

**Archaeological monitoring around
Roman Circus House,
Off Circular Road North,
Colchester, Essex
February 2012 - July 2013**



**report prepared by
Mark Baister**

**on behalf of
Colchester Archaeological Trust
and Taylor Wimpey**

CAT project ref.: 13/06c
Historic Environment site code: 2013.32
NGR: TL 9942, 2461



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CAT Report 722
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Introduction

This report describes seven archaeological watching briefs carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) at and around Roman Circus House from the period of February 2012 to July 2013. The site is located south of Colchester town centre just off Circular Road North (NGR TL 9942, 2461; Fig 1). The fieldwork was carried out by professional archaeologists from CAT.

The site is in close proximity to Colchester's Roman Circus (EHER 46327), a scheduled monument (SM 1021426). A Roman cemetery was previously excavated to the north-west of the site (see forthcoming CAT Report for 'GAL Area H').

Results (Figs 2-5)

All groundworks were undertaken using a mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless bucket under continuous archaeological supervision.

1. Circus starting gates reconstruction

Monitoring required as part of scheduled monument consent for CAT.

A series of trenches were excavated over the locations of the Roman Circus (EHER 46327) starting gates. The trenches were excavated to a depth of 250-300mm below modern ground level, stopping in the grey/brown silty sand topsoil above the foundations of the Circus. The bases of the trenches were subsequently covered with plastic sheeting prior to being infilled with concrete to create the foundation pads for replica starting gates.

2. Electricity trench for Roman Circus House (Fig 3)

Monitoring required as part of scheduled monument consent for CAT.

Approximately 160m of trenching (at a width of 350mm-400mm and a depth of 700-750mm) was excavated from the west edge of the garden of the Sergeants' Mess (SM garden) to Roman Circus House (Fig 2).

The stratigraphy of the trench varied over this distance. A layer of grey/brown sandy silt buried topsoil was present throughout the trench, but was in places covered by a modern layer of tarmac and crush 400mm thick. From the SM garden up to the Le Cateau Road, the natural subsoil of sand and gravel was encountered at a ever increasing depth (470mm to 650mm), until the Roman Circus House garden, when only topsoil was encountered.

Three features were identified in the SM garden (Fig 3):

Context	Description	Finds	Date
F1	linear(?) with soft, moist light grey/brown sandy silt fill	peg tile (not retained)	post-medieval
F2	linear(?) With soft, moist light grey/brown sandy silt fill	brick (not retained)	post-medieval/modern
F3	700mm wide patch of small CBM/ragstone fragments. pathway?	-	Roman?

The only feature of interest was F3 (Plate 1). The narrowness of the trench makes interpretation difficult, but it appears to be an intentionally placed surface, possibly a path running north-west to south-east. No finds were recovered from the trench.

3. Postholes for the hoarding surrounding the former Sergeants' Mess

Monitoring required as part of scheduled monument consent for Taylor Wimpey.

A series of small postholes approximately 200mm square and 300-400mm deep were examined prior to erection of a hoarding in the SM garden. They were cut into grey/brown, sandy silt topsoil. No archaeology was encountered.

4. Bat hibernaculum foundations (Fig 4)

Watching brief undertaken for Taylor Wimpey.

A foundation 13m long and 5m wide was dug under archaeological supervision to the north-west of the former Sergeants' Mess. 300mm of tarmac and crush was dug through before a layer of topsoil 500mm thick was uncovered. Below this the trench cut into the natural orange sand and gravel for 1200mm before it was bottomed.

Nothing of archaeological interest was exposed. The only feature observed was a cut for a modern pipe running north-south across the foundation trench (Plate 2). No finds were recovered.

5. Postholes for gates into SM garden

Monitoring required as part of scheduled monument consent for Taylor Wimpey.

Four postholes were dug (Fig 2) for the placement of two new gates allowing entrance into the SM garden. They were 300mm square and 550-600mm deep, and cut into the topsoil of grey/brown sandy silt. No archaeology was observed or finds recovered.

6. Archive store foundations (Fig 5)

Watching brief undertaken for CAT.

The square footings for a one story archive store were excavated to the north-west of Roman Circus House. These footings were subsequently filled with concrete to create the foundation for the building. The footings were excavated to a depth of between 1m and 1.5m below modern ground level. They cut through a modern layer of tarmac and crush 100mm-120mm thick, then a mid/dark brown sandy-silt buried topsoil 890mm- 910mm thick, before coming onto the natural gravely orange sand. The pits for two soakaways (1.5m deep) and pipe runs leading into them (600mm deep) were also monitored.

Two archaeological features were observed during monitoring (Fig 5):

Context	Description	Finds	Date
F1	linear with a dark black sandy silt fill, running north-south?	pottery, tile	Roman
F2	large pit(?) with a dark black sandy silt fill	pottery, tile	Roman

During the digging of the foundations, F1 (Plate 3) was cut into 200-300mm, and F2 (Plate 4) was cut into by 400-500mm, but neither feature was bottomed when foundation trench was fully excavated.

F1 has fragments of a pottery bowl dating from the late 2nd century to 3rd century, whereas F2 has a greyware pottery fragment from a large bowl of a broad Roman date. Both these features would have been associated with the high level of Roman activity to the south of the town, surrounding the Circus.

No other features of archaeological interest were uncovered.

7. Water trench for Roman Circus House

Watching brief undertaken for CAT.

Approximately 57m of trenching (at a width of 350mm-400mm and a depth of 750-800mm) was excavated north-west of Roman Circus House. The trench was cut through a topsoil of dark brown sandy silt (sometimes covered by tarmac and crush 120-150mm thick). Natural sand or gravel was not observed. Numerous modern services were encountered, but no features of archaeological interest.



Plate 1 Electricity trench, possible path F3. Facing west.



Plate 2 Bat *hibernaculum* foundations, showing modern service. Facing west.



Plate 3 Archive store footings, ditch F1. Facing north-east.



Plate 4 Archive store footings, pit F2. Facing south-west.

Conclusion

Very little of archaeological importance was exposed during the various groundworks, largely due to the (in general) small size of the excavations and shallow depths reached.

Of the features identified, only three (two from the archive store foundations and one from the electricity trench) can be said to be archaeologically significant. All being of Roman date, they fit easily into the area of Roman activity surrounding the Circus, although their nature and purpose are unclear.

Acknowledgements

CAT would like to thank Taylor Wimpey for commissioning and funding several of the projects. The site work was undertaken by A Wightman, C Lister, S Benfield, B Holloway and M Baister. The project was monitored by Martin Winter for Colchester Borough Council, and Deborah Priddy for English Heritage.

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Appendix 1: contents of archive

One A4 document wallet containing:

1 Introduction

1.1 Risk assessments

2 Site archive

2.1 Site digital photographic records

2.2 Attendance registers

2.3 Various notes

2.4 Site photographic records on CD

3 Research archive

3.1 Monitoring (client) report

Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

Summary sheet

Address: Roman Circus House, Off Circular Road North, Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TL 9942, 2461	Site codes: CAT project – 13/06c
Type of work: Archaeological monitoring	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: February 2012 to July 2013	Size of area investigated: -
Location of curating museum: Colchester and Ipswich Museum Accession code: 2013.32	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHER numbers: 46327
Final report: 722	
Periods represented: Roman, Post-Medieval	
<p>Summary:</p> <p><i>Seven archaeological watching briefs were carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) around Roman Circus House from February 2012 to July 2013. The site is located south of Colchester town centre just off Circular Road North (NGR TL 9942, 2461).</i></p> <p><i>All seven watching briefs were primarily negative, with only three observed features being of any archaeological merit. One pit, one ditch and one pathway(?) were observed, all dating from the Roman period.</i></p> <p><i>No other features of archaeological interest were uncovered.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Keywords: Roman, circus	Significance: *
Author of summary: Mark Baister	Date of summary: August 2013

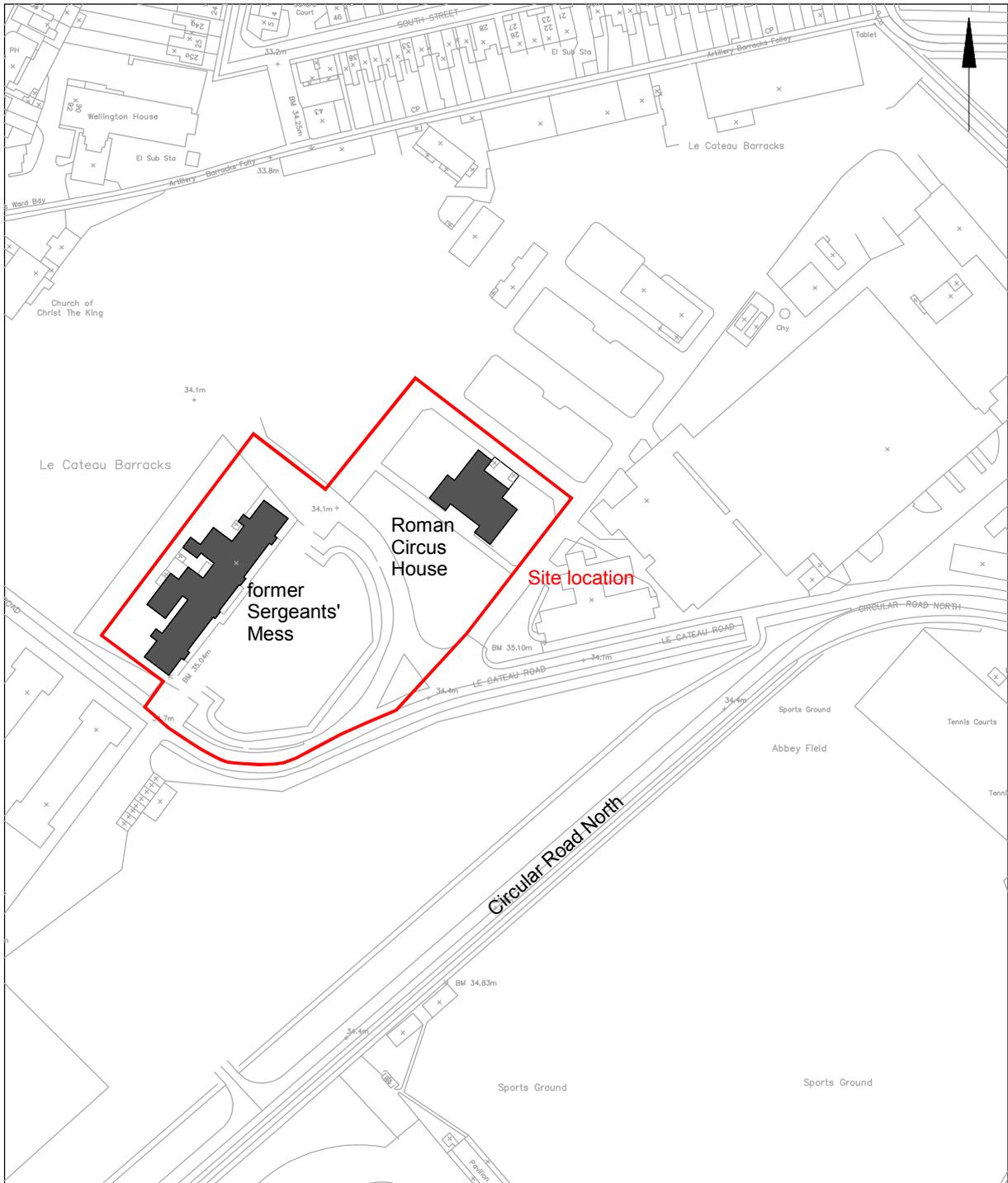


Fig 1 Site location.

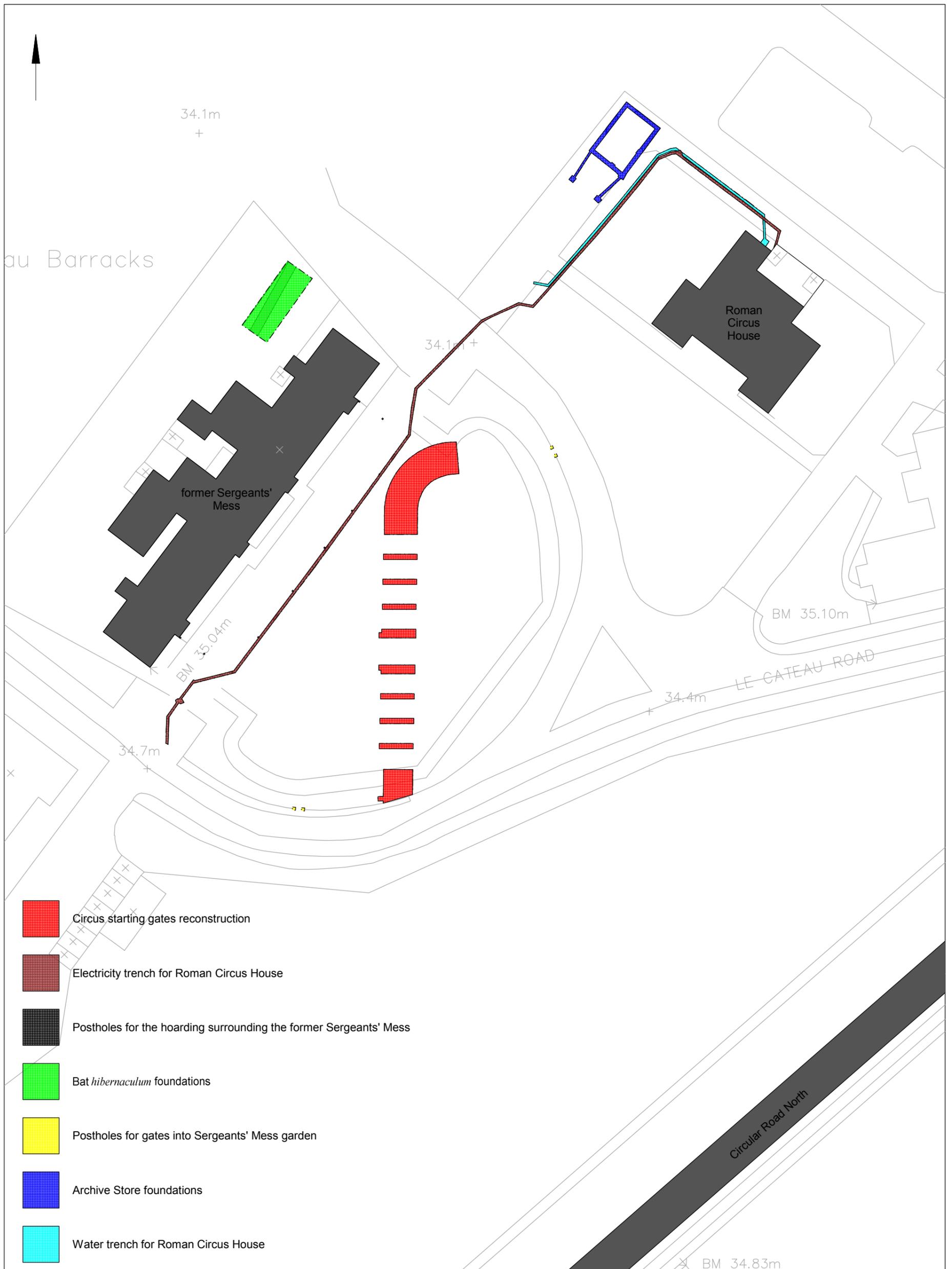


Fig 2 Areas observed by archaeological watching brief.

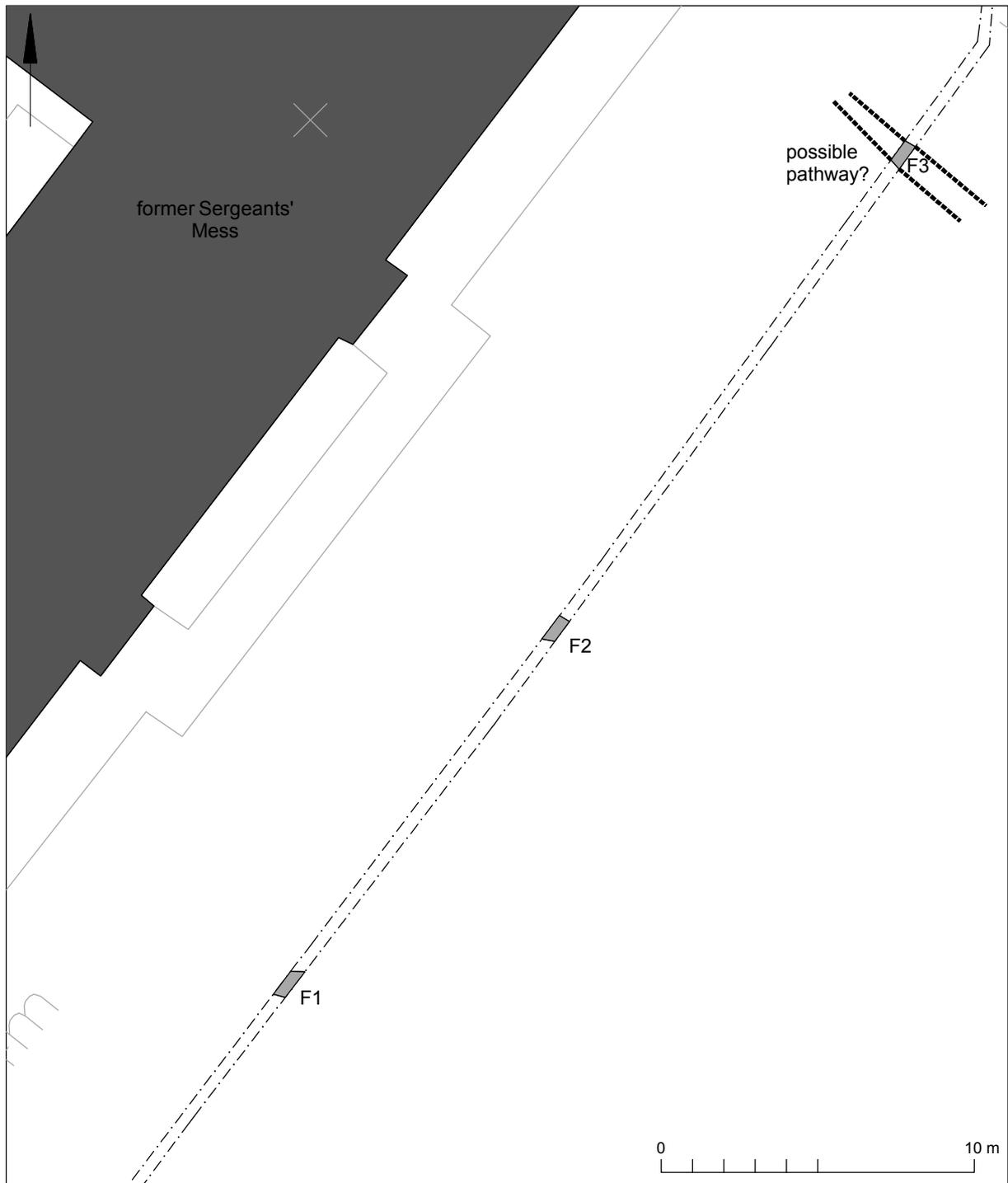


Fig 3 Electricity trench for Roman Cirus House watching brief results.

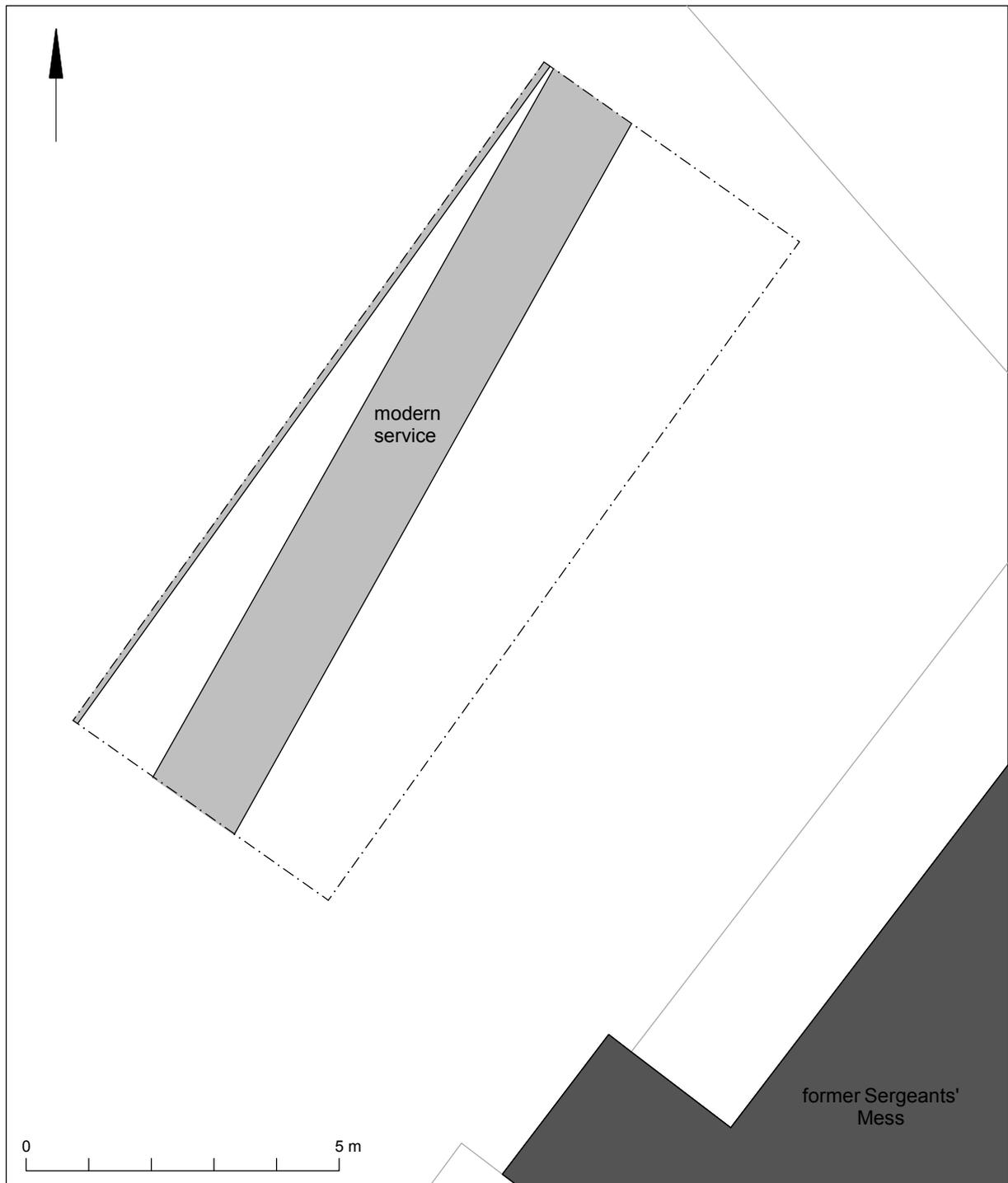


Fig 4 Bat *hibernaculum* footings watching brief results.

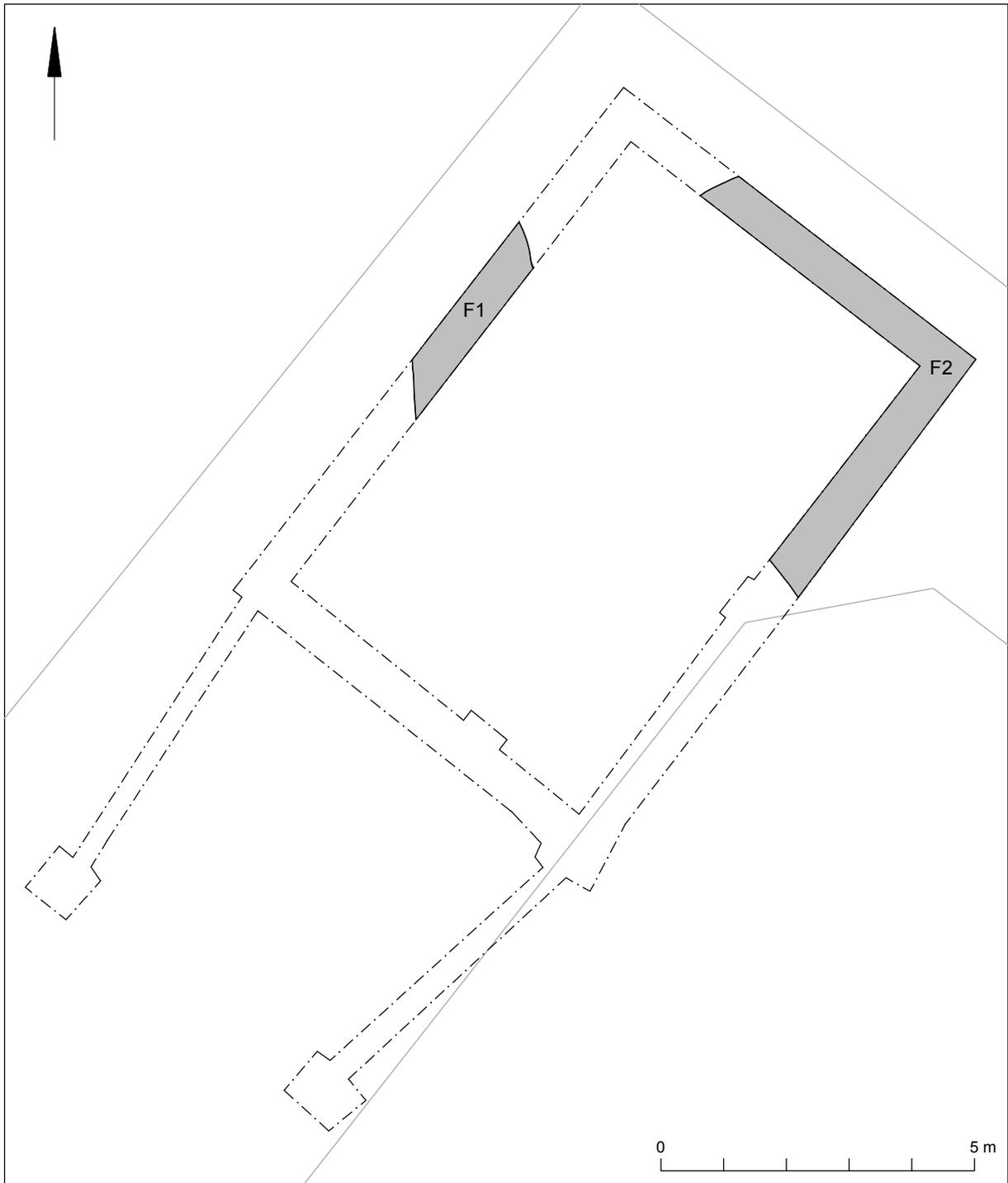


Fig 5 Archive store footings watching brief results.