

**An archaeological evaluation
in the playground of
Colchester Royal Grammar School,
Lexden Road,
Colchester, Essex**

February 2002



**on behalf of
Roff Marsh Partnership**

CAT project code: 02/2c
Colchester Museum accession code: 2002.24
NGR: TL 9883 2474



Colchester Archaeological Trust
12 Lexden Road,
Colchester,
Essex CO3 3NF

tel.: (01206) 541051
tel/fax: (01206) 500124
email: archaeologists@colchester-arch-trust.co.uk

CAT Report 179
March 2002

Contents

1	Summary	1
2	Introduction	1
3	Archaeological background	1
4	Aim	1
5	The evaluation trench	1
6	The finds	2
6.1	Finds list	2
6.2	Pottery <i>by Stephen Benfield</i>	2
6.3	Small finds <i>by N Crummy</i>	3
7	Discussion and interpretation	3
8	Acknowledgements	3
9	References	3
10	Glossary	3
11	Archive deposition	4
12	Site data	4

Figures after p 5

EHCR summary sheet

List of plates and figures

- Fig 1 Site location.
- Fig 2 Trench location.
- Fig 3 Trench section.
- Fig 4 Trench plan.

Front cover: the site, view north-east.

1 Summary

A single evaluation trench was excavated across the footprint of a proposed new art-block building in the playground of Colchester Royal Grammar School, Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex. The aim of the evaluation was to establish the nature and condition of any archaeological remains and to assess how any remains would be affected by the construction of the new art-block building. The trench was excavated to natural subsoil. One linear feature was identified, probably a Roman boundary ditch.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching in the playground of Colchester Royal Grammar School, Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex. The trench was located at NGR TL 9883 2474.
- 2.2 The trench was excavated between the cricket school building and the adjacent art and technology classroom building by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on 13th of February 2002.
- 2.3 All fieldwork was done in accordance with a specification agreed with the Archaeology Officer of Colchester Borough Council.
- 2.4 This report mirrors the standards and practices contained in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines for the standards and practice of archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1999).

3 Archaeological background

The development site is situated outside the historic Roman town wall and within the western cemetery area of the Roman town. There have been a number of archaeological discoveries in the immediate area. These consist mainly of Roman burials, pottery and furnaces (ESMR 13207, 13173, 13157). An unusual walled cemetery, about 80m to the north of the proposed new building, was excavated between 1934 and 1940. Several Roman roads are known to converge under Gurney Benham House. A record of these discoveries is to be found in *Roman Colchester* (Hull 1958).

4 Aim

The aim of the evaluation was to establish the nature and condition of any archaeological remains that survive in the area, and assess how they would be affected by the construction of the new art-block building on the site.

5 The evaluation trench (Trench or T1)

- 5.1 A single evaluation trench was excavated, in the footprint of the proposed new art-block building. The trench was located 4m from the south-west end of the existing art and technology classroom, between it and the cricket school building which is to be demolished. The trench measured 5m x 1.80m, and it was cut by a mechanical excavator using a toothless ditching bucket down to the natural subsoil (a depth of 90cm). The sides and bottom of the trench were then cleaned by hand. There were four contexts in the trench. The first (Layer or L1) was the tarmac surface of the playground; the tarmac continued to a depth of 14cm. Directly below L1 was the bedding for the tarmac surface (L2), an orange sand and clay mixture with stone chippings and gravel. L2 continued to a depth of 8cm until it interfaced with L3, a grey brown silt that contained frequent small stones. L3 continued to a depth of 60cm, although at 40cm it started to join the natural subsoil L4 in a zone of dirty natural where the two layers mix. This layer continues for 20cm. L4 was a yellow/orange sand. When the trench had been excavated by the mechanical excavator, it

was cleaned by hand, and during this process a linear feature (Feature or F1) was identified.

- 5.2 F1 was cut into the natural subsoil L4. It was deepest at its northern end at 30cm, and it sloped up to its southern end where it was shallowest at 10cm. The fill of F1 was the same material as L3, ie a grey brown sandy silt with frequent small stones. F1 had clear edges against the natural subsoil, but it became indistinct as it began to bottom out against the natural L4. There was a lot of mixing between the natural and the fill of F1 (probably the result of animal or plant-root activity).

6 The finds

6.1 Finds list

Weights are shown in g.

Finds no	Context	Weight	Description	Quantity
1	F1		Cu alloy coin	1
2	F1		Au alloy coin	1
3	F1	156	Fe nails	12
3	F1	43	Fe object	1
3	F1	44	Animal bone	3
3	F1	236	Roman tile	2
4	L3	43	Bos (cow) tooth	1
4	L3	40	Roman tile	2

6.2 Pottery by Stephen Benfield

Introduction

This is the report on a pottery group excavated by CAT on the playground at the Colchester Royal Grammar School, Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex in February 2002, at NGR TL 9883 2474. The archive will be deposited at Colchester Museum under accession code 2002.24.

Material

The material consisted of a total of 5 sherds weighing 843g. The sherds came from 1 bag representing 1 site context (F1). The material was classified according to Symonds and Wade (*CAR 10*). The material from the bag was listed, weighed and identified and is shown in the following table.

Weights are shown in g.

Trench	Sherd	Type	Fabric code	Weight	Date
T1	1	Large storage jar	H2	154	Roman
T1	1	Roman grey ware sherd	GX	1	Roman
T1	1	Colchester colour ware beaker	C2	23	early 2nd-mid 3rd century
T1	1	Ring-neck flagon	DJ	2	1st-2nd century
T1	1	Body sherd of Dressel 20 amphora	AJ	663	1st -early 3rd century

Discussion

The pottery that has been recovered from the evaluation trench is all Roman and ranges from the 1st to 3rd centuries AD. The nature of the pottery and the concentration of Roman material, combined with the lack of any other pottery from earlier or later periods, indicate that F1 is likely to be of at least Roman date. However, due to the amount of animal or plant-root activity which is present in F1, it is possible that the pottery may have been brought in from elsewhere by the burrowing activities of animals and the disturbance caused by plant roots.

6.3 Small finds by N Crummy

SF 1. (1) F1. Very worn *dupondius*(?). Obverse: legend missing, bearded head, radiate, to right. Reverse: ?emperor to left, sacrificing at an altar, SC in field. Date: late 2nd century to early 3rd century.

SF 2. (2) F1. Silver *denarius*, well-preserved, but with much corrosion still adhering. Elagabalus. Obverse: IMP ANTO[-] PIVS AVG, laureate bust right, draped. Reverse: P M [-] COS III P P, emperor to left, sacrificing at an altar and holding club. As RIC 256. Date: AD 221.

7 Discussion and interpretation

As the evaluation trench was excavated and cleaned, a linear feature was identified. The feature (F1) was cleaned and excavated by hand, and finds were recovered. The datable finds were pottery, one copper-alloy coin and one silver coin. The pottery is all Roman, and dates from the 1st to 3rd century AD. The two coins date from the late 2nd century to the early 3rd century. Other material recovered from F1 included iron nails, animal bone and Roman ceramic building material. The finds indicate that F1 is of Roman origin, probably a ditch. However, there was much disturbance and mixing of the fill of F1 with the natural subsoil by what appeared to be animal burrows and plant-root activity. As a result, it is possible that the finds may have been brought into F1 by this animal and plant-root activity (although it is more likely that the feature represents the remains of a Roman ditch). Other finds from the evaluation trench include ceramic building material and bone from L3. L3 appears to be the only surviving archaeological layer, since L1 and L2 are modern (and laid when the playground surface was created). No other features were observed in the evaluation trench.

8 Acknowledgments

The project was managed by Howard Brooks and the site work was carried out by Ben Holloway and Nigel Rayner. The project was monitored by Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council.

CAT would like to thank Mr Peter Stebbings, Bursar of Colchester Royal Grammar School, for his assistance and for providing access to the site, and to Roff Marsh Partnership for commissioning the work.

9 References

Hull, M R, 1958 *Roman Colchester*, Society of Antiquaries Research Committee Report, **XX**

Symonds, R P, & Wade, S, 1999 *Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-86*, Colchester Archaeological Report **10**, ed by P Bidwell and A Croom

10 Glossary

CBM	ceramic building material
context	a specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
EHCR	Essex Heritage Conservation Record
ESMR	Essex Sites & Monuments Record
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by man
Roman	the period from AD 43 to around AD 430

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 2002.24.

12 Site data

12.1 Site context list

Trench	Context	Description	Context date
T1	L1	Tarmac	modern
T1	L2	Bedding for tarmac surface	modern
T1	L3	Subsoil	Roman-modern
T1	L4	Natural	glacial/post-glacial

12.2 Soil descriptions

Trench	Context	Description
T1	L1	Black tarmac.
T1	L2	Orange sand and clay mixture bedding material for the tarmac surface, contains stone chips and gravel.
T1	L3	Grey brown sandy silt, contains frequent small stones - also forms the fill of F1.
T1	L4	Orange yellow sandy natural.

Ben Holloway, March 2002

© Colchester Archaeological Trust 2002

Distribution list:

Roff Marsh Partnership
Mr Peter Stebbings, Colchester Royal Grammar School
Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council
Essex Heritage Conservation Record, Essex County Council



Colchester Archaeological Trust
12 Lexden Road,
Colchester,
Essex CO3 3NF

tel.: (01206) 541051
tel/fax: (01206) 500124
email: archaeologists@colchester-arch-trust.co.uk

Checked by: *Howard Brooks*
Date: *15.03.02*

athlon/c:/reports02/crgs02/rep179.doc

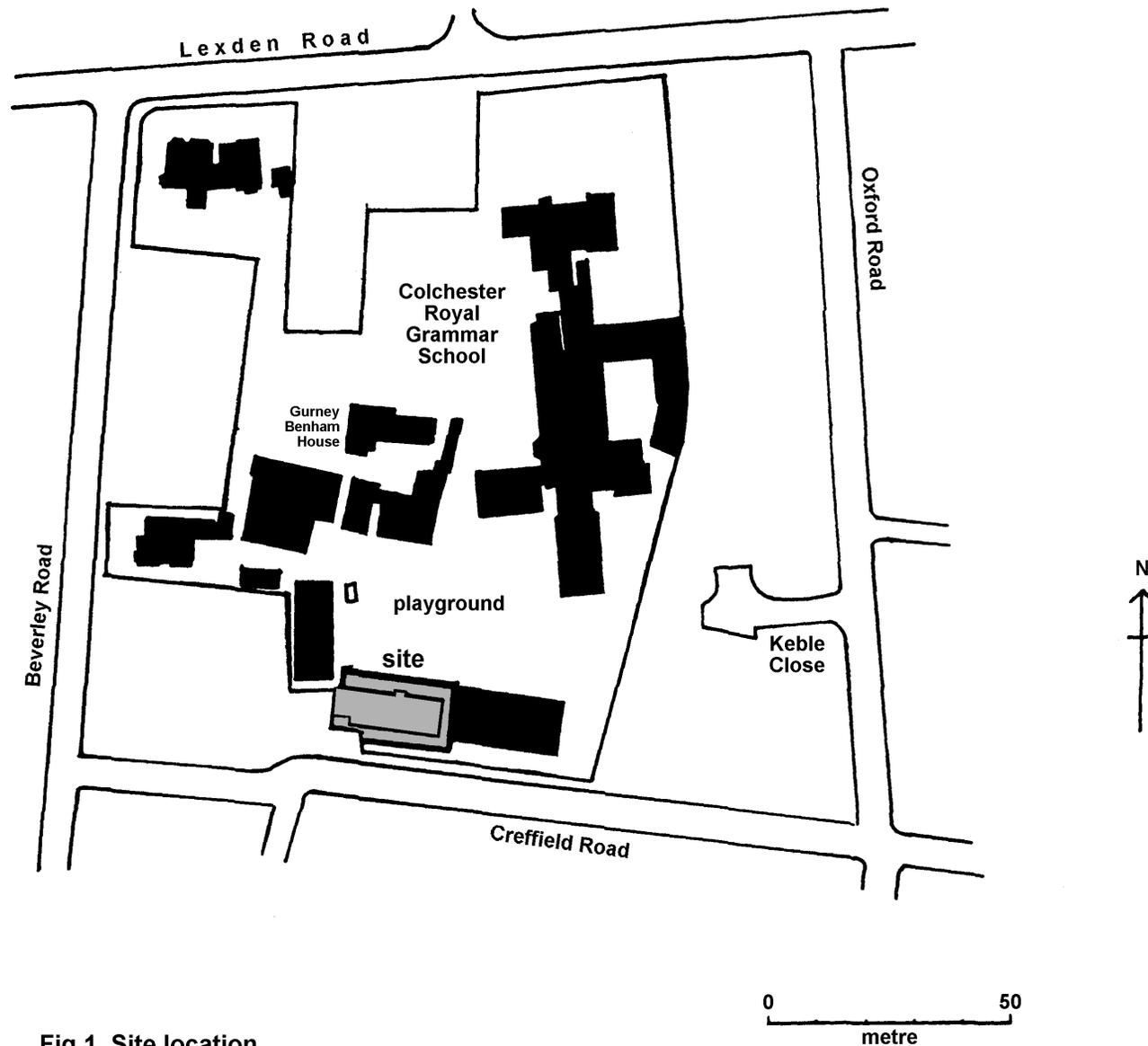


Fig 1 Site location.

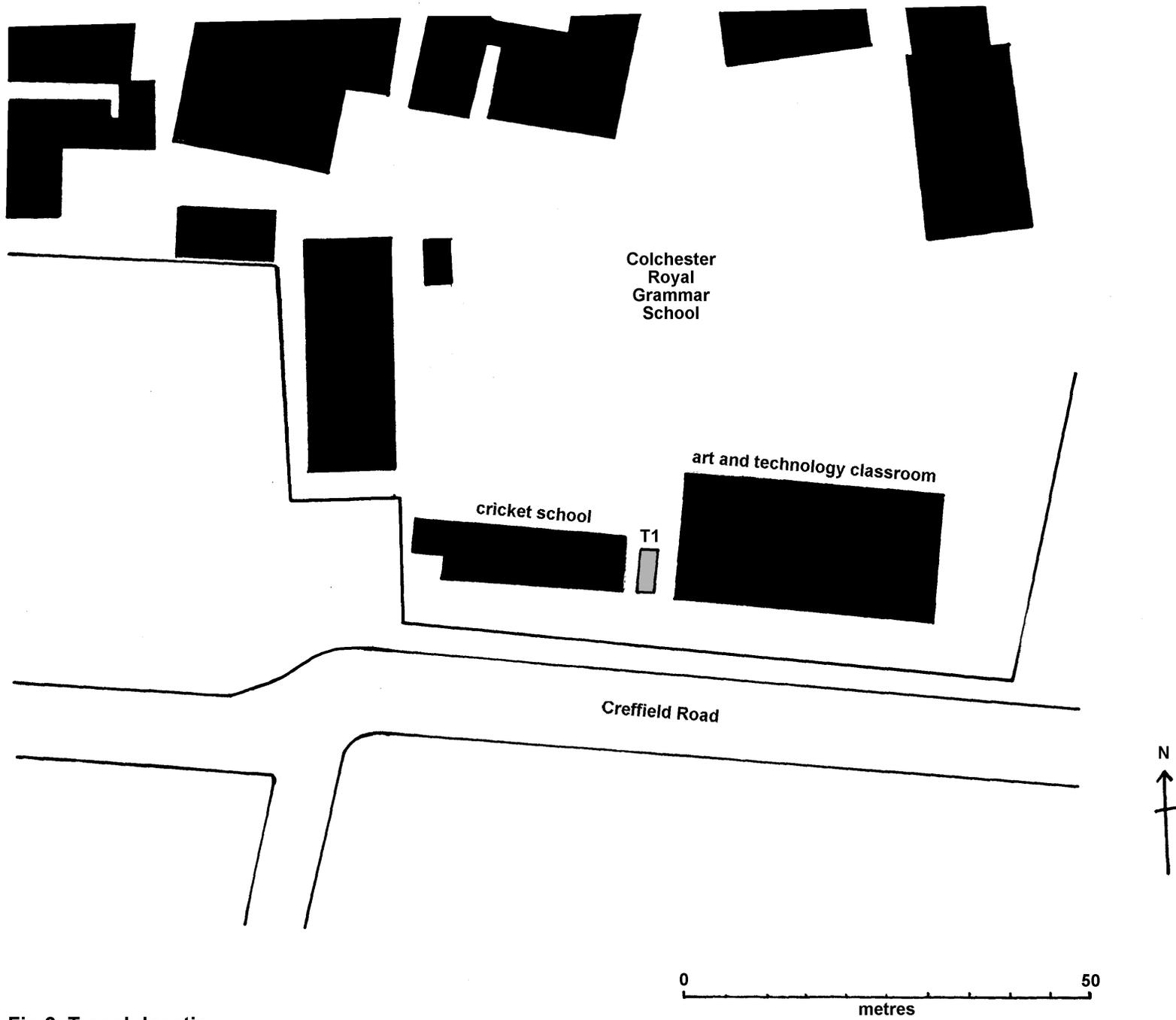


Fig 2 Trench location.

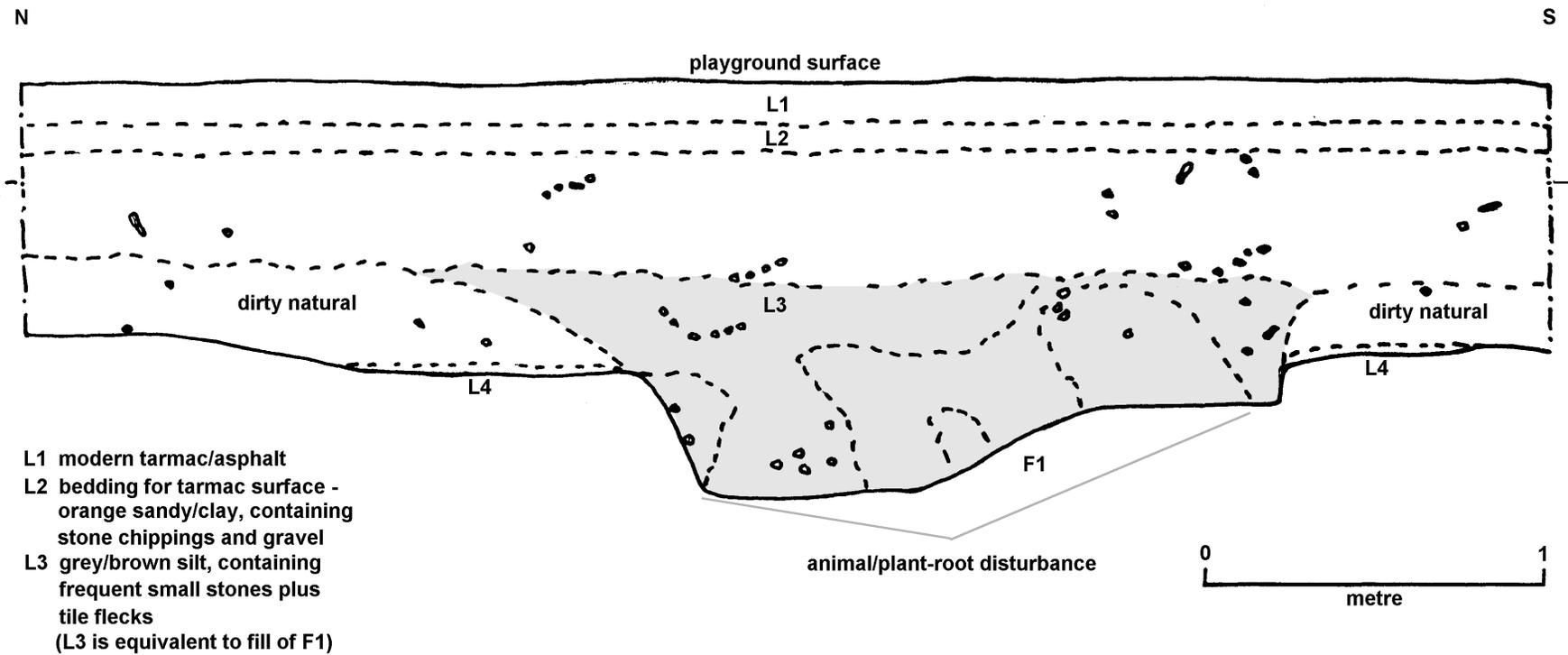


Fig 3 Trench section.

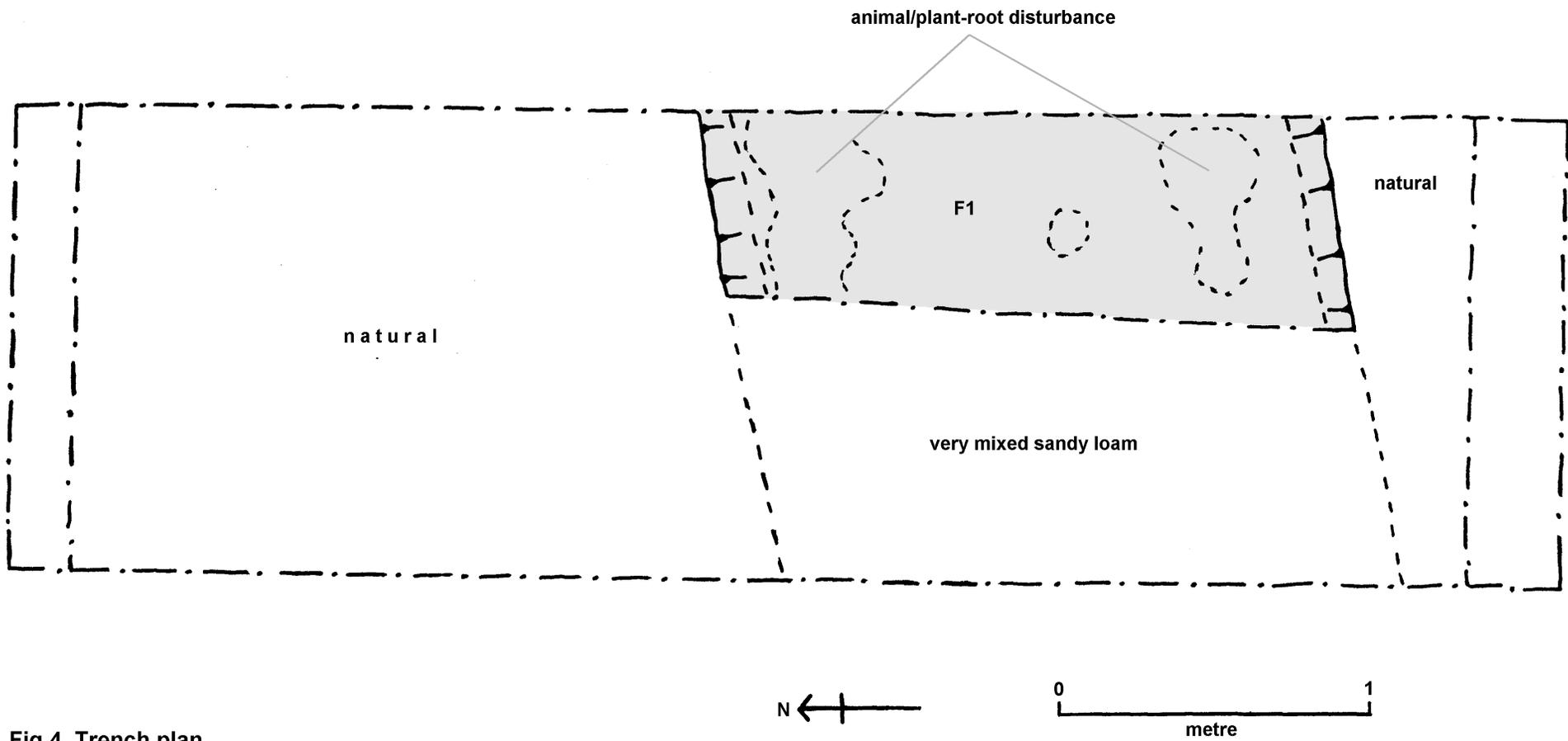


Fig 4 Trench plan.

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

Summary sheet

Site name/address: The playground of Colchester Royal Grammar School, Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 9883 2474	Site code: Museum accession code 2002.24
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: February 2002	Size of area investigated: 1 small trench
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museum	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related SMR nos: 13207, 13173, 13157
Final report: CAT Report 179 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Roman	
Summary of fieldwork results: A single evaluation trench was excavated across the footprint of a proposed new art-block building. The aim of the evaluation was to establish the nature and condition of any archaeological remains, and to assess how any remains would be affected by the construction of the new building. The trench was excavated to natural subsoil. One linear feature was identified, probably a Roman boundary ditch.	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Ben Holloway	Date of summary: 6th March 2002