

**An archaeological evaluation
rear of 95-96 High Street,
Colchester, Essex
January 2006**

**report prepared by
Howard Brooks**

**commissioned by
Roff Marsh Partnership
on behalf of
Slain Properties**

CAT project ref: 06/1d
Colchester Museums accession code: 2006.32
NGR: TL 99873 25240



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CAT Report 360
March 2006

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1 Summary

This site straddles the line of the arcade on the south precinct wall of the Temple of Claudius, close to the presumed position of the central gateway. A trench on the north edge of the vacant plot at 96 High Street revealed Roman masonry (5.7m wide north-south) at 2.0m below modern ground. The depth below modern ground and the flat top of the exposed masonry suggest that the trench position actually coincided with the passageway through the centre of the gateway.

There was some damage to the north edge of the masonry, and the modern nature of the deposits sealing the Roman masonry suggest that the excavated layers may simply be the soils tipped back into Rex Hull's 1931 excavation trench.

It is possible that one of the excavated soil layers is part of the Norman bank built over the top of the partially-demolished Roman arcade when the castle earthworks were being created.

It is speculated that the west side of the Roman gate arch should survive west of the trench position and very close to modern ground-level (under Crowther's Entry). It is not certain whether the east side of the gate survives, but, if so, it should coincide with the rear of 95 High Street.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological evaluation carried out at 95-96 High Street, Colchester, Essex by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on 30th January 2006.
- 2.2 The evaluation was commissioned by Roff Marsh Partnership on behalf of Slain Properties.
- 2.3 Following submission of a planning application (F/COL/05/1964) for residential and retail development, a requirement for an archaeological evaluation was made by Colchester Borough Council Archaeologist (CBCAO). CBCAO issued a brief for the archaeological work. A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by CAT, and was approved by CBCAO prior to start of site work.
- 2.4 The site is in the town centre, on north side of High Street. As 95 High Street is built up from front to back, the evaluation trench was cut to the rear of 96 High Street, a vacant plot on the east side of the unmarked road known as 'Crowther's Entry'. The vacant plot was in use as a car park at the time.
- 2.5 Site is centred at National Grid Reference TL 99873 25240.
- 2.6 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* (CM 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (CM 2003), and the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological field evaluation* (IFA 1999) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IFA 2001). The guidance contained in the documents *Management of archaeological projects* (MAP 2), and *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment* (EAA 3), *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy* (EAA 8), and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14) was also followed.

3 Archaeological background (Fig 1)

- 3.1 The land in question is located within the town walls and in a sensitive archaeological area, being within both the Roman temple precinct and Norman castle bailey.
- 3.2 The High Street in the Roman and medieval period was the main route through Colchester town with a continuous frontage of properties on both sides of the road. The site itself lies within Insula 22 of the Roman town, the principal feature of which is the Temple of Claudius, which lies directly under the Norman castle keep. The temple itself was central within its own sacred precinct (*temenos*). This enclosure is

very large, with its southern edge lying under the properties on the High Street, from Museum Street to Cowdray Crescent. Excavations in 1964 showed that this Roman masonry arcade forming the southern boundary of the *temenos* still survives to an extraordinary degree. Even after the attentions of Norman stone robbers, the Roman foundations were found to measure 15 feet in width (Hebditch 1971). These excavations confirmed the results of work carried out in 1931 and 1953, which also revealed an impressive gateway immediately adjacent to the site in question (Hull 1955; Hull 1958; UAD event 3105).

- 3.3** A watching brief on the construction of a new wall rear of 96 High Street failed to reveal any significant remains, mainly because the building work did not penetrate below 0.5m below modern ground-level (CAT Report 126).

4 Aim

The aim of the evaluation was to identify and record any surviving archaeological remains (specifically the remains of the precinct wall and/or gateway), and to assess their quality, date, extent and importance.

5 Results (Figs 2-3)

There was an excavation on this site in 1931 (Hull 1958, 171), in which Rex Hull uncovered standing Roman masonry less than 1 foot below modern ground. This was the robbed top of the west side of the monumental gate which is centrally located on the south side of the precinct of the Temple of Claudius. To the east, Hull found a massive foundation 28 feet wide and at least five feet thick (*ibid*). This was the foundation on which the gate was built. The foundation sloped slightly so that its flat top surface was between 5 feet and 8 feet below modern ground.

Before the start of this evaluation, it was the expectation that we would come down onto the Roman masonry previously exposed by Hull quite close to modern ground-level. In fact, masonry (Feature or F2) was not encountered until 2.00m below modern ground. This means that our trench must be located not over the west side of the gate but actually between the two sides of the gate and over the central passageway through it.

The highest excavated horizon (Layer or L1) was essentially the car-park surface – pieces of stone rolled into clay to give a hard surface. This overlay a crushed brick car-park foundation (L2). Under L2 there was a series of infills (L3-L8). The top layers, L5 and L6 (gravel, and sand with bricks respectively), sloped down strongly from south to north, were very modern in character, and are undoubtedly recent infilling. L6 continued down into cut feature F3, which also cuts into the north edge of the masonry foundation. It is not clear whether cut F3 is contemporary with Hull's excavation, or whether all the excavated soil horizons are simply soil layers tipped back into Rex Hull's 1931 excavation trench. It is quite possible that they represent a later hole, dug at some unknown date in the later 20th century.

As mentioned above, the expected Roman foundation (F2) was encountered at 2.0m below modern ground. The foundation was constructed of hard concreted gravel in a creamy white mortar, with occasional fragments of Roman brick or tile, and was noticeably flat-topped (except at its northern edge, where it was 0.2m lower. This area of foundation was labelled F1). If the foundations were built in courses or layers, it would appear that a single course has been removed (robbed?) here at the northern edge.

The one uncertain element is the layer of dark soil (L7) lying over L8 and the top of the Roman foundation. There was no doubt in our minds during the evaluation that this was modern infilling (like all the overlying material). However, in many ways it resembles a layer of dark soil which Rex Hull found overlying the Roman foundations. He interpreted this as part of the make-up of the Norman bank (dumped over the demolished Roman arcade when the Norman castle earthworks were created). All that can be said is that L7 may be the same dark soil, but it looked post-medieval on site.

It was hoped that the width of the arcade foundation could be measured (to confirm earlier measurements). Unfortunately, the northern edge of the masonry had been removed by F3, and the masonry continued out of the south edge of the trench (the size of the plot precluded any further excavation to the south – there was no room for the JCB to sit, and hand-digging was too dangerous given the soft infill). All that can be stated with certainty is that the arcade foundation survives here to a width of at least 5.7m., with some damage on its north edge.

There was no further excavation below the foundation level, apart from defining its northern (damaged) edge where it was cut by F3.

6 Finds

There were no finds.

7 Discussion

The evaluation has shown that the foundation of the southern arcade of the Temple of Claudius survives here. Its highest point is at 2.00m below modern ground. However, there is an important qualification to this. The 2006 trench position falls exactly in the middle of the passageway through the monumental decorative arch which was centrally located in the south arcade wall. On either side of the central passageway are the rising sides of the arch. Rex Hull excavated over the west side of the arch in 1931, and found it surviving only 1 foot below modern ground under the road surface immediately west of 96 High Street (ie in 'Crowther's Entry': Hull 1958, fig 86, 170). It is not known whether the east side of the gate survives, but if it does, it should occupy at least partially overlap the rear part of 95 High Street.

One of the excavated layers may be part of the Norman castle bank overlying the robbed Roman foundations.

For the purpose of plotting the position of the current trench in relation to the known parts of the temple precinct, elements of Hull's (1958) plans have been overlaid on a modern street plan (Figs 2-3). It appears from this that the north edge of the exposed masonry must be close to the north edge of the gate structure. If so, then Hull's measurement of the foundation width at 28 feet (8.5m), and the fact that 5.7m of it was exposed in the trench, allows us to calculate that there must be a further 2.6m of foundation south of the south end of the trench. In fact, the plotted trench position on Figure 3 suggests that the distance between the trench edge and the south edge of the gate could be closer to 1m.

8 Archive deposition

The finds and the paper and digital archive are held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but both will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2006.32.

9 Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to Roff Marsh Partnership (Mr Bob Ward) for commissioning the work on behalf of Slain Properties who funded the work.

The fieldwork was carried out by Will Clarke of CAT. The project was monitored by Martin Winter, Colchester Borough Council Archaeology Officer.

10 References

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11 Glossary

CBCAO	Colchester Borough Council Archaeological Officer
context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made, usually an layer or a feature
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c AD 1500
modern	period from the 20th century onwards to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
post-medieval	period from c 1500 to c 1900
Roman	the period from AD 43 to AD 410 approximately
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database, maintained by Colchester Museums
U/S	unstratified, ie no context
WSI	written scheme of investigation

Distribution list:

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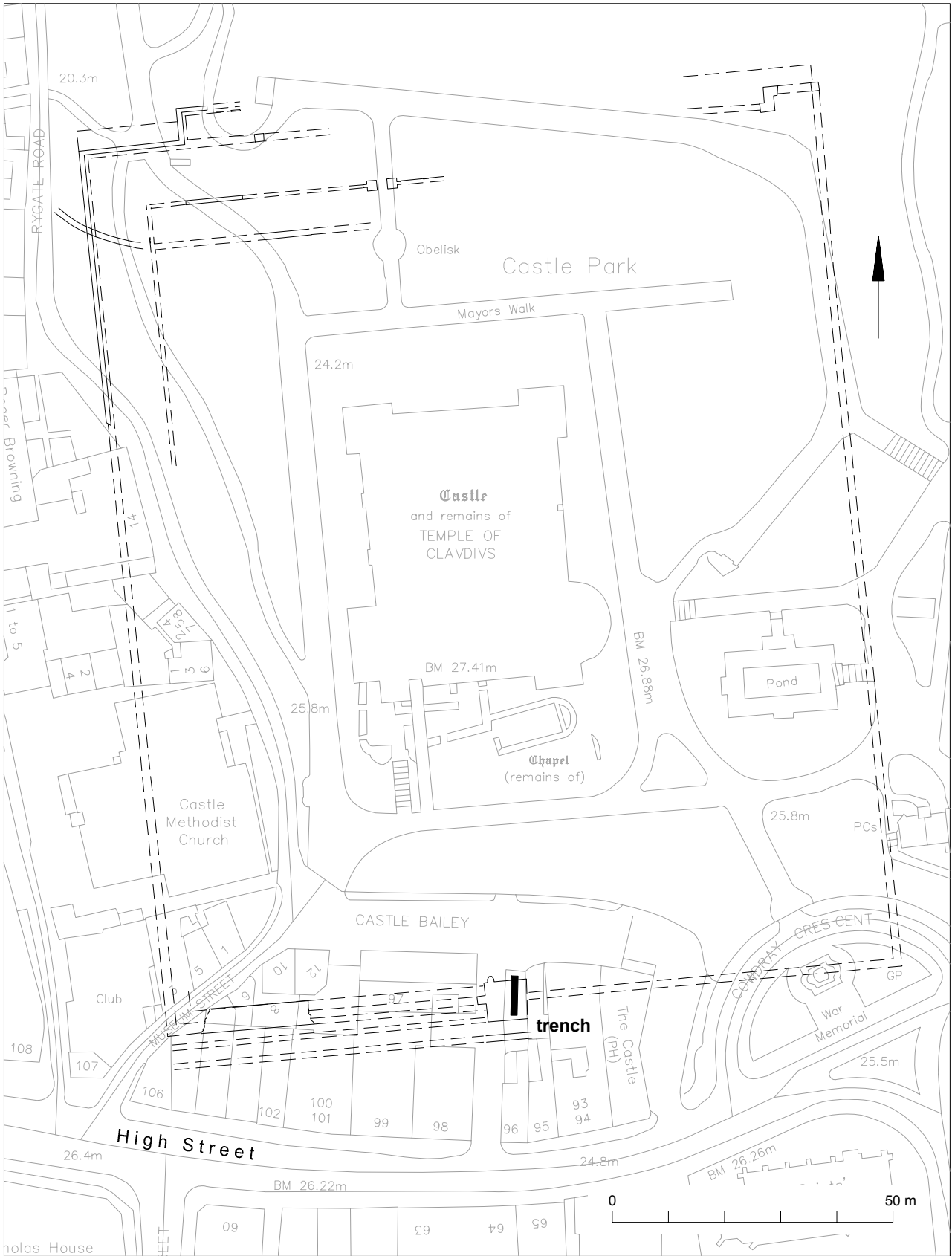
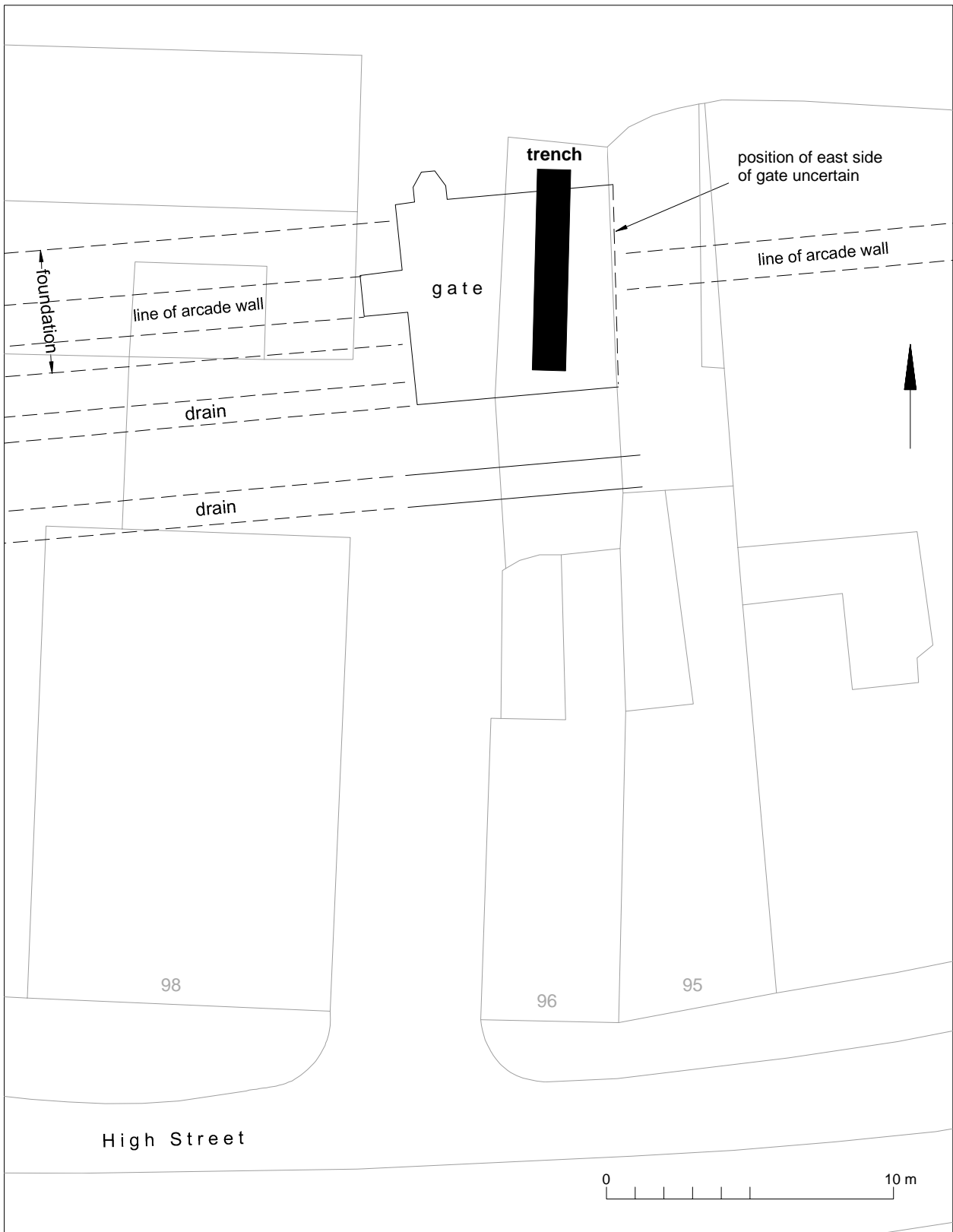


Fig 1 Site location, showing the precinct of the Temple of Claudius.



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Fig 2 Trench location in relation to the precinct of the Temple of Claudius, and the gate.

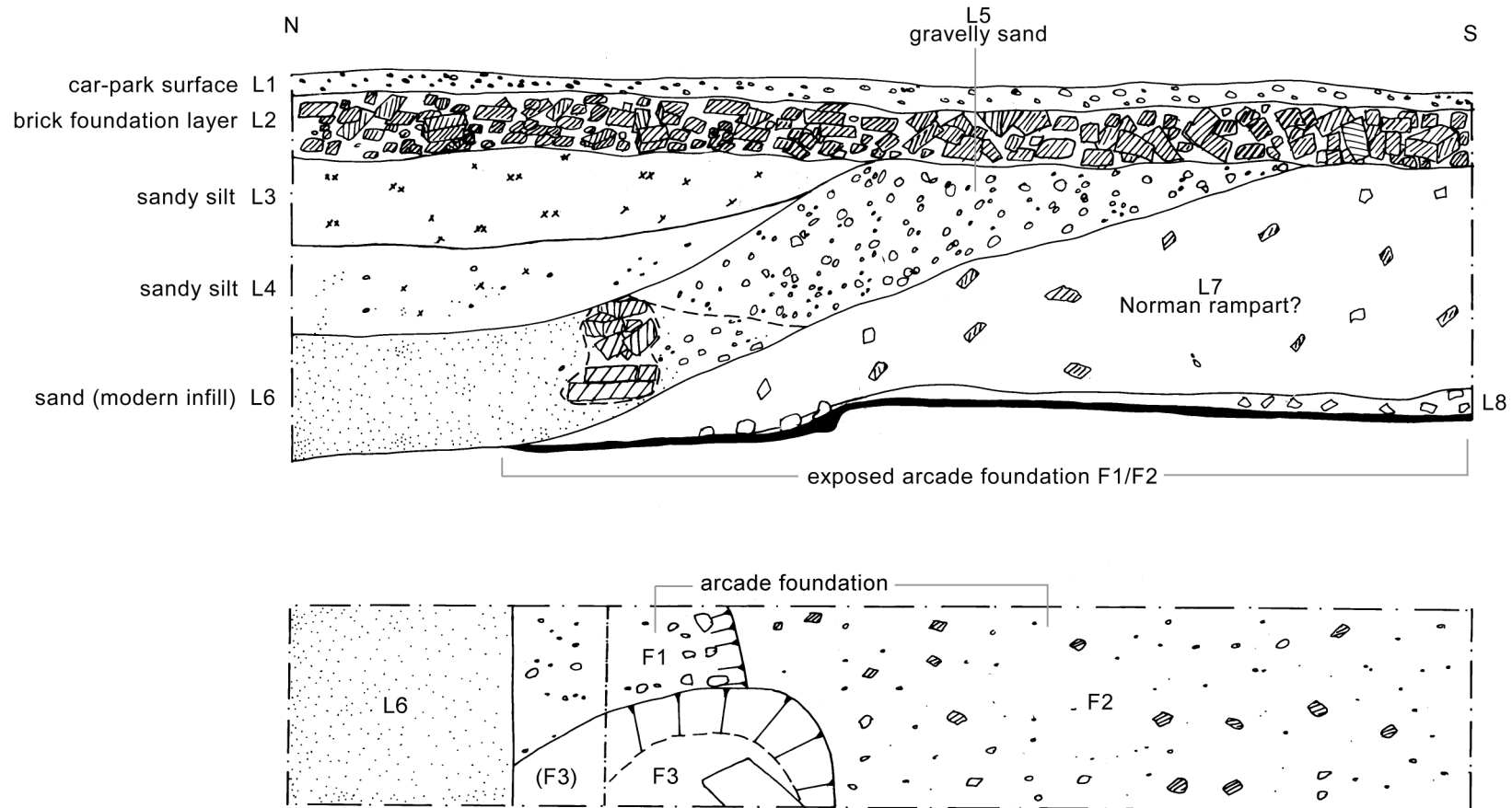
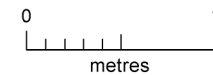


Fig 3 Section and plan.



**Essex Historic Environment Record/
Essex Archaeology and History**

Summary sheet

Site address: rear of 95-96 High Street, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TL 99873 24300	Site code: Museum accession code 2006.32
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: 30th January 2006	Size of area investigated: 1.2 x 7m
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHER/UAD nos: 3105
Final report: CAT Report 360 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Roman, medieval?, post-medieval, modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results:</p> <p><i>This site straddles the line of the arcade on the south precinct wall of the Temple of Claudius, close to the presumed position of the central gateway. A trench on the north edge of the vacant plot at 96 High Street revealed Roman masonry (5.7m wide north-south) at 2.0m below modern ground. The depth below modern ground and the flat top of the exposed masonry suggest that the trench position actually coincided with the passageway through the centre of the gateway.</i></p> <p><i>There was some damage to the north edge of the masonry, and the modern nature of the deposits sealing the Roman masonry suggest that the excavated layers may simply be the soils tipped back into Rex Hull's 1931 excavation trench.</i></p> <p><i>It is possible that one of the excavated soil layers is part of the Norman bank built over the top of the partially-demolished Roman arcade when the castle earthworks were being created.</i></p> <p><i>It is speculated that the west side of the Roman gate arch should survive west of the trench position and very close to modern ground-level (under Crowther's Entry). It is not certain whether the east side of the gate survives, but, if so, it should coincide with the rear of 95 High Street.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Howard Brooks	Date of summary: March 2006

