

An archaeological evaluation at Colchester Institute, Sheepen Road, Colchester

August 2000

**on behalf of
Colchester Institute**



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Report 103

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Contents

Summary	1
Introduction	1
Site condiction	2
Methods	2
Results	
Trench 1	2
Trench 2	3
Provisional interpretation	3
The Roman pottery <i>by S Benfield</i>	4
Roman tile	6
Small finds	7
Archive	7
Acknowledgements	7
References	7

Figures

Figures

Fig 1 Location plan.

Fig 2 T1: plan.

Fig 3 T1: section.

Fig 4 T2: plan.

Fig 5 T2: section.

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NGR: TL 9883 2570

Summary

The site lies to the eastern side of the late Iron Age and early Roman industrial centre at Sheepen (Essex Scheduled Ancient Monument or SAM no 46). Two 10m x 1.5m evaluation trenches were dug by machine in advance of a proposed college extension, revealing pits and deposits which appear to be associated with the main period of activity at Sheepen, ie c AD 5-60.

Introduction

This report describes the results of a field evaluation which took place in August 2000 to investigate the archaeological implications of a proposed extension at the Colchester Institute, Sheepen Road, Colchester.

The site lies to the east of the Sheepen Scheduled Ancient Monument (Essex SAM no 46), a late Iron Age industrial centre established by the Trinovantes and then maintained in the years after the Roman conquest. Extensive excavations in the 1930s and later smaller-scale work have produced evidence of workshops engaged in a range of industrial activities including metal-working, enamelling and leatherwork in the areas to the west of the site (Hawkes & Hull 1947; Niblett 1985), but very little investigation has taken place in this region of the settlement.

The evaluation followed the specification contained in the site Evaluation Brief issued by Colchester Museums Archaeology Officer, observing the requirements detailed in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1996a) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996b). Detailed plans for the development were submitted to Colchester Borough Council on 20th April 2000 (Local Authority Application no F/COL/00/0692).

Site condition

The site lies on level ground at the west side of the main entrance to the college. At the time of the evaluation it was mainly grassed, with occasional trees which to some extent dictated the trench locations. The areas investigated lay to either side of a tarmac driveway, within the footprint of the proposed extension (Fig 1).

Methods

Two trenches, each 10m long and 1.5m wide, were dug by a machine equipped with a toothless ditching bucket, then manually examined and recorded.

Results

Trench 1 (plan: Fig 2 & section: Fig 3)

This trench was situated to the south of the present driveway, approximately 12m north of the spot where a Roman timber-lined well was found in the 1930s.

Excavation ceased at a depth of 0.75m, having revealed the following stratigraphy of layers (L):

- L1 Modern turf and dark brown silt loam topsoil.
- L2 Pale brown silt loam. An earlier topsoil, weathered. This material merged with L3 at an overall depth of 0.6m.
- L3 Dark brown silt loam.
- L4 Pale yellowish brown silt loam flecked with worm holes. Natural.

Three features (F) were noted in this trench:

- F4 A vertical cylindrical shaft of unknown depth. Part-filled with very loose soil, this feature appeared during the stripping of L2, and is perhaps a modern survey borehole.
- F5 A pit, represented by an area of dark brown sandy silt loam with rare minute charcoal flecks. The edges were indistinct, merging with the surrounding natural (L4). Two small Roman body sherds were recovered from cleaning over the surface of this feature.
- F6 An area of brown silt loam, slightly darker than the surrounding material, but quite possibly a natural variation in L4 rather than a man-made intrusion. No finds are associated with this feature.

Trench 2 (plan: Fig 4 & section: Fig 5)

This trench lay close to the north-east side of the new block. The depth of excavation varied from 0.5m to 0.7m in the south-east and central stretch, with an extension to 1.0m at the north-west end of the trench.

The stratigraphy shown in section Figure 5 was composed of the following layers:

- L1 Modern turf and dark brown silt loam topsoil.
- L2 Dark brown sandy silt loam with occasional small stones. Modern topsoil.
- L3 Dark brown sandy silt loam with a scatter of small stones and gravel.
- L4 Mainly a dark greyish brown silt loam with a scatter of small stones, occasional charcoal flecks and common Roman pottery sherds.
- L5 Dark greyish brown sandy silt loam, stony, with a higher content of charcoal flecks than L4.
- L6 Pale yellowish brown silt loam flecked with worm holes. Natural.

L4 and L5 were similar with little to differentiate between them except for a slightly higher stone and charcoal content in L5.

At the north-west end of the trench, removal of L5 to the top of the natural silt loam revealed a pit (F2) with traces of reddened burnt soil in places on its eastern side. The pit fill was a dark greyish brown sandy loam with common oyster shell, occasional charcoal flecks, and fragments of animal bone and pottery. To the south-east of F2 was a smaller feature, similar to (and perhaps part of) F2.

Provisional interpretation

The uppermost archaeologically sensitive levels appear to lie at overall depths of 0.6m in Trench 1 (T1) and 0.5m in Trench 2 (T2). In T1 this is represented by a deposit (L3) from which the more closely datable pottery belongs within a late Iron Age-early Roman range. Pottery of the same period was also found at the interface between L3 and L2, although allocated to the later L2 to avoid any possibility of contamination (see pottery report below, find nos 1 and 2). In T2, the highest archaeologically sensitive level was found to be the top of L4, which with L5 yielded quantities of early Roman pottery. Stratified Roman building material was confined to T2, L4.

The soils immediately above these levels (T1, L2 and T2, L3) seem to be a post-Roman accumulation with occasional residual Roman finds in the case of T2, L3. The later phases of this post-Roman material may have been stripped, resulting in a sharp interface with the

overlying turf and topsoil deposits (T1, L1 and T2, L1 & L2), which are associated with 20th-century landscaping activity.

The Roman pottery

by S Benfield

The pottery is presented in the form of a short summary and a table of pottery fabrics for individual contexts.

Summary

There is approximately 8.5 kg of pottery from the evaluation which is dominated by coarse wares, either coarse reduced or coarse oxidised wares, though amphora sherds are well represented from a minimum of three vessels. Fine wares are also present in smaller quantity with some samian (both plain forms and one decorated vessel), together with a *terra nigra* plate and some sherds in fine oxidised ware. Of the more closely datable pottery, ie the samian, *terra nigra* and a single amphora rim, these can all be accommodated within the late Iron Age and early Roman period, corresponding with the major occupation at Sheepen, dated c AD 5-60, as revealed in extensive earlier excavations (Hawkes & Hull 1947; Niblett 1985). The samian (with the exception of one unstratified vessel which is a 2nd-century form) can all be accommodated within the Claudio-Neronian--earlier Flavian period, and a single potter's stamp, if identified correctly as that of ALBUS, also occurs previously at Sheepen (Hawkes & Hull 1947, 196). The single *terra nigra* plate is of early to mid 1st-century date, and the amphora rim is a mid 1st-century form. Amongst the coarse reduced wares, some sherds are grog-tempered and hand-made, though probably wheel-finished, and are probably of late Iron Age date. The majority of the coarse ware sherds can be classified as Roman, and, though not closely datable in themselves (the few rim sherds are small and fragmentary), there is a absence of any identifiable fabrics or forms from which would date from the late 1st to earlier 2nd century or later, and most if not all are probably of the same date range as suggested for the fine wares and dated amphora.

In summary the pottery from labelled contexts can be broadly dated to the late Iron Age and early Roman period, probably corresponding to the main occupation sequence at Sheepen of c AD 5-60, and the majority of the contexts contain at least some sherds which are, or probably are, of post-conquest Roman date. The small amount of unstratified material from the site contains at least one later sherd of 2nd-century date.

Table of Roman pottery by context and fabric

Fabric codes as *CAR 10*:

AJ	Dressel 20 amphora
AA	other amphora
SG	South Gaulish samian
CG	Central Gaulish samian
TN	<i>terra nigra</i>
DZ	fine oxidised wares
DJ	coarse oxidised wares
GX	other coarse wares
HZ	large storage jars and other vessels in heavily tempered grey ware.

context	find	fabric code	sherds	comments	date
T1/L2	1	AJ	2	sherds probably from a Dressel 20 amphora	1st-2nd century
		GX	7	grog-tempered sherds of Late Iron Age-early Roman date, one at least wheel made	late Iron Age-early Roman
		GX	2	body sherds	Roman
	2	GX	3	thick grog-tempered sherds probably from two jars, hand-made and wheel-finished	probably late Iron Age
		GX	4	from two jars, one sherd late Iron Age- early Roman, three others from one jar of Roman date	probably early Roman
		HZ	3	from at least two large storage jars, one sherd combed	probably late Iron Age-early Roman
T1/L3	3	AA	1	amphora body sherd	1st-2nd century
		DJ	11	body sherds probably from large flagon	
		GX	14	rim, base and body sherds from jar, hand-made, wheel-finished, rim form similar to CAM 258B but not an exact parallel (Hawkes & Hull 1947, 269)	probably late Iron Age
		GX	1	body sherd	Roman
T1/F5	20	GX	2	body sherds	Roman
T2/L3	5	GX	1	jar sherd	Roman
	15	GX	3	body sherds	Roman
T2/L4	7	AA	11	body sherds from cylindrical amphora in sandy buff fabric (possibly same vessel as L4 find number 9, 11 and 12 below)	1st-2nd century
		DJ	1	probable flagon sherd	1st-2nd century
		GX	1	sherd	Roman
	8	DJ	11	sherds probably from a flagon	Roman, most probably 1st-2nd century
	9	AA	9	sherds from two vessels: six sherds from a cylindrical amphora in buff sand fabric including part of solid spike (possibly same as L4 find 7, 11 and 12), and three in pale buff fabric	1st-2nd century
		AJ	5	body sherds (some burnt) and rim; rim profile suggests a mid 1st-century date (Peacock & Williams 1986, fig 66)	1st century, probably mid 1st century
		DJ	11	body sherds from three or more vessels	Roman, probably 1st-2nd century
		GX	6	base, body and rim sherds from at least four vessels including form CAM 260A (probably early Roman)	Roman
	10	SG	1	Dragendorff form 15/17R (rouletted)	1st century, most common in the Claudio-Neronian-early Flavian period

	11	SG	2	joining sherds from Dragendorff form 29 bowl	mid 1st century-mid Flavian
		AA	13	seven sherds including solid spike from amphora in buff sandy fabric (probably same vessel as L4 finds 7, 9 and 12, certainly as find 9 as spike sherds join), and six sherds from amphora in pale buff fabric	1st-2nd century
		GX	3	body sherds	Roman
	12	AA	13	body sherds from cylindrical amphora (see L4 find number 7, 9 and 11 above)	1st-2nd century
	13	DZ	1	fine oxidised ware body sherd	
		DJ	10	sherds and fragments probably from a flagon	Roman, probably 1st-2nd century
		GX	8	sherds from at least three vessels, probably jars; base sherds from one jar oxidised, two fragments may be Late Iron Age or early Roman	Roman
	16	SG	2	joining sherds from probably South Gaulish samian dish, stamp: possibly ALBUS of La Graufesenque, noted for different stamp die at Camulodunum (Hawkes & Hull 1947, 196)	Roman, 1st century
		AJ	11	fragments, probably from Dressel 20 amphora	1st-2nd century
		GX	2	Roman	Roman
		HZ	3	Roman	Roman probably 1st-2nd century, though possibly later
T2/L5	17	AA/AJ	1	body sherd from amphora in Spanish fabric	1st-2nd century
		DZ	1	fine oxidised ware sherd	Roman
		GX	11	rim fragments, body sherds and base from jars	Roman
T2/F2	18	DJ	2	body sherds	1st-2nd century
		HZ	1	grog-tempered combed body sherd	late Iron Age-early Roman
	19	TN	2	joining rim sherds of form CAM 2	late Iron Age-early Roman, pre-Flavian
T1/unstratified	4	GX/HZ	2	combed body sherds from two vessels, one grog-tempered	late Iron Age-Roman
T2/unstratified	14	?CG	1	samian dish of Dragendorff form 18/31, possibly from Central Gaul	2nd century
		AJ	1	Dressel 20 amphora sherd with base of handle	1st-2nd century
		GX	10	two rims and body sherds from jars/bowls, appear to be probably early Roman	Roman, probably 1st century

Roman tile

Four small fragments of tile were recovered.

Context	Finds no	Description
Trench 2, L4	10	<i>tegula</i>
Trench 2, L4	11	<i>imbrex</i>
Trench 2, L4	11	unidentifiable

unstratified	4	imbrex
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Small finds

A plain copper-alloy tongue (sf1) from a buckle was found in T2, L4. This was inspected by Nina Crummy, a small finds specialist, but no date determination was possible due to the lack of dateable characteristics.

Archive

The detailed site record, photographs and finds will be deposited permanently with Colchester Museum under cover of museum accession code 2000-80.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Mrs J E Dickinson of Colchester Institute and Mr M Winter of Colchester Borough Council for their assistance in the course of the evaluation.

References

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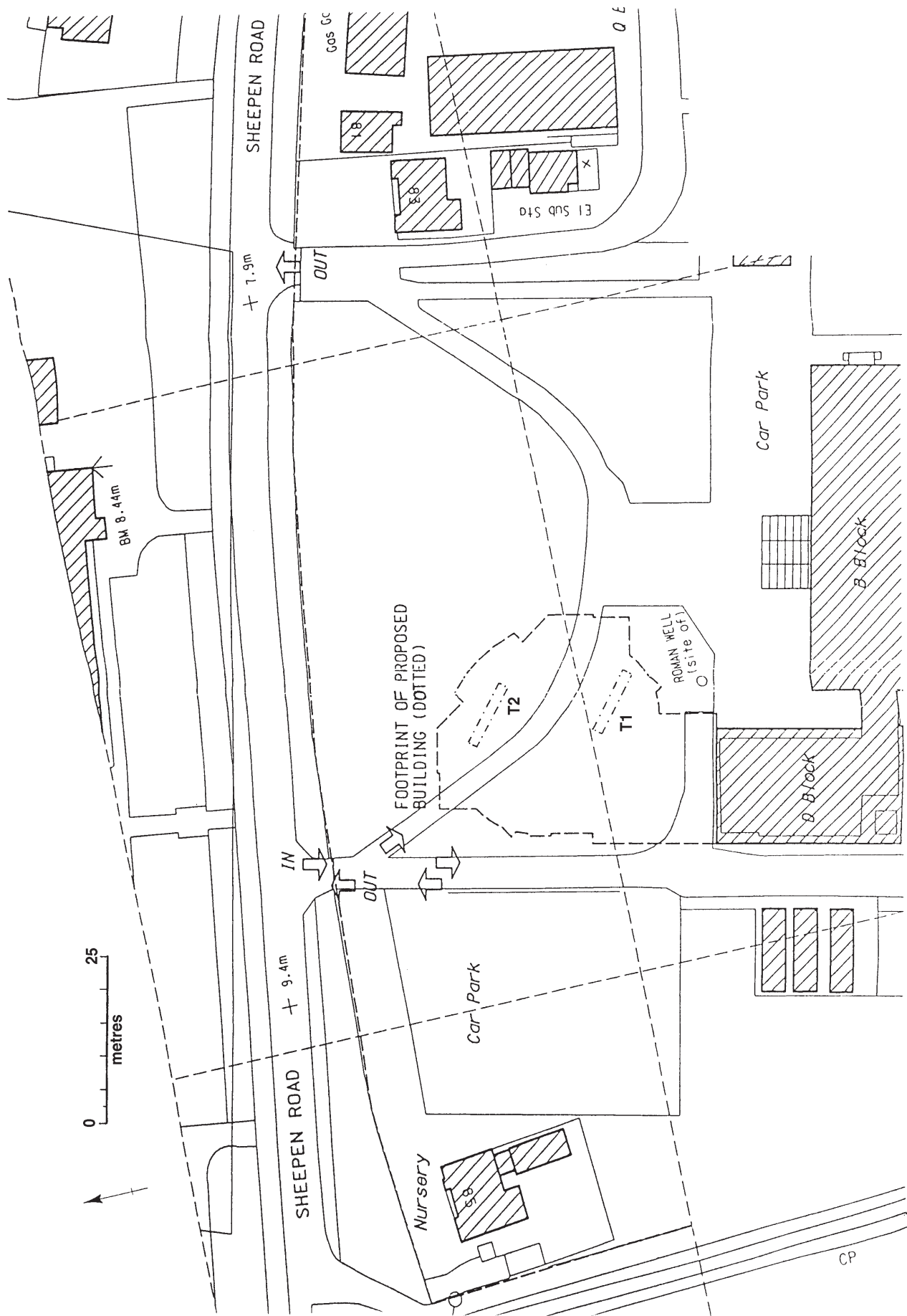


Fig 1 Location plan.

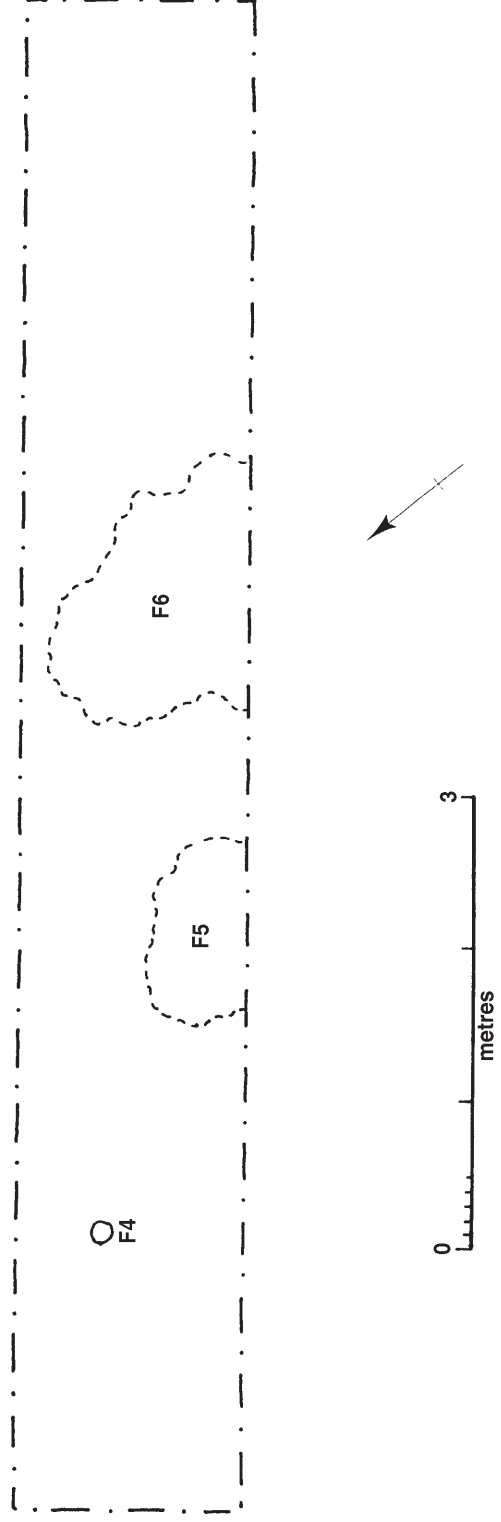


Fig 2 Trench 1: plan.

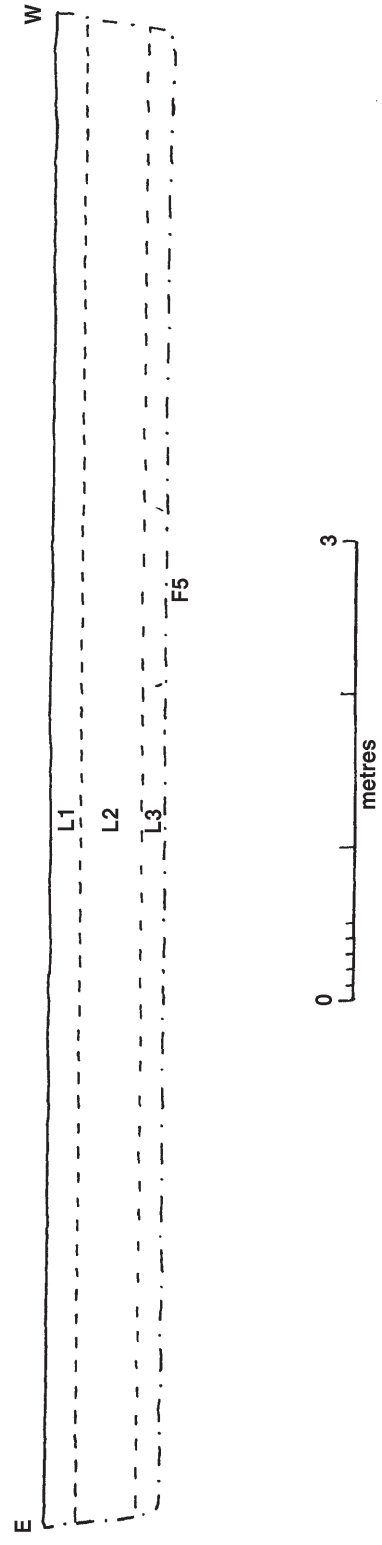


Fig 3 T1: section.

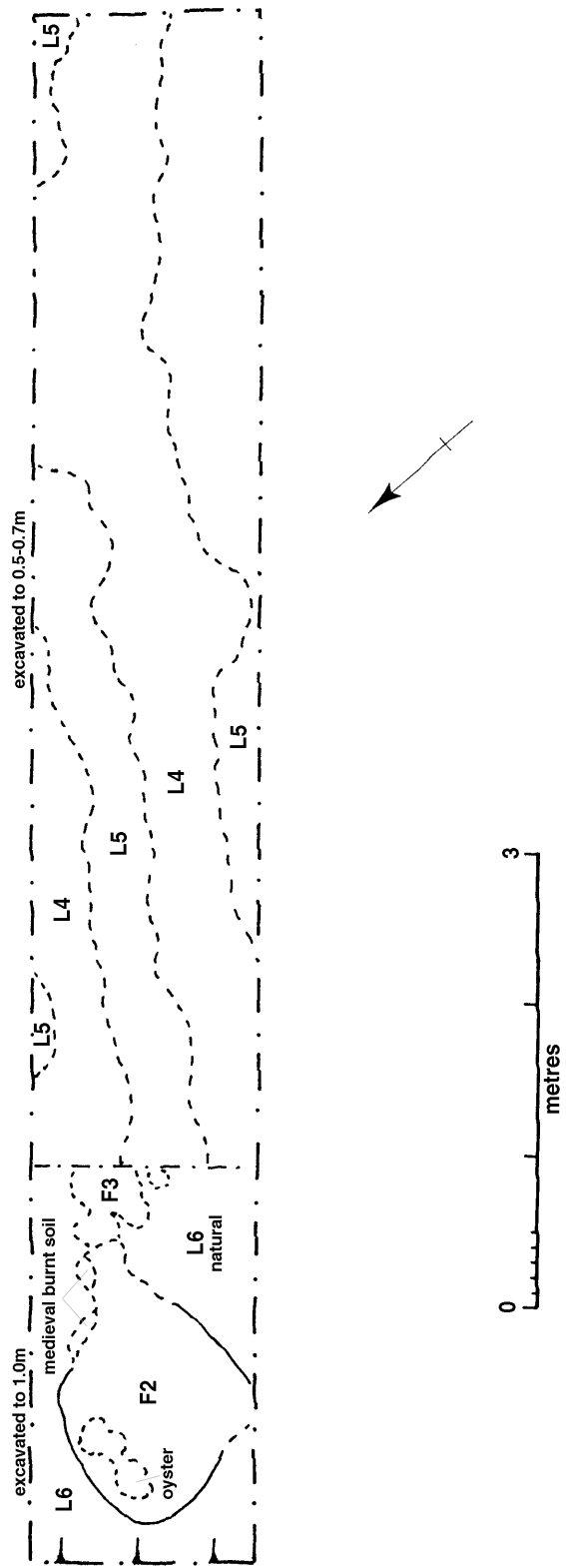


Fig 4 T2: plan.

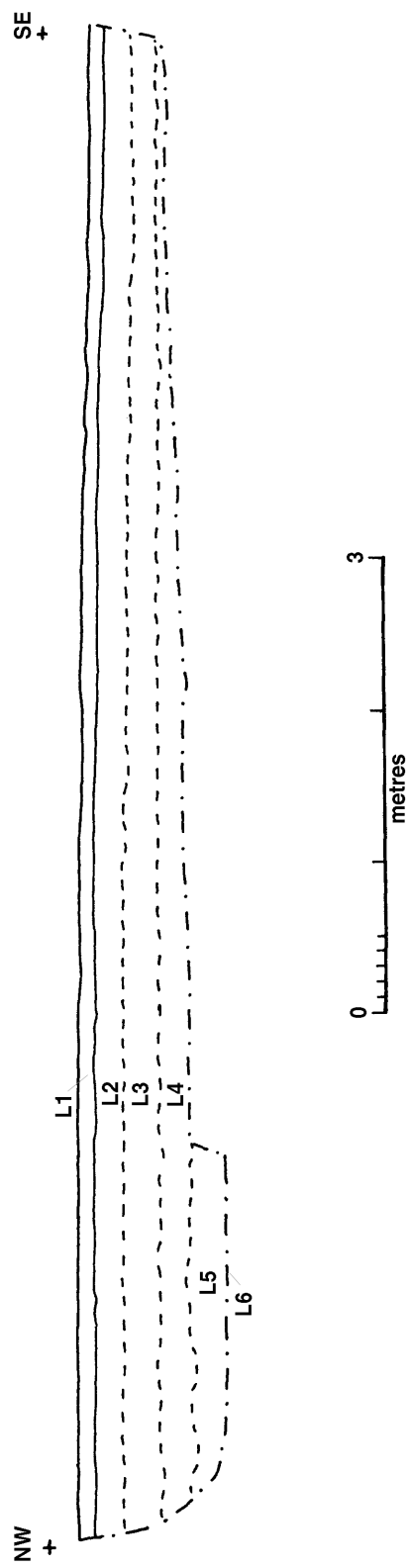


Fig 5 T2: section.