

**An archaeological watching brief
on the line of the
Northern Approaches Road
Phase 2a
and on land to the west of
Colchester General Hospital,
Colchester, Essex**

August 2001-March 2002

**on behalf of
Cofton Land and Property**

CAT project ref.s: 01/6a & 01/11e
Planning application no: COL/97/0221
Colchester Museums accession code: 2001.152
NGR: TL 9890 2812-TL 9940 2645 and TL 9930 2731 (c)



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CAT Report 186
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1 Summary

A watching brief was carried out during topsoil-stripping for new access roads and new drains for the Northern Approaches Road Phase 2a and also during topsoil-stripping for residential development on land to the west of Colchester General Hospital, Colchester, Essex. Along the road line, two spreads of medieval pottery were recorded but no associated features were observed. Four ephemeral pit- and ditch-like features of late Iron Age to early Roman date were recorded on the land to the west of Colchester General Hospital.

2 Introduction

2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between August 2001 and March 2002. The watching brief was commissioned by Cofton Land and Property and it is one of a series of desk-based and field studies concerned with land directly or indirectly affected by the construction of Colchester's Northern Approaches Road (NAR).

2.2.1 The line of the Phase 2a road (NAR 2a) starts 4km to the north of the town centre at Boxted Road (National Grid Reference or NGR TL 9890 2812) and runs in a south-easterly direction. It crosses Mill Road and then takes a southerly course, extending to the west of Colchester General Hospital, and joins the Asda supermarket roundabout by North Station (NGR TL 9940 2645; Fig 1). The length of this section of the NAR is approximately 2km. The road is being built on a south-facing slope through land that was previously laid to rough grass.

2.2.2 The area for residential development to the west of Colchester General Hospital and the line of the NAR is located 2.5km to the north of Colchester town centre, on high ground to the north of the Tall Trees housing estate. This 60m x 60m site consists of two grass fields separated by a hedge (now removed) and a ditch, and it is centred at NGR TL 9930 2731 (Fig 1).

2.3 Planning permission was given under application no COL/97/0221 for residential development incorporating Phase 2a of the Northern Approaches Road. A condition for a watching brief was attached to this permission.

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, revised 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996, revised 2002), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1999).

3 Archaeological background

3.1 The Essex Heritage Conservation Record (EHCR) records two Roman burials which form part of a Roman cemetery, recorded by CAT during work on the Turner Rise development in 1996-7 (Shimmin forthcoming). A Roman road was also discovered, extending north towards Colchester General Hospital (EHCR 11799; Shimmin forthcoming).

3.2 A field evaluation by CAT on the route of the proposed Northern Approaches Road in 1997 revealed two main areas of archaeological significance (Benfield 1997). Late Iron Age and early Roman field-ditch features indicating the existence of a nearby farmstead were found immediately west of Colchester General Hospital; they were also found to the south, where they extended from Turner Village to Turner Road. Subsequently, desk-based assessments were prepared in May 2000 (Brooks & Orr 2000a; Brooks & Orr 2000b), which considered the earlier finds in a broader archaeological context.

3.3 Evaluation by trial-trenching was carried out by CAT in 2001 on land to the west of Colchester General Hospital which is to undergo residential development as part of the planning permission. Linear features were found directly below the ploughsoil over a widespread area. These features mainly consisted of pits and gullies which were contemporary with those found on the route of the new road and are thus probably late Iron Age to early Roman (Crossan 2001).

4 Aims and objectives

The aim of the watching brief was to record the location, character, date, extent, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains exposed by the groundworks. Particular attention was paid to the possible occurrence of evidence of late Iron Age and Roman occupation.

5 Methods

- 5.1 The fieldwork was carried out by the author, Stephen Benfield and Philip Lomas from CAT. All the topsoil-stripping for both the NAR and the land west of the hospital was monitored, with the surface being checked for features or concentrations of finds. The conditions for observation during the topsoil-stripping were impaired by waterlogging and wheel-ruts. The drains for the road were monitored intermittently, and the monitoring focused on areas of archaeological activity which had been observed in the topsoil-strip (Figs 2-5).
- 5.2 All exposed subsoil features or archaeological deposits were planned (Fig 5). A section drawing of typical layers was made (Fig 4) at a scale of 1:10. A sufficient proportion of the exposed features or deposits were excavated by hand to give a clear idea of the nature, depth, condition and significance of the remains.
- 5.3 Features, layers and deposits were registered on CAT pro-forma record sheets.
- 5.4 Artefacts were assigned finds numbers, and washed, marked and bagged according to context.

6 Results

6.1 Topsoil-stripping of NAR 2a

6.1.1 Area north of Mill Road, alongside Defoe Crescent - 22nd October 2001

400mm of topsoil (Layer or L1) had been stripped off. The area was very waterlogged after heavy rain, which obscured large parts of it. No features of archaeological interest were observed.

6.1.2 Southern half of the road line – 2nd-15th August 2001

The southern half of the road line (excluding Bruff Close) was monitored in August 2001. Various unstratified finds were recovered, consisting mainly of modern brick, tile and pot, some Roman brick and tile, and two sherds of late Iron Age or early Roman pottery (see section 7 below).

6.1.3 Area south of Mill Road – 13th and 14th November 2001 (Figs 2-4)

L1 topsoil had been stripped off and was approximately 300mm deep. Late medieval pottery and some thick peg-tile were found in the top of the subsoil L2. This came from the area between Mill Road and an east-west fence line just north of former Nurses' Home. There were two concentrations of medieval pottery: in Area 1, at the western end of the fence line, and in Area 2, in the middle of the road strip, approximately 65m north of the fence line.

Area 1 – two trenches (Trench or T1 and T2) were hand-excavated across the pot scatter. No features were observed. The section (Fig 4) showed upper (disturbed) clay subsoil, which was 140-150mm deep (L2), lying over mottled clay natural L3. Most of the pottery came from the upper part of L2. There were no finds from L3. Following this, an area around the trenches was re-stripped by machine which removed an approximate further 100mm of L2, but no archaeological features were observed.

Area 2 – this was re-stripped by machine which removed a further 100mm of L2, but no features were observed other than the southern end of a 1996/7 evaluation trench (T2); this was confirmed as such by a small sondage excavated into it.

6.1.4 Land south of Bruff Close (formerly Turner Rise) – 13th and 14th November 2001

No finds or features of archaeological significance were observed in this area.

6.1.5 Land north of Bruff Close – 13th and 14th November 2001

Much of the length of the road here was affected by a major pipe-trench. Possibly not all of the topsoil was removed at the western end. Between 200mm and 400mm of topsoil was stripped. The results were essentially negative, but one fragment of possible Roman tile and one struck flint flake of indeterminate date were retrieved.

6.2 New drains for NAR 2a

6.2.1 South of Mill Road – 16th January 2002

A visit was made while drains were being dug out on the western side of the NAR just south of Mill Road. Only a small length of trench was open, 700mm wide and 1.4m deep. Two manholes approximately 1.6m deep and 2m x 2m wide were also open. The following soil profile was observed:

L1 – 100mm of topsoil (in one corner only, the rest had already been stripped off);
mid brown silty loam.

L2 – 200mm of grey clay subsoil.

L3 – natural orange and grey clay to the bottom of the trench.

No features or finds of archaeological significance were observed.

6.2.2 Area between Mill Road and Bruff Close – 1st-28th February 2002

Several more monitoring visits were made as drains were dug between Mill Road and Bruff Close. Where sections had not been obscured by shoring and could be monitored, nothing of archaeological significance was observed.

6.3 New access roads for NAR 2a

6.3.1 South of the Nurses' Home – 14th March 2002

A further 1-1.2m of material was stripped off to make a new access road just south of the Nurses' Home. This included modern overburden dumped by the contractors. Natural grey and yellow clays were reached. A layer of grey silty clay containing peg-tile and modern land-drains was observed.

6.4 Land to the west of Colchester General Hospital

6.4.1 The western side of the field boundary ditch – 27th, 28th and 30th November 2001 (Fig 5)

The area was stripped of dark brown loamy topsoil (L1) to a depth of between 350mm and 600mm. Subsoil of light brown or orangey brown sandy silt with small stones was exposed (L4). Two or three of the evaluation trenches from the previous investigation were observed. Several unstratified finds were retrieved from the surface of the subsoil, mainly consisting of Roman pottery and tile. The following features were observed, all in the south.

F1 - a spread of burnt Roman tile and charcoal in a possible feature with uncertain edges near the south baulk. One piece of peg-tile was also included. These were found in an orangey brown, mottled grey brown sandy subsoil, 400mm below ground-level.

F2 - a burnt area which was roughly circular and 1m wide.

F3 - a darker patch with charcoal, Roman tile and pottery, possibly the bottom of a pit.

F4 - a possible linear feature, 2.5m in length and 600mm wide, possibly the bottom of a ditch which has been truncated. Its fill of only 70mm depth was a grey brown sand with medium stones and it was cut into the reddish brown sandy subsoil. The top of this feature was 500mm below ground-level. The feature contained Roman tile and pottery.

6.4.2 The eastern side of the field boundary ditch – 27th, 28th and 30th November 2001

250mm of topsoil was taken off here. No features or finds were observed, but these may have been obscured by wheel ruts and puddles of water.

7 Finds

identified by Stephen Benfield and Howard Brooks of CAT

7.1 The material from Areas 1 and 2 of the NAR road line is closely dated to a 13th- to 16th-century period bracket by Fabric 21/21a (the latter being Colchester-type ware).

At the earlier end of the date range, there are a few sherds of Fabric 20 medieval grey ware, but the absence of all but a few Fabric 40 (post-medieval red earthenware) sherds means that this group does not date much later than the 16th century. All finds from Areas 1 and 2 are from L2 and do not derive from any features.

- 7.2 Outside these two areas (Areas 1 and 2), most of the material retrieved along the road line consisted of modern pottery, tile, and slag or coal. However, of interest were two sherds of grog-tempered ware dating to the late Iron Age or early Roman period.
- 7.3 The pottery from the area west of Colchester General Hospital consists of grog-tempered grey wares and early Roman grey wares in fabrics GX and HZ. The GX forms include CAM 218 and CAM 266 jars. The pottery is similar to the late Iron Age to early Roman material from Sheepen (Hawkes & Hull 1947). However, the presence of Roman tile may indicate a Roman rather than Iron Age date.

Table 1: list of finds by context.

Fabrics referenced to Cotter 2000 and Symonds & Wade 1999, and CAM numbers for Roman pottery to Hull 1958.

Find bag no	Context	Description	Date	Weight in g	Discard
NAR 2a, southern half					
-	U/S	Peg-tile	medieval to modern	585	√
-	U/S	Brick or tile	Roman	334	
-	U/S	Slag	undated	97	
-	U/S	Brick	modern	738	√
-	U/S	Coal	undated	34	√
-	U/S	Fe objects, probably farming implements	modern	872	√
-	U/S	slate	modern	292	√
-	U/S	Fe nail	modern?	20	√
-	U/S	4 flint flakes	prehistoric?	16	
-		Several flowerpot sherds (Fabric 51b)	19th-20th century	113	√
-		6 sherds of sandy orange ware (Fabric 21)	13th-16th century	32	
		1 sherd of post-medieval red earthenware (Fabric 40)	16th-19th century	9	
		1 sherd of ironstone (Fabric 48d)	19th-20th century	10	
-		2 sherds of grog-tempered pottery	late Iron Age-early Roman (early to mid 1st century BC to mid 1st century AD)	16	
NAR 2a, Mill Road					
1	Area 1, L2	2 tile fragments	modern	200	√
1	Area 1, L2	1 peg-tile with hole	medieval to modern	26	√
1	Area 1, L2	4 sherds of Fabric 21/21a ware	13th-16th century	19	
1	Area 1, L2	1 sherd of burnt Colchester ware (Fabric 21a)	15th-16th century	23	
2	Area 1, L2	1 brick fragment	post-medieval	70	√
2	Area 1, L2	4 sherds of probable Colchester ware (Fabric 21a) including a handle fragment	15th-16th century	75	
3	Area 1, L2	1 brick fragment	undated	63	
3	Area 1, L2	2 sherds of Fabric 21/21a	13th-16th century	10	
NAR 2a, Bruff Close					
4	U/S	Roman tile?	Roman ?		
5	L2	Struck flint flake	prehistoric?	?	
NAR 2a, Mill Road					
6	Area 1, L2	2 unidentified sherds	undated	11	
7	Area 1, T1, L2	1 tile	modern	58	√

7	Area 1, T1, L2	1 tile or pot sherd	undated	17	
7	Area 1, T1, L2	3 sherds of Fabric 21 or 21a	13th-16th century	19	
7	Area 1, T1, L2	1 unidentified sherd	undated	7	
7	Area 1, T1, L2	1 sherd of medieval sandy ware (Fabric 20), rim piece	13th century	10	
8	Area 1, T2, L2	7 sherds of Fabric 21 possibly 21a (Colchester ware)	15th-16th century	65	
9	Area 1, L2	1 rim sherd of Colchester ware (Fabric 21a)	15th-16th century	25	
10	Area 2, L2	3 brick fragments	modern	59	√
10	Area 2, L2	17 sherds of Fabric 21 or 21a ware, including a handle	15th-16th century	188	
10	Area 2, L2	Clinker	undated	95	√
11	Area 1, L2	Peg-tile	medieval to modern	397	√
11	Area 1, L2	3 sherds of probable medieval sandy ware (Fabric 20)	13th century	84	
12	Area 2, L2	1 unidentified sherd	undated	16	
12	Area 2, L2	4 sherds of Fabric 21/21a including 2 handle fragments	15th-16th century	74	
12	Area 2, L2	2 sherds of either degraded Fabric 40 glazed or possibly Fabric 21/21a ware	13th-16th or 16th-19th century	13	
13	backfill of evaluation trench	2 sherds of ironstone (Fabric 48d)	19th-20th century	4	
13	Area 2, backfill of evaluation trench	2 sherds of very gritty sandy orange ware (Fabric 21)	13th-16th century	5	
13	Area 2, backfill of evaluation trench	Modern tile	modern	15	√
14	access road south of Nurses' Home	Modern tile	modern		√
West of General Hospital site					
15	F3	Roman tile	Roman	1101	
15	F3	1 sherd of heavily-tempered grey ware large storage jar (fabric HZ)	1st century AD to late Iron Age or early Roman	24	
15	F3	9 sherds of grey ware pottery (fabric GX)	1st century AD to late Iron Age-early Roman	78	
16	surface of F1	Roman tile including and <i>imbrex</i> and <i>tegula</i>	Roman	922	
17	F2	Slivers of stone	undated	24	
18	U/S surface finds from west of boundary ditch (bag mislaid)	Finds mainly consisting of Roman pottery and tile	Roman	bag mislaid	
19	F4	1 sherd of grog-tempered pottery (fabric HZ)	1st century AD to late Iron Age or early Roman	49	
19	F4	Roman tile	Roman	64	

U/S = unstratified

8 Discussion

- 8.1 No archaeological features were observed along the line of the road during the watching brief. The two concentrations of mainly 13th- to 16th-century pottery are likely to be the product of manuring in the Middle Ages rather than settlement on the site. This conclusion is supported by the lack of archaeological features found in the Mill Road area during the evaluation of 1996/7 (Benfield 1997). The nearest medieval settlement would have been at Myland (Mile End) to the south-west of the site.

- 8.2 Within the area to the west of Colchester General Hospital, features were not easily observed; however, ephemeral and shallow pits and ditches were recorded which are similar to those found during the 2001 evaluation (Crossan 2001). Three out of four of these features contained Roman tile and/or late Iron Age-early Roman pottery. The features were extremely shallow, and either they are the bottom of pits and ditches which have been truncated or they represent areas of burning. Their presence indicates occupation on the site or nearby.

9 Archive deposition

This report plus the record sheets, notes and finds are held by CAT at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex but the archive will be deposited permanently with a copy of the report with Colchester Museums under accession code 2001.152.

10 Acknowledgements

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

Adam Owen of Cofton Land and Property for commissioning and funding the work, and Martin Winter, Archaeological Officer for Colchester Borough Council, for monitoring the work.

11 References

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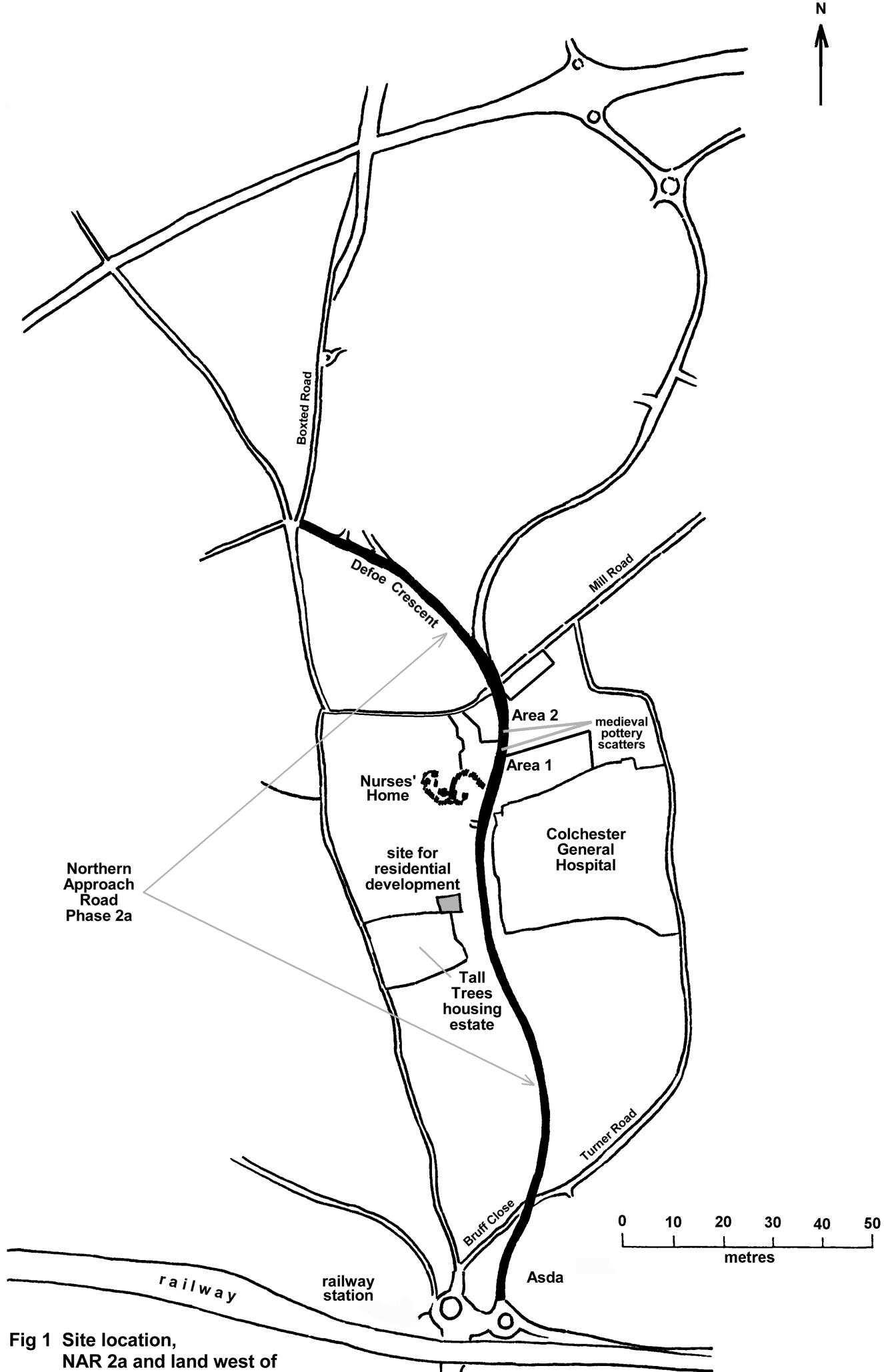
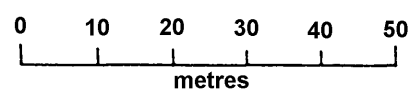
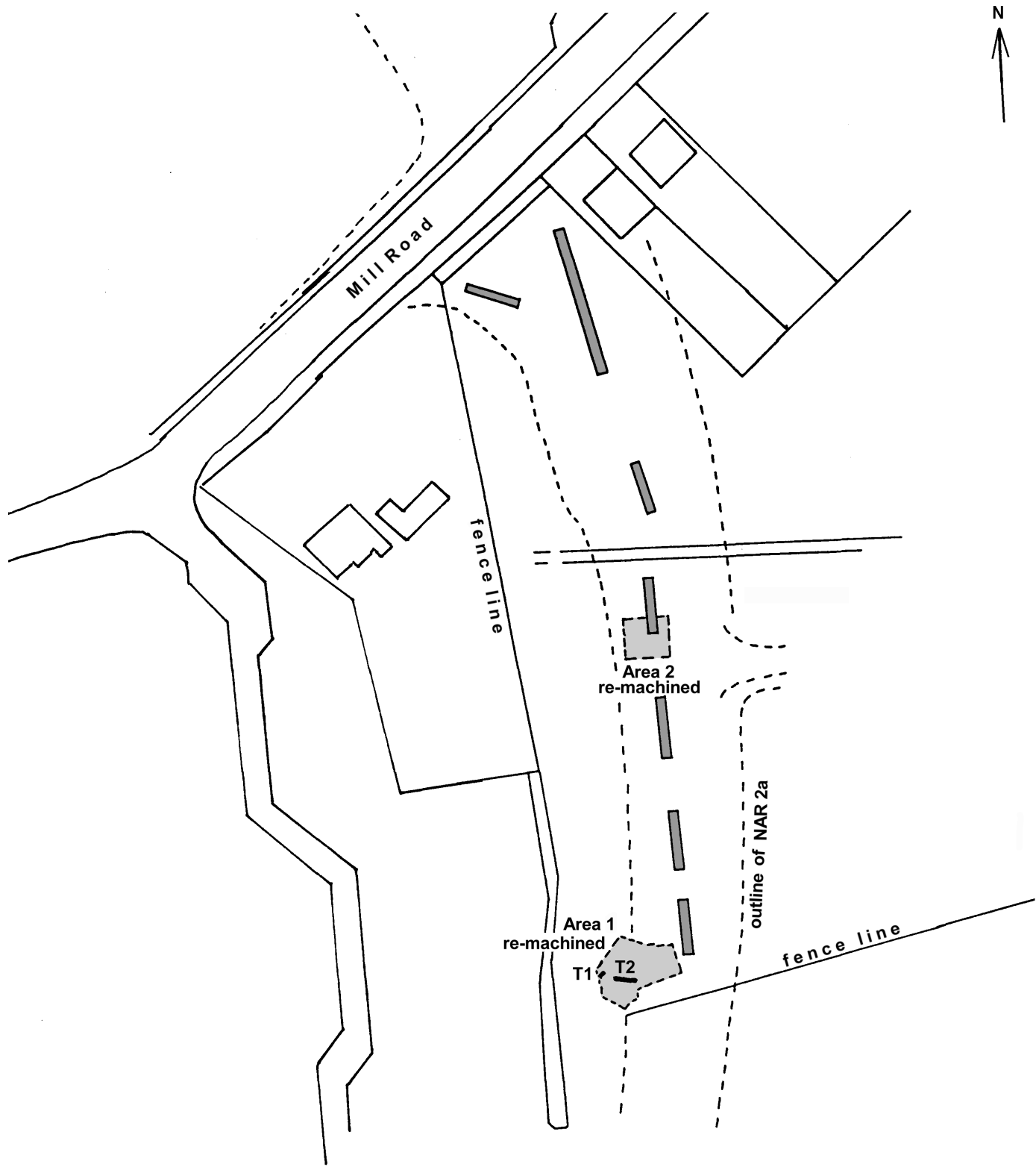


Fig 1 Site location, NAR 2a and land west of Colchester General Hospital,



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Fig 2 NAR 2a site: Mill Road; plan of Areas 1 and 2, showing areas of medieval pot scatter, scale 1:100.

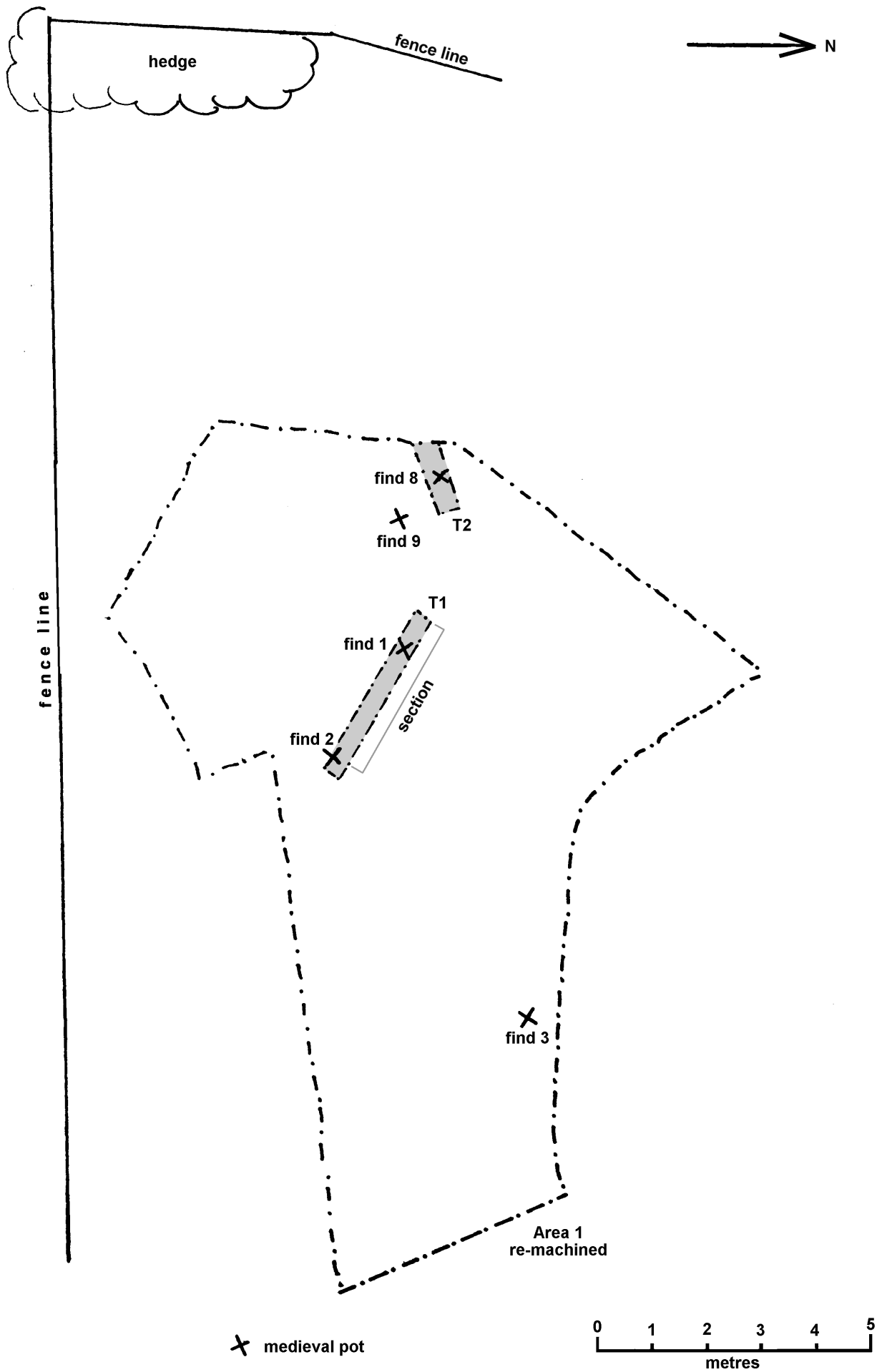


Fig 3 NAR 2a site: Mill Road;
 plan of Area 1, scale 1:100.

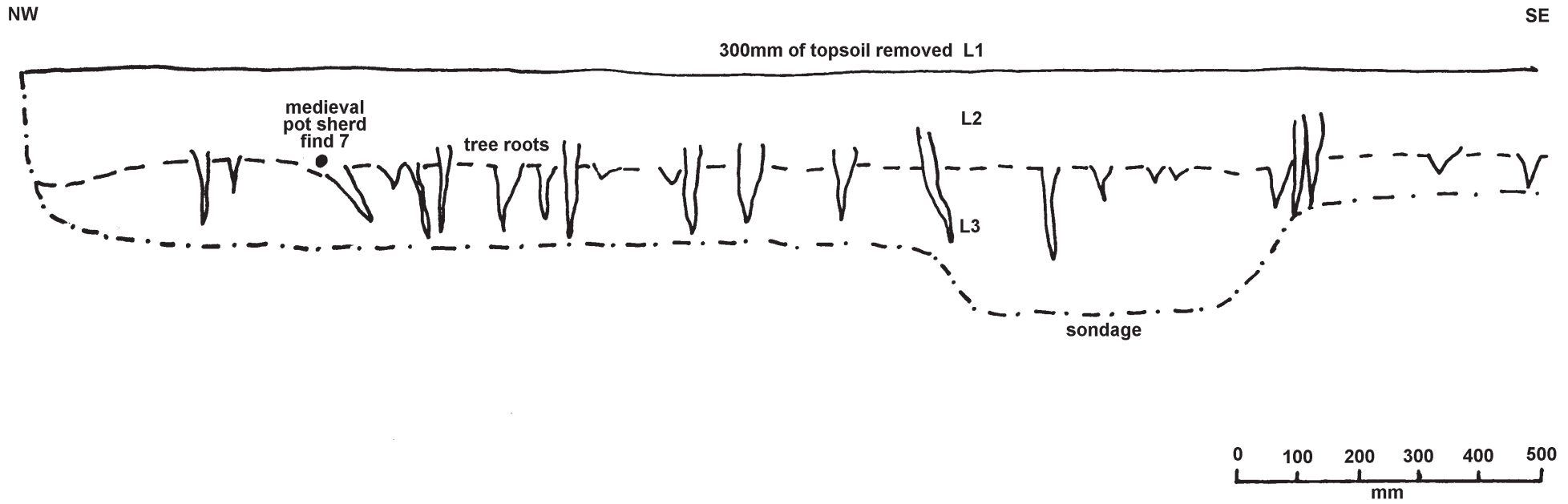


Fig 4 NAR 2a site: Mill Road; Area 1 - T1, section drawing, scale 1:10.

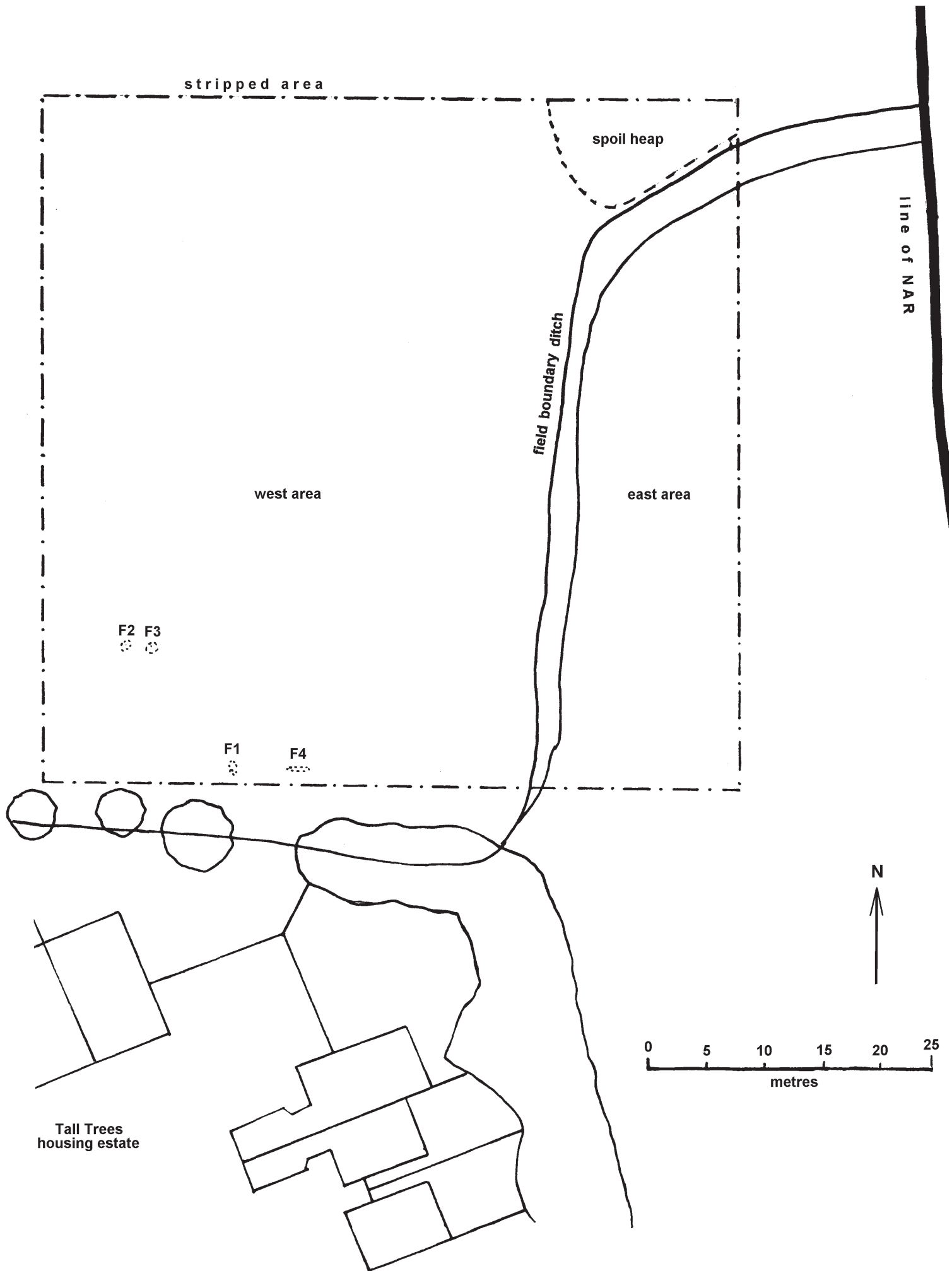


Fig 5 The area west of the Colchester General Hospital: plan of the area, showing archaeological features, scale 1:400.

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

Summary sheet

Site name/address: Northern Approaches Road Phase 2a and land to the west of Colchester General Hospital, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TL 9890 2812-TL 9940 2645 and TL 9930 2731 (c)	Site code: 2001.152
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: November 2001-March 2002	Size of area investigated: 2km road length plus 60m x 60m area
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? Yes	Related EHCR nos: 11799
Final report: CAT Report 186 and summary in EAH	
Periods represented: Late Iron Age, Roman, medieval, and modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>A watching brief was carried out during topsoil-stripping for new access roads and new drains for the Northern Approaches Road Phase 2a and also during topsoil-stripping for residential development on land to the west of Colchester General Hospital, Colchester, Essex. Along the road line, two spreads of medieval pottery were recorded but no associated features were observed. Four ephemeral pit- and ditch-like features and late Iron Age to early Roman pottery were recorded on the land to the west of Colchester General Hospital.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: CAT Reports 2, 78, 79 and 165	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: September 2002