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the Colchester archaeologist



Roman drain
Circus latest
Griff Rhys Jones unveils mosaic
Burial of a druid?







the Colchester archaeologist



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Front cover. Nigel Rayner excavating a wooden Roman drain on a site in St Peter's Street.

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Roman circus mosaic in brief

The circus and the new circus mosaic are described in an eight-page leaflet published by the Trust to coincide with the unveiling of the mosaic in January 2008. Copies can be obtained from the Trust (address above) for £1each (collected) or £1.50 each by post.



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Drains and gates galore

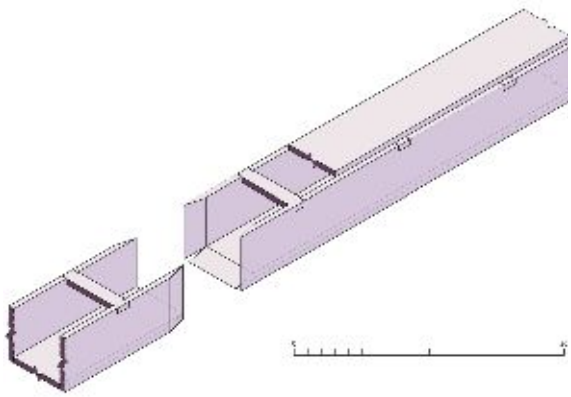


An impressive drain – the biggest Roman object yet to be discovered in Colchester – and perhaps an unsuspected Roman gate all made for an extraordinary investigation in St Peter's Street.

Roman drain

Roman wooden objects are rarely found in Colchester. Wood will usually only survive if it is permanently water-logged, but for most places in the town the ground conditions are not suitable for this to happen. However, along the northern part of the town-centre where it extends down to the river – particularly from St Peter's Street to the bottom of the Balkerne Hill – the water-table lies only a few metres at most below the modern ground level, and there saturated wood can survive for thousands of years.

Recent investigations on a site in St Peter's Street resulted in the uncovering of a 11.5 m long length of a Roman wooden drain. This is the largest wooden object of Roman date seen in Colchester so far. The drain was a remarkable find with the timbers so well preserved that details of its construction were quite plain. Even its wooden cover survived over most of its length.



The drain was made of thick boards which had been sawn (not split) from the trunk of the same oak tree. The drain was about 0.4 m deep and 0.4 m wide. No nails were used to make the drain, but it had held together at the top by

batons with dovetail joints at either end and by stones packed along the outside at the bottom. The batons also supported the plank cover. Although the drain was choked with rubble and silt, copious amounts of water still flowed along its length just as it would have done when the drain was made.

The site lies just outside the walled part of the Roman town with the buried remains of the town wall making its southern boundary. The drain extended northwards from the line of the wall, its purpose being to take surplus water from inside the walled part of the town and presumably deposit it in the river a little further downhill. The source of the water must have been a spring which in medieval and later times fed the well which gave its name to Stockwell Street.

Date of the drain

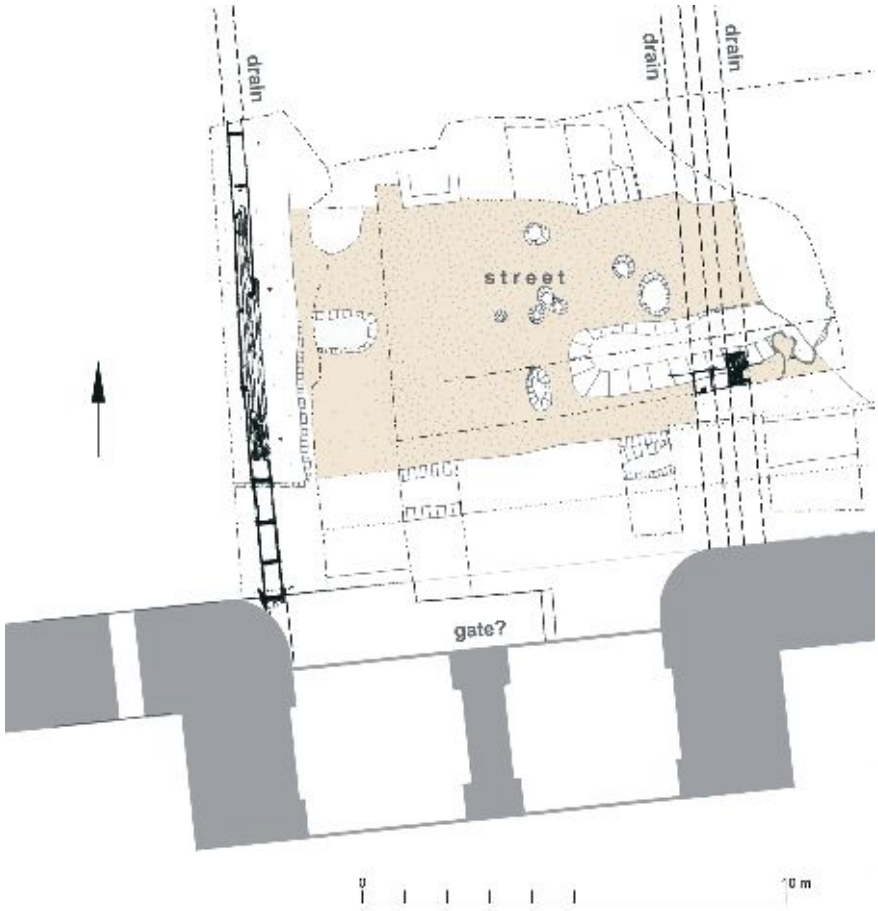
Previous work elsewhere in the town has indicated that the town wall was probably built c 65-80 and that the men who built it left behind untidy spreads of unused mortar and stone on either side of wall as part of the construction process. The drain in St Peter's Street had been filled in part with exactly this kind of material and sealed with a thick deposit of more of the same, apparently to make a thick capping over it. All this provides dating evidence for the drain itself telling us that it must have had a relatively short life being built and abandoned between AD 43 at the earliest and c AD 80 at the latest.

In an effort to test this theory, dendro-chronologist Martin Bridge kindly agreed to examine samples of the drain to see if he could date it by studying and measuring the tree rings patterns in them. The absence of bark meant that an exact date for the felling date of the tree could not be obtained, but he was able to estimate with some confidence that the drain had been made no earlier than AD 62. More work is to be done on the timbers but, if this date proves to be true, then the drain must have had a very short life indeed and, more interestingly, it would have been part of that mammoth rebuilding work which followed the destruction of the town in AD 61 during the Boudican revolt.

Another town gate?

There are various puzzling aspects of the site which suggest that, not only had we discovered a spectacular drain, but we had also stumbled over evidence for a hitherto unsuspected Roman gate. No physical remains were found which could be identified as a part of the gate which is partly why this whole matter is so tricky. Crucially there was an accumulation of layers of horizontally-bedded gravel which, anywhere else in the town, we would have unhesitatingly identified as part of a Roman road. However, there was a problem here because this apparent road lay north-south which meant that its passage southwards would have been blocked by the town wall. How then could the existence of a north-south street in this





Simplified plan of the St Peter's Street site showing the main gravelled areas forming the street, the drain along the west side of the street, the remains of the two partly-uncovered drains along the east side of the street, and how these might have related to a hypothetical twin-arch gate in the town wall.

position be reconciled with the wall unless there had been a gate for it to pass through?

The relationship of the drain to the sequence of gravel layers seemed to support the view that the layers were part of a north-south road. The streets of Roman Colchester were generally bounded on both sides by wooden drains and, at the St Peter's Street site, our wooden drain lay alongside one side of the ?north-south road in just the way drains did elsewhere. (Generally the drains being wooden do not survive although their positions are indicated by square-cut trenches along both sides of the streets.) However, if our gravelled area really had been part of a north-south road, then another drain probably existed along the other side of it.

To see if this was true, a small trench was dug on the opposite side of the road at just the right distance away for a street of normal width. And, sure enough, buried under some layers of gravel was uncovered part of a second wooden drain. In fact, further excavation showed that there had been two wooden drains here, one presumably being a replacement for the other. Collectively then, all three drains show that the gravel layers probably were parts of a road and, importantly, they point to the exact location of the gate had one existed.



An usual wooden object preserved by the water-logged ground conditions. A 1st-century pine cone. The cone is about 7 cms wide.

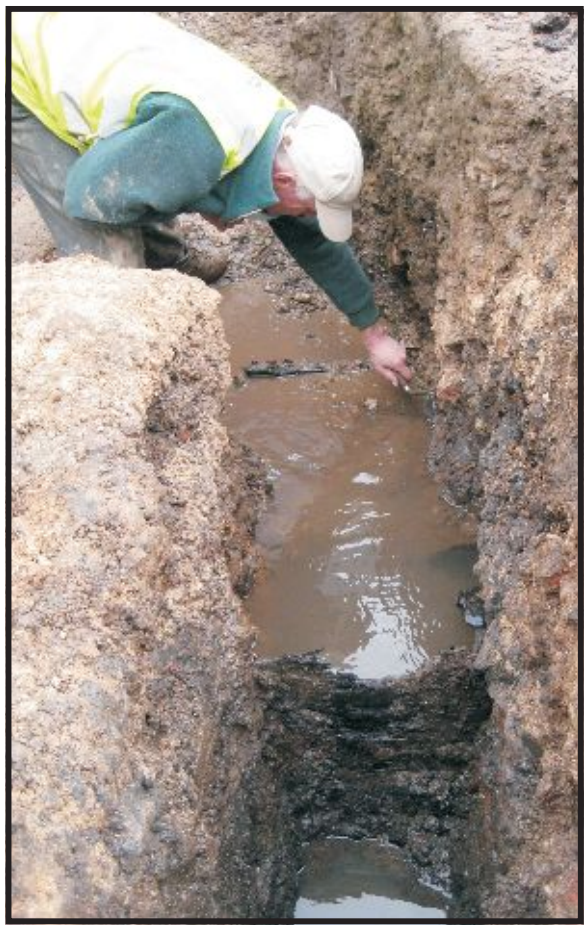
Unfortunately it was not possible to examine the place where the road would have crossed the line of the wall to prove that there had been a gate there. However, the wall appeared to have been absent at the southern end of the main drain where we had managed to trace for a distance of about 400 mm beyond the point where the foundation of the wall should have been had there been no gate. Similarly a trench to the east showed a similar absence of foundation there too indicating a gap in the wall 4 m, enough for a gate of two carriageways.

So there you have it – we seem to have found a gate without ever seeing anything of it. Not a particularly satisfactory result you might think. As it is, the evidence for its existence rests on the apparent absence of wall where otherwise it should have been, and the existence of what appears to have been a north-south road issuing out of the putative gate. It certainly looks as if there ought to have been a gate here, but in truth more substantial evidence is needed to be sure.



Colchester for certain had at least six Roman gates, so a gate in St Peter's Street would have made a minimum of seven, as many as known in London (a much bigger Roman town). A gate here would also be surprising since it would have been very close to North Gate, making these gates much closer than we would have expected gates normally to have been. Perhaps this was all to do with the provision of good access to a landing area along the south bank of the river Colne? To the east, in the medieval period, there would have been Rye Gate. Could Rye Gate have been of Roman origin and thus could there have been yet another gate leading to the river from here as well? Further east still is Duncan's Gate, again leading to the south bank of the river. Oh dear, the number of gates is starting to get out of hand. But it gets worse. What about elsewhere around the circuit, away from the river? Rex Hull, excavating near Priory Street in 1934, thought there may have been a Roman gate on the site of one of the medieval bastions there. This would have been at the other end of the street leading to Duncan's Gate. Is there a pattern emerging here – was there a gate at the end of every second street where they met the wall? Surely not since this would make Colchester a very peculiar walled town indeed. Or was it?

Philip Crummy



Above.
The St Peter's Street site viewed from the south-west showing the remains of the gravelled street (centre) and the wooden drain along its western side.

Left.
The two drains along the eastern side of the street. This was all that was uncovered of them.

The excavation at St Peter's Street was funded by Enterprise Heritage. The fieldwork was undertaken by Adam Wightman and Chris Lister.

Circus latest eight gates – not twelve



The 2006 excavation in the garden of the Sergeants' Mess when the remains of two of the starting gates were uncovered. The illustration of the chariots is by Peter Frost.

The discovery of two of the starting gates in 2006 was a big step forward in our investigation of the Roman circus. After all the gates were a focal point of the building so it was important to understand what they were like. Armed with the width of each gate it was possible to reconstruct on paper a line of twelve gates so that they neatly spanned the whole width of the building and this is how they were presented in last year's **The Colchester Archaeologist**.

However, there were niggling problems with this reconstruction. The ends of the north and south stands appeared to meet the outermost gates at awkward angles which left them looking oddly slanted and elongated, and the two little patches of what appeared to be mortared foundations at the south end found much earlier in 2005 did not fit easily into the reconstructed plan. Moreover, there was more than a strong suspicion that the Colchester circus could have had fewer than what is generally regarded as the standard twelve gates. One circus (Bovillae in Italy) for certain had ten, and there are a few circus mosaics which show only eight. As it happens, one of these is the mosaic from Lyons which was used as the main inspiration for our own modern version of this kind of mosaic (see pages 8-11). On top of all this is the fact that, although the Colchester circus was of average length (about 450 m), it was unusually narrow, another feature which hints that the number of gates was less than twelve.

The site of the gates lies wholly within the garden of the former Sergeants' Mess. The building was due to be sold with the prospect that the garden would become private and inaccessible for future investigations, so the opportunity was grasped to return and solve the gate problem once and for all. Taylor Wimpey kindly gave permission for the new excavation,

and the work was funded by the subscriptions of the corporate members of the Friends.

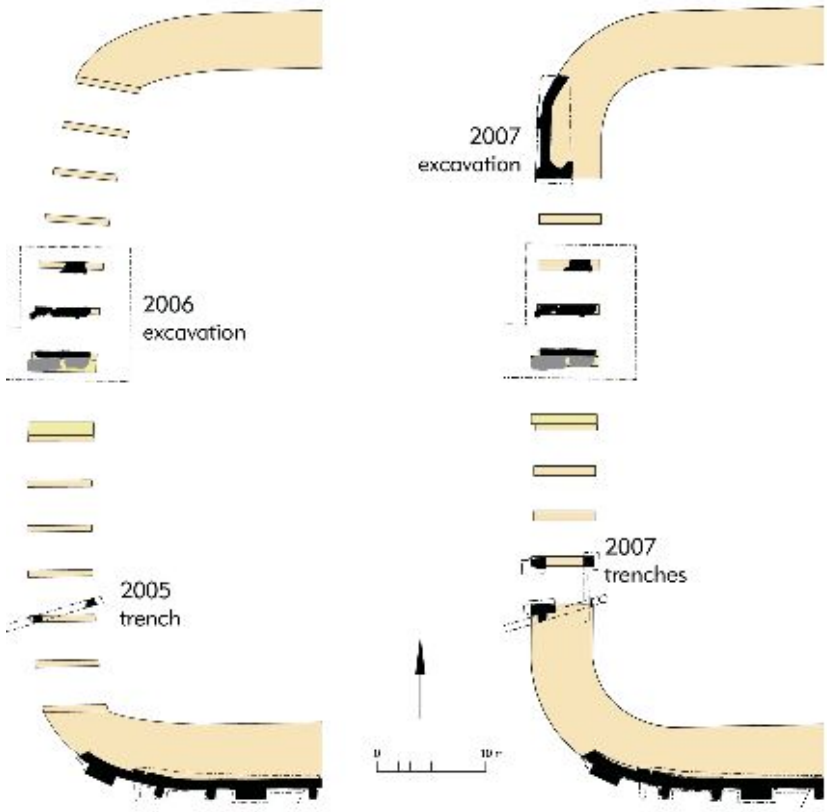
The plan was to excavate the area where the northern end of the gates met the west end of the north stand. Would this turn out to contain the remains of two gates or instead would it prove to be where the end of the stand curved southwards to meet a string of gates numbering eight or even ten rather than twelve?

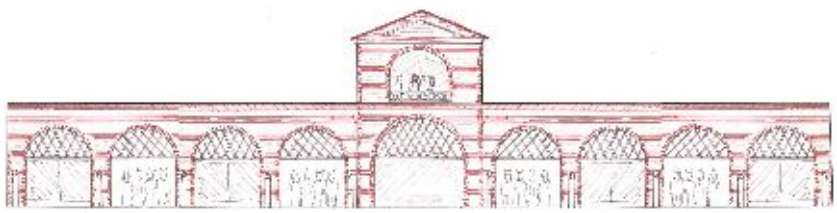
Almost as soon as the topsoil had been removed, it was apparent that there were no stalls where the trench had been sited. Instead the remains could clearly be seen of a curving foundation that marked the outside wall of the north stand. Further investigation showed that the curved foundation had met a deep east-west foundation that corresponded to the end of the stand where it would have met the outermost of the gates. A few small trenches at the other end of the garden confirmed that the south stand behaved in exactly the same way. In other words, there was now no doubt that the circus had only eight gates.

This means that the circus at Colchester is the first one to be found to have had only eight gates. But there are other circuses which are as narrow as Colchester and perhaps, when the sites of their gates are investigated, they may show that Colchester's circus was not unique in its number of starting gates.

Philip Crummy







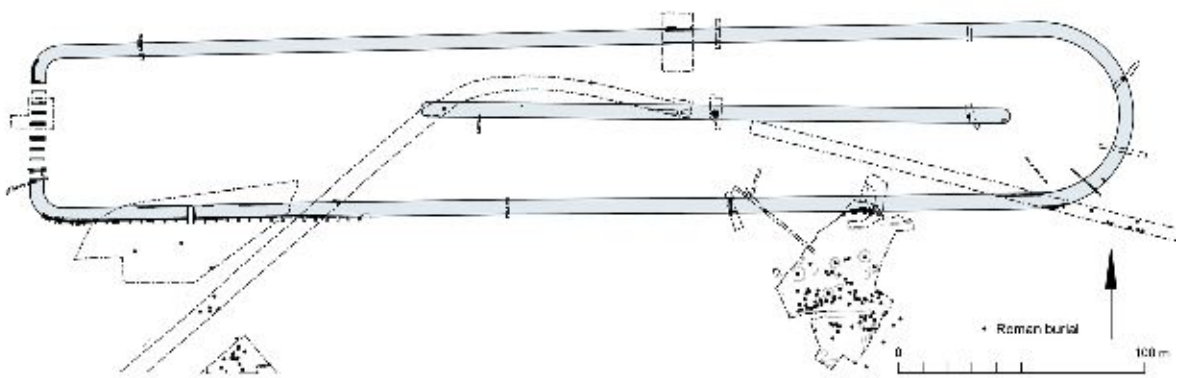
Top left. The west end of the circus reconstructed after the 2006 excavation as having twelve gates.

Top right. The latest version of the plan based on the 2007 excavation showing a total of only eight gates.

Above. A reconstruction of the west end of the circus with eight gates.

Left. The critical trench (viewed from the north) proving there was only eight gates. The curving white band is the remains of the foundation of the outermost wall of the north-west corner of the stand.

Below. Latest plan of the circus.





The grand unveiling



By Peter Herring





PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANCES DALE. AND CAT

After over a year of being in storage at the old garrison riding school (courtesy of Lexden Restorations), I can at last report that the circus mosaic has now been unveiled to the public. Previous attempts to find a temporary location (pending the design and location of a visitor interpretation area) were thwarted either by planning concerns or the sheer cost of building a suitable structure. At one of the planning meetings, Stephen Egerton, our voluntary planning consultant, suggested that we look at the triangle of land bounded by Le Cateau Road, Circular Road North and the Bovis Homes site. This was the area originally excavated back in 2004-5 and featured in the Channel 4 Time Team programme. The land was owned by Bovis Homes and after a phone call with their land director, John Walker, they were happy to grant us a licence to place the mosaic on the site of part of the south stand of the circus. To avoid penetrating the Roman levels, we designed an earth bank surrounded by a fencing structure set into infilled earth. The design was reviewed by Austin Hicks, the drawings were produced by Kate Egerton, and the planning submission prepared by Stephen Egerton. As the site was now listed as a scheduled ancient monument, we needed approval from English Heritage, and with the support of Debbie Priddy and colleagues, this was turned around in a remarkable 24 hours.

At last everything looked set. The usual problems needed to be resolved – namely the labour for building and the money for paying for everything. The Heritage Lottery Fund allowed us to use the surplus of our original grant, and we were very fortunate to receive the backing of Essex Heritage Trust (with a £3,500 grant) and a donation of £500 from the East of England Co-operative Society Community Dividend 660



PHOTOGRAPH KINDLY PROVIDED BY VAN COLES

Fund. The fencing was expensive, and we also needed to provide a polycarbonate screen over the mosaic to protect it from the elements. This latter component only became affordable when Simon Blaxill, managing director of Kent Blaxill stepped forward and saved us around £1,500 by providing the screen and his glazing team's services at cost price - our thanks to CAT Friend Owen Hay for helping to expedite all of this.

Our friends at 'D' Company of the Military Correctional Training Centre agreed to provide the labour for preparing the mosaic frame and all the heavy lifting activities. Thanks in particular are due to Sgt Bob Byers and Sgt Matthew Bradstock-Tye. Everything was almost ready to start work, but we lacked some basic facilities such as a mechanical digger to move the earth and, of course, somewhere to brew up and keep warm. This is where I need to thank Don Weaver, Bovis Homes project manager, Barry Edwards and boss Marcus of the Tamdown Group for their tremendous support and assistance. We really would not have been able to complete the mound construction without their and their colleagues' efforts. So, on a sunny but chilly morning in December, a team of volunteers (Les Peck, Stewart Houston and Eddie Moolman) marked the position of the mound so that the Tamdown team could start shifting earth. In early January we commenced work in building the supporting frame for the mosaic, and then in mid January Kent Blaxill fitted the polycarbonate protective screen. This left only one problem – how to move a near one tonne weight from the old Garrison School to its new home?! Once again, 16 staff from MCTC came to our help, together with a lorry and then fork-lift truck provided by Tamdown Group. The whole exercise was overseen by volunteer engineer Les Peck and a









Exhibition in the former garrison riding school.

slightly worried but then much relieved me. As we were manoeuvring the mosaic into place, the heavens opened and remained pretty much that way not only as we were trying to turf the earth bank but until well after the unveiling ceremony itself.

On the morning of Saturday 19th January, I must admit to being concerned as to whether anybody would turn out as the weather was quite atrocious – howling winds and persistent rain. I was therefore both surprised and encouraged to see a very healthy crowd (including representatives from all the local press, TV and radio) to witness the unveiling. In the presence of the mayor, Ray Gamble, and with help from Joseph Wright and Emily McGougan, who laid the first of 200,000 tesserae, Griff Rhys Jones unveiled the finished article. Once again, I need to thank the soldiers of MCTC who did a tremendous job in making sure that the tarpaulin and children didn't end up somewhere in Suffolk!

I have always felt that this project was particularly special in the way in which it seemed to have inspired and galvanised the local community into action and therefore I was absolutely delighted that all sectors were represented at the unveiling – these included Peter Froste, who created the original artwork, Anne Schwegmann-Fielding who made the video showing the children how to make a mosaic, Sue Cowans, headteacher at the Philip Morant School (where the mosaic was made), Kevin Flower and his colleagues Tessa Sagar and Christine Roberts from the art department, David Burrage, headteacher at Gosbecks Primary School, officers and soldiers from MCTC, volunteers from CAT, local businesses, local and national politicians and last but not least the schoolchildren (and parents) who made the mosaic.

After the unveiling it was off to the old Riding School where there were numerous displays including artefacts and finds from the original circus dig. The gathered audience was treated to an *ad hoc* speech from Griff Rhys Jones where he challenged the people of Colchester to make the most of the unique historic buildings and heritage sites within the town.

Thanks to electricity and lighting provided by HSS Hire, we were able to display the 70 'companion' mosaics which were made by Year 10 art students from the Philip Morant School. These were the students who had made most of the main characters on the circus mosaic and who were sponsored to make the companion mosaics as part of the GCSE examination. Their brief was to make a Roman-style mosaic which reflected themselves and Colchester, taking design cues from their mentor Anne Schwegmann-Fielding, make use of recycled materials and have a 3-D component. All visitors commented on the marvellous creativity of the students.

The project is now almost complete. At the time of writing, a group of willing volunteers (Les Peck, David Erdbeer and Eddie Moolman) are helping me to install some 'posh' fencing around the mosaic. When I started the project off, I had no idea how it would end. I can however have no hesitation in saying that it was much more rewarding than driving a desk in the City! I have been truly heartened by the endeavours of the children and volunteers who worked on the project and at how they have been so excited to be both celebrating and creating history. This kind of project is what a local community is all about, and I look forward to the day when the mosaic can be moved into a permanent home – it deserves to be protected for future generations to enjoy.

Some of the 70 'companion mosaics' made by students at Philip Morant School.













Colchester Institute



Excavation viewed from the south. The main Roman road extends obliquely across the photograph from bottom right to centre left.

Colchester Institute stands on the edge of the Sheepen site, an area of exceptional archaeological interest. Major redevelopment of the Institute is being preceded by substantial archaeological investigations. Howard Brooks brings us up to date on the latest discoveries there.

The principal discoveries have included a previously-unknown Roman gravelled road heading towards Balkerne Gate. Running off the gravel road, two minor roads give access into various parts of the Sheepen settlement. Beside the roads were timber buildings (some with cellars), hearths and metal-working floors, ovens or kilns, and two timber-lined wells.

The more northerly of the wells was of particular interest. It was a timber-lined well in a deep shaft. The upper part of the timber lining was a rectangular structure made with vertical planks, the longest surviving of which were 60cm long (roughly 2 feet). Below this, the lower part of the well appeared to be a separate structure lined with a circular, basket-like structure of wattles. Only one side of this basketwork structure survived, to a depth of only 15cm (roughly 6 inches). The type of wood used in the well is yet to be positively identified (the vertical planks were either of either oak or ash, and the basketwork was almost certainly hazel).

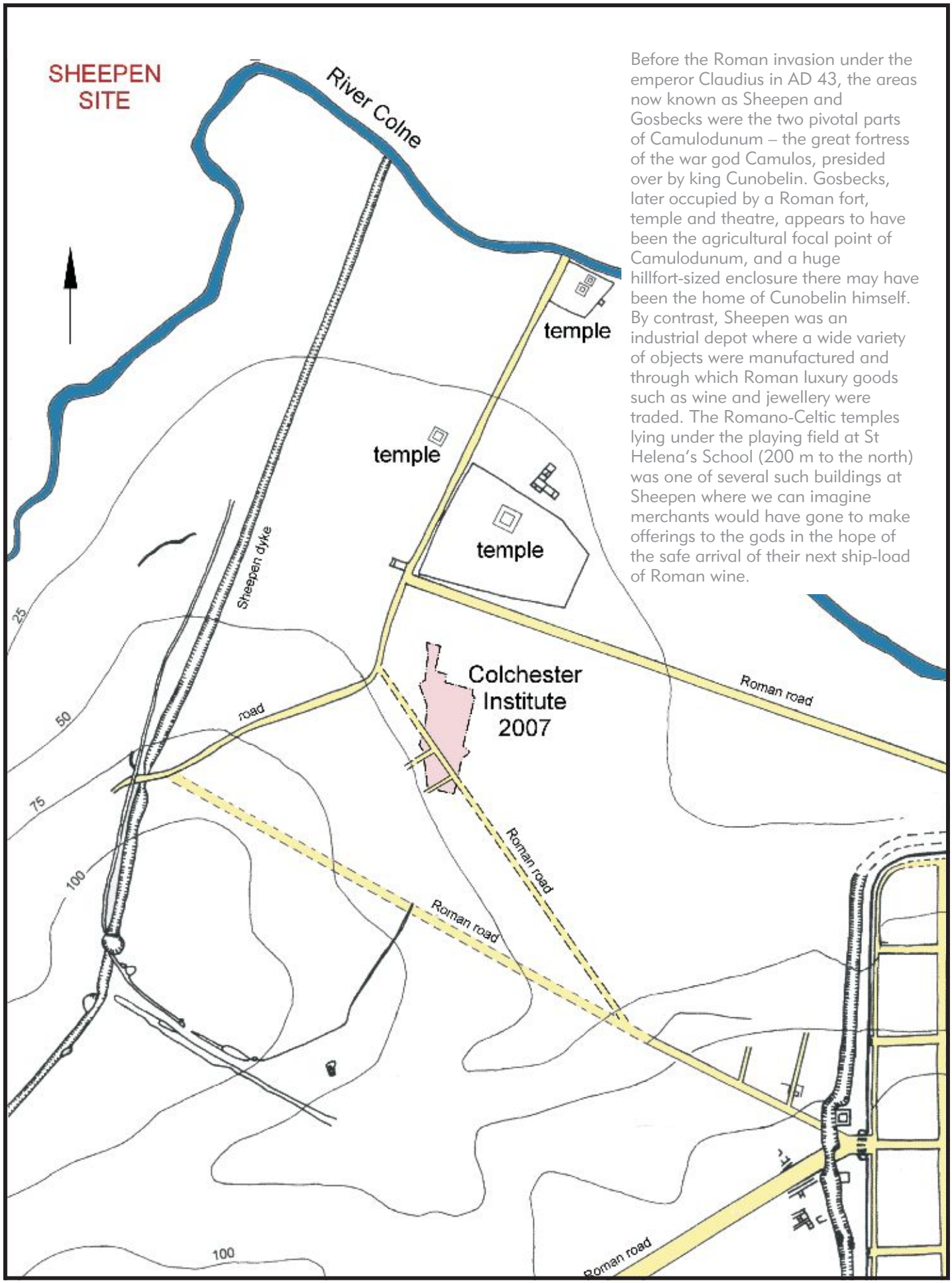
Although the wood is still to be identified, there have been some interesting early results from the study of the soil filling up the well. Val Fryer, who regularly reports on the environmental aspects of our sites, reports that various cereal grains and common weeds were in the well. These must have blown in off surrounding fields, and further study will tell us which crops were grown nearby. There were also a sloe stone, the seeds of vetch and goose grass, and moss fronds (which probably grew in the well during its lifetime). A sample of the soil from the well was also sent to an entomologist (an insect specialist). He reports that there were insect remains including water-loving beetles, and other creatures such as dung-beetles and grain pests. These are referred to as 'synanthropic' (which means that they live in association with humans).

Apart from the insect and other environmental remains, there were other important finds from the well. These include several sherds of a type of imported early Roman amphora known as Dressel 1. The date of these sherds may contribute to the continuing debate about the foundation date of the Sheepen settlement, and thus of Camulodunum as a whole.

In common with the other Sheepen sites, this has been a 'finds-rich' excavation, producing many coins, brooches and other small finds (quite apart from the usual large quantities of broken pottery and animal bones). Apart from the intrinsic interest of these finds, they also provide vital dating evidence for the various phases of

Fragment of coin mould.





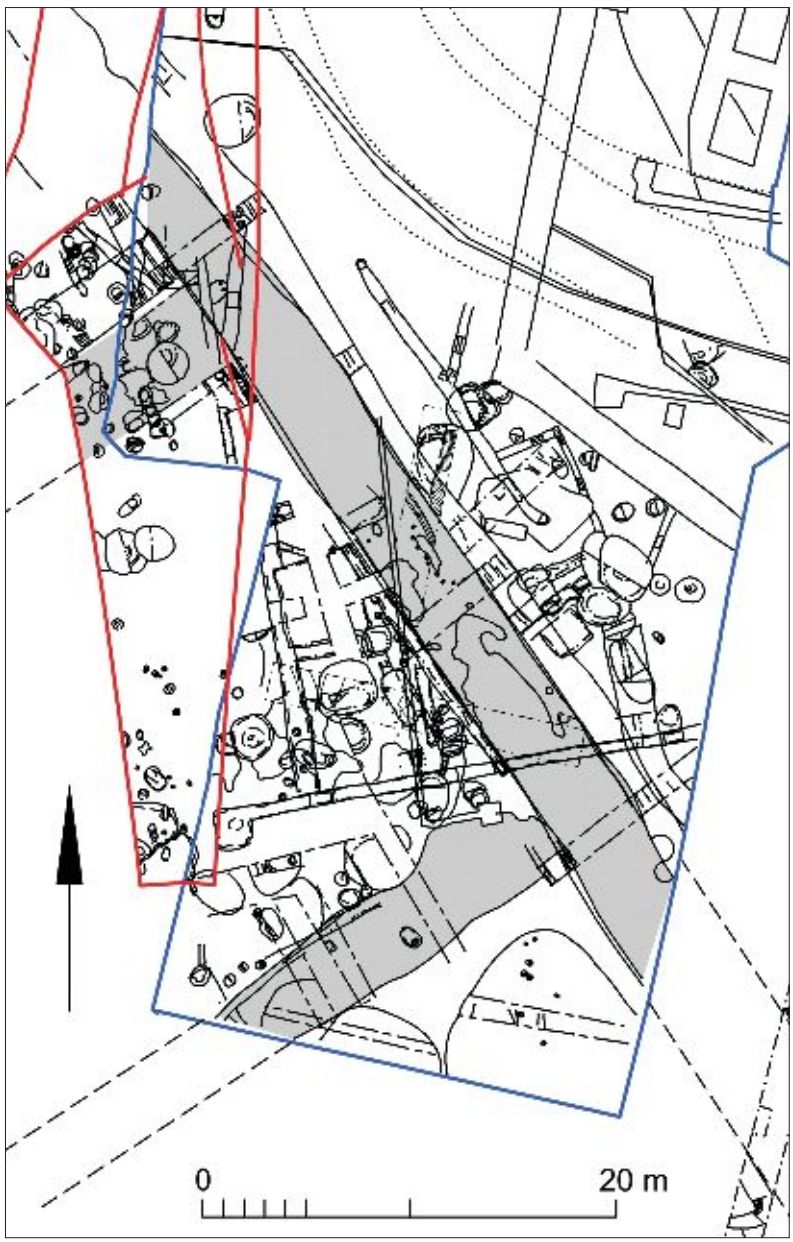
Before the Roman invasion under the emperor Claudius in AD 43, the areas now known as Sheepen and Gosbecks were the two pivotal parts of Camulodunum – the great fortress of the war god Camulos, presided over by king Cunobelin. Gosbecks, later occupied by a Roman fort, temple and theatre, appears to have been the agricultural focal point of Camulodunum, and a huge hillfort-sized enclosure there may have been the home of Cunobelin himself. By contrast, Sheepen was an industrial depot where a wide variety of objects were manufactured and through which Roman luxury goods such as wine and jewellery were traded. The Romano-Celtic temples lying under the playing field at St Helena's School (200 m to the north) was one of several such buildings at Sheepen where we can imagine merchants would have gone to make offerings to the gods in the hope of the safe arrival of their next ship-load of Roman wine.

activity on the site. Among the most interesting and important finds are coin moulds, which are thought to have been used in the process of making coinage.

Moulds such as this were found by Christopher Hawkes and Rex Hull in their 1930s excavations on Sheepen, and more recently at the Kiln Road site in 1971. It would be difficult to overstate the historical value of these finds, which are held to be enormously important by scholars of the period. In the transition from the Iron Age to the Roman period, there are several archaeological indicators of the gradual move from the small-scale farms of the Iron Age to the towns of the Roman period. Among these are the construction of the defended centres known as oppida, the beginnings of urban planning (streets, etc), and the minting of coins. The fact that we have evidence of all three of these at Sheepen (the Sheepen dyke is less than 200m from the west side of the excavation site) underlines the importance of this part of Colchester in the study of the archaeology of the late Iron Age and early Roman period in Britain.

Elsewhere were closely-packed inter-cutting pits, some containing cremation burials and others votive pots with no cremated bone. These burials may be outliers of a small early cemetery found on the main Sheepen site (just the other side of the hedge) in 1971 when the sports field there was being formed.

Below. Close-up of some of the timbers at the base of a well.

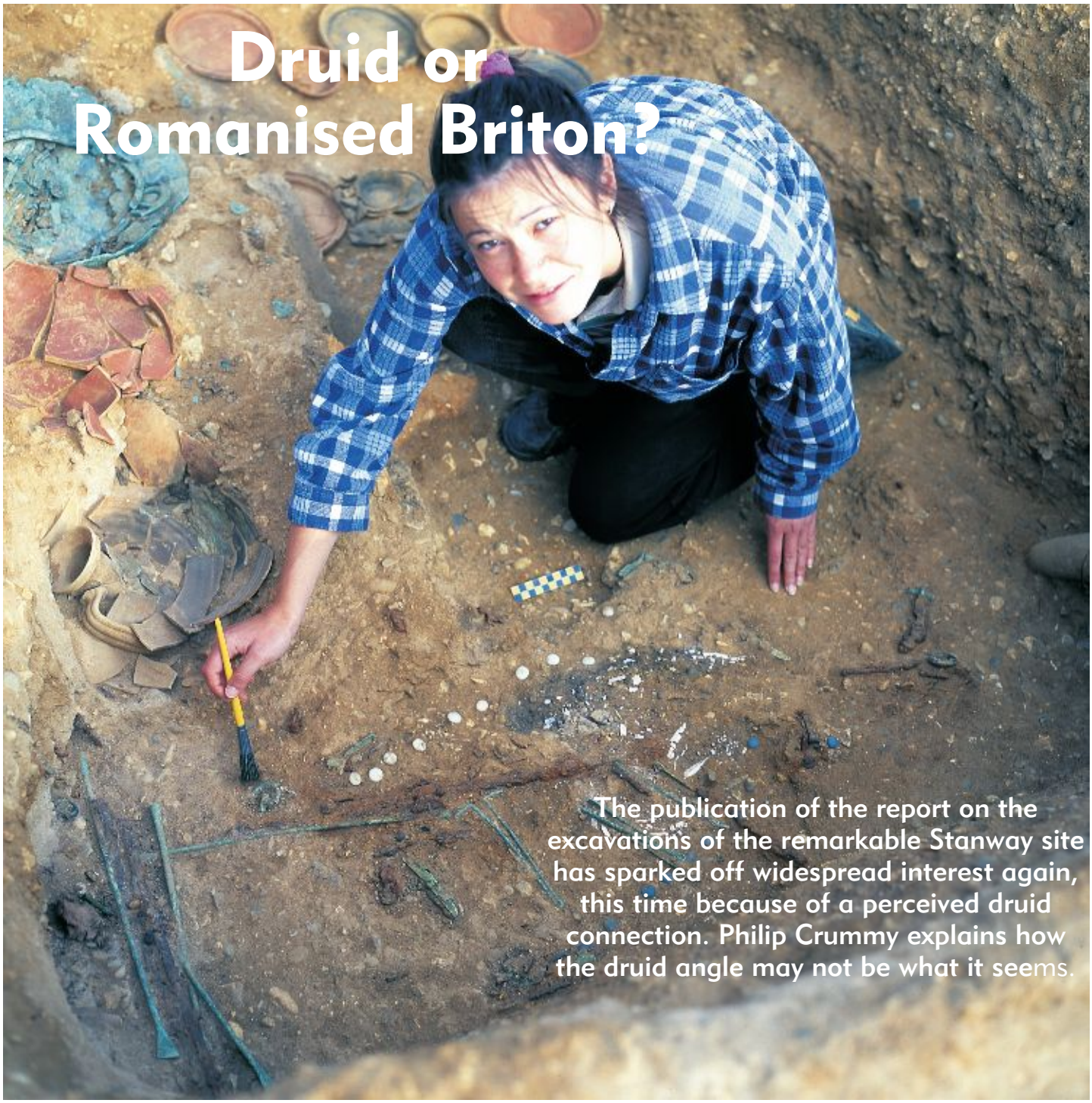






Excavations on the Colchester Institute site were run by Ben Holloway (pictured crouching above with surveyor Chris Lister), Kate Orr and Donald Shimmin. The work was commissioned by Colchester Institute, via CgMs, who were the archaeological consultants.

Druid or Romanised Briton?



The publication of the report on the excavations of the remarkable Stanway site has sparked off widespread interest again, this time because of a perceived druid connection. Philip Crummy explains how the druid angle may not be what it seems.

Lisa Hepi excavating the Doctor's burial in 1996.

'Your move Claudius'

The discovery of the Doctor's burial in 1996 caused huge interest, at least by archaeological standards. Local interest was great with about 1,500 people visiting the site on an open day to get a glimpse of the grave being unearthed. The visitors were shown a few blue counters lying in a line at one end of the grave. We could see the metal hinges and corner pieces of a wooden game board there, but were we about to find a lot more counters all laid out as if the game was about to start? Over the following few days, more counters slowly emerged and by the time we had finished – 26 in all had appeared – and yes there they lay white on one side, blue on the other - just as if in play.

The discovery caused a great media stir. The fact that the story was released in August when news is traditionally quiet made all the difference, but even so, the level of interest was quite extraordinary and unexpected. In truth, it was out of proportion to the importance of the find. Nevertheless the story made every national newspaper in the UK, in many cases featuring on their front pages. The Daily Mail's big spread headed 'Your move Claudius' was a classic. The story even made the six o'clock news on BBC TV, and I must have been interviewed for at least a

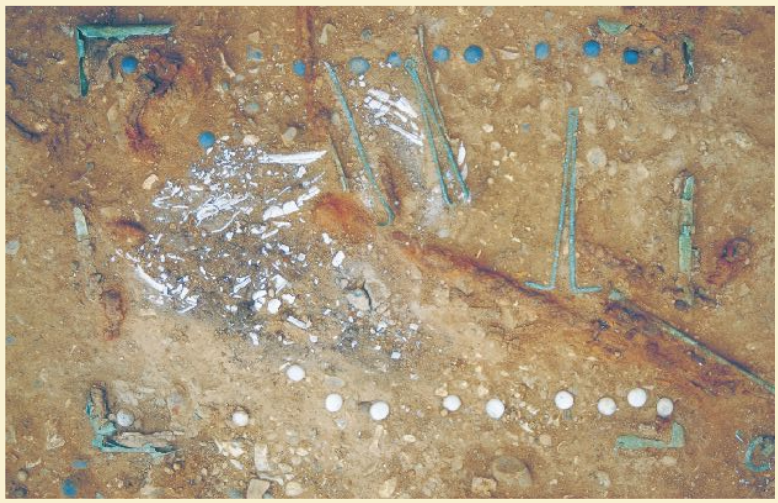
dozen different radio stations on the day the story was released. A lot more was soon to follow including an interview on the Today Programme on Radio 4 and a lengthy and relaxed, live late night chat to a very interested DJ at Radio Perth in Australia.

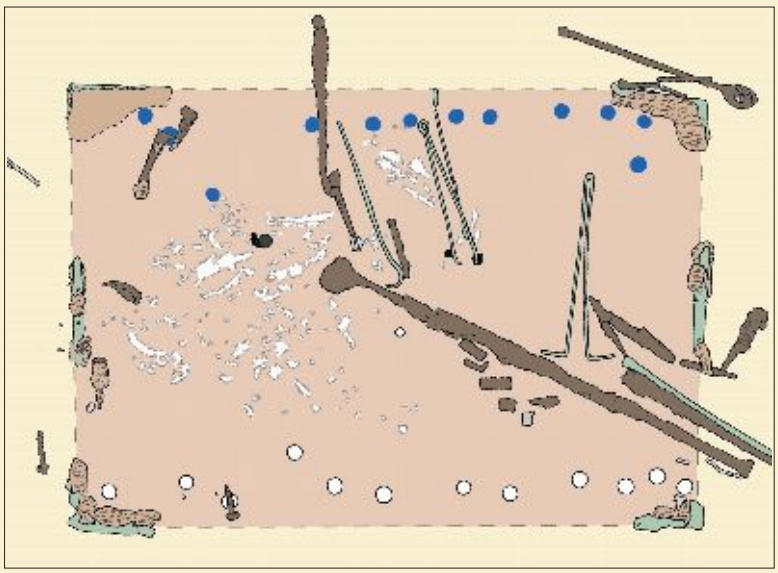
A month or so later we released the fact that the grave also contained a set of surgical instruments. Finds of this kind are very rare, this being possibly the first definite example of a complete surgical kit from Britain. (There is the disputed suggestion that one had been found many years earlier in the Roman fort at Corbridge.) Again this triggered widespread interest which, although not as great as the game board, nevertheless resulted in much national media coverage. Not surprisingly there was considerable interest from organisations and people involved in medical practice today. The story even made the Lancet with an article written by Ralph Jackson, our British Museum expert on ancient medicine.

The site was a sand and gravel quarry worked by Tarmac, and the purpose of the excavations was to record what was to be destroyed during the quarrying operations. The idea was that we would excavate just ahead of the quarry face as it advanced across the field. But the pit has a thirty year life and progress was slow and the excavations had to take place in short bursts. They started in a small way in 1987, the 'Doctor' was excavated in 1996, and the investigations finally fizzled out in 2003.

Preparation of the report was a lengthy and complicated affair culminating in its publication at the very end of 2007. The report contains not only detailed descriptions of the site and the various objects found there, but also many discussions about various aspects of the site such as the history of board games, the use of the medical equipment, the ethnic identity of the dead, funerary practice evident in the remains found on the site, and the ethnic origin of the dead represented in the cemetery. In amongst all that, some mentions of druids were picked up in the press and the site was back in the news again. The possibility that the Stanway Doctor had been









Centre and top. The game board, surgical instruments, and rods *in situ*. The white fragments centre left are the cremated remains of the Doctor. Three of rods lie diagonally from the centre of the board to the lower right-hand corner.

Above. Thirteen of the fourteen surgical instruments. Left to right: scalpels (x2), saw, hooks (x2), double-ended hook?, forceps (x2), handled needles (x3), spoon probe, and handle (uncertain form).



Excavations in progress in 1996. The Doctor's burial can be seen in the background.

a druid was flagged up in the report, but it was played down on the grounds that the evidence for such a connection was rather weak and uncertain. Interest in Britain was relatively restrained (helped at this end when it was pointed out that technically this was all old news and the druid connection was far from certain!), but even so the druid angle was reported in the Independent on Sunday and BBC Radio Four among other places. Strangely though, the interest turned out to be mainly abroad. It was not huge coverage - just a trickle of little articles in magazines circulating in a number of countries. First were articles in Der Spiegel in Germany and Archaeology magazine in the States. Then followed publications circulating in Holland, France, Poland, Russia, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Latvia, Iceland, and Spain.

Druid or not?

Our knowledge about ancient druids comes from various texts written by about twenty different classical writers. Although there are some variations and differences of emphasis in their descriptions, collectively they tell us that in Gaul and Britain before the Roman conquests of those two places, druids were a respected and powerful group of people whose status and authority extended beyond normal tribal boundaries. Julius Caesar said that Gallic society was dominated by two classes of people, warriors on the one hand and druids, healers and diviners on the other. We are told that druids were theologians interested in



the natural world. They were in effect guardians of knowledge and acquired wisdom who would arbitrate in disputes and officiate in religious ceremonies especially those concerned with human sacrifice. The early Roman emperors tried hard to stamp out the druids but only had limited success. However, the influence of the druids did seem to have diminished considerably with the Roman conquests of Gaul and then Britain.

The possibility that the Stanway 'doctor' was a druid comes about from the fact that his grave goods included objects that point to healing and possibly divination. But there are a couple of sticky problems here.

Firstly, the evidence for divination in the grave is in reality very thin and rests on the presence of eight mysterious rods. Nothing like them appears to have been found before, so we have few clues as to what they were used for. The rods are all the same shape, but they come in two sizes and two materials (iron and copper-alloy) so that there are two of each combination. The way they lay in the grave seems to hint how they were used. Three of them look as if they been extracted from the group in some way and placed carefully on the board. The remaining five were then laid to one side in a bunch as if they had been rejected or were not to be used any further. This raises various questions such as, 'Why extract just three rods?' 'And was the selection of those three a random one?' The distinctive shape of the rods means that if they had been dropped or thrown on the ground in some way, they could only have come to rest either face up or face down. This would mean that a selection of three rods would provide a large number of possible combinations which a diviner could have 'read'. However, it must be stressed that the idea the rods were used for divination is a very tentative one, and it would be no surprise if one day similar rods were found elsewhere in association with other objects which make clear that their real purpose was not divination but something more practical. Indeed lying close to the rods in the Doctor's burial was a row of eight metal rings, each of which had been attached to a piece of red-painted wood by a leather loop. Given that there were eight rings and eight rods, it seems likely that the two groups of objects were closely related in some way. And if this had been true, then divination would become an even less likely explanation for the rods.



The eight enigmatic rods found in the Doctor's burial. Four are iron and the other four are made of an alloy of copper.

Left. Replicas of the game board, counters, surgical instruments, rods, and strainer bowl

Below. Doctor's burial.

Right centre. The rods, rings, counters and the remains of the game board *in situ*.







Secondly, the information that we have from Classical texts seems to imply that druidry, healing, and divination were different skills practised by different people. If this had been a universal truth, then our Doctor would have been a healer, not a druid. But then these same sources make it clear that druids practised divination, and this raises the question to what extent were the skills interchangeable within the groups? In other words, could we have found a healer who practised divination or, more to the point, a druid who practised healing? If our doctor is to be seen in these terms at all, a more conservative interpretation of all this would be that we have simply found somebody who belonged to that class of people made up of druids, healers, and diviners, and we leave it at that.

But who was he really? Certainly, the dead person had been concerned with medical practice. This conclusion is made clear from the surgical instruments and the presence in the grave of a type of vessel known as a strainer bowl which, in this case, appears to have been used to make a tea-like drink made from artemisia sweetened with honey. Artemisia in the ancient world was used to treat a range of human ailments, so its presence in the grave sits neatly alongside the surgical instruments.



Our doctor was also of high social status. This much is apparent from the range and nature of the objects buried in his grave. But most importantly, he appears to have been a Briton who, like his kinsmen and peers, was very Romanised. Like those around him, he seems to have lived like a Roman eating and drinking in a Roman manner. To judge by graffiti scratched on pots from elsewhere on the site, he may even have spoken Latin. He seems to have had a grounding in Roman medical practice, and he played strategy games on a Roman game board with imported Roman counters.

It's as if our Doctor lived in two worlds - Roman and British. If he had been a druid, then he would have been druid in a Roman world. But the mixing of cultures in this way was quite normal. The problem is how can we tell what the dead person had been in life? How can we really know if our doctor was a druid or even a member of the druidic class which Caesar and others talked about. These are complicated issues where matching enigmatic remains found in the ground with imprecise and sometimes contradictory texts written 2,000 years and more ago is never going to be an easy or certain process. No doubt we have not heard the last of the Stanway 'doctor'.

Piece of cake

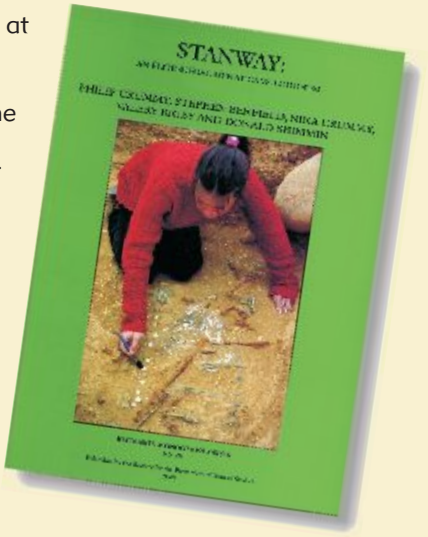


Now for the good bit... The Mayor of Colchester prepares to cut a up a chocolate cake in the shape of the game board. Left to right behind the Mayor: Ben Holloway (CAT), Paul Sealey (Colchester Museums), Alan Everard (Tarmac), and Mark Joel (Tarmac).

The completion of the Stanway project was marked in late 2007 with the publication of a 480-page report giving an in-depth account of the site and the remarkable finds made during the course of the investigations. Copies of the report were presented in the Town Hall to the Mayor of Colchester, Councillor Ray Gamble, and representatives from Tarmac, the company which, with English Heritage, made the project possible.

Copies of the report can be ordered from the Roman Society, Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU, England at a cost of £46 each including post and packing. Cheques should be made payable to the Roman Society and drawn on a UK bank in sterling. Further details are available by telephone (+44 (0)20-7862 8727) or email (office@romansociety.org).

If you are interested to buy a copy, please be aware that the report is primarily a technical record of what was found.



Hot Stuff at Oxford Road



The Lexden Road area is known for its Roman burials and its grand Roman funerary monuments. Recent investigations in a street just off Lexden Road revealed an impressive complex of ovens which may point to the existence of a bread shop in the area.

Emma Spurgeon cleaning the latest of the three Roman ovens in the centre of the site. One of the earlier ovens is visible to the left.

Lexden Road is an archaeological hotspot, particularly the area around the Colchester Royal Grammar School (CRGS) and the Essex County Hospital. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, part of Roman Colchester's extensive Roman cemeteries is to be found here (a Roman 'temple-tomb' excavated at CRGS was reported in **The Colchester Archaeologist** 19), and the splendid Longinus and Facilis tombstones and the 'Colchester sphinx' (now on display in Colchester Museum) were all found within a hundred metres or so of CRGS. Secondly, a major Roman crossroads underlies CRGS. From this crossroads, one road goes north-east to the Balkerne Gate, another south-west to London, and another south to the farmed fields south of the Roman town.

When CAT were commissioned to investigate a small redevelopment plot at 3 Oxford Road, we expected to find Roman roads and burials. What we actually found was evidence that a well-appointed Roman house had been emolished, and a number of Roman ovens had been built over its remains. The excavations reported here were sponsored by Mr Massey of River Colne Developments Ltd.

Cult of Isis



The figurine of Harpocrates stands 9 cm high. It lay in a layer containing debris from a Roman building which may have been demolished to make space to build the ovens. The building had been of good quality since it contained wall plaster and fragments of marble veneer. The presence of the figure raises the possibility that it had been a temple or shrine.

Excavations in 2007 on a site in Oxford Road turned up a well-preserved copper-alloy figurine of the child-god Harpocrates, who is associated with the cult of Isis. Harpocrates is the Graeco-Roman name given to the sky-god Horus, son of Isis and Osiris, as a young child; it comes from the Egyptian meaning 'the Infant Horus'. Isis is often shown in Roman art with Harpocrates and Osiris (who was known to the Romans as Serapis), the three of them forming a powerful family trinity. Harpocrates figurines are far from common in Roman Britain. There is one from near Brandon, Suffolk, and four from London, three made of metal and one of terracotta.

Harpocrates is shown as a naked young boy, on this figurine with very chubby cheeks, with his finger on his mouth. In Egypt this gesture represents the hieroglyph for his name, but the Greeks and Romans misinterpreted the symbolism and made him their god of silence and secrecy. He has a crescent moon on top of his head, which is the sign of Isis, and is sometimes also horned, a secondary moon symbol. On the Oxford Road figure he has one horn sprouting from the centre of the crescent, while on one of the London figurines he has a horn on each side of the crescent. Both figures are winged, and so have taken on some of the characteristics of Cupid/Eros, as was the case at Delphi, where he was linked to both Eros and Apollo.

The London Harpocrates, which is made of silvered bronze and is fitted with a gold body chain, is shown with a dog, tortoise and snake, images of watchfulness and secrecy, but the Oxford Road figure holds a bird by the back of the neck and his finger lies midway between his mouth and the bird's beak, as if he is swearing it to secrecy. A goose, a hare and a hawk accompany a winged figurine of the god from Bavay in northern France, and a fine marble figure in the Borghese Gallery in Rome shows him with a duck. The bird on the Colchester figurine has some of the characteristics of a hawk (such as a blunt-ended tail) and some of a domestic fowl (small head, narrow neck and pointed, rather than curved, beak). As the falcon is associated with the adult Horus, who is shown in Egypt as falcon-headed, it is tempting to prefer this possibility.

The site at Oxford Road is not far from the temple-mausoleum found at Colchester Royal Grammar School in 2005, where the bones of a falcon were found in a burial (see **The Colchester Archaeologist** 19). At the time the possibility was considered that the bird might have been a votive offering associated with the cult of Isis. The new figurine from Colchester, found so near to the falcon bones at CRGS, strengthens this idea and suggests that there was a cult practising Isis worship in the area.

Nina Crummy

A preliminary investigation in 2005 had shown that the Roman road which should cross this plot actually crossed a little farther to the north-west than was originally thought. This meant that it missed the frontage plot where the new house is due to be built. The archaeological technique for investigating this site was agreed with Mr Martin Winter, who monitors planning applications for the Borough Council and advises on archaeological policy. The decision here was that CAT would excavate the footings trenches for the new house, and record whatever turned up.

One feature revealed by the earlier evaluation trench (but not fully understood at the time) was part of one of the tile-built hearths which came to light again in 2007. Hearths were found in the centre of the site and also on the Oxford Road frontage. In both cases, there was evidence of several periods of use. There were two groups of hearths, both showing several periods of repair or rebuilding. The main group of hearths were located in the centre of the site, the other on the Oxford Road frontage.

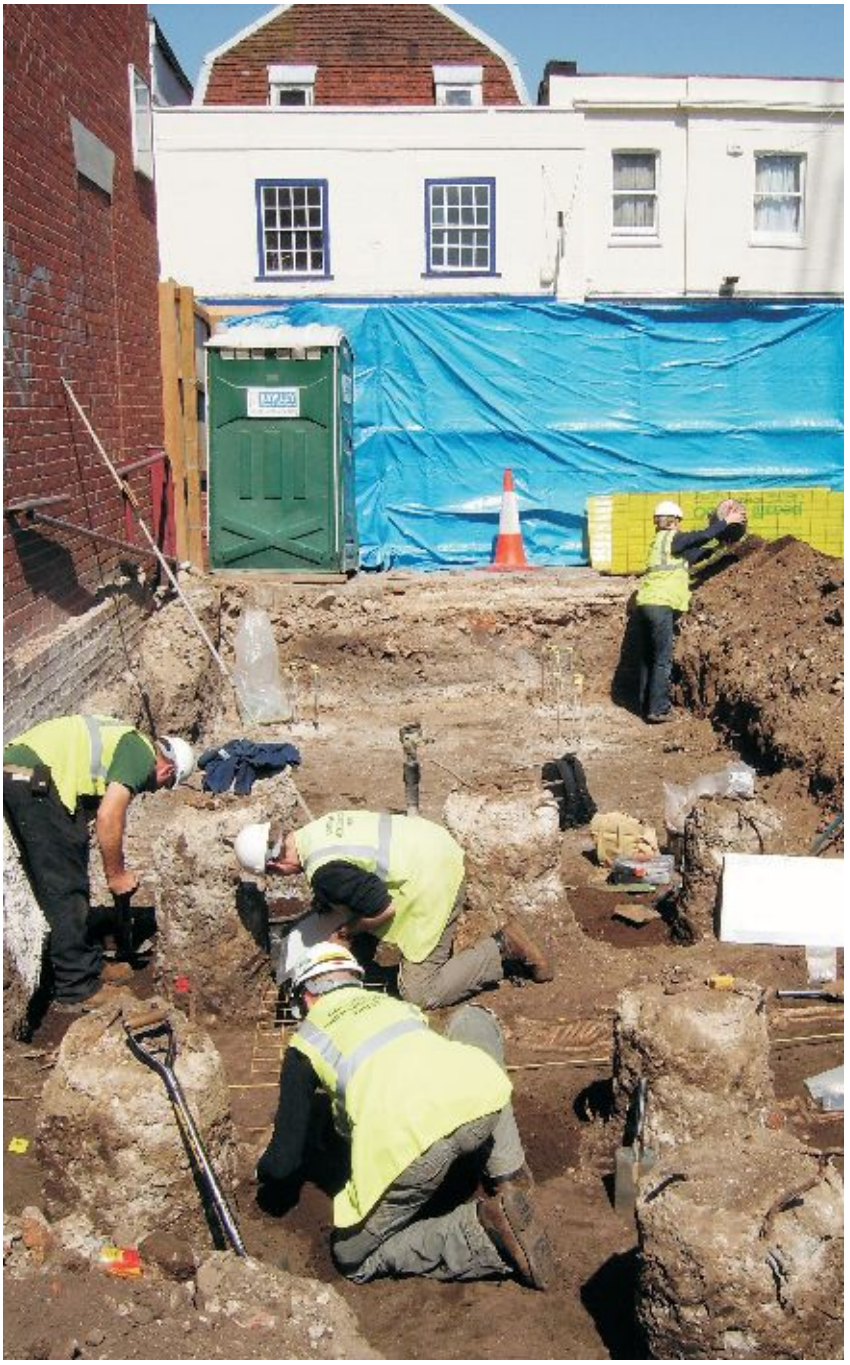
What were the ovens used for? To answer this kind of question, archaeologists usually look out for accompanying debris which might give a clue as to what an oven was used for. For example, a pottery kiln site will often have piles of broken, misfired pots (called 'wasters'). and an oven used for metalworking might have tell-tale evidence such as hammer-scale, lumps of metalworking slag and perhaps metal off-cuts. Unfortunately, there was no such evidence at Oxford Road, so we have to assume that whatever was being baked or burnt had been completely removed from the site. A distinct possibility is that the ovens belonged to a shop selling bread.

Howard Brooks



Under the church of the Crossed Friars

Steve Benfield continues his investigations in Crouch Street to discover more about the layout of the Roman town



In the previous issue of the magazine, we were able to tell you about the discovery of the lost church of the Crossed Friars. Few people today would suspect that during the Middle Ages Crouch Street was the site of a friary. The only remaining clue is in the unusual street name, crouch being an old word for cross, so that the name derives from the Crouched or Crossed Friars. Nothing of the friary buildings survives above ground today – only parts of the foundations remain hidden beneath the modern buildings.

Early in 2007, during work on behalf of Bellway Homes who were developing the former Cash Converters site, the Trust was able to uncover some of these foundations revealing the east end of the medieval friary church. Enough of the foundations survived to allow us, together with records from earlier excavations by the Trust beneath Birkett Long's offices next door, to produce a plan of most of the church building. Later in the development work, two areas within the site the medieval church needed to be dug out for foundations for the new building. Excavation of these areas revealed graves dating to probably after 1403 when a burial licence was granted, and after part of the church had been demolished. This was as far as the story was able to go at the time of the last magazine. However, since then, there have been new discoveries telling something about the area in the Roman period.

Roman street

While we were excavating medieval burials, we noticed that there was gravel in the bottoms of some of the graves. An almost intact Roman pottery bowl (dating from the 1st to the early 2nd century) lay in the gravel close to its south edge, showing that the gravel was not a natural deposit. At the time we were fully pre-occupied rescuing the burials, so we were not able determine the full extent of the gravel. However, two things were clear. Firstly the gravel was earlier than the medieval remains, so it was probably Roman in origin, and secondly it did not extend over the whole of the area we were digging.



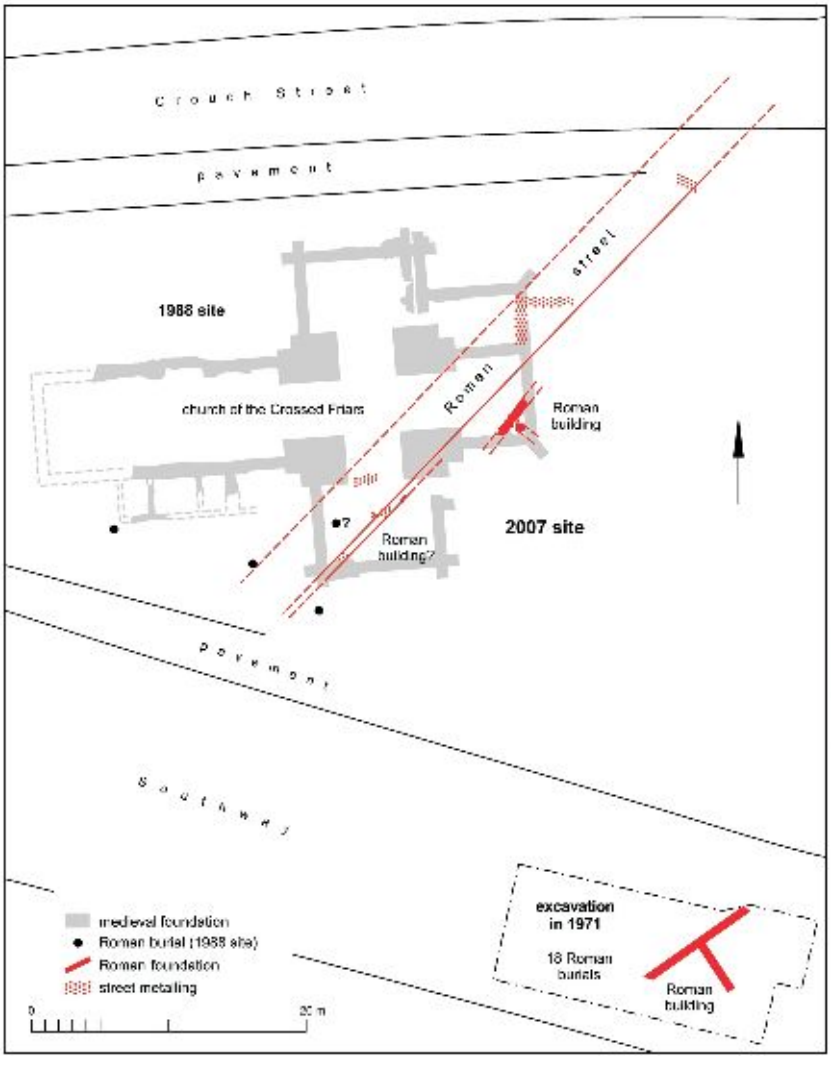
Far left. Last-minute excavation around the tops of the new piles.

Left. The fragment of Roman pot lying in the gravel forming part of the ?Roman street.

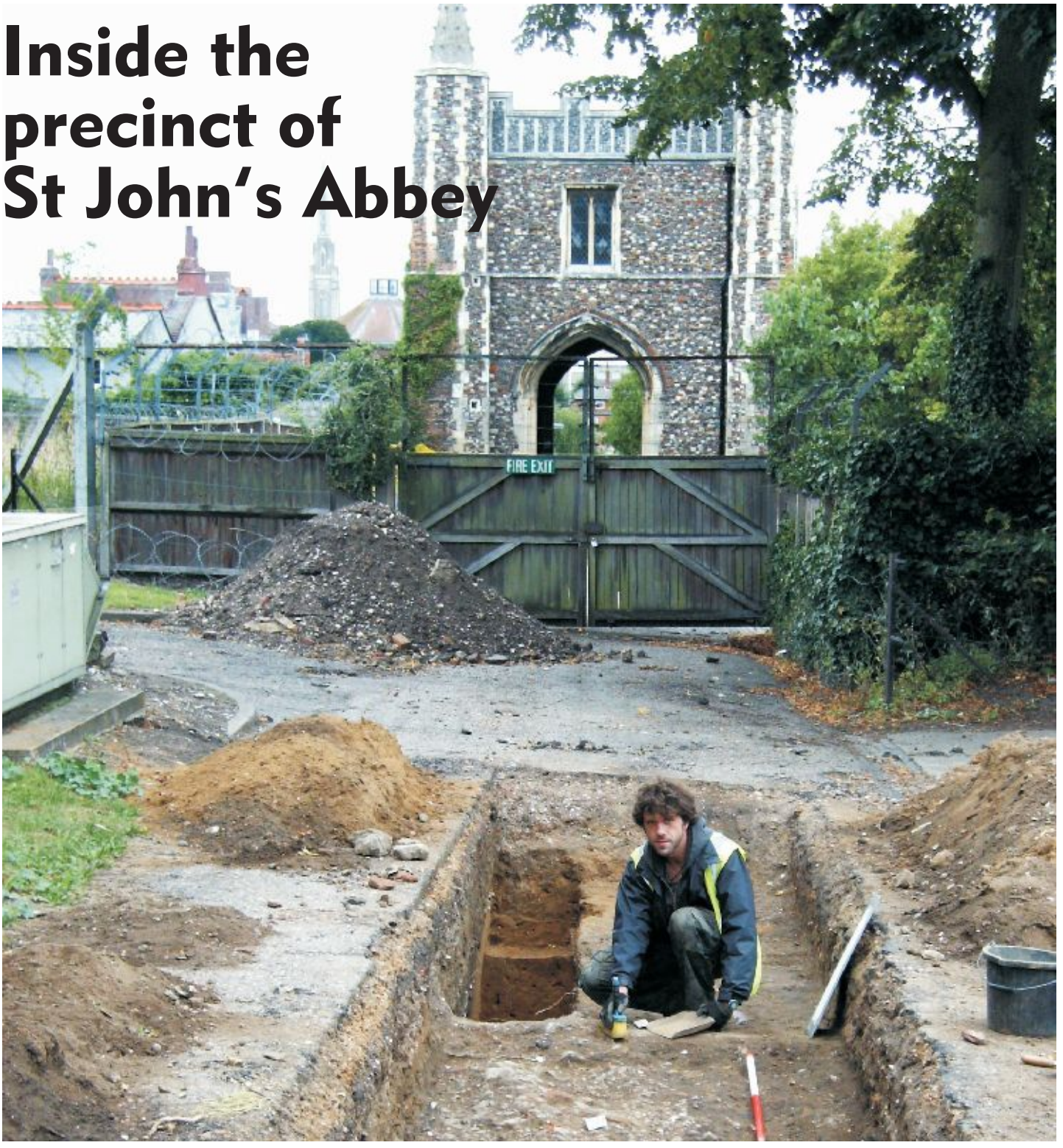
This excavation was not the end of the archaeological work on the site and, during later visits, gravel surfaces were seen again. The first was at the northeast corner of the site, just under the edge of the decorating shop on Crouch Street. The second was in the base for a lift-shaft, about halfway between the two places where the gravel had already been found.

Later, when we were plotting this information, the probable significance of the gravel surfaces we had seen became clear. The gravel only appeared in areas forming a band across the site, extending from the southwest to the northeast corners, and nowhere else. It was at this point that we realised that we were looking at what was probably the remains of a small Roman street up to about 4 metres wide. The gravel must have been the remains of the street surfaces. Some foundations we had found just to the south of the street, and on the same alignment, must be parts of a Roman house, and there were signs that another, earlier, house had also stood along the south side of the street here.

The existence of a Roman street in this position and in this alignment would help explain how a small number of Roman buildings, probably houses, in this area outside the walls were accessed in Roman times. These buildings include part of a structure excavated in 1971 on a site now under Southway, and another house where there is now the pedestrian subway in Crouch Street. The small Roman street at Crouch Street would probably have appeared very similar to two others excavated in 2002 by the Trust at the former St Mary's Hospital site, which featured in **The Colchester Archaeologist** no 16 for 2003.



Inside the precinct of St John's Abbey



St John's Abbey was founded by the Norman baron Eudo Dapifer in 1095 AD. The abbey gate still survives as does much of the wall which encircled the monastery and protected it. But little is known about the layout of its buildings. Now investigations inside the precinct have provided the first sight of buildings not seen for more than 300 years. Ben Holloway provides the details.

The area around Abbey Field has always been a hive of activity, with the coming and going of the military and the public. However, the last year has seen the completion of the first phase of the new garrison project and the MoD relocating to the new Merville Barracks and passing on their redundant buildings and sites to developers. With the redevelopment of the old MoD establishments beginning in earnest, archaeological evaluation work prior to redevelopment is being carried out as areas of land are being released to Taylor Wimpey. The Trust carried out just such an investigation at the Flagstaff House compound in August of 2007.

The Flagstaff House site is of great archaeological interest for a number of reasons. Three component parts of the circus extend into the Flagstaff compound: the north stand, the semi-circular eastern end, and the central barrier. Roman activity on the site was not restricted to the circus. Limited investigation funded by the Friends of the Trust in 2005 showed Roman burial activity east of the circus and, during the monitoring of deep drainage work on Flagstaff Road, dumps of domestic Roman material suggest there had been some kind of extra-mural settlement in the area too. In addition to the high level of Roman activity, about two thirds of the Flagstaff compound site covers part of the precinct of St John's Abbey where of the abbey's buildings remain unexplored and poorly understood. It was for all of these reasons that a scheme of 25 evaluation trenches was designed to investigate the circus, the Roman cemeteries, and the possible extra-mural buildings or related activities, and to look for and identify any of the monastic buildings.

We were successful in identifying continued burial activity in the southern half of the site with the discovery of three inhumation burials and a single cremation. These were recorded but left *in situ* to be dealt with if necessary in a later excavation project. In addition to the confirmed grave deposits, evidence for several more burials was recovered in the form of fragments of lamp, a 2nd-century silver coin of Pertinax, and a copper-alloy armlet belonging to a child. These artefacts area likely to have been disturbed from nearby burials, possibly during post-medieval sand and gravel extraction. (A number of quarry pits were found just outside the abbey precinct wall and may be the source of the sand needed to build it.) These burials are likely to be a part of the substantial complex of burials which has been identified to the south under Napier Road in 2006 and further south still in 2004.



Various parts of the circus were also successfully picked up during the trenching, although the results were to a degree unspectacular mainly because some traces of the building had been removed by later building activity. Parts were seen of the north stand and there was some indirect evidence for the central barrier, but Flagstaff House itself sits directly over the site of the eastern end of the circus, so it was impossible to establish the location of any remains there or indeed if any still existed. Nevertheless what was seen of the building proved interesting and informative. This included the robbed out remains of the outer wall foundation of the north stand and a highly compacted gravel surface forming part of a path surrounding the building possibly leading into one of the entrances. Of particular note was an area of erosion at the east end of the central barrier presumably caused by the turning of the chariots as they swung around the far turning



Above.
Remains of buildings associated with the Lucas mansion.

Left.
Coin of the short-lived Roman emperor Pertinax.



French token dated AD 1380.

post before heading at full speed along the return leg of the track. As had been seen during the recent excavation of the near turning post at the other end of the central barrier (*see* **The Colchester Archaeologist**, 20, 2-5), greensand stone and other building materials lay scattered across the surface of the track indicating that the perimeter wall of the central barrier had been allowed to decay slowly and fall into ruin.

Further evidence of Roman activity was identified on the Flagstaff Road side of the compound where large quantities of pottery and tile were found in a series of substantial pits. The domestic and structural nature of the finds would appear to point to the previous existence of occupation in the immediate area in the Roman period. However, no Roman structural remains apart form the circus were identified anywhere across the evaluation area. The domestic nature of the pottery combined with the presence of building materials suggests a house or perhaps a small villa. Specific material finds associated with the pits include fragments of wall plaster, tessera cubes and Roman brick which appear to elude to a degree of status and grandeur, suggesting the possibility a wider, well-to-do settlement zone, maybe a suburb outside the walls of the Roman town.

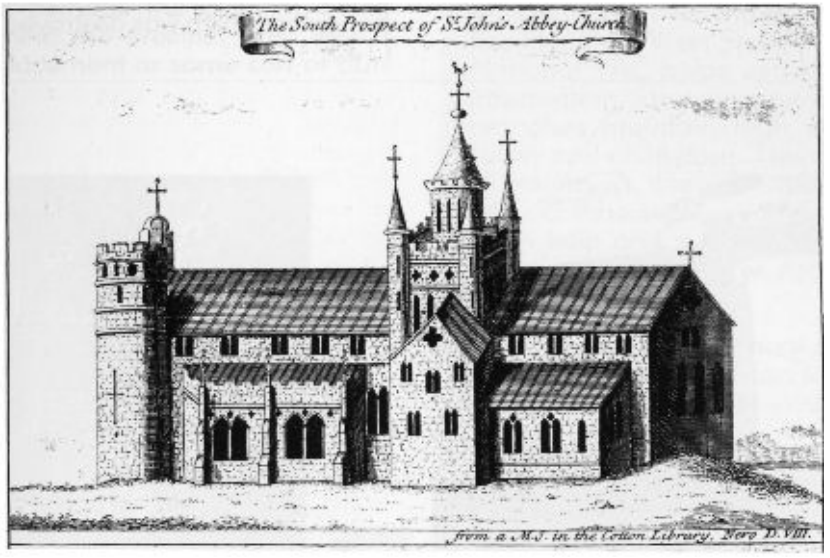
As we know, two thirds of the Flagstaff House compound overlaps the site of the precinct of St John's Abbey. Although the area under investigation is too far south to cover the probable location of the abbey church (which is unknown), the evaluation trenches did reveal parts of the monastic buildings. These included a number of foundations and other structural remains. Of particular interest is a medieval wall foundation on the eastern edge of the evaluation site. Although upper courses of stone had been removed (presumably during the Dissolution), a substantial wall foundation remained *in situ*. Interestingly, we were able to tell that it had been part of an outside wall of the building, because on its west side was a roughly-cobbled surface representing an external yard or path and on its east side was a fragment of compacted clay floor representing an internal surface.

Further structural remains consisting of mortar and rubble foundations were identified against the precinct wall on the western side of the site. These buildings were close to extensive midden deposits containing very high numbers of oyster shell and animal bone. A precise date can be ascertained from a French jetton (token) of Charles VI dating to AD 1380. Further evidence of the medieval activity consists of a number of fragments of window glass some of which are coloured and have been painted. It seems likely that this material dates to the 14th century and may represent repair or replacement of glass from the abbey church.

The remains of a lime kiln were found nearby in the form of large pit with scorched sides. Pottery from the fill of the pit points to a date in the 13th or 14th centuries for its use. The lime was made by burning oyster shells which presumably explains why unburnt shells occurred in such exceptionally large numbers in the nearby midden deposits.

It is well known that disagreement between Henry VIII and Pope Clement VII over the annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon had dire consequences for the Catholic church, its lands and status in England. The Abbey of St John in Colchester was no exception. Evidence for the fallout as a result of Henry VIII's problems with Rome, the establishment of the protestant Church of England, and the resulting Dissolution of the Monasteries were apparent in our trenches where large pits contained demolished building materials including plaster, glazed floor tiles and decorative window glass. This material points to major building works following the purchase of the abbey site by the Lucas family for the construction of a private mansion. Elements of this remodelling of the site were also apparent during our evaluation. Stone foundations incorporating peg-tile levelling courses are likely to be associated with this period, as is a post-medieval drain constructed using decorative stonework from the abbey building. As in the case of the abbey church, the exact location of the large house which the Lucas family created is not precisely known, but it is thought to have stood somewhere around the centre of the precinct possibly incorporating parts of the monastic buildings. This means that substantial foundations found in one of the trenches in the southern part of the site close to the precinct wall are more likely to be the remains of ancillary buildings associated with the mansion such as perhaps a kitchen or a stable block.

The abbey remained in the hands of the Lucas family until the civil war. After the siege of Colchester in 1648, the property was confiscated by Parliament and it then passed through a number of families and owners until 1860 when the site was purchased by the War Office to became a military establishment.



A 15th-century drawing of St John's Abbey church.

Neolithic pits and pots in Great Bentley



Howard Brooks writes...



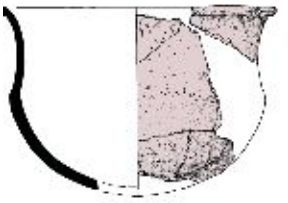
The New Stone Age (or Neolithic period) is of great interest to archaeologists because it was a period during which the daily lives of our ancestors changed radically. Prior to this period, we were all 'hunter-gatherers', but in the Neolithic most people were increasingly involved in growing crops and tending animals. People also began to build permanent homes, to make pottery and weave cloth. However, some of the activities of New Stone Age people are less easy to understand. Why did they build monuments such as stone and timber circles? Why did they dig pits and fill them with broken objects? Was this rubbish disposal? Or was it a religious activity? A recent site examined by CAT contained some of these mysterious pits.

Great Bentley is in the Tendring peninsula, an area known for large areas of archaeological 'cropmarks' – where ripening crops show the patterns of ancient fields, burial sites, and even buildings. One particular field in Great Bentley is close to a group of cropmarks which look like ploughed-out burial mounds, one circular and one rectangular (like a 'long barrow'). When a planning application was lodged to create an agricultural reservoir, one of the conditions of the planning consent was that a series of exploratory trial trenches should be dug across the field. These would show exactly what type of archaeological remains survived under the ploughsoil, and would enable a decision to be reached on what should happen next (should the remains be preserved or excavated?).

The eighty-four evaluation trenches (which, if put end to end would run for 2.5km) revealed activity ranging from the Neolithic to the Roman period (as well as a few modern field boundaries). But the most important archaeological feature was a Neolithic pit containing the broken remains of at least four early Neolithic bowls. Exactly why the pots were buried is unclear, but our best guess is their burial was probably done during a ceremony linked to the adjacent burial mounds, and may have been an offering in thanks for a good harvest . But the pits did not merely contain broken pots – they also contained groups of stones which must have been collected and deliberately placed in the pits. These included worked flints, burnt flints, white and red pebbles, and large lumps of conglomerate stone (weighing up to 11kg). We may not have any Stonehenges in Essex, but smaller lumps of stone do seem to have been significant to Neolithic man. Again, the reasons for this are not really clear to us today.

A clue to the continuing importance of the site may lie in the fact that when Romano-British farmers laid out a field system over the site, they left the old burial mounds in their own field, as if to exclude them from the agricultural area. The past is a powerful place, and whatever had gone on there in the Neolithic period still had an influence over people working the land three thousand years later.

The excavations at Lufkins were directed by Ben Holloway and funded by Brett Aggregates.



Above.
Paper reconstruction The Neolithic pot from Gt Bentley (diameter 22cm or 8 inches).

Below.
Sherds from the Neolithic pot, with £2 coin for scale.





Spoil heap

By Ben Holloway

As we have noticed, in recent years we have been venturing out more and more into the big wide world (well Essex and occasionally Suffolk) during the course of our work, and 2007 was no exception. Teams from CAT have braved the elements (in particular a rather un-summery summer season), horribly early mornings and traffic jams as our investigations have taken us from Southend to Braintree and everywhere in between including our more familiar stamping grounds in and around Colchester.

Work further afield in Essex included repeat visits to some old sites at Great Notley and Great Bentley.

West Clacton reservoir

Our second return trip was to Great Bentley. Cropmark surveys and evaluation work had the area marked as one of interest, so, when construction work for the new west Clacton reservoir began, a team from the Trust was mobilised to investigate. Two field systems were revealed. The first was aligned north-south, and was undated. The second was aligned north-west to south-east, and belonged to the Late Iron Age or early Roman period. Earlier occupation was indicated by the presence of residual Neolithic flints and Bronze Age pottery in the ditch fills. The most remarkable find was a group of small fragments of Roman coloured glass – the raw materials of enamelling. These came from the fill of an early Roman ditch. The circumstances of discovery indicate that these were in a cloth or leather bag dropped or placed in the ditch.



An unusual discovery at Great Bentley of Roman glass broken up in pieces for use in enamelling.

Skyline 120 Business Park

The Trust returned to undertake a further phase of evaluation in advance of the continuing expansion of the business park between the A131 and A120. Previous work on the project has included the excavation of a 1st/early 2nd century Roman enclosure, so hopes were high for further interesting discoveries as a grid of twenty-four evaluation trenches were opened. The results were a little disappointing. Archaeological features (almost all ditches or gullies with a few pits) were present in only thirteen of the twenty-four trenches, and were absent from the south-western part of the site. Only five of the twenty-seven features which were excavated produced any finds. Post-medieval field boundaries shown on the 1881 Ordnance Survey map were found in the western and north-eastern parts of the site. However, the absence of any obvious Roman finds implies that most of the land here was not inhabited, but it may have been arable associated with the previously excavated Roman farmstead. Another area is awaiting evaluation so perhaps we will have better luck next time.

Heybridge

Destroyed by fire in 2004, Heybridge hall was a fine example of a 13th-century house. Evaluation trenches took up where work by the Essex County Council field archaeology unit left off. No structural evidence was identified during the evaluation. However, the presence on the site of medieval pottery of 12th- to 13th-century date supports the early date for the foundation of the hall. Further work on the site of the building itself is expected in the not too distant future…

Southend

A trip to the seaside was the promise of this next investigation (and an opportunity for a certain Us fan to knobble the shrimpers!) Two evaluation trenches were excavated in Southchurch Park (training ground for Southend United) where impressive-sounding prehistoric remains had been recorded many years ago. However, natural clay deposits were sealed by a number of post-medieval and modern horizons indicating that the site had been intensively landscaped for the current football pitches.



Excavations at the Colchester Garrison church.

As well as adventures into the county it has been a busy year closer to home and as ever there always seems to be something going on in Colchester.

Colchester Garrison

Work in and around the garrison continues. With the completion of the first phase of the new Merville barracks, troops are starting to vacate old establishments and these are gradually being redeveloped. Prior to this, the Trust has been evaluating and excavating various sites as they become available. Here follows a selection of the past year's more interesting garrison investigations.

Abbey Field

Within the oppidum of Camulodunum, the site of a new carpark was excavated prior to construction. The principal feature identified during excavation was a continuation of a north-south aligned trackway first found during excavations in 2004. A group of seven Roman cremation burials were uncovered to the east of the trackway. Five of them included a pot containing the cremated remains of the dead person. The burials are a continuation of the Roman cemeteries to the east.

Butt Road carpark

More evaluation work and possibly the earliest start of the year! Work had to start before the carpark opened at 6.00 am so we could lay out the trenches before people parked on them. Trenches revealed two cremation burials and twelve inhumation burials as well as a number of ditch features that may define burial plots within a wider cemetery. None of the burials were fully excavated but were left *in situ* as a further excavation phase of work is expected sometime in the future.

Garrison church

There was some uncertainty about the extent and nature of the cemetery on the site of the Garrison church and, as the building was soon to become redundant, we were asked to investigate it. The work involved three different elements: historical research, a geophysical survey by Dr Tim Dennis of Essex University, and a limited trenching scheme to try and establish numbers and density of any burials.

In 1804, the land was bought for a military burial ground to serve Colchester's Napoleonic garrison whose barracks stood some distance to the east (near modern Artillery Street and Barrack Street). Five hundred and sixty-four people were subsequently buried on the site between 1807 and 1812. Only four gravestones now survive and these are placed around the perimeter of the site, the only legible one being dated to 1809. The gravestones were presumably cleared away from their original positions when the graveyard was 'tidied up'. Burial may have continued here until

Plan of the Garrison church in 1886.





Abby Young starts to clean a plain red tessellated pavement discovered by workmen at the Sixth Form College.

as late as 1815, when the Napoleonic Wars ended, and possibly beyond that date. The Crimean War saw a new garrison opening in Colchester in 1856 with its church erected over the site of the burial ground. The land was shown as 'Grave Yard' as late as the 1876 Ordnance Survey, but it is unclear if anybody had been buried there after the Napoleonic Wars.

The geophysical survey clearly showed the position of a path which had encircled the church but identification of individual graves was much more tricky. We then dug four trenches by way of a sample and as a result were able to identify a number of graves although, because of depth restrictions, no human remains were exposed. In all, we located at least 25 probable graves which points to a slightly higher density of burials than expected from the results of the historical research.

Roman Way camp/Berechurch Hall Road

This project moved away from the cemetery and circus focused garrison projects of recent years and back to the agricultural landscape. Evaluation work identified areas of activity to be further investigated in four excavation areas. Early activity dates to late Bronze age /early Iron age and takes the form of a possible round-house. There was limited evidence of both Late Iron age and Roman activity across the excavation area although stock management systems would indicate pastoral landscape uses. Elements of a farmstead enclosure (probably fronting onto the medieval precursor of Berechurch Hall Road) and further field boundaries were laid out in the medieval period. These appear to have been maintained and added to up to the mid 18th century. At which time, a small agricultural building, was erected. Later, but still in the 18th century, the old field system was rendered redundant by the creation of a large enclosure. This is shown on the Chapman and André map of 1777. An interesting result to see features excavated on the ground that could be directly connected to a cartographic source.

Various garrison projects continue to be ongoing so further updates are expected. Other work in and around Colchester over the last year has included the following.

Sixth Form College

The continued expansion of the Sixth Form College continues to keep us busy. The most recent phase of activity has involved the installation of disabled access to the new 'Mid Site Building'. Two patches of a Roman tessellated pavement were uncovered. The tesserae were plain red, and laid on a bed of pink mortar (*opus signinum*). There was no sign of any other structures (such as robbed foundations). The pavement belonged to a Roman building, the remains of which do not appear to have been previously documented. Floors and wall foundations of private town houses have been recorded in the 'Mid Site' and 'North Site' areas of the college, and under the original 1910 technical college building. The dating of other buildings on the Sixth Form site range from mid 2nd to 3rd century AD and, as the tessellated pavement fragments match these alignments, they are likely to be contemporary. The tessellated pavement is to be left *in situ*, preserved beneath the new access ramp

East Hill House

As the main construction phase of the visual arts facility or firstsite:newsite as it is officially known draws to a close, final infrastructure and service runs are being prepared. During investigation for this work, robbed-out foundations and floor levels of a Roman building were exposed. The remains were quite well preserved, mainly because they had been relatively undisturbed over the last two hundred years being under the gardens of East Hill House. The new arts building has been designed so that the archaeological remains will survive undisturbed underneath. In keeping with this plan, our own investigations were minimal, so we know little about what stood on the site in Roman times except that there were houses there.

Topfield

Two Roman inhumation burials were uncovered during a small residential development off Pope's Lane. These burials in conjunction with four found earlier on the site are outliers of the larger Roman cemetery under what is now Balkerne Heights to the west of the Balkerne Gate. Also identified was a fragment of Roman metalled surface. This may form part of a road or track that led to the industrial site at Sheepen. It would have been similar to the roads recently found at the Colchester Institute (see pages 11-13).

Hundreds of CAT reports online



Over four hundred reports are now available for download on the internet on a site hosted by the University of Essex and run by the university's Department of Computing and Electronic Systems. New reports are being added as they are being completed at the rate of about 40 to 50 or so each year. They provide accounts of the excavations and other projects undertaken by the Trust for developers, the Colchester Borough Council, and other clients.

Recent additions of particular note include the excavations at Luftkins Farm, Great Bentley (see page 27 above and Report 450) and a detailed survey of World War 2 air-raid shelters at Colchester Garrison (Report 467).

It is hoped that, with the addition in due course of earlier reports and publications, the site can be developed into an important resource for archaeological research on Colchester. The address is http://cat.essex.ac.uk

We are grateful to Christine and Adrian Clark for all their hard work designing the site and making it all possible.





The Friends of Colchester Archaeological Trust

Annual roundup by chairman Jane Meech

The January 2007 meeting of the Friends was held as usual in the Lion Walk United Reform Church. The illustrated talks brought over one hundred Friends up to date on the Roman Circus (Philip Crummy), the Circus Mosaic Project (Peter Herring), the Crouch Street friary of the Crossed Friars (Steve Benfield), and an overview of numerous excavations and watching briefs all over Essex (Howard Brooks). As always, the afternoon finished off with a splendid tea, with cakes provided by Committee members and Friends.

The following Saturday, 27th January, we were lucky enough to have a special visit to the Roman Circus site at the Napier Road/Flagstaff Road junction, where Philip Crummy showed us the excavation revealing one end of the central barrier. There would have been a turning post here where the chariots swung round.

On Saturday 21st April a large number of Friends again met at the Lion Walk church to enjoy a talk by Tony Wilmott, Senior Archaeologist with English Heritage. Tony had spent the past three years as co-Director of the Chester Amphitheatre project, a joint venture between Chester City Council and English Heritage. Tony described and showed us the excavations past and present on the site, and the innovative plans for 'The Imperial Amphitheatre Centre'. Tony's illustrations were all fascinating, but the one showing a motorised wheelbarrow caused a real ripple of interest among the audience, especially those who had recently been volunteers on the Circus starting gates site! Following Tony's talk, Philip Crummy presented a most persuasive case for the existence of an amphitheatre at Colchester.

Saturday 19th May saw a full coach-load of us off to first visit Dunwich on the Suffolk coast. Mike Corbishley had arranged a comprehensive programme for us, starting with a visit to the tiny but well laid-out museum, whose exhibits chart



Emma Spurgeon shows some of the finds from the Colchester Institute site to members of the Friends.

the history of the town from its known Roman settlement origins, via its importance by the 12th century as a major port, to its gradual decline through silting and erosion. Katharine Chant, the museum curator and advisor then walked us to the remains of Greyfriars Priory, St. James Church, and the surviving Norman leper hospital chapel. Moving on to Southwold many of us enjoyed the fine spring weather (and lunch) on the new pier, meeting up with Mike later at the glorious St. Edmunds church. Mike took us round the interior and exterior of this beautiful 15th century church, describing its history and its many features. Our last visit of the day was to the Sailors Reading Room in Southwold, a cosy refuge for seafarers in the town.

On Saturday 30th June the Trust very kindly arranged another site visit for us, this time to the Colchester Institute excavations. In spite of the appalling weather, about 50 Friends were able to view the many finds, including a large number of glass fragments in blue, green and red, and the 'star' find, a Type 1 Dressel amphora. We were also shown the well where this amphora was found, a Roman road running across the site into the Sheepen area, and what is thought to be a sunken store room or cellar by the road. The Friends are very grateful to the Trust staff for giving up their time on these site visits, which are always so popular.

A fine early autumn day on 29th September was the occasion for our final coach outing of the year, first to West Stow Anglo-Saxon village. Mike Corbishley had arranged for us to have a brief introduction, and we were then given a tour of the experimental reconstructed Anglo-Saxon buildings, one of which had recently burned down and which was in the process of a further reconstruction. We also had the chance to visit the new museum where many finds from the site are displayed. We enjoyed good weather there, but apparently a visit by Tony Robinson the previous day had been rained off, and he was expected back later that day to complete filming. We had to depart for Bury St Edmunds, so were not around to help him out. After lunch in Bury St Edmunds we met up with Mike, who took us on a detailed tour of the Benedictine abbey remains. These are within the beautiful abbey gardens, a major attraction of the town, and Mike was able to bring the original buildings of the great Abbey of St Edmunds alive for us, by his knowledgeable descriptions. Later we were able to visit St James – now the Cathedral church which was once part of the Abbey complex, and St Mary's church a little further along the road. The 15th century St Mary's is the burial place of Mary Tudor, Queen of France, sister of Henry VIII.

Our final event of 2007 was a walking tour of the timber-framed buildings of Colchester, which turned into two events as we had to organise a second date to cope with demand. On Sundays 7th and 14th October, in spectacular weather, we met up outside the Castle and Dave Stenning, an expert on Essex timber-framed buildings, took us round pointing out some of the many fine examples in Colchester. It was a real eye-opener for us, even to those brought up in Colchester, as Dave pointed out features and even whole buildings that we had never noticed. One of these was 'Feathers' in Queen Street, to look at just a modern hairdressing salon, but originally a long-walled jettied house of the 16th century. The roof, floor and one end wall are all that is left. On both days Dave ended our tour at the Red Lion hotel, where the management very kindly let us explore while Dave explained the complicated layout and history of the building. On the first tour we were also invited to view the remains of a Roman mosaic in one of the cellars.



Above.
Dave Stenning on his tour of timber-framed buildings of Colchester.

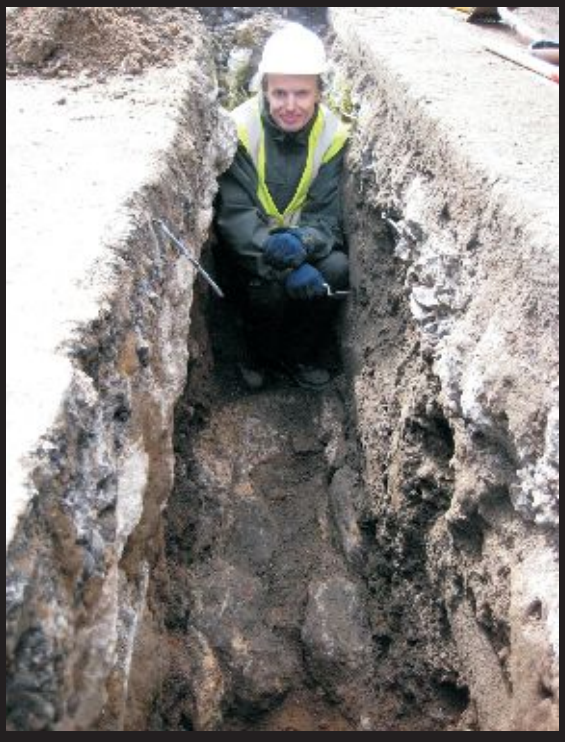
Below.
Mike Corbishley at Greyfriars Priory in Dunwich.

2007 was my first year as Chairman of the Friends, and I do not mind admitting that I approached it with a deal of trepidation. However everyone seemed to enjoy the various events, and, importantly, on the coach trips I came back with the same number with which I started out! My sincere and heartfelt thanks to Mike Corbishley for the meticulous research and preparation he puts into organising the trip destinations for us. My thanks also to Gabrielle Chadwick, Philip and Nina Crummy, and Maureen Jones, who have all been so supportive and helpful. One of the most pleasing results of the success of the trips is that, together with profits from the sale of A Victory Celebration, we were able to donate £700 to the Trust to carry out further research excavations on the Circus starting gates site.









Don Shimmin with remains of part of the South Gate.

It's a gas...

A trench for a gas main along St Botolph's Street and Queen Street is providing lots of new information about the Roman and medieval town. Of particular interest was the first sighting in over 150 years of the South Gate. This had been a major gateway into the Roman and later town until its demolition in 1818. Little is known about the size and design of the gate but enough of its foundations were revealed in the bottom of the trench to show that it must have been extensively remodelled in medieval times. Other discoveries in the trench include part of the Roman street which passed through the gate and the remains of various Roman house foundations and floors. The recording work was commissioned by Morrison for National Grid.

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