

An archaeological evaluation  
at  
**9-11 Hythe Quay,  
Colchester, Essex**

October 2000

on behalf of  
**Hills Residential**



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**CAT Report 100**

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# An archaeological evaluation at 9-11 Hythe Hill, Colchester, Essex

## 1 Summary

*The site lies on the frontage of the Hythe, the medieval port of Colchester. Two 7m-long evaluation trenches were cut. Roman levels were revealed in both trenches, at 0.82m below present site level in the west trench (T1) and at 0.6m below site in the east trench (T2). In the case of T2, there was evidence of 15th- or 16th-century activity cutting the Roman levels. The Roman levels consisted of dumped material, perhaps intended to raise ground level above potentially wet ground. There were finds of Roman pottery and brick, and of post-medieval pottery and tile. There was one possible post-medieval wall line, and a gravelly band which was perhaps a yard surface. There were a number of post-medieval and modern pots and drains.*

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1** This is the archive report on an archaeological evaluation by trial trench on a 0.1086 hectare plot on the corner of Maudlyn Way and Hythe Quay, Colchester, Essex (address 9-11 Hythe Quay). Proposed new development is a two-storey apartment block with parking. The archaeological work was commissioned by Hills Residential. The site is centred at TM 01463 24627.
- 2.2** The current development proposal is the subject of Colchester Borough Council application no F/COL/00/1409.
- 2.3** *Current state of land.* The plot is vacant, overgrown and unused. There are many services crossing the site.
- 2.4** Fieldwork was carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on 4th October 2000. Post-excavation work took place on 9th-11th September. All work was done in accordance with a brief issued by the Archaeology Officer of Colchester Museums.
- 2.5** 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 Archaeological background**

The development site has a frontage to Hythe Quay, the medieval port of Colchester, which began to develop following the Norman Conquest. The port facilities in the Roman period are obscure, but the evidence of Roman roads from Mistley to the River Colne suggests that there may have been two crossing-points or bridges at the Hythe.

The construction of Maudlyn Way required an archaeological excavation at 79 Hythe Hill (to the north-west of this site) in the winter of 1994-95. This revealed Romano-British material and evidence of a succession of properties from the 15th century onwards (Brooks 1996). A watching brief held while the road was under construction in 1994, immediately adjacent to the development site, revealed re-used (probably Roman) septaria which was interpreted as a medieval wall running north-south. Excavations on a nearby site at 64-76 Hythe Hill in October 1999 revealed structural evidence for a series of buildings of the general character of those found in 1994-95 on the adjacent plot at 79 Hythe Hill (post-excavation work for this project still in progress).

### **4 Aim**

The aim of the evaluation was to locate, identify and assess the quality and extent of any surviving archaeological remains on the site.

### **5 The evaluation trenches (Figs 1-5)**

#### **5.1 Trench 1**

A 7m-long trial trench was dug in the location shown on Figure 1. The trench was progressively stripped by a mechanical digger using a 1.9m-wide toothless ditching bucket. The upper surfaces were progressively stripped off until significant archaeological deposits were reached. The gravel surface and underlying lime mortar and recent topsoils were worked off to a depth of approximately 0.5m. This revealed two things: first, Layer 1 (L1) – stones with occasional peg-tile in a yellow brown mortar (possibly a post-medieval foundation); second, a very large post-medieval cut Feature 1 (F1), which was filled with dark brown sandy loam with common stone bricks and mortar. In the middle of F1 was a red brick wall (F2) and a drain (F3) intruded into the extreme east edge of the feature.



**Plate 1 View westwards of Trench 1.**



**Plate 2 View westwards of Trench 2.**

**5.2** The removal of a further 0.24m of grey brown loamy clay with lenses of grey brown sandy loam and yellowish brown sandy loam brought the working surface down onto a significant archaeological deposit. This was L3, a compact stony layer in a matrix of olive brown loamy sand with crushed oyster and other shells. L3 was approximately 0.12m thick, and overlay L2, a dark greyish brown sandy loam containing septaria and Roman pottery. L2 was approximately 0.4m thick, and overlay natural ground which was either orange-brown sandy gravel or greyish-brown sandy clay. The top of the natural ground was between 1.2m and 1.5m below site ground level.

**5.3** The original bottom of the trench was at 1.2m below site level, but a narrower slot was cut down the middle of the trench to a depth of 1.6m in order to locate the natural ground.

### **5.5 Trench 2**

A 7m-long trial trench was dug in the location shown on Figure 1. The trench was progressively stripped by a mechanical digger using a 1.9m-wide toothless ditching bucket. The upper surfaces were progressively stripped off until significant archaeological deposits were reached. The gravel site surface was worked off, which revealed a very large modern cut, F4 (0.7m deep and filled with orange brown sand) which covered most of the trench area. This sealed two more post-medieval cuts, F5 and F6. F5, which was cut by F4, was a drainage cut with a concrete base which contained a drainage pipe. At the east end of the trench was F6, a large pit filled with dark brown loam with modern brick fragments, mortar and peg-tile.

**5.6** The removal of a further 0.2m of grey brown loam with abundant mortar and brick brought the working level down to a significant archaeological horizon. This was L4, an 0.35m-thick deposit of greyish brown silty clay with occasional stones. L4 overlay natural ground (greyish brown silty sand with abundant iron pan). Natural ground was between 1.04m and 1.2m below site ground level.

**5.7** The original bottom of the trench was at 1.2m below site level, but a narrower slot was cut down the middle of the trench to a depth of 1.6m in order to locate the natural ground.

## 6 Finds list

Weights are grammes. Roman fabrics are after Symonds & Wade 1999; medieval and later fabrics are after Cunningham (1985) and Cotter (forthcoming).  
u/s = unstratified

Context	Qt	Wt	Description	Date
T1 u/s	1	10	Early medieval shelly ware, fabric 13s sherd.	12th century
T1 u/s	1	495	Ridge-tile fragment. Red ware fabric closer to tile than pottery. External glaze.	medieval or post-medieval
T1 L2	1	131	Roman brick fragment.	Roman
T1 L2	1	13	<i>Opus signinum</i> fragment.	Roman
T1 L2	1	199	Jaw fragment of large quadruped (probably <i>bos</i> ).	?
T1 L2	1	80	Fabric 21a Colchester ware handle with slip painted band.	15th-16th century
T1 L2	1	3	Fabric 21 or 21a sherd.	15th-16th century
T1 L2	6	114	Roman greyware sherds, fabric GX.	Roman
T2 L4	1	5	Roman greyware sherd, fabric GX.	Roman

## 7 Discussion and interpretation

7.1 The highest significant archaeological deposit encountered on this evaluation was L1, a possible wall foundation at 0.36m below ground in T1 (see below, 7.4).

### 7.2 Roman

Roman strata were encountered in both trenches. In T1, L2 (an 0.4m-thick deposit of brown loam) contained Roman debris – septaria and pottery, but also two pieces of local Colchester ware dating to the 15th/16th century. L2 sealed natural ground. In T2, L4 (at 0.6m below site ground level) was an 0.35m-thick grey brown silty clay with occasional small stones. It produced a single sherd of Roman grey ware, and can be regarded as a Roman deposit. None of these Roman or probable Roman strata were *in situ* floor deposits; they were dumped soil layers perhaps intended to raise ground level away from the potentially wet ground near the river.

### 7.3 Medieval to post-medieval

There is some evidence of medieval activity here. A single medieval sherd (unstratified) hints at a low level of activity in the medieval period. As mentioned above, the Colchester ware sherds in T1 L2 suggest that there has been some intrusion into the Roman layers, presumably in the 15th or 16th centuries. Stony L3 (sealing L2) must be a medieval or (more likely) a post-medieval dumped layer, and

its gravel content suggests it may have been a yard surface. The deposit sealing L4 contained brick and mortar debris, and must be post-medieval in date. The soily layers above L3 must be post-medieval, and hint at the gradual accumulation of soil during that period.

#### 7.4 Post-medieval to modern

The most difficult part of the stratigraphic sequence to interpret is L1, a stone-in-mortar deposit, possibly a wall line (see above, 7.1). To judge by the fact that 15th-/16th-century material came from L2, L1 cannot be very ancient. Of course, there may be other elements of the structure represented by L1 elsewhere on the site. There are a number of large post-medieval cuts on this site. These include the soil-filled post-medieval pit F1, and the very extensive cut F4. The sand fill of F4 has a very modern feel – it is almost certainly of very recent origin. There were other features of recent origin, for instance drains F5 and F3 which are earlier than the sand-filled F4, but probably more recent than F1.

## 8 Acknowledgements

Thanks to Hills Residential for commissioning the work. Site work was supervised by Carl Crossan and carried out by of Nigel Rayner. The project was monitored by Martin Winter for Colchester Borough Council.

## 9 References

- |                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
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## 10 Glossary

context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
Fe	iron
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
intrusive	early material out of place in a later context (eg a Coke bottle in a Roman pit)
medieval	from AD 1066 to Henry VIII
modern	19th-21st centuries
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
<i>opus signinum</i>	pink Roman mortar with some waterproof qualities
post-medieval	after Henry VIII and up to Victorian
PMRE	post-medieval red earthenware
residual	an earlier object out of place in a later context (eg a Roman coin in a Victorian pit)
Roman	period from AD 43 to around AD 430
septaria	local building stone used by Romans
u/s	unstratified (no context)

## 11 Archive deposition

The finds and paper archive are held at Colchester Archaeological Trust, 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but both will be permanently deposited at Colchester Museum, under accession code 2000.115.

## 12 Site data

### 12.1 Site key context list

Context	Description	Cuts/seals	Finds date	Context date
F01	pit			post-medieval
F02	brick wall	F1		post-medieval
F03	drain	F1		20th century
F04	large cut	F5		20th century or later
F05	drain cut			20th century
F06	pit	L4		post-medieval
L01	foundation			post-medieval?
L02	dump layer		Roman and 15th/16th century	disturbed Roman
L03	stones in loamy sand	L2		Roman
L04	dump layer		Roman	Roman

### 12.2 Soil descriptions

Context	Description
L01	Small medium and large stones set in a pale yellow brown mortar with occasional peg-tile.
L02	Dark grey brown sandy loam with common oyster shell, lumps of septaria, and Roman pottery.
L03	Compact and abundant small stones in olive-tinged brown loamy sand with oyster, mussel, whelk and cockle shells.
L04	Greyish brown silty clay with occasional small stones.

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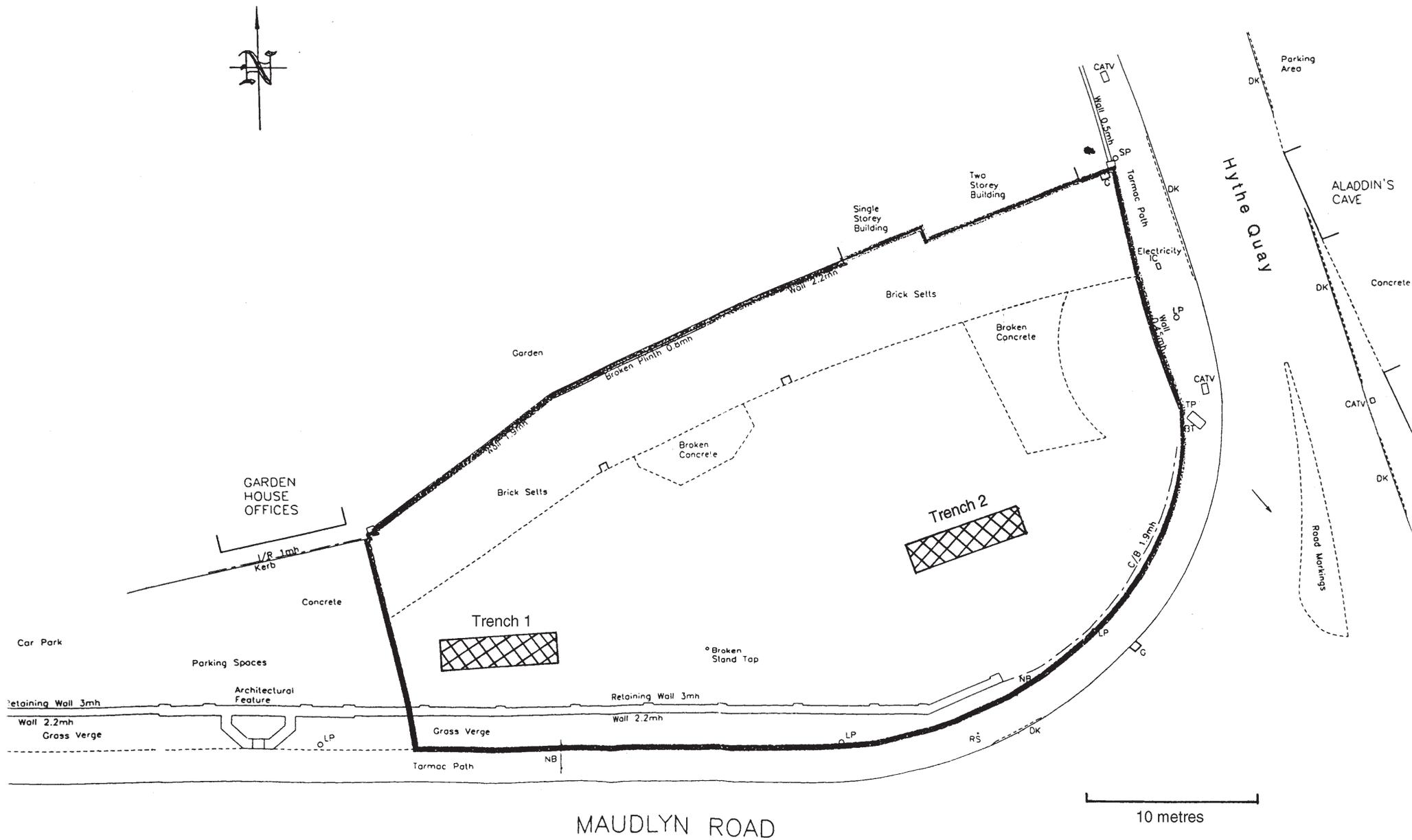


Fig 1 Site and trench location.

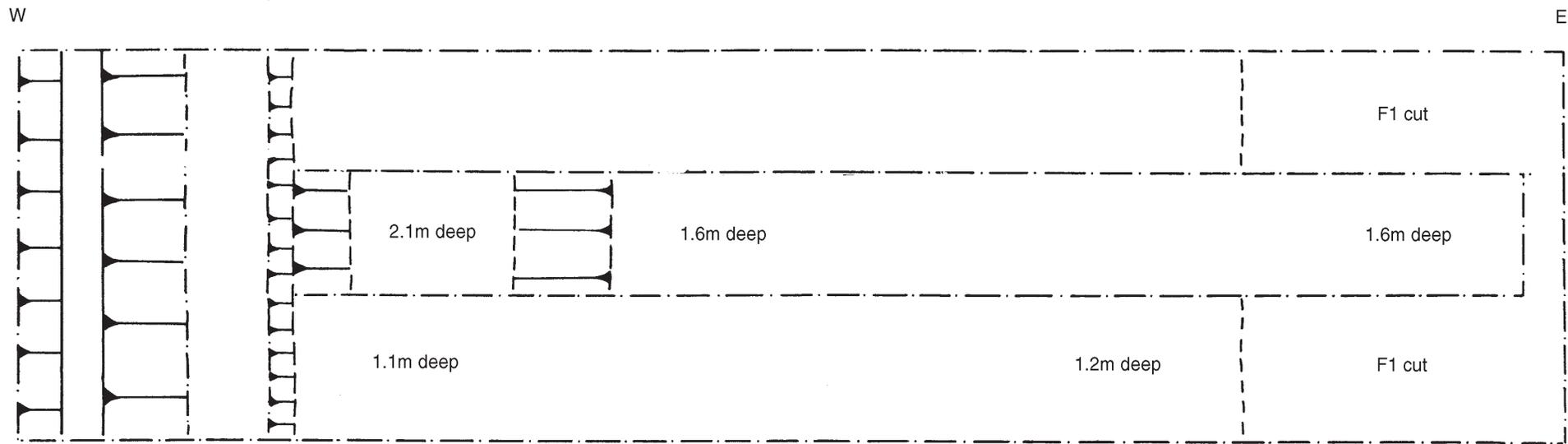
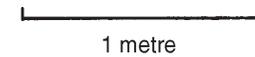
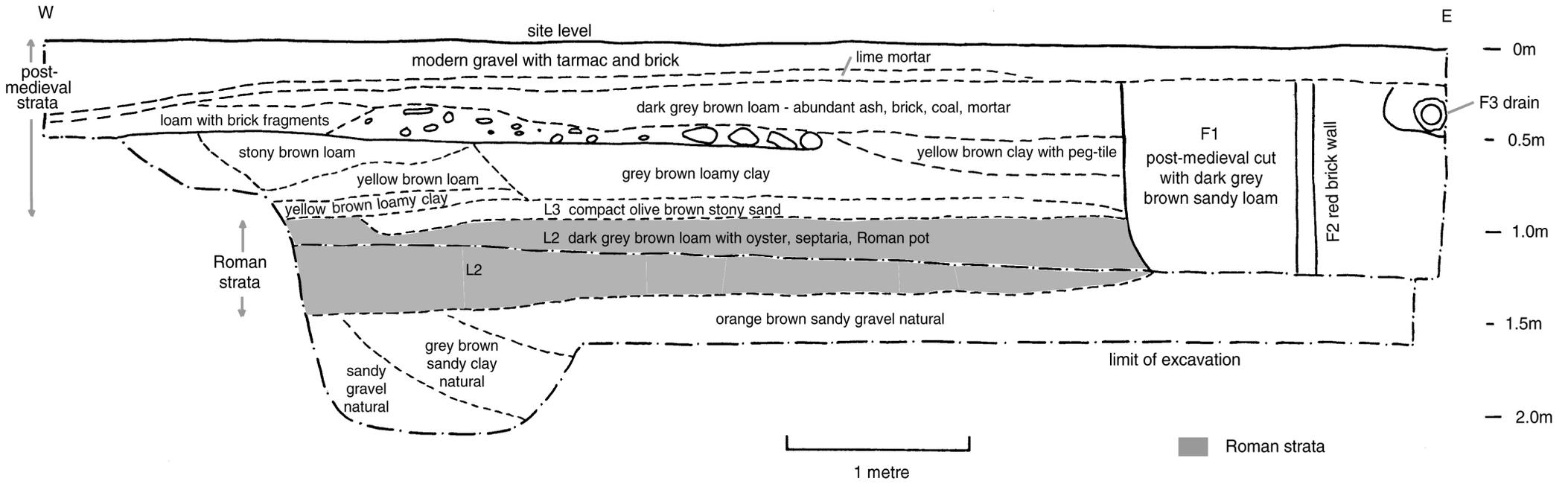
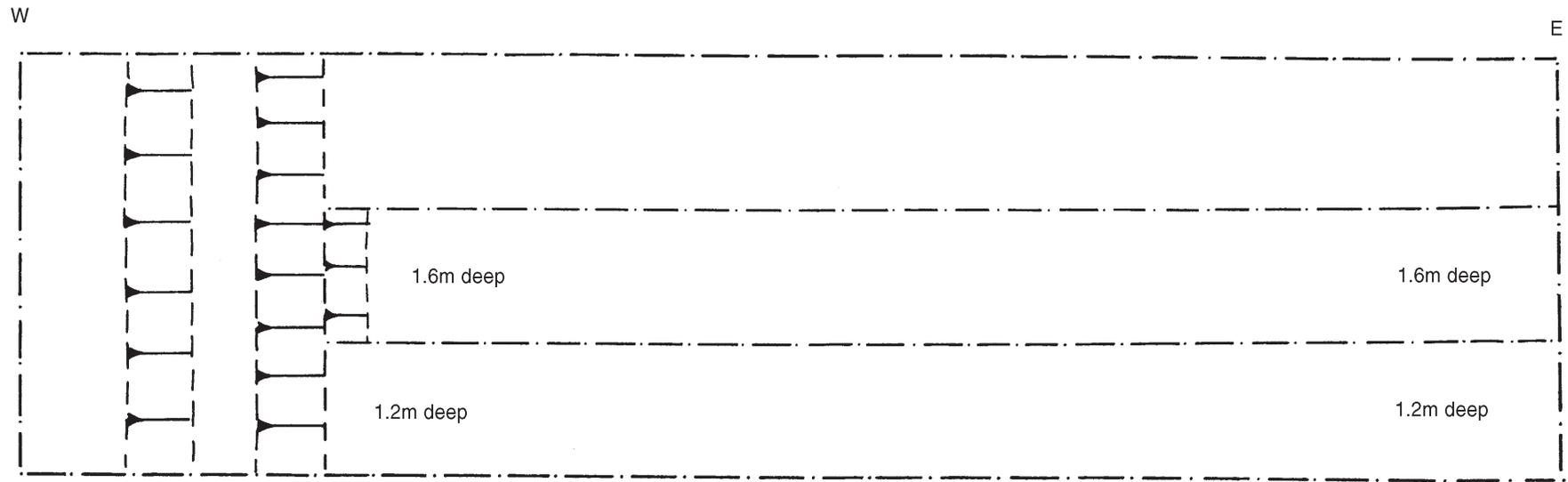


Fig 2 Trench 1 plan.

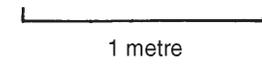




**Fig 3 Trench 1 section.**



**Fig 4 Trench 2 plan.**



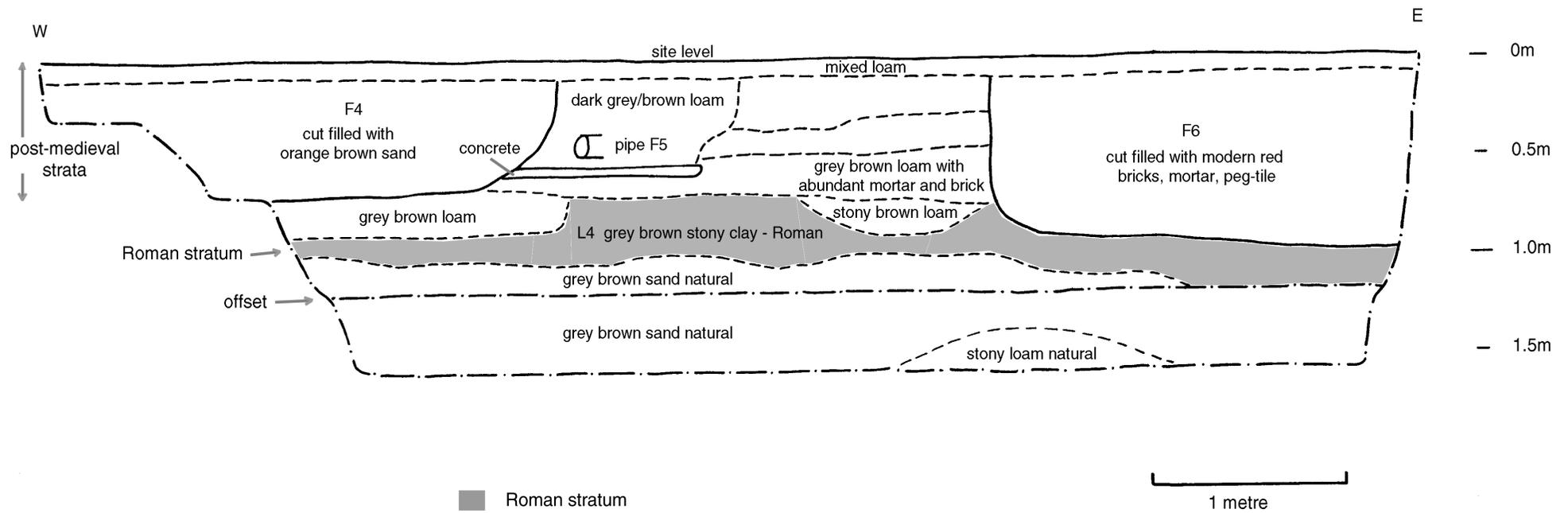


Fig 5 Trench 2 section.