



IRON AGE TO ROMAN

Cunobelin (Shakespeare's Cymbeline), leader of the British Trinovante tribe, establishes himself at Camulodunum expanding both his kingdom and trade with the Roman world.



The revolt by Queen Boudica sees the Temple of Claudius and the colonia destroyed. The city is later rebuilt but Londinium is now the capital of the province.

Pliny the Elder mentions Camulodunum in his 'Natural History'. This is the earliest public written reference to a British settlement.

ANGLO-SAXONS TO NORMANS



Colchester comes under Viking control.

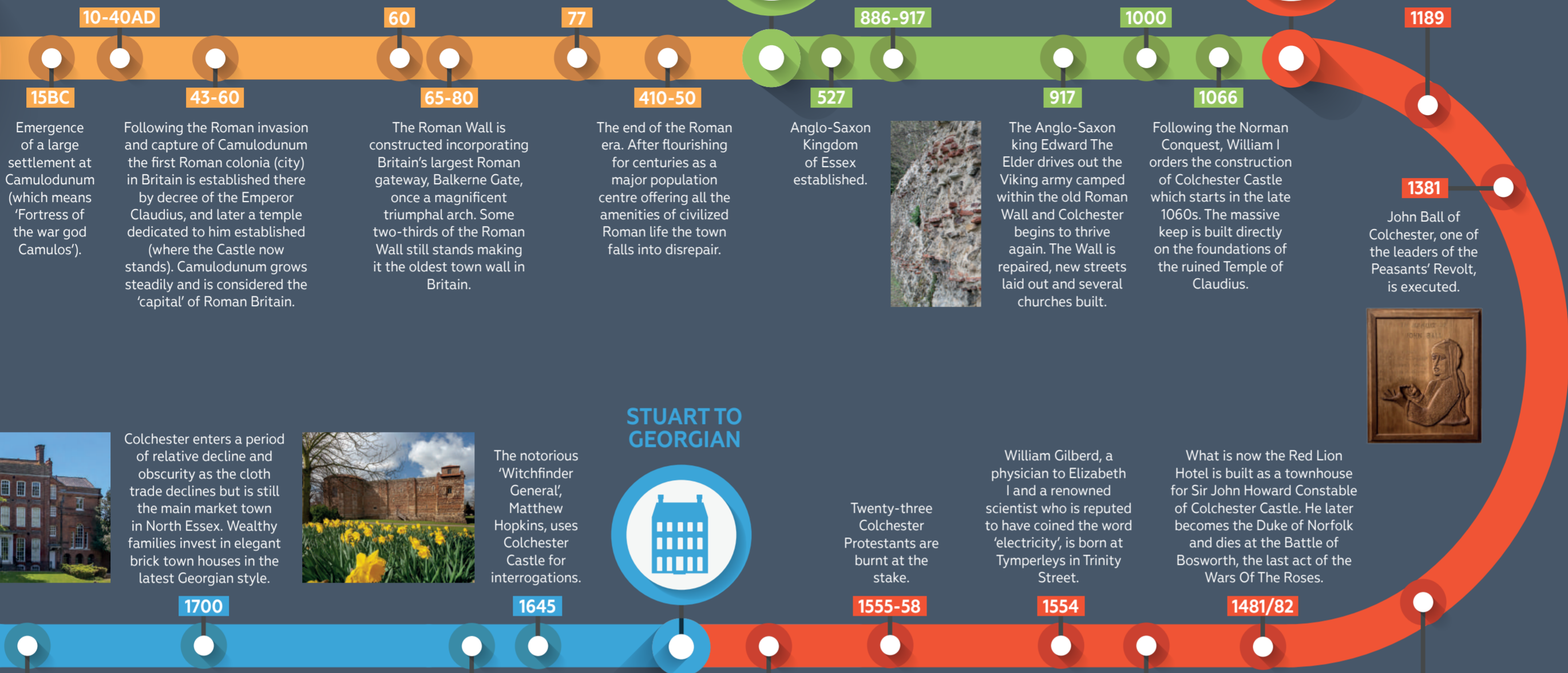


Around this date Trinity Church is built. The tower, still standing, is an outstanding example of Anglo-Saxon architecture.

MEDIEVAL TO TUDOR



Earliest known Colchester town charter granted by King Richard I.



10-40AD

15BC

Emergence of a large settlement at Camulodunum (which means 'Fortress of the war god Camulos').

43-60

Following the Roman invasion and capture of Camulodunum the first Roman colonia (city) in Britain is established there by decree of the Emperor Claudius, and later a temple dedicated to him established (where the Castle now stands). Camulodunum grows steadily and is considered the 'capital' of Roman Britain.

60

The Roman Wall is constructed incorporating Britain's largest Roman gateway, Balcerne Gate, once a magnificent triumphal arch. Some two-thirds of the Roman Wall still stands making it the oldest town wall in Britain.

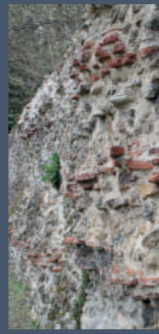
77

The end of the Roman era. After flourishing for centuries as a major population centre offering all the amenities of civilized Roman life the town falls into disrepair.

410-50

527

Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Essex established.



917

The Anglo-Saxon king Edward The Elder drives out the Viking army camped within the old Roman Wall and Colchester begins to thrive again. The Wall is repaired, new streets laid out and several churches built.

1000

1066

Following the Norman Conquest, William I orders the construction of Colchester Castle which starts in the late 1060s. The massive keep is built directly on the foundations of the ruined Temple of Claudius.

1189

1381

John Ball of Colchester, one of the leaders of the Peasants' Revolt, is executed.



Discover Colchester's best kept secrets with the Hidden Colchester self-guided walking trail. Journey back in time and uncover Colchester's historic past.



HIDDEN COLCHESTER

During this time Colchester is a significant centre for the specialist trade of clockmaking - examples of which can be seen today in Hollytrees.



Colchester enters a period of relative decline and obscurity as the cloth trade declines but is still the main market town in North Essex. Wealthy families invest in elegant brick town houses in the latest Georgian style.



The notorious 'Witchfinder General', Matthew Hopkins, uses Colchester Castle for interrogations.

STUART TO GEORGIAN



Twenty-three Colchester Protestants are burnt at the stake.

William Gilbert, a physician to Elizabeth I and a renowned scientist who is reputed to have coined the word 'electricity', is born at Tymperleys in Trinity Street.

What is now the Red Lion Hotel is built as a townhouse for Sir John Howard Constable of Colchester Castle. He later becomes the Duke of Norfolk and dies at the Battle of Bosworth, the last act of the Wars Of The Roses.

1700-1780

1700

1718-19

Hollytrees House, now a museum, is built. It was later inhabited by Sir Charles Cray, at one point the MP for Colchester, who having been given Colchester Castle as a wedding present set about its restoration making several architectural additions.



1648

The Siege of Colchester: towards the end of the English Civil War the town was besieged by the Parliamentary army for 11 weeks. The civilian population suffered dreadfully and the Roman Wall was breached. Many other buildings, notably church towers, were damaged. Parliament levies a heavy fine on the town. Passing through in 1658 the diarist John Evelyn noted 'To Colchester, a fair town, but now wretchedly demolished by the late siege'.

1565

Flemish/Dutch refugees arrive, fleeing religious persecution. They boost the town's flagging woollen industry with new techniques and skills. The area where they settled initially later became known as 'the Dutch Quarter'.



1532

The English Reformation leads to the closure of Colchester's monastic houses including St John's Abbey whose abbot is executed in 1539.



1381

By the late Middle Ages Colchester is again an important centre of population - estimated to be 6000 by this date. The woollen cloth trade is largely responsible for the town's prosperity.

1794

First infantry barracks built in Colchester.



VICTORIAN TO MODERN



Colchester Garrison is established during Crimean War.

The Colchester Earthquake causes great damage to a number of buildings - it is the most destructive in the UK in the last 400 years.

Colchester Town Hall opens. The third to occupy this site over 850 years. Every October the 'Oyster Feast' takes place in its 'Moot Hall' celebrating the annual opening of the oyster fisheries on the Colne, active since the Roman period and for which Colchester has been famous for many centuries.

The Second World War. The Castle becomes an air raid shelter. The town does suffer some bomb damage, but significant buildings survive intact. The Garrison is a focal point for troop training and transit, including Allied soldiers from many nations. Remnants of fortifications laid down in case of invasion can still be found, including in Castle Park.



Firstsite opens. A landmark building by international architect Raphael Vinoly housing a gallery, auditorium and flexible community spaces. It is a major modern addition to the townscape but one which reaches back into Colchester's past through a Roman mosaic inlaid into the gallery floor on the site it was found.



1806

Jane Taylor writes the poem 'The Star' in West Stockwell Street. Better known by its first line 'Twinkle Twinkle, Little Star'.

1843

Colchester is linked by railway to London.

1883

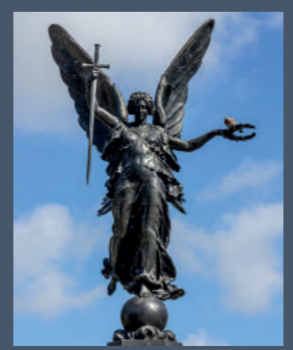
The town's enormous Victorian water tower is completed, affectionately known as 'Jumbo' after a famous elephant at London Zoo around the same time.

1892

Castle Park, situated just two minutes from the High Street, is opened by the Lord Mayor of London.

1914-18

The First World War. 1203 'Men of Colchester' are killed and many more injured. They and the dead of later conflicts are commemorated by the War Memorial in Cowdray Crescent, unveiled in 1923.



1964

The University of Essex, located to the east of the town centre at Wivenhoe Park, admits its first students.



2011

Production ends at MAN Energy Solutions, formerly Paxmans, ending a tradition of manufacturing engines for over 150 years in Colchester. Colchester's Northern Gateway Sports Park opens, including a one-mile floodlit cycle track.

MODERN DAY COLCHESTER

Colchester Visitor Information Centre
Hollytrees Museum
Castle Park
Colchester
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HIDDEN COLCHESTER

Journey back in time with our Hidden Colchester trail. Discover all those secret snippets of history that can easily be missed on a visit and immerse yourself in Colchester's rich heritage. Choose to follow the entire trail or pick out your favourite time in history and delve beneath the surface of Britain's First City.

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5 Head to Firstsite and, if it is open proceed inside. Entrance is free. In the centre of the building you will find a Roman mosaic. The Berryfield Mosaic is under a glass floor, just metres from where it was originally located in a Roman town house. Leave Firstsite and walk straight ahead, up Lewis Gardens.



6 At the top of Lewis Gardens, on the other side of East Hill you will see a building known as Winsley's House. Arthur Winsley died in 1728, leaving housing in his will for 'Twelve Ancient Men', that have lived well, and fallen into decay! These almshouses now accommodate over 100 residents.



7 To your left is The Minories. Behind its Georgian frontage lies a 16th-century timbered building. A Blue Plaque on the front of the building celebrates Dr Ruth Bensusan-Butt, Colchester's first female doctor and prime mover in establishing the town's maternity hospital. The rear walled garden contains an impressive Gothic summerhouse built in 1830. Sadly, the Minories is closed for renovations but we hope it will re-open soon.



8 Start to walk down East Hill, on the opposite side of the street you will see Greyfriars Hotel. A Georgian building named after the Franciscan Monks or 'Grey' Friars who settled here in the 13th century. The friary was one of the most impressive buildings in Colchester, but it was demolished after the dissolution of the monasteries. It wasn't until 1755 that the Rev. John Halls completed work on the central part of the building that stands today.



9 Walk past East Hill House. East Hill House, formerly Berryfields, is one of the finest houses in Colchester. Roman Wall. The Berryfield Mosaic, which is now on permanent display in Firstsite, was found here in 1928.



10 Continue to St James The Great Church. There has been a church here since the time of the Normans, but the present building dates back only to the 1300's. The radical priest John Ball, a leader of the Peasant's Revolt in 1381, once preached here.



11 Carefully cross the road, using the traffic island. This is where the Roman East Gate once stood. Look out for the plaque on the far side of the road that marks the spot.



12 Walk a short distance back up the hill and then turn right into Roman Road. (Please keep the residents in mind when on this part of the tour). As you walk along the road, note the Quaker Burial ground on your right. Colchester has a long established Quaker community and burials still take place here today. Roman Road and Castle Road, now desirable residential streets, were built on land once owned by the Grey Friars and later home to Colchester's Botanic Gardens, opened in 1823. The venture lasted less than thirty years, but it must have been a very impressive attraction with exotic plants set against the backdrop of the historic Roman Wall.



13 As the road turns sharply to the left you join the Roman Wall on your right-hand side. A footpath leads you close to the top of the wall before taking you through a gateway in the Roman Wall on your right. This gateway is a recent addition to the wall, and was likely created in 1852 when the houses in Roman Road were built.



14 Turn left. Follow the footpath beside this stretch of Roman Wall. Colchester's Roman Wall can hardly be said to be 'secret', but look closer and you can discover hidden stories everywhere. This stretch contains fossilised ammonites from the Jurassic period but you'll need an eagle eye to find them. Easier to spot are some of the 120 species of lichen that grow on the wall.



15 On your left you pass the ruins of Duncan's Gate. Duncan's Gate is one of the original Roman gateways into the town, named after Dr P. M. Duncan who excavated here in 1852/3. During the Second World War it was used as a secret ammunition store intended for use by saboteurs should the Germans occupy Colchester. Turn left through the gate into Upper Castle Park.



16 Follow the footpath that bears off diagonally to your right. You will pass the Victorian bandstand on your left. Next to it you will see the remains of a Roman town house. Bricks from this building, and others, were used in the construction of Colchester Castle.



17 On your right is the former park keeper's cottage at the bottom of the hill, now used as social housing. To your left at the end of the path is the beacon - a relatively recent addition to the park which is lit on special occasions. You can find more info on the plaques attached to it.



18 At the end of the path turn left and head towards the Castle. Of particular note is a small section of wall, beside the path. This piece of wall is all that remains above-ground of the Roman Temple of Claudius. It formed part of the wall of the precinct surrounding the temple itself which stood where the Castle now sits.



19 Look up to the walkway on the bank that surrounds the Castle, the small white wooden building is a summerhouse. This summerhouse copies the design of a Greek temple and was built in 1731 by Charles Gray who owned the Castle at that time.



20 Walk the entire way around the Castle before heading back to the fragment of the Temple wall. The ruins at the front of the Castle are often assumed to be Roman, but are in fact the foundations of a Saxon Chapel. With a lack of quality building stone the Normans used the remains of Roman Colchester to construct the Castle. As you walk around the Castle look out for the huge amount of recycled red Roman tile. This includes whole stacks of tiles called plae, taken directly from the underfloor heating systems of decayed Roman houses.



21 When you get to the end of the West Wall look up at the small gaps in the masonry. Some are arrow slits but you can also spot the outlet for the 'garderobe' or medieval toilet! Fortunately these days it's perfectly safe to stand underneath... Exit the park from the gate in the fence, close to the wall.



22 Once through the gate, cross Ryegate Road, continue straight on into the Dutch Quarter. You will see St Helen's Chapel on the corner of Maidenburgh Street and St Helen's Lane. The Chapel dates back to the 1100's although legend says it is much older and was constructed by St Helena herself in the 3rd Century.



23 Look out for the wall of the Roman Theatre marked in red bricks in Maidenburgh Street. Colchester has two Roman theatres, here and a second at Gosbecks Archaeological Park. This theatre dates to the 2nd or 3rd centuries and could have held an audience of at least 3,000. Part of the building can still be seen above ground in the walls of St Helen's Chapel.



24 Walk along St Helen's Lane through the Dutch Quarter passing the former Blue Coats School on your left. The 'Dutch' Quarter is named after Flemish Protestant refugees who fled religious persecution in the 16th century and were invited to make Colchester their home. They settled in this area and their skills in cloth manufacture and finishing revived Colchester's cloth trade.



25 At the end of St Helen's Lane, look to your right down East Stockwell Street and you'll see Peake's House. To your left, over the road is Quakers Alley - walk through it to West Stockwell Street. If you didn't have any luck finding fossils in the Roman Wall, perhaps you'll have better luck on the wall of St Martin's which borders the alley! Peake's House was originally three houses, the oldest of which was built in the 1300's. It has a long history of modifications, extensions and restoration. Mr Peake was the last owner before the house was given to the Borough Council. It is now run by the Landmark Trust as a holiday home.



26 St Martin's Church which lies south east of Colchester's Town Hall is a spectacular medieval survivor. The tower of St Martin's Church was badly damaged during the English Civil War in 1648. Many reused Roman bricks can be seen in its exterior, especially in its tower. In the churchyard is the grave of Jacob Ringer, who was a 'Dutch' clothworker. He personally paid £10 of the £10,000 fine levied by Parliament on the town of Colchester for its role in the civil war.



27 Just a short distance down West Stockwell Street you will find numbers 11 & 12 marked with a plaque. In this house lived the sisters Jane and Anne Taylor and here Jane wrote the famous nursery rhyme 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star' in 1806. Walk up West Stockwell Street to the High Street. Note Sparlings Solicitors on your left hand side. This 15th-century building includes fine carvings of angels on the exterior.



28 Across the road is the graveyard of St Runwald's Church. The church was on the High Street for centuries before being demolished in 1878. Its graveyard is above street level, as a result of there being more than one layer of burials in the limited space.



29 Turn right on the High Street past the front of the Town Hall. The Town Hall is one of Colchester's most famous buildings. A lesser known fact is that part of the reason for its construction in 1902 was that its poorly built Victorian predecessor was damaged in the earthquake of 1884.



30 As you walk down the High Street you will pass the 'Walking Woman'. This statue can hardly be called secret, but accompanying her on a ledge on the side of Fenwick's department store is a smaller sculpture entitled 'Man with Cup'. Both sculptures are by artist Sean Henry, and are of anonymous figures.



31 Cross the top of North Hill at the traffic lights. Walk along Balmerne Passage. Note the stone parish boundary markers against the wall on the left. Once a common sight these are now perhaps the best example left in Colchester. Head towards the Victorian Water Tower. The nickname Jumbo, after the famous Victorian circus elephant, was not originally meant as a compliment. The weathervane on top symbolises this connection. See if you can spot the initials of the architect CC engraved about 30ft up on the west-facing wall.



32 Adjacent to Jumbo you will see the Mercury Theatre and Balmerne Gate. Take a moment to explore some of the not-so-secret Colchester whilst you're here and follow Balmerne Passage around to the left of the Mercury Theatre. To the rear of the theatre you'll see the Quaker Meeting House, originally built as a home by John Constable's solicitor.



33 Head right along Church Street to St Mary's Church. The church is now known as Colchester Arts Centre and hosts a regular programme of events. Ask a local resident about St Mary's and the chances are they'll tell you that the nursery rhyme Humpty Dumpty was written about a Civil War cannon shot down from the church tower. It's the source of some local pride, and a tale that can often be heard quoted on TV, radio or in newspapers, but perhaps the bigger secret of all is that there is absolutely no historical evidence for this story, despite its charming appeal.



34 Walk back down Church Street towards Head Street. Cross over and continue along Culver Street, past Culver Square and then turn right into Trinity Street. Holy Trinity Church is on your left in Trinity Square. Note the door in the church tower with its distinctive triangular design. It dates to the century before the Norman Conquest, making Holy Trinity the oldest standing building in Colchester.



35 To your right is the entrance to Tymperleys. The Tudor house known as Tymperleys is tucked away and has a secret garden, with a prized 600-year-old mulberry tree. Once home to one of Colchester's more significant residents - William Gilbert, one time physician to Elizabeth I, and pioneer in electro-magnetism.



36 Walk all the way around Trinity Church and head into the busy shopping street of Culver Walk. As you come to a cross-roads, look right to the impressive spire of Lion Walk Church.



37 Turn left to head down Red Lion Walk. Keep an eye out for interesting details as you walk through including a red lion painted on a drain pipe. As you enter the High Street turn and look up to see a carving of St Michael slaying the Dragon above the entrance - not St George as is often thought!



38 Cross the High Street to the George Hotel. Like many other buildings we have seen on our walk a medieval structure lies behind the facade. In its cellar you can also see evidence of the Boudican revolt as the exposed earth changes colour to reveal a layer of ash. The building features in Sarah Perry's popular novel 'The Essex Serpent'.

39 This is the final stop on our tour. To return to the start, continue walking the High Street until you see the Castle Park Gates once again.