

Winter 2010/11



NEWSLETTER

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

Contributions are always welcome and should be sent to: (Removed in this digital version)

Copy date for the Spring/Summer edition is 30 April 2011.

The Society's website can be viewed at: (Removed due to website change)

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 2010-11

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:

From the editor

This Newsletter is missing a few regular items – we don't have a "*Christine's corner*" or "*Room with a view*", and nor do we have a programme with reply slips. Our Chair and Programme Organiser has many pressing and immediate problems which are taking up much of her time and energies just at the moment. Even Jo, good as she is at multi-tasking and being in more than one place at a time, can't deliver everything.

You have (see p.9) got a programme calendar, so it is possible to work out your diaries – and there is a contact point for expressions of interest. If all goes to plan we hope to issue a *Part 2*, or *Supplement*, call it what you will, to this Newsletter before too long and this will have all the details.

May I especially draw your attention to Ann Turner's item on Heritage Weekend in September. The Civic Society is a key member of the team that delivers this event, but more volunteers are desperately needed if it is to continue as a successful contribution to the publicising of Colchester's historical and architectural heritage. It is a rewarding experience to see the responses of visitors to the various sites, whether they be locals, who "didn't know this was on my doorstep", or people from outside the area. Do consider signing-up.

From the Secretary

E-mail addresses

I know we have a few e-mail addresses for members but it is sometimes necessary to get information out to members rapidly. It would make such a task much easier if we could have as many addresses as possible. If you are willing for us to operate a rapid dissemination mailing list we would be grateful. We will, of course endeavour not to release your details to a third party.

If you are happy to let us have your address please send it to me at: (Removed in this diital version)

The previous issue of our Newsletter contained an item about the Bluecoat Girl whose portrait is hanging in the Hollytrees Museum. We are pleased to print a follow-up from Patrick Denney.

THE BLUECOAT GIRL PAINTING

Patrick Denney

In February, 1981 a news item appeared in the local press about a lady claiming to be the Bluecoat girl as depicted in the painting by Frank Daniell, then on display in Hollytrees Museum. This lady was Ethel Matthews (nee Collins) and was pictured standing alongside Daniell's painting. Other news items appeared in subsequent years and in November 1989 I visited Ethel at her Colchester home to record her memories of the occasion.

The interview lasted for about 90 minutes and we discussed various topics from her early life including her memory of being painted by Frank Daniell in her Bluecoat School uniform. She described in detail about how she was chosen from several other girls to be painted by Mr Daniell, and how she had to attend at the Corn Exchange for several weekly sessions for the painting to be completed. She recalled that she was paid 2/6d and given a bar of chocolate after each session.

She repeatedly referred to the artist as 'Mr Paul (sic) Daniells', obviously getting him mixed up with Paul Daniels the magician who was popular on television at the time. Interestingly, she mentioned attending the Corn Exchange and not the artist's studio, and also that a number of Mr Daniell's students were also present on the occasion

Anyway, we were all thrilled to have captured her memories on tape thus solving a question which had been perplexing local historians for some time. However, in due course, I turned my attention to researching the identity of the Bluecoat boy depicted in an accompanying painting by the same artist. And it was during this research that I uncovered more information about the Bluecoat girl which led me to the conclusion that Ethel couldn't have been the girl in the painting.

I eventually discovered that the original painting of the Bluecoat girl must have been completed sometime between January and May 1905, thereby eliminating Ethel as the sitter for the following reasons:-

- Ethel was born on 8 December 1900
- She first attended Barrack Street School (later Wilson Marriage) and never become a pupil at the Bluecoat School until her the family moved to George Street around 1910
- The sitter for the original painting was painted at Frank Daniell's studio
- Ethel says that she attended the Corn Exchange to be painted and that some students were also present

What I believe happened is this. Following the painting of the original Bluecoat girl in 1905, the artist realised the idea of painting a girl in Bluecoat uniform would be a good subject to repeat for his students. In fact, he may have returned to the school on several occasions to choose a girl who was willing to be painted. And I suggest that Ethel's experience falls into this category. I do not believe for one minute that Ethel could have made the story up and that probably upon seeing the painting of the Bluecoat Girl hanging in Hollytrees Museum on some occasion; she immediately assumed that it must have been her.

So if Ethel is not the girl depicted in the painting, who could it have been?

The best and most likely contender was a girl named Gertrude Cardey who was born in 1892 and is known to have been a pupil at the Bluecoat School between 1904-1906. On the 1911 census she is living with her family in a house near Middle Mill. At the

time she had three younger brothers – William, Charles and Sidney.

Later in November 1924, her brother Charles tried to obtain a copy of the original painting and was informed in writing by local art dealer F.C Lankesheer that as the painting was copyright, permission would first need to be given by the artist. Subsequently, and after making contact with the artist the following reply was received from Frank Daniell:-

'5 December 1924

Dear Mr Cardey,

I shall be pleased to allow a photograph to be taken of the picture of the "Blue Girl". I did not have a photograph taken of it at any time or I would send you a print. I hope the original Blue Girl is well and happy.

Yours truly,

Frank Daniell'

On a final note, at the time of Gertrude's death in November 1949, the Essex County Telegraph carried the following obituary on its front page:-

Original Blue Girl dies

Mrs Gertrude Emily Gregory (57) only daughter of Mr & Mrs W Cardey of 4 Middlemill Road, Colchester, who died at Macclesfield on Wednesday, was the original "Blue Girl" whose painting by Frank Daniell, hangs in the Colchester Albert Hall.'

Visit to Beeleigh Abbey, Maldon 24th August 2010

Peter Evans

This was a make-your-own-way trip as Beeleigh Abbey is only a short way from the centre of Maldon. Well, so I was told and it is certainly true that one of our number did walk from Maldon and you certainly have a splendid view the main bridge from the garden. However, please don't ask me for directions from Market Hill.

Beeleigh Abbey have recently been restored and revamped by the current owner, Christopher Foyle has won awards both locally and nationally for the result and it is well worth the visit. It is well known that it was the home Christina Foyle, the eccentric owner of Foyle's Bookshop in London. She did not leave the house to Mr Foyle, a nephew. He had to buy it from her estate, which I think he said was £60 million.

It was indeed originally an Abbey, founded in 1180 and converted into a residence after the dissolution. The church does not survive but the current house includes part of the domestic buildings and the chapter house. There have been additions at various times and of various styles. Mr Foyle seems to

have added a modern extension in keeping with the rest of the house. It seems comfortable but still feels like a monastic building. The sitting room is very much like this and includes an original fireplace, as this was the "warming room". One room is now a sort of chapel and the Foyles have kept up contact with modern monks, which seems somehow right.

Upstairs is a haunted bedroom. Mr Foyle has not experienced any spirits but his steward and others had. Upstairs is also, as you would expect for the Foyles, a library. This was full of books and mementoes, but does not include all of Miss Foyle's collection.

Mr Foyle welcomed us personally and was very enthusiastic about his home, explaining the history and all about the restoration. He was a real gentleman to some members with mobility problems. He was also proud of the garden, which is now getting full attention and is charming. Luckily the miserable weather - this was August of course - had let up by the time we were able to walk around the grounds, which rounded off an enjoyable visit to somewhere I have always wanted to see.

Recording Britain

Mackay

Beau

Several years ago, BBC Radio 4 ran a weekly series based on a collection of paintings commissioned some 60 years before. I did not hear the first programme, which probably explained why the collection had been made, and my ears pricked up in a later episode at the mention of the Grand Theatre Colchester (now Liquid Nightclub in the High Street).

Members may be interested to read the story of the Recording Britain collection:

At the outbreak of the Second World War an ambitious scheme was set up to employ artists on the home front. The result was a collection of more than 1,500 watercolours and drawings that make up a fascinating record of British lives and landscapes at a time of imminent change.

Recording Britain was the brainchild of Sir Kenneth Clark, who saw it as an extension of the official War Artist Scheme. By choosing watercolour as the medium of record, Clark hoped that the scheme would also help to preserve this characteristic English art form. With money from the Pilgrim Trust (a fund provided by American millionaire Edward Harkness), the Scheme commissioned some of this country's finest watercolour painters, including Sir William Russell Flint, Charles Knight, Rowland Hilder and John Piper. Other younger artists – some fresh out of art school (such as Phyllis Dimond) – were invited to submit pictures and were paid a small fee for each work accepted.

Recording Britain was intended to boost national morale by celebrating the country's natural beauty and architectural heritage, but it was also a memorial to the war effort itself. The earliest pictures show the landscapes of southern England which were

under immediate threat from bombing and invasion. In due course the remit was expanded to include those landscapes, buildings and ways of life which were vulnerable to the destructive forces of progress – urban expansion, housing developments, road building and so on. As well as many scenes of traditional country life, it also shows rural industries in decline – redundant tin mines in Cornwall, slate quarrying in Wales and dilapidated windmills.

Kenneth Rowntree, then living in Essex, made several watercolours of local churches and in Derbyshire was asked to paint views in and around the village of Ashopton which was due to disappear under a reservoir built to supply the growing population of nearby Sheffield. Hennell was sent at short notice to Hampshire to record the magnificent beech avenue at Lasham before it was felled to make way for an airfield. The veteran local painter Walter Bayes shared this enthusiasm: his subjects included Colchester interiors and several London theatres.

These watercolours and drawings are a unique and fascinating record of their time, they were widely exhibited during the war years and in 1949 the Pilgrim Trust gave them to the Victoria and Albert Museum where most can now be seen on request in the Prints and Drawings Study Room.

You can see the paintings online at <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/indexplus> this will take you to the Victoria and Albert Museum collections Search Box: type in *recording britain* to see the whole collection or *recording britain colchester* to see just the local pictures.

JUMBO

Brian Light

Why has Colchester's most prominent building remained unused since sold off by Anglian Water 23 years ago? The answer is that no one can make any money from it. From a developer's point of view, Jumbo is a nightmare. The only useable floor area of about 250 m² is in a dark, airless space within the tank. The smaller sub-tank floor is useless as the arched wall openings are at the wrong level to use as windows. To utilise the tank floor at least some of the tank walls must be replaced by bespoke glass walls and a special lift fitted in the corner of one of the legs. The considerable investment required cannot be justified for this alone, so the useless sub-tank floor must be removed and extra floors fitted between the legs. However due to the space taken by the legs and the central tower, each of these floors provides only appx 140 m² and is an extremely awkward shape. These additional floors must be enclosed by glass walls and a reception area provided at ground level. All this assumes a developer can get away with treating a grade II* building as just an empty shell.

The current planning application follows this logic and shows two penthouses, two flats, a restaurant, a kitchen and office space spread over 10 floors. No use is specified for the roof space or cupola. The applicant's Valuation Report prepared by Savills explores this proposal and six others, from a single dwelling to a hotel to various mixed uses. The one applied for (option F) would result in a capital loss of £1.8m. All the options result in similar losses, and

none are viable. The market value of Jumbo under current conditions is put at less than zero. Anyone who thinks that such a scheme, even if permitted, will ever be carried out please raise their hand now.

For a great deal less than this loss (actually £1.2m) Balkerne Tower Trust could carry out its most ambitious restoration and public access scheme, including a display space in the tank, a lift, a tour waiting area, toilets, a modest office and retail space. Jumbo would then take its rightful place as a major heritage attraction alongside the others which define Colchester more than anything else. Could we raise the funds, for this or one of the more modest options? We think that the appeal of this project is such that we could, using all the means available to a registered charity.

Details of the current planning applications (change of use and listed building permission) can be seen on the CBC website under the application numbers 091305 and 091343. Due to the delay in hearing these, there is probably still time to make a comment if you wish. For everything else to do with Jumbo and the Balkerne Tower Trust, including our complete Options Appraisal by Purcell Miller Tritton, please see www.savejumbo.org.uk.

"The Railway Children" - Waterloo Station 18th November 2010

Peter

Evans

Most people are familiar with E Nesbitt's children's story through the film starring Jenny Agutter and Bernard Cribbins of about 40 years ago, a TV version or even the book itself. Most of us were really interested in how a real train could possibly be involved. Well, suffice it to say that it is a great success. We see the train, can feel the vibrations and can hear the sounds. We do not quite get the smell of the smoke but doubtless Health and Safety have stopped this.

We do get a typical station, with real British Rail dirt on the windows, and a variety of luggage scattered around. The plot involves brave and resourceful children - cunningly played by the adults they later became - who survive their descent from prosperity in London to relative poverty (they still have a servant) in Yorkshire. It has an entirely suitable and heart warming end.

It was originally produced by the York Theatre Royal and the National Railway Museum in York. The cast includes some names from television - fans of the recent success "Ashes to Ashes" would have recognised the porter and the dignified Victorian mother is a frequent TV face. They were supported by a crew that had to move the stage and the engine as well.

We all suspended belief and enjoyed it as much as the schoolchildren that made up most of the the rest of the audience- the state schools in polo shirts and the fee paying ones in blazers like deckchair canvass. It is perhaps

appropriate with a play about trains that some of the latter children arrived late.

Heritage Weekend 2010

Thank you to all those who volunteered your services for Heritage Weekend in 2010. In fact there were very few who did offer to help and I had great difficulty in filling all the slots. So I am extra thankful to those who did offer their time. The numbers attending the various properties were about the same in as in previous years with one having many more.

This year Colchester Tourism Team commissioned an economic impact study over the weekend. It turns out that £213,741.21 was earned over the week end by businesses in the town. This makes an average of £20.58 per person who visited the properties which were open.

I hope that in 2011 more members will come forward to help. You do not have to know anything about the properties as there is an information folder with all the information you need, provided for every property that is open. All that is needed is just two hours of your time to look after the property that may not always be open and to show off Colchester to visitors from all over the country and sometimes to people from abroad.

Heritage Open Days in 2011 will be held over the weekend of 10 and 11 September and I will be coming to you asking for help again then. It would be very good if I had so many volunteers that I had a long list of reserves. Stewarding at Heritage Weekend is about the only thing that the members of Colchester Civic Society are involved in and it would be good if there were more of you helping out. Please make a note of the dates for 2011 and be ready to fill in my request for help which will be with this newsletter.

Thank you once again to the few who did volunteer.

Ann Turner

CIVIC VOICE

Last year we asked members for their approval to continue subscribing to this organisation – the successor to the Civic Trust – and as we only had one dissenting voice we went ahead. Your committee has not regretted this decision as it has proved a valuable, and readily accessible, source of information. The regular issues of the online journals *Civic sense* and *Your voice* not only provide information but also give online links to the sources for the information they have gathered and digested. Obviously much of this comes from various central government departments but also local authorities, quangos, charities and pressure groups are covered. We have been able to find out about central government proposals for changes to the system for Tree Preservation Orders, news items from English Heritage about suggestions for getting buildings listed, and the proposals by Kent County Council for licensing (and charging) for A-board advertising. Our attempts to discover what Essex County is doing on this issue, which had been raised with us by Society members, didn't provide any firm answers.

Much of the emphasis recently has been with the government's Localism Bill, which includes a major review of the planning system and allows, or seems to allow, for the establishment of various "community rights" and the development of "neighbourhood plans". We could, perhaps, try to pursue the various aspects of this legislation ourselves, but when, at the last count, there were 35 consultation papers or impact assessments for one piece of legislation alone (and most of those are only available on-line) this would be extremely time-consuming. Civic Voice gives us a fairly simple means of finding our way through this jungle of paperwork and policy-making.

If you would like to look at the sort of material Civic Voice provides why not go to their website at www.civicvoice.org.uk?

Programme dates for your diary.

At the time of going to printing we don't have full details (including prices and times) for the visits, nor reply slips, but if you are interested please contact: (Removed in this digital version)

so that we can gain some idea of numbers.

27 March. Another visit to the **Olympics site**, this time with a different emphasis.

1 April. An afternoon visit to the **firstsite building**.

9 April **Coffee morning at 37 Valley Road, Wivenhoe.**
N.B. This house has steps inside, so access is not easy.

12 April. An evening visit to the former **Garrison Church** to look at it as a Russian Orthodox church.

11 May A visit to **West Stow Hall** – a house dating from Tudor times, situated a few miles to the north-west of Bury St. Edmunds.

22 May **Buckingham Palace Gardens.**

Early June (date and speaker *tbc*) will see the **Annual General Meeting**.

13 June Another visit to **Beeleigh Abbey**.

21 June **Annual Dinner** – at Hall Farm, Stratford St. Mary.

10-11 September will be **Heritage Open Days** – see the separate sheet with this *Newsletter*

2 October **Syon House**, on the banks of the Thames to the west of London

5 November our **Burning issues** meeting.

27 November A **Thames cruise**, this time **from the O₂ Arena to Westminster**, with tour of the Christmas lights.

Another visit to Rochester is being negotiated – but the date is dependent on the Cathedral authorities.