

Archaeological excavation and watching brief at Hollytrees Museum, Castle Park, Colchester, Essex

August 2000-February 2001

**on behalf of
Colchester Borough Council**

NGR: TL 9996 2527
CAT project reference: HOL 00/8E
Colchester Museum accession code: 2000.96
Planning and listed building consent no: LB/CBC/COL/98/0643



Colchester Archaeological Trust

12 Lexden Road,
Colchester,
Essex CO3 3NF

tel./fax: (01206) 500124

tel.: (01206) 541051

email: archaeologists@colchester-arch-trust.co.uk

CAT Report 132

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1 Summary

The excavations and watching brief showed that the building works did not have any impact on archaeological remains. Either the excavations took place where the ground had previously been heavily disturbed or they were not deep enough to reach buried remains. The fills of the trenches mainly consisted of modern made-up ground, fill for drain-trenches, or brick foundations and rubble.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the report on a small archaeological excavation and a watching brief carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) during alteration works to Hollytrees Museum, Castle Park, Colchester, Essex. The work was carried out at the request of Colchester Borough Council, in summer 2000 and on the 26th and 29th of January and the 7th and 28th of February 2001.
- 2.2 Hollytrees Museum fronts the High Street and is located in Castle Park, 90m to the south east of Colchester Castle, at National Grid Reference TL 9996 2527 (Fig 1).
- 2.3 The work was prompted by proposed alterations to the museum involving a new entrance, steps, ramps, paving, services and landscaping which were the subject of planning and listed building consent number LB/CBC/COL/98/0643. An application for scheduled ancient monument consent was also made. Consents were given with conditions for a small-scale archaeological excavation and watching brief.
- 2.4 This report follows the standards set out in the Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1999) and *Guidelines on the preparations and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1999) and *Standard and guidance for an archaeological excavation* (1995). It follows a project design written by CAT in response to a brief supplied by Colchester Borough Council's Archaeology Officer (CAO) in July 2000.

3 Archaeological background

- 3.1 Hollytrees House is a three-storey red-brick Grade 1 listed building. Its construction was completed in 1719, replacing a timber-framed Elizabethan house on the same site. The house and garden were opened as a museum in 1929.
- 3.2 The site is protected as a scheduled ancient monument because of its archaeological significance. The annotated plan published in Crummy 1992 and reproduced here as Figure 3 is mainly the result of substantial archaeological work done by Wheeler and Hull in the 1920s. In relation to the Roman town, the Hollytrees site is believed to stand at the south-west corner of Insula 23 with a north-south street underlying the western fringe of the property. The Roman temple dedicated to the Roman emperor Claudius survives in part, below the castle. In the medieval period, the site lay just beyond the castle inner bailey ditch.
- 3.3 In recent years, two watching briefs and a geophysical survey have taken place in the vicinity of Hollytrees and these are as follows in sections 3.3.1-3.3.3:
 - 3.3.1 1983-1984 (CAP 83-84)

A 2m-deep south-north sewer-trench from Cowdray Crescent to the area west of the park bowling green was monitored archaeologically by CAT. Figure 3 shows the route of the trench in relation to the principal Roman and medieval features to the north of Hollytrees. Information on the Roman town defences, town-houses and streets and medieval castle defences were recorded in the northern sections of the pipe-trench. Post-Roman 'dark earth' and later deposits typically occupied the uppermost 450mm in the length through Insula 15. The stretch closest to Hollytrees contained a number of post-medieval or modern features including a brick culvert, and cellar and other walls. Localised modern deposits were also noted at depths of 2m in the immediate area of the pond (Crummy 1992, 368-73).

3.3.2 1989/12A

A 800mm-deep gas-main trench leading from Cowdray Crescent to the east side of the castle was monitored. Possible natural sand was noted at 500mm depth along a short stretch approximately 12.5m to 14m from the Cowdray Crescent main gate. Elsewhere, the southern length of the trench displayed a topsoil thought to be of probable post-medieval date.

3.3.3 1998/10E

A 1998 gradiometer survey on the Hollytrees rear lawn produced a group of anomalies which are believed to be tree pits, perhaps associated with documented tree-planting by Charles Gray in the 18th century.

4 Aims and objectives

The aim of the fieldwork was to 'preserve by record' the details of any archaeological strata which will be destroyed by the development, in accordance with the brief.

5 Methods

- 5.1 All work was undertaken by a professional archaeologist. In all cases, the CAT Officer either excavated the trenches by hand or carried out a watching brief during the excavations and was able to enter the trenches.
- 5.2 Changes in soil layers and features were recorded on pro-forma CAT record sheets. Locations of modern features are shown on Figure 2.
- 5.3 Finds were retrieved and assigned finds bag numbers using pro-forma CAT record sheets. All finds were washed and bagged and then identified by specialists (see Appendix A). All finds that were retained were marked, apart from the animal bone.
- 5.4 Two of the trenches were only dug to 150mm depth and no archaeological features were found in these or the deeper trenches, and therefore only one section drawing was made (Fig 4).
- 5.5 The photographic record is made up of shots of each of the areas of work using a digital camera.
- 5.6 The Archaeological Officer for Colchester Borough Council inspected the trench for the new drain on the 26th January 2001.

6 Results

- 6.1 **Underground electricity cable (Fig 2)**

In August/September 2000 an 18m-long north-south trench was hand-dug by the contractors at the front (south) of Hollytrees Museum. The trench was 200mm wide and 400mm-500mm deep. A watching brief was carried out by Howard Brooks of CAT. The contractor's excavations encountered only modern make-up and the only finds were two pieces of clay pipe.
- 6.2 **Drain run (Figs 2 & 4)**

On the 26th of January 2001 a new north-south drain to the rear of Hollytrees was excavated to join up with an existing drain. This trench extended northwards from the northern edge of the building and was located in between two bays, to the west of the main entrance (see Figs 2-3). The width of the trench was 760mm. The trench was 1.7m long; however, a 720mm length at the southern end was only machine-dug to 400mm depth, and it was not hand-dug because it consisted of brick foundations to the building. Therefore the length of the trench that was actually hand-dug was 980mm.

The contractors removed the first 400mm of material by machine. This consisted of

brick foundations and modern brick rubble (Layer or L1 and L3). The rest of the trench for the drain was excavated by hand down to 1m by the CAT Field Officer. No features of archaeological significance were encountered, only three modern drain-trenches (Feature or F1-F3). The only finds were modern pottery, oyster shell and animal bone.

Layer 1 - (0-380mm), brick rubble and concrete with sandy material and occasional oyster shell. This layer and L2 were later removed to create the manhole.

Layer 2 - (380mm-1m), dark brown silty sand with large pieces of modern brick, some whole, measuring 100mm x 230mm x 65mm thickness. Metal fragments, bone fragments and modern pot were also contained in this layer which is interpreted as being the fill for modern pipe trenches (F1-F3). This layer extends below the brick foundation (L3) but was not excavated.

Layer 3 - (0-720mm), brick foundations under the wall pillar on the south side of the trench. This layer was excavated by machine to 400mm depth and then the new drainage pipe was inserted. The rest was left unexcavated.

Feature 1 - in L2, a ceramic drainage pipe running north-west to south-east at 550mm depth.

Feature 2 - in L2, a ceramic drainage pipe running north-west to south-east at 950mm depth.

Feature 3 - in L1, a ceramic drainage pipe running north to south at 300mm depth in the north-eastern corner of the trench.

See section drawing (Fig 4).

6.3 Planter (Fig 2)

On the 26th and 29th of January 2001, the foundations for a new 6.2m x 4m planter were excavated by hand by the CAT Field Officer. The northern edge of the footings was 7.4m north of the Ladies' public toilet. The ramp was not excavated archaeologically as the ground-levels did not need to be lowered. The footings were dug in an irregular oval shape, 600mm wide and 160mm deep.

Layer 1 - (0-30mm), concrete removed by machine.

Layer 2 - (30 -160mm), dark brown modern sandy loam with brick and concrete fragments, bone fragments, modern pottery and glass, and occasional oyster shell. This layer is interpreted as being modern make-up brought in when the toilets were added to the Hollytrees building in 1983 or when the original planter was created. A piece of Roman tile and one or possibly two sherds of Roman pottery were retrieved from this layer.

There were no features of archaeological interest.

6.4 Manhole (Fig 2)

On the 26th of January 2001, a watching brief was maintained as the manhole was first machine-dug and subsequently hand-dug by the contractors. The purpose was to connect the existing drainage pipe to the new pipe. The manhole was sited adjoining the drain-trench to the west. Its southern edge was 250mm north of the brick bay of the museum. The trench measured 1.7m x 1.85m and was dug to just over 1m in depth.

Layer 1 - (0-250/350mm), brick rubble in sandy material similar to L1 of the drain-trench.

Layer 2 - (250/350mm-1.1m), dark brown sandy silt similar to L2 of the drain-trench, containing one piece of clay pipe, much modern brick and one oyster shell. At 400mm-600mm below ground-level, a group of 21 cow leg bones were exposed by the machine in the northern part of the trench. Although fairly close together, they were not arranged in any order; nor did they come from any definable feature. As they were found with modern brick and a piece of clay-pipe stem, they are not considered to be of any antiquity. This layer is interpreted as being fill for the drainage pipe.

Feature 2 - the drainage pipe seen in the drain-trench extended into the manhole trench but at a higher level. One sherd of brown-glazed pottery was found under the pipe.

6.5 Steps (Fig 2)

New circular stone access steps were to be constructed on the existing grass bank immediately north of the house. On the 29th of January 2001, a shallow trench was dug across the southern half of the area of the new steps, from north to south across the southern half of the stepped area (the northern half, being on a slope, was to be built up and not excavated). The trench measured 2.4m by 600mm, and its northern edge was 11.3m north of the Hollytrees building. The turf and 80mm of topsoil were excavated by machine and a subsequent 70mm was excavated by hand by the CAT Field Officer.

Layer 1 - (0-80mm), turf removed by machine.

Layer 2 - (80mm-150mm), dark brown sandy silt topsoil with common pebbles. Includes modern pieces of brick, stone, oyster shell, clay-pipe stem, one fragment of bone, one piece of 13th-century pottery, and one medieval or early post-medieval curtain ring. Two probably Roman grey ware sherds were retrieved from this layer.

An area of loose modern brick and stone rubble was noticed in the south of the trench. The contractors were not digging any deeper than this level.

There were no features in this trench.

6.6 Regrading of path (Fig 2)

A watching brief was carried out on the 7th February 2001 while between 200mm-250mm of soil was removed by machine in order to lay new paving between the new steps and the rear of the house.

A 3m-wide and 8.6m-long trench was dug by machine from the rear wall to the new steps. Most of the trench was dug to 200mm depth. The northern end was dug to a depth of 250mm, where a step was to be installed (L3). The southern end of the trench was situated adjacent to the new drain run and partly over the new manhole.

The following soil profile was observed, with all layers being at the same level:

Layer 1 - a spread of brick rubble at the southern end of the trench (same layer as L1 of the drain-trench and manhole).

Layer 2 - modern yellowish sand and gravel smeared with a mid brown sandy silt containing concrete and brick rubble; this covered most of the trench.

Layer 3 - a band (3m long x 250mm wide) of dark brown sandy silt topsoil at the northern end of the trench containing modern brick and one piece of oyster shell. This end of the trench extended onto the lawn rather than the path, and hence the difference in soil type.

There were no archaeological finds or features.

6.7 East ramp (Fig 2)

A watching brief was carried out on the 28th February 2001 during tarmac-stripping for a new ramp. The ramp is situated on the eastern side of the museum. It measured 4m by 5.8m, but only 3m x 4m was actually stripped of tarmac as the rest was to be raised. The tarmac was removed using a pneumatic drill down to 60mm only. Modern hogging was exposed but not removed. No archaeological finds or features were revealed.

7 Conclusion

7.1 The investigation showed that the building works at Hollytrees Museum did not have

any impact on archaeological remains. Excavation of the steps, ramp, path and planter were not deep enough to impact buried remains. The cable, manhole and drain-trenches were excavated where the ground had previously been heavily disturbed. Fills of trenches mainly consisted of modern made-up ground, fill for drain-trenches, or brick foundations and rubble. There were no features of archaeological significance.

- 7.2 Three or possibly four sherds of residual Roman pottery were found from the topsoil, mixed in with modern finds.
- 7.3 Possible medieval and post-medieval finds included a copper-alloy curtain ring, two clay-pipe stems, a brick and a few sherds of pottery.
- 7.4 The only other finds of any interest were a collection of 21 cow leg bones which are thought to have been dumped within an old drain-trench. They are all from the same rear leg bone (metatarsal), and one or two have butchery marks. There are no cattle markets on the site so it is not known why they were deposited here.

8 **Archive deposition**

The full archive will be deposited at Colchester Museum within twelve months of the completion of the project, under accession code 2000.96. The archive consists of a bound copy of this report, the washed, bagged and marked finds, site notes, and digital photographs on disk, together with a summary of the contents of the archive.

9 **Acknowledgements**

The Colchester Archaeological Trust is grateful to the following for their co-operation during the project:

Deborah Priddy, English Heritage

Sindall Contractors

Tom Hodgkinson, Hollytrees Museum

Martin Winter, Colchester Borough Council's Archaeology Officer

10 **References**

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Kate Orr, May 2001

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Distribution list:

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Tom Hodgkinson, Hollytrees Museum



Colchester Archaeological Trust

12 Lexden Road,
Colchester,
Essex CO3 3NF

tel.: (01206) 541051
tel./fax: (01206) 500124
email: archaeologists@colchester-arch-trust.co.uk

checked by: *Howard Brooks*
date: *04.05.01*

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Appendix A: List of finds

(Identification of Roman pottery by Stephen Benfield and of post-medieval pottery by Howard Brooks of CAT.)

Fabric codes are after Cunningham 1985, Cotter 2000, and Symonds & Wade 1999.

Table 1 List of finds by context.

find no	context	description	quantity	weight	archival status
1	drain - trench	animal bone	1		discarded
1	drain - trench	oyster shell	2		discarded
2	planter trench	animal bone	4		discarded
2	planter trench	shell	2		discarded
2	planter trench	piece of Roman tile	1	299g	discarded
2	planter	one sherd of fabric 40 pottery (16th-19th century) plus one rimsherd of fabric 51b flower pot (19th or 20th century) plus one sherd of fabric 48d pottery (19th-20th century)	3	52g	retained
2	planter trench	one sherd of Oxford red colour-coat mortaria with red and pink grits (4th century, fabric TG) and one other white, possibly Roman amphora, sherd but possibly modern pipe	2	46g	retained
2	planter trench	post-medieval or modern glass bottle fragments	2		discarded
2	planter trench	clay-pipe stem fragment	1		retained
3	steps trench	copper-alloy curtain ring, medieval or post -medieval	1		retained
3	steps trench	fabric 20 pottery sherd (medieval sandy grey ware, 13th century)	1	36g	retained
3	steps trench	2 sherds of locally produced coarse grey ware, probably Roman, fabric GX	2	28g	retained
3	steps trench	peg-tile fragments, post-medieval	6	293g	discarded
3	steps trench	very small nearly complete brick 120mm x 60mm x 30mm thick, possibly a flooring brick, post-medieval	1	324g	retained
3	steps trench	clay-pipe stem fragment	1		retained
3	steps trench	oyster shells	2		discarded
4	manhole	cow metatarsus bones (lower rear leg); whole apart from one	21		retained
4	manhole	animal bone	1		discarded
4	manhole	glazed pottery fragment (fabric 40, 16th-19th century)	1	30g	retained
4	manhole	modern nail	1		discarded
4	manhole	oyster shells	5		discarded

Appendix B:

Report on the copper-alloy object from the steps trench (find bag 3), Hollytrees Museum, Castle Park, Colchester, Essex (2000.96)

by *Nina Crummy*

A copper-alloy ring of irregular sub-rectangular section, very worn in places and with filing marks on the upper and lower surfaces. The internal diameter is 16.5mm, thickness 1.5mm to 2.5mm, and height 1.5mm to 2mm.

The section and file marks are characteristics which place this ring in a group identified as curtain rings, though none has been found in association with either a curtain rod or textile to confirm this interpretation. They occur in both medieval and early post-medieval contexts, and were imported from the Continent in considerable numbers (Egan 1998, 62-4). The recovery of this example from Hollytrees can presumably be related to the late medieval and early post-medieval housing along the street frontage.

Reference

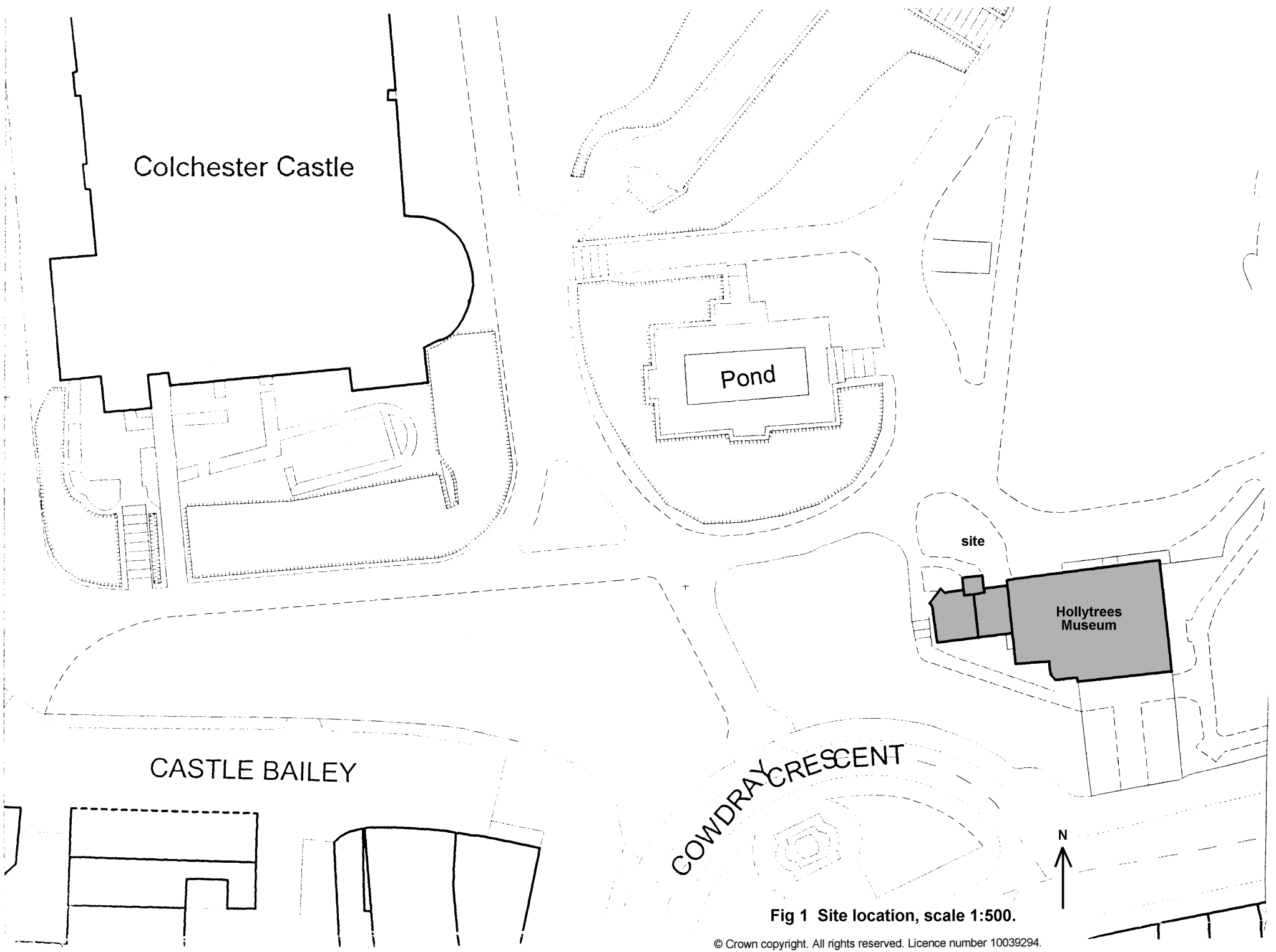
Egan, G, 1998 'The medieval household, medieval finds from excavations', in *London 6*



Plate 1 Drain-trench, looking west.



Plate 2 Manhole trench, looking south.



Colchester Castle

Pond

site

Hollytrees
Museum

CASTLE BAILEY

COWDRAY CRESCENT

N

Fig 1 Site location, scale 1:500.

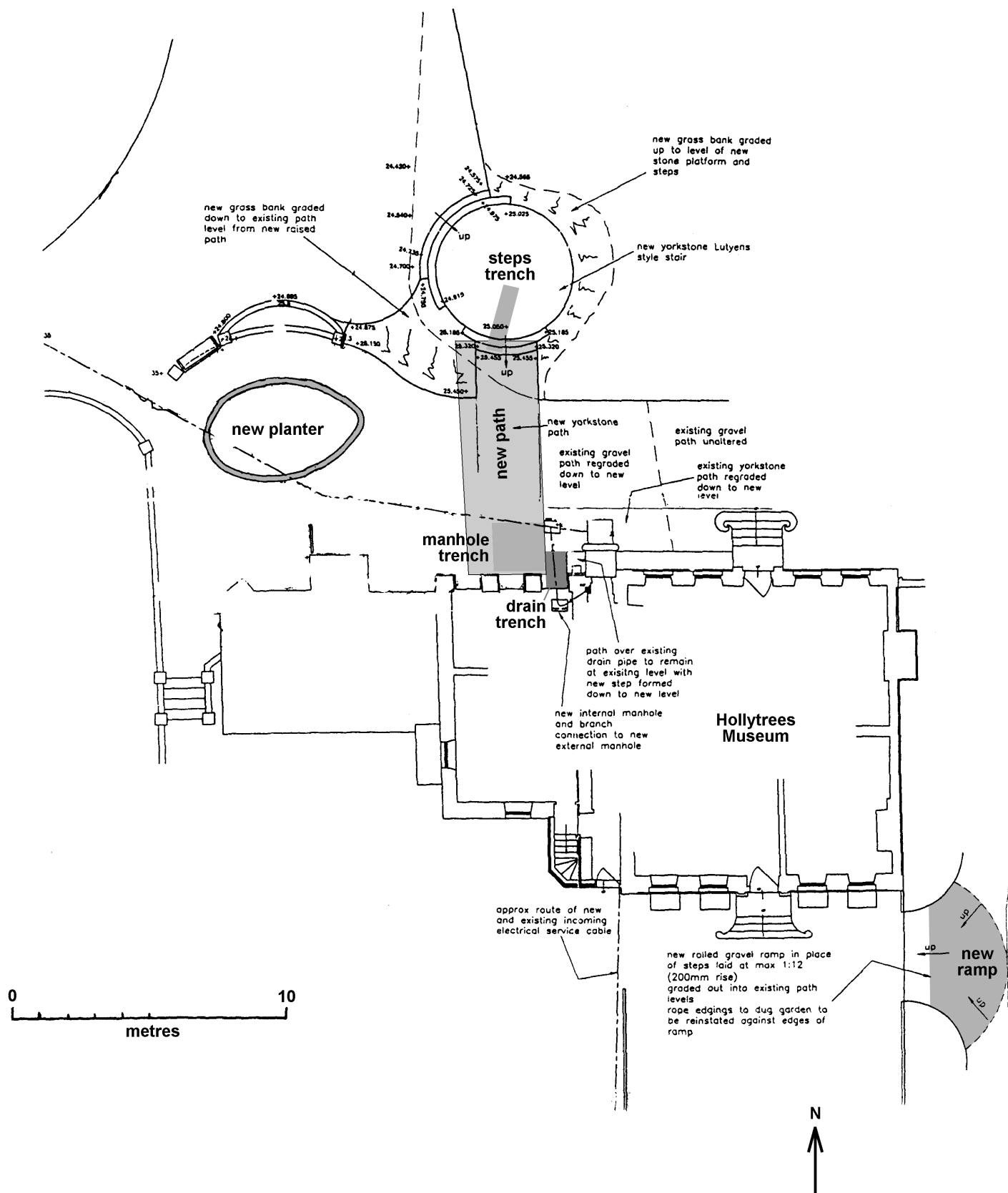


Fig 2 Site plan showing all archaeological investigation areas, scale 1:200.

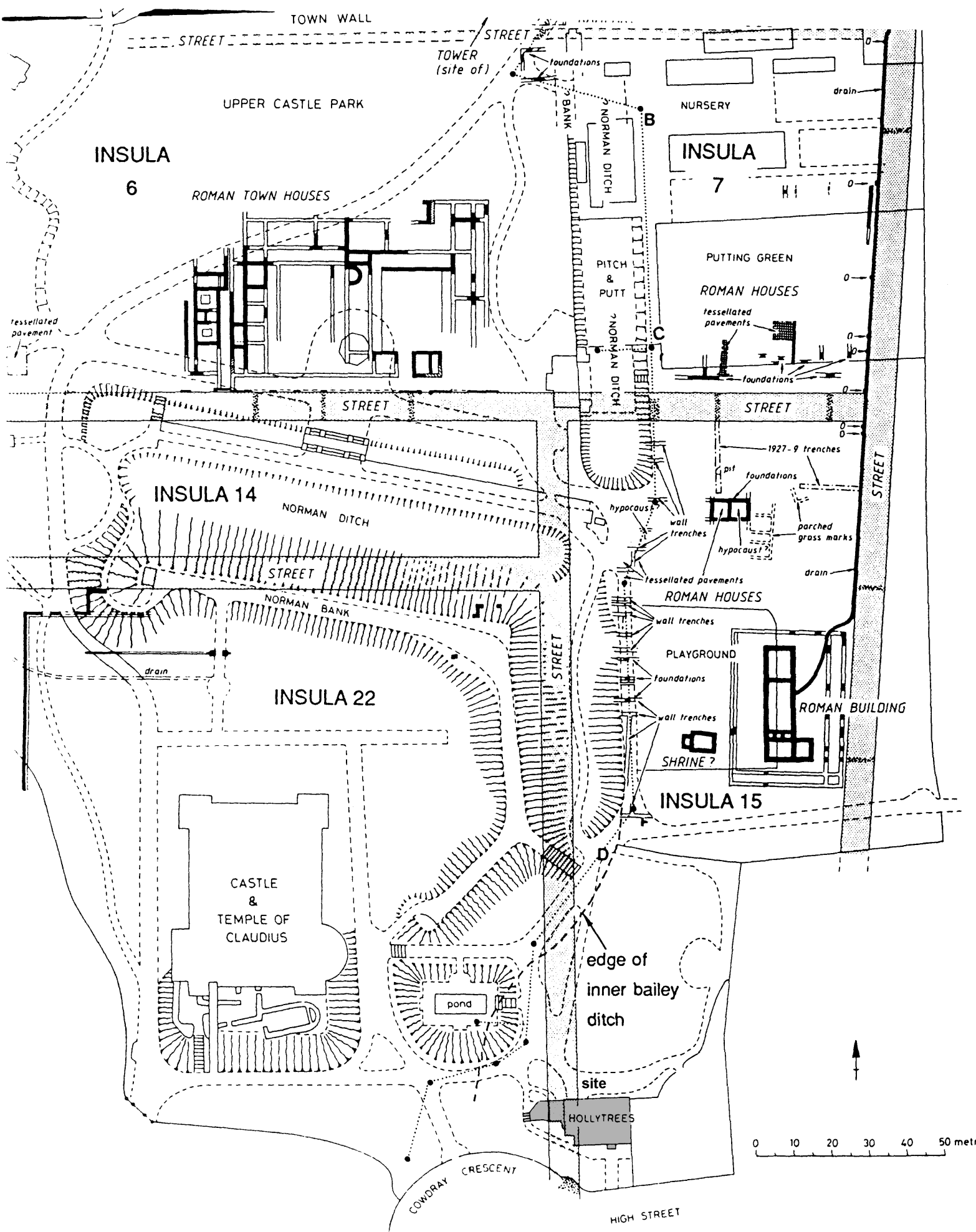


Fig 3 General plan of Castle Park archaeological sites, taken from Crummy 1992 (fig 13.225), scale 1:1250.

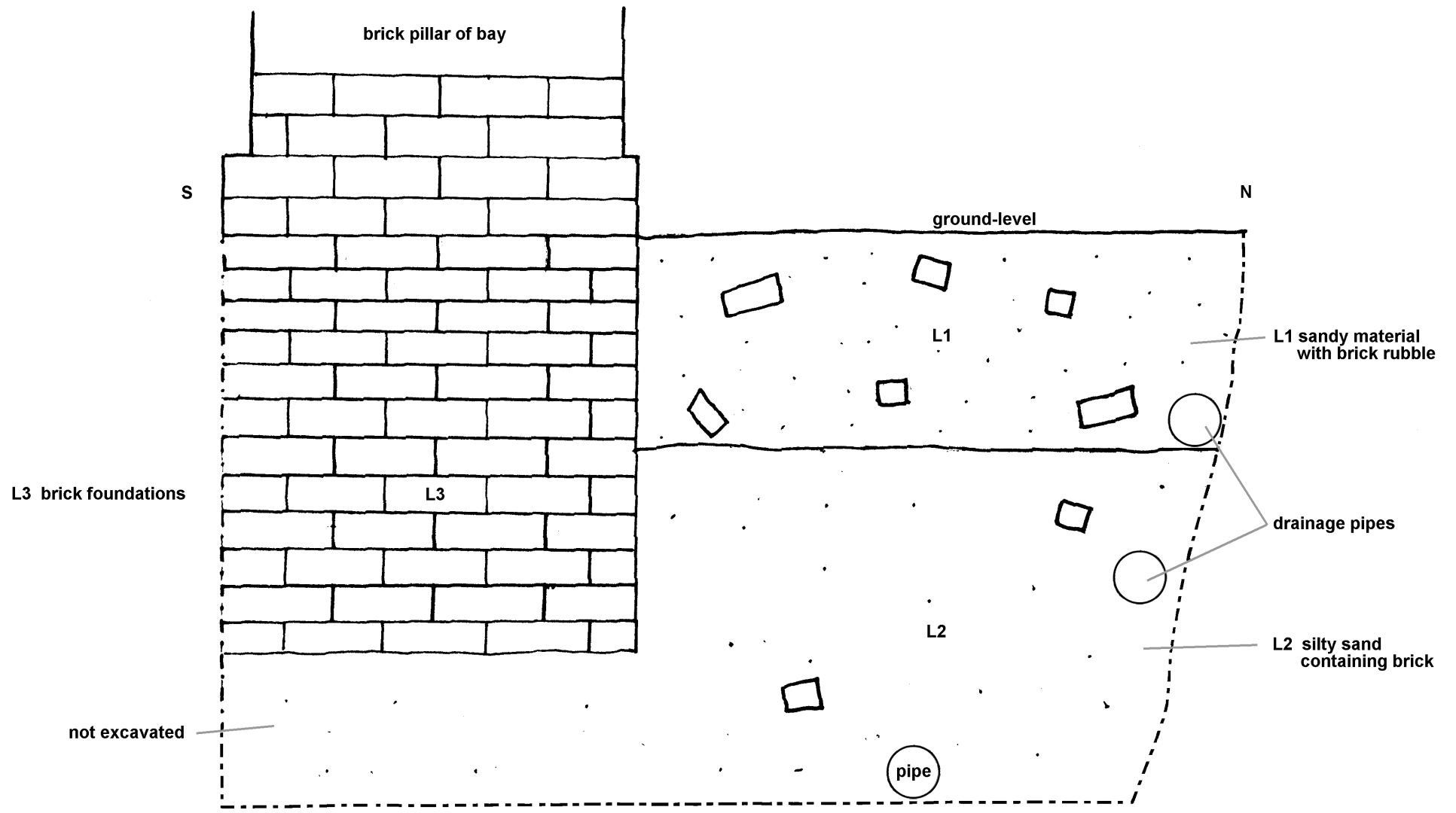


Fig 4 Section drawing of drain-trench, scale 1:10.



**Essex Heritage Conservation Record/
Essex Archaeology and History**

Summary sheet

Site name/address: Hollytrees Museum, Castle Park, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TL 9996 2527	Site code: HOL 2000.96
Type of work: Excavation and watching brief during building alterations	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: July 2000-February 2001	Size of area investigated:
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Muesum	Funding source: Colchester Borough Council (Hollytrees Museum)
Further seasons anticipated? None	Related EHCR nos:
Final report: CAT Report 132	
Periods represented: Modern	
Summary of fieldwork results: The excavations and watching brief showed that the building works did not have any impact on archaeological remains. Either excavations took place where the ground had previously been heavily disturbed or they were not deep enough to reach buried remains. The fills of the trenches mainly consisted of modern made-up ground, fill for drain trenches or brick foundations and rubble.	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: May 2001