

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT ELD LANE, COLCHESTER.

COLCHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST. APRIL 1997
[C.O.L.E.M. 1997/12]

SUMMARY

Two small evaluation trenches revealed Roman deposits, including a tile built drain or wall, surviving from approximately 1 metre below the present ground surface. No other deposits of clear archaeological significance were encountered above this level. From this admittedly limited sample it is suggested that it should be possible to proceed with construction work (ground beams and pile caps) within the top metre of site strata without further archaeological work being necessary.

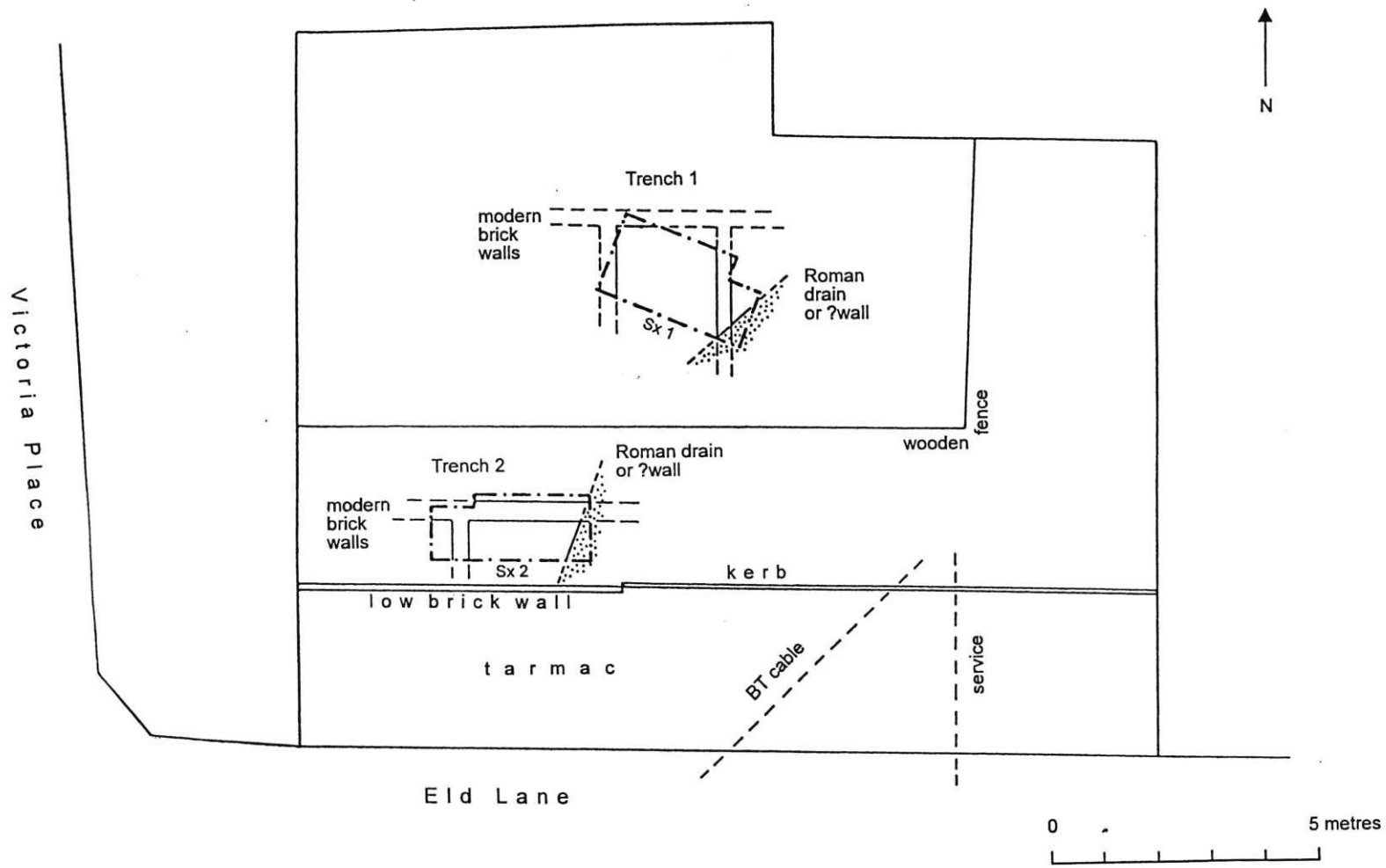
INTRODUCTION

The site is situated on the north side of Eld Lane between Victoria Place and Long Wire Street. The evaluation was effected by the machine excavation of two small trenches [Trench 1 & Trench 2, see plan] the location of which was essentially determined by the availability of areas of suitable access free of obstacles or hard surfaces. Trench 1 was located just to the north of the central site area and provides the main stratigraphical sequence. It could also be made sufficiently wide to allow safe entry and detailed recording of the section face. Trench 2 was placed towards the south-west corner of the site but could not be entered and deposits were recorded from surface inspection only.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SEQUENCE

TRENCH 1 [see plan and section 1]

A thin layer of recent accumulation and demolition rubble sealed shallow wall foundations. The foundations were constructed of frogged bricks surviving one or two layers deep, though the north wall was more substantial with a concrete and rubble base approximately 0.5 metres in depth. These were set into a deposit of dark sandy loam, about 0.5 metres thick, containing some peg tile and modern brick fragments. This dark soil extended undifferentiated into the fill of several substantial post-Medieval pits containing quantities of building material (mainly peg tiles) and other household refuse (pottery, oyster shell and animal bone). Where these pits occurred they cut into and directly seal surviving Roman deposits. However away from the major pits there is an undated layer (here about 0.4 metres thick) dominated by Roman building material (clay, plaster and some tile) mixed with medium brown sandy loam and punctuated by roots and root channels. The material inclusions are the same as the Roman layers below, and this probably represents disturbance to Roman levels. It is



Eld Lane 1997: site plan

not clear if this is entirely post-Roman activity or has its origins in the later Roman period.

Undisturbed Roman levels survive to within about 1 metre of present ground surface and are here uniformly comprised of demolition debris, that is sandy clay with common mortar and plaster pieces and occasional tile fragments. There is no doubt concerning their date as a Roman wall or drain had been inserted through them on the east side of the trench. This feature is constructed of tiles set in pinkish-red opus signinum mortar. The largest surviving fragments of tile measured approximately 16x 17x3 cm and were clearly used as broken pieces as the mortar extended over the fractures. The west side of the feature presented a rough exterior, while the east had a smooth and level face with a dark greenish brown clayey silt deposit against it. This would suggest that the feature is part of a drain rather than a wall.

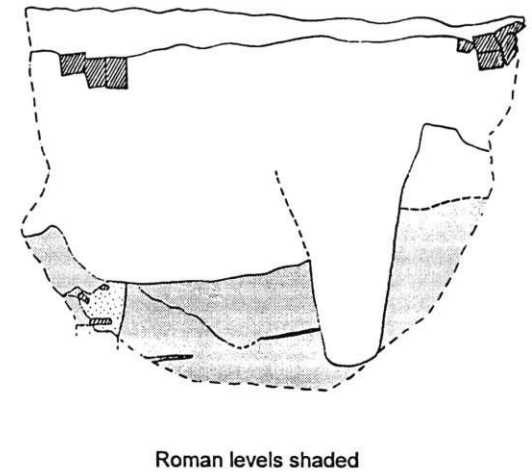
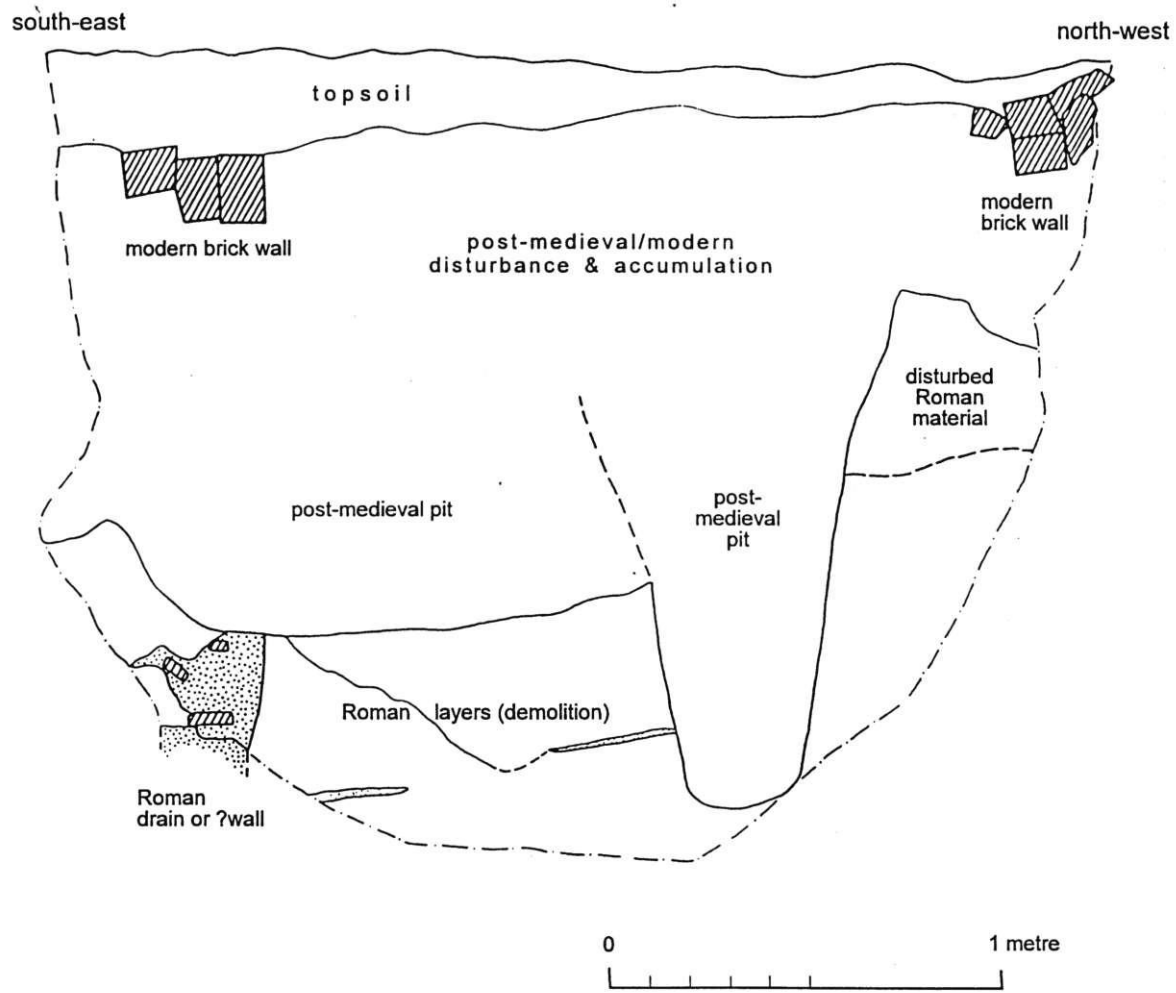
TRENCH 2 [see plan and section 2]

Recent walls of the same type and construction as in the upper levels of Trench 1 were set into a deposit of dark brown sandy loam containing some brick and peg tile fragments. This soil extended as a layer to about 1 metre below present surface levels and into the fill of a deeper cut pit, though the disturbance by post-Medieval pit cutting appeared less in this area than encountered in Trench 1. Beneath this was a broad band of Roman building material (mortar and plaster fragments with occasional pieces of opus signinum) in a matrix of medium brown sandy loam and about 0.7-0.8 metres thick. This layer is similar to the disturbed Roman levels in Trench 1, though considerably more substantial and with a higher soil content. As in Trench 1 this layer is not dated, though the same general comments apply here as above. This material directly sealed undisturbed Roman levels.

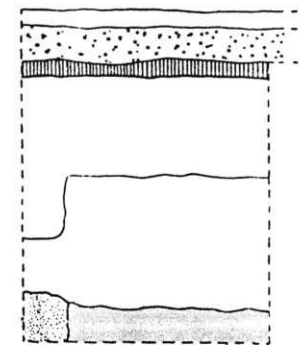
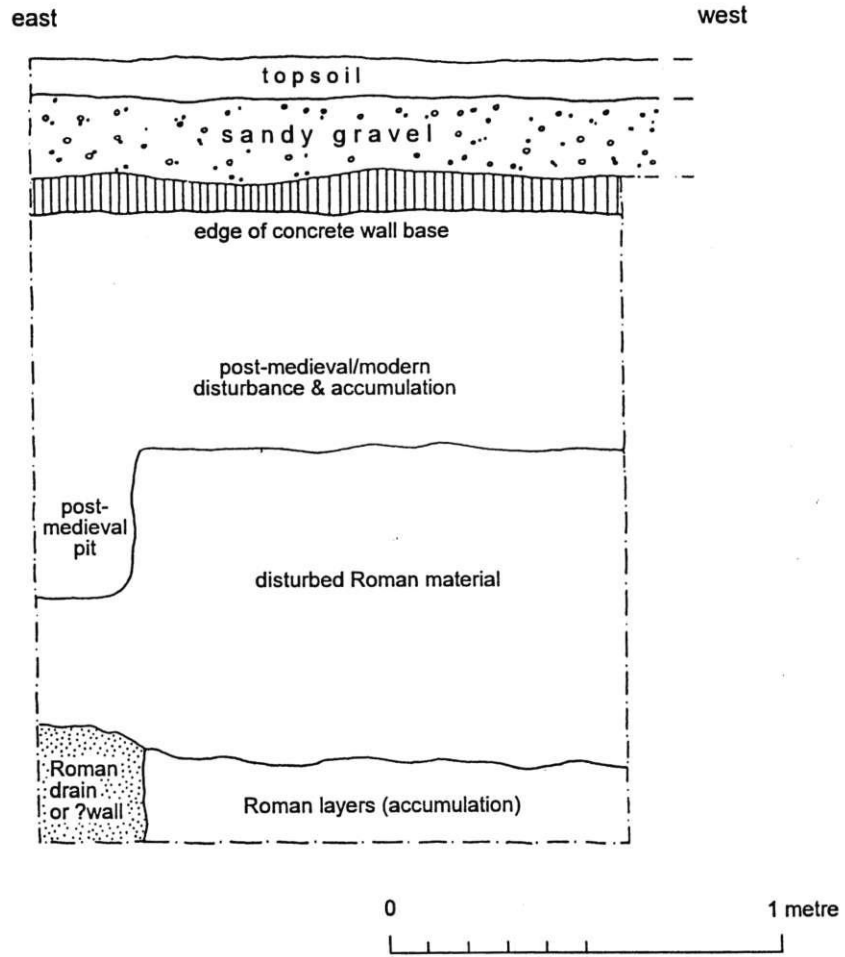
Clear Roman levels here survive at between 1.7 - 1.8 metres below the modern surface, and as in Trench 1 are demonstrable as Roman (despite a lack of datable material) as they are cut by Roman wall or drain, probably the same feature encountered in Trench 1. The Roman stratigraphy encountered here is a layer of dark brown sandy loam in excess of 20 cm thick extending below the base of the trench. This has been cut through by the insertion of the Roman drain at the east end of the trench. This feature could not be so closely observed as in Trench 1, but it is clearly of the same construction with tiles set in opus signinum mortar. A large lump of yellow brown mortar was also pulled loose by the machine in the area of this feature, which may be part of the drain base at about 2 metres below the present surface.

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Eld Lane 1997: Section 1 (Trench 1)



Roman levels shaded

Eld Lane 1997: Section 2 (Trench 2)