

**An archaeological watching brief
on Flagstaff Road,
Colchester Garrison,
Colchester, Essex
May 2007**

**report prepared by
Howard Brooks and David Ross**

**on behalf of
Taylor Wimpey**

CAT project ref.: 07/5a
NGR: TL 99650 24750
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1 Summary

This site lies immediately west of Abbey House and the western precinct wall of St John's Abbey. A watching brief during a contractor's excavation of a thrust-bore pit revealed an in situ wall foundation, possibly associated with St John's Abbey or else a post-Dissolution structure built against the outer face of the abbey precinct wall. Other features included two post-medieval pits, and a post-hole possibly associated with the wall foundation. This part of Flagstaff Road has been heavily truncated by modern service runs.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 2.1 This is the report on an archaeological watching brief maintained on a contractor's excavation of a thrust-bore pit in Flagstaff Road, immediately west of the north end of Abbey House, Flagstaff Road, Colchester Garrison, Colchester, Essex (NGR TL 99650 24750).
- 2.2 The archaeological work was carried out on behalf of Taylor Wimpey by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on 10th and 11th May 2007. Project management was by RPS Planning. Post-excavation work took place in October and December 2007, and in January 2008.
- 2.3 All fieldwork was done in accordance with the project strategy (RPS 2004a) and research design (RPS 2004b), and was requested by and agreed with the Colchester Borough Council Mr Martin Winter, who also monitored the project. This report conforms to standards and practices contained in the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IFA 1999), *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IFA 2001), Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (CM 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (CM 2003). Other sources used are *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).

3 Archaeological background

The centre of the thrust-bore pit lay 7.5m west of the projected line of the west face of the western precinct wall of St John's Abbey. The abbey was built by the Benedictine Order by 1115, burnt down in 1133, and was rebuilt in the early 13th century. The cruciform-shaped church is thought to have stood in the north part of the abbey precinct, although this location remains to be confirmed. To the north of the church were the cloister, chapel house and domestic buildings (CAR 1, 28-30).

The abbey and St Giles' church were surrounded by a precinct wall with towers. The wall dates from before the 13th century, and was re-faced in parts in the 16th century. It was partly demolished when the St Botolph's roundabout was built in the early 1970s, but it was recorded before its destruction (CAR 9, 219). There are surviving stretches (some re-faced in brick) in different places. The surviving abbey gatehouse was built in the 15th century, to give access to the town. It is possible that there was a second gatehouse, in the Flagstaff House area. The abbey was dissolved in 1538, and parts of it were demolished shortly afterwards.

The abbey precinct wall survives along the full length of the eastern side of Garrison Area B1b (ie along Mersea Road), and as a short section along the western edge (against Flagstaff Road). The southern wall remains as a standing structure along the northern edge of the car-park in the south-east part of Garrison Area B1b, and as another short segment approximately 40m to the east. The wall line is thought from cartographic sources to have had a dog-leg form on the western side of Garrison Area B1b, where it does not survive intact. The Garrison Area B1a

evaluation trenching (CAT Report 405) identified a short section of *in situ* wall and a robber trench of probable medieval date, both possibly parts of a single building situated close to the northern precinct wall.

4 Aim

The aim of the watching brief was to record the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains exposed by the thrust-bore pit. Given the location, close to the precinct wall, particular attention was paid to the possible survival of remains potentially associated with the abbey.

5 Methods

- 5.1 All the groundworks were carried out by contractors using a mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket.
- 5.2 Potential archaeological deposits which were exposed were cleaned by hand where it was safe to do so. Individual records of layers were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets.
- 5.3 Section drawings were made at a scale of 1:10. Features were planned at a scale of 1:20.
- 5.4 Finds and small finds were registered on CAT pro-forma record sheets and assigned finds numbers according to context. Finds were washed, marked and bagged according to context.
- 5.5 Colour photographs of the trenches and features were taken with a digital camera.

6 Results (Figs 2-3)

Exposed archaeological remains consisted of the remains of an *in situ* wall foundation (F1 and F4) located on the eastern edge of the circular contractor's trench. The top of this foundation was only 0.25m below modern ground-level, ie the surface of Flagstaff Road. It consisted of ragstone, mortar and septaria randomly spread throughout a very light yellow sandy mortar matrix; there was no visible coursing. Its maximum surviving width and depth were 0.42m and 0.24m respectively. The combined maximum length of F1 and F4 was 2.2m north to south.

The wall foundation lay parallel to the abbey precinct wall, and was presumably a part of a substantial undated structure of some kind. Either a medieval or post-medieval date is possible, and it may be the remains of the foundation of a post-Dissolution building erected against the outer face of the abbey precinct wall.

A large, undated post-hole 0.32m wide and 0.47m deep (F3) was found on the immediate west side of the wall foundation. The two may be associated.

The wall foundation was cut by a large pit F2. The exposed part of this pit measured 1.9m x 0.25m, but the curvature of its sides indicated that it was clearly larger than this and lay mainly off-site. It was dated by Victorian glass. Most of the north-west sector of the contractor's trench was occupied by post-medieval pit F5, which was dated by peg-tile. This measured 2.3m x 1.3m on-site, but most of it probably lay beyond the site edge.

7 Finds catalogue

by Howard Brooks

Pottery fabric descriptions are after *CAR 7*.

F1

Finds number 1 (sample 1)
1 lump of Kentish ragstone, 4kg.
1 lump of Kentish ragstone, 623g (discarded).
3 pieces of septaria, 2,002g (discarded).

These building materials were presumably robbed out of a nearby Roman structure.

F2

Finds number 2
23 fragments of peg-tile (1,946g); two fragments kept for reference (443g), others discarded - of the retained pieces, one has rather unusual oblique peg hole on curving edge (possibly not a normal peg-tile but a more specialised roof fitting of some sort).
3 sherds Fabric 40 (PMRE) pottery (146g), 17th-18th century.
6 oystershell fragments, 155g.
1 piece of slag, 32g.
7 fragments of animal bone, 111g (discarded).
7 fragments including base of what looks like an unsuccessful attempt to imitate *façon de Venise* glass tumbler; this must be Victorian or later, 52g.
9 fragments of an old glass vessel; judging by decay this looks like 17th century or thereabouts, 115g.
2 fragments of old window glass; this might be late medieval or early post-medieval, and will have been used in the windows of a large building nearby, ie a church or similar, 15g.

F5

Finds number 3
2 fragments from a fine-grained and laminated sandstone (170g); they look like pieces from a stone paving slab, post-medieval or more recent?
5 fragments of peg-tile (223g); one with hole retained (37g), others discarded.

8 Discussion

The wall foundation is probably of an unknown and undated structure. Either a medieval or post-medieval date is possible, and it may be the remains of the foundation of a post-Dissolution building erected against the outer face of the abbey precinct wall. The other large features, ie the post-medieval pits F2 and F5, and the post-hole F3, are of no particular archaeological significance, though some association between the post-hole and the adjacent wall foundation cannot be ruled out.

9 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF (CAT project code: 07/05a). It will be permanently deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums under accession code COLEM 2007.115.

10 Acknowledgements

The Trust would like to thank Taylor Wimpey for commissioning and funding the work.

The fieldwork was carried out by D Ross, and was monitored for Colchester Borough Council by Martin Winter and for Taylor Wimpey by Rob Masefield of project consultants RPS Planning.

11 References

CAR 1	1981	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report 1: Aspects of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Colchester</i> , by P Crummy
CAR 7	2000	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report 7: Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85</i> , by John Cotter
CAR 9	1993	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report 9: Excavations of Roman and later cemeteries, churches and monastic sites in Colchester, 1971-88</i> , by N Crummy, P Crummy and C Crossan
CAT Report 405		Stage 1b archaeological evaluation, Alienated Land Area B1a, Colchester Garrison, Colchester, Essex, January 2007, unpublished CAT archive report, by Laura Pooley, Howard Brooks and Ben Holloway, 2007
CM	2002	<i>Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i>
CM	2003	<i>Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums</i>
EAA 3	1997	<i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 3 , ed by J Glazebrook
EAA 8	2000	<i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 8 , ed by N Brown and J Glazebrook
EAA 14	2003	<i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 14 , ed by D Gurney
IFA	1999	<i>Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief</i>
IFA	2001	<i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i>
RPS	2004a	<i>Colchester Garrison Alienated Land outline archaeological project strategy proposal and quality plan</i>
RPS	2004b	<i>Research design for archaeological evaluations, excavations and watching briefs on Alienated Land, New Garrison, Colchester</i>

12 Abbreviations

AOD	Above Ordnance Datum
NGR	National Grid Reference

13 Glossary

façon de Venise	glass made (usually in Holland) in imitation of the superior Venetian product
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
layer	distinct or distinguishable deposit of soil
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c AD 1500
modern	period from the 19th century onwards to the present
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
peg-tile	rectangular thin tile with peg-hole(s) used mainly for roofing, first appeared c AD 1200 and continued to present day, but commonly post-medieval to modern
post-medieval	from c AD 1500 to around the late 18th century
post-Roman	period after c AD 410
Roman	period of assimilation of Britain as part of the Roman Empire, c AD 43-410

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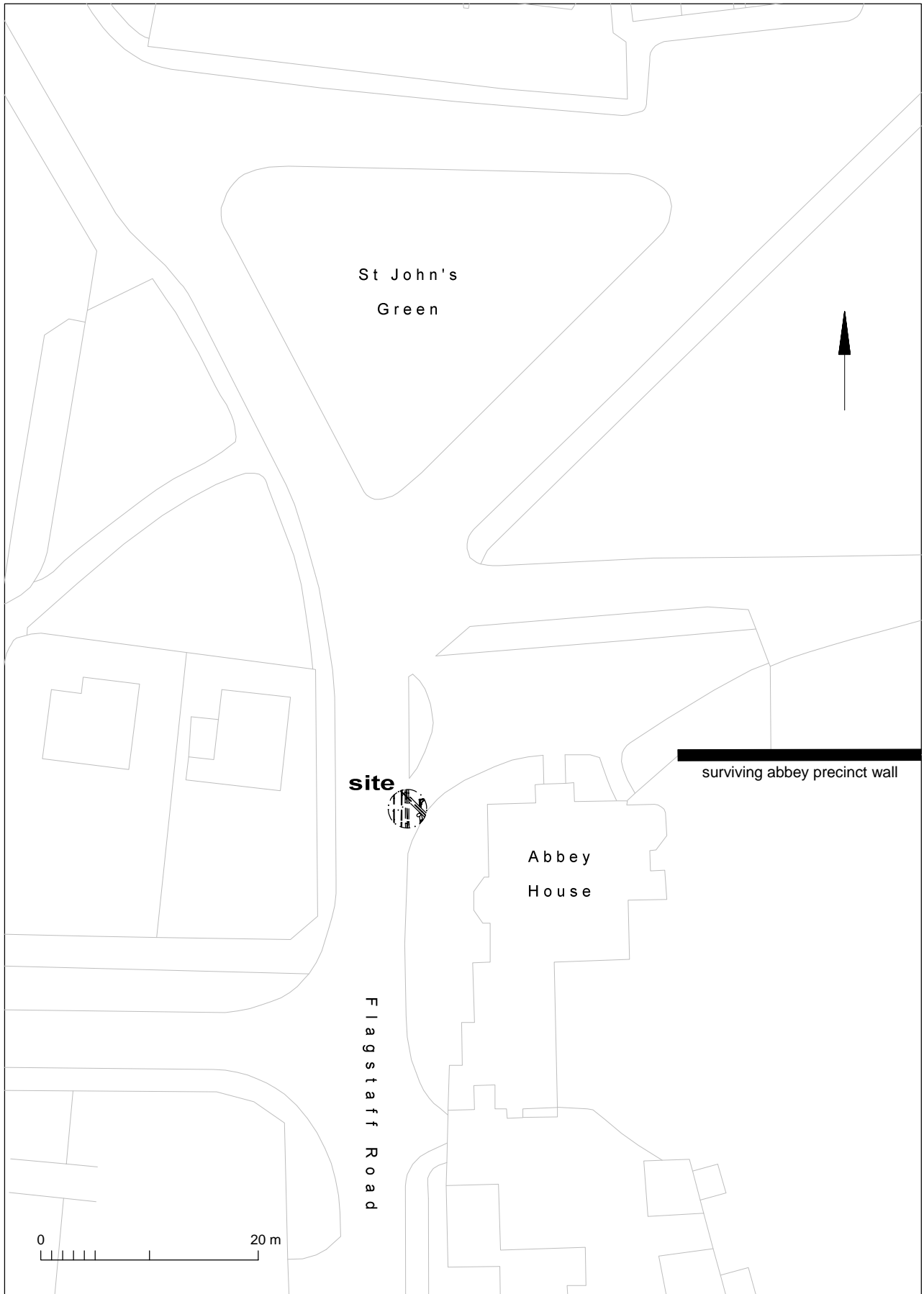
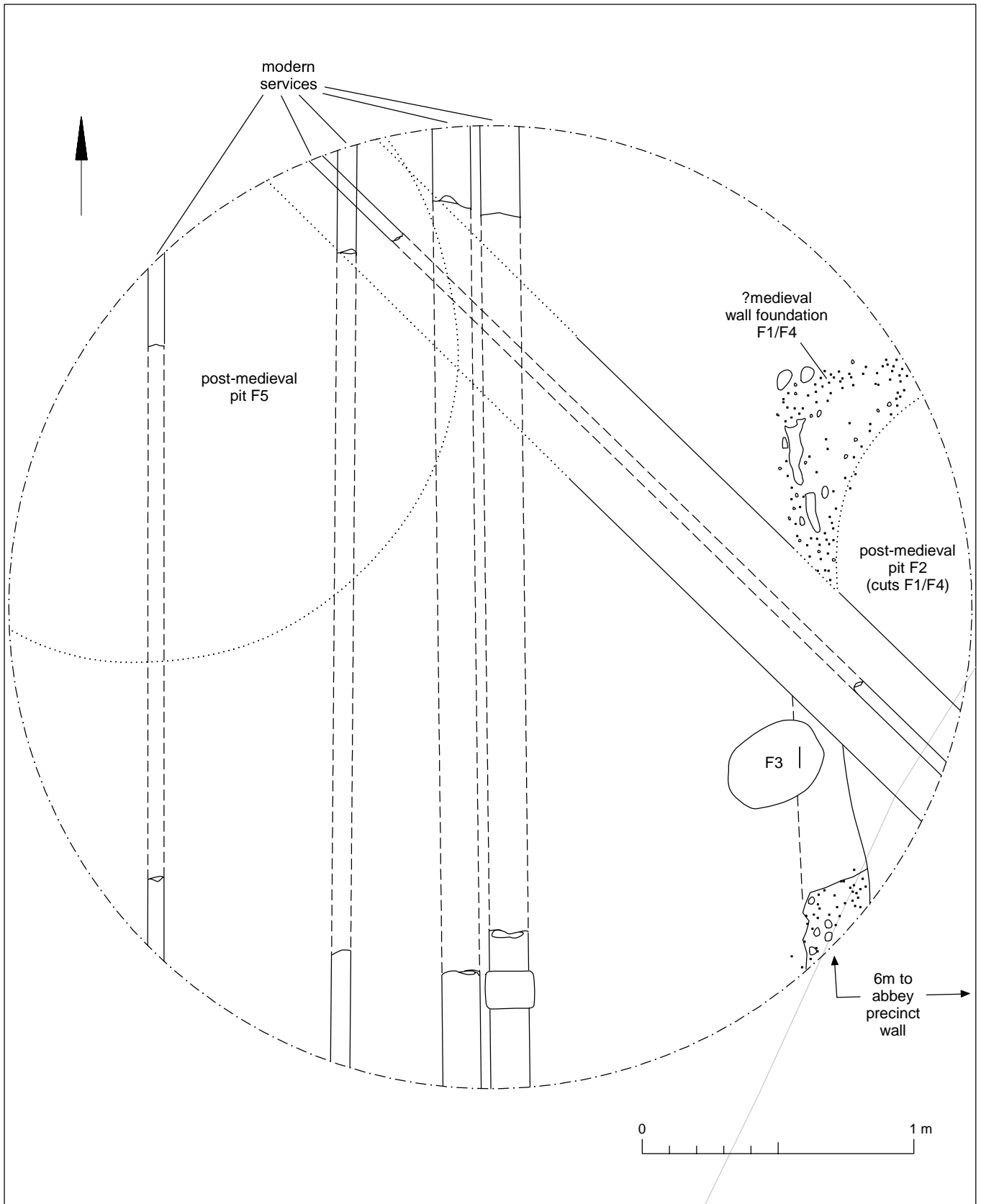


Fig 1 Site location.



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Fig 2 ?Medieval wall foundation F1/F4 and other remains.

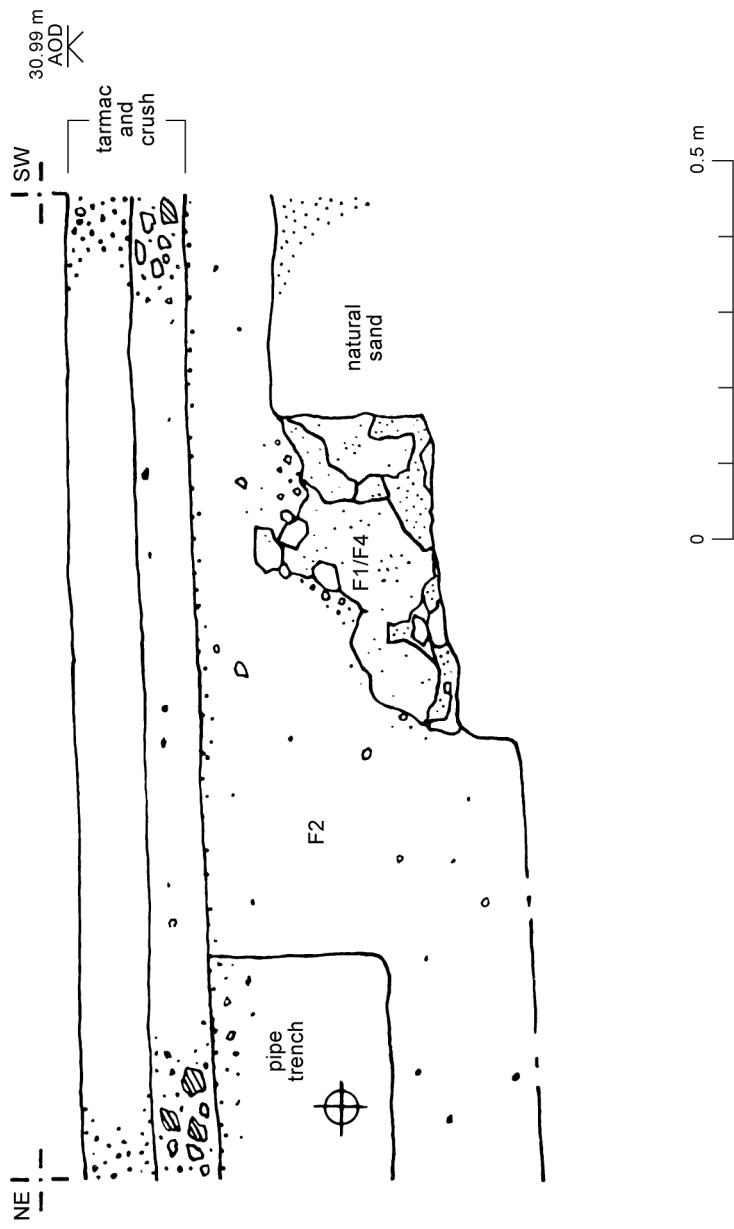


Fig 3 F1/F4 and F2: section.

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

Summary sheet

Site address: Flagstaff Road, Colchester Garrison, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TL 99650 24750	Site code: COLEM accession code 2007.115
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: May 2007	Size of area investigated: 3.5m diameter contractor's trench
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHER nos:
Final report: CAT Report 453 and summary in EAH	
Periods represented: ?medieval, and post-medieval	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>This site lies immediately west of Abbey House and the western precinct wall of St John's Abbey. A watching brief during a contractor's excavation of a thrust-bore pit revealed an in situ wall foundation, possibly associated with St John's Abbey or else a post-Dissolution structure built against the outer face of the abbey precinct wall. Other features included two post-medieval pits, and a post-hole possibly associated with the wall foundation. This part of Flagstaff Road has been heavily truncated by modern service runs.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: H Brooks	Date of summary: January 2008