

# Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

## CAT Report 576

### Summary sheet

<b>Address:</b> Land to the south of 'Serenity' 6 High Street, West Mersea, Colchester	
<b>Parish:</b> West Mersea	<b>District:</b> Colchester
<b>NGR:</b> TM 00985 12433 (centre)	<b>Site codes:</b> CAT project – 10/7b Museum accession – COLIM 2010.107
<b>Type of work:</b> Watching brief	<b>Site director/group:</b> Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT)
<b>Date of work:</b> 12-14th July 2010	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 0.15ha
<b>Location of finds/curating museum:</b> Colchester and Ipswich Museums	<b>Funding source:</b> Developer
<b>Further seasons anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related EHER numbers:</b> 2214, 2274, 2187, 6533-6534, 12546
<b>Final report:</b> CAT Archive Report 576	
<b>Periods represented:</b> Roman, medieval, post-medieval	
<p><b>Summary of fieldwork results:</b></p> <p>The Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) undertook a watching brief in July 2010 on land to the south of 6 High Street, West Mersea. The plot is on a steep southwards slope towards the Blackwater estuary and was formerly the back garden of the aforementioned property. The site work comprised the construction of a new detached dwelling with an access drive and a garage.</p> <p>The development site is located on the southern side of West Mersea in an area of high archaeological potential. It lies 100m south-west of the Church of St Peter and St Paul, underneath which survive the remains of a Roman villa (Essex Historic Environment Record or EHER nos 2214 and 2274). Roman walls, mosaics and tessellated floors have been recorded since the 18th century in the vicinity (EHER 6533-6534) and are believed to form part of an extensive complex of buildings. The site of a medieval Benedictine monastery also lies immediately west of the church and a number of human skeletons have been found in the area (EHCR 2187 and EHCR 12546).</p> <p>Prior to the first visit by a CAT employee the new access road had been excavated, a terrace had been excavated into the slope, the piles for the new building had been installed and the eastern half of the foundation trenches had been excavated. The new access road was c.5.5m wide (Fig 2) and was excavated to a depth of up to 0.7m below the modern ground level. The edges of the road cut were exposed and were examined. The road had been excavated through topsoil (L2, c.350mm deep) and into the natural sand and gravel (L4). No archaeological features or deposits were identified. The excavation of the terrace onto which the new property was to be built had involved the removal of soil and ballast from part of the</p>	

slope to a maximum depth of c.2m. The excavated material had been placed further down-slope to widen the terrace and create the area onto which a patio was to be constructed (Fig 2). The stratigraphy of the northern edge of the terrace (Fig 2) was recorded and examined for finds where gaps in the supporting steel shuttering permitted. The dark grey sandy-silt topsoil (L2) was 0.8m thick and contained modern building material and geotextile sheeting. L2 probably covered most of the slope prior to construction. Beneath L2 was a lighter sandy-silt (L3). This layer could be an early soil accumulation, but based on the thickness of the deposit (c.1m) and the relative heights of the natural L4 (see below), it was probably imported to landscape the slope down to the estuary from the area of the church. Nine fragments of Roman brick/tile and a fragment of peg-tile were recovered from L2/L3 and from L3. L3 overlay natural orange sand/gravel (L4) that did not appear to be redeposited.

A CAT archaeologist made four visits whilst the western half of the foundation trenches for the new building were being excavated. The trenches were excavated to a depth of c.1m below the level of the terrace. The whole terrace had been covered in a layer of geotextile material and crushed concrete prior to the commencement of works (L1). The foundation trenches for the northern half of the new building were excavated through natural sand and gravel into orange natural clay (L4). In the southern foundation trenches, L3 and possibly L2 overlay the natural sand/gravel. Once a trench had been excavated, shuttering was immediately installed and the poly-frames were placed between the piles. This was due to the volume of ground water resulting from recent poor weather conditions and the proximity of the site to the estuary. No archaeological deposits were identified or artefacts recovered from the foundation trenches.

The different depths at which the natural sand/gravel L4 was observed appeared to support the idea that the slope down to the estuary had been landscaped and that soil had been imported to create a gentler slope. This explains the presence and depth of L3 on the slope and its absence on the plateau at the top. During the examination of the upcast soil from the groundworks, further Roman brick and tile was recovered as well as two fragments of Roman pottery and two fragments of medieval pottery (see Appendix 1). It cannot be said for certain whether these finds, or any of those recovered from Layers 2 and 3, were incorporated in the imported soil of the slope or whether they originate from activity on the slope during these periods.

**Previous summaries/reports:** CAT Report 118, 223, 327, 330, 420

**Keywords:**

**Significance:** \*

**Author of summary:**

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**Date of summary:**

December 2010

## Appendix 1: the finds

by Stephen Benfield

The finds recovered during the watching brief are listed below by finds number for each context (Table 1). The Roman and post-Roman pottery fabrics refer to the Colchester fabric series: *CAR 10* (Roman), *CAR 7* (post-Roman). One sherd is in a fine red ware fabric, similar to that of post-medieval red earthen ware (Fabric 40) but is almost certainly of late medieval date and is described here as a late medieval Essex red ware. The fabric is fine orange-red with a smooth darker red surface. There are few visible inclusions although magnification reveals common-abundant fine silver mica and common red to dark-red/brown ferrous sand or ironstone fragments.

ctxt	finds no	finds	date
L2/3	7	RBT, 6 @ 103 g, fragments, red with one cream tile flake, thin curved piece (10 mm thick) is probably imbrex rather than later dated tile type.	Roman
L3 (west)	3	RBT 2 @ 237 g, both red; includes Roman tegula piece with upper cut away, base thickness 18 mm; other flat tile piece, probably tegula 18 mm thick.	Roman
L3 (east)	4	Roman brick 1162 g, reddish-cream fabric with sparse dark ferrous sand or ironstone inclusions, edge piece, thickness 40 mm. Peg-tile 1 @ 174 g, red, 11 mm thick	med/p-med/mod
US	1	Roman pottery, 2 @ 20 g, consist of two greyware sherds (Fabric GX) one coarse sand, other fine sandy fabric with faintly, broad rilled surface, both sherds dated Roman. RBT 4 @ 410 g, red, includes two pieces from flat tiles, both edge pieces, one 20 mm thick, other 15 mm thick	Roman
US	2	Flint 1 @ 20 g, small irregular core piece with cortex, several flaking scars and hinge fractures, possibly prehistoric Medieval pottery, 1 @ 3 g, coarse sandy Fabric 20, dated 13th-14th century. Animal bone 1 @ 162 g, complete bovid metatarsal	medieval, 13-14C
US	5	Medieval pottery 1 @ 95 g, rim and top of handle from a jug or bowl, fine slightly sandy orange-red fabric with slightly darker red surface, handle has single, broad central groove, rim dia. approx 130 mm, Late medieval Essex red ware dated c 15th-16th century Roman brick, corner piece, red, 858 g, longest surviving edge 140 mm, thickness 35 mm	Late-medieval, c 15th-16th century
US	6	RBT 2 @ 226 g includes Roman brick piece 35 m thick, 146 g, reddish-cream fabric with sparse dark ferrous sand or ironstone inclusions, also red flat tile edge piece 25 mm thick. Modern industrial silicate/ceramic piece, pale grey-green, with concoidal fractures 1 @ 80 g	modern

**Table 1** Finds by context (Key: US = unstratified finds, RBT = Roman brick and tile)

### Discussion

The finds were recovered from two numbered contexts L2/L3 and L3, and unstratified (US). The majority of the closely dated finds are of Roman date. A large piece of peg-tile recovered from L3 suggests that all of the stratified deposits recorded date to the medieval period or later.

There is a significant quantity of Roman brick and tile and together with a few sherds of Roman pottery. The Roman pottery consists of two sandy grey ware sherds (Colchester Fabric GX) both of which are unstratified (1) and cannot confidently be more closely dated other than as Roman. The Roman brick and tile includes one piece which can be identified as part of a *tegula* roof tile from L3 (3). There are also several pieces as Roman brick from L3 (4) and unstratified (5 & 6), which can be identified because of their thickness or the preservation of significant parts of the corners. A thin curved piece of tile from L2/3 (2) is most probably from a Roman *imbrex* roof tile. Almost all of the Roman brick and tile is red in colour, although

two of the brick pieces (possibly part of the same brick) are in a pale reddish cream fabric which has sparse dark ferrous-sand or ironstone inclusions.

The medieval pottery consist of two sherds. One is a sherd of medieval coarse ware (Colchester Fabric 20) dated c 13th-14th century (2). The other is a rim with attached handle from a jug or bowl (5). The latter is in a fine red earthen ware fabric (described here as late medieval Essex red ware) and probably dates to the late medieval period, c 15th-16th century. A single piece of peg-tile recovered from L3 (4) could date to any period after the later 13th century.

In addition there are unstratified finds of a single cattle metatarsal (2), a small irregular flint core with flaking scars which might be prehistoric (2) and a piece of modern industrial ceramic that is possibly part of an electricity insulator (6).

### **References**

**CAR 7** 2000, John Cotter, *Post-Roman pottery from excavation in Colchester, 1971-85*, Colchester Archaeological Report 7

**CAR 10** 2000, Robin Symonds & Sue Wade, *Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-86*, Colchester Archaeological Report 10

## **Appendix 2: contents of archive**

One A4 document wallet containing;

### **1 Site Archive**

- 1.1 Digital photo record
- 1.2 Attendance register
- 1.3 Context sheets (L1-L4)
- 1.4 Finds register
- 1.5 Site photographic record on cd
- 1.6 Page of notes on graph paper

### **2 Research Archive**

- 2.1 Monitoring (client) report
- 2.2 Finds report

### **Finds**

The finds occupy less than one box

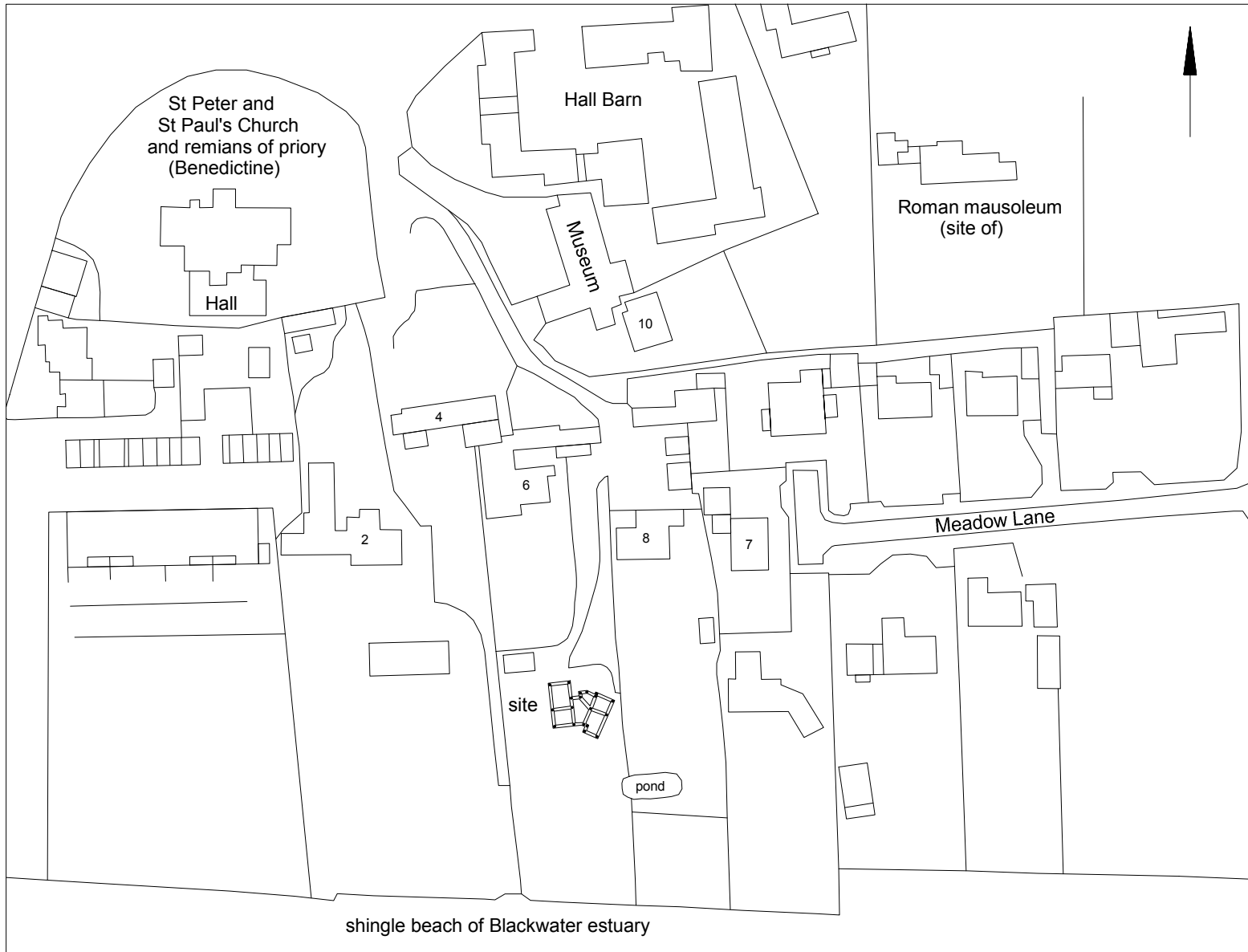


Fig 1 Site location.

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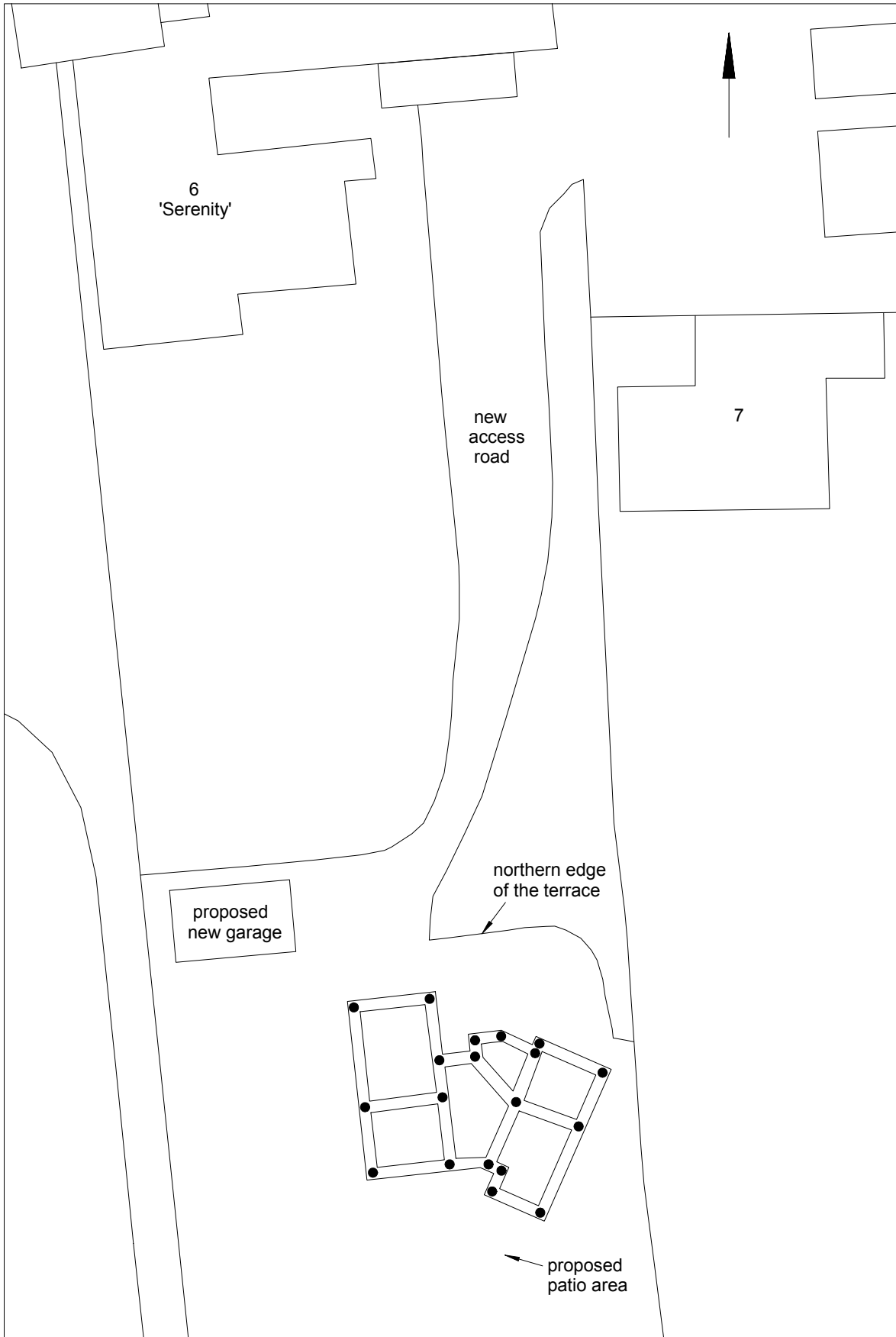


Fig 2 Site.

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