

An archaeological evaluation at 15 Rawstorn Road, Colchester, Essex October 2004

**report prepared by
Kate Orr**

**on behalf of
Mr and Mrs Harris**

CAT project ref.: 04/10b
Colchester Museums accession code: 2004.356
NGR: TL 99070 25139 (centre)



Colchester Archaeological Trust
12 Lexden Road,
Colchester,
Essex CO3 3NF

tel.: (01206) 541051
tel./fax: (01206) 500124
email: archaeologists@catuk.org

CAT Report 291
October 2004

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1 Summary

One evaluation trench was excavated at 15 Rawstorn Road, Colchester, Essex. No features of archaeological significance were recorded. Modern disturbance was encountered down to 550mm below ground-level, the ground having been deliberately made up before being used as a builders' yard. Agricultural soil which had accumulated over many centuries was encountered below this level. This soil extended to at least 1.5m depth and may seal Roman features which survive beyond the limit of the excavation.

2 Introduction (Figs 1-2)

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological evaluation carried out on behalf of Mr and Mrs Harris at 15 Rawstorn Road, Colchester, Essex. The applicants have submitted a planning application for a residential development (planning application no F/COL/04/1376) involving the demolition of the existing property and the construction of a pair of semi-detached houses. The site is located on the western side of Colchester town centre, on the eastern side of Rawstorn Road, and centred on National Grid Reference TL 99070 25139.
- 2.2 The work was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on the 12th October 2004.
- 2.3 Currently the re-development site consists of one detached property with a rear garden and side vehicular access leading to a detached garage. The site has a depth of 43m and a frontage of 12.3m. The site is on level ground at 31m above Ordnance Datum (AOD). On the north side, the land slopes downwards to the north.
- 2.4 All fieldwork was done in accordance with a specification agreed with the Archaeology Officer of Colchester Borough Council. This report mirrors standards and practices contained in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines for the standards and practice of archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1999) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996, updated 2003), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological evaluation* (1999).

3 Archaeological background (Fig 1)

- 3.1 The redevelopment site is situated outside the Roman walled town which lies 170m to the east. No archaeological remains have been recorded within the site boundary. However, the site is surrounded by important archaeological remains, principally of Roman date. These remains are dominated by the major road a short distance to the south which led from the walled town to London (Hull 1958, 2-3).
- 3.2 Extra-mural Roman occupation, considered to be an extension of the Roman town (*CAR 3*, fig 8), is known to extend up to 300m west of the town wall. Part of this settlement close to the town wall has been excavated (the Balkerne Lane site; *CAR 3*). Here buildings and property plots fronting the major Roman road leading out from the Balkerne Gate were recorded. Further Roman buildings and activities including horticulture and sand quarrying were recorded on areas away from the road frontage.
- 3.3 To the north of the Balkerne Lane site, an archaeological excavation was carried out by CAT between 2001 and 2003 on the site of the former St Mary's hospital (now a Barratts housing development). Extensive evidence for Roman suburban activity was recorded, including houses and streets, and later inhumation burials (CAT report forthcoming). Roman burials were also recorded at 'Topfield' in 2001, adjacent to the hospital site (CAT Report 134).
- 3.4 Earlier recorded finds from the area of St Mary's hospital include a small group of Roman burials, mostly inhumations with a few cremations in lead urns; these Roman burials are referred to as 'the Union Cemetery' (Hull 1958; *CAR 6*, 261-2). There have also been a number of individual finds of objects, mostly of Roman date, but which include a few prehistoric artefacts amongst which are a Mesolithic flint axe (Essex Heritage Conservation Record or EHCR 12372) and fragments of a Late Bronze Age bucket urn (EHCR 12367).

4 Aim

The evaluation was designed to locate, identify and assess the quality and extent of surviving archaeological remains prior to a decision being taken on the preservation or otherwise of deposits and the need for further work and/or mitigation. Particular attention was paid to the possibility that Roman burials or settlement remains survive on the site.

5 Methods

- 5.1 The trench was dug by Mr Harris using a mechanical mini-digger with a toothless ditching bucket. The trench was 900mm wide at its narrowest point and 9.6m long. The trench was dug to a depth of 1m except the western end which was dug deeper, to 1.5m.
- 5.2 Potential archaeological deposits which were exposed were cleaned by hand. Individual records of layers were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets.
- 5.3 A section drawing of part of one side of the trench was made at a scale of 1:10. A plan of the trench was made at 1:50.
- 5.4 Finds were registered on CAT record sheets and assigned find numbers according to context. Finds were washed, marked and bagged according to context.
- 5.5 Colour photographs of the trench were taken with a digital camera and a 35mm transparency camera.

6 Results (Figs 2-3)

The following soil profile was recorded along the entire length of the trench. The layers (Layer or L1-L4) were very regular and clearly defined:

- L1 – tarmac and sandy sub-base, 100-120mm thick.
- L2 – underlying L1 was 250mm of very mixed, loose, mid brown sandy silt containing modern bricks, modern glass bottles, peg-tile, slate, mortar and modern pottery. This is likely to be debris dumped when the plot was in use as a builders' yard.
- L3 – beneath L2 was a 250mm-300mm thick band of orangey brown sand with common small and medium rounded stones. This layer did not contain many finds apart from a few sherds of Roman pottery at the eastern end of the trench and a very small quantity of modern china at the interface with L4. This layer is interpreted as being a made-up layer, perhaps deposited to level out the slope before the site was used as a builders' yard. Alternatively it could be backfill to a large sand-pit.
- L4 – once L3 had been machined off, a dark brown slightly sandy loam was exposed. L4 started at 550mm below ground-level and continued beyond the limit of excavation (1.5m in the western end of the trench). The layer contained a few fragments of modern china, mainly near the interface with L3, and some modern glass down to 1m below ground-level. The glass was the same bottle glass found in L2 and may have been wrongly assigned to this layer. From approximately 1.2m below ground-level, occasional fragments of Roman brick and tile plus oyster shell were observed in the soil. The dark sandy loam was homogeneous and it would appear to have accumulated over several centuries. It is likely to be an agricultural soil sometimes referred to as 'dark earth'.

7 Finds

The Roman pottery was identified by S Benfield; fabrics are as given in *CAR 10*. The post-Roman pottery was identified by H Brooks (see appendix.)

Table 1: finds list.

Finds no	Context	Description	Date	Weight (in g)
1	L3	5 sherds of grey ware pottery (Fabric GX, coarse locally-made wares) - 4 pieces are from the same pot, recently broken	Roman	46
2	L2	pottery	modern	224
2	L2	ceramic bottle	modern	(not kept)
2	L2	broken glass bottles	modern	314 (not all was kept)
2	L2	Fe lump	undated	5
2	L2	slate	post-medieval	12
3	bottom of L4	brick and tile	Roman	875 (not all was kept)
3	bottom of L4	one piece of animal bone	undated	13
3	bottom of L4	small fragment of painted wall-plaster	Roman	3
3	bottom of L4	one oyster shell	undated	90
4	L4?	glass	modern	4

8 Discussion

- 8.1** The evaluation trench was dug through modern tarmac and a layer of builders' rubble. The deeds of no 15, which was built in the 1930s, state that Boydens used the site as a builders' yard while they were constructing houses on the surrounding land. Underlying this layer was a uniform layer of sand which appeared to have been deliberately deposited, perhaps to level out the slope before the site was used as a builders' yard, or to backfill a large sand-pit. If there was a large sand quarry pit here, it could account for the subsidence at no 15 and the other houses on Rawstorn Road to the north of it.
- 8.2** The dark loamy layer at the base of the trench (L4) was at first interpreted as being another dumped or backfilled layer due to the occasional modern glass and china within it. Below 1m depth, however, it contained only Roman material. The most reasonable interpretation for L4 is that it is an agricultural soil that had accumulated over the centuries. A 'dark earth' which overlies Roman features is frequently encountered in Colchester. The date of the formation of 'dark earth' in Colchester is problematic. Some evidence suggests that it formed after the 12th century (*CAR 3*, 92). However, at the St Mary's hospital excavations, to the north of the site, there was evidence that it was formed in the later Roman period after settlement had been moved back inside the town walls. The 'dark earth' on the redevelopment site is likely to seal Roman settlement remains but at a depth of more than 1.5m below ground-level. The Roman pottery found residually in L3 supports this.
- 8.3** The ground was not as disturbed as was expected. The 'dark earth' suggests that archaeological (specifically Roman) remains may survive in this area but beyond the limit of the excavation.

9 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but it will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2004.356.

10 Acknowledgements

The CAT is grateful to Mr and Mrs Harris for commissioning and funding the work. The fieldwork was carried out by Kate Orr.

11 References

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|----------------------------|------|--|
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| CAR 6 | 1992 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 6, Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School, and miscellaneous sites in Colchester, 1971-85</i> , by Philip Crummy |
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12 Glossary

Bronze Age	the period from c 2500 BC-c 700 BC
context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
extra-mural	outside the wall
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
inhumation	an unburnt burial, ie normally a skeleton in a grave
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
Iron Age	the period following the Bronze Age to AD 43
Mesolithic	the period from c 8000 BC-4000 BC
modern	period from the 19th century onwards to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
post-medieval	the period from c AD 1500 to around c AD 1900
prehistoric	the period before written records, ie until AD 43
Roman	the period between AD 43 and c AD 410

Distribution list:

Mr and Mrs Harris

Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council
Essex Heritage Conservation Record, Essex County Council



Colchester Archaeological Trust
12 Lexden Road,
Colchester,
Essex CO3 3NF

tel.: (01206) 541051
tel./fax: (01206) 500124
email: archaeologists@catuk.org

Checked by: Philip Crummy
Date: 25.10.04

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Appendix: the glass and post-Roman pottery

by Howard Brooks

Introduction

This is the report on 224g of post-Roman pottery and 318g of glass from 15 Rawstorn Road, Colchester, Essex. The material will be deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2004.356.

Pottery

Fabrics present are as follows (after Cunningham 1985 and *CAR 7*): Fabrics 45m (modern stoneware); 48d (modern ironstone); and 51a (late slipped kitchen ware). Pottery weights are listed in the table below.

Table: weight of pot fabric types per bag and context.

Find bag	Context	Fabrics			Find bag date
		45m	48d	51a	
02	L2	73g	39g	112g	19th-20th century

Glass

Find bag 2, L2

Four fragments of a green glass beer bottle. 314 grammes. Victorian.

Find bag 4, L4

One fragment of a green glass beer bottle. Very similar to fragments from bag 2. 4 grammes. Victorian.

Discussion

This is a very small group of recent material. There is nothing in the pottery collection that need be older than the 19th or 20th century. Earlier fabrics commonly found in Colchester post-Roman pottery assemblages are (principally post-medieval red earthenwares (Fabric 40); German stonewares (Fabric 45) and Colchester-type ware (Fabric 21a) are entirely absent. The other finds (glass, slate) are similarly post-medieval, with the glass almost certainly 19th century.

No further work is recommended.



Fig 1 Site location, showing projected line of Roman road.

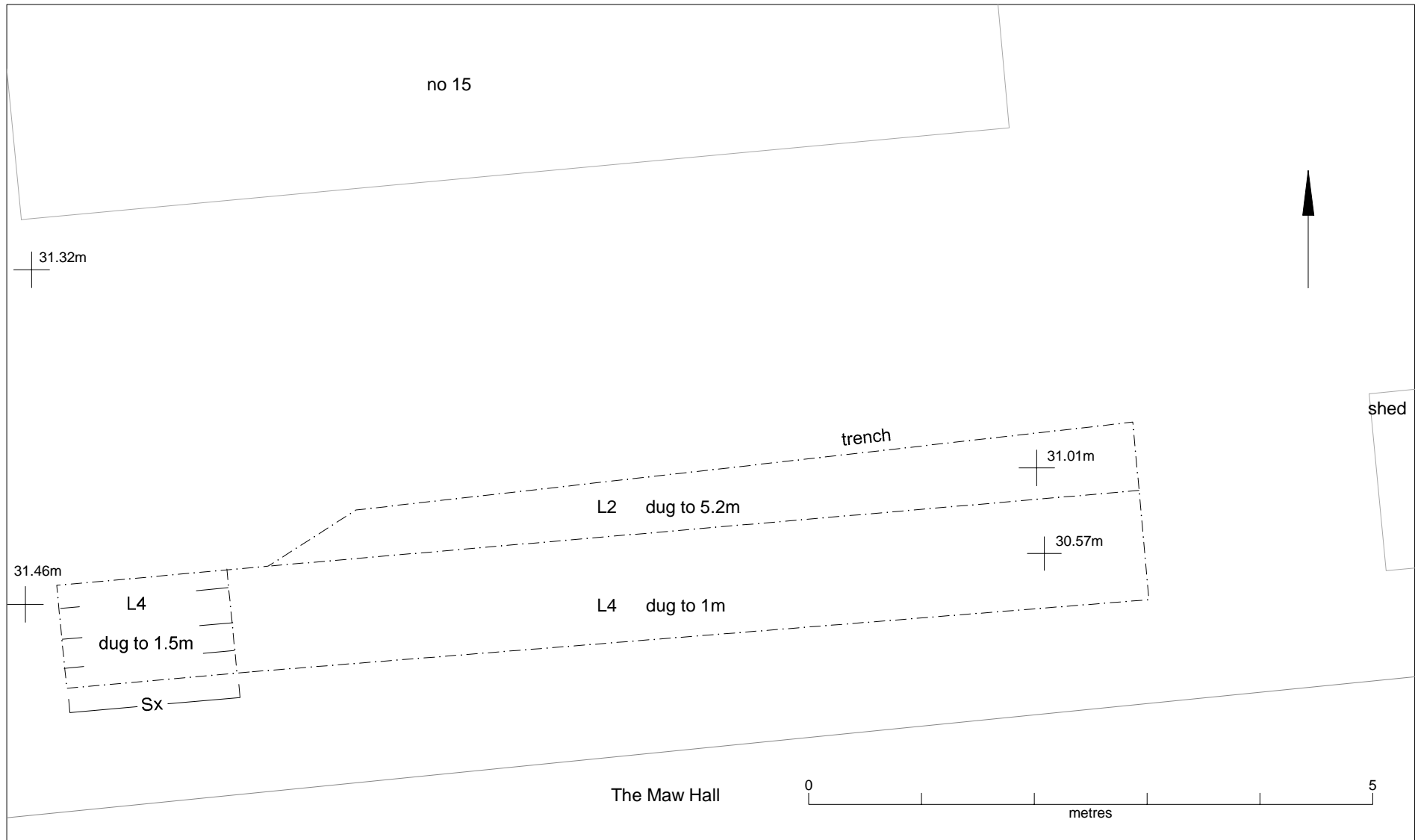


Fig 2 Plan of trench.

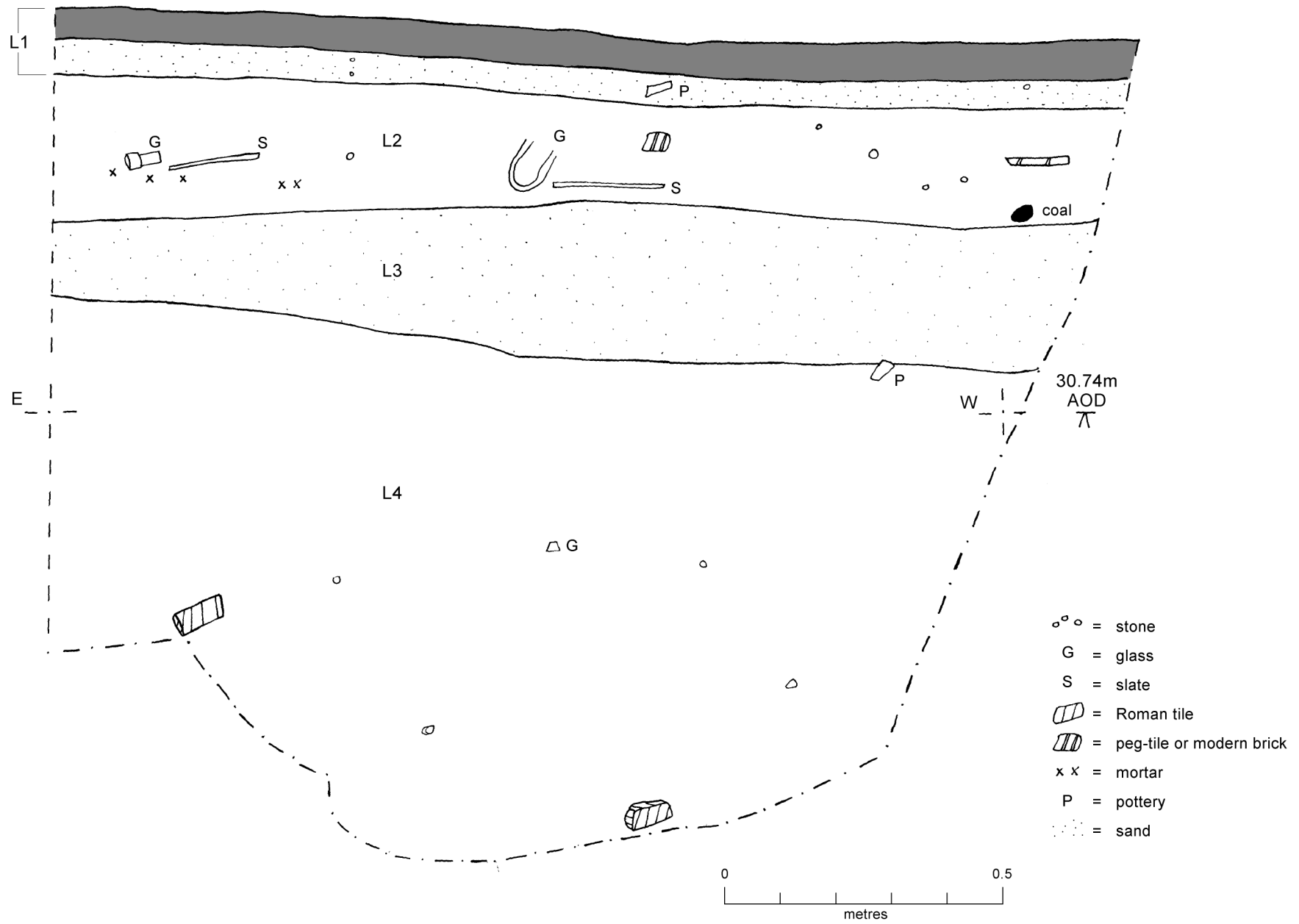


Fig 3 North-facing section drawing of the western edge of the trench.

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

Summary sheet

Site address: 15 Rawstorn Road, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TM 99070 25139 (centre)	Site code: Museum accession 2004.356
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: October 2004	Size of area investigated: 43m x 12.3m area
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: developer
Further seasons anticipated? uncertain	Related EHCR nos: 12372 and 12367
Final report: CAT Report 291 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: post-Roman and modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>One evaluation trench was excavated at 15 Rawstorn Road. No features of archaeological significance were recorded. Modern disturbance was encountered down to 550mm below ground-level, the ground having been deliberately made up before being used as a builders' yard. Agricultural soil which had accumulated over many centuries was encountered below this level. This soil extended to at least 1.5m depth and may seal Roman features which survive beyond the limit of the excavation.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: October 2004