

**An archaeological watching brief  
at 20 Yorick Road,  
West Mersea, Essex  
July 2005**

**report prepared by  
Ben Holloway**

**on behalf of  
Mrs J Mace**

CAT project ref.: 05/7a  
Colchester Museums accession code: 2005.88  
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**CAT Report 330**  
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## 1 Summary

*Observations were made during the excavation of foundation trenches and a drainage trench, forming part of a new extension to an existing garage. Little archaeological material was observed during the watching brief, the bulk of material being demolition associated with the Roman mausoleum (scheduled ancient monument or SAM no 32). In addition to the demolition material, two features were observed, both in foundation trench 2; the first was a greensand and mortar wall foundation, and the second was a modern soakaway. No structural evidence of the mausoleum was observed during the watching brief.*

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 This is the archive report on an archaeological watching brief carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) at 20 Yorick Road, West Mersea, Essex at NGR TM 0197 1251 on behalf of Mrs J Mace. The watching brief was carried out between the 19th and 22nd of July 2005. Scheduled Ancient Monument consent was given before works began on site.
- 2.2 The foundation trenches and pipe trench were excavated by machine under archaeological supervision so that any archaeological material could be recorded.
- 2.3 All fieldwork was done in accordance with a specification agreed with the Archaeology Officer of Colchester Borough Council.
- 2.4 This report follows standards and practices contained in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines for the standards and practice of archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (CM 2002) and the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IFA 1999).

## 3 Archaeological background

The site is located in an area which is rich in archaeology. 155m to the west lies the church of St Peter and St Paul and the now-demolished hall where there have been numerous reports of Roman mosaics, tessellated floors, and walls (EHER nos 2214 and 2274). West Mersea may well be the site of a small Roman town, and certainly that of an extensive Roman villa complex (Hull 1958).

The site contains the remains of a round building, first discovered in 1896, which has been variously interpreted as a Roman lighthouse or mausoleum (EHER no 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 roofing tile has also been found in the area. A geophysical survey of the site was carried out by English Heritage in 1989 which concluded that the remains of the building lie 3m south of the studio at the rear of the house (20 Yorick Road) and extend into the rear gardens of no 4 and no 6 Beach Road. The monument has been afforded the protection of scheduling (SAM no 32). The monument was visible on an aerial photograph of 1935 and was backfilled some 40 years ago. Evaluation trenching carried out by CAT in late 2003 exposed a section of the structure (Fig 1; CAT Report 255) and found the remains intact and in reasonable condition, although a large amount of loose building material was observed in the vicinity which may indicate that the structure was damaged when it was backfilled.

## 4 Aim

The aim of the watching brief was to preserve by record any archaeological deposits that were to be removed or disturbed by the groundwork's associated with the new garage extension and drainage trench.

## 5 The foundation trenches

Four connecting foundation trenches (trenches 1-4) were dug within the footprint of the extension, as shown on the trench plan (Fig 1; see plan in archive). The trenches were 500mm wide and were excavated to a depth of between 800mm and 1m. The foundation trenches were excavated through the driveway (L1), a loose gravel layer consolidated by larger stones set into asphalt. The trenches were then excavated through subsoil (L2) to the required depth. Traces of natural sand and gravel (L4) were observed in places at the bottom of the foundation trenches. Within the matrix of L2 were patches of demolition material (L3); this consisted of *opus signinum* and tile. During the excavation of the foundation trenches, two features were identified. Both of the features were observed in trench 2. A fragment of greensand and mortar wall foundation was recorded at the south-west end of the trench (F1; Fig 1), and a modern brick and peg-tile soakaway was recorded at the junction with trench 3 (F2). An area 2.5m x 6.5m was also stripped to the south of the existing garage structure for its southern extension. The topsoil (L5) was removed to a depth of 400mm prior to the laying of a concrete raft foundation. No archaeological material was observed.

## 6 Drainage trench and soakaway

A drainage trench 300mm wide and 400mm deep was excavated to the west of the new foundation to join an existing manhole (Fig 1). The drainage trench was excavated through topsoil (L5) and into the subsoil (L2). Half way along the length, a soakaway was excavated. As with the drainage trench, the soakaway was excavated through topsoil (L5) and subsoil (L2) into the natural sands and gravels (L4). No archaeological material was observed during the excavation of the drainage trench or the soakaway.

## 7 Finds

The finds from the foundation trenches consisted only of building material. No pottery or other datable material from any period was recovered. The building material recovered from the watching brief was Roman brick and tile. The tile had flecks of *opus signinum* mortar adhering to it and is from the demolition material L3, and it is likely to be associated with the mausoleum. The complete finds list is given below.

### Finds list

Finds no	Layer no	Feature no	Description	Context	Period	Weight (g)
1	L3	-	Tile	Demolition	Roman	1,980

## 8 Discussion and interpretation

Very little archaeological material was noted during the watching brief which was carried out on the foundation trenches, the drainage trench and the soakaway. Of the two features that were identified, only one was archaeological, ie the wall foundation F1. Although there was a lack of firmly datable material, it is likely that it is Roman and may be a structure or boundary wall associated with the mausoleum. No part of the mausoleum was identified *in situ*, although the same building materials used in its construction (*opus signinum* and tile) were found in the demolition material L3. It is likely, therefore, that the demolition is associated with the structure and is probably a result of the backfilling and landscaping that took place 40 years ago.

## 9 Acknowledgements

The Colchester Archaeological Trust would like to thank Mrs Jenny Mace for commissioning the work. The project was monitored by Martin Winter, Archaeology Officer for Colchester Borough Council. The site work was carried out by Ben Holloway.

## 10 References

- CAT Report 255 An archaeological evaluation at 20 Yorick Road, West Mersea, Essex, November 2003, unpublished CAT archive report, by Ben Holloway, 2003
- CM 2002 *Guidelines for the standards and practice of archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester*
- Hull, M R, 1958 *Roman Colchester*, Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London Report, **20**
- IFA 1999 *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief*

## 11 Glossary

context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
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 2005.88.

## 13 Site data

### 13.1 Site context list

Location	Context	Description	Context date
Foundation trenches 1, 2, 3, 4	L1	Driveway	modern
Foundation trenches 1, 2, 3, 4	L2	Subsoil	modern
Foundation trenches 1, 2, 3, 4	L3	Demolition	Roman
Foundation trenches 1, 2, 3, 4	L4	Glacial sands and gravels	natural
Drainage trench, soakaway	L5	Topsoil	modern
Foundation trench 2	F1	Wall foundation	Roman
Foundation trench 1	F2	Soakaway	modern

## 13.2 Soil descriptions

Location	Context	Description
Foundation trenches 1, 2, 3, 4	L1	Loose gravel overlying large stones set into asphalt
Foundation trenches 1, 2, 3, 4	L2	Yellow brown sandy silt, small stones, frequent tile fragments, <i>opus signinum</i> flecks
Foundation trenches 1, 2, 3, 4	L3	Yellow brown silt contains large amount of <i>opus signinum</i> and tile fragments
Foundation trenches 1, 2, 3, 4	L4	Yellow-orange glacial sand and gravel
Drainage trench, soakaway	L5	Dark brown silt, some small stones, occasional tile chips, large amount of plant-root activity
Foundation trench 2	F1	Greensand rubble and sandy yellow mortar
Foundation trench 1	F2	Unmortared brick and peg-tile, filled with brick rubble

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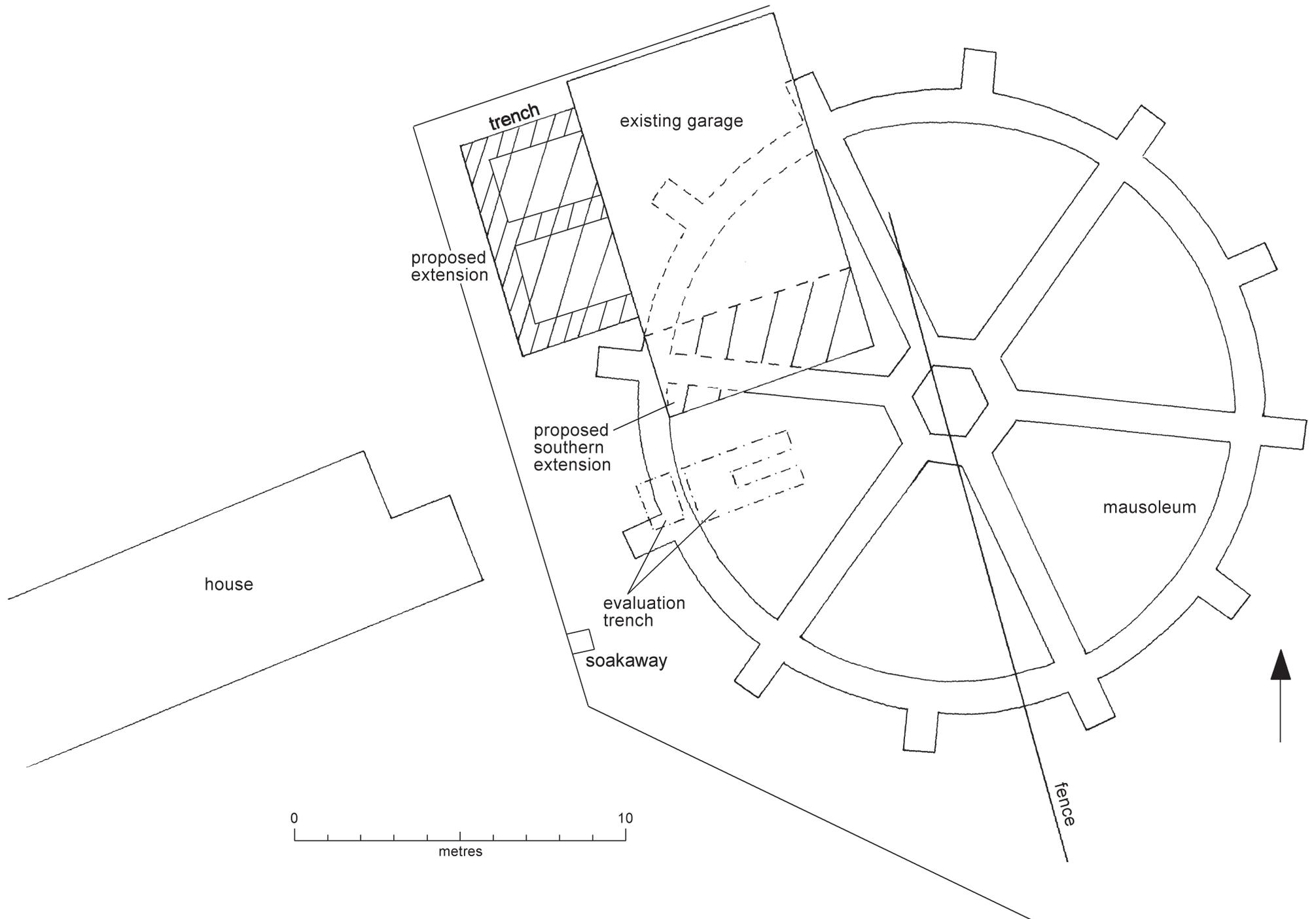


Fig 1 Estimated location of the Roman mausoleum in relation to the evaluation trench, the existing building and the proposed garage.