



CATALOGUE

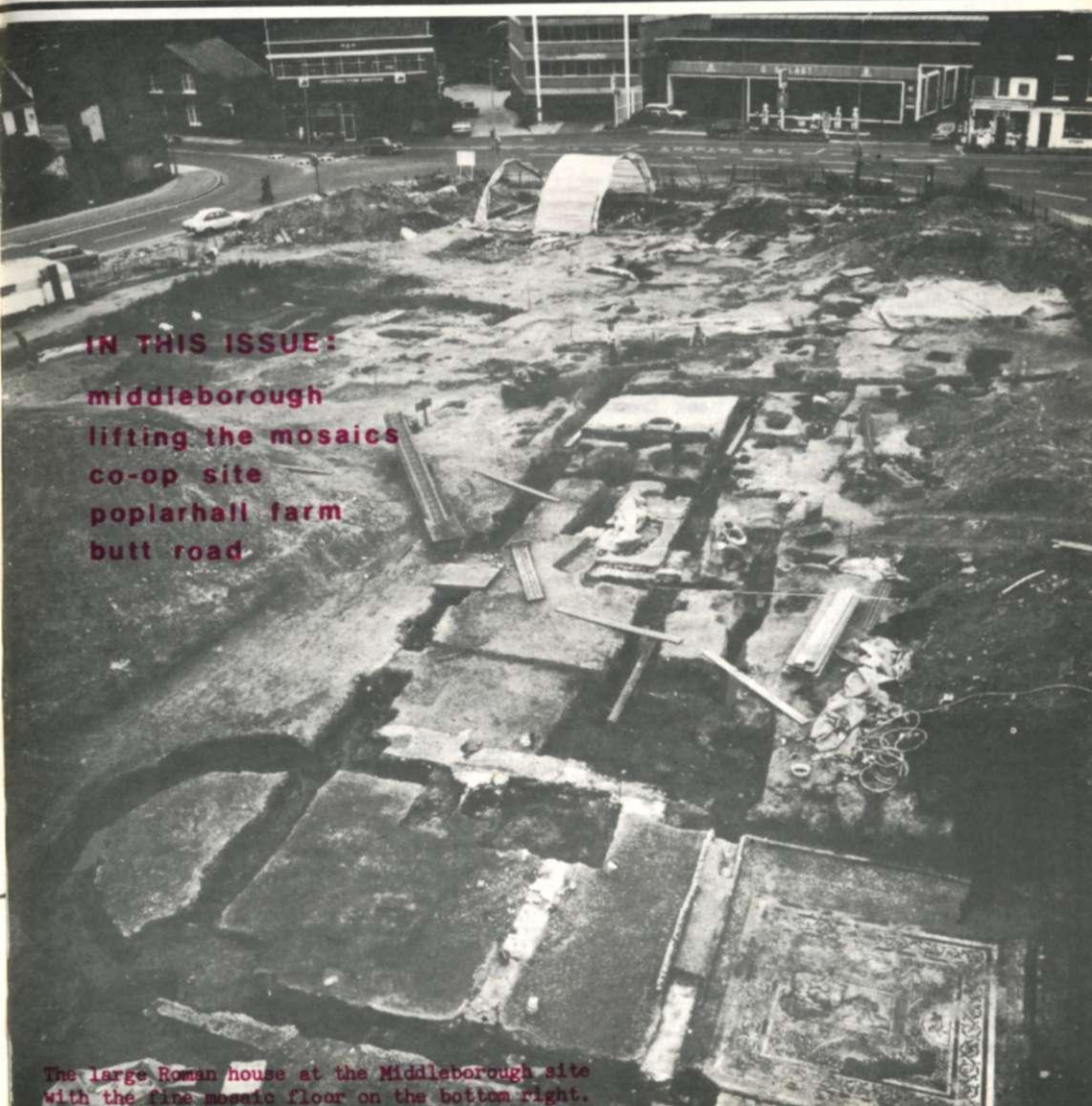
NEWSLETTER OF THE COLCHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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The large Roman house at the Middleborough site
with the fine mosaic floor on the bottom right.

The Cattle Market Site

CATALOGUE 3 contained an account of the discoveries made at the Old Cattle Market but because this was written halfway through the excavation, it represents only part of the story. The final few months saw discoveries of great interest, the most dramatic of which was a very fine, nearly complete mosaic pavement.

THE ROMAN HOUSES

Perhaps the principal outcome of the excavation was the recognition outside the town wall of a large Roman suburb of which the Middleborough Roman houses form part. In all, the remains of three houses were found at Middleborough, all of which were in existence after the town wall was built in the early 2nd century. Our waterfront postulated in CATALOGUE 3 turned out to be a bend in the road as it swung sharply westwards in the direction of the Sheepen site (see plan on Page 3).

To the west of this road lay a very fine and very large Roman house. It stretched about 50 yards back from the street frontage and enclosed an inner court on three, perhaps four, sides. At the north-west corner of the house were two large rooms of high quality separated by a cross passage. These rooms were sited so that they would be as far away as possible from the noise and bustle on the street and probably served as the principal rooms of the house. Both rooms contained mosaic pavements. The northern one had an apsidal or semicircular end and was likely to have been of exceptional quality. Unfortunately the mosaic had been scraped up during the demolition of the building, probably in the 3rd century, and the cubes no doubt re-used in a floor elsewhere. All that remained were traces in its mortar bedding. Luckily the other pavement survived and was almost intact (see Pages 6 & 7). In Roman times, this pavement had been repaired in several places with an unsightly coarse pink mortar and had been partly destroyed just north of

centre by the insertion of a large circular base, perhaps for a statue or altar. Slight traces of this can be seen centre left in the photograph of the mosaic. The first mosaic found in the house was very fragmentary and lay in the central room of the north wing. This pavement is described in the last edition of CATALOGUE and elsewhere here.

Time did not permit adequate examination of the earlier remains on the site except in one small area, under the street end of the large Roman house. Here, fronting onto the street, were found the remains of two successive earlier houses. Unlike their large successor, both were timber framed without stone foundations. The earlier of the two dates from the beginning of the 2nd century and exhibits various features which suggest that originally the Roman street was lined on the west and perhaps the east sides with closely packed small timber framed buildings. In amongst the demolition debris of the later of these two houses were large lumps of one of its walls covered with painted plaster. Careful excavation and recording of the fragments enabled the reconstruction on paper of much of the lower part of the wall. The design was of squares and rectangles over a dado of yellow and grey panels.

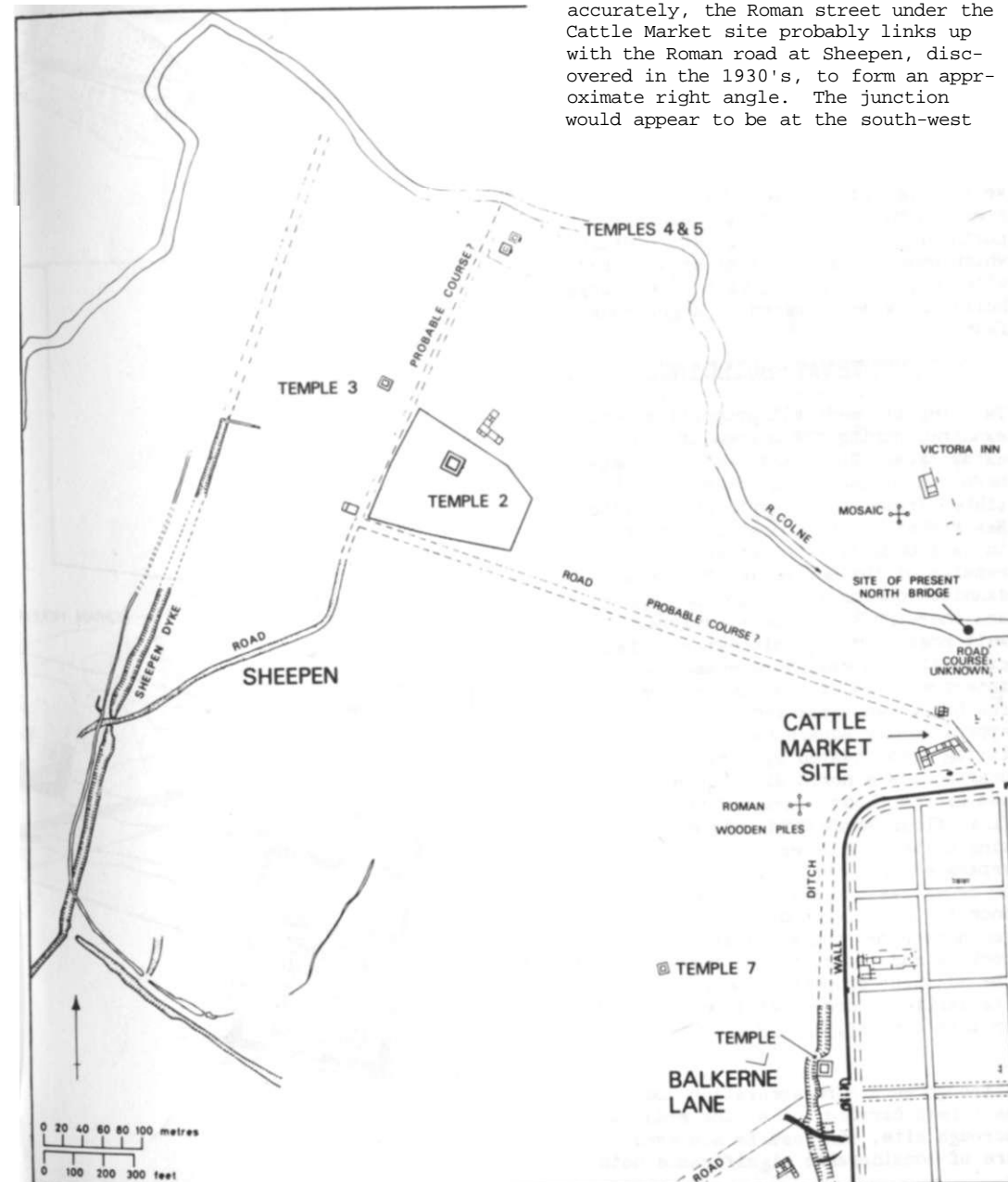
To the north of the road was found not the waterfront as conjectured but part of another Roman house. This belonged to the 2nd or 3rd century and contained rooms floored with mainly plain tessellated pavements. On its east side had been added a pair of rooms containing a hypocaust system - Roman underfloor heating. The stacks which supported the floor were well preserved and the base of the rectangular stoke-hole intact.

The presence has long been suspected of a Roman predecessor under the present Middleborough street. This, it was thought, linked the town's north-west gate at the foot of North Hill with a bridge across the Colne at the site of the present North Bridge. Such an arrangement would explain as Roman the large section of masonry found in 1843 on the site of the present North Bridge. So strong was the construction of this

structure that several attempts had to be made to blow it up with gunpowder. However the alignment and position of our third Roman house on the Cattle Market site suggest that the main Roman street from North Hill gate may lie further east than Middleborough and that therefore the stout masonry under North Bridge is probably medieval.

The series of Roman walls found over the years under North Station Road, next to the Victoria Inn, reinforce the conclusion that the line of the present street here, both north and south of the river, was established in post-Roman times.

Although its course is not established accurately, the Roman street under the Cattle Market site probably links up with the Roman road at Sheepen, discovered in the 1930's, to form an approximate right angle. The junction would appear to be at the south-west



corner of the precinct of the large temple under St. Helena's School. Thus the discovery of the street is especially significant in that now the important remains in the Sheepen area can apparently be physically linked with the layout of the Roman town. With the discovery of this short section of the road, we are now much further forward in uncovering the layout of this important part of Roman Colchester. Also the various sections of Roman walls and pavements found over the years in the vicinity of the Victoria Inn now fall into place as the remains of one or more houses in the substantial suburb which clearly existed outside the north-west corner of the walled part of the Roman town, presumably both south and north of the river Colne. The picture which emerges is not of an area packed with houses but of one with often large buildings widely spaced in a generous fashion.

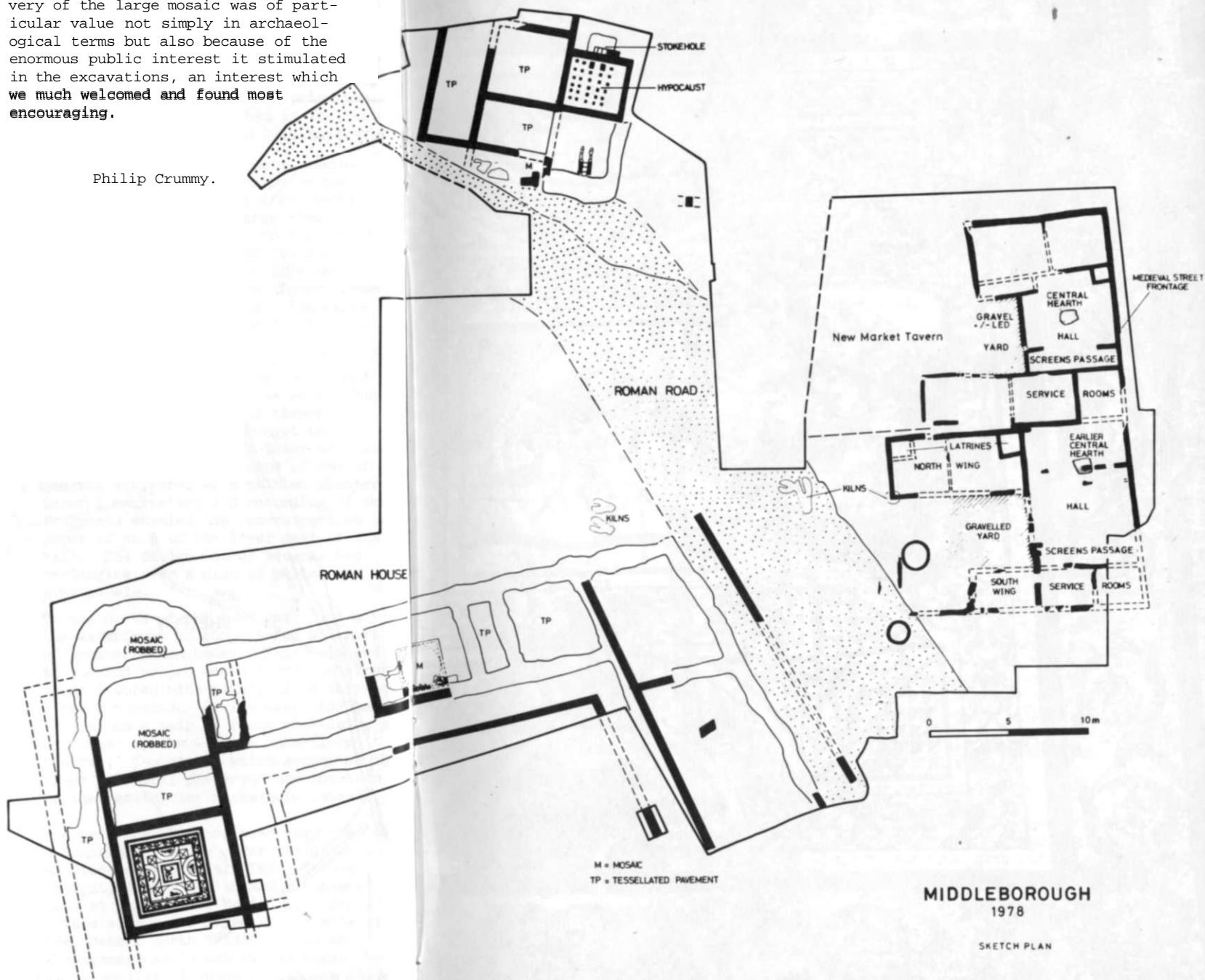
THE MEDIEVAL BUILDINGS

Two complete medieval properties were examined during the course of the excavation. The remains of the southern one of these and the surviving timber frame of the northern one (The New Market Tavern) were both described in CATALOGUE 3. The archaeological remains of the New Market Tavern were examined during August and September and these proved to be exceptionally well preserved for Colchester. Their excavation necessitated some re-interpretation of the timber frame. The house had consisted of i) an approximately square hall (or main living area) heated by a central hearth, ii) a north wing containing two ground floor rooms and one at first floor level, and iii) a south wing containing several small rooms separated from the hall by a screen or cross passage leading from the front door to the back yard. One of the southern rooms contained an oven for cooking and two contained hearths. Like the adjacent property, the house in its earliest form dates from the 13th or 14th century.

Although much more excavation could have been carried out at the Middleborough site, the results achieved are of considerable significance both

in the context of the layout of the Roman town and in the study of Colchester's medieval houses. The discovery of the large mosaic was of particular value not simply in archaeological terms but also because of the enormous public interest it stimulated in the excavations, an interest which we much welcomed and found most encouraging.

Philip Crummy.



MIDDLEBOROUGH
1978

SKETCH PLAN

The Middleborough Mosaics

During the excavations at Middleborough in the summer, three mosaics were found: one almost complete, one, smaller and badly damaged, which was featured in CATALOGUE 3, and a very small piece of a third. Only about two square feet of this last survived, enough to show that it was monochromatic with a simple geometric pattern; it came from the 2nd century house to the north of the Roman road.

The other two mosaics, both brightly coloured, came from the large town house on the western side of the site and date to the mid 2nd century. The smaller, from the north range of the house, had been severely damaged by the robbing of the foundations of the room and by later pits. All that survived were two corners, each depicting a different cantharus (a two-handled vessel), and sufficient of the inner decoration to indicate a central circle.

The larger mosaic was in a room in the west end of the house and is remarkably fine both in execution and overall design; a mosaic of this quality has not been found in Colchester since 1965. The central panel shows a pair of wrestling winged cupids watched by a bird; some of the cubes used to form the bird are as small as 3mm square. To each side of this panel is a semicircle containing a sea-beast, the undamaged ones show a sea-horse and a sea-goat, both stretched out at full gallop. Between these semicircles are triangular panels containing motifs of peltae, ivy leaves, ornate lotus flowers, and black and white squares and triangles. Each section of design is surrounded by a multi-coloured border of guilloche, or ribbon-decoration. Surrounding this central part is a border, framed by black lines, of flowing foliate scroll bearing in the roundels lotus flowers, ivy leaves and four birds.

Conservation and the mosaics

The work of the museum conservation laboratory covers a wide range of objects and materials. The museum collection must be maintained and preserved, and this includes not only the objects on display but also the reserve study collection, and conditions for storage and display continually monitored. New acquisitions usually need treatment and a large part of this work is specifically concerned with finds from excavations in the town, which come in all year round. These need to be cleaned so that they can be identified and drawn for publication, and must be conserved for future reference and display.



Jean Whiffing in the Conservation Laboratory restoring a Bronze Age burial urn.

When objects, particularly those made of metal, are excavated, they are immediately put at risk. While they are buried they deteriorate for a time, but then reach a point of stability with their surroundings. As soon as they are excavated they become exposed to new surroundings and will start on a new path of decay. So, care at the time of excavation is vital if objects are to be preserved. It is usually essential to keep an excavated artifact in a similar environment to that in which it was buried until it can be transferred to the laboratory. At its simplest, this means keeping wet objects wet, and dry ones dry. Sometimes it is possible to inhibit corrosion by creating a different but stabilising environment.

When received in the laboratory each artifact must be examined individually, and necessary treatment decided on according to material and condition. There cannot be an automatic routine, or treatment in mass. Some objects are in near perfect condition needing little treatment, while others may be little more than a stain on a piece of earth.

Both chemical and mechanical methods are used to clean and stabilise. Many of the tools were designed for other purposes, for example, dentist's equipment is particularly useful for cleaning, and X-ray photographs can reveal fragile inlays or decoration in heavily corroded pieces of metal work.

LIFTING THE MIDDLEBOROUGH MOSAICS

Lifting the Middleborough mosaics set some special problems, particularly since the site was so wet. First to be discovered were the two surviving corners of a floor. This was during a period of heavy rain, when the water level around the mosaics was quite high.

Basically the technique of lifting is that gauze is fixed to the surface of the tesserae with an adhesive to hold them in place, and the tesserae are then prized out of their setting mortar and lifted away attached to the gauze. To achieve this, the tesserae must be dry and clean and the spaces between them free of dirt so that the glue and gauze will adhere firmly. Long trowels, and a "rip" as used for removing roofing slates are used to free the tesserae, and where only a small area is involved it is possible to push a sheet of metal underneath as they are freed.

Once the piece of mosaic is lifted it can be turned over. The back is then cleaned, and a new supporting backing is applied. A fibreglass resin combination is often used as a backing since it is strong and light in weight. If the piece of mosaic is large, the fibreglass may be reinforced with a mesh of expanded aluminium.

Various adhesives can be used to fix the gauze to the surface of the mosaic but always bearing in mind that it must be removable when the new backing has been added. At Middleborough "Corvic", a co-polymer of polyvinyl chloride and polyvinyl acetate, was chosen. As it can only be used where the surface is dry, the two areas of mosaic were isolated by digging a trench around them. Luckily the weather improved and the mosaics dried out quite well. They were then lifted with little difficulty.

Meanwhile, the complete floor was discovered, and this presented a different problem. It was in an extremely wet area, and since it was close under a deep baulk, it could not be isolated. Instead, a sump was dug beside one corner and this was pumped out as water collected. The surface of the mosaic was dried using a gas fired blow heater whilst it was covered and protected by a tarpaulin supported on scaffolding.

The choice with a whole floor is either to cut it into sections and lift small pieces at a time, or to lift it in one piece by rolling it onto a large drum as the tesserae are cut free. The rolling method is generally preferable since, after backing, the mosaic will have no modern joins, but it sets engineering problems because of the heavy weights which must be rolled and lifted. A special difficulty at Middleborough was that the floor had sunk in the centre so that the sides were now at a much higher level. However, with advice and a promise of help from the Borough Engineer's Department, it was felt that rolling could have been used, with a final "roll" 5 metres wide, 2 metres in diameter and weighing about 2 tons.



The large mosaic at Middleborough being lifted. Museum and Trust staff are helped by Friends of the Trust.

However, before lifting started, it became probable that the mosaic would be displayed in a building having doors less than 2 metres wide, and it would have been necessary to cut the complete mosaic into sections to get it into the building. There was, therefore, no point in lifting it in one piece, and it was decided to lift it in a number of flat sections.

This decision was fortunate since, although the two fragments nearby had lifted so easily, one side of the complete floor was very firmly set into the bedding mortar, and some sections had to be lifted with the mortar still attached to avoid damage to the tesserae. This would have been out of the question with rolling. Finally, with a lot of hard work, and some frustrations, the mosaic was safely lifted.

The task of applying a new backing, and joining the sections, has now started. Where the mortar backing is still attached, this will have to be removed. The final mounting will depend on how the mosaic is to be displayed.

Jean Whiffing.

FRIENDS' ACTIVITIES

The Friends have held a meeting to which all members are invited once every two months during the second half of 1978-9.

In September over forty people attended a tour of the Castle vaults, where the foundations of the Roman Temple of Claudius can be seen, and of the Roman town walls and gates. Museum curator David Clarke conducted a visit to the vaults and the rest of the monuments were described by Friends' organiser, Mike Corbishley. After a two-hour trek, tea and cakes organised by treasurer Mrs Chadwick were very welcome.

Philip Crummy, Director of the Trust, led a caravan of nine carloads through the suburbs and outskirts of Colchester to inspect the visible remains of the pre-Roman defence system and burial mounds and the Roman theatre at Gosbecks in November. The earthworks, which are hardly visible in many places, assumed cumulative meaning and significance which Mr Crummy's commentary and answers to questions ably reinforced.

The last activity of 1978 was the "Festive Forum" held in East Hill House, when £139.00 was raised towards Friends' funds.

At the AGM on January 27 a draft constitution is to be submitted for approval by the Friends. It is hoped that Friends who wish to influence the organisation will attend business meetings during 1979 and help organise our future programme.

. Gill Corbishley.

BUTT ROAD

Work on the Roman cemetery at Butt Road resumed in September. The current excavations are concentrated on a 600 square metre area at the most northerly part of the site, where work to date has revealed a further 120 burials, bringing our total up to 570.

In February the remainder of the adjacent Roman temple will be examined and work on both the cemetery and the temple should be completed by the late spring. There will be a much fuller report about this season's excavations in the June edition of CATALOGUE.

Carl Crossan.

CO-OP SITE IN LONG WYRE STREET

In early December excavation started on the site of the Co-op's redevelopment in Long Wyre Street. The excavations on Lion Walk between 1971 and 1975, and observations made on other adjacent sites, suggest we may expect to find the junction of three of the town's Roman streets and buildings fronting on to them. One of these buildings may contain the remains of a Roman domestic water supply, part of which was uncovered in 1956 when the Co-op Chemist shop was built. Beneath these remains can be expected a section of the military rampart and ditch which defended the fort established here by the Roman army after the invasion in AD 43. We hope to find the remains of medieval houses within the first few days. Excavation has found that Roman material survives to within a foot of the present ground level along the Long Wyre Street frontage. The metalling of the Roman street which ran east-west and part of the walls of the house which lay to the south of the street have been located. Most of the remains of the medieval buildings which once fronted Long Wyre Street seem to have been removed when the recently-demolished buildings were constructed, but further back from the street some medieval material still survives and so far one medieval oven has been found. The excavation will continue until early February.

The Colchester and East Essex Co-operative Society has generously donated £1000 to the Trust. The money will be used mainly to employ more diggers to enable as much work as possible to be done in the short time available for the excavation.

Philip Crummy.



The timber framing of Poplarhall Farm showing after removal of modern cladding.

Until it was demolished in March this year, Poplarhall Farmhouse stood in isolation to the east of North Station Road between Colchester By-pass and North Station. Its exterior had been completely renovated earlier this century but removal of the modern cladding revealed the frame of a building erected about 300 years ago. During the course of demolition it was possible to record its structure and produce measured drawings of its timber frame.

The form of its plan, with its central chimney and entrance with a room to either side is typical of farmhouses and cottages built in the 17th century. Recent work on the structural details of timber-framed buildings in Essex has shown that the methods of jointing and construction found at Poplarhall Farm agree well with what is found in 17th century buildings elsewhere in the county. Although displaying no unusual features, Poplarhall Farm was nevertheless a good example of a small 17th century farmhouse, which in this case had been overtaken by suburban growth.

Nick Smith.

Bob Moyes, the Trust's Chief Draughtsman, designed CATALOGUE'S logo.



On two successive Saturdays in August and September, the public were invited to visit the Middleborough excavations and to see the large newly-discovered mosaic pavement. Adverts were placed in the entertainments page of the County Standard, posters were displayed in prominent places in the town and the mosaic was featured several times both on television and in the press. And the people came in such large numbers that the total reached 2700 visitors! Groups of up to forty were given guided tours of the site either by diggers or staff of the Trust or by members of the Friends. We were almost overwhelmed at times by the numbers that turned up and we were all struck by the considerable enthusiasm and interest shown by many of our visitors. Of course the Open Days could not have been the success they were without the great efforts of all concerned - many thanks to you all!
Philip Crummy.

Several members of the Trust contributed to this issue - Philip Crummy (Director), Carl Crossan & Nick Smith (Site Directors) and Nina Crummy (Research Assistant). Also contributing were Jean Whiffing (Assistant Keeper of Conservation at the Castle Museum) & Gill Corbishley (a founder member of the Friends).

The COLCHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST is composed of representatives of local and national bodies as well as a few co-opted individuals and employs a permanent staff of archaeologists to deal with the rescue sites in Colchester.

The **FRIENDS OF THE COLCHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST** has been formed to provide a means of keeping interested members of the public informed about the archaeological work going on in and around the historic town of Colchester. The Friends provide the funds to publish **CATALOGUE** - the Newsletter of the Colchester Archaeological Trust. Mike Corbishley organises the Friends and edits the newsletter.

Friends receive two newsletters a year, attend an annual programme of lectures on the previous year's progress, are given conducted tours of current sites and can take part in a regular programme of archaeological visits to sites and monuments in the area.

The annual subscription rates are as follows: Adults **£1.50**, Children & Students **75p**, Family Membership **£2.00** and Institutions or newsletters only **£1.00**.

You will find a membership form inside this newsletter. Subscriptions should be sent to Mrs G Chadwick, Treasurer, Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust, 171 Wivenhoe Rd., Alresford, Colchester C07 **8AQ**.

The aerial photo of the Middleborough site appears by kind permission of the Anglian Press Agency. All the other photos were taken by the Trust's photographer, Alison Colchester.

If you have some time to spare and would like to help the Trust on a voluntary basis contact them at East Hill House, 76 High Street, Colchester (Tel. 41051).

