

Colchester

Town Centre Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Study Area 3:

**Culver Street, Trinity Street,
Scheregate and St John's Green**



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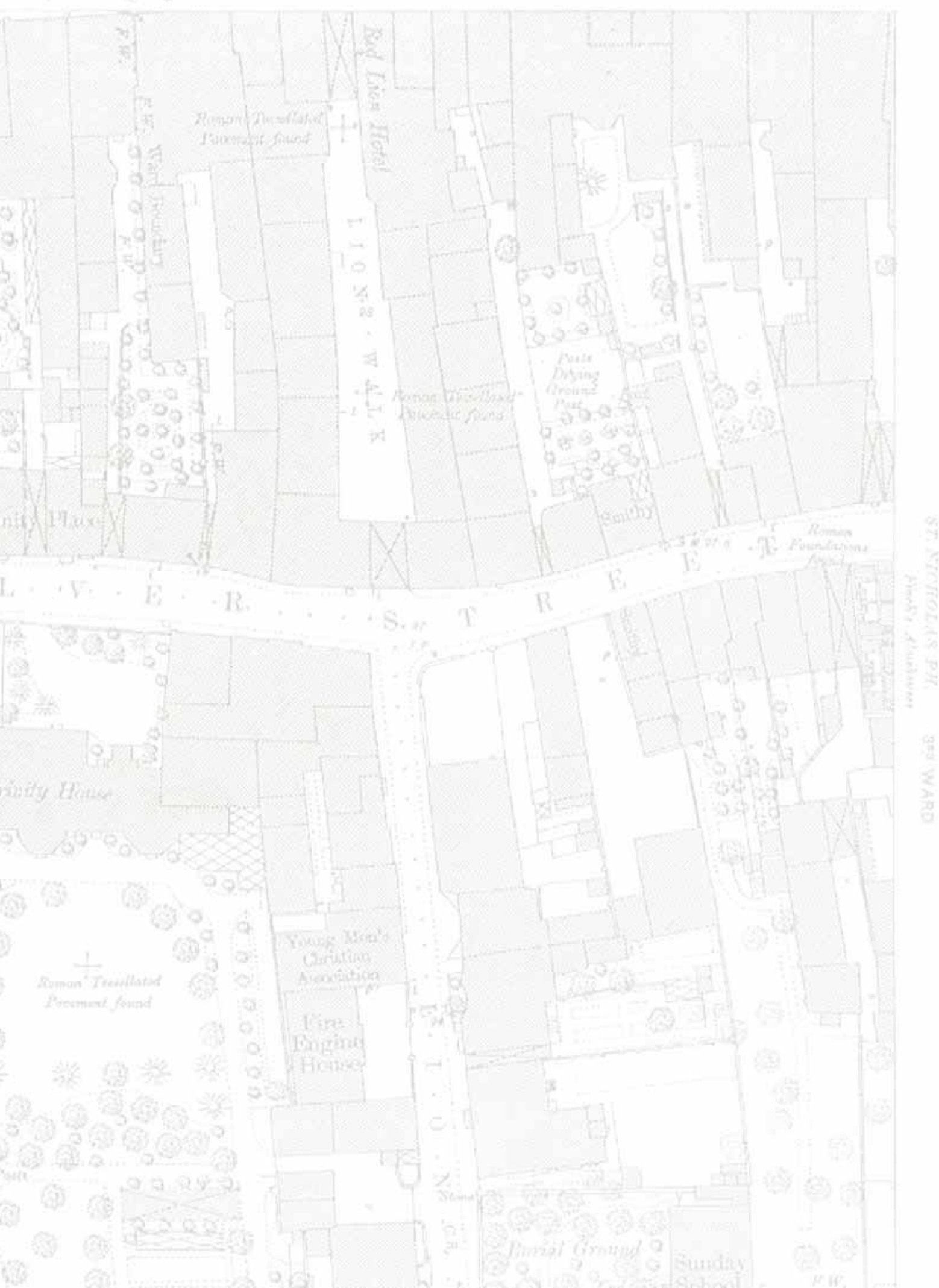
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Colchester Town Centre Conservation Area

1.0 Introduction

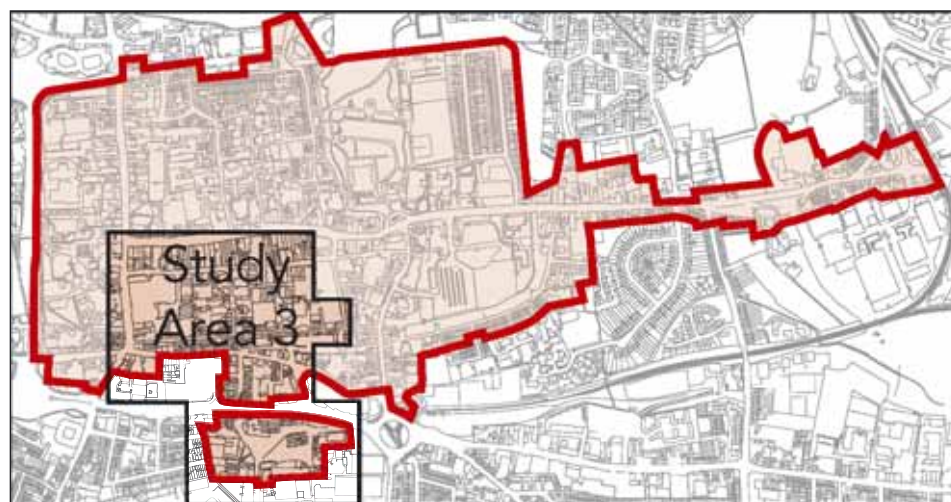


Figure 1: Colchester Town Centre Conservation Area

- 1.1 The Colchester Conservation Area No.1 was first designated in 1968, with amendments in 1978 and 1980. It covers the whole of the ancient walled town and includes parts the historic extra-mural settlements immediately outside the walls, including East Hill, Abbey Gate, St John's Green and St Botolph's.
- 1.2 *'Colchester, though not the county town, is without doubt the foremost town of Essex, and it is, what is more, a town richer than most in the country in traditions and survivals of a distant past.'* (Pevsner)
- 1.3 The Conservation Area includes the whole of the Roman town. Substantial lengths of the 1st century town walls survive, including the very impressive remains of the great west gate, known as the Balcerne Gate. The early date of these walls makes them unique in Roman Britain. However, apart from the town walls, the Roman remains are almost wholly below ground level and the character of the historic town now largely derives from the substantial number of surviving buildings of mediaeval, post-mediaeval, Georgian and Victorian date.
- 1.4 A distinctive feature of Colchester, particularly evident from the north, is its hilltop setting and close relationship with the valley of the River Colne. The High Street runs east west along the spine, with a grid of streets sloping down the hill to north and south. The Conservation Area is bounded on the south and west sides by modern dual carriageway roads, which separate St John's Green from the rest of the Area. St Peter's Street, flanked by modern development, runs along the northwest side, but on the northeast the Lower Park extends the open spaces of Castle Park well beyond the town walls. On the east side, the Conservation Area extends down East Hill and over the River Colne to East Street.
- 1.5 The social and economic development of the town centre can be readily traced through its historic buildings and structures. Roman town walls, Norman Castle, mediaeval churches, abbey and priory, mediaeval inns, the 'Dutch Quarter', Georgian town houses, and Victorian and Edwardian commercial and civic buildings, reflect the main periods of Colchester's prosperity over nearly two millennia from its first establishment as a Roman *colonia*. The Royal Commission lists 264 houses as wholly or partly built before 1714. There are a large number of good quality Georgian houses and a variety of Victorian buildings ranging from artisan terrace houses to the flamboyant Town Hall and massive 'Jumbo' water tower.

- 1.6 Like many towns, Colchester suffered from poor quality town centre redevelopment in the post-war years, but in recent times the town has demonstrated its ability both to protect its heritage and retain its vitality and significance as a retail centre, by the restoration of historic buildings and the sympathetic incorporation of a number of major developments in the historic core.

The Conservation Area Appraisal

- 1.7 There are continuing pressures for change and development, which will need to be addressed. Colchester is a town of national significance and it is vital to ensure that its character and appearance are protected and that any new development accords with the principles of preservation and enhancement inherent in its designation as a Conservation Area.
- 1.8 Following guidance in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG15 1994), the Borough Council has decided to prepare a Conservation Area Appraisal. The purpose of the Appraisal is to describe the historical development and townscape of the area and to assess its special character and significance. It should also draw out any issues that might affect the protection and conservation of the Area.
- 1.9 The Conservation Area covers a large area of diverse character. In order to assess its character and significance in greater detail, the Area is divided into six study areas based on the historic quarters and thoroughfares of the town. The study areas are covered in five separate volumes:
- Vol.1** High Street (West) and The Dutch Quarter
 - Vol.2** North Hill, Head Street and Balcerne Gardens
 - Vol.3** Culver Street, Trinity Street, Scheregate and St John's Green
 - Vol.4** High Street (East) and The Castle. East Hill and East Street.
 - Vol.5** Queen Street, St Botolph's and Vineyard Street Area.
- 1.10 Each volume contains a brief history of the town followed by a more detailed description of the historical development of the study area. This is followed by a street-by-street analysis of the townscape character of the area. A key part of the Appraisal is the statement of significance of the area and its surviving features, above and below ground. Buildings and spaces are classified according to their contribution to the character of the area and the Appraisal concludes with a statement of issues and recommendations for the future of the area.
- 1.11 An appendix sets out the current statutory protection and planning policy for the Conservation Area and includes select references.
- 1.12 Maps are included showing those buildings and spaces that make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and those that detract from the area. Additionally, maps are included showing the area as it was in the 1870s at the time of the first large-scale edition of the Ordnance Survey.

2.0 Colchester: Historical Development

- 2.1 The origins of the town of Colchester lie in the establishment of a legionary fortress by Claudius after his successful invasion of Britain in AD 42. The site occupied a good defensible position on a spur of land with an east-west ridge, sloping steeply to the River Colne on the north with more gentle slopes to the south and east. On the east side was a large annexe, about a third of the size of the fort, though its purpose is not clear. The fortress and annexe were of identical construction with earthen ramparts and a V-shaped ditch.
- 2.2 Late in the fifth decade the legion was moved to the west of Britain and a *colonia* or chartered town was established in the now redundant fortress. Some of the military buildings were reused, but the legionary defences were filled in and a new street grid laid out, dividing the town into rectangular blocks of property or *insulae*. The annexe was given over to public buildings, including the temple of Claudius and probably a theatre.
- 2.3 The town was almost completely destroyed in the Boudiccan Revolt but rebuilt soon afterwards. Between about AD 65-80, a freestanding masonry wall, the first of its kind in Britain, replaced the earthen ramparts. The new walls and ditch enclosed the site of the fortress and annexe in a great rectangle and had six gates and between twelve and twenty-four towers. The street plan remained much the same as before, but at least one new street was constructed, a north-south street east of the temple, leading to a new south gate. The town appears to have had a piped water supply from an early date.
- 2.4 In the 2nd century the growing prosperity of the town was marked by the construction of several large, well-appointed town houses and there was a remodelling on a grand scale of the southern side of the precinct of the Temple of Claudius. In the second half of the century the town defences were strengthened by the construction of an earth bank inside the masonry wall.




Figure 2: Roman Colchester in about AD 250

- 2.5 Towards the end of the 3rd century, the town, like others in Roman Britain, appears to have entered a period of gradual decline, which was never really to be reversed. In increasingly troubled times, the defences were again improved and the town ditch widened. Many houses were demolished without replacement and the size of the cultivated areas within the walls appears to have significantly increased. The suburbs suffered dramatic decline, partly perhaps through clearance of buildings to improve the town's ability to withstand a siege. Burials now took place much closer to the walls.
- 2.6 In the 4th century there was a concentration of occupation along the main street (High Street), with small houses on either side of the street, a pattern that anticipated the later post-Roman town.

- 2.7 The Roman way of life may have continued for some time after the break with the Roman Empire, but the evidence for the first Anglo-Saxon occupation in the mid 5th century, for example 'sunken-featured buildings', suggests that settlement was not concentrated in any one area but scattered amongst the ruins of the former town. It is possible that, by the 8th and 9th centuries, occupation was centred on St Runwald's Church and the lord's hall, close to the centre of today's High Street. The principal Roman streets, such as High Street, North Hill and Head Street, which connected the main gates (East Gate, North Gate and Head Gate), survive to this day. Queen Street connected the High Street with South Gate and to an extent seems to have followed the route of its Roman predecessor.
- 2.8 In 917 Edward the Elder drove out the Danish army that had occupied the town, though there is no trace in the archaeological record of the Danish presence. Edward, like his father Alfred, adopted a policy of creating fortified *burghs* as a way of consolidating his gains and allowing the local people to resist Danish reconquest. The Roman town defences were repaired, new streets laid out and new properties created.
- 2.9 The town continued to develop its commercial role and, sometime in the 10th century, High Street was widened to create a market place. This would have involved the realignment of the street and the demolition of frontage properties. Culver Street was laid out as a back street serving the new building plots on the south side. Other separate developments included the creation of Trinity Street, Lion Walk and Long Wyre Street on the south side of the town and East and West Stockwell Streets and the southern end of Maidenburgh Street on the north side.
- 2.10 By the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, Colchester had the status of a borough and was an important administrative and commercial centre. Besides St Runwald's, several other churches had been founded including Holy Trinity, St Peter's, St Nicholas', All Saints' and possibly St James'.
- 2.11 Following the Conquest, the town saw numerous changes under the lordship of the Norman Eudo Dapifer. He used the great podium of the Roman Temple of Claudius as a base for his new Castle and the High Street was diverted southwards to make room for the construction of the bailey bank and ditch, the diversion clearly visible today. He founded St John's Abbey (1095) and the leper hospital at St Mary Magdalen, and restored St Helen's Chapel, which may have stood on the site of a Roman chapel. The parish church of St Giles was founded in the cemetery of the abbey some time in 1171.
- 2.12 St Botolph's Priory was founded between 1100 and 1104 and has the distinction of being the first Augustinian foundation in England. It was formed by a small group of priests who were probably serving an existing minster with its origins in pre-Conquest times. It may even be on the site of a Roman church or *martyrium*. At the Dissolution, the nave of the priory church was preserved and used for parish and civic services for another hundred years.



Figure 3: Colchester in the 17th Century

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- 2.13 The overall pattern of streets and building plots established during the late Anglo-Saxon and early mediaeval periods lasted pretty well intact until after the Second World War. However, although the frontages of the principal streets were built up, a considerable amount of land inside the walls was taken up with gardens and other cultivated areas. One substantial area, now the Bus Station and gardens of East Hill House (formerly known as the 'Berry Field'), seems to have remained open since Roman times and was for many centuries the site of St Denis' Fair. The town walls were repaired and strengthened in the 1380s at the time of the Peasants' Revolt.
- 2.14 The surviving, ruined Roman buildings provided a ready-made source of stone and tile for the construction of the principal buildings such as the churches and castle.
- 2.15 In the Middle Ages the prosperity of the town was based on the cloth trade, its markets and the presence of the religious institutions. However, in the 14th and 15th centuries the Black Death dramatically reduced the population of the town and the economy must also have been severely affected by the closure of the Abbey and Priory at the Dissolution in the 1530s. However, the town received a boost with a reinvigorated cloth trade, particularly in the late 16th century with the arrival of refugees from the Low Countries fleeing religious persecution. Many of them settled in the area north of the High Street, still known as the 'Dutch Quarter'. They introduced the 'bays and says' for which the town became famous and which were the mainstay of the economy throughout the 17th century.
- 2.16 A substantial number of houses dating from the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries survive in the main streets, particularly in North Hill, Trinity Street, Scheregate, the east end of High Street and East and West Stockwell Streets. A number of suburbs had grown up outside the town walls, for example East Hill which also retains a number of mediaeval and post-mediaeval buildings.
- 2.17 The characteristic buildings of the 15th to 17th centuries are timber-framed, often jettied, with steep-pitched tiled roofs and plastered, gabled fronts. The mediaeval pattern of narrow-fronted 'burgage' plots at right angles to the street can still clearly be seen in several of the main streets including High Street and Long Wyre Street. Many of the mediaeval High Street properties would have had shop with chambers over on the street frontage, with an open hall behind, and further buildings at the rear. Away from the High Street where the pressure on land was less intense, many of the superior houses had halls built parallel to the street with cross wings at one or both ends, sometimes often with projecting (jettied) first floors.
- 2.18 Later, with the introduction of chimneys, open halls were floored in and new houses built with two full storeys, sometimes with continuous jetties. The fashion for jetties continued into the late 17th century.
- 2.19 The Siege of Colchester in the English Civil War resulted in the destruction and damage of many key buildings, including St Botolph's Priory, where the former priory church was almost destroyed. The mediaeval East Gate was damaged in the Siege and cleared away in 1674. In 1722 Daniel Defoe reported that the town 'still mourns in the ruins of a civil war' and referred to its 'battered walls, breaches in the turrets and ruined churches'.
- 2.20 The local tradition of building timber-framed houses, plastered on the outside, continued into the 18th century. The recovery of the economy in the 18th century is demonstrated by the number of good quality Georgian houses erected in the principal streets and also in the fashionable 'modernising' of older properties. Red brick was the predominant building material, with plain clay tiles for the roofs, but stucco also became fashionable, particular towards the end of the period. There are good groups of Georgian buildings in East Hill, North Hill, the east end of High Street, Queen Street, East and West Stockwell Streets and Abbey Gate Street.

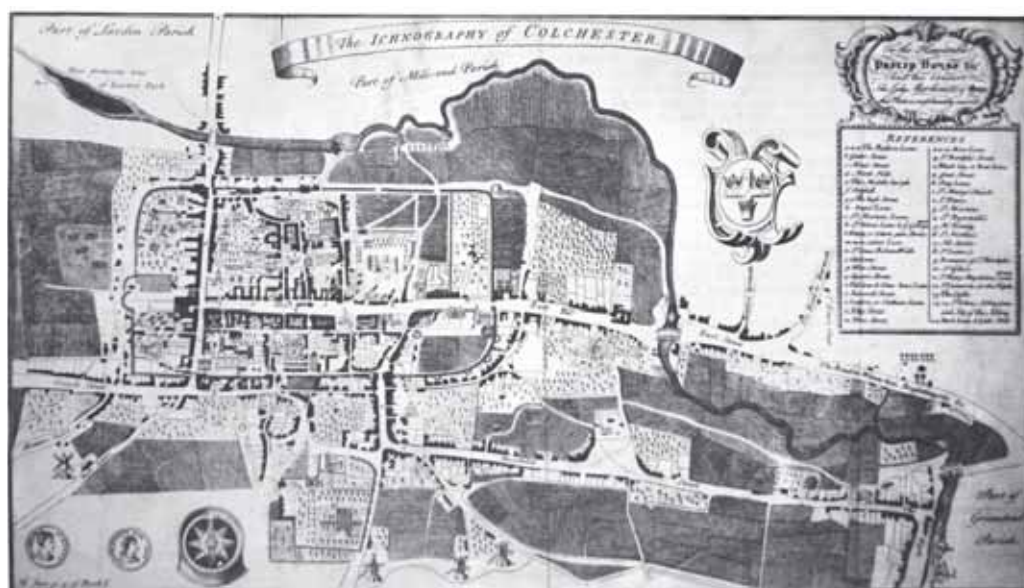





Figure 4: Colchester in the 18th Century

- 2.21 In the early 19th century, a grand new Corn Exchange was built at the North Hill end of the High Street (later the Essex and Suffolk Fire Office). The Theatre Royal was established in Queen Street in 1812.
- 2.22 Under the Improvement Commissioners, established in 1811, the main streets were paved, obstructions removed and street lighting introduced. The town walls, no longer needed for defence, were neglected, built over, or robbed for stone. With the growing demands of traffic in and out of the town, all the remaining gates, except Scheregate, were demolished.
- 2.23 Deane's plan of 1748 (*figure 4*) shows the frontages of the principal streets largely built up. But it also shows just how much of the town was still undeveloped and given over to gardens. A large part of the garden of East Hill House, built in the early 18th century, survives to this day.
- 2.24 The 19th century was a period of significant expansion. Colchester became a garrison town during the Napoleonic Wars, with the first barracks to be erected since the Roman occupation. The military presence was expanded during the Crimean Wars and later in the century, and to this day Colchester remains an important garrison town.
- 2.25 The century saw a boom in retail trade and commerce and the coming of the railways and the development of The Hythe provided the essential transport for the developing industries, such as flourmills, breweries, foundries and engineering works.
- 2.26 In the High Street many older buildings were demolished and replaced with new shops and banks in the confident styles that characterise Victorian and Edwardian architecture. The Corn Exchange moved to new premises in the High Street in 1844 and the local Cooperative Society opened its first shop in 1861. Queen Street, Long Wyre Street and St Botolph's Street also have good groups of substantial shop buildings in a variety of styles and materials.
- 2.27 A number of churches and chapels were built, reflecting the religious revivals throughout the century, including St Botolph's Church, the Baptist Church in Eld Lane, the Roman Catholic Church in Priory Street and a new Congregational Church to replace the old Meeting House in Lion Walk.

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- 2.28 The density of building increased as the back yards and gardens were developed as tenements of cheap housing, for example Smith's Yard and Albion Court off Long Wyre Street and All Saints' Court off Culver Street. By the 1870s the area around Vineyard Street and Osborne Street had become densely built up with houses and cottages backing onto the town walls and packed into courtyards. Later in the century, terraces of houses were built in Priory Street and Northgate Street. As might be expected there were numerous inns and drinking houses.
- 2.29 The predominant building material was still red brick but, with the ability to transport materials over greater distances, grey gault brick became increasingly popular in the first half of the century, together with slate for the roofs. In the second half of the century, stone became fashionable as a decorative material.
- 2.30 By the turn of the century Colchester had acquired two of its best-known landmarks, the 'Jumbo' water tower and the Town Hall, and the main built-up parts of the town centre and inner suburbs had become quite densely developed. However, it is remarkable how much open space still remained, even in the middle of the town. In 1892 Castle Park was opened and augmented by the creation of the Lower Park in the following year.
- 2.31 A number of buildings on the north side of the High Street were demolished to make way for the impressive War Memorial designed by H C Fehr and unveiled in 1923. The Memorial also includes the Castle and Hollytrees, acquired for the town by Viscount Cowdray.
- 2.32 Colchester was subject to a number of bombing raids in the Second World War, with the area around St Botolph's Green, Magdalen Street and Mersea Road suffering particularly heavy damage. In common with many other historic towns, historic buildings that had not been damaged were still the subject of redevelopment schemes and the quality of much of the rebuilding in the 1950s and 1960s was poor. The loss of St Nicholas' Church, demolished in 1955 was perhaps the most dramatic single loss which the town suffered, but many more modest buildings of historic interest were lost, for example in Queen Street, where a Georgian terrace was pulled down to make way for flat roofed 'modern' shops, totally out of character with their surroundings.
- 2.33 In 1966 a new multi-storey car park was opened in Nunn's Road. New office blocks were constructed in St Peter's Street to provide municipal offices and the huge Telephone Exchange 'tower', which dominates views from the High Street, North Hill and the Dutch Quarter, was built despite local opposition. In common with other historic towns, the quality of many of the new buildings constructed in the 1950s and 60s was generally poor and paid little regard to the historic character of the town.
- 2.34 There was, however, one particular scheme of which Colchester can be proud. In the 1950s, the restoration of over forty of the old houses in the Dutch Quarter gained a Civic Trust Award and later, the Borough Council built several infill developments of flats and houses, constructed in vernacular style sympathetic to the character of the historic area.
- 2.35 A report of 1968, prepared by the County and Borough Councils, recognized that steps had to be taken to preserve Colchester's heritage and proposed that parts of the town centre should be designated as a Conservation Area. The report also contained proposals for the redevelopment of the Lion Walk, Culver Street, St Peter's Street, St John's and Vineyard Street areas and for the construction of an inner relief road with peripheral multi-storey car parks. The south and west sections of the Inner relief Road were completed by 1981, cutting through existing road patterns and neighbourhood areas and requiring extensive demolition of houses, shops, businesses and other properties, including a church, cinema and four public houses. Multi-storey car parks were built in Queen Street (closed 1992), St John's Street, Middleborough and Balkerne Hill.

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- 2.36 Between 1968 and 1980, total commercial floor space increased by 45% in the central area. The Lion Walk shopping precinct was opened in 1976 and non-food retail space increased by 35.6% in the same period.
- 2.37 By 1984 parts of the plan had been amended because of financial constraints and a recognition that large-scale comprehensive redevelopment was not the solution in a town with an intricate and small-scale mediaeval plan. The later developments of the Culver Street shopping precinct and St John's Walk have been more successfully integrated with the historic character of Colchester. Since 1980, the importance of conserving Colchester's heritage has been recognized by the designation of the whole of the walled town and the historic suburbs as a Conservation Area.

3.0 Character Appraisal: Culver Street, Trinity Street and Scheregate

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- 3.1 This section covers the area south of the High Street as far as the town wall, from Head Street in the west to Long Wyre Street in the east. Outside the wall, Abbey Gate Street and Stanwell Street are included in Section 4.0, which covers the area of St John's Green.
- 3.2 Lion Walk appears to mark the eastern boundary of the legionary fortress erected soon after the Claudian invasion. In digging out the site for the Culver Street shopping precinct in the 1980s, archaeologists revealed evidence of several streets and over twenty buildings, including the remains of a granary and six barrack blocks. The whole area lies within the later Roman town.
- 3.3 Trinity Street and Lion Walk may be on the line of Roman streets whilst Culver Street and Eld Lane were probably in existence by the 10th century. Also dating from pre-Conquest times is Holy Trinity Church. There were no gates in this section of the Roman town wall and the Scheregate was probably cut through the wall to provide a direct link between St John's Abbey and the town.
- 3.4 The street frontages were built up in mediaeval times, though, as in much of Colchester, the areas to the rear were largely open, with gardens and orchards, and remained largely so until the 19th century, when the pressures of population growth and the requirements of industry resulted in the development of much of the backland.
- 3.5 By the 1860s, Culver Street had Paxman & Davey's Standard Ironworks (later taken over by Mumford's), a large distillery and a timber yard. Even so, as the 1876 OS map shows, there remained one or two large houses with extensive gardens, for example Trinity House and The Limes (which still exists). The religious revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries brought with them a number of new non-conformist churches, including a Quaker Meeting House off Sir Isaac's Walk, the Baptist Church in Eld Lane (1834) and a new Congregational Church in Lion Walk (1863), which replaced an earlier meeting house.
- 3.6 The 1930s saw a number of changes, including the closing of Mumford's Ironworks and the construction of a new public library. In the 1940s Culver Street was widened at its junction with Head Street and further development took place at its west end when the Fleece Hotel was pulled down in 1970.
- 3.7 In the last forty years the area has changed almost beyond recognition, with the construction of, firstly, the Lion Walk shopping centre in the 1970s and then the Culver Street shopping development of the 1980s. However, sufficient remains in Trinity Street, Scheregate, Sir Isaac's Walk and Eld Lane to give a flavour of historic Colchester.

Culver Street

- 3.8 The old name of Back Lane was appropriate to what was until recently, a narrow rear service street behind the High Street frontages. In the 1970s the Lion Walk development effectively cut the street in two, resulting in the formation of Culver Street West and Culver Street East.



Culver Street West from Head Street

- 3.9 Almost all the new buildings on the south side of **Culver Street West** are part of the Culver Street shopping development, whilst the north side has a mix of new buildings and refurbished backs of High Street properties. None of the buildings is of any great interest, but the general scale of the buildings and the variety of frontages make an acceptable street scene, which is enhanced by the bustle of shoppers, particularly when the street market is in operation. Bank Passage and Pelham's Lane have been retained as pedestrian links with the High Street and several of the shops have front and rear entrances, which add to the 'permeability' for pedestrians. At the east end the street opens into Trinity Square where the churchyard and trees form an attractive green space.
- 3.10 **Lion Walk shopping precinct**, designed by Sir Frederick Gibberd, was opened in 1976. Pevsner says that the use of brick was 'a shrewd decision when the nation was railing against concrete jungles' and it is certainly lasting much better than some other developments of similar date in other towns. The development retains the old line of Lion Walk, linking through from the High Street via Red Lion Yard to Eld Lane on the south side.



Lion Walk

- 3.11 The scheme cleverly incorporates the very tall spire of the Congregational Church built in 1863 to the design of Frederick Barnes of Ipswich, which had been rebuilt after the earthquake of 1884 and which forms a landmark feature in Lion Walk. The remainder of the church was demolished and the new octagonal United Reformed Church has been designed to reflect the shape of the earlier meeting house on the site.
- 3.12 The decision to service the development underground from Vineyard Gate involved breaching the Roman town wall and excavating an area the size of two football pitches to a depth of 4 metres.
- 3.13 **Culver Street shopping precinct**, opened in 1987, covers almost the whole area between Culver Street and Sir Isaac's walk and between Head Street and the rear of Trinity Street. It followed a similar pattern to Lion Walk, though the architecture, which is less heavy, has been described as 'a bit like Legoland.' Like Lion Walk, it was designed as a pedestrian precinct, with servicing being carried out underground, accessed from St John's Street.



Culver Square



Former Library

- 3.14 **Shewell Walk** takes its name from an earlier street and connects Culver Street with Sir Isaac's Walk via **Culver Square**, which provides a lively hub in the middle of the development. One older building of some quality was retained in the new development. This is the former public library, designed by Marshall Sisson and opened in 1939.
- 3.15 The section of **Culver Street East** as far as Long Wyre Street is now little more than a service cul-de-sac. However, the Cooperative Society's stone-clad 1930s building (No.75), with its Art Deco touches, makes an attractive feature. Opposite, part of the former St Nicholas' churchyard has been retained as a small garden. (Culver Street East is covered in Volume 5.)

Trinity Street

- 3.16 Trinity Street is undoubtedly one of the most historic and attractive streets in Colchester and, at its junction with Sir Isaac's Walk, Eld Lane and Scheregate Steps, is one of the most picturesque. From the Scheregate, the grand tower of the Victorian Town Hall dominates views up the street.



Trinity Street looking north Holy Trinity Church

- 3.17 Holy Trinity Church (now a museum) and its surrounding churchyard occupy the top end of the street on the east side forming the centrepiece of the new Trinity Square. The church is particularly interesting for its fine Anglo-Saxon tower, built wholly of re-used Roman brick. The iron railings and churchyard trees make this a peaceful oasis in the centre of the town.
- 3.18 The west side of the street is almost wholly composed of listed buildings. Starting from the top, nos.2 and 3 are timber-framed and plastered and date from the 17th century but have 18th century fronts. An interesting feature is the wrought iron hanging sign of the three cups. Was this from the old Three Cups Hotel in High Street? No.4 is 18th century and also plastered. No.6, which is listed Grade II* has a fine early 18th century red brick façade on an earlier timber-framed building. For some years it was the home of the madrigal composer John Wilbye (1574-1638).



Nos.2-6



Tymperleys

- 3.19 No.7 is of 16th century origin and incorporates an arched entrance to Tymperleys, one of Colchester's finest timber-framed houses, which is also Grade II* and dates from the 15th/16th centuries. It was the home of William Gilbert (1544-1603), described as the father of electrical science. Nos.9 and 10 are of 15th century origin, with jetties and exposed timbers. Nos.11, 12 and 13 date from the 16th century (no.11 has a red brick front, whilst 12 and 13 retain their jetties, though plastered over in the late 18th century). No.14 is probably 17th century but has a plastered Georgian front.

- 3.20 Nos.15-17 are modest 19th century red brick buildings. They are not listed, but are of local interest and part of the established street scene. The single-storey building on the corner with Sir Isaac's Walk creates a rather weak corner, but is not obtrusive.



Trinity Street west side



Trinity Street east side

- 3.21 On the east side at the foot of the hill, the timber-framed and jettied, 16th century Clarence Inn has unfortunately changed its name to the Purple Dog. Nos.18 and 19, now part of the pub, are 18th century, still timber-framed and plastered, as are nos.20 and 21. No.22 is earlier, dating from the 17th century and retains its jettied front. All these are listed.
- 3.22 No.24, the Church of Christ Scientist has a modern glazed front. The adjoining property (no.25) appears to date from the early part of the last century. Both these properties are set back from the historic building line, reducing the intimate feel of the street. No.26, which is listed and dates from the 17th century, is on the original line.



New Library

- 3.23 The 1970s library is the one building that looks out of place in the street. The huge overhang at first floor level and the ponderous slate hung roof and upper storey contrast badly with the assured design and detailing of the Georgian street frontages and is a poor backdrop to the church. Compared with the urbane qualities of the library that it replaced, this must be reckoned as a missed opportunity to create a civic building of quality.

The Scheregate

- 3.24 The Scheregate is a mediaeval postern gate, with steps leading down to St John's Street. It appears to be cut through the Roman town wall and was probably constructed as a short cut to St John's Abbey. The surrounding buildings are timber-framed and plastered and date from the 17th century. The house on the corner with St John's Street is said to have been built in 1656. This is a picturesque and much photographed corner of the town, though the modern safety railings, lamp standard and equipment box are intrusive.



Scheregate Steps

- 3.25 At the foot of Scheregate, on the east side, a group of 17th century plastered houses (now numbered 32-34 Osborne Street) and the picturesque Brewer's Arms PH, with its 19th century ornamental bargeboarded gable, enhance the scene. Unfortunately, on the west side, Centurion House in St John's Street is a most unsuitable neighbour, being crude and grossly out of scale. The setting of the Scheregate is also marred by the traffic in St John's Street and the scale of the multi-storey car park opposite.

Sir Isaac's Walk

- 3.26 With Eld Lane, this is part of an historic intra-mural street, the houses and shops on the south side built into or over the town wall. The Walk is said to have been improved and laid out in the 17th century by Sir Isaac Rebow, a member of a prominent Colchester family whose house is on the corner with Head Street. It is now a pleasant shopping street.
- 3.27 Rebow's House and Headgate Building form an imposing entrance to the Walk from the west, but immediately the street reduces to a more domestic scale of one and two-storeys. The north side was mostly rebuilt as part of the Culver Street shopping precinct and has been pleasantly done, with a number of individual buildings in a variety of styles and materials that reflect the area.



Rebow's House & Headgate Building Sir Isaac's Walk north side

- 3.28 Some older buildings remain. Nos.18-22 date from the early 18th century, with plastered fronts and eaves cornices and large sash windows. The Portal Precinct is a courtyard of small shops on the site of a 19th century court, and incorporates two double-fronted 19th century houses (nos.6 and 8; the former, which is listed, having a 16th century core). No.2 is also 19th century, with a painted front. One most interesting survival is no.11 (formerly The Limes) a large 18th century house still with its garden and carriage drive, approached from Sir Isaac's Walk through iron gates. It is now in office use.



No.11 (formerly The Limes)



Sir Isaac's Walk south side

- 3.29 The south side is almost wholly modern, but the well-mannered development of Mercantile House provides a fitting neighbour to the Scheregate and the gabled frontages of nos.15-23 are an attractive feature in the street scene. Several of these new developments have good traditionally designed shop fronts.
- 3.30 From Sir Isaac's Walk, Shewell Walk gives access to Culver Square, whilst St John's Wynd provides access via a flight of steps to St John's Street and the multi-storey car park.

Eld lane

- 3.31 The south side of the street is almost continuously built up, with one and two-storey buildings that are built into or on top of the town wall. The buildings date mainly from the 19th century, though some are more recent. The best groups are nos.12-16 and 18-27 on the south side and the converted former almshouses (nos.34-39) on the north.



Eld Lane



Eld Lane

- 3.32 The street is narrow and pedestrianised. It is not so much the quality of the buildings that gives Eld Lane its character as the variety of the shops and the fact that several of them open directly onto the street, like market stalls, giving the street an almost mediaeval flavour.

- 3.33 Part of the north side is open, with the handsome Baptist Church and the modern United Reformed Church set back behind deep forecourts. The Lion Walk precinct extends as far as Eld Lane, providing a link through to the High Street. Opposite the bottom of Lion Walk there is a way through to the town wall and a short balcony and steps and a lift down to the car park in Vineyard Gate. There are views from the top of the wall over the Vineyard Street area but, with the car park and back yards of properties in Osborne Street in the foreground and the multi-storey car park beyond, the prospect is not inviting.

St John's Street

- 3.34 Until comparatively recently, this was a street of houses and small shops. For much of its length it retains its historic frontage line, though it was widened at the west end when the Headgate Building was constructed at the beginning of the 20th century and then again on the south side in the 1970s when the multi-storey car park was constructed.



Fox & Fiddler and Playhouse Theatre



Nos.35-47

- 3.35 The west end has a commercial scale, with the Headgate Building on the north and the Fox and Fiddler (PH (formerly the Elephant & Castle) and The Playhouse Theatre on the south. The rest of the street, with the exception of Centurion House and the car park, has a historic domestic scale. There is a good group of listed buildings on the north side (nos.35-47), mostly dating from the 17th century or earlier with later fronts and one or two traditional shop fronts. No.48 incorporates a small warehouse building, which retains its metal windows and hoist arm. Sir Isaac's Wynd provides an attractive way up to Sir Isaac's Walk and then to Culver Square via Shewell Walk



Former warehouse



Sir Isaac's Wynd

- 3.36 The goods entrance to the service area under Culver Square is via an arched entrance set back from the street (see above photograph) and does not significantly intrude on the street scene. However, although there has been an attempt to disguise the bulk of the multi-storey car park by incorporating giant classical porticos, it still dominates the east end of the street and dwarfs the old buildings opposite.



Car park (l) and Centurion House (r)



4.0 Character Appraisal: St John's Green

- 4.1 The Benedictine Abbey of St John was founded by Eudo Dapifer, the Norman lord of Colchester, in 1095. Documentary sources indicate that, prior to the Conquest, there was a parish church on the site, founded by a priest named Sigeric. The remains of a small building incorporating reused Roman masonry, which was partly excavated in 1972 for the construction of St Botolph's Circus, are thought to belong to that church.
- 4.2 The abbey precinct covered a roughly rectangular area of the hillside overlooking the mediaeval town, measuring approximately 240m east to west and 300m north to south, bounded on the north side by St John's Green. The Abbey was turned into a private house after the Dissolution, but suffered considerable damage in the Civil War. With the exception of the gatehouse, the remaining abbey buildings appear to have been demolished after the site was used to house Dutch prisoners in the 1660s. The abbey grounds were acquired by the War Office in 1860 and are now occupied by the Garrison Officers' Club.
- 4.3 Sections of the mediaeval precinct wall survive, together with a number of terraces and garden earthworks from the post-Dissolution house, but the only building to remain standing is the 15th century gatehouse, facing St John's Green, which is listed Grade I. A significant part of the site is a scheduled ancient monument, but only a small part, fronting St John's Green, is included in the Town Centre Conservation Area. Much of the remainder is in the more recently designated Garrison Conservation Area.
- 4.4 Historically, two streets linked the Abbey to the town: Abbey Gate Street and Stanwell Street. Both were cut through in the 1970s when Southway, part of the new inner relief road, was constructed. Several historic properties were demolished and the continuity of these streets and their visual connection with the walled town was lost, particularly in Stanwell Street, leaving St John's Green as a detached area and now a separate part of the Conservation Area.

Abbey Gate Street

- 4.5 Now a cul-de-sac, this is a pleasant residential street, with a number of mature trees down the middle that give it an Arcadian feel. On the east corner, the Scheregate Hotel has a plastered parapet front with pointed lights in square hoods with drip moulds. Beyond are a fine early 19th century terrace (nos.14-16), in yellow stock brick, and three earlier houses with 19th century red brick fronts (nos.18-22), all listed. No.24 (Ivy House), dated 1860, is of local interest. The K6 telephone box near the entrance to the street is listed.



Abbey Gate Street from the north



Abbey Gate Street from the south

- 4.6 Until the late 19th century, the west side was open, with just one large dwelling, Rookery House, and its extensive gardens. On the corner with St John's Street is the new Rookery House of c1900, then the Colchester Evangelical Church, dated 1902, both in red brick, followed by three pairs of villas, the first pair, Cecil Villas, dated 1899. Beyond the underpass are two more similar pairs of villas. All these buildings are of local interest.
- 4.7 The pedestrian underpass suffers from graffiti, which is unpleasant and gives it an intimidating atmosphere and should be removed.

Stanwell Street

- 4.8 The northwest end of Stanwell Street, from the Scheregate Hotel, now forms part of Osborne Street. The south side has a pleasant group of modest, mainly 19th century houses that give a reminder of the character that this area once had. Apart from the Brewers Arms and adjoining buildings, the north side has a run down appearance, with a number of vacant sites and advertisement hoardings. The construction of the multi-storey car park in Osborne Street has created a wide, open area of road at the junction with Stanwell Street that detracts from the street scene. Stanwell House is a pleasant modern development on the remaining length of Stanwell Street, before it joins Southway.



Former Stanwell Street looking east



Whitewell Road

- 4.9 Off the old Stanwell Street is Whitewell Road, which has a terrace of 19th century cottages of local interest, and which gives access to an impressive former clothing manufactory (Abbeygate One and Two), now converted to offices and prominent in views from Southway.

St John's Green

- 4.10 The old Abbey Gate Street continues beyond the underpass as a tree-lined road, bearing left uphill to St John's Green, which was the site of an annual fair in mediaeval times. The Green is a large grassed open area of irregular shape, with a number of mature trees and buildings arranged informally around it, which gives it the air of a village green. From the top there are views to the town centre with buildings climbing to the ridge along the High Street.



Approach to St John's Green



St John's Primary School

- 4.11 On the west side is St John's Primary School, a fine, listed red brick building of 1898 by Goodey and Cressall, with large projecting Dutch gables. This was built on the site of The Cedars, a large house in its own grounds. Next to it is St Giles' Hall, in red brick with lancet windows, built in 1903 and designed by Charles Butcher, which is unlisted but of local interest.
- 4.12 At the head of the Green is Abbey House, a large house in grey gault brick with a red tiled roof that is in the ownership of the MoD but currently unoccupied. Opposite is a late 19th century house (now a dentists' surgery), also in grey brick, facing Walsingham Road. Both buildings are of local interest.
- 4.13 The main feature on the south side is the very fine abbey gatehouse, with its highly decorated front with knapped flint work set in stone panels with cusped heads and two flanking octagonal turrets. The back was largely rebuilt in brick after damage in the 1648 siege.



Abbey Gatehouse



St John's Green

- 4.14 On the lower, north side of the Green is Abbeygate House, a modern office building that incorporates two earlier buildings, one with an early 19th century grey gault brick front with Tuscan porch, which is listed, the other facing the Green was originally a pub called the Caledonian. The other properties on the north side (St John's Place) are modern but have retained the old building line. The Abbey Arms PH is a good example of a public house of around 1900 and retains most of its original features including a fine corner bow window at first floor level.



Abbeygate House



The Abbey Arms

- 4.15 Opposite St John's Place is a small island of development (nos.35-53) that occupies an important position in views across the Green. Nos.39-49 are a row of listed late 18th and early 18th century cottages, red brick and rendered.

- 4.16 The houses on the east side of the Green were originally in Stanwell Street, which led from the abbey gatehouse to the Scheregate. Nos.9-13 are a terrace of three mid-19th century red brick cottages, with low-pitched slate roofs, originally called Osbourn Terrace, but now signed Abbey Terrace. No.15 is taller with a painted front and tiled roof and small-paned sash windows. All these are of local interest. Gimber Cottage (no.17) is listed; it has Gothic arched headed windows and door and is dated 1823. No.21, which is set back from the street also has Gothic details but with flat-headed drip moulds to the windows; it should probably be listed.



Nos.9-17



Former St Giles' Church


- 4.17 Just off the Green and facing what used to be Brewery Road, is the former St Giles' Church, now a Masonic Centre, which was built in 1171 by the abbey as a parish church. Sir Charles Lucas and Sir George Lisle were buried here after their execution following the 1648 siege. The weatherboarded tower was added in 1819 and the church was restored in 1907. The church is now rather isolated and has lost its historic context; it now faces a large multi-storey car park across the Southway dual-carriageway.

5.0 Significance



5.0 Significance

Above ground features

- 
- 5.1 The area within the walls was part of the Roman legionary fortress and the later town. Trinity Street and Lion Walk may be on the line of Roman streets whilst Culver Street and Eld Lane were probably in existence by the 10th century. Also dating from pre-Conquest times is Holy Trinity Church, with its rare surviving mid-eleventh century west tower in Roman brick.
 - 5.2 St John's Abbey was founded by one of William the Conqueror's most powerful subjects and, from its inception, controlled interests in the locality, which made a major contribution to the development of the mediaeval town. The standing remains are now limited to sections of the precinct wall and the abbey gatehouse, itself a fine example of 15th century architecture. However, a significant part of the garden layout related to the post-Dissolution re-use of the abbey has survived in the form of visible earthworks.
 - 5.3 Though most of the abbey site is outside the Conservation Area, it is protected through scheduling as an Ancient Monument and any future development would fall to be considered as part of the setting of the Conservation Area.
 - 5.4 The picturesque Scheregate is Colchester's only surviving mediaeval gateway. It was probably constructed to allow direct entry to the town from the abbey. Eld Lane and Sir Isaac's Walk are rare survivals of narrow intra-mural streets that have retained, particularly in Eld Lane, a flavour of their early character.
 - 5.5 Trinity Street is an exceptionally fine street and contains a number of late mediaeval and Georgian buildings of quality, including no.6 and Tymperleys, which are both Listed Grade II*. Though now in office use, 11 Sir Isaac's Walk (formerly The Limes) is a rare survival of a large house and garden in the centre of the town.
 - 5.6 Besides Holy Trinity, there are a number of other churches of interest: St Giles' from the 12th century; Eld Lane Baptist Church (1834); and the modern Lion Walk United Reformed Church with its soaring tower retrained from the earlier 19th century church.
 - 5.7 The significance of most of the surviving historic buildings is recognised in their listing. However, the significance and quality of many of the later 19th and 20th century buildings is not generally appreciated and, at the moment, lacks any formal recognition.
 - 5.8 A number of green spaces with mature trees make a significant contribution to the character of the area, for example St John's Green, Holy Trinity churchyard and the area in front of the Baptist and United Reformed churches.

Below ground features

- 5.9 A large area within the Roman fortress and town was excavated in the construction of the Culver Street and Lion Walk shopping centres, whilst part of a Roman cemetery was excavated during the construction of the inner relief road. Existing properties on the street frontages that have not been redeveloped are likely to be on the site of earlier buildings and any rear yards or gardens are likely to contain evidence of past occupation.
- 5.10 Although there are few visible remains of the abbey, as the entry in the Schedule of Monuments says, the largely undisturbed nature of the greater part of the precinct ensures that buried evidence from many phases of occupation will survive, often accumulated to considerable depths. The remains of the house itself, perhaps incorporating the former abbot's lodgings, are thought to survive as buried features within the western part of the site. The excavated evidence and surviving remains of the pre-Conquest church are important in demonstrating a continuity of religious occupation of the abbey site.

**Open spaces:
Contribution to the area**

- 5.11 The open spaces have been assessed for their intrinsic quality and for their contribution to the special character of the Conservation Area. Several of them make a positive contribution and these are shown on Map 1.

Spaces that make a positive contribution:

- St John's Green
- Holy Trinity churchyard
- Forecourts to Eld Lane Baptist Church and Lion Walk URC Church
- Green space below The Abbey Arms PH
- Former churchyard of St Nicholas

Spaces that detract from the area:

- Gaps in frontage to Osborne Street (north side)
- Junction of Stanwell Street and Osborne Street

**Buildings:
Contribution to the area**

- 5.12 The individual buildings and other structures have been assessed on their intrinsic architectural and historic interest and on their contribution to the character of the Conservation Area. They include both listed and unlisted buildings.
- 5.13 The buildings in the first schedule are those that make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area (red for listed buildings, blue for buildings of local architectural or historic interest). These are shown on Map 1. The listed buildings are Grade II unless otherwise shown.
- 5.14 The buildings in the second schedule (green) are those that detract from the character of the area and are shown on Map 2.
- 5.15 The remainder of the buildings and spaces, uncoloured on the maps, are judged to have a neutral effect on the character of the area.

Buildings that make a positive contribution to the area:

Abbey Gate Street (East Side)

- Nos.4 – 16
- Nos.18 – 22
- No.24 (Ivy House)

Abbey Gate Street (West Side)

- K6 Telephone Kiosk
- Rectory House
- Colchester Evangelical Church
- Nos.1 & 3 (Cecil Villas)
- Nos.5 & 7
- No.9
- Nos.11 & 13

Culver Street East (South Side)

- No.75 (Co-op)

Eld Lane (North Side)

- Baptist Church
- Extensions to Baptist Church
- Nos.34 - 39 (Formerly Lady D'Arcy Almshouses)

Eld Lane (South Side)

- No.1 (with the Scheregate)
- Nos.3, 4 & 5
- Nos.12 – 16
- Nos.18 – 27

Lion Walk

- Tower of demolished Congregational Church
- Lion Walk URC Church

Osborne Street (formerly Stanwell Street)

- No.31 (Brewers Arms PH)
- Nos.32 & 33a
- No.34
- No.36 (Scheregate Hotel)
- Nos.37 & 38
- Nos.41-44
- No.45 with 12 Stanwell Street

St John's Green

- St John's Abbey Gatehouse (Grade I, Ancient Monument)
- St John's Green Primary School
- St Giles' Church (Masonic Centre)
- Abbeygate House
- Former Lord Palmerston PH (part of Abbeygate House)
- Nos.30-36 (formerly Abbey Gate Street)
- Railings to Primary School
- St Giles' Hall
- No.1
- Abbey House
- The Abbey Arms PH
- No.8 St John's Place
- Nos.9 – 13 (Abbey Terrace)
- No.15
- No.17 (Gimber Cottage)
- No.21
- Nos.39 – 49

Buildings that detract from the area:

St John's Street (North Side)

- Nos.35 – 39
- No.40
- Nos.41 – 44
- Nos.45 – 47
- Nos.49 – 53 (Headgate Building)

St John's Street (South Side)

- No.1 (Fox & Fiddler PH)

Scheregate

- The Scheregate (Grade II*)
- Nos.1 & 2
- No.3
- No.4a (inc.28a St John's Street)

Shewell Walk

- Former Library

Sir Isaac's Walk

- Nos.1 & 3 (with the Scheregate)
- No.2b
- Nos.6 & 8
- No.11
- Nos.18 – 22
- No.17 (with 58-62 Head Street)

Trinity Street (West Side)

- Nos.2 & 3
- No.4
- No.6 (Grade II*)
- No.7
- No.8 (Tymperleys) (Grade II*)
- Nos.9 & 10
- Nos.11, 12 & 13
- No.14
- No.15
- Nos.16 & 17

Trinity Street (East Side)

- The Clarence Hotel
- Nos.18 – 21
- No.22
- No.26
- Former Holy Trinity Church (Grade I)
- Walls and railings to Holy Trinity Church

Whitewell Road

- Nos.2-7
- Nos.8 & 9 (Abbeygate One and Two)

St John's Street

- Centurion House

Osborne Street

- Sheds to east of Brewer's Arms



6.0 Issues and Recommendations

- 6.1 The area contains a significant number of listed buildings: it is essential that they are preserved and maintained in a good condition. However, very few buildings dating from after 1840 are listed and the contribution of Victorian and Edwardian (and sometimes later) buildings to the character of the Conservation Area needs to be recognised. The houses in Abbey Gate Street, St John's Green and Whitewell Road are examples of those that need to be protected.
- 6.2 Since these buildings are in the Conservation Area and subject to a number of local plan policies, they have some limited protection, for example against unauthorised demolition, but it would be a good idea to make a 'Local List' of these buildings, with a brief description and photographic record. This would prove useful in considering any future proposals, particularly for alterations that might affect their character.
- 6.3 A common problem with unlisted buildings is the pressure to replace timber windows in aluminium or UPVC, which can so easily spoil their appearance. It can often affect the value of a building, and there are alternative solutions that can provide modern levels of insulation, but still retain the character of a building at a reasonable cost. The Local Authority could consider introducing an 'Article 4 Direction', which would enable these alterations to be brought under control.
- 6.4 Most properties in the area appear to be in good condition and to be well maintained. The vacant sites and poor quality buildings in Osborne Street will no doubt be dealt with as part of the Council's proposals for Vineyard Street. At the time of writing, Abbey House was vacant and boarded up. The graffiti in the underpass from Abbey Gate Street has already been noted.
- 6.5 Perhaps the main issue in the area is the amount of traffic using St John's Street, which can be a problem for the large number of shoppers using the multi-storey car parking. The safety railings and other highway paraphernalia spoil the approach to Scheregate steps, which is otherwise one of the most picturesque corners of the town.

APPENDIX A

Statutory Protection and Planning Policy

Conservation Area: the Colchester Town Centre Conservation Area was designated in 1968. It was amended in 1978 and 1980.

Ancient Monuments: the Colchester Town Wall; Colchester Castle and Park; the Benedictine Abbey of St John; St Botolph's Augustinian Priory; Southeast corner of Roman Town in East Hill House gardens.

Listed Buildings: those buildings that are included in the Statutory List of buildings of special architectural or historic interest are shown in red in the schedule of buildings in Section 5.0 and on the accompanying maps.

Parks and Gardens: the Castle Park is included in the national Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.

Planning Policy: the most recent local planning policies for the area are set out in the adopted Colchester Borough Local Plan. The following policies are of particular relevance for the Conservation Area:

- **Policy UAE1** protects the buildings, open spaces, trees and views that go to make up the character of the Conservation Area
- **Policy UAE2** sets out criteria against which planning applications will be judged in order to protect the character and appearance of the Conservation Area
- **Policy UAE3** sets out the (very limited) circumstances in which consent might be given for the demolition of unlisted buildings in the Conservation Area
- **Policy UAE4** states the presumption against the demolition of listed buildings
- **Policy UAE5** sets out criteria against which applications for listed building consent will be judged in order to preserve the special interest of the building
- **Policy UAE8** sets out the presumption against development that would adversely affect ancient monuments and their settings and includes requirements for archaeological assessments and mitigation strategies
- **Policy UAE11** protects sites on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens

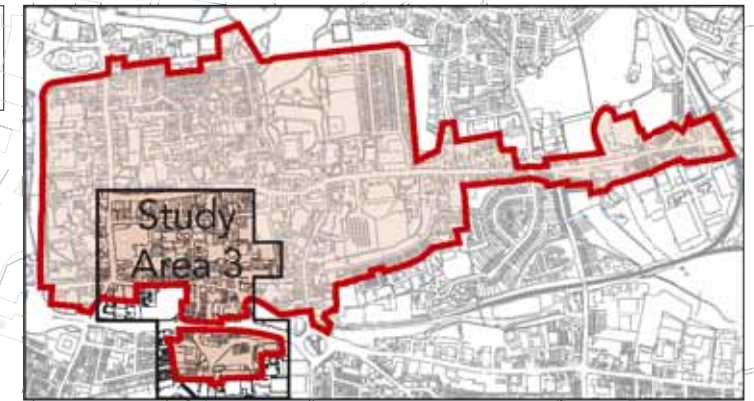
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Colchester

Town Centre Conservation Area



Conservation Area boundary

Study Area 3:

Culver Street, Trinity Street, Scheregate and St John's Green

Map 1: Positive Contributions

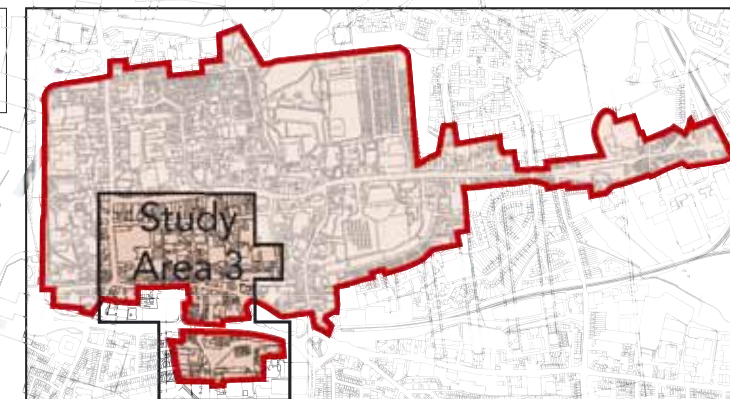
- Scheduled Ancient Monument
- Listed buildings
- Other buildings of historic or architectural interest
- Spaces making a significant contribution to Conservation Area

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Colchester

Town Centre Conservation Area




Conservation Area boundary

Study Area 3:

Culver Street, Trinity Street, Scheregate and St John's Green

Map 2: Negative contributions

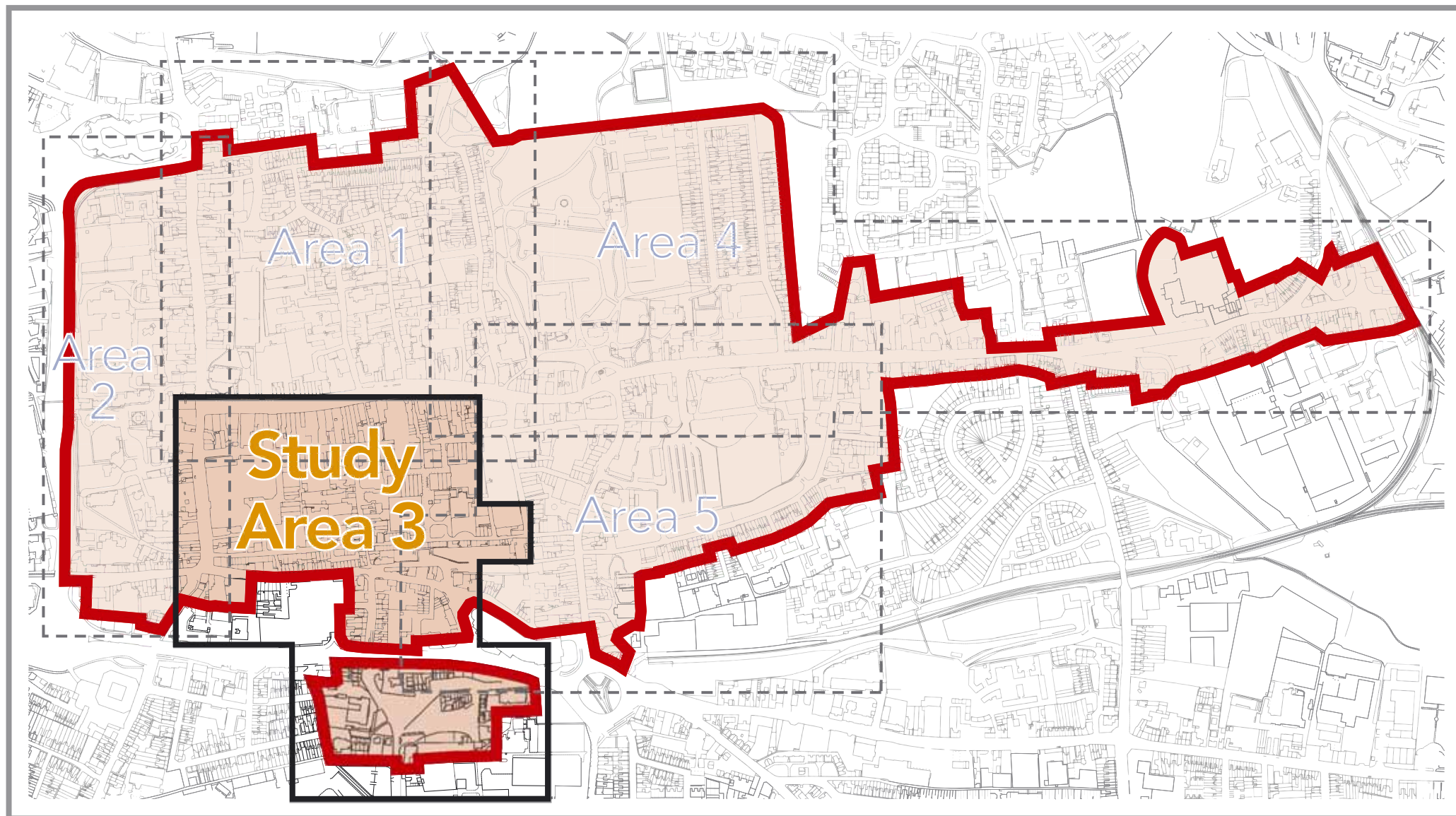
-  Buildings detracting from the Conservation Area
-  Spaces detracting from the Conservation Area

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Culver Street, Trinity Street,
Scheregate & St John's Green

Map 3: Colchester 1876 Ordnance Survey





Colchester Town Centre Conservation Area Character Appraisal Study Area 3