

**An archaeological evaluation
at the rear of 36 North Hill
(Byron's Yard),
Colchester, Essex**

February 2002

**on behalf of
Colbert Consultancy Services Ltd**

CAT project ref.: 02/2a
Colchester Museum accession code: 2002.30
Planning application no: F/COL/01/1964
NGR: TL 9936 2548



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1 Summary

A small trial-trench was excavated at the rear of 36 North Hill (Byron's Yard), Colchester, Essex. No archaeological features were exposed; however, three leather shoe soles which are thought to date from the 15th or 16th century were found preserved near the bottom of the trench. None of the shoes were within any discernible features and one was found in a layer containing modern material. Roman tile was found residually. It would appear that underlying Roman and medieval remains have been disturbed by 19th- and 20th-century activity.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the report on an archaeological evaluation carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on the 25th of February 2002 at the rear of 36 North Hill (Byron's Yard), Colchester, Essex. The work was commissioned by Colbert Consultancy Services Ltd.
- 2.2 The site consists of a small plot, located in the town centre on the western side of North Hill, at National Grid Reference TL 9936 2548. The site is currently a yard used for office parking at the rear of 36 North Hill. Previously it was occupied by Victorian cottages.
- 2.3 A planning application has been submitted under planning application no F/COL/01/1964 for a house to join a complex of four apartments to the north which received planning permission in October 2000 under planning application no F/COL/00/0532.
- 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* (2000) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (2000), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological evaluation* (1999).

3 Archaeological background

- 3.1 The site lies within Insula 1b of the Roman walled town. Any Roman buildings within this plot would have had a frontage onto the Roman street connecting Headgate and North Gate. There is a large number of records of archaeological finds and excavations of various scales in the vicinity of this site, and these include:

No 49 North Hill (CAT project ref. 8/74b)

The removal of 1.4m of topsoil in 1974 revealed three Roman masonry foundations and two tessellated floors, one of which may have been a mosaic. This was interpreted as being part of a Roman town house. The Roman strata were cut into by a post-medieval well, a cellar and many pits (Crummy 1992, 79).

No 45 North Hill

A Roman tessellated pavement, 25 feet wide, reported in 1849 (Hull 1958, 76).

No 40 North Hill (CAT site 12/79)

A Roman clay deposit (clay floors) and a redeposited piece of *opus signinum* (another floor fragment?) showed that there had been Roman buildings on this site. Roman strata were heavily cut by post-medieval pits (Crummy 1992, 937).

Bowlers Brewery

There are also records of a multicoloured floor from Bowlers Brewery, the site of which incorporates the present site. However, as Hull reports, the exact location is not known (Hull 1958, 76). Hull prefers a location well to the west of the present site (in Insula 1a\ near the east end of the brewery).

- 3.2 An evaluation carried out by CAT in summer 2000, in an adjoining yard to the north, revealed part of a Roman tessellated floor at a depth of 1.1m below modern ground-level (Crossan 2000).

4 Aims and objectives

The aim of the archaeological work was to determine the location, character, extent, date, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains. This information will be used to make an informed decision on any necessary archaeological work.

5 Methods

- 5.1 The fieldwork was carried out by the author, with monitoring by Martin Winter, the Archaeological Officer for Colchester Borough Council. A single trench was excavated measuring 4.3m x 1.5 m in the location shown on Figure 2. The trench was progressively stripped using a small mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket. As no archaeological features were exposed, the trench was dug to 1.2m below modern ground-level, with a deeper section at the northern end to test the depth of natural ground. The trench could not be placed within the footprint of the new building due to the presence of the site hut which could not be moved.
- 5.2 All exposed sub-soil features, archaeological deposits and negative features were manually cleaned, drawn in section and plan and examined in sufficient detail to allow their nature, date and importance to be assessed.
- 5.3 Individual records of excavated contexts, layers, features or deposits were entered on pro-forma record sheets. Registers were compiled of finds and small finds. Finds were washed, marked and bagged according to context.
- 5.4 Standard 'record' shots of contexts were taken on a digital camera. Colour transparencies were used for overall site shots and all important contexts.
- 5.5 A metal detector was used to check the spoil heaps and any suitable strata.
- 5.6 OD heights were taken.
- 5.7 Soil samples were taken of appropriate deposits for sampling.

6 Results

- 6.1 A mid brown sandy loam underlain by a brick rubble layer (Layer or L1 and L2) formed the surface and hard-core for the car park. The rubble may have come from the demolished cottages on the site. These layers sealed a dark brown compact silty layer which appeared to have a high organic content (L6). Although without finds, this layer is presumed to be post-medieval as it was sealed by and overlies post-medieval or modern layers. The southern end of the trench exposed a small amount of a very compact dark brown clayey/peaty layer at 600mm below ground-level (L4). This contained wood, oyster shells, undated tile, Roman tile, modern pottery and animal bone. Water was seeping into the trench through this layer. A soil sample was taken of this layer, but due to its later dating to the modern period it was not sampled.
- 6.2 Once these layers had been recorded and removed, a thick layer of dark grey brown silty loam with mortar and charcoal flecks was exposed. This contained oyster shell, animal bone, peg-tile, medieval and modern pottery, Roman roof-tile and one piece of Roman *tesserae* (L3). L3 had a green tinge to it at the southern end of the trench and was fairly wet further down. Within L3 near the bottom of the trench, and protruding out of the western section, a leather shoe sole was revealed (find bag no 4, small find no 2). This was found at 1.15m below ground-level. Modern pottery was found with it.
- 6.3 Underlying L3 was a dark brown, very fibrous layer (L5). A similar mix of oyster shell, Roman tile and peg-tile was found within it. Two more leather shoe soles had been preserved within this layer. One shoe sole (find bag no 6, small find no 3) was found 1.1m below ground-level near the centre of the trench. The third shoe sole (find bag no 8, small find no 1) was recorded 1.1m below ground-level, protruding from the eastern baulk. Medieval pottery and peg-tile was found with it. All the leather shoe soles were found on the interface of L3 and L5 and were not within any discernible features. The shoe soles are discussed more fully in section 7.2.
- 6.4 L5 did not extend to the northern end of the trench. Here, where the trench had been

dug to a greater depth, L3 came straight down onto natural yellowy brown clay (L7). The top of the natural was 1.35m below ground-level.

7 The finds

7.1 Finds report

by Stephen Benfield and Howard Brooks

Introduction

This is the report on a group of finds excavated by CAT from a site at the rear of 36 North Hill (Byron's Yard), Colchester, Essex in February 2002. The archive will be deposited in Colchester Museum under accession code 2002.30.

The material

The material came from 8 bags representing 4 site contexts, and consisted principally of tile, pottery, animal bone and shell. The pottery was classified according to Cotter (Cotter 2000). Material from each bag was listed, weighed and identified. These lists are summarised here as Table 1 (below).

Discussion

These site contexts are all medieval or post-medieval with some Roman tile and pottery occurring residually. Whereas L1 and L5 could be considered medieval if taken out of context, the presence of later material in L3 and L4 shows that the sequence is 19th- to 20th-century in date, with all other finds occurring residually. This is typical of a site which has underlying Roman and medieval remains which have been disturbed in the last 200 years.

Table 1: stratified finds: quantity and weight of finds per bag and context.

All weights are in g.

Trench	Context	Find bag no	Small find no	R qt	R wt	M qt	M wt	PM qt	PM wt	other qt	other wt	Comments/date
1	L1	1						2	224			peg-tiles, one with peg-hole
1	L1	1								1	3	oyster shell D
1	L1	1				1	45					Fabric 21a (Colchester ware) rim sherd as fig 88 no 93 (Cotter 2000), but with incised wavy line instead of painted decoration - green glaze over white slip, mid 15th-mid 16th century
1	L3	3								4	25	shells D
1	L3	3								9	219	animal bone D
1	L3	3								1	623	huge modern Fe lump D
1	L3	3		2	193							<i>tegula</i> flanges
1	L3	3		1	25							<i>tessera</i>
1	L3	3		7	711							Roman tile
1	L3	3						4	271			peg-tile D
1	L3	3								5	233	undated tile D
1	L3	3								1	67	undated brick D
1	L3	3				1	28					Fabric 21, probably Fabric 21a from Colchester, 15th-16th century
1	L3	3				1	27					Fabric 21a, burnt sherd
1	L3	4	2							1		almost complete leather shoe sole
1	L3	5								1	15	curvy tile, undated
1	L3	5										modern stoneware (Fabric 45), 19th-20th century
1	L3/L5	9				1	7					burnt Fabric 21a (Colchester ware), 15th-16th century
1	L3/L5	9								1	19	probably a peg-tile fragment
1	L4	2								6	47	oyster shells D
1	L4	2								4	49	animal bones D
1	L4	2								1	81	undated tile fragment D
1	L4	2		1	198							combed box-tile fragment
1	L4	2		1	5							Roman grey ware sherd
1	L4	2						1	15			Fabric 51b flowerpot fragment, 19th-20th century
1	L4	2								1	43	undated brick fragment D
1	L5	6	3							1		half-complete leather shoe sole
1	L5	7						1	45			peg-tile D
1	L5	7		2	92							Roman tile
1	L5	7		1	50							<i>imbrex</i> fragment
1	L5	7								3	24	oyster shells D
1	L5	7								1	25	animal bone D
1	L5	8	1							1		nearly complete leather shoe sole
		totals →		6	117	3	12	3	261			TOTALS

PM = post-medieval
qt = quantity

M = medieval
wt = weight

R = Roman
D = discarded

7.2 Report on the leatherwork

by N Crummy

These three shoe soles cannot be closely dated, but the absence of nails points to a later medieval or early post-medieval date. Though all these pieces lack the toe, it does not seem likely that they had the elongation, sometimes highly exaggerated, typical of the 14th century, while soles of similar form have been found in 15th-century contexts in London (eg Grew & de Neergaard 1988, fig 106). The waists are not very narrow, also making it unlikely that the soles predate the 15th century. The heel-piece, with tunnel stitching running round the margin, is a repair. Similar cobbler's patches have been found at King's Lynn (eg Clarke & Carter 1977, fig 164, 17).

SF 2. (4) L3. Left foot leather shoe sole, lacking the outer corner of the heel and the toes. There is edge/flesh stitching all the way around the margin. Length 232 mm.

SF 3. (6) L5. Long heel-piece from a left foot composite leather sole, with the inner corner worn away. There is widely-spaced tunnel stitching around the margin. Length 97 mm.

SF 1. (8) L5. Five fragments of a left foot leather shoe sole, badly decayed in places. Removal of the attached mud may cause further damage. The largest piece runs from the heel to the ball of the foot. There is edge/flesh stitching on the surviving margin. Two of the accompanying fragments (which join) are probably from a different shoe. Length of the largest piece 116 mm.

8 Discussion

- 8.1 The evaluation did not reveal any features of archaeological significance. However, the remains of three leather shoe soles were preserved at the bottom of the trench in organic layers. These are dated by style to be of later medieval or early post-medieval date, ie 15th or 16th century.
- 8.2 Most of the layers contained peg-tile which, although classified as post-medieval in Table 1 in section 7.1, was also used in the late medieval period. Modern pottery or modern artefacts were present in L1, L2, L3 and L4. This indicates a modern date for all the deposits, except for L5 at the bottom of the trench which could be late medieval or post-medieval. Two of the shoe soles came from this layer. It is likely that the other shoe sole, from the bottom layer L3, was originally deposited within L5 like the other two, but has since been disturbed and mixed in with later deposits. There was a sizeable amount of Roman tile and a small amount of medieval pottery, but none of it was *in situ* as it was found in the same context as later material (see section 7.1).
- 8.3 It would appear that Roman and medieval remains did exist on the site, but these have been disturbed and destroyed in the last 200 years, probably by building work or dumping of material to terrace the site.

9 Acknowledgements

The Colchester Archaeological Trust is grateful to the following for their help and co-operation:

Mr R Colbert of Colbert Consultancy Services Ltd for funding the work
Martin Winter, Archaeological Officer for Colchester Borough Council, for monitoring the work
Arches Plant for providing the machine

10 References

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- Crossan, C, 2000 An archaeological evaluation at 36a North Hill, Colchester, CAT Report 92
- Crummy, P, 1992 *Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School and other sites in Colchester, 1971-85*, Colchester Archaeological Report **6**
- Grew, F, & de Neergaard, M, 1988 *Shoes and pattens*, Medieval finds from excavations in London, **2**
- Hull, M R, 1958 *Roman Colchester*, Report of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London, **XX**

11 Archive deposition

The full archive including a copy of this report, finds, digital data, photographs, plans and site notes will be deposited permanently with Colchester Museum under accession code 2002.30.

12 Site data

Soil descriptions

Context	Description	Date
L1	mid brown sandy loam – surface of car park	modern
L2	brick rubble – hard-core for car park	modern
L3	dark grey brown silty loam with mortar and charcoal flecks	modern
L4	dark brown very compact organic clayey/peaty layer	modern
L5	dark brown very fibrous layer	late medieval or early post-medieval
L6	dark brown compact silty layer with a high organic content	post-medieval or modern

Kate Orr, March 2002

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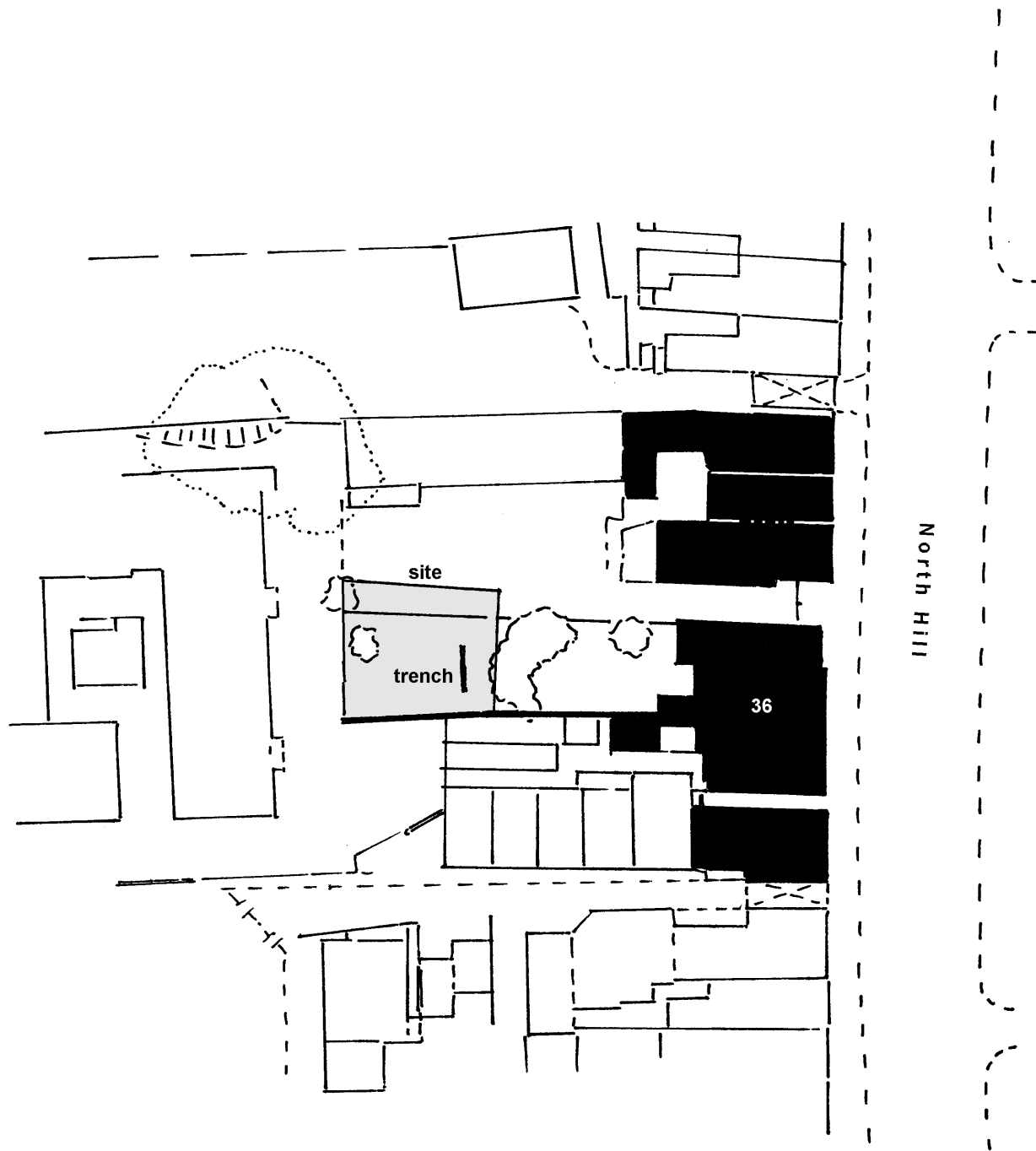
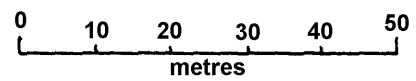


Fig 1 Site location; scale 1:1000.



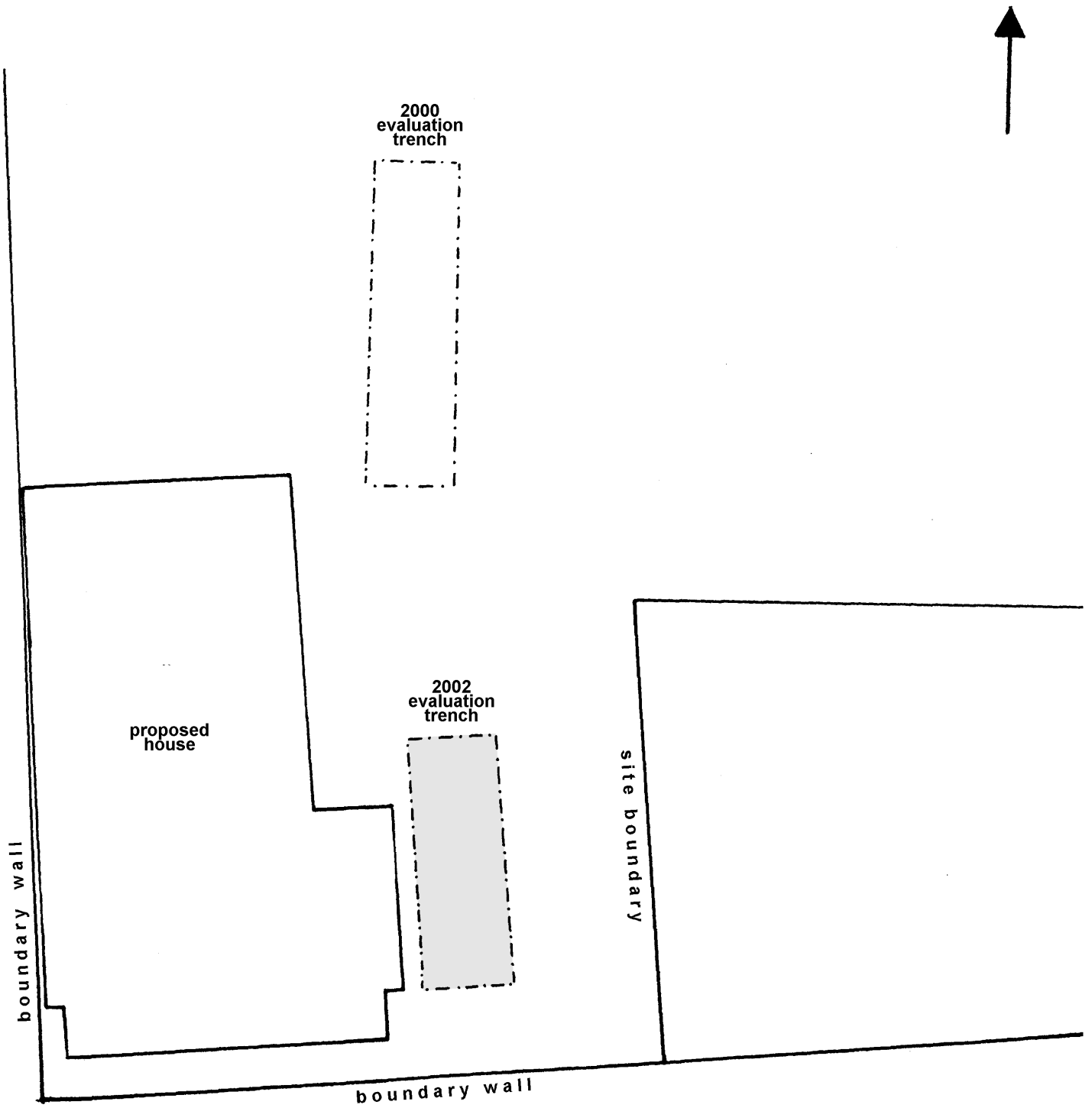
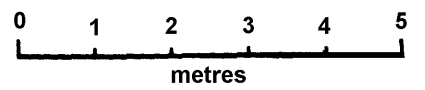


Fig 2 Location of evaluation trenches, scale 1:100.



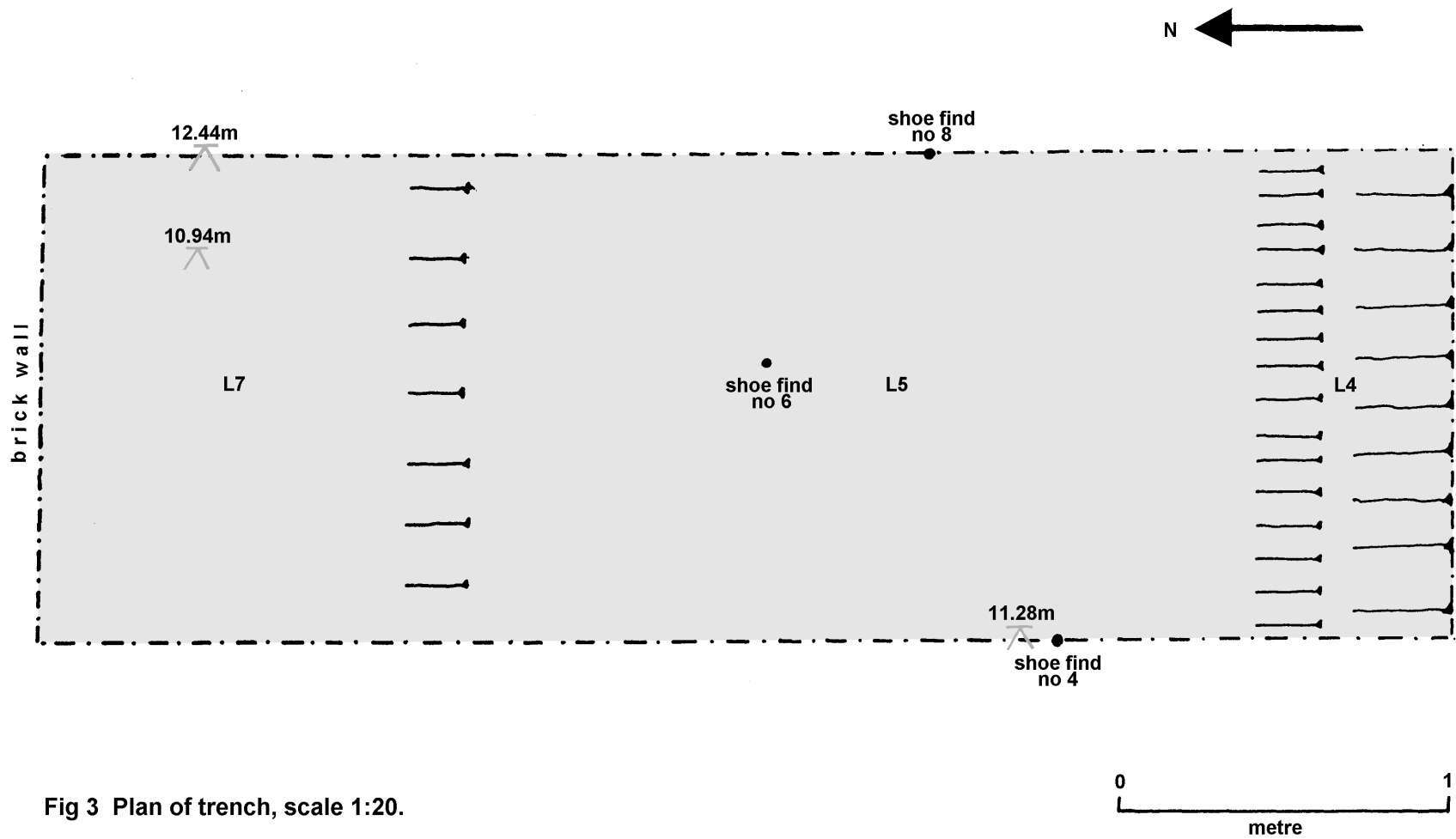


Fig 3 Plan of trench, scale 1:20.

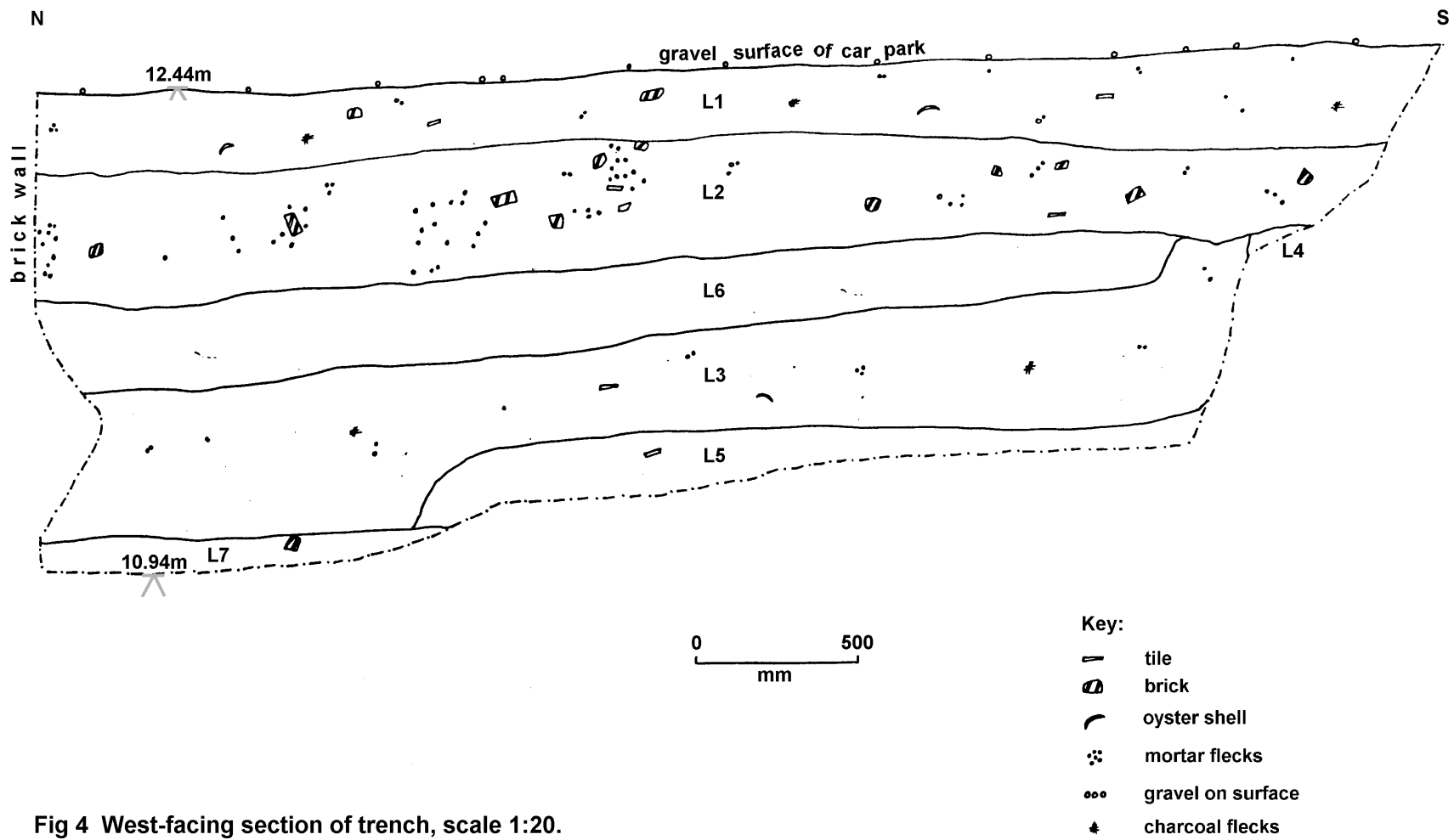


Fig 4 West-facing section of trench, scale 1:20.

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

Summary sheet

Site name/address: The rear of 36 North Hill (Byron's Yard), Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TL 9936 2548	Site code: 2002.30
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: 25th February 2002	Size of area investigated: 1.5m x 4.3m trench
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museum	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated?	Related EHCR nos:
Final report: CAT Report 177 and summary in EAH	
Periods represented: ?Late medieval, post-medieval and modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>A small trial-trench was excavated to the rear of 36 North Hill (Byron's Yard), Colchester, Essex. No archaeological features were exposed; however, three leather shoe soles which are thought to date from the 15th or 16th century were found preserved near the bottom of the trench. None of the shoe soles were within any discernible features and one was found in a layer containing modern material. Roman tile was found residually. It would appear that underlying Roman and medieval remains have been disturbed by 19th- and 20th-century activity.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: March 2002