

Colchester Archaeological Trust



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**Archaeological investigation of
Mersea Blockhouse, 300m south of Mersea Stone,
East Mersea, Essex: October 2024**



CAT project ref.: 2024/09e
CHER code: ECC4875

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East Mersea, Essex: October 2024**

NGR: TM 07195 15166 (centre)

Scheduled Monument: 1013832

Scheduled monument consent: S00246399

**Historic England Inspector of Ancient Monuments:
Dr Jess Tipper**

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Place Services**

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1 Summary

An archaeological investigation took place at Mersea Blockhouse, 300m south of Mersea Stone, East Mersea, Essex. The blockhouse (fort) is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (NHLE 1013832) situated in low-lying marshland the sea wall at the mouth of the Colne Estuary. First built in 1543 as part of Henry VIII's extensive programme of coastal military defence, it was used and adapted periodically in times of unrest until the 19th century. A map of 1656 shows it was a triangular earthwork with semi-circular bastions in each corner. The archaeological investigation was commissioned by Essex County Council in response to damage being caused to part of the monument by coastal erosion.

The investigation focussed on a small earthwork mound closest to the sea, thought to be part of a southern rampart. The seaward face of that mound was cut back to form a flat section through the surviving earthwork. The section was hand-drawn, with photogrammetry carried out before and after the section was cut.

The mound represented a small part of both the southern rampart and the easternmost (seaward) bastion. To the south of the rampart part of a possible outer moat was also identified. Layers recorded appear to be associated with the Henrican blockhouse and phases of refurbishment and repairs in the 17th century.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the report for an archaeological investigation carried out 17th-24th October 2024 by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on Mersea Blockhouse, a Tudor blockhouse located on the northeastern corner of Mersea Island, 300m south of Mersea Stone, East Mersea, Essex.

Mersea Blockhouse is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (NHLE 1013832) situated in low-lying marshland outside of the sea wall at the mouth of the Colne Estuary. The archaeological investigation was commissioned by Essex County Council in response to damage being caused to the monument by coastal erosion, in particular a small mound on the shoreline.

The work was carried out with Historic England consent (no. S00246399) which required a written scheme of investigation (WSI) to be produced (CAT 2024a) and approved by Dr Jess Tipper, Principal Inspector of Ancient Monuments for Historic England (HEIAM).

In addition to the scheduled monument consent and WSI, all fieldwork and reporting was undertaken in accordance with:

- *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (Historic England 2015),

- Professional standards of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, including its *Code of Conduct* (CIfA 2020a-b, 2022, 2023a-b),
- East of England standards and frameworks published by East Anglian Archaeology (Brown & Glazebrook 2000, Gurney 2003, Medlycott 2011) and the recent review updates on <https://researchframeworks.org/eoe/>
- Relevant health and safety guidelines and requirements (CAT 2024b).

3 Archaeological and historic background

Historian Christopher Thornton (2023) has written a comprehensive report on the Henrician Fortifications at East Mersea and St Osyth. The following are some excerpts about the Mersea Blockhouse:

“The fortifications at East Mersea and St Osyth were initially built c.1543 as part of Henry VIII’s extensive programme of coastal military defence, following the break with Rome and the potential threat of invasion from the Catholic powers of Europe. The pair of forts were sited in north-east Essex either side of the entrance to the Colne estuary, Mersea on the west and St Osyth on the east. Both fortifications were constructed at a basic level, comprising earthen bulwarks defended by ditches and armed with a small number of cannons. They had the advantage, though, of lying behind or among coastal salt marshes which aided their protection from seaborne attack. Additionally, that at East Mersea lay on an island which itself was only accessible by a long, and defensible, causeway that linked it to the mainland, while that at St Osyth lay on a peninsula that was separated from the rest of the parish by St Osyth creek (a tributary of the Colne) which was crossed by a tide mill’s lengthy dam forming another causeway. Both sites, therefore, had advantageous defensive features.” (Thornton 2023, 4).

A plan of Mersea Blockhouse from the early 1540s is housed in the British Library (BL). *“The proposed fort was a moated seven-sided (septagonal) enclosure, with an apparently earthen rampart constructed or topped with ‘maunds’ (large round baskets filled with earth) similar to those used in 16th-century and later warfare to protect gun-crews in the field and sometimes called gabions. Similar ‘maunds’ are shown defending the guns on the ramparts in another plan in the BL of the much larger Deal castle, probably dating from 1539...”* (Thornton 2023, 43).

This structure, however, may never have been built. *“By 1656, when a plan of the East Mersea fort was first depicted on a map, it took a quite different form than that in the BL plan, comprising a triangular earthwork, the sides estimated at about 80–100 yards long, with a semi-circular bastion at each corner The form has been confirmed by field survey of the surviving earthworks, which found the longest side of the earthworks to the west to measure c.80m north east–south west, and at its widest the earthworks measure 45m east–west. The earthen banks are up to 1.5m high, breached in two places by sea erosion. Physical evidence for the three rounded bastions appears to have been*

largely destroyed by a combination of the sea wall on the south-western and north-west sides and the insertion of a late 18th century/early 19th century gun battery on the eastern side. The latter, on the site of the eastern bastion, is visible as a **widened area of the earthen bank at the eastern apex of the triangle**. Similarly, the other two bastions were likely destroyed by the construction of the sea wall which truncated the western side of the enclosure¹ (Historic England listing 1013832; Priddy 1983, 145, 147–9). As already noted, both the BL plan of c.1543 and documentation from 1586 both indicate that there was a drawbridge giving access to the fort, but as that seems most likely to have been located between the two landward facing bastions it has probably also been destroyed.” (Thornton 2023, 47).

“When due consideration is given to the development of fortification in general, and notwithstanding the plan in the British Library, it seems most probable that the basic plan first evidenced on the map of 1656 is most likely the original one which had remained unchanged from the mid-16th century.” (Thornton 2023, 47).



Map 1 Close-up of a map of an estate in East Mersea (part of manor of East Mersea), 1656, showing the fort, Martles Marsh and the house to the north-east of the fort upon the saltings (ERO, D/Det P2).

“Some further tentative comments can be made about the fort’s possible internal structures, although these are only speculative as there is very little documentary material and limited archaeological evidence. The regular garrison of about eight people in the 1540s and 1550s would have needed

¹ The sea wall was constructed somewhere between 1777-1805 and it is possible that at least some of the fort survives beneath.

accommodation, cooking facilities and personal storage, as well as storage for arms and munitions. That some sort of buildings existed on the site, both then and later, is also suggested by the widow living there in 1586, and by its use as a residence by the landowner when a proposal was made for its demolition in 1655 (below, section V). While the ECC field survey in 1982 concluded that it was an entirely earthen structure, as no evidence for brick or stonework was found and the sea had made breaches in the monument (Priddy 1983, 149). However, there remains the possibility that excavation might reveal the former existence of an internal residence or military blockhouse of some type as suggested by the BL plan.” (Thornton 2023, 48).



Map 2 Close-up of the blockhouse site, 1875 (OS Map 1:2500, 1st edn, sheet LXVII.3).

“The 2002–3 survey and excavations revealed foreshore activity in front of the fort in two main locations (A and B) (Heppell 2013, 144–9; figure 2). Site A had two features. First, there was a row of 38 mainly elm stakes/posts/piles to landward, faced by broom fascines or faggots, which has been interpreted as a revetment probably used for securing boats broadside to the shoreline (Heppell 2013, 147). Second, twelve metres in front and seaward of the revetment and parallel to it, other timbers were uncovered in the form of two substantial elm sill beams and associated upright piles mainly of oak, with evidence of carpentry techniques including mortices and pegs. By reference to comparative evidence from London and elsewhere, the structure has been interpreted as part of a timber quay frontage, again allowing boats to tie up broadside on. Features suggest that (at the very widest) it is dateable to the 15th to 18th centuries, but a closer date range of 16th to 17th century is suggested by wood technology, pottery and carbon dating.” (Thornton 2023, 6–7).

Thornton's '*widened area of the earthen bank at the eastern apex of the triangle*' is the area most imminently under threat by coastal erosion and the focus of this project. It likely represents all that remains of the eastern bastion as well as part of the rampart. It stands alone as a small mound on the shoreline with a lagoon (representing the interior of the blockhouse) behind. An analysis of the historic mapping carried out in 2013 (Heppell, figure 4) suggests that the coastline in 1656 was approximately 25-30m from the eastern bastion.

4 Requirement for work

As stated in the WSI, the requirement for work was as follows:

- 1) To cut back a section of the eroding rampart and a transverse section across the earthwork (mound) to sufficiently obtain a long vertical section(s), recording any features or layers exposed during the work and to obtain samples and dating evidence from layers. It is thought that the lower part of the earthwork is sitting on natural. At the base, the section will be excavated/recorded to a depth of 0.3m below current shingle/sand to establish natural. If natural is not established in the section a 1m² test-pit will be excavated.

See Section 6 for the results of this requirement.

- 2) Monolith sampling of the exposed section to be carried out by the specialist geo-archaeologist. Upon visiting the site, they will decide on best locations to take samples.

Keith Wilkinson of ARCA Geoarchaeology at the University of Winchester had been contracted by Historic England to carry out a borehole survey of the blockhouse. While on site, he assessed the requirement for the monolith sample but recommended that it was not carried out. This was because one of the boreholes (BH19) was located through the eroding earthwork and therefore sampled the same stratigraphic sequence as the proposed monolith, while also extending sample collection to the intertidal deposits beneath the earthwork. As the borehole went through the centre of the earthwork, there was less risk of contamination than would have been the case with a monolith taken from the section face. Assessing a monolith is also simply a case of describing the deposits that it sampled, and this was something that was done both by CAT in the field and by the borehole survey. Monoliths are also used as source material for microfossil sub-samples which might then be assessed, but such sub-samples can be taken from the borehole cores².

² With thanks to Keith Wilkinson for supplying the information supplied here.

3) Photogrammetric recording of the exposed section.

Two sessions of photogrammetry were undertaken, one on the first day of fieldwork (17th October 2024) and the other on the final day (24th October 2024). Both sessions followed the same methodology, the only variation being the extent of the ground coverage in each.

The aim was to capture the entirety of the surviving part of the earthwork mound, from which the required individual orthographic views could be generated. The first session included a slightly broader area of beach in front of the mound to the south-east and to the north-east, in front of section 1 where the more distinct layers observed in the faces of the mound could be seen eroding from the beach surface.

The second session focused on the three beach facing sides of the mound and less on the landward side, where the long grass covering the top of the mound was challenging for image alignment later in the photogrammetry process and would likely result in an incomplete model.

To provide a geolocated and accurately scaled 3D model from the photogrammetry, multiple ground control points were placed around the three beach facing sides of the surviving mound. These included a measured line of points running the length of the seaward face. The control points were located by GPS.

The photography followed standard photogrammetry practice with several flowing loops being made around the subject at different camera heights and angles, with care taken that images were overlapping. This involved the use of an extending 3.5m pole with the camera attached and being operated wirelessly via a mobile phone.

Both sessions of photogrammetry were time constrained due to the high tide. Poor lighting conditions during the second session were unavoidable. Low sunlight struck the seaward facing section obliquely and cast the northeast facing section (section 1) into dark shadow. Additionally, drying salt began to cause a significant whitish bloom on the face of the sections.

The data was imported into RealityCapture where the photos were aligned and a point cloud generated. The point cloud was geolocated with the aid of the ground control points and a full 3D mesh model created. From the two resultant models scaled orthographic images were generated for both main sections.

All photogrammetry images will be uploaded to the Archaeology Data Service with the rest of the digital archive.

Photogrammetry sessions

Session 1 (17 th October 2024)	Pre-excavation	211 images ECC4875 S1 SfM (1) to (211)	9 control points, circular, dual ring, 12-bit
Session 2 (24 th October 2024)	Post-excavation	199 images ECC4875 S2 SfM (212) to (410)	8 control points, circular, dual ring, 12-bit

Camera and software details

Photogrammetry software	RealityCapture 1.4.1
Camera	Panasonic DMC-LX15
Camera Effective Pixels	20.1 Megapixels
Image resolution	5472x3648
Aspect ratio	3:2
Image format	JPEG (DCF/Exif2.3)

Other equipment

3.5m extending pole
Gimbal mount for camera
Mobile phone with wi-fi connection running the Panasonic Image app.

Survey equipment

Leica GNSS	GS07 Smart Antenna CS20 Field Controller
Coordinate system	OSGB36(15)

5 Aims

Specific project sampling and research aims:

- Identify the pre-rampart ground surface.
- Identify the nature/character of the rampart (look for evidence of timberwork such as 'bulwarkes of earth and board').
- The proposed fort was a moated seven-sided (septagonal) enclosure, with an apparently earthen rampart constructed or topped with 'maunds' (large round baskets filled with earth). Is there any evidence of the maunds (as described by Chris Thornton)?
- Is there any evidence for an interior walkway on the inner edge of the rampart?
- Is there any evidence of a gun emplacement?
- Determine whether cut turves have been incorporated in the rampart make-up.
- Identify different phases, e.g. repair and/or refortification/reuse.

6 Results (Figs 2-6)

When the WSI for this project was being completed, plans of the blockhouse and the eroding area of rampart/earthwork were taken from the 2022 survey of the monument completed by Historic England (Fig 2). The proposed location of the cut-back section was plotted based on this survey. However, it was soon apparent on arrival on site that further erosion had taken place and the section was cut between 0-2.5m further inland (see Fig 3).

Unfortunate project timings also meant that fieldwork occurred during extreme high tides, meaning that the sea facing cut-back sections were covered by the tide twice a day and on a couple of occasions all the cut-back sections were completely submerged. This hampered recording as the section face had to be recleaned every day and freshly eroded patches of section-edge collapsed.

The cut-back section consisted of five parts (Sections 1-5) as shown on Figs 4-6 which were hand drawn. Two sessions of photogrammetry also took place. The first session was conducted to show the mound in its existing state before the section was cut-back and consists of two elevation views, one of the north-east facing side of the mound (Section 1) and the other the south-east facing side (Sections 2 and 4) (Figs 7-8).

Photogrammetry was again completed at the end of the project once the section had been cut-back (Figs 7-10), but it had suffered very badly from high tides and the lighting conditions were very poor on the day with low oblique sunlight on one side (Sections 2-4) and the other being in shadow and almost too dark to see any detail (Section 1). To make matters worse, the breeze began to dry the salt on the face of the section, and this began to turn white.

Description of the layers and features as seen in the sections

Layer 1 (L1)

The top of the earthwork was covered with long, dense tough grass and low bushes growing above thin deposits of windblown beach sand and a carpet of thick matted fine roots (L1a, fine brown sandy silt, loose, 0.07m thick with abundant fine roots; L1b, fine yellow sand, 0.05m thick, with frequent sea shells and small stones; L1c, dark brown silty clay/peat like texture, 0.08m thick).

Finds (finds no. 1 & 18) – a fragment of post-medieval pot.

Date – 19th to 20th century.

Seals L2, L3/L11, L8/L14, L18.

Firepit F1

The remains of a firepit were identified cut from L1b. Grass and other vegetation had grown over the feature, but it clearly cut the lower layers forming L1. No finds were recovered, but stratigraphy suggests a 19th to 20th century date.

Layer 2 (L2), finds no. 3

An accumulation layer of mid greyish/brown silty clay, up to 0.02-0.09m thick. Does not cover the whole earthwork.

Finds (finds no. 3) – Medieval and post-medieval pottery, post-medieval/modern brick, a piece of 19th century clay tobacco pipe bowl, some slate and a piece of residual flint.

Date – 19th century.

Sealed by L1.

Seals L3/L4/L11.

Layer 3 (L3), Layer 4 (L4) and Layer 11 (L11)

A substantial deposit of silty clay covering most of the earthwork. Originally numbered L3 and recorded as a dark greyish-brown colour. As L3 weathered the lower half of the deposit began to turn lighter and browner. This distinction became more apparent, and the browner part was eventually given its own number, L11. The smaller deposit of L4 was seen as browner than L3 from very early on in the evaluation and was numbered at the same time. It is now considered to be the same as L11.

L3/L4/L11 was generally 0.18-0.25m thick (Sections 2-4), but increased in thickness, up to 0.37m thick, as it extended towards the blockhouse interior (Section 1).

Finds (from L3 only, finds nos. 4 & 7, sample no. <1>) – Medieval/post-medieval brick, clay tobacco pipe stem, a tiny fragment of glass, an iron nail, coal/clinker/coke and shell.

Date – Post-medieval.

Sealed by L1 and L2.

Seals L5 and L6.

Layer 5 (L5)

L5 was sealed by L3/L4/L11 and was very different to the other deposits. As this layer was eroded by the high tide each day it left a distinctive laminated texture suggestive of weathered organic material, thought on site to be turves this was later confirmed during the environmental assessment (see Section 8). Where possible to determine, the turf blocks were approximately 300mm long by 90mm high and had been laid in a double height row for most of the length (see Photograph 3). Where L5 was cut and cleaned by trowel the fragile laminated texture was lost, leaving a soft clay-like smear. Typically L5 was 0.14-0.23m thick (Sections 2-4) but increased to more than 0.4m thick as it extended towards the fort interior (Section 1). The full depth of L5 in Section 1 could not be reached due to the fluctuating height of the water in the lagoon at the rear of the bastion that threatened to flood the excavation at various times.

Finds (finds no. 6, sample no. <2>) – Coal/clinker/coke, shell and a piece of residual flint.

Sealed by L3/L4/L11.

Seals L6.

Layer 6 (L6)

Layer 6 was an equally distinct deposit, consisting of a thin (c 0.01m thick) dark blackish/grey silt with fine charcoal and grit inclusions. It sloped slightly at the front of the earthwork (Section 4), flattened out (Sections 3-4) but then steeply descended towards the interior of the fort (Section 1). The layer was also seen eroding from the beach surface to the north of the earthwork. Borehole analysis has indicated that this represents *in situ* burning, suggesting that this is a buried land surface (Wilkinson 2025, 30).

Finds (sample no. <3>) – Tiny fragment of post-medieval glass, coal/clinker/coke.

Sealed by L5.

Seals L7/L14, L9/L10 and L8.

Layer 7 (L7) and Layer 14 (L14)

L7 (dark grey slightly sandy silt) and L14 (medium to dark grey/brown silty clay) are probably part of the same deposit and could be associated with L9 and L10. L7/L14 is 0.04-0.18m thick.

Finds from L7 (finds no. 2, sample no. <4>) – Post-medieval pottery, peg-tile, clay pipe stem and coal/clinker/coke.

Finds from L14 (finds no. 5) – Clay pipe stem.

Date – Post-medieval.

Sealed by L1, L6.

Seals L9 and L10.

Layer 9 (L9), Layer 10 (L10) and L15 (L15)

Layer L9 (dark brownish-grey silty clay, 0.07-0.12m thick), sealed L10 (dark greyish sandy silt, 0.02-0.09m thick) which appears to be the same as L15 (dark grey silty clay, 0.02-0.06m thick). All three contexts produced fragments of brick and/or peg-tile (see Photograph 8), suggesting perhaps demolition or clearance of buildings on the site.

Finds from L9 (sample no. 7) – Medieval/post-medieval brick, coal/clinker/coke.

Finds from L10 (finds nos. 8 & 15) – Post-medieval pottery, post-medieval/modern brick, peg-tile, clay pipe stem, coal/clinker/coke, shell.

Finds from L15 (finds nos. 9, 10 & 17) – Peg-tile, clay pipe stem, iron nail, coal/clinker/coke, shell, animal bone.

Dating evidence – c 17th century.

Sealed by L6 and L7/L14.

Seals L12.

Layer 12 (L12)

L12 is a horizon of small to medium stones in an orange/grey/brown sandy-silt which appeared to have been compacted into the top of clean clay layer L8 (see Photograph 9). It was very different from the rest of the layers and could possibly have formed part of a surface beneath demolition layers L9

and L10/L15, but this would need further investigation. It can also be seen eroding out of the beach to the north of the earthwork. This layer appears to end where clay layer L18 of the rampart begins. No finds were recovered.

Sealed by L7/L14, L9 and L10/L15.

Seals L8 and F3.

Cut feature F3

Cut feature F3 was a small bowl-like cut with a single fill of medium orange/brown sand. It was not possible to determine what this cut feature might be.

Finds (sample no. <12>) – Shell.

Sealed by L12.

Cuts L8.

Layer 18

Layer of medium-dark brown clay, probably forming part of the rampart of the blockhouse, c 0.5-0.6m thick. Could possibly be part of L8 but more weathered in appearance. No finds were recovered.

Sealed by L1 and L7/L14.

Possibly seals L8 (or could be a part of L8).

Seals L13 and L19.

Ditch F2 and Layer 17

The remains of what appears to be a roughly east/west aligned ditch were identified on the external edge of the rampart and possibly formed part of the external moat of the blockhouse. The top fill of the ditch was excavated and numbered F2. Beneath was a charcoal rich layer, excavated and numbered L17. The lower fill of the ditch could not be fully excavated due to continual flooding. It was augured to a depth of 0.8m below current ground level where clean solid clay was encountered (not numbered).

Finds from F2 (finds nos. 13, 14, 16, 19) – 18th-century musket ball, clay pipe stem, coal/clinker/coke, slate.

Finds from L17 (finds nos. 11 & 12) – Post-medieval pottery, peg-tile, 17th-century clay pipe bowl, clay pipe stems, coal/clinker/coke, slate.

Dating – Finds from the lower fill suggest a mid-late 17th century date and those from the upper fill an 18th century date.

Sealed by L1.

Cuts L18.

Layer 8

Marbled mid-brownish grey to brownish-orange silty clay, over 0.65m thick at deepest.

Finds (sample no. <5>) – coal/clinker/coke.

Sealed by L6, L12 and L18 (or L18 is a part of L8).

Seals L13 and L19.

Layer 19

L19 was largely indistinguishable from the surrounding clay layers of L8, L13 and L18 but slowly weathered over a couple of days to reveal a texture very similar to that of L5, suggestive of turf blocks.

Up to 0.16m thick. No finds were recovered.

Sealed by L8 and L18.

Seals L13.

Layer 13

Earliest clay deposit recorded. Clean medium/dark brown clay, up to 0.4m thick with some discrete lenses of sand. No finds were recovered.

Sealed by L8, L18 and L19.

The mound was recorded in section to a maximum height/thickness of 1.42m. Natural ground level was not reached during CAT's work either when cutting back the section or in the small 0.3m deep test-pit dug against the far north-east corner of the mound. The test-pit could not be dug any deeper as it filled with water quicker than it could be excavated. Borehole analysis revealed that the sediment comprising the ramparts survived to a thickness of 1.67-1.82m (Wilkinson 2025, 4), so natural ground level was approximately 0.25-0.4m deeper than CAT's excavations.



Photograph 1 View of the mound before the section was cut back, looking north-west.



Photograph 2 Close-up view of the eroded edge of the mound before the section was cut back, looking north-north-west.



Photograph 3 Close-up view of the eroded edge of the mound before the section was cut back, focussing on turves layer L5 and dark layer L6, looking east.



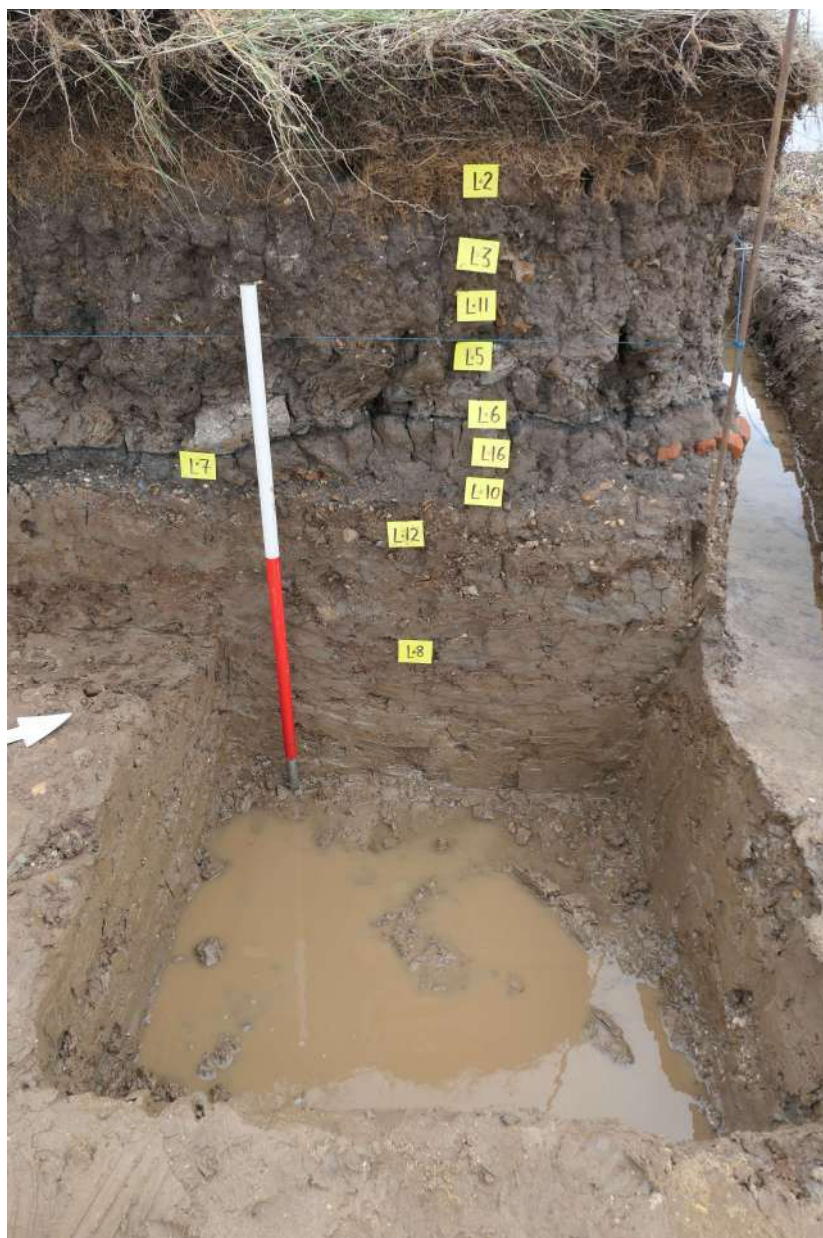
Photograph 4 View of the mound after the section had been cut back, looking north.



Photograph 5 View of the mound after the section had been cut back, looking south-west.



Photograph 6 Close-up of the cut back section (Section 4), looking northwest.



Photograph 7 Close-up of the cut back section (Section 2) and the test-pit, note that the layer labelled L16 should actually be labelled L9, looking north-west.



Photograph 8 Close-up of the cut-back section (Section 1), showing the pieces of brick in layers L9 and L10, looking south-west.



Photograph 9 Close-up of the cut back section (Section 2), looking north-west.



Photograph 10 Ditch F2 and L17, looking north.



Photograph 11 High tide against the seaward face of the mound, looking south.



Photograph 12 High tide against the seaward face of the mound, looking north-east.

Tentative interpretation

Chris Thornton (2023) has provided an extensive history of the Mersea Blockhouse and the following is a summary of significant dates:

- Mersea blockhouse was built 1543 by Henry VIII (Thornton 2023, p.4).
- It was decommissioned 1551-1553 (p.41),
- but briefly recommissioned by Philip and Mary 1558 (p.41).
- It is noted as decayed in 1574 (p.41),
- and by 1586 there is an old woman living there and the ditch has fallen in (p.42).
- It is again described as 'decayed and ruined' in 1609-10 (p.51).
- There is documentary evidence for repairs and reuse in times of trouble, in 1629-31 (p.53), in 1648 during the Civil War (p.53-4), and in 1652-4 during the Anglo-Dutch War which included a reference to the buying of turf for repairing and upholding the fort (p.57-8).
- The fort was again decommissioned in 1655 (p.59).
- Sometime between the late 18th to early 19th century there was a gun battery in use in the blockhouse (p.63-73).

The following is a tentative interpretation of the results of the investigation of the eroding mound which provided a stratigraphic sequence but little dating evidence and was limited in scope. If future

excavation of the mound was to take place, or indeed future excavation/investigation of the rest of the blockhouse, these interpretations would need to be tested and re-evaluated.

The dimensions of the blockhouse are not known. However, from the surviving remains it is possible to provide an approximate determination of where the mound fits into the plan of the blockhouse. This approximation is shown on Fig 11. The size and precise location of the blockhouse as shown on Fig 11 is a hypothetical suggestion to aid interpretation and would need amending following further investigations. An interpretative section drawing based on the following discussion can be found in Fig 12.

The plan on Figure 11 shows that the mound is located on the southern rampart of the triangular blockhouse on the edge of the eastern bastion. A bastion is a projecting portion of a rampart, and in the case of the blockhouse it had three rounded bastions, one on each corner of the triangle. Image 1 below is a reconstruction drawing of the blockhouse as it might have looked in the 17th century. The reconstruction shows the triangular blockhouse with earthen ramparts surmounted by raised walkways linking the circular bastions. It also shows an external defensive moat and internal buildings protected behind the earthworks. The approximate position of the mound in relation to this drawing is indicated by the blue circle.

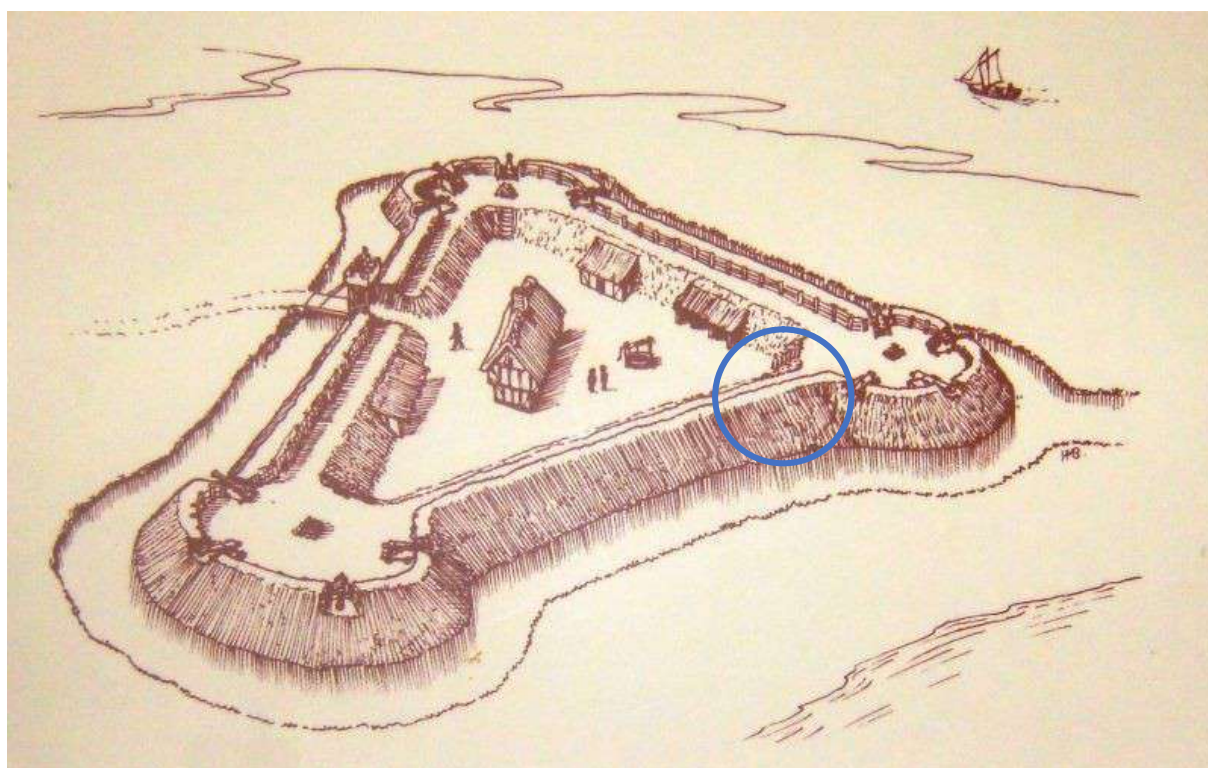


Image 1 Reconstruction of the blockhouse in the 17th century. Drawing from Cudmore Grove Country Park / Essex County Council. Approximate location of the mound indicated by the blue circle.

Evidence would suggest that the mound is made up of part of both the southern rampart and the back of the raised platform which formed the circular bastion. The steep descent to the north-west of layers L6 and L5 in Section 1 (see Fig 12), would certainly seem to indicate that the mound includes part of the rear slope of the bastion leading into the centre of the blockhouse. The original ground surface/base of the blockhouse was not identified, with borehole investigations suggesting that it ranged from 0.25m (in the test-pit) to 0.68m deeper than these current works.

The earliest layer recorded was L13 which was domed in appearance and sealed by turf layer L19. These are probably part of the rampart of the Henrican fort. Layers L13/L19 were sealed by clay layer L8 which spread across the rest the mound. As shown in the reconstruction, the top of both the rampart and bastion are approximately at the same height, as are L13, L19 and L8, meaning that L8 could represent the top of the bastion. If we assume therefore that L8 is a part of the bastion of the Henrican fort, then stone layer L12 set into the top of the clay could represent the original surface of the bastion.

Clay layer L18 also appears to be part of the rampart. It seals rampart layers L13/L19 and bastion layer L8. This means that L18 could be a part of the original Henrican rampart alongside L13/L19, and the stratigraphy is evidence of phases of construction. However, L18 could also represent a later phase of repair to the rampart. Unfortunately, no finds were recovered from L18 to aid interpretation. Interestingly though, stone layer L12 appears to end where L18 of the rampart begins suggesting that the two could be contemporary, and that L18 could therefore be part of the original rampart.

Bastion stone layer L12 is sealed by L9 and L10/L15. These thin layers produced a larger number of finds which included fragments of brick and peg-tile indicating structural remains, as well as domestic remains in the form of pottery, clay tobacco pipe, animal bone, shell, an iron nail and coal/clinker/coke, all of which suggest a date in the 17th century. Together they would appear to represent a phase of refurbishment of the blockhouse, with the demolition and clearance of old structural remains. What those structural remains might represent or indeed when they were built is not known, but they could potentially include the original buildings of the Henrican fort. Layer L7/L14 may also be associated with this phase of refurbishment.

Burnt layer L6 indicates a fire in the blockhouse.

Turf layer L5 is significant as there is a documentary record to a payment for turves to repair the blockhouse that is dated to 1653 (Thornton 2023, 57-8). We know this layer is not part of the Henrican fort as it seals L9/L10/L15 which have been dated to the 17th century (see above). Although we cannot be certain that L5 dates to 1653 it would certainly seem plausible, and the location of L5 would indicate repairs to the bastion.

Layers L3/L4/L11 and L2 may be associated with the late 18th-/early 19th-century gun battery.

The discovery of part of what appears to be a ditch (F2) on the edge of the mound is potentially a significant feature that needs further investigation to determine if this is the edge of the moat. It certainly appears to be a steep-sided feature that cuts the edge of the rampart, but the width, depth and alignment needs to be established. If the clean clay identified at the base of the auger hole is in fact natural, then this is at the same approximate height as 16th-century ground level, and the feature is therefore not deep enough to be the moat. However, until the full width of the feature is determined, the deepest point cannot be investigated.

If further investigation proves this to be part of the moat, then the finds from upper fill F2 and lower fill L17 need discussion. A musket ball from F2 dates to the 18th century and fragments of a clay pipe bowl from L17 to the mid-late 17th century. This shows a gradual silting of the feature, with the fragment of clay tobacco pipe probably associated with the reuse of the blockhouse during the Civil War and Anglo-Dutch War (a period from 1648-1654), and the musket ball with the late 18th-/early 19th-century gun battery. What would also need further investigation is whether this represents the moat of the Henrican fort cut when the blockhouse was built in 1543, or if it was a later recut when the fort was refortified and reused. There is documentary evidence from 1586 that stated that the ditch had 'fallen in' (Thornton 2023, 42) so some subsequent repairs would be presumed necessary.

7 Finds

7.1 Pottery and ceramic building material

by Dr Matthew Loughton

The archaeological investigation uncovered a small assemblage of pottery and ceramic building material (henceforth CBM) at 42 sherds with a weight of 3.5kg (Table 1). This material was recovered from eight layers (Table 1).

Ceramic material	No.	Weight (g)	MSW (g)
Pottery	10	95	10
CBM	32	3,475	109
All	42	3,570	85

Table 1 Summary of the pottery and CBM.

Medieval, post-medieval and modern pottery

Medieval, post-medieval and modern pottery was recorded according to the fabric groups from CAR 7 (Cotter 2000). The assemblage consists of 10 sherds with a weight of 95g and mean sherd weight (MSW) of 10g which was recovered from five layers (Table 2). Post-medieval red earthenwares (fabric

F40), account for the majority of the pottery at six sherds with a weight of 92g, which included sherds from black glazed ribbed jugs or mugs dating to c 1550/1600-1725 (Cotter 2000, 212) which came from L1 and L10. One sherd of blue-transfer printed Staffordshire-type white earthenware (fabric F48D) with a weight of 2g, dating to 1800-2000, came from L2. Finally, three small unidentifiable pottery sherds (totalling only 1g) are perhaps of early medieval sandy ware (fabric F13) or Colchester-type ware (fabric F21), dating from 1000-1550.

Context	No.	Weight(g)	MSW (g)
L1	2	15	8
L2	5	4	1
L7	1	65	65
L10	1	10	10
L17	1	1	1
Total	10	95	10

Table 2 Quantities of medieval, post-medieval and modern pottery from specific layers.

Ceramic building material (CBM)

CBM consist of 32 fragments with a weight of 3,475g and MSW of 109g which was recovered from seven layers, although the only assemblage of note came from L10 (Table 3). The majority of the CBM is in a very fragmentary state and consists of sherds of medieval/post-medieval peg-tile and non-diagnostic brick fragments. Some of the larger un-frogged brick fragments from L10 have dimensions of ? x 100-110 mm x 48/50 mm and date from the 15th to the early 17th century (Ryan 1996). One of the un-frogged brick fragments from layer F10 is burnt with a vitrified edge.

Context	No.	Weight(g)	MSW (g)
L2	1	4	4
L3	1	9	9
L7	4	17	4
L9	7	48	7
L10	17	3,392	200
L15	1	1	1
L17	1	4	4
Total	32	3,475	109

Table 3 Quantities of CBM from specific layers.

Conclusion

Table 4 summarizes the ceramic dating evidence for the layers which contained dateable pottery and CBM. Dating evidence appears largely focussed on the post-medieval period, particularly the 16th to 17th centuries, but includes a few pieces of possible medieval pottery and some of 19th-20th century date.

Context	Medieval, post-medieval and modern pottery	CBM	Ceramic spot dates
L1	F40 (cup/mug)	-	Post-medieval
L2	unidentified crumb (F13/21?), F40, F48D	BR	19th century
L3	-	BR	Medieval/post-medieval
L7	F40	PT	Post-medieval
L9	-	BR	Medieval/post-medieval
L10	F40 (cup/mug)	BR UNFROGGED, PT	17th century
L15	-	PT	Medieval/post-medieval
L17	F40	PT	Post-medieval

Table 4 Approximate spot dates for the individual layers.

7.2 Small finds

by Laura Pooley

A lead shot was recovered from the upper fill of F2 sx4 (finds no. 13; small finds no. 1). At 18.2mm diameter and 31.3g, it is probably an 18th-century 14½ bore musket ball (Flynn & Webley 2019).

7.3 Clay tobacco pipe, glass, iron nails, coal/coke/clinker, slate and shell

by Laura Pooley

Thirty-five fragments of clay tobacco pipe (96.4g) were recovered from contexts F2, L2, L3, L7, L10, L14, L15 and L17, with most coming from ditch F2 (10 fragments) and L17 (15 fragments) which was the lower fill of F2. Most were undatable stem fragments but there were six pieces of bowl. Three joining fragments from L17 formed an incomplete bowl, the size and shape of which most closely matches a CAR 5 (1988) Type 5 (dated to c 1640-1670) or Type 6 (c 1660-80). A fragment of bowl from L2 included the partial stamp of DUB[LIN] and dates to the 19th century.

Two very small fragments of glass came from L3 and L6 (0.4g), two iron nails were recovered from L3 and L15 (30.7g), and three pieces of slate were found in F2, F2/L17 and L2 (52.1g). None were datable.

Small fragments of coal/coke/clinker were recovered from contexts F2, F2/L17, L2, L3, L6, L7, L8, L9, L10 and L15 totalling 995 fragments at 409.4g (mean fragment weight of 0.41g). The vast majority came from L17 (521 fragments), with L15 (161 fragments), L7 (131 fragments) and L10 (96 fragments) also producing large amounts.

Pieces of oyster, cockle, mussel, periwinkle and whelk shell were also found in soil samples from L3, L5, L10, L13 and L15.

Context	Finds no.	Sample no.	Description
Clay tobacco pipe			
F2 sx4 upper fill	14	-	Four stem fragments, 13.7g.
F2 upper fill	-	<14>	Three stem fragments, 5.7g.
F2 Fill 2	19	-	Stem fragment, 4.4g.
F2 sx4 Fill 2	16	-	Fragment of bowl showing rouletted rim, 1.2g. Stem fragment, 6.2g.
L2	-	<6>	Fragment of bowl with partial oval/circular stamp in incuse, DUB[LIN], 1.1g.
L3 sx1	4		Stem fragment, 6.2g.
L7	-	<4>	Stem fragment, 2.4g.
L10 sx1	15		Two stem fragments, 3.9g.
L10	-	<8>	Stem fragment, 2.4g.
L14 sx4	5		Two stem fragments, 5.9g.
L15 sx4	9		Two stem fragments, 6.4g.
L17 (lower fill of F2) sx4	11	-	Three joining fragments of bowl, c 40% of rim present and partially rouletted, all of foot/stem missing, 6.2g. The size and shape of the bowl most closely matches to a CAR 5 (1988) Type 5 (c 1640-1670) or Type 6 (c 1660-80), but it is difficult to be certain without the foot. Four stem fragments, 7.8g.
L17 (lower fill of F2)	-	<10>	Seven stem fragments, 21.1g, one has been burnt, and one includes the oval foot of a bowl. Fragment of bowl showing rouletted rim, 1.8g.
Glass			
L3	-	<1>	Tiny slither of glass, green tinge, <0.1g.
L6	-	<3>	Fragment of glass, green tinge, curved, 0.3g.

Iron nails			
L3 sx4	7	-	Virtually complete, square-sectioned shank which is slightly curved, small flat round head (7.6mm diameter), 44.0mm long, 4.8g.
L15 sx4	10	-	Incomplete, approximately half of head and tip of shank missing, also almost completely covered in corrosion. Appears to have a square-sectioned shank and flat round head (18.8mm diameter), 59.8mm long, 25.9g.
Coal/coke/clinker			
F2 sx4 upper fill	14	-	5 fragments, 13.8g.
F2 upper fill	-	<14>	17 fragments, 33.3g.
F2 Fill 2	19	-	3 fragments, 5.3g.
L3	-	<1>	8 fragments, 2.5g.
L5	-	<2>	5 fragments, 1.2g.
L6	-	<3>	3 fragments, 11.7g.
L7 sx2	2	-	1 fragment, 7.1g.
L7	-	<4>	130 fragments, 50.2g.
L8	-	<5>	2 fragments, 1.1g.
L9	-	<7>	33 fragments, 5.3g.
L10	-	<8>	96 fragments, 34.3g.
L15	-	<11>	161 fragments, 48.3g.
L17 (lower fill of F2)	-	<10>	531 fragments, 195.3g
Slate			
F2 sx4 upper fill	14	-	One fragment, 1.8g.
L2 sx1	3	-	One fragment, 48.2g.
L17 (lower fill of F2) sx4	12	-	One fragment, 2.1g.
Shell			
L3	-	<1>	Oyster shell: Ten fragments, 29.5g. Cockle shell: Three fragments, 2.3g. Periwinkle shell: Two fragments, 0.6g.
L5	-	<2>	Oyster shell: Seven fragments, 10.4g. Cockle shell: 44 fragments, 13.0g.

			Periwinkle shell: Six fragments, 6.2g. Mussel shell: Ten fragments, 5.5g.
L10	-	<8>	Oyster shell: Two fragments, 1.6g.
L13	-	<12>	Oyster shell: Six fragments, 24.9g. Cockle shell: Sixteen fragments, 12.5g. Periwinkle shell: Seven shells and fragments of shells, 16.0g. Whelk shell: Three fragments, 3.2g.
L15	-	<11>	Oyster shell: Two fragments, 2.1g. Cockle shell: Eight fragments, 0.5g. Periwinkle shell: Two fragments, 0.8g.

Table 5 Clay tobacco pipe, glass, iron nails, coal/coke/clinker, slate and shell listed by context.

7.4 Animal bone

by Alec Wade

Seven fragments of animal bone were recovered (10g) from L15 (finds nos. 9 and 17). One piece was identifiable as a medial fragment of a left sheep or goat proximal radius with a small part of the articular surface present. It is likely from the relative size of the fragment that it is from an adult animal. There may be indications of slight dog gnawing on this piece, but the very poor surface condition of the bone makes this determination difficult. The remaining bone is also very likely to be sheep or goat (based upon relative size) and includes five small pieces of rib and a diaphysis fragment, potentially part of the radius described previously.

7.5 Lithics

by Tabitha Lawrence

Two flint blades were recovered during the investigation. Both were residual finds within later contexts, likely redeposited during the construction of the blockhouse.

The first blade was recovered from L2 and made from mottled brown flint. It exhibits platform preparation and attributes of soft hammer knapping such as a small bulb. The second blade made from mid black flint was recovered from turf layer L5. The blade exhibits evidence of platform preparation and has long parallel removals on its dorsal face. It has been struck by soft hammer percussion.

Context	Finds no.	Sample no.	Flint type	Cortex %	Hard/soft hammer	Platform preparation	Modification
L2	-	<6>	Blade	70	Soft	Yes	-
L5	6	-	Blade	20	Soft	Yes	Use-wear, edge-damage.

Table 6 Worked flint listed by context.

Given the dimensions and soft hammer knapping attributes of both blades, a date of the Late Mesolithic to Early Neolithic period would be appropriate.

The analysis of this flint has been completed in accordance with the *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (ClfA 2020). The principal works cited include *Prehistoric Flintwork* (Butler 2005) and the *Classification of Lithic Artefacts from the British Late Glacial and Holocene Periods* (Ballin 2021). The measurement of flakes follows the methodology as devised by Saville (1980) and outlined by Butler (2005).

8 Environmental assessment

by Alan Clapham

Introduction

Ten flotation samples were analysed for their plant remains content (Table 8). Samples from layers L3, L5 and L6 were the only ones to produce plant remains, with sample 2 from L5 being the richest.

Apart from the waterlogged plant remains, charcoal was recorded in most of the samples but there were few identifiable pieces. The wood taxa identified included yew (*Taxus baccata*), gorse (*Ulex* sp), oak (*Quercus* sp), hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and willow/poplar (*Salicaceae*). The charcoal most likely is derived from hearths within the fort.

Methods

Ten flotation samples were analysed for plant remains. The samples were dried but on inspection the samples consisted of waterlogged plant remains and therefore should have been kept wet rather than dried out. Drying out of plant material preserved by waterlogging tends to lead to distortion which in turn makes accurate identification difficult. Luckily, in this case, little distortion was noted making identification of taxa possible.

Prior to analysis the samples selected were re-sieved by the author through a series of geological sieves (2mm, 1mm, 0.5mm and 0.25mm). This was undertaken to flush out any humic or clay particles that had broken down during storage. This produced a cleaner sample facilitating the extraction of the plant macrofossils.

The samples were examined using a low-powered (x8-x56) stereomicroscope and the extracted plant macrofossils were identified using the author's own modern plant reference collection and a plant seed atlas (Cappers et al, 2006).

Where charcoal fragments were deemed identifiable, the pieces were examined in 3 dimensions and identified with the aid of Hather (2000).

The results are recorded in Table 7.

Nomenclature of the plant taxa follows Stace (2019). Common names and habitats (Table 9) also follow Stace (2019).

Results (Tables 7-9)

Of the ten samples selected for analysis only three samples <1>, <2>, and <3> from layers L3, L5 and L6 respectively produced any plant remains. The plant remains were originally preserved by waterlogging. Small fragments of charcoal were found in most samples but most of the fragments were too small to identify accurately.

Sample 1, Layer 3

The plant remains from this layer consisted of fruits of orache (*Atriplex* sp), blinks (*Montia fontana* ssp *chondrosperma*), forget-me-not (*Myosotis* sp), bristly oxtongue (*Helminthotheca echioides*), elder (*Sambucus nigra*), hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) and duckweed (*Lemna* sp). Apart from the duckweed, which is an aquatic species, the other taxa can be found on rough/disturbed ground with blinks and hemlock being typically associated with damp soils.

Other remains recorded from this layer included small fragments of charcoal, and the sclerotia of the soil fungus *Cenococcum geophilum*. Foraminifera, ostracods, insects and molluscs were commonly recorded with occasional earthworm cocoons. Black vitreous lumps were also present most likely of coal.

The fragments of charcoal large enough to be identified (Table 8) consisted of single pieces of heartwood of oak (*Quercus* sp) and willow/poplar (*Salicaceae*).

Sample 2, Layer 5

This layer produced the largest number and greatest diversity of plant remains. The sample was dominated by large numbers of grass culm bases, culm nodes and internodes (stems), these were not identifiable but the presence of spikelets of perennial rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*) and common couch (*Elymus repens*) lends support to the interpretation of this layer as being of turves (Table 7).

Other plant remains present represented other local habitats such as disturbed/bare ground and included corn poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*), bramble (*Rubus* Section *Glandulosus*), thistle (*Cirsium* sp), smooth and prickly sowthistle (*Sonchus oleraceus* and *S. asper*) and elder.

A salt marsh environment is represented by thrift (*Armeria maritima*) and sea arrowgrass (*Triglochin maritimum*). Other maritime species were recorded and included wild cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*), Babington's orache (*Atriplex glabriuscula*), grass-leaved orache (*Atriplex littoralis*), sea purslane (*Atriplex portulacoides*) and sea beet (*Beta vulgaris* ssp *maritimus*). These are often found on sandy and shingly beaches which are present in the area on the seaward side of the salt marsh on which the fort is located.

Other remains recorded include small fragments of charcoal, charred rootlets, abundant foraminifera, common molluscs, occasional earthworm cocoons and insect remains. Possible evidence of human activity may be indicated by the presence of lumps of black vitreous vesicular material and hammerscale/smelting waste (Table 7).

The identifiable charcoal (Table 8) included heartwood of yew (*Taxus baccata*), oak, and willow/poplar.

Sample 3, Layer 6

This sample contained abundant grass culm nodes along with spikelets of perennial rye-grass, suggesting that these may have been from the sealing Layer 5. Other plant remains included bramble and orache (Table 7).

Other remains included small unidentifiable charcoal fragments, occasional foraminifera, insects and molluscs along with common coal fragments and black vitreous vesicular lumps.

Identifiable charcoal included single heartwood fragments of yew, oak and willow/poplar and a sinch branchwood fragment of hazel (*Corylus avellana*).

Sample 4, Layer 7

No plant remains were found in this sample which appeared to be mostly of a clay/silt sediment with small lumps of a vitreous black material. The clay lumps were difficult to disaggregate and contained foraminifera, insects and small fragments of charcoal.

Some of the charcoal was identifiable and consisted of a single piece of yew heartwood and a single piece of gorse (*Ulex* sp).

Sample 5, Layer 8

It consisted of a very fine sediment with no identifiable plant remains. Occasional charcoal fragments and foraminifera were recorded.

Sample 7, layer 9

This sample consisted of a fine sediment with occasional small unidentifiable fragments of charcoal.

Sample 8, Layer 10

This layer contained abundant black vitreous vesicular lumps suggestive of high temperatures and occasional foraminifera.

Sample 12, Layer 13

This layer is thought to be the earliest clay layer of the fort and contained no identifiable plant remains. Black vitreous vesicular lumps were abundant, and foraminifera were common.

Sample 9, Layer 14

The only plant remains recorded were a single fruit of the aquatic duckweed and a sedge (*Carex* sp) nutlet. Occasional grass culm nodes were also recorded suggesting the possible remains of turf. Black vitreous, vesicular lumps were common.

Identifiable charcoal included three fragments of oak heartwood with a range of 1 to 4 annual growth rings.

Sample 10, Layer 17

This layer is of the lower layer of the moat associated with the fort. Abundant coal and black vitreous lumps were recorded with occasional unidentifiable small fragments of charcoal. Some of the larger charcoal fragments were identifiable and were of oak (Table 8).

Discussion

Of the ten samples (see Tables 8 and 9) presented for analysis it is apparent that only one sample, <2> from Layer 5 produced plant remains large enough in numbers and range of species to forward an interpretation of their presence.

Layer 5 when freshly exposed revealed a distinctive laminated texture which has been interpreted as the remains of turves. The presence of large numbers of grass remains in the form of culm bases, culm nodes and internodes (stems) along with the spikelets of perennial rye-grass, and common couch suggest that turves were indeed present. Apart from the open rough grassland from which the turves were most likely taken, other habitats were represented in the Layer 5 assemblage.

Given the location of the Blockhouse on the Colne Estuary it is not surprising that representatives of more marine habitats are present. Saltmarsh, on which the fort is situated is indicated by the finds of thrift and sea arrowgrass, these are most likely to have been growing on the upper levels of the

saltmarsh where incursions by high tides occur less frequently and it is possible that turves from this area were also used to build the fort's defences.

Plants indicative of areas more exposed to the saline influence of the estuary, such as the exposed sandy and stony beaches beyond the saltmarsh include Babington's orache, grass-leaved orache, sea-purslane and sea beet. The bracteoles and fruits of the oraches and sea beet are designed to be dispersed by water and therefore are most likely to have arrived within the assemblage during flooding by high tides or even possibly by high onshore winds. The presence of the foraminifera does suggest a marine origin for the substrate of the turves. The presence of earthworm cocoons and terrestrial molluscs indicates that inundation by the sea was not a common occurrence at the time of deposition. The presence of open/disturbed/waste ground habitats as indicated by species such as elder, bramble and poppy would have occurred naturally within the local area. Areas of disturbed ground would have occurred within the fort caused by the daily activity of the garrison stationed there.

Evidence for human activity is limited, but the presence of charcoal, possible hammerscale/smelting waste and coal fragments does suggest some activity, perhaps either related to daily maintenance of the fort i.e. for cooking, or for the firing of artillery based at the fort.

The wood taxa identified from their charcoal remains (yew, gorse, oak, hazel and willow/poplar) would have been grown and collected locally. Due to the lack of annual tree ring counts and the low number of identifiable pieces it is not possible to say anything regarding local woodland management.

Conclusion

The plant remains from Layer 5 do indeed support the archaeological evidence that turves were used in the construction/repair of the blockhouse. The turves were most likely taken from the area above, or at the highest point of the saltmarsh on which the fort was constructed. This saltmarsh is represented by remains of thrift and sea arrowgrass. The more exposed sandy, shingly beaches below the saltmarsh were represented by plant tolerant to higher saline conditions such as sea beet and sea-purslane and Babington's orache. Other habitats represented in the assemblage included open disturbed and waste ground with a few trees and shrubs. The area would have been very open and exposed. Human activity was represented by fragments of coal and charcoal as well as hammerscale/smelting waste.

Sample	1	2	3	4	5	7	8	12	9	10
Layer	L3	L5	L6	L7	L8	L9	L10	L13	L14	L17
Volume (l)	50	50	10	10	10	20	10	?	40	40
Flot volume (ml)	200	260	30	40	10	20	10	5	170	80
Taxa										
Waterlogged										
<i>Papaver rhoeas</i>		1								
<i>Rubus</i> Sect <i>Glandulosus</i>		2+3f	4							
<i>Brassica oleracea</i>		1								
<i>Armeria maritima</i>		8								
<i>Atriplex glabriuscula</i>										
bracteoles		2								
<i>Atriplex littoralis</i>										
bracteoles		13+3f								
fruits		16								
<i>Atriplex portulacoides</i>										
bracteoles		3+12f								
fruits		13+23f								
<i>Atriplex</i> sp	10		3							
<i>Chenopodium album</i>	1									
<i>Beta vulgaris</i> ssp <i>maritimus</i>										
Fruits with perianth		23+12f								
opercula		13								
fruits		4								
<i>Montia fontana</i> ssp <i>chondrosperma</i>	2	1								
<i>Myosotis</i> sp	3									
<i>Cirsium</i> sp		1								
<i>Helminthotheca echioides</i>	1									

Sample	1	2	3	4	9	10
Layer	L3	L5	L6	L7	L14	L17
Taxa						
<i>Taxus baccata</i>		1 hw (0)	1 hw (0)	1 hw (0)		
<i>Ulex</i> sp				1 bw (0)		
<i>Quercus</i> sp	1 hw (5)	2 hw (0)	1 hw (0)		3 hw (1-4)	1 rw (1); 2 hw (2-5)
<i>Corylus</i> sp			1 bw (3)			
Salicaceae	1 hw (3)	1 hw (0)	1 hw (0)			

Table 8 Charcoal identifications from the various layers. The figures in brackets are the number of annual growth rings visible.
(hw = heartwood; bw = branch wood; rw = round wood).

Scientific name	Common name	Native status	Habitats
<i>Taxus baccata</i> L.	yew	N	limestone and acid sandstone
<i>Papaver rhoeas</i> L.	corn poppy	A	arable, waste ground
<i>Ulex</i> L. sp	gorse	N	grassy places, heathland, open woods on sandy/peaty soil
<i>Rubus</i> Sect <i>Glandulosus</i> Wimm. & Grab.	bramble	N	all sorts of habitat, natural and man-made
<i>Quercus</i> L. sp	oak	N	wide range of soils
<i>Corylus</i> L. sp	hazel	N	hedgerows, scrub, woodland
Salicaceae	willow/poplar	N	all types of soils, but mostly wet, especially riverbanks
<i>Brassica oleracea</i> L.	wild cabbage	N	sea-cliffs and roadsides
<i>Armeria maritima</i> (Mill.) Willd.	thrift	N	saltmarshes, saline turf, rocks and cliffs by the sea
<i>Atriplex glabriuscula</i> Edmonston	Babington's orache	N	sandy and shingle beaches
<i>Atriplex littoralis</i> L.	grass-leaved orache	N	saline open or colonised usually in sandy places
<i>Atriplex portulacoides</i> L.	sea-purslane	N	saline mud and sand, fringing pools and lakes, often flooded at high tide
<i>Atriplex</i> L. sp	oraches	N	saline, arable and disturbed ground
<i>Chenopodium album</i> L.	fat-hen	N	waste and cultivated ground
<i>Beta vulgaris</i> ssp <i>maritimus</i> (L.) Arcang.	sea beet	N	shore and waste ground near sea
<i>Montia fontana</i> ssp <i>chondrosperma</i> (Fenzl) Walters	blinks	N	many kinds of damp places

<i>Myosotis</i> L. sp	forget-me-nots	N	all types of habitat
<i>Cirsium</i> Mill sp	thistles	N	all types of habitat
<i>Helminthotheca echinoides</i> (L.) Holub	bristly oxtongue	A	disturbed and rough ground
<i>Sonchus oleraceus</i> L.	smooth sowthistle	N	waste and cultivated ground
<i>Sonchus asper</i> (L.) Hill	prickly sowthistle	N	waste and cultivated ground
<i>Sambucus nigra</i> L.	elder	N	hedges, woods, waste and rough ground
<i>Conium maculatum</i> L.	hemlock	A	damp ground, roadsides, ditches, waste ground
<i>Lemna</i> L. sp	duckweed	N	ponds, ditches, fresh and brackish water
<i>Triglochin maritimum</i> L.	sea arrowgrass	N	saltmarshes, and salt-sprayed grassland
<i>Carex aquatilis</i> Wahlenb.	water sedge	N	swampy areas by lakes, rivers, marshes
<i>Carex</i> L. sp (trigonous)	sedges	N	wide range of wet soils
<i>Lolium perenne</i> L.	perennial rye-grass	N	grassy places, waste and rough ground
<i>Elymus repens</i> (L.) Gould	common couch	N	cultivated, waste and rough ground, open ground near sea

Table 9 Common names, native status and habitats of the plants identified from the layers. (N = native; A = archaeophyte).
Nomenclature, native status and habitat designation taken from Stace (2019).

9 Conclusion

Archaeological investigation was carried out on the earthwork mound at Mersea blockhouse as it has suffered significant erosion in recent years. Between the Historic England survey of 2022 and CAT's fieldwork in October 2024, 2-4m to the seaward facing edges had been lost, and at high tide even parts of the cut back section collapsed. Using the 2022 and 2024 data, the mound is likely to be completely lost within four years.

CAT's investigations have proved that the mound holds important stratigraphic information about the construction of the rampart and associated bastion. Excavation of this earthwork before it is lost to the sea could reveal further dating evidence and allow some of the interpretations suggested in this report to be tested and re-evaluated in the light of any new evidence obtained.

The loss of the mound would also have a negative impact on the interior of the blockhouse (currently inundated with sea water) and other surviving parts of rampart, all of which would become more exposed to the sea than they currently are. Excavation of the better surviving parts of the rampart have the potential to reveal more information about its construction, size/shape and appearance, and evidence of repair/refortification. Excavation of the centre of the blockhouse could also provide significant information on the presence of buildings and their purpose.

In response to the research aims:

- The pre-rampart ground surface was not identified during this phase of excavation. The high water table meant that the test-pit, excavated to locate natural ground level, filled with water quicker than it could be bailed out and excavation had to stop.
- The borehole investigation (Wilkinson 2025, 4) indicates that the blockhouse earthworks are 1.67-1.82m thick. As excavated, the cut-back section of mound revealed the top 1.44m of earthwork, with the buried part of the earthwork probably ranging from 0.25-0.68m thick.
- The rampart largely consists of clay layers, although turves were identified in L19 and appear to have been incorporated into the rampart make-up. Borehole investigations have indicated that the ramparts are likely to have been made from mudflat deposits, possibly dug from the interior of the blockhouse (Wilkinson 2025, 4).
- As highlighted by Chris Thornton (2023, 47), there is no evidence that the proposed septagonal fort shown on a British Library plan of the 1540s was ever built. It was probably always a triangular earthwork with semi-circular bastions at each corner. There is no evidence that the rampart was constructed or topped with maunds but there is evidence for turves.
- The investigation did not reveal any evidence for an interior walkway on the inner edge of the rampart.
- The investigation did not reveal any evidence of a gun emplacement, although layers L2 and L3/L11 could be associated with it and an 18th-century musket ball was recovered from the upper fill of F2.

- There does appear to be evidence of phases of repair/refortification/reuse, the most noticeable being turf layer L5 which is possibly associated with documentary evidence detailing the purchase of turf in 1653.

10 Acknowledgements

CAT thanks Essex County Council for commissioning and funding the work. The project was managed by A Wightman and C Lister, fieldwork was carried out by A Wade with K Anderson, B Holloway, M Perou and D Spenner. Figures are by A Wade, E Holloway and L Pooley. Photogrammetry was carried out by A Wade. The project was monitored for Historic England by Dr Jess Tipper.

11 References

Note: all CAT reports, except for DBAs, are available online in PDF format at <http://cat.essex.ac.uk>

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12 Abbreviations and glossary

CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
CCC	Colchester City Council
CHER	Colchester Historic Environment Record
ClfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists

context	a single unit of excavation, which is often referred to numerically, and can be any feature, layer or find.
Early Neolithic	period from 4000 BC to 3300 BC
ECC	Essex County Council
feature (F)	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain: can contain 'contexts'
Late Mesolithic	period from 7000 BC to 4000 BC
layer (L)	distinct or distinguishable deposit (layer) of material
medieval	period from 1066 to 1540
modern	period from 1901 to current
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
OASIS	Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations, http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main
post-medieval	period from AD 1540 to 1901
section	(abbreviation sx or Sx) vertical slice through feature/s or layer/s
ws	written scheme of investigation

13 Contents of archive

Finds: Part of one box

Digital record:

CAT Report 2135

CAT WSI

Digital photographs

Site data (including scans of original plans/sections)

Survey data

14 Archive deposition

The archive is currently held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at Roman Circus House, Roman Circus Walk, Colchester, Essex CO2 7GZ, but will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museum (finds) and the Archaeology Data Service (digital).

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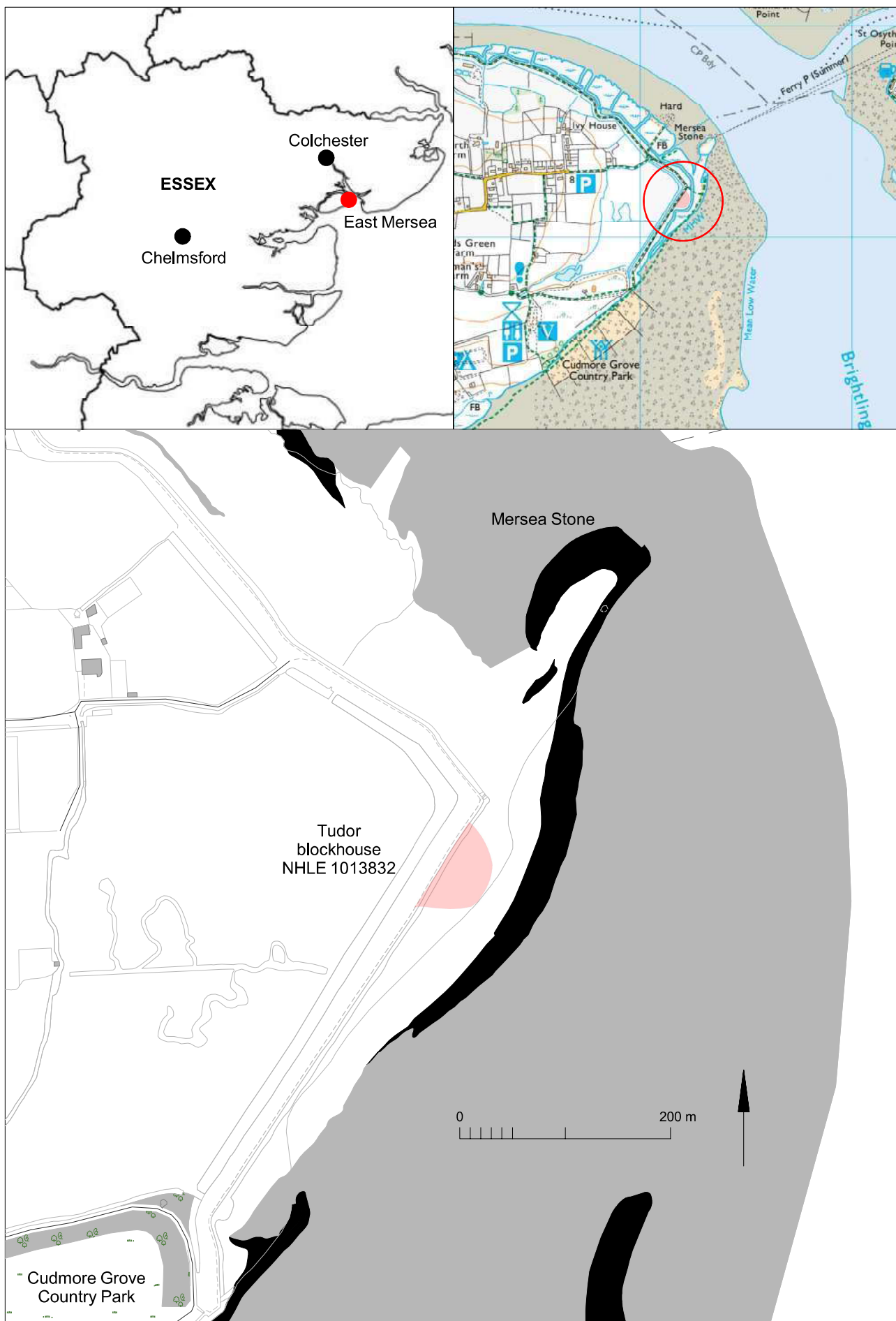
Colchester Historic Environment Record

Appendix 1 Pottery list

Context	Feature type	Find number	Soil Sample number	NR	GR	MSW	Discard	Rim	Handle	Base	Wmd	Sooting (ext)	Charing (int)	Burning	Organic Residue	Other deposit	Mineral encrustation	Mortar encrustation	Abrasion	Fabric Group	Typology	Function	EVE	Diam	Comments	Start Date	End Date
L1	-	1		1	7	7														F40	CUP/MUG	CUP/MUG			BL GLAZE	1550/1600	1725
L1	-	2		1	8	8														F40	CUP/MUG	CUP/MUG			DARK GL NR BLACK, RIBBED	1550/1600	1725
L2	-	3		1	2	2	X													F48D					BLE TRANSFER PR	1800	2000
L2	-		6	1	1	1	X													F40					GREEN GLAZE	1500	1800/1900
L2	-		6	3	1	0	X													UNID CRUMB					F13/21?	1000	1550
L7	-	?		1	65	65		0	0	1										F40					BL GLAZE, FROM BENEATH 'BLACK' LAYER	1500	1800/1900
L10	-	15		1	10	10														F40	CUP/MUG	CUP/MUG			BL GLAZE	1550/1600	1725
L17	-		10	1	1	1	X													F40					BLACK GLAZE	1500	1800/1900

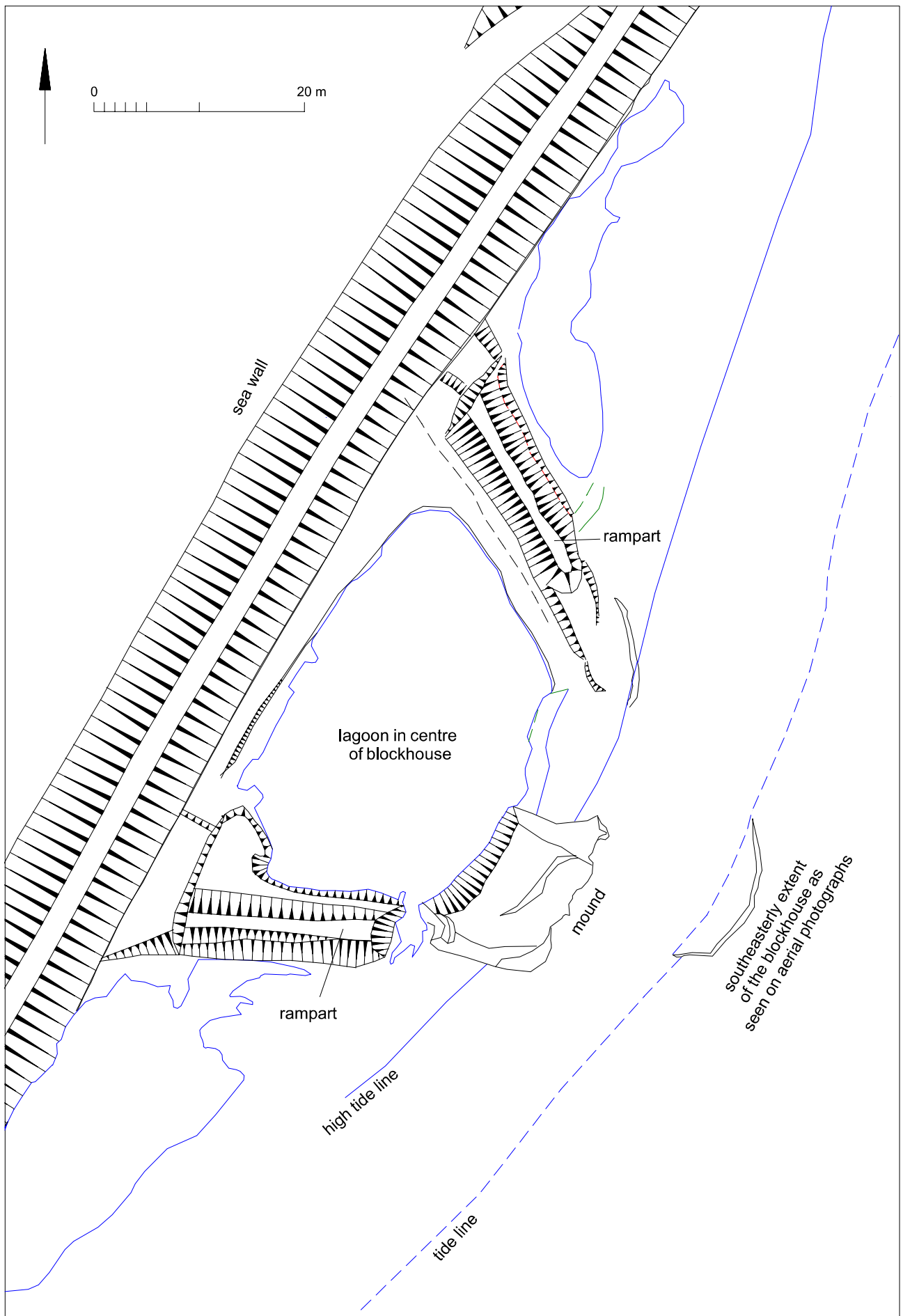
Appendix 2 CBM list

Cxt	Feature type	Find no.	Soil S no.	NR	GR.	MSW	Discard	Typology	Sub-type	L	BR.	TH.	Frog. L	Frog. Width	Hack/skintling/pres. marks	Mortar	Burnt	Overfired	Vitrified surf.	Abraded	Modif.	Comments	Date
L2	-	3		1	4	4	X	BR															POST MEDIEVAL-MODERN
L3	-		1	1	9	9	X	BR															MEDIEVAL-POST MEDIEVAL
L7	-	2		1	13	13	X	PT															MEDIEVAL-POST MEDIEVAL
L7	-		4	1	2	2	X	PT															MEDIEVAL-POST MEDIEVAL
L7	-		4	2	2	1	X	PT															MEDIEVAL-POST MEDIEVAL
L9	-		7	7	48	7	X	BR															MEDIEVAL-POST MEDIEVAL
L10	-	8		1	20	20	X	PT															MEDIEVAL-POST MEDIEVAL
L10	-	8		3	10	3	X	BR															POST MEDIEVAL-MODERN
L10	-	8		1	451	451		BR	UN-FROGGED	?	110	50										OR/RED	POST-MEDIEVAL
L10	-	8		3	260	87	X	BR		?	?	50										OR	POST MEDIEVAL
L10	-	8		1	136	136		BR		?	?	50											POST MEDIEVAL
L10	-	15		1	84	84	X	BR															POST MEDIEVAL-MODERN
L10	-	15		3	468	156		BR	UN-FROGGED													OR/BUFF	POST MEDIEVAL-MODERN
L10	-	15		1	444	444	X	BR	UN-FROGGED	?	110	48											POST MEDIEVAL
L10	-	15		2	1124	562	X	BR	UN-FROGGED	?	?	48										RED/MAROON	POST MEDIEVAL
L10	-	15						BR	UN-FROGGED	?	100	48						X	X			RED/MAROON, SLIGHTLY GLASSY/MIT EDGE	POST MEDIEVAL
L10	-	?		1	395	395		BR	UN-FROGGED	?	110	48										OR, OR/RED NODS	POST MEDIEVAL
L15	-		11	1	1	1	X	PT															MEDIEVAL-POST MEDIEVAL
L17	-		10	1	4	4	X	PT															MEDIEVAL-POST MEDIEVAL



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Fig 1 Site location.



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Fig 2 Plan of Mersea blockhouse as surveyed by Historic England 2022.

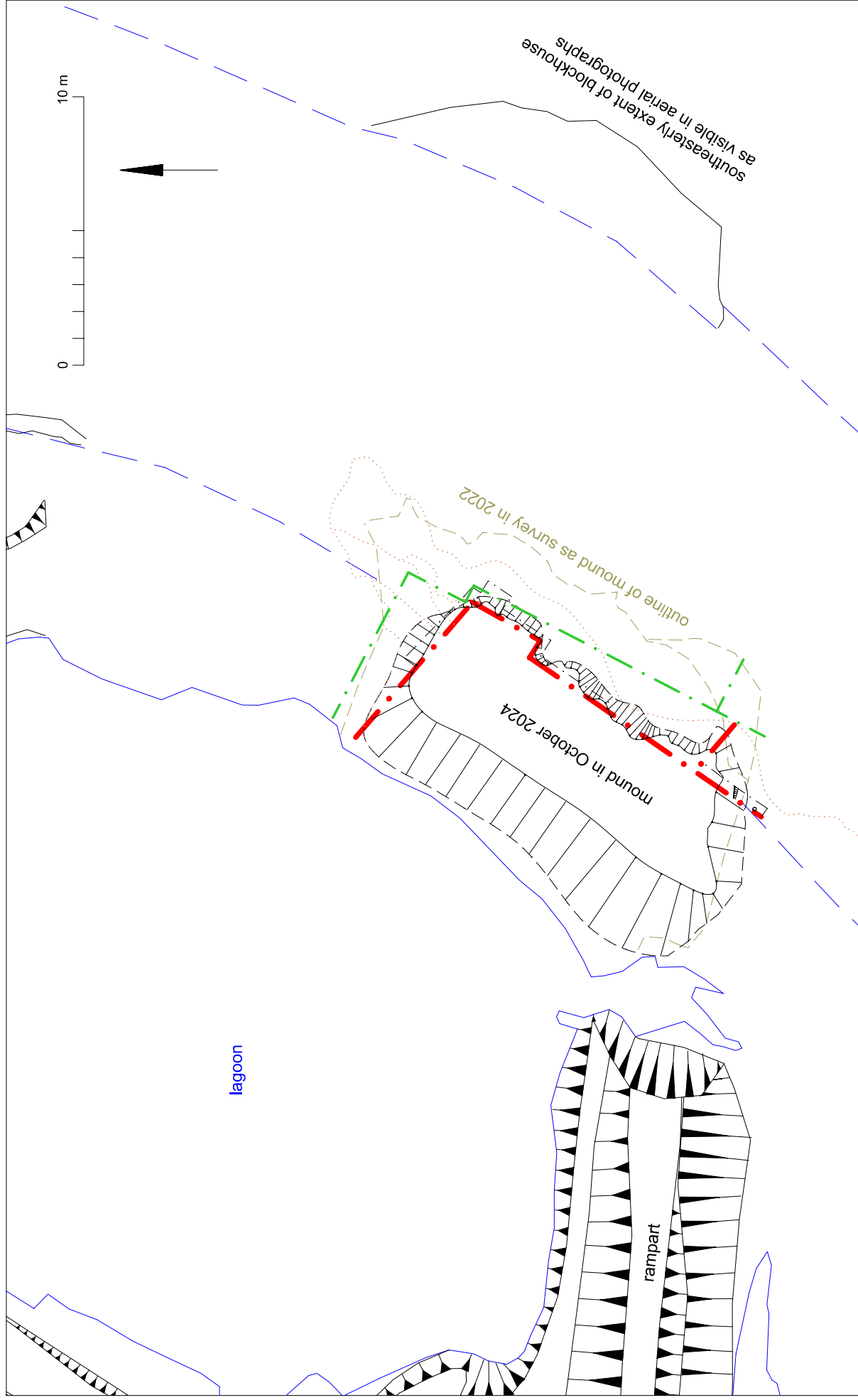
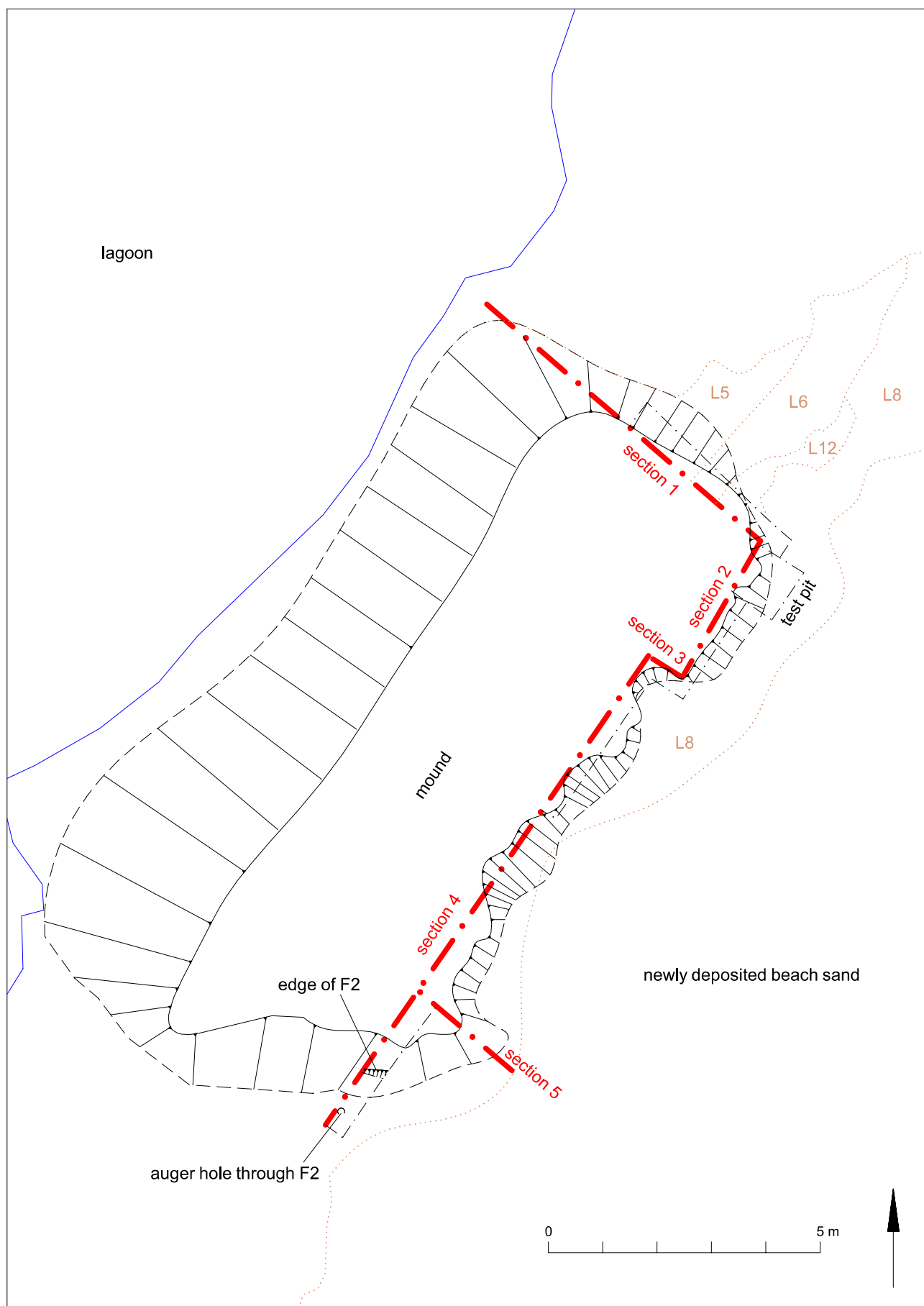


Fig 3 Plan showing a new survey of the earthwork under threat from erosion. The green dot-dash line was the original proposed section location, however due to erosion the red dot-dash line is the actual location of the section.



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Fig 4 Plan showing a new survey of the earthwork mound under threat from erosion with extent of cut-back section shown in red, and extent of layers in earthwork eroding out into the foreshore in brown.

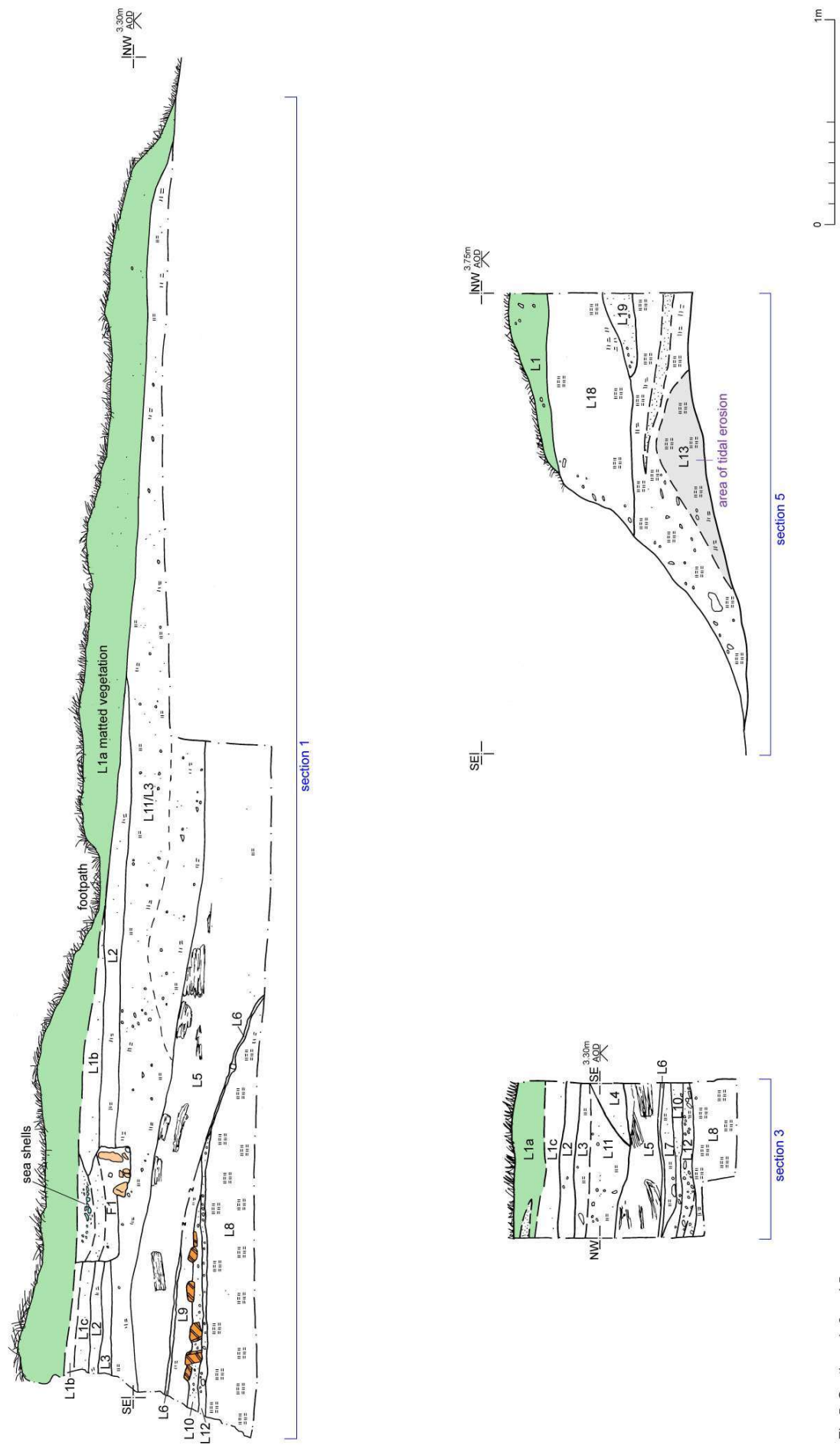
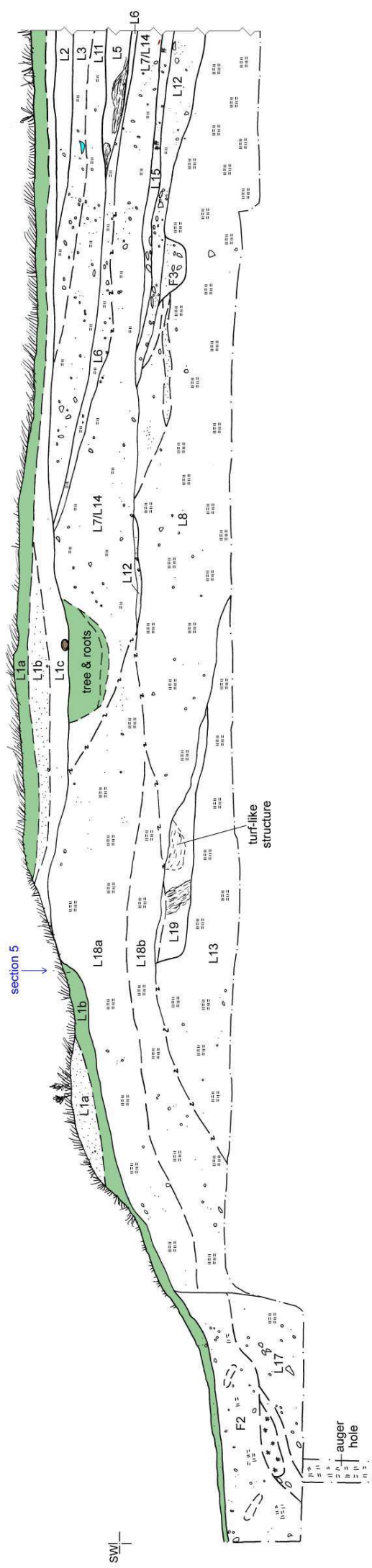
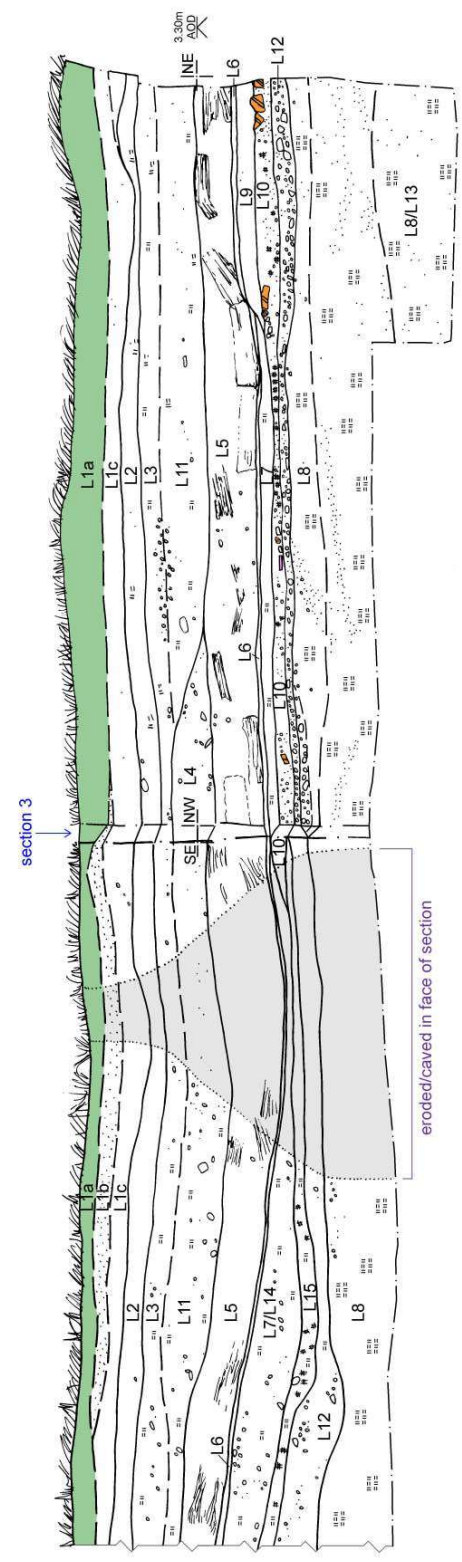


Fig 5 Sections 1, 3 and 5.



section 4a



section 2

section 4b

Fig 6 Sections 4 and 2.

pre-excitation



post-excitation

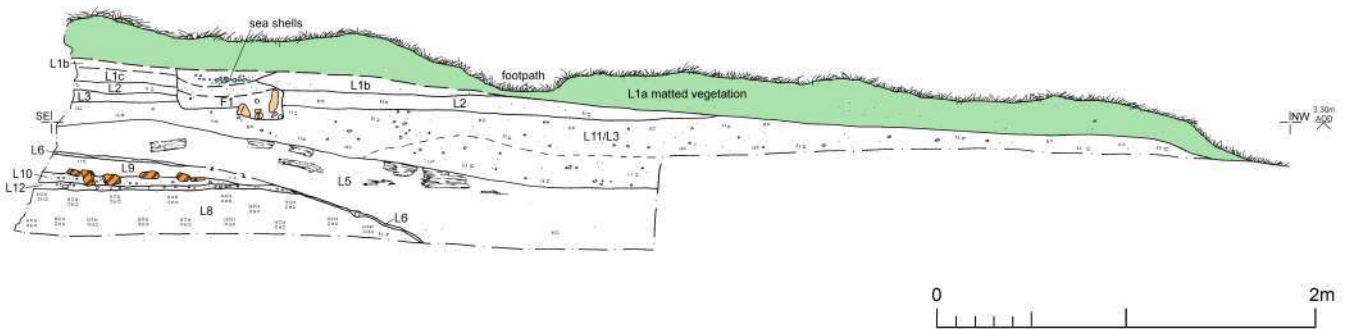
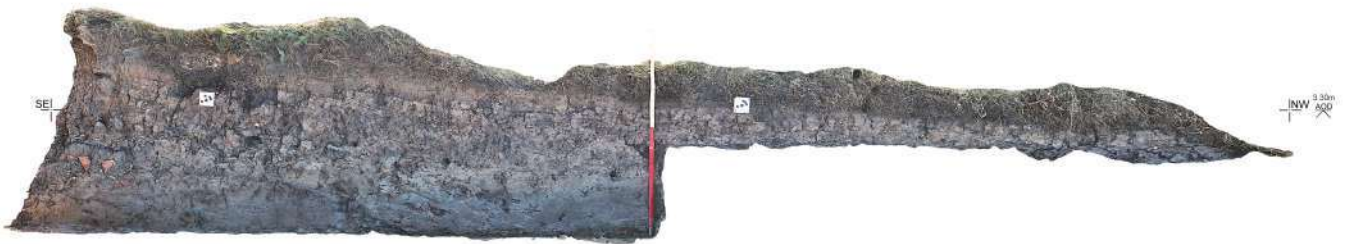


Fig 7 Section 1: pre-excitation and post-excitation orthos alongside the section drawing.

pre-excavation



post-excavation



Fig 8 Sections 4 and 2: pre-excavation and post-excavation orthos alongside the section drawing.

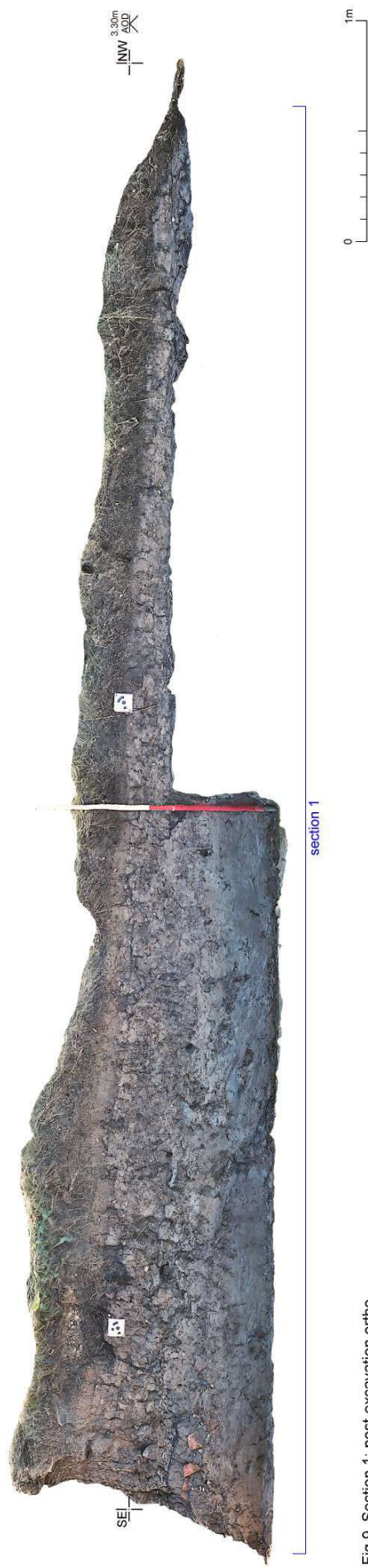


Fig 9 Section 1: post-excavation ortho.



section 4a



section 4b

section 2



Fig 10 Sections 4 and 2: post-excavation ortho.

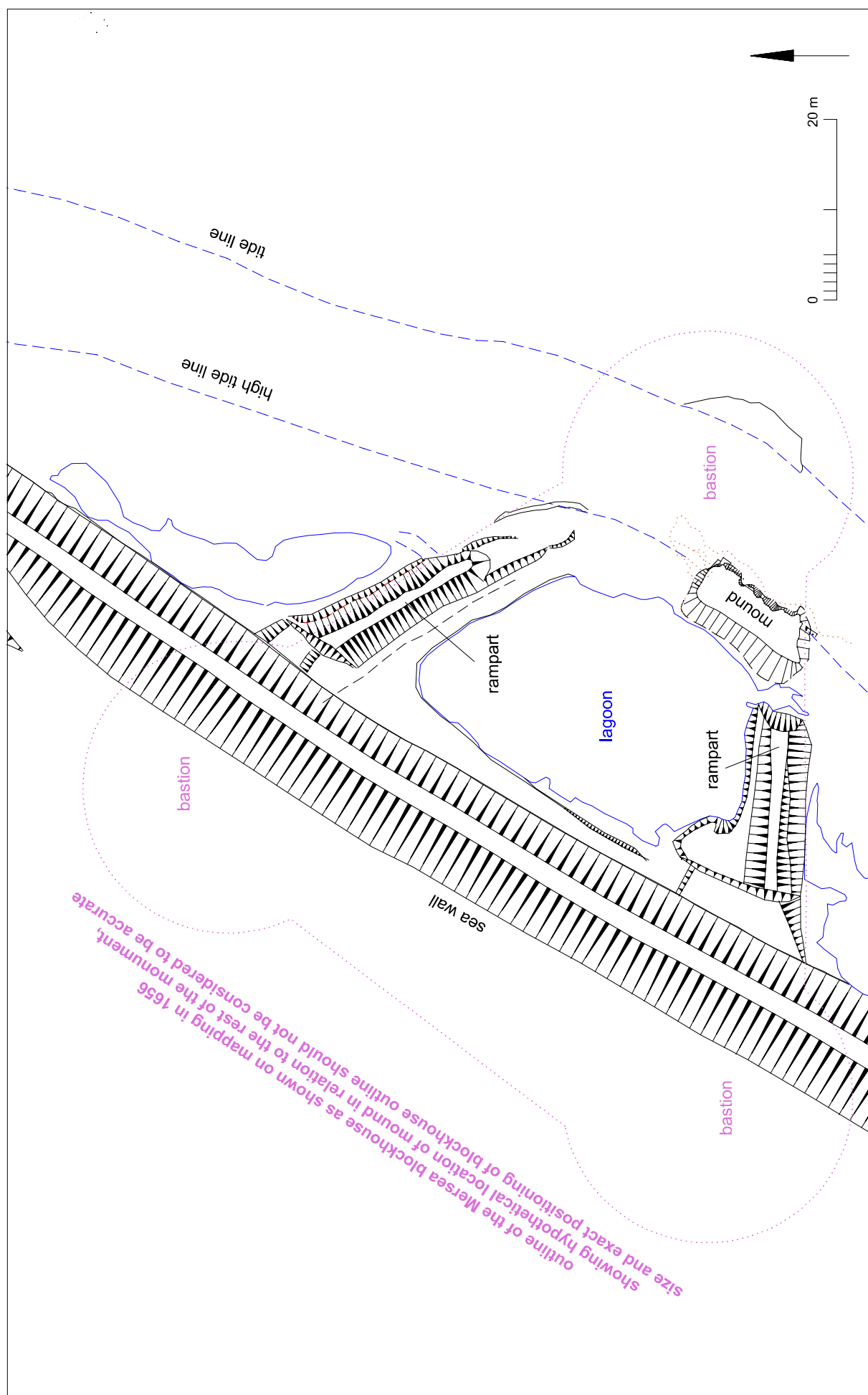


Fig 11 Plan showing the probable location of the mound in relation to the blockhouse. The exact size and position of the blockhouse outline as shown here is hypothetical and should not be taken as fact.

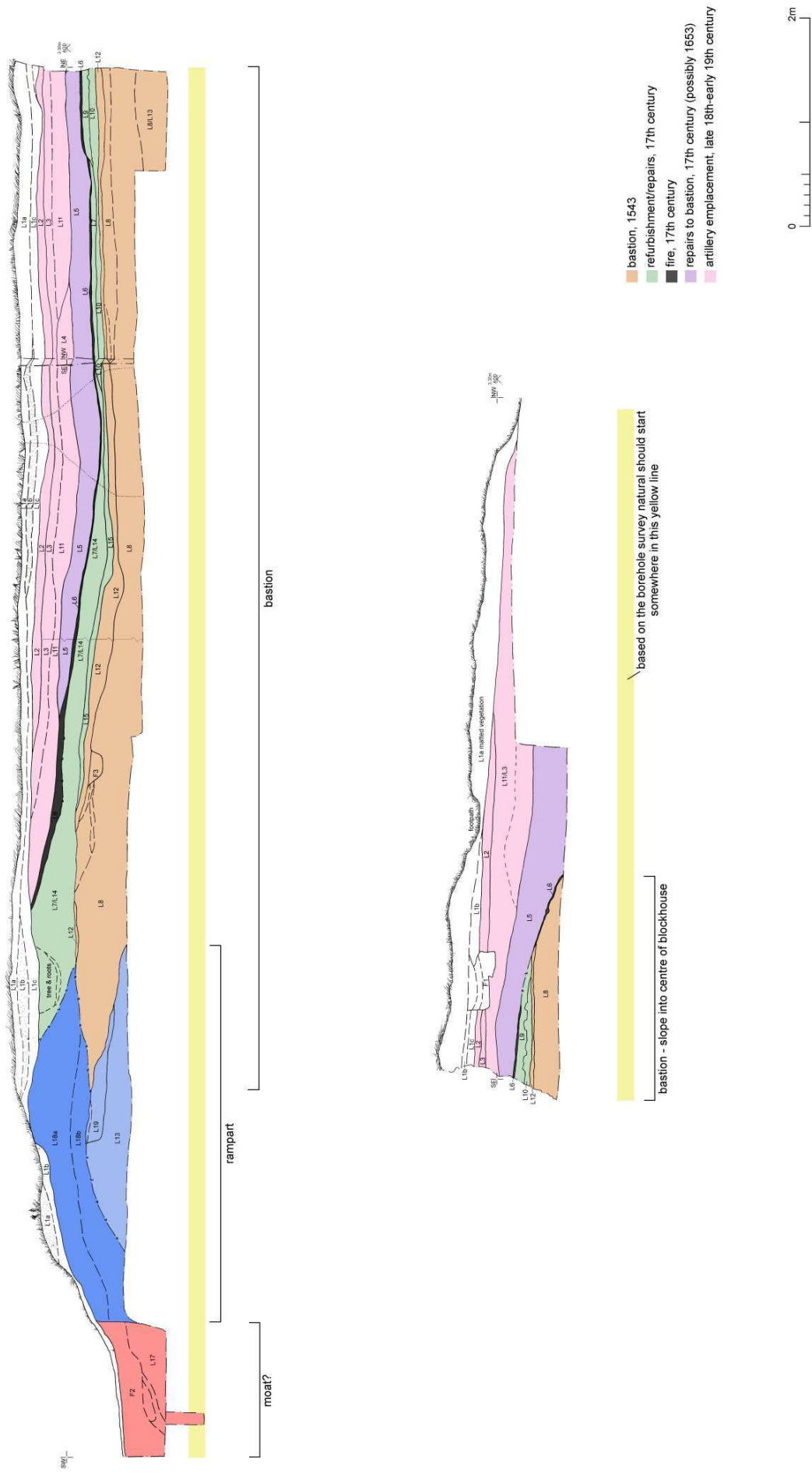


Fig 12 Interpretative section drawing based on the discussions in Section 6.

OASIS Summary for colchest3-528027

OASIS ID (UID)	colchest3-528027
Project Name	Archaeological investigations at Mersea Blockhouse, 300m south of Mersea Stone, East Mersea, Essex: October 2024
Sitename	Mersea Blockhouse, 300m south of Mersea Stone, East Mersea, Essex
Sitecode	ECC4875
Project Identifier(s)	2024/09e
Activity type	Research Excavation
Planning Id	
Reason For Investigation	Scheduled monument consent
Organisation Responsible for work	Colchester Archaeological Trust
Project Dates	17-Oct-2024 - 24-Oct-2024
Location	Mersea Blockhouse, 300m south of Mersea Stone, East Mersea, Essex NGR : TM 07195 15166 LL : 51.796745918311146, 1.003354357345151 12 Fig : 607195,215166
Administrative Areas	Country : England County/Local Authority : Essex Local Authority District : Colchester Parish : East Mersea
Project Methodology	Archaeological investigation of an earthwork mound forming part of a scheduled ancient monument. All works were carried out as specified in the scheduled monument consent and project wsi.
Project Results	<p>An archaeological investigation took place at Mersea Blockhouse, 300m south of Mersea Stone, East Mersea, Essex. The blockhouse (fort) is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (NHLE 1013832) situated in low-lying marshland outside of the sea wall at the mouth of the Colne Estuary. Built in 1543 as part of Henry VIII's extensive programme of coastal military defence, it was used periodically in times of unrest until the 19th century and was a triangular earthwork with semi-circular bastions in each corner. The archaeological investigation was commissioned by Essex County Council in response to damage being caused to part of the monument by coastal erosion.</p> <p>The investigation focussed on a small earthwork mound closest to the sea. The seaward face of that mound was cut back to form a flat section through the surviving earthwork. The section was hand-drawn, with photogrammetry carried out before and after the section was cut.</p> <p>The mound represented a small part of both the southern rampart and the easternmost (seaward) bastion. To the south of the rampart, part of the defensive ditch was also identified. Layers recorded appear to be associated with the Henrican Blockhouse, phases of decay and abandonment, and repairs in the 17th century.</p>
Keywords	Blockhouse - POST MEDIEVAL - FISH Thesaurus of Monument Types
Funder	Historic England ,County Council Essex County Council
HER	Scheduled Monument Casework - unRev - STANDARD Colchester Borough Council - unRev - STANDARD
Person Responsible for work	Adam Wightman, Chris Lister

HER Identifiers	
Archives	Physical Archive - to be deposited with Colchester & Ipswich Museum Service (Colchester Collection); Digital Archive - to be deposited with Archaeology Data Service Archive;

Report generated on: 30 Jan 2025, 11:58