

**An archaeological evaluation
on land adjacent to
2 Alexandra Road,
Colchester, Essex**

April 2002

**on behalf of
Hills Residential**

CAT project code: 02/3b
Colchester Museum accession code: 2002.55
NGR: TL 9826 2438 (centre)



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CAT Report 187
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EHCR summary sheet

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1 Summary

This 0.05 hectare site, on land adjacent to 2 Alexandra Road, Colchester, Essex, is on the fringes of one of Roman Colchester's main cemeteries. The site was evaluated by three trial-trenches. These showed that the southern two-thirds of the site had been truncated by recent pits. On the northern edge of the site, a Roman soil layer survived. This contained pits and other Roman features, but no burials. Spot dating of the finds would suggest Roman activity of the 2nd to 3rd centuries.

There were loose human bones from one of the recent pits in T2. Presumably there were Roman burials on this site, but they have been disturbed or destroyed by pit-digging in recent centuries.

There was a large quantity of Roman building debris from the site – brick, roof-tile and tesserae. The source of this debris must have been a Roman structure near to or perhaps on the site.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the report on an archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching carried out on land adjacent to 2 Alexandra Road, Colchester, Essex, situated at National Grid Reference TL 9926 2475 (centre) (Fig 1).
- 2.2 The evaluation was commissioned by Hills Residential, and was conducted by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) in April 2002 (Fig 2).
- 2.3 All fieldwork was done in accordance with a specification agreed with the Archaeology Officer of Colchester Borough Council.
- 2.4 Proposed work is the erection of three-storey residential apartments.
- 2.5 This report follows 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

- 3.1 The site lies in an area of archaeological potential, being 280m outside the town wall and Headgate, the site of a main access to the historic town. The gate at Headgate was demolished in 1766 (Hull 1958, 59-60) and partially uncovered in 1988 (Crummy 1992, 396-8).
- 3.2 The proposed development is situated immediately adjacent to the major Romano-British cemetery on the site of the present police headquarters. The cemetery was first recorded by local antiquarian William Wire in the 1840s when a sand-pit was being worked (Essex Heritage Conservation Record or EHCR 12563, 13136). It was extensively excavated in the 1970s and 1980s, leading to the discovery of over 700 Romano-British burials (Crummy *et al* 1993, 4-202). Roman kilns have also been found nearby (EHCR 12398).
- 3.3 An excavation by CAT in 1998 at 47 Butt Road revealed three late Roman inhumations, two in nailed wooden coffins (Urban Archaeological Database or UAD 3701). These were discovered at only 25cm below modern ground-level, which implies that there has been some lowering of the ground in this area (mainly 19th-century terracing: CAT Report 58).

4 Aim

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

5 Evaluation methodology

- 5.1** The site measures approximately 36 x 14m (0.05 hectares). There were some constraints on the siting of trenches (ie parked cars, drain runs). The three evaluation trenches were cut in the positions shown on Figure 2. These totalled 13.7m in length (4.8% of site area).
- 5.2** Topsoil/ploughsoil or other overburden was removed by mechanical digger with a flat-edged ditching bucket under archaeological supervision.
- 5.3** Stripping of topsoil/ploughsoil or other overburden by machine only proceeded as deep as the first significant archaeological level, at which level archaeological features or deposits were cleaned and excavated by hand.
- 5.4** Site contexts were recorded on pro-forma record sheets, planned at 1:20 or 1:50, and digital photographs were taken.

6 Results

6.1 Trench 1 (Fig 3)

This trench had the only significant archaeological survival. L5 and L8 defined the highest surviving Roman layers at 31.1m AOD (or approximately 0.7m below existing site level).

Within the depth of L5 and L8 there were a number of pits or cuts (F10, F11) and smaller post-hole-type features (F12, F13). No 'cut lines' were visible in L5/L8. This means that there has been some disturbance to this layer in Roman times, either by general digging around (for instance, digging pits F10 and F11), or perhaps by cultivation.

The deepest point at which Roman deposits were found was at 30.0m (this is the bottom of F10), and the ceramic finds suggest activity in the 2nd and 3rd centuries.

6.2 Trench 2 (Fig 4)

As in T1, this trench was dominated by two large, intercutting pits, F1 and F2. Given its size and position, it is very likely that F2 is the same feature as F5 in T1. F1 was machine-excavated down to 29.5m AOD (the limit of excavation), where natural sand was seen. The date range of the pottery in this feature suggests it was dug out in the 16th-18th centuries. The finds in F2 were all Roman or undated (animal bone), but the soily nature of the feature suggests a post-medieval date in line with F1.

Lying on natural sand and cut by F2 there was a layer of stony sand loam with Roman tile fragments (Layer or L2). This may represent the remains of a truncated Roman feature.

A few pieces of human bone were also found in pit F2. Given the proximity of the Roman cemetery at Butt Road, it is reasonable to assume that the bones are Roman in date, and derive from burial(s) which were disturbed by the digging of pit F1.

6.3 Trench 3 (Fig 5)

This part of the site had been heavily truncated down to at least the limit of excavation at 30.2m AOD (and probably much deeper). A large pit (Feature or F5) dominated this trench (Trench or T3). This was only excavated down to 30.0m AOD, but went deeper. Finds in F5 ranged from residual Roman to peg-tile. The peg-tile could be medieval or post-medieval. However, the pit had a soily post-medieval appearance, and it is most likely to come at the end of the medieval/post-medieval date range than at the beginning. F5 cut an earlier pit F6. F6 contained residual Roman pottery and peg-tile. As with F5, a post-medieval date is preferred for F6.

F4 was a modern surface-built wall which was mechanically removed.

7 The finds

7.1 Finds list

Post-Roman fabrics are after Cotter (2000).

T = trench

Cont = context number

R = Roman

Qt = quantity

Wt = weight

D = discarded

T	Cont	Bag no	Description	Qt	Wt in g	Finds date	Context date	D
1	F05	4	Roman pottery, inc samian bowl footing	2	105	Roman, mid 2nd-3rd centuries	post-medieval	
1	F05	4	Peg-tiles	2	85	post-medieval	post-medieval	
1	F05	4	<i>Imbrex</i>	1	100	Roman	post-medieval	D
1	F05	4	Tiles	3	390	Roman	post-medieval	D
1	F06	5	Pottery	1	30	Roman, mid 2nd-3rd centuries	post-medieval	
1	F06	5	Animal bone	1	15	undated	post-medieval	D
1	F06	5	Peg-tile	1	30	medieval or later	post-medieval	
1	L05	11	Roman pottery, inc mortarium	8	225	Roman, mid 2nd-3rd centuries	Roman	
1	L05	11	Animal bone	2	105	undated	Roman	
1	L08	11	<i>Imbrex</i> fragment	1		Roman	Roman	
1	L08	11	Brick, tile	3		Roman	Roman	
2	F01	2	PMRE (Fabric 40)	3	50	post-medieval	16th-18th	
2	F01	2	German stoneware (Fabric 45)	1	20	post-medieval	16th-18th	
2	F01	2	Roman pottery, inc samian	5	205	Roman, mid 2nd-3rd centuries	16th-18th	
2	F01	2	Human bone	5	185	Roman	16th-18th	
2	F01	2	Clay pipe stem stamped "21", and ".ERRY" (DERRY?)	1	5	post-medieval	16th-18th	
2	F01	2	Tiles	3	225	Roman	16th-18th	D
2	F01	2	<i>Imbrex</i>	1	110	Roman	16th-18th	D
2	F01	2	Peg-tile fragments	2	35	medieval or later	16th-18th	
2	F01	2	Post-medieval brick	1	420	post-medieval	16th-18th	
2	F02	1	Pottery	2	145	Roman, mid 2nd-3rd centuries	post-medieval?	
2	F02	1	Animal bone	1	85	undated	post-medieval?	D
2	F02	1	Brick fragment	1	155	Roman	post-medieval?	
2	L02	3	Pale brown <i>tessera</i> , no mortar adhering	1	12	Roman	post-medieval?	
2	L02	3	Roman pottery, including samian	4	155	Roman, mid 2nd-3rd centuries	post-medieval?	
2	L02	3	Tiles, brick	6	1095	Roman	post-medieval?	
2	L02	8	Red ? <i>tessera</i> , no mortar adhering	1	10	Roman	post-medieval?	
2	L02	8	Pottery	8	60	Roman, mid 2nd-3rd centuries	post-medieval?	
2	L02	8	Animal bone	10	130	undated	post-medieval?	D
2	L02	8	Nail - coffin nail?	1	15	undated	post-medieval?	
2	L02	8	<i>Imbrex</i> fragment	1	50	Roman	post-medieval?	D
2	L02	8	Roman brick fragment	1	145	Roman	post-medieval?	D
3	F08	6	Slate	1	10	post-medieval	modern	D
3	F08	6	Mortar	1	40	post-medieval	modern	D
3	F08	6	Septaria	1	90	post-medieval	modern	D
3	F08	6	Flowerpot (Fabric 51b)	1	35	19th-20th centuries	modern	
3	F08	6	Animal bone	5	30	undated	modern	D
3	F08	6	Green glass fragment	1	5	?Roman	modern	
3	F08	6	2 worked limestone fragments	2	230	?	modern	

T	Cont	Bag no	Description	Qt	Wt in g	Finds date	Context date	D
3	F08	6	CuA object?	1		?	modern	
3	F09	7	Nail - coffin nail?	1	25	undated	modern	
3	F10	9	Red tessera, no mortar adhering	1	15	Roman	modern	
3	F10	9	Roman pottery, inc samian	43	525	Roman, mid 2nd-3rd centuries	Roman	
3	F10	9	Animal bone	32	240	undated	Roman	
3	F10	9	Nails - coffin nails?	5	200	undated	Roman	
3	F10	9	Glass sherds	1	2	Roman	Roman	
3	F10	9	Flat green glass piece	1	7	?Roman or later	Roman	
3	F10	9	Chalk lumps	2	35	?	Roman	
3	F10	9	<i>Tegula</i>	2	120	Roman	Roman	
3	F10	9	<i>Imbrex</i>	2	260	Roman	Roman	
3	F10	9	Brick	1	125	Roman	Roman	
3	F10	9	Tile	5	360	Roman	Roman	
3	F10	10	CuA clasp	1		?	Roman	
3	F11	12	Pottery	29	350	Roman, mid 2nd-3rd centuries	Roman	
3	F11	12	Nail - coffin nail?	4	85	undated	Roman	
3	F11	12	<i>Imbrex</i> fragments	4	380	Roman	Roman	
3	F11	12	Animal bone	1	20	Roman	Roman	
3	F11	12	Tile fragments	2	230	Roman	Roman	
3	F14	13	Pottery	3	25	Roman, mid 2nd-3rd centuries	Roman	
3	F14	13	Tile scraps	2	20	Roman?	Roman	D

7.2 Small finds

by Nina Crummy

There is no reason to suppose that any of these pieces is necessarily of any great antiquity. No further action need be taken.

- (6) F8, T3. Two fragments of limestone, representing one or two blocks. They are probably part of a worn post-medieval doorstep or similar stone feature, but the possibility that they are older cannot be wholly excluded.
- 1) The larger has parts of two worked contiguous 'edges' set at right angles, both well finished, but one retains saw marks while the other has been rubbed to a smooth finish. They are not true edges from a thin slab but parts of surfaces from a cube or rectangular block. The other surfaces on the fragment are broken. Maximum dimensions 73 x 69 x 26 mm.
 - 2) The smaller fragment has one smooth finished edge, with a face at right angles to it that is irregular but worn smooth. Both edge and face are very slightly curved. The piece has fractured across a hole or curved notch, at least 12 mm in diameter, cut into the face. It may be a dowel hole. Maximum dimensions 77 x 47 x 17 mm.
- (6) F8, T3. Copper-alloy strip, broken at each end. The piece curves irregularly along its length and has been bent (damaged) close to one end. The surfaces are obscured by corrosion. The metal is heavy, and may be brass. Length 87 mm, width 8.5 mm, thickness 3 mm.
- (10) F10, T3. Copper-alloy double-headed stud, either circular and worn to a flat edge at one point, or deliberately made to that shape. The size of the gap between the heads suggests that they were attached to leather or thick textile. Maximum diameter 13 mm, height 4 mm.

8 Discussion

T1 and T2 showed that the southern two-thirds of the site had been disturbed by post-medieval or modern pits to a depth between 1.6m and 2.3m below site level (ie down to 30.2-29.5m AOD, the limit of excavation). No significant archaeological remains survived here. A small quantity of human bone was found residually in T2. Given the proximity of the large Roman cemetery at Butt Road (under the present police headquarters; Crummy *et al* 1993), and given the fact that other Roman

burials were found in 1998 at 47 Butt Road (CAT Report 58), these bones are most likely to be Roman and to derive from disturbed Roman burials.

In the northern third of the site, there was a covering of 0.8m of post-medieval and modern material lying over Roman deposits which were themselves approximately 1.0m deep (ie between 31.0m and 30.0m AOD).

Although the removal of the Roman soil deposit (L5/L8) revealed Roman pits and other cuts, no cut lines were visible. This suggests some disturbance to the Roman soils during the Roman period, either by general digging around or perhaps by cultivation.

A few pieces of human bone were found in T2. Given the proximity of the Roman cemetery at Butt Road, it is reasonable to assume that the bones are Roman in date, and derived from burial(s) disturbed by the digging of pit F1.

There was a large quantity of Roman building debris from this site – brick, roof-tile and *tesserae*. The source of this debris must have been a Roman structure near to or perhaps on the site.

9 Acknowledgments

The Trust would like to thank Mr J A Hills, of Hills Residential, for commissioning the work and for assistance given.

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

10 References

- CAT Report 58 An excavation at 47 Butt Road, by Stephen Benfield, 1998
- Cotter, John P, 2000 Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85, Colchester Archaeological Report 7
- Crummy, N, Crummy, P, & Crossan, C, 1993 *Excavations of Roman and later cemeteries, churches and monastic sites in Colchester, 1971-88*, Colchester Archaeological Report 9
- Crummy, P, 1992 *Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School, and other sites in Colchester, 1971-85*, Colchester Archaeological Report 6
- Hull, M R, 1958 *Roman Colchester*, Society of Antiquaries Research Committee Report, **XX**

11 Glossary

AOD	above Ordnance Datum (Newlyn)
ceramic	pottery (and fired clay)
context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
cut	a hole in the ground which cannot be given a specific label like 'pit'
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
medieval	after AD 1066 and up to Henry VIII
modern	Victorian and later
natural	geological deposit(s) undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
post-medieval	after Henry VIII and up to Victorian
PMRE	post-medieval red earthenware
Roman	the period from AD 43 to around AD 430
SMR	Sites and Monuments Record
truncated	chopped off

12 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is held at the Colchester Archaeological Trust, 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but it will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2002.55.

13 Site data

13.1 Site context list

T = trench Cont = context number

T	Cont	Description	Above	Below	Finds date	Context date
2	F01	Very large pit	F02	L06	16th-18th centuries	16th-18th centuries
2	F02	Pit	F01	L02	Roman, mid 2nd-3rd centuries	post-medieval?
3	F03	Wall		L03		modern
	F04	Wall	L03			modern
1	F05	Pit	F06	F03, F04	post-medieval	post-medieval
1	F06	Pit		F05	medieval or later	post-medieval
	F07	Wall				
3	F08	Buried barrel			19th-20th century	modern
3	F09	Cut - post-hole?		F8	undated	modern
3	F10	Pit	intercuts F11		Roman, mid 2nd-3rd centuries	Roman
3	F11	Pit	intercuts F10		Roman, mid 2nd-3rd centuries	Roman
	F12	Post-hole?		F11		
	F13	Animal burrow				
3	F14	Pit?	L7		Roman, mid 2nd-3rd centuries	Roman
	L01	Tarmac bedding stones	F01	-	-	modern
2	L02	Feature fill?		F02	Roman, mid 2nd-3rd centuries	Roman?
	L03	Car park layer			-	modern
	L04	Dump			-	post-medieval
1	L05	Layer	F11?		Roman, mid 2nd-3rd centuries	Roman
	L06	Dump		L01	-	post-medieval
	L07	Natural			-	-
1	L08	Fill of F10?			Roman	Roman

13.2 Soil descriptions

Cont	Description
L01	Tarmac and bedding stones.
L02	Yellow brown sandy loam, very stony, occasional oyster shell and Roman tile.
L03	Orange sand and stones with mortar.
L04	Dark compacted silts and sand.
L05	Brown sandy loam.
L06	Very dark grey brown, almost black compact sandy loam with occasional small stones, common coal, charcoal, peg-tile, modern brick fragments.
L07	Natural dirty silty sand, mottled.
L08	Dark yellow brown sandy loam, common small stones.

Howard Brooks, May 2002

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Distribution list:

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Checked by: Philip Crummy
Date: 10.06.02



Fig 1 Site location.

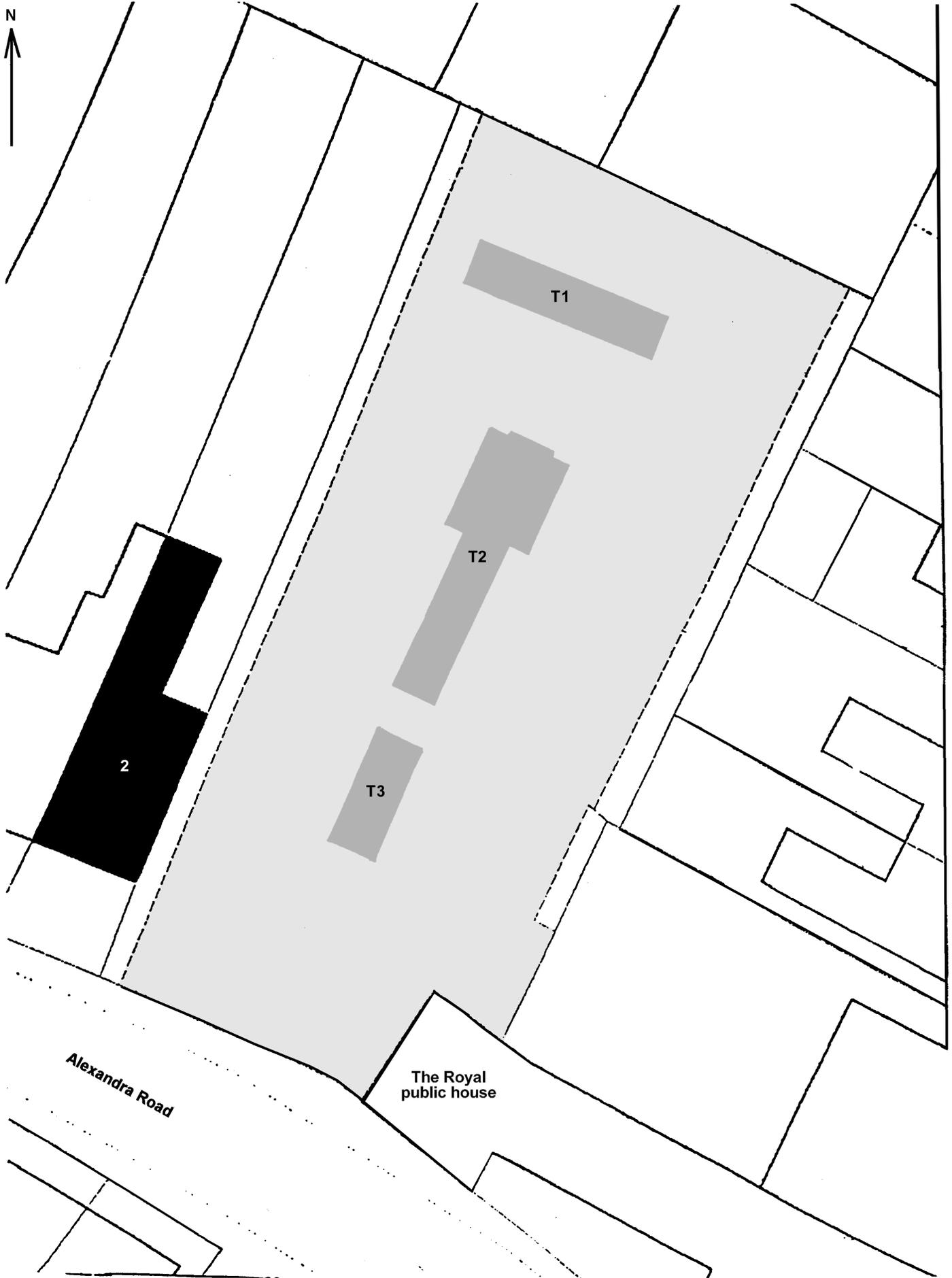


Fig 2 Trench locations, scale 1:200.

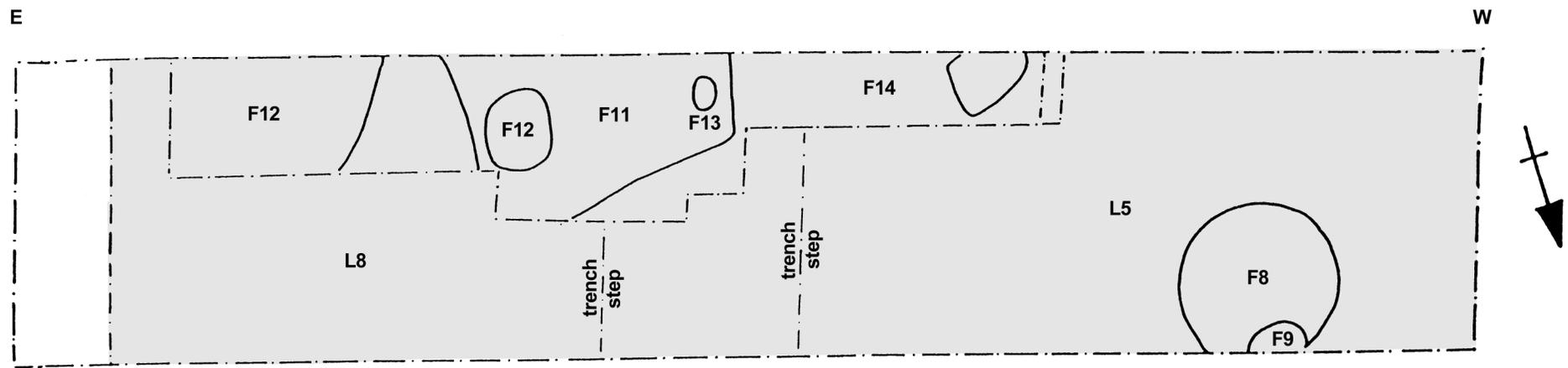
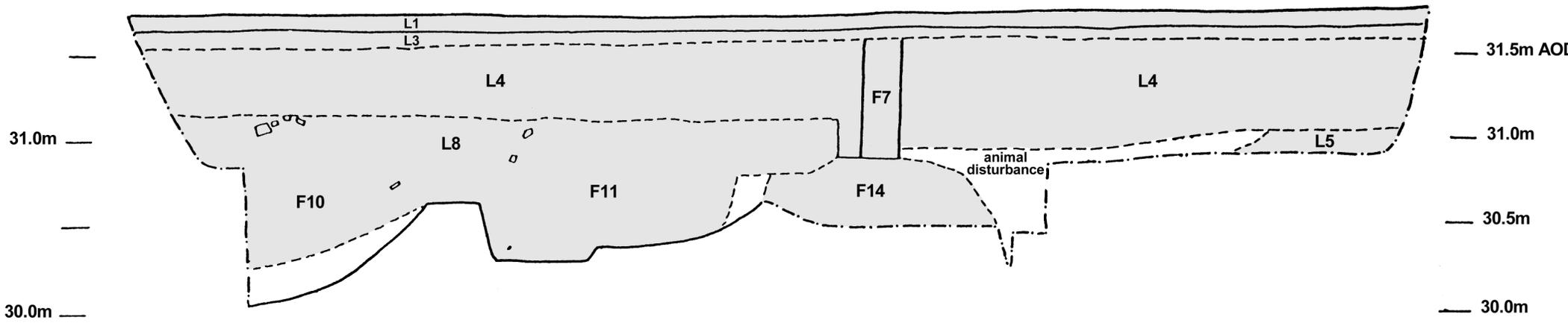


Fig 3 Trench 1: section and plan.

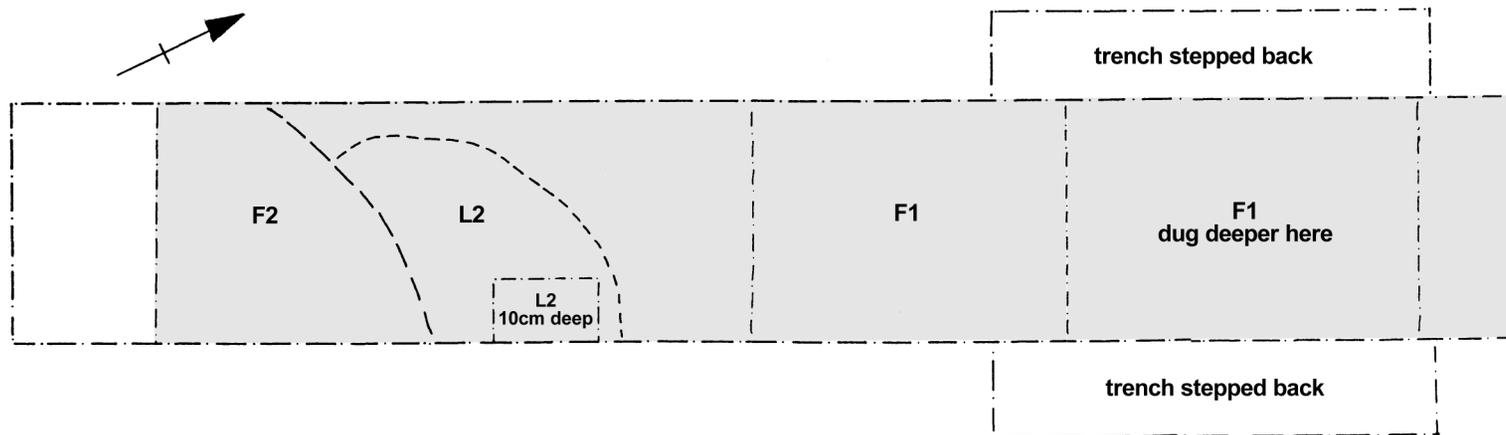
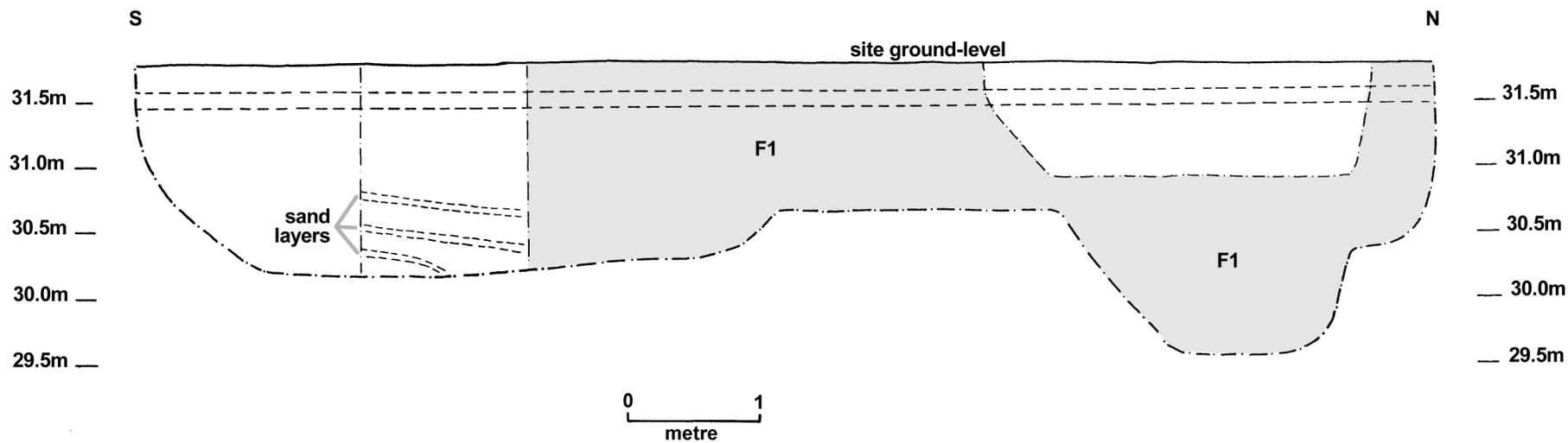


Fig 4 Trench 2: section and plan.

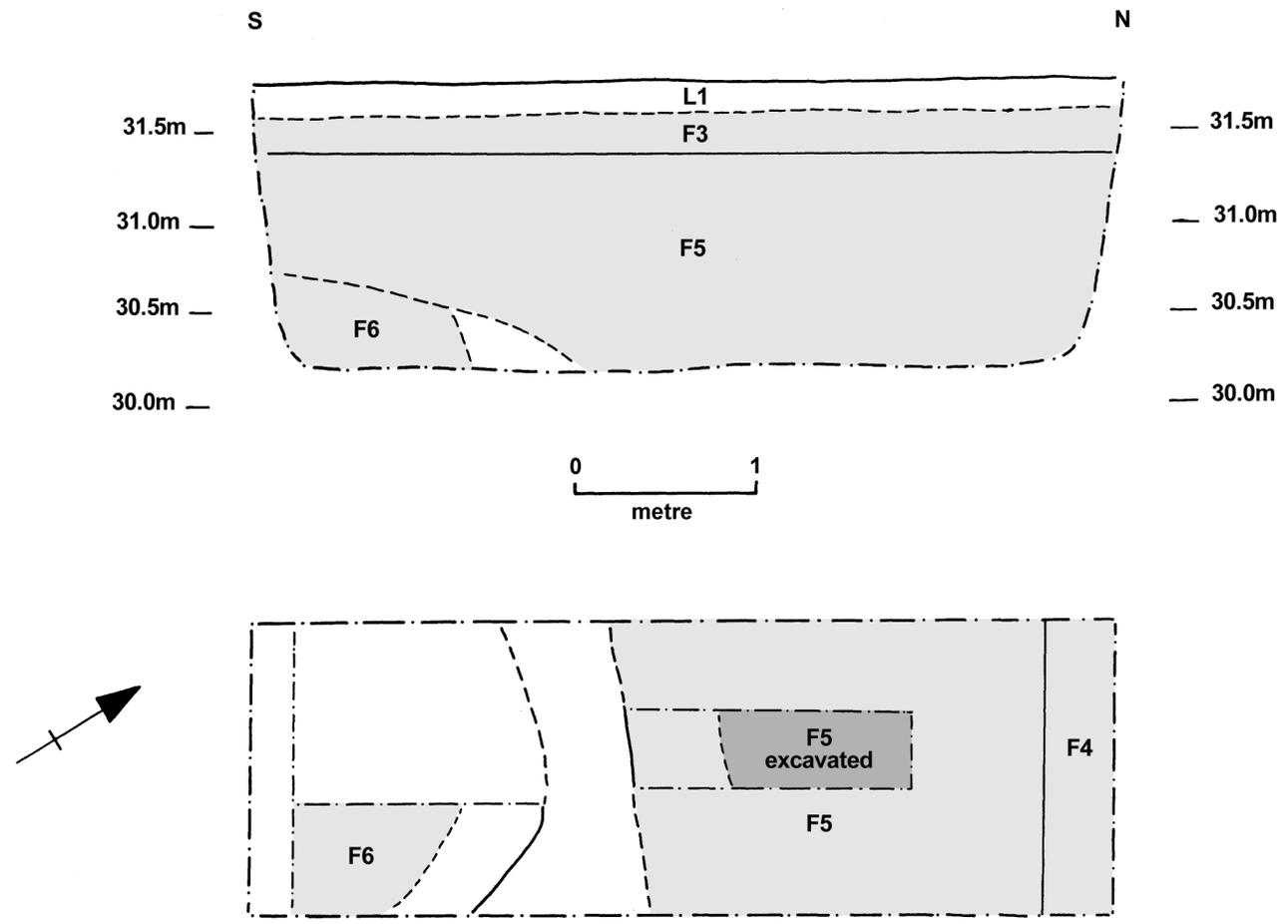


Fig 5 Trench 3: section and plan.

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

Summary sheet

Site address: Land adjacent to 2 Alexandra Road, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 9826 2438 (centre)	Site code: Museum accession code 2002.55
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: April 2002	Size of area investigated: 0.05 hectare
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related SMR nos: 12398, 12563, 13136; UAD 3701
Final report: CAT Report 187 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Roman, post-medieval, modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results:</p> <p><i>This 0.05 hectare site is on the fringes of one of Roman Colchester's main cemeteries. The site was evaluated by three trial-trenches. These showed that the southern two-thirds of the site had been truncated by recent pits. On the northern edge of the site, a Roman soil layer survived. This contained pits and other Roman features, but no burials. Spot-dating of the finds would suggest Roman activity of the 2nd to 3rd centuries.</i></p> <p><i>There were loose human bones from one of the recent pits in T2. Presumably there were Roman burials on the site, but they have been disturbed or destroyed by pit-digging in recent centuries.</i></p> <p><i>There was a large quantity of Roman building debris from the site – brick, roof tile and tesserae. The source of this debris must have been a Roman structure near to or perhaps on the site.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Howard Brooks	Date of summary: 15th May 2002