

An archaeological evaluation at Vineyard Gate, Colchester, Essex January-April 2004

1: interim results

**report prepared by
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**commissioned by
Colchester Borough Council**

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report is the first in a series describing the results from archaeological evaluation trenches excavated in the Osborne Street and Vineyard Street areas of Colchester between January and April 2004 (Vineyard Gate). It is presented in a short form in order to disseminate key aspects of the findings to the relevant agencies as early as possible. More comprehensive reports with interpretation will be available in the coming weeks.
- 1.2 The archaeological works are taking place as part of a wide-ranging programme of ground investigation, including environmental and engineering bore-holes which were archaeologically monitored and reported on in CAT Report 262 (March 2004). At the time of writing, the results presented below cover the first fifteen evaluation trenches with brief notes on a further two trenches which are currently undergoing excavation.
- 1.3 This project 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 2003), and the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standards and Guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (1999).

2 Archaeological background

The archaeological background to the area is set out in detail in Part 1 of the St Botolph's Quarter Regeneration Schemes, Cultural Heritage (Archaeology) Statement, produced by Oxford Archaeological Associates (OAA) for Colchester Borough Council in April 2003. The Vineyard Street Regeneration Area sections of the document describe the current level of knowledge of the town defences and extra-mural settlement from the Roman period onward.

3 Aims

The overall objective of the exploratory trenches was to gain as much background information as possible in relation to the depth, date and complexity of the archaeological deposits. This information can then be combined with existing knowledge of this region of the town to assess the archaeological impact of future regeneration within the Vineyard Gate area.

4 Methodology

Trenches were located as far as was practicably possible to achieve a representative sample across the site, given the wide variation in levels and the varied nature of the existing townscape. Of necessity, trench dimensions were frequently tailored to fit the often limited space available.

In all but one of the sample areas, trenches were excavated by machine down to the uppermost archaeologically significant level. Excavation beyond that point was then carried out manually either to natural subsoil or to an intermediate level where dictated by operational conditions. Detailed descriptions of the excavation and recording methods used may be found in the site Written Scheme of Investigation produced by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) in December 2003.

5 Results

The trench locations are shown in Figure 1. The area numbers (eg Area 1) are those used in the course of the investigation and are coded into the original site records. On occasions, proposed locations were unavailable or were revised with the result that the area codes 3, 7, 9 and 13 were not used.

5.1 Area 1

Trench 1 (section: Fig 2)

Location: small car park west of 24 Osborne Street

NGR: TL 99688 24980

Trench dimensions: 4.6m x 1.5m

In the northern part of the trench, Roman deposits were found to lie immediately below 50cm of modern car-park surfacing and hardcore (L1-L3). Elsewhere, only a thin intervening layer of later soil (L4) survived, indicating a significant loss of post-Roman material. The latest surviving Roman deposit (L5) appears to be waste tipped from the higher ground to the north. Beneath this was a tip of olive-tinged sandy loam (L8) which spilled into a large pit (F3) containing burnt daub and carbonised material (L6). Finds from L6 included animal bone, nails and glass together with Roman pottery of late 2nd- to earlier 3rd-century date. Natural sand survived at its highest at the northern end of the trench, where it formed a shelf at an overall depth of 1.2m. Here, L5 sealed pits F1 and F2, both filled with olive-tinged soils with common oyster shell and minute charcoal inclusions. Excavation of the heavily-cut area in the central and southern part of the trench was extended to a depth of 3.1m. An auger probe through the remaining pit fill found natural sand at an overall depth of 3.4m. Stratigraphically, the earliest excavated context within the deepest part of the trench was L9, an olive-brown sandy loam with oyster shell and animal bone inclusions. Pottery from this layer indicates a late 2nd- or 3rd-century date, reinforcing overall indications that the excavated pits and dumped material appear to represent Roman extra-mural rubbish-disposal from the c late 2nd century or later.

5.2 Area 2

Trench 1 (sections: Figs 3-4)

Location: grassed area at the junction of Osborne Street and
entrance to Vineyard Gate

NGR: TL 99714 24975

Trench dimensions: 5m x 1.6m

Removal of 50-60cm of a late 20th-century spread of topsoil (L53) revealed foundations of mortared septaria and brick (F39) and c 17th-/18th-century coursed red brick (F38). At the southern end of the trench, modern demolition debris (L56) sealed lime and clay deposits (L57, L59) which may represent floors associated with the post-medieval foundation F38. Beneath these was a pit (F42) of uncertain but probable post-medieval date. The post-medieval foundations were set into a disturbed layer of dark earth (L54) which was devoid of datable finds. The lower part of L54 merged with a similar but paler soil (L55) which contained a large quantity of Roman pottery of up to 2nd- to 3rd-century date. In the southern part of the trench, L55 was cut by a large pit (F40) with inclusions of Roman brick, tile and *tesserae*. L55 sealed a thin gravel surface (L60) which rested on natural sand and was cut by Roman pits F45 and F41.

Trench 2

Location: grassed area at the junction of Osborne Street and
the entrance to Vineyard Gate

NGR: TL 99716 24949

Trench dimensions: 3.6m x 1.8m

The uppermost 70cm-1.00m consisted of late 20th-century spreads of rubble and topsoil. Removal of this material revealed a cellar which occupied the greater part of the trench. Walled in brick of similar construction to F38 in the adjacent Trench 1, the cellar appears to belong to a property which formerly stood on the south side of Vineyard Street. Machine excavation of part of the modern cellar infill exposed clean sand at a depth of 17.89m OD on the western side of the trench. At the eastern side of the trench, the area unaffected by the cellar cut consisted of a dark greyish brown sandy loam which extended to a depth of at least 18m OD. No manual excavation was attempted within this trench due to the unstable condition of the sides.

5.3 Area 4

Trench 1

Location: yard at rear of 18 Osborne Street

NGR: TL 99766 24974

Trench dimensions: 2.6m X 1.5m

This trench is currently undergoing excavation. Modern deposits extend to approximately 40cm depth, beneath which are medieval or post-medieval pits cutting Roman demolition debris. The uppermost Roman level lies at a depth of 70cm.

5.4 Area 5

Trench 1 (section: Fig 5)

Location: eastern end of Vineyard Street car park

NGR: TL 99804 25009

Trench dimensions: 8m x 1.5m

In this north-south trench, an area extending between 3m and 11m to the south of the town wall was investigated. Twentieth-century material (L100-L102, F71) occupied the uppermost 50cm, overlying spreads of 19th-century and later make-up, levelling and dumped material to a depth of at least 1.4m (L103-L106). Beneath these were c 17th-/18th-century sandy loams with light scatters of oyster shell (L107, L109) sealing pits of similar date (F75, F76). At 1.65m depth, a late medieval or early post-medieval compacted gravel surface (F74) overlaid oyster shell-rich deposits (L114, L115). This group displayed the latest indications of sinkage into underlying features. Between 2m and 2.5m depth, spreads of dumped soils (L122, L123, L127) appear to be medieval. The earliest of these (L127) sealed a large medieval pit (F89). Evidence for the town ditches was limited to the region approximately 8m to the south of the town wall. At 2.6m depth, the southern side of a medieval ditch (F97), cut by the pit F89 and sealed by L127, was found to cut the northern side of a large ditch (F91). Finds from the combined contexts suggest that this section of the fill of F91 is probably Roman.

Trench 2

Location: southern side of Vineyard Street car park

NGR: TL 99778 24983

Trench dimensions: 9m x 1.5m

This trench is currently undergoing excavation. Modern features, including a brick basement and house foundations, occupy the uppermost 1.1m. These were set into post-Roman deposits which extend to 1.6m, below which are Roman levels which include well-preserved structural features.

5.5 Area 6

Trench 1 (section: Fig 6)

Location: yard on southern side of Vineyard Street

NGR: TL 99838 24987

Trench dimensions: 6.6m x 1.3m

Removal of concrete yard-surfacing (L89) revealed a 19th-/20th-century cobbled area (F64) which, with repairs, covered a number of modern service trenches and brick wall foundations (F63, F66, F67, F68, F69). Due to the common presence of these intrusions in the eastern part of the trench, further excavation was restricted to a 3m length in the relatively undisturbed area to the west. Here, the cobbles (F64) were laid on a base layer of broken brick and gravestones with inscriptions dating from the early to mid 19th century (L90). Underlying this was a mixed post-medieval to modern deposit with common small fragments of red brick (L91) which continued to an overall depth of 60cm, where it interfaced sharply with a very dark greyish brown soil accumulation containing occasional minute charcoal and mortar inclusions (L92). This very dark soil was devoid of finds but stratigraphically appears to belong within the post-Roman to medieval phases of the site. At a depth of 75-85cm, probable late Roman dumped material (L93) sealed an olive-brown silt loam-

filled slot (F65) which lay on a north-south orientation. The slot cut a sequence of Roman gravel and clay surfaces represented by L94 gravel, L95 clay, L112 make-up, L111 gravel, L96 make-up, and L97 clay. L97 was laid on clean natural sand at a depth of 1.2m and was the earliest feature to be found, with the possible exception of L98, a silty sand which may be a tree throw or simply a silty variation within the natural.

5.6 Area 8

Trench 1 (section: Fig 7)

Location: Arthur Street, inside former St Helena's Hospice warehouse

NGR: TL 99809 24970

Trench dimensions: 5m x 1.5m

Beneath the 20cm-thick modern warehouse floor (L74, L75) was a substantial layer of dark sandy loam (L76) which contained a wide range of finds including modern pottery. This layer extended to an overall depth of 1m, at which point it merged with an underlying paler sandy loam (L77) with finds of up to the 18th century in date. At a depth of 1.3m a silty clay (L88) sealed a series of compacted stony surfaces (F47, F56 to F62) separated by silty deposits (L83, L84b, L85 to L87). The earliest surface (F62) was composed of medium to large pebbles. It lay at a depth of 2m and was found to rest on natural sand. Datable finds from the sequence of stony deposits were limited to the uppermost levels: finds from L83 and F56 were exclusively Roman and the topmost gravel (F47) included a 12th-century pot sherd together with Roman pottery and tile.

Trench 2 (section: Fig 8)

Location: Arthur Street, inside former St Helena's Hospice warehouse

NGR: TL 99818 24970

Trench dimensions: 4m x 1.4m

The 30cm-thick modern warehouse floor (L80, L81) sealed a 1.2m-deep layer of dark sandy loam of 15th-century or (more likely) later date. This material sealed two pits, one of which (F49) contained 15th-/16th-century pottery together with residual Roman sherds. The pits cut a compacted gravel surface (L48) below which was a more substantial deposit of larger stones (F54). Removal of F54 exposed natural sands and gravels. In the absence of finds, the date of the two stony deposits (L48 and F54) is provisionally placed in the broad date range of Roman/medieval.

5.7 Area 10

Trench 1 (section: Fig 9)

Location: car park at north end of Arthur Street

NGR: TL 99848 24970

Trench dimensions: 5m x 1.5m

Modern material, consisting of surface deposits (L11, L12, L13), pits (F11, F12, F14), and disturbance (L14) extended to depths of between 50cm and 1.1m. Beneath these was a thick accumulation of very dark brown sandy loam (L15) which continued to an overall depth of 1.5m. Several features were cut from within L15, which appears to have accumulated over a lengthy period of time. The latest of these were pits F8 and F10, which are probably of post-medieval origin. At an earlier level, removal of L15 revealed an inhumation burial (F9) orientated north-south with the head to the north. Only the skull was exposed, leaving any post-cranial remains beyond the southern limit of excavation. A Roman brick fragment stood vertically to the east side of the skull and one nail was found to the west. The skeletal material was left *in situ*. The grave appears to be Roman, although a medieval date cannot be dismissed. At the earliest level, L15 overlaid a compacted gravel surface (F7) which was cut by the grave F9. The gravel contained small quantities of Roman pottery and animal bone and lay above natural sand at a depth of 1.7m.

5.8 Area 11

Trench 1 (section: Fig 10)

Location: butchers' shop yard at rear of 13 St Botolph's Street

NGR: TL 99859 24936

Trench dimensions: 1.7m x 1.3m

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 shell (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 horn core, which may indicate horn-working activity in the vicinity. Excavation ceased on reaching the water table at an overall depth of 2.7m.

5.9 Area 12

Trench 1 (section: Fig 11)

Location: inside warehouse at corner of Arthur Street and Osborne Street

NGR: TL 99869 24920

Trench dimensions: 2.9m x 1.4m

Under 20cm of modern concrete hard standing (L17) and hardcore (L18) was a dark earth/topsoil layer (L19) truncated at the southern end by a modern wall (F13). This dark earth layer is modern, containing finds from the 17th to the 19th centuries. Under the topsoil were four layers cut at the southern end of the trench by a brick and lime mortar wall (F14) which is possibly associated with the upper modern wall F13. These layers include a post-medieval/early modern clay accumulation (L20), beneath which were L21 and L22. L21 was a gravel layer, possibly laid for consolidation purposes. L22 was a dark organic silt with a wide range of finds including pieces of leather footwear, horn cores and 18th-century pottery. Horn cores were also recovered from the underlying L23, a paler silt, probably of 17th- to 18th-century date, which also contained residual Roman building material including *tesserae*. Layers L21-L23 were cut by a dark brown, highly organic linear feature (F35) which may be a ditch. Although this feature was only present in the section and produced no datable finds, its stratigraphic relationships point to a late post-medieval to early modern period of use. The horizon between post-medieval and medieval deposits seems to lie at 2.3m depth, and is marked by the interface between L23 and L24, an organic accumulation with a finds assemblage that included residual Roman brick, tile, *tesserae*, pottery and medieval pottery with bone and horn cores. L24 contained a network of waterlogged wooden stakes and planks (F15, F16, F17, F18, F19, F20, F21, F22, F23, F24, F25, F26), perhaps part of a drainage system, although the heavily saturated conditions affected the visibility of these. The timbers continued into the top of the underlying medieval layer (L25) where finds included a large fragment of lava quern, 12th- to 14th-century medieval pottery, and more horn cores. Excavation ceased at an overall depth of 3.56m.

Trench 2 (section: Fig 12)

Location: inside warehouse at corner of Arthur Street and Osborne Street

NGR: TL 99862 24920

Trench dimensions: 4m x 1.5m

Removal of 20-50cm of the concrete floor and underlying hardcore (L32) revealed a dark earth/topsoil layer (L33) which was cut by a modern wall (F30) at the southern end of the trench. Both were clearly western continuations of features noted in Trench 1 (ie wall F13 and topsoil L19). L33 sealed a post-medieval compacted deposit (L34) with finds ranging from residual Roman brick to post-medieval brick, pantile, slate and pottery dating to the late 16th to 17th century. Below this layer was a small dump of sand (L35) embedded in a dense dark silt (L36). Finds retrieved

from this layer included animal bone, horn cores, peg-tile, slate and pottery from the 15th to 16th centuries, and also a minute fragment of modern clear glass believed to be present by contamination. Removal of L36 revealed two large horizontal fragments of waterlogged timber (F31 and F32A). These lay on an east-west orientation and may originally have formed part of a revetment. These timbers may also relate to the waterlogged wood remains in L24 of Trench 1. Under L36 was a layer of compact sand and gravel (L41) which sealed a sequence of accumulation and dumped deposits. The uppermost two layers, L42 and L43, contained horn core and residual Roman brick. At the limit of excavation, L44 yielded residual Roman brick and tile alongside peg-tile and 13th- to 14th-century pottery. Excavation here ceased at an overall depth of 2.8m. The horizon between post-medieval and medieval deposits appears to be in the region of L36, which lies at an overall depth of 1.7m.

5.10 Area 14

Trench 1 (section: Fig 13)

Location: car park north of 2a Arthur Street

NGR: TL 99847 24949

Trench dimensions: 4.5m x 1.5m

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 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.

5.11 Area 15

Trench 1 (section: Fig 14)

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

NGR: TL 99861 24950

Trench dimensions: 5.7m (overall) x 1.5m

Excavation at the northern end of the trench was limited to a depth of 20cm due to the presence of shallow 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 or earlier. Excavation ceased at an overall depth of 2m.

5.12 Area 16

Trench 1 (section: Fig 15)

Location: yard north of 2a Osborne Street

NGR: TL 99880 24917

Trench dimensions: 2m x 1.5m

Machine removal of the modern yard-surfacing revealed a very dark greyish brown sandy silt loam (L68) which extended to an overall depth of 85cm. Beneath this lay dumped clay-rich soil (L148) which rested on a dense clay deposit (L69). Underlying the clay were layers of gravel (L70), very dark silt loam (L71), and a pale grey loamy sand (L72). Groundwater seepage prevented excavation beyond a depth of 1.9m. The only distinct feature in this trench was a pit (F46) which cut L148 and was sealed by L68. Pottery in the fill of F46 points to a late 16th-century or later date for this feature. Peg-tile fragments in L148 indicate that this material is medieval at the earliest. The earlier gravel (L70) and underlying deposits (L71, L72) failed to produce any datable inclusions. In the absence of solid evidence, the dates of these layers remain uncertain, although comparison of the depths with the nearest sample points in Area 12 suggests that they are more likely to lie in the medieval to post-medieval range than Roman.

5.13 Area 17

Trench 1

Location: pavement outside 18 Osborne Street

NGR: TL 99771 24951

Trench dimensions: see below.

This small-scale investigation took place within a redundant concrete tree planter set into the Osborne Street pavement. A tree stump and modern planter fill were removed to a depth of 1.2m, beyond which lay intact earlier material which was probed by auger to an overall depth of 2.4m. The earlier soil, a dark greyish brown sandy silt loam with occasional minute fragments of oyster shell and charcoal, became increasingly moist with depth. No finds were recovered from the auger cores. Elsewhere, similar soils were found to be of post-medieval date.

6 Acknowledgements

The evaluation was conceived and organised by Oxford Archaeological Associates in conjunction with Colchester Borough Council (CBC). Particular thanks are due to Simon Collcutt (OAA) and Philip Wise (CBC) for their close involvement throughout and for their considerable hard work in managing to organise access for the large number of trenches over a short period of time.

The excavations were supervised for Colchester Archaeological Trust by Ben Holloway. This brief report was prepared by Carl Crossan and Ben Holloway with the aid of Emma Spurgeon.

7 Archive deposition

The original site records, finds, post-excavation reports and associated project papers are held by CAT at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex but will be deposited permanently with Colchester Museums under museum accession code 2004.10.

8 References

- | | |
|--|---|
| St Botolph's Quarter Regeneration Schemes, Cultural Heritage (Archaeology) Statement, Part 1 | OAA for Colchester Borough Council, April 2003 |
| Written Scheme of Investigation | CAT WSI for an archaeological evaluation and watching brief at Vineyard Gate, Colchester, by Carl Crossan, December 2003 |
| CAT Report 262 | Archaeological monitoring of the Phase 1 borehole programme at Vineyard Gate, Colchester, Essex, unpublished archive report, by D Shimmin, March 2004 |

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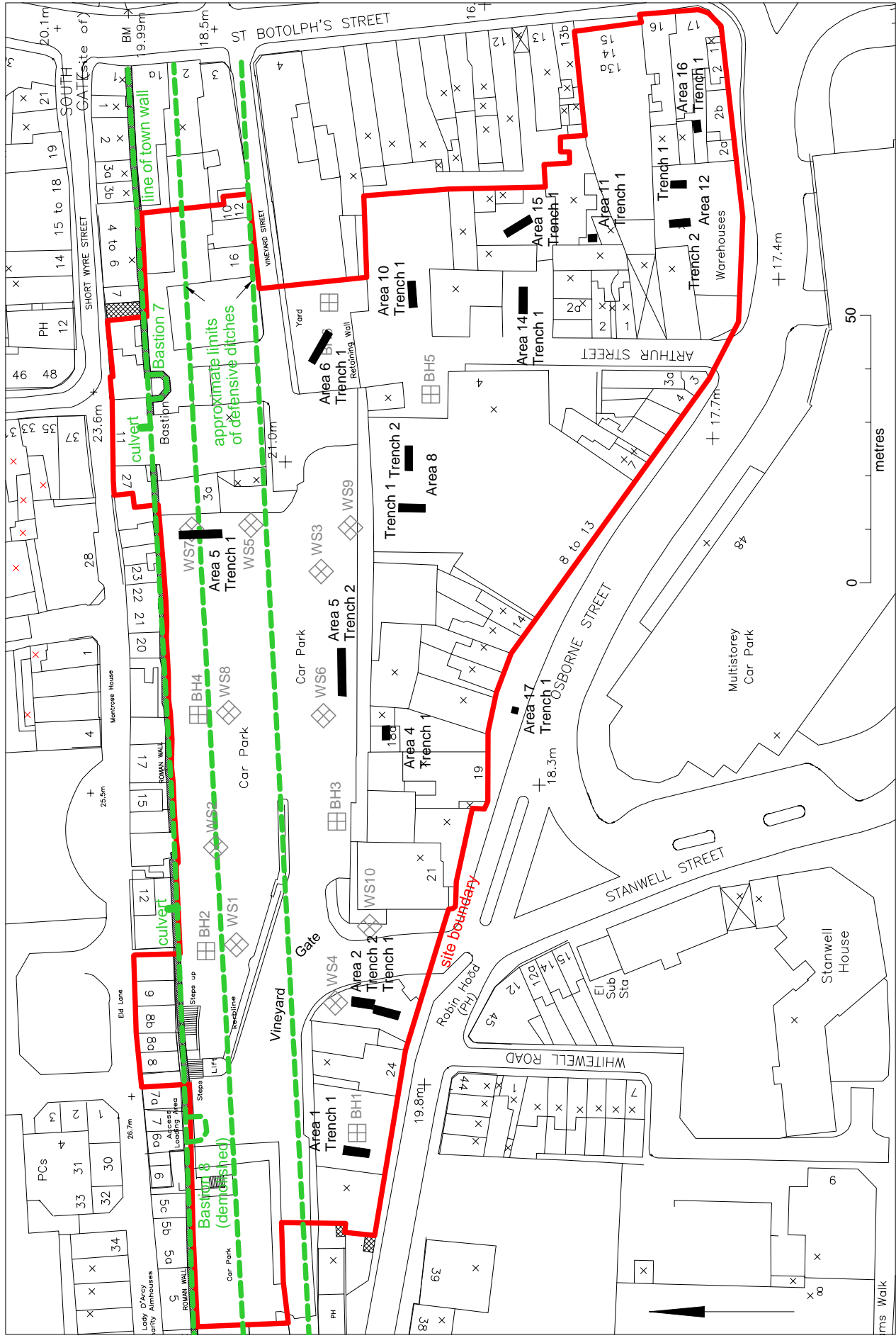


Fig 1 Location of evaluation trenches.

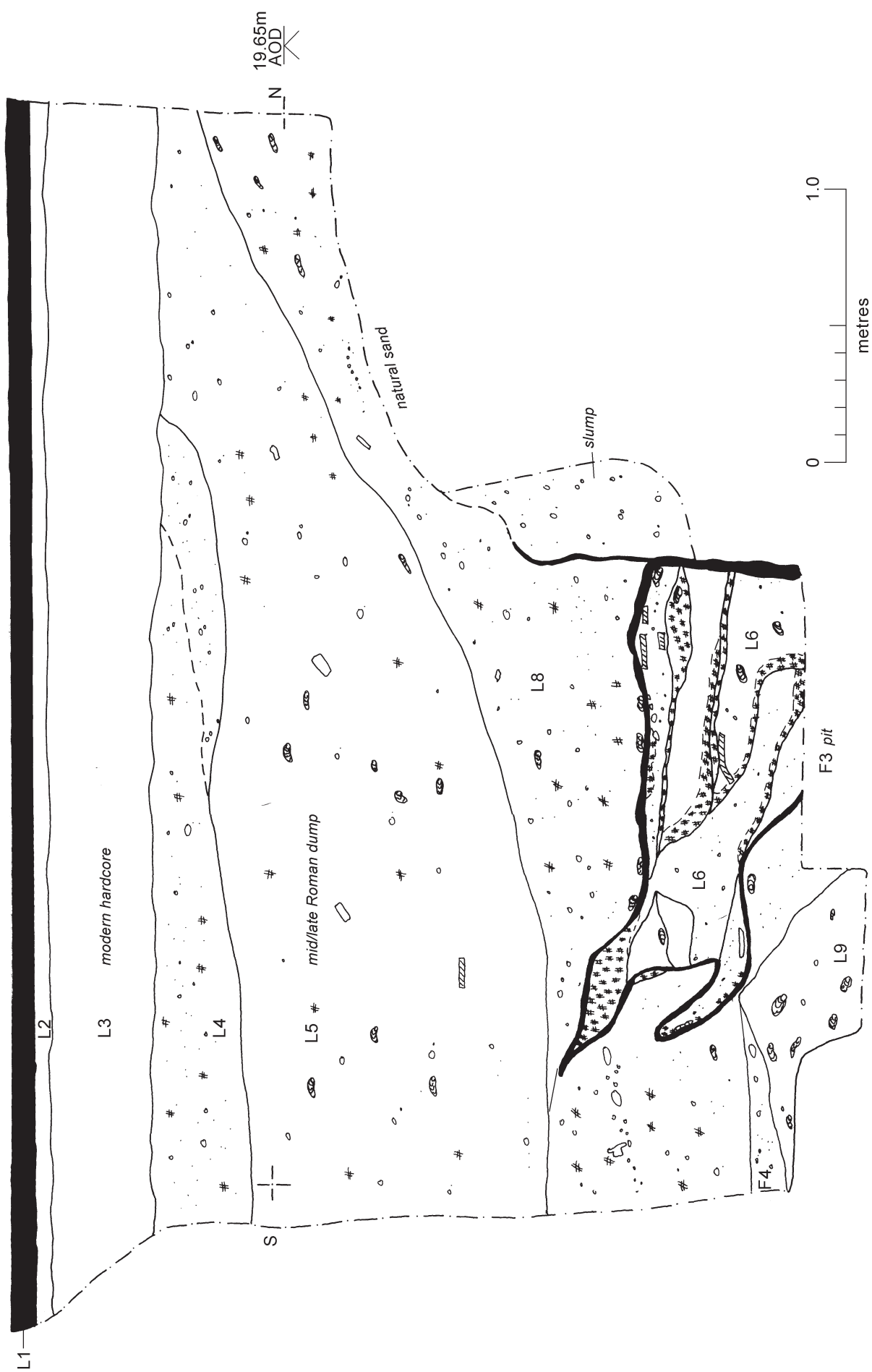


Fig 2 Area 1 Trench 1 section. West side.

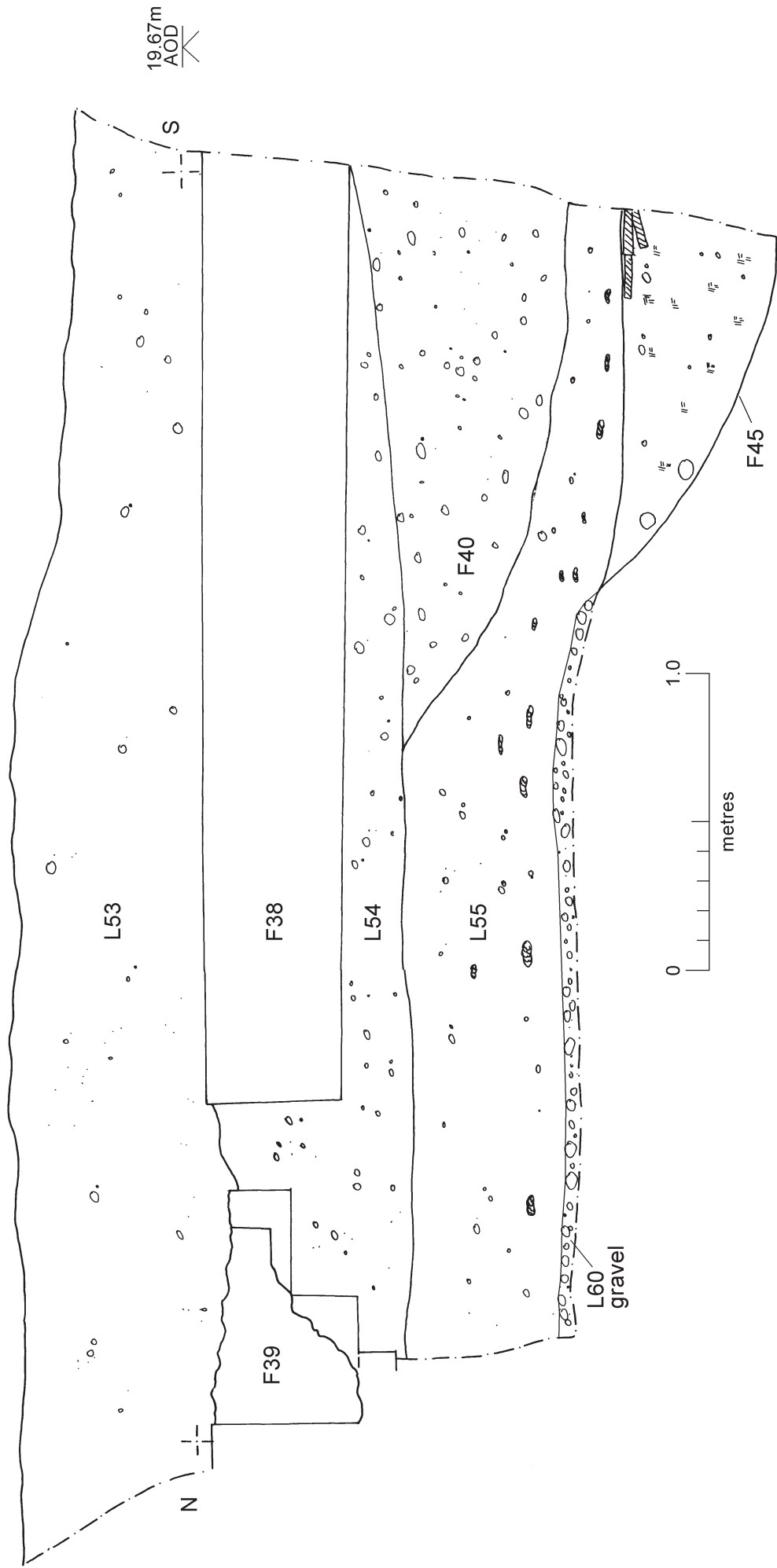


Fig 3 Area 2 Trench 1 section. East side.

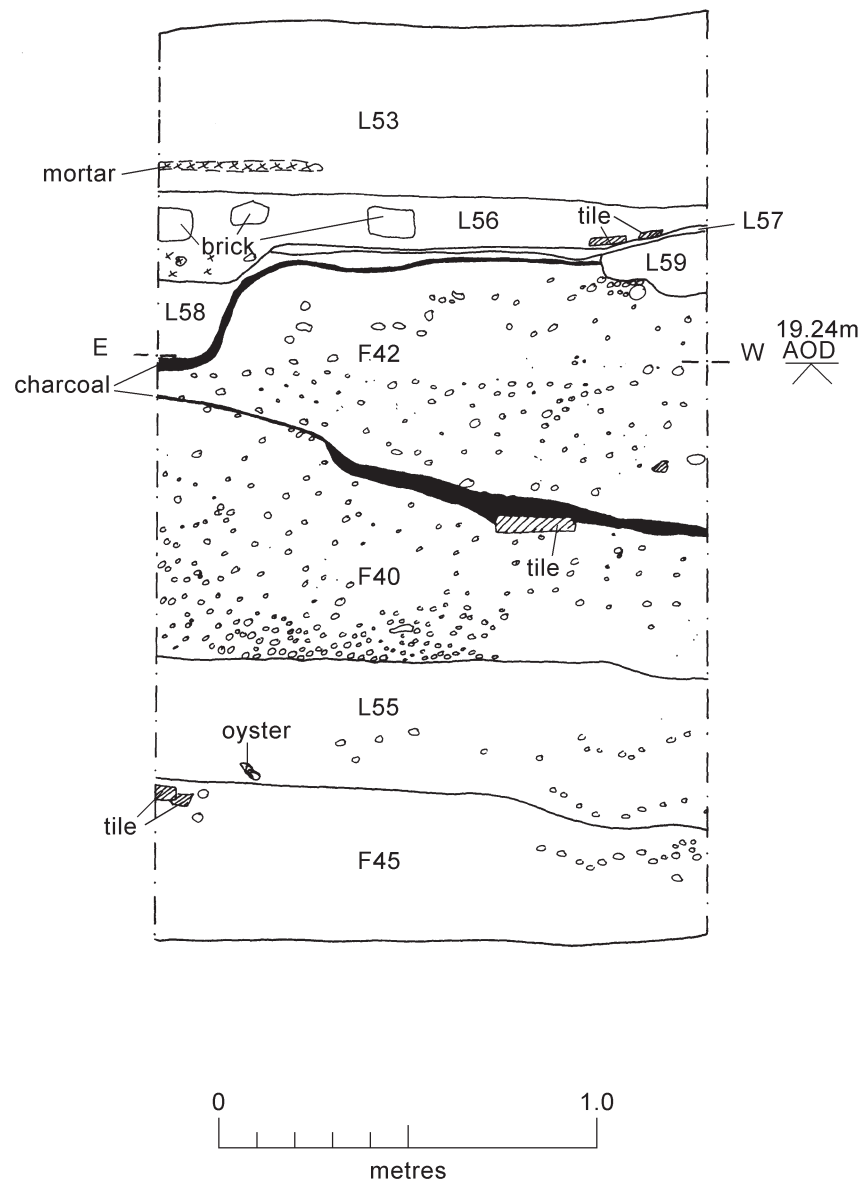


Fig 4 Area 2 Trench 1 section. South side.

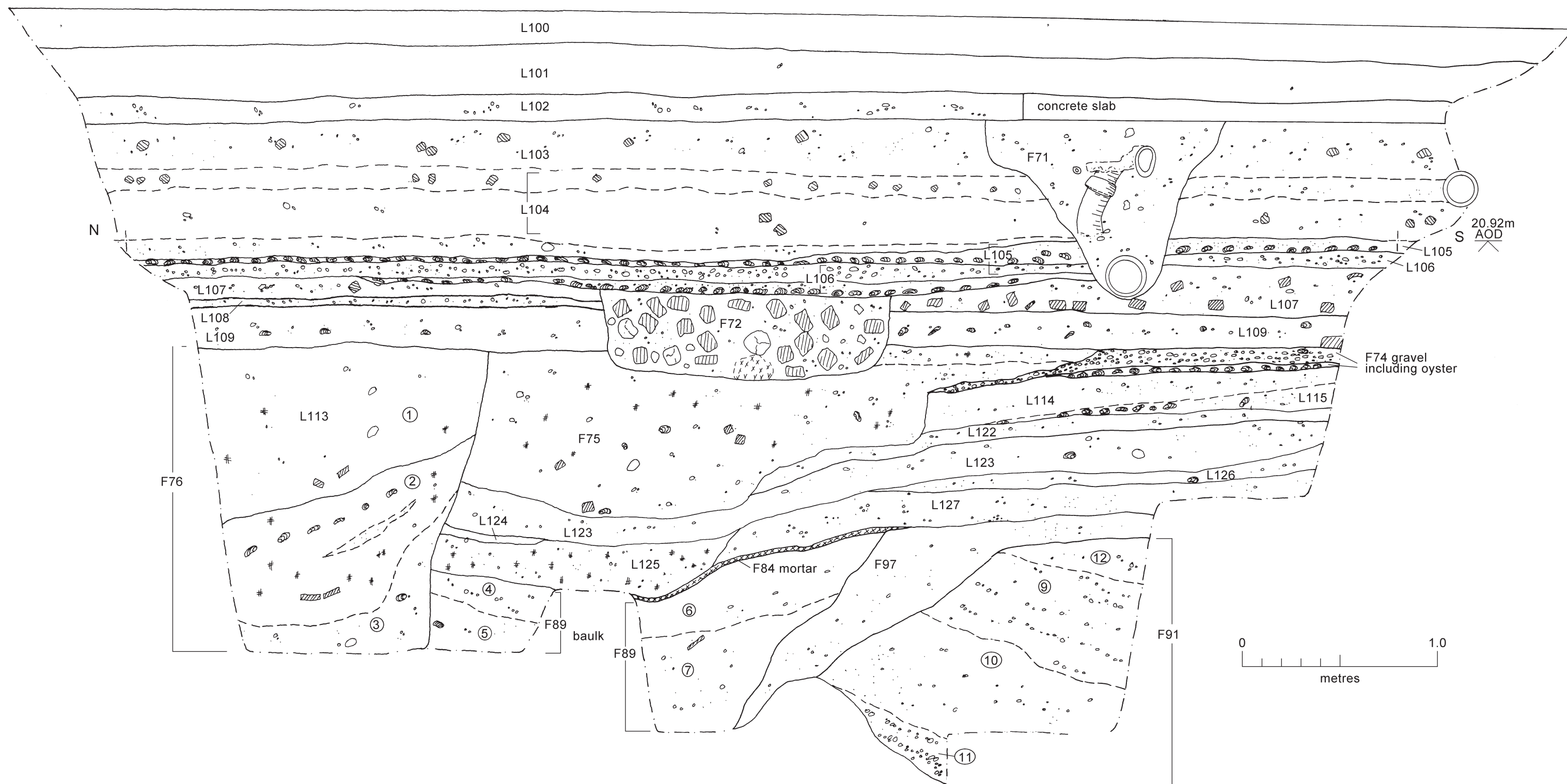
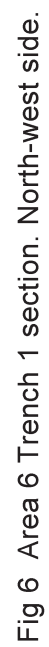


Fig 5 Area 5 Trench 1 section. East side.



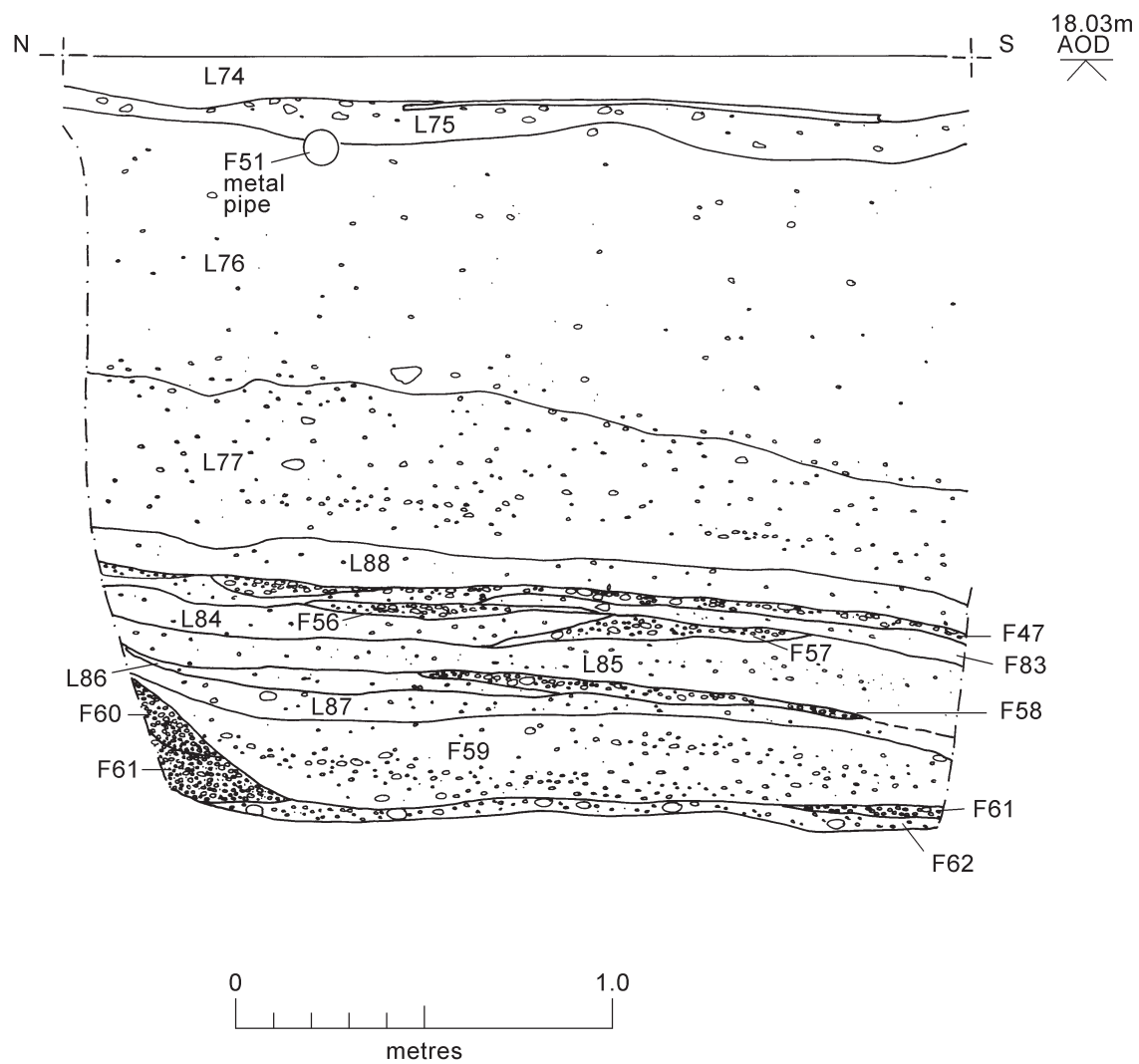


Fig 7 Area 8 Trench 1 section. East side.

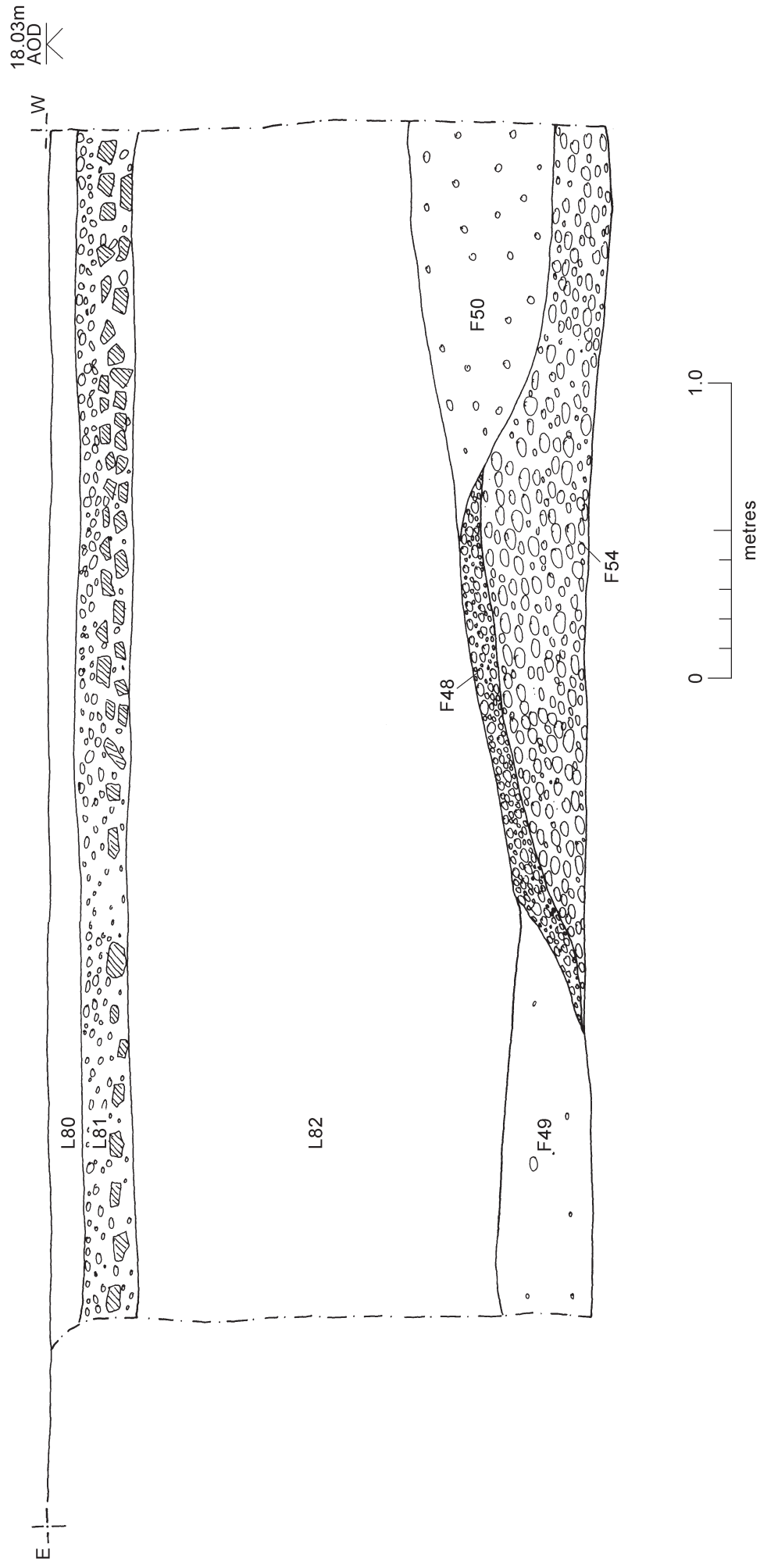


Fig 8 Area 8 Trench 2 section. South side.

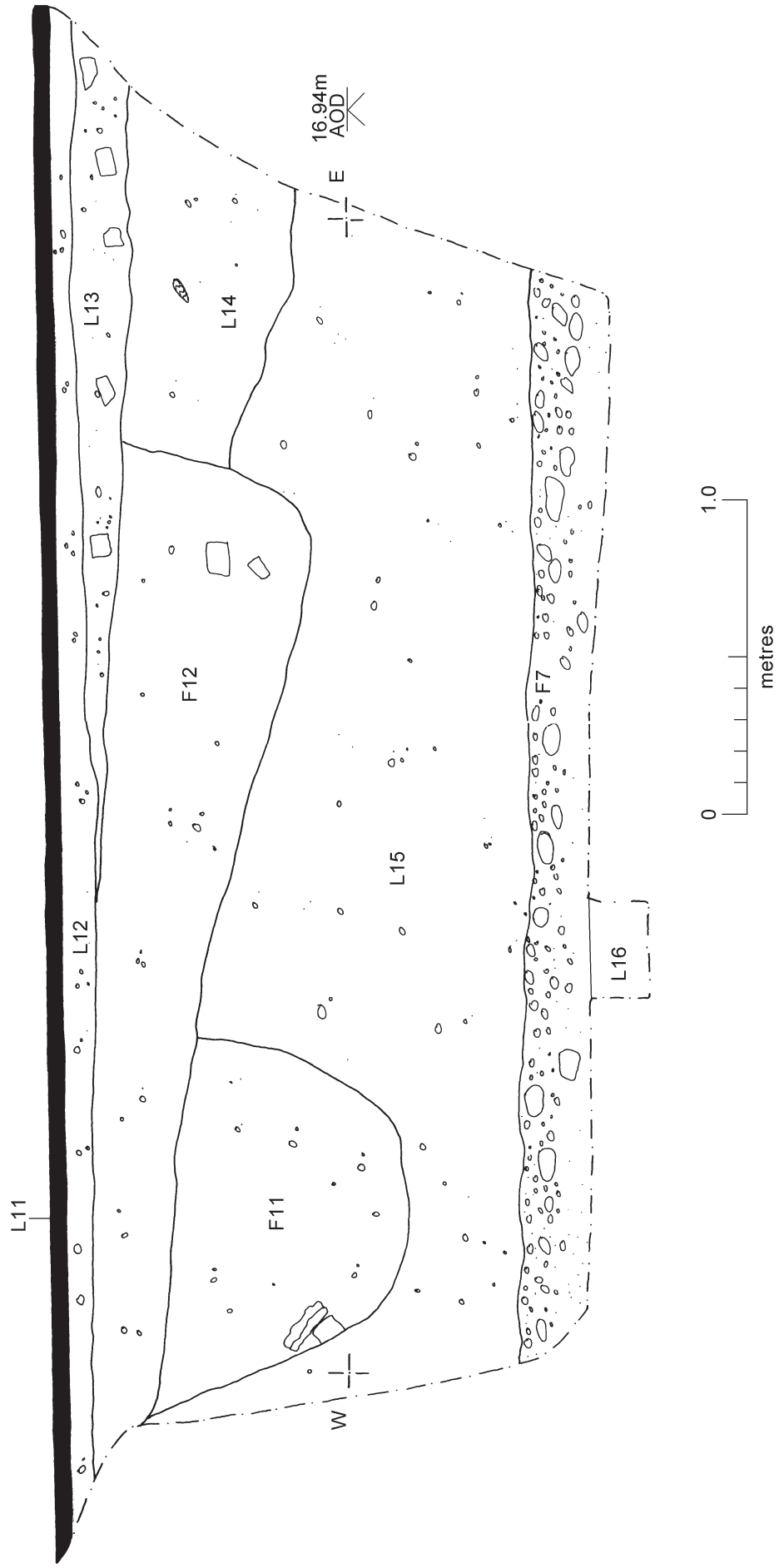


Fig 9 Area 10 Trench 1 section. North side.

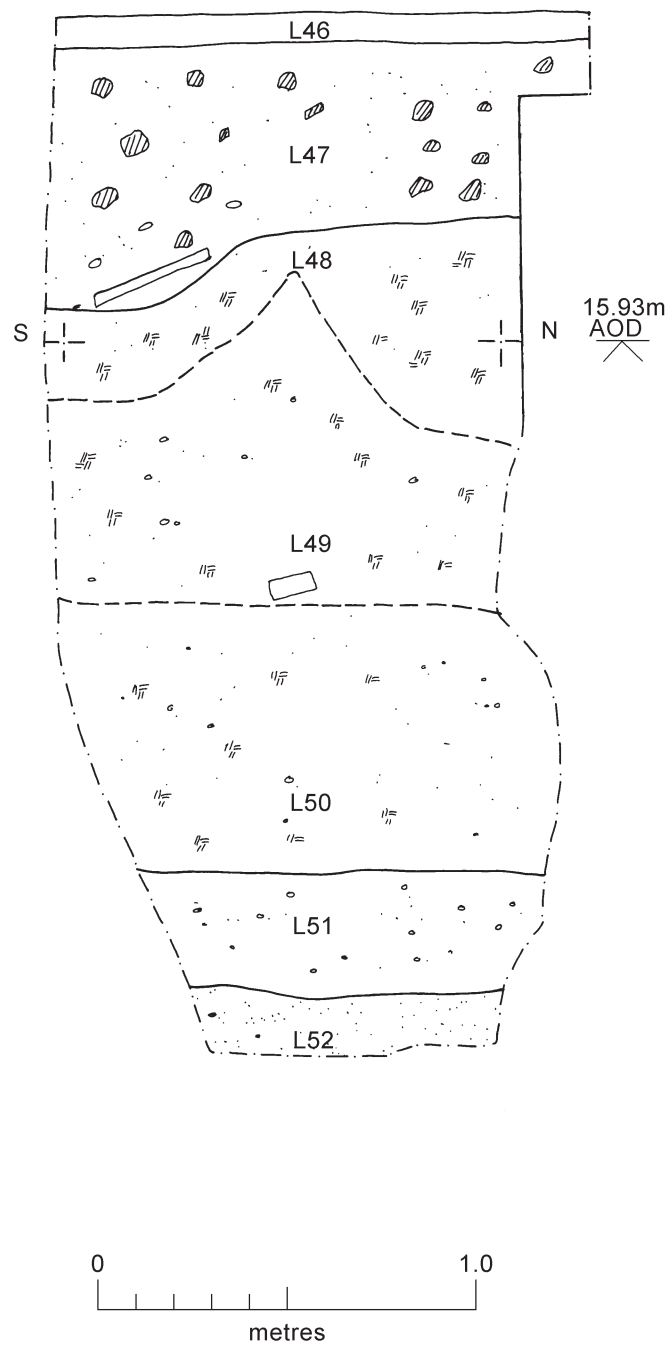
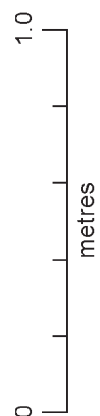
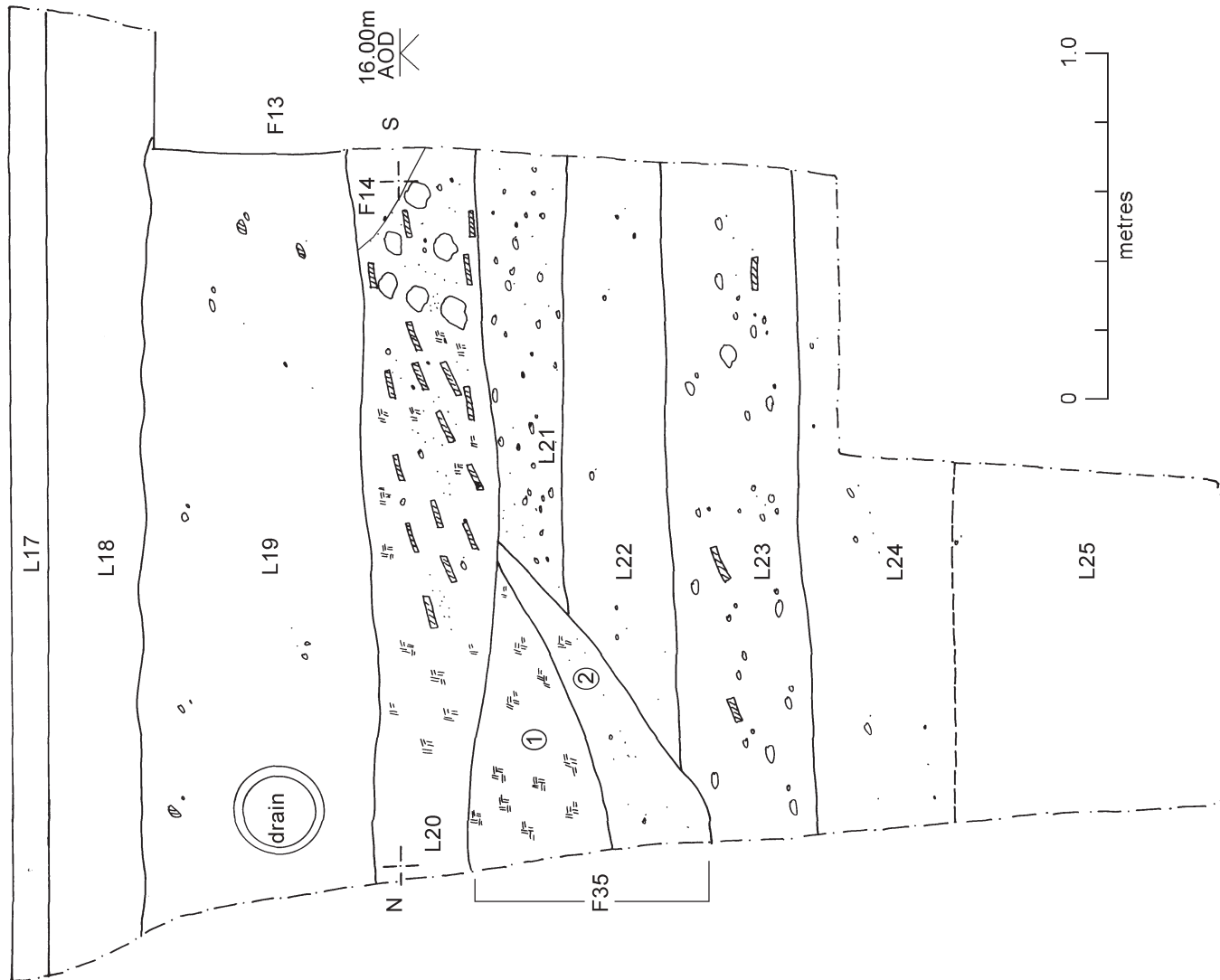


Fig 10 Area 11 Trench 1 section. West side.



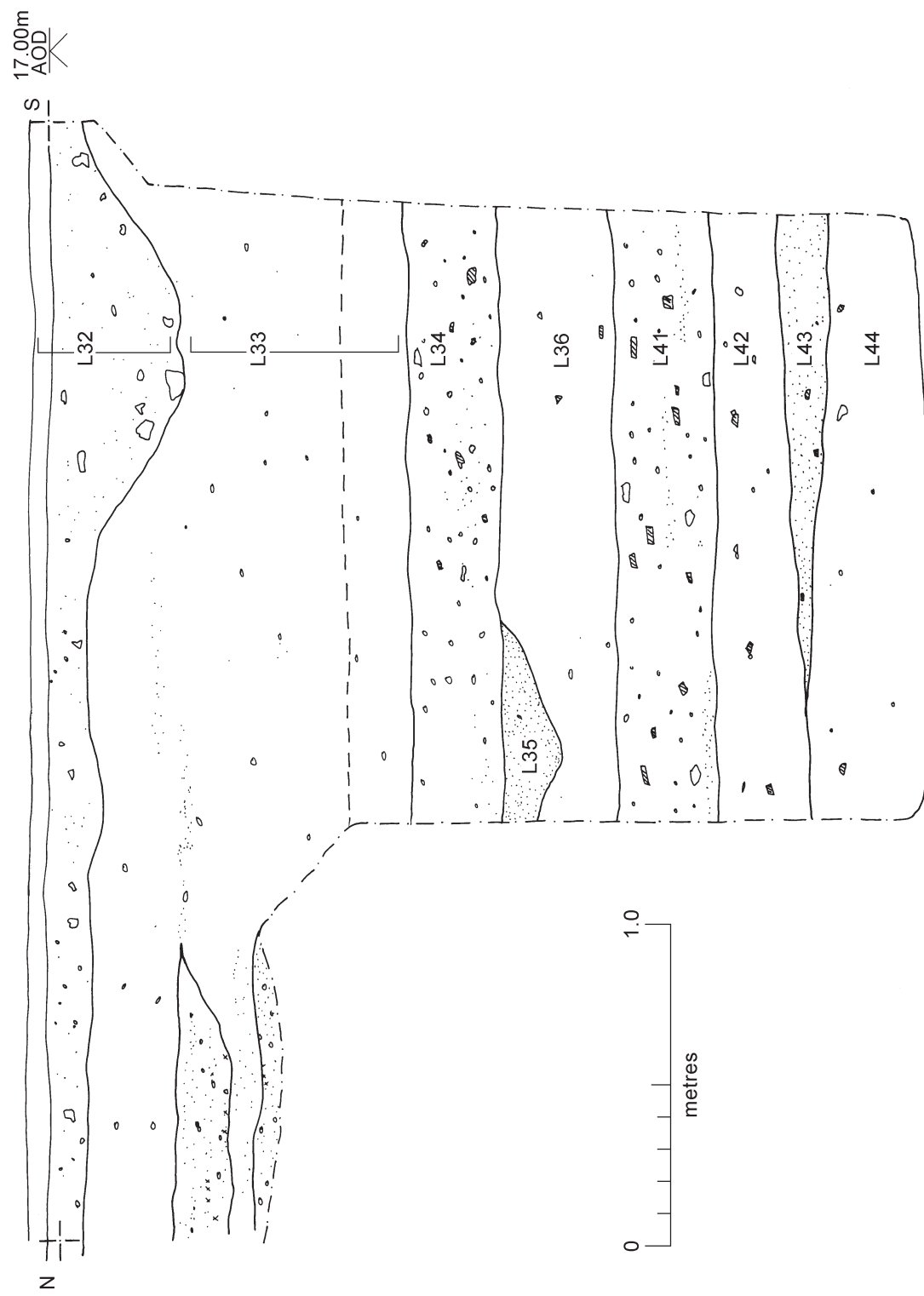


Fig 12 Area 12 Trench 2 section. East side.

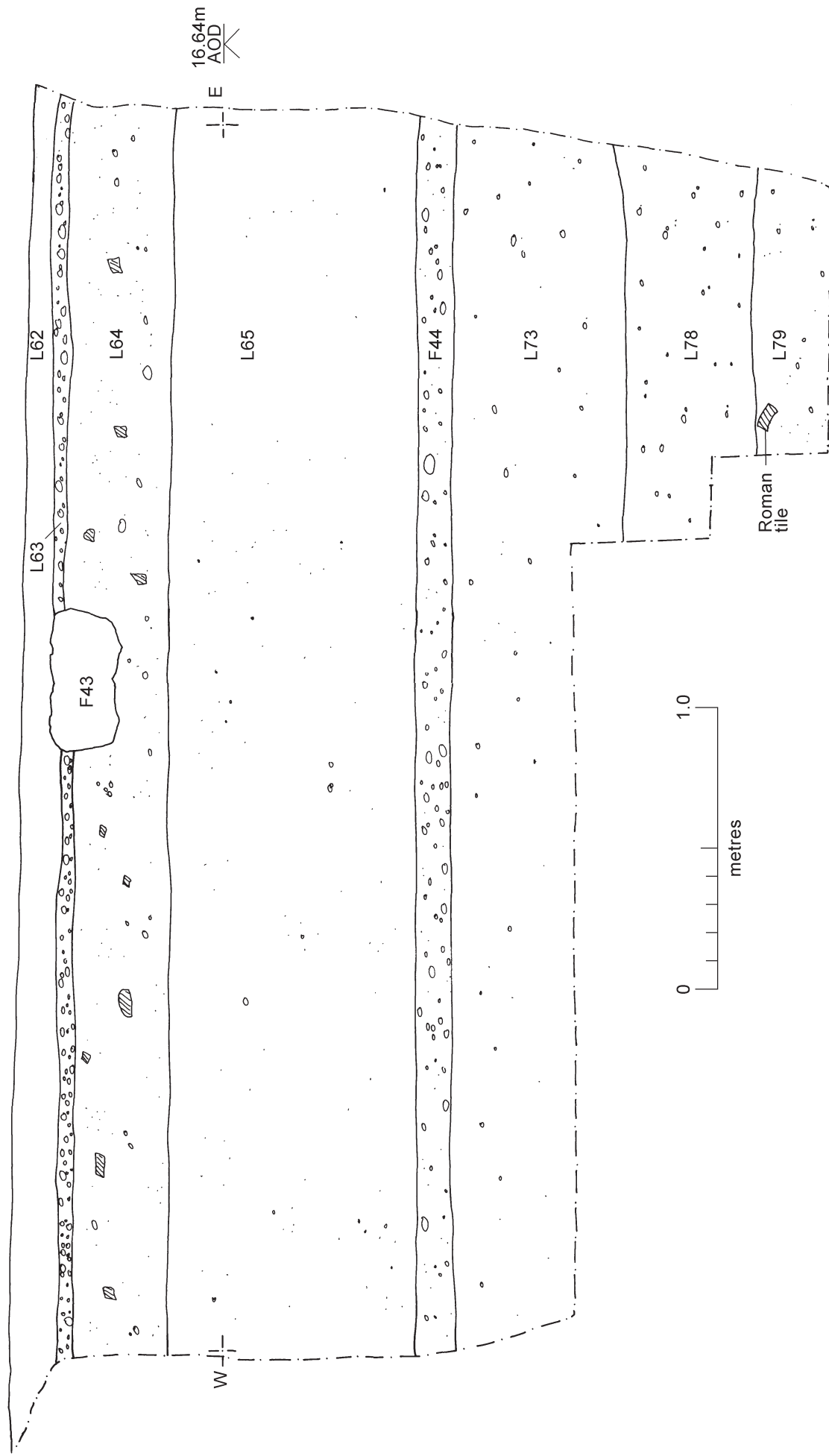


Fig 13 Area 14 Trench 1 section. North side.

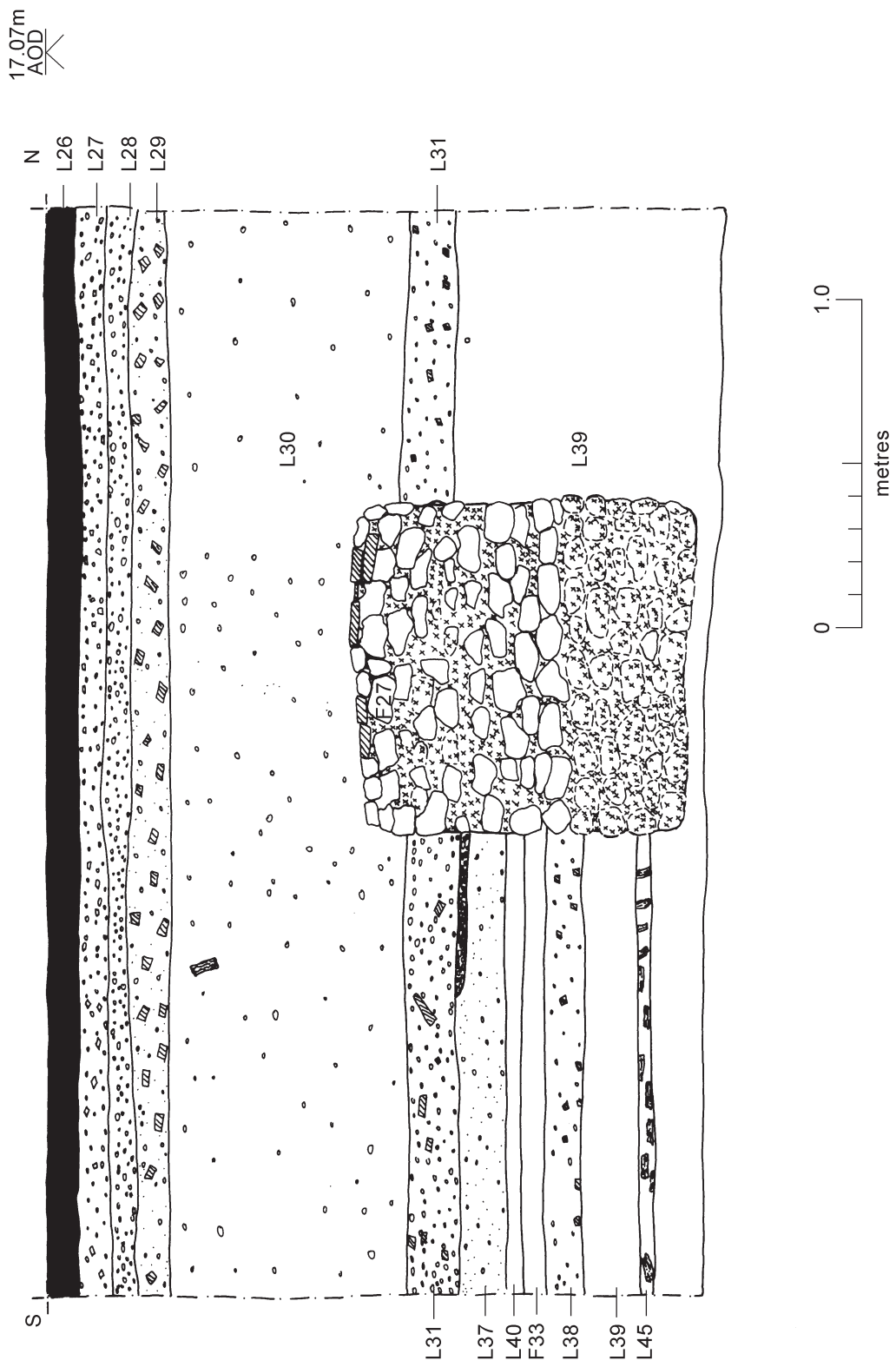


Fig 14 Area 15 Trench 1 section. West side.

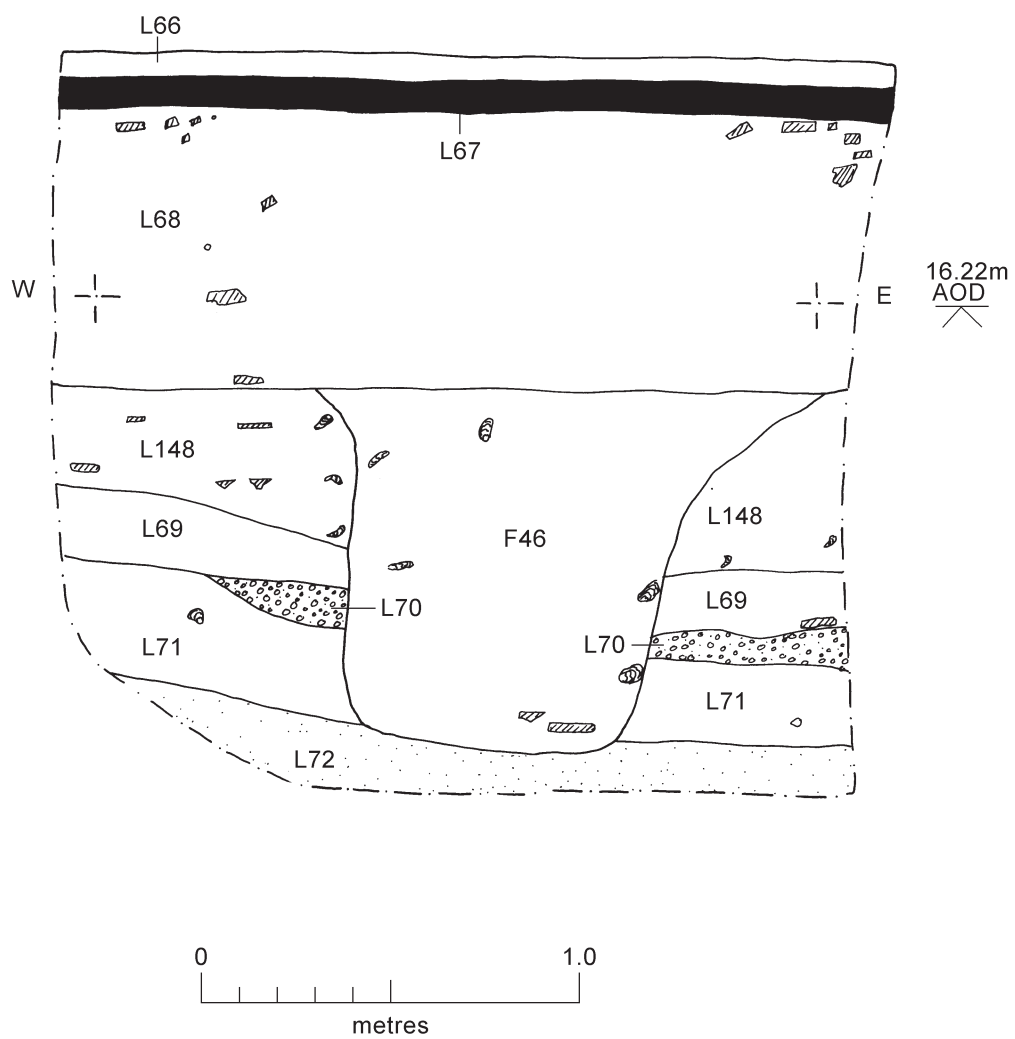


Fig 15 Area 16 Trench 1 section. North side.