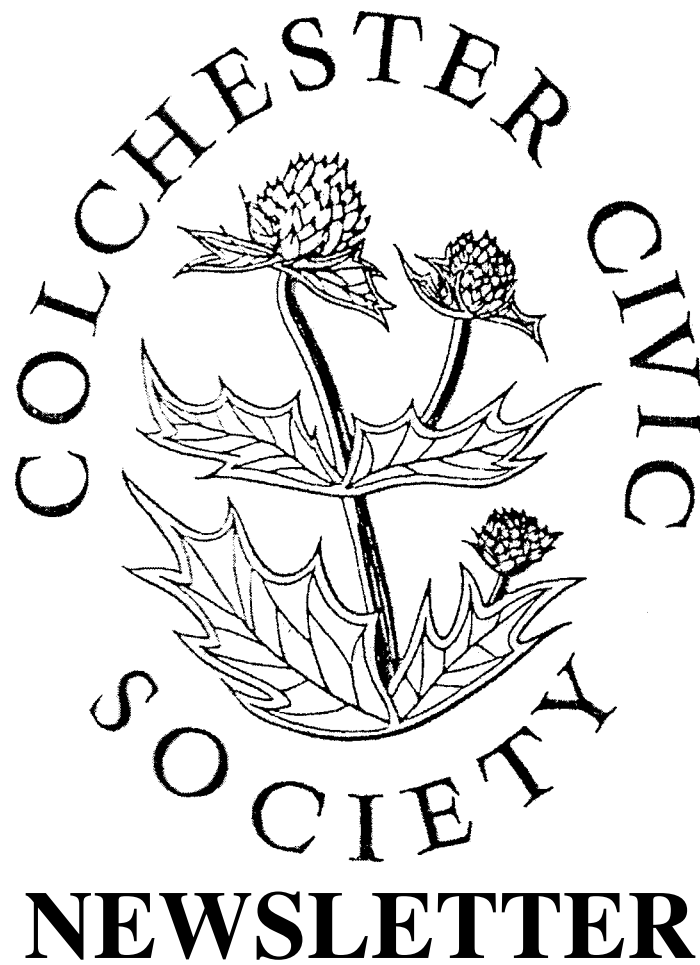


# Spring 2013



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*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.

Contributions are always welcome and should be sent to  
Peter Evans, 5 Grimston Road, Colchester CO2 7RN (telephone 01206 540990) or emailed to  
peter.evans7978@btinternet.com

The Society's website is <http://www.colchestercivicsociety.org>  
(this website will shortly be redesigned).uk

**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 broader geographical basis.

**CURRENT OFFICERS**

**Hon. Life President:**

**President:**

**Vice Presidents:**

**Chairman**

**Vice Chairman and Programme Organiser:**

Jo Edwards, 43 Priory Street, Colchester CO1 2QB.

01206 868254

**Treasurer:**

**Secretary:**

**Membership:**

**Newsletter Editor:**

**Footpaths:**

**Other elected members:**

## A ROOM WITH A VIEW

Some years ago, a couple of Civic Society members commented that I was really lucky to live in the town centre. I agreed, but said that there was a downside. Noise, vandalism, anti-social behaviour all around. It was obvious that they didn't really believe me and so A Room with a View was born. It provides a snapshot of life in the middle of Colchester. The following is a verbatim report. I hope you will forgive the language!

It's 11.30 pm on the Saturday before Christmas. A small group of shrieking women staggering along Priory Street on impossibly high heels have disturbed Cooper, the Jack Russell, who has been asleep in his early Christmas present, a new bed with faux sheepskin covered mattress (he ate the last one – bed, mattress - the lot!). Cooper jumps out of bed and runs to the window seat to look out, but can't locate the gap in the curtains. As he struggles to find it, the following conversation takes place:-

Woman One: 'I've just pissed myself!'

Woman Two: 'You pissed down the alley!'

Woman Three: 'I need a pee! I'm going to piss myself right here!'

At this point, Cooper discovers the gap and peers out into the darkness. Woman Three sees the curtain move.

Woman Three: 'F... off, you bastard. Let me have a PISS!'

Cooper ignores the reference to his dubious parentage and watches with considerable interest whilst she relieves herself in the road within a yard or so of our front door, teetering on her heels, miniscule skirt hiding nothing. Thank goodness it is raining but I might go and find the disinfectant, just in case!

*Jo Edwards*

## COLCHESTER BUILDINGS AT RISK AND ENGLISH HERITAGE

English Heritage has issued the 2012 list of Heritage At Risk. Colchester features in the list but there is only one building, 'Jumbo' Water Tower (described as condition poor), and two conservation areas – Distillery Pond area and the Hythe, both listed as very bad but with no change in the condition.

If anything it is a surprise that other buildings are not listed. There is concern about the Odeon building in Crouch Street, for example, although a purchaser may have been found, Jumbo is featured in an article later in this newsletter. There is some action at Hythe but it is not clear from the report which part of the area is a particular problem.

Overall there are 19,759 monuments listed, including 7,976 conservation areas. 3,109 of these are at risk (16.6%) with 524 of them conservation areas (6.6%). If you want to check individual areas or sites, you can visit the English Heritage website, which has all the details and also the criteria used for establishing the list.

There are some minor sites at risk inside the Borough although not within the town itself, for example St Mary's Church at Birch. Outside of Colchester, Clacton seafront is included as well as parts of Dovercourt and the Maltings at Thorpe-le-Soken, which is visibly falling down.

In another report, Heritage Counts 2011/12, details are given of how many of the 375,888 listed buildings have been the subject of crime. 70,000 listed buildings were affected, 19% of the total. 38% of the group known as faith buildings, which include churches and chapels, have suffered from crime, the largest type of crime being theft of metal, for example, lead from a roof.

On the brighter side, the Heritage Counts report does also announce that visits to heritage properties have increased to 62.3 million in 2011/12. This is the highest number since the figures were first produced in 2005/6. There are several reasons suggested for this, including more people holidaying at home due to the economic situation, major improvements and investments to heritage properties and the effects of historical themed television. (The Downton Abbey effect).

## Williams and Griffins store development

Your executive committee have been approached by the Fenwick Group, the owners of Williams and Griffin, about the proposed redevelopment. A summary of the redevelopment project is as follows;

- The total cost is £32 million
- Replacing the existing many floor levels with 3 floors throughout the store, although the existing menswear area and the western end of the store (closest to the Fire Office) will remain mainly

unaffected (except for the frontage)

- Redevelopment of the back of the store, outbuildings, offices and other rooms will be incorporated into the new store, increasing the floor space considerably
- A new frontage will replace the existing eastern and western ends of the store but the central area, including the foundry yard and the Ratcliffe's present shop will be retained and enhanced. The frontage will be mainly glass.

We had a presentation from a representative of the architects, Aukett Fitzroy Robinson. Hugo Fenwick, from the board of the company, and his staff were available to answer questions at our July 2012 meeting. A second meeting followed in November to update us and to address some questions that we had raised.

The Fenwick group originated in Newcastle in the 1890s and has stores in York, Windsor and Richmond, among a select group of others. Since 2003 it has redeveloped a store in Canterbury and so it has experience of dealing tactfully with new building in historic towns.

We raised issues concerning 'light pollution' which could result from the increased glass frontage on High Street and the proposed loss of the Jacklin's façade, where the former Jacklin's Restaurant was situated. The light issue is being dealt with by the Council's Planning department and we have been assured by more than one source that the remains of the Jacklin's façade (now above the menswear department) is merely that – there is no remaining original structure behind it. There would be significant problems in trying to retain the remaining façade.

It seems that the reasons for the internal store redevelopment are widely accepted and there are no real objections to the proposed work and to the changes to the rear entrance. The design of the new frontage itself is the main cause of discussion. The Committee was able to take soundings at the autumn burning issues meeting. Whilst we were not inspired by the plans for the frontage, we had no particular objections and felt that on balance, the £32 million investment in High Street outweighed any disadvantages. The Planning Committee of the Council appears to agree and the proposal has been approved.

### **St Nicholas Church, High Street – the Dial Church**

In 1956, St Nicholas Church was demolished and the site bought by the Colchester Co-operative Society to build their department store, St Nicholas House. The church was medieval and had been restored by Sir George Gilbert Scott. There was a clock that had been built out over High Street, hence the nickname, and it had the tallest spire in Colchester.

By the 1950's it was rather past its best and even became dangerous. Nevertheless, the demolition was not popular. Nationally the loss of churches and other buildings at this time led to improved conservation measures, including civic societies.

Here we have a programme from a recital held in 1934 when the church was totally safe.

### **Colchester Zoo - 50th anniversary commemorations**

The Zoo first opened for business in 1963 and is celebrating the 50th anniversary with public art by placing a 'stampede of giraffe' around the town. These will be 8 feet 6 inches high models and the Zoo has started to recruit artists to decorate them. Other towns have had public art projects – central London and Milton Keynes come to mind and this one is called 'Stand Tall for Giraffes'.

They will start to appear for 3 months between June and the August bank holiday. The 'herd' of

Colchester and District Musical Society

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President :: The Worshipful The Mayor (Alderman W. Gurney Benham, J.P., G.C.)

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HANDEL'S  
"MESSIAH"  
ST. NICHOLAS' CHURCH  
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14th, 1933  
At 7.30 p.m.

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Principals:

Mrs. DOROTHY WRIGHT - - -	Soprano
Miss GRACE BALL, L.R.A.M., A.R.C.M.	Contralto
Mr. HARRY PITT - - - - -	Tenor
Mr. BASIL HEMMING (CHARTERHOUSE CHAPEL, LONDON)	Bass

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Hon. Conductor :: MR. W. F. KINGDON  
Mus.Bac. (Oxon.), F.R.C.O., Hon. A.R.C.M.

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Admission Free      Programme Sixpence

giraffes will migrate to the Zoo for September and will then be auctioned in aid of the Colchester Zoo charity 'Action in the Wild'" So, if you see any jolly if strangely coloured giraffes do not be surprised – they are really there.

### The National Theatre comes to town

It is now possible to see productions from the National Theatre (NTLive) here in Colchester. Both Firstsite and the Odeon participate in NTLive which is described as 'an exciting initiative to broadcast live performance of plays onto cinema screens' and indeed it is possible to see ballet and opera as well on the same basis. Glyndebourne Live, Royal Opera and Royal Ballet Live were available.

2012 at Firstsite featured National Theatre productions including 'Timon of Athens' (with Simon Russell Beale) and 'the Last of the Hausseman's' (with Julie Walters) from the National Theatre. Prices started at £10 and they are usually on Thursday evenings.

Firstsite also has started a series of local history talks under the title 'Colchester's Avatars'. They are on the third Thursday in each month at 7pm. The subjects include the Town Hall and the statues displayed - Samuel Harsnett, Boudicca, Eudo, Gilbert etc – are the atavars. Amongst the speakers are Andrew Philips, Philip Crummy and James Raven.

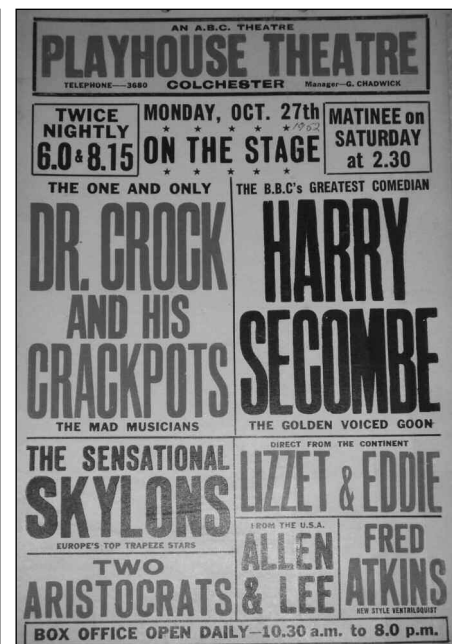
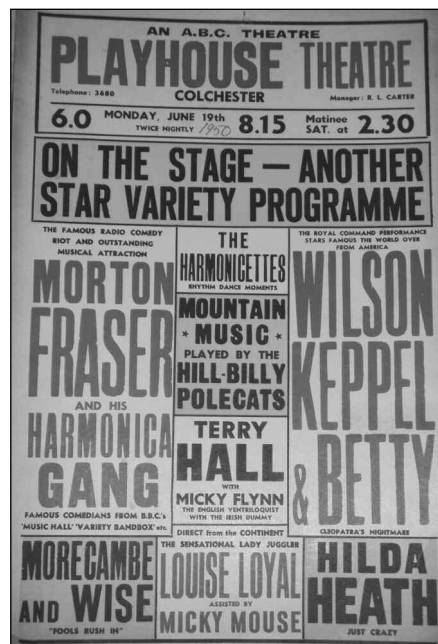
Perhaps the cultural quarter we were told about has arrived!

### The Playhouse, St John's Street

The Secretary has been contacted by a customer with the suggestion that a plaque be fixed to the building to record its history and importance to the town. This is not something that fits into the standard Blue Plaque scheme but it is something that we could consider. Other towns do have similar schemes. (Do you have any views on this?)

It was built as the Playhouse Theatre in 1929 but in the 1930's it became a cinema. Uses have varied over the years and for some time it was a Music Hall. Many big names of entertainment, including Morecambe and Wise, Bruce Forsyth, the Rolling Stones and Wilson Keppel and Betty, have trod the boards over the years. (Your editor remembers it being used for Speech Days for the Gilbert School in the 1960's). In 1981, the Playhouse changed into a Bingo Hall, but was then empty until the Wetherspoon chain bought it and opened after a restoration project.

The interior has been decorated with copies of playbills from the days when music hall acts toured to the Playhouse. The stage area has been restored and is used as part of the restaurant area. Mannequins have been set up on the balcony in period costume, so that the atmosphere of the Playhouse is recreated. There are photos and other Music Hall memorabilia and the management have done some research with the Holness which had a long connection with the Playhouse. A board gives some details. For example, there is a story about Max Miller, who appeared several times. It seems that his reputation for meanness is well founded as he would wait inside the bar after his act. Customers would enter and say 'there's Max



Miller – what will you have to drink Max?’ He never had to pay for his own tipple.

I thought that it was a nice touch to have a carpet with theatrical masques as a pattern. They have certainly put a lot of effort into recreating a past era.

The prices are good and so is the service.

### **Footpath Problems and ‘A’ boards**

Members have raised issues about footpath obstructions caused by advertising boards. These often, but not always, take the shape of a letter A. They are placed outside shops or restaurants. Whilst in theory advertising is not unreasonable or unexpected, in practice it can be taken to extremes with some establishments scattering several boards on the pavement, which restricts easy access, especially where the pathway is narrow or already occupied by chairs and tables. This can be irritating for able-bodied people, but particularly so for disabled people or those with children, whether in pushchairs or not.

This is not a problem limited to Colchester. There have been complaints in the Tendring area, in Clacton and Connaught Avenue, Frinton. One café in Walton has about 12 boards outside. What can be done?

As these are not permanent structures, it is not a planning issue. Rather, it is a matter for the Highway authority, Essex County Council. It has been raised by group and individuals apart from the Civic Society and the County Council has looked at the problem.

I paraphrase a letter that the secretary received from Jeremy Lucas, the Essex County Councillor; ‘Essex County Council will be implementing a tolerant policy for ‘A’ boards. By allowing other councils to implement a tolerant or zero tolerant approach, this will enable local areas to implement decisions that are responsive to the needs of highway users and support local businesses.’ This appears to mean that they are doing nothing.

It may be that it is considered that a recession is not the time to tell businesses to cut back on any form of advertising, or it may be the difficulty in finding an appropriate method of tackling the problem.

There are serious problems in some areas where access for people in wheelchairs, parents pushing prams or just shoppers is badly reduced so we expect to return to the problem again.

A different problem exists in Queen Street where scaffolding at number 13 has been erected for an unusually long time. This building is of considerable historic interest and we are concerned that it should be repaired and reconstructed properly. However, it is a narrow footpath and access to the bus stops is difficult. It has been raised with the Planning Authority, which recognises the problem.

### **The Bottle Stop campaign**

We have been approached by Karen Fowler of Greenstead Road with information about this and the POP campaign which both aim to have all glass used for bottles and drinking glasses in nightclubs and similar establishments replaced with less potentially harmful plastic materials.

The Bottle Stop campaign was started in August 2012 by Jane Sheriff, whose husband Philip died as a result of being stabbed in the neck by a broken bottle after attending a corporate event earlier that year. She joined forces with Margaret Goldings’ POP campaign, which started after her son Blake had survived similar injuries in 2005 only after major surgery. There have, of course, been other such tragic cases.

Plastic glasses are now used in nightclubs (and other places including cinemas) but some drinks are still sold in glass bottles. However, Ian Lucas MP for Wrexham, has taken up the issue following an incident locally and has a private member’s bill going through parliament, with a second reading due on 2nd March.

This is an initiative that deserves support and we have written to Sir Bob Russell and Bernard Jenkins our local MPs asking for their help and sent a copy to the Borough Council. Not all private members bills become law but even if they fail their objectives may be taken up by the government.

### **Colchester’s Roman Wall**

As you will be aware, the Society has agreed to sponsor one of the 12 display panels that will be placed at strategic points around the wall. Repairs to the wall and improvements to access are underway, encouraged by the Friends of the Roman Wall.

The panel that has been allocated to the Civic Society is the site of East Gate, East Hill. The design of the panels has been co-ordinated with the refurbishment of the Castle. Other panels have been chosen by

other sponsoring organisations. We are still fund raising by holding raffles to cover the cost of our contributions.

Planning permission has to be obtained before the panels can be installed but this process is underway and it is hoped that the first panel, at Balcerne Gate, will be unveiled by the Mayor at 10am on 16th April 2013.

More details about the activities of the Friends of the Roman Wall can be found on their website.

### **Jumbo the Water Tower – an update**

Most if not all readers of this newsletter must be aware by now that the Friends of Colchester Roman Wall are currently preparing, with the help of CBC, a series of interpretation panels at each of the gates along the wall. As a separate initiative, but in full co-operation with this scheme, the Balcerne Tower Trust is preparing a Jumbo interpretation panel to be installed on the Council landscaped area opposite the Mercury, bordering the pavement and very close to Jumbo itself.

This is at an advanced stage. We have permission from the Parks and Recreation Manager to install the panel on the CBC land and have just been granted planning permission for it, albeit for an outrageous application fee of £385. (If it were an advert for Coca Cola, the cost would have been £110!). The panel is being financially supported by a donation from one of our trustees, another donation from the Colchester and NE Essex BPT, and part of the CBC allowance granted to Cllr Bill Frame as well as by the Civic Society, so it has good community support. The panel will have the same 'look and feel' as the Roman Wall panels and will share a similar graphic design. Like the panel to be placed near Balcerne Gate, it will have an A1 size lectern type frame mounted at 45 degrees.

This will mean that for the first time ever, the numerous passers by will be able to read about this famous landmark. Sir Bob Russell has agreed to 'unveil' the panel when it is finally installed, an occasion to which Civic Society members are warmly invited. Watch this space!

**PS** It is expected that the panel will be unveiled on 16th April.

*Brian Light*  
*Chairman, Balcerne Tower Trust*

### **ROUND UP FROM PREVIOUS ACTIVITIES**

The blue plaque that Ann Turner wrote about in the last edition commemorating Dr Newell has now been installed next door to the Cinema in Head Street. (Former GPO building)

We have had several successful visits to Beeleigh Abbey near Maldon, the home of the Foyle family. Foyle's publishing have now produced a book on the history of the house, which can be obtained from local bookshops at £14.99.

### **COLCHESTER MUSEUM SERVICE**

Members will have seen in the local press that Colchester Borough Council is planning to sell the Museum Resource Centre in Ryegate Road and move staff to other premises, here in Colchester or in Ipswich. Only the barest of details is available at present and there must be worry about how this will affect the management of the major refurbishment of the Castle, which is just about to start. The Friends of Colchester Museums have asked for more information and hope to be seeing Councillor Tim Young and others from the Council soon to express their concerns and to ask for a commitment to the future of our Museums.

The Castle closed in January and is current being emptied so works can commence. The Castle will reopen between 9th March and 7th April to allow the Castle to be seen without interruption for the first time since 1936. See the Social Programme for an opportunity to attend an event on 24th March.

The Museum Service has a new director, Bill Seaman, who is due to take up his post in April. He is currently with the Norfolk Museum Service but actually worked at the Colchester Museum for 5 years in the 1990's as Visitors Services Manager.

### **MEMBERSHIP NEWS**

Congratulations to Cecil and Felicity Minter, who, for many, many, years have been active and stalwart members of Colchester Civic Society. They celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary on the 10th January 2013. We send them our love and very best wishes.

Mr Mears of Stratford has joined us and Mr and Mrs Salmon of Colchester, Mrs Jones of Elmstead Market and Mrs Edge of Wivenhoe have rejoined.

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

### **From the Membership Secretary**

Thank you to all of you who have paid your subscription for 2013 already. There are still a number who have not yet renewed and I would remind you that subscriptions were due on 1 February. If you have not renewed by 1 June then your membership will be taken as lapsed.

Many of you have your newsletter hand delivered which saves on postage. At the moment I have 13 members who take on this task but I am looking for someone to take on delivery in the Roman Road area. It is a small job that you would only have to do twice a year. If you feel that you are able to take on this task please get in touch with me. Thank you to those that already do the delivery.

Elsewhere in this newsletter, you will see information about Heritage Weekend 2013. I am asking for volunteers to steward the properties that will be open for this national weekend event. Please consider spending sometime to steward a property and if you are able to do so then return the form to me as soon as possible.

*Ann Turner*

## **REPORTS OF SOCIAL EVENTS**

### **Bulmer Brick and Tile Company 4th October 2012**

The history of the site at Bulmer, Suffolk, can be traced right back to 1450 and for most of those years London clay was dug and processed into bricks at that site. In 1595 it was owned by a man called Hurrell. In 1795 it had passed into the hands of a man named English and in 1936 it was bought by a Mr Minter who undertook some restoration of the site. The present owner, Mr Peter Minter conducted us round the site explaining the many processes of brick making, pausing at sites of activity and special interest and enlivening his talk with good humoured observations of old and modern industrial life. At some time there was one man making the moulds and he was so thorough that he kept a record of every mould that he made so the company now has about 700 of them. The moulds in which the bricks were shaped were simple pinewood boxes.

Bulmer's bricks are made from local clay from the owner's pit which has been worked for 400 years or more and still has a few hundred years' worth of clay to be dug. Looking into the pit from its base level, at least 40million years of clay deposit can be seen in layers. Used by the Romans to build Colchester Castle, Septaria can be seen. It originated as clay on the River Thames bed, which ran through that area at that time, also there is a yellow layer of volcanic ash, origin unknown. Both of these layers can be seen in the cliffs at Walton.

Bulmer clay is of a very high quality and when fired at a certain temperature becomes a gentle rosy red. This is the colour of the ancient bricks in

Hampton Court Palace, replacements for which are supplied by Bulmer. After the fire at the Palace,



*Bulmer clay pit*



*More drying bricks*



Bulmer supplied the bricks for the damaged chimneys of which there were 365, each one costing £10,000. Sometimes Marks Tey clay is bought in and used, as it fires to a white brick because of the high quantity of sand in it. It is useful for making the tiles for Holkham Hall, Suffolk, the home of Lord Leicester.

The general public would expect that the owner of the pit would be entitled to extract his own clay free of charge but no, modern bureaucrats, eager to grab every penny they can from the electorate while declaring that the small business man should be encouraged and helped to produce goods for Britain to sell at home and abroad, require the owner to pay for a licence to extract his own clay for the next 10 years. This involves surveys, inspections etc. which could cost about £20,000 and then there's VAT and Income Tax. The business now employs about 30 people and exports bespoke bricks all over the world, even to China, America, Australia and New Zealand.

Once dug, the clay is sorted and mixed with water in the pug-mill. It's then dried slowly until it reaches the right consistency to mould. Once moulded into shape the bricks or tiles are laid out on racks in the open air to dry even more before firing. If they are too wet they will explode when subjected to the high heat of the kiln.

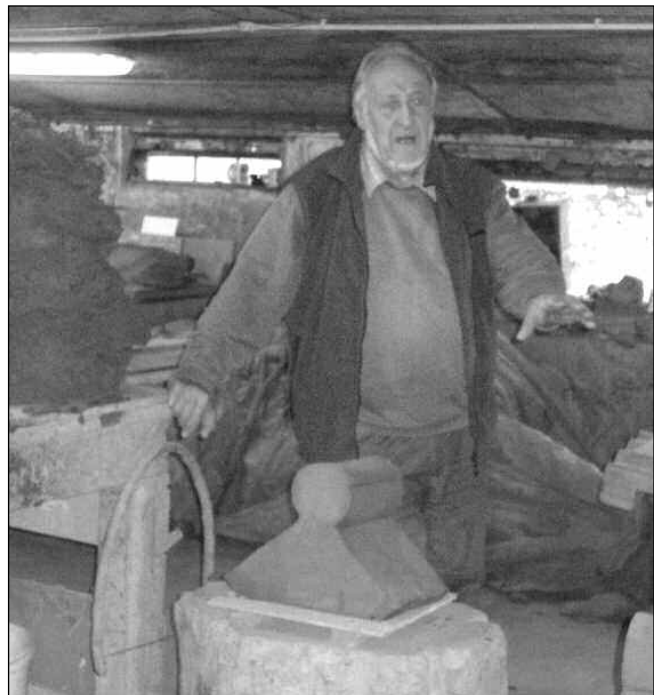
The round, brick and wood built kilns are based on the old medieval designs to which Mr Peter Minter has made some slight modifications to improve their efficiency. They are dome shaped with holes in the roof to create a downdraft. The inner dome is constructed of brick and has 7 fires and chimneys built into it. The floor of bricks is laid in a herring-bone design to cut down its expansion which can be as much as 5 cm. The loading plan and level of heat changes the colour of the bricks. They are fired at temperatures of between 700°C and 120°C. These coal fired kilns, once lit, require attention all night long. The outer wall, which encloses a roofed passage, from which the fires can be tended, is made of wood and bricks.

It was a fascinating tour following the making of bricks from start to finish. Mr Peter Minter led us proudly round his domain and lingered by the craftsmen and women allowing them to demonstrate their skills to us, in the bright sunshine. He was open, explicit, humorous and courteous.

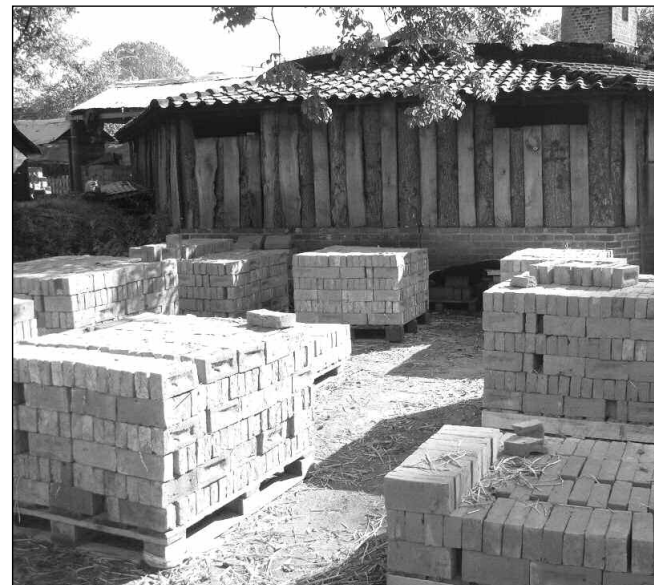
If you want to see some of his products you can take trips to Sible Hedingham, Norfolk where you can see Crowstep Gables and Layer Marney. Strangely there are not many in Colchester. Perhaps Marks Tey was closer.

It was agreed that this was a short, snack-less, very enjoyable expedition. It was an added pleasure to have Jo out with us and enjoying herself. This was another of her 'firsts'.

*Eileen Sheldon*



*The owner with a roll top ridge tile*



*Exterior of the kiln built by the owner from an ancient design which he modified for better efficiency*

## **SOCIAL PROGRAMME ARRANGEMENTS**

Oh dear! Things didn't quite go according to plan last year, for reasons quite beyond our control and below you will find a number of updates on proposed visits that remain outstanding. I have high hopes of delivering all of them, eventually, but some may take some time! I am so sorry! But still, another year, another programme and I hope all will run smoothly in 2013. I'm tempting fate again, aren't I? I'm so sorry about the cost of some of these events. As you are probably aware, I keep the prices as low as I can, not normally intending to make a profit. It's just the cost of everything has risen hugely, especially coaches! Please tell your friends, neighbours, relations and other groups about our outings. Non members are welcome (many go on to become members) and it's so good to have a full coach. We do have insurance for our events, but, unfortunately, it does not cover anyone over the age of 80, so please bear this in mind. Now that the old bus station has closed, our main pick up point will be at the top of East Hill, but we will normally be able to pick up at Tollgate and along Lexden Road, too. Just let me know if you'd like to be picked up elsewhere. If we are going into Suffolk, we can also stop at St John's in Ipswich Road. We aim to please! All our coaches have loos unless otherwise stated.

### **UPDATE ON COLCHESTER MAGISTRATES' COURT VISIT POSTPONED AGAIN!**

Those of you still waiting to visit the Magistrates' Court will know that our proposed second tour was scheduled for last autumn but was postponed. It was hoped that it would take place in March this year, but, again, it has been postponed. I'm so sorry about this. The original arrangements were made with a manager who was made redundant. The new manager is doing her best to accommodate us, but things have changed and finding a date when the Courts are not in use but someone is available to show us around is not proving easy. Her new list of the very few days when the building is not open to the public will be available in April and I've agreed to phone her then to see whether something can be arranged. Please watch this space!

### **UPDATE ON STOUR BOAT TRIPS OVER TO YOU!**

Decisions, decisions! What do we do? I have been talking to my friend, Dorothy, at the River Stour Trust. She tells me that Flatford Lock remains impassable and Dedham Lock is very iffy. The Trust has obtained a quote for repair of both locks and the Environment Agency is now hoping to fund the work but it will be at least 18 months before it is finished. Do we risk Dedham Lock being OK and book to go upstream to Stratford or do we wait until the work is complete and return to the original trip to Cattawade? I think I need to consider my own sanity here, so I'd prefer to wait for the work to be done unless any of you still waiting for your cruise on the Stour want to take the risk of another abortive trip. Please let me know! I'm happy if you are! (Please phone Jo direct)

### **UPDATE ON THE BOW BACKWATERS**

As I feared, the boat company who were to provide this trip went out of business. All, however, is not lost. I understand there are moves afoot to find someone else to run the cruises. This is something that a number of us REALLY want to do, for family history reasons, so I am keeping a very close watch on the situation.

### **UPDATE ON THE JOHN BALL PLAQUE**

The saga of the John Ball Plaque continues. Last spring, we were expecting to be invited to the unveiling of the plaque in the Dutch Quarter, after we had arranged for its repair but Colchester Borough Homes had to return to the drawing board when further issues arose about the proposed site for the plaque. I now hear that the tenants in the houses to which the plaque is to be attached have agreed to it being there and now the matter is with the Property Services Department who are assessing the suitability of the site. I fear that they may have doubts about it being on a wall which is, I understand, already cracked, as the plaque weighs a ton! If you would like to be there when the plaque is eventually unveiled, please let us know as soon as possible.

### **UPDATE ON THE STOCKWELL PLEASE SEE BELOW!**

## **UPDATE ON GREYFRIARS**

The builders are working hard on the conversion of Greyfriars into a hotel. We have been promised a guided tour when the work is complete, probably late autumn.

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## **WELL, HAVING GOT THAT OUT OF THE WAY, HERE'S THE PROGRAMME FOR 2013:**

### **SUNDAY 24th MARCH 2013 MEET AT COLCHESTER CASTLE AT 5.45PM BY KIND INVITATION OF THE FRIENDS OF COLCHESTER MUSEUMS.**

We have been invited by the Friends of Colchester Museums to join them for a look at the historic structure of Colchester Castle without its contents. As you will, no doubt, already know, the Castle has closed for 15 months for major redevelopment. Before the work starts, everything must be removed and placed into storage, so this will be the first time the building has been empty since a roof was put on it prior to its opening as a museum in 1935. There will be tours of the building and tea, coffee and biscuits will be available. This will be a really interesting, unlikely to be repeated in our lifetimes, opportunity, not to be missed and we thank the Friends for their kind invitation. **TIME IS SHORT, SO IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO GO, PLEASE PHONE PETER EVANS ON 01206 540990 ASAP.**

**Cost £1.50**

### **10th APRIL 2013 MEET AT THE TOP OF EAST HILL (OPPOSITE GREYFRIARS ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE HILL) AT 8.00AM FOR A VISIT TO GREENWICH, THE CUTTY SARK AND THE EMIRATES CABLE CAR.**

We begin with coffee the National Maritime Museum cafe, where we meet our guide for the day and then spend a short while in the Museum, having a look at a beautiful ceremonial barge, inspiration for the Diamond Jubilee River Pageant. We then walk the few steps to Queen's House where we have a guided tour. Then we will be free in Greenwich to find lunch, or to explore further before, for all of you, it's off to the newly restored Cutty Sark. Me? No way! I have a real phobia about sailing ships and I will be somewhere else!! The Cutty Sark was built in 1869 on the Clyde. She was only intended to be in use for 30 years! Initially, she was, of course, a tea clipper, but the opening of the Suez Canal soon made her redundant. She found alternative work carrying wool from Australia and then, later, became a general cargo ship until 1922 when she began a totally new career as a training ship, first in Falmouth and then on the Thames. She remained as a training ship until 1954 when she was moved to dry dock in Greenwich. Now restored following the terrible fire in 2007, she has reopened to the public. Explore the ship and wander beneath her - the thought makes me feel really sick! However, the trip on the new Emirates Cable Car does appeal to me. It's a return journey, so if you don't want to join me, you needn't! The Cable Car, heavily sponsored by the Emirates Airline, opened just before the Olympics. It crosses the Thames between the Royal Victoria Docks and the Woolwich Peninsular, close to the O2, reaching a height of 300 ft over the river. There are 34 gondolas, each able to carry 10 people. The Cable Car is the most expensive ever built. It cost something in the region of £60 million. Was it worth it? Well, time will tell, but I, for one, am really looking forward to the experience! There will be time to grab a cup of tea at the O2 before we leave for home.

**Cost £42**

### **MONDAY 15th APRIL 2013 MEET AT THE STOCKWELL, AT THE JUNCTION OF WEST STOCKWELL STREET WITH STOCKWELL, AT 6.55PM.**

I am so sorry about this huge burst of Civic Society activity in one fortnight. It wasn't planned like this but has evolved because of reasons rather outside our control. One of those reasons has been the nightmare that has faced all involved in the restoration of the Stockwell. Those of you who read our last Newsletter may remember that I'd changed the date of our visit because progress had been so good that they decided to open in November 2012, two weeks earlier than planned. From that moment on, everything went wrong! Essential building supplies needed for the completion of the building didn't turn up. The opening was put back again – and then again. The weather then caused problems. The opening date slipped again. Finally, I heard that, with a huge push and all hands on deck, they could open in February

and we were given another date for our visit. I was so pleased for them – and for us. The copy was all ready for the Newsletter when I had a frantic message. The kitchen floor had started to bubble and needed to be taken up! Another delay! They were in despair! Apparently, the very wet weather last year had upset the water table which, in turn, had upset the screed under the flooring. So now we have a new date! It's set beyond the proposed opening, so they have asked us to go on a Monday when the place will be reasonably quiet as they have lots to show us. The pub was structurally unsound when the restoration project began. Robert Morgan, the new owner, knew it would be a big task, but I don't think he really knew just how much he was taking on. It has, however, been an extraordinary journey, during which amazing discoveries have been made. The builders have found some really unexpected treasures, not just beneath the floor but hidden in the structure of the building too. There's a Roman road, a well, coins dating to the reign of Edward III, wonderful architectural features long hidden and much more to both intrigue and amaze us. Car parking in the Nunns Road (W&G) car park is £2 and in Middleborough or Sheepen Road 50p after 6pm. Please let us know if you need or can offer a lift. Please let me know on the reply slip whether you are coming as soon as you can, so that I can let Mr Morgan know how many to expect.

**Cost FREE!**

**WEDNESDAY 17th APRIL 2013 MEET AT THE COLCHESTER BOROUGH HOMES OFFICES IN GOSBECKS ROAD AT 10.50AM FOR A VISIT TO THE COLCHESTER SOS BUS.**

You may remember that the idea for a Colchester SOS Bus sprang from seeds sown by the Colchester Civic Society way back when we were involved with the Colchester Town Partnership. The CTP worked hard to address the issues of Colchester Town Centre at night, recognising that we had the same problems as most towns and cities throughout the country, a vibrant night-time economy that was in danger of overwhelming or, at least, damaging a diverse and much more inclusive evening one. People over the age of 40, and even some below that age, were thinking twice about venturing into the town to go to the cinema, a lecture, concert or even a meal. Unfortunately, the CTP was dissolved before it was able to implement some of its potential solutions but the SOS Bus idea had been taken up by others and was on a roll! It was so successful that we now have a new bus which came into service at the beginning of December 2012. Staffed by trained volunteers, like its predecessor, it provides a safe refuge for those in difficulties in the town centre on the busiest nights of the week, reducing the pressure on the police and on A&E. Issuing advice, providing a calming few words or shoulder to cry on or making phone call to a parent are often all that is required to resolve a problem that could otherwise escalate. Today we have the opportunity to have a look at the bus and to hear from Wayne Powell, from Open Road, the SOS Bus Co-ordinator, exactly how the service works and what it has done for our town. Incidentally, when it's not parked at the lower end of High Street on a busy night, it is used for a number of other, equally valuable, purposes. Please come and find out more! Lifts can be arranged.

**Cost £3 All proceeds to be donated to the SOS Bus**

**SATURDAY 20th APRIL 2013 MEET AT THE BUS STOP AT THE TOP OF EAST HILL, OPPOSITE GREYFRIARS (ON THE SOUTH SIDE) AT 8AM FOR A VISIT TO THE SHARD.**

The Shard is the huge glass building that towers over the new London Bridge Quarter, south of the Thames, by London Bridge Station. Designed by Italian architect Renzo Piano, in collaboration with British architect, Richard Rogers, it is 310 metres tall. It is now complete and was opened by the Prime Minister of Qatar and Prince Andrew on 5th July. The lower floors of the building will be occupied by offices, the middle floors are to house restaurants, with the 5\* Shangri la Hotel above them and above the hotel there will be a number of flats – the cost of which will be unimaginable! And then, finally, at the top, on Floors 68 to 72, there is a viewing gallery, accessed by high speed lifts. On a clear day, the view from the top is spectacular – over 40 miles. I have deliberately chosen late April for this visit in the hope that it WILL be a clear day and that any clouds will swiftly move on!! That is the last reference to the weather that I will allow when mentioning this visit!! Our lift to the viewing gallery is booked for 2pm but we will spend a couple of hours in the morning, after a short break for coffee, learning about the history of tall buildings in London, from Roman foundations – the wall, the Forum and the Basilica, through to the massive mediaeval old St Pauls (which, when it burnt in 1666, caused a river of molten lead to run down Ludgate Hill), Wren's new St. Pauls, the City spires (and the whole business of protecting views of

them), the Monument, the Nat West Tower, the Gherkin, the Pinnacle and, of course, the Shard. Don't worry, we will have time to find lunch – there's plenty of places to eat! The cost of this day is horrendous, I'm sorry to say, but tickets for the Shard are incredibly expensive and the price for the hire of coaches worse! A coach to London is now almost £600! A word of warning. There are no seats in the viewing gallery at the Shard so if you are worried about standing for any length of time, a folding stool might be a good idea. Even if you have already expressed an interest in this day (I needed some idea of numbers as I have already had to buy non-refundable tickets) please can you now complete the slip at the back of this Newsletter to confirm your booking. Please do this as soon as possible

**Cost £49**

**WEDNESDAY 15th MAY 2013 MEET AT THE TOP OF EAST HILL (OPPOSITE GREYFRIARS ON THE SOUTH SIDE) AT 8.30AM FOR A VISIT TO THE ALL ENGLAND LAWN TENNIS CLUB AT WIMBLEDON**

Not, I'm afraid, during Wimbledon Fortnight, but it will still be a fascinating visit as we take a "behind the scenes" guided tour of both Centre and No 1 Courts, the Picnic Terraces, the Press Interview Room and the Millennium Building which houses the, normally private, players' facilities. And that's not all, because we will also visit the Lawn Tennis Museum, which contains an amazing collection of tennis memorabilia covering the period from 1555 to the present day, including the kit worn by Andy Murray for his Olympic victory on Centre Court!! So now is the time to round up all your tennis mad friends and relations and invite them to join you for this trip to Wimbledon. We welcome guests! We will arrive in time for morning coffee, light lunches will be available in the Wingfield Cafe and we'll have time for a cup of tea before we leave.

**Cost, including morning coffee, £38**

**TUESDAY 21st MAY 2012 MEET AT ST BOTOLPH'S PARISH HALL (ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE CHURCH) AT 7.30PM FOR OUR SPRING UP MEETING.**

This is a very informal opportunity to raise issues about Colchester, large or small, and discuss them with others. Do come! Lifts can usually be arranged. Coffee and biscuits will be available.

**TUESDAY 4th JUNE 2013 MEET AT THE BALKERNE RESTAURANT AT THE COLCHESTER INSTITUTE IN SHEEPEN ROAD AT 7.15 PM FOR OUR BIRTHDAY DINNER**

The Society will be 49 years old this June and we will be celebrating with dinner at the Balkerne Restaurant at the Colchester Institute. The menu is not yet available, but, if you are interested, please complete the slip and I'll forward it to you as soon as I have it. For those of you unaware of the restaurant, it is a hidden gem in Colchester. Delicious food and delightful service is provided by the students at the Centre for Hospitality and Food Studies (CHeFS). I do hope you can come. Please let me know whether you need or can offer a lift. Car parking on site is available.

**Cost £17.50 (three courses and coffee)**

**WEDNESDAY 12th JUNE 2013 MEET AT FIRSITE AT 7.00PM FOR OUR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

Yes, a different venue this year because, following the Burning Issues meeting in November, it became apparent that many of us would appreciate an update on firsite and how it's first year and a bit have gone. I asked Wayne Warner, firsite's Commercial Director, whether he would speak to us and he agreed immediately, in the next breath inviting us to hold our meeting, free of charge, I might add, in the building so that he could show us what he is talking about – a brilliant offer which I accepted with alacrity! So, AGM at 7pm and then it's over to Wayne! Please do your best to come. Lifts can be arranged.

**WEDNESDAY 10th JULY 2013 MEET AT THE TOP OF EAST HILL (OUTSIDE GREYFRIARS ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE HILL) AT 8.30AM FOR A VISIT TO BELLE GROVE AT WESTHILL IN SUFFOLK (WITH FREE TIME IN SOUTHWOLD)**

Now I've seen some odd houses in my time, but this one is simply extraordinary. Suffice to say, it even has an outsize dragon draped over the chimney stack. Based on a fanciful picture in an old

architectural magazine, which the owners came upon by chance, the recently completed, award winning, house replaces the 19th century cold and draughty farmhouse on the family farm. The Daily Telegraph suggests that it was designed by a combination of hobbits, wizards and gingerbread men! It is truly quite surreal and really a must see. It is probable that our party will be too big for us all to visit at the same time, so I propose that we divide our group in half, one half visiting in the morning, whilst the those in the other half have a stroll around Southwold, perhaps visiting the pier, a delight, and quite unlike any other pier I've ever been to! Then we can swap over for the afternoon. We'll all be free at lunchtime to find something to eat in Southwold.

**Cost £32 including refreshments at Belle Grove**

**FRIDAY 2nd AUGUST 2013 MEET AT THE TOP OF EAST HILL (OPPOSITE GREYFRIARS ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE HILL) AT 9.30 AM FOR A VISIT TO BUCKINGHAM PALACE.**

I have been hoping that Buckingham Palace would reinstate the full garden tour that we had booked a couple of years ago, which was cancelled by them at the last moment because President Obama came to stay, but they seem to have decided that these tours will no longer feature in their programme. It's a pity. However, this year, of course, marks the 60th Anniversary of the Coronation and the Buckingham Palace State Rooms will be filled with a wonderful array of the dress, uniforms and robes worn by the Royal Party at the Coronation, including those worn by Prince Charles and Princess Anne (even though she was considered too young to attend!) Remember, the Queen's crimson velvet robe was woven, by hand, at Warners in Braintree. Also on display will be the Diamond Diadem, the crown worn by the Queen on all coins and postage stamps. This, apparently, is set with 1333 diamonds. After our self guided (audio-guide available) visit to the State Rooms, there will be time to visit the Garden Cafe, which serves sandwiches and "delicious pastries created especially for Buckingham Palace", the shop and the loo, before we meet again for our Garden Highlights tour. This includes the famous herbaceous border, the wisteria covered summer house, the rose garden and the tennis court where George VI played tennis with Fred Perry. Please wear comfortable shoes as there is a fair amount of walking and carry as little as possible as larger bags will have to be left in the cloakroom which is a route march from the end of the tour! Loos are available only at the end of the tour of the State Rooms, so we will arrive early, allowing enough time for a picnic or snack in St James' Park and the use of the facilities there! Please remember, if you are bringing a picnic, put it in a disposable bag as, once the coach has dropped us, we won't see it again until the end of the afternoon. Photography is not allowed indoors, but cameras are welcomed in the garden. Places for this tour are limited, so please apply promptly. If you are disabled, please let me know as soon as possible as I will have to arrange special access for you. Incidentally, there is no seating available in the garden, so folding stools, shooting sticks etc might be a good idea if you don't like being on your feet too long.

**Cost £45**

**WEDNESDAY 14th AUGUST 2013 MEET AT 3, REGENT STREET, ROWHEDGE BETWEEN 2PM TO 4PM FOR AFTERNOON TEA AND CAKES.**

Executive Committee member, Billie Berry, has very kindly offered afternoon tea and cakes at her home in Rowhedge. This will be a chance to just chill out! How lovely! Numbers are very limited, so please apply early and by the 9th August at the latest. No cost, but donations, please, on the day, for the Society's Roman Wall interpretation board (we've collected well over half the money required for 'our' board already! Great stuff!) There is little parking in the area, but the No 66 bus stops round the corner and runs every half hour 8mins and 38mins past the hour from the bus stop opposite Marks & Spencer (High Street, stop Y). Directions available. If you would like to go, but can't use public transport and need a lift, please let me know and I'll see what I can arrange for you.

**SATURDAY 7th AND SUNDAY 8th SEPTEMBER 2013 HERITAGE OPEN DAYS**

As usual, we are appealing for members to give a few hours of their time over this weekend to welcome visitors to some of the buildings open to the public. No experience or knowledge required as we will provide all the information you need. Please help! We really do need you!

**20th SEPTEMBER 2013 MEET AT THE TOP OF EAST HILL (OPPOSITE GREYFRIARS ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE HILL) AT 8.00AM FOR A VISIT TO HARLINGTON MANOR AND**

**JOHN BUNYAN'S BEDFORD.**

Why John Bunyan's Bedford? Well, it's all because the owners of Harlington Manor can't accommodate all of us at the same time and, as Harlington Manor is the house where Bunyan was held before his trial, a theme emerges; one that will keep us all occupied and out of mischief for the whole day! Harlington Manor, which is listed Grade 2\*, is a beautiful house dating from 1500 (maybe parts date back to the 1300's), although it has later additions. The site was occupied by the Wingate family from the 14th to the 19th century. There are two priest holes. Both Henry VIII and Charles II are thought to have stayed in the house and, as I've mentioned, John Bunyan was interrogated in the Great Parlour following his arrest for seditious preaching in nearby Lower Samsell. He was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment in Bedford Prison by Sir Francis Wingate. We will be shown round the house by the owners and I know that you will enjoy the visit. Whilst one half of the group are at the house, the other half will be with a guide, following the Bunyan theme and visiting Elstow, where Bunyan was born. The group visiting the Harlington Manor in the morning will have coffee there, whilst the others have coffee at the Swan Hotel in Bedford (with a Bunyan connection, of course). We'll all be free in Bedford at lunchtime and then we'll swap over for the afternoon, the house group having tea there and the rest visiting the Swan.

**Cost £42 to include morning coffee and light tea.**

**OCTOBER 2013 DATE TO BE CONFIRMED A VISIT TO THE ST HELENA HOSPICE DAY CENTRE**

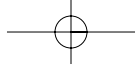
We went to the hospice just before it opened and it's about time we returned to see what has happened since. However, this will be more than just a look at the Day Centre. It will be a chance for the hospice staff to tell us exactly what they do – and it's not necessarily what you think! An interesting and very valuable visit.

**MONDAY 4th NOVEMBER 2013 MEET AT ST BOTOLPH'S PARISH HALL AT 7.30 PM FOR OUR BURNING ISSUES MEETING.**

Like the Spring Up meeting earlier in the year, this is an opportunity to discuss things that are happening – or, perhaps, not happening – in the town. Concerned about something affecting Colchester? Then come and tell us what is troubling you. All welcome. Lifts can usually be arranged.

**AND DECEMBER?**

I have an idea, but it's too early to arrange it! More anon! And, of course, we may have a date for our Greyfriars visit by then.



## COLCHESTER CIVIC SOCIETY SOCIAL PROGRAMME 2013 REPLY SLIPS

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

Make cheques payable to Colchester Civic Society

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



### John Ball Plaque Ceremony (date to be confirmed)

I/We would like to come

Name .....

Address .....

Post Code .....

Telephone .....

Email .....



### Sunday 24th March 2013 17.45pm Colchester Castle Cost £1.50

Payable to Friends of Colchester Museums

Please telephone Peter Evans direct on 01206 540990

I/We would like to come

Name .....

Address .....

Post Code .....

Telephone .....

Cheque for £ .....

enclosed

Email .....



### Wednesday 10th April 2013 12.30pm Greenwich Cost £42

I/We would like to come

Name .....

Address .....

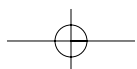
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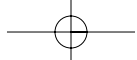
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Email .....







**Monday 15th April 2013 The Stockwell Cost Free**

I/We would like to come

Name

Address

Post Code

Telephone

Email



**Wednesday 17th April 2013 SOS Bus Cost £3**

I/We would like to come

Name

Address

Post Code

Telephone

Cheque for £

enclosed

Email



**Saturday 20th April 2013 The Shard Cost £49**

I/We would like to come

Name

Address

Post Code

Telephone

Cheque for £

enclosed

Email



**Wednesday 15th May 2013 Wimbledon Cost £38**

I/We would like to come

Name

Address

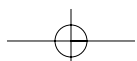
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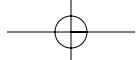
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Email





**Tuesday 21st May 2013 7.00pm St Botolph's Parish Hall Spring Up Meeting**

I/We would like a lift

Name

Address

Post Code

Telephone

Email



**Wednesday 4th June 2013 Birthday Dinner at Balcerne Restaurant Cost £17.50**

I/We would like to come

Name

Address

Post Code

Telephone

Cheque for £

enclosed

Email



**Wednesday 12th June 2013 Firstsite Annual General Meeting**

I/We would like a lift

Name

Address

Post Code

Telephone

Email



**Wednesday 10th July 2013 Belle Grove and Southwold Cost £32**

I/We would like to come

Name

Address

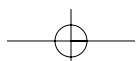
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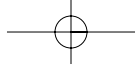
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**Friday 2nd August 2013 Buckingham Palace Gardens and Coronation Robes Cost £45**

I/We would like to come

Name .....

Address .....

Post Code .....

Telephone .....

Cheque for £

enclosed

Email .....



**Wednesday 14th August 2013 Tea Party**

I/We would like a lift

Name .....

Address .....

Post Code .....

Telephone .....

Email .....



**Friday 20th September 2013 Harlington Manor and John Bunyan Cost £42**

I/We would like to come

Name .....

Address .....

Post Code .....

Telephone .....

Cheque for £

enclosed

Email .....



**Wednesday 4th November 2013 7.30pm Burning Issues Meeting St Botolph's Church Hall**

I/We would like a lift

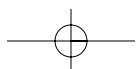
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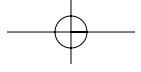
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### HERITAGE OPEN DAYS 2013

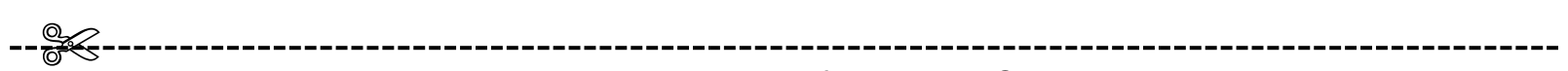
This year, Heritage Open Days will be held on 7 and 8 September.

Once again I am asking for people to help steward the various properties that will be open. It has not yet been decided which those properties will be but most likely it will be the same as before. However, if anyone has a suggestion to make for a new property to be added to the list please let me know.

Last year the visitor numbers to all the properties were about the same. It is thanks to those that act as stewards that the event is so very popular. I am now asking for stewards for 2013. If you have done it before you will know it is not difficult as everything is provided for you. So if you have not done it before please consider giving two hours of your time to act as a steward. I would particularly like to hear from some of our newer members as we have a few older ones who have done it for a number of years and feel that they cannot help any more. My pool of helpers is therefore getting very small.

Please indicate which times you can help and return the slip to me as soon as possible. It would help if you could say you can do any time on either day.

Return the slip to: (removed on old digital version)  
Please reply before 30 June 2013.



I am willing to act as a steward for Heritage Open Days 2013

Saturday 7 September AM PM

Sunday 8 September AM PM

Full name

Address

Post Code

Telephone number

E mail

