



CATALOGUE

NEWS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS IN COLCHESTER

number 11

summer 1982



CULVER STREET SITE

ROMAN LOTTERY BY THE TOWN

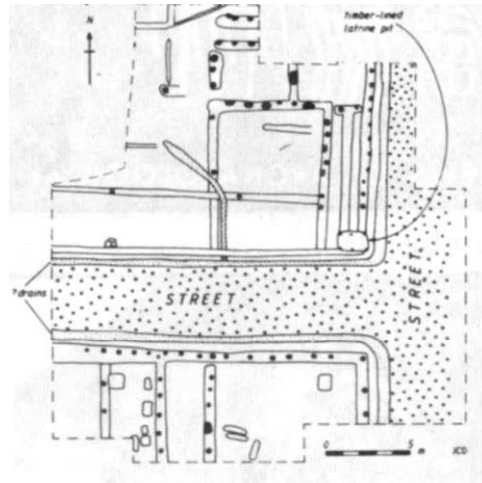
CULVER STREET

THE TRIBUNES' HOUSES

The present phase of the excavation of the Culver Street dig has been completed, producing important and unexpected material right until the end. The site concerned lies behind the former Public Library where parts of two military buildings were found. These were houses which belonged to tribunes, junior officers of the legion.

The details of the corners of the two tribunes' houses have now been clarified and we can see that these parts of the buildings consisted of ranges of small rooms that probably provided the service quarters of each house. The corner room of the northern house was the most interesting. It contained a large timber-lined latrine pit (see Catalogue 10) into which emptied a drain that ran across the centre of the room. The floor of the room had been of wood and there may have been a wooden lid over the drain.

* The remains of the tribunes' houses.



The latrine pit was located in the very corner of the building so that it could easily be emptied by bringing a horse and cart up to the back of the house. The pit contained some unusual imported pottery (described on page 5 by Robin Symonds).

When these houses were demolished in AD 49 the posts that supported the walls were either pulled out or sawn off and their ends left to rot in the ground. The clay from the walls was spread evenly over the site as a base upon which the succeeding buildings were constructed. Because we found no tile fragments in this layer it seems possible that the buildings had been thatched. The absence of plaster fragments shows that the walls had been left undecorated.

Between the two tribunes' houses was a gravelled street, and close to the outer walls of each building was a shallow ditch to carry away rainwater from the street and roofs.

BUILDING METHODS

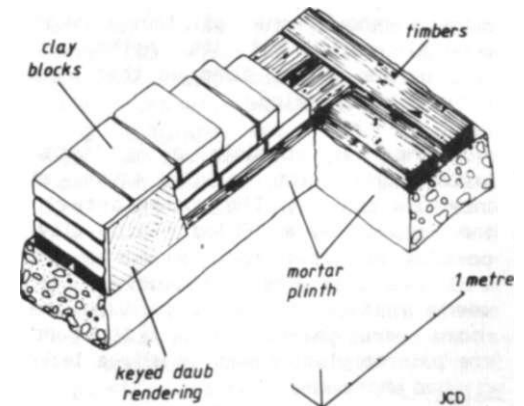
The walls of the tribunes' houses had been constructed in a way that was



* Part of a wall of a barrack block. Above: during excavation. Below: plan showing method of construction.

typical of Roman military building elsewhere. A series of wooden posts were set in a deep trench, the trench was backfilled, and the spaces between the posts then filled with day blocks.

The external walls of the barracks in Colchester were built by an entirely different method. The diagram given here shows the technique used. A plinth of pebbles and mortar was constructed to stand above ground level; wooden shuttering was used to support it until the mortar dried - we have found several instances where the shuttering was not securely joined and the pebbles and mortar have squeezed



out between the boards. Timbers were then placed along the plinth and above these were laid the unfired clay blocks that formed the wall proper. The faces of the wall were rendered with a thin coating of daub which, on the inside face, was scored or impressed with shallow grooves to provide a key for wall plaster.

The purpose of the plinth was to provide a strong and stable base for the clay block wall and to raise it above the ground to prevent the foot of the wall being exposed to the damp. Although plinths like these have been found elsewhere in the fortress, (eg at Lion Walk) this is the first occasion on which any of the clay block superstructure has been found in position. Because of the importance of this find, a large section of the plinth with its clay superstructure has been boxed and lifted complete in the hope that it will be possible to put it on display in the museum.

The internal walls and partitions within the barracks were of much lighter construction and seem to have been of studwork with daub infill. Because these buildings were retained for occupation in the early civilian town, which was made from the redundant fortress, their internal arrangements were modified and we cannot always be sure that all the walls destroyed at the time of the Boudican revolt were necessarily of military origin. The diagram shows one of the civilian internal walls, but its method of construction is the same as that used in the military period.

The wall consists of a timber ground-plate with upright studs at intervals along it. The spaces between the studs were filled with clay, possibly in blocks, and the face of the wall was plastered and painted. It seems that in the military period the rooms were generally undecorated and the painted plaster was usually a later civilian improvement.

In the military and civilian periods the floors of the rooms were usually of sand or day. In one part of the site however we found two successive wooden floors, the later one having been burnt in the Boudican revolt. The floor consisted of planks resting on timber joists.

PRE-ROMAN FINDS

Some of the most interesting finds from the last stages of the excavation were pieces of Iron Age and Bronze Age pottery from the soil below the earliest Roman layers. One small pit contained several large sherds of a bucket-shaped Bronze Age vessel. There did not appear to be any pre-Roman structures so although there was pre-Roman activity on the site we do not yet have evidence of occupation on top of the hill before the Twentieth Legion established its fortress here shortly after the invasion in AD 43.

THE NEXT PHASE OF THE EXCAVATION

Delays in starting the Culver Street development meant that by the end of March we had excavated almost all the areas that could be made available to us. We must now wait until plans for the development are finalised before the demolition of the buildings that will allow the excavation to continue. So far we have excavated less than half the total area that we wish to excavate before the development begins. Already much new knowledge about Roman Colchester has come to light - the military buildings and the late Roman basilica are particularly important (see Catalogue 10) - and we can be certain that more important material is waiting to be discovered in the second stage of the excavation. Let us hope there is not long to wait.

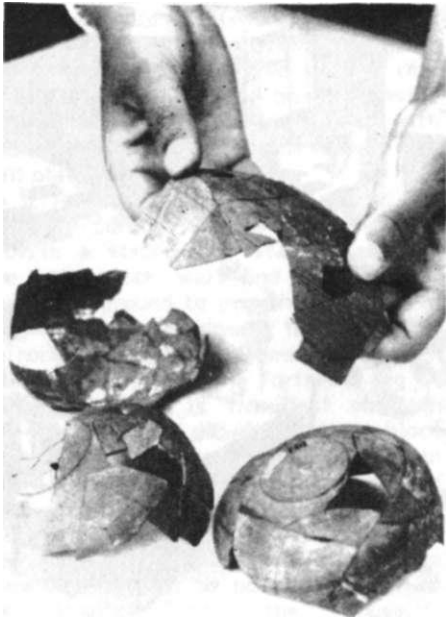
N.A.Smith



POTTERY BY THE TON

The pottery in the lowermost features of the recent excavations in Culver Street is an extraordinary confirmation of Colchester's primary importance in the Roman invasion of Britain. The most remarkable group is a set of at least ten small bowls in an extremely fine grey fabric known as 'eggshell' ware, probably from the region of Cosa in northern Italy. The walls of these bowls are often less than 1 mm thick. They were found in the large latrine pit adjacent to one of the tribune's quarters in the legionary fortress, and must therefore have been discarded sometime between about 44 and 49 AD. But these in fact

represent only a part of the fine wares from these early features, which contained a wide variety of the best of Roman tablewares at the time of the invasion. Aside from the ever-present plates, dishes, bowls and cups in terra sigillata from the Toulouse region of southern France, there were cups from Spain, a range of beakers and cups made near Lyons, in central France, and there were also imported coarse wares, such as amphorae from Spain and southern France, and mortaria from northern France. There were also fine wares such as mica-dusted bowls and beakers, and another sort of 'eggshell' ware known as terra



* Above: small vessels made in 'eggshell' ware. Below: the pottery team from Colchester appearing on Blue Peter.

nigra. These wares were probably imported from the continent, but from unknown sources. Most imported wares are of course represented at the museum from earlier excavations, but many are known almost nowhere else in Britain, and certainly nowhere but at Colchester have such large quantities of early Roman fine wares been found.

Although it is clear that the invasion of Britain and the establishment of the legionary fortress at Colchester brought with it the best in early Roman tablewares, it was not long before the potters themselves arrived in the town to reproduce their wares here. Alongside the quantities of imported wares we have found equal quantities, or more, of very similar wares probably made locally throughout the period before the Boudican revolt. These imitate most closely the range of beakers and cups from Lyons, which commonly have a sprinkled sand decoration known as 'roughcasting'. The sand, which seems to have been applied simply in order to make the vessels easier to grip, is covered with a colour-coating, which is thick and chocolate-like on the Lyons versions,

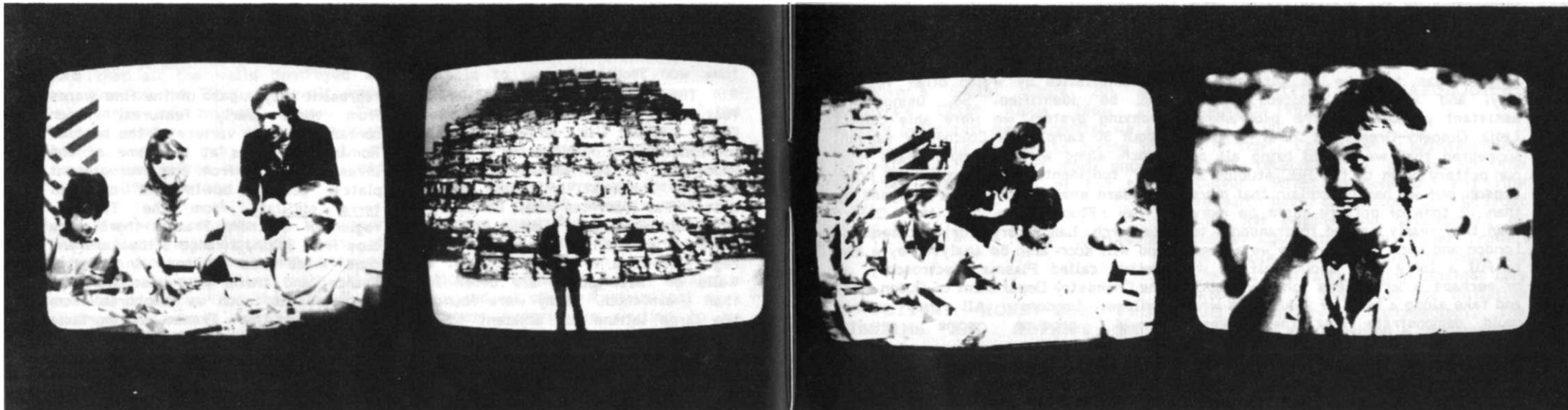
but tends to be either quite thin or worn right off on the local Colchester versions. These early Colchester colour-coated wares were the first products of Colchester's pottery industries, which, after the brief interruption of the Boudican revolt in AD 61, continued to manufacture pottery of the highest quality made in Britain, from the beginning to the end of Roman Britain.

INDEXING 12 AND A HALF TONS OF POTTERY, WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

Since its creation in 1971, the Colchester Archaeological Trust has been accumulating pottery at a rate of more than a ton per year. The first Pottery Analyst hired by the Trust, Dr Philip Kenrick, established a very effective system for cataloguing the Roman pottery, including a 'Type Series' for fabrics and forms, and a micro-computer programme for registering the pottery for statistical analysis. In the months after I succeeded him, I came to feel that this registering process needed to be

greatly speeded up if we were to realize the potential of such a large amount of pottery within a reasonable amount of time. The best way of doing this seemed to be to catalogue the pottery in two stages, in other words to prepare for the final studying of the pottery by first making all the pottery into a sort of library, with an index.

The method of creating this index was inspired by Mrs Sue Wade, who as the finds assistant for the Culver Street excavations had organized a remarkably efficient team of volunteers and Friends of the Trust, for washing and marking the pottery from the site. When the excavations came to an end last March, it was feared that this loyal team would have to be disbanded, and the impetus for such voluntary work would be lost during the wait for a new excavation. The job of indexing the pottery seemed ideal for them, and so it has proved. Since April we have already indexed nearly three tons of Roman pottery, and soon we will begin indexing the medieval and post-medieval pottery as well. We would certainly like to take this opportunity to thank



the volunteers, who have taken on the new work with gusto, some of whom travel considerable distances and/or give up considerable amounts of their time to come and help. The team has been expanding, including pupils from various schools such as Colchester Royal Grammar School, Philip Morant Comprehensive School, and girls from Colchester County High School who are working towards their Duke of Edinburgh Awards. Other groups of students are planning to help in their summer holidays. We should also soon see the start of a Manpower Services Scheme, which will employ six school-leavers on a full-time basis. Having said all that, we could still use more help! the work will probably continue well into the autumn, and anyone who would like to volunteer is welcome to come to the site at Culver Street (weekdays, 9 to 4). As you can see from the photographs, we work outside when the weather is good, the work is not too taxing, and our sunburns are beginning to turn into nice tans.

The pottery indexing project seems to have been attracting quite a lot of press coverage, which is gratifying because it is a way for us to show that post-excavation work can be as interesting as the digging itself. But we have been surprised to find that interest in our work has now spread as far as national television! Blue Peter began to take an interest in May, and we were visited by an assistant producer of the programme, Lelia Guinery-Green. At first it was suggested that we should bring all of our pottery down to the BBC studios in London, but we had to explain that more than 12 tons of pottery might be more than they really wanted to transport to London and back in a day. So we agreed to fill a lorry with about half of it, or perhaps a little less (oh, my back), and take along a team of volunteers who could demonstrate how the process works, from washing and marking the potsherds' to bagging them up for storage. The programme was broadcast on June 17th.

In terms of archaeological research, the indexing system has already been proving its worth and efficiency. The object of it is to provide a means of easy access to pottery of any particular type. Partly as a way of testing the system, we recently began a study of terra sigillata, or 'samian', made at Colchester. This very common fine pottery (that red glossy stuff you find everywhere!) was made in large quantities at workshops in southern and central France in the 1st and 2nd centuries respectively, and in north-eastern France and the Rhineland in the later Roman period. Attempts were made to make samian in Britain, and the only one of these attempts which came close to matching the quality of the continental samian was here at Colchester, where the local samian is of a very high quality indeed. Colchester samian is often rather difficult to distinguish, however, from the continental types; as a result it has only been securely identified in the region of Colchester, and there has never been any positive confirmation that it was widely distributed in Britain. As a way of getting to grips with this problem, we have been having a number of our best examples scientifically analysed, to be sure that there have been no misidentifications, and from them to establish definite typological characteristics by which other vessels can be identified. So, using the indexing system, we were able to collect about 30 samples of Colchester samian, which, along with 7 samples each from four continental workshops and some standard sherds, have been analysed by X-ray Fluorescence at the Oxford Research Laboratory for Archaeology, and will soon also be analysed by a new method called Plasma Spectroscopy, at the Chemistry Department of Queen Mary College, London. All that science should produce some results!

Robin P. Symonds

NOTES

THE BIANCHI ENSEMBLE AND A NEW TOWN TRAIL

Since 1974 a branch of the national Young Archaeologists Club has met at the Castle Museum each month. Members of the club, visiting school parties and tourists often ask for guides to the town's remains. There are, of course, museum guides and booklets as well as our own 'Guide to Colchester's Roman Wall' but nothing specifically designed for young people. What was needed was an introductory archaeological town trail. The problem, as always, was where to find enough money to produce it.

By a lucky chance an offer came from Howard Marshall, one of the directors of the Vineyard Press, printers of the Young Archaeologists Club magazine. He suggested using his own orchestral ensemble to put on a charity concert and offered the services of Vineyard Press for publicity and tickets.

On Wednesday 7th April about 200 people came to St Mary's Arts Centre to hear the Bianchi Ensemble play two pieces, one based on the other - Beethoven's Septet (Opus 20) and Schubert's Octet (Opus 166). The players performed magnificently; we all enjoyed the wine and snacks during the interval; and the concert made enough for the first print-run of the town trail.

Mike Corbishley

A POTTERY MONEY-BOX FROM WILLIAMS AND GLYNN'S BANK

In addition to the excavations, the Trust keeps an eye on all building work in and around the town so that any



* Glass and pottery from the rear of Williams and Glynn's Bank in Head Street.

objects or structures found during the course of these projects can be recorded. Especially rewarding was a large quantity of broken pottery and glass recently found in a brick-lined pit behind the Williams and Glynn's Bank in Head Street. Some of the pieces could be fitted together to make three almost complete vessels (see photo). These date to about the 16th century and consist of a beautiful glass goblet, a German stoneware jug and a brown-glazed pottery money-box.

THE BRITISH ARCHAEOLOGICAL AWARDS 1981

The Colchester Archaeological Trust received two awards for the Culver Street excavation and the research being carried out by the Trust into the origins and development of Roman Colchester. The 'Silver Trowel' is an award sponsored by the Legal and General Assurance Society Limited. This was given to the Trust for initiative and originality in archaeology. The Trust was also awarded a certificate of merit by Country Life under its category of best project undertaken by a professional archaeological group in 1981.



* The Mayor of Colchester, Roger Browning, unveils a descriptive plaque at the Balcerne Gate

RECENT MEETINGS

The new year started with our AGM, which was held in January on the same day as the AGM of the Trust. The two business meetings rapidly followed one another in the morning, and in the afternoon both groups met up for guided site tours followed by illustrated talks in the Public Library by Nick Smith on recent excavations and Philip Crummy on Colchester's Roman theatres. The weather stayed fine for us, despite the terrible Arctic conditions of early January, and well over a hundred Friends managed to attend.

March saw us gathering outside the Balcerne Gate to watch His Worship the Mayor of Colchester unveil a plaque (donated by the Friends) which explains to visitors the present visible remains and what the gate would have looked like in Roman times. We then moved on to Tymperleys, the former home of Mr Bernard Mason, to hear a very interesting talk by David Clarke, the curator of the Museum and a member of the Friends, on the history of the house and the collection of Colchester clocks donated by Mr Mason with his

house to the Borough. We were able to look over the house and grounds and we found that there were so many clocks in the cellar that if they had all struck together we would have been deafened!

In May Mike Corbishley led us out to Mersea Island for an opportunity to crawl into the East Mersea tumulus, and to look round West Mersea Museum with its fascinating collection of objects from around the world,

DATES FOR TOUR DIARY

First of all, may I thank all of you who took the time and trouble to fill in and return the questionnaire on our outings. The results have been very worthwhile, with some imaginative ideas for future trips.

The day trip this year is on Saturday July 10th. The coach will leave the War Memorial by the Castle Park promptly at 9.00 a.m., and take us to the Early Neolithic causewayed camp at Maxey (Cambs) being excavated by the Welland Valley Project. Friends are advised to bring stout boots or

Wellingtons as the site is waterlogged! We shall meet our guides, Francis Pryor and Maisie Taylor, at Barnack Church, which will give us an opportunity for a quick look at some Saxon architecture. After Maxey we move on to Peterborough for lunch and a guided tour of the Cathedral at 2.30 p.m. The coach will leave Peterborough at 4.30 p.m. Book your seat (£3.00) with Brenda May, 5 William Close, Wivenhoe, Essex.

On Saturday September 11th there will be a coach trip to Kelvedon for a walkabout of the town led by Mike Eddy of Essex County Council's Archaeology Section. Mike has been excavating in Kelvedon over the last few years, and has made several important discoveries. The coach will leave the War Memorial at 1.15 p.m. Seats are £1.00. Book with Brenda May, address above.

The November coach trip will be on Saturday 13th to Mount Bures, to see the remains of the Norman motte (a wooden tower built on a steep man-made mound) and the church. We shall then either move on to Bures to see the De Vere Chapel, or return to Colchester via Great Tey church. Seats will be £1.00. Book with Brenda May.

Friends are advised that they come on trips at their own risk, though insurance cover has been taken out on behalf of the organization.

Nina Crummy

CHANGES AT THE FRIENDS AND THE TRUST

Mike Corbishley, after five very successful years as Organizer for the Friends, stood down at the AGM last January. His efforts on our behalf are much appreciated and we hope that despite Mike's busy schedule he will still be able to find time to continue his close association with the Friends in the future. Colin Bellows takes his place.

At about the same time, Hugh Thompson could not be persuaded to take on a second three-year term of office as chairman of the Trust. Pressure of work prevailed - especially his recent appointment as chairman of the Lincoln Archaeological Trust. We thank him warmly for his support and encouragement. Our new chairmen is Professor John Wilkes from the Institute of Archaeology in London.

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.

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 73p, Family Membership £2.00 and Institutions £1.00. Those who live too far away to attend meetings or go on trips can receive newsletters only at a reduced rate of £1.00.

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

Philip Crummy (Editor)

* Cover: Sue Wade, Jonathan Drake and Kick Smith with the Silver Trowel Award.

LION WALK CHURCH

The next site for excavation in Colchester is expected to be the Lion Walk United Reformed Church. The site will probably be made available later

this summer for a dig lasting three weeks. The investigation will be sponsored by the Norwich Union. (The aerial photograph was taken in 1972 during the excavations at Lion Walk.)