

Site: FREDA GUNTON HOUSE, BALKERNE GARDENS
NGR: TL 9923 2524

Reason for Watching Brief: Extension, sun lounge
Architect: Roff Marsh Contractor: W.Hills
Fieldwork By: CC
Report By: CC

Date: March 1999

Summary:

Foundation trenches for an extension to the west side of Freda Gunton House revealed part of the north-south Roman street between insulae 17a and 17b. The exposed street metalling was sealed by deposits of burnt daub. A robbed north-south oriented wall foundation was also plotted.

Report:

The development involved construction of a single-storey sun lounge against the west side of Freda Gunton House. The site for the extension lies on a previously terraced area (Fig. 5) which was stripped of its paving and turf. Semi-circular in plan, the 50cm wide foundation trench (Fig. 2) was machine-dug at irregular intervals over a period of five days.

The trench sections are shown in Figures 3 and 4. Both were drawn as straight east-west linear representations of the trench stratigraphy, adjusted to compensate for the curvature of the trench.

The principal features revealed were:

Roman Street Metalling

Roman street metalling was most clearly represented in Section Two (Fig. 4), where compacted gravel (L17) overlaid a thick layer of make-up (L18) resting on natural sand (L20). In places the gravel appeared to sub-divide into distinct layers (up to four), but these minor horizons were inconsistent and lacking in any discernible horizontal continuity, except for the lowest 12cm which had a slightly lower stoney content. The same sequence occurred in Section One (Fig.3) where the eastern extent of the gravel (L17) could not be established due to the presence of a later intrusion (L2, L5).

Burnt Daub Deposits

Overlying the extant street metalling was a thin deposit of burnt daub (L21), which was also present to the east in Section Two as a very thick redeposited layer mixed with unburnt daub (L29). Burnt daub was also observed in lesser concentrations in L26, L27, L6 and L13. The feature filled by L26 was also noted in the southern side of the Section Two trench and might possibly be a roadside ditch.

Robbed Wall Foundation

Cutting the burnt daub layers (L26, L27 and L29) in Section Two was a 55cm wide robber trench with a high content of yellowish brown mortar fragments in its backfill. The trench lay on a north-south orientation and its mortar-rich backfill was typical of robbed Roman foundations.

Dumped Deposits

It was not possible to establish an exact horizon between the Roman and later deposits. In Section One, L4 appeared to be a topsoil laid after modern terracing. The features filled by L2, L5 and L1 are recent and L10 is perhaps associated with the terracing. In Section Two, L24 equates to L4: L25 and L32 bore a strong similarity to L24 and are probably relatively modern. The latest reasonably convincing Roman layers are L3, L8, L9 and L11, all of which occur in Section One and seem to be dumped material post-dating the burnt daub deposits.

Finds

No satisfactorily stratified finds were recovered from the site. Of the Roman pottery collected from the machined loose nothing need be later than 2nd century date. Among the pottery was a base or large lid firmly inscribed with four parallel strokes, one of which has lighter lines in the form of the letter "B". A single lightly inscribed line runs across all four of the strokes (Fig. 6).

Discussion

The overall impression is of a fairly well preserved early Roman street with later dumped deposits cut by 20th century and perhaps also 19th century terracing for housing. The burnt daub layers are presumably Boudiccan, although in one instance nearby a Hadrianic or later date has been suggested for burnt daub found in this part of the Roman town (Dunnett 1971, 52-53). Past observations on the line of the insulae 17a/17b street include a 1978 watching brief on foundations for Parsley House, where burnt material was found beneath the earliest extant street metalling (CAR 3, 845, 3/78a, Section G). The section recorded on that occasion lay about 18 metres to the south of the present site. More recently, in a watching brief on the site of an extension to the north side of Freda Gunton House (CAT project ref. 6/95a: Sections 2, 5 and 6), successive layers of metalling were noted but in the absence of a clearly defined stratigraphic link to burnt daub which lay to the east the relationship between burnt material and street could not be firmly established: the burnt daub was thought probably to post-date the earliest metalling and pre-date at least two later deposits of gravel (6/95a: Section 5).

Abbreviation

CAR 6 Philip Crummy, Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilberd School and other sites in Colchester, 1971-85, 1992

Bibliography

Dunnett, B R K, 1971 "Excavations in Colchester: Balcerne Gardens", in Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society, 3rd series, vol 3.

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Section One (Fig. 3) and Section Two (Fig. 4): Layer Descriptions

- L1 Very dark greyish brown sandy loam with occasional oyster fragments.
- L2 Similar to L1.
- L3 Yellowish brown sandy loam, occasional minute shell fragment. Dump.
- L4 Mainly dark greyish brown sandy loam, with slight traces of yellowish brown sandy loam (the latter similar L3).
- L5 Similar to L2, but with patches of brown sandy loam. Occasional charcoal.
- L6 Mixed: approximately 50% soil similar to L3, with 50% burnt daub.
- L7 Similar to L3.
- L8 Similar to L3.
- L9 Similar to L3, but with very slight olive tinge, occasional oyster shell fragments.
- L10 Yellowish brown loamy sand with a very high gravel content. Clean and quite different from other (distinctly street) gravels in the section. Relatively modern?
- L11 Same as L9.
- L12 Similar to L8, but with a very slight olive tinge. Dump.
- L13 A mix of L9 /L11 material and burnt daub.
- L14 Similar to L9.
- L15 Similar to L9.
- L16 Yellow sand, slightly loamy but overall fairly clean.
- L17 Yellow loamy sand dominated by compacted gravel. Street metalling.
- L18 Mixed, mainly a brown silt loam with a very slight olive tinge. Make up.
- L19 Very similar to overlying L18, but slightly sandier. Merges with L18.
- L20 Natural sand.
- L21 Burnt daub.
- L22 Similar to L7.
- L23 Brown to dark brown sandy loam with occasional oyster shell.
- L24 Dark greyish brown sandy loam with rare oyster shell.
- L25 Very similar to L24, but with rare small fragments of tile.
- L26 Indistinct. Mainly burnt daub with flecks of brown silty clay. Roadside ditch?
- L27 A mix of L26 and L23.
- L28 Dark greyish brown sandy loam with a high content of yellowish brown mortar lumps. Robber trench fill.
- L29 A mixture of burnt and unburnt daub. Contains a scatter of charcoal. Charcoal is more common in the lowest 15cms.
- L30 Pale yellowish brown silty sand with approximately 10% gravel.
- L31 Pale greyish brown silty sand.
- L32 Similar to L24.

Illustrations

Figure 1. Location Plan

Figure 2. Site Plan

Figure 3. Section One

Figure 4. Section Two

Figure 5. Elevation

Figure 6. Pottery Graffiti

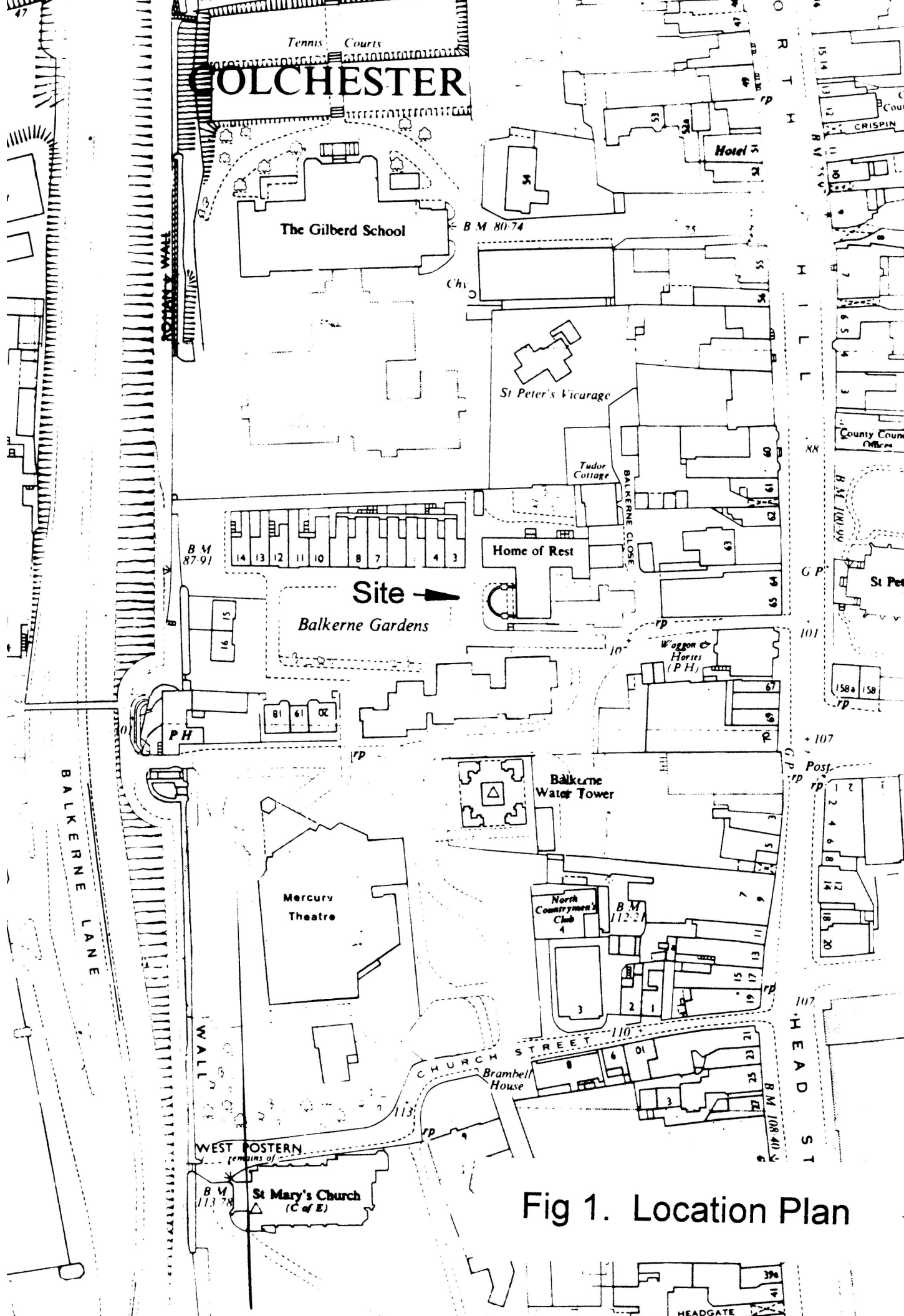


Fig 1. Location Plan

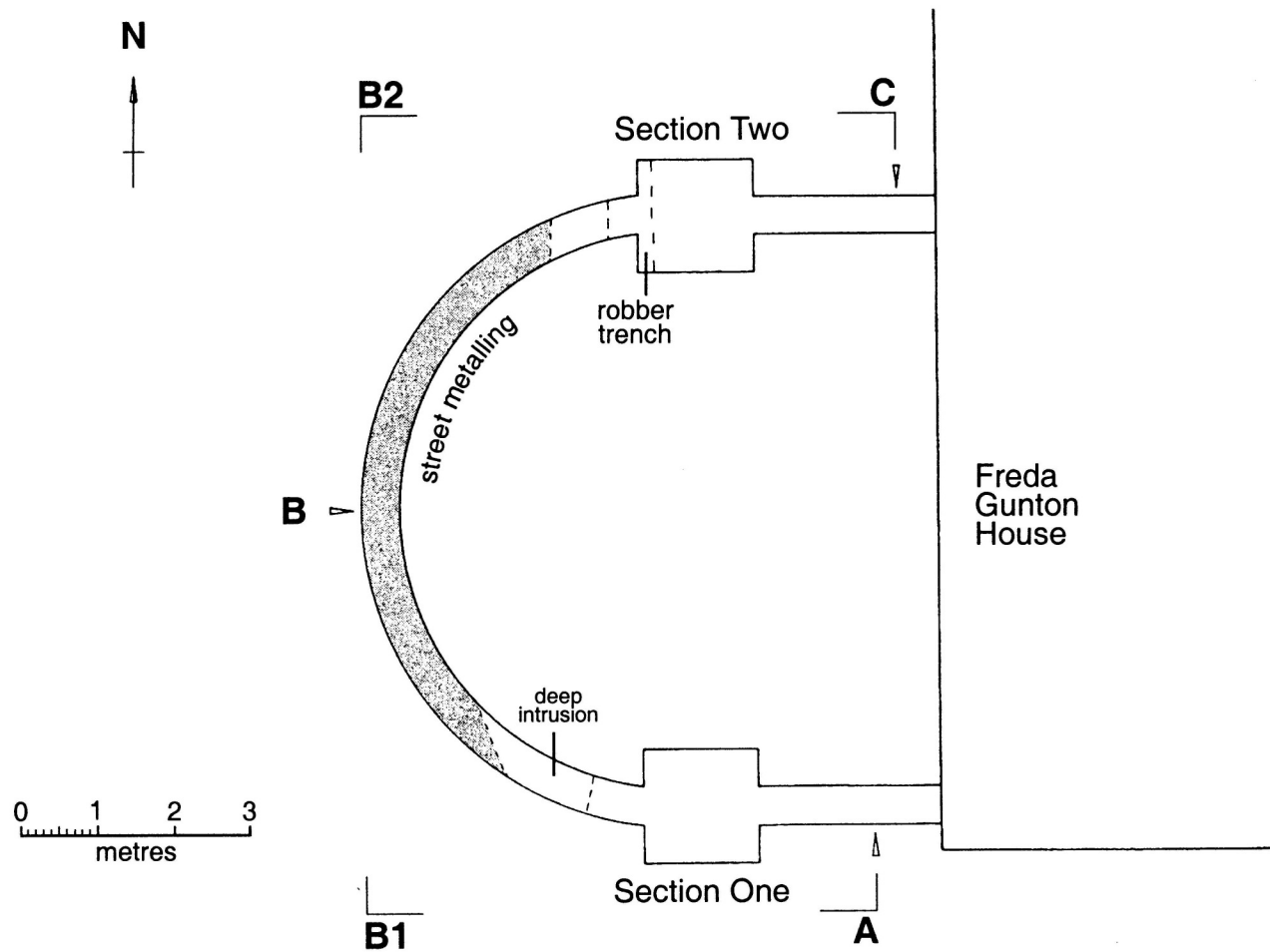
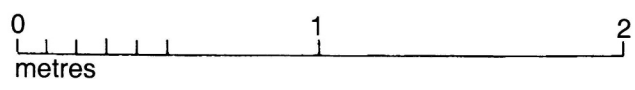
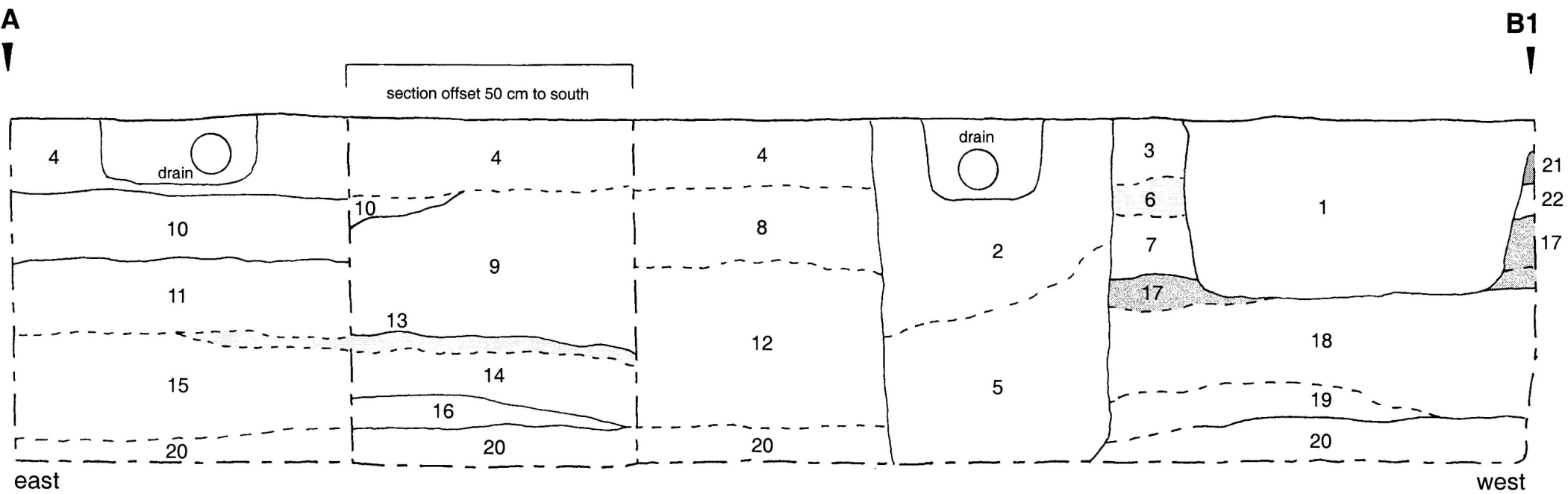


Fig 2 Freda Gunton House, Balcerne gardens; extension plan - March 1999



Section One




-  burnt daub
-  mixed material, includes burnt daub
-  metalling

Fig 3 Freda Gunton House, Balkerne Gardens - March 1999

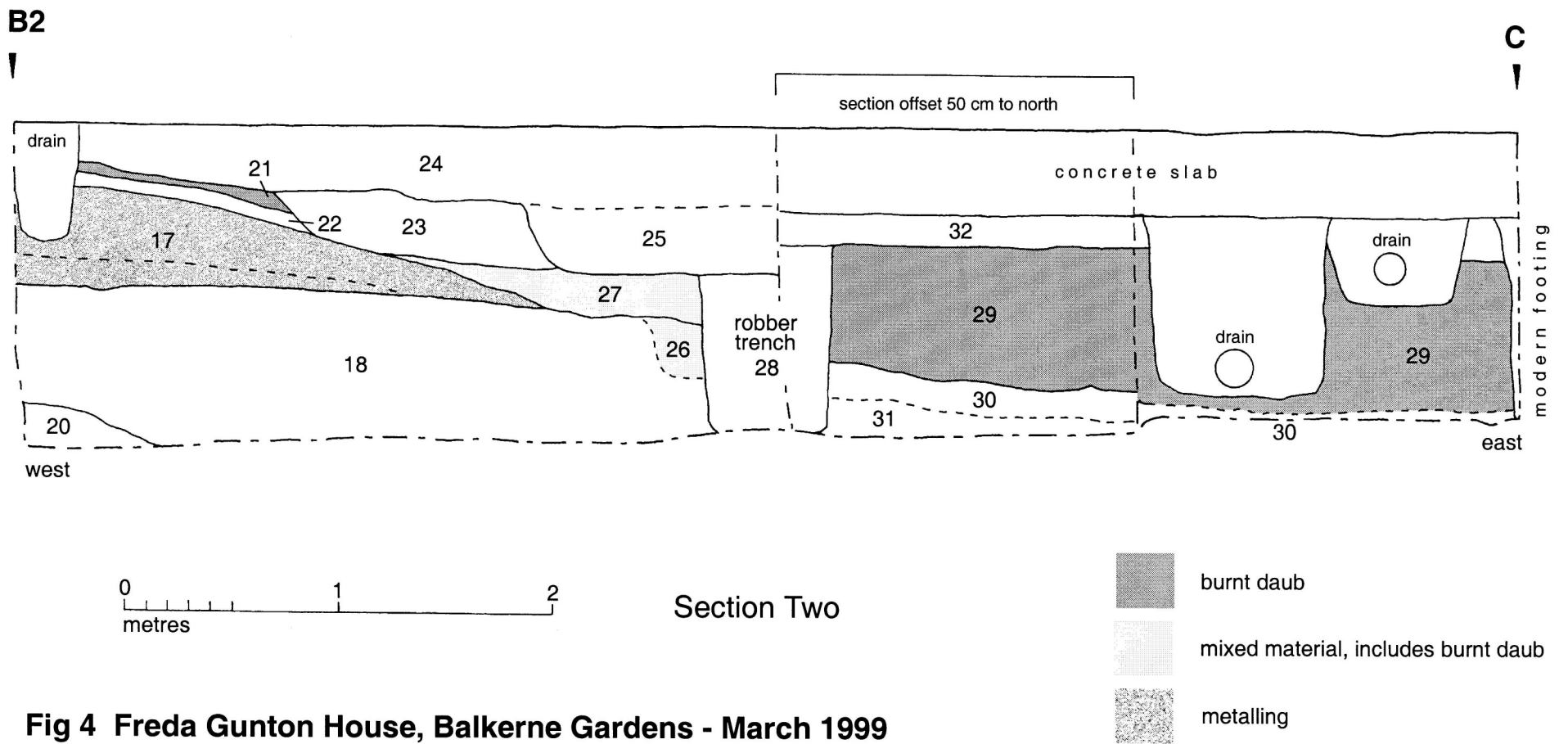
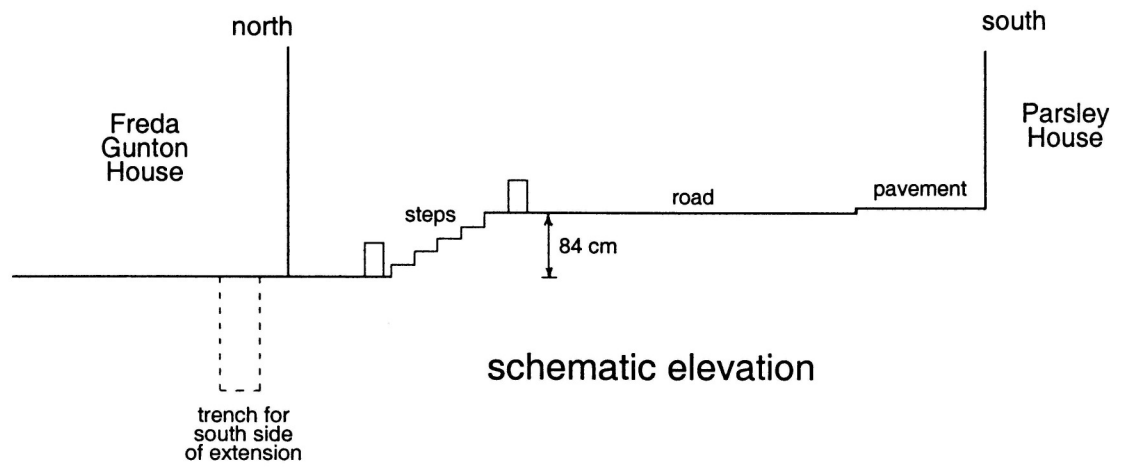


Fig 4 Freda Gunton House, Balkerne Gardens - March 1999



**Fig 5 Freda Gunton House, Balkerne Gardens;
extension - March 1999**

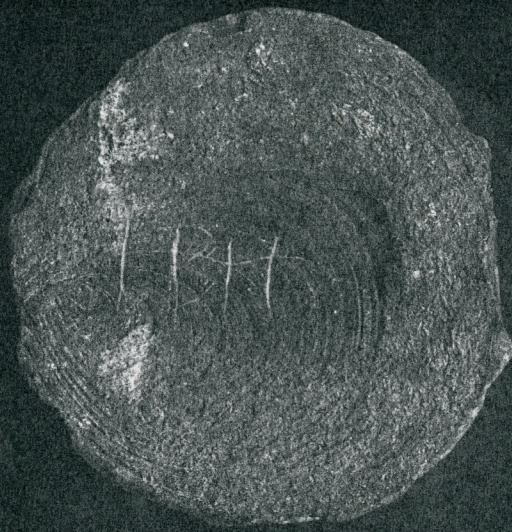


Fig 6. Pottery: graffiti on base or large lid (*actual size*)