

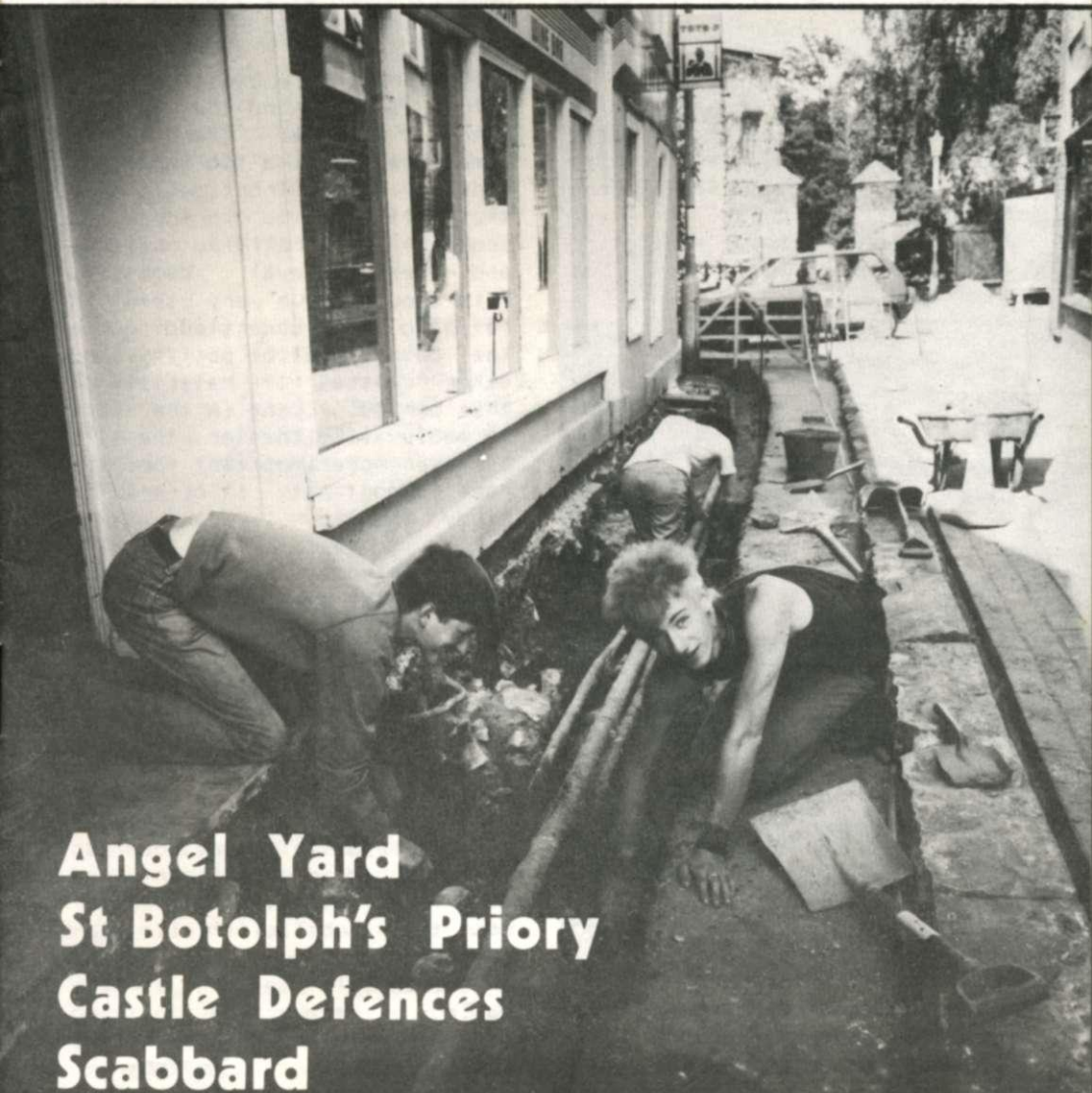


CATALOGUE

NEWS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS IN COLCHESTER

Number 19

Summer 1986



**Angel Yard
St Botolph's Priory
Castle Defences
Scabbard**

THE ANGEL YARD BEGINS....

After a period of uncertainty, the archaeological dig on the former Council carpark at the Angel Yard is finally underway. Our work will continue until the end of August when builders will take over the site to start constructing the new 'mini town hall'.

Since the site has such a central location in the town, it has probably seen extensive use since Roman times. Recent bore holes drilled in the site tend to confirm this, indicating about 3.5 m (11ft 5in) of



* The cobbled yard being prepared for photography.

archaeological deposits on the site. Luckily the new building does not have a deep basement, and its piled foundations will leave much of these deposits undisturbed. This makes it unnecessary to excavate the site to its full depth.

Unlike recent excavations at Culver Street and the Gilbert School, Angel Yard is immediately behind two important medieval street frontages and is thus likely to produce a sequence of stratified medieval and post-medieval deposits. This should prove very useful in refining our understanding of the development of pottery and other classes of material of this period. Lying in the heart of medieval Colchester, the site is even more important for the rare opportunity it offers to study the town in the Saxon period (especially the 9th and 10th centuries) for which our knowledge is still very limited.

Already the remains of two buildings with medieval foundations originally fronting the High Street have been uncovered. One (probably of 15th- or 16th-century date)

was originally part of what was recently a bicycle shop. The one room so far examined in detail contained some large ovens. Their number and their substantial size suggest that they were intended for a commercial use such as the baking of bread or the roasting of barley for brewing. The

identification under the microscope of charcoal and burnt plant remains in the deposits of ash in the ovens should throw some light on their function.

On the east side of the site was a second medieval building on the plot now occupied by Ernest Newsons. Most of the buried remains of earlier structures were destroyed during the construction of a cellar in the 17th century. Behind this house was an open yard with a series of roughly cobbled surfaces. One of these surfaces is particularly well preserved with a shallow 'V' profile gully or drain lined with large slabs running through the centre of the yard.

Work has just begun in the north-west corner of the site where there are wall foundations for medieval and later buildings fronting on to West Stockwell Street. As the excavation progresses, the layout of the buildings should become much clearer.

The site lies in an area of the Roman town which is comparatively little known and it is hoped that as a result of the excavations the nature of the buildings in this part of Roman Colchester will become apparent. Given its position in the Roman town centre, it is likely that this area was occupied by shops and houses although it is always possible that there might have been a public building here. Apart from finds in later pits, nothing from the Roman period has yet been uncovered. Given the depth restrictions of the excavation, it is possible that



* The excavation of a post-medieval oven.

the Roman levels will not be reached. (Equally they should not be greatly affected by the construction of the building.) The situation is further complicated by the site being on a hillside and thus it may have been terraced, perhaps several times over.

In July, new areas of this promising site will become available for excavation following the demolition of parts of the surrounding buildings. As usual, Friends and the public are also most welcome to visit the site. We hope to see you some time this summer.

AT THE END OF THE DAY...

The end of the day is a dangerous time on an archaeological site. This is when all things different or interesting turn up to demand immediate attention and hours of careful work. It was just such a time at Angel Yard when one of the diggers working in an inoffensive 18th-century pit put his foot in something: his boot had penetrated a hard crust of lime at the bottom of the pit and half disappeared into a cavity. With the aid of a torch, a tantalising set of ribs could be made out which we guessed were probably human. Being late in the day, all that could be done was to fill in the hole and leave the remains until the following day hoping that no uninvited visitors (especially dogs) would disturb it.

Work resumed the next morning after an evening pondering the meaning of north-south aligned burials encrusted in lime. Soon all the lime overlying the skeleton was uncovered and part was gently removed to expose a few more bones. Once the skull was revealed, it was patently obvious that we were dealing with a pig.

The question immediately arose: why should a pig be accorded such an elaborate burial? The possibility that the animal had been a beloved family pet, temperamentally unsuited for sausages, could be rapidly dismissed leaving a more chilling explanation...

site was once an abattoir for a local butcher so the fact that the pig was encased in lime rather than pastry implied that the animal must have been suffering from an unpleasant illness when it died. Pigs can succumb to a variety of infectious diseases. Some can affect humans - but even after such a long time?

The discovery was rapidly reported to the Council Environmental Department who referred the matter to a vet in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food. Meanwhile back at the site, the grave was quickly filled in and all the finds from the area were sealed in plastic bags and reburied. Work on that part of the site was halted.

A few days later, the man from the Ministry arrived to supervise the disposal of the remains. For this purpose a JCB digger was hired to remove the pig from the ground and the army called in to administer the last rites with a flame thrower. As the soldiers did their work, quite a crowd gathered to witness this rather ignominious cremation. An hour and three gallons of paraffin later, it was all over and all that had to be done was take soil samples to confirm that nothing nasty had survived.

The part of the site once occupied by the abattoir has now been filled in and abandoned although, in any case, the chances of there being any harmful bacteria in the area are exceedingly remote.

Geoff Carter

We knew that this part of the

SCABBARD

In early May, Anne-Maria Bojko, the conservator at the Colchester and Essex Museum, finished X-raying the iron objects from the Gilberd School site. The X-rays help to weed out the pieces which are not worth further time-consuming cleaning. What Anne-Maria saw on one of the developed plates made her reach for the telephone and dial my number.

Readers of **Catalogue** will remember that last summer I mentioned that the Gilberd School site had produced a range of military equipment from the early levels of the Roman fortress and veteran's colonia. What Anne-Maria's X-ray showed was that one of the large corrosion-encrusted pieces of iron was the front plate of an military dagger scabbard.

The Gilberd School scabbard is inlaid with brass and enamel. The field of decoration is divided into four zones, three rectangular with a triangular one at the base. In each of the three rectangular zones is a rosette with petals of brass and enamel, and in the triangular zone is an inverted chevron also of brass and enamel. Conservation of the scabbard will continue over the next few weeks, but it is already clear that though the enamel has largely disappeared, the brass is well preserved.

There were two types of scabbard



in use by the invading Roman army. One was made of iron, with a leather, wood, or horn liner, and was inlaid on the front. This type went out of use during the reign of Claudius, and is much less common in Britain than the second type, which was made of wood (Or horn) and leather and had inlaid iron plates fitted to the front. An example of the second type (which continued in use to the end of the 1st century) was found during the Balke Lane excavations (see **Colchester Archaeological Report 2**, fig 154), and we now have, from the Gilberd School, a very fine example of the earlier type.

Nina Crummy

ST BOTOLPH'S PRIORY

For many years there has been the hope that one day it would be possible to improve the presentation of St Botolph's Priory to the public by uncovering the eastern half of the buried remains of the church. Earlier this year, in the light of current proposals to redevelop the area on the east side of the priory, English Heritage asked the Trust to carry out a small exploratory excavation on the site of the buried part of the building. The aim was to find out more about the original layout and size of the church and whether the buried remains are well enough preserved to warrant exposing permanently for public display.

St Botolph's Priory was founded between 1093 and 1100 as the first house of Augustinian canons in England. The impressive and evocative ruins we see today, with striding arches, massive columns, and ornamented doorways, probably represented no more than half the original length of the church. The remains of the eastern arm of the building, including the choir and the transepts (which would have stood on either side of a central tower) have been completely buried for nearly 400 years.

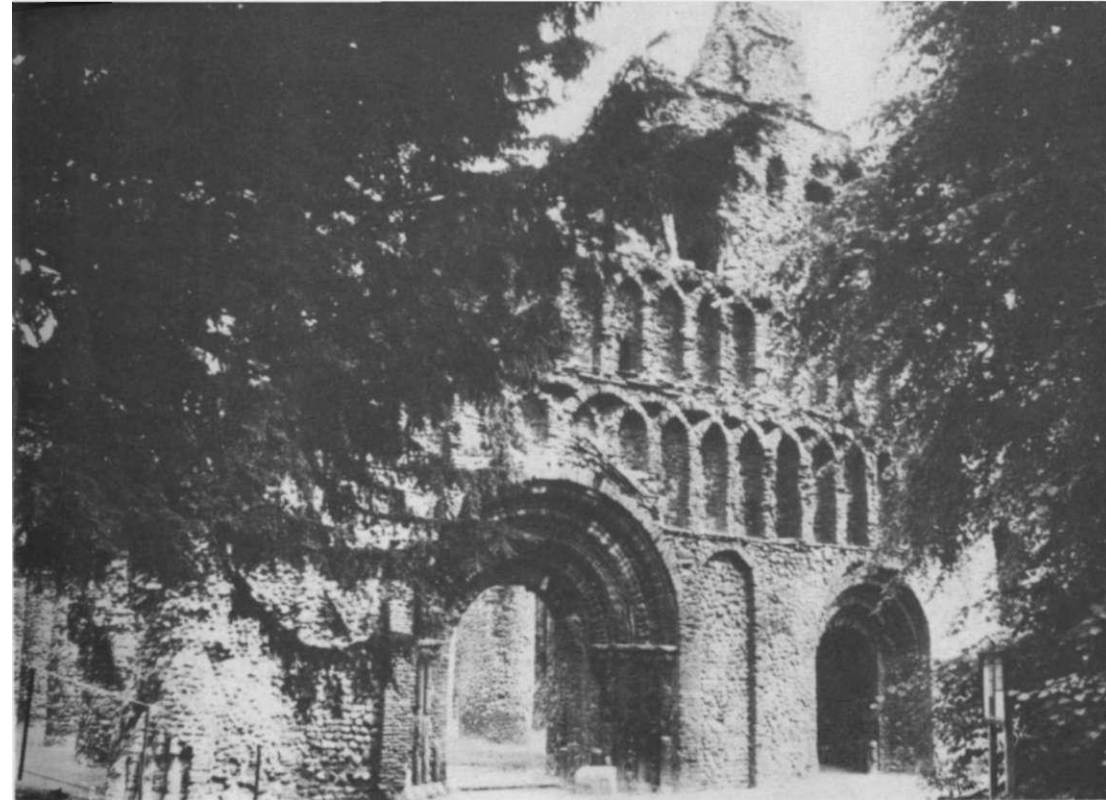
Accordingly, last January and February, several small trenches were dug in the rear garden of the parish hall adjacent to the north-east corner of the

standing ruins. Here parts of the previously unrecorded foundations of the northern transept were uncovered. The foundations, where these survived, were of substantial stone-and-mortar construction, 4 ft wide and 2 ft deep and, like the standing ruins of the priory, were made of stone and tile salvaged from the remains of Roman buildings.

Despite the foundations of the eastern wall having been completely destroyed in comparatively recent times, it is nevertheless still possible to estimate the size of the transept due to the symmetrical nature of church planning.

The north transept turns out to have been fairly small, measuring externally only about 19 x 32 ft. The superstructure and all traces of the floor had been robbed, and trial trenching further east showed that the north wall of the choir had been similarly destroyed.

By the early 16th century, the number of canons had shrunk from twelve to seven (plus the prior), and in 1536, the monastic community felt the heavy hand of the Dissolution commissioners under instruction from Henry VIII and his ministers. Most of the priory buildings were granted to the Lord Chancellor, although the church was retained for parochial use. However this entailed only the retention of the nave, a situation paralleled at Haltham Abbey.



* The west front of St Botolph's Priory.

A thick layer of demolition debris, largely consisting of crushed mortar over the area recently excavated, makes it clear that the transepts and choir of the church, and presumably the other priory buildings, were systematically demolished and robbed of building materials. This probably occurred early in the 17th century, as finds in this material included clay-pipe stems, manufactured only following the introduction of tobacco in the 1580s.

The shrunken church was short-lived, being badly damaged by cannon fire during the Siege of

Colchester in 1648, and has remained in ruins ever since. Meanwhile the buried remains of the transepts and choir, together with most of the other demolished

priory buildings, were covered by gardens, with engineering works encroaching on the site after World War II.

Our work earlier this year was in reality very modest: not only does much more of the church lie buried and unknown but the remains of the whole monastic complex no doubt survive and await exploration.

D Shimmin

CASTLE DEFENCES

You may remember how, when a few years ago, the Borough Council resurfaced Maidenburgh Street, we were able to uncover a large part of the outer wall of the Roman theatre which, much to everyone's surprise, turned out in places to lie only a few inches below the modern street surface. Well, a similar operation this summer in Museum Street has proved to be equally productive and surprising although this time what the remains represent is not so obvious.

As in Maidenburgh Street, Museum Street is being semi-pedestrianised'. As I write this, the existing road surface and the adjacent footpath are being removed to a depth of about a foot or so and replaced by a single surface of brick. The work is being done in stages to keep the street open to pedestrians.

Over the last few weeks, hasty digging after each phase of stripping has revealed what at first sight appeared to be a bewildering complex of very substantial walls and foundations only a short distance below the modern surface. Although odd bits of wall have been noted under the street before, nobody had any idea that the remains were so extensive-

Most bits of wall were parts of the defences of the castle. They formed what seemed to have been an irregularly-shaped passage which either led up to or had been part of the 'Dunbarr Gate', the rather obscure entrance into the southwest corner of the castle bailey.

But not all the foundations proved to have medieval; next to newsagents at the south end of the street was a massive Roman foundation. It appears to lie north-south and, much to our surprise, overlies the line of the east-west street known from excavations many years ago a short distance to the east.



* Part of the massive Roman wall which passes under the newsagents at the south end of Museum Street.

What all this means is not certain. The castle is built on the remains of the Temple of Claudius. The Roman building stood in a large precinct bounded on the south side by a large ornamental facade on the south side of which was the street already mentioned. To the south of the precinct, on the other side of the street was at least one public building. The discovery of the massive wall at the south end of Museum Street suggests that either the precinct and the public building to the south were linked in some way to form in effect a single

architectural unit or that something, like a massive monumental gateway straddled the east-west street at the point where it reached the precinct.

Despite the uncertainties of these discoveries, the recent frantic archaeological digging in Museum Street has certainly provided much stimulating new information about an already fascinating area of Roman and medieval Colchester. Work still continues; perhaps there will be more to tell in our next issue?

Phi 11p Crummy

* Part of the castle defences being uncovered in Museum Street.



TIME FOR A CHANGE?

This is the 19th issue of **Catalogue**. Our modest newsletter has lasted long enough to cover ten years of excavations in the town - happily rather longer than we originally expected. Is now the time for **change**?

With recent advances in micro-computers, the world of publication has changed a great deal since **Catalogue** first began. With the right equipment, it is now possible to prepare in the office the so-called 'camera-ready copy' needed for printed material such as books and magazines at a cost and at a speed which a few years ago would have been unthinkable. The Trust hopes to buy some equipment of this type in the near future to speed up the preparation of our technical reports (**Colchester Archaeological Reports**) whilst at the same time reduce the production costs. As a bonus we will have the ability to produce a new bigger and better publication to replace **Catalogue**. The question is, assuming the equipment can be purchased, should this change take place?

A few years ago it was the arrival of computerised 'word processing' which had a revolutionary impact on the efficiency of producing the written word. Now we are seeing the appearance of comparatively cheap electronic page-make systems and 'desktop publication' which in the long run is likely to have

almost as big an impact in this field. Today the micro makes it possible not only to create and manipulate text but also to arrange it on the page exactly as it would appear in the printed product. And with the aid of the low-cost laser and allied printers which are now appearing on the market, it is possible to produce more or less straight from the computer finished artwork ready for plate-making without the usual long-drawn-out process of conventional typesetting, proof reading, and preparation of the finished pages by 'cutting and pasting'.

At present the quality of laser output does not match that of conventional typesetting machines. For this reason, some page make up programs allow either output via a laser printer or, when needed for top quality jobs, directly on a typesetting machine. Either way preparation times and production costs are radically reduced.

For some years, we have benefitted from savings in production costs by having the typesetting prepared straight from our disks rather than having a typesetter re-key all the text on his machine from paper printouts obtained from our machine. This has had the effect of reducing costs and proof-reading time. But the output was always as rolls of typesetting which had to be manually cut up and laid down

alongside the illustrations to form the finished pages - a surprisingly time-consuming job. The last two editions of **In Search of Colchester's Past** and **Colchester Archaeological Reports 2** and **3** were all done this way - so was the last edition of **Catalogue** (set courtesy of Vineyard Press). It is only logical for the Trust to make the next step and make full advantage of electronic page make-up.

The plan is to replace **Catalogue** with a 24-page magazine to be published in December each year. The new publication would be slightly smaller than A4 (ie almost twice the size of **Catalogue**), have a full colour cover, and be printed on a good quality paper. Unless anybody can suggest anything better, it would be called the **The Colchester Archaeologist**. Being more commercial in aspirations, the name of the magazine must make clear to the would-be purchaser what the magazine is about. 'Catalogue' is unsuitable for this reason.

The magazine would be produced by the Trust, and the Friends would buy at cost price sufficient copies for distribution to the membership plus the usual complimentary copies for the local schools and elsewhere. We hope that it would be sold in local bookshops and the museum for around a pound but of course, the publication would be free to members of the Friends. The magazine will need to be self-financing so good external sales would be essential to keep it going. The summer edition of **Catalogue** would be replaced with a news-sheet (which could still

be called **Catalogue**).

You will notice elsewhere within these pages that **In Search of Colchester's Past** has been brought up to date and reprinted yet again. This is the third time this has happened; clearly there is a need for a more regular means of keeping the public in touch with archaeological developments in the town. Something like **The Colchester Archaeologist** seems the best way to do it.

Bearing in mind that the equipment needed to make this venture possible has not been bought (and conceivably might never be!), we invite your views on the proposed changes. No response will be taken to mean approval - so around Christmas time, you should receive your copy of the new magazine. If instead **Catalogue 20** falls on your doormat, then we will have received letters of disapproval for the scheme - or we will have been unable to raise the money to buy the equipment in the first place!

Philip Crummy

NOTES

DATES FOR YOUR DAIRY

On Saturday 26th July, the Friends will visit **Stansted** where the Essex County Council Archaeological Section is excavating a number of sites in advance of the development of London's third airport. Current sites will be visited and there

will be a small exhibition of finds to illustrate work carried out so far. After visiting the site, we move on to Stansted Mountfitchet Castle - a Norman motte and bailey castle which has been imaginatively reconstructed. Admission to the castle is £2.98 for adults and £1.59 for children.

The coach leaves the War Memorial (outside Colchester Castle) at 10.00 am and will cost £3.99 per person. Please bring a packed lunch which can be eaten at Stansted. Return by 5.00 pm.

The next trip is on Saturday 6th September when we will be visiting the important excavations at **Sutton Hoo**, site of the famous ship burial. If time permits, we will also visit Woodbridge Museum. There will no stop for lunch. The coach will leave the War Memorial at 1.00 pm and costs £3.00 per person. Return by 6.00 pm.

Friends should already have received booking slips for the Stansted and Sutton Hoo trips. If not, you can book by contacting Brenda May, 5 William Close, Wivenhoe, Colchester, Essex (telephone Wivenhoe 5655).

Howard Brooks

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Fortunately the second edition of **In Search of Colchester's Past** sold rather more quickly than we had imagined. This has made it possible to reprint the booklet again and this time include an account of last year's discoveries at Culver Street. Since its publication

in 1979, 6,000 copies of the booklet have been sold underlining that there is considerable public interest in the archaeology of the town.

For some time, it has been the hope of the Trust to publish a map of Colchester showing how the plan of its Roman predecessor related to the modern town. With the publication of **Discover Colchester's Past**, this ambition has now been realised. By using an excellent aerial photograph taken specially for the purpose by Roger Featherstone of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, a combined town guide and poster has been produced which shows the main places of historical and archaeological interest in town and gives sufficient information to allow the reader to pursue the subject in more detail should he or she wish.

The booklet and guide/poster cost £1.90 and £0.90 respectively and are available in the museum, local bookshops, and the Angel Yard site.

Philip Crummy

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Social Secretary: Howard Brooks
Representative on CAT: Gabrielle Chadwick
Catalogue editor: Philip Crummy

Cover: part of the castle defences being excavated in Museum Street.