

**An archaeological
watching brief at
'Bonds', 14-15 North Hill,
Colchester, Essex**

October 2001-April 2002

**on behalf of
Colchester Borough Council**

CAT project ref.: 01/10
Colchester Museums accession code: 2001.235
NGR: TL 9940 2546



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1 Summary

Observations were made during groundworks associated with the repair of the medieval building (formerly 'Bonds') at 14-15 North Hill, Colchester, Essex. Under the floorboards of the building, previous floor surfaces and the original medieval ground-level were exposed. Timber and brick foundations were revealed and there was evidence of the underpinning of wooden sole plates with peg-tile. A wall and a vaulted ceiling to a cellar dating to the late 17th or 18th century was exposed.

The groundworks did not impact on any Roman remains.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the report on an archaeological watching brief carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) between the 24th October 2001 and the 17th April 2002 at 14-15 North Hill, Colchester, Essex. The work was carried out on behalf of Colchester Borough Council.
- 2.2 The property is located in Colchester town centre, on the eastern side of North Hill at National Grid Reference TL 9940 2546 (Fig 1).
- 2.3 Works to repair and refurbish the listed building, which was formerly S. Bond and Son Antiques ('Bonds'), were grant-aided under the CAP (Conservation Area Partnership) scheme. A condition of the grant was that an archaeological watching brief be carried out. The watching brief was carried out during ground-reduction of floors in rooms on the ground floor of the building for the laying of new floors, and the excavation of service trenches and a path around the outside of the building.
- 2.4 This report follows the standards set out in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1999, updated 2002) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996, updated 2002), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (1999).

3 Archaeological background

- 3.1 Nos 14-15 North Hill was originally built as one L-shaped, two-storeyed building. The rear (east) wing of this Grade 2* listed building dates from the early 15th century and consists of a long wall jetty which is unique in Essex. It is timber-framed, with wattle and daub remaining in some places. The south front of the rear wing has a fine original double window with cinquefoil-headed lights (DCMS 1998). The interior of the first floor contains fine-quality late 16th-century coloured wall paintings (English Heritage 2000). The building was formerly a shop but its original use is not known.
- 3.2 The frontage is early 17th century but the building was re-fronted in the 19th century to form two shop fronts (DCMS 1998).
- 3.3 The site is located within the walls of the Roman legionary fortress and later Roman town of *Colonia Claudia*. It is sited within Insula 10 of the later Roman town. Roman mosaics and tessellated pavements have been found very near this site, including two mosaics excavated in 1906 and 1925 to the rear of nos 17 and 18 North Hill (Hull 1958, 77-80, plate 15; Crummy 1992, 355).

4 Aims and objectives

The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any features, finds or deposits of archaeological significance revealed by the groundworks.

5 Methods

- 5.1 The watching brief was carried out by Stephen Benfield, Howard Brooks and Kate Orr of CAT. Visits were made in October and November 2001 and January 2002 during ground-reduction prior to the laying of new floors in the old workshop/store at the rear of the building, the old kitchen in the middle of the building and the old lounge towards the front of the building. These rooms all occupy the early 15th-century wing of the building. Subsequent visits were made from March to April 2002 during the digging of services and a path outside the building (Fig 2).
- 5.2 A record of the position of the excavations is reproduced as Figure 2. Soil types and previous floor-layers were noted and given layer numbers. Features were recorded and assigned feature numbers. Section drawings were made mainly at a scale of 1:10 and plans of features were drawn at a scale of 1:20 where appropriate (Figs 3-9).
- 5.3 Artefacts were collected and assigned find numbers according to context where possible (Appendix A); one item was examined and reported on (Appendix B).
- 5.4 A colour photographic record was made with a digital camera.

6 Results

6.1 The old workshop/store area - ground-reduction (Figs 3-4)

In October 2001, the floor-level was reduced by between 450mm and 500mm below ground-level. A brick plinth was exposed underneath the wooden upright and sole plate (Feature or F5). This brick plinth is thought to be part of the original medieval building as the bricks were of thin 'Tudor' type (50mm). The following soil profile represents the previous floor-levels and their make-up layers. Layer or L1-L3 surrounded the brick plinth and L4 lay beneath it:

- L1 - 25mm of compacted yellowish silty clay from a previous floor.
- L2 - 100-150mm of dark brown silty clay loam with loose peg-tile and early bricks which measure 220mm x 100mm x 50mm. This is the make-up for L1.
- L3 - approximately 280mm of light brown clay with brick rubble (especially in the centre of the room) which is likely to represent an earlier floor.
- L4 - underneath L1-L3 and the brick plinth was a dark brown silty clay loam layer containing peg-tile and medieval pottery (find no 2). This layer continued beyond the limit of the excavations and is interpreted as being the medieval ground-level from the time of construction of the building.

Medieval and post-medieval pottery, clay pipe, a stone hone, peg-tile and a lump of Roman mortar were found unstratified from this area (find no 1).

A compacted layer of creamy yellow mortar with flecks of tile (F1) was revealed at the bottom of the reduced area at 450mm below ground-level, surrounded by L4. This layer had uneven edges and surface and extended to an area of roughly 1.4m x 850mm. The feature was situated in front of a blocked-in doorway and may be a spillage of mortar from the construction of the brick plinth.

6.2 The old kitchen – ground-reduction (Figs 5-6)

In January 2002, the floor-level of the old kitchen was reduced by 400mm-500mm for the laying of a new floor. Underneath the floorboards, a double layer of bricks was recorded around the edge of the room and down the middle of the room (F2). The thickness of the bricks (90mm) indicates a modern date and those round the edge of the room were probably foundations laid quite recently to underpin the wall. The bricks laid down the middle of the room may once have supported a dividing wall. The following layers were recorded:

- L5 - 70mm-thick modern wooden floorboards.
- L6 - 150mm-200mm of broken peg-tile and slate, mixed with dark brown silty soil with mortar flecks at the same level as the brick foundations and extending across the room; this layer was probably a make-up layer.
- L7 - underneath the brick foundations (F2) was a dark brown silty soil with mortar flecks containing abundant oystershell, frequent peg-tile and slate, which probably represents the medieval ground-level.

6.3 The old lounge – ground-reduction (Fig 7)

6.3.1 In November 2001, the old lounge area was monitored as ground-levels were reduced. 600mm of topsoil (L8) was dug out of the north-west corner of the room to below the bottom of the wooden sole plate to the western wall. A thin layer of mortar (L9) at 400mm below ground-level was recorded which appeared to be the bed for a stripped-out floor or something similar. A layer of peg-tile (L10) was recorded under the sole plate at 400mm below ground-level. It would appear that the medieval timber sole plate was later underpinned by digging down and inserting the peg-tile beneath it.

6.3.2 In January 2002, another visit was made to record a vault to a possible cellar which was exposed under the floor in the south-western corner of the room (F3). The part of the vault that remained was made of unfrosted bricks and measured 200mm x 95mm x 60mm. The size of the bricks would seem to indicate a late 17th- or early to mid 18th-century date for the cellar (Ryan & Andrews 1992, 101-2).

The vault was attached to and surrounded by a brick wall, part of which was exposed (F4), although the depth of the wall was not established. Most of the vaulting had been removed, presumably when the floor was lowered. This may have occurred during groundworks to insert the chimneys between the old lounge and adjacent rooms. There was a gap in the south-east side of the vault which may have been an entrance. The backfill (L11) in the vault consisted of soil with brick and peg-tile and one sherd of modern pottery (find no 3). This would suggest that the cellar was filled in during the 19th or 20th centuries.

6.4 Services and path (Fig 8)

Two visits were made in March and April 2002 to monitor a trench which was dug to the north of the building to move the existing sewer. The trench was 750mm wide and 500mm deep. A dark grey sandy silt topsoil (L12) was recorded containing abundant peg-tile, modern pottery and one almost complete clay pipe (find no 4).

Two visits were made in April 2002 to monitor groundworks for a new drain and a path down the southern side of the building. 500mm of dark brown sandy loam topsoil (L12), containing oystershell, modern brick and slate, was removed. After the topsoil was removed, the following layers were exposed below the timber sole plate to the southern wall of the building:

L13 - 220mm of yellow sand and stones, packed with peg-tile and Roman tile.

L14 - 160mm of burnt clay with smaller amounts of peg-tile and Roman tile.

L15 - underneath L2 and L3 was a stony dark brown silty clay layer that extended beyond the limit of the excavations and was probably the medieval ground-level at the time of construction.

It would appear that, as in the lounge, the medieval timber sole plate to the southern wall of the building has been underpinned by peg-tile.

7 Discussion

Under the floorboards, soil layers were exposed which made up previous floor-surfaces, some of which possibly date from the original medieval phase of the building. The original medieval ground-surface was reached during ground-reduction in the old workshop/store, the old kitchen and in the path trench to the south of the building. Timber and brick foundations were revealed and there was evidence of the underpinning of wooden sole plates with peg-tile.

A wall and a vaulted ceiling to a cellar dating to the late 17th or 18th century was exposed under the floor of the old lounge. No cellar this far back in the building had been recorded before. The Colchester Museums cellar survey (1999-2000) recorded a post-medieval cellar under the shop at the front (north-west) of the building which is still accessible: it measures 6m x 5m and 2.2m from ceiling to floor, and it is constructed of brick but is not vaulted. The vaulted cellar found under the old lounge

during the watching brief must have been a separate room, albeit next to the cellar under the shop, as there is no access between the two.

The groundworks did not impact on any Roman remains.

8 Archive deposition

The archive is held by CAT at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester. A copy of this report, the finds, digital data on disk and the paper archive will be deposited permanently with Colchester Museums under accession code 2001.235.

9 Acknowledgements

The Colchester Archaeological Trust is grateful to the following for their help and co-operation:

Terry Barrel of W A Hill Builders
Adrian Gascoigne of Colchester Museums for information on the cellar
John Prosser, Conservation Officer for Colchester Borough Council
Martin Winter, Archaeological Officer for Colchester Borough Council

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Kate Orr, July 2002

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Martin Winter, Archaeological Officer for Colchester Borough Council
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Date: *08.07.02*

Appendix A: list of finds

identified by Howard Brooks

Medieval pottery descriptions after Cotter 2000.

Table 1: List of finds.

Find no	Context	Description	Date	Weight
1	U/S from old workshop/store	Lump of <i>opus signinum</i> mortar	Roman	102g
1	U/S from old workshop/store	Glass bead	modern	2g
1	U/S from old workshop/store	Animal bone (discarded)	undated	6g
1	U/S from old workshop/store	Bone label from antiques shop	modern	1g
1	U/S from old workshop/store	Clay-pipe stem	post - medieval	3g
1	U/S from old workshop/store	Iron disc with hole (discarded)	modern	13g
1	U/S from old workshop/store	3 sherds Fabric 20 medieval sandy grey ware	later 13th or 14th century	18g
1	U/S from old workshop/store	1 sherd Fabric 21a Colchester-type ware or Fabric 40 post-medieval red earthenware	16th-18th centuries	12g
1	U/S from old workshop/store	Stone hone	early post - medieval?	21g
1	U/S from old workshop/store	Peg-tile fragment	post-medieval	33g
2	L4, from workshop/store	3 sherds of Fabric 20 medieval sandy grey ware	later 13th or 14th century	29g
3	L11, from backfill in cellar in old lounge	1 base and rim fragment from a shallow vessel in flowerpot ware (Fabric 51b)	19th-20th centuries	34g
4	L12, topsoil in sewer-trench to north of building	Clay pipe, almost complete	19th century	32g
5	F2, cellar in old lounge	Whole frogless brick 200mm x 95mm x 53mm, with mortar attached	late 17th-mid 18th centuries	1.1kg

U/S = unstratified

Appendix B: report on the hone

by Nina Crummy

The hone

The hone was recovered from context (1), unstratified. Made of Norwegian ragstone, it is extremely worn, with both sides, both faces, and both ends abraded. Length 93 mm. One side is dished and slightly rounded. The other is also dished, but is worn to a slick flat surface, which appears to be that most recently in used. One end is worn down to a blunt irregularly-shaped point, with very shallow point-sharpening grooves on one face. The shallowness of these grooves is a result of the face being abraded after they went out of use. The other end is narrower but thicker, providing a comfortable grip. It is spalled, perhaps on the lines of point-sharpening grooves, but has again worn smooth after this damage occurred. While the point of a blade was usually sharpened in a long groove, a hone from the Middleborough site, Colchester, had point-sharpening grooves across one end (Moore & Oakley 1979, 280-83; Crummy 1988, fig 79, 3131).

Norwegian ragstone is a fine-grained schist from the Eidsborg quarry near Telemark, Norway. Hones of this type were imported into Britain in considerable numbers from the Late Saxon period onwards, perhaps continuing as late as the early post-medieval period (Crummy 2000, 121).

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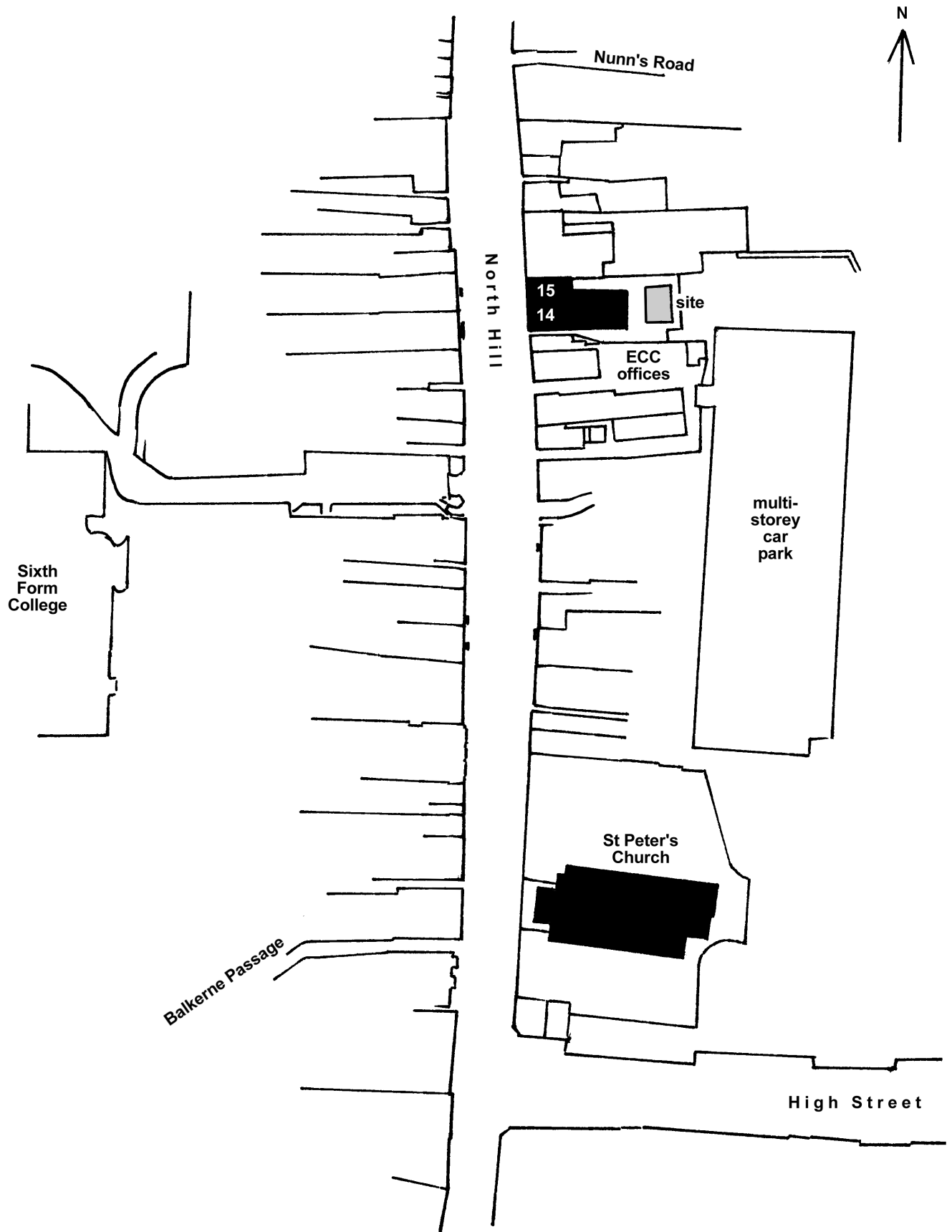


Fig 1 Site location, scale 1:1250.

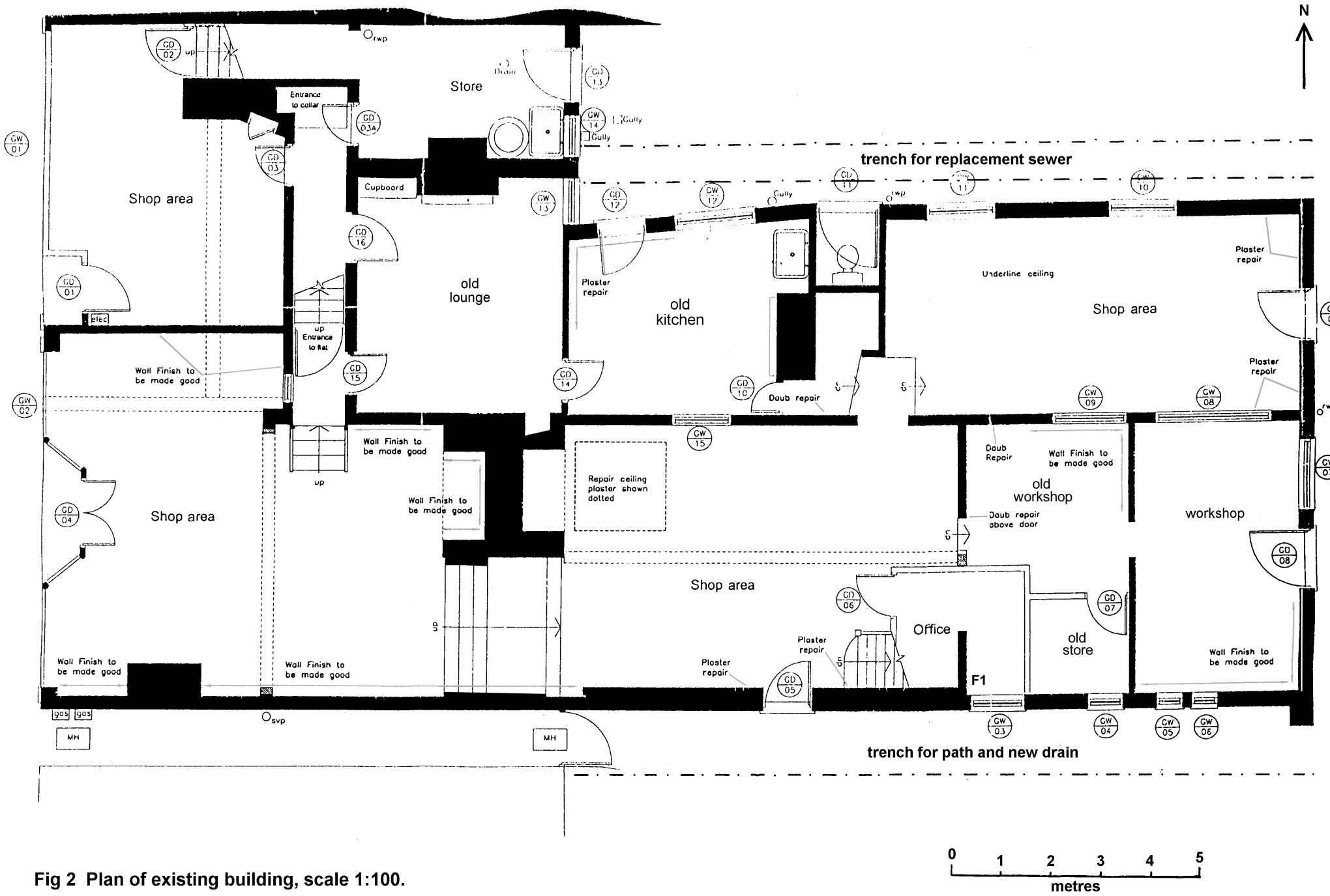


Fig 2 Plan of existing building, scale 1:100.

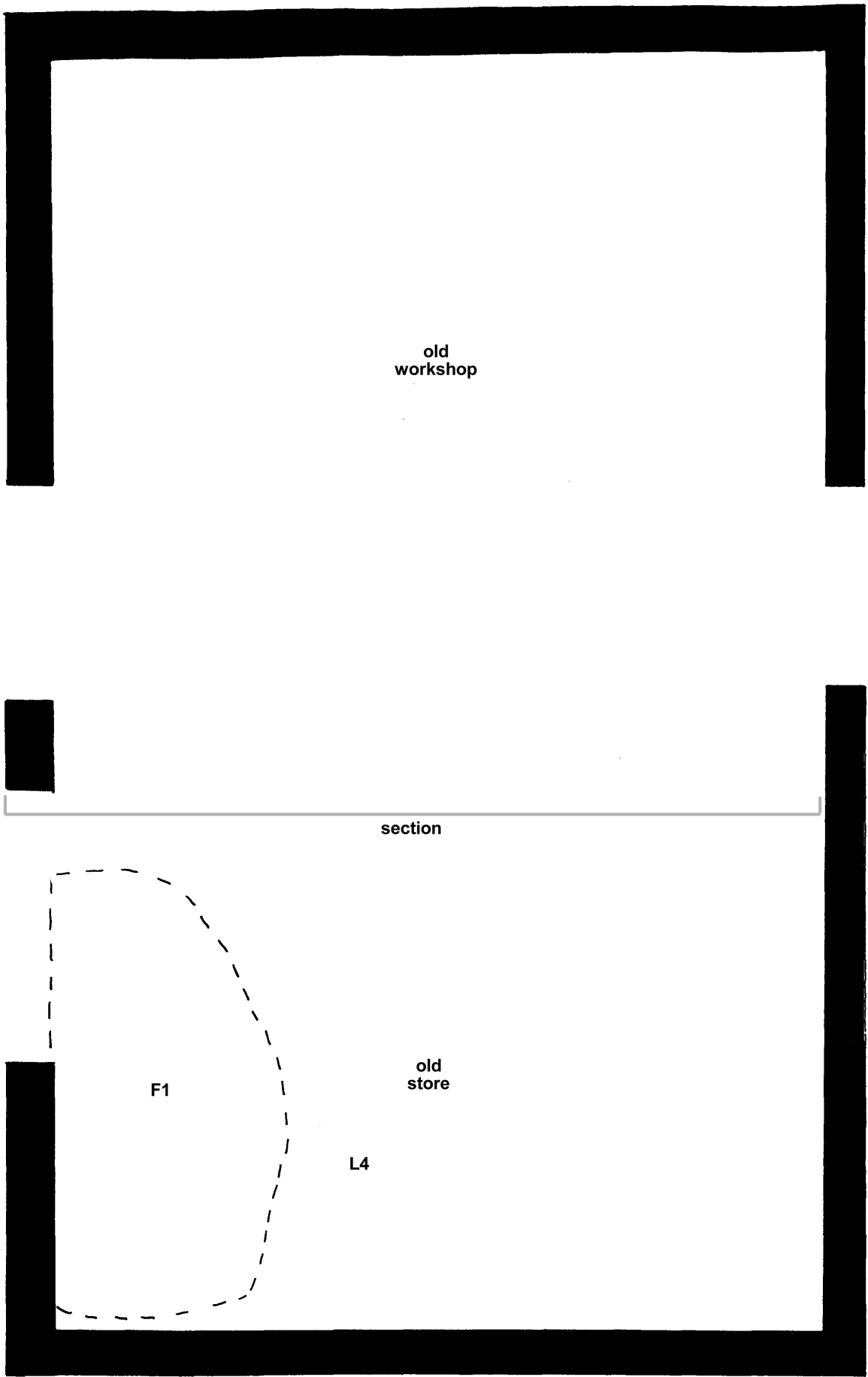


Fig 3 Plan of F1 in old workshop/store, scale 1:20.

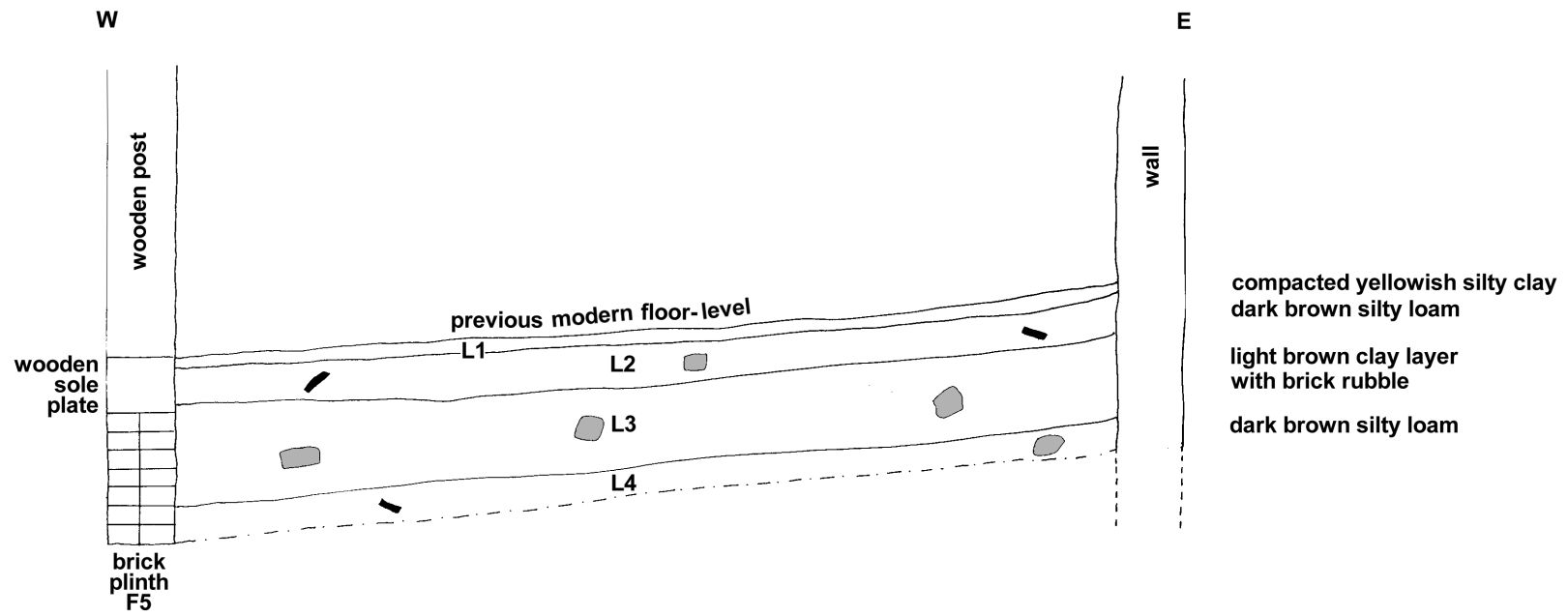


Fig 4 Section drawing of old workshop/store after ground-reduction, scale 1:20.

0 500
mm

peg-tile

brick

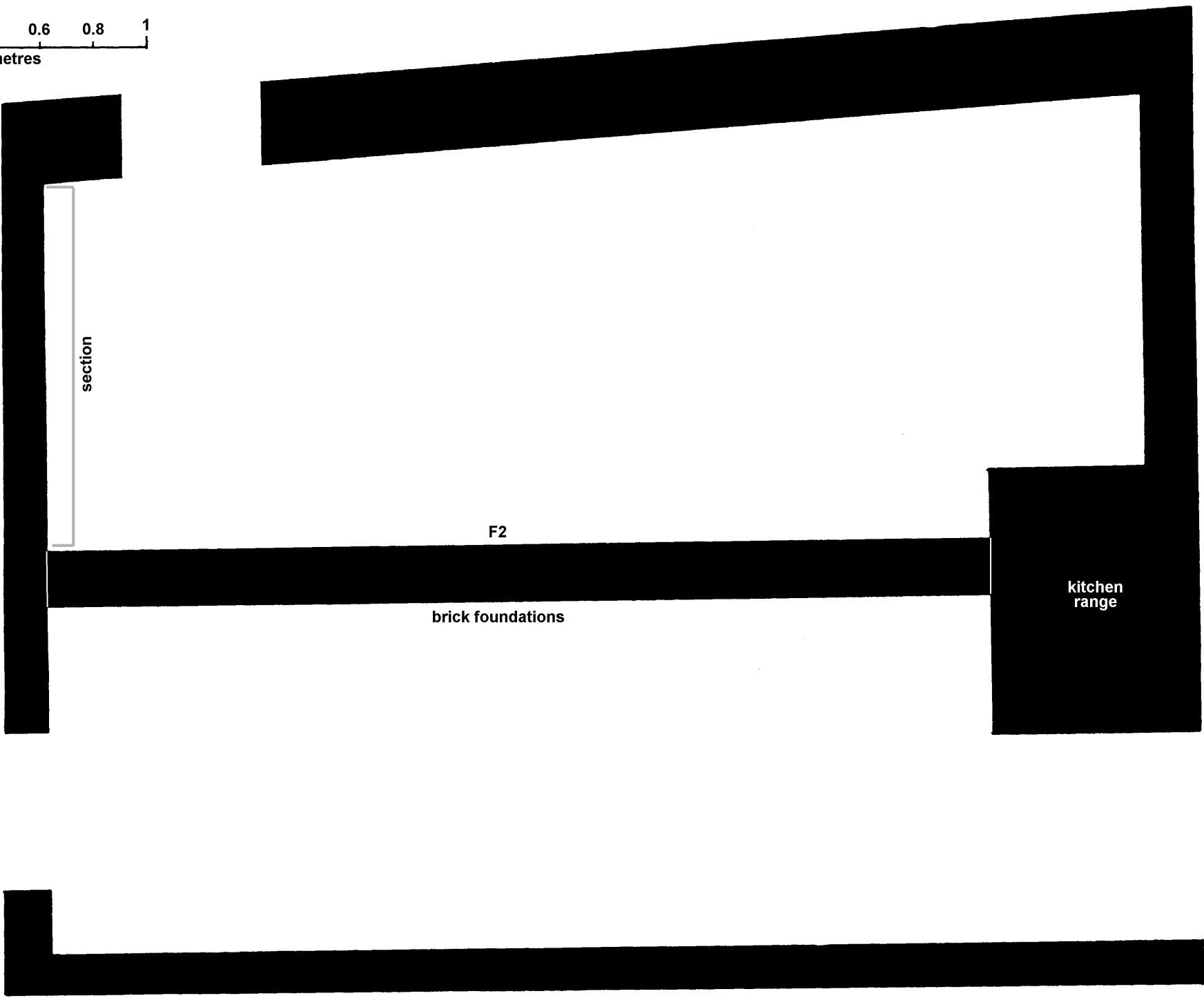
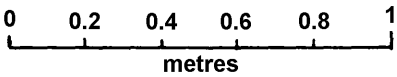


Fig 5 Plan of old kitchen, scale 1:20.

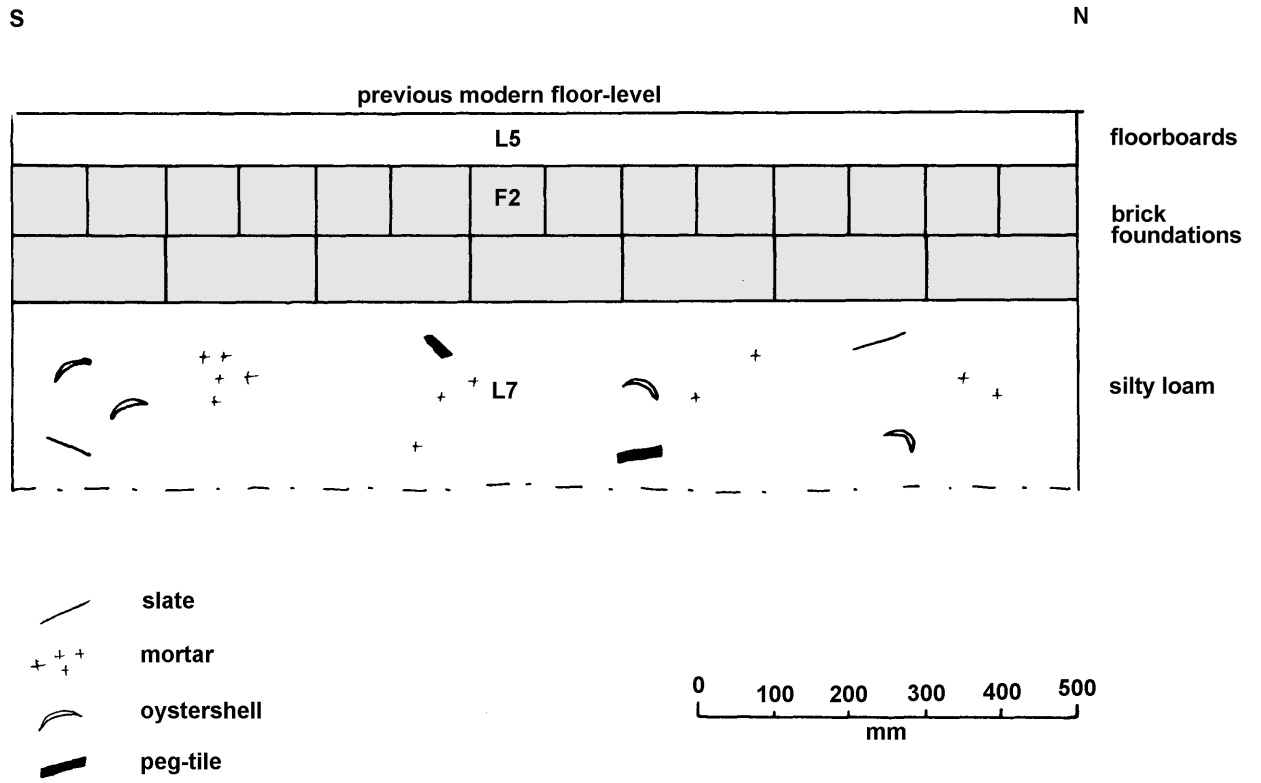


Fig 6 Section drawing of old kitchen after ground-reduction, scale 1:10.

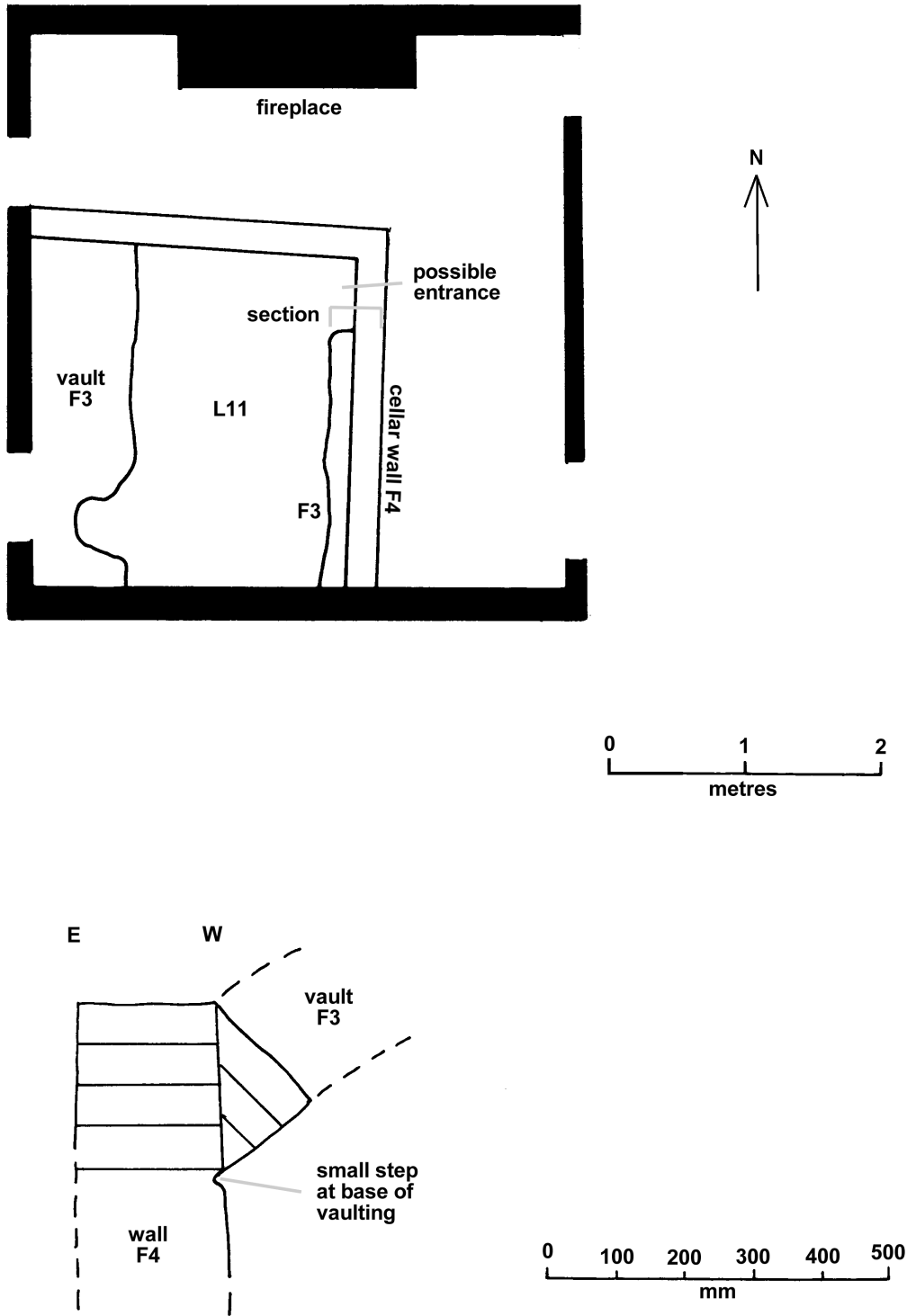
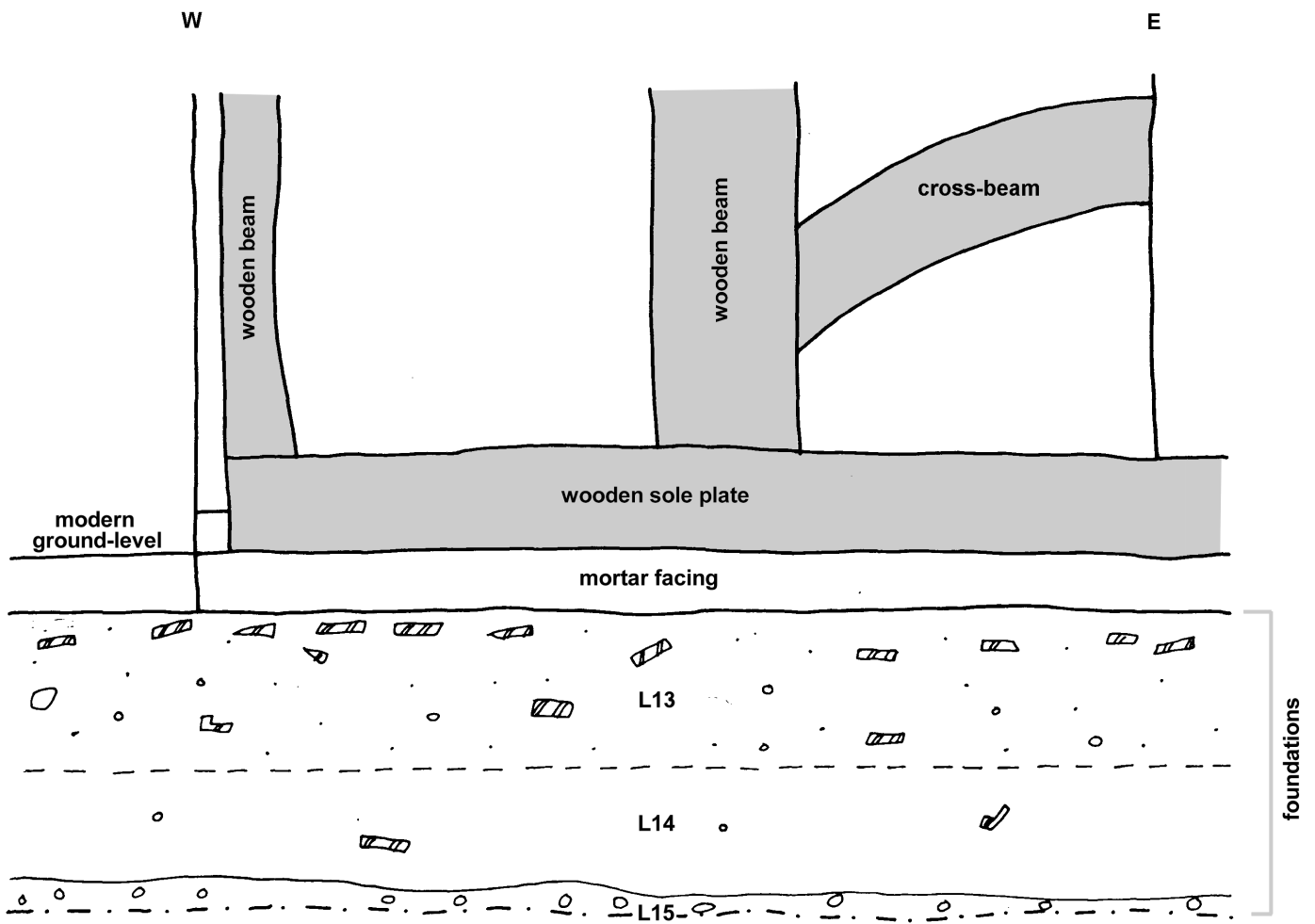
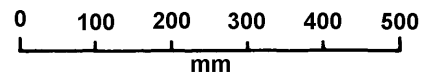


Fig 7 Top: plan of F3 and F4 - the old lounge after ground reduction, scale 1:50; and bottom: section drawing of F3 and F4, scale 1:10.



- L13 yellow sand and stones packed with Roman tile and peg-tile
- L14 burnt clay with Roman tile and peg-tile
- L15 dark brown silty clay with abundant stones

Fig 8 Section drawing of southern exterior of rear wing after digging of services/path trench, scale 1:10.



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

Summary sheet

Site name/address: 'Bonds', 14-15 North Hill, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester Borough
NGR: TL 9940 2546	Site code: 2001.235
Type of work: Watching brief	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: 24th October 2001-17th April 2002	Size of area investigated: 9m x 11m
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: Colchester Borough Council
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHCR nos:
Final report: CAT Report 192 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Medieval, post-medieval and modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: <i>Observations were made during groundworks associated with the repair of the medieval building (formerly 'Bonds') at 14-15 North Hill, Colchester, Essex. Under the floorboards of the building, previous floor surfaces and the original medieval ground-level were exposed. Timber and brick foundations were revealed and there was evidence of the underpinning of wooden sole plates with peg-tile. A wall and a vaulted ceiling to a cellar dating to the late 17th or 18th century was exposed.</i></p> <p><i>The groundworks did not impact on any Roman remains.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: July 2002