The Visitor Centre has a new acquisition which will be revealed at the Christmas Buffet - see below. Those who attended the Friends Afternoon Tea in August found out about the exciting Roman Garden project. If you didn't attend please pop in to the Visitor Centre to see the plans.

Many congratulations to Samantha on adding to her qualifications with an Open University degree in Classical Studies and her appointment to a permanent post with the Trust.

Friends Christmas Buffet

... and 'Secret Unveiling'

We are delighted to invite you to a **Christmas Buffet** at Roman Circus House

Monday 13th December at 2.30pm

Tickets £10 per head

To reserve a place please email Howard Brooks at **hb@catuk.org**. Or, if you don't have email, call or text Howard on **07415 952 891.** The cost is £10 per head - please pay by cash on the day.

The numbers attending will be strictly limited to **40 people** and **Friends will need to reserve a place**. (If you book a place and subsequently find that you cannot attend please let us know, so that we can offer the place to someone else.)

The Centre is closed to the public on Mondays so we will have it all to ourselves.

If you haven't reserved a place please do not attend.

Please arrive in time to eat at 2.30pm and bring your face mask if you feel more comfortable doing so. Following the food, Samantha has arranged a special event, details of which we're not going to tell you…. just yet !

The Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust

News November 2021



Mersea Barrow - a postcard view showing the entrance passage - see P4

Roman Circus Centre
Winter opening hours



From October to Easter the Centre will open

Tuesday to Friday, 11am - 3pm

There are tours at 12 noon & 2pm

The Centre will be closed on 24th December for the Christmas and New Year holidays
re-opening on Tuesday 4th January 2022

Charges: £3 entrance - or £6 to include 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.

For more information see the Roman Circus Visitor Centre website:

www.romancircus.co.uk

The Centre Café Winter opening hours

From October to Easter the café will open
for the same times as the Visitor Centre

Tuesday to Friday 11am - 3pm

Can you help?

The Roman Circus Cafe is in need of volunteers.
If you feel this is something that might be of interest to you, please contact Sue for an informal chat on 07935604640

Friends trip to Brooklands Museum

Before we were rudely interrupted by the pandemic we were planning our first trip for 2020 which was to be a visit to Brooklands Museum that May. We are now negotiating a new date (around May 2022) for the trip to take place at last. We will let you know as soon as we have that date.

some of them were the burial places of the cremated remains of children. Also a cluster of inhumations from an exceptionally distinctive site revealed big graves with mini-pots and traces of tiny coffins suggestive of a separate cemetery for young children and babies.

Moreover, the excavations promise to throw some light on the genetic profile of the population of the first city of Roman Britain by identifying individuals who could have been immigrants of African or Germanic origin. We have great hopes that the Trust will get more precise data on this subject as a result of an exciting DNA research project which is to be conducted by Pontus Skoglund Laboratory of the Francis Crick Institute and due to start very soon.

But the investigation was not limited to burials and the circus. There was much more besides including:

a) fields, droveways and field ditches which together formed part of the Late Iron Age and Roman rural landscape,
b) part of the earthwork defences of Camulodunum where a large hoard of coins had been buried for safekeeping,
c) investigations inside St John's Abbey which revealed lime kilns and some monastic buildings,
d) part of the ring of ditches and forts which had been constructed around the town during the siege of 1648,
e) World War I practice trenches where soldiers were trained and prepared for trench warfare,
f) Seven buildings of the Victorian garrison were recorded for posterity or prior to their conversion into housing.

The Garrison project is full of inspiring discoveries which will be described in the final publication.

From the Centre Manager

Samantha Rowley, the Education & Outreach Manager at the Centre, reports that despite the limitations it had been a good Summer Season. There were three Roman Days during July all visited by the Caspian Horses and all well attended by the public. School groups have returned and more school and group bookings are coming in.

More from the Garrison by Yulia Shevlyakova
Post-excavation Assistant to Philip Crummy

We are currently working on an overview and synthesis of all the archaeological work which was carried out on the site of the Victorian and later army garrison in Colchester. Long hours were spent in the field working on twenty-two separate sites each followed by a detailed account published online of the findings (cat.essex.ac.uk). Thanks to the hard work of the Trust's team, a new chapter of Colchester's Roman past finally revealed itself.

The fieldwork started in 2000 and continued intermittently over a period of 17 years, the last site report being published in 2019. The aim was to investigate and record the archaeological remains over the whole of the Garrison redevelopment area. By the time the excavations were finished, a Roman circus and more than 1,100 Roman burials had been discovered and carefully excavated, all providing a great addition to the important study of the Roman cemeteries of Colchester undertaken many years ago by M R Hull. There were urned and unurned cremations, high status *busta* (where the body was cremated on its place of interment), amphora burials, cists, east-west Christian inhumations and evidence suggesting family plots. The Trust identified a large number of small pits filled with 'pyre debris'. These are found quite frequently on cemetery sites elsewhere in the country although, here at least, there is a strong possibility that



An Anglo-Saxon burial of a probable immigrant lady of an African origin with remains of a 2nd skull (child) behind thighs.

From Adam Wightman, Trust Fieldwork Manager

Well, well, well, what do we have here then?

The WELL-preserved remains of a Roman timber-lined well were uncovered during a recent excavation on the Tendring Peninsula.



Trust archaeologists Alec and Harvey cleaned, recorded and sampled the timber structure that supported the sides of the well before working with the developer to ensure that it is safely preserved beneath the new development.

Three go to an Essex island!



All of the Trust's excavation work is undertaken on dry land, so it was quite an adventure for our team when they had to wait on the beach for a water-taxi to return them to the mainland after a hard day's work! Sadly nothing was found during the trial-trenching evaluation, so there is no need for the Trust to invest in a company boat any time soon.

Special passage in the afterlife?

Recent excavations on a site in Colchester's western Roman cemetery uncovered a series of well-preserved skeletons, one of which had a coin placed in or on their mouth. The

purpose of this coin in Roman custom was to pay the ferryman who's job it was to convey the souls of the newly-dead across the water that separated the world of the living from the underworld.



Hidden Archaeology

by Mike Corbishley

Mersea Mount, a Roman Barrow

Where is it? Follow the Mersea Road south from Colchester past Abberton on the B1025 and cross the Strood to Mersea Island. Once over the causeway follow the road on the left to East Mersea and in 1km you will see the barrow on your left.



The barrow seen from East Mersea Road

What is it? A barrow is a burial mound. This one is conical in shape 33.9 metres (111 ft) wide and 6.9 metres (22.5 ft) high.

When was it constructed? We know the barrow is Roman. It was excavated in 1912 by Samuel Hazzledine Warren a geologist and prehistorian for the Morant Club which was formed in Colchester in 1909 to investigate local archaeology. New archaeological work has established that it was constructed in the mid-2nd Century AD.

What was inside the barrow?
The excavations revealed a small burial chamber, constructed mostly of Roman tiles and inside was a lead casket which contained a glass urn. Inside the urn were the cremated remains of a man aged between 35 and 45 who had suffered from a disease of the joints (Diffuse Idiopathic Skeletal Hyperostosis - one to look up!) The forensic investigation of the bones also showed that they had been coated with frankincense from East Africa.



Where can I see more about the barrow? The Mersea Museum, founded in 1976, is at 12 High Street in West Mersea. Follow the main road through the village to the High Street and down as far as the parish church. Turn left in front of the church for the entrance gates of the museum. The museum has more information about the barrow and you can see the flask and remains of the burial there. After the excavations of 1912 an entrance chamber was constructed which is sometimes open, for example on Heritage Open Days.

Where can I find out more?
Unfortunately Mersea Museum is only open between May and September but a Friends visit to the Barrow and Museum is being planned for the spring. The barrow is also sometimes opened for special events. Visit the Museum website www.merseamuseum.org.uk and follow links to Barrow, Roman tombs and Publications. Also see an article in the East Anglian Daily Times 28 June 2013 https://www.eadt.co.uk/news/mersea-mystery-of-the-island-bones-is-finally-solved-2087964

Photographs courtesy of Mersea Museum.