

**An archaeological evaluation
at 38-40 Crouch Street,
Colchester, Essex
September-October 2006**

**report prepared by
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**commissioned by
Bellway Homes**

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1 Summary

During an archaeological evaluation at the extra-mural site of 38-40 Crouch Street in Colchester, further evidence was found for the medieval house of Crouched Friars. This included a large stone-and-mortar foundation, 0.65 m below the modern ground-level. An early post-medieval foundation may have resulted from the conversion of some of the friary buildings into a private residence.

Surprisingly, there was no definite evidence for medieval burials, although a probable Roman inhumation was discovered at the rear of the site.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 2.1 The evaluation was commissioned by Bellway Homes in advance of a proposed mixed residential and commercial development on the site. It was undertaken by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) in late September and early October 2006.
- 2.2 This followed an earlier archaeological evaluation in July 2004 in the narrow car park on the western side of the site (CAT Report 277).
- 2.3 The site is located on the south side of Crouch Street, 130 m south-west of the Roman and medieval walled town, and covers an area of some 1,110 sq m. The evaluation took place within the existing building (formerly Cash Converters) on the central and eastern part of the site. This building was probably of earlier 20th-century date, and measured approximately 20 m east-west by 37 m north-south.
- 2.4 The floor of the existing building lies at approximately 28.25 m AOD. Although the surrounding area is situated on a gentle south-facing incline, the underlying levels on the site itself were found in the 2004 evaluation to slope slightly from south-west to north-east (*ibid*).
- 2.5 Descriptions of the excavation and recording methods used may be found in the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for the site produced by CAT in September 2006.
- 2.6 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* (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). The guidance contained in the documents *Management of archaeological projects* (MAP 2), and *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment* (EAA 3), *Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 2. Research agenda and strategy* (EAA 8), and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14) was also followed.

3 Archaeological background

- 3.1 The remains of Roman buildings and burials have been recorded close to the site, including the following:

At least 18 inhumations of 4th-century and possibly late 3rd-century date and part of a Flavian-Trajanic building were excavated in 1971, 25 m to the south of the site, in advance of the construction of Southway (CAR 9, 236-44).

Parts of another Roman house, including a hypocaust, were uncovered in 1925 and 1973 under the north side of Crouch Street, 50 m north-east of the site (Hull 1958, 243; CAR 6, 340-41). Two large ?defensive ditches were found sealed beneath the building in 1973 (*ibid*).

Some possible Roman inhumations were noted in 1981 in stanchion holes during the construction of an office block at 32 Crouch Street, 50 m east of the present site (CAR 6, 975-6).

Several Roman burials were excavated in 1988 at the southern end of 42 Crouch Street, 15 m west of the present site (CAR 9, 245-56).

A large foundation of probable Roman date and associated Roman deposits were recorded in the south-west corner of the site during the archaeological evaluation in the car park in 2004 (CAT Report 277).

- 3.2** The site occupies the northern part of the site of the medieval house of Crouched Friars which originated in the 12th or early 13th century as a hospital and chapel (*VCH 9*, 307-8; Morant 1748, **2**, 41-3). The archaeological evidence for the monastery is limited, but can be summarised as follows:

A series of burials was discovered c 1895 during the construction of a greenhouse at 38 Crouch Street. They were described thus: 'The skeletons were adult males and each man had been buried with a rude leaden cross on his chest' (Sier 1924, 200n). From early Ordnance Survey maps, the position of the greenhouse can be pinpointed to the north-east corner of the present site, but nothing else is known of the discovery.

Various foundations and burials were noted by E J Rudsdale in 1928 during the construction of Scott's garage at 42 Crouch Street to the west of the present site (*CMR* 1929, 50-52; *CAR 9*, 245-7).

Part of a shallow, tightly-packed medieval cemetery was discovered close to the street frontage at 42 Crouch Street during a watching brief in 1977 (*CAR 6*, 854) and during a small excavation in 1988 in advance of the construction of an office block (*CAR 9*, 245-56). Also uncovered in 1988 were medieval foundations, probably from a large friary building aligned east-west (Fig 1; *ibid*).

During the evaluation in the car park in 2004, a medieval foundation and evidence for inhumations were found at the northern end of the site (CAT Report 277). These probably formed part of the house of Crouched Friars.

4 Aims

The aim of the evaluation was to establish and record the depth, extent, date, significance and condition of the archaeological remains surviving on the site. This information could then be combined with the existing knowledge of the site and surrounding area in order to assess the likely impact of the proposed development on the archaeological remains.

5 Methods

- 5.1** The evaluation consisted of three 5 m-long machine-dug trial-trenches. Two were aligned approximately east-west, one (Trench 1 or T1) at the northern end and one (T3) at the southern end of the site. A third trench (T2) in the middle of the site was aligned north-south.
- 5.2** The three trenches were dug on 28th September 2006 by a mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, after breaking up the existing concrete floor.
- 5.3** The trenches were machine-dug down to the uppermost surviving levels of archaeological significance. This was followed by cleaning up and limited excavation by hand. (See WSI for methodology used.)
- 5.4** The trenches were backfilled by machine on 9th October 2006.

6 Evaluation trenches

6.1 Trench 1 (Fig 2)

- 6.1.1** T1 measured 5.2 m by 2.1 m at the top and 4.6 x 1.5 m at the bottom. It was excavated to a depth of 1.8m below the modern ground-level. T1 was much disturbed by at least one modern cellar, and very little in the way of archaeological features was found.
- 6.1.2** Natural sand was not conclusively reached. The top of Roman deposits was possibly uncovered towards the bottom of the trench at a depth of approximately 1.6 m (L9).
- 6.1.3** The possible Roman levels were sealed by thick deposits of post-Roman topsoil, dumped material and pitfill, probably constituting what is often referred to as 'dark

earth' (L5, L6, L7, F6). Much of this was probably medieval in date. However, the similarity of this material to the backfill (L8) of the modern cellar made it difficult to be sure how much of the 'dark earth'-type material was redeposited and how much was *in situ*.

- 6.1.4** Surprisingly, there was no conclusive evidence of medieval burials, despite the record of burials being found close by in c 1895 (see section 3.2). Possibly any burials had been destroyed by later activity.
- 6.1.5** Evidence for later post-medieval and/or modern building on the site included a deposit of large greensand and septaria blocks (F3). These had traces of mortar on them and were presumably robbed from a Roman structure, and perhaps had already been re-used in a medieval building. The blocks were probably intended as consolidation of the underlying deposits for a floor or other structure, perhaps for the same building as the cellar to the east.
- 6.1.6** Remains of a cellar wall, plastered and painted white, as well as the staircase into the cellar (F4) were uncovered in the eastern part of the trench. This was constructed of unfrosted red bricks sealed in places by wooden beams. This suggests that the stairs were wooden over a brick foundation. The bricks indicate that the cellar was built in the mid 19th century or possibly slightly earlier.
- The cellar had a dark greyish-brown backfill (L8), which was not fully excavated. This was sealed by make-up for the existing concrete floor (L1).

6.2 Trench 2 (Fig 3)

- 6.2.1** T2 measured 5.2 x 1.9 m at the top and 5.1 x 1.7 m at the bottom. It was excavated to a depth of 1.05 m below the modern ground-level. Natural sand (L4) and Roman deposits were not reached in T2.
- 6.2.2** The upper levels of post-Roman 'dark earth' (L13, L15, L19) were uncovered at a depth of 0.7-1.05 m below the modern ground-level. These were probably medieval in date, although those finds recovered were largely residual Roman.
- 6.2.3** A large foundation (F14), of probable medieval date, was cut into the top of earlier layers. This was aligned east-west, was 1 m wide, and survived approximately 0.5 m deep. A large fragment of the foundation extended for 0.65 m from the east section. It appeared to have been cut by a later feature (F16), although a fragment probably from the same foundation protruded for approximately 0.15 m from the west section.
- The foundation was constructed of septaria and greensand blocks, and fragments of Roman brick and tile set in a pale brown mortar. This sealed a gravel base. The stone, as well as the brick and tile, were probably robbed from Roman structures. The top of the foundation was 0.65 m below the modern ground-level, at 27.6 m AOD.
- 6.2.4** There was little dating evidence, such as pottery, peg-tile or slate, directly associated with F14. The foundation was, however, similar to those excavated at 42 Crouch Street in 1988 (see section 3.2), and probably belonged to a building which formed part of the house of Crouched Friars (*CAR 9*, 251-3). The foundation F14 was on a similar alignment and was directly in line with the northern foundation (F27) of Building 181 (Fig 1; *ibid*, 249-51). This seems likely to have been part of a large friary building, perhaps even the friary chapel. An alternative explanation is that it was part of the precinct wall, which is shown set back from the frontage in early maps (*ibid*, 253).
- 6.2.5** A thin layer of pale brown mortar (L18) was excavated in places south of F14, notably by the west section, 0.65 m below the modern ground-level. This was level with the top of F14, and it is possible that L18 was the remains of a floor associated with the foundation. Perhaps it is more likely that L18 resulted from the demolition of F14, possibly in the early 18th century (*ibid*, 251).
- 6.2.6** The foundation F14 appeared to have been cut by a trench or pit (F16). This remained largely unexcavated, but it seemed to be fairly shallow and was backfilled with sand/gravel (L14) and a greyish-brown fill (L16, ?L17) which was difficult to distinguish from the surrounding soil.
- Most of the finds from F16 were residual Roman, although the feature was probably post-medieval in date.
- 6.2.7** Other post-medieval or modern deposits included an extensive make-up layer (L12), as well as the make-up for the existing concrete floor (L1).

6.3 Trench 3 (Fig 4)

- 6.3.1** T3 measured 5.1 x 2 m at the top and 4.9 x 1.7 m at the bottom. The northern half of the trench was excavated down to natural sand (L4) at a depth of up to 2.05 m below the modern ground-level.
- 6.3.2** A flat-bottomed feature (F8) in the north-east corner of the trench was possibly a Roman grave. Although not fully excavated, it was at least 1.8 m long, 0.5 m wide and 0.8 m deep. It contained a fragment of a human femur and some large fragments of Roman brick and tile.
Other possible Roman features included a pit (F9).
- 6.3.3** A layer of post-Roman 'dark earth' (L3), 0.8 m thick, had accumulated on the site. A quantity of medieval pottery and peg-tile was recovered from L3, as well as some residual Roman finds. This layer had been cut by a series of pits, including F7, F10, F11, F12 and F15. They were probably mainly medieval in date and were rubbish- and cess-pits of medieval date.
One pit (F7) contained several fragments of human bone. These were probably redeposited from a Roman inhumation, possibly from F8 which was cut by F7.
- 6.3.4** A probable foundation (F1) was cut into the 'dark earth' in the eastern half of the trench. This was aligned north-south and was 1 m wide and 0.65 m deep. The top of the foundation was approximately 0.55 m below the modern ground-level, at 27.5-27.72 m AOD. It was constructed of compacted layers of rubble set in a pale brown mortar. The rubble included re-used Roman building materials and fragments of post-medieval brick, floor tile and peg-tile.
- 6.3.5** The finds from F1 suggest that it post-dates the Dissolution. Many of the friary buildings were subsequently converted into a private residence, which at the time of the Siege of Colchester in 1648 belonged to the town's MP, Sir Harbottle Grimston (*CAR 9*, 251). Perhaps F1 belonged to this 17th-century rebuilding on the site.
- 6.3.6** The foundation F1 was sealed by an extensive layer of make-up (L2). Other features included a small post-medieval brick feature (F13) and a modern brick manhole (F2). These were sealed by the existing concrete floor (L1).

7 Finds

- 7.1** A quantity of finds was recovered in the course of the evaluation. These have been processed as outlined in the WSI and are listed in the appendix (Table 1).

8 Conclusions

- 8.1** The evaluation confirmed that significant archaeological remains survive intact on all parts of the site. Although the deposits in T1 near the Crouch Street frontage were disturbed by modern cellars, complex archaeological stratigraphy, including medieval burials, is likely to survive nearby.
- 8.2** Roman remains lay beyond the limits of excavation in T1 and T2, although a probable Roman burial (F8) was partially excavated in T3 at 1.25 (27.0 m AOD) to 2.05 m (26.2 m AOD) below the modern ground-level. The extent of Roman occupation on the site is indicated by the large quantity of Roman finds recovered from all three trenches, mostly residual in later contexts.
- 8.3** The remains of medieval and later buildings were found fairly close to the modern ground-level; 0.65 m (27.6 m AOD) in T2 and 0.55 m (27.7 m AOD) in T3. The foundation (F14) in T2 provides further evidence for the plan of the house of the Crouched Friars.

9 Archive deposition

The evaluation archive, including the site records, photographs and finds, will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code COLEM 2006.118.

10 Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to Bellway Homes for commissioning and funding the evaluation. The project was monitored by Martin Winter, Colchester Borough Council Archaeology Officer.

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- | | | |
|----------------------------|------|--|
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12 Glossary

AOD	above Ordnance Survey datum point based on mean sea level at Newlyn, Cornwall
CBCAO	Colchester Borough Council Archaeological Officer
context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made, usually a layer or a feature
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor
greensand	a form of sandstone, also known as Kentish Ragstone, imported from south of the Thames
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
<i>imbrex</i>	Roman roof tile
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c AD 1500
modern	period from c 1850 onwards to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
<i>opus signinum</i>	hard Roman concrete
post-medieval	period from c 1500 to c 1850
Roman	the period from AD 43 to AD 410 approximately
septaria	calcareous, clay concretions found on the Essex and Suffolk coast
<i>tesserae</i>	small cubes used to make Roman tessellated and mosaic floors
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database, maintained by Colchester Museums
U/S	unstratified, ie no context
WSI	written scheme of investigation

13 Appendix: list of finds by trench and context

Table 1: finds list. (Roman pottery fabric codes taken from *CAR 10*, post-Roman pottery fabric codes taken from *CAR 7*, and Cam vessel forms taken from Hawkes & Hull 1947.)

Trench	Finds no	Context	Qt	Wt (in g)	Description
T1	4	F3	2	10,000	Greensand lumps, robbed from a Roman structure
T1	1	L5	1	26	Small, clear glass bottle – Victorian medicine bottle?
T1	1	L5	4	367	Peg-tiles (one with peg hole)
T1	1	L5	10	278	Slate fragments (one has nail hole)
T1	1	L5	3	64	1 sherd Colchester-type Fabric 21a, 15th-16th century; 2 reduced sherds, probably also Fabric 21a, might possibly be Fabric 20 (sandy medieval grey ware)
T1	1	L5	6	143	Roman pottery: 1 sherd Fabric AJ (Dressel 20 amphora); 5 sherds Fabric GX (locally-produced grey wares)
T1	1	L5	4	534	Roman brick/tile fragments
T1	1	L5	1	270	Slag lump; this has a rounded bottom and so is possibly a 'hearth bottom'
T1	1	L5	1	4	Cockle shell
T1	1	L5	13	371	Animal bone fragments
T1	3	L5	1	9	Fresh-looking green bottle glass sherd – 19th? century
T1	3	L5	12	155	Slate fragments
T1	3	L5	2	140	Indeterminate tile/brick – probably post-medieval
T1	3	L5	1	56	Peg-tile
T1	3	L5	1	86	Strange grey-coated sherd; date uncertain
T1	3	L5	1	76	Sherd from large vessel in sandy fabric, irregular in thickness; medieval? (ie Fabric 21 – 13th-16th century?)

Trench	Finds no	Context	Qt	Wt (in g)	Description
T1	3	L5	6	57	Roman pottery: 2 sherds Fabric AA (amphora other than Dressel 20), 3 sherds Fabric GX (locally-produced grey wares), 1 sherd Fabric HG (Eifelkeramic/Mayen ware) from a jar of form Gose type 545 (CAR 10, 464-5) dated late 4th-early 5th century
T1	3	L5	2	250	Septaria lumps
T1	3	L5	3	279	Roman mortar lumps
T1	3	L5	1	137	Tufa lump
T1	3	L5	2	30	Oyster shells
T1	3	L5	2	16	Iron nails
T1	3	L5	2	63	Animal bone
T1	3	L5	3	62	Large mammal teeth – cow, presumably
T1	3	L5	34	3,771	Roman brick/tile fragments
T1	16	L7	2	71	Roman brick/tile
T1	16	L7	50	90	Mixture of cockle, oyster, snail shells (mainly cockle)
T2	9	L12	3	75	Roman pottery: 1 sherd Fabric GX (locally-produced grey wares); 2 sherds Fabric HZ (heavily-tempered grey wares) from large storage jars
T2	9	L12	2	19	Clay tobacco-pipe stem fragments; bore 2.5-3mm, so probably AD 1650-1700 (Clark 2001, 246)
T2	9	L12	1	20	Animal bone
T2	10	L13	3	153	Roman brick/tile fragments
T2	10	L13	1	26	Oyster shell
T2	10	L13	9	95	Roman pottery: 1 sherd Fabric CB (Colchester red colour-coated, roughcast ware) from a folded beaker dated early 2nd-mid 3rd century; 3 sherds Fabric DJ (coarse oxidised wares); 2 sherds Fabric GA (BB1: black-burnished ware, category 1) from a Cam 37A dish dated early 2nd-4th century; 3 sherds Fabric GX (locally-produced grey wares)
T2	13	L14	3	384	Septaria lumps
T2	13	L14	19	1,874	Roman brick/tile fragments
T2	13	L14	1	8	Roman pottery: 1 sherd Fabric GX (locally-produced grey wares)
T2	14	L15	19	1,311	Roman brick/tile fragments
T2	14	L15	3	476	Septaria lumps
T2	15	L16	2	60	<i>Opus signinum</i> mortar
T2	15	L16	2	189	Septaria lumps
T2	15	L16	29	2,481	Roman brick/tile fragments
T2	15	L16	2	36	Plain red Roman <i>tesserae</i> , rather scruffy
T2	15	L16	1	30	Buff Roman tile fragment
T2	15	L16	8	18	Roman pottery: 1 sherd Fabric DJ (coarse oxidised wares); 1 sherd Fabric GA (BB1: black burnished ware, category 1) from a Cam 37A dish dated early 2nd-4th century; 6 sherds Fabric GX (locally-produced grey wares)
T3	5	F1	2	644	Post-medieval bricks, one Tudor (max 50mm thick), one possibly later (max 58mm thick)
T3	5	F1	1	114	Thin brick (28mm thick) with one moulded edge, not Roman; presumably post-medieval floor brick?
T3	5	F1	1	22	2-inch square (50mm) green-glazed red fabric floor tile; looks post-medieval rather than medieval
T3	5	F1	39	3,595	Peg-tile fragments, 4 with peg holes
T3	5	F1	2	1,015	Septaria lumps
T3	5	F1	1	147	Roman mortar lump from underside of <i>imbrex</i>

Trench	Finds no	Context	Qt	Wt (in g)	Description
T3	5	F1	1	117	Straight-sided mortar lump, post-medieval or modern
T3	5	F1	9	1,715	Roman brick/tile fragments
T3	5	F1	3	273	Roman pottery: 1 sherd Fabric AJ (Dressel 20 amphora); 2 sherds Fabric GX (locally-produced grey wares)
T3	5	F1	1	5	?Animal bone
T3	12	F7 - lower	6	88	Human bone, including radius fragments
T3	11	F8 - lower	4	4,741	Roman brick and tile fragments
T3	11	F8 - lower	1	93	Human bone (large fragment of femur)
T3	6	L3	7	563	Peg-tile fragments
T3	6	L3	1	48	Roman pottery: 1 sherd Fabric GX (locally-produced grey wares) from a large storage jar
T3	6	L3	2	320	Roman brick/tile fragments
T3	6	L3	1	85	Unidentified brick/tile fragment
T3	6	L3	1	54	Septaria lump
T3	6	L3	8	251	Colchester-type ware (Fabric 21a) cistern sherds, including a bung hole; Cotter says that most cisterns are 14th century (<i>CAR 7</i> , 104)
T3	6	L3	3	73	Either reduced Colchester-type (Fabric 21a) ware or Fabric 20, 13th-14th century
T3	6	L3	5	76	Animal bone, 1 fragment possibly human
T3	8	L3	7	405	Peg-tile fragments
T3	8	L3	1	90	Septaria lump
T3	8	L3	4	553	Roman brick/tile fragments
T3	8	L3	1	18	Unidentified brick/tile
T3	8	L3	1	25	Roman pottery: 1 sherd Fabric AJ (Dressel 20 amphora)
T3	8	L3	1	11	Sandy medieval sherd (Fabric 21) with stabbing, from near a handle or spout?, 13th-16th century
T3	8	L3	1	4	Fabric 20 (sandy medieval grey ware) sherd, late 13th-14th century
T3	8	L3	7	70	Animal bone
T3	7	U/S	1	29	Roman pottery: 1 sherd Fabric GX (locally-produced grey wares)
T3	7	U/S	1	194	Roman tile fragment
T3	7	U/S	2	106	Peg-tile fragment

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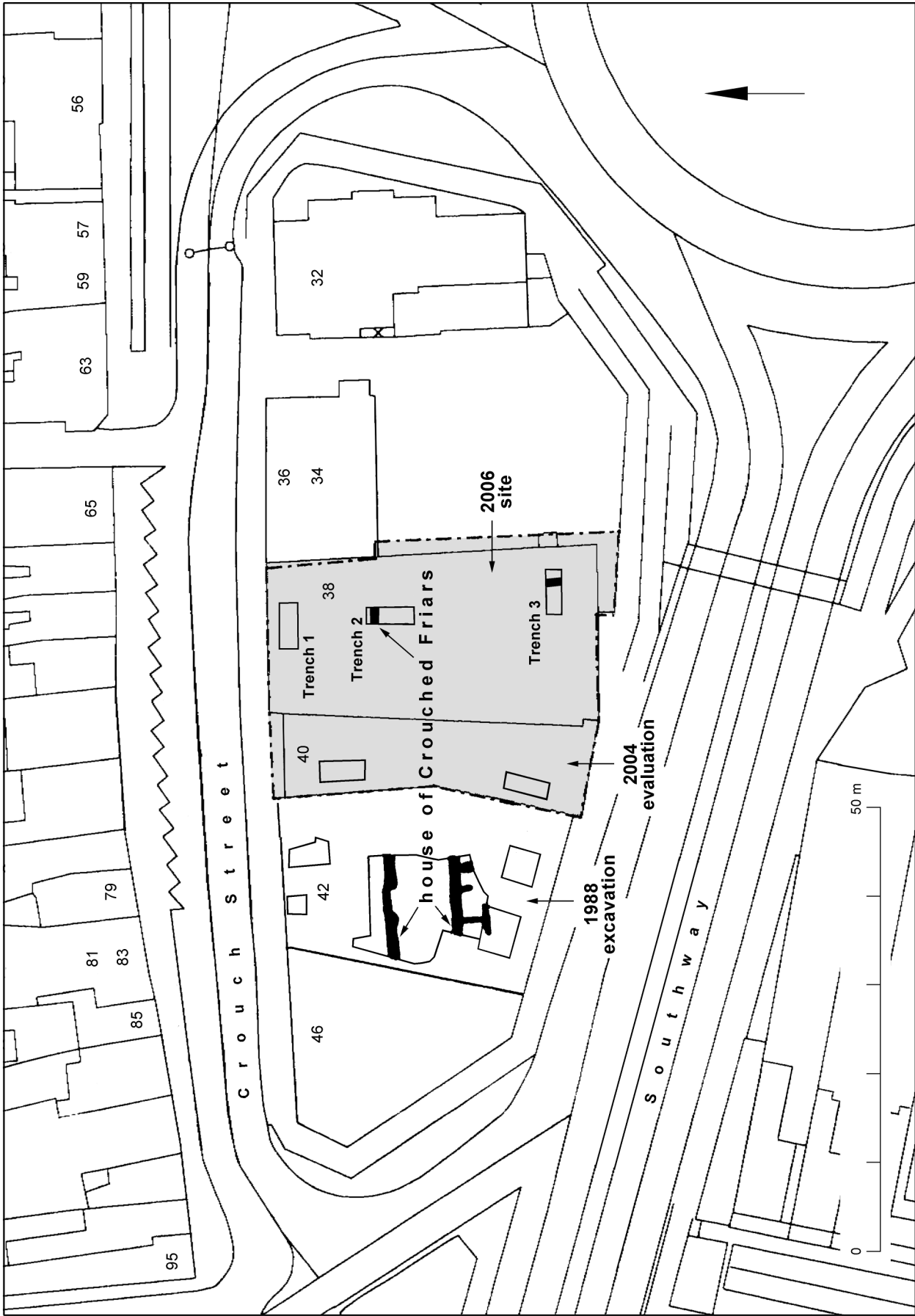


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Fig 1 Site location plan.

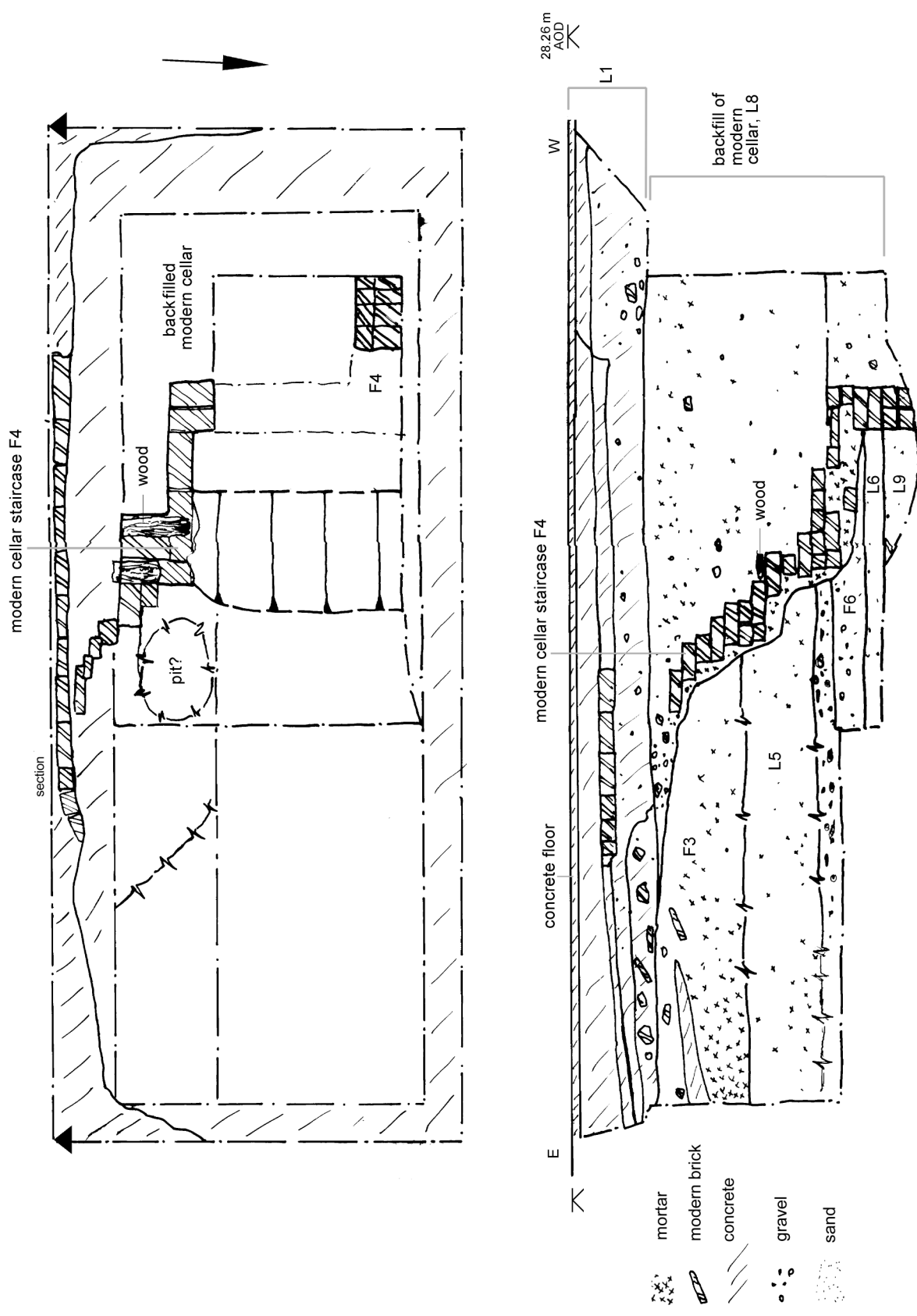


Fig 2 Trench 1: plan and section.

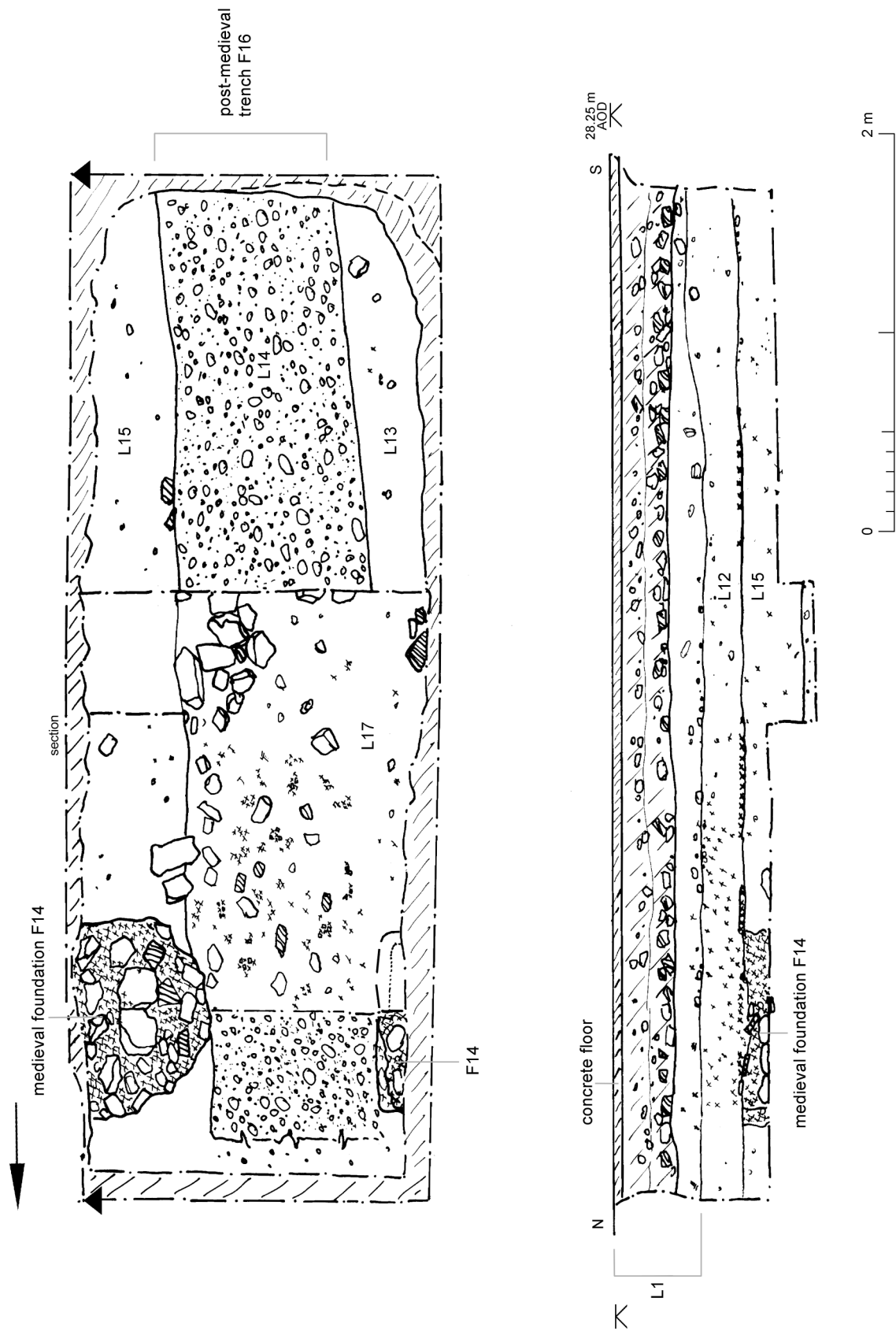


Fig 3 Trench 2: plan and section.

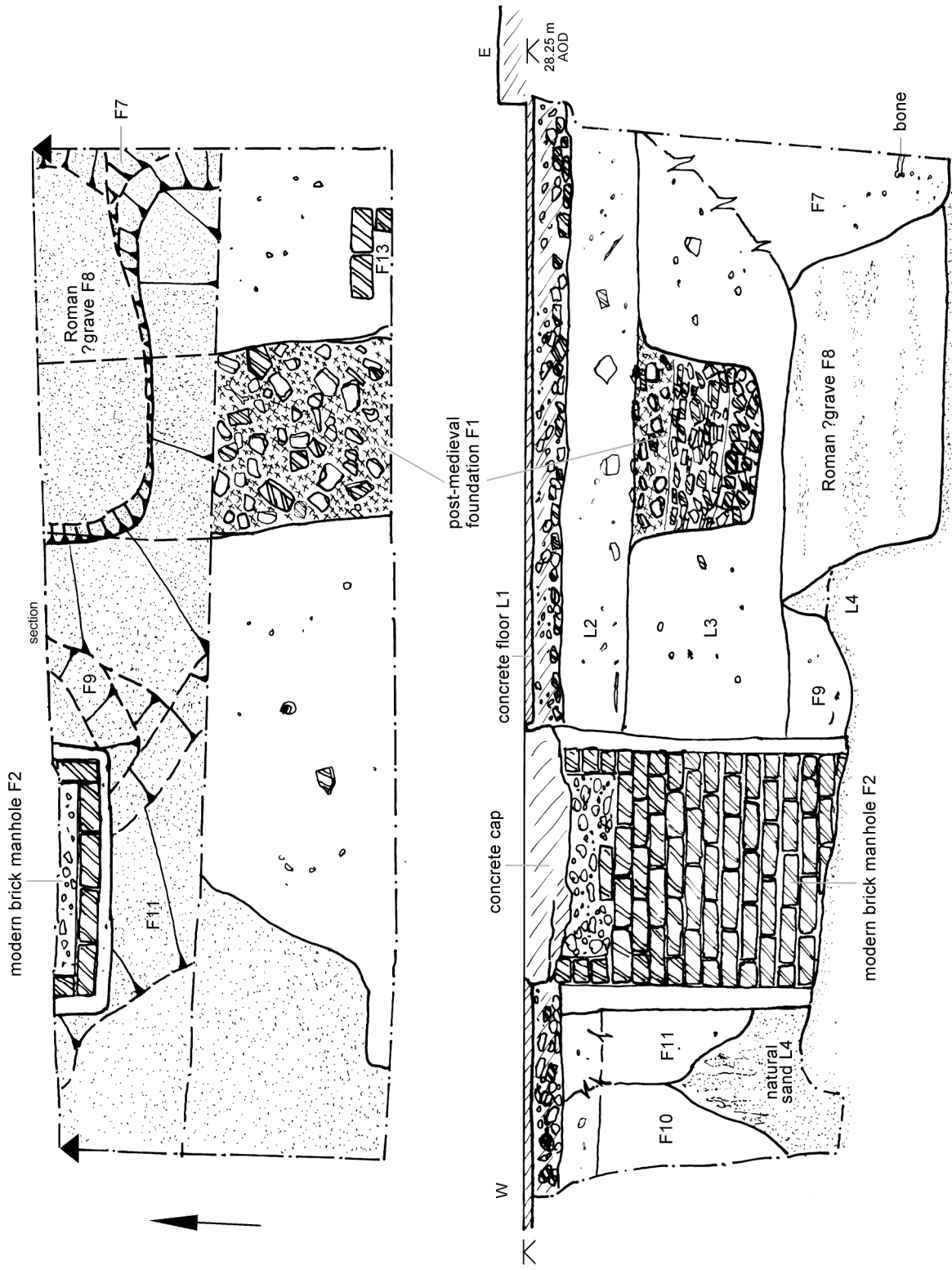


Fig 4 Trench 3: plan and section.

**Essex Historic Environment Record/
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Summary sheet

Site address: 38-40 Crouch Street, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: St Mary-at-the-Walls	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TL 9913 2495	Site code: Museum accession code: 2006.118
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: September-October 2006	Size of area investigated: 1,110 sq m
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Bellway Homes
Further seasons anticipated? Yes	Related EHER nos:
Final report: CAT Report 390 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Roman, medieval, post-medieval and modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>During an archaeological evaluation at the extra-mural site of 38-40 Crouch Street in Colchester, further evidence was found for the medieval house of the Crouched Friars. This included a large stone-and-mortar foundation, 0.65 m below the modern ground-level. An early post-medieval foundation may have resulted from the conversion of some of the friary buildings into a private residence.</i> <i>Surprisingly, there was no definite evidence for medieval burials, although a probable Roman inhumation was discovered at the rear of the site.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: CAT Report 277	
Author of summary: D Shimmin	Date of summary: October 2006