



# Colchester Archaeological Group

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## ANNUAL BULLETIN VOL. 2 1959

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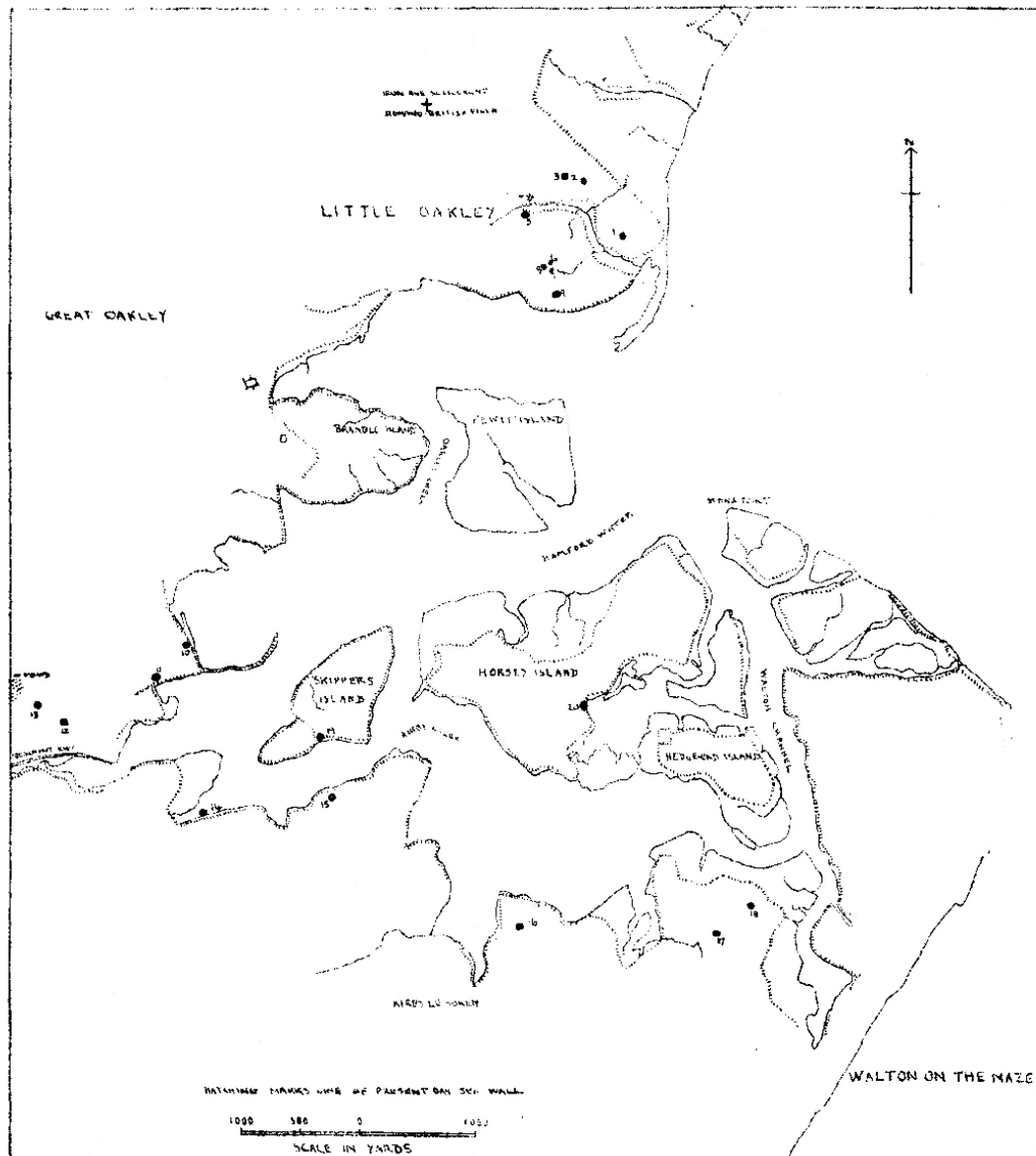
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## DISTRIBUTION OF RED HILLS AROUND HAMFORD WATER



### PART 3 SEPTEMBER 1959

**WINTER PROGRAMME** The weekly evening meetings will begin on Monday October 19th at 7.p.m. at the Castle Museum. It has been suggested that we attempt a more ambitious and constructive programme this winter and it is hoped that all local members will attend the first meeting, or failing that, the second, to help arrange this. The idea is that a short talk should be given each Monday evening by a different person on a chosen subject in which he or she is particularly interested; this in itself will entail some study and research and the discussion to follow should lead to more; and possibly to some interesting field-work later.

This Bulletin contains an article by Mr Erith on "Circular Crop Marks in the Ardleigh District" and two contributions by Mr Gant; - a report on the site of Messrs Joy's shop which has recently been demolished and a delightful 'reprint' from the British Press of 1818. An account of the excavation of the Romano-Celtic Temple at Sheepen by Mr B.Blake is also included.

The W.E.A. have asked us to include the notice of a 24 week Sessional Course provided by the University of Cambridge Board of Extra Mural Studios on "The History of Colchester 1700

- 1960" by A.F.J. Brown B.A. - to be held weekly from Friday 25th September at Greyfriars School, North Hill, Colchester.

We now have copies available of all previous Bulletins. These can be obtained price 1/3 post free from Mrs K. de Brisay, 89, Maldon Road, Colchester; to whom all enquiries and contributions should be addressed.

DISCOVERIES AT JOY'S SITE, HIGH STFSET, COLCHESTER.

by L. H. Gant.

Demolition of the premises at 51, High Street, formerly occupied by Joys produced little worthy of note since the building was a 20th cent., monstrosity, but the digging for footings and excavations for stanchions gave one a fleeting chance to examine strata and at least view some of the objects found.

The most important structure was revealed at the High Street end of the tapering site where a square building, presumed to be Norman, having massive walls enclosing an area of some twenty feet square, was found at a depth of about three feet from the present ground level. The original walls were built of rubble and tile, not coursed, and these had been cut through in two places to provide access to a neighbouring cellar, and for the stairway to the cellar formed by the building. It was not possible during the building operations to examine the outer surface of the wall and indeed the cavity was eventually filled in with cement.

A section across the building was dug to a depth of twelve feet at which depth the natural sand appeared. Close to the wall at a distance of about twenty four feet from High Street a balaster jug was recovered almost intact, the handle only being missing and slight damage being done to the foot by one of the labourers. This was of gritty texture and was partially glazed. Other fragments of early pottery and Roman Building tile were found throughout the made up ground and pits for the disposal of rubbish cut into the natural sand occurred through the strata. In about, the centre of the building, that is, equidistant from High Street and Culver Street, a circular mediaeval well was found which had been arched over and sealed by brick at no recent date. The well was beautifully coursed in stone and it is regretted that rubbish from the site was put into it before its existence was known to us.

The scatter of pipe fragments throughout the upper layers of soil provided one of the earliest bowls yet found in Colchester which dates from 1600 -1620. The greatest number of pipes were of the much larger barrel type common in the mid 17th century round about the time of the Siege of Colchester. The presence of this type might be accounted for by the premises being used by the defending forces in that struggle, as was found higher up the street at No 24 when the Essex County Standard Press Room was built some eight or nine years ago.

A spur with a painted rowel was found and it was reported, although not seen by myself, that a Roman mosaic pavement was discovered some twenty five feet from High Street, at a depth of only three feet. Mr Calver saw this and said it consisted of the usual red tesserae. In view of the disturbed nature of the surrounding soil I cannot think this is "in situ" and therefore merely record the find.

CIRCULAR CROP-MARKS IN THE ARDLEIGH DISTRICT.

by F. H. Erith.

In other counties Barrows or Tumuli are commonplace; in Essex they are a rarity. In Yorkshire there were erected 20,000 and in Devonshire nearly 6,000, but in Essex there can have been barely a score marked on the Ordnance Survey maps. The best known is the Lexden Mount, and other landmarks are at Sturmer, on the road to Cambridge; Church Farm, Tending, Lawford Hall; Ford Farm, Mistley, and Manor Farm, Great Holland. All these are definitely recognizable as barrows as they still have most of their elevation intact, but many barrows have had their height reduced by ploughing so that there are perhaps only two or three feet left above ground level, and even more have been entirely levelled so that there is normally no trace left that they ever existed.

Generally speaking, the larger the mound, the more likely it is still visible, because the physical difficulty of levelling it is greater. The smaller mounds would be easy to level down and these have mostly disappeared.

In the Ardleigh district the only sites marked on the map are the ones at Lawford Hall and opposite Ford Farm, Mistley. The one at Lawford Hall was excavated about 1810 and two urns were recovered, but of what period is unknown. The Mistley site appears to have been excavated but it is not known what was found in it. Some time ago a Middle Bronze Age urn was found at California Road Mistley, presumably from a ploughed down and unrecognizable barrow. In 1913 a Middle Bronze Age urn was extracted while digging gravel at Dedham, almost certainly from a ploughed away barrow.

In 1922 Mr Laver reported a tumulus on the Ardleigh-Lawford boundary, opposite Foxash, but the records do not say why he believed this site to be a barrow.

During the late war, Mr F.A. Girling of Lt Bromley, suspected that a site on Tye Field, Lawford, might be a barrow and in January 1959 Mr Brian Blake and I confirmed that it was. A circle of sand and fragments of Neolithic pottery were visible on the surface after deep ploughing. In a drought in 1957 Mr F.A. Girling spotted the crop mark in sugar beet at Dedham which led to the excavation of a ploughed away barrow and the extraction of two Middle Bronze Age urns, which was done under the direction of Mr Brian Blake.

Such then was the position about midsummer 1959:- Dedham, one certain and one probable barrow; Lawford two certain and one probable; Mistley one certain and one probable.

In late June of this year, Mr R.H. Farrands hired an aeroplane for an hour's flight with the idea of examining his Roman site at Lt Oakley. There had been a considerable drought and it was possible that crop marks might shew up from the air which would not be visible from the ground. Actually no crop marks did show up so, in order to use up his time, he flew over to Ardleigh to see if anything would be visible there. Besides extensive linear and other marks over the Iron Age and Roman portion of Vince's Farm, were two ring marks, one at Vince's Farm and another near New Hall.

When he informed me about this I went to the field in which the one at Vince's Farm was, and indeed, not only was the one he had seen from the air plainly visible at ground level, but also five others as well. At this stage the main crop of barley had changed colour from dark to pale green, but the actual rings were still dark green and the corn three or four inches taller. At a later stage, in July, there was no difference in colour since both main crop and ring were white, but the difference in height remained sufficient for these rings to be discernible, though less obviously so.

Subsequently I found a similar ring in a neighbouring field at Martell's Hall, Ardleigh, owned by Mr L.S. Palmer; and in July, while threshing some grass seed at Gt. Bromley Hall, I saw a ring from the top of the threshing drum.

In August, while combining wheat at Vince's, another mark became visible from the height of the combine harvester. This was only twenty yards away from the Late Bronze Age Urnfield and not much further from some of the rings in the barley field.

Later, the driver of the combine-harvester sent a message to say that he had cut through some ring marks at Grange Farm, Lawford, and he would be able to show me exactly where those were by the brightness of the stubble. But when I arrived he could not exactly locate the place as the stubble had, of course, been run over by various machines used in the harvest and was no different from the surrounding stubble. From his description it appears that these were circle marks as opposed to ring marks, and all the internal corn was taller as well as the ring circumference. This could mean that they were sites of pits of some sort and were probably not caused by barrow makers.

However, in a field of wheat which was next due for cutting, there appeared to be a mound somewhere in the centre and I asked this driver, (Michael Wright, of Manningtree) to let me know if there was a ring of higher corn and to mark the place if possible. I got a message to say that there was an enormous but quite recognizable 'halo' within the wheat and I got a rather grudging permission from the farm manager (Mr Strawson) to travel on the combine harvester as the site was being cut through. I was thus able to confirm that this was another ring mark. The mound still has about two or three feet of elevation and from one side this looks more as a depression adjoins the mound, as if the earth were taken from the one to make the other. The halo was about forty yards in circumference and six feet thick.

When the Tye Field, previously mentioned, was being cut, a ring eight feet wide and about forty yards in diameter was observed at the site of the barrow, thus showing two circular marks in one year. One of sand owing to deep ploughing and the other as a crop mark in barley, and both having the same centre. The combine driver (Mr Ron Groves) said that there were other circles nearby and he marked the most prominent with straw at the circumference and a stick at the centre, so that when I arrived a few minutes later I was able to get a survey of it.

The result of the drought in 1959 meant that an additional nine barrow sites had been found in Ardleigh as well as one in Great Bromley and two in Lawford.

It must be understood that as soon as the crops are harvested, visual evidence of these circles ceases and it may be several years before conditions are such that they would be seen again. Not only would there have to be a drought but also the crop would have to be a susceptible one. Most important of all, perhaps, is that they would have to be seen by someone who would recognize them and be aware of their significance. It is highly probable that many rings, especially in the middle of large fields or not visible from the road, are never detected at all.

What is the cause of these crop-marks? We know that in a drought corn will grow higher where the land has at one time been dug deeper, but the cause is not that the infilling contains humus, or even soil that has more plant food than the sterile undisturbed subsoil. If that were so then these crop marks would show up every year. In a drought the limiting factor to growth is moisture and it must be that this once-dug deeper soil is able to retain moisture and thus increase the growth of the crop above it. It follows then, that any increase in the height of a crop is a 'recollection' of disturbance inside the circle. This is strikingly brought out in the 'ring' at Gt Bromley, where two tufts of higher corn, each about five feet from the centre, 'reflect' what are probably two burials. The remaining interior crop, being similar in height to the exterior, implies that these two burials are the only features in the barrow.

In all the ploughed away barrows I have therefore made notes of the interior markings, both to help the excavator and also to see if this theory is correct, if any of these sites be excavated. Interior crop markings cannot apply in this way to barrows which still have some elevation left as the extra soil applied in making the barrow confuses the issue.

The crop which appears to be most sensitive is barley since it is comparatively shallow rooted and fills up the spaces between the drills better than other corn. As it is not a tall crop it can

more easily be seen from ground level than wheat which grows to chest height. Also, the thicker the crop, the more accurate the 'reflection'. A crop like sugar beet with only one plant per square foot must give a less accurate 'reflection' than, say, a thick crop of barley with continuous plants in seven inch apart rows.

What are the chances of any of these sites being excavated? Well, two of the farmers concerned would certainly never allow their land to be 'dug-up'; the family of one even implored me not to mention the existence of the site to him. The other had some reason to be apprehensive as the barrow was in the middle of a sixty acre field. It was only when I mentioned that it would be more difficult to persuade a qualified team of archaeologists to tackle the job than to persuade him to give permission for the work to be done that his mind was set at rest. The commitments already undertaken by the Colchester Museum authorities, the remoteness of most of the sites and the vast amount of earth to be shifted, preclude of any but the smallest being excavated during the next few years.

Finally, in the case of the ploughed away sites, the surveying of their exact positions may not be sufficiently accurate for them to be found again as landmarks which we may think are permanent enough have a habit of disappearing. For example, the four huge pylons at Gt. Bromley have been taken down in the last year. More hedges and trees are being bulldozed away every year and small fields are being made into big ones. It is difficult to find a reliable landmark from which to make survey.

<u>SUMMARY</u>				
<u>Location.</u>	<u>Crop.</u>	<u>Diameter</u> <u>feet.</u>	<u>Width of</u> <u>circumference.</u>	<u>Internal Markings.</u>
<u>ARDLEIGH.</u>				
Vince's Farm.	barley.	22	3 feet	Over the whole.
" "	"	21	3 "	"
" "	"	38	5 "	In centre & one
" "	"	67	3 "	quarter.
cen.,	"	66	2 "	In 2 quarters merging at
" "	"	31	3 "	About 1/3 of interior.
" "	wheat.	25	2½ "	In centre & one quarter.
Martells Hall.	barley.	33	2 "	Not discernible.
Ardleigh Hill.	wheat.	75	6 "	On 2 sides & in centre.
<u>GT BROMLEY</u> - Hall.	barley.	37	2 "	In centre.
<u>LAWFORD.</u>				
Tye Field	barley.	120	8 "	Two humps near centre.
" "	"	16	2 "	Barrow still elevated.
The Grange.	wheat.	120	6 "	Not Observed.
Foxash (Smallholding)	nil.	large.	-	Barrow still elevated
<u>DEDHAM</u>	sugarbeat.	75 (?)	6	" " "
centre.				Horshoe mark near

The site at Foxash is now occupied by Mrs Bodsworth, A smallholder, but in 1922, when Mr Laver reported it, the land was part of a large arable farm. Perhaps someone had seen a 'halo' in the drought of 1921 and told Mr Laver about it. The diameter could be 120 feet or more.

The size of the 'halo' at Grange Farm was judged by eye only.

Mr Girling has taken some excellent photographs of four rings at Vince's Farm and also of the one at Great Bromley.

EXTRACT FROM "THE BRITISH PRESS" SATURDAY, 5th SEPT., 1818.  
from L.H. Gant.

Colchester

On Thursday, 27th ultimo the first Admiralty Court for the jurisdiction of the Borough of Colchester with the Customary Court and Court of Conservancy for the fishery of the river Colne since the granting of the new charter to the Borough, was held, according to ancient custom, at a place called the Block-house, in East Mersea, in this County, and within the jurisdiction, before Edward Clay Esq., Mayor of the Borough.

After a charge of considerable length by Mr Sutton, the Town Clerk and Registrar of the Court, in the course of which he detailed to the Court and jury that so long back as the reign of Henry I the Burgesses of Colchester had the fishery of the river Colne from North Bridge to Westnesse, and (whoever might be the owners of the adjoining lands) had the customs of the waters and banks on both sides the river; and that these, and other great and important rights and privileges, were also granted and confirmed to the Burgesses by Richard I, Henry VI, Edward IV, and by divers other Kings and Queens of England.

The jury empanelled and sworn which consisted of the most respectable licensed dredgemen of the fishery of which Mr Benjamin Stacey of Wivenhoe, was the foreman, made several presentments of considerable importance to the rights and interests of the Mayor and commonalty; amongst others we collected the presentment of some London fishermen, for fishing in Pyefleet an arm of the river (in which the finest oysters are produced), with peter nets loaded with lead; several enclosures of land, over which the sea was accustomed to flow at high tide, and in which were, previous to such enclosures, many fleets and creeks into and from which the tide flowed, and situate in the parishes of East Mersea, Langenhoe and Fingringhoe; encroachments by the Lord of the Manor of St Osyth upon the admiralty of Colchester by engrossing of gravel and selling the beach below high water mark. The claims of several persons, to be licenced to dredge in the river wore also enquired into and determined.

Much other business, of importance to the interests of the Corporation and the licenced Dredgemen was transacted; and upon the Courts rising and the Mayor, Magistrates, Town Clerk and many other members of the Corporation, with a very respectable party of Gentlemen from Colchester and the neighbourhood with the Jury adjourned to a large marquee on the shore and partook of a cold collation, which had been prepared and laid out by Mr Lingwood of the Blue Posts in Colchester, in a style and manner which gave great satisfaction. An excellent band, provided by the Mayor, played during dinner and for a considerable time afterwards, on a convenient spot near the Mayors marquee, to which many of the company adjourned and joined in the cheerful dance, till the return of the tide rendered it necessary to leave the delightful spot. We do not recollect to have witnessed so large an assemblage of company on any former occasion; and we are happy to say, that the business and amusements of the day were conducted and concluded to the entire satisfaction of all.

There was a good sailing match in the afternoon between the Fox and Mary cutters, which terminated in favour of the former.

ROMANO - CELTIC TEMPLE , SHEEPEN, COLCHESTER.  
by B. Blake.

In a town such as Colchester where most people are aware of the past and too many are engaged in destroying it, to find a site as little disturbed as that excavated this Easter by the Colchester and Essex Museum is rather surprising. The site was first reported to the Museum by small boys who had dug into it and found fragments of Roman building material and a piece of tessellated pavement 'in situ'. This was also seen and reported by Mr and Mrs D. Merson of North Station Road, Colchester.

The site is on land farmed by Mr Cronin of Moat Farm and I am most Grateful for his co-operation and interest, and for permission to excavate the site which he readily gave. To you - those of the Colchester Archaeological Group who assisted at the site - I am also indebted. I relied upon your labour and hope that in exchange you gained some experience and knowledge, in addition to blisters and backache. Above all I am indebted to those three stalwarts Tessa Stratton, Douglas Merson and Peter Rose. Their constant attendance contributed much to the success of the excavation.

The Site.

The site appears as a low mound in the flood plain of the River Colne, within fifty feet of its south bank. It is situated within the angle formed by the Colchester by-pass and the river and is due west of Colchester North Station. Though only a foot or so in height the mound is quite conspicuous when once noticed. It is most evident when the field is flooded a foot or so deep as it then stands up above the water as an island. (I am indebted to Douglas Merson who showed me a photograph of this). From the mound approximately fifty feet in diameter, a narrow ridge runs to the south east. It continues on the south and west sides, though here it is barely discernible, showing as slightly drier ground when the field is waterlogged, or, in its present abnormal state as a distinct negative crop mark in the grass. The ridge is not perceptible on the north east as there higher land runs from the mound towards the river until cut by a low bluff about twenty feet from the water's edge. Between the mound and its encircling ridge was a low waterlogged area.

The presence of the pavement made it clear that a Roman building lay below the Mound. It was most likely to be a Roman-Celtic Temple. If it were so the ridge might well have been an enclosure wall surrounding a small temple precinct.

The situation of the building is very odd. It is always subject to flooding and is waterlogged for most of the year. It must be borne in mind though, that if the relative levels of the river and land changed so that the mound stood higher, the river gravel subsoil on which it stands would ensure it a firm dry bed.

The site is within the inner defensive ditch of Camulodunum and is very near the two Roman-Celtic temples excavated by Mr Hull in 1935. (Plan, Camulodunum Pl. CVI. Full report Roman Colchester pp. 224 ff.)

Excavation

The excavation lasted five weeks over the Easter holiday period. Preliminary surveying was done mainly by Dr R. Newholm and Geography students from the North East Essex Technical College and School of Art. I am most grateful to them for this and for their assistance during the excavation.

A Base Line was laid out almost east-west forming the centre line of a small grid of sixteen squares to cover the area of the mound. If time and labour should permit, trenches to explore the ridges would also be dug along this line.

Squares of ten foot side were chosen as the unit of excavation. They were thought to be the most useful size to give an intelligible area of working and of sufficient width to allow deep



digging if it should prove necessary. Baulks 2ft. 6 ins. wide allowed pathways for barrows as the spoil had to be: dumped clear of the excavation area.

At an early stage in the proceedings the top of the water table was reached. Fortunately this declined as work continued but finally persisted at a level which made further digging impossible. A water pump was borrowed and used but the water would not drain across the site to a sump as the walls and floor levels formed impervious barriers. I am most grateful to the Borough Engineer and the Superintendent of Parks whose departments loaned pumping equipment. It worked well, allowing for the extremes of temperament displayed by all such machines but proved too large for the small amount of water. The sumps were emptied in one gulp and the machine had to idle too long while waiting for them to refill.

#### Conclusion.

The mound was caused by the silting of river alluvium and accumulation of humus over remains of a Roman-Celtic Temple. The building may be dated, at the earliest, to the second half of the first century A.D. Solidly built of septaria and tile, it had a podium of about two feet and an overall width of thirty six feet. The two square walls were concentric, the outer 4ft.4in. in width and the inner 2ft. This may indicate that the main thrust of the roof was taken by the outer wall and that the inner carried much less weight, possibly upon a colonnade. If this were so the 'cella' may have been open to the sky and the deity worshipped therein one having associations with nature. Both the walls have been robbed for stone down to the top of their footing levels and the coarse red tessellated corridor between them had cracked and slipped into the trenches left.

Below the building, which was faced with Purbeck Marble, lay a more modest affair. It was of timber with wattle and daub walls. Its date was Claudian-Neronian, upon the evidence of much pottery produced from its several occupation layers, These alternated, with four floors of yellow clay which were sealed by the destruction of the building by fire.. This most probably dates to the activity of Boudicca in A.D.61. As far as may be seen from the few points where it was investigated this building conforms in plan to that above.

#### PART 4 DECEMBER 1959

This Bulletin completes our second year and we apologise for our delay in bringing it out. It was held up to include an account of an excavation at Great Bromley. The site was first noticed by Mr. F.H. Erith as a very clear crop mark during last summer's drought and it was thought advisable to dig it before his marks were lost. Mr Erith described this and other crop marks in our September Bulletin.

Our weekly meetings during the autumn proved to be most rewarding and were much enjoyed by all who took part. An account is included on pp. 28-29. A further series is planned for 1960, the programme of which is given overleaf. This has had to be re-arranged in some respects but we think members will find at least some of the items interesting. Those members who wish to join the outings to Feering or Gestingthorpe and have no transport should get in touch with the Secretary. We also include in this issue an article by Mr L.H. Gant on discoveries at No. 70, High Street, Colchester and an unusual and interesting article by Maj. A.D. Mansfield on the Victorian Gas Stove.

All enquiries may be sent to the Hon., Secretary; Mrs K. de Brisay, 89, Maldon Road, Colchester. Telephone: Colchester 6207. (evenings only).

Just as we were going to press the sad news came through that Air Commodore J.S. Chick died in the Colchester hospital on January 21st. His death will be a great loss to the Group of which he has been an enthusiastic member from its inception. Air Commodore Chick was working on the pattern of Roman roads in the district and at every meeting he would produce new information on this and on a variety of other archaeological items of local interest. He will be sadly missed and we extend our sympathy to his widow.