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*The*

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# COLCHESTER

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A R C H A E O L O G I S T

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**GOSBECKS  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
PARK**

**LEPER HOSPITAL**

**CAMULODUNUM**

**DISCOVERING  
TOMBSTONES**

**AROUND THE  
COUNTY**



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Issue Number 9 (1995-6)

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## THE FRIENDS OF THE COLCHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Cover: *Different perspective. The Friends of the Trust view historic sites from on board Hydrogen in the Colne.*

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If you would like future issues of **The Colchester Archaeologist** posted to you direct, then why not consider joining the Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust?

The Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust exists to keep interested members of the public in touch with the archaeological work in the historic town of Colchester. Members receive **The Colchester Archaeologist**, attend an annual lecture about the previous year's work, are given conducted tours of current sites, and can take part in a programme of visits to archaeological sites and monuments in the area. Publication of The Colchester Archaeologist is helped by funds provided by the Friends.

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# Visitors welcome!

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*The opening of the Gosbecks Archaeological Park brings new possibilities for public access to archaeology. The first programme of events included excavations, an exhibition, Roman soldiers, and a Roman blacksmith.*

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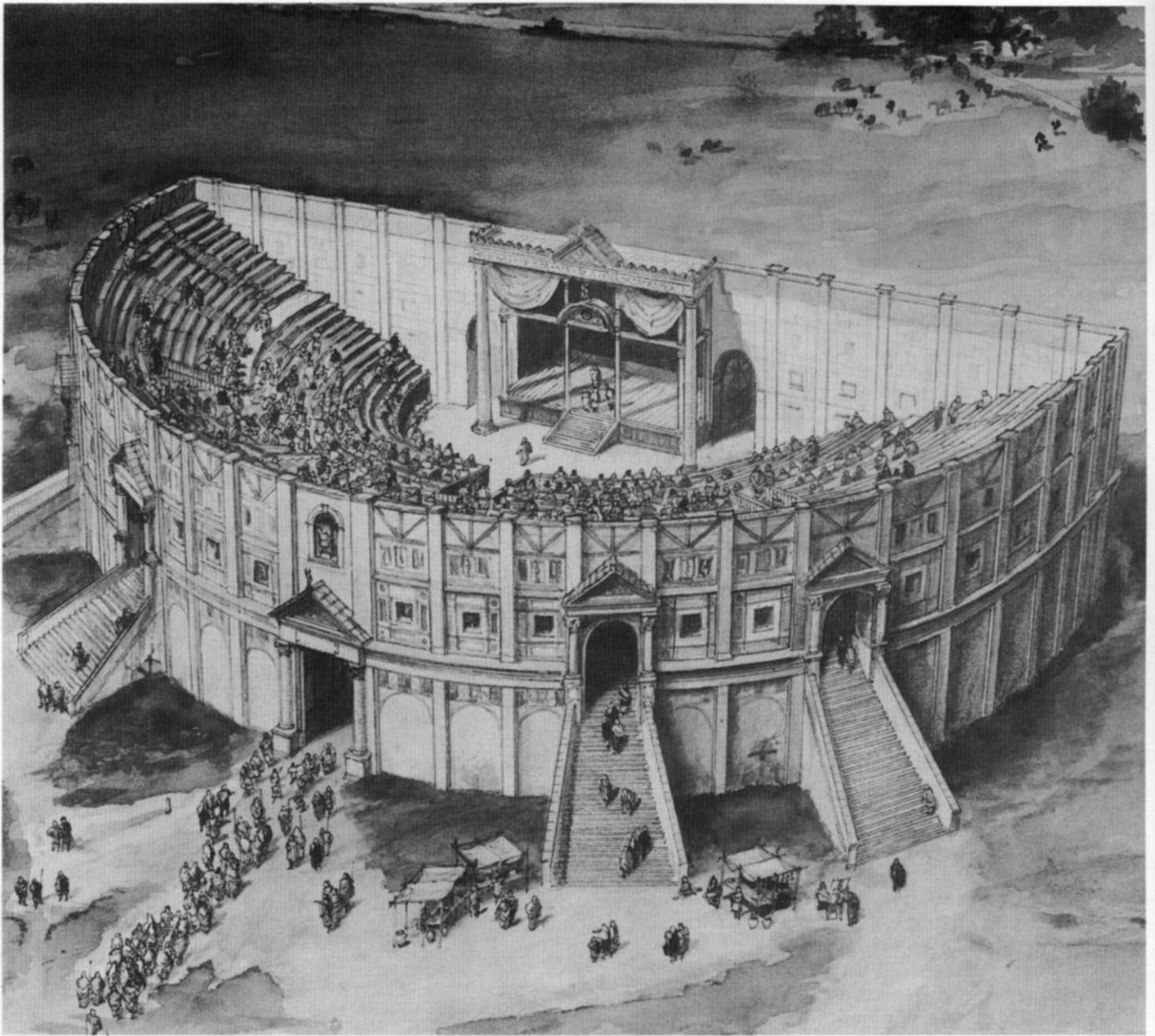
The land had been farmed by the Barbour family for many years but was transferred into public ownership as part of a package involving the residential development of a less-sensitive archaeological area on the edge of the farm. The move has been widely welcomed since it has the effect of taking the site out of cultivation. Under certain conditions, cereal crops can be very effective in revealing the plans of buried archaeological remains, with the effect that arable cultivation at Gosbecks has been very helpful in providing information about the site's past. But there is a price to pay, because repeated ploughing gradually erodes the buried archaeological remains. The creation of the park changes all that; it means that the site will never be deep ploughed again.

Although the park was opened in 1995, most of you will know either from reading the last edition of *The Colchester Archaeologist* or from visiting the site that the park was taking shape before then. In 1994, the park was set down to grass and the sites of the two major Roman monuments — the theatre and the temple complex — were marked out on the ground with miles of white lines.

August 7th 1995 was an historic day for Colchester when years of planning finally paid off. The ownership of a hundred and sixty-three acres of farmland was formally handed over to the Colchester Borough Council, and the Mayor, Councillor Mary Fairhead, declared the Gosbecks Archaeological Park officially open. Nobody can yet predict how successful the venture will be, but if things work out well, we could be witnessing the birth of what will eventually become an important feature of everyday life in Colchester — just as, for example, the Castle Museum and the Mercury Theatre are today.



*A quiz at Gosbecks on National Archaeology Day with Colchester Museums curator Peter Berridge.*



*The theatre at Gosbecks as it might have appeared in Roman times. By Peter Froste.*

Further developments followed in 1995. Permanent interpretation panels were erected at the theatre and the temple to help explain the lines on the ground. Parking was made easier with the provision off Oliver's Lane of a small temporary car park. During the summer (May to October), visitors could view an exhibition and see two excavations in progress, one at the temple and the other on the site of what was thought might have been a Roman bath-house.

Education figured strongly on the agenda, with schools being actively encouraged to visit. Janet Lumley (with the support of English Heritage) is the

Colchester Museums' education officer for the park, and since early 1995 she has been providing a service for schools. In under three months, there were about twenty schools visited the park, which is an encouraging start.

There was also a special event one weekend in September to coincide with National Archaeology Day. Various archaeological displays and demonstrations were provided in and around a marquee and there were tours of the excavations and of the park. Town Guides and the County Archaeological Section joined Colchester Museums and the Trust to make it a successful and well-attended event despite some

exceptionally heavy rain.

The site interpretation panels seem to be widely appreciated and the excavations clearly caused much interest, especially among the school parties. And the wildflower meadow provided a succession of colourful displays throughout the summer season. However, the ultimate scale and direction of the visitor facilities have not yet been decided. Colchester Borough Council is considering various options by means of a feasibility study and there will be widespread consultations, with feedback from visitors to the park being particularly important.

## Housing development

The residential development which made the park possible was only given planning consent once it was shown that it would not lead to unacceptable levels of damage to archaeological remains. Gallifords, the builders, asked the Trust to find out what the likely archaeological effects of the scheme would be. Some trenches were then dug by machine over the whole site to sample the ground as part of a preliminary archaeological assessment.

The housing development is on the northern edge of the archaeological site and the trenching showed that there would only be a need for full archaeological recording at its west end. The residential scheme was then redesigned to leave part of this area as public open space (and thereby leave it undisturbed), and the Archaeological Trust excavated and recorded the rest.

Most of the area turned out to have been covered with pits and ditches and there were few traces of buildings. The ditches were parts of a pattern of fields and land boundaries, and the pits show that there had probably been at least one house in the area although remains of its floors and walls must have largely been destroyed by ploughing. The finds showed that the occupation was almost entirely Iron Age (ie pre-Roman), dating to about 2,000 years ago. The excavation produced a fine collection of metal objects including several well-preserved brooches. No doubt these finds will make an interesting display for the park in due course.

Although Roman remains were limited, one feature turned out to be of particular interest. It was the remains of a wooden water-main, which had conducted water under pressure apparently from the stream in the middle of the Gosbecks site to some unknown building north of the Maldon Road. Water-mains of this kind were quite common in the Roman town nearby and indicate a sophisticated water supply involving water-towers, taps, cisterns, and fountains. Each main consisted of lengths of straight wooden pipes held together with thin, flat iron bands. Each pipe was a section of tree-trunk with a narrow hole bored down the centre. The walls of the pipes were thick and the bands were simply hammered into them thereby making the junctions watertight.

The main is straight and appears to aim for a spot near the head of the little valley just north of the temple portico

where there is a concentration of rubble in the plough soil. The area needs to be investigated further but it is a good candidate for the site of either a water-tower or a bath-house.

Roman water-towers were large above-ground cisterns. They fed water-mains of the type at Gosbecks and, being raised, kept the water under pressure so that the water would pour out of the outlets, providing they were no higher than the surface of the water reservoir in the tower. Gosbecks is on fairly level ground so that a tower here could have provided pressurised water over a wide area.

The water have been raised from a spring and put it into the tower. There are various ways in which this could have been done, the most likely being by means of a waterwheel cum treadmill driven by slaves. This may sound like something out of *Ben Hur* or *Spartacus* but neck chains have been found in the so-called Roman 'mithraeum' in the town centre. A spring rises in a sunken room in this building suggesting that it had been waterworks of the sort that we suspect was at Gosbecks.

## Park excavations

There were two excavations last summer. These were mounted partly as visitor attractions and partly to improve our understanding of the site so that it can be displayed and interpreted more effectively. Any interpretation of the park will involve modelling the temple and its portico either on paper or in three dimensions. Clearly investigation of the temple is a must which is why it was chosen as one of the places to dig. Also we need to know if there were any other major buildings in the area. For example, there may have been a bath-house, since sites like Gosbecks abroad, where Roman theatres and temples occur on major pre-Roman sites, are often accompanied by buildings of this type. Two possible bath-house sites can be identified at Gosbecks, and one of these was targeted in 1995.

The excavations were all done by volunteers under the guidance of Trust archaeologist Stephen Benfield. Over 30 people gave up their time to help, headed by Fred and Margaret Westgate who came daily for the whole 22 weeks.

*Andrew Gilberd and Margaret Westgate on the temple excavation.*

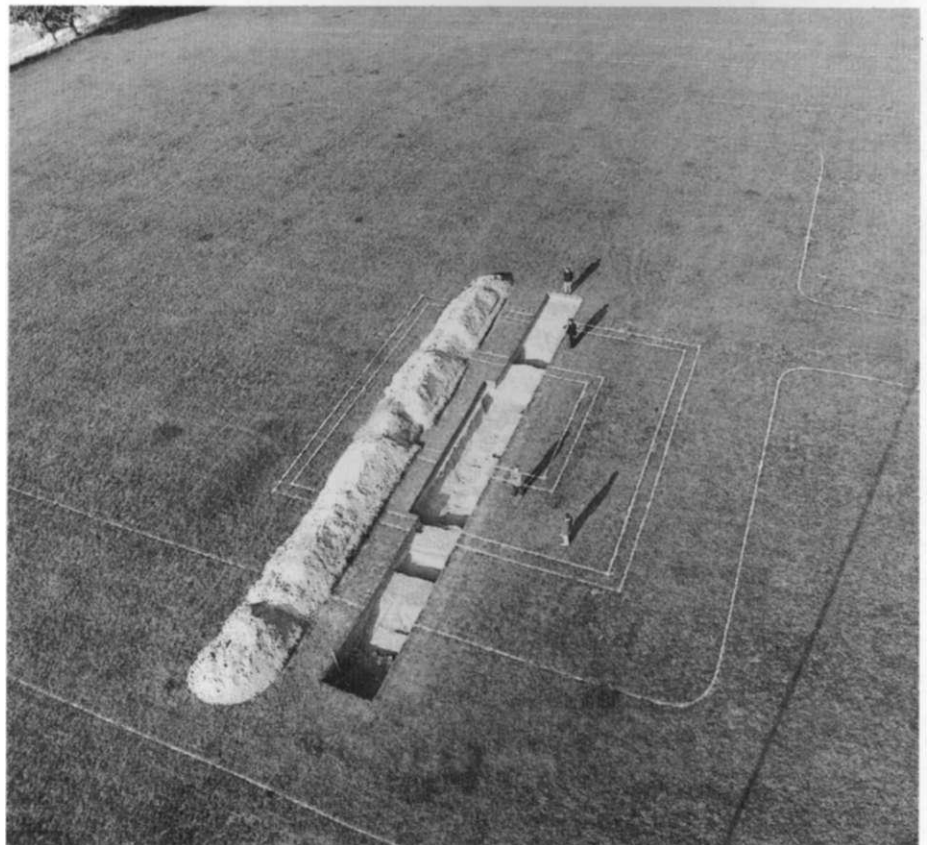


## Temple dig

When you look at holes in the ground like the ones on the temple excavation at Gosbecks, it is very difficult to get a feeling for the kind of building that once stood there, especially if it was a grand one. The trenches form straight lines and right-angled bends and, maybe with some preliminary explanation, you can see how these once held the foundations of the building. Yes, the plan becomes clearer, but you could just as easily be standing on the site of the most sumptuous building in the world as on the most Spartan. As death is the great leveller of people, demolition is the great leveller of buildings — both literally and archaeologically. There must be many an industrial building which, if reduced to an anonymous series of empty foundation trenches, might resemble Buckingham Palace in a similar state, at least in terms of the scale of its plan and foundations. But of course in addition to ground plan, there are lots of clues to be had about the nature of excavated buildings, such as objects buried in the ground, documentary evidence, and similar buildings which are better preserved.

The trench across the temple at Gosbecks showed that, at far as we could see, nothing of the building survives in its original position. There are no floors — the ploughman has gradually destroyed them as the plough bit deeper and deeper into the soil over the years. Nor are there any foundations — farmworkers dug them up and carted them off for building materials in the 19th century. However, all is not lost, and informative bits of the temple are still on the site. What is a poorly preserved building turns out to be exceptional. Readers of *The Colchester Archaeologist* last year will recall that the temple stood in the corner of a large ditched enclosure which seems to have been sacred since the days before the Roman invasion. The enclosure ditch was deep (eleven feet), and parts of the temple were thrown down into it as the feature was being backfilled. The ditch therefore contains priceless clues to the missing superstructure of the temple, including (as it turns out) pieces of collapsed column.

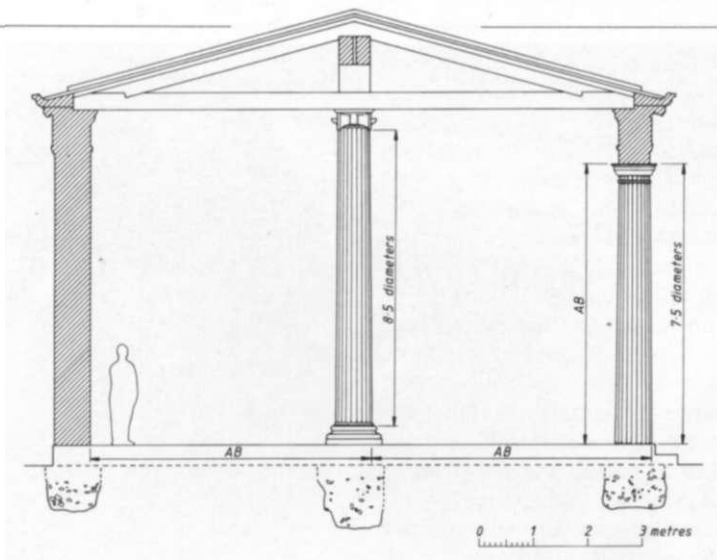
Buildings like the temple were confined to Celtic provinces of western Europe within the Roman empire, which is why they are known as 'Romano-Celtic'. Their distinctive plan



*The excavation on the site of the temple as seen from the south-east. The white lines show where the walls of the temple, ditch and portico were thought to be before the excavation. The two squares, one within the other, represent the temple which the excavation shows was slightly more to the southeast.*

consists of a central room or inner sanctuary called the *cella* surrounded by a corridor (an ambulatory or portico). The *cella* was usually square in plan, with a uniform ambulatory all round making the building square. The wall of the *cella* was often thick and of masonry whereas the outer wall of the ambulatory was supported on columns. However there were many variations. A few were polygonal or circular rather than square, the *cella* could be slightly off-centre, and sometimes it was timber-framed.

Despite the simplicity of their plans, there are considerable problems in deciding what these buildings would have looked like. The typical reconstruction shows a separately-roofed *cella* rising above the roof of a lean-to ambulatory, although it is recognised that other forms are possible, such as where *cella* and ambulatory share the same roof. The treatment of the ambulatory is also a problem. Often they are shown with spindly columns on low walls or even as being completely enclosed. No doubt in reality the Romano-Celtic embraced many more forms than their deceptively simple plans suggest. More



A reconstructed section across the portico according to rules of Vitruvius.

work is needed at Gosbecks but, as we shall see, the initial findings in 1995 point to a building which was designed, not as a Celtic hybrid, but as a full-blown product of the architectural conventions of the classical Roman world. The temple at Gosbecks thus looks as if it should make an important contribution to our understanding of this intriguing group of buildings.

Hundreds of loose *tesserae* show that the building had mosaic floors which were predominantly black and white. The walls were plastered and there were fragments of polished stone sheeting showing that the lower parts of the walls of the *cella* had been sheathed in wall veneer (to give the impression that the walls were of solid marble). The columns were made of curved tiles and mortar with surfaces plastered and painted with stippling to give a marbled effect. Part of one column lay on the side of the ditch. The curvature of the tiles suggests that the columns had been two and a half Roman feet wide (about 0.75 m) at their bases, and they narrowed towards the top in conventional classical fashion.

In Romano-Celtic temples, the *cella* was the sacred place which contained a large statue of the god to whom the temple was dedicated. Worship consisted of processions and praying, and making offerings, sacrifices, and vows. There were no services as we know them today, but the Romans would visit the temple to ask a favour of the god concerned or to celebrate a

festival in his or her honour. At the larger temples, the various rituals would have been performed by a priest at an altar outside the temple. The outer corridor would have suited processions around the inner sanctuary where access may have been limited to priests. Indeed the great portico at Gosbecks and the ditched enclosure probably mirrored an arrangement of this kind on a grand scale. The portico would have been the corridor for processions, and the ditched enclosure was an open air version of the inner sanctuary where access was limited because the ditch stopped people walking out of the portico into the sacred area.

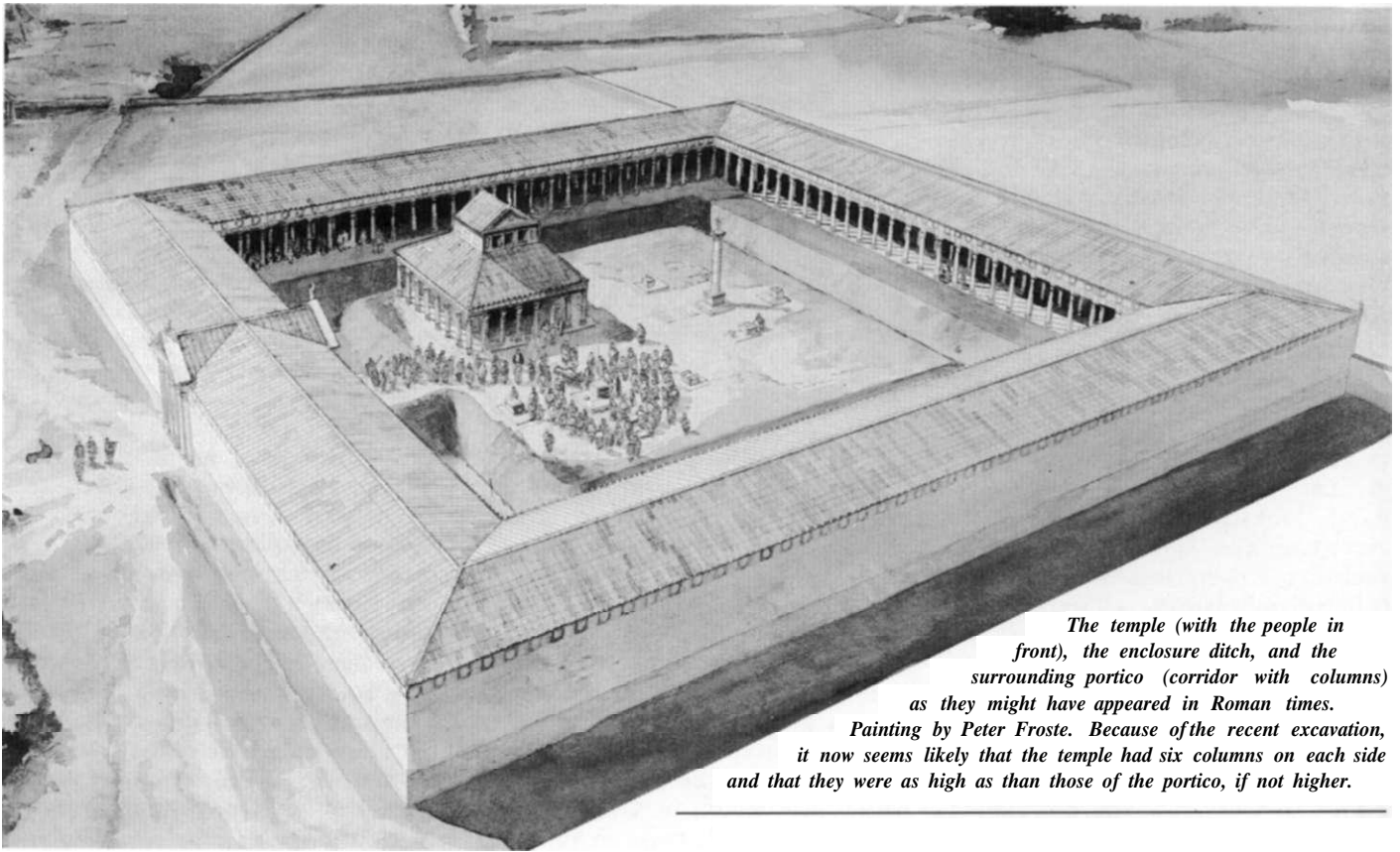
## Reconstruction

Knowledge of the plan of the temple and its portico comes mainly from aerial photographs, which show the positions of the various walls making up the complex. Although these reveal much about its plan, they are not very helpful when it comes to dimensions. It took a trench across the portico in 1977 to provide exact dimensions for the width of the portico and its foundations. The recent trench across the temple was designed to do the same for that building. However, not only did the trench provide some measurements for the plan of the temple but also, as we have seen, building debris in the adjacent part of the enclosure ditch provided information about its superstructure.

When it comes to reconstructing buildings, we are lucky that copies of a Roman architect's handbook still survives. Vitruvius seems to have written his guide about 50 or so years



Stephen Benfield examining tesserae from the floor of the temple and a curved brick from one of its columns.



*The temple (with the people in front), the enclosure ditch, and the surrounding portico (corridor with columns) as they might have appeared in Roman times. Painting by Peter Froste. Because of the recent excavation, it now seems likely that the temple had six columns on each side and that they were as high as than those of the portico, if not higher.*

before the Claudian invasion of Britain (very roughly). In it he explains that the various elements making up a building should be in proportion with each other so that the building will be satisfactorily designed regardless of its actual size. He gives what he considers are the appropriate proportions of one element to another and uses the column diameter as the unit around which the building should be designed. Thus armed with Vitruvius' rules, it should be possible to reconstruct a building knowing only its ground plan and the diameter of its columns. Unfortunately Vitruvius does not describe Romano-Celtic temples (they were not common in his day), but he does give details for porticoes, and his rules can be applied not only to the main temple portico, but also to the portico or ambulatory forming the outer part of the Romano-Celtic temple. Examinations of ancient buildings show that the principles set out by Vitruvius were not universally applied in a strict sense, and that the Gosbecks temple would probably not have followed them to the letter anyway. Nevertheless, in the absence of anything better, Vitruvius is a powerful tool which allows us to come to a good approximation as to what the building may have originally looked like.

With the help of Vitruvius, it should

in theory be quite simple to reconstruct the temple portico. All we need to know is its width, and this will provide such details as the height and diameter of the columns and the spacing between them. The 1977 excavation across the portico did just that. If the portico had been built according to Vitruvian principles, then floor to ceiling it would have measured 19.25 Roman feet (the Roman foot was slightly shorter than our own) with external columns around 2.25 Roman feet in diameter at the base, and internal columns around 2 Roman feet. The columns would have been spaced at 6.2 Roman feet intervals which is 2.75 column diameters. Regardless of how closely it followed Vitruvian principles, it is clear that the building must have been a very impressive sight.

Reconstructing the temple is much more problematic. The diameter of the columns and the size of the temple suggest that it had six columns along each side, making a total of twenty in all, and that these were spaced at around nine Roman feet intervals — but we need to see and measure more of the ground plan to be sure. The relationship between the *cella* and the ambulatory is obscure. The foundation of the *cella* is substantial and indicates a wall which was around 3.5 Roman feet

wide. This is much wider than is found in domestic buildings and is consistent with the idea that the *cella* was tall and extended above the roof of the ambulatory in the way normally assumed for most of these buildings. On the other hand, the column fragments from the ditch seem to show that the shafts were 2.5 Roman feet (or more) in diameter at their bases which points to columns 18.75 Roman feet high. This is tall — so tall in fact that they suggest a building with a single roof over a *cella* and ambulatory of the same height. In truth we cannot yet tell what form the temple took but it would seem that, like the portico, it was a grand and substantial building — much more so than the empty foundation trenches might suggest. And with its columns, friezes, and cornices, it would have had a conventional classical appearance. What is more, the size of the columns suggest that the temple and portico were really designed as parts of the same scheme and architecturally were much more mainstream classical than hitherto supposed.

The plan of Romano-Celtic temples must obviously reflect the way in which this type of building was used. There must have been something about religious practices in the north-west



parts of the Roman empire which needed or favoured this particular configuration of shrine and enclosing corridor. These pre-Roman traditions survived conquest to produce the distinctive plan which subsequently earn the label 'Celtic'. However, the fabric and principles by which these buildings were designed and constructed were little different to other public buildings in the Roman empire. Of course the column fragments in the ditch could have come from the portico rather than the temple, but the relationship between the building remains in the ground and the temple gives the impression that this was not the case. Further excavation is needed to resolve the matter.

We hope to continue the excavation next year to improve our ground plan of the temple, and to find more bits of collapsed superstructure in the ditch, particularly the upper parts such as the tops of the columns and the mouldings (frieze, cornice and architrave) which, in theory at least, ought to have framed the building just below roof level.

## Mars versus Mercury

So far we have only discussed the plan and structural remains of the temple. But the excavation also produced some finds other than building materials. In fact a stroke of luck was the finding of a tiny semi-precious gemstone. The stone, which is probably garnet, was set in an iron finger-ring, and has the figure of Mars cut into it. This suggests that he was the god who was worshipped in the temple. The ring would have been used to make seals by impressing the surface of the stone into warm wax.

Many of the Celtic gods had Roman equivalents. Mars was the Roman god of war and was equivalent to the Celtic god Camulos. The ancient name for Colchester was Camulodunum, meaning stronghold (-dunum) of Camulos who was the Celtic god of war. Gosbecks was the centre of Camulodunum where the Celtic kings lived. There would have been several sacred places inside Camulodunum but the one at Gosbecks would have probably been the most important. It would thus have been very appropriate that the war-god was worshipped there.

It may be that the presence of Mars at Gosbecks also owes something to the fact that he started off as a rustic god who protected agriculture. In general he was a god that found favour in



*Mars, the god of war. The figure is 12 mm (half an inch) high.*

situations outside the walled parts of towns, just as at Camulodunum. His functions as a god of war only came later.

This leaves us with the problem of the famous statuette of Mercury. As far as we can tell, the statuette was not found on the site of the temple at Gosbecks but somewhere close by. Its presence can be explained in several ways. Mercury could have been worshipped alongside Mars, and indeed, as sometimes occurs, the two gods may have been conflated. Equally, there could be an as yet an undiscovered temple of Mercury somewhere else on the site. This would not be surprising since Romano-Celtic temples often occur in groups. However, my own preferred option is that the statuette was scrap — a victim of the victory of Christianity over paganism in the 4th century. Its arms had already been torn off and the rest was due to melted down for reuse. It had been buried in a shallow pit for safe-keeping — just like coin and metalwork hoards — but the owner failed to recover it. If this explanation is correct, then Mercury at Gosbecks need imply no more than that a coppersmith lived there in the 4th century.

## Mystery pit

There is a rectangular patch about 150 m east of the site of the temple where the crops have always grown much better than the surrounding area. It is big — it measures 10x25 m — and

it is on the same alignment as the surrounding Roman buildings and boundaries. In Peter Froste's reconstruction of Gosbecks in the Roman period, we show it as an open-air pool, but there was no hard evidence pointing to its true nature. The discovery of the water-main earlier in 1995 made us think of a bath-house because the rectangular cropmark has a straight line out of one of its corners heading for the site of the possible water-tower discussed above. Could the line indicate another water-main or could it show a drain? In either event, the rectangular cropmark could indicate the site of a series of rooms with underfloor heating in a bath-house. The second of the two trenches in the park this year was dug to resolve the matter, or at least that was the intention.

It soon became obvious why the crops grew so well here. The pit was deep — well over a metre as it turned out — and filled with good, fairly stone-free soil, which would hold moisture. But there were few finds, only bits of weathered tile and the odd sherd of Roman pottery. It didn't look like the remains of a hypocaust — in fact it didn't look like the site of a building at all. A piece of late medieval pottery was found about a foot down into the pit. Could the whole thing have been for gravel? The pit turned out to have a flattish base which more or less coincided with the bottom of the natural stratum of gravel. Now it really did look like a gravel pit. But then, as so often happens on digs, a last-minute discovery changes everything. Sand-filled slots formed both edges of the pit-base, and there were parts of two others apparently crossing the full width of the pit. Slots like these are the sort of thing that is found in timber buildings where posts have been set in trenches in the ground. The pit must be Roman after all, and the piece of medieval pottery must have dropped down an animal hole or something similar. We can't be sure, but it looks as if this was the site of some kind of timber building with a semi-basement or low cellar. The two cross trenches are reminiscent of a timber granary.

Now it is hard to see this as the site of a bath-house. Nor could it have been an open-air pool because its timber construction would not have been watertight. For the moment, we favour some kind of store building such as a granary, but more excavation of this extraordinary building is needed to tell.

# The missing link

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*A semi-monastic life in a dormitory seems to have been the lot of a handful of the sick and poor in Colchester over 500 years ago. They were probably the lucky ones. Carl Crossan explains how excavations on the site of the medieval leper hospital at St Mary Magdalen show a tiny community where the chapel was almost as big as the living quarters.*

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PATIENCE is a virtue. Archaeologists soon learn that. Not that archaeologists are any more saintly than the rest of the population (though some may claim to be), but necessity often obliges them to sit tight and wait for fresh opportunities for further investigation to come their way. Such was the case at the site of St Mary Magdalen's church and almshouses, where nearly six years have passed since the 1989 season of excavations in the church-yard started to produce a picture of Colchester's medieval leper hospital.

The site, at the corner of Magdalen Street and Brook Street, first attracted interest in the late 1980s when plans were announced for a housing development on the land then occupied by a redundant church and disused churchyard. Although the standing church and nearby group of almshouses were Victorian, the churchyard was known to hold the remains of the original c 13th-century parish church and perhaps contain evidence of the earlier hospital from which St Mary Magdalen's parish took its name.

Medieval hospitals were religious institutions, run along semi-monastic lines with a daily routine of prayer for the souls of inmates and benefactors. Over a thousand once existed in England and Wales but today material traces of only a hundred or so survive. According to available documents, Colchester possessed four medieval hospitals, all situated outside the town walls. St Mary Magdalen's appears to be the earliest and was certainly the longest established with a charitable history extending over a period of nearly 900 years. Founded as a dwelling for lepers' in the early 1100s, the hospital was controlled by a resident master or prior. A century or so later the master was given an additional set of responsibilities as parish rector when St Mary Magdalen's Parish was created - a notable and unusual occurrence since no other example is currently known of such a relationship between the head of a leper hospital and its surrounding residential community.

*Excavation in progress of the west end of the dormitory.*

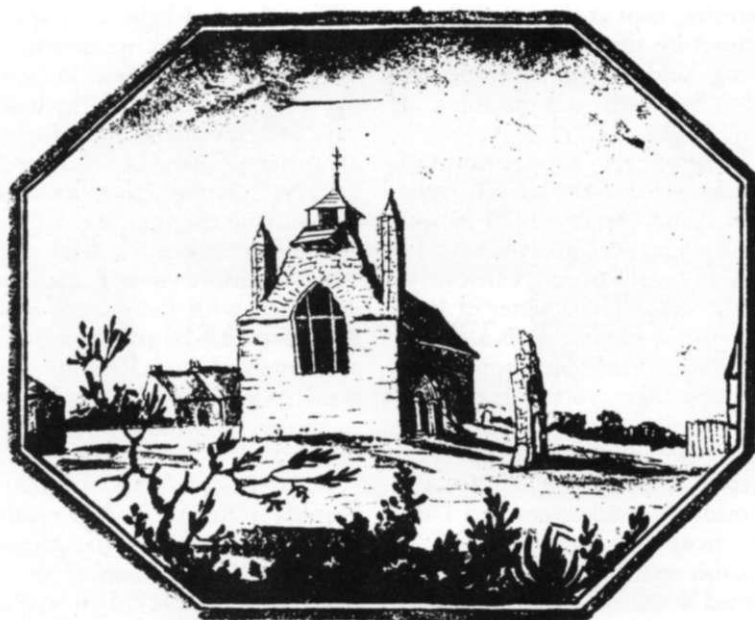
In spite of charters granting them a regular income from land-holdings and rights to hold an annual public fair, the hospital was never wealthy. Its fortunes were evidently dogged by a lengthy 14th-century dispute over the non-payment of tithes and land dues from its powerful neighbour, St John's Abbey. This issue again arose in 1423 when an inquiry into the state of the place led by Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, found that the hospital's original charter and constitution had been lost. Humphrey blamed the loss on the hospital's carelessness, an accusation the hospital wardens countered with the claim that the documents had long ago been destroyed by a devious abbot intent on avoiding payment of money rightfully due to them. Whatever the truth, the hospital's rights were restated in a fresh constitution drawn up from such documents as were available and 'the testimony of reliable men'.

The constitution, set out in the ledger book of St John's Abbey, offers some valuable glimpses into life at the 15th-century hospital. Previously a mixed institution, the hospital became an all-male household for five inmates who each received a weekly allowance of 7d. The late medieval decline in the incidence of leprosy was reflected in the new rules, which specified that the hospital must accommodate the poor and infirm if no lepers could be found. Literate brothers were to read out the psalms on three days each week and all the occupants recited the Lord's Prayer 300 times daily: 200 for the living and 100 for the dead. The death of an inmate was commemorated for 30 days during which the master would go to the graveside after daily mass and say the absolution, and the dead brother received his usual share of everything distributed in the house, as if he were still alive. On a more human level, fighting was strictly forbidden, swearing restricted to 'God knows' or 'Tis true', and the brothers were not permitted to go out drinking in the Hythe's alehouses without first getting the master's consent.

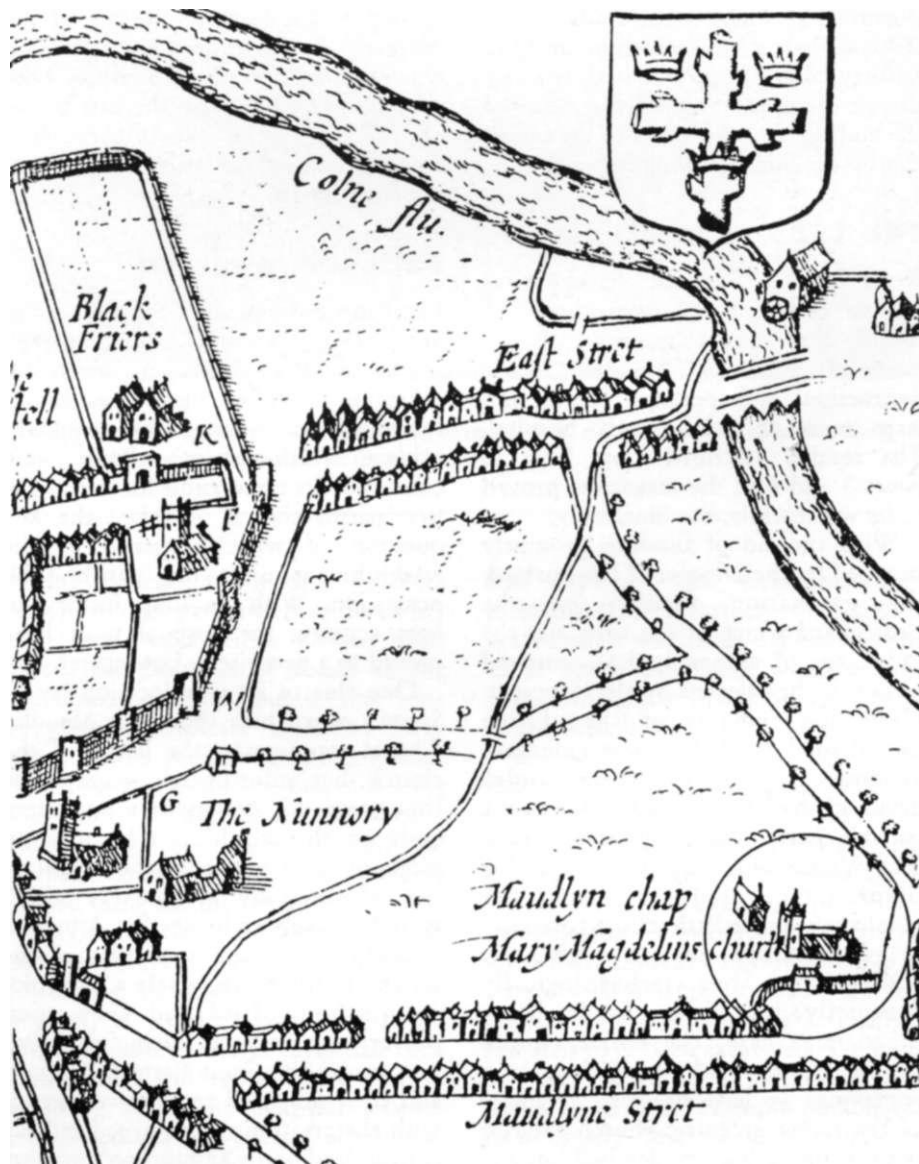
As a safeguard, important records

*Above: an 18th-century picture of the original parish church.*

*Below: An extract from John Speed's 1610 map of Colchester which shows the parish church and the Maudlin Chapel (circled). The chapel appears to be in remarkably good condition for a building described in that same year as 'totally destroyed'.*



St Mary Magdalens Church, Colchester - Essex.



were thereafter kept at the hospital in a chest secured by three locks, the three keys being held by the master, the rector of St Leonard's and the abbot of St John's.

The 16th-century suppression of religious houses led to the seizure of the hospital's assets and by 1610 it was described as '...almost decayed and its chapel totally destroyed'. Curiously, John Speed's map of Colchester of 1610 shows the parish church with a chapel standing to its north which appears to be very much intact. In that same year the hospital was re-founded as an almshouse under the title of 'The College or Hospital of King James'. Like its medieval predecessor, the 17th-century hospital consisted of a master/parish rector and five occupants, now defined as unmarried poor persons who were to reside there for life. The post-medieval institution maintained its charitable work until recent years, latterly from the Brook Street almshouses. These were built in the 1830s as part of a succession of 19th-century alterations which drastically altered the appearance of the area and left no trace above ground of the earlier almshouse, hospital or church.

## The 1989 excavations

News in 1989 of the development scheme provided the opportunity to record the buried remains of the medieval church before their destruction and perhaps locate and learn more about the early hospital. The results, described more fully in issues 3 and 4 of the magazine, proved to be worthwhile, but tantalising.

With the aid of funding promptly supplied by the Diocese of Chelmsford, the excavation focused on the churchyard which at the time was the only area of archaeological potential certain to be affected by development. Here, the remains of the church demolished in 1852 soon emerged, yielding many previously unrecorded details of the building that had been the parish's centre of worship for 650 years. The Victorians had a passion for 'improving' churches but unfortunately made little effort to record original features lost through their well-meaning but archaeologically destructive activities. In St Mary Magdalen's case, the entire church vanished, but thanks to 18th-century engravings we have been left an image of the rather eccentric church exterior with its pinnacles, wooden bell loft and

a hint of a roof light, as it appeared in the century before its destruction. Of the interior nothing was known before the excavations showed the building to have been much altered during its many centuries of use. In its later form a gallery spanned the western end, overlooking the font and aisleless nave to the elevated chancel opposite. Beneath floors of late medieval tiles decorated with fleur-de-lys and shield designs were five graves, including one accompanied by a pewter chalice, a medieval practice which points strongly to this as the resting place of a former master.

At the earliest levels, the hunt for the hospital started to produce results when the remains of an older chapel were discovered at the core of the church. Directly east of the chapel lay the sparse remains of a second early building, which was probably the hospital's dormitory block and living quarters. Both the chapel and dormitory belong to the earliest stage in the life of the hospital, a chapter brought to an end when the creation of the parish saw the chapel enlarged to form the first parish church and the dormitory was demolished to make space for graves in the churchyard.

## Patience rewarded

Excavations frequently pose as many questions as they answer and the 1989 work in the churchyard was no exception. While the investigation succeeded in locating the hospital's original 12th-century chapel and confirmed its conversion for use as the first parish church, it raised the key question of what happened to the establishment after the parish took possession. With its long history of later activity, the hospital must have moved to a new site — but where?

One clue to its new location lay in Speed's map which shows the Maudlin Chapel standing to the north of the church, but unfortunately maps of the time were not drawn to a consistent scale so this could not be used to pinpoint the position of the chapel or the relocated living quarters which would be likely to lie nearby. A further concern lay in the condition of the ground to the north, where a large plot of almshouse land had been compulsorily purchased during the 19th century by the Great Eastern Railway, and then subjected to massive damage with the creation of the broad railway cutting leading to St Botolph's station.

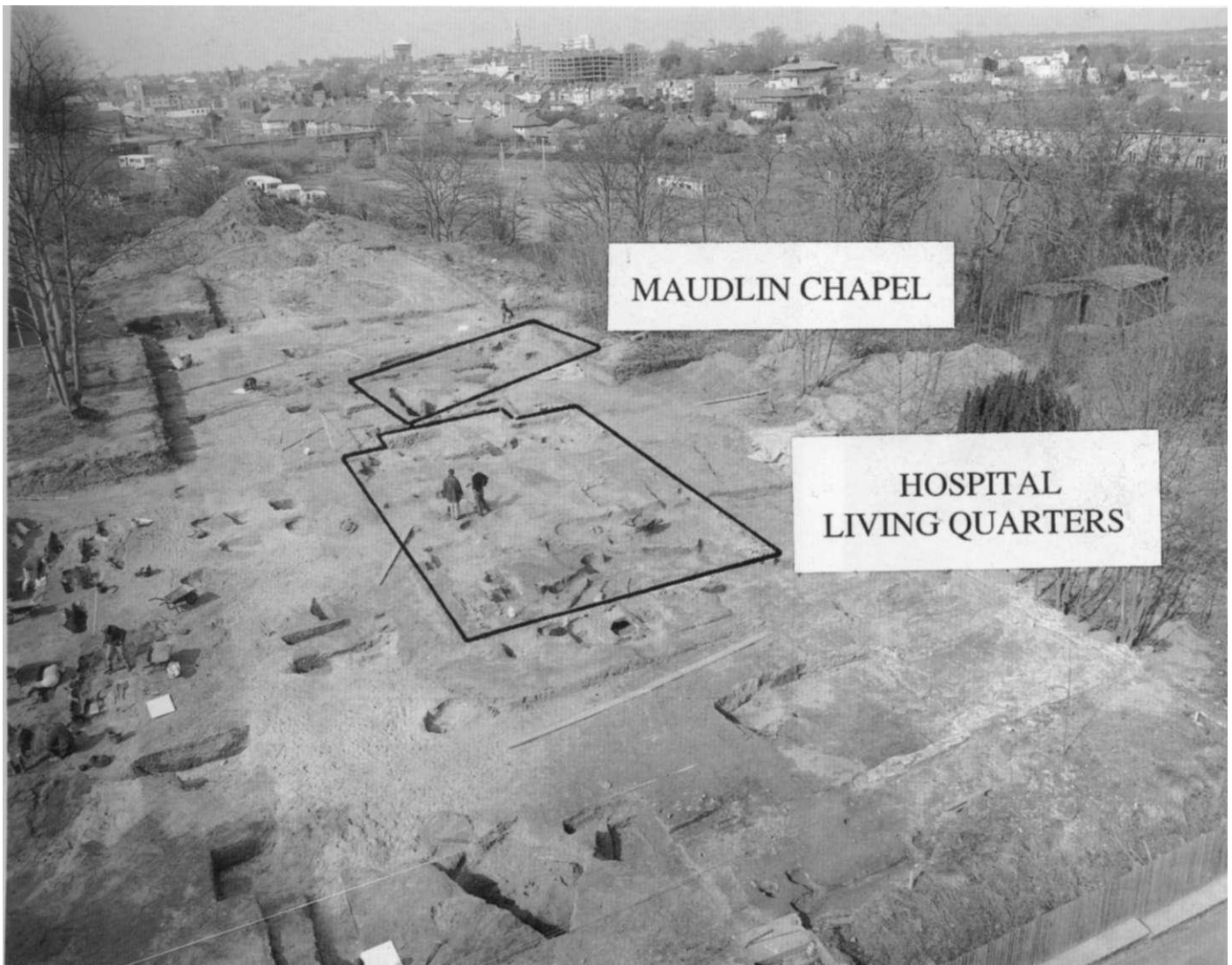
Unfortunately very little is known about the Maudlin Chapel; could all traces of this obscure building have been destroyed without trace by the railway engineers?

In the years that followed the first excavation, small trial trenches were dug to seek evidence of the elusive hospital whenever an opportunity arose. These produced mixed results but suggested that at least one fragment of an early building might still survive in the grounds between the churchyard and railway.

We could have waited a good many years for an opportunity to explore the area further but for a succession of developments in the area. By 1994, the Colne Housing Society had acquired the churchyard site along with a substantial plot to the north, including the 19th-century almshouses, their gardens and land bought from British Rail. Most of this was now threatened by construction works for the new housing scheme, so with the co-operation of the housing society and financial support from English Heritage the new area was stripped in the search for the missing hospital.

The results exceeded expectations. Not only was the Maudlin Chapel uncovered but to its east the excavations revealed the later medieval dormitory and living quarters. Built largely of reused Roman materials, the c 13th-century chapel appears to have had a simple earthen floor in an interior illuminated by the light through glazed windows decorated with a variety of red-painted foliage designs. One of the most striking features of the chapel is its size. The outer walls enclosed a floor area of almost 150 square metres — significantly larger than the neighbouring parish church and over six times the size of its 12th-century predecessor. While it is quite likely that the hospital may have gained a more spacious chapel as a reward for the move to this less prominent location, the enormous disparity between the size of the earlier and later chapels does raise the question of whether the Maudlin Chapel was used exclusively for worship. It certainly seems unlikely to have been used wholly as a chapel throughout its life for in its later stages the building was provided with a tile hearth to warm its occupants.

The adjoining medieval living quarters was also built with the extensive reuse of salvaged Roman tile and stone. Heated by a tile hearth prominently placed at its western end,



*A high-level view of the hospital from Brook Street, looking north-west toward the town centre. The churchyard, site of the 1989 excavation, lies to the left of the picture. To the right is the broad railway cutting which stopped short of removing the hospital. Photograph by Totem High Rise Photography.*

its early earth and clay floors retained marks of occupation including two heavily-fired areas used for the melting of lead. Whether the molten metal was for building repairs or the casting of lead objects is not clear, although the fact that this activity seems to have occurred repeatedly inside the building suggests that the latter is more likely. Among the everyday artefacts left behind by the medieval occupants were quantities of cooking pots, bowls and jugs, but considerably fewer imported vessels seem to have been in use here compared to the pottery recovered from the Hythe Hill site which stood only half a mile away. One type of artefact was conspicuous by its absence: no obvious medically related glassware, pottery or instruments were to be found anywhere on the site. This lack

of any evidence for medical practices may seem odd, particularly as the earlier churchyard excavations yielded some spectacular examples of disease among the human remains, but at that time very few hospitals seem to have administered medical treatment since their role was seen to be one of healing the soul, rather than the body. Considering the state of medieval medical knowledge this was probably no bad thing for the inmates.

In view of the 1610 reference to the 'almost decayed' state of the hospital following decades of 16th-century neglect, it would have come as no surprise if the medieval ruins had been demolished and replaced by a fresh building when the hospital was re-established as a 17th-century almshouse. Instead, the medieval accommodation

was repaired and enlarged, then maintained for a further two hundred years until it was finally replaced by the 1830s' almshouse terrace which became a familiar sight in Brook Street until its recent demolition.

For such a common feature of the medieval scene, the hospital, with its capacity to offer insights into social history and attitudes to disease, has tended to be neglected by researchers. While a vast range of published information is available on abbeys, cathedrals, churches and other types of religious establishment, there are few general studies of hospitals and only a few sites have been excavated. To these, St Mary Magdalen's will shortly be added as an Essex example notable for its unusually close relationship between hospital and parish.

# Landmark publication

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*The Trust's latest publication is about the results of investigations into Iron Age Colchester going back sixty years. It features the work of the late Christopher Hawkes, a great expert on the Iron Age in Britain who dug in Colchester intermittently between 1930 and 1961.*

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*Christopher Hawkes in 1931 at the excavation on the Hilly Fields.*

A NEW BOOK finally places on record a detailed account of what was arguably the most important settlement in Britain 2,000 years ago. *Camulodunum II* is the product of sixty years of work on the Iron Age settlement at Colchester, mainly by Professor Christopher Hawkes who died shortly before its publication.

Considering how extensive they were, Colchester's ancient earthwork defences are not all that easy to find — particularly if you don't know where to look. Measured end to end, there were over twelve miles of them — the largest group of their kind in Britain — and in their day, they would have dominated the landscape. The very name of the place, 'Camulodunum', meant 'fortress of the war-god Camulos' and conveyed to the outside world an awesome image of a mighty settlement with powerful defences. The dykes ceased to serve any defensive function over 1500 years ago and they have gradually deteriorated ever since. The process accelerated over the last 200 years as the built-up areas of the town spread outwards, swallowing up green fields and many of the dykes. Over the years, most of the dykes have been levelled (some in antiquity) but there are still extensive sections of the largest ones which survive in comparatively good condition. Today they look rather dull and uninteresting but

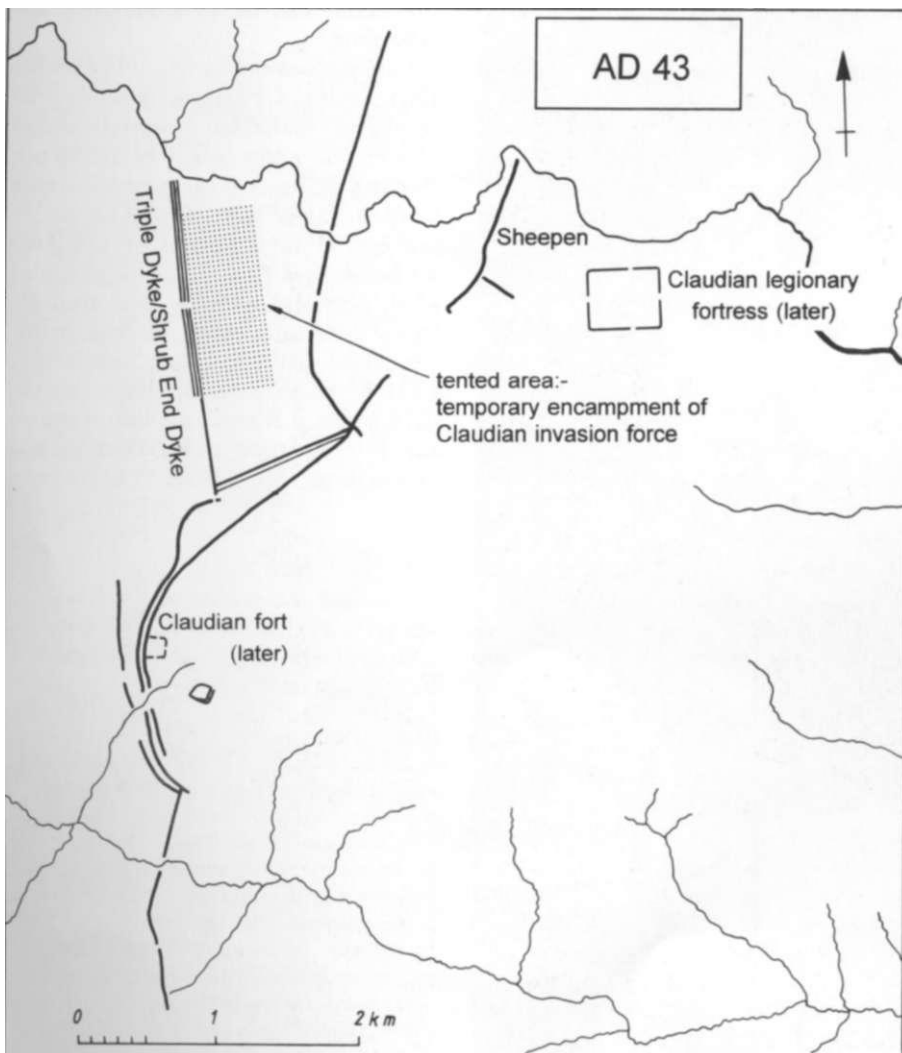
in fact they are rich source of information about Colchester in its prime.

Archaeological interest in the dykes goes back at least as far as the early 18th century when the first known survey was undertaken. Almost forty years later, a famous antiquarian of national repute called William Stukeley came to record the earthworks on Lexden Heath. The heath had not been built over at that time so the earthworks were still well preserved. He came with the encouragement of Philip Morant who was working on his history of Colchester. Various other surveys and plans followed later but it was not until 1932 that there was the first archaeological excavation of a dyke. It was done by the young Christopher Hawkes unaware that he was embarking on a campaign of digs in Colchester that was to last almost thirty years and a commitment to write them up for publication that could not be fulfilled for yet another thirty. Christopher's last excavation in Colchester was a spectacular section across the Triple Dyke in 1961. This was a fitting end to a unique series of digs in which he and others (Rex Hull, A F Hall, and Colonel A J Appleby) cut various sections across earthworks and examined entrances and places where the earthworks intersected.

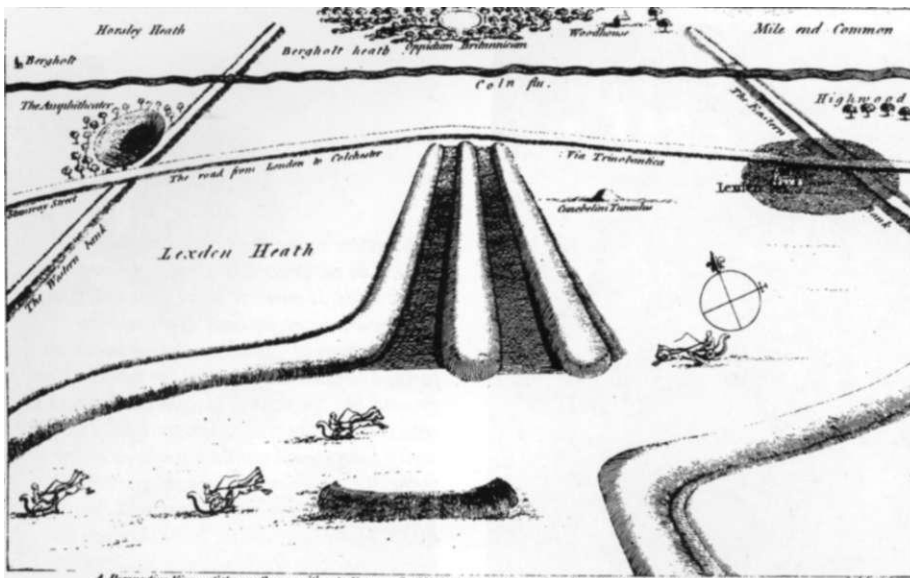
Unlike the others involved in the work, Christopher was not based in Colchester but had full-time employment elsewhere. He first came to work in Colchester in 1930 at the age of 24 when he directed the excavation on the site of what is now Cowdray Avenue (then 'the bypass'). At that time he was working at the British Museum and had to do the Colchester dig during his annual leave. The bypass excavation was producing some extraordinary material and it spread southwards to cover most of what is now known as the Hilly Fields where, at that time, there was a possibility that the site would be developed for housing. The excavation finally finished in 1939 and the results were published in 1947 in the widely-admired *Camulodunum*. This book was all about the excavation of the hilly fields and the by-pass. There was only a brief introduction to the dykes and the rest of the Iron Age settlement, mainly because it was always intended to published another book devoted to this wider topic. But Christopher was hard-pressed elsewhere. His appointment as a professor at Oxford meant that his time was even more precious although he continued to excavate periodically in Colchester. After retiring from Oxford, he was able to work intermittently on the Colchester book over a period of fifteen



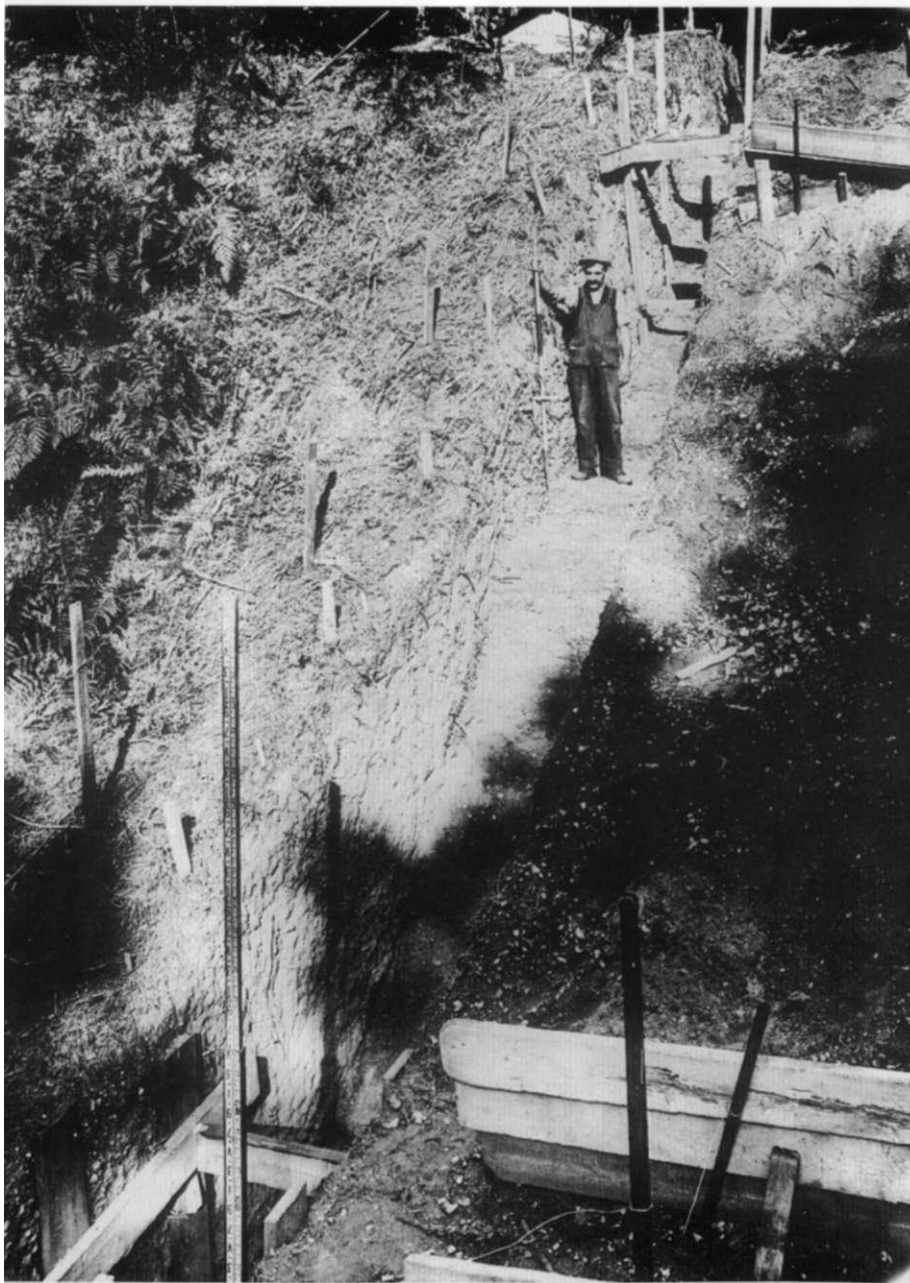
The section across the Triple Dyke dug in 1961. The earthwork consisted of three dykes side by side. It seems to have been constructed in Roman times, perhaps to protect the encampment of Claudius and his invasion force. There are no traces of the banks above ground but the three V-shaped ditches can be seen crossing the trench left to right. The ditch in the foreground would have been at the front of the earthwork and the first of the banks would have been between it the central ditch. The second would have been between the next two ditches and the third bank would have been behind the last of them. The earthwork was about 150 feet (45 m) wide and almost a mile (about 1.5 km) long. The 1961 section was dug in a field to the north of the London Road. Part of the earthwork can be seen south of the London Road, on Straight Road, where parts of the banks are still preserved.



A plan showing a possible location of the temporary encampment of Claudius and his invasion force. There are likely to have been upwards of 30,000 troops, all billeted in neat lines of leather tents. At eight men to the tent, there would have been thousands of them. There would also have been thousands of pack animals and horses, and there would have been the elephants which came over with the emperor. The area lies to either side of the road between where Lexden Road becomes London Road (next to the The Crown Inn) and its junction with Straight Road.



A Perspective View of the most magnificent Works of CAMULODUNUM, or LEXDEN HEATH from the South. August 1759.



years. Towards the end, despite failing eyesight and poor health, he had to work extremely hard to fulfil his Colchester commitments. Undoubtedly most people would have found it all too much and given up, but Christopher doggedly stuck with it and finished his work. The book was finally published in 1995, four years after he died.

*Camulodunum I* covers a comparatively short but fascinating period in Colchester's past when the place was linked with people whose names and sometimes deeds are known through ancient histories and coins. For example, Claudius, Plautius, Cunobelin, Caratacus, Togodumnus, and Boudica were all contemporary at one time (in the 20s and 30s AD) and all had strong links with Colchester. Many of you will probably not know who they all were, but you certainly would have done if you had been alive then. Most of these people would have had an impact which, even now, is or should be detectable in the archaeological record of the town, and that is one of the reasons why the archaeology of Colchester can be so stimulating and rewarding.

*Camulodunum II*, by C F C Hawkes and Philip Crummy provides an overview of the Iron Age settlement and covers sixty years of fieldwork starting with the excavation of the Lexden Dyke in 1932. The book, number 11 in the series of *Colchester Archaeological Reports*, costs £24 plus £2.40 post and packing. It is available from the Colchester Archaeological Trust, 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, C03 3NF. Like all the books in the CAR series, it is primarily one of record and interpretation rather than general explanation. ISBN 0 897719 03 5.

Above: One of the series of six views of the earthworks on Lexden Heath by William Stukeley. Drawn in 1759.

Below: The excavations of the Lexden Dyke in 1932 consisted of a series of trenches in and around the part of the dyke which passes through the woodland south of the Lexden Road and east of Church Lane. This, the largest of the trenches, was dug across the best preserved part of the dyke. It shows the ditch in the foreground and the bank in the background. The trench seems to have been dug largely by Mr Thomas who is holding a ranging rod. He was formerly a Welsh miner, which probably explains the neat and sturdy shoring in the trench.



# Around the county

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*The Archaeological Section at County Hall describe some of their latest news.*

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## Gracious living

A remarkable picture of an affluent Roman household living at Boreham about 1600 years ago has been emerging from the mud at Great Holts Farm quarry. Large-scale excavation by Essex County Council archaeologists over two years has brought to light much of the layout of a Roman farm, including fields, trackways, ponds, and, at its heart, the farm buildings.

The large farmhouse was built of timber, its walls probably wattle and daub. Inside, two rows of irregularly spaced posts would have supported the rather wayward roof. Few roof tiles

*Reconstruction painting of the Roman farmstead at Great Holts Farm, Boreham, showing the centre of the settlement as it may have appeared in the early 4th century. By Peter Froste.*





were found in this part of the excavation, suggesting that the roof covering was either of thatch or wooden shingles.

Food remains from a well were among the most interesting finds. These included local produce, such as cherries, plums and walnuts, as well as olive stones and pine kernels from the Mediterranean. Bone and shell also indicated fish, goose, duck, woodcock, hare and oyster in the diet. Not all the bones from the well are likely to have derived from food; in particular, the presence of sparrowhawk and of many thrush bones raises the remarkable possibility of hawking here during the Roman period. The significance of this is that there has so far been no indication of hawking in Roman Britain; the nearest contemporary evidence comes from elsewhere in the Roman empire. However, the presence of exotic foods on the site, plus the occurrence of sparrowhawk and one of its natural prey, the thrush, provide strong evidence for the existence of a wealthy household, perhaps with hawking as a leisure activity.

Attached to one end of the farmhouse

was a small bath suite, divided into three rooms; the *frigidarium* (cold room), the *caldarium* (hot room) in the centre, and the *praefurnium* which housed a small furnace. Hot air from the furnace would have passed beneath a raised floor, or hypocaust, in the *caldarium*, and then travelled up through a series of flues in the walls before escaping through vents beneath the eaves or through chimneys in the roof. Outside, two drains would have carried away water from the hot and cold rooms to the nearby ponds.

The waterlogged deposits at the bottom of the well and the silts at the bottom of the large pond contained preserved pollen from nearby vegetation, and this has provided clues as to the Roman landscape. It seems that the farmhouse was surrounded by areas of damp, weedy grassland, as well as shrubs and trees such as oak, pine, birch, hawthorn, beech and elder.

Some distance from the central farm buildings, the post holes of another rectangular timber building were found. This was almost certainly a granary which, at one point, appears to have burnt down. Although this was no

*Artist's impression of the medieval farm at Stebbingford during the 13th century. By Peter Froste.*

doubt a disaster for the farmer, it has, fortunately for the archaeologist, preserved by charring some of the crops stored there, including spelt (a primitive form of wheat), barley and peas.

### 13th-century farming

Seven hundred years ago, if you had walked along Stane Street from Braintree to Great Dunmow, and looked to the left as you dropped into the valley of the Stebbing Brook, you would have seen a narrow cart track, flanked by drainage ditches, running off the road to the south. The track led to a farmstead, consisting of two or three thatched huts with wattle-and-daub walls, set within a patchwork of small, rectangular fields. To the east of the buildings, a long, open-sided byre offered shelter to the farmer's few livestock. Most of the fields would have been planted with arable crops,

though some would have been left as fallow, or pasture.

Further down the valley slope, you might have seen the farmer himself, toiling away at his cultivation plot, carrying baskets of rich peaty soil from the marshy area to the south of the farmstead and dumping it in hollows dug into the valley slope, in preparation for the planting of fruit or vegetables. The farmer would have been a villein or free man, holding his land from a landlord in exchange for labour services, or for rent in money or kind. He probably shared the timber-framed farmstead buildings with his extended family.

This picture of the late 12th- to early 13th-century farmstead at Stebbingford has been built up by a team of archaeologists working in advance of a road-widening scheme for the A120. The team found traces of farm buildings, including foundation gullies, post holes and fragments of burnt daub from the walls. Behind one of the huts there was a drainage ditch, a cess pit and a rubbish pit, which provided an interesting haul of information about the diet, lifestyle and social status of the farm's occupants.

## 200 years younger

The most famous church in Essex is that at Greensted near Ongar. Its walls made out of tree trunks have secured it a place in all books on architectural history. The only parallels for this building technique, which is known as stave construction, are to be found in Scandinavia. But whereas the Scandinavian churches were thought to be 12th and 13th century in date, Greensted has always been considered a Saxon building and therefore much older. How much older has always been a matter of uncertainty. Two dates have long been current for the church. The earlier is 850 AD, a date of questionable pedigree apparently obtained by 'dendromagnetism', a technique referred to in the church guide book, but otherwise completely unknown to science. The second and later date is 1013, when a medieval chronicle records that the body of St Edmund, which had been temporarily moved to London, was housed in a wooden church at Ongar on its return journey to Bury St Edmunds. Recently, the excavation of 12th- and 13th-century stave-built structures in London has called both these dates into question, raising the

possibility that the Greensted church might be much later in date.

The last 20 years has seen the development of a reliable and accurate dating technique for timber artefacts and structures made of oak. This is dendrochronology, or tree-ring dating. It operates on the principle that the annual growth rings of a timber form a unique pattern which can be measured, plotted and matched to a master sequence or curve of tree rings which has been constructed for a long time span. The curve, which has been built up for London largely using timbers from the waterfront excavations, extends back to 300 BC.

The technique requires either a slice through a timber or a core 15 mm in diameter which is obtained by drilling into the wood with a specially made hollow drill bit. Assuming the sapwood is still present, the final ring gives the felling date of the tree. Because in the past building timber was used green and not seasoned, the felling date is almost invariably the same as the construction date. If the sapwood is not present, an estimated extra 10-50 years has to be allowed for.

Over the last eight years, Essex County Council and Ian Tyers, formerly of the Museum of London Archaeological Service and now of the Dendrochronology Laboratory at Sheffield University, have conducted a systematic research programme to construct a master curve for Essex to assist with the understanding and management of the county's many timber buildings. Central to this work has been a programme of systematic sampling at the County Council's heritage site at Cressing Temple, where the two great 13th-century barns have provided ring sequences covering several centuries. The Essex master curve now covers the period 944-1813 AD.

Because of its accuracy, dendrochronology is the obvious key to the problem of the date of Greensted church. Twelve cores have been taken from the original timbers by Ian Tyers, and these combine to give a consistent date of c 1063-1100. A more precise date is impossible because the surface of the timbers is very weathered, and an estimate has to be allowed for the sapwood. Nevertheless, this result leaves little doubt that Greensted dates from after the Norman Conquest in 1066. However, it remains the oldest timber building in both Britain and Europe, as a tree-ring date earlier than

the 13th century has yet to be obtained from any of the surviving Scandinavian stave churches.

## Industrial archaeology

For the past 30 years, industrial archaeology has been on the fringe of mainstream archaeology, and there is a widely-held misconception that the subject is dominated by a group of rather eccentric individuals involved in the preservation and cataloguing of surviving steam engines. No image could be further from the truth, and today's industrial archaeologists deal with a huge variety of different and often complex sites; these include milestones, social housing and even coal-fired power stations. The remains are constantly threatened by redevelopment and many have been lost.

The importance and fragility of this resource has been recognised by Essex County Council's Planning Department, and its Archaeological Advisory Group has initiated a major survey of all the county's surviving industrial monuments. New sites are constantly being identified as part of the development control process and, where features of interest are likely to be destroyed, these will be recorded to an appropriate standard.

At the Grade 2 listed Rochford Hospital, a full photographic record has recently been undertaken in advance of the proposed conversion and part demolition. County-wide surveys have also been completed for the lime and malt industries. Surprisingly, Essex now retains only one complete lime kiln, and this is at Beaumont Quay, near Beaumont-cum-Moze. There are more extensive remains of the Essex malt industry, and by the 18th century almost every town and village would have had at least one malthouse. As the demand for beer fell in the 19th century, the industry went into decline and now only one of the Mistley sites remains in operation.

A major success in the past year has been to secure funds for the repair and restoration of the timber trestle railway bridge at Wickham Bishops, near Witham. Erected between 1846 and 1848 as part of the Maldon, Witham and Braintree Railway, the bridge is the last surviving English example and has been designated a scheduled ancient monument. The bridge is owned by Essex County Council, and English Heritage are funding a large part of the repair work.

## Archaeology for young people

# Discovering tombstones

by Mike Corbishley

**UNTIL the beginning of the 19th century, everyone had the right to be buried in the churchyard of the parish where they died. Gradually, though, 'new' graveyards and cemeteries were established. Look out for the differences between**

- **graveyards around parish churches and**
- **cemeteries laid out with paths and roads with their own chapel and gatekeeper's lodge.**

One of the most famous 19th-century cemeteries is Highgate Cemetery. Work was begun by a special company, the London Cemetery Company, in 1856. A burial vault in one of the exclusive avenues, like this one called the Circle of Lebanon, cost over £100 — a lot of money at this time!



Over the centuries, the styles of tombstones and burial vaults changed. A favourite decoration in the 18th century was the skull and crossed bones.



Another favourite was the hour glass and a skeleton with a scythe (Old Father Time) indicating the passing of life.

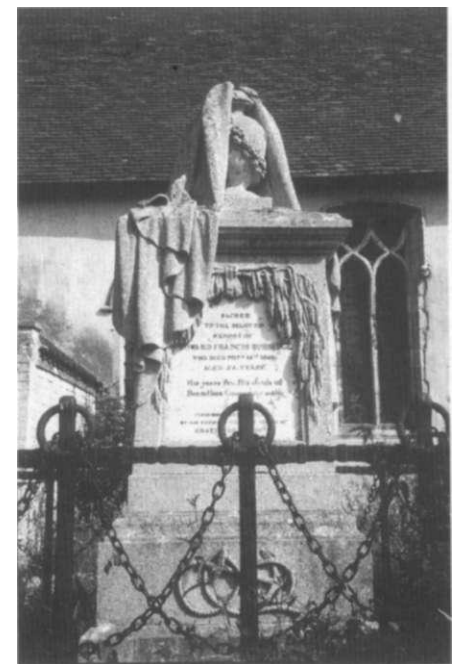


In the 19th century, tombs and headstones become very elaborate with many different symbols such as the following.

An urn and broken weeping willow tree.



An urn with flowing cloth.



A guardian angel.



Sometimes you will find very elaborate tombs...



You might like to discover your own family history through gravestones or you could just collect interesting information such as:

- average age of death at particular periods
- most popular first names
- occupations of those buried.



Clasped hands, meaning farewell.



Look out too for different styles of wording headstones. Usually tombstones give quite a lot of information, but if you come across a Quaker cemetery, you will find the inscription very simple, like this one.



Sometimes you will find graveyards in odd places. If you can find this graveyard in Colchester, write down its location on a postcard or letter, with your name, address, and age and send it to:

*Discovering Tombstones Competition,  
Colchester Archaeological Trust,  
12 Lexden Road,  
Colchester CO3 3NF.*

Closing date for entries is March 31st, 1996. The first correct answer out of the hat after that date will win free copies of *How to record graveyards*, published by the Council for British Archaeology, and *Using memorials*, published by English Heritage.

# Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust

THE FRIENDS of CAT is a thriving organisation with several hundred members. Most live in Essex or southern Suffolk, but a few hail from as far afield as Yorkshire, South Wales, Scotland, Denmark, Canada, the USA, Africa, or the Antipodes. All members of the Friends receive a copy of **The Colchester Archaeologist**, and have a chance to attend annual lectures on the previous year's work, go on organised outings to excavation sites, ancient monuments, historic buildings, and museums, and to attend events related to the work of the Trust.

## Events of 1995

The AGM was held in the Castle Lecture Hall, and was so well attended that even 'standing room only' was difficult. Speakers were Howard Brooks (Hythe Hill), Don Shimmin (Kirkee McMunn), Stephen Benfield (Gosbecks), and Philip Crummy (Gosbecks theatre). The raffle was very successful, with so many prizes donated that some were doubled up to allow the Castle to close on time.

There were three site visits for the Friends in the first half of the year; that at the Hythe Hill site was well attended, and also attracted lots of local interest. The new road that prompted the excavation was rapidly constructed and was opened for traffic a couple of months ago. Unfortunately, the weather was against us on the days of the visits to St Mary Magdalen and Gosbecks, and only a few hardy souls turned out.

In March the annual churches trip took a new slant when Martin Stuchfield led us in search of monumental brasses. Secretary of the Monumental Brass Society, Martin was full of information about all aspects of the brasses, metal, manufacturing techniques, style, clothing, people, and even about the other monuments in his chosen churches. This was a very popular trip, and the 'brass' theme will

be taken up again another year.

In May a coach-load of Friends headed for Norfolk to meet John Davies of Norwich Castle Museum on the site of the Roman town at Caistor-by-St Edmund. The site of the town has been almost untouched by later disturbances, leaving the defences in reasonably good condition, and the enclosed area clear. The defences are undergoing a programme of maintenance where erosion is a problem, and public access will be encouraged by on-site interpretation, though what form the latter will take is still being discussed — a visitor centre is one possibility.

On a scorchingly hot Sunday afternoon in July, Philip Crummy led an in-depth investigation of the Roman town wall to explore aspects not widely appreciated, ending up with iced drinks in the garden at Tymperleys, the Borough's Clock Museum.

The September trip was our most unusual to date — a sail up the river Colne in a restored Thames barge. The barge moored at West Mersea at low tide on a beautifully calm day, and when there was a sufficient depth of water, the Friends were taken out to board her by launch or, for the most nimble, the barge's tender. At first she cruised around the mouth of the

Blackwater, where the Anglo-Saxon St Peter's Church at Bradwell showed up dramatically on the marsh's edge. Peter Marsden, formerly of the Guildhall Museum, excavator of the Blackfriars boat in the Thames, and now the head of the Shipwreck Heritage Museum at Hastings, was on board to talk about the archaeology of wrecks, and also took along some pieces of eight and other salvaged items for a handling session. The barge then headed up the river Colne for Colchester on the rising tide while Philip Crummy pointed out archaeological sites and landmarks, such as the possible Roman landing-point at Fingringhoe Wick, and the presumed site of the Saxon port at Old Heath. Landing at the new turning point at the Hythe completed the cycle from ancient to very modern. A very skilled and courteous crew really put the final shine on a trip to remember.

A guided walk around Cambridge was on one of the coldest days in November, so the chance to get into King's College Chapel had an added bonus.

## 1996

The 1996 AGM will be held on Saturday 27th January. The business meeting will be at 10.30 am at 12 Lexden Road, and the afternoon lectures, tea and raffle in the Castle Museum lecture theatre at 2.00 pm. The year's trips will include a churches visit, a hands-on session (Roman leather) at the Museum of London, and a coach trip to the late Roman fort at Burgh Castle and the Roman town at Caistor-by-Yarmouth.

*Nina Crummy*



PHOTO: J. WALLACE

## New book on Colchester

Next November (1996), the Trust plans to publish a much-needed account of the archaeology and history of Colchester. **CITY OF VICTORY** will be an illustrated history of the town starting in the 1st century BC when Camulodunum was probably the most important settlement in Britain, and ending in AD 1100 with the Norman invasion and the building of the great castle from the ruins of the Roman town. The book will be extensively illustrated in full colour and it will feature many specially-commissioned reconstruction paintings by artist Peter Froste. The author, Philip Crummy, will draw on the results of the major excavations of the 1970s and 1980s to produce a unique perspective on Britain's first Roman town.

The book will be at least 160 pages long and it will be available in both hardback (£14.99) and paperback (£9.99) forms.

Colour publication is a very expensive business and the Trust is having to raise substantial funds to publish the book. You can help in this venture in a positive way by becoming a pre-publication subscriber and ordering at least one copy of the hardback version at the standard price of £14.99.

Every order helps. The more orders we get, the less we have to raise to publish the book. You will get your copy post free and we will show our gratitude by listing the subscribers at the back of the book (except of course anybody who tells us otherwise).

Orders should be sent to: Nick Hines, City of Victory fund, 19 Victory Road, West Mersea, Essex, COS 8LX. Please make cheques payable to the Colchester Archaeological Trust and make sure to include your address. All orders will be acknowledged in writing so expect a receipt in the post. The closing date for orders is July 31st 1996.

## In brief

### Colchester reports

1996 should be a big year for archaeological books in Colchester. Not only will this be the year of the **City of Victory** but it should also see the publication of the last of the *Colchester Archaeological Reports*. The excavations of the 1970s and '80s were so large and prolific that the Trust had to launch a whole series of books to publish the results. Ten of the twelve books planned in the series have been published. The two remaining are devoted to Roman and post-Roman pottery and are scheduled for publication by the end of 1996.

*Colchester Archaeological Report 2* on the Roman small finds (by Nina Crummy) and *Colchester Archaeological Report 1* (Anglo-Saxon and Norman Colchester) were reprinted in 1995.

### St Botolph's Priory

Improvements to Colchester's St Botolph's Priory continued this year with the installation of interpretation panels. The occasion was in itself an historic one since it coincided with the transfer by English

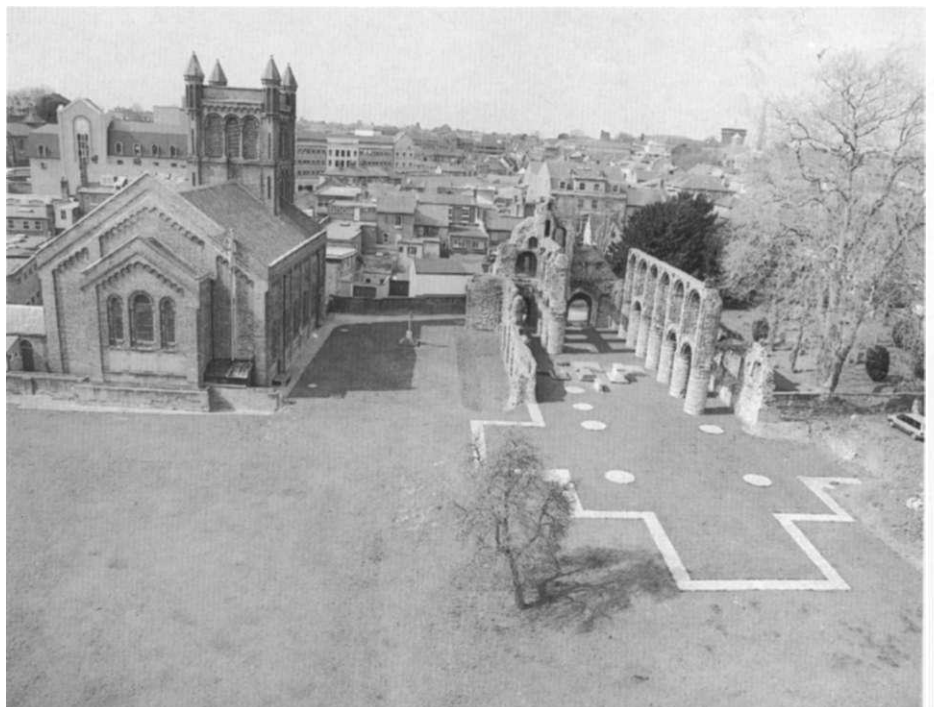
Heritage of the management of the site to the Colchester Borough Council. Over the last few years, the Colchester Archaeological Trust, commissioned by the Borough Council, excavated the east end of the priory church to recover its plan and construct permanent markers to show the positions of the missing walls and columns.

Other guardianship sites in Colchester transferred at the same time are St John's Abbey Gatehouse (c AD 1500), the well-preserved section of the Triple Dyke (early Roman) in Straight Road, and the part of the Lexden Dyke (late Iron Age) in Bluebottle Grove.

### Case of the missing finger

Go back in Colchester's town centre a thousand or so years and you would see many of the streets that still exist today. This means that dig alongside any of the oldest of the present streets and you would probably find remains of medieval and later houses.

Opportunities to excavate in the Hythe area of Colchester are rare but, with the building of the new eastern approaches road, it was possible to dig alongside Hythe Hill, a street which dates back to at least early medieval times. The site is almost opposite St Leonard's church which is mid 12th century or earlier.



*The old and not so old churches of St Botolph's (photograph by Totem High Rise Photography).*

The frontage turns out to have been vacant until the 14th or 15th century when the first house was built. Various floors, hearths, and footings allow the complex structural history of the site to be untangled. Blacksmithing debris in one of the rooms suggested that for a while part of the house had been used for iron-working.

One interesting find was a witch bottle. This was a 17th-century wine flask which had been filled up with a mixture of iron nails and bent pins (other examples also reputedly contain human hair and nail clippings), which had been buried in the foundations of the chimney breast to ward off evil spirits. Although the Hythe Hill example is broken, the iron nails and bent pins can still be made out in the compact rusted mass sticking to the bottom of the flask.

Another macabre find was a human finger bone in the blacksmithing debris. Did this belong to an unlucky blacksmith...?

## Roman villa on army land

Parts of a Roman villa were discovered during the construction of the REME workshop at the Kirkee McMunn barracks in Colchester. The remains were poorly preserved, but a hypocaust (part of an underfloor heating system) and an oven showed that the villa had been made up of various buildings which probably included a bath-house and a kitchen or bake-house. Little is known about the main villa building.

Despite being close to the Roman town, the villa was agricultural in character and stood within a series of ditched fields and droveways. Several of the ditches were exposed during building works, and others are known from aerial photographs taken during the dry summers, when buried features are visible as cropmarks.

An unusual discovery was a near-complete Roman glass feeding bottle.

## Monday night lectures

This year's series of Monday night lectures mounted by the Colchester Archaeological Group covers a range of subjects wide enough to suit all archaeological tastes. A highlight will be a lecture by Mark Roberts. He is director of the dig at Boxgrove in Sussex, and is responsible for the discovery of Britain's earliest known man. Other topics include the recently discovered Neolithic site at Brightlingsea (Nick Lavender), stained glass (Michael Archer), timber buildings (Richard Shackleton), and the Defence of Britain Project (up to World War 2: Jim Earle). Lectures start at 7.30 pm in Colchester Castle. Details from Pat Brown (tel 01206 575081).

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*Highly conjectural reconstruction of what the villa on the site of the REME workshop might have looked like. Viewed from the east. Painting by Peter Froste.*

