

Name of project/group
Colchester's Roman Circus
Type of project
Social action\Opening up public services
Location
Colchester, East of England
What was involved
<p>In 2004, Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) carried out archaeological investigations for the developer Taylor Wimpey as part of the works for the redevelopment of Colchester Garrison, and discovered the remains of a 2nd Century Roman Circus, the only one known in Britain.</p> <p>A project was subsequently conceived by CAT and Destination Colchester (a local voluntary organisation) to raise £200,000 to buy the former Sergeants' Mess (itself a listed Victorian building) and site of the Roman Circus' starting gates, to protect it, and to set up a free interpretation centre for the public. Creating a quiet and pleasant space in which Colcestrians and visitors alike can relax and explore a unique aspect of Colchester's Roman past'.</p>

Achievements
<p>Without the project, a highly significant (unique within Britain, as its only known Roman circus) heritage asset would have been lost to the local community and to the public as a whole. There would be no interpretation of the site, and there would be less awareness of local heritage, which has been greatly increased by the project.</p> <p>In September 2009 Taylor Wimpey offered the partnership six months to buy the Sergeants' Mess building. Local fundraising developed and increased due to imaginative fundraising, which employed a variety of activities in the local area, such as a Roman feast, treasure trails for children and cinema screenings (Ben Hur, courtesy of the local Odeon cinema). A number of local businesses and individuals donated, for instance a local antique shop, a printers and football fans at a Colchester United match. Schools raised money via non-uniform days for pupils. Online fundraising (via Facebook and Twitter) was also a key medium.</p> <p>The total raised was around £242,000 including pledges, from 1001 donations. The Friends of CAT donated £30,000 in total. In the final stage of the project the local council pledged the final £30,000 if the group raised £170,000, which they did.</p> <p>A major challenge for the project occurred in October 2010, when one of the two buyers for the Sergeants' Mess dropped out, leaving a £200,000 shortfall in the funding package. In</p>

December 2010 the decision was made, and put to all donors who could be identified, to apply to purchase the former Army Education Centre building rather than the Sergeants' Mess for use as the site's education centre, although the funds had been raised to buy the latter. This was due to the perceived risk of taking on such a large building.

Ownership of the garden, and therefore the means to create a free interpretation centre, would, however, still be obtained, on a long lease held by Colchester Borough Council. In January 2011 the Charity Bank approved CAT's application for a mortgage for the remaining £168,000 to buy the former Army Education Centre.

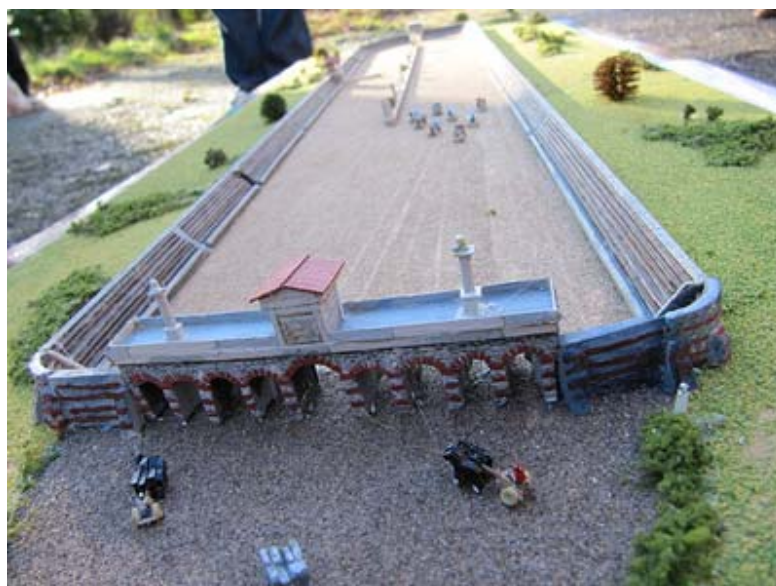


Future plans

The proposal for the site is to permanently expose under cover the central part of the Roman Circus' gates and mark the positions of the rest of the gates. An interpretation centre would be set up, also housing a tea-room; the profits from which it is hoped would allow the centre to be free to visit.

The local council have purchased land around the circus 'where possible' to save the circus for the future.

The partnership are keen to launch a second appeal, as they still believe that the ownership of the Sergeants' Mess would be beneficial to the project, and are working on an application for an HLF grant for the same purpose.



Lessons Learnt

It is considered that a key part of the fund-raising's success lay in its focus on telling a story rooted in local heritage, emphasising that it aimed to save *community* heritage, and promoting the multiple layers of heritage involved (the 19th century army garrison, the Roman Circus and the archaeological remains excavated from other periods). This attracted a wide range of people. The variety of fundraising activities and events are also considered to have been a major factor in the appeal's success, as was the use of social-media.

In terms of sharing the project experience, a member of the project team has given presentations about the project's successful fundraising tactics, including an online presentation, and one to a visiting group of planners.

Project contact

<http://www.romancircus.org/>

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