

An archaeological evaluation at 64-76 Hythe Hill, Colchester, in 1999

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Four evaluation trenches (Trenches 1-4; Fig 1), each 15m long and 1.8m wide, were excavated by wheeled digger with a ditching bucket on 29th April 1999. Machining was halted when significant archaeological deposits were encountered; otherwise it continued until natural subsoil was reached. Archaeological excavation was limited to the surface cleaning of the trenches, although two small trial-holes were hand-dug in Trench 1 (Fig 2).

The archaeological evidence from Trench 1 near the Hythe Hill street frontage has been incorporated into the main excavation report (see above). The other three evaluation trenches (Trenches 2-4) were dug away from the street frontage.

Machining at the southern end of Trench 2 was inhibited by large brick foundations, and in order to avoid these the trench was offset slightly to the east. The trench was then dug through a thick layer of topsoil, up to 1m deep, down to the natural subsoil, which was reached at a depth of 1.25-1.5m (Fig 4, Sx 1). Over the northern half of Trench 2, there were abundant fragments of brick and mortar towards the bottom of the topsoil layer, suggesting that this material had been redeposited relatively recently. This may also account for a layer of reworked subsoil 0.3m thick immediately above natural, although this was more likely to have resulted from cultivation. At the bottom of the trench, several features cut the subsoil, including at least one large well-defined circular pit (F9; Fig 3), albeit undated. Such features, mainly rubbish and cess-pits, are to be expected at the rear of properties fronting onto Hythe Hill.

A series of brick foundations, and one chalk foundation, which were encountered in the upper levels of Trench 2, presumably belonged to structures located off Parsons Lane, and which are recorded on the early editions of the OS maps.

Trench 3 proved to be shallow, and contained no significant features. Natural subsoil was reached at a depth of 0.7m, below a layer of topsoil less than 0.5m thick (Fig 4, Sx 2). Activity in this part of the site appeared to be limited to cultivation, although the extent of terracing remained unclear.

By contrast, in Trench 4 there was some 1.2m of topsoil, which sealed natural subsoil at a depth of 1.3-1.5m (Fig 4, Sx 3). Several features, all probably comparatively recent, were cut into the natural subsoil, including a possible east-west ditch (F10; Fig 3). This was cut by a large modern pit, which extended into the east section, while the bottom of a further large pit was observed towards the northern end of the trench.

No evidence was recovered for an east-west Roman road, the line of which had been projected to extend across the site some 50m south of Hythe Hill. However, due to the extent of modern disturbance in Trench 4, this cannot be regarded as conclusive.

The depth of natural subsoil in Trench 4 suggests that the slope of the hillside may become more pronounced at this point. After standing open for only a short time, the deeper parts of the trench filled with water, indicating proximity to the modern water table.

The evaluation confirmed that the archaeological evidence for medieval and later buildings diminished with distance from the street frontages, although pits and ditches could be expected for at least 50m back.

Acknowledgements

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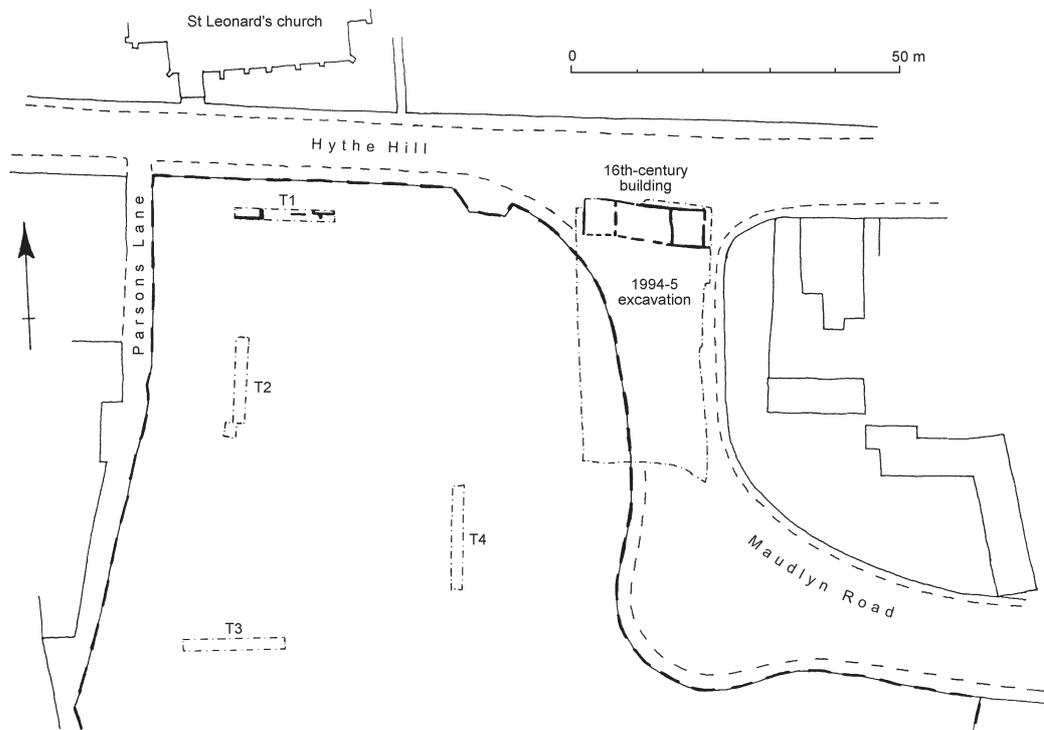


Fig 1 Evaluation trenches at 64-76 Hythe Hill. Reproduced from Ordnance Survey mapping on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown Copyright 100039294 2004.

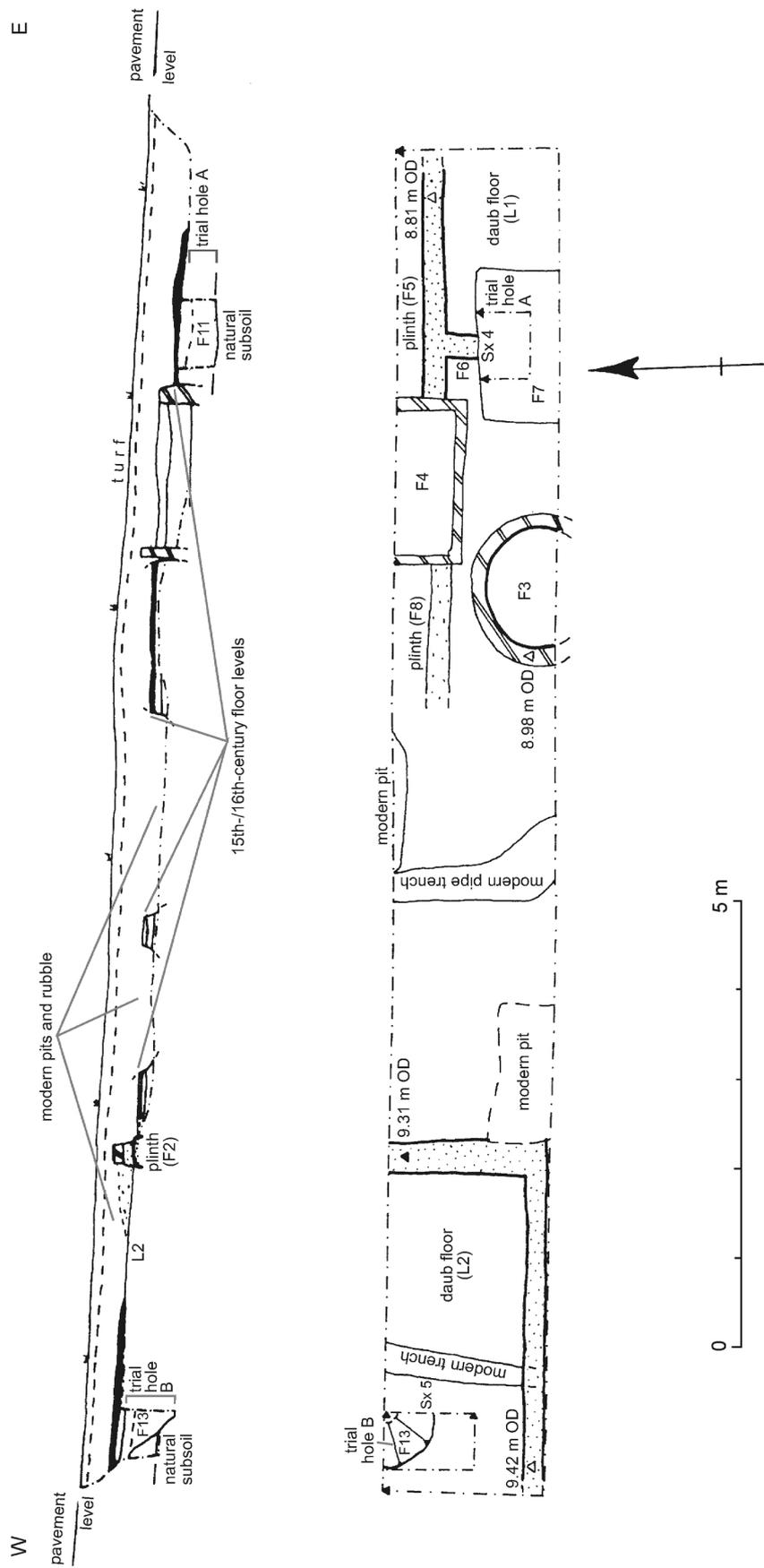


Fig 2 Trench 1

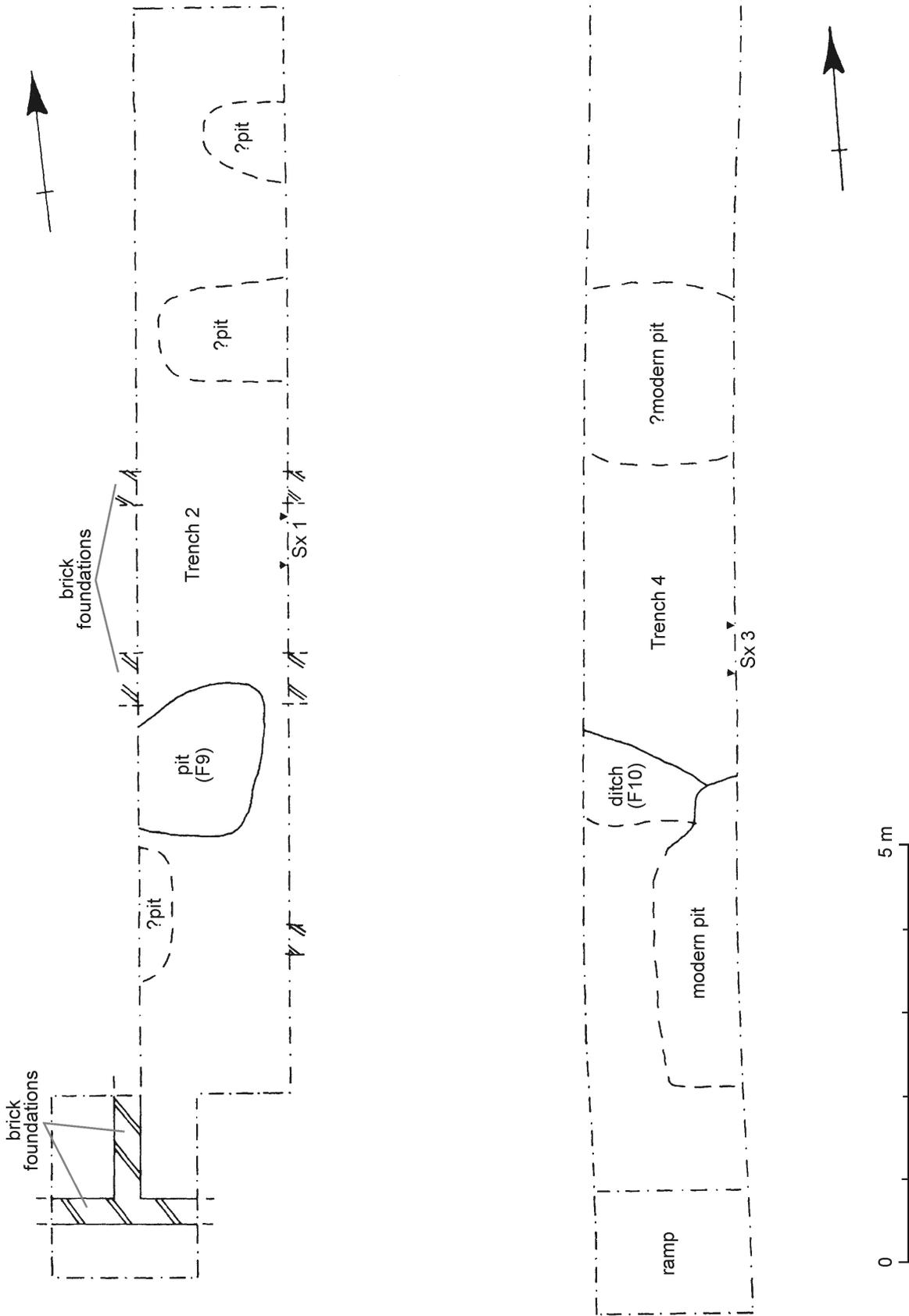
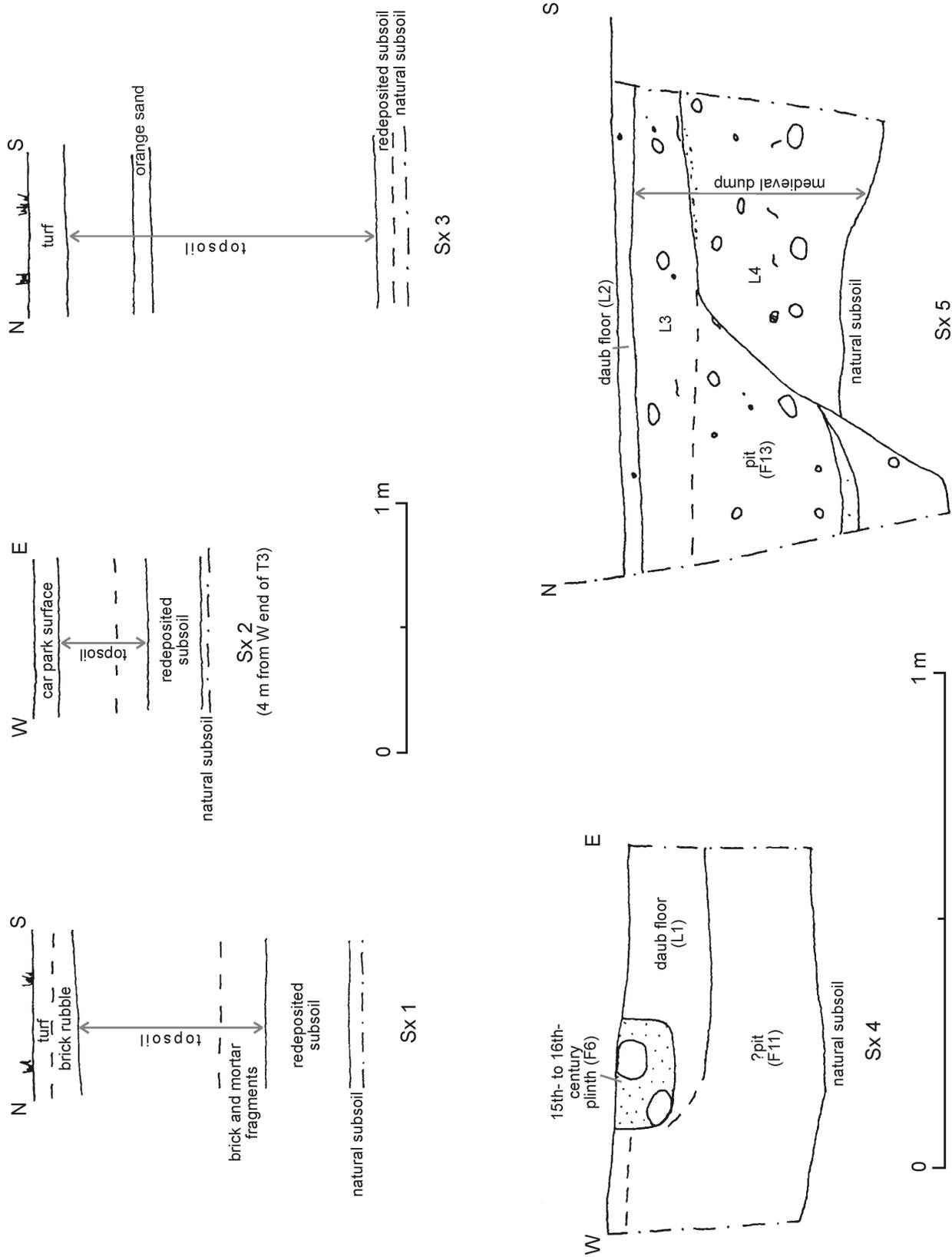


Fig 3 Trenches 2 and 4.



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