

Graduation 2008

Acceptance Speech by Honorary Graduate Philip Crummy

Chancellor, graduates, guests, Councillor Ray Gamble.

One of the worst things that ever happened to Colchester was in the AD 60s when Boudica burnt the town to the ground. One of the best things to happen to Colchester was in the 1960s when they built the University of Essex there. OK – you'll be thinking that I would say that considering what I've just been given - but really, it's true. And what's more, building the university next to Colchester was good for the university too. A place with as much history as Colchester should have its own university. And a relatively new university like Essex should be associated with a place as historic as Colchester. The University of Essex and Colchester – a marriage made in Heaven!

Although the University has never had a department of archaeology or even of archaeological science, archaeology is no stranger to the campus.

If you have watched Time Team on the television, then you'll probably have heard of 'Geofizz'. Well around 1970, Mike Tite, who was in the Department of Physics, built his own hi-tech prospecting machine and started surveying sites in Colchester. His book, *Methods of Physical Examination in Archaeology*, became a standard work on the subject. Mike was our chairman for about five years. He left Essex to head up the research laboratory at the British Museum and then moved to Oxford University to do the same thing there at the Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art.

You might think mathematics and archaeology would make strange bed fellows. Not so. Quietly working at Essex there is Professor Jim Doran, who has been coming to our meetings since the 1970s. Jim was a professor for many years in the Department of Computer Science, and he is a prolific publisher and a renowned authority on the subject of statistics and computers in archaeology and anthropology.

In the late 1970s, Charles Beaumont was the manager of Jim's department. Charles provided facilities to process excavation data which we entered on to punched cards. This early experimentation with archaeological data was moved on to a PC which we purchased with Charles' advice and support.

In the late 1990s, retrieving DNA from ancient human bone was still a demanding challenge particularly because of the problems caused by modern contamination. Here at Essex, Dr Patricia Smith and PhD student Ken Vonng in the Department of Biochemistry successfully extracted DNA from Roman skeletons from one of our excavations. The project was made possible by Harold Poulter who had served as assistant curator at Colchester Museum for over thirty years. Harold died in 1962 and left a bequest to the infant university to fund studentships in archaeology and natural science.

Many of you in the Department of Computing and Electronic Systems will know Tim Dennis. About ten years ago, Tim set up what must have been one of the first live webcasts from an archaeological site. BT kindly provided us with a suitable telephone line and Tim, helped by Terry Quinlan from the same department, magically made the whole thing work.

Because of his interest in imaging, Tim does lots of geophysical surveys these days and has worked to great effect on key sites including the Roman circus and the Lexden Tumulus.

And Adrian Clark also in the same department has been a familiar face for some time on our management committee. He has digitally modelled Colchester Castle and the Gosbecks temple, and currently Christine Clark and Adrian are developing a new web site hosted by the university to make the Trust's reports more widely available.

In terms of courses and facilities, the Centre for Lifelong Learning ran a course in archaeology (the course director incidentally was our own Howard Brooks). And the Essex section of the Victoria County History was until recently based in the Department of History. Now the Department of History is running various courses about Colchester and regional archaeology for its certificate in local history. And in the University Library you can find the splendid library of the Essex Archaeological Society.

So thank you University of Essex for all the help you have given to archaeology in the past and for the great honour which you have given me today. And thank you Andrew for those generous words of introduction, but digging holes needs lots of hands and minds. Since I have been in Colchester, a thousand people - at least - have done the real work. Imagine if we had all turned up today, we could have filled this hall and a lot more!

This is a great day for me. It's given me a second chance because - it's terrible really - but I can't remember anything about when I graduated the first time round. It's all a complete blank, except that immediately afterwards when we had left the hall, a friend of mine - Liz - who was graduating with her husband, handed me her camera and asked me to take a photograph of them both.

When I was done, she said, "Would you like me to take a photograph of you?"

I said, "Oh yes, please."

After she took it, I said, "Liz, you had your finger over the lens!"

She said, "No. I didn't!"

I said, "Liz, you had your finger over the lens!"

She said, "No. I didn't!"

So now I have no memory of the graduation and no picture either!

But my most important task is to congratulate all of you who have graduated today. I hope you all enjoy this - the great day - that you all richly deserve. Please let me give you a little advice as somebody who has already been round the block. Look around you. Look at the hall. Look at your friends and family. Try hard to remember all that you see. Hold on to these precious memories. And watch where the photographer puts his fingers!