

**An archaeological evaluation
at Short Cut Road,
Colchester, Essex
January 2007**

**report prepared by
Howard Brooks and Kate Orr**

**on behalf of
Parkland Developments Ltd**

NGR: TL 9944 2544
CAT project ref.: 07/1d
Colchester Museums accession code: 2007.5



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1 Summary

An archaeological trial-trenching evaluation of a site in Insula 2 of the Roman town found modern strata, drains and footings lying over a considerable depth of post-medieval soils. The highest significant archaeological horizons were generally Roman in date, and were found at depths ranging from 1.3m to 1.8m below present ground-level (ie the car-park surface).

A significant quantity of Roman brick and tile and other building material found in residual contexts in the post-medieval soils shows that Roman buildings once stood here. They were presumably demolished by the medieval period at the latest, as is usually the case in Colchester. Historic maps indicate that this was an area of gardens in the post-medieval period. That fact, combined with the gradual infilling of buildings over the 18th to 20th centuries, would explain the depths of soil and the modern footings and drains found here.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

- 2.1 This is the report on an archaeological evaluation on land at Short Cut Road, carried out on behalf of Parkland Developments Ltd by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between 12th January and 18th January 2007. Post-excavation work took place between 18th January 2006 and 9th February 2007.
- 2.2 The site lies on the northern edge of Colchester's modern town centre. Its north, east and west boundaries are on Northgate Road, Short Cut Road, and Nunns Road respectively. Short Cut Road is mainly used as an access road to the NCP multi-storey car-park on Nunns Road, and to the Williams and Griffin store.
- 2.3 A description of the evaluation methodology may be found in the Written Scheme of Investigation (CAT 2006).
- 2.4 Site centre is at NGR TL 9944 2544.
- 2.5 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 (Fig 1)

- 3.1 The site lies in an area of definite archaeological potential, being within the historic town wall of the Roman and later town of Colchester, which has been the subject of archaeological excavation and chance discoveries for many years (Hull 1958; Crummy 1997).
- 3.2 The site lies in Insula 2 of the Roman town. The Roman town wall runs east to west on the far side of Northgate Street, approximately 10m north of the north edge of this plot.
- 3.3 Recent archaeological work in this area includes an excavation over the road on the east side of Short Cut Road in 1975 (site code DTC 1975), when Roman buildings were detected deeply buried below post-medieval dark earth and the foundations of brick houses (CAR 6, 801).
- 3.4 A watching brief in 1999 on the site now occupied by 18-26 Nunns Road (immediately west of the current site) found that Roman deposits survived beneath the road at a depth of 2.05m as 'islands' which are the result of subsequent activity cutting into the Roman deposits. A considerable amount of Roman building demolition material was seen at a depth of approximately 2.60m; this included tile,

mortar, septaria and *tesserae*. A small area of a possible crude surface was also recorded. Beneath the eastern site section (ie facing the west edge of the current 2007 site) opposite T6, two small patches of *in situ* Roman tessellated floor surface were uncovered by amateur archaeologists at 2.65m below modern ground-level. This site therefore shows the potential for archaeological stratigraphy to survive on the current site (CAT Report 50).

- 3.5 At 21 North Hill, excavation following evaluation revealed Roman, medieval and later activity (UAD nos 3572, 3584: this site not shown on Fig 1).

4 Aim

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 Results

5.1 Introduction

Six trenches were excavated (total trench length 25m). For further details of methodology, refer to the Written Scheme of Investigation (CAT 2006).

5.2 Trench 1 (Figs 1-3)

T1 was cut in the eastern side of the site. Removal of 0.3m-deep car-park surface (rubbly soil L1) and a modern brick footing (not numbered) revealed dark soily layer L17. This is interpreted as a post-medieval topsoil, the top of which was probably ground-level before the construction of the present car-park and dumping of L1. Although L17 extended down for approximately 0.7m to 1m below ground-level, a mortared wall foundation F1 was revealed at 0.7m below ground-level. This consisted of mortared peg-tile and stone, and is probably post-medieval in date. It ran east-west across the trench, and must represent the foundation of a structure which stood here before. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (1876) shows buildings down the east side of the present site ('Fredrick Place' and 'Grove Cottages'), before Short Cut Road took its present form. F1 in T1 was presumably the foundation of one of these houses.

At 0.7m below ground-level and extending from the position of F1 towards the south edge of T1 was a layer of mortar with *tesserae* (L3). There is no reason to suspect that F1 is Roman since it contained peg-tile, but the presence of Roman *tesserae* is curious, and must be accidental. Perhaps L3 is derived from the robbing of a Roman structure the position of which is not obvious from the 2007 trenches.

Marking the bottom of topsoil L17 was a mortar-and-peg-tile layer L2 (at 0.9m below ground-level and 0.2m thick). Sealed by L2 and L3 was a lower topsoil layer (L18). This was between 0.8m and 1.2m thick, and extended down to 1.8m to 2.0m below ground-level. This layer must be post-medieval in date, because the underlying deposit (L14), an organic layer, contained peg-tile. The organic content of L14 is no doubt due to the fact that water was coming into the trench at this depth, because this is the natural water table. L14 partially sealed a pit F2 cutting a light brown clay L4, which was Roman demolition debris. All the finds from L4 were Roman, and it is assumed that pit F2 was also Roman in date (it was not excavated because it was at too great a depth for safe work).

For most of the northern part of the trench, L4 was the limit of excavation, but, in the southern part of T1, further machine excavation exposed the underlying L19, down to 2.65m below ground-level. L19 was a light brown clay layer which is almost certainly a layer of Roman demolition debris. L4 and L19 are essentially the same archaeological horizon.

The highest significant archaeological horizon in the northern part of T1 was post-medieval organic horizon L14, at 1.8m to 2.0m below ground-level. In the southern part of T1, the highest significant horizon was L19, the top of which was at 2.0m

below ground-level. The post-medieval wall foundation F1 is not considered to be significant.

5.3 Trench 2 (Figs 1-3)

T2 was also cut in the eastern side of the site. The stratification mirrors that seen in T1. Removal of car-park surface L1 and several modern brick footings (not numbered) revealed two topsoil horizons (L20 and L21) extending to 0.9m and 1.8m below ground-level respectively. These are equivalent to L18 and L19 in T1.

Removal of L21 revealed Roman demolition debris L4 over most of the trench bottom cut by F7, a rubbly deposit or pit in the south-west corner of T2. F7 is dated to the post-medieval period by Tudor brick, but the residual Roman CBM (tile and brick) and greensand lumps which it contained are probably derived from a demolished Roman structure which stood on or close to this spot. In the lower part of L21, on the east side of T2, a wooden stake was revealed at 1.5m below ground-level. This may be part of a similar horizon to the woody organic material seen in T1.

Removal of a little of L4 was the limit of excavation in this trench, at approximately 2.1m below ground-level.

The highest significant archaeological horizon was L4 at 2.0m below ground-level.

5.4 Trench 3 (Figs 1-3)

T3 was cut near the western edge of the site, near the rear entry to the Marquis of Granby public house. The stratification revealed was more complex than T2, but broadly similar, ie modern and post-medieval deposits lying over Roman strata at approximately 1.8m below ground-level.

Removal of car-park surface L1 revealed a modern, east-west brick wall with associated concrete slab (L9) and associated foundation layer (L10). Under L10 was a sequence of post-medieval deposits as follows: L11, a topsoil; L12, a charcoally patch; and L13, a lower topsoil with dark organic lens L14 (as seen in T2). This sequence lay over L24 at 1.8m below ground-level. L24 was a brown clay horizon containing only Roman-period finds, and is the same horizon as L4 in T1 and T2, and is also a layer of Roman demolition debris.

Water seeped into this trench at 1.5m below ground-level.

The highest significant archaeological horizon was L24 at 1.8m below ground-level.

5.5 Trench 4 (Figs 1-2, 4)

T4 was cut near the northern edge of the site, at the Northgate Street end. The stratification revealed was broadly similar to that seen in the other trenches, except that there were more modern drain lines and other intrusions, and Roman strata were a little shallower at 1.3m below ground-level.

Removal of car-park surface L1 to a maximum depth of 0.5m revealed a sequence of modern and post-medieval deposits, as follows: L22, a topsoil cut by modern drains F6 and a modern ceramic drain-pipe (not numbered); and L16, a peg-tile and charcoal layer (also containing residual Roman pottery) which was only visible in the southern section of T4 at 1.2m below ground-level. Partially obscured by L22 was a brick drain (F4) running obliquely across the trench. Removal of L22 revealed L25, a layer of Roman demolition debris, and the same horizon as L4 and L24 elsewhere.

The highest significant archaeological horizon was L25 at 1.3m below ground-level.

5.6 Trench 5 (Figs 1-2, 4)

T5 was cut in the centre of the site. The stratification revealed was broadly similar to that seen in the other trenches.

Removal of car-park surface L1 to a maximum depth of 0.3m revealed a sequence of modern and post-medieval deposits, as follows: L22, a topsoil containing a number of foundations and drains (not plotted); and L23, a lower topsoil horizon. Although there were no post-medieval finds from L23, it is assumed to be post-medieval like the other topsoil horizons at a similar depth in the other trenches.

Removal of L23 revealed L4, a layer of Roman demolition debris, and the same horizon as L24 and L25 elsewhere.

The highest significant archaeological horizon was L4 at 1.7m below ground-level.

5.7 Trench 6 (Figs 1-2, 4)

T6 was cut into the southern edge of the site in the plot accessed off Nunns Road. Strata in this trench were entirely post-medieval and modern. Removal of 0.5m of modern car-park surface (L1) revealed a layer of medium brown and slightly sandy soil (L6) containing modern concrete foundations (not numbered). L6 looked like recently dumped material, possibly contemporary with the present car-park surface. L6 sealed a deep deposit of dark soil down to 3.0m below ground-level, at which level natural sands and gravel was exposed. No Roman strata were exposed here.

There was no significant archaeological horizon in T6.

6 Finds

6.1 Bulk finds are listed in the archive. Below are reports on the Roman pottery, post-Roman pottery and tile, and the post-medieval glass.

6.2 The Roman pottery
by Stephen Benfield

Introduction

The evaluation produced only a few sherds of Roman pottery (4 sherds weighing 28 grammes). The pottery was recorded using the Roman pottery fabric type series devised for CAR 10, in which all of the fabrics are recorded as two-letter codes (Table 1). Where appropriate, reference has been made to the corresponding fabric types described in the National Roman Fabric Reference Collection (Tomber & Dore 1998). The vessel forms were recorded using the Camulodunum (Cam) Roman pottery form type series (Hawkes & Hull 1947; Hull 1958). The pottery fabrics and the vessel forms present in each site context were recorded for each finds number (see archive). The number of sherds was recorded for each fabric, and the identifiable pottery forms present in each fabric type. The total weight of pottery and an overall spot date was recorded for each finds number.

Table 1: Roman pottery fabric codes and fabric names used in this report (after CAR 10).

Fabric code	Fabric name	National Roman Fabric Reference Collection reference
DJ	coarse oxidised and related wares	COL WH
GX	other coarse wares, principally locally-produced grey wares	
KX	black-burnished ware (BB2) types in pale grey ware	

Roman pottery discussion

The Roman pottery consists of a handful of sherds from two contexts: T1, L18, finds no 16, and T5, L23, finds no 23. Of the three sherds from T1, one is of form type Cam 108 and can be dated to the 1st-early 2nd century. Another is possibly of form type Cam 243-244/246, which is also dated as 1st-early 2nd century. The remaining sherd, in Fabric DJ, can only be dated to 1st-2nd or possibly early 3rd century. Overall a 1st- to early 2nd-/2nd-century date can be suggested for this small group of sherds.

The other context containing Roman pottery (T5, L23; finds no 23) produced only one sherd. This sherd is of form Cam 305B and is of late Roman, late 3rd- to 4th-century, date.

6.3 The post-Roman pottery and tile

by Howard Brooks

Finds no 4, F5, T6

Piece of a wall tile in Fabric 48d. 15 g. Floral design. 19th or 20th century.

Finds no 15, L16, T4

Two sherds of Colchester-type ware (Fabric 21a) cooking pot, 42 g. Reduced fabric, and externally sooted, so this pot has been used on a fire. 15th-16th century.

Finds no 9, L3, T1

Thumbed and slightly frilled base of a baluster jug in Colchester-type ware (Fabric 21a), 30 g. Similar to base of CAR 7, fig 74.19 with the frilled base of CAR 7, fig 74.23. Probably a later jug, 15th-16th century.

Finds no 21, L22, T4

Base of large flat-bottomed vessel, probably late slipped kitchenware, Fabric 51a, although the fabric looks local. Certainly post-medieval, probably 19th-20th century?

6.4 The post-Roman glass

Finds no 22, L11, T3

Incomplete omphalos base of dark green bottle. Fresh condition, 19th century.

Finds no 21, L22, T4

- (1) Omphalos base and neck fragments of dark green bottle. Some weathering of surface to golden colour. Probably an 18th-century wine bottle.
- (2) Omphalos base and neck fragment of a dark green glass bottle. Fresh condition, probably 19th century.
- (3) Sherds from body of slightly paler green glass vessel. Probably 19th/20th century.

Finds no 20, L20, T2

Complete base (neck missing) of pale green stopper bottle. In raised lettering H.W. STEVENS OWN BOTTLE COLCHESTER & IPSWICH. Early 20th century?

7 Conclusions

7.1 The highest significant archaeological horizon on this site was generally the top of a deeply-buried Roman layer (variously labelled L4, L19, L24, L25). Although it is difficult to make definitive statements about a horizon which was not sampled to any great extent on this site, because it was too deeply buried for safe work, experience of evaluation and excavations on Roman sites in Colchester allows us to identify this as a probable layer of Roman demolition debris. In other words, it is derived from the demolition of Roman buildings (presumably town-houses) which once stood here.

The current site lies in the centre of Insula 2 which, compared to other *insulae*, is relatively unexplored. We do not know to what extent the *insula* was built-up, or if it had only been developed at the street edges with open areas or garden in the centre. On balance, the position of T4 on the north edge of the site is more likely to coincide with the position of Roman buildings on the street frontage, whereas the other trench positions may coincide with garden or yard areas. The layer of demolition debris in T4 (L25) looked as though it might have been the fill of a large robber trench, from which a Roman wall had been robbed out. However, this could not be demonstrated in this evaluation, and it may be that L25 was simply a blanket of Roman demolition debris.

There was a significant quantity of Roman brick, tile, *tesserae* and painted wall-plaster from this site, mostly in residual contexts. All of this is ultimately derived from the demolished Roman structure, although this material is mainly redeposited.

7.2 Overlying the Roman demolition layer was a deep topsoil layer (variously labelled L13, L15, L18, L21, L22, L23). Taking its stratigraphical position, it would be logical to interpret this as a post-Roman and medieval topsoil which accumulated over the

top of the Roman deposits. However, the presence of fragments of clay tobacco-pipe, 20th-century wall tiles, and 19th- or 20th-century glass, shows that it was laid down in the post-medieval period, or at the very least was heavily disturbed in that period.

This layer of post-medieval topsoil was overlaid by a later post-medieval topsoil horizon (labelled variously L6, L11, L17, L20, L26). This contained 19th- and 20th-century glass, as well as residual Roman pottery and tile.

Historic maps of the town can provide information on the accumulation of the types of soils revealed in this evaluation. John Speed's map of 1610 shows the current site as an open area to the rear of properties on North Hill and West Stockwell Street. If the map is reliable, then the site would appear to have been given over to gardens at that time (and gardening would encourage soil growth). Later maps, for instance Monson's of 1848 and the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey, show the site gradually being built over. As far as can be judged from the maps, the south edge of the current site, ie where T6 was cut, was a garden with trees in 1876, while the east side of the site (T1, T2) was occupied by two rows of small Victorian brick tenements named 'Fredrick Place' and 'Grove Cottages'. The northern part of the site (T4) seems to coincide with a 'Stone & Timber Yard'.

- 7.3** The terraced nature of the current 2007 site, with the south edge much higher than the north, masks the fact that the top of the Roman deposits, which are generally the highest significant deposits here, slope down from south to north more gently. Roman levels were not seen in T6, so they must be below 12.10m AOD. Tracing the Roman levels from that point northwards shows that they are at 10.10m AOD in T3, 9.9m AOD in T2 and T5, and 9.4m AOD on the north edge of the site in T4. there is also an apparent drop down (from west to east) in Roman levels from T5 to T1 of some 0.8m, with Roman levels at 9.10m AOD.

8 Archive deposition

The evaluation archive, including the site records, photographs and finds, will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code COLEM 2007.5.

9 Acknowledgements

CAT is grateful to Parkland Developments Ltd (Mr Jon Nash) for commissioning and funding the evaluation. Site work was carried out by K Orr, and digital survey by C Lister. The project was monitored by Martin Winter, Colchester Borough Council Archaeology Officer.

10 References

- | | | |
|---------------|------|--|
| CAR 6 | 1992 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 6: Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School, and other sites in Colchester, 1971-85</i> , by P Crummy |
| CAR 7 | 2000 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 7: Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85</i> , by J Cotter |
| CAR 10 | 1999 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 10: Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-86</i> , by R P Symonds and S Wade, ed by P Bidwell and A Croom |
| CAT 2006 | | Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological evaluation on Short Cut Road, Colchester, Essex, December 2006, by Howard Brooks |
| CAT Report 50 | | An archaeological watching brief on land off Nunns Road, Colchester, Essex, September 1999, unpublished CAT archive report, by Colin Austin, 1999 |
| CM | 2002 | <i>Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester</i> |

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Crummy, Philip	1997	<i>City of Victory: the story of Colchester, Britain's first Roman town</i>
EAA 3	1997	<i>Research and archaeology: a framework for the Eastern Counties 1. Resource assessment</i> , East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Papers, 3 , 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, 8 , 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, 14 , ed by D Gurney
Hawkes, C F C, & Hull, M R	1947	<i>Camulodunum, first report on the excavations at Colchester 1930-1939</i> , RRCSAL, 14
Hull, M R	1958	<i>Roman Colchester</i> , RRCSAL, 20
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>
MAP 2	1991	<i>Management of archaeological projects</i> , 2nd edition (English Heritage)
Monson	1848	map of Colchester
Ordnance Survey	1876	1st edition, 25 inch sheet, sheet XXVII.12.4
Speed, John	1610	map of Colchester
Tomber, R, & Dore, J	1998	<i>The National Roman Fabric Reference Collection, A handbook</i> , MoLAS, Monograph, 2

11 Glossary

CBM	ceramic building material
AOD	above Ordnance Survey datum point (Newlyn sea level)
CM	Colchester Museums
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
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c AD 1500
modern	period from c 1850 onwards to the present
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
post-medieval	period from c 1500 to c 1850
Roman	the period from AD 43 to AD 410 approximately
RRCSAL	Report of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London
septaria	conglomerate consisting of nodules of calcium-rich clay (marl)
tesserae	small cubes used to make Roman tessellated and mosaic floors
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database, held by Colchester Museums
U/S	unstratified, ie no context

Distribution list:

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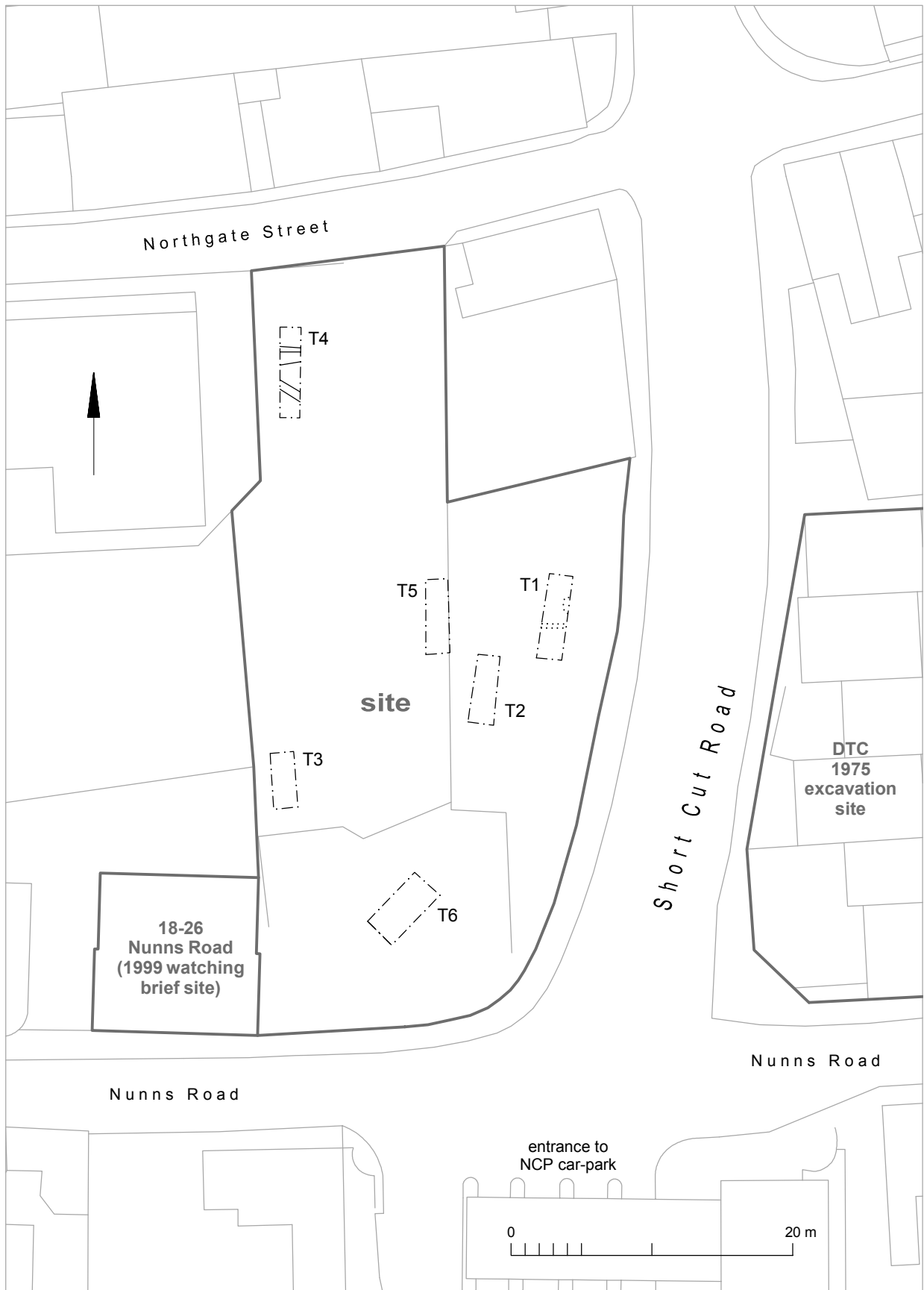


Fig 1 Site and trench location.

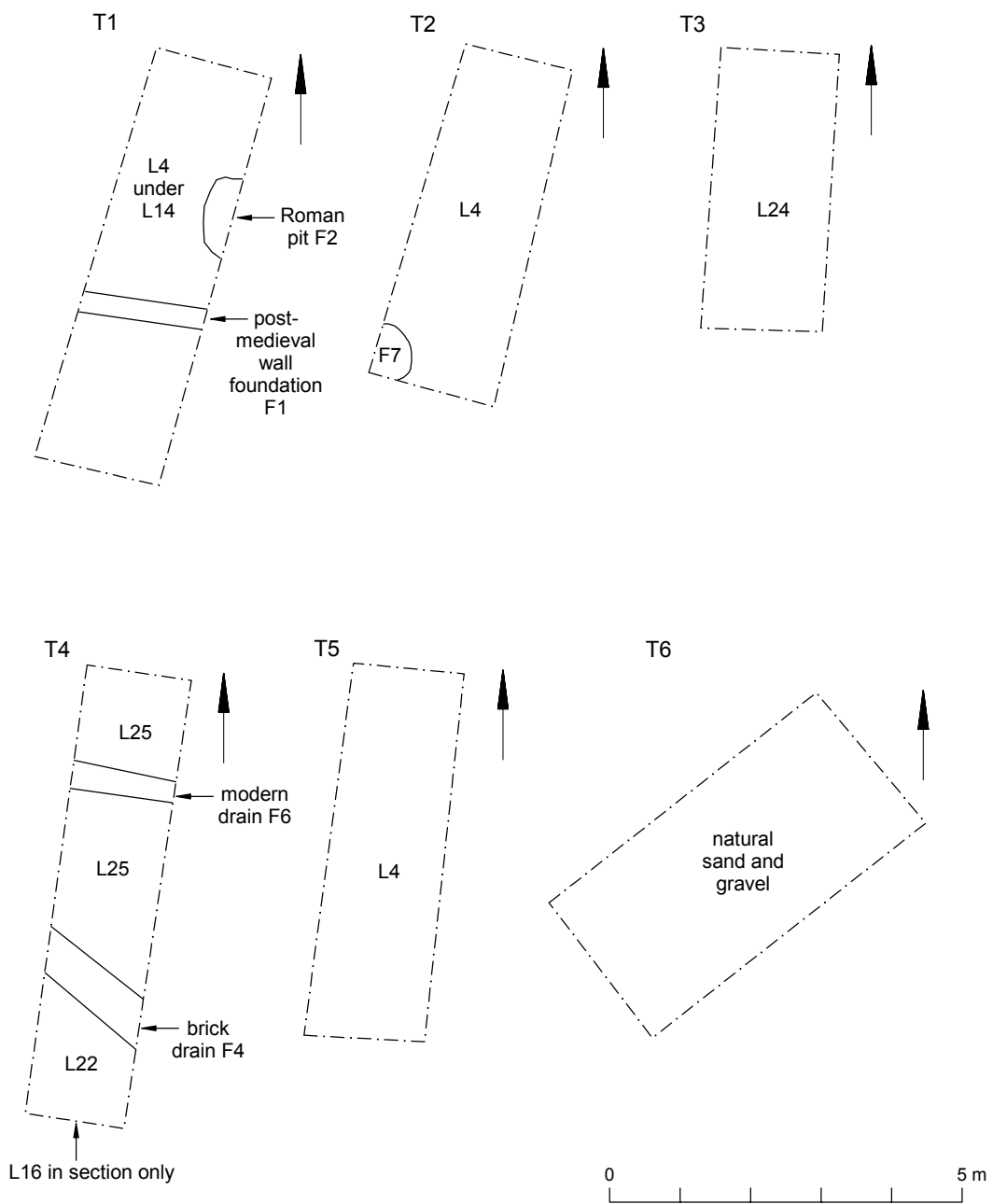


Fig 2 T1-T6: plans.

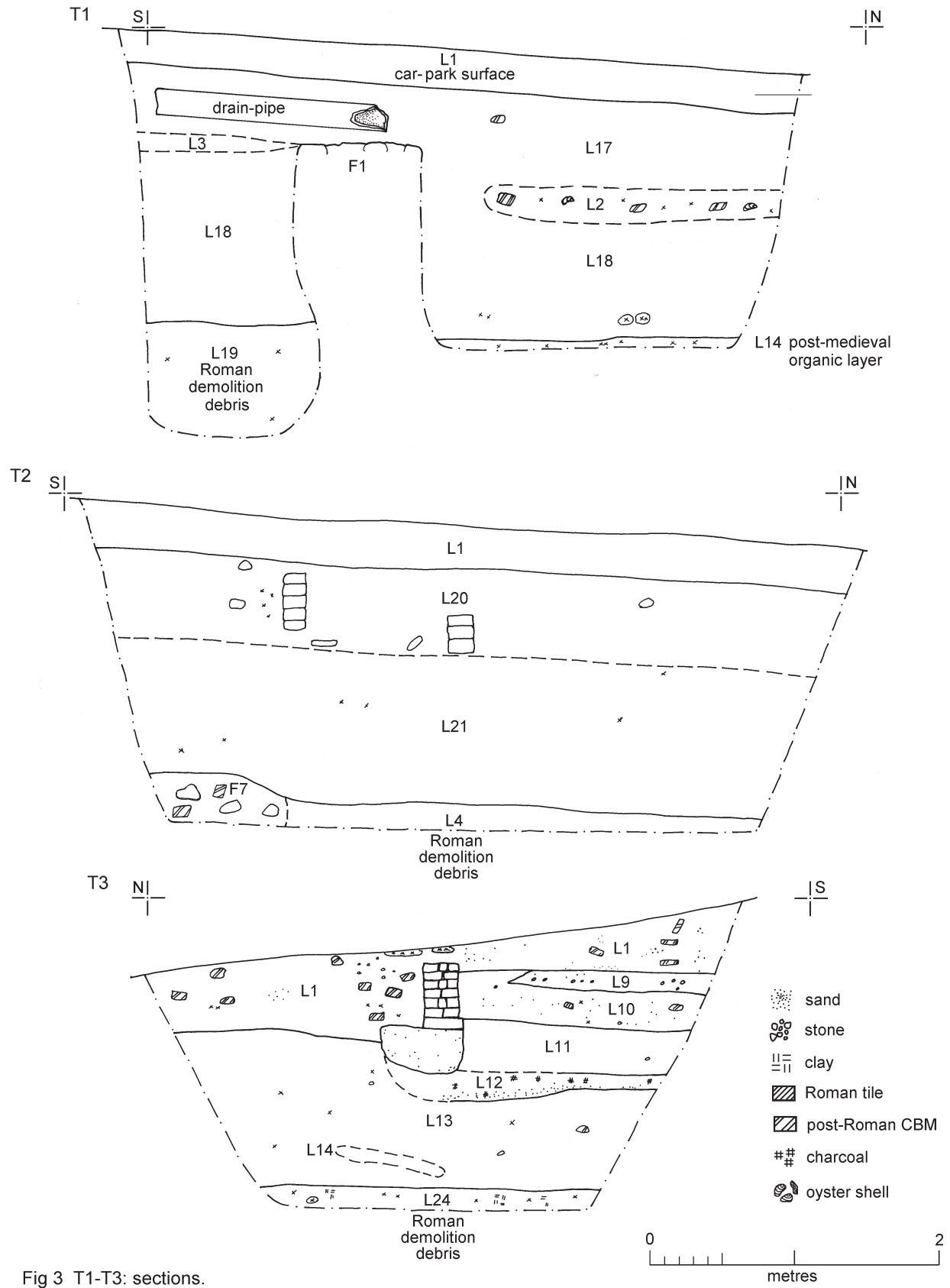


Fig 3 T1-T3: sections.

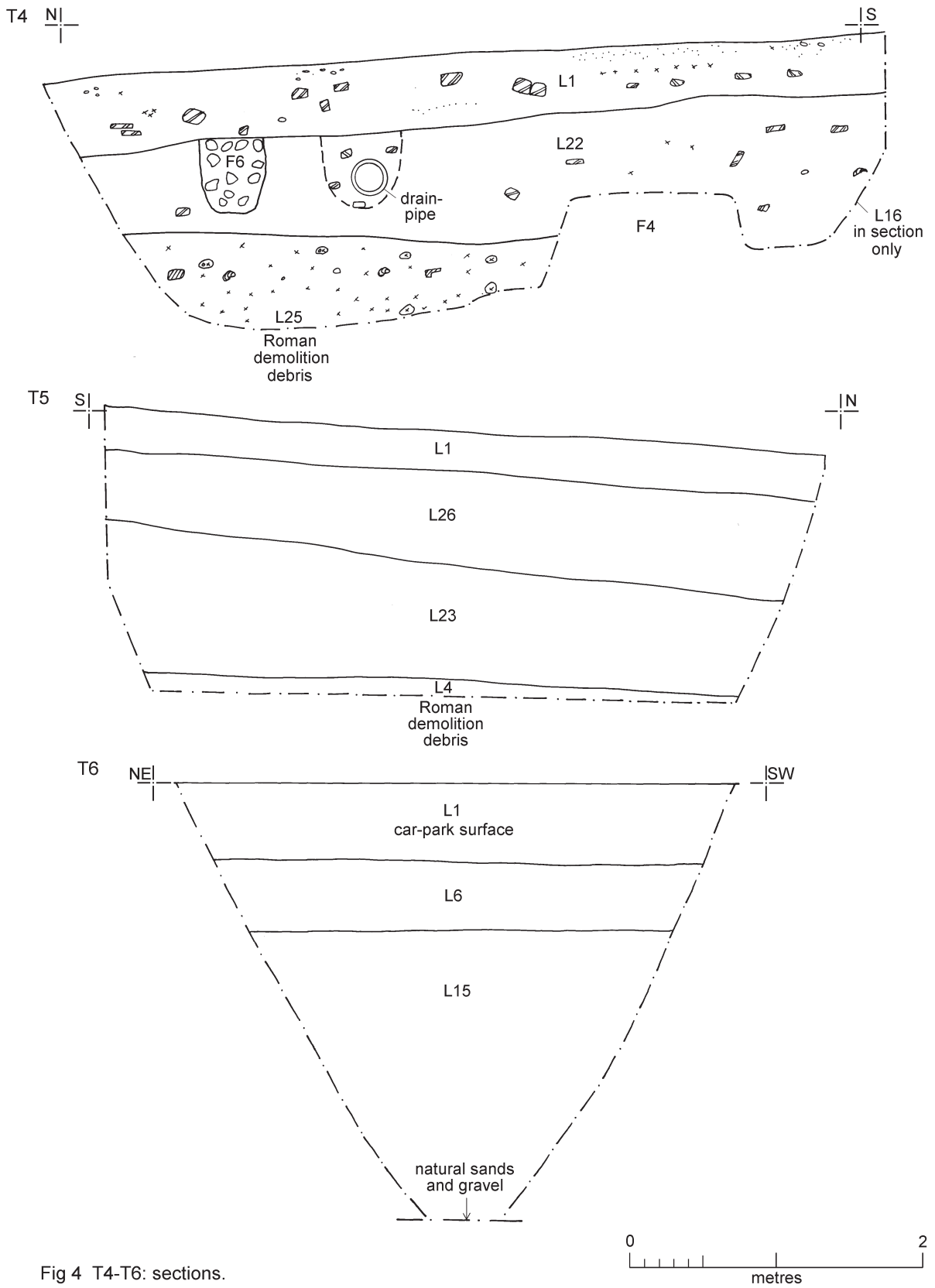


Fig 4 T4-T6: sections.

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

Summary sheet

Site address: Short Cut Road, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TL 9944 2544	Site code: COLEM: 2007.5
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: January 2007	Size of area investigated: six trenches (total length 25m) in a site covering approximately 1,200m ²
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? Yes	Related UAD nos: UAD nos 3572, 3584
Final report: CAT Report 406 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Roman, post-medieval and modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>An archaeological trial-trenching evaluation of a site in Insula 2 of the Roman town found modern strata, drains and footings lying over a considerable depth of post-medieval soils. The highest significant archaeological horizons were generally Roman in date, and were found at depths ranging from 1.3m to 1.8m below present ground-level (ie the car-park surface).</i> <i>A significant quantity of Roman brick and tile and other building material found in residual contexts in the post-medieval soils shows that Roman buildings once stood here. They were presumably demolished by the medieval period at the latest, as is usually the case in Colchester. Historic maps indicate that this was an area of gardens in the post-medieval period. That fact, combined with the gradual infilling of buildings over the 18th to 20th centuries, would explain the depths of soil and the modern footings and drains found here.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: H Brooks and K Orr	Date of summary: February 2007