

**An archaeological evaluation at the
attenuation pond site
(the south-east corner of the Abbey Field),
Colchester, Essex
April 2005**

**report prepared
by Howard Brooks**

**on behalf of
Taylor Woodrow**



CAT project code: 05/4d
Colchester Museums accession code: 2005.50
NGR: TL 9974 2403



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EHER summary sheet

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1 Summary

This site lies inside the oppidum of Camulodunum, and on the southern fringe of the Abbey Field Roman cemetery. Two parallel ditches were observed, one Roman and a second which was undated but probably Roman. They are interpreted as being the west and east ditches of a north-south-aligned Roman trackway.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching at the attenuation pond site, on the south-east corner of the Abbey Field, Colchester, Essex (Fig 1).
- 2.2 The immediate vicinity of the site is open grassland, with a small car-parking area accessed off Circular Road South. However, recent Ordnance Survey sheet TL 92 SE¹ shows a long narrow building along the south edge of the car park, and a second similar building to its east, aligned south-west to north-east and pointing towards the junction of Berechurch Road and Merrick Road. The 1991 edition of the same sheet shows that those buildings had been demolished and replaced by trees. The trees were no longer there in 2005.
- 2.3 The evaluation trenches were located at (centre point) NGR TL 9974 2403 (Fig 2).
- 2.4 Fieldwork was undertaken in April 2005 on behalf of Taylor Woodrow by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT), in association with RPS Planning, Transport and Environment. Post-excavation work was done in May 2005.
- 2.5 All fieldwork and reporting was done in accordance with Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (CM 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (CM 2003), English Heritage's *Management of archaeological projects* (MAP 2), and the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IFA 2001) and *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IFA 1999). The guidance contained in the documents *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment* (EAA 3), *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy* (EAA 8), and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14) was also followed.

3 Archaeological background

3.1 Prehistoric and pre-oppidum

A Deverel-Rimbury-type burial² with calcined (cremated) bone is reported from the west side of the Abbey Field, 500m west of this site (Essex Historic Environment Record or EHER no 11876). A picture of the landscape of this period is beginning to emerge, based on recent excavations and evaluations associated with the new garrison project³. A fully ditched-and-hedged farming landscape had not yet developed; instead, one would expect to find evidence of isolated settlements and burials. The Abbey Field Deverel-Rimbury-type burial is exactly in keeping with this general picture.

3.2 The pre-Roman oppidum of Camulodunum

During the late Iron Age (probably by c AD 5), a defended territory or 'oppidum' had been established at Camulodunum⁴. The current sites lies within the area of the oppidum. In simple form, this was a series of defensive earthworks (dykes) defining an area of some 20 square kilometres.

1 undated, but probably early 1970s
2 dating to c 1400-1000 BC
3 CAT Report 292
4 CAR 11, 174-8

Within the area enclosed by the dykes, three main centres of occupation or activity have been identified: a trading centre at Sheepen (near the Colchester Institute); a 'homestead' at Gosbecks Farm (near the Borough refuse dump); and pre-Roman activity on the later Roman farmstead site at Kirkee McMunn Barracks.

In the open areas of the *oppidum* between Gosbecks, Sheepen and Kirkee McMunn Barracks, cropmark photographs show enclosures and small fields, sometimes linked by trackways. The best surviving cropmarks have been seen around the Gosbecks site, but a lesser group of cropmarks in the central and eastern parts of the *oppidum* is to be found on either side of Berechurch Road, within a triangle the corners of which are defined by Earlswood Road, the Army Driving School and Maypole Green. There are no known cropmarks in the area of the current site.

However, two isolated cremation burials are recorded close to the current site. The first is a find reported 100m north of the current site in 1905 as a 'Celtic' cinerary urn. This is probably a Late Iron Age burial (EHER no 11878). The second is a group of two Late Iron Age vessels (probably a burial), recorded 300m west-south-west of the current site (EHER no 11877).

3.3 The Roman period – town and country

The current site lies 900m south of the walls of the Roman town, too far out to be in the Roman suburbs. However, it is within the area of the Roman cemetery defined by Rex Hull as the 'Abbey Field Cemetery' (CAR 9, 262). The recent discovery of large numbers of Roman burials at the athletics track on the north edge of the Abbey Field and at the adjacent sports pitch in 2001 (CAT Report 138) has greatly added to the number of known burials here.

The Abbey Field cemetery is centred on the north edge of the Abbey Field, but outlying burials are known as far south as the current site. Roman cremations are recorded at the (now-demolished) Garrison hospital site, which is only 250m away to the west-south-west (EHER no 11893) and also 100m west of the current site (EHER no 11894). As well as the purely Roman burials, there are also Late Iron Age burials within a few hundred metres of this site.

3.4 Medieval

The site is 700m south of the site of St John's abbey. No medieval structural remains would be expected this far south, although the name 'Abbey Field' denotes a connection with the abbey at one time.

4 Aim

The aim of the evaluation was to establish the nature, condition, date and importance of any archaeological remains on the site. Any information recovered will be taken into account in formulation of development plans and any appropriate mitigation.

5 The trial-trenches (Figs 2-5)

Two evaluation trenches were dug by machine under archaeological supervision (Trench or T1 and T2). Trench positions were designed to assess the archaeological remains in the area to be impacted by the proposed attenuation pond.

Both trenches were 40m long and 1.6m wide. T2 was dug along the north edge of the car park (east-west through the west side of the proposed pond), and T1 was dug 15m to its east edge (north-south through the east edge of the proposed pond).

Both trenches were machined to the archaeological level (where features were visible). This was the top of natural sand Layer or L6, at 2.00m in T1, and at 0.45m in T2 (see Fig 5 for representative sections). The presence of 'made ground' with modern brick fragments overlying natural in both trenches demonstrates recent disturbance here. The principal difference is that the made ground is much deeper in T1.

Trench 1 (Figs 2-4)

In T1, a number of modern service-trenches (Feature or F1) were uncovered and recorded, but not excavated. They all contained ceramic pipes of recent origin. They were grouped as if radiating away from a point somewhere to the east.

Trench 2 (Figs 2-4)

In T2, two north-south-aligned ditches (F3, F4) were observed. They were 6.5m apart (inner edge to inner edge), and, as far as it was possible to judge from a narrow trench, they appeared to be running parallel to one another. Allowing for erosion of the ditches by plough action and/or other post-Roman agencies, both ditches were similar in dimensions: F3 was 1.95m wide and 0.42m deep; F4 was 1.98m wide and 0.57m deep (Fig 4).

A series of modern trenches (F2) was also uncovered. They were filled with dark grey soil with modern building materials, and their shape is so strongly reminiscent of the practice trenches excavated west of Berechurch Road in 2002⁵ (CAT Report 246) that there can be very little doubt that they are also modern military practice trenches. They were not excavated.

6 Finds

Trench	Context	Bag no	Qt	Weight (grammes)	Detail
T2	F4	2	5	339	Roman brick/tile fragments
T2	F4	2	1	35	Brick fragment, sandier and more open texture than above fragments; possibly intrusive
T2	F4	2	1	24	Animal bone; medium-sized quadruped, otherwise unidentified

7 Discussion and interpretation

One of the two ditches revealed by this evaluation is dated by Roman brick, but the other is undated. It is argued here that they are contemporary parallel ditches, and represent the side ditches of a Roman trackway of the type excavated recently at the Colchester new garrison PFI project site (CAT Report 292). The trackways excavated at Areas 6 (north of Earlswood Way) and Area 10 (south of the Driving School site, Berechurch Road) show a system of approximately WNW-ESE tracks heading into a SW-NW track which sweeps up to the north (towards the Roman town). Therefore a track heading approximately north on the south edge of the Abbey Field is in keeping with the expected direction of trackways in this area.

The series of modern, unexcavated zig-zag trenches F2 is an Army practice trench, very similar to those excavated west of Berechurch Road in 2002 (CAT Report 246), 900m south-west of this site. It is presumably of WWI date.

8 Acknowledgements

The Trust would like to thank Taylor Woodrow for commissioning the work, via RPS Planning, Transport and Environment.

The project was managed by Philip Crummy, and the site work was carried out by Chris Lister, Laura Pooley and David Ross; the original digital survey was also by Chris Lister. The project was monitored by Martin Winter (Colchester Museums Archaeology Officer) for Colchester Borough Council and by RPS for Taylor Woodrow.

⁵ Colchester Garrison PFI project Area F east, particularly trench B2

9 References

- | | | |
|----------------|---------|--|
| CAR 9 | 1993 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 9: Excavations of Roman and later cemeteries, churches and monastic sites in Colchester, 1971-88</i> , by P Crummy, N Crummy, and C Crossan |
| CAR 11 | 1995 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 11: Camulodunum 2</i> , by C F C Hawkes and P Crummy |
| CAT Report 138 | | Archaeological excavations at the Garrison sports pitch, Circular Road North, Colchester, Essex (Abbey Field), unpublished CAT archive report, by Carl Crossan, 2001 |
| CAT Report 246 | | An archaeological watching brief on munitions clearance at Colchester Garrison, Essex: July-October 2002, unpublished CAT archive report, by Stephen Tyler and Howard Brooks, 2003 |
| CAT Report 292 | in prep | The Colchester Garrison PFI project, Colchester, Essex: a report on the 2003 excavation of Areas 2, 6, 10, August-November 2003, by Howard Brooks and Robert Masefield |
| CM | 2002 | <i>Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i> |
| CM | 2003 | <i>Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums</i> |
| EAA 3 | 1997 | <i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment</i> , ed by J Glazebrook |
| EAA 8 | 2000 | <i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy</i> , ed by N Brown and J Glazebrook |
| EAA 14 | 2003 | <i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> , ed by D Gurney |
| Hull, M R | 1958 | <i>Roman Colchester</i> , RRCSAL, 20 |
| IFA | 1999 | <i>Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation</i> |
| IFA | 2001 | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i> |
| MAP 2 | 1991 | <i>Management of archaeological projects</i> , 2nd edition (English Heritage) |

10 Glossary

context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
EHHER	Essex Historic Environment Record
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
Roman	the period from AD 43 to around AD 430

11 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive are held by Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but both will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2005.50.

12 Site data

12.1 Site context list

Trench	Context	Description	Context date
T1	F1	ceramic pipes	modern
T2	F2	Army practice trench	WWI?
T2	F3	ditch	Roman?
T2	F4	ditch	Roman
T1, T2	L1	topsoil	modern
T1, T2	L2	dumped soil	modern
T1, T2	L3	dumped soil	modern
T1	L4	black silt with modern debris	modern
T1	L5	old topsoil?	post-medieval
T1, T2	L6	natural	-

12.2 Soil descriptions

Trench	Context	Description
T1	F1	ceramic pipes in trenches filled with firm, dry, medium brown silt with modern building debris
T2	F2	firm, dry, dark greyish-brown silt with modern building debris
T2	F3	soft, moist, medium brown silt with brick inclusions (presumably Roman)
T2	F4	soft, moist, medium brown sandy silt with brick and tile inclusions (Roman)
T1	L1	moist, mid to dark brown silty topsoil
T1	L2	firm, dry, mid greyish-brown silty subsoil with modern building debris
T1	L3	firm, dry, light yellow sand with abundant modern building debris
T1	L4	firm, dry, burnt black silt with modern building debris
T1	L5	firm, moist, mid brown silt with infrequent brick and tile fragments
T1	L6	soft, moist, light, yellow sand

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Distribution list:

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RPS Planning, Transport and Environment
Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council
Essex Historic Environment Record, Essex County Council

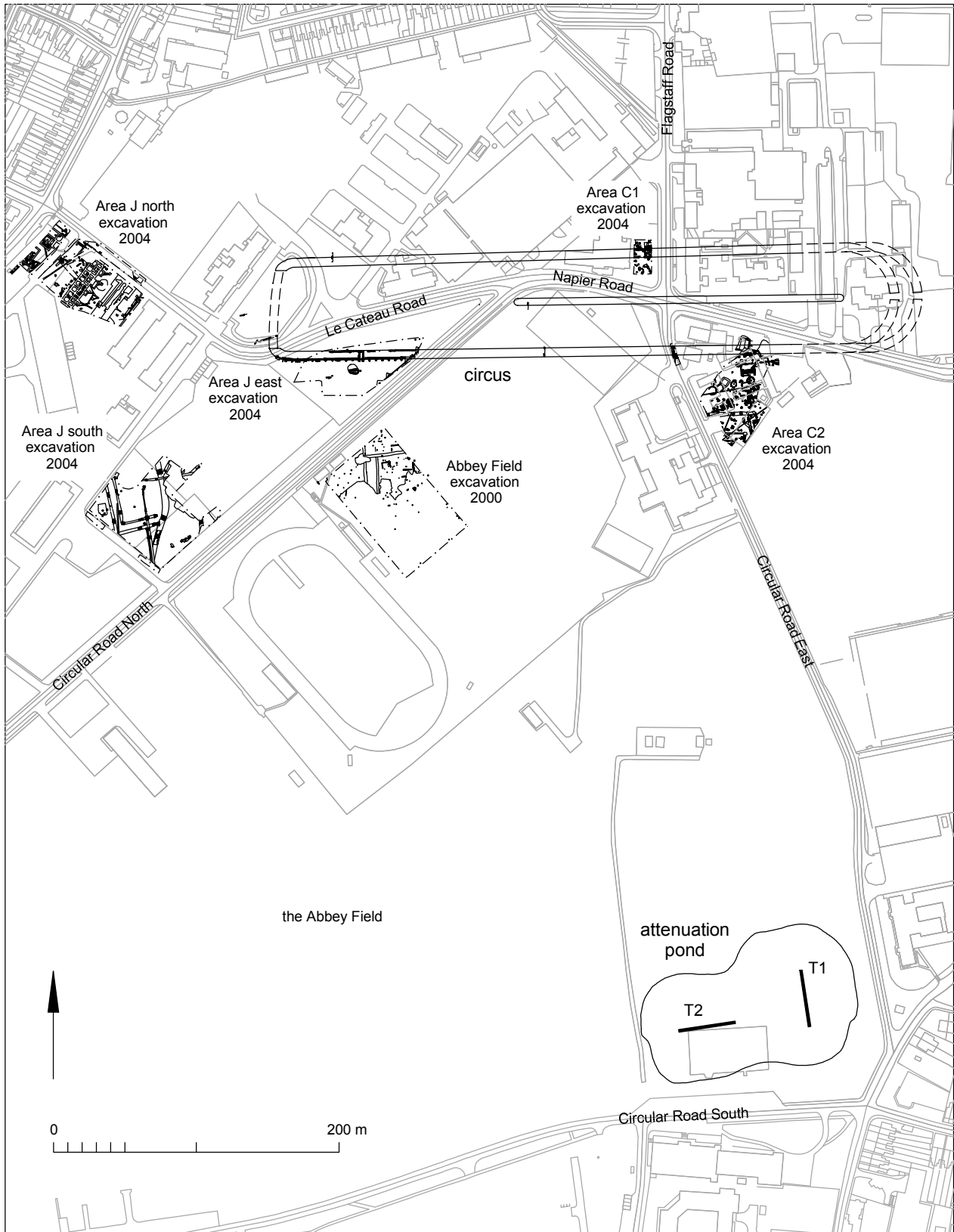


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Adams c:/reports05/attenuation pond/report320.doc



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Fig 1 Site location.

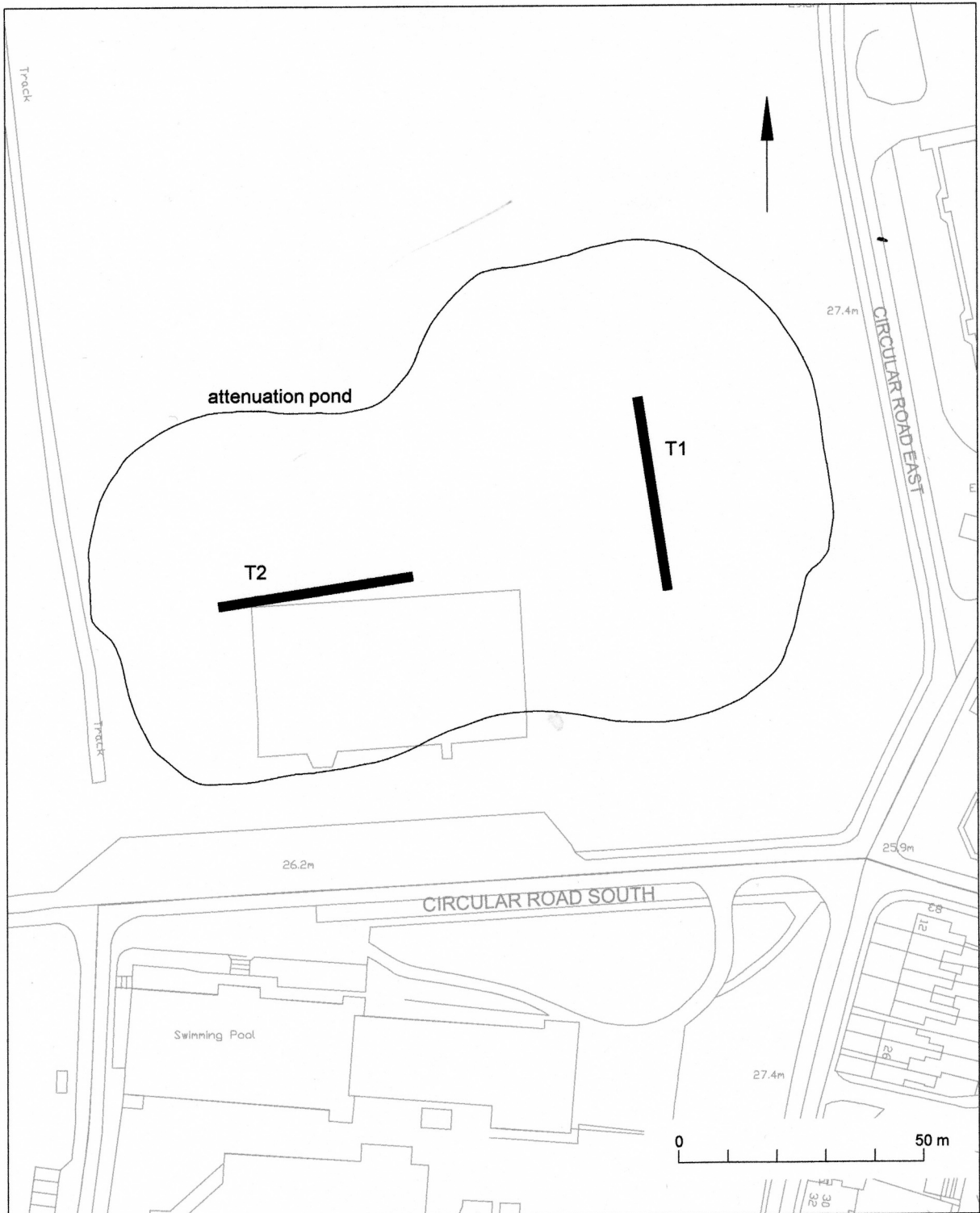


Fig 2 Trench locations.

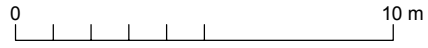
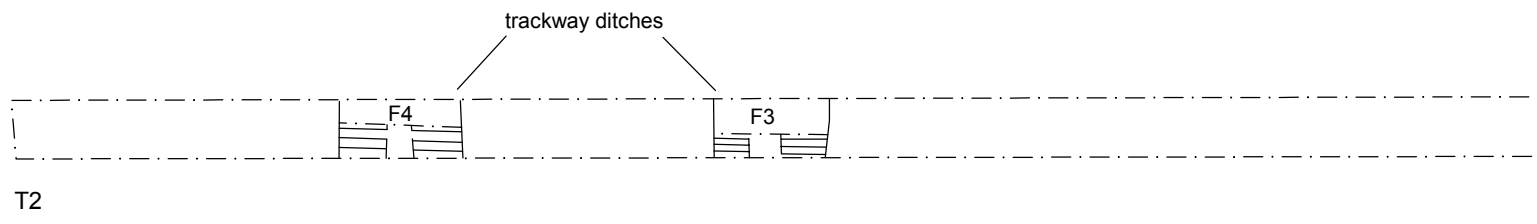
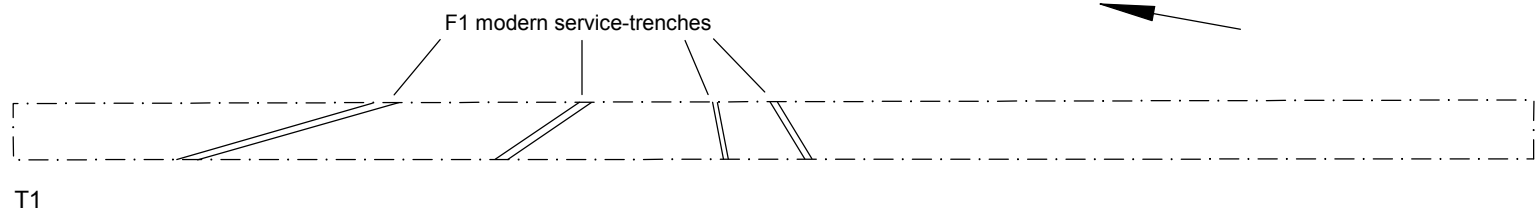


Fig 3 Trench plans.

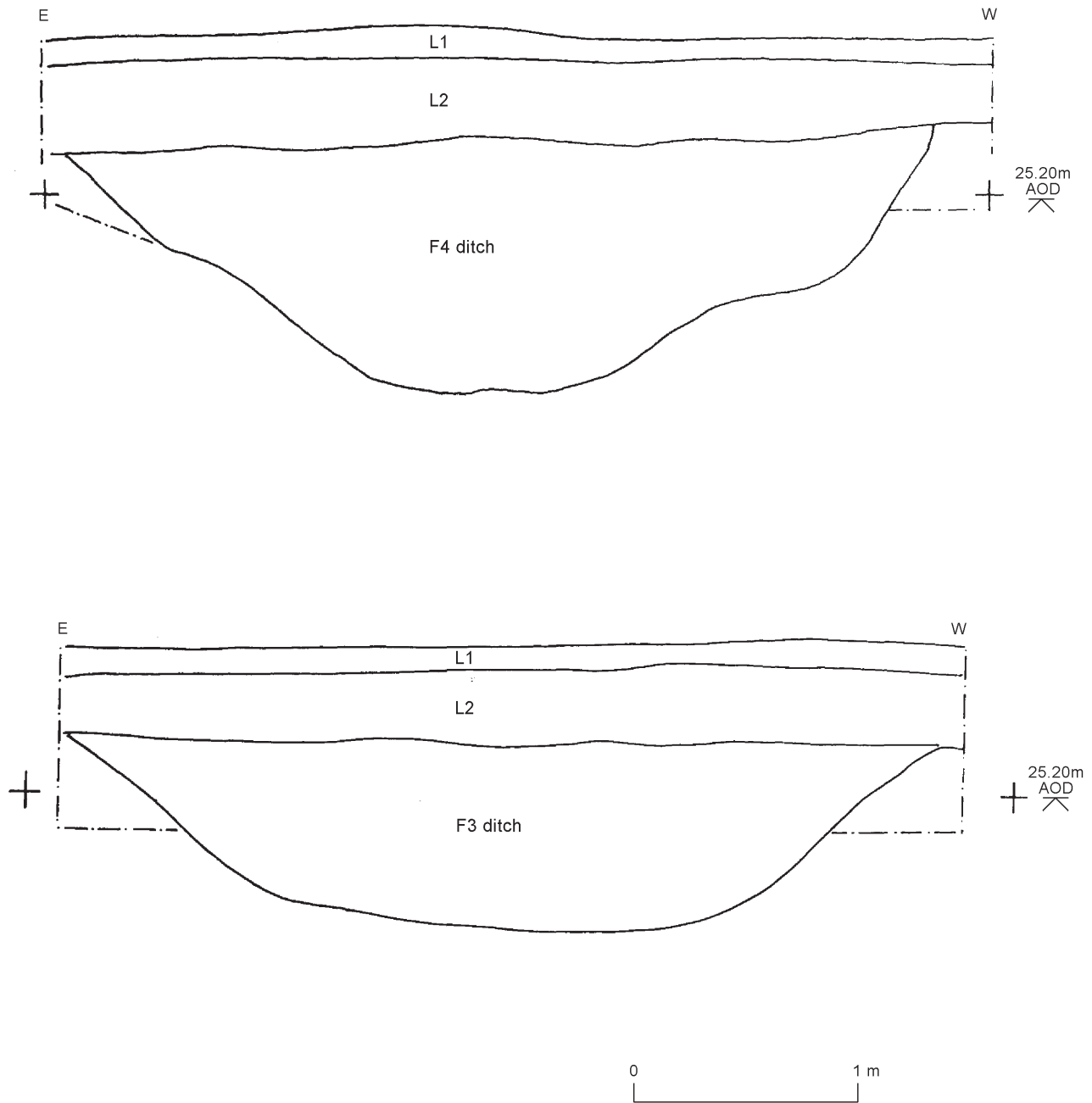


Fig 4 Sections of ditch F3, ditch F4.

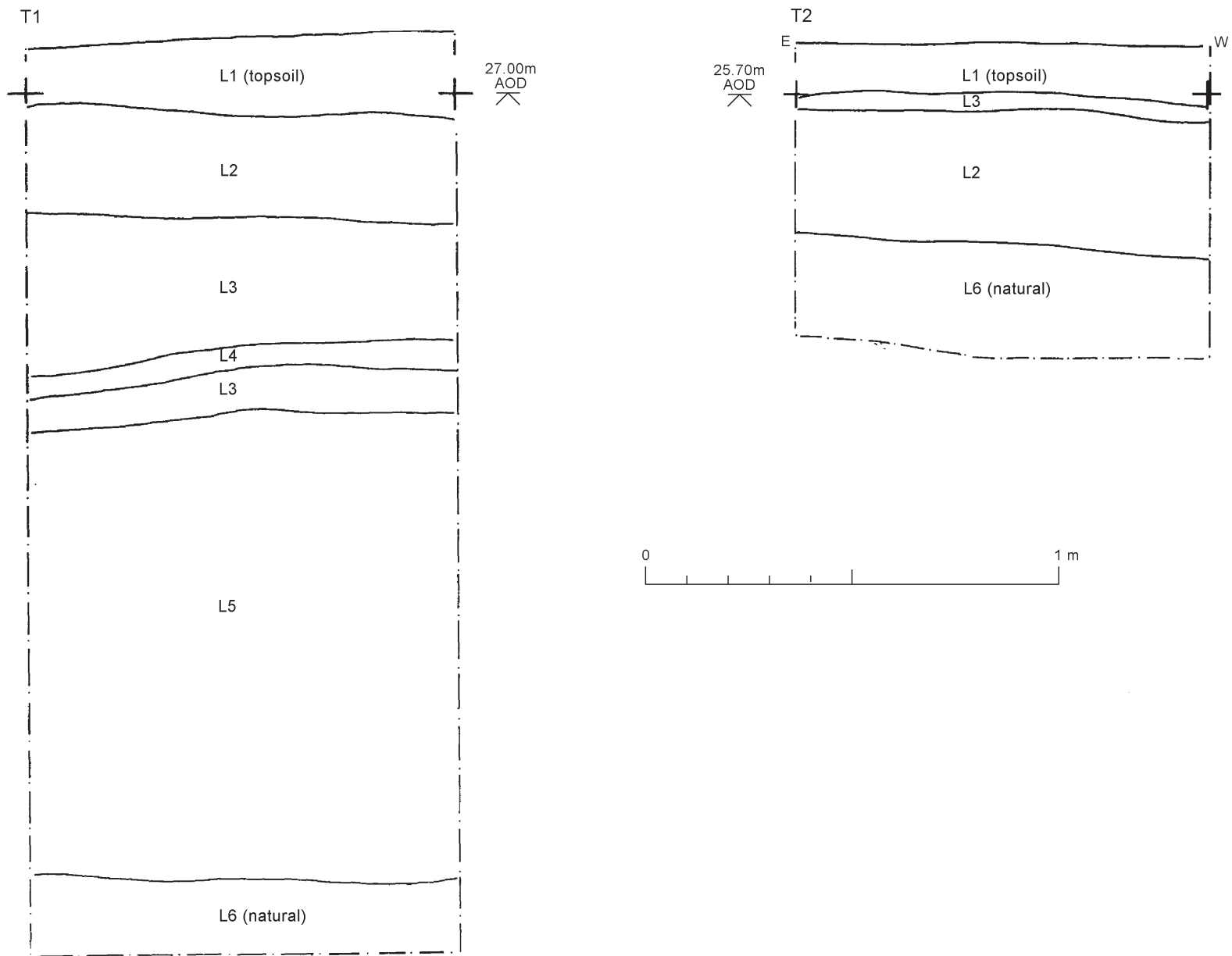


Fig 5 Representative sections of T1 and T2.

**Essex Historic Environment Record/
Essex Archaeology and History**

Summary sheet

Site address: attenuation pond site (south-east corner of the Abbey Field), Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 9974 2403	Site code: Museum accession code 2005.50
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: April 2005	Size of area investigated: 2 trenches
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHER nos: 11876-11878, 11893-11894
Final report: CAT Report 320 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Roman	
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>This site lies inside the oppidum of Camulodunum, and on the southern fringe of the Abbey Field Roman cemetery. Two parallel ditches were observed, one Roman and a second which was undated but probably Roman. They are interpreted as being the west and east ditches of a north-south-aligned Roman trackway.</i>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Howard Brooks	Date of summary: June 2005