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the Colchester archaeologist

Roman gate remains under Head Street

Latest discoveries at the chariot racing track

Colchester's friaries investigated

The cemeteries of Roman Colchester

the Colchester archaeologist

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Front cover. Chris Lister recording remains of Roman Head Gate in Head Street.

Below. Le Cateau and Cavalry Barracks, March 2007. Photograph by Van Cols Ltd.

Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust

If you are interested in following archaeological discoveries in Colchester, then why not consider joining the Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust? The subscription rates are modest, and include an annual copy of **The Colchester Archaeologist** magazine delivered to you as soon as it is published. You can also join tours of current sites and organised trips to places of historical and archaeological interest in the region.

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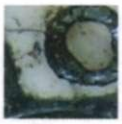


The need for a major upgrading of the services for the new Garrison development meant that the the roads which overlie the site of the circus have had to be dug up and very large new pipes laid along them. The new services along the north-south roads (Flagstaff Road and Circular Road East) were laid in 2005 and the archaeological work which preceded that operation was described in last year's edition of *The Colchester Archaeologist*. However, more recently, it was the turn of the east-west roads. The results of the resulting archaeological investigations turned out to be most impressive and exciting.

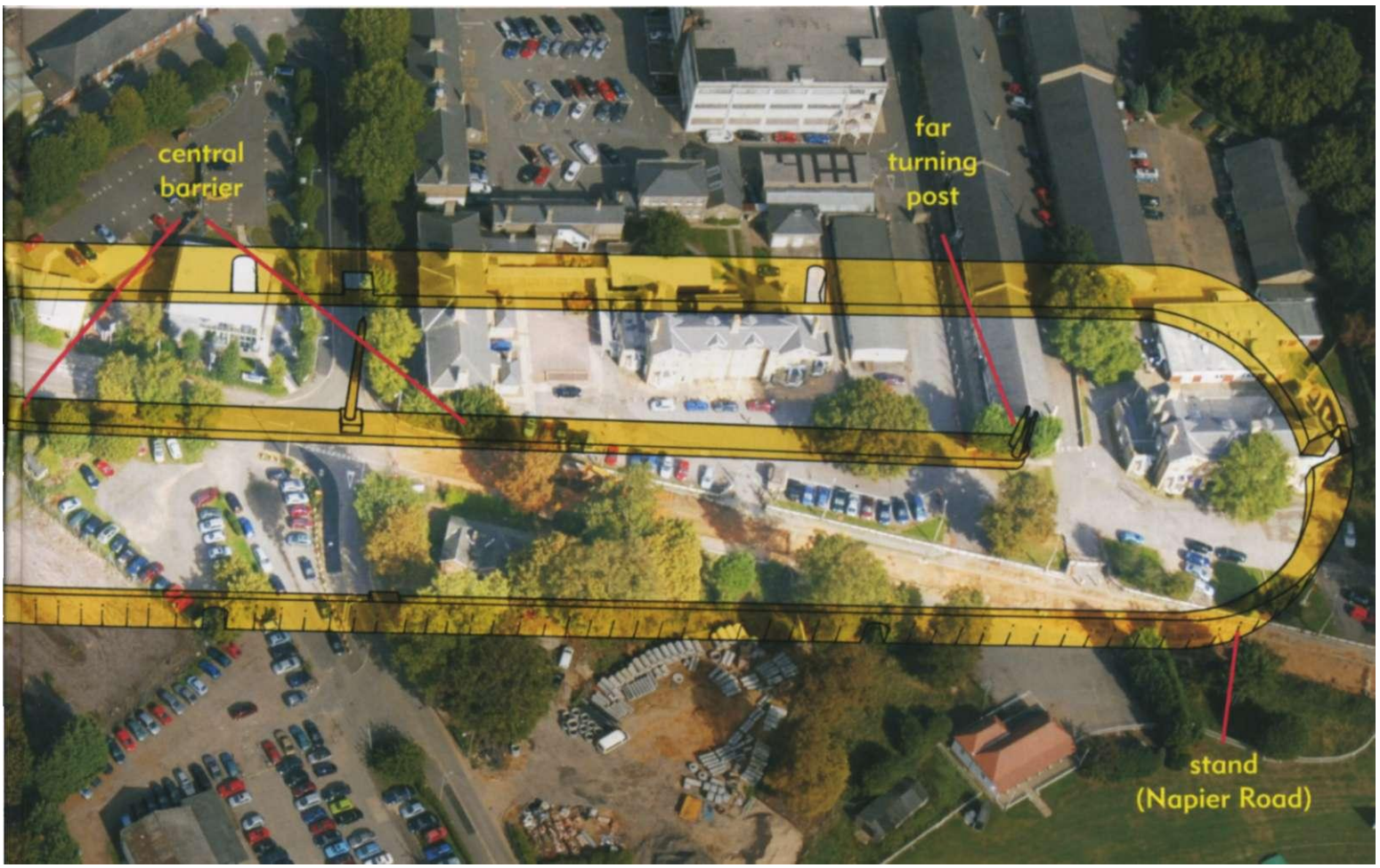
Removal of the road surface in Napier Road revealed underneath an exceptionally well-preserved section of the stand which provided new and useful information about what happened to the circus when it was no longer needed.

And Circular Road North proved even more interesting because here for the first time was an opportunity to examine in detail one of the two turning posts around which the chariots would have raced. The excavation revealed the exact position of the turning post (an important step for the recovery of the circus plan) and also quite extraordinary information about the turning posts themselves. It also told us much about the nature of the central barrier and the kinds of monuments that must have been in it.

Although the large-scale redevelopment of the Garrison has provided several valuable opportunities to investigate the circus, the site of the starting gates lies in a garden which is to be left undeveloped. This is of course a good thing archaeologically because it means that the remains of the gates will not be disturbed. However, if we are to understand the circus properly, we need to find out about the gates since they were such an important part of the circus. We need to know exactly where they stood, how many there were, and what form they took. Permission was therefore sought from Taylor Woodrow to carry out a small excavation in the garden of the Sergeant's Mess which they own and where nearly all of the remains of the starting gates lie. Twenty members of the Friends of CAT volunteered to help and worked over a three week period under the supervision of Laurie Driver and Emma Spurgeon to uncover the remains of two of the starting gates and part of the adjacent entrance into the arena.

Above. An enamelled horse harness fitting found on the Napier Road site. It lay on the arena surface, within about a foot away from the stand. It seems possible from its location that the fitting had been torn from the harness of a horse when the animal collided with the inner wall of the stand. The fitting is about 31 mm wide.

Below. Photograph by Crpl Richard Cave of the British Army. Reconstruction drawing by Peter Froste.



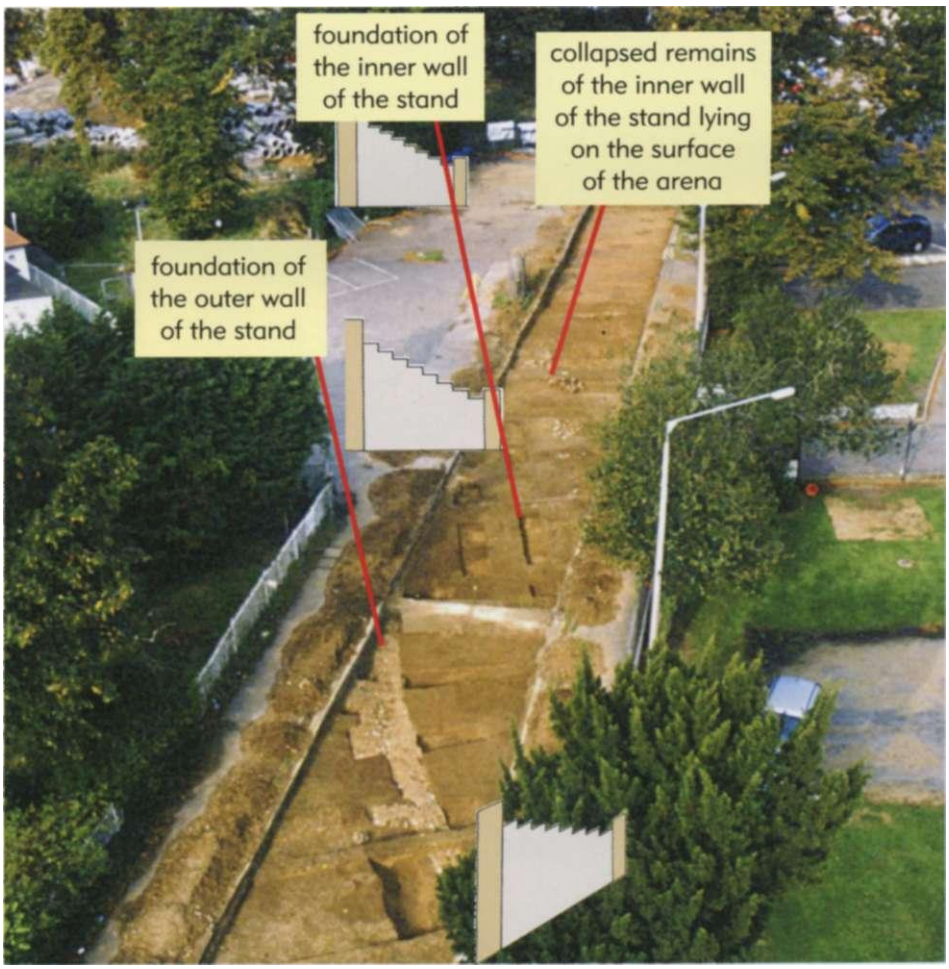
Excavation of the stand

The remains of the stand which were uncovered in Napier Road - the seating area in the circus - turned out to be the best we have yet seen in terms of preservation. In plan, the stand proved to be just as we have found it elsewhere - a narrow inner foundation and a much more substantial outer foundation made stronger with the addition of buttresses along the outside. The purpose of the buttresses was to help counteract the outward pressure on the wall caused by the earth bank, seating, and spectators so that the wall would not topple outwards.

The seating would probably have been in the form of wooden benches arranged in tiers laid directly on an earth bank contained by the inner and outer walls of the stand.

The width of the stand is of considerable interest since this is a key consideration when estimating the likely capacity of the building. Even so, it is a tricky business. If, as seems likely, spectators sat on every tier and shared their space with the feet of the spectators behind them, then the circus could have held up to about 15,000 or so people. If the spectators only occupied every other tier, then the total would have been just over half that number.

An interesting aspect of the Napier Road excavation was the evidence it provided for the end of the circus. The outer wall appears to have been deliberately dismantled in the later Roman period so that the building materials could be salvaged for reuse elsewhere. This was indicated by a layer of crushed mortar and chips of stone left by the stone 'robbers' along the outside of the circus. There was no equivalent layer of demolition debris next to the inner wall. Instead large pieces of stone lay along the edge of the arena where they had fallen off the top of the inner wall. This shows that the inner wall had not been dismantled like the outer one but had been left to decay slowly. It's hard to explain why the two walls were treated differently, but perhaps it was thought that the inner wall contained too little stone to justify the salvage work.



Above: foundation of the outer wall of the stand viewed from the west. The large projection on the right side of the wall is the base of a long buttress on the exterior of the wall.

Right: Napier Road after the road surface had been removed. Viewed from the east with conjectural profiles of the stand added. Photograph by Van Cols Ltd.

Above. The rubble lying at the end of the barrier.

Centre. Remains of one of the cones being uncovered.

Below left. Remains of the cone fully uncovered.

Below right. Evidence for pressurised water: the iron band upright as found.

Excavation of the near turning post

The purpose of the central barrier in a circus was to separate the two tracks and provide a location for monuments and lap-counters of different kinds. The barriers were terminated at either end by a turning post. Confusingly, these did not take the form of a single post as the name suggests, but instead each was composed of a group of three large cones set out on the corners of an equal-sided triangle.

When the remains of the near turning post were uncovered in Circular Road North, we were confronted by a puzzling concentration of rubble. This was reminiscent of the rubble in the Napier Road site which had tumbled off the inner wall of the stand on to the surface of the arena. Further investigation revealed that the rubble lay to the west of the remains of a narrow wall which had formed the semicircular end of the barrier. In other words, just as at Napier Road, the rubble represents parts of the circus which had collapsed on to the arena after the building was no longer used. The fact that the rubble derived from the barrier was proved by the remarkable discovery in the rubble of part of the base of one of the three cones which had stood a few metres to the east on the end of it. The cone had been made entirely of brick, much of it with a curved edge to form the circular outer face of the cone.

An odd feature of the rubble was that it appeared to be far too low down to be lying on the arena surface. However, more investigation revealed the explanation. It lay on a part of the arena surface which had been heavily worn away. A favoured tactic during the races was to keep as close as possible to the end of the barrier when making 360 degree turns. The profile of the arena surface immediately next to the turning post illustrated this point beautifully by being worn away to a depth of perhaps about half a metre where the chariots had made their U-turns.

Another remarkable discovery was that of a narrow iron band lying upright in the arena close to the barrier. The iron band may seem a rather dull and inconsequential object. However, this is not the case, because it is clearly recognisable as part of a water-main. The thin iron bands were hammered into the walls of thick wooden pipes to make pressure-resistant mains. The presence of the collar shows that pressurised water was taken to the barrier and that thus the latter must have incorporated a range of advanced features such as water-filled basins, fountains, and lap-counters in the shape of spouting dolphins, which characterised the circus in its fully-developed form.

Excavation of the starting gates

The starting gates proved to be better preserved than expected. The remains of two complete stalls were uncovered plus one side of the central entrance. The latter would have been flanked on either side by an equal number of stalls which, in most circuses, was six to give a total of twelve in all. Although the total number of gates in the Colchester circus is yet to be established beyond any doubt, the size of the stalls and the width of the west end of the circus (all now known) neatly fit a full complement of twelve. Solid walls of stone separated each of the stalls. The stalls themselves were just wide enough to make sure that once inside the horses in a four-horse chariot could not turn around but had to face the direction of the race. The front of each of the gates would have been fitted with double doors. The magistrate who presided over the races and was responsible for starting each one sat in a special box above the entranceway. On his command, an assistant (also in the box) pulled a lever which operated a mechanism designed to ensure that all the doors opened simultaneously. Remains of the demolished box lay on a thin gravelled surface in the entranceway where the presence of fragments of roof tile and painted plaster showed it to have been a well-built and nicely decorated room.

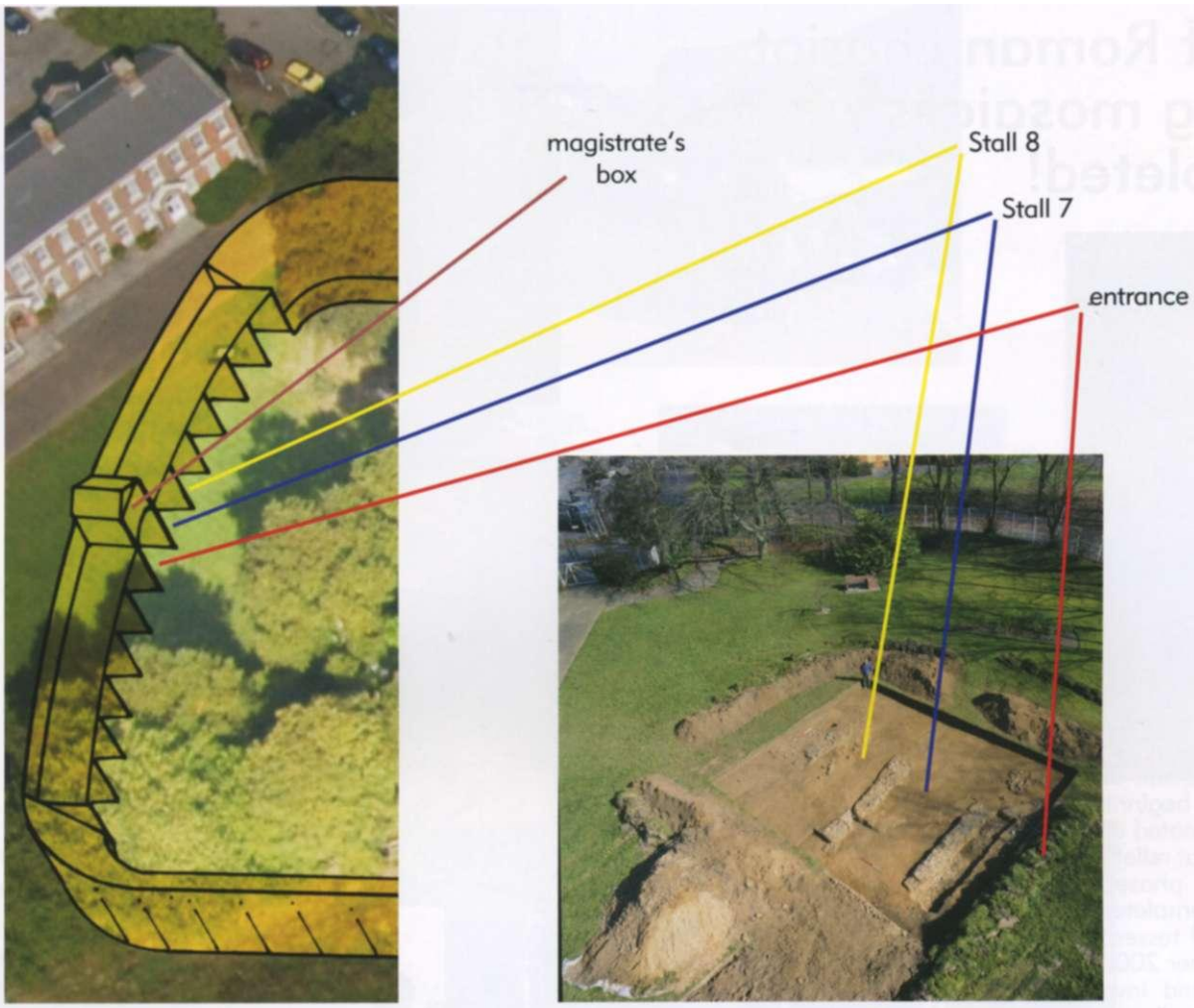
Philip Crummy

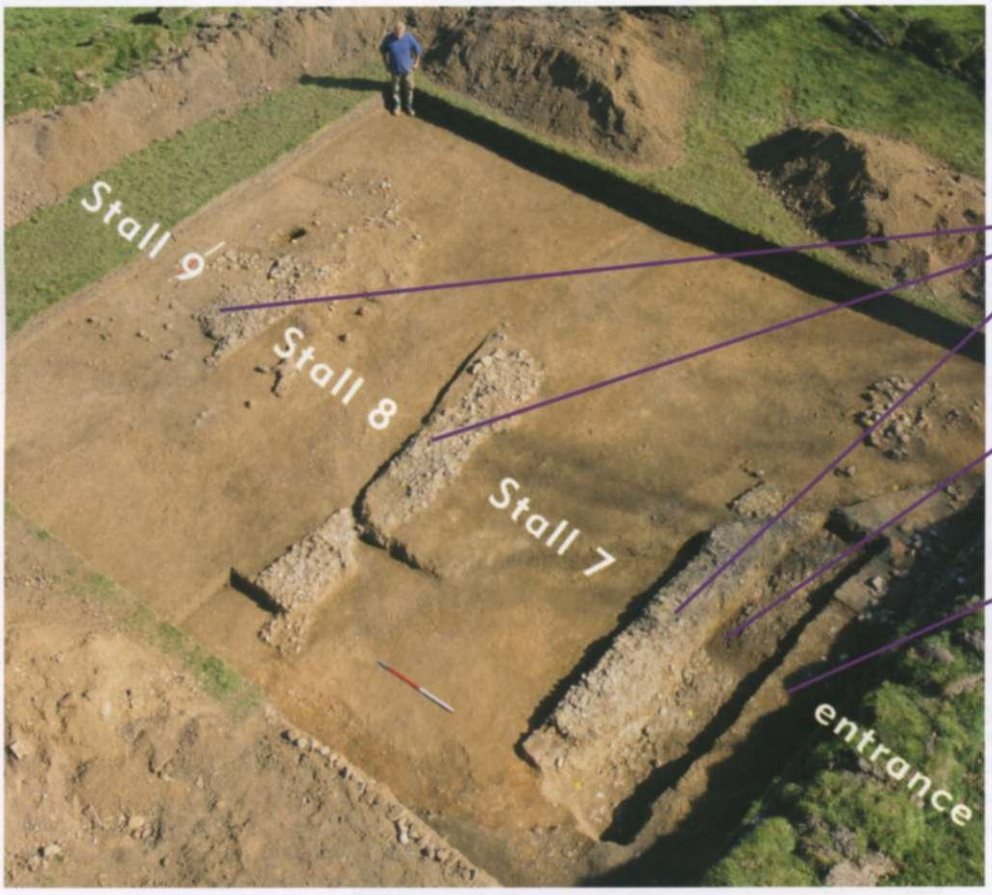
Above top: excavation in the garden of the Victorian Officers' Mess, later to become the Sergeants' Mess.

Left centre: the excavation of stalls 7 (left) and 8 (right) looking westwards. The chariots would have faced to the bottom right in readiness for the start.

Left below: the remains of the roof and walls of the magistrate's box under excavation.

The excavation of the gates was a research project and therefore not part of the main Garrison excavations. It was made possible by a grant from the **Essex Heritage Trust** with additional funding from the **corporate friends of the Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust.** (See inside cover for the names of the corporate friends.) Permission to excavate in the garden was kindly given by Taylor Woodrow. Most of the excavation was carried out by volunteers from the Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust. The excavation of the circus and burials (pp 10-13) is part of the garrison excavation undertaken for Taylor Woodrow with project management by RPS Planning.





foundations of the stalls

foundation of the north wall of the entrance

remains of the demolished magistrate's box overlying the gravelled floor in the entrance

Giant Roman chariot racing mosaic is completed!

A

B

It is well over a year since I wrote my first article for the CAT magazine and at that time the first half of our 20 by 10 foot mosaic was beginning to take shape - with an estimated 60,000 tesserae laid. It is with great relief that I can report the construction phase of the project has now been completed. In fact the last of the 200,000 tesserae were laid on the 7th September 2006. It has been quite a journey and involved many people from almost all segments of our local community. It has given me tremendous satisfaction to see the way in which everybody has pulled together to create a superb piece of illustrative artwork which will hopefully be appreciated by generations of Colcestrians and town visitors in the decades ahead.

Whilst we should be justifiably proud of what we have created, the task is not quite finished. The mosaic is waiting for a home so that it can be properly unveiled. Several options are currently under review and I am hopeful that we can reach a satisfactory conclusion very soon. For this reason, I have not included a picture of the completed mosaic - you will need to be patient!

C

Within the confines of this article, it is impossible to do justice to the enormous construction task, and I have therefore decided to provide a short timeline of the key events along the way. Having never made a mosaic in my life, it was truly a journey of discovery, but we must remember that the key contributors to the project have been around 1,000 of our local school children and young adults - well done, you have created another chapter in Colchester's illustrious history!

Peter Herring
Voluntary Project Manager, CAT Abbeyfields Roman Mosaic Project

D

Assembly

A One of the scenes at an early stage.

B Sara Green placing the last tile of the first half.

C Class 9AH stops for a photo.

D Alan Stokes lays the last tile of the second half.

E

F

G

Completion

E Off to the Army camp.

F Soldiers apply the fibre-glass base.

G Completed mosaic carefully manoeuvred into its temporary resting place.

H Meanwhile students at the Philip Morant School complete their 'companion mosaics' on a Roman theme. Five of the sixty plus artworks are on display here.

H

I would like to thank the following people for their help and support with the project:

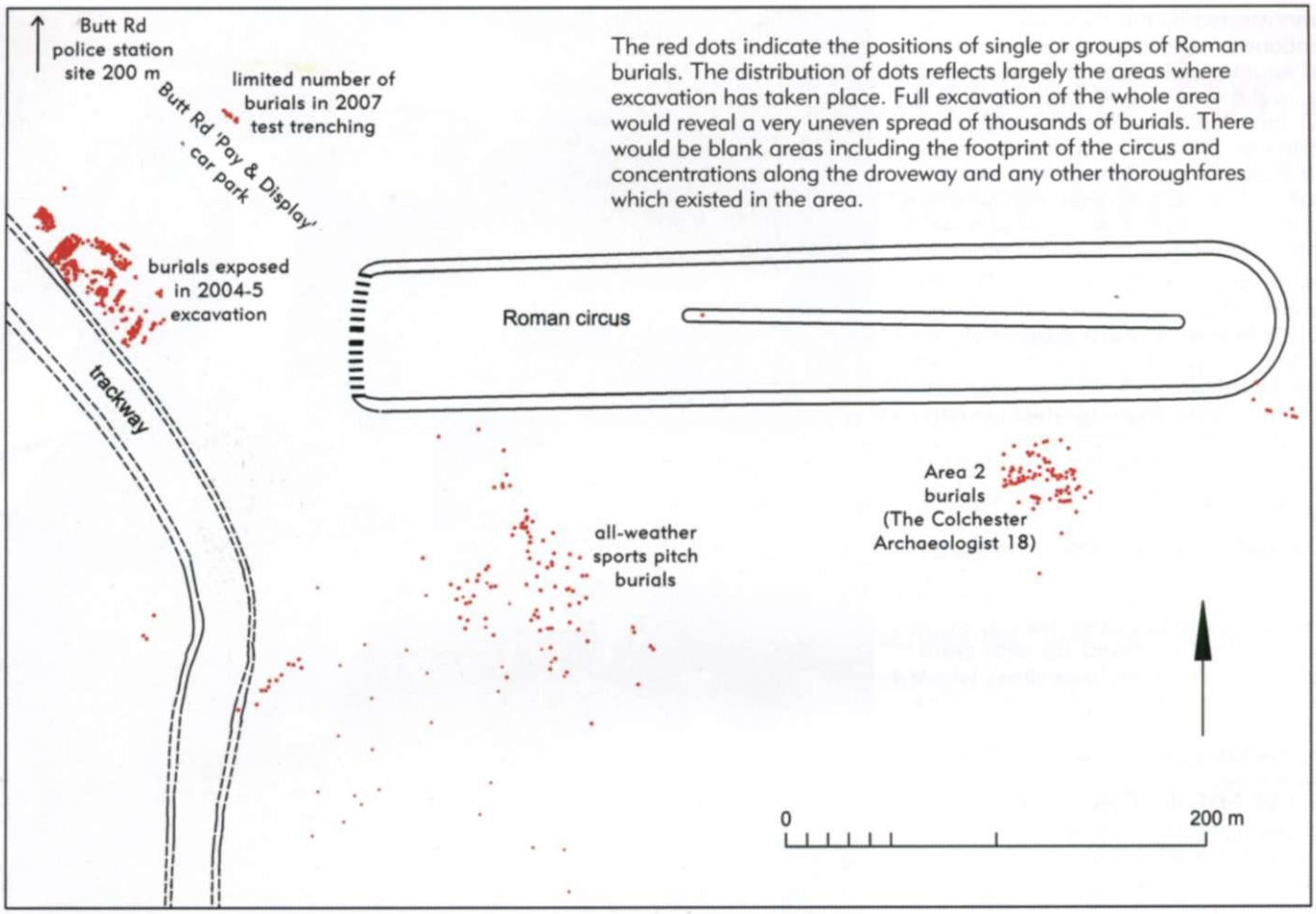
* The Heritage Lottery Fund (The Local Heritage Initiative) for their financial support
* Peter Froste for the artwork design and production
* Sue Cowans, Kevin Flower, Tessa Sagar, Chris Roberts, John Jones & all the staff at The Philip Morant School & College
* All the students of The Philip Morant School & College for their tremendous commitment in creating the majority of the mosaic and in particular the 2005/2006 Year 10 Art students who undertook the complex parts of the mosaic
* The pupils from Prettygate Infants & Junior Schools, Hamilton, Lexden, Home Farm and Gosbecks Primary Schools who helped to complete the mosaic
* Anne Schwegmann-Fielding for support, inspiration and advice
* DAG Construction of Stanway for providing the workshop foundation
* Stacey Flannegan of the Philip Morant Site Team for his work on keeping the workshop weatherproof and secure
* Glenn Jones for the supply and fitting of the workshop carpet
* Volunteers from the Friends of CAT who provided essential assistance in completing the mosaic - especially Brenda May, Margaret Gooderham and Alan Stokes
* Sara Green and Bella Pearce for their helping out in the workshop
* Sgt Bob Byers & Staff of MCTC 'D' Company for their tremendous support in the key tasks of transporting the mosaic, joining the two halves and the fibre glass and reinforcing process
* Michael Swindells from the Mosaic Shop, Bath for his generous discounts
* The Dulux Decorator Centre, Colchester for the donation of materials
* Tile & Stone, Colchester for the generous discounts on grout mix
* The East of England Co-operative Society for keeping the students refreshed during the hot weather!
* Lexden Restorations for providing storage facilities for the finished mosaic
* Van Cols Creative Design & Photography for kindly photographing the finished mosaic
* HSS Hire for transport and the supply of equipment
* Adhere Industrial Tapes for storage facilities and materials
* Technical Resin Bonders Ltd for the supply of the reinforcing panels

Grave concerns: the cemeteries of Roman Colchester

In his magisterial 1958 publication *Roman Colchester,* Rex Hull suggested that Roman Colchester had seven separate cemeteries. Archaeological work since that time has brought to light a very large number of burials, notably at Butt Road and on the Colchester Garrison site. How has our perception of the cemeteries changed over the half-century since Hull's publication?

By Roman law, adults could not be buried in a city or town. So, by necessity, burials had to be located outside the city walls. In Hull's time, it was thought that the burials were loosely grouped into what we would now call 'cemeteries', and Hull recognised seven of these around Colchester - the Lexden, West, Abbey Field, Butt Road, Union (ie St Mary's), North and North-east cemeteries. The discovery of many more Roman burials since the 1950s has shown the situation was not quite so simple.

One change since Hull's time is the realisation that the burials were placed in discrete plots whose boundaries were defined by ditches, or by the side of an adjacent road or track. It had been known for some time that a favourite location for Roman burials was alongside main roads, particularly as they approached the town gates. In Colchester, the London Road was flanked by impressive monuments such as the Colchester Royal Grammar School temple-tomb *(Colchester Archaeologist* 19), by lesser tombs such as those marked by the Longinus and Facilis tombstones, and by the Colchester Sphinx. It has been more of a surprise that, even when the roads turned away from the town into areas of farmland, the sides of those semi-rural or rural trackways were still favourite places for burial. A good example is a



major trackway which has only come to light in recent years, flanking the 2004-5 excavations to the south of the Butt Road 'Pay & Display' car park and then running south across Abbey Field. On the 2004-5 sites, only the east side of the track fell within the excavated areas, but over 350 burials crowded up to this boundary. The existence of these ditched cemetery plots first became evident on the site of the Butt Road police station, where major excavations took place in the 1970s and 1980s before the police station was built. Here, a small 2nd- to 3rd-century, ditched cremation and inhumation cemetery was replaced by a large, ditched inhumation cemetery in the late 3rd and 4th centuries. Evidence of similar burial plots was seen in 2007 in test trenches on the Butt Road 'Pay & Display' car park site, where the absence of burials in the middle of the site implies an empty plot in between two separate cemeteries, the southern one being the cemetery excavated in 2004, and the northern one a new discovery whose southern extent is defined by a ditch.

Intriguingly, there may be a chronological theme to these cemetery plots. Cremation cemeteries of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD tend to be located away from the Roman town, whereas inhumation burials of the 3rd and 4th centuries tend to be closer. This is

demonstrated by the three sites already mentioned - there were 73 cremations and no inhumations on the sports pitch site, and there were 90 cremations and 207 inhumations on the 2004 excavation site. The trend is confirmed by the Butt Road Police Station site, where a small 3rd-century cremation cemetery was followed by a late 3rd- and 4th-century cemetery with 734 inhumations.

Why is this so? By around AD 300, Roman Colchester was shrinking. There is clear evidence from excavations for the demolition of town houses and even areas of suburbs beyond the walls. This left vacant plots, many of which reverted to agriculture. Perhaps these vacant plots encouraged the establishment of the later inhumation cemeteries closer to the town.

Since Hull's day, we have developed a greater understanding of the huge variety of burial types. Careful excavation on cemetery sites reveals burnt patches of earth mixed up with cremated bone. These are 'pyre sites', where the cremation fire took place. One particularly interesting type of pyre site is the full-body cremation or *bustum* (plural *busta).* These have been recognised at Handford House (*Colchester Archaeologist* 17) and at the Garrison. In well-preserved *busta,* the cremated body can drop, more or less in its articulated position, into an open slot under the pyre where the remains were left to rest.

The whole issue of burial and burial rites has become much more complex since Hull's time. We now realise that burials were not simply inhumations or cremations, but included a range of apparently odd types of burials, such as cremated bone placed into a hole without a cremation vessel, or perhaps cremated bone mixed up with a few potsherds. It seems clear that what went into a burial depended on how much of the remains were collected from the pyre site. Was the thoroughness of this collection a reflection of tradition and the ethnic origin of the mourners? Did rich people's burials contain many pots and carefully collected cremated bone, and did poor people have a budget burial? Of course, we may never know the answers to any of these questions. That is the fascination of archaeology, the more we dig up, the more questions we have to ask....

Howard Brooks

Pictured above and on the previous pages excavating Roman graves: Cat Bell, Brian Hurrell, Nigel Rayner and Mariusz Gorniak.

Making up for the next life

A strange-looking two-part object found in one of the burials at the Garrison site was the Roman equivalent of the modern powder compact. Women ground their cosmetics in one part of it and applied the product to their bodies with the other. Nina Crummy explains how these items were used and describes the 'look' that might have been achieved as a result.

The objects buried with the dead can be among the most informative things an archaeologist can study, but they can also pose as many questions as they answer. The objects most often found in Roman graves are jewellery, clothing, a pot filled with food or drink for the journey to the Underworld, a lamp to light the way or coins to pay the ferryman. Other things are less commonly recovered, and one woman's burial from Roman Colchester, excavated in advance of the Abbey Field redevelopment, contained a cosmetic set, an object which is not especially rare in itself but is unusual as a grave deposit.

Cosmetic sets are copper-alloy two-piece objects, a crescentic pestle and a grooved mortar. They come in two main forms and can have decorative terminals, with no two sets being completely alike. Lumps of coloured mineral would have been placed into the mortar and ground to a powder by the pestle, then applied to the face, or perhaps the body. They are peculiar to Roman Britain, with only one certain find from France, found, oddly enough, near the entrance to the Channel Tunnel.

There are many references in contemporary literature to the make-up used in Roman Italy. Most favoured was a white foundation, made either from white lead or the white excrement of crocodiles, with rouge and kohl used for colouring the cheeks and accentuating the eyes. The total effect would have been quite unsubtle, more like exaggerated stage make-up than the natural effect aimed for these days. Stone palettes were used for grinding up cosmetics and other beauty preparations, and these objects are found in Britain as well as on the continent.

Although many of the citizens of Britain might have followed Roman fashions for painting the face, there are hints that we were always just that little bit different. Caesar, Ovid, Martial and Pliny are among the Roman writers who describe the British as painting their bodies, and it is generally understood that the specific Latin words they used meant that the Britons favoured a dye made from woad, Isatis tinctoria. This plant produces a blue colour, much used by dyers of textiles, but if old dye is used or if the skin is over-exposed to the substance, it can turn black. This may have often happened, as Pliny describes how the wives of Britons, and their daughters-in-law, looked like Ethiopians after staining their bodies with a plant extract.

Unfortunately, so far there is no evidence about what sort of cosmetics were ground up in the British metal sets, as no trace of any mineral has yet been found preserved inside a mortar. It is tempting to imagine that the woman buried at Abbey Field, who took her cosmetic set with her to the grave so that she could continue to look her best in the next life, may have been a Briton who had continued the practice of her ancestors, but she might equally well have used Roman-style cosmetics, grinding them up in a handy British metal mortar instead of on a stone palette.

The cosmetic set was found tucked under the skull of an adult. From the way the two parts lay in the ground, it looks as if they had been loosely held together by something like a piece of string or leather (now decayed completely away) threaded through the loops.

Two arches or one?

The remains of the Roman gate at Head Gate are surprisingly well preserved and lie only a foot or so below the modern road. A recent trench for new BT ducting along Head Street provided a rare opportunity to find out more about the original appearance of the gate.

Head Gate takes its name from the gate which used to stand at the Crouch Street end of Head Street, this having been the chief or head gate of the walled medieval town. Originally, the Head Gate was one of six gates leading into the Roman town of which the Balkerne Gate was the most important (perhaps along with East Gate on the opposite side of town). The closure of the Balkerne Gate in the late Roman period meant that the main route into town from London and the west was through the Head Gate, hence its name.

Roman gates in general varied considerably in plan. The largest, like the Balkerne Gate, consisted of a pair of archways flanked on either side by a single smaller archway for pedestrians. Some gates had just one main archway rather than two and some, like Duncan's gate in Colchester, consisted of just a single archway with no separate provision for pedestrians at all.

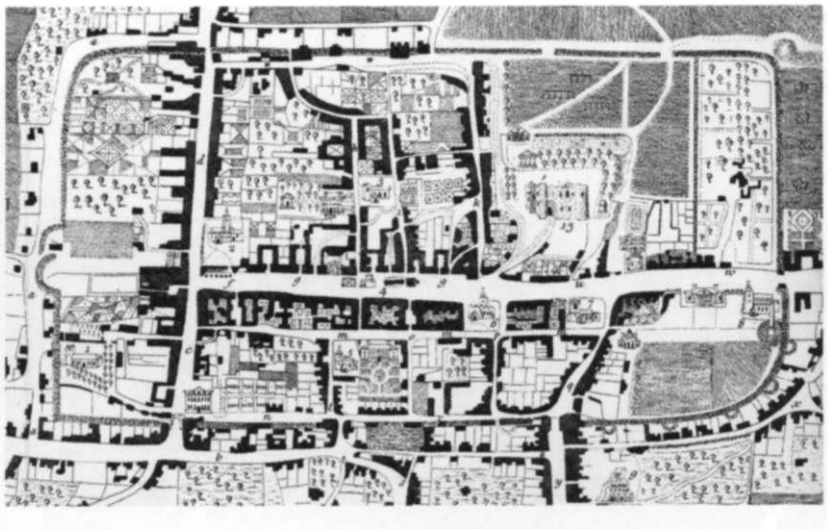
Head Gate was demolished in 1753 leaving us with little reliable information about its appearance apart from an indicative sketch on the Colchester town plan which was published just a few years earlier in Morant's History of Colchester and a similar sketch on Speed's map of Colchester which appeared in 1610. Both show a gate with just a single arch. Other evidence for the gate only having a single arch is to be found in the records of the Siege of Colchester where Lord Capel, one of the royalist generals, is said to have fastened the gate shut with his cane.

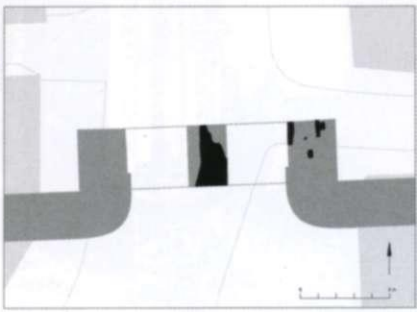
Opportunities to investigate the site of the gate have been very rare in the past which is not surprising considering that its remains lie under one of the busiest roads in the town. In 1988, the Council replaced the pavement surfaces along Sir Isaac's Walk and into Head Street. The remains of the gate were exposed because they turned out to be within about a foot and a half of the modern street level. This was the first real opportunity to examine the gate and the results of this work were described in *The Colchester Archaeologist* for that year (no 2). Although the investigations were very limited, it did seem as if the drawings in Morant and Speed were misleading and that the gate originally was of double-arch form.

In 2006, BT needed to lay some major ducting along the length of Head Street and beyond. The contractors, Lowery Ltd, commissioned the Trust to carry out a watching brief during their work because of the archaeological sensitivity of the area. Fortunately Don Shimmin, who had carried out the recording work in 1988, was on hand to take up the challenge once again.

A problem with work of this kind is that we can never know beforehand how much survives under the streets because so much has been destroyed with the laying of services and drains of various kinds in the past. Work in Head Street started at the north end and, from the outset, the watching brief proved very rewarding with the exposure of various stretches of Roman foundations along the east side of the street.

When the trenching reached the site of the gate, it became clear that our luck was in because masonry survived not far below the modern ground level. From





Opposite page. Chris Lister recording the central pier of the Head Gate in 2006.

Left. Don Shimmin and Steve Benfield excavating the Head Gate in 1988.

Above. The plan of Colchester published in 1 748 in Morant's History of Colchester. Close-up of the Head Gate below.

Left below. Latest plan of Roman Head Gate showing the two-arched plan.

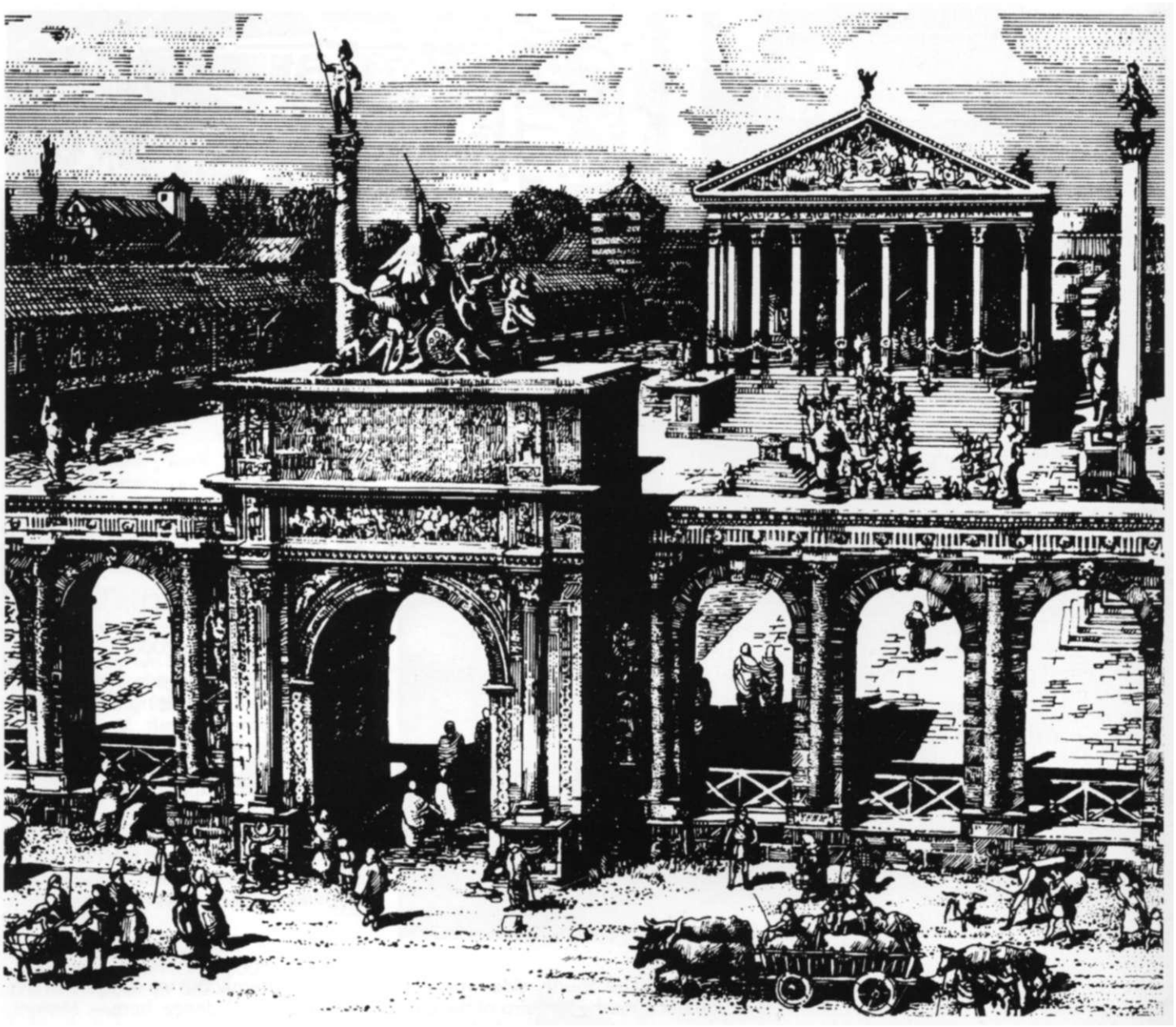
our work in 1988, it appeared that the trench would pass through the central pier of the gate if, as we believed, it had really been a double-arched structure. We explained to Lowery that we could of course record the masonry where it was to be cut by their trench, but that we could make much more sense of what we were to see if the trench could be made a bit bigger. Lowery readily agreed to oblige and made the necessary arrangements for us to carry out the work on a Saturday so they could cut their trench on the Sunday when the street was relatively quiet. We worked out where the central pier ought to lie if the gate had indeed been in the form of two arches, and we marked out the position of the enlarged trench on the street for Lowery to dig out. Fortunately not only did it all work out well and the central pier turned up where it was supposed to, but the remains themselves proved to be well preserved and the lowest half metre of the base of the pier turned out to be intact.

The enlarged trench allowed us to uncover and plot three sides of the central pier. The fourth side was not exposed because the remains of the pier extended under the western half of the street where traffic had been reduced to a single lane. But we needed to find the position of the west face of the pier. This would let us to work out the position of the centre of the pier exactly and thus enable us to reconstruct the plan of the whole gate on the assumption that the west side of the gate was a mirror image of the east side. How could we find out? It was clear from the pattern of the Roman bricks forming the corners of the pier that the west side of the pier could not have extended very far under the street, so we decided to make the tiniest of holes in the side of the trench. It was like digging a little rat hole along the face of the pier. We groped our way along the face for the distance of about 400 mm until it stopped and we could feel the corner. Could this be a first - archaeological excavation by touch!

So the plan as reconstructed in 1988 proved to be right (but with a few minor corrections) and Roman Head Gate seems to have been a double-arched structure afterall. But we appear to have a conflict of evidence here - Morant, Speed and Lord Capel tell us that between 1610 and its demolition in 1753 there was one arch whereas the Roman remains in the ground indicate there had been two.

The double-arched plan neatly spans the full width of Head Street as we know it today suggesting that the gate in this form and the street (its post-Roman version) were contemporary. In other words, it looks as if when Head Street was laid out, perhaps in the 10th century or so, the Roman gate was still in its original two-arched form and that its reduction to a single arch must have happened some time later but before 1610. The most obvious time for such a radical alteration would be around 1400 when the walls of the town were extensively repaired and refurbished. But this is guesswork, and we need to wait for further chances to investigate the gate to see if this puzzle can be solved.

Philip Crummy



Roman archaeology

A short distance south of Colchester Castle lie the well-preserved remains of a monumental entrance into what had been the precinct of the great Temple of Claudius. Luckily the foundations of the entrance and the massive arcaded screen of which it was part were inadvertently preserved by the Norman builders of the castle when they piled up a great bank of soil over the ruined remains to make a defensive bank around the castle bailey. The degree of preservation and the importance of the buildings which stood there mean that any trenches or holes in this part of town are bound to prove extremely interesting. Recently there were two opportunities for investigations in the area. Don Shimmin describes some of the findings.

The east end of the High Street was diverted southwards in the late 11 th century to make room for the castle bailey ditch (The *Colchester Archaeologist* **14,** 15-17). The curve in the road can still be seen today, although the ditch was later backfilled and built over. While the digging of the ditch destroyed underlying Roman remains, the construction of the Norman rampart behind the ditch helped to preserve them. In particular the south side of the precinct of the Temple of Claudius was bounded by a wall, which despite Norman robbing survived well beneath the rampart.

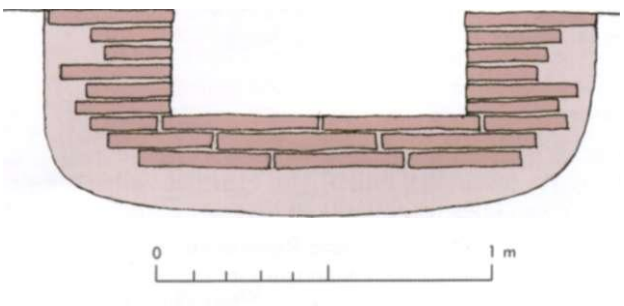
Excavations in 1931, 1953 and 1964 uncovered parts of this wall. It consisted of a large arcaded screen with half-engaged columns to the front and rear of the piers, and was probably originally at least 8 m high. The 1931 excavation revealed the remains of the west side of a monumental arch centrally-placed in the south wall (see above illustration). The remains lay only a foot below the modern ground level, and to the south were traces of two large Roman drains.

In 2006 it was possible to examine parts of this area again on a small scale. On the east side of the narrow modern street known as Crowther's Entry (after a previous owner), several evaluation trenches were dug in advance of a proposed redevelopment. These revealed a large stone-and-mortar foundation, 1.6 m below the modern ground level. The south face of the foundation was uncovered, although it was not possible to locate the northern edge. This was probably part of the foundation for the arch where the carriageway passed under it.

The monumental arch was about 8 m wide and was faced with tufa. This easily-worked stone was probably brought by sea from quarries near the the Hampshire coast. Across the front of the arch it is likely that there was an inscription, perhaps recording Claudius' role in the conquest of Britain. Evidence from elsewhere suggests that the Roman circus at Colchester was closely linked to the Imperial Cult (emperor worship), and circuses and temples were sometimes part of the same complex as at Tarragona in Spain. Although in Colchester the circus and the Temple of Claudius were some 700 m apart, on race days a procession of priests and officials probably passed under the arch on their way to the circus *(The Colchester Archaeologist,* 18, 14).

Further Roman remains were uncovered 0.9 m below the modern ground level on the west side of Crowther's Entry in December 2006 during rebuilding work. The north side of a well-preserved drain was traced for 7.5 m. It was constructed of Roman brick set in a hard pinkish mortar (*opus signinum).* The drain probably lay between the precinct wall and an east-west street, which had been destroyed when the Castle Bailey ditch was dug.

The recent work has enabled the location and depth of the Roman arch and nearby remains to be plotted more accurately, and thus the impact of any future redevelopment can be assessed with more confidence.



Above left. Artist's impression (Peter Froste) of the monumental arch which led into the precinct of the Temple of Claudius.

Above. The 2006 excavation in progress in Crowther's Entry.

Above right. The Roman drain as uncovered late in 2006 in a yard off Crowther's Entry. Only the southern half of the drain is exposed. The vertical face visible in the photograph would have been buried in Roman times when the drain was in use.

Right. Conjectural reconstruction of a cross section through the drain.

Roman remains - new views

Howard Brooks

Redevelopment work in Colchester sometimes opens up views which have never been seen before. The demolition of the Mercury Flats has allowed the unusual view shown below right of the Mercury Theatre. Appropriately, the figure of Mercury himself is seen on the corner of the theatre building.

The Mercury Flats was part of the Balkerne Gardens residential home. The home occupies a prime piece of the Roman town, situated immediately north east of the Balkerne Gate, in Insulas 17a and 17b of the Roman town. Although there has never been the large-scale excavation which the site deserves, various watching briefs and trial trenches over recent decades have brought to light fragments of the Roman buildings which once occupied the site. Roman coin hoards were found here in 1965 and 1977.

Plans for redevelopment triggered a small evaluation in 2005, and a watching brief in 2006 on the new building and its drains. As expected, various Roman wall lines, floors, and gravel surfaces have come to light. Loose finds were plentiful, and included a significant quantity of late Roman pottery. The new scheme was designed so that the disturbance to the underlying archeological remains would be as limited as possible. The result is that the interesting and well-preserved Roman remains on the site survive for future generations to examine.

The recording and investigations were funded by the Balkerne Gardens Trust. The architects who commissioned the work were Stanley Bragg.

Above right: Jumbo looms over the Balkerne Gardens residential home. The trenches visible are new drain lines for the rebuilt Mercury Flats.

Right: Will Clarke recording Roman strata in the builder's trenches with Mercury just visible in the background perched on the Mercury Theatre.

The lost church of the Crossed Friars

Crouch Street is a relatively quiet street today. But it was not so long ago that it was at one end of the road between Colchester and London. For travellers from that great city, a landmark at the end of their journal would been the church of the friary of the Crossed Friars. Stephen Benfield describes how recent work on a building site has led to the discovery of the long-lost church.

Standing outside shops in Crouch Street and looking across the road, there is not usually much to see. However, I as write this account, hoardings where Cash Converters used to be, proclaim the imminent arrival of a new development of flats. Above this you are drawn to look up at the crane towering over the site. By coincidence, six hundred years ago in the Middle Ages, people passing along what is now Crouch Street would also have been drawn to look up at almost exactly that same spot. There, reaching up to about the top of the Birkett Long's offices, they would have been gazing up at the tower of the church of the Crossed Friars.

It seems remarkable that, of the four medieval religious houses founded in Colchester, little today remains to be seen. The ruined of part of the church of St Botolph's Priory can still be visited. There is the restored gatehouse of St John's Abbey, although nothing of the abbey itself remains. The area of Grey Friars is still commemorated in the name of Grey Friars College (but see pp 24-5 below). Crossed Friars is probably the most obscure of all these houses and is now all but invisible in the modern town. However, there is one lasting memorial of the house of the Crossed Friars, although this is not immediately obvious, the name Crouch Street. Crouch is an old word for cross, and the Crossed Friars were also known as the Crouched Friars. Crouch Street is in effect Cross Street and is named after the friary that once stood there. Excavation and recording by the Trust on behalf of Bellway Homes, during the redevelopment of the former Cash Converters site has allowed part of the remains of the Crossed Friars church to be identified. In conjunction with earlier excavations, much of the ground plan of the church can now be pieced together.

Distant brethren: crouched friars in Crouched Friars, London.

The Crossed Friars and Colchester

The name, Crutched, Crouched or Crossed Friars comes from the physical appearance of the brothers. Each of the friars carried a wooden staff that had a cross on the top of it, and each had a red cross of cloth sewn on to his habit. The habit was originally brown or black in colour, but was later changed to blue. They were a Mendicant order, which means that they begged and relied on charitable donations for their income and support. Their main concern was caring for the poor and needy, helping to look after both body and soul.

The origin of the Crossed Friars is uncertain. They claimed a middle-eastern foundation of the 1st century AD, but

Excavations in progress uncovering the tops of the church foundations.

were later reconstituted in 4th century Jerusalem. They were in Italy in the 12th century when Pope Alexander III gave them a constitution and a rule of life similar to that of the better known Augustinian order. A rule is a guide in the form of a set of ideals of how to live a religious life, of which the rule of St Augustine, written in about AD 400, is one of the earliest. In England, the Crossed Friars first appear at the synod of the diocese of Rochester in 1244. They may have come to Colchester as early as the following year, although the first secure record of the order in Colchester refers to 1251. At that time they occupied a hospital and chapel buildings at Crouch Street, established for them by the Lords of Stanway. The Crossed Friars were not a large order in England, and a small number of houses were established in this country at Colchester, London, Reigate, Oxford, York, Great Weltham and Barnham (Suffolk), Wotton-under-Edge (Gloucestershire), Brackley (Northamptonshire) and Kildale (Yorkshire).

By 1401 the friary at Colchester had fallen on hard times, and parts of the church (the nave, chancel and bell tower) were in need of repair. It may have been at about this time, and on account of poverty, that the Crossed Friars lost control of the premises as it is recorded as being at this time a free chapel or hospital. The poverty of the Colchester house can be contrasted with the more affluent London friary established in 1249 at Tower Hill. This lay directly at the other end of the road between London and Colchester (the Colchester friary being at the Colchester end). The location of the London house is still called Crutched Friars. In 1342 the London Friars were seeking accommodation for thirteen of their brothers to study at Oxford University, and in 1350 were also building a new chapel. This wealth appears to have been achieved by slow acquisitions of grants and purchases of property. However, it seems that not all of their wealth was being accrued above board. There are records of 1349 of London friars involved with robbery and in 1391 of abetting a man who had stolen property from the house of the Bishop of Bath and Wells. At Colchester financial help was obtained in 1403 from the Bishop of London who helped to revive the fortunes of the religious establishment. Incidentally this also led to the disclosure of an interesting fact about the possessions of the friary. At that time a list of their possessions was drawn up and among these was a relic believed to be a piece of wood from the holy cross. However, we know that the Crossed Friars were no longer in control of the establishment at that time and in 1407 a guild of St Helen was founded in the church. However, in 1496 the Crossed Friars, after producing papal bulls and other evidence, were able to reclaim the church and hospital. At about this time, in the later 15th century, it was recorded that there were two chapels and a hospital on the site. In 1526 an man accused of murder, William Gilbank, claimed sanctuary in the church. He was sheltered in the choir near the high alter and would not be surrendered by the friars.

However, by the early 16th century the days of the great medieval religious houses, large and small, were numbered. Most were to fall and their property to be sold off, during the dissolution. The wealth of many made them attractive targets for the king. Their despised reputations for good living and loss of religious zeal made them easy targets - one only has to think of the well-fed friar in Robin Hood. This

in many ways, rather than the death of Richard III at Bosworth in 1485, was the real end of medieval England. In 1538 the buildings and estates of the Crossed Friars were granted to a Sir Thomas Audley. It was shortly after this time that illustrations representing what survived of Crouched Friars first appear on maps, the earliest of these being in 1610. In 1637 Crouched Friars was purchased by Sir Harbottle Grimstone, member of Parliament for Colchester. Sir Harbottle converted the site into a house and it is probable that any surviving parts of the church would have been demolished at this time. The church would have had little part to play in comfortable secular dwellings that usually made more use of ancillary buildings of former religious houses. However, Sir Harbottle was not able to enjoy his possession for very long. In 1648 Royalist soldiers occupied the house during the siege. It was bombarded and assaulted by the Parliamentarian army forcing out the Royalists who in retreat set it ablaze, destroying the house. In 1700 a workhouse was established on the site and it is recorded that this building was mostly of a new construction.

The church of the Crossed Friars

In present day Crouch Street, the construction method being used for the new flats, as with many modern buildings, consists of deep concrete piles joined together by concrete ground beams. Preparation for this work involved the clearing away of the last remains of the Cash Converters building and the reduction of the ground level over parts of the site. This was so that a layer of hard standing could be laid for the large piling machine to operate on without sinking into the ground. The construction process was designed to minimise the impact on the underlying remains. Even so, it was during the reduction of the ground level that the Trust was able to record sections of medieval foundation exposed on the west side of the site. As the machine worked rapidly across the site from the Southway side towards Crouch Street, a small team from the Trust was soon hard at work chasing the surviving sections of the foundations. These consisted of two parts. The tops were mortared stone and tile rubble, with facing stones in some places. The lower part was thin layers of rammed earth, alternating with thin layers of either mortar or gravel, in the foundation trench below. This lower part was presumably a cost cutting measure, saving on the expense of entirely mortared foundations.

The ground plan could not be completely recovered because the digging of various trenches coupled with various other groundworks over the years had damaged parts of the site. However, various gaps could be filled in using one's imagination so as to try to understand the plan. Initially it seemed that there might be several buildings, and that understanding the plan from the fragments might prove difficult. Then, about the middle of the west side of the site, two massive square foundation bases appeared. Unlike the other foundations these were constructed entirely of mortared rubble and must have been built to support a great weight Assuming that these large bases were a symmetrical pair within a building, the other wall foundations could be viewed in relation to them. Also, the current archaeological work is not the first time that the Trust has been able to investigate the site of the religious house of the Crossed Friars. In 1988, Don Shimmin led a small rescue excavation on the site of what is now Birkett Long, solicitors. This revealed parts of a medieval building, including two large parallel wall foundations extending east to west across that site. Bringing all this information together, it was at this point that the archaeological penny dropped. What we were uncovering was the east end of a large medieval church building, and the large foundation bases were the southeast and northeast supports of a tower above the crossing. To the north and south of this were the remains of the two transepts and to the east we had the south wall of the chancel. Two gaps in the foundations, thought to indicate that the foundations were of separate buildings, could now be seen to be the site of doorways. These doors must have been planned when the church foundations were built. The large foundations Don Shimmin had recorded in 1988 fitted in perfectly with this interpretation: these were clearly parts of the walls of the nave. This means that the remains of the west end of the church must be lie somewhere beneath what is now Tesco. A number of other sections of foundation recorded since, indicate that there was probably a chapel attached to the north side of the chancel. Also there are indications of other buildings to the north-east of the main church. A foundation, running under the Dulux shop, at the northeast corner of the site,

The remains of the base of a tiled floor in the church. Loose tiles exactly match the impressions of missing tiles in the mortar base of the floor.

could be part of a building or part of a boundary wall that is indicated on the early maps.

The site of the church had been reduced in the past to the tops of the medieval foundations with the result that very little of the floor levels now survived. However, not quite everything of the later medieval layers had gone. One small area of mortar was uncovered in the south transept that had the curious imprint of rough squares in its surface. This was thought possibly to be render collapsed from a wall or vault. However, as so often in archaeology, the true identity of this only became apparent slightly later. Many churches have areas of tiled flooring, often set in a diamond pattern in relation to the orientation of the church. This was exactly the alignment here with the imprint of the squares. Later some plain glazed tiles were found which exactly fitted the imprints, although these were not necessarily the original tiles from this floor. This shows that the floor of the south transept was made of tiles, presumably glazed, set in a diamond pattern. This fragment of floor had survived as, fortunately, it must have sunk below the level of the rest of the floor surface before that was removed. Areas of probable mortar floor, but without any tile impressions, were uncovered sunk into an earlier feature in the north transept. Also there were two phases of plain mortar flooring in the chancel. The floor level in the chancel must either have been lower than that in the area of the crossing and transepts or possibly the floors there represent an earlier phase of a building pre-dating the main church.

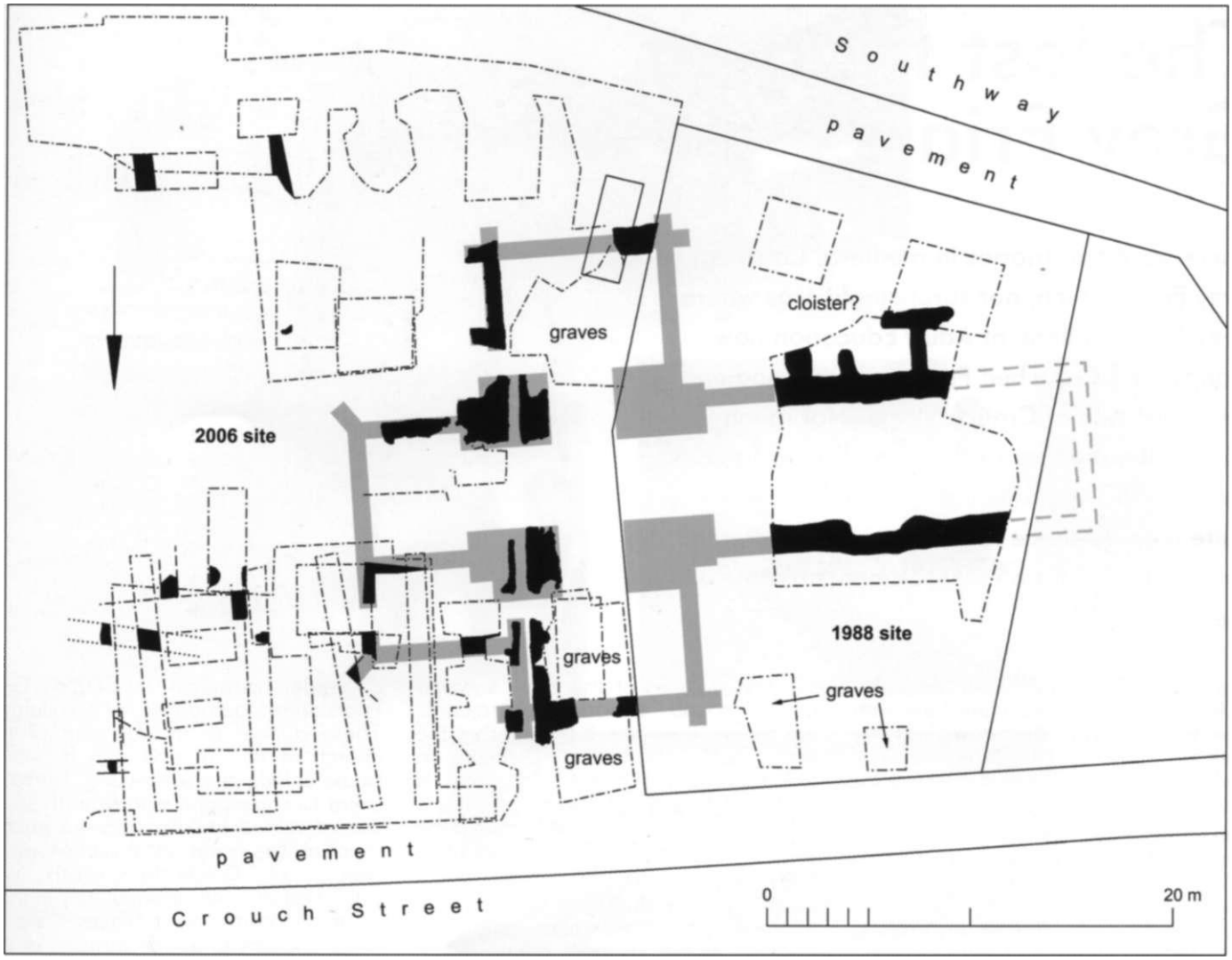
As construction work progressed, machine excavation began again for the concrete ground-beams. On the south of the site, this revealed little of interest, but once work began on the west side of the site, in the area of the church building, everything changed. Almost immediately human bones began to appear. It soon became apparent that near the surface most of this bone had been disturbed and was loose in the backfill of other features, but lower down there were articulated bones that were in situ burials. The plan of the new building meant that two areas on the west of the site could be investigated, and in all about 60 burials were recorded from these areas. All the burials were oriented east to west, with the head at the west end of the grave, and there were no indications of any coffins or of objects placed in the graves. The burials were set out in north-south rows with some cutting earlier ones. In many cases where one cut another, the disturbed bones were re-buried loose to one side of the later burial. All of the burials were found in the transepts or in between the north transept and the Crouch Street frontage. None were discovered south of the church or east of the transepts.

Don had found similar closely-packed burials on the 1988 site (Birkett Long) just to the north of foundations that we now realise formed part of the nave. Also there is a record from 1928 of the discovery of many burials in the area of the nave itself. As yet there is no specialist report on the bones from the

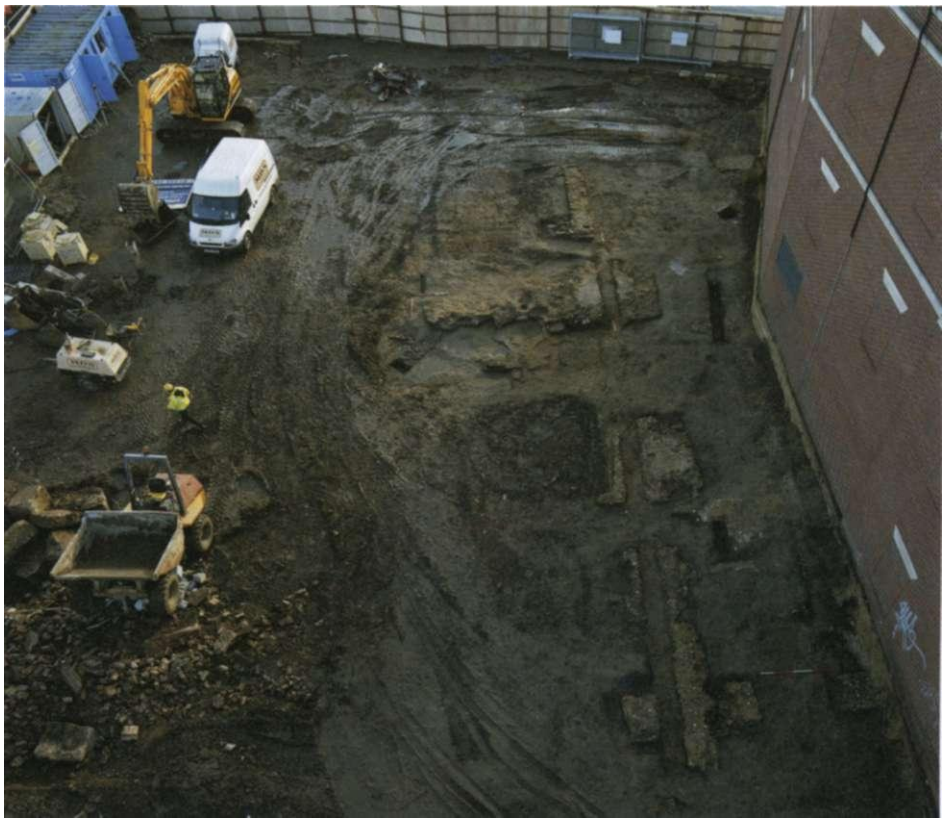
Above. Conjectural impression of the parts of the church found on the excavation site. View seen from the north side of Crouch Street with Birkett Long's to the immediate right.

Right. Plan of the church. North is to the bottom of the plan to match the orientation of the photograph above.

Right below. High level photograph of the site by Van-Cols Ltd showing the remains of the church. Taken from the north. The orientation matches the plan and photograph above.



2007 excavation. However, it is obvious from the size of some of the skeletons that not all of the burials are adults as some are so small that they must have been children. Clearly these are not the remains of brothers of the friary. In 1402 a grant was made to the chapel for burial of the inhabitants of the neighbouring parts of Crouch Street and Maldon Lane, and this probably explains the presence of children. But even so, it is clearly not a straightforward matter to establish who was buried where. There may for example be burials associated with the hospital and chapel which predated the friary. Given this, the archaeological development of the site is likely to have been quite complicated, and many questions remain unanswered. However, the lost church of the Crossed Friars has now been found and we now know significantly more about what was once an obscure monastic site in the town.



The excavations on the site of Crouched Friars were carried out on behalf of Bellway Homes who funded the work.

The lost friary of Grey Friars

There were two friaries in medieval Colchester: Grey Friars which, not surprisingly, was where Grey Friars College of Adult Education now stands, and Crouched Friars, which stood on the south side of Crouch Street. Not much is known about either of them, and opportunities for site investigations are limited. So it was quite a coincidence to find ourselves working on the sites of both establishments almost at the same time.

Grey friars followed the rule of St Francis of Assisi, and they wore a grey tunic with a white cord (hence their name). By the time St Francis died in 1226, the order had spread from Italy to all over Europe including Britain.

The friary at Colchester was founded in the early 13th century sometime before 1237. In common with the other monastic institutions in England, it was closed in the early 16th century and the land and buildings were confiscated and disposed of. By this stage, the friary lands had been extended to include all of the north-east corner of the walled area of the town. The property was bounded on the north and east sides by the town wall, on the south side by the street later known as Friar Street (now the eastern end of the High Street), and the west side by the castle lands.

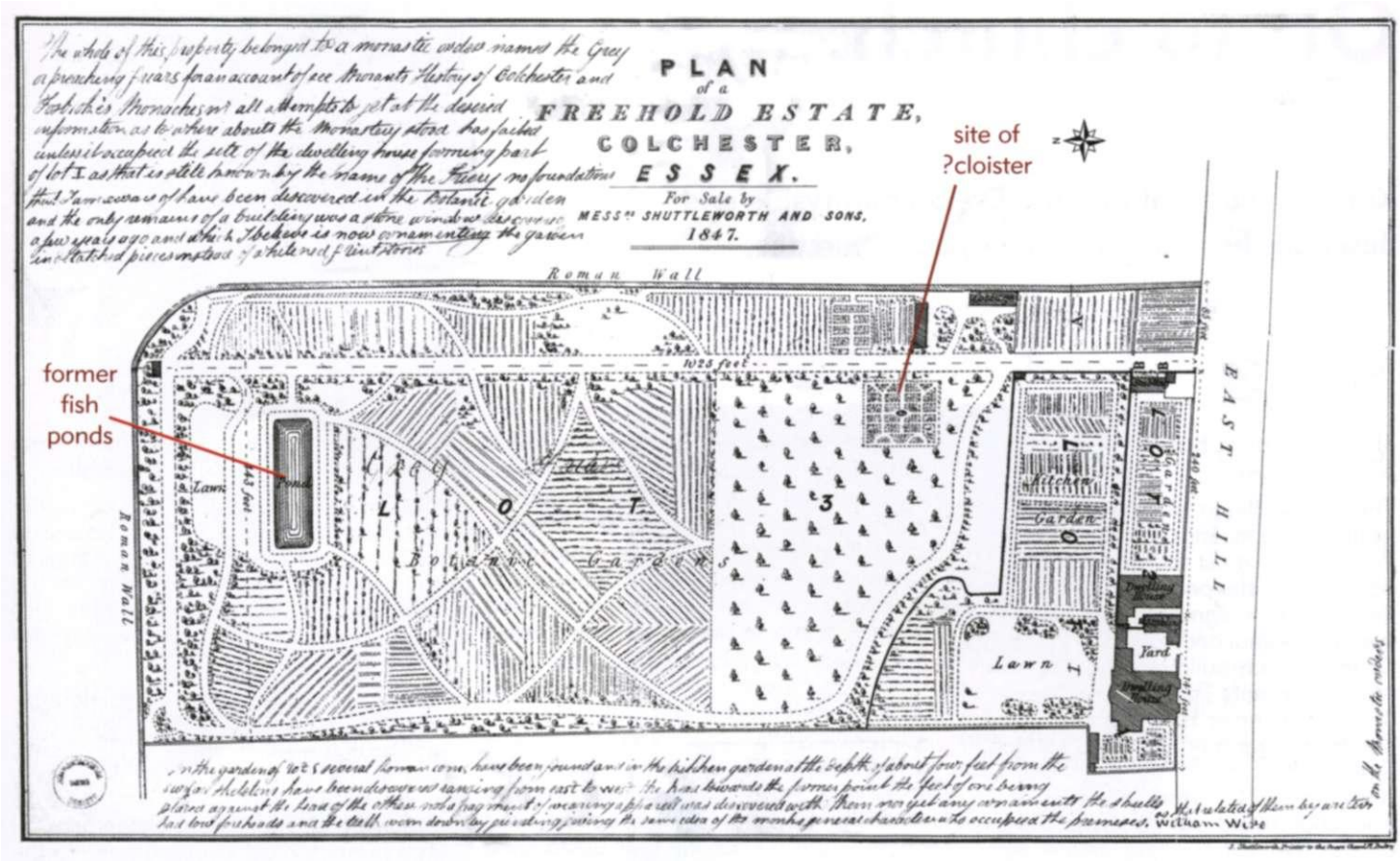
The friary buildings gradually disappeared so that by the late 18th century, nothing of the friary survived above ground. Unfortunately records are sparse. However, it is clear that the friary had included a church, an infirmary, a hall, some lodgings, a kitchen, a bakery, a brewery, gardens, a gatehouse, a precinct wall along the south side of the friary, and at least two fish ponds.

Little is known about the layout of the buildings, and until recently the exact position of the church and the main friary buildings is uncertain other than the fact that the complex lay somewhere north of the High Street frontage. However, there were some clues, and the best of these is a sketch drawn by William Stukeley in 1718. Stukeley is a well-known antiquarian who travelled the country drawing famous historical buildings and other landmarks. In Colchester, he also sketched the castle, St Botolph's Priory and the earthworks on Lexden heath. His sketch of the Grey Friars shows a line of ruined buildings. These appear to include part of the church at the far end with a gabled house or lodgings just beyond. The ruins seem to correspond with a north-south line of ruined buildings shown on the map of the town in Philip Morant's history of Colchester which was published in 1748. Immediately in front of the ?church on Stukeley's sketch there appears to be the remains of the cloisters with more buildings (presumably the main living area) in the centre and foreground. None of these remains appear in the subsequent town map of 1777 suggesting that they must have been demolished sometime around the middle of the 18th century.

However, an interesting and detailed plan survives of the site in 1847 when most of the friary land had been used as a botanical garden and was soon to be sold off for the Roman Road and Castle Road development. This plan is of interest partly because it was annotated by William Wire (Colchester's first archaeologist) who recorded on it a discovery of skeletons in the kitchen garden. The plan shows a curious square feature in the garden which is reminiscent of the ?cloister in Stukeley's drawing. Could this be a relic of the friary cloister or was it simply a fancy part of the Botanic Garden? It certainly

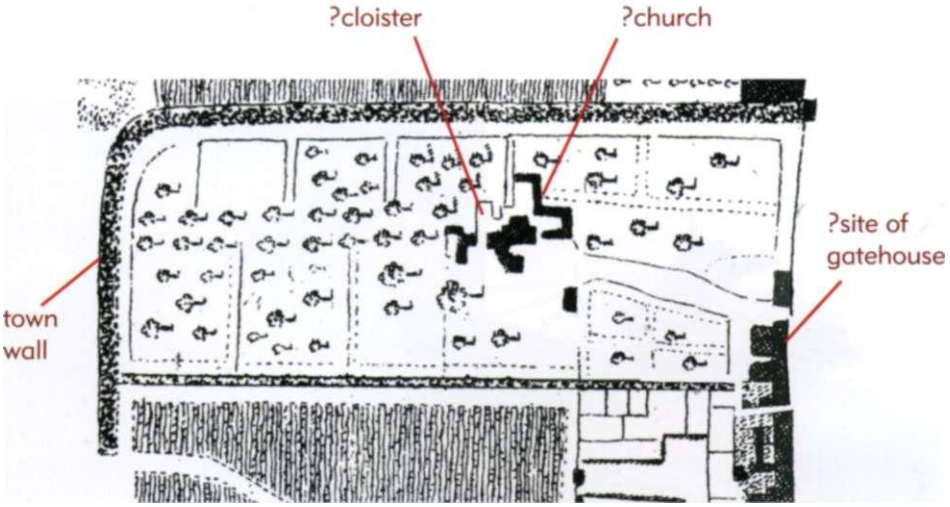
Above. Stukeley's sketch of Grey Friars in 1718.

Left. Part of the supposed foundation of the church of Grey Friars friary exposed in early 2007.



appears to be in the right place for the cloister. Most importantly the plan is dimensioned which means that we can do something not possible with any of the earlier plans - we can work out the exact location of that square and thus fix on the ground the likely position of the church assuming, of course, that the remains of it really do appear on Stukeley's sketch.

These conclusions were made as a result of a study of the site commed by the Essex County Council when the future of the Grey Friars college was being considered. As part of this process, the County Council also asked the Trust to investigate the college site to establish what impact any redevelopment might have on the buried remains there. This meant digging trenches to test the most likely location of the friary buildings to see if any archaeological remains still survived. Several trenches were dug in key positions in the car park at the rear of the college. Four were on the site of the kitchen garden to see if the cemetery described by William Wire could be found, and the two others were located on the likely site of the church. No burials were discovered but at least a displaced fragment of human skull suggests the presence of graves in the vicinity. However, better luck was had with the other trenches because in one of those, right where the remains of the church should be, was found part of a large east-west foundation. The foundation appeared to be 2.4 m wide which, given its width, could hardly be anything other than part of the church itself. Very little of the building was exposed it is true, but it looks as though we found church of Grey Friars after all. Little did we know at the time that we were very soon to find the town's other friary church - the one at Crouched Friars.



Above. Plan of the former lands of Grey Friars dated 1847 and annotated by William Wire. Reproduced courtesy of the Essex Record Office.

Above centre. Extract of the town plan in Morant's history of Colchester published 1748.

Philip Crummy

The desk-based assessment and subsequent evaluation were carried out by Kate Orr for the Essex County Council.

Off to church...

Kate Orr gets out into the Essex countryside and describes her work in three village churches.

St Barnabas' Church, Alphamstone

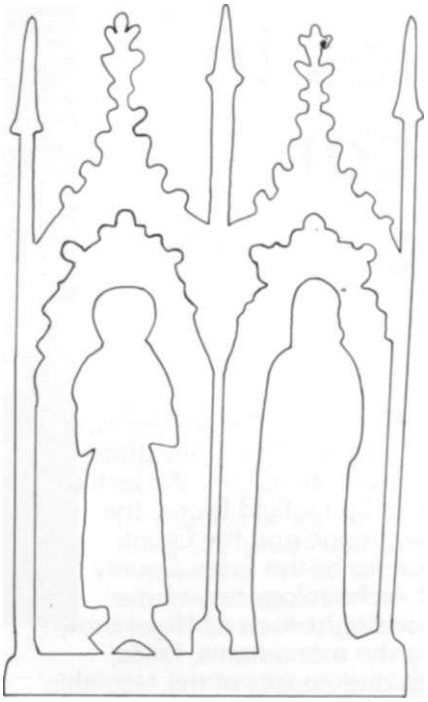
The Essex village of Alphamstone lies nestled in a quiet corner of the Stour Valley. Like most parish churches, St Barnabas' is steeped in history. However the is more enigmatic than most and even its original dedication is not known. Of the church building standing today, most elements date from medieval times. The nave is thought to be the earliest surviving part, being Norman or Saxon. But the history of the site stretches back further back than this. The churchyard stands as a platform above the surrounding fields. Many sarsen stones have been gathered up in the area and are distributed in and about the churchyard, which has led some to speculate that they once formed part of a prehistoric stone circle. One large sarsen has actually been incorporated into the church foundations and can be seen in the interior, projecting from under the south-west corner of the nave. Stone circles are a phenomenon of the Neolithic and Bronze Age and were often surrounded by burials. Early Bronze Age burial urns have been found within the churchyard and in the surrounding fields, and their presence adds weight to the theory that there was a stone circle here. Prehistoric sites may have retained their sanctity into the Christian Saxon period, and there is the probability that upstanding barrows (containing burials) were respected by the church builders if only out of sheer superstition. Alternatively the establishment of the church building here may have been a deliberate attempt to Christianise a pagan site.

Another dimension to the site is the presence of a Roman villa adjacent to the churchyard as well as the findings of Iron Age and Roman pottery in the churchyard itself. Certainly there has been continuous use of the site for 4,000 years.

As an archaeological complex, Alphamstone church and graveyard must rank amongst the most important in Essex, and we therefore welcomed the opportunity to dig some test pits there in March 2007. Movement of the chancel arch prompted an investigation into the causes. This involved taking a look at the foundations and recording any burials or other features at the exterior of the nave on the northern side.

Above. St Barnabas' church, Alphamstone. Viewed from the south-east.

Right. Some of the sarcen stones outside St Barnabas' church. These may be the remains of a prehistoric monument consisting of standing stones.



St Andrew's church, Marks Tey The missing grave slab of Robert de Teye and his wife Katherine. The brasses which where set in the stone were removed many years ago and are now lost.

The limited excavations revealed that the nave foundations had been cut into earlier features including a grave. The alignment of the skeleton was east-west which indicates a Christian burial. The fact that the nave dates from at least the 12th century means that the grave was earlier than this, presumably Late Saxon or early Norman. Despite these clues as to what was here before the building of the church, the site remains a bit of a mystery.

St Giles' Church, Great Maplestead

CAT were called in to monitor renovations of the tower and the addition of a new toilet at St Giles' Church in Great Maplestead in 2006 and 2007. The earliest parts of the church, ie the apse and tower, appear to have been constructed in the 12th century. Most of the middle portions have been rebuilt or altered by the addition of aisles and transepts. It is considered to be an important example of a four-celled Norman church. However, it has been suggested that its structural history is rather more complicated. For example, all the Norman elements may not be of one build, and it is not known why the tower is out of alignment. Like St Barnabas', it is possible that St Giles' Church is late Anglo-Saxon in origin. A fragment of Anglo-Saxon interlaced stonework is preserved on the north-east window sill in the south transept. Earthworks, possibly man-made, can be seen within the churchyard and supposed Roman burials have been reported as being found under the north aisle and in the adjoining vicarage.

Floor reduction of the tower exposed the flint foundations to the tower and nave. These suggest that the tower and the nave were of one build. A short stretch of footing trench for the new toilet to the east of the south porch (formerly a store) did disturb some disarticulated human bones. Contractors had to remove part of the eastern wall of the south porch in order to create a doorway into the new toilet. This involved removing the stone plaque commemorating those who died in the First World War. On removal of the plaque, a window was exposed still with its glass panes. Presumably this window is contemporary with the south porch and is thus 14th century. The window had to be removed temporarily but is to be put back into the new toilet wall. The plaque has been mounted on the west wall of the south transept.

St Andrews church, Marks Tey

St Andrews Church, Marks is another interesting church, noticeable because of its uncommon wooden tower. At the end of 2006, a watching brief was carried out by CAT during lowering of the floor levels in the nave and chancel. The nave is Norman or earlier with Roman brick dressings, and the chancel dates to the 14th century. It is possible that the church lies on a Roman site, but essentially its potential is unknown. The watching brief added some interesting details, firstly a stub of septaria foundation revealed under the present chancel arch. This may mark the position of an earlier east end, or an earlier and narrower chancel arch. Four vaults were exposed in the chancel. These are almost certainly associated with four tomb slabs which had recently been stored in the west tower; one belonging to Rev Peter Wright (died 1839) and the others to members of the Bree family (died 1740, 1753 and 1761). A number of objects were found under the old church floorboards. One was a very fine Purbeck marble tomb slab with the indent of a missing brass. Martin Stuchfield has identified this as the missing slab of Robert de Teye and wife Katherine (dated 1360), whose missing inscription is recorded by Philip Morant in his history of Essex in 1768. Also under the floorboards were pieces of window tracery, mostly derived from the replacement or repair of windows in the 19th century. However, three pieces without glazing grooves may be part of a missing stone rood screen. Stone rood screens are rare in Essex churches so these fragments, if they do belong to a rood screen, are a valuable find. They also add detail to our previous understanding of the pre-Victorian layout of the church. The de Teye tomb cover is to be reset in the new church floor, and a sample of the tracery pieces will be kept in the church.

Bodies in the car park

As much is known about the prehistory of the Chelmer Valley as almost any other part of Essex. Excavations over the last 25 years on sites at Springfield Lyons, the Boreham Interchange and the Great Baddow enclosure by the Essex County Council Field Archaeology team have allowed archaeologists such as Nigel Brown to bring to life the monuments, fields, burial grounds and houses of the Neolithic and Bronze Age farmers who lived here 4,000 years ago. Now, excavations by CAT at the new Chelmsford park-and-ride site near Sandon have revealed more burials and possible buildings.

Anyone who has worked in Chelmsford will understand the appeal of parking on the fringes of the city and taking a short bus ride to work. The park-and-ride on the Junction of the A414 Maldon Road and A12 Chelmsford Bypass was so popular that a second phase was soon under construction. CAT carried out trial trenching and excavation on the site in 2005 and 2006, on behalf of Essex County Council and Equity Estates.

Excavations have shown that there were several phases of activity on the park-and-ride site. The discovery of a small group of Neolithic flints indicates that people were present in the area sometime between 4,000 and 2,500 BC. However, it is much more difficult to know exactly what they were doing here. The absence of any evidence for buildings or agriculture (ie post holes, pits or ditches) suggests that Neolithic people did not live on this site, although they may have been active in the vicinity.

The main phase of activity dated to the Late Bronze Age, and consisted of thirty-five cremation burials, and a large cluster of post holes. Pottery from the post holes was dated by Nick Lavender to the period between 1,000 BC and 800 BC. Bone from the cremation burials gave radiocarbon dates centering on the 10th century BC, which is broadly supportive of the pottery dates. There were two groups of cremation burials which may be contemporary, or slightly separated in date. The lack of overlap between the cremations burials and the post holes suggests that one part of the site was reserved for burial, and another part for domestic activity. The cremated bones, examined by Francesco Boghi, were too small to yield any useful data on the age or sex of the buried people.

Contemporary with the burials was a large cluster of post holes. This is not easily untangled, but may contain the ground-plans of several structures, including a post circle, fences, 'four-posters' and 'two-posters'. None of these structures are definite, but the fact that they occur in the same part of the site as the bulk of the pottery sherds and other finds identified by Nina Crummy as parts of clay ovens and a possible kiln support the idea that there was a domestic centre here, presumably associated with a post-built structure. The discovery of a spindle-whorl sug-

Above. Brian Hurrell digging a Bronze Age cremation burial.

Left. Digging on the Park & Ride site.

Above right. A flood of cars waiting for extra parking spaces.

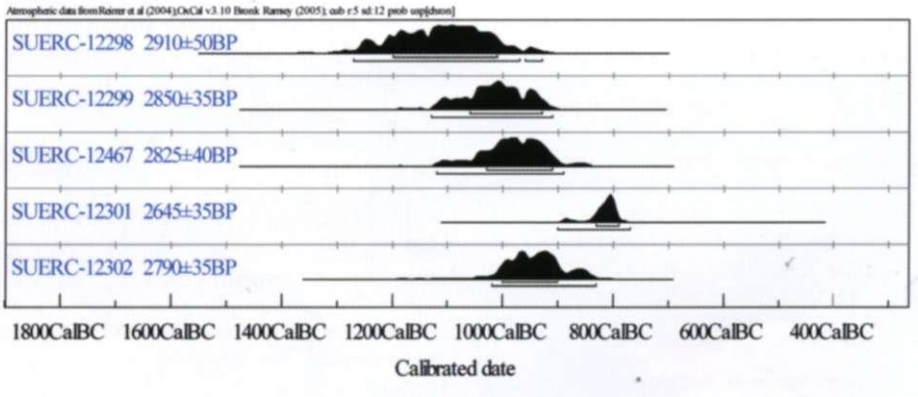
gests that the local economy included weaving. There were two buried vessels in among the post-hole cluster. As these were empty, it is difficult to argue that they were burials. Conventionally, archaeologists interpret these as 'placed deposits' whose ritual significance may be lost on the modern observer.

In a later phase (still in the Late Bronze Age or possibly the Early Iron Age) field ditches were laid out across the site. As these cut through the post holes and cremations, they must herald a complete change in land use. It would be normal to interpret this as a change to pastoral farming, with the land being allowed to revert to grass, and a system of hedges and ditches used to control stock. The layout of the ditches, with one being a possible stock funnel, does not contradict this interpretation.

The final phase of activity was in the Middle Iron Age, when a number of pits were cut through the field ditches. Quite what they mean is difficult to say, but pits would usually suggest an element of domestic occupation.

It is easy to see the building of the car park as a rather brutal end to the history of the site. But it can be argued that this latest change is in keeping with the earlier changes of land-use whereby populations adapted the land to suit their own particular needs. So who knows, perhaps one day car parks will be of great interest to archaeologists!

Howard Brooks and Ben Holloway



The above illustration shows the radiocarbon dates for five of the cremation burials from the Chelmsford park-and-ride site. There is a little scientific jargon here, which needs to be understood so that we can read off 'real' dates. The left side of the illustration shows each sample with its reference number, and a date in years BP followed by a '±' notation. BP stands for Before Present, which by international agreement is the year AD 1950. Let us take the first result as an example. To convert this 'Before Present' date to a 'Before Christ' date, subtract 1950 from 2910, the answer of course being 960 (BC). In fact this date is only the centre point of a range which is given as ±50, or 50 years on either side of 960 BC (ie 1010 BC - 910 BC). (To complicate matters though, we need to bear in mind that for each of the 'real' dates, there is a small possibility it actually lies outside its date range.) The final bit of scientific jargon is 'CalBC. This refers to the fact that 'raw' radiocarbon dates are too 'young', and have to be calibrated against tree-ring dates to give a reading in 'real' or calendar years BC. The scale along the bottom of the illustration shows calibrated dates (ie dates in 'real' years BC).

Thus, the centre points of all five dates are (reading down the column) 960 BC, 900 BC, 875 BC, 695 BC, 840 BC (each one with a small error margin of 35 to 50 years). These dates all coincide with the Late Bronze Age. The dating work was carried out by the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre in East Kilbride.

The dykes of Camulodunon:

anti-chariot defences or boundaries of a major trading centre?

David Grocott argues that the dykes of Colchester - for so long seen as the ancient defences of the town - may have been nothing of the sort.

Iron Age warriors in action at Camulodunon as they race out of one of the entrances in the dykes. Reconstruction by Peter Froste.

The traditional interpretation of the Dykes of Iron Age Colchester has been that they were defences drawn up through later prehistory to defend an area inhabited by a pastoral farming elite of militaristic local chieftains. Men daubed with woad would stand behind these barriers and stare out across the land, awaiting attack. This interpretation has always had a heavy emphasis on the defensive capability of the dykes and has not looked at what I believe is a more likely alternative - that the dykes were far more important than mere defence. I believe the dykes were there primarily to mark an area of special significance, an area of special importance far greater than previously thought - an area of special significance that has parallels in the Far East and Scandinavia.

The dykes form a network that mostly help to join the Roman River with the Colne and, with these river valleys, create a sealed-off area. But apart from that, why do we think the dykes are primarily defensive?

Well the Iron Age name of Colchester, Camulodunum - the fortress of the War God - rather sets the tone. But apart from that the answer is that we just seem to think the dykes are defensive because of their scale. We do have Roman historians, like Strabo, who talk about the British and describe their large settlements as being 'in the wood' using natural barriers, marshes, rivers etc in conjunction with man-made fortifications. That certainly fits with the model of Colchester and the artificial boundaries working in conjunction with the rivers Roman and Colne. Romans, including Julius Caesar, also tell us that the Britons were incredibly war-like and ferocious. Both Strabo and Caesar provide great detail about the use of chariots in British warfare. This is of course seen by many archaeologists as all the proof needed to say that the Britons, incredibly war-like in their general demeanour, had built the dykes to prevent the oft-quoted 'flowing' chariot warfare which would be broken against the tank-trap-like structures that are the dykes. Alas, I do not believe this is an argument we should trust.

It is famously difficult to identify warfare in archaeology. Two thousand years on, a ferocious battle would amount to little within the archaeological record, and chariot formations would count for even less. Isolated examples such as piles of sling stones at south coast hill forts and ballista bolts from Roman war engines are our only glimpse into what must undoubtedly be an under-represented feature of Britain's ancient past.

But that aside you can't get away from the fact that the point of archaeology is to base your understanding on what you can prove and in Colchester there is very little to suggest warfare. There is a revetment at the front of one of the dykes in Lexden, but that is remarkable for being a seeming one off. It is also important to remember the political motivation for Caesar to exaggerate the warlike nature of the people he met in Britain to boost his own prowess in his quest to become emperor.

Whereas evidence of warfare and defence is conspicuous by its absence at Camulodunum, evidence for trade is disproportionately abundant. Coin moulds at Sheepen, continental pottery and metalwork, amphora and jewellery are all to be found by the imported bucket load. Colchester was, everyone agrees, a major focus of trade.

A similar story is to be found at other so-called oppida like Colchester, where large dykes have been seen for decades as evidence of warfare and defence. Here there is no sign of warfare but there are coin moulds and monetary concentrations. From a strictly archaeological perspective then, the evidence is clear - Colchester was all trade and not defence.

So if the dykes weren't for defence what might they have been used for? I believe there are two examples from history that may show us what Iron Age Colchester may have been like and why it had such huge dykes constructed around it.

Firstly are the Viking emporia which were to be found throughout the first millennium in the Baltic and North Sea. These centres of trade were surrounded by 'defences', but the defences, the edges of the settlements, were not solely barriers against the outside but marked the limits that foreigners could move. The famous case for this is Hedeby on the Danish/German border where travellers from as far as Moorish Spain came to trade but could not leave the walls of the settlement. Here the walls of the settlement may have originally had a defensive purpose but they became synonymous and symbolic of the limits of special activity that could take place within the settlement.

Closer to Colchester the Romans themselves were very specific in what could be done inside and outside city walls. Walls determined activity - like

burial which was only allowed outside the city walls. Is it possible that Colchester's status as a trading centre was marked by the dykes which surrounded it? Could it be that inside the initially defensive dykes of the settlement, certain trading activity grew and became enshrined in increasingly elaborate and less defensive earthworks?

Another example of a trading centre that is physically separated can be found thousands of miles away from Colchester in 17th-century Japan. During the Edo period, from 1641-1853, the powerful Shoguns sought to limit interaction with the outside world and to control trade. In order to keep some contact while at the same time adhering to the principles of isolation, an artificial island was built in Nagasaki Bay. This island, Dejima, was for two hundred years the only place in Japan where contact with the west would be permitted. It allowed the Shoguns of Edo to keep an iron grip on the trade with the west. If you look at the Japanese model of Dejima, the parallels with Colchester are striking. Japan sought isolation or at least control over foreign contact following instability caused by contact with an alien and materially richer culture.

In Britain the Roman conquest of Gaul and the aborted invasions by Caesar had destabilised the southeast and left the British chieftains feeling insecure - albeit entranced by the material wealth promised by Rome.

In Japan a ruling caste hoped to control trade to reap the benefits of strictly monitored trade. In Colchester the Catuvellaunian tribe under Cunobelinus hod established a major settlement at Colchester specifically to get closer to the trading opened up by the Roman conquest of Gaul. Always remember that for Cunobelinus trading was the priority in seeking out Colchester - not seeking a good defensive position. And of course in Japan the culture was militaristic but the island of Dejima was not fortified for defence - its walls were built to physically separate the act of trading with outsiders. In short - as at Dejima - just because the dykes of Colchester look defensive, it does not necessarily follow that they were primarily used for defence.

This idea - that Colchester's dykes were built to segregate foreigners and the act of trading - is not so preposterous. The Greek historian talks about the island of Ictis which later historians and archaeologists have been identified as the naturally-excluded St Michael's Mount in Cornwall. Here on this natural island, Diodorus says, trade took place between the Britons - rich in tin - and the materially richer foreigners. Ictis is just a naturally occurring Dejima. Further along the British south coast, the site of Hengistbury Head near Bournemouth was an Iron Age mercantile centre that was positioned on a peninsula with its connection to the land cut by a ditch and bank. These sites and others like them start to suggest a tradition of Iron Age trading centres physically cut off and separated from the surrounding countryside into which foreigners could come and trade. This caution need not have been a result of xenophobia (although that may have played a part), but was probably the logical extension of centralised and highly controlled trade begun in Britain in the Bronze Age.

Although the walls of Dejima may look defensive, they clearly were not as the island was never home to more than 100 Dutch merchants, and these walls would have proved completely ineffective if the Japanese ever decided to seriously test the island. The defences were built by the Japanese to keep the island separate and was intended to keep foreigners distinct and show in physical form the limits of trading. Could this be a parallel to the dykes of Colchester?

This is of course a largely academic point. Camulodunum fell to the Romans in AD 43, was sacked by Boudica in AD 60, and began its slow decline from powerhouse of Britain to average-size, provincial town. But I feel it is important for us to think about the dykes of Iron Age Colchester as not just militaristic chariot traps. For me such a simplistic explanation is naive and misses the point. I don't think it does Colchester or the dykes justice.

David Grocott studied archaeology at Durham University and Popular Culture with the Open University and is currently studying for an MBA.

Other views

Similar arguments like this have been made before, ie that the dykes were really land boundaries or they were barriers to control livestock. The trouble with these ideas is that they offer no explanation as to why all the dykes on the west side of Camulodunum faced westwards and the dyke on the east side (Berechurch Dyke) faced eastwards. If the dykes really did have no defensive purpose, then it would not have mattered which way they faced. Moreover, these theories do not convincingly explain why there was a succession of dykes on the west side of Camulodunum each of which was significantly further west than the last one. A defensive purpose for the dykes is overwhelmingly the most obvious and most likely reason for their existence. However, this is not to say that the other explanations cannot hold good as well. Everybody can still be right and honour can be satisfied all round.

PC

The Friends of Colchester Archaeological Trust

Jane Meech, new chairman of the Friends, tries her hand at digging...

Jane and Mick Meech excavating on the site of the circus.

My name is Jane Meech, I am the new chairman of the Friends of CAT, and I have a guilty secret (and just in case this sounds like an introduction to Archaeologists Anonymous, don't worry, I'll explain later).

The Friends of CAT exists to provide a bridge between the professional archaeologists at the Trust, and members of the public who have an interest in archaeology generally, and especially in what is happening in Colchester, a town that has a seemingly unending supply of surprises whenever a spade is put into the ground. The Friends meet every year in January to hear about the various contracts the Trust has been working on. At the meeting on 20th January 2007, over 100 Friends enjoyed illustrated talks about the excavations and 'watching briefs' undertaken all over Essex during 2006, including Marks Tey, Basildon, Great Notley, the Chelmsford park and ride at Sandon, the Crouched Friars site in Colchester, and of course the latest up-date on the Roman circus site. And, incidentally, we all enjoyed a splendid tea and cakes session afterwards.

In July and August 2006, Philip Crummy led two conducted walks around the Roman walls. Both walks were booked to capacity, and Philip shared with us some of his comprehensive knowledge about the building and development of the walls. On a chill day more than 40 Friends gathered at the Napier Road/ Flagstaff Road junction, where Philip reminded us of the overall Circus layout, orientation and dimensions, and then led us to where the excavation had revealed one end of the central barrier, where there would have been a turning post (where the chariots would have swung around 360 degrees). While we were there Philip mentioned that Taylor Woodrow, the developers, had allowed a trench to be dug in front of the Sergeants' Mess. Philip believed this was where the starting gates would have been, and while it was a wonderful chance to establish this, time and funds were scarce, and Friends were invited to volunteer to help on the dig. (I should mention at this point that it is not normally possible for volunteers to work on Trust excavations because these are nearly always related to commercial developments. However this was an exceptional case because the work was being carried on a research basis.)

Now for my guilty secret - I am a Time Team fan, and have been since the series started. Before that, in common with many other people I would guess, my knowledge of archaeology and its methods was almost nil, and my interest in same was even less. There are some archaeologists, professional and amateur (but not the Trust I might add), who have reservations about Time Team, and regard it as 'archaeology lite'. However, I would argue that anything that arouses and engages the interest of a large swathe of the population, that shows the fascinating history that lies beneath our feet, that demystifies and proves that archaeology can be for everyone, can only be A Good Thing.

So, having been an armchair archaeologist for all these years, when Philip asked for volunteers, it was my chance to be in there for real! I fired off an email to Philip offering to help, and three weeks later got a phone call from Laurie Driver, a Trust archaeologist who was to supervise the dig, telling me that it was to begin on the 19th February. When Mick, my husband, and I first went four days later, the mechanical diggers had been at work, and in front of the Sergeants' Mess was a huge square(ish) hole. My dreams of daintily wielding a trowel were immediately destroyed - I soon learnt that these early stages are about brute force and muscle power. Now, correct me if I'm wrong, but I cannot recall ever having seen a wheelbarrow on Time Team, and certainly not one full of wet earth. After that first day, which was also cold and very wet, I considered giving up my gym membership, since the digging and the loaded wheelbarrow pushing appeared to be exercising every muscle in my body, including some I was not aware I possessed. Also, at this time, I could not make head or tail of what was supposed to be there, it just seemed a jumble of lumps of stone. Over the next three weeks, however, the outlines of the starting gates began to appear, it gradually started to make sense to me, and I even had a find - a Roman nail! Laurie, and Emma Spurgeon, another Trust archaeologist and the Trust illustrator, were models of patience and frequently stopped what they were doing to explain things to me, not only about the site but also to show me the correct techniques. After that first day the weather was a bit kinder to us, but my admiration is unbounded for the professionals who have to carry on whatever the elements throw at them. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to be on this dig, and to experience the thrill of seeing the past appear beneath my trowel. Will I still watch Time Team? Yes, but with a more critical eye in future, and a far deeper understanding of the hard work and technical knowledge that a dig entails.

Not everyone can experience an actual dig, and maybe I will never do another one, but belonging to the Friends does mean that, via *The Colchester Archaeologist,* we can keep up to date with the Trust's work. By attending the annual lecture in January we also get a chance to hear first-hand from the project leaders, and have the opportunity to qsk questions and chat to them at the tea and cakes session afterwards.

Many thanks

After many years of hard work, two key members of the Friends have decided it's time to take a back seat. After a mammoth 25 years (bar just two), Nina Crummy has handed over the task of organising the trips to Jane Meech and founder member Mike Corbishley, and Gabrielle Chadwick has stood down as chairperson after 15 years in the job. Both roles are very time-consuming, and the work of Nina and Gabrielle are much appreciated by all concerned. However, both will remain active in the Friends. Nina is to continue maintaining the membership database and Gabrielle plans to help out in more general ways.

Colchester Roman circus poster. 841 x 595 mm (AI). £5.00 each.

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