



CATALOGUE

NEWSLETTER OF THE COLCHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

number 5

summer 1979



IN THIS ISSUE:

New excavation under the Co-op
Romano-British Jewellery
Potter's kiln found at Middleborough

10 cm

New excavation under the Co-op

When the Colchester Co-op announced its intention of rebuilding its shops along part of Long Wyre Street it was clear that an archaeological excavation would need to be carried out in advance of the new building in order to record as much as possible of the archaeological evidence that would be destroyed. Sixty-five days in the middle of winter, not the best time to carry out an excavation, did at least allow a proportion of the site to be properly excavated. A generous donation of £1,000 from the Co-op helped to speed the work.



The main reason for the site's importance was that it lay on a Roman road junction. It was hoped that it would therefore provide information on the layout of the eastern part of the town in the Roman period, for the street plan did not remain unchanged throughout that time but was modified and developed to the same extent as the town plan is altered by development today.

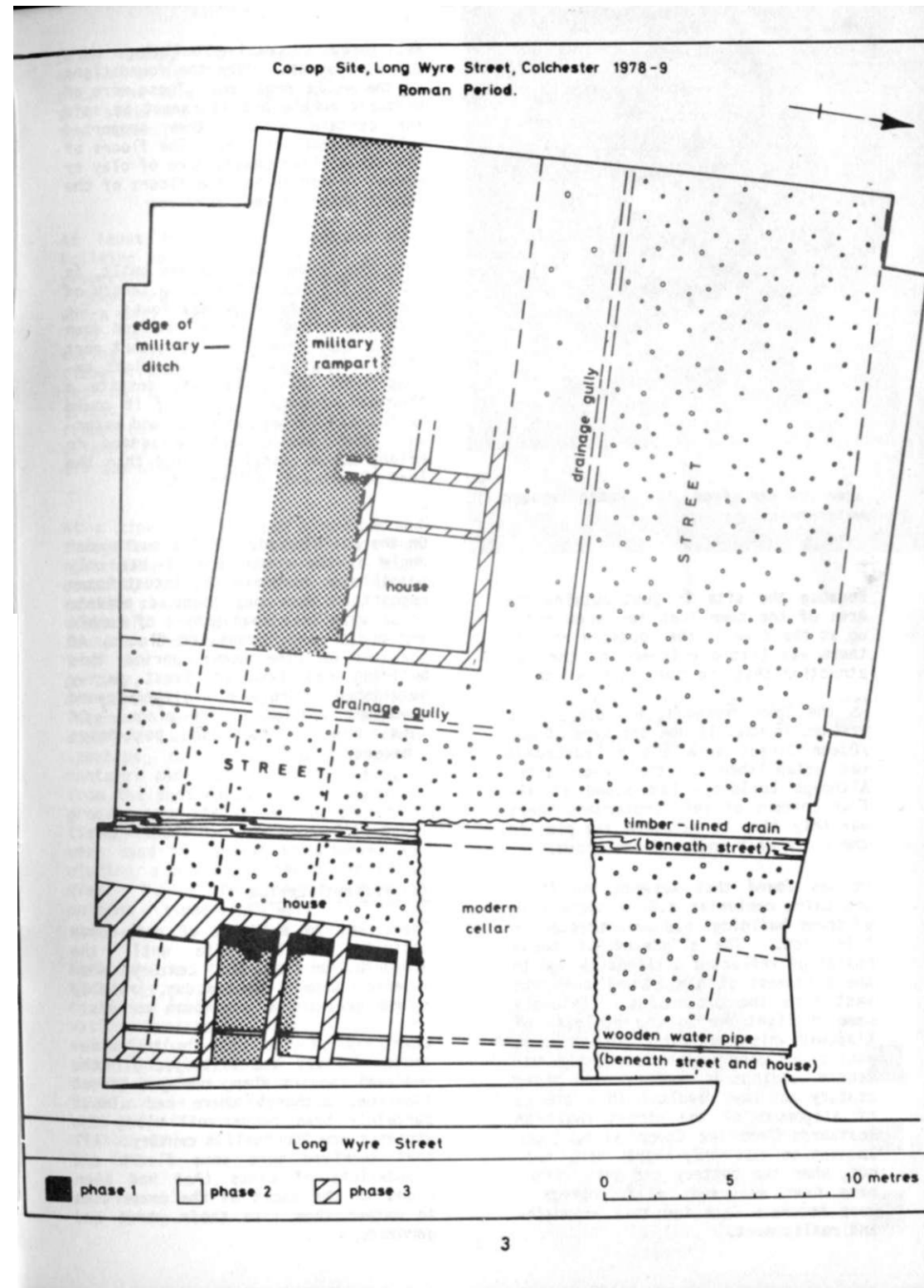
The Roman Period

As expected the earliest features on the site were the ditch and rampart that had been constructed to defend an annex of the military fortress, built here soon after the Roman Invasion in A.D. 43. The ditch and rampart had first been found during the Lion Walk excavation of 1971-1974 and their presence on the Co-op site shows that the military base extended at least as far east as Long Wyre Street. All that survived of the rampart was a stump about one foot high, but this was sufficient to show that it was built of sand and revetted with clay.

In A.D. 49 the military fortress was converted to a civilian colony and the rampart demolished to fill the ditch. On the Co-op site a large, timber-lined drain and a wooden water-main were laid across the demolished defences. Although in both cases the wood had completely rotted away, it could be identified as a dark brown stain in the sand. Furthermore, the iron collars that had held the sections of water-main together still remained in position, showing that the pipes were each about seven feet long. The drain presumably served buildings that lay somewhere north of the site, possibly buildings associated with the Temple of Claudius that was built at about that time.

OPPOSITE

Plan of the site during the Roman period showing the military rampart and ditch, the drain and water-main, the streets, the three phases of building in the south-east angle of the cross-roads and the building to south-west.





Iron collar from the Roman wooden water-main.

Because the site is just outside the area of the town that had been built up at the time of the Boudican revolt, there was little evidence of the destruction that the town suffered then.

As the town expanded, buildings were erected in what is now the Wyre Street /Queen Street area and a crossroads was established on the Co-op site. Although buildings had stood at all four corners of this crossroads there was only time to excavate the plot in the south-east angle of the cross.

It was found that between the first and third centuries A.D. a succession of three buildings had been erected on this plot. The alignment of these buildings reflected a slight change in the alignment of the street that ran east from the crossroads. Evidence came to light during the building of Kingsway which suggested that a large public building under Caters had extended southwards during the third century and had resulted in a change of alignment of the street that ran eastwards from the Co-op site. Our excavation not only bore this out, but, when the pottery and other finds have been analysed, will provide a more accurate date for this expansion and realignment.

All three successive buildings were private houses. Only the foundations of the walls remained. These were of mortared rubble but it cannot be said for certain whether they supported walls of stone or clay. The floors of the two earlier phases were of clay or gravel in mortar but the floors of the latest phase did not survive.

When the Co-op Pharmacy was built, in 1956 on the adjacent site, a length of Roman lead water-pipe was found. The pipe ran through a brick sump and down into a lead tank. We hoped that part of this water supply system might extend into this site but, despite a thorough search, no trace of it could be found. The wooden drain and water-main that was discovered seemed to belong to an earlier period than the lead pipe found in 1956 did.

On the building plot in the south-west angle of the crossroads it was only possible to excavate the latest Roman deposits. Here was found a private house with deep foundations of rubble and mortar and tessellated floors. At the end of the Roman period this building had been at least partly demolished and a timber-framed structure erected in its place. Of this only slots and post-holes remained.

The Medieval Period

There was no evidence of post-Roman activity on the site until the eleventh or twelfth century when several large pits were dug, probably to rob gravel from the Roman streets.

Levelling of the site in the nineteenth century had destroyed all the medieval remains along the Wyre Street frontage, although there had almost certainly been houses all along the street since the twelfth century. All that survived were some floors and foundations of wings that had been added to the backs of the properties to extend them into their yards and gardens.

Cathy Manby (a Trust excavator) working on (or in!) a medieval cess-pit. The holes in the bottom and the side slots are for uprights to support the timber lining.

At least three periods of medieval building could be seen in one of the properties. The earliest had been a flimsy structure with wattle walls of which only the stake holes survived. This had been replaced, probably during the fifteenth century, by a timber-framed building with its walls set on a plinth of mortared roof tiles. A second phase of timber framed building had been set on rubble plinths and had probably survived until the nineteenth century.

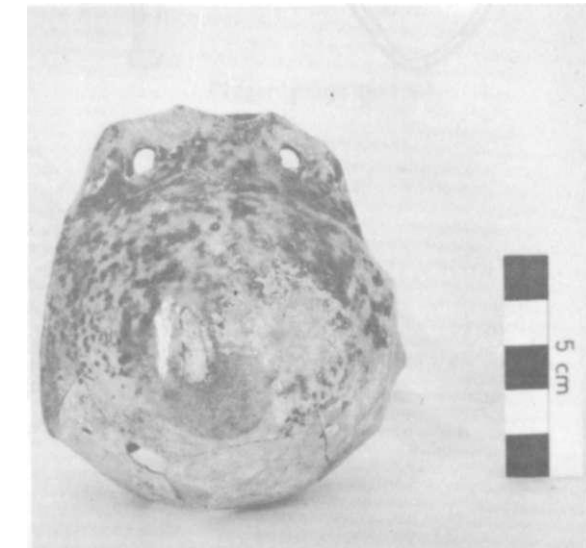
At a time when household rubbish and sewage had to be disposed of by each householder and not by the local council, pits in yards and back-gardens played a large part in rubbish disposal. Many rubbish pits were found on the Co-op site, of all dates from the twelfth to the nineteenth century, containing large quantities of pottery and bone. Of particular interest were a deep, stone-lined cess-pit with two drain inlets (perhaps dating to the fifteenth century) and a cess-pit that, judging from the post holes in its bottom and grooves down its sides, had once been timber-lined. Old broken roofing tiles were used in several structures, including a drain and the floor of an oven. During the contractor's excavations a stone-lined well was found.

Although the time restriction meant that only a part of the Co-op site could be fully excavated, the excavation nevertheless provided much new evidence for the changes that took place in the layout of Colchester during the Roman period, for what was found can be related to not only the Long Wyre Street area but to the plan of the whole of the eastern part of the town.

Nick Smith



A small flask, called a costrel, with handles for attaching to a belt. About 300-400 years old.



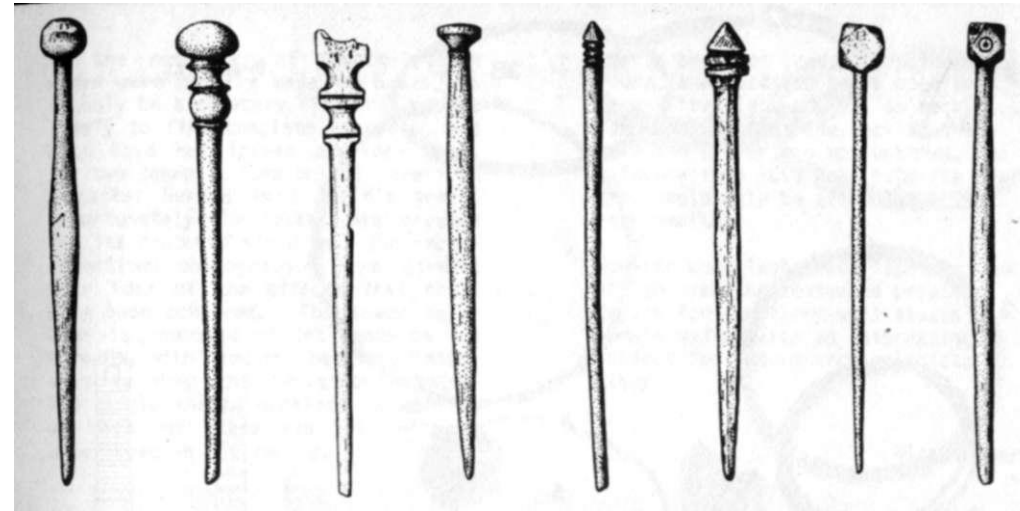
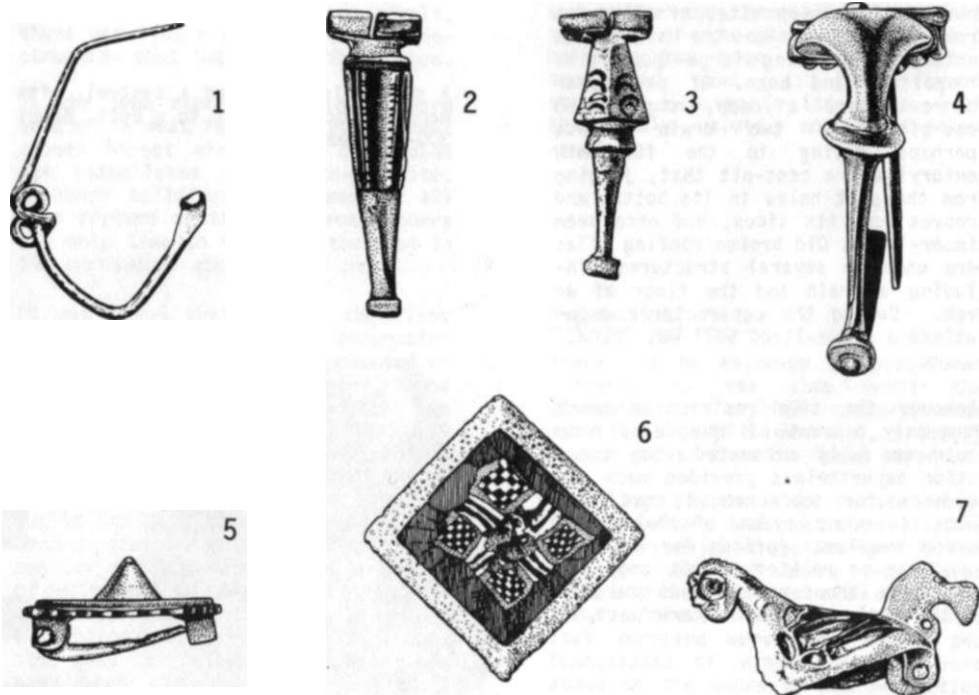
Romano-British Jewellery

Examples from excavations in Colchester, 1971-1979.

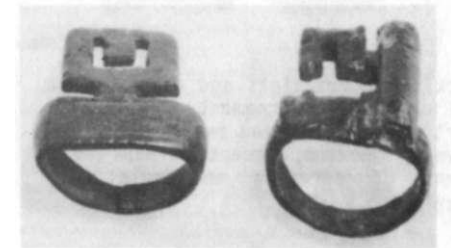
The items of Jewellery worn by the average Romano-British Colcestrian were essentially similar to those we know today. Though differing in details of use, material and manufacture then, as now, they were designed to ornament parts of the body or to make a functional object attractive.

Brooches and pins are the two major groups of functional jewellery and inevitably each group contains examples so plain that the description jewellery is questionable.

Brooches were worn by both men and women to fasten cloaks or similar garments. Early brooches were comparatively plain, but they gradually became more and more elaborate, so that by the second century A.D. brooches in the shapes of birds and animals were being produced. The brooches (see below) all date to the first or second century A.D. and show the broad range of early Roman brooches from the purely functional (1) to the novelty type (7). Brooches were usually made of bronze; various techniques were used to embellish them, from decorative moulding on the bow (2) to inlaying niello (3) or brightly coloured enamel (6 & 7). The results produced by enamelling, which flourished in the second century, were particularly effective. The colours used on (6) are red, dark and light blues, white, black and yellow.



Surprisingly, even hair-pins show considerable variety in the shape of the head (see above) as well as in the material used. The commonest hairpins found on Roman sites are made of bone: judging by the hundreds that we have recovered their loss caused no great hardship. In contrast, the hairpins found with the bodies in the Butt Road cemetery are of silver, glass, jet or bronze, rarely bone; clearly the most treasured pins only were used to dress the hair of the dead (see front cover), or were deposited in the grave for use in the after-life.

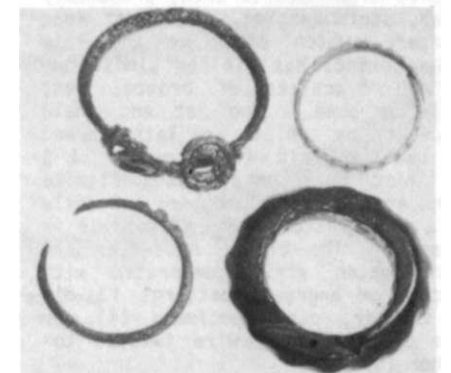


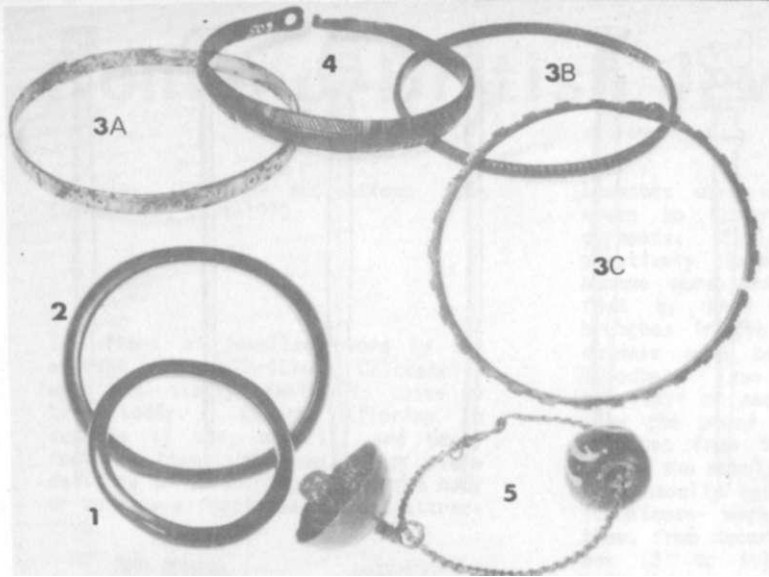
Finger ring with intaglio design

Ring keys form an interesting group within the finger-rings. Often the key to a small box containing personal possessions was made set on a ring so that the owner could wear it and be sure of its safety (see right, above).

Another group is composed of rings set with a gem-stone or glass cabochon engraved (3) with an intaglio design. Intaglios have the design cut into the surface, the reverse of cameos where the design stands out from the surface, and so could be used as seals since when the stone was pressed into soft wax it would leave a relief impression of the design. Roman finger-rings were made of many substances, metal, jet, bone or even glass, and could be patterned or plain or have a bezel holding a gem-stone, glass or enamel.

Finger rings (below)



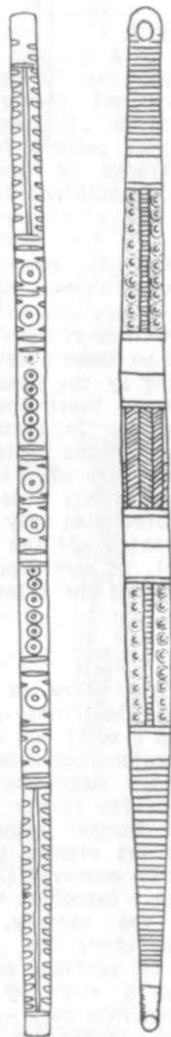


Bracelets

Necklaces, bracelets and earrings are all designed to ornament a particular part of the body, and rarely, if ever, have a function, except perhaps as a means of carrying an amulet, or displaying wealth.

Earrings are not common on Roman sites but enough examples survive to show that they ranged from plain metal hoops to elaborate drop-earrings of filigree and precious stones.

Bracelets, on the other hand, are very common on Romano-British sites of the late third and fourth centuries, when they became extremely popular, probably because there was a move away from wide, heavy and consequently expensive bracelets to thin, presumably cheap, strip bangles. The Butt Road cemetery, which dates to the late Roman period, has yielded almost one hundred bracelets of bronze, jet, shale or bone. The jet and shale bracelets or armlets are lathe-turned and usually plain (see above 1 4 2). (Jet is a hard, black lignite found at Whitby in Yorkshire and shale is a clayey stone from Kimmeridge in Dorset.) The bronze bracelets are thin beaten strips decorated with punched or engraved patterns (3a-c), or thicker, cast specimens (4), or made of strands of wire twisted together (5).



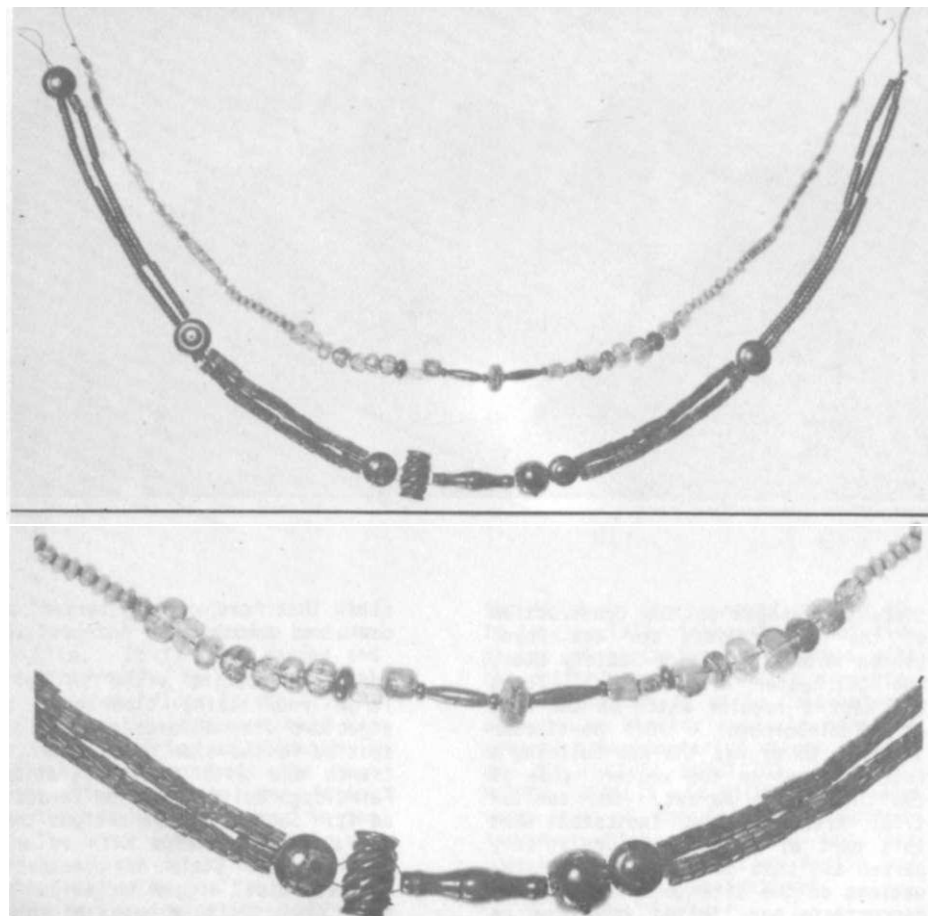
Bracelets 3a and 4, showing decoration

As the necklaces of Romano-British women were usually made of beads, it is only on a cemetery site that we are likely to find complete examples, and Butt Road has indeed provided some. The two shown (see below) are from a casket buried in a child's grave. Unfortunately the casket was crushed and its contents mixed up. The reconstructions photographed here give a fair idea of the effects that could have been achieved. The lower necklace is composed of jet beads on two threads, with 'spacer' beads at intervals to keep the two strands apart. The single thread necklace is made up of beads of glass and jet, with an amber bead in the centre.

Bronze and bone beads have also been found, and beads could be used to thread bracelets as well as necklaces. Though craftsman-made necklaces of gold and silver are not unknown, the evidence from Butt Road suggests that they could only be afforded by the very wealthy.

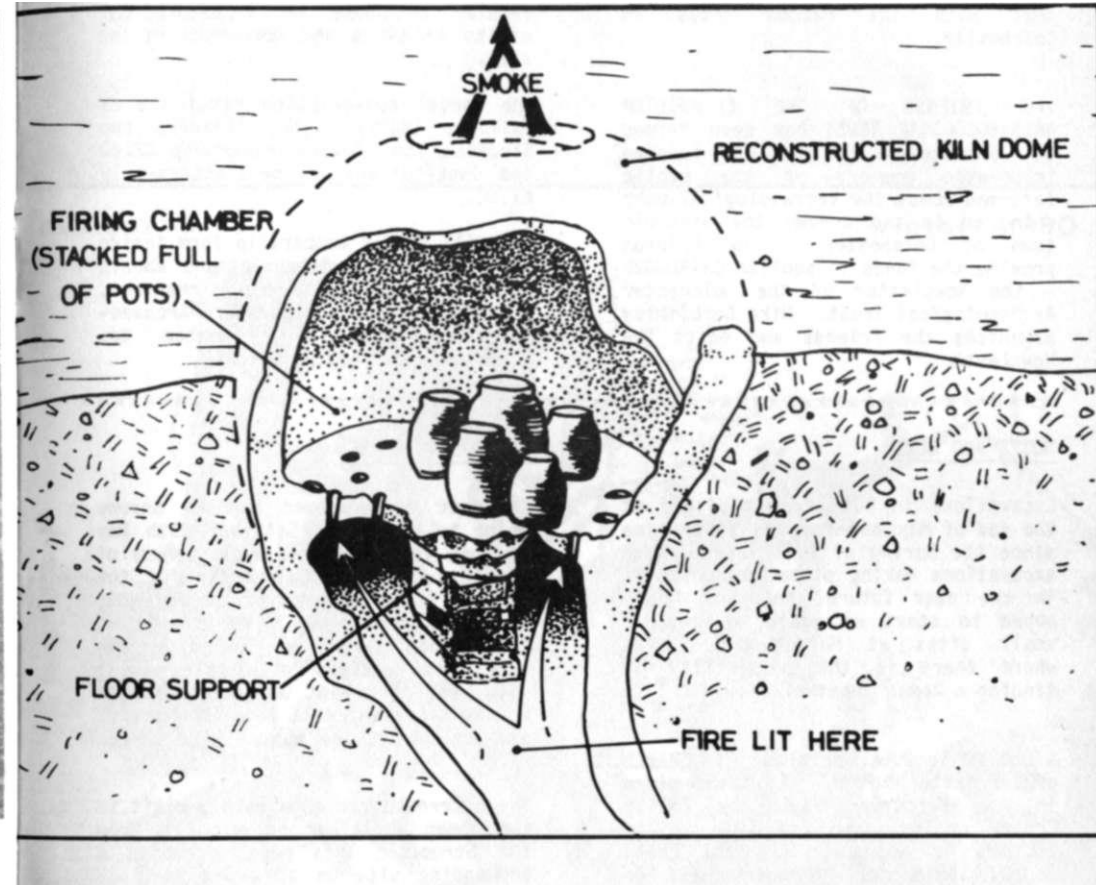
However much tastes and fashions come and go over the centuries people's desire for jewellery will always remain and provide an interesting subject for future archaeologists to study.

Nina Cummy



Rethreaded bracelets from a casket in a child's grave

POTTER'S KILN FOUND AT MIDDLEBOROUGH



Since work began on the construction of the new premises for the Royal London Mutual Insurance Society Ltd., the Colchester Archaeological Trust has kept a regular watch on the site at Middleborough. Of particular interest to us was the new building's basement area on the western side of the Old Cattle Market. Our earlier trial trenching had indicated that this part of the site was relatively barren and that during our main excavations on the site in 1978 we should concentrate our limited resources on the eastern side of the site. This proved a correct decision as the discoveries described in Catalogues 3 and 4 show. However, so prolific was the

site that even the "barren" area contained something of interest too!

During a routine visit in April a large red stain, clearly a burnt structure like an oven or a kiln, was spotted in the side of a contractor's trench and with the cooperation of Fairclough Building Ltd we investigated it. Soon it became obvious that it was a Roman potter's kiln in an unusually good state of preservation. The mechanical digger had sliced it in such a way as to expose the interior of the kiln without damaging it badly. This was fortunate as it is undoubtedly the best kiln found in Colchester since the 1930's.

The accompanying photograph and diagram explain the construction and use of the kiln. It is pear shaped and divided internally by a horizontal floor. Above the floor is the "firing chamber" where the potter stacked his pots ready for firing and beneath is the "flue" which conducts the heat from the fire up into the firing chamber through holes or vents in the floor. The upper part of the kiln was pierced by a vent or chimney through which heat and smoke could escape. A preliminary examination of the pottery found in and around the kiln shows that the main products were flagons and mortaria (mixing bowls), and that the potter was in business in

the first or early second century AD. It is especially interesting that five pieces of mortarium are stamped with the potter's name "VEBRI", a name previously unknown to us in Colchester, although we already know the names of several other mortarium makers. These are CUNOPECTUS, DUBITATUS, MARTINUS, MESSOR, REGA, even as far north as Scotland.

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 the rescue sites in Colchester.

The FRIENDS OF THE COLCHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST has been formed to provide a means of keeping interested members of the public informed about the archaeological work going on in and around the historic town of Colchester. The Friends provide the funds to publish CATALOGUE - the Newsletter of the Colchester Archaeological Trust. Mike Corbishley organises the Friends and edits the Newsletter.

Friends receive two newsletters a year, attend an annual programme of lectures on the previous year's progress, are given conducted tours of current sites and can take part in a regular programme of archaeological visits to sites and monuments in the area.

The annual subscription rates are as follows: Adults £1.50, Children and Students 75p, Family Membership £2.00 and Institutions or newsletters-only £1.00.

You will find a membership form inside this newsletter. Subscriptions should be sent to Mrs G. Chadwick, Treasurer, Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust, 171 Wivenhoe Rd. Alresford, Colchester C07 8AQ.



NOTES AND NEWS

FRIENDS AT MERSEA

Excavations in Butt Road finished at the end of May and for the first time since the Spring of 1971 there are no excavations taking place in the town. In the near future, however, it is hoped to start up again on several small sites at Maidenburgh Street where there is the possibility of finding a Roman theatre!

It must have seemed odd to anyone going to Mersea on Saturday 19th May of this year to see a whole convoy of cars drive out of Colchester for the Island. It was the day of the FRIENDS' visit for that month. We stopped at the Strood, where we looked at the very last vestiges of a salt making site, and then went on to East Mersea for an excellent talk about the church and a look at the moated site there.

A public lecture entitled "In Search of Colchester's Past" is to be given in the Mercury Theatre by Philip Cummy on November 2nd 1979. The lecture is sponsored by the Essex County Standard. Members will be sent more details later in the year.

The afternoon finished with a visit to the Roman burial mound not far from the Strood. This mound occupies a commanding site on the road to East Mersea but is now hemmed in by a house and barns and is covered with trees. Philip Cummy, the Director of the Trust, gave us a talk about the site.

You can buy a pamphlet about the mound from the Castle Museum but it was interesting to look at the report of the original excavations carried out in 1912. The plan reproduced here is from the Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society, Volume 13 (New Series). You will find a copy in the town's reference library and the finds are now in the Castle Museum.

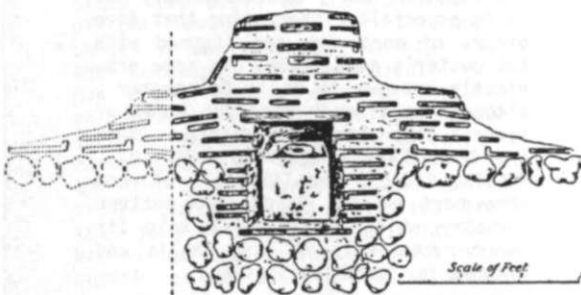


FIG. 2.—SECTION OF THE TOMB: CONJECTURAL RESTORATION ASSUMING THAT THE STRUCTURE WAS APPROXIMATELY SYMMETRICAL.