

**An archaeological evaluation
in the car park of
Greyfriars Community College,
Castle Road, Colchester, Essex
January 2003**

**commissioned by
WS Atkins Consultants Ltd
on behalf of
Essex County Council**

**report prepared by
Kate Orr**

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Colchester Museums accession code: 2003.28



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1 Summary

An archaeological evaluation trench in the car park of Greyfriars Community College, Castle Road, Colchester, Essex, revealed a depth of modern topsoil and probable post-medieval layers down to 1.5m depth. Natural ground was not reached and it is suspected that medieval and Roman deposits lie at a further depth than was reached during the investigation.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological evaluation in the car park of Greyfriars Community College, Castle Road, Colchester, Essex, which was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on 22nd and 23rd January 2003.
- 2.2 This report follows a brief written by the Archaeological Officer for Colchester Borough Council and a Written Scheme of Investigation written by CAT.
- 2.3 The site is located close to the town centre at NGR TM 0010 2535. The trench was placed at the northern end of the walled car park, to the north of Greyfriars Community College. The car park occupies a north-facing slope and is surfaced with tarmac.
- 2.4 The investigation was prompted by a proposal to replace a 33m length of the brick wall with a new wall on fresh foundations. The section of wall in question forms the boundary between the northern end of the car park and Castle Road.
- 2.5 This report follows the standards set out in the Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1999, updated 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996, updated 2002), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological evaluation* (1999).

3 Archaeological background (Fig 1)

- 3.1 The site lies in the north-east corner of the walled town, within what was an *insula* in the Roman period (Insula 24). This was a street block situated a short distance to the east of the Temple of Claudius, fronting the Roman town's main street and close to the East Gate. This is a relatively unexplored area and very little is currently known of the nature of Roman activity within the *insula*.
- 3.2 The site takes its name (Greyfriars) from the friary, which was established there by 1237 and dissolved in 1538 (UAD no 13136). At the time of its surrender, the friary included a hall, infirmary house, chambers, kitchen, bakery, brewery, gardens and four acres of land within the precinct walls. In 1622, a gatehouse still stood in Frere Street (now part of the High Street) with buildings set back from the frontage. Nothing of the medieval establishment appears to have remained by 1847 (*VCH Essex*, 306-7). Human skeletons found at Greyfriars are believed to be medieval graves (UAD no 3833).

4 Aim

The aim of the fieldwork was to establish the depth and nature of any archaeologically sensitive features or deposits which may be affected by the proposed foundation work.

5 Methodology

- 5.1 A cable avoidance tool was used to scan the area to locate electrical cables prior to placing the trench. The single trench was placed parallel to the wall, 1.4m away from the wall, and it was dug to a width of 1.5m and a length of 6.2m (Figs 2 and 3).
- 5.2 The trench was dug by contractors using a mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision. After the tarmac had been removed, a toothless ditching bucket was used to excavate the trench.
- 5.3 Individual records of layers and features were entered on CAT pro-forma recording sheets.
- 5.4 Section drawings of features and layers were made at a scale of 1:10. A plan of the trench was made at 1:20
- 5.5 Finds were registered on record sheets and assigned find numbers according to context. Finds were washed, marked and bagged according to context.
- 5.6 Colour photographs of features were taken with a digital camera and a transparency camera.
- 5.7 Spoil heaps were checked for metal artefacts using a metal detector.

6 Results (Figs 3-5)

- 6.1 The trench was dug to a depth of 1.5m at the western end and 1.2m at the eastern end. An extra arm of the trench was dug up to the wall, at the eastern end of the trench, to reveal the foundations of the wall (Fig 3). This arm was partly machine-excavated under archaeological supervision and partly excavated by hand by an archaeologist. The top of the wall foundations were observed at 1.35m below ground-level.
- 6.2 65mm of tarmac was cut through using a cutter (Layer or L1). This overlaid a sub-base of loose asphalt and rubble concrete, 250mm thick (L2). Underneath the modern sub-base was a thick layer of modern topsoil (L3) consisting of grey brown sandy silt with occasional charcoal flecks, oystershells, slate, modern pottery, occasional Roman pottery and Roman tile and abundant peg-tile. This layer (L3) was between 300mm and 700mm in thickness and was difficult to distinguish from the layer below (L4). L4 was a mid-brown silty sand with mortar flecks and occasional chunks of *opus signinum*. It contained frequent Roman tile and peg-tile.
- 6.3 Within L4 were two spreads of mortar (L7 and L8). L7, at the western end of the trench, spread over approximately 200mm and was just over 100mm thick as seen in both north-facing and south-facing sections (Figs 4-5). L7 contained peg-tile, Roman pottery and tile, and post-medieval pottery. Another spread of mortar (L8) was recorded further to the east. This was a very thin layer which became thicker at the eastern end of the trench. At this eastern end it also contained abundant tile. This mortar spread continued over most of the eastern end of the trench and was at the same level at L7. In the west-facing section, L4 took on a greenish hue where it sealed L8.
- 6.4 Where the trench was dug deeper at the western end, a layer of grey brown sandy silt similar to L3 was recorded below L4. This layer (L5) contained occasional tile fragments.
- 6.5 A straight-sided cut feature was recorded in the west-facing section at the eastern end of the trench (Feature or F1). This abutted the wall and cut through layers L3, L4 and L8. The feature was sealed by the tarmac and its sub-base. F1 was filled with modern brick rubble and yellow sand. It was not observed in the section opposite. Natural ground was not reached.

7 Finds

Roman pottery and tile was examined by Stephen Benfield of CAT. Post-medieval pottery and tile was examined by Howard Brooks of CAT. Cam numbers refer to Hull 1958 and the other fabric numbers refer to Cotter 2000.

Table 1: List of finds by context.

| Find no | Context | Description | Date | Weight in g |
|---------|----------------|---|---------------------------|-------------|
| 1 | L3 | Peg-tile | medieval-modern | 78 |
| 1 | L3 | Roman jar fragment (Cam 268) | 2nd-early 4th century | 10 |
| 1 | L3 | 3 fragments of buff Roman tile or possibly amphora | Roman | 26 |
| 1 | L3 | 1 fragment of flowerpot | 19th-20th century | 30 |
| 1 | L3 | 1 fragment of late slipped kitchenware (Fabric 51a) | 19th-20th century | 18 |
| 1 | L3 | Oystershell | undated | 8 |
| 1 | L3 | slate | modern | 34 |
| 1 | L3 | Coal | undated | 1 |
| 2 | L4 | Roman tile | Roman | 833 |
| 2 | L4 | Peg-tile | medieval-modern | 433 |
| 2 | L4 | <i>Opus signinum</i> | Roman | 105 |
| 2 | L4 | Mortar with impressions, possibly for roofing or part of a wall | undated | 99 |
| 2 | L4 | Glazed floor tile | medieval or post-medieval | 260 |
| 2 | L4 | Nail | undated | 17 |
| 3 | L4, sealing L8 | Base of a post-medieval red earthenware pot (Fabric 40) | 16th-19th century | 42 |
| 4 | L7 | Roman grey ware sherds | Roman | 16 |
| 4 | L7 | 1 Roman tile fragment | Roman | 35 |
| 4 | L7 | Peg-tile | medieval-modern | 273 |
| 4 | L7 | 1 rim of a pot | possibly post-medieval | 8 |

8 Discussion

- 8.1** The wall was built in the 19th century, judging by the bricks (John Prosser, Conservation Officer for Colchester Borough Council, pers comm). The investigation showed it to have a brick stepped foundation. L1 and L2 and F1 are obviously modern, post-dating the wall. The ground-level on the Castle Road side of the wall is 900mm lower than on the car-park side. Thus the top 900mm of material on the car-park side must have been deposited since the wall was built. Either the material has washed down the slope over the years or it was deliberately deposited to reduce the gradient of the ground. That would make L3 a modern layer. L4 then may represent the Victorian or earlier ground-level, dating to the time that the wall was built. No associated building remains were exposed within the spreads of mortar (L7 and L8). These may be dumps of unwanted material left over from building work in the vicinity.
- 8.2** Although one part of the trench was dug to 1.5m depth, natural ground was not reached during the investigation and no definite archaeological features were exposed. The presence of peg-tile in layers L4, L5, L7 and L8 does not provide definite dating evidence as peg-tile was in use from the medieval to the modern periods. It seems that the trench was not dug deep enough to expose earlier remains, and that if any remains of the medieval friary buildings still survive, they are protected by a depth of post-medieval and modern material. The presence of Roman pottery and *opus signinum* mortar suggests that Roman remains may also be present but even further below the depth of the trench.

9 Acknowledgements

The site work was carried out by Kate Orr. The project was monitored by Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council. John Prosser, Conservation Officer for Colchester Borough Council, provided assistance.

The Trust would like to thank Greyfriars Community College for allowing access to the site, W S Akins Consultants Ltd for commissioning the work, and Essex County Council for funding the work.

10 References

- Cotter, J, 2000 *Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester 1971-85*, Colchester Archaeological Report **7**
- Hull, M R 1958 *Roman Colchester*, Society of Antiquaries Research Committee Report, **XX**
- VCH Essex* 1984 *The Victoria History of the County of Essex: vol IX, Colchester*, ed by J Cooper

11 Glossary

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| context | specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made |
| EHCR | Essex Heritage Conservation Record, Essex County Council |
| feature | an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts' |
| NGR | National Grid Reference |
| natural | geological deposit undisturbed by human activity |
| medieval | the period from 1066 to c 1500 |
| <i>opus signinum</i> | Roman mortar made using crushed tile |
| peg-tile | flat roof-tile in use from the medieval period to the present day |
| post-medieval | the period from c 1500 to c 1800 |
| Roman | the period from AD 43 to around AD 430 |

12 Archive deposition

The archive is held at Colchester Archaeological Trust, 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex, CO3 3NF, but it will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums, under accession code 2003.28.

13 Site context list

Table 2: lists of contexts.

| Context | Description | Context date |
|---------|---|-------------------------|
| L1 | Tarmac | modern |
| L2 | Sub-base for car park consisting of loose asphalt on top of rubbly concrete | modern |
| L3 | Topsoil consisting of grey brown sandy silt with occasional charcoal flecks, oyster, slate, modern pottery, occasional Roman pottery and Roman tile and abundant peg-tile | modern |
| L4 | Mid-brown silty sand with mortar flecks and occasional chunks of <i>opus signinum</i> . It contained frequent Roman tile and peg-tile | post-medieval or modern |
| L5 | Grey brown sandy silt with tile | post-medieval? |
| L6 | (no L6) | - |
| L7 | Spread of mortar containing peg-tile and Roman pottery and tile | post-medieval? |
| L8 | Spread of mortar containing tile | post-medieval? |
| F1 | Straight-sided pit filled with modern brick rubble and yellow sand | modern |

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Distribution list:

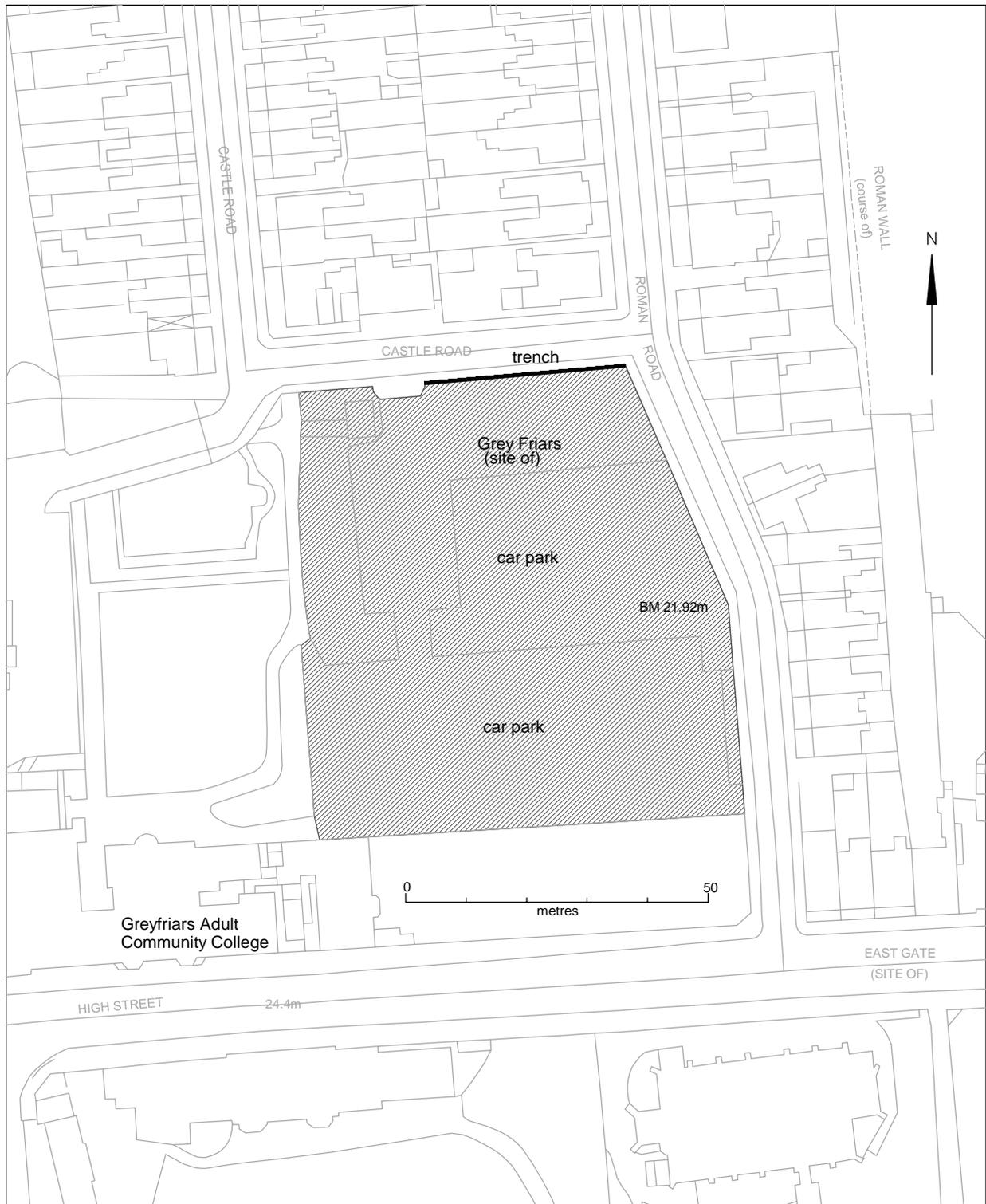
Essex Heritage Conservation Record, Essex County Council
Mark Jackson, W S Atkins Consultants Ltd
Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council



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Checked by: *Howard Brooks*
Date: *01.02.03*



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Fig 1 Site location.

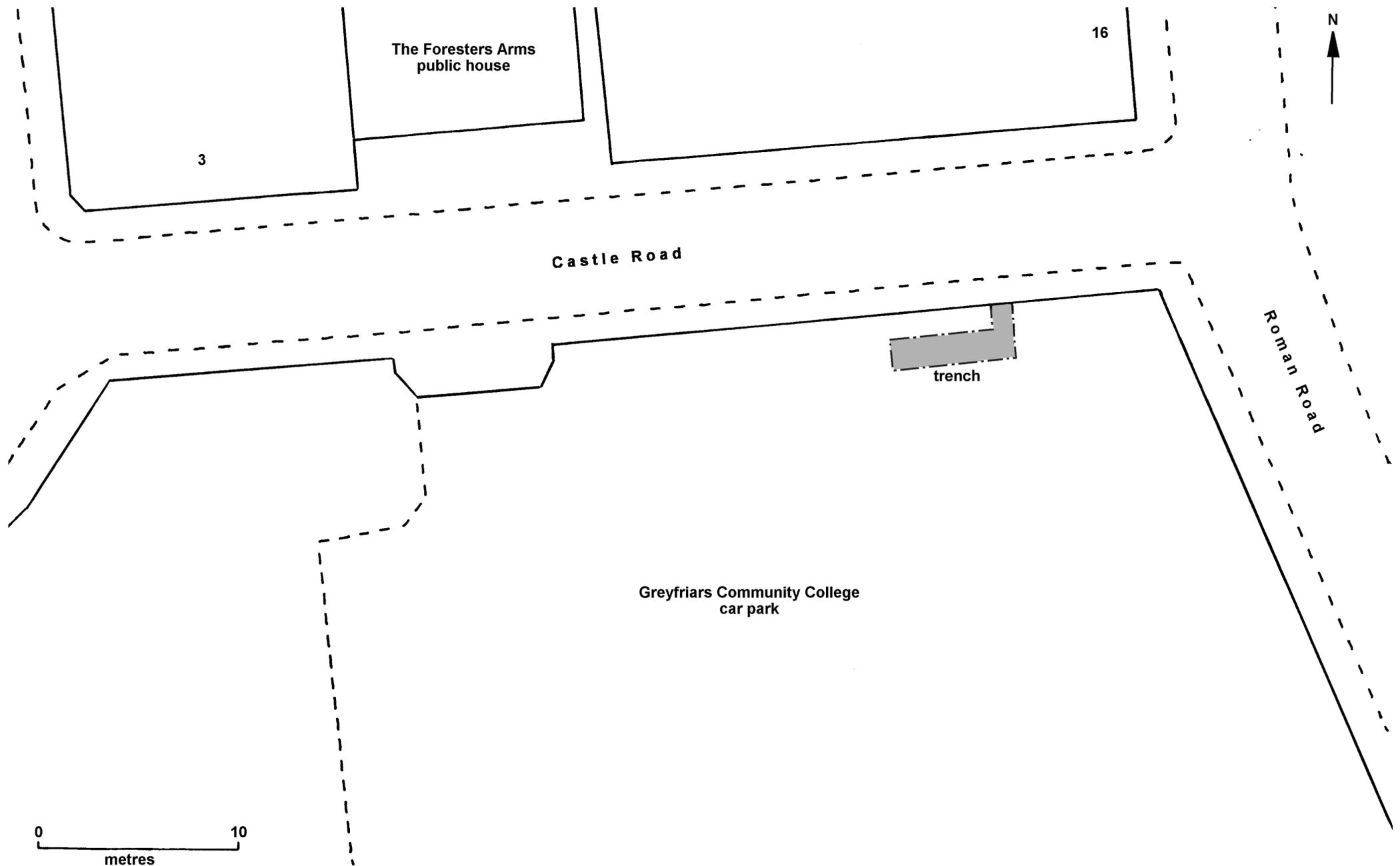


Fig 2 Location of trench.

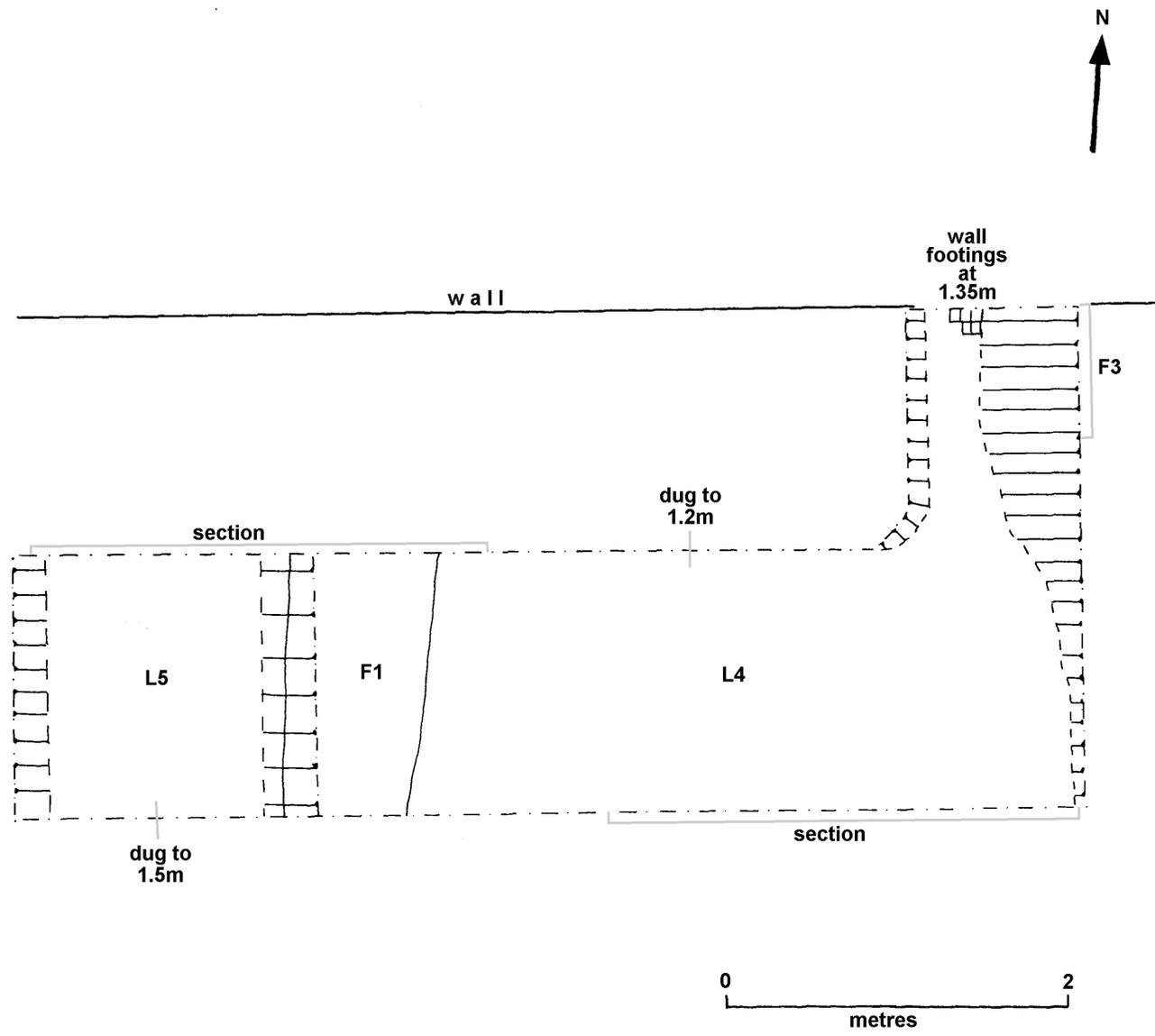


Fig 3 Plan of trench.

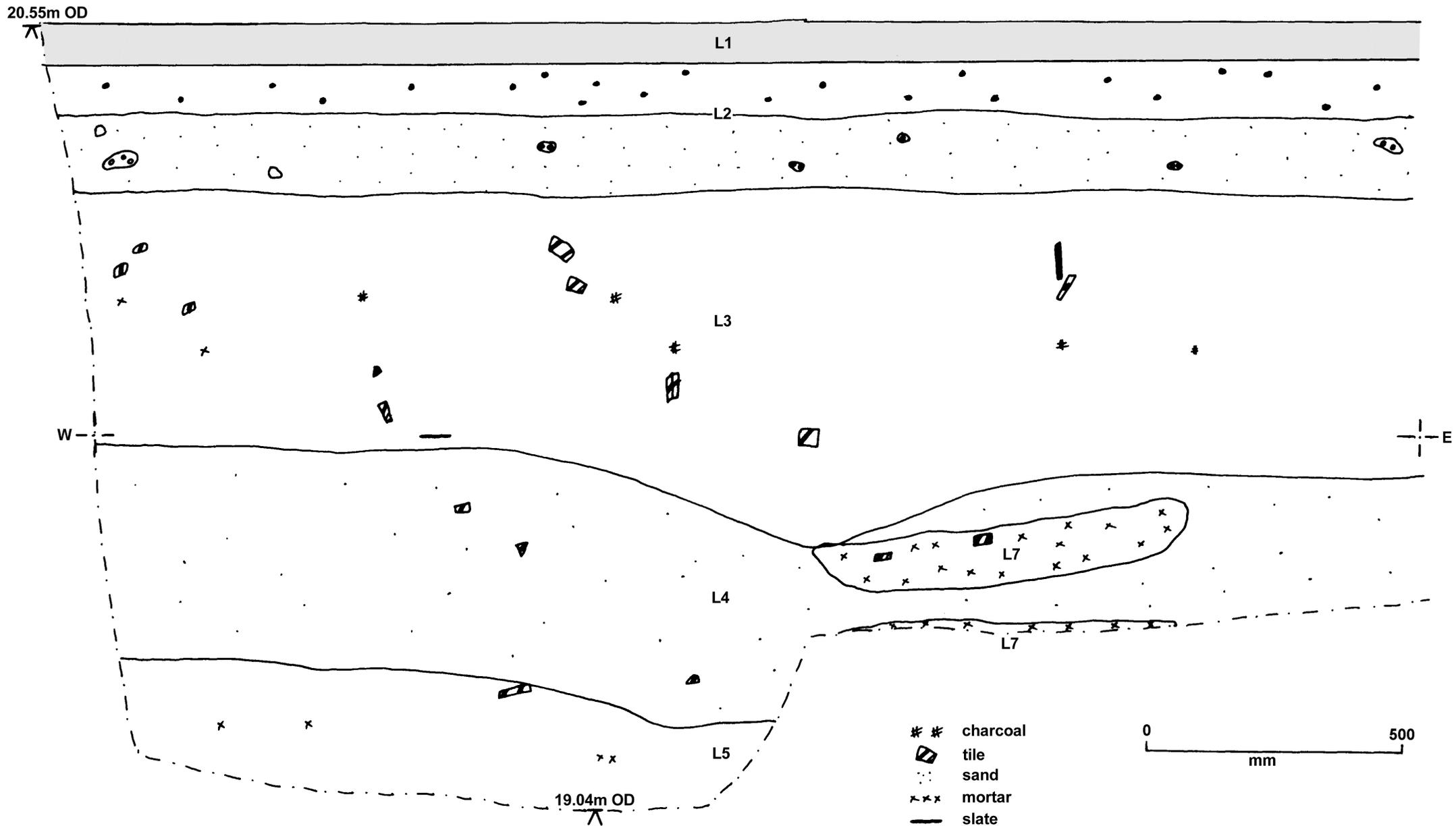
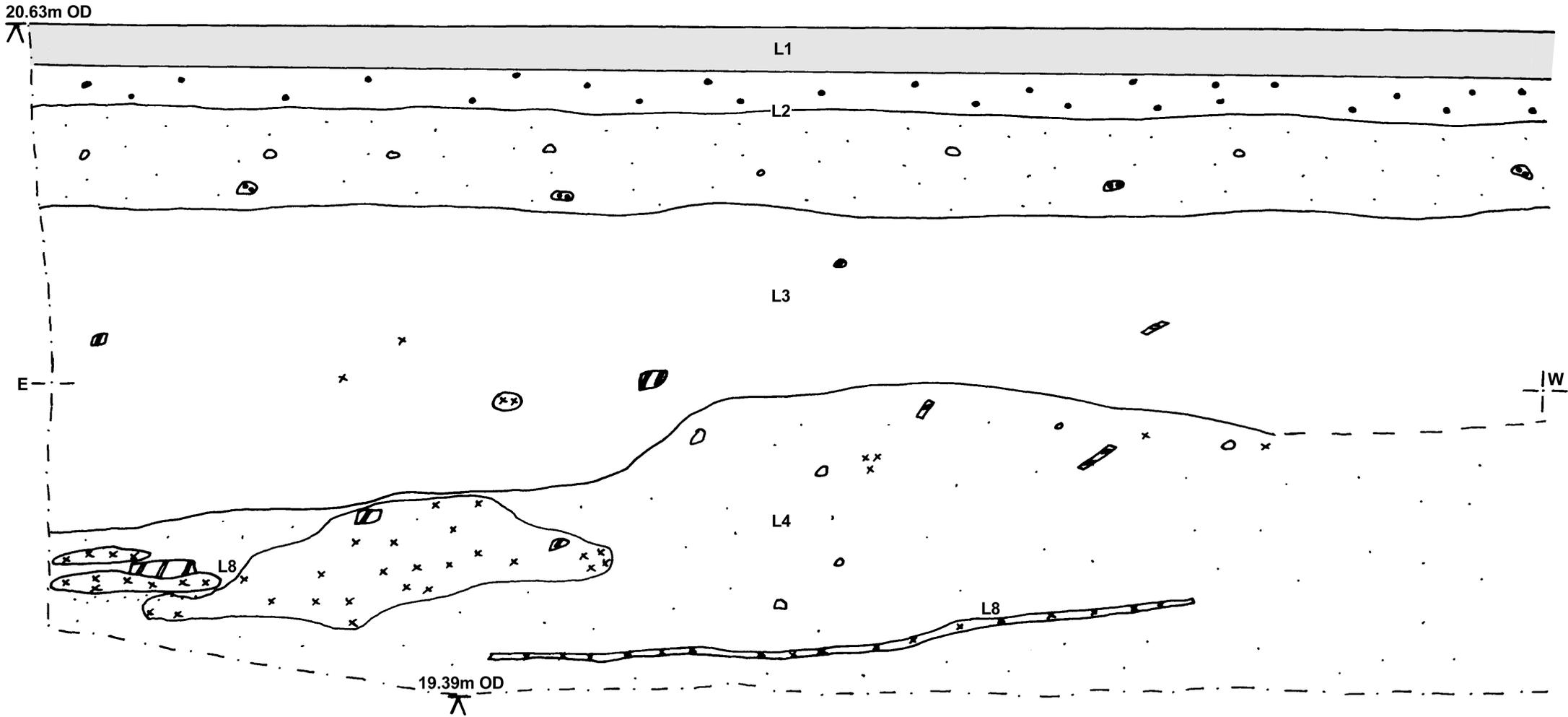


Fig 4 Trench: south-facing representative section.



-  tile
-  sand
-  mortar
-  concrete
-  stones
-  asphalt

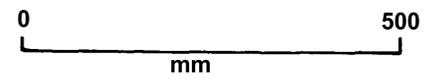


Fig 5 Trench: north-facing representative section.

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

Summary sheet

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|---|--|
| Site address: the car park of Greyfriars Community College, Castle Road, Colchester, Essex | |
| Parish: Colchester | District: Colchester |
| NGR: TM 0010 2535 | Site code: Museum accession code 2003.28 |
| Type of work: Evaluation | Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust |
| Date of work: January 2003 | Size of area investigated: 6.2m x 1.5m trench |
| Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums | Funding source: Essex County Council |
| Further seasons anticipated? Yes | Related EHCR nos: |
| Final report: CAT Report 219 and summary in <i>EAH</i> | |
| Periods represented: Modern and post-medieval | |
| <p>Summary of fieldwork results: An archaeological evaluation trench revealed a depth of modern topsoil and probable post-medieval or modern layers down to a depth of 1.5m. Natural ground was not reached and it is suspected that medieval and Roman deposits lie at a further depth than was reached during the investigation.</p> | |
| Previous summaries/reports: None | |
| Author of summary: Kate Orr | Date of summary: February 2003 |