations in 1964 revealed more of the arcade and showed that the base of it still survives to a considerable extent. The arcade had gradually fallen down in the post-Roman period and was robbed in the 11th century to provide building material for Colchester castle (Hebditch 1971, 115-30).
- 3.3 A watching brief was conducted at the Castle public house by CAT in 1985. Eight trenches were monitored, including a 1m-deep trench dug for an extension. Human skeletons were found by contractors in one trench inside the public house. An extant section of Roman wall constructed of tile set into *opus signinum* was observed in one trench inside the public house. A mortared wall foundation was discovered 1m below ground-level in the trench dug for the extension, and it is believed to represent part of the Roman arcade (CAT 1985).
- 3.4 The development site lies within the outer bailey of the Norman castle. The bailey ditch runs from east to west, approximately 8m south of the site of the Roman arcade (Hebditch 1971, fig 3).

4 Aim

The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological remains that were exposed during the construction of the new extension and to assess the quality and extent of any remains that were encountered.

5 Methods

- 5.1 The area of the new extension was stripped using a mechanical excavator with a toothed bucket. This activity, and the excavation of the piles, was observed by an archaeologist from CAT. The area of the new extension was stripped to a depth of between 500mm and 900mm.
- 5.2 Individual records of layers and features were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets.
- 5.3 Sketch plans were made of features.
- 5.4 A photographic record was made using a digital camera.

6 Results

- 6.1 The development site occupies a slight south-facing slope, hence the northern part of the site was dug to a greater depth than the southern side in order to level the site out. Concrete and brick rubble from the recently demolished extension was removed (Layer or L1). Underlying this was a dark sandy silt topsoil containing peg-tile, mortar and shell (L2); part of L2 may be backfill from trenches dug by CAT in 1985 (section 3.3). Near the centre of the stripped area, at 700mm below ground-level, modern brick foundations to two separate buildings (probably former outbuildings) were exposed within L2. No other features were observed in the central or southern area (Fig 2).
- 6.2 Three piles drilled along the northern edge of the stripped area and aligned in an east-west row encountered 'something hard' at 1.5m depth (F2), according to contractors. This obstacle was not drilled through but was used as a base for the piles. The spoil from the piles in this area was examined and was found to include septaria and some large pieces of Roman roof tile.
- 6.3 Soil-stripping 500mm to the south of this row of piles revealed a loose spread of septaria, Roman tile and mortar lumps within a mid brown mortar-rich sand (Feature or F1). This spread was encountered at 900mm below ground-level and appeared to follow an east-west alignment. However, only a small part of this spread was uncovered as the contractors had reached their desired level.

7 Discussion

- 7.1 Soil-stripping in the central and southern part of the development site did not extend deep enough to impact any remains of archaeological interest. In the northern part of the site, however, a hard obstacle was encountered during piling at 1.5m depth and Roman building debris was present in the spoil from the drilling of the piles (F2). The obstacle may be part of the blocked-off Roman arcade which was encountered over 1m below ground-level in the 1964 excavations. The debris from these piles included septaria and Roman brick/tile, including roof tile. This may be demolition debris from the Roman arcade as it accords with what we know of the materials used to construct it.
- 7.2 The loose spread of septaria, mortar and Roman tile/brick found at 900mm below ground-level (F1) may also be part of the Roman arcade. Both F1 and F2 are aligned with the projected line of the *temenos* arcade, as shown by previous investigations in and around the site.
- 7.3 The Norman bailey ditch was not exposed during the work.

8 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but it will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2004.96.

9 Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to GBA Designs Ltd for funding the work and Wingrove Contractors for allowing access to the site. The fieldwork was carried out by Kate Orr.

10 References

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| Crummy, P | 1992 | <i>Excavations of Roman and later cemeteries, churches and monastic sites in Colchester, 1971-88</i> , Colchester Archaeological Report 9 |
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| Hull, M R | 1955 | 'The south wing of the Roman "forum" at Colchester: recent discoveries', in <i>Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society</i> , 25 |
| Hull, M R | 1958 | <i>Roman Colchester</i> |

11 Glossary

context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c AD 1500
modern	period from the 19th century onwards to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
Norman	the period dating from the Norman conquest of AD 1066 to c AD 1200
Roman	the period from AD 43 to AD 410 approximately.
septaria	a local stone used in Roman buildings and often re-used in medieval buildings

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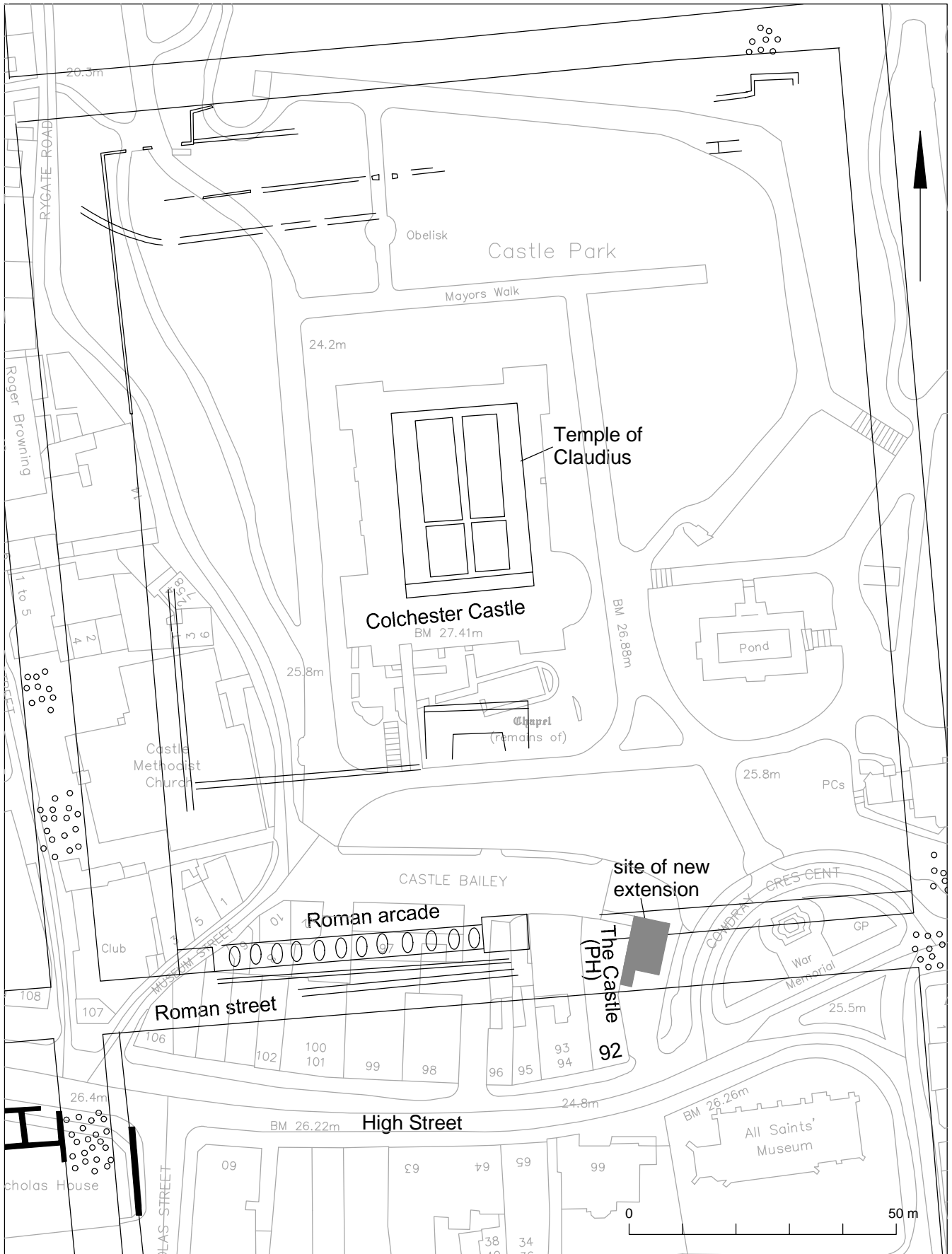


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Fig 1 Site location showing Roman arcade.

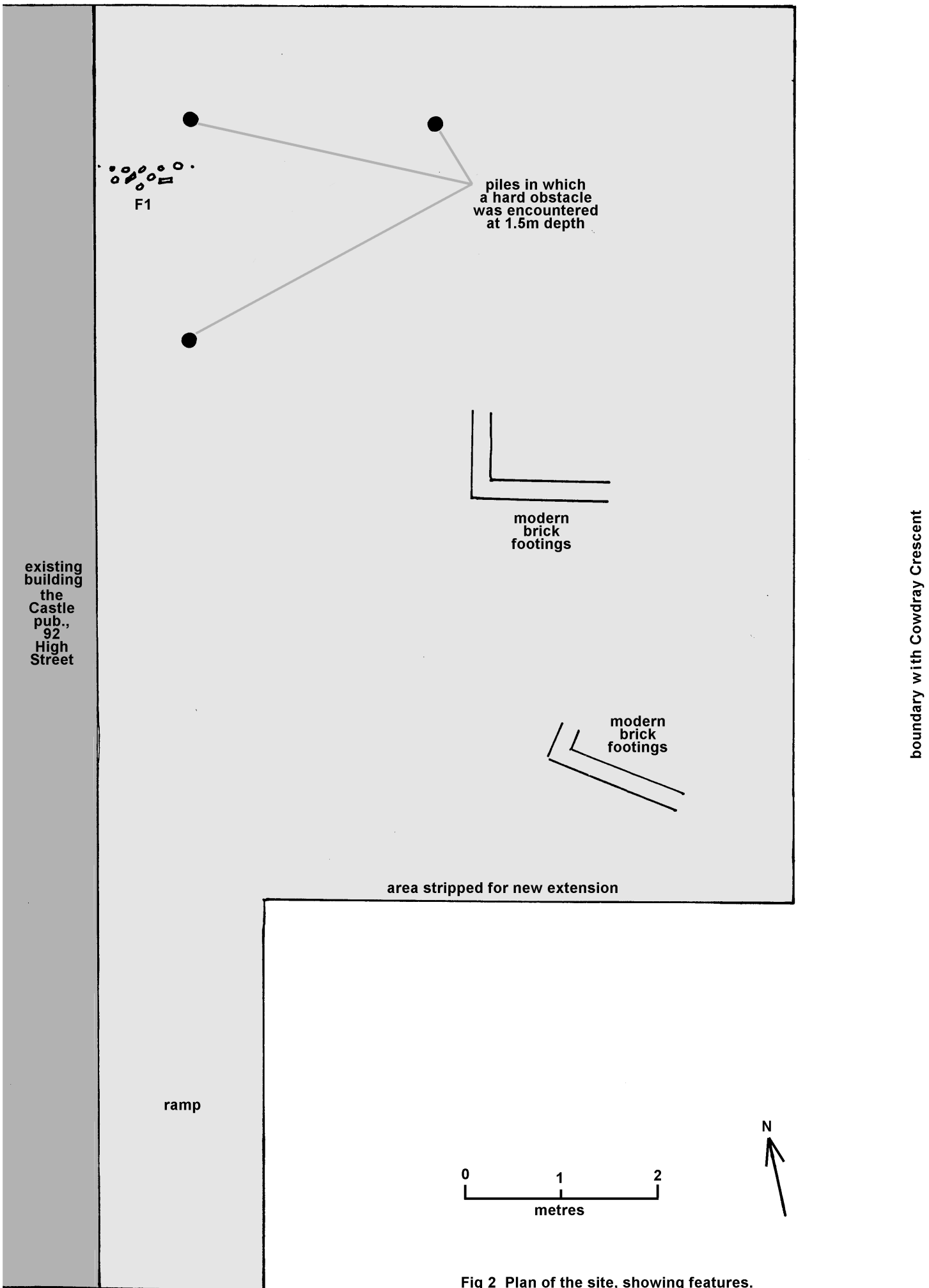


Fig 2 Plan of the site, showing features.

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

Summary sheet

Site address: The Castle public house, 92 High Street, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 99897 25235	Site code: Museum accession code 2004.96
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: February-March 2004	Size of area investigated: 7m x 9m
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: GBA Designs Ltd
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHCR nos:
Final report: CAT Report 265 and summary in EAH	
Periods represented: Roman and modern	
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>Observations were made during groundworks for an extension to the Castle public house. A spread of Roman building material was encountered and, during piling, a hard obstacle was encountered at 1.5m below ground-level which may represent part of the remains of the Roman arcade which enclosed the temple precinct.</i>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: March 2004