

An archaeological evaluation at Handford House, 1 Queens Road, Colchester, Essex

September 2002

**on behalf of
Vaughan and Blyth Ltd**

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Contents

1	Summary	1
2	Introduction	1
3	Archaeological background	1
4	Aim	1
5	Methods	2
6	Results	2
7	Finds	3
8	Discussion and interpretation	5
9	Acknowledgements	5
10	References	5
11	Glossary	6
12	Archive deposition	6
13	Site data	6
Appendix A:		
	Report on the Roman pottery <i>by Stephen Benfield</i>	8
Appendix B:		
	Report on the cremated bone <i>by Sue Anderson</i>	9
	Plate	9
	Figures	after p 9
	EHCR summary sheet	

List of plates and figures

Plate 1 T1: cremation F1, looking north.

- Fig 1 Site location, scale 1:1000.
- Fig 2 Plan of the site, showing trench locations, scale 1:400.
- Fig 3 T1: plan, scale 1:50 with detailed plan of F1, scale 1:10.
- Fig 4 T2: plan, scale 1:50.
- Fig 5 T3: plan, scale 1:50.
- Fig 6 T1: representative south-facing section of trench and east-facing section of F1, scale 1:10.
- Fig 7 T2, F3: north-facing section, scale 1:10.
- Fig 8 T2, F4: south-facing section and F5: south-facing section, scale 1:10.
- Fig 9 T3: sections of features, scale 1:10.
- Fig 10 T3: representative west-facing section of trench, scale 1:10.

1 Summary

During an archaeological evaluation in the grounds of Handford House, 1 Queens Road, Colchester, Essex, the excavation of three trial-trenches revealed one in situ Roman cremation and other possible cremations. Modern or post-medieval gardening activity and the digging of pits for rubbish-disposal may have destroyed other cremations on the site.

2 Introduction (Figs 1-2)

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching, at Handford House, 1 Queens Road, Colchester, Essex. The work was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between the 4th and 6th of September 2002.
- 2.2 The 60m x 70m site is located in the grounds of Handford House which suffered serious fire damage earlier in 2002. This Victorian property was most recently used as an old people's home and it is situated at the corner of Beverley Road and Queens Road in Lexden. The site lies approximately 1km west of Colchester town centre at National Grid Reference or NGR TL 9858 2475. The evaluation site is fairly level, lying at 36m OD. Two of the trenches (T1-T2) were dug in the garden and one (T3) in a tarmac parking area.
- 2.3 All fieldwork was done in accordance with a specification agreed with the Archaeology Officer of Colchester Borough Council. The work was necessitated by a planning application to demolish Handford House and erect twelve apartments and four semi-detached houses on the site.
- 2.4 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 evaluation* (1999).

3 Archaeological background

- 3.1 The evaluation site lies within what Hull termed the 'West Cemetery' (1958, 253-4). This Roman burial ground covers a large area and was in use over a long time span, and included both inhumation and cremation burials. Most of the finds were made in the 19th century and formed part of large collections which were badly catalogued or split up. At least one burial area was contained within a wall, and traces of large funerary monuments are known from the Roman walled cemetery to the rear of the Colchester Royal Grammar School and from West Lodge in Lexden. Roman tile tombs, lead and stone coffins, and other built tombs have been found from all over the area, lining the Roman roads leading to the walled town (Crummy *et al* 1993, 259-60).
- 3.2 Many Roman burials have been found in Beverley Road, including some spectacular and well-preserved funerary monuments (Crummy *et al* 1993, 259-60). Most of these were excavated by George Joslin around his house in Beverley Road (UAD no 907). Directly opposite the evaluation site, in the garden of 13 Beverley Road, Joslin in 1866 discovered the so-called 'child's grave' which contained an unusual collection of pipeclay figurines (UAD no 990, EHCR no 11850). Joslin's finds include the tombstone of the Roman centurion Facilis found in 1865 (UAD no 992 and EHCR no 11857). In the garden of 1 Queens Road itself, two Roman cremations and other remains have been recorded although their precise find spots as recorded may be erroneous (UAD nos 1001 and 1003).
- 3.3 The Ordnance Survey map of 1875 shows Handford House as 'Gafwell House'.

4 Aim

The aim of the fieldwork was to locate, identify and assess the quality and extent of any surviving archaeological finds, features or deposits.

5 Methods

- 5.1 The three trenches were dug by the contractors under archaeological supervision using a mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket. All trenches were 1.5m wide and between 14m and 15m long. Spoil heaps were checked for artefacts.
- 5.2 The archaeological features which were exposed were cleaned and excavated by hand. Individual records of layers and features were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets.
- 5.3 Section drawings of features and layers were made at a scale of 1:10. Plans of trenches were made at 1:20, except for the cremation in F1 which was planned at 1:10.
- 5.4 Finds were registered on CAT record sheets and assigned find numbers according to context. Finds were washed, marked and bagged according to context.
- 5.5 Colour photographs of features were taken with a digital camera and a 35mm camera.
- 5.6 The bottom of the trenches and the spoil heaps were scanned for metal finds with a metal detector.
- 5.7 Ordnance Datum heights were taken of all features and the top and base of each trench, using a dumpy level.

6 Results

6.1 Trench T1 (Figs 3 and 6)

6.1.1 The trench was positioned in the lawn at the front of the house. It was dug to a depth of between 580mm and 630mm and a length of 15m. Between 440mm and 550mm of greyish brown silty loam topsoil was removed under archaeological supervision (Layer or L1). Topsoil sealed a subsoil of yellowish brown silty loam with frequent stones. The Roman pottery found in this layer and the lack of later material suggests that this layer dates from the Roman period (Fig 6).

6.1.2 Halfway along the trench, machine digging was stopped at 580mm below ground-level when the base of a Roman cremation urn (find 2) was exposed. What remained was the bottom 60mm containing cremated bone (find 18). The analysis of the bone concluded that it was likely to have been a child cremation (Appendix 2). Judging from the diameter of the base of this grey ware urn (110mm), it may have been fairly large; however, it had been previously disturbed and broken as most of it was lying embedded in L2, over an area of 400mm. The outline of a pit dug for the cremation could be traced (Feature or F1; Fig 6), except on the northern side where it was indistinguishable from the subsoil which it cut (L2). Except for two sherds of pottery from another Roman vessel (find 21) found within F1, there were no grave goods with the cremation. The rest of the trench was dug to the level of the natural sand and gravel (L3). No other features were revealed. Remains of another Roman pot were retrieved from the spoil heap at the same place as F1 (find 2); it was given the same finds number as it was originally thought to be part of the same cremation urn.

6.2 Trench T2 (Figs 4, 7 and 8)

6.2.1 This trench was dug to a depth of between 500mm and 700mm and a length of 15.7m, in an area of lawn and flowerbed, on the eastern side of the house. The western end of the trench had to be stepped out to the north to avoid a plastic pipe.

6.2.2 375mm of topsoil (L1) was stripped off the eastern half of the trench. This overlaid a mid brown silty loam subsoil (L4). Within this layer was animal bone and Roman pottery including parts of two pots, one of which was upright in the soil and may have held a cremation (find 11; Fig 7). However, no bones were found within this vessel and it is not considered to be *in situ*. The peg-tile and post-medieval pottery found from L4 indicate a post-Roman date for this layer. The broken remains of two Roman jars plus animal bone and possibly human bone were retrieved from the spoil heap, 5-6m from the eastern end of the trench (find 6). These probably represent further cremations but were unfortunately missed in the ground. They came from L4, and therefore had probably already been disturbed and redeposited.

- 6.2.3** A spread of white/pink mortar (F3) was recorded at the base of the eastern end of the trench. Towards the centre of the trench, this layer became more mixed with the orange natural sand and gravel (L5). The mortar spread F3 was sealed by L4 and could be Roman, possibly from a floor. It does not appear to be mortar from a stone wall as no septaria or other building stone was found within it. A section was taken through this feature and it was found to be just over 200mm thick (Fig 7).
- 6.2.4** The western end of the trench appeared to be more disturbed, perhaps from gardening activity, and there was less topsoil (200mm). Two modern features were recorded at this end of the trench. F4, a 5m-wide ditch aligned north to south, was quarter-sectioned. It was cut from quite high up (400mm below ground-level) and sealed by topsoil and a disturbed mid brown silty loam (L12). F4 was flat-bottomed and was made up of three fills, the bottom one of which contained peg-tile and modern china (Fig 8).
- 6.2.5** F5, a ditch feature aligned north to south at the western end of the trench, was sectioned. It was sealed by topsoil and a disturbed layer of pale orange silty loam with flecks of grey silt and orange sand (L11). Like F4 it was cut from quite high up, but its width was not established as it continued under the western baulk. In plan, the feature looked like two separate ditches but it was, in fact, one feature with different fills consisting of diagonal bands of greyish/mid brown silty loam alternating with pale orangey brown sandy loam. This feature had been backfilled with material containing Roman pottery and peg-tile (Fig 8).
- 6.3 Trench 3** (Figs 5, 9 and 10)
- 6.3.1** The third trench was excavated in a tarmac parking area on the western side of the house. The trench was dug to 14m in length and 1m depth. Tarmac and sand and gravel sub-base (L6) were removed to expose a demolition layer (L7) made up of slate and brick rubble and powdery cement. Topsoil (L1) was exposed at 350mm below ground-level. Below topsoil was a thick layer of mid brown silty loam (L8), slightly lighter in colour than the topsoil and containing peg-tile. At the base of the northern end of the trench, a thin layer of yellow mottled with light brown silty sand (L9) sat above the natural (L10) (Fig 9).
- 6.3.2** At the base of this trench were five shallow features (pits and ditches) cut into the natural (Figs 5 and 10). A small flat-bottomed pit (F6) at the northern end of the trench did not contain any finds. The bottom of a ditch (F7) was encountered further along, the fill of which contained two pieces of Roman pottery. Although no later artefacts were found within the fill, the fact that it was on the same level as other post-medieval or modern features and had a similar fill suggests that this feature is contemporary with them. Next to F7 was another flat-bottomed pit (F8) which had been cut through L9 and L10. This pit was 300mm deep and larger than F6. The fill of F8 contained one piece of Roman pottery and one small piece of modern glass. An irregular-shaped ditch (F9) was recorded in the centre of the trench. Peg-tile and clay pipe from the feature gives it a post-medieval or modern date. At the southern end of the trench, a long, narrow linear feature was observed running under the baulk (F10). Slag and peg-tile within the fill again rule out the possibility of this feature representing something of archaeological significance.

7 Finds

- 7.1** All finds were kept apart from peg-tile, coal, flower pot and slate. The predominant finds were Roman tile and pottery (see Appendix A), although peg-tile was also abundant.
- 7.2 Table 1: List of finds by context (pottery fabric codes are referenced to Cotter 2000).**

Find no	Context	Description	Date	Weight in g
2	T1, from F1 and spoil heap	Incomplete cremation urn	Roman	610
2	T1, from F1 and spoil heap	Pottery sherds	Roman	90
2	T1, from F1 and spoil heap	Pottery sherds	Roman	8
2	T1, from F1 and spoil heap	Pot sherd	Roman	5
2	T1, from F1 and spoil heap	Charcoal	undated	1
3	T1, L2	Pottery sherds	Roman	39
4	T2, L4	Animal bone	undated	12
4	T2, L4	Pottery sherds	Roman	5
4	T2, L4	Roman tile	Roman	38
5	T2, L1	Pottery sherds	Roman	10
5	T2, L1	Pottery sherds	Roman	3
5	T2, L1	Peg-tile	post-medieval or modern	39
5	T2, L1	Roman tile	Roman	355
5	T2, L1	Burnt flint	undated	11
5	T2, L1	Coal	undated	1
6	T2, U/S on spoil heap	Human and animal bone	undated	54
6	T2, U/S on spoil heap	Pottery sherds	Roman	21
6	T2, U/S on spoil heap	Pottery sherds	Roman	82
7	T2, F5	Peg-tile	post-medieval or modern	54
8	T2, U/S on spoil heap	Roman tile	Roman	298
9	T3, L8	Roman tile	Roman	373
9	T3, L8	Peg-tile	post-medieval or modern	15
9	T3, L8	Flower pot (Fabric 51b)	modern	17
10	T3, F8	Pottery sherd	Roman	4
10	T3, F8	Glass	modern	1
11	T2, L4	Pottery sherds	Roman	138
11	T2, L4	Pottery sherds	Roman	46
11	T2, L4	Peg-tile	post-medieval or modern	28
11	T2, L4	Glazed post-medieval red earthenware sherd (Fabric 40)	16th-19th century	8
12	T3, L1	<i>Tessera</i>	Roman	14
12	T3, L1	Roman tile including <i>tegula</i>	Roman	304
12	T3, L1	Glazed post-medieval red earthenware sherd (Fabric 40)	post-medieval or modern	27
12	T3, L1	Slate	modern	8
13	T3, U/S on spoil heap	Pottery sherd	Roman	7
14	T3, F9	Peg-tile	post-medieval or modern	26
14	T3, F9	Clay-pipe stem	post-medieval	4
14	T3, F9	Roman tile	Roman	63
15	T2, F5	Pottery sherd	Roman	48
15	T2, F5	Pottery sherds	Roman	22
15	T2, F5	Pottery sherds	Roman	53
15	T2, F5	Pottery sherd	Roman	5
15	T2, F5	Peg-tile	post-medieval or modern	120

16	T2, F4	Roman tile	Roman	265
16	T2, L4	Peg-tile	post-medieval or modern	70
16	T2, F4	Modern china (Fabric 48d)	19th-20th century	2
17	T3, F10	Asphalt	modern	9
17	T3, F10	Roman tile fragment	Roman	33
17	T3, F10	Peg-tile	post-medieval or modern	19
18	T1, F1	Cremated human bone from F1	Roman	21
19	T3, F7	Pottery sherds	Roman	7
20	T2, L4	Pottery sherds	Roman	7
20	T2, L4	Pottery sherd	Roman	11
21	T1, F1	Pottery sherds	Roman	4
22	T1, U/S from spoil heap	Lead object	modern	20

U/S = unstratified

8 Discussion and interpretation

- 8.1 The principal remains recorded during the evaluation were Roman cremations. Only one was found *in situ*, in T1, below the topsoil. This urn contained the cremated remains of a child, but it had been disturbed previously by activity which broke off most the urn. Remains of possible other cremation urns were found in T2, and human bone was found on the spoil heap. This is to be expected as the site lies within the 'West Cemetery' of the Roman town where abundant burials have been found in the past.
- 8.2 Evidence of disturbance from the post-medieval period to the modern day was seen in T2 and T3. Wide ditches in T2 may be the result of gardening activity and the 1875 OS map does show flowerbeds in this area. Further ephemeral pits and ditches in T3 may have been the result of building work or dug for rubbish-disposal. The same map shows a hexagonal structure in the area of T3 which is no longer standing. It may be that the construction of this building destroyed other unrecorded Roman cremations here.

9 Acknowledgements

The site work was carried out by Kate Orr, Laura Gadsby and Chris Lister of CAT. The finds were identified by Howard Brooks and Stephen Benfield of CAT and Sue Anderson of Suffolk County Council Archaeology Service. The project was monitored by Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council.

The Trust would like to thank Ross Bain from Vaughan and Blyth Ltd for commissioning and funding the work.

10 References

- Cotter, J, 2000 *Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85*, Colchester Archaeological Report 7
- Crummy, N, 1993 *Excavations of Roman and later cemeteries, churches and monastic sites in Colchester, 1971-88*, Colchester Archaeological Report 9
- Hull, M R, 1958 *Roman Colchester*, Report of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries, 20
- Symonds, R P, 1999 *Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-86*, Colchester Archaeological Report 10

11 Glossary

context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made, eg a layer or feature
EHCR	Essex Heritage Conservation Record, Essex County Council
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor
modern	the period from c AD 1700 to the present day
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
post-medieval	the period from c AD 1500 to AD 1700
Roman	the period from AD 43 to c AD 430
<i>tessera</i>	a small cube used to make a Roman mosaic or tessellated floor
<i>tegula</i>	a Roman roof tile
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database, Colchester Museums

12 Archive deposition

The archive is held at Colchester Archaeological Trust, 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but it will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2002.161.

13 Site data

Table 2: List of contexts.

Context	Trench	Description	Context date
L1	T1-T3	Greyish brown silty loam topsoil with frequent stones	modern
L2	1	Yellowish brown silty loam subsoil with frequent stones	Roman
L3	1	Natural sand and gravel	Glacial
L4	2	Mid brown silty loam subsoil with rare stones	Roman
L5	2	Natural sand and gravel	Glacial
L6	3	Tarmac and sand and gravel sub base	modern
L7	3	Demolition layer consisting of slate, brick rubble and powdery cement	modern
L8	3	Mid brown silty loam subsoil with infrequent small stones	modern
L9	3	Light brown mottled with yellow silty sand	post-medieval or modern
L10	3	Natural sand and gravel	Glacial
L11	2	Disturbed pale orange silty loam with grey flecks and flecks of orange sand, some stones	modern
L12	2	Disturbed mid brown silty loam with rare stones	modern
F1	1	Cut for cremation (find 2) filled by yellowish/brown silty loam with rare stones	Roman
F3	2	Whitish/pinkish mortar spread, mixed with natural sand and gravel in places	Roman
F4	2	Ditch filled by: a very pale brown silty loam with frequent small stones b light orange/mid brown sandy loam with frequent stones c dark brown sandy loam with rare stones	modern
F5	2	Large ditch filled by 5 fills: a, c & e – greyish mid brown silty loam with frequent stones b & d – very pale orangey/brown sandy loam	post-medieval or modern

F6	3	Small pit filled by: a mid brown sandy silt b mottled light/mid brown sandy silt	undated
F7	3	Linear feature filled by mid brown sandy silt with rare small stones	post-medieval or modern
F8	3	Pit filled by mid to dark brown silt with mottled orange sand and infrequent small stones	modern
F9	3	Ditch-like feature filled by: a light to mid brown silt b dirty yellow to mid brown silt	post-medieval or modern
F10	3	Ditch filled by light brown sandy silt	modern

Kate Orr, October 2002

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Appendix A: Report on the Roman pottery
pottery identified by Stephen Benfield of CAT

The pottery is characterised by locally produced grey wares, some of which form part of a cremation urn of 2nd-century or later date (find 2). Three other possible cremation urns were found but not *in situ* which were of grey ware, buff ware and colour-coat ware (finds 6 and 11). Other types of vessels represented were flagons, amphora, mortaria and storage jars.

Table 3: List of Roman pottery (pottery fabric codes are referenced to Symonds & Wade 1999).

Find no	Context	Description	Date	Weight in g
2	T1, from F1 and spoil heap	Sherds making up part of a grey ware jar used as a cremation urn from F1 (Fabric GX)	Roman, 2nd century or later	610
2	T1, from F1 and spoil heap	Sherds of at least 2 other grey ware jars including one lattice jar	mid 2nd to late 3rd century	90
2	T1, from F1 and spoil heap	2 sherds of Hadham ware vessel (Fabric CH)	late 3rd-4th century	8
2	T1, from F1 and spoil heap	Fragment of pot	Roman	5
3	T1, L2	5 sherds of different grey ware vessels including 1 possible narrow-necked jar (Fabric GX)	Roman	39
4	T2, L4	2 sherds of a very abraded grey ware or black-burnished ware vessel (Fabric GA or GB)	Roman	5
5	T2, L1	Very abraded sandy grey ware rim and body sherd (Fabric GX)	Roman	10
5	T2, L1	2 sherds of Colchester buff ware (Fabric DJ)	Roman	3
6	T2, U/S on spoil heap	5 sherds of an early colour-coat ware small jar (Fabric EC); could be a cremation urn	pre-Flavian	21
6	T2, U/S on spoil heap	Sherds of a base of a small grey ware jar or beaker which could be a cremation urn (Fabric GX)	Roman	82
10	T3, F8	1 grey ware sherd	Roman	4
11	T2, L4	Most of the base of an orangey Colchester buff ware flagon, possible cremation urn (Fabric DJ)	?1st-3rd century	138
11	T2, L4	Sherds of early Roman sandy and grog-tempered vessel, very heavily abraded	late Iron Age-early Roman	46
13	T3, U/S on spoil heap	Micaceous grey ware sherd (Fabric WX); might be imitating samian Dragendorf type 27	Roman	7
15	T2, F5	1 sherd of a large grey ware storage jar (Fabric HZ)	Roman	48
15	T2, F5	1 sherd of a mortaria in two slivers	?1st-2nd century	22
15	T2, F5	1 sherd of amphora; ?Dressel 20	Roman	53
15	T2, F5	1 rim of a black-burnished ware jar (Fabric GA)	2nd-3rd century	5
19	T3, F7	2 sherds of grey ware, one has a flattened lattice decoration, very abraded (Fabric GX)	3rd-4th century	7
20	T2, L4	3 sherds of a possible flagon (Fabric DJ) but not the same one as find 11	Roman	7
20	T2, L4	1 heavily-tempered grey ware sherd (Fabric HZ)	1st-3rd century	11
21	T1, F1	3 sherds of a buff ware ?flagon (Fabric DJ)	Roman	4

Appendix B: Report on the cremated bone
by Sue Anderson of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service

Three bags of bone were submitted for analysis, as follows:

Finds bag no	Context	Details
(4)	T2, L4	Two fragments of pig mandible and teeth and fragments of small/medium mammal long bone. Unburnt.
(6)	T2, U/S	Thirty-nine fragments (56g) of heavily calcined/cremated long bone fragments, including a distal ?femur fragment of a medium mammal, the end of a juvenile long bone with unfused epiphysis (sheep/dog sized), and fragments of a large tibia. Some of the long bone fragments may be adult human, but the general appearance and thickness of the bone suggests mostly animal.
(18)	T1, F1	Two fragments of skull and 38 fragments of long bone (22g), heavily calcined/cremated. Includes distal femoral epiphysis fragment, and pieces of tibia and humerus. Probably human, young juvenile (approx 2-5 years?).

Apart from the definite animal bone fragments in bags (4) and (6), much of this material consisted of undiagnostic fragments which were difficult to identify with any certainty. However, it seems likely that the few fragments in bag (18) were the remains of a juvenile cremation burial.



Plate 1 T1: cremation F1, looking north.

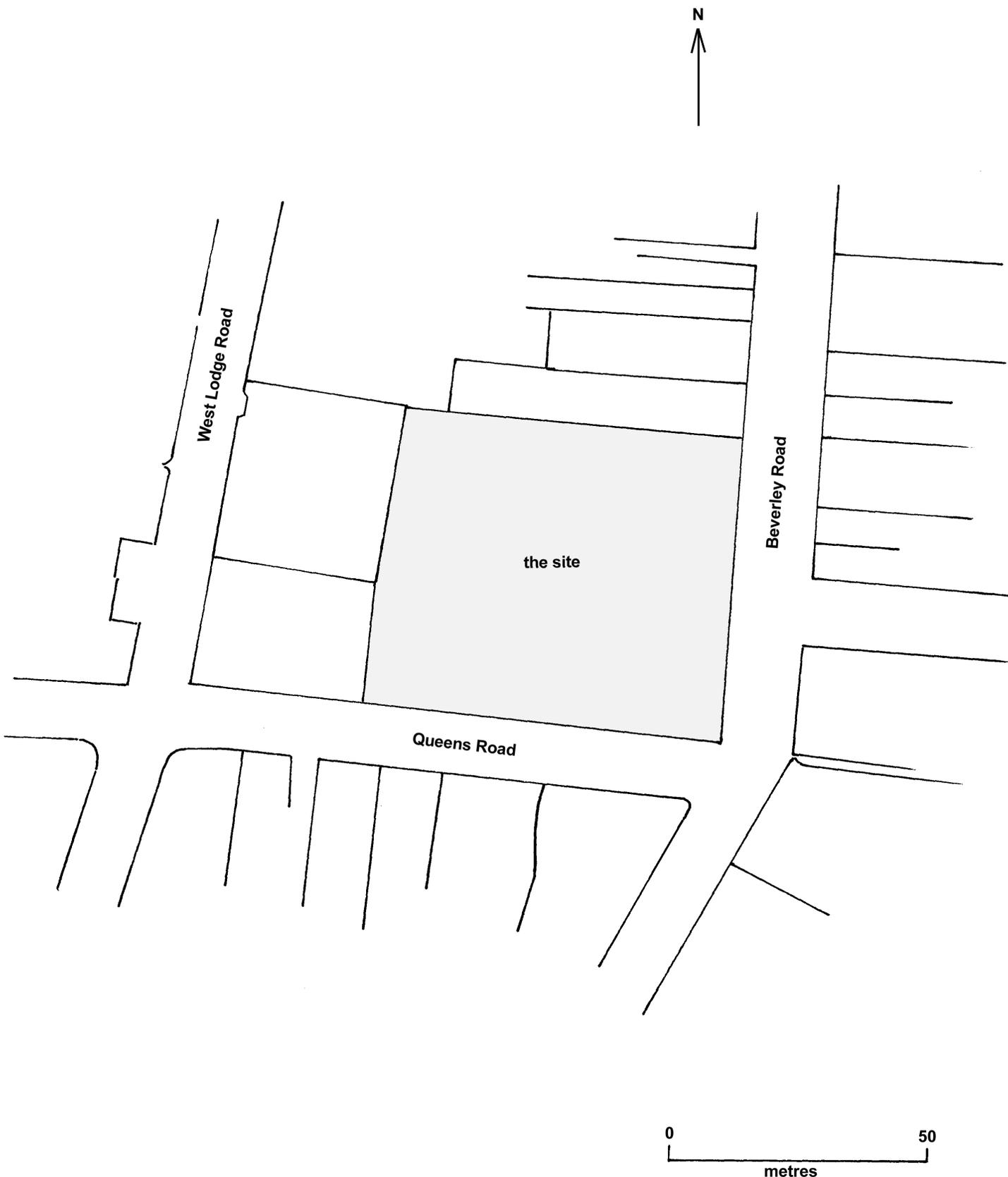


Fig 1 Site location, scale 1:1000.

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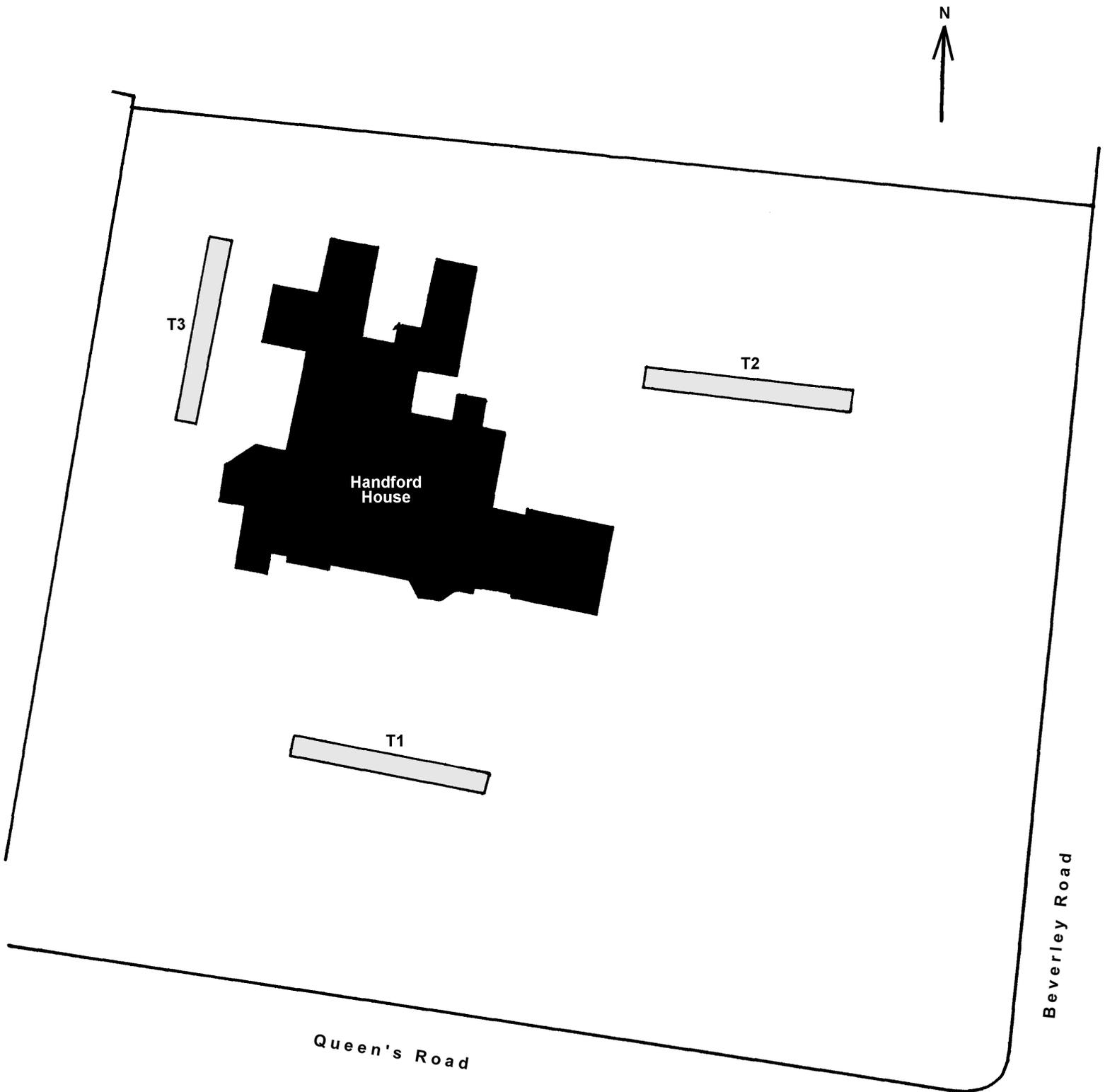
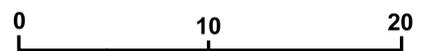


Fig 2 Plan of the site, showing trench locations, scale 1:400.



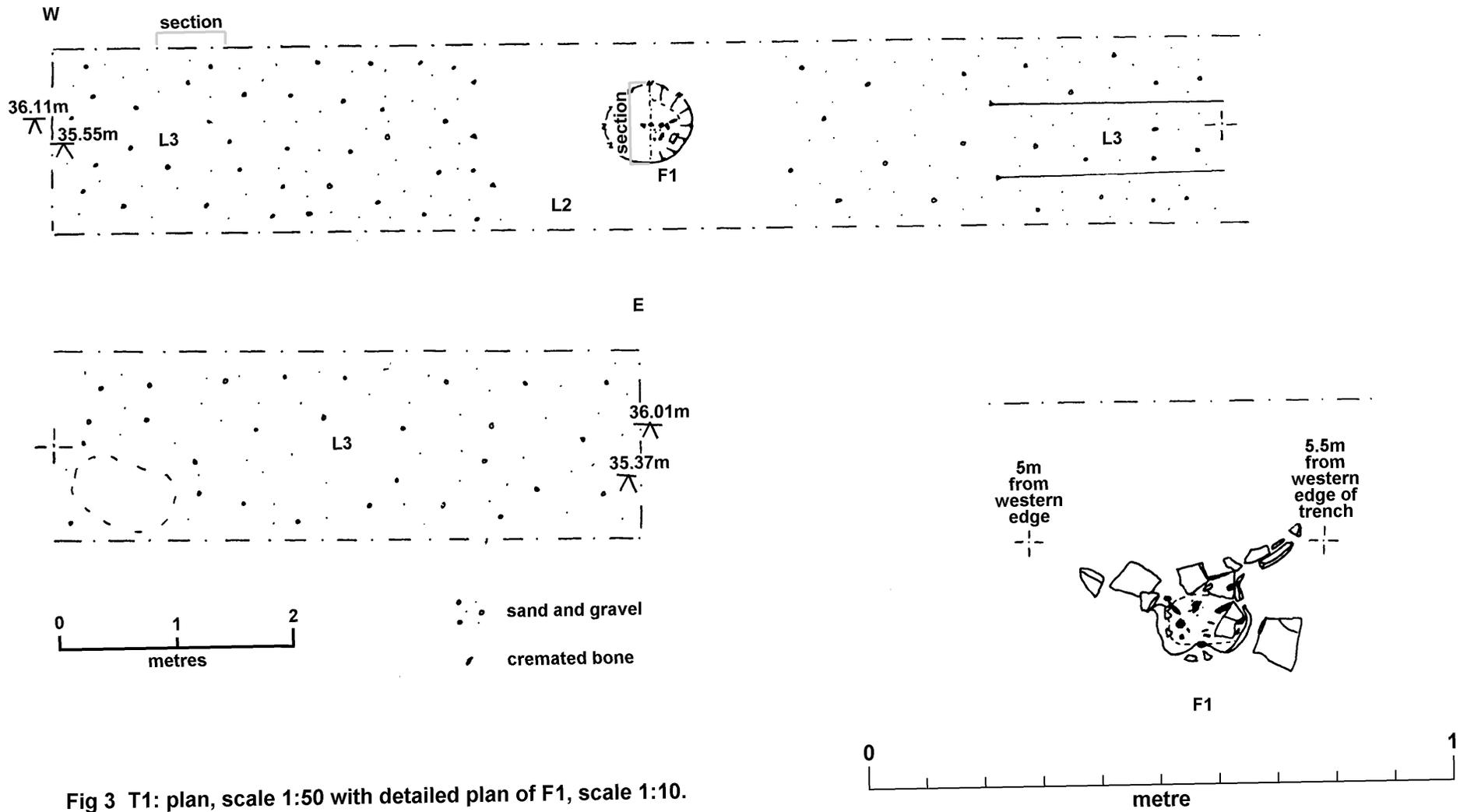


Fig 3 T1: plan, scale 1:50 with detailed plan of F1, scale 1:10.

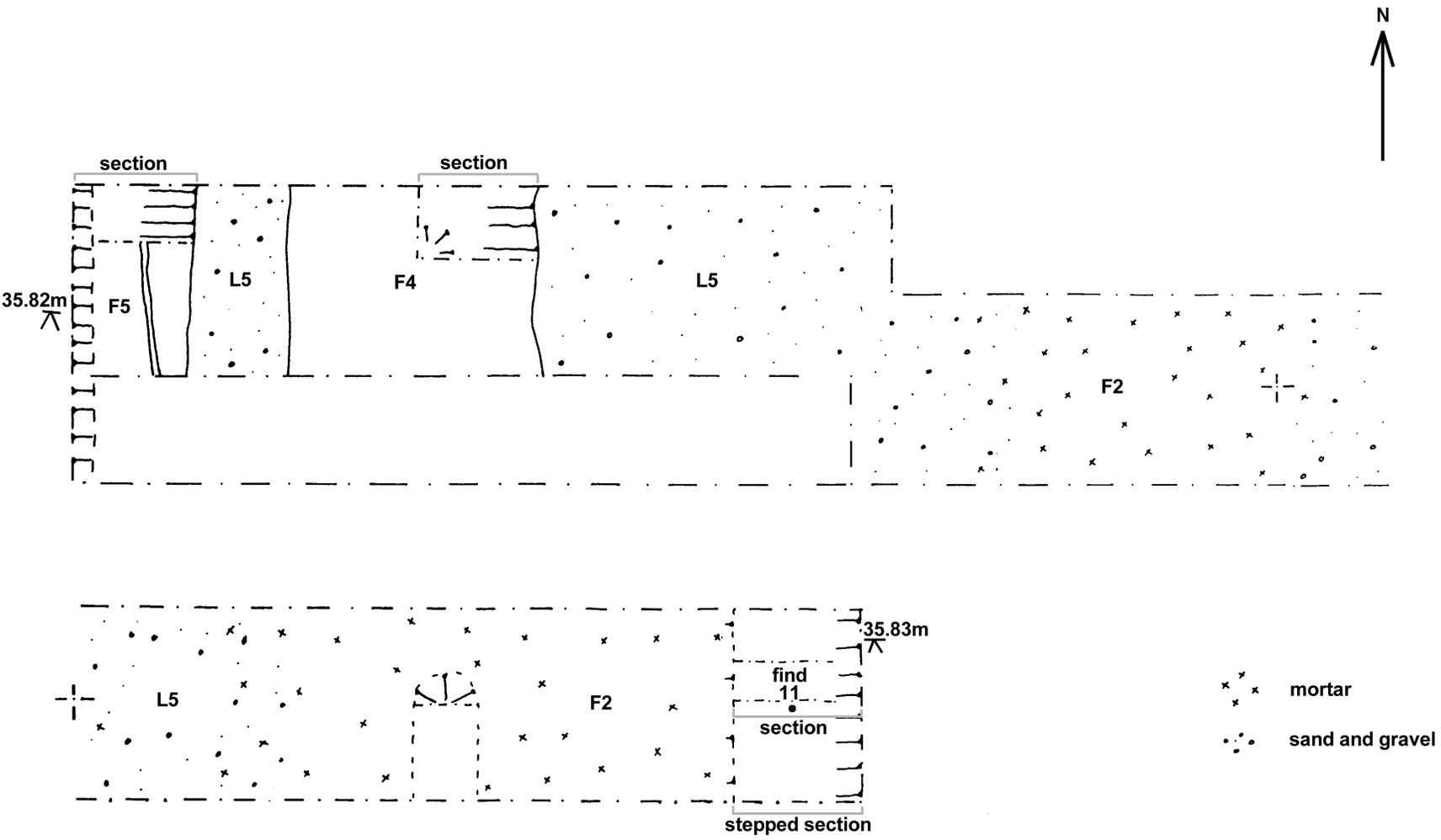
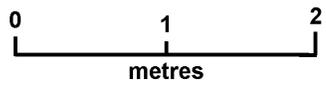


Fig 4 T2: plan, scale 1:50.



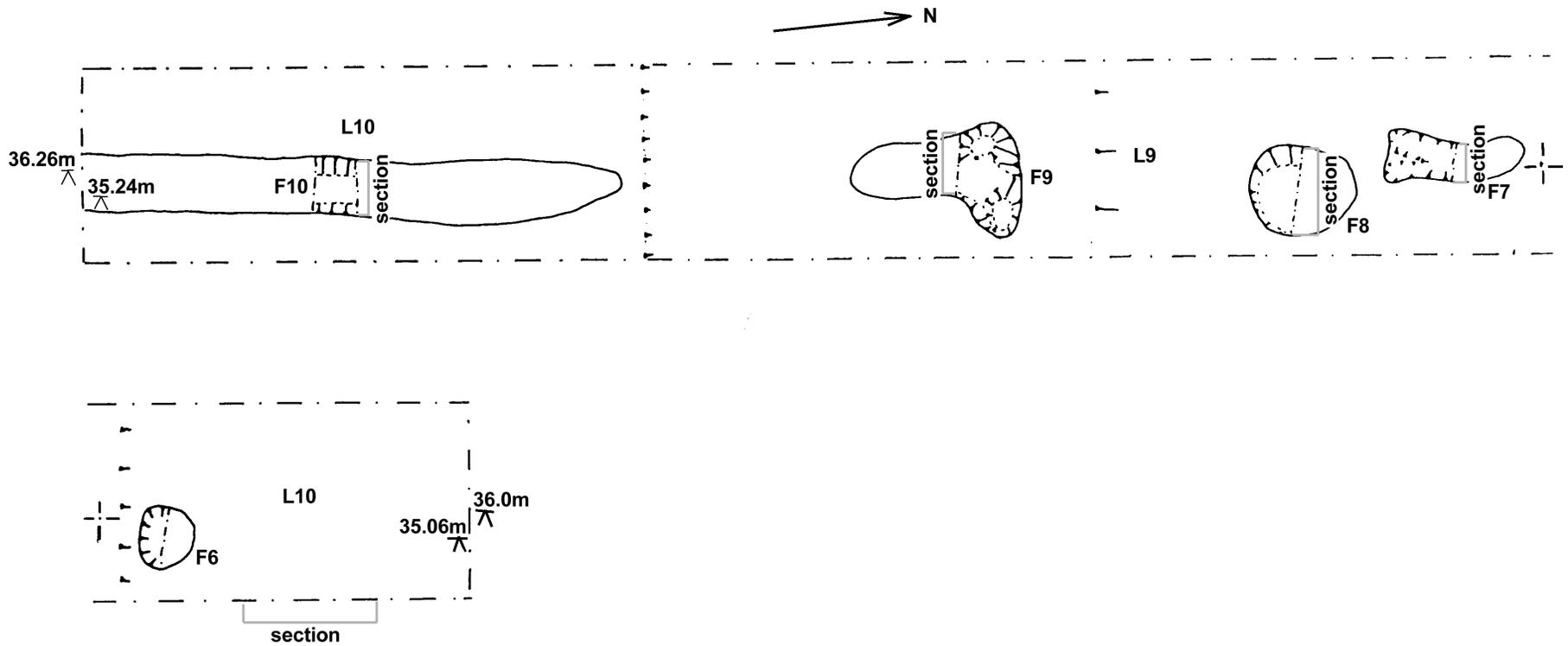


Fig 5 T3: plan, scale 1:50.

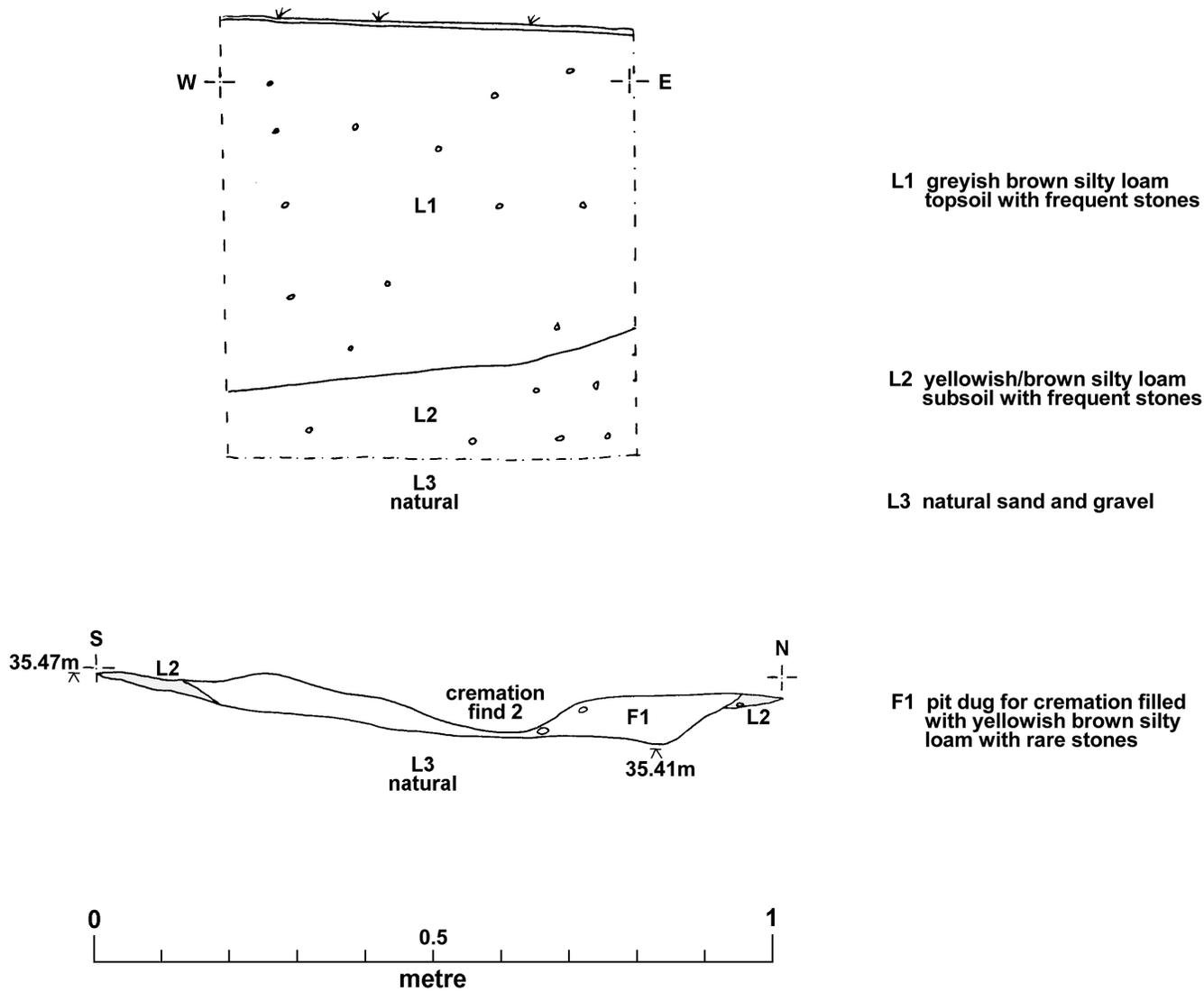


Fig 6 T1: representative south-facing section of trench and east-facing section of F1, scale 1:10.

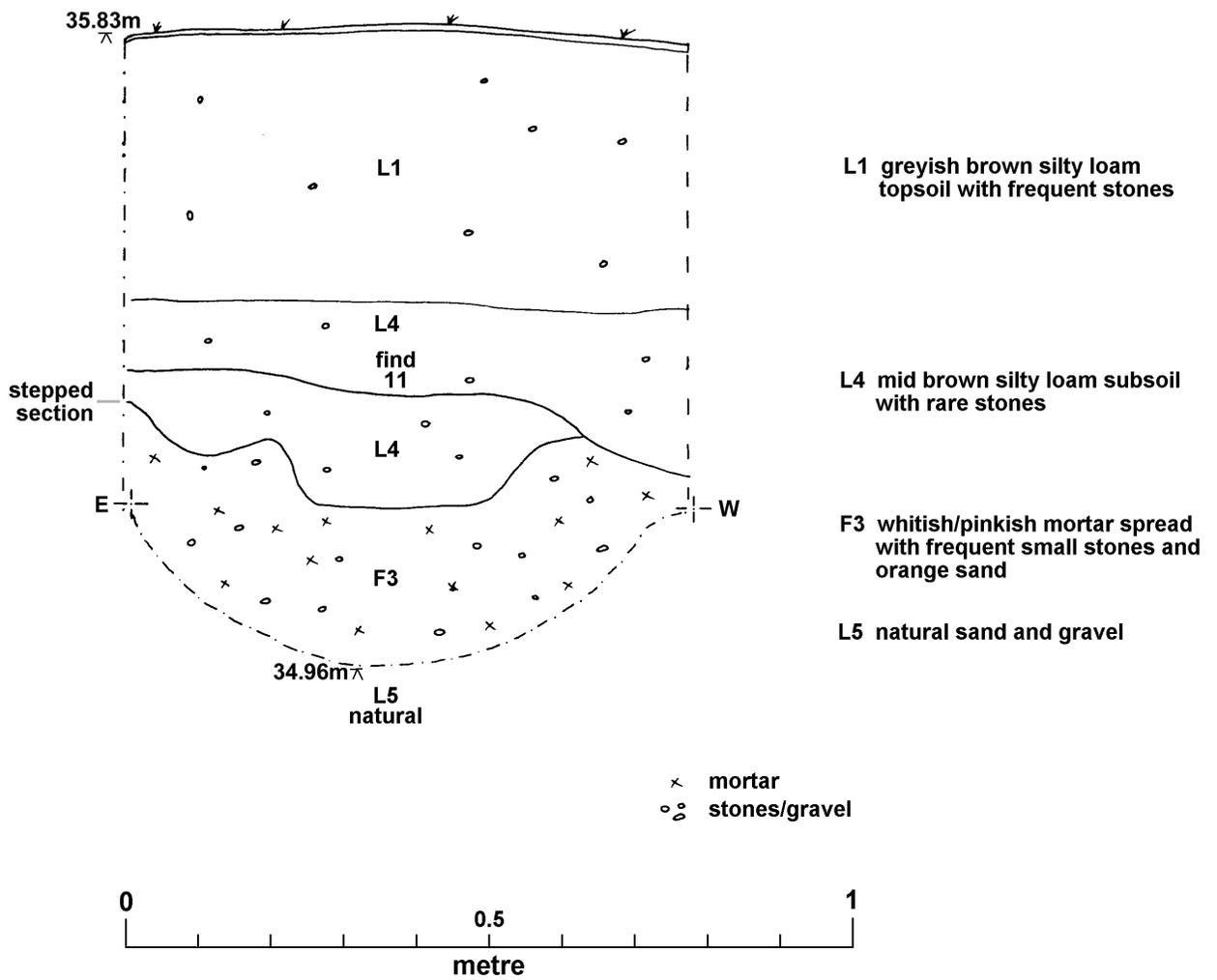


Fig 7 T2, F3: north-facing section, scale 1:10.

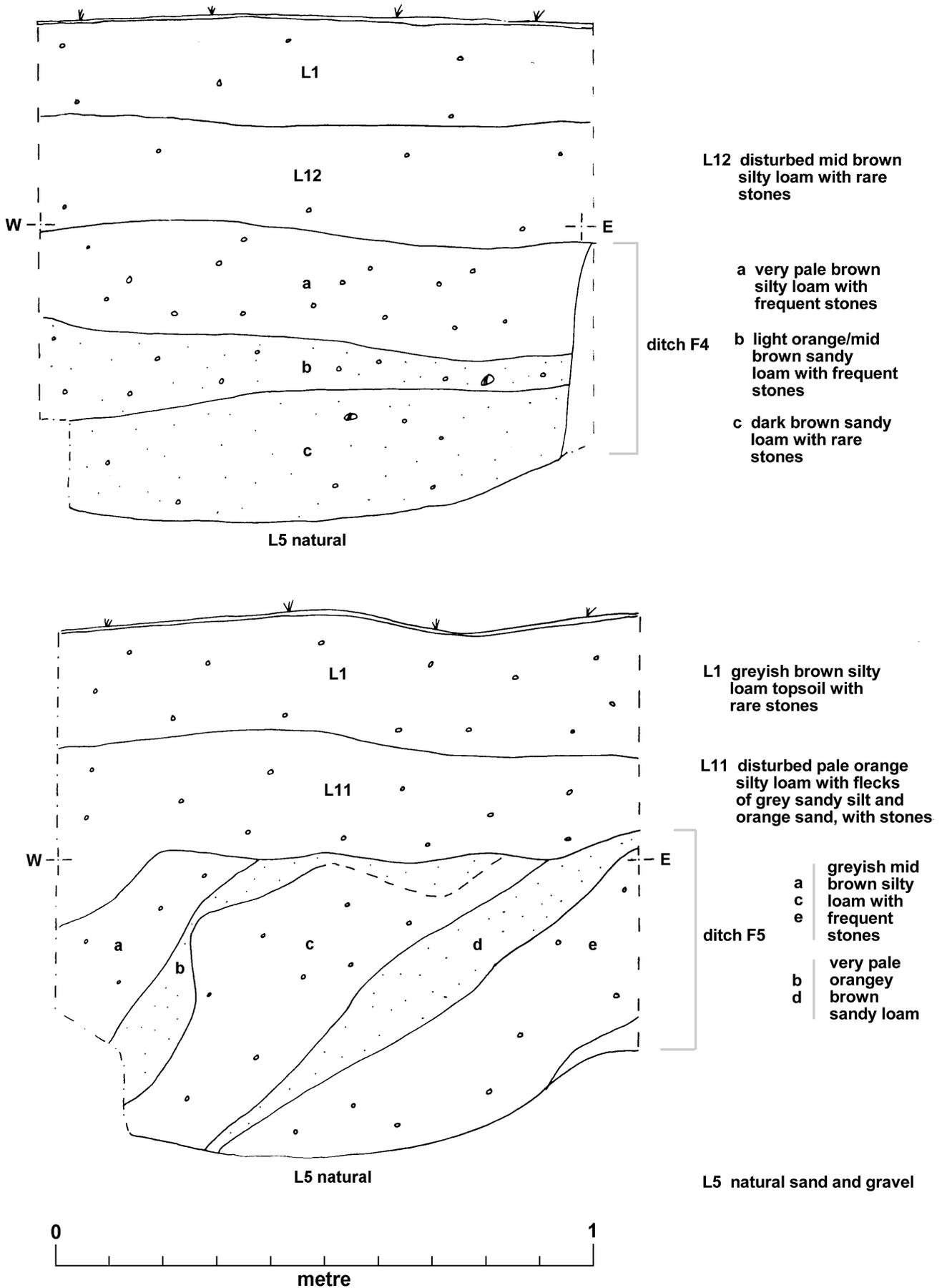
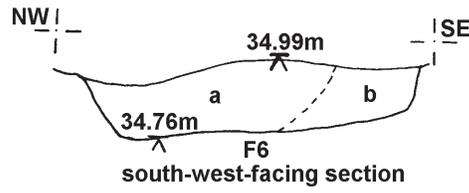
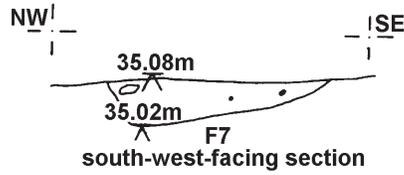


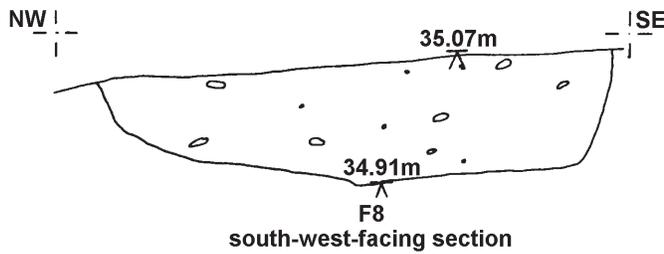
Fig 8 T2, F4: south-facing section and F5: south-facing section, scale 1:10.



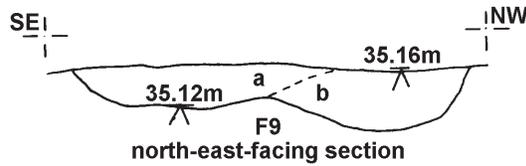
pit F6
 a mid brown sandy silt
 b mottled light/mid brown sandy silt



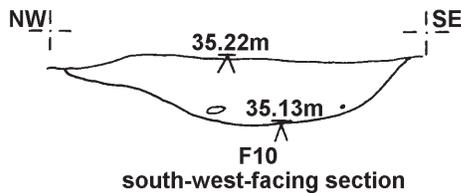
ditch-like feature F7
 mid brown sandy silt with rare small stones



pit F8
 mid to dark brown silt with mottled orange sand and infrequent small stones



ditch-like feature F9
 a light to mid brown silt
 b dirty yellow to mid brown silt



ditch F10
 light brown sandy silt

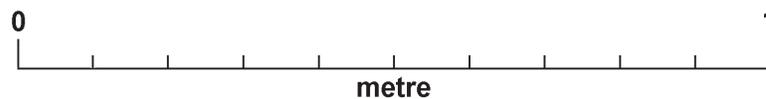


Fig 9 T3: sections of features, scale 1:10.

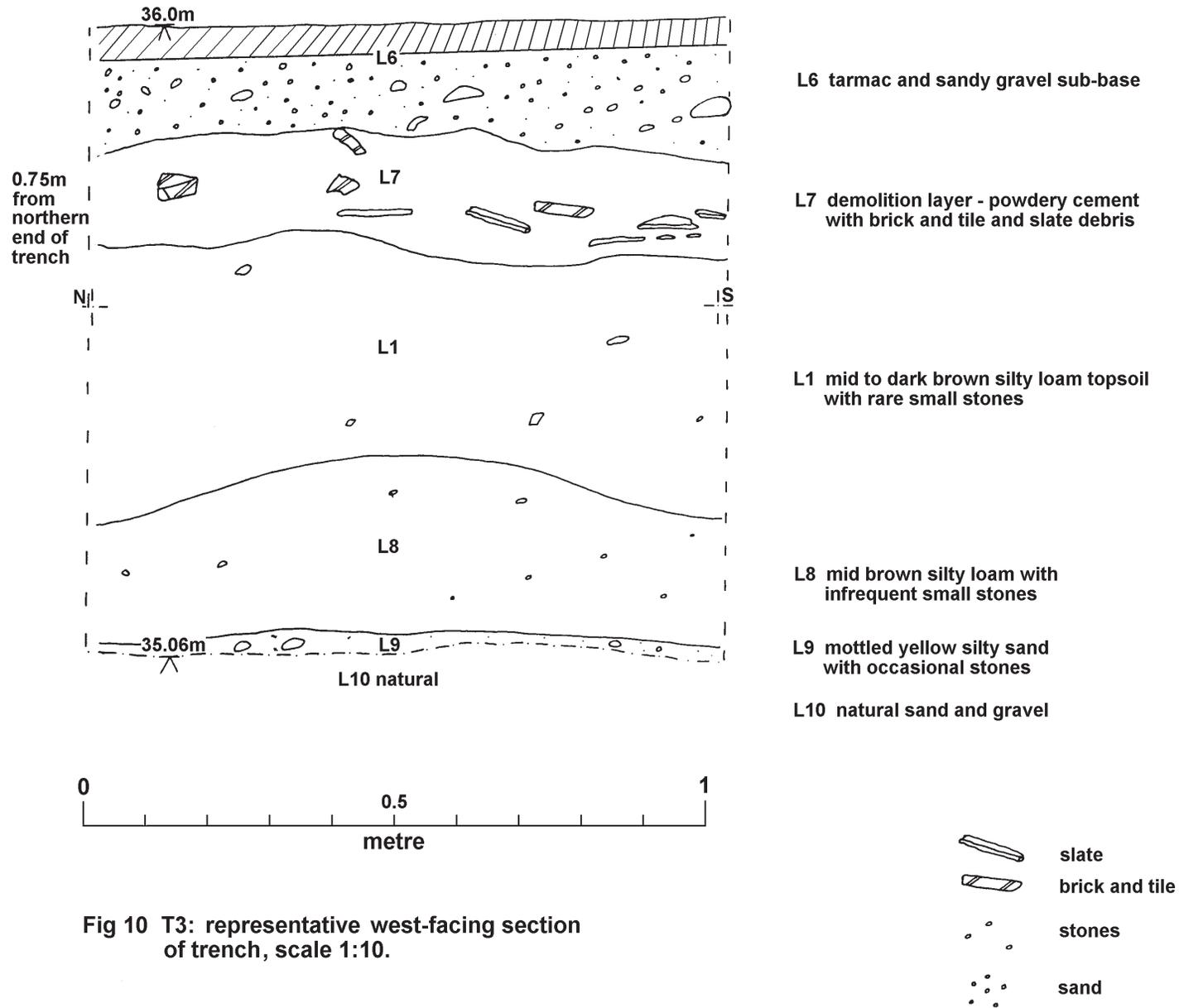


Fig 10 T3: representative west-facing section of trench, scale 1:10.

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

Summary sheet

Site address: Handford House, 1 Queens Road, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 9858 2475	Site code: Museum accession code 2002.161
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: September 2002	Size of area investigated: 3 x 15m trenches
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? Yes	Related EHCR nos: 11850 & 11857
Final report: CAT Report 210 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Roman	
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>During an archaeological evaluation in the grounds of Handford House, 1 Queens Road, Colchester, Essex, the excavation of three trial-trenches revealed one in situ Roman cremation and other possible cremations. Modern or post-medieval gardening activity and the digging of pits for rubbish-disposal may have destroyed other cremations on the site.</i>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: October 2002