

Spring 2016



Registered Charity 237885

This Newsletter has been edited
for The Colchester Civic Society by Peter Evans.

Opinions expressed by contributors
are not necessarily those of The Civic Society.

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A ROOM WITH A VIEW

As I write this, we are still awaiting Essex County Council's decision on the proposal to reverse the traffic flow in Priory Street. These photographs were taken at the same time and show three separate lorries, two parked and one travelling the wrong way in an attempt to get out of the street! As reversal, if it happens, will effectively turn Priory Street into a major section of the one way system around the town, with far more traffic, can someone please explain to me how this tiny, busy, street will cope?

Jo Edwards

RIGHT and BELOW: Two typical current views
in Priory Street



WALL OF WISHES

In September 2015, the Society took part in the Architectural Heritage weekend by reviving the idea of a Wall of Wishes, the suggestion of Jo Edwards. This encourages passers-by to write what they wish for Colchester on labels and tie them to the wall. The ideas were sometimes most surprising. Summaries of the responses were sent to the Council.

It was also a useful recruitment opportunity and put the name of the Colchester Civic Society in front of the public

Peter Evans

BELOW: The floral dragon that welcomed visitors to the Castle Park in September 2015 and ABOVE RIGHT: our 'Wishing Well' stall just around the corner



CANNOCK MILL COHOUSING

I went with Elisabeth Baines, our Chair and Austin Baines, our secretary, to look at a proposed redevelopment of Cannock Mill in Old Heath Road, Colchester. The Society and other groups had been invited to see what is proposed and what the idea of cohousing is. We were made very welcome. They have already invited neighbouring residents.

The site is about half way along Old Heath Road, at the foot of the hill opposite Distillery Lane. It is wooden and still has a mill pond, though much overgrown. The Mill and the pond will be restored and used as part of the communal area. I was surprised with the size of the site, which includes a Victorian house on the hill. There is some land that will be the site of the new houses but at the time we



ABOVE: A view of Cannock Mill, off Old Heath Road, with (RIGHT) 'sheep safely grazing' on part of the site. Construction works have now started.

visited, sheep are grazing there. (They come from the urban farm based in Scarletts Road nearby, as mentioned in my notes about Heritage Open Day in the Winter 2014 edition). It was something of a shock to see sheep grazing on Old Heath Road.

Cohousing has existed in Europe and USA for over 25 years. Residents have their own homes but share some facilities and activities,



for example they are considering a car pool and will have some meals together. The community will be mutually supportive and are likely to share interests. Their vision includes good neighbourliness, active ageing and eco awareness. The new properties will be built to highest standards (Passivhaus) with much insulation to ensure that they are energy efficient.

We liked the design, which includes 23 new properties, which will fit in well with the area. We spoke to the architect, Anne Thorne, and understand that the scheme has Council approval. More details are available at www.cannockmillcohousing.co.uk and apparently they still have spaces.

As this newsletter goes to press, I see that work has started on the site.

Peter Evans

HIGHWAYS ISSUES

Many members have remarked on the condition of local pavements and road surfaces. These are the responsibility of Essex County Council as the Highways Authority, and all complaints should be addressed to them. Colchester Borough Council no longer has any involvement in highway issues. There are a lot repairs necessary and the best way to deal with them is to report them individually.

There are four ways of doing this.

- Online is probably the County Council's preferred choice but there are options;
- The internet - go to www.essexcc.gov.uk or email contact@essexcc.gov.uk
- Telephone Essex County Council Customer Services on 0345 603 7631
- Go to the Public Library (not the Town Hall) where there are County Council staff to help.

Please have a specific description of the location, the problem and the repair needed. Complaints are acted on but may take time. The Society can follow up if it becomes clear that there are real delays, and we can follow

up on the process generally. It is in the County's interest to deal with repairs as it will receive insurance claims for 'trips and falls' as they are known.

The County Council has asked us to report any unnecessary or redundant street signs that come to our notice, and they will investigate removal. Please let us know if you come across any.

Peter Evans

LICENSING REVIEW

Colchester Borough Council instituted a review of licensing of pubs and clubs – the Late Night Economy. They requested views of interested parties and when we offered views on behalf of the society, we asked if it was possible to have a meeting. Some of the Executive Committee was invited to Rowan House in November 2015 to meet John Ruder, the Licensing Manager, who was very willing to discuss licensing matters with us (especially as no one else had asked to do so.)

It was interesting and informative to hear of the problems that the Council faces in dealing with the town centre late at night. It was particularly heartening to find that not only did Licensing Officers regularly patrol (or at least visit) the various establishments but that generally there were good relationships with the owners and managers of the various establishments.

John pointed out that the Council must work within the law and to ensure the new policy is both fair and effective it has been framed with the assistance of an expert QC/barrister. We were impressed with the positive attitude and were aware of improvements already.

The Council will soon have to review policies under the Gaming Acts – fruit machines, betting etc.

We find it to be very helpful when responding to various policies and applications if we

have met the staff involved, and have met planning officers already. We can understand the problems that they face, and they can understand that our aims are for the benefit of the town.

Peter Evans

CIVIC VOICE

The Civic Voice is now well established as our national representative body and continues to support local civic societies in addition to making our views known at Parliamentary level. The following is a summary of their current activities:-

1. A response has been made to the Government's proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework published on 7/12/2015, after a period of consultation with Civic Societies.

2. The All Party Parliamentary Group for Civic Societies is now fully up and running. In January the Civic Voice hosted the event in Parliament with over 130 delegates to discuss the future of the historic environment and how communities can play a greater role in protecting heritage. The next event will be themed around historic towns and cathedral cities.

3. The second Design Awards event is now underway. This is a national celebration of good design and restoration projects nominated by local community organisations. Each year the Civic Voice Design Awards will recognise projects from up and down the country which have achieved a very high standard of design and made a positive contribution to the quality of life in the local community.

4. War Memorials. One million pounds a year will be made available until 2019 by the Heritage Lottery Fund to help finance projects about the First World War. The public can apply for grants of between £3,000 and £10,000 for projects that will help explore,

conserve and share First World War heritage and deepen understanding of the impact of the conflict. Civic Voice run a regular War Memorial News update and can help with workshops and advice and support.

5. Civic Day this year is on the 18th June and is a national celebration of civic pride. Individual societies will be organising events for the day to say 'we care where we live'.

More detailed information on these topics can be found on the Civic Voice web page.

Paul Weston

HISTORIC BUILDINGS IN COLCHESTER AND OTHER NEWS

The Society was asked to comment of the report commissioned by Colchester Borough Council on Jumbo, or more correctly, the Balcerne Tower, from the North East Essex Buildings Preservation Trust. The building is generally in good order and privately owned.

The report suggested that the most appropriate use of Jumbo would be a mixture of Tourist attraction and a restaurant. This would probably be able to attract sufficient finance to carry out repairs and sympathetic conversion works, Jumbo being a Grade II* Listed Building. We were generally supportive but raised a few issues with the Council.

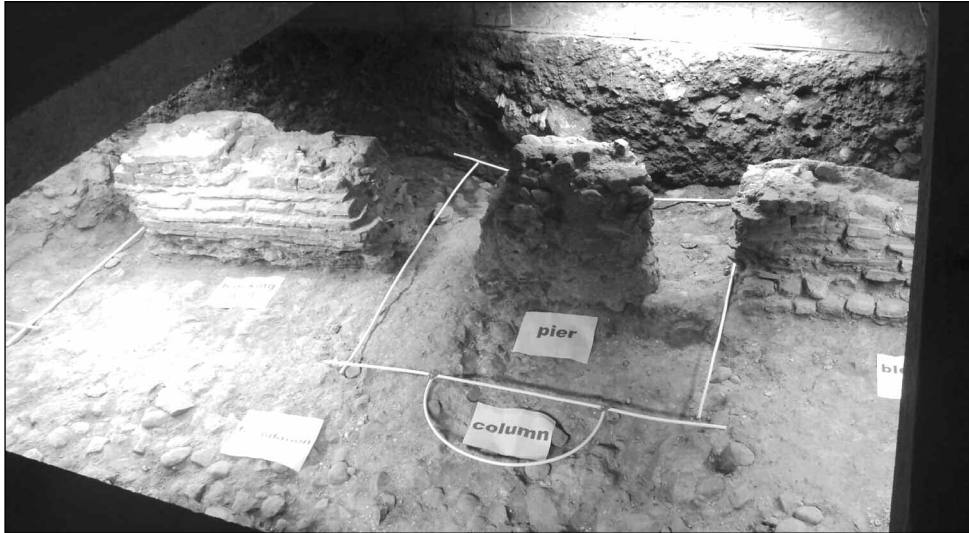
There have been opportunities to view recent historic discoveries. The Castle Museum now displays the Fenwick Hoard. This was a selection of Roman jewellery, which was discovered as works were carried out on the Williams and Griffin store, owned by the Fenwick Group. The hoard has been presented by Fenwicks to the Town. A large number of Civic Society members joined the Friends of Colchester Museums and Friends of Colchester Archaeological Trust on 23rd March for a special viewing.

Some members also took the opportunity to see the remains of the Roman Temple colonnade, discovered by the Archaeological

Trust under the short street, Castle Bailey, immediately opposite the Castle, near the park gates. The existence of some remains were already known but the excavation proved them to be much more substantial than expected. The owners, Flying Trade, are also

other residents, on board. (This contrasted with the attitude of Essex County Council about the plans to reverse traffic flow in Priory Street, which were on display at the same time).

Peter Evans



ABOVE: Roman remains just under the Castle Bailey, near Castle gates.

proving keen to enable the remains to be seen by the public in future.

Other members have pointed out that at long last the old Grosvenor Hotel in Maldon Road has finally been renovated. For a long time, it could easily have been regarded as one of Colchester's biggest eyesores, so it is good to see it looking smart.

There is also good news about the Gymnasium on the Abbeyfields, next to the site of the former Garrison Pool. Repair works have started after the major fire.

We have commented on Colchester Borough Council's plans to improve the layout of Priory Street and to improve the view of the Roman Wall. Whilst we were critical of the original plans, the Council was quite happy to take our suggestions, and those of

BELOW: The former Grosvenor Hotel, on the corner of Maldon Road and Alexandra Road, following improvements.



STREET NAMING UPDATE

Members will be aware that the Society is now being consulted by the Borough Council over the naming of Streets. Ruth King Close, the first one that we actually named, was the subject of a naming ceremony by Councillor Theresa Higgins, Mayor of Colchester, on 11th March 2016. Miss King was headmistress of the Colchester Girls High School for 25 years before it moved to the present site next door.

The ceremony was arranged with the help of the Colchester Girls High School Old Girls Association, the school itself and co-ordinated for the Civic Society by Henry Spyvee. Liz White, Chairman of the Old Girls Association told us that Miss King was strict and feared but also much respected and loved for dedication to the school and her pupils. We heard that one pupil could not understand the maths homework that Miss King had set. She was too scared to go to school the next

day but her father persuaded her to confess to Miss King. She did this, shaking in her shoes, but Miss King could not have been kinder and went through the homework with her until she understood. So successful was she that the pupil became a maths teacher herself.

We had a very good turnout on a beautiful spring day from the School, the Old Girls and residents, all invited by Henry. Councillor Higgins impressed us by arriving by bicycle, with the Borough Arms proudly displayed on the basket. We were able to inspect the Close – which will be gated when finally completed. These are nice properties, and so is Headmaster Terrace, which is on the same site, formerly part of the former Park Road

BELOW LEFT: Mayor Theresa Higgins arrived for the ceremony by bicycle. Note the Borough Arms on the basket.





ABOVE: Vic Lewis, Peter Evans and Henry Spyvee with the name plate for the first Civic Society named Road.

BELOW: Colchester Girls High School pupils and Mayor Theresa Higgins unveil the Road's nameplate..



County Council offices, including the house Altnacealgach, which been converted back into housing. After the ceremony, many of us were invited to Liz White's home in Lexden Road for coffee and cakes

Incidentally, the Street Naming Group of the Civic Society, had no hand in the naming of Headmaster Terrace. It had already been named before we became involved.

In the 2015 Spring edition we mentioned Ruth King Close and also that the estate to be built on the Betts Factory site on Ipswich Road was to be named after the crew of a Lancaster bomber which crashed nearby, based on information provided by our member Vic Lewis. The estate is only partially complete and will not be finished for 18 months. The developers are keen on making sure that residents know why the names were chosen and it is likely that there will be a naming ceremony.

We have had success with naming other streets although they have yet to be built.

Peter Evans

NEWS FROM IPSWICH PIGS GONE WILD

Residents of Colchester will be familiar with the 'invasion' of animals across the town for the summer. In 2013 Colchester enjoyed over one hundred 2.5m tall Giraffes, individually painted in their own unique style - a celebration of the 50th Birthday of Colchester Zoo.

Ipswich is now getting similar treatment with at least 40 pigs, all sponsored by local companies and organisations and painted by selected artists. They will spend ten weeks out and about in prominent positions around the town, drawing attention, not only to themselves but also to the building in front of which they are located.

At the end of the summer they will all come together for Heritage Weekend and be

displayed in Ipswich Town Hall and Corn Exchange. After Geritage Weekend they make their way to Trinity Park, home of the Suffolk Show and Suffolk Agricultural Association for a mass auction on Thursday 15th September.

The Pigs trail maps can be found at Pigs Gone Wild Ipswich.

John Norman

Chairman, The Ipswich Society

The Architectural Heritage Weekend 2016 is 10th-11th September and the exact properties to be opened to the public in Colchester, Ipswich and elsewhere will be announced closer to the date.

THE WILLIS BUILDING, IPSWICH

John Norman, of the Ipswich Society (see article above) wrote to me about the article in the last issue concerning the Willis Building in Friars Street. I was told whilst on the tour of the building that the swimming pool provided for staff was closed because a potential leak had been identified. My guide, a long standing member of Willis staff, and a former colleague on the tour were quite definite about this and added that staff usage was declining.

However, John believes that this was not the case. I quote from his email; 'the swimming pool which did not close as the result of a potential leak but because the number of employees using the pool had declined, and the demand for office space had increased. This change caused English Heritage to 'list' the building at Grade 1, then the newest Grade 1 listed building in the country (Lloyds Insurance offices (Richard Rogers) has since been listed Grade 1). The pool was discretely covered with a removable suspended floor, a floor with narrow glass panels enabling to outline of the pool below to be clearly seen, particularly when the pool is illuminated and the office above dimmed.

The Willis Building, which was open for

Heritage Open Days in September celebrated 40 years as an open plan office block last year. It is as fresh and exciting today as it was in 1975 - and there are not many office buildings that can claim to be still functioning as designed after so long in use.

Willis was not open for Heritage Open Days 2014 as it was undergoing some substantial refurbishment work, additional provision for disabled users, improved egress routes should there be an emergency and a complete change of the lighting system, from fluorescent tubes to LEDs, remarkably none of which changes the perceptions of visitors as they inspect the building. Willis is to be congratulated on the way they have protected the ambience of their listed building.

One other small but significant point, I'm sure the Wherry visited in Norwich isn't 1000 years old (built in 1095?) but probably just over 100.'

Peter Evans, with thanks to John Norman

LISTED BUILDINGS AND LOCAL LISTING

In the last edition, we looked at some local Grade 1 listed buildings. The next most valued buildings are listed Grade II* and include Jumbo. Originally, Jumbo was only Grade II but was advanced to Grade II* in 2003, following a submission from Brian Light of the Balkerne Tower Trust.

The other Grade II* buildings are mainly in the town centre and rather surprisingly includes St Peter's Church on North Hill. Further down North Hill, the Marquis of Granby is Grade II*. Both the Minories and the Minories Summerhouse are listed Grade II*, and also both the Siege House and the rear wing of the building, 73-75 East Street listed separately

Other addresses are

- 9 and 10 East Hill,
- 3/5 West Stockwell Street (Solicitor's office,

- 29/31 West Stockwell Street,
- George Hotel, High Street,
- 11A-11B High Street (between Barclay's and Waterstones),
- 71 Culver Street,
- 20 and 22 Crouch Street,
- St Michael's Church, Berechurch Hall Road (deconsecrated).

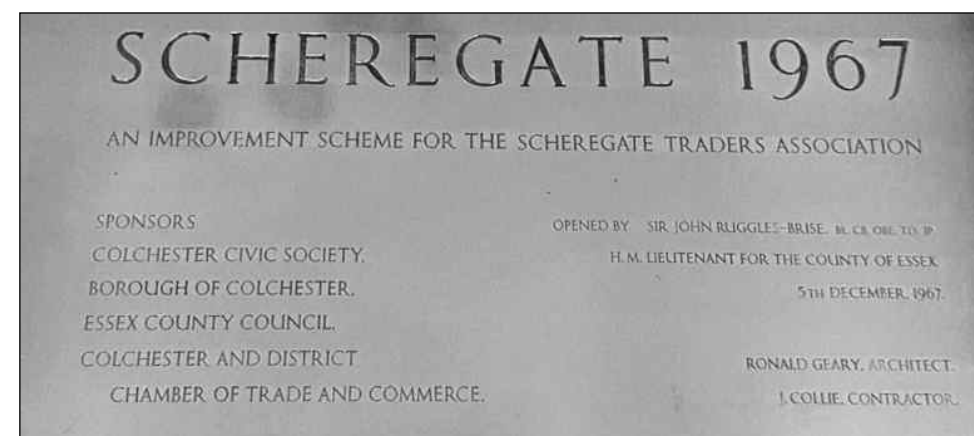
We have been gathering information to support a request to Historic England to list the former Jacks building, 5/6 St Nicholas Street, Colchester. It has been very helpful to have access to the property deeds held by Colchester Borough Council. The actual date of construction is still not known, but most likely is late 17th century, as the papers in the deed packet start in 1712. Sadly, there are no old maps but hopefully we will shortly be in a position to make an application. If you have any old photographs of the street, they would be appreciated.

Peter Evans

FRIENDS OF COLCHESTER ROMAN WALL

The AGM of the Friends of Colchester Roman Wall in February 2016 heard -

1. Two Interpretation Boards were installed in the last year, at North Gate and Priory Street Car Park. This makes five out of a projected 13.
2. Installation of a Board at the NE Corner of the Wall should take place shortly.
3. Work on Boards at Scheregate and Head Gate were at an advanced stage but both needed Planning Permission.
4. 'Fixing the Link', a project by Colchester and Essex Councils and Abellio Trains involved metal plaques in the pavement to mark the site of North Gate. This had been extended to include Head Gate, South Gate and East Gate.
5. Refurbishment of Priory Street Car Park will involve better viewing of the Wall and



floodlighting. It was hoped that Balkerne Gate also will be floodlit.

Becoming a Friend of Colchester Roman Wall costs £25 a year. See website www.romanwall.org for further details.

Henry Spyvee, Chairman

MEMBERSHIP

We welcome the following new members – John Mann and Dr Paul and Mrs Rusiecki, of Colchester, Barbara Twoomey of Rowhedge – and hope to see you all at our social events.

All Civic Society members can claim day admission to National Trust properties by taking advantage of a scheme arranged by Civic Voice (see article above). You only need to write to Civic Voice, 60 Duke Street, Liverpool L1 5AA with a stamped addressed envelope and stating that you are a member of Colchester Civic Society. Passes can be worth up to £14 a day.

BLUE PLAQUES

At the time of writing, it seems that the Blue Plaque commemorating Dr Ruth Bensusan Butt will be installed very shortly at the Minories, where she used to live. This has taken a long time to finalise, partly due to the building being listed. For newer members, Dr Bensusan Butt was, amongst other achieve-

ments, Colchester's first female doctor.

Executive Committee member Rosemary Jewers has put a lot of work into achieving this and has also been very involved with the cleaning of the commemorative plaque on Scheregate Steps, on the left hand towards the top of the steps. This was originally installed in 1967 by the Civic Society, shortly after its foundation and so was in need of some smartening up. It looks fine now

Down at Frinton, a Blue plaque was installed last autumn at the MacGregor Hall (formerly W.I. Hall) commemorating the actress Lynda Bellingham, who gave her first professional performance there in 1969. This



must have been easier to achieve as the building is wooden and is not listed.

Peter Evans

ARCHIVE CORNER

Jo Edwards found a newspaper report in which her father, Ken Mabbitt, then chairman of the Civic Society Planning Committee, is quoted as saying that there was growing pressure on businesses to move out of the town centre due to high property costs. This article was dated almost exactly 45 years ago but seems to tie in with recent news articles. Nothing changes.

Or does it? In the same article, John Bensusan-Butt, the Society Chairman, said that the Council wanted to attract more people to live in the town centre, especially the Dutch Quarter but this was unlikely to happen in the present climate. Recently, people have moved into the Dutch Quarter, the former KB site off High Street, Telephone House, Angel Court and St Nicholas House and indeed others. John did suggest 'pent-houses' and we could claim some of those.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

John Norman of the Ipswich Society (see articles above) has pointed out an error on page 21 of the last newsletter, when I referred to a Norfolk Wherry in Norwich for the Architectural Heritage weekend. I accidentally increased the age from over 100 to 1000 years. The actual date of construction was 1895. Apologies – and well spotted John.

The previous newsletter included an article on pages 4-6 contributed by Bruce Neville about the Taylor sisters of Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star fame. This was spotted our member Rosemary Jewers, who identified a link to her own family. She and John have exchanged information, to each other's advantage.

We have a new illustration on the back cover. It shows The Market when it was on the

Culver Street Car Park. I think it must be about 1970 - does anyone know better?

Peter Evans

HIGH STEWARD OF COLCHESTER

On 3rd November Sir Bob Russell was installed as High Steward of Colchester at a meeting of the Borough Council. It marks Sir Bob's 31 years as a Borough Councillor and 18 as an MP (some of this overlapping). He was Mayor in 1986/87 and is only the second person to be Mayor, MP and High Steward.

The post of High Steward dates back to 1635 and Sir Bob is the 23rd person to hold that office. The job started off as the King's Enforcer in a town seen as trouble for Charles I. It did not work and the first High Steward, Lord Holland, was executed in 1649 just before the King.

In the 20th century the post became purely honorific and was held by such people as Lord Cowdray and Lord Alport, former MP's for the town. Sir Bob has the opportunity to appear at civic functions but there is no regalia and no cost to the Council Tax payer.

On the same evening the Council appointed two more Honorary Aldermen (former Councillors who have been Mayor and/or served for 20 years or more). These are Martin Hunt and Margaret Kimberley.

Henry Spyvee

STOP PRESS

The Colchester Archaeological Trust is carrying out a review of Local historic Buildings. We do not have details of how this will work but volunteers are requested. If you are interested, please let us know. More information in the next newsletter

Peter Evans

REPORTS OF SOCIAL EVENTS

16th October 2015

A trip to Exhibition Road

Some 45-50 people went on a trip to visit the museums founded from the profits of the Great Exhibition of 1851; namely, the Natural History Museum (NHM), the Science Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum. (There was money left over to fund the Albert Hall, just up the road, as well).

We had a good run up to the Museums and once there were dropped off outside the NHM with instructions to return in 6 hours – plenty of time to see everything. Or so we thought.

As there was a long queue at the main entrance, (well worth seeing itself), of the

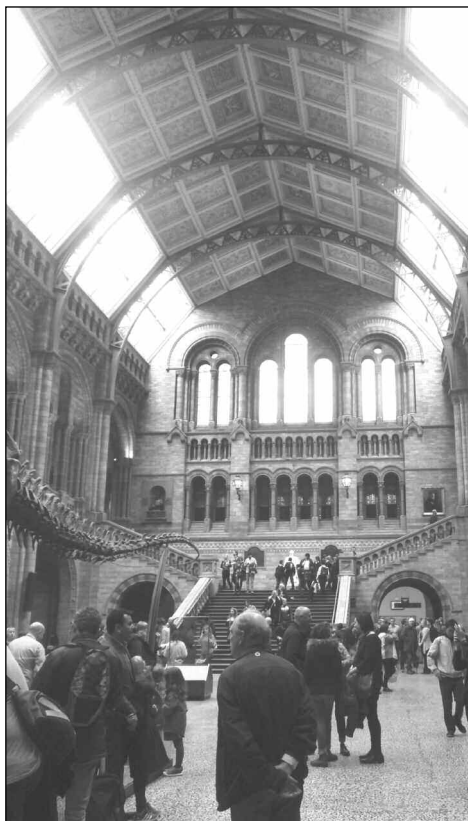
NHM, Peter Evans and I decided to go to the Science Museum instead but when we turned the corner we found a side entrance to the NHM with no queues so in we went.

It soon became clear that six hours would not be enough to see even half what was in the NHM although we did our best. Starting with what was once the collection of the National Geological Museum (now merged with NMH) we viewed the minerals that form the earth and followed the clearly marked displays showing how the world was formed.

This was not a subject that I have had a great deal of interest in before but will concede that the way everything was set out and explained, together with the many impressive

BELOW: *The main entrance to the National History Museum*





inter-active displays made things very informative and interesting. Certainly, the many school children visiting were keen and excited. They were almost exhibits in themselves as the poor teachers tried to keep them in order.

Moving into the main part of the Natural History Museum, the first thing that struck Peter & I was the magnificent grand architecture of the main display hall. The Victorians certainly had vision and knew how to build. Some may wish to contrast this with the modern galleries and museums. I shall say no more!

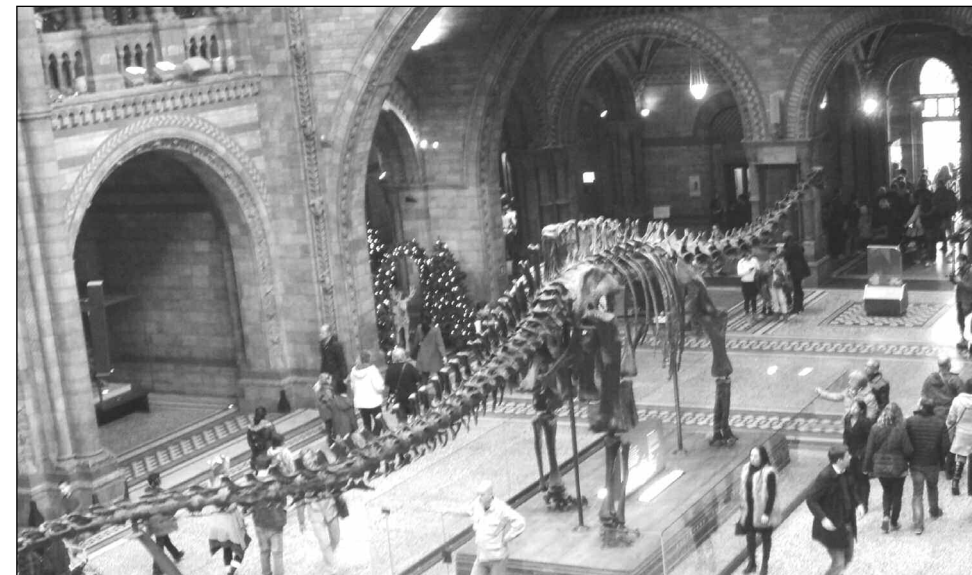
Neither of us were terribly keen on stuffed animal exhibits as such. However taken in historical context when they were originally collected, the displays are impressive. Attitudes were much different then and now



the NHM now carries out a vast amount of conservation work.

Conscious that we had only seen half the NHM, we decided to spend the remaining time in the Science Museum and two hours was only sufficient to get a broad overview of the Museum. This again is well set out with displays depicting the technological and engineering advances of the ages with many interactive exhibits for the amusements of the many school children (and adults) that were visiting. There was also an exhibition of early photographs near a welcome café.

All too soon it was time to go with a lot more to see in Exhibition Road. A week, or two, might just do it. Others spent their time at the V & A, but we had run out of time, and legs, as all the museums cover large areas.



ABOVE: *The famous dinosaur in the Natural History Museum. (Note the Christmas decorations being set up).*

BELOW: *A view of the outside of the V & A restaurant.*





ABOVE: An interior view in the V & A restaurant.

After a long trip through the height of the Friday London rush hour - again enlivened by Tim the driver's running commentary - we arrived back home at 8pm.

Kevin Hodgson

OTHER SOCIAL EVENTS

16th January 2016 New Year's Meal at the Siege House and visit to the 'Painting the Modern Garden - from Monet to Matisse' exhibition at the Royal Academy on 27th

February 2016

The New Year's meal at the Siege House was attended by 28 members. The meal was much enjoyed and it is good to know that the Siege House has been given our seal of approval.

A number of members took advantage of the invitation from the Friends of the Minorities to visit the Royal Academy. I understand that the exhibition was much appreciated and considered well worth the trip.

SOCIAL PROGRAMME 2016

Yet again, I must begin with an apology. This time for the late arrival of the next instalment of the 2016 Programme. I have had horrendous difficulties with both my phone and my internet connection and have been without either for several weeks this year. Thank goodness for Greyfriars! I have recently been forced to sit in their reception area, drinking vast amounts of coffee, whilst finalising the Programme using my mobile phone and my iPad, the latter linked to their internet!! The things that I have to do for the good of the Civic Society. Really above and beyond the call of duty!!

On the subject of Greyfriars, our coffee mornings there, on the first Monday of every month, including Bank Holidays, are proving both popular and successful. We will continue with our Spring Up and Burning Issues meetings to allow those who are working to come and discuss issues affecting the town, although we are hoping to change the format of these slightly - see details below - but they will be supplemented by the coffee mornings. So far, issues raised have covered a huge spectrum, from the future of various buildings (eg the CoOp in Long Wyre Street) and pieces of land (eg the strip behind the metal hoarding in Lewis Gardens) to the problems of the lack of open waiting room and loos at the Bus Station to serve the late night or early morning coach passengers.

After each meeting, we have addressed the questions, comments and concerns raised and have entered into discussions with the appropriate powers that be in each case. We have, for example, discovered that there have been pre application discussions between the CoOp and CBC and it has been recognised that the best future for the erstwhile Long Wyre Street premises lies with division into smaller retail units. We have ascertained that

the land bordering Lewis Gardens is likely to be sold to Greyfriars, who also own East Hill House. We have also passed on a member's solution to the overnight facilities issue at the Bus Station. And so on and so forth. Do come if you can. We meet in one or other of the rooms next to the bar. Coffee and tea, and, if the chef remembers, which he normally does, lovely, freshly made, little shortbread biscuits are available. There is, at the moment, no charge, but donations are gratefully received! Guests are welcome. And on the subject of East Hill House, the Civic Society are first on the list for a preview when the restoration work is complete. It will be some time yet, I understand. The building was, I know, in a dreadful state when OMC took it and Greyfriars on. What a project! I know a lot of you are very keen to look around so please complete the reply slip so I can let you know immediately when I get a date.

I have been struggling with some really hard to arrange visits this year and a couple of imponderables too, so this is still not the full programme for the year, I'm afraid. I am still hoping to get into St George's Hall behind the Duchess in High Street and I am trying to sort out a sensible visit to Foulness, easier said than done. I have a couple of other things too, which are by no means certain but, if they come off, will be interesting. There will be more in the next Newsletter but, if you are interested in either St George's Hall or Foulness, please fill in the slip so I can keep you informed. The same applies to the John Ball plaque unveiling, still on hold because the person crucial to getting it resited is very unwell at present.

Please remember that guests are welcome to join us at any of our events. And another thing. We will pick up en route if we possibly can when going anywhere by coach, so, if you



Eileen Sheldon and Eve Pereira at a Greyfriars Coffee Morning.

think we may be passing a bus stop near you, please ask. Wyevale is no longer allowing the use of their car park but the Marks Tey Hotel are happy to accommodate our cars at the cost of £1, payable to the coach driver on the day. Please park at the far side of the car park away from the hotel itself.

Jo Edwards

And so to our Programme:

Wednesday 1st June 2016

Meet at St Botolph's Parish Hall (on the south side of the church) at 7.30pm for our annual Spring Up meeting.

As usual, this provides an opportunity for members and guests to raise and discuss issues, large or small, affecting the town. We are hoping to introduce a regular slot into each Spring Up and Burning Issues meeting where a speaker will explain a particular current issue. As the Society have recently unveiled the first street name for which we have been responsible, Henry Spyvee, Chair

of the Street Names Committee, has offered, arrival of third grandchild permitting, to explain why the Society has become involved and how the whole thing works. It is a really interesting subject. Coffee will be provided and lifts can probably be arranged. Please ask if you need one.

Sunday 5th June 2016

Meet outside the front of the Minories at 10.55am for the unveiling of the Civic Society's Blue Plaque to commemorate Dr Ruth Bensusan Butt who lived and worked at the Minories for 40 years.

Dr Ruth Bensusan Butt, besides being the mother of one of our founder members, John Bensusan Butt, was an extraordinary, formidable, trail blazing woman. I remember her well, as she was my neighbour when I was a child and I used to 'help' her in her garden. She was always very kind to me and I was very fond of her and not in the least frightened by her as everyone else seems to have

been! She was a GP, but she was also an incredible pioneer for the health of women and children. She was also a suffragist, Fabian and local Labour Councillor. We have invited her family and the Colchester Medical Society as well as representatives from the Colchester Labour Party and the Fabians. The unveiling will be followed by refreshments at the Batte Lay Tearoom (the Minories Cafe). Numbers are VERY limited so if you wish to attend, please let us know as soon as possible.

Cost: No charge but a donations bowl will be apparent in the cafe as this exercise has not been cheap!

Monday 6th June 2016

Meet at Greyfriars at 10.30am for our monthly Coffee Morning.

Parking is available in the hotel car park. This is accessed through the public car park opposite the *Forester's Arms* in Castle Road. Drive into that car park and swing round to the right. Large wrought iron gates face you. Press the button on the post on your right and the gates will open automatically.

Monday 13th June 2016

Meet at the bus stop on East Hill, just above the church, at 8am for a visit to London Gardens, Ancient and Modern.

Why do I ever embark on the arrangements for such visits? Can somebody please explain the masochistic streak in me? I have been absolutely determined to arrange a visit to the Sky Garden at the top of the Raphael Vinoly designed Walkie Talkie building in Fenchurch Street (yes, he also designed Firstsite) but the unbelievable difficulty in doing so has driven me to the brink! After umpteen calls and vast amounts of misinformation, I am now 75% sure that I have cracked it but I might have to return to the drawing board at the last minute, so please

forgive me if things go awry a couple of weeks before the visit. The intention is to visit the Sky Garden in the morning. Now, this depends entirely on me being able to acquire the tickets which can only be booked three weeks in advance. It also depends on precision as the coach has to be on time but we mustn't be early either. The tickets allow an hour in the Sky Garden during which you will have the chance to view the City of London in all directions from 35 floors up, whilst taking in the plants - then it is back onto the coach and off to the far more group friendly, cooperative, Fulham Palace where we can have lunch in their cafe or picnic in their garden. Very civilised!

The afternoon will be spent with a guide, who will take us into the palace but also around the beautiful gardens, once the pride and joy of the 'botanising bishops'. So what is Fulham Palace? I have received blank looks from nearly everyone I have mentioned this visit to, so it is obviously not well known. There is evidence that the palace has been used by the Bishops of London since about 700AD, first as a country home and then as a main residence. In the 1970's, the Church Commissioners finally decided that the building, partially mediaeval and partially Tudor, was no longer fit for purpose, and, although the Church still owns it, it is no longer used as a residence and is now in the care of a trust. It houses a small museum and an art gallery, both very interesting, but there is a lot more to see inside. The gardens are undergoing restoration, the Walled Garden being the most recent to have had extensive work. The history of the gardens is quite extraordinary. One of the 'botanising bishops', Henry Compton, ordained in 1675, acquired the first American azalea and the first American magnolia to reach these shores and planted them in the garden. He had a reciprocal arrangement with the churchmen he sent to the

Americas. He would send them seeds if they returned the favour! He also managed to grow the first coffee tree in Britain. We will hear about his efforts and those of the bishops that followed. We will also find out why the garden now contains a number of allotments. There should be time for tea and cake in the cafe before we leave for home.

Cost £28.00

Wednesday 22nd June 2016

Meet at St Botolph's Parish Hall at 7.00pm for our Annual General Meeting

Please note the time of this meeting. 7.00pm NOT 7.30pm! After the business part of the meeting, coffee will be available before our AGM Talk.

Some of you will be aware of the fact that Colchester Civic Society is working with Kath Wood, erstwhile Director of Firstsite, and with Colchester in Bloom, to facilitate the restoration of the concrete murals in the Southway underpasses. This is proving to be something of a journey! The murals, depicting people and objects from Colchester's history, were designed by husband and wife team, Henry Collins and Joyce Pallot and made by Huttons. Henry and Joyce, who lived in Lexden, were artists of national importance. They designed similar murals for Sainsbury's and BHS stores all over the country. Very much of their time, the ones in the underpasses are now an important part of our cultural heritage. Unfortunately, they are beginning to suffer from neglect, and need, like the underpasses they are in, a considerable amount of TLC. We have undertaken a huge amount of research and are now at the stage where serious fundraising can begin to take place. Come and find out all about the murals, their history and their place in our modern world and, at the same time, find out what we, as a society, are hoping to achieve. It is one of the biggest projects we have ever been involved in and we

want you to know all about it so that you can shout about it from the rooftops! Lifts can be arranged.

Wednesday 29th June 2016

Meet at the bus stop just above St James the Great on East Hill at 8.30am for a visit to Mere House in Kent.

After a comfort stop at Lakeside, we will make our way to Mereworth, near Maidstone, in Kent, where we meet our guide for the day, Andrew Wells, who is the owner of Mere House and until recently, a church warden at Mereworth Church. Mere House was built in 1780 as a rectory for the Lord de Despencer, formerly Sir Francis Dashwood of West Wycombe. It remained as a rectory for many years but was, at one time, used as a school and was also used by the military during the war. Andrew Wells is a descendant of the Dashwood family. The house was much altered in 1876 by the architect George Crickmay and his assistant, one Thomas Hardy, the future novelist.

The house is surrounded by a 6 acre garden, complete with lake, woodland walk, ornamental trees and shrubs and extensive lawns. Mereworth Church was built in the mid 1740's to replace the 12th century village church, demolished because it was in the way of alterations to Mereworth Castle. Built in the Palladian style with an unusual Neoclassical interior, it is Grade 1 listed and described by English Heritage as being of exceptional interest. During the day, guided by Mr Wells, we will see both the house and the church and be free to wander through the gardens as well. Mr Wells is an expert in the field of historic buildings and this should prove to be a very interesting and enjoyable day. Lunch will be available at the *Swan* on the Green at West Peckham, the adjoining village, or, if you prefer, bring a picnic (please let us know do we can inform the pub) and after-

noon tea will be provided by Mr and Mrs Wells.

If you want food from the *Swan*, ciabatta rolls have to be ordered in advance, available at £8.95 each to include tea or coffee. Choices are (a) crayfish and rocket; (b) bacon, lettuce and tomato; (c) sausage and fried onion; (d) smoked cheddar and onion marmalade. Please give your choice/s on the reply slip.

Cost £35.00 (including tea and cake but NOT the ciabatta)

Monday 4th July 2016

Meet at Greyfriars at 10.30am for our Coffee Morning and discussion.

Monday 11th July 2016 at 10.20am or

Monday 18th July 2016

at 2.20pm or Wednesday 21st July 2016 at 2.20 pm.

Meet by the tearoom at Flatford for a cruise down the River Stour to Cattawade and back.

I have chartered the *Stour Trusty* for this long awaited return to our series of cruises on the Stour. We only managed one cruise to Cattawade, several years ago, before the lock at Flatford was badly damaged - not by us, I hasten to add! Repairs are now complete and this stretch of the river is now open again. We are going from Flatford this time as I think most of you have now done the Dedham to Flatford bit. Prices have gone up, I'm afraid, but the trip is still good value as you will have three hours on the river. *Trusty* is covered by a canopy so a light shower is not going to cause much of a problem but we will rebook if the weather is awful so, if in doubt, ring me. There are loos at Flatford, which I suggest you use before you embark, as there are none aboard. The boat will leave from the jetty just over the bridge. There is parking in the main car park at the top of the hill or blue badge parking at the bottom of the hill. Lifts can be arranged.

Please indicate your first, second and third choices of date on your reply slip as the boat only takes 8 passengers and I may have to do some juggling!

Cost £20.00

Tuesday 19th July 2016

Meet at 8.55am Crouch Street or at 9.05am the Marks Tey Hotel for a visit to Hever Castle.

The Civic Society have been invited to join this visit arranged by the Friends of Colchester Museums. Hever Castle is a fortified Manor House surrounded by a moat. The original castle was built in 1270. In the late 15th century, the castle became the home of the Bullen or Boleyn family, who built a splendid residence within the old walls. Several centuries later, the building became home to the Astors who are responsible for much of what is there today. The house is filled with fine furniture, tapestries and paintings. The castle is set within 125 acres of land, with lakes and an award winning garden. You will be free to wander all day and enjoy everything Hever has to offer, including an on site restaurant.

Cost £32.00 plus £1 if parking at the Marks Tey Hotel.

(Cheques payable to The Friends of Colchester Museums and to be sent to The Friends of Colchester Museums, c/o Peter Evans, 5 Grimston Road, Colchester CO2 7RN)

Monday 1st August 2016

Meet at Greyfriars at 10.30am for our Coffee Morning again!

Sunday 14th August 2016

Meet at the bus stop outside Greyfriars at 8.30am for a visit to Thetford and the St George Whisky Distillery

Our day will begin with coffee in Thetford where our guide for the morning will join us

before taking us on a walking tour of this interesting little town. The name Thetford tends to conjure up a mental picture of heathland and forest and few people actually think of the place itself, which is a shame, for there is much to see. After the tour, there will be a period of spare time in Thetford, giving the opportunity for finding lunch and for a further explore before returning to the coach for the short trip to the distillery at Roudham. Here we will have a tour, visiting the distilling floor where we find out how whisky is made and the warehouse where the casks are stored whilst their contents matures. There might well be an opportunity to taste, too!

Why on earth is there a distillery here? Well, it is the ideal site. Fresh, pure, Breckland water flows through an aquifer deep below the distillery and the other main ingredient of whisky, barley, is readily available as Norfolk is one of the most important regions in the world for growing it. The distillery was set up by James Nelstrop, who comes from a very long line of farmers. On retirement, he decided he needed an interest and, after a bit of thought, decided to persuade his son to join him in whisky making! Finding a retired distiller from Laphroaig prepared to help, their first barrels were produced ten years ago. They haven't looked back. There will be time after the tour to have a cup of tea and a slice of cake in the tearoom on site, buy a bottle of whisky in the shop or wander through the cricket bat willows down to the River Thet, which meanders slowly through the nearby meadows.

Cost £34.50

Monday 5th September 2016

Meet at Greyfriars at 10.30am for even more coffee!

Saturday 10th September and Sunday 11th September 2016.

Heritage Open Days.

As usual, we require volunteers to be ready to help steward some of the properties opening to the public this weekend and also to staff the Civic Society Wishing Wall if we have the opportunity to erect it. Stewarding is great fun and not difficult as you will have the information you need. The Wishing Wall is also quite an experience. For those who haven't come across it, it is a wire screen similar to those found around building sites, to which members of the public tie coloured luggage labels upon which they have written their wish for Colchester. The results are always fascinating. It is a great way to promote the Society and its work and a wonderful opportunity to engage with Colcestrians and visitors to the town.

Wednesday 21st September 2016

Meet at the bus stop just above St James the Great on East Hill at 9.am for a Cinematic Experience in London.

Long in the planning, this visit has evolved into something entirely different from the original concept! It has been unexpectedly difficult to coordinate but I think we are there! Phew! We start our day with the opportunity to eat, very necessary as getting gaps in the proceedings at the right times has been just too challenging. I WOULD SUGGEST THAT YOU BRING SOMETHING WITH YOU TO SUSTAIN YOU LATER IN THE DAY. The coach will drop us close to our first venue, in Regent Street, and you will be free to find brunch. We will then gather again at the Regent Street Cinema ready for a guided tour. Why? Well, the newly restored cinema is the oldest in Britain and has quite a tale to tell. It opened in 1848 as a theatre attached to the Royal Polytechnic Institution and was specifically designed for 'optical exhibitions' - including lantern slide shows forming a backdrop to live music and drama; the height of

technological wonder! In 1896, it became the birthplace of cinema in the UK when the Lumiere Brothers' Cinematographe machine showed moving images to an audience of journalists. From the 1920's to 1980, it operated as a cinema before being closed and turned into a lecture theatre for the college next door.

After a huge amount of fundraising, it was restored to its former glory by the University of Westminster and opened its doors as a cinema once again last year. That is a very brief summary. There is a lot more to this lovely building, as we will discover, including the fact that it showed the first X rated film in the country! After our tour, we go straight to the auditorium for a matinee performance, preceded by music from the cinema organ. I have absolutely no idea what film we are seeing. It is complete pot luck as their programme only goes up to June at the moment. All I do know is that it will be an old classic, possibly a musical featuring Fred Astaire or maybe even Elvis! Goodness knows! Unfortunately, I have had to decline the offer of appropriate dancing lessons in the bar afterwards - I kid you not - for we will need to leave the cinema and rejoin the coach for the short journey to Lambeth and the Cinema Museum. The Cinema Museum is housed in the workhouse that was home to Charlie Chaplin when he was a child. It houses the most incredible collection of film and cinema memorabilia from projectors to posters, cinema staff uniforms

to carpets and seating to ashtrays. The museum also owns about 17 million feet of film! The collection is the work of two friends who realised that so much of our 20th century history was being lost as cinemas throughout the country were being closed or updated. The collection is spectacular. Again, we will have a guided tour of this little known gem of a museum. You will be relieved to know that a cup of tea will also be available!

Cost £39.00

Monday 3rd October 2016

Meet at Greyfriars at 10.30am for the Coffee Morning

Wednesday 2nd November 2016

Meet at St Botolph's Parish Hall at 7.30pm for our Burning Issues Meeting.

Like the Spring Up meeting and the monthly coffee mornings, this is an opportunity to raise issues affecting us all in Colchester. Coffee available. If you need a lift, please ask.

Monday 7th November 2016

Meet at Greyfriars at 10.30 am for our Coffee Morning.

Monday 5th December 2016

Meet at Greyfriars for the last Coffee Morning and discussion of the year.

The Objects of The Civic Society are to:

- a) Encourage high standards of architecture and town planning in the Borough of Colchester.
- b) Stimulate public interest in and care for the beauty, history and character of the area of the town of Colchester and its surroundings.
- c) Encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features of general public amenity and of public interest.
- d) 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.
- e) Co-operate with other local, regional and national organisations in the pursuit of the same objects on a broader geographical basis.

CURRENT OFFICERS

Hon. Life President:	Vacant
President:	Vacant
Vice Presidents:	John Burton, Ray Chandler
Chairman	Elisabeth Baines, 37 Valley Road, Wivenhoe CO7 9LZ. 01206 823523
Vice Chairman and Programme Organiser:	Jo Edwards, 43 Priory Street, Colchester CO1 2QB. 01206 868254
Treasurer:	Paul Weston, 46 Wordsworth Road, Colchester CO3 4HR. 01206 548511
Secretary:	Austin Baines, 37 Valley Road, Wivenhoe CO7 9LZ. 01206 823523
Membership:	Ann Turner, 1 Robin Close, Great Bentley CO7 8QH. 01206 250894
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	Rosemary Jewers, 16 Abbeyfield View, Colchester CO2 7US 01206 543287
	Henry Spyvee, 16 Wakefield Close, Colchester CO1 2SD. 01206 866575



Colchester's Saturday market