

**An archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching
at Area O of the
Garrison Urban Village,
Colchester, Essex
May 2004**

**report prepared by
Ben Holloway**

**commissioned by
RPS Planning, Transport & Environment
on behalf of
Taylor Woodrow**

CAT project ref.: 04/4D
Colchester Museums accession code: 2004.296
NGR: TL 9953 2389 (c)



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1 Summary

This is the archive report on an archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching at Area O of the planned urban village at the Garrison, Colchester, Essex. This work was carried out as part of a programme of archaeological evaluation of areas of alienated land, acquired by Taylor Woodrow for residential development. A single 1.8m x 50m trial-trench (Trench O1) was excavated, within which two archaeological and one natural feature were recorded. The archaeological features comprise two linear features probably representing a boundary ditch which had been recut at a later date. The earlier of the two ditches contained two sherds of Roman pottery and a number of horse teeth. Both of the archaeological features cut a natural feature, the size and profile of which suggests that it is a tree bowl. Undated hillwash deposits associated with the dry valley followed by Circular Road South were recorded at the northern end of the trench.

2 Introduction

2.1 The proposed development of the alienated land at Colchester Garrison involves the redevelopment, primarily for residential use, of areas of the present Colchester Garrison and adjacent farmland formerly owned by the MoD. The construction of the new garrison over the next four years will allow a phased decanting of the existing Garrison personnel into the new garrison, thus facilitating phased release of the former Garrison areas. In response to the proposed development and redevelopment, a programme of further archaeological evaluation by means of trial-trenching is now required. This work is being undertaken by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) in 2004 on Areas C, O and E as a continuation of the partial evaluation of alienated land conducted by CAT in 2002 for *The new garrison composite environmental statement* (Masefield 2002). The results for Area C are presented in CAT Report 271 and those for Area E will be presented in CAT Report 274.

Area O is centred on National Grid Reference TL 9953 2389, and is located on the south side of Circular Road South and the west side of Ypres Road (Fig 1). It is currently public open space with cut grass. Area O has not always been open space; the former military hospital was within Area O, to the south of Trench O1, until its demolition in 1995 (CAT Report 97). The site of Sobraon Barracks, a temporary camp which was built before World War One and demolished in 1949, also falls within Area O but to the west of Trench O1. The site is located on the side of a dry valley which slopes down from south to north from a plateau on which the military hospital was constructed. The base of the valley is reflected in the line of Circular Road South running east-west.

The local drift geology is predominantly sands and gravel. This is occasionally in a clay matrix, and is sometimes capped by cover loam. Colluvial (hillwash) deposits are likely to be located at the base of the valley.

The requirement for minimal further trenching within Area O was agreed at a meeting between Colchester Borough Council Archaeological Officer (CBCAO), RPS (the project archaeological consultants), and CAT (the archaeological contractors) which was held on 24th February 2004.

2.2 The archaeological evaluation was commissioned by RPS on behalf of Taylor Woodrow and was carried out by CAT in May 2004 under RPS project management. The project was monitored by the CBCAO and RPS.

2.3 The investigation followed a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by RPS in association with CAT, dated March 2004, and agreed by CBCAO (RPS 2004b). The WSI was produced in accordance with a research design prepared by RPS in 2004 (RPS 2004a). This report mirrors the standards and practices contained in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on the standards and practice for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (2002), and the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standards and guidance for an archaeological field evaluation* (1999).

3 Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of the archaeological evaluation were to assess the location, extent, date, character, condition, quality and importance of any surviving archaeological features or deposits which may be impacted by the development. This information will inform any mitigation strategies that may be required ahead of or during development. To achieve this the evaluation will attempt to address the following objectives:

- to establish the presence/absence of human burials
- to establish whether the site is rural or domestic in character, and
- to establish whether there are any buildings or other structures on site (in the form of post-holes, gullies, etc).

4 Archaeological background

4.1 Introduction

The archaeological and historical setting of the proposed development area has already been comprehensively explored in a desk-based assessment or DBA (CAT Report 97), and is only summarised here (ie the *oppidum* and cropmark sites), followed by information on Roman burials and map evidence. This section is also based on CAT Report 206, RPS 2004a and RPS 2004b.

4.2 Archaeological remains of the Iron Age *oppidum*

4.2.1 Much of the land south and south-west of Colchester's modern town centre falls within the area of the pre-Roman *oppidum* of Camulodunum. The only above-ground traces of this *oppidum* are some of the linear banks and ditches of the defensive dyke system that surrounded it, and centres of occupation with smaller sites and trackways, field boundary ditches and roads have been identified from cropmarks. The Garrison PFI site occupies the eastern edge of the *oppidum*, and one of the defensive dykes (the Berechurch Dyke) crosses the extreme south-eastern edge of the Garrison PFI site. Thus Area O lies within the area of the pre-Roman *oppidum*.

As presently understood, the *oppidum* had two main centres of activity: at modern Gosbecks Farm (2km south-west of the Garrison area), which was a Late Iron Age and Roman rural farmstead (and possibly the home of Cunobelin); and Sheepen (2km north-west of the Garrison area), which was the industrial and trading centre. It is possible that other such centres existed within the *oppidum*.

Apart from these two large centres, it is likely that there were a number of smaller domestic and farming sites in the *oppidum* which await discovery. One has been recorded at Kirkee McMunn Barracks (Shimmin 1998). The cropmarks within the Garrison PFI site may represent the trackways and field boundary ditches associated with such sites.

Over the southern part of the Garrison PFI site, a large area of cropmarks is recorded. Geophysical survey has partially confirmed and also added to the pattern of linear cropmark features (CAT Report 184). An informed interpretation based on previous limited excavations would indicate that they are late prehistoric and/or Romano-British in date, and represent the trackways, paddocks and field boundaries of a rural settlement of that period. In some areas, the overlapping of the cropmarks suggests that more than one period or phase of activity is represented.

4.2.2 In addition to the pre- and early Roman activity occupation and agriculture that is associated with the *oppidum*, the land immediately to the south of the Roman walled town includes the area of its southern extra-mural cemetery and therefore has a higher potential to contain burials of a Roman date than the areas further south, ie Area O, the use of which appears to have been agricultural in the Roman period.

A number of Roman graves were recorded in the area of the Garrison PFI site throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. One of these discoveries was of three burials, including one of a lead coffin, on the north side of Somme Road (south of Area O: Hull

no 105, UAD event 1055, EHCR no 13198, NGR TL 9927 2368). However, no further graves were recorded in the area of Somme Road during the trial-trenching in the new garrison Area YPR to the south of Somme Road in 2002 (CAT Report 206). Roman graves have also been recorded to the north-east of Area O (the southern part of Abbey Field: Hull no 200, UAD event no 1099). The burials at Abbey Field were previously noted by Hull during hut-building activities 'north of the military hospital' in 1939 (Hull nos 132 & 133, UAD event no 1073, EHCR nos 11893-11894, NGR TL 9960 2395).

These recorded burials of the Roman southern extra-mural cemetery have been found over a very wide area and the density of burials appears to vary greatly. It would seem that some areas of this cemetery were designated as intensive burial plots (such as on the site of the sports pitch at the northern end of Abbey Field) while other areas to the south contained a far less dense distribution of burial groups (CAT Report 54; CAT Report 97; CAT Report 138). Roman burials have also been found during the current programme of evaluation, in Area C1 and Area C2, in May 2004 (CAT Report 271).

4.3 Evidence of post-Roman use of the area and site

No evidence of any Anglo-Saxon, medieval or post-medieval activity was recorded in or around Trench O1. Evidence suggests that Area O remained under agriculture until the development of the modern Garrison during the later 19th and early 20th centuries.

4.4 Cartographic evidence

Maps from the 18th and early 19th century show the area as arable land. Chapman and André's map of 1777 shows the area as unwooded, as does the 1st Edition OS map of 1874. However, later 19th- and 20th-century maps show extensive development across the entire area with the construction of the military hospital and the gymnasium to the south and east of Area O and the construction of Sobraon Barracks on the central and western parts of Area O. These structures were, with the exception of the gymnasium, demolished in the second half of the 20th century, although the footings and groundworks associated with them are likely to have had a substantial impact on any archaeological features on the site.

4.5 Previous archaeological investigations

A series of trial-trenches was excavated in 2002 within the area of the new garrison (Area YPR), located to the south of the central position of Area O and Somme Road (CAT Report 206). Despite the relatively undisturbed nature of this area, few archaeological features were found. A single ditch contained a fragment of Roman tile and may therefore represent a field division of the Roman landscape. No burials were observed in this area. The foundations of the now-demolished military hospital were recorded to the immediate south of the eastern end of Area O (CAT Report 197). The southern two trenches were excavated in ground which was less disturbed but produced no significant archaeological features or deposits. A single trench was excavated on the west side of the car park at the southern extent of Abbey Field in 2002 to the immediate north of Area O. The area had been heavily disturbed by modern services and no significant archaeology was recorded (CAT Report 206).

5 The trial-trench

5.1 Introduction (Figs 1-3)

A single trench was machine-cut under archaeological supervision in Area O (Trench O1 or TO1). The trench was 1.8m wide and 50m long. Table 1 below gives grid co-ordinates for the ends of the trench, its length, and heights above Ordnance Datum for modern ground-level and the level of natural subsoil. Next, a summary and list of contexts is given for the trial-trench (section 5.2 below). This is followed by a general discussion of the archaeology in section 7.

Table 1: Trench co-ordinates and heights above OD for modern ground-level and natural subsoil.

Trench no	Terminal co-ordinates	Trench length	OD level on ground-level	OD level on natural
TO1	N: 599568.79, 223924.11 S: 599552.07, 223876.62	50m	25.46 29.81	24.46 29.21

5.2 Description of the archaeological sequence

This section gives an archaeological summary of the trench with a tabulation of context and finds dating information.

Trench O1: summary (Figs 1-4)

This trench was excavated at the north-east end of Area O. The only datable feature was Roman and consisted of a linear ditch (OF1). Two other features were observed in the trench, ie an undated linear feature (OF2) which cut ditch OF1 and a natural hollow or tree throw (OF3) that had been cut by the later linear feature OF2. The features were clustered in the southern half of the trench, cutting the natural geology (OL3). In the northern 5.0m of the trench, colluvium or hillwash associated with the dry valley to a maximum depth of of 1m at the northern end of the trench (machine sample). No finds were recovered from the deposit.

Table 2: Trench O1 – archaeology.

Feature or layer no	Type	Dated finds	Phase
OF1	Linear ditch feature	1st- to 3rd-century pottery	Roman
OF2	Linear feature re-cut for OF1	None recovered	-
OF3	Natural feature	None recovered	-

6 The finds

6.1 General

The finds are listed in Table 4 (Appendix) which gives descriptions and approximate dates for stratified finds. Summaries of the Roman pottery are given here. No small finds were recovered from this evaluation.

6.2 The Roman pottery

by Stephen Benfield

In total, 50g of Roman pottery was collected from the evaluation. The assemblage contained two sherds of heavily-tempered grey ware storage jar (Fabric HZ). These storage vessels were used throughout the Roman period and as a result the pottery dating could be accommodated within a range of the 1st to 3rd centuries. (Fabric descriptions are after *CAR 10* and Hawkes & Hull 1947 and Hull 1958.)

7 Discussion

During the evaluation in Area O, only three archaeological features were recorded. No post-medieval, medieval or Anglo-Saxon features were observed, nor were any features of a prehistoric date. The only cut archaeological features observed were Roman. These consisted of linear Roman ditch OF1, an undated later recut associated with ditch OF1 (OF2), and a natural feature OF3 which had been cut by OF2. The features that were observed were all cut into the natural sands and gravels OL3. There was no modern disturbance in the trial-trench as efforts had been made to locate it outside the known footprint of the now-demolished military hospital and Sobraon Barracks. The linear ditch features are likely to have been boundary ditches forming part of a Roman field system, with the pottery from OF1 confirming their Roman date. The second linear feature OF2

is likely to be a re-cut of the earlier boundary ditch, either for emptying out silting or redefining a land boundary. The features that have been observed indicate that the landscape was being used for agriculture. This interpretation, combined with the lack of any evidence for structures such as post-holes and associated occupation debris, is consistent with Area O being a primarily rural site. The dry valley which runs below Circular Road South is shown to have been part-filled by hillwash deposits. The deposits remain undated, although colluviation tends to occur at times of agricultural intensification, as tree cover is reduced so allowing soil to run off, and it would be expected that some of the soil build-up is of Late Iron Age/Roman date.

Table 3: summary of all features.

Note: (1) number of each context type
 (2) that number as a percentage of all contexts
 (3) that number as a percentage of cuts only (ie discounting layers).

	topsoils, subsoils, other layers	prehistoric features	Roman features	Anglo-Saxon and medieval features	post-medieval and modern features	undated features	natural features
(1) number	3	0	1	0	0	1	1
(2) as % of all contexts	50	0	16	0	0	16	16
(3) as % of all cuts		0	33	0	0	33	33

8 Conclusions

The evaluation work which was carried out in Area O consisted of a single 50m-long trial-trench within which three archaeological features were recorded. No features of prehistoric or Iron Age date were observed, nor was there any evidence of Anglo-Saxon or medieval activity on the site. No evidence of post-medieval or modern activity was observed during the evaluation, except for that which is already documented such as the military hospital and Sobraon Barracks.

The evidence from the evaluation suggests that the site was part of a rural landscape throughout prehistory and the Roman period and on into the medieval, post-medieval and modern periods, until the construction of the military hospital and Sobraon Barracks in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

9 Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned and funded by Taylor Woodrow. The project consultants were RPS. The project was monitored by CBCAO Martin Winter. RPS provided EOD cover.

The fieldwork was supervised by Ben Holloway and carried out by Mariusz Gorniak and Chris Lister.

10 References

- | | | |
|---|-------|--|
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11 Glossary and abbreviations

Anglo-Saxon	the period from c AD 430 to AD 1066
AOD	above Ordnance Datum
CAR	<i>Colchester Archaeological Report</i>
CBCAO	Colchester Borough Council Archaeology Officer
cut	an unspecified hole in the ground
ditch	a linear cut, usually to define the edge of a field
EHCR	Essex Heritage Conservation Record, held by Essex County Council
EOD	Explosive Ordnance Disposal
Iron Age	7th century BC to Roman invasion of AD 43
Late Iron Age	c 200 BC-AD 43
medieval	from AD 1066 to Henry VIII
modern	19th and 20th centuries
NGR	National Grid Reference
pit	a hole dug principally for the disposal of rubbish
post-medieval	after Henry VIII and to the end of the 19th century
prehistoric	pre-Roman, or generally the years BC
residual	something out of its original context (ie a Roman coin in a 19th-century pit)
Roman	the period from AD 43 to c AD 430
RPS	RPS Planning, Transport & Environment
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database, held by Colchester Museums

12 Archive deposition

The finds and paper and digital archive are held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2004.296.

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13 Appendix
Table 4: finds list.

Finds bag no	Context	Area	Trench	Detail
1	OF1	O	TO1	Pottery, horse teeth

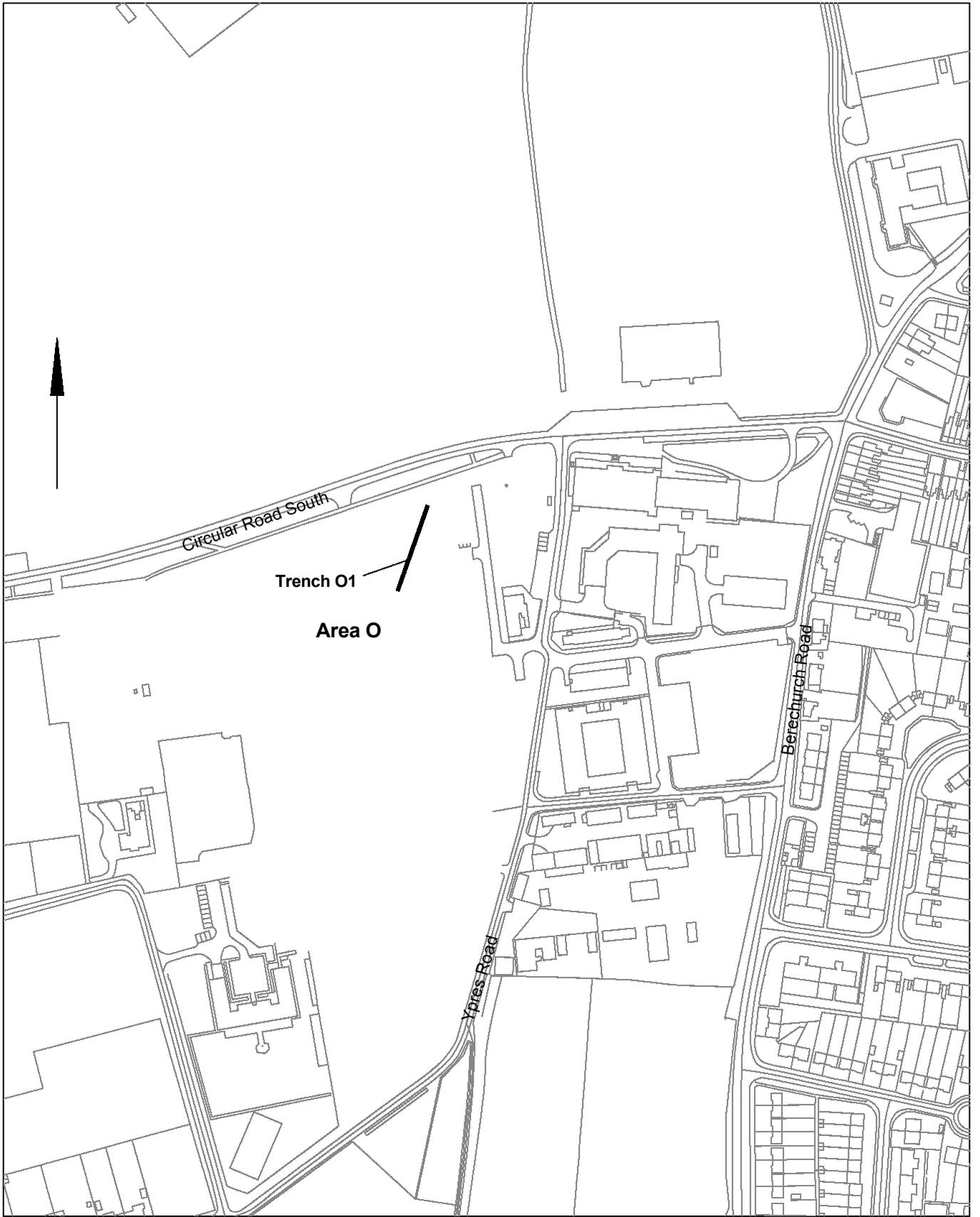


Fig 1 Trench location plan.

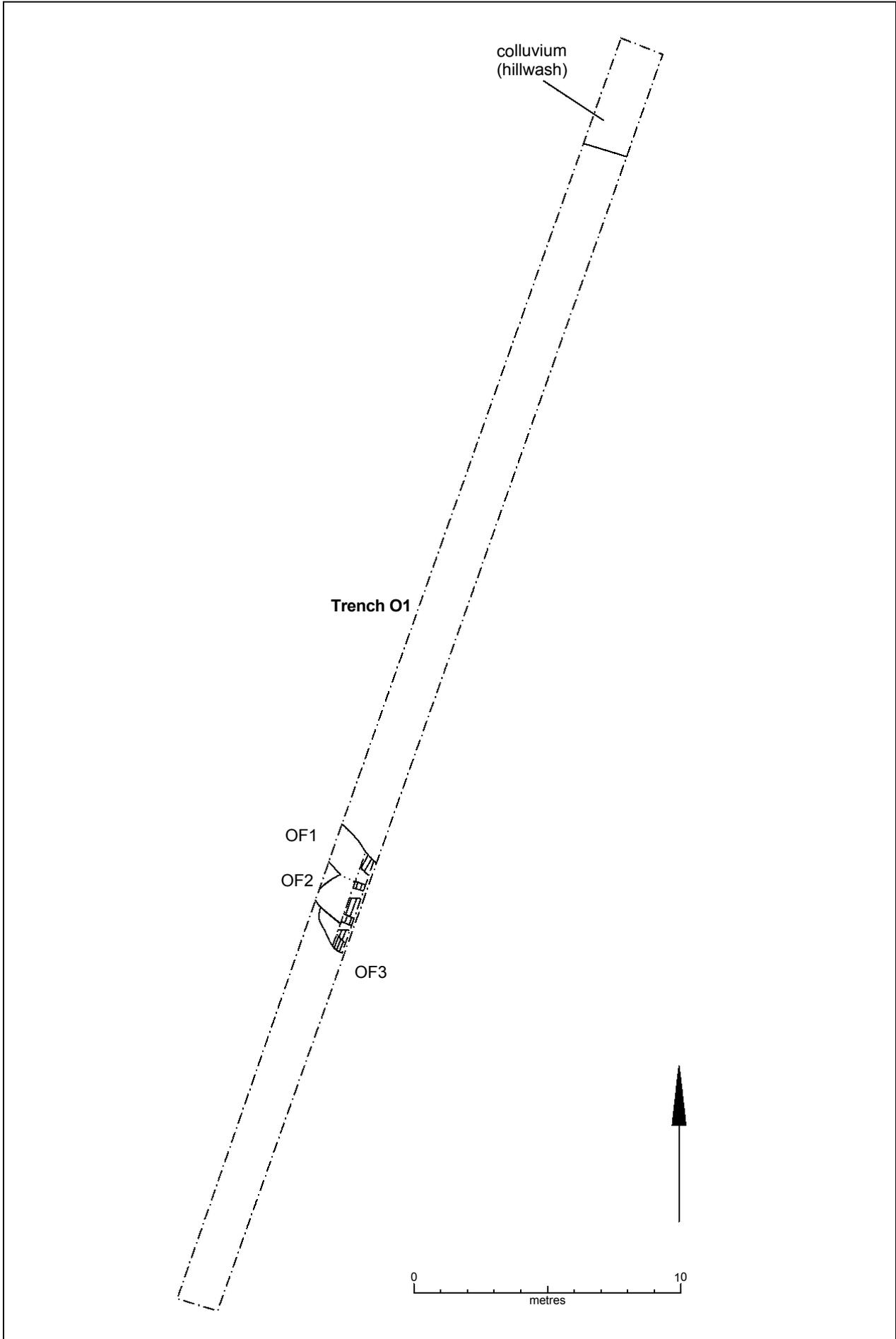


Fig 2 Trench O1: plan.

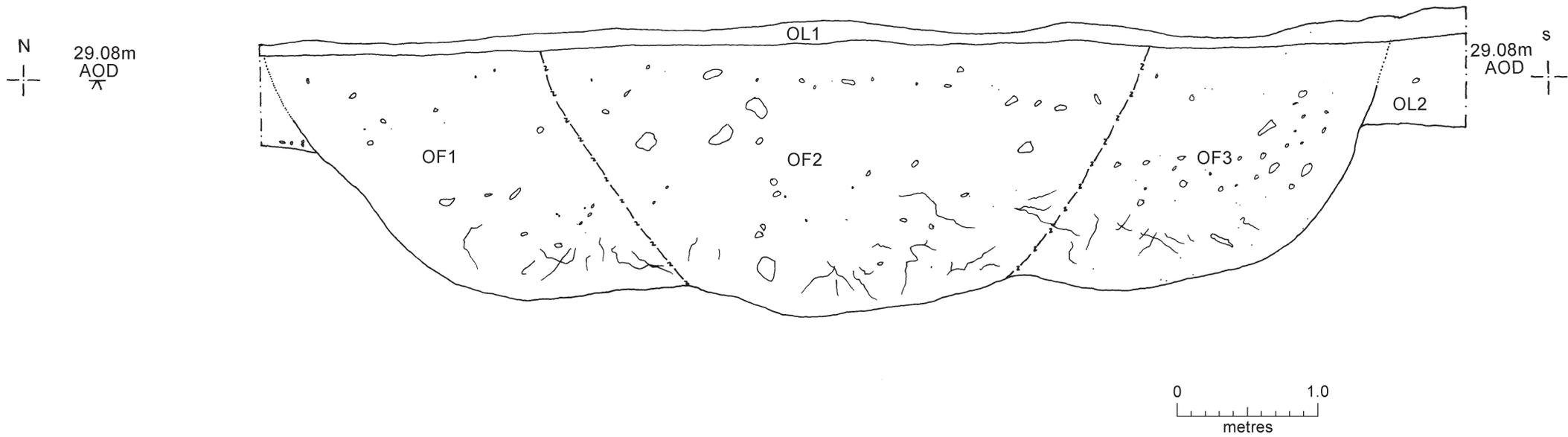


Fig 3 Trench O1: section.

Essex Heritage Conservation Record/ *Essex Archaeology and History*

Summary sheet

Site name/address: Area O of the Garrison Urban Village, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TL 9953 2389 (c)	Museum accession code: 2004.296
Type of work: Evaluation by trial-trenching	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: May 2004	Size of area investigated: 80m ²
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? Yes	Related EHCR nos:
Final report: CAT Report 272	
Periods represented: Roman	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>This is the archive report on an archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching at Area O of the planned urban village at the Garrison, Colchester, Essex. This work was carried out as part of a programme of archaeological evaluation of areas of alienated land, acquired by Taylor Woodrow for residential development. A single 1.8m x 50m trial-trench (Trench O1) was excavated, within which two archaeological and one natural feature were recorded. The archaeological features comprise two linear features probably representing a boundary ditch which had been recut at a later date. The earlier of the two ditches contained two sherds of Roman pottery and a number of horse teeth. Both of the archaeological features cut a natural feature, the size and profile of which suggests that it is a tree bowl. Undated hillwash deposits associated with the dry valley followed by Circular Road South were recorded at the northern end of the trench.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: CAT Reports 97 and 206	
Author of summary: B Holloway	Date of summary: June 2004