COLCHESTER

recent excavations
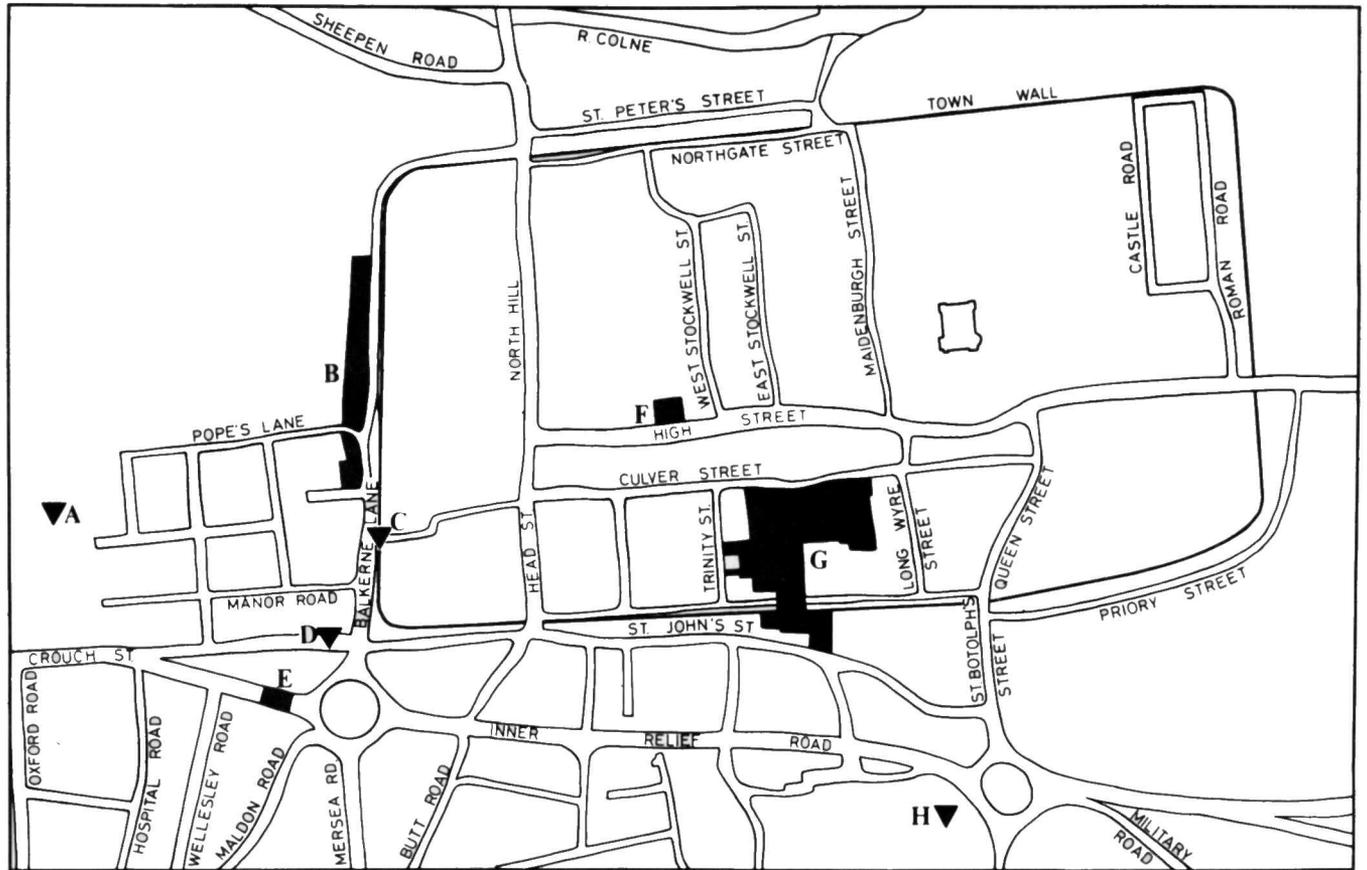## and research

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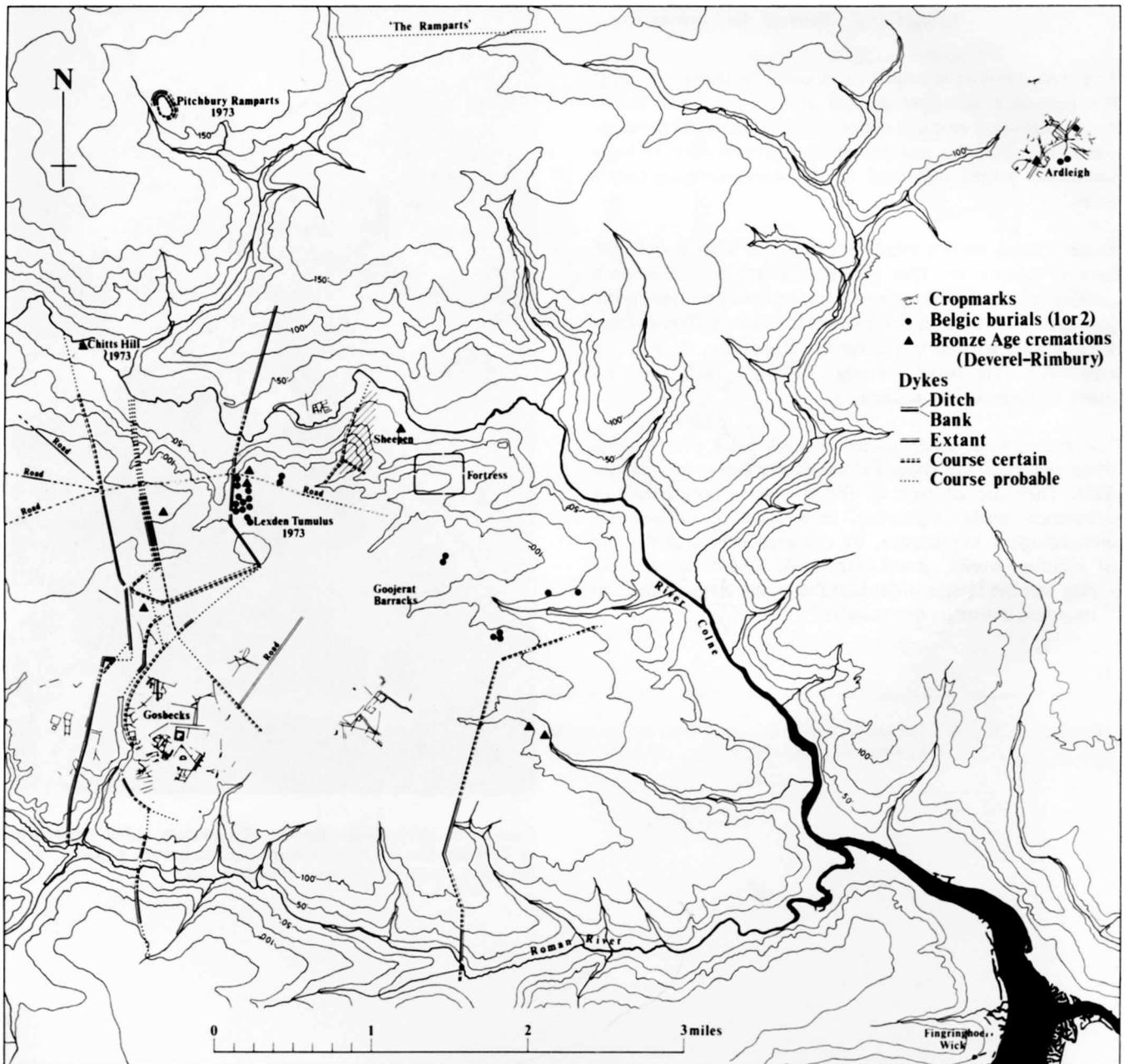
COLCHESTER

RECENT EXCAVATIONS AND RESEARCH

by

Philip Crummy

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Town centre sites mentioned in text: A . . . Oaks Drive 1973, B . . . Balkerne Lane 1973-4, C . . . St. Mary's Steps 1972, D . . . Crouch Street 1973, E . . . Maldon Road 1971, F . . . Cups Hotel 1973-4, G . . . Lion Walk 1971-4, H . . . St. John's Abbey Grounds 1972.

Cover: **Painting by Pete Froste based on a reconstruction by Philip Crummy.**

Prehistoric Colchester. Belgic sites and dykes, location of military fortress, Bronze Age cremations, prehistoric and Roman cropmarks, Roman roads known as cropmarks and sites mentioned in text.

Foreword

This little booklet was written in order to describe briefly the general conclusions arrived at as a result of recent excavations and research concerning the historical development of Colchester and to satisfy a general need to keep interested people informed of the Archaeological Unit's work.

Readers must bear in mind that much of what is outlined here is speculative. This present account of Colchester's development is different from what has been written in the past and, doubtless, in some respects will be different from what will be written in the future. Hopefully, none of the conclusions are totally wrong, although over the years many of them will be refined.

The excavations under discussion took place over the last three years and are those for which the writer was responsible. They are all part of the long-term programme of excavation made imperative, in a town of Colchester's archaeological importance, by the ever-increasing volume of building works, gravel extraction, road-building, pipelaying and the like, in order that the archaeological material is recorded before its destruction.

Cups Hotel 1974. Bronze figurine of a goddess, either Abundantia or Fortuna. She is holding a cornucopia in her left hand and may have held a rudder in her right. (Height 4 cms.)

Belgic Colchester

". . . . the coast (of Britain is inhabited) by Belgic immigrants who came to plunder and make war . . . . and later settled down to till the soil."

Caesar: The Conquest of Gaul

Colchester was formerly known as Camulodunum and was the home of Cunobelinus, the most famous and probably the most powerful king of the Belgic tribes in Britain. It was defended by a series of banks and ditches, much of which still survives to this day. These dykes, as they were called, had their banks to the inside and were particularly effective against cavalry and chariots. The final layout as we know it today was closely integrated with forest and marsh and was not the result of a grand master plan, or even an unfinished one, but the product of constant reappraisal and improvement schemes. Two main centres of occupation are known, Gosbecks and Sheepen, and a third, probably a minor one, was recently discovered at Goojerat Barracks. A large Belgic settlement is known, as a result of the work of Mr. F. Erith, to have existed at Ardleigh. This site does not lie within the defences of Camulodunum and may have had smaller dykes of its own. It does not, therefore, concern us here, but the Ardleigh settlement is so close to Colchester that the histories of the two must be closely knit.

Of all the Belgic occupation sites, only Sheepen has been closely examined archaeologically. Major excavations were carried out over the 1930s when the site was found to have been a very rich and important one. The quality of the pottery was high and included abundant quantities of imports from the continent. Luxury goods in glass and bronze had clearly been quite commonplace at Sheepen, the general high standard of living in sharp contrast to that suggested by the finds, so far, from Goojerat Barracks and Ardleigh. A crucial discovery, however, was that of pieces of broken coin moulds found scattered over the southern side of the site. Many more of these were again found in 1971 during an excavation made necessary by residential redevelopment on the south side of Sheepen. Each mould originally consisted of slabs of clay with fifty flat-bottomed circular holes for the manufacture of blank coin flans. The flans were then stamped with a die on each side. Belgic coins inscribed with CVNO have long ago been identified as those of Cunobelinus and the CAM legend, often accompanying this, equated with Camulodunum.

Over a hundred such coins had been found by the end of the Sheepen excavations of the 1930s, so that, bearing in mind the wealth of its inhabitants as indicated by the finds

and the importance of the site as implied by the strength of the defences, the excavators were confident in attributing the broken coin moulds to debris from the mint of Cunobelinus and the Sheepen site as his Camulodunum. The distribution of Iron Age coins over Southern England and Northern France, with their designs and legends, is a source rich in historical potential and has been used to infer movements of peoples and to confirm the existence of an often inter-related royal class ruling the Belgic tribes. The occurence, for example, in the Colchester district of coins of Dubnovellaunus from the Kent area has been taken to imply an invasion and occupation by this king, whereas coins of other Iron Age tribes found locally were not attributed with similar significance. This kind of interpretation of the coin evidence led the excavators at
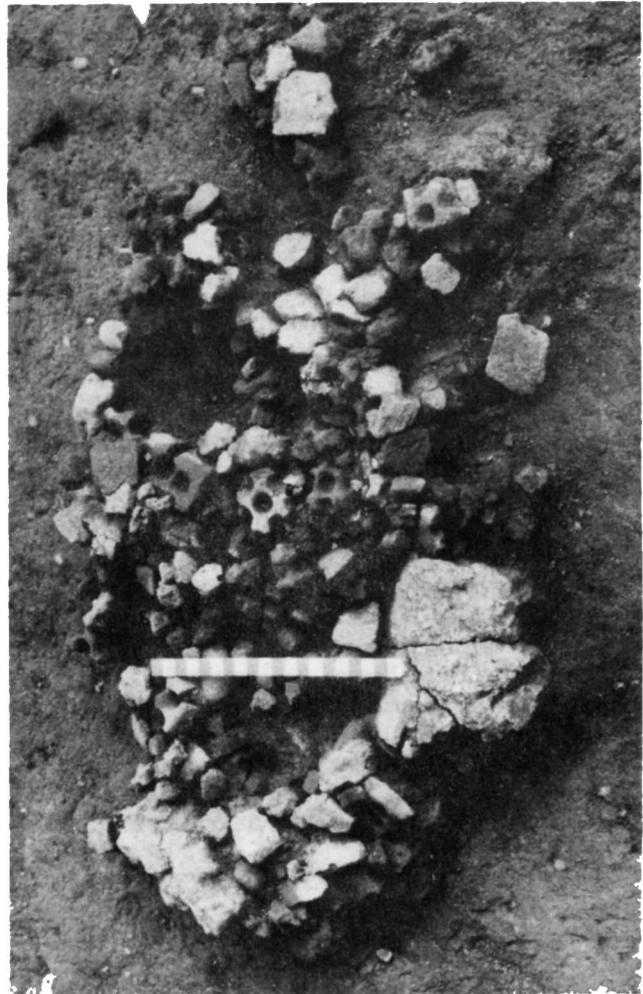

Sheepen 1971. A small dump of broken Belgic coin moulds (scale in centimetres).

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Sheepen to suggest that the site might have been founded by Cunobelinus as his new capital, following a military occupation. However, there is a good case for arguing that the presence of non-local Iron Age coins is the result of trade contacts and political and economic policies. Certainly, the Sheepen site should be seen as the culmination of a longer Belgic occupation of the Colchester area, perhaps pre-dating it by as much as a hundred years.

Colchester possesses in the Lexden Tumulus one of the few barrows in Britain thought to be of Belgic date. Barrows were made by heaping material excavated from a surrounding ditch over one or more burials. The commonest type of barrow is round, with a ditch encircling a mound, and usually dates to the Bronze Age. The Lexden Tumulus is of this type, but is thought to be Belgic because of the rich burial found in its centre during excavations in 1924. The burial rite was cremation and the grave-goods had been mutilated. Bronze finds included figures of a boar, a bull, a griffin, a cupid, a small table and a silver medallion of the head of Augustus dating to c. 17 B.C. at the earliest. Many pieces of chopped-up chain mail and fittings of bronze and silver were found, and, although they were discovered fifty years ago, the size of the task has prevented any serious attempt at reconstruction. When this is possible, exciting results may well be expected.

In 1973, planning permission was granted for a new house alongside the Tumulus, on condition that it did not encroach on the monument. As it was difficult to define the limits of the Tumulus on the ground, the Excavation Committee was asked to excavate a narrow trench through the edge of the mound to establish its exact position. This was done, but the narrow trench proved to be too small for any positive conclusions. Very little of the original mound was still intact and no finds were recovered from it to suggest that it was Belgic in date. Indeed, had it not been for the Belgic burial in the centre of the mound, discovered so many years ago, the Tumulus would have been considered to be Bronze Age. In the St. Clare Road area, many Belgic cremations have been recovered in the past, buried in pots or amphorae. The most recent discovery of this nature was a flagon and part of a terra nigra platter, dating to A.D. 10-43, found by workmen whilst digging a pipe-trench in the public footpath close by
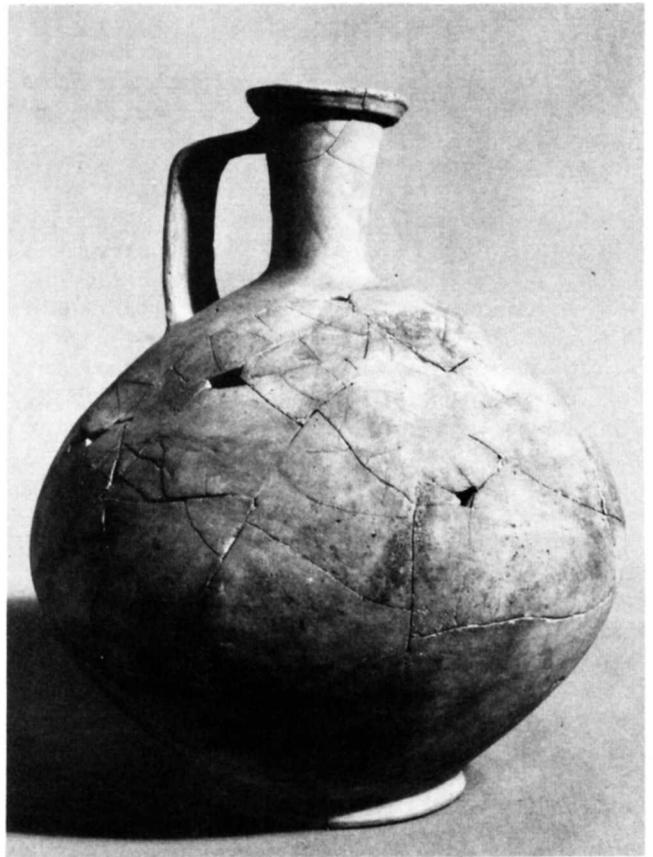
Lexden Tumulus 1973. A flagon, probably dating to A.D. 10-43, found buried near the tumulus.

the Lexden Tumulus. Some of the St. Clare Road burials, however, clearly pre-date the main phase of occupation at Sheepen and probably date to the second half of the last century B.C., or slightly later, and are broadly contemporary with the Belgic burial in the Lexden Tumulus. It is tempting, then, to wonder whether the Lexden Tumulus is really Belgic, or whether it is Bronze Age with an inserted Belgic burial. The fact that so few 'Belgic barrows' are known in Britain is suspicious, but, on the other hand, the Lexden Tumulus is exceptional on account of its extra-ordinary grave-goods.

Colchester Before the Belgæ

"For their life was altogether uncivilized, perfectly rude, and wholly taken up in wars, so that they were long without any Learning . . . . the only sure and certain means of preserving and transmitting to posterity the memory of things past."

<div align="right">Camden: Britannia</div>

The local fore-runner of the Belgic dyke system was the Iron Age hill-fort at Pitchbury. The Gas Board was given permission to lay a gas main across the site, so excavation was necessary in the summer of 1973. The hill-fort consisted of an area of five acres, defended by a double bank and ditch with a single entrance. The outer bank and ditch was shallower than the inner one and was not constructed round the whole circuit. This was, perhaps, because a second bank and ditch was felt to be unnecessary on the southwest side, where the hill-fort was already protected by a steep valley and brook. Most of the defences were levelled some time ago for agricultural purposes and the interior of the hill-fort badly damaged by ploughing and more recent bulldozing. No traces of any structures were found in the strip excavated across the interior of the hill-fort, although the presence

PITCHBURY RAMPARTS 1973

BASED ON CONTOUR SURVEY AND CROP MARKS
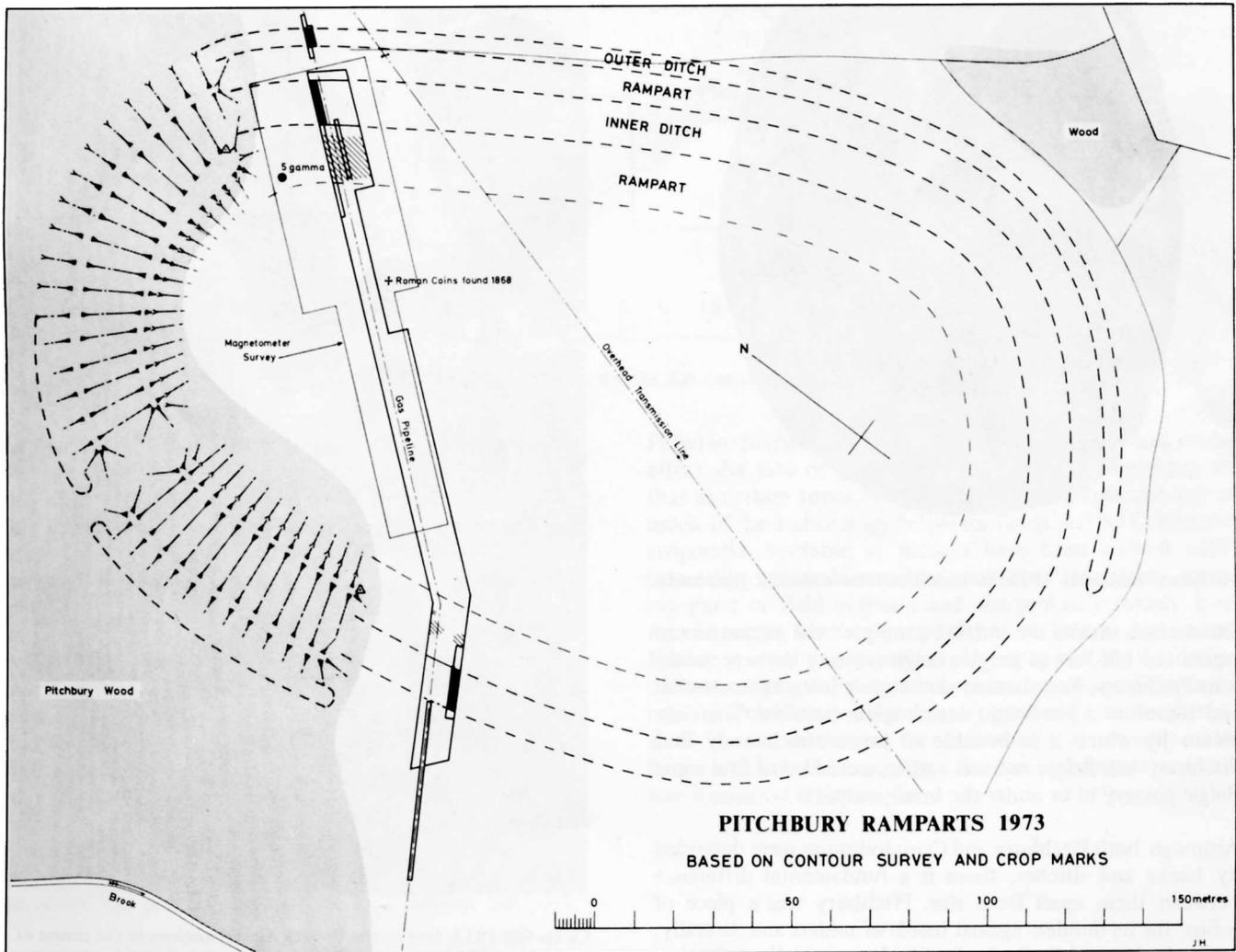
Pitchbury Ramparts 1973. Iron Age hill-fort.

of a quantity of pottery and flints of various dates indicates that some may have existed there. The Iron Age pottery found was of two different periods; either Belgic in date or second and third centuries B.C. Some late Neolithic pits were discovered, dated by the associated flints, which included, notably, a fine, worn discoidal knife. A few mesolithic flints were also discovered scattered throughout the area. The late medieval pottery found during the excavation may have resulted from the quarrying of the ramparts for sand and gravel in the medieval period.

Pitchbury Ramparts 1973. A Late Neolithic discoidal flint knife.

Excavations on the site in 1932 prompted the excavators to regard the hill-fort as Belgic. Belgic pottery there certainly is at Pitchbury, but there is also earlier Iron Age material, and therefore a pre-Belgic date is quite possible. The only means by which it is possible to prove conclusively that Pitchbury was Belgic and not earlier, would be to find some Belgic pottery in or under the inner rampart.
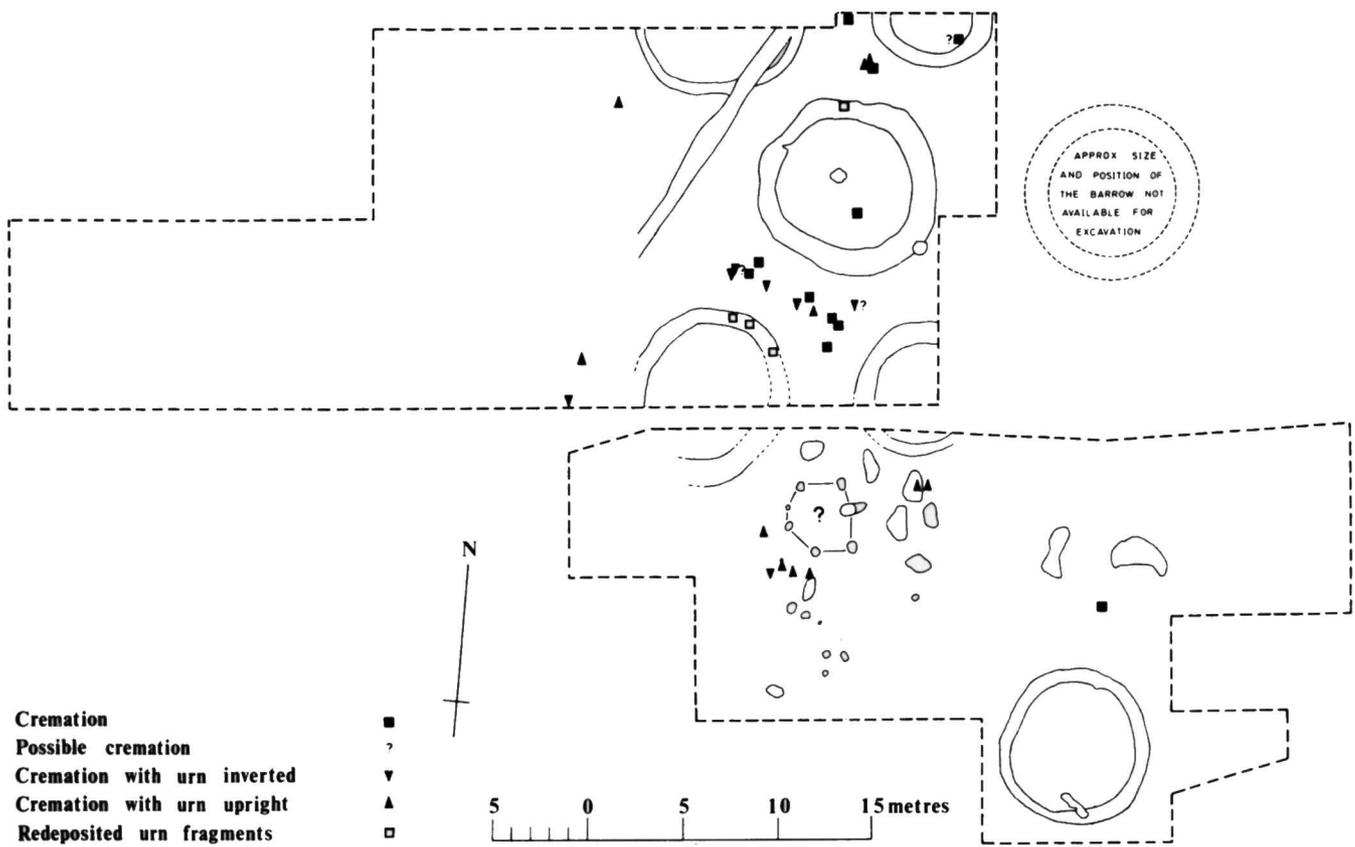
Although both Pitchbury and Camulodunum were defended by banks and ditches, there is a fundamental difference between them apart from size. Pitchbury was a place of refuge for its builders against bands of raiders and, literally, a last ditch stand in times of crisis. It was totally defensive. The dyke system of Camulodunum was, of course, later in date, and its sheer magnitude indicative of a wealth of a community able to spend so much of its time in non-productive ditch-digging. It was a means not only of defence but also of aggression. Guerilla tactics would, no doubt, have been possible against a penetrating enemy and there would have been no need for direct confrontation. Furthermore, the dyke system provided a means of escape, something that did not exist at hill-forts like Pitchbury.

Pitchbury is not the only site to produce evidence of pre-Belgic occupation in the area of Colchester. Early Iron Age post-holes were found at Sheepen in 1971 and clearly represent a fraction of the total remains of a pre-Belgic settlement that was there.

Chitts Hill 1973. One of the Bronze Age cremations in the course of excavation. The pot was buried upside down and its base destroyed by ploughing and/or the gravel quarry machines.

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Cremation   ■
Possible cremation   ?
Cremation with urn inverted   ▼
Cremation with urn upright   ▲
Redeposited urn fragments   ▫

APPROX SIZE AND POSITION OF THE BARROW NOT AVAILABLE FOR EXCAVATION

5   0   5   10   15 metres

**Chitts Hill 1973. Bronze Age cemetery.**

At Chitts Hill in 1973 a Bronze Age cemetery was discovered during gravel-quarrying for the new Northern By-pass. Seven ring ditches were recorded and over thirty cremations. The ring ditches are the remains of round barrows whose mounds have been removed. Each cremation was buried either on its own or in a pot. The pots are of a distinctive type, known as Deverel-Rimbury, which is found in cremation cemeteries all over the south-east of England and dates to 1200 - 700 B.C. Similar cemeteries have been found at Lexden, Sheepen and at Ardleigh, where over a hundred pots have been recovered. The distribution of the cremations in relation to the barrows at Chitts Hill makes it quite clear that they were later, and, indeed, there was evidence suggesting that some cremations had been inserted into the barrow mounds. A ditch, forming part of a field enclosure, was also discovered and it post-dates the levelling of at least one barrow. Little pottery was found in the ditch, but what was recovered was probably of Iron, or Late Bronze, Age date.

Filled-in ditches and pits, as well as buried walls and roads, affect the rate of growth of crops directly over them, so that at certain times of year aerial photographs can tell us much of the archaeology below the fields. All the Colchester cropmarks available at present have been plotted with interesting results. Most of the marks are field ditches, forming parts of field systems, and are probably mainly Iron Age in origin, but could date from the Bronze Age to the Roman period. Cropmarks, photographed at Gosbecks, show short lengths of metalled roads branching off the main road to Colchester, and indicate a previously unrecognized, small Roman settlement there. Gosbecks is not only a key Belgic site but also contains a Roman timber theatre and a fine Romano-Celtic temple.

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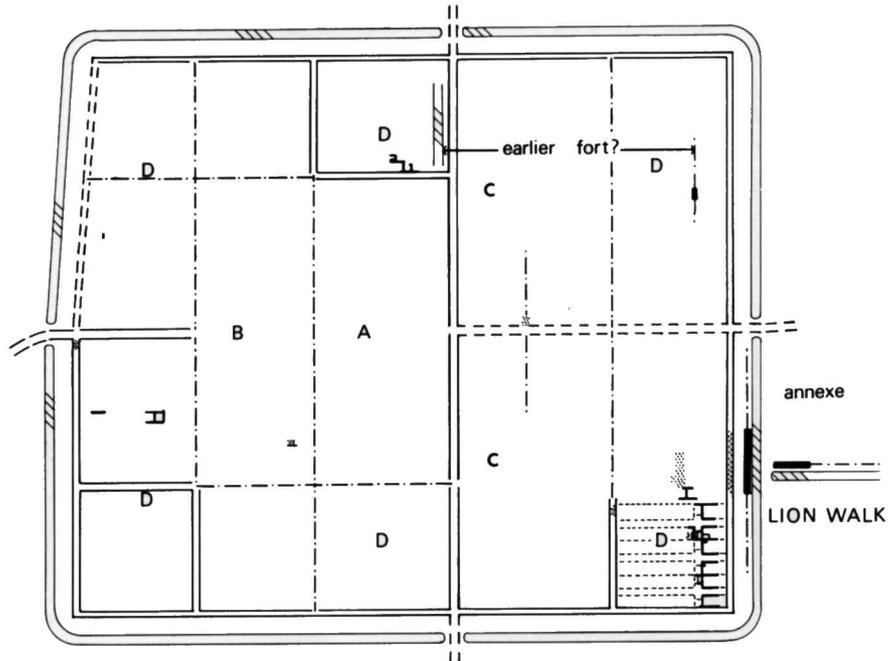
COLCHESTER

CAERLEON
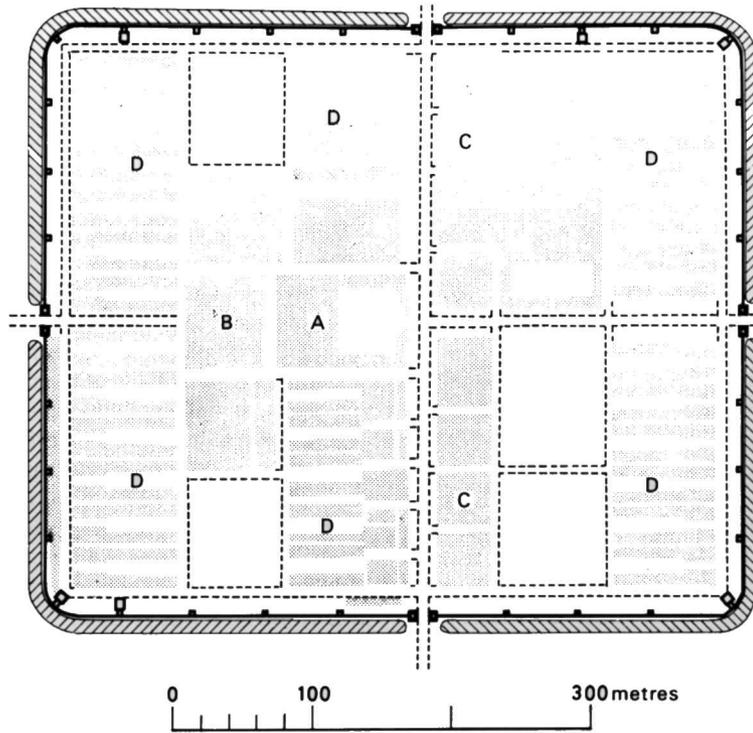
Conjectural layout of the legionary fortress at Colchester and the fortress at Caerleon for comparison.
A . . . principia, B . . . praetorium, C . . . mostly officers' houses, D . . . barracks.

The Fortress and Early Town

"They create a desolation and call it peace."

Tacitus: Agricola (Caractacus' speech)

It is now fairly certain that the town started off as a Roman legionary fortress and that this lay under what was to become the western half of the walled area. The fortress had been quite deliberately sited within the defences of Belgic Camulodunum, just south of the spring line on the fifty foot contour. Although there are objections to the theory that there is a military base as large as a fortress under Colchester at all, there are several points strongly in its favour. One, in particular, is the striking similarity between the street system of the later Roman town within the postulated area of the legionary fortress and that of the fortress at Caerleon in Wales. Several streets of the Roman town have, over the years, been sectioned, and only in certain cases have buildings been found beneath them. There are, indeed, good archaeological reasons for supposing that many of the streets of the western half of Roman Colchester were of military origin.

Consequently, several possible layouts of the military streets and buildings can be worked out, the most likely of which, on present evidence is given here. At the Cups Hotel in 1974, part of a north-south pre-Boudiccan road was observed in the side of the builders' trenches after removal of cellars. This fits in well with our postulated fortress layout and would have very likely run up the eastern side of the house of one of the tribunes, an officer of the legion.

A military base of some size has long been suspected in the Colchester area. Several military tombstones were found some time ago testifying to the presence of the Twentieth Legion. They were found in the vicinity of the Royal Grammar School and Beverley Road and indicate the location of a military cemetery. At Fingringhoe Wick, a considerable amount of Claudian military equipment and pottery found some time ago during gravel-quarrying led Mr. Hull to suggest the existence of a military supply depot there.

In Lion Walk, the fortress defences were found to consist of a V-shaped ditch about 9 feet deep and a bank of sand about 10 feet wide, revetted with sandy clay loam walls

Tombstone, found in 1868, of the centurion M. Favonius Facilis who lived in the fortress at Colchester and was attached to the Twentieth Legion.


Lion Walk 1973. The defences of the annexe of the legionary fortress. In the background, centre, is a section through the V-shaped ditch. In the middle left is the base of the rampart and in the middle right traces of the parallel timbers on which the rampart was laid. Built into the rear of the rampart was a small furnace which can be seen in the foreground, left.
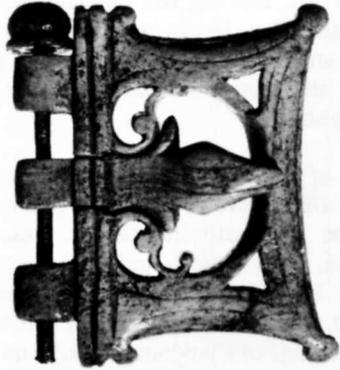
Lion Walk 1973. Military bone buckle (actual size).

and built on a layer of parallel logs. The rampart may have been coursed at regular intervals throughout its height by similar bands of timber, but not enough of the rampart survived to determine this. An annexe of unknown size and function was defended by a similar bank and ditch and was situated on the eastern side of the fortress. Parts of seven military buildings were also found at Lion Walk, six of which were all of the same type and arranged in a manner typical of military fortresses. The seventh was much larger than the others and built around a gravel courtyard.

It was possible to examine one of the group of six in detail. This building, it was found, could be divided into two blocks. The east part was built on mortar and stone sills, whilst the remainder, at least as much as was available for excavation, was entirely timber-framed and possibly had been rebuilt several times. The latter was subsequently demolished, but the section built on the more substantial mortared sills was kept. The central wall in this was rebuilt
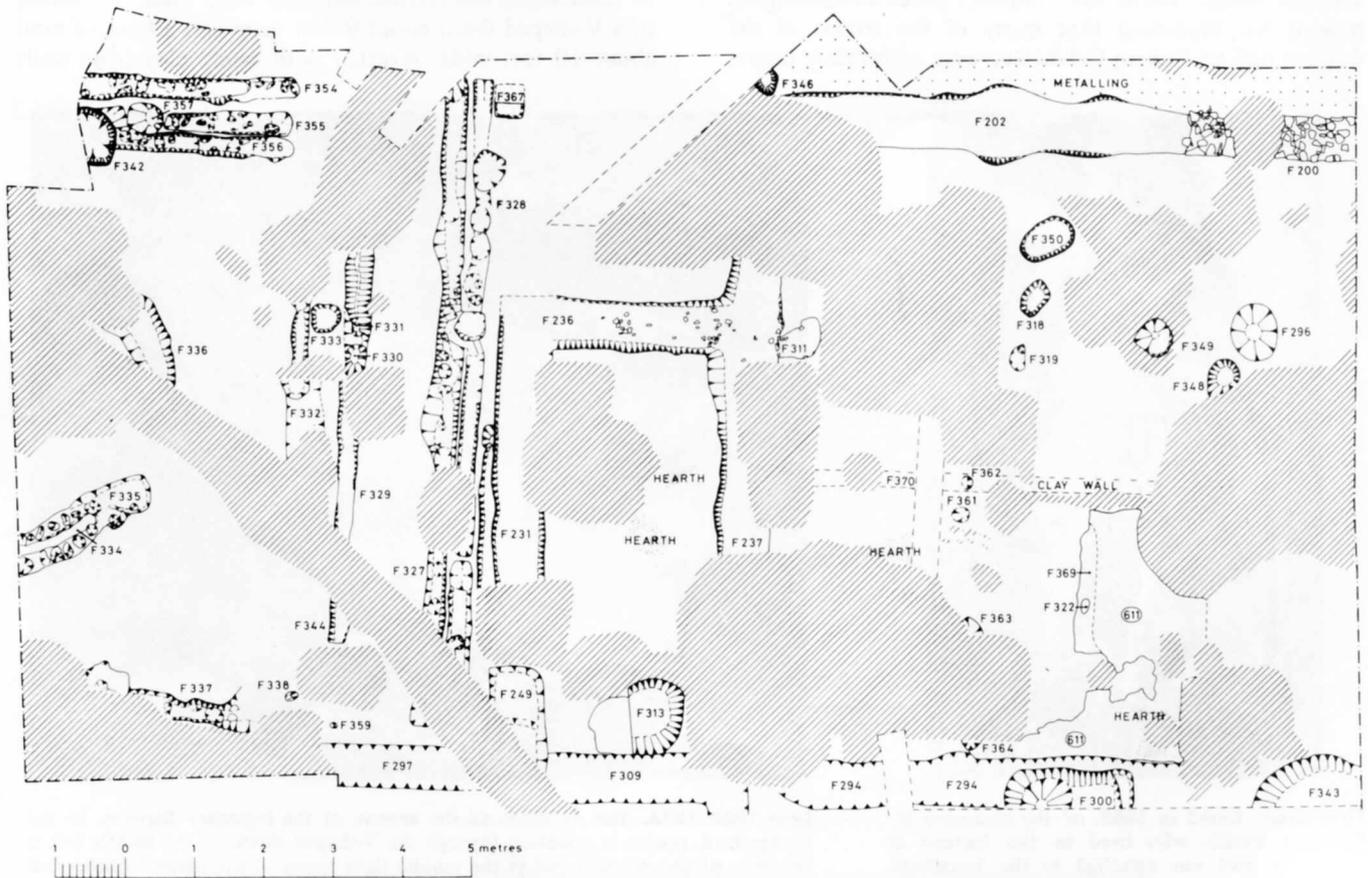

Lion Walk 1973. Part of a military barrack block.

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and the floors replaced. The building was then destroyed by fire during the Boudiccan revolt of A.D. 60/61. We are fortunate, when dealing with this period in Colchester, in having a sound historical framework in which to work. We know that the Romans invaded Britain in A.D. 43, and that the garrison in the Colchester area was withdrawn and the town with the status of a Colonia founded around A.D. 49; furthermore, we know that the Britons, under Boudicca, revolted and burnt the Roman towns of Colchester, St. Albans and London in late A.D. 60 or 61. In the case of the above building in Lion Walk, we can be quite sure that it was military in origin and we can also be quite sure that it was destroyed in A.D. 60 or 61. This can only imply that the building was re-used in the new Colonia. A similar sequence seems to have happened elsewhere in the town. The early buildings found by Miss B.R.K. Dunnett at North Hill in 1965 and at St. Mary's Rectory in 1967 are similar in construction to those at Lion Walk and were also burnt down in A.D. 60 or 61. On the other hand, the courtyard building in Lion Walk

was apparently not re-occupied in A.D. 49, but demolished and replaced with a new building.

It seems, then, that the Colonia was no new, purpose-built town, but simply and practically the Roman fortress re-occupied. It was a method of killing two birds with one stone: a way of founding a settlement of veteran soldiers and, at the same time, finding a use for a redundant fortress. There is evidence that several other towns (such as Gloucester and Exeter) started off in just this manner.

The changeover from fortress to Colonia was not a straightforward and painless one. The military defences were filled in and built over, an event doubtless regretted later in A.D. 60. Whole buildings and parts of others would have been demolished. Some would have been replaced by new ones; others would not. Considerable alterations were made to the re-occupied buildings. Most of the streets were kept, many were perhaps widened and new ones laid out. On the east side of town, just outside
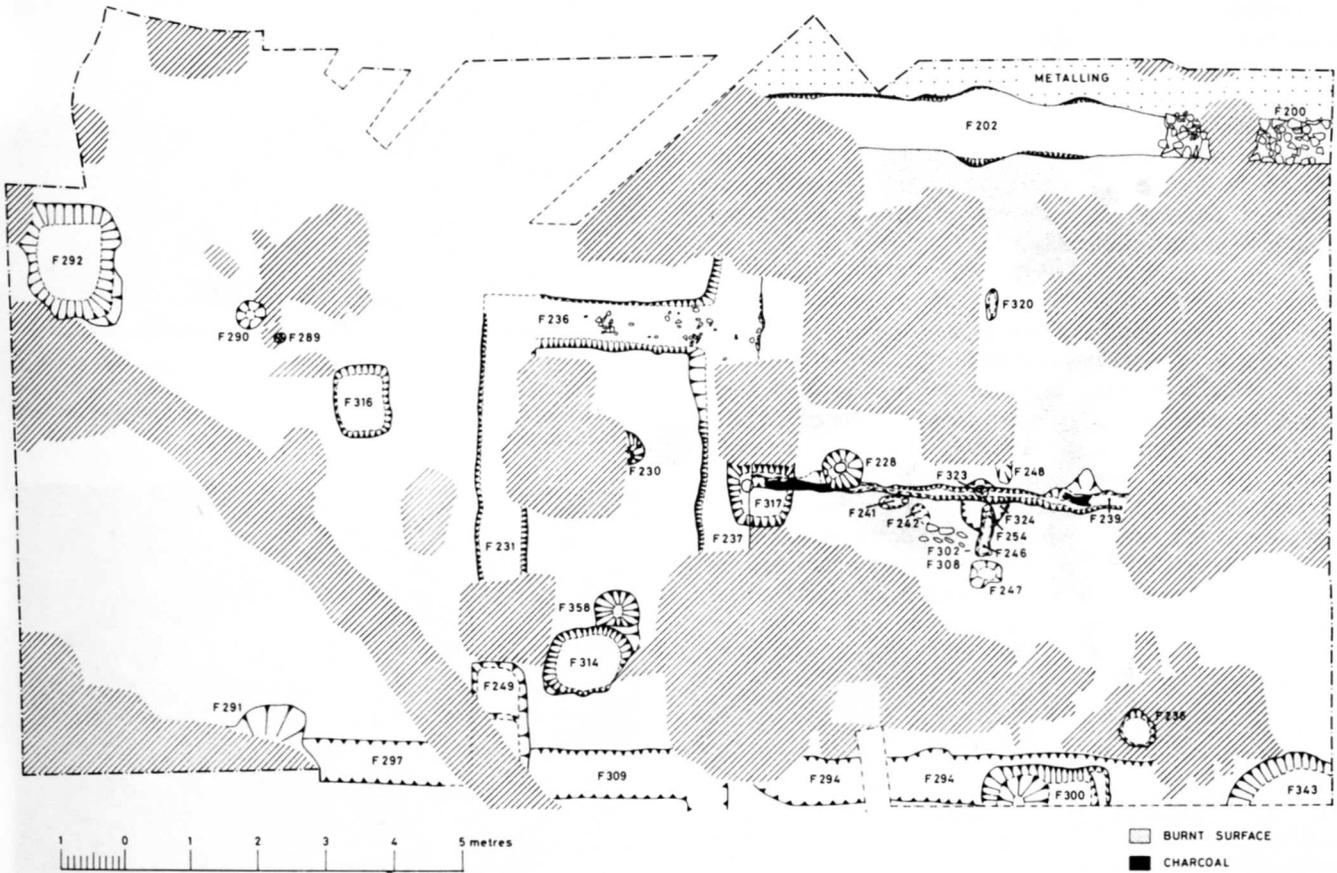
Lion Walk 1973. Part of the same barrack as opposite but adapted for use in the new town. It was destroyed by fire in A.D. 60.

the area of the old fortress, several public buildings were built. These probably consisted of, amongst others, the Temple of Claudius, a theatre and a basilica, the Roman equivalent of our town hall. The building techniques employed were very sophisticated by the previous military standards. Many of the walls were built on timber sills with rectangular uprights at regular intervals. The panels were bridged with vertical and horizontal wattles, and the whole timber frame filled in with daub, plastered over and then painted, sometimes with simple designs. It has been suggested by D. Fishwick in 'Britannia' that the building of the Temple of Claudius would not have been started until after Claudius' death in A.D. 54 and that it may have been unfinished in A.D. 60. Apparently then, despite the Colonia's head start with the ready-made fortress, the changeover process would have taken years, but, as we know, the work came to an abrupt end.

The street system of the town has recently been re-examined and found to be on two different alignments. The streets on the west were on the same alignment as the fortress underneath, including, of course, the military buildings at Lion Walk. The streets and buildings, public and otherwise, on the eastern side of the town, were slightly askew and on the same alignment as most of the later Roman buildings at Lion Walk. The reason for this is not clear. It may have had something to do with an irregularity in the eastern side of the fortress, or it may be a result of the Roman surveyors' desire to keep the new extension to the town on as level ground as possible.

When Boudicca and her followers burnt the town down, they did a very good job, for, in almost every site where an excavation has taken place within the area of the early town, remains of the Boudiccan destruction have been found. Apart from this layer's obvious importance in terms of dating the sites and in the study of Colchester's early years, the burnt layer has produced some interesting carbonized organic finds, which, had it not been for the fire, would not have survived. Olives, dates, wheat, seeds and nuts have all been found at one time or another, as well as the remains of a bed or couch from Lion Walk. It was rectangular in shape and lay in a corner of a room. The ?bed consisted of two thin mattresses covered with cloth woven in twill.

Lion Walk 1972. *Above:* **Part of a wattle and daub wall burnt in A.D. 60.** The rectangular uprights and the vertical wattles are clearly visible as well as the plastered and painted faces of the wall in section. (scale in inches and centimetres).
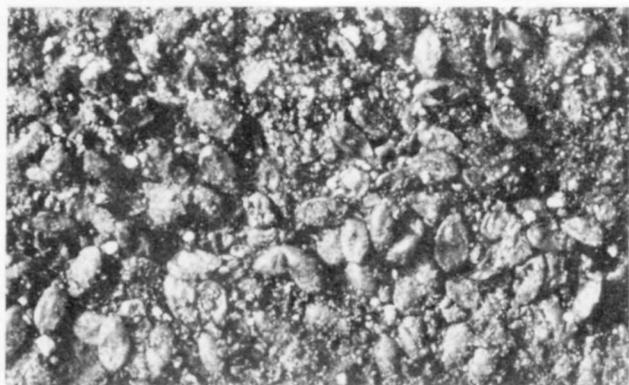

Cups Hotel 1974. *Right:* **part of a building destroyed by fire in A.D. 60.** The building had been timber-framed and some of the panels filled in with fragments of segmental bricks. In the photograph the charred remains of the timber-framing have been removed, leaving the brick panels.
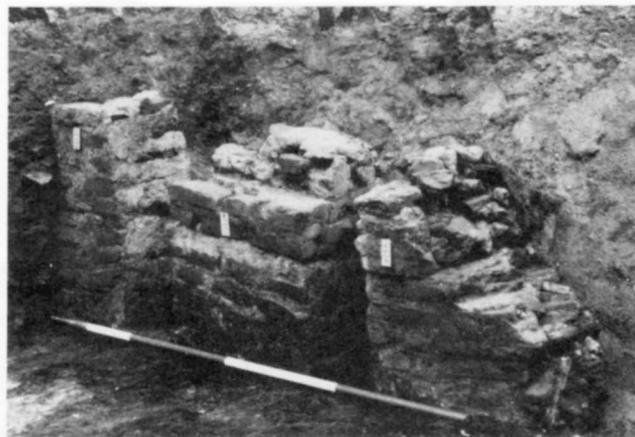
Upper Mattress

Lower Mattress

N

Carbonised material

- :::: Stuffing
- ▦ Timber
- --- Rope

Carbonised cloth or impression on stuffing

- ▨ Diamond twill
- ■ Plain weave
- ▨ Unidentifiable weave
- ░ 2-over-2 twill
- ( )| Folds

0   1 metre

Lion Walk 1972. *Above:* **Bed or couch destroyed by fire in A.D. 60.**
Right: **Close-up of some burnt cloth from the bed or couch.**

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Lion Walk 1973. *Above:* Burnt dates lying on the floor of a building destroyed by fire in A.D. 60. (Coin is a 2p piece).

Cups Hotel 1974. *Left:* Linseed on the floor of another building burnt down in A.D. 60 (twice actual size).
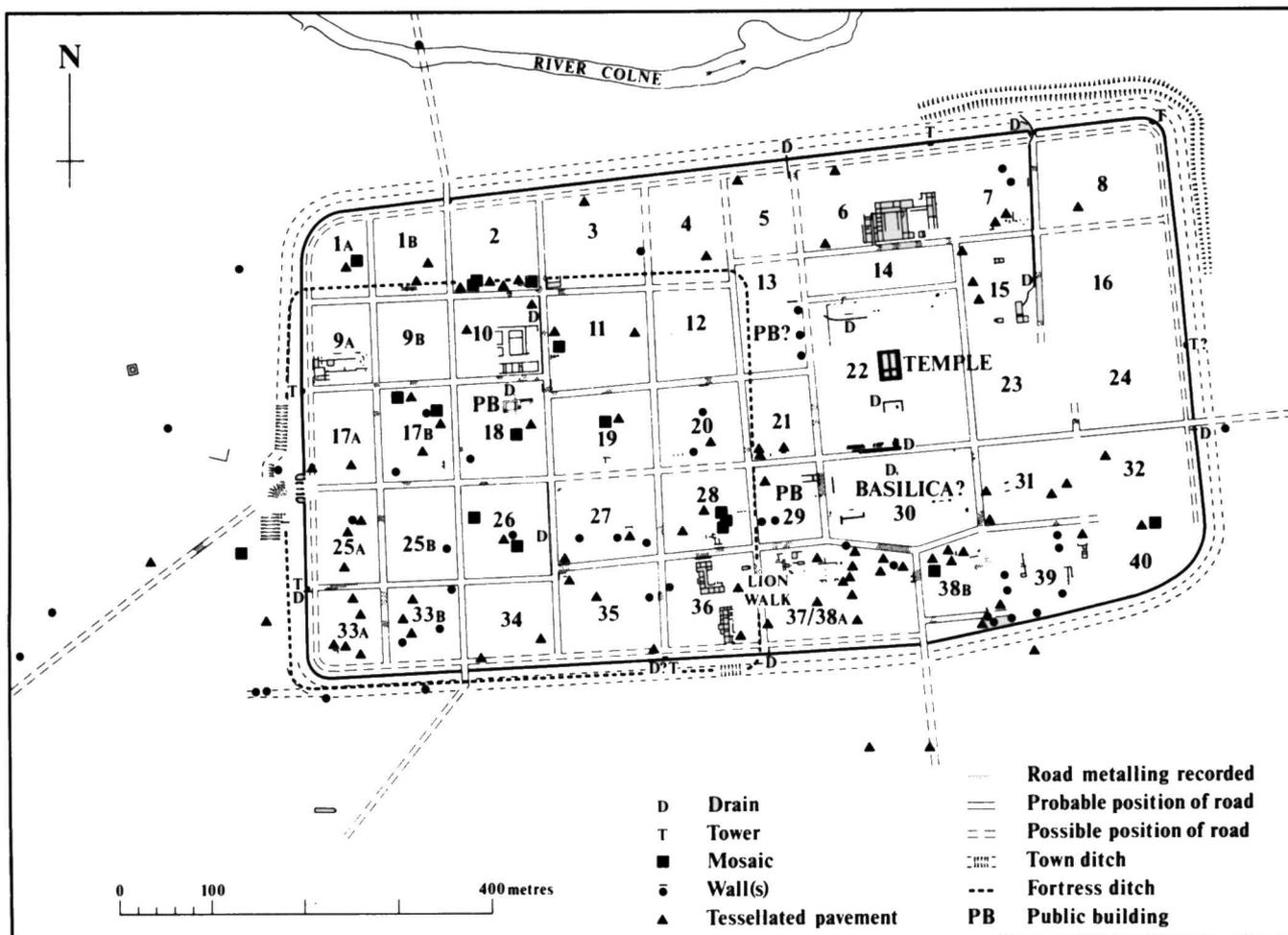
Roman Colchester

"this island . . . . wherein they (the Romans) had built cities and forts, bridges and streets of admirable construction, which are seen among us even to the present day."

Athelwerd: Chronicle (Tenth century)

Although we are beginning to understand the origins of the Roman town, we know very little about the public buildings, a situation usually quite the reverse in most other Roman towns, particularly on the continent. The Temple of Claudius has long ago been identified, of course, but not much else. Huge walls with foundations over seven feet deep were seen in 1969 and 1970 under Caters and

Sainsbury's in Insula 30, and presumably belong to the Basilica. A curved wall recorded under Maidenburgh Street in 1891 in Insula 13 may possibly be part of a theatre. Large, wide walls have also been observed in Insulae 18 and 29, and they, too, presumably belong to public buildings. A large building is thought perhaps to have been in Insula 3/4 on account of the way the medieval street, West Stockwell Street, swings round to the west. It has been suggested that this may be the site of the theatre or amphitheatre, but the spring in Stockwell would suggest public baths are more likely.

It was not until the second century that private houses were, in general, built in stone and tile, although, even then, clay walls were still always common. Substantial parts of two houses were excavated in Lion Walk and were

D	Drain			Road metalling recorded
T	Tower		= =	Probable position of road
■	Mosaic		= =	Possible position of road
ẟ	Wall(s)			Town ditch
▲	Tessellated pavement		- - -	Fortress ditch
			PB	Public building

Roman Colchester. The town was divided by roads into a number of roughly rectangular or square areas called insulae, each of which has been given a number for easy reference.

found to have been built around a central courtyard. The south house had a number of hypocausts and was floored throughout with mosaic and tessellated pavements. Many of the townsfolk, whilst living in these relatively grand houses, relied on the manufacturing and industrial processes, attested by the various ovens, furnaces and working surfaces excavated in Lion Walk. One of the most interesting had a clay dome and was a smithying furnace, made clear by the minute fragments of crushed slag found mixed in the ash and burnt daub.
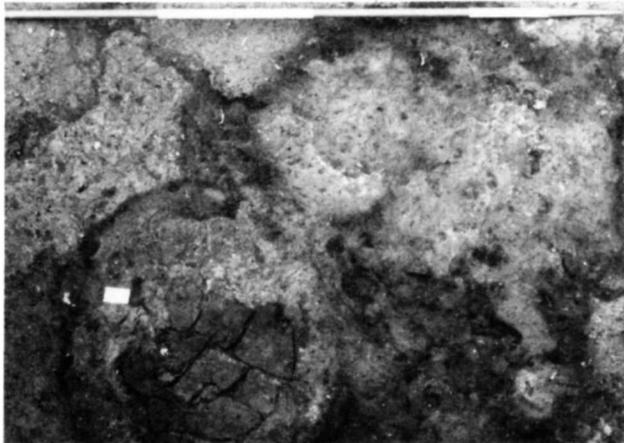
Lion Walk 1972. Remains of a smithying furnace with tile floor.

The town was, we are told by Tactius, undefended at the time of the Boudiccan revolt, and our excavations both at Balkerne Lane and Lion Walk bear this out. However, recently at Balkerne Lane a ditch was found which was dug after the Boudiccan burning of the town and subsequently filled in before the end of the first century. The discovery of this ditch comes as no surprise. The people of Colchester, what was left of them, having been caught out once, were not to be caught out again. This ditch was filled in and probably replaced by the one found in 1973 in Crouch Street, dug in order to allow expansion of the town westwards.

The Balkerne Gate has recently been critically re-examined and the conclusion reached that what the excavators took some 65 years ago to be Period 1 is, in fact, Period 2, and vice versa. The gate started off as a monumental arch, consisting of two archways, and was originally free-standing and quite independent of any walls or gates (see front cover). It was perhaps built to demarcate the original limits of the town when the above-mentioned Balkerne Lane ditch was filled in, a practice that can be closely paralleled at Roman St. Albans. When, in the second century, it was decided to enclose the town with a wall, it

Lion Walk 1974. Section through Roman town wall and its medieval re-facing.

was chosen, possibly for topographical reasons, to build the western side of the new circuit on the original line of defences and, consequently, to incorporate the monumental arch in the new wall, and the footways and guardrooms being added together with the town walls. Hence the origin of the Balkerne Gate as we know it today. It may seem strange that the excavators could apparently interpret the gate wrongly in the first place, but the reader must take into account the fact that it was excavated some time ago and three examples of monumental arches of this type have since been found in Britain.

Moving the defences back to their former position at the west side of the Colonia meant that the Crouch Street ditch was redundant. The hypocaust found on top of it was part of one of the buildings apparently undefended outside the town walls.

At Lion Walk, a trench was excavated behind the section of the town wall due to be breached by the developers. Walls are notoriously difficult to date, and several other sections of the Colchester town defences have been excavated in the past with conflicting results. The most likely sequence, however, is that the wall was built free-standing, around the middle of the second century, and then a rampart built up behind it not long after the wall was completed, using material from the demolition of buildings from inside the town. There can be no doubt that

the wall was meant to be free-standing in the first place, although it may be that the rampart was an addition planned from the start, and that a free-standing wall was a necessary part of the construction procedure.

It has been thought for some time that there may have been a Roman postern gate at St. Mary's Steps. An excavation there in 1972 proved that it was, indeed, a postern gate, but not a Roman one. A few Roman tiles can still be seen forming part of a tile-turned arch in the Roman wall at the north side of St. Mary's Steps. By following through the tile courses in the town wall, it can be seen that, compared with the Balkerne Gate, the arch is far too low to have been a gateway, and is clearly part of a Roman drain. It was in use in an enlarged form as a means of access from the town into Balkerne Lane by the sixteenth century. The drain at St. Mary's Steps is part of an elaborate system of tile drains which was built at the same time as the town wall. The drains ran along the sides of many of the streets and through the base of the town wall. The series of internal towers built at the ends of the roads would have afforded, amongst other things, the additional protection needed at the mouths of these otherwise vulnerable drains.

Roman Colchester was an important pottery manufacturing centre and over thirty pottery kilns have been found in the past. In 1973 three more were discovered during building operations at Oaks Drive. They had all been very badly damaged, so that only the bottoms of the stoke-holes and firing chambers survived. They were all key-hole shaped with a central tongue that would have supported a platform of fire bars on which the pots would have been stacked for firing.
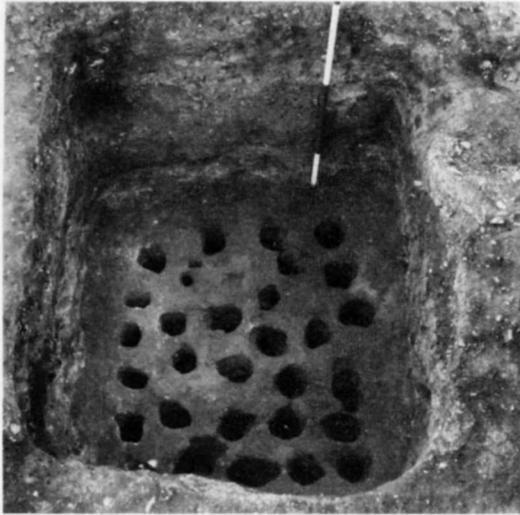
At Balkerne Lane, in 1974, four wooden water-pipes were found running along the side of the Roman road into the Roman town. The lengths of pipe were made by drilling holes out of small tree-trunks and held together and made watertight by hammering the ends into thin iron bands. The wooden pipes had almost decayed completely, of course, but brown stains still survived showing where they lay, as well as the rusted remains of the iron bands. Nearby a building was discovered that had three of its sides built on piers four feet deep. The fourth side consisted of a wall which, like the piers, was built on a series of wooden piles. Although, to date, it has only been possible to excavate parts of this structure, a total size of 35 feet square seems likely. No regular floor levels could be associated with it and it was sufficiently important for the Romans to swing their last and biggest defensive ditch around it. What was this building?

The discovery of the wooden pipes, although earlier in date and apparently not related, makes a water tower a distinct possibility, particularly in view of the links Balkerne Lane has had in the past with Colchester's water supply. Balkerne Lane is higher than almost everywhere else within the town walls. Water is recorded in 1552 as being fed through the Balkerne Gate in lead pipes. The Corporation had two reservoirs in 1707 just inside the

Oaks Drive 1973. Last minute trowelling of one of three Roman kilns found during building works.

Balkerne Lane 1974. Remains of four wooden water pipes running along the Roman road into the Roman town.

Balkerne Lane 1974. One of the pier foundation pits.
The holes at the bottom were left by the wooden piles
driven in to stablize the pier.
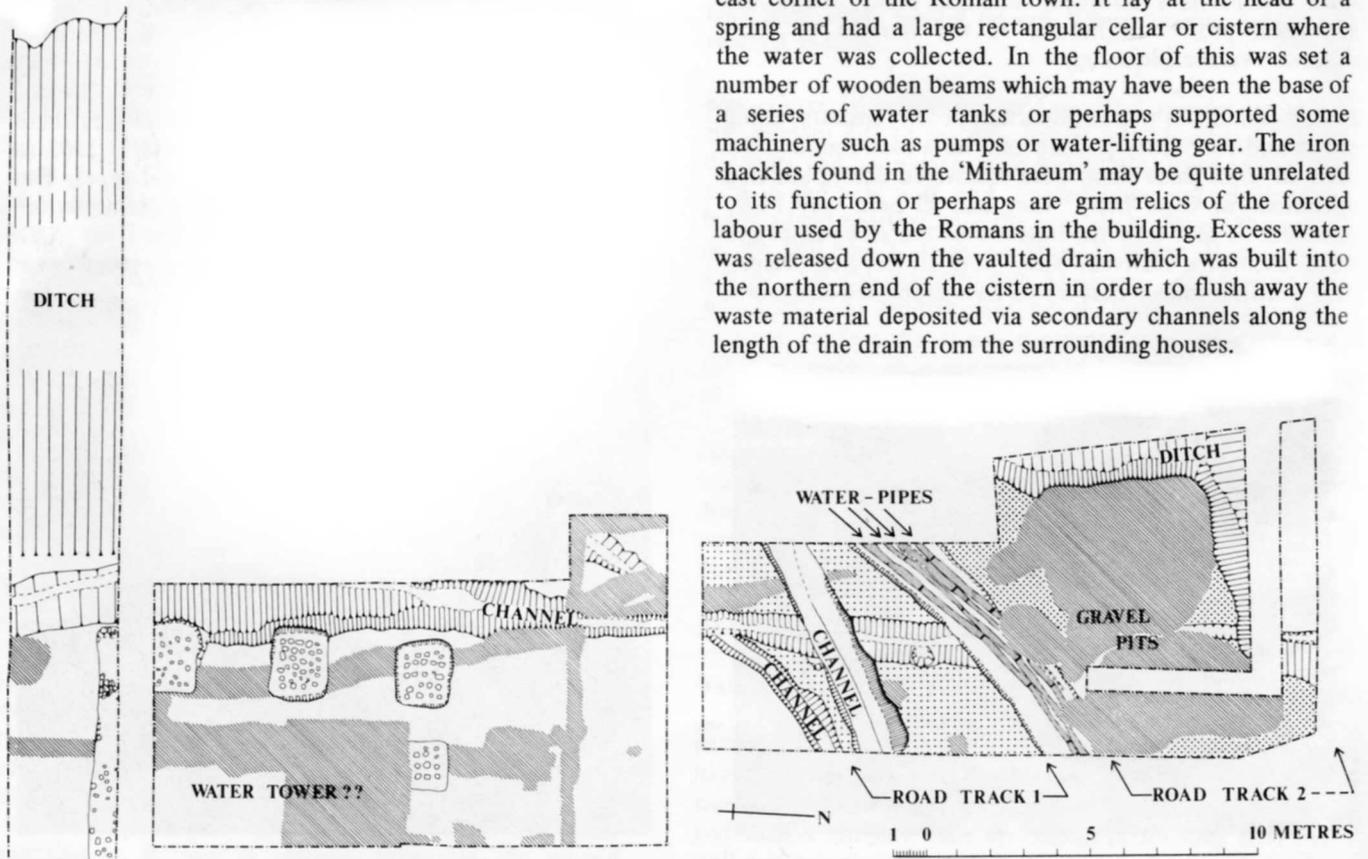
Balkerne Gate, and, of course, Colchester is dominated
today by the nearby Victorian water tower, 'Jumbo'.
Several possible sources of water are known, apart from
the river, but all lie some fifty or so feet below the
Balkerne Lane wooden pipes, so that at some stage the
water would need to have been pumped or lifted.

At Lincoln it is known that the Romans brought water
into the town over a distance of a mile and a quarter
and raised it 70 feet, so that something similar at Colchester
is feasible. Our pier building, then, might have been a
massive water tower, intended to serve the town with a
plentiful supply of pressurized water. Excavation at
Balkerne Lane will continue throughout 1975, so that
more information may well come to light to clarify the
matter.

Colchester's famous 'Mithraeum' has been a matter of
debate for some years, and it is by no means certain what
purpose the building was designed to serve. One plausible
interpretation is that it was a 'water-works' for the north-
east corner of the Roman town. It lay at the head of a
spring and had a large rectangular cellar or cistern where
the water was collected. In the floor of this was set a
number of wooden beams which may have been the base of
a series of water tanks or perhaps supported some
machinery such as pumps or water-lifting gear. The iron
shackles found in the 'Mithraeum' may be quite unrelated
to its function or perhaps are grim relics of the forced
labour used by the Romans in the building. Excess water
was released down the vaulted drain which was built into
the northern end of the cistern in order to flush away the
waste material deposited via secondary channels along the
length of the drain from the surrounding houses.

Balkerne Lane 1974. Water pipes, pier building, defensive ditch and the two or three track road.

The Romans were not allowed to bury their dead in towns and the cemeteries at Colchester all skirt the town walls. Archaeological excavations were carried out at two places where the southern section of the new Inner Relief Road involved earth-shifting, and in both places Roman burials were found. At Maldon Road and St. Botolph's Corner, the burials were inhumations with their heads to the west and feet to the east. They had been buried in wooden coffins, only the nails of which survived, and roughly one in every two had been buried with at least one pot or glass vessel. A total of around fifty burials were recovered, a paltry number when it is realised that upwards of 20,000 Romans were probably buried outside the walls!

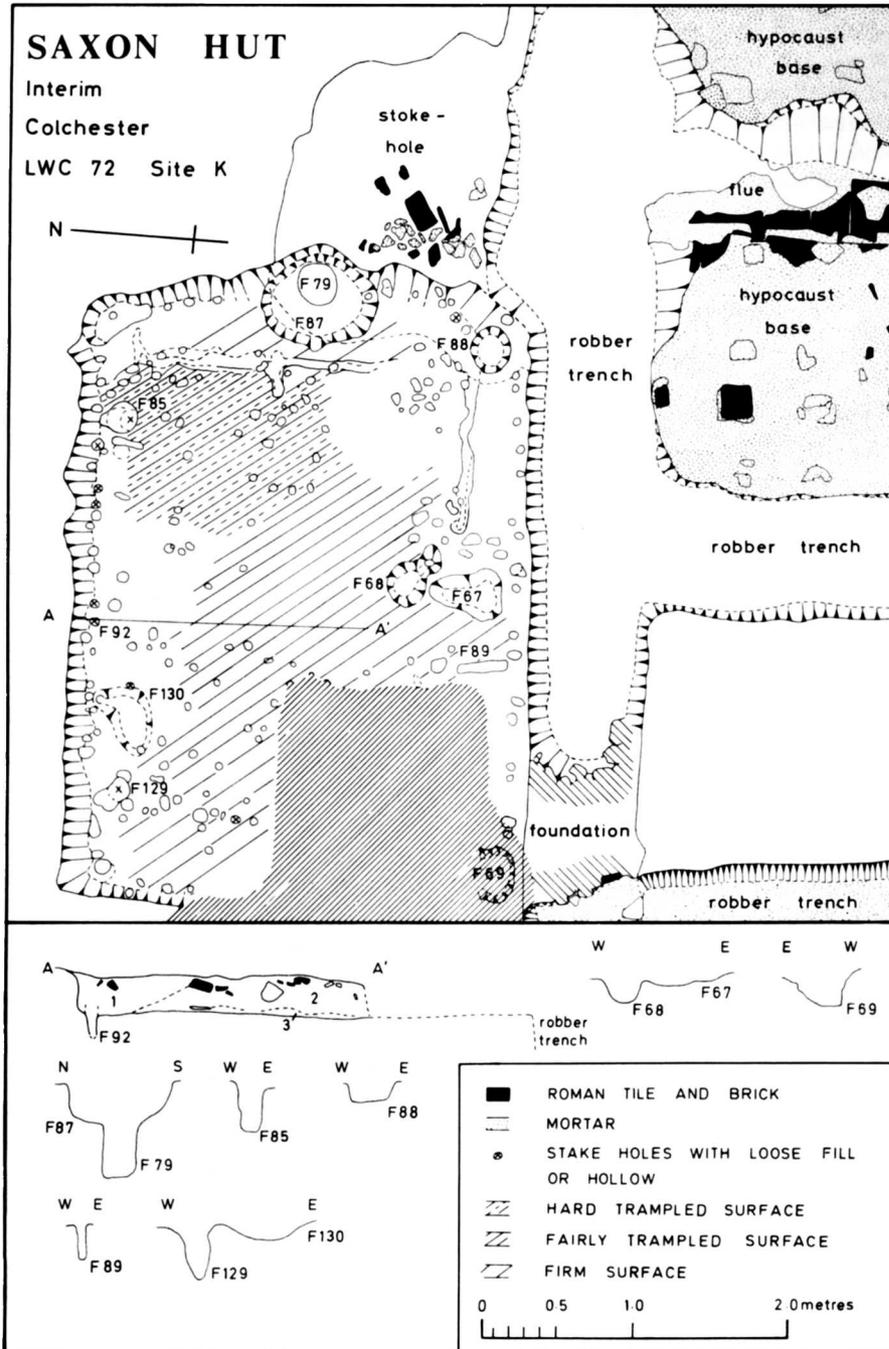**Maldon Road 1971. Pots in a child's grave.**

During the third, fourth and first part of the fifth centuries Roman Britain was subjected to a succession of Saxon raids, and, of necessity, towns had to have defences that were as strong as possible. Recent work at Balkerne Lane illustrates the mounting pressure on British towns caused by the Saxon onslaught. When the latest and biggest ditch was dug around Colchester, gaps were left in the circuit in order not to interfere with the roads in and out of town. However, at a later stage, the gaps were dispensed with at the Balkerne Gate and probably at Duncan's Gate by digging an additional ditch across each road. The net result was an improved defensive system at the expense of fewer access routes in and out of town. The Balkerne Gate, in its final form, was defensively very weak. Normally, the flanking towers of Roman gateways projected beyond the front of the carriageways, but this was not the case here, perhaps because of a wish not to hide the front of the monumental arch. Furthermore, it was probably not possible to walk above the main carriageways and look out over the approach road, as was usual, and thus the gate was

weaker still. Not far from the town walls the Balkerne Gate road met up with one from the Head Gate, so that to redirect traffic from the former to the latter would have been no great loss. These factors, therefore, may have inclined the Romans finally to abandon the road and dig their ditch right in front of the gateway.

The fate of the last Roman population of Colchester is not known, but recent work, as we shall see in the next chapter, has thrown some light on this problem. So many buildings were built in stone that something as dramatic as the Boudiccan sack of the town is not to be expected. Frequently, the latest Roman layers have been destroyed by subsequent activity, so that often the archaeological evidence is slight. What is clear, however, is that the town was not flattened, but that many buildings remained standing and crumbling for many centuries to come.
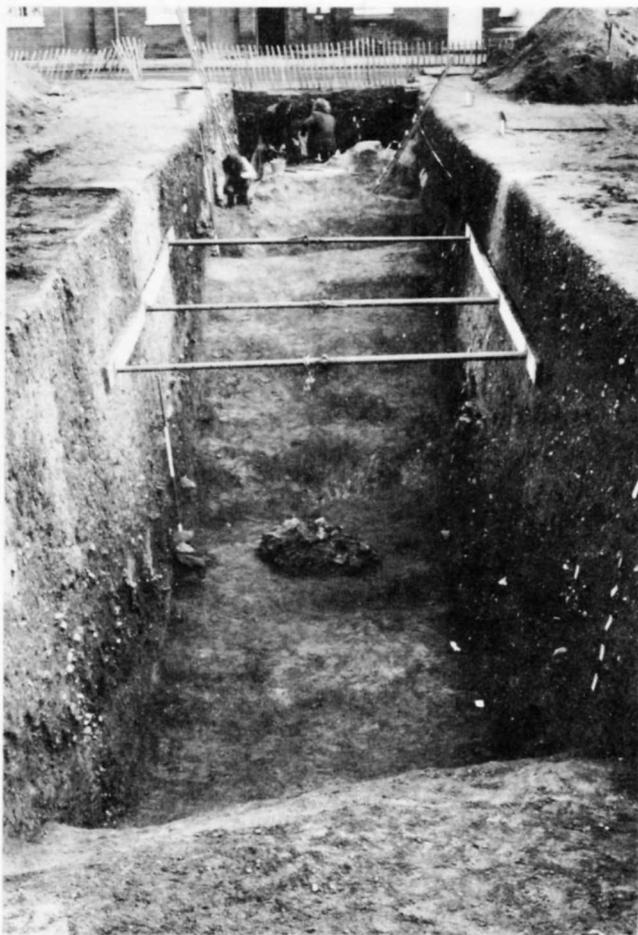
Balkerne Lane 1974. A section across the latest and biggest Roman defensive ditch dug around the town.

SAXON HUT

Interim

Colchester

LWC 72   Site K

N

hypocaust base

stoke-hole

flue

hypocaust base

robber trench

robber trench

F 79

F87

F 88

F 85

F68

F 67

F 92

A   A'

F 89

F 130

F 129

foundation

F 69

robber trench

A   A'

1   2

F 92   3

robber trench

W   E   E   W

F 68   F 67   F 69

N   S   W   E   W   E

F 87   F 85   F 88

F 79

W   E   W   E

F 89   F 129   F 130

ROMAN TILE AND BRICK

MORTAR

STAKE HOLES WITH LOOSE FILL OR HOLLOW

HARD TRAMPLED SURFACE

FAIRLY TRAMPLED SURFACE

FIRM SURFACE

0   0·5   1·0   2·0 metres

Lion Walk 1972. Saxon hut built up against a wall of a decaying Roman house.

22

Saxon Colchester

"Wondrous is the masonry shattered by fate, the fallen city buildings; the work of giants has decayed. The roofs have caved in, the towers are in ruins, the barred gates destroyed, there is frost on the mortar, the gaping shelters collapsed and torn apart, undermined by age."

The Ruin (Tenth century)

Two Saxon huts were discovered at Lion Walk. Their floors, as is normal with such buildings, had been dug out to below ground level and their central roof ridges supported by substantial posts at each end. One of the huts was of particular interest; it had been built up against the side of a Roman house, so that we can see, with particular clarity, the relationship between Saxon and Roman Colchester, and, furthermore, its floor had been peppered with stakes, so that we can draw certain conclusions about the construction of the hut. The Roman building, against which the hut had been built, had in its time been a very fine one, with several mosaics and hypocausts. The stoke-hole for one of the hypocausts had been filled up with tiles and mortar that had slid off the roof. One end of our hut, was dug through the stoke-hole, so that we can conjure up a rather evocative picture of a little wooden shack tacked onto the side of a crumbling Roman house, the mosaics neglected, the hypocausts clogging up and the roof caving in. A fragment of an annular loomweight found in the fill of the sunken floor suggests that the stakes may have been connected with weaving and that some stakes might have supported a loom. The loomweight, however, because of its finds spot, may post-date the hut.

It is a matter of considerable debate whether or not such huts had timber floors over their hollows. Certainly, in this case, the manner in which the stakes were distributed over the whole floor and the discovery on it of a distinctive trampled surface, make it quite clear that there was no timber floor over the hollow. There are, at present, doubts as to whether the Saxons actually lived in this kind of hut. It is held that these were work places and that they really lived and slept in rectangular houses without sunken floors. No such building has, as yet, been found in Colchester but the fragment of loomweight helps bear out this theory.

The pottery used by the Saxons is very distinctive, often tempered with grass. Over a hundred pieces were found in Lion Walk distributed over the whole site in such a way as to suggest that more huts may have existed there, but had since been destroyed by much later activity, such as digging pits and so on. This type of pottery has also been
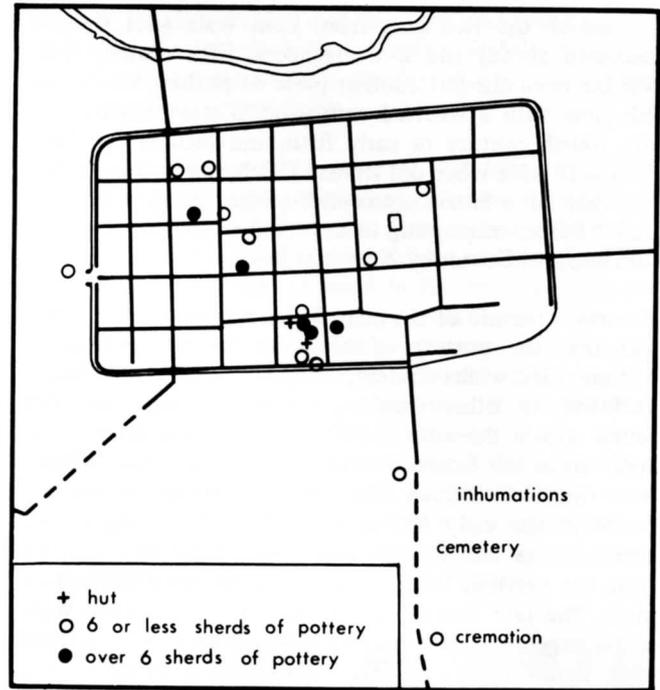
Pagan Saxon Colchester. Fifth to seventh centuries A.D.

found scattered throughout the town, and at least one piece turns up on most of the excavations. In other words, it looks very much as if the Lion Walk situation may well have been typical of the walled area, with Saxons living in a fairly haphazard fashion distributed throughout the crumbling remains of the Roman town.

If the number of huts found at Lion Walk is indeed typical, then we can estimate a total of, say, 200 huts in all, plus an unknown number outside the walls. These would not have all been in use at one time, of course. When this number is compared with the 60 or so found at the Saxon village at West Stow in Suffolk, and the 100 or so at Mucking in Essex, it is clear that the settlement at Colchester was quite a large one.

Saxon settlements have been found associated with other Roman towns, and there is much to be learnt in this connection. The most important information so far, however, has come from the Roman town of Caistor-by-Norwich in East Anglia. A large pagan Saxon cemetery was found outside the town walls, dating, it is thought, from before A.D. 400, when the Roman community was still in existence. The implication of this early date is that these were pagan Saxon mercenary soldiers deliberately settled outside the town to protect it from the raids of their fellow barbarians. A piece of a carinated bowl was found

in one of the two huts from Lion Walk (not the hut discussed above) and is a diagnostic fifth century type. Not far from the hut another piece of pottery was found, this time with a facetted carination, a style dated to the late fourth century or early fifth, and certainly no later than A.D. 450. When did Roman Colchester end and is this hut that of a Saxon mercenary soldier living within the walls? Before attempting to answer this question, we must turn again to Caistor-by-Norwich.

A curious feature of the early Saxon occupation at Caistor was that the pottery of both the Roman and Saxon communities, whilst contemporary, was, in effect, mutually exclusive. In other words, no Saxon pottery has been found within the walls and very little Roman pottery has come from the Saxon cemetery. The same seems to have been true at Colchester, for, although Roman pottery was found in the early hut at Lion Walk, the group lacked coherence as late Roman and must simply have derived from the previous Roman occupation on the site. Furthermore, the late fourth century material from Lion Walk and a large early fifth century group from the Cups Hotel both significantly contain no pagan Saxon pottery. Two pieces of pottery from the Cups Hotel are probably sixth century in date and, in conjunction with other fragments from the town, make it clear that the bulk at least of the Colchester pagan Saxon material is post-Roman.

There is a type of late Roman pottery common in Colchester known as 'Romano-Saxon', the forms and decoration of which are reminiscent of contemporary Saxon material on the continent. This pottery, however, is Roman in manufacture and fabric and is thought to have resulted from the use of Germanic troops in the regular Roman army in Britain. In view of the occurrence of Romano-Saxon pottery in late Roman contexts and the close proximity of the two communities in Colchester, it is hard to believe that the early hut at Lion Walk really is that of a mercenary soldier or soldiers but rather that it was one of the first huts of the post-Roman pagan Saxon settlement of the town. In A.D. 410, Emperor Honorius sent a message to the towns of Britain, saying, in effect, that due to pressure from the continent, Rome could no longer spare any soldiers and that the towns must look to their own defences. This the towns did, had they not taken steps already and their efforts met with varying success. The pottery from the early hut at Lion Walk may indicate that Roman Colchester did not last more than a few decades after A.D. 410.

The fate of the town over the eighth and ninth centuries is quite obscure. The common occurrence of pits is a distinctive feature of Middle and Late Saxon towns. No Middle Saxon pits or pottery have, as yet, been identified in Colchester and the impression gained so far is that, at
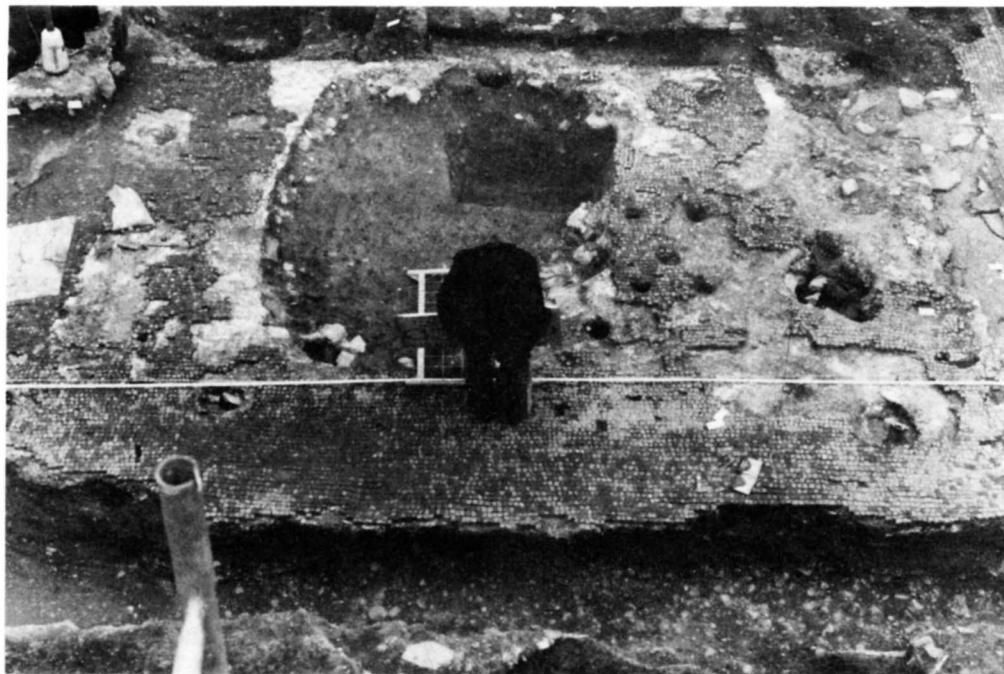
Lion Walk 1972. One of the Saxon huts being planned. The bottom of the hut had been dug through the tessellated pavement visible over most of the photograph.

Lion Walk 1972. A rim fragment of a Saxon pot with a facetted carination *(top left)*.
Cups Hotel 1973. A rim fragment of a Romano-Saxon pot *(bottom right)*.

found in its fill indicates that the ditch was being rapidly filled in by the mid-eleventh century or slightly later. It is difficult to estimate when it was first dug as it may have been cleaned out several times.

Edward the Elder pursued a policy first initiated by his father, Alfred the Great, of creating defensive strongpoints over his territory, usually in the form of towns defended by a bank and ditch and inhabited by a sufficient number of people to man the defences in the event of siege or attack by the Danes. There is, it has been suggested, evidence for the creation of whole towns with roughly rectilinear street systems, laid out to accommodate the necessary numbers to hold the defences. It has, furthermore, been suggested that Colchester was such a place and that the whole medieval street system dates from this period. The discovery of the ditch in Vineyard Street fits this theory very well, but, as we shall see, closer examination of the topographical evidence proves that in Colchester, at least, the situation was not so straightforward.

this time, the town was deserted or that the population must have been quite small. Late Saxon pits were found at the Cups Hotel and a tenth or eleventh century one discovered in 1956 under St. Nicholas' Church. It is significant that both these sites were on the High Street, whereas, although the relevant material has not yet been examined exhaustively, no Saxon pits were found during the Lion Walk excavation. It would seem then that the distribution of the occupation in Colchester by the tenth century had moved towards the High Street frontage. Such a reorganization, if it happened as such, would have been to facilitate trade and commerce and would have marked the start of the medieval town as we know it today.

We are told in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle that in the early tenth century the town was occupied by the Danes. What effect this had on the archaeology or population of the town we have no idea. We are also told that the Danes were driven out, and that Edward the Elder 'repaired and restored the town where it had been broken'. Sir Mortimer Wheeler suggested long ago that the blocking across the Balkerne Gate may have been built by Edward the Elder. The blocking wall, as we now realise, effectively stopped up the gap that was originally bridged by the monumental arch. If the arch had fallen down, as it may well have done, the blocking wall can clearly be seen as a repair. A deep ditch was found during the Lion Walk excavations running outside the town wall along Vineyard Street. The pottery

Lion Walk 1972. The excavation in progress of a section across the Late Saxon ditch found in Vineyard Street.

Late Saxon and Medieval Colchester

"all . . . . our burgesses may hunt, within the banlieu of Colchester, the fox, and the hare, and the cat, and they may have their fishery from North Bridge up to Westnesse"

Charter of Richard 1, 1189

It is quite striking how different the alignments of the medieval streets and property boundaries are from the Roman ones underneath, and also quite clear that many of the medieval streets could only have originated after substantial areas of the Roman town had been cleared. Certain of the medieval streets, however, are more or less in the same position as the earlier Roman ones: High Street, North Hill, Head Street and Queen Street. The reason why there is apparent continuity with these particular streets is, of course, because of the direct access afforded by them to the main Roman gates.

0   100   400 metres

The relationship between the Roman and medieval property boundaries based on the 1876 Ordnance Survey 1:500 maps. The Roman roads are shown stippled and the parish boundaries indicated by dashed lines. By studying early photographs of Colchester buildings, by looking at those plots shown on the 1876 maps that still survive today, and by taking into account listed and other buildings of historic importance, the property boundaries can be divided into three categories. The first consists of those boundaries which are demonstrably of some antiquity and are shown on the above plan in bold. The second category consists of those boundaries which are demonstrably not medieval or earlier and are omitted from the above plan. The third category consists of the property boundaries that cannot, at present, be allocated to either the first or second categories: these are shown above in faint. The seventeenth century houses built on the site of the southern section of the Castle ditch and the nineteenth century Nunn's Road development have both been included in the last category as it is difficult to disentangle them from earlier property boundaries. The above plan is fairly arbitrary but makes a good basis for further topographical studies of the town.

Certain of the streets have 'pinched' ends as they meet up with other streets: the west end of Culver Street; the southern ends of West and East Stockwell Streets; the southern end of Maidenburgh Street. Other junctions do not: High Street with Queen Street; Head Street, High Street and North Hill; Culver Street with Lion Walk; Culver Street with Long Wyre Street; and Culver Street with Trinity Street. The 'pinched' end phenomenon is presumably a result of using a strip from the side of a property which fronts on to the older street for the construction of a T-junction, and is therefore important in the study of town development. No 'pinched' ends at junctions suggests that the streets are contemporary or that the older street was not densely occupied. Pelhams Lane is an extreme case of the 'pinched' end phenomenon as it seems to consist wholly of a strip of one of two adjacent properties.

If we examine the medieval property boundaries closely, it is clear that, on the whole, they do not relate to the Roman ones underneath. There are however, certain possible exceptions. Many of the property boundaries fronting on to the High Street between St. Runwald's and St. Nicholas' Churches are on the same alignment as the Roman buildings below, as well as a group between Long Wyre Street and Queen Street and the long boundary which runs due east from the Balkerne Gate. There are, furthermore, examples of the re-use of Roman walls in the town (see over). Apart from the Saxon hut built against the outside of a Roman house, which is a very good example of this, there are five other possible cases. The Castle, of course, was built around the base of the Roman Temple of Claudius. The remains of the temple, therefore, must have been visible in the second half of the eleventh century, as well as the Roman walls around its courtyard which were sealed by the rampart of the Castle Ditch at about the same time. Roman walls were observed by Mr. Hull some time ago in a trench in the pavement on the north side of the High Street, and noted by him to coincide with the alignment of some of the present-day property boundaries. The western wall of this group was rediscovered while the writer was carrying out a recent cellar survey. It runs under the shop exactly on the line as plotted by Mr. Hull, and was used as part of the cellar wall.

The Late Saxon and Norman pits found at the site of the Cups Hotel pre-date the robbing of the Roman foundations and their distribution in relation to these walls could be interpreted as suggesting another example of the re-use of a Roman building. The relationship could equally well be a coincidence.

St. Nicholas' Church was a fascinating example of re-used Roman walls. The general dimensions on the block plan given here are rather inaccurate for various reasons, but the relationships are correct. The original church was either rebuilt mostly on Roman foundations, or, more likely, was a modified part of a Roman building. It was, we are told, rebuilt in the fourteenth century. The church was enlarged and restored in the nineteenth century and finally demolished in 1956 when some excavations were carried out on the site by Mr. Hull. He apparently found no fourteenth century wall on top of the Roman ones, which would suggest that they were much more than just re-used foundations, as he supposed.

St. Helen's Chapel is also very intriguing. According to the Colchester Chronicle, St. Helen's was restored by Eudo Dapifer in 1076 at the time he built the Castle. The base of the northern wall is clearly Roman and is possibly Roman almost up to its full height. It was again restored in the fourteenth century, and its present windows perhaps inserted then. Most of what is visible today is a very skilful nineteenth century restoration. The founder of St. Helen's Chapel must, therefore, have re-used at least one of the walls of the massive public building observed and plotted in 1891 under Maidenburgh Street. Why this part of the building should have been selected and why so far from the High Street frontage is not clear. The fact that Eudo was said to have restored rather than built the Chapel is certainly in keeping with the theory that much of the Chapel was Roman in the first place. Furthermore, the founder is traditionally thought to have been a Roman, St. Helena herself, mother of Constantine the Great. Whether or not the Chapel was founded by St. Helena and whether or not it was part of a Roman church is another speculative matter, but it does appear that St. Helen's was traditionally thought to have been Roman. It seems reasonable to suppose that, during Eudo's restoration of the Chapel, he probably cleared Maidenburgh Street of Roman walls, using the stone for his new castle, and that therefore the street dates to the late eleventh century.
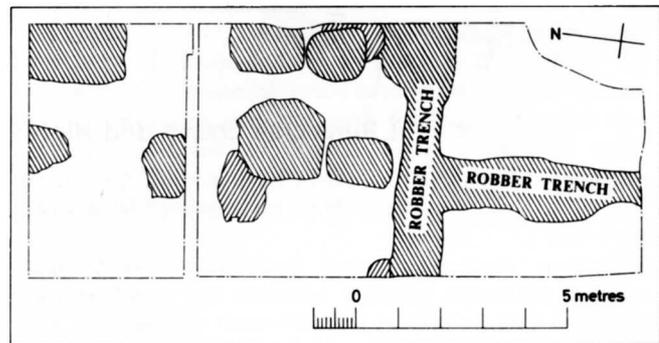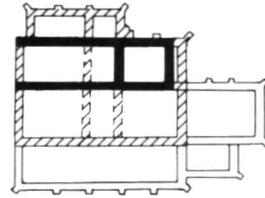

Cups Hotel 1973. Late Saxon and Norman pits in relation to the Roman building as represented by the robber trenches.
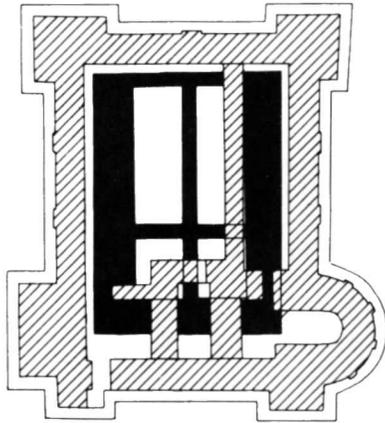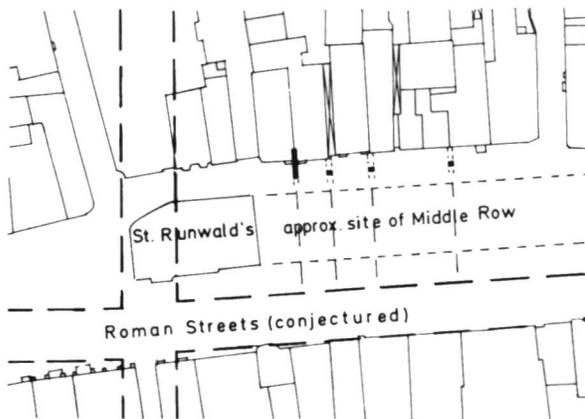
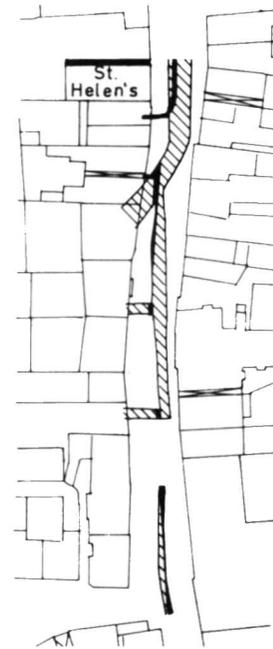**a. Colchester Castle keep**

■ Roman
▨ Norman

b. St. Nicholas's Church
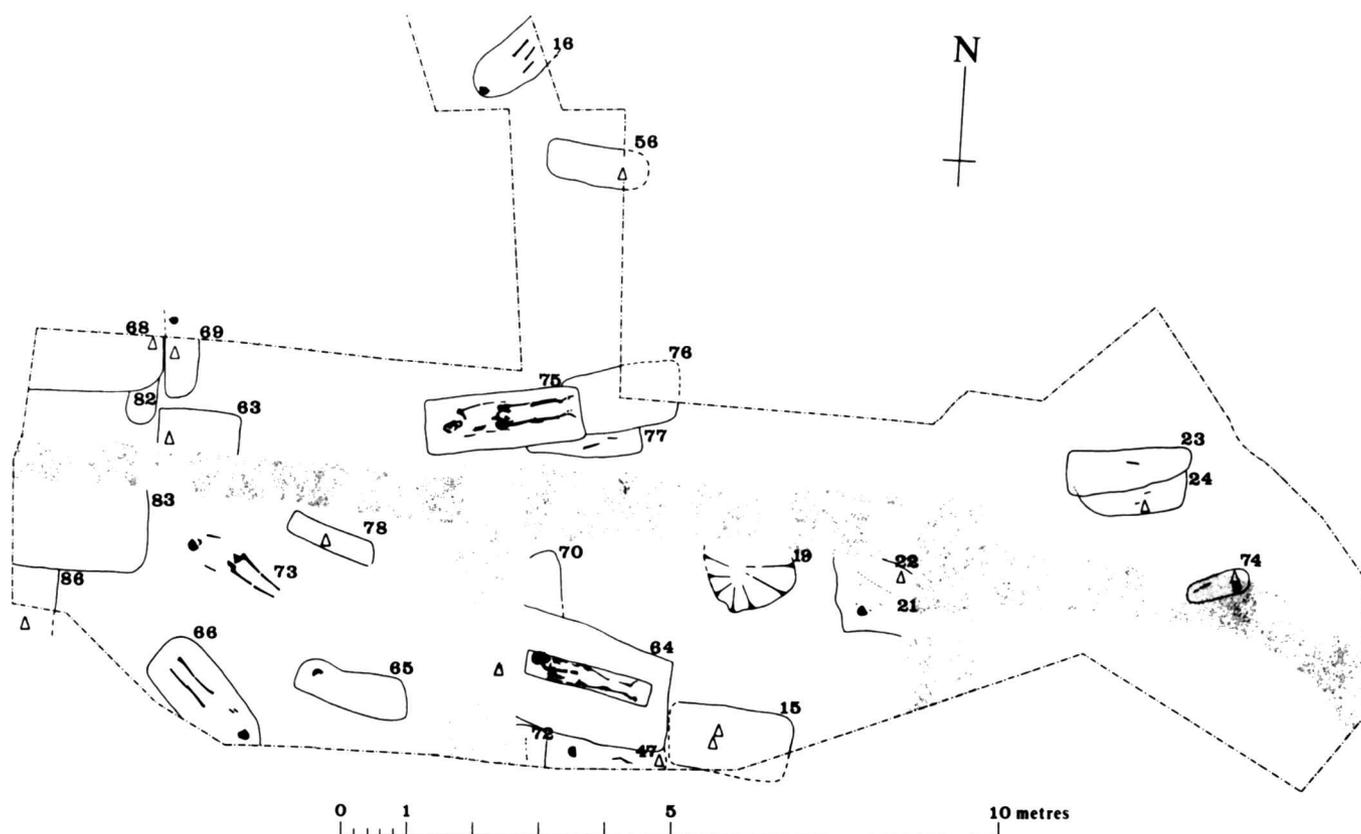
■ Roman
▨ 14th. century
□ 19th. century

St. Runwald's
approx. site of Middle Row

Roman Streets (conjectured)

c. St. Runwald's Church and High Street

St. Helen's

d. St. Helen's Chapel and Maidenburgh Street

■ Roman Wall observed
▧ Roman Wall conjectured

10   0   50 metres

Examples of re-used Roman walls or foundations in Late Saxon and Norman Colchester.

St. John's Abbey Grounds 1972. Saxon church with part of the underlying Roman cemetery.

The churches of All Saints' and Holy Trinity were both built on the same alignment as the Roman buildings nearby and beneath. In the case of All Saints', this could simply be a result of constructing the church parallel to the adjacent street rather than the re-use of Roman walls or buildings. In the case of Holy Trinity, when the position of its nave and aisle walls are compared with the projected lines of the Roman walls found during the Lion Walk excavations it seems that re-use of Roman walls is unlikely. Holy Trinity was built on a Roman cross-roads and, doubtless, the gravel metalling afforded a good foundation on which to construct the building. The alignment of Holy Trinity may simply have depended on the alignment of its parish as a whole, which was, in turn, determined by the alignment of the town walls, as well as the property boundaries in existence when the parish was created.

Eudo was responsible, on behalf of the king, for the construction of Colchester Castle and the Hospital of St. Mary Magdalen; and himself founded St. John's Abbey, where, apparently, a priest called Sigeric once had a little wooden church dedicated to St. John the Evangelist. During the construction of the new St. Botolph's round-

about in 1972, a church was found, inside what were the grounds of the Abbey. It consisted originally of a square nave with a stilted apsidal chancel. Later the nave was replaced by a larger one, and the old one perhaps used for a chancel. The church was demolished and replaced in the twelfth century by St. Giles', only a hundred yards away, and the area used as a part of the monastic cemetery. It is true that our church was not timber, but presumably it had been rebuilt in stone.

The principal stone buildings in the late Saxon period must have been churches and, as in the case of St. John the Evangelist's, the material would have come from the Roman town. However, it was not until the Norman period that the rate of re-use of Roman building material really stepped up. The Castle, St. John's Abbey and St. Botolph's Priory must have used up much stone.

Many domestic buildings had rubble walls, a notable example being the medieval building excavated in Lion Walk. It originally consisted of a twelfth century rectangular stone-built block with semi-circular arched doorways onto which were added two further stone-built units to
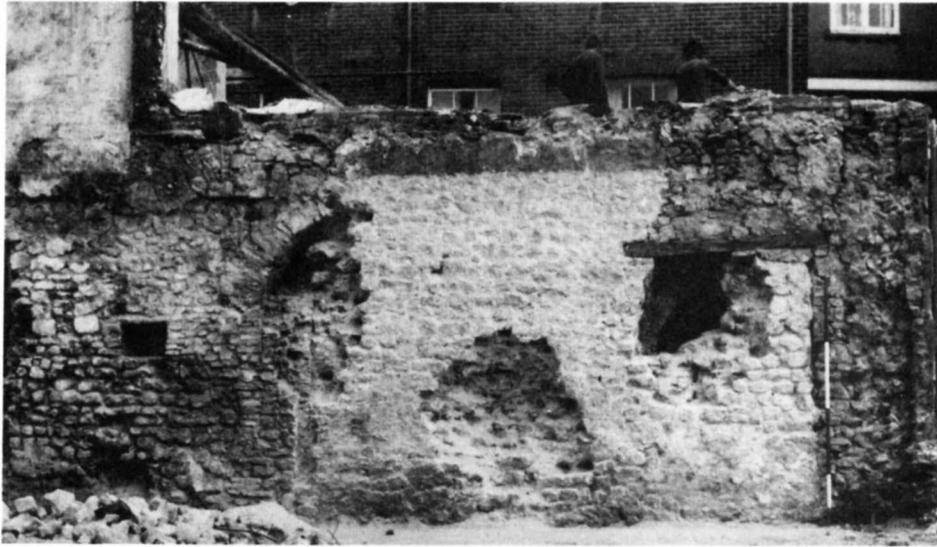
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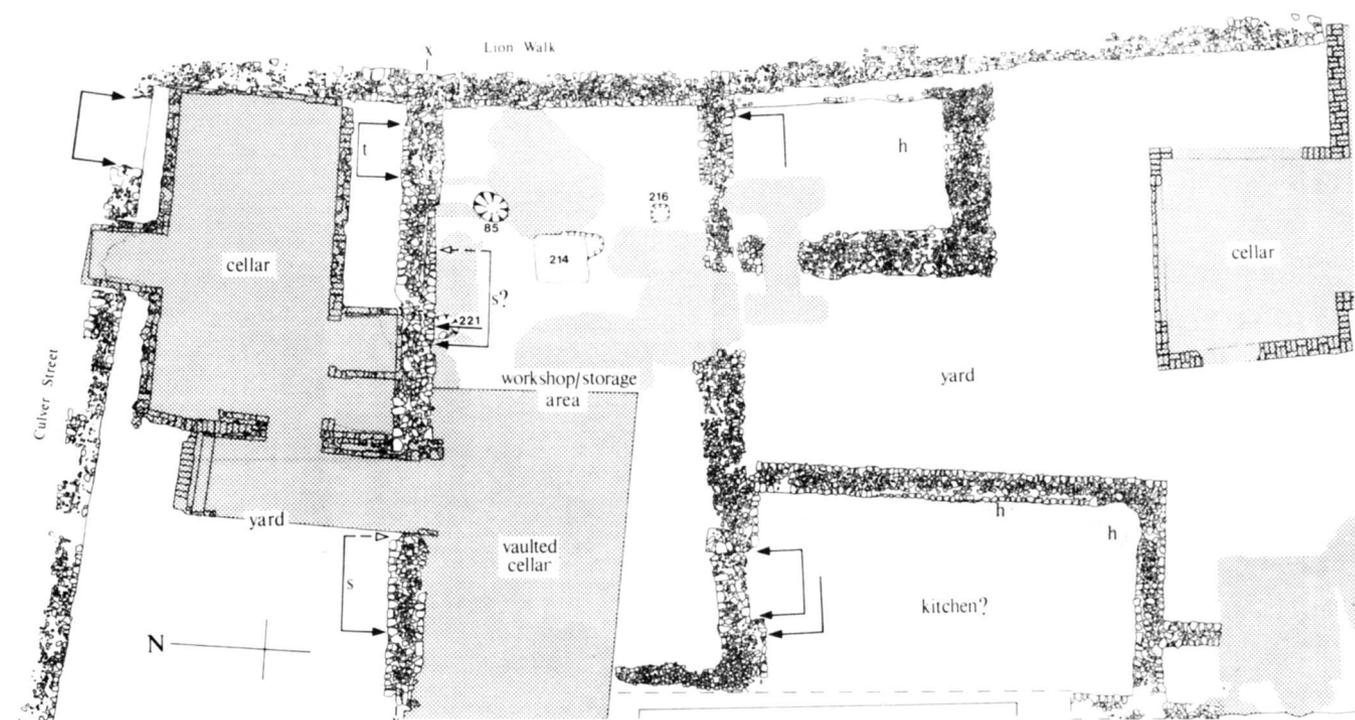
LION WALK COLCHESTER 1972/3 SITE G
MEDIEVAL HOUSE INTERIM PLAN

→ arch jamb   - - ➤ possible arch jamb

s   semicircular arch   t   two centred arch

h   hearth   main post-medieval disturbances

0 1   5   metres   10
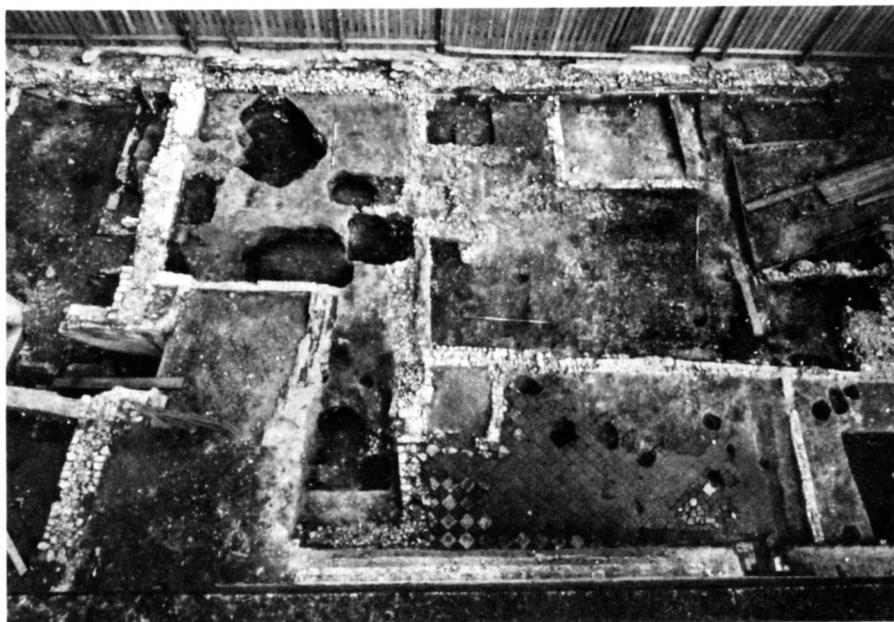
Lion Walk 1972. *Above:* **Norman house on the west corner of Culver Street and Lion Walk.**
*Right:* **Sixteenth century (approx.) rebuilding of the Norman stone house.**

Lion Walk 1971. The much altered and sole surviving stone wall of the Norman house discovered during demolition.

the south. The eastern one of the two blocks was demolished and a boundary wall with only one entrance built all round the property. The house was substantially rebuilt around the sixteenth century, but most, if not all, of the new walls were timber-framed. Several stone buildings are known in the High Street and another one was recently discovered at the Cups Hotel. Several cellars were built of re-used stone although how much of the superstructure was also stone is unknown. The cellar wall, recently exposed at Hilton's, is a good example of this. It is fourteenth century and made of Roman brick and stone, perhaps re-used several times before, mixed with large pebbles, medieval peg-tile, chips of stone left over after carving the arch: in other words, anything that the medieval builders could lay their hands on, provided it was not too small. During excavations in Colchester, it is frequently found that the foundations and buried stumps of Roman walls were dug up for their stone and tile during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and this is, no doubt, symptomatic of the supply of upstanding Roman walls running out. If we look at the Castle keep, we can see some proof of this. The Castle is thought, rightly or wrongly, to have been built in two stages. Certainly the stone used in the second stage is far more broken up and of poorer quality than that used initially. This would tie in with the notion that, broadly speaking, the twelfth century saw the last of the above-ground Roman walls. Of course, the concept of the clearance of Roman remains is clearly bound up with the formation of the medieval street system. It may be that by the time new medieval streets were laid out large areas were already clear. The

walls re-used at St. Nicholas' Church, St. Helen's Chapel and the Castle were all part of Roman public buildings, whose walls were very substantial. Indeed, the ditch of the Castle was dug across the High Street at this time, not because the Normans were being perverse, but because it would be too much work to move the obstructing Roman foundations! There may well be an element of this behind the building of the Castle itself. It may be, then, that by the Norman period most of the other buildings with slighter walls had fallen down or been demolished. It must be significant how little stone is ever found during excavations. There is rarely, if ever, any substantial post-Roman layer of collapsed walls.

Hiltons 1972. Fourteenth century cellar wall.
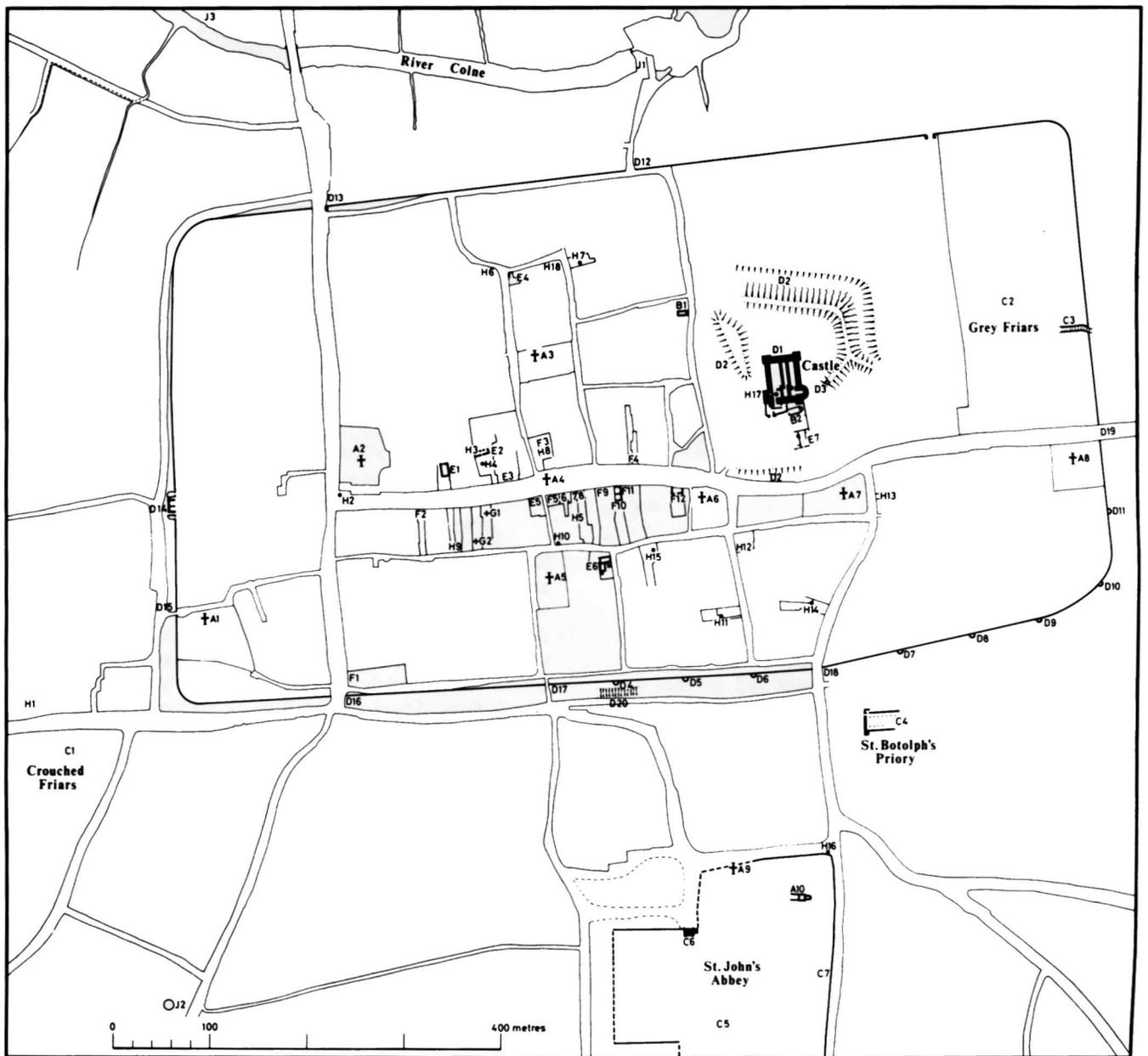
Important buildings and features in medieval Colchester (excluding notably timber buildings).

A1–10	parish churches	C7	St. John's Abbey Wall	D17	Scheregate
B1	St. Helen's Chapel	D1	Castle	D18	St. Botolph's Gate
B2	Castle Chapel	D2	Castle ditch and rampart	D19	East Gate
C1	site of Crutched Friars	D3	Castle 'folly'	D20	Vineyard Street ditch
C2	site of Grey Friars	D4–11	bastions	E1–7	stone houses
C3	Grey Friars conduit	D12	Rye Gate	F1–12	stone cellars
C4	site of St. Botolph's Priory	D13	North Gate	G1–2	site of coin hoards
C5	site of St. John's Abbey	D14	blocking wall of Balkerne Gate	H1–18	wells
C6	St. John's Abbey Gate	D15	postern gate	J1–3	mills
		D16	Head Gate		

The town was a Royal Borough. We know that the parishes of St. Runwald's, Holy Trinity, St. Martin's, St. Peter's, St. Nicholas', All Saints' and St. James' all belonged to the crown, barring the odd property here or there, and the king, therefore, must have benefited financially from town development. If we examine the parish boundaries (see pages 26 and 32) it looks very much as if the parish of Holy Trinity was, in part, cut out of the parish of St. Runwald's, if not out of St. Nicholas' too. (It must be stressed, however, that parish boundaries often changed considerably and that, therefore, too much emphasis cannot be placed on them.) Since the parochial system was established as a result of the legislation of Edmund in 936-946 and of Edgar in 970, and since the parish of Holy Trinity is apparently later than that of St. Runwald, it is reasonable to suppose that Holy Trinity parish was created sometime after the mid-tenth century or so. The well known triangular-headed doorway of the church tower, and the fact that the tower was added on to an earlier nave, would suggest a date of not later than 1050 for its foundation. The tower of St. Martin's is thought to be early twelfth century and therefore St. Martin's parish was laid out by that date. The obvious topographical similarities with the parish of Holy Trinity, the fact, for example, that neither parish has any frontage on the High Street, indicates a possible A.D. 950-1050 date here too. Trinity Street, Lion Walk, West and East Stockwell Streets are integral parts of their parishes, and presumably are contemporary with them.

We can, therefore, by careful study of the archaeological, topographical and historical evidence, postulate a sequence somewhat as follows: Colchester in the late seventh, eighth and ninth centuries was either deserted or consisted of a relatively small population probably living along the High Street. The layout of the town up until the tenth century was dominated by the upstanding remains of the Roman one. The earliest churches and parishes in the town centre are probably St. Peter's, St. Runwald's, St. Nicholas' and All Saints. Many Roman buildings may have been in use in a modified form and they certainly, in some cases, defined the limits of Saxon properties. The Culver Street/High Street area was laid out at one time, much of the land doubtless cleared of upstanding Roman walls and Saxon houses and split up into plots. The lack of uniformity in the width of plots fronting onto the High Street and the relationship of some of the medieval property boundaries with the Roman ones underneath suggests that this reorganisation was not necessarily complete and that many properties and buildings survived this process. Culver Street was always, and still is, the rear boundary of these properties, and a back lane. A market area was possibly created by cutting back the properties on the east side of

St. Runwald's Church, an event which may post-date its foundation. Between 950 and 1050 Trinity Street and Lion Walk were laid out, the church founded and the parish formed, probably all at once. The parish of St. Martin's, its streets and church, may date to this period too but need not necessarily have been laid out at the same time as Holy Trinity. The southern side of the High Street at the west end was widened, doubtless to make more room for the market. This may have taken place when the High Street/Culver Street block was laid out. Middle Row was probably late and was a permanent version of the temporary stalls originally put up in the market centre. However, it lay so neatly along the frontage of the Roman predecessor of the High Street, that the possibility must be borne in mind that it was a small block isolated as the result of the construction of an east-west back street running along the north side of St. Runwald's. In the late eleventh century Maidenburgh Street was created and the eastern end of the High Street diverted around the Castle Ditch about the same time.

Some Roman walls, particularly on the High Street, were either re-used or served as property boundaries throughout the post-Roman period. The positions of these only survive today where there was no complete reorganisation of land use in the Late Saxon and medieval periods. Pelham's Lane probably post-dates the formation of the Culver Street/High Street block and is unlikely to be earlier than the formation of Holy Trinity parish. Queen Street is basically Roman but was straightened slightly at a time no earlier than the formation of Culver Street. Head Street, North Hill, North Station Road, East Hill, East Street and Queen Street are all wider and not necessarily in the exact positions of their Roman predecessors. Eld Lane and Northgate Street are in the same position as the Roman streets, but their origin is not clear.

That Colchester's street system can be shown not to be of one period but of several, takes much force out of the theory that Edward the Elder reorganised much of the town. The rectilinear street system was, it is argued, an expression of the military purpose behind the work and a diagnostic feature of it. It would be tempting, nevertheless, to postulate, but difficult to prove, that the High Street/Culver Street block, the Vineyard Street ditch and the blocking wall at the Balkerne Gate as well as a tenth century repopulation of the town were all the result of Edward's policies. The pottery found in the Vineyard Street ditch, however, suggests that it may have been dug much later than Edward's reign, some time up until the construction of Colchester Castle, and, furthermore, the High Street/Culver Street block, being the first in a series developments of its kind, could equally well, on present

evidence, post-date Edward as pre-date him.

The distribution of the buildings on the plan opposite indicates fairly well where the main centres of occupation lay. The heart of the medieval town was, of course, the High Street. The Moot Hall stood there, St. Runwald's Church, the market, Middle Row, and Red Row at the west end. Two huge, thirteenth century, silver coin hoards were found opposite the Moot Hall. Other main streets were Trinity Street and West Stockwell Street; with Culver Street, Lion Walk and, perhaps, East Stockwell Street being of subsidiary importance.

Interesting information has come to light during recent excavations concerning medieval methods of making lime. The fuel used was nearly always wood, and the lime was made from shells. As these are basically chalk, when they are burnt in a reducing atmosphere where the air supply is restricted, they are converted to lime. The more primitive method of achieving this was by use of large pits, several of which have been found at Lion Walk and at St. Botolph's Corner. A more sophisticated technique, however, was by the use of lime kilns. A complex of such structures was found during the Lion Walk excavations just north of Eld Lane. Each kiln consisted of three parts. The central portion was the reducing chamber, which was flanked by two pits, one for stoking and one for raking out.

The town walls, although built by the Romans, protected the town right up until the siege of 1648. A tax is known to have been levied in 1312 for the repair of the town walls and gates. Between 1382 and 1421, further repairs were carried out to the town walls, and a series of bastions added. Eight in all were built, the exact positions of seven of which are now known. The remains of the seventh were discovered during the excavations at Lion Walk. It bridged almost exactly the length of Roman wall recently removed for the new Lion Walk basement, so that all traces of it have now completely gone. The bastion had been demolished, probably after the siege of 1648, not long after it had been repointed for the last time.

A subject of particular interest is that of the harbour, crucial in any consideration of Colchester's development. Belgic Colchester imported vast quantities of goods, principally pottery, from the continent, and was, by Belgic standards, a wealthy place. The supply depot at Fingringhoe, already mentioned, supplied Claudian Colchester. Although mostly destroyed by gravel-quarrying, a peculiar bank of clay known as Bacon Hard exists on the beach and runs out from the site of the depot towards the Colne. This was examined by Mr. Hull some years ago and thought by him to be a Roman pier. Old Heath, formerly Old
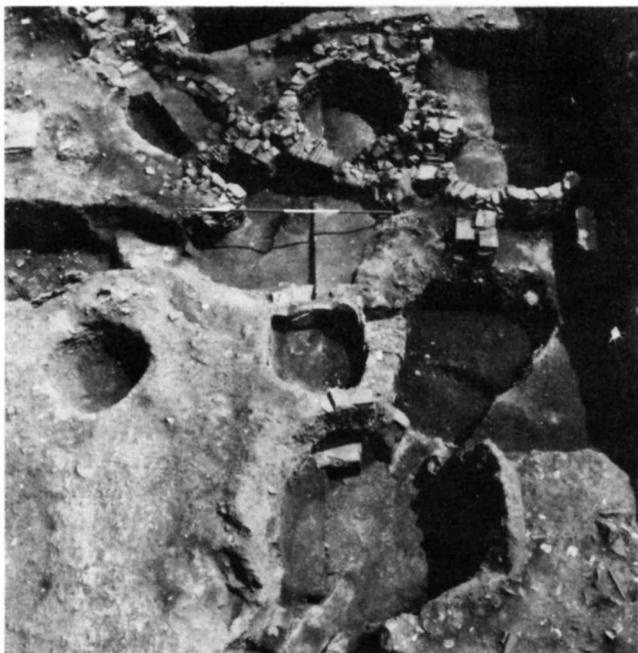
Lion Walk 1972. Medieval lime kilns on the north frontage of Eld Lane.
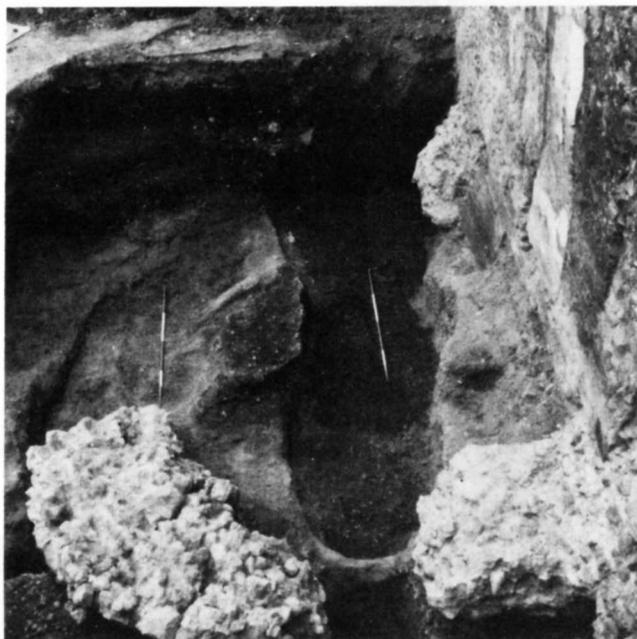
Lion Walk 1972. Remains of the medieval bastion discovered during the excavations.

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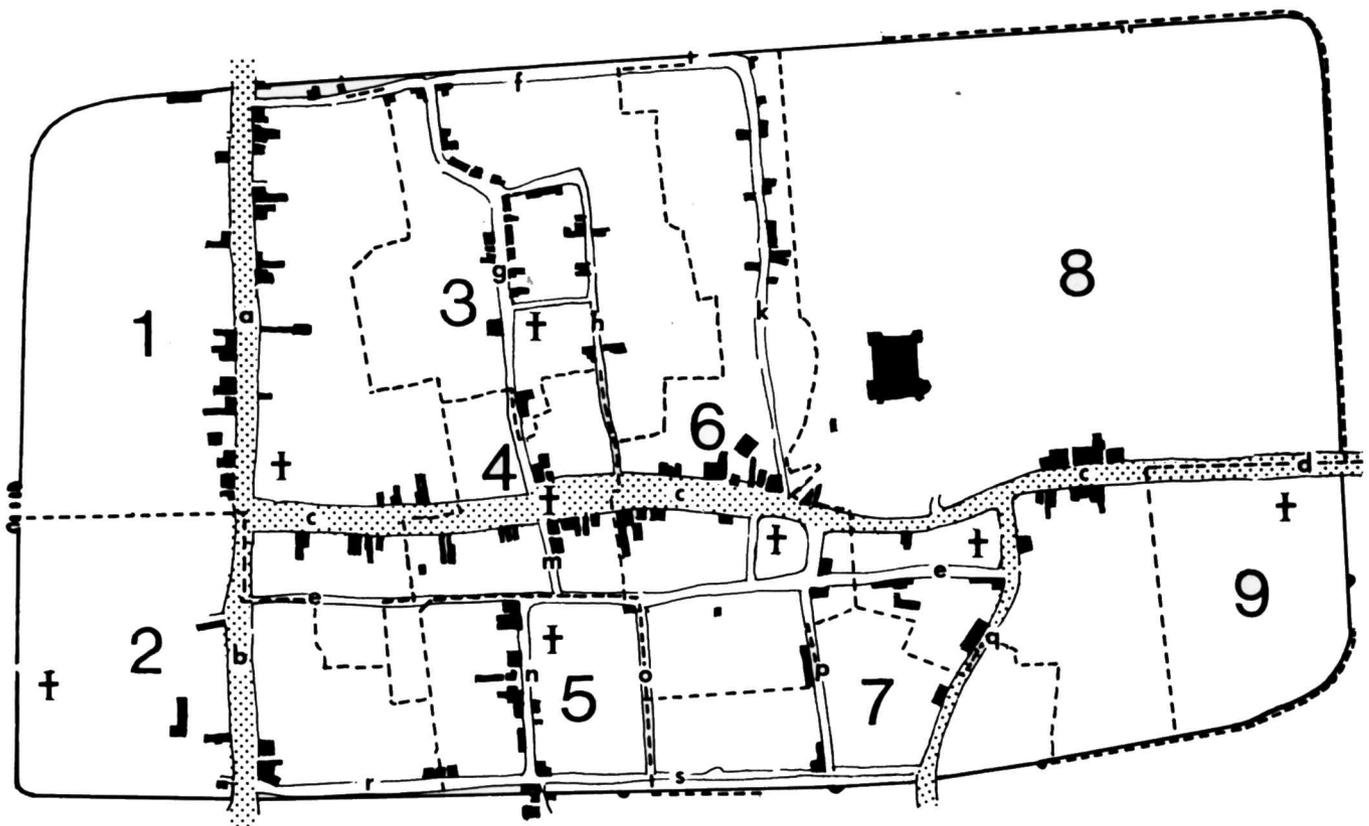
Medieval Colchester. Buildings considered to be of historic importance by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments in 1922. Parish boundaries based on Monson's 1848 map are shown by dashed lines. 1 . . . St. Peter's, 2 . . . St. Mary-at-the-Walls', 3 . . . St. Martin's, 4 . . . St. Runwald's, 5 . . . Holy Trinity, 6 . . St. Nicholas', 7 . . . St. Botolph's, 8 . . . All Saints', 9 . . . St. James'.

Hythe, has long been regarded as the Saxon port which was replaced by the New Hythe, or simply the Hythe, as it is now called. The New Hythe, along with its church, St. Leonard's, and parish, was probably a piece of Late Saxon or Norman town development.

We have traced, albeit tenuously, the growth of Colchester, The siting of the borough, as we have seen, was chosen over 2,000 years ago by the Trinovantes, their outer dykes to remain as stable boundaries for the town long after their defensive role had ceased. The location of the walled town was unwittingly chosen by the Roman army who built their fortress in a carefully chosen spot within the defences of Camulodunum and overlooking the principal area of Belgic occupation. The town left by the Romans in the fifth century acted as the natural focus for the development of medieval Colchester. By the end of the twelfth century, the street system of the town centre as we know it today had crystallized, and, with the notable exception of the town walls, almost all visible remains of the Roman town underneath had disappeared.

The process has, for good or evil, started on another cycle, because we are witnessing with the Inner Relief Road and the Shewell Road and Lion Walk precincts drastic changes in Colchester's topography. Such changes in a place of Colchester's historic importance must be preceded by archaeological excavations with adequate finances and time provided, particularly as these building works can and do destroy, once and for all, the archaeology below.

Members of the public often believe, through no fault of their own, that the purpose of excavations in the town is to find specimens to stock the museums, or, at best, to search for interesting and spectacular buildings. This, however, is not doing justice to the excavations. Each trench should be seen as only a tiny part of what in effect is one huge site consisting of the entire borough where discoveries not made in an excavation can be almost as significant as those that are. A tremendous amount remains to be learnt and it is hoped that Colchester will let no opportunities slip nor fail to face up to the responsibilities of its outstanding cultural heritage.

Acknowledgements

The Colchester Excavation Committee consists of representatives of local authorities and relevant local and national bodies as well as individual members. Its aim is to ensure adequate recording of threatened archaeological evidence in the area and raises money to achieve this. The present scale of the necessary work is such that a team of permanent full-time workers, the Colchester Archaeological Unit, has recently been appointed by the Committee to cope with rescue archaeology both in the town and district of Colchester.
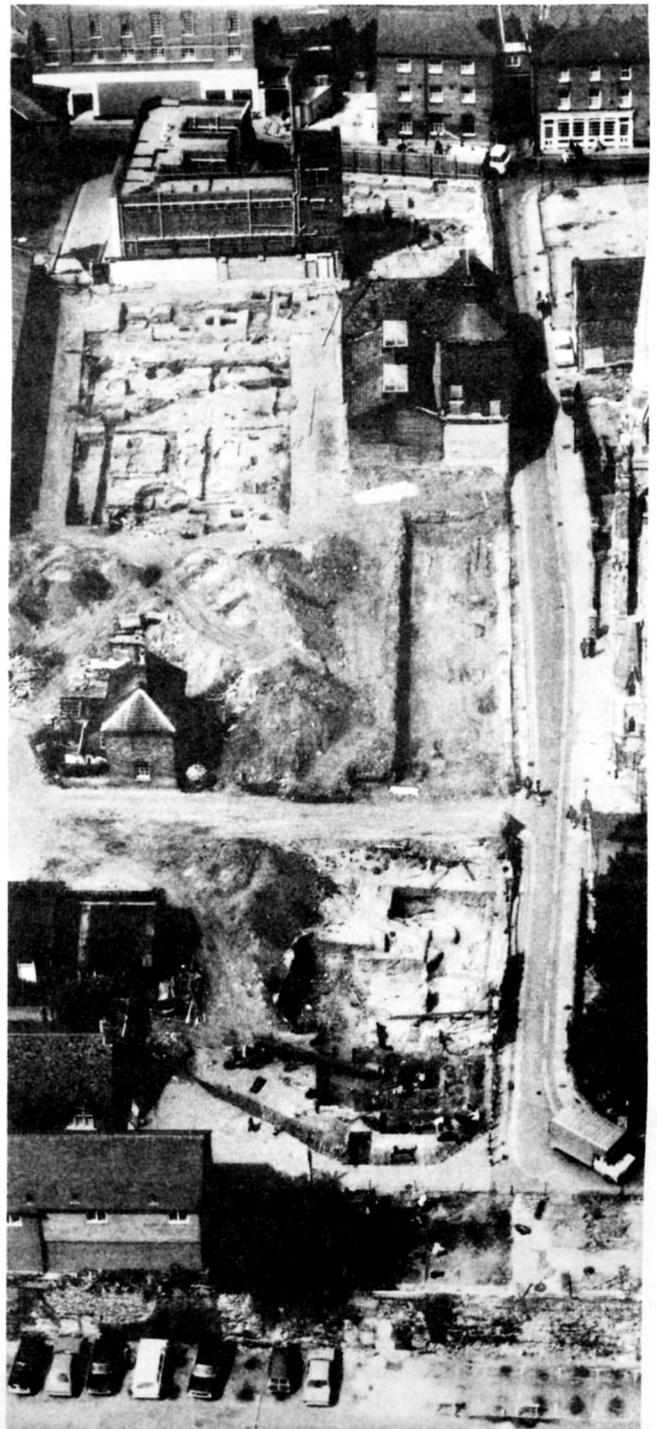
Photo: 665 Aviation Squadron

Lion Walk 1972. Excavations in progress. The Roman town wall is visible at the very bottom of the photograph.