

**THE HISTORY AND  
ANTIQUITIES OF  
COLCHESTER CASTLE**

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The History and Antiquities of Colchester Castle by Anonymous

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"A Castle some tyme stronge and statelye, as the ruynes thereof do shewe,"  
NONNAN, Chorography of Essex, 1594.

"That great Castle, . . . . . which I believe to be one of the most  
interesting buildings of its kind in the breadth and length of this island."  
LORD CAMBRIDGE, Inaugural Address at Colchester, 1876.

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1882.

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## PREFACE.

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An attempt is made in the following pages to set before the Public in a popular form, and at a price that should place it within general reach, some accurate information on the History and Archæology of the Royal Castle of Colchester. The want of some special guide to so remarkable a Building has long, I am informed, been felt. If we except the pamphlets avowedly written in support of the eccentric "Roman theory," there is no publication of the kind. The account given in Morant is not only meagre and inaccurate, but also out of date and inaccessible to the general Public. Two little books have, it is true, been issued—"Sketches of Ancient Colchester" and "The Tending Hundred in the Olden Time,"—but such information as they contain is virtually copied from Morant.

I have endeavoured to give life and interest to the "dry bones" of Archæology by using the Castle as a means of elucidating some fresh facts in the History of Colchester, and of throwing occasional light on the manners and customs of the time. I would hope that, by grouping historic events around this one building, I may rouse among those who have it ever before their eyes, a new and keener interest in the general history of their country. In the Introductory Chapter on "Ancient Colchester" the opportunity has been taken of putting together all that is known of that obscure period, and of thus illustrating an historic continuity which can be paralleled by few, if any, among the ancient towns of England. I trust this may serve to increase the pride which the inhabitants of Colchester may justly feel in the traditions of their olden greatness, and to remind them that they may indeed claim to be "citizens of no mean city."

I would add that by the courtesy of Mr. Round, M.P., the Proprietor of the Castle and its ancient Demesnes, I have been enabled to examine several of his documents containing original information. I have also to acknowledge the assistance of Mr. Gunner, the intelligent Keeper of the Castle and Curator of the Colchester Museum.

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## I.

## ANCIENT COLCHESTER.

SCARCELY has the darkness of the pre-historic epoch been illumined by the earliest rays of the dawn of British history when we are vouchsafed a vivid glimpse of an already existing Colchester, "Camulodunum, the Royal seat of Cunobelin,"<sup>1</sup>—such is its description in the pages of Dio Cassius, before it fell beneath the conquering Roman. Who then was Cunobelin and what was Camulodunum? Cunobelin—the Cymbeline of Shakespeare—was not improbably<sup>2</sup> the grandson of that very Caswallon who had resisted so gallantly<sup>3</sup> the invasion of Cæsar, that the Romans, for nearly a century, refrained from repeating the attempt. Like him, Cunobelin was recognised as the head of a wide confederacy (united, there is reason to believe,<sup>4</sup> by a system of native roads), but he seems to have fixed his residence within his hereditary dominions, first at Verulam (St. Alban's) and then<sup>5</sup> at Camulodunum (Colchester). He appears, in his youth, to have travelled as far as Rome,<sup>6</sup> and from Italy he probably brought back with him the skilful artists who designed and wrought his famous coinage.<sup>7</sup> After a reign extending over more than forty years,<sup>8</sup> he died as he had lived, on the banks of the Colne, powerful and free.

The site of this British Camulodunum<sup>9</sup> was long a problem

<sup>1</sup> *ἡ ἐν τῷ Κυνοβελίνου βασιλείῳ*

<sup>2</sup> The site of Caswallon's capital is rather doubtful, but Camden may be right in placing it at Verulam. Now Verulam was the original capital of Cunobelin.

<sup>3</sup> In the summer of 54 n.c.

<sup>4</sup> Pearson: *History of England* i. 12, 15. *Quart. Review* xvii. 78, 80.

<sup>5</sup> This is proved by the more advanced character of his coins, struck at Camulodunum.—Beale Poste: *Coins of Cunobelin and the Ancient Britons* (1858), p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> Beale Poste: *Coins of Cunobelin*.

<sup>7</sup> For his coins, see also Morsant's *Colchester* (1748) iii. 22, 29.

<sup>8</sup> It is considered that he began his reign before the Christian era, and died about 41 a.d.—Beale Poste: *Britannic Researches* (1858).

<sup>9</sup> *Observations on the site of Camulodunum* (Jenkins), *Archæologia* xxix (1842). *The Romans at Colchester*, *Quarterly Review* xvii. (1855). *The site of Camulodunum* (Scarth), *Archæological Journal* xxxiii. (1876). See also Camden, &c.



for the Antiquary, but the issue has now been unanimously narrowed to the sites of Lexden and Colchester. But even this rivalry disappears when we realise that it comprised them *both*. "The circumference of the city," says Mr. Jenkins,<sup>1</sup> "might probably have been about eight miles, and comprised the whole of Colchester and the village of Lexden and the land lying between and contiguous to them." "When we picture to ourselves," adds the Quarterly Reviewer, "what a British Oppidum was,<sup>2</sup>—a wide space enclosed within mounds or stockades or, more commonly, flanked on two or three sides by woods or morasses, and defended in front by a rude rampart,—we shall be struck with its perfect correspondence with such a position. To the North of it flows the Colne, in a deep, and what must in those days have been a marshy valley, while on the South it is flanked by a smaller stream, still called the Roman river, which probably made its way through dense forests. These two streams, meeting in the estuary of the Colne, enclose on three sides the peninsula on the neck of which Lexden stands; and across this neck of land, or such part of it as was unoccupied by marsh or wood, two or perhaps three parallel lines of rampart may now be traced for two or more miles, supposed to be British from the flint celts which have been found about them. . . . In the space within them, amounting to about twenty (?) square miles, inaccessible on the North, South, and East, and strongly defended on the West, the Trinobantes could retire in security, with all their flocks and herds." That the actual residence of Cunobelin may have stood at Lexden, as its name<sup>3</sup> would seem to imply, is very probable, but I cannot admit that, on that account, Colchester itself should be excluded from the limits of his capital. On the contrary, a glance at the map will show that it formed an integral part<sup>4</sup> of his stronghold. For we must remember that the oval space thus enclosed would be none too large for the permanent headquarters,<sup>5</sup> and the potential retreat, of the most powerful tribe in Britain.

<sup>1</sup> *Colchester Castle, the Temple of Claudius* (1869) p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Compare Pearson i. p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> *Vide* Jenkins: Lexden, Lessenden, Llys-dyn—the seat of royalty.

<sup>4</sup> We might expect that the population would be impartially spread over the area, and that so favourable a site as that of Colchester would not be neglected. The chief, however, would naturally reside at the most important military point.

<sup>5</sup> It must be remembered that they all had their sheep and cattle with them.

That three<sup>1</sup> British roads already led to Lexden merely indicates that at Lexden was the *entrance* to the tribal settlement, the one break in the long line of rampart.<sup>2</sup> At each extremity of the main line of defence, a rampart would seem to have been carried out into the woods, as an additional cover to the flanks; but the actual settlement would not have extended beyond the two streams. And this brings us to the strangest point of the whole story, namely, that our modern Colchester not only includes within its limits the great bulk of the British Camulodunum, but that the boundaries of the two are, for considerable distances,<sup>3</sup> absolutely identical! Are we not almost driven to the conclusion that Lexden and East Donyland<sup>4</sup> are annexed to Colchester *because* with Liys-dyn and Din-y-lan it constituted Camulodunum?<sup>5</sup> If so, our ancient Boundary, with its otherwise unmeaning extension to Stanway Heath and to Kingsford Bridge, becomes full of significance as the standing witness to the military necessities of the ancient Briton.<sup>6</sup>

The second scene in the history of Colchester begins with its Conquest by the Emperor Claudius, A.D. 44. Called over by a son<sup>7</sup> of the deceased Cunobelin, he entered in triumph the famous stronghold at the head of a train of elephants and some 25,000<sup>8</sup> legionaries, and high above the waters of the Colne, in a

<sup>1</sup> One of these is thought to be identical with the present road to London. (Q.R. xvii. p. 80.)

<sup>2</sup> There is a large collection of sketches and views of these works, as they appeared in the last century, in the Gough Collection, at the Bodleian.

<sup>3</sup> *i.e.*, on the West, along the great rampart dividing the parishes of Lexden and Stanway, and anciently known as the Wyldenhay, *i.e.*, Wealdun-Hai—"the limit of the jurisdiction" (Jenkins). On the South, along the Roman river.

<sup>4</sup> Donyland is plausibly explained by Jenkins as Din-y-lan—"the precinct of the Town." There is no good Saxon derivation. Notice that the original "Donyland" just filled this part of Camulodunum, but that a subsequent division cut *East* Donyland out of the area.

<sup>5</sup> It is important to observe that the three constituent parts of the ancient "Camulodunum" have retained names derived from British or Roman originals. Does this show that they mainly retained also their populations?—*Cornhill Mag.*, September 1881, "*Old English Clans*" (Mr. Allen.)

<sup>6</sup> I commend this phenomenon, *quantum valet*, to the notice of Mr. Green and the rest of that modern School who maintain that every trace of the Roman (and *a fortiori* the pre-Roman) Polity was wholly effaced by the 'English' Conquest. See also p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Adminius.

<sup>8</sup> The four Legions with auxiliaries, &c., would amount to fully this number.—Horsley's *Brit. Rom.* I. chap. vi. p. 76. Compare Roy p. 187.

vast encampment<sup>1</sup> of which the lines may be roughly reproduced in the existing streets<sup>2</sup> of Colchester,—there were seen flashing in the sunlight the victorious Eagles of Rome.<sup>3</sup> A military colony was the favourite method by which the Romans secured their “march,” the limit of their latest conquest. Accordingly ‘Colonia<sup>4</sup> Camulodunum,’ their first Colony in England, rose rapidly<sup>5</sup> among the conquered Trinobantes. Lapped in Italian luxury, and scorning the thought of possible danger from those ‘barbarians’ whom they insulted<sup>6</sup> and oppressed, they dwelt at ease in their scattered Villas, without the protection of a wall<sup>7</sup> or even, at length, of a garrison.<sup>8</sup> Relying on their tutelary<sup>9</sup> Deity, that Emperor-God whose

<sup>1</sup> That the camp of Claudius was fixed (as General Roy asserts.—*Military Antiquities*, 1793, p. 187) on the site of the present Colchester is, I think, shewn (1) by that site being the strongest point within the area of Camulodunum (the Britons required *space*, but the Romans *strength*); (2) by its being the furthest removed from the dreaded chance of a surprise by the infuriated natives; (3) by its remarkable correspondence with the size required for the camp of such a force (a strong outpost was planted out at Lexden); (4) by the camp-like plan on which Colchester is laid out.

<sup>2</sup> “The direction of these avenues has been nearly, though not precisely, preserved to the present day. The High Street of Colchester, like the Corso of Rome, for no reason that can be traced, deflects slightly from the original line, and is no longer flush with the Prætorian or front gate in the Western face of the walls, though it still preserves its original exit at the opposite side. . . . We have called the Western entrance of Colchester the Prætorian, because the West gate, we conceive in this case, was that which was supposed to face the enemy.” Q.R. xvii. 86.

<sup>3</sup> The mutilated Eagle of a Roman Standard, found at Colchester, is now in the possession of Mr. H. Willett of Brighton.

<sup>4</sup> Of such importance was the British Camulodunum that not only did the Romans select it as the first point to be occupied, but they actually retained its native name. Just as I placed the camp of Claudius on the very site of Colchester, so would I place there this first Colony, a conclusion confirmed by all discoveries on that site and rendered probable by its coincidence with the previous camp and the second Colony, by its striking situation, and by its easier access to the sea. “Wherever,” says Mr. Freeman, “the British settlement was, I cannot bring myself to believe that the site of the Colony was other than the site of the present town.”—*Arch. Journ.* xxxiv. 50.

<sup>5</sup> There seems some doubt as to the exact date. Jenkins is probably right in fixing it at 50 A.D.

<sup>6</sup> Tac. Ann. xiv. 81.—“Pellegant domibus, exturbabant agris ‘captivos,’ ‘servos’ appellando.”

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* “Coloniam nullis munimentis septam; quod ducibus nostris parum provisum erat dum amœnitati priusquam usui consulitur.”

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* 32. “Sed quia procul Suetonius aberat petivere a Cato Deciano procuratore auxilium.”

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* “tutelâ templi freti.” Mr. Jenkins, by what must be pronounced