

A watching brief at 41 Castle Road, Colchester

CAT Report 67

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March-April 2000

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Summary

Footings trenches for a new dwelling south of the existing house at 41 Castle Road revealed Roman stratigraphy at several points. One thick gravelly layer was seen, but not in the correct place to be the Roman street dividing *insulae* 7 and 8 of the Roman town (which should run west of this property). It is presumably a yard or pathway. Other details included a possible clay floor, a post hole, and another metalled area. A few finds of Roman brick/tile and pottery were collected, but none were stratified.

Introduction (Figures 1 & 2)

The watching brief took place between 17th March - 12th April during development groundworks for the erection of an additional domestic building on the southern half of the existing land plot at 41 Castle Road. Just prior to the commencement of the watching brief by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT), the Colchester Archaeological Group (CAG) excavated two small trenches into the footprint area of the new building where existing levels had been reduced by the contractors, south of the existing house.

Little is known of the archaeology of this area of the town, though the site lies inside the Roman walled area close to Duncan's Gate, just east of the Roman street which leads to it (figure 1), and any recording of archaeological deposits in this area is therefore of considerable interest.

Summary of observations and recording (Figure 2)

When the CAT watching brief began the garden area south of the existing house had already been reduced by the contractors by up to 1.2 m, forming a levelled area at approximately the height of the pavement on Castle Road. Into this reduced area two small trenches had been excavated by the CAG. To the west the garden remained at its original level, leaving a deep section north - south across the site, and on this area the contractors machine excavated a rectangular series of footings each approximately 0.5 m wide and 2.5 m deep. A further series of shallower footings were excavated by machine on the previously reduced area.

Observation of the CAG trenches:

The full excavation records and finds from the two archaeological trenches are held by the CAG, but the following deposits and features were briefly noted for each trench during the watching brief. In the east trench at its west end was a deposit of clay approximately 0.3 m below the reduced level, and in the centre of the trench a small circular feature had been excavated. These had been provisionally interpreted as the remains of a clay floor and a post-hole. In the west trench was a dirty stony layer at its west end which was provisionally interpreted as a metalled surface.

Observations and recording of the footings on the west garden area:

Only the north and west footing trenches on the unreduced west area of the garden were observed and these could not be entered safely - recording was limited to observation of the uncleaned sections as left by the machine (Figures 2 & 3). The top 1.4 m of the deposits consisted of 0.5 m of modern dark topsoil over a thicker deposit of dark stony sandy loam. In two places, at the east and west ends of the north footing trench, this was observed to overlie a dirty stony (gravelly) deposit up to 0.3 m thick which also contained some oyster shells. Below this, from about 1.7 m down, was a yellow brown stony silty sand which appeared to be clean and is probably natural subsoil, and this overlay natural sandy gravel which occurred at about 2.4 m down. The builders had collected a small amount of finds, mostly of Roman tile and brick with some Roman pottery (Appendix 1 Table). Much of this material had been collected in excavating the east footing trench.

Observations and recording on the eastern reduced area:

Though footings for the new building extended across the reduced area to approximately level with the front of the existing house only those on the western part of this area were able to be observed.

The reduction of the eastern half of the site had formed a deep north - south section across the area, which also extended for a short distance east - west, and this was further deepened to up to 2.5 m by the excavation of a footing trench at its base. In contrast to the sections of the footings to the west this section could be cleaned and recorded in detail (Fig. 4). The basic sequence of deposits was as follows: modern topsoil and stony loam (❶) over Roman gravels cut by pits (❷), over natural subsoil (❸).

Stephen Benfield

Appendix 1

Table: List of unstratified Roman finds selected on site (not retained as part of archive)

Find type	comments
Roman pottery	samian rim sherd Drag. 36, ?Central Gaul, 2nd century
Roman pottery	samian rim sherd Drag. 18/31 or 31, Central Gaul, 2nd century
Roman pottery	samian fragment ?East Gaul
Roman pottery	samian fragment
Roman pottery	Nene Valley mortaria rim sherd (CAR 10 fabric code TE) mid 3rd - 4th century
Roman tile	2 fragments of scored hypocaust tile
Roman tile	1 frag of cross-scored hypocaust tile (not early type, prob 2nd cent, pers. comm. E. Black)
Roman brick	fragment white fabric (possibly Eccles fabric, pers. comm. E. Black)
Roman brick	2 other fragments one with red fired/heated sandy clay adhering to it

List of site visits by CAT

Date (2000)	Duration	comments
17th March	0.5 hrs	Final CAG work in progress
22nd March	1.5 hrs	Negative, no footings open
28th March	0.75 hrs	Negative, no footings open
3rd April	1 hr	Negative, no work in progress
4th April	1 hr	Negative, no work in progress
7th April	2 hrs	Recording footing trenches
10th April	6 hrs	Recording footing trenches & main section
11th April	4.5 hrs	Completing main section
12th April	1 hr	New footings towards road already concreted

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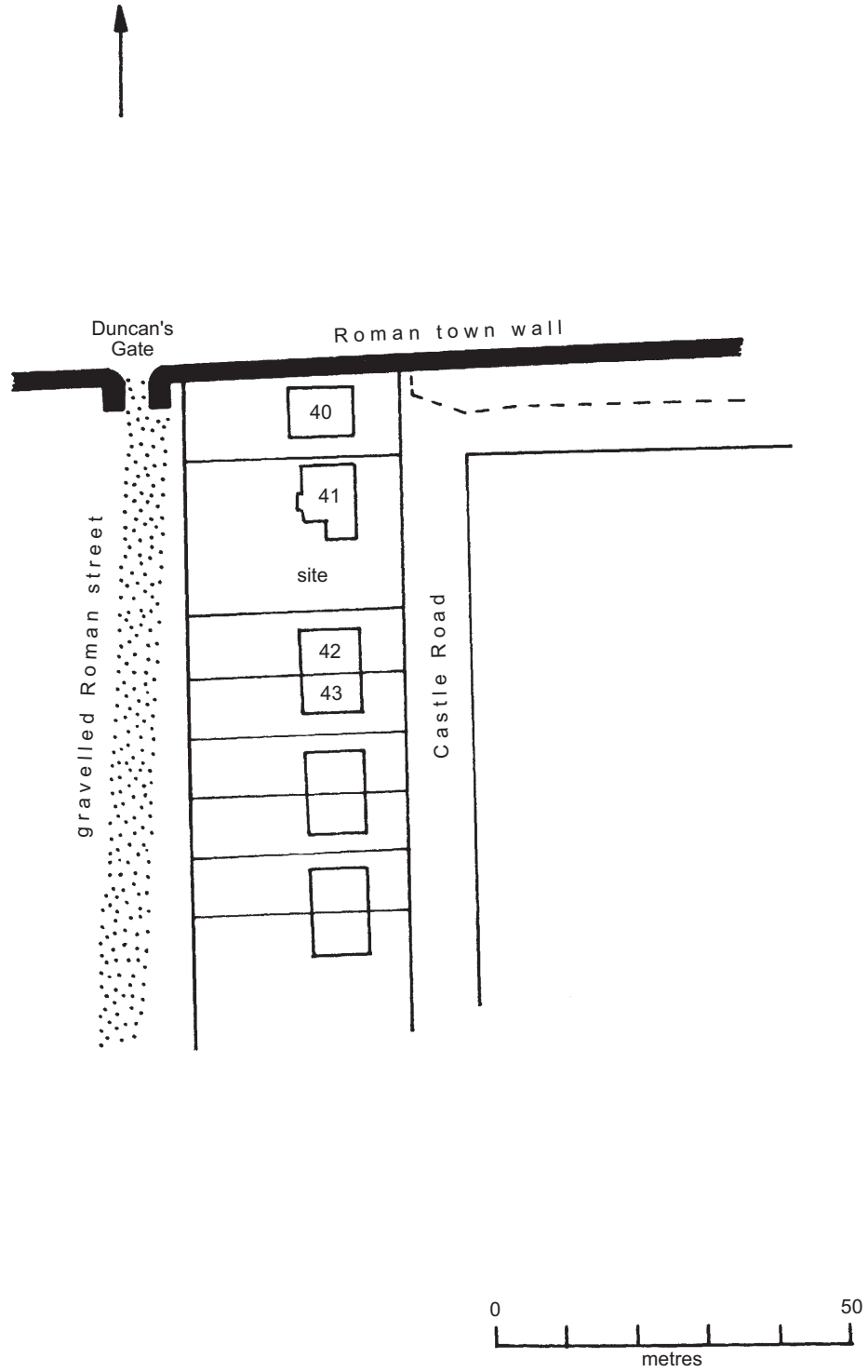


Fig 1 Site location, with Roman town wall.

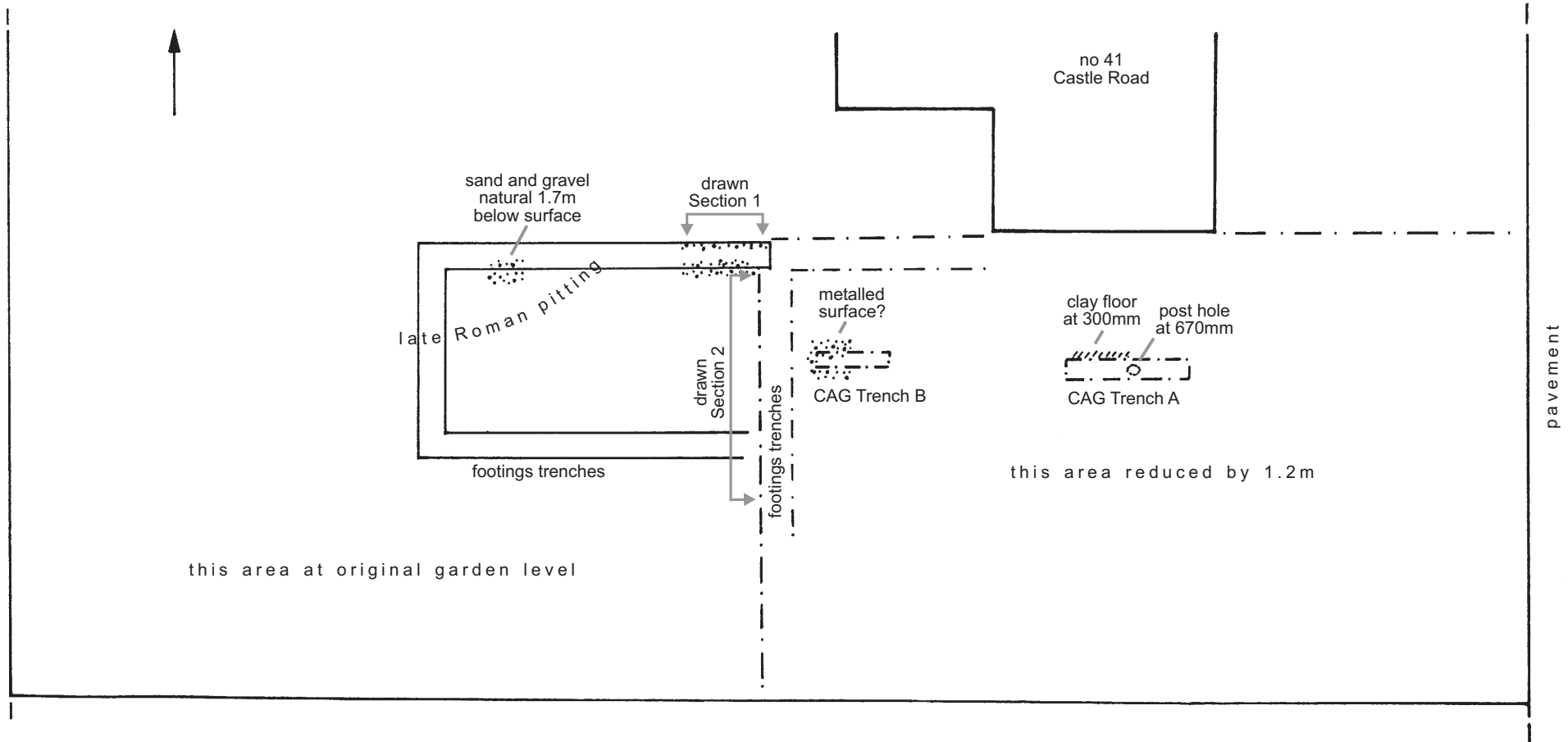
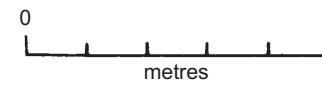


Fig 2 Summary of observations.



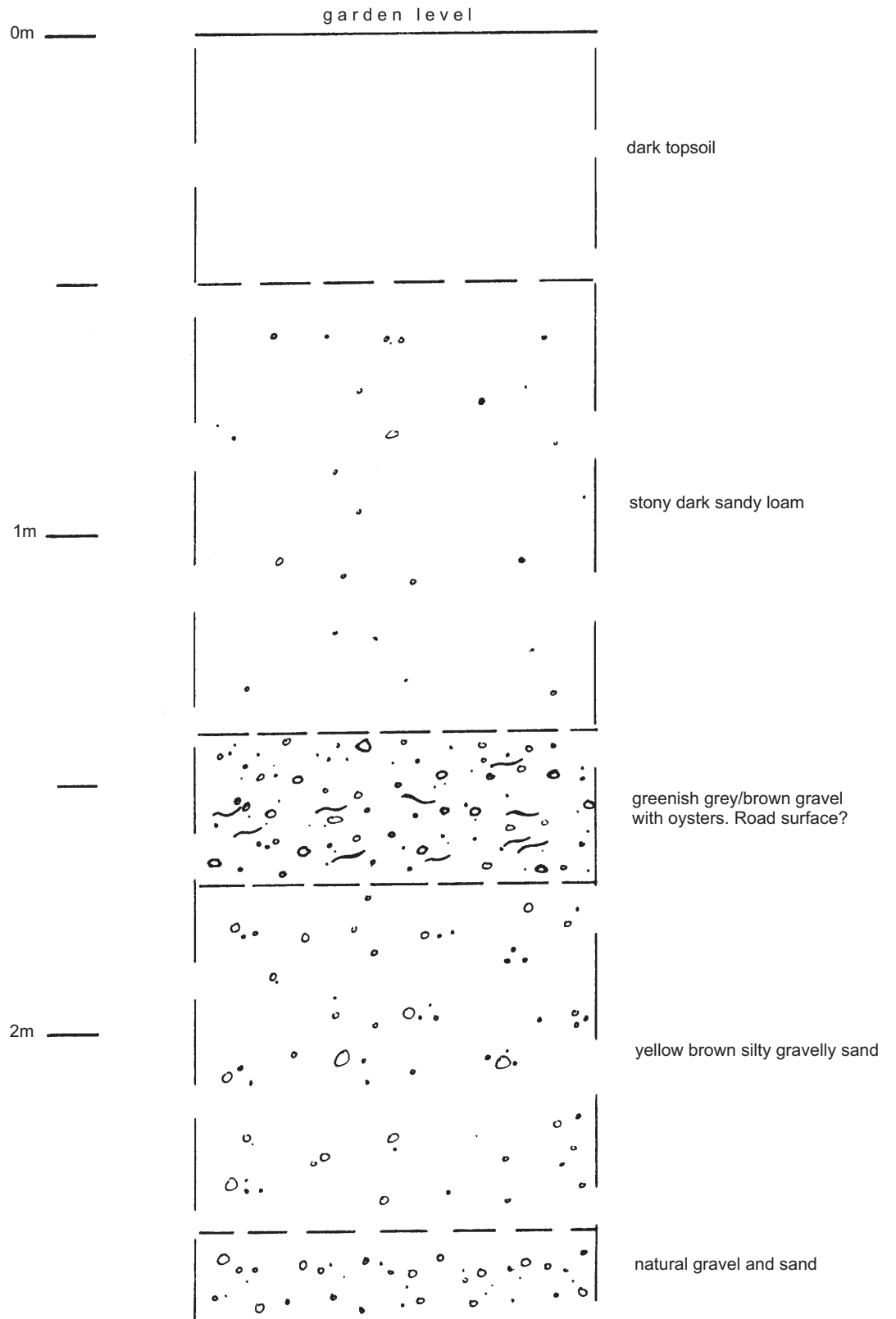


Fig 3 Section 1.

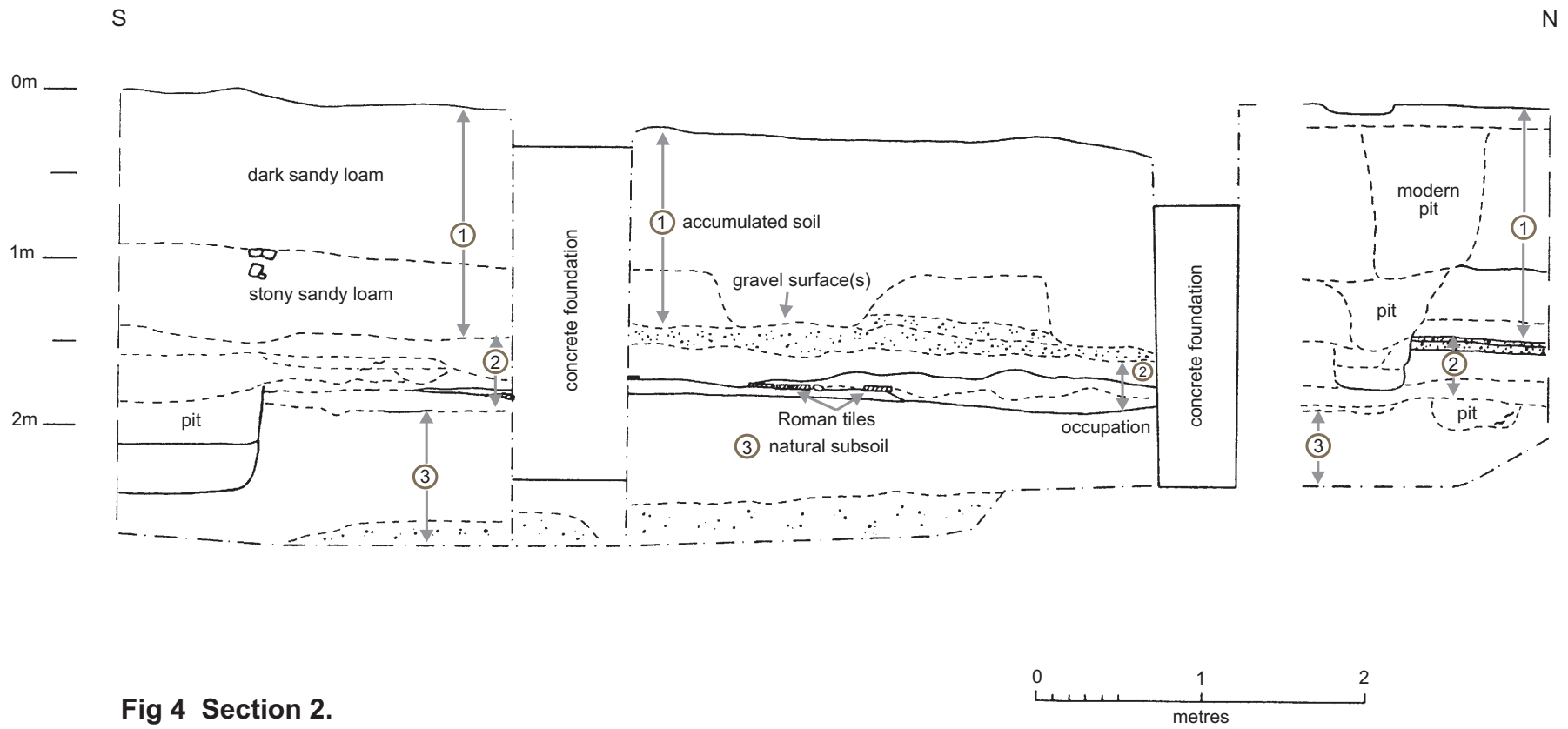


Fig 4 Section 2.