

An archaeological evaluation on land at the junction of Hall Road and Goldsands Road, Southminster, Essex

January 2002

on behalf of
Mrs Talbot, Hillside Playcare Centre



HAMP site code: SOUH 02
CAT project no.: 02/1d
Colchester Museum accession code: 2002.29
NGR: TL 9635 9953 (c)



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1 Summary

An archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching on land at the junction of Hall Road and Goldsands Road, Southminster, Essex revealed ditches of probable medieval date, one of which showed evidence of grain-processing in the vicinity. Roman tile and late Iron Age or Roman pottery indicates settlement of this date nearby.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the report on an archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between the 24th and 30th of January 2002 on land at the junction of Hall Road and Goldsands Road, Southminster, Essex (Fig 1). A planning application has been submitted to Maldon District Council for the construction of a single-storey play centre with access and parking (planning application no MAL/1128/01). An archaeological evaluation was recommended prior to any planning decision being made.
- 2.2 The development site is situated to the south of Hall Road which is on the eastern side of Southminster, centred on National Grid Reference TL 9635 9953 (Fig 2). It is an uneven grass field which slopes down to the north-east, its lowest point being 14m OD. A bank in the field forms the southern boundary; the north, east and west boundaries are formed by a water-filled ditch and hedge.
- 2.3 The work was carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI) prepared by CAT in January 2002 which in turn follows a brief written by the HAMP group of Essex County Council (see Appendix C). This report follows the standards set out in the IFA's *Standard and guidance for archaeological evaluations* (1999).

3 Archaeological background

The plot of land lies in close proximity to an earthwork of unknown date in Pandole Wood which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM no 212). The medieval moated site of Southminster Hall lies approximately 250m to the east. The development site lies along the main road frontage in an area of possible medieval settlement.

4 Aims and objectives

The aim of the archaeological work was to determine the location, character, extent, date, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains and to record these features.

5 Methodology

- 5.1 The work was undertaken by professional archaeologists Kate Orr, Laura Pooley and Nicole Weller of CAT. The total area excavated was 4% of the available 0.5 ha area.
- 5.2 The trenches were excavated by machine with a toothless ditching bucket and then cleaned by hand. Most were excavated down to the natural clay at between 700mm and 800mm depth. Each trench was 1.6m wide and 20m long, apart from Trench 6 (T6) which was 23m long.
- 5.3 Individual records of excavated contexts, layers, features and deposits were entered on pro-forma record sheets.
- 5.4 Features exposed in each trench were planned at a scale of 1:50, apart from F5 and F7 which were planned at 1:10. Section drawings at a scale of 1:10 were made of each feature.
- 5.5 Modern features including drains, soakaways and foundations were left *in situ*.
- 5.6 All finds from contexts were retained and numbered on pro-forma CAT record sheets. All finds were examined by Howard Brooks and Stephen Benfield of CAT. Modern finds were later discarded. Earlier finds were marked and bagged according to context.

- 5.7 Digital photographs were taken of all contexts. General site shots were taken using colour transparency film.
- 5.8 A metal detector was used to scan the spoil heaps.
- 5.9 OD heights of features were taken. Co-ordinates were established for each trench with a GPS (Global Positioning System).
- 5.10 Soil samples were taken of appropriate features.
- 5.11 Pat Connell of Essex County Council made a monitoring visit on the 29th of January 2002.

6 Results (Figs 2-8)

- 6.1 The high water-table on site and the rain made conditions very wet, and a pump had to be used to empty T7 of ground-water once it was dug. T1-T6 were excavated down to the natural clay (Layer or L4). No features of archaeological interest were found in any of these trenches. A concrete covering to a drain was revealed in T2 (Feature or F1). A layer of dark brown clayey loam topsoil approximately 200mm thick formed the top layer in all trenches (L1). Below this was a layer of mid brown/reddish clay loam with occasional to frequent small stones, which was 350-400mm thick. This layer contained a small amount of peg-tile (L2). A band of dark grey/brown clayey loam was present in T6 and T7 (L3) which was sealed by L2. L3 contained one piece of medieval rim sherd from T6. The northern end of the most northerly trench (T3) revealed evidence of modern disturbance in the form of an orange sandy layer containing modern brick (L5) underneath the topsoil. According to the landowner, who farms the land, this area had been heavily disturbed and dumped on in recent times.

T7 was the only trench that revealed features of archaeological interest. Four ditches crossed the trench, aligned north to south (F3-F6). These ditches were all at approximately 800mm below ground-level and cut into natural clay (L4). F3 was a shallow ditch feature, 750-800mm wide. It was filled with a stony mid-dark grey brown loam but contained no finds (Fig 4). F4 was a similar width and contained a very dark grey/black clay loam (Fig 5). This contained six sherds of Roman or possibly late Iron Age sherds from a storage jar and one sherd of Roman or medieval grog-tempered grey ware. A soil sample was taken from the fill of F4 for plant macrofossil assessment (see Appendix B). The fill contained burnt cereal grains, chaff and weeds which probably represent hearth or oven waste dumped in the ditch in the post-Roman period. The grain deposit is unlikely to be of late Iron or Roman date as it was dominated by bread wheat rather than spelt wheat, spelt being the staple wheat crop in the late Iron Age and Roman periods. F4, therefore, is likely to be post-Roman in date, with the earlier pottery being residual.

F5 was 850 mm wide at the western end of the trench and was a probable ditch terminal (Figs 6-7). When half-sectioned it was found to be flat-bottomed and straight-sided and filled with a mid-dark grey loam. One sherd of Roman or medieval grey ware came from the fill. F5 was disturbed by a tree root, the tree bowl of which was filled by dark grey brown clayey loam with decaying wood (F7). F6 was a flat-bottomed ditch, 1m wide, containing a grey clay loam with small stones (Fig 8). One piece of Roman or late Iron Age pottery and one piece of probable Roman brick were found in the fill.

The finds consisted predominantly of pottery and tile, but only small quantities were found. The presence of late Iron Age or Roman pottery, although not *in situ*, indicates the presence of some settlement of that date in the vicinity (see Appendix A).

7 Discussion

- 7.1 The evaluation trenches produced negative results, apart from T7 which revealed three ditches and one possible ditch terminal. The date of these features is uncertain; however, they are likely to be medieval, judging from the material found in their fills.

- 7.2 These ditches may be related to the scheduled ancient monument in Pandole Wood which is of unknown date.
- 7.3 The fill of ditch F4 provides evidence of cereal-growing and -processing nearby in the post-Roman period.
- 7.4 The late Iron Age/Roman pottery, although not *in situ*, indicates the presence of some settlement of this date in the vicinity.

8 Archive deposition

The full archive, including a copy of this report, the bagged and boxed finds, digital photographs and transparencies, plus section drawings and plans on hanging strips, digital data on disk and a summary, will be permanently lodged at Colchester Museum under accession code 2002.29.

9 Acknowledgements

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

Mrs Talbot, for commissioning the work, and Mr Talbot for his assistance on site
Mr Fisher, the landowner, for providing access to the site
Pat Connell, HAMP group officer for Essex County Council

Kate Orr, March 2002

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Appendix A: Finds report

by Howard Brooks and Stephen Benfield

Introduction

This is the report on a group of finds excavated by CAT from a site on land at the junction of Hall Road and Goldsands Road, Southminster, Essex in February 2002 (NGR TL 9635 9953 (c)). The archive will be deposited in Colchester Museum under accession code 2002.29.

The material

The material came from 14 bags representing 11 site contexts and 3 unstratified contexts, and consists principally of tile and pottery, with small quantities of glass, daub, slag and iron nails. The pottery was classified according to Hull (Hull 1958) and Cotter (Cotter 2000). Material from each bag was listed, weighed and identified. These lists are summarised here as Table 1 (below).

Discussion

The most striking feature of this material is the very abraded condition of the late Iron Age or Roman pottery. It would appear, on the face of it, that the Roman or late Iron Age material is residual in later contexts. This seems to be the case in F4, where the Roman or late Iron Age pottery is residual in a medieval context. L3 and F5 are also medieval in date. The question is whether F6 is late Iron Age/Roman or medieval. This is difficult to establish from the finds - F6 could be early, but there must be a note of caution here as late Iron Age/Roman material is residual in medieval contexts elsewhere on the site.

Finds from L1 and L2 are clearly modern (19th-20th century) and medieval or post-medieval respectively.

References

- | | | |
|--|------|---|
| Cotter, John | 2000 | <i>Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-1985</i> , Colchester Archaeological Report 7. |
| Crummy, N,
Crummy, P, &
Crossan, C | 1993 | <i>Excavations of Roman and later cemeteries, churches and monasteries in Colchester, 1971-88</i> , Colchester Archaeological Report 9. |
| Hull, M R | 1958 | <i>Roman Colchester</i> , Society of Antiquaries Research Committee Report, XX. |

Table 1: stratified finds: quantity and weight of finds per bag and context.

			date ? qt	date ? wt	R qt	R wt	med qt	med wt	P M qt	P M wt	mod qt	mod wt	Comments/date
T r e n c h	C o n t e x t	Bag no											
1	L2	9			1	40							tile fragment - <i>tegula</i> ?
2	L1	5			0	0					1	14	Fabric 48d ironstone, 19th-20th century
2	L2	6			0	0			1	80	0	0	peg-tile D
3	L5	4			0	0			0	0	1	16	modern ribbed drain fragment D
4	L2	10			0	0			1	124			peg-tile with round peg-hole
6	L1	1			0	0			1	57			peg-tile with chamfered edge
6	L3	3			0	0	1	5					Fabric 13 rim sherd, 12th century
7	F4	11			0	0	1	3					pottery, probably Fabric 20
7	F4	11			1	15	0	0					LIA or Roman storage jar
7	F4	11			2	4	0	0					very abraded Roman grey ware sherds
7	F4	11	4	18	0	0	0	0					daub lumps - undated, presumably Roman
7	F5	13			0	0	1	4					Fabric 20 medieval coarse ware
7	F6	14			1	5							LIA or Roman potsherds
7	F6	14			1	53							Roman brick?
		totals →	4	18	6	117	3	12	3	261	2	30	TOTALS

Table 2: unstratified finds; quantity and weight of finds per bag and context.

			un- dated qt	un- dated wt	med qt	med wt	PM qt	PM wt	mod qt	mod wt	Comments/date
T r e n c h	C o n t e x t	Bag no									
2	us	8					1	21			Fabric 40 PMRE with tiny glaze flecks
3	us	7					0	0	1	45	glass, modern D
3	us	7					1	93	0	0	peg-tile D
3	us	7							1	41	modern ceramic tile D
7	us	12			1	32					Fabric 20 rim
7	us	12	2	19	0	0					Fe nails
7	us	12	2	17	0	0					daub lump
7	us	12	1	13	0	0					slag
		totals →	5	49	1	32	2	114	2	86	TOTALS

Weight is in g.

Key

LIA = Late Iron Age PM = post-medieval med = medieval
R = Roman mod = modern D = discarded

Fabric 13 = early medieval ware, 12th century
Fabric 20 = medieval coarse ware, 13th-14th century
Fabric 40 = post-medieval red earthenware (PMRE), 17th-19th century
Fabric 48d = modern ironstone, 19th-20th century

wt = weight
qt = quantity

Appendix B: Charred plant macrofossils: an assessment

by Val Fryer

Introduction

Excavations on land at the junction of Hall Road and Goldsands Road, Southminster, Essex were carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust. A single sample for plant macrofossil assessment was taken from a ditch fill provisionally dated to the late Iron Age/Roman period.

Methods

The sample was processed by manual water flotation/washover, collecting the flot in a 500 micron-mesh sieve. The dried flot was scanned under a binocular microscope at magnifications up to x 16, and the plant macrofossils and other remains noted are listed in Table 3. Nomenclature within the table follows Stace (Stace 1997). All plant remains were preserved by charring. Modern contaminants including fibrous roots were present but rare.

The non-floating residue was collected in a 1mm-mesh sieve and sorted when dry. Artefacts/ecofacts were not present.

Results of assessment

Plant macrofossils

Cereal grains/chaff and seeds of common weed species were present at varying densities. Preservation was poor to moderate; a high proportion of the grains had become puffed and distorted during charring.

Cereals

Oat (*Avena* sp.), barley (*Hordeum* sp.), rye (*Secale cereale*) and wheat (*Triticum* sp.) grains were noted, with wheat being predominant. Both the 'drop form' grains typical of spelt wheat (*T. spelta*) and rounded grains more typical of bread-type wheats (*T. aestivum/compactum*) were present, with the latter being more common. Bread wheat-type rachis nodes were also recorded but spelt chaff was absent. Other chaff elements included barley and barley/rye rachis nodes.

Wild flora

Seeds of segetal weed taxa were predominant and included corn cockle (*Agrostemma githago*), brome (*Bromus* sp.), fat-hen (*Chenopodium album*), black bindweed (*Fallopia convolvulus*), indeterminate grasses (Poaceae) and dock (*Rumex* sp.). The abundance of stinking mayweed (*Anthemis cotula*) seeds probably indicates that some or all of the cereals were being grown on heavy clay soils.

Other plant macrofossils

Charcoal fragments and pieces of charred root, rhizome or stem were common. Other plant macrofossils included indeterminate culm nodes, inflorescence fragments and seeds.

Other materials

The fragments of black porous 'cokey' material, black tarry material and the organic concretions are all probably derived from the combustion of organic remains, including cereal grains, at extremely high temperatures. Rare small mammal or amphibian bones were also noted but are possibly modern contaminants.

Discussion

Preservation of the plant macrofossils within the assemblage was generally poor, and it appears likely that the material had either been subjected to repeated episodes of burning or had been burnt once at an extremely high temperature. Similarly preserved material is frequently recovered, either from hearth/oven features, or in secondary contexts (including ditch fills) where such material has been dumped, and the Southminster material may be derived from a similar source.

Cereal grains, chaff and weed seeds are present within the assemblage, with grains being predominant. This may indicate that the material is derived from semi-cleaned grain awaiting the removal by hand of the larger contaminant weeds (for example corn cockle, brome and black bindweed) or seed heads (stinking mayweed and dock). However, it must be noted that the high temperatures, to which this material appear to have been subjected, can destroy delicate chaff elements, thereby creating a bias within the assemblage towards the larger, more durable macrofossils.

As stated above (Introduction), this material was recovered from a ditch fill with a provisional pottery date of late Iron Age or early Roman. At this period, spelt was the staple wheat crop with residual elements of emmer (*T. dicoccum*) and an increasing quantity of bread wheat. However, the chaff assemblage from this current sample is dominated by bread wheat-type rachis nodes, and is, therefore, unusual for the period. A similar assemblage was noted from a possible corn drier at Culver Street, Colchester (Murphy 1992, 281-2), although this was of late Roman date with some possible Saxon contamination. Discussions with the excavator of the Southminster site have shown that medieval material was present in some features (possibly including this ditch), and it should, therefore, be stated that some intrusive material may be present within this assemblage.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the assemblage may be derived from hearth/oven waste dumped in a secondary context. Although the composition of the assemblage may have been affected by intensive burning, it appears most likely that semi-cleaned grain (principally wheat) is represented. Cereal production was probably concentrated on the local heavy clay soils.

Although this sample does contain a quantifiably viable assemblage (ie 200+ specimens), analysis of a single sample of uncertain date would not contribute to the interpretation of the archaeological features recovered. Therefore, no further work is recommended.

References

- Murphy, P, 1992 'Plant macrofossils', in *Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilberd School, and other sites in Colchester, 1971-85*, Colchester Archaeological Report 6
- Stace, C, 1997 *New flora of the British Isles*

Table 3: Charred plant macrofossils.

Sample no	2
Context no	F4, T7
Cereals	
<i>Avena sp. (grains)</i>	xx
Cereal indet. (grains)	xxx
(detached embryo)	x
(rachis internode fragments)	x
<i>Hordeum sp. (grains)</i>	xx
(rachis nodes)	x
<i>Hordeum/Secale cereale (rachis nodes)</i>	xx
<i>Secale cereale L. (grains)</i>	x
<i>Triticum sp. (grains)</i>	xxx
(rachis internode fragments)	x
<i>T. aestivum/compactum type (rachis nodes)</i>	xx
Herbs	
<i>Agrostemma githago L.</i>	x
<i>Anthemis cotula L.</i>	xx
<i>Bromus sp.</i>	x
<i>Chenopodium album L.</i>	x
<i>Chenopodiaceae indet.</i>	x
<i>Fallopia convolvulus (L.)A.Love</i>	x
Small Poaceae indet.	x
<i>Rumex sp.</i>	xx
Other plant macrofossils	
Charcoal <2mm	xx
Charcoal >2mm	x
Charred root/rhizome/stem	x
Indet.culm nodes	x
Indet.inflorescence fragments	x
Indet.seeds	x
Other materials	
Black porous 'cokey' material	xx
Black tarry material	x
Burnt organic concretions	x
Small mammal/amphibian bones	x
Sample volume (litres)	6
Volume of flot (litres)	0.1
% flot sorted	100%

Key:

x = 1-10 specimens xx = 10-100 specimens xxx = 100+ specimens

Appendix C:

Brief

*by the Heritage Advice, Management and
Promotion group of Essex County Council*

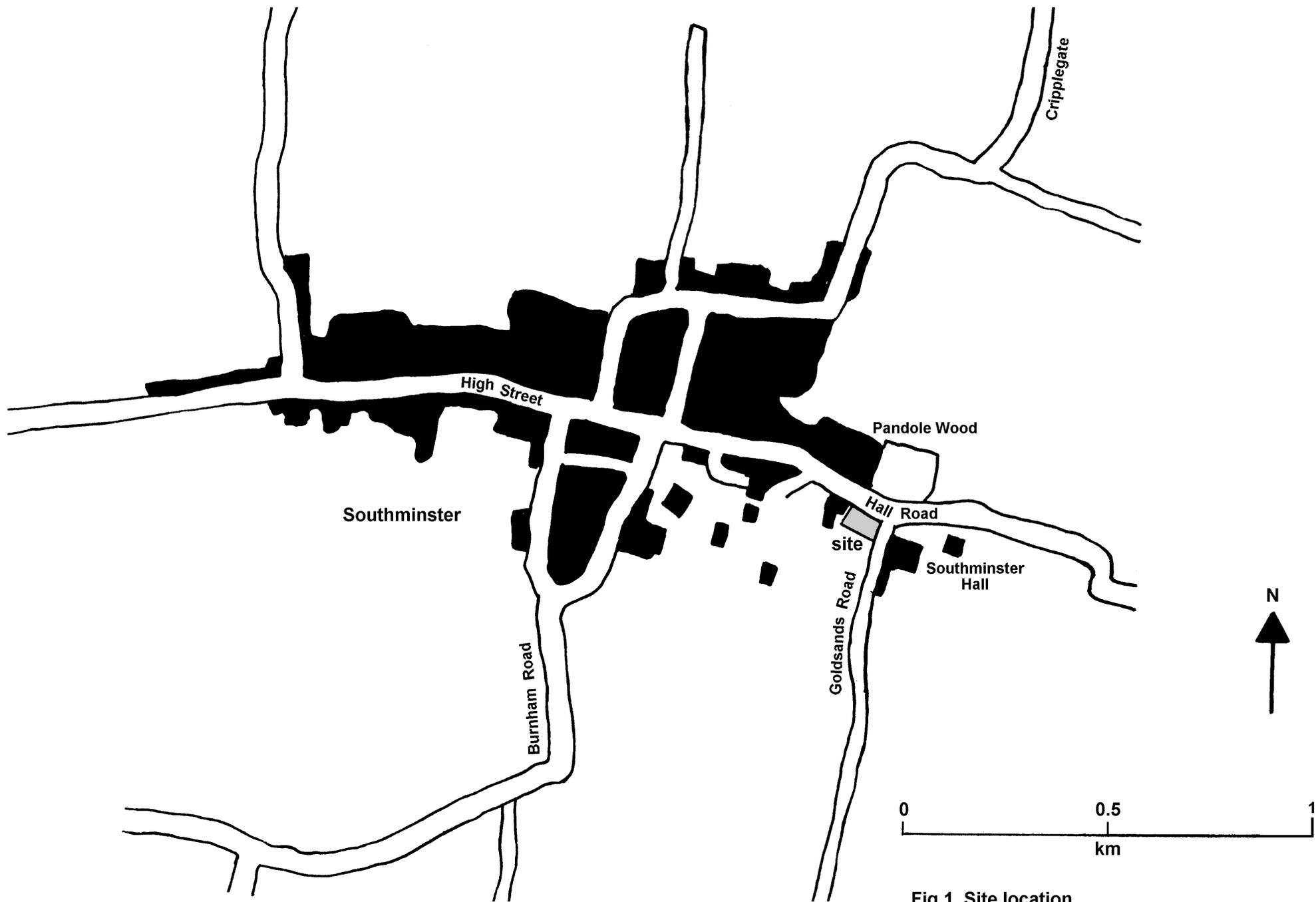


Fig 1 Site location.

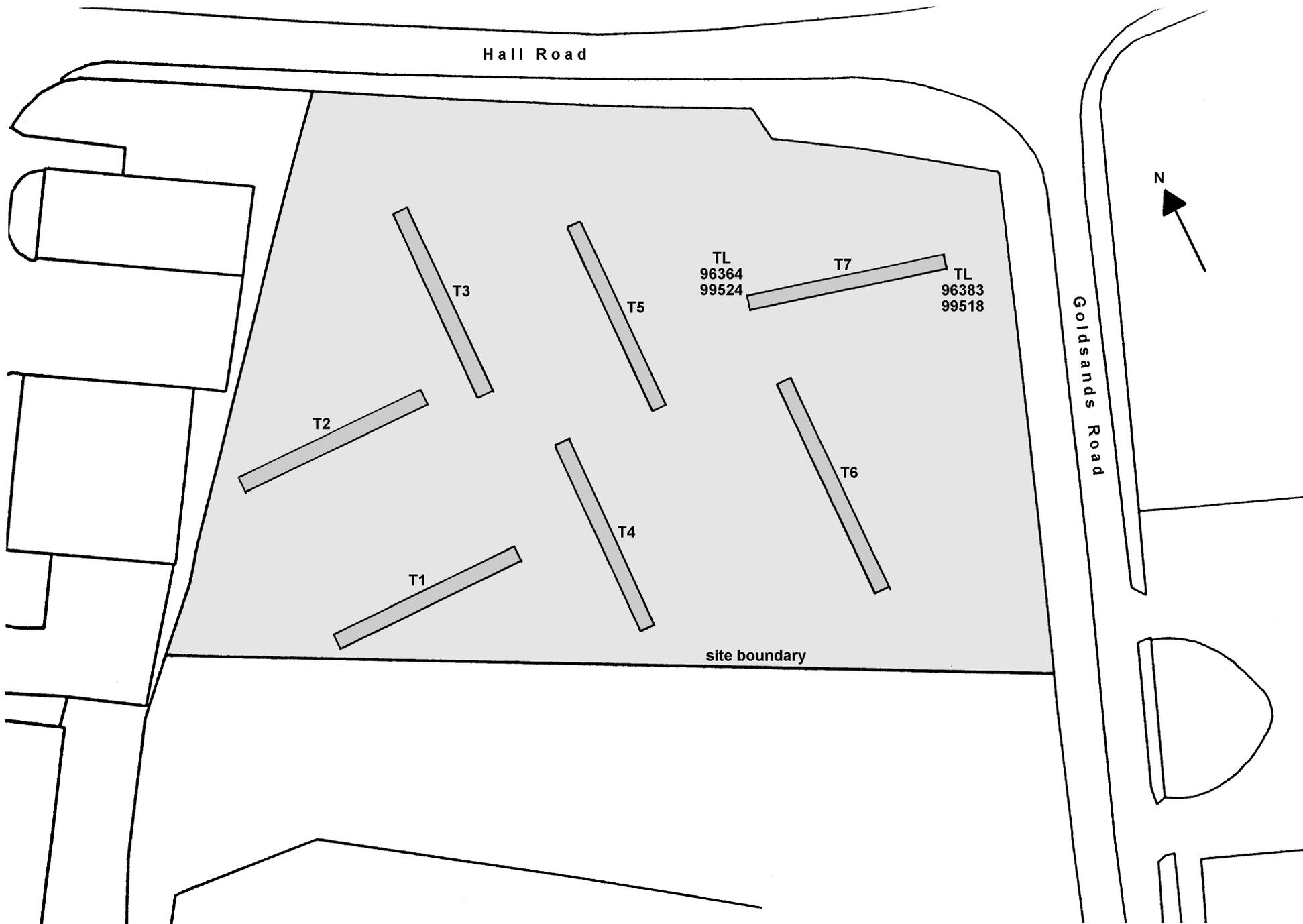
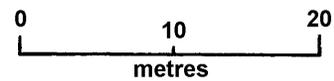


Fig 2 Trench location plan.



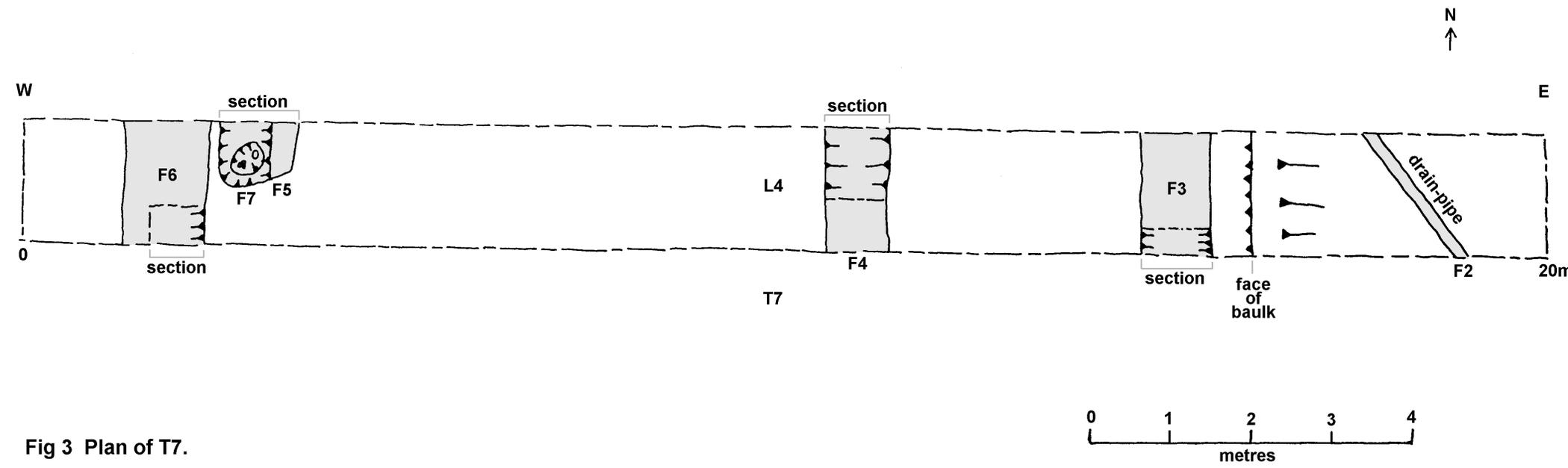


Fig 3 Plan of T7.

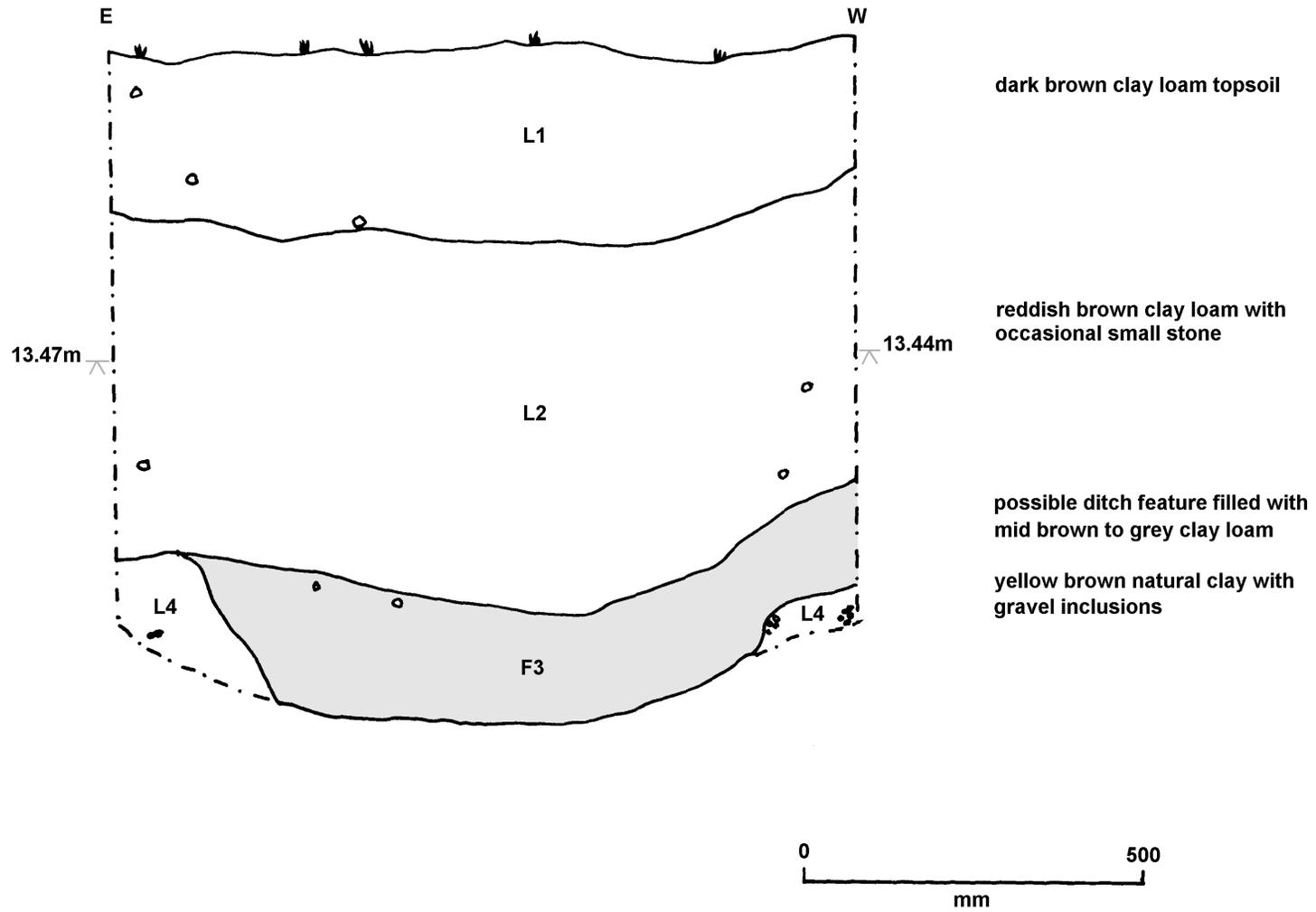


Fig 4 Section drawing of F3, T7; scale 1:10.

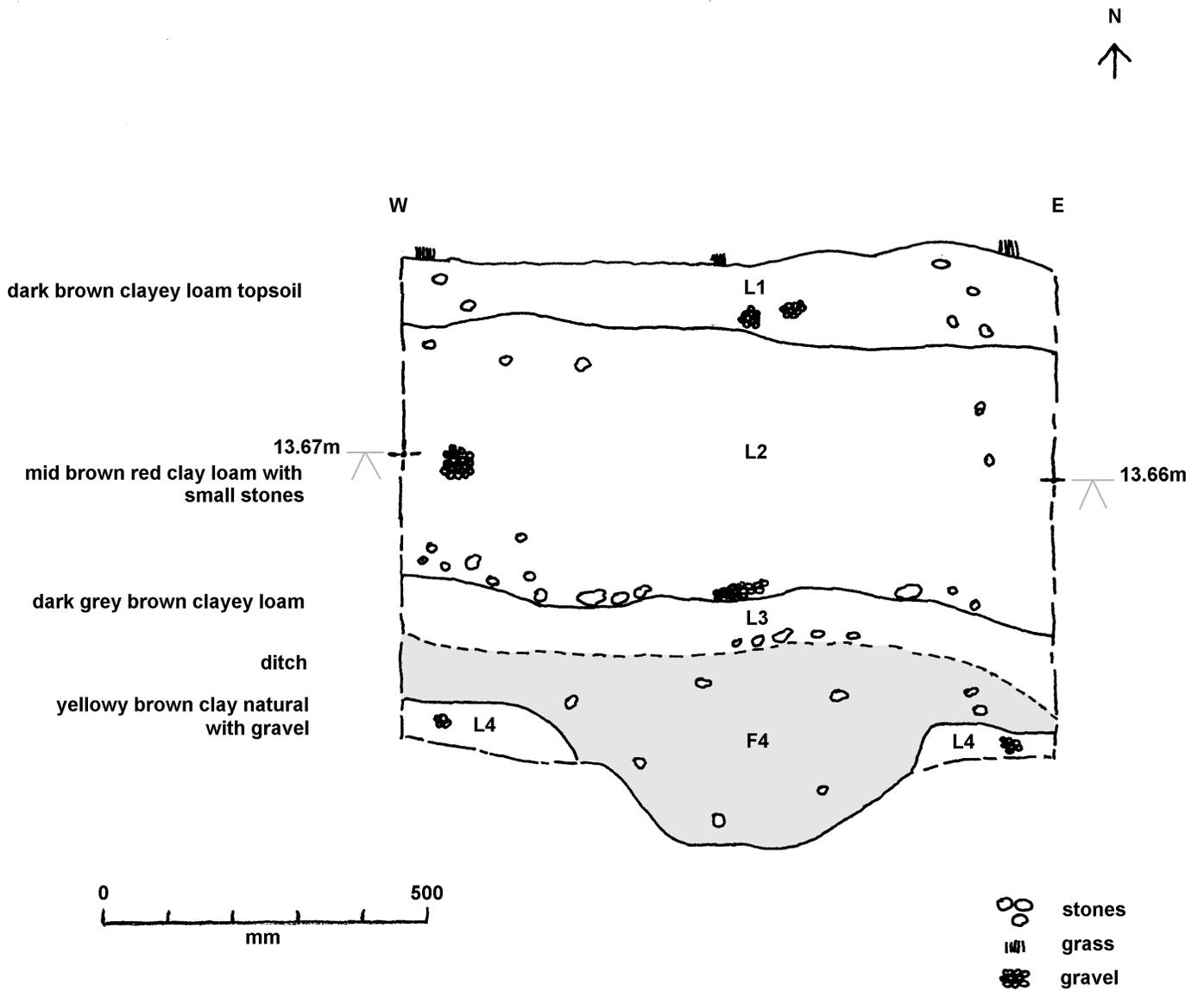


Fig 5 Section drawing of F4, T7; scale 1:10.

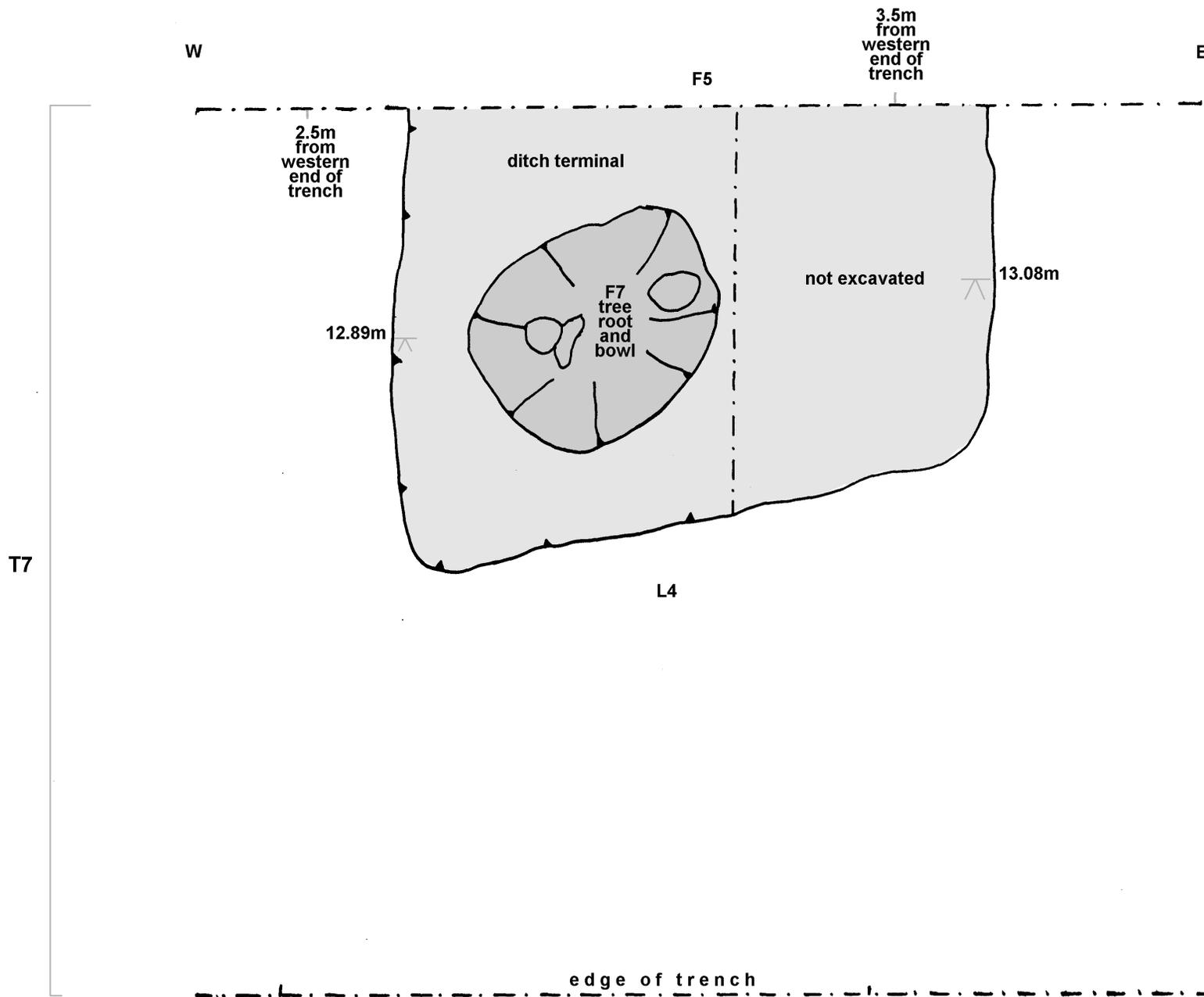
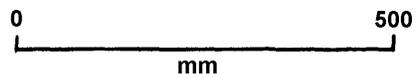


Fig 6 Plan of F5 after F7 had been removed, T7.



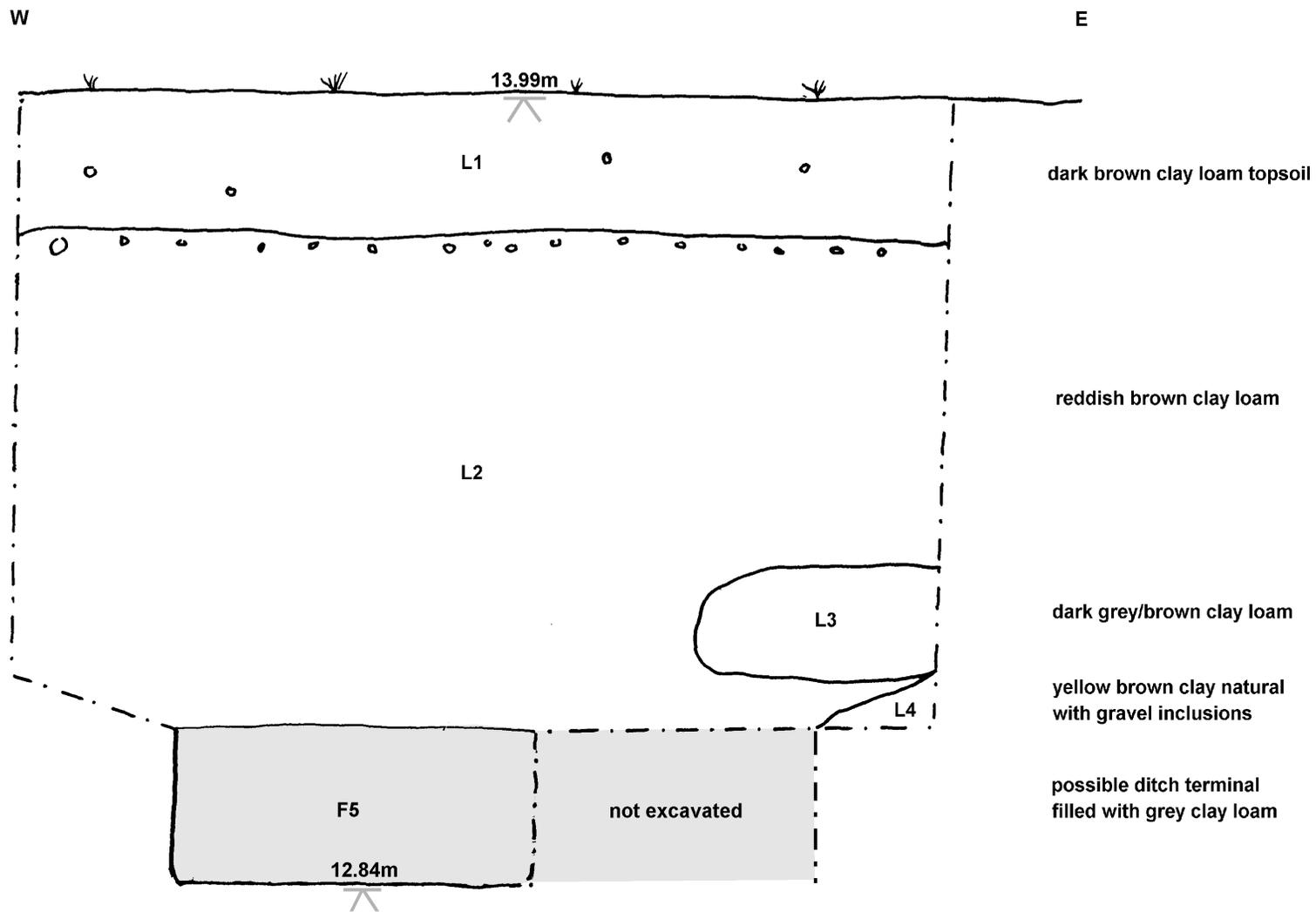
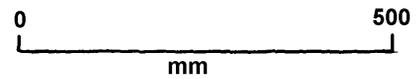


Fig 7 Section drawing of F5, T7; scale 1:10.



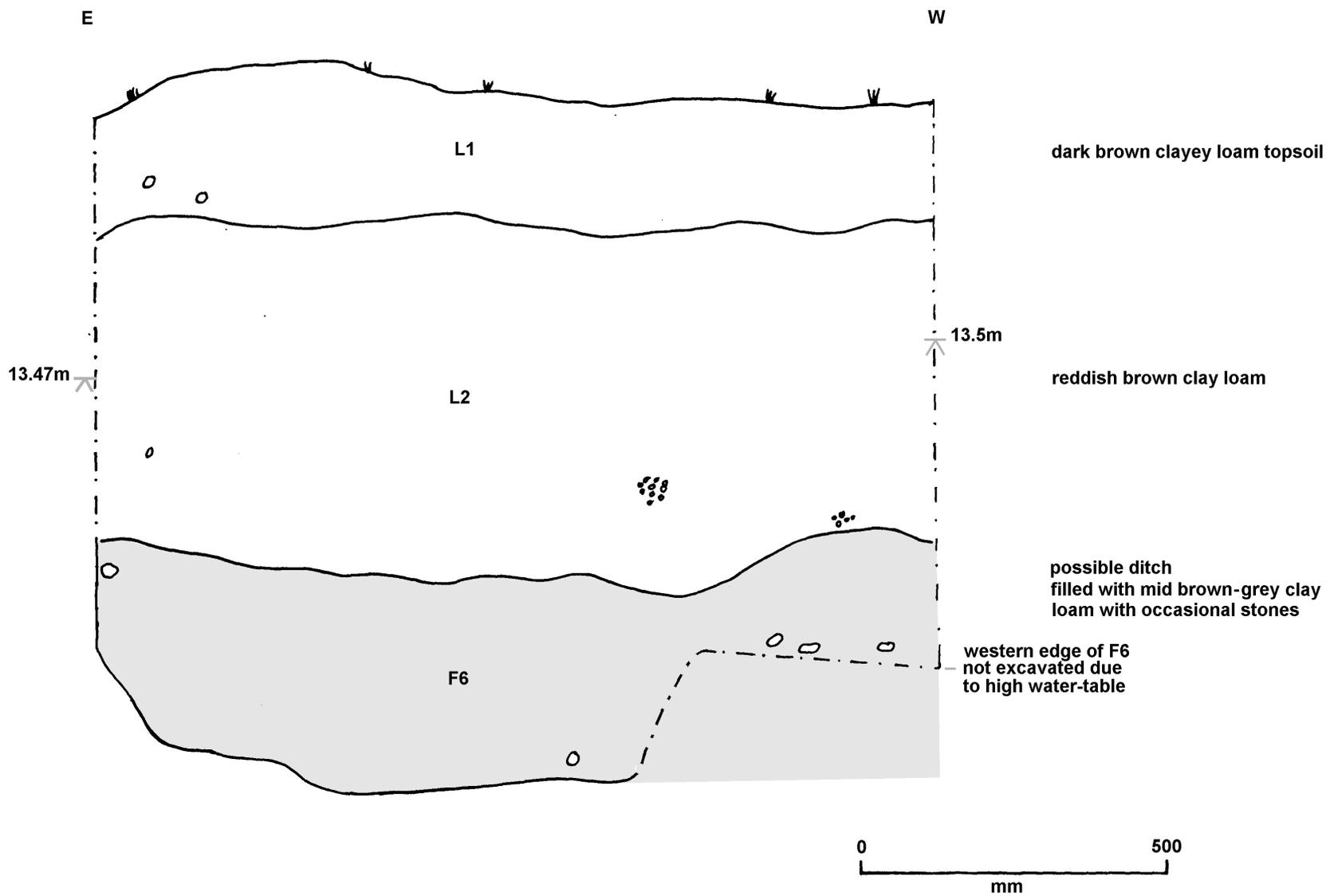


Fig 8 Section drawing of F6, T7; scale 1:10.

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

Summary sheet

Site name/address: Land at the junction of Hall Road and Goldsands Road, Southminster, Essex	
Parish: Southminster	District: Maldon
NGR: TL 9635 9953 (c)	Site code: SOUH 02
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: January 2002	Size of area investigated: 0.5ha
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museum	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related SMR nos:
Final report: CAT Report 176 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Post-Roman/medieval	
Summary of fieldwork results: An archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching revealed ditches of probable medieval date, one of which showed evidence of grain-processing in the vicinity. Roman tile and late Iron Age or Roman pottery indicates settlement of this date nearby.	
Previous summaries/reports: N/A	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: March 2002