

Summer 2009



NEWSLETTER

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Registered Charity 237885

This Newsletter has been edited for Colchester Civic Society by John Egan. Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of Colchester Civic Society.

Contributions are always welcome and should be sent to <mailto:info@colchester-cs.org.uk>

The Society's website can be viewed at <http://www.colchester-cs.org.uk>

Check the website for up to date news and information about the society and its work.

The objects of Colchester Civic Society are:

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

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE FOR 2008-9

Hon Life President:

President:

Vice Presidents:

Chairman & Programme Jo Edwards, 43 Priory Street, Colchester CO1 2QB

Organiser: 01206 868254

Treasurer:

Secretary:

Membership:

Newsletter Editor:

Footpaths:

Tree Group:

Other elected members:

CHRISTINE'S CORNER

The other day, I was chatting to a local solicitor, whose field of expertise is property. He asked me how long I had lived in my house in High Street and was amazed when I told him that I moved there in 1947. "That's a record," he said. "I haven't, in all my years dealing with property, come across a house that has been in continuous ownership for so long." It made me think. I suppose I have been here a long time. Colchester High Street has certainly changed. I, of course, remember it being two-way, complete with a Saturday market in the road on the south side and gentlemen's conveniences on a large traffic island outside Angel Court (in the crypt of St Runwald's Church). The Salvation Army Band used to play on that island on Sunday evenings. It was a busy street, full of shops. There weren't many in Culver Street until the shopping centres were built. Despite all the traffic, the shoppers and, on Saturday mornings, the cattle and sheep being driven to the market at the foot of North Hill (a farmer, a lad and a couple of dogs keeping control of fairly sizeable herds or flocks as they threaded their way through cars and buses) the High Street seemed safe. It wasn't an unpleasant place to be. After it became one-way in the 1960's, it started to change, but that change was slow to begin with. Thinking about it, I was reminded of an incident that caused much merriment in our family. My sister in law, Flo, had a dog, Flossie, small, very scruffy and extremely nervous. Flossie went everywhere with Flo, refusing to be anywhere but within a few inches of her feet. Unfortunately, Flo was admitted to hospital, where she was to remain until her death a few months later. Who was to have Flossie? Much to my dismay, she landed up with us. We really didn't want her but there was no other solution. Flossie was distressed and confused for a little while, but soon decided that my feet were an excellent substitute for Flo's. She stuck to them like glue, refusing to go out with anyone else. At least it kept me healthy, taking her for her constitutional around the Park and along the riverside. One day, I went out, leaving Floss with Ken, my husband. He was going out too, in the car. At the time, we had no garage, and the car was parked in a rented space in a large garage off St Runwald's Street - a garage that had once belonged to the Cups Hotel. Not wanting to leave the dog on her own at home for very long, he collected the car and went home to pick her up. Returning to St Runwald's Street sometime later, he put on the Cossack style hat knitted for him in grey boucle wool by my mother (not the most flattering of garments) picked up a large bunch of privet he had gathered for my younger daughter's stick insects and his briefcase and opened the car door, intending to put Floss on her lead. As quick as a flash, she was out and away, dashing home to find me, as fast as her legs could carry her. She ran up West Stockwell Street and into High Street, where, frightened by so many pedestrians, she decided that it was safer to run down the middle of the road. Ken followed, in hot pursuit, briefcase in one hand, privet in the other, hat askew. Down the High Street he puffed, also in the middle of the road, yelling "Flossie, Flossie!!" at the top of his voice. He was to tell us afterwards that everyone stopped and stared - he never really appreciated why! Luckily I had returned. I was at home, preparing lunch, when I heard a noise at the front door. I opened it, and there, on the step, was Flossie. I let her in, wondering where on earth she had come from. A few moments later, an exhausted and dishevelled husband knocked on the door. "Is she here?" he gasped, still clutching the privet twigs. "Yes," I said, calmly "I wondered where you had got to." Two or three years later, neither Flossie nor Ken would have stood much of a chance. High Street had become something of a racetrack. At night it was awful as boy racers circled the one way system. The alterations to the street a few years ago curbed that considerably. Now plans are afoot to change the High Street once again. I wonder what conclusions will be drawn. Will the High Street be pedestrianised? We must remember that our town centre has moved south, away from the High Street, over an alternative east west route, Culver Street and the area that was once occupied by a large engineering factory - yes, I remember that too! We have our pedestrianised area there. I remain unconvinced about the practicalities of closing the High Street to traffic. On face value, it appears a reasonable idea, but the absence of an east-west route through the town centre itself bothers me. One begins to think about the pressure on poor Brook Street. And what about all those elderly people coming in from the country by car because their bus service is so poor. Most are not eligible for a blue badge, but find walking uphill from our car parks hard (it is not until you are old that you realise there are slopes all over our town centre!) Many people are dropped and picked up in High Street. And what about servicing the shops? The larger multinational shops can probably arrange out of hours deliveries, but the small, local traders, the ones we must not lose if we are to retain our character, may well struggle. There is much to consider. I wonder how far the discussions have got?

SOCIETY'S ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING– Monday 18th May 2009

This is an edited version of the Chairman's report to the meeting.

Glancing at last year's report, I see that I began by reporting the Executive Committee's intention to have an "Away Day" to examine, with a facilitator, probably from the Civic Trust, a way forward for the Society. We felt that we needed to review what we were doing and examine ways to refresh and revitalise the Society. Unfortunately, the Civic Trust was unable to help us. Approaches were made to other potential facilitators but this is still work in progress. However, it did prompt us, in the interim, to organise our response to planning applications properly, and John Egan, Chair of our Planning Group, set up regular meetings at Angel Court where the Planning Group meet to discuss new applications. It is a system that is working well. The Planning Group have commented on, objected to or written to support a large number of applications during the year. Obviously, some of these applications are for new buildings, not so many this year. An extraordinary number relate to the night-time economy and/or licensed premises: applications for smoking areas - The Bull in Crouch Street and the Hippodrome where a roof terrace was to provide a smoking area; an extension at Nineteen in Head Street, a new bar in St Botolph's Street and, possibly, in Church Street, a takeaway on the corner of St Helena Road and Drury Road, to name but a few. Details appear elsewhere in the Newsletter. A vibrant nightlife in the town means that there is a great necessity to close the gates of vulnerable churchyards, especially those in residential areas where revellers gather, using the open spaces for all sorts of nefarious purposes, and disturb those living in the surrounding houses. The Society objected to the Council's cost saving move to leave St Mary's and St Martin's Churchyards open at night. And, whilst on the subject of cost saving, we also objected to the destruction of the rose beds and shrubberies on our roadside verges. Many of those were placed there to stop vehicles parking and no amount of daffodil planting will prevent that! We have raised the issue of signage too. We have objected to signs on buildings in, for example, Trinity Street, North Hill and Queen Street. Some signs have been put on listed buildings without planning consent, some are temporary banners that have become permanent. We have tackled, again, the huge and fast growing numbers of A boards that are now blocking our pavements and the chairs and tables outside bars and cafes which are appearing without permission. This has caused an interesting exchange between Essex County Council and Colchester Borough Council. Whose responsibility is it to monitor these? We will pursue the matter. John Egan was able to raise matters of concern to us all at the Local Transport Plan event earlier in the year. We remain as proactive as possible in discussions about traffic and transport issues and are looking forward to the results of the long awaited Historic Core Zone studies which are due imminently. These will, without doubt, provide some solutions to congestion in the town centre. I could carry on ad nauseam about the work of the Planning Group. I've only touched the surface here. But one final point that I will make. We have expressed our concern about the Council's decision not to have a dedicated conservation officer or a dedicated design champion. Colchester needs both!

Jonathan Pearsall, who joined the Executive Committee at the last AGM, took on the role of Footpath Officer. He was doing a superb job, but, unfortunately, had to tender his resignation a little while ago. We really miss him! Amongst other things, he did much to sort out that path at the bottom of Balkerne Heights, which has been the cause of considerable concern for some time.

Trees have caused some angst too. Our Planning Group and our Tree Group have been concerned the Council's slight laissez-faire attitude to trees in planning applications. Confusion about the role of both Essex and Colchester Councils towards tree preservation orders has not helped. The situation is being pursued. Incidentally, for various reasons, the planting of the black poplar beside the river in memory of Executive Committee member Joy Clark, has been postponed until this autumn.

The Executive Committee usually has review documents or strategies to consider each year. This year a small working party examined the Museum Services Review Document and made comments. I hope they were useful!

We work closely with the Museum Service each year to ensure that Heritage Open Days happen in the town. Thanks to the very hard work of Ann Turner, our Membership Secretary and Heritage Open Days Co-ordinator, many people, both local residents and visitors to the town were able to explore buildings and sites not normally open to the public.

As usual, we relied on the goodwill of members of the Society, who very kindly gave up their time to steward the properties. We thank them all. Heritage Open Days this coming year will be even more exciting. Watch this space!

Our Burning Issues and Spring Up meetings, where members have the opportunity to raise issues of concern to Colchester residents, gave us lots to consider. Matters raised at the Burning Issues meeting ranged in diversity from the condition and future of the old Odeon cinema in Crouch Street to the problems caused by urban foxes. Much of the Spring Up meeting was spent discussing the proposed Magistrates Court next to St Botolph's Station and the refurbishment of Lion Walk Shopping Centre. Members' views were sought and the Planning Group has already taken some action. Both Burning Issues and Spring Up help the Executive Committee formulate policy. Please try to attend these very important meetings and have your say.

The Society's educational and social programme continues to flourish. Not one but two holidays, the first a weekend in Harrow, staying at The Grims Dyke Hotel, erstwhile home of W.S. Gilbert, of Gilbert and Sullivan fame, where we were treated to a performance of "Patience" over dinner. We also visited the RAF Museum at Hendon and Harrow School during the weekend. Our second holiday was in East Kent, where we visited Pugin's house at Ramsgate, explored Sandwich and saw what can be done with spoil heaps, black and white - the black spoil heap from Betteshangar Colliery and white chalk from the Channel Tunnel have both been turned into country parks. We visited castles, had a cruise on the river and a ride on the miniature train to Dungeness! Apart from the holidays, we had a wonderful visit to Westminster Abbey, organised by our Vice President, John Burton, who is Surveyor to the Fabric of the Abbey. We toured three more Suffolk Churches with Roy Tricker, we had a fascinating tour of Frogmore Mill in Hemel Hempstead, an old paper mill still recycling paper. We had a delightful morning at Coggeshall Abbey and an extraordinary visit to Copped Hall at Epping. We toured Wembley Stadium, and, closer to home, had two visits to the Weston Homes Community Stadium in Colchester. We also visited the Essex Energy Village at the Cavalry Barracks. We have visited the Warner's Silk Museum and the Combined Military Services Museum at Maldon. Some of us climbed to the top of the church tower at Dedham and visited the amazing muniment room above the church porch before enjoying the wonderful works of Alfred Munnings at Castle House. We have had our lighter moments too; our Annual Dinner at Hall Farm, Stratford St Mary, a visit to London with a singing guide, which incorporated a visit to an old music hall in the midst of a very lengthy restoration (we saw the Christmas lights in Regent and Oxford Streets, too) and, of course, our New Year Party at St Annes Community Centre. The Party! What would we do without the incredible band of people who work so hard to make this a success. Thanks so much, all of you!

I have already mentioned our collaboration with the Museums for Heritage Open Days. We continue to work with other groups, sometimes formally, sometimes informally through the personal involvement of individual members of the Executive Committee. Ann and Jonathan are both Tourist Guides and we work closely, through them, with the Guides on Heritage Open Days, too. We have planned some joint outings with the Friends of the Minories, which helps both organisations. We maintain contact with the Colchester Chapter of the RIBA through our architect members, which is very useful. Additionally, we have attended meetings, often on an ad hoc basis, of other organisations, Destination Colchester, for example. We have joined the Friends of the Roman Circus. We continue to be represented at Colchester 2020, the Local Strategic Partnership, both through me, as a partner, and through the Assembly. The biennial Colchester 2020 and RIBA Architectural Awards, run in conjunction with Colchester Borough Council and the Colchester Civic Society, took place in the Autumn. The joint winners of the New Building category were the St Anne's Community Centre and the Ivor Crewe Lecture Hall at the University (named, of course, after one of our Vice -Presidents). Stable 7 at the Essex Eco Village won the Heritage (restoration) Project. Art in the Built Environment was won by the public loos in Lion Walk, A Sense of Place by Phases 1 and 2 of the Wellhouse Green development at West Mersea. The Centre for Brain Sciences at the University of Essex won the category for Sustainable Developments, a category sponsored by Pinstripe Creative. Some years ago, the Civic Society joined with other societies dear to the heart of one of our founder members, John Bensusan Butt, to raise money for a memorial to him. Visitors to the Mayor's Parlour will see a display cabinet containing a book from the Harsnett Library, which was bought with some of the money raised. The decision has been made to spend the residue on a bench for the garden at the Minories, his former home.

One organisation with whom we will have no more contact is the Civic Trust, which, unfortunately went into administration recently. We are still coping with the fallout and will report back anon. Attempts had been made

To keep the organisation going - Griff Rhys Jones had been appointed as President to give the Trust a high profile, an appeal had been launched - we sent information out to all our members - but it was to no avail. The Trust was our link with national government. It also supported our Regional Associations. The East of England Association of Civic Trust Societies, of which the Colchester Civic Society is a very active member, hopes to continue, albeit in a slightly different form. This is incredibly valuable to us. Apart from giving us a forum in which to discuss concerns with other local Civic Societies, it also provided the vehicle that we need to influence regional policy. It has a representative on the East of England Environmental Forum, for example. It remains to be seen how the organisation will operate in the future, but we wish it every success.

Our membership remains fairly static in numbers. When I became Chair, my mission was to double the membership and I am failing dismally. I'd like to challenge you all to recruit a couple of new members in the coming year! I don't care how old they are, but a few under 40 would be good! We are having some problems on the Executive Committee, too, as our numbers decrease, hence the motion that is before you this evening (to reduce the quorum at committee meetings). There are so many things that we would like to do, but we haven't enough people on the Committee to do them! We would love some willing volunteers. If you don't want to commit yourselves this evening, have a think, come to a meeting if you wish and see what happens. We can always co-opt you later! We are so lucky to have members who help with things like Heritage Open Days, the party, one off events that crop up. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you, once again, for all that you do for the Society. We hope to have the opportunity to thank you again later in the year. More anon!

And I must thank the Executive Committee for all their hard work during the year. They really are great and so supportive. Nothing is too much trouble. Elisabeth does a superb job as Secretary, with Austin providing back-up. What a partnership! Austin is like a ferret - he can find important snippets and reports in the depths of the most obscure local and national government websites! Thanks, too, to Ann, who travels many miles to Colchester, often in appalling weather, to attend our meetings, who is our membership secretary, the sender out of Newsletters and who works so hard for Heritage Open Days and to Paul, our Treasurer, waiter and washer up extraordinaire. Thanks are due to our Planning Group, Dave, Brian and Austin, with occasional advice from Andrew and John Burton, convened by John Egan. John has also taken on the Editorship of the Newsletter again! I'm so relieved that we have an Editor to replace Pam Nelson, who, unfortunately, had to give up through pressure of work - our thanks to her too! Thanks to Jonathan - we are so sorry that he couldn't remain with us. A local County Councillor was really looking forward to working with him! And thanks to Christine and Ray. Thanks too, to the Social Committee, and others, who help so willingly at the Party.

Finally, we were very saddened to hear of the death of Barbara Hines, a very long-standing and loyal member of the Society, whose husband, Judge Hines, was a great help to the Society many years ago when he took a very active role in several important inquiries. We heard recently that Barbara had made a sizeable bequest to the Society. We will ensure that the money is spent wisely.

And that concludes my report, which I hope you will accept. The report was accepted.

Our treasurer, Paul Weston presented the accounts which showed a small excess of income over payments. The accounts were accepted.

Details of the current members of the committee are on page 2 of this Newsletter. The committee is delighted that Professor Colin Reardon, Vice-Chancellor, University of Essex has agreed to join his predecessor, Professor Sir Ivor Crewe and John Burton as vice-presidents.

After the formal business of the meeting, there was an interesting and informative talk by Jonathan Rochford of Groundwork about their work in Colchester and further afield, building safer and stronger communities.

NEW MEMBER

Ann Turner

We are glad to welcome Mrs Caroline Bridge of Leavenheath as a new member.

THE CIVIC TRUST

In her annual report, Jo Edwards mentioned that the Civic Trust had gone into administration. The following letter from Philip Kolvin sets out the reasons for the decision.

April 16, 2009

Dear Members,

As many of you will be aware, The Civic Trust's financial position has come under severe pressure since the loss of the Green Flag contract last summer. Despite this, the financial forecasts for the Trust have been that the Trust would maintain its solvency through the course of the current financial year. However, a number of recent events have caused a revision of those forecasts. These have included a failure to attract sufficient funding from Purple Flag, poor results from the fundraising appeal to our membership, a significant drop in the number of BizFizz and High Street UK programmes won in recent months, and an unsuccessful bid to the Empowerment Fund.

The Trustees have been examining ways of addressing this shortfall. Some restructuring of the Trust's support activities were implemented earlier in the year and a sub-contract with ENCAMS to run the Green Flag Award scheme for part of the current year has provided some relief. However, it has become clear that severe funding constraints being imposed on local authorities and our other current and potential funders as a result of the credit crunch will mean that even our current, modest financial forecast for the next few months is unlikely to be achieved.

The Trustees met yesterday to consider a number of options for the Trust's future. These included a potential merger with another organisation or dramatically scaling back the number and scope of our programmes. They have with great regret concluded that the Trust will not be able to continue to operate on a solvent basis and resolved to place the Trust into Administration.

This has been an agonising decision. The Trustees are acutely aware of the Trust's fifty two year history and legacy. We are extremely conscious of our obligations to members, staff, donors and other stakeholders. Because of these responsibilities, the Trustees believe it is essential that this action is taken now. Working with the Administrator we aim to ensure that, where possible, key programmes currently in place are handed over to other organisations to continue delivery with the minimum of disruption.

I appreciate this news will come as a shock and there will be understandable anger and disappointment that the outcome was not otherwise. With more than 700 active societies across the country, the Civic Society movement will continue and thrive. The Civic Trust, in its current form can no longer provide the national voice but there may be other structures or organisations which can. The Trustees have identified possible options for how ongoing support can be provided for the Civic Societies Programme and will make recommendations to the Administrator; however, it will be for the Administrator to determine whether or not these options are feasible. Once the Administrator has had time to consider the situation, the Civic Society designated Trustees, Kevin Trickett, Peter Diplock, Peter Cooper and Hilary Silvester, will meet with the National Committee, as representatives of the movement, to discuss what actions might be appropriate.

On a personal note, I wish to express the greatest regret that it has not been possible to keep the organisation afloat. The simple reality is that the Trust was heavily reliant on the Green Flag Award scheme and Biz Fizz. While the loss of the first of those programmes was sustainable, the loss of Biz Fizz income, largely caused by the squeeze on local authority spending in the current climate, was not.

So far as the civic societies are concerned, I am, as I have always been, suffused with admiration for their expertise, their endeavour and the contribution they make. The difficulty with which I and the Board have grappled is that the amount generated by Civic Society subscriptions is wholly inadequate to sustain even a skeletal movement. There was a need to increase income from societies four-fold to put in place the most basic elements of a national movement – being press, policy, campaigning, web and education functions. That proved impossible in circumstances in which we did not have even individual contact details for members and there was no proper fund-raising function or capability within the organisation. I am very proud of what we have managed – having greatly improved hard and electronic communications, established a civic societies web-site, introduced a good programme of training for civic societies, secured a high profile President for the organisation, and begun to engage societies with a vision of what may be possible if only a better nexus could be found between individual

between individual societies themselves and between them and the Trust. However, pulling off what we did against the declining economic function of the Trust was always a race against time, and ultimately time was against us. Furthermore, I am acutely aware of the disjuncture between many societies and central office, which I suspect has long beleaguered the organisation.

I still passionately believe in the civic movement, but it now needs grassroots members of vision and energy to start afresh with a new organisation, working within its means and building gradually from the bottom, rather than relying on the efforts of a relatively remote corporate structure. These observations are intended as a frank appraisal of what we have done and what we failed to do. At all times, however, I and my fellow trustees have done our utmost to deliver the charitable objectives of this organisation. If they can be carried forward, albeit in a new format, nothing would give us greater pleasure. I salute the civic societies and wish them increasing success in the future.

Philip Kolvin QC

On behalf of Trustees

DO WE NEED A “NEW CIVIC TRUST”?

John Egan

Many civic societies existed before the formation of the Civic Trust in 1957. There was a Colchester Civic Society in existence before the Second World War.

About ten years ago, the Civic Trust encouraged civic societies to set up regional organisations, which we did in the East of England. Colchester Civic Society has always played an active part in the East of England Regional body.

Your committee is agreed that some form of upper tier organisation would be useful but we remain unsure whether this should be a strong regional body, co-operating with other similar regional teams or a strong central body, like the Civic Trust. We will consider what we need to help us be as effective a civic society as possible, take part in the debate and decide later this year.

If any member has strong views on this, please let the committee know.

CIVIC SOCIETY INITIATIVE

This extract from the Civic Society Initiative’s website explains an attempt being made to investigate the setting up of a successor body to the Civic Trust. See <http://www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk>.

In essence the purpose of the Civic Society Initiative is a simple one – to establish the means within twelve months to ensure provision of a national voice and support for the civic society movement.

The loss of the Civic Trust has prompted a groundswell of support for the civic society movement. Messages of support and practical offers of help have been received from a large number of professional bodies, local authorities, voluntary and charitable organisations and others. Over 500 civic societies have already said they want to be kept in touch with the future arrangements for supporting societies and providing a champion for the movement.

It is clear that many share the view that the civic society movement is too important for it to lose its national voice. The role of societies and local community action is as important now as it was when the Civic Trust was set up. This is the sentiment at the heart of the package of measures now being put in place to allow a range of options for the future health of the civic society movement to be explored and assessed.

A full range of options will need to be examined but three things are clear:

- The civic society movement needs an independent champion
- The movement needs to be supported as a network where the voice of individual societies and local groups can be strengthened
- The future needs to be rooted in what the societies want and they need to drive the way forward.

The core package for establishing the Civic Society Initiative which has emerged is as follows:

- One year's funding donated by the National Trust for Tony Burton to lead the Initiative
- Office accommodation and in-kind support donated by CPRE (in London) and the RIBA (in Liverpool)
- A charitable "home" to receive funds and provide governance through the North of England Civic Trust
- A civic society convention supported by Blackpool Council and hosted by Blackpool Civic Trust in October 2009
- English Heritage will deliver Heritage Open Days in 2009.

While there has been no decision as to whether a new organisation is even needed, it is essential that the solution meets the needs of the civic societies and other similar community groups. A top down solution will not work. The Civic Society Initiative will take an open approach and explore a full range of possibilities for the movement.

ROOM WITH A VIEW

Jim Edwards

Are we, as suggested by the "Daily Rage" and its ilk, living in a surveillance society? Are the particular human rights they hold so dear being ravaged? Has Big Brother finally arrived? Not if you are middle aged and legless in Priory Street at 1.30am on a Sunday morning! A couple of hours before seagulls landed noisily to finish off the jetsam of fast food decorating the car park and before the dawn chorus finally ushered the dregs of the club-goers out of earshot of our front door, I witnessed, yet again, the delights of town centre living. Three couples in their late thirties or early forties celebrated their night on the town by spending a quarter of an hour trying to change the shape of a roadworks sign by massaging it, none too gently, on the road and on a convenient lamppost. Now, they may have been a troupe of avant-garde artistes practising their Turner Prize entry, but their next activity, throwing the shopping trolley, suggests that, far more likely, they were training for the Olympics! All the while, these heroes of the night-time economy managed to maintain a cacophony of shouts, screams and giggles that would have done credit to any group of amplified fourth form girls, and that was just the men! The women, however, had the decibel count championship won by a mile! After another fifteen minutes, they moved, in fairly random fashion, along the street until they reached the car park entrance just past our house. Here a sign announcing new parking charges confronted them. Were they just irked by the thought of losing more valuable beer money or was there a more justified citizens' protest in their attempts to annihilate another sign? This time, the sign being chained to a post thwarted them. Previous experience of sign bending/throwing/stealing has taught the Council lessons that road contractors have yet to learn. Anyway, the point of this is to demonstrate that whatever political camp you come from, righteous right or liberal left, the State's eyes in Priory Street will not interfere with or hinder your ability, or anyone else's, to ruin the sleep of local residents. Throughout the episode, the CCTV cameras on which we are told we can rely to secure our peace and property, remained, unerringly, as usual, focussed on the empty parts of our "temporary" car park! Come to Priory Street for your after drinking fun! Your civil rights will be quite safe!

MEDIEVAL COLCHESTER'S LOST LANDMARKS

Ann Turner

John Ashdown-Hill has made an in depth study of the life and times of Sir John Howard, later Duke of Norfolk and his connections with medieval Colchester. Some of what has been discovered has been used to write a book illustrating Colchester in the late medieval times.

A lot of what he has to tell us in the book has disappeared so the title of the book is appropriate. From what is told it is possible to picture life in Colchester in medieval times. It is interesting that then, as now, there were problems of people leaving litter in the town but at that time it was dung heaps so not only are we given a picture of the town but we can also smell it. The book is well written and there are plenty of illustrations.

As a tour guide I found the book very useful and there are a number of fine points that I shall be adding to my tours. I shall also try and find some of the lost sites that were shown to us.

This is a period of history that is difficult to study unless you are able to read medieval handwriting or understand Latin so I thank Mr Ashdown-Hill for bringing this book out. I shall recommend it to all the other Colchester guides.

Author: John Ashdown-Hill

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This article is reproduced, with the author's permission, from the Newsletter of the Colchester Bus Users Support Group, as a contribution to the debate on this subject.

THE TRUTH ABOUT PARK & RIDE

Peter Kay

Bus-based Park & Ride schemes have been in operation in this country since the 1970s, and local authorities' enthusiasm for them shows no sign of abating. The main reasons for this seem to be that they are readily achievable (*pace* Colchester!) within the UK transport policy framework, popular with the public, and (to date) audibly opposed by hardly anybody (except where an inappropriate site is chosen for the terminal, as at Eight Ash Green). The general public assumption is that P&R is needed to reduce the amount of traffic in the inner area. However in practice many P&Rs have achieved very little on that front. They can only do so if the amount of town centre parking is reduced after the P&R starts (which in turn may be difficult to achieve if a large percentage of it is privately owned). Also, some local authorities have quite deliberately used P&R not to reduce traffic but as a means of increasing the number of people able to access the town centre (which can be considered a legitimate aim, but is a very different thing). Colchester has promised that it *will* reduce town centre parking after P&R starts – the proof of that will be in the eating!

Much research has now been done on the actual impacts of UK P&R schemes. Alas, hardly any local authority officers or councillors seem to have read any of it, and they continue to propagate long-disproved notions in consequence. The truth about P&R is much less palatable than the myths. The principal long-term impact of P&R schemes is to encourage wholly car-based lifestyles, by making it easier for people to live in villages or small towns at a distance from where they work, whereas people who live closer to work in the suburbs are left with the 'old' options of high parking charges in town centre car parks, or using 'real' public transport at higher fares than P&R users pay. Indeed research done in Oxford, which has the oldest-established major P&R system, shows that an increasing % of P&R users are people who have deliberately moved house further out because the P&R lifestyle was more pleasant. These people of course drive far more miles per week than they did when they lived in the suburbs!

However there are plenty of immediate damaging impacts as well, particularly for 'real' public transport operations and their users. To get motorists to use P&R, the charges have to be very low. Most UK P&Rs have been a 'success' in the sense of attracting the hoped-for usage level, but none have been able to operate at a profit, and most make a large loss, equivalent to a public subsidy of £1 - £1.50 per user per day. But as UK transport policy expects most weekday daytime 'real' bus services to operate on a purely commercial basis, the *unsubsidised* 'real' buses running in the same corridor as the P&R have to charge much higher fares! In the circumstances it is hardly surprising that all surveys show that, when a P&R starts, most of those who were previously going into town by train or bus but who have a car available to them, immediately switch over to the subsidised P&R, and again as a result start driving more miles per week than before. The temptation to change to P&R is the greater given the usual motorists' assumption that their car journey from home to the P&R terminal doesn't 'cost' anything. The number of P&R users 'abstracted' from real public transport varies between 10% and 40%, depending on local circumstances. At the higher levels the damage to local public transport can be serious.

There are no bus-based P&Rs in the biggest conurbations, because they have sizeable rail networks, and it is a long-established practice for people to drive to the nearest station and travel by train to the city centre. This too is of course 'park & ride', but it is a very different thing merit wise to remote-terminal bus-based P&R, because the motorists are in this case *strengthening* 'real' public transport. It would of course be possible to have bus-based P&R that operated on the same basis, i.e. (to give a local context example) there could be P&R car parks at Chappel, White Colne, Earls Colne, and Halstead east side, where motorists from the surrounding area parked to use an improved 88 bus route into Colchester. This would be a much more effective way of reducing car mileage than having the same motorists travelling separately one behind the other to a P&R terminal on the outskirts of Colchester! But no such scheme has ever been tried in the UK. The reasons, no doubt, are (1) because of the longer distance travelled on the bus, the fares that would have to be charged to P&R motorists would be 'too high' (2) it would be less appealing to the average middle-class motorist because they would be seen to be travelling on something too much like a real bus rather than an apartheidist motorist-only bus.

In essence, then, most P&Rs are a system for using public money to encourage people to become more car-dependent, to damage public transport to a lesser or greater extent, and in some cases to actually increase net car mileage. [The last depends on how much abstraction from public transport there is]. It is not surprising, then, that all 'green' groups are now heavily anti-P&R. But it has so far proved impossible to get the true situation through to more than 1% of the public, even in such sophisticated places as Cambridge York and Oxford. Moreover, now that every waffling local authority has latched on to the idea that they must claim to be 'green', they are now putting

out the Big Lie that P&R is 'green'. Witness the current Essex publicity for the second Chelmsford P&R at Essex Yeomanry Way, which is repeatedly referred to as part of the county's 'sustainable transportation strategy'.

Let us now look at the results of Essex's first P&R at Chelmsford (Sandon), opened in 2006. Unlike Norfolk CC, which has suppressed the facts about its P&R usage to cover up the point that significant abstraction from local rail services has occurred, ECC have published the results of a 2008 survey at Sandon. This shows Mon-Fri usage of just over 1,000 people (700 on Sats). 82% of users formerly travelled into the town centre by car, 12% formerly used bus throughout (mostly from the Maldon area), and 6% formerly used train (mostly from Kelvedon and Witham). Thus even at this site, where one would not have expected a particularly bad abstraction element, 18% of users were abstracted from public transport. [National guidance on P&R instructs local authorities to pay attention to the risk of abstraction when planning a P&R scheme, but it is clear that Essex aren't interested in this – the list of potential 'problems' with the Essex Yeomanry Way scheme doesn't even mention abstraction]. The P&R costs £2.20 per person per day, or £42 for a monthly ticket (compare the 'real' bus pass cost from Great Baddow of £58 for a month). P&R income for 2007/8 was £573,000, and operating costs £750,000, resulting in an operating deficit of £177,000. However one must add to this the interest on the £5.5m construction costs, say £275,000 a year – so the real loss is around £450,000 a year. If this was a railway line it would never have survived Dr Beeching! Instead it is now to be extended from 925 places to 1,425.

Our own concern, obviously, is with the likely impact of the Colchester proposals. The Eight Ash Green site did not seem likely to result in a particularly high level of abstraction, given that the rail service from this direction is not very convenient for Colchester town centre, and that it is unlikely that very many current 70 71 and 88 users have cars available. The Cuckoo Farm site is more difficult to quantify as it is not easy to foresee what % of the users will come from 'A12 west', A134 corridor, 'A12 north', or A120 Tendring. It also has to be borne in mind, as part of the overall politics, that there is a desperate need for a bus priority corridor between North Colchester and the town centre, and that we are not likely to actually get this (given that local authorities actually regard motorist P&R bus passengers as far more important people than real bus passengers) unless it is needed for the P&R as well. Furthermore, had we decided to oppose *all* the Colchester P&Rs as anti-public transport, which it could be said we 'ought' to have done in principle, we would almost certainly have been disregarded as incomprehensible eccentrics.

Our opposition has therefore been directed solely towards the third, eastern ('University') Park & Ride. This is a most peculiar animal. Colchester's 2001 New Transport Strategy, the current Essex Local Transport Plan, and most other policy documents of recent years, have all stated that the policy for Tendring is to have a *rail-based* park and ride, i.e. to enlarge the station car parks and introduce a better train service between Clacton / Walton and Colchester Town. This would be an excellent scheme, enhancing local public transport and producing a big reduction in car mileage. For reasons never revealed, though, nobody at either CBC or ECC has ever thought that it might be a good idea to DO anything about it. On top of that, CBC has actually been promoting a *rival* scheme for a bus-based P&R somewhere off the A133 near the University, and ECC has done nothing to stop them. This would be one of the most destructive P&Rs ever seen in the UK, as it would result in massive abstraction from local bus and rail services (why should anyone pay £7 to travel from Clacton to Colchester by train when it can be done for '£2' on a subsidised P&R?). Instead of being improved, the rail service would be pushed into a spiral of decline. The Wivenhoe – Colchester bus service would be particularly hard hit, as the fare on the P&R would again inevitably be much less than on the 'real' buses. There would also be a big increase in net car mileage. In 2007/8 this scheme came into the open when it was included in CBC's 'Core Strategy'. It was opposed by C-BUS (and nobody else!) at the public inquiry, and the independent inspector had no hesitation in striking it out, firstly because it was in conflict with the Local Transport Plan, and secondly because it was clear that no investigation had been done of its pros and cons. So, a victory for the moment – but we all know that these schemes stick in the drawers.

GLADYS MAY MOTTERSHAW

We are sad to report the death on 2nd May of Mrs Mottershaw, who at 103 was believed to be our oldest member. She was not born in the town, having been born in Yorkshire, and had lived in many places before settling here, latterly at Balkerne Gardens. We send our condolences to her family.

VISIT TO SOUTH ELMHAM HALL

Jean Budd

On a cloudless day, we found ourselves winding down country lanes which got narrower as we went deeper into rural Suffolk, to the ancient site of South Elmham and its Grade 1 listed, moated Hall.

Now a working farmhouse, the building over the last 20 years had been beautifully restored by its owner, third generation farmer, John Sanderson. He met us in the attractive courtyard where we had coffee in the company of crowing cockerels chasing their harem of hens, surrounded by the tallest and most magnificent trees I have seen. We were later to learn they were many hundreds of years old.

In his introductory talk he told us, that when taking over the farm from his father, he decided to diversify the business, restore the property and research the amazing history. He then took us on a tour of approximately 3 acres enclosed within the quadrangular moat, which gave us the opportunity to view the L-shaped timber framed building from the outside, while he explained the structures and changes which had taken place over 700 years. The main part of the Hall is a stone range of the late 13th century that measures 14m x 8m internally and may have been a chamber block attached to a now vanished open hall.



South Elmham Hall

The Hall was one of the country seats or ‘palaces’ of the medieval Bishops of Norwich, starting with Herbert de Losinga, founder of Norwich Cathedral and located at the heart of a deer park, which was used as a hunting lodge. Medieval documents refer to numerous structures here also; a chapel, cloister, stables, kitchen, bakery, laundry, wellhouse, dairy and dovecote. It was not a surprise to learn that ‘Time Team’ had carried out “geophysics” in the grounds. It was grand enough to entertain royalty; Edward II stayed and conducted affairs of state here in 1362 while on his way to Norwich. The Hall became Bishop William Bateman’s favourite property and when he founded Trinity Hall, Cambridge, in 1350, the documents were drawn up at Elmham. With the restoration in 2001 of the complex of barns to provide a restaurant, bar, conference and wedding venue, the area surrounding the courtyard became ‘Bateman’s Barn’ in his memory. By one of the two bridges over the moat was a ruined gatehouse, a tall tower thought to have been built by Bishop Despenser who suppressed the Peasants Revolt in Norfolk and in 1399, tried a Lollard for heresy in a court at South Elmham.

With the dissolution of the monasteries, the Manor was granted to Lord North by Henry VIII and sold by him in 1617. Following two further sales, it was finally tenanted in 1842. The second tenant was J Sanderson in 1906, the present owner’s grandfather, and he was able to purchase the farm in 1921.

We then went into the house and using the enormous kitchen with its huge exposed beams as our base, we split into two groups for a tour of the marvellous interior, the most impressive feature being the 13th century wall paintings which occur on both the ground and first floors. The former first floor grand hall (now subdivided into en-suite bedrooms for paying guests) contains the earliest domestic wall paintings in Suffolk, the best preserved section being in one of the lavatories! We were to learn that it is the presence of such wall paintings that enable the house to achieve a Grade 1 listing.

We returned to the courtyard for a delicious lunch, after which we were taken through the farm and round its ancient meadows to the ruin of the Old Minster. This was set deep inside ancient woodland in a clearing or earthwork that was thought to be of Roman origin and the seat of the Anglo-Saxon See of Elmham. But although described as “one of the most enigmatic and romantic ruins in England” many of us were happy to leave as we were being attacked mercilessly by mosquitoes!

On our return to the coach we stopped to enjoy the tranquil scene of grazing rare British White Cattle together with brown Simmental cows. The farm of 455 acres, managed under a Government Stewardship Agreement, is mostly arable: cereals, wheat, barley, sugar beet, oilseed rape and peas. We watched the ultra-modern equipment bale hay for silage and learnt that only one part-time and two full-time employees are needed to do all the work!



Batemans Barn

COLCHESTER'S CARING PAST

John Egan

A unique display of images and memorabilia highlighting the medical and social history of Colchester is being developed for permanent view in the Primary Care Centre on Turner Road.

The exhibition, which is due to open on Wednesday August 12th, will feature many fascinating and historic photographs, drawings and printed items recalling the great and good professionals who have cared for the community over the past 150 years.

The exhibition is being prepared by volunteers from the Colchester Medical Society who have worked to research and select items from an archive collection started in the 1960s by the late Dr John Penfold of Essex County Hospital.

From August 12th the exhibition will be open Mondays to Fridays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission will be free.

ESTATE AGENTS SURVEY BACKS VALUE OF CONSERVATION AREAS

A survey of estate agents in the East of England by English Heritage shows that people value conservation areas because of their special character and appearance, that they are prepared to pay higher prices for properties in well-kept conservation areas and that they want this local heritage to be protected for their own and future generations to enjoy.

The poll of estate agents was done in the run-up to the launch of this year's English Heritage at Risk register on Tuesday 23 June, 2009. The focus this year was on Conservation Areas at Risk and English Heritage when announcing the results of the first ever study into the condition of over 1,190 historic conservation areas in the East of England also launched a campaign to help residents and councils work together to improve these special places.

Conservation areas are designated by local authorities after public consultation. They vary enormously and could include historic towns or villages, streets of well-preserved 1930s semi-detached houses or old industrial areas.

Conservation areas found to be at the highest risk of neglect, decay or being spoilt by unsympathetic changes will be identified so that local councils and communities can prioritise actions and resources to improve them.

Now the views of estate agents have given added weight to the push to see our most cherished and distinctive neighbourhoods safeguarded. English Heritage teamed up with market researchers BDRC to quiz estate agents on the link between property values and conservation areas. The results show that:

- * three-quarters of estate agents believe that a well-maintained conservation area adds to the value of the properties within it - confidence in the area retaining its character and the attractiveness of the environment were the two key reasons cited
- * 82% felt that original features tend to add financial value to properties and 78% believed they helped a property to sell more quickly
- * nearly 50% reported that residential properties within conservation areas were selling for more than equivalent properties outside.

David Stebbens of Watsons Estate Agents in Norwich, who took part in the survey, said: "Properties in conservation areas tend to sell for more because they tend to be more attractive and in sought after locations."

Simon Knight, of Cooper Hirst Estate Agents in Chelmsford, who also took part, said: "Conservation area status means that the planning system can ensure the character of the area is maintained."

John Scott, of Scott Madison in Colchester, said that the single most damaging thing a homeowner can do to their property in terms of reducing its financial value is to destroy its original character by removing features such as fireplaces and he would tell a prospective purchaser that "There is an overall duty of care and protection from the local authority".

As well as identifying the chief threats to conservation areas, this year's Heritage at Risk register listed for the East of England all the Grade I and II* historic buildings at risk, all the scheduled monuments at risk, all the historic parks, gardens and landscapes at risk and even the registered battlefields and protected wrecks at risk - the most comprehensive picture yet compiled into the state of the region's heritage treasures.

Heritage at Risk is supported by heritage insurer Ecclesiastical, which is proud to be associated with English Heritage in its campaign to save the nation's historic environment.

The society's planning group continues to meet regularly to look at planning applications and to comment when we consider it necessary. This is not easy. The council's planning website is difficult to navigate, descriptions of documents are often uninformative and large plans often appear on screen so heavily reduced in size as to be impossible to understand. In addition, the website is being improved, which has caused us many problems. Senior councillors are aware and express concern but have not been able to bring about a speedy solution. However, we persevere.

There are several recurring issues in applications we have examined in the past few months: fascias and signage, shutters and backland development. The council is in the process of adopting a Supplementary Planning Document on Backland & Infill Development, which we hope will help to clarify the acceptability of this type of development for the benefit of developers, architects and ourselves.

The most notable of the backland developments that we commented upon was to put two additional dwellings on the site on the corner of North Station Road and Cowdray Avenue, alongside the Albert. This was refused.

We objected unsuccessfully to a new fascia at KFC in High Street; also to two applications for signage on North Hill, which have not yet been decided. Applications for shutters have been refused at a dress shop in Eld Lane and a jewellers on the corner of Crouch Street and Head Street. We had some sympathy with the latter as the new shop replaced an empty one which was a blot on the streetscape. We hope that some satisfactory outcome can be negotiated, since we see that need for security during hours when the shop is closed.

The most important applications to be approved recently were those concerning the Lion Walk precinct. We are delighted to see an expansion of the retail space in the town centre at the expense of offices and had no objection to the removal of the bridge over Dolland & Aitchison although we felt that the new first floor retail space fronting Culver Street East could have been better designed. Our main issue was the plan to re-point much of the brickwork with paler mortar and replace some of the hanging slate. We could not convince the planning committee and can only hope that the result is better than we fear.

The growth of the pub trade in the town centre continues to cause annoyance to residents and many visitors. We were unsuccessful in objecting to the change of use of the first and second floors at 17 Head Street to A4 (drinking establishment) use but were successful in opposing extended hours in the new bar at 21 Osborne Street. We have again objected to A4 use for the Whybrows offices in Church Street, although we do not have any problems with the building becoming a restaurant. At the planning committee meeting conditions were imposed which should ensure that the premises do not become solely a drinking establishment.

We supported the application for a new convenience store with residential accommodation above it in Wimpole Road and this was approved.

We, again, successfully joined many others in objecting to a hotel in Cherry Tree Grove. The town may need another hotel but not here!

We are concerned that the development of a care home in St Fillan Road may cause on street parking to increase and upset nearby residents, as may a plan for more student accommodation at Avon Way. We objected to the design of a block of 24 flats in Clarendon Way, which we think will be bland and uninteresting.

The main planning issue outstanding is the new Court Building by Town Station. We feel that there was insufficient consultation and that the design is not appropriate for the site. Such a design might sit well on a green-field site but fails to function as a meaningful urban form. If members share our concern, tell your councillors. A copy of our response appears on page 17.

VISIT TO DEDHAM – BELLS, PEWS & MUNNINGS

Peter Evans

This was a short drive to see the Church and Munnings Museum, in the nearby but often forgotten Dedham.

There was a warm welcome from the Reverend Moate in the church. He was a keen and knowledgeable guide, showing us the Dedham Library, a room above the porch. Now restored, it houses a lot of local information, collected by previous incumbents including the only surviving extracts from destroyed early parish registers. Rev Moate is researching a previous rector for a PhD.

He showed us recently discovered bullets shot by puritan agents in the 1640's trying to destroy church statues. There is also a Tom Keating painting featuring recent residents.

Entering the church, we were all impressed by the pale gold oaken pews. These, and indeed almost the entire church furnishings, were the work of Ken Mabbitt and his firm. Jo Edwards herself and the family were models for carvings.

We also climbed the tower with another guide, who later popped up at the Castle House. In the ringing chamber we all had a go at bell ringing – an added extra we had not expected. There is wonderful view from the tower over Dedham, and beyond to Harwich. The view makes it clear how houses were originally built sideways on to the main street, with later Georgian frontages.

After lunch, we moved on to the Alfred Munnings Museum. The museum had only recently received a number of paintings on loan to add to their already impressive collection. Whilst everybody thinks of Munnings as a painter of horses, both racing and hunting, we saw examples of his other work including sympathetic human figures. I particularly enjoyed his early commercial posters for varieties of Caley's and Colman's products from Norwich. In all his works he had captured not only the image but the spirit of the time.



The Museum, in the attractive Castle House - no sign of an actual Castle, however - is well worth the visit and having tea in the café surrounded by many of the posters ended a very pleasant visit.

WHY COLCHESTER NEEDS A BUS STATION

Tim Oxton

Tim Oxton was a co-ordinator of the Save Our Bus Station campaign, 2004 – 2006

Many people who live in town, if they use buses at all, only use them between their homes and the town centre, station or hospital. The bus station doesn't concern them, for they don't need to get off there. And for other destinations they use their cars.

But many others don't use cars. They can't afford one, or they can't drive, or they have chosen to do without. They still have to get about.

Suppose you live in Glensford and your relative is in hospital in Clacton. Or you live in Rowhedge and you work at Severalls Lane. Or you return from Peterborough, collect your dog from Tiptree, and then get home to Mersea. Or you live in Ardleigh and have an appointment at the General Hospital. Or you live in Monkwick and you are flying from Stansted airport. You need to change buses, without having to alight in one place and then board your onward bus elsewhere.

As the hub of north east Essex, Colchester has to serve its hinterland, including the towns and villages outside the borough. Otherwise, how will people get to its shops, theatres, museums, art galleries, pubs and restaurants? If they are heavily laden with shopping, why should they have to stand in the cold wind, obstructing the pavement, while waiting for buses back to their villages?

The bus station needs to be central, with all bus routes passing through or close by it. It must also accommodate coaches and long distance buses. Practical possibilities are:

1. Queen Street (present temporary bus station plus ex-Keddies building and/or the bus garage)
2. Osborne Street/Vineyard Street area (with or without Vineyard Gate development)
3. St Botolph's area (Colchester Town station or Britannia car park)

These all pose difficulties, but Colchester Borough and Essex County Councils must make their choice and then work together to solve them.

A LOCAL LIST FOR COLCHESTER

John Egan

Philip Crummy, Director of Colchester Archaeological Trust, has assembled a small team of people interested in putting together a list of Buildings, Structures and sites of Special Local Architectural, Archaeological or Historic Interest but which do not meet the criteria for National listing. The hope is that the list would be adopted by Colchester Borough Council as a Supplementary Planning Document [SPD].

Colchester Civic Society fully supports Philip's aim and is represented on the team.

Leading councillors and officers support the proposal, and we hope that the project will be underway in the next few weeks with a launch at the Town Hall.

A website is planned where nominated properties will be posted.

COURT BUILDING

This is the Society's submission to the borough council about the proposed new court building by Town Station.

Colchester Civic Society continues to support the inclusion of a new court building as part of the St Botolph's Regeneration Scheme but it should be one where the considerable expenditure produces a truly memorable outcome. This will be the most significant public building to be planned for this town for perhaps 100 years and it is therefore important that there should be a significant amount of public involvement and scrutiny. Unfortunately, this has not happened; Colchester Civic Society tried to get involved in pre-application consultation but was rebuffed, consultation being restricted to English Heritage and planning officers at Colchester Borough Council. It is also regrettable that no real effort has been made by either the applicants or the borough to encourage public involvement since the application was submitted.

Any building must not only serve its purpose but also impact positively upon its setting, in this case the conservation area, adjoining listed buildings such as the Town Railway Station, St Botolph's church and St Botolph's Priory and the town walls, which are scheduled ancient monuments. It will also have to relate to the yet to be designed Vineyard Gate Retail Development planned for the opposite side of St Botolph's Street.

Although English Heritage does not oppose the scheme, it is clear from their letter of 22nd July 2009 that they have strong reservations, "with regard to the treatment of the tower element" and "that there is need to create texture and interest and bring a human scale to this block". They also comment that, "Although in real terms it is not, at five generous storeys an abnormally high building, because of the scale of its neighbours it appears in the rendered images to be particularly bulky". The civic society shares these reservations.

We understand that a 'landmark building' has been requested with the intention that such a building should provide variety and orientation and follow the principles set out in the Essex Design Guide. It is sensible to mark Town station a little more emphatically but such a tall slab would confuse the urban form and be an unfortunate and unwelcome intrusion into its many long views. Even with a complex building it should be possible to organise its massing in a more sensitive way. Arranged as three random-looking boxes, it will fail to address the street. Such a design might sit well on a Greenfield site but fails to function as a meaningful urban form. Despite the tower like entrance block, the roofline is dull and monotonously horizontal with little of those features that enliven traditional Colchester. There is a bewildering confusion of window shapes and subdivisions that might produce a mirage like blurring over the surfaces.

We consider that the new building should be immediately recognised as a significant public building with an aura of justice but it has more the look of an educational building or even a small power station. Its architecture has no specific origin and could diminish Colchester's image as a significant historic town; the remembered impression of any town can be diminished and confused by such 'anywhere' structures. This building should be as memorable as the Town Hall or Jumbo and add to residents' and visitors' collective image of the place. The Town Hall is a good example of contemporary technology (a steel frame) being clad in a dignified

envelope to express its special function. We are not suggesting some Edwardian pastiche but the challenge remains: to provide a street scene of quiet dignity.

If everyone is determined to employ a distinctive 'fly tower' its profile and silhouette deserves more thought. The mono-pitch roof is a cliché of the 1960s and of a particularly aggressive shape. There are other ways of concluding a vertical accent, many of which can be seen in our existing skyline.

The St Botolph's Regeneration Scheme has been beset by problems: firstsite newsite years late and substantially over budget; Vineyard Gate years behind schedule and unable to deliver the promised Bus Station; the Cultural Quarter likely to be delivered piecemeal well after firstsite is ready. It is therefore vital that the court building should be right in all aspects; the borough cannot afford another mistake.

We fully support English Heritage's recommendation that "detailed planning permission should only be granted when your authority has satisfied itself that all the unresolved design aspects of this important proposal have been fully resolved."

The society hopes that they will be and remains prepared to take part in discussions which might lead to a positive outcome.

First of all, may I, as usual, remind everyone that, unless otherwise stated, our events are open to all, both members and non-members. Another reminder, the Society's insurance does not cover those over 80 years old. Obviously, if you are over 80, you are still more than welcome to join any of our events, but it must be at your own risk. We do apologise for this, but it is beyond our control. If you are in any doubt about whether you can manage a particular outing, please get in touch and I will tell you just what is involved.

St Ives - and Waitrose

I knew it! I knew it!! My sixth sense was in overdrive! I am jinxed by St Ives! Having confirmed all but one (important) little bit some time ago, and having, at last, managed to sort that out, I went back over my arrangements with everyone concerned, just to make that final check. It is something I always do, that double and treble checking. Thank goodness! "Everything alright for our visit?" "Oh, no, sorry, I'm going away on holiday that week. You'll have to arrange another date!" I have decided that I WILL NOT be beaten! I WILL take you all to St Ives if it's the last thing I do. Because the day is a bit complicated, I want to be there, and my availability is in doubt between now and September as Jim is hoping for his next operation shortly, so I am arranging a date for next year. I'll give you lots of notice. I am so sorry about this. It's beyond my control, I'm afraid.

Meanwhile, I'm in the process of arranging a visit to the new Waitrose in Colchester. I haven't got a date yet - it's too soon as they are not opening until September, but if you are interested, please complete the slip and I'll contact you with more information as soon as I have it.

Saturday 12th September and Sunday 13th September 2009 Heritage Open Days

We will need as many of you as possible to act as stewards at the buildings and sites open to the public over this weekend. It is great fun! Please volunteer by contacting Ann Turner whose address is on page 2 of this Newsletter.

Monday 21st September to Friday 25th September 2009 Our Annual Holiday in Manchester

As many of you know, this year's holiday will be in Manchester and Salford. I had hoped to stay at Worsley, but, unfortunately, I was so heavily gazumped that we are now going to the new Ramada at Salford Quays (so no golf course, sorry guys!) We will see as much as we can in a few days - the obvious visits to the Imperial Museum North and the Lowry, an optional evening visit to a working factory, a guided coach tour of Manchester, a zoom, by lift, up in the world for a spectacular view, (weather permitting) and, of course, a boat trip on the Bridgewater Canal - what holiday would be complete without a boat trip! We will also be able to attend choral evensong at Manchester Cathedral, and, hopefully, if all goes well, attend a performance by the Halle at Bridgewater Hall. This is a bit touch and go. Their dates won't be announced for several months but I have some insider knowledge! Trouble is, their plans may alter, so please don't hold me to it! Needless to say, we've been working on the tea and coffee stops. One is a bit bizarre but we will return to an old friend too. Finding a hotel has been an absolute nightmare. They are either incredibly expensive or really grotty. We've gone for the former but managed to knock the price down a bit - well, actually a tremendous amount. The cost is still horribly expensive - sorry - but it includes dinner, bed and breakfast, entrances, several guided tours, the boat trip and the Halle and morning coffee and afternoon tea on most days. I need to know immediately whether you are interested, as I have to give the hotel and Bridgewater Hall some accurate idea of our numbers. There are a number of single rooms but, if you are prepared to share with a friend, it may help! Please let us know on the slip.

Cost £525..

Saturday 7th November 2009 Meet at Colchester Bus Station at 8.30am for a visit to Rainham

Our visit to the recently opened RSPB Reserve at Rainham will, dare I most inappropriately say, kill two birds with one stone!! Not only will we be able to explore this fascinating area on the mediaeval marshes beside the Thames, but we will also have a guided tour of the new, award-winning visitor centre, something of an architectural masterpiece, which has a wealth of innovative “green” features. The reserve is a haven for huge flocks of wild ducks in the winter, but little egrets, curlews, lapwings, peregrines, ringed and golden plovers and water and rock pipits can also be seen on this erstwhile military firing range. The reserve is easy to access, with boardwalks throughout, but the huge picture windows in the visitor centre enable those who do not wish to venture out to see the marshes in comfort! There is a café, too! Please complete the slip if you would like to come.

Cost, to include morning coffee, £22.00

Tuesday 10th November 2009 Meet at St Botolph’s Parish Hall at 7.30pm for our Burning Issues Meeting

This meeting, which, like the Spring Up meeting, is open to all, is a further opportunity for you to raise matters of concern about your town. Please come, join the discussions and give your point of view. Lifts can be arranged.

Saturday 5th December 2009 Meet at Colchester Bus Station at 8.00am for an exploration of Food, Glorious Food in London

Our day starts with coffee near London Bridge. We will then take a short walk through “The Larder of London”, where butter, bacon, cheese and tea were unloaded from boats on the Thames, to Borough Market which has been a wholesale market for 1000 years. We will be there when farmers trade next to specialist shops. Stalls offer fruit, meat, fish, dairy products, beer and wine. A lot of the produce is organic and is in much demand, particularly by restaurateurs. Back on the coach, we tour London, looking at the history of eating out - jellied eels, pie and mash, hot chocolate and hotel teas. We stop at Covent Garden at lunchtime - find a café or eat a sandwich whilst watching the street entertainers. Then our tour continues before we stop at Fortnum and Mason where we will be free to explore the splendid food hall. There will be time for a cup of tea before rejoining our coach for our journey home via, of course, the Christmas Lights in Regent Street and a glimpse of those in Oxford Street too. This day provides an opportunity to stock up the larder for Christmas and to buy some unusual gifts. Please complete the slip if you are interested.

Cost £26.00

REPLY SLIPS

Please return slips with payment to Jo Edwards, 43 Priory Street, Colchester CO1 2QB. Her telephone number is 01206 868254. Cheques should be made payable to Colchester Civic Society.

Monday 21st September to Friday 25th September 2009 - Our Annual Holiday in Manchester

Cost £525.

I/We would like to come:

Name

Address

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Post Code.....Tel. No.

A cheque for £..... is enclosed as a deposit

Saturday 7th November 2009 - Visit to Rainham

Cost £22.00

I/We would like to come:

Name

Address

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Post Code.....Tel. No.

A cheque for £..... is enclosed

Saturday 5th December 2009 - An Exploration of Food, Glorious Food in London

Cost £26.00

I/We would like to come:

Name

Address

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Post Code.....Tel. No.

A cheque for £..... is enclosed

Visit to new Waitrose Store

I/We would like to take part:

Name.....

Address.....

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Post Code.....Tel. No.....