

**An archaeological investigation  
of the Roman town wall at  
Roman Road, Colchester, Essex  
October 2004 and February 2006**

**survey and report prepared by  
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**on behalf of  
Colchester Museums**



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## 1 Summary

*Colchester Archaeological Trust undertook detailed survey (drawn and photographic) of the upstanding parts of the north-eastern section of Colchester's Roman town wall, combined with the excavation of two trial-holes at the exterior of the wall to the east of Roman Road. The work was commissioned by Colchester Museums in order to prepare a conservation strategy for the wall, which is a scheduled ancient monument.*

*The trial-holes confirmed that survival of the foundations varies. Where they have not been robbed away, the foundations extend 2.1m from the existing face of the wall and are in a sound state of preservation.*

*Above ground, the survival of the wall is very patchy. Up to 2.4m width of wall has been lost and nothing of the original exterior facing of the wall survives, only the core. The majority of what is standing has been refaced in brick or stone or completely rebuilt in brick.*

## 2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 2.1 This is the report on detailed archaeological drawing of the upstanding north-eastern section of Colchester's Roman town wall, combined with the excavation of two trial-holes at the exterior of the wall to the east of Roman Road (National Grid Reference or NGR TM 00177 25385 (c)).
- 2.2 The walls are a scheduled ancient monument (Essex SAM no 7). The section of extant Roman wall under investigation runs on a north to south alignment through grassy open space which was formerly botanical gardens. It forms the rear boundary of properties on Roman Road.
- 2.3 The work was commissioned by Colchester Museums and carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT). The recording of the upstanding sections of the wall was carried out in October 2004. The two trial-holes were excavated between the 20th and the 24th February 2006. Work was carried out according to a brief written by the Archaeological Officer at Colchester Museums.
- 2.4 The work has been carried out in accordance with Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines for the standards and practice of archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (CM 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (CM 2003), and the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IFA 1999) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IFA 2001). Other sources used are *Management of archaeological projects*, second edition (MAP 2), and *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1* (EAA 3), *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2* (EAA 8), and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14).

## 3 Archaeological background (Figs 1-2)

- 3.1 The investigation site is situated immediately outside the Roman town wall on its eastern side. The wall was constructed around the town in the later 1st century AD following the revolt led by Boudica. It is constructed of a core of layered septaria and mortar faced with coursed septaria and tile. A recent study has concluded that the wall has an average width of 2.67m (including offsets) which is equivalent to precisely nine Roman feet (*pedes Monetales*). A hypothetical cross-section of the wall shows the foundations as being 3.77m wide (Crummy 2003). Some previous work shows that the wall foundations were surprisingly shallow at 600mm deep (Hull 1958, 25-6). Work by CAT at the Sixth Form College in 2005 shows the stone foundations to be 1.2m deep with wooden piles below (CAT report in prep), although, being water-logged, ground conditions here presumably explain their exceptional depth.
- 3.2 A section was cut across the wall from 27 Roman Road in 1925. The original interior face of the wall was preserved below the garden. The width of the surviving wall was

1.7m wide (Hull 1958, 42-3). If the wall was originally a standard width of 2.67m, this means that 1m of the exterior face has been lost. The depth of the wall foundations was not established during this investigation.

- 3.3 The eastern side of the Roman wall survives only partially and has been robbed and weathered away and subject to use as a garden wall for some of its length. Where sections of original wall are still extant, it does not survive to its full width above ground; the outer face and much of the core is missing.
- 3.4 During the siege of Colchester, a major outwork was added on to the north-eastern corner of the wall, probably by the Royalists (*VCH 9*, 249). It is shown as housing two cannons on the 1648 siege map of Colchester.

## 4 Aim

The aim of the detailed drawing of the eastern side of the wall was to record this section and in particular to establish which elements are original and which have been refaced or completely rebuilt in later periods. The aim of excavating the trial-holes was to establish the original width of the wall, the preservation of the foundations and their depth. This information will be used to prepare a scheduled monument application for repairs to the wall.

## 5 Methodology (Figs 3-4, 5-11)

- 5.1 A detailed drawing of the east face of the wall was prepared showing the stone and brickwork in the outer face of the wall on the north-eastern side, to the east of Roman Road. 236m of the wall was plotted using a total station, onto which was mapped a digital photographic record of the wall. The wall was divided into a number of sections according to the various phases of repairs. Some parts of the wall, mainly in the southern section, were obscured by vegetation and were therefore not possible to draw.
- 5.2 Two 2m-long and 1m-wide trenches were hand-dug by CAT at the base of the wall to the east of Roman Road.
- 5.3 Individual records of layers and features were entered on CAT pro-forma record sheets. All exposed subsoil features, archaeological deposits or negative features were manually cleaned, planned using a total station, and examined in sufficient detail to allow their nature, date and importance to be assessed. Section drawings of features and layers were made at a scale of 1:20.
- 5.4 Standard 'record' shots of contexts were taken with a digital camera.
- 5.5 A metal detector was used to scan spoil heaps.

## 6 Results

### 6.1 Trench 1 (Figs 2-3)

This trench was located at the southern end of the area, 800mm from the exterior face of the wall. There was a build-up of topsoil against the wall, presumably where material had been thrown from houses on Roman Road. This topsoil (Layer or L1) contained septaria, Roman brick and tile and modern building material. It sealed a 200mm-300mm deep dump of loamy soil containing modern material (L2). This modern material sealed the foundations to the wall (F1), and it would appear therefore that there had been recent digging around the foundations. The foundations consisted of irregular septaria blocks bonded with lime mortar. The top of the foundations had been robbed away leaving a footing which sloped towards the east at an approximately 45-degree angle and extended 2.1m from the existing face of the wall. The foundations were observed to be 1.15m deep. Natural ground was not reached in this trench even though a slot was dug to 1.75m depth. This again attests to modern digging up against the foundations to quite a depth.

## 6.2 Trench 2 (Figs 2 and 4)

The second trench was positioned to the north of Trench 1, 700mm away from the exterior face of the wall. The wall foundations were not encountered, necessitating a narrow slot to be dug on the western side of the trench to take it right up the wall face. This slot confirmed that the wall foundations do not survive here but have been robbed out. A robber trench (F3) running parallel to the wall was recorded cutting into redeposited natural ground (L6). This robber trench consisted of dark grey brown silt with mortar and a high stone content including some septaria. The presence of post-medieval brick and tile give a fairly late date for this robbing. The robber trench was sealed by a series of post-medieval to modern layers indicating recent digging and dumping in this area.

A brick wall foundation was revealed at right angles to the Roman wall. This may be connected to the area's use as botanical gardens and may correspond to a building showing on the 1st edition OS map (1876).

The only other feature within the trench was a narrow curving gully (F2) which was cut into redeposited natural (L6). The gully went underneath the brick foundations and may have carried water from or to the building.

## 6.3 The elevation of the standing remains of the wall (Figs 2 and 5-11)

The drawing of the wall face has shown that the majority of the wall in this area has been refaced in brick or stone. In some areas, brick buttresses have been added. In other areas, sections of the wall appear to have been completely rebuilt or re-faced in brick. The brickwork is 19th and 20th century and it is assumed that the stone facing or 'sheathing' belongs to the 1930s (although further research is needed to clarify the date). In some areas, the wall only survives to 500mm above ground-level. At its highest it is 4.6m in height. Nothing of the original exterior face of the wall survives; in fact, most of the width of the wall has been lost. Where the original fabric of the wall core is exposed, it consists of septaria rubble with brick courses.



Plate 2 Foundations of wall in Trench 1, looking west.

Section no	Drawing Sheet no.	At the back property no:	Material	Date of the repairs	Remarks
1	1	10-11 Roman Rd.	Septaria blocks Red-brick	modern (second half of the 20th century)	The thickest part of the Roman wall in the studied elevation - the wall's core. The lowest part of this section is obscured by earth. A modern wall is butt at the southern end of this section.
2	1	11 Roman Rd.	Septaria blocks (9 courses) Septaria blocks (4 courses), Roman bricks (2 x 4 courses)	Late 19th century (?)	The rear of the inner face of the Roman wall in the lower part. Probably late 19th-century date sympathetic repair of the upper part of the wall. The lowest part of this section is obscured by earth.
3	1	12 Roman Rd.	Roman bricks, PM bricks, septaria blocks, modern red-brick	Post-medieval (?) Second half of the 19th century	The rear of the inner face of the Roman wall (obscured partly by earth). The Roman remains are covered in the southern part of the section with probably post-medieval repairs. (However its 19th century date cannot be excluded). In the upper-north part there is a probably 20th century red-brick repair on the wall. Section 3 ends with a 19th-century red-brick wall (running E-W), which divides properties nos 12 and 13. Between the 19th-century wall and the post-medieval (?) repairs, there is a feature that looks like a buttress or a part of gate. It is made of 4 x 2 courses of septaria with a course of Roman tile between them, and 4 Roman bricks in the corners. A Roman date for this feature cannot be excluded, but considering that no gate or buttress is expected to be in this part of the wall, the feature may be considered as a 'Romanised' (repair) sympathetic reconstruction of probably second half of the 19th century.
4	1	13 Roman Rd	Septaria blocks, Roman bricks	No repairs	A ca 3m wide gap in the visible remains of the wall, after which the wall emerges as a mostly loose heap of septaria blocks and bricks. The wall's lower part is obscured by earth.
5	1 2	14, 15, 17, 19, 21, and 23 Roman Rd.	Septaria blocks, Roman bricks Post-medieval peg-tiles and post-medieval brick	Post-medieval (?) /19th century	The longest surviving part of the Roman wall in the studied elevation. The rear of the inner face visible (only at the back of nos 15 and 17 Roman Rd is the wall thicker, the elevation consisting here also of the Roman wall core); mostly 2 x 4 courses of brick with 1 x 4 courses of septaria in between them (except a part at the southern back side of the 15 Roman Rd property, where one more group of septaria and brick courses are preserved). At the back of nos 21 and 23 Roman Rd (Landsdone Villas House), the lower part of the wall elevation is covered with probably post-medieval facing (repair?), consisting of septaria, peg-tile and the occasional brick. However 19th-century date for this repair cannot be excluded.
6	2 3	25 Roman Rd.	Septaria and occasional brick in dense polygonal bond, Red-bricks and stone	Second half of 19th century (1860s?) and early 20 <sup>th</sup> century (1930s?)	Modern repair of the wall. It completely obscures the remains of Roman wall. The <i>terminus ante quem</i> for this repair is the early 1950s. <i>Terminus post quem</i> is the turn of the 19th century. The most plausible date seems to be the 1930s. At the back of no 25 is a Victorian date (1860s) wall with the early 20th century (1930s) facing on its lower part.
7	3	27 Roman Rd.	Septaria and occasional brick in dense polygonal	Second half of the 19 <sup>th</sup> century (1860s?)	Very similar to Section 6 - a modern facing/repair (of the 1930s) on a 19th

			pattern Red-bricks Red-bricks and stone	and early 20th century (1930s?)	century brick and stone wall (of probably 1860s date). In the central part of the section is a brick semicircular feature, which may mark the position of a Roman culvert.
<b>8</b>	3	29 Roman Rd.	Red brick and septaria blocks	Modern 19 <sup>th</sup> /20 <sup>th</sup> century	Of red-brick construction - a plain wall in the upper part, with segments of the core of the Roman wall visible in the lower part. It seems that the lower part of Section 8 marks the height of the Roman wall remains. The Roman wall is visible only in 4 segments - 'windows'. A further 5 'windows' are filled with a very peculiar and random pattern, presumably an artistic impression of the Roman wall.
<b>9</b>	3	31 Roman Rd.	Red-bricks, bricks and septaria	Modern 19 <sup>th</sup> /20 <sup>th</sup> century and early 20th century (1930?)	Brickwork, probably contemporaneous with the brick segment in Section 8. South from it there is modern facing - of 1930s date - which probably follows the height of the preserved Roman wall as it slopes down.
<b>10</b>	4	33 and 35 Roman Rd.	Concrete on remains of Roman wall	Modern - 20th century (?)	Remains of Roman wall repaired with a concrete
<b>11</b>	4	37 and 39 Roman Rd.	Septaria and other stone, occasional bricks	Modern - 1930s (?) and 19th century (?)	Septaria blocks in polygonal pattern with occasional post-medieval and Victorian bricks. At the bottom, a brickwork of probably 19th century date.
<b>12</b>	4	41 and 43 Roman Rd.	Red bricks	Modern - 19th century (?)	Red brick facing with buttresses. Probably late Victorian date.
<b>13</b>	5	45 and 47 Roman Rd.	Red brick with septaria	Modern (1930?)	Facing/repair made of alternating sets of septaria (2 x 6 and 1 x 3 courses) and modern brick (3 x 2 courses). A part of Roman wall (core?) visible in the damages part of the facing. 1930s date is the most probable.
<b>14</b>	5	49, 51, 53, 55 Roman Rd.	Septaria and occasion other stone with occasional brick	Modern - early 20th century (1930s?)	Facing made of septaria and other stone with occasional post-medieval and Victorian brick - polygonal pattern. Its early 20th-century date (the 1930s) is the most plausible. Small fragments of Roman wall (core?) visible in two places
<b>15</b>	6 7	57 Roman Rd. and Society of Friends (Quakers) Burial Ground	Septaria and occasion other stone with occasional brick	Modern - early 20th century (1930s) and the 1990s	Facing made of septaria and other stone with occasional post-medieval and Victorian brick - polygonal pattern. Its early 20th-century date (the 1930s) is the most plausible. Fragments of Roman wall (core?) visible in northern part of the section. Recent (of the 1990s) repairs at the top of the section.

## 7 References

- |               |         |                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CAT Journal 1 |         | Journal of the Colchester Archaeological Trust, <b>1</b> (for the year 2001), ed by P Crummy                                                                                                 |
| CAT report    | in prep | <i>Excavation at the Sixth Form College – “Tunnel under the wall”</i> , by Mariusz Gorniak                                                                                                   |
| CM            | 2002    | <i>Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i>                                                                                       |
| CM            | 2003    | <i>Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums</i>                                                                                           |
| Crummy, P     | 2003    | 'Colchester's town wall', in <i>The archaeology of Roman towns: studies in honour of John S Wacher</i> , ed by P Wilson                                                                      |
| EAA 3         | 1997    | <i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, <b>3</b> , ed by J Glazebrook                    |
| EAA 8         | 2000    | <i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, <b>8</b> , ed by N Brown & J Glazebrook |
| EAA 14        | 2003    | <i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, <b>14</b> , ed by D Gurney                                                      |
| IFA           | 1999    | <i>Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation</i>                                                                                                                             |
| IFA           | 2001    | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i>                                                                        |
| Hull, M R     | 1958    | <i>Roman Colchester</i> , RRCSAL, <b>20</b>                                                                                                                                                  |
| MAP 2         | 1991    | <i>Management of archaeological projects</i> , 2nd edition (English Heritage)                                                                                                                |
| VCH 9         | 1994    | <i>Victoria County History of Essex</i> , <b>9</b> , The Borough of Colchester, ed by J Cooper                                                                                               |

## **8 Acknowledgements**

CAT is grateful to Colchester Museums for commissioning and funding the work. The project was supervised by Chris Lister with the assistance of Catriona Bell, Laurence Driver, Brian Hurrell, Nigel Rayner, Emma Sanford and Tom Woolhouse.

## **9 Archive deposition**

There were no finds. The paper and digital archive, including the digital photographic record, are currently held by CAT at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex, but both will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2006.25.

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**Distribution list:**

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**Appendix: concordance of property nos and Section nos.**

<b>Section nos</b>	<b>Property nos</b>
Section 1	no 10 & 11 Roman Road
Section 2	no 11 Roman Road
Section 3	no 12 Roman Road
Section 4	no 13 Roman Road
Section 5	no 14, 15, 17, 19, 21 & 23 Roman Road
Section 6	no 25 Roman Road
Section 7	no 27 Roman Road
Section 8	no 29 Roman Road
Section 9	no 31 Roman Road
Section 10	no 33 & 35 Roman Road
Section 11	no 37 & 39 Roman Road
Section 12	no 41 & 43 Roman Road
Section 13	no 45 & 47 Roman Road
Section 14	no 49, 51, 53 & 55 Roman Road
Section 15	no 57 Roman Road & Society of Friends (Quakers) Burial Ground

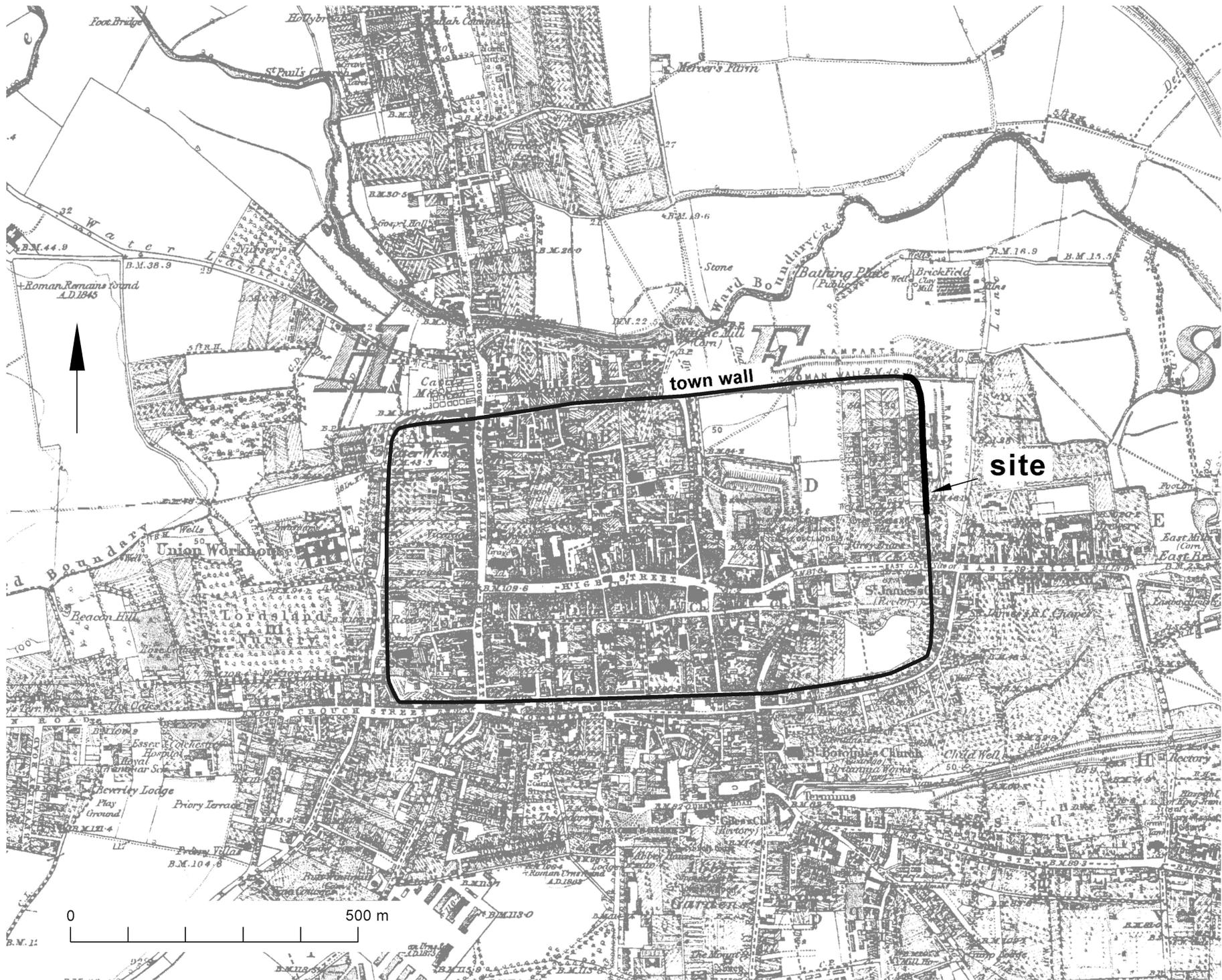


Fig 1 1st edition OS map (1876), showing site location.

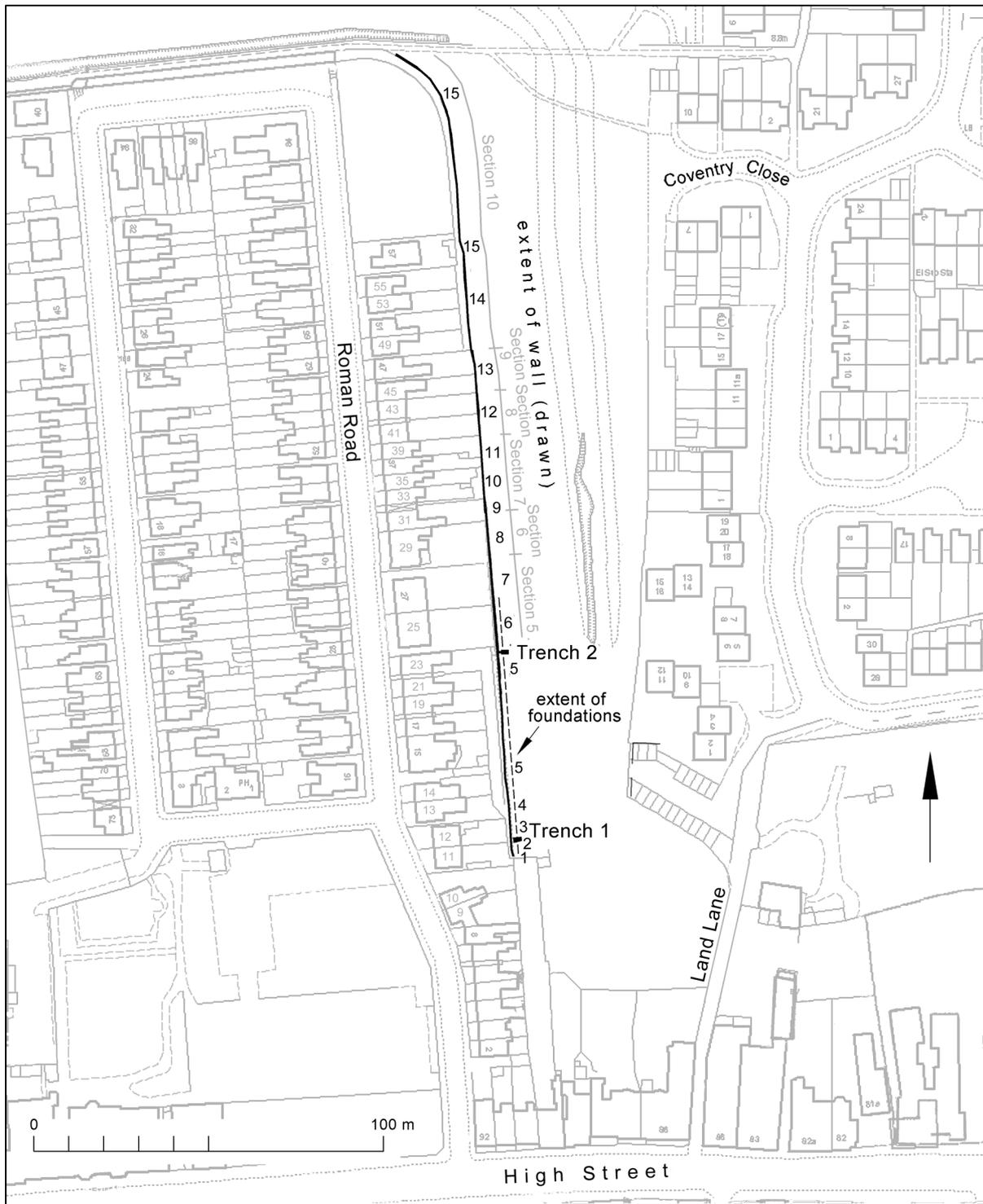


Fig 2 Location plan, showing the length of wall drawn in detail and the location of trenches.

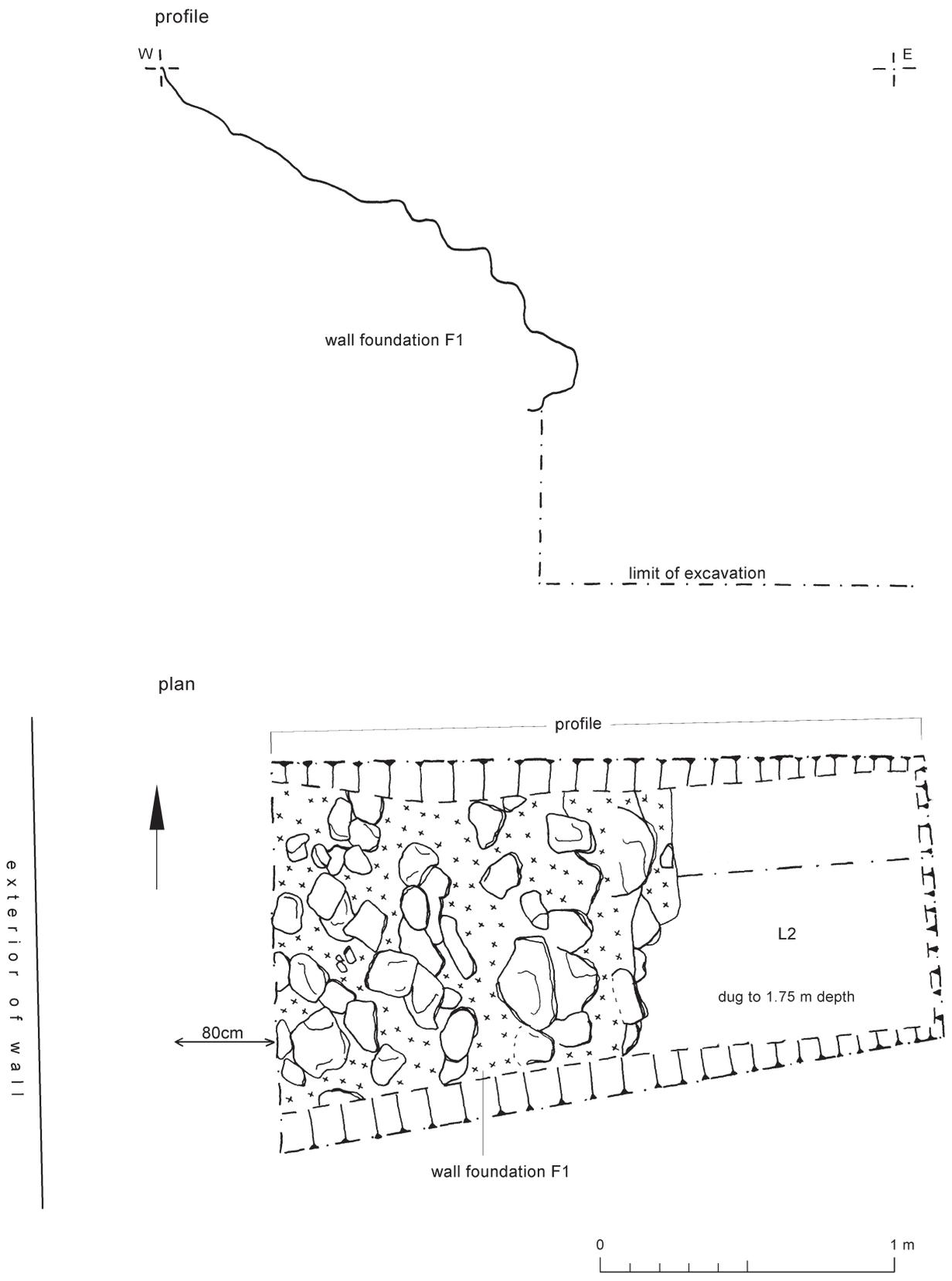
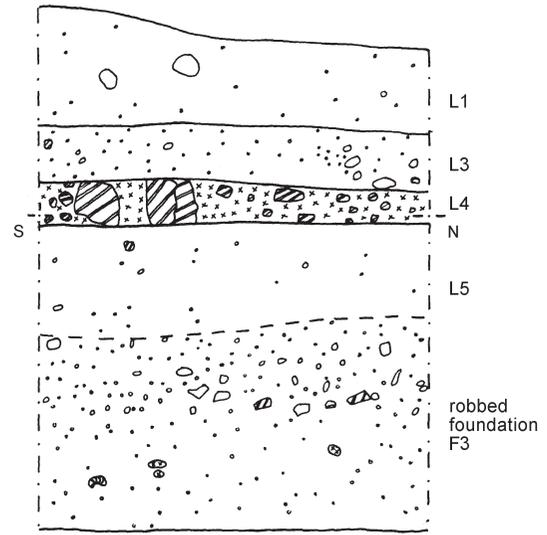


Fig 3 Trench 1: profile and plan.

section



plan

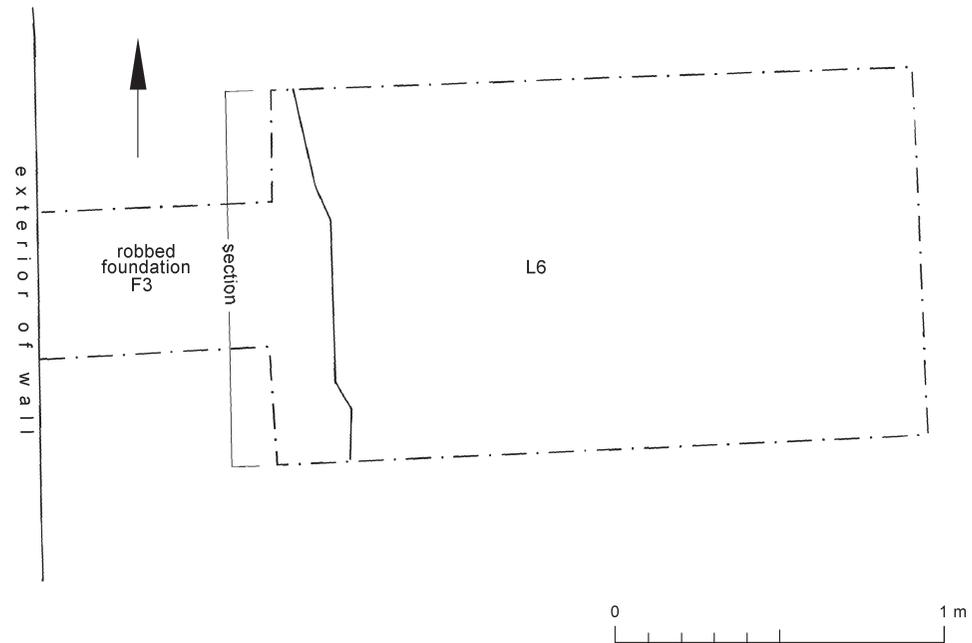


Fig 4 Trench 2: section and plan.

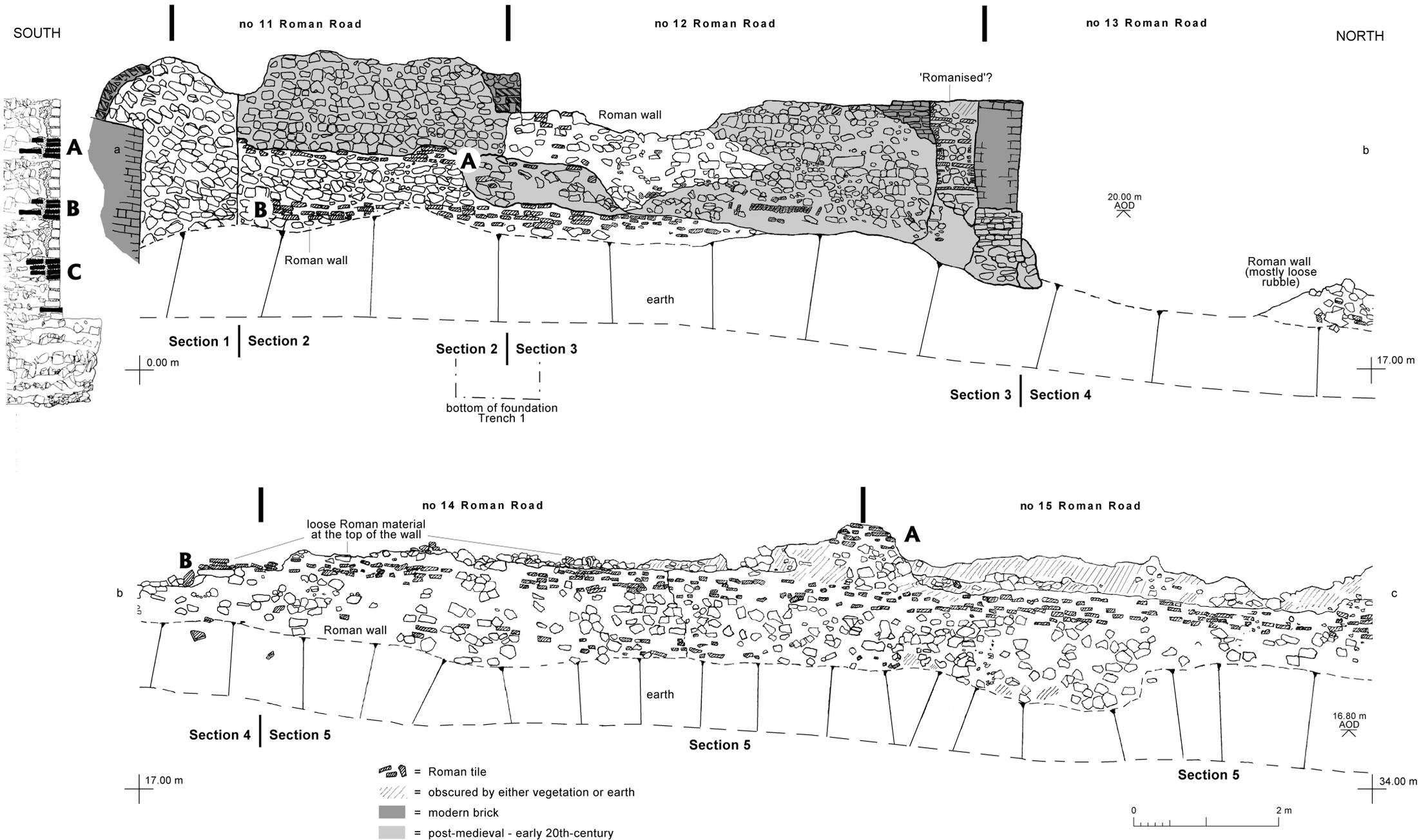
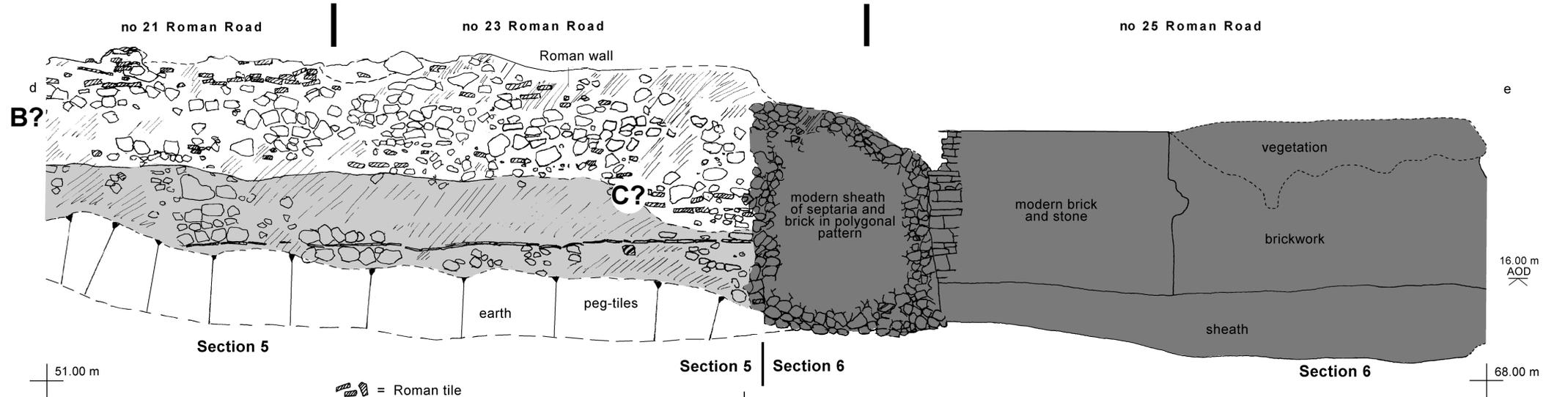
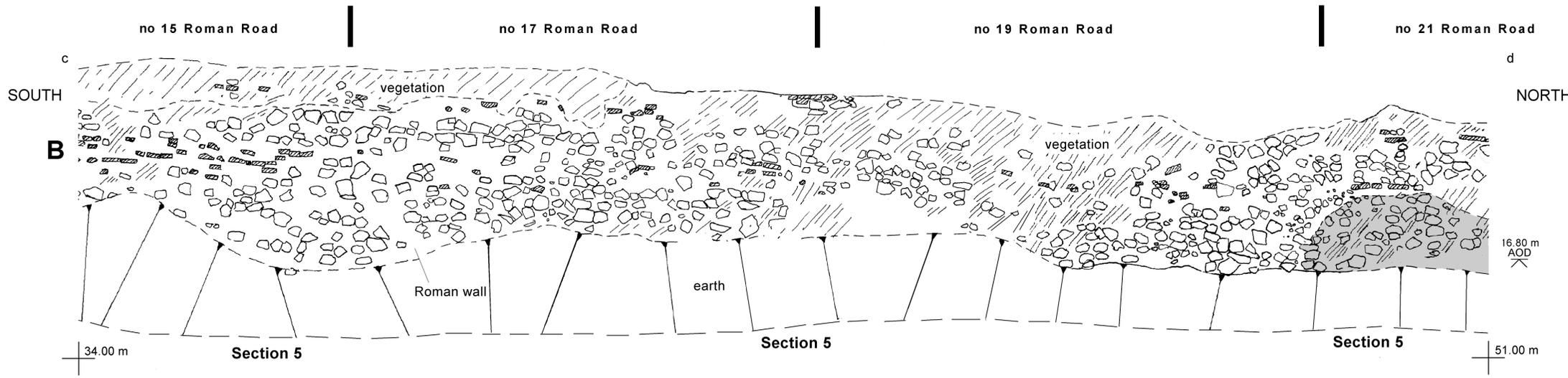


Fig 5 Wall elevation: sheet 1.



-  = Roman tile
-  = obscured by either vegetation or earth
-  = modern brick
-  = post-medieval - early 20th-century

bottom of robbed foundation  
Trench 2



Fig 6 Wall elevation: sheet 2.

SOUTH

no 25 Roman Road

no 27 Roman Road

NORTH

obscured  
by tree



Section 6 | Section 7

no 29 Roman Road

no 31 Roman Road

obscured  
by tree



Section 7 | Section 8

Roman wall

Roman wall

Section 8 | Section 9

Fig 7 Wall elevation: sheet 3.



SOUTH

NORTH

no 33 Roman Road

no 35 Roman Road

no 37 Roman Road

no 39 Roman Road



Section 9 | Section 10

Section 10 | Section 11

no 41 Roman Way

no 43 Roman Way

no 45 Roman Road



Section 11 | Section 12

Section 12 | Section 13



Fig 8 Wall elevation: sheet 4.

SOUTH

NORTH

no 45 Roman Road

no 47 Roman Road

no 49 Roman Road



Section 13

Section 13 | Section 14

no 51 Roman Road

no 53 Roman Road

no 55 Roman Road



Section 14

Roman wall (core)

Section 14



Fig 9 Wall elevation: sheet 5.

SOUTH

no 57 Roman Road

Society of Friends (Quakers) Burial Ground

NORTH



Section 14

Section 15

Section 15

Society of Friends (Quakers) Burial Ground

Society of Friends (Quakers) Burial Ground



Section 15

Roman wall

Roman wall



Section 15

Fig 10 Wall elevation: sheet 5.

SOUTH

Society of Friends (Quakers) Burial Ground



Section 15

Society of Friends (Quakers) Burial Ground



Section 15

NORTH

Society of Friends (Quakers) Burial Ground



Section 15

Society of Friends (Quakers) Burial Ground

Section 15



Fig 11 Wall elevation: sheet 7.

# Essex Historic Environment Record/ *Essex Archaeology and History*

## Summary sheet

<b>Site address:</b> the Roman town wall at Roman Road, Colchester, Essex	
<b>Parish:</b> Colchester	<b>District:</b> Colchester Borough
<b>NGR:</b> TM 00177 25385 (c)	<b>Site code:</b> Museum accession code 2006.25
<b>Type of work:</b> Evaluation and building recording	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust
<b>Date of work:</b> Building recording - October 2004 Evaluation trenches - February 2006	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 215m of upstanding wall plus 2 trenches measuring 2m x 1m each
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Colchester Borough Council
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related EHER nos:</b>
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Report 256 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
<b>Periods represented:</b> Roman	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust undertook detailed archaeological drawing of the upstanding north-eastern section of Colchester's Roman town wall, combined with the excavation of two trial-holes at the exterior of the wall to the east of Roman Road. The work was commissioned by Colchester Museums in advance of a programme of conservation of the wall, which is a scheduled ancient monument.</p> <p>The trial-holes confirmed that survival of the foundations varies. Where they have not been robbed away, the foundations extend up to 2.1m or so from the existing exterior face of the wall and are in a sound state of preservation.</p> <p>Above ground, the survival of the wall is very patchy. Up to 2.4m width of the wall has been lost and nothing of the original exterior facing of the wall survives, only the core. The majority of what is standing has been refaced in brick or stone or completely rebuilt in brick.</p>	
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b> Hull 1958, pp 25-6 and 42-3; CAT Journal 1, pp 4-9	
<b>Author of summary:</b> Kate Orr	<b>Date of summary:</b> April 2006