

## **A Visit to The Circus**

In September 2020 a small group of us arranged a visit to Colchester's Roman Circus Visitor Centre which included a guided tour of the outdoor excavations.

Colchester – Camulodunum – was the capital of Roman Britain, and as such could be expected to have all the familiar features of a Roman city. The site of the huge Temple of Claudius (now incorporated into the Castle), the theatres (the one in Maidenburgh Street is easiest to visit) and the wall have long been known, but archaeologists have puzzled over the location of other likely features. When part of the old barracks was sold for redevelopment, they were thrilled in 2005 to discover the site of the only known chariot-racing circus in Britain. With seating for 8000 spectators it was one of the largest outside Rome.

Because the circus site has for so long been under Victorian (or later) military buildings the amount of original Roman material *in situ* is limited – but the Roman Circus Centre make the most of what they have. Outdoors are the foundations of part of the tiered seating, now covered with glass so that you can see both the roman work and where drains and ducts have been cut through in the last 150 years. At the western end of the site are the 8 starting gates, partly reconstructed but with some original material. Whoever buys the apartments being created from the adjacent former military building will have a splendid view through the starting gates down the whole length of the circus to the town houses now covering the rounded eastern end. Another former military building is home to the indoor displays including a model of the circus, a second model still being built of the whole of roman Colchester, and information boards comparing the Colchester circus with others found throughout the former Roman empire. At the time of our visit there was a display on the finds from the Essex County Hospital site, located on the road west towards London which, as expected, was a street of roman tombs.

### **OPEN FOR THE SUMMER SEASON**

The Roman Circus Visitor Centre including COLCHESTER'S 'STREET OF TOMBS' EXHIBITION is open 10am to 4pm, Tuesday - Saturday and Bank Holidays Mondays to 25 September 2021. Entrance on the day £3, or £6 with tour of Roman Circus archaeological remains bookable online. Guided tours take place at 12 noon and 2pm Tuesday to Friday, 12 noon and 1pm Saturday. <https://www.romancircus.co.uk/>