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Conflict and culture

A self-guided walk around Colchester



Journey through Colchester's 2,000 year history
Follow in the footsteps of Roman soldiers
Explore impressive buildings and surprising features
Enjoy Colchester's vibrant arts scene

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the stories of our landscapes
discovered through walks







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Conflict and culture

Journey through Colchester's 2,000-year history

Colchester in Essex is Britain's oldest recorded town and has a fascinating history as a multicultural settlement.

Discover a legacy of rulers from Belgium, Italy, Germany and Denmark. Find out about other people who left their mark on the town including the Normans, the Flemish and a man who made millions in Mexico.

Also explore Colchester's proud identity as a military town and discover a vibrant arts scene, both of which give Colchester worldwide connections.

Discover some impressive buildings and structures including a restored castle and a ruined priory, a very old wall and a grand town hall, a travellers' inn and a soldiers' canteen, mansions of the wealthy and cottages of the poor, a jumbo brick tower and a golden banana. Be prepared for some surprises!

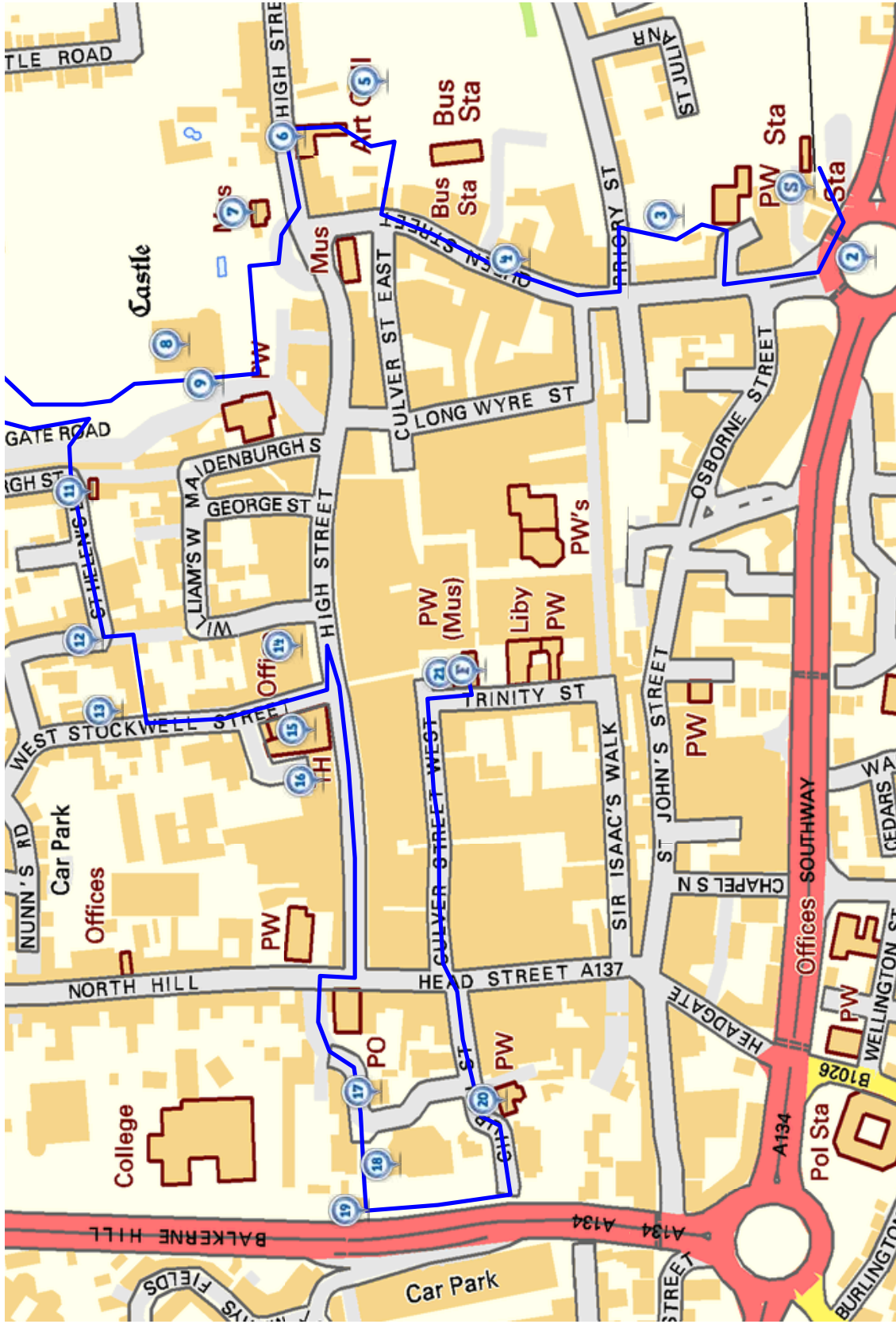


Roman walls are evidence of Colchester's military past
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



Firstsite Gallery reflects the town's contemporary culture
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Route overview



Practical information

Location	Colchester, Essex
Getting there	<p>Train - Colchester has 2 stations. The walk starts from Colchester Town on the southern side of the town centre. Colchester North is the through station with services from London Liverpool Street, Norwich, Ipswich and Chelmsford.</p> <p>Bus - The nearest stop to the walk is at Colchester Town railway station, which is served by many local bus routes.</p> <p>Car - Access via the A12 from Chelmsford, the A120 between Braintree and Harwich and the M25. Plenty of parking in Colchester town centre including on Osborne Street by St Botolph's Circus (near Stop 1 of the walk).</p> <p>Bicycle - Colchester is on National Cycle Route Number 1 (to Harwich) and Number 51 (to Oxford via Ipswich, Cambridge and Milton Keynes).</p>
Start point	Colchester Town railway station, CO2 7EF
Directions from railway station to the walk start	<p>From Colchester North railway station there are many buses that run to the town centre. Alternatively it is about 20 minutes walk between stations.</p> <p>If walking take the first right at the roundabout outside the station and go under the railway bridge. Continue along this road up to a second roundabout and turn onto North Station Road. Continue for about 1 kilometre until you reach Southway. Turn left and continue onto St Botolph's roundabout.</p>
Finish point	Holy Trinity Church, CO1 1JN
Onward journey	To return to Colchester Town station see Directions 22.
Distance	1 ½ miles
Level	Gentle - A fairly flat town centre route

Conditions

The route is along pavements and paved footpaths. The town centre can be busy at weekends. Be careful of traffic when crossing main roads.

Suitable for

Families - Exciting sights for children including the castle and the Roman remains.

Wheelchairs and pushchairs - step-free if using the alternative directions provided

Refreshments

There are plenty of places to eat in the town centre. Cafés along the route at the Firstsite Gallery (Stop 5), The Minories (Stop 6) and Holy Trinity Church (Stop 21)

Toilets

Public toilets are available in the galleries and Castle Park (Stop 9).

Places to visit

Firstsite Gallery is open Tuesdays to Saturdays 10am to 5pm. Closed Mondays except Bank Holidays. Free entry. Tel: 01206 577067

The Minories gallery and Garden Cafe are run by Colchester School of Art. Free entry. Tel: 01206 712437

Colchester Zoo is open daily from 9.30am, closing times vary throughout the year. Admission charges £19.99 adults, £13.50 children, £17.50 seniors, £9.99 disabled or carers. Tel: 01206 331292

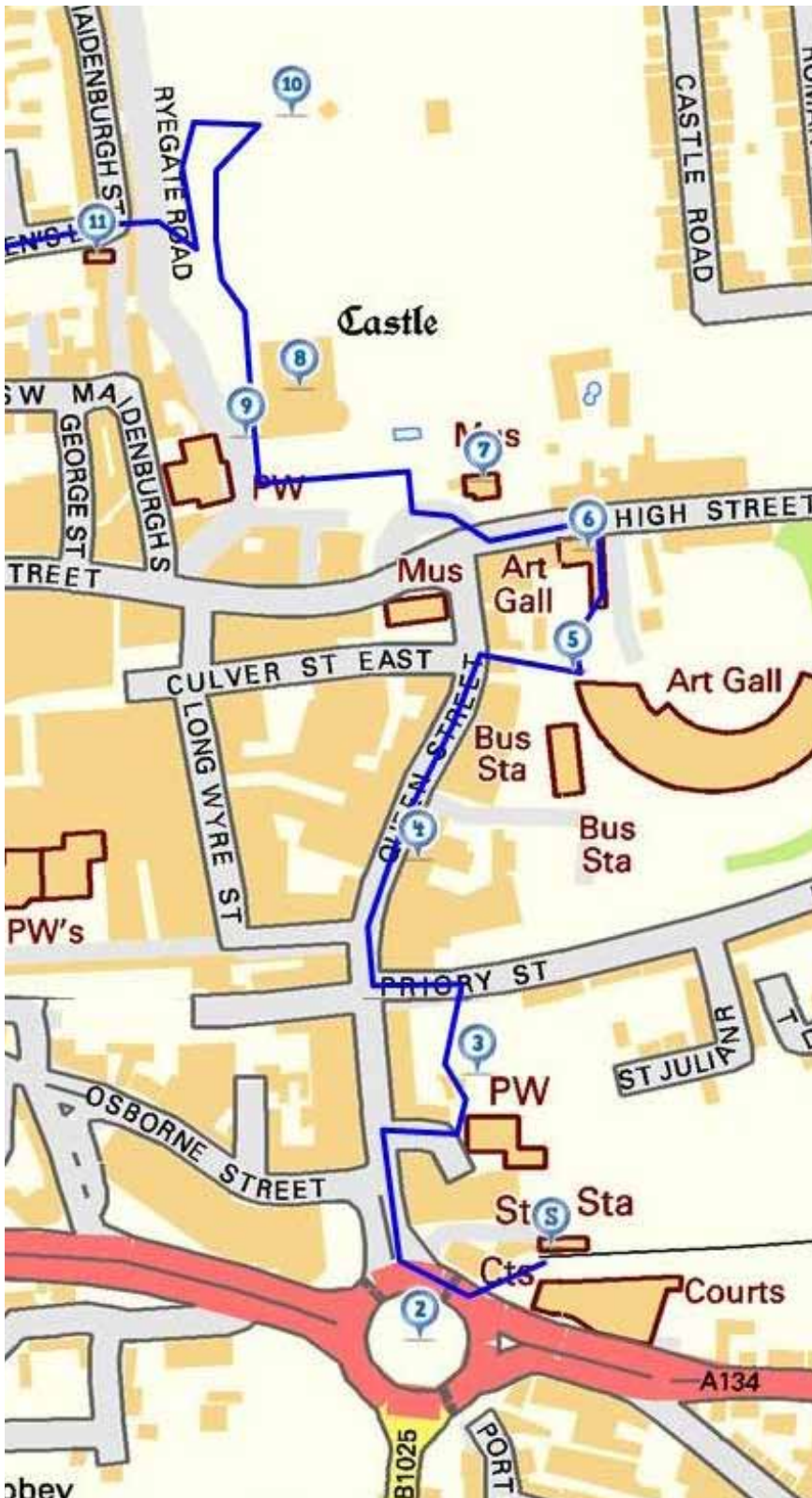
Other info

Colchester Oyster Festival takes place annually in Castle Park each autumn. **The Oyster Feast** takes place on the last Friday of October at the Moot Hall.

Tourist information

Colchester Visitor Information Centre is located at 1 Queen Street, directly across the road from the Hollytrees Museum (Stop 7). Open Mondays to Saturdays from 9.30am. Tel: 01206 282920

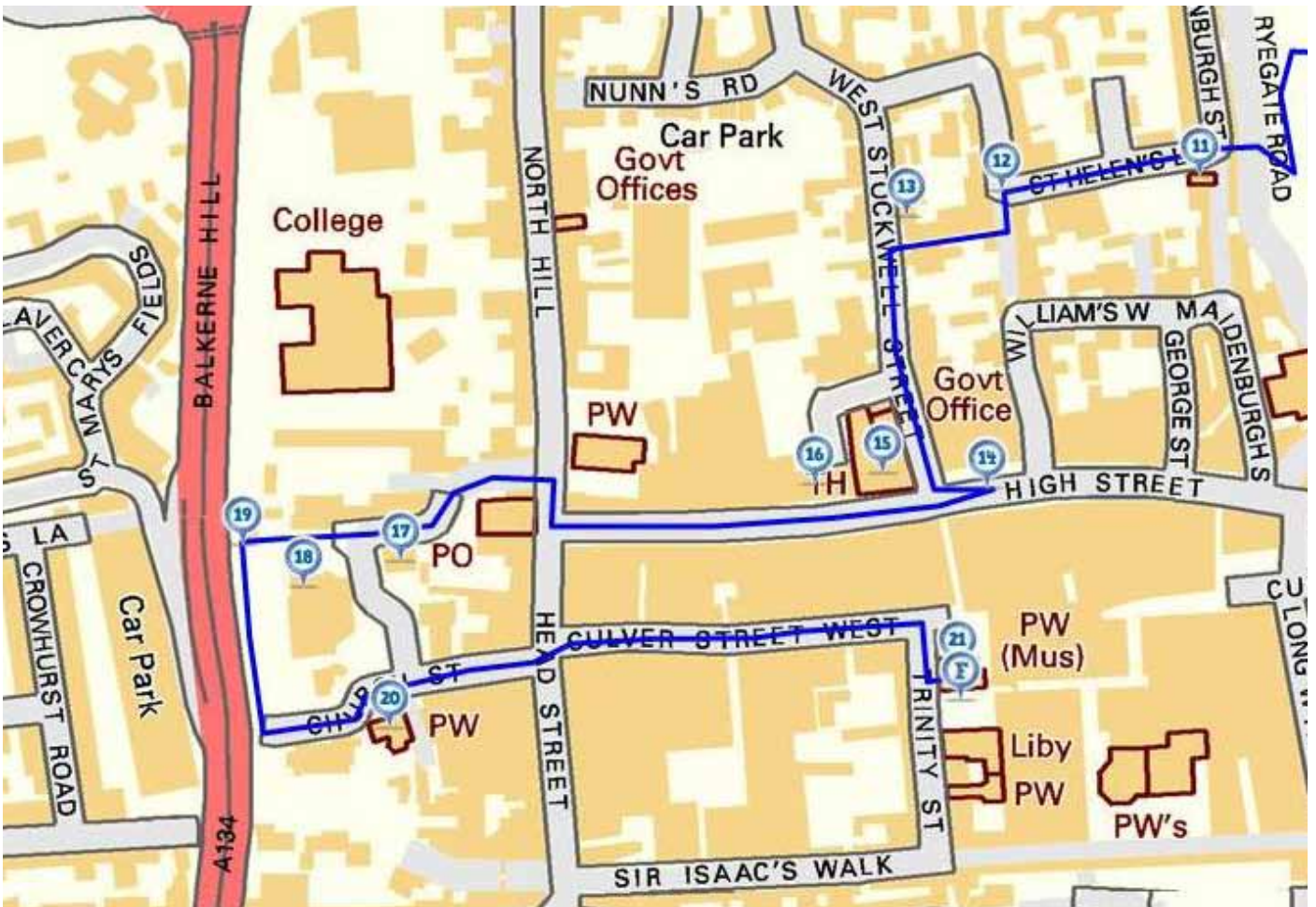
Detail for the first half of the route



Stopping points

1. Colchester Town railway station
2. St Botolph's Circus
3. St Botolph's Church and Priory
4. 37 Queen Street
5. Firstsite Gallery
6. Minories Art Gallery
7. Hollytrees House
8. Colchester Castle
9. Cowdray plaque, Castle Park
10. Roman townhouses, Castle Park
11. St Helen's Chapel

Detail for the second half of the route



Stopping points

- 12.** Corner of St Helen's Lane and East Stockwell Street
- 13.** Twinkle House, 11 and 12 West Stockwell Street
- 14.** The Hippodrome
- 15.** Colchester Town Hall
- 16.** Site of The Three Cups, 138 High Street
- 17.** Jumbo Water Tower
- 18.** Mercury Theatre
- 19.** The Balkerne Gate
- 20.** St Mary at the Walls Church (Colchester Arts Centre)
- 21.** Holy Trinity Church
- F.** Holy Trinity Church

1. Welcome to Colchester

Colchester Town railway station

Welcome to Colchester! Did you know that Colchester is Britain's oldest recorded town? For centuries it has been one of the most multicultural settlements in the world.

Two thousand years ago Colchester was ruled by a Celtic king of Belgian origin called Cunobelin – the Cymbeline made famous by William Shakespeare. Following their conquest of Britain, the Romans made Camulodunum – as Colchester was then known – their capital in AD 43.

Three hundred years later, the Saxons from Germany then the Danes made Colchester their home. Since then the international trend has continued with the Normans – who left their mark in the form of a spectacular castle – then Flemish weavers from Holland made the town famous for its cloth trade.



Colchester through the centuries - a Victorian water tower and 1960s theatre seen through a Roman gateway
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Colchester is also famous as a military town. A garrison was established here during the Napoleonic Wars and this became home to soldiers from all over the world. Today 16 Air Assault Brigade is based in the town comprising, among other units, the second and third battalions of the Parachute Regiment.

The town's international make-up is further enhanced by the students and more than 2,500 staff that work at Essex University, whose campus is located just outside the town.

This walk was created by local writer Neil D'Arcy Jones. **Neil:** I've lived in Colchester all my life. I created this walk so people could discover what a great place Colchester is. This walk is a journey through the conflict of the past and the culture of the present. I hope that you enjoy it!

Directions 1

Colchester Town railway station is located just off St Botolph's Circus, a busy roundabout. Stand in a safe place beside the roundabout.

2. A man on a mission

St Botolph's Circus

This area of Colchester is called St Botolph's, named after Botwulf of Thorney, a seventh century Anglo Saxon abbot who spent most of his life travelling around Western Europe preaching Christianity to pagan tribes. For that reason, he is known as the patron saint of travellers (along with St Christopher and many other saints). He is also the patron saint of farming, which is quite appropriate here in East Anglia.

He died in the Suffolk village of Iken about 680 AD. Years later, his remains were transferred to the abbey at Bury St Edmunds on the instructions of King Canute, who was then king of England, Denmark, Norway and parts of Sweden. The remains were later moved to Westminster Abbey in London.

More than 70 churches are dedicated to St Botolph, including four in London. The town of Boston in Lincolnshire is named after him ('Boston' stems from 'Botwulf's Town'), as is Boston in America, where there is a St Botolph's Street as well as a private club and a House at Boston College named after him.



St Botolph
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)



St Botolph's Street road sign
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 2

From St Botolph's Circus, go up St Botolph's Street, which is the road between the entrance to the station car park on the right hand side and a multi-storey car park on the left. After less than 50 metres, turn right into a narrow lane with a church at the end. Go around the left side of the church to the open ground between the church and the priory ruins.

3. Monks, bombs and musicians

St Botolph's Church and Priory

Our story of Colchester is one of conflict and culture. St Botolph's Church has experienced both over the years. To the left are the ruins of St Botolph's Priory and the present church stands where the kitchen and the refectory of the old priory would have been. Recent excavations have also revealed that a Roman house once stood next to the site.

The priory was granted its charter by William II in about 1100 and was the first House of the Augustinian Order of monks in England. When King Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries in 1536, the priory was partly demolished. Further damage occurred during the Siege of Colchester of 1648 (but more of that later).



The ruins of St Botolph's Priory
© Josie Campbell, Geograph (CCL)

The present church was built in the Victorian era, with the East Windows coming from Flanders in Belgium. It narrowly escaped destruction during the Second World War. An incendiary bomb scored a direct hit on the church in 1943. Fortunately it fell on a radiator and the escaping water extinguished the fire.

In recent years the church has become the home for the town's large classical music scene with soloists from all over the world performing here, including the German soprano Daniela Bechly and the Japanese pianist Noriko Ogawa.

Directions 3

Do take time to explore the priory ruins and look at the information boards. When you are ready, go through the small graveyard at the side of the priory and out of the gate. Turn left onto Priory Street and then right onto Queen Street. About 50 metres up Queen Street on the right hand side is Number 37, which is a red brick building. At the time of creating this walk it was a bar called TPs. Stop outside. You may prefer to stand on the opposite side of the road for a better view.

4. The 20th, the 12th and the 16th

37 Queen Street

This building opened in 1879 and used to be a soldiers' home and canteen. It is the perfect place to find out about Colchester's long history as a military town.

The Romans conquered Britain in AD 43 and established a garrison in Colchester. The Legio XX Valeria Victrix – the Twentieth Victorious Valerian Legion – was based here. This legion had made their name fighting in Germania (an area to the east of the Rhine and north of the Danube, covering present-day Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Poland), Hispania (present-day Spain and Portugal), and Illyricum (covering present-day Albania, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia).

In AD 60 the legion famously helped quell the rebellion led by Queen Boudicca after she had burnt Colchester to the ground. Later the legion was based at Chester and from there was involved in building Hadrian's Wall.

Fast forward several centuries and Colchester regained its military importance during the Napoleonic Wars, the series of wars between Napoleon's French Empire and coalitions of opponents including Britain. The first infantry barracks was built in 1794 and this grew over the next ten years to house more than 7,000 officers and men.



The Legio XX Valeria Victrix seal
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)



A parade on Abbey Field, Colchester (c.1898)
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Further expansion took place in the 1850s with the Crimean War, which was a conflict between the Russian Empire and an alliance of other empires including Britain, which mostly took place in the Crimea (present-day Ukraine).

During the First World War, Kitchener's 12th (Eastern Division) was organised in Colchester before it went to fight on the Western Front in Belgium and France.

Today, Colchester Garrison is home to 16 Air Assault Brigade, which has been posted to Iraq and Afghanistan in recent years, and recruits soldiers from all over the Commonwealth including nations such as Australia and New Zealand, Canada, India, African countries (such as South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Kenya and Ghana), Caribbean nations (such as Jamaica and St Vincent) and Pacific nations (such as Papua New Guinea and Fiji).



Part of a display of regimental insignia
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 4

Continue up Queen Street. Shortly before a church on the left hand side is a passageway on the right hand side. Go down this passageway towards a modern gold coloured building. Stop in the plaza outside.

5. The Golden Banana

Firstsite Art Gallery

The 'Golden Banana' is the affectionate name the people of Colchester have given the new £28 million Firstsite Art Gallery. Completed in 2011, it is one of the new group of art galleries which have recently been built in the UK to promote modern art in the regions.

The building itself was designed by the world-renowned Argentinian-born architect, Rafael Vinoly. Inside is a section of Roman floor mosaic dating from circa 200 AD. It was discovered by accident in 1923 when a gardener dug a hole to dump some weeds!



Detail from the Firstsite Gallery
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Also inside are exhibits of prestigious works from artists based all over the world. It is also, rather appropriately, one of the homes to Essex University's collection of modern Latin American art, Escala. The collection is now thought to be the best of its kind outside of Latin America with more than 745 artworks by 375 artists from 18 countries. It was established in 1993, following the donation of a work by Brazilian artist Siron Franco by a former student of Essex University.

Many of the works are on permanent display at the university's Wivenhoe Park campus, just outside the town, but following the opening of the Firstsite Gallery, various works are also exhibited in a special Escala-designated room.

Directions 5

The gallery is free, so do go inside if you are interested in the art collections or the building itself. Directly facing the Firstsite entrance is what looks like a red brick circular tower. To the left is a gate through a brick wall. If the gate is open, go through to the garden inside. If the gate is shut, go round the right hand side of the tower, follow the road to High Street. Stop immediately on the left by the entrance to The Minories.

6. A good impression

Minories Art Gallery

This is the Minories Art Gallery. This is where Firstsite used to be before it moved into its new home in the Golden Banana. This building is now home to the Colchester School of Art run by the Colchester Institute, which continues the long history of art and artists associated with the house.

It was originally a Tudor house, but was greatly transformed in Georgian times. During the 1800s, many tenants lived at the Minories including an immigrant German doctor, whose son, Harry Becker, became one of East Anglia's most famous painters.



The garden at the Minories
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Lucien Pissarro, son of the famous French Impressionist painter, Camille, stayed in the house many times over the years with his sister-in-law Ruth Bensusan-Butt. Lucien was born in Paris but spent most of his life in England and was instrumental in introducing the Impressionist style to Britain. He was one of the founders of the Camden Town Group, along with German-born painter Walter Sickert. Lucien was also a founder of the Monarro Group, which aimed to exhibit artists who were influenced by Impressionist painters such as Claude Monet and Lucien's father, Camille.

Directions 6

If you are in the garden of the Minories, go through the white door past the café, the shop and the gallery rooms to the front door. Turn left onto High Street. At the traffic lights, cross over to the right, past the war memorial and through the park gates. Take the first path on the right and stop outside the rear of a large house.

7. Recreating the past

Hollytrees House

Built in 1719, Hollytrees House has been the home of some of Colchester's most important citizens. Perhaps the most important was Charles Gray, who lived here from 1727 until his death in 1782. He was the MP for Colchester and a trustee of the British Museum in London.

He was so interested in history that his mother-in-law bought the ruins of Colchester Castle for him as a wedding present! He restored it and saved the castle from ruin – but more on that at the next stop.



Hollytrees House
© Richard Robinson, Geograph (CCL)

Now Hollytrees House is one of the three museums in the town run by the Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service, and dedicated to re-creating what life would have been like in Victorian times. During that era, the house was owned by the Round family, who were prominent members of Colchester life. In the 1881 census there were nine members of the Round family living here and just as many servants.

Today it has many artefacts from the Victorian era including Chinese tea caddies, tea from Ceylon and a sedan chair, imported from Italy. The museum is free so you might like to come back later to go inside.

Directions 7

Retrace your steps and stop in front of the castle.

8. Temple, castle, prison then wedding present

Colchester Castle

Colchester Castle may look old, but it is actually built on the site of an even older structure. During Roman times, this was where the magnificent Temple of Claudius stood. It was the grandest Roman building in Colchester and fitting for a town which the Romans had chosen as their capital of Britain.

But when Queen Boudicca of the Iceni tribe sacked the town in AD 60, she burned the temple to the ground. You can still see the scorch marks in the vaults of the castle today.



The walls of Colchester Castle
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

When the Normans arrived in Colchester, they used much of the Roman building materials still lying around to construct the castle. The castle was ordered by William the Conqueror and building was completed by around 1100. The castle keep is the largest ever built in Britain – and is one-and-a-half times bigger than the White Tower in the Tower of London.

The castle served as a royal castle and later as a county prison. By 1650, a survey condemned the building and it was scheduled for demolition. But it was saved by Charles Gray's mother-in-law, as we heard earlier, and Gray set about restoring it to its former glory.

Colchester Castle is now a museum and contains plenty of exhibits from antiquity including Roman pottery, Saxon broaches, Viking weaponry and Norman coins. It has also shown treasures from China thanks to the museum's link with the Jiangsu Province and at one stage had an Egyptian mummy from Thebes.

Directions 8

Go along the front of the castle and past the bridge. Look straight ahead on the perimeter wall of the grounds for a crescent stone seat and plaque.

9. Down Mexico way

Cowdray plaque, Castle Park

This plaque commemorates a very generous bequest to the town by Viscount Cowdray. He was born Weetman Dickinson Pearson in 1856 and made his money as the owner of S Pearson and Son, an engineering company which built railways, docks and harbours in Britain, Ireland, China and Mexico.

For example, he built Dover harbour on the south coast of England, the docks at Halifax in Canada and the Sennar Dam in Sudan. In 1889, he was invited by the President of Mexico to build a railroad from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

While building the Mexican railway, he struck oil. In fact, records say it is still the largest oil field ever discovered. He created the Mexican Eagle Petroleum Company, one of Mexico's largest firms, which was later taken over by the Royal Dutch Petroleum Company (now Royal Dutch Shell), the global oil and gas company headquartered in the Netherlands.



Viscount Cowdray
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Back home, Pearson was elected Colchester's MP in 1895 and kept the seat until 1910, when he became a baron. Meanwhile, with the money he made from the Mexican oil strike, he bought the land here, just after the First World War. He created Castle Park as a memorial to the town's soldiers who died, which included two of his own sons.

Following the war, he was active in Liberal politics and in philanthropic activities. He endowed a professorship in the Spanish department at the University of Leeds, and contributed to University College London, the League of Nations Union, the Royal Air Force Club and Memorial Fund, and to many public projects. He died in 1927.

Directions 9

Follow the path down the side of the castle. Where the path splits, keep left and follow it downhill through formal gardens. When you reach a beacon, turn left along a tree-lined path towards the bandstand. Before reaching the bandstand, stop on the left hand side for some stones laid out in the grass.

10. The archaeologist's archaeologist

Roman townhouses, Castle Park

Sir Mortimer Wheeler is one of this country's greatest archaeologists. He was a radio and television personality as well as the chief promoter of the Grid Square Method (known as the Wheeler-Box Method).

He made his name partly from a series of well publicised excavations at Roman sites around the country. In 1920 he came to Colchester and, on this very spot, uncovered three Roman townhouses which dated back to the second century AD. These were rather grand houses with a Mediterranean style courtyard.



Floors of Roman townhouses excavated in Castle Park
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Unfortunately most of the masonry was subsequently used to build Colchester Castle. All that's left are these terracotta-tiled floors.

As for Sir Mortimer, he went on to bigger and better things. In 1924, he was appointed Director of the National Museum in Wales, but decided to leave in 1926 to act as Keeper of Archaeology at the Museum of London, where he stayed until 1937. That same year he became the first director of London University's Institution of Archaeology which he founded with his wife Tessa.

Outside of archaeology, he fought in Germany and France in the First World War and then in North Africa and Italy in the Second World War. After the war, he became Director General of Archaeology in India and then Archaeological Adviser to the Pakistani National Museum.

Directions 10

Retrace your steps along the path and turn left at the beacon. As the path starts to rise, it forks. There is also a small path immediately to the right which leads down to a gate. Take this path and leave the Castle Park. Go straight across and down the alley onto Maidenburgh Street. Stop in front of the small chapel.

11. The Mother of Christianity

St Helen's Chapel, Maidenburgh Street

St Helena or St Helen is the patron saint of Colchester. Further along the walk – if you have your eyes peeled – you may be able to find her statue. Here's a clue: it's quite high up.

St Helena is known as the Mother of Christianity mainly because she was the mother of Constantine, the first Christian Roman Emperor. Local legend has it that she was the daughter of Old King Cole, the King of Colchester, and that she met Constantine's father, Emperor Constantius Chlorus, while he was fighting a campaign in the province.



Icons inside St Helen's Chapel
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Today, however, most historians believe she actually came from Turkey, but that didn't stop Colchester Victorians adopting her for their own! As well as this Chapel, which is now run by the Greek Orthodox Church, there is a school named after her.

As if being Constantine's mother wasn't enough to gain her sainthood, St Helena spent her later years touring the Holy Lands and the Middle East in search of Christian relics. She purportedly located both the cross and the nails of the crucifixion and returned to Rome with them, where they can still be seen today.

Colchester has one of the largest Greek communities in Britain. According to the 2001 census an estimated 35,000 people born in Greece lived in Britain, with Sunderland, Manchester, and Birmingham alongside Colchester as the largest Greek-born communities outside of London.

Directions 11

The chapel is usually open and it is worth taking a look inside. From the chapel continue up St Helen's Lane to the junction with East Stockwell Street. Directly in front are houses painted in different colours. Stop at this corner.

12. Weaving through the streets

Corner of St Helen's Lane and East Stockwell Street

This is Colchester's Dutch Quarter, so called because of the Flemish weavers who made it their home after fleeing religious persecution from the Low Countries in the sixteenth century.

At the time, Colchester petitioned Queen Elizabeth I to allow religious refugees into the town and by 1575 more than 500 had settled here.

Many of them were highly skilled weavers and it was through their trade that Colchester soon became famous for its high quality cloths known as Bays and Says. The modern-day equivalent is the green baize that covers a snooker table.



The large ground floor windows of the weavers' cottages
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

At one point, Colchester was regarded as one of the most important wool towns in the country. Many of their timber framed houses still exist today. You will notice that houses such as numbers 37 and 38 have very large downstairs windows, which were essential for letting in plenty of light so that the weavers could see what they were doing at their looms.

Directions 12

Turn left up East Stockwell Street for a few metres and then right along Quakers Alley that runs between the Townhouse youth centre on the right and St Martin's Church on the left. At the end, turn right down West Stockwell Street. Stop outside the first house on the right, which has a brown plaque on the wall.

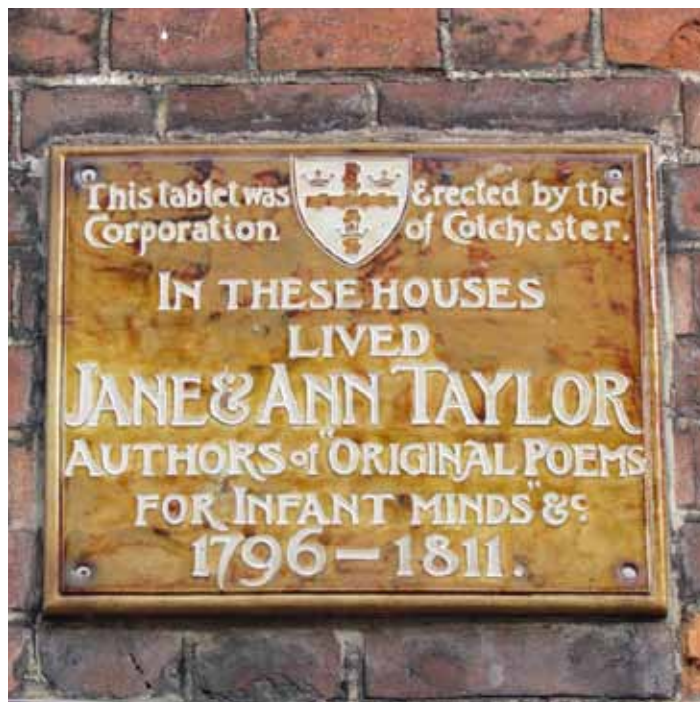
13. How I wonder what you are

Twinkle House, 11 & 12 West Stockwell Street

This building was once the home of sisters Jane and Ann Taylor, who became well known for writing various children's stories, poems and nursery rhymes.

Their most famous was 'The Star', which we now all know from its first line 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star'. It was published in the 1806 collection 'Rhymes for the Nursery', which was the second of three books the sisters produced.

It was set to the French tune 'Ah Vous dirai-je Maman', which dates back to 1761. The German Christmas carol 'Morgen kommt der Weihnachtsmann' also uses the melody, as does the Hungarian carol 'Hull a pelyhes fehér hó,' the Dutch children's song 'Altijd is Kortjakje ziek', and the Spanish children's song 'Campanita del Lugar'.



Plaque on Twinkle House, home of the Taylor sisters
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The French melody has also been the inspiration for many classical compositions including works by Mozart, Haydn and Liszt, and also features in Saint-Saëns's 'Carnival of the Animals'. In 1958, the rhyme and melody even inspired a Number One hit record on the US Billboard Hot 100 when American group, The Elegants, released their song 'Little Star'. It went on to spend 19 weeks in the chart and sold more than a million copies. Today a plaque above the door commemorates the Taylor sisters.

Directions 13

From Twinkle House, go up West Stockwell Street to Colchester's main High Street. Cross the road carefully and turn left. Continue about 20 metres until you are opposite a set of bus stops. Look behind the bus stops at the red brick building with the words 'Grand Theatre' on the top.

14. Making a right Charlie of himself

The Hippodrome, High Street

This building is called the Hippodrome, which takes its name from ancient Greek culture – a hippodrome was a stadium for racing horses. The name was commonly given to theatres in the 1900s because of the entertainment they offered at the time, such as equestrian acts, bears and elephants.

Colchester's Hippodrome certainly saw a team of Indian elephants, as well as appearances by, among others, queen of the Music Hall, Marie Lloyd, and a then-unknown actor named Charlie Chaplin.



The facade of the Grand Theatre, built in 1905
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



Portrait of Chaplin during his tour
with the Fred Karno company
Wikimedis Commons (CCL)

He appeared at the Hippodrome as part of Fred Karno's very popular comedy sketch act, Mummie Birds. He was there in 1910 a matter of weeks before Mummie Birds travelled to the US, where Chaplin eventually made his name and his fortune.

The Grand Theatre, which seated 1,700 people, opened in 1905, changing its name to the Hippodrome a year later when it became a Music Hall. In 1920 it became a cinema and was later run by the Gaumont British Picture Corporation until the Sixties when it was turned into a bingo hall run by Top Rank. Today, as you can see, it is a nightclub, playing host to some of the best DJs in the country.

Directions 14

Retrace your steps along the High Street. Stop opposite the spectacular Town Hall.

15. The Oyster Feast

Colchester Town Hall, High Street

The author Daniel Defoe wrote his novel 'Moll Flanders' while staying in Colchester in 1722. At the time, he noted that the town was famous for two things: roses and oysters.

Here at the Town Hall, Colchester's 'native' oyster is celebrated every year with a special feast. The Oyster Feast traditionally takes place in the Moot Hall on the last Friday in October. It is one of Colchester's biggest civic events which in years gone by attracted dignitaries from all over Europe and further afield. They have included guests from Colchester's twin towns of Imola in San Marino, Avignon in France and Wetzlar in Germany.



The ornate Town Hall
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



Oysters were once harvested from the River Colne
© Chris 73, Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

The Colchester native oyster is a delicacy all over the world and was once harvested on the mud flats of the River Colne, the river which runs through the town. Now they are mainly grown on the mud flats around Mersea Island, about eight miles south of Colchester. That's where every September the mayor of Colchester officially opens the oyster fishery by dredging the first catch, eating gingerbread and drinking gin.

Directions 15

Remain in the same place. Look at the modern concrete building immediately to the left of the Town Hall (at the time of creating this walk it was a Job Centre).

16. The Travelodge of its day

Site of the Three Cups, 138 High Street

Looking at the town's High Street today, it's hard to imagine that it was the main road between London and the port of Harwich. Colchester's most popular inn once stood here. You are going to have to use your imagination a bit because the beautiful Three Cups building is unfortunately now gone.

It opened in 1701 as the New White Hart and Three Cups but the name was later shortened to just the Three Cups. It was the Travelodge of its day.



The Cups Hotel (1892)

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The Three Cups sign
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG
Discovering Britain

Lord Nelson was said to have visited the Three Cups with Lady Hamilton after he had defeated the French Fleet at Akoubir Bay in Egypt in 1798. He returned the following year following the bombardment of Copenhagen.

During the Napoleonic Wars it was rightly regarded as one of the first inns in England, being the stopping off point for many dignitaries who had landed at Harwich. They included the Turkish and Danish ambassadors, the King of Sweden and the princess of Monaco. Perhaps the most illustrious visitors were the exiled King Louis XVIII of France or our own Prince Regent and the Duke of Wellington.

The copper Three Cups sign was moved elsewhere in the town before the building was demolished in 1968. See if you can find it later on the walk.

Directions 16

Continue along the High Street. At the end, cross over and stand outside the black and white building, which is the post office. Did you find the statue of St Helena that was mentioned earlier? If not, look back down the High Street and on top of the Town Hall – there she is, carrying the Cross. Go about 20 metres down North Hill and then turn left along a narrow road called Balkerne Passage, which is almost opposite St Peter's Church. Follow the road round. Stop beside the brick tower.

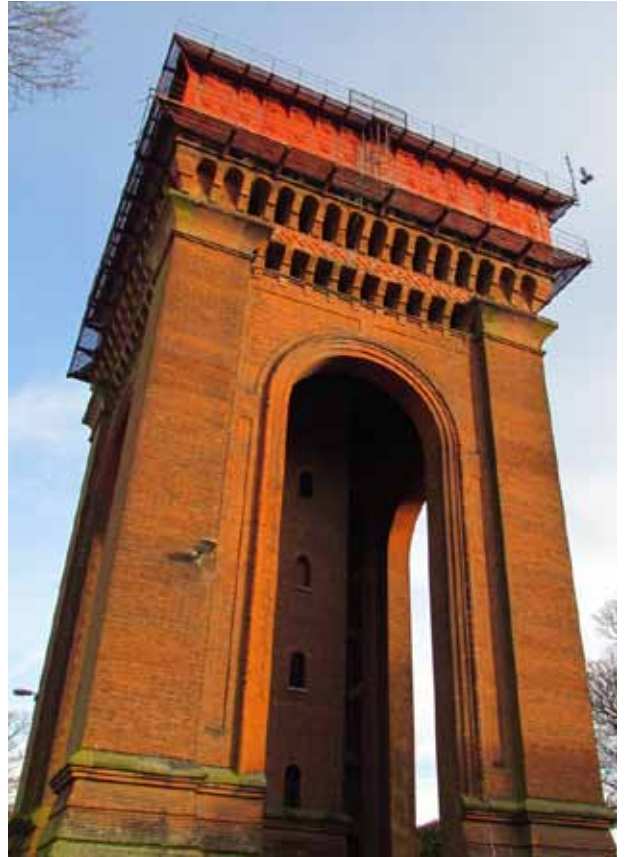
17. Woah there Nelly

Jumbo Water Tower, Balcerne Gardens

This magnificent feat of Victorian engineering used to be the water tower that supplied the town. It was built in 1883, consisting of 1.2 million bricks, and could hold 1,069 cubic metres of water. At the time of construction, it was thought to be the second largest of its kind in England. Because it overshadowed his rectory, a local reverend gave it the nickname Jumbo, after the famous elephant at London Zoo.

Jumbo the elephant was born in French Sudan, modern day Mali, and taken to Cairo in Egypt where he was sold to a Paris Zoo. In 1865 he was transferred to London Zoo, where he was much loved by the children he gave rides to.

When the legendary showman PT Barnum paid \$10,000 for Jumbo, it instigated a national outcry with thousands of children writing to Queen Victoria to demand that he stay at the zoo. Unfortunately Barnum got his way and Jumbo was shipped to the USA, where he was a huge hit. Tragically Jumbo was killed when he was hit by an express train in Ontario, Canada.



The impressive Jumbo water tower
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 17

Follow the road past Jumbo. Stop outside the building behind, which is the Mercury Theatre.

18. All the world's a stage

Mercury Theatre, Balkerne Gate

There has always been an arts scene in Colchester. We have already heard about impressionist painters, novelists, theatres and museums. Meanwhile, the Colchester Repertory Company was established in 1937. It performed its shows at the Albert Hall on Colchester High Street and in the 1950s, a certain Harold Pinter made his theatrical debut there.

In 1968 a trust was set up to build a new theatre for the town and four years later the Mercury Theatre here was opened. It takes its name from a Roman statue of Mercury, the Messenger of the Gods, which was ploughed up by a local farmer in 1940. It was one of the finest Roman bronze statues ever discovered in Britain and is now housed in the Castle Museum. There is a replica in the theatre's foyer, which was donated by local newspaper owner, Hervey Benham.

The Mercury Theatre Company is now one of the last remaining repertories in the country, putting on around six productions each year. Most recently the theatre has become one of the partners in a European theatrical exchange programme which has led to several international festivals. That has included theatre companies from Georgia, Moldova, Italy, Poland and Bulgaria, to name but a few.



Mercury atop his eponymous theatre
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 18

From the Mercury Theatre, head towards the Hole in the Wall pub. Stand beside the brick archway.

19. Who goes there?

The Balkerne Gate

This is the largest free standing Roman Gate left in Britain and was the city's main entrance in Roman times.

When the Romans conquered Camulodunum in AD 43 they initially set up a fortress with a military gate here. Soon afterwards they decided to establish their capital city here, which they called Colonia, and which was a planned settlement inhabited by military veterans. Queen Boudicca's sacking of Colonia in AD 60 led to another re-build, this time with one of the first brick walls to be constructed in the country.



The remaining arch of the Balkerne Gate
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Here at the main west entrance, a triumphal arch was built celebrating Emperor Claudius' invasion of Britain. Similar ones were built in Gaul in modern-day France, Turkey and, of course, Rome itself. All that is left today are the remains of what is believed to be a guardroom to the left and a walkway next to it, both of which date back to 200 AD.

The Hole in the Wall pub stands where the main gate used to be. If you walk round to the other side, you will see the Roman foundations of the Gate underneath it. Look at the information board for a picture of what the whole gate once looked like. Imagine the thousands of legionaries from all over the vast Roman Empire marching through this gate!

Directions 19

Walk along the raised path with the Roman walls on the left and the dual carriageway to the right. After a short distance is a set of steps up through the wall to a church. Stand outside the church.

20. Where Humpty had his fall

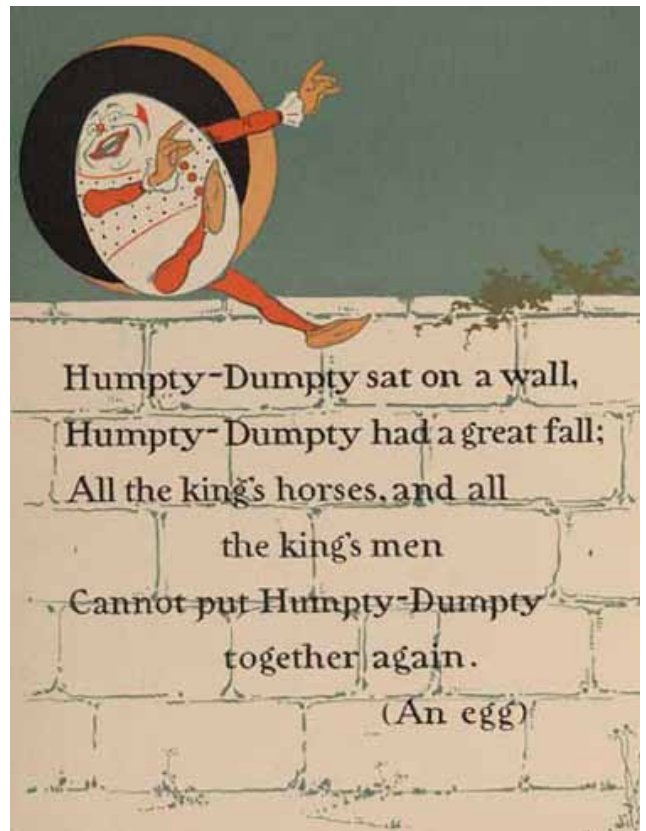
Colchester Arts Centre, Church Street

St Mary at the Walls Church, which is now the Colchester Arts Centre, perfectly sums up Colchester's troubled past with its renaissance present.

During the English Civil War, the Cavaliers (supporters of the king) fought against the Roundheads (supporters of Parliament). In 1648, there was a siege here in Colchester. A cannon was placed on top of the church by the Cavaliers, directing fire at the advancing Roundhead troops.

Sir Thomas Fairfax, the Parliamentarian general leading the Roundhead attack, ordered that all attempts be made to knock the cannon off its perch.

Local legend has it that either the cannon, or the man firing it, was known as Humpty Dumpty. Eventually the Roundheads succeeded in blowing the cannon off the wall, and all the king's horses and all the king's men could not put 'Humpty' together again. Did you know that was the origin of the rhyme that you know so well?



Humpty Dumpty in the childrens' book
'Denslow's Mother Goose' (1902)
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

The church is now de-consecrated and since the 1980s it has been a centre for the arts where many musicians, comedians and actors from all over the world have performed. This is also where the town's Black History Month was launched with artists from all over Africa and the Caribbean taking part.

Directions 20

Walk past the church and follow Church Street past the Friends' Meeting House. There is also another view of Nelly on the left hand side. At the main road, use the pedestrian crossing and go straight across into Culver Street West. Go along this shopping street until you reach a small square with a church. This is Trinity Square. Before going into the church, have you found the Three Cups that was mentioned earlier? Turn right down Trinity Street, past the church tower. Turn left into the churchyard.

21. The Father of electricity

Holy Trinity Church, Trinity Street

This is Holy Trinity Church, parts of which date back to the 1020s before the Norman invasion of 1066.

There are a number of well-known locals buried in the graveyard including William Gilbert, or Gilbert as he is sometimes known. He was Elizabeth I's physician but perhaps more importantly is rightly regarded as the father of electricity. His main scientific work was 'De Magnete, Magneticisque Corporibus, et de Magno Magnete Tellure' (in English 'On the Magnet and Magnetic Bodies, and on That Great Magnet the Earth'), which was published in 1600.



William Gilbert magnetising iron bars
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)



The Battle of Trafalgar memorial tomb
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

In this book Gilbert argued for the first time that the Earth was magnetic and that was why compasses pointed north. He also studied static electricity using amber. The Greek word for amber is 'elektron' and so Gilbert called the phenomenon the 'electrical force'.

Also in the churchyard is a memorial tomb to a number of sailors who fought against a combined Spanish and French navy fleet at the Battle of Trafalgar of 1805. The tomb is the site of a remembrance service every Trafalgar Day on October 21.

The church is now a café but you are free to go inside and look around. Inside the church you will find a memorial tablet to Gilbert and also one to the Tudor madrigal writer John Wilbye.

Directions 21

Remain at Trinity Church for the final stop.

22. A story of conflict and culture

Holy Trinity Church, Trinity Street

We are now at the end of our walk around Colchester. The town's long and distinguished history stretches back over 2,000 years and it is wonderful that we can still see so many historic buildings and remains today. Much of the town's history has been associated with the military but any town which is a military garrison is vulnerable to attack. We heard about the Queen Boudicca revolt, a civil war siege and a German bomb all damaging the town's buildings.

We have heard about some of the town's more noteworthy individuals who made their mark with scientific and archaeological discoveries. We've also heard about people who passed through here or settled here, ranging from novelists and painters to artisanal weavers and an exiled king. We've also seen the strength of culture here in Colchester, both in the past and today, with a vibrant contemporary cultural scene ranging from art and music to theatre and museums.

Many of the people and events associated with Colchester have international connections. It is, and always has been, a very multicultural place. Along the walk route, we found links to almost 80 different countries.

We hope you have enjoyed the walk and learned something new, whether you have been to Colchester before or not. If so, why not visit the Walk the World website where there are other walks throughout the UK that you can try.



Scenes from Colchester
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 22

From Holy Trinity Church, you are just a short distance from Colchester Town railway station where the walk started. To return to the station, go down Trinity Street towards Sir Isaac's Walk. Take a left turn along a small lane onto Long Wyre Street. Continue and then take a right onto Queen Street at the T-junction. Walk down this road towards St Botolph's roundabout. Colchester Town station is by the roundabout.

Further information

Balkerne Tower Trust

www.savejumbo.org.uk

Colchester and Ipswich Museums

www.cimuseums.org.uk

Colchester Arts Centre

www.colchesterartscentre.com

English Heritage - St Botolph's Priory

www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/colchester-st-botolphs-priory

Firstsite Gallery

www.firstsite.uk.net

Friends of The Minories

www.theminories.co.uk

Mercury Theatre

www.mercurytheatre.co.uk

Othodox Colchester - St Helen's Chapel

<http://orthodoxcolchester.org.uk/chapel.htm>

St Botolph's Church

www.stbotolphs.org

Visit Colchester

www.visitcolchester.com

Credits

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