

**An archaeological watching brief
at Rivenhall Church of England
Primary School,
Church Road, Rivenhall, Essex**

June-July 2001

**commissioned by
the Stanley Bragg Partnership Ltd
on behalf of
Rivenhall Church of England Primary School**

CAT project ref.: 01/5B
Essex County Council site code: CERH.01
Planning application no: CC/BTE/0001/01
Braintree Museum accession code: BRNTM 2001.9
NGR: TL 829 178



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CAT Report 150

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1 Summary

A watching brief was carried out at Rivenhall Church of England Primary School, Church Road, Rivenhall, Essex, but it did not reveal any features or finds pre-dating the modern period. No Roman material was collected. Most of the ground has been badly disturbed by activity relating to the building of the modern school.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the report on a watching brief carried out at Rivenhall Church of England Primary School by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT). The work was necessitated by the construction of a new hall, classbase and ancillary accommodation, and is the subject of planning application no CC/BTE/0001/01. The previously existing relocatable classroom, WC, servery, oil tank and sheds have been demolished (Fig 2).
- 2.2 The site's National Grid Reference is TL 829 178. The school is situated on the main road towards the north of Rivenhall village, south of the Church of St Mary and All Saints (Fig 1).
- 2.3 The work was carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation prepared by CAT in May 2001 which in turn follows a brief written by Essex County Council's Heritage Advice, Management and Promotion (HAMP) section. This report follows the standards set out in the IFA's *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs* (1994).
- 2.4 In February 2001, CAT excavated three small trenches to evaluate the site (Orr 2001). The watching brief followed on from this and was monitored by Richard Havis, the HAMP officer.

3 Archaeological background

- 3.1 The archaeological landscape of Rivenhall is dominated by the Church of St Mary and All Saints and the underlying Roman villa (EHCR 19117). The villa, which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, consists of at least four major Roman buildings and a variety of associated structures and features, the only surface trace of which is the platform on which the east end of the church is built. The site has been known for some years from cropmarks, soil- and parchmarks, and from various investigations. The Essex Roman Society undertook fieldwalking and excavations there in 1950 and 1951, and the Essex Society for Archaeology and History excavated in advance of the installation of a sewer-trench in 1971. However, the villa and church site are synonymous with Warwick and Kirsty Rodwell, who excavated there in 1972-3 and have now published the results in two volumes of CBA Research Reports.
- 3.2 The Rodwell excavations showed that the main villa building measured approximately 60m by 25m, lay on the west side of the complex, and was aligned north to south, and that its southern rooms are located under the church. To the north-east is a building which was possibly domestic in use, arranged around a courtyard and leading to a bath complex. Another building to the south-east of the main villa building was probably a timber aisled barn. Between these buildings and surrounding them are a number of metalled areas and an east-west road. Smaller details include a T-shaped 'corn-drier' (ie a malting oven) and a possible mill (Rodwell & Rodwell 1986; Rodwell & Rodwell 1993).
- 3.3 Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age material is also recorded at this site, including *in situ* material from a buried soil horizon. Cropmarks show field systems of a late Iron Age farmstead to the south of the villa which may be the original farm location.
- 3.4 Anglo-Saxon occupation of the villa site involved the construction of a post-built hall in the centre of the site. A Saxon cemetery was also located on the villa site, and this is undoubtedly connected with a small timber church which was the precursor of the medieval church of St Mary and All Saints.

- 3.5** On the current school site, the building of an extension in 1873 uncovered a large number of *tesserae*, indicating that a Roman structure may be located here (EHCR 19100). However, a watching brief in 1995 failed to locate any archaeological deposits close to the school (Heppell 1995).
- 3.6** An archaeological evaluation (Orr 2001) consisting of three small trial-trenches failed to identify any structural remains which might be associated with the adjacent Roman villa site. The principal remains uncovered were modern drains and other features relating to past use of the site by the school. Roman brick/tile and pottery were found in residual contexts.

4 Aims and objectives

The aim of the watching brief was to determine the location, extent, date, and character of any archaeological remains threatened by the proposed development and to record them. Specific areas for study were:

- Evidence of occupation in the Roman, Saxon and medieval periods
- Surviving structural elements and their state of preservation
- The range of objects that were in use, their status, the presence of imports, etc
- The quality of environmental deposits surviving on the site.

5 Methods

- 5.1** The watching brief was carried out by Howard Brooks, Kate Orr and Karly Weller of CAT, following guidelines set out by the Institute of Field Archaeologists and Essex County Council. Approximately 80% of the groundworks were monitored. The new PE store and the exterior foundation trench to the new hall were not monitored. Some trenches were monitored while they were being dug; others were monitored after they had been dug and before they were filled in.
- 5.2** A record was made of the groundwork areas monitored which has been reproduced on Figure 3. Trenches were dug by machine. Foundation trenches were dug to a width of 600mm, unless otherwise specified.
- 5.3** Soil layers and modern features were recorded but not drawn due to the absence of archaeological deposits.
- 5.4** The spoil heaps were checked. No finds were retained.
- 5.5** A record of digital photographs was kept.

6 Results (Figs 2 & 3)

04/06/01

An approximately 1m-square test-pit was dug for the new classbase to the north-east of the current assembly room, and this was monitored. Nothing of archaeological significance was seen.

06/06/01

Foundations for the new classbase were continued in an area previously occupied by a shed, servery and oil-storage shed. Trenches were dug to 1.3m depth. The following profile was observed in the exterior (northern) foundation trench:

Layer 1 (L1) - tarmac, 0-70mm.

L2 - mixed loose brown sandy silt with modern rubbish, 70-300mm.

L3 - brown sandy clay with small stones and modern brick, 300-700mm.

L4 - natural light brown clay, 700mm-1.3m.

The following profile was observed in the interior foundation trenches:

- L1 - tarmac 0-50mm.
- L2 - loose asphalt mixed with sandy modern sub-base with brick flecks, 50-350mm.
- L3 - mid brown clay with flint, 350-700mm.
- L4 - natural orange/brown clay and flint 700mm-1.3m.

Five drains plus two water-pipes run through the interior foundation trenches within layers L2 and L3.

08/06/01

The exterior (eastern) foundation trench to the new classbase was monitored. All ground here was made-up. Infill around the existing porch consisted of 400mm of grey gritty sandy loam with frogged bricks and concrete debris.

11/06/01

A brief visit was made to the site while more of the classbase foundations were being dug, but they had come to a stop because the digger could not pull out all the brick rubble.

14/06/01

The trenches for the new plants library next to the girls' toilet on the northern side of the site was monitored. The 1.4m-deep foundation trenches were dug near and partly within the area of CAT evaluation trench 3 (Orr 2001). In this area, 600mm of silty sandy made-up ground overlays natural orange clay and gravel. At the northern end of the eastern trench, there was a depth of brick rubble from a soakaway. In the northern trench there were three drains sitting on a layer of concrete.

19/06/01

A soakaway was dug in the north-eastern corner of the site and was monitored. This measured 3m x 3m and was dug to a depth of 3.75m. It was too deep to enter but the following profile was observed:

- L1 - loamy mid brown topsoil with occasional stones and modern pottery, 0-550mm.
- L2 - natural reddish/brown sand and gravel, 550mm-3.75m. This area looked fairly undisturbed, which makes sense as there were no buildings on it or near it.

26/06/01

The foundations for the servery and staff WC next to the plant library were monitored. These were partly dug through the infill from evaluation trench 3 and also on the site of a previous shed. The foundation trenches were dug to between 1m and 1.3m deep; however, 200mm of topsoil had already been stripped off.

The interior foundations for the new hall next to the infants' classbase building were also being dug out. This new structure was being built in the old play area. The trenches were dug to just over 1m depth. The following profile was observed:

- L1 - 550mm of a dark brown/grey mixed sandy clayey layer with stones and some modern brick at the western end.
- L2 - 500mm of natural yellow/brown clay with gravel/flint. The natural becomes shallower to the south.

27/06/01

The rest of the interior foundation trenches for the new hall were monitored. A similar profile was observed as on the previous day.

The foundations for the corridor between the infants' classbase and the new servery were also monitored and a similar profile was recorded.

02/07/01

The southern exterior foundation trench to the new hall was monitored. It was partly dug through evaluation trench 1. The depth was 1.2m except for the middle section which was dug to 2m. Tarmac and brick rubble were observed in the western section. A similar profile was observed to those of the other hall foundation trenches.

The drain along the northern side of the new hall was not monitored, but it was said by the contractors to contain the same fill as the foundation trenches.

13/7/01

A service trench was monitored leading east from the new hall to the new soakaway. Nearly half had already been filled in, and therefore only approximately 10m was seen including the manhole. The service trench was dug to 1.2m depth and 600mm width. A similar profile to that of the soakaway was observed.

No features of archaeological significance were observed within any of the trenches. Spoil heaps were checked for finds as were the edges of trenches where possible. However, all finds were modern and found in made-up ground, and so these were not retained.

7 Conclusions

- 7.1** Between 550mm and 700mm of modern made-up ground containing modern bricks and other modern debris was observed in the majority of the trenches. The ground here had been disturbed by the construction of the present Victorian buildings as well as by newer sheds and 'prefabs' and by old services which criss-cross the site. This modern layer overlays natural orangey brown clay containing flint.
- 7.2** In the north-eastern part of the site, the digging of the soakaway showed the ground to be undisturbed. Under the topsoil, natural sands and gravels occurred at approximately 550mm below ground-level.
- 7.3** There were no features or finds pre-dating the modern period from this watching brief. One would have expected trackways and ancillary buildings to the villa complex to be located here. However, nothing of this nature was revealed, nor any residual Roman finds such as tile and *tesserae*. In the area of the school buildings this can be explained by the serious ground disturbance caused by their construction. However, where the ground had not been disturbed, ie in the area of the soakaway trench, there was also nothing of archaeological significance visible. One can only assume that this soakaway area was not within the area of the villa complex.

8 Archive deposition

The full archive, including a copy of this report, digital photographs, digital data on disk and a summary, will be permanently lodged at Braintree Museum under accession code BRNTM 2001.9.

9 Acknowledgements

The Colchester Archaeological Trust is grateful to the following for their co-operation at various stages of the project:

Richard Havis, HAMP Officer of Essex County Council
A Horne, Rivenhall Church of England Primary School
David Jenner, the Stanley Bragg Partnership Ltd
Brian Spence, Huttons Builders

10 References

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- Orr, K, 2001 An archaeological evaluation at Rivenhall Church of England Primary School, Church Road, Rivenhall, Essex, CAT Report 128.
- Rodwell, W J, & Rodwell, K A, 1986 *Rivenhall: investigations of a villa, church and village 1950-77.1*, CBA Research Report 55.
- Rodwell, W J, & Rodwell, K A, 1993 *Rivenhall: investigations of a villa, church and village 1950-77.2*, CBA Research Report 55.

Kate Orr, September 2001

Distribution list:

- Richard Havis, HAMP (Essex County Council)
- Essex Heritage Conservation Record (Essex County Council)
- Record Office (Essex County Council)
- Braintree Museum
- Nigel Cooper, Rector of the Church of St Mary and All Saints
- Rivenhall Church of England Primary School
- the Stanley Bragg Partnership Ltd



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Date: 15.10.01



Plate 1 Northern internal foundation trench to new hall, looking south-east.

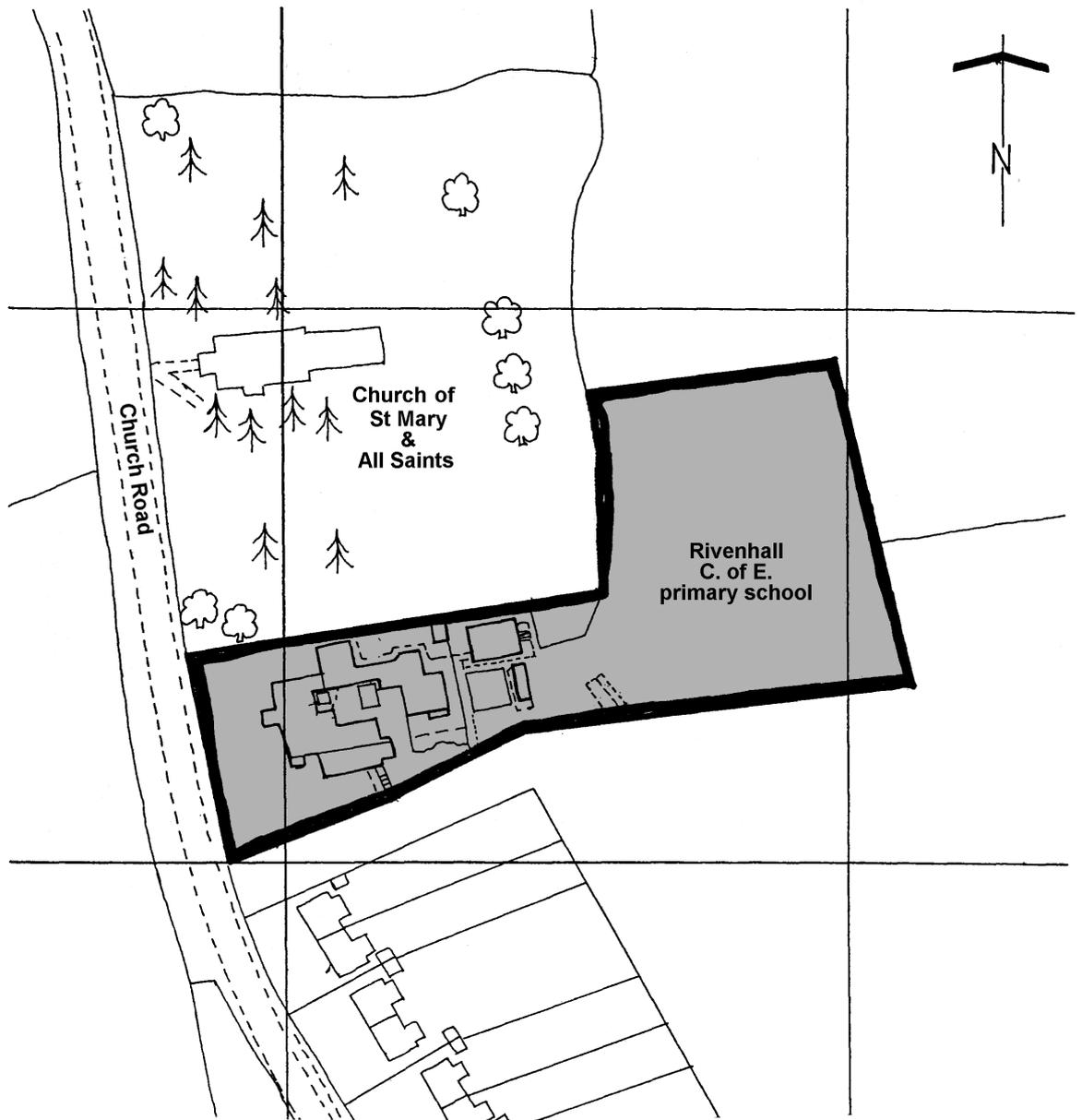
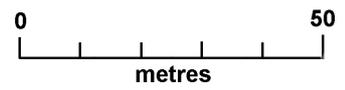


Fig 1 Site location. Scale 1:1250.



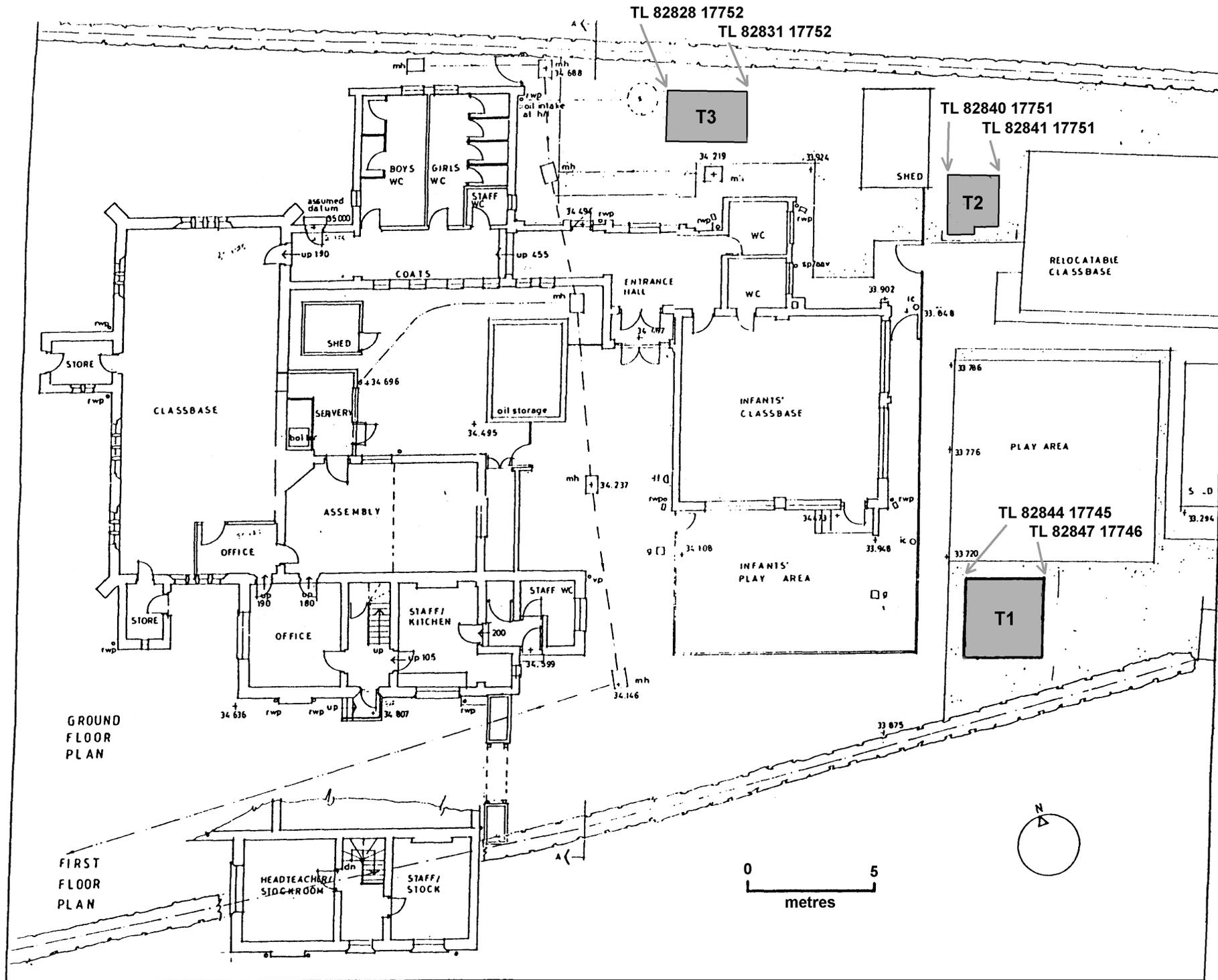


Fig 2 Plan of school showing evaluation trial-trench positions. Scale 1:200.

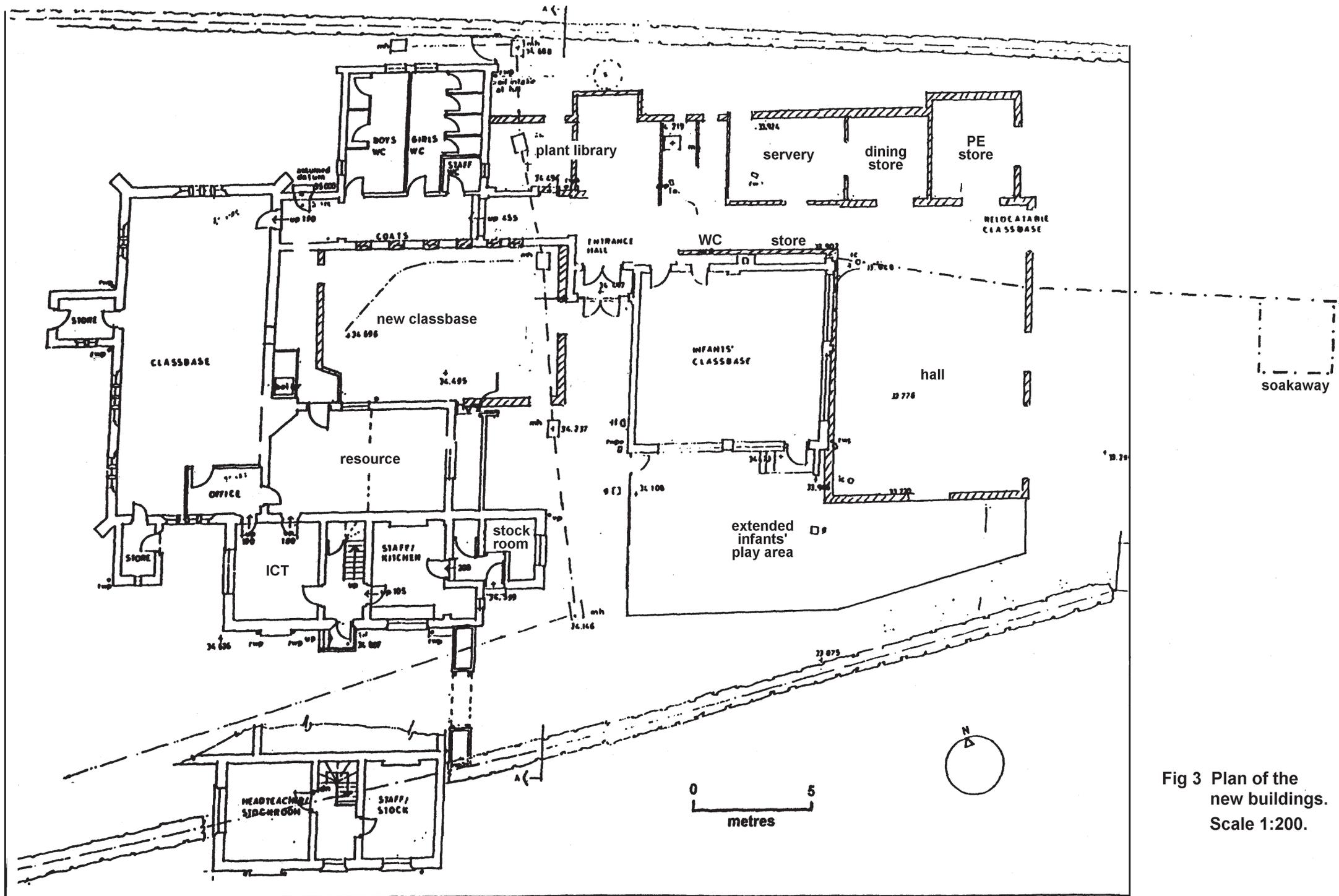


Fig 3 Plan of the new buildings.
Scale 1:200.

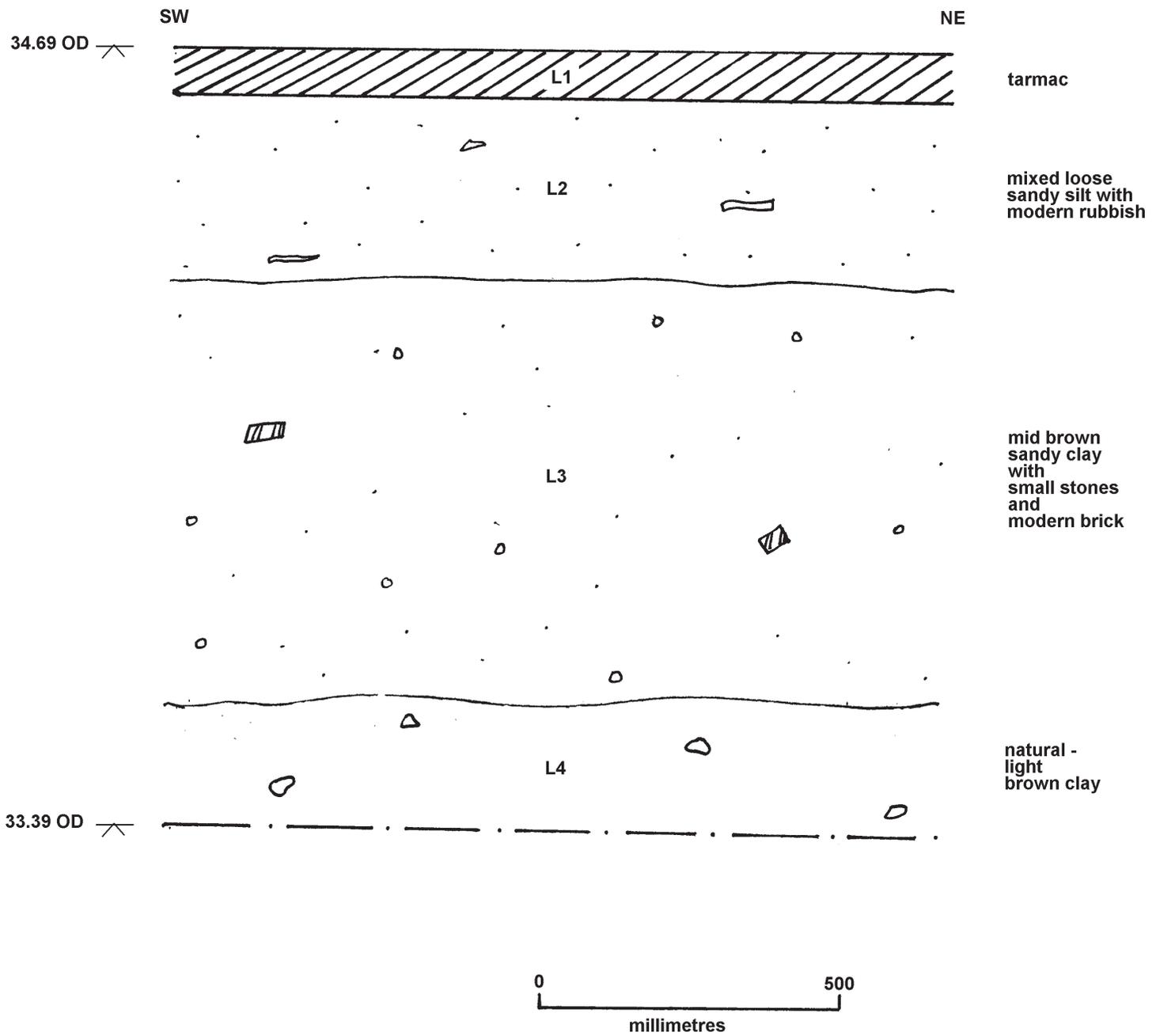


Fig 4 Section drawing of part of the north-eastern exterior foundation trench for the new classbase. Scale 1:10.

**Essex Heritage Conservation Record/
Essex Archaeology and History**

Summary sheet

Site name/address: Rivenhall Church of England Primary School, Church Road, Rivenhall, Essex	
Parish: Rivenhall	District: Braintree
NGR: TL 829 178 (centre)	Site code: CERH.01
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: June-July 2001	Size of area investigated: 44m x 16m
Location of finds/curating museum: Braintree Museum	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHCR nos: 19117, 19100
Final report: CAT Report 150 and summary in EAH	
Periods represented: Modern	
Summary of fieldwork results: The watching brief of groundworks for a new classbase, hall and ancillary buildings did not reveal any features or finds pre-dating the modern period. There was no Roman material collected. Most of the ground has been badly disturbed by activity relating to the building of the modern school.	
Previous summaries/reports: CAT Report 128	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: September 2001