



CATALOGUE

NEWS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS IN COLCHESTER

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NEW LIGHT ON THE STROOD

SOME OF THE PILES FROM THE STROOD

The Strood is an artificial causeway, about a mile long, which provides Mersea Island's only link with the mainland. It used to be thought that the Strood was of Roman origin but a recent discovery has not only shown this to be untrue but has also provided a very precise and surprising date for its construction.

THE STROOD AT WEST MERSEA FROM THE AIR
FRONT COVER

Important Roman remains have been known on Mersea Island for many years. In and around St. Peter's Church at West Mersea, a series of Roman pavements and walls has been recorded indicating the previous existence of what was presumably a large Roman villa. Nearby were discovered remains of the famous West Mersea Roman mausoleum and about one and a half miles away is the well-known Roman barrow (See Catalogue No. 5). These remains, coupled with the straight, Roman appearance of the Strood, have prompted the belief that the causeway must be of considerable antiquity.

In 1978, whilst the Anglian Water Authority were laying a pipe-line across the Strood, a series of well-preserved oak piles was discovered. These were of square section, up to 8.5 feet long and had pointed ends. The tops of the piles were about 5 feet below the present ground-level and were sealed by a series of read surfaces. The depth of the piles and their relationship to the later surfaces seemed to suggest that the piles had been there for a long time and that the Strood had indeed been built in the Roman period.

Although only about 22 piles were discovered (where the trench for the pipeline was at its deepest) the density of those found implied a total number under the Strood of perhaps 3,000 to 5,000.

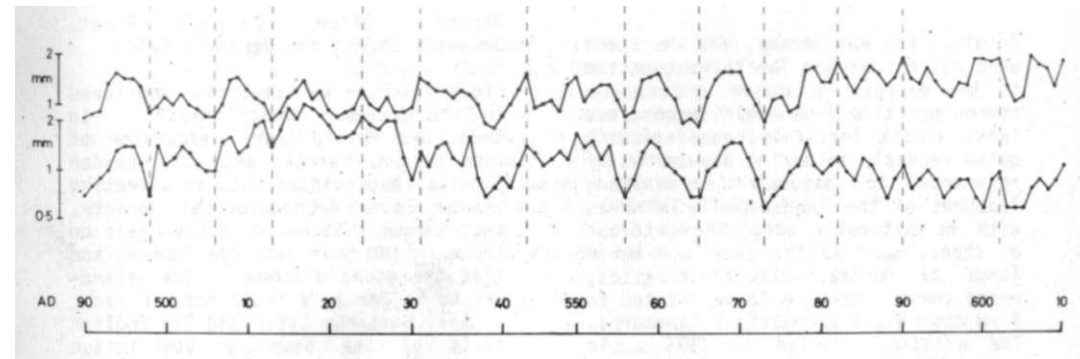
A sample of wood cut from one of the piles was sent for radiocarbon dating and a result pointing to the construction of the causeway in the 7th or 8th centuries AD, i.e. some two or three centuries after the end of the Roman period and at a time not renowned for major building works. At Sheffield University, the piles were then subjected by Jennifer Hillam to tree-ring analysis, a technique potentially more accurate than radiocarbon dating. The surprising result was obtained that the piles were felled sometime between AD 684 and 702.

Each ring in a tree represents a year's growth and its thickness is dependent on the growing conditions for that year. Thus the trees over a wide area will show the same variations in the widths of their tree-rings since they all experience more or less the same weather. Tree-ring analysis exploits this phenomenon and is essentially to do with matching sets of tree-ring patterns, one with another. Until the discovery of the Strood piles, no British sequences of ring-widths was available for the early post-Roman period but Jennifer managed to obtain a match with a German series (see drawing).

The building of the Strood in c. AD 700 must have represented a considerable effort in time and money and the question arises "why was it built?". There is written evidence to the effect that in the 10th century there had been a minster church at St. Peter's in West Mersea. It is a good guess, therefore, that the minster was in existence by c. 700 and that the causeway was built as a direct consequence.

Philip Crummy

TREE-RING PATTERNS: THE PILES FROM THE STROOD (ABOVE)
AND THE GERMAN SEQUENCE (BELOW)



DERAMY'S STONE

In January 1975, a boulder was raised from the field ditch which forms part of the present parish boundary between East and West Mersea and set up on the boundary by the side of the main road. It was cemented to a plinth to which a plaque was fixed which reads:-

"Dertmy's stone - Boundary of the Manor of West Mersea granted by King Edward the Confessor to the Monastery of St. Ouen in 1046."

On January 30th 1975 the stone was ceremoniously unveiled. The Essex County Standard for January 31st recorded the event:-

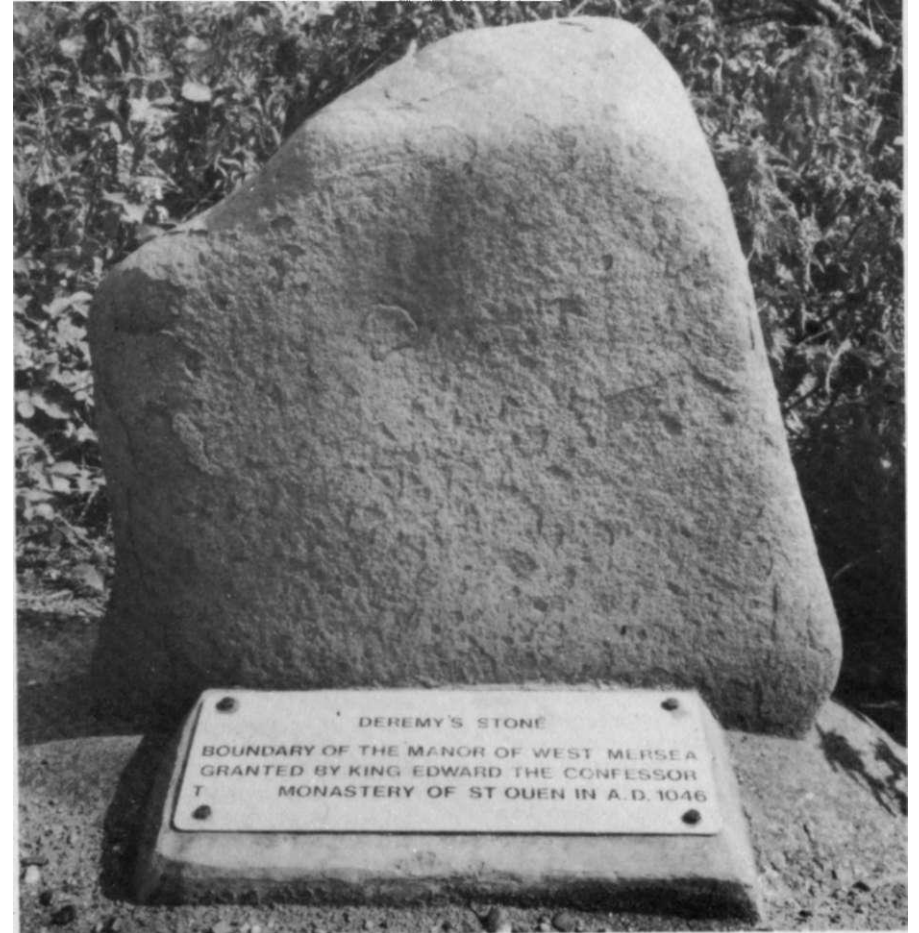
"There was quite an air of self congratulation in the crowd.... the police were there to control the traffic as 30 excited locals witnessed the ceremony, the Mayor of West Mersea honoured the occasion with his presence;.. But while Dr Alec Grant unveiled the stone in its new setting another Island historian, Mr John Bennett, composed himself for an attack delivered with calm conviction at the end of the ceremony. Mr Bennett believes this stone is nothing more than one of a number of glacial erratics spread across the island."

Briefly, who was Deramy, and where and what was his stone? The third question is the easiest to answer. It was a common practice from Anglo-Saxon times (and, almost certainly, earlier) until quite recently to define boundaries by reference to natural or man-made features of the landscape. In areas with no naturally occurring outcrops of stone, such as the clay and marsh lands of Mersea, glacial erratics, where these occur, could be resited to form convenient and obvious landmarks. The erratic unveiled in 1975 could quite likely therefore be a boundary marker.

But why was it called Deramy's? In his "History of Essex" (1763), the well known local antiquary, Philip Morant, published a copy of a charter in Latin of Edward the Confessor, dated 1046, but clearly, on linguistic grounds, substantially altered in the 17th century at the earliest. This charter granted lands at Mersea and Fingringhoe to the monastery of St. Ouen at Rouen in Normandy. In the charter's description of the boundary of these lands several landmarks, including a stone are described as "Deramy's". Deramy, it seems was an important person. It is from this charter that the islanders of Mersea took the name Deramy's Stone.

However, in 1962, an Old English copy of the boundary description was discovered at Rouen. This copy was made in 1421 and was therefore earlier than Morant's Latin version. On comparing the two texts, it became clear that Deramy was a fictitious personal name invented by whoever had tried to translate the original Old English into Latin. When faced with the Old English word δam (pronounced "tham", meaning "the" in the masculine dative singular), the translator had confused the Old English barred d, δ , with the medieval Latin δ , which stands for "der". Hence " $\delta et \delta am stane$ " became "ad Deramy's Stone". Also mentioned in the Latin text are Deramy's Ditch, Deramy's Fleet, Deramy's Street and Deramy's Pete.

Finally, where was the stone mentioned in the boundary description? In 1923, Dr. Philip Laver, excavator of the Mersea barrow and the Lexden tumulus, had pointed out, at a meeting of the Essex Archaeological Society, that Deramy's Stone would have lain on the mainland near Pete Tye Common, and that the stone claimed by the islanders to be Deramy's could not, in fact, be so. Both the Latin and Old English texts of the boundary description clearly state that the stone was "in Fingringhoe".



DERAMY'S STONE ON MERSEA ISLAND

So, the boulder raised in 1975 as Deramy's Stone has been misidentified on two counts. First, Deramy never existed. Second, the stone mentioned in the Confessor's charter lay some four and a half miles away on the mainland. However, despite these facts, Deramy and his stone will undoubtedly continue to thrive in the folk history of Mersea Island.

Nina Crummy

STOP TAKING OUR PAST

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE PLUNDERING OF BRITAIN'S PAST

WHY ARCHAEOLOGISTS ARE OPPOSED TO TREASURE HUNTING

EXCAVATIONS

What are archaeological excavations like, then? You may have seen the excavations by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at Middleborough, Salkerne Hill or in the town centre. Excavators are not working at random but to a number of rules by which archaeological features (like the walls of a Roman house or the filling of a medieval cesspit or the timbers of a 16th century building) are excavated. On site you may see people taking notes, making precise and technical plans or taking photographs.

Off site people will be dealing with the finds (all the objects that the excavators have dug up) - washing marking and cataloguing them. Some of the finds need special treatment in the museum's conservation laboratory. Other people will be working towards an interpretation of what the excavators are finding - looking at records and maps, dating the material, identifying the bones and seeds.

PASSING ON THE INFORMATION

Eventually the information about that bit of the past which has been dug up will be presented in three ways: first the objects (and sometimes the remains in the ground) will be displayed in some public place like a museum. They will be cared for, and treated when necessary for future generations.

Second, the story which surrounds these objects will be presented to the public, usually in the museum with the objects themselves but frequently in booklet form as well.

Third, the archaeologist will produce a detailed report of the work done; this is mainly for other archaeologists and is used as a reference work to help understand other archaeological sites.

An additional factor in today's archaeology is that the great majority of archaeologists in this country are concerned with sites that are threatened in some way. The Colchester Archaeological Trust was set up principally to deal with such rescue sites.

STOP TAKING OUR PAST

How do treasure hunters (especially those armed with metal detectors) fit into all this? Unfortunately while claiming to be motivated by an interest in the past they pose yet another serious threat to the nation's heritage and to our understanding of it. A report published in June 1980 by the Ancient Monuments Board for England, a statutory advisory body to the government, said, "The Board deplores and continues to be deeply concerned about the damage being caused to scheduled sites by the activities of treasure hunters". Scheduled sites, by the way, are those small number of archaeological sites throughout the country which are specifically protected by law!

DAMAGING THE ENVIRONMENT

There are now hundreds of examples of archaeological sites damaged by treasure hunters. Most archaeologists who have excavated have, at some time or other, had to face damage on their excavations from this source - and Colchester's sites have suffered too.

The person with the metal detector is doing just the opposite of what the archaeologist does. The metal detector beeps or buzzes, a hole is dug and a metal object is extracted from the ground. In the majority of cases that object will be buried in some archaeological feature and other objects will be removed at the same time. The objects that have been wrenched from the ground will no longer be able to tell us their part of the story of the past. Part of the site will have been damaged beyond repair.

This is not the end of the story, though, for that metal object. In some cases it will be given to a museum, but what often happens is that the object is badly treated and not scientifically conserved; no record is made of the object; it disappears into a private collection or is sold and is therefore unavailable for further study.

The sum of this activity has been to damage the unwritten story of our past while satisfying one individual's greed for the possession (or sale) of an object from the past.



In the recent past people, who often called themselves or were called antiquarians, studied the past by collecting objects in a random way. Sometimes this pastime involved shipping archaeological remains from countries such as Italy, Greece or Egypt to private collections and public museums in western Europe.

In the late 19th century, and more especially in this century, those interested in the material remains of the past (that is, archaeologists) developed increasingly complex and scientific techniques for collecting and understanding those remains.

NEW TECHNIQUES

Many new techniques have been developed for extracting the most detailed information from objects and remains; techniques such as the analysis of pollen from ancient deposits, which helps to build up a picture of past environments. Techniques have been developed in recent years to organise and to try to perfect the methods by which archaeological material is excavated from the ground. Archaeological excavations today should only be undertaken on a properly organised basis or the evidence that is extracted will be suspect - it will not present a true picture of what happened in the past.

STOP TAKING OUR PAST

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE PLUNDERING OF BRITAIN'S PAST

It is, of course, easy for the treasure hunters to say that all this is the argument of the archaeologists who "have a vested interest". Certainly we do; we care about our past and its remains. Like many other groups of citizens we feel that the past belongs to us all and feel angry and saddened that it is so often under attack from a small number of individuals.

Damage to other aspects of the environment is causing many individuals and groups to come out against treasure hunting. The Association of County Councils and the Association of District Councils are pressing the government for stronger legislation to combat what the Colchester Borough Council called the "irresponsible use of metal detectors". The actions of treasure hunters recently caused the City of Oxford Council a bill for £4,400 to re-soil and seed part of their land.

What can we do to put a stop to all this? A campaign called STOP (Stop Taking Our Past) was launched in March to bring people's attention to the problem. Practically every amateur archaeological society or group (like the Friends) supports the campaign by belonging to the Council for British Archaeology. Professional archaeologists working in the field or laboratories and museum staff are represented by their own associations. Apart from the Councils' Associations already mentioned the campaign has the support of a large number of varied non-archaeological organisations such as the Council for Nature, Inland Waterways, National Heritage, National Trust, National Farmers Union and the Historic Houses Association.

What can you do to help? If you belong to an organisation (local or national) whose interests are threatened by treasure hunters, bring the campaign to its attention and ask it to support us. If a resolution is passed, write to me at :

STOP CAMPAIGN,
c/o Council for British Archaeology,
112, Kennington Road,
London, SE11 6RE.

BREAKING THE LAW

If you see treasure hunters at work find out if they have permission to be on the land in the first place. Treasure hunting is not allowed on Colchester Borough or Essex County Council land. If the land is private, inform the owner. In case of difficulty inform the police - you may well be witnessing somebody breaking the laws of The Criminal Damage Act 1971 (an offence to destroy or damage someone's property), The Theft Act 1968 (an offence to remove objects from another's land), or the laws relating to Treasure Trove where the finding of an object of gold or silver must be reported to the local coroner. In addition some sites will be protected by the new Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 which specifically makes it an offence to use a metal detector on such a site without the consent in writing of the Secretary of State.

Help us preserve what's left of our past - at least from this sort of mindless damage.

Mike Corbishley

The Museum and Metal Detecting

Metal detecting can only be acceptable "in archaeological terms". What exactly does this mean?

It means first, that anyone using a metal detector must understand that archaeology is about facts, not loot. Finds are important, but it is find + context which really counts; and neither is of much use unless both are subsequently recorded and if appropriate published, both then being retained in an accessible state. Every excavation begins in a museum, using what is already known, and no object found by a metal detector could be identified were it not for the records and specimens that museums exist to preserve.

The key, therefore, lies in an attitude of mind, an attitude which, alas has been sadly lacking in the metal detector press. Buried objects are more than just things, they are part of our history. Museums preserve that history.

A few examples of the practical uses of metal detecting in co-operation with archaeology may help. After any excavation on a town site there is always surplus earth to be removed by machine. Metal detecting over the tip may recover objects, but careful record, including the observation of what kind of soil is adhering to them could be helpful in completing the

interpretation. One recent notorious case of the tip at Sheepen illustrates this - what was wrong was not searching the site but the failure to keep any records and the total disappearance of almost all the finds. At the very least a histogram of the coins would have been useful.

Again someone walks over a field and finds, in the surface soil, Roman coins. Carefully plotted, they form a group in one corner. This could be a clue to a Roman settlement. What the detector user does NOT do is to go on digging into stratified levels.

Some years ago a Saxon cemetery turned up on a road excavation. A metal detector was taken over the area and the anomalies marked. This greatly simplified the excavation of the graves, but of course, they were excavated not just dug into for the metal objects.

We had all this trouble years ago over bird's eggs. "Why shouldn't I sell them?" was the cry. But at last people have realised that if the practice continued, there wouldn't be any birds either. Mrs Nesbitt said it all, years ago:-

"I must not pick the public flowers, They are not mine, but they are ours."

David Clarke

Computing Roman Pottery

Of all the finds from the Trust's excavations in Colchester, the pottery and the bone are the greatest in bulk. The study of the bone provides information about the ancient economy, eating habits etc., but the interpretation of the pottery evidence is more crucial to the understanding of the structures excavated. Many types of pottery can be dated with a greater or lesser degree of accuracy; in the absence of coins or other more direct evidence - such as inscriptions or features which can be related to known historical events - it is from the potsherds associated with buildings, roads, ditches and other features that their history and chronology is determined.

This involves a great deal of painstaking work: the excavations in Colchester since 1971 have produced about ten tons of pottery - possibly half a million sherds! In order to assess the date of groups of material that are important to the excavator the pottery specialist has to examine each sherd and, where possible, to deduce its date of manufacture from its fabric and its shape. For the purpose of the excavation report this information must be presented in the form of an argument which the reader can follow and evaluate for himself. The primary task, therefore, is to create a catalogue of all the wares and shapes (forms) found in the excavation: work on the Roman pottery started in 1979 and is expected to take a total of three to four years. The size of the catalogue is such that the use of a computer is essential in order to handle all the information and to provide different kinds of sorted lists as a basis for further study. We have been very fortunate in securing the sympathy and interest of the Computing Service at Essex University, and we have been able to use their computer in the creation of the cataloguing system. We hope now that finance will be forthcoming for us to buy our own microcomputer: this would not replace the use of the larger machine but would make the whole operation run more smoothly and efficiently.

A second aspect of the pottery which is of interest to the specialist, is the information which we can derive from it about the pottery trade and the various centres of production. In Roman Britain much of the production of utilitarian vessels, such as cooking pots and storage jars, was carried out by small scale workshops with fairly restricted markets. Certain enterprises, though, were successful on a much larger scale. This is particularly true in the case of fine tablewares (e.g. dishes, bowls and cups) and of certain specialised vessels such as mortaria (mixing bowls with a roughened interior). The identification of the sources of the pottery found in Colchester and the study of the relative quantities in which different wares occur can give us valuable information about the various production centres and the extent of their markets. The more distant imports include early Roman mortaria and late coarse wares from the Rhineland, fine red-gloss wares (terra sigillata or "samian" ware) from south and central France and amphoras (which would have contained wine or oil) from Italy and southern Spain.

Colchester itself was a major production centre during much of the Roman period and the market was amply supplied with an entire range of wares of local manufacture. Both fine drinking cups and mortaria made here have been found on Roman sites all over Britain; therefore any further light that we are able to throw on their production and dating will be relevant to archaeologists working in many parts of the country. Much pioneering work was done on the pottery of Roman Colchester by M. R. Hull, a former curator of the museum. It is our hope to build on his work with the aid of the new material made available to us by the large excavations of the seventies.

Philip Kenrick



PHILIP KENRICK WORKING ON SOME OF THE HALF MILLION SHERDS!

The COLCHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST is composed of representatives of local and national bodies' as well as a few co-opted individuals and employs a permanent staff of archaeologists to deal with the rescue sites in Colchester.

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

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

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

Subscriptions should be sent to Mrs G. Chadwick, Treasurer, Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust, 171 Wivenhoe Rd. Alresford, Colchester C07 8AQ.

Editorial

A GUIDE TO COLCHESTER'S ROMAN WALL

Although our newsletter is principally about excavations of the Colchester Archaeological Trust we cannot always bring you up-to-the-minute news of discoveries from the ground. At the moment the Trust has no excavations in progress - this does not mean that the archaeologists are not busy, though. In this issue we bring you reports of post-excitation work and other projects that the trust has become involved in. We are also devoting part of CATALOGUE to the problem of treasure hunting. In the next issue (due in January 1981) we hope to bring you news of the Trust's next big site in Culver Street.

Mike Corbishley

COLCHESTER FROM THE AIR

A new booklet about Colchester's Roman wall and gateways is now on sale. Written by Mike Corbishley it has been published by the Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust to encourage the citizens of Colchester and our tourists to take a longer look at the Roman remains in the town. Available from bookshops and the museums. Special rate for Friends (see information slip in this issue).

Contributing to this issue were:

Philip Crummy, Nina Crummy and Philip Kenrick (Colchester Archaeological Trust); David Clarke (Curator, Castle Museum, Colchester); Mike Corbishley (Organiser, Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust).
Photographs by Alison Colchester and Essex County Newspapers.

