

**An archaeological evaluation  
on land west of  
Colchester General Hospital  
(NHS Estates West District Site)  
Colchester, Essex**

**August-September 2001**

**on behalf of  
Cofton Land and Property**

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EHCR summary sheet

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## **1 Summary**

This 12ha site lies on high ground approximately 2.5km to the north of Colchester town centre. A field evaluation in advance of development revealed a widespread area of linear features of late Iron Age/early Roman (pre-Flavian) date. For the most part, the evidence from the exploratory trenches is in the form of discrete plots of ditches and gullies of the period and is currently too fragmentary to permit an overall pattern to emerge. Other finds included a single find of late Bronze Age-early Iron Age pottery and two ditches of medieval or possibly later date.

## **2 Introduction**

This report describes the results from an archaeological field evaluation which took place in August and September 2001. The fieldwork was commissioned by Cofton Land and Property to assess the archaeological implications of development on land to the west of Colchester District General Hospital (Fig 1).

The present evaluation is one of a series of desktop and field studies concerned with land directly or indirectly affected by the construction of Colchester's Northern Approach Road. In this instance, the site lies adjacent to Phase 2 of the new road. A watching brief which is currently being held on the Phase 2 road construction work will be the subject of a separate report.

## **3 Background**

Previously, a field evaluation on the route for Phase 2 of Colchester's Northern Approach Road revealed two main areas of archaeological significance (CAT Report 2, 1997). Late Iron Age and early Roman features were found immediately west of the General Hospital; they were also found to the south, where they extended from Turner Village to Turner Road. Subsequently, desktop assessments were prepared in May 2000 (CAT Report 78 and CAT Report 79), placing the earlier finds within a broader archaeological context. These assessments are included here in Appendix B and Appendix C.

In May 2001, the Archaeological Officer for Colchester Borough Council produced a brief for the evaluation, in response to which a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (Appendix A). This WSI was accepted in June 2001.

## **4 The field evaluation**

The evaluation consisted of twenty-eight 1.8m-wide trenches, covering a total area of 2580 sq metres (location: Fig 1). The trench numbers set out in the WSI have been retained for this report, with the addition of two trenches (Trench or T29 and T30) which were dug following consultation with the Borough Council's Archaeological Officer. One proposed trench (WSI trench 15) was abandoned for safety reasons. A further two trenches, intended to investigate the grounds of the Nurses' Home, were postponed awaiting demolition of the property which is understood to be scheduled for March 2002.

## **5 Methods**

The project was carried out in accordance with the requirements detailed in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1999) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996).

Trenches were progressively stripped of topsoil by machine and exposed subsoil features examined by hand and recorded using the methods specified in the WSI (Appendix A).

## 6 Results

The principal results from each trench are set out below in Table 1.

In column two, the subsoil depth is quoted in relation to the present ground-surface. This is intended as a guide to the horizon for established or potentially archaeologically sensitive levels in the immediate area of each trench.

In addition to the features noted in column three, the subsoil surface displayed a variety of irregularities, most of which on manual examination were established to be of probable geological origin. These are not included here.

More detailed descriptions of the features and stratigraphy are included in the full archive which will be deposited with Colchester Museum. Archaeologically significant features (eg Feature or F103) are indicated in italics.

Table 1: Trench data.

Trench no	Subsoil depth	Result summary	Detail illustration
T1	30cm	Modern brick foundations, drains, pit and ditch.	
T2	30cm	Modern brick foundations, drains and pits.	
T3	75cm	Modern brick foundations, drains and pit.	
T4	45-50cm	<i>Depression F103 with probable prehistoric potsherd.</i>	<i>Fig 2</i>
T5	35cm	No discernible features.	
T6	30cm	No discernible features.	
T7	25cm	<i>Late Iron Age/early Roman linear feature (F136).</i> Land-drains.	<i>Fig 3</i>
T8	35-40cm	No discernible features.	
T9	20-25cm	<i>Early ditch (F82).</i> Land-drains, depression.	<i>Fig 4</i>
T10	30-35cm	<i>Late Iron Age/early Roman ditch (F124) and later pit (F123).</i>	<i>Figs 5-6</i>
T11	40cm	Modern dumped deposits.	
T12	30cm	Land-drains.	
T13	55-60cm	<i>Ditch (F70), possibly early.</i> Post-medieval to modern pits, drains and ditch.	<i>Fig 7</i>
T14	35-95cm	Post-medieval or later ditch and pits.	
T15	n/a	Trench excavation abandoned due to depth of modern deposits.	
T16	40cm	Modern pit.	
T17	30-35cm	<i>Gully, medieval or later (F61).</i> Modern drain and pit.	<i>Fig 8</i>
T18	25-30cm	No discernible features.	
T19	25cm	<i>Late Iron Age/Roman linear group (F48, F49, F54). Gully, possibly Roman (F59). Late Iron Age/early Roman linear depressions (F46, F47, F58). Late Iron Age/early Roman ditch/gullies F42, F45, F53, F55, F56).</i> Modern drains.	<i>Figs 9-12</i>
T20	20cm	<i>Medieval or later ditch (F22).</i> Modern pits and drains.	<i>Fig 13</i>
T21	25cm	Modern post-holes and pit.	
T22	25-30cm	Modern land-drain.	
T23	25-30cm	Modern pit and land-drain.	
T24	30-35cm	Modern land-drain and pit.	
T25	35-40cm	Linear feature, probably modern.	
T26	20cm	Land-drain.	
T27	30-50cm	Land-drain.	
T28	40-75cm	Land-drain.	
T29	30cm	No discernible features.	
T30	20cm	<i>Late Iron Age/early Roman ditch (F133).</i>	<i>Fig 14</i>

Trenches T16 and T17, together with the southern parts of T13 and T14, fell within the frame of a geophysical survey carried out in 1997 (Appendices B and C, fig 2, plot 5). No early features were found in these trenches which could be related to the geophysical data. However, a land-drain in T17 and a post-medieval ditch in T14 did coincide with linear responses produced by the 1997 survey.

The results are described below by period:

### **6.1 Prehistoric**

An indication of prehistoric activity came in the form of pottery found in trench T4. The pottery, dating to the early to mid 1st millennium BC, lay in a poorly defined shallow depression (F103).

### **6.2 Late Iron Age/Roman**

In T19, excavation revealed linear features with pottery indicating activity firmly based in the late Iron Age/early Roman period (Figs 9-12). In the southern part of the trench (Fig 12), the upper fills of features F45, F53, F55 and F56 were identical and seem to form an acute junction between two ditches. Finds suggest that F45 and F55 belong to the same late Iron Age/early Roman phase of activity as nearby linear groups, and by association this is probably true of F53/F56. Three metres to the south, ditch F42 shares the same orientation as F45 and is assumed to be contemporary, although no datable finds were obtained from it. The outlines of F46, F47 and F58 (Fig 11) were barely perceptible: careful examination recovered early Iron Age/Roman pottery from F47 and F58 and revealed them to be linear depressions set on a similar orientation to F42 and F45/F55. In the northern part of T19, an east-west linear group composed of intercutting features F48, F49 and F54 (Fig 10) contained fragments of Roman ceramic building materials, including roof-tile. An east-west feature at the northern extremity of the trench (F59) appeared to be a flat-bottomed gully, probably of Roman date (Fig 9). The shallow profiles obtained on examining most of the linear features in T19, particularly F46, F47 and F58, suggest that some erosion may have taken place in this area prior to the deposition of topsoil cover.

The course of a ditch dating to this period was traced across three trenches in the region to the north-west of T19. This is represented by F124 in trench T10 (Fig 5), by F133 in T30 (Fig 14), and by F136 in T7 (Fig 3). Sections through the fills of F124 and F133 yielded unusually large quantities of pottery which, viewed as a whole, are consistent with a pre-Flavian date. The ditch was again exposed in T7 (F136) where it was discernible by the pottery content in its fill. A pit F123, cut into the fill of F124, also contained early Roman pottery. Although the pit is attributed to this period, it is possible that the finds are residual, in which case the pit may be of later date. In T10 and T30, F124/F133 cut a very uniform layer of mid brown fine sandy loam (L55 and L44) which was established to be 30cm deep where sectioned. This material is possibly an early topsoil or accumulation within a broad localised depression.

A north-south-orientated ditch (F82) was revealed in T9 (Fig 4). The date range of pottery from the fill suggests that it was contemporary with the late Iron Age/early Roman features to the south.

T13 contained a flat-bottomed east-west linear feature (F70) with a distinctive pale sandy fill (Fig 7). It is included here as a feature of possible antiquity, although in the absence of closely datable finds its date remains indeterminate.

### **6.3 Medieval**

Small quantities of pottery recovered from the fills of the ditch F22 in T20 (Fig 13) and gully F61 in T17 (Fig 8) indicate medieval or later dates for the infilling of these features.

#### 6.4 Post-medieval to modern

In total, 136 features were recorded in the course of the evaluation. The majority clearly belonged to the post-medieval to modern period. These included a large number of land-drains and a group of modern brick foundations and associated features in T1-T3.

### 7 Finds

#### 7.1 Prehistoric pottery

*Identification by Dr Paul R Sealey*

Feature	Trench	Description	Find	Sherds	Wt (g)
F103	T4	depression	54	8	20

The sherds are all from a pot in a reduced (red-brown) fabric with poorly-sorted crushed burnt flint temper. It appears to be late Bronze Age or early (initial) Iron Age pottery, probably belonging in the bracket c 1000-500 BC and possibly later (rather than earlier) in that period.

#### 7.2 Late Iron Age and Roman pottery

*by Stephen Benfield*

There was approximately 3.5 kg of late Iron Age-early Roman pottery from the evaluation, with one large group of material (3.16 kg) coming from the ditch F124 (Table 2). The majority of the pottery consists of local coarse grey wares with soft fabrics, often with some grog temper, of late Iron Age-early Roman date, and there are only one or two sherds in well-fired Roman grey ware. There are also a number of imports with fine wares represented by terra rubra, terra nigra and South Gaulish samian, and other imported vessels represented by amphorae and possibly by mortaria. Overall the pottery is comparable to that from the Sheepen site at Colchester (Hawkes & Hull 1947; Niblett 1985) and most, if not all, can be dated to the late Iron Age-early Roman (pre-Flavian) period.

Fabric codes as *CAR 10*:

SG South Gaulish samian

AA amphorae, all (excluding Dressel 20 and Verulamium region amphorae)

AJ amphorae, Dressel 20

TZ mortaria, Colchester and imported from the Continent

UR terra nigra-type wares

DZ fine oxidised wares

GX other coarse wares, principally locally-produced grey wares

HZ large storage jars and other vessels in heavily-tempered grey wares

Table 2: Late Iron Age and Roman pottery, and other ceramic material from late Iron Age and Roman contexts.

Feature	Trench	Description	Find	Pottery fabric code	Sherds	Wt (g)	Comments/ date
F45	T19	Linear feature	20	GX	1	2	LIA/early Roman
F47	T19	Shallow spread	15	GX	2	5	LIA/early Roman
F48	T19	Pit?	24	GX	3	5	LIA/early Roman
F55	T19	Ditch corner?	27	TZ	1	15	very abraded mortaria flange/rim, early Roman
F58	T19	Shallow spread	30	GX	1	1	LIA/early Roman

F59	T19	Linear feature	31	AA	1	50	amphora handle, 1st-2nd century Roman
F82	T9	Ditch	48	GX	1	10	soft grog-tempered ware, LIA
F82	T9	Ditch	48	DJ	5	20	Roman
F82	T9	Ditch	48	AJ?	1	5	very abraded, Roman
F123	T10	Pit	61	GX	1	5	jar base, early Roman
F123	T10	Pit	61		1	1	daub/pot fragment
F124	T10	Ditch	62	SG	2	40	South Gaulish samian, very abraded, 1st century
F124	T10	Ditch	62		1	5	unidentified samian, abraded
F124	T10	Ditch	62	DZ	2	10	terra rubra bowl/dish, pre-Flavian
F124	T10	Ditch	62	HZ	1	120	
F124	T10	Ditch	62	AA	1	100	amphora handle, probably Cam 186, 1st-2nd century
F124	T10	Ditch	62	GX	66	380	Cam 218, Cam 266, LIA-earlier 2nd century
F124	T10	Ditch	63	GX	30	330	LIA/early Roman
F124	T10	Ditch	64	GX	14	200	Roman grey ware, CAM 266 jar, Roman 1st century
F124	T10	Ditch	64	UR (LTC)	1	5	platter, Claudio-Neronian - Flavian
F124	T10	Ditch	65	GX	18	100	Cam 266, LIA/early Roman
F124	T10	Ditch	65	GX	1	15	Cam 92, Claudio-Neronian
F124	T10	Ditch	66	GX	20	300	Cam 218 grey ware vessel, LIA/early Roman
F124	T10	Ditch	67	GX	15	90	LIA/early Roman
F124	T10	Ditch	67		1	30	peg-tile, post-medieval, presumably intrusive
F124	T10	Ditch	70	GX	116	970	Cam 218, Cam 266 Cam 119A LIA/early Roman
F124	T10	Ditch	70	HZ	8	390	
F124	T10	Ditch	70	AJ	4	70	amphora fragments, Dressel 20

F124	T10	Ditch	70		1	5	unidentified daub
F133	T30	Ditch	71		1	50	heavily abraded mortaria or amphora, probably early Roman import
F133	T30	Ditch	71	UR	1	15	?terra nigra, Cam 14, pre-Flavian
F133	T30	Ditch	72	TZ	4	660	heavily abraded mortaria with spout, Cam 194, pre-Flavian 1st century
F136	T7	Ditch	76	HZ	3	250	
F136	T7	Ditch	76	GX	5	20	LIA/early Roman

### 7.3 Post-Roman pottery

by Howard Brooks

Table 3: Post-Roman pottery, brick and drain fragments.

Feature no	Trench No	Description	Finds no	Fabric	Quant	Weight (g)	Comments
F9	T23	Linear feature	7	45, rim of stone-ware jar	1	7	modern
F14	T21	Pit	10	51b, flowerpot	1	16	19th-20th cent
F22	T20	Ditch	11	13, sandy medieval ware	2	8	12th-13th cent
F43	T19	Field-drain	19	ridged exterior	1	18	post medieval-modern
F61	T17	Gully	34	heavily abraded	1	25	probably medieval
F65	T14	Ditch	36	brick - overfired and partially vitrified	1	66	post-medieval
F75	T13	Linear feature	42	45m, stone-ware	1	4	19th-20th cent
F77	T13	Pit	44	40, red earthen-ware	1	3	17th-18th cent
F86	T1	Pit	50	ceramic field-drain	1	26	20th cent
F92/ F94	T1	Wall footings	51	45, stone-ware	1	13	19th-20th cent
F112	T2	Building	68	45d, Frechen stone-ware	1	3	AD 1550-1700



#### 7.4 Ceramic building materials

A total of 11.2 kg of brick and tile fragments was recovered from the evaluation. A large proportion of the finds in this category were too small to permit further identification. Where some identification was possible, peg-tile occurred in established post-medieval to modern contexts. Roman brick and tile were found in the following contexts:

Table 4: Roman brick and tile.

Feature no	Trench no	Feature description	Find no	Material description	Weight (g)
F48	T19	pit?	25	brick, 43mm thick.	159
F48	T19	pit?	25	brick, 44mm thick.	200
F49	T19	ditch	16	brick, 34mm thick.	626
F49	T19	ditch	16	brick, 40mm thick.	689
F49	T19	ditch	33	<i>tegula</i> flange: flange height 44mm, flange width 34mm, base thickness 30mm.	173
F49	T19	ditch	33	<i>tegula</i> flange: flange height 52mm, flange width 37mm, base thickness 22mm.	348
F49	T19	ditch	33	brick, 44mm thick.	194
F49	T19	ditch	33	brick, 44mm thick.	213
F49	T19	ditch	33	brick, 42mm thick.	239
F49	T19	ditch	33	43 small fragments, unidentifiable.	1215
F54	T19	ditch	26	<i>tegula</i> flange: flange height 44mm, flange width 30mm, base thickness 19mm.	231
F54	T19	ditch	26	<i>tegula</i> flange: flange height unknown, flange width 29mm, base thickness unknown.	40
F54	T19	ditch	26	<i>tegula</i> flange: flange height 57mm, flange width 32mm, base thickness 21mm	21
F54	T19	ditch	26	brick, 38mm thick.	342
F54	T19	ditch	26	tile, 27mm thick.	98
F54	T19	ditch	26	tile, 25mm thick.	182
F54	T19	ditch	26	18 small fragments, unidentifiable.	617
F61	T17	gully	34	brick, 35mm thick.	185

#### 7.5 Quernstone

Three small quernstone fragments, amounting to 127g, were found in the fill of a late Iron Age/early Roman pit (F48).

## 8 Discussion

The evaluation revealed significant evidence of late Iron Age/early Roman activity contemporary with that previously found on the route for the new road. If representative, the results indicate that this activity covers a broad area across the central part of the site but is likely to be sparse or perhaps even absent in the areas sampled by trenches to the south of T20 and north-west of T7. For the most part, the evidence from this evaluation is in the form of discrete plots of ditches and gullies of the period and is currently too fragmentary to permit an overall linear pattern to emerge. The ditch F124-F133-F136 produced an unusually large amount of pottery from small-scale exploratory excavation, which suggests a nearby focus of occupation. A further indicator may be the presence of Roman brick and roof-tile fragments in the adjacent T19 and T17, which perhaps point toward a source of this activity.

Other periods were more thinly represented, with an isolated find of late Bronze Age/early Iron Age pottery in T4 (F103), and medieval or later linear features in T20 (F22) and T17 (F61).

The subsoil depths given in Table 1 (p 2: column 2) are included as an indicator of the depths at which any archaeologically sensitive material may be expected to lie. Where found, sensitive levels were generally shallow with early features sealed by a thin layer of topsoil and thus vulnerable to wholesale stripping. One exception was the north-eastern part of the site, where modern dumped deposits in T11-T13-T14 increased in thickness in an easterly direction to the point where the proposed trench T15 (intended to lie east of T14) was abandoned since it would otherwise have exceeded a safe working depth.

In relation to any future fieldwork, it is worth noting that in several instances (e.g. F133, F136 and F42) considerable difficulty was experienced in distinguishing early features from the surrounding soils. Even with very careful manual cleaning, the differences in soil colour and texture were barely perceptible and on occasions it was necessary to rely heavily on the presence and angles of inclusions to help establish feature profiles.

## 9 Archive

The evaluation archive, consisting of site and post-excavation records, plans, photographic material and finds, will be deposited with Colchester Museum for permanent retention under cover of museum accession code 2001-151.

## 10 Acknowledgements

The Trust is most grateful to the following organisations and individuals for their involvement and assistance during this evaluation:

Adam Owen and Mr L Bonner of Cofton Land and Property  
Philip Wise, Martin Winter and Dr Paul R Sealey of Colchester Museum

The desk-based assessments in Appendix B and Appendix C are reproduced with the kind permission of Andrew Martin Associates.

The Trust's core fieldwork team consisted of Colin Austin, Ben Holloway and Chris Lister.

## 11 References

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- Niblett, R, 1985                          *Sheepen, an early Roman industrial site at Camulodunum*, CBA Research Report, **57**

Carl Crossan, November 2001

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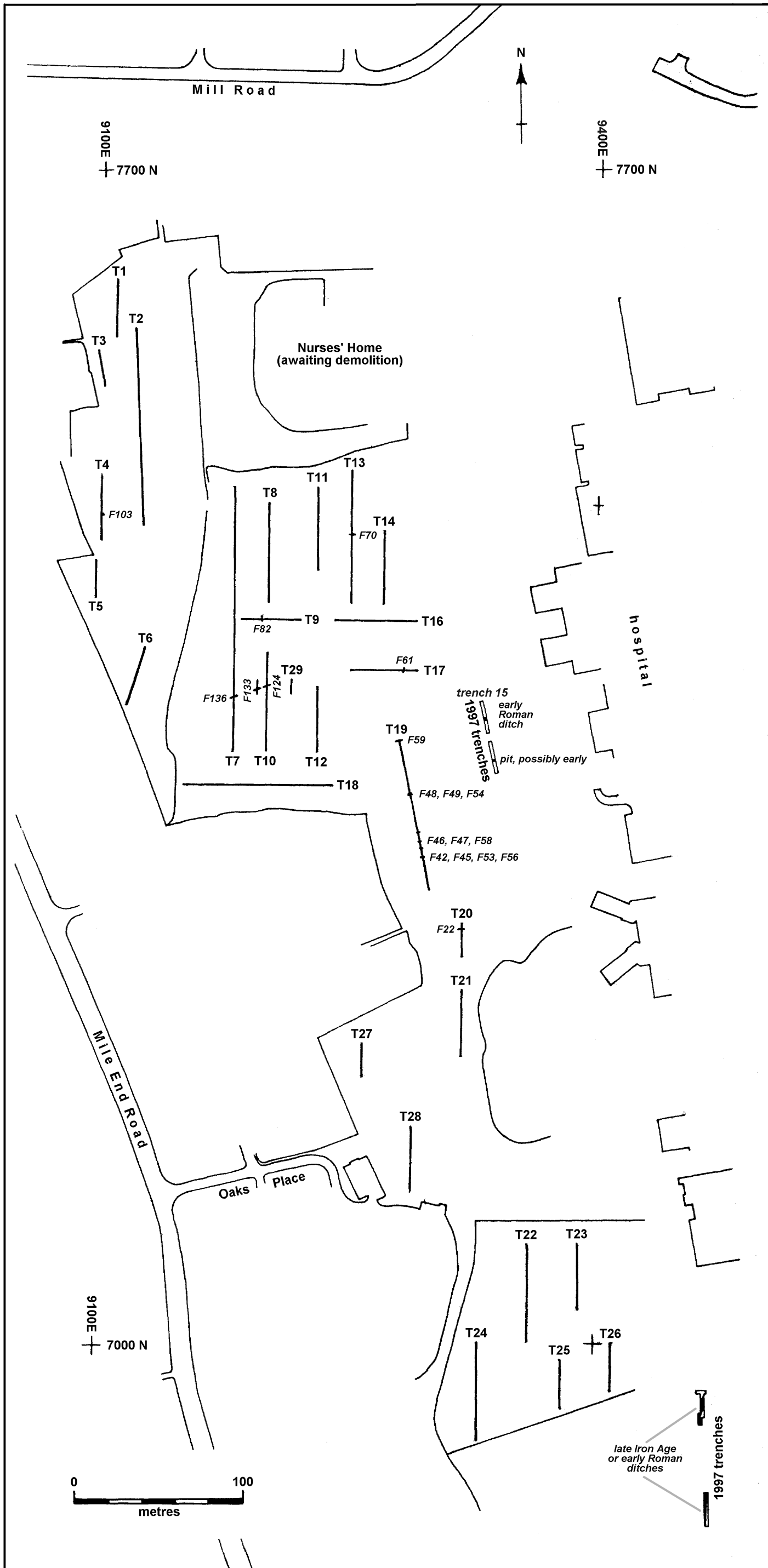


Fig 1 Trench location plan.

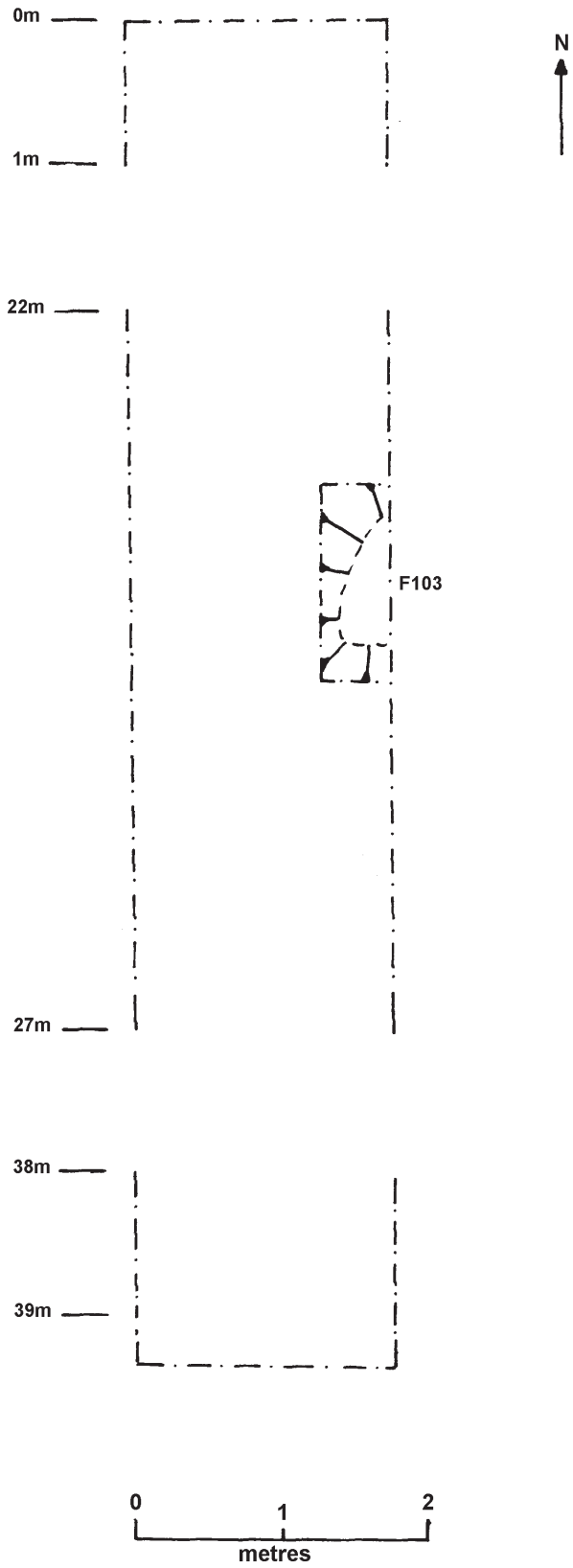


Fig 2 Trench 4: plan.

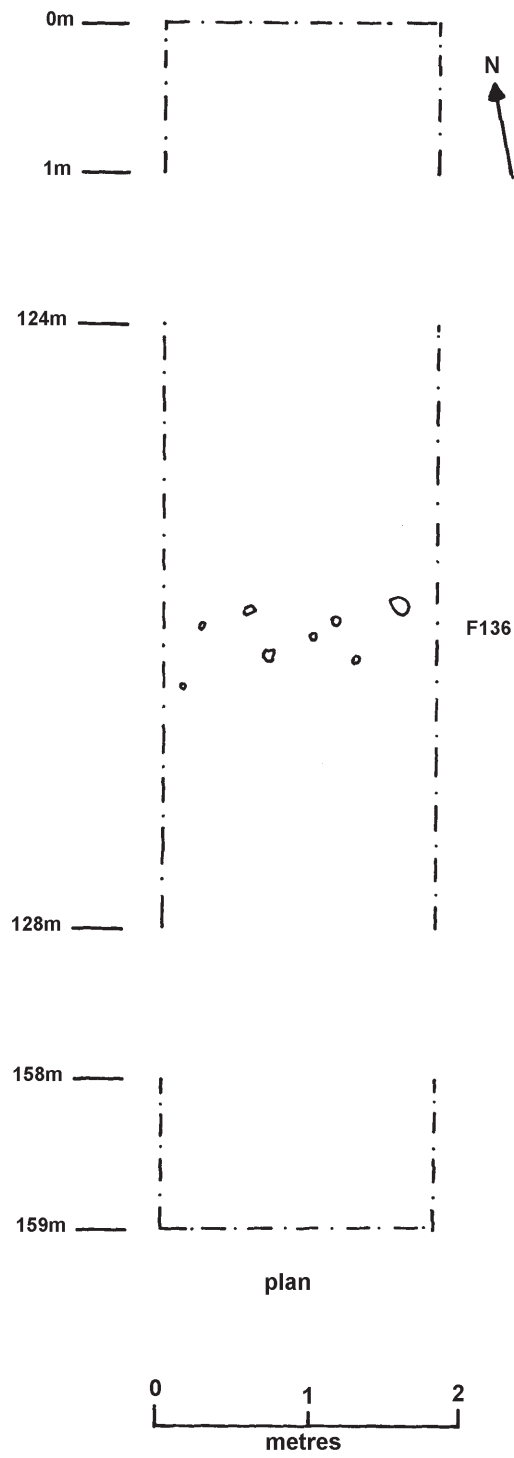


Fig 3 Trench 7: plan.

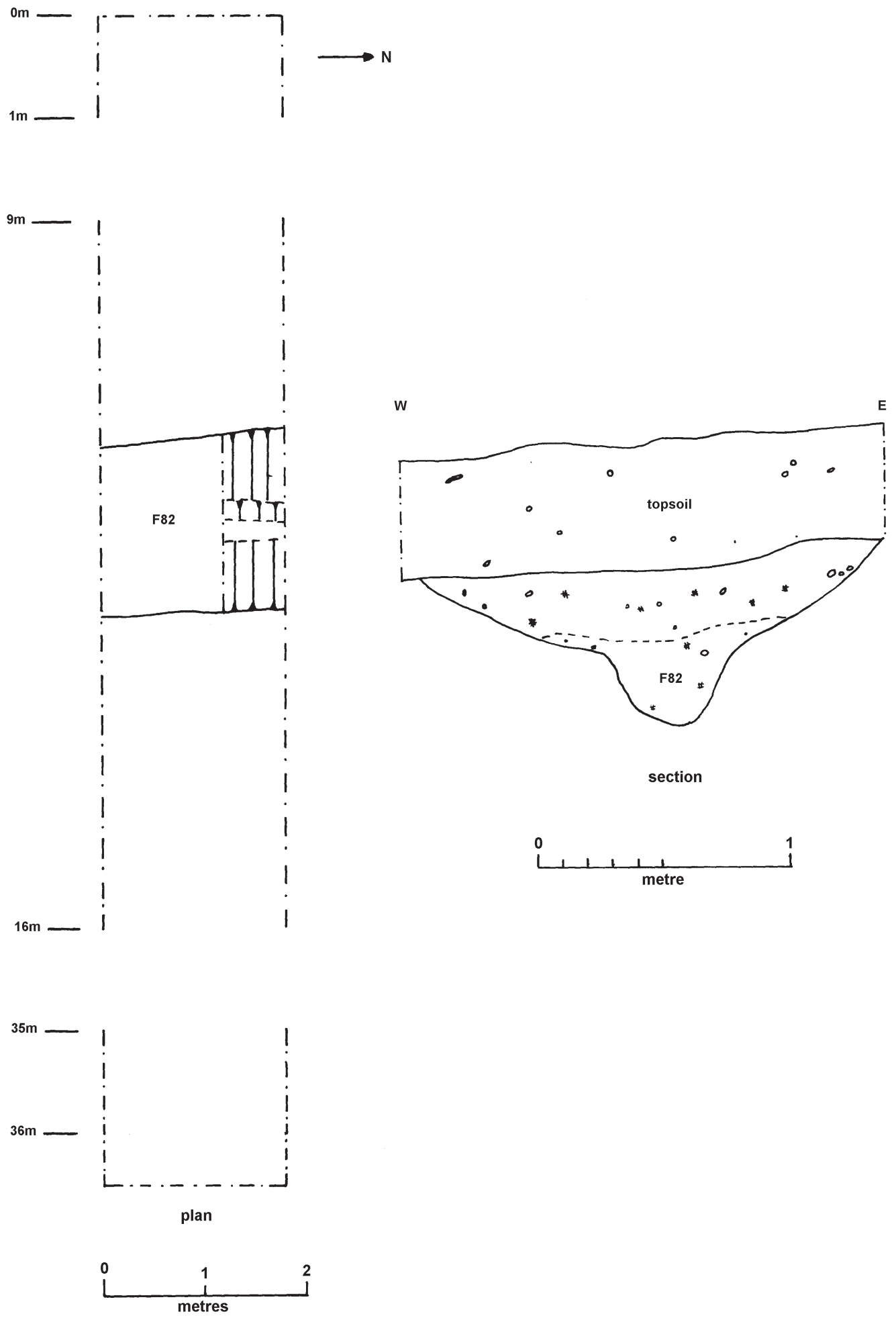


Fig 4 Trench 9: plan and section.

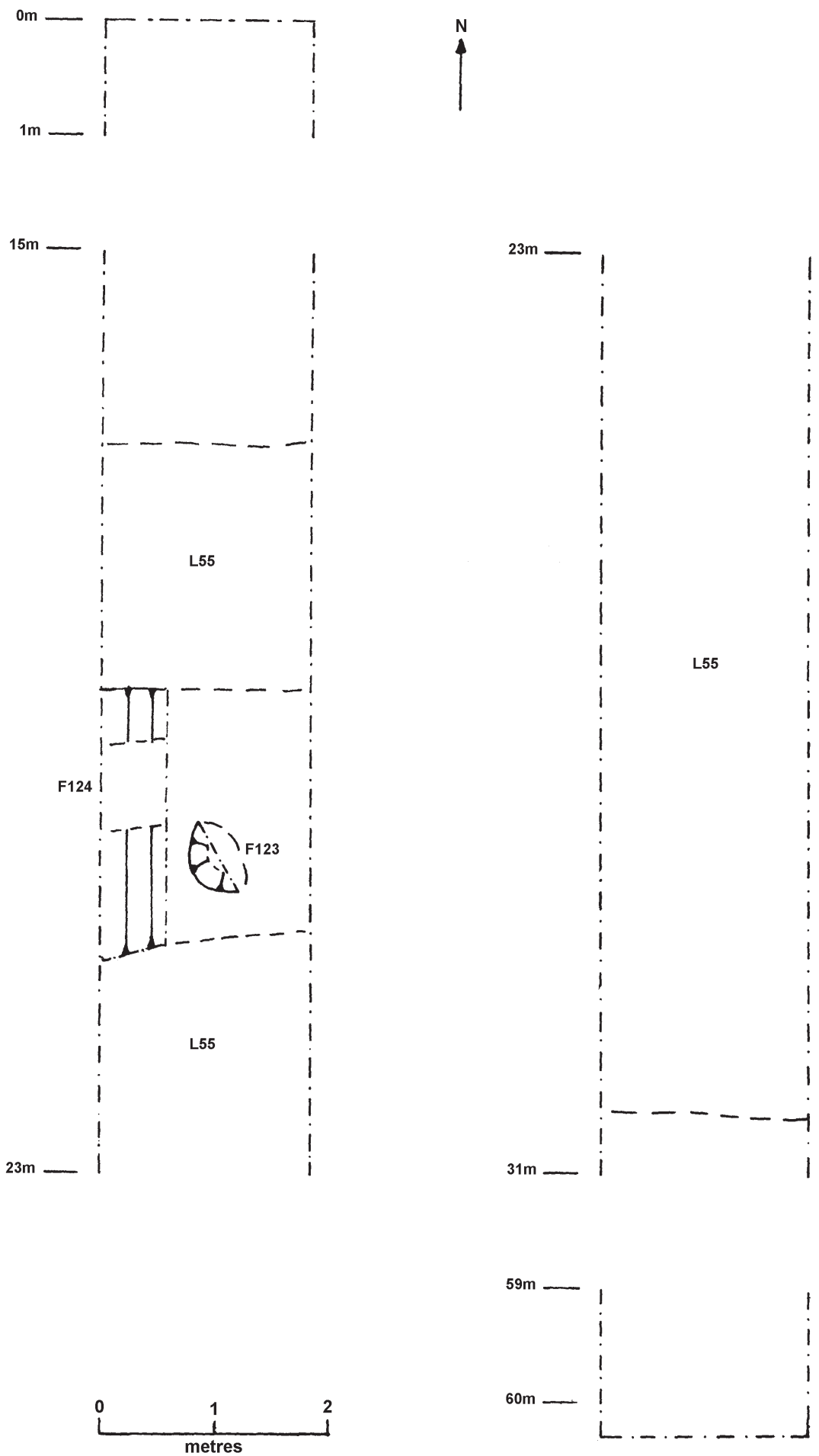


Fig 5 Trench 10: plan.



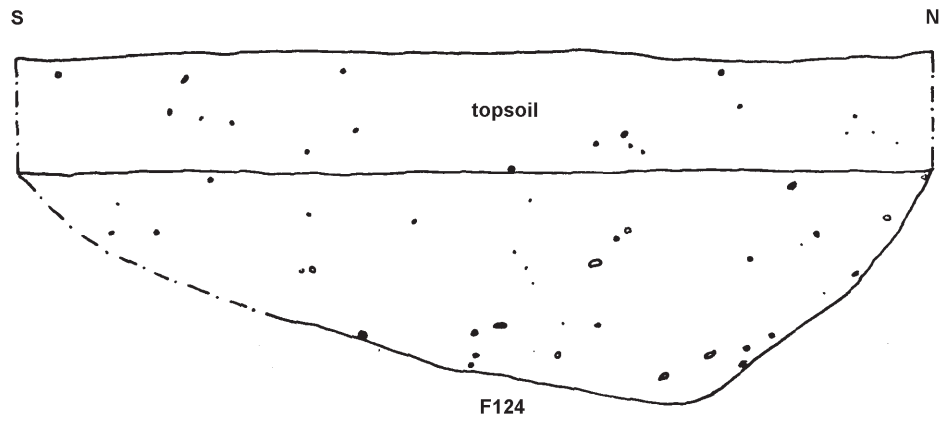
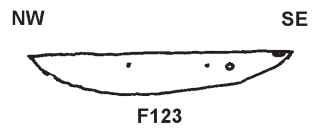


Fig 6 Trench 10: sections.

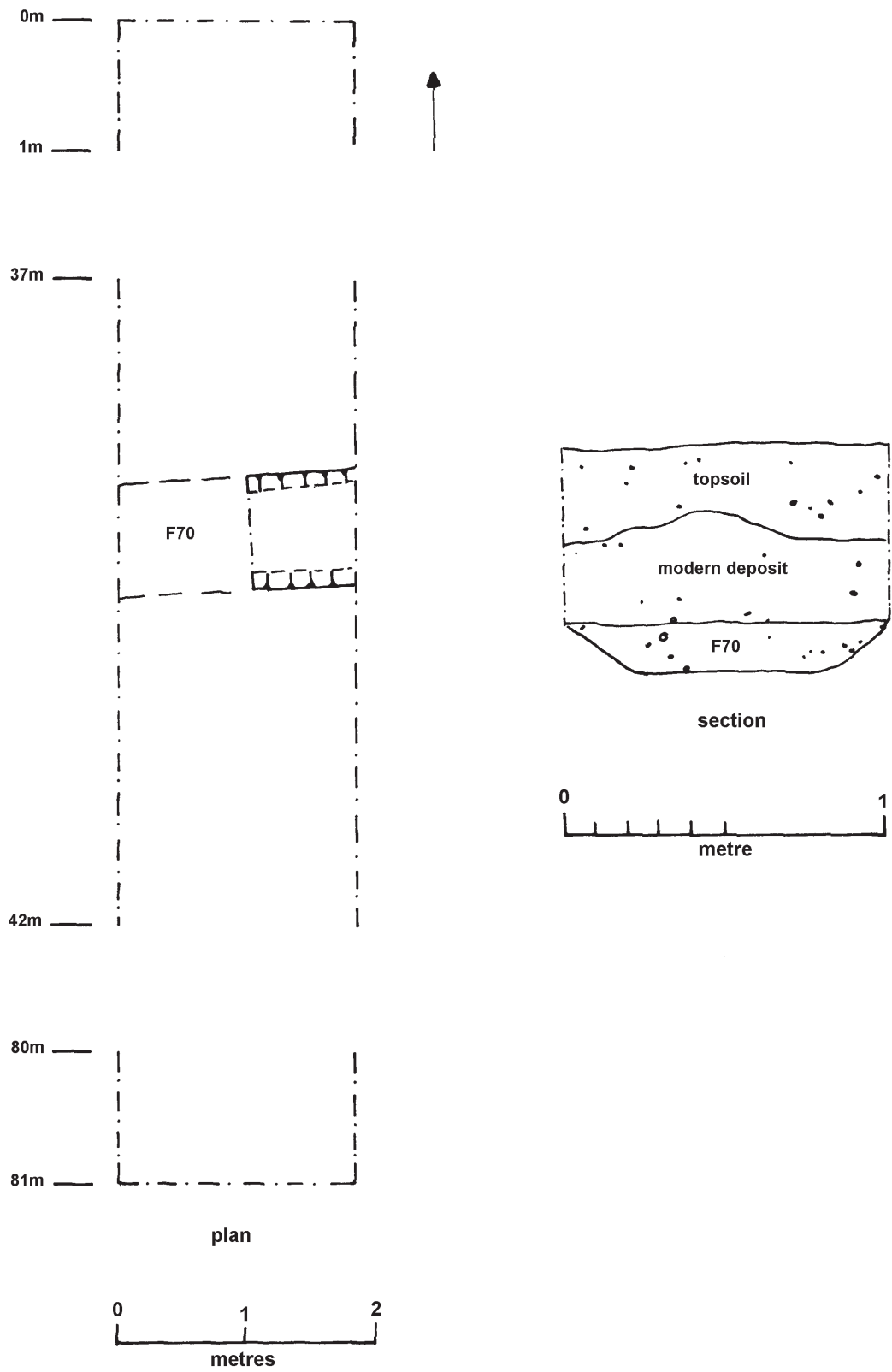


Fig 7 Trench 13: plan and section.

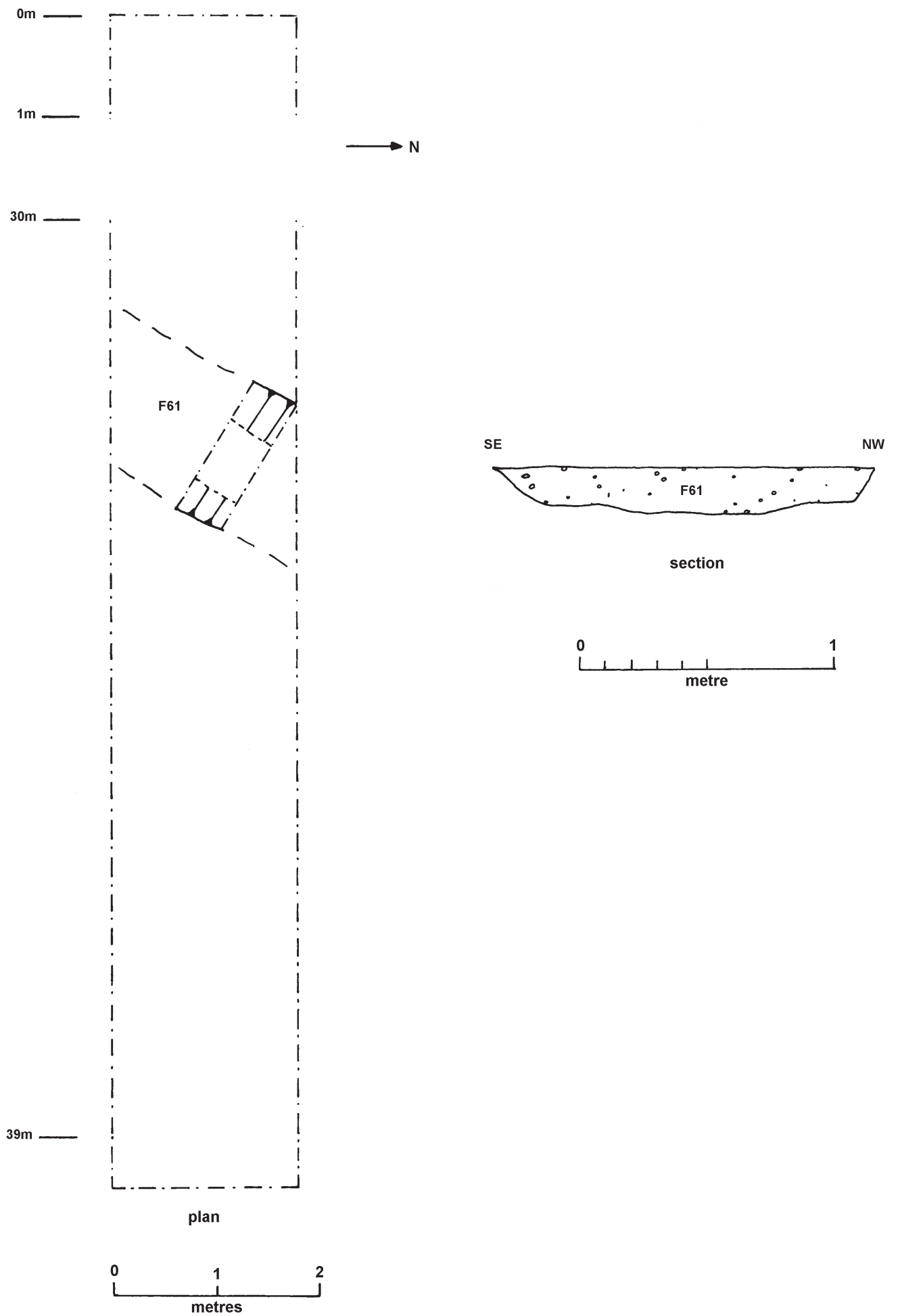


Fig 8 Trench 17: plan and section.

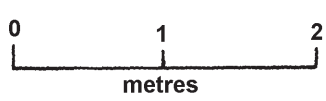
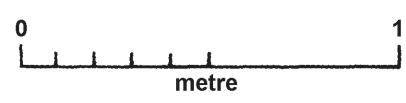
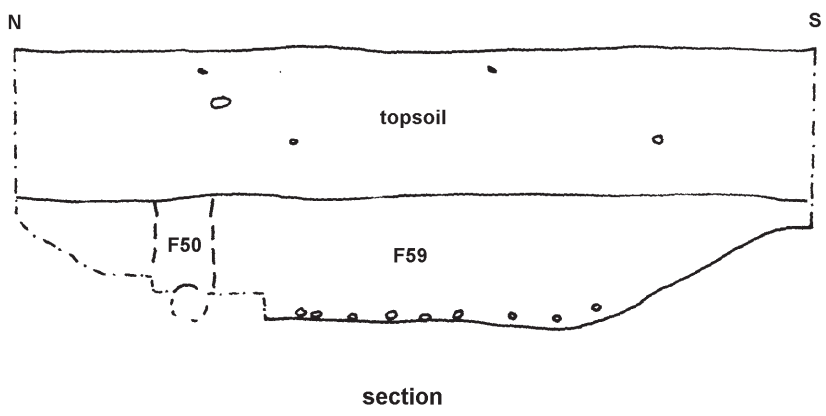
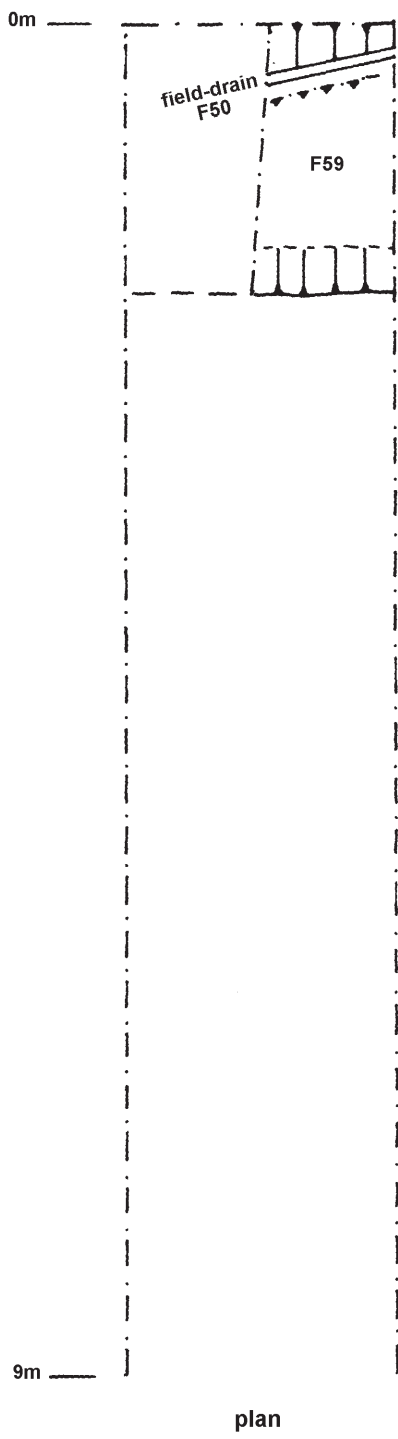


Fig 9 Trench 19 (0-9m south): plan and section.

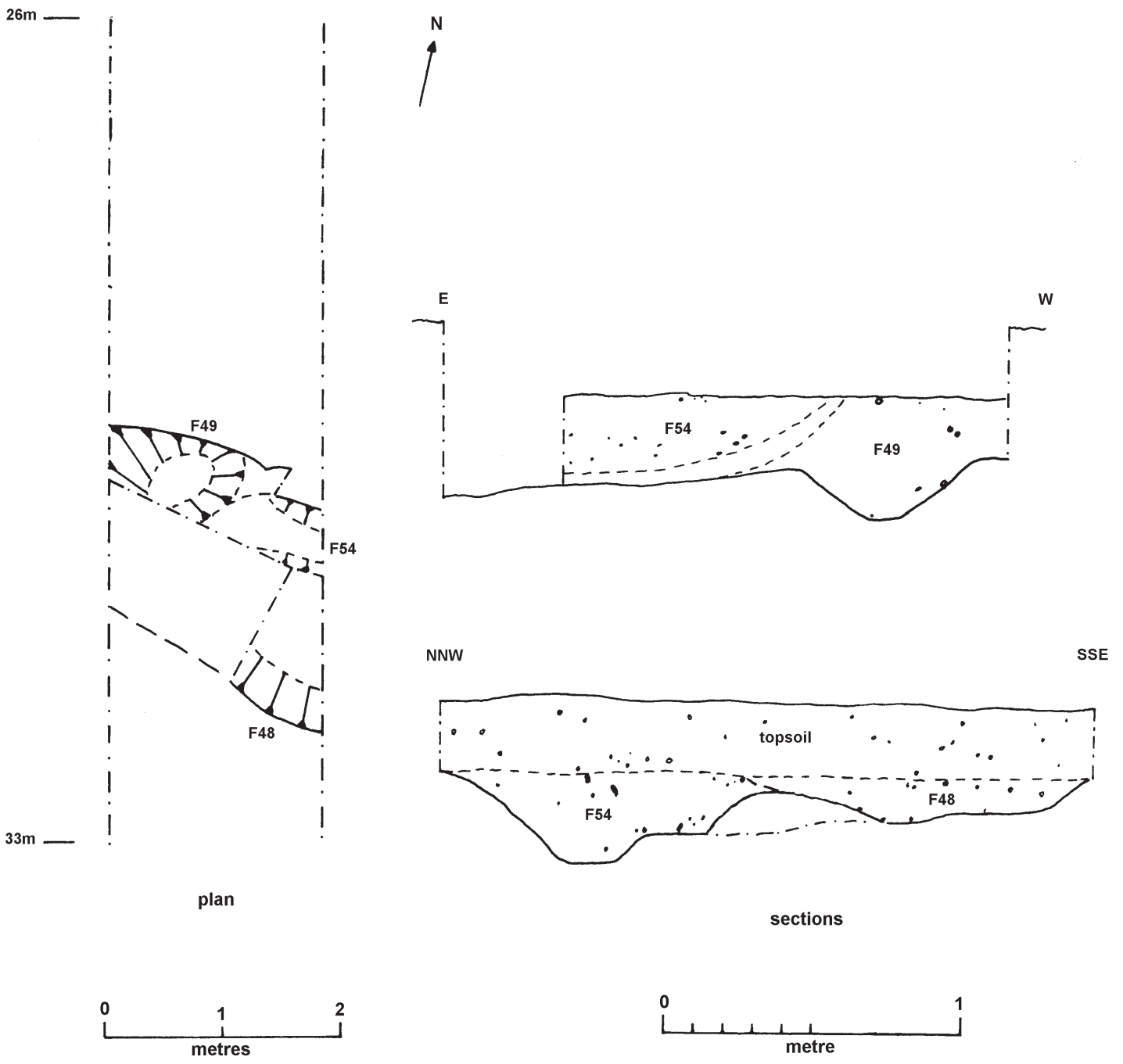


Fig 10 Trench 19 (26-33m south): plan and sections.

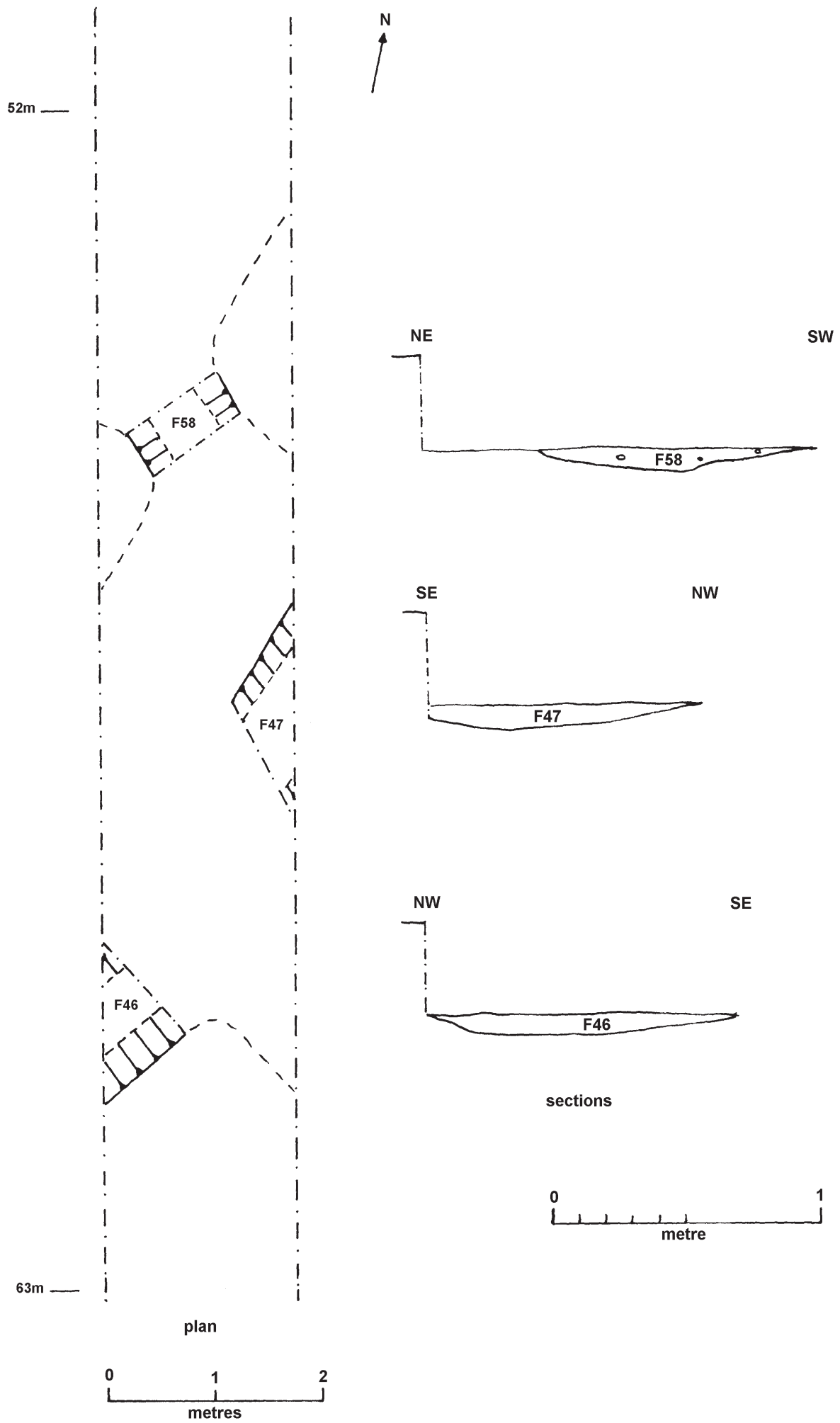


Fig 11 Trench 19 (52-63m south): plan and sections.

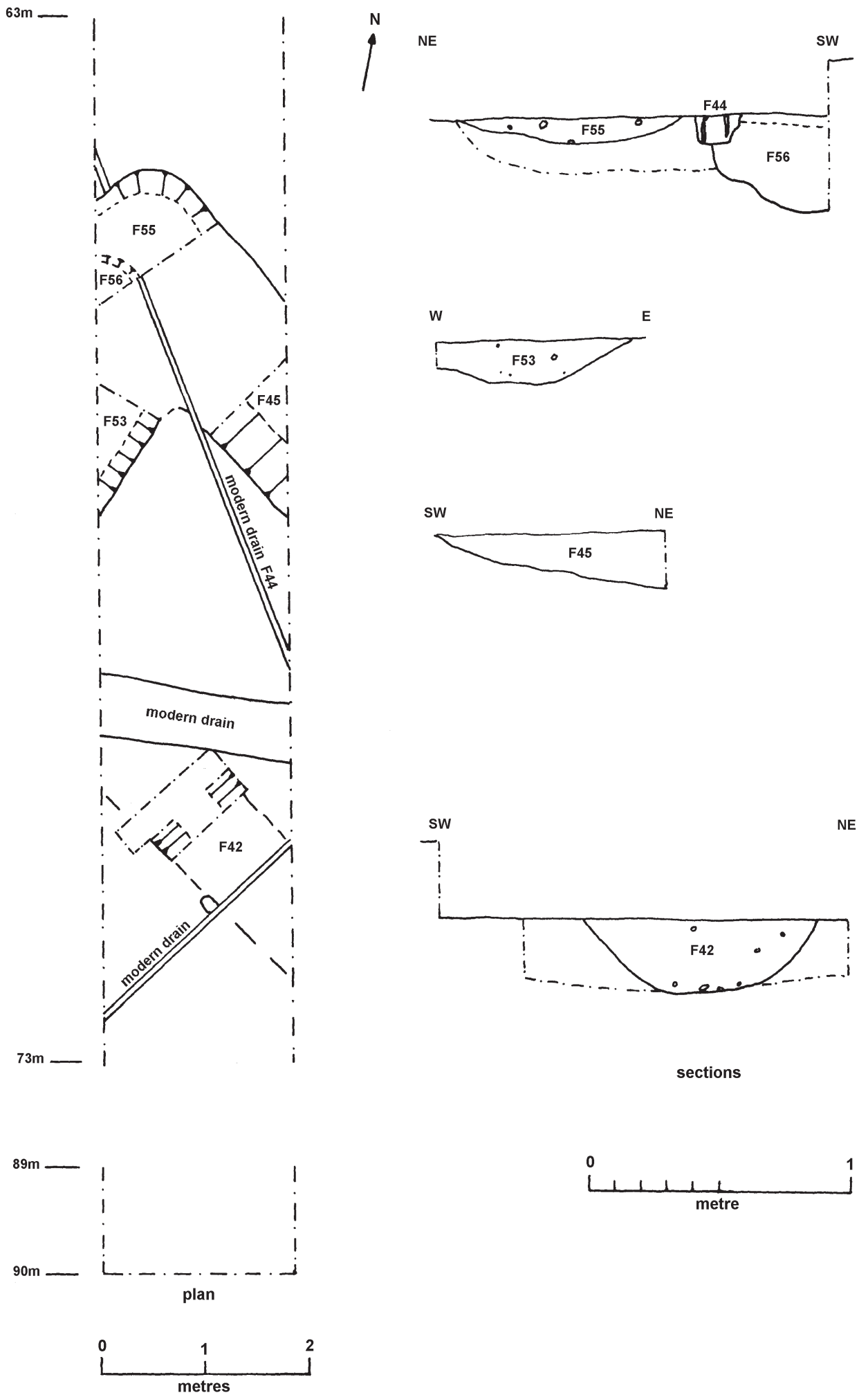


Fig 12 Trench 19: (63-90m south): plan and sections.

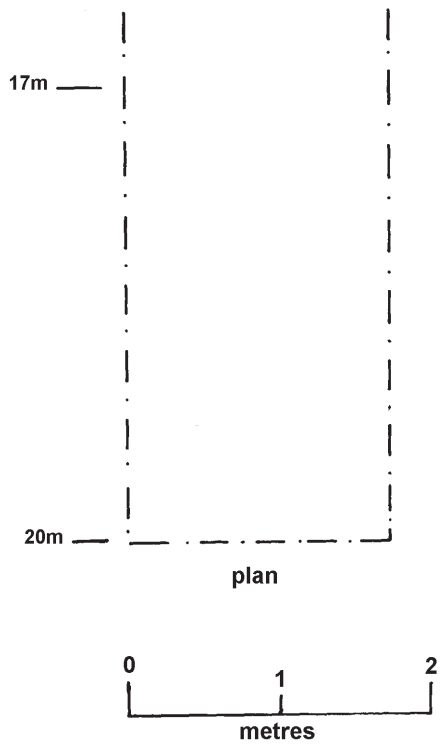
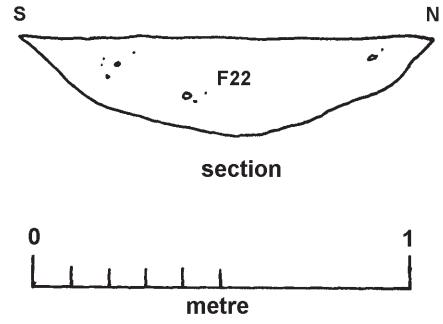
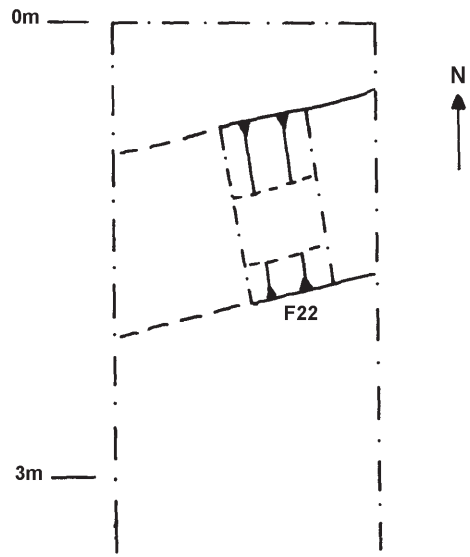


Fig 13 Trench 20: plan and section.



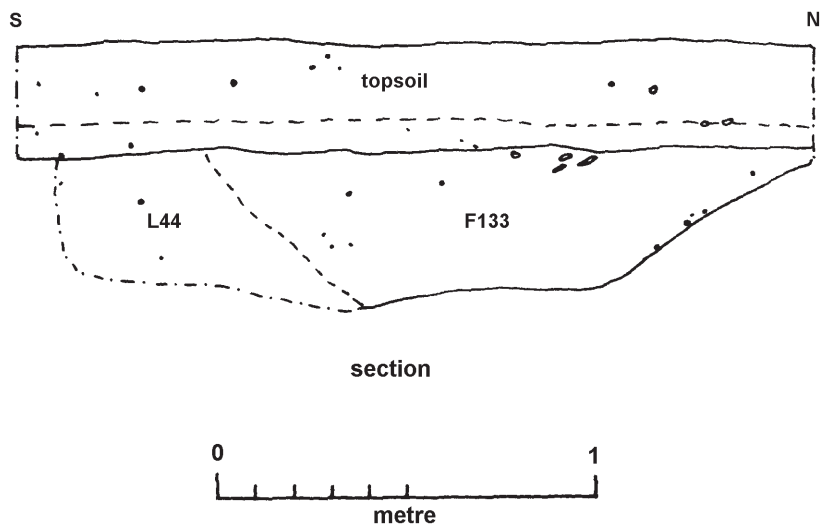
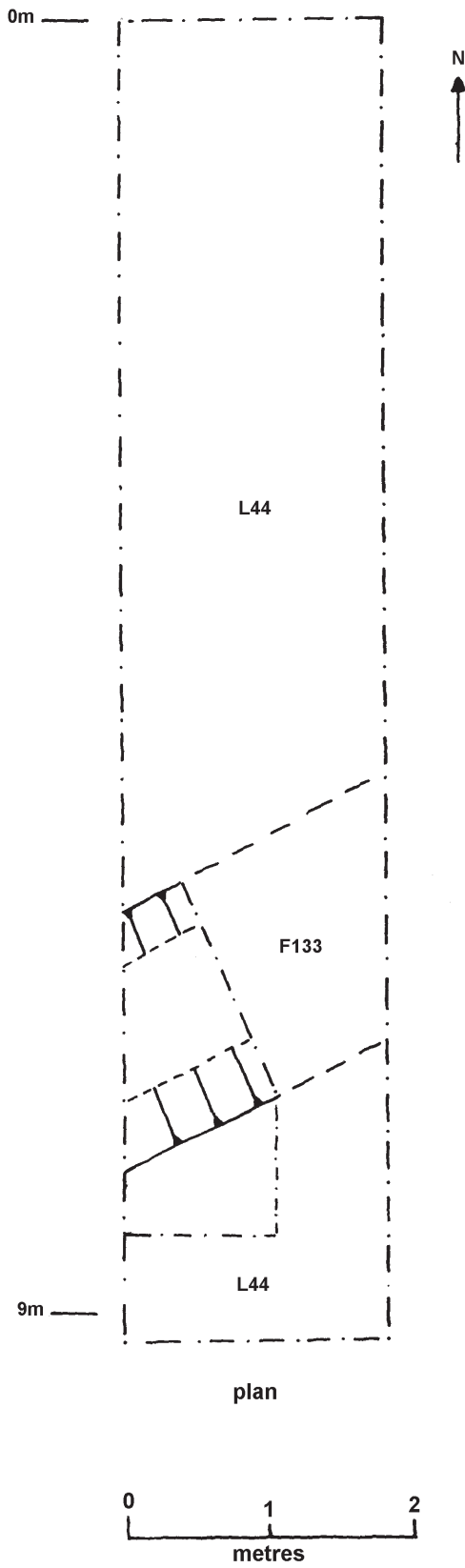


Fig 14 Trench 30: plan and section.

**Essex Sites and Monuments Record/  
Essex Archaeology and History**

**Summary sheet**

<b>Site name/address:</b> Land west of Colchester General Hospital (NHS Estates West District Site), Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Mile End	<b>District:</b> Colchester
<b>NGR:</b> TL 9931 2650 (centred)	<b>Site code:</b> 2001-151
<b>Type of work:</b> Evaluation	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> August and September 2001	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 2600 sq m
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester Museum	<b>Funding source:</b> Cofton Land and Property
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> To be determined	<b>Related SMR nos:</b>
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 165 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods represented:</b> Principally late Iron Age-early Roman, also a single find of late Bronze Age-early Iron Age pottery.	
<b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b> This 12ha site lies on high ground approximately 2.5km to the north of Colchester town centre. A field evaluation in advance of development revealed a widespread area of linear features of late Iron Age/early Roman (pre-Flavian) date. For the most part, the evidence from the exploratory trenches is in the form of discrete plots of ditches and gullies of the period and is currently too fragmentary to permit an overall pattern to emerge. Other finds included a single find of late Bronze Age-early Iron Age pottery and two ditches of medieval or possibly later date.	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> An archaeological evaluation on the line of the Colchester Northern Approaches Road. Stage 1: Turner Road to Boxted Road, CAT Report 2 (1997); summary in <i>EAH</i> <b>29</b> , 198	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Carl Crossan	<b>Date of summary:</b> November 2001