

An archaeological evaluation at 7 Ashley Gardens, Colchester, Essex July 2003

report prepared by
Kate Orr

on behalf of
Mr Nicholson



CAT project ref.: 03/7d
NGR: TL 98309 25064
Planning application no: F/COL/03/0234
Colchester Museums accession code: 2003.194



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EHCR summary sheet

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Plate 1 (front cover): site shot looking north.

1 Summary

Two small trial-trenches were excavated in the garden of 7 Ashley Gardens, Colchester, Essex. A probable Roman deposit was recorded in one trench which had been cut by a large ditch which may be Roman or post-medieval in date. The presence of a small amount of residual Roman tile and pottery would be expected from a site in this location, but it does not signify actual Roman settlement on the site itself. Three fragments of medieval pottery may indicate medieval activity in the vicinity.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological evaluation at 7 Ashley Gardens, Colchester, Essex which was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT). The fieldwork took place on the 25th July 2003.
- 2.2 Planning permission was applied for in April 2003 for the erection of a new dwelling and detached garage (application number F/COL/03/0234).
- 2.3 The 0.128ha site is located west of the town centre on the northern side of Lexden Road, at National Grid Reference TL 98309 25064. The new property is to be built within the garden of 7 Ashley Gardens which is on a slight north-facing slope. The site is bounded by trees and bushes to the north and west, the driveway to the south and the house of no 7 to the east (Figs 1-2).
- 2.4 This report follows a brief written by the Colchester Borough Council Archaeology Officer and a Written Scheme of Investigation supplied by CAT.
- 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 evaluation* (1999).

3 Archaeological background

- 3.1 The site is located within the area of the 'West Cemetery' of the Roman town, adjacent to the main route to London, which would have been lined with funerary monuments. This area has produced many of the more spectacular remains ranging from early Roman military gravestones to the later cremations (Crummy *et al* 1993, 258-64). A Roman lead coffin was discovered in 1880 some 30m north of the site (UAD no 1051), and a Roman cremation burial is recorded on the other side of Lexden Road (UAD no 1010).
- 3.2 The site lies near the boundary of the Scheduled Ancient Monument area of Sheepen, a late Iron Age settlement and industrial centre established by the Trinovantes tribe and maintained in the years after the Roman conquest (Scheduled Ancient Monument or SAM no 46). Extensive excavations in the 1930s and smaller-scale work in 1970 and later have produced evidence of workshops engaged in a range of industrial activities including metal-working, enamelling, pottery-making and leatherworking in the areas to the north of the site (Hawkes & Hull 1947; Niblett 1985).

4 Aim

The evaluation was designed to locate, identify and assess the quality and extent of any surviving archaeological remains prior to a decision being taken on the preservation or otherwise of deposits and the need for further work and/or mitigation.

5 Methodology

- 5.1** Two 1.5m-wide trial-trenches were excavated, both on a north-south alignment. Trench 1 measured 5.1m and Trench 2 measured 6.4m in length. A mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket was used to remove the soil in spits until archaeological features or natural ground was exposed.
- 5.2** Individual records of layers and features were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets. All exposed sub-soil features, archaeological deposits or negative features were manually cleaned, drawn in section and plan and examined in sufficient detail to allow their nature, date and importance to be assessed.
- 5.3** Section drawings of features and layers were made at a scale of 1:10. Plans of features were made at 1:20.
- 5.4** A register was compiled of finds. Finds were washed, marked and bagged according to context.
- 5.5** Standard 'record' shots of contexts were taken with a digital camera. Colour transparencies were used for overall site shots and all important contexts.

6 Results (Figs 3-4)

6.1 Trench 1

Layer or L1 consisted of 300mm of mid brown sandy silt topsoil with occasional small stones plus modern material, and sealed a thick accumulation layer of mid to dark brown soil, sandier than the topsoil above and with frequent small stones. This layer contained medieval coarseware pottery, peg-tile, clay pipe and animal bone (L3). On the western side of the trench, a seam of modern orange sand (L2) had been deposited on top of L3. At the northern end of the trench, L3 appeared to continue to beyond a metre below ground-level. A slightly greater depth of soil at the northern end of the site was expected because of the slope of the land. However, a scoop was taken out of the northern end of the trench to test the depth of natural, and natural sand had still not been reached at 1.9m below ground-level.

On inspection of the west-facing section, it was seen that L3 did not continue down but was sealing a large east-west aligned ditch (Feature or F1), filled by orangey brown silty sand and containing occasional fragments of Roman tile. (Some of the finds attributed to L3 may actually have come from F1.) At the southern end of Trench 1, natural yellowish sand was appearing at 950mm below ground-level (L6). Sealing L6 was a patch of light brown silt containing some Roman tile (L4). This is interpreted as being a probable Roman deposit which had been cut by F1. Apart from the 1.9m-deep scoop at the northern end of the trench, the remainder of the trench was excavated to a depth of 1.2m.

6.2 Trench 2

L1, consisting of 300mm of topsoil, was stripped off. In the centre of the trench was a dump of concrete and brick rubble. Tree-root disturbance was also recorded in L1 and the underlying layer L5 which consisted of loose, very mixed light orangey sand and grey brown silty sand. This layer extended to 900mm below ground-level and contained peg-tile. It was completely different in character to L3 in Trench 1. L5 sealed natural red sand with seams of dark grey brown silty sand (L6). There was no Roman deposit sealing natural in Trench 2. An irregular narrow curvilinear feature containing coal and peg-tile was cut into the natural (F2). This feature was not excavated. The trench was excavated to a depth of 1.1m.

7 Finds

Table of finds by context. The Roman material was identified by Stephen Benfield and the medieval and modern pottery by Howard Brooks. Post-Roman pottery after Cotter 2000.

Find no	Context	Description	Weight in g	Date
1	L1, T1	1 slate fragment	22	modern
1	L1, T1	Fe nail	24	modern
1	L1, T1	peg-tile fragment	24	medieval to modern
1	L1, T1	fragment of ironstone pottery (Fabric 48d)	1	modern
2	L3, T1	peg-tile fragments	144	medieval to modern
2	L3, T1	animal tooth and bone fragment	76	undated
2	L3, T1	2 clay-pipe stems	15	post-medieval to modern
2	L3, T1	2 abraded Roman potsherds	33	1st-3rd century
2	L3, T1	3 sherds of medieval coarseware (Fabric 20)	15	13th-14th century
2	L3, T1	fragment of ironstone pottery (Fabric 48d)	2	modern
2	L3, T1	1 base of a flowerpot (Fabric 51b)	26	19th-20th century
2	L3, T1	1 oystershell	10	undated
2	L3, T1	Roman tile fragments	238	Roman
3	L4, T1	1 piece Roman brick or tile	355	Roman
4	L5, T2	clay-pipe stem	1	post-medieval to modern
4	L5, T2	peg-tile	48	medieval to modern

8 Discussion

- 8.1** A probable Roman deposit (L4) was recorded in Trench 1 but most of this had been cut away by a large ditch (F1). F1 may be Roman in date; however, due to the depth of the feature, it was not safe to enter the trench to inspect its fill in detail. From the side of the trench, Roman tile could be seen in its fill including one large piece at 1.9m below ground level. No later material was visible but without hand excavation it is impossible to assign a definite date to the feature. L3 contained three sherds of residual 13th- to 14th-century pottery which may indicate medieval activity in the vicinity.
- 8.2** Trench 2 did not impact any archaeological features or deposits. L5 and L6 were very mixed, perhaps the effect of tree-root activity. There had also been some modern dumping of building material in the topsoil.
- 8.3** The presence of a small amount of residual Roman tile and pottery is what would be expected from a site in this location but does not signify actual Roman settlement on the site itself.

9 Acknowledgements

The Colchester Archaeological Trust would like to thank Mr Nicholson for commissioning and funding the work.

The project was monitored by Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council. The project was managed by Kate Orr and the site work was carried out by Kate Orr and Sarah Price.

10 References

- Cotter, J 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**
- Hawkes, C F C, & Hull, M R 1947 *Camulodunum*, RRCSAL, **14**
- Niblett, R 1985 *Sheepen, an early Roman industrial site at Camulodunum*, CBA Res Rep, **57**

11 Glossary

context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
EHCR feature	Essex Heritage Conservation Record, Essex County Council an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
NGR	National Grid Reference
medieval	the period from AD 1066-c 1500
modern	the period from c AD 1700 to the present day
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
post-medieval	the period from c AD 1500-1700
Roman	the period from AD 43-c AD 410
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database at Colchester Museums

12 Archive deposition

The archive is held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but it will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2003.194.

13 Site data

Site context list

Trench	Context	Description	Context date
1 & 2	L1	Turf and mid brown sandy silt topsoil with occasional small stones; containing slate, coal, peg-tile, Fe nail and white china	modern
1	L2	Seam of orange sand with occasional small stones, in western side of trench only	modern
1	L3	Mid to dark brown silty sand accumulation with frequent small stones; containing peg-tile, clay pipe, animal bone, slate, Roman pottery and Roman tile	post-medieval
1	L4	Light brown silt containing Roman tile	Roman?
2	L5	Loose, very mixed light orangey sand and grey brown silty sand containing peg-tile	post-medieval
1 & 2	L6	Natural sand	
1	F1	Large ditch filled by orangey brown silty sand, containing Roman tile	post-medieval or Roman?
2	F2	Irregular narrow curvilinear feature containing coal and peg-tile	modern

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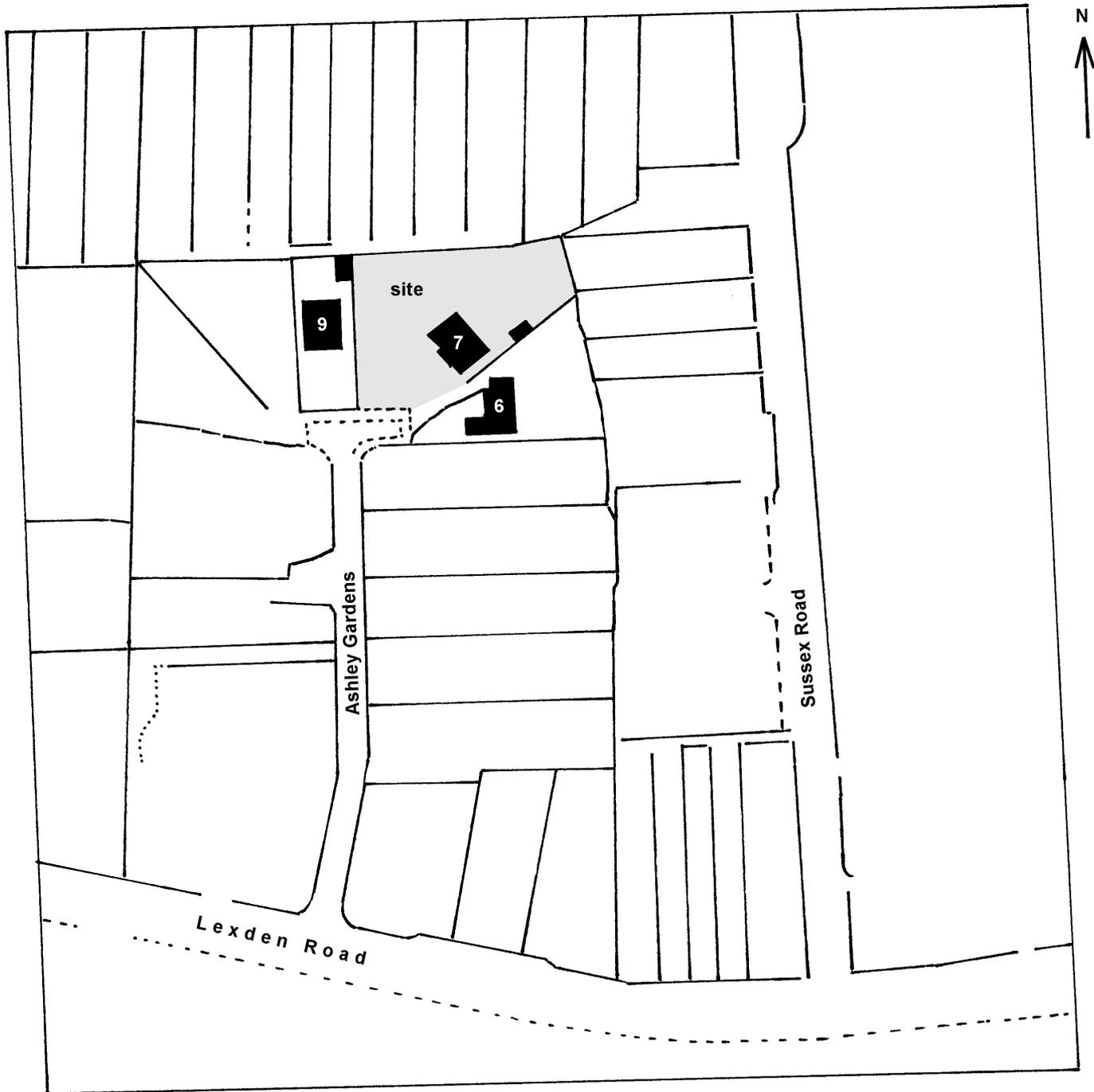
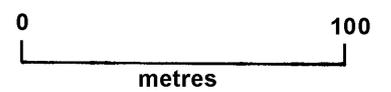


Fig 1 Site location, scale 1:2500.



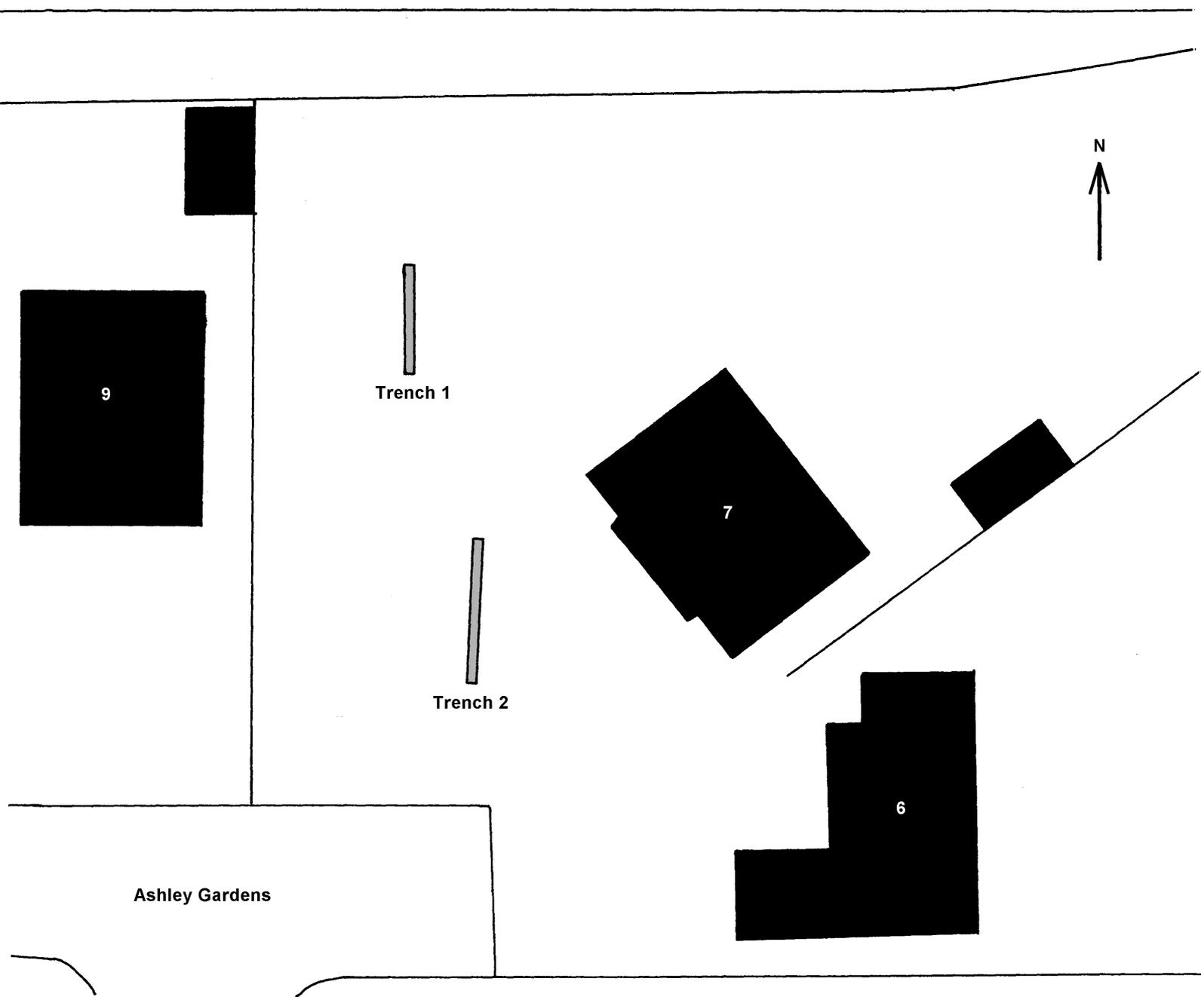


Fig 2 Site plan showing trench locations, scale 1:250.



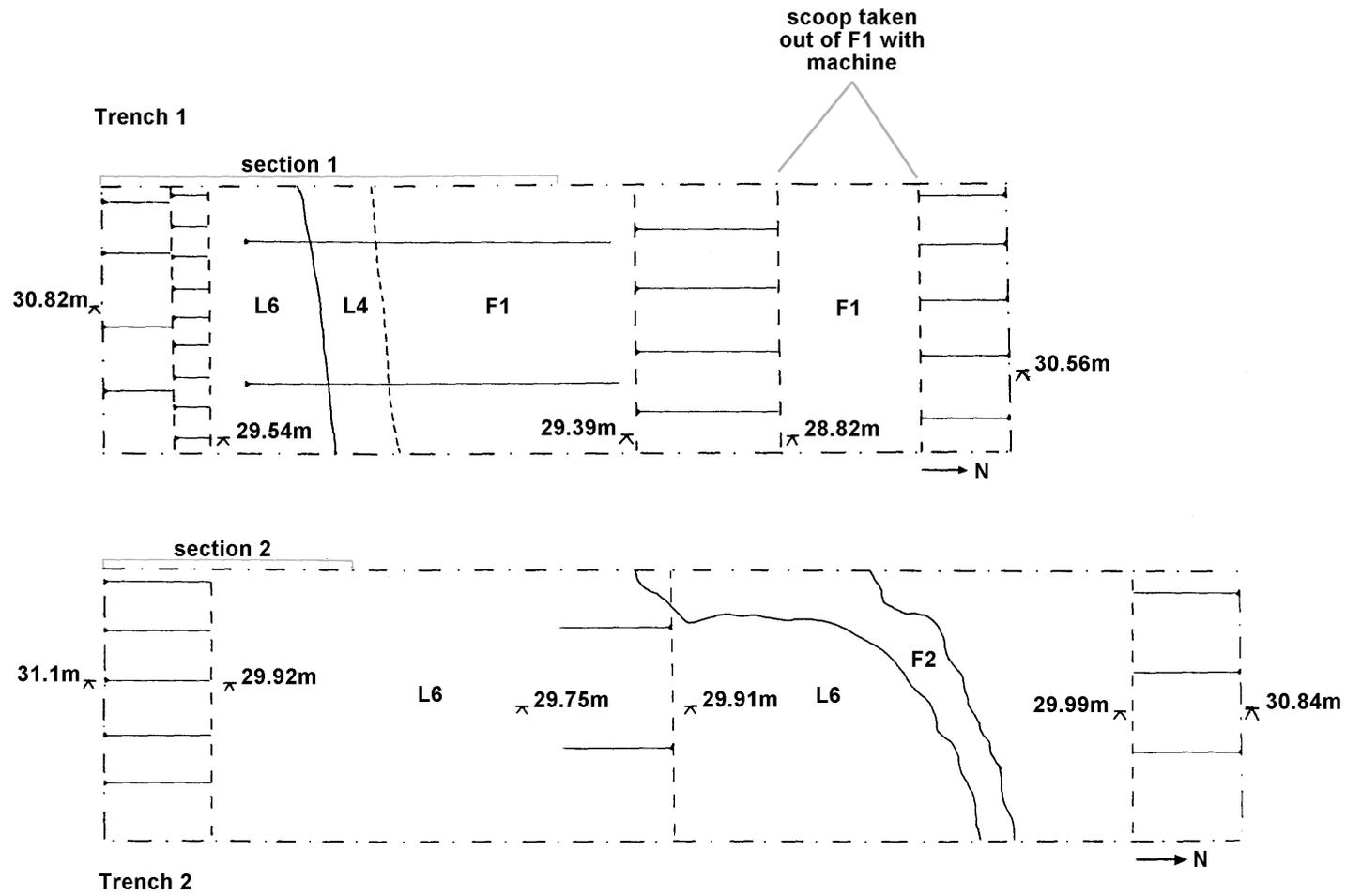
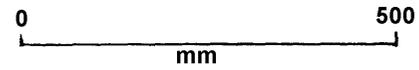


Fig 3 Trenches 1 and 2: plan, scale 1:40.



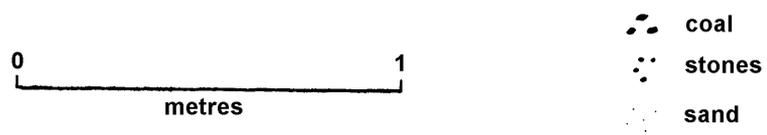
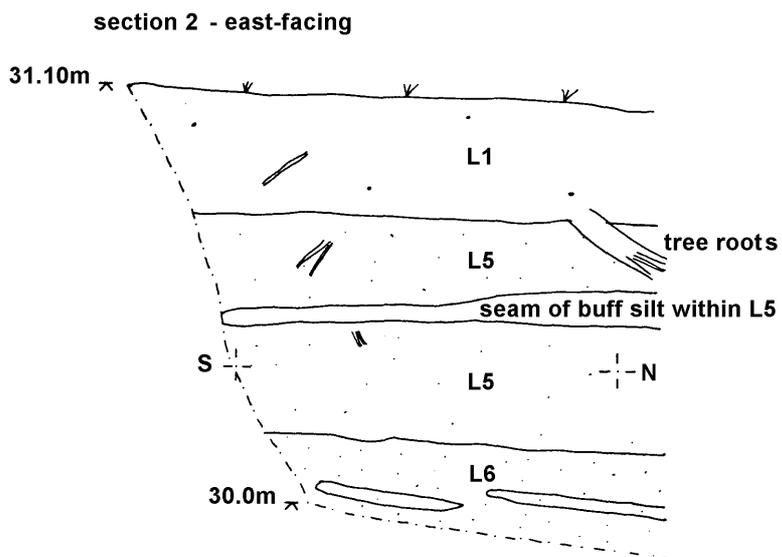
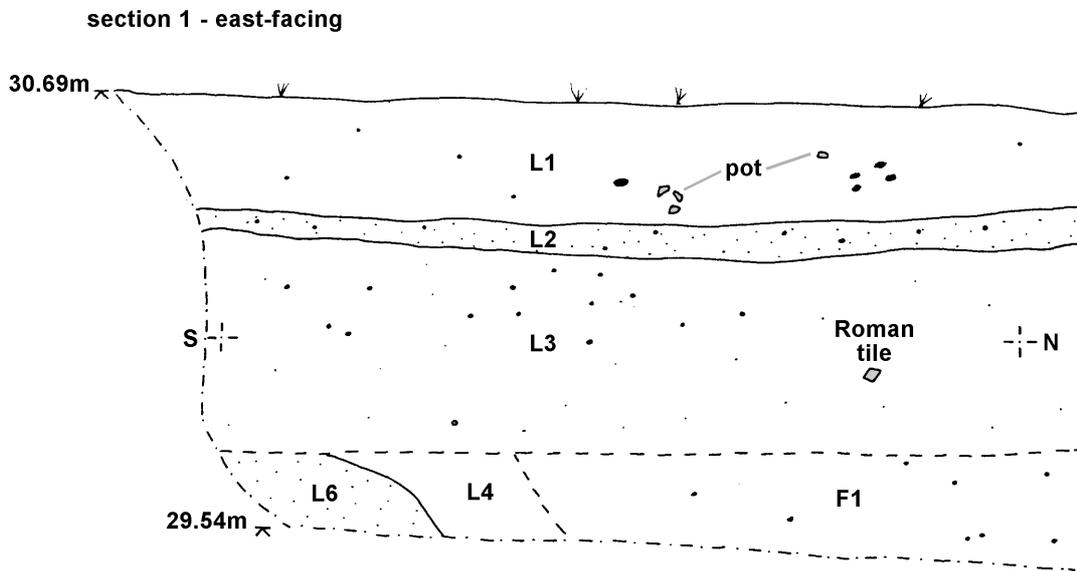


Fig 4 Trenches 1 and 2: sections, scale 1:20.

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

Summary sheet

Site address: 7 Ashley Gardens, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 98309 25064	Site code: Museum accession code 2003.194
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: July 25th 2003	Size of area investigated: 0.128 ha
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? Not known	Related EHCR nos:
Final report: CAT Report 240 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Roman, medieval, post-medieval, modern	
Summary of fieldwork results: Two small trial-trenches were excavated in the garden of 7 Ashley Gardens, Colchester, Essex. A probable Roman deposit was recorded in one trench which had been cut by a large ditch which may be Roman or post-medieval in date. The presence of a small amount of residual Roman tile and pottery would be expected from a site in this location, but it does not signify actual Roman settlement on the site itself. Residual 13th- to 14th-century pottery may indicate medieval activity in the vicinity.	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: August 2003