

An archaeological evaluation rear of 25 Head Street, Colchester, Essex

July 2002

on behalf of
Mr Steve Norman

CAT project code: 02/6d
Colchester Museums accession code: 2002.124
NGR: TL 9937 2510



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EHCR summary sheet

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1 Summary

A single evaluation trench was excavated to the rear of 25 Head Street, Colchester, Essex. The principal archaeological remains consisted of Roman demolition debris lying over a Roman mortar floor, both of which were cut by a 13th-century cess-pit.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching at the rear of 25 Head Street, Colchester, Essex, on the site of a proposed extension to the existing property.
- 2.2 The evaluation trench was excavated by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on 15th July 2002 at National Grid Reference (NGR) TL 9937 2510 (Figs 1-2).
- 2.3 All fieldwork was done in accordance with a specification agreed with the Archaeology Officer of Colchester Borough Council.
- 2.4 The 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* (1999).

3 Archaeological background

The site is situated in the south-west corner of the modern, medieval and Roman town of Colchester. We are in the fortunate position of knowing a great deal about the archaeological remains in this part of the town, due to numerous excavations carried out in the last century and published, for instance, in Hull 1958, Crummy 1984 and Crummy 1992, and the recent excavations nearby on the old Post Office site (CAT Report in prep). In such a position one would expect the following archaeological sequence:

- medieval and post-medieval pits
- a Roman gravel street?
- buildings of the Roman town
- buildings of the Roman fortress or colony.

The extent to which these archaeological strata actually survive depends on the depth and extent of later intrusions.

4 Aim

The aim of the evaluation was to establish the nature and condition of any archaeological features or deposits that survive in the area which will be affected by the construction of the proposed extension.

5 Methods

- 5.1 A single evaluation trench (Trench 1, 1.5m by 1m, was hand-dug at the location shown on Figures 1 and 2.
- 5.2 All site recording, photography and treatment of finds followed standard CAT methodology (CAT 1999).

6 Results (Figs 3-5)

The archaeological sequence exposed in Trench 1 (Fig 3) was as follows:

- 6.1 The top 30cm had been stripped off by contractors before the trench was excavated by hand. Below this was Layer or L1, a layer of disturbed topsoil (covered by modern flagstones)(Section 1, Fig 4). L1 sealed L2, a dumped clay layer containing modern brick and peg-tile. L2 sealed L3, a dark silty clay layer which was originally Roman but had been disturbed by root activity.
- 6.2 L3 lay on top of a Roman mortar floor (Feature or F1) which was also cut by F2 and F3, a small and large pit respectively (Section 2, Fig 5). The mortar floor sloped slightly, and was at 1.25m below modern ground. There was no excavation of Roman levels below the mortar floor F1.
- 6.3 F3 was a cess-pit, judging by its fill. It was excavated to 1.75m below modern ground, but not bottomed. Finds from F3 suggest that it was open and in use in the 13th or 14th century.

7 The finds

7.1 Finds list

Bag no	Context	Qty	Wt	Description	Date
3	F3	2	36	animal bones	?
3	F3	4	99	Fabric 20 body sherds	late 13th-14th centuries
3	F3	4	373	Fabric 20 rims inc a complete bowl profile	late 13th-14th centuries
3	F3	1	17	Fe nail	?
3	F3	1	81	peg-tile fragment	post-medieval
3	F3	1	58	Roman box-tile fragment	Roman
3	F3	1	57	Roman tile (<i>imbrex</i>)	Roman
3	F3	1	57	Roman tile (<i>tegula</i>)	Roman
3	F3	3	325	Roman tile fragments	Roman
3	F3	1	158	slag lump – hearth bottom	?
3	F3	2	72	tile fragments	?
1	L3	1	24	amphora fabric ?lid fragment	Roman
1	L3	9	154	animal bones	?
1	L3	1	33	buff flagon base	Roman
1	L3	6	74	Fabric 20 body sherds	late 13th-14th centuries
1	L3	2	24	Fe nail fragments	?
1	L3	4	293	hearth-bottom fragments	?
1	L3	4	63	indeterminate tile fragments	?
1	L3	1	6	Nene Valley body sherd	3rd-4th centuries
1	L3	1	9	peg-tile fragment	post-medieval
1	L3	1	11	Rhenish ware cup rim	mid 2nd to 3rd centuries
1	L3	1	153	Roman brick	Roman
1	L3	9	153	Roman grey ware body sherds inc large storage vessel	Roman
1	L3	1	84	Roman tile (<i>imbrex</i>)	Roman
1	L3	1	222	Roman tile (<i>tegula</i>)	Roman
1	L3	5	261	Roman tile fragments	Roman
1	L3	1	84	tap slag lump	post-Roman
2	L3	3	367	amphora	Roman
2	L3	3	97	animal bones	?
2	L3	2	30	black-burnished ware bowl fragments	AD 120+
2	L3	2	20	Fabric 20 body sherd + rim	late 13th-14th centuries
2	L3	1	39	Fe nail	?
2	L3	5	59	grey ware sherds inc rim	3rd-4th centuries
2	L3	3	534	large storage vessel fragments	Roman
2	L3	1	30	peg tile fragment	post-medieval
2	L3	5	574	Roman tile	Roman
2	L3	1	101	Roman tile (<i>imbrex</i>)	Roman
2	L3	1	56	small flagon rim	2nd-4th centuries
4	L3	1	5	Cua coin, heavily covered	Roman
5	L3	1	12	Cua object	?
6	u/s	1	14	clay tobacco-pipe bowl fragment	post-medieval
6	u/s	8	43	clay tobacco-pipe stem fragments	post-medieval
7	u/s	1	10	ceramic kiln ?prop, tubular, 41mm long, ends splayed to 20mm	post-medieval

7.2 The Roman coin

by Nina Crummy

SF 1. (4) L3. Illegible *antoninianus*. 3rd century.

7.3 Comment on the finds

7.3.1 Post-Roman

Dealing with the later material first, there is a good group of medieval pottery: four rims in Fabric 20 medieval coarse ware and a complete bowl profile also in Fabric 20. There is no close match for the bowl in Cotter (2000), the published examples all being more inturned than this example¹. Nevertheless, the Fabric 20 group of pottery is good enough to suggest a date of the late 13th or 14th century for the pit F3 in which it was found.

Of principal interest in the post-medieval material was a ceramic spacer bar (possibly a kiln spacer: find 7), several lumps of hearth-bottom and one piece of tap slag. This indicates the production of iron in this area in the medieval period or later.

7.3.2 Roman

The bulk of the Roman finds consists of brick and tile from nearby buildings. There is also a box-tile fragment, indicating that there was a hypocaust in the vicinity. The Roman pottery consists principally of grey wares, with two sherds of later colour-coat, several amphora sherds, and a few black-burnished ware sherds. As a group, this seems to date from possibly the 2nd but more likely the 3rd century.

8 Discussion and interpretation

8.1 The highest significant archaeological horizon was L3, a clay deposit commonly found in Colchester and usually consisting of the collapsed or demolished remains of clay-walled buildings. This was at 0.75m below modern ground. While this was a Roman layer originally, it had been heavily contaminated by root action from plants, and could not be described as a sealed context. The clay layer L3 was on top of a mortar floor also of Roman date (F1), at 1.25m below modern ground. The finds from L3 are 2nd or 3rd century, suggesting a date of probably 2nd century for the mortar floor (F1).

This sequence of collapsed clay over mortar floor is common in Colchester, and suggests that the evaluation trench was positioned over an area of Roman town housing. It is interesting that no Roman street gravel was encountered here, confirming the fact that the east-west Roman street between Insula 25b and Insula 33b passes north of this point. The trench did extend below the mortar floor F1, so no earlier Roman remains (ie Boudican, Roman fortress) were exposed.

8.2 Following the Roman sequence above, the next archaeological period is represented by the medieval cess-pit F3. Common sense suggests that this was outside (west of) the medieval property at 25 Head Street in the 13th and 14th centuries. The general nature of the fill of the cess-pit reflected its primary use, but there was other material in there as well, both medieval pottery sherds and residual Roman material. There were also fragments of hearth-bottom from the pit, indicating the production of metal (presumably iron) in this area in medieval times. Indeed, the fact that the pieces of slag were found in the pit must indicate that the metal production was slightly earlier than or contemporary with the life of the cess-pit.

9 Acknowledgments

The project was managed by Howard Brooks and the site work was carried out by Ben Holloway. The project was monitored by Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council.

The Trust would like to thank Mr Steve Norman for commissioning the work.

¹ all post-Roman fabric codes after Cotter 2000

10 References

- CAT, 1999 *Policies and procedures*
- CAT Report in prep Excavations at 29-39 Head Street, Colchester, Essex
- Cotter, John P, 2000 *Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester 1971-85, Colchester Archaeological Trust Report 10*
- Crummy, Philip, 1984 *Excavations at Lion Walk, Balcerne Lane, and Middleborough, Colchester, Essex, Colchester Archaeological Report 3*
- Crummy, Philip, 1992 *Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School, and other sites in Colchester 1971-85, Colchester Archaeological Report 6*
- Hull, M R, 1958 *Roman Colchester, Society of Antiquaries Research Committee Report, XX*

11 Glossary

ceramic	made of clay
context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
SMR	Sites and Monuments Record
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
hearth-bottom	concretion of metal products resulting from iron smithing
hypocaust	Roman underfloor heating system
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
Roman	the period from AD 43 to around AD 430
post-medieval	after <i>circa</i> 1530 and up to Victorian
tap slag	waste metal tapped out of a smithing hearth

12 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is held at Colchester Archaeological Trust, 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but it will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2002.124.

13 Site data

13.1 Site context list

Context	Description	Context date
L1	topsoil	Modern
L2	clay dump make up	Modern
L3	root disturbed clay demolition debris	Roman, root-disturbed; finds are 2nd- to 3rd-century
L4	clay-wall demolition debris	Roman
F1	mortar floor	Roman, possibly 2nd century
F2	small cut	post-Roman
F3	cess-pit	13th-14th centuries

13.2 Soil descriptions

Context	Description
L1	Turf, grey brown sandy loam containing occasional small stones.
L2	Dark yellowish brown sandy loam, containing common small stones and occasional traces of peg-tile flecks.
L3	Very dark brown silt.
L4	Yellow brown clay.
F3 fill	Very dark brown silt.

Ben Holloway and Howard Brooks, September 2002

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Adams/c:/reports02/25HeadStreet/rep198.doc

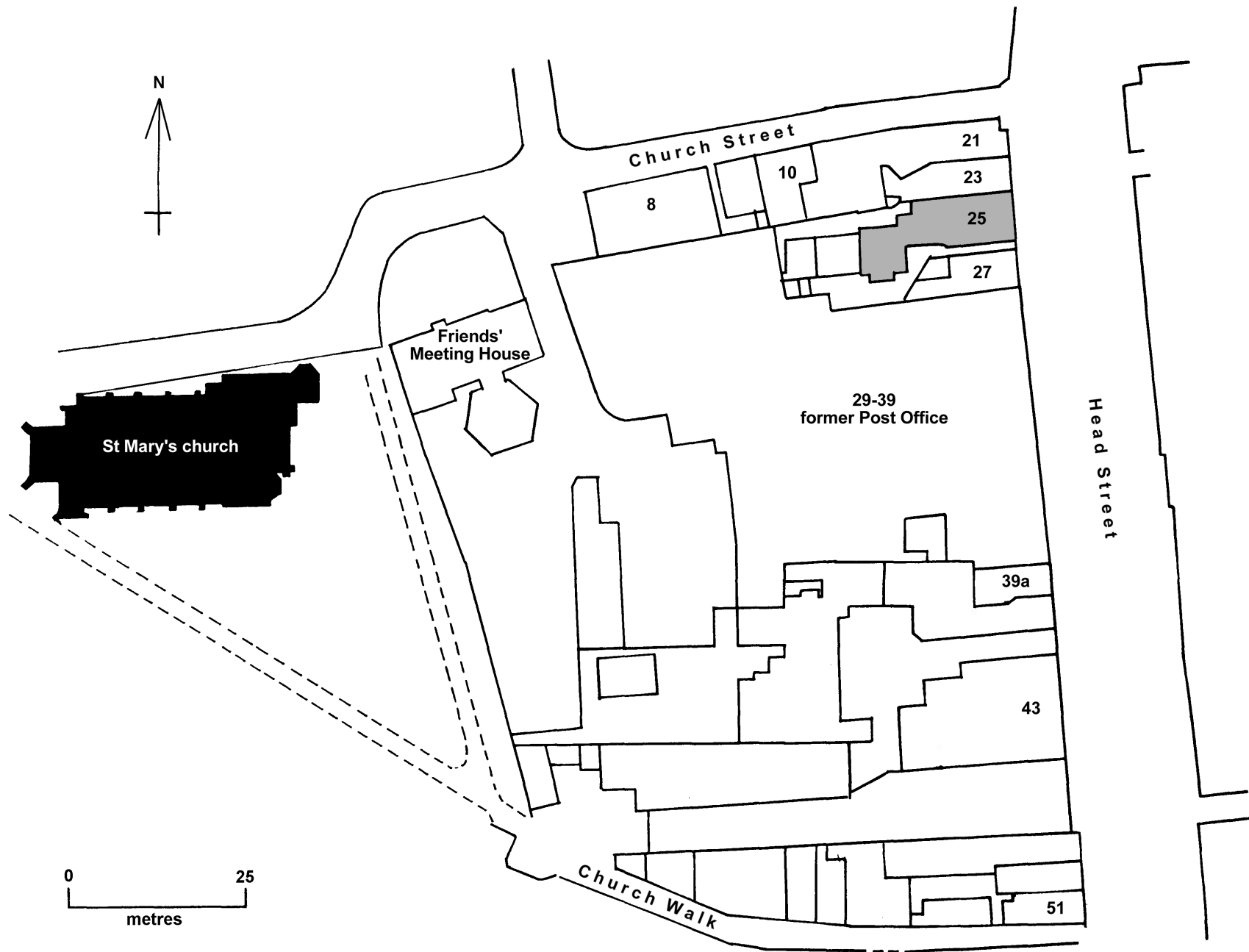


Fig 1 Site location.

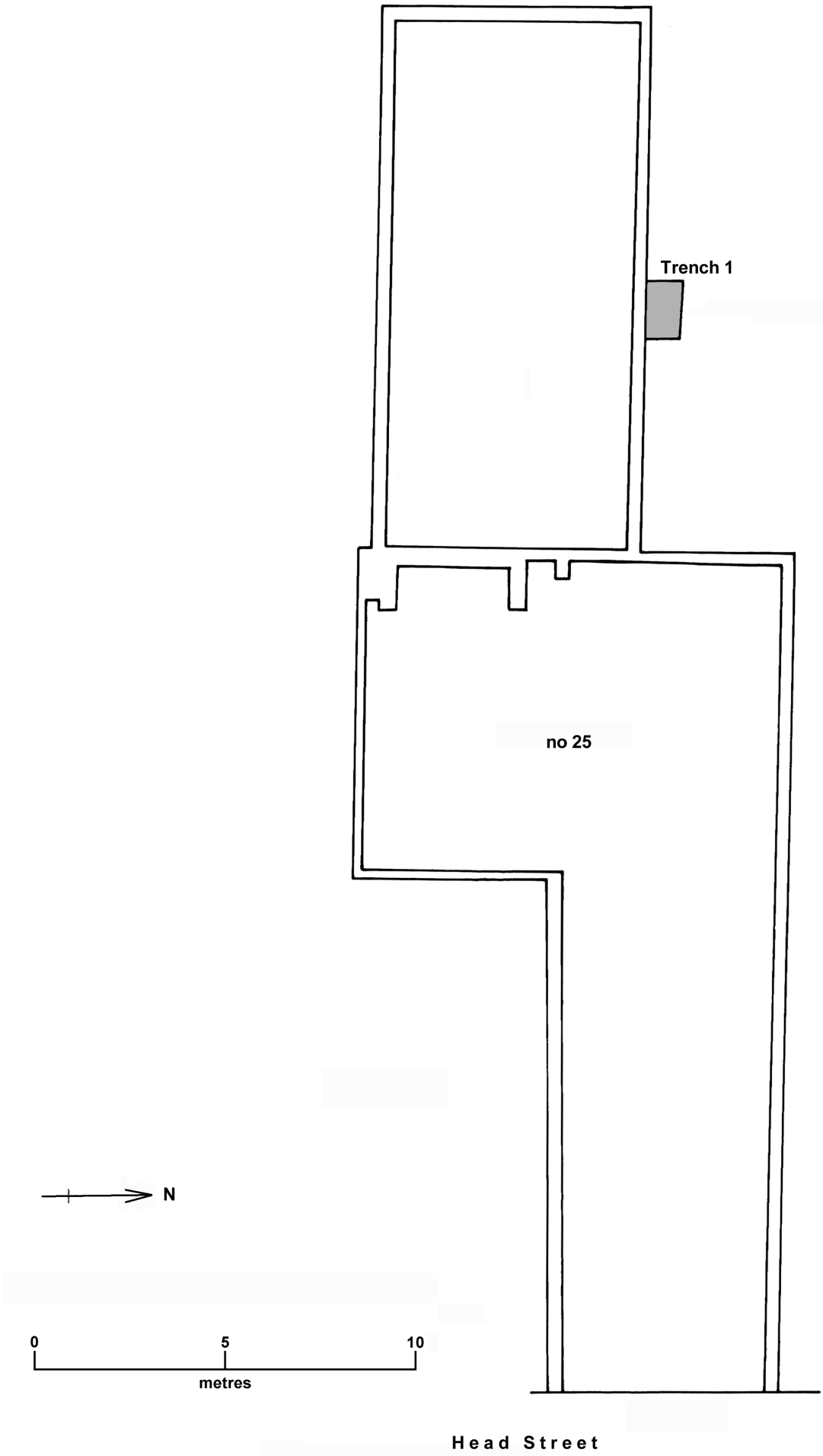


Fig 2 Trench location.

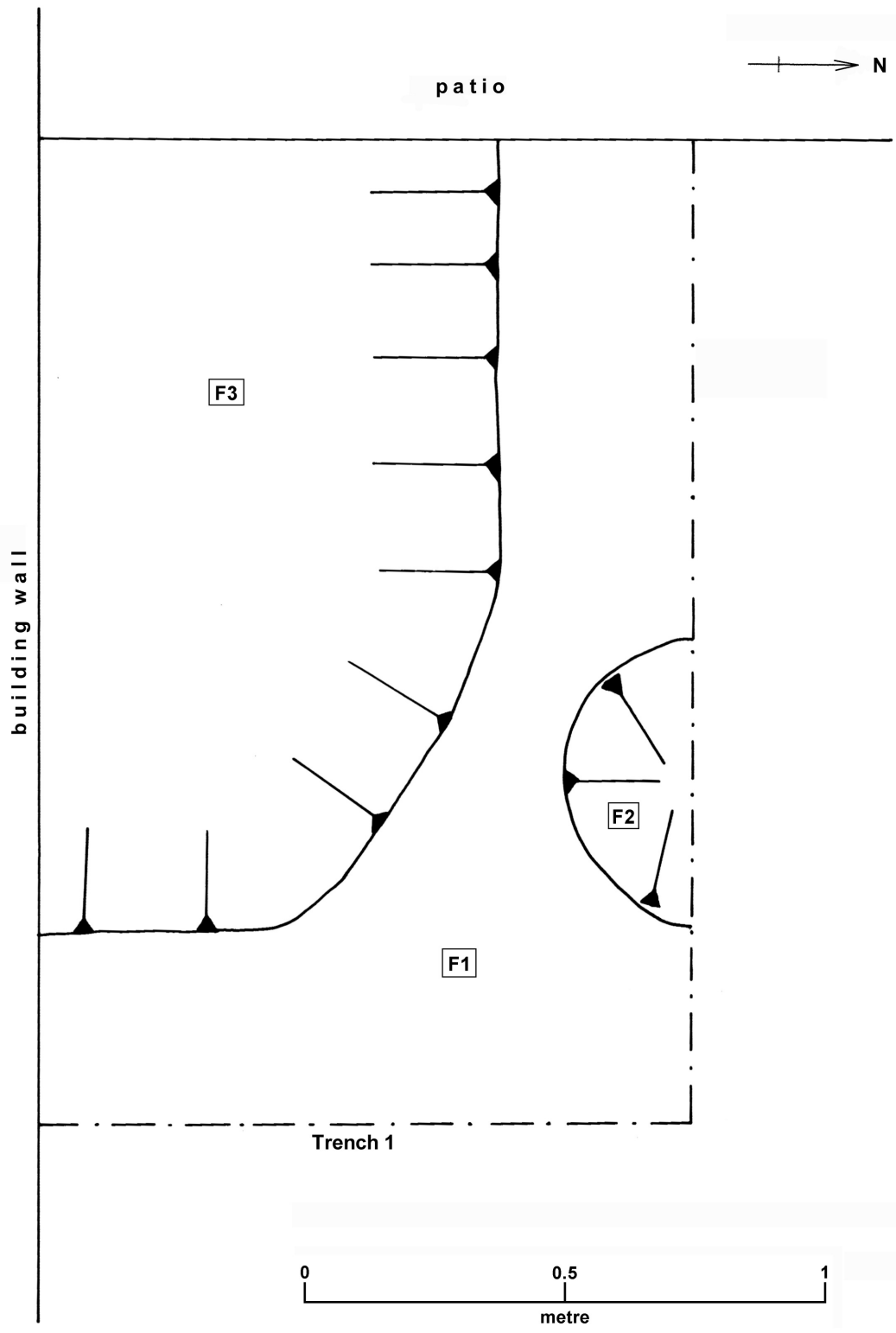


Fig 3 Site plan.

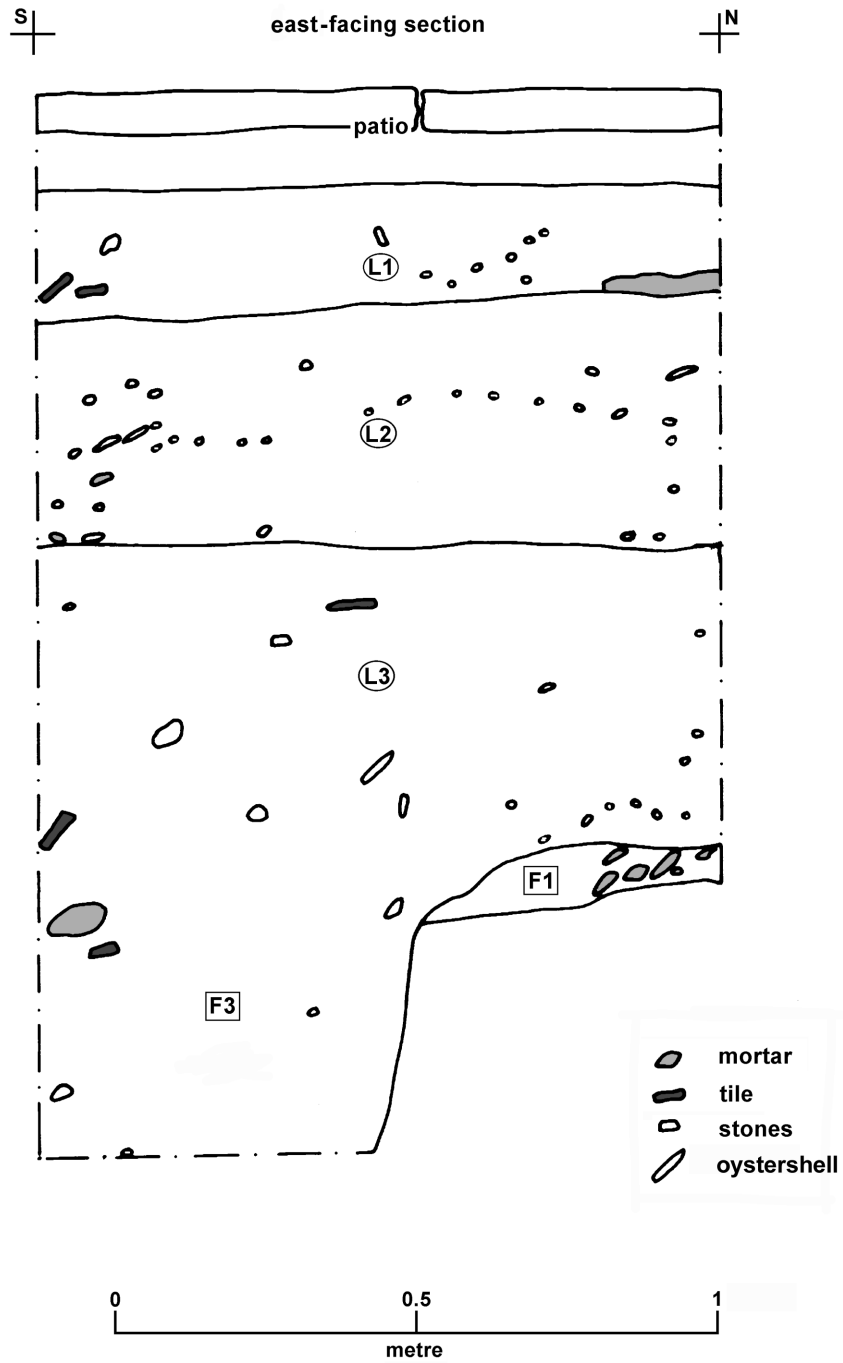


Fig 4 Trench 1: Section 1.

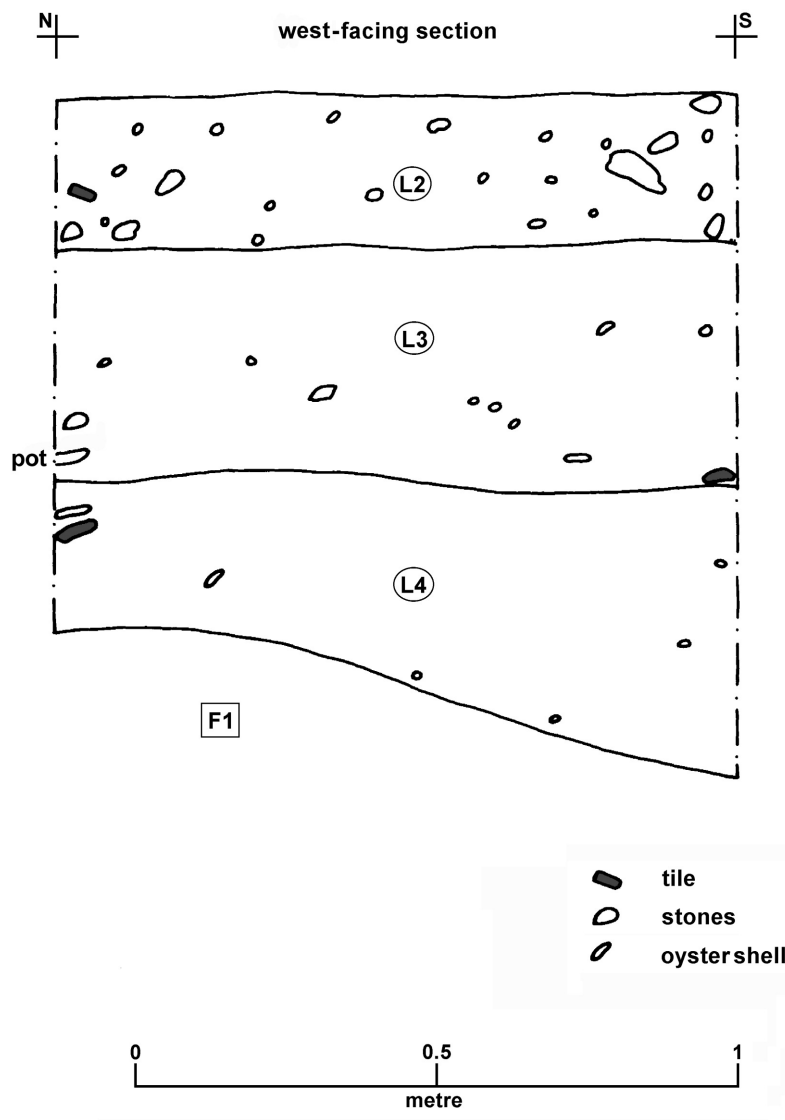


Fig 5 Trench 1: Section 2.

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

Summary sheet

Site address: rear of 25 Head Street, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 9937 2510	Site code: Museum accession code 2002.124
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: July 2002	Size of area investigated: 1 small trench
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related SMR nos: None
Final report: CAT Report 198 and summary in EAH	
Periods represented: Roman and medieval	
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>A single evaluation trench was excavated to the rear of 25 Head Street. The principal archaeological remains consisted of Roman demolition debris lying over a Roman mortar floor, both of which were cut by a 13th-century cess-pit.</i>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Howard Brooks	Date of summary: 18th July 2002