

**An archaeological evaluation at
the rear of 12 and 13 St Botolph's Street,
Colchester, Essex
April 2004**

**report prepared
by Carl Crossan**

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Results summary

Three evaluation trenches were dug in open areas to either side of the passageway between 12 and 13 St Botolph's Street and Arthur Street (Areas 11, 14 and 15 in Fig 1). In all three trenches, the removal of 19th- and 20th-century surfacing and levelling revealed a series of thick deposits of dark earth and dumped soils belonging to the post-medieval period and, at greater depth, possibly extending as far back as the medieval and Roman periods. The trench in Area 15 revealed the remains of one or more buildings in the form of two north-south stone wall foundations together with indications of a clay floor at a depth of 1.5m. The clay and one of the wall foundations appear to belong to the post-medieval period; the second foundation is either of similar date or earlier.

Introduction

This report is one of a series describing the results from archaeological evaluation trenches excavated in the Vineyard Gate area of Colchester between January and May 2004.

In total, 19 locations were investigated within a region bounded to the north by the Vineyard Street stretch of the town wall and to the south by Osborne Street. The focus of this report is a group of three trenches excavated in areas to the rear of 12 and 13 St Botolph's Street (Fig 1).

Historical background

Colchester's status as England's oldest recorded town owes its origins to events 2000 years ago, when the regional tribal stronghold of Camulodunum became the prime target for the Roman invasion of AD 43. The victorious Roman army established Britain's first military fortress in the western part of the area now occupied by the town centre. In the years that followed, the fortress developed into a major town which was destroyed during the Boudican revolt of AD 60/61. After the suppression of the uprising, Camulodunum was rebuilt and the town wall that we know today was eventually constructed. Roman settlement spread well beyond the limits of the walled town; suburbs developed outside the north and west gates, and, from its earliest days, cemeteries along the main approach roads. The Roman town was to survive for almost 400 years until finally abandoned to the Saxons in the 5th century. In the following centuries the town was sparsely occupied and its Roman buildings were left to decay and collapse.

Colchester re-established itself as a major provincial town and trading centre in the medieval period. The century following the Norman conquest saw the construction of the castle, an ambitious undertaking with the largest Norman keep in Europe, together with the monastic houses of St John's abbey and St Botolph's priory which dominated the area beyond the south-eastern stretch of the town wall. The main gateway in this part of the town was the south gate, which stood at the junction of the modern St Botolph's Street and Short Wyre Street. This was the closest gateway to Hythe Quay and would have served as a main entry and exit point for goods traffic on the one-mile route between the walled town centre and the medieval quayside. Medieval and later activities in the locality are reflected in the earlier street names, which often related to local drinking houses and trade. Vineyard Street, known in the 14th century as Beres Lane, later became Blackboy Lane (1678) and then Brickyard Street (19th century). Arthur Street and Osborne Street are named after Arthur Osborne, a local mid 19th-century brewery owner.

Archaeological background

Archaeologically, this region of Colchester is of interest because it adjoins the town's southern defences and lies close to the site of a major gateway. A recent study divided the area broadly into three zones (Johnson *et al* 2003). The high ground in front of the town wall can be seen as a defensive zone containing the Roman and medieval town ditches. Beyond the defences are two zones subject to settlement: one on higher ground in Vineyard Street and one on the lower slopes to the south where relatively wet ground conditions may have influenced the nature of past development activity. The only substantial archaeological excavation to have previously been undertaken within the area was prompted by the 1970s' breach of the town wall to form the Vineyard Gate service entrance to the Lion Walk precinct. A section dug through the town defences encountered a series of Roman and medieval ditches up to 5m deep, with a possible medieval street to the south and remains of post-medieval and later buildings over the backfilled ditch (CAR 3, sheet 6a, sx 55). In Osborne Street, systematic investigation has previously been undertaken only on the south side of the street, where, during an excavation in advance of the construction of the NCP multi-storey car-park, floors deriving from a Roman building were recorded at the eastern end of the site (Shimmin 1994). These lay at about 3m depth, below the well-preserved remains of medieval wicker-lined drains which were followed by a series of later medieval and post-medieval buildings belonging to a plot extending back from the St Botolph's Street frontage. At the Stanwell Street end of the site, the excavations exposed the floors of a 16th- to 17th-century timber-framed building which had been destroyed by fire, probably during the Civil War siege of Colchester in 1648. References to Roman tessellated floors and cremation burials appear among records of chance finds made in the Osborne Street area in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Since these discoveries were recorded with varying degrees of precision, their exact locations are in the main uncertain.

Results

Annotated plans and section drawings of the trenches are included in the figures at the end of this report. Numbers preceded by 'L' or 'F' are layers and features which were individually identified, investigated and recorded. A guide to terms can be found in the glossary.

Area 11 Trench 1 (plan Fig 2; section Fig 3)

Location: yard at the rear of 13 St Botolph's Street
NGR: TL 99859 24936
Trench dimensions: 1.7m x 1.3m
Surface level: 16.8m AOD

Removal of up to 1.1m of modern concrete, hardcore and make-up (L46, L47, L48) exposed the construction level of a c 19th-century brick foundation (F37) which occupied the upper northern side of the trench. Beneath this was a series of a very dark grey, predominantly silty deposits with occasional oyster shells (L49, L50, L51), above a pale grey silty sand with common minute fragments of tile or brick (L52) which lay at a depth of 2.55m. The layers L51 and L52 were devoid of finds. Dating evidence from L50 included several fragments of peg-tile and a medieval pot sherd together with residual Roman pottery, which suggests a possible medieval or, more likely, post-medieval date for this level. A noteworthy find from L50 was a horncore, which may indicate horn-working activity in the vicinity. Excavation ceased with the reaching of the water table at an overall depth of 2.7m.

Area 14 Trench 1 (plan Fig 2; section Fig 4)

Location: car-park north of 2a Arthur Street
NGR: TL 99847 24949
Trench dimensions: 4.5m x 1.5m
Surface level: 17.35m AOD

Modern surfacing, foundations and make-up (L62, L63, F43, L64) rested on a thick layer of dark greyish brown sandy loam (L65). This extended to a depth of 1.4m, sealing a post-medieval spread of compacted stone (F44), which may be associated with the similar L31 exposed to the

east in Area 15. Post-medieval levels appear to continue to a depth of at least 2.1m, where a post-1790 pot sherd was found at the interface between L73, a dark sandy loam with wide-ranging pottery and building material inclusions, and L78, an underlying olive-tinged sandy loam. Excavation beyond approximately 2m depth took place below the water table and was limited to the north-eastern corner of the trench. Here, the olive-tinged L78, which contained no datable material other than occasional Roman tile inclusions, sealed a very dark grey loamy sand (L79) which extended beyond the 2.85m maximum depth of excavation. The only closely datable find from limited excavation of L79 was a sherd of 4th-century pottery. The finds seem to bracket layers L78 and L79 within a broad date range between the very late Roman and the late 18th century.

Area 15 Trench 1 (plan Fig 2; section Fig 5)

Location: yard at the rear of 12 St Botolph's Street

NGR: TL 99861 24950

Trench dimensions: 5.7m (overall) x 1.5m

Surface level: 17.07m AOD

Excavation at the northern end of the trench was limited to a depth of 20cm due to the presence of shallow modern services. In the remainder of the trench, 40cm of modern yard surfacing (L26 to L29) overlaid a thick post-medieval layer of very dark sandy loam (L30) which extended to a depth of 1.1m. Removal of L30 revealed the northern butt end of a wall foundation constructed of re-used Roman building stone and topped with tile (F27). Surrounding F27 was a coarse stony dumped soil (L31) which rested on a thick dark grey silt-rich material containing 17th-/18th-century pottery and post-medieval brick. To the south of the wall (F27), olive-tinged deposits (L37, L40) were found to rest on a possible clay floor (F33) which lay between F27 and a masonry foundation to the east (F32). It was not clear whether F32 was contemporary or possibly earlier than F27. In the lowest excavated level of the trench, a very dark silty soil (L39) presented a uniform appearance with no discernible interfaces other than those shown in the section illustration. However, this context seems more likely to represent an accumulation over a lengthy period of time ending in the post-medieval period. Within L39, a sporadic layer composed largely of wood fragments may be a remnant of matting laid over this waterlogged soil. Datable finds indicate that post-medieval levels include the foundation F27 and extend at least as far as the clay layer F33 which lies at a depth of 1.5m. Beyond this depth, dating is indeterminate and may extend into the medieval period or earlier. Excavation ceased at an overall depth of 2m.

Finds

The main categories of finds from these trenches were pottery, building materials and animal bone, all of which are undergoing specialist analysis. The pottery sherds and loose building materials variously belong to the Roman, medieval and later periods. The animal remains included a number of horncores from the lower levels of the Area 11 and Area 15 trenches. These have also been found in quantity in trenches a short distance to the south of this group and point to the existence of a local horn-working industry. The horncores are from goats and long and short-horn cattle and are generally thought to have been traded initially with the heads still attached.

Documentary sources

by Philip J Wise of CM

Amongst the deeds of the land now occupied by Allen and Son (Butchers) at 13 St Botolph's Street is a mortgage agreement dated 17 August 1757. The agreement was made between Mrs Elizabeth Goslin, a widow, and Mr Samuel Wall, who is described as a gentleman. It is stated that Mrs Goslin's late husband was a Stephen Goslin whose occupation is given as a fellmonger (one who prepares and sells animal skins).

The 1757 mortgage refers to an earlier indenture of 29 January 1752, now lost, again between Elizabeth Goslin and Samuel Wall. In this, Elizabeth Goslin in return for £80 sold to Samuel Wall

'those six severall messuages or tenements and dwelling houses situate lying and being in Buttolph Street... Four of which messuages then late were in the several tenures of James Brockwell James Inman Benjamin Knock and the widow Eagle and then or then late were in the several occupations of James Brockwell William Boys the Younger the widow Knock and Hannah Eslin... and the other two in the several tenures of John Dykes yarnmaker and [William] Barrell and in the occupation of John Dykes only...'

It is clear that the land holding was sub-divided into several properties occupied by artisans or widows of artisans, although only one occupation – yarnmaker – is given.

The structural evidence from Area 15, masonry wall foundations and a possible clay floor, may represent part of one of those 'six severall messuages' described in the 1757 mortgage. The existing buildings on the site probably date to the early 19th century. This may be argued on the basis of both the architecture of the St Botolph's Street frontage (Jagger 2003, 4) and from documentary evidence. Monson's 1848 map of Colchester clearly shows the present side alley leading off St Botolph's Street and the complex of ancillary buildings to the rear. The same features appear in an earlier source preserved in the deeds of 13 St Botolph's Street – a conveyance of 14 November 1837 which includes a detailed map of the property. Interestingly, at this date the property is described as a 'Butcher's Shop'.

Documentary sources:

Mrs Eliza Goslin to Saml Wall Mortgage for a further sum of £27 dated 17th August 1757.
Thomas Challis Esq and wife to Mr Daking Bear and his Trustees conveyance of a freehold messuage Butcher's Shop... situate in Botolph Street... Dated the 14th November 1837.
Map of Colchester by E. Monson 1848.

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to Mr John Allen, both for his co-operation in permitting the trenching to take place, and particularly for providing the opportunity to study the title deeds of 13 St Botolph's Street. Thanks are also due to Mr Allen and his staff at Allen and Son for their help and patience in the course of the trenching.

The investigation was funded through Colchester Borough Council, conceived and organised by Colchester Museums (Philip Wise) and Oxford Archaeological Associates Ltd (Simon Collcutt).

Glossary and abbreviations

AOD	above Ordnance Survey datum point based on mean sea level at Newlyn, Cornwall
Boudican	relating to the revolt led by Boudica against the Roman occupation in AD 60/61
CBC	Colchester Borough Council
context	specific location on an excavation, usually relates to finds
cut	an excavation of unspecified purpose
make-up	material dumped to raise ground-level
medieval	the period from AD 1066 to Henry VIII
modern	19th century to the present
NGR	National Grid Reference
OAA	Oxford Archaeological Associates
post-medieval	after Henry VIII and up to Queen Victoria
residual	something out of its original period context, eg a Roman coin in a modern pit
Roman	the period from AD 43 to c AD 430
Saxon	the period from c AD 430 to AD 1066
septaria	a local stone first used for building in the Roman period, frequently salvaged and re-used in later periods

References

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- Johnson, A P, 2003 'St Botolph's quarter regeneration schemes, Colchester, cultural heritage (archaeology) statement, part 1: background and existing situation', Oxford Archaeological Associates Ltd
- Petchey, M R, & Colcutt, S N 1994 'Excavations at Osborne Street, Colchester', *Essex Archaeology and History*, 25, 46-59
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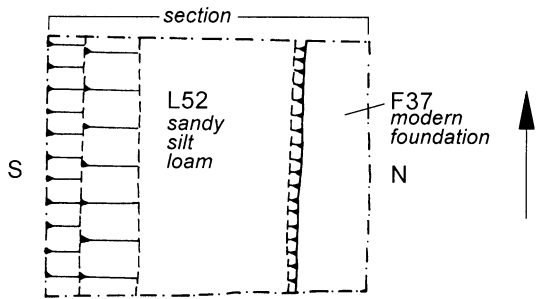
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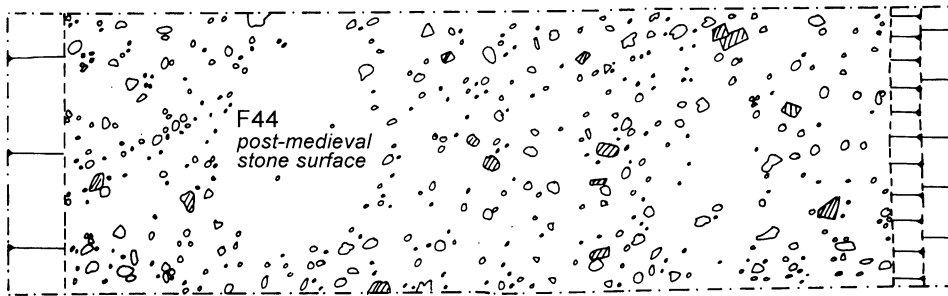


Fig 1 Trench location.

Area 11 Trench 1



Area 14 Trench 1



Area 15 Trench 1

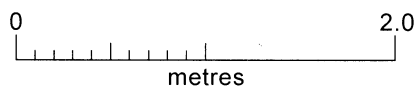
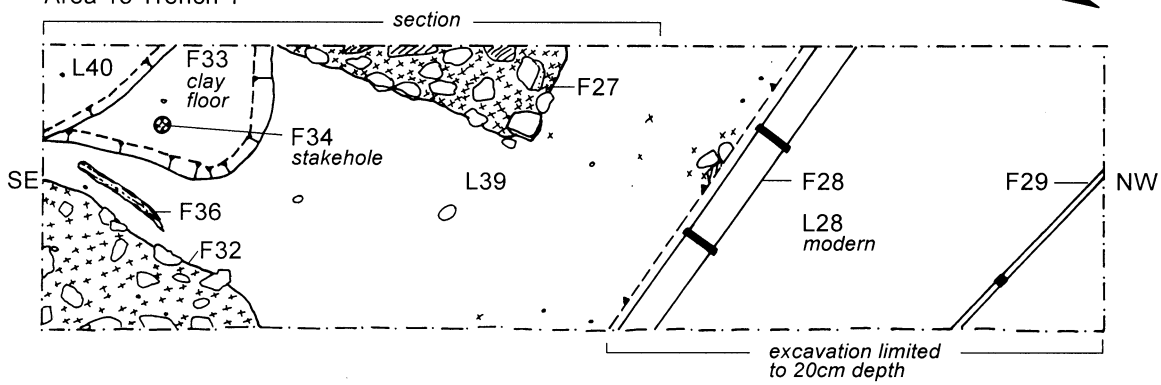


Fig 2 Area 11, Trench,1; Area 14, Trench 1; Area 15, Trench 1 - plans.

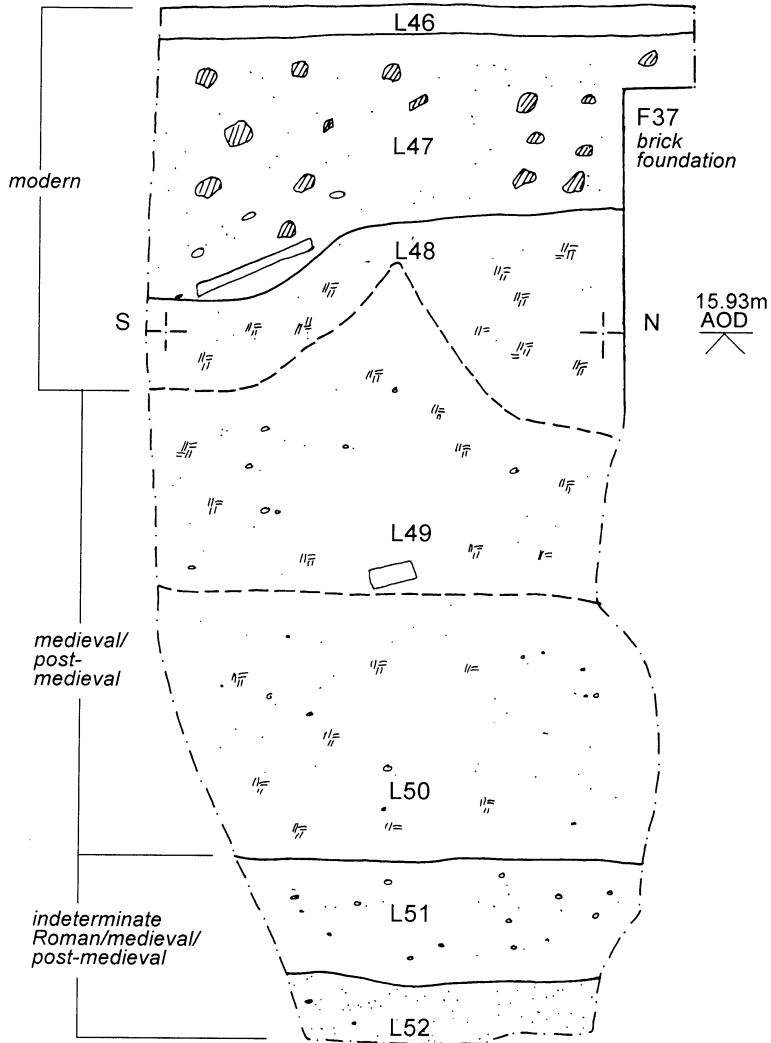


Fig 3 Area 11, Trench 1: section.

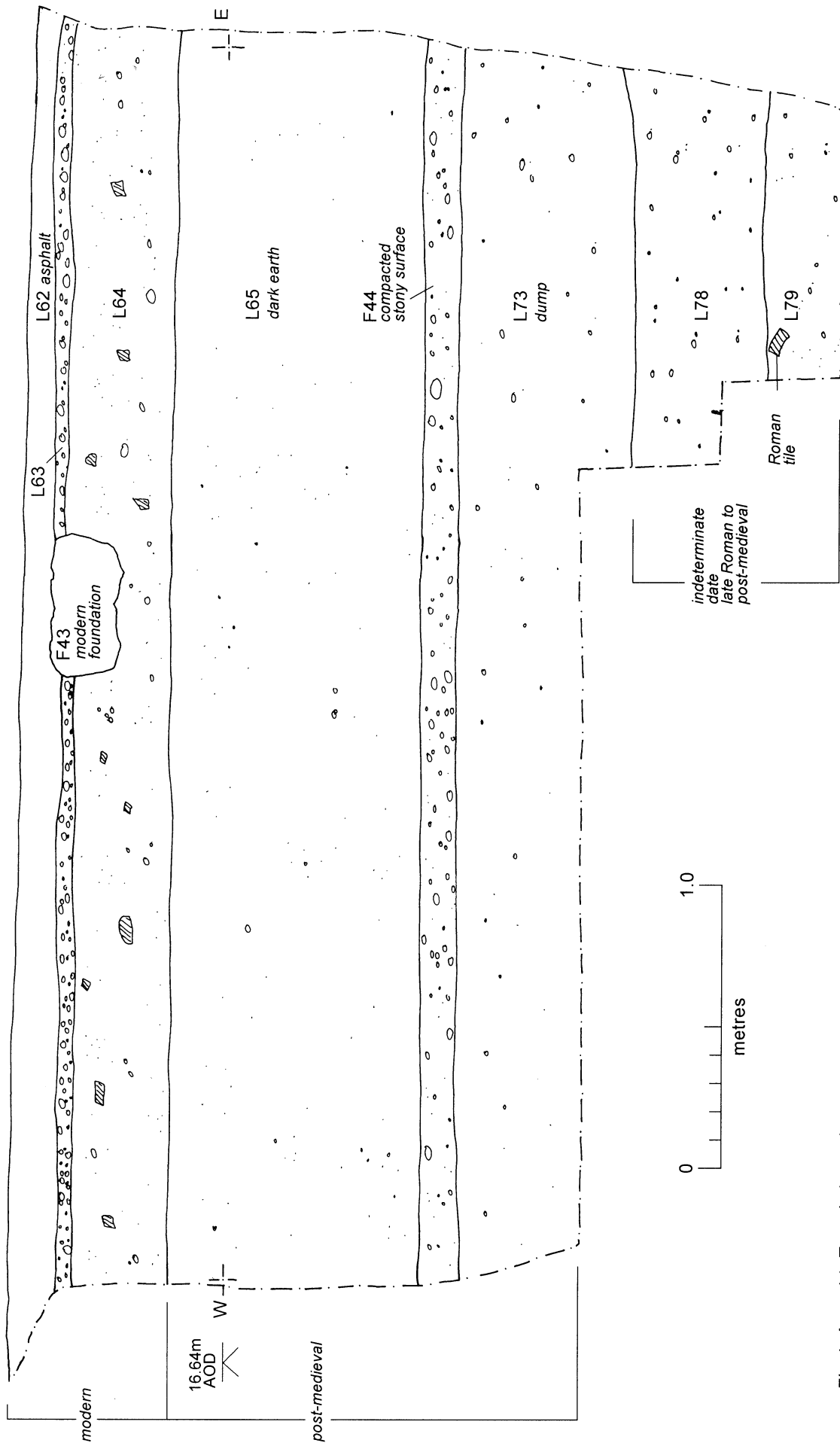


Fig 4 Area 14, Trench 1: section.

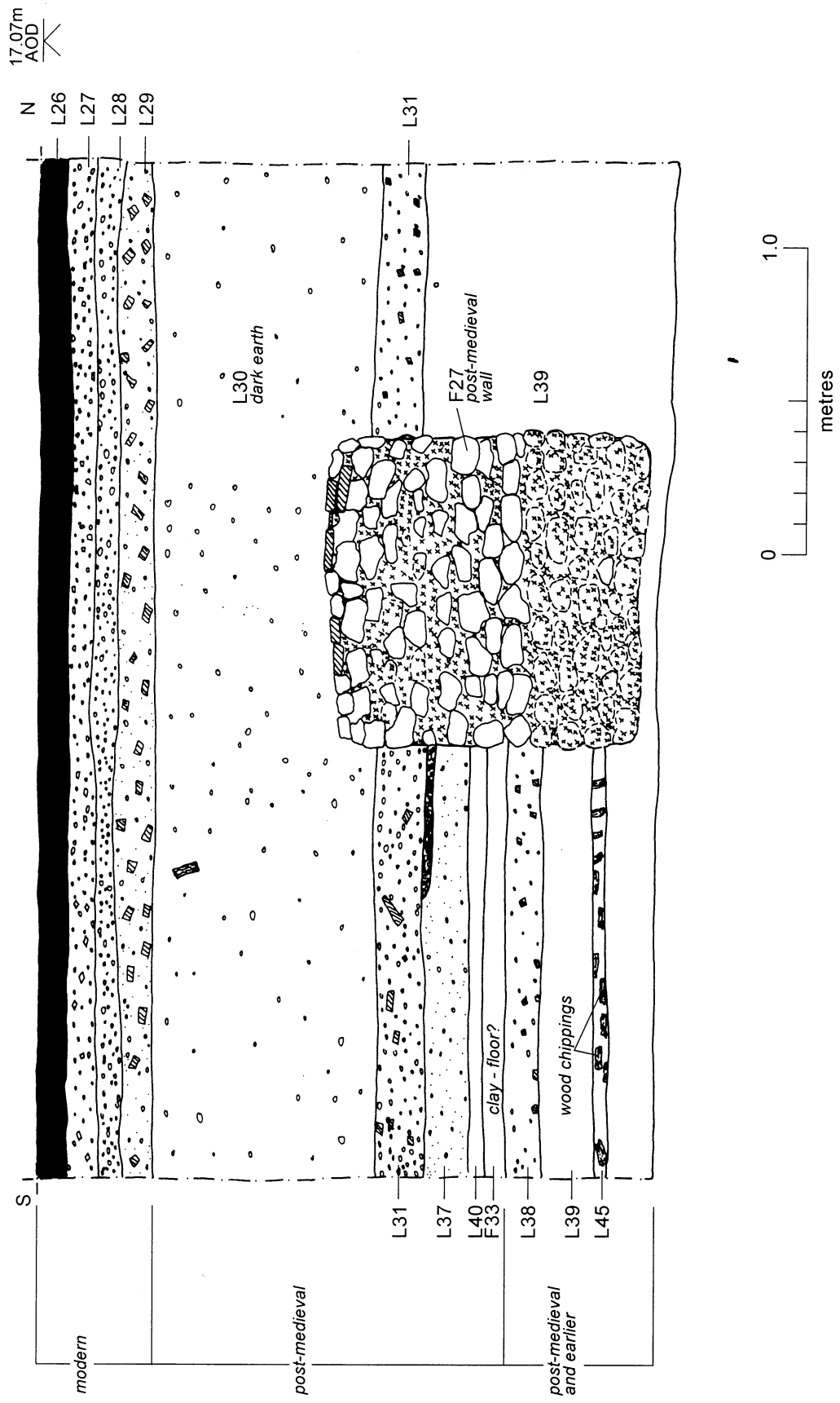


Fig 5 Area 15, Trench 1: section.