



CATALOGUE

NEWS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS IN COLCHESTER

number 8

january 1981

*Silver Street
The Dig!*



THE BIG DIG BEGINS

FOREWORD

Colchester has always been seen as an important Roman site owing to its known status as a Roman colonia - the first of only four in the country - and owing to the presence there of the remains of the great temple of Claudius, not to mention its fine Roman city wall. But its importance has recently been greatly increased by the results of the archaeological excavations at Lion Walk with their demonstration of the prior existence of a great Roman army base under the city in the early days of the Roman occupation. Its existence was proved there but we need to know more of its plan and history, for fortresses of this period are extremely rare anywhere in the Roman Empire. The potential of the Culver Precinct site is of enormous interest in the setting of European archaeology and I believe that it is a matter of the utmost importance that as much information as possible should be recovered by excavation before redevelopment takes place.

S. S. Frere

January 1981 should see the start of the long awaited Culver Street excavation. At first the scale of the work will be small but by mid summer large areas around the old public library should be under excavation with much of interest for the Friends and public to see. The Culver Street site should prove to be the largest and most exciting excavation to have taken place within the walls of Colchester (Fig 1). Before work of this magnitude can begin, however, there is inevitably much preparation and planning to be done - especially matters concerning general finance, diggers and other site staff, site and hostel accommodation, plant hire and tools, hoardings and so on.

As part of this work, a report entitled Archaeology and the Culver Precinct was prepared by the Trust earlier this year. In it the archaeological potential of this site was explained and to help give you a taste of what is to come at Culver Street extracts from the report, including a foreword by the Trust's President - Professor S. S. Frere, are reproduced here. (Readers should note that since this report was written, the limits of the development have changed - mainly on the western side - and it is now intended to breach the town wall to the south as happened at Lion Walk.)

Cover: Mosaic found in 1881 south of Culver Street.
(If this pavement survives it should come to light in January or February 1981.)

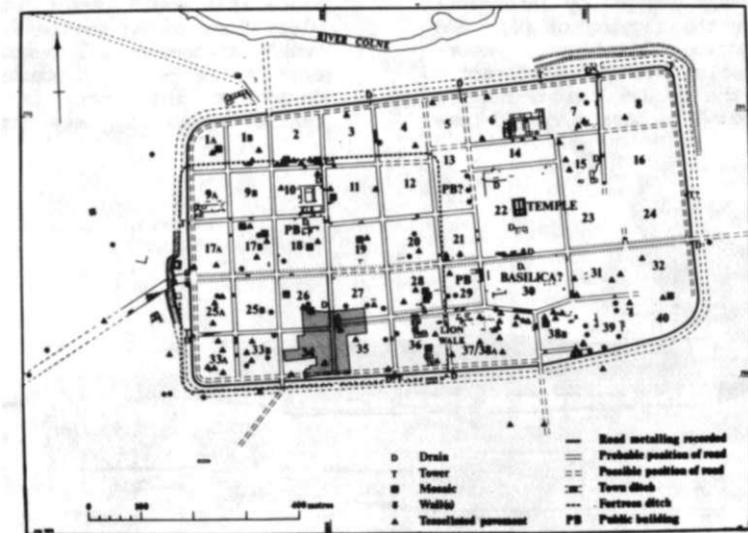
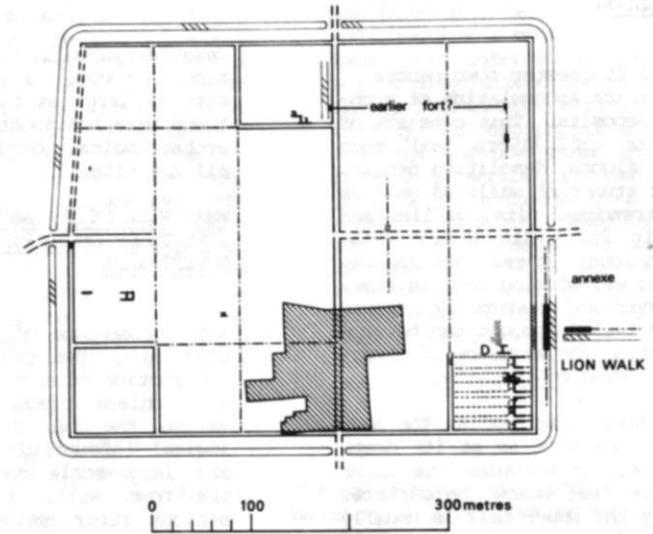


Fig 1: The Culver Street site in relation to the fortress (top) and the Roman city (below).

WHAT ARE THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS OF COLCHESTER LIKE?

Over much of Colchester town centre there is a thick accumulation of archaeological deposits. This consists of a succession of layers and such features as floors, demolition debris, make-up and stumps of walls as well as filled in trenches, pits, gullies and ditches (Fig 2). With modern excavation techniques, these remains can be disentangled, working back in time, layer by layer and feature by feature so that a detailed account can be compiled recording the sequence of structures encountered on the site.

Within the Roman town walls, the accumulation of deposits is at its deepest and generally occupies the upper eight to nine feet below the surface. Very broadly the upper half is usually medieval and later and the lower half is generally Roman. Pits and ditches may extend down further. The remains of any one period never survive intact, unfortunately, because they will have been damaged by later activities like the digging of pits and the construction of cellars. Nevertheless in almost every town centre excavation the archaeological remains have been found to have survived com-

paratively well. On past record alone, it would be remarkable if, on a site as large as the Culver Precinct, there were not substantial and complex archaeological deposits over nearly all the site.

WHAT WILL BE THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF DEVELOPING THE CULVER STREET AREA?

Any disturbance of the ground within Colchester town centre will mean the destruction of archaeological deposits and, unless preceded by full excavation, the loss of potential archaeological information. It follows that any large-scale redevelopment within the town walls is bound to have serious repercussions for the buried remains in the area affected.

The worst that could happen would be the digging of a large hole or basement more than eight or nine feet deep since this would result in the complete loss of an entire area of the town's archaeological remains. However, the normal procedure adopted during building works in the town-centre is to dig deep trenches for

strip foundations. These are always dug through the accumulation of remains, down into the underlying, naturally deposited sand and gravel. Although in theory the use of strip foundations means that small pockets of archaeological deposits survive untouched, usually the disturbance is so extensive that what little is left is almost meaningless. Trenches for strip foundations tend to be so deep that collapse of the surrounding archaeological deposits and their subsequent removal is almost inevitable. On some sites where strip foundations have been used, the whole site has been lowered to the top of the natural sand and gravel and the archaeological remains on the site thereby completely destroyed.

At the Culver Precinct, the area proposed for redevelopment is two and a half acres, equivalent to about 2% of the Roman town-centre. The development will involve a combination of a basement for underground services and surrounding ground level development using, presumably, strip foundations. Clearly the digging of a very large hole for the underground services will have very serious archaeological implications although, as explained above, the damage resulting from the use of strip foundations can be almost as bad. Lion Walk, where unavoidable devastation resulted from the construction of a similar basement, underlines the scale, irreversibility, and gravity of the impending loss at the Culver Precinct (Fig 3).

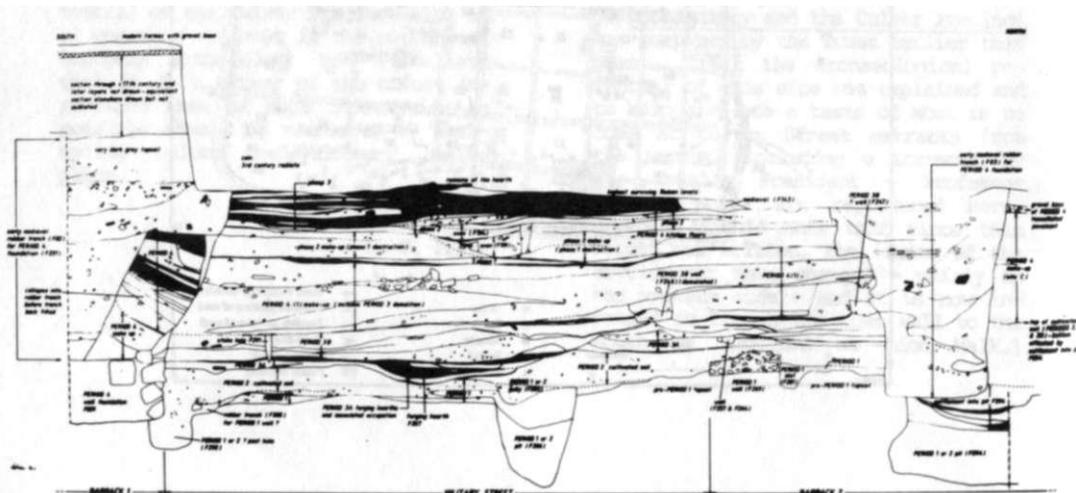


Fig 2: One of the many sections across the archaeological remains excavated at Lion Walk between 1971 and 1974.

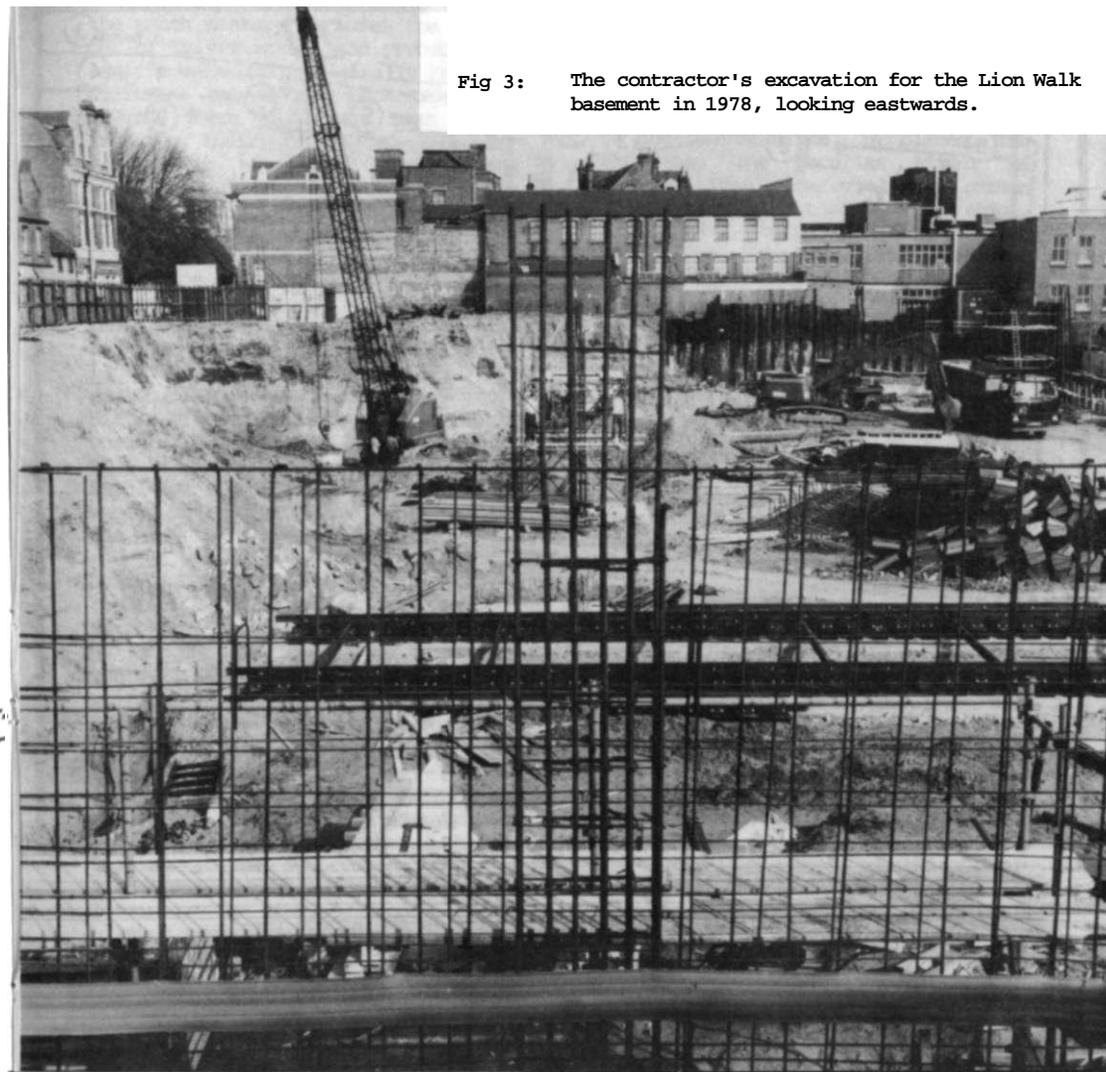


Fig 3: The contractor's excavation for the Lion Walk basement in 1978, looking eastwards.

WHAT ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES CAN BE
EXPECTED AT CULVER PRECINCT?

At the Culver Precinct site a variety of buildings and other structures, dating from about AD 43 to medieval times and later, can be expected. The earliest remains should belong to the legionary fortress which precede the Roman town. Our plan of the fortress is still largely conjectural (Fig 1) so that undoubtedly the largest contribution of the site will be the information that it should yield about

the military base. From present knowledge it seems likely that the main north-south street of the fortress should lie along the middle of the site on the same line as the street of the later Roman town and more or less under the modern Shewell Road. To judge by fortresses elsewhere, the street was probably lined by store-rooms and had officer's houses to the east and barrack blocks and other buildings to the west.

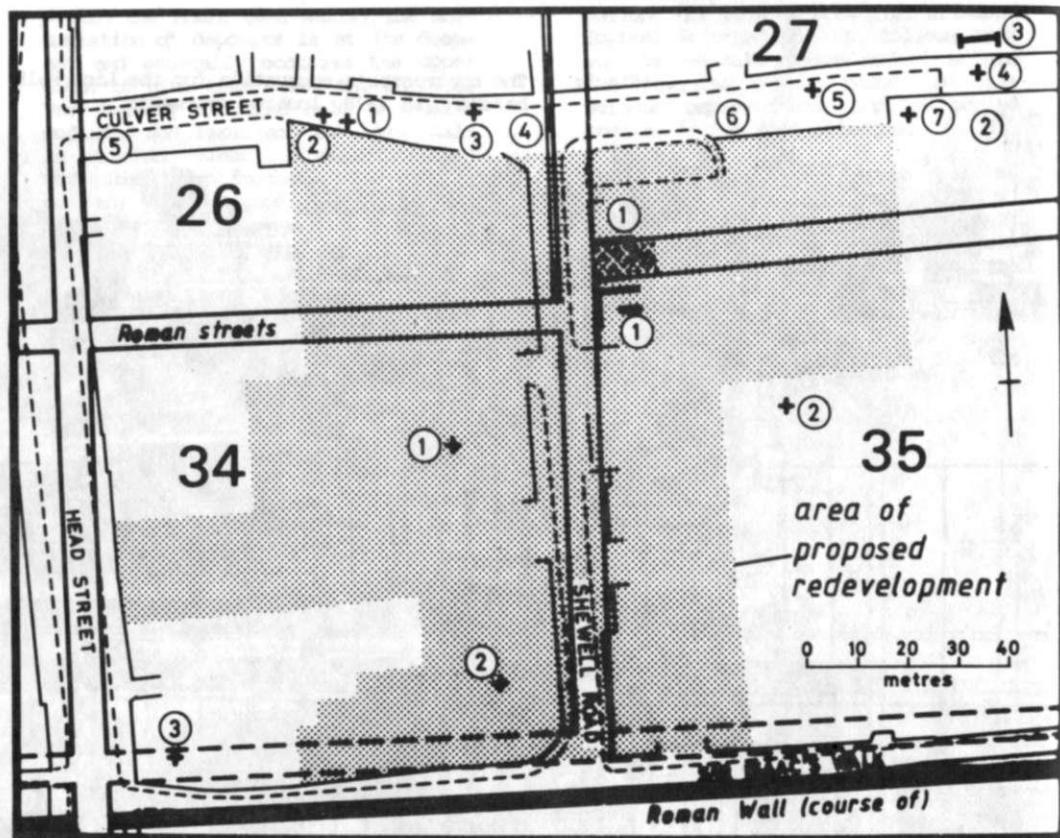


Fig 4: Previous finds and discoveries in and around the area of the proposed Culver Precinct.

Other unexpected finds at Lion Walk were two sunken huts belonging to the early Anglo-Saxon period, i.e. 5th to 7th centuries. Although by comparison to their Roman predecessors, these were humble little structures, their historical importance is considerable. They are the first and only buildings of this date to be found in Colchester, and show that after the end of the Roman period the town continued to be inhabited, although on a different basis. There must have been other huts in the town but these can only be found by chance. In an area as large as Culver Precinct there is a strong chance of others coming to light.

Part of the replanning of the town in the tenth century included the laying out of Culver Street and probably Sir Isaac's Walk (both originally known by different names) and from this time onwards there would have been buildings on their frontages. However since both were back streets and Shewell Road (Fig 4) is a twentieth century creation, the area within the Culver Precinct is likely to produce few sites of medieval and later buildings. The exception is Tesco's frontage on to Head Street which must have been continuously built up since the tenth century.

Again a reminder of the unpredictability of even quiet street frontages comes from Lion Walk where along the side of Eld Lane (a continuation of Sir Isaac's Walk) was found a complex series of medieval lime kilns, and by the side of Culver Street were discovered remains of a Norman stone house. There is no reason why Culver Precinct should not produce similar surprises.

The earliest remains of the Roman town will probably include adapted military structures as well as new purpose built buildings. On balance, domestic occupation seems most likely in this area of the Roman town but only by excavation can this be determined. Culver Street spans the corner of four *insulae* so that information about the structures in each of these should be obtained. The previous finds of tessellated pavements, mosaics and narrow

stone walls point to the presence of private houses. Remains uncovered should include the brick drain found in 1936 alongside the north-south road and the mosaic found in 1881 which, if it still survives, can be lifted and preserved. The tail of the rampart behind the town wall will also be available for excavation and thus more evidence about the date of the town wall should be recovered.

In general, large scale excavations will produce plans of successive houses built on the same sites. There is also the possibility of public buildings or other major structures which cannot be anticipated before excavations begin. Perhaps other mosaics will be found and, no doubt, other remains will be uncovered of buildings destroyed in the fire of the Boudiccan Revolt of AD 60-61. This latter level nearly always reveals important information about structures of the period since, in places, the fire had the peculiar effect of turning organic materials to carbon and so causing their preservation. Various food-stuffs and seeds and even a small bed have been found preserved in this way.

The obvious parallel to the Culver Precinct site is the Lion Walk area, excavated 1971-74. This was of similar size and yielded about five tons of pottery, bone, coins and other finds. The site records from here consist of about forty note-books and about three hundred large sheets of detailed plans and section drawings. Quite unexpected, but now of crucial importance to our understanding of Colchester's earliest years, was the finding at Lion Walk of early defences levelled some time before AD 60-61. This discovery led to the identification of the fortress and the establishment of a conjectural layout for it which was subsequently confirmed to a degree by the large-scale excavations at Balcerne Lane. Excavations at Balcerne Lane and Lion Walk have revolutionised our knowledge of Colchester's past and demonstrated the considerable potential of large-scale archaeological excavations.

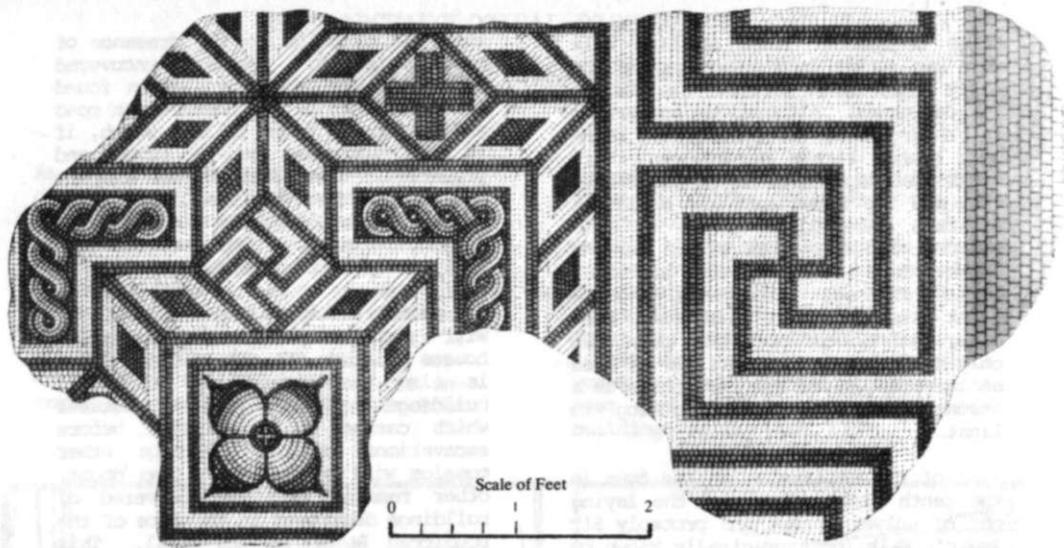


Fig 5: Mosaic pavement found in 1886 in Culver Street.

WHAT HAS BEEN POUND IN OR NEAR THE
CULVER PRECINCT SITE?

Discoveries in the past have been mainly along Culver Street itself when various trenches have cut through archaeological remains (Fig 4). It is very likely that the density of remains under this street is typical of the entire area. Notable finds have included two mosaic pavements, one on the fringes of the Culver Precinct site (Fig 5) and the other well within it (Cover). The watching brief carried out during the development of Nos. 1 to 3 Trinity Street, when an extensive range of archaeological material was observed, provides the clearest indication of the archaeological potential of the area (Fig 6).

Previous discoveries in and around the Culver Precinct site can be summarised insula by insula as follows:-

Insula 26

No. 1 A coloured mosaic pavement (Fig 45) was found when a drain was being laid in 1886 in Culver Street at a spot nearly opposite Bank Passage. The pavement lay five feet below the

modern surface and was covered by many fragments of brightly coloured plaster which had come from the walls of the room in which it lay. Only part of the pavement could be exposed since the rest of it extended under a building on the southern frontage of Culver Street. The pavement had a plain red tessellated border (rows of cubes made from fragments of tile about an inch across) which was probably the area of tessellation partly exposed in 1856 when another drain was being laid. The part exposed and drawn in 1886 (Fig 5) was lifted and is now in the Colchester and Essex Museum.

Nos. 2 & 3 In 1936, when a water-main was laid along Culver Street a series of Roman walls, pavements and other remains were observed. To the west of the mosaic (No. 1 above) two tessellated pavements and a piece of Roman wall were found (No. 2). One of the pavements was exposed for a length of 25 feet and must have been part of a corridor. Near the mosaic was uncovered what was taken to be the west wall of the room containing it. To the east (No. 3) were three more Roman walls, a platform of several courses of Roman tiles laid longitudinally, and an extensive layer of brick and rubble.

No. 4 In the same trench as nos. 3 and 4 a Roman drain was observed. This had been laid along the western side of the adjacent north-south Roman road. Only the top of its arch was exposed, but clearly it was of the standard 2nd century type which was built of Roman brick and was big enough for a man to walk along, crouched.

No. 5 The site of the Fleece Hotel was observed during redevelopment in 1970 but little of significance was noted.

Insula 27

No. 1 In 1938-39, contractor's excavations for the foundations of the public libraries were observed and a plan of the remains drawn (Fig 7). Included in this illustration is the position of the trench dug in 1934 which is the only systematic archaeological excavation to have been pre-

viously carried out within the area of the proposed Culver Precinct. The principle feature of the library site is an east-west Roman street which meets a north-south one at the western boundary of the site. To the north and south were observed tessellated pavements and narrow walls, presumably belonging to private Roman houses. The earliest Roman remains were nine feet below the modern surface.

No. 2 In 1977-78, the vacant plot of No. 1 Trinity Street was rebuilt and Nos 2 and 3 redeveloped. The area concerned is adjacent to the Culver Precinct Site. A small trial excavation was carried out by the Trust prior to the start of building operations and a close watch was kept on the early stages of the building work while foundations were being constructed (Fig 6). The Roman remains, observed mainly in the side of the builder's trenches, belonged to one or more Roman houses. Included were

Trinity Street 1977-8

showing the most important archaeological features revealed by the contractor's foundation trenches

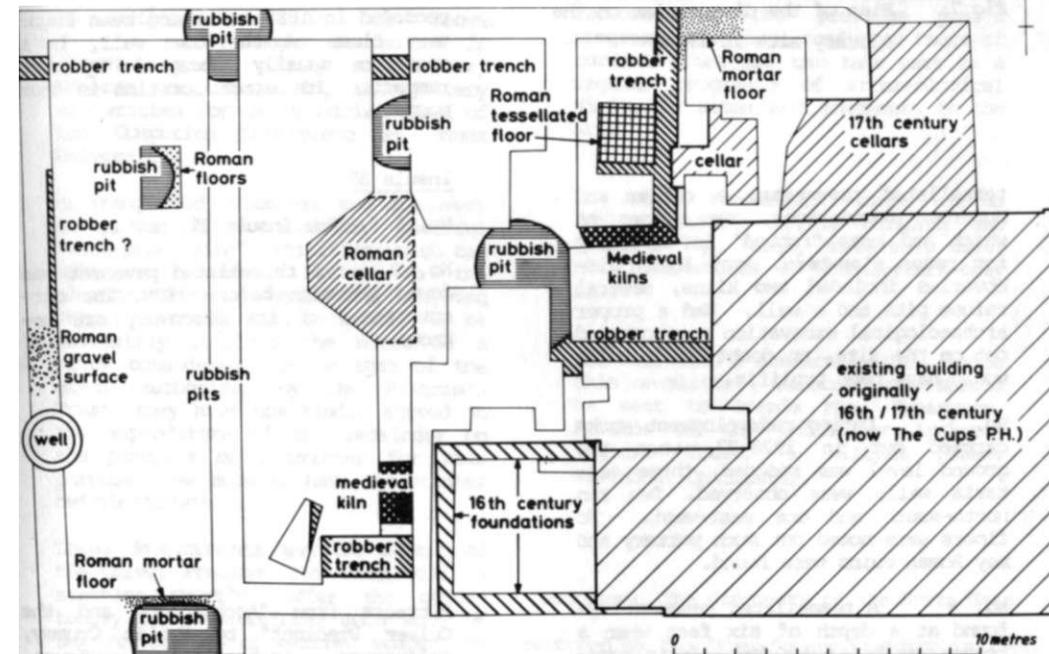


Fig 6: Plan of the observations made during the redevelopment of Nos 1 & 3 Trinity Street in 1977-78. The outlines of the contractor's trenches are indicated by thin lines.

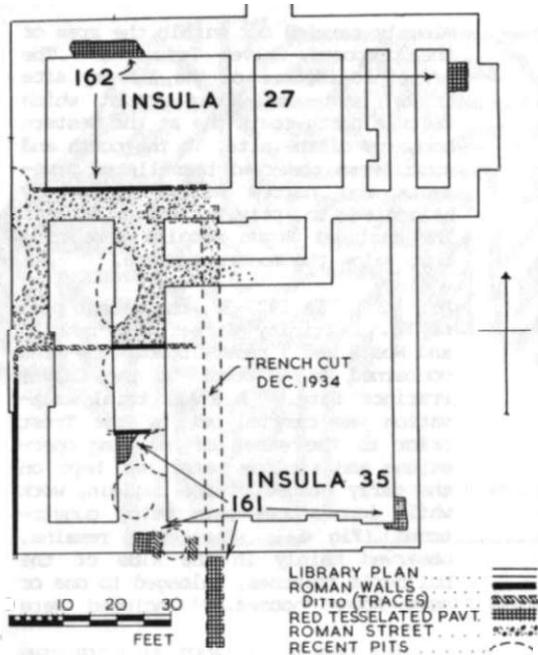


Fig 7: Plan of the discoveries on the library site in 1938.

tessellated pavements, a cellar and numerous foundations, the stones of which had been "robbed" in antiquity for reuse elsewhere. Post Roman discoveries included two kilns, several refuse pits and a well. Had a proper archaeological excavation been carried out on the site, no doubt the results would have been prolific.

No. 3 During redevelopment works carried out in 1926-27, when the ground level was reduced, three septaria walls were observed. Two ran north-south and one east-west. No floors were noted but such pottery and many Roman coins were found.

No. 4 A tessellated pavement was found at a depth of six feet when a trench was being dug for a drain sometime before 1909.

No. 5 In 1936, a two-foot wide Roman wall was cut through in Culver Street opposite the rear entrance to what was the Essex Standard offices.

No. 6 In about 1972, a tessellated pavement was observed about two feet down in a trench dug for a pipe along the south side of Culver Street.

No. 7 A foundation, supposedly Roman, was observed in 1880 in the garden of No. 1 Trinity Street.

Insula 34

No. 1 A coloured mosaic pavement was found in 1881. It was about five feet down and was overlain by fragments of coloured wall-plaster (see cover).

No. 2 A Roman pavement was found near Sir Isaac's Walk before 1871-72. Circumstances of the discovery are unknown.

No. 3 A tessellated pavement was recorded in 1888 as having been found very close to the town wall, in a position usually occupied by the rampart. Its exact location is thus suspect.

Insula 35

No. 1 See Insula 27, no. 1.

No. 2 A tessellated pavement was found sometime before 1888. The circumstances of its discovery are unknown.

Extracts from "Archaeology and the Culver Precinct" by Philip Crummy, Colchester Archaeological Trust, Spring 1980.



C.A.T. ENTERS THE WORLD OF THE MIGHTY MICRO !

In our last issue we reported on the study of Roman pottery being undertaken by Philip Kenrick and on our hopes of acquiring a microcomputer for the work. Our appeal for funds for this purpose was responded to most generously by the Pilgrim Trust, who covered the entire cost of the VECTOR MZ machine seen in use above.

We bought the "micro" in August, and a highly satisfactory program for cataloguing the pottery was written for us by Adrian Wheal of the Computing Department at Essex university.

An unexpected bonus was the discovery that the micro includes powerful "word-processing" facilities which can make an enormous saving in the clerical work of typing and retyping report and other text material. As we ultimately obtained the micro at a price considerably below that of the grant authorised by the Pilgrim's Trust, they have now kindly agreed to the expenditure of the remainder on the purchase of a printer for this purpose. We hope to have the printer before Christmas.

These developments and the advent of the Culver Precinct dig which will be starting shortly, offer the opportunity of computerising much more of our records at an earlier stage. We are eagerly examining the possibilities.....

THE FRIENDS OF THE COLCHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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

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

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

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

You will find a membership form inside this newsletter. Subscriptions should be sent to Brenda May, Treasurer, Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust, 5 William Close, Wivenhoe, Colchester.

Backpage: The discovery of the North Gate, recorded by the Essex County Standard in 1944.

Courtesy of Essex County Newspapers.

BROWN AND SON LTD.
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Essex County Standard

ESTABLISHED 1831.

Vol. CXXIV, No. 2986.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 1944.

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PLANS, DEEDS, DOCUMENTS
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Harvest Nearly Home Despite Recent Rain

FINE WHEAT & BARLEY YIELDS: MILK WARNING

The rain has done much to help the crops in the Essex district, and the harvest is now nearly home. The wheat and barley crops are in good condition, and the yields are expected to be fine. However, the rain has also caused some damage to the milk crops, and a warning is issued to farmers to be careful of their cows.

This Has Thrilled Archaeologists More Than Anything In 20 Years



THE ROMAN GATEWAY FOUND AT COLCHESTER.

Colchester Roman Gateway Found

Archaeologists have discovered a Roman gateway at Colchester, which is believed to be the largest of its kind in the world. The gateway was found during excavations at the site of the Roman city of Eborac. It is made of large stone blocks and is over 100 feet long. The discovery is a major find for archaeologists and has thrilled them more than anything in 20 years.

This Week's News from the War Fronts

Ace Missing: D Day Hero Killed Japs' Captives: Italy Awards

AIR-ACE MISSING
 Squadron Leader Clapping of Colchester

MISSING AFTER RAID
 —GETS HOME

PRISONERS IN JAPANESE HANDS
 List of Over Hundred From Colchester District



MISSING AFTER RAID — GETS HOME

GALLANTRY IN ITALY
 Awards to Colchester Officers



GALLANTRY IN ITALY

THE BAN HAS GONE
 And a Minister "Incursion" Has Started

The ban on the sale of alcohol has been lifted, and a minister has made an incursion into the field. This is a significant development for the public, as it allows for the sale of alcohol once again.

THE LAST OF THE BAN BREAKERS

CARELESS FIRES IN ENGL

There have been several cases of careless fires in England, which have caused significant damage and loss of life. It is a reminder for the public to be careful with fire.

I Have Shot My Wife's Bures Tragedy

HARVEST FIELD ACCIDENT

A tragic incident has occurred in a harvest field, where a man has shot his wife. The incident is being investigated, and it is a sad reminder of the dangers of firearms.

IT'S A JOY IF IT COMES FROM JOYS

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Hospital's Fear Patients Will Suffer Under Health Scheme

The fear is expressed that patients in hospitals will suffer under the new health scheme. The chairman of the hospital board has expressed his concerns, stating that the scheme may lead to a reduction in the quality of care provided to patients.

SHOP at the CO-OP.

The CO-OP is open to help customers of Ladies, Men, and Children.

AUTUMN CLOTHING

Extra clothing coupons available for children from Sept. 1st to Oct. 31st.

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