

**An archaeological watching brief  
at 97 High Street,  
Colchester, Essex  
March 2010**

**report prepared by  
Donald Shimmin**

**on behalf of  
Flying Trade Group plc**

CAT project ref.: 10/3a  
Colchester and Ipswich Museums accession code: COLEM 2010.13  
NGR: TL 9985 2524



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**CAT Report 587**  
September 2011

## Summary

*An archaeological watching brief took place at 97 High Street, Colchester, Essex during the machine-excavation of a series of test-pits by the developer. The remains of the south precinct wall of the Roman Temple of Claudius were uncovered close to the modern ground-level in the southern part of the site. Little of archaeological significance was reached in the northern part of the site, where the ground-level had been considerably made-up in modern times.*

## Introduction (Fig 1)

An archaeological watching brief was carried out on behalf of Flying Trade Group plc at 97 High Street, Colchester, Essex. This involved the monitoring and recording of a series of test-pits that were excavated by the developer prior to redevelopment of the site. The watching brief was undertaken by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) in March 2010. It followed a brief (CBC 2010) written by Colchester Borough Council's Archaeological Officer (CBCAO).

The site is situated in Colchester town centre, at the rear of properties on the north side of the High Street, at NGR TL 9985 2524. It lies to the south of the castle bailey and on the western side of a narrow lane known as Crowther's Entry. The existing property consists of a late 1960s' office block with car-parking on the ground floor and with a yard to the south. The site covers an area of approximately 315 sq m.

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 watching brief* (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), and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14), was also followed.

## Archaeological background (Fig 1)

The site is located in Insula 22 of the Roman town and is in an area of outstanding archaeological interest.

An archaeological excavation took place on the site in 1964 and revealed part of the well-preserved south precinct wall of the Roman Temple of Claudius (1964 excavation on Fig 1). Even after the depredations of Norman stone robbers, the foundation platform survived to a width of 15 feet (4.57 m). It was surmounted by the remains of pier bases for a large arcaded screen (Hebditch 1971, 122), and also by a series of later blocking walls (*ibid*, 122-3). To the south of the precinct wall, in a trench dug also in 1964 along the western side of the site, traces of several phases of west-east Roman drains were uncovered. The well-preserved northern side of one of these drains, constructed of brick set in *opus signinum*, was exposed in 2006 during rebuilding work along the southern edge of the site (CAT Report 440; 2006 trenches on Fig 1).

The 1964 excavations confirmed the results of archaeological work carried out nearby in 1931 and 1953 (Hull 1955; Hull 1958, 169-75). The 1931 excavation revealed, immediately to the east of the site, the remains of the western part of a monumental arch centrally placed in the south precinct wall (1931 excavation on Fig 1; the 1953 site lies beyond the area of Fig 1). Part of the archway was also uncovered in evaluation trenches at the rear of 95-96 High Street in 2006 (CAT Reports 360 & 380; 2006 evaluation trenches on Fig 1).

One of the reasons why the south precinct wall was so well-preserved was because it was 'insulated' by the Norman inner bailey rampart which was piled up on top of it. The rampart was surmounted by a curtain wall, which was probably built in the 12th century and replaced an earlier timber palisade (VCH 9, 244). The digging of the inner bailey ditch to the south of the rampart necessitated the diversion of the High Street southwards, and the resulting curve in the street is still visible today. As a result of later activity, the remains of the curtain wall and much of the rampart were destroyed, while the bailey ditch was backfilled and built over (Hebditch 1971, 121; Drury 1983, 407-8). The footprint of the proposed building lies across the line of the Roman temple south precinct wall.

## Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to identify and record the depth, extent and condition of any archaeological remains uncovered in the test-pits, and to assess the date and significance of these remains.

## Methods (Fig 2)

Nine test-pits (TP1-TP9) were dug by the developer using a mechanical excavator. This was done primarily in order to gain information on the foundations of the existing building, as the intention was to retain its structural frame. TP1-TP5 were dug in the northern part of the site, adjacent to the castle bailey. TP6-TP9 were dug in the lower, southern part of the site, accessed off Crowther's Entry. The height of the modern ground-level in the castle bailey is approximately 26.3 m AOD, while that in the yard to the south is 25.2 m AOD. Monitoring and recording of the test-pits were carried out by CAT on 2nd-3rd March 2010.

Following the breaking-out of the existing concrete surfaces (L1), the deposits in the trenches were progressively stripped under the supervision of a CAT archaeologist. Machine-excavation continued until archaeologically-significant deposits were reached. Where no such deposits were found, machine-excavation continued until the developer was satisfied with the depth of the test-pits, or until the safe working limit of the machine arm was reached, or until intractable obstacles were encountered. The test-pits varied in size, but were usually just over 1 m in length and at least 0.6 m wide. The approximate depths of the test-pits were as follows:

TP1: 1.30 m	TP2: 1.70 m	TP3: 1.90 m
TP4: 1.20 m	TP5: 1.15 m	TP6: 0.60 m
TP7: 1.15 m	TP8: 1.10 m	TP9: 0.55 m

The developer gave CAT staff time to investigate, clean and record any archaeological remains uncovered, and to collect up the finds unearthed. However, this work was constrained by health and safety considerations. Thus, due to the depth and unstable sides of the test-pits in the northern part of the site, most of the recording here had to be done from the modern ground-level looking down into the trench. Also, in the southern part of the site, it was not possible to investigate TP8 in detail due to the proximity of asbestos, although the removal of this by the developer was in hand.

Individual records of archaeological contexts, such as layers or features, as well as finds, were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets. Plans were drawn at 1:20 and section drawings were made at 1:10. Standard record shots of the test-pits were taken on a digital camera. Further information on the recording methods used can be found in the CAT document *Policies and procedures* (CAT 2006), and detailed notes on the stratigraphy in the test-pits are available in the site archive.

## Results

The natural subsoil was not reached in the test-pits. Previous investigations in the southern part of the site suggest that it lay approximately 1.7 m below the modern yard surface (23.5 m AOD), and consisted of sand and gravel sealed in places by shallow pockets of cover loam (CAT Report 440, fig 3).

### Roman south precinct wall (Fig 2)

Part of a large Roman wall or foundation (F1) was uncovered in TP6. This was constructed of a hard pale brown mortar containing fragments of stone and Roman brick/tile. It lay approximately 0.4 m below the modern yard surface (24.8 m AOD). No edges were revealed to confirm its alignment. However, it probably formed part of the south precinct wall of the Temple of Claudius. Its proximity to the modern yard surface suggests that F1 may have belonged to a blocking wall or pier-base on top of the foundation platform rather than to the platform itself.

A thin, dark greyish-brown, post-Roman deposit (L3) lay between F1 and the modern concrete surface (L1). A small quantity of Roman brick/tile fragments was recovered from the machine spoil from TP6. A large lump of limestone, with a roughly dressed face, was also found in the spoil. It was photographed but retained on site. These finds probably came from L3, but most or all of them are likely to originally derive from the south precinct wall.

Part of a hard, pale brown layer of mortar (F2) was uncovered in TP8. This contained stone fragments and lay 1.05-1.1 m below the modern yard surface (24.1-24.15 m AOD). It was not possible to examine F2 in detail, due to the proximity of asbestos. No edges were visible. The position and depth of F2 suggest that it probably formed the top of the foundation platform of the south precinct wall, close to its southern edge. Alternatively it could be part of a 'concrete apron' immediately to the south of the arcade wall (Hebditch 1971, 118).

### Other Roman deposits (Fig 2)

The mortared surface F2 in TP8 was sealed by a brown gravelly deposit (L6), 0.30-0.35 m thick. This contained a few fragments of stone, Roman brick/tile and *opus signinum*. It was probably Roman in date, but did not appear to be metalling. Similar layers were found during earlier investigations nearby (Hull 1958, 65; Hebditch 1971, 118-20; CAT Report 440, 2-3). They were perhaps make-up layers or material scraped up from the east-west street to the south. The gravelly deposit L6 in TP8 was sealed by post-Roman topsoil or 'dark earth' (L4).

A brownish layer, similar to L6 in TP8, was also uncovered in TP7. It lay at about the same depth, 0.75 m (24.45 m AOD), below the modern yard surface. It was at least 0.30 m thick and contained fragments of stone, Roman brick/tile, mortar and *opus signinum*. It was also sealed by post-Roman 'dark earth' (L4). Trowelling in the south-western corner of TP7 revealed some *opus signinum* at a depth of just over 1 m below the modern yard surface. This may have been *in situ*, and could have been part of an east-west Roman drain.

Several fragments of Roman building materials, including part of a column brick and a piece of Purbeck marble, were recovered from the machine spoil from TP7. These were probably residual in post-Roman deposits. However, it is likely that the fragments originally derive from the south precinct wall or from associated Roman deposits nearby.

### Post-Roman deposits (Fig 2)

The only significant archaeological deposit reached in the northern part of the site was in TP3 at a depth of 1.75 m below the modern ground-level (approximately 24.55 m AOD). This consisted of a brownish layer (L5), which contained abundant oyster shells, some mortar fragments, and a few pieces of Roman brick/tile. It was sealed by 'dark earth' (L4). These deposits survived only in the northern part of TP3, as they were cut away over the southern part of the test-pit by the foundation trench for the existing east-west brick wall.

The part of L5 uncovered in TP3 lay approximately 1 m north of the Roman south precinct wall and 0.25 m below the level of F1 in TP6. It was perhaps the fill of a medieval or later pit cut into the rear of the Norman rampart.

Dark greyish-brown post-Roman topsoil or 'dark earth' (L4; *CAR 3*, 92) was observed in several test-pits. In TP3, in the northern part of the site, it appeared to lie between 1.15 and 1.75 m below the modern ground-level. In TP7 and TP8, in the southern part of the site, it was more truncated, lying roughly between 0.35 and 0.75 m below the modern ground-level.

Sealing L4 in TP3, and also observed in TP2, there was a lighter, more mixed layer of dump/topsoil (L3), approximately 0.5 m thick. This was probably of post-medieval or modern date, and may have been redeposited. Similar deposits, but only approximately 0.2 m thick, were recorded in TP6 and TP7 in the southern part of the site.

Extensive layers of modern rubble make-up (L2), approximately 1.15 m thick, were noted in all the test-pits in the northern part of the site. These were deeper up against the brick foundations of the existing building, where they formed the backfill of the modern foundation trenches. The make-up consisted largely of fragments of brick, concrete and stone. A similar deposit, 0.35 m thick, was recorded in TP9, where it sealed a modern concrete surface. In TP1, TP4, TP5 and TP9 only modern deposits were observed. The existing surfaces (L1) were of reinforced concrete, 0.1-0.2 m thick, and were in places bedded on a thin layer of sand.

## Finds

A quantity of finds was recovered during the watching brief. They came from the machine spoil and were thus unstratified. Where appropriate, the finds were washed, marked and bagged according to context, in line with the recommendations in *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IfA 2008b). A fragment of worked stone is described in this section. The remaining finds are listed by test-pit in Table 1 in the appendix, and further details are provided in the site archive.

### The worked stone

A fragment of a Purbeck marble veneer slab was recovered from the machine spoil from TP7. It probably originally derives from the Roman south precinct wall. Fragments of Purbeck marble were found in the 1964 excavation on the site, re-used in a Roman east-west drain (Hebditch 1971, 120 & 123). Fragments of Purbeck marble were also discovered in the 1953 excavation a short distance to the west of the site (Hull 1955, 45-6, 49).

SF 1. (6) TP7, unstratified. Purbeck marble. A fragment of a veneer slab. Two straight edges at right-angles to each other, one surviving 155 mm long, the other 135 mm long. Mortar adhering to underside. Maximum dimensions 200 by 200 mm, maximum thickness 30 mm. Weight 2,203 g.

## Conclusions

The property is located close to Colchester castle keep and the site of the Temple of Claudius in the heart of the historic town centre and in an area of outstanding archaeological interest.

The test-pits highlighted the contrast between the northern and southern parts of this split-level site. Significant archaeological remains were located close to the modern ground-level in the lower, southern part of the site. These included part of the well-preserved south precinct wall of the Temple of Claudius. However, in the northern part of the site, the ground-level had been considerably made-up in recent times, and significant archaeological deposits were only reached in TP3 at a depth of approximately 1.75 m below the modern ground-level.

The impact of the proposed redevelopment on the archaeological remains needs to be minimised. In particular, any damage to the south precinct wall should be avoided. If some disturbance of the archaeological deposits surrounding the precinct wall is unavoidable, then these deposits should be excavated and recorded in advance of the proposed groundworks.

### Archive deposition

The archive from the watching brief, including the site records, photographs and finds, will be permanently deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums under accession code COLEM 2010.13, in accordance with *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester and Ipswich Museums* (CIMS 2008b) and *Archaeological archives: a guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation* (IfA 2007). The archive includes a cardboard wallet containing the context sheets, site plans, a copy of the CBCAO brief, and notes on the test-pits and finds; a CD containing digital material including the site photographs; and two museum boxes containing the finds.

### Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to Flying Trade Group plc for commissioning and funding the watching brief and to the workmen for their help on site. The work was monitored by Martin Winter (CBCAO).

### Glossary

AOD	above Ordnance Survey datum point based on mean sea level at Newlyn, Cornwall
CBCAO	Colchester Borough Council's Archaeological Officer
context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made; usually a layer or a feature
cover loam	a natural, wind-blown deposit, probably formed towards the end of the last Ice Age
dark earth	post-Roman topsoil; probably the result of long-term cultivation, refuse-disposal and pit-digging.
feature	an identifiable context, such as a pit, a wall or a post-hole
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c AD 1500
modern	period from c 1850 onwards to the present
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
<i>opus signinum</i>	Roman 'concrete' with a pinkish appearance due to the addition of brick/tile fragments
post-medieval	period from c 1500 to c 1850
residual	finds that were deposited earlier than the context in which they were found
Roman	the period from AD 43 to c AD 410
<i>tegula</i>	flanged Roman roof tile (plural <i>tegulae</i> )
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database, maintained by Colchester and Ipswich Museums
U/S	unstratified, ie without a well-defined context

### References

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

CAR 3	1984	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report 3: Excavations at Lion Walk, Balkerne Lane, and Middleborough, Colchester, Essex</i> , by P Crummy
CAR 7	2000	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report 7: Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester 1971-1985</i> , by J Cotter

CAR 10	1991	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report 10: Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-86</i> , by R P Symonds and S Wade, ed by P Bidwell and A Croom
CAT CAT Report 360	2006	<i>Policies and procedures</i> (Colchester Archaeological Trust) An archaeological evaluation rear of 95-96 High Street, Colchester, Essex, January 2006, unpublished CAT archive report, by H Brooks, 2006
CAT Report 380		Stage 2 of an archaeological evaluation at the rear of 95-96 High Street, Colchester, Essex, July 2006, unpublished CAT archive report, by D Shimmin, 2006
CAT Report 440		An archaeological watching brief at 99 High Street, Colchester, Essex, December 2006, unpublished CAT archive report, by D Shimmin, 2007
CBC	2010	<i>Brief for archaeological attendance and recording (a watching brief)</i> , 97 High Street, Colchester, Essex, by M Winter
CIMS	2008a	<i>Guidelines on standards and practice for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i> (CBC)
CIMS	2008b	<i>Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester and Ipswich Museums</i> (CBC)
Drury, P	1983	'Aspects of the origins and development of Colchester Castle', in <i>Archaeol J</i> , <b>139</b> (1982), 302-419
EAA 3	1997	<i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. resource assessment</i> , ed by J Glazebrook
EAA 8	2000	<i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. research agenda and strategy</i> , ed by N Brown and J Glazebrook
EAA 14	2003	<i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> , ed by D Gurney, ALGAO East
Hebditch, M	1971	'Excavations on the south side of the temple precinct at Colchester', <i>Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society</i> , <b>3</b> (3rd series), part 1, 115-30
Hull, M R	1955	'The south wing of the Roman "forum" at Colchester: recent discoveries', in <i>Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society</i> , <b>25</b> , part 1, 24-61
Hull, M R	1958	<i>Roman Colchester</i> , RRCSAL, <b>20</b>
IfA	2007	<i>Archaeological archives: a guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation</i>
IfA	2008a	<i>Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief</i>
IfA	2008b	<i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i>
MoRPHE	2006	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment</i> (English Heritage)
VCH 9	1994	<i>A history of the County of Essex, 9: the Borough of Colchester</i> , ed by J Cooper, The Victoria History of the Counties of England

### Appendix: list of finds by test-pit

All weights are in grammes. Roman pottery fabric code follows that used in *CAR 10* (identification by Stephen Benfield of CAT). Post-Roman pottery fabric codes follow those used in *CAR 7* (identifications by Howard Brooks of CAT). Stone fragment examined by Dr Keith Oak of Havering Sixth Form College.

**Table 1: finds list.**

Test-pit	Context	Finds no	Qty	Description	Weight (g)	Comments

TP2	U/S	1	1	medieval pot handle	112	Fabric 21a, skillet handle, 15th-16th century
			1	clay-pipe stem fragment	1	bore diameter: 3 mm
			3	animal bone fragments	93	
TP6	U/S	2	1	medieval pot sherd	42	Fabric 20, 12th-13th century
			4	3	<i>tegula</i> flange fragments	873
		2	Roman brick/tile fragments	929	1 x 24 mm thick, with mortar adhering; 1 x 29 mm thick, with mortar over broken edge	
		1	Roman brick fragment	1,695	55 mm thick, with mortar over broken edge	
		1	fragment of cant brick	1,676	50-54 mm thick, 80-90 mm wide, maximum surviving length 227 mm, with mortar adhering, probably post-medieval	
TP7	U/S	5	1	<i>tegula</i> flange fragment	1,100	with mortar over broken edge
			1	Roman column brick fragment	approx 2,500	60 mm thick, with mortar adhering
			2	fragments of cant brick	1,750	46-54 mm thick, 83-94 mm wide, maximum surviving lengths 135 mm & 202 mm, probably post-medieval
			1	brick fragment	1,290	43-48 mm thick, 103-104 mm wide, maximum surviving length 209 mm, with mortar adhering, post-medieval?
			1	stone	approx 5,000	hard, whitish ?marble, possibly dolomitic or travertine, unworked with honeycomb weathering, dimensions approx 200 x 90 mm
TP8	U/S	3	1	Roman pot sherd	3	Fabric GX

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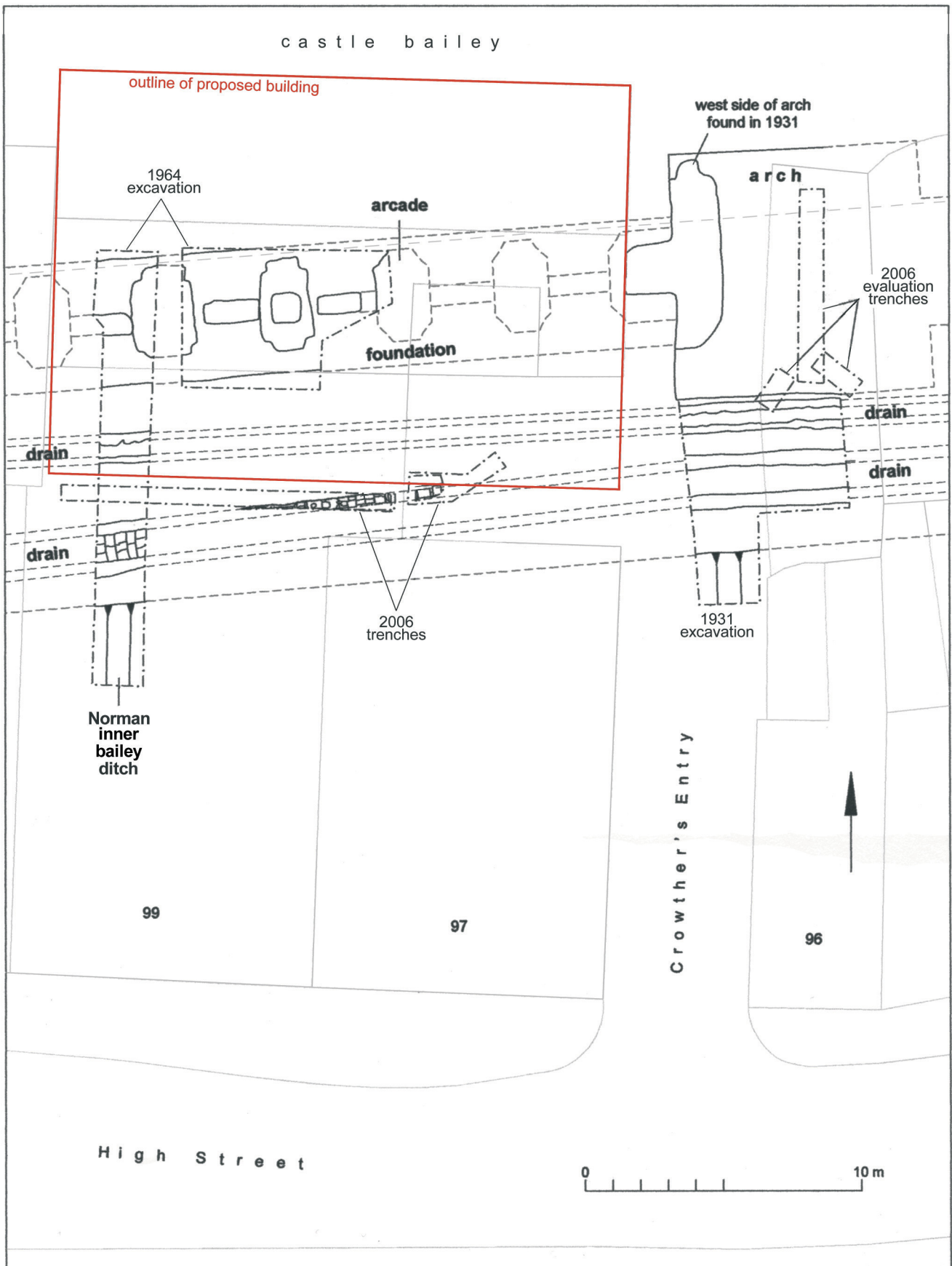
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Fig 1 Location plan, showing the outline of the proposed building in relation to earlier excavations.

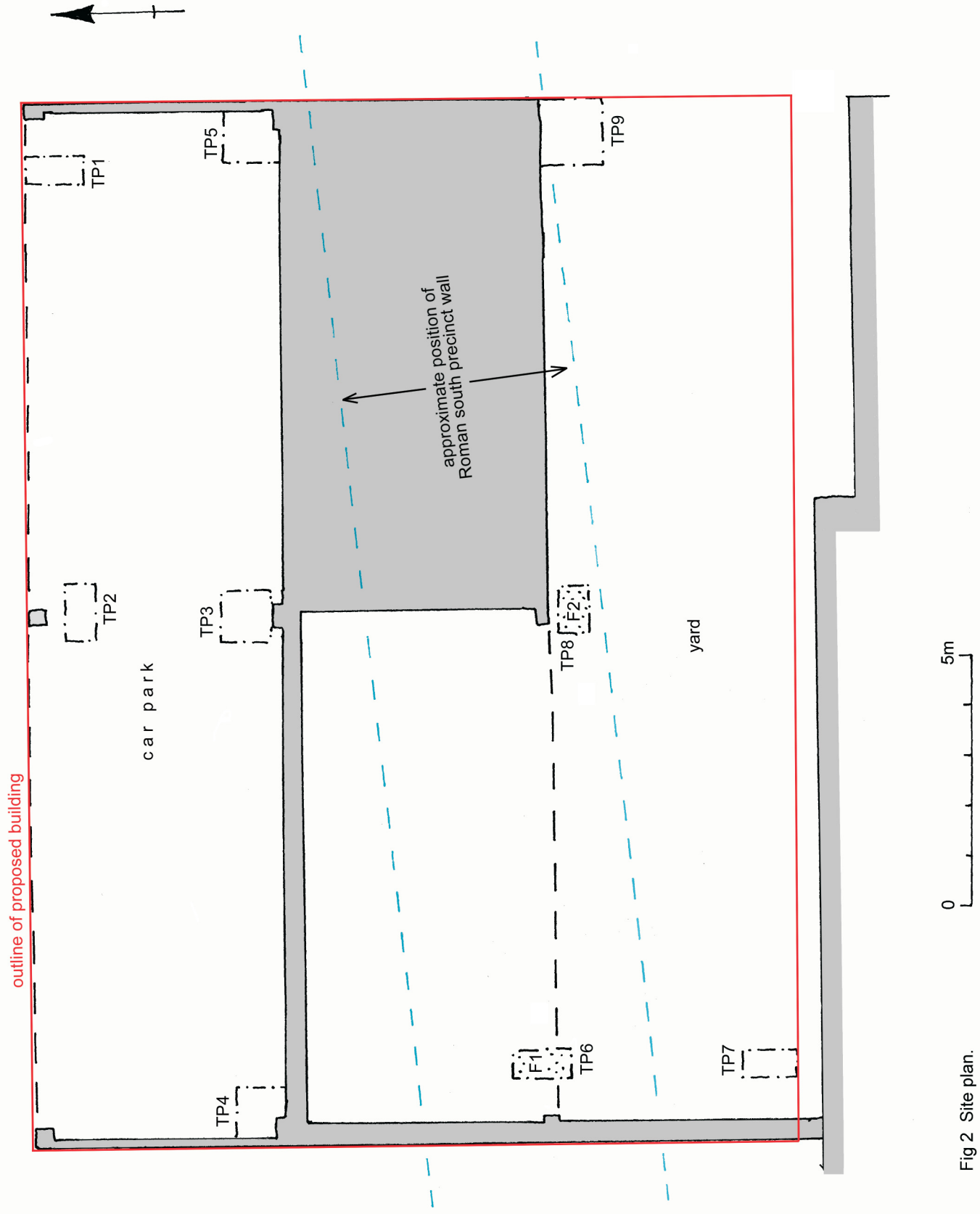


Fig 2 Site plan.

## Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

### Summary sheet

<b>Site address:</b> 97 High Street, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester
<b>NGR:</b> TL 9985 2524	<b>Site codes:</b> CAT project - 10/3a Museum accession - COLEM 2010.13
<b>Type of work:</b> Watching brief	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> March 2010	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 8 sq m
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester and Ipswich Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Developer
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> Yes	<b>Related EHER and UAD nos:</b> -
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 587 and summary in EAH	
<b>Periods represented:</b> Roman	
<b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b> <i>An archaeological watching brief took place at 97 High Street, Colchester, Essex during the machine-excavation of a series of test-pits by the developer. The remains of the south precinct wall of the Roman Temple of Claudius were uncovered close to the modern ground-level in the southern part of the site. Little of archaeological significance was reached in the northern part of the site, where the ground-level had been considerably made-up in modern times.</i>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> Hebditch 1971	
<b>Keywords:</b> Temple of Claudius, Roman, precinct wall	<b>Significance:</b> *
<b>Author of summary:</b> Donald Shimmin	<b>Date of summary:</b> September 2011