

Winter 2015



*Registered Charity 237885*

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for The Colchester Civic Society by Peter Evans.

Opinions expressed by contributors  
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## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT AGM 17th JUNE 2015

Thanks to The Minories for their hospitality for hosting the AGM.

Our last AGM on June 30th 2014 marked the start of our fiftieth anniversary year which has been a very busy one. On June 14th the nearest we could get to our actual fiftieth birthday on June 21st, members were invited to a tea party at the Upper Bowls Pavilion in Castle Park.

Thanks to Rosemary Jewers, a very talented researcher, Society members joined with Daniell family members at 8 East Hill, the home of Mr and Mrs Warner, to see the unveiling of the blue plaque to Colchester painter Frank Daniell which the Society had funded.

In spite of the best efforts of the Roman Wall Committee who had hoped that the East Gate interpretation board, which the Society had sponsored, would be unveiled in June it didn't finally arrive until November 21st. Thanks to the heroic efforts of Museum staff, it was in place by the next morning to be unveiled by Councillor Tim Young, Portfolio Holder for Culture. On this occasion we were then invited to coffee at Beacon House.

Our Birthday lunch at the Minories on November 30th completed our celebrations, or so we thought. Members who accepted the invitation to Greyfriars on June 8th enjoyed a splendid party. I have thanked Greyfriars for this unexpected and memorable end to our anniversary year.

It hasn't been all parties however. Thanks to a very experienced committee without whose support I would have often been at a loss, the Society has covered a lot of ground and achieved some at least of their aims for the year.

In spite of her husband's illness, Jo Edwards, as well as arranging another programme of visits, has been a tower of

strength. We are fortunate to have three committee members Ken Cooke, Ray Chandler and Henry Spyvee who between them have many years experience as Borough and District Councillors.

Our Treasurer, Paul Weston, also arranges hall bookings and serves us with welcome coffee and biscuits at committee meetings.

As well as dealing with membership subscriptions, Ann Turner arranges for the delivery of the newsletter, organises volunteers for Heritage Open Days Weekend and is compiling the history of the Society.

Austin Baines and Brian Roach are our planning subcommittee, to which Brian's professional experience makes a very valuable contribution. The Society is now more frequently consulted by Colchester Borough Council on planning matters.

Henry Spyvee, Peter Evans and Vic Lewis (a former committee member) as our Street-naming sub-committee are communicating with CBC on appropriate street names.

Peter Evans is also editor of the newsletter, the new format of which is much appreciated.

Rosemary Jewers has not only become our acknowledged expert on blue plaques but has also, in collaboration with Jo's nephew Oli, taken on responsibility for our website, which has made the Society better known to the public.

We are now consulted by CBC on planning matters, and comment regularly on planning and licensing applications. In particular the committee met with Karen Syrett of CBC's Planning Service to discuss the draft revised Local Plan. Libby Kirkby-Taylor has been very helpful with advice on heritage matters. At the present she is helping us with one of this year's projects, arranging to find a site at Stockwell for the John Ball plaque which we rescued from an Ipswich stonemason's yard.

Appropriately enough, staff at The Minories is in the process of applying for a

plaque in memory of Dr Ruth Bensusan-Butt who lived at The Minories and practised here as a GP for forty five years.

We have been asked to apply for listing for 'Jacks', and our researchers have begun the long process of amassing the considerable amount of information now required for listing. Contributions from the public will be very welcome.

We were able to support the Friends of St Botolph's Church when they asked English Heritage to replace the information boards at the Priory, and have also agreed to assist David Stenning and Richard Shackle with the publication of their buildings history of the High Street.

*Elisabeth Baines, Chairman*

## A ROOM WITH A VIEW

Glancing out of my front room window, I caught sight of several surveyors in the street outside. Bearing in mind that moves are afoot to reverse the traffic flow in Priory Street, I went out to investigate. I approached the nearest two, delightful young men who were somewhat mystified by the number of people who had accosted them that morning. They immediately told me that they were nothing to do with traffic reversal and were there purely to study the car park. Their task, they told me, was to see how the car park could be landscaped without losing many spaces.

Now, this landscaping idea has cropped up several times over the 35 years or so that I have lived in Priory Street. When I bought my house, searches showed that it was a temporary car park, soon to be grassed over. Hmmm! Soon afterwards, we were told that it would be reduced in size to provide just parking for residents. A few years later, nothing having happened, we were told that trees and shrubs would border parking for residents, the churches and the school. And so it has gone on, each decade bringing a new

plan. Last year, we were assured that the car park would be more or less surplus to requirements once the Park and Ride was open.

My conversation with the surveyors was therefore slightly puzzling. I knew Colchester Borough Council were hoping to improve the setting of the Roman Wall in Priory Street by running a walkway beneath it so that pedestrians don't take their lives in their hands when trying to get close to it. However, I didn't realise that they hoped to achieve this without losing car park spaces. I asked how the surveyors were progressing with their task. Both looked a little worried.

"It is not easy," one sighed.

"No," said the other. "We really can't see how to fit the parking spaces in because we don't think they will be allowed to pull that wall down. It's quite old, isn't it?"

I started to laugh and then realised, with a mixture of bemusement and horror, that he was absolutely serious.

"No," I said, "I think taking down the Roman Wall to allow for more parking spaces might be frowned upon a little."

*Jo Edwards*

## MEMBERSHIP

We welcome as new members Paul Walker, Jayne Richardson, Clive Stephen and Julia Havis, Susan Pinto and Diana Hargrave - all of Colchester.

Most members will be aware that Jim Edwards died on 22nd June 2015, after a long illness that he fought all the way. Our sympathy goes out to Jo and Tom.

## JIM EDWARDS

Jim died in the presence of Jo and their son Tom on 22nd June 2015. Jim had opted not to continue treatment and finding painless peace must have been wonderful for him. Jo and Tom had suffered also for many years at

Jim's agony, both physical and mental and must feel the deep hole left by the absence of their fun loving, warm hearted, wilful man and it is to be hoped that they feel our warmth and affection and best wishes for them to resume their own lives with their fond memories of Jim.

By 10th August Jo had managed to fulfil all Jim's wishes as to how his humanist funeral should be conducted. It really was a celebration of his life with his many friends relating stories of his escapades as man and boy and one friend playing his guitar and singing for him. *The Internationale* was sung with great gusto as the floral hammer and sickle were ceremoniously removed from the wicker coffin.

Jim was happily remembered and toasted at The Crown, Lexden, where a generous buffet was laid on for his many friends who were grateful for his friendship and many charitable acts throughout his active life.

After a democratic discussion as to its fate, the hammer and sickle were reverently laid on the steps of the Conservative Club.

Jim is missed by all who knew him and Jo is loved and held in high esteem by all who know her and know of her travails, and her many kindnesses in recent years.

*Eileen Sheldon*

## LOCAL HISTORY AND OTHER NEWS

The Roman gold and silver hoard found on the Williams and Griffins site, and known as the Fenwick Hoard, is to be given to the town. Colchester Archaeological Trust hosted a group of talks on the background to the Hoard on a Saturday morning at Firstsite in April. A lot of restoration work has been done and on the probable owners. We should be getting news about how we can view the hoard later in the year, as it will be put on display locally.

On a recent walking tour of London, the

guide (an old friend) referred to the Cheesegrater, the Walkie-Talkie and the Gherkin. Was it just London that gave new buildings nicknames? He said that Dublin does it and Birmingham has a statue with a pond known locally as the 'Floosie in the Jacuzzi'. His theory is that it is a very British trait, the same trait that meant that we could not take Hitler seriously. This was food for thought.

Suddenly I remembered that in Colchester we have never called the Balkerne Water Tower anything but Jumbo and this dates back to 1888. More recently, of course, we have had the Golden Banana (Firstsite) and at the University, the Silver Dustbin, following a remark by Prince Charles. Although none of these seem to have the longevity of Jumbo, we were nicknaming buildings before it became fashionable in London. Colchester leads the way!

We have lost a local view. For many years I have watched the Wilson Marriage building in Barrack Street come into view as trains travelled into Colchester Town Station (or St Botolph's station as some of us still think of it). It is now pretty much obscured by a new housing development at the top of Brook Street. This was built on the site of Clift's sawmill, allotments and some houses. The roads on the estate are named Clift and Sawmill, which is ideal. It is sad that we do not appreciate views until they have gone.

High Street has recently welcomed another café/bar, this time in the former Angel Court, previously Council Offices. It is called Bill's. When I first heard this, I thought that it was a witty name relating to the fact that Angel Court had housed a Cash Office, where people went to settle their bills. Not so. It is part of a new chain and just coincidence – there are a growing number of branches including Bury St Edmunds, Leicester and Chichester. There is some scope for originality in names,

however, as my local fish and chip shop has reopened as 'Oh My Cod'.

The Essex County Hospital site has finally closed and has gone on the market. In April, a ceremony was held to close the small chapel used by the chaplaincy team. A new chapel is available at the District General.

Anthony Roberts, the director at Firstsite opened a door leading from the field behind Firstsite, leading through the Roman Wall for a few weeks in the summer. It had been closed for many years. Whilst open, it gave an impressive view of Firstsite.

*Peter Evans*

## PLAQUES

We are awaiting further news on the Blue Plaque to be installed at the Minories to commemorate Dr Ruth Bensusan Butt. A Planning Application has been lodged in our name by Rosemary Jewers. In the meantime, a plaque has been installed in a rose bed immediately opposite the Castle entrance to commemorate the historian Victorian William Wire. It was paid for by The Friends of Colchester Museums and Historic Essex.

Down the road, Clacton has commemorated the site of Butlin's Holiday camp and in Frinton, a plaque has been set up for the actress Lynda Bellingham, who started her career at the Frinton Summer Theatre.

One of the oldest plaque in town is that in West Stockwell Street for the authors of the nursery rhyme *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*. We have been sent the following article about them, which may be of interest.

*Peter Evans*

## BEHIND THE PLAQUE

One of the oldest plaques in Colchester is to Ann and Jane Taylor who lived in Angel Lane (West Stockwell Street) from 1796 to 1811. It was from there that they wrote their poems for children that included *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* by Jane. Their father was



the Rev. Isaac Taylor, minister at the Meeting House in Bucklersbury Lane (St. Helen's Lane) until 1810 when the family transferred their allegiance to the Round Meeting House in Lion Walk.

The following is an extract from a letter written by Ann Taylor, the eldest sister, in which she describes the last few days that the family spent in Colchester before moving to Ongar on 11 September 1811.

'On Monday Evening August 26, we all walked to the Springs to take leave of them, of the wild mount and the Church Lane (all at Lexden).

On Saturday August 31, Jane and I closed the labours of 12 or 14 years in the workroom. We rose from our long accustomed places for the last time and glanced at dear Mile End (Church) thro' the trees. Jane and I then sallied out for a lonely moonlight ramble, and as it was late and we alone, we could not go far. We only went to the bridge (at Middle Mill) at the entrance of the meadows. We returned up North Hill, thro' the Town; it was all life and bustle; the bright and busy shops on one side and the broad light of the moon on the other, but we felt like homeless strangers, and it seemed almost wrong of the people to be so busy.

On Thursday (September 5th), we drank tea with poor Mr. Drake (Father's successor) who is already in as much trouble as ever we



*Nos. 13-11 West Stockwell Street. The double house (12 and 11 West Stockwell Street), on which the plaque is attached, was much altered in 1815, after the Taylors had left.*

*The front of the house to the left (13 West Stockwell Street) is unchanged and was part of the house in which the Taylors lived.*

were and I have no doubt would thankfully exchange situations again with us; on Friday at the Mackintosh's (Dr. Richard Duncan Mackintosh at 82 East Hill) and on Saturday supped at the Savill's [Rev. John Savill on North Hill, minister of Lion Walk].

Sunday, September 8, was the last we spent at Colchester, and most touching one it was; our house being entirely dismantled, we were kindly entertained at Henry Thorn's (27 High Street), the whole day and every one of us; such a strange Sabbath I never passed.

On Monday (September 9th) morning was the final packing, and as if we had not enough to do, an express came from Henry Thorn's about nine o'clock that the Prince Regent was

expected to pass thro' the Town every moment, and that we must go up immediately to see him. Over a mass of dust and disorder, we sallied forth, like most loyal and loving subjects to catch a glimpse of him. If we could not see the King, at least to see his coach, and this our loyal hope was exactly gratified, for after waiting two hours and watching every undulation in the crowd, the royal carriage at length appeared, and we could just discern three plainly drest (sic) gentlemen in it as it passed; so then we went home again, and I think if his Royal Highness could but have known the home that we left for a peep at him, he would reckon us among the most faithful adherents to the House of

Hanover, and I daresay that many a pension has been bestowed upon less genuine loyalty.

On Tuesday (September 10th) morning at seven o'clock came the Waggon that continued packing till two. As it groaned up the lane, it was packed to such an unusual height, that it attracted general attention and apprehension all thro' the town. We had sent Rebecca (the maid) off by coach that morning to be ready to receive the goods. We turned into a desolate house to dress, as we were all to dine and drink tea again at Henry Thorn's. After tea, having still several calls to make, we all sallied forth our different ways; Jane and I took St. Mary's Churchyard, Mother went to the Round Meeting House to take leave of Decimus's grave (her tenth child had died in 1801 of scarlet fever, aged 5). At 8 o'clock, we all assembled at Mr. (James) Mansfield's (senior trustee of the Meeting House in Bucklersbury Lane), to say goodbye to a number of his and our friends'.

Ann and Jane spent their last night at 70 High Street, the home of Benjamin Strutt and after breakfast, they returned to their own house in Angel Lane.

Ann terminated this part of her letter with, 'at half past eleven on Wednesday morning, September 11th, 1811, saw the door close for the last time, and (we) drove slowly up Angel Lane, from a circle of kind neighbours to watch us out of sight. We looked first on this side, then on that, then thro' the window behind, that we might lose nothing it was possible to see, suffice it to say, we were leaving Colchester'.

*Bruce Neville*

## HISTORIC ENGLAND AND LISTED PROPERTIES

Earlier this year, the former English Heritage was split into two organisations. The new English Heritage retains the historic properties such as Audley End and will be

operating like the National Trust as visitor attractions. It will have to balance its own budget.

The other responsibilities are transferred to a new body, Historic England. It will deal with listed properties, and other such duties. Overall, 2.5% of listed properties have the top rank of Grade I and about 5.5% are Grade II\*, with the remaining 92% being Grade II. There were 376,099 listings as at March 2015, but as each listing can cover several properties, there could be over 500,000 addresses. The final decision rests with the government via the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

As quoted in the previous edition, there are 1500 listings in the Colchester area, which works out about 2500 properties, as some listings cover more than one address.

Which actual properties are listed in Colchester? Some are obvious but others are unexpected, and indeed some properties are not listed that you might expect would be, and it is for this reason that the Society is looking at applying to have the former Jacks Shop in St Nicholas Street listed. It is close to the Castle, which of course Grade I listed.

Other Grade I listings are; the Roman Wall, Balcerne Gate, Winsleys Almhouse in Military Road, Bourne Mill, The Red Lion, St Botolph's Priory, East Hill House (76 East Hill), the Red Lion and the Town Hall.

There are four telephone boxes that are grade II listed (see the article right). Buildings that are Grade II\* include what is described as the Summer House in the Minorities Garden and we can look at some of the other Grade II\* another time, one of which is Jumbo.

The Executive Committee has agreed to start the process to request Historic England to make 5/6 St Nicholas Street, formerly Jack's, a Listed Building. This is a complicated process and if any members have any information about it please let me know.

*Peter Evans*



*The former Jack's building on the corner of Culver Street, with Kent, Blaxill's shop next door and opposite both the former Cross Keys public house and Co-op Men's shop, all four of which are no longer on this site*

## COLCHESTER POST BOXES

Post Boxes have been in use in the UK since 1852, the first four were installed in Jersey and three years later in 1855, six were erected in London.

All Post Boxes were painted olive green, but as they clashed with the countryside people sometimes had a job to find them and also walk into them. So in 1859 red was first adopted as a standard colour. The first Post Boxes were painted red in London 1874 and it was 10 years later before all Post Boxes were repainted.

There are three different types of Post Boxes; we have the Pillar Box, Wall Box and Lamp Box. Many of the Wall Boxes were installed in the rural districts as these were a cheaper alternative to the Pillar Box. Many towns and cities still have rare Post Boxes and what I have seen of them they have been very well looked after, more than I can say for the old and rare Post Boxes in Colchester. Over

the last ten months I have recorded 136 Post Boxes in Colchester, not counting the Rural Districts.

The oldest Post Boxes in the town are Victorian and there are still seven of these in use today. Four of these have the Royal Cypher (initials) on the door and the letters Post Office above the aperture. The other three have no letters on them; these are called Anonymous Boxes making them the oldest in the town.

These Anonymous Boxes are in Lexden Road opposite Vint Crescent, Creffield Road and Mersea Road near the Grapes Public House.

The rarest Post Box in the town is in Glen Avenue. It is an Edward VIII box and there were only 150 of these boxes erected in 1936 in the whole of the UK. Edward was never crowned King of course. How I would love to see this one repainted and the letters picked out in gold, also the ones in the town centre.

After all, our town is a tourist attraction.

We have the six different Monarchs' Cyphers on our Post Boxes in Colchester - they are Victoria, Edward VII, George V, Edward VIII, George VI and Elizabeth II.

So the next time you post a letter, look for the Royal Cypher, some of the boxes have been standing for over 100 years and are 'still going strong!'

*Graham Tuckwell*



*The box in Lexden Road  
with Graham Tuckwell standing by it.*



*The Cipher for Victorian Postboxes  
as seen on a box in Lexden Road*



*The Edwardian box in Northgate Street  
LEFT: The box in Lexden Road  
near Glen Avenue*

## REPORTS OF SOCIAL EVENTS

### **Tymperleys, Trinity Street, Colchester 14th April 2015**

I am sure that many members will remember how unpopular it was when the Borough Council announced that they were going to sell Tymperleys. However, the decision was speedily reversed and finally a lease was agreed between the Council and the Charrington family of Layer Marney Towers in late 2013, to everyone's relief.

So, a large party from the society was greeted by Alice Charrington, manager for the family and given tea, coffee and nibbles. Alice is clearly an enthusiast for the building and has been deeply involved with the conversion and restoration process. She told us the story of how they have reached their present stage and of the problems that they encountered. Very much to the surprise of the family, English Heritage proved to be not only flexible but really helpful. In particular, English Heritage agreed, indeed encouraged, the demolition of the 1950's extension and replacement by an up to date state of the art kitchen block.



*The main staircase inside Tymperleys  
RIGHT: Looking east from the garden  
showing the house and archway*

Tymperleys is an old building but Alice said that little if any of it is original and this makes it easier for adaptations to be made. The windows are famously 1950's work by Crittalls of Witham, even if they have a period look. The walls have little gaps in places and repairs have been made with new oak, which will age and crack and bend like the other wood.

Alice is interested in the history and keenly following up on it between her other commitments. The house, of course was home to William Gilberd, the father of electricity and physician to Elizabeth I. She is interested to know about the other occupants. During the Civil war, the Countess Rivers lived there but other occupants are less certain.

Some Colcestrians will remember that it was the home and surgery of Dr Jarrold but it was bought and substantially renovated by Bernard Mason, local industrialist, in the mid 1950's. He used it to house his enormous collection of Colchester clocks. He generously announced that he had gifted both Tymperleys and the clocks to the Borough at







*The western end of the garden at Tymperleys*

a dinner soon afterwards. He originally hoped that it would be a home for the Mayor, but this was not to be.

The garden, of course, features a Mulberry Tree. Alice says that sadly it is gradually dying but there are younger saplings coming on. The restaurant does use Mulberries picked from the tree – which Alice said she rose early to pick before other people had the same idea.

Tymperleys is now settling down into a successful venture, with a fine line in beautiful cakes. I must visit it again soon. It was only when I was sitting there that I remembered my first visit in about 1960, when Mr & Mrs Mason opened it for a coffee morning in aid of St Botolph's Church. I wanted to see inside and persuaded my mother to take me. It rained heavily.

*Peter Evans*

#### **Gravesend, Kent 20th April 2015**

A trip to the garden of England, this time to Gravesend in Kent, established as a Saxon landing site on the southern shore of the Thames. Like many places, it has had its share of industry and 1960 modernism but the town still has an historic core which is listed these days.

On arrival we were greeted by our guide Christophe Bull inside the attractively designed Tourist Information Centre. We set off with him for a walk taking in the church of St George (rebuilt after a fire in 1727). Dominating the churchyard is a statue of the native American Princess Pocahontas, wife of the tobacco trader John Rolfe of Heacham of Norfolk. Before she was able to return to North America, she died in Gravesend in 1617



*The church of St George at Gravesend*

although the site of her grave is not known.

We walked into the High Street, in the past a busy spot with shoppers from Essex, who came on the Tilbury Ferry, as well as local people. Many are now lured away by the Bluewater Shopping Centre yet there are still specialist retail outlets to attract visitors.

In 1845 the railway line arrived and visitor numbers soared to 1,500,000 in 1849 but in that year the Margate line opened and after 1850, the seaside charms of Margate overtook Gravesend.

We admired the fine old Town Hall, a 19th century building, replacing several other town halls on the site since 1573. Gravesend had received its original charter in 1268. The business of the town is now conducted in a

brutalist concrete and glass building, opened in 1968, just outside the historic centre.

Then on to the river front, pausing to admire the *Three Daws* pub, rescued from dereliction in the late 20th century. It is now a respectable traditional weather boarded tavern – a far cry from the days when smugglers and pirates struck deals in the warrens of rooms then in the inn. We reached the Town Pier, the oldest cast iron pier in the world, built in 1834. There is a second interesting structure a little further along; the Royal Terrace Pier. It was used by many superior passengers, including Royalty bound for Germany.

Gravesend had two ferries – 'The Cross Ferry', which traversed the Thames to and

from Tilbury, and also the profitable 'Long Ferry' which travelled up and down to London. Later Gravesend had a Car Ferry until the first Dartford Tunnel opened in 1964.

A grassy area in Gravesend's East Street, near the water, was once crowded with pubs and breweries. Now it is a Riverside walk, leading to St Andrews Gardens and is overlooked by a recent 8 feet high statue of a WWII Sikh airman, Squadron Leader Nahinder Singh Pujji DFC. At present 8000 Sikhs live and work in the Gravesham area, drawn here after the war by the British labour shortage.

Further along the Riverside, the former St Andrews Church, Rivertown, opened 1871, is now an Arts Centre. Beside it stands an old pub later converted into a mission house used

RIGHT AND BELOW:

*Exterior and interior views of the Sikh Temple*



by many emigrants whilst they awaited passage to Australia and New Zealand in 19th century.

The unfortunate General Gordon, killed in Khartoum, spent five happy years here in charge of the forts here. A very religious man, he helped many impoverished local boys to gain a basic education and employment. Near New Tavern Fort the garden of his long vanished house is a small public park, close to the oldest building in the town, the 14th century, Milton Charity, a free museum called the Charity Heritage Centre.

Christophe led us through what had been a planned late Georgian Street service to the town centre to the Reliance Fish restaurant, Queen Street for lunch. The inner man (and woman) now replete, we walked on to the Sikh Temple, the Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara. (The first Sikh Guru was Guru Nanak 1460-1539). The Gurdwara complex was built on a former military barracks site of 8.5 acres. The building work started in 2002, finished 2010 at a cost of £14 million and inaugurated in 2011. The glistening white marble was quarried in India and fashioned in prefabricated form by local craftsmen to be re-erected here, in England. The subtle white and gold interiors are beautiful to behold. The Gurdwara comprises three temples in one building, the largest in Europe.

Our Sikh guide was a former Mayor of Gravesend. We respectfully donned scarves to cover our heads and went barefoot. The ladies were elegant but the men looked like pirates (or possibly smurfs) as we toured the Gurdwara. Afterwards, we were encouraged to sit down to eat bhajis and other food and to drink refreshing mugs of tea provided by the Langer, the community kitchen of the temple complex). A wonderful welcome and a fine centre for residents and visitors from far and near.

*Pam Pudney*

## **The Old Vicarage Gardens, East Ruston, Norfolk**

**19th June 2015**

On 19th June we set off for East Ruston in the guiding hands of Monica, Jo being at her dying husband's bed side. Everyone on the coach had Jo affectionately and compassionately in mind throughout the day, but we bore in mind that both she and Jim, who had been with us so often on Civic Society trips, would want us to carry on as normal, so we did. It turned out to be a lovely day. Jo has never been there and she would enjoy it very much.

The journey north with Kings Coaches was uneventful and pleasant passing through the East Anglian countryside and glimpsing a field of poppies in full bloom. We stopped for lunch at a pub that supplied us well with plenty of sandwiches and tea or coffee and then set off again for East Ruston.

We parked in a field and had a short walk to the entrance drive, planted on each side with sweet smelling roses, sweet peas, pinks and with hydrangeas and other perennial plants and shrubs in sweet disarray. Parked casually on the drive was a wonder of design, engineering genius and beauty in the form of a two tone 1933 Delage D611 Cabriolet.

Twenty or more years ago two jobbing gardeners, Alan Gray and Graham Robson bought the Vicarage and its fertile gardens. They had about four or five gardens leading off each other, a rose garden, an herbaceous garden, among them and a wild flower meadow, which, in May, was a rich riot of colour. A few plants were sold from the potting shed often manned by Alan who really loved the plants with which he seemed loathe to be parted. Graham and Alan could often be seen gardening with very little help but now they have prospered and they have many gardeners to assist them. Their genius was to buy glebe land as it became available





*St Mary's Church, Happisburgh*

and design a desert garden, a New Zealand garden, ponds with interesting modern, often metallic fountain structures in them.

We wandered off in many different directions to see gardens full of flowers or lawns containing a specimen tree and surrounded by high immaculate hedges where one could sit with just the birds and bees for company and contemplate. One could spend all day in that beautiful place and good walkers could see all the gardens.

The tea room, where many of us reunited at the end of the day, served very traditional Vicarage teas as well as a few larger snacks.

The skill of Alan and Graham and their artistry have contributed to the beauty of that corner of England and to the pleasure of the hundreds of visitors who go there. Long may they continue to do so.

*Eileen Sheldon*



*The Desert Garden*



*Pictures courtesy of the owners (ABOVE)  
of the Old Vicarage Gardens, East Ruston*

#### **Greyfriars, High Street, Colchester 8th June 2015**

A party of some 30 people met at the new Greyfriars Hotel for an evening tour of the newly renovated property.

The building has a long history having been in its time a private house, convent, school and a Further Education Centre and is now to start a new life as a hotel.

I was particularly interested in seeing how much Greyfriars has changed as between September 1969 and December 1970 I attended school there whilst it was being used by Philip Morant School, prior to the new school being completed. It had also been, many years earlier, the home of the Colchester High School for Girls.

Meeting in the newly-built foyer, it was immediately apparent how the place had changed and how extensive the renovation work has been.

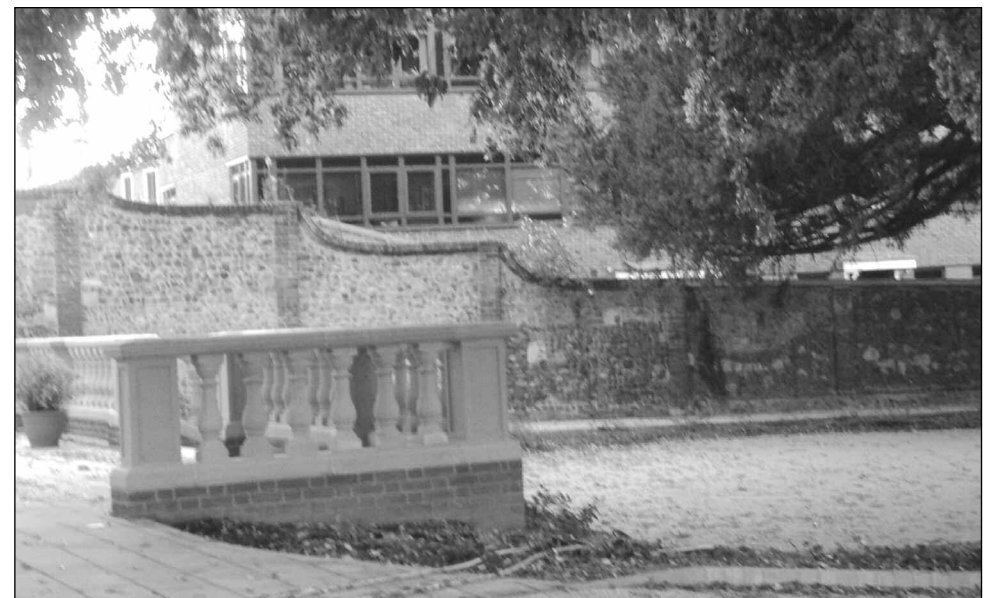
We were shown into the main dining room, to be given a warm welcome by the Manager and staff of the hotel and were treated to an excellent buffet and drinks. In my time at the school hall cum canteen – the standard of food was a distinct improvement from the school dinners that I remembered there. I also remember a stained glass window being

broken during an indoor game of football during bad weather. It has been invisibly mended.

Splitting into groups, we were given a guided tour around Greyfriars Hotel and were soon impressed by the quality of the work that has been undertaken; for once the cliché 'no expense spared' was no exaggeration. Of particular note was a magnificent chandelier in the breakfast room which had been imported at great expense from Italy.

I was amused to find that the main bar has been located in what had been the senior master's office – a fervent teetotaler who gave us several lectures on the perils of the demon drink.

Going upstairs we were shown around a variety of bedrooms designed to suit a range of budgets from £70 per night up to £500 (including breakfast). All these rooms have been impeccably fitted out and decorated, whilst the en-suite bathrooms were all walled in marble. Ironically, the dingiest classroom



*Greyfriars*



*Another rear view of Greyfriars*

during my time there which rejoiced in the nickname 'The Black Hole of Calcutta' was now the most expensive suite and now bore little resemblance to its former existence.

I had a chat with the manager, Mr Nadir Suleman, and was pleased to find out that nearly all the young and efficient staff had been recruited from Colchester Institute's School of Hotel Management.

There was an evident determination to get things right and I am certain that Greyfriars in its new re-birth as an Hotel will continue to serve Colchester as well as it has done so in the past.

*Kevin Hodgson*

#### **Colchester Castle Walls 14th July 2015**

This was an interesting opportunity to see the Castle through the eyes of Philip Crummy, Director of the Colchester Archaeological Trust, one of Colchester's

leading historical experts.

He explained the reasons for the different materials used. There was no local stone available so Roman bricks, tiles and stone were re-cycled, and only small amounts brought in, such as from Caen. As sources became scarcer, the apparent patterns that the builders of the Castle used ceased. In some places there are quite extensive repairs,

The original entrance was at the rear, the north side. A doorway is clearly visible but I must admit I had not really appreciated exactly what it meant.

Philip mentioned the long standing debate about the actual size of the Castle when it was completed. Whilst there is no doubt that the base is much bigger than the White Tower at the Tower of London, it is still unclear if the walls were ever much taller than now. Probably not although there would have been a fully complete walk way round the top of the wall.

We did take time to admire the beautiful new bridge that has been installed to replace the old damaged one, giving access to the Castle entrance.

Whilst nearby, Philip gave us more news about a monumental Roman Arcade that has been discovered beneath the rear of 97 High Street, the former Kent Blaxill premises. This would have been the boundary of the Temple of Claudius compound. Some remains had been located previously, but these are much more extensive.

The developers, The Flying Trade Group, have generously agreed to make the remains visible through the floor of the new café. It now appears that the foundations of the Arcade are more spectacular than originally thought.

This evening visit shows that not only is there more to be found beneath the ground, but it seems that we do not take proper notice of the remains, like the Castle, that we can see.

*Peter Evans*

#### **Letheringham Lodge and Woodbridge Tide Mill Living Museum 31st July 2015**

Despite some mishaps on the way, this turned out to be a very enjoyable day, with pleasant weather all day.

Jo Edwards was back with us, which was just as well as there had to be some changes of plan. The original location for our coffee stop had closed down and there were possible replacements. We ended up at the Woodbridge Notcutts Nursery as it was impossible for us to get to an alternative, as the police had to close the road as there were cows on the road. (Honest –

this was Suffolk after all). Steve, our driver, knows a lot of 'cow' jokes). There were some other traffic problems. Anyway, refreshed, we split into two parties, with Jo leading the group going to Letheringham Lodge, whilst the rest of us had a tour of the Mill. We had to keep in touch by phone, to confirm timings, and then had trouble getting coverage by mobile. All was sorted, however.

Some of us had visited the Mill previously but since then, the Trust that runs the Mill obtained a grant from Heritage Lottery Fund that enabled them to carry out repairs and to make improvements. For example, the viewing platform overlooking the Tidal Mill pond was not there at all last time I visited. The work was done in 2012 and the Mill certainly looks in prime condition. We had an informative tour and were able to enjoy a film of the history of Woodbridge and the Mill.

The machinery was restored and is kept in good order by volunteer engineers. Whilst I fully realised that the tide provided the power to run the mill wheel to grind corn, I did not realise that it also provided power to operate a hoist to lift the corn from the ground floor to the top story of the Mill to be fed into the



*Letheringham Lodge*



*Letheringham Lodge showing the moat and the Hooper Swans*

mill stone. After time for a coffee or a quick look at Woodbridge, we boarded the coach for a 20 minute ride via Wickham Market and Letheringham Lodge.

The owners, Pauline and Matthew Bickerton, plus Dottie the dog, met us at the end of the drive – the coach could not fit – and led us to our meal salmon enroute, salad and cheesecake. We ate surrounded by the moat, with Hooper Swans watching, although they soon moved as far from us as possible.

The Bickertons have owned the Lodge and some surrounding buildings for less than three years. They have faced neighbour problems, (only recently solved), and an enforcement order was due to be served when they purchased it. The repairs to main building have now been completed, but there are some other buildings to be tackled.

The building is in two parts, the older section built in 1472 by Sir Anthony Wingfield. Dendrochronology has dated some of the timbers and it seems that it was a



*Woodbridge Tide Mill*

hunting lodge. In Victorian times, a brick built extension was added, but the Bickerton's main interest is the lodge. They have managed to complete the restoration to the approval of Suffolk Coastal Council. (We have heard good things of them before). Whilst most of the house has a modern feel, an upstairs corridor has a feel of the middle ages. The owners are particularly proud on this but wish that it still had the original panelling which a previous owner had moved to a Brodick Castle on the Isle of Arran. They did

manage to reinstall windows removed by the previous owner.

I was struck by the isolation of the Lodge. From upstairs, under the beautifully restored tiled roof, there are no other buildings at all, not even a church.

We were made very welcome and it is always so interesting to visit these unusual and much loved houses.

*Peter Evans*

## COLCHESTER HERITAGE OPEN DAYS 2015

Once again I thank those of you who stewarded some of the properties that were open for Heritage Open Days this year. We looked after St Martin's Church, Roman Theatre, Audley Chapel and helped at Sparlings.

There were one or two hiccups which hopefully will be sorted out for next year and the suggestions made by the stewards will certainly be considered and acted upon.

Overall visitor numbers at the venues were down on previous years. This maybe because at the last minute the Borough decided to put on an all day event in the Park and closed the High Street for other events. Also there were new properties open especially in Trinity Street.

St Martin's had 113 visitors on Saturday and 50 on Sunday. Roman Theatre, 242 on Saturday and 112 on Sunday. Audley Chapel had 19 on Saturday morning and Sparlings had 80 visitors. The total visitors to all venues over the weekend was 8064 compared to 13261 the previous year.

I shall be asking for stewards again for 2016 and although it is a long way off, 10th and 11th September, I hope that you will consider helping.

*Ann Turner*

### Heritage Open Days Colchester and beyond

As you know Heritage Open Days happen everywhere and it is interesting to hear what is happening elsewhere. If you have visited some places outside of Colchester, please let me know and I will include in a future edition of the newsletter.

In Ipswich, the Willis Faber Building was open on the Sunday. This black glass building was designed by Norman Foster and opened in 1975 (by Harold MacMillan). The glass



*Inside the Willis Group building*

panels are approximately 3 x 2 metres, and the office space is 220,000 square feet. It has been occupied by the same insurance company ever since, now called Willis Group Holdings Ltd. It has been much admired and featured on a postage stamp. Famously, the ground floor included a swimming pool available for staff and indeed community use. Sadly it had to be closed as a potential leak was identified and the area was converted into office place.

However, there have been no changes to the roof garden. Staff can come out of the restaurant and stroll around enjoying views over the roof tops of Ipswich. Unfortunately,



*A view from the roof of the Willis building*

it rained that day.

Willis Faber staff acted as guides and I was told that the firm has usually been involved in the Open Day scheme except for the recent years whilst refurbishments took place.

For contrast the wonderful Unitarian Meeting House of 1699 was open next door and I visited it again.

A new site was Gippeswyk Hall, the recently restored Grade II\* Tudor building in the park next to the Railway Station. It is home to the Red Rose Theatre Chain, which produces plays in Suffolk. The work has been carried out by the Heritage Lottery Fund

Norwich had a visit from the Wherry Hathor, moored at Pulls Ferry, at the edge of the Cathedral Close. This was built in 1095 for members of the Colman family, for the new leisure activity of sailing the broads. The wooden interiors are of great quality and have been restored by the Wherry Yacht Charitable Trust and it is available for hire.

Also in Norwich, it was possible to visit the auditorium at the Forum, part of the BBC Studios where some talks were given. I heard one about the Jewish community in medieval Norwich, and indeed the community of today. It was also possible to visit their Synagogue. Norwich has many events on over 4 days and I was particularly interested to hear about the apprenticeship that a young stonemason is undergoing in the City.

Back in Colchester, several properties opened in Trinity Street for the first time, proving it to be one of Colchester's most interesting streets. I was unable to go but I did visit the Cemetery for a guided tour. Seeing that this just a stone's throw from my house I should gone before.

I did not realise that it had been so carefully landscaped and laid out. There are

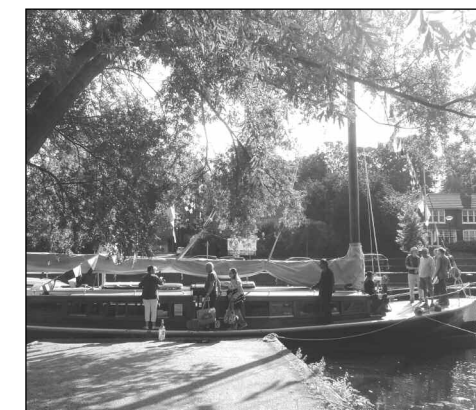


*Gippeswyk Hall*

two chapels, so that the Church of England and non-conformist congregations did not have to meet. The grave of James Paxman, one of Colchester's most important citizens is surprisingly ordinary. Colchester's most famous tramps, Marmalade Emma and Grimes do have marked graves but a poor servant killed in a fire in the managers flat above the fire office does not.

The Tour was very popular and described as 'dog-friendly' and certainly the dogs enjoyed it. I hope to go again next year as there is so much of interest and the manager has done a lot of research

*Peter Evans*



*The Wherry Hathor*



## SOCIAL PROGRAMME 2016

First of all, my apologies to anyone that I didn't manage to reach when I made the decision to pull the plug on our visit to Foulness this year. I tried to contact everyone on my list but some of you were a little elusive! There were a number of reasons for my decision, but the main one was that I was not completely confident that I could deliver a visit that would meet your expectations at the time. There were far too many 'ifs' and 'buts'! I am returning to the drawing board, armed with the information that half the Society wants to go, which means that I shall have to tackle the visit in a completely different way. Foulness is a challenging destination, for any number of reasons, but we WILL get there, hopefully in 2016.

Plans for 2016 generally are still being made. One of the problems I encounter each year is the difficulty of getting dates and prices for the places we would like to visit so much in advance. It is fine if I am looking at a big tourist attraction, because they plan well in advance, but we don't do many visits like that! Most of ours are to much more obscure, much smaller, places. So I am afraid that, at this point, you will only get a hint of the plans for 2016, plus details a couple of events for which I do have full information!

So what am I planning?

Well, Foulness, of course, and I can confirm that the Flatford Lock is working again, so we can return to our series of cruises from Dedham to Cattawade, curtailed a few years ago when the lock gates were so badly damaged they had to be replaced.

I am hoping that we can visit some gardens in London - boy oh boy, is that one difficult to arrange?! I am hoping, too, to do that Cinema tour I promised, but that is equally complicated.

A visit to a whiskey distillery is on the

cards - well, why not? We have been to a winery or two, breweries, waterworks, cider mills, dairies and a gin distillery so it seems only right!

An Aldeburgh visit is back on, this time to the Red House. I also have some local visits and events in mind, but it is too early to sort out dates for those yet. One of them will be, fingers very firmly crossed, the unveiling of the John Ball plaque in it's new position (or even, perhaps, it's original position!) in the Dutch Quarter. This has taken an inordinately long time to reach fruition and we are not there yet, but I think there is a chink of light at the end of the tunnel!

Meanwhile, an idea occurred to me in the early hours of the morning - as they do! I always enjoy our Spring Up and Burning Issues Meetings, when members gather to raise and discuss anything that is happening, or not happening, in the town. All sorts of things are brought to our attention. It is always good to find that we can solve some of your concerns.

I am more than aware, however, that many of you do not like coming into the town centre in the evening and I was obviously dreaming about this when I had my lightbulb moment!

So what is my idea?

Why don't we meet on the first Monday of every month in the bar at Greyfriars for a coffee? Let's see what happens! How about 10.30am? There is a car park, accessed through the ordinary car park opposite the Foresters Arms. If this idea proves popular, then we might have to put it onto a more formal basis with the hotel but, at the moment, we will just keep it very casual.

And now to our Programme for the beginning of 2016.

*Jo Edwards*

### **Monday 4th January 2016 The First Monday in the Month Greyfriars Bar 10.30am**

See my suggestion in the preamble above. If there is an issue you want to raise which you think the Society may be able to address, then come and discuss it over coffee. If you just fancy a chat, you are more than welcome! As I said earlier, let's see what happens!

### **Saturday 16th January 2016 Meet at the Siege House in East Street at 12.30pm for our New Year Lunch.**

I do hope you can come to our New Year celebration. For those who haven't yet been to the fairly newly reopened restaurant, I recommend it. There is a car park at the back but it is not huge, so if you can car share or come by bus, it might be a good idea. Do not park on the road beside the Mill as clamping does happen. Although the restaurant will be open to the public, we will have our own area set aside just for us. Please complete the reply slip and return it to me, with your payment, as soon as possible as I have to give the restaurant some idea of numbers by early January.

Cost (three courses plus coffee) £15.50.

### **Saturday 27th February 2016 Meet at the MAIN ENTRANCE TO THE COLCHESTER INSTITUTE in Sheepen Road at 9.25am for a visit to 'Painting the Modern Garden - Monet to Matisse' at the Royal Academy in London.**

We have been invited by the Friends of the Minories to join them on a visit to this wonderful exhibition of work by such artists as Monet, Renoir, Van Gogh, Cezanne, Klee, Klimt and Matisse, working during the period from the 1860's to the 1920's. What a treat! Guided tours of the exhibition included in the cost of the visit Please note the pick up point - an unusual one for us! I understand that car

parking is available at the Institute but please leave yourselves plenty of time to find a space. Further information about this visit from Suki Cohen 01206 262219.

Cost £38 (RA Members £24). Please make your cheque payable to The Friends of the Minories but send your payment and reply slip to me.

### **Wednesday 23rd March 2016 6.30pm for 7pm Special Viewing of the Fenwick Hoard at Colchester Castle Museum**

We have been invited by The Friends of Colchester Museums, to a special viewing of the treasure discovered in High Street, now fully restored and conserved.

This is the wonderful find made by archaeologists excavating the Williams and Griffin site in late August. They discovered a cache of silver and gold jewellery and some silver coins, hastily buried beneath the floor of a Roman house as news of Boudicca's approach reached it's occupants.

The items go on display to the public the previous day but Museum staff will be on hand to give more information and there will be wine or fruit juice and 'nibbles' included in the cost of £4. Payment should be sent to The Friends of Colchester Museums via Peter Evans using the reply slip enclosed.

## STOP PRESS

### THE JOHN BALL PLAQUE

I have just discovered that the John Ball Plaque re-erection is fairly imminent. For those who don't know the saga, many years ago it was removed from the wall of a house in the Dutch Quarter as the occupant complained that it was too near her window. It then vanished. The Civic Society eventually located it and started a long campaign to have it back on display. It languished for a couple of years on the window seat in my front room whilst seemingly endless discussions took place.

Finally, Libby Kirkby-Taylor, the Conservation Officer for Colchester Borough Council, took up the case. She has worked wonders! The Society has paid for the restoration of the plaque and has agreed to fund its re-erection. We will be having a formal, very special, unveiling ceremony as soon as the plaque is back in its rightful place.

If you would like to attend and, at the same time, find out more about John Ball, one time Curate of St James the Great on East Hill and, subsequently one of the leaders of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, then please complete the reply slip and return it as soon as possible.

*Jo Edwards*

### The Objects of The Civic Society are to:

- a) Encourage high standards of architecture and town planning in the Borough of Colchester.
- b) Stimulate public interest in and care for the beauty, history and character of the area of the town of Colchester and its surroundings.
- c) Encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features of general public amenity and of public interest.
- d) Pursue these ends by means of meetings, exhibitions, lectures, publications, other forms of instruction and publicity and the promotion of schemes of a charitable nature.
- e) Co-operate with other local, regional and national organisations in the pursuit of the same objects on a broader geographical basis.

### CURRENT OFFICERS

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President:	Vacant
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Scheregate Steps - in a town worth living in