

**An archaeological evaluation at the rear of  
Greyfriars Community College,  
High Street, Colchester, Essex  
October 2004**

**report prepared by  
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**commissioned by  
Atkins Asset Management  
on behalf of  
Essex County Council**

CAT project ref.: 04/10a  
NGR: TM 00051 25273  
Colchester Museums accession code: 2004.354



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**CAT Report 290**  
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EHCR summary sheet

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## 1 Summary

*The site lies at the eastern end of Colchester's High Street, within a relatively unexplored region of the Roman and medieval walled town. During a small-scale archaeological evaluation on the proposed site of foundations for a lift, part of a Roman tessellated pavement was recorded at a depth of 1.1m. Post-Roman levels in the area had been extensively disturbed by modern service-trenches.*

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological evaluation at the rear of Greyfriars Community College, High Street, Colchester, Essex.
- 2.2 The site is located close to the town centre at National Grid Reference TM 00051 25273.
- 2.3 The investigation was prompted by a proposal to install an external lift in a yard on the northern side of the building (location, Fig 1). The small yard is enclosed to the east by part of the 18th-century building and to the south and west by matching early 20th-century extensions.
- 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, updated 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (2003), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological evaluation* (1999).

## 3 Archaeological background

- 3.1 The site lies within the north-east corner of the walled town, close to Roman Colchester's main street. The temple of Claudius stood 200m to the west and the east gate lay 140m to the east. This is a relatively unexplored area and little is currently known of the nature of early occupation and the development of the *insulae* (street blocks) in this part of the Roman town.
- 3.2 The site takes its name from the friary which was established by 1237 and dissolved in 1538 (Urban Archaeological Database or UAD no 13136). At the time of the dissolution, 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 Friars Street or 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* 9, 306-7). Human skeletons found at Greyfriars are believed to derive from medieval graves (UAD no 3833).
- 3.3 The only fieldwork at Greyfriars in recent years was undertaken during the replacement of a car-park boundary wall situated 80m to the north of the present site. Here a preliminary trial-trench of limited depth and a subsequent watching brief on the works produced no archaeologically significant features (CAT Reports 219 and 264).

## 4 Aims

The aims of the fieldwork were to establish the depth and nature of any archaeologically sensitive features or deposits that may be affected by the proposed foundation work.

## 5 Methods

- 5.1 A cable-avoidance tool was used to scan the area to locate electrical cables prior to placing the trenches.
- 5.2 Two 600mm-wide trenches were laid out; one (Trench 1) adjoining the west wall, and the other (Trench 2) next to the east wall of the existing building (Fig 2).
- 5.3 Following removal of the asphalt surfacing, the trenches were progressively excavated by machine.
- 5.4 Individual records of layers and features were entered on CAT pro-forma recording sheets.
- 5.5 Plans and section drawings of the trenches were made at a scale of 1:10.
- 5.6 Finds were registered on CAT record sheets and assigned find numbers according to context. Finds were washed, marked and bagged according to context.
- 5.7 Colour photographs of features were taken with a digital camera.

## 6 Results (trench plans Fig 3 and sections Fig 4)

### 6.1 Trench 1

This trench, situated next to the west wall of the existing building, was excavated to a depth of up to 1.1m, then augered to reach an overall depth of 1.7m.

- 6.1.1 The uppermost 30cm consisted of 10cm of asphalt yard surfacing (Layer or L1) which sealed 20cm of modern make-up (L6) and a 0.5m-wide concrete strip (Feature or F1) bordering the standing wall at the western end of the trench. Excavation below 30cm depth was limited to a 25cm-wide strip on the northern side of the trench due to the presence of a lead water- or gas-pipe (F4) which extended the length of the trench. Removal of the make-up (L6) revealed the top of F2, a substantial roughly-built brick feature of late post-medieval or early modern date which was cut by the trench for the lead pipe (F4). To the west of F2, and probably of similar date, was a trench housing an unglazed red earthenware drainpipe (F3). The pipe lay at a depth of 80cm, above a 10cm-thick layer composed mainly of dark yellowish brown sandy loam with small mortar, tile and brick inclusions (L7). Within the narrow limits of excavation, it was not possible to determine whether the small area of L7 exposed at this depth was limited to the bottom of the drain-trench, or alternatively was part of a more extensive deposit unrelated to the drain. Excavation below L7 revealed a very dark greyish brown sandy loam (L2) which was devoid of dating evidence. This material extended down to the practical limit of machine excavation which was reached at 1.1m. An auger probe from 1.1m to 1.7m overall depth produced a series of samples containing soils similar to L2.
- 6.1.2 Before backfilling, the trench was extended to west and east to assist in groundwork planning for the new lift. At the western end, the extension exposed the brick footing of the existing early 20th-century building. At the eastern end, a 25cm-wide extension established the heavy brick feature (F2) to be 50cm thick.

### 6.2 Trench 2

This trench, situated next to the east wall of the existing building, was excavated to a depth of up to 1.18m, then augered to reach an overall depth of 1.8m.

- 6.2.1 Removal of the 10cm-thick asphalt yard surface (L1) exposed modern make-up (L8) and a 0.5m-wide concrete border strip (F6) adjoining the standing wall at the eastern end of the trench. The make-up (L8) sealed a localised patch of weak mortar (L4) which lay on a thick deposit of dark yellowish brown silt loam with small brick and mortar inclusions (L3) that extended to a depth of 70cm. Beneath this, in the south side of the trench, was the outer part of a brick-lined well or soakaway (F5). The well/soakaway was cut through a dark yellowish brown sandy clay loam (L5), a post-Roman material which sealed a Roman tessellated pavement partly stripped of *tesserae* (F7). The eastern edge of the floor (F7) was cut by a linear feature, possibly a robber trench (F9). Excavation ceased with the uncovering of the Roman floor at an overall depth of 1.1m. An auger probe into the fill of F9 reached an overall depth of 1.8m with no apparent soil change.

## 7 Finds

Table 1: list of finds by context.

Find no	Context	Description	Date	Weight (kg)
1	F3	brick fragment	Roman	1.9
1	F3	brick fragment	prob Roman	3
1	F3	brick fragment, 110 x 50mm, length unknown	late medieval/early post-medieval	1.1
2	F5	bricksample, 210 x 105 x 65mm	c 18th/19th century	2.8
3	L3	peg-tile fragment	prob post-medieval	0.066
3	L3	Portland cement-based concrete, red-brick chip aggregate	19th/20th century	1
4	F7	<i>tesserae</i>	Roman	3.5
5	L5	pottery: grey ware rim (Fabric GX)	Roman	0.005
5	L5	soft red brick fragment	prob post-Roman	0.18

## 8 Discussion

The tessellated floor (F7) found at a depth of 1.1m in Trench 2 is likely to have belonged to a building which would have had a prominent frontage location on the main east-west street of the Roman town. No equivalent structural evidence was found at a similar level in Trench 1. Instead, the dark sandy loam (L2) present at this depth appears, from auger results, to extend to at least 1.7m in depth. Although the date and purpose of this deposit could not be established with certainty, it may represent the fill of a post-Roman pit which would have removed the earlier remains in this part of the trench. Augering did not encounter natural subsoil at either of the two sample points, which extended to depths of 1.7m in Trench 1 and 1.8m in Trench 2. Since the auger locations were dictated largely by practical considerations, it is possible that the results were not indicative of general subsoil levels over a wider area. As noted above, the Trench 1 sample may be pit fill and the Trench 2 sample is perhaps robber-trench backfill. If so, both may be the fills of features cut into natural levels.

The medieval period appears to be poorly represented in these trenches. Only the possible robber trench (F9), pit fill (L2) and the thick deposit above the partly-stripped floor (L5) may belong to this phase, although these might on more extensive investigation prove to be more complex than is currently apparent.

The division between the post-medieval to modern and the earlier levels probably lies at a depth of 70cm. This was better illustrated in Trench 2, where it is represented by the interface between L3 and the underlying L5. Post-medieval to modern activity in the uppermost 70cm of the trenches is clearly associated with the existing range of 18th-/20th-century street frontage buildings and includes amenities and services (F2, F3, F5) which have had an intrusive effect on earlier levels.

## 9 Acknowledgements

The investigation was commissioned by Atkins Asset Management on behalf of Essex County Council. The Trust would particularly like to thank Neil Gilbranch and Colin Henderson of Atkins and Alan Allman of Greyfriars Community College for their assistance in the course of the work.

The site operations were supervised and recorded by Nigel Rayner of CAT. The project was monitored by Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council.

## 10 References

- CAT Report 219 An archaeological evaluation at the car-park of Greyfriars Community College, Castle Road, Colchester, Essex, unpublished CAT archive report, by Kate Orr, 2003
- CAT Report 264 An archaeological watching brief at Greyfriars Adult Community College car-park, Colchester, Essex, unpublished CAT archive report, by Kate Orr, 2003
- VCH 1984 *The Victoria History of the County of Essex*, 9, 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
- modern the period from c 1800 to the present
- post-medieval The period from c 1500 to c 1800
- Roman the period from AD 43 to around AD 430
- UAD Urban Archaeological Database, a compilation of archaeological data on England's historic towns; the Colchester database is maintained by Colchester Museums

## 12 Archive deposition

The site records and finds are currently held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF. These will be deposited permanently with Colchester Museums, under cover of museum accession code 2004.354.



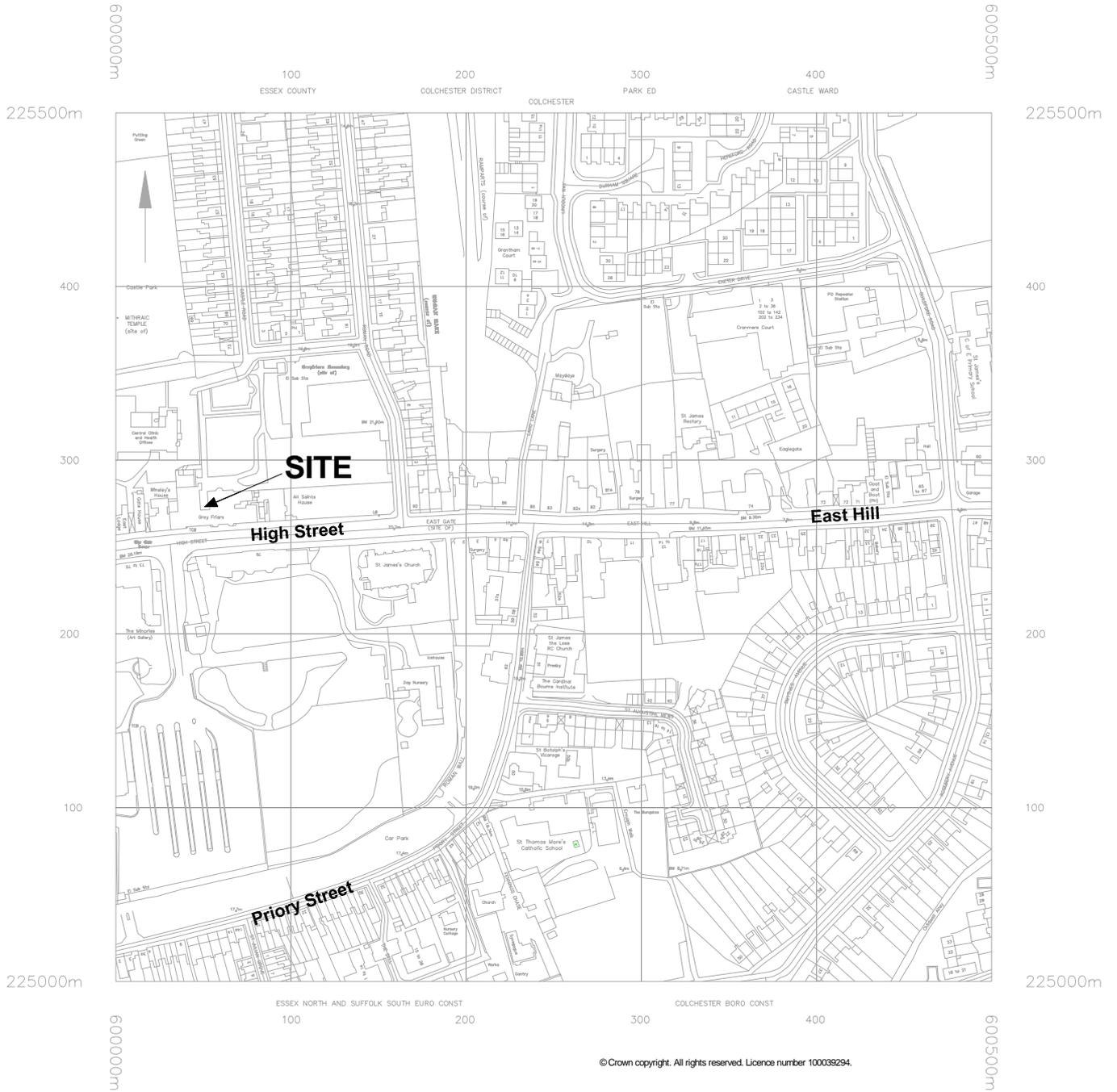


Fig 1 Site location plan.

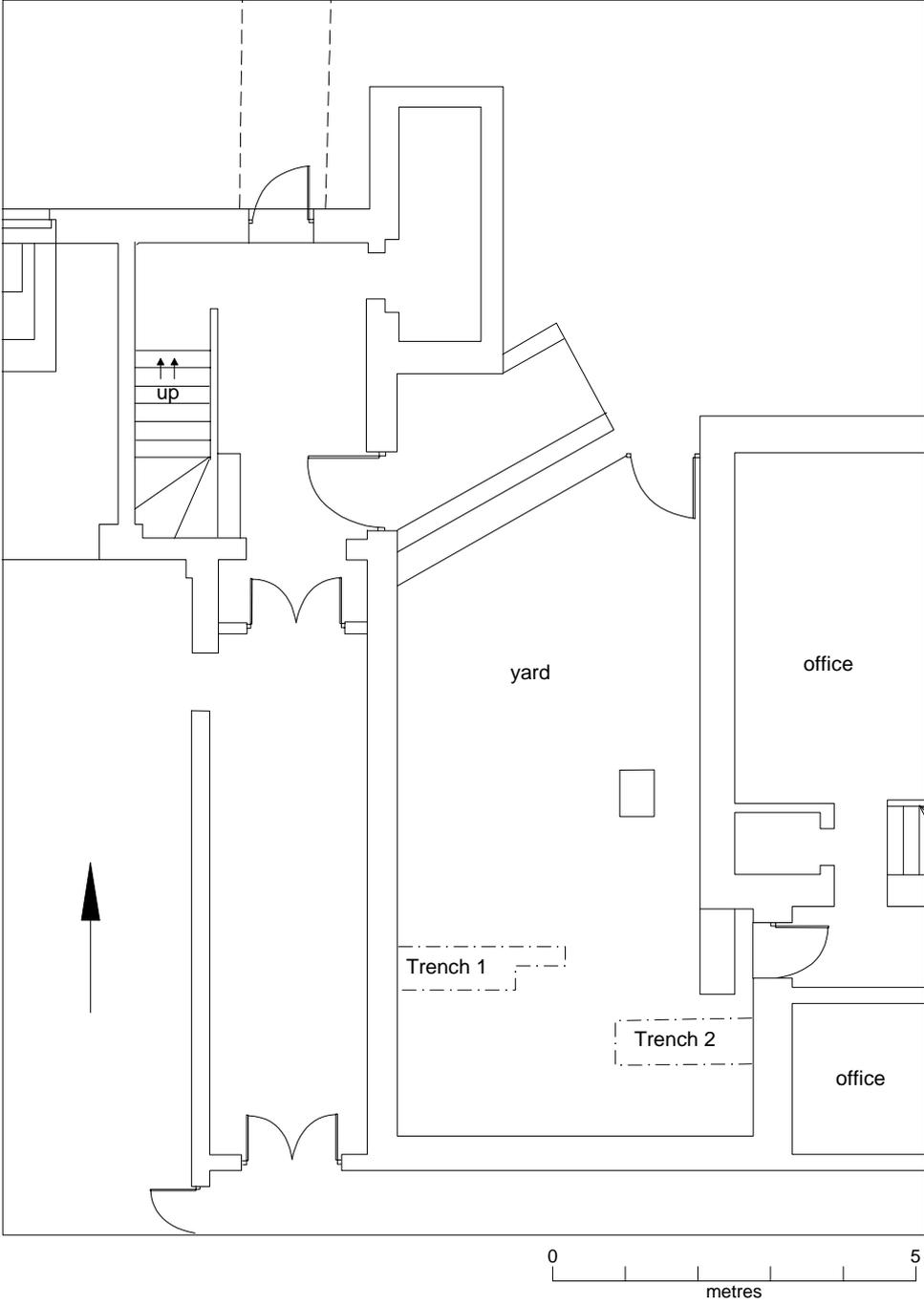


Fig 2 Trench location plan.

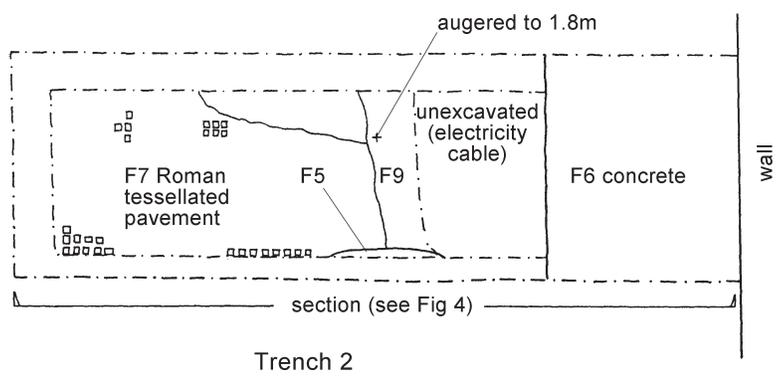
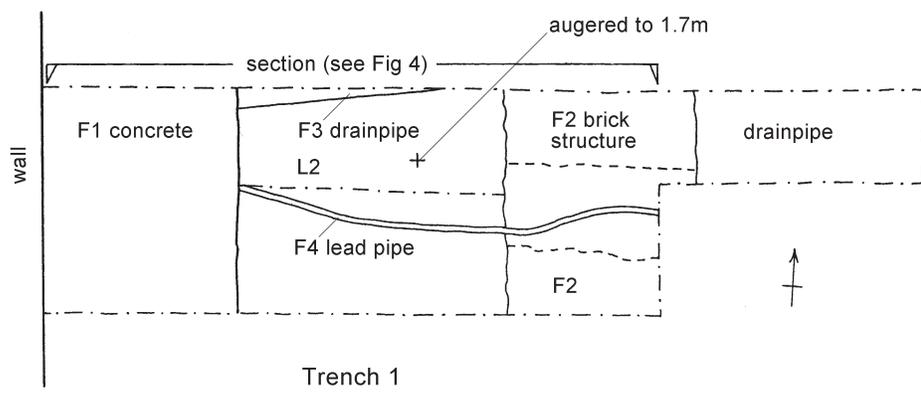


Fig 3 Trench plans.

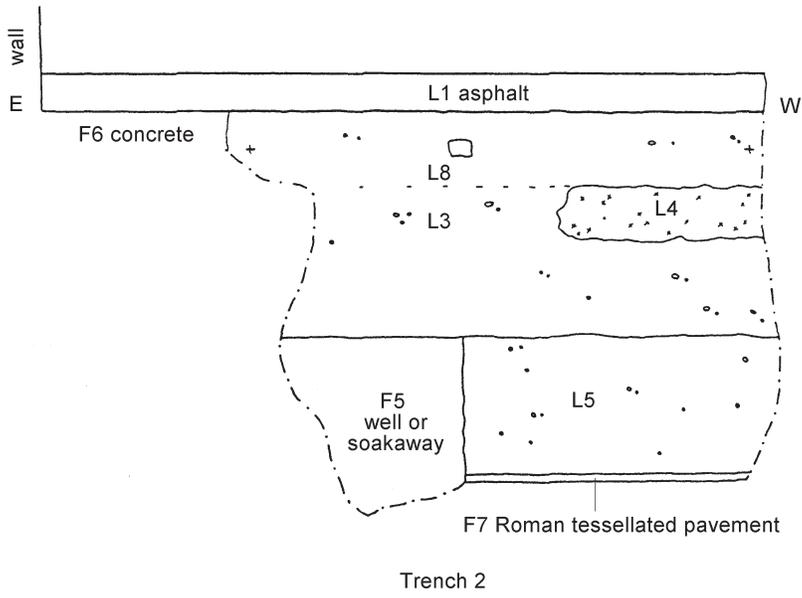
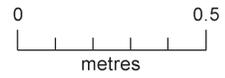
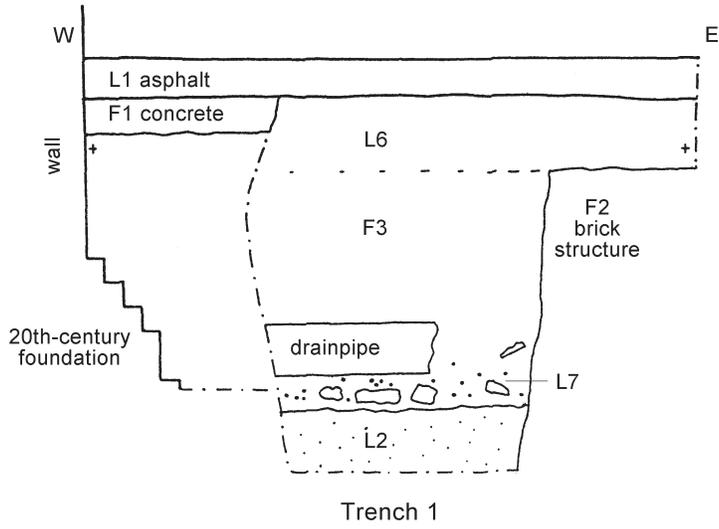


Fig 4 Trench sections

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

**Summary sheet**

<b>Site address:</b> rear of Greyfriars Community College, High Street, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester
<b>NGR:</b> TM 00051 25273	<b>Site code:</b> Museum accession code 2004.354
<b>Type of work:</b> Evaluation	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> October 2004	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 2.0 square metres
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Essex County Council
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> Yes	<b>Related EHCR nos:</b> (UAD nos 3833, 13136)
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 290 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods represented:</b> Roman, post-medieval, modern	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b>  <i>The site lies at the eastern end of Colchester's High Street within a relatively unexplored region of the Roman and medieval walled town. During a small-scale archaeological evaluation on the proposed site of foundations for a lift, part of a Roman tessellated pavement was recorded at a depth of 1.1m. Post-Roman levels in the area had been extensively disturbed by modern service-trenches.</i></p>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> None	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Carl Crossan	<b>Date of summary:</b> November 2004