An archaeological evaluation rear of
42b High Street,
Great Dunmow, Essex

April 2001

Site code: GD 9
Planning reference: Utt/1708/00
NGR: TL 627 218 centre

CAT Report 133

Contents

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1   Summary

A trial-trench evaluation uncovered several modern or post-medieval pits and ditches. There were residual Middle Iron Age and Roman potsherds and Roman tile, but no features earlier than the post-medieval period.

2   Introduction (Fig 1)

2.1 This is the report on an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching rear of 42b High Street, Great Dunmow, Essex (NGR TL 627 218 centre).

2.2 The evaluation was conducted by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) in accordance with a written scheme of investigation approved by Essex County Council Heritage Advice, Management and Promotions Section (HAMP). Site work was carried out on 2nd and 3rd April 2001, and post-excavation work between 4th and 10th April.

2.3 The project was monitored by Essex County Council HAMP.

2.4 The finds and archive are held at CAT headquarters in Colchester, but will ultimately be deposited at Saffron Walden Museum.

3   Archaeological background

3.1 The site lies within the Roman and medieval town of Great Dunmow.

3.2 There is limited evidence of prehistoric activity in the urban area, specifically in the Bronze Age and Late Iron Age.

3.3 A Roman small town developed at the junction between Stane Street and the Roman road from Cambridge to Chelmsford, with a built-up area (possibly enclosed) spreading out to the west, between the River Chelmer and a tributary stream. The present site lies in the eastern side of the northern half of the built-up area, as plotted by Medlycott (Medlycott 1998). A separate settlement was located at Church End, to the north of the town. A large quantity of Roman pottery has been found on New Street, indicating that an important focus of the Roman town may be located near to the present site.

3.4 Both Roman settlements were reoccupied in Anglo-Saxon times, although precise details of the Anglo-Saxon occupation need to be more closely studied. It is not known whether any Anglo-Saxon remains will be found on the present site.

3.5 The early medieval settlement in Dunmow appears to be located at Church End near the parish church. The granting of a market charter in 1277 may have been the occasion for the movement of the focus of medieval occupation to the High Street/Market Hill areas. The current site is isolated in the medieval built-up area west of the High Street.

4   Aim

4.1 The aim of the archaeological work was to determine the location, character, extent, date, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains. Using this information, an informed decision can be made on any future necessary archaeological work.

4.2 Specific aims of the evaluation were to assess the:
• Evidence of the Roman town and the nature of its occupation
• Evidence of the medieval town and the nature of its occupation.

5   Description of the evaluation (Figs 2-4)

5.1 Turf and topsoil (Layer or L1) were removed by machine with a flat-edged bucket down to the highest significant archaeological level, which was the surface of natural ground (L2) where archaeological features were visible. The obvious modern date of L1 was confirmed by post-medieval and modern pottery (Fabrics 40 and 48d) [1]. Technically the evaluation had two trenches – Trench 1 or T1 (E-W) and T2 crossing it (N-S) - but the two are treated here as one trench.

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[1]   these medieval and later fabrics are after Cotter 2000 and Cunningham 1985

5.2   The slight slope in natural ground meant that the trench was slightly deeper at its east end than at its west. At the east end the trench was excavated to 810mm below modern ground, in the centre it was down to 600mm below, and at the west end it was down to 450mm below modern ground.

5.3   All the archaeological features were cut into natural ground L2. These were as follows (see Figs 3-4): Feature 1 or **F1**, the shallow bottom of a probable post-hole (containing peg-tile); **F2**, a small pit or post-hole (no finds); **F3**, a subrectangular pit deeper on its west side than on its east (containing peg-tile and 19th- to 20th-century [Fabric 48d] sherds, with residual Roman? tile and Middle Iron Age sherds); **F4**, a steep-sided feature which looked more like a ditch on the surface, but dug more like a pit (in the sense that the edges seemed to be turning in, rather than running off straight - finds from F4 included slate, peg-tile, clay tobacco pipes, flower pot (Fabric 51b) and residual Roman sherds; and **F5**, a large and deep pit which had been truncated by an engineering test-pit - F5 contained post-medieval and modern pottery (Fabrics 40 and 48d) and Roman tile.

6   Finds

6.1   Prehistoric pottery

I am grateful to Paul Sealey of Colchester Museum for examining and commenting on these sherds.

Three sherds (33g) were recovered from a residual context in F3. A sand-tempered pottery in a very dark grey fabric, which is typical of Middle Iron Age material from this region. The surface is either dark grey over brown or brown with grey blotches. The vertical scoring on one sherd is, again, typical of pottery of this period. The smallest sherd, while it could quite easily be contemporary, might also be a later sherd.

6.2   Roman pottery by Stephen Benfield

There is only a small quantity of Roman pottery (35g) from the evaluation, all residual in F4. The majority of this, five small to medium-sized sherds (31g), is coarse sandy grey ware representing one or two vessels which can only be dated as Roman. However, there are also two abraded small to medium-sized sherds (4g) of late Colchester colour-coat roughcast ware (Colchester fabric CB) which can be dated to the earlier 2nd-late 2nd/earlier 3rd century (Symonds & Wade 1999, 264, 494-6).

6.3   The medieval and later pottery

Although this is a small group, it seems worthwhile to point out the complete absence of medieval fabrics which one might reasonably expect in an urban context. The presence of post-medieval and modern Fabrics 40 and 48d would support an argument for post-Roman activity in, say, the 17th century and later, but the lack of Fabrics 13 or 20, for instance, argues against any significant medieval activity here.

6.4 Other finds list

Weights are in grammes. Medieval and later fabrics are after Cotter 2000 and Cunningham 1985.

Context	Bag no	Qty	Wt	Description	Finds date	Context date
F1	2	1	13	Peg-tile fragment	post-medieval	post-medieval
F2	4	1	8	Peg-tile fragment	post-medieval	post-medieval
F3	3	1	884	Natural sandstone lump	?	19th-20th century
F3	3	1	129	Peg-tile fragments	post-medieval	19th-20th century
F3	3	1	44	Roman? tile	Roman	19th-20th century
F3	3	1	37	Rough daub lump	?	19th-20th century
F3	3	1	15	Fabric 48d sherds	19th-20th century	19th-20th century
F3	3	1	17	Brick lump	post-medieval	19th-20th century
F3	3	1	33	Sand-tempered sherds	Middle Iron Age	19th-20th century
F3	3	1	2	Glass sherd	post-medieval	19th-20th century
F4	5	2	50	Fe nails, triangular (broken?) head, 7mm square section	post-medieval	19th-20th century
F4	5	15	39	Fabric 48d sherds	19th-20th century	19th-20th century
F4	5	1	3	Slate	post-medieval	19th-20th century
F4	5	6	3	Animal bone fragments	?	19th-20th century
F4	5	1	4	Glass fragment, 2mm thick	post-medieval	19th-20th century
F4	5	6	10	Clay tobacco pipe stem fragments	post-medieval	19th-20th century
F4	5	4	117	Peg-tile fragments	post-medieval	19th-20th century
F4	5	5	82	Brick lumps	post-medieval	19th-20th century
F4	5	1	5	Flower pot sherd (Fabric 51a)	19th-20th century	19th-20th century
F4	5	1	10	Fabric 40 PMRE sherd	17th-18th century	19th-20th century
F4	5	5	31	Roman grey ware sherds	Roman	19th-20th century
F4	5	2	4	Roman beaker sherds	Roman	19th-20th century
F5	6	2	169	Roman tile fragments	Roman	19th-20th century
F5	6	1	63	Tile/brick lump	post-medieval	19th-20th century
F5	6	1	3	Fabric 40, post-medieval red earthenware	17th-18th century	19th-20th century
F5	6	1	1	Fabric 48d, ironstone sherd	19th-20th century	19th-20th century
F5	7	1	18	Peg-tile fragments	post-medieval	19th-20th century
F5	7	1	1	Fabric 48d	19th-20th century	19th-20th century
L1	1	13	77	Animal bone fragments	?	19th-20th century
L1	1	5	33	Fabric 48d sherds	19th-20th century	19th-20th century
L1	1	1	85	Length of copper pipe	modern	19th-20th century
L1	1	6	355	Peg-tile fragments	post-medieval	19th-20th century
L1	1	2	95	Brick lumps	post-medieval	19th-20th century
L1	1	2	106	Fabric 40 PMRE sherds	17th-18th century	19th-20th century

7 Discussion and conclusions

There are two main points arising from this evaluation. First, there is a considerable depth of topsoil on this site. In fact, its depth has probably been accentuated by the presence of a garden retaining wall. The obvious post-medieval and modern date of this topsoil is confirmed by pottery Fabrics 40 and 48d (collectively 17th-20th centuries). All the excavated features (except undated F2) are of the same general date. What, then, is the function of the features? There is always a difficulty in interpreting a small group of features in a single trench, and the same difficulty applies here. All one can say is that the features are probably connected with the disposal of rubbish or with horticulture.

The second main point is that despite the post-medieval and modern dating of all the contexts, Middle Iron Age (MIA) and Roman pottery was found in residual positions (in F3 and F4). The discovery of Roman pottery within the limits of a Roman small town is, of course, no great surprise, but the MIA pottery is an interesting discovery which hints at some form of prehistoric activity here or hereabouts. There is also an amorphous daub lump and a piece of sandstone from the same context as the MIA pottery. While it

is tempting to interpret them as prehistoric, it is actually impossible to prove that they are not post-medieval or modern.

One interpretation which would explain the residual finds is as follows: the finds were originally in MIA or Roman features (or layers). These features (or layers) were later cut away by post-Roman construction or gardening, releasing the finds to circulate in the garden topsoil. Later, deep post-medieval and modern features cut right down into natural ground and in the process picked up the MIA/Roman finds from the topsoil. Hence the MIA and Roman finds became mixed up with post-medieval and modern finds which are contemporary with the cuts in which they were found. Having said that, it is always possible that soil may have been imported into a garden such as this, and this may be another mechanism whereby archaeological finds can travel (presumably relatively short) distances.

It is interesting that there is no medieval material from this site. Two factors may be at work here: the fact that the site is a back plot rear of the High Street frontage, and also the location of the site towards the south edge of the medieval town area[2] where it is away from the main centre of activity.

8   Archive deposition

The full archive will be deposited at Saffron Walden Museum within two months of completion of the final publication report on the project, and confirmed to HAMP.

9   Monitoring

The project was monitored by Essex County Council Heritage Advice, Management and Promotions Section (HAMP).

10   Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to: Mr W Frecknall for commissioning the archaeological work, through the good offices of Andrew Stevenson Associates, and to Paul Sealey of Colchester Museum for examining the Iron Age pottery. Site work was done by Kate Orr and Nigel Rayner.

11   References

Cotter, John	2000	*Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-1985*, Colchester Archaeol Report **7**
Cunningham, C M	1985	'A typology for post-Roman pottery in Essex', in *Post-medieval sites and their pottery: Moulsham Street, Chelmsford*, by C M Cunningham and P J Drury, Chelmsford Archaeol Trust Report **5**, Council British Archaeol Res Report **54**, 1-16
Medlycott, Maria	1998	Great Dunmow: historic project assessment report, Essex County Council, Planning Department, Archaeology Section
Symonds, R P, & Wade, S	1999	*Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-86*, by P Bidwell and A Croom (eds), Colchester Archaeol Report **10**

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[2]   as shown in 'Great Dunmow medieval interpretation' (Medlycott 1998)

12   Appendices
12.1   Feature and Layer list

Number	Description	Finds date	Context date
F1	Post-hole	Post-medieval	Post-medieval
F2	Small pit/post-hole	Post-medieval	Post-medieval
F3	Pit	19th-20th century	19th-20th century
F4	Straight-sided pit or ditch	19th-20th century	19th-20th century
F5	Pit	19th-20th century	19th-20th century
L1	Turf and topsoil	19th-20th century	19th-21st century
L2	Natural	-	-

12.2   Soil descriptions

Number	Description
F1 fill	Dark yellow brown sandy loam with occasional small gravel
F2 fill	Dark yellow brown sandy loam with occasional small gravel
F3 fill	Dark yellow brown sandy loam with occasional small gravel, peg-tile, pottery and glass
F4 top fill	Grey brown silty loam with occasional gravel
F4 middle fill	Abundant small gravels in grey brown silty loam
F4 almost bottom fill	Grey brown silty loam with occasional stone, and a lens of darker grey silty loam
F4 bottom fill	Yellow sand (redeposited natural)
F5 top fill	Very loose medium to large gravels, chalk lumps, tile, pottery
F5 bottom fill	Very dark grey brown sandy loam with charcoal flecks and common small gravels
Layer 1	Very dark grey brown sandy loam with occasional small stones, mortar and charcoal flecks
Layer 2	Dark orange brown patchy and coarse sand and gravel

Howard Brooks, 09.04.2001

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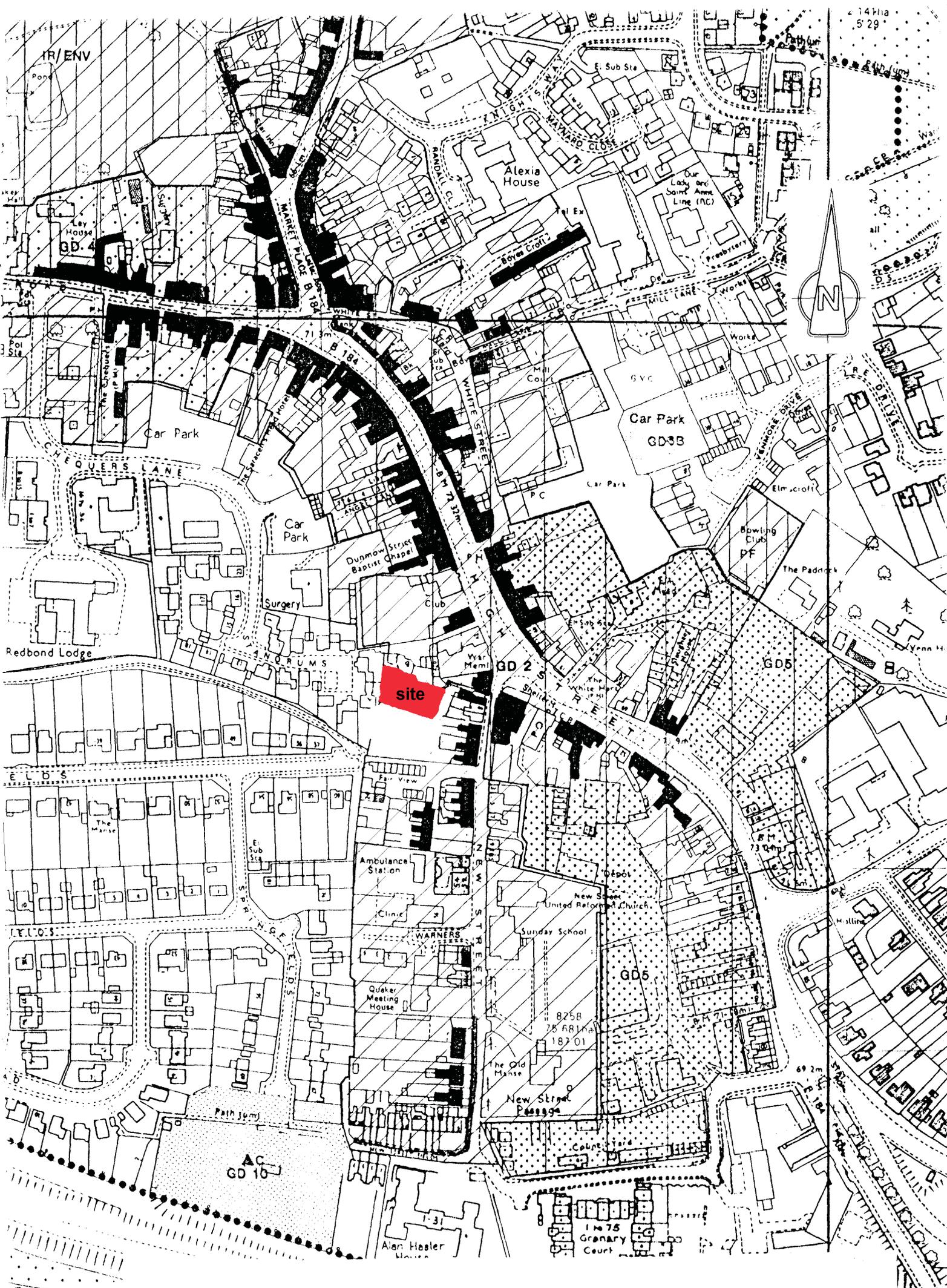
Fig 1 Great Dunmow, with site location. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Licence number 10039294.

High Street

offices

site boundary

Trench 1

TL 62762 21800

Trench 2

TL 62786 21791

hedge

0   10

metres

Fig 2 Trench location.

76.58m ▽

contractor's test-pit

F5

Trench 2

76.13m ▽

76.46 m ▽

Trench 1

residual
Roman sherds

F4

F2

F1

75.79m ▽

residual Iron
Age sherds

F3

76.60m ▽

0   10

metres
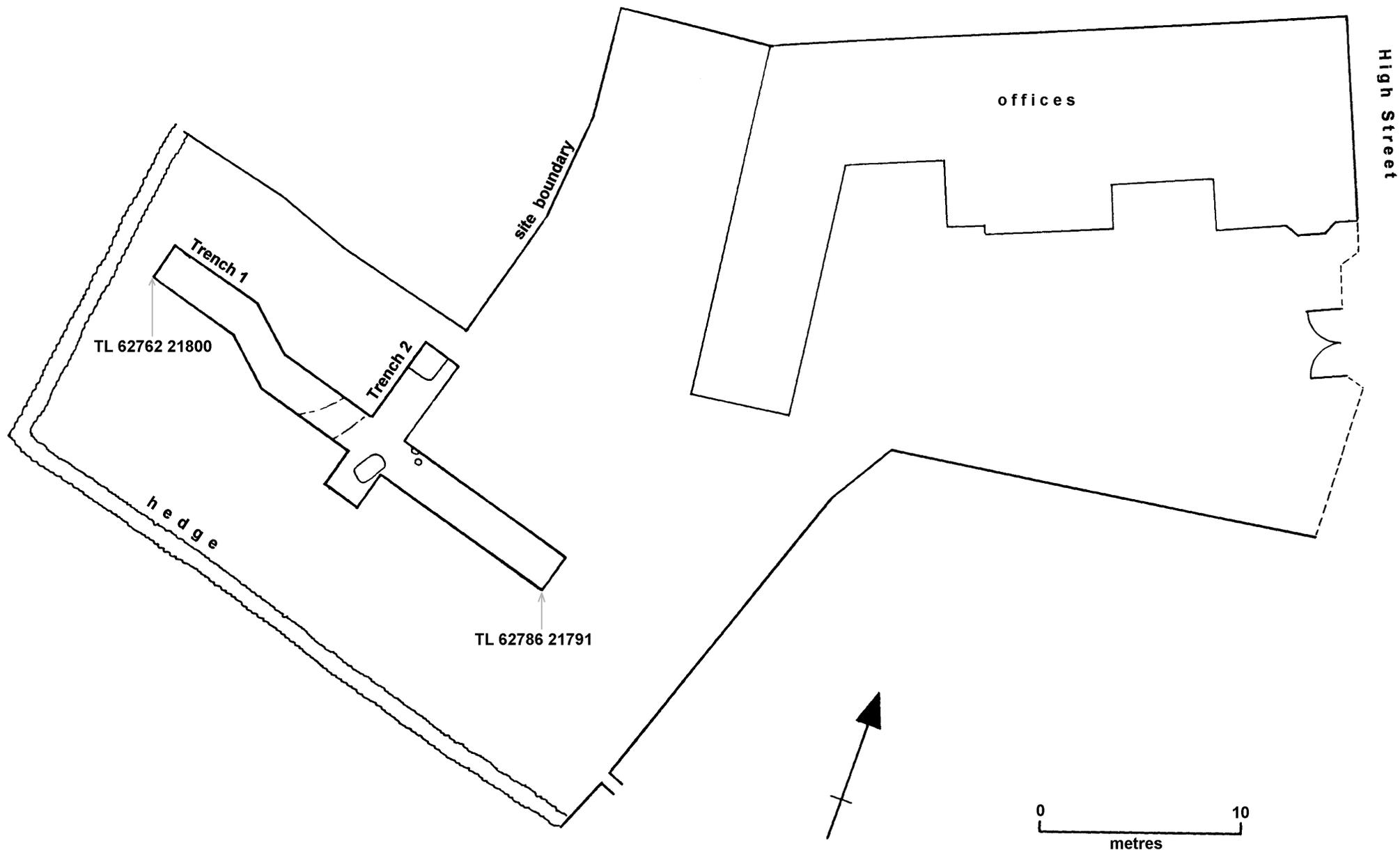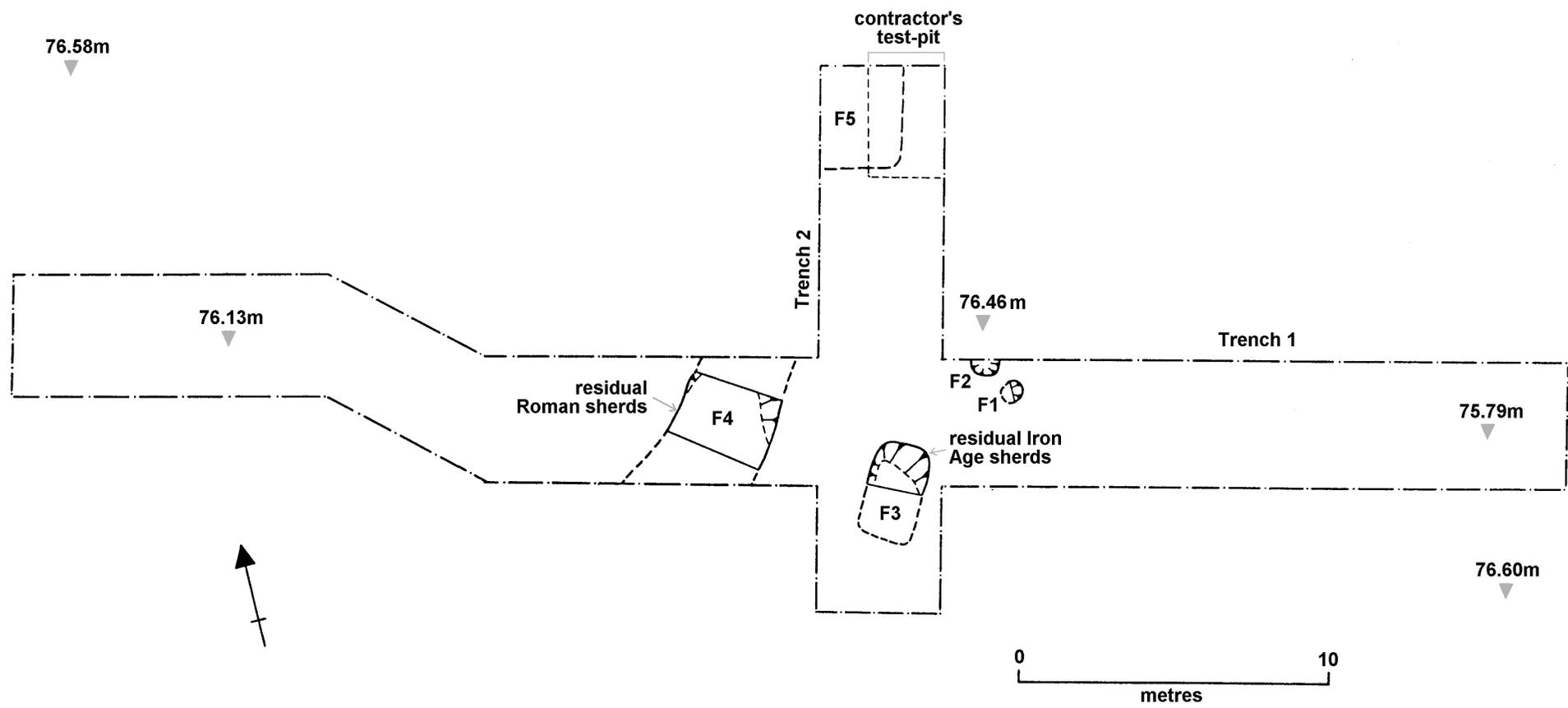
Fig 3 Trench plan.
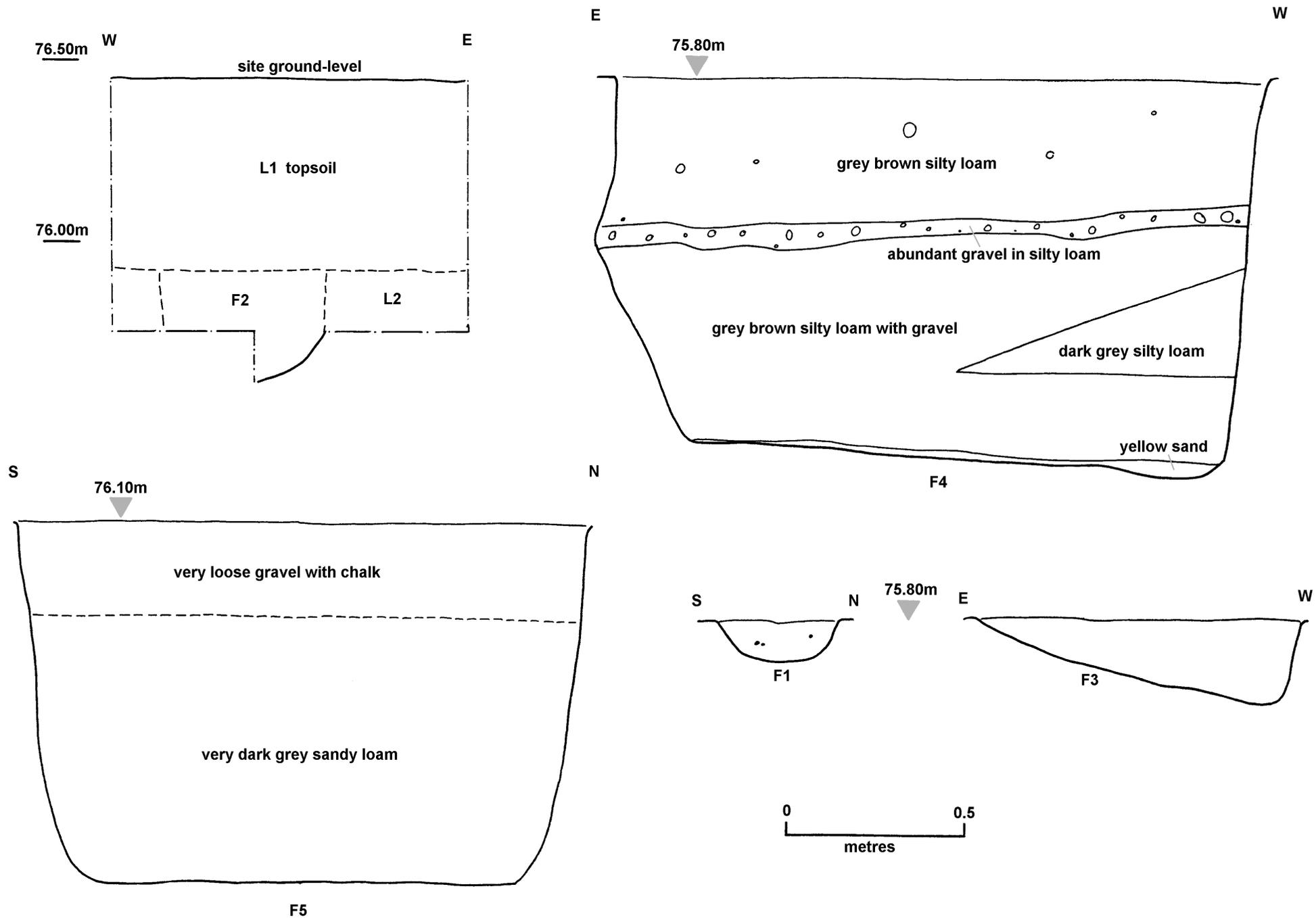
Fig 4 Trench and feature sections.

Essex Sites and Monuments Record/
Essex Archaeology and History

summary sheet

Site name/address:	**rear of 42b High Street, Great Dunmow, Essex**		
Parish:	Great Dunmow	***District:***	Uttlesford
NGR:	TL 627 218 centre	***Site code:***	GD9
Type of work:	evaluation	***Site director/group:*** H Brooks, Colchester Archaeological Trust	
Date of work:	April 2001	***Size of area investigated:*** $66m^2$ trench in $720m^2$ site	
Location of finds/curating museum: Saffron Walden		***Funding source:*** Developer	
Further seasons anticipated? No		***Related EHCR nos:*** 9050, 9051, 13883	

Final report: Summary in *Essex Archaeology and History*

Periods represented:
Post-medieval and modern, with residual Middle Iron Age and Roman

Summary of fieldwork results:
A trial trench evaluation uncovered several modern or post-medieval pits and ditches. There were residual Middle Iron Age and Roman potsherds and Roman tile, but no features earlier than the post-medieval period.

Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: H Brooks	***Date of summary:*** 10/04/2001