

# **An archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching at 2-3 Priory Street, Colchester, Essex**

**November 2014**



**report prepared by  
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with a finds report by Stephen Benfield**

**Commissioned by  
Chris Rollafson and the Colchester Islamic Cultural Association**

CAT project ref.: 14/09j  
Museum accession code: COLEM 2014.87  
NGR: TM 00013 24995



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**CAT Report 800**  
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## Summary

*A single trial-trench was excavated by the Colchester Archaeological Trust to the rear of 2-3 Priory Street in Colchester town centre prior to the construction of an extension.*

*Roman deposits, including at least one in situ surface and debris from the demolition of a Roman building, were identified at the northern end of the evaluation trench. Previous archaeological investigations in the close vicinity have suggested that there was at least one extra-mural building of late Roman date in this area.*

*The Roman deposits on the site had been truncated by medieval inhumation burials associated with the Priory of St Botolph. A significant quantity of disarticulated human bone was recovered and reburied and two articulated skeletons, both young individuals, were uncovered at depths of only 0.68m and 0.74m below the modern ground level.*

## Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the archive report on the archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on behalf of the Colchester Islamic Cultural Association at 2-3 Priory Street, Colchester, Essex (NGR TM 00013 24995) (Fig 1). The proposed development (LPA 140569) comprises the construction of an extension to the rear of the property, which is currently in use as a mosque. The extension is to be located to the south of the existing building on ground that slopes gently to the south (Fig 1).

The proposed extension is located c 40m to the south of the historic walled town adjacent to the scheduled monument area of St Botolph's Priory (Fig 1). The priory was founded circa 1104, probably on or near a pre-existing church. Only the nave walls of the priory church remain standing. The full extent of the Priory precinct is not known, but the northern boundary is presumed to correspond with Priory Street, therefore placing the development site within the precinct (Fig 1). The nave of the priory church was used as the parish church after the dissolution of the priory in 1536 and until the Siege of 1648, when it was left a ruin.

The aim of the investigations was to locate, identify and assess the condition of any surviving archaeological deposits to enable an informed decision to be taken on the requirements of further archaeological mitigation strategies. The work was undertaken in accordance with a brief produced by the Archaeological Officer of Colchester Borough Council (Winter 2014) and a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by CAT (2014).

This report follows the standards set out in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (CIMS 2008a) and also those in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological evaluation* (IfA 2008a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IfA 2008b). The guidance contained in English Heritage's *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE 2006) and in the documents *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), *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14) and *Research and Archaeology Revised: A Revised Framework for the East of England* (EAA 24) was also followed.

## Results (Figs 1 & 2)

The trial-trench measured 9m x 1.6m and was roughly north-south orientated within the footprint of the proposed extension (Fig 2). The concrete hardstanding had been removed from the investigation area prior to the arrival of the CAT archaeologist.

A layer of loose concrete and sand (L1) and a dark brown/grey post-medieval soil (L2) (Fig 3) were both removed under archaeological supervision using a tracked excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket. L2 contained clay pipe pieces (see finds section below) as well as peg-tile and post-medieval brick fragments (which were not retained). Beneath L2, a homogenous, brown sandy-silt (L3) was encountered which contained frequent fragments of disarticulated human bone as well as oyster shell and pottery sherds (Fig 3).

Two east-west aligned inhumation burials (F1 & F3) were identified during the reduction of L3 (Fig 2). Both burials contained the articulated skeletal remains of young individuals (Plates 1 & 2). The skeletons were partially exposed to allow the archaeologist on site to confirm that they were *in situ* and ascertain the level of bone preservation. They were subsequently covered over and reburied.

It was not possible to distinguish the grave cuts associated with the two skeletons within L3. However, the western end of F1 was discernable where it cut a metallated surface (L4) and a compact layer of mortar and silty-clay (L5) (Fig 2). These two layers, along with a layer of Roman brick/tile fragments and mortar (mostly *opus signinum*) (L6: Fig 2), are Roman deposits that have been heavily truncated by the later burials. Sherds of pottery and a coin recovered during the cleaning of L6 suggest that these layers are late Roman in date (see finds section below). The grave cuts of two further inhumation burials were identifiable where they cut the Roman layers (F2 & F4: Fig 2).

To the south of F3, a sondage was excavated to ascertain the depth of the natural geology (Fig 2). Excavation continued to a depth of 1.9m below modern ground level (BMGL) but the natural geology was not encountered (Fig 3). The excavated soil was a brown sandy-silt throughout (?L3), although at a depth of 1.5m below modern ground level the first of two lenses of Roman mortar was noted (Fig 3). Fragments of disarticulated human bone were recovered from the uppermost 0.65m of L3, but not in the lower 0.9m (Fig 3).



**Plate 1: The northern end of the trench with the inhumation F1 in the foreground and the Roman layers L4-L6 behind, facing south-west.**



**Plate 2: Inhumation F3, facing north.**

## Finds

by Stephen Benfield

A small quantity of bulk finds consisting of pottery, ceramic building material (CBM), clay pipes and two small iron objects (one of which is almost certainly a nail) were recovered from three contexts (L2, L3 & L6). The finds from L3 were recovered as two finds groups L3i (2) & L3ii (5) and as a single find L3iii (4). The finds group L3i comes from the north end (northern third) of the evaluation trench, finds group L3ii comes from the south end (southern two thirds) and the find L3iii came from the hand-excavated sondage at a depth of 1.7m BMGL. The majority of the closely-datable finds are of Roman and medieval date. A small number of finds can be dated to the post-medieval period. The total quantities of finds are listed by type in Table 1.

**Table 1 Type and quantities of finds**

Finds type	no.	wt (g)
Pottery	28	397
Ceramic building material (CBM)	10	525
Clay pipe	2	20
Iron objects/nails	2	40

**Table 2 Pottery fabrics list**

Fabric code	Fabric description	Period
CZ	Colchester colour-coated ware	Rom
EA	Nene Valley colour-coated ware	Rom
GA	BB1: Black-burnished ware, Category 1	Rom
GB	BB2: Black-burnished ware, Category 2	Rom
GX	other coarse wares, principally locally-produced grey wares	Rom
KX	Black-burnished ware (BB) types in pale grey ware	Rom
13	Early medieval sandy wares	med
13	Early medieval shell-dusted sandy wares	med
20	Medieval sandy grey wares (general)	med
22	Hedingham fine ware	med
42	Border ware	p.med

The pottery was recorded using the Colchester Roman and post-Roman fabric series (*CAR 10* & *CAR 7* respectively). Vessel form numbers refer to the Colchester/Camulodunum (Cam)-type series (Hawkes & Hull 1947 & Hull 1958). The pottery fabrics recorded are listed in Table 2. All of the finds are listed with a spot date in Table 3.

**Table 3 Types of finds by context and find number**

ctxt	find no	find type	fabric	no	wt (g)	form/description	period	spot date
L2	3	C Pipe		2	20	Complete bowl (Crummy Type 7 - L17C) & a stem piece	p.med	L17C
L3i	2	CBM		2	20	Small <i>tessera cubes</i> (white mortar around base)	Rom	Rom
L3i	2	CBM		2	53	Roman <i>imbrex</i>	Rom	Rom
L3i	2	Pottery	GX	11	66	2 jar rim sherds, rest body sherds	Rom	Rom
L3i	2	Pottery	CZ	1	7	Beaker body sherd	Rom	E2-L3C
L3i	2	Pottery	GA	1	8	Cam 279A/B jar, lattice decorated body sherd	Rom	M2-3C
L3i	2	Pottery	GB	1	12	Base sherd	Rom	E2-3C
L3i	2	Pottery	KX	1	30	Cam 39 bowl rim	Rom	M2-4C
L3i	2	Pottery	GX	1	22	Rim sherd: Cam 307(?) bowl with lid seated rim	Rom	L2-4C
L3i	2	Pottery	42	1	6	Green glazed surfaces	p.med	M16-17C
L3i	2	Pottery	13	1	3	Body sherds	med	L11-E13C
L3i	2	Pottery	20	2	24	Body sherds	med	L12-14C
L3i	2	Pottery	22	1	41	Body sherd form a jug(?) decorated with green & splash glaze and small applied vertical ribs	med	12-13C
L3i	2	Iron		1	14	Rod (80 mm long) with splayed (trefoil-like) foot		Not closely-dated
L3i	2	Iron		1	26	Corroded piece, almost certainly a nail		Not closely-dated
L3ii	5	CBM		2	318	Roman flue tile, one with scored keying (11 mm thick), one plain piece	Rom	Rom
L3ii	5	CBM		1	12	Small <i>tessera cube</i> (white mortar around base)	Rom	Rom
L3ii	5	CBM		3	122	Peg-tile	Med-p.med/mod	13/14C-p.med/modern
L3ii	5	Pottery	GX	1	18	Base sherd	Rom	Rom
L3ii	5	Pottery	KX	1	22	Base sherd from a bowl	Rom	M2-3/4C
L3ii	5	Pottery	13S	1	10	Body sherd	med	11-E13C
L3ii	5	Pottery	13	1	8	Rim with thumbled top	med	L11-E13C
L3	4	Pottery	GX	1	35	Base from a bowl	Rom	M1-2C(?)
L6	1	Pottery	EA	2	85	Base & body sherd	Rom	M3-4C prob 4C

A single Roman copper-alloy follis (SF1) was also recovered from cleaning over the surface of L6. The coin can be dated to the mid 4th century (AD 335-341).

**SF1** (Find 6) Coin. Roman copper-alloy follis (1.5g). Obv. corroded. Rev. legend **GLORIAEXCER.CITVS** with two soldiers, one standing either side of single standard. Dated AD 335-341.

All of the finds were recovered from soil layers. The finds from L2 consist of clay pipe pieces, including one bowl of Crummy Type 7 (**CAR 5**) that can be dated to the late 17th century.

The finds from L3 include a single sherd of post-medieval Border ware (Fabric 42) dated to the mid 16th-17th century. However, the majority of the closely-dated pottery is of medieval and Roman date. The date range of the medieval pottery present spans the 11th-13th century, with the latest dated sherds in fabrics of 12th-13th century date. Amongst the sherds is a body sherd from a Heddingham ware vessel, probably a jug, decorated with applied, plain strips and a glazed upper body. Finds of pieces of peg-tiles (L3ii) most probably date to after the late 13th century (Ryan 1993, 97), but are not closely dated. The Roman finds from L3 are clearly residual. The closely dated Roman pottery is primarily of 2nd-3rd/4th century date and includes a sherd from a Cam 279A/B jar, a bowl of form Cam 307 and a dish of form Cam 39. Of note are a number of small, red tile, *tessera* cubes that have mortar adhering to them and have been used in a Roman floor.

The small quantity of pottery from L6 is of late Roman date, broadly dating the mid 3rd-4th century and most probably of 4th century date. A fourth century coin (SF1) dated AD 335-341 was also recovered whilst cleaning over the surface of this layer.

All of the disarticulated human bone encountered during the evaluation was reburied on the site once the evaluation was complete and the two articulated skeletons identified were not excavated. The level of bone preservation encountered at the site was very good.

## Discussion

The evaluation has shown that Roman deposits survive within the area of the proposed extension at a depth of 0.59m BMGL. At least three distinct layers were observed, including an *in situ* metalled surface and debris from the demolition of a Roman building. These deposits are evidence of an extra-mural building to the south of the walled town which may have fronted onto the Roman road that followed the line of modern-day St Botolph's Street (Fig 2). The finds-dating evidence suggests that activity in this area continued into the late Roman period. Other evidence of Roman extra-mural buildings in this area includes a floor of red tesserae recorded to the north of the site under Priory Street (Hull 1958, 293), the discovery of part of a Roman building underlying the chancel of the Priory Church in 1991 (Crummy 1997, 150 and an extensive unpublished archive with CAT) and the identification of stratified deposits of 2nd to 3rd third century date at 30, St Julian Grove in 1970 (Walton-on-the-Naze Records Office annual report 1971) (Fig 2).

The two articulated skeletons uncovered during the evaluation were both orientated east-west with the head at the western end, indicating that they were Christian burials. No closely-datable finds were associated with the burials. However, the presence of medieval pottery in the surrounding soil and the location of the site within the precinct of St Botolph's Priory would suggest that they are medieval in date. Other inhumation burials were found in close proximity to the development site during excavations at the east end of the priory church in 1991 (Crummy 1997, 150), to the north of the priory church

transept in 1986 (Shimmin 1986), and immediately to the south of the site in 1939 (Hull 1958, 293) (Fig 2).

Two inhumation burials were also uncovered during the construction of an extension to the rear of the neighbouring property (1 Priory Street) in 2000 (CAT Report 96). These burials were located at 1.4m and 1.8m BMGL. Although the two skeletons identified during this evaluation were only 0.68m and 0.74m BMGL, the presence of deeper burials was indicated by the extensive truncation of the Roman deposits and the high frequency of disarticulated human bone (Fig 2). The absence of an articulated skeleton in the sondage excavated towards the southern end of the trench probably indicates the presence of a deep Roman feature in this area or a burial located deeper than 1.9m BMGL.

## Acknowledgements

CAT would like to thank Chris Rollafson and the Colchester Islamic Cultural Association for commissioning the project. The site work was undertaken by A Wightman. The finds were identified by S Benfield and E Holloway illustrated the sections.

The project was monitored by Chris Lister for Colchester Borough Council.

## References

**Note: all CAT fieldwork reports are available online in .pdf format at <http://cat.essex.ac.uk>**

- |                      |      |  |
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Winter, M	2014	Brief for an archaeological evaluation, 2-3 Priory Street, Colchester, Essex.

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## **Appendix 1: contents of archive**

One A4 document wallet containing:

- 1 Introduction**
  - 1.1 Copy of the evaluation brief issued by ECC
  - 1.2 Copy of the WSI produced by CAT
  - 1.3 Risk assessment
  
- 2 Site archive**
  - 2.1 Site digital photographic record
  - 2.2 Attendance register
  - 2.3 Context sheets (L1-L6, F1-F3)
  - 2.4 Finds register
  - 2.5 Site photographic record on CD
  - 2.6 Trench plan
  
- 3 Research archive**
  - 3.1 Monitoring (client) report
  - 3.2 Finds report

### **Not in wallet**

The finds (1 partial museum box)

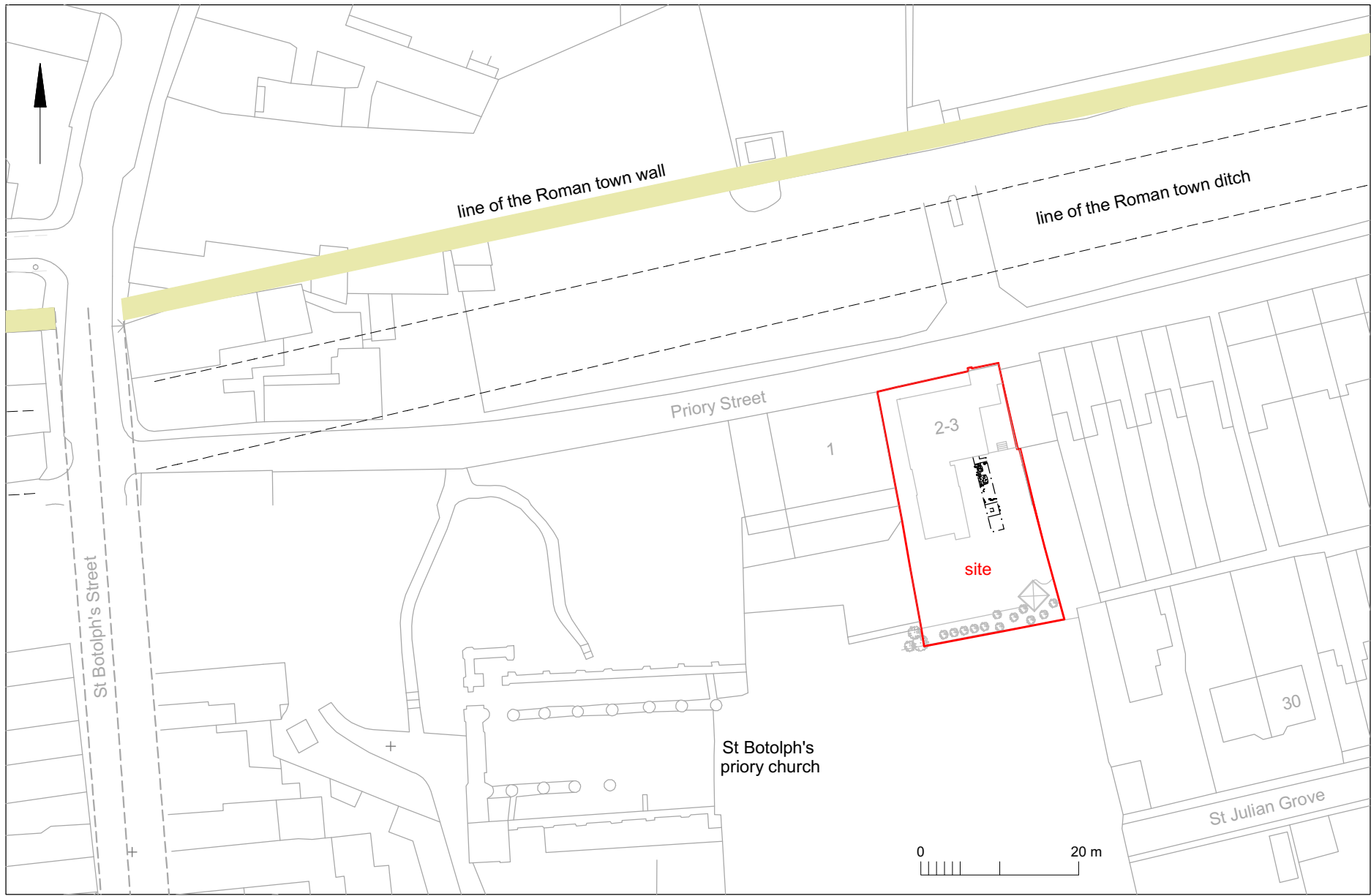


Fig 1 Site location.

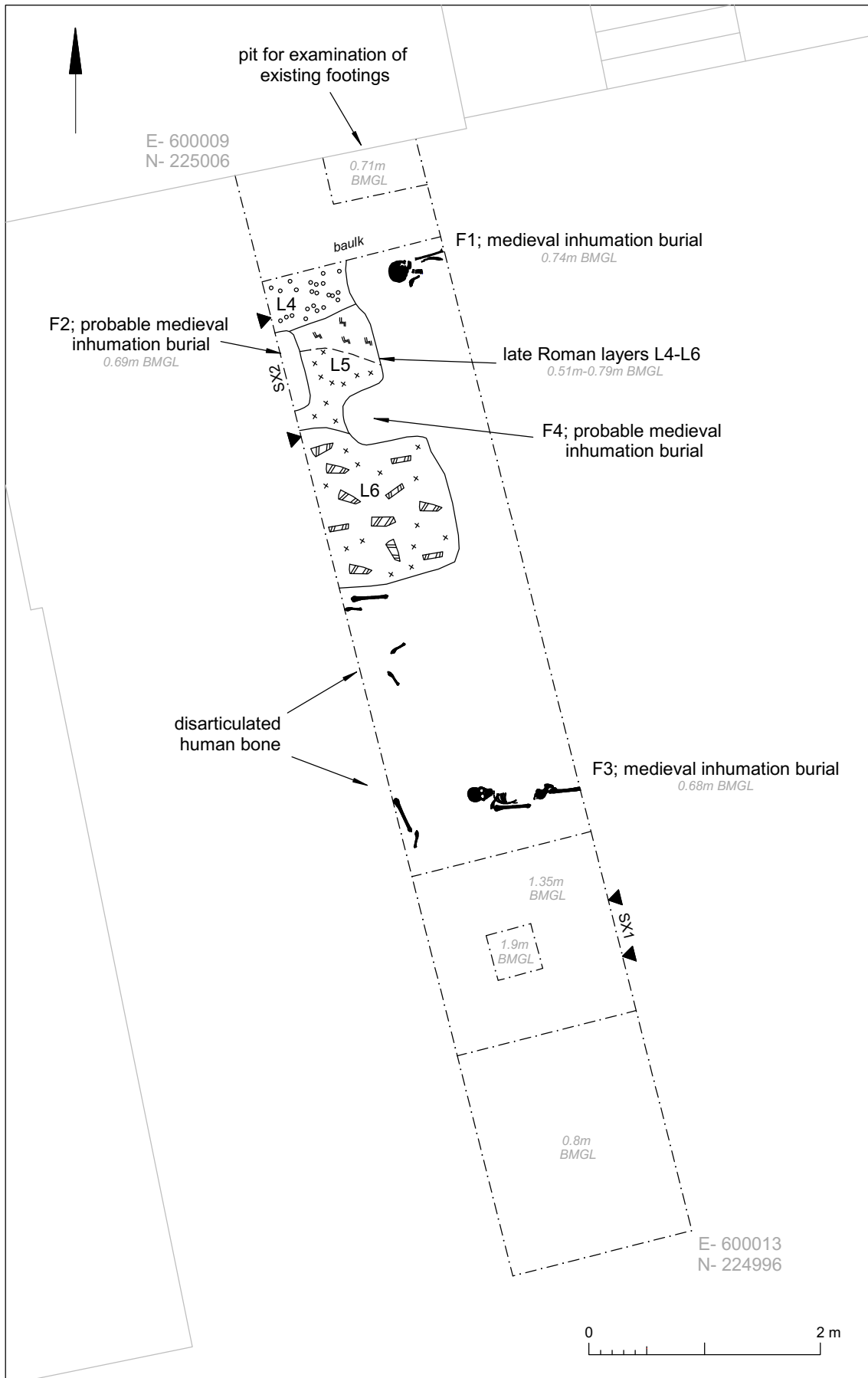


Fig 2 Results (BMGL- below modern ground level).

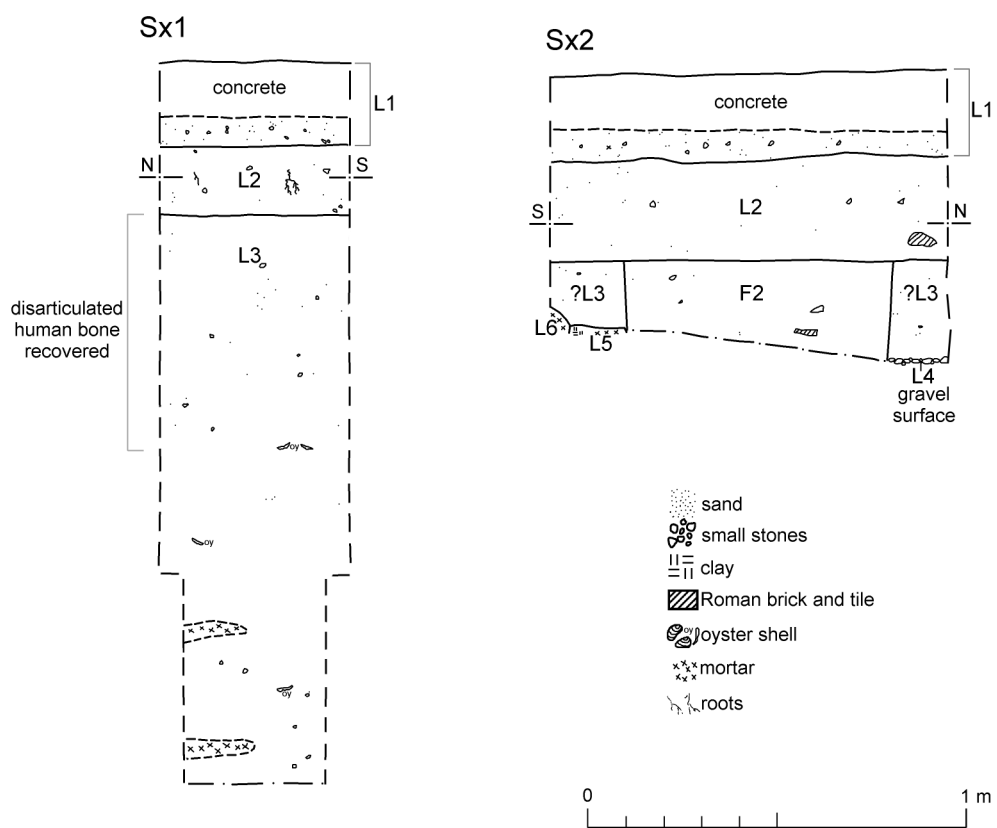


Fig 3 Sx1: representative trench section, Sx2: section showing F2.

# Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

## Summary sheet

<b>Address:</b> 2-3 Priory Street, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> St Botolph's	<b>District:</b> Colchester Borough
<b>NGR:</b> TM 00013 24995	<b>Site codes:</b> CAT project – 14/09j Museum accession – COLEM 2014.87
<b>Type of work:</b> Evaluation by trial-trenching	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> October 2014	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> One trench 9m x 1.6m
<b>Location of curating museum:</b> Colchester & Ipswich Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Developer
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> Yes	<b>Related UAD numbers:</b> 355, 3165, 3174, 3518
<b>Final report:</b>	CAT Report 800
<b>Periods represented:</b>	Roman, medieval
<b>Summary:</b>	
<p><i>A single trial-trench was excavated by the Colchester Archaeological Trust to the rear of 2-3 Priory Street in Colchester town centre prior to the construction of an extension.</i></p> <p><i>Roman deposits, including at least one in situ surface and debris from the demolition of a Roman building, were identified at the northern end of the evaluation trench. Previous archaeological investigations in the close vicinity have suggested that there was at least one extra-mural building of late Roman date in this area.</i></p> <p><i>The Roman deposits on the site had been truncated by medieval inhumation burials associated with the Priory of St Botolph. A significant quantity of disarticulated human bone was recovered and reburied and two articulated skeletons, both young individuals, were uncovered at depths of only 0.68m and 0.74m below the modern ground level.</i></p>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> none	
<b>Keywords:</b> medieval inhumation burials, Roman extra-mural settlement	<b>Significance:</b> **
<b>Author of summary:</b> Adam Wightman	<b>Date of summary:</b> November 2014