

## **THE HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS IN THE BOROUGH OF CHELMSFORD.**

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Nick showed the history chronologically, beginning with the Neolithic. The Springfield Cursus was excavated by the County Council Field Unit in 1979, ahead of the development of Chelmer Village. This cursus, at nearly ½ mile long must have been important as it would have taken the effort of a community to complete. From the Bronze Age there was an enclosure at Springfield Lyons. This was first recognised from the air and the excavation was funded by the British Museum, in return for keeping all the finds. Before reaching the Bronze Age level, a C5 and C6 pagan cemetery was found, which respected a ditch. This Bronze Age ditch had in it, on either side of the entrance, a collection of clay moulds for making swords.

Excavations in the 1970's at Little Waltham in advance of the construction of the bypass, revealed Iron Age round houses. The archaeology was only about 1ft below the surface.

The site of Chelmsford became settled by the Romans after the Boudican rebellion. It lay about half-way between and Colchester and had river access to the sea. The Antonine Itinerary mentions *Caesaromagus* and the site of this place was debated until the 1970's, when it was agreed that it was Chelmsford. Excavations showed the presence of an early fort. In 1758, William Stukeley drew an incorrect plan but correctly labelled it as *Caesaromagus*.

In 1968 the Excavation Committee was formed following a threat to buildings for the construction of Parkway. Before destruction, the buildings were recorded and excavated. Paul Drury was in charge of excavations in Chelmsford, Great Dunmow, Heybridge and Braintree. Later, Excavation Committee was renamed the Chelmsford Archaeological Trust, which continued until the late 1980's.

In the Roman era, *Caesaromagus* was a small town surrounded by a bank and ditch. The Roman road to Colchester lay on the line of what is now Moulsham Street. The major buildings were the mansio and bathhouse. Excavation was done by the County Council Field Unit in 1988. Just outside the defences was a Romano-Celtic temple, dating to about 325. The name of an emperor being used in the name of a town only occurs for somewhere important. It is possible that *Caesaromagus* was so called as it was planned to be the capital after the Boudican rebellion. The bathhouse was excavated by Drury and box flue tiles were found. An inhumation was found in the town in 1972, with grave goods including a jet pendant with the head of medusa. at Great Holts in the 1990's. Gravel extraction at Boreham in the 1990's exposed a building with apses. This may have been a church, but it was more likely to have been the country

In the surrounding countryside there were a number of farms. A crop mark showed up from the air in 1975, at Chignall St James. The site was

scheduled and has never been excavated. There is another villa site near Broomfield Church. Excavation of Pleshey Villa was stopped by the outbreak of WWI. The County Council excavated the villa house of an official.

The Saxons were farmers who did not use towns such as Chelmsford. Some of the places where they settled later became Springfield, Broomfield and Great Waltham. Other settlements formed smaller villages. During digging for gravel in 1880 at Broomfield, a burial of about 624 was found. There was no body but the grave goods were comparable to the Prittlewell burial. There were items decorated with gold and garnets and a pair of blue glass jars. A similar pair was found at Prittlewell and fragments were found at Sutton Hoo.

After the Romans had left, the wooden bridge over the R Chelmer collapsed, meaning a detour through Writtle. As a result, Chelmsford declined. In about 1100, new bridges were built over the R Can and R Chelmer. In 1199, the town received a Royal Charter to hold a market, so in July 1999, the town celebrated its 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The market was on a triangular piece of land in front of the church.

In 1591, John Walker drew a map of Chelmsford. The area where the Dominican Friary had stood was shown. This friary was founded in the late C12 and was dissolved in 1538. The only building left standing was the kitchen, drawn by Stukeley in 1751. Water was taken via a culvert from the R Can to supply the friary. Traces of this and some medieval window glass have been found. King John's Hunting Lodge at Writtle was founded in 1211 and was used by the king when hunting in Writtle Forest. The agricultural College now stands on the site. At Pleshey, there is a Norman motte and bailey castle, although the bailey was small. It was slighted during the Civil War of the mid C12 after which a larger bailey was created. The village was enclosed by a third defence. The top of the motte was excavated by Chancellor in the C19 and the bailey was excavated by the Archaeological Society in the 1960's. More recent excavations were undertaken by Birmingham University.

A brick bridge was built over the R Chelmer at the end of the C14, this being one of the earliest brick structures in England. Floor and roof tiles were made at Danbury and the kilns were excavated in 1974. Chelmsford remained an agricultural market town until the construction of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation in 1797. This gave the town access to the coast at Heybridge. Later, the railway came to the town which then became a centre of industry. Two important industries were Hoffman's, making ball bearings, and Marconi's which led research into radio and connected technologies.

The creation of cellars in the Victorian era destroyed much of the stratigraphy. Chelmsford was recently elevated to city status.

