

Co-Operative Society's stores,  
Long Wyre Street, Colchester  
Archaeological Evaluation

A PRELIMINARY REPORT

January 1998

Colchester Museum site accession code: 1997.76

COLCHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST LTD

## Co-Operative Society's stores, Long Wyre Street, Colchester

Archaeological Evaluation, December 1997.

### PRELIMINARY REPORT

#### ***1 Background and Introduction***

- 1.1 This is a preliminary report on the archaeological evaluation conducted inside the Co-Operative Society's store, Long Wyre Street, Colchester, during December 1997. The evaluation was commissioned by the Co-Operative via Stanley Bragg Architects, and was carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust. All archaeological work was carried out according to a brief written by the Archaeological Officer of Colchester Borough Council.
- 1.2 The importance of the site, which lies across *insulae* (blocks) 37 and 38a on the southern edge of the major walled Roman town of *Colonia Claudia Victricensis* is self-evident (for full discussion see final report).
- 1.3 The evaluation consisted of five hand-dug test pits, all of which produced archaeological deposits of varying depths (predominantly Roman).
- 1.4 The full archive report will be some weeks in the preparation. However, the finds have been dated, and the general conclusions of the project are quite clear - the final archive report will effectively include all the technical reports, drawings and discussions to back up the conclusions offered here.

#### ***2 The report***

This report has been drafted with the specific aim of providing information for the relevant Planning Officers. The approach has been as follows:

- The site location, immediate archaeological context and location of test holes are shown on figure 1.
- The archaeological deposits encountered in the evaluation have been grouped into "insignificant" and "significant".
- For each test pit, the zones of "significant" and "insignificant" archaeological deposits have been plotted at scale against the existing floor slab depth and the proposed floor slab and pile cap depth (figures 2-6). Thus, for each test pit, the effect the digging of the proposed pile caps and laying of the floor slab is immediately obvious.
- Figure 7 summarises the same information in relation to the horizontal distribution of archaeological deposits in the two proposed units.

### **3    *Discussion of the archaeological remains***

Without pre-empting the final archive, it will be useful to summarise the archaeological remains here.

#### **3.1    *Test Hole 1***

The archaeological remains are deeply buried here. The upper part of the deposits are dominated by a succession of post-medieval and modern topsoils, These seal a layer of medieval soil, cut by a pit. These in turn seal a Roman soil layer and a Roman masonry footing. Despite the protective effect of a great depth of topsoil, proposed floor slab will cut right through the medieval layers and into the top of the Roman deposits. Pile caps will cut right through the significant deposits.

#### **3.2    *Test Hole 2***

Test hole 2 revealed the metalled Roman street lying directly below modern slab. This is because this part of the Co-op building has been terraced down at some stage, and the material which originally masked the Roman deposits has already been removed. This is the only area of the site where the pile caps will not remove the archaeological deposits in their entirety.

#### **3.3    *Test Hole 3***

As in TH1, a blanket of recent soils protects the underlying Roman deposits. This is the only part of the site where the proposed slab does not penetrate through to the significant deposits. However, the pile caps will remove all the significant deposits.

#### **3.4    *Test Hole 4***

This TH provided a good sequence of archaeological material. Under a capping of recent soils, a medieval robber trench showed the position and course of a Roman masonry wall. This structure which this wall belonged to had no surviving floors, but a depth of dumped Roman clay was probably part of the missing floor's foundation. This dumped clay lay over an earlier Roman gravel surface (floor or yard?), and part of the dumped clay sequence is dated by a coin, probably a first century Claudian copy. The dumped clay also contained chopped-up painted wall plaster - the demolished remains of a previous Roman structure (i.e. one predating the masonry wall). Proposed slab will cut right into this material, and both types of pile cap will cut right through it.

#### **3.5    *Test Hole 5***

This TH was the most interesting from an archaeological point of view. Lying under a series of modern soils was a coloured Roman mosaic pavement on a gravel foundation. While this is not the most usual foundation for a mosaic (usually laid on mortar), there can be no denying that this TH has cut into a formal room of a Roman town house. There is every chance that it is the same structure as the robbed out wall in TH4, but this cannot be proved. Under the mosaic floor, a series of Roman soils sealed a layer of orange burnt debris, originating in the Boudiccan destruction of the year AD 60/61. This Boudiccan destruction was associated with a masonry wall - a certain early Roman structure. Proposed slab bottom will remove the mosaic floor, and the group pile caps will cut right through the Roman deposits.

## **4    *Conclusions***

- 4.1**    *Archaeological evaluations are based on a small number of test holes. While it may be expected that they will give a reasonable impression of the location, depth and quality of archaeological deposits, there can be no **guarantee** that this is the case - only large-scale excavation can give more definite results.*
- 4.2**    It would appear from the results of this evaluation that there may be a blanket of significant archaeological deposits over the whole site, and that the proposed development will have an effect on it.
- 4.3**    Except in TH3 area, the proposed slab cuts into the top of significant archaeological deposits over the whole site. The individual pile caps cut into the deposits over all the site, and penetrate them in Unit 1 TH 4 area. The group pile caps cut right through the significant deposits in all areas except Unit 2 TH2 area.
- 4.4**    It may be convenient to consider the site in zones (see figure 1). The eastern side of the site (Zone A) is already heavily disturbed by recent cellars, and there may be good reason to doubt whether much significant archaeological material survives here. The central part of the site consists of the Roman street (Zone B). The western part of the site (Zone C) where Roman walls and a mosaic floor were revealed, offers a much better opportunity for the survival of significant archaeological deposits.



1 / 500 SCALE

NORTH

St Nicholas House

St Nicholas Passage

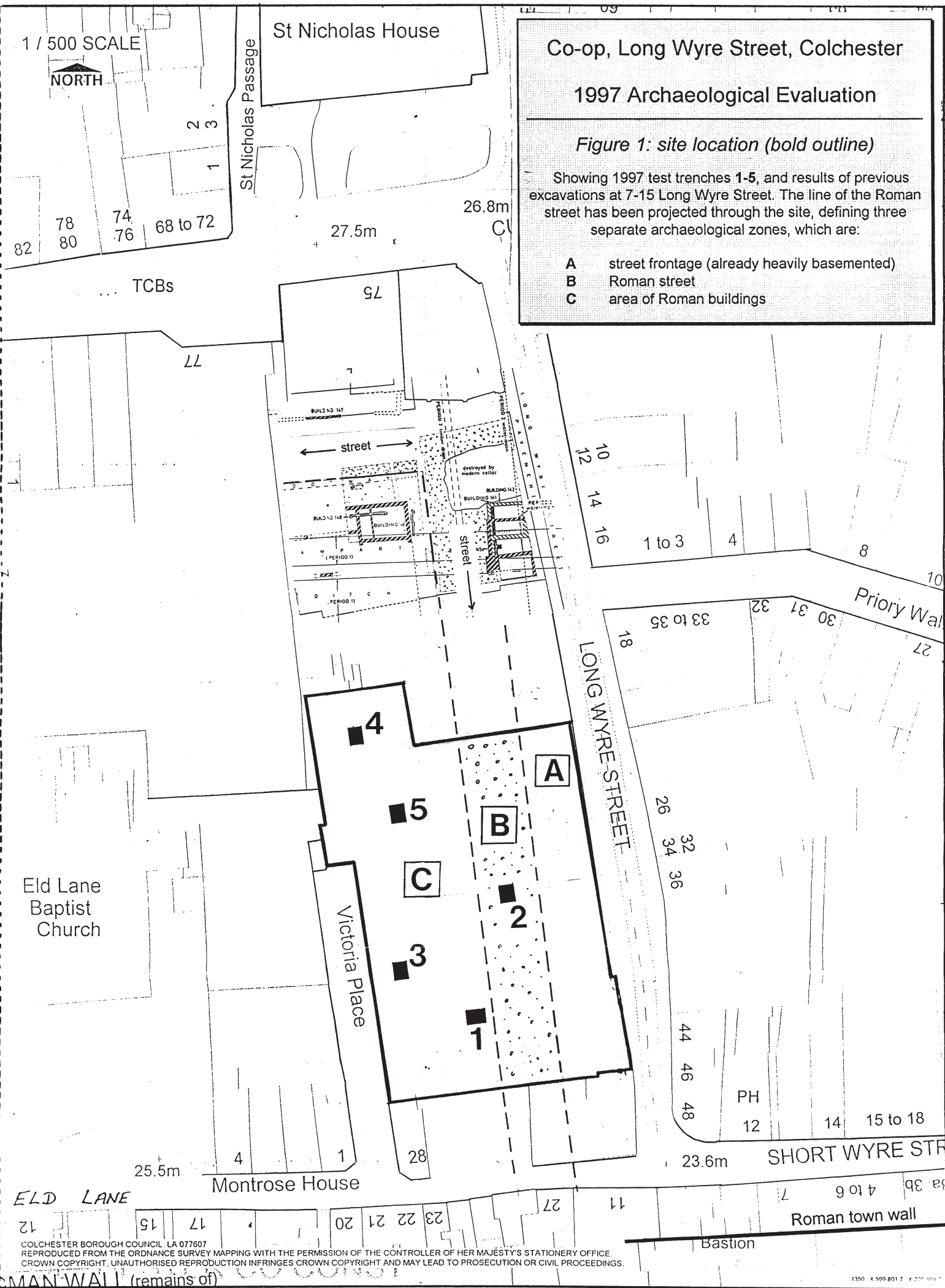
Co-op, Long Wyre Street, Colchester

1997 Archaeological Evaluation

**Figure 1: site location (bold outline)**

Showing 1997 test trenches 1-5, and results of previous excavations at 7-15 Long Wyre Street. The line of the Roman street has been projected through the site, defining three separate archaeological zones, which are:

- A** street frontage (already heavily basemented)
- B** Roman street
- C** area of Roman buildings



# STANLEY BRAGG

ARCHITECTS

10/10/07

EXISTING F.F.L. 25.820

PROPOSED FLOOR CONSTRUCTION  
• 75 SCREED  
• 200 R.C. SLAB

A

PROPOSED F.F.L.  
UNIT 2 24.750

B

C

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

TRIAL HOLE 1

Scale 1:50

Date Dec 2007

Drawn by IM. S

Co-op, Long Wyre Street, Colchester

1997 Archaeological Evaluation

## Figure 2: trial hole 1

archaeological deposits plotted against existing slab depth and proposed slab and pile cap depth

- Showing:
- A insignificant recent deposits
  - B significant archaeological deposits (medieval)
  - C significant archaeological deposits (Roman)

proposed slab bottom cuts 400mm into significant deposits;  
individual pile caps cut 600mm into significant deposits  
group pile caps cut right through significant deposits

# STANLEY BRAGG

ARCHITECTS

100000

EXISTING F.F.L. 24.990

PROPOSED F.F.L.  
UNIT 2 24.750

PROPOSED floor construction:

- 75 SCREED
- 200 R.C. SLAB

A

B

Co-op, Long Wyre Street, Colchester

1997 Archaeological Evaluation

**Figure 3: trial hole 2**

archaeological deposits plotted against existing slab depth and proposed slab and pile cap depth

Showing: A insignificant recent deposits  
B significant archaeological deposits (Roman)

proposed slab bottom cuts 250mm into significant deposits;  
individual pile caps cut 900mm into significant deposits  
group pile caps cut 1350mm into significant deposits

ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
TRIAL HOLE 2

Scale 1:50

Date DECEMBER

Drawn by M.



# STANLEY BRAGG

ARCHITECTS



EXISTING F.F.L. 25.820

PROPOSED F.F.L.  
UNIT 2 24.750

A

B

Co-op, Long Wyre Street, Colchester

1997 Archaeological Evaluation

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

TRIAL HOLE 3

Scale 1:50

Date DECEMBER

Drawn by IM

### Figure 4: trial hole 3

archaeological deposits plotted against existing slab depth and proposed slab and pile cap depth

Showing: A insignificant recent deposits  
B significant archaeological deposits (Roman)

proposed slab bottom is 350mm above significant deposits;  
individual pile caps cut 200mm into significant deposits  
group pile caps cut right through significant deposits

# STANLEY BRAGG

ARCHITECTS

100000

EXISTING F.F.L. 26.200

PROPOSED floor construction  
 • 75 screed  
 • 200 RC SLAB

A

PROPOSED F.F.L.  
 UNIT 1 25.350

B

1500 max

ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
 TRIAL HOLE 4

scale 1:50

Date DECEMBER

drawn by 1/11

Co-op, Long Wyre Street, Colchester

1997 Archaeological Evaluation

**Figure 5: trial hole 4**

archaeological deposits plotted against existing slab depth and proposed slab and pile cap depth

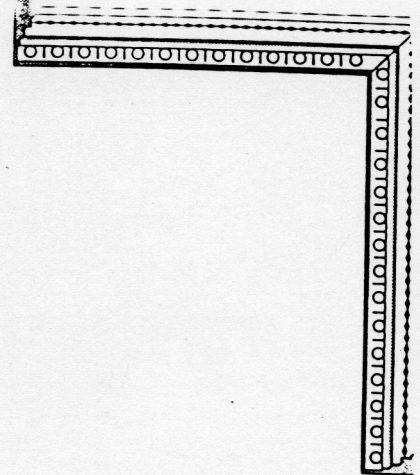
Showing: A insignificant recent deposits  
 B significant archaeological deposits (Roman)

proposed slab bottom cuts 600mm into significant deposits;  
 individual pile caps cut right through significant deposits  
 group pile caps cut right through significant deposits

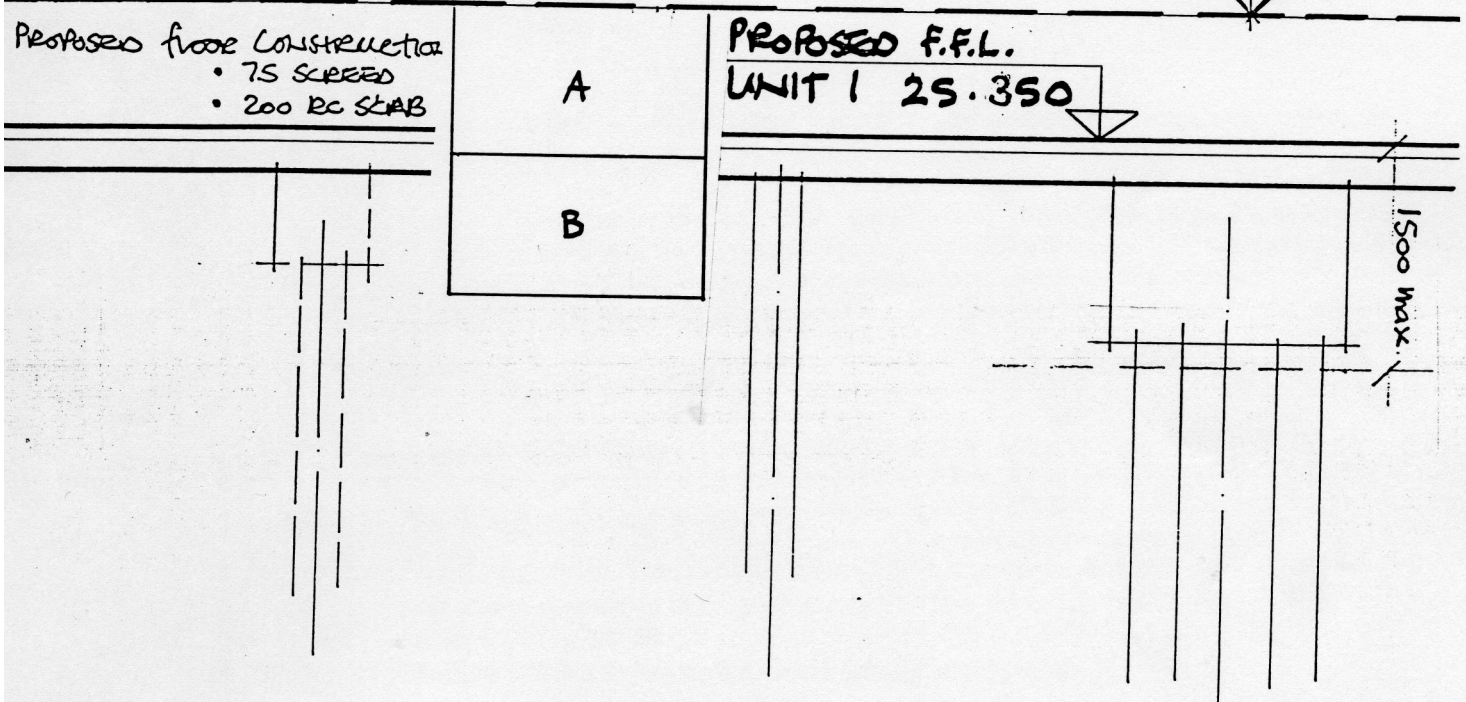


# STANLEY BRAGG

ARCHITECTS



EXISTING F.F.L. 26.200



Co-op, Long Wyre Street, Colchester

1997 Archaeological Evaluation

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

TRIAL HOLE 5

Scale 1:50

Date DECEMBER

Drawn by M.

**Figure 6: trial hole 5**

archaeological deposits plotted against existing slab depth and proposed slab and pile cap depth

Showing: A insignificant recent deposits  
B significant archaeological deposits (Roman)

proposed slab bottom cuts 100mm into significant deposits (mosaic floor)  
individual pile caps cut 900mm into significant deposits  
group pile caps cut right through significant deposits

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## 1997 Archaeological Evaluation

**Figure 7: summary plan**

showing depth of significant archaeological deposits removed by proposed slab depths and pile caps in units 1 and 2 (see two individual labels).

