

**An archaeological evaluation
rear of
63 North Hill, Colchester, Essex.**

February 2000



on behalf of Fenn Wright Ltd

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CAT REPORT 64

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An archaeological evaluation rear of 63 North Hill, Colchester, Essex.

1 Summary

An evaluation by a single trial trench has confirmed the expected survival of Roman deposits on this site which lies within insula 17b of the Roman town. The highest surviving significant archaeological deposit (a layer of Roman wall material robbed out in medieval times) was at 0.25m below modern surface (31.00m AOD). The bottom of the sequence of archaeological material (all Roman in date) was at 1.75m below modern surface (29.50 m AOD). There were finds of Roman pottery and building debris, medieval peg tile and pottery, and a seventeenth century trader's token.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological evaluation by trial trench on the site of a proposed new extension rear of (west of) the existing building at 63 North Hill, Colchester, Essex. The excavated trench was at TL 99345 25240.
- 2.2 Fieldwork was carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between 16th - 19th February 2000, and post-excavation work took place between 22nd - 29th February 2000.
- 2.3 All fieldwork was done in accordance with a brief issued by the Archaeology Officer of Colchester Museums.
- 2.4 This report mirrors standards and practices contained in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines for the standards and practice of archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester*.

3 Archaeological background

The plot at 63 North Hill is situated within the Roman town, in *insula* 17b. It would have had a frontage onto the Roman street running between Headgate and North Gate. There are a large number of records of archaeological finds and excavations of various scales in the vicinity of this site. These were fully explored in the Desk-Based Assessment of this site prepared for Fenn Wright Ltd ¹. There are several nearby sites at Freda Gunton Lodge and the Wagon and Horses site which are repeated here in abbreviated form here because they are referred to in this report. For the other sites such as the Mercury Theatre, St Mary's Church and the Gilberd School, see the Desk-Based Assessment.

Freda Gunton Lodge 1994 (figure 4 number 4)

An evaluation showed 0.6 metres of topsoil above 1.15 metres deep Roman deposits containing Roman brick and tile and flue tile (evidence for a Roman building with a hypocaust and a tiled roof).

Balkerne Gardens [now Freda Gunton Lodge] (figure 4 number 10)

Engineers test pits showed recent topsoil, archaeological deposits, and natural sand at various depths:

	T1 (Parsley House)	T2 (PH)	T3 (PH)	T4 (Freda Gunton Lodge)	T5 (FGL)
Topsoil	1.20m thick	1.3m thick	0.9m thick	0.9m thick	0.9m thick
Roman strata	1.80m thick	0.8m thick	2.1m thick	1.6m thick	1.8m thick
Natural subsoil	at 3.0 metres	at 2.1 m	at 3.0m	at 2.5m	at 2.7m

Observation of footings trenches revealed much Roman stratigraphy, a gravel yard, wall lines, burnt material probably of Boudican period and the street between insulae 17a and 17b.

The Wagon and Horses site 1994 (figure 4, number 15)

Observation of contractors trenches for a rear extension revealed:

Modern concrete and dumped soils to 0.4m
burnt surface at 0.4m
Various deposits 4.4m to 1.04m
a charred horizon at 0.7m - 1.04m
mixed sandy clay, gravels to 1.49m
natural sand at 1.49m

Modern
Roman?
post-Boudican (after AD 60/1)
Boudican (AD 60/1)
early Roman

¹ A Desk-Based Assessment of the Archaeological Remains around 63, North Hill, Colchester. January 2000: CAT Report 60.

Freda Gunton Lodge 1995 (figure 4 number 16)

Observation of contractors trenches in the NW corner of FGL revealed well preserved Roman deposits 1.05 metres deep (including Boudican) within 0.5m of present ground level.

Freda Gunton Lodge 1999 (figure 4 number 19)

Observation of contractors trenches on the west side of FGL revealed Roman street metalling (the street dividing *insulae* 17a and 17b) and a deposit of Boudican burnt daub:

modern topsoil at level of concrete slab	very recent landscaping
burnt deposit of daub at less than 0.2m below site level	Roman
street metalling at 0.3 to 0.8m below	early Roman
large deposit of burnt daub at 0.55 - 1.25m below	early Roman
trench bottom at 1.5	

This sequence demonstrates that high quality Roman stratigraphy survives very close to modern ground level. Modern truncation has removed later soil deposits which would have protected this stratigraphy.

4 Aim

The aim of the evaluation was to locate, identify and assess the quality and extent of any surviving archaeological remains on the site.

5 The Trial trench (figures 2-6).

5.1 A single two-by-two metre long trial trench was dug in the location shown on figure 2, using hand tools. The gravel surface of the car park (L1) was worked off, but this came down quickly onto a wall line (F3) running east-west across the trench, and to a concrete area south of it. Due to the impracticality of removing the wall and concrete in the time available, this part of the trench was abandoned and work was concentrated on the area north of the wall.

5.2 Under L1 a modern rubble layer (L2 - the foundation for gravel L1) was worked off. This revealed a blanket of dark soil L3, and a deposit of crushed mortar (L4) at the west end. Layer 3 contained a large amount of residual Roman material (see section 6.1) but was dated by slate, peg tile and fabric 40 to the post-medieval period. At first, it was not certain how L3 and L4 were related - it later turned out that L3 sealed L4. Layer 4 contained a large quantity of Roman material, but was dated by peg tile to the medieval period or later, and earlier than L3 which sealed it.

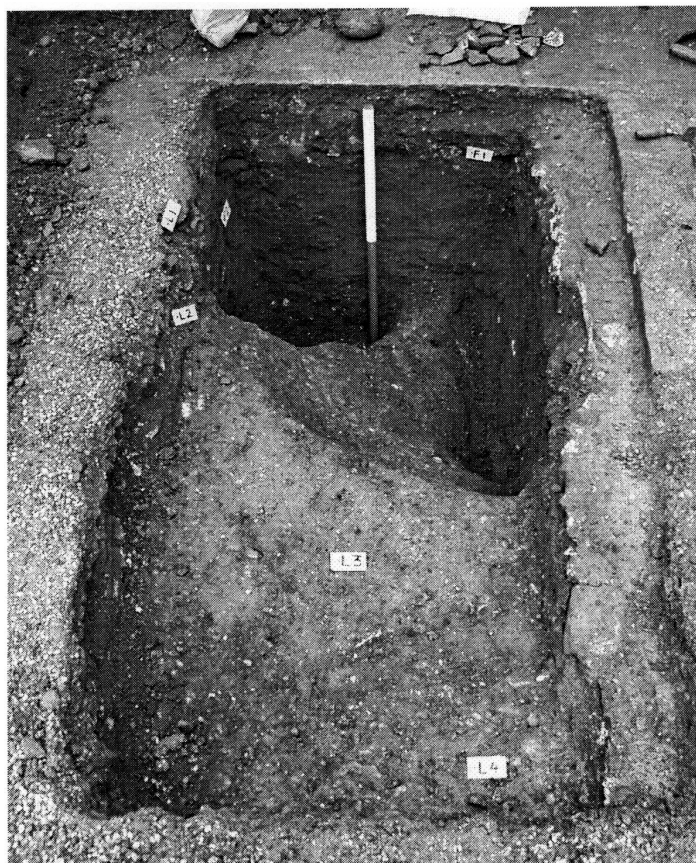


Figure 2: evaluation trench looking east

5.3 As L3 was worked down two things became apparent. First, L3 was the top fill of a pit (F5); second, there were two other pits cutting L3/F5 (F1, F2). The top horizon of F1 and F2 was removed as one, and the finds (all post-medieval) are listed as F1/F2. However, separate excavation of the lower halves of F1 and F2 produced fabric 48d pottery, which dates F2 to the 19th-20th century. The relationship between F1 and F2 is not known, but it can be assumed that F1 is of a similar date to F2. Feature 1 also produced the only small find from the site - a trader's token of the third quarter of the 17th century.

5.4 The pit sequence (principally F5) cut through a sequence of Roman strata as follows. Directly under the rubble area L4 was a small piece of possible walling (F6) consisting of a few pieces of septaria in pale brown mortar. This had the appearance of being part of a larger structure (presumably robbed away as L4). Feature 6 lay on a spread of yellow sand (L5) on top of which were a few patches of mortar (L7). Rather than being the remains of a very thin mortar floor, these mortar patches had the appearance of being spills of wet mortar on a building site - possibly connected with the construction of wall F6. Directly under L5 sand was a thick (80cm) deposit of gravelly sand. In this position, this cannot be a Roman street (the lines of all the streets around this *insula* are known with a fair degree of precision). Possible explanations could be a series of yard surfaces, or a foundation to support a superstructure (F6 above?). There were no finds from L6. A later sondage showed that L6 sealed another gravel band which itself sealed natural sand (section - figure 7).

5.5 Another island of Roman stratigraphy survived between the cuts of pits F5 and F1/2. A silty layer L7 lay over L8 a silty sand. There were no finds from L8, but L7 contained a sherd of Colchester colour coat rough-cast beaker which dates to the early/mid 2nd century to the mid 3rd. Layer 8 sealed a thin red burnt layer (L9). The fact that this seals L10 which contained a fragment of CAM 167 flagon of 2nd-3rd century date means it was not a Boudican deposit. Layer 10 was a sandy layer over natural sand L11.

6 The finds

6.1 Finds list ²

Weights are grammes. Roman fabrics are after Symonds & Wade 1999, Medieval and later fabrics are after Cunningham (1985), and Cotter (forthcoming). U/s = unstratified

Context	bag no	Qt	Wt	Description	Date	Discard
F01	3	1		trader's token	1650-1675	
F01/F02	2	21	775	animal bones		✓
F01/F02	2	1	140	burnt peg tile	post-medieval	✓
F01/F02	2	2	385	tegula flange	Roman	✓
F01/F02	2	2	520	flue tile	Roman	
F01/F02	2	33	1180	PMRE	post-medieval	
F01/F02	2	1	5	PMRE black glazed	post-medieval	
F01/F02	2	1	70	fabric 48 type	19th-20th	
F01/F02	2	1	85	imbrex fragment	Roman	✓
F01/F02	2	2	215	amphora?	Roman	
F01/F02	2	2	85	fabric 23 type leg and handle		
F01/F02	2	6	30	clay tobacco pipe stems	post-medieval	
F01/F02	2	5	90	clay tobacco pipe bowls	post-medieval	
F01/F02	2	1	155	mortar concretion with brick inclusions, a non-pink <i>opus signinum</i>		✓
F01/F02	2	1	10	coal		
F01/F02	2	1	15	slate	med or later	
F01/F02	2	3	85	TGE fabric 46	16th-17th cent	
F01/F02	2	1	20	thick window glass	Roman?	
F01/F02	2	2	25	pale green bottle glass	post-medieval	
F01/F02	2	2	20	fabric 13 early medieval ware		
F01/F02	2	6	55	greyware sherds	Roman	
F01/F02	2	1		stumpy handle in buff fabric	Roman?	
F02	4	1	5	septaria spall	Roman	✓
F02	4	1	195	tegula flange	Roman	✓
F02	4	1	170	flat tile fragment	Roman	✓
F02	4	1	20	plain red tessera	Roman	
F02	4	1	55	partially glazed tile	post-medieval	
F02	4	1	335	amphora sherd	Roman	
F02	4	1	40	greyware rim	Roman	
F02	4	1	15	animal bone - rib		✓
F02	4	1	3	slate	med or later	
F02	4	2	45	clay tobacco pipe bowls	17th cent +	
F02	4	1	5	fe nail		
F02	4	1	10	PMRE black glazed	17-19th	
F02	4	4	150	PMRE	16-19th	
F02	4	1	5	fabric 21a Colchester ware glazed	15-16th	
F02	4	1	15	stoneware fabric 45		
F02	4	1	5	fabric 48 type	19th-20th	
L03	6	3	110	peg tiles	post-medieval	✓
L03	6	2	715	tegula flange frags	Roman	
L03	6	2	415	brick	Roman	✓
L03	6	2	55	tegula flat fragments	Roman	✓
L03	6	1	35	plain red tessera	Roman	
L03	6	1	70	flue tile	Roman	
L03	6	1	20	pig/boar tusk	?	
L03	6	4	150	animal bone	?	✓
L03	6	1	1	slate	med or later	
L03	6	2	1	oyster flecks		✓
L03	6	4	65	glazed fabric 40 PMRE	16th-19th cent	
L03	6	2	3	glass fragments including a 7cm diameter	Roman	

² Roman pottery examined by Stephen Benfield (CAT), medieval and later by Howard Brooks (CAT).

Context	bag no	Qt	Wt	Description	Date	Discard
				rim from a Roman jug very similar to Cool and Price 1995 catalogue 997.		
L03	6	2	15	Samian ware frags	Roman	
L03	6	4	60	greywares	Roman	
L03	6	2	135	amphora fragments	Roman	
L03	6	1	3	buff flagon sherd	Roman	
L03	6	1	60	odd pinky fabric sherd	Roman?	
L04	5	1	300	septaria with mortar adhering	Roman	✓
L04	5	1	40	PMRE	16-19th	
L04	5	1	75	brick fragments	Roman	✓
L04	5	3	185	tegula flat pieces	Roman	✓
L04	10	1	15	Grey ware bowl rim sherd, mortar adhering	2nd - 3rd??	
L04	10	2	100	peg tile		
L04	10	7	550	tegula flat pieces, heavily mortared	Roman	✓
L04	10	3	575	brick pieces, heavily mortared	Roman	✓
L04	10	1	40	brick/tile scrap	Roman	✓
L04	10	1	60	flue tile	Roman	
L04	10	2	185	mortar lumps		
L04	10	1	30	tooth: large quadruped ruminant		
L04	10	2	1	shell frags		
L07	7	1	145	Dressel 20 amphora sherd	Roman	
L07	7	1	5	grey ware sherd	Roman	
L07	7	1	5	Colchester red colour coat rough cast ware fabric CB	early-mid 2nd-mid 3rd	
L10	9	1	220	Brick fragment	Roman	
L10	9	2	285	Tegula flat pieces	Roman	
L10	9	2	65	Animal bones		
L10	9	1	20	Fe nail		
L10	9	1	60	Large jar white slipped ware fabric MQ	Roman	
L10	9	1	5	greyware sherd	2nd-3rd???	
L10	9	1	65	large flagon double handled CAM 167 type fabric DJ coarse oxidised ware	1st-3rd century	
u/s	1	3	70	Animal bones	-	✓
u/s	1	1	250	pale brown mortar lump	Roman?	✓
u/s	1	1	485	Tudor brick 42 mm thick, burnt	16th-17th	✓
u/s	1	1	50	peg tile	post-medieval	✓
u/s	1	2	70	stoneware sherds fab 45	16-17th	
u/s	1	6	110	PMRE glazed sherds	17-19th	
u/s	1	1	40	TGE sherd		
u/s	1	1	60	fabric 48 type	19-20th	
u/s	1	7	32	clay tobacco pipe stems	post-medieval	
u/s	1	2	20	clay tobacco pipe bowls	post-medieval	
u/s	1	1	2	greyware	Roman	
u/s	1	1	150	amphora?	Roman	
u/s	1	1	2	glass frag 2mm thick	Victorian?	✓

7 Discussion and interpretation

- 7.1 It is useful to compare the evaluation results with those from adjacent sites with surviving Roman stratigraphy in *insula* 17. At Freda Gunton Lodge and Balkerne Gardens (to the immediate west of the site), the thickness of surviving Roman strata has been measured at eight points. The maximum surviving thickness was 2.1 metres, the average 1.45 metres, and the minimum 0.8 metres. At the Wagon and Horses site, surviving thickness was 1.1 metres. Therefore the 1.1 metres thickness of surviving Roman strata at 63 North Hill is slightly below the average survival to the west, but exactly in line with what survived at the Wagon and Horses to the south-east.
- 7.2 A slightly different picture emerges on the date of the material at 63 North Hill. Where it was possible to closely observe the strata at the Wagon and Horses and Freda Gunton Lodge ³ it was observed that the later Roman strata had been badly truncated or were entirely missing - in fact there was very little surviving stratigraphy above the Boudican horizon of AD 60/61. However, at 63 North Hill the slender dating evidence shows that the strata date to the second and or third centuries, and identifiable early Roman deposits are not apparent. It is especially interesting that there is no Boudican material here. There *is* a burnt layer, it cannot be Boudican because the underlying deposit is dated ceramically to the 2nd or 3rd century.
- 7.3 There is very little that can be said about the site activities visible in the archaeological record of this site, beyond a few general points. The lower Roman levels were sandy and not the clay dumped floors of the type normally encountered in the town. There is evidence of the construction of a Roman wall (splashed mortar), and possibly of the wall being supported by a gravel foundation. The absence of any obvious Boudican debris has already been mentioned. There is the expected evidence of the later (medieval) robbing of the Roman remains (mortar rubble), and the post-medieval or modern pitting of the site is absolutely what one would expect rear of properties which are (or were originally) of those periods.

³

Freda Gunton NW extension and sun lounge - figure 4 numbers 16, 19

8 Acknowledgements

Site work was supervised by Howard Brooks, and carried out Colin Austin and Nigel Rayner. The project was monitored by Martin Winter for Colchester Borough Council. Report text by Howard Brooks. Report figures by HB after originals by CA and NR, scanned by Gillian Adams. Report editing by GA. Thanks to Fenn Wright Ltd for commissioning the work, for plans provided and other assistance, and to Martin Winter of Colchester Museums for monitoring the project.

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10 Glossary

context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
ESMR	Essex Sites & Monuments Record
fe	iron
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor. Can contain "contexts"
imbrex	Roman roof tile (stops rain getting between tegulae)
intrusive	early material out of place in a later context (e.g. a Coca-Cola bottle in a Roman pit)
medieval	from AD 1066 to Henry VIII
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by man
opus signinum	pink Roman mortar
post-medieval	after Henry VIII and up to Victorian
PMRE	post-medieval red earthenware
prehistoric	the years BC, before Roman
residual	an earlier object out of place in a later context (e.g. a Roman coin in a Victorian pit)
Roman	period from AD 43 to around AD 430
septaria	local building stone used by Romans
tegula	Roman roof tile
TGE	tin-glazed earthenware
u/s	unstratified (no context)

11 Archive deposition

The finds and paper archive are held at Colchester Archaeological Trust, 12 Lexden Rd, Colchester, Essex C03 3NF, but both will be permanently deposited at Colchester Museum, under accession code 2000.13

12 Site data

12.1 Site context list

Context	Description	Cuts/seals	Finds bags	Finds date	Context date
F01	Pit		3 (2)	1650-1675	Post-medieval
F02	Pit	L03	4 (2)	17th-19th	Post-medieval
F03	Wall	L2		-	20th century
F04	Mortar debris - robbed wall?			-	Medieval?
F05	Pit	L04		-	Post-medieval
F06	Structure	L05		-	Roman
F07	Mortar veneer	L05		-	Roman
L01	Gravel surface	L2		-	modern
L02	Rubble	F01, F02		-	modern
L03	Fill of pit	F5	6	16-19th cent	post-medieval
L04	Demolition	F6, F7	5, 10	16th-19th	Post-Roman
L05	Yellow sand	L6		-	Roman
L06	Stony layer			-	Roman
L07	Mortary layer	L8	7	early-mid 2nd to mid 3rd	early-mid 2nd to mid 3rd
L08	Silty sand	L9		-	Roman
L09	Burnt layer	L10		-	Roman
L10	Mixed layer	L11	9	2nd or 3rd century	2nd or 3rd century
L11	natural			-	-

12.2 Soil descriptions

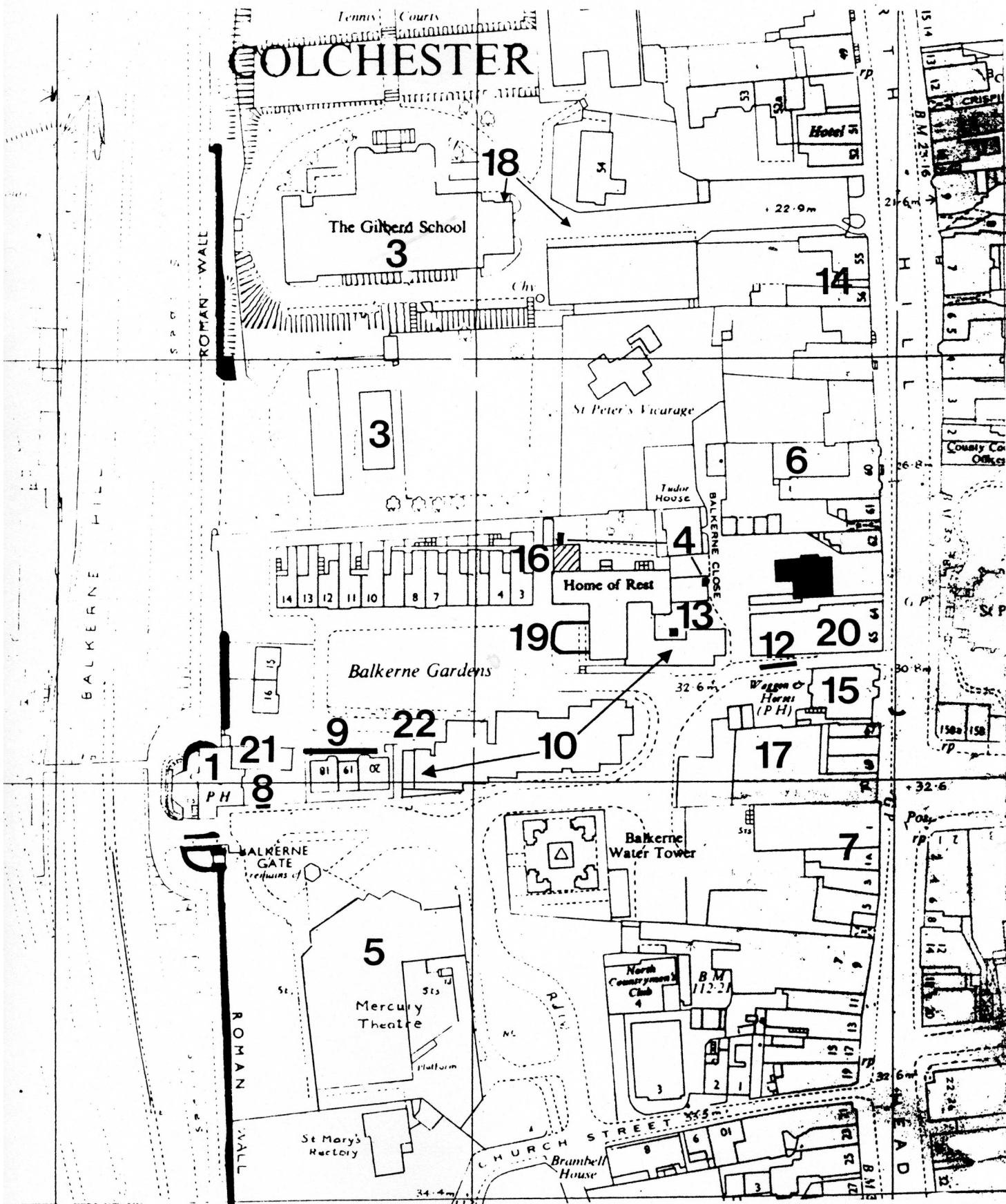
Context	Description
F01	10yr 3/2 very dark greyish brown sandy loam
F02	10yr 3/2 very dark greyish brown sandy loam
F05	fill is L03
L01	gravel parking surface with orange brown sand and stone hogging below.
L02	brick rubble with silts and gravel
L03	10yr 4/3 brown sandy loam with common crushed mortar tile and brick fragments, charcoal, oyster fragments and small/medium stones.
L04	10yr 5/6 yellowish brown mortar fragments with peg tile and Roman brick
L05	10yr 5/8 yellow brown sand
L06	10yr 5/3 brown very compact stony layer
L07	10yr 5/4 yellowish brown mortar silty layer with charcoal, mortar and oyster flecks
L08	10yr 5/3 brown silty sand with small stones.
L09	5yr yellowish red burnt tile and daub
L10	10yr 5/8 yellowish brown sand with oyster, charcoal, tile.
L11	10 yr 6/4 light yellow brown silty clay natural

24th-29th February 2000

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Figure 4: Site location

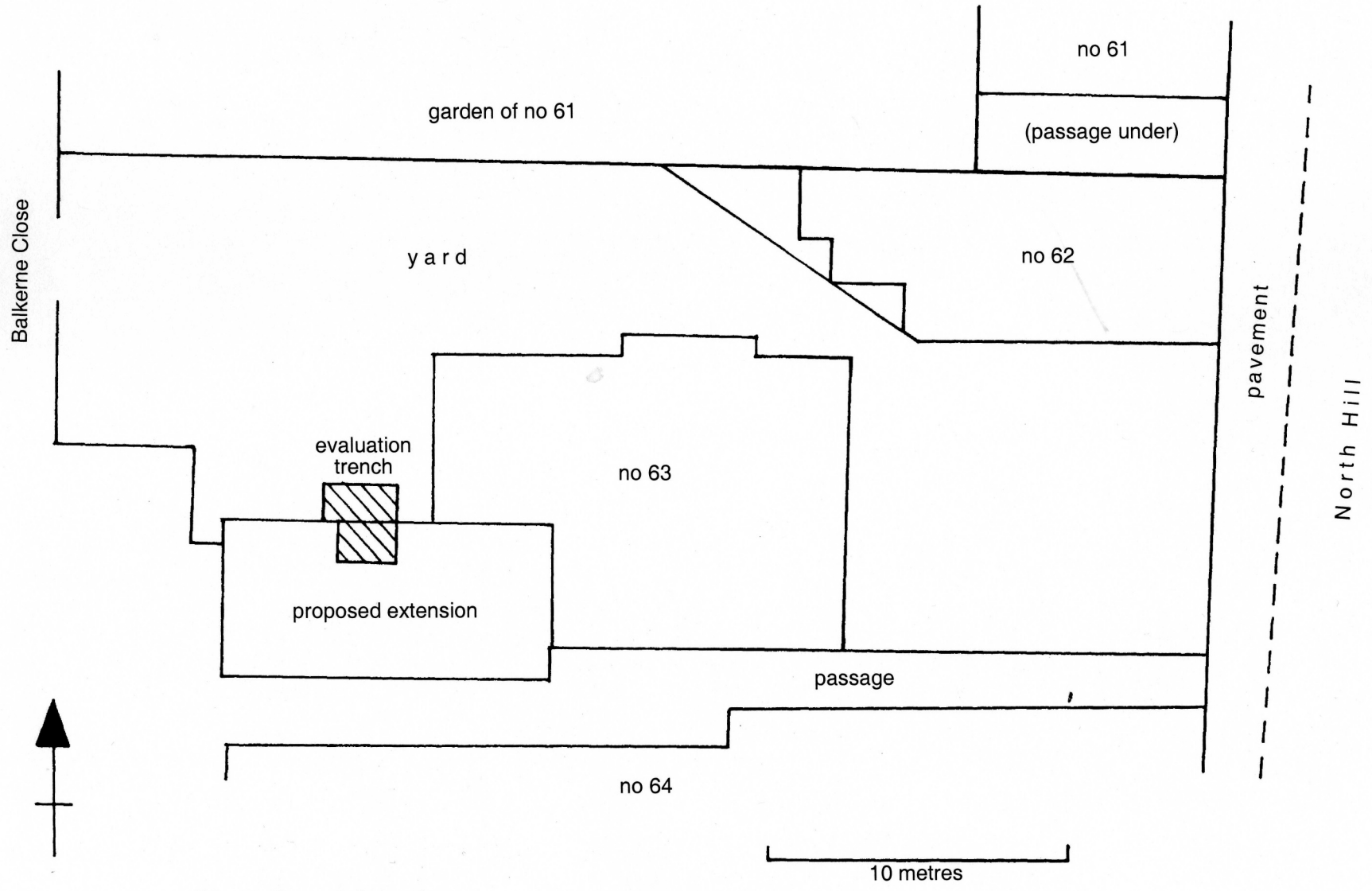


Fig 5 Trench location.

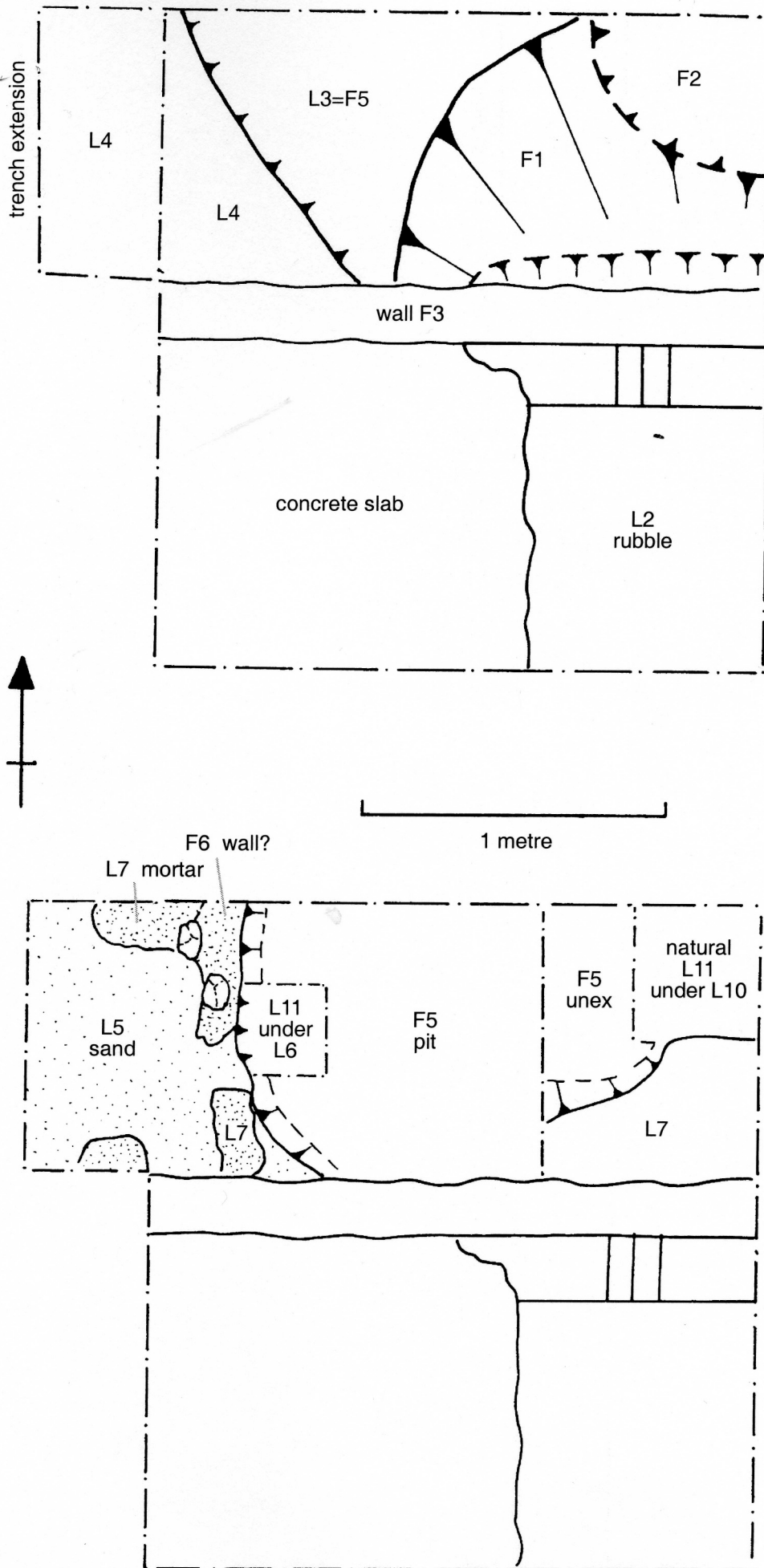


Fig 6 Site plans: post-medieval features (above) and Roman layers with later cuts (below).

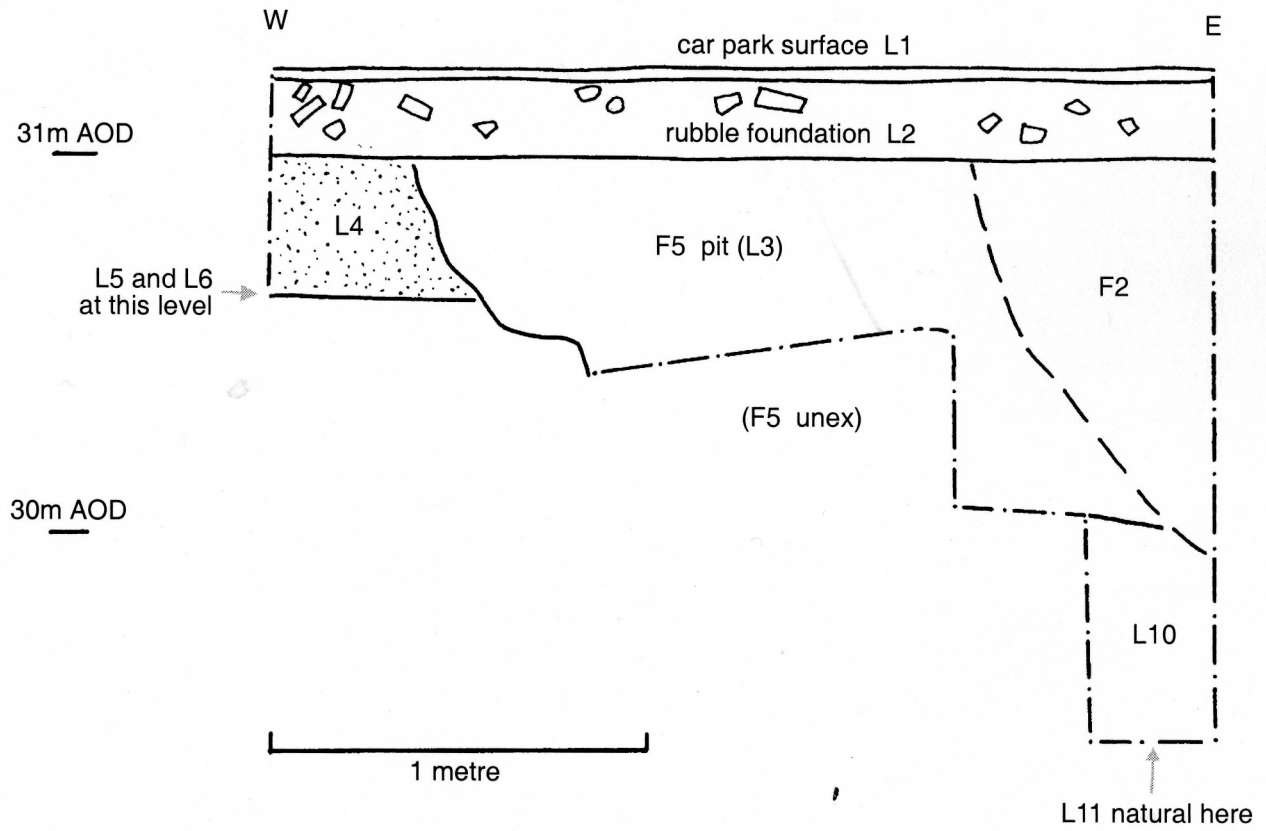
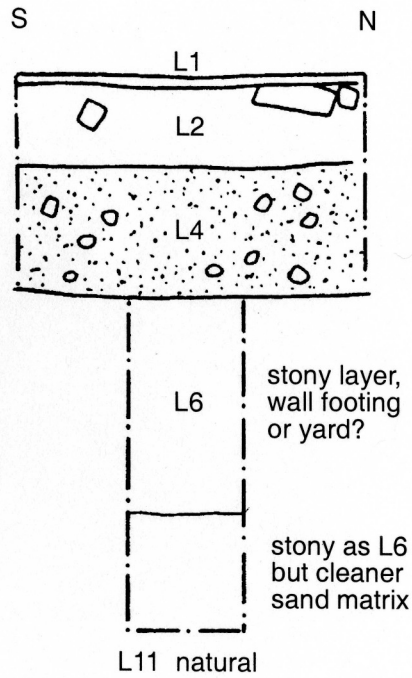


Fig 7 Sections.