



Charity Registration No.237885

NEWSLETTER APRIL 2025

This Newsletter has been edited for The Colchester Civic Society by Glyn Barritt. Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of The Civic Society.

Contributions are always welcome and should be sent to Glyn Barritt

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The Society's website: www.colchestercivicsociety.co.uk; interact with on social media...

Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/colchestercivicsociety>

X (Twitter) – <https://x.com/colcivicsociety>

BlueSky - <https://bsky.app/profile/colcivicsociety.bsky.social>

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

An invitation to all Members of Colchester Civic Society

The 2025 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Society will be held on Tuesday 10 June at 19.00pm prompt, in the Cloisters Restaurant at Greyfriars, High Street, Colchester.

AGENDA

- 1 Apologies for absence
- 2 Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 10 June 2024
- 3 Matters arising from the Minutes
- 4 Chair's Report for 2025
- 5 Financial Report and Accounts
Treasurer, Paul Weston, will present the Financial Report and Accounts for 2024 (copies will be available at the meeting)
- 6 Appointment of Auditor/Independent Examiner
- 7 Election of Officers and Executive Committee
Nominations at least 7 days prior to the AGM may be sent to the Secretary, Michael Fitt at 31 Roman Road, Colchester or by e-mail to honsecCCS@gmail.com, or handed in at one of our regular coffee mornings.

Current Officers are:

Chair: Jo Edwards

Vice-Chair: Ann Turner

Hon Secretary: Michael Fitt

Hon Treasurer: Paul Weston

Executive Committee: Up to 14 members may be elected.

Current members are:

Sheila Anderton, Glyn Barritt, John Collett, Roger Dennis, Peter Evans,
Robert Mercer, John Salmon and Ken Walker

Civic Society members assisting the Executive Committee on specific issues, but not members of the committee, are Richard Arnopp (Plaque trails) Pamela Bradley (New Blue Plaques), Ged Dickinson (Social Media)

Please note that under our constitution, the President and Vice-Presidents are appointed by the Executive Committee.

- 9 Proposal to Formally Adopt a Revised Objectives Clause in our Constitution
(Following approval by the Charity Commission)
- 10 Any Other Business

Should any member wish to appoint a Proxy for the Meeting they should do so, in writing, to the Secretary, at least 48hours before the meeting.

Please do your best to come and take part in the governance of our society, and if you are interested in taking an active role, please speak to a member of the Committee.

'HELLO' FROM YOUR NEW EDITOR...

Welcome to my first edition of the Civic Society Newsletter as its Editor. I have taken this role over from Peter Evans who has been your editor for nearly 12 years and very grateful we are to him for having done a sterling job in all that time. We are not losing Peter from the Executive Committee... far from it! He will be taking over the role of Treasurer from Paul Weston who again, has served the Committee well in keeping control of our finances.



I have the privilege of being a Colchester City Tour Guide alongside a number of colleagues who qualified for this prestigious role in 2022. Since that time, I've enjoyed giving historic walking tours of Colchester, leading visitors into the Roman foundations and onto the roof of our beloved Castle, and tours of our beautiful Town Hall. The picture here – *taken by Irene Kettle of North Essex Heritage* - shows me about to enter the wonderful and iconic Jumbo water tower where tours of the inside have become a popular addition to the suite of tours our Guides now offer.

My other responsibility on the Civic Society Executive Committee is to make sure that some of Colchester's Heritage Open Day venues are staffed by volunteers. This year, Heritage Open Days fall between Friday 12 September and Sunday 21 September, and we are hoping to meet many Civic Society members at some point during that time. A full programme will be published by Colchester City Council a little nearer the time and we'll make sure we point you in that direction later in the year!

Away from guiding, I volunteer at St Helena Hospice's Vintage Shop in Sir Isaac's Walk and work part-time at Colchester Hospital. And before that, my main career was in educational technology when I found myself extolling the benefits of technology to teachers and headteachers for all aspects of school life – learning, teaching and management!

I would like this newsletter to convey news and information... but I'd also like to share some of your stories and endeavours towards making our city a must-see destination! Please feel very welcome to contact me – glynbarritt@gmail.com



On behalf of the Civic Society, I would like to thank Green Square for printing this newsletter and its attachments. More information about the company can be found on the website here - <https://www.greensquare.me/>

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS 2025

From Programme Organiser, Jo Edwards....

We are delighted to have secured events to span many of the forthcoming months. More opportunities may present themselves throughout the course of the year and we shall of course, notify you of those opportunities if they come to fruition.

Please remember that events are open to all Civic Society members and guests are generally welcome to join us on visits – but please check if you are in doubt. Enclosed with this newsletter are reply slips which you can post back to me, hand to me (at Coffee Mornings) or email to me - josiemedwards@hotmail.com. Payment can be made by cash, cheque or bank transfer - if you choose the latter, please let us know what the payment is for!

COFFEE MORNINGS

All members are welcome at our Thursday Coffee Mornings – just turn up at Greyfriars by 09.30am and meet at the Cloisters restaurant.

We hold many of our meetings at Greyfriars as it is convenient for public transport, has free car parking and is fully accessible. If you are not able to manage the steps up to Reception, the staff will flatten them for you (the steps can transform into a lift)!

We can use the dedicated Hotel car park which is off to the right as you drive into car park entrance opposite the Forester's Arms. Just before the tall gates, there is an intercom on a short post – just press the button and say that you are there for a Civic Society meeting when the receptionist answers. The gates will open automatically (away from you).

The cost of attending our Coffee Mornings is free ...but donations to Society funds are very welcome as the cost of coffee, tea, biscuits and room hire works out to be £7 per head. We pass a donations box around the room at every meeting (as long as someone reminds me) **but your presence is far more important than your donation!**

Future Coffee Morning dates...

The first Thursday of every month at 09.30am in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars

1 May 2025	5 June 2025	3 July 2025	7 August 2025
4 September 2025	2 October 2025	6 November 2025	4 December 2025

Thursday 24 April 2025 – Holy Trinity Church

Meet at Holy Trinity Church in Trinity Street to find out more about the church and the amazing plans for its future. The cost is free.

Please let me know as soon as possible if you are interested in this rather special visit. Although funding for the repairs to the church is available through the Government's *Town Deal* scheme, the money for converting the church into a warm, functional, space still needs to be raised. A Heritage Lottery Fund bid is currently being drawn up. St Helena Hospice is hoping to be able to open the church as an all-purpose community hub. They are now

working in partnership with the Council that owns the building, to see what can be achieved. This is your opportunity find out more and to give your thoughts, which will be really useful material for the HLF bid. Despite the fact that this visit is planned for late April, please wear warm clothes - the church is unbelievably cold and it is empty! There is no seating, so if you can't stand for long, please bring a camping chair or stool.

As we can only have a few people in the church at a time, we have arranged three slots - 10am, 11am and 12noon. Please indicate on the reply slip which you would prefer. The 10am slot is almost fully booked so please choose the later ones if possible. And please indicate whether you want the same time slot as a friend.

Thursday 1 May 2025 – Coffee Morning

Meet at 09.30am in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars

Friday 2 May 2025 – Orderly House Cavalry Barracks

Meet at 10.00am at the Barracks in Dragoon Road, Colchester CO2 7FU

Cost is free but please consider a donation to the *Le Cateau Memorial Fund*.

Orderly House was originally the Guard House, Prisoners' Room and Cells, and Fire Engine House at the Butt Road entrance to the Cavalry Barracks. Local developer Adrian Mann has returned a derelict building to its former glory, retaining most of its original features including the cell doors! The work he has done is superb and shows what can be done to preserve the history of such buildings whilst creating a stunning and practical modern workspace. This is a rare opportunity, not to be missed! Adrian was also deeply involved with Civic Society member, Paul Knappett's extraordinary efforts to commemorate Le Cateau Barracks with the beautiful memorial between the Sergeant's Mess and Roman Circus House. Although the memorial is now in place, fundraising to cover the full cost of it is ongoing. I would therefore like to suggest that those who join us on this visit consider a voluntary donation to the Memorial Fund.

Directions and parking

Turn off Butt Road into Circular Road West; take the first turning on the left into Dragoon Road (not signed) and then left again. Continue along Dragoon Road to the end - Orderly House is last building on left set in the inner corner of Butt Road and Circular Road West.

Some parking is available (see directions below) and there is a bus stop in Butt Road.

Jane's Walk Colchester

Saturday 3 May to Sunday 11 May (inclusive)

Jane's Walk is an international week of free local walks led by local people on local themes, taking place in towns and cities around the world, honouring the legacy of the urbanist, writer and activist, Jane Jacobs (1916-2006), and marking the anniversary of her birth.

Information and 2025 programme on the website -
<https://www.walkcolchester.org.uk/janes-walk>

Monday 12 May 2025 – Annual Spring Up Meeting

Meet at 19.00pm in the Salon at Greyfriars.

Conscious of the fact that some members are unable to come to Coffee Mornings, we offer two meetings a year where members can catch up with all that the Society is doing but also raise matters that they would like us to address. The other meeting is **Burning Issues**, usually held close to Guy Fawkes Night!

The cost is free, but donations to the Society are very welcome.

Wednesday 14 May 2025 – St Martin's Church and St Helen's Chapel

Meet at 19.00pm at St Martin's Church, West Stockwell Street.

Both of these ancient churches are now in the care of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Colchester, which is under the jurisdiction of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland, and they are receiving the TLC they needed. The visit is an opportunity to find out more about the Orthodox Church and about the ancient and rather chequered history of both churches.

St Martin's is a mediaeval church with the remains of a Norman tower and 14th century roof. The tower was badly damaged in the Siege of 1648 and the church fell into disrepair afterwards - the historian Philip Morant described it as 'ruinous'. The Victorians rescued it, helped by Gilbert Scott, who visited in 1876; he was so impressed by the roof that he gave the money which was needed to restore it! The church was made redundant in 1953 and was later occupied by a theatre group who used it from 1957 to 1987 - they painted the internal walls black! During the 1960s, it became the home of 'The Disc' - a weekend discotheque for the young people of Colchester. The church was passed to the Churches Conservation Trust in 1996 and became the Orthodox Church in 2022.

St Helen's Chapel is a 13th century building built on the remains of the Roman Theatre but also built on the site of an earlier chapel, as Eudo Dapifer's records refer to repairs made in 1076. It fell into disuse in the 14th century, before becoming a chantry until it was bought as a Meeting House for the Quakers in 1683. More recently, it was used as a furniture repository and Colchester Museum store before being acquired by the current church.

The cost is free but donations towards the upkeep of these very important buildings would be gratefully received.

Thursday 5 June 2025 – Coffee Morning

Meet at 09.30am in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars

Tuesday 10 June 2025 – Annual General Meeting

Meet at 19.00pm in the Cloisters Restaurant at Greyfriars.

The business part of the meeting will be followed by a short break for coffee before a presentation by Matthew Brown and Clare Ratcliffe from Colchester Council about the lesser known projects funded by the Government's *Town Deal* Fund. Members have

attended the various briefings given to the Civic Society about the *Town Deal* and *Levelling Up* projects in the city but there are a number of smaller projects that have rather gone under the radar. We will find out about the huge difference they have made to people's lives and we might also get some updates on the progress (or otherwise) of some of the big projects, too!

The cost is free but donations to the Society are welcome.

Tuesday 17 June 2025 – Visit to Anglesey Abbey

Meet at 08.45am at the coach stop opposite Greyfriars.

Rosemary Jewers, one of our Civic Society Vice Presidents, moved to Cambridgeshire recently to be nearer her family. At a very temporary loose end, she decided to apply to be a volunteer at Anglesey Abbey and was accepted. She immediately asked whether we could visit so she could see us all again. Of course, Rosemary...we are on our way! I suspect most of you know Anglesey Abbey but it's a place you can visit time and time again and see something new on each occasion.

Probably founded by Henry I as the Hospital of St Mary, it was converted in the 13th century into an Augustinian Priory which lasted until the Dissolution. It then had a series of owners, the first of whom stripped the roof off the buildings to use the materials for his new home at Madingley. It wasn't until 1609 that the ruins were turned into a house. The house was eventually bought by American-born Lord Fairhaven and his younger brother in 1926. Lord Fairhaven lived there until his death in 1966, at which time the house and estate passed into the management of the National Trust. Lord Fairhaven was a great collector and amongst the treasures in the house is the recently restored pagoda clock.

The gardens are lovely and garden tours will be available during the day. Please indicate on your reply slip if you wish to go on a garden tour. And, of course, there is the Lode Mill to visit as well.

Light meals are available at the cafe or you can bring a picnic.

If you have guests who would like to join us, then please feel free to bring them.

Although we start from East Hill, the coach will pick up at Marks Tey and, if there is a demand, in Lexden Road, too.

Cost: National Trust and Royal Horticultural Society Members £20
Non NT or RHS Members £37

Thursday 3 July 2025 – Coffee Morning

Meet at 09.30am in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars

Thursday 17 July 2025 – Guided Walk of Castle Park with our new Town Crier

Meet at 18.30pm at the Museum Street Gate to Castle Park

As many of you know, the Civic Society joined with the Arts Society Colchester, the Friends of Castle Park and Colchester Photographic Society to devise a simple trail of the Castle Park, ideal for families and for visitors to Colchester wanting a walk before dinner whilst staying at one of the nearby hotels. The trail is just about to be formally launched.

In a conversation with the new Town Crier and Civic Society member, Rennie Chivers, he mentioned that he was doing some in depth research about the Park. I asked him whether he would be prepared to share what he had found out to celebrate the launch of the Trail. There and then, we agreed the date for this walk. And there is one thing for sure. Rennie can be heard! He also has huge enthusiasm, some interesting source material and a passionate love of Colchester and its history. It should be a really good evening!

The cost is free but donations to the Society's funds are always welcome.

Thursday 7 August 2025 – Coffee Morning

Meet at 09.30am in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars

Thursday 4 September 2025 – Coffee Morning

Meet at 09.30am in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars

Heritage Open Days

12-21 September (inclusive)

This year's dates are later than previously and span two weekends. The Civic Society has been asked to steward the Roman Theatre on both weekends which means that we need your help please on the 13 and 14 September, and again on 20 and 21 September. It is also possible that we might need a couple of volunteers at the Audley Chapel in Berechurch Hall Road as well.

Stewarding is great fun and you will meet a lot of very interesting people! I thoroughly recommend it. Can you help us, please?

****SAVE THE DATE****

Thursday 18 September 2025 at 10.30am – Visit to Colchester Oyster Fishery

The Colchester Oyster Fishery at Pyefleet Quay, East Mersea and glorious scenery is a visit not to be missed. More information about this rare opportunity will be given in the next newsletter.

Thursday 2 October 2025 – Coffee Morning

Meet at 09.30am in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars

Sunday 12 October 2025 – Historic City Walk

Meet outside the Town Hall at 14.00pm

An afternoon's historic walk with Civic Society Executive Committee Member and Chair of Colchester Tourist Guides Association, Glyn Barritt.

The Civic Society is strongly encouraging you all to *Look Up* while walking in Colchester - and this walk is no different, adding 'look a little closer' to truly appreciate the history that has shaped our beautiful City. Please join me for this October's '*Look a Little Closer*' tour - you may have your own tales that you can add to the mix of lesser known delights!

The cost is free but donations to the Society's funds are always welcome.

Monday 20 October 2025 – Annual Burning Issues Meeting

Meet at 19.00pm in the Salon at Greyfriars.

See the information for the **Spring Up** meeting in May. This is your second opportunity to attend an evening meeting to find out what we are doing and to tell us what you would like us to do!

Wednesday 29 October 2025 – Visit to Exhibition Road, London

Meet at 08.00am at the Coach Stop opposite Greyfriars.

Before Covid, we had a very popular visit to London that I have decided to repeat. So often, I hear people say that they would love to visit the Science Museum, the Natural History Museum and/or the V&A but as they are such a hassle to get to, they don't. The answer? A coach from Colchester to Exhibition Road! Just that, nothing more. Once you are there, you will be free for the day to decide where to go and what to see - and the cost will be less than the train fare, even with railcards! Guests are welcome.

The cost is £20 per person

Thursday 6 November 2025 – Coffee Morning

Meet at 09.30am in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars

Thursday 4 December 2025 – Coffee Morning

Meet at 09.30am in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars

Please use the reply slips enclosed with this newsletter to book your place on the visits and to indicate your attendance at other events.
Thank you.

CAST IRON LAMP POSTS

Colchester Civic Society is looking for volunteers to carry forward the restoration of our Cast iron Lamp post during the summer of 2025.

John Salmon writes...

After discovering that Essex Highways had removed Colchester's cast iron lamp posts from its maintenance programme, Colchester Civic Society initiated necessary restoration to address their deteriorating condition. Our restoration efforts began in June 2020, with residents organising the repainting of the lamp posts in Roman and Castle Roads.

In the following year, the Irvine Road Area Residents Association organised the stripping and repainting of a similar number of lamp posts in Irvine, Athelstan, Capel and Audley Roads. Since then, small groups organised by individual residents have completed the stripping and repainting of cast iron lamp posts in Queens Road, Beverley Road, Victoria Road and The Avenue. Errington Road and Wickham Road are the latest areas to benefit from this work, with a small group of volunteers calling themselves the **Lamp Post Saviours** (*shown in the photograph*).



Hamilton Road was also due to benefit from work on the remaining four cast iron posts, organised by resident and Civic Society member, David Molloy.

However, the programme for conversion of the county's streetlights to LED resulted in around thirty of our cast iron posts being deemed unfit for conversion - and this included all five cast iron posts in Hamilton Road.

At this point, David Molloy turned his attention to trying to persuade Essex Highways to make the minor repairs necessary for the conversion of these posts, instead of replacing them. With the help of County Councillor, Sue Lissimore and Ward Councillor, Pam Cox (now Colchester's MP), David met some success. Four Hamilton Road posts have now been repaired and converted to LED lighting and David will now turn his attention to organising their stripping and repainting during the coming summer, as well as continuing to attempt to secure the long term future of these posts. Currently, Essex County Council's policy is still one of managed decline with no long-term future for these assets, despite the efforts of the Civic Society and Colchester's residents.

There are many more streets which could benefit from the restoration of their cast iron lamp posts; these are to be found in the New Town area, St John's Green, St Mary's and in the Lexden Road and Maldon Road areas (see Bob Mercer's full list here - Colchester Lamp Post Local-Listing Survey****).

If you are interested in getting involved, please email me - John Salmon at info@colchestercivicsociety.co.uk. I will arrange for permission with Essex Highways and provide you with the paint, tools and equipment you will need. Also instructions as to how to carry out the work and provide the necessary insurance cover.

****For those who are receiving a hard copy of this newsletter, you can access Bob Mercer's spreadsheet by typing this url into your web browser - https://www.colchestercivicsociety.co.uk/colchester-lamp-post-local-listing-survey_r-merc-2020-copy/ OR...

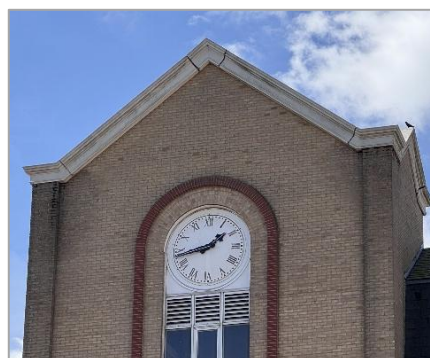
On the home page of the Colchester Civic Society website, scroll down to the *What We Do* section and click on the *What We Do* link. On the resulting page, you will a section headed *Colchester's Cast Iron Lamp Posts* – click on the *Read More* button. Scroll to the bottom of this page and follow the link *A Survey of Colchester's Iron Work*; to access the spreadsheet, one further click on *Colchester's Cast Iron Lamp Post – Data Only*.



AN ANNIVERSARY THAT YOU MAY HAVE MISSED

Peter Evans writes...

During the Covid lock down, I took a number of walks in various directions from home for exercise and a breath of air. Whilst Abbey Fields is quite close, it was full of people walking dogs or children and circled by many cyclists. I preferred the other streets, which were not crowded and I was even able to cross Southway on foot as no traffic was in sight in any direction! The view from St John's Abbey Gate across to the Bus Station was entirely devoid of people. I walked down Mersea Road, no one else in sight, and spotted that the clock on the Osborne Street NCP had stopped at 1.42. It was somewhere around the end of March or early April 2020. It is still at that time despite efforts by the Civic Society and others to persuade someone to fix it!



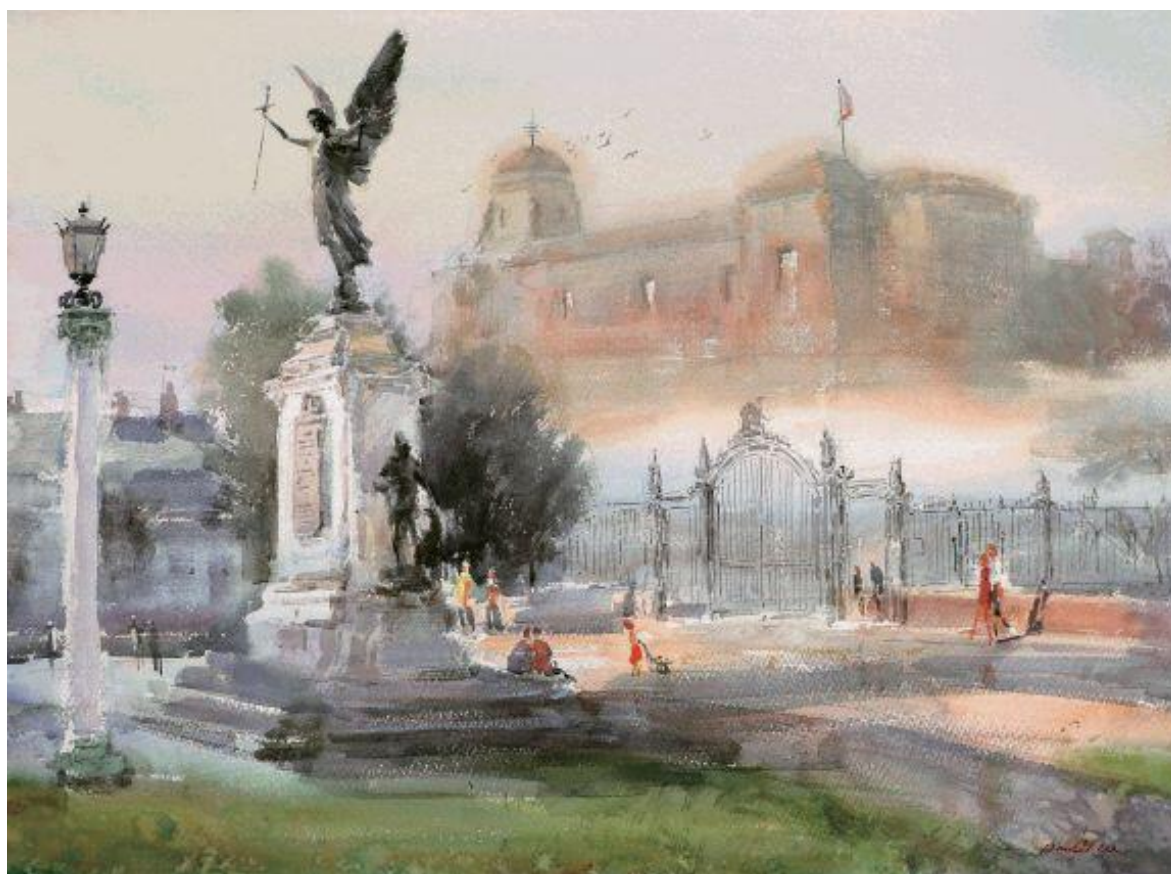
So for the last five years, it has shown the same time (1.42)! Automatically, I still look up at the clock but no luck - still 1.42! I don't expect a celebration, but **when is it going to be fixed?**

OUR WEBSITE

www.colchestercivicsociety.co.uk

For those of you who are not familiar with our website, John Salmon has provided this short, guided tour...

When you first connect with the website you will see a painting of Colchester High Street. This is by Li Mang and is one of twelve paintings featured in a calendar for 2022 produced by Colchester Chinese Culture Society. Most are local scenes and are said to be a tribute to John Constable. I first saw this calendar on sale in the Firstsite shop and with the assistance of the Chinese Cultural Society, I was able to contact the artist, Li Mang. He was very helpful and gave me permission to use any of the paintings from the calendar on our website. He also sent me a copy of a pdf containing the high quality images of all twelve paintings which were used for the printing. Currently I alternate between the High Street Scene and this one of the Castle and the War Memorial.



I would like to find other paintings of Colchester's major landmarks to exhibit in this way. If you have any suggestions, please get on touch.

Further down the page you will see links (in blue boxes) to our social media accounts. Thanks to the dedicated work of our publicist and social media lead Ged Dickinson, our **X** account (formerly known as Twitter) and our **Facebook** account have more than one thousand followers. Beside the links to these accounts, you will see a new one named **Blue Sky**. This is a fast growing social media platform which is very similar to the original

Twitter. We think that this may eventually replace **X**, which has become associated more and more with extremist content. By the end of its first month, our Blue Sky account had over one hundred followers. Ged posts daily and his posts are available on all three platforms. Do take a look if you haven't done so already. You can view our posts to all three social media accounts from the website without any need to open a social media account of your own. But if you do have a social media account, we would love you to follow one or more of our accounts and better still, engage with the posts by liking, sharing and commenting.

Directly underneath the social media links are links labelled **Become a Member** and **What We Do**. Virtually all new members join us via the online form which is on the *Join Us* page. The *What We Do* link opens a page giving a brief introduction to all the areas of work with which the society is involved. There are fourteen areas of work listed here along with links to pages providing detailed information about the various projects and areas of work.

The **Eyes and Ears** page for instance, includes reports on a number of clean-up and litter-picking projects and also provides links for you to follow for reporting a range of issues such as graffiti, fly-tipping, dog fouling, trees, streetlights, water and drainage.

Both the **Conservation** and the **Cast Iron Lamp Post** pages have hidden depths, with a vast amount of information on offer. Follow the link to the *Survey of Colchester's Iron Work* which opens a further sixteen pages including a history of Colchester's Iron Foundries.

The most recent addition to the *What We Do* pages is one entitled **Colchester's Heritage**. This page brings together a number of surveys which record aspects of Colchester's Heritage, including Robert Mercer's most recent *Survey of Colchester's Sculptures*, his *Historic Post Boxes Survey*, *Survey of Historic Street Names* and Dr Paul Rusiecki's survey of *Colchester's War Memorials*. Also added here is a link to new page entitled *Colchester's Heritage On Film* which currently hosts one film by Ken Rickwood about Colchester's iron foundries, but which will be developed over time as more films become available.

As you journey through the website, you'll notice that the navigation links at the top of each page remain the same. On a smaller device like a mobile phone, the symbol shown on the right will offer you the same menu of links. These include a history of the Society, news, events and outings, and a newsletter archive going back to 2009. Also offered are contact details for the Society with a list of officers and members of the executive committee.



THE X FACTOR- LET'S GET SOCIAL

Ged Dickenson writes..

Social media isn't everyone's cup of tea. Some people love it. Some loathe it. Many people misunderstand it or are suspicious about it. What no one can deny though is that social media platforms such as – TikTok, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Bluesky, Instagram, Threads, Snapchat, Telegram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube and a host of others have changed the way many people communicate.

It is estimated that 5,24 billion people - 63.9% of the world's population - use social media. The average daily usage is 2 hours and 21 minutes (February 2025)¹. In the UK, the percentage is even larger at 82.8%. There were 66.33 million internet users in the United Kingdom at the start of 2024, when internet penetration stood at 97.8%. The UK was home to 56.20 million social media users in January 2024, equating to 82.8% of the total population.

It is often said that using social media is something only young people do; but research by NHS Wales showed that, in Wales at least, 76% of those aged 60-69 and 60% of those aged over 70, were using one or more types of social media platform².

Colchester Civic Society is increasingly using social media to get the word out about who we are and what we do. That is why we have just expanded our social media presence to include Bluesky - [@colcivicsociety.bsky.social](https://bsky.social/@colcivicsociety). What is more, it is quick - messages and information can be shared almost instantly. If we want – *and we certainly do want* – to increase our visibility, we really must continue to embrace and expand our use of social media to engage with the wider community, as well as our members.

One important thing to remember though, is that people don't need to 'sign up' to Facebook, X/Twitter or Bluesky just to see what's being posted! Our Civic Society Website - www.colchestercivicsociety.co.uk - has two 'buttons' on the home page which take you straight to our latest posts on X/Twitter or Facebook.

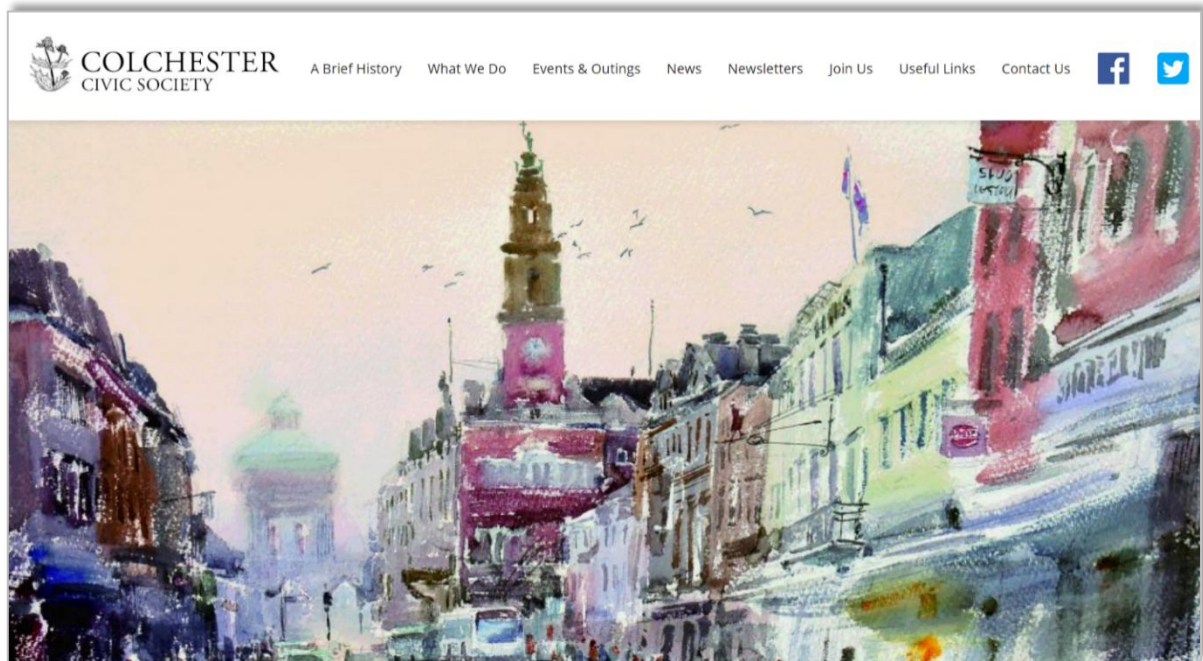
Alternatively, if you use the internet, all you have to do is type [@colcivicsociety](https://bsky.social/@colcivicsociety) for X/Twitter, or [@ColchesterCivicSociety](https://www.facebook.com/ColchesterCivicSociety) for Facebook or [@colcivicsociety.bsky.social](https://bsky.social/@colcivicsociety) for Bluesky into Google or another search engine and you should find links to those platforms.

If want to engage a little more, perhaps by *liking*, *commenting* on or *sharing* our posts, then you will need to register as a Bluesky, Facebook and/or X/Twitter user. You can do this on your home computer or smartphone, either directly on the web or by downloading the

¹ Smart Insight's Global Social Media Statistics Research Summary 2025 - <https://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/>

² 'Population Health in a Digital Age' - <https://phw.nhs.wales/news/over-60-and-online-new-population-health-report-finds-older-people-in-wales-actively-involved-in-social-media/>

relevant app. However sceptical you are – even if you’re a staunch and proud *luddite* – please do take a look at what we are doing and saying on social media. What is more, if you are already active on these two platforms, then please *follow, like, share* and *comment* on our tweets and posts; thousands – *yes, thousands* - already do!



Colchester Civic Society website landing page showing social media links top right...

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WHERE AND WHAT IS IT? A #COLCHESTER CONUNDRUM!

Ged Dickenson asks (in social media speak) - *#WhereAndWhatIsIt ?*

As you wander the ancient streets of our heritage-filled City – how much do you really see? How good are your detective and observational skills? If you are like many busy folk, you probably miss quite a lot!



Just for fun, every Tuesday on our social media channels, we ask these very questions alongside a photograph of something that people might have missed amidst all the hustle and bustle of everyday life. We put people out of their misery the following Friday by publishing the answer, alongside a more expansive picture with some snippets of information about our feature!

We realise that not all our members and supporters yet follow our social media posts so we thought we’d include a couple of our teasers here in the Newsletter for their benefit. There are no points, no prizes ...just a warm inner glow of self-satisfaction if you get the answer right – and some bragging rights!

Answers towards the back of the newsletter on page 32

TAKING ON THE ROLE OF THE NEW TOWN CRIER

New Member, Rennie Chivers, Colchester's new Town Crier writes...

My wife Denise and I have lived in Bourne Road, Colchester since 2001. My journey to becoming the Town Crier began in August 2024. I had known Bob Needham, who had held the role for 27 years, from my days of serving as a fellow officer in Essex Police. The role appealed to my penchant for theatre, but Bob appeared entrenched in the role with no foreseeable hope of me taking over from him.

When I happened to meet Bob last summer, he told me that he was intending to retire in 2 to 3 years. I expressed my interest in the role when that day finally came. When I met him two weeks later, the timescale for retiring had been reduced to 'weeks or months'. Upon his advice I attended the British Town Crier Championships in Sleaford in September 2024. I could not take part in the competition *per se* but I met fellow Town Criers, gave a mock 'cry' and received some very positive feedback from the group. A few weeks later, Bob had submitted his intention to stand down and proposed to the Mayor that I was suitable to take on the role. On the morning of Wednesday 13 November 2024, I met with Bob and the Mayor, Cllr Leslie Scott-Boutell, at the Town Hall where I was formerly handed the role. Four hours later I was leading the Festive Light Parade along the High Street.



I was aware that the council were strapped for cash and would not be keen to fund bespoke livery, unlike many other Town Criers whose livery is funded by the local authority and made by reputable tailors of civic robes. I am totally self funded. I receive no expenses or concessions from Colchester City Council. I made my first set of livery (in the photograph above) based on late Georgian design. I have just finished my second set of livery (see overleaf) and will shortly start making matching livery for Denise, who will be my consort at Town Crier competitions.

The primary role of the Town Crier is to provide support for the Mayor at civic ceremonies, but my personal intention is to promote the heritage and history of Colchester, to support tourism, local charities, and business improvement opportunities in the area. To that end I thought that at the very least, the Town Crier should know about the history of the city, but my knowledge was seriously lacking. I had been so focused on my work during my 32 years as a police officer and then 14 years as a forensic fire investigator, I had little time for, or interest, in history.

I thought that the best way to gain a comprehensive knowledge of Colchester's history was to train as a local Tourist Guide. The reality was that there were no training courses

scheduled and that it could be up to 5 years before the next local course would be run. In the light of this, I decided to research local history and teach myself.



The other side of the role is to immerse myself in those local societies and organisations which might benefit from my role. Joining the Civic Society was an obvious choice, but also membership of Colchester Museums, The Roman Circus Centre, the Friends of Castle Park, the Colchester Watch and the local Residents Panels. I have also made contacts through Ann Turner and Glyn Barritt with Town Guides and the North East Essex Heritage Trust which is overseeing the restoration of Jumbo.

I have taken an active involvement in social media, specifically Facebook and Instagram. On those forums I see plenty of exciting news about Colchester, but many of the posts are riddled with negative comments. This does nothing for the development of the city and I try to adopt a supportive stance wherever possible.

Additionally, I have been working with Colchester Business Improvement District (BID) and Martin Leatherdale of Lion Walk Shopping Centre to assist with new businesses, the Summer Carnival and the Soapbox Run, to name a few.

Recent work has been the opening of Barnardos in Culver Street and ale tasting with the Mayor and Colchester Watch. I will be making a National Proclamation outside the Town Hall as part of the 80th VE Day celebrations at 10.00am on 8 May 2025.

There are two organisations that support the role of Town Criers across the country. The *Loyal Company of Town Criers* and the *Ancient and Honourable Guild of Town Criers*. Both organisations run local and national competitions. They also offer public liability insurance. The competitions judge the content of the cry, volume, clarity of speech, inflection and diction. Awards are also given for the best dressed crier/consort. I am entering two competitions this year.

I have been extremely encouraged by the support that I have received from all of my new contacts within the Civic Society and from around Colchester. I hope that this support is reflected in my enthusiasm for the role. There are exciting times ahead and it is my pleasure to play my part in making things happen to improve the city and maintain its rich heritage for residents and tourists alike.



ROOM... WITHOUT A VIEW!

Jo Edwards writes...

I am, again, departing from my normal practice of reflecting upon the myriad of sights I see from the windows of my home in Priory Street as I want to tell you about the extraordinary experience I had just after last Christmas, when I was unexpectedly admitted to hospital.

My son, Tom, announced halfway through serving an amazing Christmas dinner he had cooked, that he didn't feel well. Within hours, he was coughing badly. Within a couple of days, so was I. I soon developed symptoms that worried me a tad. Very unusually, I decided to phone 111. Much to my astonishment, I was told by a clinician that I needed to go straight to the hospital. I phoned Tom, who was feeling much better, and he insisted I should go, although I was reluctant. Arriving at the hospital, we both looked in horror at the waiting room, which was absolutely packed, with people sitting and even lying on the floor. However, 111 had told the reception staff to expect me and we were fast-tracked down corridors, each one lined with patients on trolleys, straight to a small clinic and ushered into a room where there were 8 curtained cubicles BUT no windows! There was a reclining chair in each cubicle but they all appeared to be broken and fixed in the reclined position. I had my wheelchair with me, thank goodness, and opted to stay in it. Tom lay on the recliner. Sitting wasn't really an option! It wasn't long before a doctor appeared. He sent me for an x-ray and then an ECG and blood test. I was rather surprised when I saw my SATs levels which were considerably below those of my late husband, who died from emphysema. That really shocked me.

I had arrived at the hospital at lunchtime. Tom had gone in search of sandwiches and hot drinks whilst I was having my ECG. It was early evening when the doctor reappeared to tell me that they were keeping me in but there were currently no beds. I sent Tom home, telling him I would be fine. He found one of the hospital phone chargers for me and left. I continued to sit in my wheelchair, waiting. Stupidly, I assumed that I would be given at least a drink of water but it wasn't to be. I was put on an antibiotic drip, which curtailed my mobility. Trying to move with a drip stand and a walking stick in an incredibly tight space seemed inadvisable, I decided.

Eventually, at about 11pm, I was told that I would be staying in the bay overnight. Shortly afterwards, there was the most almighty crash that continued to reverberate for several seconds. Someone had managed to locate a secret supply of beds and had pushed them, like a string of supermarket trolleys, down the corridor to the clinic. As he tried to get them into the room, he caught the Christmas tree by the reception desk and knocked it flying. Baubles went everywhere, bouncing across the room, under chairs and clinical trolleys, desks and medical equipment. It was utter chaos. What made the chaos even worse was the confined space which presented a challenge as beds were exchanged for broken recliners that, by the very fact that they were flat, took up far more room than they should. Eventually, all was sorted, beds were made up and it was suggested that we should get as much sleep as we could. My drip was disconnected, which allowed me to go to the little bathroom within the tiny clinic.

I could see no source of drinking water, though. I asked for some and was given one of those tiny white plastic disposable cups, perhaps a third full. Now, I want to make it ABSOLUTELY clear. **The staff were incredible.** They were grey with exhaustion, struggling to make their patients as safe and comfortable as they could. I was put on another drip and lay down on my bed, still fully dressed. I slept remarkably well, only disturbed a couple of times by the nurses who had been caring for me during the day, checking that I was OK. I hadn't seen any of them taking a break. I understand from a fellow patient that they didn't. I was woken by a very deep, male voice asking whether he could come in. Still half asleep, I said yes. A huge man pulled the curtain aside and said 'Breakfast?' You bet!

I chose porridge, which was lovely and was also given two slices of toast. They were both from the ends of a loaf, so very thick. They had also been 'kept warm', very unsuccessfully, under a tea towel so they were tough and soggy, but with butter and marmalade, they were just what I needed. However, it was the tea that brought the greatest pleasure! I don't like tea much but it tasted like nectar! Whilst I was tackling the toast, a nurse appeared to tell me that we were all being moved, as day patients were arriving for clinic appointments. I just had time for a quick visit to the bathroom before being whisked off to a huge waiting room, crammed with patients. And there I stayed. There was a water dispenser in the corner but it was completely inaccessible because of rows of patients in wheelchairs in front of it. The hours passed...

Eventually, in the mid afternoon, a nurse looked round the room and realised that several of us had been given nothing to eat or, more importantly, drink. She went off and, some time later, returned with a box of sandwiches and tiny containers of fruit juice which she distributed, one each. She refused to say where they had come from, saying that she hoped she wouldn't be sacked!! Meanwhile, the lunch trolleys and drinks trolleys had passed through the room to the wards beyond... but had not stopped!

I was still there at 9.45pm when the Consultant appeared. He told me that he was due to go off duty but he wasn't going until he had done what he could for me. He explained that the bloods taken the previous day had coagulated before they could be tested and asked whether I would agree to another test. It is horrendously difficult to get blood from me especially if I am dehydrated and so I wished the nurse luck. Eventually, after umpteen false starts, she managed to get a little and asked the receptionist, who was just going home, whether she could go via the lab to drop it off. She agreed. My wait continued. Tom appeared. Eventually, we were moved to another small ward as the waiting room needed to be cleaned. I began to think that the Consultant had gone home but he returned, obviously really upset and embarrassed. My second lot of bloods had vanished. The lab had no idea where they were! He sat and talked to me. He had enough information to risk a diagnosis of severe acute bronchitis and asked me if I would like to go home on the understanding that I could come straight back and be fast tracked again if I got worse. I left the hospital shortly before midnight, clutching a pack of massive antibiotic tablets. I didn't return.

So why am I telling this saga of my 36 hours as an inpatient at Colchester Hospital? I know that it was mid-winter and the hospital was having to deal with a lot of patients but three months on, there are still patients dying on trolleys in hospital corridors. The hospital staff are outstanding. The nurses and doctors are stretched to breaking point, doing all they can

to treat and care for patients, working ridiculously long hours until they are dropping with exhaustion. There are not enough staff and there are nowhere near enough ordinary beds to cope with the normal seasonal pattern of admissions. Heaven knows what would happen if there was a major incident in the area or another epidemic. There are issues that could be addressed by the Hospital Management Team but others, like the lack of social care which causes bed blocking, can not. However, the main problem is the massive growth in Colchester's population. Despite a lot of new buildings at the hospital, we still don't have the capacity to deal with the ordinary, run of the mill, admissions for winter chest infections, norovirus etc etc. I would be the first to acknowledge the need to house Colchester people, particularly those stuck in emergency or inadequate accommodation. Refugees? Asylum seekers? Absolutely! There but for the grace of God go!! But do we really need to provide so much housing for people moving out of London, for example, without far more vital, substantial and timely infrastructure?

I listened to the Spring Statement today. Rachel Reeves, in her rousing speech, announced... *'This Government will deliver the houses and infrastructure this country badly needs.'* Shouldn't it be the other way round? **Surely infrastructure should come first!**



CIVIC SOCIETY REPLACES FELLED TREE

The Civic Society has planted a London Plane tree close to the junction of Southway and Headgate to replace another which had to be felled after sustaining bad storm damage.

Both trees were planted by Civic Society members to commemorate Jean Lamb, who died in 2006.

Chair of the Civic Society, Jo Edwards said of Jean...

"Jean was a long standing, stalwart member of the Society, who served on our Executive Committee for many years, much of the time as our Newsletter Editor. She is very fondly remembered for all she did for the Society and for Colchester.

We were saddened when Jean's original tree suffered storm damage and had to be felled and vowed to plant a replacement. We are so pleased that this has now been achieved and would like to thank Paul Cook and Will Hinde from Colchester City Council and contractors, M J Green Treework, for their invaluable help.

The Civic Society cares about Colchester, its heritage and its future. We believe street trees are an important part of our heritage but we've lost far too many in recent years and we'd like to see many, many more being planted. They clean our air. They shade our pavements. They lift our spirits, feed wildlife and beautify our surroundings.

Colchester Civic Society continues to be actively engaged in planting and protecting trees in many locations around Colchester. These have included substantial planting in areas around Jumbo and the Mercury Theatre, on King's Meadow, in St Nicholas Churchyard and the Priory grounds, as well as contributions to major projects such as Charter Wood."



CRIME FICTION

Peter Evans writes...

I have always enjoyed crime fiction - not the violent variety, but more for the puzzle! And so, I was pleased to attend a *Meet The Author* event at Waterstones. One of the authors was C L Miller (Cara Miller) who has started a series of crime fiction based in the world of Antiques. She lives in the Dedham/Nayland area and is a member of the family that produces the *Miller Price Guides*. I had already seen her last year in a similar event at Red Lion Bookshop with her first book *The Antique Hunter's Guide to Murder* - a big seller!

This time at Waterstones, C L Miller was in conversation with James Henry, who has just published the latest in his series of crime novels involving detective *Inspector Lowry*, a policeman in the Colchester division in the 1980s/90s. I had already read *Blackwater*, the first in the series and was impressed with the atmosphere, and the many references to the town in those days although I could not judge the accuracy of his references to police procedures. It was not until I had read the next novel *Yellowhammer*, that I realised that I and all Civic Society members know someone who can speak on police procedures in that time period ...namely our Membership Secretary, Ann Turner!

Ann was a Police Sergeant who transferred to the new Southway premises from the Queen Street HQ. I offered her my copy of *Yellowhammer* and she agreed that his references to the Colchester area - West Mersea, New Town and Greenstead- were spot-on! There were one or two items that Ann noticed about moving between the uniform and detective branches, and especially the fact that the bar at Queen Street was not in the basement ...but upstairs! (I thought that the creation of a bar anywhere in the Police Station was a piece of creative imagination - but no, there really was one!)

James Henry - real name James Henry Gurbutt - had already written the continuation of the Inspector Jack Frost stories (starring David Jason on TV). He is based in the Coggeshall area (surely enough inspiration for crime fiction at one time) and works in publishing. I was surprised to find a detailed description of a hairdressing shop in Artillery Street in his first book and part of Barrack Street in his second. The latest novel is called *The Winter Visitor* - he uses wild bird references, as Nick Lowry is an avid bird watcher.

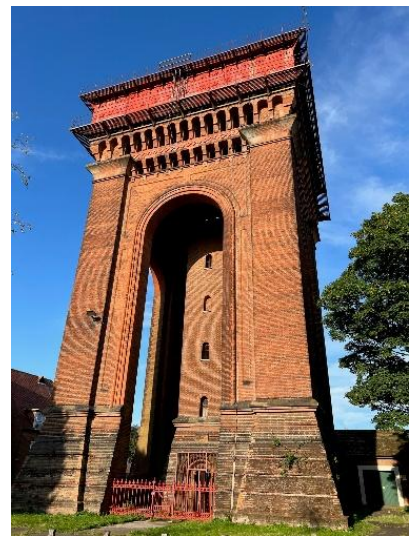
Many areas have their own detective series. There are several in Yorkshire and Cambridge, the *Fethering Mysteries* (by Simon Brett) in Sussex, *Morse* (by Colin Dexter) in Oxford and so on. Ruth Rendell lived in Suffolk, as did her friend P D James, and Colchester is often mentioned. Robert Thorogood, who created the *Death in Paradise* series and its spin offs set in the Caribbean and Cornwall, comes from Colchester.

My personal recommendation is *The Flaxborough Chronicles*, good 'tongue in cheek' plots told by journalist Colin Watson in Lincolnshire in the 1950s/60s.

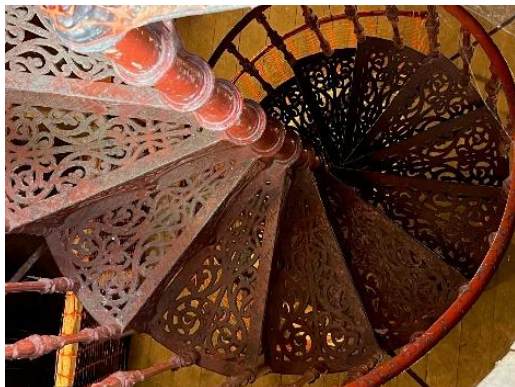


JUMBO – A CELEBRATION OF WONDERFUL THINGS TO COME!

Jumbo, the largest Victorian water tower that remains in England has recently secured an amazing £8m grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and £550k funding from Historic England. Along with many Colchester residents and visitors to the town from far and wide, the Civic Society couldn't be happier! This iconic Grade II* building has dominated Colchester's skyline for over 150 years and for 100 of those years, supplied the Borough with fresh, running water. After having stood largely redundant since 1984, the grant will enable a unique piece of the country's heritage to be saved and made accessible to the public as a heritage and events space.



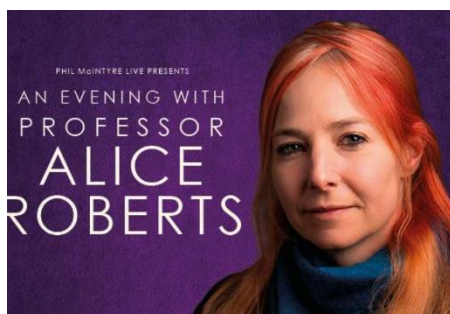
The grant funding couldn't have come at a more opportune time for repairs are urgently needed to save the cast iron water tank which will become one of the key features of the restored building. Keep in touch with developments to Jumbo by visiting the website - <https://jumbo.org.uk/>



Civic Society member Brian Light devoted more than twenty years to researching Jumbo and was engaged as a consultant archivist for the project. His book is still available in local bookshops and in the Visitor Information Centre.

In 2006, Brian Light and others established the Balkerne Tower Trust to fight for public access to Jumbo which was on the *Heritage At Risk* register. Simon Hall, Chair of North Essex Heritage said...

"Brian and the Balkerne Tower Trust's successful application to upgrade Jumbo to a Grade II listing, and their determination over many years to oppose inappropriate development has helped give North Essex Heritage the platform to drive the project forwards."*



Professor Alice Roberts will be at Charter Hall, Colchester on 16 October at 19.30pm taking her audience on an investigative journey to establish who, how and why Christianity was spread, the fall of an Empire and the rise of another!

<https://colchester-events.co.uk/event/an-evening-with-alice-roberts/>

COLCHESTER CIVIC SOCIETY LOGO.

John Salmon writes...

If you have ever wondered why Colchester Civic Society adopted the sea holly as its logo? Here are two explanations (also included on the *Brief History* page of the website):

The logo depicts the sea holly or Eryngo (*Eryngium maritimum*). In the 17th and 18th centuries, the roots were boiled and soaked in sugar to produce sweetmeats that were considered a great delicacy and given to visiting dignitaries. By the 19th century, production stopped as the plant became almost extinct. Nowadays, it is illegal to dig up the plant and today. It grows in just a few places on the beaches of Mersea Island.



We are told that it was adopted as a logo because the plant has prickly leaves and long beneficial roots which seemed to sum up what the Society is all about. It was hoped that the deep rooted instinctive human desire to control our environment would help make Colchester a better place to live although the Society would not be too prickly in obeying this desire!

However, we have come across a reference to Colchester's connection with sea holly that suggests a connection with another deep rooted instinctive desire! The *Time by the Sea* by Ronald Blyth is a wonderful memoir of the writer's time at Aldeburgh, as part of Benjamin Britten's circle and in it, he has this to say:

"The sea pea and the sea holly (Eryngium maritimum) are both edible; the first when one was starving, the second when one was sampling the local haute cuisine.... The sea pea was famine food, the sea holly delicious food when sexual appetite was at a low ebb. It was candied at Colchester, the centre of the Eryngo trade, and was on the menu for centuries."

??

Another #WhereAndWhatIsIt Teaser...

Where can you see this inscription?

Answer on page 32.



REDEVELOPMENT OF ST BOTOLPH'S ROUNDABOUT



Picture taken from Essex Highways Public Consultation Report October 2023

John Salmon writes...

Plans for the redevelopment of St Botolph's Circus appear to be near completion and preparations for beginning work on this have also started with the issuing of orders for removal of trees on and around the roundabout. There are three trees to be removed on the roundabout, with twelve more being removed at other locations. The plan is for thirty new trees to be planted on completion.

The retention of trees on the roundabout would appear to be a response to the objections raised over their removal. There will however be the loss of one tree, because it is in poor condition and two large Leylandiis will also be removed.

Colchester Civic Society has been actively involved in consultations with Essex Highways over this scheme since the first proposal for redevelopment in 2019. The proposals originally involved using the section 106 funds provided by the developers of the new housing in Mersea Road and the south side of Abbey Fields, following the relocation the Colchester Garrison. The primary aim being to improve the accessibility into the city centre for the new residents of this area by upgrading the provision for pedestrians and cyclists crossing Southway and St Botolph's Roundabout, as well as improving the whole look and feel of this major gateway to the city centre, without impacting significantly on traffic flow through the junction.

Currently the Southway and St Botolph's subways force cyclist and pedestrians alike into narrow underground passageways, which do not provide an adequate or safe way to cross this very busy dual carriageway. They are prone to flooding and are regarded as 'no go'

areas by almost everyone after dark. (There have been two serious assaults in these subways in recent months.)

The original plan involved just one surface crossing on the Magdalen Street side of the roundabout. We argued for additional crossings for Mersea Road and Southway, and a plaza area between St Botolph's Street and Town Station, plus separate cycle lanes. Kevin Bentley, who was head of Highways at the time, agreed with us and ordered a postponement so as to work on improvements along these lines.

Five years later we are (hopefully) close to seeing it happen. However, we are not there yet and with this in mind, I submitted these comments on behalf of the Colchester Civic Society directly to the Highways design team:

"We recognise the necessity to remove trees on and around St Botolph's Roundabout in order to carry out the planned redevelopment of this junction. However we are concerned to see that these trees are not removed until the start of the contract for the project, because the scheme does not yet have full approval and the contracts have not been let. If this scheme is delayed, or does not go ahead, the roundabout and surrounding area will be left to look even worse than they do now.

We would also like to stress that we are very concerned to see that the redevelopment results in this public space becoming a more beautiful and significantly greener one than is currently the case, with a good mix of species and a sizeable number of large and mature trees, well-established at the time of planting. Numbers mean little in a space this size if they turn out to be mostly ornamental trees in pots."

CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH MARS... AT COLCHESTER CASTLE!

The touring 6m diameter artwork *Mars* by Luke Jerram will be at Colchester Castle until 9 May 2025 and will provide visitors with an opportunity to inspect its valleys, craters, volcanoes and mountains. Each centimetre of the internally lit spherical sculpture represents 11km of the Martian surface.

Luke Jerram says...

"Mars follows on from my other touring astronomical artworks, Museum of the Moon and Gaia, and allows a close encounter with the Martian planet. I hope that visitors will feel transported to its inhospitable desert wasteland and in comparison, really value our life on Earth."



INSPIRATIONAL WOMEN'S CORNER

Margaret Cavendish

Margaret Cavendish was born in 1623 to the Lucas family who lived in a manor house on the site which had been occupied by St John's Abbey. Like many women of her time, Margaret received little formal education but one of her brothers, John, was a scholar and he gave her some instruction but for the most part, she was free to pursue her own scientific and literary interests.

Following the outbreak of Civil War in 1642, she left to join the court of Queen Henrietta Maria (wife of Charles I) which went into exile in Paris. During the war, Margaret suffered many losses - these included her mother and her brother Sir Charles Lucas who was executed outside Colchester Castle (with Sir George Lisle) for treason after the Siege of Colchester. The family home was ransacked by the Parliamentary forces and the family vault desecrated.



While at court, Margaret met and married William Cavendish, the Earl of Newcastle. Back in Britain, William hosted meetings of the Welbeck Circle - an intellectual group who collected scientific instruments and conducted experiments. As a woman, Margaret was not allowed to contribute to debates but William supported her writing which she refused to publish anonymously! One such was *The Blazing World* in 1666 - one of the earliest science fiction novels and the first to be written by a woman in English! Its remarkable story involves interplanetary travel, alien creatures and technologies that didn't exist at the time, like submarines! She was also the first woman to publish a work of philosophy and science in English exploring such topics as the nature of matter, existence of God and the relationship between mind and body. And she was the first woman to be invited to attend the Royal Society. Margaret died in 1673 and is buried in Westminster Abbey. Her epitaph reads...

*"This Duchess was a wise wittie and learned Lady,
which her many Bookes do well testifie".*

The current exhibition in Hollytrees Museum about Margaret's life features stunning character illustrations by local artist Catalina Carvajal who was inspired by *The Blazing World*. Visitors to the exhibition will also have an opportunity to see a reproduction of one of her elaborate outfits which complements her bold and unconventional personality.

Margaret Cavendish: Trailblazer
Hollytrees Museum until 30 August 2025

An exhibition in partnership with the University of Southampton
and supported by UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council

REVELOPMENT OF THE ST BOTOLPH'S QUARTER

The Civic Society's response to the public consultation for the proposed programme of works at St Botolph's – Robert Mercer writes...

The Society's opposition to the proposed plans for the Britannia car park area centres on the core issue that we are totally unconvinced that the closure of the open site carpark is justifiable and warranted. The experience of many of our members who use car parks is that the indoor carparks are considered unsafe for women users at night, in contrast to the open-air car park at the Britannia site.



Picture taken from the Colchester City Council website page: <https://www.colchester.gov.uk/info/cbc-article/?id=KA-04872>

The Britannia is a popular carpark for the southern part of the city, especially for those from the outlying villages and West Mersea, for whom this is the first sizable parking opportunity. And it is an ideal parking site for those with a need for large vehicle parking like motor homes. With the proposed loss of Vineyard Street car park, the need to retain this car park is even more important for the benefits of nearby retailers who depend on this footfall.

Regretfully, an opportunity for a coach terminus with toilet facilities, light food provision and local visitor information still needs addressing. For many years, the City centre has only had a single bus stop for coach pick-ups and drop-offs.

The proposal for an open-air market on a new 'public square' is considered to be wishful thinking at best. It is unlikely to succeed, owing to its proposed distance from the City centre shopping area and by being at the bottom of a hill. Other uses are unconvincing so far and it has all the makings of a white elephant. Perhaps a roller-skating rink or an ice rink at Christmas is just as fanciful!

Can the City's finances truly afford the loss of this prime parking place for this ill-judged whim?

The rather unattractive and heavy ramp proposal from the station platform is a brave concept and no doubt complies with the directions that regulate such structures. However, most wheelchair users would find the ramp and its corners difficult to negotiate in any direction, with the added risk of severely draining wheelchair batteries.

Improvements to the grounds of the Priory

Improvements to the pathway through the Priory and changes to the direction and materials must be with the approval of Historic England. The route that people have made that had to be closed off for various reasons should be reconsidered and re-opened with

agreement if possible. However, improved surfacing and additional handrails across the site should be welcomed.

The Society is uncertain if the potential benefits of a children's area might warrant the expense and work. We wonder if it will sit well within the historic structure without harming the sightlines and the remaining archaeological remains. We have considerable concerns over the costs of maintenance and care, and particular concerns with regard to an area that might attract unsociable behaviour.

The connection from Priory Street to Firstsite

The opening in the Town Wall and the planned ramp are changes that have been granted approval. We are uncertain as to why the proposal suggests that an unattractive, heavy block-style ramp which leads only to the street would be an improvement. Why is there no entry/exit into the carpark without the use of the narrow footpath in Priory Street? This will only add to a potentially more dangerous crossing area to the Priory graveyard. There seems little physical acknowledgement of how busy Priory Street traffic can be and the number of pedestrians using the street to return to the carpark. We would strongly urge a new wider pathway linking to Queen Street and St Botolph's Street that will address the long-standing issue of the camber, particularly at the corner.

We note the additional block areas for pedestrians on both sides of the street but are concerned with the concentration of footfall on the northerly footpath. Does the Street need more street calming measures at this junction?

The benefits of the new opening and vista from the Town Wall will be transforming for St Botolph's Priory and we hope it will encourage more visitors to see this beautiful survivor from our Norman past.

We do so wish that plans existed to clean up the view of the back yards of the shop premises of St Botolph's Street that are only too visible for the visitor passing into the Graveyard area and through the Priory.

We would urge the desperate need for first class signage in this area and for additional interpretation boards to explain the remains more expansively.

Security of the Priory site is unexamined in any detail but is essential to prevent climbers on the buildings; the John Ball Square site will require good security in a similar style with lockable gates when necessary, through the Town Wall.

The vague and stylised concept drawings have necessarily left much unexplained to the interested citizens of the city and any planning application will undoubtedly be closely examined by many of us to ensure a truly beneficial design for our City.

The Council did reply to our letter with its counter argument.

A CHANGE FOR COLCHESTER ZOO

Frequent visitor to the Zoo, Peter Evans, writes...

On 1 January 2025, Colchester Zoo changed itself into a charity from a limited company. Ever since 2004 it has had a charitable arm - *Action for the Wild* - for operations overseas, but now, the entire Zoo is a charity. This will help with fund-raising and applications for grants. The Zoo which was founded in 1963, now covers over 60 acres and is home to over 150 different species. According to Trip Advisor, it is the number one outdoor visitor attraction for Essex.



Of course, this does not affect your favourite creatures, or indeed what we would call 'visitor experience' at the Zoo. When I visit, I will still look for the Fennec Fox (*photograph on the left by courtesy of Colchester Zoo online*), a pretty little creature and desert dweller with huge ears, the undoubtably smelly Aardvark (such an unusual animal) and the Australian Lorikeets (pictured below), who descend on you when you visit them with nectar, then fly off when cup is empty. There is still a male lion, but the female died a year or so ago. I understand he is quite elderly

and 'retired' - there is no further intention to breed from him. All animal breeding programmes are carefully controlled for each species, not just locally but internationally too.

Some years ago I was approaching a display area when birds of prey were being flown. The nearby lion enclosure was not quite so securely covered as it is now and when one of the birds of prey disobeyed the instructor, it headed off into the lion enclosure. I can still see the lioness, chomping her teeth, with feathers sticking out from her jaws. I could not tell which type of bird it was. A passing father was explaining what had happened to his son, perhaps 8 years old. "It is what happens in the wild." The little boy thought for a moment, then sagely nodded his head, no sign of tears.



There is a new enclosure for Amur Leopards. They are lithe and forever on the move – they manage to look both cute and menacing at the same time!

If you visit the Zoo, you will notice that there are always construction works underway somewhere. New enclosures are always being developed, to make the conditions better for the residents. Quite how many people are in the building team, I don't know. I would think that collectively, their skills and techniques must be extensive and constantly developing in order to protect both the residents and visitors! *It must be a fascinating job!*

GREAT BRITISH SPRING CLEAN

Our GBSC Team writes...

Now in its tenth year, the Great British Spring Clean (GBSC) is the nation's biggest mass-action environmental campaign. Since 2016, an army of millions of amazing Litter Heroes across the country have shown they love where they live by pledging to pick more than four million bags of litter!

Organised nationally by the *Keep Britain Tidy* Charity organisation, the GBSC campaign grabs the headlines, focuses people's attention and encourages individuals, groups, schools, Local Authorities and organisations like the Colchester Civic Society, to 'do their bit' to visibly improve the look and feel of the places they live, work and operate in.

During this year's campaign which ran from 21 March to 6 April, Colchester Civic Society organised three special GBSC Litter Picks. Members, supporters and friends were out and about in the city on the 21, 24 and 27 March. We are delighted to have been able to make a practical difference to the look and feel of Colchester during this year's GBSC, collecting over 100 bags of litter from Colchester's heritage filled streets!



Every time we do a litter pick, we're amazed by the sort of things we find. There's the usual 'normal' type of litter - cigarette butts, bottles, cans, fast food wrappers and the like - but we always find some larger, or more unusual items. Perhaps the most unexpected find this year was the black wig we found in Vineyard Street! A close second though must be the knitted snake we picked up off the pavement by North Station Roundabout! Then there was the double mattress and lorry tyre down by the Hythe, the air fryer, broken chair, three partially deflated footballs and a child's scooter by the Avenue of Remembrance memorial wall at the Albert Roundabout.

We also collected three abandoned shopping trolleys, a car exhaust box, car battery, carpet, solidified bag of cement, multiple abandoned road signs and cones, selection of tent poles and almost two dozen full pet food pouches!

In a YouGov survey carried out on behalf of *Keep Britain Tidy* ahead of the GBSC, more than 31.6 million people said 'litter-free' streets would help them love where they live – and 72% of UK adults said 'seeing litter makes them less proud of their neighbourhood'.



Here in Colchester the work of The Society in helping to make Colchester - Britain's First City - a cleaner, neater, better, place to live in, work in and visit, isn't just a once a year effort during the GBSC period. **It's what the Civic Society is all about and its what we do day in and day out all year round.** And we do this in a host of different ways.. litter picking is just one of a myriad of other things we do such as reviewing and commenting on the technicalities of planning applications, survey work, protecting and planting trees, making and commenting on highways proposals and suggesting buildings for local or national listing, to name just a few.



Sorting the small things really can make a huge difference!

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ANSWERS TO THE #WHEREANDWHATISIT TEASERS!

Congratulations if you recognised either of the two teasers!



The first is one of the two ornamental lamp brackets on the front of the 1844 built, Grade II listed, former Headgate Congregational Church. The building is now home to the Headgate Theatre.



And this is the inscription albeit partially hidden, above the main entrance to Colchester's Grade I listed Town Hall which opened in 1902.



And finally, keeping a watch on the murals in Queen Street...



Local artist Adrian LeRoy of LeRoy Murals is working with Colchester City Council to brighten up the hoardings in Queen Street. His murals will adopt a Clean Air theme with wild animals and meadows... but you'll also see some reminders of our City's rich history. Not only will the murals be painted on the hoardings facing Queen Street, but they will go around the corner into the old bus station and depict a river scene with otters and pike.

The picture above shows that Adrian has made a wonderful and very colourful start... keep a watch!

CIVIC SOCIETY'S OBJECTIVES

- Encourage high standards of architecture and town planning in the Borough of Colchester.
- Stimulate public interest in and care for the beauty, history and character of the area of the city of Colchester and its surroundings.
- Encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features of general public amenity and of public interest.
- Pursue these ends by means of meetings, exhibitions, lectures, publications, other forms of instruction and publicity, and the promotion of schemes of a charitable nature.
- Co-operate with other local, regional and national organisations in the pursuit of the same objects on a broader geographical basis.

CURRENT OFFICERS

President	John Burton MBE
Vice Presidents	Right Reverend Roger Morris - Bishop of Colchester, John Egan, Rosemary Jewers, Brian Roach, Henry Spyvee
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Newsletter Editor	Glyn Barritt, 17 Regency Green, Colchester CO3 4TD T: 07812 147827 E: glynbarritt@gmail.com
Other Elected Members	Sheila Anderton John Collett Roger Dennis Robert Mercer John Salmon
Co-opted member	Ken Walker



One of Margaret Cavendish's Bear Men (as depicted by Catalina Carvajal) whom she said represented the scientists of the day!



Charity Registration No.237885