

**An archaeological watching brief at
the Territorial Army Centre,
Circular Road East, Colchester, Essex**

January 2001

**on behalf of
Shenstone and Partners**

CAT project reference: 01/1B
Colchester Museum accession code: 2001.14



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CAT Report 121

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1 Summary

- 1.1** A watching brief was carried out at the Territorial Army Centre in January 2001, during ground works for a new building and car park.
- 1.2** All the material excavated by the contractor consisted of modern made-up ground. Natural ground was not reached except in the northern area where a modern Army trench was dug out and concrete foundations were exposed.
- 1.3** One fragment of Roman tile and one piece of Roman grey ware pottery were the only finds.
- 1.4** In short, the investigation produced negative results due partly to disturbance of the ground by Victorian buildings and partly to the fact that archaeological levels were not reached.

2 Introduction

- 2.1** This is a report on an archaeological watching brief carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between the 12th and 17th of January 2001, for Shenstone and Partners.
- 2.2** The watching brief was carried out during ground works for a new building and car park sited to the north of the Territorial Army (TA) Centre grounds on the east side of Circular Road East, Colchester, Essex. The site's National Grid Reference is TL 9987 2418.
- 2.3** The site is located approximately 1km south-east of Colchester town centre in the Garrison area between Berechurch Road and Circular Road East (see Figs 1 and 2). It comprises a fenced plot which has been cleared of buildings.
- 2.4** The area of the site is on a gradient which rises to the north. However, the site itself has been made-up with material to flatten it out (see section 7).
- 2.5** The nature of the ground works consisted firstly of stripping the entire development footprint (see Plate 1). This was carried out using a JCB excavator fitted with a ditching bucket. Stripping proceeded to a depth of between 450mm and 500mm over the area of the car park at the north end of the site, while levels on the area of the building to the south were reduced by between 200mm and 300mm. The second phase of work consisted of the excavation of foundation trenches around the perimeter of the area of the new building to form a raft foundation in the southern end of the site. Trenches for the building raft were between 1.7m and 1.8m wide and were dug out to between 600mm and 750mm below the original surrounding ground-level.

- 2.6** This report follows the standards set out in the Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1996) and *Guidelines on the preparations and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1994). The report follows CAT's standard Written Scheme of Investigation which in turn follows a brief written by Colchester Borough Council's Archaeology Officer.

3 Planning background

Colchester Borough Council granted planning permission under planning application no CD/COL/00/0952 for the construction of a prefabricated building measuring approximately 660m², with car parking to the north. A condition of the planning permission was that an archaeological watching brief be carried out.

4 Archaeological background

- 4.1** The development site is located within the major late Iron Age settlement of Camulodunum and is just outside the walls of the Roman legionary fortress and town of *Colonia Claudia*.
- 4.2** The site is on the fringe of an extensive Roman cemetery outside the Roman walled town. A number of Roman cremation burials have been recorded in the vicinity of the development area. Several Roman cremations were found just north-east of the TA Centre in 1939 during the erection of an air-raid shelter (Urban Archaeological Database no 1070). One presumably Roman burial was found actually at the TA Centre (UAD no 1090). Pottery and cremations have been found at the football pitch to the north of the TA Centre (UAD nos 1110, 1098). Roman roof-tile and other material has been found at the TA Centre during a CAT archaeological evaluation in 1996 (UAD no 3593).
- 4.3** The high potential of this area is demonstrated by the large number of cremation burials (73) recently excavated by CAT on Abbey Field in advance of the laying of the new all-weather sports pitch, 400m to the north-west of the TA Centre.
- 4.4** In the medieval period this land, which was part of St Giles' parish, belonged to St John's Abbey up until the dissolution of the monastery in 1538 (*Victoria County History, IX*, 140). Following this the land may well have passed into the ownership of the Lucas family.

- 4.5** The line of the Civil War Siege defences is believed to run from west to east though Abbey Field and possibly through the area of the TA Centre, although the line has not so far been proved.
- 4.6** Historic maps up to 1874 show the area of the TA Centre as fields. Army Married Quarters were built on the site sometime before 1874 (see Fig 3, OS 1874-76 1:10560 map) and were demolished sometime between the 1970s and 1991, judging from maps.

5 Aims and objectives

The aim of the archaeological work was to identify and record any archaeological features or deposits revealed by the ground works.

6 Methods

- 6.1** Fieldwork was undertaken by professional archaeologists who were present during topsoil-stripping and the excavation of the raft foundation trenches.
- 6.2** A metal detector was not used to scan spoil-heaps as all the material being removed was modern make-up.
- 6.3** A plan of the site was made at 1:100 and reduced for this report (see Fig 4). Several section drawings were made at scale 1:10, two of which have been reproduced in this report (see Fig 5).
- 6.4** No finds were retained as all that was found of any archaeological significance was one sherd of Roman grey ware pottery and one fragment of probable Roman tile, both from the northern end of the site and within modern horizons.

7 Results

7.1 Northern area – car park

- 7.1.1** Concrete foundations to previous buildings were uncovered during soil-stripping in the northern half of the northern area. The tops of these foundations are at 300mm below ground-level and they are 700mm in depth, ie the bottom of the foundations are at 1m below ground-level (see Fig 5, Section 1 and Plates 2 and 3).

7.1.2 The soil profile observed in this northern area is modern turf and topsoil overlying yellow sand with modern brick and tile, overlying modern dark brown sandy loam with modern brick, which in turn overlies natural brownish yellow slightly loamy sand into which the concrete foundations were dug (see Fig 5, Section 1).

7.1.3 Natural ground was encountered when a modern Army trench was dug out. In this area the natural sand occurred at 600mm below ground-level (see Fig 5, Section 1).

7.2 Southern area – the new building

7.2.1 Three brick walls (presumably on top of concrete foundations) spaced 2.2m apart were exposed in a foundation trench and a water-main trench. The tops of these walls were recorded at 750mm below ground-level, ie lower down than those in the northern section. These walls and the foundations in the northern section are remains of Victorian Married Quarter buildings showing on the 1874-76 OS map (Figs 3 and 4).

7.2.2 The soil profile observed during machine-excavation of raft foundations consisted of modern turf and topsoil overlying modern yellow gravelly sand with modern brick fragments, which in turn overlies darker brown sandy loam containing modern building materials (see Fig 5, Section 2). In the western foundation trench, the yellow gravelly sand overlaid a layer of brick and concrete rubble which was probably demolition debris from the Victorian buildings. In the southernmost part of the building footprint, the soil profile beneath the topsoil is almost entirely modern sand.

7.2.3 Natural ground was not reached in the southern area during the contractor's operations.

7.3 Conclusions

The modern sandy material excavated was probably brought in after the Married Quarters were demolished to level out the site. More material was needed in the southern part as this is on a lower level. This explains why walls were found at a greater depth in the southern part of the site. This gradient can be seen in the roadside bank on the western edge of the site which is 150mm above the road surface in the north and 1.3m above the road surface in the south.

7.4 Finds

One small piece of Roman tile and one small sherd of Roman grey ware pottery were found in the northern area. The pottery was found within the fill of a modern Army trench and the tile within modern brown loamy sand.

8 Discussion

- 8.1 All the material excavated by the contractor consisted of modern made-up ground, presumably imported to level the site after the Married Quarters had been demolished. Natural was only reached once, at 600mm below ground-level (see Fig 5, Section 1).
- 8.2 One fragment of Roman tile and one piece of Roman grey ware pottery, both from modern horizons, were the only finds.
- 8.3 The investigation produced negative results. The area has been heavily disturbed by foundations to Victorian Married Quarters. Had the contractor's excavations gone deeper, archaeological features cut into the natural might have been revealed.

9 Archive deposition

A copy of this report and a 1:100 plan with 1:10 section drawings, plus digital data on disk, will be permanently lodged at Colchester Museum under accession code 2001.14.

10 Acknowledgements

Thanks to Martin Winter (Archaeological Officer of Colchester Borough Council and to Shenstone and Partners.

11 References

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- Crossan C, 1996 Archaeological evaluation at the TA Centre, Circular Road East, CAT summary report
- Crummy, N, Crummy, P, & Crossan, C, 1993 *Colchester Archaeological Report 9, Excavations of Roman and later cemeteries, churches and monastic sites in Colchester, 1971-88*
- Orr, K, 2000 An archaeological desk-based assessment of the Colchester Garrison PFI site, CAT Report 97

Kate Orr, January 2001

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Plate 1 Photograph after initial clearing, looking north.

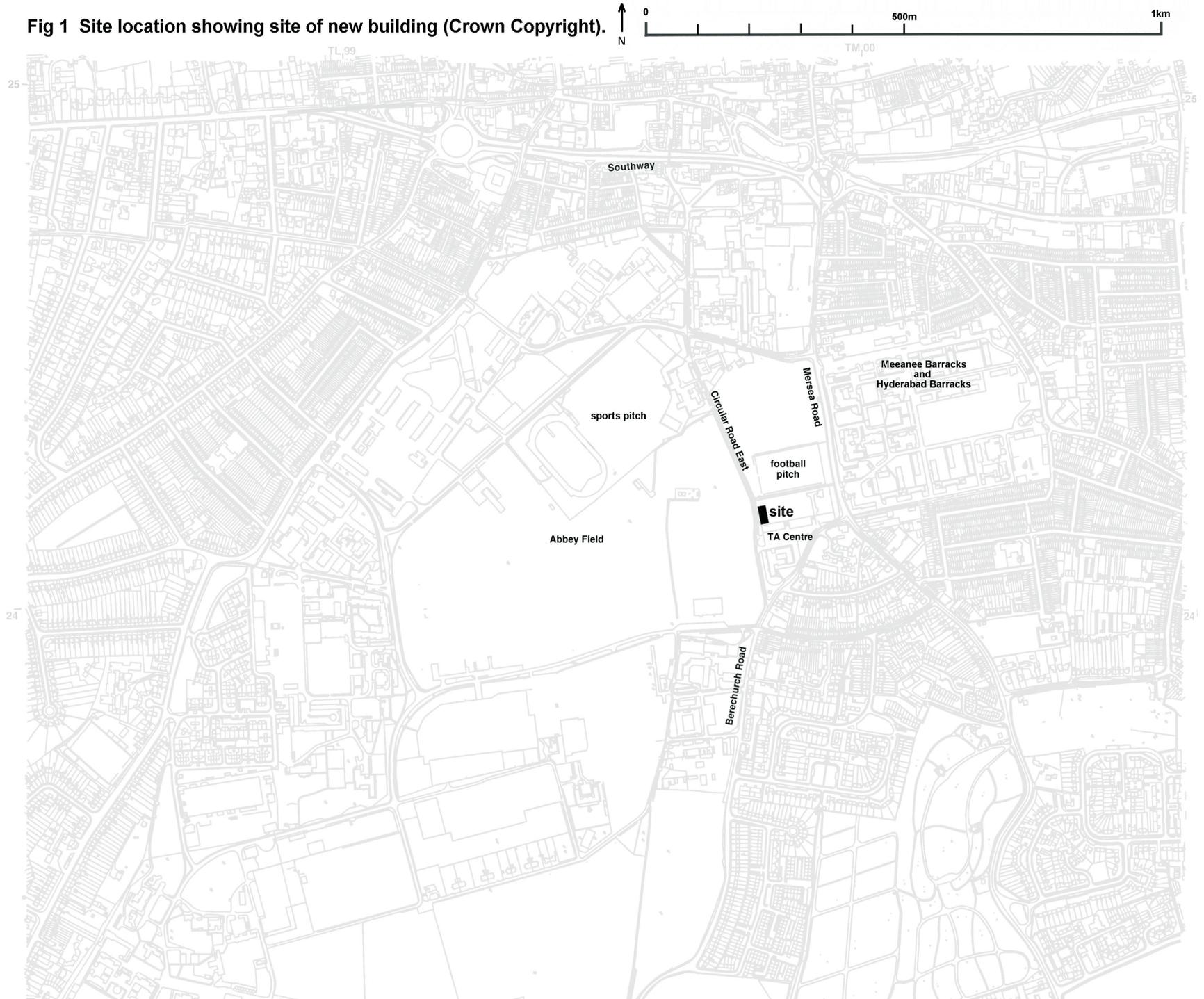


Plate 2 Photograph of walls at northern end of the site, looking south-west.



Plate 3 Photograph of Section 1, looking east.

Fig 1 Site location showing site of new building (Crown Copyright).



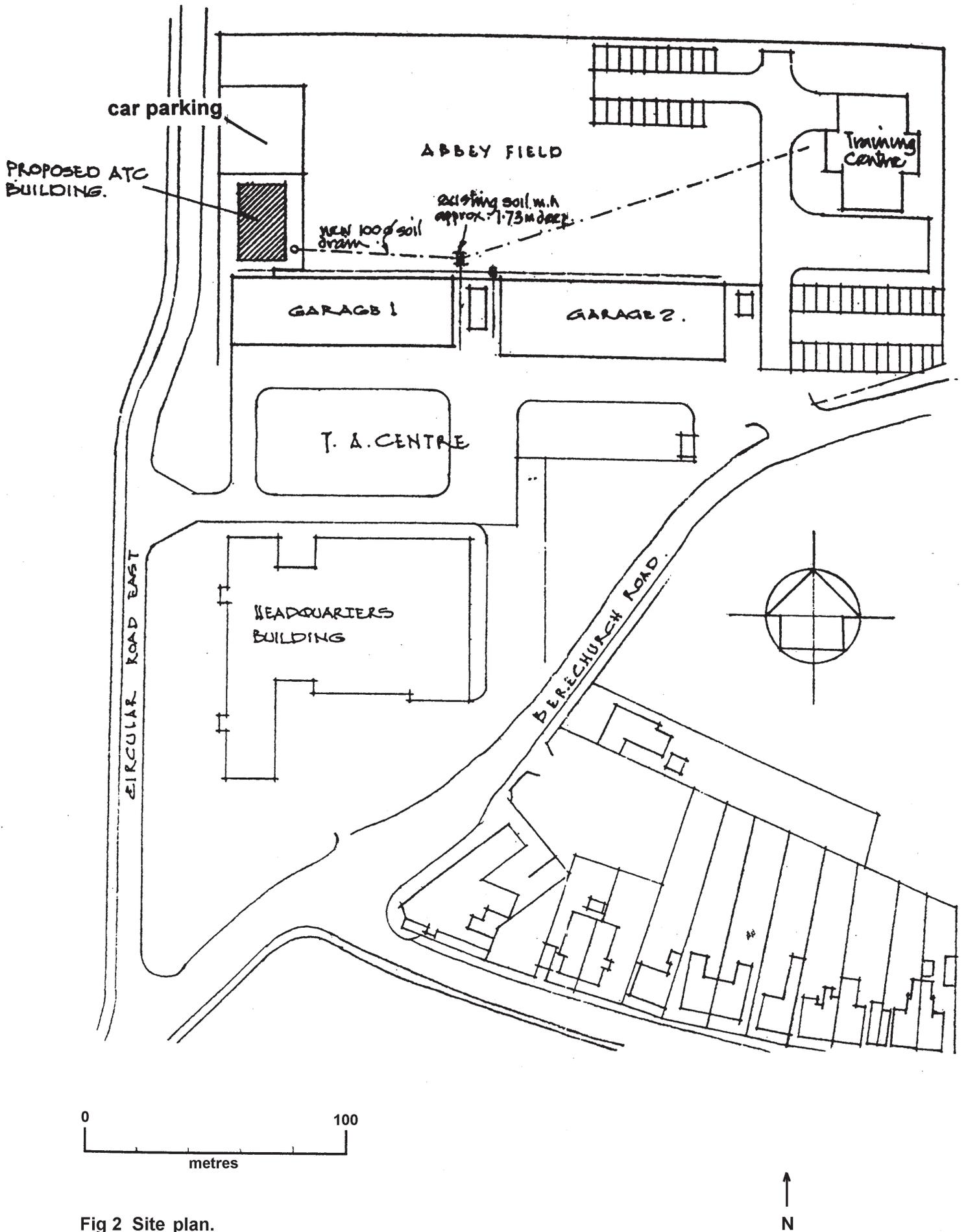


Fig 2 Site plan.

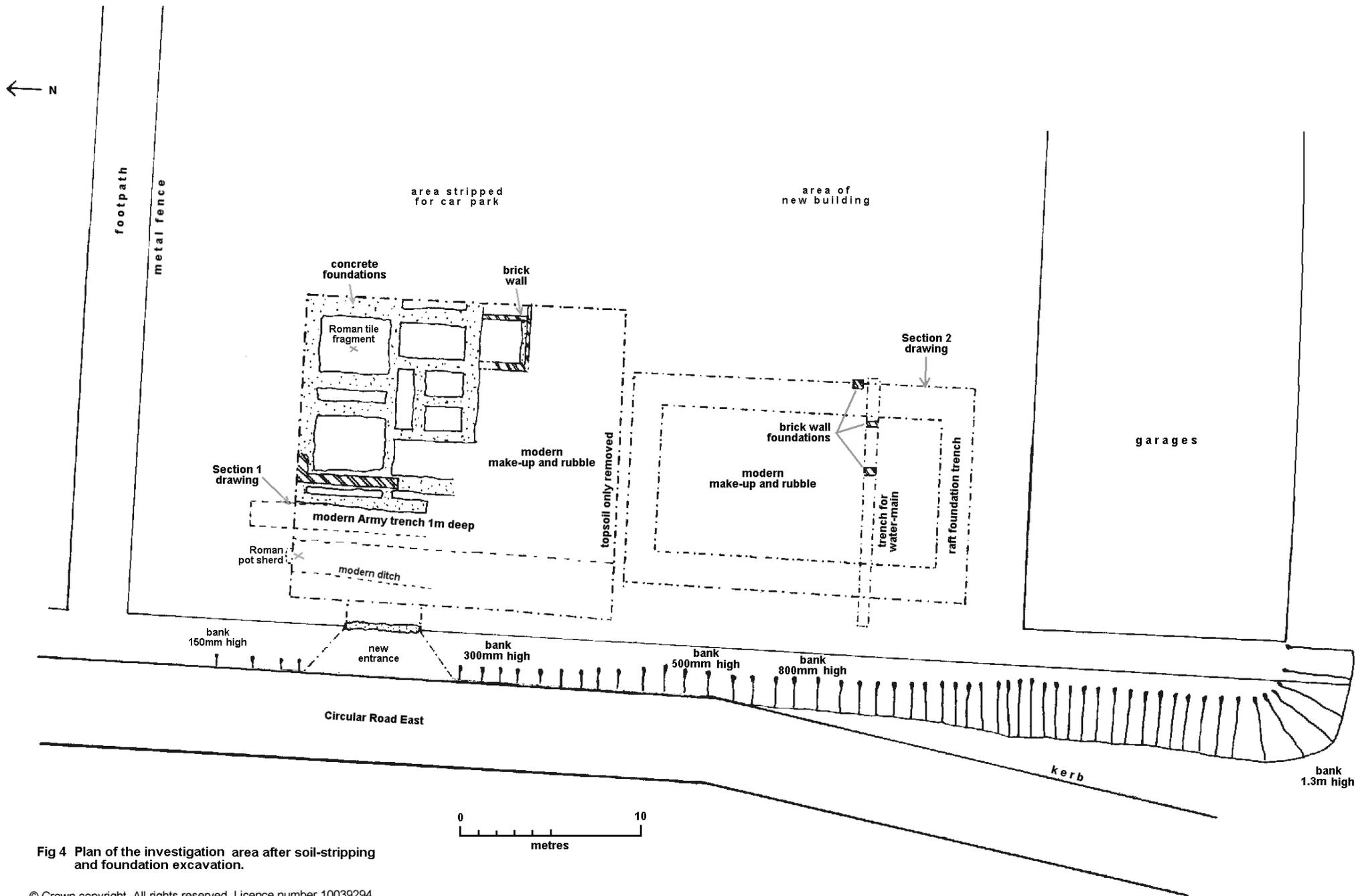
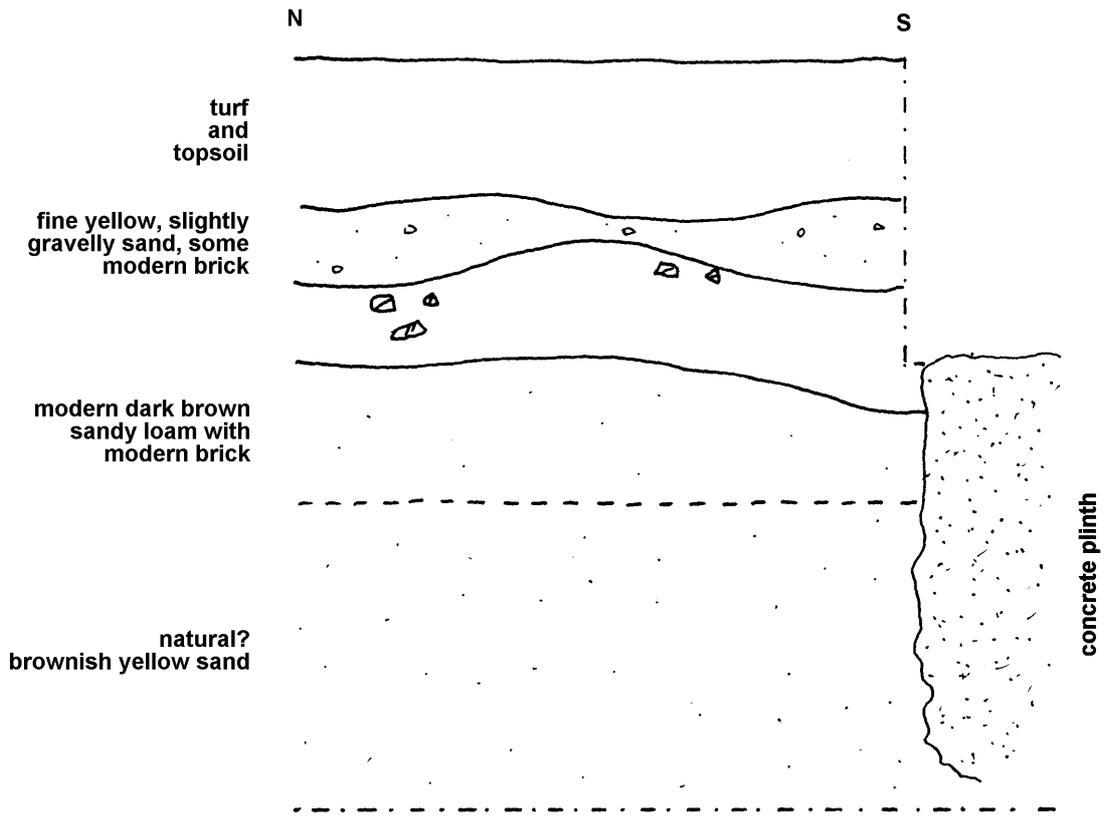
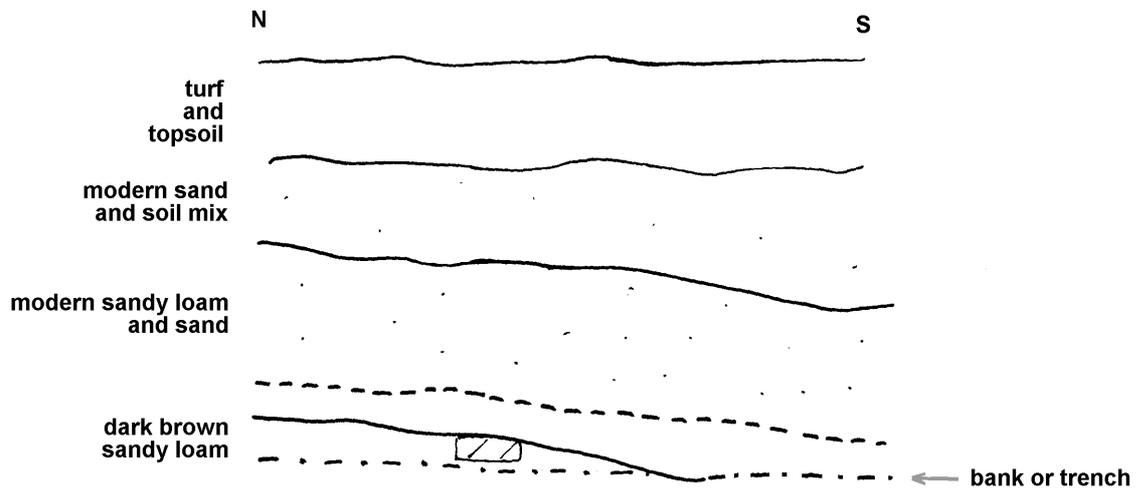


Fig 4 Plan of the investigation area after soil-stripping and foundation excavation.



Section 1



Section 2

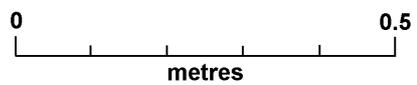


Fig 5 Section drawings.