

**An archaeological watching brief  
at North Station Road  
(the Victoria Inn),  
Colchester, Essex  
February-May 2002**

**on behalf of  
Tendring Construction Ltd**



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## 1 Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out at North Station Road (the Victoria Inn public house), Colchester, Essex in 2002, and this produced more evidence of a high-status Roman residence that had been observed during the 2001 evaluation. The evidence consisted of a foundation, and parts of two mosaic floors and a herringbone floor. The structure was demolished to make way for at least one large building with tessellated pavements which probably had a public rather than a domestic function. The sparsity of stratified pottery made dating difficult; however, the site is thought to have been in use from the early 2nd to the late 3rd century AD.

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief which was commissioned by Tendring Construction Ltd and carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between the 12th February and the 13th May 2002. The work was necessitated by the construction of twelve apartments which were given planning permission under application number no F/COL/01/0731 with a condition for a watching brief.
- 2.2 This report follows a brief written by the Archaeological Officer for Colchester Borough Council and a Written Scheme of Investigation written by CAT.
- 2.3 The site is located outside the town wall, on the west side of North Station Road and on the south side of the Victoria Inn at NGR TL 9932 2577 centre (Fig 1).
- 2.4 The 0.075 hectare site is on fairly level ground at 7m OD and was formerly covered by gravel underlain by a thick layer of concrete on the western side. The site was used as a car park for the nearby HSBC bank until recently.
- 2.5 This report follows the standards set out in the Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1999, updated 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996, updated 2002), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1999).

## 3 Archaeological background (Fig 2)

- 3.1 The site is located outside the wall of the early Roman legionary fortress and later Roman town of *Colonia Victricensis*. The Middleborough area is rich in archaeology, and it is clear that the site lies within a suburb of the Roman town. Some 40m north of the site, part of a large Roman house was discovered immediately north of Victoria Chase during construction work for the new Midland (now HSBC) Bank at 26 North Station Road in 1976 (Crummy 1992, 346; Essex Heritage and Conservation Record or EHCR 12514.)
- 3.2 In 1998, CAT carried out an archaeological evaluation at the old Poultry Market site (now 'Market Close') to the south of the site and north of the River Colne. A Roman foundation 800mm wide was recorded in one of the trenches. This lay at the same NW-SE orientation as the features found at 26 North Station Road (Crossan 1998).
- 3.3 A mosaic floor was found in 1880 on the south side of Victoria Chase less than a metre below ground-level, just north of the site (*TEAS* 1884; EHCR 12517), and a tessellated pavement was discovered in front of the Victoria Inn in 1929 (Crummy 1992, 346; EHCR 12623). Roman suburbs were excavated in 1979 before the construction of the Royal London building, some 220m to the south of the site at Middleborough (Brooks & Crummy 1984, 155-209).
- 3.4 The site has been built on before. The Chapman and André map of 1777 shows buildings lining this part of North Station Road. Maps from 1897 to the 1970s show no 8 North Station Road just to the south of the Victoria Inn public house. The 1897 OS map shows temporary buildings at the back of the public house, the remaining one of which - a small brick electricity substation - was demolished early in 2002. Maps from the 1960s show a factory partly covering the western end of the site.

- 3.5** An archaeological evaluation carried out by CAT on the site in 2001 revealed part of a previously unknown mosaic floor adjacent to an unusual Roman sunken structure of *opus signinum*. The sunken structure (which showed evidence of a surrounding stone wall) contained a large amount of broken fragments of painted wall-plaster as well as a coin of the later 4th century. The structure could have been a water-tank or a cellar; an alternative explanation is that it was a tank for fulling cloth. These and other features found during the 2001 evaluation represent the remains of a 2nd- or 3rd-century house. This occupied a Roman suburb in present-day Middleborough, near the road leading north from the north gate of the Roman walled town (Orr 2001).

#### **4 Aims and objectives**

The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological finds, features or deposits revealed by the groundworks. Particular attention was paid to the possible occurrence of the remains of Roman buildings.

#### **5 Methods**

- 5.1** The fieldwork was carried out by Colin Austin, Ben Holloway, Chris Lister, Kate Orr, Nigel Rayner and Nicole Weller of CAT with project management by Stephen Benfield.
- 5.2** The excavation by contractors of test-trenches, trenches for ground-beams and drains, and piles was monitored during the watching brief. The trenches were dug using a mechanical excavator with a toothed ditching bucket. The piles were drilled using a piling rig and only the spoil heaps could be checked for finds. Four blocks of ground-beams were dug; Blocks 1 and 2 on the North Station Road frontage and Blocks 3 and 4 on the Victoria Chase frontage.
- 5.3** Where possible, areas were cleaned by hand to ensure the visibility of archaeological deposits. Spoil heaps were checked for artefacts.
- 5.4** Individual records of layers and features were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets.
- 5.5** Section drawings of features and layers were made at a scale of 1:10, some of which have been reduced to 1:20 and included in this report (Figs 4, 9 and 13-19). A plan of all features in Blocks 1 and 2 was made at a scale of 1:50 (Fig 5). Plans of the mosaic floors, tessellated pavements and herringbone floors were made at 1:1 and have been reduced and included in this report (Figs 8-12). A plan of F42 in Block 3 was drawn at 1:10 (Fig 4).
- 5.6** Finds were registered on CAT record sheets and assigned find numbers and small finds numbers according to context. Finds were washed, marked and bagged according to context.
- 5.7** Colour photographs of features were taken digitally and with a 35mm transparency camera.
- 5.8** The ground-beams were dug over a four-week period, and the investigation was rather piecemeal as the trenches were not all open at the same time. Each trench was covered over with framing and concrete as soon as CAT finished recording features within it. Obviously features have only been excavated by hand where they appeared in the contractors' trenches. It was not possible to extend the contractors' trenches to follow features.
- 5.9** In Blocks 3 and 4, where there was a high density of archaeological features, the ground-beam trenches were numbered a-q for the purposes of this investigation. Features were numbered F13-F43 to follow on from features F1-F12 which were assigned numbers in the 2001 evaluation.

## 6 Results

### 6.1 The pre-piling stage (Fig 3)

Visits were made in February 2002 to monitor four test-trenches (T1-T4) which were dug by the contractors to test the area before piling. These were all dug on the western side of the site. T1 was 9.4m long and 2m deep. The first 800mm consisted of very mixed grey-brown sandy loam with brick and mortar (Layer 2 or L2). This was underlain by very stony orange/brown clay natural (L4).

T2 was dug immediately behind the Victoria Inn; it was 2m long and 800mm deep. It cut through L2 only. T3 and T4 were small test-holes dug 2m deep through similar layers to those in T1, ie very mixed loam with rubble to 800mm depth underlain by very stony clay natural.

The removal of footings of previous buildings on the north-western side of the site, adjacent to Victoria Chase, were also monitored, but there was nothing to record except for brick footings to the demolished electricity substation.

Another visit was made in February 2002 after an 8.4m-long trench had been dug to lay a supporting foundation to the rear of the Victoria Inn public house (T5). It was dug to a depth of 1.6m from the surface of the public house floor but 1.1m from the surface of the car park. The first 500mm was made up of concrete, brick and brick rubble from the floor of the public house (L1). Underlying this was 600-700mm of grey-brown sandy loam with blocks of concrete (L2). From approximately 1.1m depth from the floor of the public house (600mm depth from the former surface of the car park) there started a disturbed Roman layer containing *opus signinum* chunks, yellowy mortar and Roman brick and tile mixed in with a grey-brown sandy loam (L3). Natural was not reached.

### 6.2 Piling

Between the 28th February and the 7th March 2002, several visits were made during piling which was carried out to a maximum depth of 14m. Spoil heaps were checked for finds but nothing of archaeological significance was observed except fragments of Roman tile.

### 6.3 Excavation of ground-beams (Fig 5)

**6.3.1** Between the 13th March and the 8th April 2002, ground-beam excavation was monitored. The ground-beam depths were between 300mm and 1m. Their width was between 450mm and 600mm; however, due to their sides collapsing, some larger areas were dug out. Ground-beams to Block 3 in the north-western corner of the site were dug to between 300mm and 500mm depth, but the ground here had already been lowered by 600mm from the level of the pavement. The width of the ground-beams was between 650mm and 750mm. There were no features on the Victoria Chase road frontage, but this was the area where footings to modern buildings had been dug out by the contractors.

**6.3.2** On the eastern side of Block 3, between two pile-caps (in Trench r; Fig 4), there was a thin, compact layer of creamy-coloured mortar sitting on top of a layer of *opus signinum* of total thickness 30mm (F42). F42 formed a right angle and may represent the base of a mosaic floor in the corner of a room. No *tesserae* or impressions of *tesserae* on the surface were observed. F42 was surrounded by F43, a looser light-mid brown silty loam with a abundant flecks of *opus signinum* and yellow mortar. The fact that F43 contained peg-tile makes it likely that it was a medieval robber-trench, ie that it was dug in the medieval period to remove the stone which formed the Roman wall surrounding F42. F42 was 550mm below ground-level; however, the ground had already been lowered by 600mm, and therefore it was 1.15m below the pavement level of Victoria Chase. F42 and F43 were sealed by a dark brown silty loam layer (L7). Above this layer was a thin layer of asphalt (L6) and a mixed layer containing modern brick and concrete which was probably very recently deposited, ie during the current building work (L5). If F42 had been in the corner of a room, then the walls would have been aligned NW to SE.

**6.3.3** No features of archaeological significance were observed during the digging of the ground-beams of Block 4, just behind the Victoria Inn. The area had been heavily

disturbed by the electricity substation and 19th-century buildings (see section 3.4) and all the spoil contained modern brick.

- 6.3.4** At the end of March 2002, ground-beams for Block 1 (Trenches a-h) on the North Station Road frontage were dug out by the contractors. This was the area where the remains of a Roman town house, including an *opus signinum* cellar or tank (F6) and a mosaic floor (F12), were observed during the 2001 evaluation. These have been preserved *in situ* (Figs 3 and 5).

The top of a wall foundation, 550-600mm wide, of a Roman building was recorded running NW to SE across two ground-beam trenches in Block 1 (F20 and F19; Plate 1). This wall foundation had not been robbed and was still fairly solid. Figure 2 shows a Roman foundation which was found in 1932 in the pavement lying almost at right angles to this wall; however, there was no evidence of it in the ground-beam trench. At the same level as the foundation F20/F19 and abutting it was a well-preserved brick herringbone floor (Figs 6-8 and Plate 1); this was recorded in three ground-beam trenches (F14, F15, F27). Each of the three areas of herringbone floor were on the same NW-SE alignment and were at the same level. If F27 belongs to the same room as F14 and F15, then it would mean that the room was at least 5.5m wide and by 6.5m wide. It would also mean that the *opus signinum* structure F6 found during the 2001 evaluation was either in the same room as the herringbone floor or was built through it later.

No other wall foundations to this room were found during the watching brief. The small bricks ('*spicae*') forming the herringbone pattern were set into *opus signinum* mortar on top of concrete (see Appendix B). Some parts of the floor had an almost smooth surface and some of the bricks were blackened. Loose *spicae* of similar dimensions were found in the 2001 evaluation and are presumed to come from the same floor originally but, having been re-used, were thus found in demolition debris inside the *opus signinum* structure (Orr 2001).

- 6.3.5** The building with the wall foundation (F19 and F20) and the herringbone floor (F14, F15, F27) was demolished to make way for a new building later on in the Roman period. The evidence for this was a wall (F45) which had been robbed out. The robber-trench was recorded in three of the ground-beam trenches (F16, F17, F29; Figs 13-15). It lay almost parallel with the line of the earlier wall and cut through the herringbone floor (F14, F15) and the layers that had accumulated over it (L15, L19, L24, L25, L31). A tessellated floor had been laid inside this room (to the north-east of wall F45) and this was recorded in two trenches (F13 and F26; Fig 14). This floor was 350-400mm above the herringbone floor and incorporated a base of *opus signinum* (L17, L20, L21) and mortar (L18, L22). F26 was only seen in section and appeared to have slumped. F13, although incomplete, was seen in plan and consisted of an outer border of cream *tesserae* surrounding red tile *tesserae*. F13 was found over the line of the robber-trench F17 and so is interpreted as being an entrance way, or alternatively it may have slumped when the wall was robbed out and the floor was consequently undermined.

A lack of dating evidence for the robbing of the later Roman wall makes it difficult to date this event to the later Roman or early medieval period.

- 6.3.6** The robbed-out Roman wall was sealed by several occupation layers of uncertain date. A clay floor (L14) and burnt layers representing a hearth (F23 and L13) were recorded in one of the trenches. This occupation material may be medieval. These deposits are overlain by more burning and occupation debris (F25, L12 and L29; Figs 13 and 14). Modern pits (F18, F28, F22, F24) also cut through the Roman tessellated floors and the robbed wall. All the features and deposits were covered by modern orange sand (L10) and some by rubble (L28).

- 6.3.7** At the northern end of Block 1, part of a mosaic floor with a black and white border was seen in section (F30; Fig 9 and Plate 2). This looked very similar to F12 (the mosaic floor excavated in the 2001 evaluation) and was at the same level, so it is likely to be contemporary. However, it cannot be part of the same mosaic floor

because the northern and western edges of F12, as defined by the border, were exposed during the 2001 evaluation. Unfortunately F30 had been cut into by the machine. Two large two chunks of mosaic (find nos 13 and 15) from this trench were found on the spoil heap. The *opus signinum* base attached to find no 15 was 170mm thick. The machine had left most of the *opus signinum* base in place (L32) and it extended half way across the bottom of the trench. Large pieces of Roman tile had been placed at the base. From the small area exposed, the design of the mosaic could be seen to consist of black and white bands which may have formed the border to a more ornate, coloured central pattern. This suggestion is supported by one of the chunks of the mosaic found on the spoil heap (find no 13; Fig 10) which had a design of four colours, ie black, white, grey and red.

- 6.3.8** At the beginning of April 2002, the ground-beams for Block 2 (Trenches i-q) on the North Station Road frontage were dug out. Part of a red tessellated pavement (F31; Fig 12) was found which may be related to the mosaic floor found during the 2001 evaluation (F12) as it was at the same level and nearby. It is likely to be the continuation of the patching that was observed on F12.
- 6.3.9** A 1.5m length of black and white mosaic floor (F37; Figs 11-12 and Plate 3) was exposed in the middle of Block 2, in Trench m. The design of black and white opposed triangles alternating with squares of black and white, surrounded by a double black border, was exactly the same as that found on F12 last year. Pile-cap F39 may have been driven through the south-eastern end of the mosaic floor. The mosaic did not continue on the other side of the pile-cap but, judging by its double border, the edge of the room had been reached. Like F12, F37 had been patched using a Roman tile where the *tesserae* had worn away or subsided. The mosaic had slumped down slightly to the north but its highest point was at approximately the same level as F12. F37 must be part of the same mosaic floor as F12 which would mean that it covered a room of 4m width and unknown length. No trace of the mosaic was found in the interconnecting trenches k and p which was perhaps partly due to the digging of the manhole F41. Figures 5 and 12 show a conjectural square room based on the shape of Roman rooms excavated in Middleborough (Crummy 1984).

Ground-beams q and k cut through the edges of mosaic floor F12. Where ground-beam Trench k caught F12, it was given a feature number (F36; Fig 17).

- 6.3.10** An area of demolition debris from a Roman building (F32) was recorded in Trench l which consisted of a spread of painted wall-plaster and septaria starting at 800mm below ground-level. The wall-plaster included some decorated pieces and a concave piece from some type of structural recess (Appendix D).
- 6.3.11** A substantial robbed-out Roman wall, over 1m wide, was seen in two of the ground-beam trenches in the south-western corner of Block 2 (F33 and F40; Figs 16 and 18). This feature consisted of Roman tile, mortar, *opus signinum* and septaria and extended from 700mm below ground-level to beyond the bottom of the trenches. This robbed-out wall ran in a more westerly direction than the two wall foundations recorded in Block 1 and so cannot be part of the same building.

Most of the Roman features in Block 2 were overlaid by a thick layer of dark grey/brown silty loam (L33) containing loose *opus signinum*, septaria and Roman tile. This is interpreted as being a disturbed Roman or modern layer and sits directly underneath the modern sand (L10).

#### **6.4 Excavation of services**

In April and May 2002, the drain-trenches and manholes were excavated. No archaeological features were observed in any of the trenches and the only find was an unstratified sherd of 17th- to 18th-century pottery (find no 29).

## 7 Site data

**Table 1: List of contexts.**

Block	Feature or layer no	Trench no	Description	Date
1	F13	Trench h	Part of a tessellated pavement - relates to wall F45 and F16/F29	later Roman
1	F14	Trench a	Brick herringbone-pattern floor, continuation of F15 and F27 - relates to wall foundation F19	earlier Roman
1	F15	Trench b	Brick herringbone-pattern floor, continuation of F14 and F27 - relates to wall foundation F20	earlier Roman
1	F16	Trench h	Robbing of wall F45, continuation of F17 - disturbed by modern features, same as F29	later Roman or medieval robbing
1	F17	Trench b	Robbing of wall F45, continuation of F16/F29	later Roman or medieval robbing
1	F18	Trench h	Brick rubble - foundations cutting F13 and F16	modern
1	F19	Trench a	Wall foundation, continuation of F20 - relates to F15	earlier Roman wall, demolished in later Roman period
1	F20	Trench g	Wall foundation, continuation of F19 - relates to F14 and F15	earlier Roman wall, demolished in later Roman period
1	F21	Trench g	Pile-cap cutting F15 and F20	21st century
1	F22	Trench b	Small cut feature, cuts L12, L14, L20 and L28 and F17 and F23	modern
1	F23	Trench b	Hearth, reddish and pale grey charcoal-stained clay - probably relates to clay floor L14	post-Roman
1	F24	Trench a	Pit filled with brick rubble, partially truncates F13	modern
1	F25	Trench b	Pit filled with burnt layers; cuts though F17 - upper fill A: mottled red brown, light brown and dark brown clay loam with occasional small stones and common charcoal, with a seam of charcoal at the bottom lower fill B: light brown clay loam slightly mottled with reddish brown clay loam with occasional charcoal	post-Roman
1	F26	Trench g	Tessellated floor, seen in section only - relates to F45 and F17	later Roman
1	F27	Trench d	Brick herringbone-pattern floor, continuation of F14 and F15	earlier Roman
1	F28	Trench h	Pit, cuts F29	modern
1	F29	Trench h	Robbed-out wall, continuation of F17, same as F16	post-Roman
1	F30	Trench e	Mosaic floor with four colours and black and white border; seen in section only	Roman
2	F31	Trench k	Red tile tessellated pavement	Roman
2	F32	Trench l	Demolition debris consisting of painted wall-plaster, <i>opus signinum</i> plaster plus septaria	later Roman

2	F33	Trench n	Robbed-out wall material consisting of mortar, tile, <i>opus signinum</i> and septaria; continuation of F40	Roman
2	F34	Trench k	Concrete pile-cap, cuts F31	21st century
2	F35	Trench n	Concrete pile-cap, cuts F33	21st century
2	F36	Trench k	Black and white mosaic floor, seen in section only; edge of F12 (found during 2001 evaluation)	Roman
2	F37	Trench m	Black and white mosaic, slightly slumped: continuation of F12 and F36	Roman
2	F38	Trenches m and k	Fill of 2001 evaluation trench - mixture of modern orange sand (L10) and grey brown silty loam (L33) plus hazard tape - above mosaic F36 and F37	21st century
2	F39	Trench m	Concrete pile-cap, possibly truncates F37	21st century
2	F40	Trench o	Robbed-out wall material consisting of mortar, <i>opus signinum</i> and Roman tile; continuation of F33	Roman
2	F41	Trench p	Brick manhole: the base is at the same level as mosaic F37 and so may have destroyed it	modern
3	F42	Trench r	<i>Opus signinum</i> layer covered by a white/ yellowish mortar layer – possible base for a mosaic floor	Roman
3	F43	Trench r	Robber-trench next to F42 containing light-mid brown silty loam with abundant flecks of <i>opus signinum</i> , mortar and peg-tile	medieval
1	F44	Trench a	Pile-cap cutting F19	21st century
1	F45	Trenches b and g	Roman wall, relating to herringbone floor F14 and F15, later robbed out (F16/F29 and F17)	later Roman
contractors' test-trenches	L1	T5 (new foundation to Victoria Inn)	Concrete, and brick rubble – floor-base for Victoria Inn	modern
contractors' test-trenches	L2	T1-T4 and T5 (new foundation to Victoria Inn)	Mixed grey/brown sandy loam with brick and mortar	modern
contractors' test-trenches	L3	T5 (new foundation to Victoria Inn)	Disturbed Roman layer consisting of grey/brown sandy loam with <i>opus signinum</i> chunks, yellow mortar and Roman brick	Roman
contractors' test-trenches	L4	T1, T3, T4	Stony orange/brown clay natural	Glacial period
3	L5	Trench r	Brick and concrete rubble, probably deposited during current building work	21st century
3	L6	Trench r	Layer of asphalt	modern
3	L7	Trench r	Dark brown silty loam sealing F43	undated
1 and 2	L10	Trenches a-q	Orange sand – base for car park	modern
1	L11	Trench b	Thin deposit of white wall-plaster	post-Roman
1	L12	Trench b	Dark grey brown sandy silt deposit overlying a dark black layer - same as L29	post-Roman
1	L13	Trench b	Dark blackish burnt layer, likely occupation burning	post-Roman
1	L14	Trench b	Clay floor, different clays with charcoal staining - probably relates to hearth F23	post-Roman

1	L15	Trench a	Dark reddish brown sandy/clayey deposit directly over the herringbone floor F14 and F15 - looks similar to L31	Roman
1	L16	Trench a	<i>Opus signinum</i> base to herringbone floor F14	earlier Roman
1	L17	Trench a	<i>Opus signinum</i> base to tessellated pavement F13	later Roman
1	L18	Trench a	Mortar base for F13, containing septaria	later Roman
1	L19	Trench a	Built-up layer below L18	Roman
1	L20	Trench g	White mortar base to tessellated floor F26, 5-10mm thick	later Roman
1	L21	Trench g	<i>Opus signinum</i> base to tessellated floor F26	later Roman
1	L22	Trench g	Brown mortar base for floor F26	later Roman
1	L23	Trench a	Grey brown sandy loam deposit with common small stones, sealing floor F26 and robber-trench F17; mixed with lumps of mortar from floor and wall, occasional Roman tile and <i>opus signinum</i> ; contains medieval pot sherd	medieval
1	L24	Trench g	Mixed orange brown/dark yellow brown loamy sand with abundant small stones and occasional septaria pieces; make-up layer for floor F26	Roman
1	L25	Trench g	Grey/brown silt, charcoally, with <i>opus signinum</i> , mortar flecks and wall-plaster; make-up layer for floor F26, sealing F20 and F15	Roman
1	L26	Trench g	Dark yellow brown/greenish brown silty clay with abundant charcoal flecks and occasional oyster and <i>opus signinum</i> flecks; make-up layer for floor F26, sealing F20 and F15	Roman
1	L27	Trench g	White mortar base to herringbone floor F15	earlier Roman
1	L28	Trench b	Rubble layer under L10	modern
1	L29	Trenches b and g	Dark grey/brown silty loam with rare small stones and common charcoal flecks, burnt staining - occupation layer, same as L12	post-Roman
1	L30	Trenches b and g	Light yellow brown clay lens with dark grey brown, almost black loam	post-Roman
1	L31	Trench b	Red/brown sandy deposit sealing F15 - make-up layer, looks similar to L15	Roman
1	L32	Trench e	Thick <i>opus signinum</i> base to mosaic floor F30; whole pieces of tile at the bottom; at least 140mm thick	Roman
2	L33	Trenches k, o, m, n	Dark grey/brown silty loam overlying Roman features, contains abundant loose <i>opus signinum</i> chunks, mortar, septaria and Roman tile, 1 sherd of modern flower pot and 1 piece of peg-tile	Roman with modern disturbance
1	L34	Trench e	Grey brown loam with mortar, seals F30	Roman with modern disturbance
1	L35	Trench b	Dark yellowish brown/slightly green sandy loam with lenses of very dark grey brown	post-Roman or modern

**Table 2: List of all finds by context.**

Block	Find no	Small find no	Context	Description	Weight in g	Date	D
1	1		Trench a, F13	<i>Tesserae</i>	80	Roman	
1	2		Trench a, F14	4 loose bricks ( <i>spicae</i> ) from herringbone floor, 1 with <i>opus signinum</i> attached	1130	Roman	
1	3		Trenches a and h, L10, above F13	<i>Tesserae</i>	95	Roman	
1	3		Trenches a and h, L10, above F13	Mortar from a roof	700	Roman	
1	4		Trench a, F24	Brick lump	125	modern	Y
1	5	-	no no 5	-	-	-	
1	6	5	Trench g, L25	Fragment of a lamp	5	Roman	
1	7		Trench g, F21, from area smashed by pile-cap F21	2 whole bricks ( <i>spicae</i> ) - with <i>opus signinum</i> attached - and 1 fragment from herringbone floor	1150	Roman	
1	8		Trench g, L23	1 pot sherd	30	medieval	
1	9		Trench g, L26	1 sherd of grey ware pottery	5	Roman	
1	10	-	no no 10	-	-	-	
1	11		Trenches a and h, U/S by F13	1 pot sherd	8	Roman	
1	12		Trench e, U/S	1 sherd of pot	90	Roman	
1	13	1	Trench e, U/S, probably part of F30 and L32	Block of mosaic F30 with four-colour design	6000	Roman	
2	14		Trench k, U/S	Painted <i>opus signinum</i> lump	6500	Roman	
2	15	2	Block 1, Trench e, U/S, probably part of F30 and L32	Block of black and white mosaic	too large to weigh	Roman	
2	16		Trench j, L33	5 pieces of <i>tegula</i> , 1 with <i>opus signinum</i> attached, 1 piece of combed flue tile and 1 piece of brick with mortar	2650	Roman	
2	17		U/S, probably L33	<i>Imbrex</i> with mortar	75	Roman	
2	17		U/S, probably L33	3 fragments of pottery	205	Roman	
2	17		U/S, probably L33	Animal bone	55	undated	

2	18		U/S, probably trench l	<i>Opus signinum</i> chunk	900	Roman	
2	18		U/S, probably Trench l	Painted wall-plaster on <i>opus signinum</i> plaster base	5000	Roman	
2	19		Trench l, F32	1 sherd of pot	22	Roman	
2	19		Trench l, F32	Piece of sewer-pipe, probably out of context	110	modern	Y
2	19		Trench l, F32	<i>Tesserae</i>	25	Roman	
2	19		Trench l, F32	Painted wall-plaster	5400	Roman	
2	20		U/S	8 pieces of <i>tegula</i> and one piece of brick with mortar	5500	Roman	
2	21		Block 1, Trench e, F30	<i>Tesserae</i> from mosaic floor F30 (F12)	420	Roman	
2	22		Trench k, L33, by F31	Painted wall-plaster	160	Roman	
2	22		Trench k, L33, by F31	1 brick lump	150	Roman	Y
2	23		Trench m, L33, sealing F37	Animal bone	100	undated	
2	23		Trench m, L33, sealing F37	Peg-tile	60	modern	Y
2	23		Trench m, L33, sealing F37	Modern flowerpot	15	modern	Y
2	23		Trench m, L33, sealing F37	Combed flue tile	55	Roman	
2	24		Trench k, F36 (F12)	Black and white <i>tesserae</i> from F12 mosaic floor	65	Roman	
2	25	3	Trench q, F36 (F12)	Part of black and white mosaic floor F12	1100	Roman	
2	26		Blocks 1 and 2, Trench q, F38	Painted wall-plaster on <i>opus signinum</i> base	825	Roman	
2	27	4	Block 1, Trenches a and h, F13	Chunk of tessellated pavement F13	3500	Roman	
service- trenches and piling	28		U/S from piling	1 piece of flowerpot	10	modern	Y
service- trenches and piling	29		U/S from service- trench	1 piece of Metropolitan slipware	85	post- medieval	

U/S = unstratified, D = discarded

## 8 Discussion

### 8.1 Introduction

The 2002 watching brief, together with the 2001 evaluation, revealed parts of a high-status Roman residence that had been demolished and replaced by a larger Roman building on the site. The evidence consisted of a foundation and robbed-out walls, and parts of two mosaic floors as well as a tessellated pavement and herringbone floors. The sparsity of stratified pottery made dating difficult; however, the stratigraphy and the typology of the mosaic and other floors make it possible to divide the site into two or possibly three periods.

#### 8.1.1 Period 1

The wall foundation F19/F20 with its herringbone floor F14/F15/F27 belongs to an early Roman building. These three areas of herringbone floor were following the same alignment and were at the same height. Further excavation would have shown definitely whether they were part of the same floor. If they were, then the floor covered an area of at least 5.5m x 6.5m. The *opus signinum* structure F6 from the 2001 evaluation may have been a sunken feature in this room or it may belong to a later Roman phase.

The only other *in situ* herringbone floor (*opus spicatum*) known in Colchester was found during excavations on North Hill (Dunnett 1966, 39 & 40). Loose *spicae* have been found during excavations at Culver Street but the bricks were much shorter, narrower and deeper than the *spicae* from this watching brief. These types of floors are likely to have been in demand in the 2nd century or later when substantial floors were common (Crummy 1992c, 256-7). To mix different-coloured bricks in flooring was common in the Roman period (Brodrigg 1987, 52).

The watching brief revealed more of a black and white mosaic floor F12/F37 which had been discovered during the 2001 evaluation and dates probably to the later 1st or early 2nd century. This mosaic cannot be contemporary with the later Roman wall F45 because it is much lower down than the tessellated pavements F13 and F26. The mosaic appears to be following the same alignment as Roman wall foundation F19/F20 so might be contemporary to it and the herringbone floors, ie belonging to the earlier Roman phase. A small part of another mosaic with four colours and a black and white border (F30) was exposed which is possibly contemporary with F12/F37, although coloured mosaics are usually dated later in the Roman period than black and white mosaics (Philip Crummy pers comm). There is between 30mm and 200mm difference in height between the herringbone floors and mosaic floors, but this may be due to slumping or to slight inaccuracies in taking levels.

#### 8.1.2 Period 2

The Roman wall F45 (which was subject to later robbing: F16/F17/F29) belongs to a later Roman building with tessellated pavements F13 and F26. This building may date to the later 3rd century. We know from excavations at Middleborough that settlement in this area contracted in the 3rd century and moved back into the town wall (Brooks & Crummy 1984, 155). The bricks (*spicae*) from the herringbone floor were probably re-used in the walls of this later Roman building. The evidence for this is the re-used *spicae* which were found within the demolition debris inside the *opus signinum* structure during the 2001 evaluation. This would suggest that the *opus signinum* structure was in use during this second building phase; however, the top of it is lower than the surface of the tessellated floors. The *opus signinum* structure was filled in with debris from the building (including painted wall-plaster) when it was demolished.

The width of the robber-trench F16/F17/F29 (900mm-1m wide) suggests that this later Roman building was not a private residence but some kind of public building or monumental structure. It may be the same building as that found at the old Poultry Market site in 1998 (Crossan 1998).

This re-use of building materials is also seen in the roof-tile found during the watching brief. Examples dating from the early 2nd century were found with evidence of mortar on the broken edges (see Appendix B).

The width (1.3m) of robbed-out wall F40/F33 in the south-west corner of Block 2 makes it also likely to have been part of a large public building. However, it follows a more westerly alignment than robbed-out wall F16/F17/F29, so is unlikely to be part of the same public building as described above. Without dating evidence it is not clear whether these two buildings are of the same period.

### 8.3 Other evidence

No other wall foundations for interconnecting rooms were observed during the watching brief except for those already described. It may be that they have been too thoroughly robbed-out in the past or disturbed in recent times to trace. Alternatively the ground-beam trench excavations may have missed them.

### 8.4 Conclusions

To conclude, the 2002 watching brief produced more evidence of a high status, early Roman townhouse which had been recorded during the 2001 evaluation. This building was located in a suburb outside the Roman town wall, situated alongside the Roman road leading out of the north gate of the walled town. This house featured a brick herringbone floor. The black and white mosaic floor and another, coloured mosaic floor found during the 2002 investigation are also thought to have formed part of this residence.

The building was then demolished and one or probably two larger buildings were constructed on the site. One of these contained tessellated floors and both buildings would have had internal painted walls. One of these later Roman buildings may be part of the building found to the south at the old Poultry Yard site. These later buildings are likely to have had a public rather than a domestic function due to the size of their foundations. It is not clear if the structures from either period relate to the mosaic and Roman buildings found in previous centuries. It would appear that the buildings had been demolished by the 4th century.

## 9 Archive deposition

A copy of this report plus the finds, site notes and digital photographs on disk will be deposited permanently with Colchester Museums under accession code 2002.87.

## 10 Acknowledgements

The Colchester Archaeological Trust is grateful to the following for their help and co-operation:

Tendring Construction Ltd for funding the work  
Martin Winter, Archaeological Officer for Colchester Borough Council

## 11 Glossary

<i>imbrex</i>	curved Roman roof-tile used to keep two <i>tegulae</i> together
peg-tile	roof-tile used from the medieval period to the present day
<i>opus signinum</i>	pink-coloured Roman mortar made using crushed tile, often used as a base for floors
<i>opus spicatum</i>	Roman flooring made of small oblong bricks in a herringbone pattern
septaria	Roman building stone
<i>spicae</i>	individual oblong brick used in a herringbone pattern floor
<i>tegula</i>	Roman roof-tile with flanged edges
tessellated pavement	Roman floor made with plain <i>tesserae</i>
<i>tesserae</i>	individual clay or stone cubes that make up a tessellated pavement or a mosaic floor

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Kate Orr, August 2002

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Date: *02.09.02*

## 13 Appendices

### Appendix A: Report on the Roman pottery

pottery identified by Stephen Benfield of CAT

Eight sherds of Roman pottery were found, only three of which came from stratified contexts. As in the 2001 evaluation, the small amount of Roman pottery is not very informative. What was found spans the 1st to the 4th centuries and mainly consists of grey ware and black-burnished ware vessels. One fragment of an oil lamp was found (see Appendix E). Fabrics after Symonds and Wade 1999.

**Table 3: List of Roman pottery by context.**

Find no	Context	Description	Date	Weight in g
6 (small find no 5)	L25, Trench g	Fragment of a lamp	Roman, 1st century AD	5
9	L26, Trench g	Rim of a grey ware jar	1st/2nd century AD?	5
11	U/S by F13, Trench a or h	1 sherd of black-burnished ware type 1 pottery	early 2nd century to end of the Roman period	8
12	U/S Trench e	Sherd of a large storage jar	Roman	90
17	U/S spoil heap from Block 2, probably from L33	Part of a flanged bowl, black-burnished type, Cam 305	mid to late 3rd-4th century AD	90
17	U/S spoil heap from Block 2, probably from L33	Small sherd of black-burnished ware type 1 pottery	early 2nd century to the end of the Roman period	15
17	U/S spoil heap from Block 2, probably from L33	Grey ware sherd	Roman	100
19	F32, Trench l	Shelly ware rim	late 4th century AD	22

### Appendix B: Report on the Roman ceramic building material

identified by Ernest Black (independent brick and tile specialist)

The assemblage includes two pieces of combed tile (find nos 16 and 23) from a box flue heating system, with mortar traces. These tiles probably date originally from the 2nd century AD, but they both come from L33 which also contained peg-tile and modern flowerpot so they are in a residual context.

There were a number of *tegula* pieces, some with thick bases and a groove at the junction of the base and the flange indicating a probable early 2nd-century date. Others have thin bases and a lack of groove, indicating a later 2nd-century or later date. All the earlier tile showed signs of re-use as a building material, ie mortar covering the broken edges, except for one piece (find no 20).

One sizeable piece of mortar retained a curved shape of an *imbrex* but it was curved on both sides as if it had been placed between two *imbrices* (find no 3).

One fragment of Roman tile from a later *tegula* base was incorporated into an *opus signinum* mixture which covers one broken edge. This is possibly the bottom of a floor base (find no 16).

Several fragments of brick (*spicae*) from a herringbone floor were recovered. Three had underlying flooring material adhering. The thickness of the flooring material is complete in

one case (F15, find no 7). and comprises a thin layer of *opus signinum* (10mm) above 74mm of white mortar incorporating small chips of stone and pebbles. The sizes of the *spicae* range from 135mm x 40mm x 40mm to 145mm x 50mm x 45mm, which is the same as those found during the 2001 evaluation. Brodrigg (1987) gives the average measurement as 144mm x 62mm x 26mm for *spicae*; the *spicae* from the 2002 watching brief are therefore fatter than average.

**Table 4: List of ceramic building materials by context.**

Find no	Context	Description	Date	Weight in g
1	Trench a, F13	<i>Tesserae</i>	Roman	80
2	Trench a, F14	4 whole herringbone bricks ( <i>spicae</i> ) inc 1 with <i>opus signinum</i> mortar attached	Roman	1130
3	Trenches a or h, L10, above F13	<i>Tesserae</i>	Roman	545
3	Trenches a or h, L10, above F13	Piece of mortar from a roof	Roman	700
4	Trench a, F24	Brick	Roman	125
7	Trench g, F15	2 whole <i>spicae</i> and 1 fragment, inc 1 with <i>opus signinum</i> attached	Roman	1115
16	Trench j, L33	1 piece of combed flue tile with mortar traces	2nd century?	320
16	Trench j, L33	1 piece of brick with mortar	Roman	525
16	Trench j, L33	5 pieces of <i>tegula</i> of different thicknesses, some re-used, inc 1 re-used, with <i>opus signinum</i> attached	later 2nd century AD onwards	1800
17	U/S spoil heap from Block 2, probably L33	<i>Imbrex</i> with mortar	Roman	75
19	Trench i, F32	<i>Tesserae</i>	Roman	25
20	U/S spoil heap, Block 2	1 piece of brick with mortar	Roman	1500
20	U/S spoil heap, Block 2	8 pieces of <i>tegula</i> of different thicknesses, some re-used	early 2nd century AD and later 2nd century AD onwards	4000
22	Trench k, L33, by F31	1 brick lump	Roman	150
23	Trench m, L33, sealing F37	1 piece of combed flue tile with mortar traces	2nd century?	55
23	Trench m, L33, sealing F37	Peg-tile	modern	60

## Appendix C: Report on the non-Roman pottery

pottery identified by Howard Brooks of CAT

The non-Roman pottery was sparse and was mainly unstratified. One piece of medieval pottery (find no 8) gives a medieval date for L23. Fabrics after Cotter 2000.

**Table 5: List of non-Roman pottery by context.**

Find no	Context	Description	Date	Weight in g
8	Block 1, Trench g, L23	1 sherd of Fabric 20	medieval, 13th century	30
19	Block 2, Trench l, F32	1 piece of sewer-pipe, probably out of context	modern	110
23	Block 2, Trench m, L33, sealing F37	1 sherd of flowerpot (Fabric 40)	modern	15
28	U/S from piling	1 sherd of flowerpot (Fabric 51b)	19th-20th centuries	10
29	U/S from service-trench	1 piece of Metropolitan slipware (Fabric 40a)	17th-18th centuries	85

## Appendix D: Report on the painted wall-plaster

26kg of painted wall-plaster was retrieved in total and mainly from a single context, ie F32 in Trench l, Block 2. This feature consisted of a spread of demolition debris from a Roman room comprising painted wall-plaster and septaria, starting at 800mm below ground-level and continuing to at least 1m in depth (the depth of the trench). The surface area of each piece was measured by colour and pattern and these are listed in Table 6. Plain blocks of colour were more common than patterned plaster, with red being the most common colour followed by green. Some pieces showed a white stripe which had divided the panels of colour on the wall. This is similar to the wall-plaster which was found during the 2001 evaluation. However, the painted wall-plaster which was found during the 2002 watching brief had mainly been painted onto a base of pinkish *opus signinum* plaster, whereas that found during the 2001 evaluation was mainly on a base of regular yellowish plaster.

It was hard to distinguish colours, the blue paint in particular being very badly weathered. Although there was obviously a pattern or representation, it was impossible to define what this was. One of the most interesting pieces was a large concave fragment painted a greeny blue colour. This must have been part of the apsed end of a building or a rounded recess for a window. A red-painted corner piece with a 120° angle was also retrieved.

*The wall-plaster was processed by Colin Austin of CAT.*

**Table 6: Categories of painted wall-plaster by context.**

<b>Finds no</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Context</b>	<b>U/S (probably F32) Block 2 probably Trench l</b>	<b>F38 Blocks 1 and 2 Trench q</b>	<b>U/S Block 2 Trench k</b>	<b>F32 Block 2 Trench l</b>
<b>Colour</b>				
<b>Red</b>	99cm <sup>2</sup> 1 piece on very pale <i>opus signinum</i> and 1 piece with a very coarse finish with large tile inclusions showing on surface		400cm <sup>2</sup> 1 large block	110cm <sup>2</sup> 5 pieces inc 1 corner piece with 120° angle
<b>Green</b>				237cm <sup>2</sup> 13 pieces
<b>Blue</b>	130cm <sup>2</sup> 4 pieces inc 1 with yellow and white pattern			
<b>Red and blue</b>	71cm <sup>2</sup> 1 piece with a white stripe			114cm <sup>2</sup> 2 pieces – 1 very weathered, the other with weathered blue overlapping red, with a white stripe dividing from green colour
<b>Greeny blue with a red and yellow pattern</b>	191cm <sup>2</sup> 2 pieces inc 1 large concave piece possibly from an apsed wall, on very pale <i>opus signinum</i> plaster			
<b>Green and red</b>	35cm <sup>2</sup> 1 piece	25cm <sup>2</sup> 1 piece		109cm <sup>2</sup> 5 pieces, inc 1 striped
<b>Yellow and red</b>	95cm <sup>2</sup> 1 piece with pattern with some green and a white stripe			
<b>No colour</b>		73cm <sup>2</sup> 2 pieces		
<b>Uncertain colour</b>				107cm <sup>2</sup> 3 pieces

## **Appendix E: Report on the Roman lamp fragment**

*by N Crummy (independent small finds specialist)*

The lamp sherd

(6) L25. A small fragment from the shoulder of a picture lamp of Lyon Ware, the upper edge split at the junction between the two halves of the mould, Lyon Ware picture lamps were introduced to Britain by the invading army in AD 43, and their distribution in Britain is almost exclusively confined to military sites, the exception being London. None have been found in primary contexts post-dating the Boudican destruction of AD 60/61 (Crummy 1983,77-8; Crummy 1992a, 162; 1992b, 217-8). The form of the lamp will have been either Loeschcke's Type I, with voluted angular nozzle, or Type IV, with voluted round nozzle (1919, Taf 1). These forms are Wheeler's Types 1 and 2 respectively (1930, 62-3).



**Plate 1** Tessellated pavement F13, herringbone floor F14 and wall foundation F19, looking north-east.



**Plate 2** Mosaic floor F30 and *opus signinum* base L32, looking north-east.



**Plate 3 Mosaic floor F37 from above.**

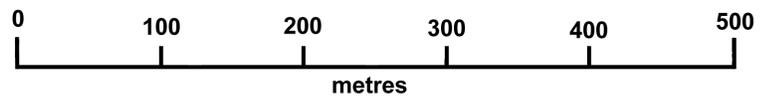
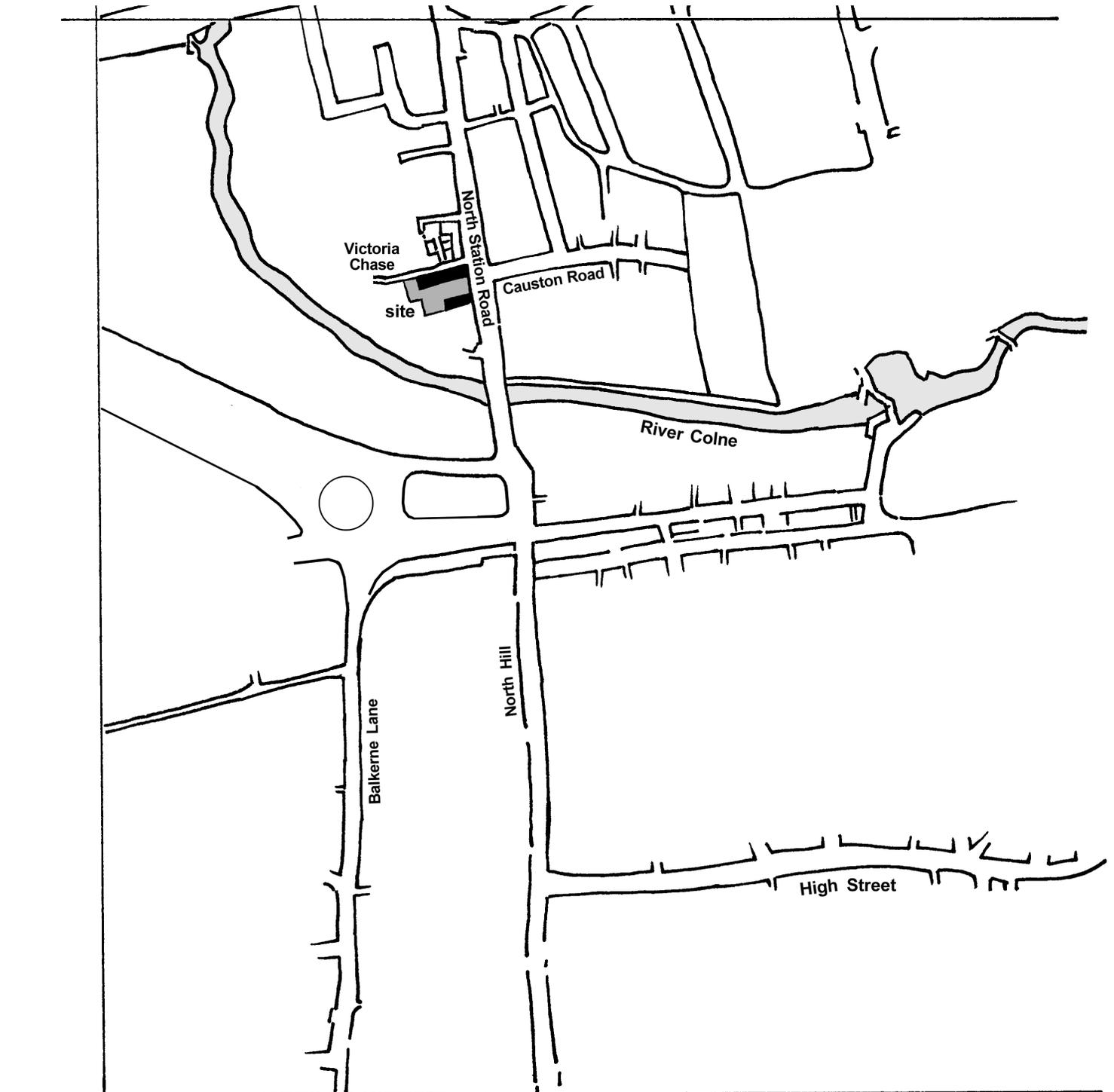
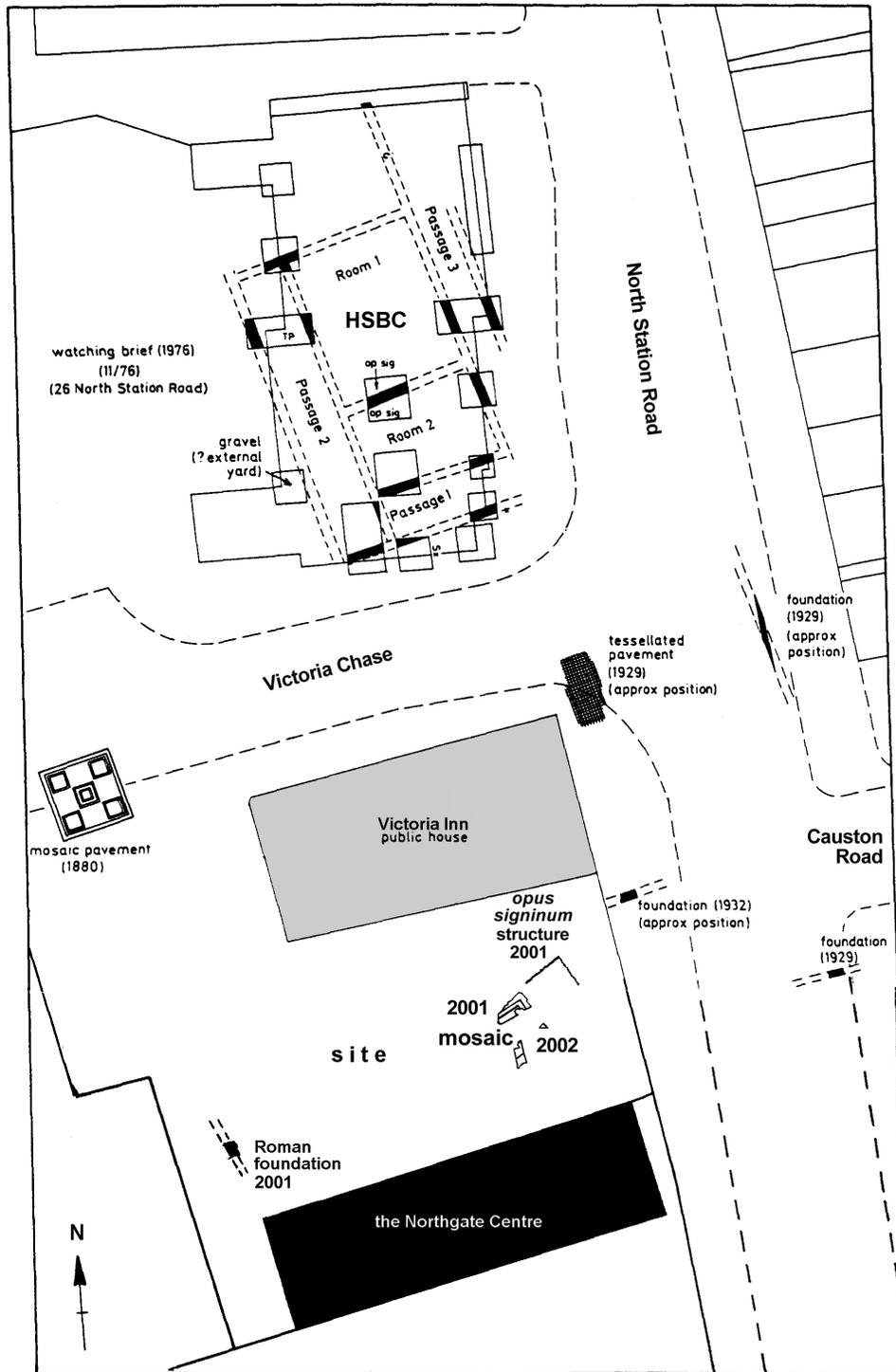


Fig 1 Site location, scale 1:5000 approx.



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Fig 2 Previously known archaeological sites tied in with archaeology from the 2001 evaluation and 2002 watching brief, scale 1:500. (Adapted from Crummy 1992, 347.)

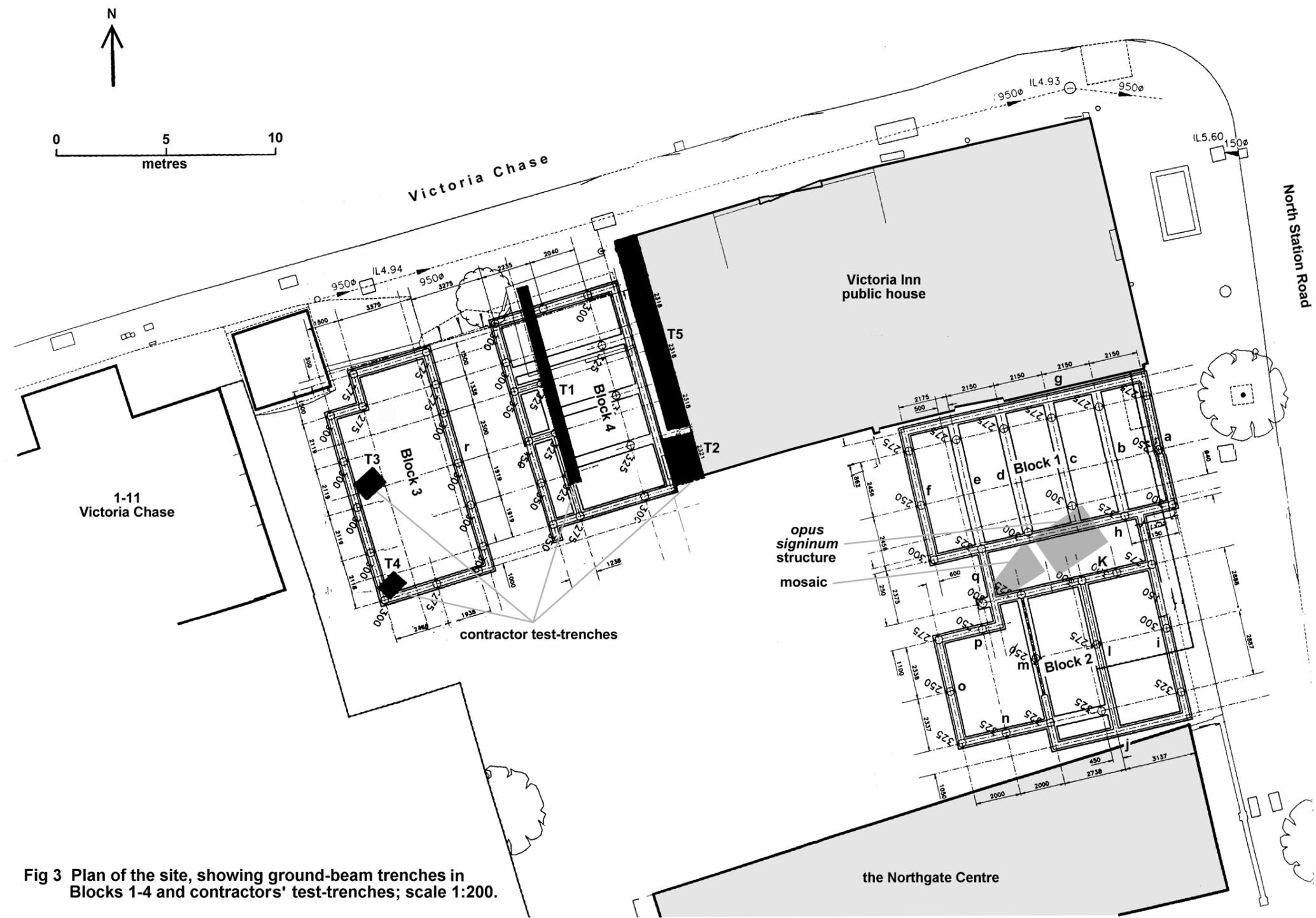


Fig 3 Plan of the site, showing ground-beam trenches in Blocks 1-4 and contractors' test-trenches; scale 1:200.

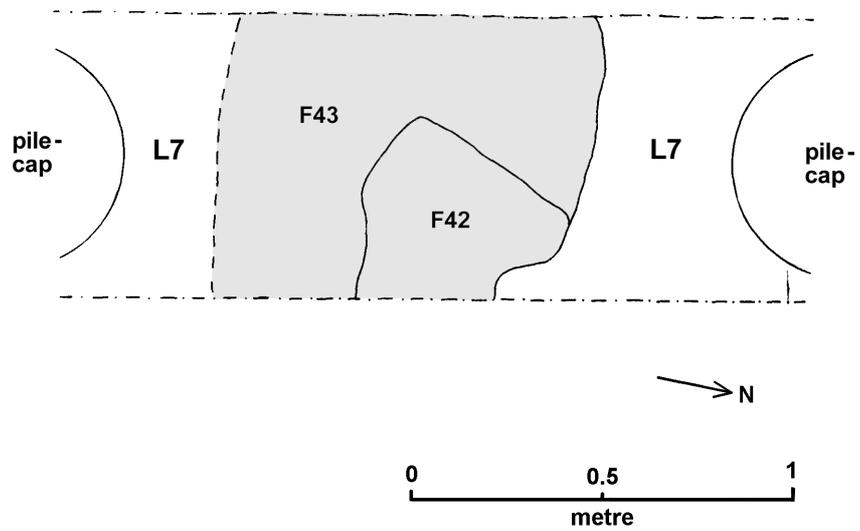
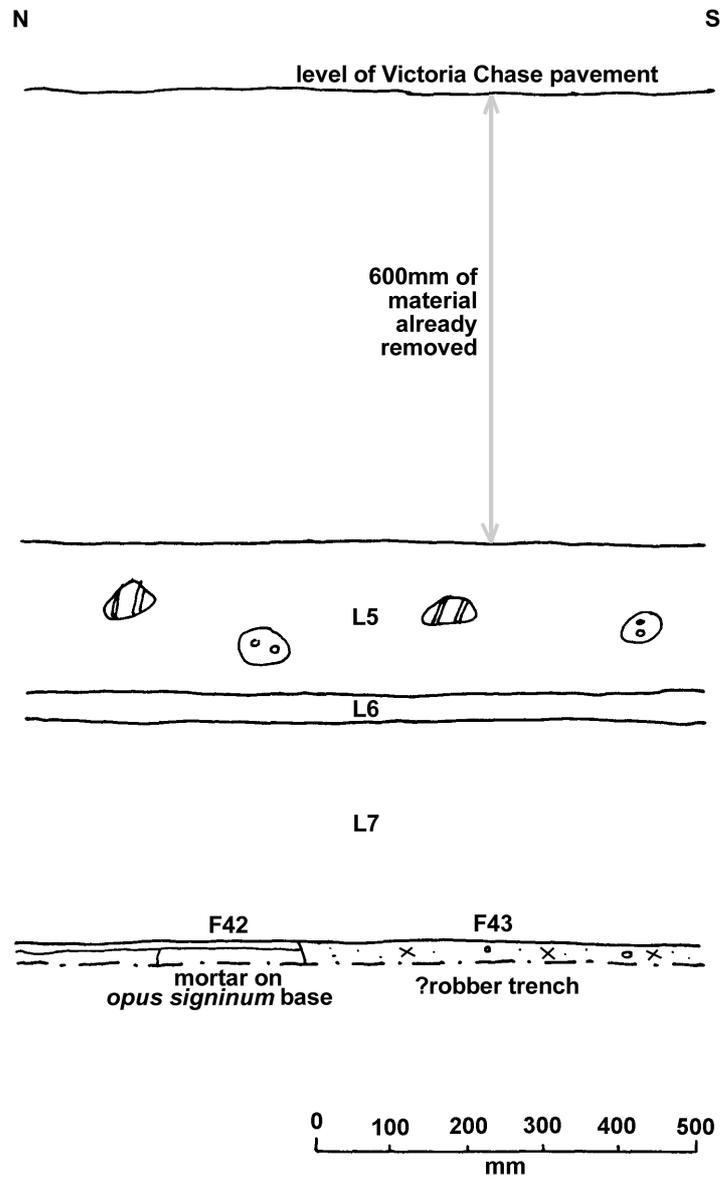


Fig 4 Block 3, Trench r: F42 -  
top, west-facing section, scale 1:10  
and bottom, plan of mortar base, scale 1:20.

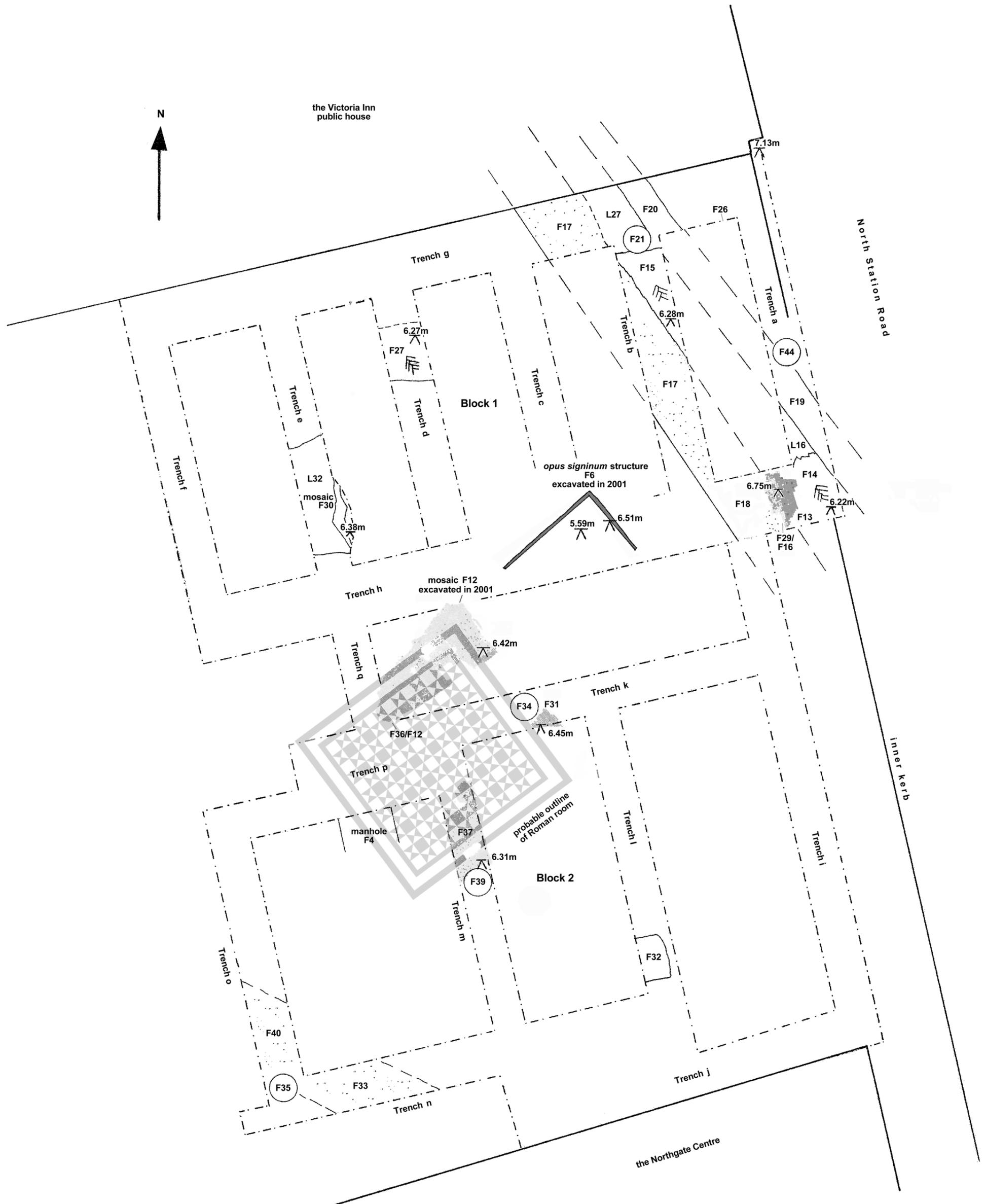
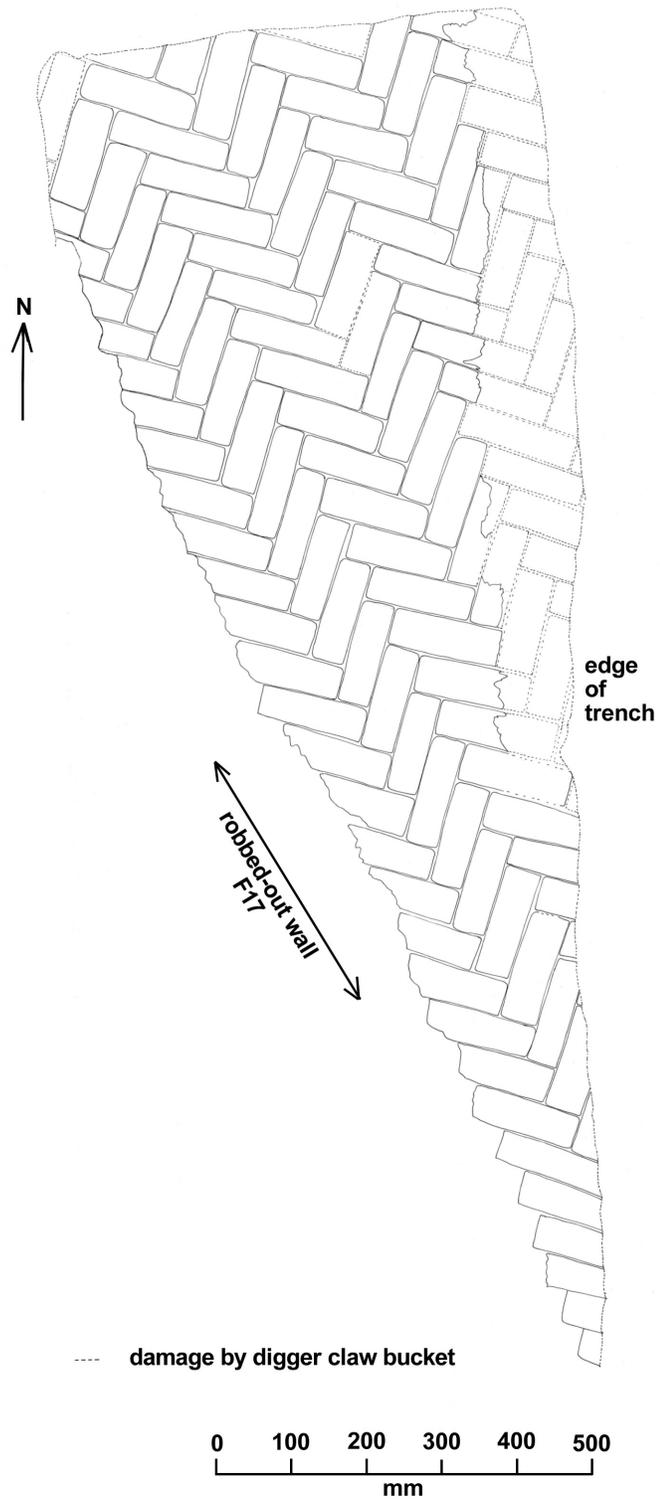


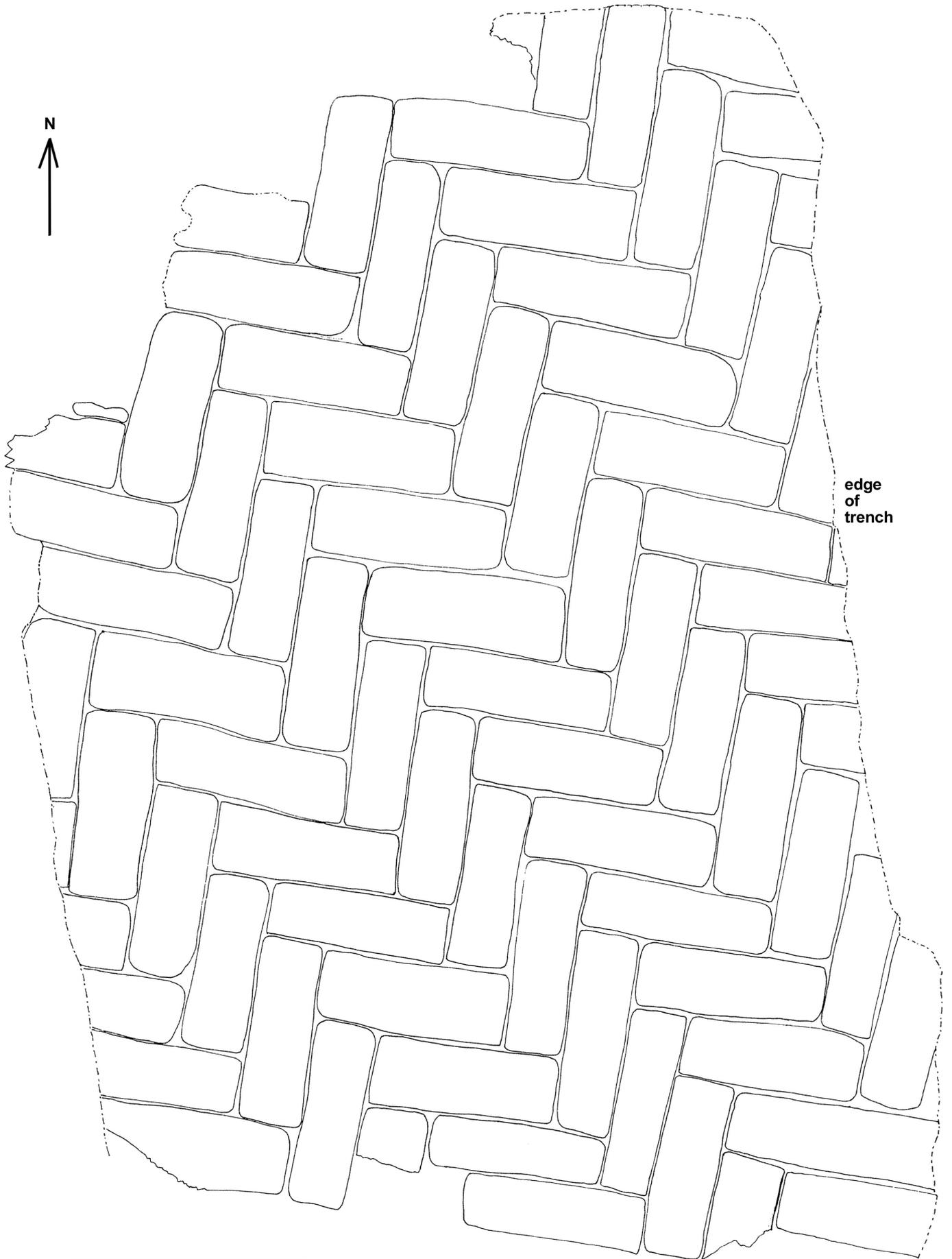
Fig 5 Plan of features in Blocks 1 and 2, showing probable outline of Roman room, scale 1:50.



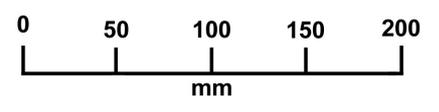
**Fig 6 Block 1, Trenches a and h:  
herringbone floor F14 - plan, scale 1:4.**



**Fig 7 Block 1, Trench b: herringbone floor F15 - plan, scale 1:10.**



**Fig 8 Block 1, Trench e:  
herringbone floor F27 -  
plan, scale 1:4.**



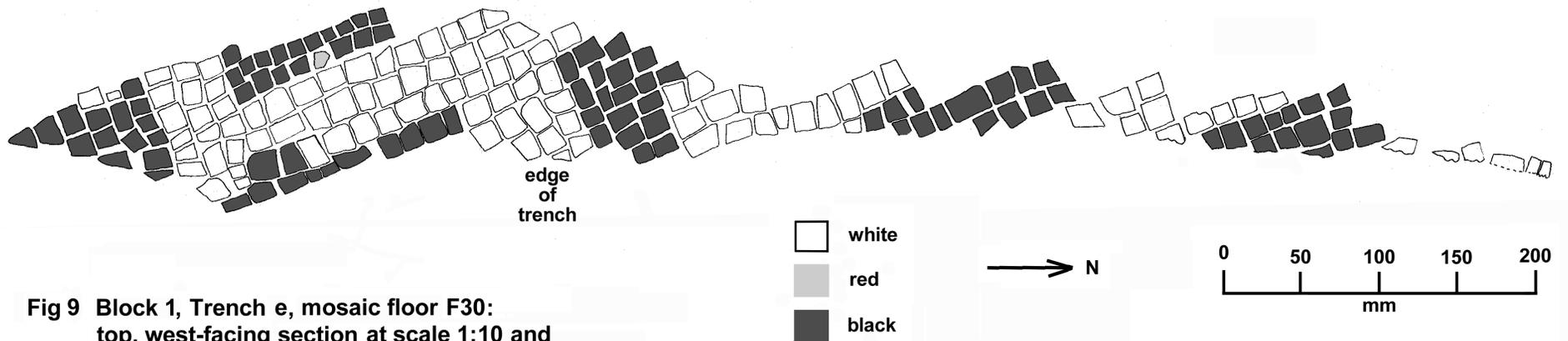
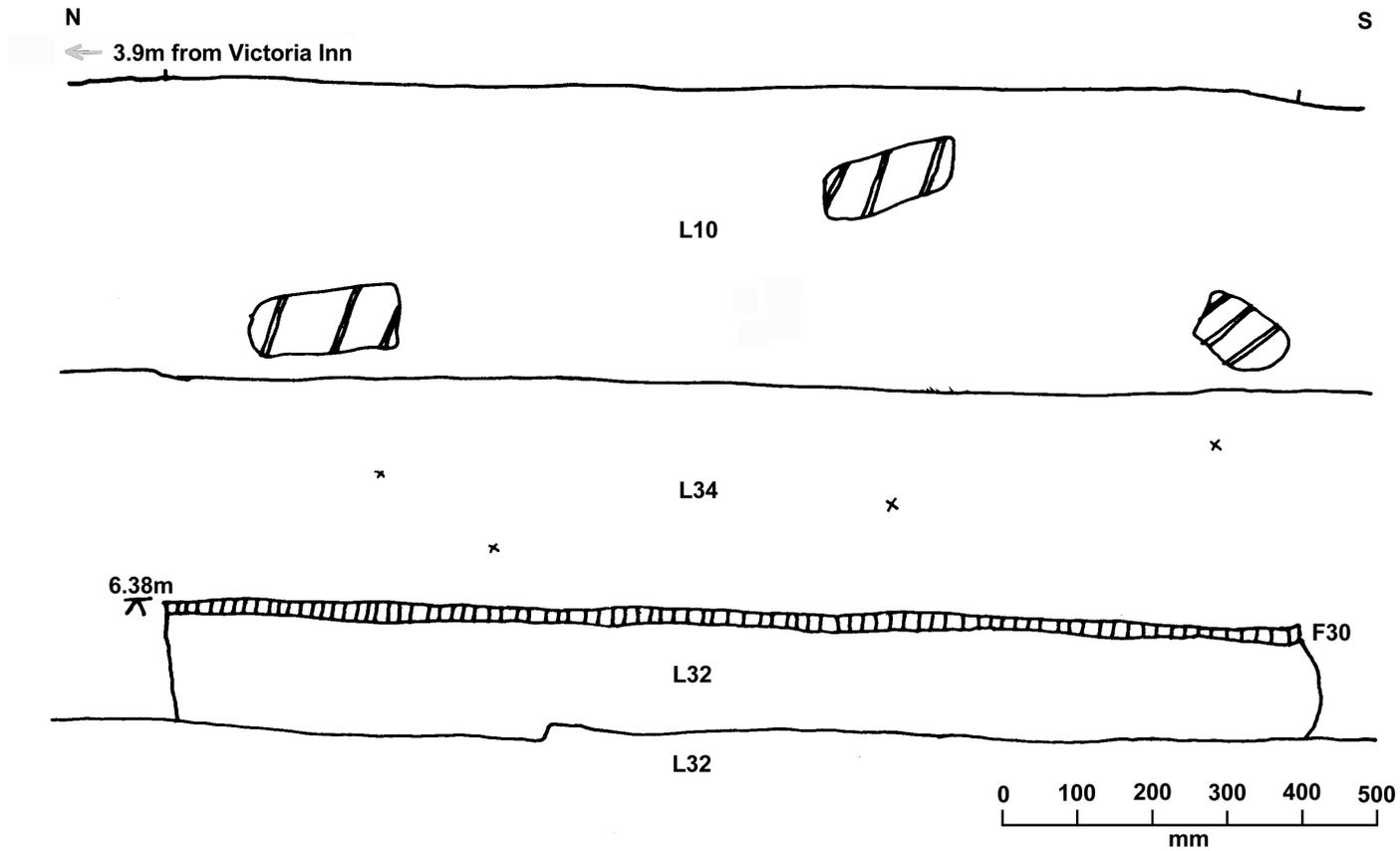
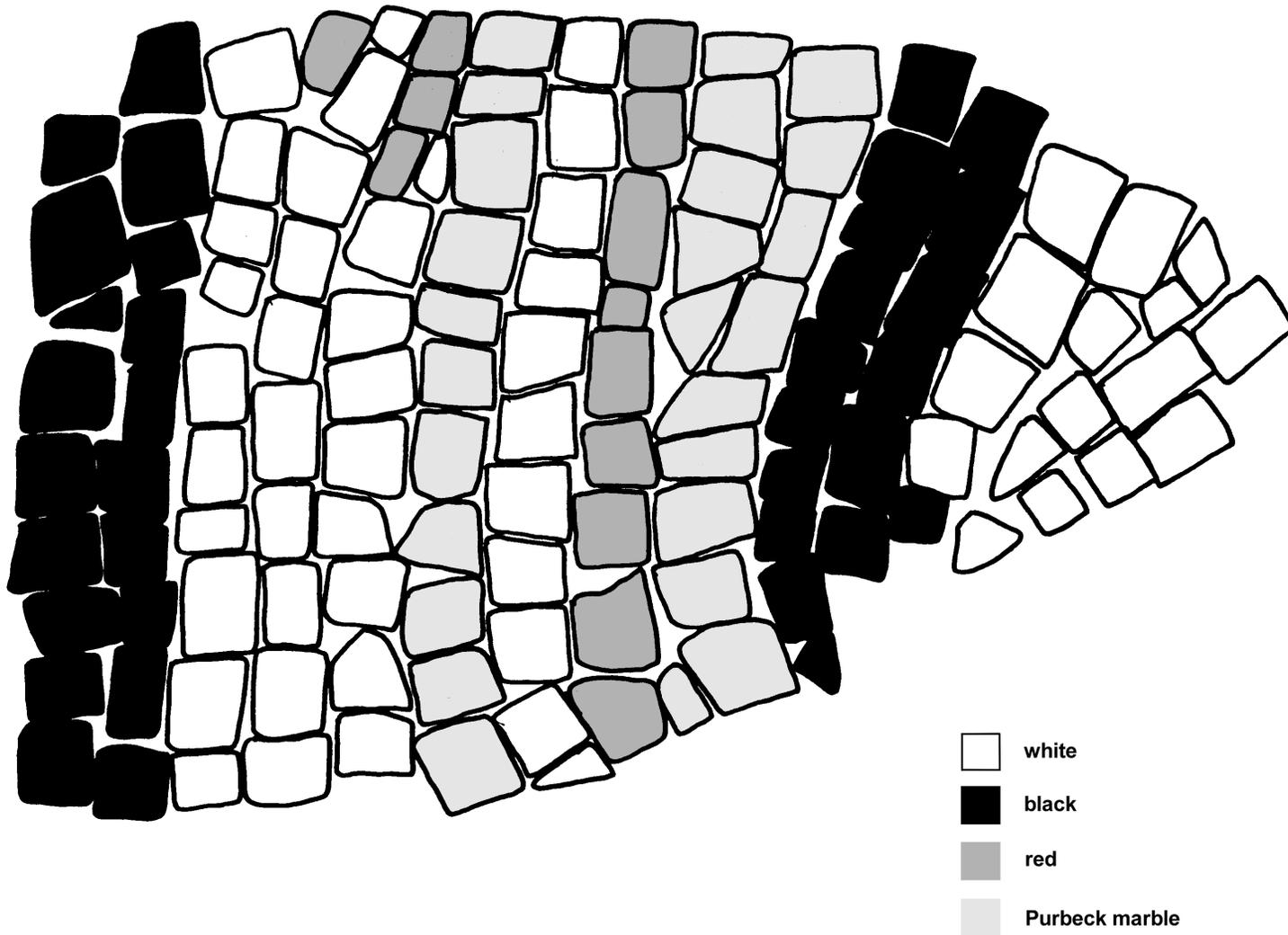


Fig 9 Block 1, Trench e, mosaic floor F30:  
top, west-facing section at scale 1:10 and  
bottom, plan at scale 1:4.



**Fig 10** Unstratified fragment of mosaic floor (find no 13)  
in Block 1, probably part of F30; scale 1:1.

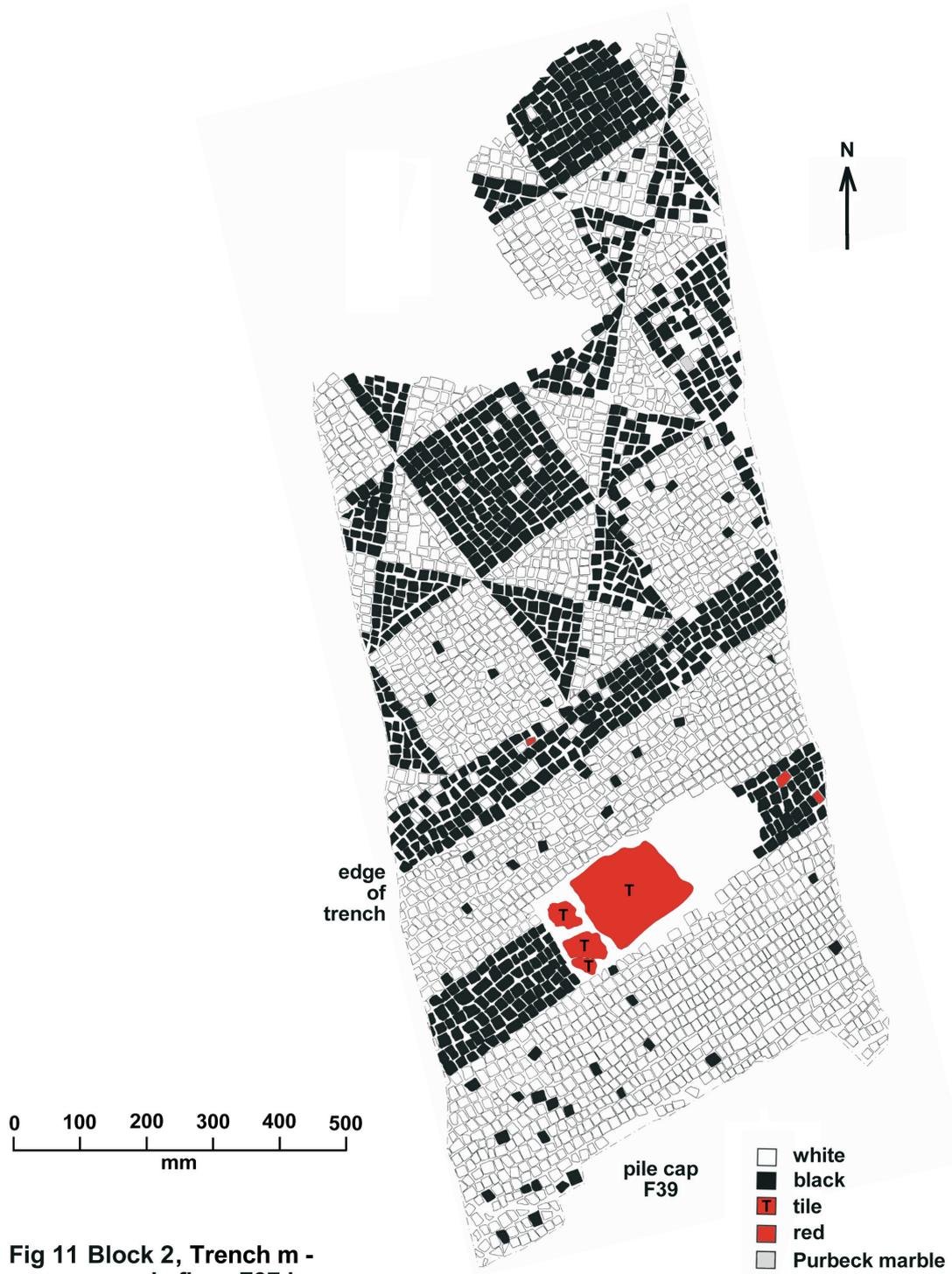


Fig 11 Block 2, Trench m -  
mosaic floor F37 in  
plan, scale 1:10.

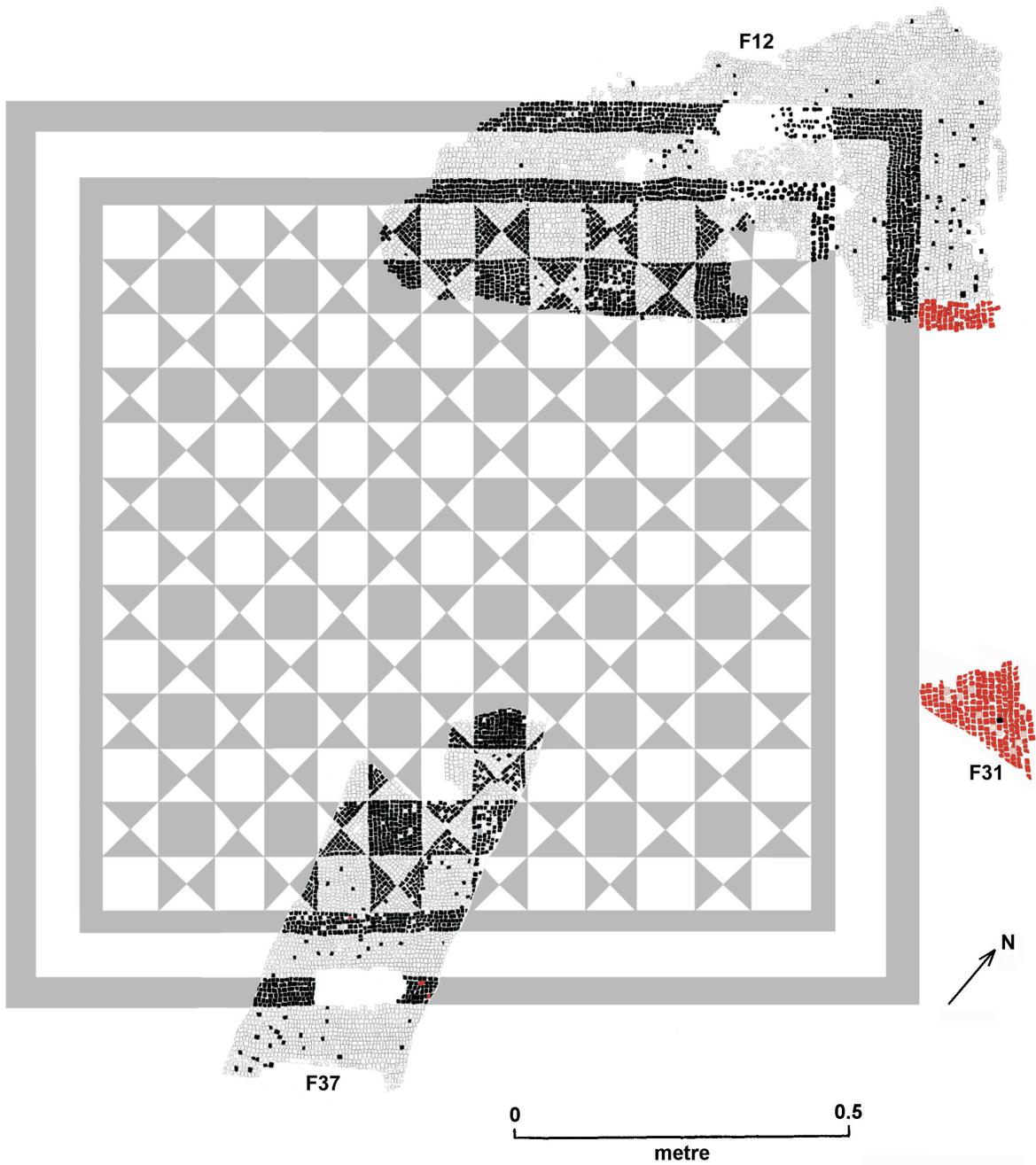
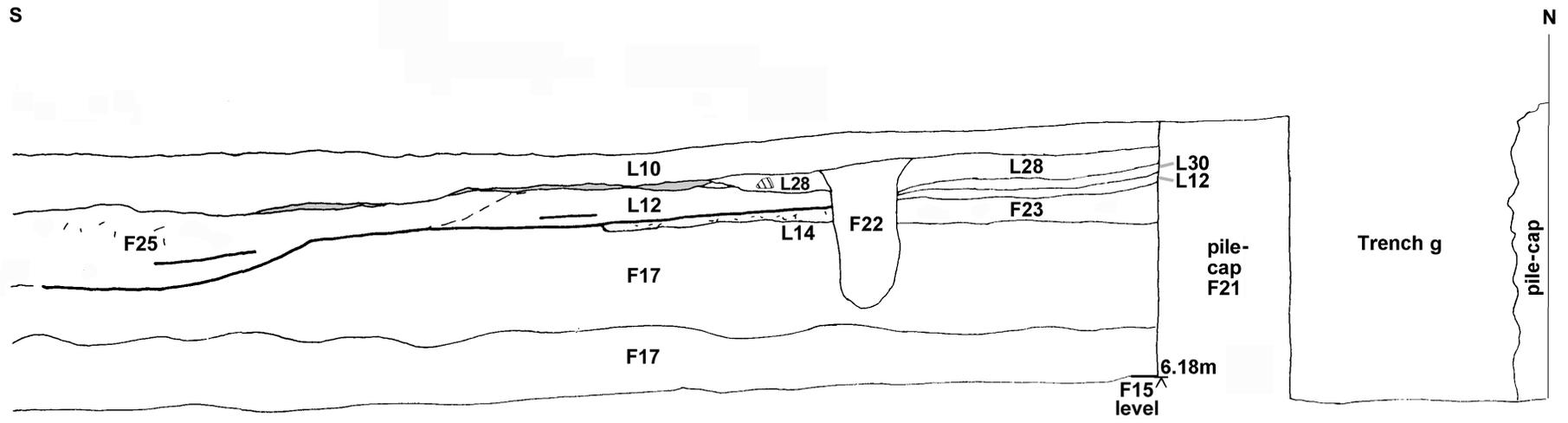


Fig 12 Mosaic floor F12/F37 and tessellated pavement F31:  
conjectural plan, scale 1:40.

- conjectural
- white
- black
- red
- pink
- cream



L11

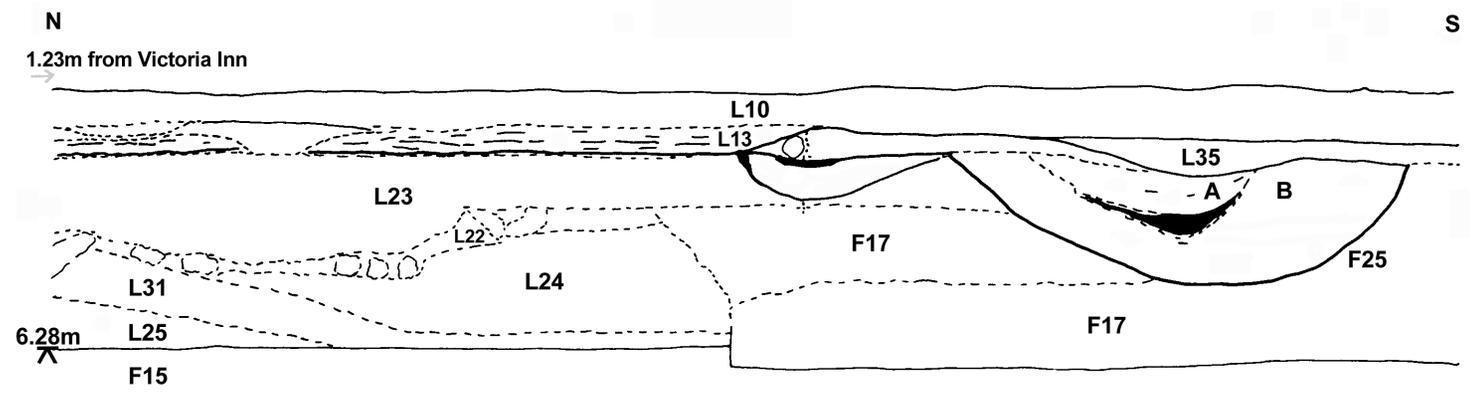
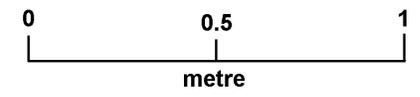


Fig 13 Trench b: top, east-facing section and bottom, west-facing section; scale 1:20.



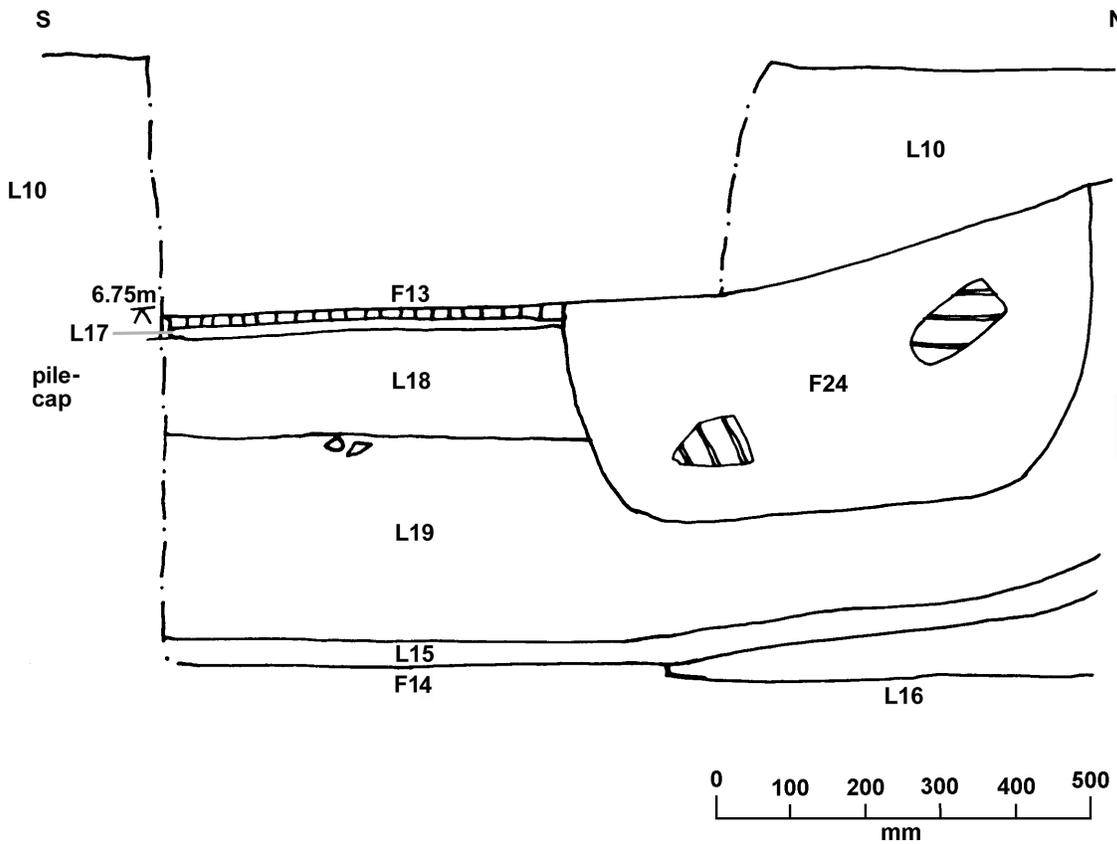
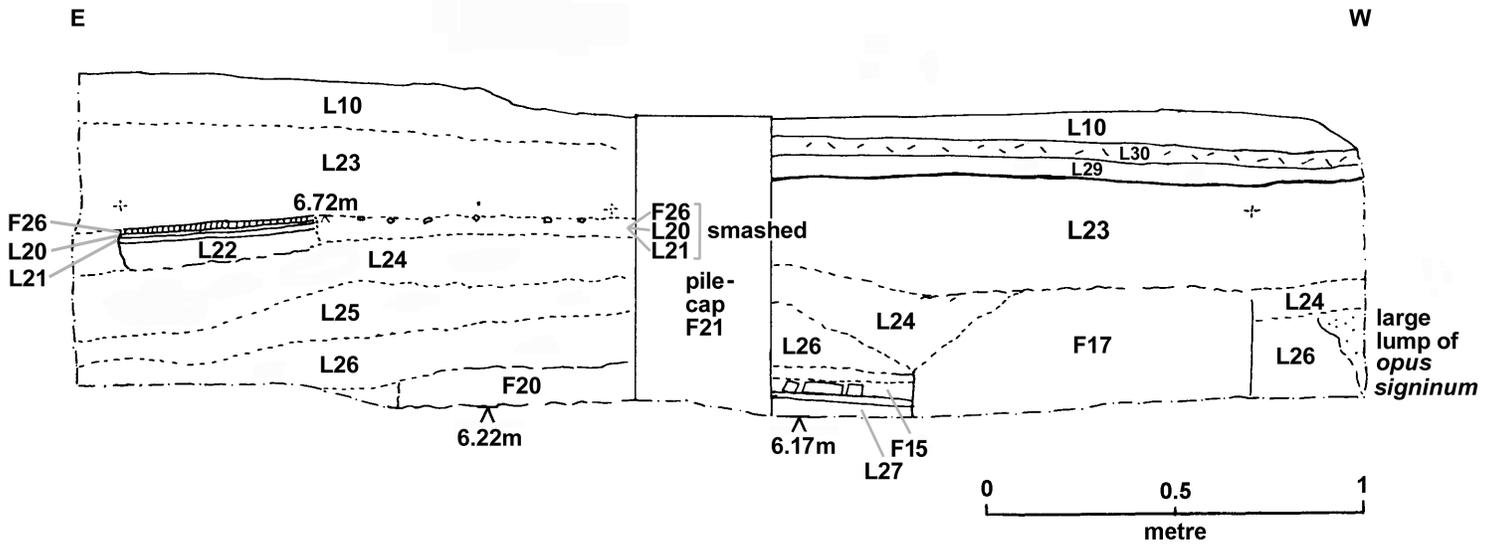


Fig 14 Top: Trench g - north-facing section, scale 1:20;  
 and bottom: Trench a - east-facing section, scale 1:10.

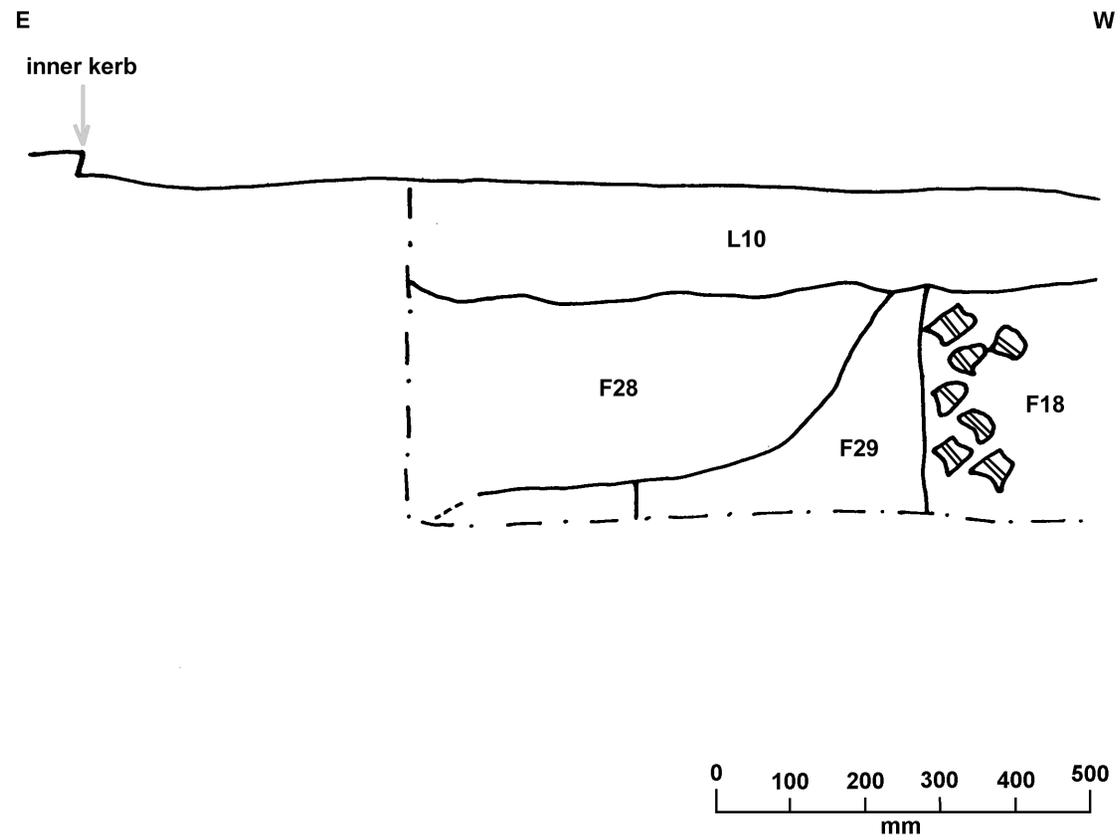


Fig 15 Trench h: north-facing section, scale 1:10.

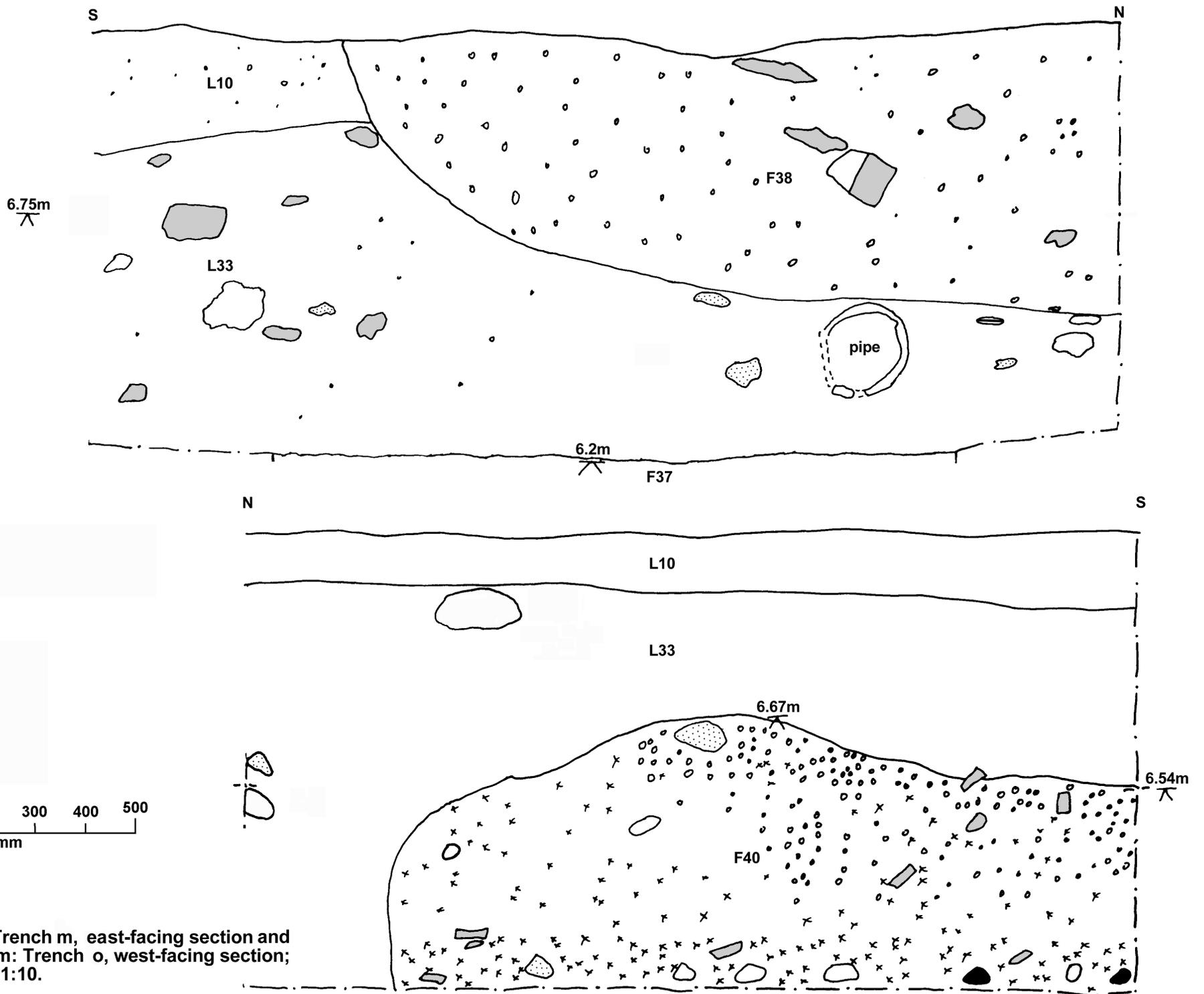


Fig 16 Top: Trench m, east-facing section and bottom: Trench o, west-facing section; scale 1:10.

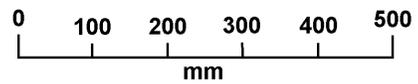
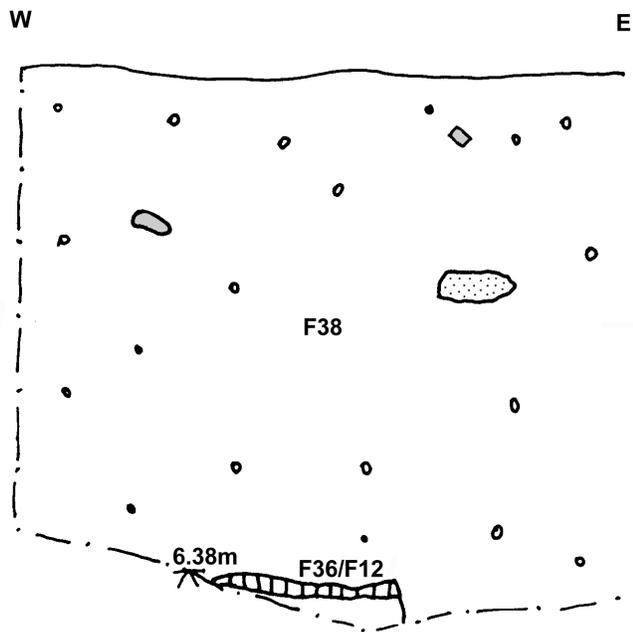
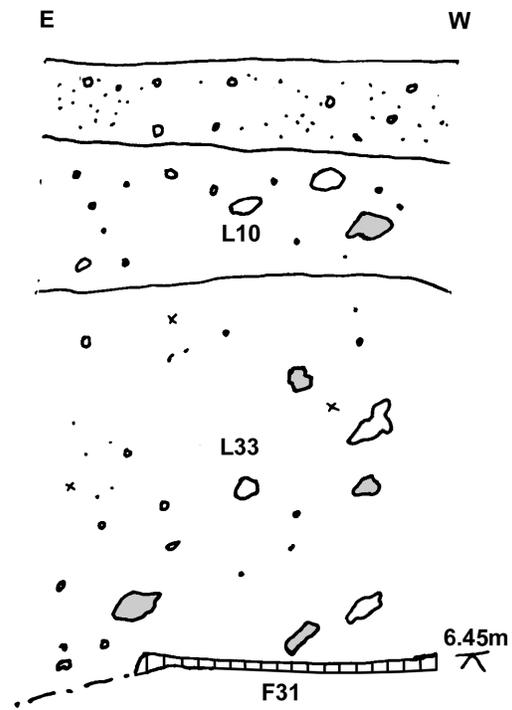


Fig 17 Trench k: top, north-facing section with F31 and bottom, south-facing section with F36/F12; scale 1:10.

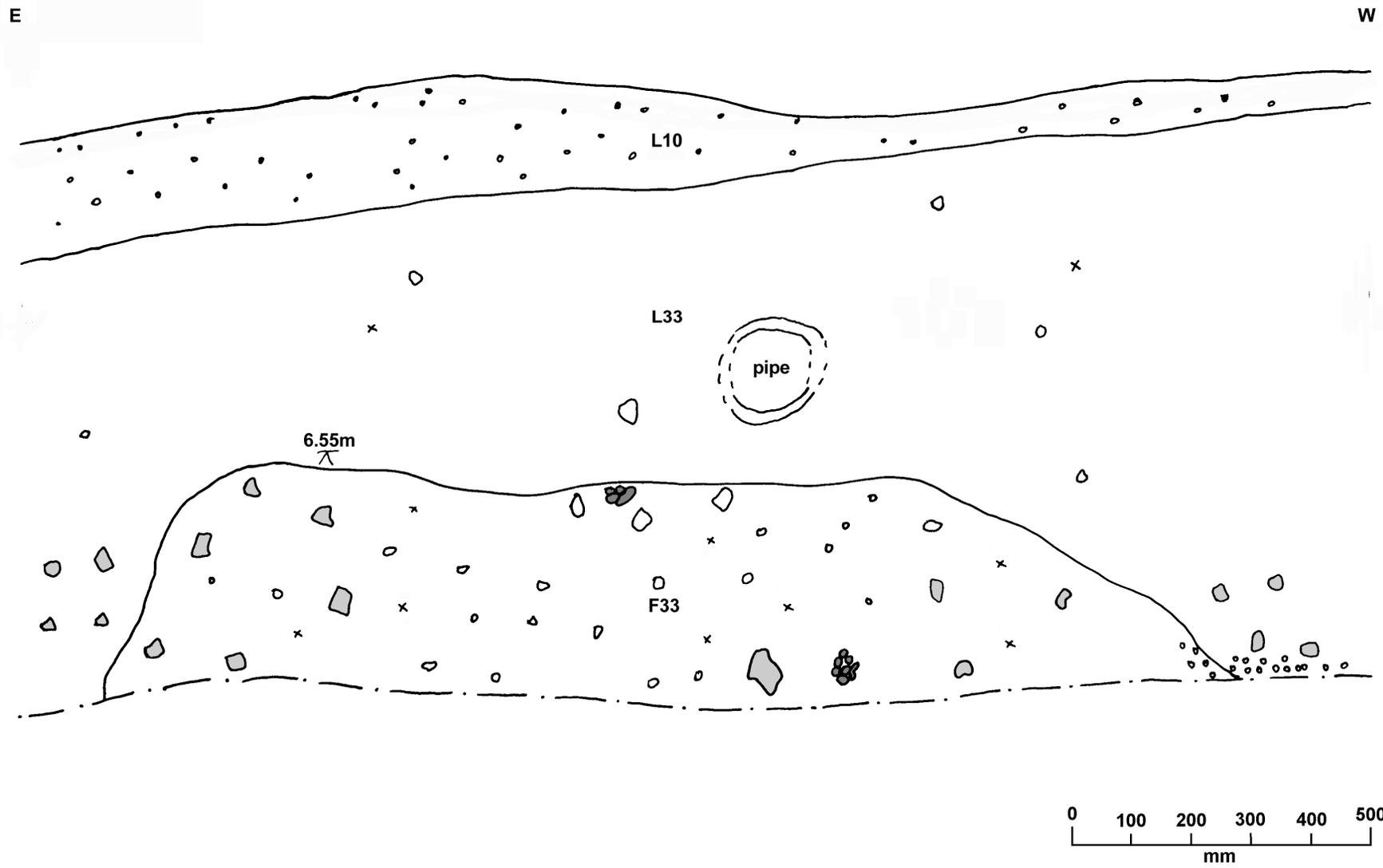


Fig 18 Trench n: north-facing section, scale 1:10.

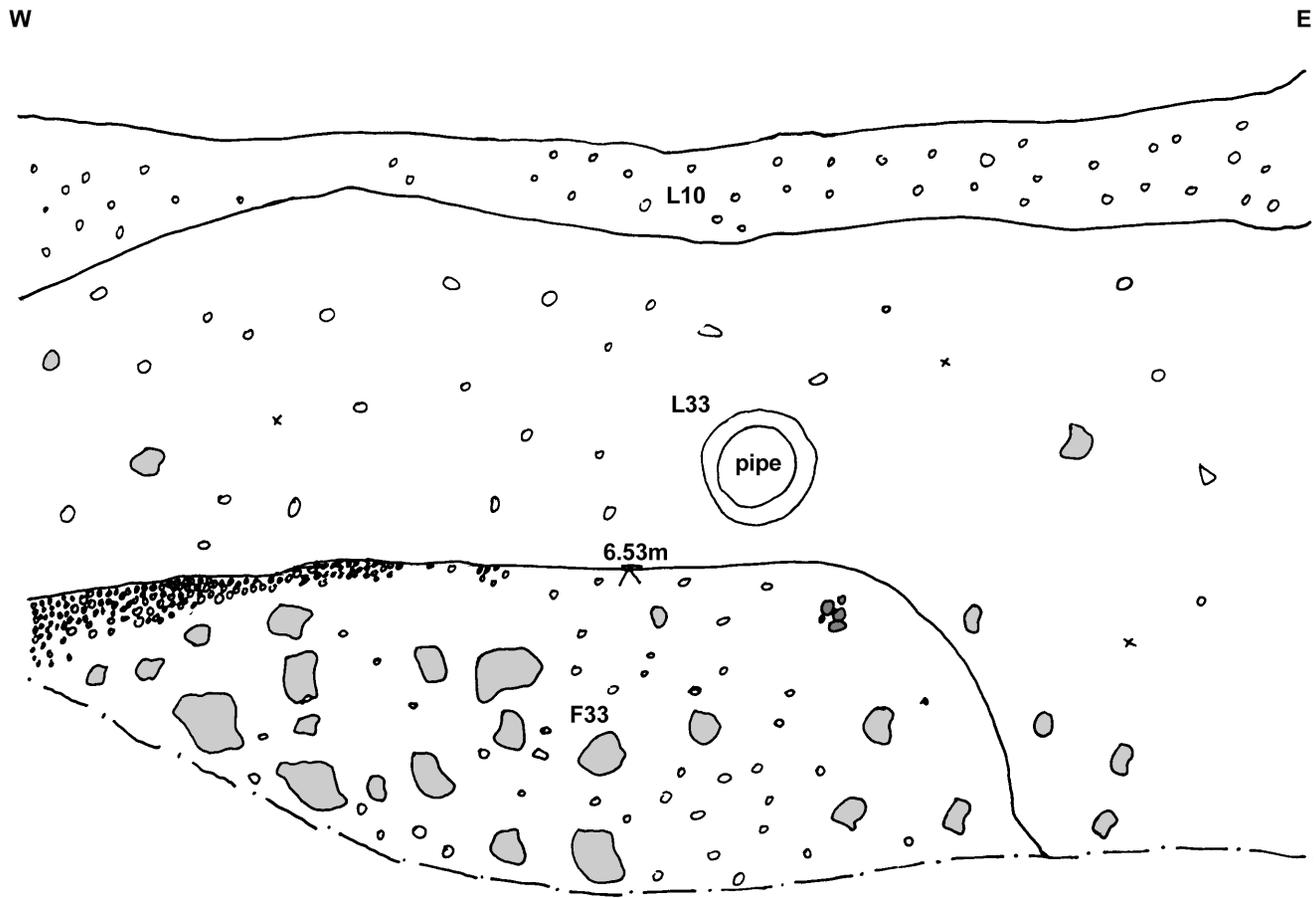
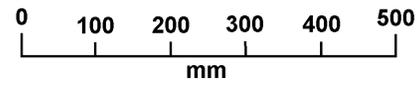


Fig 19 Trench n: south-facing section, scale 1:10.



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

**Summary sheet**

<b>Site name/address:</b> North Station Road (the Victoria Inn), Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester Borough
<b>NGR:</b> TL 9932 2577	<b>Site code:</b> 2002.87
<b>Type of work:</b> Watching brief	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> February-May 2002	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 0.075 ha
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Developer
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related SMR nos:</b> 12514, 12517, 12623
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 193 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods represented:</b> Roman, 2nd-3rd century AD	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b>  <i>An archaeological watching brief was carried out at North Station Road (the Victoria Inn public house), Colchester, Essex in 2002, and this produced more evidence of a high-status Roman residence that had been observed during the 2001 evaluation. The evidence consisted of a foundation, and parts of two mosaic floors and a herringbone floor. The structure was demolished to make way for at least one large building with tessellated pavements which probably had a public rather than a domestic function. The sparsity of stratified pottery made dating difficult; however, the site is thought to have been in use from the early 2nd to the late 3rd century AD.</i></p>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> CAT Report 163	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Kate Orr	<b>Date of summary:</b> August 2002