

**An archaeological evaluation at
20 Yorick Road, West Mersea, Essex
November 2003**

**report prepared by
Ben Holloway**

**on behalf of
Mrs Jenny Mace**

CAT project ref.: 03/11f
NGR: TM 0197 12514
Colchester Museums accession code: 2003.313



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EHCR summary sheet

1 Summary

An evaluation trench was dug in the garden of 20 Yorick Road, West Mersea, Essex to locate and assess the condition of the remains of the Roman mausoleum ahead of a planning decision on the southern extension to a garage.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological evaluation carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) at 20 Yorick Road, West Mersea, Essex on behalf of Mrs J Mace. The evaluation was carried out between the 18th November and 8th December 2003. Scheduled Ancient Monument consent was given before works began on site (NGR TM 0197 12514).
- 2.2 The trench was dug by hand by an archaeologist to enable planning permission to be determined for the building of an extension to the garage/studio.
- 2.3 All fieldwork was done in accordance with a specification agreed with the Archaeology Officer of Colchester Borough Council.
- 2.4 This report mirrors standards and practices contained in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines for the standards and practice of 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 2002), and the IFA's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological evaluation* (1999).

3 Archaeological background

The site lies within an area rich in archaeology. West Mersea is the site of a small Roman town or an extensive Roman villa complex. The church of St Peter and St Paul lies 155m to the west of the site, as does the site of the hall from where there have been numerous reports of Roman mosaics, tessellated floors and walls (EHCR nos 2214 and 2274). The site at 20 Yorick Road contains the remains of a round building, discovered and uncovered in 1896. The building used to be regarded as being the remains of a Roman lighthouse, but now its identification as a Roman mausoleum is not in doubt (EHCR 0038). The structure is 20m in diameter with a hexagonal chamber in the centre from which radiate six walls. These walls meet the 1m-thick encircling wall and project beyond it for over a metre as external buttresses. Between each pair of walls there is an extra buttress, making twelve in all. The structure is made of tile on foundations of mortar and ragstone. Dressed stone and roof tiles have also been found. A geophysical survey of the site was carried out by English Heritage in 1989, and this concluded that the building lies 3m south of the studio and extends into the rear gardens of nos 4 and 6 Beach Road. The monument has been afforded the protection of scheduling (Scheduled Ancient Monument or SAM no 32). It has not been seen for many years, but it shows clearly on an aerial photograph of 1935. The present condition of the mausoleum is uncertain since it was covered over without record about forty years ago.

4 Aim

The aim of the evaluation was to locate, identify and assess the quality and extent of surviving archaeological remains prior to a decision with regard to mitigation. Specifically the aim of the evaluation was to establish the condition, position and depth below ground-level of the mausoleum in relation to the proposed southern extension.

5 The evaluation trench

A single 5 m x 1.5 m trench was excavated by hand south of the existing garage and of the proposed southern extension. The trench was opened firstly by removing turf

and excavating through 300mm of topsoil (Layer or L1) then through 70mm of subsoil (L2) to the top of the archaeological layers. One archaeological feature was identified at the western end of the evaluation trench. Feature or F1 is the Roman mausoleum.

6 Finds

The finds from the evaluation trench consisted only of building material. No pottery or other datable material from any period was recovered. The building material produced by the evaluation consisted of brick, tile and stone. The tile had *opus signinum* mortar adhering to it and is associated with the mausoleum F1. The stone is more difficult to explain. There was a piece of York stone with flecks of modern mortar attached to it. It is likely that this material represents waste from a modern building project, possibly a patio. There was also a fragment of pumice stone found associated with the mausoleum F1. It is likely that this stone was re-used and incorporated into the rubble foundations of the building. No worked building stone was recovered during the evaluation and no roof tile was observed. The complete finds list is shown below.

Finds list

Finds no	Layer no	Feature no	Description	Context	Period	Weight (g)
1	-	F1	Tile	Mausoleum	Roman	1038
	-	F1	Stone	Mausoleum	Roman	1711
2	-	F1	Flint - burnt?	Mausoleum	Roman	335
3	-	F1	Tile	Mausoleum	Roman	429
4	-	F1	Stone	Mausoleum	Roman	132

7 Discussion and interpretation

The evaluation identified the location of the mausoleum and in conjunction with aerial photographs allowed it to be provisionally orientated in relation to the existing garage and the proposed southern extension (Fig 1). The evaluation also identified the depth at which the remains survive and the condition of the surviving remains.

The evaluation trench exposed a portion of the outer wall of the foundation and part of a buttress. The structural remains were recorded between 100mm and 300mm depth for the buttress, and at 400mm depth for the exposed section of the outer wall.

The *opus signinum* and tile foundations are intact and appear to be in good condition (at least as far as can be observed in the evaluation trench). There is, however, a large amount of building material such as tile and *opus signinum* lumps loose in L1 around the foundations, indicating that it has been damaged, possibly when the mausoleum was backfilled about forty years ago.

8 Levels and mitigation

The highest surviving part of the mausoleum exposed in the evaluation trench is 0.85 m below the garage floor and 0.42 m below the adjacent turf surface of the garden (Fig 2). Thus if the floor level of the proposed southern extension is to be the same as the present floor of the garage, then it would appear possible to construct a raft foundation in such a way so as not to foul any surviving remains of the mausoleum within the footprint of the proposed southern extension, providing that the raft is no more than about 0.4 m thick. The maximum possible thickness of the raft is hard to estimate, but the footprint area of the proposed extension slopes downwards away from where the mausoleum has been partly uncovered in the evaluation trench. Thus, even if parts of the mausoleum survive elsewhere just

under the surface of the garden, there should still be sufficient clearance for a raft of around 0.4 m in thickness. Should a substantially thicker raft be required, then there might be a need to take more levels within the footprint of the proposed new build and investigate this matter further.

9 Acknowledgements

The Colchester Archaeological Trust would like to thank Mrs Mace for commissioning the evaluation. The project was monitored by Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council, and Philip Wise of Colchester Museums. The site work was carried out by Ben Holloway and Steve Tyler.

10 References

Hawkes, C F C, & Crummy, P, 1995 *Camulodunum 2: Colchester Archaeological Report 11*

Hull, M R, 1958 *Roman Colchester*, RRCSAL, 20

11 Glossary

context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
LIA	late Iron Age
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
NGR	National Grid Reference
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
Roman	the period from AD 43 to around AD 430

12 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but it will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museums under accession code 2003.313.

13 Site data

13.1 Site context list

Location	Context	Description	Context date
Evaluation trench	L1	Topsoil	modern
Evaluation trench	L2	Subsoil	modern

13.2 Soil descriptions

Location	Context	Description
Evaluation trench	L1	Dark brown silt, some small stones, occasional tile chips, large amount of plant-root activity.
Evaluation trench	L2	Yellow brown sandy silt, small stones, frequent tile fragments, <i>opus signinum</i> flecks.

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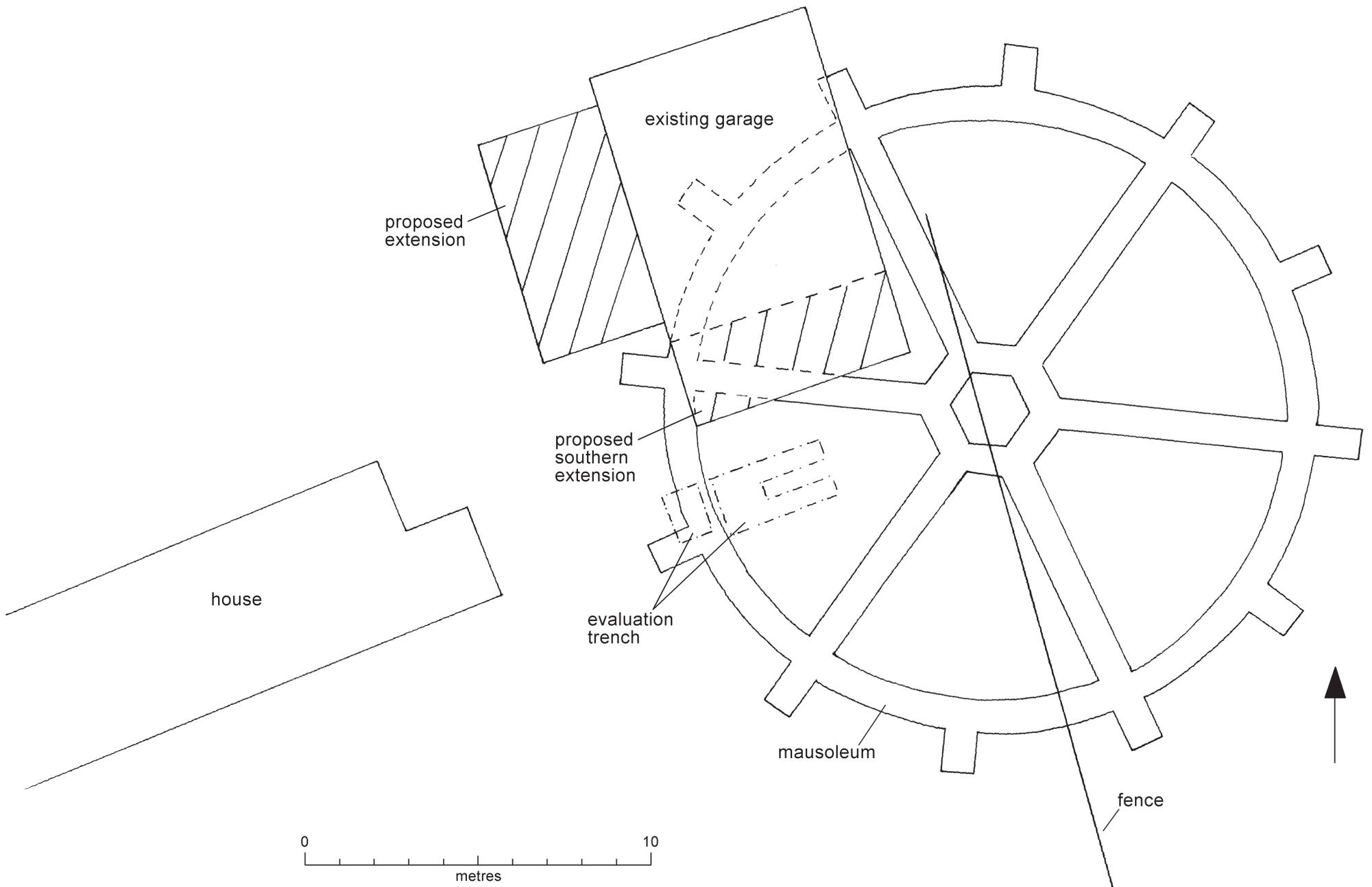


Fig 1 Estimated location of the Roman mausoleum in relation to the evaluation trench, the existing building and the proposed garage.

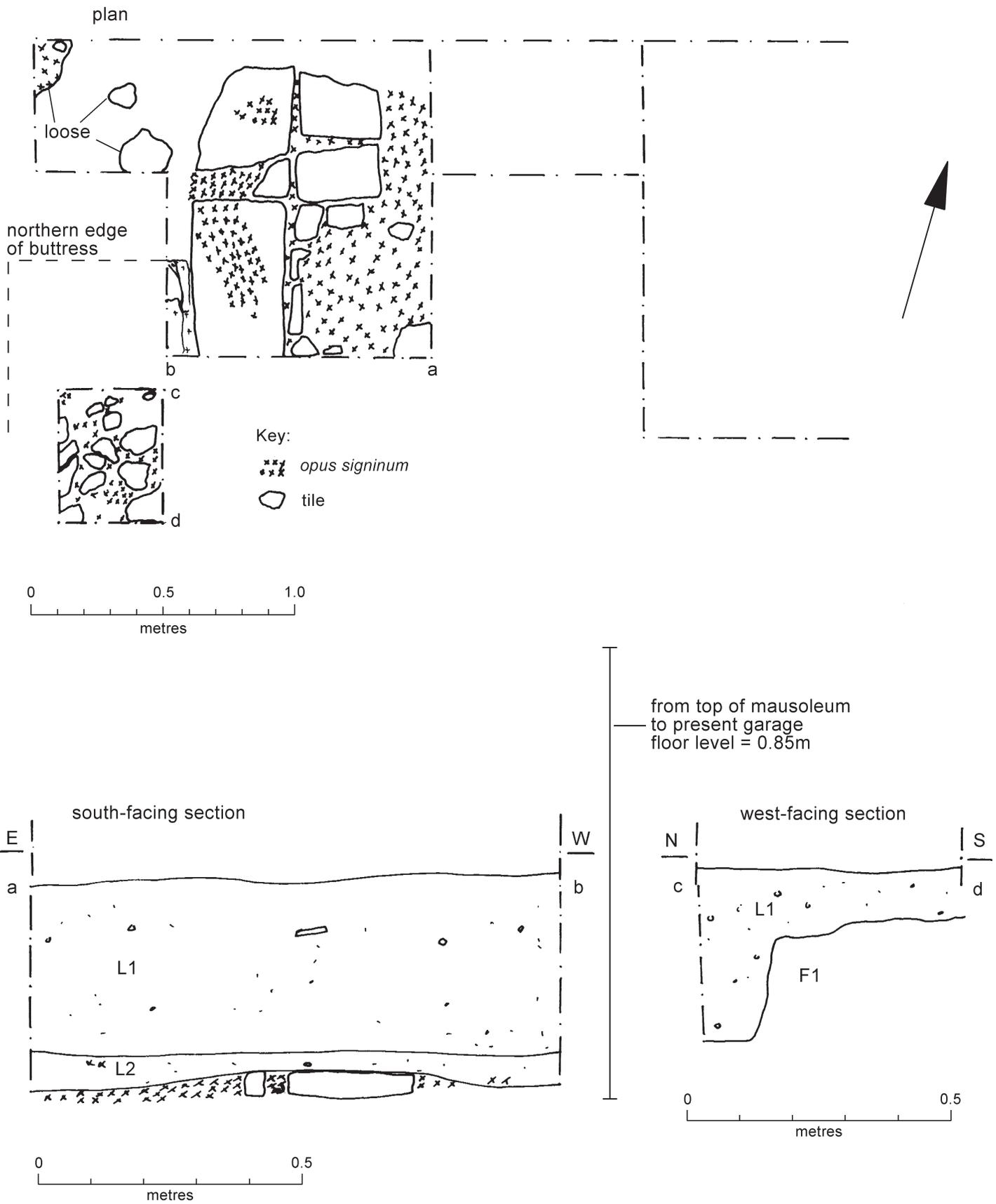


Fig 2 Plan and section of evaluation trench.

**Essex Heritage Conservation Record/
Essex Archaeology and History**

Summary sheet

Site address: 20 Yorick Road, West Mersea, Essex	
Parish: West Mersea	District: Colchester
NGR: TM 0197 12514	Site code: Colchester Museums accession code 2003.313
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: November/December 2003	Size of area investigated: 7.5m square
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museums	Funding source: House owner
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHCR nos: 0038; Essex SAM no 32
Final report: CAT Report 255 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: Roman	
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>When an evaluation trench was dug in the garden of 20 Yorick Road, West Mersea, Essex to assess the condition of the Roman mausoleum, the remains were found to be in relatively good condition. The west edge of the monument was located, allowing its position to be more accurately plotted than has been possible before.</i>	
Previous summaries/reports: N/A	
Author of summary: Ben Holloway	Date of summary: January 2004