

SUMMER 2022



*Registered Charity 237885*



This Newsletter has been edited  
for The Colchester Civic Society by Peter Evans

Opinions expressed by contributors  
are not necessarily those of The Civic Society.

Contributions are always welcome and should be sent to  
Peter Evans, 5 Grimston Road, Colchester CO2 7RN  
Telephone: 01206 540990  
or emailed to [peterevans7978@btinternet.com](mailto:peterevans7978@btinternet.com),

The Society's website: <http://www.colchestercivicsociety.co.uk>

## CONTENTS

Chair's Annual Report .....	4
Annual General Meeting 28th June 2022 .....	12
Room with a view .....	13
Membership .....	13
New Year's day walk .....	14
Heritage tours .....	15
Royal Platinum Jubilee tree planting.....	16
Society shows civic pride .....	16
Friends of Castle Park .....	17
Letter from America .....	18
Community Action Days .....	22
Friends of Crouch Street.....	23
Poppy appeal 2022 .....	23
Parking posts .....	23
Reports of Social events .....	24
Social programme.....	27
Heritage Open Days .....	30
Objects, and Officers of the Civic Society .....	31

## **COLCHESTER CIVIC SOCIETY CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22**

This is, I'm afraid, a very detailed and full Annual Report as I am very much aware of the fact that our limited opportunities to meet this year have meant that many of you have only a sketchy idea of what we have been doing. The Report will be published in our next Newsletter, thus reaching all members and hopefully rectifying the situation. I always find writing the Report rather daunting but also gratifying as it really brings home to me just how much we do to 'make Colchester a town worth living in'. That was, as many of you know, the original strap line for the Society, way back when it was founded in 1964, and it is still so appropriate today, although, of course, we will have to change 'town' to 'city' in the future!

Despite the continuing limitations inflicted upon us by COVID, the Society has had another busy year.

I deeply regret that we have been unable to have our usual events, particularly our Coffee Mornings, which are so important, but it was far better to be safe than sorry. I am, however, pleased to report that we started the Coffee Mornings again in May (they are now on the first Tuesday of every month) and we have also had some events, the first of which was a walk around some of the sites in the town centre which we hope will benefit from the Town Deal Government Funding. The Town Deal Team at the Council invited us to two further briefings about the progress being made, including an explanation of their new bid for funding from the Levelling Up Fund, which we have agreed to formally support. We really appreciate their efforts to keep us in the loop and we know that they are taking our comments and suggestions onboard. We have had a few other local events this year; a guided walk of the Cemetery, which was, I understand, really fascinating, a Georgian Colchester walk led by Ann Turner, who is a mine of extraordinary information and a tour of the Mercury Theatre, quite an eye opener as we had toured the building just before all the work began. What an incredible difference!

Despite our enforced lack of face to face contact, we have tried to keep in touch, both through our Newsletter, edited so well by Peter Evans, and via our website, Facebook and Twitter. John Salmon looks after our website, He has a number of interesting plans for it, one of which has actually come to fruition. He has asked various artists whether we can use their pictures of Colchester scenes on our home page and the first of these is a very unusual one of Colchester Castle by Li Mang. Another plan involves film of Colchester. This has been prompted by the transfer of a film the Society commissioned in 1972 into a format that we could both view and use! Unfortunately, the film is rather the worse for wear and has lost its soundtrack but it does contain snippets of interest. John works in partnership with another of our members, who prefers to remain anonymous, to update our Facebook page. This member also looks after Twitter for the Society. He has achieved a large number of 'followers' by, amongst other initiatives, creating a really well researched 'On this Day' entry for every day of the year. Some record major events but others are just snippets from the lives of ordinary Colcestrians, many of whom lived in the town centuries ago. It is a huge, ongoing, task but one that is so worthwhile.

We have dragged the Society kicking and screaming into the 21st century by finally sorting out an email mailing list of members. You may ask why we haven't done this before. It is surprising how many members didn't have email addresses pre COVID. However, a recent check revealed a much higher proportion of the membership are now able to receive information by email so we took up the challenge. And what a challenge it was! Membership Secretary, Ann Turner, and Peter Evans tackled the job. At this point, may I make a plea. If your email address contains hyphens,

underscores or dots, please make sure that they are very clear when you hand write them! Poor Peter has, in some cases, had to try every possible permutation. We think we are now almost there but it has been a steep learning curve! I do thank them for their efforts. Disseminating urgent messages to you all will be so much easier in the future, as long as you read them!

One of the reasons that we need this method of almost immediate communication is the fact that the opinion of the Society on a variety of matters is being sought so much these days. The Town Centre is facing huge changes and those tasked with addressing these changes, such as the Business Improvement Team (we will hear more about them shortly when Sam Good, our speaker, talks to us after this meeting), the Town Deal Team, Essex County Council, particularly Highways, Colchester Borough Council etc., all want our views, often at very short notice. HAT, the local architects working with the BID Team, talked to us about promotion of ‘the Indies’, the independent shops, cafes and other businesses in Sir Isaac’s Walk, Eld Lane and Short Wyre Street and then arranged for Society member, Nicola Burrell, to present her ideas for the arch over Short Wyre St, at its junction with St Botolph’s St, to IL members at a reception at FirstSite. The arch is now in place.



*Short Wyre Street installation*

We were also consulted about a 3D mural proposed for Sir Isaac’s Walk. Highways have consulted us about their Active Travel plans, a consultant working for CBC discussed proposals for a new Cultural Strategy for the town. Further afield, the Executive Committee had an online meeting with MAN, better known locally as Paxman’s, about the development of their site in Colchester and Bradwell Power Station have sought our views on their rebuild (several changes of policy

and staffing mean that we have yet to meet them!). Poor Bob Mercer has again tackled and commented upon the Essex Mineral Local Plan Review which must be the driest and most mind numbing document ever written. With the amount of sand and gravel extraction in the area, we do need to keep an eye on the situation, though. We have just been asked to support an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund by St John’s Green School to enable an in-depth study of the history of the area around their two sites. Their plans for this project are really exciting and we look forward to helping them achieve their goal. My little grandson, Jimmy, currently in the reception class at the school, is looking forward to this so much so I do hope the bid is successful!



*St John’s Green School*

Bob has again done some sterling work on the Planning front this year. He monitors the planning applications submitted to the Council and comments on many. The assumption that the Civic Society objects to everything is often made but this is grossly unfair! We certainly do not. Bob does object to some but he often makes helpful or positive comments too. The Society's views are usually very much welcomed by the Borough's Planning Department and, during the year, Bob and John Burton have worked with both the Planners and Councillors to help formulate a much needed Masterplan for the Town Centre. Of current concern is the proposed redevelopment of Priory Walk and part of Long Wyre Street. Housing in the town centre is to be welcomed but it must be well designed and built and very mixed, not just cramped flats with little natural light where nobody stays long. We must create proper new communities. We hope very much that the Society will continue to be involved in the creation of the Masterplan.

Bob also works closely with the Planning Enforcement Officers. This year we have really pushed for some improvement in the design and colour of shopfronts in the Town Centre Conservation Area where there are now some truly awful facades. But, regarding Planning matters, I have saved the best until last. After three and a half years of battling against the Alumno development on the old bus park site, we now know that it will not go ahead. All the effort - the countless meetings, the legal advice, the lobbying, the evidence gathering, the days giving that evidence to the Public Inquiry, the support to those so badly affected by the plans; it was all worth it! The site will now be incorporated into the aforementioned masterplan for the town centre, on which the Society will be properly consulted. It may be that, as a result of that consultation, Alumno will be invited back to look at a far smaller and less intrusive development.



*Original proposal for the site*

Who knows? Essex County Council have exercised their right, under the terms of the covenant on the site, to buy back the land and they are fully behind the idea of the Masterplan. Let's hope that whatever the future of the land, it will provide the catalyst for the regeneration of the whole of the eastern end of the town centre, something that student flats would never have done. I would like to thank Sir Bob Russell, John Burton, Dorian Kelly, Alan Short, Jenny Brown and Bob Mercer for their extraordinary work on this project and to record our thanks to OMCI, the owners of GreyFriars, and Lawson Planning Partnership, particularly Kathryn Oelman, for their wonderful help.

It is Bob Mercer who leads on Heritage projects. He has been working so hard on the restoration of the grave of Waterloo veteran, Jesse Jones, which is in the graveyard at St Botolph's Church. You would never believe the difficulties he has had, particularly with moving goalposts, but his efforts have finally paid off. The completion of the project will be celebrated at an event in October after the last detail, a small plaque, is put in place. Well done, Bob!

We are still up against the most almighty challenges regarding the restoration of the listed Middleborough Fountain. The saga beggars belief. We made enquiries about an application for a substantial grant and were told that we were likely to qualify. Armed with that information, we tried to find a way of putting in a water supply that wouldn't entail huge roadworks and found a solution. We sourced information about a modern tap for the fountain that would comply with

modern H&S standards. And then we hit a brick wall - ownership of the fountain. It is on land belonging to ECC but they refuse to accept responsibility for it. CBC cannot accept the responsibility because it is not on their land. We cannot get the grant to do the work without the owner's permission. Total stalemate. It is SO frustrating!

The cast iron lamp post painting project led by John Salmon really has taken off. During the year, following the huge success of the project in Roman and Castle Roads and the Irvine Road area, the lamp posts in Victoria Road and Studd's Lane have now been stripped back and repainted and work on the lamp posts in Beverley Road and Queen's Road is underway. The Avenue will hopefully be next. I would like to thank both John and the residents of these areas for the superb effort they are making to protect these historic and charming features in our streets.



Middleborough fountain

Bob Mercer has been out on his bike again, this time to record all the sculptures in the town. This was done at the request of the Council's Planning Office. I think his well-received report will soon make its way into our website. One important sculpture is in bad condition. I feel another project coming on!

The saga of the anonymous post box continues. This is story of the rare pillar box, one without a Royal cipher, that was suddenly removed from its site outside the Grapes in Mersea Road. We moved swiftly to remonstrate with Royal Mail, both about the removal of a popular post box and about the loss of a rare example. Unfortunately, Royal Mail flatly refused to reinstate the box either on or near the site but they did agree to find a home for the box itself somewhere else in the town. We eventually heard that it would replace the ordinary one outside Superdrug in High Street. Sadly, this proved impossible because of underground services. They suggested that it could be moved to the bottom of St Botolph's St, to the site outside what was the St Botolph's Post Office (who remembers that? I do - just!). We thought they could do better. A site is still being sought. If all fails, we do have a fallback suggestion. We will keep you updated! Hopefully, the sudden removal of our historic post boxes will be a thing of the past as we have now worked with Colchester Borough Council to get them locally listed. Thanks, again, to Bob and his bike!



*Old View of Le Cateau barracks*

The Society's advice was sought by Paul Knappett, a new member. He had been working, with the developer of the erstwhile Sergeant's Mess, on plans to commemorate the site of Le Cateau Barracks on a tiny piece of waste ground between the Mess and Roman Circus House. He wanted a very small memorial on a plinth on which would be a map of what was where, plus information about what was, strictly, the Warrant Officers and Sergeants' Mess, formally the Officers' Quarters. He also wanted the

commemorate Major Raymond England and the men of the Royal Field Artillery, who left these barracks to fight at the Battle of Le Cateau, never to return. At a site meeting, we suggested a tactile map on the plinth and two blue plaques on the former Sergeants' Mess, a plan that was immediately agreed by both Paul and the developer. After considerable discussion with Heritage England, and with lots of support from Colchester Borough Council and Philip Crummy from the Colchester Archaeological Trust, who is incredibly enthusiastic about the idea, progress is finally being made. Rosemary Jewers has helped Paul with the plaques (thanks, Rosemary), the new residents of the Sergeant's Mess have provided the funding and they are being made as I speak. The Garrison Commander will be unveiling them, in the presence of Major England's relatives, on 26th August. The map remains work in progress. It will happen but a lot of fundraising will be required!

We have been struggling with the erection of a blue plaque commemorating Catherine Marsh, a 19th century philanthropist, who was born at St Peter's Vicarage, not the current one, we realised, but the one that was on the site of the Co-Op Bank in High St. This plaque is one of those to be erected at the request of the Lord Lieutenant of Essex as part of a Jubilee project to recognise 100 influential women of Essex. Hopefully we will eventually get there but neither Pamela Bradley, who has been doing all the hard work, nor I, will hold our breath.

The Lock Hospital plaque is 'oven ready' and we will get that up shortly. Our thanks go to Pamela and to Rosemary Jewers who maintains the Society's Plaque Trails. We were consulted about an Essex County Council Snapping the Stiletto project about a temporary trail around the town centre designed to recognise women who had really made a difference to the lives of other, very disadvantaged, women. Just before I leave plaques, I must mention a delightful correspondence I have been having with the Old Girls' Association coordinator at Sydenham High School, Nikola Hall. She had found information on the internet about Dr Ruth Bensusan Butt's blue plaque, which we erected a few years ago. Dr Ruth was a student at the school and Nikola was trying to find out more about her. I was able to give her a lot of information (I knew Dr Ruth very well and, as a



*Former Masons factory*

small child, spent a lot of time 'helping' her in her garden at the Minories) and I sent her both the Fabians' booklet about her, written when we unveiled the plaque, and the book, 'The House that Boggis Built', which describes the Minories at the time she both lived and worked there. I was also able to put her in touch with Civic Society member, Dr Liz Hall, who has done considerable research on her life and work. Nikola was thrilled to bits! It really brought home to me how important our work with plaques is as, without spotting the photo of the plaque on the internet, Nikola would never have received such a wealth of information.

Peter Evans has been coordinating the work of our Street Naming Advisory Committee with Vice President, Henry Spyyee, still very much involved from his new home in Guildford. Erstwhile Mayor, Joyce Brooks will soon have a road off Butt Road named after her. A new development off

Berechurch Hall Road will have roads named after James Cook's discovery of the Hawaiian Islands as one of his Captains, James Ward, is buried in the churchyard of nearby St Michael's Church in Berechurch. The committee have been involved in the choice of names for the Cowdray Centre redevelopment and are currently deciding appropriate names for the roads on the Essex County Hospital site.



Sheila Anderton continues to lead our Eyes and Ears initiative. Her determination and enthusiasm are boundless and she really deserves our gratitude. Eyes and Ears basically covers all general 'housekeeping' issues in the town, those irritating little things that can make Colchester look unkempt if not quickly addressed. Loose paving slabs, potholes, graffiti, pockets of litter or fly tipping, damaged street furniture, fly posting, plastic ties on lamp posts (6156 have now been cut off and sent to the Council for recycling!), dying trees, piles of pigeon poo - you name it, Sheila either reports it or deals with it herself with the help of a small team of Society members.

Through her, the Society has built a great relationship with Sam Lancaster, the Town Manager, and her staff, who we would really like to thank, along with the Neighbourhood Teams on the outskirts of the town. A team of Civic Society members have turned out in all weathers to support the Council's Community Action Days where small areas within the town centre are blitzed - graffiti, litter and weeds cleared, walls and railings painted, vegetation cut back etc. This is a scheme that has the huge potential to make a real difference and we hope that it will continue into the future. Sheila and John Collett, who is our Civic Society Litter Warrior as well as Footpaths Lead, work together in organising our contribution to the Great British Spring Clean, a national Keep Britain Tidy campaign. The Civic Society team of litter pickers spent two mornings collecting litter from, predominantly, the eastern end of the town centre. Overall, 49 bags of litter were collected plus a large number of larger objects like broken chairs, badly damaged shopping trolleys, crushed traffic cones, a sound system, a length of drainpipe, fly tipped building materials etc etc. It is amazing how much clothing is found - odd shoes and rather too much feminine underwear! The mind does boggle at times. Thank so much, all of you, for doing this incredibly worthwhile but sometimes quite unpleasant job. It makes the world of difference. We do come back to GreyFriars after the Great British Spring Clean litter picks to wash our hands and warm up. As ever, the staff are so welcoming, despite our somewhat scruffy and wind blown appearance. We are so lucky to have the hotel as our base for so many meetings and events and, again, I would like to thank both the owners and staff for all that they do for us. They are truly amazing.

John's work on footpaths is ongoing. A team from the Society worked incredibly hard to clear the path that runs alongside the Hilly Fields from Sheepen Road to Popes Lane, encouraging the Council to step in with their machinery to do the bits that could not really be done by hand. A route that was becoming increasingly impassable was suddenly transformed. Ad hoc Civic Society teams have cleared other areas, including Land Lane. John has also been engaged in the Meander Mews - Rouse Way saga, trying so hard to establish ownership of the land between the two ends of paths so that they could finally be joined up, which was always the intention. He finally obtained the deeds of the adjacent property which were examined by a solicitor on our behalf. They haven't resolved the issue but will inform further work which will hopefully 'pave the way' to a new route for both cyclists and pedestrians. John is like a terrier so I am sure will get there one day! Thanks, John!

Our submission to Essex County Council regarding the formal designation of a much used path south of the river along Cymbeline Meadows will be with them for some time, possibly several years. The legal processes take an inordinate amount of time. We will let you know if we hear anything. Incidentally, John fields a number of enquiries from the public (who are very appreciative) about local footpaths and rights of way which he either answers or passes on to Essex County Council.

So we move on to wider Highways issues. John Salmon leads on Highways matters. This year, we decided to see whether we could form some sub committees to help our 'leads' who were really getting overloaded. The Highways sub committee met for the first time a few weeks ago

and I would like to thank them for offering to help. It is great group, each person able to bring their own specific knowledge and/or experience of their preferred mode of transport to the table in order to produce a balanced view. Peter Evans, who leads on Public Transport matters will attend the Highways sub committee meeting as there is obviously a slight crossover between the two. Peter has addressed the reorganisation of bus routes, numbering and timetabling as far as he can, pointing out that a bit of proper warning might not go amiss in future!

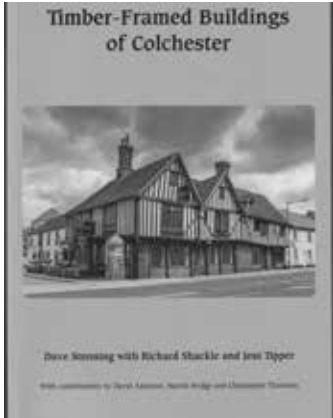
The Licensing lead has, I am very pleased and relieved to report, been taken on by Paul Larkin, who will carefully monitor applications for new or amended licences. The one big application this year was for Atik, who wanted to open until 4am 7 days a week and to 6am on special occasions. We objected, as did the Dutch Quarter Association and others, including individual Civic Society members. Such late licences have the potential to cause all sorts of wide reaching problems, not only to town centre residents and residents on the main roads from the town centre, but also to our large hotels where a quick look at TripAdvisor shows that guests object to being disturbed throughout the night by revellers. Having revellers on the streets until all hours prevents our street cleaners preparing the town properly for the new day, meaning that those going to work find vomit, urine and discarded fast food everywhere. Luckily, Atik saw the objections and rapidly amended their application. Their new hours are not good for the town but are slightly more acceptable than those originally proposed.

Ann Turner, with one of her many hats on, coordinates our input into Heritage Open Days. Originally introduced to the town, and initially organised, by the Civic Society, we handed the job to the Council many years ago but we still provide support to the Museum Service who are now responsible for the extremely popular scheme here in Colchester. We now provide stewards for the Roman Theatre in Maidenburgh Street and the Audley Chapel at Berechurch. Thanks to everyone who helps. I think they will all agree that it is fun and really good to talk to so many visitors from all parts of the country and abroad.

Ann, changing hats rapidly, is also our Membership Secretary. Responding to requests for online membership applications, we have facilitated these with the help of our Treasurer, Paul Weston, and John Salmon, who amended the website to accommodate this change. Yes, we had teething problems but with some tweaking I think we are almost there! Incidentally, we can now take payment for events online, too. Pamela Bradley and Ann Larkin continued some work that began just before Covid struck and have produced a very interesting paper about the recruitment of new members which the Executive Committee are about to consider. Thanks, both of you. We certainly do need new members, whether they want to get actively involved or whether they would prefer to simply provide quiet support. I hope that every one of you will do something for me this year. Could you see whether you can recruit at least one new member, please? It would make such an immense difference and I would be so grateful. We do, of course, have huge support from so many people who have not actually joined the Society. Our Twitter following, for example, is going up in leaps and bounds!

There is no doubt that our activities get us noticed. I am very often amused by Facebook posts, on a multitude of issues affecting the town, where those commenting announce that the Civic Society will sort things out. Where DID I put my magic wand?? We are certainly much better known than we were. Some of this is down to the efforts of Bob Russell who very kindly writes articles about our various projects and activities and submits them to the Gazette, who almost invariably print them. Thanks Bob. We really appreciate your support. Peter and Bob Mercer were both interviewed by BBC Essex during the year, Peter about a proposal to rename Stalin Road and Bob about Paul Knappett's Le Cateau memorial. And Bob and I were interviewed by a Mail on Sunday

journalist about our public phone kiosk surveys and our dealings with BT. We sang their praises, which I don't think the journalist expected! Bob had his photo taken in the red kiosk outside Greyfriars. Our hi vis vests, complete with a huge Society logo on the back, are a splendid way of advertising what we do. Our litter picking teams, footpath clearing teams, Community Action Day teams etc all wear them and are often engaged in conversation by passers by who say how pleased they are that the Civic Society is undertaking such tasks. We do what we can to raise awareness. I gave a talk to the WI about the Society recently, for example.



Earlier in the year, we were asked whether we could support the publication of a book entitled 'Colchester's Timber Framed Buildings'. Having a very good idea of what this would look like, having seen the forerunner of the book, which we published ourselves a few years ago, we agreed to help. What a good decision that was! The book is absolutely stunning. And the bonus? Our logo printed very prominently on the back cover, for all to see!

Our Constitution really does need to be brought up to date and I hope that we will be able to tackle that task in the coming year. However, it does have its very good points from which we certainly benefit. Whereas other Civic Societies have very rigid aims, ours are wonderfully open to interpretation, something that allows us to do some very unexpected things.

Last autumn, members very kindly knitted or crocheted poppies for the British Legion to sell. Sheila thought this was a great way for us to both support the Legion in their 100th year but also to acknowledge that we are proud to be a Garrison Town. Incidentally, we do get a lot of support from our Garrison Commanders! Thanks to all those who contributed. The poppies were very well received and sold immediately, raising a fair bit of money.

At the moment, the Executive Committee is still meeting by Zoom. We have finally got our act together (with all of us now knowing which buttons to press!) and the meetings, very kindly hosted by Howard Davies (thanks, Howard) are now very successful. We will, I think, soon return to face to face meetings, although the thought of turning out on cold, dark and wet winter nights may make us think again! I would again like to thank the Executive Committee, and, of course, our anonymous Tweeter, for their extraordinary enthusiasm, ideas, dedication, hard work and support throughout the year. They are truly amazing. And I would also like to thank our President, John Burton, who does so much for the Society, despite being so busy. And thanks to all of you. With your help, we will make Colchester a city worth living in.

*Jo Edwards*  
Chair, Colchester Civic Society 2021-2  
presented at the Annual General Meeting



## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AT GREYFRIARS, 28TH JUNE 2022

### Talk from Sam Good, Colchester Business Improvement District Manager, Our Colchester

Before the talk, our Chair, Jo Edwards announced that the Executive Committee has agreed to create Elisabeth Baines, a former chair, Austin Baines and Brian Roach as Vice Presidents of the Society in view of their long and valuable service on the Executive Committee over many years.

#### Our new vice presidents



Austin Baines



Elisabeth Baines



Brian Roach

In his talk, Sam Good explained that the Business Improvement District is often referred to as the “Bid” but now other local organisations are making Bids for funding, so the term is becoming confusing. There are 328 “Bids” in Britain and this one is chaired by Simon Blaxill.

The Business Improvement District is an area of most, but not all of the commercial area of the Town Centre, including Crouch Street so that most shops are included. Sam told us that there are 480 hereditaments (rated properties – a term I had not heard since I retired) in that area that contribute a levy that funds all the projects undertaken, although the smaller units do not have to contribute. (320 businesses pay a levy, 420 are supported by it.) The budget is £5 million, with a staff of 6, shortly increasing to 9. Their overall object is to make the town centre attractive to visitors and practical for the businesses.

Projects organised by the BID include the Parklets (seating with plants in High Street) and 1200 planters full of greenery. The BID also funds the employment of 3 Street Ambassadors.. Sam was proud to report that they had been able to tell some shopkeepers that they were eligible for substantial grants from Covid funds. It is good to hear that they are still speaking to Marks and Spencer about retaining a food hall in High Street.

Current projects are way finding for the “Indies” - the smaller shops of Wyre Street through to Sir Isaac’s Walk, the Colchester Gift Card scheme (60 businesses involved) Christmas 2022 and the 2022 Colchester Garden Festival.

Of the shops in the Town Centre, 91% are occupied and a further 4-5% are under offer.

*Peter Evans*



## ROOM WITH A VIEW



It is amazing how quickly the roof and walls of the old Eastern National Bus Garage disappeared. I looked at the remaining framework as I drove into the Priory Street Car Park and was filled with some really conflicting emotions.

I have vivid memories of that building, memories stretching back to my early childhood. I often walked down Queen Street and St Botolph's Street with one or other of my parents; with my mother to the launderette next to Moore and Robert's (remember them?) or to visit Neville, the manager of the green grocers on the corner of St Botolph's and Osborne Street and supplier of my first,

very hard to get, post WW2, banana! The shop was Jackson's but we called it Smith's, presumably a previous name. Neville, apart from squirrelling away bananas for me, always saved bruised melons for Dad, who would do the fruit and vegetable shopping for the week last thing on a Saturday afternoon. Why bruised melons? I have no idea!!

A trip to the lower reaches of St Botolph's Street took us past the bus garage. I was always told to take care as buses came in and out. I loved the smell of the garage; exhaust fumes mixed with the rich aroma of warm oil. The cavernous building intrigued me. It was dark and noisy, the sound of throbbing engines, hammers hitting metal and singing or whistling men all echoing in the vast space. I longed to explore but, of course, I never did.

When I bought my house in Priory Street in the late 70s (a temporary move but I never left) I began to see the bus garage in a slightly different light as it loomed over the street above the line of the Roman Wall. It seemed to be the most inappropriate place for such a building. Very early each morning, buses reversed to within a few inches of the Roman Wall where their engines were left running for long periods to 'warm them up'. Clouds of exhaust fumes filled the air - and the front bedrooms of those living in Priory Street. Somehow, the smell wasn't so pleasant once I was no longer a child! For my husband, terminally ill with emphysema, the fumes were horrendous. Buses queued in Queen Street waiting to turn into the garage, causing severe congestion around the town and on East Hill. Emergency vehicles were often obstructed. Thankfully, the garage finally closed and was left to the pigeons. So yes, I am a little sad to see the loss of a building that has been so much a part of my life but I am very pleased that a far more appropriate and less polluting use is in store for the site. I wish the venture by Colchester Borough Council, to provide digital and creative work spaces, every success.

*Jo Edwards*

*PLEASE NOTE:*

*Jo's landline is no longer in use and her mobile number should be used - 07771 626561*

.....

## MEMBERSHIP

We welcome new members Ronald Abbott, Glyn Barritt, Simon & Rebecca Collis, Elizabeth Silverwood-Cope, Robert and Nicola Dines, Joy Hopkinson, Stuart and Catherine Johnson, John Lowley, Mark and Bridget Russell, Pam Schomberg and Don Maxwell, Will Steeds, Ken Walker and Nick Wickenden, all of Colchester, David and Diane Bignell of Elmstead Market and Paul Knappett of West Mersea

## A NEW YEAR'S DAY WALK

As you may know, Sir Bob Russell arranges fundraising walks around Colchester (see next article) I have done one before and always intended to do more. When I found that he was planning a walk around New Town on 1st January 2022, it seemed too good an opportunity for a New Town boy, born and bred, to miss. It was a bright sunny day, if seasonally cold, and I needed the exercise.



*The former Oliver Twist pub, Military Road*

About 16 of us met at St Botolph's Railway Station (sorry, Colchester Town Station), just the right sort of number for what was to be a 90 minute walk. Sir Bob was councillor for New Town for 30 years and knows the area well. Our president, John Burton joined us and the others varied from wide knowledge to none at all.

New Town proper is bounded by Magdalen Street, Wimpole Road and Military Road, but it grew beyond those boundaries. The walk started in Magdalen Street and walked through the soon to be officially named Tram Folley, the site of the former Tram and Bus Depot, with student accommodation on either side, then looked at the recent additions of the Winnock Almshouses. Other places we saw included Barrack Street School – now Wilson Marriage Education Centre, Spurgeon Memorial Chapel Artillery Street, St John's Orthodox Church (formerly Camp Church) and 99 Winnock Road, as Winnock Lodge, home of James Goodey, the founder of New Town. This was an early cement built house, and of great interest to John



*St John's Orthodox Church*

Burton, as were a number of architectural features on the terraced houses of the area, especially in New Town Road. Many years ago, when we lived in Winnock Road my father complained about the state of 99 Winnock Road to our Councillor, John Bensusan Butt, who explained that it was a very important building and that demolition was not an option.

After 2 hours I made my excuses and left the group at St George's School, 2 minutes from home, leaving to rest to walk back to the station.

I did find out some things I did not know, but more importantly, saw those familiar streets through new eyes. To me, it seemed that there was more care and attention paid to the creation of these houses than we see these days.

It was an interesting idea of Sir Bob's to visit this often ignored corner of Colchester and hopefully, the Civic Society will have a further tour shortly.

*Peter Evans*

*St George's School*



*Villas, Winnock Road*



## HERITAGE TOURS

Colchester High Steward Sir Bob Russell organises three separate heritage tours as part of his fund-raising for a statue of sisters Jane and Ann Taylor, Jane being the author of a poem – written in Colchester, in 1806 – which has evolved into arguably the World’s most popular nursery rhyme... ‘Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star’.

He is hoping that they may be of interest to Civic Society members.

Planning permission has been given for the statue which will be sited in High Street, diagonally opposite the Town Hall just to the east of Pelham’s Lane in a wide section of pavement.

From April to September the Tours are held fortnightly, and from October to March once a month. All are on Sunday mornings, starting at 10am from Colchester Arts Centre. Each lasts around two hours. On request, he also does bookings on other days.

A brief synopsis of each:

**Tour “A”** features Balkerne Gate, Jumbo, Holy Trinity and Tymperleys, Red Lion Yard and High Street, Dutch Quarter including the house where the poem was written, Castle Park and Castle, finishing at the War Memorial.

**Tour “B”** takes in where Royalists surrendered after the Siege in 1648 during the English Civil War, the Roman Christian Church, sites of bombing raids in the two World Wars, St Botolph’s Priory, finishing at the Castle.

**Tour “X”** is exclusively Roman. Balkerne Gate and Roman Wall, Roman Christian Church and Roman Chariot Racing Circus, Roman Wall from Vineyard Street along Priory Street to East Hill, the Roman element of the Castle, finishing at a Roman Theatre.

Bookings can be made to Colchester Arts Centre on Colchester 500900 or online at [www.colchesterartscentre.com](http://www.colchesterartscentre.com)

Alternatively, turn up on the day. A donation of £5 is requested.

Others who wish to support the fund-raising can make donations to <https://gofund.me/c1bfae10>  
Cheques payable to “Twinkle Star Fund” can be sent to Sir Bob at 35 Catchpool Road, Colchester CO1 1XN.

Further information can be obtained from [sir.bob.russell@hotmail.com](mailto:sir.bob.russell@hotmail.com)

The projected cost of the statue is £80,000, but this has been halved thanks to the generous pledge of a £ for £ donation. Of the reduced target of £40,000, the £15,000 which had been raised – including from the heritage tours – has enabled the statue in clay and other material to be made by sculptor Mandy Pratt (who made the statue of footballer Peter Wright at Colchester United’s former Layer Road ground), and for a mould to be made from this.

A further £25,000 is now needed for the mould to be used to cast the statue in bronze.

*Sir Bob Russell*



## ROYAL PLATINUM JUBILEE TREE PLANTING 6TH FEBRUARY 2022

I attended this event with Ann Turner, our Membership Secretary, as representative of the Society. I started by sliding down a muddy slope, just avoiding landing flat on my back, much to Ann's amusement.

His Worship the Mayor, Robert Davidson, and the Town Sargeant, Paul Lind, both in fully Civic rig and regalia, attended along with Mrs Davidson, the Mayoress, and the representative of the Army and the Right Reverend, Roger Morris, Bishop of Colchester. It was a ceremony that deserved uniforms, medals and robes, but also much good humour.



Several former Mayors – Alderman Mary Fairhead, Dr Chris Hall, Gerard Oxford-attended along with Sir Bob Russell, a former Mayor and MP and now High Steward. There were also members of the public and some Council officers.

Once the tree was planted, we retired to the Mayors Parlour for refreshments. I always enjoy entering the Town Hall and it seemed appropriate as HM the Queen has visited it at least 3 times to my knowledge.

*Peter Evans*

---

## SOCIETY SHOWS CIVIC PRIDE IN COLCHESTER



*Great British Spring Clean*

Members of Colchester Civic Society collected 49 bags of rubbish during their latest clean-up operations, which were undertaken as part of the national "Great British Spring Clean" campaign promoted by Keep Britain Tidy.

The areas covered included the lower end of Ipswich Road and Coach Road into East Street; Brook Street and Sawmill housing estate off Brook Street; and Vineyard Street and the former Bus Station.

The sacks, along with some bigger fly-tipped items, were immediately collected by the Borough Council. These collections usually last two hours

and have been arranged for several years. Some individual members undertake regular collections in a specific area which they have adopted.

This proves that Colchester Civic Society members take pride in Colchester, and the litter picking is an obvious sign of what members get engaged in. Litter picking has just resumed, after two years of Covid restrictions.



A further event which Civic Society members supported was the Community Action Day organised by the Borough Council on Monday April 2, in the Childwell area of Colchester, somewhat neglected but one with a strong history from past centuries. This is to the north of the branch railway line to Colchester Town (St Botolph's) Railway Station, from Brook Street to Rosebery Avenue and then onwards via Ernulph Walk to Priory Street.

This was more than just collecting litter. It involved painting out graffiti, cutting back shrubbery and clearing the surface of the public footpath. And then, a few weeks later, Civic Society members assisted the Council again in a further Community Action Day at St Botolph's Roundabout. There is a lot more to be done in that area but the volunteers still made a huge difference.

As Jo Edwards has said: "Anyone can join in for a couple of hours. No special skills needed – just a bit of enthusiasm and a wish to make a difference in Colchester, to help make it a town worth living in." New members are welcome to join the team of litter pickers and/or Community Action Day volunteers.

*Sir Bob Russell*

.....

## **FRIENDS OF THE CASTLE PARK**

Friends of Castle Park was first formed in 2005 and to date we have an active committee of 10 and 139 members. Working with Colchester Borough Council we aim to provide support and assistance within Castle Park.



*Rose dead heading*

FoCP has several important roles within the work of the park. We are a major consultative body for the park management, thereby having important input into long and short term planning and initiatives for change within the park.

Another important role is providing opportunities for community involvement through our gardening volunteer groups where members of FoCP can enjoy taking part in the work of the park. Being a member of FoCP provides a unique opportunity to become more than a visitor. We organise a variety of walks, have workshops to support our fundraising events and host talks which are open to the public to attend.

In addition to this there is our on-line presence with a website, Facebook page and an Instagram account. The public is encouraged to engage with us through these mediums. There are also publications, the main one being the Colchester Castle Park Tree Trail by Christopher Howard, others, which are all available to download for free from our web page, include self- guided walks, articles about the park, and worksheets for children. There is also a regular newsletter sent to members and viewable on line.

Our most recent projects were to raise monies to support a grant application by the council to enable an update of the Imola Pond and a donation from us of new rose to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

We continue to grow in both activities and membership and invite you, if you are not already a member, to join with us to help support this amazing space, that our city is extremely fortunate to own.

*Elizabeth Fitt*

.....

**Stop Press;** Colchester Castle Park has been nominated for "UK's Favourite Park" run by Fields in Trust, and voting opened at midday today, running until 18th August. If you receive this newsletter before that date, you can vote for it. The website is [fieldsintrust.org](http://fieldsintrust.org) and click on the 'Champion' tab.

.....

## LETTER FROM AMERICA

With town centre shops closing and possible changes of use to residential, we thought it would be interesting to ask someone who had lived in the High Street what that was like. In a first for the Newsletter, Adrian Walling, a retired doctor now living in the US, tells us what he remembers.

I have fond memories of growing up at 124 High Street, Colchester. I was 2 years old when we moved there in 1950, and 23 when we moved away in 1971. The building is opposite the Red Lion Hotel and next door to Mann's music shop. When we lived there, it was Robinson's Chemists. In 1971 the business was closed, and the property was sold to Thomas Cook. Today it is a charity shop.



In my time, 124 High Street was a combined pharmacy and sub post office. The shop, dispensary and various outbuildings took up the ground floor of the Georgian building, with our living accommodation on three floors above. There was a dark basement that was rumoured to have Roman bricks, but that may have been a family myth.



After George Robinson, the pharmacist and owner of the premises, died in 1950, his widow needed a pharmacist to manage the business. My father had qualified from London University in 1939, after serving an apprenticeship at Weddell's at the bottom of the High Street, where Harry White was the pharmacist. Mr. White still called my father "boy", long after Dad was qualified and had his own pharmacy.

My father spent most of the War in India, but in 1944 he requested a home posting, hoping to return to Colchester to be close to family. Someone at the War Office had other ideas, and he was sent to Raigmore Hospital in Inverness. Fortunately for me, he met and married my mother, who was a nurse. After he was de-mobbed in 1946, they moved south, first to Beaconsfield and then on to Colchester, where my father became the manager of

Robinson's chemist shop. The sub post office closed, I think, around 1960, allowing the retail business to expand.

My great grandparents, Frank and Elizabeth Walling, had brought their family from north London to Colchester in December 1898. Frank was a printer and his family had been in London for generations. After he had survived an attack of typhoid, his doctor advised him to move to the country for his health. Colchester was then regarded as a healthy, country town. Frank became general manager of the Essex County Standard print works. After moving around the town, the family eventually settled in Layer Road.

My grandfather, Harry, the second of their seven children, was born in London and was 9 years old when the family moved to Colchester. He claimed to remember the troops parading through the town after the Boer War. My grandfather lived in the town for the rest of his life except for a spell in the army during World War I. He was first posted to York (where my father was born) and later served in the trenches in France.

My grandmother's family came from West Bergholt. She had trained as a seamstress and worked in London. My grandparents and their two sons lived in what later became the Conservative Club, at the bottom of High Street, until Harry built a house on Ipswich Road in the 1920s. He was an accountant at Blomfields, an ironmonger's in St John's Street. He cycled to and from work (as well as home every day for lunch) until he retired at age 68: one reason maybe, why he lived to 95.

We lived above the shop at 124 High Street. The building had no garden, only a small concrete yard and outbuildings at the back. My mother planted flowers in window boxes outside the front room to brighten up the place.



The garage opened on to East Stockwell Street and had originally been built to house a carriage. The adjacent former stable was used to store coal that was delivered at the beginning of the winter in hundred weight sacks by men wearing leather shoulder protection. For several years after we arrived at High Street our milk was delivered daily by horse and cart. The horse was called "Judy" and she wore a straw hat in the summer.

Coming in the front door of the shop, the chemist's counter was to the left and the post office counter was straight ahead. There were windows either side of the front entrance with displays and huge carboys on a ledge above. The pharmacy was at the back beyond the post office and the stairs to the basement.

The living accommodation above the shop was built around a central, oblong staircase. A skylight at the top made the place feel full of light. The kitchen, pantry and front living room were all on the first floor, and the back living room was three steps down and above the dispensary. Two bedrooms were on the second floor, although the front one was six steps up from the back one. Bedroom 3 was on the third floor at the back of the building. The bathroom was on a different level between the second and third floors. We always seemed to be going up and down stairs!

Each room had a fireplace, but the house was cold and draughty in the winter. If we sat in the front room looking out on the High Street, we were at the same level as the upper deck of the buses. Some passengers were obviously surprised to see straight into our front room. The big front room windows were, however, great for watching parades and events in the High Street. We always had

a lot of people over for the annual Carnival Parade, and I remember watching the crowds during the Oyster Feast.

Next door, on the corner of High Street and East Stockwell Street, was a stamp shop owned by Mr Brown. It was one of those old-fashioned shops with cases full of stamps and shelves of books about stamps. His garage was adjacent to ours and I vividly remember him trying to back in his black Austin A30, with a constant stream of instructions from Mrs Brown – some helpful and some not. I bought a stamp album and several stamps from him with my pocket money.

The Lamb Hotel was on the other corner of East Stockwell Street, but I was not allowed in there. The Hippodrome came next, and I remember the crowds waiting to be admitted to the Saturday morning pictures. Next was Travis the Butchers, which had wood shavings on the floor, and then Hearsurn's fish shop.

The High Street widened out between the Hippodrome and the Town Hall, and there was a taxi rank set out in the road. During the winter the cabbies ran their engines to stay warm, causing interference on our television set. The Town Hall clock used to mark every quarter all day – and all night. Guests staying over said that it kept them awake, but we were accustomed to it and tuned it out.

Towards the end of the 1960s there were plans for more shops in Culver Street, including what is now Lion Walk Centre. My father thought that this would reduce the attraction of the north side of the High Street. Trade did decline and in 1971 the business was closed. My parents decided to buy a pharmacy near Norwich, which they ran together successfully until they retired in 1984.

The High Street was two-way until 1963. It was always busy, and I remember the traffic jams, especially on weekends when many people from London drove to the coast. The first bypass was usually jammed with traffic, and many motorists thought it would be easier to go through the town, but it was just as bad.

The bus stop was conveniently right outside the shop, although my father thought it blocked the view of the shop. When I was quite young, I started to visit my grandparents in Ipswich Road by myself. The fare was half an old penny for a child, although it soon doubled to a penny. The bus conductor had a machine that produced different coloured tickets. My grandfather always met me off the bus, and so I felt perfectly safe.

My mother had been brought up in a village in the Highlands of Scotland, but she loved living in the High Street. Colchester had a thriving Caledonian Society, and many of my parents' friends were Scottish. I remember my parents going out in evening dress to dinner-dances and events for the Caledonian Society or the Pharmaceutical Society, at the Red Lion. One year in the late 1960s my father was President of the local Pharmaceutical Society.

Mr and Mrs Bradley managed the Red Lion Hotel in the 1960s and they had two children. I don't recall any other children who lived in the High Street. I was an only child, and I often went to the Castle Park swings and roundabouts to play. When my Scottish cousins came to visit in the summer, we spent a lot of time in the park and enjoyed the boats on the pond in the lower park.

After 50 years my memory is a bit hazy, but some things stand out about the various shops and businesses in the High Street. In those days it was very busy as the principal shopping area for the town and for people coming in from other areas. Beyond Mann's there was an off-licence a few doors down, run by Mr and Mrs Sparks. There was a seed merchant called Matthews, and the

George Hotel. On the corner of the road leading down to the Castle was Mr. Maltseed's newsagent shop. It had many newspapers, magazines, sweets and those books high up that little boys are not supposed to read.

My mother took me shopping most days and sometimes when she met a friend for coffee. I think the coffee shop was Thorogoods, in Head Street.

Sainsbury's was close to the Red Lion and stands out in my memory. We went in one entrance, worked our way along the counter on one side, then across and back the other side. White tiles were everywhere, and everything was spotless. Each item had to be purchased in its own department, and so we might queue and pay several times to get butter, meat, and bread. If you forgot something, the entire process had to be repeated. I think the first section had butter, cheese and dairy items. The butter was in huge mounds behind the counter. To buy a pound of butter, a shop assistant cut a lump and beat it into shape with wooden paddles, occasionally cutting some off to adjust the weight. Early on, the scales measured using brass counterweights – no digital then! It seemed to go on forever and I was fascinated as to why they took so long. I think the meat was right at the back of the shop. The butchers cut meat directly from the carcasses hanging in the back. Bacon and ham were sliced for each customer and people specified how thinly or thickly they wanted it cut. Again, each item was weighed, wrapped, and paid for before moving on to the next department. I realise now that it was an inefficient way to shop, especially if the assistant liked to chat.

It was wonderful to have so many shops within walking distance of home. I was taken to Owen Ward, the tailor, for school uniforms and fancy clothes. Curry's had a shop next to the Red Lion. There was a Boots the Chemist shop on the top of High Street, on the corner with Head Street. There were Christmas lights in High Street around Christmas and New Year, and those in Short Wyre Street stand out in my memory. I enjoyed the last-minute rush on Christmas Eve and although it was dark the Christmas lights made it feel cheerful.

I recall a huge fire at Farmers Ironmonger's shop close to Weddell's (Harry White's pharmacy) and remember being told that it was so bad because the tins of paint made it worse. Harry White eventually retired and his dispenser, Mr Kemp, moved to help my father in the pharmacy.



I attended grammar school in Clacton, travelling there and back by train, walking to and from St. Botolph's station (now Colchester Town) every school day. In 1966 I went to medical school at the University of St Andrews at Dundee, graduating in 1971, when I finally left Colchester, and married another medical student in our class. We have three children and celebrated our Golden Wedding last year.

After post-graduate training in Dundee, we worked for the NHS in Kent, and then in 1980 migrated to the state of Kansas in the US. We spend half the year in Kansas, but I am writing this from our winter home on Maui, Hawaii, where we spend the rest of the year. The whales also come here in the winter, and we enjoy watching them swimming in the ocean.

Although High Street was busy during the day, it was almost empty during the evenings and on Sundays. Despite the shortage of neighbours and other children in High Street, I enjoyed the experience, and it was never dull. Every year we visit family in the UK, and I especially enjoy visiting my cousin in Colchester and walking down the High Street; it brings back so many good memories. Having said that, I do love the wide-open spaces in Kansas, plus the warmth and sunshine in Hawaii!

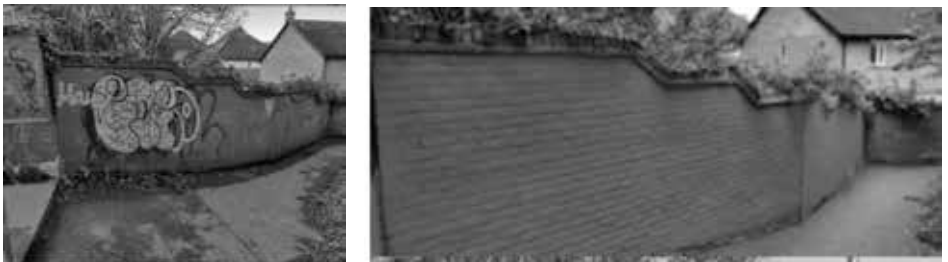
*Adrian Walling*

.....

## COMMUNITY ACTION DAYS (CADS)

CADs are the initiative of the CBC Town Centre Neighbourhood manager and led by members of her team, with the active support and encouragement of the Society.

The initiative aims to bring council staff and volunteers from the community to tackle, over the course of a few hours in a single day, the type of relatively small and 'quick fix' jobs that can have a wholly disproportionate effect on improving issues for the local community.



*Before and after view of Childwell Alley*

Recent CADs have included:

- Litter picking, weeding and repainting pedestrian barriers and other street furniture along Queen Street and the surrounding area.
- Giving much needed TLC to the historic Grade 11 listed North Bridge by clearing weeds, litter and surface debris.  
Litter picking along and repainting a graffiti filled wall on Childwell Alley, including the railway bridge.
- Weeding and cutting back overgrown shrubbery around Middle Mill – plans for repainting some of the railings and weir mechanisms were postponed due to the rain forecast but haven't been abandoned!
- Clearing weeds and overgrown shrubbery and sweeping debris from the underpass and the central area at St Botolphs.

We understand that responsibility for CADs will now be allocated to the CBC's Community Response Team. We await an update but hope the initiative expands and develops with greater community involvement.

Please keep an eye open for details of upcoming CADs on the Society Facebook page or by following us on Twitter. Any members wanting to help on future days will be warmly welcomed.

*Sheila Anderton*

## FRIENDS OF CROUCH STREET

We have been advised that a new organisation has been set up to represent the businesses of Crouch Street. A number of changes to the area have been planned, and mentioned in the local press, and the Friends of Crouch Street say “ we have an immediate challenge to face with regards to the ill conceived, unwanted and poorly consulted remodelling of the street we hope that this association will have a long and beneficial future for all concerned.”

Membership is free. For more information please contact [focrouchstreet@gmail.com](mailto:focrouchstreet@gmail.com)

.....

## POPPY APPEAL 2022

Last year, Society members commemorated the centenary of the British Legion by knitting poppies for its volunteers to sell during the November Poppy Appeal. One hundred and thirty were handed over and all sold well. We're keen to get clicking again this year and welcome member support.

There are a variety of patterns on the internet and in craft shops or use the pattern below:

### Pattern

Using 3.5mm ( or 3.75mm needles), cast on 60 stitches with red double knitting wool

Rows 1-6: Knit 2, purl 2 rib. 8 rows will make a bigger poppy

Row 7: Knit 2 together across the row (30 stitches)

Row 8: Slip 1, knit 2 together, pass slip stitch over across the row (10 stitches)

Break off yarn and pass back through the remaining stitches and pull tight. Join the edges to form a round and fasten off.

Attach a small black button to the centre or, alternatively, use black wool and cast on 16 stitches. Then cast off. Coil into a tight spiral and sew to the centre of the poppy.

Finally, fasten a small safety pin to the back.

If you wish to take part, please contact Sheila on 07871802442 or email [sheilamanderton@gmail.com](mailto:sheilamanderton@gmail.com) or Jo on 07771626561 email: [josiemedwards@hotmail.com](mailto:josiemedwards@hotmail.com) to arrange collection of finished poppies.

.....

## PARKING POSTS

Amongst the many things that our Eyes and Ears team notice are faulty parking posts. These have usually been clouted by a vehicle and could be dangerous to passing pedestrians or vehicles. They are reported to the North East Essex Parking Partnership who repair them promptly.



*These photos tell the story of a frequently damaged Parking Post in Smythies Avenue. It has been repaired but has been reduced in size in the process*

## REPORTS OF SOCIAL EVENTS

### Our first “Social” event for 2 years Tour of Colchester Cemetery, 22nd April 2022



*Starlight tearooms,  
Colchester Cemetery*

About 20 of us gathered at the cafe in the Cemetery, to meet our guide, Sharon Mooney, who has researched the history of the Cemetery and looked into the stories of some of the people buried there.

This was not a morbid event, as Sharon has taken a great interest in the the people and takes full advantage of all the sources out there on the internet. In the case of the unmarked grave of young boy, a previously unexplained death, Sharon had found that the family had moved on to Sheffield after his death. It appears that his mother has already been arrested for assault and there were further problem before she died a few years later. Many local people had thought that his parents had been involved but no charge was ever made. However, Sharon has discovered new evidence.

Sharon explained that by the 1850s, urban churchyards were either full or about to be, so burial boards were established by law to create large cemeteries on the fringe of towns. Colchester’s cemetery was selected from 3 possibles (one owned by Philbrick, who was Town Clerk at the time) but the choice fell on land offered by Mr G Tetrell, the owner of Plum Hall in Mersea Road. This was easily the best choice in any case. Work commenced, with landscaping by Benjamin Cant, and Sharon showed us the site of the first burial.

As Civic Society events always involve food, we started off at the cafe, the Star Light Tearoom, which was originally the non-conformist chapel for the cemetery, and quite close to the northern entrance (close to Bourne Road). The Church of England chapel is a little further into the centre of the site. It is no longer in use, but apparently a home to bats. Other wildlife live nearby.

I live quite close to the Cemetery – don’t we all – but there were several things I found out for the first time. There are some tombstones with coloured coats of arms, memorials to 5 Belgian service men in the First World War.

The house and offices at the northern entrance are modern and replaced a magnificent Victorian structure, which Sharon assumes had to be demolished. There are so many stories connected to the people commemorated there, or who have no commemoration, but Sharon is on the case.



*Gravestones for Belgian First World War  
Soldiers*

She is giving a talk on the Cemetery to the Friends of Colchester Museums at Lion Walk Church on 20th September.

*Peter Evans*



## Tour of Georgian Colchester, 22nd May 2022



*Tour starting at Holly Trees Mansion*

Putting aside all thoughts of the City status announced a few days earlier, we headed back to the 18th & 19th centuries with Ann Turner to find out about the people and places of Colchester then.

Ann started at Holly Trees and covered other buildings of the period mainly within the then parish of All Saints, going as far as the Georgian theatre (perhaps better known to us at the former Eastern National garage), then returning to Holly Trees via Culver Street East, and the site of the Bluecoat school, (rear of Sainsbury's) and nearby, the site of the Grammar School.

The houses were usually the homes of Members of Parliament, Mayors, Baymakers and other of the wealthy classes – such as the Minorities, East Hill House and the Queen Street house, until 1989, the Town's Police Station. Whilst the front of this building is familiar and attractive enough, the back of the

building is a great surprise, but it is difficult to access. Ann, of course, pointed out that there are many other buildings of that time, in Colchester, many on North Hill.

We could not have anticipated that it would be such a bright, sunny and hot day and that traffic would be so heavy at times. Ann rose above it all and we all learnt at least one thing we did not know. There were also a lot of other people about, including a group of young, rather loud, lads of about 19, using the F word. One of our party called out "Language, lads" indicating her young granddaughter. Amazingly, she was not flattened, but received an apology!

*Peter Evans*

.....

## 16th June 2022 – tour of Mercury Theatre

The Society has supported and followed the redevelopment of the Mercury Theatre since the early days in 2014. Now we returned to see it in operation.



*Farmer's Market outside Mercury Theatre, June 2022*

The seating in the main house has been increased to 553 with the Studio having 99 seats. If you book seat J22 main house, it is the seat sponsored by the Civic Society. There is a large bar restaurant and space for meetings, work stations for hire and a total of 72 dressing rooms, up

from 23. Steve Mannix, the Chief Executive, and one of his colleagues were our guides as it now possible to get lost backstage.

However, the thing that hit me, almost literally on a very hot day, was air conditioning throughout the building. Steve is proud of the Mercury's sustainability; they say that they are the most sustainable building in Colchester Town Centre, and have been awarded a BREEAM 'Very Good' certificate which puts us in the top 25% of non-domestic buildings in the whole of the UK for sustainability. Lights come on automatically when light levels call for it. IT has been installed as part the construction. We saw a £2.5k light being installed in the auditorium, and heard that the carpenters had been given automated equipment costing £25k to speed up their work.

Nevertheless, there are nods to the history of the Mercury and the people connected with it. In the auditorium, one of the staff seats has a tribute to Sue Bidwell, longest serving usherette. The state of the art rehearsal room records a bequest specifically for rehearsal facilities from the late Kit and Mary Hughes, whose family have recently seen the completed room. (Kit Hughes was my dentist!)

It was strange to stand on the stage and have lights play around us and, having recently seen the excellent all singing, all dancing production of Comedy of Errors, to see the sign from Hotel Ephesus still on site, and, in the same room, the flats to be used in the 2022 pantomime being prepared – a well known local landmark will feature on stage!

However, Covid made the last 2 years very difficult for a theatre trying to up date itself and just keep going. Steve said they were 3 days away from bankruptcy at one stage. They survived and are open for business.

*Peter Evans*



## SOCIAL PROGRAMME

### **Friday 26th August Meet at the erstwhile Sergeants' Mess next to Roman Circus House at 10am for the unveiling of TWO Blue Plaques.**

The Society has been supporting member Paul Knappett in his efforts to interpret and commemorate the old Royal Artillery Barracks (renamed Le Cateau Barracks after the First World War). He is planning a superb tactile map of the area on a beautiful plinth, but that is work in progress as funds have to be raised (if anyone can help, he would be hugely grateful!). However, the first part of the project will soon be complete; two blue plaques to be sited on the building that became known to us all as the Sergeants' Mess. This building started life as the Officers' Quarters before becoming the Mess for Warrant Officers and Sergeants.

**Plaque One** gives this information and will be sited on the wall facing Roman Circus House.

**Plaque Two**, to be erected at the other end of the building, is unbelievably poignant. It commemorates Major Raymond England, Battery Commander 88th Battery, who would have lived in this building, and the men of the 39th 68th and 88th Batteries XIVth Brigade Royal Field Artillery killed at the Battle of Le Cateau 26th August 1914. We will be unveiling these two plaques on the anniversary of that terrible battle.

The Garrison Commander will unveil the plaques and we hope that members of Raymond England's family will be present. The ceremony will be followed by morning coffee (and cakes!) in the Roman Circus House marquee. If you need a map showing how to get there, please let me know.

Cost? Free but donations to the Tactile Map Fund gratefully received.

### **Tuesday 6th September Meet in the Cloisters Restaurant at Grey Friars at 10am for our monthly Coffee Morning**

Cost? Free but donations welcomed.

### **Thursday 8th September meet at COLCHESTER TOWN HOUSE YOUTH CENTRE, WEST STOCKWELL STREET (entrance mid way along Quakers Alley immediately north of St Martin's Church)** at 5pm for the next in our series of briefings by the Town Deal Team.

At our last meeting with the Town Deal team, the subject of parking in the town centre was mentioned a number of times and it became apparent that we needed a session almost entirely devoted to this subject (although I am sure there will be follow up reports on other matters we have raised). As a consequence the team has arranged for us to meet Richard Walker who knows more about the parking policies of CBC than anyone else. He should be able to answer all our questions. It should be an interesting exchange! Please remember that the Britannia and Vineyard Street car parks are threatened with closure, deemed surplus to requirement.

You will note the unusual location. This will, I am sure, be the first time that many of you will have ventured inside this building. I think you will be very surprised as to what it has to offer. We will have the opportunity to look around and will be able to hear more about the plans for it once it has been refurbished with, of course, Town Deal money. Disabled parking facilities **are available** under the building.

Cost? Free

## **Saturday 10th and Sunday 11th September Heritage Open Days**

Thank you to all those who have volunteered to act as stewards. We are very grateful to you. Details of all the properties open to the public will be on our website as soon as we have them. Do take the opportunity to visit as many as possible, particularly as some are not normally open to the public.

### **Saturday 1st October Meet at Colchester Arts Centre (aka St Mary at the Walls) at 11am for a tour of the newly refurbished building.**

Your wish is my command! Many of you have asked whether we can visit the Arts Centre to hear about the work that has been done to update the building, making it more accessible for all and improving its environmental sustainability. The loos are now, quite literally, works of art and are absolutely spectacular. We have an additional treat for the more active and less acrophobic amongst us; an opportunity to climb the tower. It is not a massive climb, but the stairs are not the easiest so please don't attempt this without some thought. The wall at the top is about waist height. The view provides a very interesting and slightly unexpected perspective of the area. We must emphasise that you climb the tower at your own risk.

Cost? Free, but contributions towards a donation to the Arts Centre welcomed.

### **Tuesday 4th October Meet in the Cloisters Restaurant at Grey Friars at 10am for our monthly Coffee Morning**

Cost? Free but donations welcomed

### **Friday 21st October Meet by the grave of Captain Jesse Jones in St Botolph's Churchyard at 2.30pm**

If all goes to plan, this will be the culmination of a Civic Society project that has been incredibly challenging, the restoration of the grave of Captain Jesse Jones, who served with the First Foot Guards (renamed the Grenadier Guards after the Battle of Waterloo) and the East Essex Militia. Captain Jones was awarded the Peninsular Medal with the Barossa Bar and the Waterloo Medal. Captain Jones' grave was in quite a state when we embarked on the project. It has now been cleaned and repaired and a small plaque giving details of the inscription on the stone, now barely readable, will shortly be added. Part of the project involved the erection of a very well read interpretation board nearby, unveiled last year. This gives information about three important citizens buried in the churchyard, Captain Jones, Dr Roger Nunn MD and William Warwick Hawkins MP. More information is available on the Civic Society Website under the Conservation heading. After a short ceremony at the graveside, there will be much needed warm drinks and cake at the St Botolph's Church Hall.

It would be wonderful if you could bake a cake for the occasion. Please can you let me know if this would be possible.

Please complete the booking slip if you would like to come as we need numbers for catering purposes.

Cost? Free, but donations always welcomed.

**Irvine Road Community Orchard Visit**

I know that many of you have been awaiting details of our visit to the orchard. This has now been postponed to 22nd April next year - apple blossom time with any luck! Please save the date.

**Wednesday 26th October** Meet in the Salon at Grey Friars at 7pm for our Burning Issues Meeting

I am very much aware of the fact that members who are working are generally unable to attend our Coffee Mornings, so this is an opportunity for those people who feel left out! Come and find out what we are up to, raise matters of concern that you would like us to tackle (we will do our best!) or simply chat about the town - or city as we will be by then.

Cost? Free but donations welcomed.

**The planting of the Society’s Jubilee Tree.**

We are aiming to plant a tree to commemorate the Queen’s Jubilee. Discussions with Colchester Borough Council about a suitable site are ongoing but we hope that this will soon be agreed. If you would like to be kept informed, please complete the booking slip and we will let you know where, when and if it will be planted. We hope that lots of you will be able to attend

**Tuesday 1st November** Meet in the Cloisters Restaurant at Grey Friars at 10am for our monthly Coffee Morning

Cost? Free but donations welcomed.

**Tuesday 6th December** Meet in the Cloisters Restaurant at Grey Friars at 10am for our monthly Coffee Morning

Cost? Free but donations welcomed

**December. Date and venue to be confirmed.  
Another briefing by the Town Deal Team.**

This time, Simon Cairns, head of the Borough’s Planning Department, will be in the hot seat. This should be another extremely interesting encounter. If you are interested, please complete the booking slip and I will let you know the date, time and place as soon as I know myself.



Colchester Museums



heritage open days

# Heritage Open Days

9 - 18  
September  
2022



Discover Colchester's heritage in the annual celebration of historic buildings and sites



[www.visitcolchester.com/HODS](http://www.visitcolchester.com/HODS)

LEAFLET AVAILABLE FROM VISITOR'S INFORMATION CENTRE AND THE CASTLE MUSEUM - OR VISIT [WWW.VISITCOLCHESTER.COM/HODS](http://WWW.VISITCOLCHESTER.COM/HODS)

## 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, others 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

PRESIDENT	<b>John Burton</b> MBE
VICE PRESIDENTS	<b>Right Reverend Roger Morris</b> , Bishop of Colchester <b>Austen Baines, Elisabeth Baines, Mr B A Barton,</b> <b>Brian Roach, Henry Spyvee</b>
CHAIR AND PROGRAMME ORGANISER	<b>Jo Edwards</b> , 43 Priory Street, Colchester CO1 2QB 07771 626561                      josiemedwards@hotmail.com
VICE CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY	<b>Ann Turner</b> , 1 Robin Close, Great Bentley CO7 8QH 01206 250894                      ann@hollytreehouse.com
TREASURER	<b>Paul Weston</b> , 46 Wordsworth Road, Colchester CO3 4HR paulweston523@gmail.com
SECRETARY	<b>Mike Fitt</b> , 31 Roman Road, Colchester CO1 1UR
NEWSLETTER EDITOR	<b>Peter Evans</b> , 5 Grimston Road, Colchester CO2 7RN 01206 540990                      peter.evans7978@btinternet.com
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OTHER ELECTED MEMBERS	<b>Sheila Alderton</b> , 30 Rosebery Avenue, Colchester CO1 2UL <b>John Collett</b> , 208 Cranmere Court, Exeter Drive, Colchester CO1 2RX <b>Howard Davies</b> , 60 Rawstorn Road, Colchester CO3 3JH <b>Ann and Paul Larkin</b> , 112 Cranmere Court, Exeter Drive, Colchester CO1 2RX <b>Robert Mercer</b> , 59 Shrub End Road, Colchester CO3 4RA <b>John Salmon</b> , 68 Castle Road, Colchester CO1 1UN

**THE BOROUGH ARMS OF  
THE BOROUGH OF COLCHESTER**



**The heraldic description is:**

“Gules (red), four Pieces of Wood raguly conjoined in a cross proper, each side arm transfixing with a Nail palewise Sable (black) ensigned by an Ancient Crown Or (gold) and that in base enfiling a like Crown and transfixing by a like Nail in bend.”

It represents the legend of St Helena, daughter of King Coel and mother of Constantine, the first Christian Roman Emperor, the true cross (still growing and so green) and the nails from the crucifixion, together with the gold crowns worn by the Three Kings at the birth of Christ. The arms were awarded as early as 1413, but were considered too Catholic after the Reformation, so the green cross was replaced with a white one. However in 1915, the Town Council agreed to a proposal from Alderman Gurney Benham to revert to the original style. Some of the earlier examples of the Arms still exist. No doubt the arms will continue to be used by the Council when a city.