



# CATALOGUE

NEWSLETTER OF THE COLCHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

number 1

summer 1977

## A Framework for Today

Poor old Colchester....

knocked down flat.

"And that", said the Planners,

"is that".

(Beth Hart, The Gilbert School)

Over the last few years this view of Colchester has often seemed apt. But from an archaeological point of view the destruction has had *good* results as well as bad ones. On the one hand it gives us an opportunity to investigate the past but on the other it leaves us little time to do all we think is necessary. Of course the modern idea of what is necessary differs from the view of archaeologists of earlier generations. For archaeologists today it is impossible to cope with modern urban excavation without large financial resources and teams of experts to provide 'back-up' for the primary digging. The Colchester Archaeological Trust is responsible for the excavation and recording of the town's threatened archaeology. Money for this purpose comes from the Borough Council and the County Council, but principally from the Department of the Environment. The function of the Trust's Executive is to use these grants to the best advantage in dealing with the many demands which the town's redevelopment creates.

In Colchester a large team of full-time archaeologists is needed to cope with the current **6ites** and to prepare the material from previous excavations for publication.

At the moment all the Trust's excavators are busy at Butt Road with their site director, planner and photographer. In East Hill House (the Trust's temporary headquarters) they are backed up by finds\* experts, draughtsmen and a research assistant. The Trust's Director, Philip Crummy, coordinates the efforts of these workers. Finally some of the objects found are dealt with by the conservation laboratory at the Castle Museum, where you will eventually be able to see the finds.

The team at the moment is working on a large site in Butt Road, before the building of a new Police Headquarters. The site is just a small part of a 150 acre Roman burial ground. The Trust's excavators are hoping to dig around 2,000 skeletons, although there are probably as many as 100,000 Romans buried around Roman Colchester. There is more information about the Butt Road site in Notes and News at the end of this newsletter and in our autumn edition there will be a full report.

In 1867 fifty guineas was all that was needed to recommence excavations in the Roman city of Wroxeter. This year our budget will be in the region of £40,000. The Trust is not asking you for financial assistance (although no offers will be refused!) but we should like your support for our work. You can assist us in two ways: by presenting the case of archaeology whenever it is possible to encourage national and local bodies to support the work; or by coning and helping in the work itself.

Hike Corbishley

Remains of a Roman house at Balkerne Lane.



## Three years' excavation at Balkerne Lane

After three years of work the rescue excavations at Balkerne Lane finally ceased last December. Before the archaeological explorations began, it was known from casual finds of walls and pavements that Roman buildings had existed in this area even though they were outside the walled part of the town. But now we know that this part of Roman Colchester had not simply been a suburb which had developed outside the walls late on in the life of the colony but that it had stemmed from the days before the town wall was built when the Roman city was larger and included all of the Balkerne Lane area. The sequence of expansion and contraction was quite complicated but can be briefly summarised as follows.

The main Colchester to London road in Roman times, the original A12, ran obliquely across the Balkerne Lane site towards where the Colchester Royal Grammar School is today. Our excavations revealed that on either side of the road between A.D. 43 and 50 there lay the remains of a civil settlement which was situated outside the legionary fortress. The settlement was separated from the fortress by a bank and ditch, the remains of which lay beneath the modern road, Balkerne Lane.

Around A.D. 50, the defences were filled in and the Roman colony was founded. The rather flimsy buildings of the civil settlement were swept away and replaced by much better quality houses, no different from those elsewhere in the city.

In late A.D. 60 or early 61, these houses at Balkerne Lane, in common with the rest

of the city, were destroyed as a result of the revolt led by Queen Boudicca and her followers. After the uprising had finally been quashed, the authorities in Colchester somewhat belatedly reinstated the defences which they had so rashly filled in some 10 years earlier.

About 20 years later these defences were dispensed with in the Balkerne Lane area and replaced by a new bank and ditch further west; the town spilled westwards and clearly by this time had fully recovered from the devastation of A.D.60/1.

Sometime during the first half of the second century the decision was taken to protect the town with a stone wall, but, possibly for reasons of expense, the wall was not built around the western expansion of the city but along the old line of defences at Balkerne Lane, thus isolating the houses to the west.

Eventually, a hundred or 60 years later, in order to improve the defences still further, the ends of the ditches which butted onto the road leading in at the Balkerne Gate were joined together and the road put out of use. This is the root cause of why today the High Street does not extend up to the Balkerne Gate. Had it done so, it is very likely that not much of the gate would survive today.

The remains of buildings and other structures discovered during the excavations include two temples, a

Oculist's stamp from Balkerne Lane. The stamp is 3.1 cm long and on one side says **MARTIAL CROC** meaning 'Martial, the oculist'.



monumental gateway, many private houses dating from circa 43 to 400, the remains of five water-mains and a possible aqueduct.

The volume of finds recovered from the excavations is enormous and includes not only about 600 crates of pottery and bone fragments but also about 6,000 other objects, mostly fragmentary. These include 2,000 coins and 3,000 objects of bronze, bone or iron such as brooches, pieces of military fittings, bracelets, beads, rings, pins, keys and locks. In addition, hints relating to the occupations of the Roman inhabitants of the Balcerne Lane area were given by the uncovered remains of kilns and ovens as well as the discovery of specialised objects such as weaving implements, 'rough-outs' for bone pins, crucibles, and waste products from metal working. A notable find in this context is a stamp used in the manufacture of cakes of eye-salve (see photo).

Thus, not only did the excavations reveal much about the development of the Roman

town but also yielded valuable evidence relating to the lifestyle and economy of the Roman occupants in this part of the town.

Work has begun on producing the excavation report, but due to the size and complexity of the site, this will take several years to complete.

Summary reports of the discoveries at Balcerne Lane can be found in *Britannia* VII (1976): 343-4 and *Archaeological Excavations 1975: 56-7* (HMSO 1976). A much fuller interim report will appear in *Britannia* VIII (1977)."

P.C.

(It is possible to obtain archaeological journals through your public library but members of the Essex Archaeological Society have free access to most of them in their library at the Hollytrees Museum. Ed.)

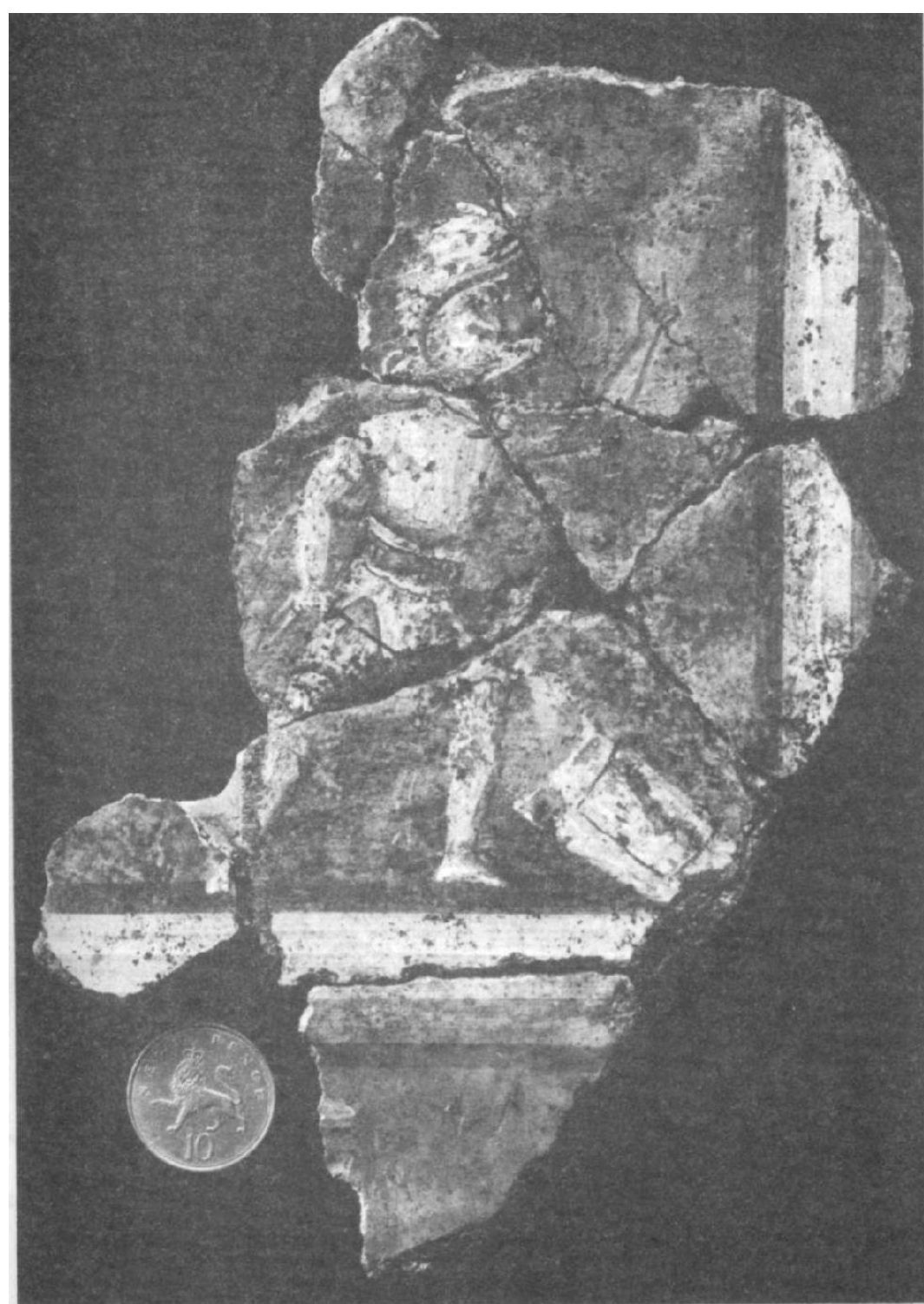
## Roman spectator sports in Colchester

Recent discoveries from Balcerne Lane have turned our attention to sport and entertainment during the Roman period. The chief Roman spectator sports were gladiatorial combat and chariot-races. The latter were held in circuses, such as the Circus Maximus in Rome, and consisted of races between teams of two, three, four, six or seven horses drawing light chariots. Gladiatorial combats took place in amphitheatres; there were two main types of gladiator, the SECUTORES, themselves grouped into three divisions, Thracians, Samites and Gauls, armed with sword, shield and body armour, and the RETIARII, armed with shoulder guard, net and trident. Other entertainments which took place in amphitheatres included armed men (BESTIARII) fighting wild beasts, wild beasts set against captive defenceless men, and even naval battles.

During the excavations at Balcerne Lane depictions of both gladiators and chariot-racing have been found. Fragments of a clear monochrome mould-blown glass chariot-cup, decorated in relief, were discovered in 1976. The cup wall is divided into three friezes, the topmost bearing the legend OLYMPE VA, the middle frieze shows a charioteer driving a QUADRIGA, a four-horse chariot, and the lowest frieze shows a lion catching a ?dog. The symbol for "Catalogue" is based on this cup. There are other examples of these cups from Colchester. The Sheepen excavations of the

Opposite.

A gladiator painted on a wall of a Roman house found at Balcerne Lane in 1976.



1930s produced an almost complete cup showing pairs of gladiators in combat, and a complete chariot-cup, now in the British Museum, was found in a grave in Wellesley Road. The cups are probably Gaulish and date to the mid first century.

Late in 1976 at Balcerne Lane a large quantity of collapsed wall plaster was found. Among the pieces were several which fitted together to show two gladiators, one virtually complete (see photo). Probably a Thracian, he wears a crested helmet, breastplate, belted tunic, greaves and carries a short sword; his shield lies on the ground before him and he raises a finger in token of submission. The gladiator behind him has a much larger shield and is possibly therefore a Samnite. The painting is executed in reds, cream and white against a green background.

Over the years a fairly substantial collection of objects depicting amphitheatre or circus scenes have been found in Colchester. The local pottery industry of circa 200 has contributed largely to this group, both sarian and barbotine wares. Among the collections of the British Museum is a barbotine vase showing a gladiator driving a QUADRIGA, a confusion of the two themes by the potter. In the Colchester and Essex Museum are several pieces of barbotine decorated variously with BESTIARI and chariot-scenes; most notable among the barbotine wares is the 'Colchester Vase' which depicts an animal hunt, bear-baiting by BESTIARI and a contest between a SECUTOR and a RETIARIUS, the latter raising his finger in submission. Also possibly connected with the local manufacture of barbotine ware is a small negative punch of a SECUTOR. The Colchester Samian potters included in their range of figure-types some connected with the amphitheatre. Potter A used a captive in conjunction variously with an attacking bear, lion/leopard and dog, and three different pairs of SECUTORES, one pair being duplicated by Potter B.

First-century lamps, possibly made locally, also show gladiators: the Neronian levels of the 1930s Sheepen excavations brought to light a fragment of a Gaul with a ?Samnite; and the pre-Boudiccan levels of the Lion Walk excavations, 1971-74, produced a very small fragment showing a

?Gaul. These lamp fragments are in varying fabrics and are from different moulds.

In the British Museum there is an ivory statuette of a SECUTOR carrying a shield on which is shown a contest in progress between two SECUTORES. This statuette was found somewhere in Lexden.

Perhaps the most unusual find in this group is that of the terracotta plaque supposedly found on the site of the Union House circa 1848. The object is now lost but a drawing by Josiah Parish survives. It shows a plaque on which in relief is a heavily-armed gladiator turning towards a large, ferocious leaping fish.

As Colchester was one of the major towns of Roman Britain we might expect to find in or near it either an amphitheatre or a circus, or both. No circus has yet been found in Britain, though eight amphitheatres are known. Hypotheses have been put forward to suggest sites for each in Colchester, but these ideas are too unsubstantiated to be accepted yet. It remains for future archaeological excavators of Colchester to solve these problems.

N.E.

## Scrubbers wanted !

Helpers are needed to wash the large backlog of uncleaned animal bone from the excavations over the last six years. There are almost a quarter of a million pieces to wash, so there is plenty to do! If you are interested please contact Vicky Grainger at the Trust headquarters at East Hill House, 76 High Street, Colchester (Tel. 02026 41051).

# Archaeology above ground at Trinity Street

The opportunity to investigate this site arose as a result of plans to carry out extensive alterations to Nos 2 and 3 Trinity Street and to erect a new building on the vacant site that had been No. 1 at the corner of Trinity Street and Culver Street.

The investigation had two aims, the first being a complete survey of the existing building, of which the earliest parts appeared to date to the late 16th century. At that time No. 3 seems to have formed the northern arm of an H-plan house comprising Nos 3, and 5 Trinity Street. It was of brick laid in English Bond and two of its surviving walls contained brick four-centred arched, making it the earliest known domestic building in Colchester constructed exclusively of brick. Two large semi-circular arches in the west wall of Nos 1 and 2, also of English Bond brickwork, are of approximately the same date and may be part of the same property. Towards the end of the 17th century the whole block, Nos 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, was given a new brick facade of Flemish Bond, which incorporated a string course and pilasters at first floor level, an unusual feature, together with large rectangular mullioned windows, one of which remained at the back of No. 2. The building was probably divided into five separate units at the end of the 18th century when the present doorways and sash windows were inserted.

The second aim of the investigation was to find further evidence of the date of the earliest post-Roman occupation in this area of the town. Therefore a small area was excavated as close to the Trinity Street frontage as possible and this provided a series of pits dating from the 18th century back as far as the late 10th or early 11th century. The pottery found in the earliest pits is in accordance with the conclusions arrived at from previous excavations in Lion Walk and Trinity Street that Culver Street and Trinity Street were both in use as thoroughfares well before the Norman conquest. Even small excavations like

this can be useful in showing which parts of the town were occupied during the successive periods of its history and the present excavation is to be seen as one of a series of such excavations to be continued in the future.

N.A.S.

## NOTES AND NEWS

The Colchester Archaeological Trust is composed of representatives of local and national bodies as well as a few co-opted individuals and employs a permanent staff of archaeologists to deal with rescue sites in Colchester. This year the Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust was formed to support the Trust's work. The subscription per year is - Adults and Institutions £1.50, Family Membership £2.00, Children and Students 75p. For this, Friends receive two newsletters a year, are able to attend a lecture on the year's work and will be given conducted tours of the current sites. Mike Corbishley organises the Friends and edits the newsletter, but subscriptions should be sent to Mrs G Chadwick, Treasurer, The Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust, 171 Wivenhoe Road, Alresford, Colchester CO7 8AQ. You can contact the Colchester Archaeological Trust via the Castle Museum, Colchester.

Through the Manpower Services Commission under the Job Creation Project - the government scheme to create jobs to help alleviate unemployment - the Trust has received a grant to enable it to employ two more draughtsmen, a part-time clerical assistant and someone to help catalogue the animal bones excavated over the last six years. This grant will be of great help in speeding up the task of publishing the results of recent excavations. Total is £8,000.

Government cuts in spending have not resulted in a cut-back in the Trust's grant for this year. Instead the Trust's grant from the Department of the Environment is the same as last year which, since there is no allowance for inflation, does represent a cut of sorts. Total almost £40,000, one third from local authorities.

To date over 400 burials have been dug up at the Butt Road cemetery - in all up to 2000 are expected. Arrangements are being made for bone specialists to examine and report on the material; this, it is hoped, will include considerable assistance from abroad, from the Institute of Palaeopathology and Paleoanthropology in Lyons.

Open days for the Friends at Butt Road cemetery are on 29th and 30th July. Some finds will be on display and guides will be available although, because of the excavation techniques employed, there will not be a great deal of the site to see. Visitors will be shown how the archaeological excavation is being carried out and the recording system will be explained. Entrance via Denmark Street, off the top of Maldon Road. Anytime between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm.

A small display of recent finds from Butt Road is being organised in the Castle Museum for August.

We shall temporarily stop work at Butt Road in early August in order to move to Gosbecks for a month, to work there between harvest and recultivation. The Department of the Environment is concerned about the effect of ploughing on this very

important Roman sacred site and the aim of the excavation is to assess the extent of the danger. We will return to Butt Road in September.

YOU can still buy copies of 'Not only a matter of time' - a booklet which outlines the archaeology of Colchester and suggests ways in which it might be dealt with before it is all destroyed. From the Castle Museum - 60p.

You can also buy from the Castle Museum an article, with plans, about Portreeve's House, East Bay, Colchester. The Trust carried out a detailed recording and analysis of this 15th century building. It was published in Post-Medieval Archaeology Vol.10 and is now available as an offprint for 25p.

Contributing to this issue were:

Philip Crummy . . . the Trust's Director  
Nick Smith . . . a site director  
Nina Elmore . . . the research assistant

Bob Moyes, the chief draughtsman, designed our front cover and Alison Colchester took the photographs.

