

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

COLCHESTER CASTLE PARK

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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Name: COLCHESTER CASTLE PARK

County: Essex

District: Colchester (District Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.893101
Longitude: 0.90254585
National Grid Reference: TL 99818 25598
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1000208
Date first listed: 01-Jul-1987

Details

A late C19 public park incorporating a mid C18 house and its grounds, set around the remains of a Norman castle, on the site of a Roman Temple built in c AD 54.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

A legionary fortress was built at Colchester soon after the Roman conquest of AD 43 and, following the relocation of the garrison, was replaced by a civilian settlement or colonia after AD 49. The most important building in the colonia was the Temple of Claudius, the focus of the imperial cult in Britain, which was sited within what is now Castle Park. The first phase of the building of a castle on the site began in the 1070s and the bailey was completed in c 1100. Between the C15 and C17 the Castle passed into private ownership, fell into disrepair, and most of the bailey buildings disappeared. In 1726 the Castle was inherited by Charles Chamberlain Rebow and in the following year he sold it to Mary Webster. Mary conveyed the property to her daughter Sarah who had recently married Charles Gray. The Grays lived in an adjacent house, now known as Hollytrees. It was built in 1718 for Elizabeth Cornelisen, Mary Webster's sister. On Elizabeth's death in 1719 the house passed to her niece Sarah, then married to Ralph Creffield who died in 1723. Charles Gray made great changes to the landscape around the Castle where he made a pleasure ground, creating a walk along the bailey from a rotunda to a summerhouse and adding a parterre and canal garden below the north side of the bailey. At Hollytrees mansion he removed the formal garden to the north of the house and replaced it with an informal lawn with trees (Sparrow, 1767). The remainder of the land now covered by the park was divided into fields. Charles Gray died in 1782 and his estate was inherited by the Round family. The development of the pleasure grounds associated with Hollytrees mansion in the C19 are not well documented but the OS 6" map published in 1875 shows Gray's layout little altered apart from the loss of the parterre. In 1870 John Joslin submitted proposals for a public park to the trustees of Charles Gray Round but negotiations failed. Joslin continued to petition the Council and was successful after 1891 when a large legacy was left to the town by Richard Catchpool. The trustees agreed to lease part of the site, excluding Hollytrees and its garden. A plan was drawn up by Messrs Backhouse and Co who also constructed and supervised the layout of the park, which was opened in 1892 although the final layout was not complete until 1896. In 1893 the land north of the river was bequeathed to the Council as an extension of the park. Lord and Lady Cowdray purchased Colchester Castle in 1919

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and gave it to the town to commemorate the First World War; a monument was erected by the south entrance. In 1920 the Council purchased Hollytrees mansion and gardens from the Round trustees at which time plans for the area were drawn up by a local nurseryman, R W Wallace. The Council had immediately started a programme of archaeological work however and these plans were not implemented. Hollytrees mansion became a museum and its grounds were incorporated into the public park. The site remains (2000) in public ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Colchester Castle Park stands in the middle of the town of Colchester, in an urban setting partly bounded by properties on the north side of the High Street which forms its southern boundary. The c 9ha site is bounded to the west by Ryegate Road and Middle Mill Road. To the east the boundary is formed partly by the gardens of houses in Castle Road and partly by open ground, while to the north the park is enclosed by the River Colne, beyond which lie sports fields. The ground within the park falls to the course of the river in the north, giving fine views from the Castle across the town. The remains of the Roman town wall (listed grade I) run from east to west through the centre of the park, dividing it into Upper Park where the Castle is situated, and Lower Park which is bordered by the river.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to the park is in Cowdray Crescent, next to the War Memorial beside Hollytrees Mansion Museum on the High Street. Walls, railings made of cast iron, and gates hung on gate piers surmounted by iron lamps (listed grade II) form a crescent setting for the memorial. Two further late C19 gated entrances (listed grade II) are located in the south-west corner of the park, one approached from Museum Street off the High Street, and the other halfway along the western boundary at Rye Gate. Both were erected in 1892. There are also several minor entrances to paths around the perimeter of the park.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING There are two principal buildings on this site: the Castle and Hollytrees Mansion Museum, both located on the southern boundary of the park. The Castle Keep (scheduled ancient monument, listed grade I) was built in the late C11 on the site of the great Roman Claudian temple, using Roman tiles and septaria. It is now probably less than half its original height, since partial demolition work was undertaken in 1693. Considerable restoration work was carried out by James Deane for Charles Gray in the mid C18.

Hollytrees Mansion Museum (listed grade I) stands c 80m to the east-south-east of the Castle and is an early C18 red-brick town house of three storeys with a parapet to north and south. The west wing is also of three storeys but at a lower level. The entrance front to the south looks onto a small enclosed garden enclosed by original C18 ironwork railings (listed grade II). Hollytrees was built in 1718 for Elizabeth Cornelisen and was occupied by Charles Gray from 1726 until his death in 1783. He commissioned James Deane to add the west wing in 1748. The house was acquired by the town in the early C20 and is now a museum.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The garden of Hollytrees lies on the north side of the house, approached from the Castle in the west through a brick archway. The area is laid to lawn in which a sensory garden was developed in the 1950s. To the west of the lawn is a sunk lily pond garden, built in 1929 after the house was acquired by the town, on the site of the old stables. The pleasure grounds associated with Hollytrees, and now part of the public park, are laid out around the Castle Keep. The building is surrounded by grass and enclosed to the north and east by the raised bailey, constructed over the ruins of the precinct walls of the temple. The bailey was landscaped by Charles Gray in the mid C18, adding a walk along the top to a rotunda (now a ruin, listed grade II) c 20m to the east of the Castle, at the south end of the east arm, and a summerhouse (listed grade II) built in the style of a miniature Greek temple at the west end of the north arm, c 35m north-north-west of the Castle. Below the north side of the Castle Keep is the Mayor's Walk, consisting of a partly surviving avenue of limes planted in 1892, and between this and the bailey walk stands an obelisk, erected in 1892 to commemorate the death of Sir Charles Lucas and Sir George Lisle in 1648. Beyond the north side of the bailey is an enclosed formal garden, running along the length of the bailey. It was laid out in 1922 as a rose walk within the boundary wall of Gray's canal garden and was restored as a parterre of bedding in the 1930s.

PARK The remaining features of the site are associated with the creation of the public park from 1892 onwards, which is divided by the Roman town wall into the Upper Park and the Lower Park. On the west side of the Castle Keep is a C20 rockery, to the north of which lie upstanding Roman remains. Much of the western boundary is screened by a dense mix of trees and shrubs, planted at the end of the C19 to hide the backs of the houses beyond. On the north side of the Rose Walk lies the Catchpool

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Avenue, a lime walk which runs from east to west below the bailey, beside the remains of a Roman pavement (listed grade II) and a cast-iron bandstand erected in 1892 at the centrepoint of the walk, c 150m north of the Castle. At the western end of the Avenue stands the Victorian gardener's hut, and at the eastern end a cafe. Erected in the neo-Georgian Classical style in the 1930s, the cafe stands just to the south of the end of the Avenue, where a pavilion had stood until 1930. To the north of the Avenue, grass planted with scattered trees is laid on the slope leading down to the Roman town wall (listed grade I), at the eastern end of which the entrance to the park is marked by Duncan's Gate. This was discovered by a former mayor of Colchester, Dr P M Duncan in 1853 and represents the north-east gate of the Roman town. The east side of the Upper Park is formed by Hollytree Meadow, an open field with a line of trees running along the eastern boundary wall of the park (C18, listed grade II). Within this field many Roman archaeological features survive. The area also contains a disused nursery area and a modern late C20 children's play area.

The Lower Park to the north of the town wall is mainly covered by open grass areas, with a serpentine walk around it. The river edge is lined by trees planted at the end of the C19, although the riverside walk was not completed until 1979. Two bowling greens are located on the east side, the lower of which having a thatched pavilion built in c 1922. On the west side of the open lawn is a boating lake, overlooked on its northern bank by an early C20 park keeper's lodge.

REFERENCES

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Description written: January 2001 Amended: April 2001 Register Inspector: EMP Edited: September 2001

Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.