

Graduation 2008 Honorary Graduate - Oration

Oration for Honorary Graduand Phillip Crummy

Orator: Andrew Phillips

Chancellor, the Senate has resolved that the degree of Doctor of the University be conferred upon Philip Crummy.

Archaeology is big in Britain: Stonehenge, Tutankhamen, television's Time Team. And it is big in Colchester. Approach roads to the town still proclaim: Colchester, Britain's Oldest Recorded Town. Two statues of Boudicca adorn its streets, and Carnival days abound with Roman centurions and ladies in home-made togas. Such public awareness reflects the town's history, but it also reflects the work of one man: Philip Crummy, Director of the Colchester Archaeological Trust since 1970.

Philip was born in Edinburgh and studied at Portobello High School. From here to St Andrew's University where he read Physics, Maths and Psychology. In his vacation he was invited by a friend to go on an archaeological dig. In those days it was a cool thing to do. In Scotland, very cool. He liked it and on graduation followed the digging to Bristol, to Oxford, to Colchester. Within a year he was appointed director of the then infant Colchester Archaeological Trust.

Almost immediately Philip was plunged into the massive redevelopment of the town which has continued, with occasional lulls, ever since. The Lion Walk Precinct required, in the centre of an historic town, a hole in the ground the size of two football pitches, 40 feet deep, which removed all the archaeology. Philip was soon directing the largest archaeological site in Britain. Finance was a nightmare and the logistics called for quite as much skill as building the precinct.

And after Lion Walk, Butt Road, Balcerne Hill, Culver Precinct: dig followed dig, so that, as I speak, Philip and his staff have now been responsible for excavating 15% of the built-up area of Colchester. In so doing an immense amount of detail has emerged about the Roman and post-Roman town. Detail requires sound recording and detail calls for interpretation. Not least among his achievements have been a string of journal articles, academic monographs and the 12 volumes of the Colchester Archaeological Reports, many written by Philip himself, and found in university libraries throughout the English-speaking world.

And he has been a great populariser. The so-called doctor's grave at Stanway and the chariot-racing circus were both international news. From an early date Philip saw the value of a local news sheet which has blossomed into the glossy magazine, The Colchester Archaeologist, found even on the news stands of W.H. Smith. His lavishly illustrated popular book, City of Victory, has had two long print runs. And the local public are invited, wherever feasible, to visit local excavations. They come in hundreds.

Today the Colchester Archaeological Trust is as busy as ever, a business with a six-figure annual turnover. To it Philip Crummy brings great inter-personal skills as the Trust deals with developers, local authorities and the wider community. After 36 years as Director, the high regard of his peers was reflected in the publication of a festschrift in his honour in 2006.

Each of the great disciplines represented here today owes as much to the long careful accumulation of data as to the big idea. Philip Crummy has built up a record of Colchester's archaeology which will serve scholarship for centuries to come.

Chancellor I present to you Philip Crummy.