



*Charity Registration No.237885*

**NEWSLETTER**  
**JANUARY 2026**

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

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## PROGRAMME OF EVENTS 2026

*From Programme Organiser, Jo Edwards....*

Welcome to our Programme for the first part of 2026. If you have questions, please contact me – 07771 626561 – [josiemedwards@hotmail.com](mailto:josiemedwards@hotmail.com) - or by post at 43 Priory Street, Colchester CO1 2QB. Please remember that guests are welcome to join us on any visit unless otherwise stated.

You will see that we say some events are free but donations are always welcome – we really mean that! We value your presence, your interest, your comments and your support above all else! However, compared to other Civic Societies, our subscription rate is deliberately, fairly low and we are trying to do a huge number of things on a very limited budget. And so, if you can afford a donation to help us achieve our goals, it would be very welcome.

Please complete the enclosed reply slips if you are interested in any of our events and post or email them to me. I know it is easier to phone me but I am often out and about without pen and paper readily available and it is easy to forget names and contact details in those circumstances. Please pity my ageing brain!

Payment can be made by cheque, cash or bank transfer. Bank details are on the reply slips. If you do pay by bank transfer, please remember to use the reference box to say 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).

I am often asked how much our Coffee Mornings cost. We are charged £7 per person which might seem a lot but there is no additional charge for the use of the room and equipment. Car parking is also free and the coffee is good!

#### **Future Coffee Morning dates in early 2026**

*The first Thursday of every month at 09.30am in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars  
Cost is free but donations are welcome*

8 January        5 February        5 March        2 April        7 May....

**Tuesday 6 January 2026 – Winter Deep Clean Litter Pick**

*Meet at 10.00am outside Greyfriars*

Weather permitting, we will be tackling some of the grot spots in and close to the City while the vegetation is dormant. We will return to Greyfriars around noon for a hot drink.

If you cannot manage this date or would like to do more, the *Winter Deep Clean* fortnight runs from 5-18 January so please contact us if you would like to borrow a litter picker and a supply of bags. Please try to join us - we do make a huge difference and it is so satisfying!

**Thursday 8 January 2026 – Coffee Morning**

**PLEASE NOTE: this is a week later than usual as the first Thursday is New Year's Day**

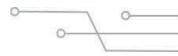
*Meet at 09.30am in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars*

**Date TBA early in the New Year - visit to the new Digital Hub in Queen Street**

 We have been invited to explore the new Digital Hub when the builders leave. Many of you will remember that we visited the site of the new building, previously the Eastern National Bus Garage (that's going back a while!) to meet with the archaeologists who had been excavating the area immediately adjacent to the Roman wall. We were fascinated by some of the finds, many of which were related to the Theatre Royal which preceded the Bus Garage. The Theatre was destroyed by fire in 1918.

The Digital Hub is one of the Government-funded Town Deal projects. Colchester is recognised for its creative sector and the building will provide much needed workspace for small creative businesses to grow whilst receiving support from each other and from the Colchester Business Enterprise Agency.

If you are interested in this visit, please complete the reply slip and I will let you know the date of the visit as soon as I have it. Cost is free.



**Thursday 5 March – Coffee Morning**

*Meet at 09.30am in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars*

This month, we welcome the City Centre Police Team again. This is always a fascinating morning as they tell us about their latest challenges, initiatives, successes – always something of an eye-opener! Incidentally, Chief Inspector Michelle Sparks, Colchester District Commander Essex Police, will return to speak to us again in the Autumn.

**Tuesday 10 March 2026 – Colchester Town Hall**

*Meet at 11.00am in the foyer of the Town Hall, for a rather special visit!*

All being well, we will be greeted by the Mayor before embarking on a guided tour of the Town Hall, including the recently restored Moot Hall which now looks absolutely splendid. At the end of the tour, members are invited to an organ recital in the Moot Hall, always a delight!

Cost is free but donations welcome

**Tuesday 17 March and Thursday 26 March 2026 – Great British Spring Clean Litter Picks**  
*Meet at 10.00am outside the front door of Greyfriars*

Every year, Civic Society volunteers join this great *Keep Britain Tidy* initiative and every year, we clear a phenomenal amount of litter and fly-tipping from our streets. Please join us for one or other of our mornings or even better, both!

Please bring your own gloves. Litter pickers and special GBSC rubbish bags will be provided. Hot drinks afterwards at Greyfriars.

If you cannot manage either of these mornings but would like to help during the GBSC period (17 March – 2 April 2026) by doing your own litter pick – perhaps in your own residential area – please let us know on the reply slip. We do other litter picks during the year, sometimes in partnership with Colchester Council Neighbourhood Teams. We would really appreciate your help with these too and would love to add you to our volunteer list.

**Thursday 2 April 2026 – Annual Spring Up Meeting**  
*Meet at 19.00 in the Greyfriars Salon (just off Reception)*

We are conscious that many members are not able to attend our monthly Coffee Mornings and so, twice a year, we offer an evening version ...an opportunity to catch up with what the Society is doing and to raise issues that you would like us to address, if we can. All are welcome!

Cost is free but donations are welcome.

**Monday 27 April 2026 – Visit to Stowe, Buckinghamshire**

*Coach leaves East Hill at 08.00, roadworks permitting; pick-ups can be arranged along Lexden Road and at the bus stops opposite Marks Tey Hotel. If you choose to park at Marks Tey Hotel, please let me have your car registration by 17 April – do not pay at the machine in the car park but please pay the fee (normally £6) to the coach driver.*

Stowe has a very long history. In the early 1300s, Osney Abbey managed a Manor House at Stowe but this was surrendered to the Crown at the time of Dissolution. The estate was then leased to a sheep farmer called Peter Temple. His son bought the property in 1589. It was then passed down through several generations until a very shrewd marriage brought enough money to build a new mansion, designed by William Cleere. By 1697, under the ownership of Sir Richard Temple, the 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Cobham, the house and gardens had been transformed into a grand estate. Sadly, overspending in the 1800s brought disaster and part of the estate had to be sold in 1848. Finally, in 1921, the house was sold and with the help of architect Clough Williams-Ellis, converted into a school for boys which opened in 1923. It is still a school, a very prestigious one!

Our day begins with coffee and biscuits in the house (not owned by the National Trust) before a much recommended tour of the building, including a visit to the Museum. We shall leave the house in time for lunch, travelling to the National Trust Visitor Centre where you

can purchase a light lunch if you haven't brought your own picnic. The afternoon is then yours.

There are various options: I have booked a guided tour of the gardens for the group but you are free to explore by yourself if you prefer. Please state your preference on the reply slip.

It is quite a walk to the garden entrance but there is a shuttle service. If you would like the use of a mobility scooter or 4-seater golf buggy, I can see what I can do but do ask me as soon as possible. I hope you enjoy your visit to the extraordinary grounds with its spectacular statues, follies and temples, the whole creation being the work of Capability Brown and architect, James Gibbs. We will be leaving soon after 16.30.

Cost

...to include morning coffee, biscuits and guided tours of both the house and gardens

RHS and National Trust Members      **£33.50**

Non RHS or NT Members      **£50.50**

**Thursday 7 May 2025 – Coffee Morning**

*Meet at 09.30am in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars*

**Date TBA in May or June 2026 – Visit to Colchester Archaeological Trust**

*A visit to Roman Circus House for a private view and talk about a very interesting burial discovered recently.*

**Thursday 4 June 2026 – Coffee Morning**

*Meet at 09.30am in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars*

**SAVE THE DATE!**

**Thursday 18 June 2026**

Unveiling of a plaque to commemorate Colchester's Napoleonic Barracks at the Artilleryman Public House in Artillery Street. Details to follow in the Spring newsletter.

Much more is planned for the Summer and Autumn and will be advertised in the Spring newsletter. But for our early programme, please use the reply slips enclosed to book your place on the visits arranged so far and to indicate your attendance at other events. Thank you.

## THE WORK OF THE CIVIC SOCIETY

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*The Civic Society's 2025 Annual General Meeting was held way back in the summer on a warm evening on Tuesday 10 June 2025 and the Annual Report presented by our Chairman, Jo Edwards is always a wonderful opportunity to look back over the year at the sterling work of its Executive Committee and Society members. A full copy of the Annual Report can be obtained by emailing CCS Secretary - honseccs@gmail.com - but here are just a few highlights...*

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The planning application for the former Army Base Repair Organisation [ABRO] site which is bordered by Roman Circus House, the Butt Road Car Park and Flagstaff Road has caused great concern. The developers – Countryside Partnerships - submitted a plan for housing that was unimaginative and in our view, inappropriate, for such an incredibly important and sensitive site. The Council's Planning Committee agreed and rejected the application but Countryside appealed. This uniquely historic site, which also contains original buildings of the Victorian Artillery Barracks, deserves a plan that enhances and retains the important historic importance of the site. And this is achievable with the help of local architects like Francis Terry. John Burton from the Society will be our representative at the Planning Inquiry meeting in July 2025.

Elsewhere in the old Garrison, is the wonderful conversion of the Cavalry Barracks Guard House in Butt Road and we heartily congratulate Mr and Mrs Mann who have developed this for offices. We are very pleased that the building will be open to the public for Colchester's Heritage Open Weekends in September. After many years of waiting for these barrack buildings to be saved, we congratulate Gus Newell on his redevelopment of other original Cavalry Barracks buildings for new uses and express our delight that the Horse Infirmary on the edge of the ABRO site has now been listed.

We are extremely pleased that Holy Trinity Church is now beginning to receive some desperately needed reparation, but we remain seriously concerned about the plans to open up the churchyard by removing the wall and railings west of the tower and necessitating the re-siting of grave markers. We would prefer the churchyard to remain the wonderful oasis it is currently although we agree it needs better maintenance by the Council. Strangely, the railings were removed during the Second World War to help the war effort but replaced in the late 1970s to stop people drinking in the churchyard!

With regard to the Council's plans for a new pedestrian route from Colchester Town Station to Firstsite, we have expressed reservations, firstly about the steepness of the route for those in wheelchairs and secondly, about the proposed 'Square' between the station and St Botolph's Church – a potential 'white elephant'.

In preparation for the work on St Botolph's roundabout, the CCS was consulted about the re-siting of the Henry Collins and Joyce Pallott murals in the underpasses there. The CCS in partnership with Colchester in Bloom were responsible for restoring the Southway murals in 2014 with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and other sources. It's not ideal but we

have agreed to them being moved to John Ball Square behind the new digital hub building in Queen Street on the proposed route from Town Station to Firstsite.

Planning Lead, Bob Mercer monitors all planning applications very carefully and comments on many of them. Many of our day-to-day objections have been against UPVC windows as replacements in Conservation Areas. Bob objected to the works to the erstwhile Foundry Arms in Artillery Street which included UPVC windows and a fully rendered outside. The decorative brickwork to the exterior was lost, of course. Despite refusal, this saga continues with a current application which would leave the UPVC windows but remove the render. Once again, Bob will oppose this application.

Bob has been kept on his toes and indeed commented on the many changes to the plans for the new hotel at the top of North Hill. The latest of these plans includes bedrooms without windows to meet the developer's wish for 93 bedrooms rather than 75!

The battles against BT, Essex Highways and J C Decaux over applications to place full screen advertising on huge monoliths in the significant streets of the Town Conservation Area continue. At least Essex Highways offers some mitigation for their giant structures with bus timetable information. Appeals have been made and are currently underway against their refusals.

Other planning objections by the CCS include housing development proposals in Lexden at the Old Rectory and also Little Glebe in Spring Lane. Sadly, we appear to have lost the battle over the Old Heath 'tin tabernacle' as it has been destroyed by fire. New housing will eventually appear.

John Salmon, who, amongst other responsibilities, leads on Highways matters with assistance from our Highways Group, has commented on our behalf on the proposed East Hill cycle ways and his article about appears on page 21. Members have also made their views clear at our monthly Coffee Mornings and those views have been reflected in our robust and well reasoned responses to consultations by Essex Highways.

John Salmon also leads our Lamp Post project and we thank all those involved in making a difference to the appearance of their streets. But while more cast iron lamp posts have been restored this year, we still need more volunteers for the large remaining number still to do!

And John also maintains our website - we urge you all to have a look, particularly at the film section. Ged Dickinson is our social media champion, posting on Facebook, X and BlueSky and receiving excellent feedback. One of his most popular features was the *Lone Cone* series – abandoned cones around our City, some serving no purpose and discovered by our Eyes and Ears Team. Ged's pictures and accompanying poetry prompted some extraordinary conversations! Ged also takes on publicity for the CCS and his excellent relationship with the Gazette has resulted in several good articles which give readers an understanding of what we do and why; and in spite of negative comments by certain keyboard warriors, we receive a lot of positive feedback.

This year has seen the installation of new blue plaques in Colchester and the surrounding areas to honour significant historical figures and events. Our own was the long-planned plaque on the boundary wall of the Lock Hospital bordering the Old Heath Recreation Ground Car Park. The wall is all that is left of the Victorian hospital that treated women with venereal diseases - a particular problem in a garrison town. And we were involved in giving 'how to' advice for other plaques erected in Dedham and Wivenhoe. But here we must make mention of the extraordinary efforts of CCS member Paul Knappett in installing a blue plaque at the entrance to the Cavalry Barracks in Butt Road and the wonderful monument of Cavalry Barracks which is sited where Le Cateau Road meets the Roman Circus. Paul's articles appear on page 12 and page 30.

Ken Walker is a new Executive Committee member and IT expert, and he has taken on responsibility for updating our Plaque Trails. We have a few new ones to add and quite a number of old ones hiding in undergrowth!

The last of our 60th Anniversary projects was the leaflet entitled *Looking Up in Colchester* - the brainchild of Peter Evans although thanks must be expressed to Richard Arnopp and Adrian and Carolyn Rushden for their invaluable help in producing it. Pamela Bradley's very successful Jane's Walk last May proved that people are really interested in seeing Colchester from a different angle!

The Civic Society really enjoys working in partnership with other groups! For example, in a project suggested by us and led by the Colchester Arts Society, Pamela Bradley, Richard Arnopp, Mike and Elizabeth Fitt and David Hibberd produced a Castle Park Trail for families and City visitors. An online trail (also available in leaflet form from the VIC) was created with the Friends of Castle Park and Colchester Photographic Society. We are also supporting the endeavours of Destination Colchester to update and improve the signage in the City Centre thereby encouraging tourism to Colchester which is so vital for our economy!

We are always so grateful to our volunteers: sincere thanks to those who help steward open venues and guided walks for the Council's Heritage Open Days in September; and to those who participate in our Action Days or multi-agency blitzes on areas of the City during which we clear litter, weed, prune, paint etc! This year's Great British Spring Clean resulted in over 100 bags of general rubbish and a great deal of fly-tipping and fly-posting dealt with. Thanks to John Collett, Litter and Footpaths Lead and Sheila Anderton, Eyes and Ears Lead, for co-ordinating these events.

Hot off the press comes news that for Castle Park Action Day, new Executive Committee member Rennie Chivers completely refurbished the cast iron litter bin at the Cowdray Crescent entrance. It is now a beautifully painted bin with gold banding, and red and green Colchester Arms.

Sheila Anderton has a wonderful rapport with the Council team and her Eyes and Ears reporting of graffiti, fly-tipping, damaged street furniture, dangerous footpaths, flyposting etc do much to improve the look and safety of our City. You may have seen her about the City with her clippers, ready to cut off thousands of plastic ties that once held notices on lamp posts and road signs!

John Collett, who for several years has been trying to establish and re-establish footpaths, has seen some limited success with a route between Meader Mews and Rouse Way. We are still waiting for a decision on the path across Sheepen Meadows. Roger Dennis, Public Transport Lead, has been lobbying for more trains into Colchester Town Station and has also started to address some of the problems at the Osborne Street Bus Station.

We have planted a London Plane outside Southway House to replace the original tree which was destroyed in a freak summer storm – this tree is in memory of a long-serving Committee member, Jean Lamb. We have also pursued the problem of long dead silver birch trees in the High Street.

We are conscious that our Annual Report recounts a number of diverse activities but our loosely worded aims enable us to be so. Another of our activities then is the knitting or crocheting of our very popular poppies for the British Legion (210 in 2024) which raise a considerable sum. More volunteers are always welcome!

We need a few older CCS members to run their eyes over our list of origins of Colchester Street names please! The Council holds a list of all the streets in Colchester and the reasons behind their names. Our Street Naming Committee, lead by Vice President Henry Spyvee, has been involved in the monumental task of trying to sort out the Council's lists and although we are making progress, we need your thoughts! Henry has longed hoped for a road named after legendary Colchester Royal Grammar School Headmaster, Jack Elam (also a founder member of the Civic Society) and we are pleased to say that a road in Braiswick will eventually bear his name.

This year to date and last year has seen a very successful programme of visits and events: a successful coach trip to Nymans in West Sussex, a visit to St James the Great Church on East Hill, a visit to the Mercury to see the pantomime preparations and a visit to St Martin's Church and St Helen's Chapel in the spring. And there were two guided walks – one to the Cavalry and Le Cateau Barracks with Paul Knappett and the other a city centre walk with Glyn Barritt. We have, of course, continued our regular briefings from the Council's Levelling Up and Town Deal team, to whom we give our huge thanks, and as part of those briefings, we were treated to a visit to Holy Trinity Church to learn more about its restoration and future.

We must thank Greyfriars for their continued support for the Society and their enabling us to hold many meetings there but for operational reasons, Greyfriars could no longer host our Coffee Mornings on a Tuesday. However, the switch to Thursday mornings has in no way, brought a downturn in attendance; particularly well attended was the one at which architect Francis Terry presented his ideas for the Roman Circus area, including the ABRO site. Presentations by the Police are always popular and Major Curt Vines spoke to us about the proposed Colchester Airborne Soldier Statue on Abbey Fields. We also had a presentation of Destination Colchester's Signage Project and an eye opening talk from Andrew Weavers about Local Government reorganisation.

Our events, coffee mornings, the biannual evening update events, our website and social media all serve to keep us in touch with CCS members and our newsletter is sent to every

member. Peter Evans produced a special coloured issue for our 60th Anniversary - a splendid way to celebrate our birthday! Having had to digest the shock of our Treasurer, Paul Weston wishing to retire, Peter Evans with his vast experience of being Treasure for a number of Colchester Societies has taken this on. But the domino effect left a vacancy for a Newsletter Editor which Glyn Barratt has taken on and to add to the good news, our newsletters will be printed by CCS member Linda Green's Greensquare company.

Peter has been a great Newsletter Editor producing a magazine filled with updates, enjoyable articles about our activities and the life and history of the city in general. A very hard act to follow! And we must also take this opportunity to thank our previous printer Kathy at Design Sweet – we wish her a very happy retirement in Norfolk.

We have had to say goodbye to two of our longest-serving Committee members this year, namely Paul Weston and Ann Turner although both have taken on the roles of Vice President for the Society.

**We are not a big Society and yet, we achieve so much.** But we could do with far more members and I would ask you all to try to recruit at least one new member in the coming year so that we can face the future with even more strength and support. Thank you to you, our CCS members and thanks to your amazing Committee and to those who are not Committee members (through choice) but still lead on very important aspects of our work.

## JUMBO CALLING..

Until work starts in earnest on restoring the much-loved Victorian water tower icon *Jumbo*, tours have been extended until the end of January. This is a great final opportunity to take a peep inside the tower which for over a hundred years from 1883, supplied the residents and factories of Colchester with much needed water.

And 2026 will see some exciting community-led fund-raising opportunities to help turn this much loved icon into a wonderful heritage visitor attraction. The first such opportunity is the sponsorship of Jumbo bricks at just £5 each! The first 2,000 bricks will actually be worth £10 per brick to the Jumbo Project, thanks to the kind donation of a benefactor. These fund-raising activities will complement the wonderful progress North Essex Heritage has already made in securing grants from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic England, the UK Government, Colchester City Council and the Garfield Weston Foundation.



And if anyone has acquired through the generations, pictures of Jumbo's construction between 1882-83 or any record of Jumbo's milestone moments, these would be very much appreciated! More information can be found on the Jumbo website – <https://jumbo.org.uk>

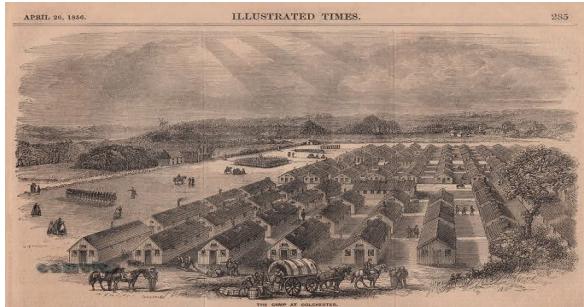


## PRESERVING COLCHESTER'S MILITARY HISTORY

*A team including Ian Bates, Colin Knowles and Colchester Civic Society members: Linda Green, Liz Mullen, Paul Knappett and Neal Benjamin - supported by the Civic Society - has for the past four years, worked to preserve and promote Colchester's post Roman Military History. In this special article, Paul Knappett writes on behalf of the team...*

The team is passionate about promoting Colchester's incredible military history, evolving from its establishment as a Roman garrison in AD 43 followed by a Napoleonic garrison for the great French wars.

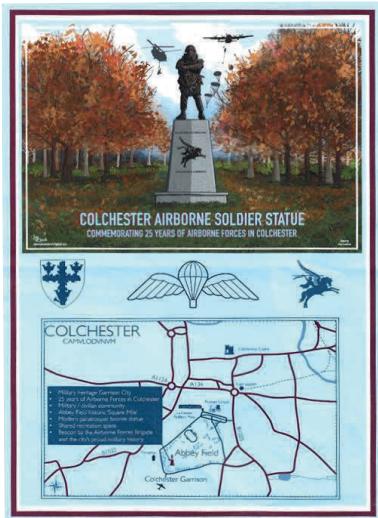
Large camps were established during the period of the Crimean War; the picture below shows the camp built on Ordnance Field in an area between Mersea and Military Road during the mid-1850s. The only remaining building from this period is the wooden Camp Church in Military Road. The Meeanee and Hyderabad Infantry Barracks were built on this site during the late 1890s to replace the huddled barracks shown in the image below.



Between 1862-1864, the first permanent brick-built barracks of Colchester Garrison were constructed off Butt Road to house the Cavalry. A decade later, the adjoining Royal Artillery Barracks were built. Following the turn of the century, additional barracks and a military hospital were added to the

garrison. The garrison continued to develop further to accommodate and train soldiers for both World Wars and conflicts thereafter, until its seven Victorian barracks and headquarters complex were no longer fit for purpose and replaced by Merville Barracks in 2008.

The city is now home to the modern Colchester Garrison, a significant military installation that continues to host the 16 Air Assault Brigade and other supporting units. At our January (Civic Society) meeting, Major Curt Vines of the Parachute Regiment presented a project to erect a monument depicting a larger-than-life sized Paratrooper on a tall stone plinth located on Abbey Field. This monument will commemorate twenty-five years of the Airborne Forces being stationed in Colchester's Merville Barracks. Our team and Sir Bob Russell have worked closely with Major Vines and designed a twenty-five-mile route around Colchester focusing on 35 waypoints depicting Colchester's military history. Major Vines and a team of Para Veterans tabbed (fast walked) the route carrying 25kg backpacks to raise money for the project. Paul Knappett's two daughters and his youngest daughter's partner, who is also a Para, tested the route for Major Vines and completed it in eight hours. The image below shows what the monument will look like.



Currently, although a tremendous amount more could be done to support the Roman Circus Visitor Centre, the team realised its limitations at an early stage and have therefore been proactive where they can, focusing on preserving and promoting Colchester's Military history from the Napoleonic Period up until today. The following is a summary of the work completed by the team thus far, including work that is still ongoing:

Historic research by Paul Knappett was completed for the developers who restored the Royal Artillery (Le Cateau) Officers' Quarters, and the Cavalry Barracks Guard House. Further work includes supporting the developers restoring the remaining Cavalry Barracks buildings and with the restoration of the badly declined pedestrian gate leading into the barracks off Butt Road.

Most recently, new research at the request of Historic England, has seen the historic listing for the Le Cateau Barracks Officers' Quarters, Sergeants' Mess, Stable Blocks A and B and the Adult School reviewed and amended by the team.

Working on behalf of the Civic Society, a listed building application was submitted to Historic England for the Le Cateau Barracks' Horse Infirmary and Gun Park with store over. At the request of the joint head of planning, a submission was also made for the Riding School, 1930s Cook House and Dining Hall. The Horse Infirmary application was approved by the Secretary of State and it has now become Grade II Listed (ensuring the building will be retained and restored, hopefully, to its former glory). The two-story Gun Park has also been retained because of the research submitted by the team as part of the developer's plans for the ABRO site.

Historic information on the ABRO site was also provided to Colchester City Council's heritage planning advisor, Rowenna Malone, the aim being to ensure that the new buildings on the ABRO site reflected the correct architectural detail found in the Royal Artillery (Le Cateau) Barracks.

With support from Jo Edwards and Rosemary Jewers, the team established two blue plaques on the Royal Artillery (Le Cateau) Barracks Officers' Quarters. These plaques commemorate the history of building built in 1874-1875 and remembers Major Raymond England and the men of 14 Brigade Royal Field Artillery killed at the Battle of Le Cateau.

As a military honour to the Royal Artillery, the barracks were renamed Le Cateau Barracks after the Great War. The last mounted Artillery unit, 37 Field Regiment Royal Artillery were also renamed Le Cateau Battery Royal Artillery as a military honour after being awarded three Victoria Crosses in the Battle of Le Cateau. In 1937, they were the last mounted

Artillery Unit to be stationed at Le Cateau Barracks and are shown in the picture on ceremonial parade; note - this is now Butt Road car park.



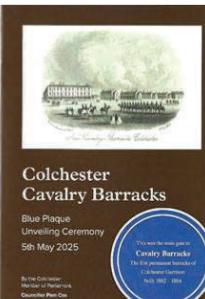
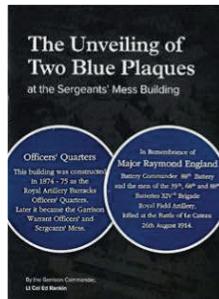
On 5 June this year the team additionally established a blue plaque at the entrance gate to the Cavalry Barracks off Butt Road. The plaque commemorates the Cavalry Barracks as the first permanent barracks of the Victorian Colchester Garrison built in 1862-64. The photograph below shows the Guard Room and main gate to the Cavalry Barracks (both of which have been wonderfully restored by its present owners), where the blue plaque is mounted.



The surviving buildings of Cavalry and Le Cateau Barracks are of national importance being the only examples of their pioneering design to improve the health and wellbeing of men and horses. Their design was part of the Cardwell reforms which were influenced by reformists like Florence Nightingale

following lessons learned from the Crimean War. Twenty thousand men died in that war but only five thousand in combat, the rest died of disease and illness caused by the poor conditions in hospitals and barracks. Souvenir booklet covers below - electronic or hard copies are available on request from the team.

On Waterloo Day next year (18 June 2026), a further blue plaque, sponsored by the Civic Society, will be established on the Artilleryman Public House in Artillery Street. It will mark where the Napoleonic Barracks were built between 1794 and c1800 to accommodate around 7000 officers and men and 400 horses. It was the largest Napoleonic Garrison in Britain and progressively removed following Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815.



### Royal Artillery (Le Cateau) Barracks Monument

Following a meeting with Jo Edwards, John Burton, Philip Crummary and the developer Michael Tomkins, who renovated the Officers' Quarters, the decision was taken to erect a monument to commemorate the Royal Artillery (Le Cateau) Barracks. This monument was

carefully designed to commemorate the barracks' historic military past and architecture. It also includes the Roman Circus starting gates, which were discovered on the site in 2004. These formed a key element of what is the only known Roman Circus to be discovered in the UK.

The monument was placed at the entrance to the former Officers Quarters and the Roman Circus starting gates to add to its setting. It has been constructed with a brick pier that reflects the architecture of the barracks and supports a solid bronze, tactile, scale 3-D model of the barracks. There is also a solid bronze frieze in relief on all four sides of the monument depicting mounted soldiers and their field guns leaving the barracks for France on 18 August 1914. Within eight days, they were engaged in the crucial Battle of Le Cateau.



A QR code on the monument takes visitors to a website with audio links providing more detailed information on the history of the barracks, the Battle of Le Cateau, the "Old Contemptibles" whom the men from 14 Brigade Royal Field Artillery were proud to be part of. Additionally, it provides information on the

Roman Circus as Historic England considered this to be very important for when the Roman Circus Visitor Centre is closed.

The monument was unveiled by Major Nick Storton the Battery Commander of Le Cateau Battery Royal Artillery and Colonel Hugh Toler Deputy Lieutenant of Essex on the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Le Cateau, 26 August 2024.

The team, led by Paul Knappett, also provide walking tours of the Royal Artillery (Le Cateau) Barracks and Cavalry Barracks. The tours focus on the architecture of the military buildings that remain and on the uses of these buildings in their heyday. Information is also provided on the many historic battles the soldiers who were stationed there took part in; these included the Battle of Le Cateau, the Charge of the Light Brigade and the Indian Rebellion. And of course, Lord Baden Powell was stationed at Cavalry Barracks. The opening and closing credits of *Blackadder Goes Forth*, an Elton John music video / *I Guess That's Why They Call It the Blues* and a scene from Monty Python's *The Meaning of Life* were also filmed there.

It has been a long-held aspiration of many for Colchester to have a heritage centre to promote its military and industrial history. The development of the ABRO site presents a **one-off opportunity** to achieve this in a Grade II Listed Horse Infirmary located in the centre of the Victorian barracks.

The photograph below shows that the building consists of eight individual areas which makes it a perfect venue to display themed exhibits from Colchester's military and industrial past stretching back over past 250 years - an obvious theme being the part horses played in

war, because the Cavalry and Artillery Regiments were stationed there and because the original veterinary fixtures and fittings still exist inside the buildings.

There would be no lack of exhibits; multiple shipping containers of military exhibits have already been offered to the team from a military source. Sir Bob Russell also has access to a container storing the millennium industrial exhibits.

As a community heritage project located in a rare listed heritage building, the team are confident that a very strong case could be made for Heritage Lottery Grant funding and commercial investment. That said, everything depends on Colchester City Council supporting the project and negotiating the transfer of ownership of the building to an agreed organisation. The key issue is timing, because Countryside Partnerships has to declare its plans for both the Horse Infirmary and two-story Gun Park within six months of planning consent being granted for the ABRO site.



*The team would like to take this opportunity to record its sincere thanks to the Civic Society for all the support it has provided.*

## WHERE AND WHAT IS IT? A #COLCHESTER CONUNDRUM

*Ged Dickinson 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 questions alongside a photograph of something that people often miss amidst 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 and some snippets of information about our feature!

We realise that not all Civic Society members and supporters follow social media posts and so we thought we'd include a couple of teasers in our Newsletter for their benefit, mostly! There are no points or 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 46

## MYTHICAL CREATURES

*Colchester Castle's Mythical Creatures exhibition is currently thrilling visitors and families, writes Glyn Barrett – it runs until 22 February 2026.*

**O**nce upon a time... it was thought that the world was filled with fantastic creatures, from dragons and unicorns to griffins and mermaids. This is the message that welcomes visitors to the Mythical Creatures exhibition currently in the Castle's Museum – a stunning exhibition for which Castle staff must be warmly congratulated!

Folklore and stories told within communities across the world have provided generations with opportunities to share knowledge and reinforce moral standards and values, as well as being routes for escapism. Fables and tales were once accepted as fact before advances in zoological knowledge gave us more understanding of the animal kingdom.



Dragons for example are found in myths and legends of many cultures around the world but their symbolism varies greatly between cultures – Western dragons are often depicted as large, fire-breathing monsters and represent challenges to overcome and of course, their terrifying nature has often been exaggerated in literary works, on television and in film, and now in games. The dragons of East Asia however, are generally believed to be symbols of good fortune, power, wisdom and authority. Some dragons in the past may have been cases of mistaken identities for in the medieval period, non-native species such as crocodiles and large snakes were imported and added to the Royal menageries – escapees would have terrified the local population who would not have seen anything like them before!

The unicorn in modern fairly tales looks like a white horse with a single long horn but the first description of a unicorn nearly 2000 years ago recorded by an ancient Greek historian was of a white equine body with purple head, dark blue eyes and a long horn in the centre of its brow. And although various descriptions have emerged over time, the common feature is that the horn had a wide range of healing properties from neutralising poisons to curing fevers to delaying the ageing process!

*(Editor's note: I'm now on the hunt for one!)*



But the creature that held the most fascination for me in the exhibition was the Mermaid, often believed to be a creature of vanity and therefore depicted with mirrors, combs and brushes. According to legend, Melusine was a mermaid who hid her true form and lived as a beautiful woman. Once a week, she would transform into her monstrous self – a half

human, half sea snake. Her husband eventually discovered the truth and banned her from the family home but she returned every night to nurse her children.



But anyone who thought that mermaids were always depicted in their beautiful form would be interested in the Feejee (or Fiji) Mermaid – one of the most famous of several fake mermaids exhibited during the 1800s in London, New York and Boston. It was supposedly caught in the South Pacific close to the Fiji Islands and was composed of the head and torso of a juvenile monkey sewn onto the body of a fish.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these man-made hoaxes were generally made by Japanese fishermen for the Asian market. One such Fiji Mermaid came into the ownership of P T Barnum who described it as an ugly, dried-up, black-looking diminutive specimen, about three feet long; its mouth open, its tail turned over, and its arms thrown up, giving it the appearance of it having died in great agony. Exhibiting the specimen contributed to Barnum's success as a master showman and someone capable of concocting an elaborate scheme to expand this curiosity into Fiji mermaid fever across the United States. Over the years, various versions of the 'mermaid' emerged with different compositions, some being made entirely from papier-mâché!

*The picture on the left is a correct likeness but reduced in size, from the New York Sunday Herald, 1842.*

The picture on the right is of a Ningyo, sometimes also known as a Fiji Mermaid. In Japanese folklore, they were believed to be half human, half fish and belong to a group of spirits known as *yokai* which were believed to have been responsible for several unexplained events! In the 1700s, models of these creatures were made and shown at carnivals across Japan – people believed that the representations had magical healing properties which is why many specimens are displayed in religious shrines and temples.



*The Ningyo exhibit is on loan from the Brighton Museum and was collected by its founder Henry Willett over 100 years ago.*



## RAILWAYS THAT NEVER WERE

*Sir Bob Russell writes...*

The Summer 2025 edition of *Stour Valley Steam* – magazine of the East Anglian Railway Museum – has a fascinating article by the late S E “Bunny” Austin, one of the earliest members of the Museum and one-time Editor of the magazine. It is based on an article which appeared in the *Essex Chronicle* in 1919 and mentions nine projected light railway lines in different parts of Essex which were never built, including three in the Colchester area.

The first of these was a proposed line from Stanway to Mersea Island, from the London mainline to Mersea Island via Abberton and Peldon - a distance of 11 miles.

The second, unfortunately, confuses the names Boxted with Boxford and Nayland with Stoke-by-Nayland (all four villages are mentioned!). Further research is needed to clarify which of the two villages is correct. I am confident it is Boxted, not Boxford; but difficult from the description as to whether it is Nayland or Stoke-by-Nayland. This proposed line would run from Colchester North Station via Mile End and Horkesley Heath to Boxted. The article then suggests that the line would continue north to Stoke-by-Nayland crossing the River Stour into Suffolk one-and-a-half miles “east of Boxted Bridge”, so while this would be Stoke-by-Nayland, the newspaper article says the line from Colchester would have “an approximate length of six-and-a-half miles to Nayland”.

The third line in our part of Essex would have gone two miles from Kelvedon to Coggeshall.

The article in the *Essex Chronicle* (undated, but the year 1919) refers to the Highways and Transport Sub-Committee, which I am assuming is part of Essex County Council. There is no mention of these lines being for passenger traffic - just for the transport of farming products.

I have previously been made aware, confirmed by Parliamentary archives, of proposals for a railway line from Mersea Island to Colchester.....the destination being a station built opposite what used to be *The Drury Arms*, on the corner of Butt Road and Layer Road. This would have given Colchester a fourth railway station!

Some 65 years ago, one of my Scout Leaders, Bert Harman, moved from Mile End to Empress Avenue, West Mersea - in those days an unmade road. From memory, I recall him saying that every year he paid 10 shillings (50p) to the British Railways Board because the bottom third of his back garden was where the railway line would have been. Recollection from what he said was that the line would have gone across the Island, from around The Strood, to the coast for a maritime link to either the railway at Tollesbury Pier Station or perhaps Bradwell, if the line from Southminster was continued there.

Nothing to do with the above, but there was once a light railway from North Station to Mile End – around 1910 to 1912, carrying building materials for the construction of the Severalls Hospital complex. I do not know the exact route, but while reading archive copies of the *Essex County Standard* from that period (researching another matter), I came across a report of a tragic murder/suicide of a young couple with a photograph of the scene next to this railway line.

## COLCHESTER'S LOCAL RAILWAY

*Our local railway company - Greater Anglia [GA] - has been nationalised. The government transferred ownership and control to the Department for Transport on 12 October 2025. Roger Dennis writes...*

Under privatisation, the national railway was divided into railway operating companies that ran the trains and stations, rolling stock companies that owned the trains, and the nationalised Network Rail [NR] that owned the tracks, signals, and stations.

Initially, the operating companies bore the financial risk of selling tickets to passengers, leasing the trains, renting the stations and paying access charges for the track. Many of them subsequently failed financially and reverted to state ownership. The final blow to commercial independence was inflicted by Covid-19 when ticket sales fell dramatically. The Johnson Government decided to support operators by bearing the commercial risk; it also committed itself to renationalising the remaining private operators by forming a new entity to be called *Great British Railways [GBR]*. The present government is continuing this policy.



*Picture: BBC News, East of England*

GA says that passengers will not notice any difference. While the railway that we see will be the railway that we know, a major organisational change is that NR and the railway-operating companies will both be part of GBR and run by combined regional management teams. Under privatisation, NR and GA had to decide which of them was to blame for delays to the service and NR compensated GA for those caused by faults to the track or signals. That will no longer be necessary.

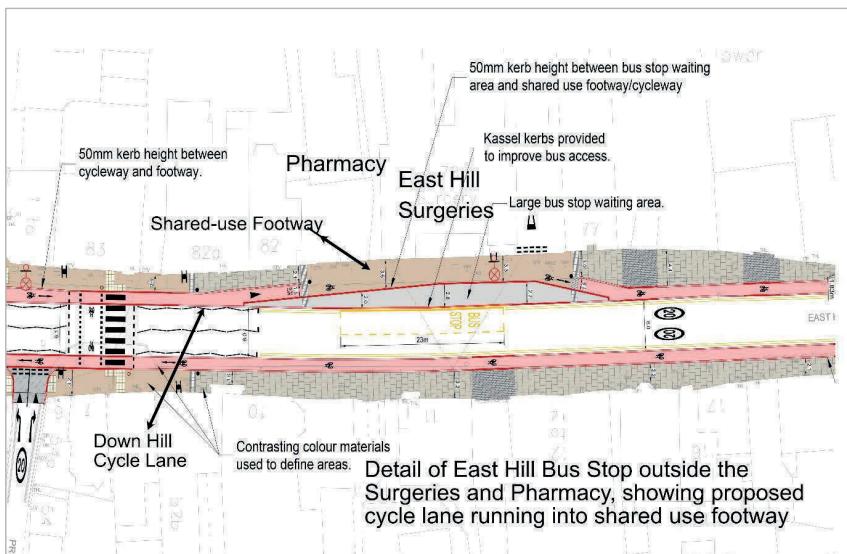
Railways with overhead electric power are the most efficient mode of personal transport in energy terms, the best environmentally, the quickest, and the safest. (There are 80 times as many deaths on the roads as on the railways.) Some 80% of personal travel is in private cars and 10% is by railways. The government should encourage what economists call *modal shifts* from car to rail; this would reduce road traffic congestion and increase economic productivity, making the country better off.

A common complaint about railways is that the fares are too high, but the government has announced that it will not reduce them. GA's fare structure is designed to maximise its income, rather than to maximise passenger journeys. The cheapest fares are those bought a long time before travelling and so passengers who do not plan their life in detail pay a lot more than those who do! Railways are no longer run commercially but are providing a public service and therefore fares should be affordable to all.



## EAST HILL CYCLE LANES

As you may have heard, the most recent proposals for the East Hill cycle lanes involve a significant change from the plan previously consulted on. The bus bypasses have been removed and replaced with shared-use footways behind the bus stops (*see the drawing below*). Colchester Civic Society's Highways Group have objected to this change and proposed that the scheme be paused.



A more recent development is that the East Hill scheme will now be looked at by The County Council Cabinet and the Head of Highways (currently Tom Cunningham) will enact the decision. In the light of this, the society has taken a two-pronged approach.

The Executive Committee has sent a letter to Tom Cunningham calling for the scheme as a whole to be abandoned. The Highways Group has also sent in a letter to Tom Cunningham reiterating their request for the scheme to paused in the event that it is given the go ahead. Both letters are reproduced here for you to read – ref TRAF/8556.

Colchester Civic Society members have studied in great detail, the proposals for cycle lanes on East Hill and the lower end of High Street in Colchester, and have come to the conclusion that, sadly, we cannot support this scheme. There are simply too many problems with it.



## LETTER TO TOM CUNNINGHAM FROM THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

We recognise the need for cycle ways in the City but these must be safe for all, including the cyclists themselves.

### Setting the Scene

East Hill is both comparatively narrow and extremely steep. It is the arterial road into the City centre from East Anglia and the Tendring Peninsular. Two primary schools, one at the beginning of Guildford Road and the other a short distance along Priory Street mean that the pavements are heavily used by schoolchildren twice a day. Two separate GP surgeries share a building (with a very small car park for staff and, perhaps, a couple of Blue Badge holders only) halfway down the hill, immediately adjacent to a bus stop. Access to the surgeries' car park is via a driveway fractionally below the bus stop. Next to the surgeries, on the western side, is a busy pharmacy with no parking. A little further up the hill, on the other side of the road, is the Parish Church of St James the Great. The only access to the Church is from East Hill. There are other businesses, including takeaway food shops, on the hill. There are also a good number of residential premises. Near the top of the hill, East Hill becomes the easternmost end of High Street with the prestigious Greyfriars Hotel on its north side but its staff offices on the south side. There are other offices, some frequently visited by very vulnerable people, before the entrances to our two renowned art galleries and the main gates to Castle Park and both the Hollytrees and Castle Museums.

### The Proposal

#### 1 Safety

- A Neither floating bus stops nor shared space options will work for safety reasons, the main issue being the steepness of the hill and the speed that cycles (and mopeds) will consequently be able to travel eastwards. One hopes that cyclists would ride with respect for their own safety and that of others, but we all know that many would not.

However, there are other considerations. Two of the bus stops on the route are heavily used by National Express passengers with considerable amounts of luggage accommodated in the boot of the vehicle. Alighting drowsily after a long journey and trying to retrieve luggage whilst dodging cyclists is not a good idea. Equally, standing waiting for a coach, surrounded by a crowd, all with suitcases, whilst cyclists swerve around you, is not to be recommended either. It is safe for nobody. However, these dangers pale into insignificance when one considers the bus stop immediately outside the two surgeries. The thought of cyclists swerving at high speed onto the footway and off again at the very point at which people, including young schoolchildren, are alighting from or waiting for buses, patients are queuing waiting for the surgery to open and the elderly, sick and infirm are leaving the surgery, sometimes confused and distressed, is quite horrific. A floating bus stop there would be equally dangerous. Fast food couriers on mopeds seem to travel down the hill at the speed of light! They do not mix with young schoolchildren and those alighting from buses with toddlers, buggies etc. It would

be so easy to step into the path of a fast-moving bike or moped and the result could be absolutely catastrophic.

- B Large groups of schoolchildren visit the Museums, arriving by school buses or coaches which currently drop off and pick up outside the Hollytrees gate into Castle Park ensuring immediate safety. Any other drop off would bring those children into potential conflict with moving vehicles.
- C Narrowing the pavements could easily compromise the safety of children going to the local primary schools.
- D Moving the bus stop currently outside 71 High Street considerably further east will affect those who are elderly or disabled as it is much further to walk to the City centre, is uphill and involves the crossing of Lewis Garden - U Turn Central. It is a long way to the next stop in Osborne Street.

## 2 Welfare

- A We have serious concerns about the removal of parking on the hill, particularly for those who are elderly, disabled, very sick, recovering from surgery, heavily pregnant or are bringing a sick child to the surgeries. The car park has extremely limited Blue Badge spaces but most of those aforementioned patients would not qualify for a badge as their incapacity may well be temporary or not quite severe enough. The nearest public car parks are some way up the very steep hill and are expensive. There is no wheelchair route from the Priory Street car park. For those with a disability, a 'halfway point' on the hill where they can park to allow them to access nearby premises is vital.
- B Equally, we are concerned about the very limited parking there will be outside the Church. Although the public car parking is nearer, it is still too far for the elderly and infirm to walk to the only route into the church. Hearses need to park immediately outside the church gate as bearers already have to carry coffins up the steps to the church - not easy.
- C Many of those living on East Hill have cars. If the parking is removed, they will have to find alternative places to park at night. The local car parks are expensive. The knock-on effect on resident parking areas in nearby streets, already inadequate, could be interesting!
- D Deliveries, unloading cars etc will become problematic for residents.
- E There are organisations that have meeting places on the hill who rely on street parking. One example is Outhouse. Their members like to park close by as some feel vulnerable. Currently there are two formal disabled parking spaces on the street immediately outside the Outhouse which will be lost.

## 3 Economy

- A There are a number of businesses on the route that would be adversely affected - the pharmacy, the restaurants (particularly the takeaways) the bars, the hotel etc.
- B Colchester has huge tourism potential but is known within the travel industry as unfriendly to visiting groups. The two coach drop-off and pick-up spaces in the High

Street are inadequate. They are often in use (not necessarily by coaches) and, if approaching from Ipswich or Harwich for example, can only be reached after an almost entire circuit of the City centre. There needs to be an alternative drop-off point at the top of the Hill.

#### **4 Equality**

One of our members very succinctly commented that the cycle lanes will benefit few but disrupt and endanger many. It is hard to argue with this statement.

We want to advance safe cycling without compromising safe walking and bus access and we want to ensure that mobility-restricted users of key services can do so as practically as possible in a difficult hillside context. Unfortunately, there appears to be no way of achieving this. Cyclists have options - they can easily take alternative routes; but patients would find it extremely hard to move to other surgeries, businesses to other locations or even children to other schools, residents to new homes and bus passengers to different routes!

#### **5 Conclusion**

Civic Society members, who have dedicated cyclists amongst their number who are horrified by the proposals, overwhelmingly ask whether the proposal for cycle lanes at the eastern end of High Street and on East Hill could be scrapped completely. Yes, we all realise that the money will be lost to Colchester but that is no reason to go ahead with a scheme that is so dangerous (to all, including cyclists) and benefits such a tiny proportion of those who use the route. Dare we say that reopening the bus lane at the High Street Queen Street junction would improve safety at the lower end of High Street and on East Hill immeasurably by considerably reducing traffic and stopping U turns. It would be a much cheaper and far less disruptive option.

If, however, the unpopularity and inherent dangers of the proposed scheme are not enough to change your minds, please, at least, delay until the issue of shared space and floating bus stops on cycling routes have been discussed by the Government and full recommendations made.

#### **LETTER TO TOM CUNNINGHAM FROM THE CIVIC SOCIETY'S HIGHWAYS GROUP**

Dear Mr. Cunningham

....Colchester Civic Society Highways Group has been set up to look closely at proposals such as the 'Walking and Cycling Improvements for East Hill with a view to helping to produce the best possible design without passing judgement on the overall merits of the scheme under consideration. Our members include people with special interests in cycling, walking and public transport and have worked directly with the Highways Colchester Design team to assist with their development of plans for both St Botolph's Circus and East Hill.

**Should the East Hill scheme be given the go ahead, we ask that the current plans for the East Hill Cycle Lanes be paused and reviewed once the legal uncertainties surrounding the use of bus bypasses are resolved and a design is approved by the Secretary of State.**

The safety of bus bypasses has been called into question at a national level and in June 2025, the UK Parliament debated the Bus Services (No 2) Bill, which directly addresses floating bus stops. A key amendment—Amendment 39A introduced by Lord Blunkett—was passed and now requires the Secretary of State to issue formal guidance on the provision and design of floating bus stops. Also at the local level, there has been considerable concern over the safety of bus bypasses, especially at the East Hill surgeries stop, which is halfway down the hill, where cycle speeds are very likely to be a high.

However, the current proposals involve directing these 'high speed' cycles, along with e-scooters, e-bikes and cargo bikes onto a shared use footway directly outside the main pedestrian entrance to both GP Surgeries and the pharmacy on East Hill. We believe this will be much less safe than the original design because it will direct this cycle traffic into an area where there is a concentration of pedestrians, including people with limited mobility, wheelchairs users and mothers with pushchairs. We ask therefore that this scheme be paused until the formal guidance is issued and an approved design can be produced for bus bypasses.

The Essex Highways design team defend the shared use scheme on the basis that it conforms to the guidelines of LTN 120, because the footway width provided is more than that specified for shared use where there are less than 300 cycles per hour, as is the case here (such a frequency of numbers is unlikely to be found anywhere in Colchester). However, we see the current proposals as running counter to the principles and aims on which the Department for Transport has promoted and funded the development of cycle lanes. These aims and principles are laid out in their Gear Change document [Gear change: a bold vision for cycling and walking](#) and in their Cycle Infrastructure Design document [Cycle Infrastructure Design](#), both of which specify that:

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*Cycles must be treated as vehicles and not as pedestrians. On urban streets, cyclists must be physically separated from pedestrians and should not share space with pedestrians. Where cycle routes cross pavements, a physically segregated track should always be provided. At crossings and junctions, cyclists should not share the space used by pedestrians but should be provided with a separate parallel route. Shared use routes in streets with high pedestrian or cyclist flows should not be used. Instead, in these sorts of spaces, distinct tracks for cyclists should be made, using sloping, pedestrian-friendly kerbs and/or different surfacing. Shared use routes away from streets may be appropriate in locations such as canal towpaths, paths through housing estates, parks and other green spaces, including in cities. Where cycle routes use such paths in built-up areas, you should try to separate them from pedestrians, perhaps with levels or a kerb.*

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In our view, these principles should most definitely be applied to areas such as East Hill and High Street. After all, if Colchester High Street and East Hill do not count as an area where this 'Bold Vision For Cycling And Walking' should be fully applied, then there is nowhere in Colchester which qualifies. The High Street and East Hill cycle lanes, if they are to be installed, will come in the face of a considerable loss of amenity to the businesses and residents of these streets. The one redeeming feature of this scheme for them can come

only from the full segregation of cyclists and scooters from pedestrians, which will return the footways for the exclusive use of pedestrians. The risks of stepping out of the front doors of both residences and businesses and walking into the path of a cycle or scooter will be much reduced and it will feel safe and comfortable to use the footways again. The current proposals for introducing shared use footways, will achieve the opposite to this.

Given that bus bypasses have been in use for over twenty years in a number of European countries, we fully expect that the UK government will issue guidance for the safe use of them here. In Belgium, for instance, there are stop lights on the cycle lanes which come into use when a bus is at the bus stop. Other countries use a change of road surface on the cycle lanes to force a reduction in speed. So the problems can be overcome; and it is very important for the development of cycling infrastructure that they are.

However, we believe that if such approval is not granted, then the scheme for the High Street and East Hill cycle lanes should not be implemented in its present form. If this scheme is to improve conditions for pedestrians as well as cyclists, and not actively disadvantage mobility-restricted walkers and chair users, then the principle of segregation must be maintained and be effective in removing most (if not all) of the bicycles and scooters which currently use the footways on East Hill. The current proposal, involving shared use areas, achieves the opposite to this and reinforces the message — already well established through the more general use of shared pathways — that it is acceptable for cyclists to use footways. **With the increased use of e-bikes and scooters, we believe it is time to change this message and begin a shift to fully segregated cycleways in urban areas.**



## ROOM... WITH A VIEW!

*Jo Edwards writes...*

Now I love buddleias and I recognise their importance to bees and butterflies, but these are just two of the bushes that were growing vigorously at the edge of the Priory Street car park earlier in the summer - they were firmly rooted in the pavement. Others were in the car park itself!

Thanks to our **Eyes and Ears Team** who reported them, the ones in the pavement were removed before they caused too much of an obstruction. We are often told that the material used to surface the edges of the car park prevents weeds from growing. It has, I believe, been suggested for some of the upcoming projects in the City.

*Oh dear!*



## HERITAGE OPEN DAYS 2025

*Glyn Barritt writes with sincere thanks...*

...to all those Civic Society members who were involved in Heritage Open Day events between Friday 12 September and Sunday 21 September inclusive.

This year's Heritage Open Days were a resounding success once again. Our call for Civic Society volunteers to steward the Roman Theatre in Maidenburgh Street and Peake's House in East Stockwell Street brought forward established and new volunteers who all found the experience most enjoyable, in spite of some lively rain and thunder on the first Saturday! Our volunteer stewards at Audley Chapel even took the opportunity to clear the grounds of some unwelcome undergrowth!



And of course, our thanks also to City Guides within the Civic Society who led the very popular walks around the Roman Wall and from Town to Sea, then a focused Roman Walk, Siege Walk, Cemetery Walk and Gosbecks Walk ...and tours inside Holy Trinity Church, the Town Hall and Greyfriars. Elsewhere, Civic Society members may well have been involved in stewarding events at churches ...amongst all the other open

venues and activities! A fantastic two-week period showcasing the unique history that Colchester offers.

*The pictures were taken by Civic Society member Richard Arnopp who not once but twice, stepped into the breach of stewarding at very short notice. Thank you very much, Richard!*

**! STOP PRESS !**

Heritage Open Days 2026 have just been announced –  
Friday 11 September to Sunday 20 September 2026



## AUSTIN BAINES

Right at the start of the Annual Report given at the AGM in June this year, sorrow was expressed at the death of Austin Baines, a former Vice President of the Civic Society and long serving member of the Executive Committee. Austin died on 17 October 2024 and is very much missed. He will be fondly remembered for his hard work in furthering the aims of the Civic Society.

## NEW VICE PRESIDENT: ANN TURNER

*At this year's AGM, long-serving member Ann Turner stepped down from her role of Vice Chair (amongst others!). Jo Edwards writes...*

Ann and I have been trying to work out how long she was on the Executive Committee and we reckon it must have been about 35 years! Ann has been our Vice Chair, Membership Secretary, Heritage Open Days Coordinator and Newsletter Distributor for decades but over the years, she has also been our Minutes Secretary, Archivist and resident Town Guide, always prepared to guide visiting Civic Societies and to provide tours for our own members.

She has been absolutely invaluable with her provision of guided tours for the Heritage Lottery funded projects with which we have been involved, helping us to fulfil the demands of the Heritage Lottery Fund. These were particularly challenging when we restored the Southway Murals which required us to undertake 'activities at the project site'. Underpasses are notorious for activities but not, we realised, ones that were 'quite right'! Ann saved the day with a series of tours based on the characters depicted in the murals!



*Ann is pictured leading one of her favourite tours - The 1648 Siege of Colchester - and having organised Heritage Open Day stewarding for CCS for many years, it seems fitting to include the next item here...*

## THE ENJOYMENT OF HERITAGE OPEN DAY VOLUNTEERING

*CCS Member Sandra Kelly and HOD Volunteer writes...*

"I only joined the Civic Society this year and new members were invited to join in and man an historical site during Colchester's Heritage weekends; and so, I signed up for two mornings at the Roman theatre. I knew where this was but had only looked at it through the window and knew nothing about it. So it was with some trepidation that I joined Lynn Sturges that first Saturday. It was a lovely morning and Lynn showed me the ropes. Printed sheets gave me essential facts about the theatre and the lovely replica Mediterranean garden behind the building. Visitors poured in, more than 80 in about 3 hours. They were not only interested in the theatre but told us about their treasures too.

The following Saturday, I shared the shift with Richard Arnopp and learned even more from him. Once again, there were loads of keen visitors from all over. The time just flew by. Both days were a joy ...lovely experiences. I'm doing it again next year and would recommend it to others. You'll need a good bladder though as the nearest loo is the George! However you can fit a crafty tot in as a reward! Seriously, it really was a great experience, and one that I look forward to repeating."



## COLCHESTER BUS STATION

*There is general opinion among bus users that the Osborne Street bus station is unsatisfactory, but no one seems to know exactly what the problem is and what can be done to solve it. Frequent bus user Roger Dennis suggests a couple of practical changes to ease congestion...*

The underlying problem seems to be that bus drivers get in each other's way. Allotted bays are often already occupied by other buses, thereby causing tailbacks in Queen Street, St Botolph's Street and even around St Botolph's Circus. This in turn delays other buses, making services unreliable.



There are six bus stops labelled **Aa** to **Af** along the south side of Osborne Street, each with a stopping bay marked on the road. **Aa**, the first bay, is for infrequent services (for example, to Birch and Layer) and is separated from the others by the exit from the multi-storey car park. Bays **Ab** to **Af** are each designated for more frequent services. These bays are not long enough to accommodate more than one bus and at times of congestion, buses cannot use their allotted bay – hence the tailbacks.

To check this, I persuaded John Collett to join me one quiet Sunday evening so that we could measure the bays: we discovered that **Ab** to **Ae** are all around 18 metres long. As most buses are 10.5 metres long, it is impossible for two buses to use the same bay at the same time. A check on the bus timetable showed that despite this, there are several instances each day when two buses are scheduled to use the same bay at the same time.

If the four bays **Ab** to **Ae** were rearranged into three longer bays, each would be able to accommodate two buses simultaneously. In this way, six buses could use the space currently available for four and overcrowding of the bays would become less frequent.

Buses from stop **Af** (which is long enough to be used by two buses at the same time) travel south of the City along Butt Road or Maldon Road. However, buses that serve Birch and Layer also stop along Butt and Maldon Roads but they are allotted stop **Aa** to pick up their passengers – 100 metres back along Osborne Street. Many more passengers for the Butt and Maldon Road stops could use the Birch and Layer buses if all buses travelling along Butt and Maldon Roads pick up passengers from stop **Af**. If the same system were applied to all the infrequent services, stop **Aa** could then become a setting-down-only stop.

The layover bays on the north side of Osborne Street cannot be used to set passengers down as their doors would open onto the busy roadway. However, the infrequent buses could use one of these layovers if time permits and move to their starting stop when necessary.

*The whole scheme would not be expensive. It would require just three bus stop posts to be moved and appropriate markings to be painted on the road.*

## BLUE PLAQUE ON THE ARTILLERYMAN PUBLIC HOUSE

*Paul Knappett writes with the kind permission of Jess Jephcott to reproduce some of the information on the Camulos Military Heritage website; specifically, The Napoleonic Period c1750-c1860*<https://www.camulos.com/militaryheritage/militaryheritage4.htm>

The Civic Society has secured the necessary consent from Colchester City Council, Greene King and the landlord of the Artilleryman Public House to establish a blue plaque on the Artilleryman. The plaque will mark where the largest of the nation's Napoleonic Barracks were located in Colchester and it will be unveiled on 18 June 2026 - Waterloo Day.

It was not until the outbreak of the Great French War in 1793 that barracks were built in Colchester and other towns up and down the country. Prior to that, regiments were billeted in small parties over a wide area in towns and villages. The system pressed heavily on and was a source of grievance to publicans, only inns and taverns being liable under the Mutiny Act to receive billets. An entry in the corporation records in 1685 reads...

*"His Majestie's commission officers now quartering within the town be entertained with a bottle of wyne for ye joyful news of ye defeat of ye rebels in the west."*

During the following year, mine host of the Red Lion was paid *"the sum of five pounds for the quartering of several troopers more than his proportion he ought to have done"*. A return of the *"Inns and Alehouses and their Stable Room and Bedding"* sent to the War Office at this time shows there were at this time in Colchester, 207 *"Beds for Guests"* and stabling for 460 horses, out of which civilian requirements would have to be met.

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The Essex Regiment was formed in 1881 by the union of the 44<sup>th</sup> (East Essex) and 56<sup>th</sup> (West Essex) Regiments of Foot which became the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> battalions respectively of the new regiment. The 44<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot was an infantry regiment in the British Army. After 1782, the regiment became known as the 44<sup>th</sup> (East Essex) Regiment of Foot. The 56<sup>th</sup> (West Essex) Regiment of Foot was an infantry regiment of the British Army, active from 1755 to 1881. It

was originally raised in Northumbria as the 58<sup>th</sup> Regiment and renumbered the 56<sup>th</sup> the following year when two senior regiments were disbanded. The regiment was later absorbed into the Royal Anglians.

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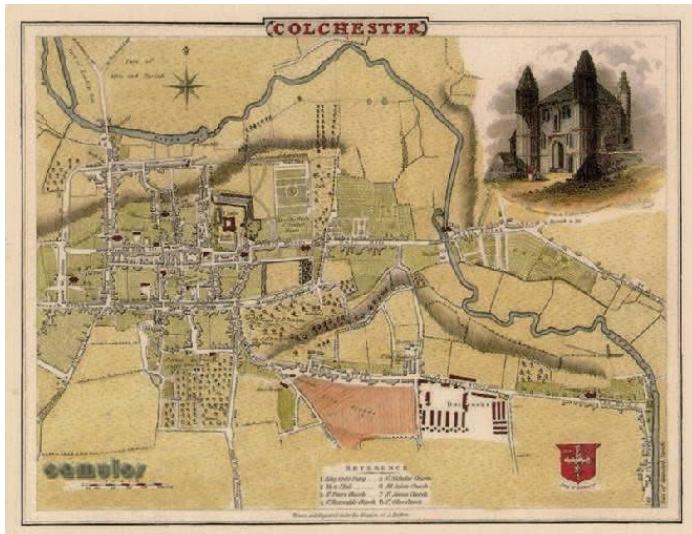
Private in 1791

Not all innkeepers were so obliging and complaints were general, a writer in the Gentleman's Magazine of 1743 summing up their attitude in the words "*the Landlord looks upon the Soldier as an Intruder forced into his House and Rioting in the Sloth at his Expense.*" During the American War, the Ipswich Journal of 21 November 1778, wrote that "*the burden of the soldiery in Essex is found insupportable, particularly in Colchester, where the principal inns have 150 men each; a petition has been sent up to the war office praying relief.*"

The outbreak of hostilities with Republican France in 1793 and the prospect of a long war, led to a '*Humble Petition of the Innholders and Alehouse keepers*' of Colchester begging the Corporation "to give all possible Encouragement to Government building Barracks in the Town." The pressing

needs of the day led to prompt action being taken. By the time of the Peace of Amiens being signed in March 1802, wooden hutments for 5840 men had been erected.

Troops, often enroute to the Continent, had been billeted in Colchester from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. In 1794, local innkeepers, concerned by the growing expense of the practice, petitioned the corporation for barracks to be built in the town and in the same year, the first infantry barracks were built on 4 acres to the south-east. By 1800 additional infantry barracks, artillery and cavalry barracks had been built on an adjoining 21 acres, the whole bordered by Magdalen Street (later renamed Barrack Street) on the north, Wimpole Lane on the west and Port Lane on the east. In 1805, the barracks could accommodate over 7,000 officers and men and 400 horses. Much of the building was done by Thomas Neill.



After the Napoleonic Wars, the barracks were reduced. When the disposal of barrack buildings began in 1816, the only people in the artillery barracks were 1 barrack serjeant and 12 patients in the hospital. Buildings, fixtures and fittings of the cavalry barracks were sold in 1818. The sale of the older barracks and the freehold site on which they stood, started in March 1817 but was not, for technical reasons, completed until 1840. In 1818, the government paid £5,000 for the continued use of 14 acres on which stood infantry barracks with accommodation for 51 officers, 800 men and 16 horses. Those were the only barracks left in Colchester by 1821 when they were occupied by up to 16 officers and 602 men. The government also retained Barrack field - 23 acres south of the barracks bought for an exercise field in 1805, and the Ordnance field - 32 acres west of the barracks between Military and Mersea Roads in St. Botolph's parish, bought in 1806. The 14 acres of land used in 1818 was given up before 1836 but leased again in 1856 for a temporary exercise ground. In July 1856, when 10,000 men of the German Legion occupied the barracks, 2,000 of them were housed under canvas on Barrack Field. (Between 1865 and 1878, the army allowed the Colchester and East Essex Cricket club to use part of the field; in 1885, the field was leased to the town as a recreation ground.)



*Private of the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers in 1793*

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## BLUE PLAQUE FOR KEN ASTON

Born in Colchester, Kenneth George Aston MBE (1 September 1915-23 October 2001) was an English teacher, soldier and football referee who was responsible for many important developments in football refereeing - including the yellow and red penalty system. And the Civic Society is working towards erecting a blue plaque in his honour. The site at Colchester's Football Stadium has been identified and the design of the plaque currently under discussion.

However, a CCS member (a few of us know who!) has offered to pay for the plaque which will be a huge help. We are about to approach CUFC and Colchester City Council for permission to erect the plaque and we are also exploring possibilities for the unveiling, which could be rather exciting!



## ST GEORGE'S DAY SERVICE AT ST BOTOLPH'S CHURCH

*Peter Evans writes...*

On 27 April, I decided to go to St Botolph's Church, which I regard as my parish church (when actually, it isn't!) ...and was surprised to find that it was the annual St George's Day – Colchester's Civic Service was taking place there. At one time, St Peter's Church on North Hill held the Civic Services but they seem now to be held at St Botolph's.

I arrived to find not only the Vicar, Reverend Chris Smith and the curate Reverend Emma Smith (his wife) but also the Bishop of Colchester, the Right Reverend Roger Morris and Civic Society Vice President, all in appropriate vestments for the service. Shortly after my arrival, one of the Town Hall staff in uniform dashed in, clutching two wooden blocks which he arranged on the altar. People started to arrive, then the Town Sergeant, Paul Lind (who retired in June) dressed in full ceremonial uniform - white stockings, cravat, gloves etc- and carrying the gorgeous gold Borough Mace, which always precedes the Mayor and his party. The Mace was placed on the wooden blocks on the altar. Councillor Lesley Scott-Boutell in the last few weeks of her Mayoralty was likewise dressed with tri-corn hat, chain, lace ruffles and robe with gold trimmings. The Mayoress, Jessica Scott-Boutell, was also there in support.

Then came a selection of former mayors. One such was Councillor Tim Young, Mayor when King Charles III came to confer City status. His wife Nicola took a seat in the congregation with other dignitaries. Other former first citizens of Colchester attended in robes denoting their status. Then the councillors arrived, a diverse group of people showing that the Council is truly representative. The occasion was colourful and impressive even before a word was said ...oozing Colchester's history and tradition. Also taking part in the service were the Lord Lieutenant of Essex, the Garrison Commander and the Senior Chaplin of 16 Air Assault Brigade.

This service particularly struck me. The Mayor and Town Sergeant represent Colchester at Civic Events - Remembrance Day, commemorative events, Royal Visits etc - but with the reorganisation of Local Councils into Strategic Authorities, the status quo will change. Indeed, they will disappear because the new rules make no reference to them. Over 800 years of tradition is at risk. (I refer to the Local Government changes which were summarised in an email to Civic Society members in May.) However, the City Council and other Essex Councils are aware that they must take action to retain mayors and any form of civic leadership.

Does it matter - do we really need a Mayor and all the ceremonial? I think it would seem very flat without them. There has been no consultation asking us if we want to lose them. Indeed, Harwich, Wivenhoe, West Mersea, Brightlingsea, Frinton and Walton, Sudbury and many other local towns have them.

## VISIT TO ANGLESEY ABBEY

*On a sunny 17 June, the intrepid Civic Society charabanc set out for the wilds of deepest Cambridgeshire to visit the National Trust properties at Anglesey Abbey and Lode Mill. Mike Fitt writes...*

After a short magical mystery tour through country lanes, thanks to conflicting 'brown' signs, we arrived and were met by Rosemary, Civic Society member, one-time Executive Committee member, and Anglesey Abbey National Trust Volunteer. Rosemary had suggested the visit and greatly assisted our entry.

Anglesey Abbey is the creation of Huttleston Broughton, the First Lord Fairhaven, whose father had made a fortune in mining and railways in the United States. Originally a 13<sup>th</sup> century Augustinian priory, it was converted into a manor house in circa 1600 and then extensively remodelled and extended between 1926-58 by Sydney Parvin and Albert Richardson. Inside this Jacobean style home is contained a mixture of medieval vaulting, low beamed rooms and airy light spaces. Many decorative features were reproduced or brought in from other buildings, including early 17<sup>th</sup> century panelling and a 16<sup>th</sup> century strapwork chimneypiece. Lord Fairhaven also devised the 100 acre garden which blends formal and more naturalistic landscape styles. We were particularly taken with the splendid rose beds.



Having been warned by Rosemary, that the Pagoda Clock was running several minutes fast, we dutifully made our way into its presence in time to see the 12 o'clock chimes. This wonderful 19<sup>th</sup> century clock featured on the BBC's *Hidden Treasures of the National Trust*; at 12 o'clock the chimes ring and the ornamental pineapples burst into life!

Then it was off to the café for a splendid lunch followed by a snooze on the thoughtfully provided National Trust deckchairs, under the magnificent trees. Well, it was a very warm day!

The grounds are also home to Lode Mill. While the mill that exists today is likely to have been built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it is thought that a watermill stood on the site of Lode Mill at the time of the Domesday survey in 1086. In 1793, the mill was described in a sale notice as *Anglesey water mill with dwelling house, yard, garden, barn, stables and outhouse, and three acres of pasture adjoining*. Old photographs show the house next to the mill - this was taken down during the 1930s renovation.

Around 1900, the mill was converted to enable cement grinding rather than corn grinding. An engine may have been installed at this time, as inside the mill today there are shafts, gears and a chain drive, all of which are unusual in a watermill.

At that time, the mill was owned by the Bottisham Lode Cement and Brick Company. Unfortunately, the company was a victim of competition and the business had closed down by 1920, leaving the mill derelict.

In 1934 Lord Fairhaven acquired the mill and began restoring it to its original corn-milling condition. The project was completed by 1936, after the removal of the mining and cement-making equipment.

In 1978, the Cambridgeshire Wind and Watermill Society restored the mill to full working order and by 1982, it was once again milling corn. Unfortunately, the mill now requires more work and having to prioritise expenditure, the National Trust has had to pause further work.

Bottisham Lode is the stretch of water below the mill, one of a number of lodes that were used as a transport link to the River Cam. The water above the mill is called Quy Water.

After a browse through the gift shop, it was back to the coach for the trip home. Altogether a most enjoyable day out, thank you Jo and thank you Rosemary.



## REMEMBRANCE POPPIES



Every year, Civic Society members led by Sheila Anderton and Carolyn Rushton knit and/or crochet poppies in support of the Royal British Legion as part of its November Poppy Appeal. This year was no exception and a total of 385 poppies were knitted or crocheted! They are always popular and sell really well.

A HUGE thank you to everyone involved!

So this is also a call to arms for next year! Please contact Sheila – [sheilamanderton@gmail.com](mailto:sheilamanderton@gmail.com) or Carolyn – [Carolyn.rushton@ntlworld.com](mailto:Carolyn.rushton@ntlworld.com) – if you are interested in supporting this very worthy cause.



## ANOTHER #WHEREANDWHATISIT TEASER...

Where can you see this?

Answers towards the back of the newsletter on page 46



## NEW VICE PRESIDENT: PAUL WESTON

*The 2025 AGM saw the formal stepping down of long-time Treasurer, Paul Weston from the Executive Committee. Jo Edwards said of Paul...*

We are not quite sure when Paul joined the CCS (our records are at the Essex Record Office) but I reckon it was in the mid 1970s, which means he has been CCS Treasurer for nigh on half a century! Paul has always been efficient, dedicated, calm, pragmatic, patient and wise, just what a Society such as ours needs! With Kath Wood, he took on the challenge of the Heritage Lottery Fund application and subsequent paperwork and calmly coped with it all, taking such a weight off our shoulders.

However, Paul has other skills... he is expert at microwaving peas, for example! Thinking back to those massive fund-raising New Year parties we held in ill-equipped halls, heaven knows how we would have managed without him! Three course lunches often with hot starters and always a hot main course for up to 100 members; all crockery, cutlery, hostess trolleys, glasses, drinks and food to be carried from cars to hall and back again; tables and chairs to be set out and laid etc - Paul was incredible!

I can remember him planting trees with the Civic Society Kids at Charter Wood and, again with the Kids, cleaning all the brass plaques on the old Charter self-guided walking tour of the city. And I can remember him helping with our carnival floats - those were the days. Paul also liaised with Civic Voice for us before John Salmon took over. Paul, we are going to miss you SO much!

**Paul said this in his reply...**

“

*It has been a privilege to serve as the Treasurer of the Society since the early days of its creation. For many years, the Civic Society operated on a limited budget and fund-raising was often the order of the day. Through all the ups and downs, the Society has been fortunate to have had Jo at the helm, and her dedication and drive has ensured its continual development! To this end, we owe Jo as huge debt of gratitude. I have met and worked with many enthusiastic and inspiring people giving their time and support to the Society and I will always treasure those memories.*

*Today, the Colchester Civic Society is as active as I have known with an Executive Committee working tirelessly for the well-being of Colchester. I am sure the Society will go from strength to strength and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to help in my own way.*

”

***The picture shows President, John Burton, presenting Paul with a Civic Society Certificate of Appreciation and gifts from us all.***



## LOOKING BACK... QUITE A LONG WAY!

*Two things happened recently that sent the thoughts of both our Secretary, Mike Fitt, and me back through the mists of time. Jo Edwards writes...*

The first was the discovery in a box of treasures handed to us by Ann Turner, who has retired from her unofficial role of Civic Society Archivist. Amongst the random collection of papers was an invitation to the Society's first Executive Committee Meeting, sent by the Secretary, John Bensusan Butt to my father, Ken Mabbitt.

The second was the 500th meeting of the Executive Committee, held on 21 October 2025.

Mike and I began to reminisce about past Executive Committee meetings - and Chairs. The more we reminisced, the more we laughed - and sighed! We thought we should share some of our memories with you.

I go back farther than Mike. I joined the Executive Committee in 1968 but occasionally took Minutes before that. In those days, the Committee was very male dominated. Members were well-known Colcestrians, all of whom were deeply worried about plans to modernise the centre of the town just to 'keep up with the Joneses'. Meetings were very formal and serious. They began with sherry and ended with coffee, and were held in a fug of tobacco smoke from pipes, cigars and cigarettes. I remember being sent out to buy cigarettes to put on the table at meetings!

Bernard Mason was the first Chairman. Bernard, who left his home, Tymperleys, to the town, intending it to be used as the official residence of the Mayor, soon resigned following controversy over a planning application to build a supermarket near the Castle. I remember the heated discussions very well. Within a very short time, academics from the new University of Essex joined the Committee and in 1967, Anthony Rowland-Jones, who was the youngest UK University Registrar ever appointed, became the Chair of the Society. How on earth did he cope? There was so much going on. Conservation Areas were created with help from the Society, the Cups Hotel in the High Street was demolished, demolition teams moving in overnight just as its listed status was being agreed and, much to the horror of the Society, the 'Post Office Tower' was built in the Dutch Quarter, despite our desperate objections. As a Government building, planning permission was not required.

John Bensusan Butt became Chair in 1969, rightfully so as the Society really was his creation. He faced some dreadful challenges - the building of Lion Walk Shopping Centre and the Public Inquiry about the building of Southway, plus an Inquiry about the building of the Queen Street multi-storey car park.

The Society is strictly apolitical, something we proved when, in 1972, Lord Alport (Conservative) was our President, Peter Watts (Colchester's Liberal Party candidate for the General Election) was our Chair and John Bensusan-Butt (Labour Councillor) was our Secretary. Of course, many years later, Ken Cooke, Labour Councillor, erstwhile Mayor and Alderman was also Chair. His wonderful stories would brighten the dullest of meetings.

Mike remembers two more early Chairmen ....

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*'I first became Secretary of the Civic Society during 1977. The Chairman was Tom Hart and I was invited along to an Executive Committee meeting at his home in Ashley Gardens, to meet the Committee or, I am sure, for them to have a look at me! Anyway, I must have passed muster as I became Secretary and remained so until 1987.*

*Tom's meetings were legendary. At each meeting, under 'matters arising', he would go through the previous minutes, line by line, and update or comment on every item, which then would need minuting. Consequently, once something appeared in the minutes, it remained there forever; and the meetings got longer and longer, 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning was not unusual.*

*I then had to produce the minutes, by hand, of course. I was travelling to work in Clacton by train from the Hythe each morning. I think the line must have had some of the oldest rolling stock as I had to compose each minute in my head and quickly write it down each time we stopped at a station.*

*Issue of the day was the development of what is now Culver Square. We sought to ensure as big a town square as possible, the retention of the Marshall Sisson-designed library, and a limit on the number of storeys of the new Debenhams. Results could be described as good and bad. Debenhams was reduced in height and there is a reasonable town square. The library frontage was retained but its marvellous interior and sweeping staircase were lost. You'll have to ask Jo about her nearly braining a press photographer with a wayward sandwich board!*

*1979 saw Tom Hart standing down as Chairman and the post being filled by Bill Hudson. We all knew he had many and various connections but I don't think we were expecting at a 'Roman' dinner he hosted at his Rose and Crown, a whole roast peacock and a whole roast swan! Committee meetings were not quite so lavish but were, at least, much shorter.'*

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I, too, remember those interminable meetings. Today's EC members don't know how lucky they are! The references to Bill Hudson, the Committee meetings at the Rose and Crown (held in a room with a marked list to port) and that utterly extraordinary dinner (all of us dressed as Romans) remind me of yet another Chairman, John Shippey, owner of the bookshop in Head Street. John and his wife, Hilda, lived in a beautiful house in Highlands Drive, off Lexden Road. Hilda was the most wonderful hostess. We were greeted with the customary sherry but John had to get through the business part of the Committee meetings pretty quickly as Hilda would call us through for 'supper'! She was a superb cook and she really went to town. Wow!

The Society finally joined the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the election of Pam Nicole as Chair in 1974. There was a marked air of disapproval at first. 'A WOMAN?' But Pam was not fazed at all and she soon proved herself, paving the way for other women to follow in her footsteps. The Society had been relatively insular until then but Pam and Tony West gathered together all the local amenity societies and created CADFAS, the Colchester and District Federation of

Amenity Societies - a very powerful group which provided mutual support. Some years later, another Chairman, John Egan, with another beautiful house at the end of another lane off Lexden Road, started to forge links with other Civic Societies across the Eastern Region - a region that covered, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. Sadly, the demise of the Civic Trust put paid to the formal meetings but the connections made were invaluable. John and his wife, Caroline, were quite extraordinary, hosting fundraising parties, Caroline producing wonder food and supervising the kitchen at our huge New Year lunches. Oh, the stories I could tell! We were so sorry when they moved back to London! Their departure made one enormous difference to Executive Committee meetings. The tradition of sherry at the beginning of every meeting ceased! Why? Because Paul Weston found us a new meeting place - the church hall attached to the Methodist Church in Straight Road! Sherry didn't seem quite so appropriate there! We used that room for many years until we realised that most of us lived a very short walk from GreyFriars and didn't drive. Before you ask, we have not reinstated the sherry but we did celebrate our 500th Executive Committee meeting with a glass of Prosecco!

I would be writing forever if I included every Chair we have had over the last 61 years so I hope I haven't offended anyone by missing them out - I haven't even mentioned both of my parents! Mike's and my memories could provide the subject matter for a whole series of books - no, neither of us are volunteering! But it is quite extraordinary what the Society has achieved. It has taken the hard work and serious dedication and commitment of many remarkable people to get us to where we are now and we owe them huge thanks. Colchester could easily have been a very different place without them - one and all.

## UPDATE RE THE ABRO ENQUIRY

*The ABRO enquiry opened on 8 July 2025 at the Town Hall Old Library and to the astonishment of many, it concluded the same day! Bob Mercer writes...*

The Council had chosen not to defend its principal reason for refusal — design quality— following legal advice which was triggered by a conditional offer from the developer's barrister to waive any claim for costs if the objection was withdrawn. The Planning Inspector carefully considered the remaining concerns.

With regard to heritage, he found that the development would cause only a very low level of harm to the conservation area and would not harm the setting of any listed, scheduled or non-designated heritage assets, including the Roman Circus.

The Inspector also recognised several public benefits: the delivery of over 200 new homes, including 15 affordable dwellings to meet local needs, the economic benefits to the city of the large construction site, improvements to public access and interpretation of the Roman Circus through the removal of buildings and enhanced pathways. These benefits were judged to outlay any limited harm identified.

With regard to infrastructure, the Inspector was satisfied that the public benefits outweighed the little harm identified.

The Appeal was therefore allowed, subject to planning conditions which would focus on preserving and protecting the historic Roman Circus, a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Public Open Space must be provided by a minimum of 10% usable open space. There must be a net gain in biodiversity. Specific conditions will govern the design details of the development to ensure it is appropriate to the site. The archaeological investigation must be a detailed investigation and compliant with Historic England's consent.

Highways and Access conditions will address highway safety to ensure pathways and improved pedestrian links, particularly with Flagstaff Road. Legal agreements are in place to ensure developer contributions to local services and infrastructure.

## CIVIC VOICE SET TO CLOSE

*John Salmon writes...*

You may not have heard of Civic Voice but a small proportion of your Colchester Civic Society membership fee goes towards supporting it, along with fees from many Civic Society members across England. Member organisations of Civic Voice range from small societies such as Spalding and March to those in our major cities, such as Birmingham and Leeds. At regional and national levels, it has contributed to debates on issues such as planning reform and heritage protection. It has also been the centre of a national network for Civic Societies, providing frequent newsletters and conferences which have kept us in touch with the work of other societies, and providing online workshops and discussions on a range of topics, such as planning and blue plaques.

However Civic Voice is facing closure, primarily because it is no longer financially viable in its present form. Membership has dropped significantly in recent years, down from around 320 to the current membership of 130. The organisation has been struggling financially for some years now, despite the best efforts of Ian Harvey, who had managed to hold it together since its inception - Ian has moved on to take up a post in Place Making at Liverpool University.

In February this year, Rob Hattersley was appointed as the new Chief Executive of Civic Voice. While Rob has managed to resolve a large number of outstanding administrative and financial issues, he resigned in August this year, having come to the conclusion that the organisation remains financially unviable with income falling far short of what is needed to meet the cost of a full-time Chief Executive and other, albeit limited, supporting staff.

The trustees of Civic Voice are therefore proposing that it be closed down at the end of its financial year (February 2026) unless a solution can be found. The principal hope here is for a volunteer-led organisation to be maintained. However, the current organisation has just five trustees and despite recent appeals, no further volunteers have come forward, so the prospects for survival in any form do not look good.

At our recent Executive Committee meeting, it was agreed that we would welcome any attempt to keep Civic Voice afloat and that we will respond to the current consultation in time for the final meeting on 8 November 2025, when a decision will be made.

## AUDLEY CHAPEL

On Heritage Open Day on 20 September, CCS Stewards

Peter Evans and Sheila Anderton (who took these photographs) welcomed visitors to Audley Chapel, a small 16<sup>th</sup> century chapel on Berechurch Hall Road and currently, in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust. (It was once part of St Michael's Church which was declared redundant in 1975 and which now offers office space.)

The Chapel was built as the burial place of the Audley family, whose most prominent member was Thomas Audley, Henry VIII's Lord Chancellor. The Chapel contains the tomb of Sir Henry Audley which was erected before his death in 1648! It includes a white marble effigy of Sir Henry in armour, reclining on a black and white tomb chest which is carved with the figures of his five children.



Also inside the Chapel is a tablet to Robert Audley (d 1624) and 19<sup>th</sup> century memorials. The fine hammer beam roof is decorated with carvings which include the emblems of Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon, suggesting that the Chapel was completed before their divorce in 1533.

Wonderful treasures aside, Audley Chapel needs regular, very basic TLC and we are very pleased to say that new CCS Member, Nicholas Chilvers, has volunteered to help. Nicholas will be popping in every few weeks to sweep the floor and remove some of the cobwebs although he'll have to choose a bright day because there is no electric light inside the Chapel!

More information about the Churches Conservation Trust here –

<https://www.visitchurches.org.uk>



## REMEMBERING COOPER

*Upon hearing of the death of my Parson Jack Russell, Cooper, several members asked for an obituary in our Newsletter! Why, you might ask? Jo Edwards writes....*

My somewhat irascible little dog helped me on a number of occasions when I suffered from writer's block, always finding something to say about his *Room with a View*. He generally borrowed my phone to type, using his rather unique, phonetic, spelling. Unfortunately, some words are now embedded in my predictive text, which can be a tad embarrassing if I don't proofread emails before I send them!

Cooper was born in October 2010 in Kent. We had always had rescue dogs but this time, my son wanted a puppy. Cooper was 'interesting' from the start. Falling over the fender and breaking the very top of his leg when he was less than 3 months old, he was confined to the house, unable to socialise, while it healed - something that definitely caused problems later. Once he was well enough, we took him to puppy training classes. They were a total disaster ...Cooper was expelled! I was told that he was completely untrainable. The vet, somewhat amused, did some tests and announced that Cooper did, indeed, have learning disabilities.



Coops had very forthright opinions about cyclists, pigeons, rain, cats, hi-vis, 'utha dogs' and visitors. He never considered the wisdom or otherwise of his actions and never learnt a lesson. He hated workmen in the house and always had to be corralled after biting the plumber's steel toe-capped boot. The plumber was fine. Cooper's teeth were not! On one occasion, he spent the day staring through a glass door at a man doing some repairs in my dining room. As soon as he had gone home and I opened the door, Cooper showed his extreme disapproval by dashing straight to the toolbox left on the floor and cocking his leg! It took me ages to wash and dry both tools and box! Cooper was unrepentant. The workman, thankfully, remained oblivious. Perhaps Cooper's greatest misdemeanour was his visit to our roof one summer afternoon. He'd found my son's attic bedroom window open and decided to explore. I was alerted to the fact that he was trotting backwards and forwards along the ridge of the terrace by a large group of street drinkers who had stopped on their way to the Priory and were chanting 'Jump, Jump, Jump!' Luckily, only tiles fell into the street! His half-hour of fame (by which time, a huge crowd had gathered) was brought to an end by a couple of firemen on two ladders, armed with burgers from a neighbour's barbecue and a very large zipper bag.

Very little fazed Cooper. However, he was absolutely TERRIFIED of butterflies. If he spotted one in the garden, he would dash upstairs and hide behind the bathroom door, as long as there wasn't a spider in the bath! He hated spiders, too! Otherwise, he was a tough little dog. In June last year, he was diagnosed with lymphoma. Between them, Colne Valley Vets and the veterinary hospital at Newmarket kept him happily alive for the next nine months. He never experienced any side effects from chemo and thoroughly enjoyed his visits to Newmarket where was plied with duck sausages whilst undergoing treatment. It wasn't the cancer that killed him. He spotted a pigeon in the garden and took a flying leap from the arm of my chair, over my shoulder and onto the floor, slipping as he landed. I think he broke his leg in exactly the same place as before. He was in terrible pain and I had to make the final decision as I knew he had little time left. My faithful little protector and companion died peacefully on 24 March.

He is much missed.

*RIP Cooper.*

## A TALE OF TWO SIEGES

*Fortunately, I wasn't in Sarajevo between 1992 and 1996 but I did spend four days there in April this year while on a month-long backpacking tour of Europe, writes Ged Dickinson ...and was immediately struck by some of the parallels between Sarajevo and Colchester.*

'Sniper Alley' isn't a phrase or place one usually associates with Colchester. If however you'd been in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina from April 1992 to February 1996, it would be a place and phrase you would have been only too aware of – it was in one of the besieged city's main streets where civilians were targeted by snipers of the besieging Serb forces. Before visiting the city I had pictured it as a narrow alley or lane, perhaps what we might call a 'folly' here in Colchester rather than the major highway that it is.

On the surface, Colchester and Sarajevo have little in common; but looking a little more closely and you might be surprised at the parallels. Both cities have rivers flowing through them, both were Roman settlements and both cities were subjected to very significant military sieges during periods of Civil War. Colchester (*Camulodunum*) was once the capital of Britain, Sarajevo is the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



In both cities, there remains significant evidence of the sieges and in both cities, their present 'sense of place' is informed and shaped by their time under siege.

The Siege of Sarajevo was the prolonged military blockade of the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, lasting from 5 April 1992 to 29 February 1996 during the Bosnian War. Serbian forces, specifically the Army of Republika Srpska, besieged the city. The siege was the longest in modern warfare, with a duration of 1,425 days, and resulted in significant casualties, damage and displacement.

The Siege of Colchester on the other hand was somewhat shorter, starting on 12 June 1648 and finishing on 28 August 1648. It involved a Parliamentarian Army led by General Fairfax besieging a Royalist Army along with the mainly Parliamentarian civilian population of Colchester.



In both sieges, the core purpose was to surround the city to prevent supplies and people from entering or leaving, ultimately aiming to force the defenders to surrender. In both cities supplies of food were very low. Both were bombarded from the outside causing casualties and serious structural damage to buildings and in both cities, the results of the bombardments can still be seen. More so perhaps in Sarajevo than in Colchester but then Colchester has had rather longer to recover. In Sarajevo while there has been much post-war reconstruction,

there are still a great many buildings scarred by shells, shrapnel and bullets. Some are little more than stark skeletons of their former selves. In some cases, they have been preserved just as they were at the end of the siege to stand as memorials. In others, they lie abandoned by their former, and perhaps still current, owners given the vast numbers who relocated out of, or within, the ethnically and religiously divided city.

Modern Colchester has fewer siege-damaged buildings and structures. The missing tower of St Martin's Church, the repairs in brick to the otherwise stone built tower of St Mary-at-the-Walls and the now brick-filled 'Berryfield Breach' in the Roman Wall along Priory Street, are all visible reminders of the Siege of Colchester over 375 years ago.

I was particularly struck by the way both cities have chosen in places, to highlight damage from armaments. In Colchester at the Old Siege House, there are red painted circles to be seen in the outer walls where musket balls struck and became embedded in the building's timbers. Sarajevo has 'Sarajevo Roses'. These are a type of memorial - around 200 of them - made from concrete scarring caused by a mortar shell's explosion that was later filled with red resin. Mortar rounds landing on concrete during the siege created a unique fragmentation pattern that looks almost floral in arrangement, hence 'Sarajevo Rose'.



I feel I know Colchester quite well as I've lived here since 1988. Yes, it has some issues - not everything is perfect by any means - but it's a place I like and am comfortable living in. Sarajevo on the other hand seemed to me to be quite a strange place albeit one I'd had on my list of places to visit for a long time.

I remember it now as the place where the longest siege in the history of modern warfare took place. A siege that was three times longer than the Battle of Stalingrad and more than a year longer than the Siege of Leningrad. I remember that 46 years after NATO's inception in 1949, it was in Sarajevo in 1995 that the organisation's first ever combat intervention took place.

I feel I've only scratched the surface and that there's so much more about it to discover. Perhaps that's not surprising given I was in Sarajevo for only four days rather than the over-forty years I've lived in Colchester. My main takeaway memory however, will be that it's the first place, amongst all those that I've visited on my various travels, where the feelings from an earlier conflict were still so very raw. I felt that somehow things simply hadn't yet been resolved.

The siege of Colchester ended with the surrender of the town. The Siege of Sarajevo ended in neither victory nor defeat but when the besieging forces withdrew as part of the Dayton Peace Accords.

*I couldn't help but think –that we've not yet seen the end of Bosnian conflict – I hope I'm wrong – we'll see.*

## WALK AROUND ROMAN COLCHESTER



Colchester is not able to boast the Roman ruins of Rome and other European cities but the Romans certainly left their mark here in Colchester or *Colonia Victricensis*, the first capital of the new Roman province of Britannia. Roman building styles and incredible technologies were the envy of later invaders which meant that Roman building materials were heavily plundered and reused.

Civic Society members lead by City Guide, Glyn Barritt enjoyed revisiting the Roman

influences in our City on a beautiful, autumn Sunday afternoon, 12 October. What a wonderful start to our walk, at the Balkerne Gate.

*Civic Society member Ann Larkin writes...*

Our Roman walk around Colchester was on a beautiful autumn afternoon; the sun was shining and it wasn't even very cold. We met Glyn outside the Mercury Theatre where she gave us information regarding Roman Colchester and the way their beautiful architectures shaped early Colchester. The Roman wall was built as a defence following Boudica's attack on the Roman *colonia* when she burnt the city to the ground! Archaeologists in Colchester will tell you that a blackened layer exists underground, signifying the catastrophic destruction of the Roman *colonia* back in AD60/61. (A similar layer exists in London and St Albans.)

We looked at the early Christian Church ruins outside the police station and Glyn pointed out that this could have been used for pagan worship at an earlier date.

We walked through the Dutch Quarter and examined what little remains of the theatre in Maidenburgh Street. The model inside the building made us realise how large the theatre was.

We then went into Castle Park where we saw the remains of a rich Roman family's house set in the grass behind where the Temple of Claudius would have been. We were also told about Duncan's gate in the north Roman Wall, one of six gates that were included in the build of the wall and named after its discoverer, P M Duncan.

Our tour ended there, with the promise of future tours. Thank you, Glyn for a very pleasant couple of hours.



## TALKING... LICENCING

*Rennie Chivers, Town Crier for the City of Colchester writes...*

As a member of the CCS Executive Committee, I have offered to take responsibility for all matters related to licensing. Colchester City Council (CCC) has a Licensing Committee and Licensing Sub-Committees dealing with matters including Hackney Carriages (taxis), Private Hire vehicles and drivers, Sex Establishments, liquor licensing, betting, gaming and lotteries (gambling), and all other matters contained within the Licensing Act 2003. I have some previous experience in this field. During the 1990's, I was the Licensing Sergeant at Colchester Police Station. I regularly visited licensed premises to ensure compliance with the law and the terms of their licence. I reviewed applications for new licences, and variations and extensions to existing licences. I also instigated criminal proceedings for breaches of licensing law and provided evidence at the Magistrates court.



I expect most of the matters that will be of concern to Society members will relate to liquor licensing, but I will address any licensing issues that are a cause for concern. I will be doing my best to identify those applications that need intervention but to lessen the possibility of my overlooking something, I would ask for your help and cooperation. If you become aware of a licensing issue (or if you are unsure about whether an issue is a licensing matter), then please reach out to me with as much information as possible so that I can do my best to address concerns and act where necessary. I will keep you all informed of the matters I take on and of their outcome.

*You can contact me by email at [renniechivers@hotmail.com](mailto:renniechivers@hotmail.com) , or by telephone on 07754 462201.*

## ANSWERS TO THE #WHEREANDWHATISIT TEASERS!

Congratulations if you recognised either of the two teasers:



The first is the left hand carved figure on the front of Colchester's first public library on West Stockwell Street. The handsome building, designed by Brightwen Binyon, opened in 1894 and is Grade II listed.



And this is the crozier or ceremonial staff of Colchester-born Samuel Harsnett, Archbishop of York between 1629-1631, as represented on his statue on the front of the Grade I listed Colchester Town Hall.



## 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
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Other Elected Members	Sheila Anderton Rennie Chivers John Collett Roger Dennis Robert Mercer John Salmon
Co-opted member	Ken Walker



This nut is from a rare palm tree found in the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean. They were the source of several myths as they could be carried long distances by ocean currents from the then uninhabited Seychelles to places where the tree was unknown. People thought the floating nut resembled a woman's or mermaid's bottom! Its early scientific name was *Lodoicea callipyge*. Callipyge is from the Greek and it means... 'beautiful rump'!

*One of the fascinating exhibits in the Mythical Creatures exhibition at Colchester Castle, running until 22 February 2026*



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