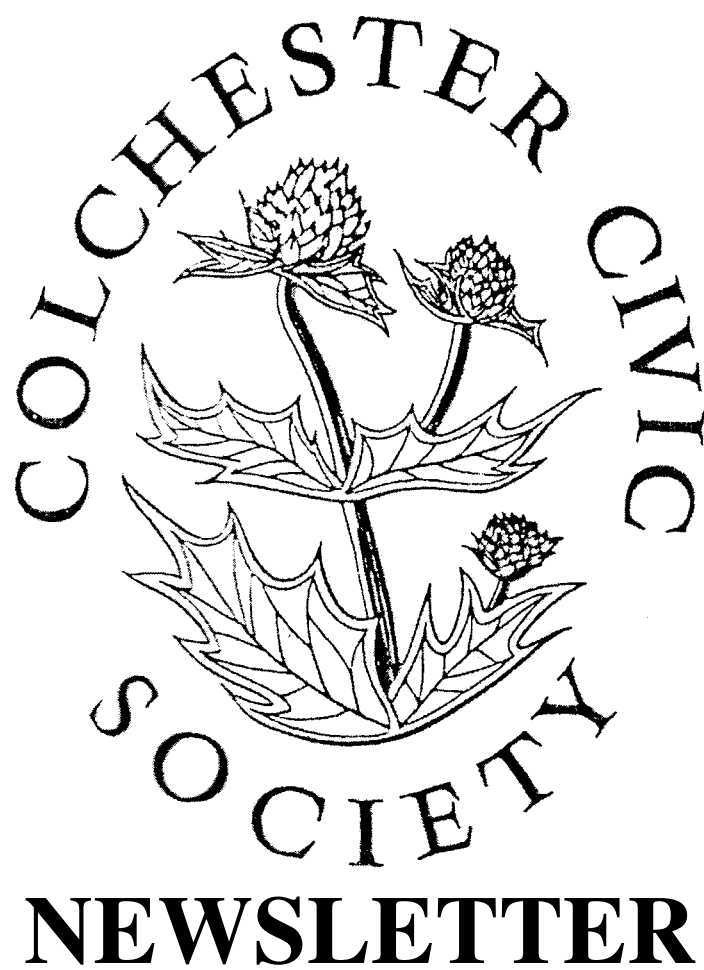


Winter 2013



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Registered Charity 237885

This Newsletter has been edited for The Colchester Civic Society by Peter Evans.
Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of The Civic Society.

Contributions are always welcome and should be sent to
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peter.evans7978@btinternet.com

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

The objects of The Civic Society are to:

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

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Hon. Life President:	Bill Hudson	
President:	Vacant	
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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FROM ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 13TH JUNE 2013

Five years ago, when "A" boards started encroaching on our pavements, Jo Edwards led a battle with the outside bodies that she was a member of to demand that either the Borough Council or Essex County Council admitted responsibility for policing this matter. Eventually, the County Council as Highway Authority took responsibility but agreed a "tolerant" attitude towards them. However, the Partially Sighted Group staged a demonstration and the Essex County Highways Department put forward a scheme of regulation. Nothing was said about enforcement, unfortunately, but one presumes that the recently appointed Zone Wardens will include it in their remit.

The Society has been consulted about two major planning applications. The Williams and Griffins application was discussed extensively and criticism of the eastern end glazing was made plain when we met the management of the Fenwick group, although we accepted the principle for the development. Tesco also consulted us on their plans for the Butt Road development and here we drew attention to possible transport problems.

Two derelict buildings continue to disturb us. In Queen Street, an important ancient shop building, is still covered in scaffolding, which is an eyesore and a hazard for pedestrians. There is a problem with planning enforcement. We are also concerned about a property in East Street.

The Civic Society lunch at St John's Church Hall was a welcome return to a much loved function. The Social programme continues to flourish with much hard work from Jo Edwards, whom we heartily thank. Equally my personal thanks go to Elizabeth Baines and Paul Weston, and also to the other Executive Committee members for their support during the year.

Ray Chandler
Chairman, Colchester Civic Society

Stop Press: the scaffolding from Queen Street was suddenly removed and the property tidied up at the end of July. We had been in touch with the Planning Department, which had been concerned as well. This is probably not the end of the story.

ROOM WITH A VIEW

How good it was to see scaffolding going up against the Roman Wall in Priory Street.

It is many years since I phoned the Council to ask whether they could put barriers against the wall to protect cars and pedestrians as large stones were falling off into the car park. One particularly large one had nearly hit me as I took the dogs for a walk one night and, a few days later, several slightly smaller ones, still big enough to cause a nasty injury, had cascaded down, causing great consternation to car park users. The barriers duly arrived. Some time later, a notice went up too, saying something along the lines of "Colchester Borough Council. Looking after our Heritage". The irony of this statement was not lost on residents, tourists, car park users in general as the grass and weeds grew behind the barriers, litter gathered and further stones fell from the wall. Those of us who knew about the programme of repairs got fed up with explaining the situation to those that did not. I've lost count of the number of times I've gone through my Forth Bridge type explanation. After so many years, even I had started to wonder whether the work would ever be done. But now it is happening!

Unfortunately, though, not in time to stop Claudia, our car, having a sizeable lump of Wall dropped onto her bonnet by some delightful reveller late one night. It will cost over £300 to repair. As a consequence, we have told Claudia that she will just have to live with the large dent. We have told her that it adds character to her appearance! I'm not sure she believes us though.

Jo Edwards



Tom Rumble and Jean Budd with a friend at the Annual General Meeting

BOOK REVIEW – “Housing and Hope” – a celebration of the history of the Colchester Quaker Housing Association. Edited by Liz Taylor-Jones and published by Wivenbooks.

In 1965, before David Cameron thought of the Big Society, some local Quakers and other interested people decided to do something to help local homeless people. It started in a small but practical way and only came to an end in 2007 when various pieces of legislation combined to make it impractical to continue in the same vein. The Housing Association merged with Family Mosaic, a similar organisation, but larger and more appropriate.

When I worked for Colchester Borough Council, I knew that Christian Action rented some spare properties from the Council for use by homeless people, and also bought or developed other properties with Council assistance and loans. I did not realise the depth of their activities, that they spread to Clacton, Sudbury, Chelmsford, Witham and beyond and how professional it was. It was a very worthy, hardworking group and much respected.

I remember receiving a phone call from Christian Action asking a question, probably about the horrific Housing Association Grant (HAG) regulations. I answered the question as well as I could but said that they should have asked the Council actually involved, which was a neighbour. “Oh I know” said the lady on the phone (possibly Liz Taylor-Jones) “but Colchester is always so much more helpful”. Unsolicited compliments like that are rarer than hen’s teeth and it speaks volumes of the good relations between the two organisations.

The architect for some of these projects was Brian Roach, a member of our executive committee. He also fondly remembers Christian Action.

The book has biographies of the main players and has input from various people involved. I remember John Cole, with his beret, bicycle clips and files in the cycle basket, dealing with major aspects of the charity.

Many will remember Bernard Brett, who managed a large chunk of the administration despite his major disabilities. He was often to be seen being wheeled around town in a wheelchair with an alphabet on a tray which he used to communicate with his helpers. Sometimes, they would be seen manhandling him and his wheelchair on to a train. I thought he was just having a day by the sea at Clacton. I did not realise that Christian Action had properties to manage at Clacton, and that was where he was bound. Bernard Brett House stands on South Way, named in his honour, and provides help for young people with housing problems.

The book modestly records the valuable but unsung work that Christian Action did over 40 years.

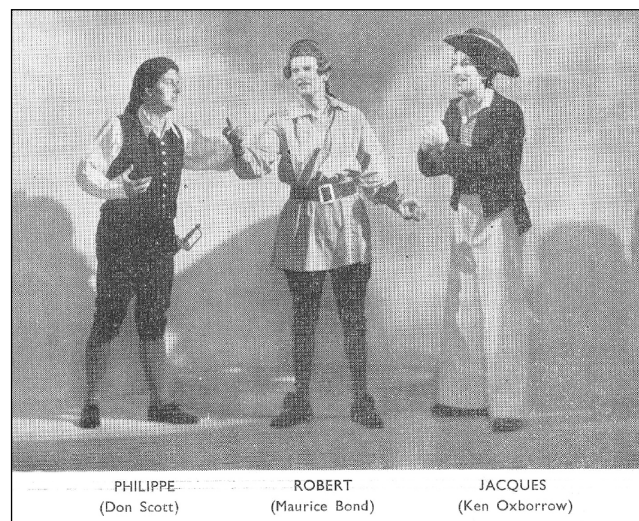
Peter Evans

THE PLAYHOUSE

In the previous newsletter, we included an article about the Playhouse. This produced a letter from our member Sheila Scott, with memories of time in the Colchester Operatic Society, which used the Playhouse for performances for many years. There was not sufficient space to cover this in the previous newsletter but it is more interesting in any case to quote from Sheila’s experiences of the Operatic Society.

“I joined the society soon after leaving the Girls High School. The annual shows were extremely popular and were the highlight of the “social season”. It provided a little glamour after the war, although rationing was still in force.

Before the war Gilbert & Sullivan operas were performed (I don’t know where) but in 1949 a very youthful Charles Mackerass arrived from the antipodes to conduct our production of “New Moon” by Sigmund Romberg. In 1950 Leo Quayle conducted “Desert Song” (also Romberg) and in 1951 Marcus Dodds joined Charles Mackerass for our show “Student Prince”. All 3 young men were very pleasant and on the way up. They had permission to perform from Sadler’s Wells. I have not got all the programmes from the period but Marcus was back in 1959 to conduct the “The Merry Widow”.



From a 1949 programme



These well illustrated programmes are a delight to read with their pictures and photos of people, places, shops, names, and businesses – most of them gone! And of course, fashion. They were all produced by local architect Horace Pearce.”

Sheila has provided us with an autographed page from the 1949 programme for “New Moon” and an advert for Luckings. Information from the 1950’s programmes from the 1950’s show that the same conductors, in different combinations, were present throughout, as Sheila thought. I have not found where the society performed before but they were using the Playhouse in 1934. Does anyone know what they used before the Playhouse was available?

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

We welcome new members including Vivien Baldry of Feering; Carol van der Sande, Long Melford; Mr & Mrs David Cable, Alresford; Caroline Crosby, Tollesbury; Ann Daws, Alresford; Janet Gardener, Stanway; Kate Shaller, Peldon; Raymond and Beverley Smith, West Mersea.

In the Queen's Birthday Honours List, two of our members received honours and we congratulate them. Andrew Philips received a BEM and John Burton an MBE.

For details of how to join, please contact Ann Turner, Membership Secretary. Fees are £8 for a single member and £12 for couples.

National Trust and English Heritage Passes

As we are affiliated to the Civic Voice, all members can claim free day passes for admission to National Trust or English Heritage properties. When writing, please refer to your membership of the Colchester Civic Society

For **National Trust properties**, please write to Gill Roxborough, Civic Voice, Unit 101, 82 Wood Street, The Tea Factory, Liverpool L1 4DQ, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope. The pass is transferrable and can be given to family or friends if you already have membership of the National Trust.

To download **English Heritage passes**, please visit <http://tinyurl.com/civcenglish.offer>. The pass is valid for one visit per member and not as part of a group. It is not transferrable and expires on 31st January 2014. If you don't have internet access, you can apply by post as above for National Trust passes.

50th Anniversary

June 2014 will be the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the society. If any one has any thoughts or memories of events, campaigns etc of the last 50 years for inclusion in the newsletter, please send them to the editor.

Blue Plaques - stop press

After a great deal of research into the life of Frank Daniell the Colchester artist and portrait painter, we are delighted to announce that he is to be commemorated with a blue plaque in the Civic Society's forthcoming 50th anniversary year. Keep an eye on the news in the local press and there will be more in the next newsletter.

Daniell was responsible for the Bluecoat girl and boy paintings, amongst others.

REPORTS OF SOCIAL PROGRAMME 2013

New Year Lunch 23rd February 2013 - St John's Church Hall, Colchester.

From our Restaurant Critic

The Civic Society Christmas Lunch was held in the elegant and spanking new reception suite of St John's Church hall on Saturday February 23rd 2013. It was a little unclear if it was celebrating the Spirit of Christmas Past (2012) or the Spirit of Christmas to come (2013) – perhaps both, as the Society looks both backwards to the historic heritage of Colchester and forwards to good building and planning for the future. In any case the new building at St John's was an excellent venue with a curving wall and light spacious interior itself an example of good design. A real embellishment to the community.

The lunch itself was an example of moving with the times, as instead of relying exclusively on an already very active committee to do all the hard work involved in a cold buffet (which ranged from salmon to quiches, ham, coleslaw and a variety of salads), this was provided by an outside caterer, who provided an excellent range of delicious dishes. The committee itself provided some very welcome mulled drinks on arrival and operated a bar during the meal and its members were also responsible for an excellent carrot and orange soup for the first course – good soup is a rarity at public occasions today, and a dazzling array of puddings. These were much appreciated as was evidence by the number of helpings taken up in various surges to the table. Three were relatively common and five were not unknown! There was little room left for the tempting cheese and biscuits.

Besides being a gourmet feast the lunch was also a very pleasant social occasion with easy mixing encouraged by the venue which provided a warm and light interior.

The well-stocked raffle proved a great success in raising funds for the society. The most popular prizes were those connected with food and drink which augmented the sale of the remaining good things from the buffet. We understand that Cooper Edwards would like to express his appreciation of various treats which have supplemented his usual diet of £20, £10 and £5 notes!

Altogether it was a most successful and sociable event a real credit to all who were involved in organising and catering a really splendid "Christmas Lunch".

Ian Budge

The Empty Colchester Castle - 24th March 2013

Colchester Castle is undergoing a major refurbishment costing £4 million. It closed after



Christmas 2012 and was emptied of all exhibits. The Museum management had realised that local people wanted to see what the Castle looked like empty, and this would be the first opportunity since the 1930's to do so. Several groups hired the Castle – for example for a Real Ale Festival – but the Museum invited various local groups for private views.

The Civic Society was invited to join The Friends of Colchester Museums on Sunday 25th March, when Peter Berridge, Tom Hodgson and Philip Wise of the Museum Service and Mark Davies of The Friends of Colchester Museum (and formerly of Colchester Museums) gave informal tours. Over 400 people wanted to see the Castle empty but that Sunday it snowed heavily, so numbers were down but it was still a very large crowd that turned up.

Many said how they first thought that empty the Castle seemed smaller but soon, the Castle seemed to change shape and get bigger. Several interesting features of the walls – some that had not been known before – were pointed out. We understand that the new displays in the Castle will not hide the walls and will emphasise that the building was large and important in medieval Colchester. Apparently the project is on time and on budget and will reopen for summer 2014.

Greenwich and Flying the Emirates – Thursday 10th April 2013

The select group who ventured forth to visit the delights of Greenwich were amply rewarded by not only the sun and mild(ish) weather but panoply of architectural, cultural, scenic and engineering wonders.

A trouble free journey, an informative and scholarly guide, Martin, placed the Maritime Museum in historical, chronological context then gently guided us to view some of the Nelson memorabilia and interestingly the contemporary maps of the Tudor palaces which were the habitué of royalty. We saw the ceremonial barge – inspiration for last year's Diamond Jubilee River Pageant. Did you know that the Museum can help you trace your family history with the most comprehensive maritime archive in the world covering merchant ships and seamen and the Royal Navy?

Historic Greenwich is overlooked by General Wolfe – he of the battle against the French at the heights of Abraham in Canada. Standing imperiously on the hill adjacent to the original Royal Observatory and looking North towards the River Thames, the Isle of Dogs (where some Henry VIII dogs were kennelled) and the now resplendently refurbished CUTTY SARK.

The Queen's House, an Inigo Jones Palladian masterpiece, completed circa 1638 for Charles' I Queen Henrietta Maria, features an elegant tulip stairs and case plus a 40-foot cube Great Hall. The



villa contains a world-class collection of paintings, has an impressive view and access to the Thames framed by the Old Royal Naval College, Wren's twin-domed riverside masterpiece including the Painted Hall and Chapel, wherein now resides the Music Faculty of Greenwich University

We then had ample time to have lunch and wander at our leisure. We then visited the amazing Painted Hall – often described as the 'finest dining hall in Europe'; designed by Wren and Hawksmoor in 1698 – originally intended to be used as an eating space for the naval veterans, known as Greenwich Pensioners who lived at the Royal Hospital for Seamen but subsequently thought to be too grand for everyday use!

We reconvened at the aforementioned CUTTY SARK, the last surviving tea clipper, re-opened in April 2012. Initially built for the China tea trade and launched in 1869, Cutty Sark's original wooden planks and iron frames that crossed the China Seas have been meticulously restored. All interiors were accessible and fully restored with interactive displays which recalled the hard working life of the 18th Century seaman. Narrow aisles and claustrophobic quarters designed for those under five and a half feet in stature! Interesting displays of figureheads with some easily recognisable characters e.g. General Gordon of Khartoum and muses of antiquity. We spent some minutes eyes closed on a bench which accurately simulated the passage of a ship through the ocean nursing minor collisions with the bulkhead and beams! The ship was raised 3m above her dry dock – it was quite awe-inspiring to be able to walk under this huge copper-bottomed ship!

Onwards again into the 21st Century and saw a truly panoramic visual of the Thames, the old Victoria Dockyards, the newish Thames Barrier and the ever increasingly busy Canary Wharf development. We enjoyed the 360 degrees round trip including a 'few white knuckles' high above the river with an unparalleled view of the city including St Paul's Cathedral, Olympic Park and the new Crystal building - even the Shard in the distance. The Emirates Cable Car was an exciting and 'must do' experience.

In conclusion a memorable day blessed with good weather, good company and an itinerary of delights!

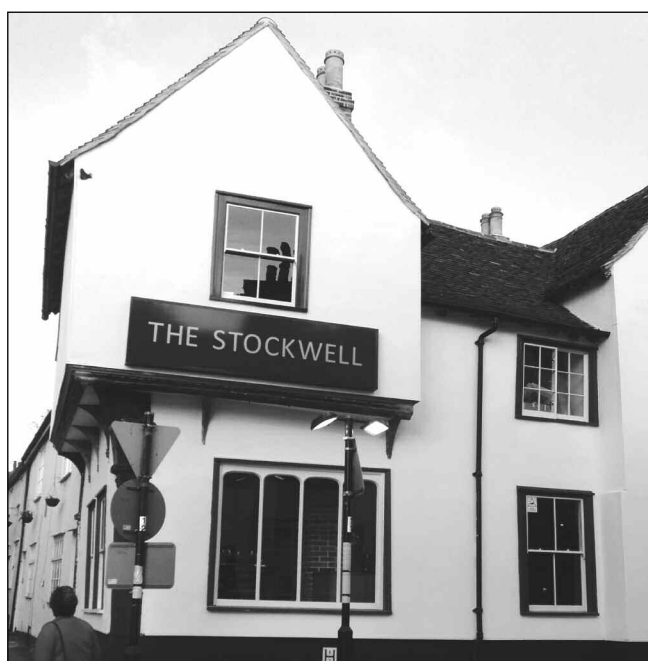
Peter Hazlewood

The Stockwell -15th April 2013

At last! The promised and oft postponed tour of The Stockwell happened and the evening was warmish and sunny and our hopes for an interesting tour were high. We were not disappointed.

We were greeted at the door by the owner Robert Morgan. Passing by the truly ancient bar and meeting room we were ushered into a large, modern, white and black dining room where there was seating for all of us and tea or coffee and gourmet Brownies were served. What a delicious and comforting surprise!

While we were comfortably seated Robert told us about his reasons for attempting to restore the three houses that now form The Stockwell and his adventures while undertaking the project. He has always lived in a medieval house and has a strong



emotional attachment to buildings of that period.

When he bought The Stockwell Arms it was in danger of falling down. When a surveyor climbed a ladder and touched the chimney, it moved and the building was hastily evacuated. At that indication of the fragility of the building the Council Planners waived their objections to his plans and allowed him to proceed with due care and diligence. Robert exercised these and consulted closely with the Council, archaeologists, and engineers at every step. He was impressed by the interest, knowledge and advice of those officials, their willingness to co-operate and also by the expertise of the architects Inkpen Downey.

So, with friendly discussions and the interest of all concerned, the project began.

It was found that a Roman Road runs through the dining room, four feet down. A well was found containing about 600 bones, all of a uniform size, which were probably the detritus from a tannery. The building had originally been three houses, one of which was a small Hall House, and they were leaning in different directions with small gaps between them. Of the twelve main beams, five of them were in the ground. Why hadn't the place fallen down? The chimney weighing 91/2 tons was bearing down on the minimally supported walls.

As the building was prepared for restoration and shored up relatively modern repairs fell away and a barrel backed inglenook was revealed. The metal work in the chimney is the original. During restoration Robert decided not to disguise the new beams but to preserve and display the remains of the old ones.

Of the original three houses the one built in the 1700s was the richest. Its floor had dropped significantly. A mud and wattle section of the wall was found and has been preserved behind a glass pane. In the gap between houses number 2 and 3 two dead cats were found.

Upstairs is the Empire room containing a picture of George V dated 1935. In the void of that room people had been living. There was a large gap between these two houses where a knife, a marrow spoon, a tunic, 18 buttons, a pair of dividers, a leather purse, a Roman vase, a travelling Barber's pole, a coin dated 1335 and another dated 1348 were found. We were shown a copper Archer's Ring which protected the finger pulling the bow and a Roman Key ring. In this Hall House is a Minstrels' Gallery. To restore this house a beam had to be lifted manually as no machinery was available to do that task.

The engineers decided that a 10 foot platform foundation measuring 800 cubic metres had to be placed under the houses and the pylons supporting that platform had to measure 42 feet.

After Robert's talk he conducted half the group around the inside of the building while Dave Stenning took the other half outside to show them part of the Dutch Quarter, which had been settled by the Flemish Weavers who fled their own country and took refuge in Colchester. He expounded upon the architecture of the buildings and the lives of the people who had lived there. He explained that the Wyvern symbol was connected to the weavers. In Angel Street the building currently painted blue was the old Wool Hall.

This is but a short outline of the history of The Stockwell but if you would like to know more it has an excellent web site at www.thestockwellcolchester.com<<http://www.thestockwellcolchester.com/>>

The many problems encountered by Robert whilst restoring this fascinating building had delayed our tour on at least three occasions, but when we were able to see the finished building and hear its history and the dramatic account of undertaking such a challenging project, we ended our day feeling profoundly grateful that such people as Robert feel strongly enough about our town to risk huge sums of money and tremendous effort to maintain its history and human memories of Colchester, of which we all feel rather fond and proud.

Thank you Robert. May your efforts be well rewarded.

Eileen Sheldon



The internal ceiling and rafters

Visit to the SOS at Gosbecks Bus 17th April 2013

The Civic Society has always kept an eye on the "Night time economy" as part of the licensing issue. Jo Edwards has been closer than most to the operational issues that have become necessary and as part of her membership of the Colchester Town Partnership, was instrumental in introducing the concept of the SOS bus to Colchester. She was aware of one operating in Norwich and once suggested, all parties involved - the Council, the Police, health authorities etc. - became convinced that it would benefit the town.

We were impressed and indeed surprised by the professional way that the bus is run by the charity, Open Road. The Co-coordinator, Wayne Perkins, explained all aspects of the operation and we were constantly surprised by some the facts. But what exactly does it do?

On Friday and Saturday nights, the bus stands outside the Slug And Lettuce in High Street (the old TSB opposite St Nicholas House) from 8.30pm until 4am or later. It has a medical room and a kitchen/rest room for volunteers. It is there to help those who need some sort of help during those hours. It is not just those who need support because of excess drink or drugs, but those who have become ill, been attacked or have become detached from friends and cannot get home. Not all of this is their own fault and the SOS bus helps victims of theft or rape, and was involved in a recent death in St Peter's Street.

Surprisingly, there is no shortage of volunteers to help out. Only medical staff are paid and 80 volunteers take at least one shift a month, after training both on and off the bus. Wayne has experience at Accident and Emergency in the health service and does much of the training himself.

Pubs and clubs do offer practical help and the security staff will support if needed. The Police are glad of the presence of the bus and over the past 5 years, over 4000 people have been helped without reference to the Police Station or A&E, which must be a great saving to the District General.

Those who use the bus are encouraged to contribute for the water, condoms and flip-flops (to replace lost or damaged footwear) issued on board. Some lifts home are given (as a last resort) but Wayne and his colleagues are wary of this being taken for granted. Apart from these contributions and other voluntary gifts, Open Road depends upon support from the Borough Council, the Primary Healthcare Trust and the Police, but Wayne seeks support from anywhere.

The bus is still yellow, but is now a purpose adapted if not built version, acquired late in 2012. The old bus is still available and has been used for a pilot scheme in Ipswich. The Essex Police Commissioner has visited and is impressed

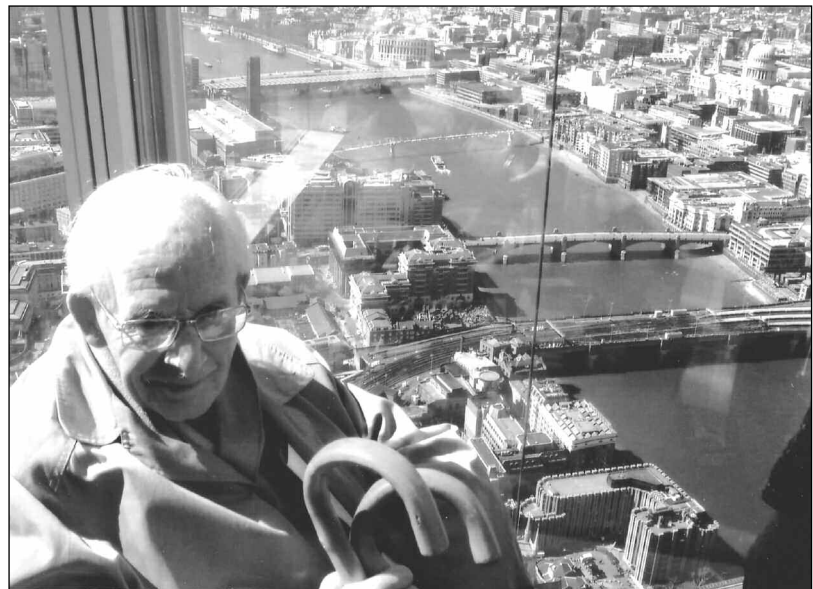


Visit to the Shard 20th April 2013 - The View!

We could not believe our luck when such a beautifully clear day dawned for our trip to the Shard. We stopped for coffee at St Paul's, which looked magnificent in the bright sunlight, and met up again

with our guide Martin, who had looked after us for our Greenwich and Emirates cable car trip the week before, so enjoyable. Whilst there, it was interesting to learn about “Temple Bar” which was installed in the City Wall in 1673 but removed into obscurity in 1870. It was only re-erected beside St Paul’s just 8 years ago and looked splendid following restoration.

As we were visiting Western Europe’s tallest building (1016 feet), the height of London’s buildings was very much the subject of the day. We started with St Paul’s, built 1710 to a height of 365 feet, which makes it the 38th tallest building in the capital, when it was once the highest. Number 1 Canada Square is the second tallest and in fact, Canary Wharf has 5 of the tallest, followed by the Heron Tower, (the Cheese grater), Tower 42 (the Gherkin), the Post Office Tower and the “Walkie-Talkie”. We learnt that in the 1960’s, the laws were relaxed on the height of buildings but to enable the current heights to be reached, foundations of 60 feet have to be dug, with the result that many more Roman remains are being discovered and we passed one such site where an archaeological dig was taking place.



Tom Rumble in The Shard with London in the background

After coffee, we set off over London Bridge (now the 3rd on the site) for a fascinating tour of Royal Victoria Docks going, firstly, down the once medieval street Royal Mint Street, where the executioner of Charles I lived, then Cable Street, displaying a plaque giving details of the battle between Oswald Mosley and his followers (black shirts) and the east enders, then on into redeveloped Wapping where Helen Mirren and Graham Norton have their homes. We continued past “Spirit Quay” the entry point for bonded goods, the River Police Station (the oldest uniformed force in the world) in Rotherhithe and then Garnett Street, where Johnnie Speight lived and wrote “Till Death Us Do Part”. We passed dockside pubs “Captain Kidd” (commemorating the pirate who was executed there), “The Devil’s Cavern” and the oldest of them all, the “Prospect of Whitby”.

We saw the Free Trade Wharf to which, when still affected by plague in 1668, the only traders who would still come were the Dutch, hence the expression “Dutch Courage”! We passed through Limehouse, the first opium smoking Chinatown, and saw Hawksmoor’s beautiful St Anne’s Church and later, his St George’s in the East, built 1711. We saw the “Star of the East” pub at the entrance to the former West India Dock, which was the first Dock to be built in 1804. The places and facts kept coming as we passed the 1980 Billingsgate Market (rent – 1 fish per annum), Poplar DLR station (poplar trees grew here to provide a windbreak) and St Katharine’s Dock with carved elephants atop the gate pillars indicating the entry dock for ivory.

We were meant to explore Canary Wharf (built in 1983 and so named because this is where bananas were originally imported from the Canary Islands) but the area was cordoned off for the London Marathon the following day, so we now made our way to... the View ! Enroute we glimpsed a bizarre looking vehicle called a “Pedal bus” where several people stood sideways to their direction of travel, pedalling furiously and manoeuvring the vehicle as they went. Parking by Southwark Crown Court, we found time for lunch at Hays Wharf.

The Shard stands over the entrance to London Bridge Station and in a short time we were in one of the 44 lifts (some double decker) whizzing us up to levels 68 to 72 (the top level is 95) which have public access to... The View! On such a day, it was simply stunning. People were reduced to upright ants, cars were dinky, railway systems were toy train sets, mighty buildings mere models and all the bends in the Thames could be seen from the Barrier to Kew, in other words for 40 miles in any direction. The Wembley Arch was quite clearly seen. It was like being in a plane coming into land and hovering at 800 feet. To add to our amazement, the abseilers who clean the top level windows were practising their skill – on the other side of the glass! Lower level windows, we learnt, are cleaned from cradles which are

housed behind up and overstructure in the building. A Fulltime job as there are 11,000 panels, enough to cover Trafalgar Square 2.5 times to 8 football pitches!

At levels 34-52 is the Shangri-La Hotel with 200 guest rooms, restaurants, gym and pool - did Martin really say that a stay was £3000 a night? Below the hotel are offices and above are private apartments – what price are these?!

What an awesome day we had. Thank you Jo for organising such a splendid outing!

Tom Rumble and Jean Budd

Meal at CHeFS, Colchester Institute 23rd May 2013

Our annual meal took place at the Institute, where the chefs and waiters are under training. Apart from the fact that there is a lot of staff, you would never know. We had a good choice of food, all of which was excellent and of a high quality. The quail and lamb were delicious.

It is nice venue and I took the opportunity to enjoy the paintings on the walls and you get an unusual view of the town from this part of the Institute.

Southwold and Belle Grove House, Wednesday 10th July 2013

Here we had a day of contrasts. Southwold is always a popular destination and we know what we will see. There's the medieval church, the lighthouse, Adnams Brewery, the many greens and the Pier. Traffic regulations now mean that coaches

cannot set down in the main streets, so the pier was the rendezvous.

Belle Grove House could not take the complete party of 40 people in one visit, so we split into 2 parties, visiting Southwold and Belle Grove turn and turn about.

We did not know what to expect at Belle Grove, except that it was unusual. It was also new, having built on the site of a family farmhouse, which was demolished as it needed considerable repair. Nick Fisher and his wife Jo Jordan decided to replace it with a new house of their own design. They had spent a lot of time running safaris in Africa but had retained a base in nearby Halesworth.

The inspiration came from a design in an old architectural magazine. They did not have an architect and were advised to produce a model of their dream home to show to the planning authority rather than a plan. There are a number of coincidences and pieces of luck during the construction of Belle Grove and one was that when they sought an architectural model maker, they found one 3 minutes away via Yellow Pages.

When they presented their model to the council, they



expected opposition. Amazingly, there was none – the council loved it! It was part of a scheme including holiday lets and barn conversion, and the construction work – by a team of Polish craftsmen – took place over about 3 years. The owners were able to move into the upper part of the house whilst the rest of the work was done.

Now to describe the property. Fortunately we have photographs as otherwise you might not believe me. The entrance porch is pure Lavenham, the rear portion is circular, resembling an oriental temple and there is a huge Tudor style brick chimney. The bricks have been recycled from the farmhouse and other materials have come from all over the world. One way is reinforced hay bales. Pillars in the porch come from Rajasthan, metalwork in the hall are from Lowestoft Railway Station and a fire station; other materials came in bulk from Indonesia and from car boot sales. Nick struck a deal in France to buy wood cheap.

The life size dragon on the chimney – didn't I mention the dragon – has a tail reaching down to the ground and is a lightening conductor. Having decided that they wanted a dragon, Nick & Jo were able to commission one made of steel from Herefordshire. The summer house is very comfortable with a temple feel to it.

It seems that Nick was the driving force behind the building and Jo behind the interior. The furniture and furnishings are imaginative. Each bedroom has an ensuite bathroom of some size and some style, oriental or period. There are four poster beds. Downstairs (the stairs go round a tree trunk) there is a state of the art kitchen but also quirky items like an almost life-size art deco waiter holding a telephone. The sitting room has a massive fireplace that looks Georgian but is a mixture of periods and sources and a curved sofa of great comfort. Each room encourages you to relax, sit down, and enjoy the books and pictures.

Every now and then you can hear the railway at the end of the garden but not really see it, except from the top storey. Jo told us that a guard from the Lowestoft-Ipswich line hired a holiday cottage to find out what had been going on after seeing some building works from the train.

Belle Grove has been reviewed favourably in THE GUARDIAN and has a website www.belle-grove.com

This is a strange and spectacular property that fascinated and amazed us, and Jo and Nick made us very welcome. Perhaps it will teach us to be more imaginative in our own homes.

Visit to Buckingham Palace, 2nd August 2013

The object of this trip was to visit the exhibition celebrating 60 years since the Coronation, but also to tour Buck House itself.

You cannot help by being struck by the magnificence and great sense of history just entering the state apartments, as of course it was designed to. The carpet is one of those that feel so soft that your feet just sink in. We were given audio guides that efficiently took us through the Palace and the art collection. The Queen has at least 5 Van Dycks and 6 Rembrandts. There is an equestrian portrait of Charles I and amongst the many royal portraits is a striking sexy likeness of Queen Alexandra, which would make any pop starlet feel ugly and dowdy.

The Coronation exhibition does not have an audio guide but is well displayed. The centre piece for me was what the Queen wore on the day. We have all seen this many times but I had not realised how heavy the outfit must have been. The dress, stiff with embroidery and gems, and the crown would have been enough but the train, even if carried by the attendants, would have been difficult to manoeuvre quite apart from the weight of the velvet and ermine. When she was anointed with the oil (which alone of the service the Queen would not allow to be filmed) she changed to a simple shift type dress. Together all this goes some way to make us understand why at the age of 87 the oath and the service still means so much to her and why she will not consider abdication, unlike the Queen of the Netherlands.

We can view the Coronation service again. It is my first vague memory, seen at age two and half years on a small TV screen through the many chair legs of our living room. We see guests moving about after the ceremony and there are some set piece portraits, although it is difficult to identify them all – even the guides cannot. The famous Angus Beaton portrait of HMQ with crown, orb and sceptre with Westminster Abbey behind her turns out to be a trick – the view of the Abbey is a screen and the Queen was in





Buckingham Palace, where all photos were taken.

Many of the other royal outfits were on display, including the men's uniforms. Princess Anne wore a delicate white lace dress that seems a risk for any 2 year old to wear, let alone a horse mad tomboy, and Prince Charles was also in white. In some ways it was totally different parallel universe, well away from the traffic jammed London of today but that meticulously planned event impressed the rest of the world then and it still does now.

The staff inside were smart, pleasant looking, friendly and helpful. However, there were some problems with the organisation. The only toilets are not available

until you have done the tour of the Palace (90 minutes minimum) despite the less than wonderful availability of facilities in the St James Park. At the end of the tour it is quite a walk back for a comfort stop. Also, having arrived at the entrance, it took about half an hour to get in, although the security clearance itself not taking much time. I suppose there are just too many people visiting.

When booking Jo Edwards experienced conflicting information from the office, some very helpful some just the opposite. Whilst the garden tour was informative, the rules about photos and stepping (never mind walking) on the grass seemed over the top and applied zealously in this case, but maybe we were unlucky. Certainly the Palace needs security, as more recent events have proved.

There was a road train for those who needed it, however. We toured the large garden which was mainly green but there is a wonderfully colourful border full of traditional English flowers but the other main colours came from roses. These have been chosen because of their names – one is named for HMQ's favourite TV situation comedy "The Good Life" – and others for members of the Royal family. Elsewhere trees were planted by King George VI and there is the tennis courts were he played Fred Perry.



The centre of the lawn has been strengthened to form a helicopter landing pad which was used for the James Bond scene in the opening sequence of the 2012 Olympic games. I am sure that there were all sorts of hidden security.

I was surprised at first that there were not many seats – what is the point of a garden if you cannot sit down and enjoy it (not that we visitors could sit down however) and I had visions of the Queen strolling in her garden accompanied by corgis and a footman with a deckchair but there are hidden benches and a summer house.

As one of the party said, we must not forget to look at the iconic Buckingham Palace gates and the statues in the Mall even though there were so many tourists in the way. They are indeed impressive and deserve our attention.

The café was beautifully laid out and well organised, with the delicious food of high quality but pricey.

Tea Party in Rowhedge 14th August 2013

Our picture shows members enjoying homemade sandwiches, cakes and afternoon tea in the sunshine at the invitation of Executive Committee member Billie Berry. Billie was assisted by Grace Lewis and Ruth Brown.

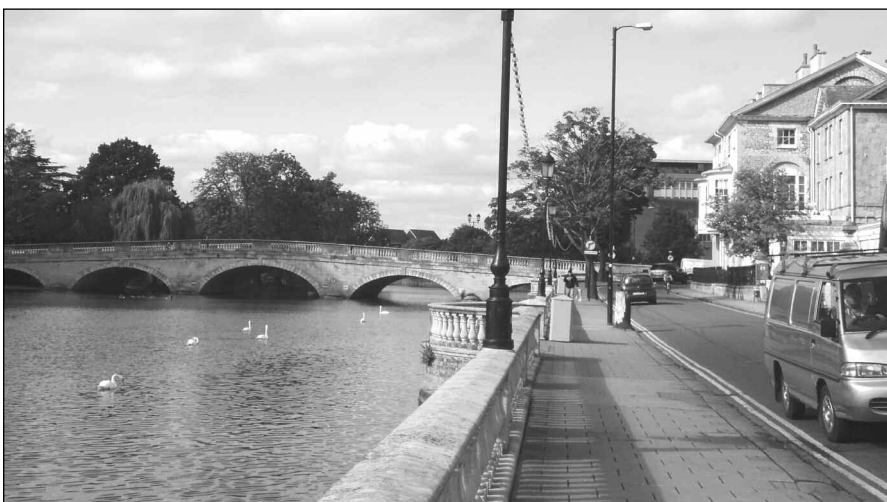
The profits from the day went to Civic Society funds. If you feel that you could help by holding a similar event (in or outdoors) please contact Jo Edwards.



John Bunyan themed visit to Bedford 20th September 2013

A party of 21 - where were the rest of you? – did this Swan action-packed tour. After a coffee stop at the Swan Hotel by the River Ouse in Bedford, we went to Elstow Abbey. The abbey church and its separate bell tower are all that remains of a nunnery. John Bunyan was born nearby, christened at the abbey church and spent his youth in the area. Later he was baptised as a believer secretly at night in the River Ouse. Freedom of worship for Dissenters dates from the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1689.

We then returned to Bedford for a guided tour of the town. In the lunch period Vivien and I opted to look round the Bunyan Museum. This is next door to the 1850 Bunyan Free Church. It was a postcard of a stained glass window

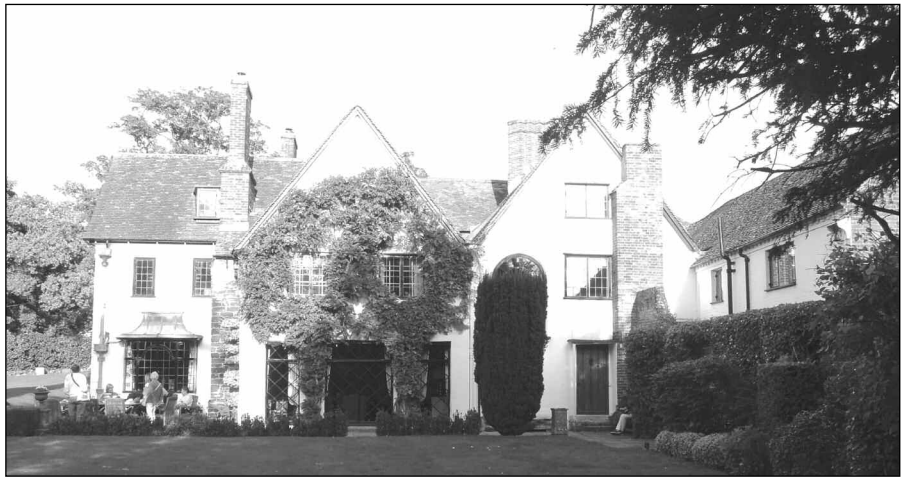


Above: Swan Hotel and Bridge, Bedford. Below: Elstow



at this Church which was the only mail to reach Terry Waite while he was in captivity in Beirut. The card showed Bunyan in his prison cell.

In the afternoon we went to Harlington Manor to be taken round by its enthusiastic owner, David Blakeman. The building may have started life as a mediaeval hall house. Its styles range from Tudor to 20th century, often in the same rooms. It makes for a fascinating melange. The Blakemans have achieved a lot in the two years they have been there



Harlington Manor

but there is a daunting amount still to be done. The visit and our day finished with tea and delicious cakes, thanks to Mrs Blakeman. The Bunyan link was that it was in this house where he was interrogated and held overnight before his trial for 'seditious preaching'. This led to 12 years in prison and the writing of 'Pilgrim's Progress', the second most read book in the English language.

The consensus was that another visit to Bedford would be worthwhile, including a check on progress at Harlington Manor, possibly in a couple of years time.

Henry Spyvee

SOCIAL PROGRAMME 2014

The Colchester Civic Society will be 50 years old next year and we will be celebrating! There will be lots of opportunities for what, I have discovered, most Civic Society members like best. "What's that?" I hear you ask. Suffice to say, we will be having morning coffee and afternoon tea in as many interesting places as possible, both near and further afield, so as many of you as possible can join us. Full details of our whole 2014 Programme will be in the next Newsletter, but below you will find events for the beginning of the year. I remember the inaugural meeting of the Society very well and find it somewhat startling that the beginning of the First World War was only 50 years before that! How time flies! We will be marking that anniversary too, with a visit to the newly refurbished Imperial War Museum in London and visit to the WW1 airfield at Stow Maries which is currently being restored; a fascinating place. And we will have visits to some lovely old houses, at least one trip to London and plenty more.

Saturday 18th January 2014 Meet at Roman Circus House, off Circular Road North, Colchester at 2.30pm for Afternoon Tea at the home of the Colchester Archaeological Trust.

Numbers for the New Year Lunch in 2013 were disappointing, so, this year, we will be celebrating the New Year with afternoon tea at Roman Circus House. The Civic Society made, for us, a fairly substantial donation towards the purchase of the erstwhile Army Education Centre, close to the Starting Gate of the Roman Circus. The building is now home to the Colchester Archaeological Trust and will be the interpretation centre for the Circus. In a former life, I often worked in the building, as part of the team involved in the resettlement of soldiers leaving the Army. I cannot believe the changes that have been made by the Archaeological Trust. A dark and dingy building has been transformed into a light, bright, airy and very welcoming one. It is early days. More work has to be done before the full potential of the place is reached and Philip Crummy will talk to us about his plans and show us around. Please come! (The cakes are really yummy!) It is not an easy place to find, I'm afraid. It is within easy walking distance of the town centre. There is some parking available but please phone me on 01206 868254 or on my mobile 07771 626561 for directions.

Cost £7.50.

Saturday 15th February 2014 Coach leaves East Hill, outside Greyfriars, at 10am for a visit to the Masterpieces - Art and East Anglia Exhibition at the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia Norwich. (Pick ups at Tollgate, Lexden Road and St John's available by arrangement).

This is your opportunity to see an extraordinary exhibition put together by the Sainsbury Centre. They have gathered together an amazing array of items which reflect the art, culture and heritage of East Anglia. There are over 270 exhibits, gathered from museums and private collections worldwide but all have been inspired by, collected in or produced in East Anglia. The items on show include paintings, photographs, ceramics, glass, fashion and textiles but there is also a prehistoric flint axe head, a really beautiful Romano British head of the Emperor Claudius, found in a river, and a Formula One Lotus 72 car (which is absolutely stunning!). This is a must see exhibition, all housed in the Grade 2* gallery designed by Norman Foster. There is a cafe in the building where you will be able to buy lunch and a cup of tea before we leave. A guided tour of the exhibition is available as long as enough of us want it.

Cost £24. (Tour £3 extra. Please tell us if you want the tour at the time of booking).

Tuesday 18th March 2014 Meet at the Garrison Officers' Club in the St John's Abbey grounds, St John's Green at 10.15am for a visit to the new building.

I suspect that some of you may never have ventured beyond the St John's Abbey Gateway and into the grounds of the Garrison Officers' Club. Such an imposing entrance can be a little off-putting! I suspect many more of you knew the rather charming but hopelessly outdated old building, destroyed by fire in 2010, but have not seen the new building. So now is your chance! Come for morning coffee and biscuits, hear what the new building has to offer and explore! This is the last remaining Officers' Club anywhere in the world. It opened in 1887 to provide social and sports facilities to serving Army Officers and their families. After a while, local civilians were allowed to join the club, too. Eventually, in 2001, the Army relinquished control of the premises and, a few years later, just before the fire, the club members bought the building and the land it sits on. It is now a private members club, still providing social and sports facilities in the heart of the town. Parking is available in the grounds. Yes, you can drive through the gateway!

Cost £2.

Thursday 10th April 2014 Meet at the Joan Tomkins Day Centre at St Helena Hospice, Barncroft Close, Highwoods at 7.00pm.

A little while ago, I was with my husband, Jim, at a meeting at the Hospice Day Centre, where he is a patient. During the course of the conversation, it became apparent that a number of the patients had no idea what the Hospice actually did. Their view was that it was purely for those who were expected to die imminently, which is far from the case. One woman was so terrified of seeing the wards in the main building, she refused to go to art therapy there. I spoke to the powers that be and suggested that a programme of visits by local groups would not go amiss. If people can find out what the Hospice actually does and spread the word, then an awful lot of fears could be assuaged. So that's how this visit has come about. We visited the main building just before it opened. It is about time we went back, to see the Day Centre and to find out how things have changed over the years. I think you will find the whole experience very interesting and eye opening. Please do come. Lifts can be arranged.

Cost A minimum donation of £3 for the Hospice.

The New Colchester Civic Society Website

All being well, our new website will be launched on 1st January 2014, the beginning of our 50th Anniversary Year. It will start as a basic framework upon which we can all build and we would welcome your comments and suggestions about what else should be available on it.

COLCHESTER CIVIC SOCIETY SOCIAL PROGRAMME 2014 REPLY SLIPS

Please return to: **Jo Edwards, 43 Priory Street, Colchester CO1 2QB.**
 Make cheques payable to **Colchester Civic Society**
 If you have an email address please advise as it makes contacting you easier

Saturday 18th January 2014 2.30pm Roman Circus £7.50

I/We would like to come

Name

Address

Post Code

Telephone

Cheque for £

enclosed

Email

Saturday 15th February 2014 10.00am Masterpieces Sainsbury Centre, Norwich £24
(please state pick up point and if you require the tour)

I/We would like to come

Name

Address

Post Code

Telephone

Cheque for £

enclosed

Email

Tuesday 18th March 2014 10.15am The Officer's Club £2

I/We would like to come

Name

Address

Post Code

Telephone

Cheque for £

enclosed

Email

Thursday 10th April 2014 7pm Joan Tompkins Centre, St Helena Hospice £3

I/We would like to come

Name

Address

Post Code

Telephone

Cheque for £

enclosed

Email

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS 2014

In 2014, Heritage Open Days will be held on 13 and 14 September.

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

Last year the visitor numbers to all the properties were down on the previous years mainly due to the weather. There were visitors from all parts of the country and some from abroad, South Africa for example. It is thanks to those that act as stewards that the event is so very popular. I am now asking for stewards for 2014. If you have done it before you will know it is not difficult as everything is provided for you. So if you have not done it before please consider giving two hours of your time to act as a steward.

I would particularly like to hear from some of our newer members as we have a few older ones who have done it for a number of years and feel that they cannot help any more. .

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

**Return the slip to Miss A. Turner, 1 Robin Close, Great Bentley,
Colchester, CO7 8QH
Please reply before 30 June 2014.**

I am willing to act as a steward for Heritage Open Days 2014

Saturday 13 September AM

PM

Sunday 14 September AM

PM

Full name

Address

Post Code

Telephone number

E mail

SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE FOR RENEWAL 1 FEBRUARY 2014.

Subscription rates are £8 single membership, £12 joint membership and £12 for corporate membership. If you are paying by standing order please ensure that your Bank is paying the correct amount.

Please renew my membership for the year February 2014-January 2015. Your membership will lapse if not renewed by 30 June 2014. An early return of this form with your subscription would be appreciated.

Please complete in capital letters.

Name

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Address

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Telephone number

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Email

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Amount enclosed £ cash/cheque made payable to "Colchester Civic Society"

If you wish to receive your newsletter by email in the future please indicate.

I wish to receive my newsletter by email in the future - Yes No

It would help the Society if you are able to gift aid your subscription. Please complete the declaration overleaf if you are able to do so. It is only necessary to complete this declaration once and if your circumstances change and you are no longer able to gift aid then please notify the membership secretary.

Please return with your subscription to the Membership Secretary:-

Miss A. Turner, 1 Robin Close, Great Bentley, Colchester CO7 8QH

GIFT AID DECLARATION – COLCHESTER CIVIC SOCIETY

Registered charity number 237885

Details of donor

Title Surname First name

Address

Signature Date

I want the charity to treat as Gift Aid donation all subscriptions and donations and other qualifying gifts of money made

- * today
- * from the date of this declaration
- * *delete as appropriate.*

I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and or Capital Gains Tax for each tax year, 6 April to 5 April that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all charities of Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CACS) that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for that tax year.

I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify.

I understand the charity will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give on or after 6 April 2008.

Please notify Colchester Civic Society if you want to cancel this declaration, change your name or address or no longer pay sufficient tax on your income and or capital gains.

If you pay Income Tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.

Please return to the membership Secretary

Miss A. Turner, 1 Robin Close, Great Bentley, Colchester CO7 8QH