

An update on the excavations (2005-7) on the site of the Roman circus at Colchester

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A preliminary account of the earliest excavations of the Colchester circus was given in *JRA* 18 (2005) 267-77. In providing a brief update of the first report, the present note is therefore limited to an outline of the most significant results of the circus investigations between late 2005 and October 2007.¹ A review of the results of all the circus excavations up to October 2007 will appear in *Britannia* 39 (2008).

Dating evidence for the circus is still limited. A construction date in the 2nd c. A.D. still seems fairly certain, although it seems increasingly possible that the building ceased to be used around the end of the 3rd c., if not in the 270s (for further discussion see *Britannia* 2008). Further opportunities to investigate the circus in the near future are likely to be very limited.

The cavea

In August 2006, removal of the modern road surface on Napier Road close to the E end of the circus (fig. 1, NR 2007) exposed the best preserved section of the *cavea* seen yet. The foundation of the outer *cavea* wall survived almost intact over a distance of c.10 m. The now familiar elements were well represented here:

- a) the narrow, shallow foundation of the inner *cavea* wall made of unmortared stone chippings;
- b) the thin scatter of rubble from the inner *cavea* wall made of unmortared stone chippings;
- c) the clean truncated base of the 'earth' bank which supported the tiered seating;
- d) the broad mortared foundation of the buttressed outer *cavea* wall; and
- e) the gravelled surface immediately outside the circus which was sealed by the layer of crushed mortar and stone chips left behind when, in the later Roman period, the outer *cavea* wall was demolished and the stone salvaged for re-use.

The tapering of the design of the circus

A trench cut early in 2005 in the garden of the former Education Centre near the W end of the circus was partly re-excavated and extended southwards early in 2007 (fig. 1, EC 2007) to check the provisional conclusion drawn in 2005 that the arena tapered in width from east to west. The foundation first uncovered in the original investigation did prove (as thought at the time) to belong to the outer *cavea* wall and, as expected, the foundation of the inner *cavea* wall was duly uncovered in the extended trench. With the secure fixing of the position of the inner wall of the *cavea* which the latest investigation provided, it has become apparent that the arena tapered in width from c.62 m at the E end of the circus to c.60 m at the W end.

The barrier and turning post, remains of a cone, and foundation of a monument on the barrier

Most of the near turning post was excavated when the modern surface along Circular Road North (fig. 1, CRN 2007) was removed early in 2007 (just as it had been earlier in Napier Road). Interpretation is tricky in some respects but some conclusions can be drawn from the investigation with a fair degree of confidence. The turning post does not appear to have stood on a separate platform but seems to have been integral with the barrier. The foundation for the central barrier (fig. 2) was narrow (c.0.4 m wide) and shallow (probably only 0.5-0.6 m deep). The barrier appeared to be c.5.9 m wide. Remains of the barrier wall in the form of loose rubble lay on the arena surface near the end of the barrier.

The surface of the arena had been worn away by the chariots as they performed their 180° turns. The erosion was at its greatest close to the end of the barrier, showing that the chario-

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