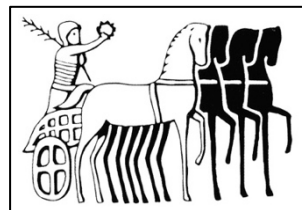


# The Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust

News

March 2019



## The case of the re-appearing Roman houses

In 1906, Colchester's museum curator Arthur Wright nipped out into the Castle Park to eat his lunch. This was not surprising since that summer was truly a scorcher. In fact September of that year saw temperatures in the UK reach a blistering 36°, which for that month is still the highest ever recorded in the country.

We've no idea what he had for lunch but we do know he spotted something that got him very excited - rows of cracks and strange lines of parched grass. Did he remember to finish his lunch? We'll never know but a little investigation on his part quickly revealed the tops of some mysterious foundations just under the surface. The penny dropped - he had just stumbled on the remains of a Roman house right under his ham sandwich!

Local artist Major Bale was called in to make a measured plan of the marks before the rains came and made them disappear. The fruits of his labours were then stored safe and sound in the bowels of Colchester Museum (fortunately the world's largest Norman castle). Fourteen years later archaeologist Mortimer Wheeler, later of *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral?* fame, got the plan out and did some serious digging. And the result? Part of not just one Roman house but a row of three alongside a well-preserved Roman street.

As we all know, 2018 was another scorcher. The prolonged heat and the absence of rainwater caused strange patterns to emerge in fields and even parks all over the country mirroring remains of the past normally hidden below.

For more on this story and others visit the Colchester Archaeological Trust website at [www.thecolchesterarchaeologist.co.uk](http://www.thecolchesterarchaeologist.co.uk).

## Special event for Friends

Friends are invited to inspect the many interesting finds from the Mercury Theatre excavation at Roman Circus House on **Friday 22nd March** between **10:30am** and **12**. Philip Crummy will be on hand to explain and interpret the finds which are currently being processed. Refreshments will be available from **10am**.

## Roman Circus Centre

Although the Roman Circus Centre is currently closed for the Winter it will be opening again on Tuesday **9<sup>th</sup> April 2019**.

The centre will be open from Tuesdays to Saturdays, 11.00am to 4.00pm plus Bank Holiday Mondays, until Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> September 2019.

Bookings for school visits and other group tours are welcome including during closed season and the Centre is available for hire by corporate organisations and societies. Call 01206 501785 for details.

The Roman Circus Centre tearoom will also open on 9th April serving teas, Italian coffees, hot chocolates along with sandwiches and cakes. Eat in or take out into the sunlit garden next to the circus remains. A small gift shop will be opening too!

## Forthcoming trip

Our next trip will be to **Prittlewell Priory** and **Southend Museum** on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> June.

The Museum has a special exhibition this summer of the Prittlewell Prince excavation, one of the most important Anglo Saxon burial sites since Sutton Hoo. There will be significant finds on display from this royal burial.

There will also be artefacts recovered from HMS London, the 17<sup>th</sup> century warship which was accidentally blown up in the Thames on its maiden voyage. Our coach will leave from outside the Greyfriars Hotel at 8:30am and arrive back at around 6pm. **To book** please use the booking form on the back page.



Photo: Marc Pether-Longman

**Did you know?** ... that you can read all copies of the *Colchester Archaeologist* magazine from 1986 to 2007 and copies of the Trust's newsletter *Catalogue* from 1977 to 1987 at the Friends web page: <http://focat.org.uk/the-library>

Also available are the brilliant and comprehensive Colchester Archaeological Reports:

CAR 1: Aspects of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Colchester

CAR 2: The Roman small finds from excavations in Colchester 1971-9

CAR 3: Excavations at Lion Walk, Balcerne Lane, and Middleborough, Colchester

CAR 4: The coins from excavations in Colchester 1971-9

CAR 5: The post-Roman small finds from excavations in Colchester 1971-85

CAR 7: Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85

CAR 8: Roman vessel glass from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85

CAR 9: Excavations of Roman and later cemeteries, churches and monastic sites in Colchester, 1971-85

CAR 10: Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester 1971-86

CAR 11: Camulodunum 2

CAR 12: Animal Bones from Excavations in Colchester, 1971-85

**And** ...that there are over 900 Colchester Archaeological Trust Reports available to view online at the Colchester Archaeological Trust Online Report Library which is a joint project between the Trust and the University of Essex. Just go to <http://cat.essex.ac.uk> where you can also see a scanned copy of Philip Morant's 1748 *History and Antiquities of the most ancient Town and Borough of Colchester*.

**Can you help?** The Friends are looking for someone with **web and social media skills** to look after our web pages and to create a new facebook page. If you think that you might be interested please email Mark Davies at [gmarkrdavies@btinternet.com](mailto:gmarkrdavies@btinternet.com)

We are also looking for one or two volunteers to help in **organising Friends coach trips**. This involves planning including a recce, booking coaches and making sure that we don't lose any members during the trip. If you think you might be able to help please call Brenda on 01206 - 825655 for a chat.

### **Aquila Sessions at Roman Circus Centre**

There will be six Aquila sessions at the Roman Circus Centre again this year. The game Aquila is an interpretation of a 2,000-year-old game board and pieces discovered in Stanway by the Trust in 1996. Alex Jones created this simple-to-learn and addictive strategy game based on a Roman board-game *Iudus Iatruncolorum*.

Aquila is a game for two players aged 10 years and over. Alex will bring the game-boards and teach visitors how to play. The sessions are free and open to all. They will be held between 11am and 1pm on the following Saturdays: 13th April, 11th May, 8th June, 13th July, 10th August and 14th September. *Children under 16 must be accompanied by an adult.*

## **Dates for your Diary**

On **Monday 29<sup>th</sup> April at 10:30 at Roman Circus House** Friends are invited to an illustrated talk given by John Mallinson on the Roman Villa currently being excavated at Fordham by the Colchester Archaeology Group. There is no need to book but there will be a £2 charge at the door.

**13<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> July** will see the Roman Circus Centre taking part in the **2019 Festival of Archaeology** which is also to be a celebration of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council for British Archaeology.

**Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> August Roman Circus Chariot Day** - The Trust is planning an exciting chariot event with Atkinson Action Horses which will take place on Abbey Fields.

**Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> September** As part of **Heritage Open Days** there will be a programme of activities at Roman Circus House - look out for details during the Summer. For the two Sundays of the Heritage fortnight (**15<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> Sept.**) the Café will also be open for visitors from 11am - 4pm.

**More help needed** The success of trust events relies on the help of our wonderful volunteers. If you can spare any time on these days please contact the Centre Manager Samantha on 01206 501785 Option 6, or email [sr@catuk.org](mailto:sr@catuk.org). We will especially need help with marshalling for the Chariot Day. **Thank you**

**Café volunteers needed** for the Summer season 9 April to 28 September. Could you help out for a few hours a week in the Roman Circus Centre Café? Full training will be given. A Food Hygiene Certificate will need to be gained. This basic online course can be done at home or at the Centre (with support if needed). If you would like to volunteer or have some questions, please contact Samantha on 01206 501785 Option 6, or email [sr@catuk.org](mailto:sr@catuk.org).

## What we did last year reported by Brenda May

At our February 2018 AGM the Annual Lectures were attended by 70 members. A presentation was made to Margaret Gooderham to thank her for the 35+ years that she has been helping processing finds, travelling in from her home in Suffolk on public transport in all weathers. Howard spoke about trial excavations to locate the Town Wall at Great Chesterford. Laura then talked about the evidence of charcoal burning taking place in the north of Colchester which was quite densely forested at one time and Steve showed slides about Neolithic pottery dating back to 3000BC which had been found at the Lufkins Farm site near Great Bentley. Finally Philip discussed his plans for the Roman Circus site.

In **March** Patrick Denney the well known local historian gave a very entertaining illustrated talk on Edwardian Colchester to over 60 members.

Also in **March** members were invited to Roman Circus House to meet Peter Froste for the preview of his exhibition of archaeological paintings of the early history of Colchester. Many thanks to the volunteers who gave up their time to act as guides.

On **31<sup>st</sup> March** members attended the official opening of the Roman Circus Mosaic which is now displayed on a wall at Roman Circus House. The mosaic was designed by Peter Froste and originally completed by children at Philip Morant School. Unfortunately it had been damaged by weather and had to be refurbished by volunteers under the direction of Peter Herring who gave up an enormous amount of his time to see the project through.

In **May**, 42 members of the Friends led by Mike Corbishley travelled to Burgh Castle, one of the best preserved of the Roman Saxon Shore Forts, which were built in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century to protect the coast from Saxon invaders. Mike led the group around the site then on to the round tower Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, parts of which are over 1000 years old. The church is noted for a 14<sup>th</sup> century East Anglian Lion Font and a small stained glass lancet window dedicated to St. Fursey, an Irish saint said to have established a monastery in the ruins of the Roman fort in 633 AD. The group then visited the excellent Time & Tide museum in Great Yarmouth and the church of St Helen at Ranworth, known as the 'cathedral of the Broads'. Some of us ventured up the Tower - 89 steps, no handrail, 2 ladders and a trapdoor. Apparently the view from the top is well worth it!

In **September** we visited West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village on a beautiful warm and sunny day. We were met by a very knowledgeable guide who took us on a tour of the site which contains several reconstructed wooden buildings. The site is now a country Park and has a decent café, an outdoor classroom for school parties and best of all a really excellent museum. After lunch we went on to visit the 14<sup>th</sup> century St Ethelbert's Church at Hesselsett which is most famous for its wall paintings, 15<sup>th</sup> century font, painted rood screen and mediaeval stained glass.



### Visit to Prittlewell Priory and Southend Museum - Saturday 22nd June 2019

Please reserve .... place(s) @ £29.50 each for the visit to Prittlewell Priory

Name(s) .....

Address .....

Tel ..... Email .....

Please make cheques payable to **Friends of the Colchester Archaeological Trust** and send to Brenda May 13, Field Way, Wivenhoe, COLCHESTER, CO7 9HG