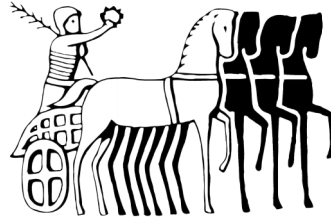


Colchester Archaeological Trust



**CAT Report 1928
issued May 2023**

**Archaeological evaluation on land at the former
Friends School, Mount Pleasant Road, Saffron
Walden, Essex, CB11 3EB: April 2023**



**CAT project ref.: 2023/02b
ECC code: SWFS23**

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report prepared by Ben Holloway

**fieldwork by Ben Holloway with Ziya Eksen,
Matt Perou and Alice Parker**

**commissioned by Ben Stephenson,
ACD Environmental Ltd
on behalf of Chase New Homes Ltd**

Prepared by:	Ben Holloway	Project Officer
Reviewed by:	Laura Pooley	Post Excavation Manager
Reviewed and approved by:	Philip Crummy	Director of Archaeology
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Colchester Archaeological Trust

Roman Circus House,
Roman Circus Walk,
Colchester,
Essex CO2 7GZ

tel.: 01206 501785

email: bh@catuk.org

web: <https://catuk.org/>

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OASIS summary sheet

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1 Summary

An archaeological evaluation (five trial-trenches) was carried out on land at the former Friends School, Mount Pleasant Road, Saffron Walden, Essex in advance of the redevelopment of the site. The Friends School site is located within an archaeologically-sensitive area, with previous archaeological investigations providing evidence of human activity ranging in date from the Mesolithic to the Roman periods. Features encountered during the evaluation included 19th-20th century gullies, an undated tree-throw and modern infrastructure activity associated with the former school.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the report for an archaeological evaluation carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between 18th-20th April 2023 at the former Friends School, Mount Pleasant Road, Saffron Walden, Essex. The work was commissioned by Ben Stephenson of ACD Environmental Ltd on behalf of Chase New Homes in advance of the demolition and conversion of existing buildings and the construction of 96 new residential dwellings and associated recreational and amenity space.

In response to consultation with Essex County Council Place Services (ECCPS), the Historic Environment Advisor advised that, in order to establish the archaeological implications of this application, the applicant should be required to commission a scheme of archaeological investigation in accordance with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (MHCLG 2021).

All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a *Brief for Archaeological Evaluation and Excavation at Former Friends School, Saffron Walden* written by Katie Lee-Smith detailing the required archaeological work (ECCPS 2023) and a written scheme of investigation (WSI) prepared by CAT in response to the brief and subsequently agreed with ECCPS (CAT 2023).

In addition to the brief and WSI, all fieldwork and reporting was done in accordance with *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (Historic England 2016), and with *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14 and 24). This report mirrors standards and practices contained in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (ClfA 2014a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (ClfA 2014b).

3 Archaeological background

The following archaeological background includes extracts of the ECC Brief (ECCPS 2022) and Essex Historic Environment Records (EHER) held at Essex County Council, County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex (accessed via <http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk>).

The proposed development is located in an archaeologically-sensitive area. In 2015, human remains were uncovered during development work at the Tudor Works, some 100m west of the site. This burial is thought to have been part of a larger Roman cemetery extending across the area (EHER 48579). Groundworks to the north of West Road, approximately 245m north of the site, revealed extensive remains dating from the Neolithic to the Late Iron Age. These remains consisted of numerous pits and a large ditch containing two or three skeletons at its eastern end, which was thought to be part of a causewayed enclosure (EHER 508). Numerous find spots of prehistoric and Roman artefacts also lie within the vicinity of the proposed development site. Some 245m north of the site, a bronze coin of Cunobelinus, a Mesolithic tranchet axe or adze, a flint core, another axe or adze, a Roman double-headed iron axe and a post-Mesolithic flint flake have been found (EHER 18560, EHER 47264, EHER 446, EHER 509, EHER 510). Immediately to the west of the site, a considerable quantity of Roman pottery was found in 1934 (EHER 504). Neolithic flakes, calcined flint and roughly knapped scrapers have also been recovered approximately 270m south-east of the site (EHER 507).

In 1993, a trial-trenched evaluation and an excavation were undertaken in advance of proposed development approximately 350m to the south-east of the present development site. Several pits were uncovered, one of which contained some 38 sherds of Early Iron Age pottery. In addition several worked flints dating from the Middle Bronze Age to the Iron Age were recovered from topsoil and two pits (EHER 14594). A further trial-trenched evaluation was carried out at the school in 2006 during which excavations uncovered several plough scars and modern service trenches (EHER 46249). Several features were identified during a 2008 geophysics survey in the school playing fields (EHER 48802).

4 Aims

The aims of the archaeological evaluation were to record the extent of any surviving archaeological deposits and to assess the archaeological potential of the site to allow the ECCHEA to determine if further investigation is required.

5 Results (Figs 2-4)

Five trial-trenches were machine-excavated under the supervision of a CAT archaeologist.

Trenches T1-T3 were 30m long by 1.8m wide. Modern topsoil (L1, 0.15-0.2m thick) sealed a buried soil layer (L2, 0.25-0.30m thick) which overlay natural. The latter (L3) was encountered at a depth of 0.50-0.55m below current ground level). In the northern part of T2, L2 was replaced by a deposit of compacted hardcore/crush (L5, 0.15m thick).

Trenches T4 and T5 were 15m long and 1.8m wide. They were significantly deeper than T1-T3 being excavated to a depth of 0.65-0.7m through a modern imported topsoil (L4, 0.2-0.3m thick) which sealed L1, L2 and L3.

Trench 1

Feature F1 was located in the northern part of the trench. It continued beyond the limit of excavation but was >4.5m long, 1.7m wide and 0.15m deep. Although there was no datable material from the feature, a single fragment of animal bone was recovered. Rooting at the edge of the cut and irregularities in the profile suggest this feature is probably a tree-throw.



Photograph 1 Trench 1 F1, facing north-east.

Trench 2

T2 contained no archaeological deposits. Modern activity is represented at the northern end of the trench where, prior to evaluation, L2 had been removed and a layer of hardcore crush material (L5) has been imported.



Photograph 2 Trench 2, facing south.



Photograph 3 Representative section of Trench 2, facing east.

Trench 3

Trench 3 contained no archaeological deposits, a sondage was excavated at the west end of the trench into L3 to check for masking deposits.

Trench 4

Trench 4 contained no archaeological deposits. There was however, significant modern truncation observed in the central and eastern parts of the trench. This took the form of a service run for an electrical cable and a large concrete service duct.



Photograph 4 Trench 4, facing west.

Trench 5

Gully F2 was located at the north end of T5. The feature was aligned north-east/south-west, was 0.4m wide and 0.16m deep, and contained fragments of peg-tile.

Gully F3 was located in the central part of the trench. The feature was aligned north-east/south-west, was 0.46m wide and 0.15m deep, and contained no datable material.

Modern service runs were present in the southern part of the trench.

6 Finds

by Dr Matthew Loughton and Adam Wightman

Three fragments (132g) of medieval/post-medieval peg-tile and one fragment (24g) of 19th-/20th-century brick came from gully F2. From tree-throw F1 was a fragment (4g) of sheep metapodial which had been heavily gnawed, most likely by rats. None of this material was retained.

7 Conclusion

Archaeological evaluation at the former Friends School, Mount Pleasant Road, Saffron Walden revealed three features, namely one tree-throw and two gullies. Finds from F2 date from the 19th-20th century. Although tile fragments may suggest potentially earlier activity, it seems likely that these features are associated with the foundation of the school in the 1870s. Modern services were observed across the trenching scheme. Landscape levelling in the north of T2 along with concrete stanchion bases may suggest this area was formerly a grass tennis court.

8 Acknowledgements

CAT would like to thank Ben Stephenson of ACD Environmental Ltd and Chase New Homes for commissioning and funding the work. The project was managed by C Lister, A Wightman and

L Pooley, with fieldwork carried out by B Holloway with Z Eksen, M Perou and A Parker. Figures were compiled by B Holloway and E Holloway. The project was monitored for ECCPS by Katie Lee-Smith.

9 References

Note: all CAT reports, except for DBAs, are available online in PDF format at <http://cat.essex.ac.uk>

Brown, N & Glazebrook, J	2000	<i>Research and Archaeology: A Framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy.</i> East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Paper 8 (EAA 8)
CAT	2023	<i>Health & Safety Policy</i>
CAT	2023	<i>Written Scheme of investigation for trial trenching at the former Friends School, Mount Pleasant Road, Saffron Walden.</i> By Elliott Hicks
CIfA	2014a	<i>Standard and Guidance for archaeological evaluation.</i> Revised October 2020
CIfA	2014b	<i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials.</i> Revised October 2020
CIfA	2014c	<i>Code of Conduct.</i> Revised October 2022
ECCPS	2023	<i>Brief for Archaeological Evaluation and Excavation at Former Friends School, Mount Pleasant Road, Saffron Walden,</i> by K Lee-Smith
Gurney, D	2003	<i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England.</i> East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Papers 14 (EAA 14)
Historic England	2016	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)</i>
Medlycott, M	2011	<i>Research and archaeology revisited: A revised framework for the East of England.</i> East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Papers 24 (EAA 24)
MHCLG	2021	<i>National Planning Policy Framework.</i> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

10 Abbreviations and glossary

CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
CIfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
context	specific location of finds on an archaeological site
ECCPS	Essex County Council Place Services
EHER	Essex Historic Environment Record
feature (F)	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain: can contain 'contexts'
layer (L)	distinct or distinguishable deposit (layer) of material
modern	period from c AD 1800 to the present
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
OASIS	Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations, http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main
post-medieval	from c AD 1500 to c 1800
prehistoric	pre-Roman
residual	something out of its original context, e.g a Roman coin in a modern pit
section	(abbreviation sx or Sx) vertical slice through feature/s or layer/s
WSI	written scheme of investigation

11 Archive deposition

Digital record: This project falls within the CIfA definition of a sterile project (<https://www.archaeologists.net/selection-toolkit/sterile-projects>), and as such the preserved archaeological archive will take the form of a single digital document that incorporates all the relevant elements from the project archive. This document will be uploaded to OASIS and released into the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) library, from where it will be curated by the ADS. The single digital document will include the report, brief, wsi, photographs, and original site data (for example context sheets, section drawings).

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Distribution list:

Ben Stephenson, ACD Environmental Ltd
Chase New Homes Ltd
Katie Lee-Smith, Essex County Council Planning Services
Essex Historic Environment Record

Appendix 1 Context list

Context	Trench no.	Finds no.	Identification	Description	Date
L1	All	-	Topsoil	firm moist dark grey/brown silty clay	Modern
L2	All	-	Subsoil	firm moist medium grey/brown silt with occasional chalk flecks	Undated
L3	All	-	Natural	firm moist medium-light grey clay frequent chalk inclusions	Post-glacial
L4	T4, T5	-	Imported topsoil	Firm dark grey brown silty clay	Modern
L5	T2	-	Hardcore/crush	Crushed brick	Modern
F1	T1	1	Tree-throw	firm moist medium brown silty clay. 4.9m (L) x >1.7m (W) x 0.20m (D) Feature extending beyond the limit of excavation.	Undated
F2	T5	-	Gully	Firm medium grey/brown silty clay occasional chalk flecks 2.4m (L) x >0.4m (W) x 0.20m (D) Feature extending beyond the limit of excavation	Undated
F3	T5	-	Gully	Firm medium grey/brown silty clay occasional chalk flecks 2.2m (L) x >0.4m (W) x 0.15m (D) Feature extending beyond the limit of excavation	19th-20th century.

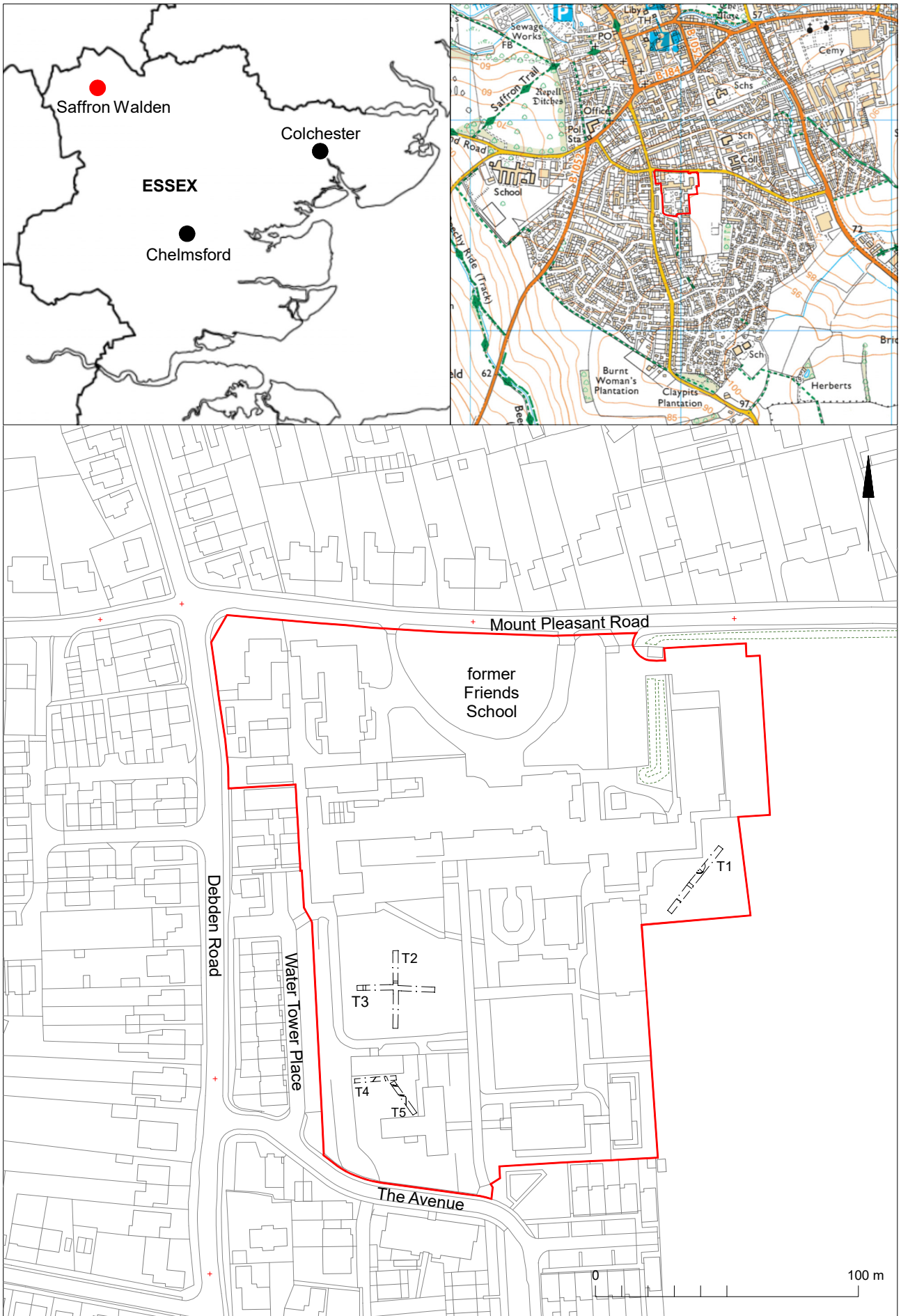


Fig 1 Site location.

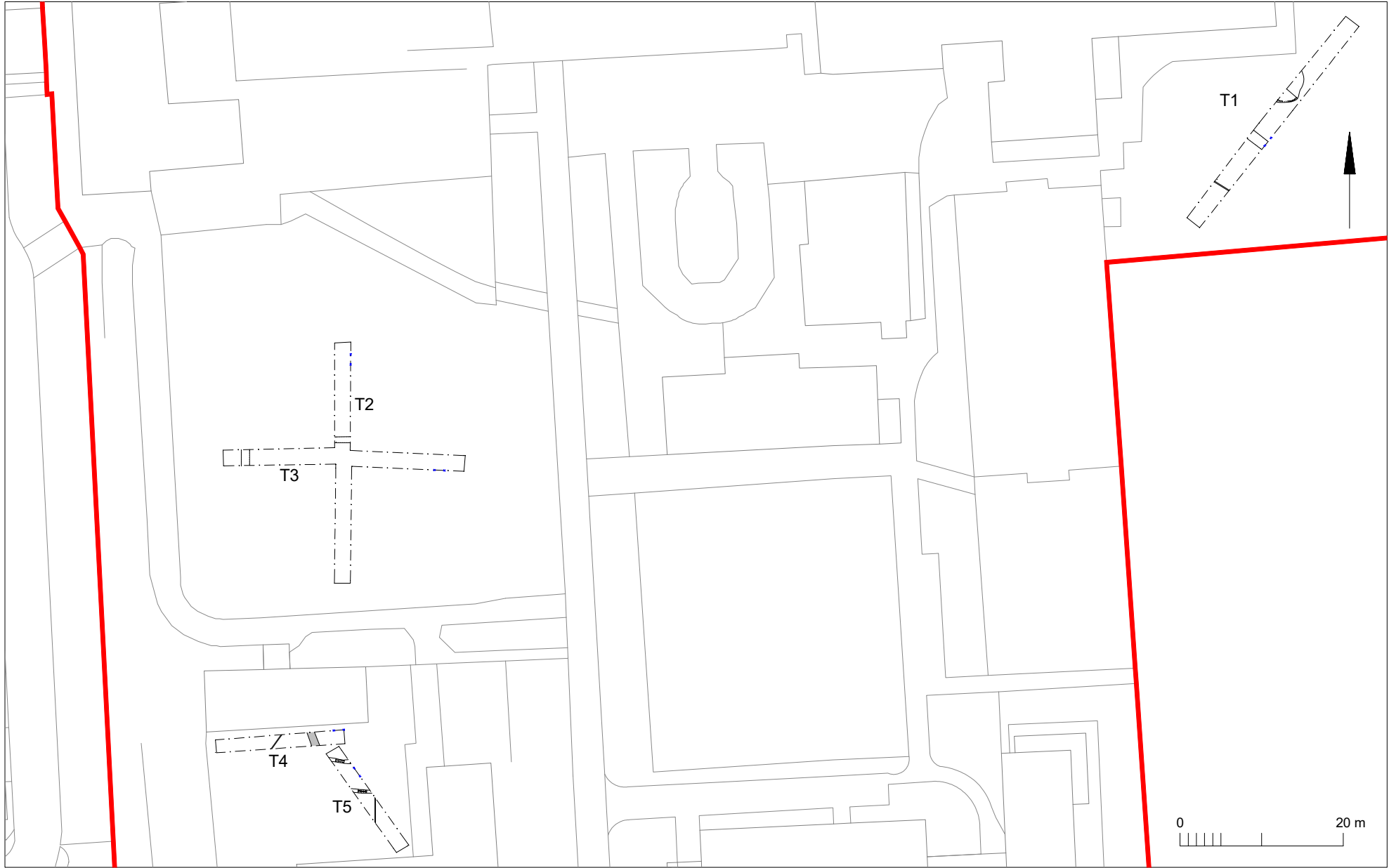


Fig 2 Evaluation results.

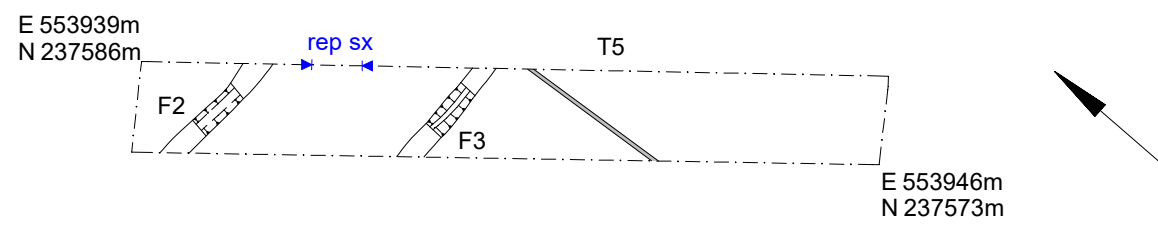
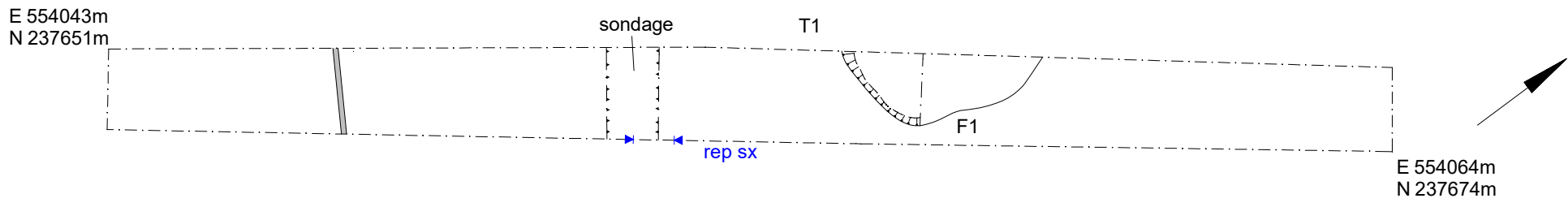


Fig 3 Trench results.

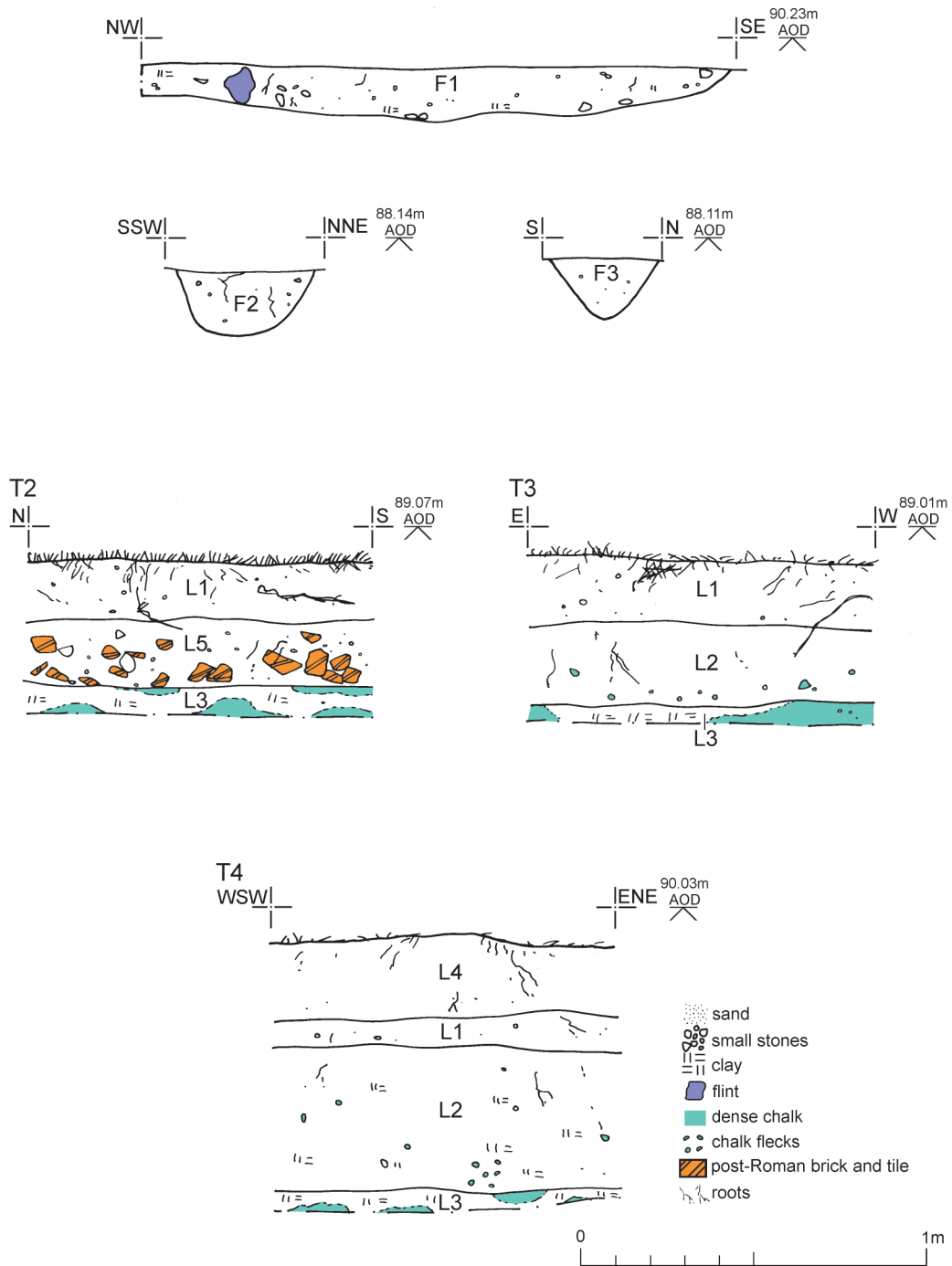


Fig 4 Feature and representative sections.