

**Archaeological observations**  
at  
**22-24 High Street, Colchester**  
(formerly John Menzies')

January 2000



**on behalf of Chartwell Land Development Ltd**

Archive report



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**CAT Report 57**

# **Archaeological observations at 22-24 High Street, Colchester, Essex (formerly John Menzies')**

December 1999-January 2000

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## **1 Summary**

*Significant archaeological horizons, probably all Roman in date, were observed at 29.60m above Ordnance Datum slightly north of centre of the premises. This level coincides with 1.00m below the top of the existing floor slab. The bottom of the archaeological horizon is marked by natural sand at 28.60m AOD.*

## **2 Introduction**

- 2.1** This is a report on the archaeological remains observed during engineering test pitting inside the shop premises at 22-24 High Street, Colchester, Essex (formerly John Menzies' newsagents). The site also includes the adjacent estate agent's shop, 12 Culver Street, in the south-east angle of the same plot. The site is centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) TL 99542518.
- 2.2** The archaeological work was commissioned for Chartwell Land Development Ltd by CgMs Consulting Limited, and was carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust between December 1999 and January 2000.
- 2.3** The project was monitored on behalf of the clients by Paul Chadwick of CgMs Consulting, and for Colchester Borough Council by Martin Winter.
- 2.4** The site work and this report mirrors standards and practices contained in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines for the standards and practice of archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1996).

### 3 Description of the observations

For the purposes of this report, the below-ground investigations seen by CAT are simply numbered Test pits 1-4, irrespective of any numbers used by the contractors. There then follows a brief description of what was seen in each test pit (TP), with associated drawings.

#### *Test pit 1 (Figs 2-3)*

This was an L-shaped trench slightly north of the centre of the old shop, and was the major below-ground geotechnical disturbance. Archaeological deposits were visible at four points located on Figure 1, and are given here as sections 1-4. Section 1 was drawn and described in more detail:

#### Test pit 1: section 1 (Figs a, 2)

Context	Description	Interpretation	Date	Height of top (AOD)
L1	Concrete tiles	modern shop floor	20th century	30.60m
L2	Concrete slab with metal reinforcing	modern shop slab	20th century	30.55m
L3	Very mixed brick, concrete stone, sand rubble	make-up for modern floor	20th century	30.45m
L4	Sand brick, concrete rubble	demolition debris	20th century	30.10m
F1	N-S trench with cable in pipe	electric cable	20th century	30.10m
L5	Compacted loamy deposit with abundant mortar fragments & flecks, slate, brick fragments	demolition debris from previous buildings?	probably 20th century	29.95m
F2	Pit filled with dark grey brown silty loam, with medieval or later rubbish pit	highest surviving medieval deposit	medieval or later	29.70m
F6	Modern concrete base and fill of its cut. Slightly undercuts the strata around it	concrete stanchion and pit	20th century	29.60m
L6	Orange brown sandy deposit with Roman brick or tile. Looks burnt	Roman demolition debris. Highest Roman level	Roman	29.60m
L7	Dirty dark orange brown deposit, more mixed than L6, brick and tile fragments		Roman	29.60m
F3	Feature	uncertain feature	medieval or later?	29.50m
F4	A charcoal-filled cut	uncertain cut	Roman	29.30m
L8	Orange linear band	possible floor surface	early Roman	29.20m
L9	Orange brown sand and stones	redeposited natural?	Roman	29.35m
L10	Orange brown natural sand	natural sand	-	28.70m

### Test pit 1: section 2 (Fig 3)

North face of north-east corner of Test pit 1. Strata revealed here were:

Description	Interpretation	Date	Height of top (AOD)
Modern concrete slabs with tiles on top	modern shop floor	20th century	30.60m
Loose stony rubble - make up for above	modern shop floor	20th century	30.45m
Pale brown mortar with brick lumps	demolition debris/make-up	20th century	30.20m
Concrete rubble with soily lenses	demolition debris	20th century	29.90m
Mid brown clay with several charcoally layers, one of which may be a floor level (at 8.75m). There was also one shallow possible cut visible in section	stratified Roman material with floor(s?)	Roman	29.65m
Lower levels obscured by rubble	(rubble at bottom of geotech trench)	21st century	29.10m

### Test pit 1: section 3 (Fig 3)

Central within main east west bar of Test pit 1. North face of trench.

Description	Interpretation	Date	Height of top (AOD)
Modern concrete slabs with tiles on top	modern shop floor	20th century	30.60m
Loose stony rubble - make-up for above	modern shop floor	20th century	30.45m
Dark brown soily deposit	this is different to sections 1 and 2; post-medieval pit fill	post-medieval	30.30m
Mid brown clay	stratified Roman material, no detail visible	Roman	29.90m
Limit of excavation	(bottom of geotech trench)	21st century	29.00m

### *Test pit 2 (Figs b, 4, 5)*

This was cut against the inner face of the High Street end of the building. No archaeological strata were seen, and natural subsoil was not reached.

The pit revealed a modern concrete beam running south from an upright concrete pillar. To the east of this was a concrete wall with a modern brick facing (top at 30.2m). This rested on a rough concrete band (at 29.4m) over a brick rubble layer, probably infill of a cavity or cellar on the street frontage. Limit of excavation here was at approximately 29.2m.

On the west side of the concrete beam, investigation was only down to approximately 29.80m. Here, an older wall was revealed. This was built of frogless red bricks measuring 45x100x??mm, of the type generally called 'Tudors'. In Essex, these are dated to the late

16th or 17th century.<sup>1</sup> A later date is probably ruled out by the thinness of these bricks. They are probably the face of a brick cellar (of unknown depth) belonging to a building pre-dating the present structure which is entirely 20th century in date.

#### Test pit 2: section 4

This is not very informative. Modern concrete slab down to 30.1m, over a modern cut with concrete rubble (bottom at approximately 29.6m), cutting a brick rubble layer (top 30.1m, bottom 29.6m).

#### *Test pit 3*

This was located in the north-east corner of the shop. The trench was backfilled by contractors before it could be inspected. The contractors reported that a modern partition wall was visible to 50cm down, with stones below it.

#### *Test pit 4*

This was located on the Menzies' side of the north-west angle created inside Menzies' by the estate agent's on Culver Street. The entire pit was filled by concrete beams and slabs. The stanchion base was located at 1.8m below floor (28.80m). Various recent strata were seen in the north face of the trench, as follows:

<b>Description</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Height of top (AOD)</b>
Modern reinforced concrete slabs with tiles on top	modern shop floor	20th century	30.60m
Loose rubble and stones	make-up for modern shop floor	20th century	30.10m
Concrete sleeve with pipe	cable pipe?	20th century	29.5-29.7m
Brick stone and concrete rubble in dark soily matrix, and lenses of concrete and sand	a mixture of demolition debris from previous building and constructional debris from present building	20th century	29.4-29.6m
Concrete base	top of concrete stanchion base	20th century	28.80m
Limit of excavation	(bottom of geotech trench)		28.70m

<sup>1</sup> Ryan & Andrews 1994, 93-103



**Fig a** View of west side of Test pit 1 (section 1 here).



**Fig b** Cellar wall exposed in Test pit 2.

## 4 Discussion

- 4.1 Of the four test pits, only three were inspected (TP1, 2, 4). Test pit 3 had been infilled before it could be seen.
- 4.2 Test pit 2 revealed a 16th- or 17th-century brick wall, which is probably part of a cellar belonging to a previous property on this site. Test pit 4 revealed only modern deposits.
- 4.3 Only Test pit 1 was helpful in establishing the depth and thickness of surviving archaeological deposits. In the three drawn sections a common pattern was seen. Below modern slab, there was a blanket of modern debris down to 29.60m AOD. In one section this contained concrete and was therefore definitely modern; in another (section 1) it contained slate and was certainly post-medieval.
- 4.4 Below this lay an archaeological horizon, approximately 1m thick (down to 28.60m AOD). The top of this horizon was cut by dark brown soil-filled features. Although no finds were recovered, it is likely that these are either medieval or later rubbish pits.
- 4.5 The material which the pits cut was generally a thick layer of brown clay. Although this could not be differentiated in section 3, it was clear that it actually consisted of a number of distinct bands. In section 1, the top contained much brick and tile, and is therefore probably a Roman demolition deposit, or possibly Roman material disturbed in medieval times. Below this were several distinct bands of clay, in some instances with possible burnt clay surfaces. Judging by similar deposits excavated elsewhere in the town centre,<sup>2</sup> these must be successive Roman clay floors of buildings otherwise undetected (unless F4 in section 1 was a wall trench).
- 4.6 The natural subsoil was only reached in section 1, at 2m below modern floor (28.60m AOD).
- 4.7 Any development work which intrudes below 29.60m will have a detrimental effect on the archaeological strata described here.

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<sup>2</sup> eg Crummy 1992 *passim* and at the Co-operative Society's stores in 1998 (Brooks 1999)

## 5 Finds

A few unstratified finds were collected from Test pit 1, and a sample of the cellar wall from Test pit 2.<sup>3</sup>

Context	Type	Comment
u/s TP1	sherd of samian ware, Dragendorf form 30	probably South Gaulish, 1st century
u/s TP1	2 sherds grey ware fabric DX	one is from a lid
u/s TP1	1 tegula fragment	
u/s TP1	1 large rod handle fragment	probably from an amphora
TP2	fragment of frogless red brick	from cellar wall

## 6 References, glossary, acknowledgements

### References

- Brooks, Howard, 1999 *Excavations at the Co-operative Society's store, 21-31 Long Wyre Street, Colchester, April-May 1999*, CAT Report 44
- Crummy, P, 1992 Colchester Archaeological Report **6**, *Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School, and other sites in Colchester 1971-85*
- Ryan, Pat, & Andrews, David, 1994 'A brick and tile typology for Cressing Temple', in *Cressing Temple, A Templar and Hospitaller Manor in Essex*, by DD Andrews (ed), 93-103
- Symonds, Robin P, and Wade, Sue, 1999 *Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-86*, CAT Report 10

### Glossary

AOD	above Ordnance Datum (Newlyn)
demolition debris	debris resulting from demolition of a building - broken brick, mortar etc
occupation	signs of human habitation - usually rubbish (potsherds, tile, shells etc)
OS	Ordnance Survey
medieval	from AD 1066 to early 16th century
post-medieval	after medieval and before Queen Victoria
Roman	from Claudius' invasion of AD 43 to around AD 410
tegula	Roman roof tile

### Acknowledgements

Thanks to Chartwell Land Development Ltd for commissioning the work, to Paul Chadwick of CgMs Consulting, and to Martin Winter of Colchester Borough Council for monitoring the work.

Site work all by Colin Austin.

<sup>3</sup> pottery comments by Stephen Benfield of CAT. Fabrics are after Symonds & Wade 1999

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*January 2000*

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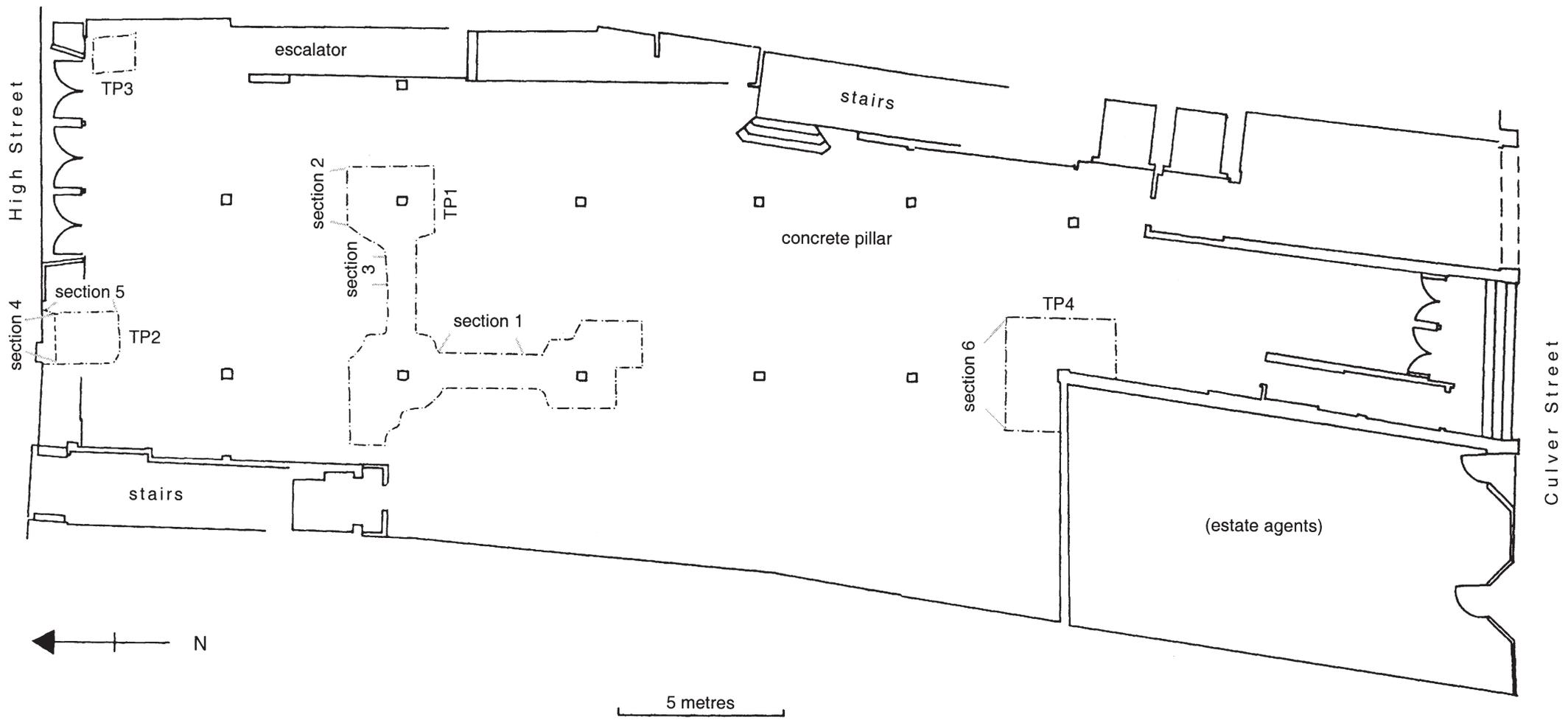


Fig 1 Site plan showing test pits and drawn sections.

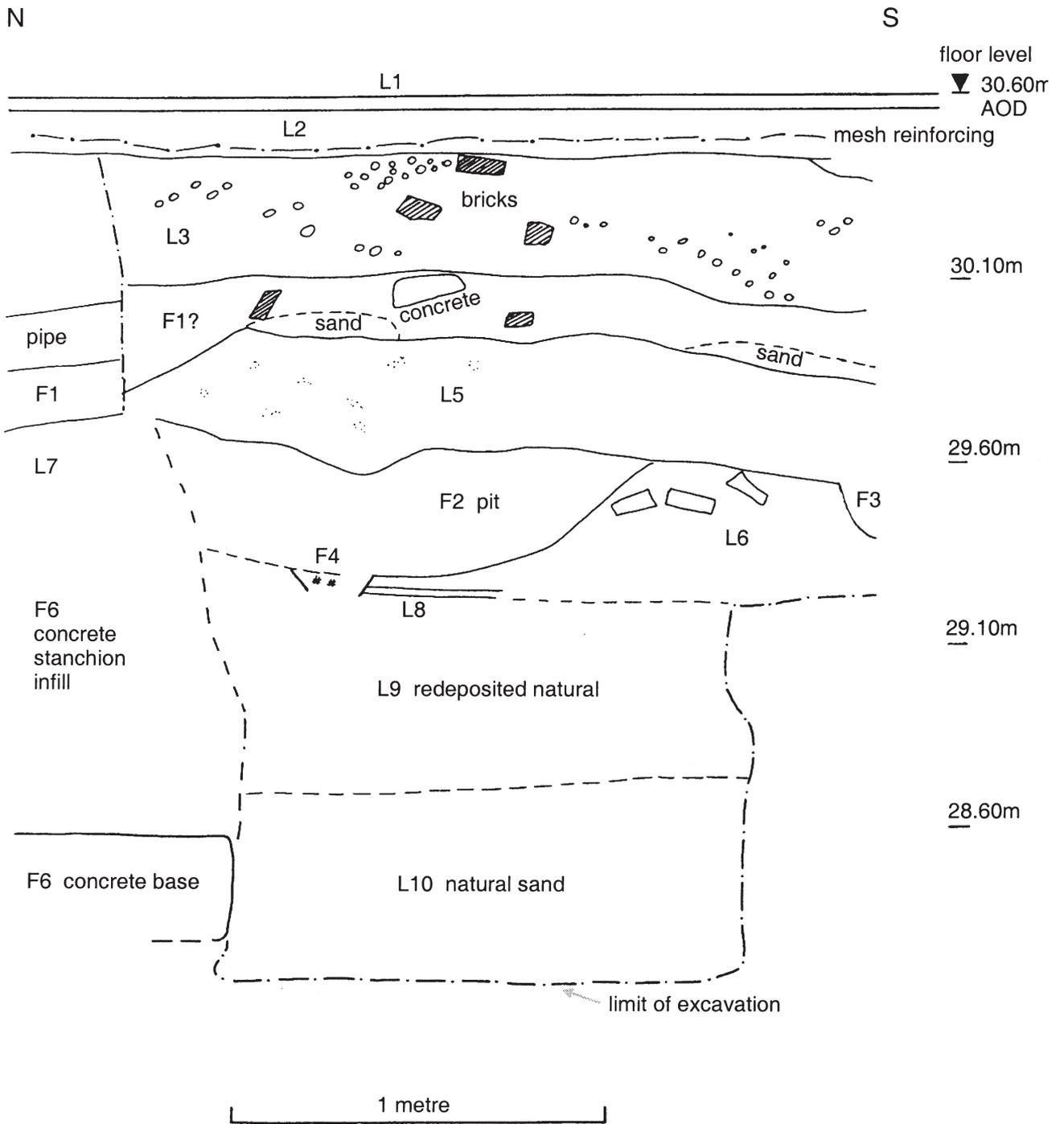


Fig 2 Section 1.

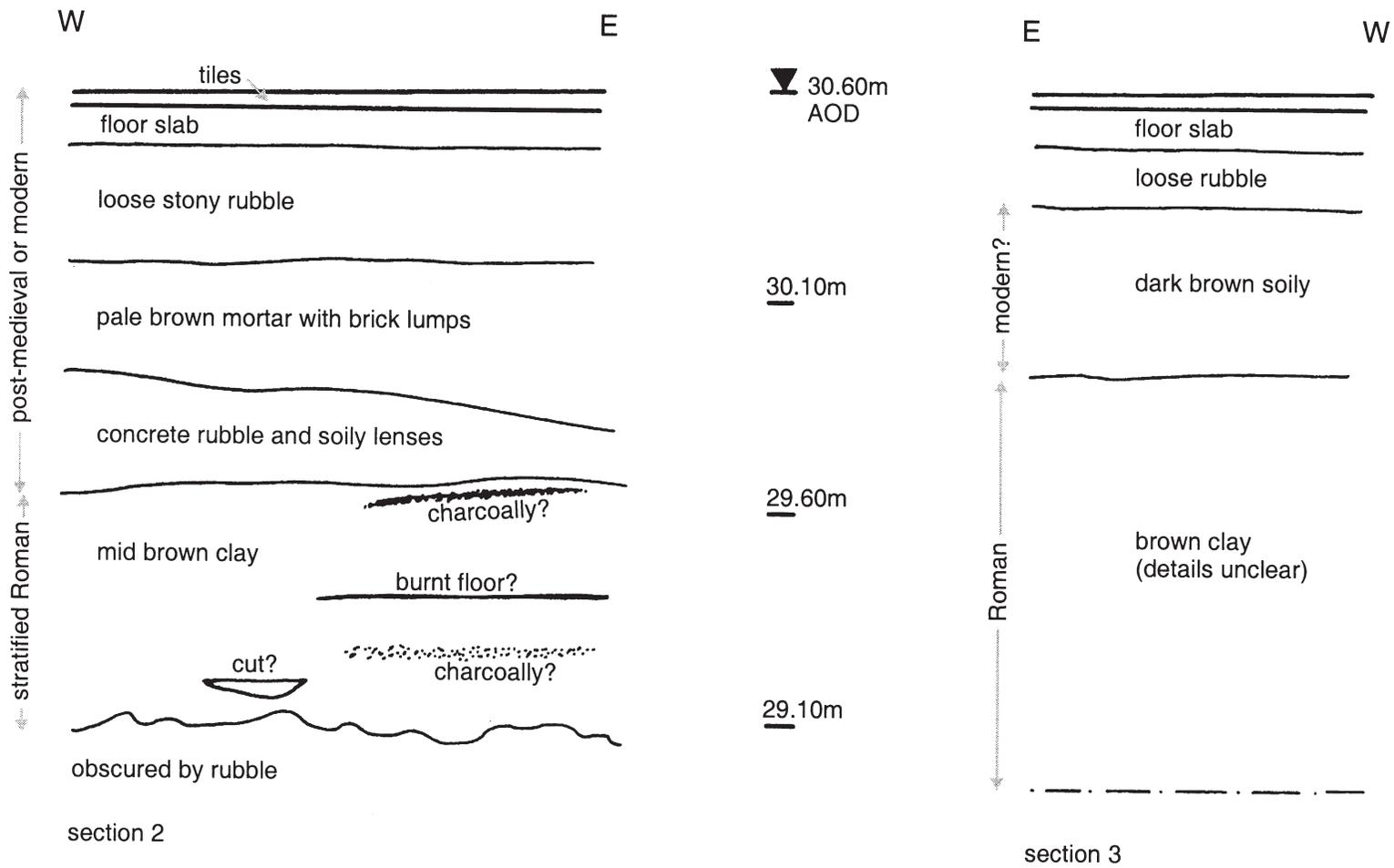


Fig 3 Sections 2, 3 (Test pit 1).

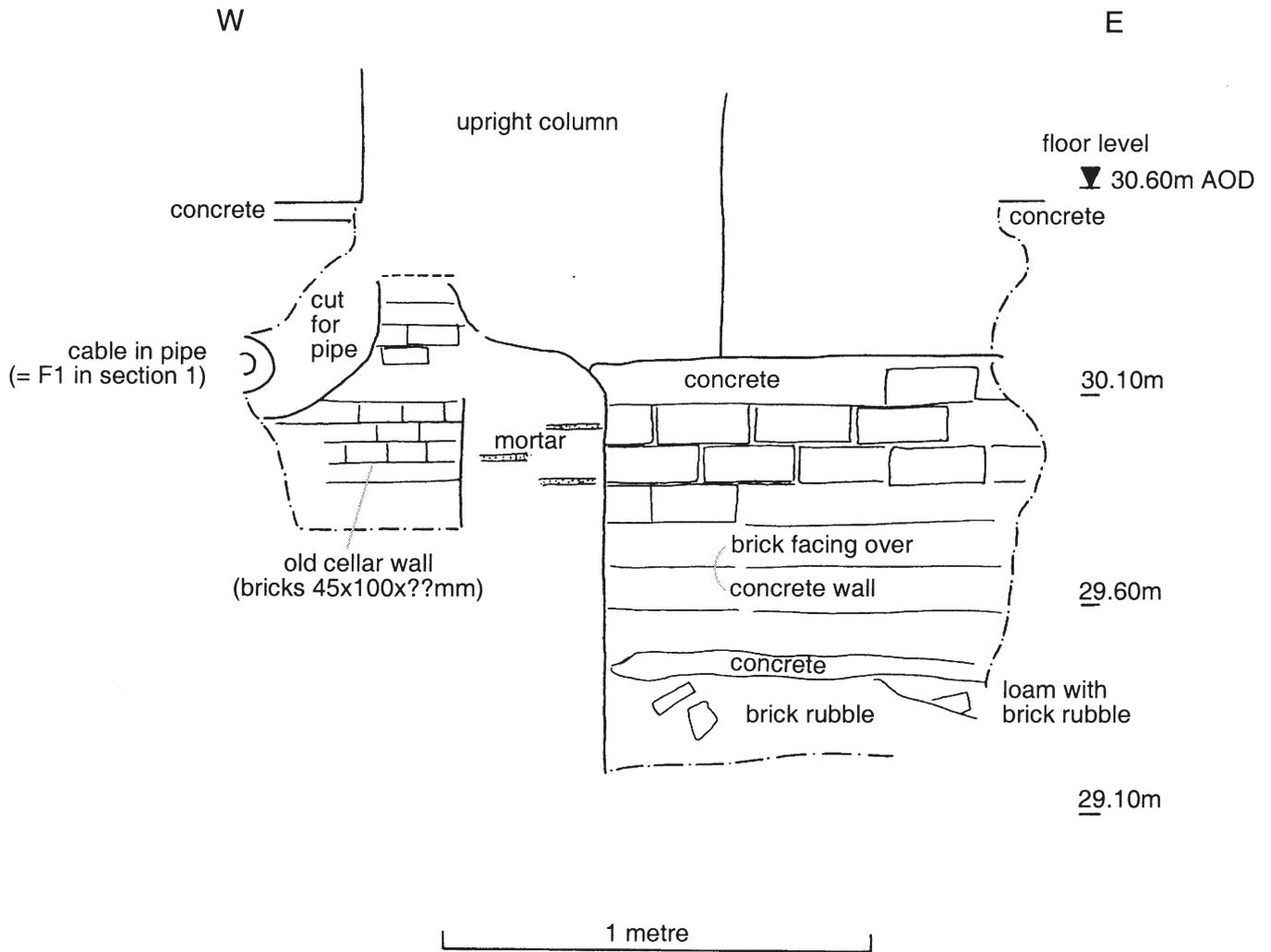
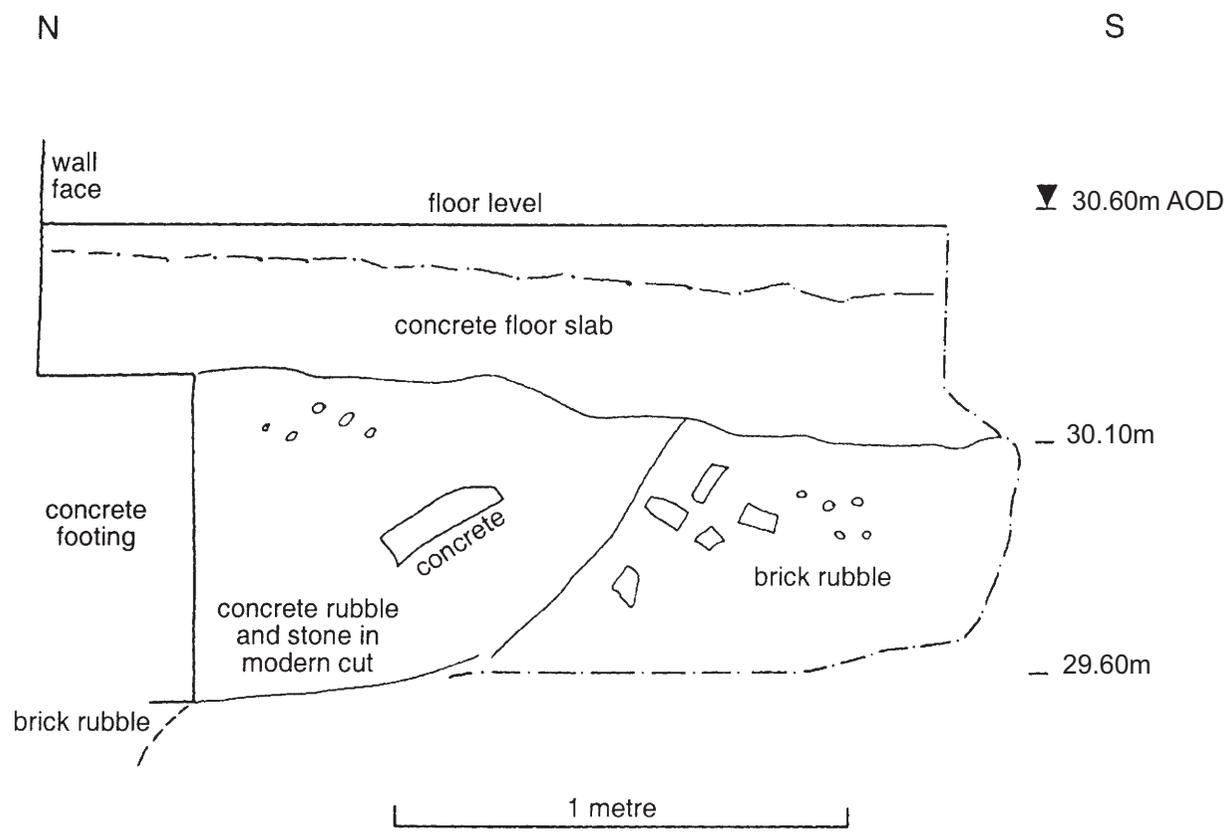


Fig 4 Section 4 (Test pit 2).



**Fig 5 Section 5 (Test pit 2).**

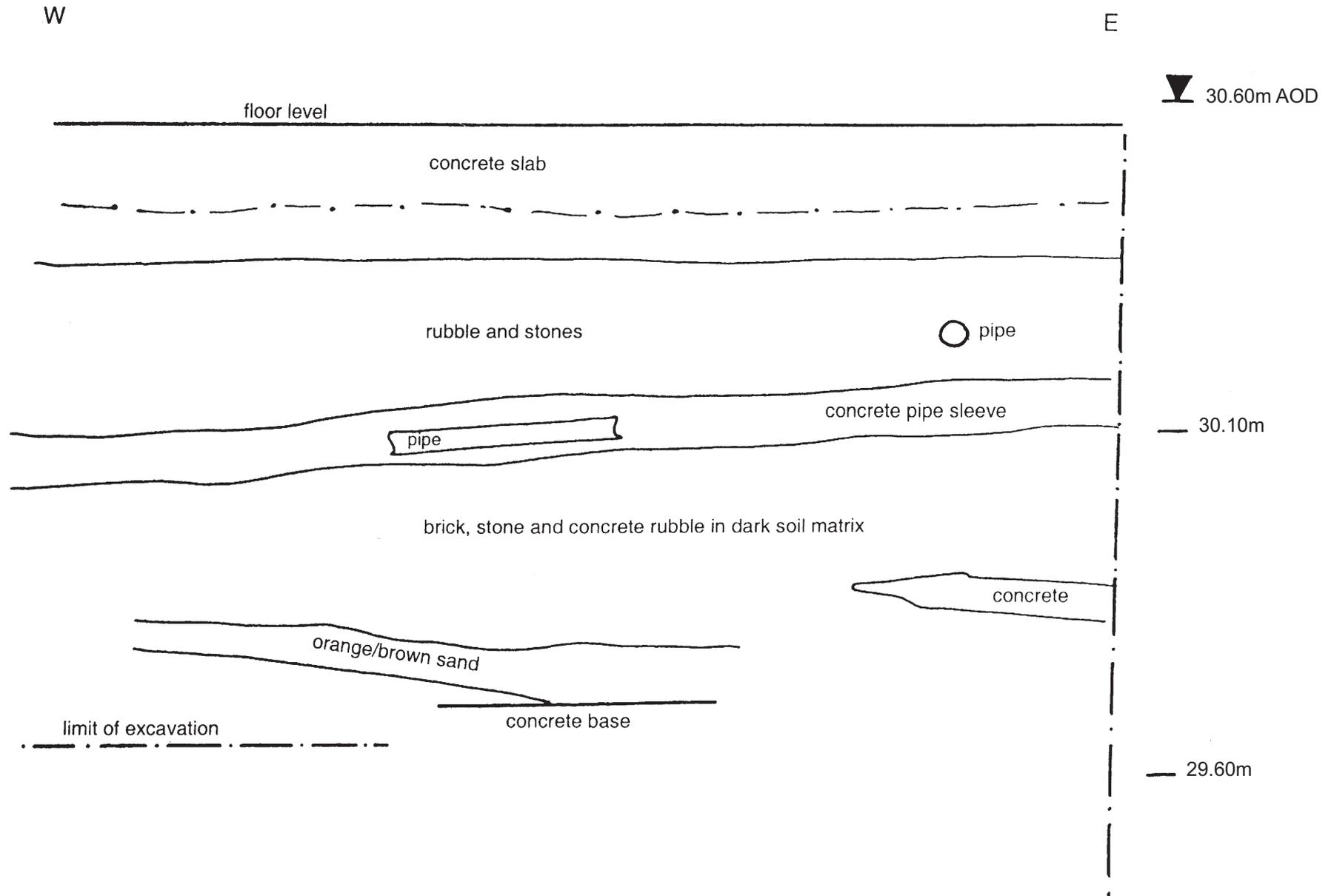


Fig 6 Section 6 (Test pit 4).

## 22-24 High Street (John Menzies')

### Work log

Date	CA hours	HB hours	Comment
20/12	0.5	0	Site visit - nothing to see
21/12	0	2	Site meeting
23/12	7	0	Observing excavation of Test pit 1 and writing up notes
4/1	0.5	0	Site visit
5/1	3	0	Observing Test pit 2
6/1	3	0	Test pit 2 and writing up notes
7/1	0	2.5	Site meeting
10/1	3	0	Observing Test pit 4
11/1	1.0	0	Observing Test pit 4
13/1	5.5	0	Observing Test pit 4 and writing up notes
18/1	0	3.75	Post-excavation
19/1	0	1.87	Post-excavation
20/1	0	3.75	Post-excavation
21/1	0	3.75	Post-excavation
24/1	0	5.62	Post-excavation
<b>Totals</b>	<b>23.5</b>	<b>23.24</b>	