

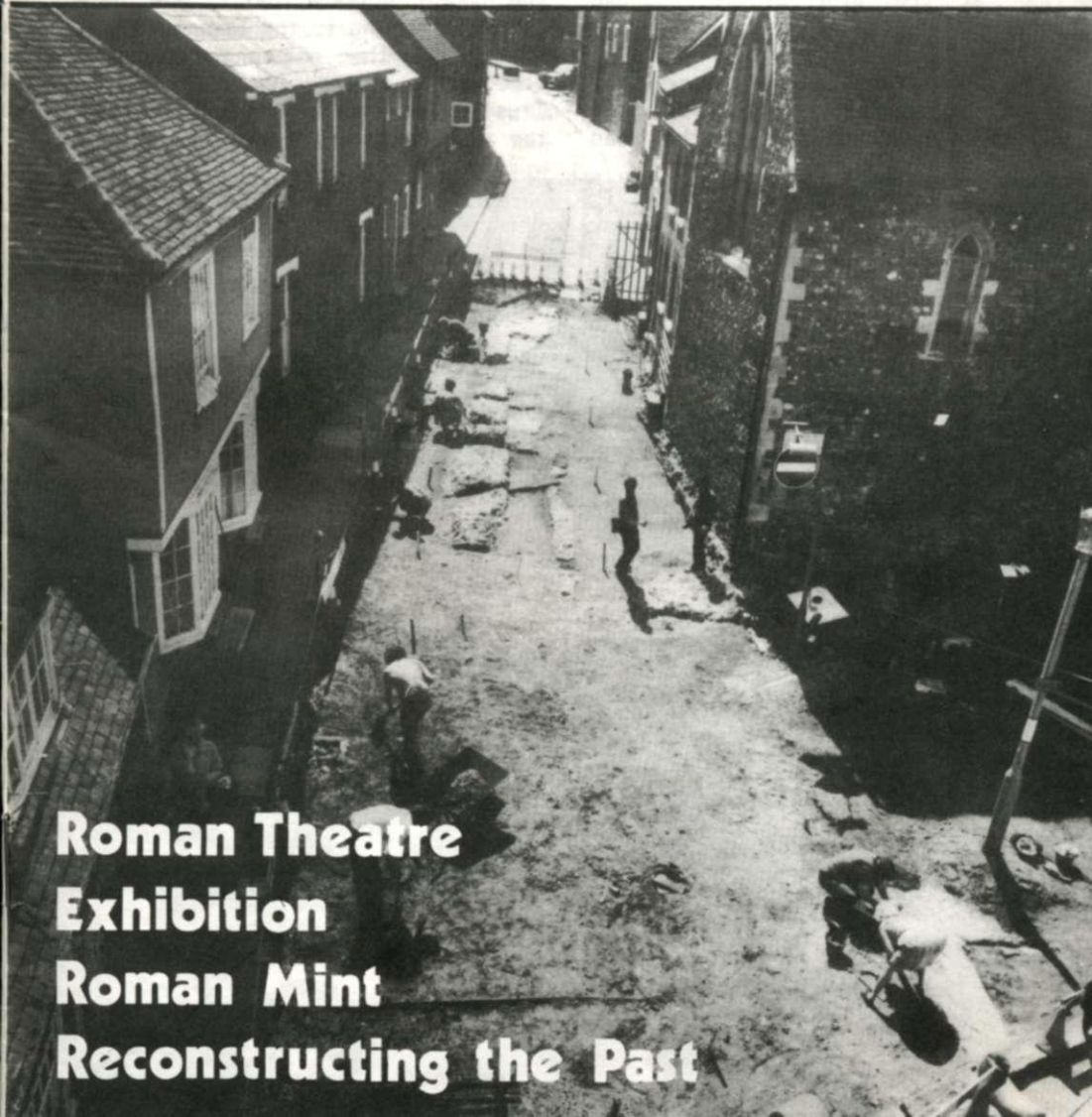


CATALOGUE

NEWS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS IN COLCHESTER

Number 15

Summer 1984



**Roman Theatre
Exhibition
Roman Mint
Reconstructing the Past**

THE ROMAN THEATRE

It is very rare in Colchester to get the chance to dig under a street; it is rarer still to find Roman foundations still intact and just under the modern surface. But this is just what happened earlier this year at the site of the Roman theatre.

Maidenburgh Street was in a very poor state of repair so the Borough Council decided to replace the road

and pavements with a single surface of paved bricks. To do this the existing surface and its make-up (all modern) had to be removed and as a result the foundations of the theatre were exposed. They lay so close to the modern surface that in one place tar was sticking to the Roman mortar. The Council then rearranged its work schedule to allow a few days for the Trust to examine the remains and make the necessary records.

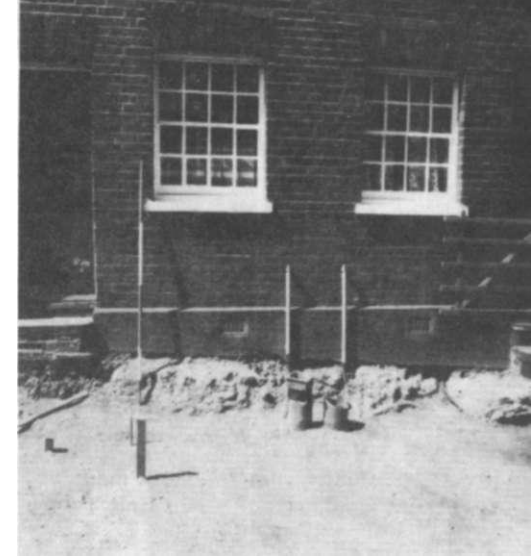


The foundations had been very cut about by modern service trenches, especially those for sewers. Nevertheless, more than enough survived to enable some valuable detail to be added to the plan of the theatre as we now know it.

The main part of the theatre was D-shaped in outline. The curved part was the auditorium and the straight part the stage. Readers of CATALOGUE may remember in issue number 10 how during building works in 1981 the existence of the theatre was proved and the outline of its plan was determined. Now some details relating to the eastern edge of the auditorium and the eastern limit of the stage area can be added.

It had been realised for some years that the north wall of St Helen's Chapel had been built directly on top of the foundations of the theatre. Recent discoveries have confirmed that the base of the Chapel's east wall also was Roman. This prompts the question, 'Were the other two walls of the Chapel also on Roman foundations?' If so, then the tradition (in the medieval 'Colchester Chronicle') that the building was of Roman origin will have proved to be well founded. In other words, it could have been more than simply a post-Roman building incorporating Roman foundations but a restored part of the theatre. Indeed it is just conceivable that this part of the theatre had some kind of association with Christianity in the later Roman period. (As a parallel, a baptismal font was inserted in the Roman period into one of the entrances of the amphitheatre at Carnuntum on the Rhine.)

The curved foundations found in 1931 are to be on permanent display in a



Not only was St Helen's Chapel built on Roman foundations but so to were some of the adjacent Victorian houses.

specially-built house in Maidenburgh Street - it is not open yet but the foundations and the part of the floor of the theatre can be seen through the windows. The position of the outer curved foundation under the new street surface is also indicated by different coloured bricks to give the visitor an idea of the scale and position of the building.

The plan of the theatre is proving to be unusually complex because there were other walls south of the auditorium. The resurfacing of Maidenburgh Street is being done a section at a time. More foundations will be revealed this summer as the work progresses southwards up the street away from the main part of the theatre.

Philip Crummy

EXHIBITION OPEN...

From June 8th to October 31st an exhibition on Archaeology in Colchester is on show in the Castle Museum, Colchester.

The exhibition is composed of photographs and finds and aims to present to the public at a general level the major discoveries made by the Trust during the 1970s and 1980s.

David Clarke, curator of the Museum, has provided a screen outlining archaeological work in the town before 1970, and has acquired on loan three pots found in the first kiln excavated in Colchester.

Apart from this 'Early Years' section, the exhibition screens cover the following headings: 1) Rescue Archaeology, 2) Colchester Archaeological Trust Ltd, 3) The Excavation Process (What we do, and How we do it), 4) Camulodunum, 5) The Roman Fortress, 6) The Early Colony, 7) Roman Public Buildings, 8) Roman Life, 9) Roman Cemeteries, 10) Anglo-Saxon, Norman and Medieval Colchester, 11) The Post-excavation Process (Re-excavating a finished site, and What happens to the finds), and 12) How To Keep In Touch, which of course highlights the Friends.

There are five main cases of finds, military equipment and imported pottery from 'The Roman Fortress'; early jewellery, household items, locally-made pottery, and carbonised organic finds all from pre-Boudican levels in 'The Early Colony'; a wide range of local and imported ceramics, figurines, and other small finds in

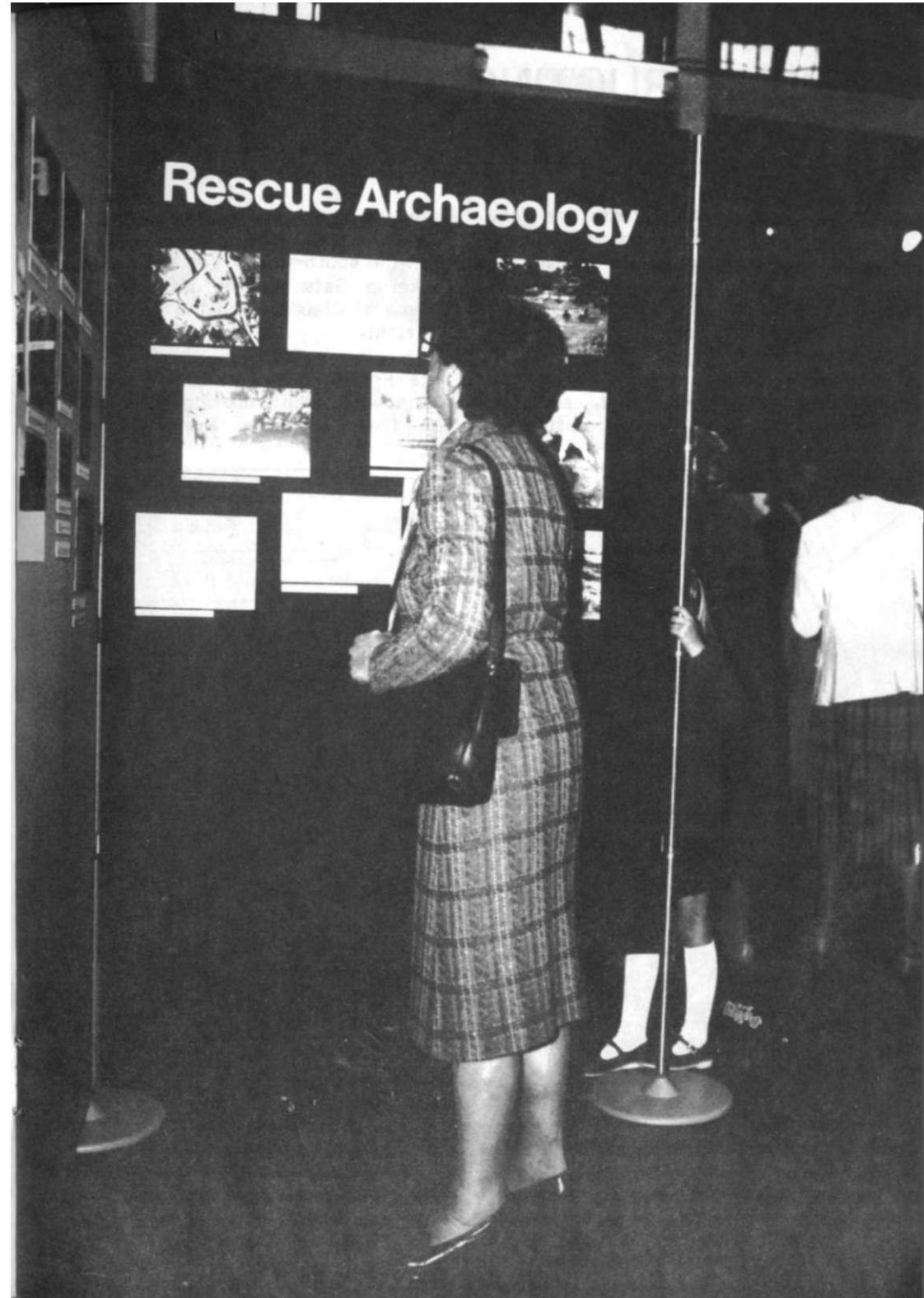
'Roman Life'; jewellery and other grave goods in 'Roman Cemeteries'; and, less spectacular perhaps, but equally important, Anglo-Saxon pottery and other finds and Colchester-made medieval pottery in 'Anglo-Saxon and Medieval'. A sixth case shows the publications of the Trust over the years, and the two awards won by the Trust in 1981.

Lastly, the exhibition includes an audio-visual display entitled "Digging a Roman Cemetery" which tells the story of the Butt Road cemetery excavation, why it was dug, what we found out about Roman burial practice, and what we can learn from the skeletal remains of the population of late Roman Colchester.

The exhibition was financed by the Colchester and Essex Museum, who also lent us the expertise of their designer, Annette Burrows. Annette translated my original scheme into a reality which far outshone my hopes. Many other members of the Trust and Museum staff loaned their own particular skills, and they too are gratefully thanked.

The Castle Museum is open on Mondays to Saturdays from 10.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m., summer Sundays 2.30-5.00 p.m. Admission charges are Adults 60p, Children and UB40 holders 20p, and OAPs free. The exhibition covers most of the ground floor area, and runs until the end of October.

Nina Crummy

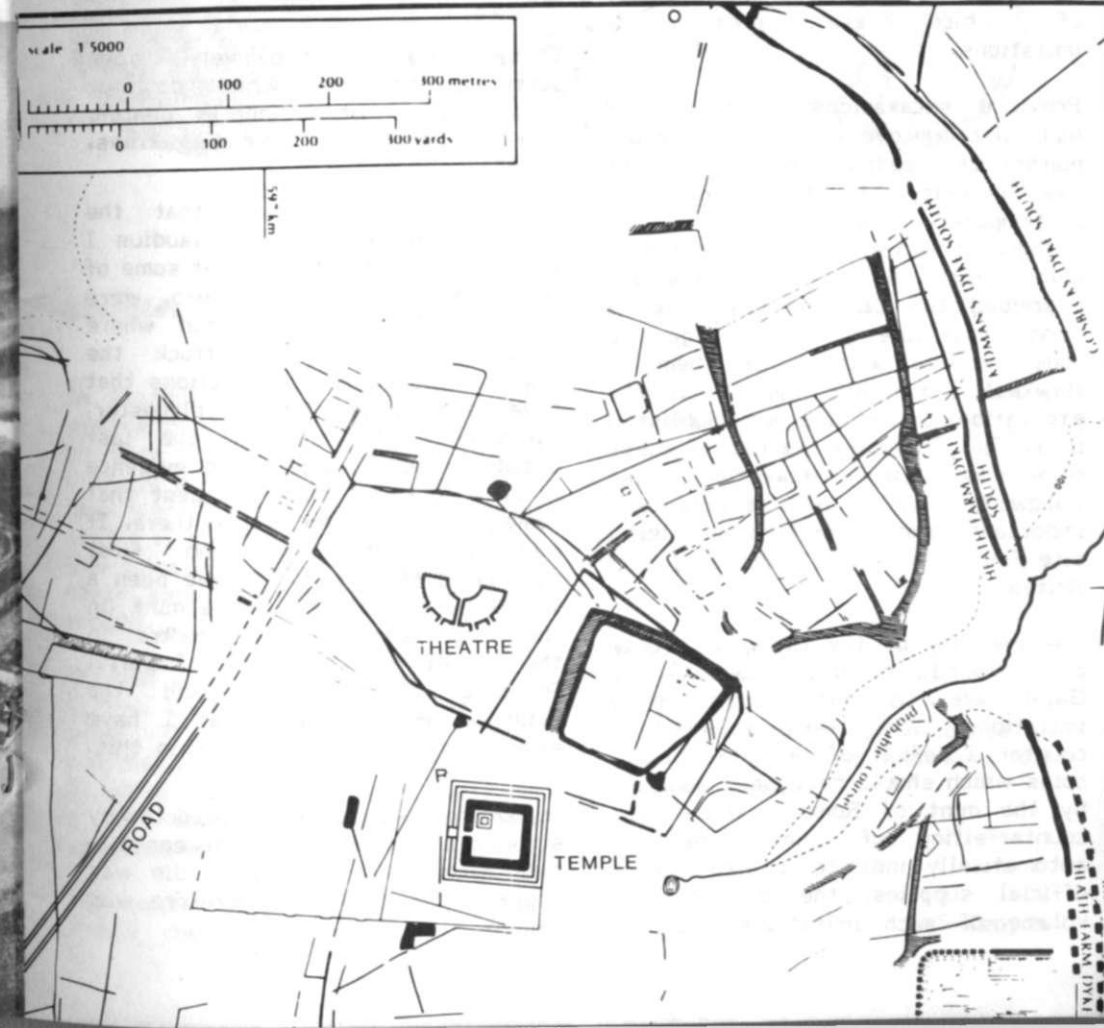
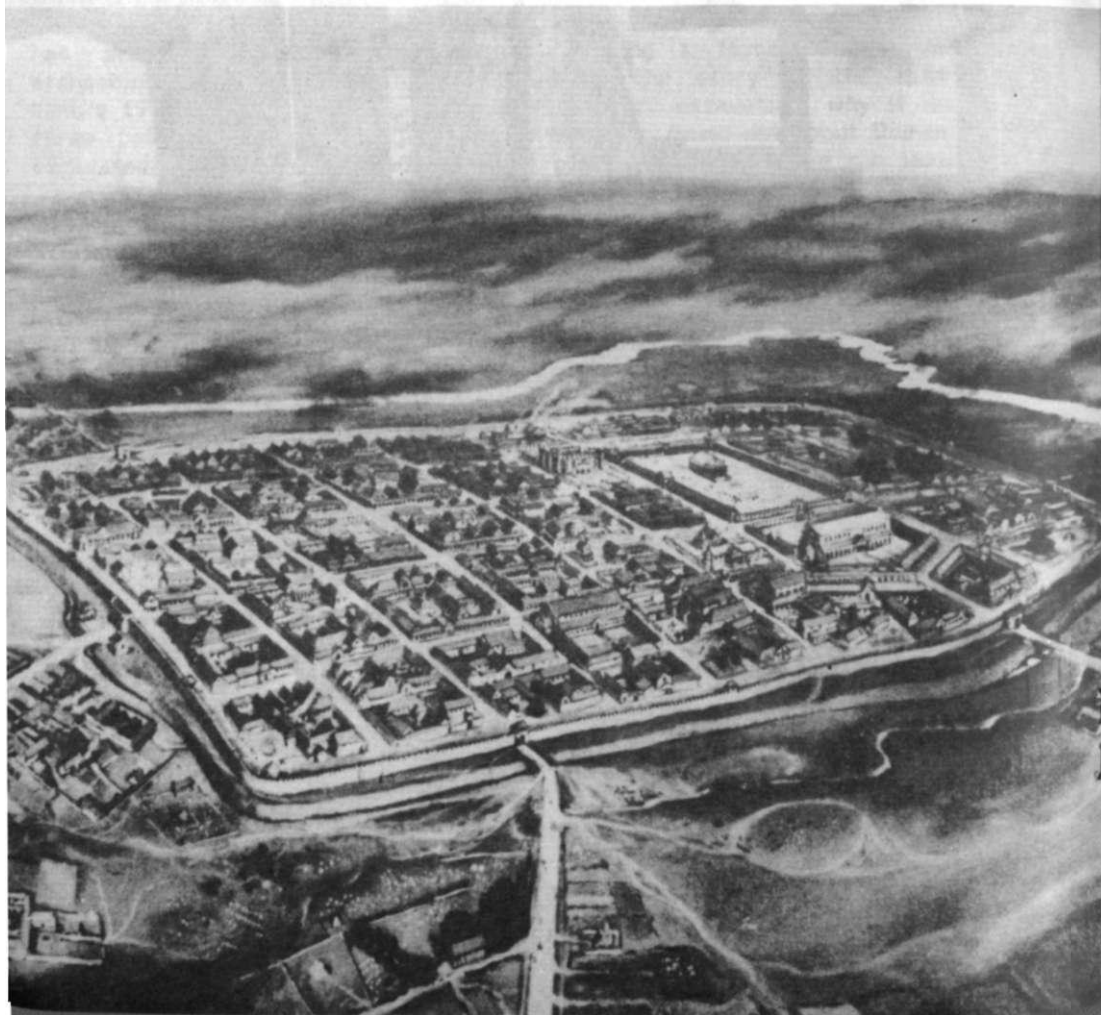
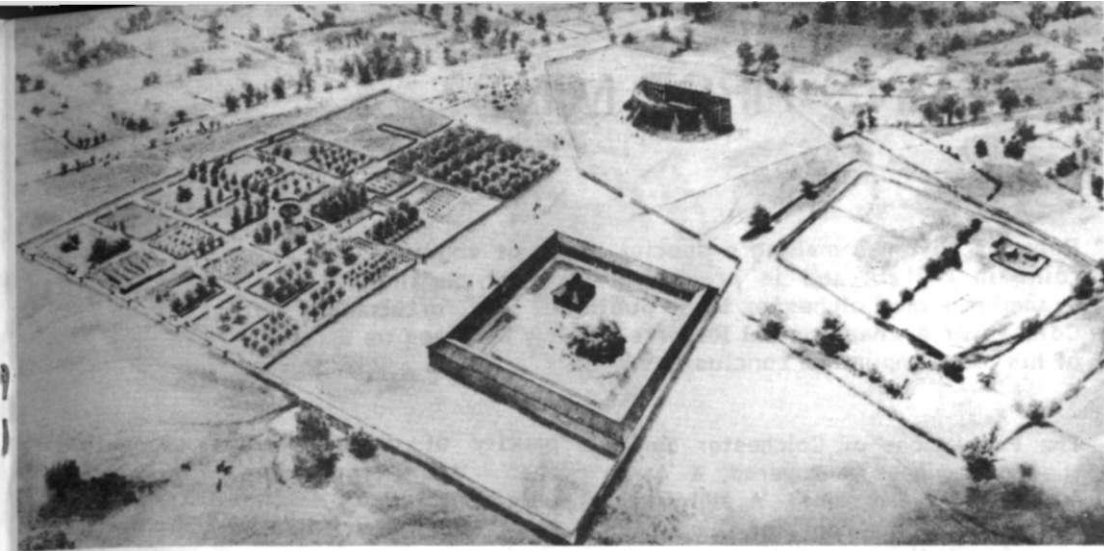


RECONSTRUCTING THE PAST

Over the years, Pete Froste has done many drawings and paintings in which he reconstructs scenes in Roman and later Colchester. Two of his latest colour paintings are of Gosbecks and Colchester town centre. The view of Gosbecks (top right) is from the south showing the temple, the theatre, the Roman road, and the surrounding fields. His painting is

based on the plan reproduced on the right. Colchester (below) is shown from the south-west. You can see the Balcerne Gate on the left and the Temple of Claudius and the theatre on the right.

Pete Froste is a former art teacher who now lives in Cambridge and works for the Cambridge Evening News.



BRITAIN'S FIRST MINT ?

Robert Kenyon is making a special study of some of the earliest Roman coins in Britain and is preparing a report on the recently-excavated examples from Colchester to be published in a forthcoming volume of the Colchester Archaeological Reports. Below he gives us a foretaste of one of his most important conclusions.

The excavations of Colchester during the 1970s have uncovered a large number of Roman coins. A significant number of bronze coins of Claudius I were found: the overwhelming majority of which are contemporary imitations.

Previous excavations of Colchester had also uncovered a considerable number of Claudian bronze coins, the vast majority of which were also contemporary imitations. Dr Sutherland in his report on the Roman coins from the 1930s excavations described the Claudian coins as "a most remarkable group", and gave a comprehensive account of them in Hawkes' and Hull's report on the excavations of Camulodunum (published in 1947). The large number of these coins found during excavations make Colchester the most prolific and important centre for the scattered site-finds of this currency in Britain.

The majority of the Claudian bronze coins found in this country (and Gaul) are in fact contemporary imitations. They were produced to counter a deficit of orthodox bronze coins which should have been supplied by the mint of Rome. Whilst the counterfeiting of coins does not automatically indicate a shortage of official supplies, the overwhelming volume of such imitations and the

paucity of orthodox coins suggests that the hypothesis is not unreasonable. A similar picture can be seen in the Claudian coins from Gaul.

These 'copies', however, pose particular problems which do not usually arise when one is dealing with orthodox Roman coins.

For example, we know that the orthodox bronze coins of Claudius I were struck at Rome, and that some of those of his successor, Nero, were struck at Lyons, France, but where were the mints that struck the Claudian copies? The excavations that have been carried out at Colchester, particularly the ones of the last decade or so, have produced evidence which encourages me to suggest that some may have been struck there. It was Dr Sutherland who first postulated that it would have been a very natural place to site a mint (in the first administrative centre in the newly established Imperial Province of Britannia) and the evidence of the coins that I have examined would seem to confirm this.

In Roman times coins were produced by striking a disc of metal between two dies with a hammer. Each die was engraved by hand and therefore was unique.



Examples of stylistically-linked Claudian copies from Colchester.

In examining the coins from all the excavations I was able to identify a group of eleven which were so similar in many ways that I suggest that the dies were made at the same minting centre if not by the same die-cutter. The coins may be grouped together by their similarity of style, size and weight,

"Eleven coins which are so similar - is that unusual?" I hear you ask. In brief "Yes!" One of the most noticeable characteristics of Claudian copies is the variety of style, size and weight of coin encountered.

The number of stylistically- and die-linked coins of this group can be

increased to twenty-four by examining the coins from many excavations, museums and publications. As the bulk of them was found at Colchester, and one came from an early Roman context (AD 43-49) at Lion Walk, I suggest that they are products of the first Roman mint in Britain, operating in Camulodunum shortly after the occupation. Further excavations at Colchester will I hope provide more die-linked coins to increase the weight of evidence in favour of this. Who knows, a die might even be found!

NOTES AND NEWS

CASTLE PARK PIPE-TRENCH

A few hearts fluttered when the mechanical digger brought up a mass of worked marble, including slabs inscribed in Roman capitals, as work on the new sewer neared the Park Gates at Cowdray Crescent. However, hopes of inscriptions from the Temple of Claudius were quickly dashed by the realisation that this was debris from a stonemason's yard of c 1900.

Elsewhere the pipe trench yielded a steady stream of archaeological information. This ranged from sections through the town wall, ditch, rampart, and streets to wall foundations and floors, including tessellated pavements and a ?hypocaust from several Roman buildings, some previously unrecorded.

Of particular interest was the discovery of the much denuded remains of a post-Roman bank and ditch near the nurseries. This was probably part of the outer defences of the Castle and perhaps is identifiable on the ground by a slight rise and fall running north from the park cafe.

Donald Shimmin

RECENT MEETINGS

As usual our January AGM was split into two, a morning business meeting and an afternoon session of illustrated talks. However, for various reasons, the two parts were

separated by not one lunch, but a whole fortnight. At the business meeting Colin Bellows, the Chairman of the Friends, delivered his annual report of our activities and committee meetings; Philip Crummy summed up the work of the Trust over the preceding year (briefly little excavation, much post-excavation, and much speculation over when Culver Street and other impending sites would be able to start, how long we would have on each site, and how to manage on the available funds); and Brenda May's financial report was given in her absence by Gabrielle Chadwick. She proposed that in view of rising costs of both printing and postage over the years since the Friends were formed it would be wise to raise the subscription rates. The motion was carried. Details of the new subs will be found elsewhere in this edition.

The afternoon session saw the presentation to the Mayor of Colchester of a copy of Colchester Archaeological Reports 2 and 3, and illustrated talks by Professor John Wilkes, Chairman of the Trust, who put Roman Colchester in perspective within the Empire and province, and Philip Crummy, who summed up the work of the Trust in the town over the 70s and early 80s.

"Due to circumstances beyond our control" the March outing to Sutton Hoo turned into an illustrated talk (ably delivered by Martin Carver, director of the Sutton Hoo project) in Ipswich Museum. In view of the mad March winds and rain this was perhaps not an entirely unfelicitous

change of programme. After Martin's talk the sun had decided to try to shine, so our tour of the Blackfriars excavation in Ipswich was muddy but not sodden. Keith Wade, Field Officer for Suffolk County Council's Archaeology Section, led us round Saxon town defences and occupation, and medieval and later monastic buildings.

(Each month this summer already has a Friends' event organised, so I hope that next year we will be able to arrange a trip to Sutton Hoo, and can only keep my fingers crossed that nothing will go wrong then!)

The evening of June 7th was the occasion of a private view of an exhibition in the Castle Museum on **Archaeology in Colchester**. A description of the exhibition appears elsewhere in this edition. To all of you who came to this private view, thank you for your support and for making the occasion such a pleasant evening.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

July 28th: Springfield, Great Dunmow, Thaxted, plus!

Details and booking forms for this trip went out with Catalogue 14. Anyone wishing to book at this late stage should contact Brenda May, 5 William Close, Wivenhoe, Colchester, to see if there is room left on the coach. Briefly, we will leave Colchester at 10.30 a.m., visit the Springfield excavation at Chelmsford, have lunch at Great Dunmow (probably best to bring a picnic), rapidly tour Thaxted, Great Bardfield, Finchingfield, and Wethersfield, and stop for tea and/or steam engines at the Colne Valley Railway Centre at Castle Hedingham,

August 11th & 12th: Second-hand book sale

Thanks to all the Friends who have donated their unwanted books I am now unable to get into my room at Lexden Road, and there are boxes and boxes of books competing with the finds for space in the kitchen and corridors. The sale will be held at 12 Lexden Road on Saturday August 11th and Sunday 12th. Someone will be there from 8.30 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. on both days, and Friends (and friends of Friends) are welcome to turn up whenever is convenient. I can promise you a fine selection, from paperback to hardback, from crime, romantic and science fiction to "solid" volumes on practically every subject under the sun! And cheap! Hot and cold drinks will also be available at realistic prices. For those intending to have a really good browse, if the weather is fine you could bring a picnic to eat in the garden.

September 21st-23rd! Wessex and Bath weekend

This weekend trip is now fully booked.

November 17th: Churches tour

This year's tour of churches in the Colchester District will take in Marks Tey, Copford, Easthorpe, Messing, Inworth, and Layer Marney, and finish once more with tea at the Hare and Hounds pub at Layer Breton. We will leave Colchester at 1.15 p.m. from the War Memorial at the Castle Park, and expect to be back at about 5.15 p.m.

Nina Crummy

On behalf of the Borough of Colchester, the mayor, Mr J Bird, accepts copies of Colchester Archaeological Reports 2 and 3 from the Trust's President, Professor S S Frere (right) and copies of Catalogue numbers 1 to 14 bound as a single volume from the Friend's Chairman, Mr C Bellows (left).

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 visits to

archaeological sites and monuments in the area.

The annual subscription rates are as follows. Adults £2.00, Children and Students £1.00, Family membership £2.50, and Institutions £2.00. Those who live too far away to attend meetings or go on trips can receive newsletters only at a reduced rate of £1.50. Subscriptions should be sent to Brenda May, Honorary Treasurer, Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust, 5 William Close, Wivenhoe, Colchester, Essex.