Issue no 13, 2000

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the Colchester archaeologist

Ancient farmstead
at Abbotstone

Spotlight on the Castle Park

Shopping
in medieval Colchester

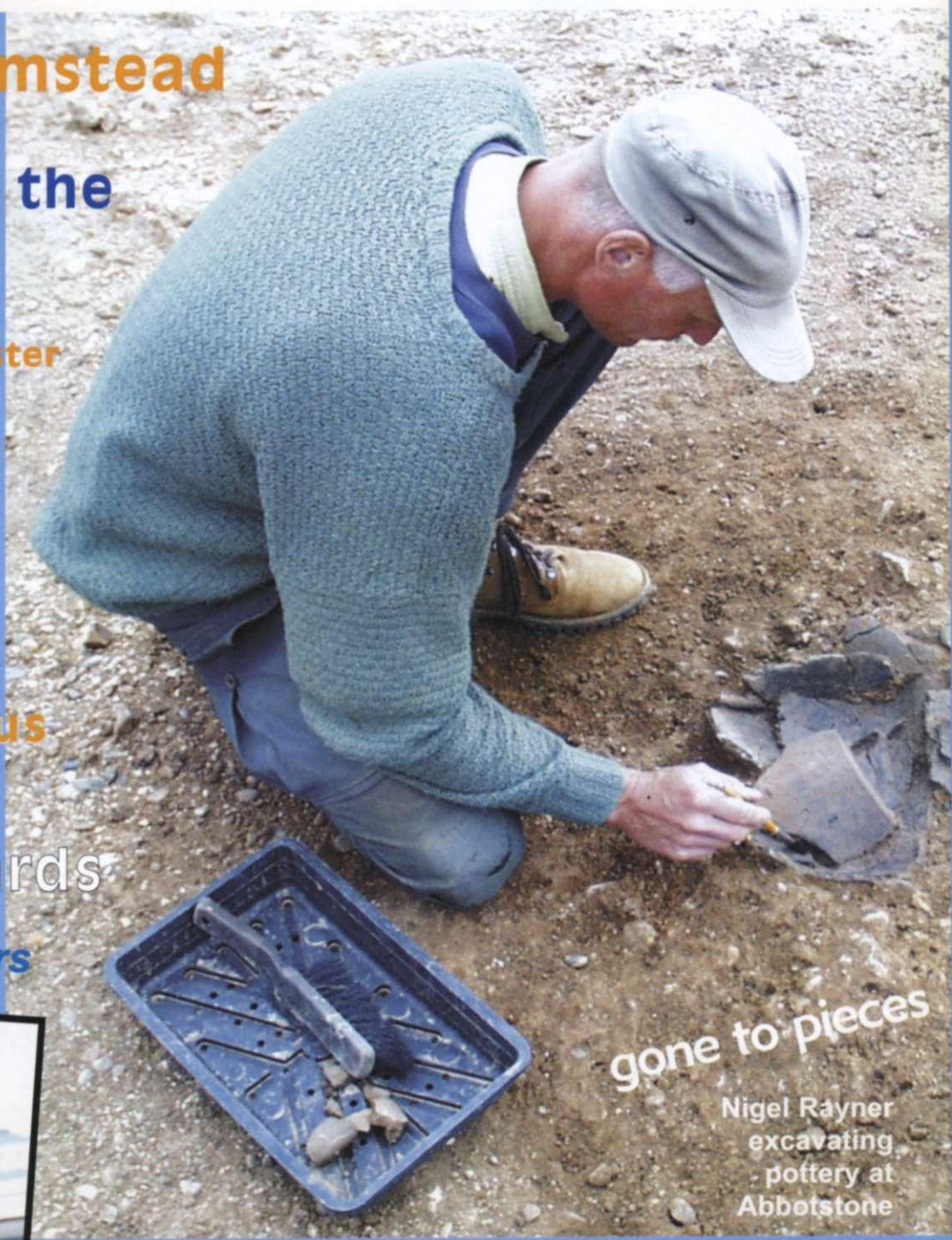
Middleborough
wood and leather

Virley church

plus
around the county
and
on the trail of transport

Circus Maximus
reproduction Roman glass *special offer*

Julian Richards
in conversation —
Meet the Ancestors



gone to pieces

Nigel Rayner excavating pottery at Abbotstone

— and news of the latest archaeology in and around Colchester

the Colchester archaeologist

Front cover: Nigel Rayner of the Trust excavating fragments of a large storage jar (1st century AD) on the Abbotstone site. Inset: Julian Richards on site at Spitalfields, London (photo, courtesy of the BBC).

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The Colchester Archaeological Trust is an IFA-registered full-time professional unit, providing developers and others with a full range of archaeological services, from consultancies and site evaluation to full excavation. We have over 25 years' experience of working in partnership with construction industry professionals and local government planning departments.

The Trust is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. The work is carried out by a team of fully trained and insured archaeologists assisted by paid excavators and volunteers.

The Trust also designs and publishes its own reports, books and magazines in-house.

With thanks to all the contributors to this issue of the magazine:

Dr Janet Cooper of **Victoria County History** of Essex
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James Fawn
Andrew Phillips
Julian Richards

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The Trust is grateful to the Colchester Borough Council for placing an advertisement on page 27 and its support of the magazine.

The Colchester Archaeological Trust in Lexden Road

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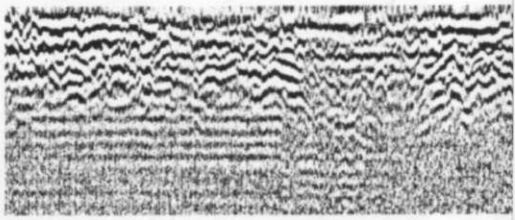
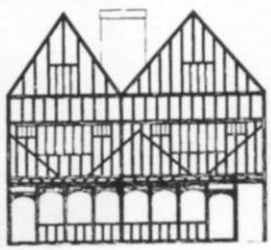
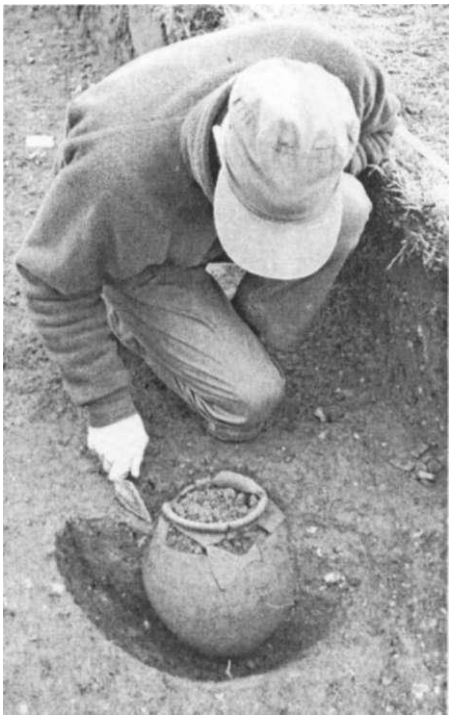




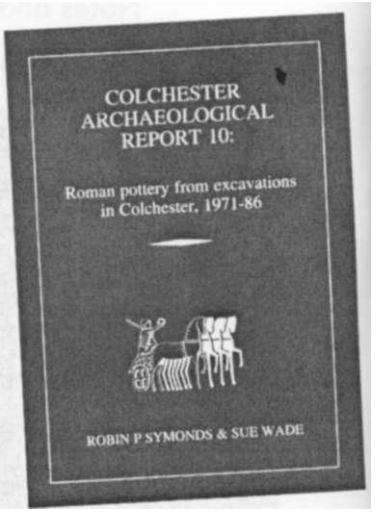
Notes and news



Roman burial under rugby pitch

A trial archaeological investigation on a football pitch on the Abbey Field led to the discovery of a Roman burial. The dead person's cremated remains had been placed inside a large pot (shown right) which was buried upright in the ground. Cremation pots were often sealed with a lid or a piece of broken tile, but in this case no lid of any kind was found. The cremation dates to the 2nd or 3rd century. It would have been one of many in a cemetery, so others can be expected on the site.

The rugby pitch was being investigated in advance of a scheme to replace it with an all-weather sports pitch. The investigation was funded by the Ministry of Defence.

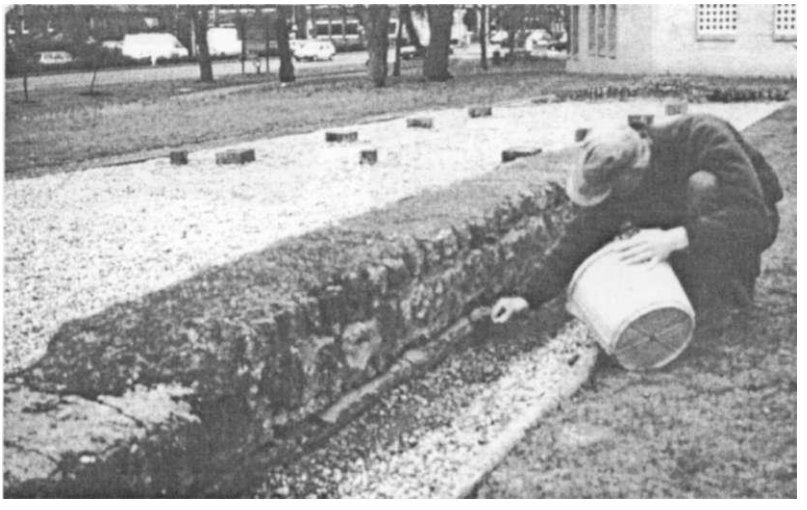


Roman pottery volume

The results of a major report on Roman pottery from Colchester is now available. It is one of the most detailed of its kind in Britain and will form the basis of pottery studies in Colchester for many years to come. The report was written by Robin Symonds and Sue Wade, and is the tenth volume in the series of *Colchester Archaeological Reports* published by the Trust. The book is aimed primarily at specialists in Roman pottery. *Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-86* costs £44 post free and is available from the Trust.

IFA registration

The Trust is now a registered organisation with IFA, the Institute of Field Archaeologists. Registration in this manner is a national system of accreditation for archaeological units like the Trust. It means that developers who may wish to employ the Trust can be assured that the Trust's methods of practice are of a professional standard.



Butt Road Roman church

The Friends of the Trust are to provide a bench next to the remains of the Roman church in Colchester. The gift is to mark the start of the new millennium.

The Roman church is also undergoing a facelift courtesy of a grant from the Essex County Council. The walls have been repaired and repointed and a new noticeboard is to be installed in the spring of 2000.

The picture (left) shows Nigel Rayner of the Trust repairing the Butt Road Roman church by the Maldon Road roundabout (the police station is behind him).

St Osyth

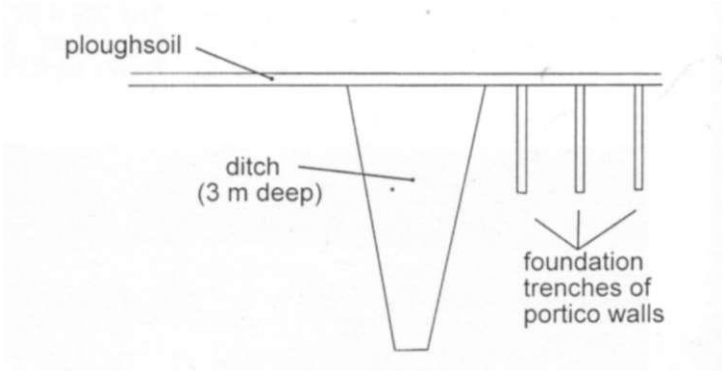
Building developments on archaeological sites or sites close to known archaeological remains often have to be preceded by archaeological investigations. The work is generally limited in scope and designed to show what effect the proposed development is likely to have on archaeological remains.

The Trust recently carried out an investigation of this kind in the centre of the historic village of St Osyth, on a site next to the church (above) and not far from the priory. The project was funded by J R Trodd Builders.

Investigations of this type can involve geophysical surveys, field walking on freshly ploughed land (where archaeological finds are collected on a systematic basis), and the archaeological excavation of samples of the site as happened at St Osyth. The results of the investigations are reported back to the local planning department, who then take the findings into account when determining the planning application.

Steve Benfield of the Trust doing post-excavation work on Roman pottery from Abbotstone.

The trial was done by Erica Utsi of Utsi Electronics (pictured left) and it was funded by the Association for Roman Archaeology to whom we are most grateful.

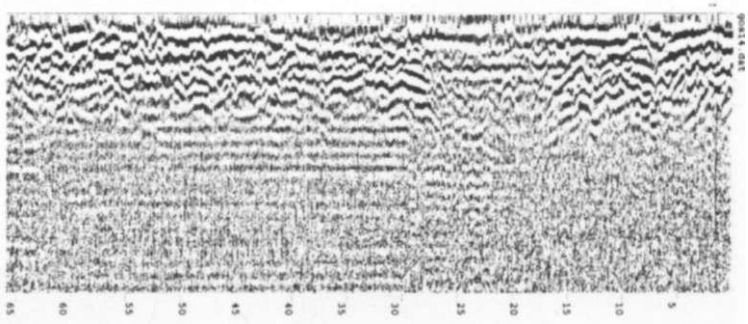


Ground radar at Gosbecks

Geophysical techniques are an improvement on digging in that they are non-destructive. At Gosbecks, this is an especially important consideration because of the importance of the site, which is why we are hoping to test the effectiveness of as many different techniques as possible.

The latest trials involve ground radar. The method has the advantage that it can penetrate much deeper than resistivity and magnetometer surveys and that it can produce sections through the ground showing how ground conditions vary with depth. Disadvantages include greater expense per area covered and results which are more tricky to interpret

The results have yet to be fully assessed, but they seem to be promising and appear to show features which have not been detected before.



A sample printout of a section from the ground radar survey with an interpretation of the main features visible in it above.

Ancient farmstead

A major excavation at Abbotstone on the outskirts of Colchester offers a rare opportunity to explore the relationships between the native Britons and the Roman settlers who founded Roman Colchester and confiscated substantial areas of farmland around the new town for themselves.

When the Roman army came to Colchester under the emperor Claudius, large tracts of land were confiscated, and many Britons were displaced from their farmlands. At first the confiscated land was used as pasture for the animals belonging to the military base which the army built at Colchester. But later, when the army moved out and the Roman town was established, the land was divided into plots and given to retired soldiers so that they would become farmers and stay in the area.

According to the Roman historian Tacitus, the settlement process got out of hand because some of the soldiers took to driving the Britons off their land so that they could have it for themselves. However, we can see from this comment that there were at least some Britons who were supposed to continue holding land, and therefore that around Colchester there must have been a mix of farms held by Romans and Britons.

It is clear in other places that many Britons prospered under the Romans. They were able to accumulate substantial wealth and build large villas for themselves and their families. Although the initial military opposition to the Romans seems to have centred to an extent on Colchester, there appear to have been some influential Britons in the settlement who sided with the Roman invaders and thus may have been rewarded for their loyalty by being allowed to retain their land.

For many years, we have been hoping for an opportunity to excavate a British farmstead close to Colchester, one that started in the Iron Age and continued in use in the Roman period. Such a dig would be important because it would provide a chance to find out if, at least in one instance, Britons had been allowed to continue to farm after AD 43 and if so, how they fared. A critical factor would be whether or not it proved possible to tell if the farm had been taken over by Romans or retained by the British. So too would the presence or absence of a Roman villa. A large Roman-style building on a British farm would show that Britons were able to succeed under the Roman regime whereas the absence of a villa on a Roman-occupied site would be equally telling for the opposite reason. The site of Abbotstone offered just such a chance.

Abbotstone

The site was discovered as a result of cropmarks on aerial photographs. Marks such as these show the positions of buried archaeological features and appear in crops shortly before harvest-time. Dating sites from cropmarks alone can be tricky, particularly if more than one period of occupation is represented. In the case of Abbotstone, the marks suggested a native farmstead but it was not possible to be sure. The most diagnostic feature is a large squarish area demarcated by a wide, presumably defensive ditch. This defended enclosure would have been the central feature of the farm. The farm owners would have lived in round-houses inside the enclosure where there would also have been various farm buildings and grazing land. Other elements making up the farm would have included fields and areas of pasture.

At the time of the Roman invasion, most Britons in south-eastern Britain seem to have been living in unenclosed round-houses, either in small farms or loosely clustered together to form settlements of which Camulodunum was an exceptionally large example. Farms with defended enclosures such as appears to have existed at Abbotstone were relatively uncommon, and seem to have been the homes of an elite minority of the pre-Roman population. They were probably the pre-Roman equivalent of the medieval manor house.

A much clearer example of such an enclosure exists at Gosbecks (see *the Colchester archaeologist* magazine, nos 8 and 9), about 1.5 miles to the west of Abbotstone. The central location and the exceptional size of the Gosbecks

enclosure suggest that this was the home of the succession of British kings who lived in Camulodunum throughout the hundred years or so leading up to the Roman invasion.

Until recently, the Abbotstone site was under the plough, but now cultivation has stopped and the site is part of Bellhouse pit, the Tarmac gravel quarry at Warren Lane.

Where to dig?

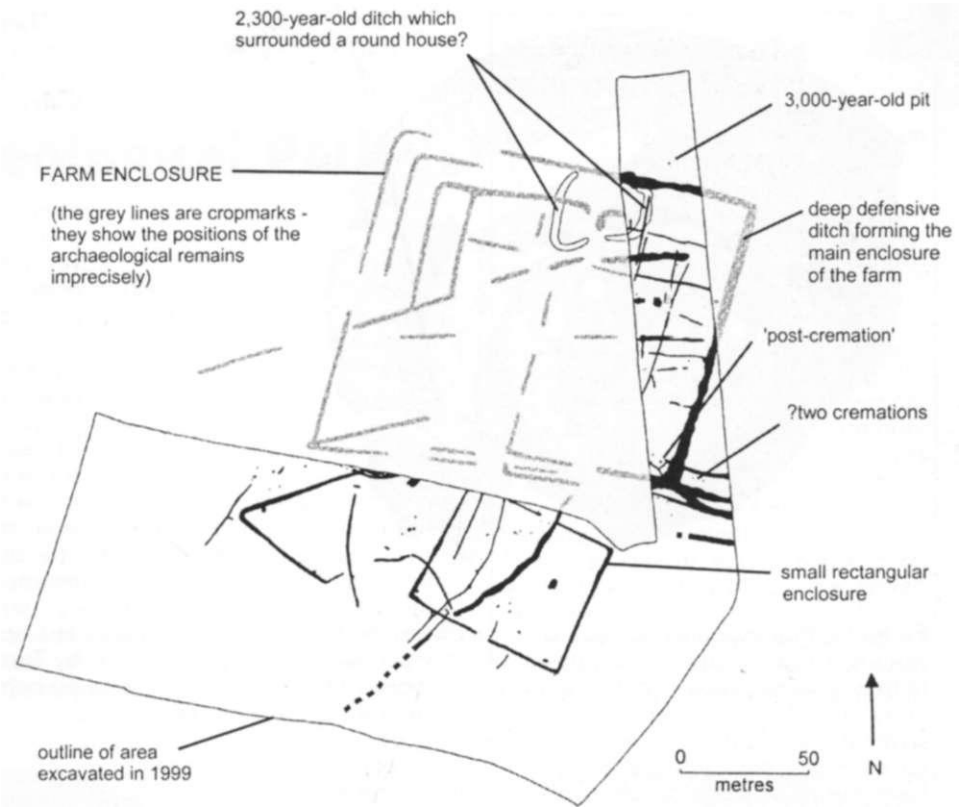
The archaeological investigation involved a series of preliminary steps designed to identify the area which we would need to excavate fully.

First of all, the cropmarks were carefully plotted on a large-scale map. The site was then systematically walked on a grid system shortly after ploughing, and all surface finds plotted to try and obtain some dating evidence for the marks and identify the densest areas of occupation. Next, part of the site was surveyed with a magnetometer ('geophys' in Time Team jargon), in an attempt to determine how faithfully the cropmarks reflected what was under the soil. (In the event, it turned out that the ground here was not very responsive to this kind of technique.) A field evaluation was then carried out. This is a standard archaeological technique designed to establish the nature and extent of archaeological remains on sites without going to the expense of large-scale excavations. The method involves sampling the site by digging a limited number of trenches evenly-spaced across it and partly excavating some of the archaeological remains found in them. The evaluation at Abbotstone was successful and showed that we were indeed dealing with a farmstead which originated in the late pre-Roman period and continued into Roman times. Thus by the end of all these steps, we had found out for certain what kirld of site it was and we were able to identify the most important part of the site which needed to be fully excavated.

The fifth and final stage of the investigation was the full excavation of the area identified during the evaluation. For various practical reasons, this work is to be in two stages. One-third has already been done, with the remaining two-thirds of the site being scheduled for the early summer of 2000.

The first results

The problem with heavily-cultivated sites like Abbotstone is that they have been badly damaged by ploughing and the remains of buildings survive very poorly if at all. Floors and shallow features such as hearths and even stake holes can be removed completely by the plough so that it is very difficult to find prehistoric houses. Only deep features such as ditches and pits survive, and generally these provide the only clues about the positions of vanished buildings.



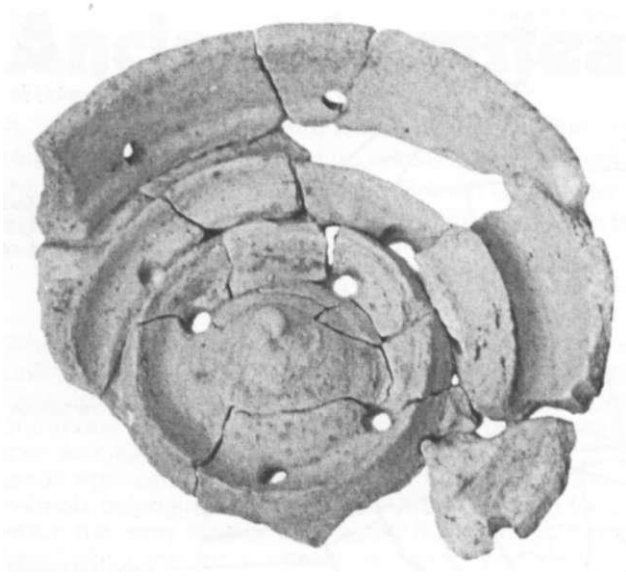
Sites frequently produce the remains of more than one period of occupation, and Abbotstone is no different. The earliest indications of occupation recognised so far take the form of a single pit containing a small amount of pottery. The sherds date to the late Bronze Age and show that the pit is about 3,000 years old. The pit was probably dug by somebody living in a nearby round-house, but no traces of any related buildings have as yet been identified.

Also apparently earlier than the farmstead is a deep ditch which in plan is rather like a slightly squared-off circle with two opposing gaps. The pottery in its fill shows the ditch to belong to the Middle Iron Age, making it about 2,300 years old. The ditch probably enclosed a round-house, with one of the gaps corresponding to the position of the door.

It is difficult to disentangle the ditches and pits which survive from the farmstead. The main element was the large rectangular enclosure formed by a large defensive ditch. The interior of the enclosure seems to have been divided in some way by a series of small linear ditches aligned with the sides of the enclosure. The purpose of these ditches may become clear when the rest of the enclosure is dug.

Opposite page: photograph of the narrow strip excavated north to south across the farm enclosure (plan above), viewed from the east.

The strange 'post-cremation' where the cremated remains were placed under an upright post.



Evidence that Abbotstone was a farm comes from various kinds of finds. Fragments of at least two pottery cheese-presses (one shown above) points to dairy farming, and fragments of quernstones scattered across the site indicate the grinding of corn for flour. Further evidence for arable farming comes from the microscopic analysis of soil samples taken from key deposits. The investigation was carried out by environmental archaeologist Val Fryer who found waste materials from the processing of wheat (various types), oats, and barley or rye.

Excavator John Mabbitt uncovering on upright pot containing a cremation (shown right).

There were two, possibly three, burials. One was a rare type of burial where the cremated bones were placed under a large upright post in a deep pit. It is hard to imagine what the post was for. Did the post simply mark the site of the burial, or was it the more important feature with the cremated remains being some kind of offering or symbolic deposit?

To the south of the large enclosure, there are various ditches, many of which are as yet undated. Some belong to the farmstead like the one forming a small rectangular enclosure, whereas others may pre- or post-date the farm.

The next and final phase of excavation will cover the central core of the complex, and should prove critical. Will we find the remains of a Roman-style building there? Will we make any sense of the internal divisions? How early was the farmstead? Is the presence of the ?Middle Iron Age ditch a coincidence or was the farmstead already at least 300 years old when the Romans invaded Britain in AD 43?

The archaeological excavations are being funded by Tarmac pic so that the remains can be recorded before gravel- and sand-extraction begins.

Colin Bellows

Sadly Colin Bellows died on Boxing Day 1999, and with his passing we have lost one of our most ardent and long-standing supporters.

Colin was associated with the Trust for over twenty years. He was a founder member of the Friends of the Trust in 1977, and he became chairman four years later at a time when the Trust was involved with the major dig at Culver Street. He served on the Trust's management committee, first as the chairman of the Friends and later in a personal capacity. His family, too, shared his interest in archaeology. His son Ian worked as an excavator for the Trust in the 1970s and his daughter-in-law, Stephanie Pinter-Bellows, is an osteoarchaeologist.

Colin travelled widely and was inspired by many impressive archaeological sites abroad. Yet his enthusiasm for Colchester never waned, despite the comparative absence of above-ground remains. Colin always believed passionately that archaeology and history belonged to everybody, and that Colchester should make its heritage accessible to as many people as possible. It was his commitment to popular archaeology that made Colin such a fitting chairman for the Friends, and one of many reasons why he will be greatly missed.

Flower power

in Gosbecks Archaeological Park

In 1999, for the fifth summer running, excavations have been carried out by the Trust in Gosbecks Archaeological Park. The main idea of the project is to explore the remains of the major features in the park so that they can be marked out on the ground for visitors to see. This summer the plan was to locate and trace as far as possible the boundaries of the enclosures for the temple and the theatre.

The boundary of the temple enclosure was hard to find. It has never showed as a cropmark, and we were unable to detect it by geophysical survey. However, it was found in 1948 and traced by trenching for about 300 metres. The boundary took the form of a wall with interesting shallow rectangular indentations along its length. These look to have been ornamental and may have been alcoves for benches or statues. A large-scale plan of the discoveries was made at the time, but now it is difficult to use because, being in a large featureless field, there are almost no useful points of reference. This summer the wall was eventually relocated in one spot and recorded in a such way that it can be found easily in the future.

In contrast, the enclosure boundary for the theatre was easily located, thanks to a particular plant. This part of the park is laid out as a wildflower meadow, and one of the plants turned out to be very sensitive to buried ditches. One year, shortly after the meadow was mown, we noticed that the bird's foot trefoil started to grow in a very distinctive line which corresponded to where (from the aerial photographs) the theatre boundary should be. The patches were quickly measured and planned before they vanished, and this year, after being checked by a geophysical survey, the record was used to place trenches along the line of the boundary.

This remarkable plant also acts in a similar way along the line of the foundations around the temple, although its behaviour seems to depend on things like the time of year, the weather, and the mowing regime in the park. Archaeologists are keen to find new and better ways of exploring under ground without having to dig — the behaviour of the bird's foot trefoil at Gosbecks shows how even humble plants can help.

The excavations were funded by the Colchester Borough Council through the Museum Service.

Many thanks to the volunteers...

The digging in the park has been done almost entirely by a large band of volunteers. Over the last five years, about 100 people have been involved and helped in every aspect of excavation, from digging and site recording to geophysical survey and processing finds after the fieldwork finished.

The volunteers come from different backgrounds and want to dig for different reasons. There are school leavers considering studying archaeology at university, and students wanting field experience for their coursework. Some volunteers are in full-time employment and come on their days off or when they are on leave. Quite a few others are retired or unemployed.

The excavations in the park would not have been possible without them and the Trust is much indebted to them all.

No excavations are planned at Gosbecks for the year 2000. However, things may change, so if you are interested in volunteering, either write to the Trust giving your details or watch the Trust's web-site (colchester-arch-trust.co.uk) for the latest news.

Mr Joslin's pride and joy

by James Fawn

George Joslin Jnr, notable citizen and member of a leading Colchester family, was a keen amateur archaeologist of the 19th century. He assembled an extraordinarily large collection of Roman objects from the Lexden area which he kept in a private museum in his house in Beveriey Road. His collection was eventually sold to Colchester Museum.

When looking at the collection of the Colchester Museum, one cannot help noticing the large number of artefacts which bear the label 'Joslin'. Some readers will recall the ironmonger's shop of that name in the High Street. Opened by George Joslin in 1817, it stood on the corner of Maidenburgh Street until the business closed in 1959 when it was demolished and new premises were built on the site (occupied by Argos in recent times). The family were part-lessees of Colchester gasworks. One of George's sons, George Joslin Jnr, born in 1821, was manager of the gasworks from 1847 to 1865 and was still a director of the company in 1890. It was he who created what was probably the largest private collection of antiquities in the country during the latter half of the 19th century.

He was well placed to do so. In the mid-1860s he moved away from the smell of gas at the Hythe to the fresher air of Beverley Road, in an area south of Lexden Road which had been part of Roman Colchester's west cemetery, nearly two millennia previously. Round about, houses were springing up rapidly, and the builders must have discovered hundreds of Roman burials, many with their accompanying grave goods. One of the burials in the Joslin Collection is the so-called 'Child's Grave', which Joslin found in his own garden.

George Joslin Jnr. had a house built with an extension to act as a museum for the artefacts which he either bought from the builders' workmen or retrieved from those excavations which he personally instigated and supervised. When the Joslin collection was eventually catalogued by John Price in 1888, it contained 1,241 entries, many of them multiple finds of exceptional merit. Whether the housemaid had to dust them all is not recorded.

The catalogue places many of the artefacts into 126 groups in sequence, 'arranged and classified in the order in which they were discovered'. This helps to place some of the finds in a context, but in general Joslin did not record the circumstances of their discovery. We may frown on this failure, but he was only following the typical practice of his contemporaries. Joslin was not the first to excavate in and collect artefacts from the Roman cemetery, and many other exhibits in Colchester Museum originated from this area, notably those from West Lodge unearthed in the 1840s and 1850s. However, much material must have been smashed, discarded or lost; also a great deal was sent to other museums! What George collected was saved for Colchester.

George Joslin Jnr. (© Colchester Museum).

With the lack of recording, the scope and character of his activities is not easy to judge. According to Price he possessed 'a deep interest in his pursuit, aided by the frequent supervision of his excavations and the expenditure of a large amount of time and money'. We can obviously accept his deep interest and appreciate that he must have disbursed considerable sums of money in rewards and payments; assessment of his supervision must rest on the two reports of his excavations that were published.

At Beverley Road in 1868 Joslin owned some land, about 100 metres north of his home. There he discovered the famous Roman tombstone of the centurion Facilis, now on display in Colchester Museum. In the following year, he joined the Essex Archaeological Society and thus entered the mainstream of archaeology in the county. As a new member, he may not have felt confident enough to report his finds personally, for he entrusted the Facilis publication in the society's *Transactions* to the Rev. Barton Lodge. This was a pity because, although some details of the discovery are given and the location is entered on O.S. maps, he might have enlarged on certain features of the site. Interestingly, the report refers to photographs taken by Joslin himself. He almost certainly took the one which adorns the report.

George Jnr. 's house in Beverley Road in 1999 (by kind permission of the owner).

The second report, which was about his 1877 excavation of Roman pottery kilns to the north of Lexden Road, also appeared in the *Transactions* and this he wrote himself with illustrations by Josiah Parish. He did not give the location (although it is known), but he included measurements, plans and sections in his description. This creditable effort by the standards of the day suggests that he received beneficial advice and assistance from his membership of the society.

Joslin certainly repaid the society. He was elected to its council in 1872 and assiduously attended its meetings until his death in April 1898. Having a museum of his own, he was eminently suitable for the society's museum subcommittee from 1876 and he later became one of the society's representatives on the Borough's museum and muniment committee. He was also a co-auditor of the Society's accounts.

Apparently Joslin always made his museum accessible to those who wished to see it. When the Royal Archaeological Institute met at Colchester in 1876, the members visited it and afterwards were enthusiastic enough to declare that they 'wanted men like Mr Geo. Joslin who had built a private collection of Roman remains surpassed by none in Europe'.

In 1883 the Essex Society considered creating a fund for its purchase, for it seemed 'to have outgrown the limits that Mr Joslin's residence can afford' (perhaps Mrs Joslin said "It will have to go"). In the event, the fund was not set up until 1893. In October, the subscribers — who included well-known names in British archaeology — purchased Joslin's collection, including Facilis, for a bargain price of £1,300 plus four further instalments of £50, and presented it to the Borough. Originally displayed in an area specially cleared for it, much of the Joslin Collection is now in the museum's archive collection and not on display. In entirety, it remains an important assemblage from a particular area of the town, linking antiquity and Victorian Colchester.

The two reports on Joslin's excavations are available in Colchester Library.

When you next go to Colchester Museum, look out for items from Joslin's collection — in particular, the tombstone of Facilis and artefacts from the 'Child's Grave'.

Above, *the well-known tombstone of the Roman centurion Marcus Favonius Facilis of the XX Legion.*

Extraordinary 'Child's Grave'

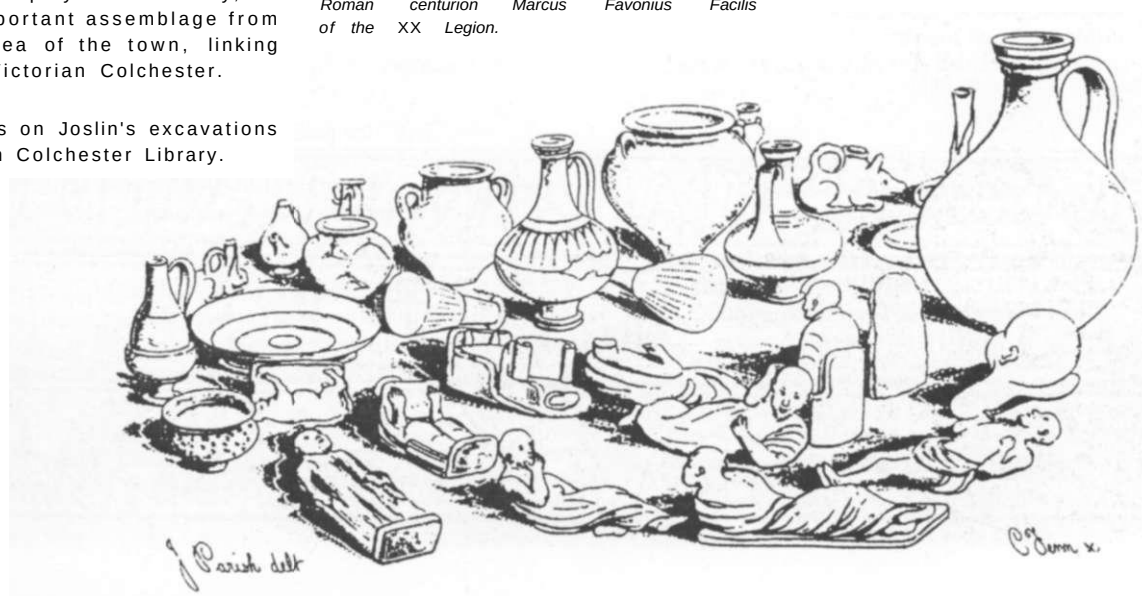
One of the most important grave groups in George Joslin's collection was the so-called 'Child's Grave' which he helped to dig up in July 1866. Joslin had asked a labourer to dig an ashpit in his back garden, but felt the man needed instruction on how to do it. Joslin took the spade himself and was surprised to uncover the first of the grave goods. This made them proceed with great caution.

The group included 13 pipe-clay figurines, 12 pottery vessels, 10 unguent vessels for perfumed oils and ointments, a hoard of 34 coins, and about 600 bone fragments from a burnt funerary couch. The figurines include comic old men in various poses — reading, standing, seated, and reclining. It is not certain what they represent. The men are generally thought to depict learned philosophers or teachers, although mimes or reciters at a banquet is another possibility. The unguent flasks are in the shapes of various animals such as monkeys and lions. Most of the items were imported from central Gaul.

It is not certain that the grave was really that of a child. A critical item is a small spouted vessel bearing a strong resemblance to the feeding-cups used to wean children today, but some archaeologists prefer to see this item as a kind of lamp filler.

The group is strongly Roman in character (as opposed to native British). It dates to the first decade or so after the foundation of the Roman town, so that the group may prove to have been buried with the child of a newly-settled retired Roman soldier.

Below, artefacts from the 'Child's Grave' drawn by Josiah Parish.



The 'Circus Maximus' beaker

The complete glass beaker from the Roman West Cemetery at Lexden in Colchester, found in 1870, is a fine example showing monuments in the Circus Maximus — a new reproduction beaker has been produced

by Mark Taylor and David Hill

Mark Taylor and David Hill were featured on television in 1999, on the Time Team's September Bank Holiday programme, and will also be featured on television in 2000 — for example, early in the year on an episode of *Meet the Ancestors* with Julian Richards; their glassware appears in the new film *Gladiator*.

For more information on the Roman West Cemetery of Lexden, see *the Colchester archaeologist* no 12.

Pictures below: drawing of the frieze of the beaker; on the opposite page, top, the original glass beaker; and below, the new reproduction beaker by Mark Taylor and David Hill.

Most Roman race tracks were based upon the original design (although not the actual size) of the famous Circus Maximus in Rome itself.

A virtually intact cylindrical glass beaker was found in the West Cemetery in Colchester in 1870 and presented to the British Museum, where it is now displayed. This dates from the second half of the 1st century AD, and shows a wealth of details of this celebrated *spatium,* as well as naming four of the best-known charioteers of the day.

On the lowest of the three friezes are shown the four competitors. They are *quadrigae* (four-horse chariots), and represent the four *factiones,* the privately owned and funded racing 'houses' or teams who took part in each race: Albata, Prasina, Veneta and Russata (the Whites, Greens, Blues and Reds), each of whose riders and horses would have worn the colours of their *factio,* exactly as modern jockeys ride in the silks of a particular owner. Horses were bought in from stud farms around the Empire, especially Spain, and the races were dangerous events, although lucrative for the winners. The chariots run from left to right, reflecting the spectator's view of a race in the *arena* from the tiered seats of the Circus.

The central third of the beaker shows 14 of the monuments which adorned the *spina,* the central barrier, and which spectators would have seen above the heads of the drivers, just as it is depicted here. As well as statues (of Pollentia, goddess of might; the Roman Imperial lion; and the emperor himself), the *spina* also contained small shrines and altars, two pavilions, and a throne to seat the winner of individual races, not unlike the podium used for victorious athletes in modern track events. Most importantly, the centre of this structure held the great red granite obelisk of Rameses II, which Caesar Augustus had brought from Heliopolis (and which still survives, re-erected in the Piazza del Popolo in Rome), and two structures which acted as lap-counters — the *septem ova* were seven gigantic wooden eggs, one of which was inverted at the end of each lap, and seven *delphini,* large gilded bronze dolphins, which will be familiar to fans of the film *Ben Hur!*

The two vertical seams of the mould halves were cleverly disguised by incorporating the *metae* (the trio of vast conical stone columns at each end of the *spina,* around which the competitors turned) at either side of the design.

The upper frieze of the vessel gives the racing charioteers' names: three of them (Olympe, Hierax and Antiloce) have the suffix 'VA', which is probably short for 'vade' ('go') or possibly 'vale' ('farewell'), but Cresces' name is followed by 'AV, short for *'awe'* ('hail'), suggesting that he is the winner of this race.

For more information on Roman glass circus beakers see 'Decorated Mould-blown Glass Tablewares in the First Century AD' by Jennifer Price in ***Roman Glass, Two Centuries of Art and Invention*** *edited by M Newby and K Painter (1991).*

A chapter devoted to Roman horse racing can be found in ***Daily Life in Ancient Rome*** *by Jerome Carcopino, Penguin Books.*

The Circus Maximus

As its name implies, the Circus Maximus was the largest, as well as the oldest, of Rome's three race tracks.

The course originally took advantage of a natural valley, with two wooden posts around which the races were run. Successive emperors improved and embellished the idea, building wooden seating which was later replaced by stone. These rebuildings culminated in the huge marble structure built by Nero after the fire of 64 AD.

This was by far the largest building in Rome, having the great race track at its heart. The exterior closely resembled the concept of a modern 'mall', with its arcades of sheltered shops, restaurants and pubs, and, unsurprisingly, 'book-makers'.

In 1999, a commercial scheme to build a smaller version of the Circus Maximus near Colchester was refused planning consent.

Special offer

for readers of *the Colchester archaeologist*

'Circus Maximus' beaker

Following the success of the previous offers on chariot-'race and gladiator beakers, readers of *the Colchester archaeologist* can now purchase a new chariot-race beaker at a similar reduced price. This reproduction is an accurate, hand-made copy based directly on the complete beaker from Lexden, and now on display in the British Museum.

To support the Colchester Archaeological Trust, Mark Taylor and David Hill, who make a magnificent range of reproduction Roman glass vessels, have again made a generous offer to donate £2 to the Trust for every beaker purchased in this special offer.

These superb lightweight beakers are made entirely by hand and blown into three-piece moulds. The beakers are 8 cm high and are made in a blue green glass. They are beautiful to look at as well as being tactile, informative and fascinating ornaments.

at **£12** each
(including post & packing)

— usual price £17 each
(including p & p)

Please make all cheques payable to
Colchester Archaeological Trust Ltd:
send your order, with cheque for £12 per item required, to —

Mark Taylor and David Hill: Glassmakers,
Unit 11, Project Workshops, Lains Farm,
Quariey, Andover, Hampshire SP11 8PX

Orders will be despatched direct from the workshop as soon as they are received, and will be sent individually boxed. (Catalogue sent on request. Beakers previously on offer are still available at £12 each incl p & p, or all three (or any three) for the special price of £33 incl p & p.)

Divers search for Roman ship

Clues in a Colchester auction room point to the location of a Roman ship which sank on its way to Colchester with a cargo of Gaulish pottery

Late Iron Age coin from Colchester, found in the River Colne in 1980. It shows a ship of Gallic type. Similar ships are likely to have used the Roman port at Colchester.

Some years ago, a very interesting barnacle-encrusted Roman dish came up for auction in Colchester. It was interesting because it looked as if it had been part of the cargo of a sunken Roman trading ship. The dish was complete and its red colour and distinctive shape showed that it had been made in the 1st or 2nd century AD in Gaul, from where it was presumably being imported into Britain along with many hundreds of similar vessels when the ship went down.

The auctioneer said the dish had been trawled up by a Brightlingsea fisherman at least sixty years beforehand, and that it was being put up for auction by the fisherman's daughter. We desperately wanted to find out as much as possible about where, how and when the find had been made. Unfortunately, we had little luck. First of all, we (Paul Sealey and I) were outbid during the auction and we failed to buy the find for Colchester Museum. This was a great pity because we needed to get it seen by an expert who specialises in this type of pottery. He would have been able to date the vessel closely and tell us the name of the potter who made it and presumably many of the other vessels in the ill-fated shipment. Worse still, various efforts to contact the fisherman's daughter failed. However, there was one clue: a loose hand-written scrap of paper in the bowl stating where it had been found. We don't know who wrote the note and how reliable it was, but presumably (hopefully) it was the fisherman's daughter.

With some excitement, I looked up various maps to try and find the place mentioned in the note, but could see nothing like it. Did it really exist or did the writer of the note get the name wrong? I asked various acquaintances who sailed for pleasure if they had heard of this place, and I asked various port authorities the same question. I drew a blank all round and put the problem .to the back of my mind, thinking that one day I would have to try and research the problem properly.

Then, one day, I found myself sitting next to Mark Girdlestone at a lunch. We got talking and, as it turns out, he is a professional diver who was working in the North Sea. I told him about the dish but, like everybody else I had spoken to about it, he had not heard of the find spot. However, when Mark was next at his dentist's, he repeated the story to him. I don't know how people can talk to dentists when visiting them professionally, but fortunately Mark managed it. His dentist told him that he happened to have some Victorian Admiralty charts at home which had belonged to his father and that he would consult them later. And lo and behold, the mystery was solved. The find spot mentioned on the letter really does exist (but with a different name),

and we now feel fairly confident that we know where the dish was found.

But now the hard bit really starts. Did the dish really come from a sunken ship? And if so, what are the chances of finding it? Diving conditions off the coast are extremely difficult and hazardous. Visibility is down to 0-6 inches near the surface, otherwise it is 'black water' where divers can only work by touch alone. Strong currents mean that there are only four short periods of 30-45 minutes a day for diving when the water is said to be 'slack'. This is when the tide is turning which it does approximately four times a day, and the currents are consequently at their lowest. It is safe to dive in currents of up to about 1.5 knots, but the current at the find spot can reach 4 knots which is dangerously strong and can blow divers away.

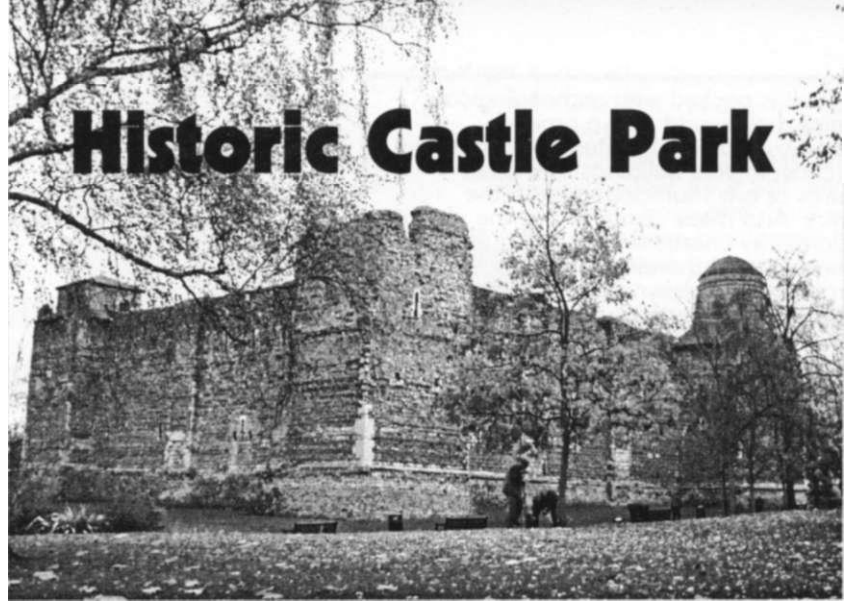
Realistically, prospects of finding the remains of a wrecked Roman ship in these very difficult circumstances are not great. But Mark and his friend and business partner Sean O'Dell (of Sharemark) have already started. Finds so far include lots of oyster shells and flints but nothing Roman.

Clearly finding a wreck by feel alone will take a long time. Although we have a find spot, there is an awful lot of sea bed to feel by hand. The plan is to sweep the area systematically with a magnetometer in the hope of detecting any iron nails which might have been in the hull of a ship. And cores will also be taken through the uppermost deposits of the seabed to help determine the level at which any wrecked Roman ships may lie.

Colchester was a port in Roman times. Thousands of tons of goods must have been transported by water in and out of Colchester during this period, and many Roman ships might well have run aground or sunk as they negotiated the sand banks and currents in and around its coastal waters. The picture is complicated by the fact that rising sea levels have left parts of the coast submerged, making it harder to know precisely what the coastline was like in the Roman period and where harbour facilities might have been.

Pictures: Sean O'Dell diving into black water from the 'Mackhan', with Mark Girdlestone on deck.

Thanks to Mark Girdlestone and Sean O'Dell for their help and enthusiasm, and to their skipper Malcolm Hooper.



by Andrew Phillips

The Castle Park in Colchester was opened in 1892. It owed its existence to two men, William the Conqueror and Edward Catchpool. William built the castle on royal lands. Through various rich owners these descended to James Round MP, the nearest thing to William the Conqueror in Colchester in 1892.

Younger son of an old Quaker family (an ancestor was imprisoned in Colchester castle), Edward Catchpool made his fortune as an ironmonger in Reading. In his will he left £3,000 (say £300,000 today) to open a public park in Colchester. It was time for James Round MP to be magnanimous.

Round agreed to sell the castle lands (well, ten acres) at £300 an acre, then gave £500 back for its conversion to a park. It cost more than that, actually, as 100 men landscaped the land, uncovered archaeology, laid gravel paths and planted trees donated by Councillor Ben Cant, Britain's most famous rose grower, who had planned the park layout 30 years before.

The Park was opened on October 30th 1892, the day of the Oyster Feast, and practically everyone in Colchester seems to have been there. The mayor was the Quaker, Wilson Marriage, a Castle Park campaigner for almost 20 years. The Lord Mayor of London and his assorted sword-bearers opened the park, where 11 Essex mayors planted 11 lime trees at the back of the castle, in what is still called 'Mayors' Walk'.

A Victorian bandstand and 'medieval' pavilion (actually a cafeteria) came later, and, after the First World War, another MP — Weetman Pearson — gave us the castle, while another Round gave Hollytrees House and its gardens to be added to the park. Then the War Memorial was built.

Thus the people of Colchester relaxed for over 100 years. Football, cricket, cycling and tennis were played in Lower Castle Park. Aldermen played bowls on the green. From 1959, ever more splendid Colchester Tattoos were held. Every Easter Monday (until 1939) girls gathered in hundreds while soldiers turned their skipping ropes: how innocent we were then, except for the few huddled in the lea of the Roman wall. Here Sir Oswald Mosley addressed his mob, Rose Shows bloomed in army surplus marquees, and 'History Fayres' made money and gave a new meaning to the word recreation.

But the greatest single recreation in Castle Park was surely the Pageant.

The Pageant

This took place in 1909. The entire Middle Class of Colchester dressed up in costumes they made themselves to act out a Cecil B de Mille version of Colchester history, orchestrated by the appropriately named Louis Napoleon Parker: a cast of 3,500, an audience of 11,000 for the opening service, a full-sized Temple of Claudius and real bullocks pulling the Ancient Britons' plough.

The text was written in that peculiar English once reserved for Edwardian nurseries. Here is a sample:

Listen good folk and you shall hear
The King and Queen are a-drawing near.
He is Henry the Sixth, I ween,
And Margaret of Anjou is his Queen.

And so on.

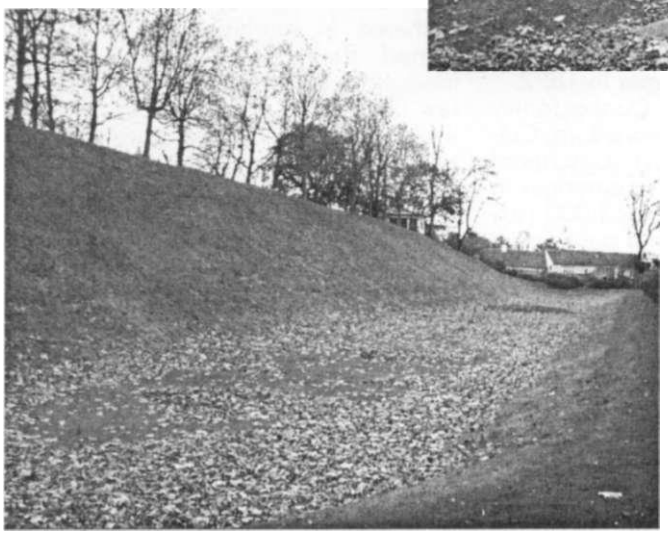
When Castle Park was finished in 1892, the town council made a VIP site visit. Contemplating the mud and the slender sapling trees, Ben Cant observed, with melancholy in his voice, "None of us will live to see this in all its mature glory." In 1999 everyone in Colchester can.

The Park is packed with archaeological remains, below and above ground. Arguably, it has the greatest concentration of archaeological buildings and other features of any municipal park in the country. And these remains give the park its extraordinary character. But it is due for a major refit, and therein lies the challenge: to improve the park even further and yet, at the same time, continue to preserve and promote the features which give it such a special atmosphere in the first place.

Exploring Castle Park

spotlight on the Castle Park...

C Part of one of the Roman houses excavated in 1920 by Mortimer Wheeler. Several rooms with plain tessellated floors have been left exposed, although the tops of the foundations for the walls have been protected with modern paving slabs.

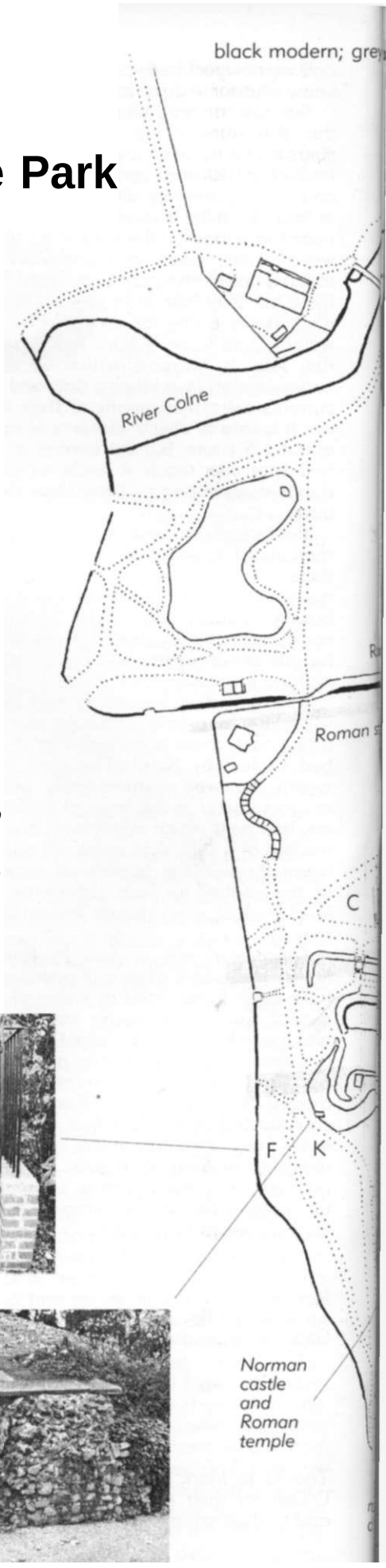


D & E Part of the defensive earthworks which encircled and protected the Norman castle. The earthwork is in the form of a bank (left) and ditch (right). The ditch was originally V-shaped in profile and much deeper than it is today.

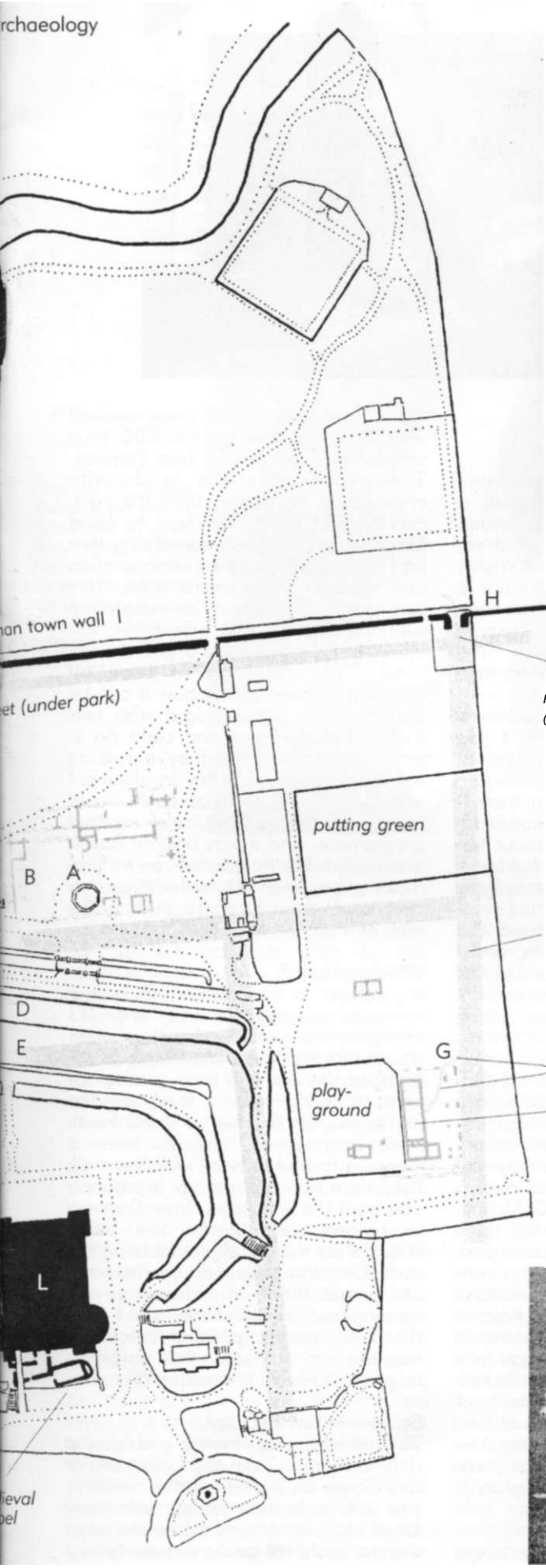
F These steps lead down to a Roman drain. It is made of tile and is large enough for a small person to crawl along. The drain was discovered in 1892. Roman drains of this sort may account for some of stories which exist of 'secret tunnels' in various places in the town centre.

K Part of a wall or foundation of the largely unknown Roman building which enclosed the precinct of the Temple of Claudius on three of its four sides. The paving slabs on top are modern, as is the skin of stone on the front. The wall seems to have been still standing in the Norman period when it was buried under the bank of the Norman defences (which can be seen on top of it). This part of the wall was exposed in 1892 when some of the bank was removed to make the path which cuts through the wall.

L Colchester Castle, built in the late 11th century on top of the remains of a major Roman temple dedicated to the emperor Claudius. On the south side, by the entrance to the museum, there are the remains of a chapel and other buildings which stood in the bailey of the Norman castle.



A bandstand
B Roman houses (under park); excavated in 1920
C exposed part of Roman house
D Norman defensive ditch
E Norman defensive bank
F Roman drain

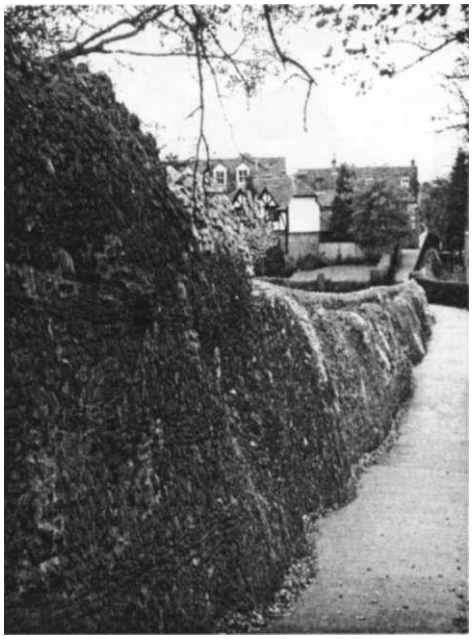


Roman gate (Duncan's gate)

Roman street (under park)

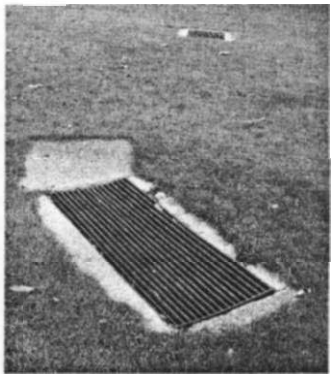
Roman drain

Roman 'mithraeum' (under park) — probably a Roman waterworks



I The Roman town wall where it divides the Lower and Upper Castle Park. The wall was originally about eight feet thick with vertical faces front and back. The outer face has largely been destroyed and cut back by stone robbers and the effects of the weather. The surviving wall now consists of the core and the inner face, which is well preserved because it was buried until relatively recently (the 1850s). The core (shown here) is covered with a modern protective 'skin' of stone.

H The well-preserved remains of Duncan's Gate, the narrow Roman gate which is named after Dr P M Duncan who discovered it in 1853. It is hoped that the gate can be re-opened as part of the improvements to the Castle Park after over 1500 years of disuse.



G Two grilles (one in the background) overlying the top of a Roman tile drain. The drain took excess water from a nearby Roman building and carried it down the hill and through Duncan's Gate so as to discharge into the town ditch which was immediately beyond the town wall. The building used to be interpreted as a particular type of temple (a 'mithraeum'), but a waterworks is a more likely explanation. The building was kept open for view for many years, but was filled in during the 1960s. Its site is now partly under the children's playground.

Julian Richards

in conversation...

Julian Richards, creator and presenter of BBC 2's *Meet the Ancestors,* talks to Philip Crummy about his fascination with science-based archaeology

Wages to archaeology

My interest in archaeology started by accident really. I left school with no clear idea of what I wanted to do and, to fill in between school and re-taking A-levels, I had to work for a year. I got a job as a wages clerk, but I felt I couldn't stand that for a year so I went into my local museum in Nottingham to see if they had any work. The Keeper of Art said that he hadn't, but instead told me about a dig just beginning in the town. The archaeologist in charge took me on as a volunteer and from the very beginning I just loved it. I just found digging so exciting: finding things that could tell a story — working outside, doing something difficult — and seeing part of the history of my home town emerge from the dirt.

I found it all very fascinating because I'd been bored by history at school. This was because of the way the subject was taught — you know, kings, popes, dates, and treaties — but archaeology is history about real people and everyday life. Almost from that first day as a volunteer, I decided that that was what I wanted to do. So I continued to dig for a couple of years, then I went to Reading University to study archae-ology, and I've worked as an archae-ologist ever since.

Before *Meet the Ancestors*

As part of my degree, I did a field project studying medieval settlement patterns on the Berkshire Downs. This got me involved with field walking, earthwork survey and aerial photo-graph plotting and this led to my first job. Just about the time that I was finishing my degree course, I heard that they were setting up an archaeological unit in Berkshire and was introduced to the unit director who was looking for temporary help setting up a sites and monuments record for the county. One short-term contract followed another, so I ended up staying in Berkshire for about five years as a field officer until the counties within Wessex (Berkshire, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset and the Isle of Wight) all got amalgamated to form what is now Wessex Archaeology. At this time (1980) I was transferred to Salisbury and was asked to direct the Stonehenge Environs project, a fantast-ic opportunity for a prehistorian — I had abandoned medieval studies a long time ago. To be asked if you would like to look at the Stonehenge landscape and be involved in fieldwork, excavation and interpreting that incred-ible landscape was just a wonderful gift. That occupied me for about ten years, with about five years of fieldwork and excavation and then a lengthy period of writing up.

During that time, I also wrote various guidebooks and walks' leaflets, and I did a lot of teaching as well. And in fact during the 1980s, I had my first involve-ment with TV. People are always making programmes about Stonehenge so there are various dreadful pictures of me — with an even worse haircut than today — describing my fieldwalking experiences. That lasted through till about 1990 when I left Wessex Archae-ology and together with Pete Cox and John Hawkes, two other ex-Wessex project managers, formed AC Archae-ology. For me, this lasted for three years, during which time I became con-vinced that contract archaeology was ruining my enjoyment of the subject that I loved. It's easy for this to happen when business takes over, so then I went to work for English Heritage as a fieldworker on the Monuments Protec-tion Programme. This brought me back to my fieldwork roots, dealing with field monuments in Wiltshire, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. And then came the first series of *Meet the Ancestors.*

Meet the Ancestors

The programme really came about because, in about 1994, I was involved with a programme for the BBC in a series called *Secrets of Lost Empires.* The whole series was to do with engineering challenges from the past, and one of them was how to build Stonehenge, obviously something that had exercised people's imagination and speculation for many years. This was an opportunity to try an experiment with full-sized replica stones — you know, forty-ton uprights and a ten-ton lintel. The idea was to have an engineer who works out how it can be done and an archaeologist who tells them what they can and can't do in terms of the period that they're working within. So because of my involvement with Stonehenge, I was asked if I would like to be the archaeologist on that programme, and it was brilliant fun. It was really what introduced me to film-making, and what led me (admittedly a couple of years later) to putting the idea of *Meet the Ancestors* to the BBC.

Which episode?

It's difficult to work out which is your favourite programme and why. It's often a mixture of an interesting burial, a beautiful location and perhaps some-body on site who has been particularly nice to work with. I think all the archaeologists that we've worked with have been great, and it's been a pleasure for me to work with them all. But I think my favourite site is probably one from the first series, from Donegal in Ireland, but maybe I'm being seduced by the wonderful location, an early Christian burial site on the coast of Donegal Bay. The archaeology was exciting and unpredictable, and I think the combination of that, plus the location and the story that emerged, have left quite an impression on me.

Science in archaeology

But different programmes grab you in different ways. Take the burial site at Cranborne in Dorset — the Neolithic site with a woman buried with three small children. It astonished me what the site could tell us. As somebody who

Pictures: left, Julian Richards on site in Spitalfields in London; right, Julian Richards at the excavation of burials at Lihou Abbey, the Channel Islands (photo's courtesy of the BBC).

had excavated Neolithic multiple burial groups, I knew that really you hadn't been able to say very much about them in the past. Now with modern science, we can tell not only what sex the children were, but we can actually find out about the kinship of the people buried in the same grave group. That really astonished me. It makes you think, good heavens, if we can do this for places like Cranborne, can't we apply these sort of techniques to other sites? Can't we expand the use of this science outwards? It's going to tell us such an awful lot about the structure of prehistoric society and about people's movements.

It's been a huge eye-opener seeing the potential that's there. I think that at the moment it is largely untapped, probably because a lot of this science is very new, and also it is often not within archaeologists' remits, particularly if they're doing commercially-funded excavations. You know the archaeologists are there to dig sites and take the analysis to a certain stage. But developers are not very keen to pay for things like DNA studies and isotope analysis.

When I talked to Paul Budd and Janet Montgomery at Bradford University who do a lot of work on isotopes, I was very surprised to find that they were having great difficulty persuading archaeologists and curators to let them have samples to study, because people felt their methods were new and they weren't certain of the results. Well, that strikes me as bizarre because if you don't experiment, you will never advance. And you know these tests are not so destructive as the old-fashioned carbon-sampling used to be, where you burnt half the skeleton to get a radio-carbon date. The fact is that some of the results from our samples have shown that the method really works. So hopefully we have had some beneficial influence.

The Time Team

The Time Team is a very different programme to *Meet the Ancestors* and they're showing a different sort of archaeology. I've always agreed with Mick Aston that the Time Team has done a good job in raising the public profile of archaeology, but it's not 'real' archaeology because you don't do sites in three days. Mick's response has always been that certain evaluations are carried out in a short period of time, but normally you wouldn't dream of trying to evaluate a major Roman villa complex or a chunk of urban stratigraphy in three days. But that is the structure of their programme and what gives it a certain edge — the race against time. I hope what we're doing though is showing 'real' archaeology, where the digging might be speedy but isn't carried out at an artificial pace, and where the analysis goes on for months and months after the end of the excavation.

Reconstructing the past

Archaeologists often ask, why do we do so many facial reconstructions? And yet it's one of the things that fascinates the viewers. Yes, maybe as archaeologists, it's within our experience to hold together everything that the science and the archaeology has told us and maybe create visual pictures in our own minds as to what was going on and what an area and a person looked like. But for the people who aren't used to this, who aren't used to pulling all this information together, showing them a landscape and showing them a person on whom you can actually place all of this information is a very effective approach. Facial reconstructions certainly work for me, and I find it as gripping as ever to see the person whose remains we've just seen excavated really coming to life.

With thanks to Julian Richards.

2000 or 2001?

We take the calendar for granted, but it is very important to us all because it governs our lives. For our society to function properly and efficiently, we all need to know when to work and trade and when to rest and play. Our calendar, and the way of counting the passage of time, have both evolved over a long period. The latest change was unusual in that it was populist rather than official. Its effect was to rob the 20th century of a year.

Like everywhere else, Colchester celebrated the start of the 20th century on January 1st 1901. Celebrations were muted. There were various midnight services in many of the churches and special dinners the evening before in some of the hotels and pubs. However, subdued or not, nobody was in any doubt that 1901 and not 1900 was the start of the new century.

Last year only spoilsports (of which there are very many) dared to risk spoiling the party by suggesting that it was to start a year too soon, but there is no doubt that strictly speaking the next millennium should not begin until January 1st 2001.

The reason is simple enough: it is because the first year of the 1st century was 'AD 1', not 'AD 0'. This means that the next century began a hundred years later, ie in 101. It could not start in AD 100 because that was only 99 years later. Thus for the same reason, the next millennium should clearly start in 2001, not 2000.

Incidentally, the absence of a year zero was not a mistake. To have called a year 'zero' would have been non-sense, because it would be like saying that the year did not exist. It would have been illogical. It's like the days of the month. Just as we call the first day of May 'May 1st' and not 'May 0', then so too the first year of each century has to be called ' 1', '101', '201', and so on.

Our calendar originated in the Roman period. At first the Roman calendar was based on a 12-month lunar year with extra days and months added occasionally to keep it roughly in line with the seasons. Years were counted from the foundation of Rome which was placed at 735 BC. Like ancient calendars in general, it was not very accurate and would drift badly out of sync with the seasons.

A major reform under Julius Caesar in BC 46 effectively gave us the calendar that we use today. His reform proved very effective because it was based on good-quality scientific data provided by astronomers, and because lunar months were ditched in favour of the solar year. The trick was to fix the length of the year first and then re-define the number of days in each month to match.

Not only was the length of the year fairly accurately known at this time, but it was also recognised that it involved a fraction of a day. The earth spins like a top as it moves in its orbit around the sun, each spin corresponding to a day and each orbit to a year. The fraction of a day comes about because there is not an exact number of spins in each orbit. The solar year was reckoned to be 365 1/4 days, so the standard year in the Julian calendar was set at 365 days. The lengths of the months were adjusted to 31 and 30 days alternately except for February which was to be 29 days. The odd1/4day was accounted for by adding, as we still do today, an extra day to February every four years. Other changes introduced at this time in-cluded switching the start of the year from March 1st to January 1st and extending the year BC 46 to 445 days to correct a serious mis-match which had developed between the old calendar and the seasons of the year.

lchester (

HED EVERY WEDNESDAY M(

225. WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 2, 1901.

THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA.

FIRST ANNUAL
CLEARANCE SALE
OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
AT
ALBERT SCARFE'S,
27, HIGH STREET, COLCHESTER,
Will commence on SATURDAY NEXT, January 5, 1901

Advertisement from a local newspaper of 1901 (courtesy of the Essex Local and Family Studies Centre at Colchester Library).

Under Augustus, the symmetry of the new calendar was upset when August was named after him. A day was taken from February and added to August, and the lengths of the following months were changed from 30 to 31 days and *vice versa.*

The Julian calendar was widely used for more than 1,500 years. However, because the solar year is about 11 1/4 minutes short of 365 1/4 days, the seasons again gradually crept out of time with the calendar. By 1582, this discrepancy had grown to about ten days and Pope Gregory XIII decided that further reform was needed. He corrected the accumulated imbalance between the seasons and the calendar by ordering that ten days be dropped from October, and he reduced the discrepancy between the solar and calendar years by decreeing that century years should only be leap years if they could be divided by four hundred. This had the effect of reducing the difference between calendar and solar year to only 26 seconds. Britain adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1752 and we have been using it ever since.

The AD system of counting the years (anno *Domini)* has at its starting point the birth of Christ. The system seems to have originated in the early 6th century when an abbot named Dionysius Exiguus used it to compile tables predicting when Easter would fall. He did this in preference to a system in use at the time (anno Diocletiani or the 'Era of the Martyrs') which took as its starting point the year AD 284 which was in the reign of the Roman emperor Diocletian, who was notorious for his persecution of the Christians.

Dionysius had to work out when Christ was born and correctly (as explained earlier) defined this year as 'AD 1' rather than 'AD 0'. However, he was almost certainly wrong about the year Christ's birthday and set his AD 1 a few years later than it should have been. The Gospel of St Matthew states that Christ was born in the reign of Herod the Great whom we know from other sources died in 4 BC. The year of Christ's birth is still a matter of considerable debate but most historians favour around 6 or 5 BC. On this basis, the new millennium started in AD 1995 or 1996. (Incidentally, the use of BC (before Christ) is much later. Its introduction is credited to a French astronomer in 632.)

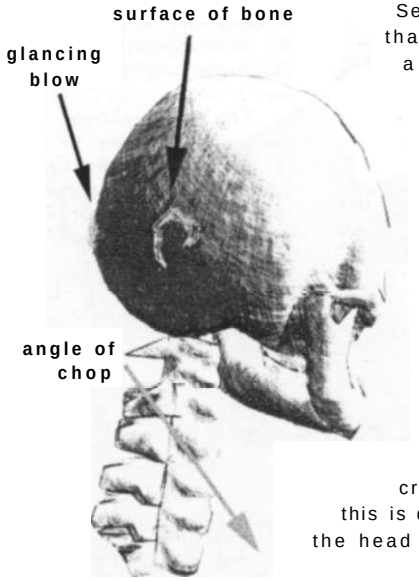
Of course, pedants aside, everybody now reckons that 2000 is the start of the new millennium. Government, businesses, the media, and the public in general — pretty well everybody — all accept it. The build-up for the start of 2000 made the party irresistible. We have effectively seen an unofficial, truly 'popular' reform of the calendar in which the 20th century has been reduced to 99 years in length.

Ultimately, does it all matter anyway? Why not regard the new millennium as starting in 2000 if that is what most people feel is right? Our calendar is only an abstract and temporary means to an end, a mere set of labels which most of the world uses to govern our lives. There will be no physical manifestation of the new millennium in the real world outside mankind. The length of the solar year is a product of the earth's orbital speed and its distance from the sun. Our year could so easily have been longer or shorter than it is. We have reached the year 2000 but only because we have eight fingers and two thumbs and count in tens. If we had two extra fingers and counted in a duodecimal system instead, we'd now reckon to be in the 17th century!

Butt Road burial

Roman ritual or execution?

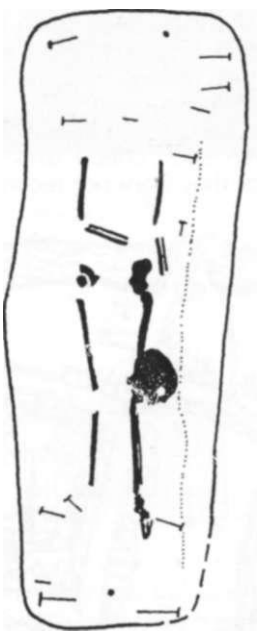
Post-mortem decapitation is a well-known practice in the Roman world, although the reason for it is obscure. It would appear that in many cases the head was removed carefully by gently slicing between two neck vertabrae so that bone damage was minimal. The head was then placed in the grave somewhere other than at the head end. However, a recently-discovered 4th-century example at Butt Road shows a much more crude form of decapitation, where the head was removed in a more brutal fashion.



Several cuts around the back of the skull from Butt Road show that more than one attempt was made to remove the head with a single, violent blow. Moreover, the spinal column just below the head was sliced clean through at an angle of about 45 degrees as if the man had bowed his head forward to receive the blow.

The man was buried with some consideration, because he had been carefully laid out on his back inside a nailed wooden coffin. The body was placed in the coffin such that there was space for the head had it still been attached. This creates the impression that the head was not only removed post-mortem, but that it had been detached after the body was put in the coffin. However, the cuts at the back of the skull seem to rule out removal of the head with the body in the coffin, although nevertheless ritual decapitation after death still seems far more likely than execution by chopping off the head.

The positions and angles of the cut marks on the skull are crucial, but the skull is still in pieces awaiting restoration. When this is done, further study may help solve the puzzle of when and how the head was removed.



Plan of the grave; left, the skull (drawing by Alec Wade).

The excavation was funded by the Trust's accountants, Beaumont Seymour, as part of a small building project at the rear of their premises.

Shopping in medieval Colchester

V.C.H.

by Dr Janet Cooper
of the Victoria County History of Essex

The sale of goods played an important part in the economy and life of medieval Colchester, as it does in the modern town. But there were some important differences between the two. Although there were permanent shops in the Middle Ages, the market (held on most days) and the three annual fairs were at least as important as sources of goods.

The market

The market was held in the High Street, from its western (Head Street/North Hill) end down as far as about Maidenburgh Street. Not a great deal is known of its organisation, but the butchers had their stalls, or shambles, near West Stockwell Street; the fishmongers seem to have been outside the Red Lion; and the butter market was outside the town hall. The corn market was held at the west end of the High Street, and the leather-workers' stalls may have been nearby. Other stalls, in the Middle Ages as in the 16th and 17th centuries, would have sold fruit and vegetables, shoes, gloves, baskets, wooden dishes, and other small items. Pots may also have been sold, but they seem to have been such cheap and everyday items that they were not recorded.

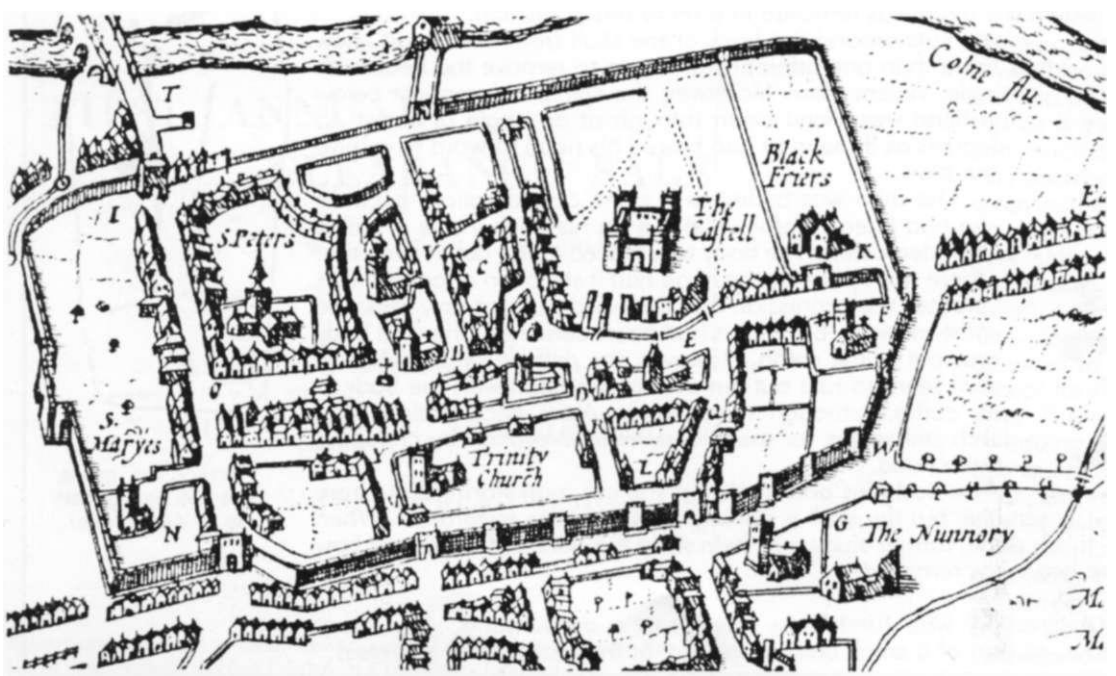
The fairs

The main fairs were the midsummer fair, which belonged to St John's abbey and was held on St John's green, and St Dennis's fair, which belonged to St Botolph's priory and seems to have been held near the priory in the open area known as Bury Field (now largely occupied by the bus station). There is little direct evidence for what was sold at the fairs, but it almost certainly included the two main products of medieval Colchester, cloth and leather goods. In the 16th century silk ribbons were sold at the midsummer fair, and the list of those attending St Dennis's fair included fletchers, sadlers, soapers, tanners, goldsmiths, haberdashers, hosiers, grocers, pewterers, ironmongers, and basket-makers.

Permanent shops

The shops themselves were small — one particularly tiny one in the High Street in 1420 was only five feet wide and nine feet deep. Sometimes their owners occupied upper rooms or *solars* built over them; sometimes shops were leased independently of the surrounding rooms. Often they were both workshop and shop in the modern sense. They usually had a door from the street with beside it a large unglazed window whose shutter could be let down to form a table on which wares could be displayed.

The permanent shops, which could be owned and run only by freemen of the borough, were concentrated in the High Street, although there were others in North Hill and a few in some of the back streets of the town. They would have sold many of the goods also available in the market, but to protect the consumer, shopkeepers were not allowed to buy grain, cattle or similar goods before they were offered for sale in the market so that they could then resell them at a higher price. The restriction did not apply to the craftsmen, such as goldsmiths, shoemakers and tailors, who made goods for sale, nor to the more specialised shops such as those of the mercers, vintners and spicers who sold luxury goods like silk and muslin, wine, and pepper, ginger and saffron. In some towns the shops were grouped by trade, giving us street names like Wood Street or Milk Street in the City of London. That does not seem to have happened in Colchester, although Long and Short Wyre Streets may take their name from wire-makers, and in the 1380s there was a Cook Row, a Bakery Row, and a Cordwainers' Row (for the makers of fine leather shoes) in or near the High Street.



This is a detail from a map of Colchester in about 1610 (by John Speed). Medieval Colchester would have been very similar.

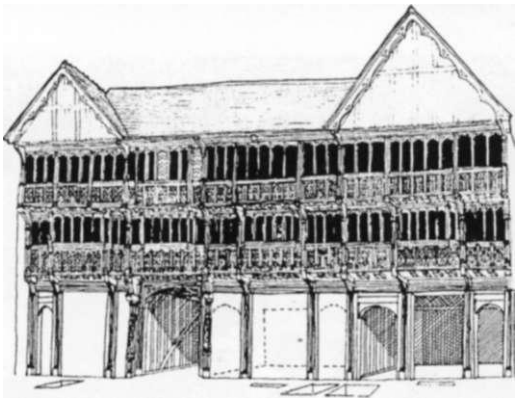
The High Street lies between the letters 'O' and 'E\ and 'Y' marks Culver Street. The map shows a market cross and St Runwold's church in the High Street.

See page 33 for details about VCH books on the history of Colchester.

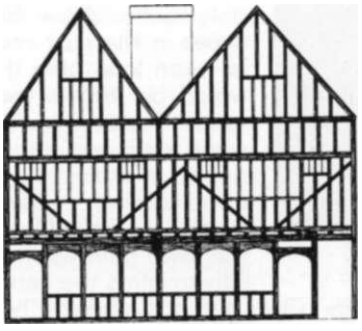
The oldest shops In town

At a guess, there must have been a hundred or more shops in Colchester 500 years ago. Being on the ground floor, these structures are especially vulnerable to later developments and, as a result, few traces of them survive today. However, if you know where to look, you can still find parts of a few early shops around the town.

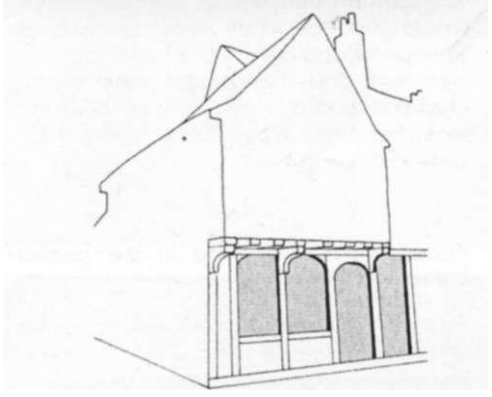
Here are four examples. Three are in the High Street, which was the prime site for shops since it accommodated the market. The commercial value of the High Street frontage explains why a single plot might have more than one shop on it and why these units could be relatively large structures. The fourth shop, which is in Queen Street, is more typical of shops away from the High Street. Here the shop was simply the front room of the house with a shop front consisting of a door and a wide window. As in all these shops, the window was unglazed and its shutter was lowered to expose the goods on sale.



The Red Lion Hotel. An early development of *circa* AD 1500 with three independent units on the High Street, and a slightly earlier large house to the rear which became an inn. The units on the frontage were three-storeyed, each with o lock-up shop on the ground floor. (Drawing by David Stenning.)

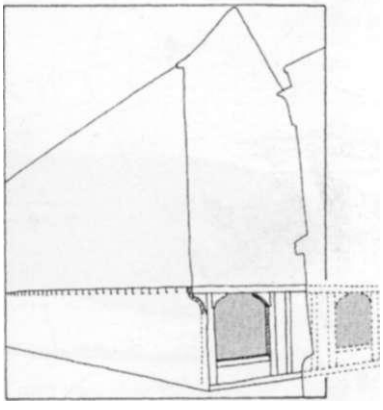


Angel Court. This was a 17th-century development of two houses, each with a large shop unit on the street frontage at ground-floor level. Each shop had three windows and a door. The present building is new with a facade which replicates a facade which was added to the original building in the 19th century. The drawing (by the Colchester Archaeological Trust) is a tentative reconstruction of the original building, based on the limited number of timbers which survived when the building was demolished in 1989.



Cate Brahms. Dating to the early 14th century, this is the earliest known medieval shop in Colchester. It had one large window subdivided by a vertical central timber, and a door leading into the shop. The door on the right led into the main part of the house. (Illustration based on drawings by Richard Shackle.)

The George Hotel. The remains of two shop windows can be seen on the right inside the building as you go in (possibly 15th century in date). They faced on to a narrow lane (now George Street) off the High Street. Presumably there were more windows on the High Street frontage. (Illustration based on drawings by Richard Shackle.)



With thanks to Richard Shackle and David Stenning for information about the buildings and Janet Cooper for her article on medieval shopping.

Down by the river

Organic materials usually need damp conditions

Medieval cobbler

The site is at Middleborough, in a garden about 20 m from North Bridge. It lies a short distance north of the Roman houses discovered in 1979 on the site of the Royal London buildings. The garden belongs to a house which fronts on to what was known as Sheepen Road before the Royal London was built and the present road layout created. Interestingly, Sheepen Road was known as Water Lane in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The collection of leather from this evaluation is small and consists of three bits of discarded shoes, four off cuts and part of a strap. Two of the soles are so worn that they have holes in them. Both have holes under the big toe and one has a second hole under the ball of the foot. They poignantly show how shoes in the past could be worn long after they would be thrown away today. Fashions in footwear changed rapidly and so the soles provide good dating evidence for the deposit. One of the soles narrows markedly towards the centre, is of one piece, and has a narrow heel. Another is of a distinctive 'winkle-picker' form so that, together, they point to a date for the collection of around the late 14th century.

The presence of offcuts suggests that the material is waste from a leatherworker's workshop which was in a house on the north side of Water Lane. Being next to the river, there is also a possibility that the leatherworker also tanned the hides since tanning needed large quantities of running water, but there is no clear evidence of this in the leather collection.

The largest collection of leather found in Colchester so far consists of over 300 scraps from the Trust's excavation in Osborne Street in 1988-9. Most of that material was shoe-manufacturing waste dating to about AD 1200. The Middleborough material is modest by comparison, but it is of interest because of its different location and date.

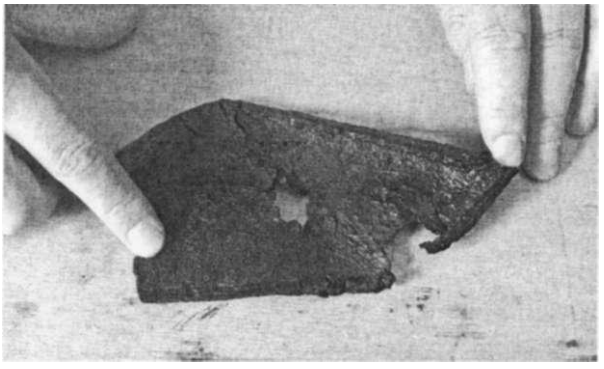
Roman timbers

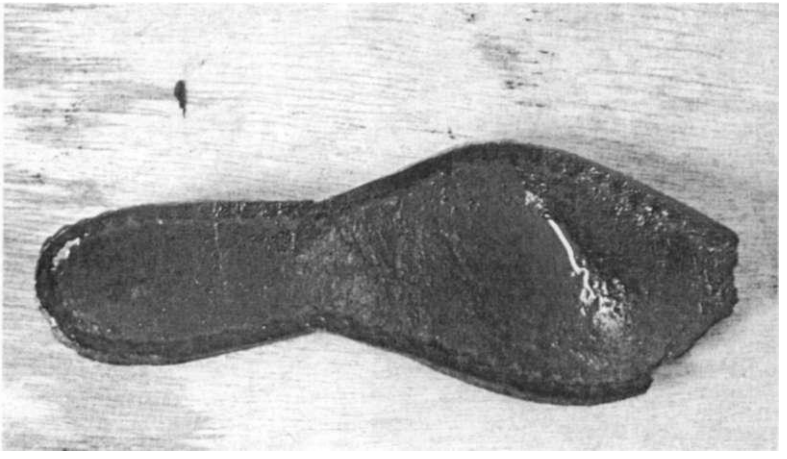
Another interesting find were two exceptionally large timbers from about 1.0 m below the fragments of leather. Pottery found at the same level shows them to be Roman in date. One piece was a rather shapeless part of a large branch of elm which had been used as a rudimentary chopping-block. The other piece was of more interest. It was an oak pile, about 1.4 m long. One end was pointed and the other, which was rather battered and decayed, included the remnants of a joint.

Groups of piles were often driven into the bottoms of foundation trenches where the ground was damp or waterlogged, and as a result, they can often be exceptionally well preserved and look far younger than they actually are. A well-known case is the riverside Roman wall in London which is built over large numbers of wooden piles. Another example is the Strood at

Above: *machine-stripping in the garden of 'Middleborough House';*

Parts of 14th-century shoes. Below, 'winkle-picker' form; and right, one-piece sole.



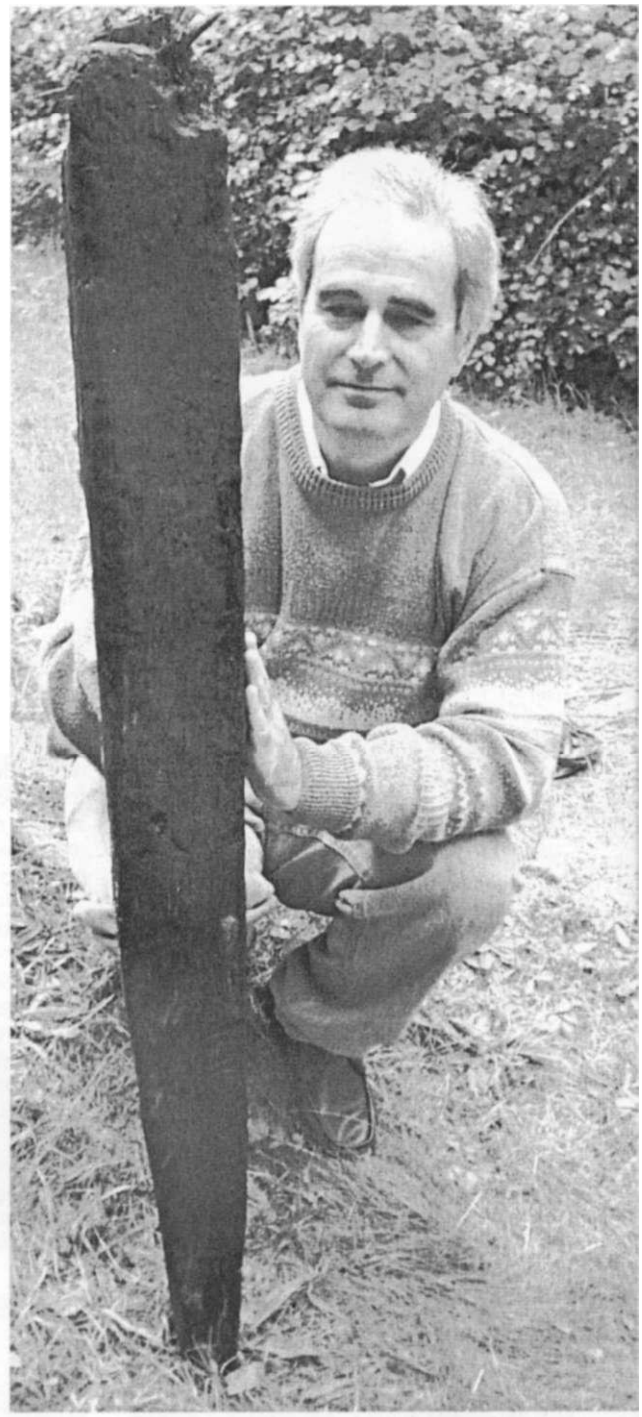


Mersea which was built on top of thousands of piles. Tree-ring dating showed those piles to be Anglo-Saxon and to belong to around AD 700.

The wooden pile at Middleborough was lying flat, showing that it had been pulled out of the ground in Roman times. The pile therefore could have come from anywhere such as a nearby Roman bridge. (There must have been a bridge across the River Colne close by because there were several substantial Roman houses over on the other side of the river.) However, piles under foundations do not have joints at the top end, so perhaps the timber was reused and had originally been part of a timber-frame in a house. Alternatively it may have been part of a timber-framed structure such as a jetty or wharf.

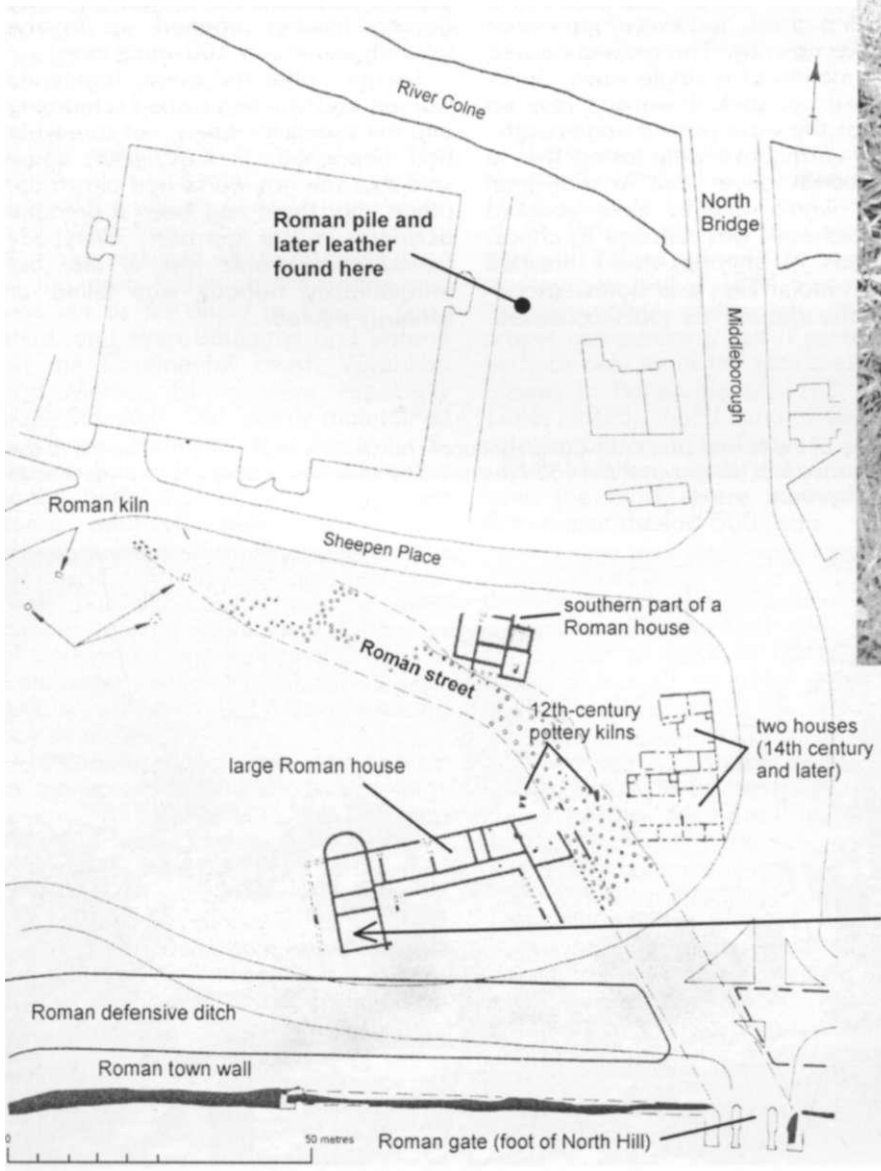
The evaluation was funded by Chase Racing 4 Ltd.

Howard Brooks of the Trust with the Roman oak pile.



Below right, mosaic found in 1979 during the Middleborough excavation.

Roman and medieval buildings and other remains at Middleborough



Virley church: solitary survivor of the Essex earthquake of 1884

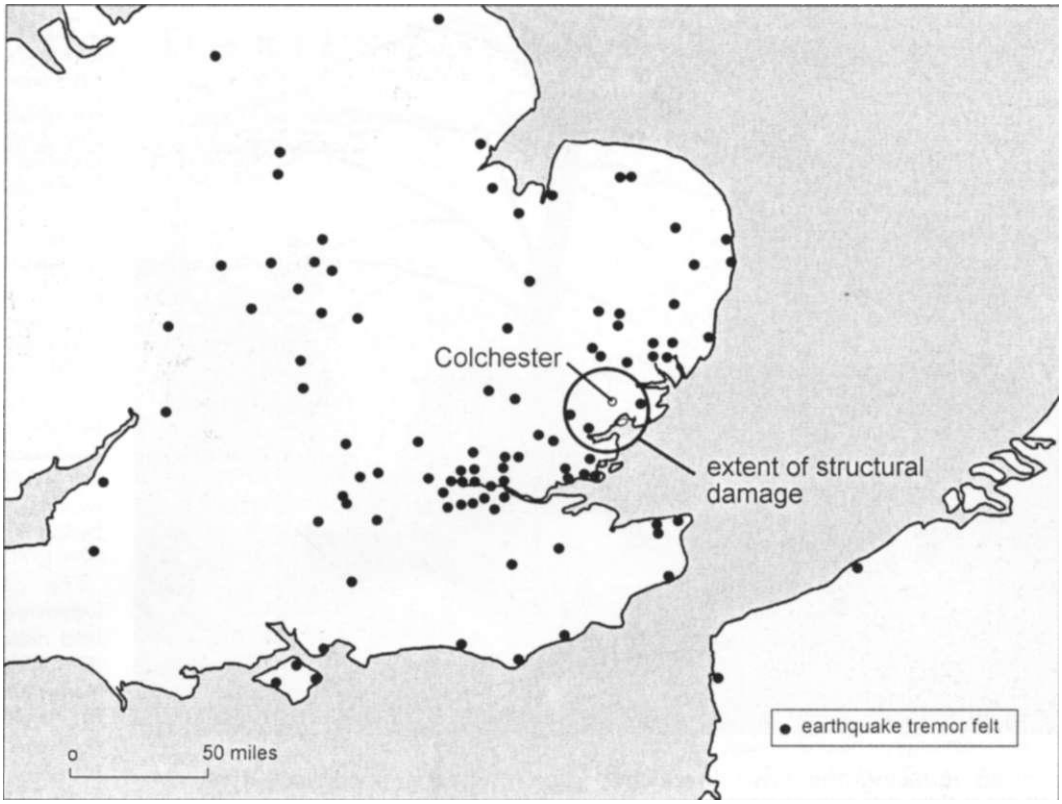
The most destructive earthquake known in Britain happened at 9.18 am, on April 22nd 1884. In Colchester, it was just an ordinary bright sunlit morning. Then suddenly, in a matter of a few seconds, the townsfolk were terrorised and Colchester was brought to a standstill in a great cloud of dust. All around the district, there was chaos: collapsed chimneys and roofs, and wrecked buildings including the little church at Virley.

A rumbling sound moved quite distinctly through the ground like a low, menacing growl, and everything began to shake violently. The ground heaved in the motion of a single wave. Buildings rose up, sank down and rose up again as the wave passed underneath.

The earthquake only lasted five to ten seconds or so. But in that brief period, whole villages were wrecked and Colchester was reduced to chaos. Hundreds of chimney-stacks crashed through roofs. Tiles and slates cascaded to the ground as roofs collapsed. Walls buckled and cracked. Window glass shattered. And in some places, gaping fissures opened up in the ground, some over 100 yards long.

Seconds after the event, frightened women and children rushed screaming into the streets for safety, not sure what had happened. In Colchester, some said that the gas works had blown up, others that there had been a dreadful accident in the garrison. Everybody feared considerable loss of life, but miraculously nobody was killed or seriously injured.

The spire of the former Lion Walk Congregational church early in 2000 (left). The top of the spire crashed into the graveyard in 1884 (below). The spire was restored to its present state soon afterwards.



Map showing the extent of the places where the 1884 earthquake was felt. People in bed were more likely to notice the tremors where these were very faint.

The epicentre was about four miles south of Colchester's town centre, around the villages of Abberton, Peldon and Wivenhoe. The worst structural damage occurred within 20 miles or so of this area, although the earthquake was felt as far afield as Exeter, Yorkshire, and even Boulogne and Ostend on the Continental coast. Wivenhoe and Mersea Island were especially badly affected. Old, poorly-maintained properties were hit the hardest, although timber-framed houses seemed to fare better than brick buildings, even some relatively new ones. Many churches like that at Virley were badly damaged with towers, parapets and roofs partially collapsing. The most famous casualty was the top of the spire of Lion Walk Congregational Church in Colchester which crashed to the ground, with some bits missing a young boy by inches.

In London, as in many places closer to the epicentre, the shock was fairly severe. The Houses of Parliament were violently shaken and a three-foot wave engulfed some boats in the Thames. Throughout much of the south-east of England, and in places as far away as Portsmouth, Birmingham, and Leicester, houses shook, windows rattled, furniture and crockery moved, church bells rang and clocks stopped. Even where the earthquake was too weak to cause any serious damage, the vibrations left many people feeling frightened and nauseous.

There are records of well over a thousand earthquakes in Britain. One in 1692 is said to have cracked the tower of St Peter's church in Colchester, although it does not seem to have been as severe as that of 1884. Records are too incomplete and patchy to allow proper comparisons, but it seems that perhaps only six of the recorded earthquakes in Britain (ie of 1185, 1246, 1248, 1275, 1382 and 1480) are comparable in magnitude to that of 1884. In other words, this may have been the most severe earthquake in Britain over the last 500 years.

Virley church

Well over a thousand buildings were repaired in the aftermath of the great earthquake of 1884. A few were too badly damaged to save and were demolished completely. However, the evocative little church at Virley, which was wrecked during the quake, was neither repaired nor demolished, and now appears to have the unique distinction of being the only surviving relic of that calamitous event.

Over the years since 1884, the ruined church has gradually decayed. Frost, wind and rain have all helped to reduce the ruin to its present rather perilous state. The process has been quickened by locals who have used the ruin as a convenient source of materials for their rockeries and various other building projects.

Earlier in 1999, the owners of the church — Mr and Mrs Carbutt — asked the Trust to record the building since some of the walls are now in danger of collapse. The survey involved clearing away vegetation obscuring the walls, looking for moulded and other worked stones in the fallen debris around the ruin, making a plan of the remains, and preparing a scaled photographic record of all the surviving above-ground structure.

The church is very small, reflecting the fact that it was in a poor parish. Although dating evidence is scarce, the main part of the church seems to belong to the.first half of the 13th century.

The earthquake split the walls of the building, shook all the tiles off the roof, and left the building a wreck. However, it is apparent that the building must have been in a poor state at the time which partly explains why it was so devastated by the shock.

The tower is recorded as having fallen down at an unspecified date before the mid 18th century. Also part of the chancel seems to have collapsed, for it was rebuilt with timber-framing infilled with brick. This was a cheap solution more appropriate for a house than a church. There are no signs of a door on either the north and south sides of the nave suggesting that, after the tower fell down, the church was restored in a much shortened form which did not include rebuilding the tower. The new plan seems to have

involved reducing the nave to about half its original length and inserting a small timber tower in the roof. Access into the remodelled church must been through a door in a new timber-and-brick wall forming the west end of the new church. Various bits of evidence suggest that all this work (including the rebuilding of the chancel) took place in the 17th century or so.

Even such a drastic overhaul as this was not enough, and there was a succession of other attempts to keep the decrepit little church going. Ominous cracks appeared in the chancel arch, and so great iron hoops, which are now propped up against one of the walls, were fitted under the arch in the hope that this would stop the roof collapsing into the middle of the church. Equally dangerous was the way in which the north and south walls started to lean outwards, endangering the roof still further. Consequently brick buttresses were built against the outside of these walls to counteract the movement. To judge by the size of the bricks, the work was carried out some time around 1800-1850. The repairs were effective enough, but of course the work was no match for the destructive power of the earthquake.

Truth or fiction

The poor state of the building made for good reading in the novel *Mehalah* which was written by Reverend S Baring-Gould, rector at East Mersea between 1871 and 1881.

'..The church of timber and brick, put up anyhow on older stone foundations, had warped and cracked; the windows leaned, fungus growths sprouted about the bases of the timbers. Every rib showed in the roof as on the side of a horse led to the knackers....

..Virley Church is not much bigger than a stable that consists of two stalls and a loose box, whereof the loose box represents the chancel....

..Virley Church possessed one respectable feature, a massive chancel-arch, but that gaped; and the pillars slouched back against the wall in the attitude of the Virley men in the village street waiting to insult women as they went by....

..The altar was a deal table, much worm-eaten....The communion rails had rotted at the bottom....The floor in the midst, before the altar, had been eaten through by rats, emerging from an old grave, and exposed below gnawed and mouldy bones a foot beneath the boards....'

None of the wooden fittings or fixtures now survive, but there is much else in this description that can be recognised today: the remains of the original stone chancel and its brick and timber replacement, the 'chancel-arch... that gaped' as testified by the iron hoops, and the outwards lean of the pillars which supported this arch. Clearly, with or without the earthquake, the days of Virley church must already have been numbered.

This project was funded by Mr and Mrs Carbutt. The work was carried out in conjunction with David Andrews of the Essex County Council and Nigel Oxley of Colchester Borough Council.

Pictures: above, Virley church a few years after the earthquake; left, the iron hoops which supported the chancel-arch can be seen leaning against the chancel wall.

Marks of the Devil

The Essex marshes are fertile grounds for weird legends and ghost stories. The Virley church figures prominently in one of these, and was famous for marks on its walls which were reputedly made by the Devil himself

Apparently a medieval lord at Salcott-cum-Virley was attempting to build himself a new manor house but was making little progress, because every night his tools and materials mysteriously disappeared. The nobleman was convinced that somebody was creeping up under cover of darkness and stealing his goods. He must have been very dim because he did not realise that he was trying to build his house on top of a deep marsh and that everything was simply sinking into it.

The lord of the manor decided that one night he would keep vigil and catch the culprit red-handed. However, instead of a thief, up strode the Devil with two dogs. The Devil took one of the nobleman's house timbers and threw it into the darkness crying, 'Where this beam doth fall, there build Barn Hall'. The chosen spot proved to be a sound one and free of the marshes, because Barn Hall stands there to this day.

In return for this favour, the Devil took it that the man owed him his soul and vowed, "Where you are buried on land or sea, there I will come to fetch you."

The terrified man decreed that, when he died, his body was to be kept in a coffin embedded in the walls of Virley church. The idea was that he would be protected by the sanctity of the church. The plan clearly worked a treat — at least for a while — and the power of God and the church proved to be too much for the Devil, who could only claw at the walls trying in vain to claim his prize.

Today there are no obvious 'claw marks' in the ruined church or indeed anything which could have been passed off as such in the past*. Perhaps in 1884 the bones of the nobleman were shaken from their safe entombment by the earthquake and the Devil finally got his man. As for the famous claw marks, they may have crumbled to dust as parts of the church came crashing down in the earthquake — or maybe they are yet to be rediscovered in the village, hidden behind the dahlias in somebody's rockery.

*Of course, apart from anything else, we could point out that the walls of the church are clearly too narrow ever to have contained a coffin, but why ruin a good story?

The *source of the legend: The devil comes to Salcott' by Jenny Humphrey (Colchester Public Library).*

Around the county

Essex County Council

by the Heritage Conservation Group

The new Essex Record Office

Millions of documents, miles of shelves

Moving the Essex Record Office headquarters from County Hall to its new building got under way in 1999. A new purpose-built Record Office, due for completion in October 1999, will open to the public in late January 2000. It occupies a riverside site at Wharf Road in Chelmsford, close to the town centre and within walking distance of the railway station. Several public car parks are close by. Disabled users will be able to park at the entrance to the Record Office itself.

The new building will provide greatly enhanced facilities for the storage and conservation of records and for public access. The three-storey repository will contain sufficient space for 1 5-20 years' growth of records. There is also space on the site to double the size of the repository in years to come, so that it provides enough growth space for at least the next millennium! The public searchroom can accommodate 120 users, half for microfilm/fiche use and half for the study of manuscripts. All catalogues and indexes will be accessible electronically via 60 terminals, with automated document ordering. There will be additional public facilities. Planning the transfer of the documents took several months. If you have ever moved house you can imagine the difficulties of ensuring that every document among the several millions that we hold was transferred safely and can be instantly found in its new location!

Measure by measure

Every box, and every volume or series of volumes, had to be measured (height, width and depth) and entered on to a database. New shelf locations in the new building were then assigned to each one, carefully calculated to ensure that they are all stored on shelves of the right dimensions and in such a way as to make the most efficient use of the space. Next, the documents or the boxes that contain them were labelled, so that during the transfer of records the removers knew precisely where each document or box was to go.

Much of this work went on behind the scenes without affecting the public service. But from June onwards services to the public were gradually reduced. From October, documents stored at the out-store began to be transferred to the new building, and were temporarily not accessible to the public. The transfer of all documents stored at County Hall began in November. The Chelmsford search-room closed in December for the final phase of the move, when the search-room equipment and contents were finally transferred, and remains closed until the new building opens. The precise date of opening for the new building will be announced as soon as it is known. We recommend that anyone intending to visit the Essex Record Office from November 1999 until the new opening contacts us in advance (tel. (01245) 430067; email: **ero.enquiry @essexcc.gov.uk)** to check the availability of the records they wish to see.

Where is it?

Because the new building is in an area of previously undeveloped land, even those who know Chelmsford well are not always sure of how to find it. Once you know where to look, the building is clearly visible from High Bridge Road or from the A138 going south towards the Army and Navy roundabout. The address of the new Essex Record Office is: Essex Record Office, Wharf Road, Chelmsford CM2 6YT, tel. (01245) 244644.

A centre for Essex history

The new ERO building will offer far more to the public than just the search-room for the study of documents, maps and microfilm.

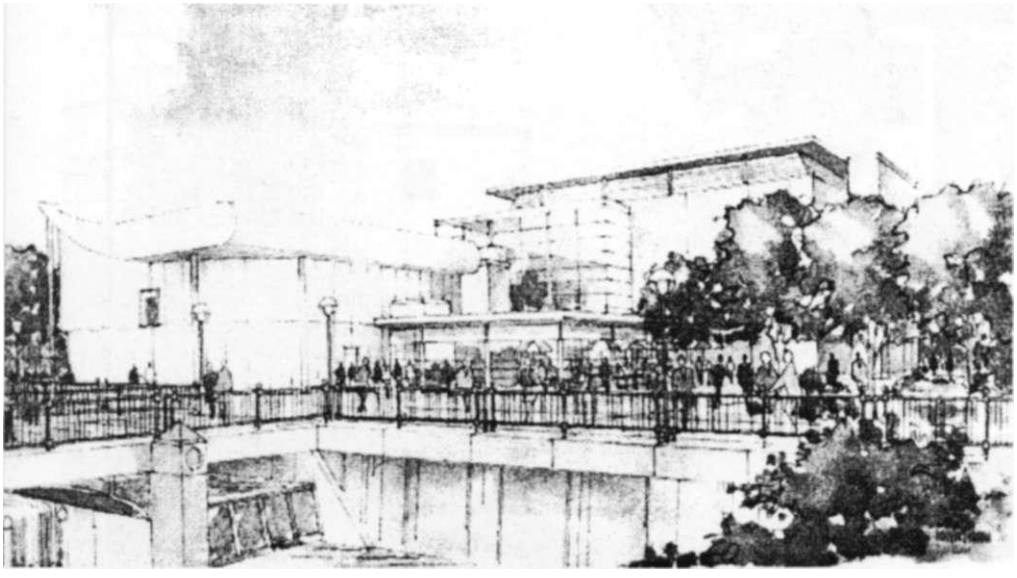
The new building is designed as a centre for the study of Essex history, and provides a lecture theatre and other meeting rooms which can be used for open learning: adult education classes, school visits, meetings of local societies, and a programme of lectures and exhibitions on all aspects of Essex heritage.

The services available to the public include a searchroom which is open to anyone wanting to study parish registers or wills, or any records on microfilm, and the Record Office library.

The University of Essex and other education providers have a base in the building. The public suite (lecture theatre, seminar rooms, exhibition space) is available for hire by local organisations, and the Essex Society for Family History is setting up a new Family History research room, where their superb resources for family history (printed books, microfilm/fiche material and computerised information) will be open to the public as well as to members. The ESFH collections, which are not confined to Essex material, complement the Record Office's own holdings, and this partnership between the ERO and the county family history society will ensure that the new building is the essential research centre for family history in Essex.

In these ways it is intended that the new ERO will be as open and welcoming as possible to researchers, to local organisations and to the general public.

We hope to meet many of you there in the months and years to come!



The picture shows an artist's impression of the new Record Office.

National Archaeology Day '99

Around 2,000 visitors to Gosbecks Archaeological Park at Colchester enjoyed both good weather and a wide range of archaeological activities at the annual National Archaeology Day, held over a weekend in July. Working with Colchester Museums, staff from the County Council's Heritage Conservation Group helped provide a fun day out with something for everyone, from age six to sixty (and beyond). A mini-excavation, finds sorting, trying on (and making) Roman armour, clay oil-lamp making, story-telling and Celtic face-painting were all available.

The Colchester Archaeological Trust excavation on the site was open to visitors who could observe the excavators in action. The Trust provided guided tours and also a display in the marquee.

Training dig

In summer 2000, the Essex County Council field archaeology training excavation will be at Brightlingsea. For further details contact 01376 331 431.

Make a date with the Millennium History Fair

In 2000 the Essex History Fair will be held at Cressing Temple, with re-enactment societies, wandering minstrels, mummers' plays, Punch and Judy, local history lectures and much more. There is plenty of parking, and of course a chance to look at the two magnificent 13th-century timber-framed barns of Cressing Temple itself.

Sunday 11th June 2000,
10.00 am-5.00 pm,
at Cressing Temple Barns near Witham.

Make your mark on the Millennium

Essentially Essex - a County Council project for the Millennium

This exciting project aims to involve the people of Essex in recording the people, places and spaces which are special to them in the year 2000. It has secured Millennium Commission funding.

Photographs, sound recordings and arts projects will be used to create a record of life in Essex in this special year. The results will then be converted into a digital format so that they can be stored on computer and thus readily accessible to people throughout the county.

Photography

Between January and December 2000 we hope that many people will take a photograph and bring it into their local library. We are particularly interested in pictures of people going about their day-to-day tasks at home or at work, special occasions, and hidden corners of Essex. Libraries across the county will be holding displays of some of the best material in 2000 and beyond.

We're not necessarily expecting professional quality. Interesting subject matter is at least as important as the quality of the photograph.

Sound recordings

A visual record has its limitations and is enriched when complemented by the medium of sound. Not only does this provide documentation for the picture (anyone with a collection of old family photographs will know how frustrating it is when names, dates and places are unidentified). Written information about the photograph — not just where and when it was taken, but why — will be really useful. However, if it is possible to provide a sound recording of the photographer explaining why the picture was taken and what it means to them, it would really help to bring the image to life.

Arts projects

A team of artists will be appointed to work individually or together with communities across the county, enabling people to develop their own artistic skills and to create artworks that capture the life of the locality and the aims and aspirations of its people in the year 2000. The artists themselves will also create a single or series of inter-related artworks that focus on aspects of Essex life in the year 2000.

Essex Libraries, the Record Office and Cultural Services have joined together to organise and promote *Essentially Essex.* The project will be promoted through the county's libraries and from January 1 7 the larger libraries will be running a monthly help-desk where staff will be on hand to answer any questions.

In the meantime, if you would like to find out more, please contact: Essentially Essex, Colchester Library, Trinity Square, Colchester CO 1 1JB or'Phone Answers Direct on 01245 438438 or **essentially.essex@essexcc.gov.uk** for e-mail.

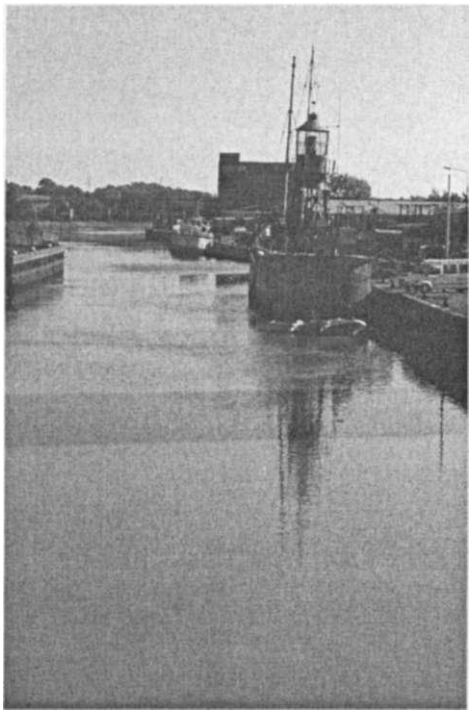
Essentially Essex is your opportunity to make your mark on the Millennium.

On the trail of transport

archaeology for young people

by Mike Corbishley of English Heritage Education

How do you travel about?
Perhaps you go to school by bus but use a car for all other travel.
How would you have travelled if you had lived in Colchester at the beginning of the century?
How has transport changed since then?



Here are some clues to help you get on the transport trail

Ships

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the port of Colchester was at the Hythe. By the 1840s it was a busy port and there were regular boat services to London. The port is still in use, although it is not accessible by large cargo ships. You can get a good view of the port from the new bridge which links the industrial estates of the Hythe with the inner ring road.

Coach and horses

The first regular transport links between Colchester and London (and elsewhere) were coaches. We know that in the 18th century it took nine hours to reach London! Inns in the centre of town had large openings through to a yard at the back for coach and horses. Look out for this one at the Red Lion Hotel in the High Street (right). The Red Lion has been a coaching inn since about 1500.

Colchester High Street in about 1902.

Railways

The first major impact on transport in and out of Colchester came with the arrival of the railways. The line between London and Colchester was opened on 29 March 1843, although the first train arrived at North Station two days late! The railway network eventually reached other places — the Hythe in 1849, Harwich in 1854, Walton in 1867 and Clacton in 1882.

Two forms of transport — between 1928 and 1929 buses replaced the trams in Colchester town. The building behind is the Railway Hotel, now gone. This area is now the huge roundabout at the entrance to North Station.

Getting about in town

Until 1904 the only bus services (first horse-bus then motor bus) had only operated between Colchester and neighbouring places. On 28 July 1904 Colchester got its own tram system, opened by the Mayoress. The last Colchester trams ran in 1929 — motor buses had replaced them. Next time you walk down St John's Street look at the multi-storey car park above the shops. The site was once the bus park!

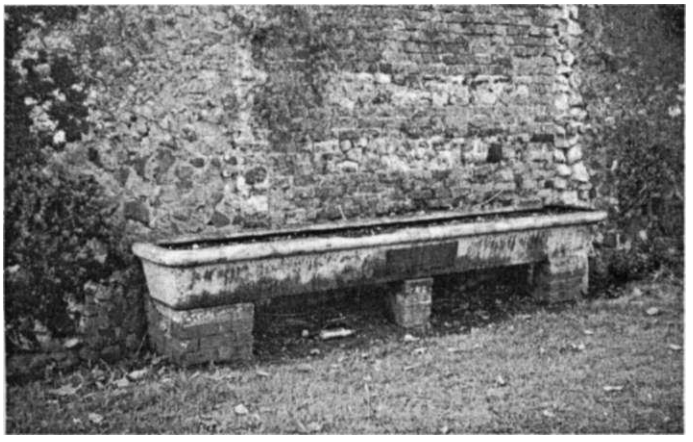
Roads around Colchester

By 1930 Colchester town centre was already becoming congested with traffic. The first by-pass to the north of the town was built between 1930 and 1933. The road is still there of course, but you can see evidence of when it was built in the plaques on the bridges which had to be built.

Historic photographs courtesy of Norman Jacobs; the photograph of the Red Lion is from the Notional Monuments Record of English Heritage; other photographs and text by Mike Corbishley.

Competition with prize

Where's this?



This has something to do with transport and it's somewhere in Colchester!

There's a free English Heritage video and booklet, ***The Big History Action Pack,*** for the lucky first correct answer out of the hat after September 1, 2000.

On a postcard simply say what it is and where you can see it today with your name, age and address and send it to Competition, Colchester Archaeological Trust, 12 Lexden Road, Colchester C03 3NF. You *must be aged 16 or under.*

The Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust

Last year, Friends were able to learn how to interpret timber-framed buildings as part of a tour of some of Colchester's more interesting examples. The first tour was taken by Dave Stenning who is the leading expert on timber-framed buildings in Essex. The event was heavily over-subscribed and had to be repeated a few weeks later, when it was led by myself (PC) as a poor substitute for the master.

The tour started off at the Rose and Crown Hotel where, with the kind permission of the proprietors, we were able to go into the building to see what remains of Colchester's oldest aisled hall. Although slightly run-down, East Street is one of the best streets in the town, so the subsequent walk along the street and into town up East Hill offered many opportunities for looking at other interesting timber-framed houses. After studying more buildings in and around the High Street, the tour finished in the Red Lion Hotel, first with a visit to several of the rooms (again with kind permission of the management) and then with a very pleasant tea in the restaurant.

The Red Lion is one of the oldest and best-preserved timber-framed inns in England. It was extensively renovated about ten years ago, when Dave Stenning spent many weeks there investigating every nook and cranny in a way that had never been done before. His enthusiasm and inside knowledge made for a great end to what proved to be a memorable tour.

In July, there was a coach trip to see the remains of the Roman forts of the Saxon shore at Richborough and Reculver in Kent under the guidance of Alan Ward of the Canterbury Archaeological Trust. Richborough has a special significance for Colchester since this was (supposedly) the site of the main supply base for the Roman invasion of Britain, which initially, of course, was all about capturing Colchester. These visits followed on from an earlier trip three years ago to see the similar forts at Caistor-by-Yarmouth and Burgh Castle in Norfolk.

In May, a coach party of Friends visited sunny Norfolk to enjoy spectacular views from Warham Iron Age hillfort. As in previous visits to Norfolk, our guide was John Davies. John is Chief Curator of the Castle Museum in Norwich and he specialises in the Iron Age and Roman periods. By way of a contrast, the trip also included a visit to the site of the medieval shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham which was destroyed at the Dissolution.

The annual churches' trip was as popular as ever with visits to the churches at Tilty, Great Easton, and Little Easton. An added and unexpected bonus was an invitation on the day to visit a Norman motte in a private back garden at Great Easton. The motte must be one of the best-preserved examples in Essex. The tea at Little Easton was exceptionally well appreciated.

We don't often arrange visits to museums and you might imagine that the Essex Secret Bunker at Mistley would be outside the range of interests of our members. How wrong you would be. The visit took the form of an extended tour (a 'Curator's special') which proved riveting indeed. The bunker was a product of the Cold War and was to be a centre of local government in the event of a nuclear war. Fortunately, the building was never really used. In the end, it was only fully staffed once and that was during the miners' strike in the 1980s.

A central feature of the Friends' programme of events are visits to current excavations. This year there were two, one to see the summer excavations in the Gosbecks Archaeological Park and the other to the excavations at the Abbotstone site off Warren Lane. The Abbotstone visit was especially popular, with over a hundred members turning up for a tour with site director Howard Brooks.

The Friends continue to provide welcome support for the work of the Trust, not just with an annual subsidy towards the production costs of *the Colchester archaeologist* magazine, but also this year with the purchase of a new slide projector and screen. Last year we must have given illustrated talks to well over 500 people belonging to various local groups and societies, in 14 venues. The new equipment will help us continue to spread the word.

If you are on the internet, you can access the Friends' web site at www.friends-of-cat.ndo.co.uk where you will find information about the current programme of events.

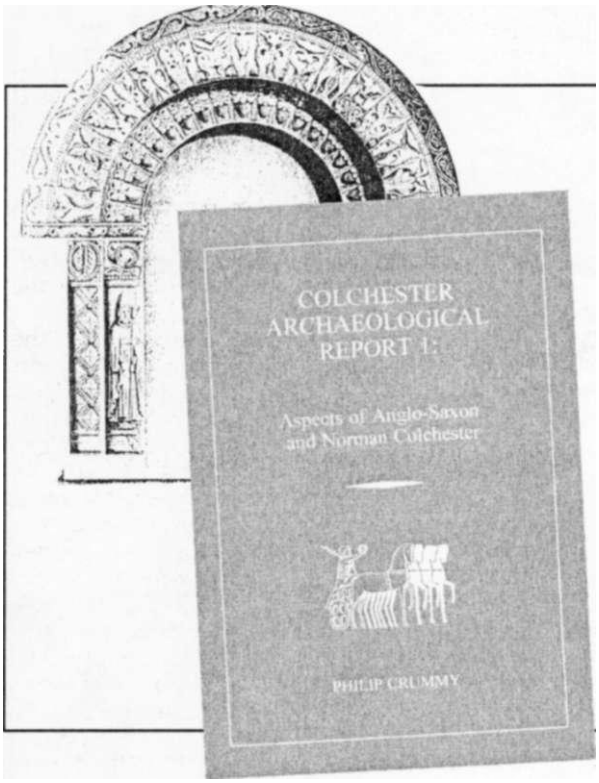
Pictures: top, Dave Stenning and the Friends admire a 15th-century house in West Stockwell Street; below, the Friends walking at Warham Iron Age hillfort (photo, by James Fawn).

If you would like future issues of our magazine *the Colchester archaeologist* sent to you direct, then why not consider joining the Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust? The Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust is a group which exists to keep interested members of the public in touch with the work of the Trust in and around the historic town of Colchester. Members receive a yearly magazine, attend an annual lecture about the previous year's work, are given conducted tours of current sites, and can take part in a programme of visits to archaeological sites, museums, historic buildings and ancient monuments in the Colchester area and beyond.

The Colchester archaeologist is published with funds provided by the Friends.

The annual subscription rates are as follows:
Adults and institutions £3.50
Family membership £4.50
Children and students £2.50

If you want to join the Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust, your subscription should be sent to:
Maureen Jones, Honorary Treasurer,
the Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust,
5 Ashvvin Avenue, Copford, Essex C06 1BS



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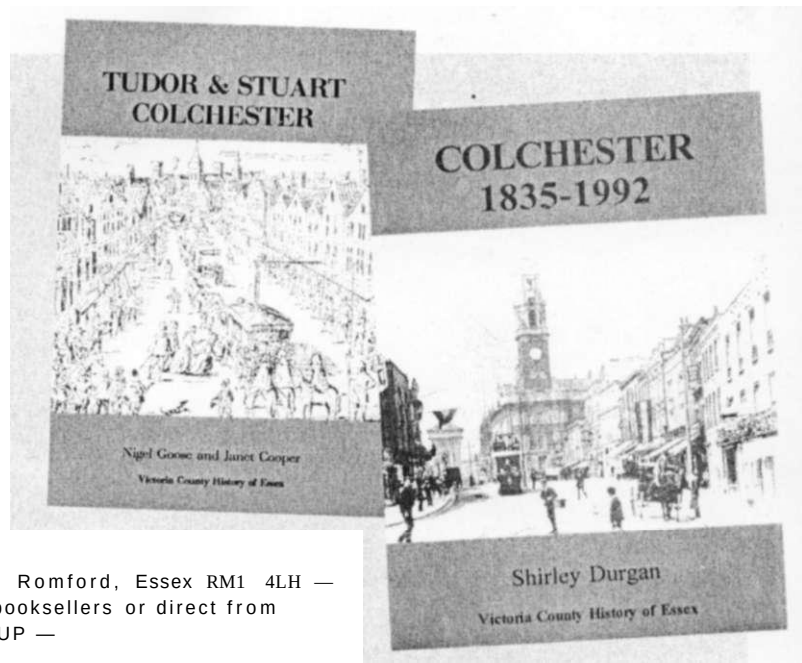

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Medieval Hythe

Recent excavations revealed 500-year old buildings at the Hythe, but still no sign of a Roman harbour

The announcement towards the end of 1999 that the port of Colchester is to close is an important landmark in the history of Colchester, since it will bring to an end the town's involvement with waterborne trade that goes back over 2,000 years.

The Hythe appears to have been a Norman development which grew up around a wooden jetty on the east bank of the river immediately south (downstream) of the where the old Hythe Bridge now stands. Originally the settlement would have been separated from the town by green fields.

Recent excavations at the Hythe have uncovered the remains of houses which belonged to this settlement. The area under excavation was along the modern street frontage directly opposite the medieval church of St Leonard's. It is part of a much larger site under development for housing. The earliest deposits take the form of a thick layer of cultivated soil containing bits of broken pottery and other remains dating from the 12th to the 14th or 15th century. Although no structures of this period were identified, the presence of the pottery and soil suggests that a contemporary building such as a house must have existed nearby.

Sealing and cutting the cultivated soil were various sequences of floors and foundations belonging to houses which lined the street frontage from the 15th or 16th century onwards. These buildings were similar to the houses excavated in 1994-5 before the mini-roundabout and new link road were built immediately to the east. Although the houses were not on the waterfront, they were nevertheless part of the medieval settlement at the Hythe.

The excavations did not produce any significant evidence of Roman occupation in the area, although the investigations were too far from the waterfront to provide definite proof either way. Harbour facilities at any one time are likely to have been quite complicated and they would have varied according to period. In Roman times, the town may have been served by several harbours rather than just one, the most likely candidates being West Mersea, Fingringhoe and Mistley. In Saxon times, a harbour seems to have existed at Old Heath (meaning 'the old hythe' or landing area) which in the early medieval period was replaced upstream by 'New Hythe', the place we call 'the Hythe' today.

The 1999 projects were funded by Tendring Construction Ltd.

Top, St Leonard's church on Hythe Hill; left, part of the excavation site looking up the hill.

This is a medieval stone spindlewhorl from the site, used for spinning (shown at actual size).

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