

Spring 2017



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

After Jim, my husband, died in the summer of 2015, I realised that I was now free to tackle all those house maintenance jobs that had been building up over the years. He had very severe breathing problems so anything that involved excessive dust or fumes had been on hold. The first task was to remove his garden shed, used for bike storage. I hadn't had the heart to do this whilst he was alive but I was aware of the fact that it could collapse at any moment so it had to go. Unfortunately, the removal of the shed gave Cooper, the terrier, access to the low wall at the end of the garden and he could now stand on tippity toe to terrorise both our neighbours and people going to the Spiritualist Church behind us. His behaviour towards the latter gave cause for concern as, on a Sunday evening, he would find a convenient flower pot to give him extra height and then lie in wait. As soon as he heard female voices, he would stand on the pot and look over the wall, pausing until the poor women were just below him and then he would let rip with a barrage of canine abuse before falling back off the flowerpot, thus disappearing from their line of vision. Nobody knew where he was and this caused huge consternation! Amusing though it was, it had to stop, so Rob the builder came and put a very sturdy trellis along the top of the wall, which did the trick. The next job was the painting of the front of the house, desperately needed. It had been desperately needed for years, especially as getting Jim's very heavy wheelchair in and out had caused all sorts of damage to the front door and door frame. I booked a painter. He was very busy but we scheduled a slot in the late summer of 2016.

Needing to store family treasures from my mother's house, which was on the market, I realised it was time to deal with issues in the attic. Enter Rob the builder again, who decorated the room having sorted out some dam-

aged plaster and also put the window frame back in - no, don't even think about asking the obvious question! Then, on my birthday, at the end of June, my dining room ceiling collapsed with no warning whatsoever. It was caused by a very small leak in a pipe in the bathroom above. Water had been slowly dripping onto a joist, probably for years, and the joist, an original dating from 1836 but obviously 'pre loved' and thus much older, had finally given up the ghost.

By the time I had sorted out an insurance claim and worked out how I was going to cope without a bathroom or loo for some time, (a hotel was out of the question as Cooper does not do hotels and kennels do not do Cooper!), news of two local construction /civil engineering projects reached us. The development of the old Watt's stonemason yard, also behind me, and the tarding up of the Priory Street car park were, we were told, imminent. Both at once. Interesting! I called the painter and put him off until this Spring. And thank goodness I did as utter mayhem ensued. Really, the car park was done incredibly quickly and efficiently by a small team of delightful men, nearly all, if not all, foreign. They were unbelievably hard working, never stopping to lean on a spade. They were helpful, friendly and highly skilled and the results of their labours are stunning, well worth the wait of nigh on 50 years to turn it from a temporary into a permanent car park. However, by the very nature of the work they were doing, they required heavy plant and fleets of enormous tipper lorries. And when I say heavy plant, I mean heavy plant. The crusher, used to break up the old surface of the car park before it was taken away by the stream of lorries, was vast. It was taken off a low loader on East Hill and trundled the wrong way down Priory Street. Unfortunately, the arrival of the crusher and other heavy plant nearly always coincided with the arrival of school-

children at St Thomas More's school, almost immediately opposite the entrance to the car park. This was very much beyond the control of the poor men on site and they were terribly worried. They spoke to me about it, explaining that they were having serious problems with deliveries as lorry drivers were refusing to bring their vehicles into such a narrow street.

And then things got worse, much worse, as the development on the Watt's yard began. How much heavy plant does a small development of two houses and seven flats need? I have the answer. Lots! Now this is something that we should really watch out for more as we consider planning applications. The site is not very big (and will be seriously overdeveloped, I think) but it is the access that has really caused the most appalling problems. Did anyone, at planning stage, really think about how the site would be serviced and supplied? I suspect not. The road down to the site is little more than an unmade up track, narrow and very steep. It joins Priory Street at its narrowest point, just before what was, at the time, the second entrance into the car park, unfortunately the entrance being used by those

working on the refurbishment. At the top of the track there are houses on each side, a small end terrace brick built cottage on one side and a very old timber framed house on the other. There are also telephone cables that pass overhead. I came home one day to find that the builders had dug a gigantic hole across the entrance. On investigating, I discovered that they were assessing the strength of the ground as they were concerned that the weight of the plant they were bringing in would displace the soil sideways, thus caving in the side of the basement of the timber framed house! Concrete poured into the hole, apparently on top of all the service pipes etc., would resolve the matter! OMG! And then it started.

I think, on balance, the arrival of the pile driver was probably the most traumatic in a whole series of horrific deliveries. The thing was immense. Try as he might, the poor driver could not get it round the corner from Priory Street into the lane. Not only was it far too long, the front perilously close to the timber framed house each time he tried to manoeuvre it, it was also far too tall and the telephone wires were seriously at risk.



The exceedingly difficult driving conditions in Priory Street

Backwards and forwards he went, banksmen appearing from everywhere to watch his every move. As time went on, the queue of traffic grew. Work on the car park ground to a halt as, caught in the queue, were the tipper lorries taking the crushed concrete and Tarmac away. The car park workers came over to try and help. I was supposed to be going out but I sat in my car watching. Feeling very sick, I realised I was also shaking like a leaf. One false move and my next door neighbour's house would be severely damaged - at the very least! Eventually, after what must have been an hour of turning, inch by inch, the banksmen all cheered and the pile driver moved slowly down the hill. They had got it in but could they get it out? As it happens, this was a little easier as there was more room for the front of the thing but it still took some doing. Soon afterwards, I realised that the road immediately in front of my house was going to become the main unloading point for further plant. Colossal low-loaders invariably arrived as the children were going to school. A crusher, a couple of huge cranes, diggers etc. were unloaded and loaded within inches of the front of my house. I had to admire the incred-

ible skill of the drivers. It is, however, mightily disconcerting to look out of one's bedroom window to find a man in a crane cab looking in - from above, and to open one's front door to find the muddy tracks of a crusher a couple of inches from one's nose! There was no way I could get out of the door when they were loading and unloading. I am, I realise, writing this in the past tense. Why, I don't know, as the cranes are still onsite. More awfulness to come, then.

One morning, I was woken at some unearthly hour (it was still pitch dark) by a male voice right outside my house. "They are taking the f.....g p..s!" Dragging myself into consciousness, I lay in bed wondering whether I had heard aright. Yes, I most certainly had, as, even more vehemently, the comment was repeated. I realised that orange lights were flashing a little further down the street. Intrigued, I got up and went to investigate. I found a distinctly miffed lorry driver who had been driving all night to deliver precast concrete flooring to the building site. His lorry was not as big as some, but it was not articulated either and it was carrying a very heavy load. The poor man had been told to arrive by



The problems caused by too large vehicles and too narrow streets

5.30am so the lorry could be unloaded before there was too much traffic. I broke the news that it was unlikely that there would be anyone on site for a further two hours (and I wasn't wrong!). He was just beside himself! He had been up and down the road, wondering where the site was and couldn't believe the access when he finally found it. The arguments about that delivery ran on throughout the morning. I learnt several new, but unrepeatable, words! The actual work on both sites has, at times, been really challenging to residents, although we have coped. Pile driving is always disruptive, thump bang, thump bang, thump bang and Cooper took great exception to the enormous giraffe that emerged out of the fog one autumn morning - well, the crane did look very menacing! But it was the crusher and the diggers on the car park that had the most dramatic effect. The whole house shook when they were working and, on more than one occasion, the draining rack beside my sink was vibrated right off the draining board, complete with contents! My walls are covered with pictures, all of which ended up at rakish angles! I must admit that I was very pleased when that work finished,

just before Christmas.

Meanwhile, in those few days before Christmas, whilst Cadmans were still working on the collapsed dining room ceiling and bathroom leak, my fairly new central heating condenser pump suddenly died. The airing cupboard floor, chipboard, turned to mush and the hot water cylinder threatened to fall through onto the stairs. In that week, I had two plumbers, two carpenters, two plasterers and an electrician here - all at once. Oh what fun! They were just amazing and we were able to use the dining room on Christmas Day, albeit with a newly plastered ceiling - still wet - and a pendant light that couldn't be attached to it. On Boxing Day, on my own again, I was immersed in John Buchan on my new Kindle and didn't register Cooper's desperate attempts to tell me that he needed to go into the garden. Poor little dog. Realising that he wasn't going to go out, he headed for the bathroom. Well, you would, wouldn't you?! A couple of minutes later, there was the most awful buzzing sound. That did register, and I got up to investigate. As I went through the door into the dining room and Cooper was halfway down the stairs, which run through



The newly landscaped Roman Wall in Priors Street

the side of the room, there was an almighty bang, all the lights went out and a sheet of blue flame shot across the room, just in front of me and within a few inches of Cooper's head. Unfortunately, the builder had taken the floor covering in the bathroom up and Cooper's accident was just above that pendant light! Needless to say, the building work continues!

Jo Edwards

COLCHESTER ON THE MAP

On 15th November 2016, the Essex Records Office returned to Colchester with an exhibition of local maps in the Moot Hall.

One of the earliest maps was from 1748 and titled "The Iconography of Colchester", probably by James Deane. All buildings are shown in great detail, which is fascinating. There is also one of those panoramic views of the town, entitled "Perspective view of Colchester in the County of Essex", which is dated about 1780, from a viewpoint to the east. All English towns had such views and they seem to feature the same group of fashionably dressed tourists looking at the town.

The displays included maps which gradually show the growth of the town. For areas



*The exhibition of maps in the Moot Hall,
Colchester*

close to the town centre, it was easy to trace the building of roads. I was particularly interested to see the area off Mersea Road where I live referred to as "Broome Hill". Should anybody remember this term being used, I would be very interested to hear. I have been doing a little research on the land on the corner of Mersea Road and Bourne Road. This area was the grounds of a house called White Lodge, probably built in the late 18th century. Houses have built around the house, and a school, opposite my house, was constructed in the 1950's. White Lodge was at once stage the Rectory for St Giles Church, demonstrating the style in which clergy lived.



As the event was in the Moot Hall, the ERO displayed a photograph of the Colchester Schools Music Festival which was held there for many years. I was not the only visitor to remember taking part. The photo was apparently about 1955. As with the year I took part, the conductor (Dr Swinburne in my year, but a lady in the photo above) was perched on a rickety podium. My mother and her friend clearly regretted choosing the seat next to it and sat in fear for entire concert.

I hope the ERO return as there must be many more maps and other records to display. They should use the Moot Hall, if just to give us a chance to enjoy the decorations of what must be Colchester's most spectacular room.

Peter Evans

CHRISTMAS CAROLS

A few years ago, I went with a cousin and his wife to St Leonard's at the Hythe for a Carol Service. All my aunts were married there, including my cousin's mother, and my father and some of his brothers were christened there, all part of the large and bustling Hythe community. I try to go each year now.

Hythe Hill was densely populated 100 years ago and one of the poorest parts of the town. My grandparents lived in what was then considered state-of-the art Victorian Terrace housing at the top of the hill, and they considered themselves lucky to live there, in comparison to Hythe Hill itself. The poor quality housing – slums at one stage –were demolished some years ago and now replaced. The population has risen again.

The church is closed and in the care of The Churches Preservation Trust and the Friends of St Leonard's-at-the-Hythe. It opens annually for the Carol Service by Candlelight and is always full. It also opens fairly regularly throughout the year for visitors and for concerts. It is an interesting church and has bells that can be rung. The area is part of the parish of New Town and the Hythe.

Peter Evans

NEWS FROM THE CIVIC VOICE - HOUSING WHITE PAPER

The long awaited Housing White Paper was released in early February with the key announcement that the Government wants to encourage more development across the country. As it stands, the White Paper seems to want to open more land for development, speed up decisions and gives no greater protection than that already in place for the Green Belt.

The Civic Voice, which is the umbrella organisation for all Civic Societies, supports the need to build more homes as demand is driving up both house prices and rents to lev-

els that are unaffordable to many. Local Authority statistics show that there are more than 475,000 sites in England and Wales that have planning permission but have yet to be built.

The Civic Voice has consistently argued for Local Authorities to have “use it or lose it” powers to incentivise faster development, giving them the ability to levy council tax on plots allocated for housing in plans where homes are not built within a reasonable timescale, and to compulsorily purchase such land where necessary.

There is some concern that there is a campaign to persuade us that the only way to solve the housing crisis is by building in the countryside, either through more urban extensions or new settlements, branded as “Garden Towns or Garden Villages”. The Civic Voice remains cautious about the final document and will be looking for a clear policy for the Green Belt. They will be examining the detail behind the announcement over the coming weeks.

We will keep you posted!

Paul Weston

DVD REVIEW; “SIX ENGLISH TOWNS” BY ALEC CLIFTON TAYLOR (BBC)

This DVD and the follow up series “Another Six English Towns” and “Six More English Towns” are ideal viewing for members of any Civic Society. Between 1978 and 1984 the Architectural Historian Alec Clifton Taylor guided us around a total 18 towns, explaining their construction and social history. The fact that he is an expert in his field is shown when he happily mounts wobbly ladders in a pre- Health and Safety era to demonstrate his knowledge and aspects of the construction. He was clearly over 70 at the time and not a yellow helmet in sight.

It is his knowledge and pleasure in sharing it that made the programmes so watchable. He

becomes visibly annoyed with planners in almost each edition, steam seemingly coming out of his ears over a ghastly building in Tewkesbury. These moments are reminiscent of Civic Society Executive Committees and I am sure would have been applauded by John Betjeman and our own John Bensusan Butt.

The first series features Tewkesbury, Chichester, Ludlow, Richmond (Yorkshire), Totnes and Stamford. Other towns visited include personal favourites Bury St Edmunds, Sandwich, Saffron Walden and Beverley. All are smaller towns as Alec said that 30 minutes per show precluded the larger towns, presumably ruling Colchester out. They are now period pieces of course, all filmed over 30 years ago, as the cars and clothes demonstrate, and valuable historical documents in their own right. It was just after legislation supporting conservation had been passed. I must say the main streets of Chichester in 1978 looked pretty much the same in October 2016.

I wish I could claim credit for getting the series released on DVD, as I wrote to the RADIO TIMES suggesting it— and they printed the letter! However, I was not alone in my desire as I was told a few weeks after publication of my letter. An old friend, a tourist guide who lives in London, told me that he knew Denis Moriarty, the series producer and literary executor of Alec Clifton Taylor, and had been urging him to have the series issued on DVD. This was over 3 years ago, so probably nothing to do with either of us.

Books were published for each series and indeed individual booklets for each town. Had Clifton Taylor been younger, he would have been able to tackle a list of other towns. I sometimes wonder which towns would have been in the next series and Kings Lynn tops my list.

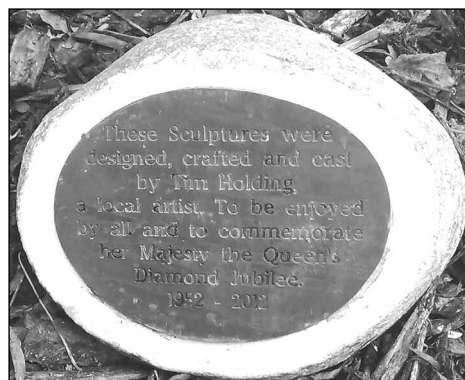
Peter Evans

A PLAQUE IN LEXDEN PARK

In the previous newsletter, there was an article about the time I photographed an elusive blue plaque, and in doing so, crossed the rail tracks at Colchester Station. A few months later, Jo Edwards and I set off to continue our photographic hunting, endeavouring to collect yet more plaque images for a Civic Society project.

It was a bright sunny January day when I climbed into Jo's car, notes in hand, camera at the ready and all set to ride shotgun once more. At various times the car stopped and I jumped out to take photos. Well, it wasn't so much as a jump, more like a slide, as the car is higher than a normal saloon and over the years I've shrunk by an inch or so! On this particular occasion I alighted from the car onto a very busy road and Jo drove off leaving me to take the photo. When she returned, she announced that another plaque had been found!

Later that afternoon we arrived at Lexden Park, where Jo had seen the plaque. A short distance from the car and near to the pond, was a flock of beautifully sculpted silver geese, and on the ground there looked to be a small plaque. Armed with my camera, I made my way across to this flightless little group. Bending down I pulled a tissue from my pocket and gave the plaque a much needed clean up



The plaque in Lexden Park

- as 'real' birds had already been at the scene! The inscription read; 'These sculptures were designed, crafted and cast by Tim Holding, a local artist. To be enjoyed by all and to commemorate her Majesty the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. 1952-2012'.

Behind the little flock there are naming plates for each goose - 'Lexi', 'Joseph', 'Quackers' and 'Pebbles'. If you have the chance to visit Lexden Park, don't forget to look for the geese sculptures, they are a delight and can be enjoyed by all, either if you are with or without children.

Rosemary Jewers



TOWN CENTRE NEWS

Clocks – the Town Clock disappeared just before Christmas whilst repairs were carried out. Like many others, I kept looking up in High Street to check the time even though I knew there was a blank space on the Town Hall Tower. It is back now, so time checks are possible again. But there is now an alternative. When Metro Bank took over the building opposite the Town Hall, they renovated the building and repaired the clock. The Civic Society had tried over several years to contact the owners to ask them to carry out repairs. We had no luck – we could not find who actually owned the building. It was frustrating but suddenly, there it was.

St Peter's Church, North Hill – the church is being floodlit thanks to funds provided as

part of the Wayfinding project, initiated by Abellio Greater Anglia and the local councils, as mentioned in the previous newsletter.

The Roman Wall – The Friends of the Roman Wall, chaired by Society member Henry Spyvee, have installed a further interpretation board by Scheregate Steps commemorating two aspects of the wall's history. First, the opening in the wall that was made in medieval times to allow visitors to reach St John's Abbey more easily and, second, the life of 'Freddie the Shrimp-Man' who, for most of the 20th Century, used to sell his shellfish at the top of the steps. According to Colchester

historian Patrick Denney, Freddie was finally obliged to give up the business in the late 1960s, when the supply of shrimps from Tollesbury dried up. The 'Scheregate' is the only surviving medieval gate in the wall and its name is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word scaerd, which means 'gap'. The gate sits on the line of the original Roman wall and it's likely that the original construction was incorporated into the foundations of the current buildings. The board was sponsored by Colchester Tourist Guides.

The long-promised Boards at Headgate and the South West Corner (Crouch Street/Balkerne Hill) are nearly ready and will be installed during 2017.

Peter Evans

MEMBERSHIP

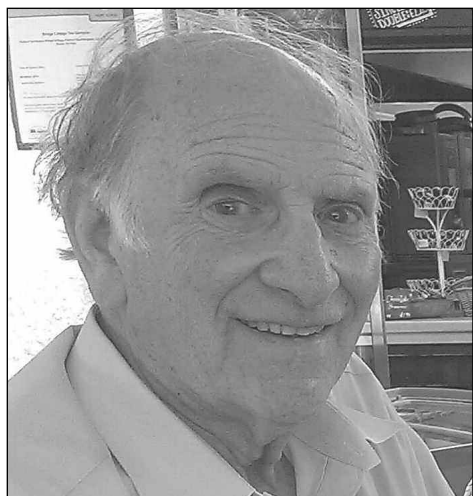
We welcome as new members Carole Maclean, Robert Mercer, Michael and Elizabeth Fitt, Carole Gunasekara and Sandra Benedetti of Colchester, Lesley Hall of Stanway and Trudie Mundell of Wivenhoe.

Sadly we have to report some deaths, starting with one of our long standing members, Kerr Tong. We send our condolences to his widow, Janet, also a very active member. Ann Pipe, sister of Joyce Sadler and mother-in-law of Tim, our regular King's driver, has also died. Both Ann and Joyce joined the Society many years ago.

We also have to report the death on 2nd March of Jessie Hamilton at age 104. Jessie



Jessie Hamilton



Kerr Tong

and her husband, Robert, (who died in 1992), were long-term and active members of the society and other local groups. They both worked in the Telephone service, with Robert helping to repair the German telephone system after the second World War. They moved to Colchester and Robert was Telephone Manager, retiring in 1975 with an OBE.

Although not a member for some years,

Kath Tobin, formerly Townsend, will be remembered as an important member of the Society's Tree Group, which, under the chairmanship of Dr Nora Johns, did so much to map and record the Borough's trees, thus ensuring their protection. The Tree Group also planted trees in East Bay, North Station, Kings Meadow and elsewhere, and worked to ensure the protection of open spaces such as St John's Green and Maypole Green. Kath died in January.

COLCHESTER CIVIC SOCIETY FACEBOOK PAGE

As some of you will already know, we now have a Facebook page. This was launched shortly before Christmas with a Christmas Greeting which included a photo of the Christmas lights in the High Street and the message;

'Welcome to the Colchester Civic Society Facebook Page. We intend to begin raising issues and concerns affecting the people of Colchester and surrounding area. Please share this page and help us widen the network in preparation for our first campaign in 2017'.

OUR FIRST CAMPAIGN – STOP THE U TURNS – CUT THE BUS LANE

On 17th January our first campaign was launched with the following statement.

COLCHESTER CIVIC SOCIETY SAY CUT THE HIGH ST./QUEEN ST. BUS LANE AND STOP THE DANGEROUS TURNS AT LEWIS GARDENS. PLEASE WATCH THIS SHORT VIDEO AND SUPPORT OUR CAMPAIGN. BY SHARING THIS POST AND GIVING US YOUR VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES. WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM PEDESTRIANS AND MOTORISTS.

The accompanying video was composed of footage of cars and vans making U turns at Lewis Gardens, along with text which pointed out the dangers for pedestrians and inviting viewers to show their support by sharing the post.

This went viral overnight and within a few days had been viewed by 60,000 people and we were inundated by comments from pedestrians complaining of how dangerous these manoeuvres are and recounting experiences of near misses. These were supported by accounts from drivers and one driver posted a photo from of his car blocking the High Street, after having been hit by a van as he attempted to make the U turn.

We didn't need to contact the press and BBC radio, they contacted us, having seen the Facebook campaign and the letters and comments they were beginning to receive.

Following up on the Facebook post an email, with links to the video, and a request to support our campaign was sent to all Borough and relevant County Councillors, including Eddie Johnson, who is the Councillor responsible for County Highways. We received positive responses from a few Councillors, which included two members of the Local Highways Panel, which is the body most likely to initiate any changes of the sort we are asking for.

Eddie Johnson has assured us that alterations to the traffic island at the Queen Street/High Street junction are imminent. However, with respect to the bus lane, he said;

“It should be noted that the bus lane is a key element of our public transport infrastructure within Colchester town centre. It has assisted in reducing traffic flow in the town centre and helps provide public transport, including the Park and Ride service, with bus priority leading to consistent and attractive journey times”.

Our reply, which probably conveys our point as succinctly as possible, was that:

“We are aware that the bus lane was intended to reduce traffic flow and ease the movement of public transport in the area. However in addition to the obvious safety issues this bus lane has produced, it is our contention that it has failed to achieve a meaningful reduction of traffic flow in the town because the ease with which private vehicles can make U turns at Lewis Gardens means that the bus lane presents no disincentive to drivers who want to access Queen Street from High Street”.

The original video has been followed up by two more. We await news of whether or not any action will be taken to stop the U turns. The campaign has, however, already been very successful in establishing a readership for our Facebook Page and making The Civic Society known to large numbers of younger people who would otherwise probably not have heard of us. If you have not already done so you can see our page and all of our posts by going to Facebook on your phone or tablet and searching for Colchester Civic Society. If you then LIKE the page you should receive future posts on your Facebook newsfeed. You can also view our page by going to Facebook.com on your computer.

MEMORIES OF CROUCH STREET

Roger Mann, one of our members has fond memories of Crouch Street as it was before road changes in the 1970s swept away the then Maldon Road corner and nearby properties. Roger describes them as a “quaint selection of small shops” and remembers a fish and chip shop down Balkerne Hill. He has sent us a poem that he wrote at the time. Change must come and Roger’s opinions are, of course his but it is always sad when much loved buildings are lost. Planning is somewhat of a different world now and by no means easy.

EPITAPH OF CROUCH STREET

Beneath the sky
Upon this empty spot
Stood homes and shops
Buildings built to last
A blended community.

Feet of history trod
This path way of man
Boudicca passed here
The Romans built a road.
Then planners of doom
To chop
This artery in two
Yesterday’s silhouettes of bygone folk
Quaint shops, shrines of the past.
Gone in eternity.

You cold grey planner
I dislike your manner
Only epitaphs remain

ROGER MANN

Premises lost included a garage and shops housing a chemist, greengrocers, sweet shop and the Stamp Shop. Any memories of the area would be welcomed.

Peter Evans

MERCURY RISING APPEAL

The Executive Committee would like to

thank members for their contributions to the appeal. If you have not yet sent a donation, a reply slip is enclosed for your use.

Executive Committee members Jayne Richardson and Henry Spyvee attended a further meeting with the Mercury Theatre Fund Raising team to receive an update on the appeal process. The theatre appreciates the society’s role within the Colchester community. We were asked to provide a letter in support of the appeal and Jo Edwards, as Chair, has done so. The letter was immediately acknowledged and is being used in support further appeals.

As well as the Appeal, the Mercury is also starting the Mercury Voices project, to collect memories and to build an archive. There is a display on at the Theatre and they will be glad to hear from anybody who can help

Peter Evans

MEETING WITH ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL HIGHWAYS TEAM

Jo Edwards, Austin Baines and Jayne Richardson from the Executive Committee met with Alan Lindsay (Transport Strategy and Engagement Manager) to enquire about future plans for Colchester and to enquire about current initiatives and areas such as the High Street plan, the park and ride, the right turn at the top of the High Street bus lane and Shrub End estate. Jayne also attended a consultation meeting at Feering just prior to the commencement of the formal consultation on the now published proposed routes for the new A120. The favoured route will be published later in 2017 and they will then lobby Highways England to get it in the official plan/budget.

We also met with Sue Lissimore, the Lexden and Prettygate councillor with regards to the Lexden Road improvements. She confirmed that laybys for buses to pull into and further restrictions on certain parts of Lexden

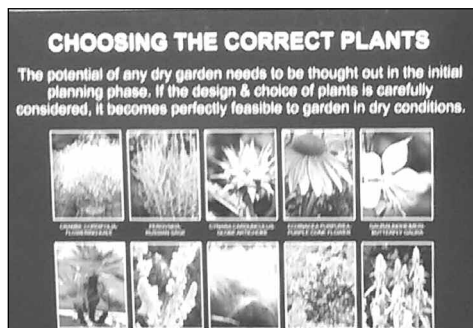
Road where cars obstruct the free flow of traffic in the rush hour are planned in place of the scrapped bus lane.

Jayne Richardson

SUCCESS WITH A SIGN

One of our members, Sheila Anderton, spotted a sign on the Castle Park with a spelling error on it. She reported it at one of our regular coffee mornings. It was pursued and, you can see from the two photographs, now corrected, as shown below.

The Society is always happy to follow up on any such matters, so please report any thing that concerns you.



DR RUTH BENSUSAN-BUTT

In the last edition, we reported on the installation and unveiling of a blue plaque commemorating Dr Ruth Bensusan-Butt at her former home the Minories. The plaque describes her as “Pioneer in Family Medicine and Social Care”. She was a Borough Councillor, socialist and a member of the Fabian Society. The unveiling prompted the

Colchester Local Fabian Society to publish a booklet, edited by Maurice Austin, including excerpts from Dr Ruth’s own hand written memories of her life, transcribed by her son John Bensusan-Butt, though with some difficulty, as the author was, after all, a doctor.

The original typed text was on display at the unveiling and it is interesting read. Her father was an observant Jew, worshipping at the Bevis Marks Synagogue in London and it seems that her mother was encouraging with regard to the young Ruth’s medical ambitions, but this may have been more to do with the boarding house not being kosher. However, she did enter the medical profession and worked at the Royal Free Hospital, amongst others. She was a Suffragist, travelled Europe (Vienna, Rome, Naples – where she married) and joined the Fabian Society.

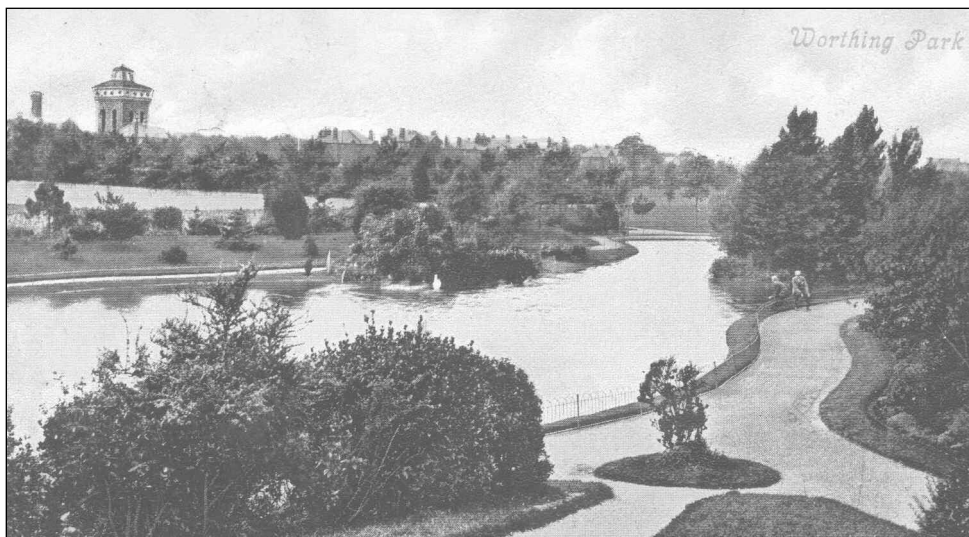
The booklet includes other information about Dr Ruth and mentions the Civic Society several times. It includes a clever picture of current Mayor Julie Young and Colchester’s first female Mayor, Catherine Alderton. It was launched on International Womens’ Day 2017 by The Mayor. Copies are available for £2 from the local Fabian Society.

Peter Evans

... AND FINALLY

I thought members might be interested in the old postcard shown opposite that I came across recently. It shows the Water Tower at Worthing, now demolished. It is so like our own Jumbo that I was confused. I believe Jumbo is the largest surviving Water Tower.

Do you enjoy BBC’s DEATH IN PARADISE – a sort of MIDSUMMER MURDERS in the Caribbean? It has been running for six seasons now and provides an old fashioned murder mystery in the sun (although apparently it actually rains a lot on Guadeloupe, where it is filmed). It was created by Robert Thorogood, who comes from Colchester. In an early episode, characters have a Colchester address.



The postcard featuring the Water Tower at Worthing

STOP PRESS

SUBWAY MURALS PROJECT

Members will recall that we were addressed at the the 2016 AGM by Kath Wood about the Southway Underpass Murals and how it was proposed to repair them. This required money and below is a press release that was issued on 4th April - the Society had been given the good news already by the Heritage Lottery Fund but it was embargoed until that date. The value of the award is an incredible £52,000. Apart from the fact that the work will be actually be done, it shows successful co-operation between the Society and Colchester in Bloom. Kath Wood is acting as Project Manager. This is something to be proud of and Jo Edwards, Rosemary Jewers and Paul Weston, our officers who have been

most closely involved with the application and Kath Wood and Pam Schomberg of Colchester in Bloom (also Civic Society members) should be congratulated.

Peter Evans

Press Release

Colchester Civic Society has been successful in its application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for funding to support the restoration and interpretation of a series of murals by artists Henry Collins and Joyce Pallot in Colchester's Southway Subways. The project is a collaboration with Colchester in Bloom and the organisations will work together to realise both the murals' renovation and community engagement programme.

SOCIAL PROGRAMME 2017

Well, do you want the good news or the bad news? Let's start with Foulness. I have made some progress! Not as much as I wanted, but progress all the same. I have been asked to go to Foulness myself as the people prepared to show us the island want to discuss our trip with me in person. Unfortunately, the earliest I can go is May (the Ministry of Defence is very strict and that is the first opportunity) so I think it is possible that our visits (yes, I will have to run two) will have to be delayed until 2018. IF I can squeeze them into the Autumn of this year, I will, so, if you are interested and haven't yet applied, please do so. I can then contact those who want to come with updates if necessary. Moving on to the Sky Gardens and Fulham Palace, I have very recently been asked by several people whether I can delay this until the current burst of terrorist activity is over. I must admit to being in two minds about this. I hate the idea of giving way but I realise that, with the cost of coaches to London now being astronomical, I have to be pragmatic. If people are going to drop out because they are not comfortable about going to central London (which I can understand) then my chances of a viable trip are reduced. If the situation remains the same in a few months time, I will return to the drawing board and devise a trip to Fulham Palace with something else to go with it, rather than the Sky Garden, as I can't see Fulham being particularly vulnerable! Perhaps I shouldn't have said that!

Please remember that all our events are open to guests. They are more than welcome! Now for a couple of reminders about coach trips. We always aim to pick up and drop off at various points convenient to members so it is always good to ask if you would prefer an en route stop. For those who don't want to bring their cars into town, Kings have an

arrangement with the Marks Tey Hotel where you can park for a small fee, currently £1. However, if you wish to take advantage of this, I MUST know at least a week in advance and I must have your vehicle registration number, please. And the second reminder? Tips! We do not include the cost of a tip in the price of any event. This is because we feel that the giving of a tip is a personal decision based on the service that you, as an individual, have received. We send a bag for tips around the coach on every outing but it is entirely up to you whether you put anything into it!

Thursday 27th April 2017 Meet at Fingringhoe Wick Nature Reserve at 7.15pm for a guided walk to hear the Nightingales.

I hope that there are as many, very vocal, nightingales in 2017 as there were in 2016. If so, we are in for a treat. There are normally 30 to 40 birds singing their hearts out at dusk at this time of the year and, of course, we should hear other species too, those like blackcaps, whitethroats, robins and possibly even cuckoos. Guided by a member of the Reserve staff, we will be taken to the very best places to hear these these magical songs. Please wear suitable shoes and bring warm clothes.

Cost: £6.

Monday 1st May 2017 Meet In the Venetian Lounge (next to the Bar) at Greyfriars Hotel at 10.30am for our monthly Coffee Morning.

Each month, members meet to discuss what is happening in our town, to raise issues of concern, to make suggestions, to find out what progress we have made in resolving problems and to generally chat and enjoy coffee and Greyfriars' very nice biscuits! We have been running these events for well over a year and the Executive Committee have taken up a lot of the issues raised with some really good

outcomes. We do hope you will join us at some, if not all, coffee mornings this year, always held on the first Monday of the month, including Bank Holidays if they happen to fall on the first Monday.

Cost: Free but donations to Society funds welcomed.

Saturday 6th May 2017 Meet outside Sainsburys' in Priory Walk at 10am for a guided walk 'Concrete Legacy - The Murals of Henry Collins and Joyce Pallot'.

This walk, led by Kath Wood, with support from Ann Turner, will examine the extraordinary concrete murals created by local artists Henry and Joyce, including those in the Southway Underpasses. It is part of the international Jane's Walks programme. A full list of local Jane's Walks during the weekend of 5th - 7th May is available from the Visitor Information Centre.

Cost Free No need to book.

Tuesday 16th May 2017 Meet in the Venetian Lounge, next to the bar at GREYFRIARS HOTEL at 7.30pm for our Spring Up Meeting

A change of venue for this regular annual meeting. Although we now have the Coffee Mornings as a place to raise issues affecting the town, we are very much aware of the fact that a number of people are unable to attend these because of work or other regular commitments. We are therefore continuing our annual Spring Up and Burning Issues Meetings, at least for a while. Greyfriars, of course, has its own car park, accessed from the public car park opposite the Forester's Arms. Press the button on the entry phone on the right as you approach the gates and they will open for you. If you need or can offer a lift, please let us know. It would be good to know in advance whether you intend to come so I can give Greyfriars some idea of numbers, so

please complete the slip. However, if you find yourself unexpectedly free and have not told us you might come, there will be no problem, I'm sure. Just turn up!

Cost: Free but donations towards the work of the Society welcomed.

Thursday 18th May 2017 Meet at Layer Marney Tower at 1.50pm for a guided tour and tea.

We have been invited, by the Friends of the Minorities, to join them in their visit to Layer Marney Tower. The afternoon will include a tour of the tallest Tudor Gatehouse in the country, built in 1524 by the first Lord Marney, a close friend of Henry VIII. The Tower retains many original features including terracotta fireplaces, Corinthian pilasters, acanthus consoles and decorated plaster ceilings. The building is listed Grade I. There will also be a chance to visit the gardens, listed Grade II and the tour will include the church. Tea and home made scones will be served at the end of the afternoon. There is parking adjacent to the Tower. If you don't have your own transport, it may be worth asking whether someone can give you a lift. I might even be persuaded to do so! Applications straight to the Friends of the Minorities please, on the attached reply slip. Cheques to be made payable to them, not to the Civic Society.

Cost: £20 to include tea and scones.

Wednesday 24th May 2017 Meet at the top of East Hill, opposite Greyfriars, at 8am for a visit to the Tunnel: Archaeology of Crossrail Exhibition at the London Docklands Museum (and a whole lot more!)

We meet our guide at Rotherhithe for coffee before spending the rest of the morning discovering the history of what is probably the first tunnel under a river anywhere in the world. The brainchild of Marc Isambard Brunel and his son, Isambard Kingdom

Brunel, the Thames Tunnel was intended as a route between Rotherhithe and Wapping, linking the the docks on either side of the Thames. It took from 1825 to 1843 to build the tunnel and in the Grand Entrance Hall and the Engine Room we will be introduced to the tale of flood, disaster and death which finally resulted in the triumphal opening of what was then perceived to be the Eighth Wonder of the World! On leaving the Thames Tunnel, we travel, via the Blackwall Tunnel, to the Isle of Dogs where we will be free to find lunch. There is a very good Wetherspoon's near the Docklands Museum, I am told! And then we gather together again to visit the museum, still with our guide. Here, in a one-off exhibition, are 350 of the oldest and oddest finds made during the construction of Crossrail, the new Elizabeth Line. 8000 years of history revealed! Information about the enormous engineering project itself is also displayed. It is an extraordinary, not to be missed, exhibition. There will be time at the end of the afternoon to buy tea.

Although our main starting point is East Hill, there will be other pick up points en route including the Marks Tey Hotel. If you wish to park at Marks Tey, please make sure that we have your car registration number at least a week in advance. Please let us know where you would like to be picked up.

Cost £38 to include morning coffee. If you are parking at Marks Tey, please include a parking fee of £1.

Probably week beginning 29th May 2017 - day to be confirmed. Formal unveiling of the John Ball Plaque.

I had hoped that I would have a date for this momentous occasion before now but, because of the complexities of getting a date that suits everyone who must be there, I am not yet quite there. Many of you have said you

would like to attend and I will be in touch with you as soon as I have finalised the arrangements. If you haven't already expressed an interest, please complete and send the appropriate slip as soon as possible.

STOP PRESS

Thought I was there. Everything slotting into place. Oh how silly am I thinking that anything to do with the John Ball Plaque could run according to plan! Enter Theresa May and her wretched General Election! As unveilers and VIP guests will now be otherwise, and unavoidably, engaged I am revisiting the calendar. Hey ho! More anon.

Probably June Date currently being arranged. Visit to Claudius Gateway, the soon to be opened Coffee House and Private Museum in the Castle Bailey.

As many of you will have seen in the local Press, the long awaited opening of the Claudius Gateway is imminent and we have been offered a private visit to see part of the ruins of what was a colossal 120m long, 28 arched arcade and gateway into the Temple of Claudius. These ruins can be seen through the glass floor of the coffee house. But this is not just a visit to see the old. It is also a chance for us to find out all about the incredible new project that is the café. Suki Dulai, CEO of Surya Foods who own the building, has teamed up with local coffee suppliers, Paddy and Scott's, to run the place with the help of volunteers, with profits going, via World Food Aid, to local charities. What a wonderful and generous move. Please come and hear all about it so that you can pass the information on to others. This is a project that really deserves our support. Complete the slip if you wish to come and I will forward details as soon as I can.

Monday 5th June 2017 Meet at Greyfriars Hotel at 10.30am for our Coffee Morning.

Will I be there? My first grandchild is due on 3rd June and my son is panicking!!

Cost: Free. Donations welcomed.

Wednesday 14th June 2017 Meet at St Botolph's Parish Hall, on the south side of the church, at 7pm for our Annual General Meeting

This year, our guest speaker will be Phil Douce from CIVIC VOICE, the national umbrella group for Civic Societies. CIVIC VOICE has very few staff but those they have seem to have boundless energy. The organisation lobbies in Whitehall and Westminster on behalf of Civic Societies, undertakes research, campaigns, builds partnerships and does all it can to foster civic pride. We will also have an update on the Southway Murals restoration project. Please come. It should be a very interesting meeting! If you need or can offer a lift, please let us know.

Friday 23rd June 2017 Meet at the bus stop outside Greyfriars at 12 noon for a visit to Columbine Hall, near Stowmarket.

THIS VISIT IS NOW FULLY SUBSCRIBED, I'M AFRAID, BUT I AM GOING TO START A WAITING LIST.

Columbine Hall, a beautiful and romantic mediaeval manor house, rises up from a spectacular moat. It is set in an acre of formal garden designed by Chelsea Gold Medal winner, George Carter but there are a further 28 acres of woodland, wild flower meadow, bog garden and farmland to see. The house was bought by it's present owners in 1993. It had been unoccupied for some time and needed considerable restoration. It is now filled with the multifarious acquisitions of two avid collectors, which range from Nelson's battered mug to a mandarin's silver fingernail guard! We will be guided through the entire house by

the owner. Our visit will take place in the afternoon and will culminate with tea and cakes but we have been invited to arrive early so that we can eat a picnic lunch in the gardens - fingers crossed for good weather. Don't mention the R word!! Please bring your own picnic!

Cost £28 to include tea and cakes.

Monday 26th June 2017 Meet at the Mercury Theatre at 6pm for a tour to update us on Mercury Rising.

I think, by now, most of you know about the plans for extending and refurbishing our much loved and highly acclaimed Mercury Theatre. In fact some of you have already contributed to our Society's appeal to adopt a seat for 10 years, thus assisting towards the huge cost of the work. The theatre has been struggling with a lack of rehearsal space and limited space for wardrobe and set building. The building is not fully accessible and some areas need updating to meet modern requirements. It is not just the building that will benefit from the proposed work but the area around the theatre. A large section of the Roman Wall will become accessible, for example. Some of you managed to get to the open day where plans were exhibited but I know many of you didn't. This is your opportunity to have a tour of the theatre as it is and to hear about the proposals on the way round. After the tour, over a cup of tea, there will be the opportunity to ask questions and to comment on the plans.

Cost: Free but donations welcomed. Any money raised will go towards our Adopt a Seat fund, thus helping the Mercury.

Sunday 2nd July 2017 A Visit to 37 Queen Street, Colchester. Time to be confirmed (I will contact all those interested as soon as I know).

In the last Newsletter, I blithely stated that

I had arranged a visit to 37 Queen Street, aka The Old Police Station, Chicago Rock Cafe or TP's Sports Bar but said that, unfortunately, I could not give you a date as the builders had yet to hand over the keys! I thought it would be in February or March. The best laid plans of mice and men is an expression that springs to mind. First of all, you were still sending in applications to join this visit well into February so I didn't push it. Meanwhile, poor Jack, the newly appointed manager, was tearing his hair because his time scales had been disrupted by the delayed handover of the building. He is on his own and is still frenetically busy. So we have come to a compromise which will suit us very well indeed! The studios will be open on 2nd July so we can REALLY see the place in action but we will all have an introductory talk about the building and the ethos behind it as well. As I said in the last Newsletter, the building looks amazing. There is now a wonderful courtyard at the back, really showing off what is actually a very lovely building and the front, beautifully restored, has never looked better. Inside it is light, bright and modern to suit its new role as artists' studios - and I use the word 'artist' very loosely. Colchester is a very important centre for the Creative Industries, believe it or not. 37 Queen Street will, hopefully, ensure that both those currently working within the field and young people coming into it, will stay in Colchester rather than move to London. The building is managed by SPACE, a visual arts organisation with a proven record of providing affordable creative workspace and support programmes. There are 40 studios on site, complete with ultrafast broadband. It has become home to artists but also to designers, illustrators, programmers, developers, digital media creatives and technologists. Please let me know as soon as possible, on the attached slip, if you would like to join us on this visit. I think it will be absolutely fascinating on all

sorts of levels.

Monday 3rd July 2017 Meet at Greyfriars at 10.30am for the monthly Coffee Morning and discussion

Cost: Free but donations welcomed.

Tuesday 18th July 2017 Meet at CROUCH STREET or MARKS TEY HOTEL (two coaches!) at 9am for a visit to Battle Abbey and Hastings.

We have been invited to join the Friends of the Museums on their visit to Battle Abbey and Hastings. Battle Abbey was built soon after the Battle of Hastings, fought on 14th October 1066. It was founded as penance for the bloodshed in that battle. Little remains of the original Norman Abbey but later monastic buildings survive, including the Great Gatehouse and the east range with its fine vaulted undercroft. Much of the battlefield site became part of the Abbey's Great Park which formed the core of the country estate which followed after the suppression of the Abbey in 1538. There will be time to visit the battlefield, the Abbey ruins, the walled garden, the icehouse and the dairy, built in 1818 and recently rethatched. There is an informative Visitor Centre where an interesting film can be seen. A cafe serves light lunches and afternoon teas. The other half of the day will give free time in Hastings. The coach will travel along the seafront, past the recently rebuilt pier, to East Beach, close to the Shipwreck Museum, the Jerwood Art Gallery, the True Crime Museum, the Blue Reef Aquarium and the Funicular Lift. Plenty to keep those with energy occupied! Those whose energy is less could, of course, make use of a deck chair on the beach and just watch the boats bobbing on the sea! Hastings has plenty of cafes and restaurants to enjoy. Please note the pick up points as they are, again, different to ours.

Cost: £30.

**Saturday 22nd July 2017 Meet at 13a,
President Road, off Oaklands Avenue, at 2pm
for our Summer Party.**

And what a venue! Very few people know this wonderful place exists and it is a gem. We will have the use of the Colchester Society of Model and Experimental Engineers' clubhouse for afternoon tea AND unlimited rides on their trains! Yes, these are available for adults, too. I kid you not! By all means bring children and grandchildren. If you can bake a cake for the occasion, it would be most welcome. Please let us know what you can provide when you complete your reply slip. Lifts can be arranged. There is some parking available. Please let us know if you need a map. The entrance to the venue is near the far end of President Road on the left, down a short drive. It is unsigned but quite obvious. President Road is off Oaklands Avenue which is, in turn, off Lexden Straight Road. Most importantly, wear clothes that don't matter too much. Trains produce smuts!

Cost £10 Children £3 Train rides free!

**Monday 7th August Meet at Greyfriars at
10.30am for Coffee.**

Cost: Free but donations welcomed.

**Monday 4th September 2017 Meet at
Greyfriars at 10.30am for our Coffee
Morning.**

Cost: Free but donations welcomed.

**Thursday 7th September 2017 12.10pm Meet
by the Lightship at Hythe Quay, Colchester
for a Cruise from the Hythe to Brightlingsea
aboard the Brightlingsea Ferry.**

Alternative dates and times:

Friday 8th September 2017 13.30pm or

Monday 18th September 2017 10.20am or

Thursday 21st September 2017 11.50am

Boarding the ferry near the Lightship on the quay at the Hythe, we will cruise gently

downstream to Brightlingsea, a journey of nearly 7 miles which takes about two hours. For those who have never taken this journey, it provides quite a different perspective of the Colne. Leaving Colchester, passing the University buildings, the river remains quite narrow. Views of Rowhedge from the river are delightful. Rounding the slight bend in the river, Wivenhoe comes into view, with Fingringhoe up on the ridge opposite. Again, a beautiful sight. Once through the Colne Barrier, which appears huge from the boat, the river widens providing vistas of water and sky. The peace brings bird life and the occasional seal. Nearing Brightlingsea Creek, the river becomes busier with sailing boats and, perhaps, jet skiers, enjoying the estuary. The boat takes 12 at a time, hence the alternative dates as I have a large number wanting this trip! Access to the boat is very easy, you will be pleased to know. After disembarking, we will take a stroll up through Brightlingsea to Cafe Chic for refreshments - and a loo - whilst waiting for the taxi to bring us back to Colchester! I will meet the ferry at the quay with my car and take you to the cafe if you don't want to walk. It is about half a mile. I have done a recce, though, and can recommend the cake!

Please give first, second and third choices for the date of your cruise and remember to tell me if your friends are also going so I can put you all on the same trip. Please remember wet weather clothing.

Cost £21.50 to include the taxi back to Colchester, a hot drink and and a slice of cake!

**Saturday 9th and Sunday 10th September
2017 Heritage Open Days**

As usual, volunteers for stewarding properties open to the public this weekend are required. We do need your help. It is really enjoyable. No experience or in depth knowledge required.

Monday 2nd October 2017 Meet at Greyfriars at 10.30am for our monthly Coffee Morning.

Cost: Free but donations welcomed.

Wednesday 18th October 2017 Meet at 1.25pm at the Visitor Centre at the Fingringhoe Wick Nature Reserve for a guided walk to the Intertidal Reaches.

This will be our second visit to Fingringhoe Wick this year. No nightingales this time as we will be concentrating on the new inter-tidal part of the Reserve. Nearly £150,000 was raised in an appeal to buy 83 acres of land adjacent to Fingringhoe Wick so that a new wetland habitat could be created as a habitat for rare species. Coastal mudflats are fast declining and this was an opportunity to engage in managed coastline realignment which reduces both coastal erosion and flooding whilst introducing saline lagoons, new mudflats, freshwater reed beds and salt marshes. These provide a nursery for marine fish and for birds like little terns. The purchase of the land also provided some valuable unenriched grassland and native species hedgerows. We will explore, with a ranger, what this new acquisition has to offer. It will be a very enjoy-

able, fascinating and educational visit, not to be missed. Please bring warm clothes and wear strong shoes.

Cost: £6.

Wednesday 1st November 2017 Meet at GREYFRIARS HOTEL at 7.30pm for our Burning Issues Meeting

Again, a change of venue. Another opportunity, particularly for those unable to get to our coffee mornings, to come and discuss issues affecting the town. Please let us know if you want or can offer a lift. It would be useful if you could tell us if you are hoping to come, although not essential.

Cost Free but donations to the work of the Society always welcomed.

Monday 6th November Meet at Greyfriars at 10.30am for our Coffee Morning and discussion.

Cost: Free but donations welcomed.

Monday 4th December 2017 Greyfriars 10.30am

Please join us for the last Coffee Morning of the year.

Cost: Free, donations welcomed.

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.

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