

An archaeological evaluation at The old car park, The Tannery, Buntingford, Hertfordshire

March 2001

**commissioned by
Trodd Builders Ltd**

CAT project reference: 01/1E
Site code: TAB.01
NGR: TL 6348 9380
Planning application ref.: 1/98/0407



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1 Summary

An archaeological evaluation consisting of two trial trenches failed to identify any remains which might be associated with the medieval town core of Buntingford. The majority of material uncovered consisted of modern made-up material including rubble. A small length of brick foundations to an 18th- or 19th-century tannery building were uncovered. These foundations are likely to extend into the rest of the site.

2 Introduction

- 2.1** This is the report on an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on the 5th March 2001 at the old car park, The Tannery, Buntingford, Hertfordshire. Proposed work is the construction of six dwellings and is the subject of planning application no 1/98/0407.
- 2.2** The site's National Grid Reference is TL 6348 9380 and its location is the centre of Buntingford to the east of the High Street. The two trenches were excavated in an old car park between the River Rib and modern houses (Fig 1). The 920m² tarmac car park is relatively flat and is crossed by various services. The OD heights of the car park surface vary between 89.4m and 90.1m, but ground-level has obviously been built up as it lies 3m above the River Rib.
- 2.3** The work was carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation prepared by CAT in January 2001 which in turn follows a brief written by the County Archaeology Office (CAO) of Hertfordshire County Council. This report follows the standards set out in the IFA's *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluations* (1994, revised 1999).

3 Archaeological background

- 3.1** Records show that Buntingford was in existence by the early 13th century. In 1338 the town received the right to hold a market and a fair (SMR no 23). The development site is within Area of Significance no 45 as designated in the Local Plan. This Area broadly defines the medieval core of Buntingford where remains of medieval settlement and commerce would be expected. The Hertfordshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) lists several 15th- to 16th-century houses/shops and inns fronting the High Street which probably replaced earlier, more temporary dwellings and commercial premises (SMR nos 10075, 10076, 10102, 10103, 10086, 10113, 10118, 10179, 10100, 10114). One of these (4 High Street) was an inn with a carriageway to a yard which backs onto the development site (SMR no 10113).

- 3.2** A Chapel of Ease was built on the High Street in or by the 13th century for people here who lived too far away from the main parish church in Layston. The site is now occupied by the early 17th-century Chapel of St Peter (SMR no 10084). It is obvious from the above evidence that this area was a centre of settlement in the Middle Ages. However, the SMR does not record any buried archaeological remains of medieval or earlier date from here.
- 3.3** The High Street continued to be a prominent area of town up until the present day, with important houses and public buildings carrying on in use and new buildings being constructed along the street, ie inns (SMR nos 10100, 10102, 10118) an almshouse (SMR no 10083), and a grammar school (SMR no 10099).
- 3.4** In the 19th century there were two maltings on the High Street (SMR nos 10075 and 10183) and a tannery (SMR no 10380, and see section 3.5). A workhouse was built on Union Terrace to the south-east of the development site (SMR no 10085). The junction of High Street, Station Road and Hare Street was obviously a busy thoroughfare for coaches and other traffic well into the 19th century, as a tollhouse was located here (SMR no 10108).
- 3.5** A tannery of 18th-century date is known to have been situated to the rear of 10 High Street. This comprised a two-storey building with basement and a timber-framed wing (Fig 6). The development site and the modern houses just to the north of it were built on the old tanyard which comprised a number of large old sheds with deep oakum pits for tanning leather (SMR 10380). These buildings show on the OS 1881 and 1897 maps (Figs 5 and 6).

4 Aims and objectives

- 4.1** The aim of the archaeological work was to determine and record the location, character, extent, date, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains liable to be threatened by proposed development. Using this information, an informed decision can be made on any future necessary archaeological work.
- 4.2** Specific aims of the evaluation were to assess:
- the medieval development of the area
 - surviving structural elements and their state of preservation
 - the range of objects that were in use, their status, the presence of imports, etc.

5 Methodology

- 5.1 The work was undertaken by a professional archaeologist who carried out the fieldwork in one day. The total area excavated was 50m², ie just over 5% of the available area. The dimensions of the trenches were 2m x 12.5m each. Their locations and length were altered slightly from the Written Scheme of Investigation to avoid an unmarked stopcock and an electricity cable (Fig 2).
- Trench 1 was located in the north-west corner of the site aligned north-west to south-east.
 - Trench 2 was located in the southern part of the site aligned north-west to south-east.
- 5.2 The trenches were excavated by mini-digger on a layer by layer basis and inspected for archaeological features or finds. When a feature was found it was cleaned by hand.
- 5.3 Individual records of excavated contexts, layers, features or deposits were entered on pro-forma CAT record sheets. Features exposed in each trench were planned at a scale of 1:50 and reduced to 1:100. Section drawings at a scale of 1:10 were made of parts each trench (Figs 2-4).
- 5.4 Modern features including drains, cables and foundations were left *in situ*.
- 5.5 Finds from contexts were numbered using pro-forma CAT record sheets. All finds were washed and bagged, and examined by Howard Brooks of CAT; these are listed in the appendix. All finds were later discarded due to their modern date, according to the policy of Hertfordshire Museums.
- 5.6 Digital photographs were taken of all contexts.
- 5.7 A metal detector was not used to scan spoil heaps as all the material being removed consisted of modern make-up.
- 5.8 Environmental samples were not taken as the deposits were well above the water table and there were no deposits of archaeological significance.
- 5.9 OD heights were not taken as part of the evaluation; however, the survey carried out for the developer included spot OD heights, some of which have been reproduced on Figure 2.

Note: T1 = Trench 1, F1 = Feature 1, L1 = Layer 1, Sx 1 = Section 1.

6 Results

6.1 Trench 1 (Figs 2-3 and Plate 1)

The northern third of the trench was dug to 1.1m. The southern two-thirds of the trench were dug to 750mm. An extra 150mm depth was dug out 3m south of the northern edge; this exposed brick footings of a previous building 1.25m below

ground-level (F2). Above this the northern third of the trench was filled with over 1m depth of 20th-century bricks mixed with concrete, asphalt, 'hogging', and slate (L2-L4). This rubble continued into the southern part of the trench, and for this reason it was not thought necessary to excavate the southern two-thirds of the trench to more than 750mm depth.

Natural ground was not reached.

The stratigraphy was as follows:

Layer 1 - 40mm-70mm of asphalt - surface of car park.

Layer 2 - 50mm of loose yellow/brown sand and gravel which includes whole unfrogged bricks (235mm x 100mm x 70mm thickness) and slate - sub-base ('hogging') for asphalt.

Layer 3 - 60mm of loose light brown coarse sandy clayey silt containing unfrogged bricks and asphalt - modern make-up.

Layer 4 - over 1m of rubble consisting of unfrogged bricks and concrete. These were mixed in with 'hogging' similar to L2 and asphalt. Modern china was also found at the bottom of this layer.

Feature 1 - a 3.3m length of electricity cable was exposed at the bottom of the north end of the trench, running in a north-north-east – south-south-westerly direction. The cable lay within L4 at 1.1m below ground-level and was covered with a concrete capping (Plate 1 and Fig 2).

Feature 2 - brick footings to a previous building were exposed at the bottom of the north end of the trench, running east-west. The footings were 470mm wide and the individual bricks were unfrogged and measured 235mm x 110mm x 70mm thickness. This feature lies within L4 at 1.25m below ground-level (Plate 1 and Fig 2).

Feature 3 - three concrete slabs in a stepped arrangement protruded out 500mm from the eastern section at the southern end of the trench (Fig 2).

6.2 Trench 2 (Figs 2 and 4 and Plate 2)

This trench by the river exposed many layers; however, all of them contained modern material. The eastern third of the trench was excavated to nearly 970mm depth. The western two-thirds of the trench were dug to 700mm.

An extra 330mm depth was dug out to 1.3m, 3m west of the eastern end of the trench (L9-L11).

Natural ground was not reached.

The stratigraphy was as follows:

Layer 5 - 70mm of asphalt for the car park (same layer as L1).

Layer 6 - 140mm of modern 'hogging' (same layer as L2). The bricks, however, appeared to be more modern than those in L2.

Layer 7 - approximately 420mm of loose asphalt, modern brick, concrete and clinker breeze mixed in with grey brown silty clay - modern make-up.

Layer 8 - 330mm of stiff mottled light brown and darker grey clay with chalky flecks containing modern brick fragments, roof-tile, and modern iron objects and glass - modern make-up.

Layer 9 - 180mm of more humic dark brown sandy silt loam containing modern iron objects, brick fragments, modern wall-tile, and one piece of horn core which may be connected with the tanning process. This layer goes down to 1.14m below ground-level.

Layer 10 - 60mm layer of reddish black asphalt. As this layer was only seen in a small section that was dug deeper by the machine, it is not known whether this is a previous surface that extends the whole length of the trench or not. This layer extends down to 1.2m below ground-level.

Layer 11 - 100mm of humic material similar to L9 containing modern tile and one cut animal bone.

Feature 4 - The outline of a storm-drain trench was exposed running north-east to south-west in the western end of the trench. The feature was 600mm wide and was found in L8, 700mm below ground-level (Fig 2 and Plate 2).

7 Discussion

- 7.1 The site lies 3m above the river and has obviously been raised at one or various points in the past. This is backed up by the borehole and test-pit data which places natural ground at between 2.5m and 3m below modern ground-level.
- 7.2 T1 exposed a short length of brick footings. SMR information shows that there was an 18th- or 19th-century tanyard on the development site (hence the name of the road). Nineteenth-century maps (Figs 5-6) show these buildings. The size and shape of the bricks give a late 18th- or 19th-century date for the footings so it seems likely that they belonged to a building which was part of the tanyard. If so, it is possible to pinpoint on the map the actual building to which the footings belong (Fig 6).
- 7.3 Figure 6 shows tanyard buildings covering most of the site and it is therefore likely that more foundations exist over the site. There were no foundations found in T2; however, this is probably because the trench at its western end was only dug to 700mm and therefore did not go deep enough to expose them. The remains of the foundations to the tannery buildings are considered to be of limited archaeological significance. The only value they are considered to have is in showing the location of the tannery buildings, but this is already known from 19th-century OS maps.
- 7.4 At some point after the demolition of the tannery, the site was artificially raised (probably not for the first time), presumably to flatten it out before turning it into a car park. A greater depth of brick rubble was found in T1 than T2, and therefore presumably the western end was lower down and needed a greater depth of infill.

7.5 Apart from the brick footings, no archaeological features or finds or any other structural remains were revealed in the sampled areas. Only rubble and redeposited material was recorded. This suggests that it is unlikely that the development will disturb any archaeological remains unless groundworks extend below 1.3m. No water-logged remains were encountered in the sampled areas. The borehole data records the water table as being between 1.7m and 3.2m below ground-level. It may be that archaeological remains, including water-logged deposits such as wood and plant remains, survive below this level. If so, only the piles and any deep services are likely to directly affect them. However, drainage of the site may cause water-logged remains to dry out.

8 Archive deposition

The full archive, including a copy of this report and site notes, plus digital data on disk and a summary, will be permanently lodged at Hertford Museum under site code TAB.01.

9 Acknowledgements

The Colchester Archaeological Trust is grateful to the following for their assistance and co-operation at various stages of the project:

Christopher Catchpole and James Monk - Trodd Builders Ltd

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Jeremy McIlwaine, Hertfordshire Local Studies Library and Archives

Kate Orr, March 2001

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Appendix

List of finds by context

Find no	Context	Description
1	Trench 2, Layer 8	1 large roof-tile
2	Trench 2, Layer 9	1 cut animal bone
2	Trench 2, Layer 9	1 piece of 20th-century glazed wall-tile
3	Trench 2, Layer 9	horn core
4	Trench 2, Layer 11	2 small pieces of peg-tile



Plate 1 Trench 1, looking north-west.



Plate 2 Trench 2, looking south-east.

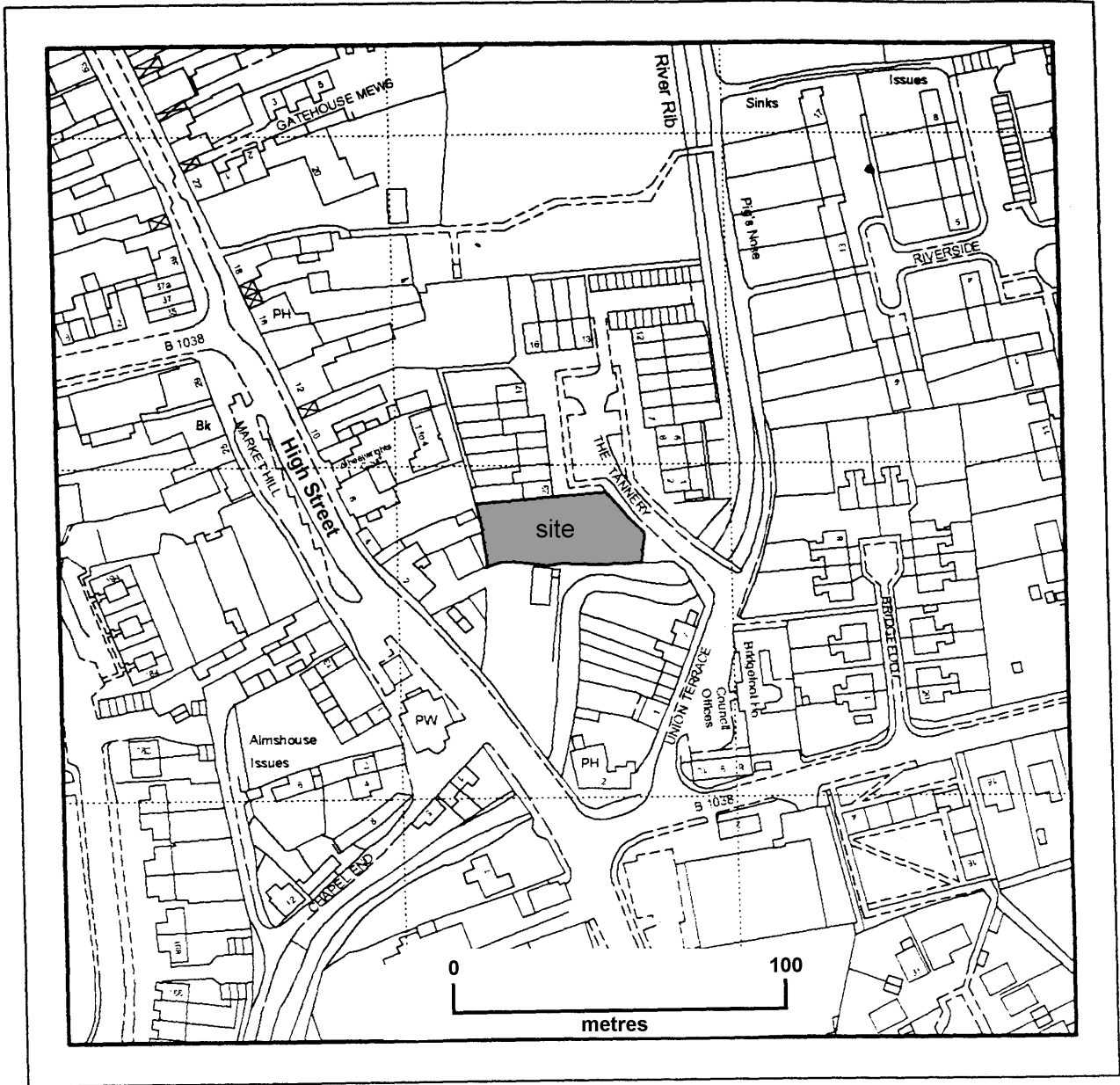


Fig 1 Site location: scale 1:2000.

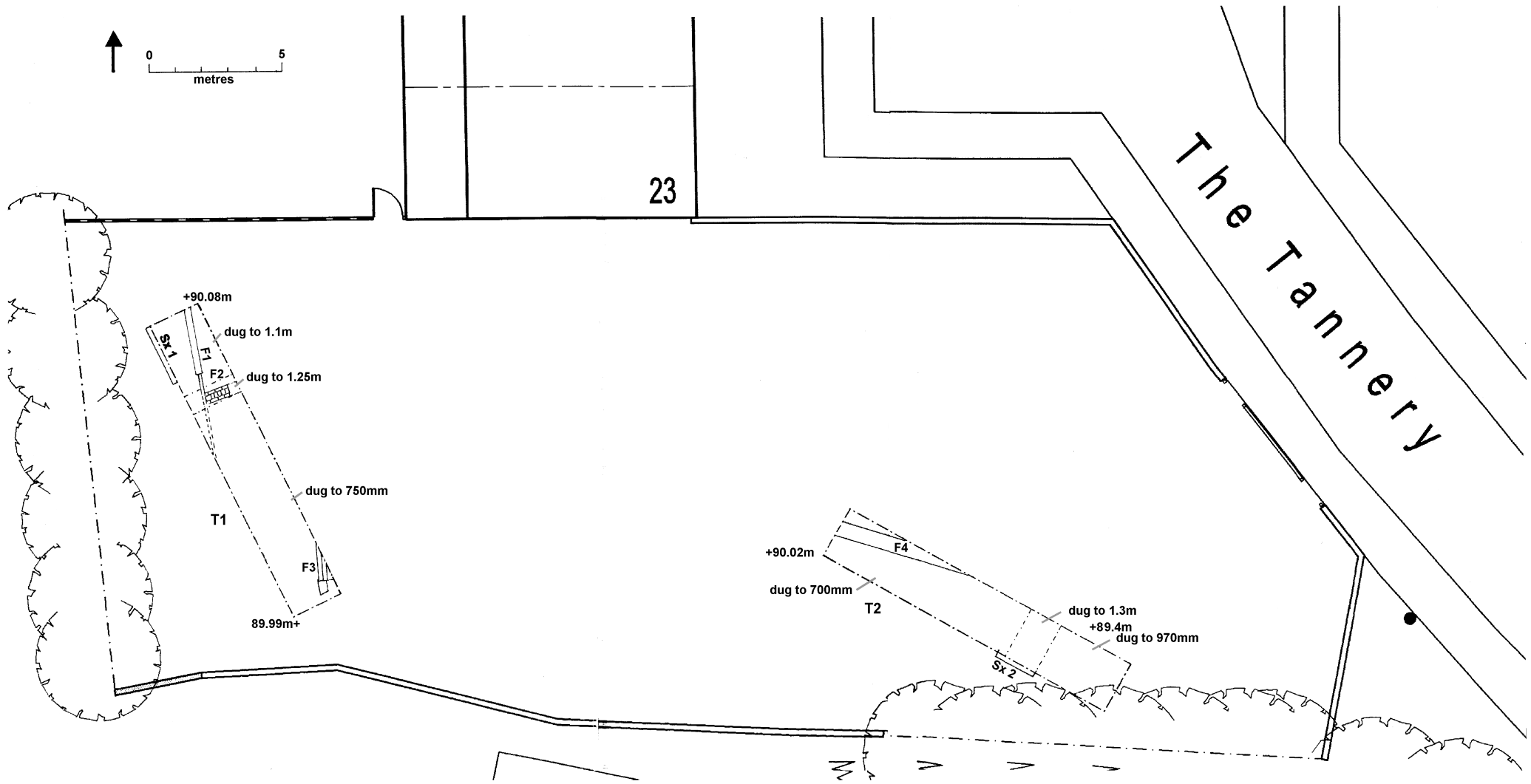


Fig 2 Plan of site, showing trial-trench positions and features: scale 1:150.

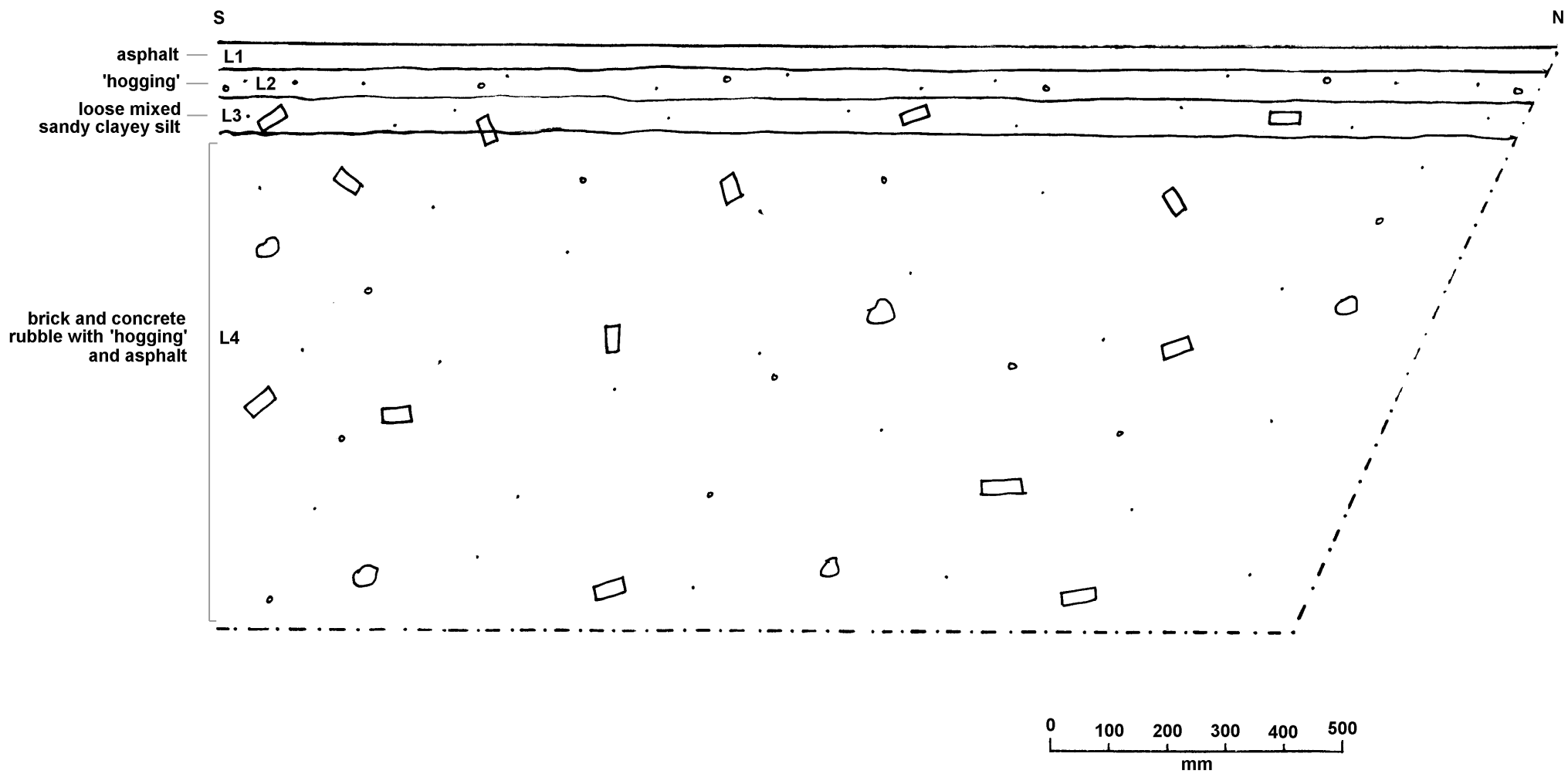


Fig 3 Part of Trench 1, Section 1: scale 1:10.

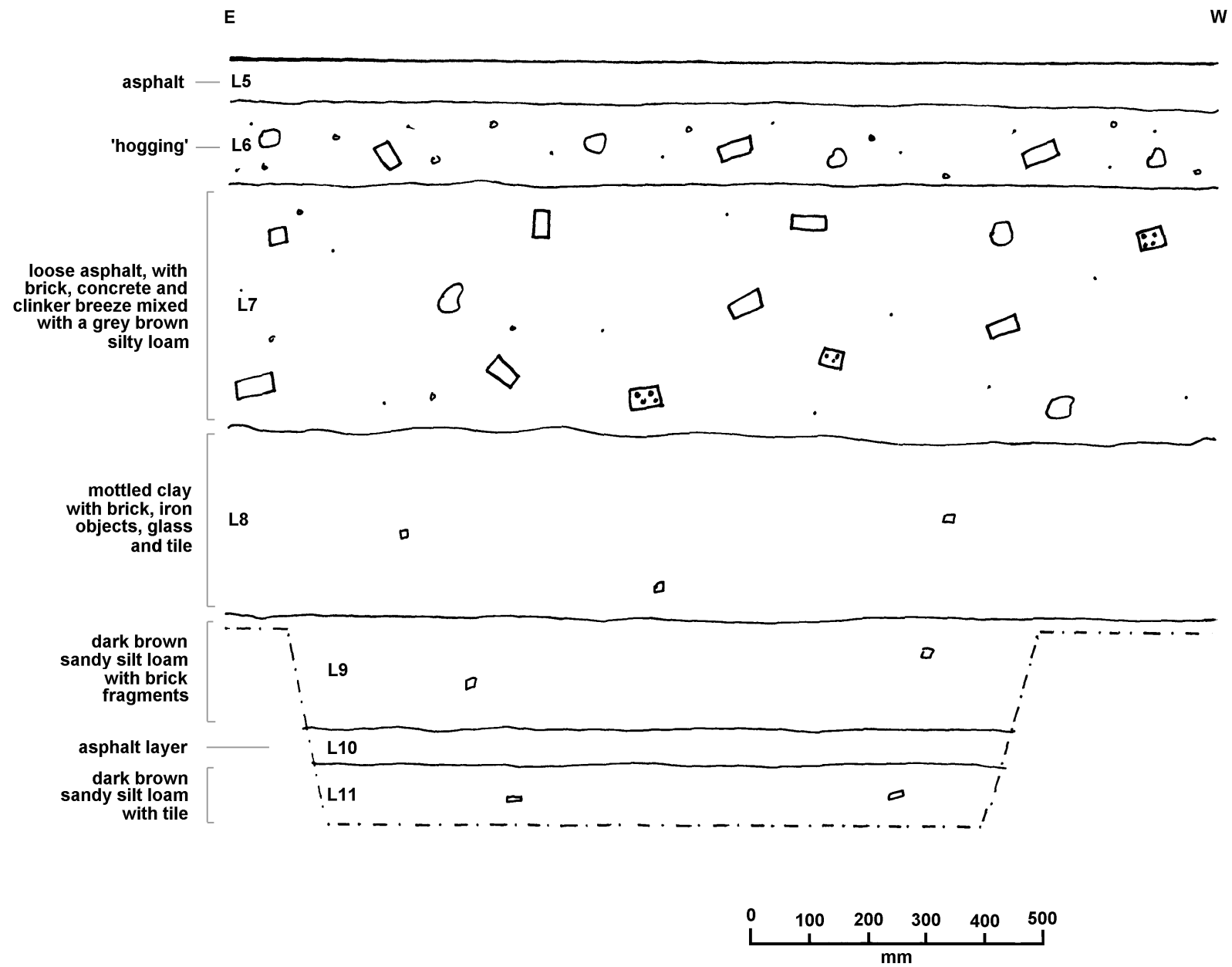


Fig 4 Part of Trench 2, Section 2: scale 1:10.

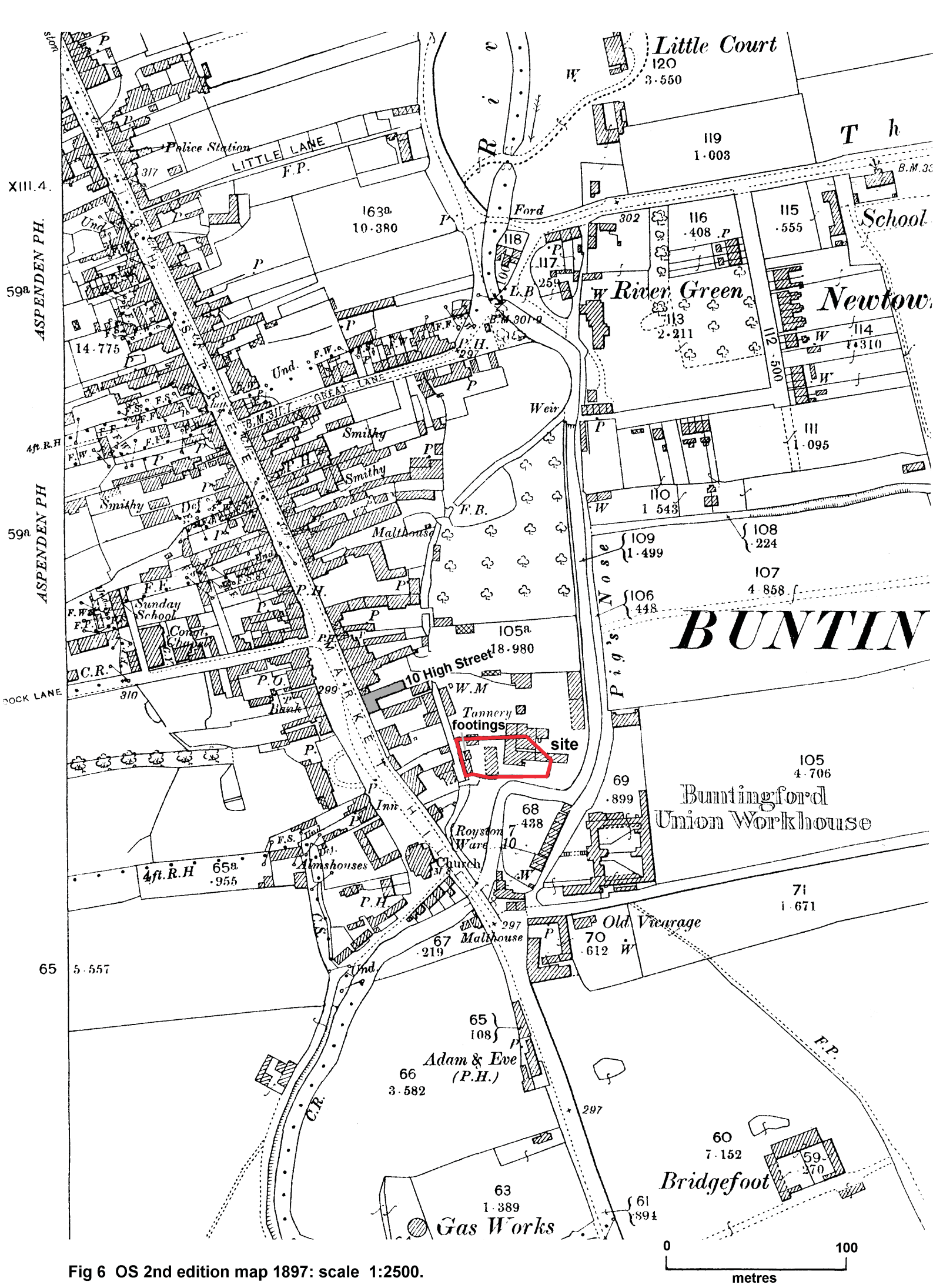


Fig 6 OS 2nd edition map 1897: scale 1:2500.

**Hertfordshire
Sites and Monuments Record
summary sheet**

Site address	The old car park, The Tannery, Buntingford, Herts.
Planning application	1/98/0407
Client	Trodd Builders Ltd
Nature of application	erection of 6 dwellings
Present land use	car park
Size of application area	920m ²
Area investigated	50m ²
NGR	TL 6348 9380
Site code	TAB.01
Site director/organisation	Colchester Archaeological Trust
Type of work	evaluation-trial trenching
Date of work	5/3/01
Curating museum	Hertford
Related SMR nos	10380
Periods represented	modern
Summary of results	Small stretch of foundations to 18th- or 19th-century tannery. Otherwise negative due to at least 1m depth of modern infilling.
Author of summary	Kate Orr
Date	March 2001