

COLCHESTER CIVIC SOCIETY CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2012

In common with many other Civic Societies, this society has been greatly concerned with the operation of the Localism bill (now Act). The Executive Committee met with Karen Syrett, a representative of Colchester Borough Council's Planning Department to discuss the implications of the bill for this society. We were informed that one large and one small parish council had started the ball rolling by taking an interest in the new legislation. We will look forward to hearing what transpires.

Tesco's planning application for a new store in the Butt Road area was discussed with the company's representatives at an early stage. In general, we made no adverse comments but we had some reservations about transport issues.

Our planning sub-committee of Austin Baines, Brian Roach and Beau Mackay have difficulty in checking all relevant planning applications because of hardware problems at the Council but do a splendid job, for example, with the Jumbo Water Tower application which gathered a great deal of public interest.

As important as planning is, the most important item on the committee agenda is the report by our treasurer, Paul Weston, who does excellent work and also examines the work of the Civic Voice, the national co-ordinating group. This organisation is beginning to find its feet and we look forward to seeing the results of our membership.

There is now hope that there is movement in the Vineyard Gate development, though not soon enough to affect the relocation of the Bus Station.

The night time economy continues to be a running sore in the social life of the town and we much regret the disinclination of club owners to contribute to the cost involved outside the clubs, for example the SOS bus. If a satisfactory closure time can be agreed, it would be helpful.

We have noted the demise of Colchester 2020 but our relations with other bodies, particularly the three "Friends" associations, continue to be beneficial. The activities relating to the Roman wall are worth mention.

Our activities on footpath and tree preservation have difficulties as it is no longer so easy to identify and locate them, as on line mapping is less easy to use. Whilst volunteers did walk the footpaths last year, we would need help to overcome checking trees preservation orders.

Despite her domestic problems, Jo Edwards has managed to produce a programme of outings and activities which plays a great part in the social life of the Society.

Last but certainly not least I must thank Elisabeth Baines for the tremendous amount of support that she has given to me during my first year as chairman and to Peter Evans who has taken over the editorship of the newsletter.

Ray Chandler, Chairman

ROOM WITH A VIEW

I wonder how many of you were troubled by the BBC advert promoting the Jubilee coverage which featured a little girl and her grandmother. "My grandma was a little girl when the Queen was crowned". I looked at grandma, saw an elderly woman, and realised just how old I am, because I was also a little girl when the Queen was crowned! I found that advert unbelievably depressing! I was three at the time of the Coronation – well, actually, nearly four – and I remember it very clearly. We went with my grandmother to buy a television from Joslins in High Street (oh the excitement) and then, on the big day, we all went to her house to watch on this tiny screen. I wore my white Coronation dress. I had two Coronation dresses. One was pink, with a printed border at the hem, featuring, if I remember correctly, the Coronation procession. The other was the white one which my mother embroidered with a lion and a unicorn and other royal bits and pieces! I had a number of commemorative items – a pencil (I still have the remains of this) a Matchbox coach and horses and a couple of red, white and blue paper kites, one of which blew away when I let go of the string at Mersea. But what I also had was the enormous Coronation arch right outside my house. It spanned the width of High Street, a spectacular structure. My parents acquired huge flags, a Union Jack, a Scottish flag with a red lion and a Welsh one with a red dragon. They hung them on poles

jutting from our front bedroom windows. I loved them. But I loved the arch even more. I was terribly distressed when it was eventually dismantled. I'd love to know who designed it. It was very much of its time. I had a photo of it and, with me on the doorstep! The picture appeared in the Essex County Standard.

I tend to agree with those who said what a shame it was that the main streets of Colchester didn't have much in the way of decoration for the Diamond Jubilee. Thanks to a few shops and to the pubs and the George Hotel, which really went to town, we had some, but really we could have done better. I am more than aware of the cost involved, but, sometimes, a bit of brightness amid the austerity does everyone good and a decorated High Street would have brought people into town. Time was when bunting stretched across the High Street at carnival time each year. It was a reminder that the big event was about to happen - everyone knew and huge numbers of people came. Such decorations do not have to be flashy and elaborate. Simplicity is often far more effective. The Diamond Jubilee has gone, but the newly established carnival is here to stay. Can we have our bunting back, please?

Pleez can I taik this opertoonti 2 apolojise 2 evriwun hoo poots letas 4 mi Missis throo R leta box. I no I hav serprized a lot ov U bi grabin the leta and Im sori. Im not arfta yor fingas, just yor leta, wich I perforate 2 sho it haz arrived. Missis iz goin 2 spoyal mi fun and get a caig (4 the post, not me). I no Im a very bad dog hoo gets up 2 orl sorts ov mischif (I had 2 B rescued off the roof ov mi hows bi men in yelo hats hoo caim in a big red lori wiv flashi bloo lites the utha day. I was sitin wotchin peepul in Priri Street but I startid nockin tiles into the rode so thay sor me. A crowd gatherd and I spent a hapi R entatainin them bi runin up and down the roof and orl the wai along the teris!) Missis undastands I wil B beta wen Im 2. She sez she carnt wate! Eniwai, Im sori if I maid U jump. I promis havint eetid eni cheks. I du eet muni tho. 20 pownd notes R mi favrits orltho I like 5 and 10 pownd wuns 2 but I don't eet them if thay R in an envelop! Pleez B very cairful wen U poot enithing thru the leta box and keep yor fingas saf wile she finds a caig wot wil fit and alow mi Ser's weelchare in and owt, sumfin she iz findin cwite hard 2 du.

Luv and lics

Cooper Edwards

We are in the throws of building work again. We have a new bathroom, but now the landing, study and front bedroom are to be tackled following water ingress through our neighbour's roof. All rather stressful, but it will be worth all the hassle when it's done. The builders park in the Priory Street car park and all of them have said the same thing. "You take your life in your hands here, don't you?" Why? Well, they've all stepped out of our front door and failed to look for traffic coming from the right, in other words, coming the wrong way along a one-way street. Cyclists are, without a doubt, the worst offenders. Years ago, Jim's wrist was broken by a speeding cyclist who swept past, inches from our door, his handle bar hitting Jim as he stepped out onto the pavement. All of our dogs have narrowly missed nose amputation. Cyclists, if you are going to ride the wrong way, please do it on the wrong side of the road too and not within inches of our houses! The west end of Priory Street has been closed several times recently, because of roadworks or events at the lower end of High Street, and on those occasions, access to the street is from East Hill. Can someone tell me why drivers take this opportunity to drive twice as fast as usual? Leaving the house becomes really quite dangerous as drivers speed along, virtually in the gutter as they drive on the left of the narrow street, their wing mirrors protruding over the pavement. Strangely, nobody seems to remonstrate, not like they do in the car park. Jim goes to the hospice day centre every Thursday. He can't walk across the road to the car, so I leave him sitting by the front door and take the car down the car park to the exit nearer Queen Street, then drive back along Priory Street to pick him up.

You would be amazed at the number of people who have told me that the car park is one way – it isn't! It's actually quite interesting to see how many drive out of their bay without looking to the right, often very fast. One woman hurtled out without looking at all, causing me to brake very hard. Boy, did she scream at me! The language was extraordinary! I'm afraid I didn't do what she told me to do, because it was physically impossible and sounded painful anyway! Instead, I stood my ground and refused to reverse, which is most unlike me as I always give way to cars coming the other way

(why is it that every driver stops and looks into every bay for a spare space even though every driver in the line of cars ahead of him has done exactly the same?!) Her shrieks attracted those waiting for buses in the bus park and people began to peer over the Roman Wall. She worked herself up into such a frenzy that she became totally incoherent. It was only because Jim was waiting that I finally realised that I would have to move, which I did, to the exclamations of disappointment from the onlookers above. She departed with squealing tyres accompanied by the smell of burning rubber and I quietly continued on my way to a small round of applause from the bus park audience!! I sometimes wonder how long it will be before there is a serious accident in the street.

As I write this, the children from St Thomas More's School are leaving for the day and those from St James' School are beginning to arrive in Priory Street on their way home. The road is full of small children and so is the car park. And we have a new menace. Scooters! Now, I applaud the idea of children coming to school on scooters and bikes. It's great, but only if their mothers or minders watch their every move. Unfortunately, this is not the case here. Everywhere I look, groups of women chatter amongst themselves as their children, bored, sweep hither and thither on their scooters, weaving amongst the melee of moving cars, whilst their brothers and sisters, well under school age, join in the fun and chase after their older siblings. It makes me feel quite sick.

Jo Edwards (and friend)

A HOTEL ROOM WITH A VIEW

By chance some Civic Society members found themselves on the same holiday in Chartres, France earlier this year. This is a small city, not quite 50,000 population, with a major cathedral (unfortunately with a repair programme in the choir) and twinned with Chichester. There are no licensing issues and apart from one major café with seats on a square, there is no intrusive night life. The principal historic buildings are illuminated at night. And it is so clean and tidy!

There are some comparisons with Colchester. They too have Roman remains, a Roman theatre in the middle of a housing development and a ruined gateway, although theirs is Norman and was destroyed by the Germans. What was unusual and interesting was that Chartres, a small city, has been so radical with car parking and traffic management. Most town centre parking has been hidden under the city streets. This is not unique but the extent of it here is unexpected. From my hotel room, I was surprised that there was no traffic noise – there was no serious traffic. Occasionally, you could see a car appear from a slope from the underground car park and drive away.

Like Colchester, they could not carry out these major works without finding Roman remains, but these have been built into the walls of the underground car park. Quite where the local mayor found the huge amount of money to complete this massive project I did not discover.

However, Colchester could have been there first. Some years ago, Cyril Meadows, a member of this Society, came up with a plan that would have provided parking spaces under the town centre, exactly what Chartres has done. Whilst the plan was discussed, nothing came of it and the upfront cost would also have been massive. Chartres found the money and suffered several years of being a construction site but is now receiving dividends.

Peter Evans



Underground multi-story car park in Chartres

FOR SHE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW!

At the Annual General Meeting on 11th June 2012, there was an unexpected piece of Any Other Business. Civic Society member Bill Abbott made the following statement:

"I am here today not just as a member of this society but as a member of the Rotary Club of Colchester Trinity and I am accompanied by our president, Andy Morton. Our organisation does like to honour those who we consider have made significant contributions to our local community. This takes the form of a Paul Harris Fellowship, established in 1957 and named after the founder of Rotary. It is given locally as recognition for service to the community.

We believe that the Colchester Civic Society, with its concern for our environment, is a vital cog in the functioning of Colchester and has made a difference to the town. In the Civic Society, Jo Edwards has been a mainstay for many a year. To many, she is synonymous with the society. She has extended her work into the Colchester Federation of Residents Associations and umbrella organisations with a wider regional remit, as well as Colchester 2020. However, her enthusiasm for things Colcestrian go much further, including being secretary of County High School Old Girls Association.

For all this and no doubt much more, our Club has decided to give Jo a Paul Harris Fellowship and I call upon our Club president to make the presentation"

This was indeed done and resulted in Jo being speechless but obviously pleased.

PLANNING UPDATE

Neighbourhood Plan Briefing

On the 1 April 2012, the Localism Act introduced a right for local communities to draw up a new type of community plan called a Neighbourhood Plan. New Regulations were recently published and these provide the framework for preparing Neighbourhood Plans.

The Localism Act enables community groups to work together to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan. In parished areas the Parish Council can produce a Neighbourhood Plan while in non parished areas a Neighbourhood Forum needs to be established. In some places, existing community groups may want to put themselves forward. In other places, local people might want to form a new group. In both cases, the group must meet some basic standards. It must, for example, have at least 21 members, and it must be open to new members.

A Neighbourhood Plan is essentially a mini Local Plan covering a neighbourhood area (which has to be agreed by the Council.) Neighbourhood Plans must conform to the strategic aims, objectives and policies in the Local Plan covering their area. In Colchester the Local Plan comprises the Core Strategy, Site Allocations DPD and Development Policies DPD (collectively these documents have previously been known as the Local Development Framework.) The Neighbourhood Plan should include a vision, objectives and a preferred development option showing how the local community wants their local area to develop. It will identify the area to be covered by the Neighbourhood Plan, set out the policies needed to help deliver the proposed development and show how the level of growth identified meets or exceeds the level of development shown in the Local Plan. The National Planning Policy Framework makes it clear that 'neighbourhood plans and orders should not promote less development than set out in the Local Plan or undermine its strategic policies.'

Neighbourhood Plans are technical planning documents and must be developed through consultation with the local community. They will be able to shape and direct sustainable development in their area. The process involves the preparation of a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) to assist those preparing the plan to identify the most sustainable development option for their area. An Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment (EQIA) also has to be prepared to ensure no section of the community is disadvantaged by the development proposed. The Neighbourhood Plan will be subject to a Public Examination and a referendum.

Whilst the Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum must initiate and lead the process the Local Authority has a number of defined roles within the Neighbourhood Plan process. These include agreeing the area to be covered by the Neighbourhood Plan; approving the Neighbourhood Forums; organising consultations, the examination, the referendum and adoption of the Neighbourhood

Plan. It is likely that the Council's expertise in relation to planning, sustainability appraisal, research and engagement, community development and EQIA's will be required by community groups during the preparation process.

There are a number of key stages involved in the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan which are detailed over the page;

GETTING STARTED - this stage is all about identifying project volunteers, the area to be covered by the Neighbourhood Plan and setting up a Neighbourhood Forum (if needed). These steps have to be agreed with the Council prior to starting work on the Neighbourhood Plan. The Neighbourhood Forum should prepare a constitution which should be submitted to the Local Authority as part of the Neighbourhood Forum application process.

GETTING ORGANISED – this stage is essentially the house keeping stage of the project where the Neighbourhood Forum or Parish Council will prepare a project plan and develop a communication strategy. The group should keep a record of community involvement and consultations carried out. Good communication throughout the process is essential to secure community support which will be critical for the referendum at the end of the process. During this stage the project team should focus on preparing a project budget or securing funding where this is needed to develop the project. The group may also start reviewing existing plans and strategies for the area and start thinking about the evidence needed to support the development of the Neighbourhood Plan.

PREPARING AN EVIDENCE BASE – during this stage key tasks involve creating a profile about the age and gender profile of the community and identifying the key social, economic and environment characteristics of the Plan area. This stage also involves auditing existing infrastructure and designations in the area and the Council's evidence base. Data gaps may be identified at this stage and it may be necessary for new studies to be commissioned by the local group to fill any gaps. Other tasks include carrying out surveys and needs assessments.

DRAFTING PROPOSALS – it is during this stage that work starts on drafting a vision, objectives for the area and possible development options. As part of this process a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Scoping Report will be prepared. A six week period of pre-submission consultation / publicity is required under regulation 14.

FINALISING THE PLAN – after the consultation the Neighbourhood Plan is finalised and submitted to the Council along with other documents. If the Council is satisfied the plan meets all the requirements of the regulations and national policy it formally publicises the plan (and notifies consultation bodies) and invites representations for a further 6 weeks. Before the examination can proceed the Local Authority has to validate that all correct procedures have been followed during the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan and appoint an independent examiner.

EXAMINATION AND REFERENDUM – Following the examination the inspector may recommend some changes however if the inspector is happy for the Neighbourhood Plan to proceed then a referendum has to be organised by the Local Authority to gauge the level of community support. If 51% or more of those who vote support the Neighbourhood Plan then the Local Authority is required to adopt it and it becomes part of the Local Plan. Once a neighbourhood plan has demonstrated its general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan and is brought into force, the policies it contains take precedence over existing non-strategic policies in the Local Plan for that neighbourhood, if there is a conflict.

For more information about Neighbourhood Plans please contact the Spatial Policy Team;

*Karen Syrett
Spatial Policy Officer, Colchester Borough Council*

Many thanks to Karen for taking the trouble to explain the situation.

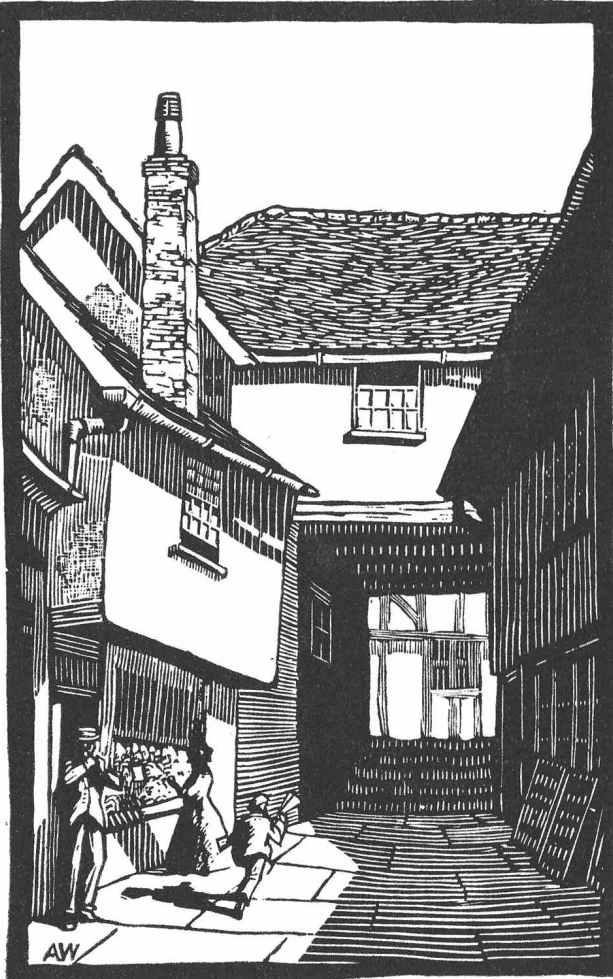
STREET NAMES AND NAMING

After my article in the previous edition, I was kindly lent a copy of Alderman Blaxill's original booklet by his grandson, Tony Blaxill. It is rather nicely illustrated with drawings, which were not included in the newspaper article. It was published in 1936 and sold for one shilling (5 pence).

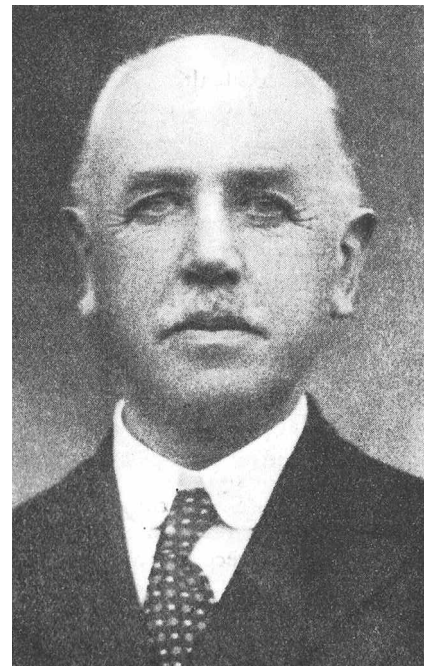
It is interesting that even in 1936 there were many yards and closes off many of the older, longer

streets. Most of these were named after public houses and are long gone. Magdalen Street had no less than 12, only Bretts Buildings remaining now.

Two of the most recently built roads then were King George Road and Queen Mary Avenue, named after the 1935 Silver Jubilee. Queens Road is indeed named after Queen Victoria but Princess Road, named after Queen Alexandra when Princess of Wales, has disappeared along with the neighbouring Denmark Street under the Police Station.



Scheregate Steps, Colchester



Ellec Blaxill

Many roads have been creatively named recently. A road off the bypass (Cowdray Avenue, itself named after Viscount Cowdray, formerly Colchester's MP Sir Weetman Pearson) is named for Thomas Wakely, a medical campaigner and founder of the "Lancet". A newer road commemorates Dorothy

L Sayers, the crime writer and scholar who lived at Witham and wrote the play "Constantine" that was performed in Colchester in 1951 as part of the Festival of Britain celebrations.

New developments off Hythe Hill on the Paxman site have been named after engines built by Paxman – Lenz, Peache. Edward Paxman Close is built on the site of a Paxman residence, later the social club.

A new updated edition of the Blaxill booklet would be interesting. However, owing to the many new developments, it would be difficult to keep up to date.

Peter Evans

FRIENDS OF THE CASTLE PARK

If you love our beautiful Castle Park you may be interested to learn about a small group of volunteers and supporters known as Friends of Castle Park. The friends are, as the name suggests, a friendly bunch who act as advocates, consultants, champions and fundraisers and occasional gardeners (!) for all things Castle Park. Our park is the home of so many different animals, buildings and plants and is of course enjoyed by people from all different walks of life.

We're always keen to recruit more Friends members and celebrate the park in each and every way we can think of. Did you know the sundial from Tymperleys is due to come back to its original home in Castle Park? But where will it go? Join friends of Castle Park and help us advise where to put it. You can be as active or as passive as you want, it all helps.

To join send a cheque to Elisabeth Baines, 37 Valley Road, Wivenhoe, CO7 9LZ or visit our website www.friendsofcastlepark.com. Membership amounts to the princely sum of just £5.00 for individuals or £7.00 for families.

*Anthony Roberts,
Chairman of Friends of Castle Park*

TOWN CENTRE HONEY

We all know that there are foxes living in the town centre, but did you know that there are bees being kept in beehives in the centre of the town? You can buy honey that Colchester made from thebeelady@sky.com which has been produced in her own hives. I could direct you to them but there are security and safety issues. We don't want to get stung, do we?

EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY

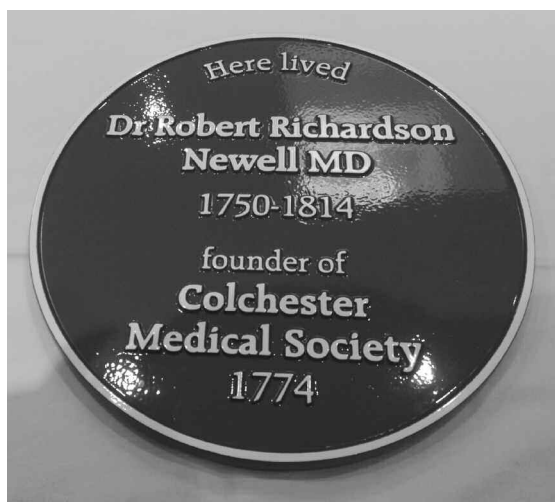
Being a member of the Civic society can be full of surprises. I received a call from Jo Edwards about 16.45 one day asking if would I go up to the town for a photo opportunity in connection with a protest about an extension to licensing hours that she had lodged on behalf of the society. As I had just returned from holiday, I could remember nothing about the application at all.

The Gazette had become very interested in the issue, which involved an extension of the opening hours of one club to 3am Thursday mornings. Jo could not go herself but tried to round up other members at very short notice. I met the photographer at about 17.15 but no other committee members could be located.

I was directed to stand in front of the club and look stern and concerned. (Some friends said I failed). The next morning I was the front page of the Gazette, and the inside as well. The story featured in other versions over the next few days. I wish I had smartened up for the photo.

However the good news was that the application, which importantly was opposed by the Police as well, was refused. The Police now seem to be taking a greater interest in these cases and the Gazette reports that the local clubs seem to have taken this on board and are scaling back their requests.

BLUE PLAQUES - DOCTOR ROBERT RICHARDSON NEWELL



Not on the wall at time of going to press

A new blue commemorative plaque has been added to those already on various buildings in the town. This one is on premises in Head Street next door to the cinema.

The plaque commemorates the founding of Colchester Medical Society in 1774 by Robert Richardson Newell. This was only the second medical society in the country and is still going strong today. The first medical society to be formed was the London Medical Society formed in 1773.

Robert Newell practiced as an apothecary/surgeon in Colchester but there is no record of him gaining his degree to practice medicine in this country and it is assumed that he gained his degree abroad. He was born in 1750 and died in 1814. He had a difficult start in life being orphaned at the age of 18. He was brought up by his grandfather John Richardson who ran an apothecary shop in Pelham's Lane but he died when Robert was 20.

Robert's father, also named Robert was an apothecary/surgeon at Harwich and his mother was Susannah Richardson. Robert married Sally Hasell in 1773 and they had 12 children, 6 boys and 6 girls. He was only 24 when he set up Colchester Medical Society and he served as its secretary until his death in 1814. He is buried in St Mary's churchyard and there is a memorial to him in the church.

His life as a doctor was spent at his house in Head Street. The house was demolished when the Post Office was built but the commemorative plaque is on the building that was built where his house used to be. It is now 37-39 Head Street.

Ann Turner

ROUND UP FROM PREVIOUS ACTIVITIES

A while ago, we had a visit to the British Old Schools Foundation at Hitchin, which was a re-creation of the way schools used to work early in 19th century. Recently, it has won the Queens

Award for Volunteers, which recognises the hard work done by volunteers, who run the Museum and play the part of teachers.

Some members enjoyed trips in 2011 around the Walton backwaters on the restored former lifeboat, the James Stevens no.14, owned by the Frinton and Walton Heritage Trust. The vessel took part in the Queen's Diamond Jubilee pageant and could be seen on some of the TV coverage. The sea trip from Walton to Docklands took about 12 hours each way.

We can now include an illustration of the Collins murals referred to in the summer 2012 edition. These are the restored murals displayed between Queen Street and Firstsite, called Lewis Gardens.



Collins panel on display in Lewis Gardens

Previously I mentioned that the walls of the barracks between Mersea Road and Military Road had been largely demolished. Now they are being rebuilt slightly further back and the railings are being restored. It does not look as if the gates can be replaced on site due to the design of the site but we have already suggested that they are preserved.

A WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Jean Akam, David and Mrs Ulla Beatie, Mrs Moira Davidson. Mrs Susan Jowers, Jean Roberts, all of Colchester. Sue McCaskey of Wivenhoe

Wendy Cardy has rejoined

Janet Crees has resigned

If you want information about how to join for a friend, please contact our Membership officer. Details are on page 2.

HERITAGE WEEKEND 2012

To all you kind people who gave up your time for Heritage Open Days this year, a big thank you. It was a very warm weekend and from what I saw there were a lot of people about. I do not have the totals for the whole weekend yet but I am sure you were all kept very busy.

The dates for 2013 will be 7 and 8 September so please put them in your diary so that when I come to ask for stewards next year you are ready to volunteer again. Maybe more of our members will come forward next time so that it is not left to the same few kind people who give up half a day each year.

Ann Turner

COLCHESTER 24 – BOOK REVIEW

For 24 hours over 21st and 22nd October 2011, some 200 photographers took about 6000 images of Colchester at work, at play, at school and in hospital. Some photographers were professional (employed by the Police and the army), others were highly experienced and award winning amateurs, and the others included me.

Of course this is an important social record. It had been done exactly 25 years ago as “Just Another Day” and the pictures from then already show a different town. This time, however, the 2011 pictures have been edited down to about 200 by Andrew Philips, assisted Anthony Cody. Andrew has written the captions – you can tell from the style and the humour.

There are views that you will never have seen of a town that you think you know thoroughly, some of the most unusual being views of High Street at night taken from ground level and above. There is the army at work and play, including a pop group made up of male and female paras. There are the Police and other professionals at work, and many if not all of your favourite shops.

Things do move on. The Mayor who opened the 1986 exhibition is now our Member of

Parliament and introduces the book. A baker photographed making bread last October is now retiring. Some buildings I photographed (sadly not included in the book, but never mind) have either been demolished or turned into a housing estate, all in a year. There will be more changes all the time.

The iconic image of punks from 1986 is shown in this book on page 4 together with photographer, George Royffe, now aged 100. This time it could be the 6th form students on page 79, the schoolboy on page 76, soldiers in training on page 21 or the butchers shop on page 44. You can buy the book and decide yourself.

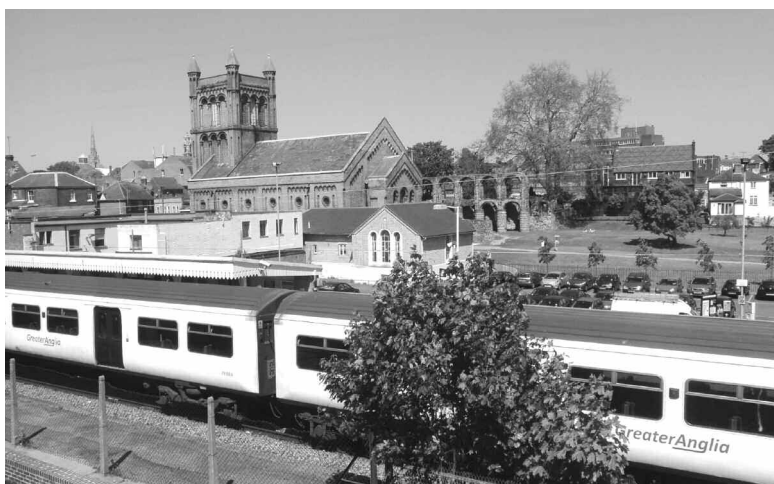
Peter Evans

“Colchester 24” by Andrew Philips and Anthony Cody is published by Amberley and is available at all local book shops at £14.99.

REPORTS OF SOCIAL EVENTS

Magistrates Court 25th May 2012

Many Civic Society members, and indeed Colchester residents generally, have complained about the new Court building which looms threateningly over Colchester Town (St Botolph's to older residents) Railway station. To me, the colour is still unsympathetic and garish although the side view from the station platform is not unpleasant.



View from the Upper Gallery

What is it like inside, however? One batch of members was given a tour in May and a further group is set to go in December. Whilst the external design may not please us, it is clear that much trouble has been taken to make the inside as practical and efficient as possible. It is as comfortable for all court users including staff, lawyers, witnesses and prisoners as security permits. Two ushers were our guides and explained how there had been some changes to the original plans, for example, prisoners are now held behind glass screens but there were problems for each side to hear each other.

The building houses 5 courts, one dedicated as a Family Court, and the others are of varied sizes for various uses. There are video links available so that prisoners do not have to be brought into court. This is also useful for vulnerable people or children appearing as witnesses. There are also interview rooms, where the furniture is nailed to the floor for safety, and the areas are colour coded for security purposes. Security is of course very important and there is a cell specially equipped for prisoners possibly likely to commit suicide.

The 17 cells for youths, males and females are also colour coded. There are kitchens so prisoners



Inside the Court

can prepare their own meals, which are provided to suit different religions or health requirements. However, the emphasis is more on the “prepared” than cuisine basis and it is not intended that prisoners should be held overnight.

The ushers are court staff but the building is run for the Courts Service by Serco. As you may infer from the availability of a video link, the courts are making use of modern IT facilities but we were surprised to find that the Magistrates Court is aiming to become paperless – that is to say to stop using paper files and documents and for images to be shown computers or laptops. This is of course common practice in many offices but seemed a very modern idea.

If you want to know what it looks like inside, just look at any modern TV courtroom drama, rather than “Rumpole of the Bailey”.

Peter Evans

Cruises on the Stour from Dedham to Flatford and beyond – from May onwards

The original idea was for a number of cruises along the river from Dedham Mill through the Flatford lock, with refreshment break, to Cattawade. Part way through the programme of cruises, however, the lock at Flatford became damaged and it was not possible to open it to allow boats through. Earlier groups were able to see more wildlife on the way to Cattawade but on the other hand, the later groups had more time at Flatford to see the views that Constable had and the mill itself, and to view the exhibits.



The River Stour at picturesque Dedham

Next door to the Mill is a Wildlife Garden, which has just been subjected to an upgrade by RSPB. The land, the size of 3 tennis courts and including a water meadow, was left to the RSPB by the late Sylvia and Margaret Richardson, who had run a café at Flatford.

No matter how far the trip went, it was a gentle and therapeutic journey, with passing birdlife and cows gazing at us from the riverbank, and our guide pointed out points of interest and the effects of the already heavy rainfall.

Stanstead Bury, Ware, 18th May 2012

The house known as Stanstead Bury, less than 10 minutes from Harlow, lies just across the border from Essex, near Stanstead Abbots Hertfordshire. The parish was once controlled by the Abbey of the Holy Sepulchre at Waltham and it is said that in 1531 Henry II exchanged some land in Essex with Waltham Abbey, giving the manor to Anne Boleyn but after her execution it reverted to the crown.

Edward Baeshe served 4 monarchs, Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I and Elizabeth I, and was given the manor in 1533 by Queen Mary. He held the title “General Surveyor of Victuals for the Navy Royal and Marine Affairs within the Realms of England and Ireland”. He was licenced to empark 300 acres surrounding Stanstead Bury by Elizabeth I and was graced by her Royal presence (with retinue!) at his home at least 3 times.

His family held the property for over 100 years. Charles II made Ralph Baeshe a knight of the Bath in 1660 but his son Edward had to sell the manor (due to debts incurred in the Royalist cause) to Sir Edmund Fielde, MP for Hertfordshire in 1676. In 1806 the Jocelyn family, with distinguished record of fighting the Spanish and French, were owners of Stanstead Bury. Since 1845 the Trower family, starting with Captain Edward Trower and his wife Emma. A sister of the current Trower owner took us on a guided tour of the house, part of which is timber framed by a late 17th century William and Mary period frontage. It overlooks an attractive garden separated from the surrounding fields by a “ha ha” ditch, giving a rustic view of cattle grazing, as in a picturesque landscape painting. The interior of the house is a very pleasant family home and the current Mrs Trower did not mind us peering into her well-ordered airing cupboard, or into her teenage children’s bedrooms.

Highlights for me were four lovely Worcester porcelain Flight Barr and Barr period dishes and the rather bizarre real human hair pigtail taken as a trophy from a Chinese man by a Trower ancestor 100 years ago in a skirmish.

There was an excellent tea served as part of the visit and then we were able to inspect the nearby church of St James, in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust. It is grade I listed and probably stands on the site of a Saxon Church. The adjacent hilltop was perhaps a Roman encampment.

In 1086 Stanstead Abbots was classed as a “Ville” with 7 burghers and a reeve (mayor), making the settlement almost as important as Hertford, St Albans or Berkhamstead. The earliest parts of the church date from 1100 including the south wall, showy in flint and faced with clunch (chalk-like). Other walls are 13th and the tower is 15th century in origin. The belfry contains 3 bells recently repaired by the Whitechapel Bellfoundry. In 2007 they were dedicated in the late Anthony Trower’s memory. They can be rung together by just one person with their new chiming apparatus. The greatest surprise is that the church interior is virtually unchanged 18th century appearance with box pews.

In 1866 Thomas Fowell Buxton of the brewing family associated with Truman and Hanbury and noted for philanthropy acquired the lordship of the manor and hold it today. Thomas Fowell Buxton paid for building the village school in 1869 and the new church of St Andrew in 1881. The population gradually moved down the hill away from Stanstead Bury and the new place of worship was more centrally sited. As St James was less used it was not “improved” by the Victorians. Therefore, beside the tombs and memorials of the occupants of the manor and the Baeshes Chapel of 1577, there are also 16th century brasses of a knight, a gentleman and a lady.

A three tiered oak pulpit stands against the middle of the south wall facing northwards into the church, sideways to the remarkably well preserved box pews. A Jacobean sounding-board or tester has been incorporated into the door of the west screen behind the 19th century organ. Inside there are lozenge shaped hatchments of the Booth family of gin making fame, which lived at Nethersfield House in Stanstead Abbots until recently.

A delightful, unspoilt church, it receives 40% funding from the government nowadays for exterior maintenance, whilst the interior is paid for by the public, Church Commissioners, local authorities and others. It was declared redundant in 1975 although 5 services are held annually. St James is open to the public Sunday afternoons 2.30 to 5pm. It is certainly worth a visit if only because Jim Edwards’ grandfather was baptised there.

Pam Pudney

Letchworth 20th August 2012

Another trip to Hertfordshire, past Duxford Air Museum and along a section of the ancient track, the Icknield Way (now A505) before turning off into Ashwell village. This was once a prosperous medieval town on the river Rhee, a tributary of the river Cam and can therefore be said to be its source springing from a freshwater pool, which we saw, surrounded by ash trees.

On arrival, we were served coffee, tea and wonderful homemade biscuits at St Mary’s Church. Then half the party went to the local museum and the other to the church, with Jan our guide, before changing round.

A medieval cottage, at one time a tailor’s shop and also a church tithe house, was purchased in the 1920’s in poor condition for £25 through the efforts of 2 local schoolboys. Enthusiastic collectors of ephemera Albert Sheldrick and John Bray wanted to create a central village collection. In 1930, the property was renovated, revealing it’s lovely oak beamed frame and since then it has gone on to become a well-run and attractively displayed small museum. A significant Roman treasure was found nearby in 2002 comprising silver items, including brooches. They are now in the British Museum but replicas can be seen here in Ashwell.

Next we entered the churchyard through a 15th century timber framed lychgate to see the church of St Mary the Virgin, with its huge 176 foot tall tower (over 40 feet higher than Dedham). Built in 2 stages from locally quarried stone and topped by a typical Hertfordshire spirelet – a “leaded spike”, it forms a prominent landmark for miles around. The Black Death arrived in England in 1348 and reached Ashwell in 1349. Inside, on the north wall of the church tower, Medieval Latin graffiti records this destructive pestilence and close by, more cheerfully, is an interesting scratched

drawing, a rare image of old St Paul's cathedral in the city of London. On a pillar in the south aisle, rather maliciously, is written "Bertha is a vixen" in Latin, another example of graffiti here. So who was she?

With a population of about 800, Ashwell still has several small shops, including a butcher and a baker, and 3 pubs. There were more than 10 pubs once but this was a known brewing area. Some of the unusual names of former pubs are listed in the Ashwell Museum. Sadly, "The Australian Cow", apparently named after the custom of granting free travel from Australia to a cow in milk, has not survived.

And so on to Letchworth Garden City, the first of the English garden cities, the idea of Ebenezer Howard, who, horrified by Victorian slums wanted a "Utopia, joining the beauty of nature with social opportunity". He wrote a book "Tomorrow; a Peaceful Path to Real Reform" published in 1898, describing his theory. Inspired by this work, Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin took on the challenge of designing houses for Letchworth. Their plans were accepted by Ebenezer Howard and the project, employing a talented team of architects, commenced in 1903 and continued until the 1930s.

We visited the Spirella factory building designed by Cecil Hignett in the Arts and Crafts style and made of fireproof brick and reinforced concrete. Begun in 1912, but held up by the outbreak of the First World war, it was completed in 1922.

The Spirella Company was set up by 3 Americans – Beeman, Kincaid and Pardee – in 1904. Their famous corsets were of innovative design using sprung steel ribbing which moved with the body and were *a bit* more comfortable and less expensive than the Whalebone stays used till then. The corsets were invented by Marcus Merritt Beeman, His wife was called Ella and by taking the Spir from Spiral and adding her name, he created the trademark "Spirella". The Spirella trio, looking for a production site in England, met Ebenezer Howard in 1910 and with his encouragement, brought their company to Letchworth. They began in cramped sheds where they employed 25 workers. Often, there were rats but the firm carried on especially in WW1 when they had to manufacture cartridge belts and fabric parts for aircraft wings. Things improved immeasurably when they moved to the new building.

While women continued to wear corsets, the firm prospered. The firm also made other garments, reaching its apogee when Miss World, our very own British girl, Miss Anne Sidney, wore a Spirella

swimsuit in 1964! During its heyday the company had been a paternalistic employer providing hockey, tennis and other facilities and holding sports days. It also offered free bike repairs for the mainly female workforce, many of whom cycled to and from work. They had a subsidised canteen and they could partake in ballroom dancing amongst other benefits.

Eventually with changing times and tastes, the company closed in the 1980s. The Factory building's future was in the balance when, encouraged by Prince Charles, Letchworth Garden City Corporation bought it in 1994. By then, the old factory was in a shabby state but after a 5 year restoration at a cost of £11 million, Cecil Hignett's architecture gleamed again – this time used by smaller organisations.



The former Spirella factory at Letchworth

We were given special access to the property, fed on a good ration of sandwiches and fresh fruit washed down with fruit juice before viewing the well sprung boardroom on the top floor illuminated by natural daylight through a dome in the ceiling. We also relaxed in the staff gardens. What a lovely atmospheric workplace for modern employees.

Then it was off to Letchworth Heritage Museum (free admission) sited in an original building occupied in 1907 by architects involved with the varied designs of houses, shops and factories for Letchworth. They were led by Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin – lifelike models of whom were to be found, rather like benign ghosts, in their office.

We left leafy, well laid out Letchworth for Ickleford parish in order to enter Hitchin lavender Farm. In 2000, this firm revived the Hertfordshire custom of growing commercial lavender which had stopped in the 1960s. Due to the damp summer of 2012 their lavender plants had flowered later than usual and the season had been extended, enabling us, along with other members of the public to “pick your own” or more accurately to cut the lavender (scissors and bags provided @ £4 per adult, accompanying children free) Greyish flower heads, have we were told, have the stronger scent, darker ones looking good but having less perfume. Sunflowers were also available. On such a pleasant sunny afternoon it seemed a perfect spot for families to relax and of course there was a shop and a café –cream teas for us and lavender products before we returned home in our Kings Coach. I did not need an evening meal on arriving home! Jo always ensures that we can enjoy a full day with regular refreshment breaks, all part of a Civic Society trip.

Pam Pudney.

Suffolk Punch Trust – Hollesley Bay 11th September 2012

On arrival at the Suffolk Punch Trust we were met by the manager, Chris Kennedy, who gave us a brief outline of the history of the stud and their current activities.

He was originally involved in horse racing but feels he has come full circle by working with much larger, slower, and I’m sure he said smelly (!) but sweet tempered horses.

We were then split into three groups. Our guide Ken took us into the big barn which has a large collection of farm equipment and especially old wagons and tumbrels. We were temporarily distracted (as he knew we would be) by the arrival outside the barn of two Suffolk Punches - Nettles Colony and Oaken Colony brought up to be hitched to the wagon - great photographic opportunity.

Ken resumed by telling us about the 23 horses currently at the stud. All Suffolks are chestnut, the mane and the tail in various shades from brownish through to blond. They have ‘clean’ legs. Their bloodline goes back as far as 1768. Three foals (two fillies and one colt have been born this year – their names all begin with Y. There are also 13 racehorses that have lost their racing licence for one reason or another. They will have 6 months complete rest and relaxation before being assessed and retrained for dressage or hacking. If retraining is not possible they will spend the rest of their days at Hollesley.

We then went to see the two Black Suffolk sows and their 17 offspring –aaahs all round, before returning to the original stables and the tack room containing all the highly polished (by volunteers) collars and brasses that are used for shows. At last it was our turn for the horse drawn wagon ride – looking out over their backs you can only wonder at the size and the strength and the gentleness of these superb animals – it was like stepping back in time when horses were the only means of transport.

After tea we had time to explore the Exhibition Hall which had a multitude of Suffolk history - a blacksmiths forge, a Co-op grocery shop, model sailing barges, information on mills and breweries, road, rail and water transport, tractors and farm implements – fascinating.

Altogether a most interesting and enjoyable visit. As Ruth said on the coach ‘Jo has done it again’

Brenda May

Saffron Walden, the Fry Gallery and Myddylton Place Friday 21st September 2012

I am constantly pleasantly surprised by the idiosyncratic nature of Colchester Civic Society

visits; the most recent was no exception.

A fascinating art gallery in the middle of delightful Saffron Walden, small but perfectly formed, full of quirky water colours, mixed media and ceramics with the customary welcome coffee and chocolate biscuits, home to a collection of North West Essex artists introduced by the curator and accompanied by some interesting anecdotes.

We also visited Listed Grade 2* Bridge End Garden adjacent to the gallery, laid out by Francis Gibson in the mid-19th century. The Gibson family were eminent bankers and brewers in the town. This was a real jewel - an environment of great charm and divided into a number of 'compartments' rather like rooms in a house. There was the sunken Dutch Garden which consists of geometric swirls of box that have been restored based on drawings by the famous Edwardian landscape gardener Gertrude Jekyll, who visited the site in the early 20th Century.

After lunch we visited a timber framed early 16th century merchant's house, 1 Myddlyton Place, latterly a guild house, malting, then a youth hostel and finally rescued by its present owner who are in the process of concerning that which deserves and documenting the history of the building and adapting some of it to 21st C living. Whilst still offering the visitor a unique glimpse into earlier centuries. We saw some of the earliest known wallpaper, beautiful peg beams and purling and the piece de la resistance – a covered bedroom complete with the 16th century pole (not I suspect for dancing!). Was it a hall, house, a merchant's shop, a guildhall, a row of 16th century cottages, maltings, youth hostel or a private home or all of these things? One of the most significant historic buildings in NW Essex it has traceable links to Kings College Chapel, Cambridge and to the town's St Mary's Church - as well as to the important Quaker families who ran the local malting and breweries before successfully turning to banking!

We then visited the parish church of St Mary said to be the largest church in Essex with an overall length of 183 feet whilst the height of the tower and spire is 193 ft. The East Saxons who gave their name to Essex were pagan but after St Cedd led their conversion to Christianity in the 7th century there was probably a Saxon wooden church there. The massive Norman stone church that was known to exist in 1130 was rebuilt and enlarged in the early form of the Decorated period between 1258 and 1259. There is so much to say about this church – well worth a visit.

All in all an interest packed day and we escaped the bad weather!



Myddlyton Place, Saffron Walden

Peter Hazlewood

SOCIAL PROGRAMME 2012/3

Meet at St Botolph's Hall at 7.30pm 7th November 2012 for our Burning Issues Meeting

Another opportunity to find out what is happening in Colchester, to raise issues that matter to you and to discuss them with others. Like Spring Up, it's very informal meeting and feel free to bring non-members. If you need or can offer a lift, please let us know.

POSTPONED Cruise on the River Stour

I must apologise, again, to those still waiting for their trip on the Stour. A combination of appalling weather (resulting in far too much water in the river), broken lock gates and my admission to hospital at the wrong time has meant that we must put off the last trips until next year. I am so sorry about this. I'll sort something out as soon as I can, assuming the lock gates will be functioning in the spring!

POSTPONED Colchester Magistrates' Court

I'm doing well here! The Magistrates' Court visit was always a fly by the seat exercise as far as I was concerned and was one that became even more difficult to organise as the numbers wanting a guided tour of the new building rose and rose! We managed the first tranche after a lot of negotiation (they don't do tours of the Court) but then the lady who arranged the event for me was made redundant! We had another visit booked in for December but that has had to be cancelled because the entire workforce at the Court will be in Chelmsford for a training day. The next time the Court is not sitting is Friday 15th March 2013 (there are only about three such days a year.) There is a chance that we will be able to go then, but I won't know until a couple of weeks beforehand. If you had booked to go and still want to, please keep this date free. Can you please complete the slip at the end of this Newsletter if you want to come? I just want to update my list as some time has passed since it was compiled.

CHANGED DATE

Monday 12th November (not Thursday 15th)

Meet at The Stockwell (previously The Stockwell Arms) on the corner of West Stockwell Street and Stockwell at 7pm.

This is getting silly, I hear you say, two postponements and a changed date! Well, part of that is because I do try to do unusual things and the execution can be very unpredictable! In this case, the owner of the Stockwell has been able to bring the opening of his new restaurant and pub forward two weeks. As a consequence, if we are going to be able to explore whilst there are no customers about, our visit must come forward too. Now, this is going to be a fascinating visit! I suspect that many of you have been watching the restoration of the old Stockwell Arms with considerable interest. It has been a real labour of love for the owner, Robert Morgan, but it has also been an extraordinary journey into the past. The builders have found some really unexpected treasures, not just beneath the floor but hidden in the structure of the building too. There's a Roman road, a well, coins dating to the reign of Edward the Third, wonderful architectural features long hidden and much more to both intrigue and amaze us. Car parking in the Nunns Road (W&G) car park is £2 and in Middleborough or Sheepen Road 50p after 6pm. Please let us know if you need or can offer a lift. Please let me know on the reply slip whether you are coming as soon as you can, so that I can let Mr Morgan know how many to expect.

Cost Free!!

I am currently arranging the full programme for 2013. Visits will include the Emirates Cable Car over the Thames combined with a chance to explore the newly restored Cutty Sark, a preview of Greyfriars before it opens as a hotel, a whiz in a lift to the 85 metre high viewing platform at the top of the Arcelor Mittal Orbit, the tallest art structure in Britain (it's the red tower in the Olympic Park!), a couple of really interesting houses, a tour of the All England LawnTennis Club at Wimbledon (probably on Wednesday 15th May, so keep this date free if you are interested) and much more. I am still hoping that we will manage the Bow Backwaters, but I'm waiting to hear whether the boat trips are happening. I understand that the company who intended to run them has had some hiccups. Full details in the next Newsletter, but here is the information about the events early in 2013.

Saturday February 2013 Meet at the new St John's Church Hall in Ipswich Road, Colchester at 12.30pm for our New Year Lunch

Yes, the New Year Lunch is back, albeit in February! Our new Social Events Committee have

decided to leave it until then as, you may remember, we had to cancel the lunch in early January 2011 because of heavy snow. We are hoping that the weather in late February may be better. All fingers and toes crossed, please! The party will also be on a Saturday this year, rather than our usual Sunday. This is because we really wanted to use the St John's Hall, which is not available on Sundays. Light and airy, with ample car parking, near a bus stop and with a superbly equipped kitchen, the hall is a great venue. Please join us, and feel free to bring non members too. We will have our usual raffle and donations of prizes are welcome! The hall is on the right, travelling out of town, just past St John's Church on the Ipswich Road. The bus stop is just past the roundabout at the end of St John's Road and the turn-off to Highwoods and Tesco's. *There is no parking on the Ipswich Road side of the hall.* To reach the car park, turn into St John's Road at the roundabout, then take a left into St John's Close. On reaching the church, turn right, between the church and the churchyard and continue to the car park at the end. The brand new hall is on your left. Please complete the slip at the end of the Newsletter if you would like to come. Please don't leave your application to the last minute as we really do need to know, ideally by the beginning of February, how many we are catering for. Please indicate on the slip whether you need or can offer a lift.

Cost £15

COLCHESTER CIVIC SOCIETY SOCIAL PROGRAMME 2012 REPLY SLIPS

Please return to: Jo Edwards, 43 Priory Street, Colchester CO1 2QB.

Make cheques payable to **Colchester Civic Society**

If you have an email address please let me have it as it makes contacting you easier

Wednesday 7th November 2012 7.30pm Burning issues meeting St Botolph's Church Hall
I/we would like a lift

Name

Address

Post Code

Telephone

Email Address

Monday 12th November 2012 7.00pm The Stockwell Cost free
I/We would like a lift

Name

Address

Post Code

Telephone

Email Address

Saturday !! February 2013 New Years Lunch St John's Church Hall Cost £15
I/We would like to come

Name

Address

Post Code

Telephone

Email Address

Probable date 15th March 2013 Colchester Magistrates Court Cost £2
I/We would like to come

Name

Address

Post Code

Telephone

Email Address

SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE FOR RENEWAL 1 FEBRUARY 2013.

Subscription rates are £8 single membership, £12 joint membership and £12 for corporate membership. If you are paying by standing order please ensure that your Bank is paying the correct amount.

Please renew my membership for the year February 2013-January 2014. Your membership will lapse if not renewed by 30 June 2013. An early return of this form with your subscription would be appreciated.

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Amount enclosed £.....cash/cheque made payable to **Colchester Civic Society**



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