

**An archaeological watching brief at  
Pinnacle House, 21 St John's Green,  
Colchester, Essex  
April 2013**

**report prepared by  
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**commissioned by  
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NGR: TL 9978 2477  
CAT project ref.: 13/03b  
Colchester and Ipswich Museums accession code: COLEM 2013.13



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**CAT Report 694**  
May 2013

**Essex Historic Environment Record/  
Essex Archaeology and History  
CAT Report 694  
Summary sheet**

<b>Site address:</b> Pinnacle House, 21 St John's Green, Colchester	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester Borough
<b>NGR:</b> TL 9978 2477	<b>Site codes:</b> Museum accession code: COLEM 2013.13 CAT project code: 13/03b
<b>Type of work:</b> Watching brief	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT)
<b>Dates of work:</b> 3rd April 2013	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 70 sq m
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester and Ipswich Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Client
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related EHER and UAD nos:</b> --
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 694 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods represented:</b> medieval/post-medieval	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b> An archaeological watching brief took place at Pinnacle House, 21 St. John's Green, Colchester, during groundwork in advance of the construction of an extension.</p> <p>The site is located approximately 230 m south of the walled area of Colchester town centre. It lies on the eastern edge of St John's Green, approximately 30 m north-east of St John's Abbey gatehouse, and is within both a scheduled monument area and a conservation area. Scheduled monument consent was obtained for the archaeological investigation.</p> <p>The site is situated within the walled precinct of St John's Abbey, and is close to the recently-discovered St John's Abbey church (CAT Report 601) as well as to the gatehouse (Fig 1). There were no previous records of significant archaeological remains from the site itself, although records from the surrounding area include: Roman and medieval burials; remains of medieval monastic and other ecclesiastical buildings; and post-medieval pits, ditches and building remains. The Roman circus lies a couple of hundred metres to the south. Pinnacle House itself dates from about 1830 and is on the local list of historic buildings.</p> <p>The aims of the watching brief were to record the depth and extent of any archaeological remains uncovered during the redevelopment and to assess the date and significance of these remains.</p> <p>The groundwork included a series of narrow trenches for the foundations of the extension, a glazed link between the house and the extension, and a garden wall to the north of the extension (Fig 1). An existing wall was incorporated into the south wall of the extension. The foundation trenches were 500 mm wide and, with the exception of the trench for the garden wall, were dug down to the natural subsoil. The trenches for the extension and the glazed link were between 1.3 m and 2.2 m deep, while the trench for the garden wall was approximately 800 mm deep. The trenches were dug by the contractor using a mini-digger with a toothless trenching bucket, and were monitored by a CAT archaeologist. On health and safety grounds, the recording of the archaeological deposits was done from the modern ground level looking down into the trenches. Further details of the methods used during the watching brief can be found in the written scheme of investigation (WSI) for the site, which was produced by CAT in March 2013.</p>	

The natural subsoil (Layer or L3) was reached in the foundation trenches for the extension and the glazed link. In the latter it was fairly shallow, approximately 0.8-1.2 m below the modern ground level (Sx 2, Fig 2). In the eastern part of the extension, it was 1.2 m deep while, in the western part, it was approximately 2 m deep (Sx 1, Fig 2). The natural subsoil consisted of brownish-yellow gravelly sand, sealed in places by thin deposits of pale brown cover loam.

In most of the trenches, the natural subsoil (L3) was sealed by an extensive, homogenous, greyish-brown layer (L2). This was between 600 mm and 1.5 m thick, and was thickest over the north-western part of the extension. Here the bottom of L2 lay approximately 2 m below the modern ground level, although it undulated slightly (Sx 1, Fig 2). Oyster shells were fairly common in L2 and tended to occur in clusters.

A small quantity of human bone fragments was recovered during the machine-digging of the foundation trench for the north wall of the extension (Fig 1 & Sx 1, Fig 2). The fragments were well-preserved and included lower limb bones, vertebrae, and skull and mandible fragments, probably from one or more adult/adolescent individuals. However, the context of the human bone fragments remained unclear. They probably came from about 1.75 m below the modern ground level, where further bone fragments were visible in the north section. It was uncertain whether the fragments came from an *in situ* burial or whether they were redeposited. No grave cuts were visible and the bone fragments seemed to derive from L2. The bones were probably medieval in date and belonged to a cemetery associated with St John's Abbey church. Other finds from L2 were sparse, and no securely-stratified dating evidence was recovered.

Layer 2 was sealed by dark greyish-brown, modern topsoil (L1), which was approximately 500 mm thick. In places there were also thin deposits of modern dump/make-up at or near the modern ground surface. The deposits in the trenches were heavily rooted. Several modern brick foundations were encountered in the trenches.

The most significant archaeological deposit uncovered during the watching brief was L2. However, the limited nature of the investigation made interpretation of this layer difficult and it remains undated. The presence of bands of oyster shells suggests that L2 accumulated gradually. It was possibly the backfill of a large, shallow pit, which was perhaps dug to extract sand and gravel. Quarry pits of varying dates, from Roman to modern, have been found elsewhere in the St John's Abbey area (see, for example, CAT Report 438). Alternatively L2 could have been accumulation and/or make-up on top of an earlier ground surface.

The human bone fragments were reburied in a trench dug for a soakaway in the northern part of the site. No finds were retained. The site records, photographs and the rest of the site archive from the watching brief will be permanently deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums.

We are grateful to Angela Baker for commissioning CAT to undertake the archaeological watching brief. CAT would also like to thank the contractors, Wall 2 Wall Plastering, for their help on site. The work was monitored by Martin Winter, Colchester Borough Council Archaeological Officer, who also prepared a brief in March 2013 specifying the archaeological work required on the site.

**Previous summaries/reports:** none

**Keywords:** human bone, St John's Abbey

**Significance:** \*

**Author of summary:**  
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**Date of summary:**  
May 2013

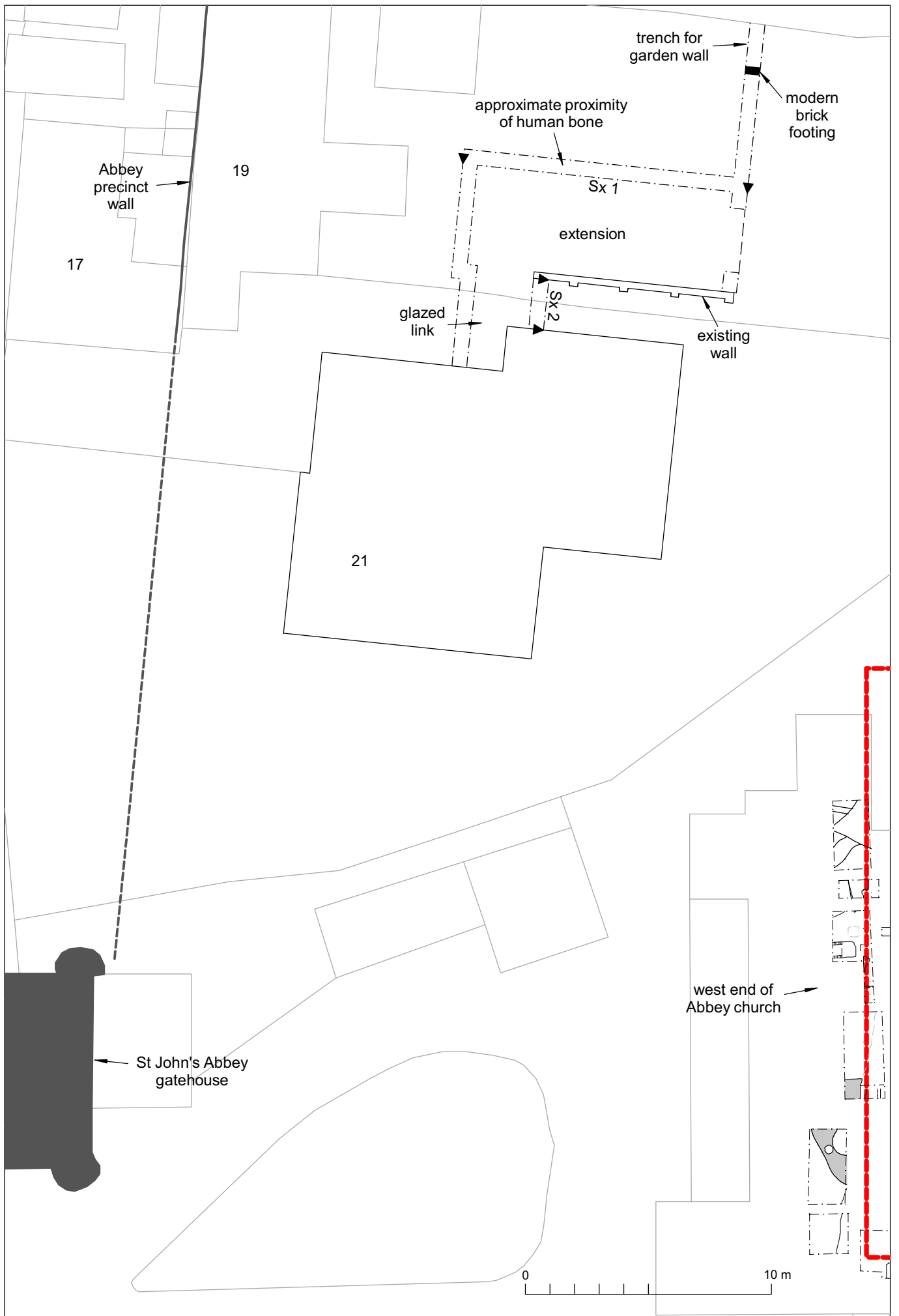
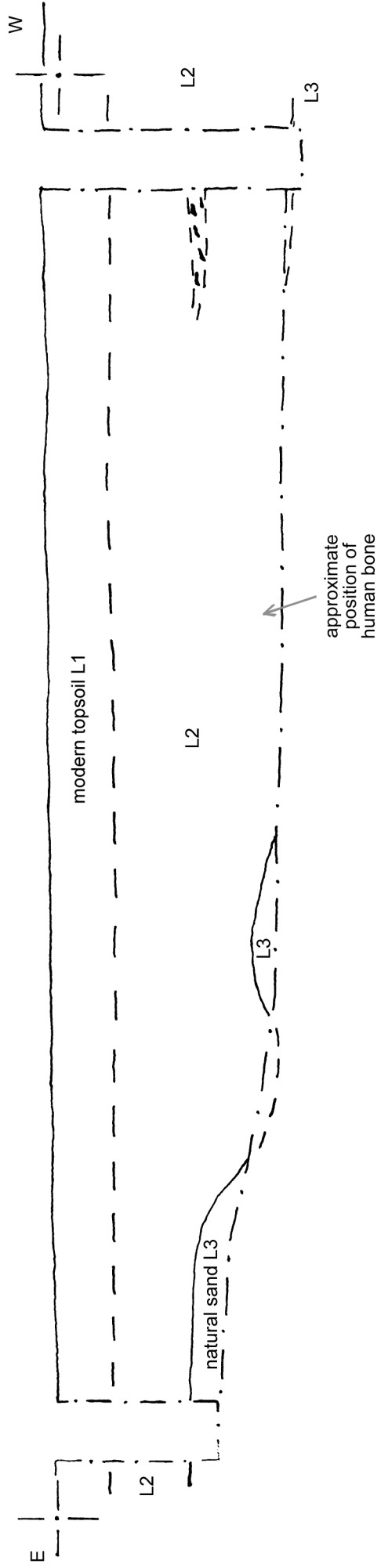


Fig 1 Site plan.

Section 1



Section 2

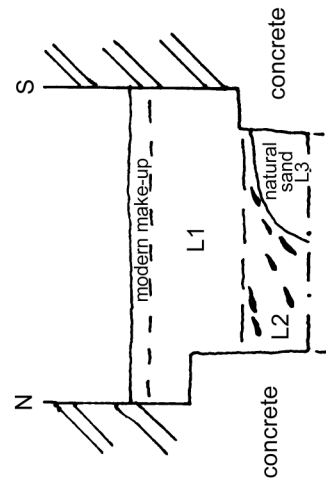


Fig 2 Sketch sections 1-2.