



*Charity Registration No. 237885*

**NEWSLETTER  
APRIL 2026**

The Newsletter is edited for Colchester Civic Society by Glyn Barritt. Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of The Civic Society. Contributions are always welcome – please email Glyn - [glynbarritt@gmail.com](mailto:glynbarritt@gmail.com)

The Society’s website: [www.colchestercivicsociety.co.uk](http://www.colchestercivicsociety.co.uk)

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## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2026

### An invitation to all Members of Colchester Civic Society

The 2026 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Society will be held on Tuesday, 9 June at 19.00pm prompt, in the Cloisters Restaurant at Greyfriars, High Street, Colchester.

### AGENDA

- 1 Apologies for absence
- 2 Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Tuesday 10 June 2025
- 3 Matters arising from the Minutes
- 4 Chair's Report for 2026
- 5 Financial Report and Accounts  
Treasurer, Peter Evans, will present the Financial Report and Accounts for 2025 (copies will be available at the meeting)
- 6 Appointment of Auditor/Independent Examiner
- 7 Election of Officers and Executive Committee

Nominations may be sent to the Secretary, Michael Fitt at 31 Roman Road, Colchester or by e-mail to [honsecCCS@gmail.com](mailto:honsecCCS@gmail.com), or handed in at one of our Coffee Mornings, at least 7 days prior to the AGM

#### Current Officers:

- a Chair: Jo Edwards
- b Vice-Chair: *vacant*
- c Hon Secretary: Michael Fitt
- d Hon Treasurer: Peter Evans
- e Executive Committee: up to 14 members may be elected.  
**Current members:** Sheila Anderton, Glyn Barritt, John Collett, Roger Dennis, Peter Evans, Robert Mercer, John Salmon, Ken Walker and Rennie Chivers

Civic Society members assisting the Executive Committee on specific issues, but not members of the committee, are Richard Arnopp (Plaque trails), Pamela Bradley (New Blue Plaques), Ged Dickinson (Social Media)

Please note that under our constitution, the President and Vice-Presidents are appointed by the Executive Committee.

### 8 Any Other Business

Should any member wish to appoint a Proxy for the Meeting they should do so, in writing, to the Secretary, at least 48 hours before the meeting.

*Please do your best to come and take part in the governance of our society, and if you are interested in taking an active role, please speak to a Committee member.*

## PROGRAMME OF EVENTS: MAY – DECEMBER 2026

*From Programme Organiser, Jo Edwards....*

Although this programme takes us to the end of the year, there will be additions at a later date. We will for example, be looking for opportunities to find out more about Local Government Reorganisation and how it will affect us all in Colchester. Andrew Weavers, Head of Governance at Colchester City Council, spoke to us when the first announcements were being made by Westminster but at that time, there was little detail. We now know a lot more, but it is too early to ask Andrew to return as the decision for us to unite with Braintree and Tendring has only just been announced. We will wait for the dust to settle a little and then see what we can arrange.

As you probably know, the Bayeux Tapestry will be coming to the British Museum in the Autumn. Having seen it, I know that I must do what I can to enable you to do so, too. I can't book for several months, but I am on the case! I suspect other opportunities for events, visits and briefings will crop up ...so more anon.

Now, a reminder about Coffee Mornings and our Spring Up and Burning Issues Meetings. Your presence is invaluable to us as a Society. You draw our attention to things we must celebrate and to matters of concern we must address. Your views help us to formulate policies on a myriad of things affecting the city. We really appreciate your input and the lively discussions that ensue. So we will continue to say that these events are free to attend. However, it costs us £7 per person to hold Coffee Mornings and donations do offset that expense; so we really do thank you for your generosity when the donation box is handed round at meetings.

Please use the reply slips enclosed with this Newsletter to book your place on the visits arranged so far and to indicate your attendance at other events. Thank you.

### **Coffee Morning dates between May – December 2026**

First Thursday of every month at 09.30 in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars.  
Cost for all Coffee Mornings is free, but donations are welcome.

7 May ..... 4 Jun ..... 2 Jul ..... 6 Aug ..... 3 Sep ..... 1 Oct ..... 5 Nov ..... 3 Dec

### **Thursday 7 May 2026 – Coffee Morning Discussion**

*Meet at 09.30 in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars*

### **Tuesday 12 May 2026 – A VERY SPECIAL EVENING!**

*Meet at Roman Circus House at 18.30*

What a treat we have in store! Archaeologists from Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) recently discovered an extremely important and interesting burial in the City and we have been invited to Roman Circus House to find out all about it. Adam Wightman will give us a talk about the grave and we will be able to see what they found. Tea, coffee and biscuits will be served.

*This really is an event not to be missed  
and I hope you will make every effort to come.*

Cost is £10 - all going to CAT (all will become clear on the night!)

### **Thursday 4 June 2026 – Coffee Morning Discussion**

*Meet at 09.30 in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars*

### **Tuesday 9 June 2026 – Annual General Meeting**

*Meet at 19.00 prompt in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars*

Please see the AGM agenda on page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

The meeting itself will be followed by a break for coffee before a talk is given by Vinnie Geaves, the Manager of Our Colchester, Colchester's Business Improvement District Team. The BID are behind a lot of 'happenings' in the City including of course, the spectacular Christmas Lights switch-on, the Easter Egg Trail and the crazy, high octane, Soap Box Rally (hopefully back in 2027), all of which bring crowds into the City centre. But the BID team also do all they can to promote our City businesses both large and small; for example, they recently produced the *Colchester Chronicles* - a mini series focusing on the people behind six independent businesses. They support the evening and night-time economies too, doing everything they can to ensure the safety and wellbeing of both staff and customers, working closely with Colchester Pubwatch, which won the *National Pubwatch of the Year Award* this year.

Their work is very diverse. I think you will find Vinnie's talk eye-opening.

Cost is free but donations are welcome.

### **Thursday 18 June 2026 – Unveiling of our Napoleonic Barracks Blue Plaque**

*Meet at 10.45 at the Artilleryman Public House, 54-56 Artillery Street, CO1 2JQ*

Civic Society member, Paul Knappett, has done it again! Determined to follow in the footsteps of our Vice President, Rosemary Jewers, to ensure that our historic military sites are identified and celebrated by blue plaques, Paul and a small team of Civic Society members have thoroughly researched the location of Colchester's Napoleonic Barracks and have ascertained that the Artilleryman Public House in Artillery Street is the perfect place for a plaque.

Do come and watch the unveiling on, of course, Waterloo Day!

Cost is free but donations are welcome.

### **Thursday 2 July 2026 – Coffee Morning Discussion**

*Meet at 09.30 in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars*

### **Wednesday 8 July 2026 – Witchcraft Walk**

*Meet at The Walls in Manningtree CO11 1ET (directions available on request)*

Guided by the Witchfinder General, Matthew Hopkins, himself (actually, our Town Crier, Rennie Chivers, but I understand he will be hard to recognise!), the walk will begin at The Walls from where we will walk through Manningtree and onto the Essex Way to Mistley. We will follow the story of several women accused of witchcraft which led to their imprisonment in Colchester Castle and subsequent hanging. We will return via Mistley to where we started.

The total length of the walk is about 3 miles, some of which is over undulating ground, unfortunately unsuitable for mobility buggies/wheel chairs. If we have enough people without their own transport wishing to join this walk, I will sort out a minibus, but it would be great if those of you with spare space in your car could offer lifts and I can supplement that with shared taxis (at an additional cost, probably around £8 per head). Alternatively, there is, of course, public transport to Manningtree.

Cost is £5 but all proceeds to Colchester Civic Society funds.

### **Friday 31 July 2026 – SAVE THE DATE!**

All being well, the statue of the Colchester Airborne Soldier will be unveiled on this day. For those who don't know anything about the extraordinary project, the statue will mark the 25th anniversary of Airborne Forces being stationed in Colchester and will honour the ethos, bravery and service of the soldiers, in

addition to reinforcing the deep bond that has been formed with the city in that time. It is modelled on a real Colchester Para and has been created by artist Amy Goodman, who also sculpted the statue of Pegasus at the entrance to Merville Barracks.

As long as planning permission is granted, the statue will be erected on the triangle of land, known locally as the Rocks, on the corner of Flagstaff Road and Circular Road. The Civic Society has been very supportive of the project and Major Curt Vines, who is spearheading it, has addressed us at two Coffee Mornings. The event is still being planned but it should be pretty spectacular.

*Keep an eye on the local Press for updates!*

**Thursday 6 August 2026 – Coffee Morning Discussion**

*Meet at 09.30 in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars*

**Sunday 23 August 2026 – Guided Natural History Walk**

*Meet at the Valley Car Park, University of Essex  
(5 mins walk from the Boundary Road bus stop)*

This is a great time of year for a walk in Wivenhoe Park, looking at the wonderful trees as well as insects, wild flowers etc. So we are offering a gentle stroll lasting between 60-90 minutes in the company of expert, award-winning, naturalist, Chris Gibson from Chris Gibson Wildlife. Chris, now retired from Natural England, is both an author and a photographer, specialising in natural history.

Please let me know on the reply slips whether you need or can offer a lift. Buses run every 30 minutes (at the moment) from the centre of Colchester. If necessary, I will arrange for a shared cab or two at a small additional cost.

Cost is £5

**Thursday 3 September 2026 – Coffee Morning Discussion**

*Meet at 09.30 in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars*

**Friday 11 September to Sunday 20 September 2026 - Heritage Open Days**

*Colchester City Council's programme will be available in the summer*

As usual, Civic Society members will be stewarding various sites in Colchester so that they can open to the public during this period. We would be so grateful if you could volunteer to help. It's a really rewarding experience and you will

meet visitors from all over the country and often, from all over the world! You don't need lots of knowledge!

If you are able to offer us a few hours of your time, please complete the forms that accompany this newsletter. If you are not sure, feel free to contact me on 07771 626561 and I will answer any questions you might have.

### **Thursday 1 October 2026 – Coffee Morning Discussion**

*Meet at 09.30 in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars*

This month, the Police will probably join us again to give us an update on policing in the city. Always interesting and informative.

### **Sunday 11 October 2026 – 'Look a Little Closer' Walk**

*Meet outside Colchester Town Hall at 14.00*

An afternoon's historic walk with Civic Society Executive Committee Member and Chair of Colchester Tourist Guides Association, Glyn Barritt.

"The Civic Society has strongly encouraged you all to *Look Up* while walking in Colchester - and this walk is no different, adding 'look a little closer' to truly appreciate the history that has shaped our beautiful City. Please join me for this October's '*Look a Little Closer*' walk - you may have your own tales that you can add to the mix of lesser known delights!"

Cost is free but donations to the Colchester Civic Society funds are welcome.

### **Thursday 22 October 2026 – Annual Burning Issues Meeting**

*Meet at 19.00 in the Salon (just off Reception) at Greyfriars*

The second of our evening meetings held particularly, but not exclusively, for the benefit of those unable to attend Coffee Mornings. As Bonfire Night approaches, come to find out what the Society has been doing during the year and to raise any burning issues that you feel we should be addressing.

Cost is free but donations are welcome.

### **Thursday 5 November 2026 – Coffee Morning Discussion**

*Meet at 09.30 in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars*

### **Thursday 3 December 2026 – Coffee Morning Discussion**

*Meet at 09.30 in the Cloisters Restaurant, Greyfriars*

## DEDHAM HONOUR FOR OUR TOWN CRIER

*Town Crier, Rennie Chivers writes about the Royal visit to Dedham on 5 February 2026...*

I was very honoured to be invited to play a small part at the visit of King Charles and Queen Camilla to Dedham on Thursday 5 February 2026. The purpose of their Majesties' visit was to meet with local 'heroes', charities and businesses with a connection to the area. The event was organised by Dedham Parish Council and Colchester City Council under the auspices the Lord Lieutenant's Office (LLO). I offered to deliver a short cry to welcome their Majesties as they began their walkabout along the High Street. The LLO agreed that I could be accompanied by my wife/consort, Denise, and that we could engage with onlookers waiting along the High Street.



Many restrictions were put in place in Dedham. Several roads were closed and parking along the main route into the village centre was prohibited.

Our day began with meeting the honoured guests who were assembling at Dedham Hall. It was enlightening to find out about some of the organisations which were lesser known to me. It was clear that everyone was passionate about their work and pleased that their efforts was known to their Majesties.

The weather was not very welcoming. Umbrellas were the order of the day. Nevertheless, Denise and I walked into the High Street where people were beginning to gather. Everyone seemed in good spirits. Flags and bunches of flowers were at the ready. Their Majesties were due to travel by helicopter from Sandringham to Langham and then by Royal car to the Sun Inn on the High Street. Unfortunately, we were told that the helicopter could not land at Langham because of the wet ground so instead they landed at RAF Wattisham. This resulted in a 30 to 40 minute delay to their arrival in Dedham.

In circumstances like this some adjustment is required to the schedule. The Royal limousine delivered their Majesties at the Sun Inn where they were met by local dignitaries including Councillor Mike Lilley, Colchester's Mayor and chosen guests. The Queen also had a lesson from the Head Chef on how to make ravioli!

Denise and I took the opportunity to engage with what was by now a crowd of several hundred people in the High Street. You might say that we were the 'warm-up act' for the main event!

As the Royal couple left the Sun Inn, the Colchester City Brass Band burst into action and I stepped forwards ringing my bell and proclaiming "Oyez, Oyez, Oyez" followed by my brief welcome cry. I had expected their Majesties to stop and listen but alas, no. Time was running short so they continued to walk to the onlookers as I delivered my cry. The King did point towards me in acknowledgement of my presence, which was rather nice.

The Royal couple took time to speak to the onlookers as they walked about 100 metres to the Essex Rose Tearoom to meet staff, enjoy a piece of cake and unveil a plaque inside. Local school children sang and a youth dancing troupe from Chelmsford performed to their Majesties' delight.

After about 30 minutes, the Royal couple emerged from the tearoom and were taken by the Royal limousine to the Alfred Munnings Museum to view the art collection before leaving Dedham to return home.

It was a very enjoyable, memorable and historic day for the people of Dedham and a very pleasurable day for their Majesties. There was no sign of any trouble although one onlooker could not resist heckling the King about, ... well you know, enough said. I am certain that in 30 years' time when people recollect the day, they will say, "Do you remember when the King and Queen visited Dedham?" To which the reply might well be "Oh yes, that was the day it rained!"



The picture on the left (taken from the BBC's website) shows the King pointing at our Town Crier.

What do you think the King is saying?

There is a prize for the best caption! Email the Newsletter Editor – [glyn.barritt@gmail.com](mailto:glyn.barritt@gmail.com)



## CHARLES DEBENHAM REMEMBERED

'The man who painted Colchester'

Civic Society members were very sorry to hear of the recent death of local artist, Charles Debenham, whose paintings and sketches of Colchester captured its journey over decades. He observed, watched and recorded change – sometimes welcome, sometimes not - his work often described as Colchester's visual memory.



*The picture above right taken from Suffolk Artists – <https://suffolkartists.co.uk/>*

At the age of 14, Charles was already going to evening classes at Colchester School of Art, later training there full-time as an illustrator. It was the beginning of a career that would take him far beyond Essex.

In the early 1960s, he was appointed to the Crown Agents' list of designers, enabling him to work with major national organisations on visitor and educational centres, exhibitions and large-scale public works.

At Earls Court, he created central features for the London International Boat Show and the World Travel Market. For London Electricity, he designed costumes and floats for the Lord Mayor's Show and Battersea Easter Parade. He won top prize for his pavilion at the Cairo International Fair in 1976. But it was his design for the Royal Wedding Exhibition at St Paul's Cathedral for Charles and Diana in 1981 that really showcased his talent for creating grand and elegant spaces.

And yet, Colchester remained at the heart of his painting and sketching passion, capturing a town in flux – the retreat of the garrison - the changing face of the streets - the emergence of coffee shops, nail bars and tattooists from boarded up premises. And he loved the interaction with curious public, wanting to know what he was painting and perhaps, what he thought of change! Charles understood that places are layered - that what disappears is as important as what replaces it - that character is built as much from odd, fleeting details as from anything permanent.

For some, his name may not immediately register ...but his work will.



## THE AUDIENCE

*In 2013 when I was the Editor of this Newsletter, I included an article about the West End play *The Audience* which was being 'live streamed' in cinemas around the country having sold out in London. This was not a new idea but still unusual ...and on this occasion, was being done on huge scale!  
Peter Evans writes...*



It was common for West End successes to be given this treatment but in 2013, it was shown on three screens at the Odeon, Curzon and Firstsite at the same time. I pointed out that quite possibly, as many people saw it that day in Colchester (986) as saw it live at the Gielgud Theatre in London; and of course, the same was happening around the country, cinema audiences all watching the same play!

The play was written by Peter Morgan and was about Queen Elizabeth II's weekly interview with her Prime Ministers over the 60 years of her reign. Neither of the participants and predecessors ever disclosed what was said - this is still the case with King Charles III. The point of the play was to consider what might have been said!

Peter Morgan had already had a massive success with his script for the film *The Queen* featuring Helen Mirren as Queen Elizabeth in 1997, dealing with the death of Princess Diana. So successful was the film in winning many awards, that Helen Mirren gave a very graceful *thank you* speech on having won the Oscars Academy award for Best Actress in 2006.

On Sunday 1 March this year, *The Audience* was shown again at Firstsite, still to a good audience. It had already been shown at the Odeon and the Curzon and it will be screened at the Mercury Theatre in May and made available to watch online. Possibly some were in the original screening audience 13 years ago. It is true that the average age of the screening audience was not low and there were many with walking sticks (including me with my sprained ankle). We were given cast lists but I had obtained a genuine programme from the 2013 production. I had also seen a second version of the play starring Kristin Scott Thomas as the Queen. Not all Prime Ministers were featured, as there were 14 of them!

One unusual aspect of the play was that Helen Mirren hardly left the stage, as her costumes, wigs and make up were changed on stage by dressers, almost before our eyes.



Of course, the Queen herself died in 2022 and from the 2013 cast, there were four deaths - including Hadyn Gwynne who had appeared as Margaret Thatcher (who herself died early in 2013) and Paul Ritter as John Major. There were insights to all the characters - and a comment about the imminent marriage of the Duke of York (as he was then) and Fergie - "they make a good couple" got a good laugh. We could all remember references to events and people, going right back to the Suez Canal. These events are part of our history and provide a memorable way of reminding ourselves.

*The picture above has been taken from the Mercury Theatre website in advertising the forthcoming screening of the play on Sunday 10 May at 16.00.*

## WHERE AND WHAT IS IT? A #COLCHESTER CONUNDRUM

*Ged Dickinson asks (in social media speak) - #WhereAndWhatIsIt ?*



As you wander the ancient streets of our heritage-filled City, how much do you really see? How good are your detective and observational skills? If you are like many busy folk, you probably miss quite a lot!

Just for fun, every Tuesday on our social media channels, we ask these questions alongside a photograph of something that people often miss amidst the hustle and bustle of everyday life. We put people out of their misery the following Friday by publishing the answer, alongside a more expansive picture and some snippets of information about our feature!

We realise that not all Civic Society members and supporters follow social media posts and so we thought we'd include a couple of teasers in our Newsletter for their benefit, mostly! There are no points, nor prizes ...just a warm inner glow of self-satisfaction if you get the answer right ...and some bragging rights!

Our 'Socials' can be found on page 2;  
Answer to this teaser on page 34

## A 300 YEAR LEGACY: THE GIFT OF ARTHUR WINSLEY



*This summer, residents of Winsley's Almshouses in Colchester will be invited to gather for afternoon tea. There will be conversation, laughter and perhaps a quiet toast. The man they will be celebrating will not be present, but his generosity shapes their lives every day, three centuries after his death.*

*Irene Kettle, a Trustee of the Almshouse Charity of Arthur Winsley, writes...*

Arthur Winsley was one of Colchester's most prominent citizens, a successful wool and cloth dealer, Alderman, Justice of the Peace and Mayor. He was a man deeply committed to his town and its people.

In his will of 1726, he made an extraordinary decision. He left £500 and much of his property, including Brickhouse Farm in St Botolph's Parish, to establish a charity. His aim was clear and compassionate: to provide a home for "Twelve Ancient Men, that had lived well and fallen into decay."

By 1734–35, his vision had taken physical form. Brickhouse Farm was transformed into 12 almshouses and a chapel, built at a cost of £560. The first residents received not only shelter but dignity, a weekly stipend of 2s. 6d. each and 36 bags of coal each year. The stipend was discontinued in 1956.

Winsley also insisted that a "Good Preacher" deliver a service annually in the chapel, a tradition that continues every January, linking present-day residents with their founder's original intentions.



*The top picture is of Winsley's Square, including the original accommodation. The picture on the right is of the Rt Revd Roger Morris, Bishop of Colchester in the ancient pulpit of the tiny chapel alongside a portrait of Arthur Winsley.*



*Picture on the left is an undated sketch of Winsley's Square from the charity's records.*

Other benefactors added their support over time, strengthening and expanding Winsley's original foundation.

Over the years, some of the original farmland was sold off. In 1811, the charity bought Barn Hall farm, adjacent to Brickhouse Farm. Parts of it were sold in 1899 and 1931, and the remainder in 1945. The land of Brickhouse Farm was sold for building between 1893 and 1914; the southern part of the farmhouse, which had been separated from the almshouses and used to house the tenant farmers, was demolished in 1966.

### FROM TWELVE MEN TO A THRIVING COMMUNITY...

Today, Winsley's charity, formally known as The Almshouse Charity of Arthur Winsley and Others, provides more than 80 homes for over 90 residents. The accommodation includes houses, bungalows and flats, offering security and independence for older people with strong ties to Colchester.



Much has changed over 300 years. In the early days, residents' wives were required to leave upon their husband's death, a stark reminder of the social realities of the 18th century.

Modern residents do not pay rent but make a contribution, including towards maintenance and heating. Applicants must be over 60 and have a significant connection to the City, with many now applying through Colchester City Council's *Homechoice* service.

The current Trustees of Arthur Winsley's charity are proud of his legacy and committed to providing modern facilities for its residents. In 2019, some of the oldest listed properties off Old Heath Road, were refurbished and adapted for modern living. A multi-million pound building project, which will start in the charity's 300<sup>th</sup> year, will see bungalows in the Rose Garden area of the site, off Gilbert Road, adapted and extended and additional homes being built.

The organisation is a registered charity, a member of the Almshouse Association, and part of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, reflecting its commitment to high standards of care and governance. It has recently become a Charity Incorporated Organisation.



The Charity is administered by seven Trustees and managed by their Clerk, Sareena Cobden, who is also the General Manager. The current Trustees are David Hart, Amanda Westbrook, Simon Pinion, Tim Field, Andrew Waters and Irene Kettle.

*The picture left to right shows Trustees and Guests at the Annual Dinner 2026.*

The Trustees used to collect rent from the tenant farmers at their annual dinner, to which the Mayor, Chief Executive of Colchester City Council and “Good Preacher” are invited today.

## THE MONUMENT AND THE GREATER MEMORIAL



Arthur Winsley left £250 for a monument so that he wouldn't be forgotten. Despite being a Nonconformist, he asked to be buried at St James The Great and St Paul's Church, East Hill, Colchester. Arthur Winsley said the memorial was to be erected “with my statue cut out in marble lying with the left hand under the head and a book in the right hand and in a night gown with inscriptions as my most judicious friends shall think proper”.

David Beattie's fascinating booklet on the monument identifies Richard van Spangen (c.1689-1757) as the sculptor. The bill came to £203 3s., which included a smaller version of the work which is in the Winsley's chapel. The booklet, *The Memorial to Alderman Arthur Winsley at the Church of St James the Great, Colchester* is available from David Beattie - [david.beattie@btinternet.com](mailto:david.beattie@btinternet.com) -for a suggested donation to St James The Great and St Paul's Church.

The stone monument to Arthur Winsley is impressive, but surely his best memorial is the one he bequeathed to thousands of people – a home for their later years. It was an astonishing gift and an awe-inspiring legacy.

## CIVIC VOICE – AN UPDATE

*John Salmon writes...*

In our January Newsletter, I reported that Civic Voice Trustees were proposing that Civic Voice be closed down at the end of its financial year (February 2026) unless a solution could be found to the issues it was facing.

I am pleased to report that having considered a range of options and listened closely to member views at the Annual General Meeting in Birmingham on 8 November 2025, an online meeting later that month and a subsequent hybrid update meeting held on 24 January 2026, the Civic Voice Board has agreed a way forward that will enable Civic Voice to continue.

I attended both of the online meetings. At the first of these, I was struck by the level of support being shown, even from societies which had not renewed their membership. And it was clear that there was a will for Civic Voice to be revived and reorganised.

By the time of the January meeting, a way forward had been clarified. The new Civic Voice will be a volunteer-led charity with a strong emphasis on connection and collaboration across the civic movement. This will be actively encouraged through the development and use of accessible online tools to facilitate the sharing of best practice and enabling member organisations and groups to learn from one another.

The aim will be to develop a volunteer-led national, regional and/or county network to connect civic societies. Its membership will be open to individuals as well as organisations.

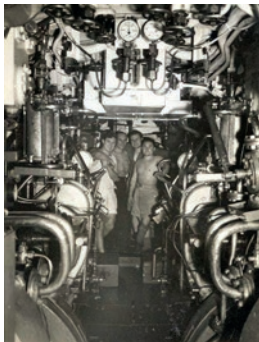
There will be a member consultation on fair, proportionate fees, with no cost barrier. And a Strategic Review will be conducted leading to a new constitution and a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. In addition, there will be regular online meetings for members, following the pattern of those held in November and February, to maintain continuity, accountability, and to check that we have the support for members as the organisation evolves.

Civic Voice has also announced a national convention to be held in Liverpool in April and their Expert Panel have completed responses on both the *National Planning Policy Framework* and the *Draft Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance*. Clearly **Civic Voice is very much up and running again!**

## HMS UNRUFFLED

*The Civic Society's tour of the Town Hall was not able to include a visit to the North Committee Room but Guide Glyn Barritt took the opportunity to describe one of the exhibits– the plaque commemorating HMS Unruffled. She writes...*

The plaque in the corner of the North Committee Room was presented to the people of Colchester to commemorate their fund-raising efforts during Warship Week in March 1942. The UK government had introduced a war bonds scheme to help provide ships for the Royal Navy and the garrison town of Colchester was charged with raising £250,000 to build a submarine – *HMS Unruffled*. Colcestrians certainly rose to the challenge, raising an amazing £435,223 by holding fetes, bazaars and dances – a truly wonderful effort!

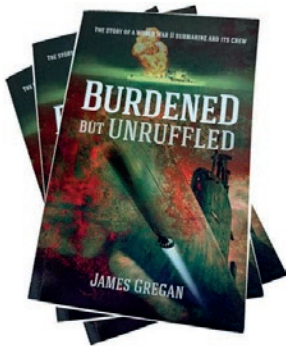


The sub was ordered in the summer of 1940 and made by Vickers Armstrong at its Barrow-in-Furness dockyards – it was to feature a locally-made Paxman diesel engine, as did half of the wartime submarine fleet built in Britain. Once deployed in the spring of 1942, the submarine patrolled the seas - mainly the Mediterranean - for three and a half years under the command of Lieutenant J S Stevens. She was originally known as P46 but became *HMS Unruffled* after Prime Minister, Winston Churchill ruled that all vessels should have names.

*The picture shows members of the crew and the Davey, Paxman & Co diesel engine*

*Unruffled* featured in twenty wartime patrols, including a crucial involvement in Operations Torch (the British-American invasion of French North Africa), Pedestal (to save Malta) and Husky (the allied invasion of Sicily), as well as special operations. It sank or damaged nearly 40,000 tons of shipping without losing a single man! And then it retired – battered and bruised, but triumphant.

The sub's final voyage was to Troon in Scotland – where she was unceremoniously scrapped in 1946 along with other submarines. Post-war Britain was desperate for metal.



## UNRUFFLED'S STORY

James Gregan is the author of the book *Burdened but Unruffled*, published in 2016. Although this book is currently out of print, copies can still be purchased online via Amazon and Google Books.

Just before taking a Caribbean cruise, Gregan had bought a holiday read at Gatwick Airport, on a topic which he wouldn't normally choose but one which was to change his life. It was Arthur Dickson's account – *Crash Dive* - of spending eighteen months on the submarine *HMS Safari* in 1942-43. Life on a submarine – the (awful) smells, fumes, lack of air, tedium of long sea passages and then stalking enemy convoys - absolutely fascinated Gregan and upon his return home, he devoured every book he could find on the subject.

He had seen the plaque in the Town Hall dedicated to *Unruffled* and so he began to put the sub's story in writing, a passion which would take him three years and over to Malta on a couple of occasions.

## UNRUFFLED BUT ...FORGOTTEN?

In Gregan's book, the submarine is described as *forgotten*. In its heyday, school children used to send the crew letters and women used to send food and knit clothes, not that they were worn in the sweltering heat of the Mediterranean but very useful for their return home to colder weather!



Three days after Christmas in 1943 – after a busy and hazardous 18 months or so that included some of those major operations – twenty-eight officers and crew of *Unruffled* were the guests on a day of celebrations in their adopted town of Colchester – lunch at The George Hotel, a warm welcome at the Regal

cinema, a civic reception at the Town Hall and a reception at Davey, Paxman & Co, makers of the sub's diesel engine. They were the town's heroes.

Today, ask anyone about the Second World War efforts of *Unruffled* and it's likely that the question will be received blankly. There isn't a single ex-Second World War submarine that people can visit in a museum and understandably, generations have moved on. And these days, Colchester itself probably has more connection with the Army.

Gregan's book tries to bring the story of *Unruffled's* heroes back to life and to celebrate the extraordinary achievements of thirty-three young men who survived the most difficult endeavours in the most awful conditions, especially when so many other brave, young men called to the war effort did not return.



In December 1942, the grateful Admiralty presented Colchester with the plaque shown above, featuring the phrase *Burdened but Unruffled*. It was hung in the Town Hall but for unknown reasons, was removed and subsequently mislaid! It was discovered on 14 March 2012

on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1942 Warship Week and it now hangs in the North Committee Room. It was the hope of James Gregan that the plaque be given a more prominent home where Town Hall visitors can readily see it.

And the sub's Jolly Roger? Might that be in someone's loft?

### FELINE GUARDIAN ANGEL?



One of the most astonishing aspects of the *Unruffled* story is Timoshenko - the resident cat said to be able to warn of an approaching enemy. Certainly the submariners believed in the power of his animal instinct and were convinced that he was their lucky mascot! When Timoshenko seemingly detected danger, he would run up and down the corridor

uncontrollably! One day, when he went missing, departure for patrol was delayed by 24 hours on the orders of the Captain, who was sure that Timoshenko played a major part in *Unruffled's* survival.

*The black and white pictures have been taken from the book by James Gregan – Burdened but Unruffled*

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE...

*For the 2026 Great British Spring Clean, Colchester's Civic Society organised five separate group litter-picks, each lasting around two hours.  
Ged Dickinson writes...*

The *Great British Spring Clean*, now in its eleventh year, is the nation's biggest mass-action environmental campaign! Since 2016, an army of millions of amazing *Litter Heroes* across the country have shown that they love where they live by pledging to pick more than four million bags of litter!

Organised nationally by the *Keep Britain Tidy* charity organisation, the Great British Spring Clean campaign grabs the headlines, focuses people's attention and encourages individuals, groups, schools, Local Authorities and organisations like the Civic Society, to 'do their bit' to visibly improve the look and feel of the places in which they live, work and operate.



Three of our five groups focused on The Moors, a fantastic wild open space along the bank of the River Colne from East Bridge to the Hythe. Most people who visit The Moors are probably most familiar with the surfaced cycle path (National Cycle Route 51) but there are also a couple of public footpaths and large areas of woodland and scrub. One of them - PRoW 137 - runs (or is supposed to) in a virtually clear straight line from the top of Timber Hill to just below the railway bridge over the Colne.



The Civic Society has had concerns recently about the lack of clarity and obstruction of the actual route of this footpath. Members led by CCS Footpath Lead - John Collett - surveyed it in early February with a view to perhaps getting the route cleared and waymarked.

Those members undertaking the survey were frankly horrified by the amount of litter and fly-tipping to be seen, particularly along the steep upper parts along the boundary with the Saw Mill and Edward Paxman housing estates. The timing of the survey, just before the start of The Great British Spring Clean period (13-29 March) was ideal and we quickly scheduled an additional three

dedicated 'Moors' Saturday morning group litter-picks to add to the two mid-week City centre litter-picks already planned.

Special mention must be made of the large group of volunteer litter pickers from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints who turned out in force – around 25 of them – for the first event on 14 March. On that first two-hour litter-pick, we collected 63 bags of assorted litter, mainly bottles and cans, along with some larger and stranger items. Over the three Saturdays along The Moors, we collected well over a hundred bags.

Then there were the four or five bikes, a superman doll, a large plastic tarantula, two office chairs, an old oil barrel, mattresses, duvets, various items of clothing and footwear, and gas cylinders. Christmas decorations, traffic cones, half-a-dozen deflated footballs, garden furniture, car wheels and tyres, lawn mowers, plant pots and much more. Oh, and let's not forget the large ceramic stork and the discarded crutch...!



Perhaps unsurprisingly, there was less to find during the two City centre events but there was certainly no shortage. We still managed to amass 35 bags of rubbish on the 17 March and a further 33 bags on 26 March.

So... around 200 bags of assorted rubbish and a vast array of larger and sometimes very strange items which are no longer blighting the streets and open spaces of Colchester as a direct result of the efforts of our members, supporters and friends during this year's Great British Spring Clean.

Of course, it would be great if people didn't drop litter or fly-tip in the first place but realistically, there is always going to be litter.

Ignoring litter and fly-tipping doesn't make it go away. It only goes away when either it decomposes naturally or when someone physically picks it up ...and when everyone respects the environment and loves where they live.

It is quite surprising how good it makes you feel when you know you're making a real, practical difference to the look and feel of Colchester – it's also a great way to gently burn off some calories and take some exercise as well!

*The GBSC Team comprises Sheila Anderton, John Collett and Ged Dickinson*

## NEW FLAG IN MEMORY OF FORMER MAYORESS

*A new Union Flag has been donated for display in the Mayoral Suite at Colchester Town Hall in memory of the late Lady Audrey Russell who was Mayoress in 1986-87. She died in June last year. Sir Bob Russell writes...*

The flag was presented to the Mayor, Councillor Mike Lilley, by Lady Russell's family led by her husband Sir Bob Russell who is now High Steward of Colchester.

It replaces a faded Union Flag which was donated 40 years ago by Colchester businessman Mr Hugh Markham whose family company celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1986. He was approached by the then Councillor Russell who became Mayor that year.



Sir Bob recalled that he and his wife had been invited to Dedham Massachusetts as part of the American town's 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations. He noticed that the US Stars and Stripes flag was displayed at public buildings and thought that it would be good if the Union Flag was displayed in the Mayoral Suite at Colchester Town Hall.

*"Over the past 40 years, the colours of that flag have faded because of sunlight, so I felt it would be nice to replace it with a new one in memory of my late wife."*

There is a plaque on the stand stating this, alongside the original plaque commemorating the Markham donation.

Family members who attended the presentation were Sir Bob's three children, twin sons Andrew and Mark and daughter Nicola; grandchildren Joseph Russell and Jessica and Sam Dines; daughter-in-law, Sarah Leith Russell; and Audrey's two sisters, Honorary Alderman Mary Blandon and Janet Green.

*Picture top right: Mayor Mike Lilley and Mayoress Alderman Lyn Barton with members of the family of the late Lady Audrey Russell stand in front of a new Union Flag which is now displayed in the Mayoral Suite at Colchester Town Hall.*

## ST LEONARD'S CHURCH

*The redundant church of St Leonard's-at-the-Hythe has an active Friends group which has just produced a book covering the history not only of the Medieval Church but of the Hythe itself. Peter Evans writes...*

My father's family had strong links to the Hythe area. Many of the families were christened or married at St Leonards. My father's brother Robert was involved with the church as something like an altar boy when the church was connected to the Oxford movement, making it a rather high church at a time when many residents would have been very poor and perhaps unlikely converts. There is a chapter about it.



At one stage, my father, his four brothers and father worked at James Paxman's factory. There are chapters about that the factory which for so much of the late 19th and much of 20th century, provided employment to a large proportion of the population of Colchester. The Paxman family took a close interest in the people who worked for them and they supported the church.

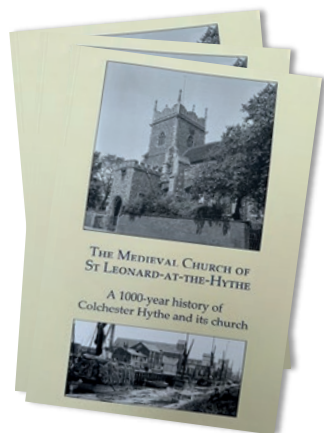


St Leonard's has been well looked after by the Churches Preservation Trust and there is a large section of the book devoted to a description of the church and its contents. The high quality stained glass installed from the 1860s until the 1930s is fully described and there are images of St Helena and the King Charles the Martyr\* (rather rare). The fact that the chancel is not square with the rest of the church is yet another unusual story of the Church.

*\*King Charles the Martyr refers to Charles I of England who was executed on 30 January 1649 but commemorated for his steadfast faith and belief in the Divine Right of Kings.*

A large section of the book is devoted to a description of the church and its beautiful features. There is the story of the angels found in the room above the porch. A general history of the area is also described – in particular, a study of how the Siege of Colchester affected the Hythe, the story of the parish school (now housing) and life in the parish in and after 1890. The population fell dramatically in the later 20th century, during which time the church was closed as a parish church.

The Hythe is changing again. After the drop in the population as the harbour closed and Paxman's shrunk, people are moving here again and St Leonards has changed as well. There has been a Friends group for a long time and it now has ambitions.



The church has a full set of bells and is a centre for change ringing, one of only three in Colchester. It is providing a space for events throughout the year but needs to provide toilet facilities and water supply for visitors. It would also like to become a registered charity to make funding applications easier.

The Friends of St Leonard's Church website - <http://stleonard-at-the-hythe.org.uk/> has details of the events and music – folk through to jazz – held throughout the year. I shall be watching out for the annual Carol Concert when the church is always full!

The book can be purchased for £15 from the Church itself, Red Lion Books and the VIC in Hollytrees House. Proceeds will support the Friends of the Church in their work to maintain the building and retain its availability to the local community. The Church is open every Tuesday between 12.00 and 14.00 and on alternate Saturdays 14.00-16.00

*The picture on the right shows a ledger stone (one of two) – this one is in the north chapel. Ledger stones were inscribed stone slabs usually laid in the floors of churches or cemeteries to commemorate the burial of a significant person. The term 'ledger' comes from the Middle English word 'lygger' which means to lie down.*



## ROOM WITH A VIEW

*Well, what an incredible difference! Jo Edwards writes...*

Hearing a curious noise, I decided to investigate. Opening my front door I was astonished to find a team of men in the Priory Street Car Park, tackling the weeds growing both in the area below the Roman Wall and alongside the pavement. They were also repairing the wooden barriers and clearing the litter caught beneath the foliage.



You may remember my comments in the January newsletter about the large Buddleia bushes growing vigorously by the barrier bordering the street. Our *Eyes and Ears Team* contacted the Council about these and the general unkempt appearance of the car park and this was the result. The Council tackled their little surface car park in Osborne Street and the big Vineyard Street one too, clearing the rampant vegetation from the cycle stands in Vineyard Street so that they can actually be used again.

A management plan and funding are now in place and so the car parks will hopefully look far better in the future. I know that many of you will say that the self-sown plants should be encouraged. To a certain extent, I agree. We have a lot of stag beetles and butterflies that consider the Roman Wall to be home. But some light and informed management is needed. The growth alongside the pavement in the Priory Street car park was actually blocking the view of drivers trying to exit onto the road, endangering small children going to and from St Thomas More School. Regular management should ensure their safety and will also provide a better welcome to those who park there, particularly the tourists, who are so vital to the city's economy.

My thanks to all involved!

JANE'S WALKS 2026 - 2-10 MAY

<https://www.walkcolchester.org.uk/janes-walk>



## HERITAGE OPEN DAYS 2026

*Glyn Barritt writes...*

Every year in September, Heritage Open Days brings together local volunteers and organisations in England’s largest community-led festival of heritage, history, community and culture. Stories are told, traditions explored and histories brought to life. They provide everyone with the opportunity to see inside interesting and often historic venues which are open to the public free of charge; and to take themed free walks with qualified Guides!



But it also an opportunity for people of all ages and from all walks of life to volunteer to steward at some of the venues – to enjoy the social experience of meeting visitors and other volunteers who share a common interest in showcasing the unique aspects of their town or city.

Heritage Open Days in 2026 will be held between Friday 11-Sunday 20 September and once again, we are looking for volunteer stewards inside the Roman Theatre in Maidenburgh Street and Peake’s House in East Stockwell Street.

Please consider giving a few hours of your time to steward by indicating your availability on the reply slip. We welcome returning stewards but also new volunteers too! And if you are not interested in stewarding, please come and support the HoD Guides and Stewards on these two wonderful weekends!

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### #WHEREANDWHATISIT TEASER - 2

Where can you see this?

Answer on page 40



## LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE-ORGANISATION

The following letter was sent on 25 March 2025 following the recent decision on LGR in England by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government – the Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP.

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*Dear Stakeholder*

*You may have seen that Government has recently announced its planned configuration for Local Government Reorganisation across Greater Essex.*

*This is the process which will see Colchester City Council and Essex County Council abolished (along with all other district, borough and city councils across Essex), and a new unitary council set up covering all their combined functions.*

*The Government has chosen a configuration of five councils across Essex, which means the new unitary council covering Colchester will also encompass the current districts of Braintree, Tendring and Essex County Council services.*

*We welcome the clarity that this decision gives us, to enable work on this change programme to continue and deliver improvements to the services we provide to our community; and we will now step up our collaborative work with all partners across Greater Essex to ensure this happens with minimal disruption.*

*We understand there will be lots of questions at this time, and we will be working hard to answer those over the coming weeks and months as the implementation plan is developed. We will keep you updated at appropriate moments as we progress.*

*If you do have any questions in the meantime then please do send them through, either directly to us or via your district councillors, and we will endeavour to answer them.*

*Best wishes*

*Pam Donnelly, Chief Executive, Colchester City Council  
Cllr David King, Leader, Colchester City Council*

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It is the intention of the Civic Society Committee to organise an all-members meeting with those tasked with steering a way through the huge challenges that lie ahead in LGR - legislation, service integration, financial and staffing issues, contracts, property ownership, disposal, elections etc.

## EAST HILL CYLCE LANES – AN UPDATE

*John Salmons writes...*

In our January newsletter, we reported that two letters had been sent to the head of Essex Highways: one from the Society as a whole, arguing in essence for the East Hill Cycle Lane scheme to be scrapped and the other, from our Highways Group, calling for a review of the scheme and the abandonment of the 'shared use' design in favour of one which involved the full segregation of cycles and pedestrians.

We received this reply to the Highways Group letter.

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*Dear Mr Salmon*

*Thank you for your email and apologies for the delay in response. Thank you also for your ongoing input into Essex Highway schemes, which is valued.*

*Following the TRO process, as all of the representations made couldn't be fully closed out, the next step is to take this forward for cabinet member decision. As part of this process, I will consider all of the outstanding representations made, as well as the response to these from the project team.*

*With any scheme, there is a balance to be met between differing priorities, and the limitations of the space available. I know that the team have looked carefully at segregation. While the ideal for any cycling scheme is always full segregation, given the space available on East Hill, the need to provide bus infrastructure, retain some parking spaces and ensure suitable pedestrian provision, this is not possible.*

*The team have worked closely with Active Travel England on the design and they, as the Government lead on Active Travel, are satisfied with the approach being put forward. The scheme has also been through an independent road safety audit and will, should it move forward, go through a post construction safety audit to assess if further mitigations are required.*

*The team will keep you updated once a decision has been taken on the TRO.*

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Not content to give up at this point, I tried again in January this year, to get the scheme reviewed, this time attempting to enlist the support of local County and Colchester City Councillors and our MP.

Our letter concluded with the following:

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*Of greatest concern is the conflictual situation the redesignation to 'shared use' will introduce at the pedestrian footway in front of the East Hill Pharmacy and the main entrance to both the East Hill and Castle Gardens GP surgeries. This is an area of 'active frontage' throughout the day from Monday to Friday, where a significant proportion of pedestrians will be elderly, disabled, or be parents with young children.*

*The introduction of shared use sections on the footway here will involve a dramatic loss of safe space, and a significant deterioration in the quality of conditions for pedestrians. The East Hill footway is currently just that, a footway, a safe space for people walking or riding in pushchairs, wheelchairs, or walking their dogs etc. Some will be blind or partially sighted, others frail and with hearing or mobility disabilities. But if this scheme is introduced, it will no longer be a safe space. Stepping out of the front door of the GP surgeries, or simply walking up or down the hill, people will find that suddenly, they have been joined by cyclists who have just been diverted from a steep downhill cycle lane, where they would naturally be travelling at high speed. This is inevitably going to be a confusing and shocking experience for many pedestrians as they encounter cyclists flashing past. This combination of vulnerable pedestrians and speeding cyclists merging at this point must carry with it a significant risk of collision and injury.*

*I hope you will agree that this is an arrangement that is inherently dangerous and unacceptable and cannot be allowed to go ahead, regardless of being compliant with the regulations regarding the width of the footways and the numbers of pedestrians and cyclist currently using East Hill.*

*On behalf of the Colchester Civic Society Highways Group, I ask therefore that the East Hill scheme be fully reviewed and 'shared use' pathways abandoned.*

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The decision on this scheme is imminent and may well have been taken by the time you read this report. I have not heard back from anyone indicating that they will be acting on my request to support a final review, so I am not hopeful of receiving any support and expect the shared use scheme to be approved.

What I have since come to understand is there can be no return to a scheme involving fully segregated cycle lanes and floating bus stops on East Hill, because the original scheme failed to pass its safety audit. The reason being (if I understand correctly) that there is insufficient width on East Hill for the cycle lanes to run behind the floating bus stops while maintaining adequate

sightlines at the crossing points. So, what this current scheme does is redesignate the cycle lane as shared use when it reaches the bus stop and in so doing, the cycle route becomes subject to different regulations, which do not prohibit its use. Incredibly, it is permissible for the cycle lane to end at the bus stop and cyclists to be diverted onto a shared use path around the bus stop area, because this avoids pedestrians having to cross a dedicated cycle path when getting on and off the buses.

There is however, one way in which this scheme might deliver a fully segregated cycle lane and cut out the dangers to pedestrians outside the surgery. This would be to abandon the downhill cycle lane and restore a fully segregated cycle lane on the uphill side.

*On a personal note...* the initiative for dedicated cycle routes to be rolled out around the country began with the publication of the Department for Transport document [Gear change: a bold vision for cycling and walking](#) in July 2020, during the Covid epidemic. This sets out guidelines for upgrading cycling networks with a view to promoting cycling and walking through the creation of dedicated cycle tracks, which separate cyclists from both pedestrians and motor vehicles.

I was surprised and excited by this initiative at first. It was clearly an attempt to begin upgrading our cycling network along the lines of the western European nations, such as Belgium and Netherlands and move away from the 'cycling on the cheap' networks we put up with, where pedestrians have to share footpaths - sometimes with a white line down the middle, with one side for cycles and the other for people walking - sometimes shared use, where people walking have absolutely no safe space to allow their toddlers to walk beside a push chair or dogs to walk beside their owners, or even for people to walk side by side without having to stop and step aside to let cyclists through.

One consequence of these shared-use paths is that a new generation has grown up who regard cycling on footpaths as normal and acceptable, regardless of whether it is actually legal, or dangerous. A tragic case hit the headlines recently where a fifteen year old boy on an electric bike hit an elderly man on the footpath outside his house, while putting out a wheelie bin. The man died in hospital sometime later and the boy, who was already devastated by the consequences of his actions had to face court and the prospect of a custodial sentence.

Fatal collisions are thankfully rare, but we must all have experienced occasions when we suffer the shock of a cyclist flashing past our shoulder –

an uncomfortable reminder that as pedestrians, we are not safe on the footpaths anymore. For me, living near to East Hill, this is an all too frequent experience, and is always shocking, especially on the Greyfriars and Roman Road side of the hill, where cyclists are heading downhill at high speed.

Consequently, I was initially pleased at the prospect of cyclists having a dedicated lane to themselves. It looked like a significant improvement and I felt the loss of short-term parking was a reasonable price to pay. But when it sunk in that instead of this promised improvement for cyclist and pedestrians, we were going to get instead, a scheme which introduced shared use spaces on the East Hill footpaths, I was appalled. It felt like a betrayal. **The Bold Vision For Cycling And Walking** proclaimed that “Cycles must be treated as vehicles, not as pedestrians. New cycle provision which involves sharing space with pedestrians, including at crossings, will no longer be funded.”

But this was being quietly dropped in favour of a scheme which directs these vehicles, including e-bikes, and even cargo bikes, onto the footpaths!

To make it worse, this is not just happening in Colchester. Sarah Gayton from the National Federation For The Blind informs me that schemes such as this are going in, with the approval of the regulator - Active Travel England - across the country. It seems to me that a scheme set up and funded by central government to promote cycling and walking has morphed into one which has lost sight of its original aims and principles and is introducing regressive schemes which are extending the creation of shared use footpaths and severely reducing the quality of the provision for walking.

The underlying issue appears to be that the designers have failed to find a safe and approvable way to provide cycle lane crossings at floating bus stops. There is plenty of video evidence available which shows that most cyclists ignore the existing zebra type crossings and Transport for London research showed that 60% of cyclists did not stop to let pedestrians cross at floating bus stops with zebra crossings.

This is clearly not an easy issue to resolve. But changing the designation of cycle lanes to shared use is certainly not the way to resolve these issues. It merely dodges them and, in my view, is irresponsible and dangerous, especially in situations such as the downhill route on East Hill, where the dedicated cycle lane suddenly becomes shared- use. If 60% of cyclists do not stop for people on zebra crossings, it is a pretty safe bet that even fewer cyclists will stop for pedestrians on short stretches of shared use path.

## KEEPING AN EYE ON COLCHESTER

*Colchester has had over the years, its fair share (some might say more than its fair share) of large major projects and initiatives that have, to a greater or lesser degree, changed the look and feel of the City. In almost all of them, Colchester's Civic Society has played a part. The Eyes and Ears Team writes..*



Some projects and initiatives have been suggested and ardently campaigned for by The Society. Others have been at the behest of the Borough/City Council, by private developers or by the County Council. Some things we have railed against and vehemently opposed. Some we have sought to influence for the better, during the consultation and planning stages.

We don't always win but we do often make a difference.



It isn't however, just the 'big things' that make a difference to the look and feel of a place. Small things matter too and often make a big impact to the look and feel of Colchester. It is upon those things that the Society's *Eyes and Ears* initiative is very firmly focused ...perhaps graffiti has appeared, perhaps fly-tipping, perhaps an overflowing bin or roadside drain or leaking pipe ...or maybe there is an area that doesn't seem to be on the Council's regular cleaning schedule.

Alternatively, it might be something that the Essex Highways Team need to be alerted to ...an uneven, broken or rocking paving stone, a pothole, a bus stop that needs attention, redundant or damaged street furniture, an unlit street light (or a light that never goes off!).

Lots of us notice and comment but how many people actually report an issue? Perhaps we don't really know to whom to report it. Perhaps we think someone else will report it or the procedure is too difficult or a waste of time even suspecting that nothing will be done about it anyway.

The Civic Society *Eyes and Ears* initiative sets out to challenge the perception that nothing can or will be done about the everyday issues that do so much to detract from the positive images that make Colchester 'A City Worth Living In'.



We have a particularly close and positive relationship with the Neighbourhood Services Teams at the City Council. Barely a day goes by when we're not logging a fresh issue through the Council's online reporting tool.

Just as importantly, barely a day goes by when the Council's staff are not out and about sorting the issues that we've reported - cleaning off or over-painting graffiti, dealing with fly-tipping, collecting abandoned traffic cones, signs, frames and sandbags.

We report literally hundreds of issues each year mainly to the City Council but also to Essex County Council, especially if the issue involves highways; for example - streetlamps, road signs, guardrails, bollards. The most common and, for some reason, difficult defect to get sorted, is the dire condition of many of our pavements and road surfaces. There is no doubt that it is much harder to resolve issues that are the responsibility of Essex County Council than when the problem is the responsibility of the City Council.

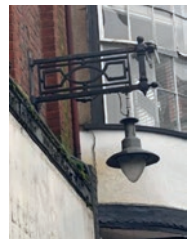
Perhaps things will get better when the Government's plans for the reorganisation of Local Government are introduced in April 2028. In the meantime, rest assured that the Society's *Eyes and Ears* team will continue to flag, report and follow up on all those relatively small issues that should be quick and easy to fix and which really do make a big difference to the look and feel of Colchester, Britain's First City.

*The Eyes and Ears Team comprises Sheila Anderton, John Collett and Ged Dickinson*

## ANSWERS TO TEASER NO 1!



The first teaser shows one of two ornamental lantern brackets on the front of the parade of shops on Head Street that once housed Lucking Smith and the Gas Showrooms. Only two (of six) lanterns remain.



# PLANNING A NEW BUS STATION FOR COLCHESTER

*John Salmon writes...*

Essex County Council has begun work on identifying possible options for a future new Colchester Transport Interchange (a Bus Station to you and me). As part of this process, the Highways Group met recently with Essex Highways officers to share our thoughts on current issues.



The project is in its early stages and the Highways design team are working through the process of identifying potential sites. This process will see a shortlisting of options ahead of consulting with the public later this year.

As part of the early engagement, they have had initial discussions with local bus operators to get views on design opportunities and constraints, and any key requirements in terms of facilities.

At present, they are looking for detailed input from specific groups such as ours with a view to building a picture of what is needed in terms of layout, service provision (such as toilets and cafe), driver layover, changeover requirements and the accessibility of possible locations, before they begin looking at which site or sites might serve best.

In particular, we were able to offer written contributions from Rowena Macaulay on current and potential accessibility issues for disabled people and also from Roger Dennis, who provided a detailed look at all the bus stops and services running through the City centre, as well as detailing issues at the existing Osborne Street interchange and how some of these might be resolved.

This is the beginning of what could be a long process, which will involve finding the funding necessary to bring any plans to life.



## CHARLES ABBOT – FIRST BARON COLCHESTER

*I was privileged to lead the Civic Society tour of the Town Hall on Tuesday 10 March and mention of the First Baron Colchester seemed to attract interest. Glyn Barritt writes...*

The First Baron Colchester was a title in the Peerage of the United Kingdom and created on 1 June 1817 for Charles Abbot, Speaker of the House of Commons between 1802 and 1817.

Charles Abbot was the son of the Revd Dr John Abbot, headmaster of Abingdon School and rector of All Saints, Colchester. By his mother's second marriage, he was the step-brother of Jeremy Bentham who is regarded as the founder of modern utilitarianism.



*The portrait pictured right was painted by James Lonsdale (1777-1839) and hangs in the Moot Hall of Colchester's Town Hall*

Abbot attended Westminster School and matriculated from Christ Church, Oxford in 1775. There he gained the Chancellor's prize for Latin verse as well as the *Vinerian Scholarship* (awarded to the student who performs best in the examination for Bachelor of Civil Law). He was admitted to Middle Temple in 1768 and called to the Bar in 1783. In 1793, Abbot became a Doctor of Civil Law and also, a Fellow of the Royal Society.

In 1795, having practised as a barrister for twelve years and having published a treatise proposing the incorporation of the judicial system of Wales with that of England, he was appointed to the office previously held by his brother of Clerk of the Rules in the King's Bench and was also elected Member of Parliament for Helston.

Abbot commenced his career in Parliament as a reformer, by obtaining the appointment of two committees - one to report on the arrangements which then existed regarding temporary laws or laws about to expire - and the other to devise methods for the better publication of new statutes. It was thanks to the work of the latter committee, and of a second committee which he proposed some years later, that copies of new statutes were subsequently sent routinely to all magistrates and municipal bodies.

Abbot's efforts also effected the establishment of the Record Commission, tasked with investigating, preserving and improving accessibility to state archives (and leading to the creation of the Public Record Office, which solidified the management of legal and government documents).



Under the leadership of the Prime Minister, Henry Addington, Abbot became Chief Secretary for Ireland which he relinquished in 1802 when he was appointed Speaker of the House of Commons. He was also the Keeper of the Privy Seal, a role he retained until his death. He served as Speaker until 1817, when an attack of Erysipelas compelled him to retire but on 1 June in that year, Abbot was raised to the peerage as *Baron Colchester of Colchester, in the County of Essex*. His speeches against the Roman Catholic claims to Ireland were published in 1828.

*So, the question asked on the tour... was there a Second Baron Colchester?*

Yes! In 1796, Abbot had married Elizabeth Gibbes (1760-1847) and they had two sons, Charles and Philip. And so, his eldest son Charles who became the Postmaster General in 1858 succeeded him to the title. The Third Baron Colchester was grandson Reginald Abbot on whose death in 1919, the title became extinct as there were no heirs.

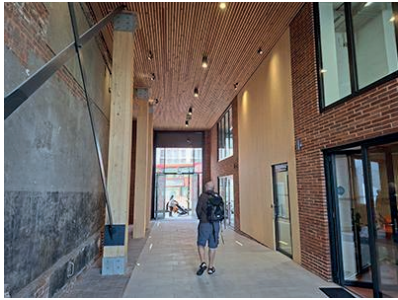
## NEW DIGITAL FORUM

*The Civic Society arranged a visit to the new Digital Forum in Queen Street on 3 March 2026. John Salmon writes...*

The Digital Forum officially opened at the end of January this year. It houses nine studio spaces, a co-working space with twenty-five desks, an events space and an executive boardroom with wrap-around balcony. The workspace is “armed with interactive technology, AV equipment, an on-site cafe and a pop-up podcasting studio.”



A particular feature of this purpose-designed building (designed by Colchester Architects, Inkpen Downie) is a 10Gbps. The £6.25m project was funded by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership, the UK government (Local Growth Fund) and Colchester City Council.



The Forum is operated and managed by COLBEA (Colchester Business Enterprise Agency). This is a not-for-profit agency supporting and helping to promote local businesses. It has been operating in Colchester since 1982. In addition to the Digital Forum, COLBEA already runs two business centres in Colchester, one in the City centre and another in North Colchester's Business Park.

Our members gathered in the co-working space, which is at the back of the building on the ground floor. We were shown around by Simon Mead, COLBEA's Chief Executive, who began by explaining that the photo portraits shown on the TV screens in this room were all bus drivers who worked from this space when it was a bus garage. Additionally, he highlighted the orange metal furniture which provides a striking design feature of this space. Simon explained that this was inspired by the metal furniture, now part of the V&A collection, which had been used originally in the bus garage's rest area. This is of course, a completely new building but a remnant from earlier incarnations of the space remains visible in the entrance hall ie brickwork from the bus garage and before that, the Theatre Royal!



Our tour began on the top floor of this four-storey building where the boardroom is located, in a large light-filled room, with a balcony and panoramic views to the south and east of the City centre. The remaining rooms provide works spaces of varying sizes - some with open views to the east, others overlooking Queen Street. All have nearby kitchens and toilets.

At the time of our visit, which was shortly after the building opened for business, all the units were awaiting their first occupants. The boardroom is available for hire and the co-working space provides desks on a daily basis. The remaining units are available for lease. Follow this link to see the spaces in 3D photographic detail! <https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=Bp75z6WBxVo>



## CITY LIFE

*Andrew Phillips (Assistant Director, Dialect Reform Unit) writes...*

It is not true that our Vibrant City Council has received £1m 'Modernisation Funding' to bring our outdated traditions into the 21st Century. But if so, I am sure they might rename the Oyster Feast the *Braintree, Colchester and Tendring Unitary Authority Annual Seafood Reception*.

They might also have a go at our poetry. No, not Old King Cole or Humpty Dumpty or – well, we all know a better candidate. But Long, Long Ago (well, about 75 years ago) Colchester's best known poem, as then spoken, was '**Never been to Colchester**' written in 1885 by Charles E Benham co-editor of the Essex County Standard. So here it is ....and its updated version....

### NEVER BEEN TO COLCHESTER

#### A BALLAD OF THE TENDRING HUNDRED

I see young Nat come outer his as I come outer mine,  
An' where you off to booy, I say, you're dressed up somethin' fine?  
"I'm gooin by the trine" he say, "in half an hour or sa;  
I'm goon to Caochester today", he say, " if you mus' know"

He'd never bin to Caochester! He hadn't I'd be boun'  
Well there's a caution ent it sir, he's niver sin the town!  
I towd 'im so ; "you want to gao a market day" sez I  
"to see the people you don't knaow, the crowds an' crowds" I say.

"An' all them little stalls an' that, along the High Street, lor,  
"I see", sez I, "I see, young Nat, you've never bin afore !  
There's rabbbbut, bards an' guinea pigs an' sweets of evry kind,  
An' knives an' tools an' thingmijigs- All manner o' stuff you'll find."

"Yes that's the day to see the town, along a all yer pals  
An' keep a walkin' up an' down an' talkin' to the gals."  
"Well I carn stop" he say. " good luck" an' off go Master Nat  
He got a peacock's feather stuck jus so like in his hat.

"Well hurry up," I sez, sez I "an' take care o' yersel.  
You got no time to lose, good-bye, goo bye, an fare ya well.  
There comes the trine, you're all behin', you'd best be startin' forth,  
An' you git out at Buttles min', don't you'll goo roun' the North!"

## NEVER GO TO COLCHESTER

sponsored by *We Are The City of Colchester*

I see'd old Zac come outa his, as I come outa mine.  
'An' where ya off to bouy?', I say, 'that gillet's mighty fine'  
I'm garna Tollgate now, he say, as allus now I do,  
To use me Sainsbry nector points to buy a thing or two.

He niver goes to Coalchester! He niver goes there now!  
To see a City that still looks jes like a markit town.  
He orter go a Monday sir; to see it is a mus'.  
An' watch the queues in John's Street all awaiting for a bus.

They're building them there cycle lanes – my, how Bob Russell swears,  
an' paving slabs that trip ya up in wot they now call squares.  
No car's allowed in High Street now to fill a parking gap,  
instead you gotta go an' use a multi-storey app.

There 's 20 places you can eat and loadsa coffee stops,  
five banks, four inns and goodness knows how many empty shops.  
The council plan to turn um all to bijou blocks of flats.  
But I dunno who's gonna pay a council tax fer that.

An' all them busses queuing up for where they're s'posed to stop;  
An' Gen Z youths on scooters wot they dump by any shop.  
An' statues, statues everywhere to brighten up the street:  
A great big woman striding off two elephants to greet.

A little man who's hiding there just halfway up a wall  
The Taylor sisters pointing out the flags on City Hall –  
but off you go ol' Mister Zac, you've got no time to lose  
your Tollgate bus from Osborne Street, it allus comes in twos.

## ANSWER TO TEASER NO 2!



Our second teaser is of the arms of Imola, one of Colchester's twin cities. The arms are carved into a stone plaque in Castle Park, in the Imola Garden - opened in 2007 to commemorate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the twinning.

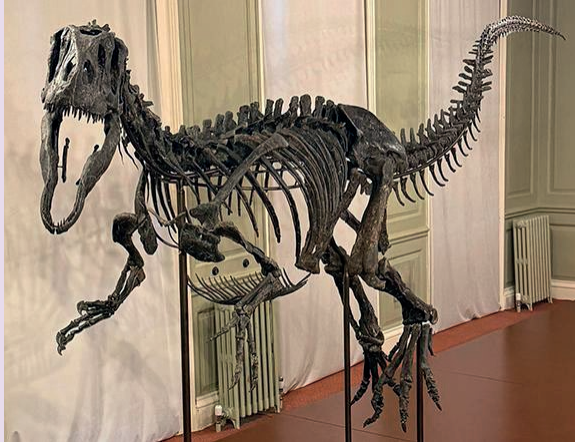


## CIVIC SOCIETY'S OBJECTIVES

- Encourage high standards of architecture and town planning in the Borough of Colchester.
- Stimulate public interest in and care for the beauty, history and character of the area of the city of Colchester and its surroundings.
- Encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features of general public amenity and of public interest.
- 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.
- Co-operate with other local, regional and national organisations in the pursuit of the same objects on a broader geographical basis.

## CURRENT OFFICERS

President	John Burton MBE
Vice Presidents	Right Revd Roger Morris-Bishop of Colchester, John Egan, Rosemary Jewers, Brian Roach, Henry Spyvee, Ann Turner, Paul Weston
Acting Chair & Programme Organiser	Jo Edwards, 43 Priory Street CO1 2QB T: 07771 626561 E: josiemedwards@hotmail.com
Treasurer	Peter Evans, 5 Grimston Road CO2 7RN T: 01206 540990 E: peterevans7978@btinternet.com
Secretary	Mike Fitt, 31 Roman Road CO1 1UR T: 01206 766372 E: familyfitt@tiscali.co.uk
Membership Secretary & Newsletter Editor	Glyn Barritt, 17 Regency Green CO3 4TD T: 07812 147827 E: glynbarritt@gmail.com
Other Elected Members	Sheila Anderton, Rennie Chivers, John Collett, Roger Dennis, Robert Mercer, John Salmon
Co-opted member	Ken Walker



Say 'hello' to 'Juliasaurus' ...or 'Julia's Lizard'!

The 6.2m long skeleton of a carnivorous 'theropod' from the Late Jurassic period was found in 2020 in Wyoming and is currently on display in Hollytrees Museum as part of the Discover: Museum Wonders exhibition running until the end of November 2026. Skeletons this complete are rarely found and so its display in Colchester is very special.

The name - a nickname currently - was chosen by the skeleton's current owner but research is underway to discover whether the skeleton could be that of a new species!

*Our sincere thanks to Pippa Pickles,  
Colchester Museums Manager, for this beautiful photograph.*