

UPPER CASTLE PARK, COLCHESTER

Sensory garden

Archaeological assessment

The Sensory Garden in Castle Park forms part of the garden on the north side of Hollytrees House Museum, a Grade I listed building dating to 1718. The Sensory Garden was originally laid out in 1953 as part of Colchester's Coronation celebrations. A further major refurbishment was carried out in 1992 involving local artists. Colchester Borough Council proposes to refurbish the existing garden and incorporate new seating, pergolas and a water feature.

Hollytrees' garden originally sloped gradually to the north, becoming a meadow running down to the town wall. By 1768 a map drawn by local architect James Deane for Rev. Philip Morant's "The History and Antiquities of Colchester" showed that formal gardens had been laid out. Landscaping was undertaken to achieve this, making the ground level and creating a shallow terrace with a low brick retaining wall at the north end.

Colchester Castle Park is a site of great archaeological importance and is a Scheduled Monument (Essex No.1). In the Roman period, the area of the sensory garden lay in insula 23 of the Roman town. Immediately to the west is insula 22, the largest and most important insula in the town, which was dominated by the Temple of Claudius, the earliest stone and mortar building in Britain (Drury 1984). To the north, in insula 15, recorded Roman remains include town houses which were excavated by Mortimer Wheeler, and a building once identified as a mithraeum but which is now thought to have been a waterworks. The principal published source for these discoveries is Roman Colchester (Hull 1958). In the medieval period, the remains of the Roman temple were used as a foundation for the Norman castle, and much of what is now the park came within the ramparts defining the castle bailey (Drury 1982).

In August 2014, in advance of the proposed works, two test pits (each 1m square) were excavated by Colchester Archaeological Trust (report forthcoming). Test pit 1 was excavated immediately to the north of the retaining wall, approximately 1m below modern ground level within the sensory garden. A Roman demolition layer was encountered 0.65m below ground level. Test pit 2 was excavated through a path within the sensory garden to a depth of 1m below modern ground level. Post-Roman dark earth was encountered down to the limit of the excavation and no archaeologically significant horizon was observed.

Based upon the findings from these test pits, the depths of the foundations for the proposed pergolas and water feature should not impact upon any archaeological deposits.

References.

- | | | |
|------------|------|--|
| Drury, P J | 1982 | Aspects of the origins and development of Colchester Castle', <i>Archaeological Journal</i> , 139 , 302-419 |
| Drury, P J | 1984 | The temple of Claudius at Colchester reconsidered', <i>Britannia</i> , 15 , 7-50 |
| Hull M.R. | 1958 | <i>Roman Colchester</i> . Society of Antiquaries Research Committee Report, XX . |

Chris Lister
Archaeological Officer
Colchester Borough Council.

04/12/2014.