

*The*  
**COLCHESTER**  
ARCHAEOLOGIST

WHERE WAS THE  
ROMAN  
BATH-HOUSE?

NEW LOOK FOR  
COLCHESTER'S  
MUSEUMS

DIGGING IN THE  
BUS PARK

ST BOTOLPH'S  
PRIORY

AROUND ESSEX

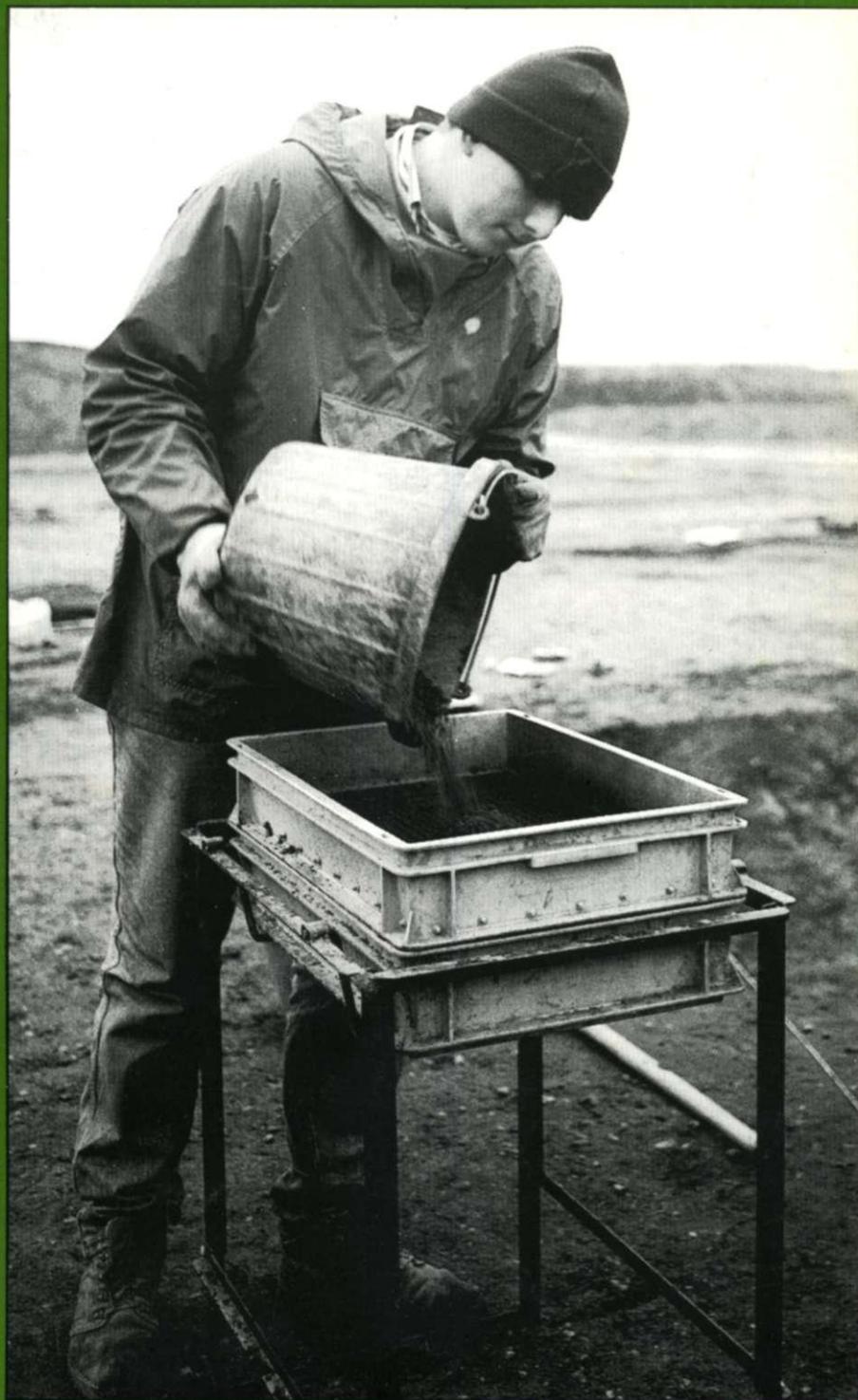
ARCHAEOLOGY  
FOR YOUNG  
PEOPLE

HERITAGE IN  
BRITAIN AWARD

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Issue Number 4 (1990-91)

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## THE FRIENDS OF THE COLCHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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Cover: Hamish MacDiarmid sieving at Stanway. (See page 20 for the Iron Age bucket found on the site.)

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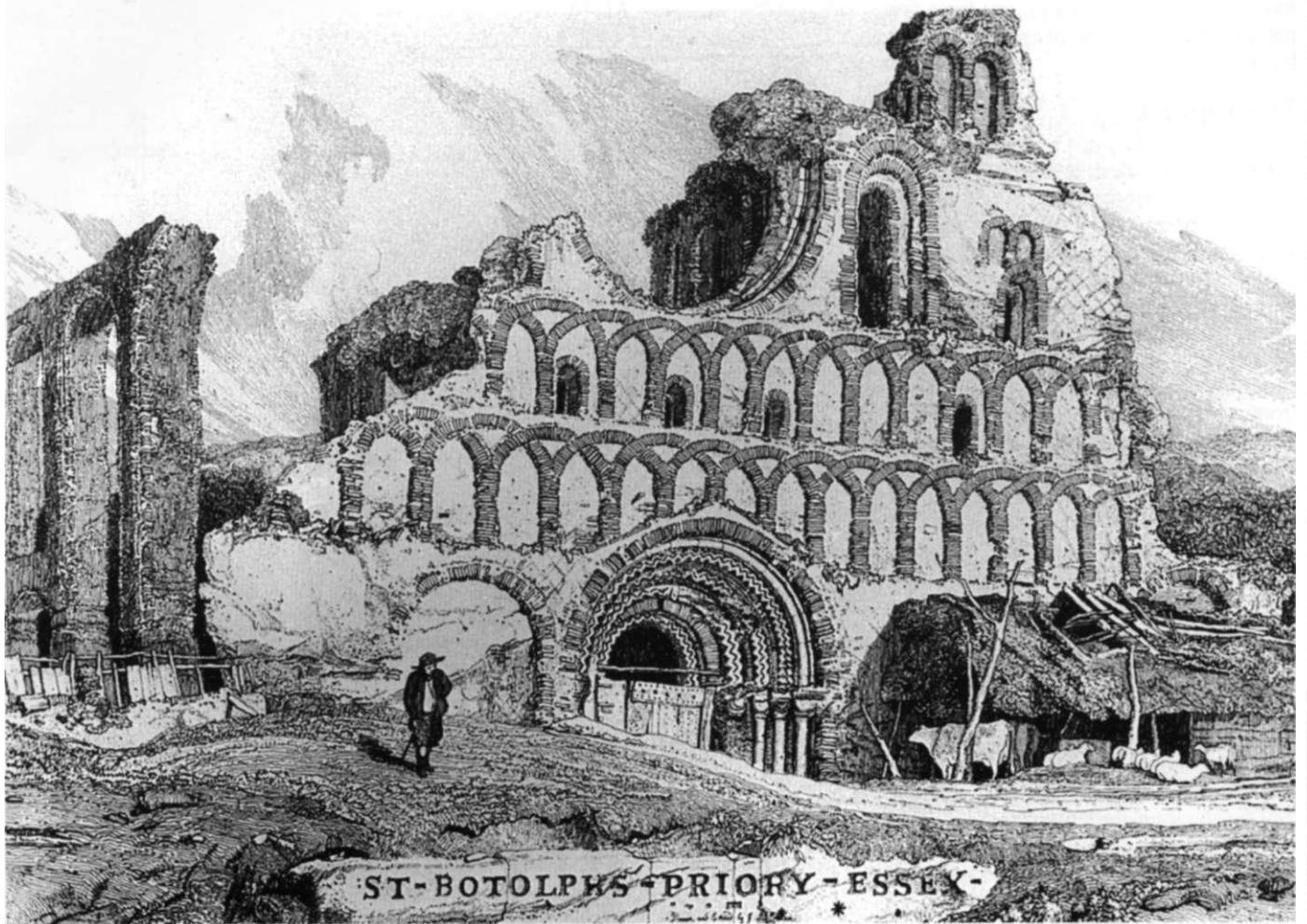
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The Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust exists to keep interested members of the public in touch with the archaeological work in the historic town of Colchester. Members receive **The Colchester Archaeologist**, attend an annual lecture about the previous year's work, are given conducted tours of current sites, and can take part in a programme of visits to archaeological sites and monuments in the area. Publication of **The Colchester Archaeologist** is helped by funds provided by the Friends.

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*The west front of St Botolph's Priory in 1811. Etching by John Cotman.*

# St Botolph's Priory Church

**S**t Botolph's Priory has been a favourite haunt for artists for many years with the result that there can be no monument or building in Colchester which has been sketched, painted, or photographed more than its attractive ruined west front. By contrast today, the priory is one of the least visited of all the town's historic attractions. What can be seen now is a pale shadow of its former self. Only the church survives above ground, and of that only the ruined west end is visible. The ruins stand on a restricted site and give

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*The remains of the impressive west front of St Botolph's explain why this was once regarded as the chief church in the town and the scene of important civic ceremonies. Now the church is to become a better and more accessible monument....*

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only a limited impression of the church's former glory. But things are changing for the better.

The priory of St Julian and St Botolph was founded around 1100 and was the first house of Augustinian canons in England. It was established by a small company of priests who, until that time, had probably served an existing church of St Botolph and had decided to adopt a monastic order.

Most of the priory church was built of reused Roman building materials robbed from the Roman town. By and large, good quality stone was used for the places where carvings were needed such as around windows and doors because the Roman material could not be worked in this way. Accordingly Barnack stone was brought from Northamptonshire and Caen stone from Normandy for this purpose. The front, like the rest of the exterior of the church, had been rendered with a layer of lime mortar to give the impression of better quality materials. The coating of render

has long since fallen off except for a few patches in some of the deeper recesses in the west front.

### The repairs

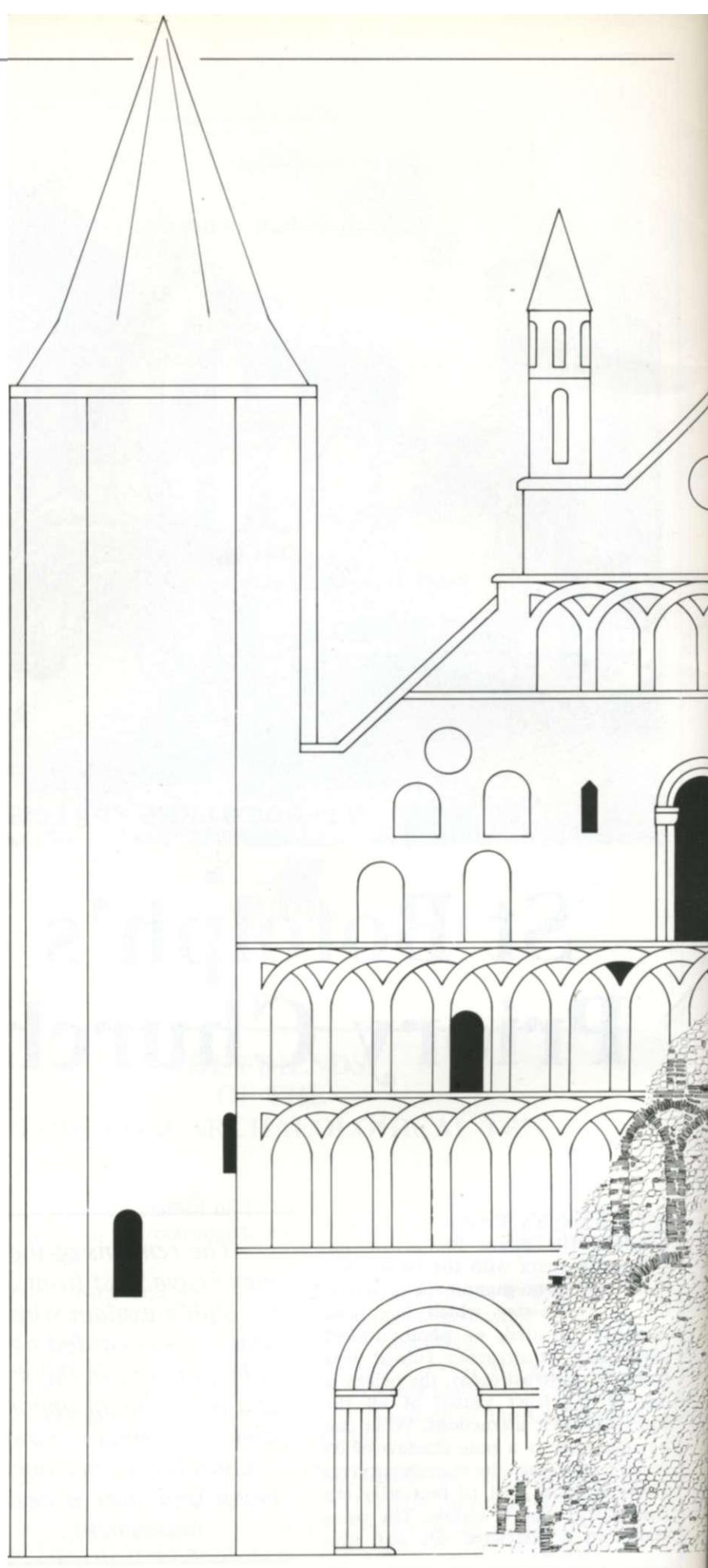
The west front has just been cleaned and extensively repaired. It was in a very bad state but the seriousness of the decay was not fully appreciated until the scaffolding was erected and the masonry could be inspected at close quarters. An attractive feature of the design is the 'blind interlaced arcading', the sequences of overlapping arches applied on the surface of much of the front. Many of the upright parts of these were so rotted that they were in imminent danger of falling off. In consequence many of them had to be rebuilt and re-attached to the wall with metal pins drilled into the masonry. The masonry itself was encrusted with thick sooty deposits which have now been removed to leave the monument looking altogether much more attractive.

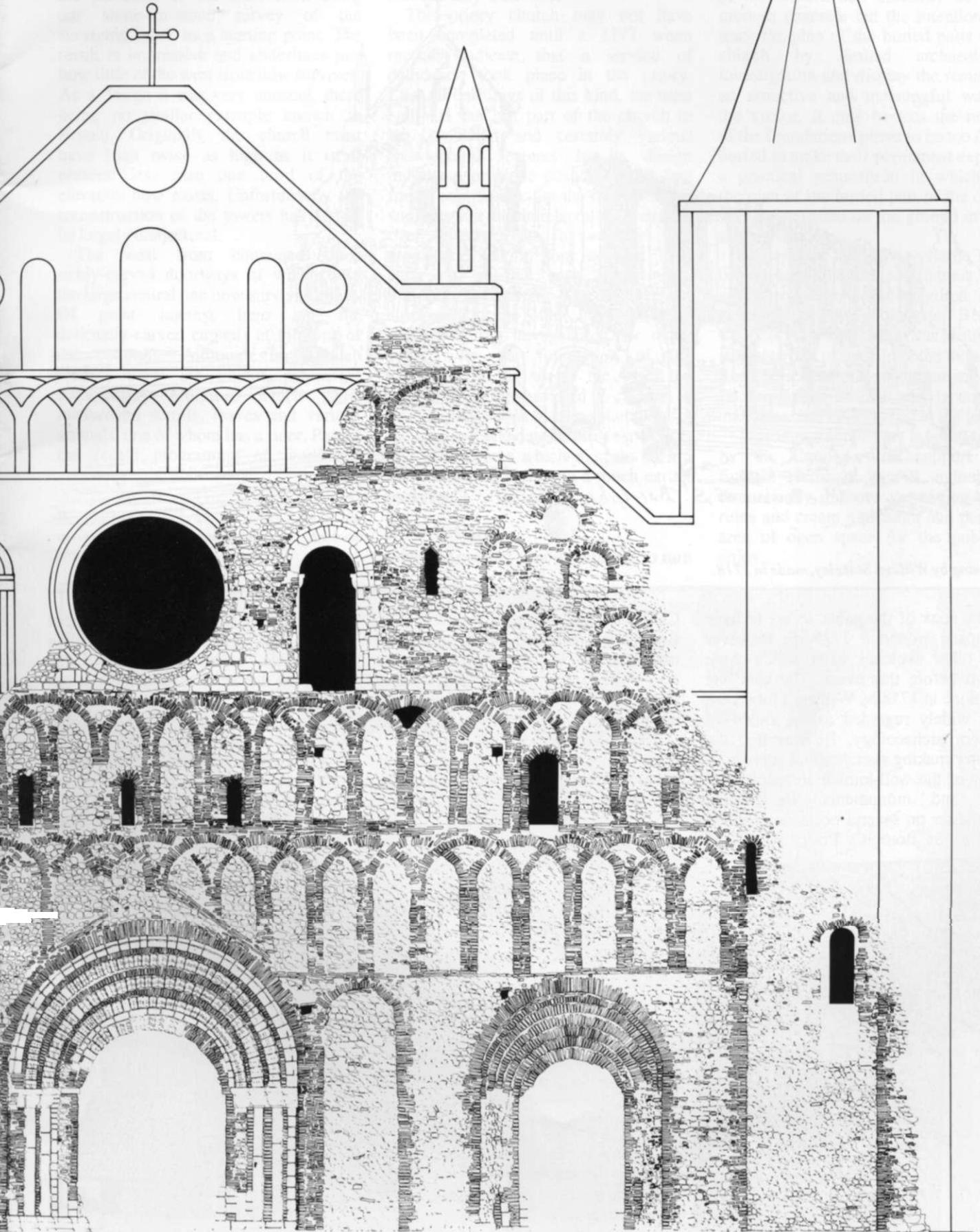
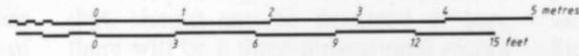
Before work started, the face of the monument had to be recorded stone-for-stone on large-scale plans. No such drawings had existed before so that this work has provided an invaluable tool for the long-term management of the monument. The drawing was done by the Trust's draughtsmen, Bob Moyes and Terry Cook, both now well experienced at this kind of work as a result of their surveys of Colchester Castle and the Roman town wall. As usual the starting point was a scaled plan of the primary features drawn in outline by the Photogrammetric Unit of the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies at York University.

### Reconstruction

What did the west front originally look like? What were the towers like and what was the design of the upper part which unfortunately fell down almost three hundred years ago before practically all of the surviving drawings and paintings of the priory were made?

Three drawings exist which help with these problems. One is a sketch taken from a painting of the west front when it was apparently still intact. If the painting is not a later artist's reconstruction (which it might be) then this sketch is the earliest representation of the priory known to exist. It shows the gable, the central circular window with its pair of flanking windows, and four recesses in the apex (one circular and three window-like). However the sketch is plainly not reliable because it does not show the arcading above the windows.







Drawing by William Stukeley, made in 1718.

The apex of the gable seems to have collapsed around c 1725-35. However two other sketches exist which were drawn before this event. The best one was done in 1718 by William Stukeley, a man widely regarded as the father of modern archaeology. He travelled the country making sketches and surveys of many of the well-known archaeological sites and monuments. He visited Colchester on several occasions and, as well as St Botolph's Priory, drew the

Castle and the dykes. His sketch of St Botolph's is neat and clearly done with careful attention to detail. It shows the now missing apex and, most interesting, the base of the steps in the north tower.

The other sketch, in this case a simple elevation, was drawn by an unknown hand supposedly in 1724. This has a somewhat stylised feel to it, the detail being so imprecise that the work gives the impression that the

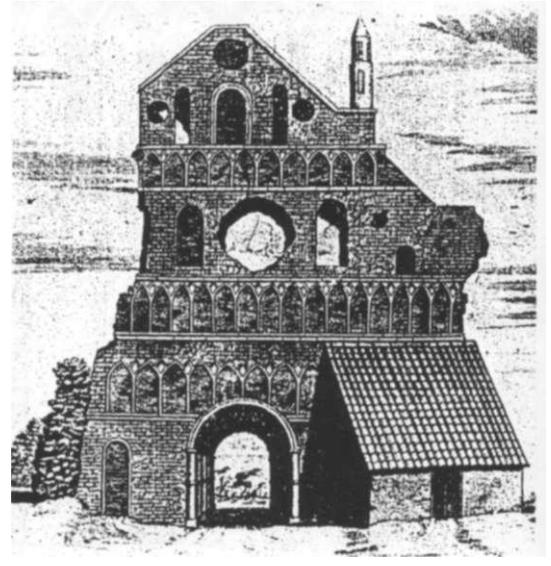
artist did not draw on site but instead relied on one or more existing illustrations which he had to hand. However the artist clearly did not use Stukeley's sketch for the two works are different in certain minor but significant respects.

The right-hand edge of the gable is strikingly similar in both these sketches, the two showing the stump of a horizontal projection which must mark the junction between the tower and the



**Left:** sketch of the apex of the west front before its partial collapse in 1725-35. The writing reads, *This Pediment is taken from an old Painting in W Carrs house - what is intended by the two uprights .... figures is not understood.*

**Right:** St Botolph's Priory church, supposedly in 1724.



body of the church.

Armed with these drawings, it has been possible to reconstruct the whole of the elevation of the west front using our stone-for-stone survey of the surviving fabric as a starting point. The result is impressive and underlines just how little of the west front now survives. As a design it was very unusual, there being no similar example known in Britain. Originally the church must have been twice as high as it is at present: less than one third of the elevation now exists. Unfortunately the reconstruction of the towers has had to be largely conjectural.

The west front contained three richly-carved doorways of which only the large central one now survives intact. Of great interest here are the delicately-carved capitals at the tops of the columns. Although now much eroded, these are unique pieces of 12th-century sculpture which show interwoven scrolls, leaves and various animals, one of whom has a rider. Part of the recent programme of work has

involved making casts of the capitals so that, should any be damaged or lost, there will be a three-dimensional record of what they were like.

The priory church may not have been completed until *c* 1177 when records indicate that a service of dedication took place in the priory. Like all buildings of this kind, the west end was the last part of the church to be completed and certainly various architectural features in its design indicate a probable post-AD 1160 date for its completion. On the face of it this suggests that the church could have taken over seventy years to complete. The monastery was a poor one, at least early on, so that such a protracted building programme would be no surprise. On the other hand, building work may not have started for many years *after* the foundation of the monastery if, as seems the case, the canons already possessed a church. A third but much less likely explanation for the apparent late date of the west front is that the features which indicate such a date were insertions into a much earlier structure.

## The future

Over the coming year attention is to turn

to the eastern half of the church which sadly was demolished as a result of the Siege of Colchester in 1648. The remains of the eastern half currently lie under modern concrete but the intention is to trace the plan of the buried parts of the church by limited archaeological investigation and display the remains in an attractive and meaningful way for the visitor. It may be that the remains of the foundations prove to be too deeply buried to make their permanent exposure a practical proposition in which case the plan of the buried part of the church will be indicated on the ground in some appropriate way.

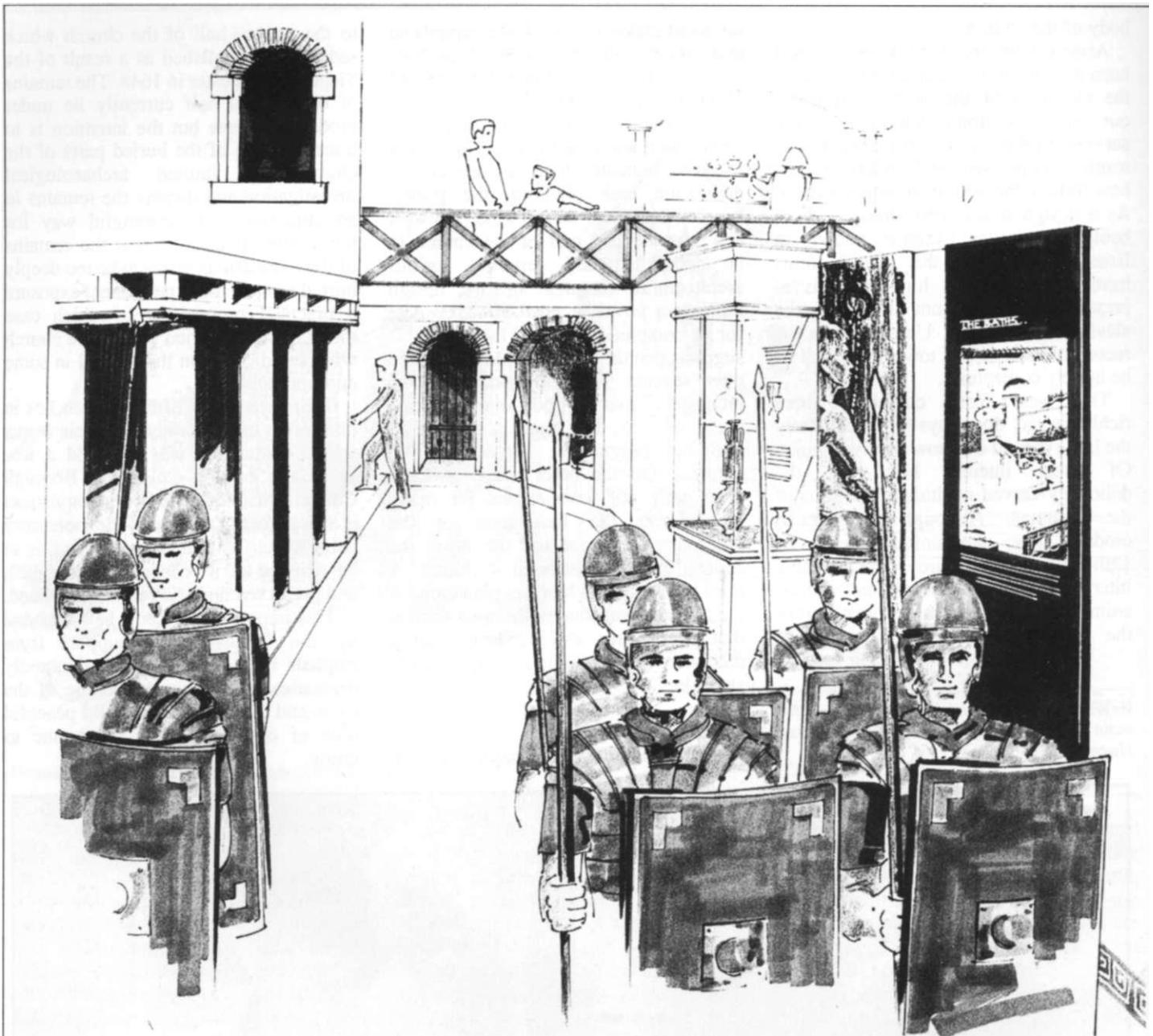
The eastern half of the church lies in one corner of the former Britannia works which fortunately was acquired a few years ago by the Colchester Borough Council. Also included in this acquisition is a large part of the site of the monastery itself which, as part of the project, is to be stripped of its concrete, landscaped, and preserved undisturbed in the ground.

This important project is being funded by the Council with support from English Heritage. It will undoubtedly dramatically improve the setting of the ruins and create a pleasant and peaceful area of open space for the public to enjoy.

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**Below:** *the capitals on the south side of the main doorway. (Photograph by Andrew Harris.)*

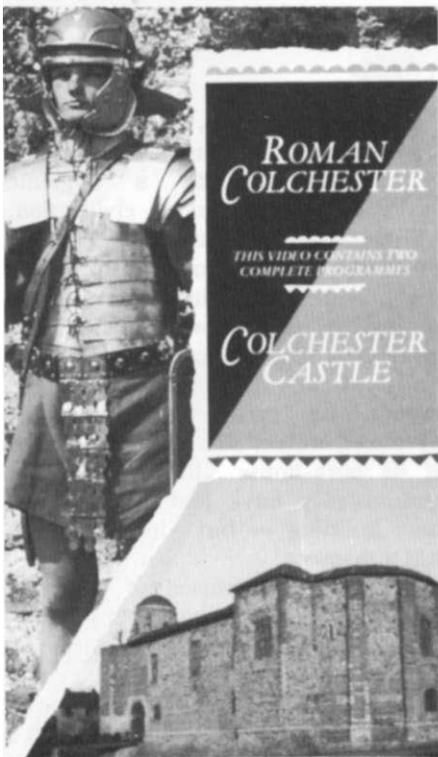




# The story of Colchester unfolds

**U**nder the guidance of the new Museum Curator, Oliver Green, the *Story of Colchester* is soon to be told at Colchester's Castle Museum. The planning of this ambitious three-year project is well underway and will involve the redisplay of the entire Castle. The scheme is to include a new self-service shop, a lift, and — essential for the modern museum — public toilets.

The redisplay is to be done in three phases. The first is to be opened in June 1991 and will affect the ground floor. Here the visitor will be able to follow the story from the earliest inhabitants of the region to the burning of the Roman town by Boudica. Stage



Two will cover the rest of the Roman period whilst Stage Three will take the story up to the building of the Castle and beyond to finish with the Siege of Colchester in 1648. The Museum's remarkable archaeological collections will be at the heart of the new displays, but presented in a more lively interpretative context using reconstructions, sound, audio-visuals and computer graphics. The completed display is likely to include such items as the famous Middleborough mosaic, excavated by the Trust in 1979, and a reconstructed section of an Iron Age house.

Other changes are already in hand. The Castle's atmospheric prisons are being refurbished partly with the intention of making them much more accessible to the public. Adjacent tableau displays with costumed figures will illustrate documented incidents from the prisons' history. A popular recent innovation was the introduction of two specially-commissioned videos, one on Roman Colchester and the other on the Castle. Visitors can watch shortened versions of these in the Castle and can buy full versions at the museum shop.

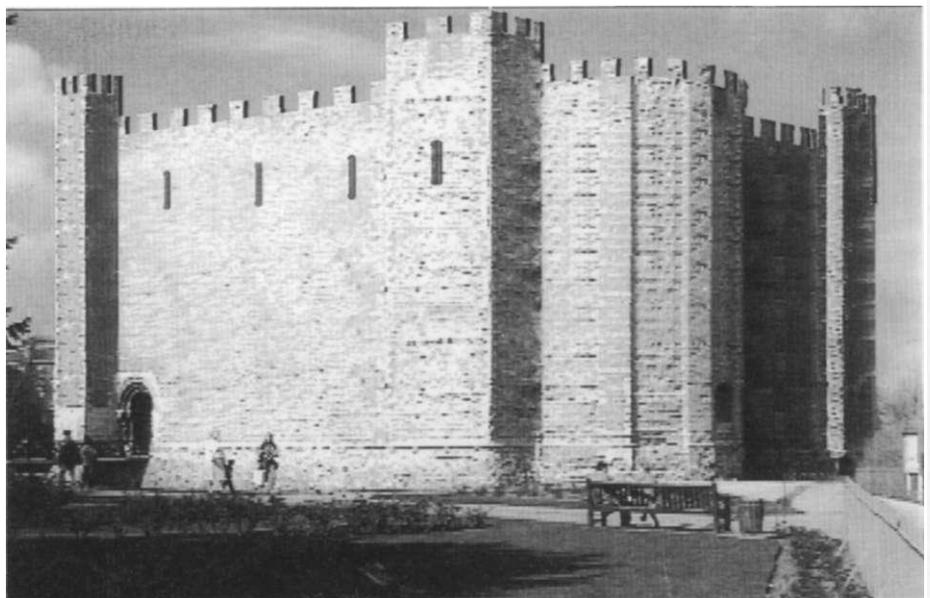
But the changes are not to be confined to the mighty walls of the Castle itself. The Natural History Museum has not escaped radical review — its new display is to be opened in March of this year. And in the near future it is hoped to provide external interpretation panels for the Castle and other monuments in and around the town.

*Opposite left: **Museum of the future.** An impression of one of the schemes considered for the ground floor of the new display. By Haley Sharpe Associates. The layout and content of the display have yet to be finalised.*

*Above: **Museum of the past.** Curator Mr A G Wright and archaeologist Dr Henry Laver in the Castle Museum around 1910. These displays were reorganised in the 1930s when the Castle was roofed over the display area was increased seven fold. This allowed the collection to be spread out and arranged in chronological order.*

*Above left: the two videos, Roman Colchester and Colchester Castle, are available on one cassette from the Colchester Museums, Museum Resource Centre, 14 Ryegate Road, Colchester CO1 1YG for £15.99 plus £2.50 post and packing (overseas extra). Together the videos last about 40 minutes. (Available on VHS and American NTSC formats.)*

*Below: Colchester Castle miraculously reconstructed with the aid of computer graphics. This is an early version of the more accurate reconstruction appearing in the Castle video.*



# Where was Colchester's bath-house?

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*A recently-excavated Roman building with massive foundations has provided yet another candidate for Colchester's elusive public bath-house*

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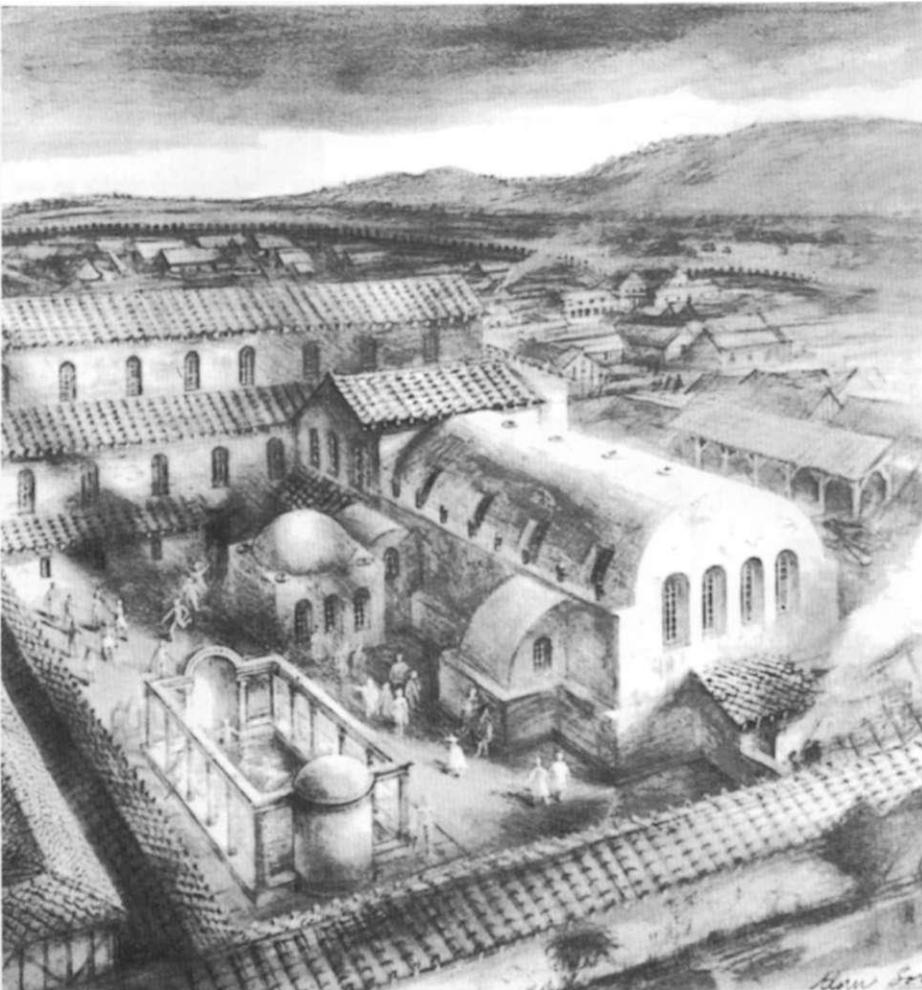
To the Romans, a visit to the public bath-house was as much a pleasure as a hygienic necessity and a sign of civilisation. Although villas in the country generally had their own bath-houses, few private houses in towns were so endowed, the townsfolk instead preferring to bathe communally. The study of any major Roman town cannot be claimed to be well advanced unless something is known of its bath-house. Colchester would undoubtedly have had at least one such building — but where it was is still a mystery.

Bath-houses consisted of series of rooms graded according to temperature. The Romans did not use soap but cleansed their bodies by working up a sweat and scraping off the dirt, perspiration, and oil (if applied) with a metallic hollow-bladed implement called a strigil. Bathers could start with some vigorous exercise in the exercise yard or hall but for most the place to get sticky must have been the hot room which had heated floors and walls and where, next to the boilers, was a large, steaming hot bath. After a thorough all-over scrape and wash, a cold shower or a dip in a cold bath would close the pores and leave the bather feeling clean and refreshed.

## Recent discovery

Tantalising remains of what had been a very substantial Roman building were recently uncovered on a building site in the centre of Colchester. Although poorly preserved, sufficient survived to show that the building had been of monumental proportions and that it just might have been the missing building.

The site is in East Stockwell Street where a new office development is planned. The foundations of the Roman building were five feet wide and up to twelve feet deep below the Roman floor level. The floors, where these survived, were of plain red tessellation but the discovery of a handful of small



*The Hadrianic baths at Woxeter: a reconstruction by Alan Sorrell reproduced by courtesy of Dr Graham Webster. The tall building in the background is a large basilica used as an exercise hall, the vaulted structures on the right are the heated rooms, the furnace is in the foreground right, and an outdoor pool is in the foreground left.*



A stngil, found at Fingringhoe near Colchester.

recently-excavated building, then the latter must have been over 150 feet long.

### A bath-house?

Clearly the size of the recently-discovered foundations rules out these having been for a house — buildings of this kind typically had foundations which were about two feet across. Unfortunately there is nothing distinctive in its plan to help indicate what the building was used for but some possibilities can be eliminated. Thus because of what is known of its plan, it is hard to see how the East Stockwell Street building could have been a classical-style temple, a Romano-Celtic temple, a forum, a church or mithracum, a theatre, an amphitheatre, a curia (council chamber), a warehouse, a granary, a circus (for racing), a library, or an inn. More plausible candidates are an indoor market, an aisled hall (basilica), a palace, or a bath-house.

But there is one good clue. Under the centre of the largest of the rooms was what appeared to be the end of a large vaulted drain. It was poorly preserved, having been largely destroyed in the medieval period when much of its

superstructure was removed for its building materials. There can be little doubt that the feature belonged to the building because it had been sealed by the floors and yet itself sealed the lower part of the dumped material forming the building platform. A drain starting in this position suggests that the structure was a bath-house and that the room concerned was the cold room (known as the *'frigidarium'*) where bathers would take a cold shower or a cold bath. If correct, this means that the distinctive hypocausts which these buildings contained under their heated rooms must remain to be discovered under the surrounding buildings. Public bath-houses elsewhere show that the end of the drain should indicate the position of the shower. Typically the drain would have conducted the waste water to a latrine which it would have flushed.

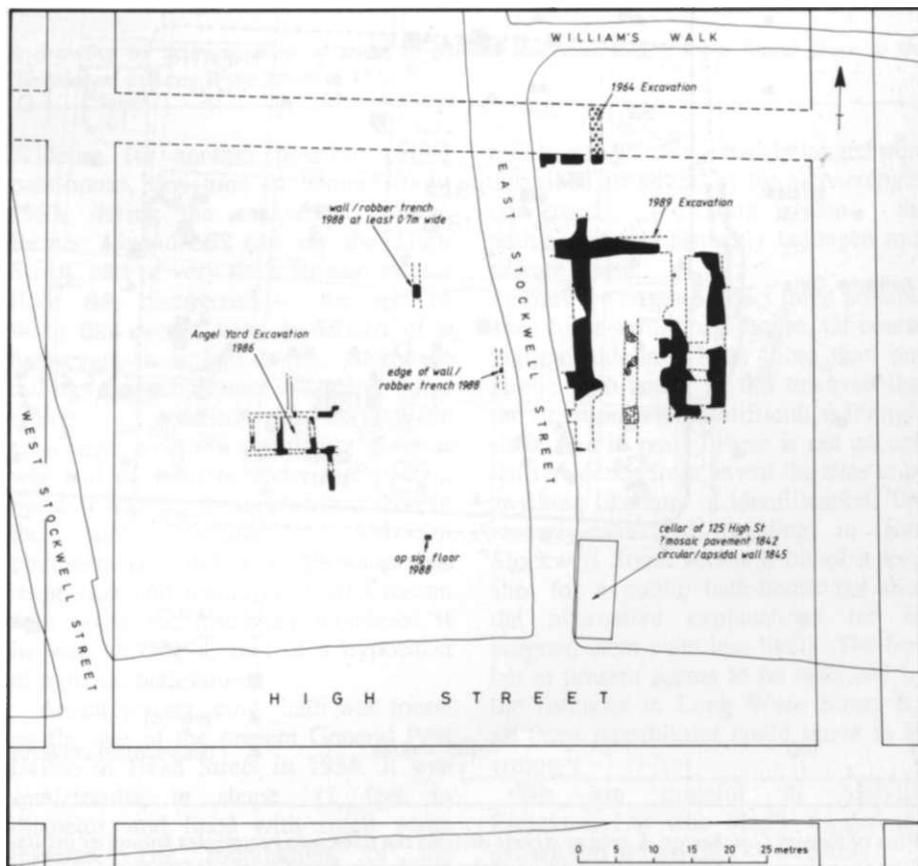
One of the problems with this interpretation is that the plan of the East Stockwell Street building does not much resemble other known bath buildings. Indeed, had it not been for the presumed drain, nobody would have suggested that the building had been a bath-house in the first place. Another

Plan of the East Stockwell Street building.

coloured cubes suggests the presence in the immediate area of at least one mosaic pavement. The building had been constructed on sloping land so that massive quantities of soil and other material had to be brought on to the site to make the floors level throughout the building.

Parts of ten rooms were identified, many of them surprisingly small considering the scale of the foundations. One of the rooms, being 35 feet wide and over 90 feet long, stood out as being substantially larger than the others.

The building extended west and southwards beyond the limits of the site so that its full size could not be established. However the building possibly included the foundation of a curved wall of 10 to 15 feet radius discovered some distance to the south in 1845. The foundation had proved to be of such solid construction that a cellar which was being built at the time could not be dug to its full depth. If the foundation had been part of the



difficulty is that the presumed cold room seems exceptionally narrow in relation to its length and the small rooms look peculiarly small in relation to the widths of the walls. Indeed, were it not for the existence of the small rooms, the building would resemble a basilica.

Basilicas were buildings which provided covered meeting places for large gatherings of people. The principle basilica in a typical Romano-British town was next to the forum. But the position of the Roman buildings excavated at the Angel Yard a few years ago [see *Catalogue 20*] shows that there could not have been a forum here otherwise this area would have been open. Nevertheless the East Stockwell Street structure could still have been a basilica and have been part of the bath-house at the same time because some public bath-houses incorporated a basilica so that

customers could exercise under cover.

### Other public buildings

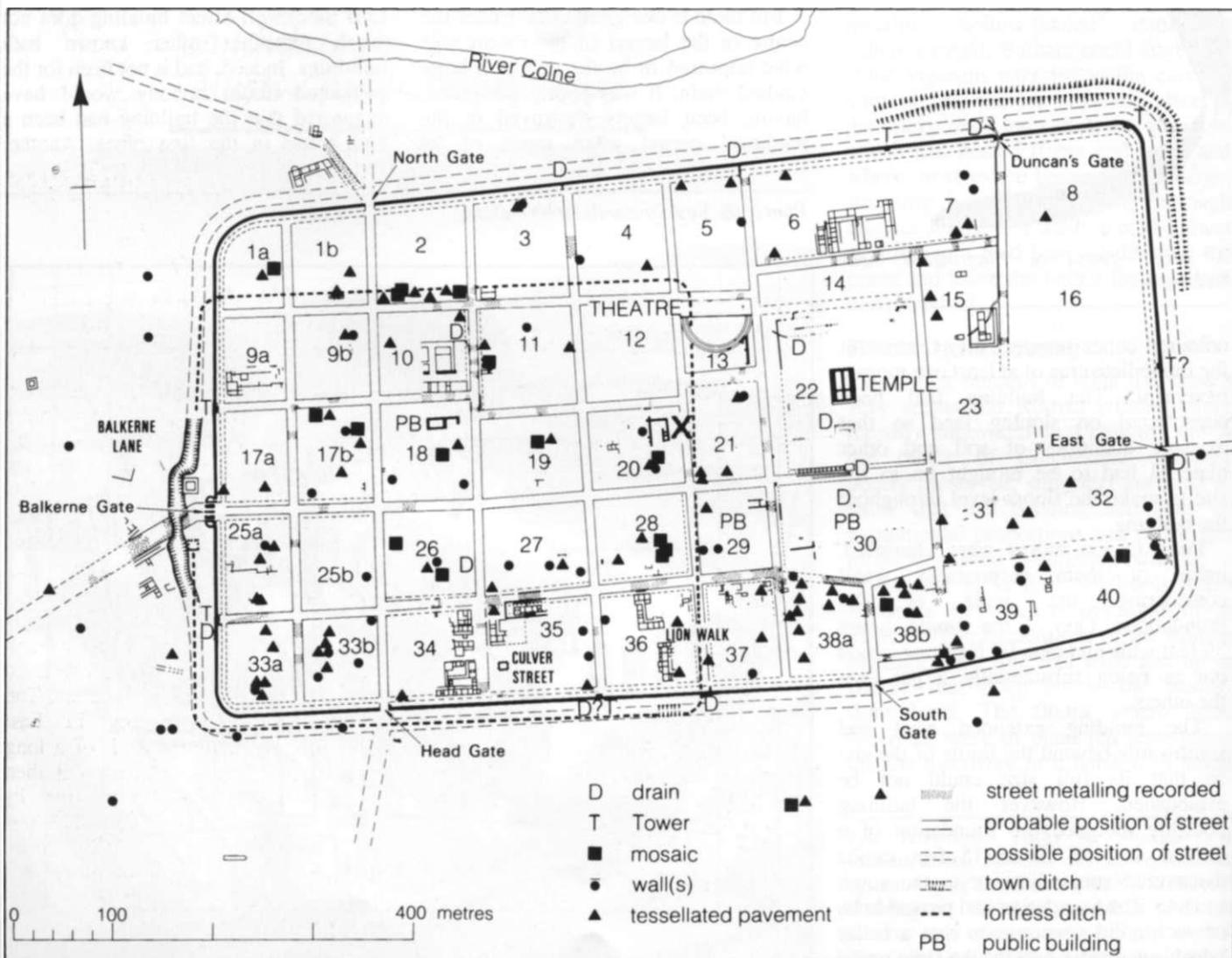
Quite a few other buildings with large foundations have been found in Colchester but, apart from the theatre and the Temple of Claudius, their functions are still obscure. The foundations of the Temple of Claudius in Insula 22 are 13 ft deep whilst the arched screen which formed the south side of the temple precinct was built on a 15 ft wide wall. To the south, in *Insula 30*, various large foundations have been recorded, some being up to about 7 ft wide. Quite what these represented is obscure but the most widely-held explanation is that they belonged to a large aisled building which, with the precinct of the Temple of Claudius, formed a forum and basilica. To the west of this building, in *Insula 29*, was another substantial structure which was

discovered in 1955 when St Nicholas's Church was demolished. The foundations are mainly four feet across which, although modest in size, are much bigger than those found in domestic buildings.

Practically all of the public buildings that are known were in the eastern part of the town. However there is a very substantial foundation in *Insula 18*. This was five feet wide and was associated with an unusual floor in which bricks were laid in a herringbone pattern. Interestingly the floor sealed a drain rather like that at East Stockwell Street.

### Other candidates for a bath-house

Probably the best evidence for a public bath-house was provided by the Victorian archaeologist William Wire. Although he never undertook any excavations (that we are aware of), he



Plan of Roman Colchester. A grid of streets divided the town into rectangles known as insulae. These have been numbered as shown on the plan for easy reference. 'X' shows the position of the building in East Stockwell Street.

did visit many building sites in and around the town and recorded what was found there. Of particular interest to him was the laying of the new sewerage system in the 1840s. This necessitated digging deep trenches along many of the streets in the town centre so that in consequence much was exposed which was of archaeological interest. (Similar exercises today can produce useful new information but by and large they are not nearly so fruitful as in Wire's day because the streets have been dug up so much since.) Of the many discoveries made were what Wire described as three 'fireplaces'. These were near the top end of Long Wyre Street and are thought to have been the mouths of furnaces which served a public bath-house.

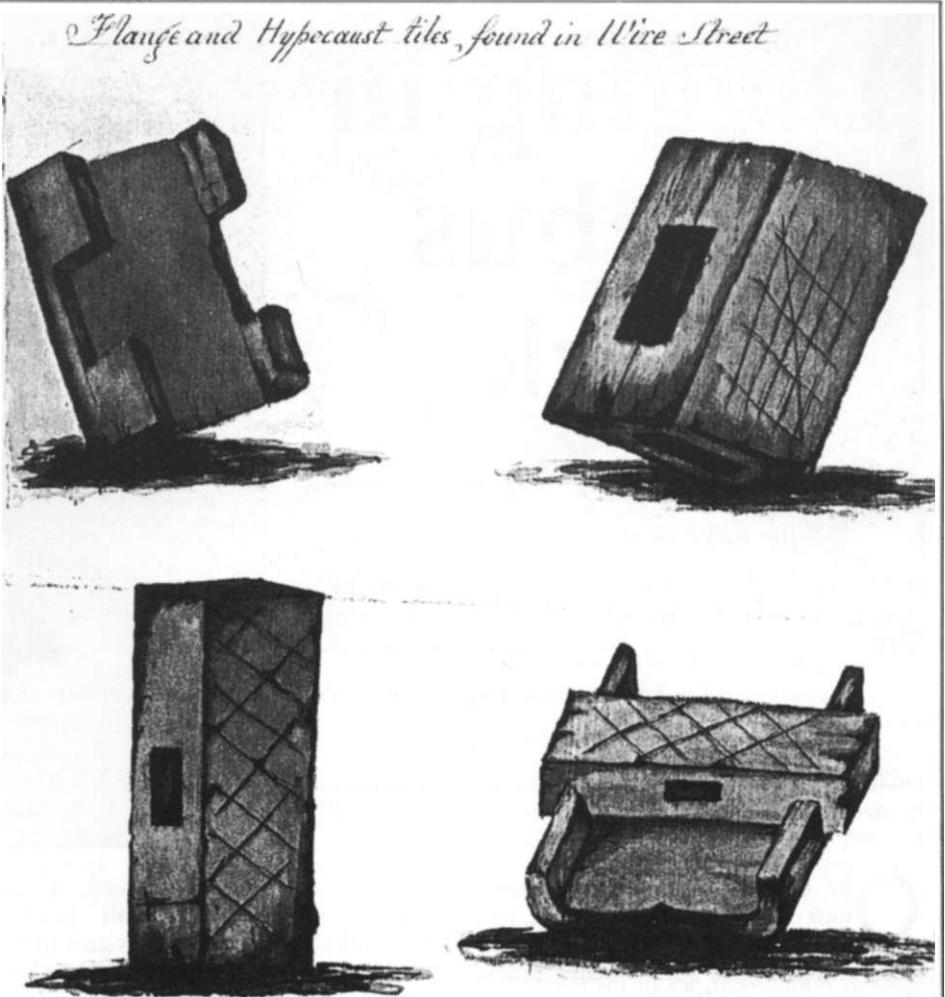
Wire recorded the discoveries in his diary:

*Visited the sewerage works Long Wyre Street. Extensive remains of a Roman villa have been discovered. Two hypocaust flues entire were found at a depth of six feet but it appears that more remains are under the footpath and houses on the east side of the street. It was not possible to make a close examination as the excavations were carried out on a novel plan. Places three feet wide, eight deep, were sunk at an interval of four feet, the intervening space being tunnelled through. Great quantities of Roman roof tiles, and bricks in fragments were thrown out, with septaria and mortar, composed of pounded brick and lime... The flue tiles were discovered close to three hypocaust arched fire places and were covered on the inside with soot. The fire places were built with bricks 8 ins square, and at my request were covered over whole, except one...'*

The furnaces would seem to have served a building occupying the north-west corner of Insula 38. Some of the flue tiles are in the museum and have been examined by Ernest Black who specialises in material of this kind. He feels that they do indeed belong to a bath-house and that they are of 1st-century date.

More of what may have been the same building was uncovered in 1929 when the present Priory Arcade (formerly Queensway) was built. Some stacks of tile from a hypocaust were seen close to the site of Wire's 'fireplaces' whilst about 55 m to the east was the red tessellated floor of an extraordinarily large room measuring at least 24 x 34 ft.

Curiously there is a piece of



A drawing by William Wire of some of Roman flue tiles which were found close to the 'fireplaces' in Long Wyre Street in 1848.

evidence for another possible public bath-house, this time in Insula 30. In 1983, during the excavation on the former 'Spendrite' site on the High Street, part of very thick Roman mortar floor was discovered — the sort of thing that would have been part of a hypocaust in a bath-house. Moreover during the subsequent watching brief which was carried out during the rebuilding works, a tantalising glimpse was had of a cavity under the existing building forming the eastern boundary of the site (Markham's). Although circumstances did not allow proper inspection and recording, Carl Crossan who made the discovery wondered if he was looking at part of a hypocaust of a public bath-house.

An interesting 'cold' bath was found on the site of the present General Post Office in Head Street in 1934. It was semicircular in shape, 11 feet in diameter, and lined with small white tesserae. The foundations of the

building to which the bath belonged were described as 'slight' by the archaeologist concerned indicating that the bath-house had probably belonged to a private house.

Thus we have in effect three possible sites for a public bath-house. Of course there could have been more than one public bath-house in the town so that the situation is not as difficult as it might seem, but in reality there is not enough hard evidence from any of the sites to be anything like sure of identification. The recently-excavated building in East Stockwell Street seems a bit of a long shot for a public bath-house but then the alternative explanations for its purpose seem even less likely. The best bet at present seems to be indicated by the furnaces in Long Wyre Street but all three possibilities could prove to be wrong.

We are grateful to Melville Properties Ltd who kindly funded the excavation at East Stockwell Street.

# Digging in the bus park

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*The next major town-centre development is planned for the early 1990s. The archaeological implications are substantial. Site Director Carl Crossan provides a taste of what is to come.*

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**O**ne of Colchester's best known and least loved buildings will soon be reduced to rubble. After standing for only twenty years, the concrete multi-storey car park which spans the Queen Street Bus Station is to be demolished as the first step in Colchester Borough Council's plans to improve this part of the town.

In its place we will eventually see a new car park, an altered bus station and perhaps a new road layout — ambitious development proposals which will have profound archaeological implications for this three-acre area within the south-east corner of the walled town.

From the outset the Borough recognised that archaeological rescue work would be needed and contacted the Trust to discuss how the necessary archaeological work could be fitted into the redevelopment schedule. To assess these needs it was necessary first to learn more about the archaeology of this large site. Fortunately, we already possessed a fragmentary picture of life in this quarter of the town thanks to the spadework of an earlier generation of archaeologists. Between 1930 and 1970 occasional small excavations and observations of building works yielded a good deal of evidence of Roman building activity including parts of several fine houses, some with hypocausts (under-floor heating

systems), mosaic floors and rooms finished in decorated wall plaster. Although the Roman street system in the south-eastern corner of the town remains poorly defined, it appears that some, perhaps all, of these houses stood in Insula 39 (see page 10), a street block bordered to the south by the town wall. In contrast to the intense Roman occupation, the area became common land in the medieval period and appears to have remained open as fields and gardens almost to the present day.

Further excavation was still required to evaluate the effects of redevelopment but, with the advantage of the earlier results, the recent short season of work could be minimised and concentrated on previously unexplored areas. The aims of the excavation were simple: to discover the depth, condition, and nature of early remains. Three small trenches were opened in various corners of the bus station and a further two were cut against the inner face of the town wall.

Parts of two Roman buildings were uncovered. One, close to the town wall, contained the tile-covered grave of a baby accompanied by a very small pot. Roman law forbade burial within towns, but exception was made for new-born babies.

The floors of this part of the house had been stripped in antiquity — a pity since the presence of loose mosaic cubes

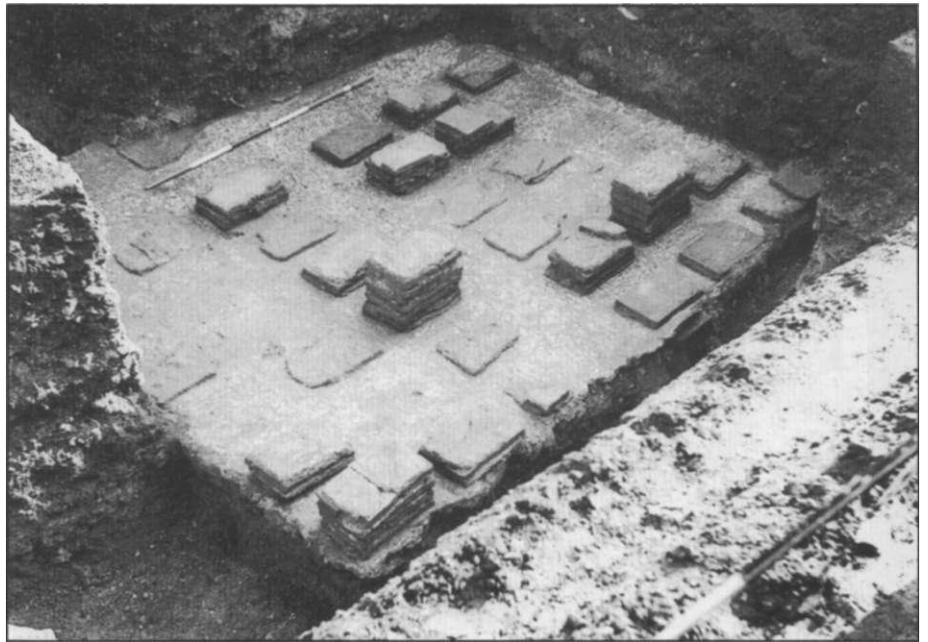
amongst the building debris suggests that they were of some quality. Between the house and the town wall lay a well-preserved length of a tile-lined surface drainage channel — continuing the course of a drain first discovered sixty years ago by former museum curator M.R. Hull when trenching an area twenty metres to the west. The drain evidently runs parallel with the town wall, its purpose being to carry surface water along the higher ground inside to a point where it could be discharged through an opening in the wall in the manner described in the second issue of this magazine (page 9).

The second Roman building came to light in the area behind the Waring and Gillow/Allied Carpets store. Here, beneath a half metre deep accumulation of medieval and later topsoil, we encountered collapsed 'clay' walls of a Roman house. In places the remains of the walls had been cut into by medieval stone robbers in order to retrieve Roman building material for reuse — a common practice of the time since Colchester lacks a local source of natural building stone. Seeking only the valuable stone embedded at depth in the wall foundations, the robbers worked with great economy, their narrow trenches precisely following the courses of walls without disturbing the interiors of rooms.

The positions of the robber trenches defined small parts of three rooms in

which intact floors of red tesserae and mortar could be seen beneath the collapsed clay walling. On removing a small portion of the wall debris from the corner of one room it soon became apparent that this was a house which had been decorated in some style. Scattered throughout the debris were many hundreds of fragments of wall plaster, painted in a rich assortment of colours: red, brown, yellow, green, blue, black and white. Thanks to the patience of the Trust's team of voluntary finds processors, glimpses of the original decorative schemes have emerged; small pieces of panels and figures, patterns floral, geometrical, marbled and mottled — even some graffiti. In all, an extraordinarily varied collection to have come from such a small area — dispersed fragments of a puzzle awaiting a future more extensive excavation to assemble the rest of the pieces.

The rooms appear to belong to a house at the north-west corner of Insula 39. This must have been a prominent position for on the opposite corner stood a major public building which we think was the forum basilica, the centre for civic administration similar in some respects to a modern town hall.



The well-preserved remains of a Roman hypocaust excavated in 1958 on the site bus park .

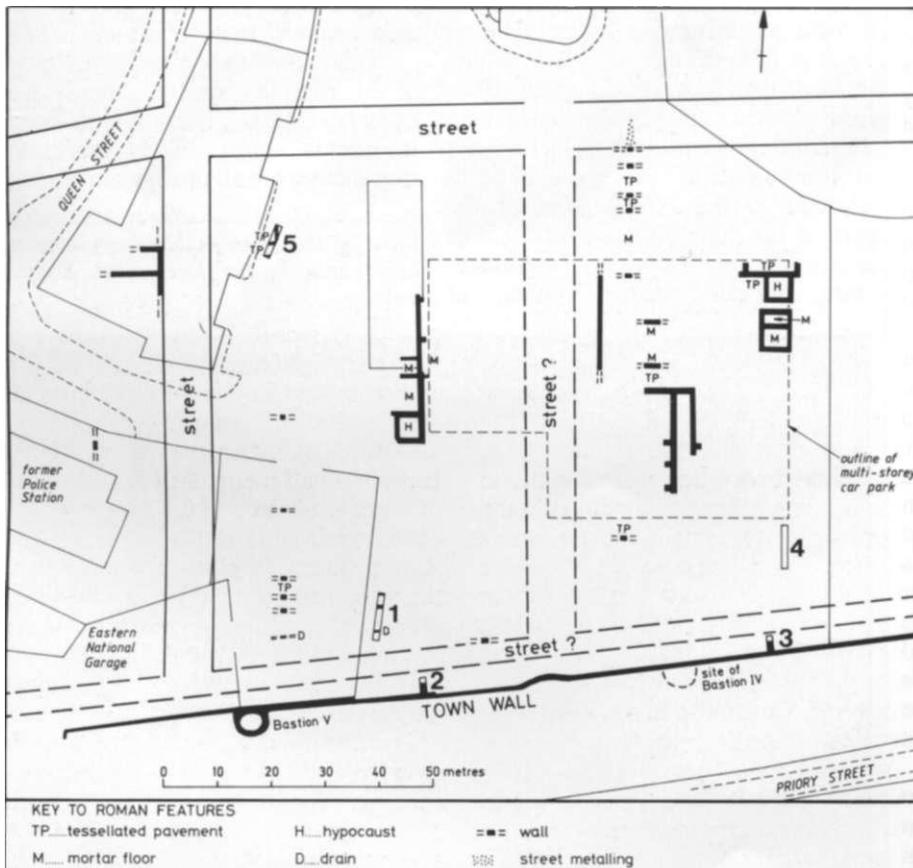
To the south of the site, the exterior face of the town wall in Priory Street exhibits a fascinating mix of Roman, medieval and later stone and brickwork. Much of its present

character derives from repairs carried out in the 14th and 15th centuries when, in addition to extensive refacing, parts of the wall were completely rebuilt and bastions were added at intervals to improve its defensive capabilities.

Immediately north of the wall the ground level in the bus station is some three to four metres higher than that in Priory Street. Starting from a level almost flush with the top of the monument, we dug two trenches against the buried side of the wall and discovered that the Roman face of the wall is beautifully-preserved only a yard or so below ground level.

Larger-scale excavations are almost certain to be needed when the details of the redevelopment scheme are finalised. As a result of the evaluation work, the future excavations can be planned with the benefit of an advance knowledge of the depths and relative importance of the various archaeological levels within the site. Equally importantly, the information recently gained may help improve the level of preservation by influencing the size and location of groundworks and thus minimise their impact on the underlying remains.

Archaeological trenches cannot be the most welcome of arrivals at a busy bus station. Happily, the recent work was completed without bringing the town's public transport system to a halt and for this thanks are due to Colchester Borough Council and Eastern National for their patience and co-operation.



Plan of the known Roman remains in the bus park and its immediate area. The recent trenches are numbered 1 to 5. Roman foundations are shown as thick black lines.

## ROMAN BUILDING AT BOREHAM

*surprise find in Britain's biggest gravel quarry*

In February 1990, Essex County Council granted permission for what will become Britain's largest gravel pit, totalling 800 acres. This will be worked in phases, over 35 years. Although few archaeological sites were known in the quarry area, provision has been made to fieldwalk each phase in advance of extraction, and to excavate where necessary. Fieldwalking began in June, resulting in the location of a concentration of Roman roof-tile fragments. Excavation followed quickly, revealing the remains of a hitherto unknown Roman building complex.

The main building sits at the top of a gentle slope, facing east, down towards a spring-fed stream. The nearest Roman road (the old Colchester road) is about half a mile away. The building's most prominent features are an unusually large apse, ten metres across the chord, and an irregular ground plan. Its builders clearly had trouble making right-angled corners! At the eastern end of the building are two smaller chambers, one square, one apsidal; on its discovery the latter had been interpreted as a possible small bath-house, but current opinion has cast serious doubts upon this.

The badly-damaged footings of further structures extend down the slope towards the stream, culminating in a smaller building which passes under the eastern limit of excavation, and thus has not been completely observed. An area of rough cobbling is associated with this structure, and overlies its southern wall in two places; whether this represents entrances cut through the wall, or the laying of a cobbled surface following its demolition, is uncertain, since the cobbles survive badly as a result of subsequent ploughing.

The eastern half of the site is also marked by a series of earlier Roman pits and ditches, forming part of at least

one rectangular enclosure. A ditch to the north, running east-west, cuts through these earlier features, and may be associated with masonry buildings. Collapsed into the top of it are the remains of a coarse cobbled surface, relating to a late phase in the life of the building. The ditch has produced colossal amounts of tile, plus pottery, some hobnails from a boot, bone pins, and a few coins. Other finds include a pair of bronze tweezers and part of a bronze spatula.

The many tile fragments include a number of 'wasters' (spoilt pieces from a kiln). It is unlikely that these would have travelled far from where they were made, so the chances are that a tile kiln, specially set up to provide tiles for the building, lies nearby, perhaps in a wood behind the excavated area. The pottery ranges in date from the 1st to the 3rd centuries A.D. Why the site came to be abandoned is not yet known, but what is clear is that it was very thoroughly robbed of all reusable building materials.

Originally, the buildings were thought to represent a villa. However, it is now suggested that they belonged to a local administrative centre. This is because of a number of factors which include the lack of domestic finds from contexts directly associated with the buildings themselves. Such finds are all from the earlier pits and ditches. In addition to this, comparison of the plan of the main building with that of a structure at Stonea in Cambridgeshire reveals many points of

similarity, and leads to a tentative interpretation of it as the *principia*, or headquarters building of an imperial estate. The procurator of the estate would sit in front of the apse, which would hold a statue of the reigning emperor, and deliver judgment in civil cases relating to the tenants and workers of the estate. The Stonea example and others abroad, possess what is referred to as a 'forehall', often apsidal, running at right angles across the front of the building, divided into waiting rooms or reception areas. This arrangement tallies quite closely with the two small rooms at the eastern end of the Boreham site.

This interpretation, if correct, makes the building at Boreham a very exciting discovery, since Stonea is the only other example known in the country.

## BRONZE AGE BURIAL URNS

Earlier this year, excavation was completed of a cropmark complex at Brightlingsea in advance of its destruction by quarrying. The cropmarks included a nucleated group of 31 ring ditches, the largest such group ever to be excavated in Essex. It seems most likely that the ring-ditches are all that remain of round

*View of the main building, showing the large apse in the foreground. Scale 2 metres.*



barrows, although primary burials were rare. Only three ring ditches, lying close together in the northwestern corner of the cemetery, contained central cremation burials. The survival of only these three burials may merely reflect a change in burial tradition, ie that the burial pits were dug deeper than previously. Burials were also recorded in clusters in between the ring ditches. In all 48 cremation burials were found. Thirty three of the cremations were contained in Ardleigh-style Deverel-Rimbury urns, dating to the Middle Bronze Age. Some were very large, up to about 1 m high and 0.4 m across the rim. Lifting these urns intact from the pits presented a major problem. First, the original Bronze Age pit was enlarged to create working space around the vessel, which was then wrapped in cling film and aluminium foil. Polyurethane foam was squeezed into undercuts below the pots. The foam rapidly expanded on contact with air

and set to form a solid base. Next, a wall of cardboard was built around the pot, to a height of about 0.1 m above the rim. The space between the card and pot was filled with foam. Once the top of the pot had been sealed with a final layer of foam, the pot was ready for lifting — this meant gently raising the equivalent of a wheelbarrow of soil weighing over a hundredweight (*see picture*). After all the urns had been lifted, they were distributed to specialists for removal of the foam, excavation of the contents, and reconstruction. Analysis of the cremated bone may provide information about burial practices and more personal data on the people who were buried. Study of plant remains should provide much new information on environment and economy in this area during the Middle Bronze Age.

The excavation has been followed by large-scale field survey aimed at locating contemporary settlements by

searching over 1000 acres of ploughed land around the ring ditch cemetery.

## THE LOST BATTERY AT BATHSIDE BAY

Former residents of Nos 12-22 Stour Road in the Bathside area of Harwich were surprised recently to see what lay hidden beneath the soil of their back-gardens. The extensive remains of the rampart walls of an early 19th-century gun battery were uncovered lying only 30 cm below the topsoil. The remains were unearthed during excavations in advance of roadwork for the new Dovercourt by-pass. The site of the semicircular shaped battery was known from old maps and the curving plan of its rampart walls is still reflected by the rear garden walls of the cottages, which were recently demolished.

The battery was built in 1811 to protect the west side of the town from the Napoleonic threat and formed part of the same defensive complex as the famous Harwich redoubt. It was armed with three 24-pounder cannon, mounted on wooden traversing platforms. The guns had an effective range of 1 mile. The battery was protected by walls 2.0 m high and 0.6 m thick with projecting bays for each gun, and fronted by a sloping band of sand. When built, the sea lapped the base of this band, but with land reclamation the site is now 150 m inland. A small octagonal-shaped guardhouse stood at the rear but this now lies under Stour Road. After the defeat of Napoleon, the battery was abandoned and allowed to decay.

Only about 60 per cent of the battery was available for investigation. This meant that only the central and western gun platforms were uncovered. The eastern gun position will be excavated in two years' time when the road is completed. Finds included several coins and a large variety of clay pipes, some decorated. The remains on the western side of the battery, which lie outside the course of the road, will be conserved and displayed in the roadside verge. A plaque explaining their history will be erected nearby.

Triumph! One of the pots is lifted from its burial pit, encased in foam.



# Play The Archaeological Detectives Game

An archaeologist's job is to hunt for clues to help find out what happened in the past.  
 Archaeologists work a bit like police detectives investigating a crime.

To play **The Archaeological Detectives Game** you need: to pretend you are a great detective . . . you also need something to write with.



investigate a crime



taking notes and photographs, making sketches



asking questions



collecting clues (fingerprints etc)



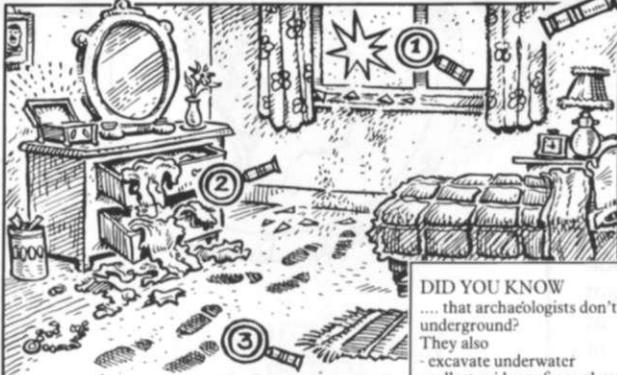
checking against their records.....



and hope to catch the criminal and put forward their evidence in court.

**Be a police detective!**

In the boxes below write down what you think happened. What was the crime?

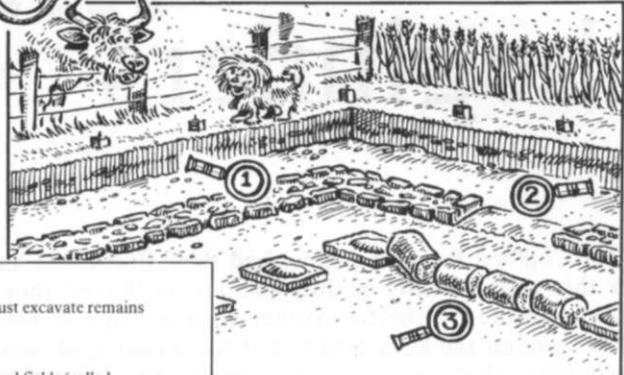


- 1 .....
- 2 .....
- 3 .....

**Clues are shown by**

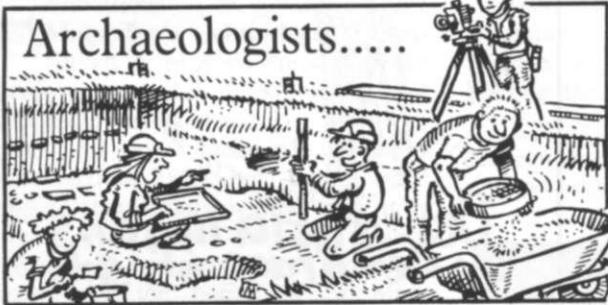
**Be an archaeological detective!**

In the boxes below write down what you think happened. What was this building like in the past?



- 1 .....
- 2 .....
- 3 .....

**DID YOU KNOW**  
 .... that archaeologists don't just excavate remains underground?  
 They also  
 - excavate underwater  
 - collect evidence from ploughed fields (called fieldwalking)  
 - make detailed records of buildings  
 - discover hidden sites by aerial photography  
 - measure out sites which exist only as 'lumps and bumps' in fields  
 ....and much much more!



investigate a site



taking notes and photographs



making plans



collecting clues (broken pottery, animal bones etc)



checking against their records..... and will present their evidence in a report or exhibition.



# LATIN for beginners

Class C at Copford Primary School had their first Latin lesson earlier this year. As part of their project on 'Faces' they got together with the Colchester Archaeological Trust to look at coin portraits through the ages, and learnt the meaning of some of the abbreviations that are to be found on Roman and post-medieval British coins. To follow up their study many of them designed a coin with a Latin legend, some of which are illustrated here, and also wrote essays to record what they had learnt.

For example, on how *not* to handle finds:

*'If you have crisps for a meal or snack the salt will eat the coin away if you touch it.'*

On the subject of Latin inscriptions and realistic Roman coin portraits:

*'The king in Latin is called Rex and the Queen is called Regina. The Emperor in Latin is Imp.'*

*'Faustina was not very happy; Nero was uncontented and selfish.'*

*'Most of the nice people looked quite nice and the bad people looked quite bad.'*

On the long cross coinage:

*'It was called long cross because it had a cross on it. Because there was no small change the lines of the cross could be cut or clipped.'*

*'Long cross coinage could be cut in quarters or halves.'*

*'When they needed small change they cut them into halves or quarters, which was silly.'*

On the subject of true-to-life coin portraits during the reign of Charles I:

*'When the world was at peace the coins were very neat, but when the king was at war the coins were not very neat.'*

*'During the period of the battle against the Roundheads the coins were very bad quality.'*

*'Charles I looked very much like he was on coins before the war and when he was at war the coins didn't look like him.'*

And on the occasional up-dating of Victoria's portrait during her long reign:

*'The Victorian coins were made when she was very young, and then one in her middle age, then when she was very old.'*

*'In the time of Victoria coin portraits were so good that they had a new face as she got older.'*

*'Victoria has grown older and different.'*

Younger children at Copford and at St George's School in Colchester had fun trying to work out what would survive if they buried their clothes and school bags in the ground and didn't dig them up again for 2,000 years. They spotted hair-slides, buttons, eyelets and lace-ends from trainers, stones and coins in pockets and purses, metal badges, watches, tuck-boxes, buckles, and many other odds and ends. When this game was extended to objects in the classroom they saw that while plastic may not be environment-friendly, items made from it will probably keep finds researchers busy in the far future!

Nina Crummy



**Dei gratia means  
By the grace of god**



# In brief....

## St Mary Magdalen's Hospital

*Carl Crossan brings us up to date on the final results of the excavation (see also Colchester Archaeologist 3, pages 8-11)*

**E**xcavations in St Mary Magdalen's churchyard continued to explore the site of the medieval hospital from which the parish derives its name.

Of the two medieval buildings discovered in 1989, one, possibly the hospital chapel, did not stand long in its original form. By the early 13th century it had been reconstructed to provide a church for the parish of St Mary Magdalen, and future masters of the hospital were charged with the additional duties of parish rector. This link between hospital and parish gave added significance to the discovery beneath the church floor of a grave containing the remains of a man with a pewter chalice laid on his chest. In the medieval period the use of pewter vessels for the celebration of Mass was officially frowned upon, silver being preferred. However, a pewter chalice was acceptable for the giving of communion to the sick and for burial in the coffin of a priest — the presence of one here is therefore a strong indication that this was the resting place of an early master of the hospital. Notable architectural finds from the church included a variety of stonework ranging in date from the 12th to the 15th centuries; also found was nearly a hundred pieces of late medieval decorated floor tile, representing the finest collection of its kind yet to be recovered from any site in Colchester.

The other hospital building lay directly to the east of the church. Here, only a few threads of wall foundation had survived the effects of intensive later grave-digging activity, but enough

remained to indicate the building's early medieval origins. With so little to draw on, its purpose can only be guessed at — perhaps a dormitory or the master's house.

When our excavations ended, the adjoining disused Victorian church became a temporary charnel house, holding the human remains recovered

from two hundred graves together with a collection of some 8,000 individual bones found dislodged from their original resting places by later grave-digging. Bone specialist Stephanie Pinter-Bellows then set up a workshop in the vestry and carried out a selective study of the remains, concentrating on the earlier material.

*The pewter chalice from St Mary Magdalen was very badly decayed. Below is a better preserved example excavated by Mike Corbishley at Little Oakley Church, Essex, in 1977.*



Conspicuous abnormalities among these early burials included an individual disabled by septic arthritis brought about by tuberculosis of the knee and a 12th-century hospital inmate infected by tapeworm eggs, a serious condition which may have been the cause of his death.

On completion of the skeletal study the remains were reinterred at Mersea Road cemetery, their new resting place marked with a re-inscribed memorial stone from St Mary Magdalen's.

## **Copford Roman villa**

A dry year means a good year for cropmarks and 1990 has proved to be one of the best in this respect. The trouble is that aerial archaeologists have been so successful in the past that even exceptional years like this one do not provide that many new sites.

One site that has stubbornly refused to yield to aerial inspection is that of the Roman villa at Copford. Over the years ploughing has brought up spreads of broken tile in one particular field in Copford thus making it clear that this was the site of a villa. The field has been 'field-walked' on at least two occasions and the spread of tile and other finds plotted to help tie down the precise position of the remains. But the soil in the immediate area of the villa seems exceptionally clayey so that the crops are much less sensitive to underlying buried features than is normally the case.

This year Ida McMaster in her aerial reconnaissance made a special effort to detect the villa and as a result she obtained some photographs which seemed to show the positions of some foundations. These were exceptionally faint — so faint in fact that it was hard to be sure that they were real cropmarks at all.

In an attempt to test the photographs, three volunteers dug a narrow slit trench through the ploughsoil directly above one of the marks. The idea was that if a substantial foundation existed in this position, then we would be able to see it very quickly without the need for a proper excavation. Needless to say, things did not work out that way. No foundation was revealed and it became apparent that it would take much more than a few hours work on a Sunday afternoon to reveal the truth.

## **An Iron Age bucket**

The remains of an unusual Iron Age bucket lay crushed in a pit at the Stanway excavation site earlier in 1990. It was made of pieces of wood bound together

with iron and copper-alloy strips, some of which were decorated.

The bucket had been broken in antiquity and had to be lifted undisturbed in a block of soil so that it could be excavated and consolidated in the museum's laboratory. Pieces of burnt bone found nearby suggest that the bucket may have been buried with a human cremation.

The Stanway excavation will probably be resumed before the end of 1990. It is hoped that the main phase of the whole project will take place in 1991 when the most promising areas will be examined.

The project is being undertaken with the financial assistance of Tarmac and English Heritage.

## **St John's Street**

It has been a year for mysterious Roman buildings in Colchester. East Stockwell Street presented us with a puzzle and later so too did a discovery on a site in St John's Street.

The St Johns Street site is next to the Boadicea pub where an office block was to be erected. It is just outside the walled part of the town, almost opposite the site of Roman and medieval Head Gate. Roman street metalling was noted in several places on the site but this was expected since it was on the frontage of the street which passed through the Roman gate. Also found were the remains of the corner of a building which had stood on the side of the street. The walls had been over five wide and strengthened with buttresses built against the external face. Like the discovery at East Stockwell Street, this had not been an ordinary house.

The building is very reminiscent of the presumed shrine found during the Balkerne Lane excavations in the mid 1970s. Like that building, it is buttressed and stands in the angle between the street out of the nearby gate and the town ditch in front of the wall. So perhaps we have found another shrine? Another explanation for the building is that it was a granary. These buildings are usually distinguishable in part by the buttresses which they incorporated to counter the outer-pressure on the walls exerted by the grain inside. A small building of this kind was found not far from here during the Culver Street excavations in the mid 1980s.

Another similarity with Balkerne Lane was provided by a fragment of a human skull which appears to have belonged to somebody who shortly before death had suffered a severe blow to the head.

At the point of impact, the outer surface of the skull had been crushed inwards whilst the inner surface stayed intact. There was no sign of healing so that it is very probable that the person met a violent death. Two skulls at Balkerne Lane were much better preserved than the fragment from St Johns Street. One showed evidence of a very similar injury whilst the other bore the mark of a ferocious chop to the back of the head with a sword or axe. The St Johns Street discovery lends strength to the view that parts of people — especially heads — were often displayed at the gates of the town in the Roman period.

We are indebted to the developers, Frincon Holdings Ltd, for funding the excavation and making it possible.

## **Archaeology lectures**

Topics covered by the Colchester Archaeological Group's winter session of Monday night lectures will include excavations at Caesarea, The Rose Theatre in London, and Suffolk, especially Sudbury. For further details, contact Denis Tripp, 69 Lexden Road, Colchester C03 3QE (telephone Colchester 578059).

## **Unique record**

The Roman church at Butt Road has appeared in the 1991 Guinness Book of Records as the oldest ecclesiastical building in Britain.

## **Yet another unique record...**

The Sites and Monuments Record for Essex is a major compilation of the known archaeological sites and monuments in the county. It was compiled by the County Archaeological Section at County Hall in Chelmsford.

The Trust has just completed a radical overhaul of the Colchester section and brought the record up-to-date with the addition of all the latest discoveries. The resulting record details 1500 sites in the Colchester District and is a most valuable tool when assessing the likely impact of planning proposals on archaeological sites.

The project was funded by the Colchester Borough Council and Essex County Council and was undertaken with the support of the County Archaeological Section and the Colchester Borough Council.

The updating was done by Simon Garrod and Steve Benfield, both of whom have since left the Trust after several years' service to study archaeology at university.

# The Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust

**T**he Friends of CAT is a thriving organisation with several hundred members. Most live in Colchester or nearby, but a few hail from as far afield as Denmark, Gibraltar, Canada, the USA, Africa, and the Antipodes. All members of the Friends receive a copy of *The Colchester Archaeologist*, and those living within a reasonable distance of Colchester have a chance to attend an annual lecture on the previous year's work, to go on organised outings to excavation sites, ancient monuments, historic buildings and museums, and to attend events related to the work of the Trust.

## The year so far

There have been outings this year to

the Celtic metalwork exhibition, 'The Work of Angels' at the British Museum, the Bronze Age wetland site at Flag Fen near Peterborough, Sutton Hoo, and around some of the well-preserved 12th-century churches in the area. The annual churches trip is always popular, but this year the Friends turned out in greater force than usual (two coach loads!) to hear the guest speaker, Andrew Harris, lead us through the intricacies of 12th-century stone-carving.

Two of our lady members, clad only in light Roman dresses, braved the uncertain September weather to run a stall for the Friends at the Five Parishes Show on Fingringhoe Ranges. The crowd must have been in adventurous mood, because nearly all the stock of Roman-style sweet wine cakes and

stuffed dates was bought, and we hope, eaten!

In November we had a new venture — a 'hands-on' session at the Castle Museum, Colchester, — when over sixty members were able to handle items in the museum collection. A wide variety of artefacts were made available, ranging from prehistoric pottery and flints to a 17th-century pistol which could be fired (well, almost). While the Friends undoubtedly enjoyed this experience, they exercised great care to ensure that the objects did not suffer, so, just as with snake-handling at the zoo, preliminary instructions on handling techniques were given, and clued-up members were at hand to supervise the less experienced. The session was combined with a comprehensive tour around the Castle, and mid-morning refreshments.

*Margaret Gooderham and Avril Farahar in Roman costume at the Five Parishes Show.*



## And yet to come

Next year's AGM will start at 2.00 pm in the lecture room at the Castle Museum on Saturday 26th January 1991. Illustrated talks will outline the discoveries of 1990 at Queen Street, St Botolph's Priory, the Roman public building in East Stockwell Street, and another enigmatic Roman building in St John's Street. These will be followed by the usual refreshments.

Next year's trips will include a walk round some of Ipswich's town-centre churches and, parking problems permitting, a coach trip to Audley End. In early autumn we may even venture further afield for a weekend, perhaps to Hadrian's Wall or the south coast.

## Do join us

Come with us on our outings by joining the Friends of Colchester Archaeological Trust. Details of the subscription rates and how to join are printed inside the front cover of this magazine. For details of trips and other events contact Nina Crummy, 2 Hall Road, Copford, Colchester, C06 1BN.

*Nina Crummy*

# Award for the Roman church

**T**he Trust was awarded *The Heritage in Britain Award* for 1990 for its work on the Roman church near Butt Road. This is a biennial award sponsored by English Heritage and its Scottish and Welsh counterparts for the best project which ensures the long-term preservation of an archaeological site or monument in Britain.

The prize is a trophy and a cheque for £500 to be spent on the project. The importance of the monument was taken into account during the judging.

The project was made possible by the support of the Essex County Council and the Colchester Borough Council.

An account of the discoveries made during the excavation and adjacent Roman cemetery at Butt Road can be found in the booklet, *Secrets of the Grave*, obtainable from local bookshops or from the Trust for £1.75 post-free.

*Right: Trust draughtsman, Bob Moyes, holds the Heritage in Britain Award. The trophy consists of a replica of a silver bowl from Sutton I loo set in a polished stone surround.*

