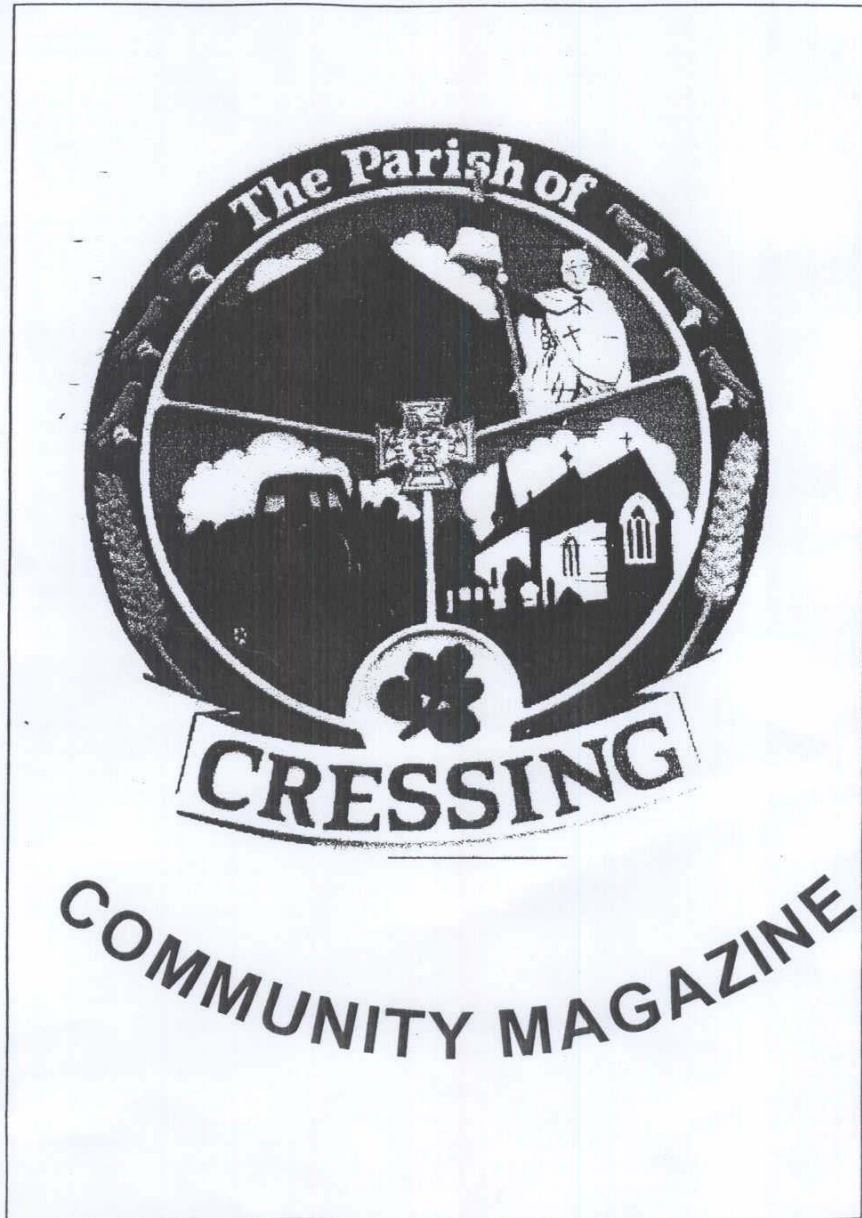


Vol 10: No. 9

Thirty Five Pence



NOVEMBER 2001

'PUSHING BACK THE BOUNDARY'

By R.Ricketts, Chairman of Brain Valley Archaeological Society.

Many years ago, between 1975 and 1979 to be precise, Students of Bramston School in Witham undertook some archaeological excavations in and around Cressing Church, its Graveyard and the adjacent field. They worked under the direction of their tutor, John Hope (a resident of Cressing at that time) assisted by volunteers.

The results of their labours have never been formally published and the artefacts unearthed have remained in storage with Braintree Museum since that time. This situation is about to change.

Brain Valley Archaeological Society have managed to obtain a very generous grant from the Local Heritage Initiative (LHI) under the administrative control of the Countryside Agency, and with the support of Essex County Council have embarked on a programme of obtaining the necessary specialists reports, drawings and site plans to enable the final publication documentation to be completed.

Coupled to this task the Society will be organising a number of events aimed to increase public awareness of their heritage and increase local historical knowledge. Some of these activities will be designed to pay particular attention towards children and the School Curriculum. An Archaeological Day will take place on 7th November in the Village School. The children will be given the opportunity to excavate, handle items recovered from the Churchyard Sites and meet a Roman Soldier.

Given the consent of the Church Faculty we intend to erect an informative notice board in the south western corner of the Churchyard, fronting on to the highway, where it will be accessible to both local people and those passing by on the Essex Way Footpath. A new booklet will be produced, and made available to the Church, which will bring together the current knowledge of the history of Cressing and an extension back into the pre history periods.

As a Society consisting of enthusiastic amateurs, we strongly believe that it is a crime to excavate and then condemn the items retrieved to reburial, albeit in boxes, in the various cellars and attics. We shall be using some of the Cressing articles along with things from other sites to produce two special Handling Boxes, one for use by local schools and the other for the visually impaired, who, whilst not visiting the usual archaeological displays in museums, have a great deal of interest in the subject and would find the tactile nature of many things available stimulating.

Cressing, first recorded in the mid 12th Century, has its roots back some 1000 years, perhaps even longer, when local inhabitants occupied the location investigated by the archaeologists and evidence of crop marks which have been noticed over the years.

A large ditch and bank formed the northern boundary. This was crossed by means of a stone causeway and entry prevented by the use of a large timber gate. Early in the 1st Century this entrance had been burnt down, either at the initial coming of the Romans

or as a result of reprisals following the Boudican Revolt of AD60. A crude burial of a female, possibly bound, into a pit would also support the theory that the occupants of the site came under attack.

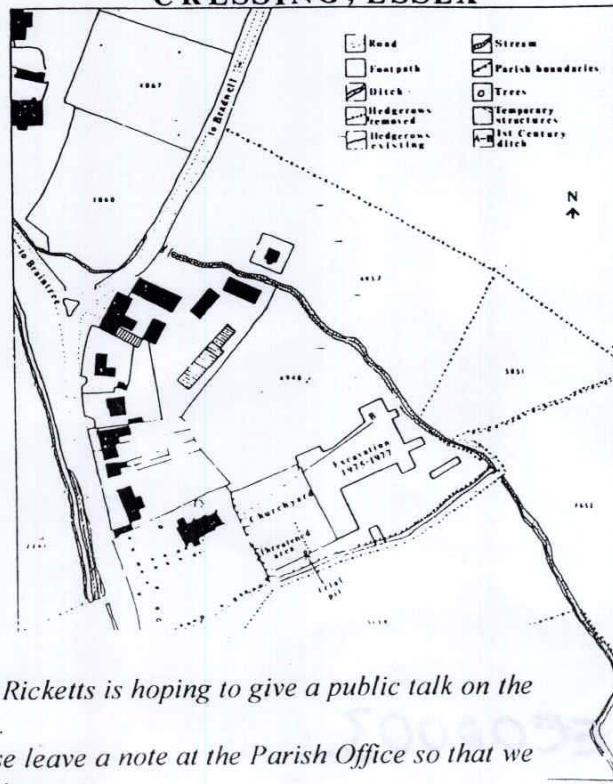
The large ditch continues westward, through the churchyard, across the road and turns southward along the existing field hedgerow line. A double ditched enclosure cropmark has been recorded in the south western corner of the field south of the Churchyard. This is thought to determine the furthestmost limit of the settled area. The whole site has Cressing brook and its associated flood plain forming the eastern flank, in total about 9 hectares which would make it nearly twice the size of similar settlements in Essex.

A number of buildings have been identified, and these have shown that the area was in use from the late Iron Age through to the 4th century when it appears to become agricultural in nature, save for one small pit in the extreme north of the excavated area which contained Saxon material, including a loom weight of the 6th century .

Maybe the Saxons settled further to the north, under the present village, and are awaiting to be discovered in the future.

Keep an eye out when digging in your garden!

CRESSING, ESSEX



If anyone is interested, Mr. Ricketts is hoping to give a public talk on the excavations at a later date.

If you are interested, please leave a note at the Parish Office so that we can gauge the amount of interest.