

Discovering Colchester's Map

Friends who wish to discover more of Colchester's rich historical heritage and who have not yet used Colchester Council's Interactive Map might be interested in taking a look. The map can be found at <http://maps.colchester.gov.uk:8010/connect/analyst/mobile/#/main?mapcfg=Planning> or go to www.colchester.gov.uk and use the search box to search for **planning on the map**. The map loads up with an overlay of current planning applications. To remove these open up the list of map layers by clicking on the layer symbol.



Unclick **Planning Applications Post 2016** and then click on the **Listed Structures and Assets** layer. This layer shows scheduled monuments, officially listed buildings as recorded by English Heritage and locally listed historic buildings. Monuments are hashed in maroon, listed buildings are coloured blue and structures on the local list are in green. Selecting a structure shows a pop-up description of the building/site. In the case of officially listed buildings the description links to the full entry at the English Heritage site. Unfortunately the equivalent local list website is not currently directly accessible.

The map system supports the following browsers and operating systems: Microsoft IE 11 & Edge, Mozilla Firefox 47.0.1, Google Chrome 52.0 & Safari 9.1.1 on Mac. On other devices, Safari on iOS 9.3.3, Chrome on Android 4.3 & 4.4, 5.0 and 6.0 and Microsoft Edge on Windows 10 are supported.

The map is a wonderful resource provided by the Borough Council and has, of course, many other uses.

Frank Black

If you haven't renewed your subscription yet...

... please send your membership fee (£6 individual, £7 family) to The Hon.Treasurer, Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust, c/o 19 Victory Road, West Mersea, Colchester. CO5 8LX with your name and address.

For any membership queries please contact the Membership Secretary Frank Black by email: fradeb@btinternet.com or by phone at 01206 543083

The Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust

News

May 2021



The rear view of the Minories Summerhouse which originally formed the end wall of the garden for East Hill House. See P4

Roman Circus Centre reopening for the Summer Season 2021

Tuesday 18th May - Saturday 25th September

Opening hours: **11 am to 4 pm**

Closed Sundays & Mondays (open Bank Holidays).



The Café will reopen on Tuesday 18th May

Charges: £3 entrance or £6 entrance including a short tour of the foundations & starting gates. Free entry for Friends of CAT, under 11's, Young Archaeologists & members of The Association for Roman Archaeology.

Non-members should book at the Roman Circus Visitor Centre website:
www.romancircus.co.uk

AGM & Illustrated Talks Saturday 3rd July 2021



The Annual General Meeting of the Friends will be held on **Saturday 3rd July 2021** at First Site. There will be a business AGM at **1pm**, to which all members are warmly invited. This will be followed at **2pm** by our illustrated annual lectures by members of the Trust's archaeological team about the current work of the Trust. If you haven't yet renewed your annual subscription you will be able to pay it directly to our Treasurer Nick Hines at this meeting.

Please note that this meeting will be held by Zoom if government restrictions

became quite a social occasion and helped me to make a new circle of friends. We all had young children who were happy to play in the garden.

Potwashing is sometimes done outside and during Colchester's Middleborough excavation a lot of volunteers managed to work in the middle of the roundabout with all the buses etc. going past.

We were later invited to work at East Hill House - a former school - now a hotel and we potwashed there for a number of years. Then the Trust moved again - this time to Camulodunum, a house in Lexden Road, and then, of course, to Roman Circus House.

When the bags of finds arrive from a dig for processing they are usually either wet mucky or dry mucky. As it is best to soak the dry finds in water to loosen the mud all finds soon become wet mucky!

Each finds bag might contain potsherds (fragments of pottery), animal bone, tile, glass or Fe (metal), flint or worked stone. Each bag has a waterproof label – it's made of a special paper called Tyvek. The label is the most important thing as it contains all the information about where the contents were found. So the label will have the site code or reference number, a finds number, a feature and layer number if appropriate. You must NEVER LOSE THE LABEL!



Photo: Samantha Rowley

We use old toothbrushes for cleaning the pottery but sponges are used on more fragile pieces. Everything is dried in plastic trays (courtesy of local greengrocer) and then re-bagged in clean bags.

Pottery has to be marked with the site code using ink and pens with nibs. This is not everyone's favourite job unless you are meticulous and very neat.

March 18 Tuesday

At the very moment the coffin was raised from the grave, a motor hearse rushed by taking a shiny new coffin to the cemetery. How one could moralise on that moment! What an example of continuity, what an illustration of the one permanent unalterable thing - death."

Besides working in the museum during the war Dudsdale had a number of other tasks: he worked as a superintendent of the air-raid shelter at Colchester Castle (often sleeping in the castle overnight between 1940 and 1942); as an observer for the Royal Observer Corps; and was seconded to the Essex War Agricultural Committee.

I liked his easy and accessible writing style and the way he introduced the personal, local and national events around him, often afraid of being killed by bombing raids especially the V1 flying bombs, worrying about being found out as a conscientious objector and looking after his ageing parents. He finally left Colchester in 1945 to take up the position of Curator and Librarian at Wisbech Museum.

Eric Rudsdale's journals have been expertly edited by Catherine Pearson and I found her extra sections, such as the Afterword which provided information about his connections with Colchester after he had left for Wisbech particularly useful. The production of the book and its illustrations are excellent. If I'm allowed one criticism it would be that an index would have been really useful – it is not just academic researchers who use them! I very much enjoyed this book and learnt a lot from it.

Mike Corbishley

Reminiscences of a potwasher

by Brenda May

Have you ever wondered what happens to the 'finds' from archaeological excavations?

Having done some potwashing in the past when I moved back to Essex I contacted Mike Corbishley who was then digging a Roman Villa site near Harwich and I was recruited to work with his group which developed into the Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust.

The potwashing sessions took place once a week at Mike's home where his wife Gill willingly gave up her dining table for us all to wash the finds. It

Events

Look out for events at the Centre in 2021 - Covid-19 permitting.

Tuesday 18th May

Summer season opening hours begin :

Tuesday - Saturday & Bank Holidays 11am to 4pm

Saturday 22nd May

Roman Circus Open Gardens Day

Monday 31st May

Bank Holiday Craft Fair

Saturday 3rd July

Friends AGM & Illustrated talks

Tuesday 20th -

Colchester Roman Week see page 11 for details

Sunday 25th July

Monday 30th August

Bank Holiday Craft Fair

Friday 10th - Sun. 19th

Heritage Open Days - Special activities for

September

England's largest festival of history and culture.

Hidden Archaeology

by Mike
Corbishley

Just before lockdown I started to think about a new regular series for our Newsletter. I wondered about places which people might walk by but never notice or know exist but which fall into the category of "Oh yes I've always thought I might visit that....". My first idea for a topic was the rather hidden-away Summerhouse at the Minories in Colchester. If you know of other 'hidden' buildings or monuments – which you might be interested in reading about in our Newsletter, please email Frank Black (fradeb@btinternet.com).

The Summerhouse at the Minories, Colchester

The gardens of the houses of those who could afford it saw a number of changes in the 18th century, from the building of canals, cascades and temples to follies, grottos, bridges and outside ornaments such as large stone vases. There is an example of one of these smaller 18th-century buildings off East Hill in Colchester.



The front of the Summerhouse seen from the Minories

The Summerhouse was originally built in the garden of East Hill House. When the house was rebuilt about 1730 the large gardens which extended to the Roman town wall were landscaped with a mound to the east and a gravel path for family recreation.

Around 1745 James

Deane, a local architect, was commissioned to design and construct what was called then an *Umbrello* "...to terminate a walk" and to take a rest. From the front you can see that the building is semi-circular. Built in the Gothic style its frontage has battlements above, three large arches into a

Book Review

E J Rudsdale's Journals of
Wartime Colchester

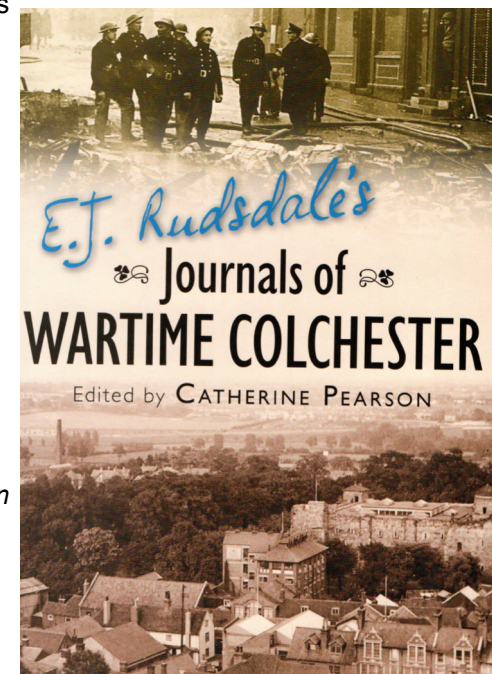
Edited by Catherine Pearson, The History Press, 2010. 223pp, £12.99, ISBN: 9780752458212.

Being in lockdown has had its advantages as it allows us to read the books which we've received as presents. I was given this book for my 77th birthday in December and, as my childhood was dominated by the war, it has always been an interest. Eric Rudsdale lived in Colchester, went to school at Colchester Royal Grammar School and helped the then curator A G Wright. After leaving school in 1928 he went on to become the first Assistant Curator to the museum archaeologist Rex Hull and worked with him on excavations. Rudsdale had kept a diary from the age of ten and had been inspired to introduce reports of his archaeological work in it because he had read William Wire's diary, which recorded the discovery of archaeological finds and buildings in Colchester between 1842 and 1857.

I was fascinated to come across some of the discoveries which I had only previously found in archaeological reports, for example;

March 17 Monday 1941

"Message from the Waterworks today to say that a [Roman] coffin had been found in their new trench in Mersea Road, quite close to where Roman burials were found in 1937. I went up as soon as I knocked off and saw it lying, north-south, right on the edge of the trench. A small grey flask was found by the north end but was broken. Made arrangements to get it out tomorrow and arranged transport by Wick's cart. Much disappointed not to be able to use Bob [his own horse] for the third lead coffin.



Colchester Roman Week

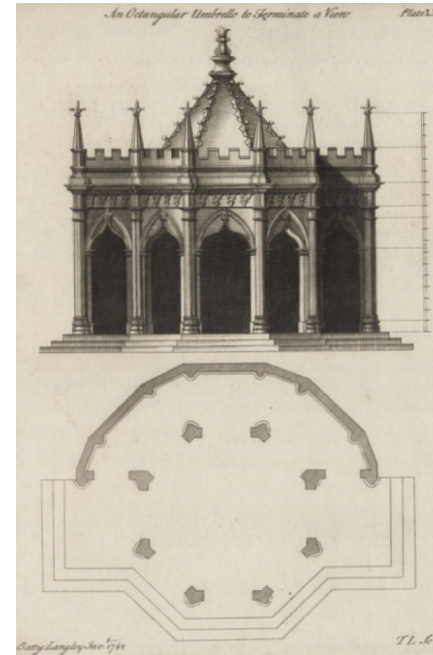
Tuesday 20th - Sunday 25th July



Last Summer the Trust had planned to hold a week of Roman themed activities at the Roman Circus Visitor Centre in July with something 'Roman' happening every day. Sadly, the pandemic put paid to our plans. The good news is that nearly everyone involved has offered to take part in 2021 (subject, of course, to the prevailing restrictions).

All outdoor events will be free to the public, just as the chariot-racing days were in Roman times. During the week there will be: tours of the arena archaeological remains; Roman walks; a mosaic day; talks on Roman themes; visits by school groups creating Roman themed poetry and theatre; a morning of Colchester Young Archaeologist activities; a display of Roman foods, and horses will once again be seen at the circus starting gates. The Colchester Roman Society will be making appearances, so why not join the staff and volunteers in Roman costume? The week of activities will end fittingly on Sunday 25th July, the date in AD 306 when Constantine the Great was declared Roman Emperor at York.

rest area and a conical-shaped roof behind. We think that Deane based his design on a drawing by Batty Langley for a book published in 1741.



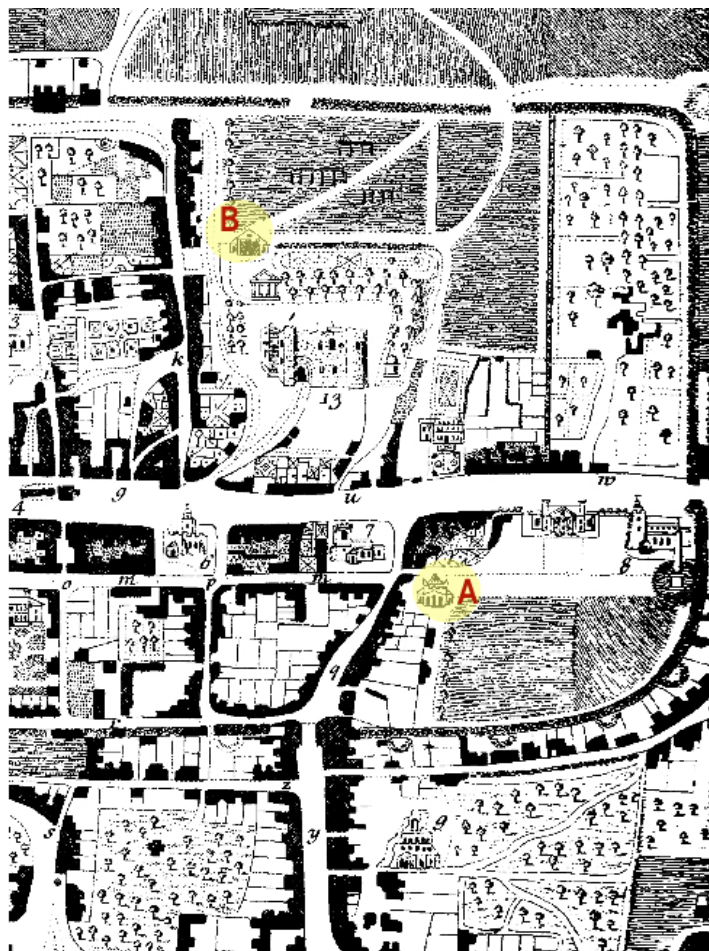
This illustration of an Umbrello (or Summerhouse) is by Batty Langley from a 1741 book called **Ancient Architecture Restored and Improved** and is thought to be the inspiration for James Deane's Summerhouse.

The rear view of the Summerhouse seen from Firstsite. The use of re-cycled stone and tiles from the town's Roman walls as well as building material from ruined Roman buildings hides its role as the semi-circular area within the Summerhouse. The construction originally formed the end wall of the garden belonging to East Hill House.



The rear of the building must have been influenced by the Roman town walls which abutted the land near the house. The Summerhouse was included in Morant's map of Colchester published in 1748.

Today you can see the Summerhouse inside the garden of the Minories because some of the land belonging to East Hill House was bought in 1923 by Geoffrey Bensusan-Butt – land which included the Summerhouse.



Part of one of Philip Morant's maps in his *The History and Antiquities of Colchester*, published in 1748 showing the Summerhouse in the grounds of East Hill House (A) and above, the 1731 Summerhouse in Castle Park (B).

Where can I find out more?

Official listing information from Historic England at <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/photos/item/IOE01/12934/04>.

General information about 18th century gardens and buildings in *The English Rococo Garden* by Michael Symes, Shire, 1991 and by the same author & publisher *A Glossary of Garden History*, 2000.

Specific information about the Minories and its Summerhouse and East Hill House is in *The Buildings of England: Essex* by James Bettley and Nikolaus Pevsner, Yale University Press for The Buildings Research Trust, 2007.

Patrick Denney's *Buildings of Colchester Through Time* (Amberley Publishing, 2012) is highly recommended - see p 16 for East Hill House and pp 22-23 for The Minories and its Summerhouse; p 91 for the Summerhouse in Castle Park built in the style of an ancient Greek temple in 1791; p20 for No. 85 High Street (Winsley's House) which was bought by James Deane around 1705.

The Colchester Roman Society

In 1987 a small group of local enthusiasts got together to form what is now known as The Colchester Roman Society. Embracing all aspects of Roman life, the group takes part in events and shows all over the UK and in Europe. The Society is affiliated with the *Legio Secunda Augusta*, a living history group based in Portsmouth.

Having enthusiastically supported Roman-themed events at the Roman Circus Visitor Centre over the last couple of years, the Society was invited (and they agreed!) to make the Roman Circus their HQ for meeting and training. Unfortunately, this coincided with 2020 the coronavirus *annus horribilis*, but we will see more Society activities on site as the pandemic subsides.