

PURCELL

MERCURY THEATRE, COLCHESTER – PUBLIC REALM WORKS  
DESIGN AND HERITAGE APPRAISAL

ISSUE 03

FEBRUARY 2017



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On behalf of Purcell ©

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## Issue 03

February 2017

*Steve Mannix*

# MERCURY THEATRE, COLCHESTER

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## INTRODUCTION

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This Design and Heritage Appraisal has been prepared for submission as part of a Heritage Lottery Fund application for the landscape around the Mercury Theatre in Balmerne Gardens, Colchester. There is an opportunity, in conjunction with the proposed redevelopment of the Theatre, to relandscape the area around the Theatre to provide a high quality public amenity space and an improved setting for the heritage assets.

This appraisal sets out:

- a brief account of the historical development of the site,
- a description of the site, its setting including the designated heritage assets, and key views,
- a statement of significance for the site, the landscape and its setting,
- an analysis of the site, its opportunities and constraints,
- a discussion of the design inspiration, and
- the initial design proposals.

This report has been prepared based on site visits, limited desk-based and archival research at the Essex Record Office and discussions with the Mercury Theatre and local amenity groups.

SITE LOCATION PLAN

□ Site Boundary

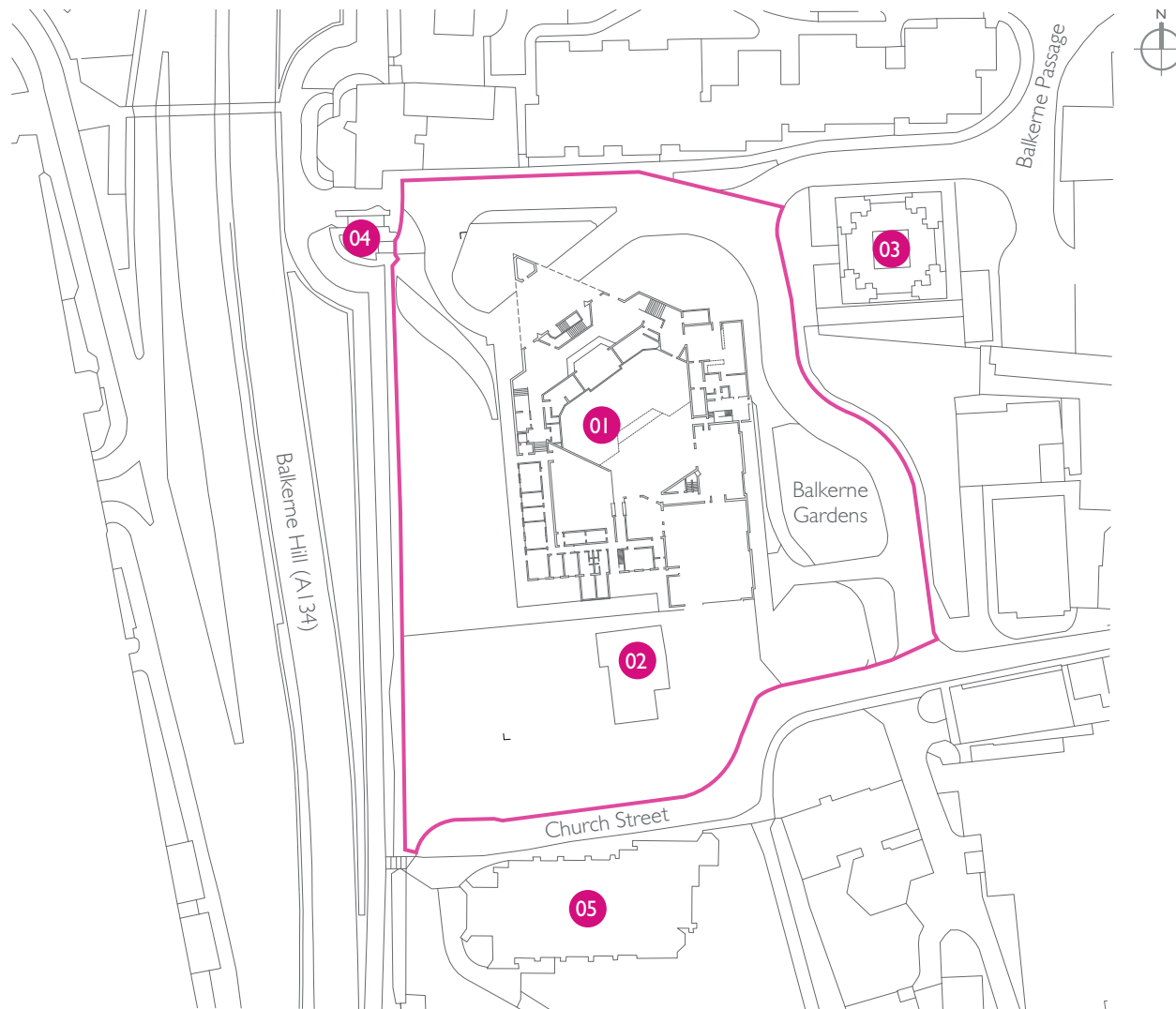
01 Mercury Theatre

02 Mercury House

03 'Jumbo' Water Tower

04 Balmerne Gate

05 Church of St Mary at the Walls



## 2 UNDERSTANDING

### 2.1 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

This outline account of the historical development of the site is based on limited desk-based and archival research at the Essex Record Office. There is scope for expansion and development of the historic development, particularly with regard to the earlier history of the site in the Roman, Anglo-Saxon and Medieval periods.

1 <sup>ST</sup> CENTURY	4 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY	13 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY
49	60	c.300
A monumental arch was built on the site of what is now known as the Balcerne Gate, to mark the foundation of Roman Colchester (Camulodunum), the capital of the new Roman colony of Britannia.	Colchester was destroyed by Boudicca and her followers. To protect the town from future attacks, the Romans then enclosed it within a wall, and incorporated the triumphal arch as part of the west gate. This gate gave access to the main road to London.	The Balcerne Gate was blocked up in response to an increase Saxon threat. At the same time, the town ditch was recut in front of the gate. This destroyed an earlier Roman water system which had brought water into the town via the gate. <sup>01</sup>
		1206
		First written reference to a church at St Mary at the Walls though there has been archaeological evidence found of settlement predating this: a Roman mosaic was discovered within the churchyard whilst evidence of mid-Saxon burials suggests that a pre-Conquest church stood on the site. <sup>02</sup>

<sup>01</sup> Philip Crummy, *City of Victory: the Story of Colchester- Britain's First Roman Town* (1997)

<sup>02</sup> Philip Morant, *History and Antiquities of Colchester* (1748), p. 228. Excavations in 1997 also unearthed fragments of mosaic pavement, see <http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archsearch/record.jsf?titelid=1818792>

14 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY	16 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY	17 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY			18 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY
1328	1557	1610	1648	1671	1714
Joseph Powell established a chantry at the church, the chapel for which, dedicated to St Thomas the Martyr, is located on the north side of the church.	Six protestant martyrs were burned to death in the grounds of St Mary at the Walls, as part of the reassertion of Catholicism under Mary I.	Although the first reference to a named rector dates to 1286 (Ralph Stevens), the first textual reference to a rectory is not until this date. However, it is likely that the rector had a house and orchard on the site since the thirteenth century. <sup>03</sup> John Speede's map of this date shows that the rectory site was mainly fields, with a line of houses running along the area roughly corresponding to the modern North Hill.	One-eyed gunner Jack Thompson and his canon were knocked off the church tower during the siege of Colchester by Parliamentary forces. This event is later said to be the origin of the nursery rhyme Humpty Dumpty, though this is likely apocryphal.	The hearth tax for this year records that the Rectory stood opposite the church across church lane, and that it was a large dwelling house containing 10 hearths. It was extended in 1677 by the then rector Joseph Powell. <sup>04</sup>	The church of St Mary at the Walls was rebuilt having lain ruined since the Civil War. The architect employed was a Mr John Price of Richmond, Surrey, and the total cost of building was £1154. Building took place over the remarkably short period of ten months, and included the levelling of the church yard, and laying of gravel paths lined with planted trees. <sup>05</sup>

<sup>03</sup> ERO D/B 5 Cr100

<sup>04</sup> ERO Q/RTh 5 f.8

<sup>05</sup> Morant, p. 127

## 2 UNDERSTANDING

### 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

1738

The historian Philip Morant was awarded the living of St Mary at the Walls. In his *History and Antiquities of Colchester* (1748) he describes the Rectory as having 'a beautiful prospect on the west and north-west for many miles into the country'.<sup>06</sup> Morant rebuilt the west end of this rectory a year later.

1748

First representation of the church and Rectory on a map, showing gardens laid out with a geometric pattern to the north of the Rectory. The Rectory is approached from the east via a tree lined avenue. To the south of the Rectory, the steps through the Roman wall, which were probably first inserted in the medieval period, are shown. In this map, the Hole in the Wall pub is visible abutting the Balcerne Gate, and there is indication that there had been some buildings built against the western side of the town wall.



Detail from Morant's 1748 map with the approximate site boundary shown in red (\*\*\*)Permission Pending)

<sup>06</sup> Morant, p.128



18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

1777

The Chapman and Andre map of Colchester shows the tree-lined approach to the Rectory but the gardens appear simpler and may have been converted to pasture. Towards the north-east of the site at the end of Balkerne Passage and including the area where Jumbo now stands, there is an area marked as a Bowling Green with a small structure on the southern edge.



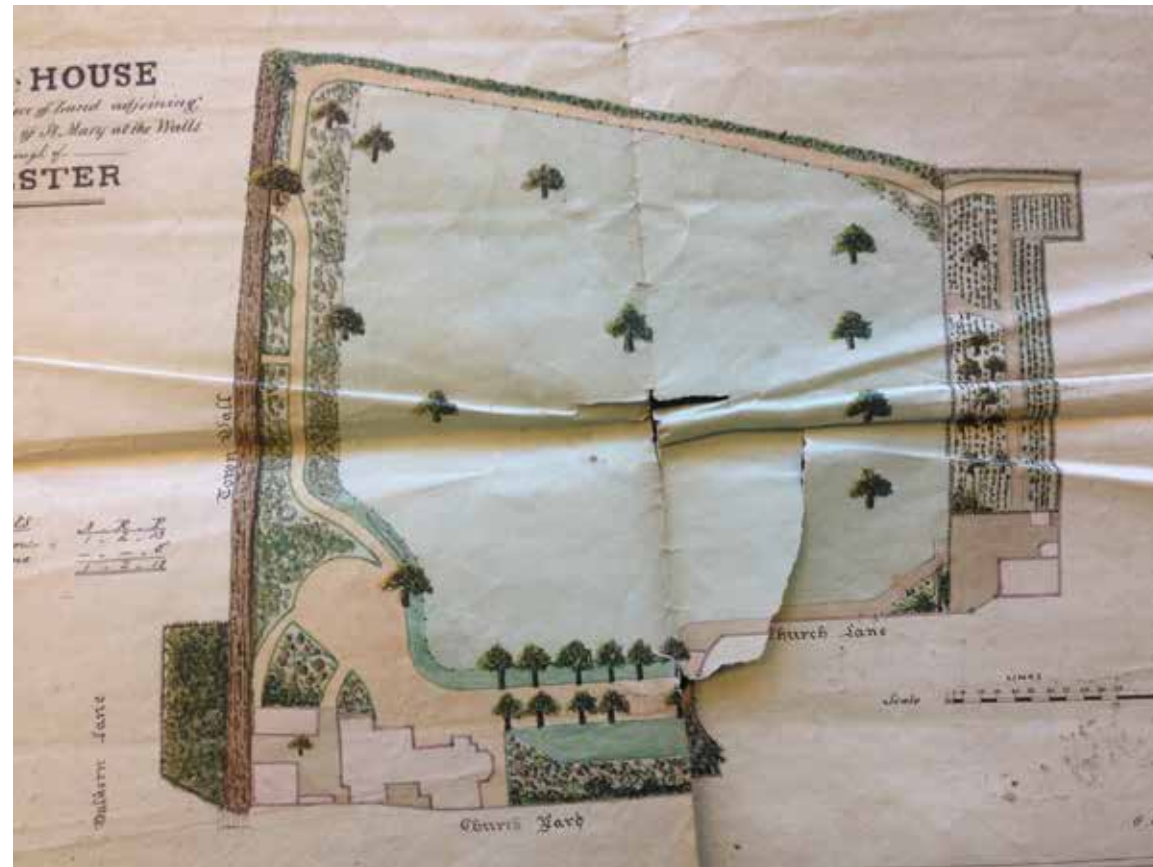
Detail from Chapman and Andre's 1777 map with the approximate site boundary shown in red (ERO \*\*\*Permission Pending)

## 2 UNDERSTANDING

### 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

1837

A plan of the rectory garden shows the footprint of the Rectory. It is arranged on an east-west axis, with detached service buildings to the east, abutting the town wall. There is a path which encircles the garden with planted borders in places and benches located at intervals along the path. Most of the garden itself is lawn, with specimen trees. At the eastern boundary is a very formally laid out section of garden, possibly a kitchen garden to serve the Rectory. There is also a building at the southern end of this, the purpose of which is unknown.



(ERO DIP 246/ 3/ 14 \*\*\*Permission Pending)

## 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

1843

The railway arrived in Colchester, and the landlord of the Hole in the Wall (then known as the King's Head) saw the occasion as a business opportunity. He knocked a hole through the Roman wall to afford the pub a view of the railway to the north, thus earning the pub its nickname, which it formally adopted in the 1960s.<sup>07</sup>

1848

The Monson map of Colchester shows a reservoir had been created to the north of the rectory garden. The Quaker Meeting House at 6 Church Street, which has a date on it of 1802, is shown on a map for the first time, as are Nos. 3 and 8 Church Street.



Detail from Monson's 1848 map with approximate site boundary shown in red (ERO TIM 399/ 1  
\*\*\*Permission Pending)

<sup>07</sup> Camulos Virtual Tour of Roman Colchester <http://www.camulos.com/virtual/townwall2.htm>

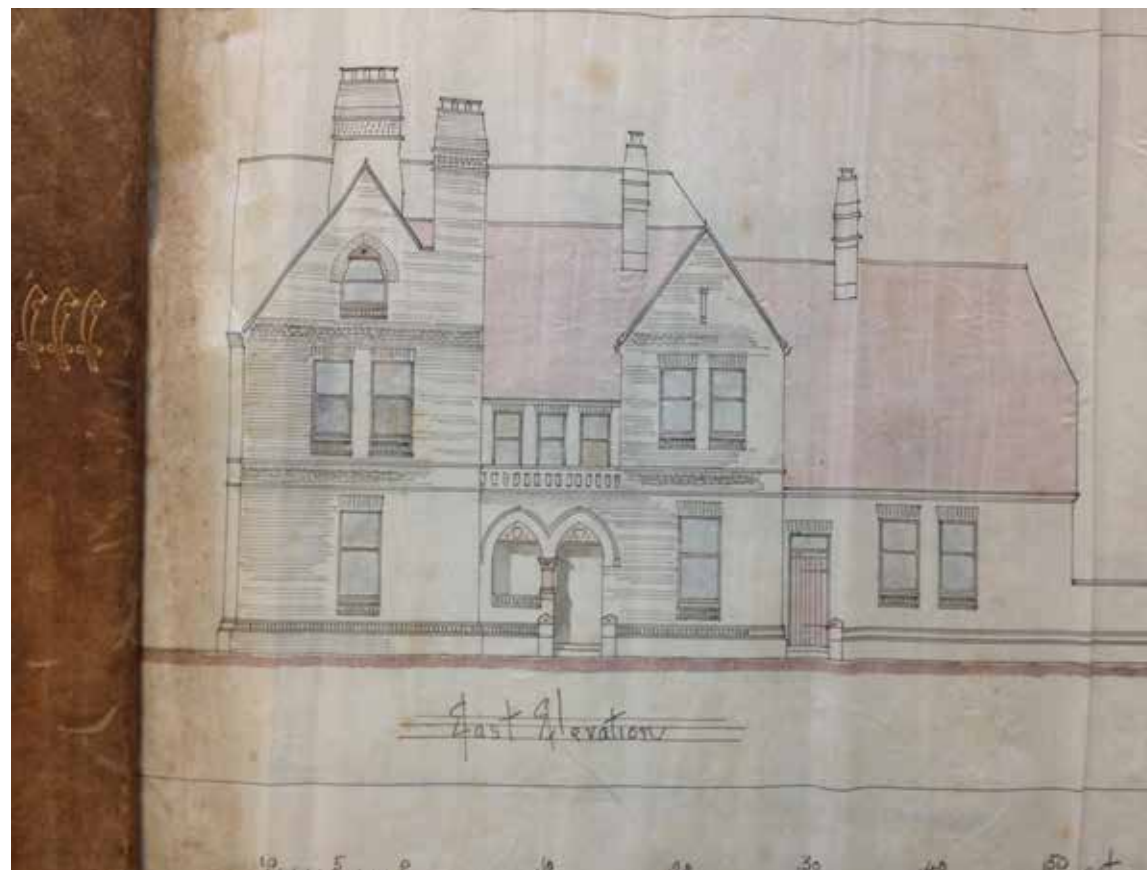


## 2 UNDERSTANDING

### 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

1871

The old Rectory was demolished, and a new one built in its place on a different site, in the north-eastern area of the garden. This two-storey house, with basement and attic was built to designs by Frederick Chancellor. When construction works began, Roman tessellated pavements were discovered in two areas of the site as well as a Roman foundation under the site of the new Rectory. During the rebuilding of the Rectory, a marble font was moved from the church and placed in the rectory garden.<sup>08</sup> At the same date, St Mary at the Walls was also rebuilt, to designs by Arthur Blomfield.



(ERO D/P 246/ 3/ 17 \*\*\*Permission Pending)

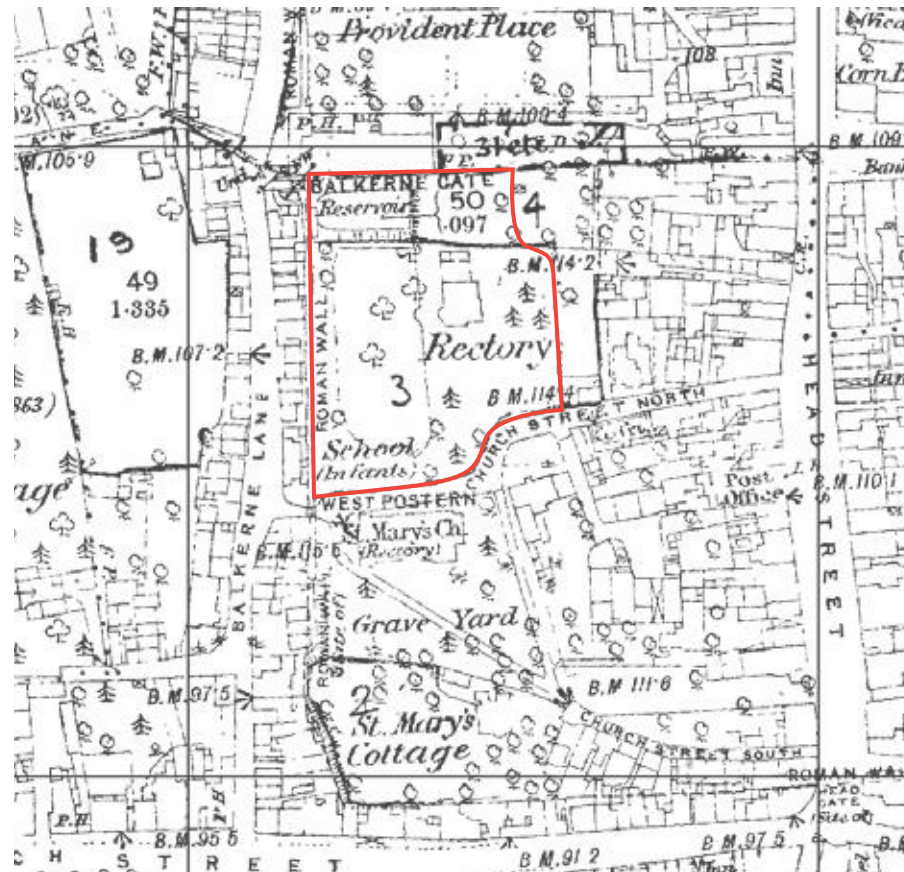
<sup>08</sup> ERO D/P 246/ 6/ 14

19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

1876

The detailed OS map shows that much of the rectory garden had been preserved despite the building works. The shrubbery walk with benches remained along the inside of the Roman wall but had been filled out at the southern end where the old rectory had been removed. Similarly the walled kitchen garden and building to the south remained. A new drive had been created from Church Street via gates (one gate pier of which survives) northwards to the west of the kitchen garden and curving back south-west to the Rectory. New shrubberies had been planted along the east of the drive whilst a long straight north-south walk divided the garden west of the Rectory.

North of the Rectory garden, east of the reservoir, was a garden which had a glass structure in its middle. A smaller glass structure was located in the grounds of the pub. East of the pub's grounds was another garden with a perimeter walk, trees and a sun dial. No.3 Church Street is labelled as a Savings Bank whilst No.8 was the County Court.



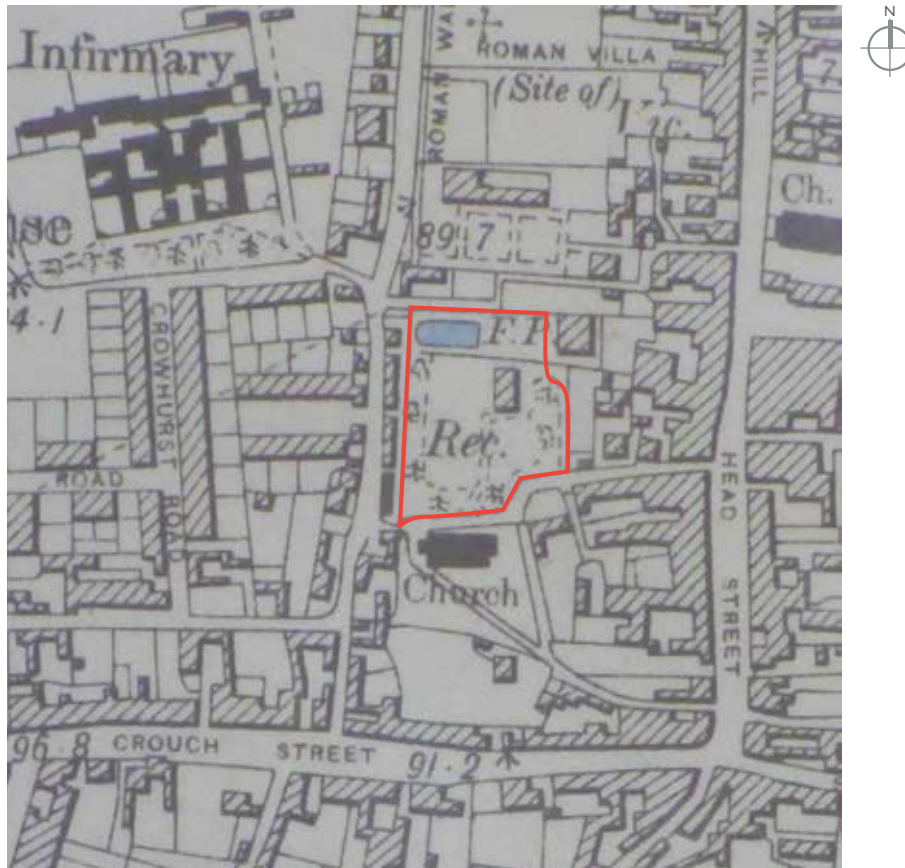
Detail from the 1876 OS map with the approximate site boundary shown in red (Ordnance Survey © Crown Copyright 2017. All rights reserved. Licence number 100020449)

## 2 UNDERSTANDING

### 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

1882

The Balcerne Water Tower was built to the west of the reservoir. It was capable of holding 1069 cubic metres of water, and was claimed to be the second largest in England. The then rector, John Irvine, protested about the erection of the tower close to the Rectory. In derision, he nicknamed it 'Jumbo' after the popular elephant housed at London Zoo and this is the name by which it is now known. The reservoir continued to be used to supply steam locomotives at the North railway station. A historic photograph (not reproduced) shows that there was an elaborate cast iron fence to the north of the reservoir and Jumbo.



Detail of the 1898 OS plan

19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

1895

A new pumping station was built by James Paxman at the foot of Balkerne Hill, to try and improve the quality of the water supply provided by the Jumbo Tower, which had been notoriously inconsistent.<sup>09</sup>

20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

1933

Improvements were carried out to the Rectory, and a loan was secured for the purpose, though the specifics of the work carried out are not known.<sup>10</sup>

1964

The 1871 house was demolished and replaced by a smaller building, which is evident from the 1969 OS Map. The new house was not built on the site of the nineteenth century property, but located to the south of it, on the site of the present Mercury House.

<sup>09</sup> <http://www.savejumbo.org.uk/history.html>

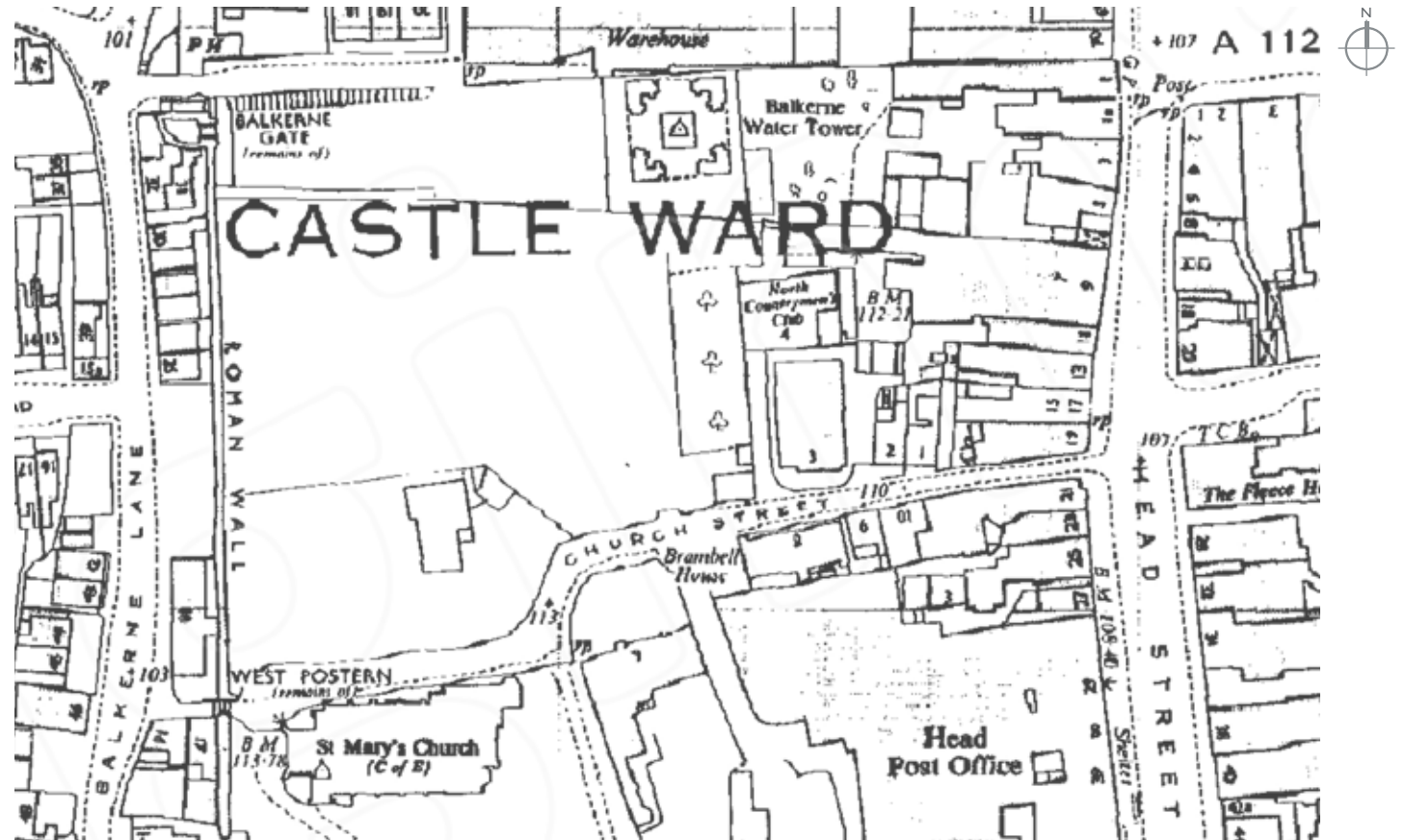
<sup>10</sup> ERO D/P 246/ 3/ 21

## 2 UNDERSTANDING

### 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

1969

By this date, the land to the north of Balcerne Gate had been developed, with a warehouse and a run of three terraced houses on the site. The present dual carriageway had not been built, and there were still buildings located on the western side of the Roman wall.



1969 OS Map shows the site of the new rectory, as well as the development on the north side of Balcerne Gate



20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

1972

The theatre was constructed to designs by Norman Dowie, and opened on 10th May. Initially, the building was structurally identical to the Salisbury Playhouse, but extensions to the latter building have undermined the similarity.

1978

St Mary at the Walls ceased to be used as a church, and was instead converted for use as the Colchester Arts Centre, which opened in 1980. The warehouse north of Jumbo was demolished and Parsley House sheltered accommodation was constructed. This was later extended following the demolition of the three terraced houses.

1983

The Rectory site was sold to Mercury Theatre, and renamed Mercury House.

1987

The Jumbo Water Tower ceased to form part of the water network in Colchester. It was purchased the following year by an evangelical Christian group, for use as a prayer tower.<sup>11</sup>

1996

Planning permission for alterations and extensions to the Mercury Theatre was granted although most of the changes were not implemented. Further minor extensions and alterations were carried out at intervals over the subsequent twenty years.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.savejumbo.org.uk/history.html>

## 2 UNDERSTANDING

### 2.2 SITE DESCRIPTION

The site comprises the Mercury Theatre, Mercury House to the south and the landscape around it as far as the Roman wall to the west and the east side of Balcerne Gardens roadway to the east.

The Mercury Theatre is a modern building, the original core of which was constructed in the early 1970s and subsequently extended. The glazed triangular wedge at first floor level, which is predominantly glazed, is supported by a column of masonry so that there is vehicular access beneath the first floor at ground level.

South of the Theatre is Mercury House, a 1960s suburban-type house that was constructed as the Rectory to the church of St Mary at the Walls that lies further south and which now is owned and used by the Theatre. There are proposals to demolish Mercury House to enable a new extension to the Theatre.



*The north end of the Theatre*



*Mercury House*

The northern and eastern parts of the landscape are dominated by the sinuous road of Balkerne Gardens. The tarmac roadway, flanked by concrete kerbs, is often lined with parked cars. The pavements in these areas are either concrete paving slabs or red setts. Bollards, metal outside the Theatre and timber linked with chains around Jumbo Water Tower reinforce the line of the road. Other street furniture includes black metal bins and brushed metal Sheffield hoops for bicycles. There is a mature holm oak at the southern end of the eastern landscape, close to the surviving 1870s brick gate pier. Other younger trees, mostly silver birches, clipped shrubs and a low hedge surrounded by a timber kick rail are arranged around the Theatre.



*Landscaping to the north of the Theatre*



*Landscaping east of the Theatre*



*Southern end of the east side showing the mature holm oak. The lower courses of the brick wall are historic*



## 2 UNDERSTANDING

To the west of the Theatre, the landscape is much simpler with a grass bank rising from a concrete-paved path along the side of the Theatre to the Roman wall. This is planted with mature trees.

To the south-west lies the garden of Mercury House, which is separated from the public area by an ivy-covered fence. A large square lawn is surrounded by overgrown shrubbery and mature trees with a timber deck at the west end and a timber smoking shelter on the north side. A narrower strip of overgrown shrubbery extends eastwards along the southern perimeter of the site and largely conceals the car parking area in front of Mercury House. The southern boundary of the Mercury House garden is defined by a historic brick wall and railings, though this has been partially rebuilt at the east end. Church Street to the south, is paved with setts.



*Landscape to the west of the Theatre*



*The Roman wall viewed from the Theatre side*



*South side of Mercury House garden*



*North and west sides of Mercury House garden*



*Historic southern wall of Mercury House garden viewed from Church Street*

## 2.3 SETTING

### 2.3.1 HERITAGE ASSETS

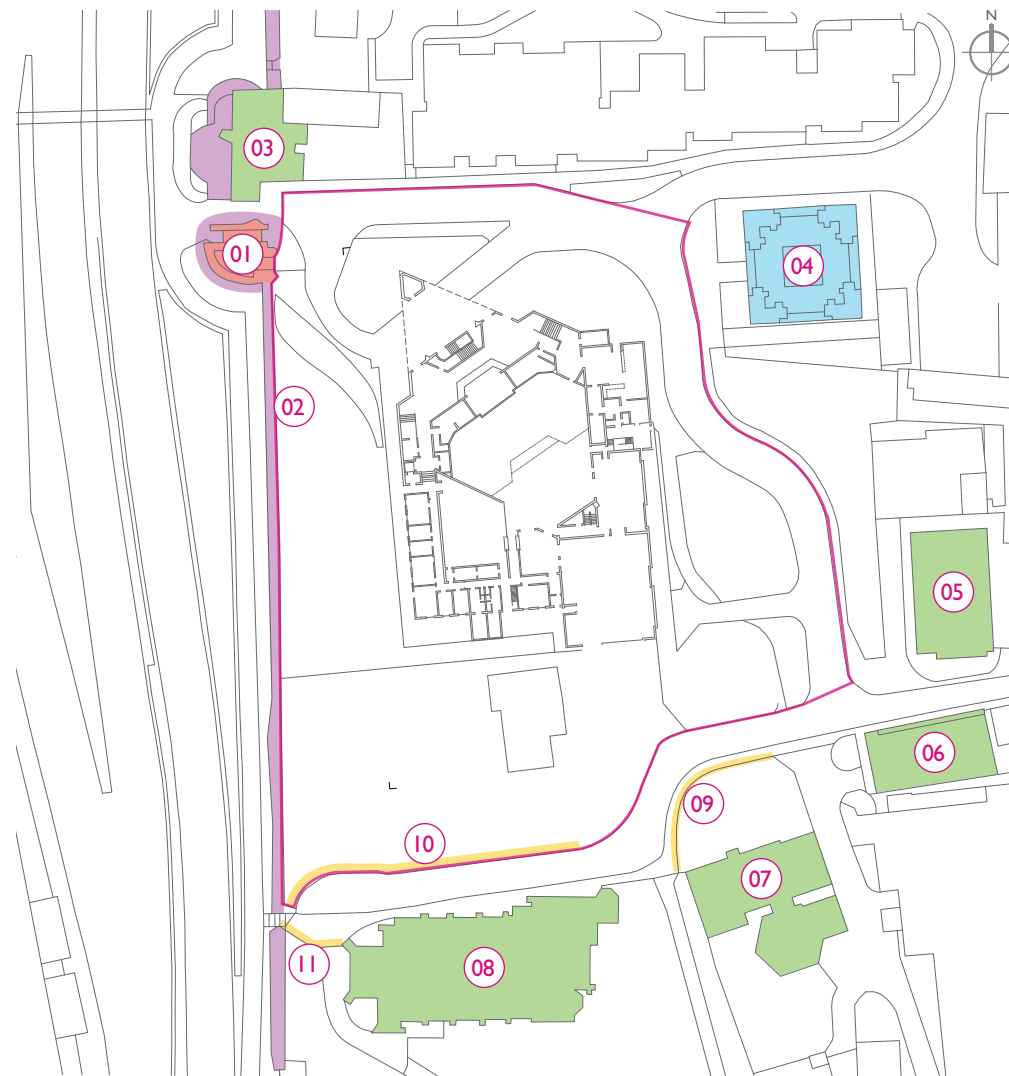
The Mercury Theatre is located in the Colchester Conservation Area and is enclosed on almost every side by other types of designated heritage assets. These are illustrated on the plan and in the table below.

No. on Plan	Asset	Designation
01	Balkerne Gate	Grade I
02	Town Wall	Scheduled Monument
03	Hole in the Wall Public House	Grade II
04	Municipal Water Tower (Jumbo)	Grade II*
05	3 Church Street	Grade II
06	8 Church Street	Grade II
07	St Mary's House (6 Church Street)	Grade II
08	St Mary at the Walls (Colchester Arts Centre)	Grade II
09	6 Church Street Railings and Gate Piers	Grade II
10	Mercury House Railings and Wall	Grade II
11	Church of St Mary at the Walls Railings and Gates	Grade II

#### DESIGNATED HERITAGE ASSETS PLAN

- Site Boundary
- Grade I
- Grade II\*
- Grade II
- Local Listing
- Scheduled Ancient Monument

*Note: Site boundary does not include Town Walls*





## 2 UNDERSTANDING

The Roman Town Wall and the Balkerne Gate, which reflect the Roman history of the town of Colchester, are significant in defining the site: the wall provides its immediate western boundary whilst the Balkerne Gate provides a prominent point of access to the site.

The Victorian Jumbo Water Tower, by dint of its height, is prominent in both close and long range.

The south of the site is faced by a number of Grade II structures, predominantly nineteenth century in construction. The church of St Mary at the Walls, has retained most of its medieval tower but the remainder of the church was rebuilt almost completely in 1714 and 1872. St Mary's House (No. 6) and Nos. 3 and 8 Church Street, the former County Court building, reflect different styles of early nineteenth century architecture.

Several of the gate piers, walls and railings along Church Street are locally listed, reflecting their contribution to the local historic environment.



*Balkerne Gate (Grade I and Scheduled Monument)*



*Roman Wall (Scheduled Monument)*



*Jumbo Water Tower (Grade II\*)*



*Church of St Mary at the Walls (Grade II)*



*Hole in the Wall Public House (Grade II)*



*No.3 Church Street (Grade II)*



*No.6 Church Street (Grade II)*



*No.8 Church Street (Grade II)*



## 2 UNDERSTANDING

### 2.3.2 WIDER SETTING

The site is located in the centre of Colchester, adjacent to the remains of the Roman Town Wall and the Balcerne Gate. The wall forms the western boundary of the site, and on the remaining sides, it is enclosed by the roads Balcerne Gate, Balcerne Gardens and Church Street.

To the west of the site, the A134 runs on a north-south axis, adjacent to the Roman wall, at a lower ground level. A pedestrian footbridge level with the Balcerne Gate spans the dual carriageway.

To the north lies a sheltered accommodation development whilst beyond to the north-east are offices and restaurants along Balcerne Passage, which leads off North Hill, one of the main historic thoroughfares in the town. Similarly to the east and south-east are shops and cafes along Church Street together with a clubhouse that occupies a small building west of 3 Church Street. The rear of the cinema building can be seen to the south-east.

The Colchester Arts Centre occupies the former church whilst No.6 Church Street is now a Quaker Meeting House. The graveyard lies to the south of the former church.



*Church Street*



*A134 Looking south along the Roman Wall*



*View through the Balcerne Gate towards Jumbo*





*Looking west along Balcerne Gate, showing the residential development lining the north of the road*



*Looking south down Balcerne Gardens, from under the shadow of Jumbo*



*Southern end of Balcerne Gardens*

# 2 UNDERSTANDING

## 2.4 KEY VIEWS

VIEW PLAN

1

View Point

→

View Direction



Plan showing location of the views photographs (Base map © 2016 Infoterra Ltd & Bluesky)





View 1: Looking North-East Towards the Roman Wall from the End of Crouch Street

This view from the pedestrian crossing at the east end of Crouch Street shows a clear delineation between the Roman town with the medieval church tower visible and the modern road and housing development to the south and west. Due to both the Roman wall and the mature trees planted along its length, very little of the site is visible. The church tower of St Mary at the Walls dominates as the view as the tallest structure.



View 2: Looking South-East from the Pedestrian Footbridge

The pedestrian footbridge is well-used and the elevated position gives a clear view towards the site. The three most prominent components of the site are visible: Jumbo, the Theatre, and the Church. However, the planting of mature trees just inside the Roman wall obscures much of the Theatre during the summer months. The Balkerne Gate is framed in the foreground, and the Roman wall is clearly expressed.

Note: the pedestrian footbridge is currently being replaced, hence the construction materials evident in the view.

## 2 UNDERSTANDING



View 3: Looking East Through the Balcerne Gate

The view through the Balcerne Gate frames Jumbo and the statue of Mercury in an attractive view that minimises the visibility of the modern housing and the street furniture that clutters other views. The planting at the base of the theatre also makes a positive contribution to the overall appearance of the site. However, most pedestrians tend to walk through the adjacent part of the Gate and therefore would see a more open view of the site. (This was obscured by workmen at the time of visiting.)



View 4: Looking South-West Towards the Theatre from the North-West near Jumbo

This view from the pavement north of the Jumbo Water Tower is used by pedestrians from North Hill through to pedestrian footbridge. The heritage assets are not visible though Jumbo looms just out of shot to the left and the Balcerne Gate and the Hole in the Wall pub to the right. The view of the Theatre itself is partially screened by trees whilst there is a profusion of bollards that define the road.





View 5: Looking North-West from the Corner of Church Street and Balcerne Gardens

This view is the point at which the area opens up from the narrow built up section of Church Street. The listed 8 Church Street frames the southern side of the view and obscures No.6 beyond. The rear of the theatre is glimpsed through the trees whilst the very ordinary Mercury House can be seen beyond.



## 2 UNDERSTANDING



View 6: Looking North-East from Church Street

Taken from the east churchyard gate, there is a greater sense of the historic layout of the area in this view. Although Jumbo and the Theatre can be glimpsed through the trees, the trees, walls, railings, gate piers and cobbles contribute to a sense of a calm, enclosed and higher quality space.



View 7: Looking South from the North-East Corner of the Theatre

The view from the Theatre south offers glimpsed views of the three listed buildings on Church Street, Nos. 3, 6 and 8. The view is marred by the cracked concrete paving, the profusion of parked cars and the unsympathetic road and paving materials with the pronounced double yellow lines.





View 8: Looking South from Jumbo Water Tower

This view is taken from where people use a cut-through across the grass. Whilst Nos. 6 Church Street and the church itself can be glimpsed through the trees, the arrangement of the road, the hedge and kick rail does not draw the eye towards these buildings.



View 9: Looking South to the Church Along the Wall

The view south towards the church has a much more restful quality than the landscaping on the east side of the Theatre. The Roman wall is visible on the right of the view whilst the church is visible as a focal point in winter when the leaves are not on the trees. The ivy-covered fence bounding the Mercury House garden is something of a barrier across the view.

## 2 UNDERSTANDING



View 10: Looking West Towards Balkerne Gate

The view towards the Balkerne Gate is not aided by the topography of the site which means that the gate sits lower than the surrounding ground and the Hole in the Wall pub is arguably more prominent. The eye is drawn to the two heritage assets as they are framed by the Theatre and modern housing.



### 3.1 ASSESSING SIGNIFICANCE

Significance can be defined as the sum of the cultural, social and/or natural heritage values that make a place important to this and future generations. Understanding the significance of a place is vital to inform sensitively managed change to ensure that the significance is maintained and, where possible, further revealed, reinforced and enhanced.

This assessment of significance has been based on a site visit, limited archival research and desk-based research. It considers the heritage values of the Mercury Theatre and former Rectory, the landscape within the site and briefly the heritage assets and other elements that form the setting of the site.

Where appropriate reference has been made to the different types of values identified in Historic England's *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance*. The relative contribution of the heritage values to the significance of the site are graded as either high, medium, low, neutral or detrimental.

Value	Definition
<i>High</i>	An aspect of value that strongly contributes to the significance of a place. These aspects may be important at a national or even international level. They will have high cultural value and will form an essential piece of the history and meaning of the place. In material terms, they will greatly contribute towards the heritage values. Conservation will be a priority, and alterations would require a defined and compelling need and general consensus and/or demonstration that significance will be considerably enhanced, reinforced or revealed as a result.
<i>Medium</i>	An aspect of value that will have some cultural importance and will make a modest contribution to the significance of a place. Efforts should be made to protect and enhance these aspects, though a greater degree of flexibility is possible than with aspects of high value.
<i>Low</i>	An aspect of value that will make a slight (yet noteworthy) contribution to the significance of a place. In material terms it will still add something to the heritage values, although this contribution may have been compromised by loss or uniformed interventions. A greater capacity for enhancement exists than for items of medium or high value, although a low designation does not necessarily mean that the feature is expendable and any material change is likely to require consent from the local authority.
<i>Neutral</i>	An aspect that has no discernible value that neither adds to nor detracts from the significance of the place. Informed change is likely to be acceptable.
<i>Detrimental</i>	An aspect of the place that detracts from its values and therefore its significance. In material terms, removal of these aspects should be strongly encouraged following the necessary consultation and consent procedures. These may be elements that have been added more recently or that have been carried out in a piecemeal way, which detracts from the integrity and completeness of the historic environment and are damaging to the fabric or wider significance.

## 3 SIGNIFICANCE

### 3.2 ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE VALUES

#### 3.2.1 THE MERCURY THEATRE AND ST MARY'S RECTORY

The Mercury Theatre was opened in 1972 having been constructed on the site of the late nineteenth century rectory of St Mary at the Walls. The site of the Mercury Theatre has little visible historical fabric associated with the Rectory except for the south wall and railings of the garden of Mercury House, and the gate pier, both of which probably date from the 1871 rebuilding of the Rectory.

The wall, railings and gate pier have medium illustrative value in recording the boundary of the lost Rectory. They have low aesthetic value deriving from their traditional materials and the detailing on each element. This contributes to the more historic character of the southern edge of the site and this is beneficial to the setting of the listed church especially and also to No.6 Church Street. The red brick of the wall and gate pier provides a subtle indicator of the historic connection between the church and the plot to the north; the Victorian rectory having been constructed at the same time as the church was rebuilt.

The original north side of the Mercury Theatre also has low aesthetic value with its distinctive angled frontage surmounted by the statue of Mercury. The remainder of the Theatre is of neutral aesthetic value.

Roman tessellated pavements and other finds were discovered when the 1871 rectory was constructed and given the site's proximity to the Roman wall, there is high potential for further Roman archaeology to exist. There is also Saxon archaeology that has been found in the vicinity of the church, suggesting this part of Colchester remained in use after the Roman period, and it is possible that there may be some Saxon archaeology surviving also. In addition, there is potential that the foundations of the earlier Rectory, which stood opposite the church, survive below the garden of Mercury House. The evidential value of the site is deemed to be high.

The Mercury Theatre is a popular cultural venue and as such has high communal value. The original northern end contributes positively to the Conservation Area, which also contributes to the building's communal value. The Victorian wall, railings and gate pier define a route from the West Postern towards North Hill that has a more historic character. They have low communal value.

#### 3.2.2 LANDSCAPE OF THE SITE

The bank landscape between the Theatre and the Roman wall contains several protected mature trees. This creates a pleasant green space which is only slightly marred by the concrete slab paved walkway by the Theatre. The trees probably related to the 1871 garden and have low illustrative value. The area has low aesthetic value.

The area to the north and east of the Theatre has a modern municipal character with numerous bollards, rails, bicycle racks and benches. The presence of parked cars, especially along the roadway adds to the cluttered effect. The current landscaping has no illustrative value and is of neutral aesthetic value.

The garden of Mercury House was defined in the 1960s but the deep overgrown areas around the west and south sides probably relate to the 1870s shrubbery of the Rectory garden. The illustrative value is low whilst the garden overall has neutral aesthetic value. The structures in it are of neutral value.

### 3.2.3 SETTING

This area of Colchester has a complex history and the buildings and structures that survive both testify to the layers of its historical development and some are notable Colchester landmarks. Besides being in the Colchester Town Conservation Area, the site has heritage assets to the north, east, south and west of it. These are all significant and whilst they reflect the changing use of the area, they do not form an especially harmonious group particularly with the modern road layout and street furniture.

The Balcerne Gate, which is Grade I listed, was the main entrance to the Roman town of Colchester and the site of the monumental arch that celebrated the establishment of the Roman town. The gate and the adjacent walls are the most visible and complete surviving part of the Roman wall that once enclosed Colchester and is of very high significance. The Roman wall has provided a constant boundary to the site for two millennia and, with the exception of the gate itself, is better viewed from the west than from the site.

The Jumbo Water Tower is the largest remaining Victorian water tower in Britain and is Grade II\* listed. It is a highly visible landmark that can be seen from across the town. Apart from a small shed with historic doors, Jumbo is entirely self-contained and is not integrated with the surrounding area.

To the south of the site, the red brick Victorian architecture of the former church of St Mary at the Walls has an aesthetic connection in terms of materials and, to a degree, style, with Jumbo. The medieval tower provides another tall built feature in the landscape whilst its combination of stone and brick forms an aesthetic intermediary between the Roman wall and the two red brick Victorian structures.

The three buildings on Church Street and the Hole in the Wall pub represent the development of the area in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Grade II listed buildings are significant individually but also contribute to an understanding of the area's development as a whole. With the exception of No.6, however, these listed buildings do not have a front façade directly bounding the site.

There are some high quality historic elements to the streetscape to the south including the locally listed gates of the churchyard, the locally listed gate piers and railings of No.6 Church Street, the cobbles to the gateway of No.6 and the churchyard (west side) and the cast iron Victorian street lamps. These contribute to the historic character of the area north of the church and No.6.

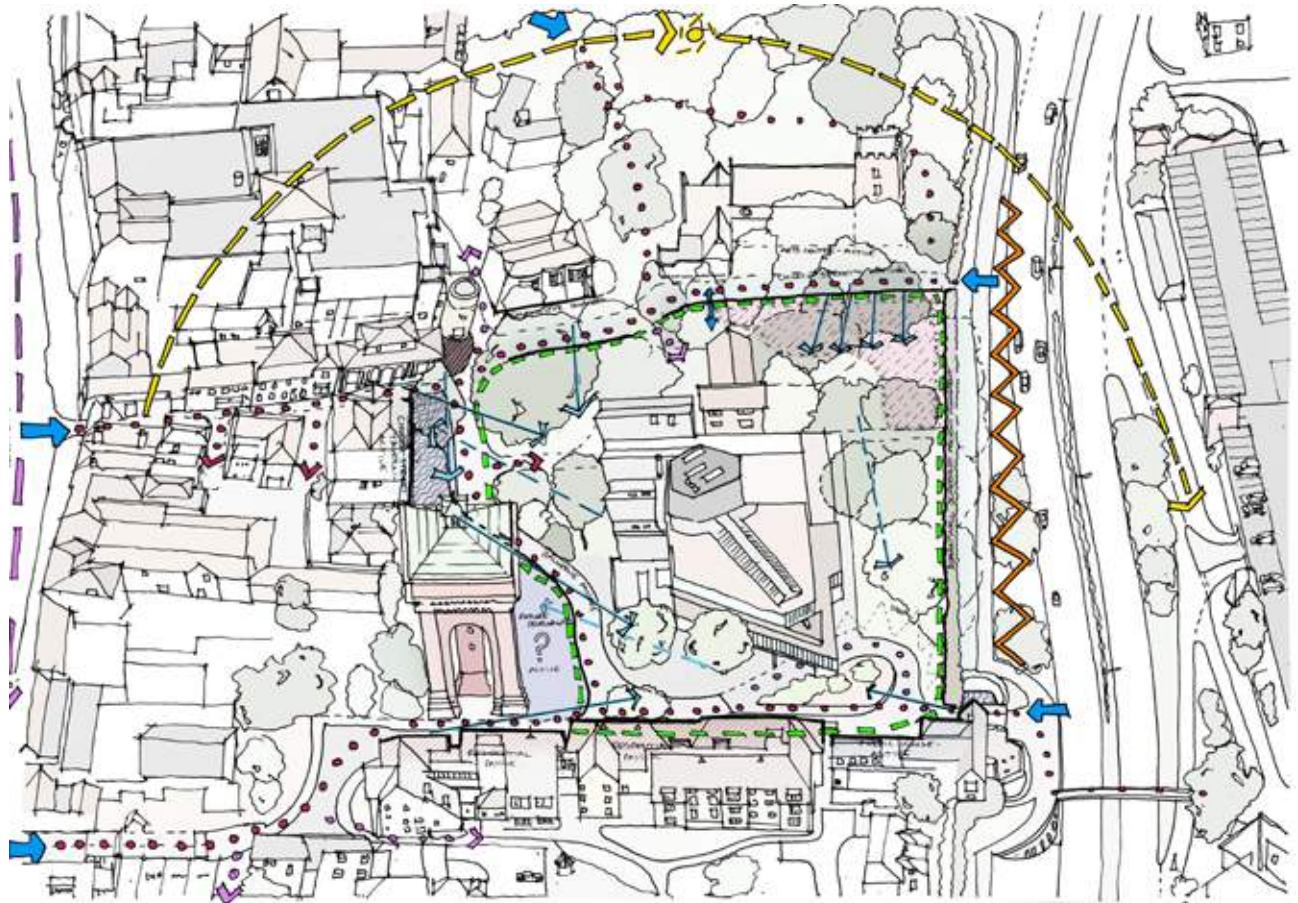
However, the area west of No. 8 Church Street and the rear of the cinema building detracts from the historic character of the area and the setting of both Nos. 6 and 8 Church Street.

## 4 SITE ANALYSIS

### 4.1 OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

The site is described in Section 2.2 of this document. The physical and social opportunities and constraints of the site and its context are listed below and illustrated in the adjacent aerial sketch:

- Site boundary;
- Pedestrian access and circulation;
- Vehicular movement and access;
- Diurnal sunpath
- Noise and acoustics
- Existing trees and soft landscaping, particularly tree preservation orders and protected assets;
- Site and building entrances;
- Active and passive facades;
- Key views across, in and out of the space.



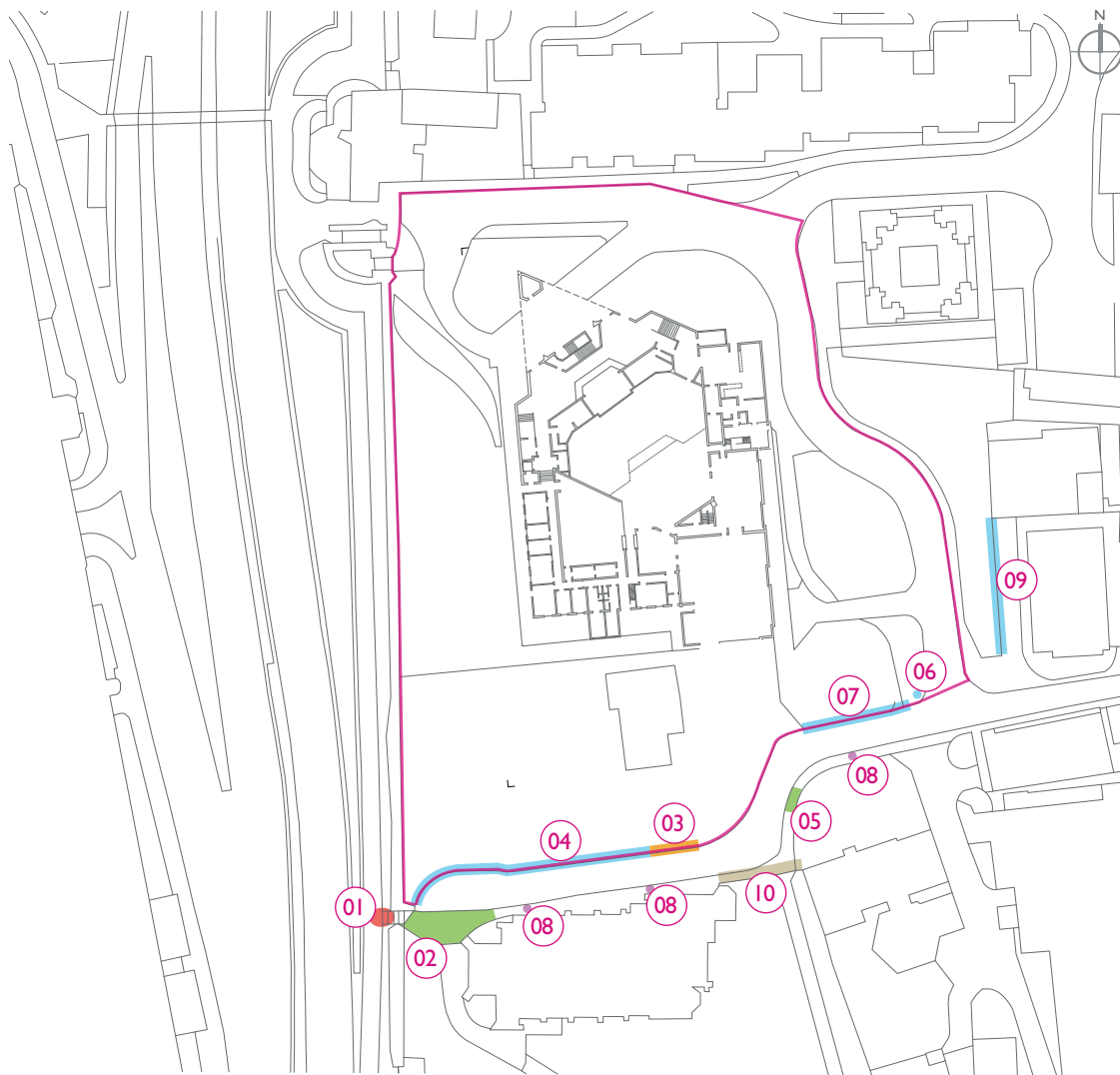
## 4.2 HISTORIC FEATURES

Aside from the designated scheduled monument and listed buildings, the surviving historic features around the site are concentrated to the south.

### HISTORIC FEATURES

□ Site Boundary

- 01 Historic steps (in a poor condition)
- 02 Area of historic cobbles
- 03 Blocked historic gate
- 04 Locally listed 1870s brick wall and railings
- 05 Cobbles and locally listed 20th century gate piers
- 06 1870s gate pier
- 07 Lower part of wall contains historic fabric
- 08 Historic lamp post
- 09 Historic brick wall
- 10 Gate and railings





## 4 SITE ANALYSIS



*Historic steps through the Roman wall*



*Historic cobbles and gate piers to the west of the church*



*1870s wall to south of Mercury House garden*



*Blocked gate to the south of Mercury House*





*Historic cobbles and twentieth century gate piers west of No.6 Church Street*



*Surviving 1870s gate pier*



*Lower part of wall is 1870s*



*Detail of the cast iron lamppost base*



*Historic wall to east of the site*



*Gates and railings east of the church*

## 4 SITE ANALYSIS

### 4.3 HERITAGE CONSIDERATIONS

The site is bounded by a number of heritage assets of national and local significance and any changes to the landscape should be developed to preserve and enhance the significance of these. The items below set out the heritage considerations in more detail. They are based on the information currently available and may be subject to alteration or expansion in the future.

#### SCHEDULED MONUMENT

- Any landscape works should preserve the visibility of the Roman wall and Balcerne Gate.
- Built structures against the wall should be avoided.
- There should be no additions or removals to the scheduled monument.

#### LISTED BUILDINGS

- Any landscape works should provide an appropriate setting for the listed buildings.
- Works should be carried out using high quality materials to ensure a suitable setting for the listed buildings.
- Existing historic features, such as railings, cobbles, gate piers and walls that form part of the setting of the listed buildings should be preserved in situ.
- It is desirable that the locally listed wall and railings to the south of Mercury House should be preserved. Where sections of wall have been replaced, the historic line of the old Rectory garden boundary should remain demarcated.

#### LANDSCAPE

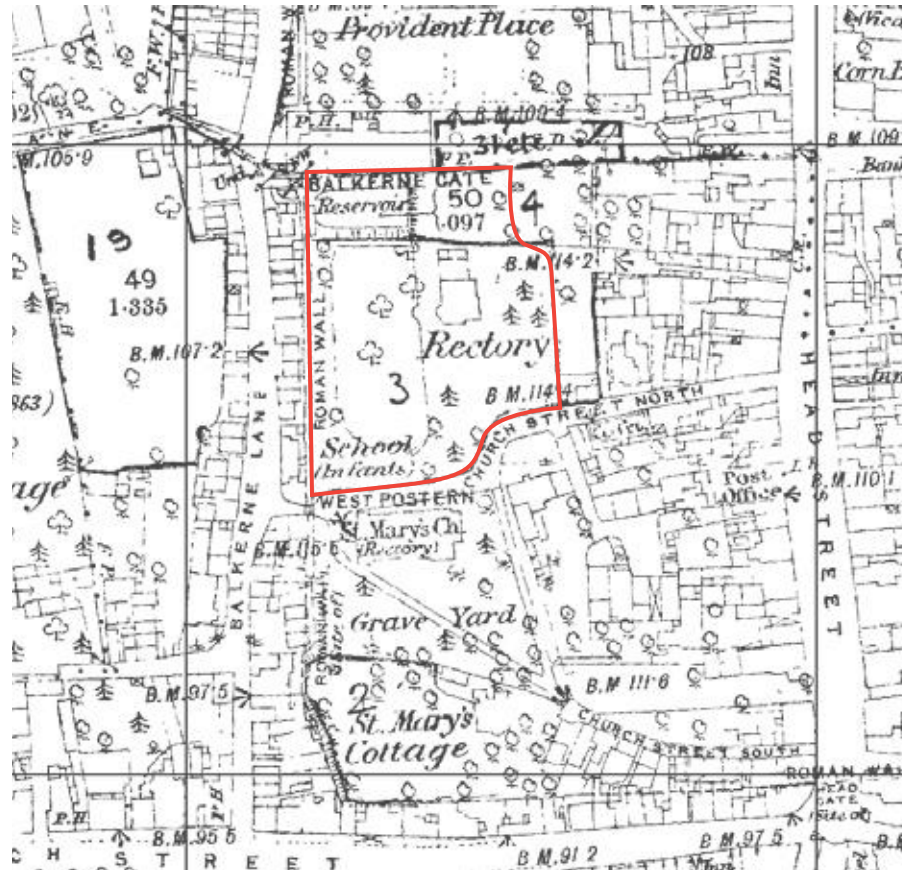
- Car parking in the area should be discouraged through the design of the landscaping or, where necessary for the Theatre, concealed as far as possible.
- It is desirable that the mature trees along the west side of the site and the holm oak in the centre should be preserved as they survive from the earlier Rectory garden.
- It is desirable that the landscaping incorporates significant areas of lawn as historically this area was a predominantly green open space, albeit a private one.
- Where possible, the landscaping should be designed to enhance appreciation of the original part of the Mercury Theatre building.



## 5.1 HISTORIC INTERPRETATION

The historic research has provided opportunities for references that may inspire or define the design proposals. These might include:

- The historic presence of a reservoir as inspiration for the use of water or a water feature in the proposals;
- The Roman wall and associated roadways and paths that may be identified in paving patterns or undulations in surface treatment;
- The locations of the rectory and how this has changed over time;
- The geometric formal garden to the rectory indicated on the map from 1748;
- The geometric lines of the orchard planting shown on the 1777;
- The historic presence of a bowling green as a reference for recreational use.



Detail from the 1876 OS map with the approximate site boundary shown in red (Ordnance Survey © Crown Copyright 2017. All rights reserved. Licence number 100020449)

## 5 DESIGN APPROACH

### 5.2 SITE RESPONSE

The site analysis raised a series of opportunities and constraints that the proposals must respond to. These might include:

- **Vehicular Movement:** The provision of servicing access to the Hole in the Wall public house, Arts Centre, Theatre and possible future use of Jumbo Water Tower must be considered and provided for. In addition, the access for cars to the theatre and disabled parking must be addressed. The current use of cars is divisive within the landscape and so a 'Shared Space' approach would provide a solution.
- **Sunpath:** Specific areas of the site enjoy sun throughout the day; naturally those wishing to sit outside choose to sit in these warmer areas and so seating (be it informal or formal) should be provided.
- **Views:** Views across the space are important and the proposals should create a sense of arrival, carefully articulating and framing views. Views out of the space are also important, perhaps most significantly the view from above the Roman wall looking across the St Mary's part the town, the Roman history of which is well documented. Such a viewing point would allow digital or phisical displays of historic landscapes as well as current views.
- **Acoustics:** The Balkerne Hill roadway has a constant stream of traffic throughout much of the day, meaning traffic noise is evident along the west boundary of the site. Furthermore, given the presence of the the Arts Centre and the Theatre, there may be opportunities to allow sound, music and performance to spill out into the public realm.
- **Privacy:** Parsely House, to the north of the site must be carefully addressed to provide views out into the public realm, but to prevent the compromise of privacy for residents.



*Aerial photograph of the site from the south*



### 5.3 PRECEDENTS AND INSPIRATION

The identification of precedent examples have assisted in illustrating ideas and concepts that have been discussed with the client. These are as follows:



*Theatrical External Space: Tudor Square, Sheffield*



*Urban "Square"*

## 5 DESIGN APPROACH



*Geometric lines: Hard and soft Landscaping*



*Integrated seating*



*Seating and lighting*





*Shared space - Exhibition Road, London*



*Leonard Circus, Hackney*



*Vertical element within the space*

## 5 DESIGN APPROACH



*Application of colour*



*Imaginative lighting*



*Display of museum artefacts*





*Public art*



*Outdoor performance*



*Outdoor play*

## 5 DESIGN APPROACH



*Holographic projection*



*Outdoor cinema*



*Projection mapping*





*Private function space*



*Water feature to induce play*



*Water feature to induce play*

## 6 INITIAL DESIGNS

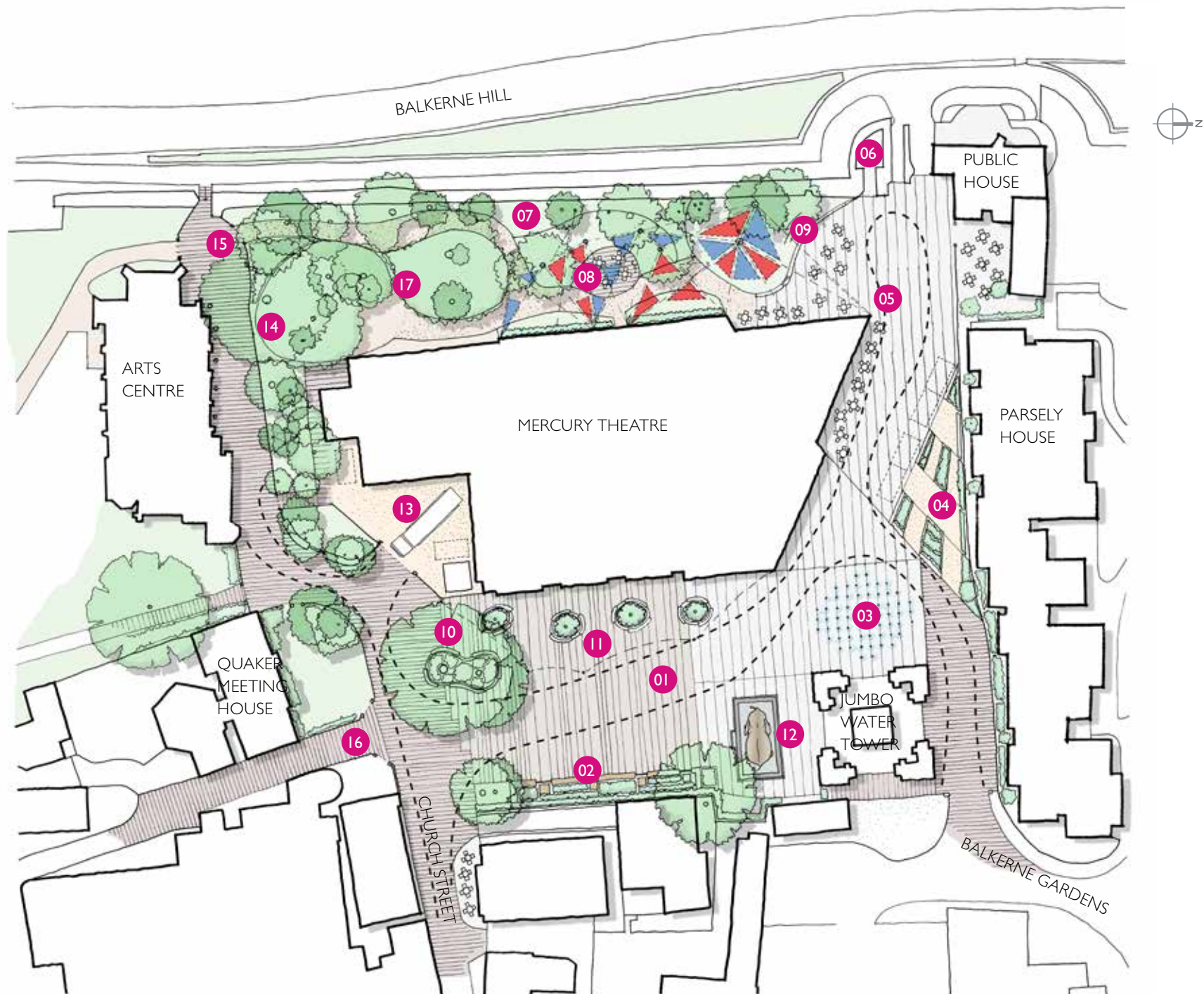
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### 6.1 MASTERPLAN

The following masterplan is an initial proposal illustrating the conceptual arrangement of functions within the public space that surrounds the Mercury Theatre and how the physical attributes of the space can accommodate these.

#### MASTERPLAN KEY

- 01 Formal shared space plaza
- 02 Interpretation/artefact seating (including listening benches) and planting
- 03 Water fountains within paving
- 04 Low-level planters and seating
- 05 Spill out seating from Theatre bar
- 06 Interpretation space within historic wall
- 07 Historic wall viewing point incorporating listening benches
- 08 Boardwalk meandering path beneath 'kite canopy'
- 09 Informal grass amphitheatre
- 10 Plinth seating beneath existing and new trees
- 11 Temporary tensile canopy at high level for market stalls and external performances
- 12 Public art
- 13 Theatre service yard
- 14 Existing tree belt thinned at low level
- 15 New gate formed at end of historic railings
- 16 Gated access to existing road and screen to restaurant service yard
- 17 Semi-private function area





## 6 INITIAL DESIGNS



*View from Church Street and southern fringe of the new formal plaza*



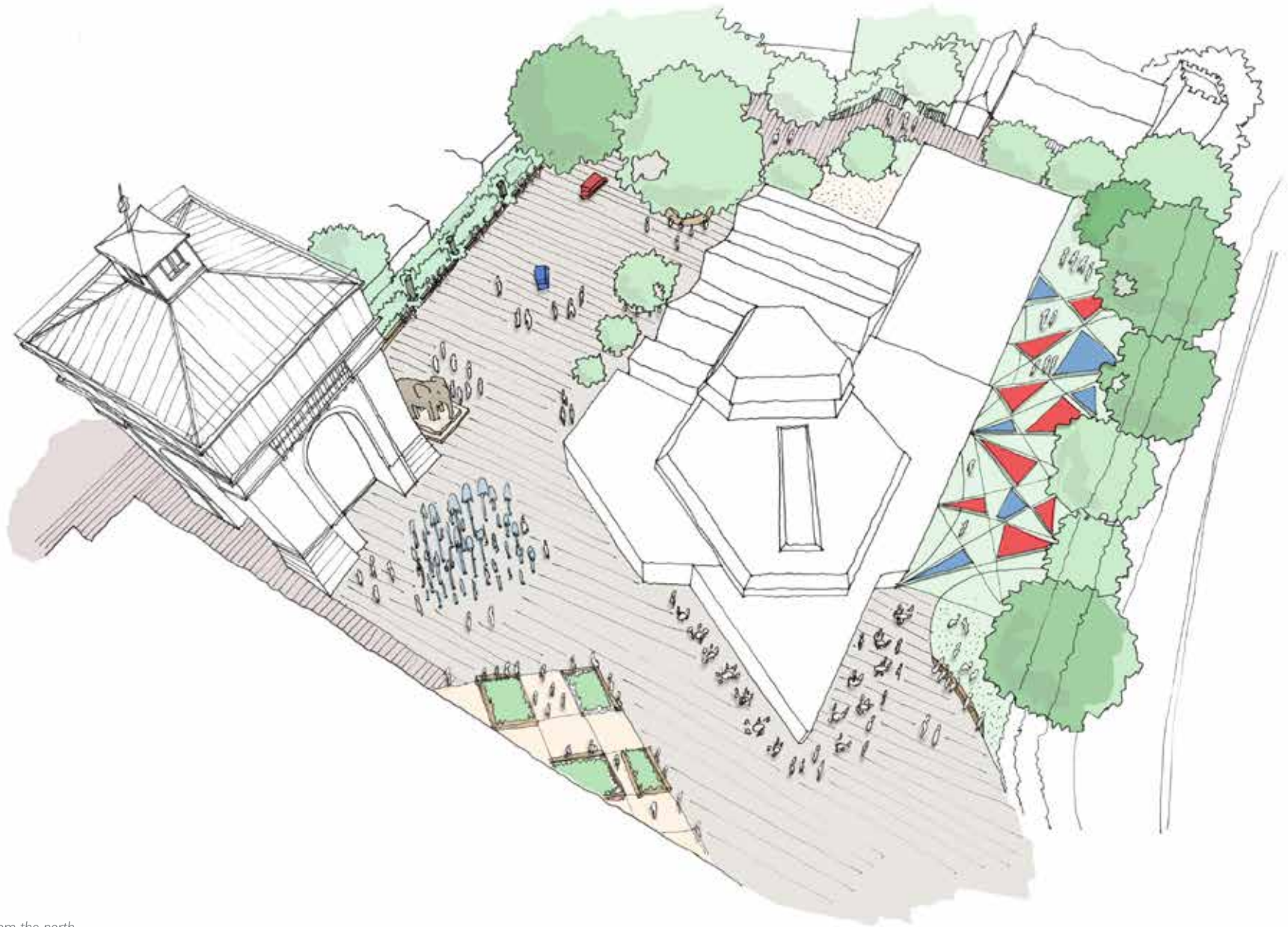


*View from Balterne Gate of the kite walkway and informal amphitheatre*

## 6 INITIAL DESIGNS



*View of the fountains in front of Jumbo and the Theatre*



Aerial view from the north

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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### GENERAL SOURCES

Cooper, Janet and C.R Elrington (ed.), *A History of the County of Essex, Volume 9: the Borough of Colchester* (1994)

Goss, Alice, 'St Mary at the Walls Church: a Brief History', *Colchester Arts Centre Website*

Martin, G.H. 'Philip Morant', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

Morant, Philip, *History and Antiquities of Colchester* (1748)

'Colchester, St Mary at the Walls', *Britain Express*

'History of Jumbo Water Tower', *Save Jumbo Website*

### ARCHIVAL SOURCES

Unless otherwise stated, all archival references are for Essex Record Office (ERO).

D/B 5 CrI00 Court Roll, 22-23 Henry VIII (1530-1531)

D/P 246/ 3/ 14 Plan: Coloured plan of house with yards, gardens and adjoining piece of land belonging to the rectory of St Mary at the Walls (1837)

D/P 246/ 3/ 17 Plans, elevations and sections of proposed new parsonage house, prepared by Frederick Chancellor (1871)

D/P 246/ 3/ 21 Counterpart mortgage of benefice to Queen Anne's Bounty to secure loan for improvements to parsonage house. (1933)

D/P 246/ 6/ 14 Postcard from J.W Irvine, former rector, concerning marble font placed in rectory garden.

D/P 246/ 3/ 27/ 2 Tithe Map, Parish of St Mary at the Walls (1846)

Q/RTh 5 Hearth Tax Assessment (1671)

## APPENDIX: LISTED BUILDING DESCRIPTIONS

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### THE BALKERNE GATE

List entry Number: 1123668

Location THE BALKERNE GATE, BALKERNE LANE

Grade: I

Date first listed: 24-Feb-1950

Details

I. BALKERNE LANE 995 (East Side) ----- The Balcerne Gate  
TL 9925 SW 4/2 24.2.50.

I

2. Probably of C2 date, rather earlier than the walls themselves. The ruin of the only remaining Roman gateway in the town wall. It is a remarkable monument and the best preserved of any Roman gateway in the country. It is also the largest, - 107 ft wide with 2 carriageways and 2 footways. It has been over-built by the Hole-in-the-wall Public House, but the north tower still stands 20 ft high and the arches of the south footway are 13 ft. A.M.

Listing NGR: TL9923625186

### MUNICIPAL WATER TOWER (JUMBO)

List entry Number: 1123669

Location MUNICIPAL WATER TOWER (JUMBO), BALKERNE PASSAGE

Grade: II\*

Date first listed: 02-Dec-1971

Details

584/4/424 BALKERNE PASSAGE 02-DEC-1971 Municipal Water Tower (Jumbo)

II\*

Water Tower. Dated 1882 and opened 1883. Charles Clegg C.E. Borough Surveyor and Engineer. Red Brick with iron water tank. Approx. 110 feet high in Romanesque Revival 'Campanile' style. Square plan. 4 corner piers with flared coursed bases and corner pilasters with coved capitals. Piers have flying buttresses and pipes to the inside. Connecting each pier is a tall rounded arch (approx. 70 feet high) with moulded architrave. Above these, a course of brackets link the pilaster capitals, above which a second course of brackets are directly below the cast iron water tank. Copper pyramid roof capped by lantern and weather vane. Decorative cast

iron spiral stair in roof. Central service pier with flared coursed base. Arched entrance to service tower with deep moulded terra cotta surround. Above this, a terra cotta plaque that reads 'WATER TOWER 1882'. Small arched openings to each storey of core tower, blind to north and south and open to east and west. Stone dedication plaque reads 'BALKAN WATER TOWER This edifice was dedicated to the public use on the 27th date of September 1883'. HISTORY: The Balcerne Water Tower, commonly known as 'Jumbo,' was built on a site adjacent to the early-C19 reservoir. In 1882 the town waterworks were taken over by the Corporation who built the Water Tower that was opened in 1883. Construction required 1.25 million bricks and 142 tons of iron to support the tank that can hold 230,000 gallons of water. It was decommissioned in the 1980s and permission had been granted for a residential conversion scheme at the time of reassessment (2003). SOURCES: Crosby, Tony. The Public Water Supply in Essex 1850-1939. Essex County Council, 1999.

A monumental water tower of 1883 in a Romanesque Revival style that references the Grade I Roman ruins at its feet.

Listing NGR: TL9932125182

## APPENDIX: LISTED BUILDING DESCRIPTIONS

### HOLE IN THE WALL PUBLIC HOUSE

List entry Number: 1337683

Location HOLE IN THE WALL PUBLIC HOUSE, BALKERNE LANE

Grade: II

Date first listed: 02-Dec-1971

Details

1. BALKERNE LANE LANE 995 (East Side) ----- Hole-in-the-Wall Public House TL 9925 SW 4/423

II

2. Built over the north carriageway of the Roman Balcerne Gate. C18, altered later. Rendered and colourwashed. 2 storeys. Mostly mid C19 sashes, but some glazing bars. Oriel bay window on north gable end. Tiled roof. Structurally connected with visible remains of Roman Town Wall.

Listing NGR: TL9924125202

### 3, CHURCH STREET

List entry Number: 1337685

Location 3, CHURCH STREET

Grade: II

Date first listed: 25-Mar-1968

Details

1. CHURCH STREET 995 (North Side) ----- No 3 (formerly listed as Nos 3 & 4) TL 9925 SW 4/13 25.5.68.

II

2. Early C19 red brick house with grey gault brick front, the ground floor stuccoed. The centre front breaks forward with a gable and pediment. Ground floor has windows and doorways with arched heads. 3-window range, 2 storeys, the roofs of slates.

Listing NGR: TL9934325139

### 8, CHURCH STREET

List entry Number: 1307057

Location 8, CHURCH STREET

Grade: II

Date first listed: 02-Dec-1971

Details

1. CHURCH STREET 995 (South Side) ----- No 8 TL 9925 SW 4/14

II

2. Formerly the District Registry of High Court of Justice. Early C19 plastered brick with a ground floor tetrastyle portico the length of the front, the end bays with flat pilasters, 4 window range, double hung sashes with glazing bars, the 2 centre windows with arched heads. Stone cornice with modillions. Slate roof.

Listing NGR: TL9934225107



## APPENDIX: LISTED BUILDING DESCRIPTIONS

### ST MARY'S HOUSE

List entry Number: 1123678

Location ST MARY'S HOUSE, 6, CHURCH STREET

Grade: II

Date first listed: 19-Feb-1959

Details

1. CHURCH STREET 995 (South Side) ----- No 6 (St Mary's House) TL 9925 SW 4/15 19.2.59.

II

2. Late C18 brick house, 2 storeys, the roofs of tiles and slates. Grey gault brick front, centre breaking forward slightly with ramped parapet, 2 storeyed shallow bow windows either side. 3 window range of double hung sashes with glazing bars. The rear wing is timber framed and plastered and has 2 hipped dormers on the west. Rain water head on west wall with initials end date WM 1802, on the east side is a one bay extension.

Listing NGR: TL9931225090

### ST MARY'S ART CENTRE

List entry Number: 1168281

Location ST MARY'S ART CENTRE, CHURCH STREET

Grade: II

Date first listed: 24-Feb-1950

Details

1. CHURCH STREET' 995 (south side) ----- Church of St Mary-at-the TL 9925 SW 4/16 24.2.50 Wall

B

the item shall be amended to read: -

CHURCH STREET (south side) ----- TL 9925 SW 4/16 4.2.50. St Mary's Arts Centre II

2. The mediaeval church was ruined in the Siege of Colchester 1648 and rebuilt 1713-14, with the exception of the late C15 west tower. This had a new embattled stage added to it in 1729. In 1872 the nave and chancel were rebuilt to the designs of Sir Arthur Bloomfield. In the tower is a marble monument to John Rebow 1699.

Listing NGR: TL9927325075



