

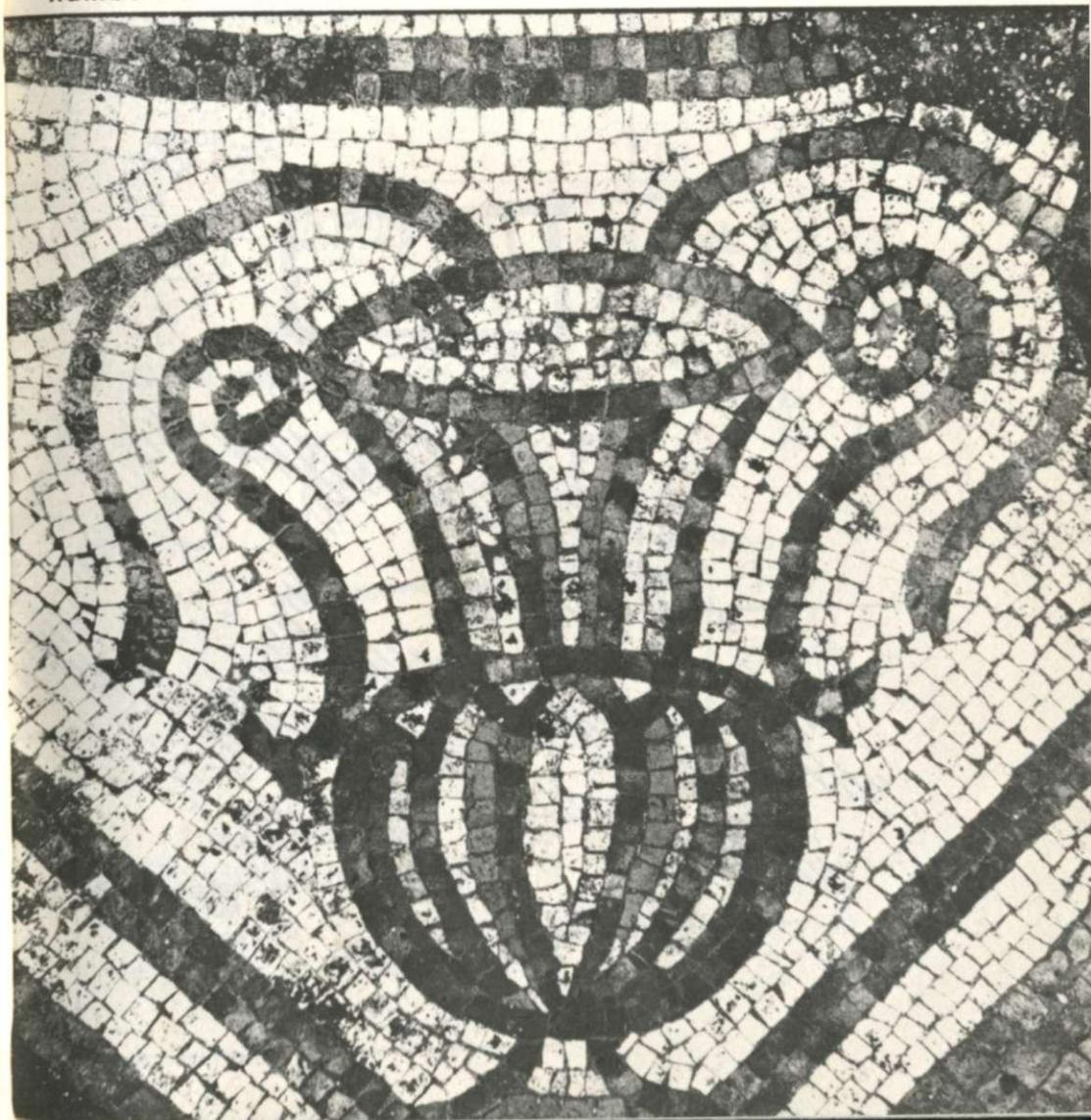


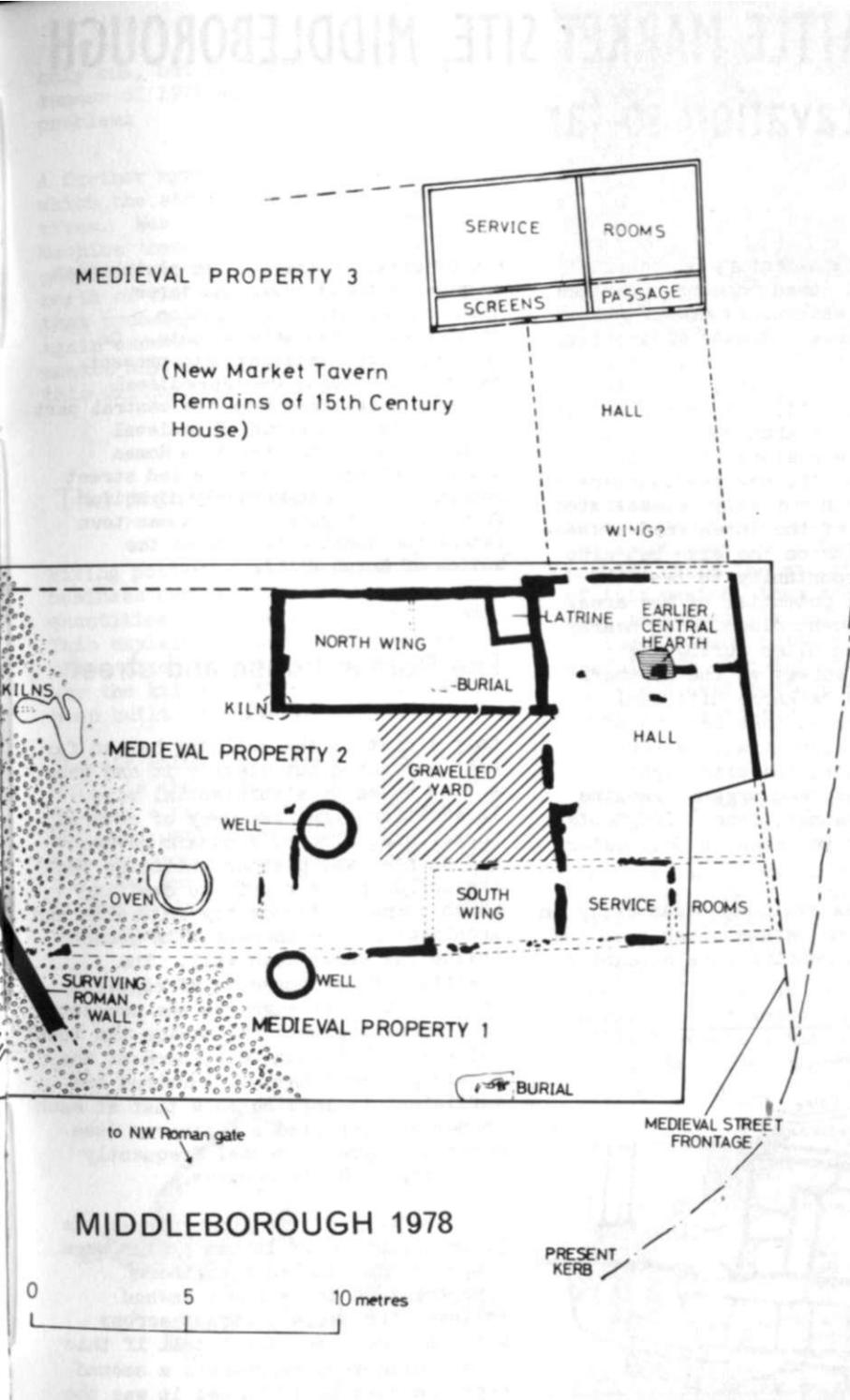
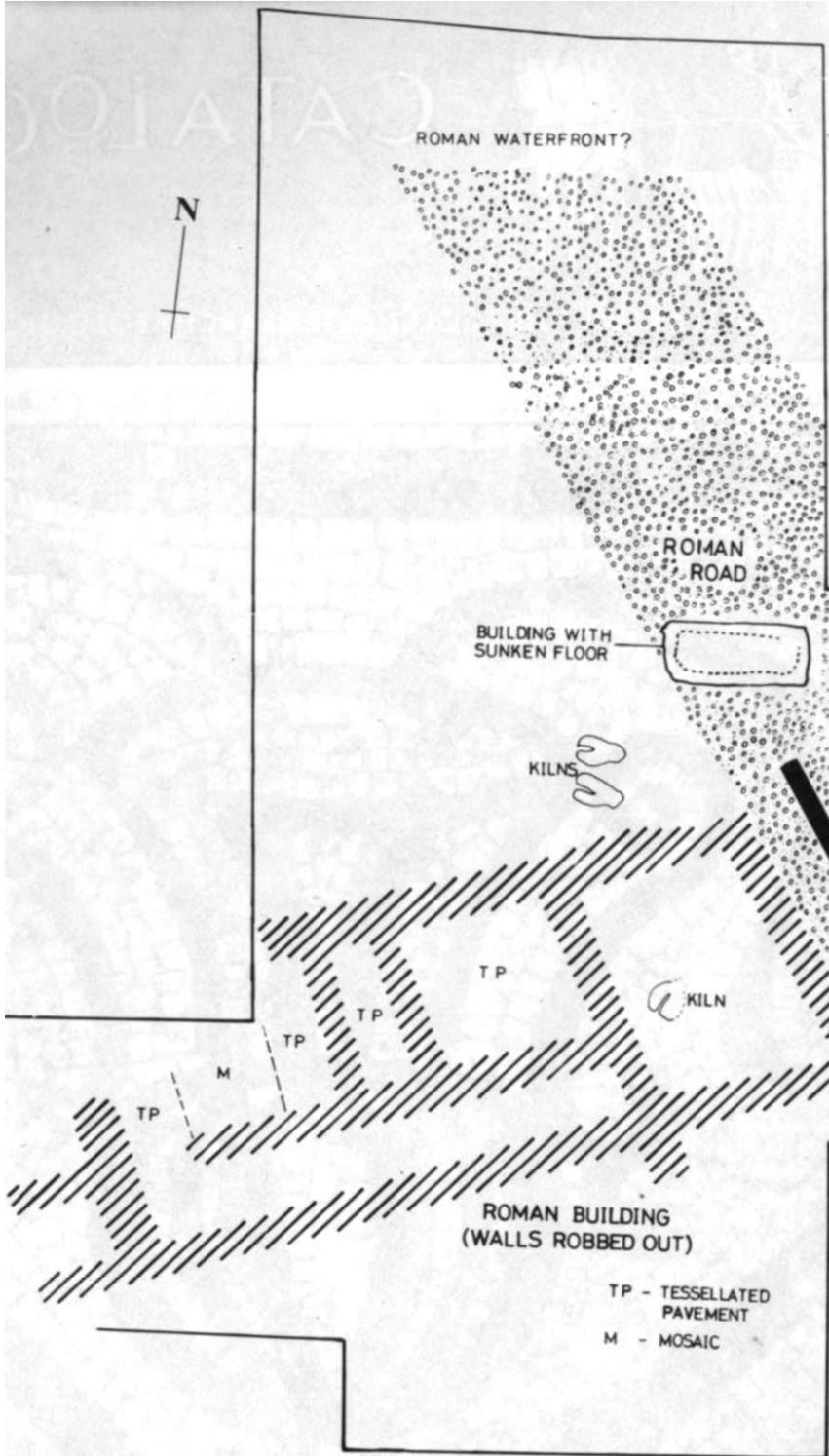
# CATALOGUE

NEWSLETTER OF THE COLCHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

number 3

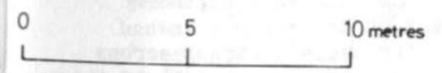
summer 1978





TP - TESSELLATED PAVEMENT  
M - MOSAIC

MIDDLEBOROUGH 1978



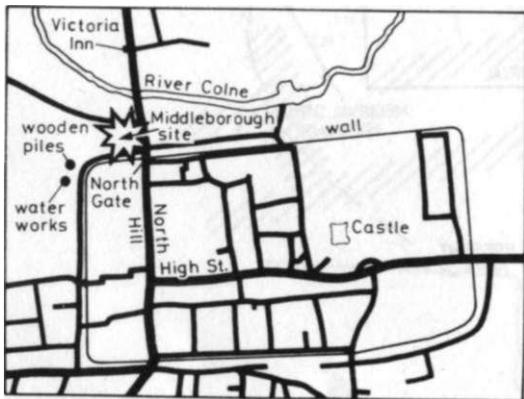
MIDDLEBOROUGH 1978

# THE CATTLE MARKET SITE, MIDDLEBOROUGH

## the excavation so far

Although the 19th-century discoveries of substantial Roman remains under the Balkerne Hill Waterworks and in the Victoria Inn area indicate indirectly the probability of Roman buildings at Middleborough (see plan), this part of Colchester has until now been something of a blank on the archaeological map. The proposed redevelopment of the cattle market as the new headquarters of the Royal London not only necessitated the recording of the threatened archaeological remains on the site but also provided an opportunity to test the archaeological potential of the area. Indeed, the recent discoveries nearby of Roman wooden piles during the building of a subway at the northern end of the new Balkerne Hill dual carriageway hinted that because of its low-lying, potentially waterlogged situation, the site might yield well-preserved organic remains (e.g. wood, leather, insect fragments) on a scale not yet seen in Colchester.

Accordingly, excavations began early in 1978 and it soon became clear that the archaeological remains were extensive



and of great interest. The sketch plan on pages 2 and 3 shows the three distinct periods of occupation discovered on the site to date. On the east side, fronting onto present day Middleborough, are two medieval houses ; scattered over the central part of the site is a group of medieval kilns; and on the west is a Roman house fronting onto a gravelled street running in a north-westerly direction from the north gate of the Roman town (where the Roman wall crosses the bottom of North Hill).

### The Roman house and street

Only a part of the building has so far been uncovered but clearly it had been a town house of a substantial size. In addition, the discovery of several tessellated floors, a mosaic pavement and painted wallplaster indicates that the building was a private dwelling which compared favourably in wealth and architectural refinement with houses inside the Roman town wall. The position of the house is of significance in that it suggests the presence of flourishing suburbs outside the town defences. Unfortunately, much of the mosaic pavement has not survived but sufficient is left to show that at each corner was depicted a cantharus (see cover), a type of vessel frequently occurring on Roman mosaics.

The discovery of the Roman street was quite unexpected. It had always been supposed that the main northern approach into the Roman town had followed the present street across North Bridge. We cannot tell if this recent discovery represents a second approach road or if indeed it was the

only one, but excavation over the summer of 1978 may resolve this problem.

A further mystery is the manner in which the street continued across the river. Was it by ford or bridge? Machine trenching on the area of the proposed multi-storey car park just north of the main site has indicated that probably a bridge was used, but again excavations over the next few months may throw further light on this difficulty.

### The medieval kilns

Firing pottery could be an anti-social business because of the large quantities of smoke and ash produced. This explains in part why kilns were often sited well away from houses and why the kilns at Middleborough had been built in a field.

The six kilns discovered so far were built in the 12th and 13th centuries to fire a range of domestic wares. The only part of each kiln to survive was the base of the chamber where the fuel was burnt to fire the pots; the superstructures have long since been destroyed.



Remains of two kilns

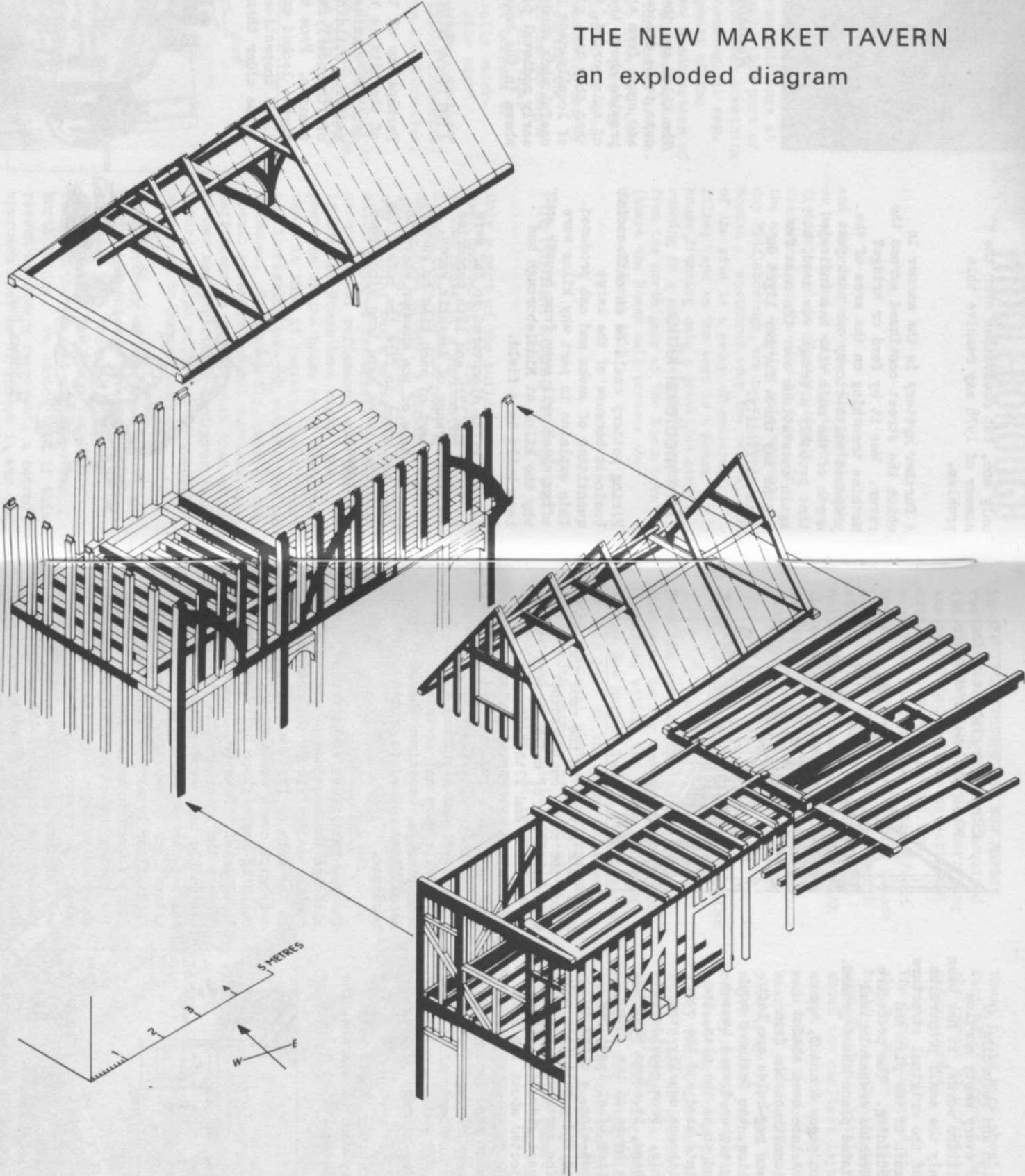
The kilns are the first of post-Roman date to be discovered in Colchester and apart from the information they provide about the structure of kilns of this period, they are of value in that they have yielded many fragments of locally-made pottery which will be useful when studying the origins of early medieval pottery found elsewhere in the town.

### The New Market Tavern

Perhaps one of the most exciting aspects of the site is the chance to combine a detailed examination of a standing late medieval building with the excavation of its underlying archaeological remains. From the outside the New Market looked undistinguished, but on close inspection the building proved to be older than might at first seem.



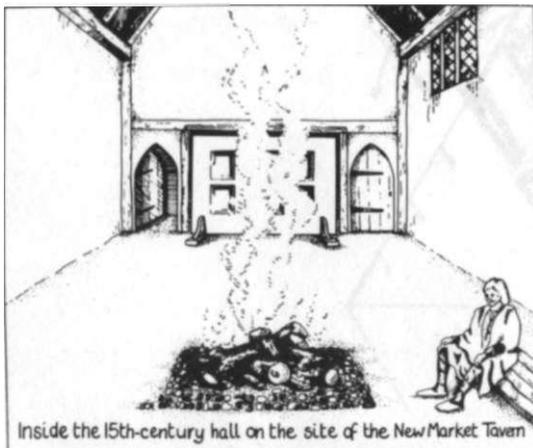
THE NEW MARKET TAVERN  
an exploded diagram



By the examination and recording of every timber and every empty mortice during the demolition works, it has been possible from only the small proportion which survived of the original structure to reconstruct much of the plan and history of the building. The procedure in some ways resembles archaeological excavation but takes place above ground.

In the drawing on pages 6 and 7, the surviving timbers have been shaded whereas those reconstructable from empty mortices and peg-holes are left blank. In practice, the features most useful in dating timber-framed houses such as this tend to be the plan, the forms of the joints used and the roof construction, although usually other aids are available. From considerations such as these, it seems that the New Market was a house of the 15th century, consisting of at least one two-storeyed cross-wing, a cross or 'screens' passage and a hall (the main living area). The north wing was jettied on its east side (i.e. its upper floor projected about two feet beyond the ground floor wall) and the ground floor was divided into two rooms and a screens passage. This last arrangement is common in medieval houses, the pair of rooms generally being used for the storage or preparation of food.

Until the 16th century, halls were usually heated by central hearths. The smoke produced necessitated a lofty



hall with a vent in the roof through which the smoke could escape. The widespread use of brick chimney stacks in the 16th and 17th centuries resulted in the conversion of countless open halls into two-storeyed blocks by the insertion of a floor at first-floor level and a chimney stack. When open halls were not as tall as two full storeys, sometimes the roof was rebuilt and raised to provide more headroom.

The New Market was no different, although the sequence of events was complex and difficult to unravel. In the 16th or 17th century at least one brick stack was inserted into the building and a floor built at first-floor level. However, in the 17th century the rooms made in the shell of the old hall were considered too low and further major structural alterations took place. The floor at first-floor level was raised and a jetty formed to match the north wing, the northern part of the old hall was extended westwards and its roof rebuilt to provide more headroom as well as form an east-west attic running the length of the extended building. The enlarged southern wing may also belong to this period.

In the 19th century the New Market reached its final form and acquired its present name. The southern wing was demolished to form an east-west external side passage and the remaining part of the jettied front bricked over with an elaborate facade along the building's east and south sides. This facelift and also the building's name were associated with the establishment of the adjacent market, founded in the mid 19th century.

### The excavated medieval house

From the archaeological remains uncovered so far and the information contained within the walls and roof of the New Market Tavern it seems that on this part of the site there were three medieval plots formed probably in the 13th century by dividing up the eastern end of the field formerly used for pottery making. At least two of

these plots were about 40 feet wide, a fact which suggests that these were the result of a single act of medieval redevelopment.

The house excavated to the south of the New Market was timber-framed and built on a slightly imperfect rectangular plan. Little can be discovered about the earliest layout of the house except that the position of the hall is made clear by successive central hearths, one of which is shown on our plan (page 3). The house underwent a major rebuild perhaps in the 15th century and after further modifications assumed the ground plan as shown here. A key innovation was the building of stone cills to prevent the new timber frame rotting. To the west side of the hall rear wings were added, the northern one being built over a stone-lined latrine pit belonging to the earlier layout of the house. At the southern end of the hall was a pair of service rooms. Although less well-preserved, the rear south wing



had slighter walls and may have consisted of a range of rooms opening onto the backyard. Behind the house were two wells, one belonging to the adjacent property. Also at the rear was a circular oven built of peg-tiles; this could have been an external feature, or as was often the case, inside a kitchen detached from the main building because of the fire risk. The needs of everyday life are well represented here - a well for fresh water, an oven for baking, a latrine and within the main building a hearth for warmth and possibly also for cooking.

### The burials and the 'sunken floor'

Two other aspects of the site are of note; these are two burials, and a building with a sunken floor. One of the burials was found on the south



edge of the site and the other beneath the rear north wing of the excavated medieval house. Their date is uncertain but they are probably late Saxon or early medieval. Both burials were laid with the head to the east, without accompanying grave goods. Why they were buried here is unclear.

The building with the sunken floor is also intriguing. It had been dug into the surface of the Roman road and is clearly of post-Roman or late Roman date, although there is no good dating evidence from the feature itself. We originally thought that it might have been a small building associated with the medieval kilns, but the way in which the sunken floor lines up with the northern boundary of one of the medieval plots suggests a later date.

### Future work

Unfortunately, there will be no time to reach the semi-waterlogged levels before having to leave the site in the autumn, but at least our work has shown that these deposits are deep enough for the bulk of them to survive the imminent building operations. However, we hope to look into the possibility of there being a Roman waterfront at the northern edge of the site and to take a limited number of samples for environmental study.

The main effort in the time left will be directed towards the excavation of the site of the New Market and the recovery of more of the plan of the Roman house.

In conclusion, the excavations at Middleborough are revealing a sequence of occupation and activities spanning a considerable period of time and are of value on a number of counts, not the least of which are the complete house plans being produced and the combination of site excavation with the study of complementary above-ground remains.

## THE FINDS

The finds from Middleborough are exactly what would be expected from a site containing post-medieval, medieval, and domestic Roman occupation.

From the post-medieval levels come dressmakers' pins, lace-ends from laces used to do up both clothing and shoes, buttons, lead seals from bales of cloth, large quantities of broken household pottery - jugs, plates and bowls of both local and imported wares - and a few copper coins of low denominations, such as farthings of Charles I (1625-149), Charles II (1672-9) and George II (1736) and a halfpenny of William III (1700). Coins of high denominations are rarely found on archaeological sites, because if a valuable coin is dropped the owner understandably tries hard to find it again. Perhaps the most picturesque post-medieval find to date is a plaster cockerel, which came from a 19th-century demolition layer; it is probably part of a child's set of toy animals.

From the medieval period come more lace-ends and pins, and two silver pennies, copper coins were not minted in England before the reign of James I. Several fragments of Purbeck marble medieval mortars, or grinding bowls have also been found; they had been deliberately cut up and reused as building material. Purbeck marble is not a true marble but a gastropodic limestone found chiefly on the Isle of Purbeck in Dorset; when cut and polished it is a good substitute for the real thing.



*Two medieval silver pennies (twice actual size)*

The Romans also exploited the Purbeck marble beds in Dorset; one of the uses to which they put the stone was as wall veneer. The Roman house at Middleborough has produced several fragments of veneer, mainly Purbeck marble, but also a piece of green porphyry, a beautiful, rich green and black igneous rock. Other finds from the house have so far been scarce, but as excavation progresses over the summer we should expect to see bone hairpins, toilet instruments such as tweezers and nail-cleaners, needles, brooches, bracelets and other articles used in Roman daily life.

Catalogue No. 3 was prepared by staff of the Colchester Archaeological Trust (Director, P. Crumry; Middleborough Site Director, H. Brooks).

# INSURANCE COMPANY TO THE RESCUE

In our last newsletter we announced a donation of £2,000 from the Royal London Mutual Insurance Society Ltd for the Trust's excavations at Middleborough where the Society plans to build its new headquarters. The money came at an opportune moment for the Trust as central and local government grants were beginning to run out.

For a number of years now commercial firms have given money towards excavation. Lloyds Bank, well known for its timely donations to archaeology (it has just given £2,652 towards the dig at Maldon), gave its first grant in 1972. Recently a Danish brewery gave over £23,000 to the York Archaeological Trust. Donations made by firms are usually more modest though and represent a small percentage of the whole budget for rescue archaeology. In 1976-7 £2.6M was spent on rescue work in England, of which £1.82M came from central government. The rest was made up by grants from local authorities, the Manpower Services Commission, museums, universities, development corporations, trusts and businesses. The businesses provided £12,960 or 0.49% of the total budget. Although this is small in cash terms, it may well represent a large involvement of individual firms in local archaeological work.

The Royal London has already demonstrated its involvement in the

archaeology of our town. Now we are pleased to announce another grant of £1,000 towards the excavations at Middleborough and the covering of the cost of publishing and distributing this newsletter. The grant for the newsletter will enable the Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust to distribute it freely to several thousand people and institutions in Colchester. We hope this will make more people aware of our archaeological heritage and lead them to join the Friends.

In their move from London, the Royal London clearly wants to be welcomed to and feel part of our historic town and is prepared to help. Welcome to Colchester, Royal London, and thank you very much - you're helping enormously!

M.J. Corbishley

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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. 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 like those outlined on the enclosed loose sheet.

The annual subscription rates are as follows: Adults £1.50, Children and Students £0.75, 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 Road, Alresford, Colchester, Essex C07 8AQ. We hope you will join!

A grateful acknowledgment!

By invitation, this newsletter was financed by the Royal London Mutual Insurance Society Ltd. The plates were donated by Moorgate Lithoplates Ltd