THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF A REDEVELOPMENT OF THE QUEEN STREET BUS AND CAR PARK

OUTLINE OF THE MAIN POINTS

Excavations and preservation

- 1) The archaeological remains on the site are likely to be well preserved (Fig 1). Even the construction of the multi-storey in 1971 resulted in the loss of no more than about ten per cent of the underlying archaeological remains.
- 2) Groundworks exceeding 1.0 m in depth are likely to affect significant archaeological remains except in the south-east comer where the deposits seem to be of limited value.
- 3) The loss of Roman streets is preferable to the loss of the remains of Roman buildings.
- 4) Any scheme which can be designed in such as way as to lessen the impact on the remains of the Roman buildings will provide some degree of preservation of the buried archaeological deposits and lessen the need for expensive and time-consuming excavations.
- 5) Ideally any sizeable excavations which need to be undertaken are likely to require about six months a year if most of the site is involved.

The town wall

- 1) We suggest that the opportunity is taken to incorporate the wall in the scheme so that the access and its setting can be improved.
- 2) The inner face is well preserved and, DoE permitting, could be partly exposed as part of a wall-walk along the southern boundary of the site. Such a scheme could involve viewing platforms over the sites of the medieval bastions (access to the top of Bastion V might be possible?) and steps at either end leading into Priory Street (Figs 2-4).
- 3) In the longer term, such a walk could be continued eastwards to East Hill and westwards to Queen Street should the Bus Garage be developed.
- 4) Ideally the creation of a wall-walk should be accompanied by the landscaping of the area now occupied by the Priory Street carpark.
- 5) In our view, a tunnel under the wall would possibly meet with English Heritage approval providing that the head of the tunnel was clear of the base of the wall foundation (see Fig 3 for dimensions) and the mouth of the tunnel was screened and set well back from the wall.
- 6) Whatever is decided, we feel that as a bare minimum any new buildings on the Queen Street site should be designed in a way that is sympathetic to the town wall when viewed from Priory Street.

Possible central feature for a new scheme

- 1) The excavation of Trench 5 showed that there is 3 well-preserved building in the north-west corner of the site. It would be possible to reconstruct one or possibly two rooms *in situ* by exposing the floors and reconstructing the walls and possibly ceilings using collapsed wall-plaster (Photo 1). The addition of costumed figures, replica furniture, and other domestic items could provide the scheme with a unique, eye-catching central feature. It would also go some way towards answering the common criticism from the public that remains are rarely left exposed after redevelopments have taken place. One Roman room would take up an area of about six metres square, two would need double.
- 2) It is envisaged that the reconstruction would be indoors, inside a glass display area.
- 3) Should such a scheme be contemplated, more work would be needed to establish the full plan of the rooms concerned and to check that they are as well preserved as the part exposed so far.
- 4) A suitable reconstruction could probably be done for around £25,000, excluding the cost of the glass fronts. The main cost will lie in reconstructing the wall-plaster and any levelling out of the tessellated floors that is needed. Reconstructing wall-plaster can be very time-consuming and expensive but the cost can be held down by involving volunteers and, if necessary, by increasing the amount of reconstructed infill between the assembled pieces.

Exploratory Excavations at Queen Street Bus Station, Colchester Summary excavation report

Sponsor: Colchester Borough Council

Introduction

In late August and September 1990, trial excavations were carried out at Queen Street Bus Station. Prompted by proposals for major redevelopment, the aims of the excavations were to establish the depth, nature and condition of archaeologically significant remains and also to assess the state of preservation of the buried north face of the town wall which forms the southern boundary of the site.

The present bus station and car park cover an area of approximately 2.8 acres (1.13 ha) within the south-east corner of the walled town. Previous small excavations and watching briefs, principally in the central part of the site, have consistently yielded evidence of substantial Roman occupation in the form of parts of several fine houses, some with hypocausts, mosaic floors and rooms finished in decorated wall-plaster (Fig 1).

The 1990 excavations were limited to five small trenches, their locations largely dictated by a need to probe areas closer to the periphery of the site.

A brief description of the stratigraphy of each trench is given below. Absolute Ordnance Datum levels are quoted where relevant as a possible guide for the planning of future groundworks.

Trench 1

Location: south-west corner of the bus station, 25 m east of the Eastern National bus compound.

Dimensions: 8.8 m x 1.2 m.

Level of archaeologically significant remains: 20.65 m OD (1.1 m below top of modern ground slab).

Removal of the heavy modem ground slab revealed a very dark greyish brown sandy loam (L2 & L3) which extended to an overall depth of 1.1 m. This material, a post-Roman accumulation of soil, was homogeneous in character and devoid of features except for a late pit containing the articulated skeletal remains of a horse. The absence of structural features is consistent with the documentary evidence which indicates that the area was open land from the medieval period to the mid 20th century. Beneath this soil were lighter deposits of destruction debris containing Roman roof and building tile, mortar and stone fragments, some of which had filled an east-west ditch situated near the southern end of the trench.

The Roman level was encountered beneath the destruction debris at a depth of 1.1m (20.65m OD). From this point excavation was limited to the minimum necessary to interpret and evaluate the uppermost surviving Roman stratigraphy. Two east-west wall foundations were located. One was constructed of Kentish ragstone and mortar (Fig 5, F10). The other was largely robbed but had some residual pieces of ragstone in the lower fill (F1). Associated floor levels had been stripped in antiquity. However, a small quantity of displaced tesserae in the overlying destruction debris offers a clue to the nature of the building's floors. Other features included the remains of a baby with a small beaker of c 3rd-century date placed by its

shoulder (F6). To the south of the building lay a perfectly preserved east-west drainage channel constructed of tile and septaria bonded with *opus signinum* (F9). This is clearly a further stretch of the Roman drain discovered in 1931 during the excavation of a trench situated approximately 15m to the west in the area now occupied by the Eastern National compound.

Excavation ceased at a depth of 1.6 m (20.15 m OD).

Trench 2

Location: adjoining the north side of the town wall at a point 32m east of Bastion V.

Dimensions: 2.9 m x 1.2m.

Level of intact Roman wall face: 21.25m OD.

The highest surviving part of the Roman town wall's north face was found at a depth of 0.7 m (21.25 m OD). Following the line of an earlier exploratory trench of unknown origin, the excavation was extended to a depth of 1.4m, revealing three courses of septaria facing blocks above four courses of tile, all in an excellent state of preservation (Fig 6, Photo 2). The Roman earth rampart (L44) was in poor condition. Although present to within 0.6 m of the modem ground surface, the uppermost 0.7m was found to be pitted and heavily disturbed by root action.

Excavation ceased at an overall depth of 1.45m (21.2 m OD).

Trench 3

Location: adjoining the north .ride of the town wall at a point 97.5 m east of Bastion V.

Dimensions: 3.2 m x 1m.

Level of intact Roman wall face: 20.02 m OD

The uppermost surviving part of the town wall's original north elevation was represented by a course of Roman facing tile encountered at a depth of 1.4m (20.02 m OD) (Fig 7, Photo 3). Excavation ceased at that level.

Immediately north of the wall, modern F111 was found to extend to with 50mm of the Roman rampart, which was uncovered at a depth of 1.95m (20.47 m OD).

Trench 4

Location: adjacent to the south-east corner of the multi-storey car park.

Dimensions: 7.95 m x 12 m.

The modern ground slab extended to a depth of 0.7 m, below which was a 0.8 m thick post-Roman accumulation of dark sandy loam (L25, L28) equivalent to, but slightly darker than, L2 and L3 in trench 1. At a depth of 1.5m a light scatter of Roman destruction debris sealed a thin spread of gravel (L37) which in turn covered a deposit of dumped material.

Excavation ceased at 1.8m (19.25 m OD).

Trench 5

Location: north-western part of the bus station, 3m east of the building occupied by Allied Carpets.

Dimensions: 6.5m x 1.2 m.

Level of archaeologically significant remains: 21.80m OD (1m below modem surface).

Modern surfacing sealed a 0.65 m thick accumulation of post-Roman topsoil (L27) of similar appearance to L2, L3, L25 and L28 in trenches 1 and 4. Directly below the topsoil was an expanse of predominantly clayey destruction debris (L32, L33, L34) which was cut by medieval trenches (F20, F21, F22) dug for the purpose of retrieving stone from underlying wall foundations. By closely following the courses of early walls, these trenches defined small parts of four rooms belonging to a Roman building (Fig 5, Photo 4).

Excavation beyond this point was highly selective and governed by the need to establish the condition of the rooms whilst minimising disturbance to the remains. Removal of the medieval trench fills produced a valuable series of sections through the Roman stratigraphy in which edges of floors were noted at the following levels:

Room 1: tessellated pavement 21.12 m OD.

Room 2: 40mm opus signinum (with quarter-round moulding?) above 80mm mortar 20.92 m OD.

Room 3: tessellated pavement 20.85 m OD.

Room 4: 70 mm opus signinum 20.75 m OD.

Generally, the floors appeared to overlie deposits with fairly high content of building debris, beneath which were layers of daub.

A small section of the clayey destruction debris (L33) was removed from the corner of Room 1, revealing a well-preserved floor of red and white tesserae (F30). The destruction debris proved to be composed largely of collapsed clay walling and contained hundreds of wall-plaster fragments decorated in a rich variety of colours and patterns, indicating a building finished to a high decorative standard (Photo 1). Complete lengths of wall-plaster were discovered *in situ* along the lower north side of Room 4 and the east side of Room 1 where, supported by the clayey debris on the floor of each room, the plaster had escaped disturbance during the medieval robbing. The plaster *in situ* has been left to await recovery at some future date.

Excavation ceased at a general level of 1.05m (21.75m OD) except where for the deeper features for the deeper features which were dug to a depth of up to 2.5m.

Prior to reinstatement, the bottom of each trench was lined with polythene sheeting. The lower part of Trench 5 was filled with sand to protect the wall-plaster.

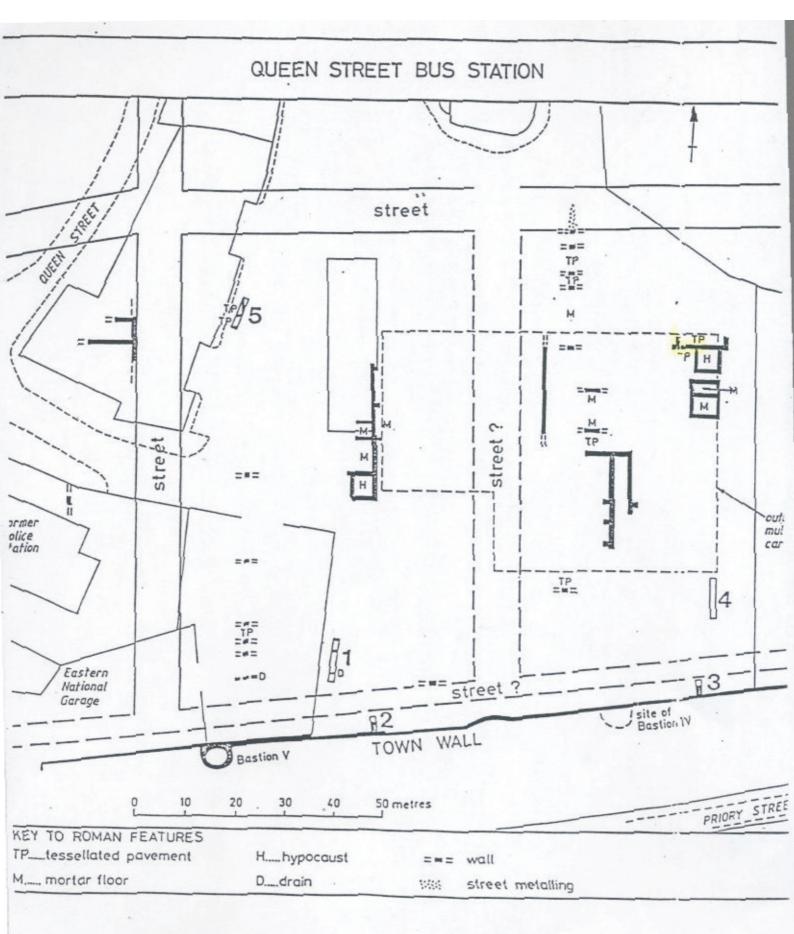
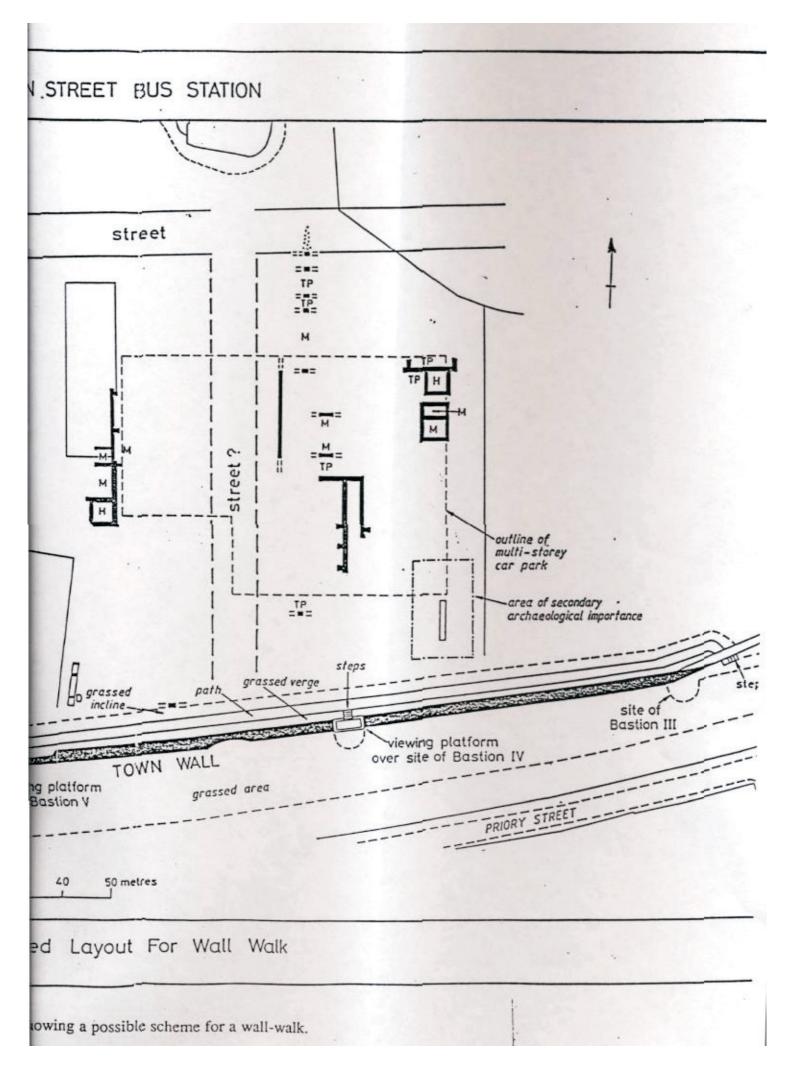


Fig 1. General plan of the Queen Street bus station area showing the positions of the trenches dug in 1990 (numbered 1 to 5) and the earlier discoveries.

Fig 2. Plan showing a possible sch



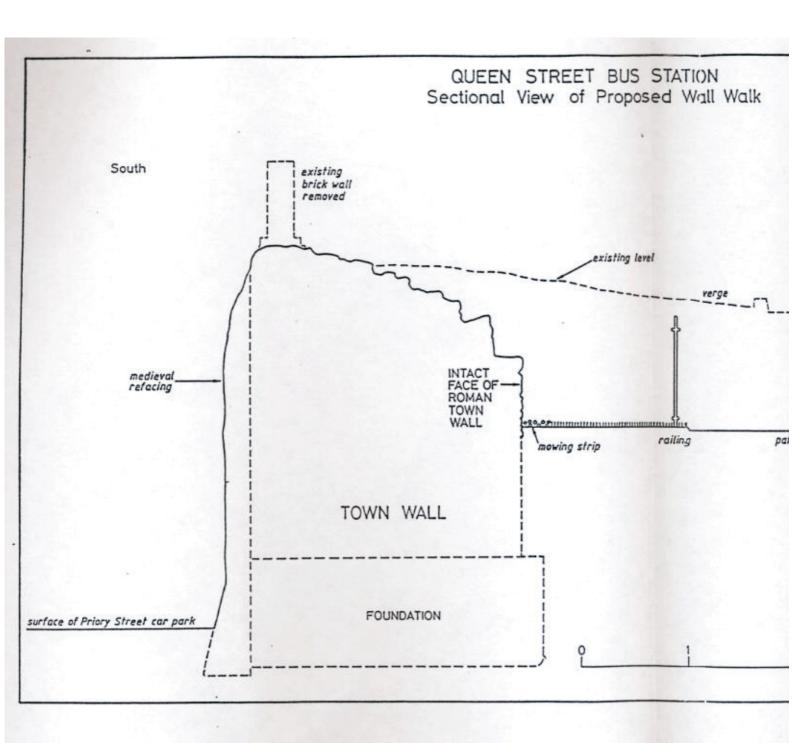
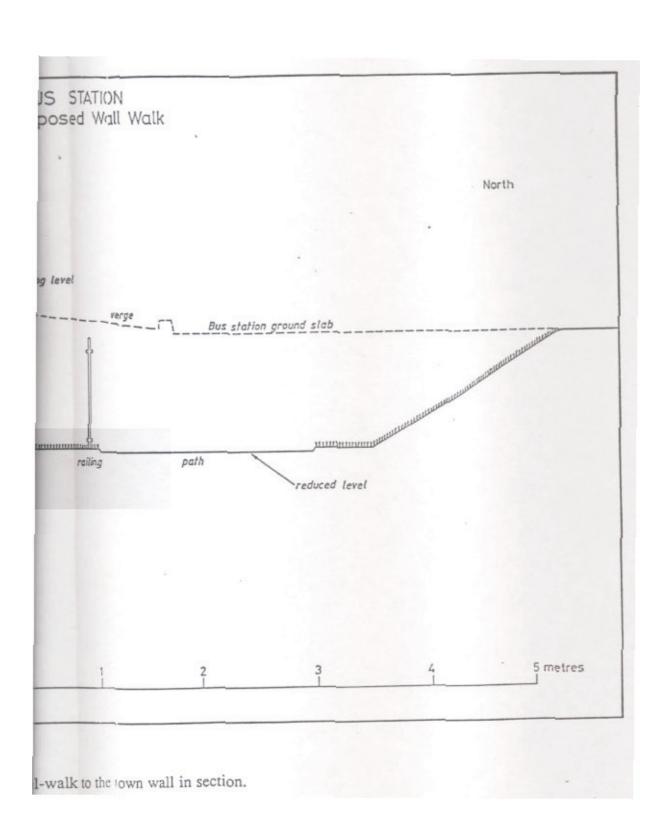


Fig 3. Relationship of the proposed wall-walk to the lown wall in s



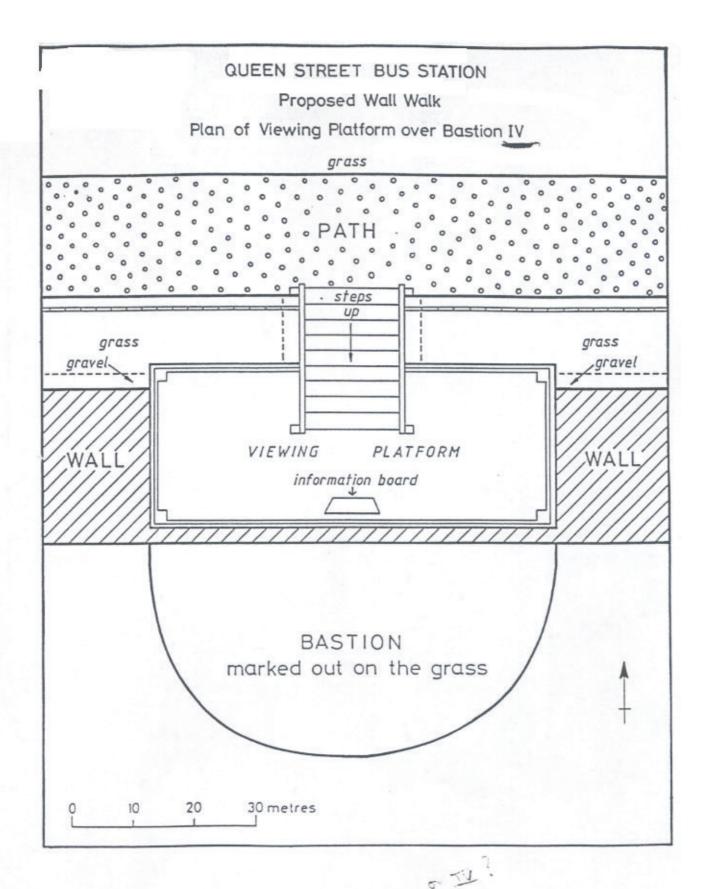
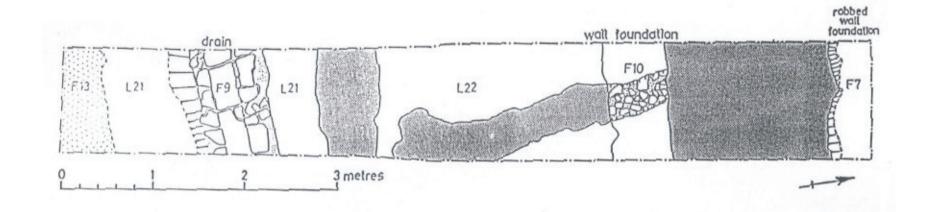
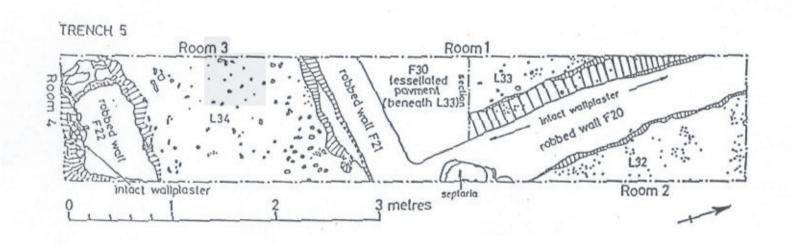
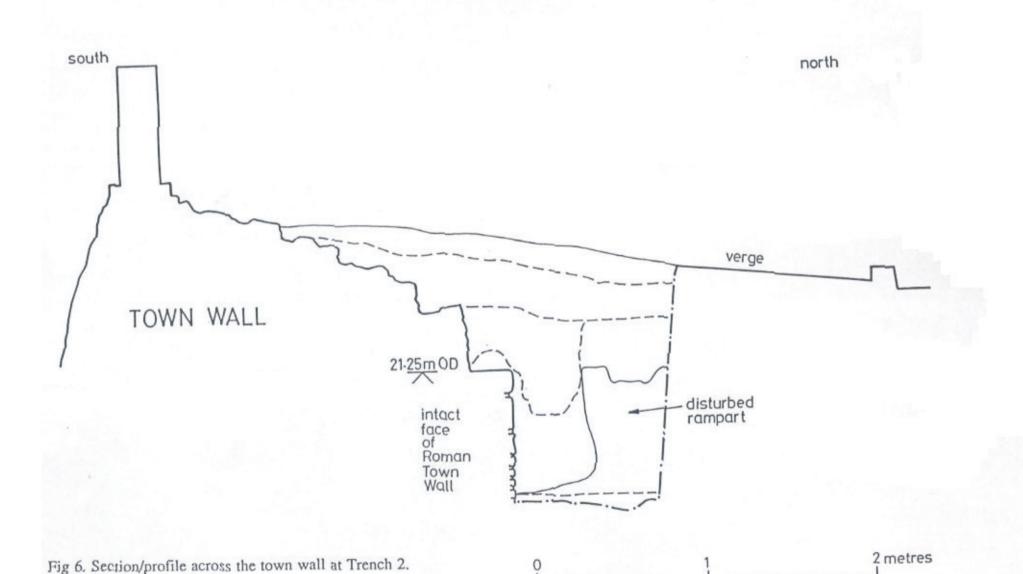


Fig 4. Plan of a viewing platform over Bastion V. (Access into the upper part of the bastion might be an alternative.)

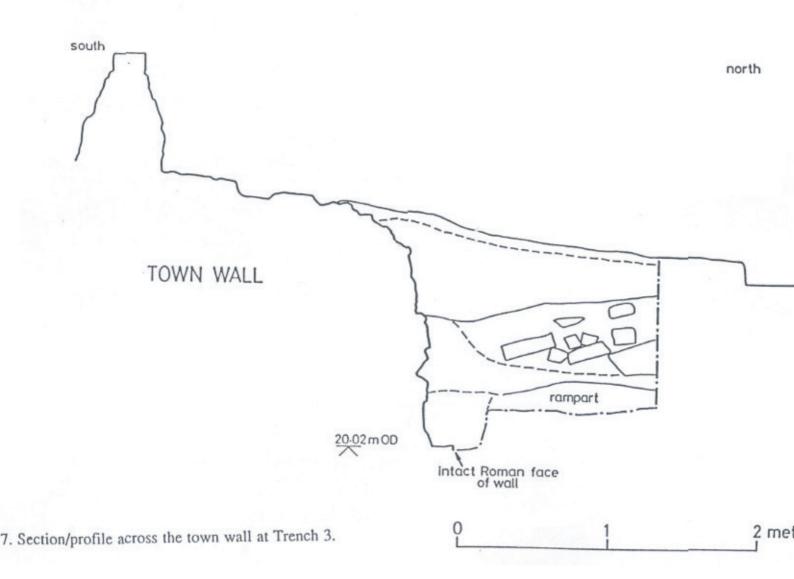




QUEEN STREET BUS STATION 1990 Trench 2 Section



QUEEN STREET BUS STATION 1990 Trench 3 Section



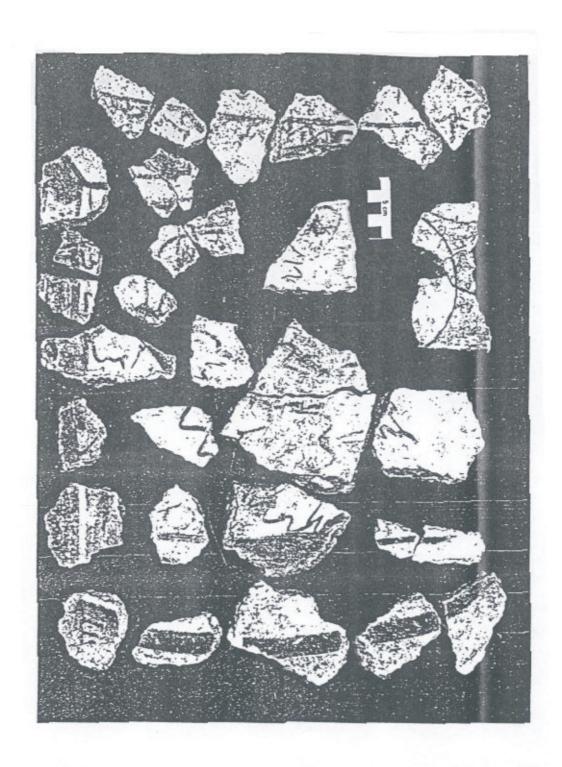
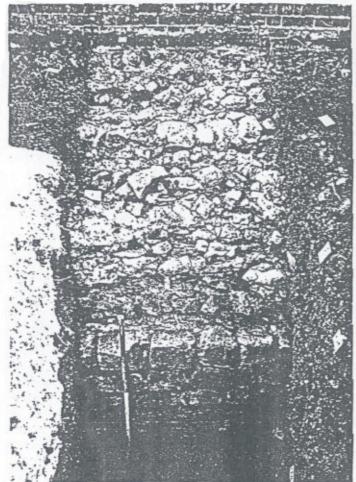
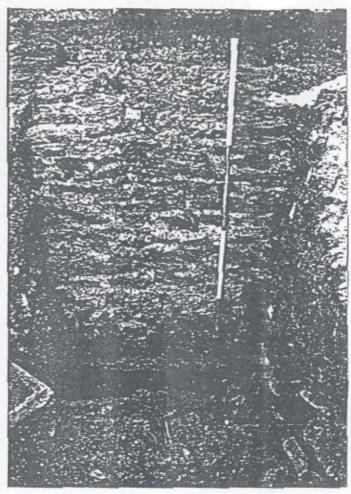
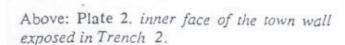


Photo 1: selection of the fragments of coloured wall-plaster from Trench 5.







Above right: Plate 3. inner face of the town wall exposed in Trench 3.

Right: Plate 4. Trench 5 viewed from the south. The open right-angled trench shows the position of the walls of the Roman house. Part of the tessellated floor is exposed in the foreground and is overlain by the remains of the demolished clay walls mixed with fragments of wall-plaster.

