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Double sided	
A3 1	
Colour 0	

# Colchester Archaeological Trust Field Projects

## Watching Brief

### Colchester Eastern Approaches Road: Stage 1

#### Introduction

This report covers the principal observations made in the course of a long-term watching brief on the construction works for Stage One of Colchester's Eastern Approaches Road.

Construction work on the road began in 1994 and was completed in the early part of 1996. At the planning stage, the consortium responsible for the scheme commissioned an archaeological evaluation which included exploratory trenches at eight selected locations along the proposed route. As a result, one site, 79 Hythe Hill, was identified for rescue excavations (to be published in a forthcoming volume of Essex Archaeology and History) and the remainder of the route was subject to the watching brief described in this report.

#### Principal Observations

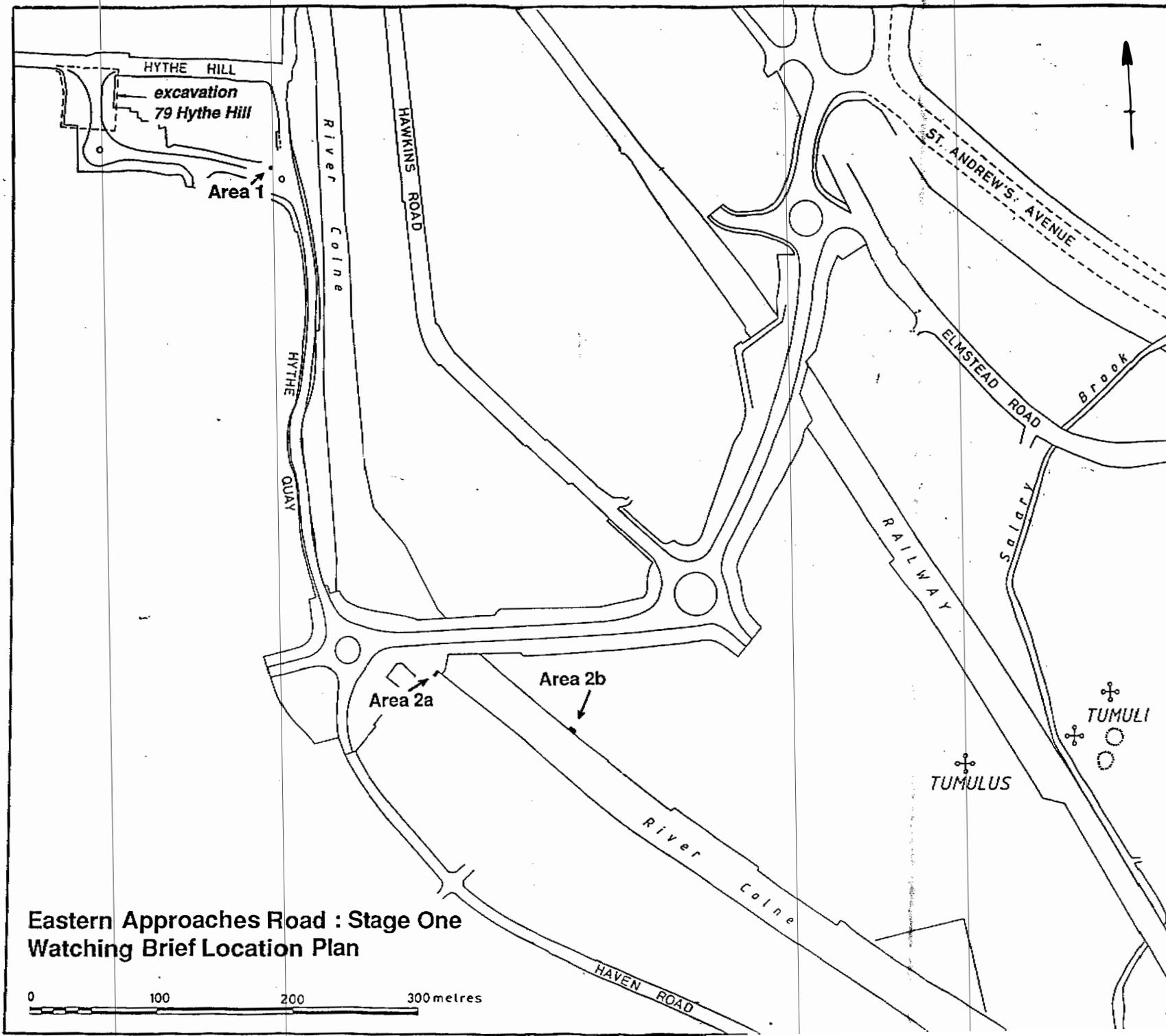
The new road runs south from the Greenstead Roundabout, bridging the Colchester to Clacton railway line, then turning west across low-lying industrial land and crossing the Colne at the northern end of King Edward Quay. From the new Colne bridge the route follows Hythe Quay north for 350 metres before joining Hythe Hill from the south via an east-west link to the former Eastern Tractors depot. The total length of the route is approximately 1.5 km, of which the eastern part, from the Greenstead Roundabout to the Colne, consists mainly of elevated carriageway.

The full watching brief record, including minor notes on ground condition and stratigraphy at various points in the route, is contained in the Colchester Museum archives. Observations on the roadworks adjoining and relevant to the archaeology at 79 Hythe Hill are described in the separate excavation report for that site. Elsewhere, two main areas stood out for their value in judging priorities for future archaeological investigation. Both were situated close to the modern river frontage (*Figure 1*) and are described in detail below.

#### Area 1. Opposite 26 Hythe Quay.

Groundwork for a new roundabout included the general reduction of surface levels by 0.7 metres at the Hythe street frontage. At the time of inspection the reduced surface was almost entirely obscured by a spread of imported sand. However, at a point 11 metres back from the street frontage, in the northern side of the cutting, a small cluster of septaria was noted within a feature largely removed by a combination of the reduction work and the adjacent installation of a cylindrical drain pit. Although unbonded, most of the stones contained residual traces of mortar and thus appeared to be re-used. The immediate area also contained a light scatter of disturbed septaria lumps and rare small fragments of peg-tile.

Figure 1



Eastern Approaches Road : Stage One  
Watching Brief Location Plan

0 100 200 300 metres

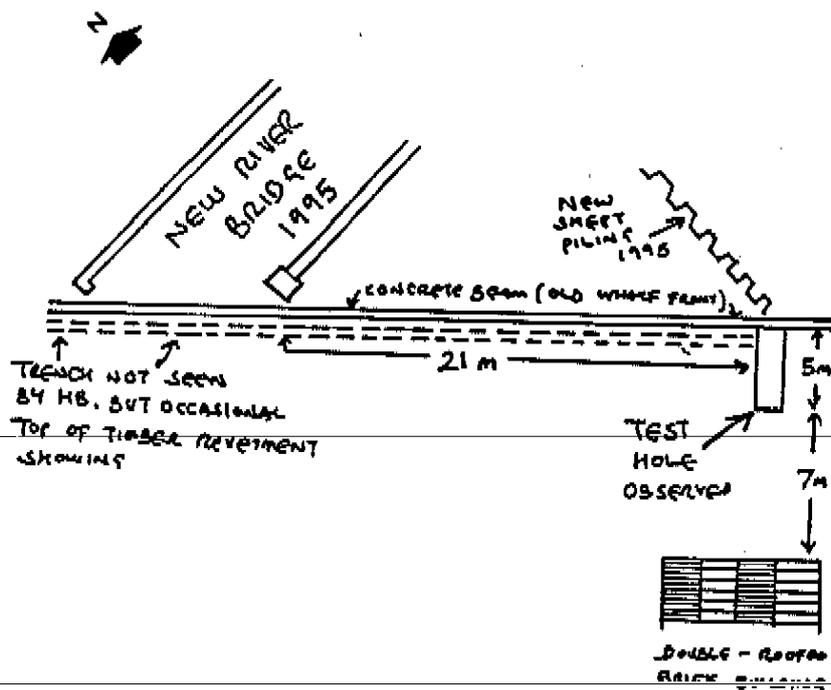
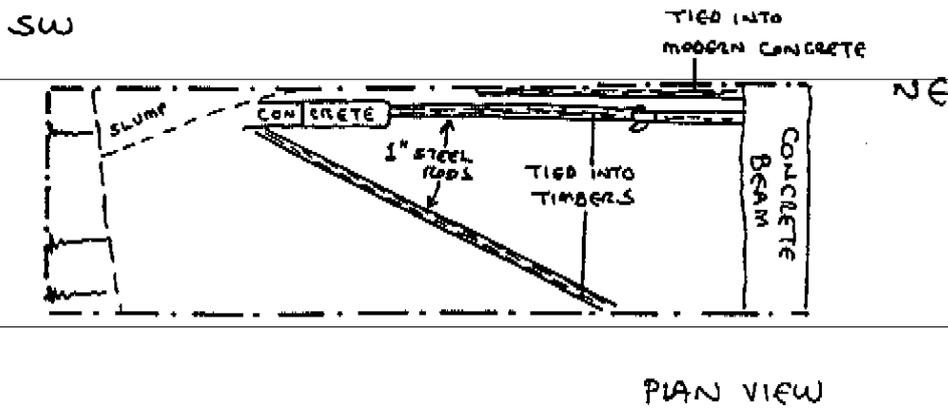
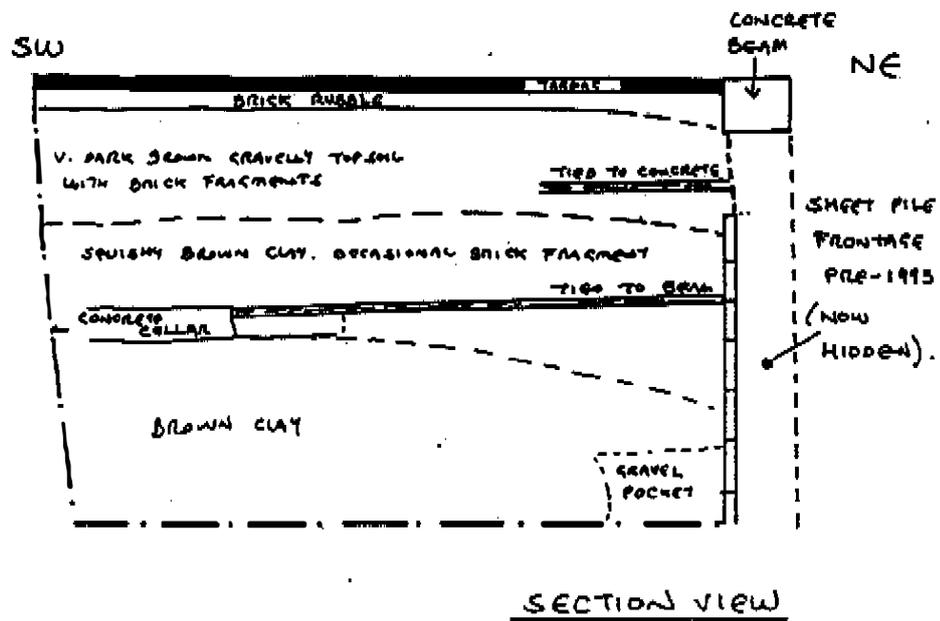


Figure 2. Eastern Approach Road Watching Brief. Area 2a location detail.



0 1 METRE

Figure 3. Eastern Approach Road Watching Brief. Area 2a section and plan.

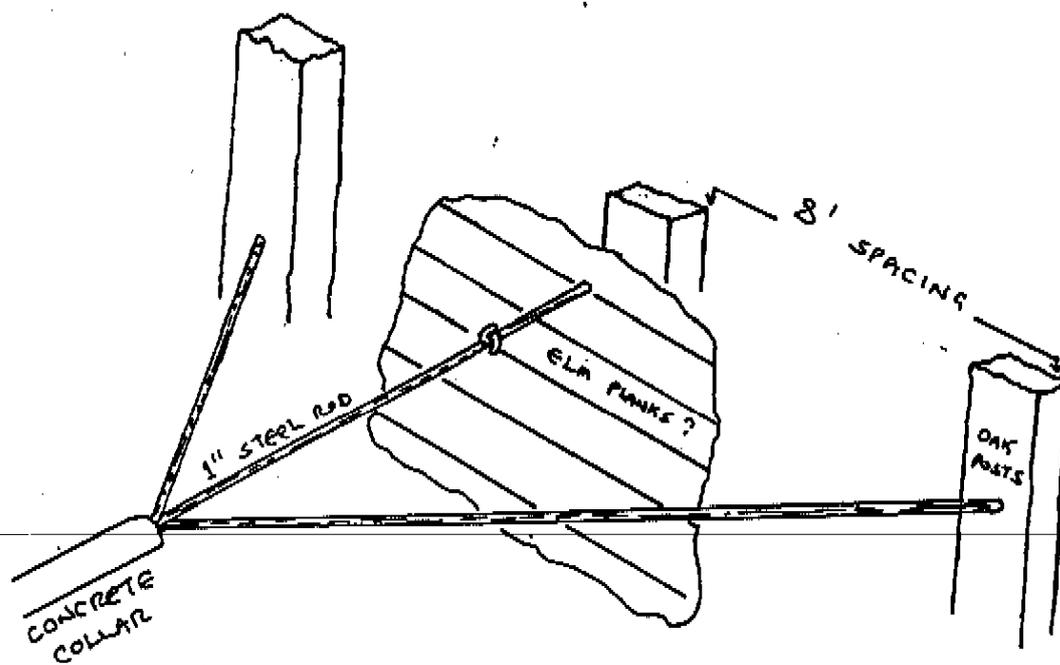


Figure 4. Eastern Approach Road Watching Brief. Area 2a revetment anchoring.

Absolute interpretation of this feature is impossible due to the scant nature of the evidence. However, it appeared to be structural and if linear may be part of a wall foundation aligned north-south. Foundations incorporating re-used Roman septaria are common from the late 11th-century onward, although the presence of peg-tile, if directly associated (i.e. displaced from the foundation), would suggest a 14th-century or later date for any quayside building at this location.

## Area 2. Colne Bridge Area

### *West Bank (Area 2a)*

A 2 x 4 metre trench, 3 metres deep, was dug for exploratory purposes prior to installation of a petrol interceptor tank close to the west abutment of the new bridge (*Figure 2*). Additionally, a long narrow trench was opened immediately behind the wharf edge but only partly observed.

Three stages of wharf construction are discernible in this area. First, the same wooden post and plank wharf which is visible along most of the Colne and is presumably Victorian. Second (and absent from the east bank of the river), a concrete sleeper beam laid along the top of the old timber frontage, presumably in the later 20th century. Third, the coffer dam built to take the new bridge abutment, which is infilled back to the old wharf front.

The trenches exposed parts of two of these stages of wharf. First, the wooden post and plank wharf was seen in the long trench (tops of some posts only) but mainly in the large trench, where the reverse side of the timber revetment was visible (*Figure 3*). The planking was apparently fixed to the rear of the posts and the whole structure pinned into the wharf by steel rods, 1 inch in diameter, which were surrounded by a concrete collar and fixed to some point beyond the south-west end of the observed trench. The rods actually seen consisted of one tied at right angles to the wharf, with a second meeting it obliquely. This would only make sense from a structural point of view if the rods were grouped in threes, as suggested in *Figure 4*. The rod fixed at right angles had two separate pieces, the end of each being formed into a hook to clasp the other section in a dry joint.

The later wharf front, where the concrete beam had been laid along the top of the old wooden posts, was also visible in the trench. In this case it was represented by an upper steel tie rod anchored to concrete beneath the beam.

Ground stratigraphy at this location therefore appears to be of very late date, backfilled against the wharf front at least in Victorian times if not more recently. It consisted of modern tarmac, and brick rubble, sealing a gravelly brown topsoil with brick fragments. Beneath this was a layer of very wet and slippery brown clay, again with occasional brick fragments. At the lowest level of the trench lay brown clay with a pocket of gravel - possibly natural, but probably redeposited.

### *East Bank (Area 2b)*

On the east bank of the Colne observation included a trench, approximately 9 x 5 x 2.5 metres deep, on the land side of the wooden revetment, with an pit extending approximately 3 metres into river silts on the river side of the revetment line. The results are best shown graphically, as on *Figures 5 and 6*.

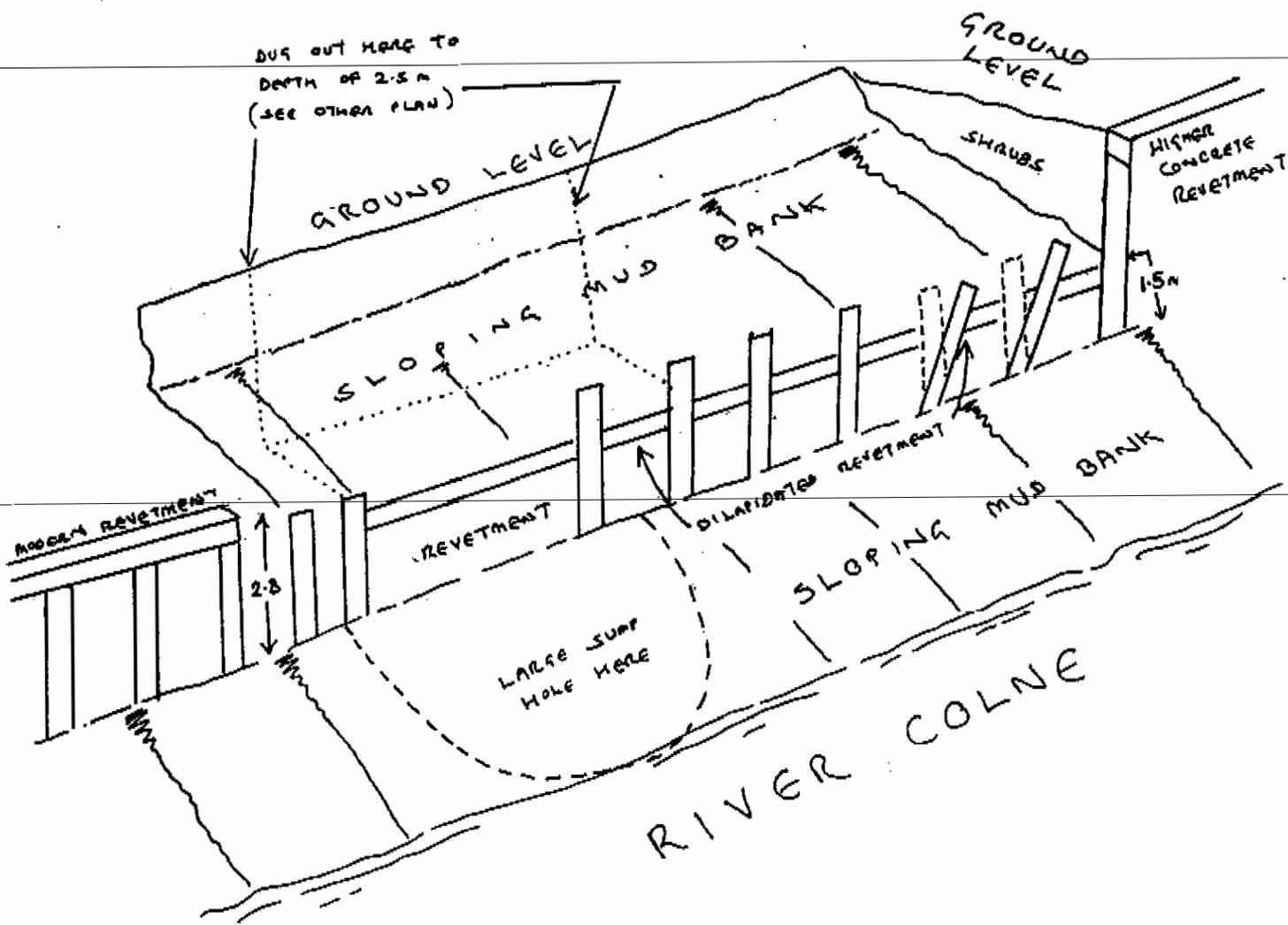


Figure 5. Eastern Approach Road Watching Brief. Area 2b cutting: schematic.

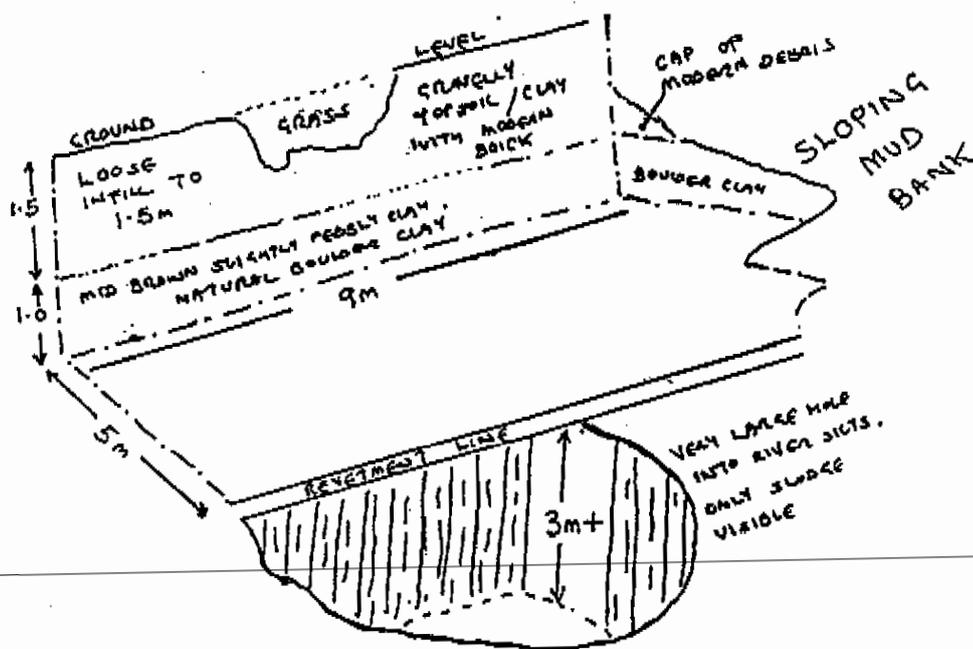


Figure 6. Eastern Approach Road Watching Brief. Area 2b stratigraphy.

Observed stratigraphy on the land side (*Figure 6*) was 1.5 metres of loose modern infill with a mixture of gravel and loamy clay and brick fragments, overlying a natural subsoil of mid-brown slightly gravelly clay. The clay was observed to a depth of one metre but extended below the trench bottom. The surface material, containing brick fragments, is certainly post-medieval in date, and possibly of 19th or 20th-century origin.

An examination of the south side revealed, apart from a slight capping of modern debris, a thin layer of recent river silts overlying the natural clay. The implication of this is that the river (having broken through the dilapidated timber revetment) is actively eroding the natural subsoil here, and depositing a thin capping of silts on top.

On the river side, close inspection of the 3 metre deep pit was not possible for safety reasons, but the exposed section appeared to display an accumulation of river silts for its full depth.

### Acknowledgements

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