

# ROYSTON CAVE

[www.roystoncave.co.uk](http://www.roystoncave.co.uk)

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*Melbourn Street, Royston, Herts SG8 7BZ*

Royston Cave is unique in Europe. Believed to date from the 14th Century, it is a man-made cavern in the shape of a beehive, with a small aperture at the top for ventilation. Its most remarkable feature is an extensive range of wall carvings representing the Crucifixion, the Holy Family and several saints, among them St Katherine, St Laurence and St Christopher. Others are less easily identified and some have been interpreted as possible pagan symbols.

The carvings are medieval in appearance and some studies of the Cave have drawn comparisons from the wall carvings and other sources to indicate that it may have been used by the Knights Templar. Other studies point to the existence of Masonic symbols within the Cave that could link the Cave to James I who was himself a Freemason and who maintained a hunting lodge at Royston. Others believe the Cave is a spiritual centre where two significant ley-lines cross and other studies indicate that the Cave may simply have been a hermitage or a prison or oubliette.

What is certain though is that there is very little hard evidence to support the various theories as no records exist as to its use or purpose and dating is very difficult for a number of reasons including the lack of organic material and contamination since the Cave was re-discovered.

Situated underneath Melbourn Street, close to the Roys Stone and the Cross the Cave is now owned by Royston Town Council, and is a Grade 1 archaeological site overseen by English Heritage. The Royston Cave is a medieval, manmade structure hewn out of the chalk, lost and then rediscovered in 1742. During 1790 the Cave was excavated and a passageway into it was dug out. This allowed visitors to see the unique medieval style carvings that now bring visitors from all over the world. Since 1996 much restoration work has been carried out with the help of grants from English Heritage, Hertfordshire County Council, the Town Council, and the Royston History Society. More work is needed to protect and restore this unique and ever intriguing ancient monument and there is currently a conservation plan in place that will take a number of years to complete. The Cave is run by volunteers from the Royston and District Local History Society.

Opening times are from Easter Saturday to the end of September - Saturday, Sunday, and Bank Holiday Mondays 2.30pm-5.00pm (last entry 4.30). The Cave is also open for the same hours every Wednesday in August. Individual tours for interested parties can be arranged. Entry is by guided tour only (which lasts around 30 to 40 minutes) and only 18 people are allowed down at any one time. During busy times, visitors may have to wait till the next tour starts. Admission charges are Adults £3 with accompanied children under 16 free, unaccompanied children under 16 are charged at 20p.

Please phone the Town Clerk or check the website for more details.

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