

SUMMER 2023



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.

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A ROOM WITH A ROYAL VIEW

At the end of our February Coffee Morning, I blithely reminded everyone that the March Coffee Morning would be on Tuesday 7th March. However, little did I know that Buckingham Palace were about to scupper that plan! Several days later, it was announced that King Charles and Camilla, Queen Consort, were to visit Colchester on the morning of the 7th. Roads were to be closed, buses diverted and it was obvious that our event would have to be shifted to the following week. I broke the news to Peter Evans, who very kindly agreed to tell everyone with an email address whilst I contacted those without. However, long experience tells me that it is easy to glance at an incoming email and decide to read it later and that later becomes never! So, on the big day, I decided to drive to GreyFriars to apologise to anyone who turned up for the Coffee Morning and to tell them to return the following week. It wasn't fair to leave that to the reception desk staff.

Arriving at the roadblock on East Hill, I turned right into Roman Road towards GreyFriars car park and didn't see this wonderful banner across the front of East Hill House (opposite GreyFriars and in the same ownership) until I sat down in a very comfy chair by the window in Reception.

The sun was streaming in, my coffee arrived (I hadn't ordered it but they know what I like!) and I relaxed. I couldn't go home until the roads reopened so I set up my iPad thinking I might get some work done - or, on the other hand, I might not! I watched people hurrying by to take up their places against the crowd barriers in High Street, hoping to catch sight of the royal couple. I didn't envy them. It was freezing out there!

Sometime later, the hotel manager, Glen, appeared. He came over for a chat. I commented on the banner opposite and discovered that there was also one on the front of Greyfriars. We decided that the chances of the King and Queen Consort coming up East Hill were infinitesimal but the banners were rather nice anyway so it didn't really matter. He got me another coffee (my third) and returned to the kitchen. By this time, the street outside was empty. Everybody was already by the barriers outside the Park. I looked at my phone. It was 11.47am. I realised that our royal visitors, who, we understood, had been scheduled to arrive soon after 10am, must be thinking about leaving the Castle, their first stop. I thought about wandering up to join the rest of the crowds to see them drive up High Street but quickly decided to stay put!



'GreyFriars welcomes King Charles and Camilla, Queen Consort!'

Suddenly, there was the sound of pounding feet and Glen appeared, running full tilt, like a greyhound, through reception towards the main door, other staff in hot pursuit. As he flew past me, holding his phone in one hand and a small Union Jack on a stick in the other, the most incongruous



sight imaginable, he yelled 'They've only just arrived! They're coming up the hill!' I swivelled round in time to see him dashing across the road, narrowly missing the first police outrider at the front of the cavalcade. As he reached the kerb the other side, he pirouetted and held up his phone to take a photo whilst waving

his little flag as they went past. I, of course, had a grandstand view! The King was on my side so I saw him pointing at the GreyFriars banner as the car swept by. He had a huge smile on his face as he read it.

Glen came back in like a dog (greyhound, of course) with two tails. He came straight to me and showed me his photos. He was thrilled with them. I asked whether he would allow me to share them with you and he told me that he would love it if I did. So here they are (over the page)

Jo Edwards



*Crown modelled for grandma
by Jimmy Edwards*

ROOM WITH A VIEW – PART 2

I hope you will forgive me but I have gone back in time, to 1953, to feature another of my Rooms with a View - and what a view it was!

If you look closely at the photograph below, you might be able to spot me standing on the doorstep of my childhood home at the lower end of High Street. My bedroom was at the front of the house, with a glorious view out over the Castle Park to High Woods. On the fields below High Woods, a large herd of Friesian cattle grazed. To the left, as I gazed out of the window from the comfort of my bed, was the Hollytrees Museum, the home, at the time, of dear old Harold Poulter, the Museum Curator. We used to wave to each other across the road. The Hollytrees was covered in Virginia Creeper, the colours changing throughout the seasons. It was a delight.

I can recall the excitement created by the imminent Coronation of the Queen. My mother bought me two red, white and blue paper kites which we took to Mersea to fly at the beach. Why two? It was inevitable that I would let go of the string of one, and I did! My mother chased it out over the mud and did manage to catch it but it was never quite the same after a brief encounter with a small pool of salt water!

I was also given a red, white and blue skipping rope and a Matchbox Coronation Coach being pulled by eight white horses.

I had two Coronation dresses, both made by my mother. I still have them. One was a border print with the Coronation procession along the hem but the other was made of fine white cotton which Mum embroidered with the lion and the unicorn, bandsmen and soldiers on horseback!



As I mentioned in a previous article, we went to Joslins in High Street to buy a television for my grandmother (so we could all gather at her house to watch the events of the big day). As usual, I digress.

A few weeks before the Coronation, my parents noticed unusual activity in the street outside the house. They were told that an arch had been

constructed which would span the road. My mother immediately decided to buy four huge flags to hang on flagpoles jammed in the sash windows on the first and second floors of the house. I loved the red lion of Scotland and the red dragon of Wales and struggled to choose which one would hang from my window!



The arch was soon in place. It was very much of its time. Perhaps one could describe the design as an exercise in post war modernism, rather abstract with lots of strangely angled sheet metal planes. I loved it. When the wind blew, the structure sang softly to itself. It was magical. Looking back, and comparing it to earlier arches for other royal occasions, it was a brave step, one that ignored rationing and austerity and looked forward to an exciting new future for both the town and the country. However, never, in their wildest dreams, would Colcestrians have believed that, within less than 75 years, their town would be a city!

Jo Edwards

POSTSCRIPT

I was so annoyed with my inability to recall the name of one of the Weddell’s pharmacy assistants when I was writing about my memories of High Street that I made some enquiries on Facebook. I am indebted to Terry Quadling who gave me the answer I was looking for. Mr White was the pharmacist and his assistants were Bernard Kemp and Arthur Ward. Shortly after the article went to the printers, I realised that I had an ancient bottle from the pharmacy, found in my mother’s medicine cabinet when we were clearing her house, over 50 years after Weddell’s closed! I couldn’t bear the thought of throwing it away.



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MERSEA ROAD – ONE OF COLCHESTER’S IGNORED ROADS

The Civic Society has great pride in the historic buildings of Colchester but the town (sorry city) is not entirely like that. I live off Mersea Road and used to think it was a dull, functional road and of little interest. However, I gradually came to realise that it is a street with a lot of stories.. I am talking about the stretch from St Botolph’s Roundabout to what was called “Broom Hill”, which is just above Bourne Road.

St Botolph’s Circus was created about 50 years ago to improve traffic flow. Colcestrians of that vintage will remember that the traffic engineers could not understand why the hole they had dug kept filling with water. It wasn’t just the old chaps with flat caps watching the puzzled workmen that were muttering that it was the Childwell spring just in Magdalen Street that was the source but the housewives and school children as well. Apparently, the Childwell was not on the maps.

In the St Botolph’s Circus subway are murals by Joyce Pallot and Henry Collins marking the history of Colchester, restored by the Civic Society and others. It is on the site of the Plough Hotel and several other buildings including one of Colchester first cinemas, the Empire, and the premises of Joliffe’s, the garrison tailor, all demolished to make way for Southway. There is a surviving piece of film with children crowding round the Empire for “Saturday Morning pictures” odd as these days the road is full of traffic . Emerging from the subway, the wall ahead of us (running along the side of the Colchester Buddhist Centre in Portland Road and 8 Mersea Road) was the site of a murder over 100 years ago.

Below is the Mersea Road Cinema, the Empire, at that time used for storage by Lockes, and now the site of St Botolph's Circus



The other side of the road, the right, is of course the wall to the former St John's Abbey, which was splendidly restored a few years ago. Founded about 1100, you can clearly see a variety of stones and Roman tiles. These could have come from any part of Roman Colchester, but the Roman Circus, discovered about 20 years ago, lay just beyond the Abbey grounds, with the entrance starting just there and the building stretching over towards Butt Road.

The photograph below shows the roadway outside the then Mermaid Pub, with the former Abbey Wall, perhaps 50 years ago.



The left hand side, being close to the barracks, attracted several public houses. Number 23 Mersea Road was a Beer House called the Sir Colin Campbell, later a Working Men's Club and may even included an early Music Hall, but since 1994 has been flats. 28 Mersea Road has been a pub for 150 years and is now the Odd One Out. Right next door to the Barracks was the Royal Standard, Public House but this also has been flats for nearly 30 years.

The left hand side of the Road was taken up by Meeanee and Hyderabad Barracks, built by the War department over a hundred years ago, but now a development of some 400 homes. Some military buildings survive now converted to flats but most notably the developers retained the wall facing on to the road, with the complete gates for the northern entrance. A blue plaque in the middle of the wall records the history of the area.

Back to the right hand side of the road, There is a cricket pitch and a school playground, but the uneven stretch of land between them and Mersea Road hides a set of underground bunkers from

World War II, apparently unopened since then. It would be fascinating to know what documents, equipment and artefacts are still there

On the junction of Berechurch Road and Mersea Road is Plum Hall, once a farm house for land up to and including the Cemetery site. On the opposite side of the road is Plum Cottage in Artillery Folley, apparent the gardeners cottage for Plum Hall. This was of course all agricultural land then.



This view is opposite Plum Hall. The soldiers are marching from the Barracks, just out of sight, possibly to the Wick, further along Mersea Road. The wooden building has been replaced by a funeral directors premises.

Moving along the right hand side Mersea Road, is the Co-operative Society Supermarket (formerly the smaller Motts Supermarket). Our local Fish

and Chip shop is whimsically called “Oh My Cod”. The Grapes Public House is a little further down the hill and is a modern replacement to an earlier building .

We come to a junction with a footpath from Grimston Road (where I live), a Cul-de-sac, built in 1932 by the Colchester Co-operative Society to house the managers in their building department. These 7 houses were subsequently sold to the managers, and my house belonged to the senior electrician. The footpath is well used as it leads directly the both parts of St George’s School. The land from this footpath stretches down Brome Hill to Bourne Road, and belonged to



“White Lodge, Mersea Road”

White Lodge, built about 1780, with a sweeping drive and an entrance for visitors in their coaches. Part of this land is now the Infants section of St George’s Primary School, but also a variety of houses and bungalows. The Lodge was once the Rectory for St Giles’ Church and later often leased to senior army officers.

Beyond are Bourne Pond, the Mill and the pleasant surrounding wooded area on the left and the Cemetery on the right, plus Barnhall and Monkwick Council Estates, the Willows private estate and the Australia estate, built for the Greater London Council. We have not even considered the Wick! So not just functional.

Peter Evans

(The pub information comes from Jess Jephcott’s book on Colchester Pubs)

OBITUARY – ELISABETH BAINES

We were sad to hear that on 1st January 2023 Elisabeth had died aged 85. She and her husband, Austen, were long standing members of the Executive Committee, with Lis being Secretary from 2005, and Chair 2014-17, retiring just a couple of years ago. She was clearly very proud to have been made a Vice President, with Austen, at the 2022 AGM..

Elisabeth was involved in many groups and organisations. She grew up in Norfolk where she was a Sea Ranger, an interest she continued when she and Austin moved to Kampala, Swansea and finally Wivenhoe. A major interest was music – joining many choral societies. By contrast, her exit music at the funeral was a song by the pop group Police.

Apart from her involvement with the Civic Society, she was much involved with local groups in Wivenhoe, including St Mary’s Church. The child of teachers, she did eventually join the profession herself, teaching at Broomegrove School. Whether in England, Wales or East Africa, she was always involved with children and young people. Her own 2 sons presented her with 9 grand and great grandchildren!



MEMBERSHIP

The Society keeps a register of members email addresses so that we can contact you to give you any urgent news, such as a invitation to an event. If you change your email address let Ann Turner, membership secretary, as you would if you move house, so we can keep in touch if necessary.

We welcome the following new members, all of Colchester – Neil Allen, Peter Chisnall, Clive and Anne Dawes, Janice Fielden, Tyler Gower, Chris & Jodi Hopkins, Michael and Gloria Kearns, Christine Mears, David Molloy, Valerie Pavitt, Margie Pearce, Jonathan Pearsall and David York, Tim Bartlett of Wakes Colne, and Dr David Hibberd of Rowhedge.

We were sad to hear that Mark Davies, a long standing member of the society, has died aged 81. Mark was involved with the management of Colchester Museums for many years and was at different times chairman of groups such as the Friends of Colchester Museums and the Essex Society for Archaeology and History, and was involved with other history groups. We send our sympathy to his family.



RAFAEL VINOLY

Rafael Vinoly, the architect of Firstsite Gallery in Colchester has died at the age of 78. He was born in Uruguay and, whatever your opinion is of Firstsite as a design, there is no doubt that he was an architect of international renown. In this country, he was also responsible for designing the Curve Theatre, Leicester, the 37 storey 20 Fenchurch Street, London - the”Walkie-Talkie” - and the conversion the Battersea Power Station into the Tate Modern Art Gallery, a project costing £5.5 billion.

Peter Evans

CLAUDIUS GATEWAY

At February's monthly coffee morning Sir Bob Russell tipped off members that the café at Claudius Gateway had reopened, so I paid it a visit directly after the meeting finished.



Between 2012 and 2015, the Colchester Archaeological Trust excavated a development site opposite the castle entrance. Substantial remains were uncovered of the façade of the precinct of the Temple of Claudius. Elements of this had been discovered as far back as the 1930s and cumulative discoveries allowed it to be reconstructed with a high degree of confidence. It consisted of an arcade, faced and paved in limestone, some 150m in length. This was made up of 27 bays, with a monumental gateway in the centre. In its scale and finish, the Colchester temple complex was unprecedented in Britain and comparable to major

temples in Rome itself. Completed in Claudius' lifetime, it was dedicated to him after his death, and thereafter probably served as focus for the imperial cult in Britain, with the conqueror Claudius serving as representative of all the deified emperors.

The site was developed as retail units and apartments by the Harwich-based developer Flying Trade Group, which is behind the Surya Hotels brand, which also owns Colchester's landmark George Hotel. In 2017 a new volunteer-run café was opened, including a display area to the rear. This had three 3m square windows in the floor which revealed the foundations of the Roman arcade below. Interpretation for visitors and customers was provided with a display explaining the nature of the visible remains and the transition of the Temple of Claudius into the Norman castle keep and then to Colchester Castle Museum.



Sadly, the café proved unsuccessful, closing within eighteen months, reopening briefly as part of a rough sleepers' initiative, and then housing short-lived "pop-up" shops which did not permit access to the archaeological display.



Now, the café is open again under new management as The Holy Bagel internet café. It offers coffees and a range of cakes and light savouries including the trademark salt-beef bagels. In its latest incarnation, the café occupies only two-thirds of the original space. The owners of the business are enthusiastic about the unique piece of Colchester's heritage that they have acquired, and there is once again access to the greater part of the archaeological exhibit, albeit for customers only.

The remainder of the former café, including one of the viewing windows, is now partitioned off and occupied as a separate retail unit which is not readily accessible to visitors.

Civic Society members may be interested to know that a planning application is under consideration for the adjacent site of 93-94 High Street, formerly occupied by W H Shepard Funeral Directors. The proposed development will have little visible impact on the High Street side of the property but

would see the demolition of the existing workrooms and garages to the rear and their replacement by two new houses. An archaeological evaluation would certainly be required which must be very likely to expose further remains of the temple façade.

To see the planning application -

<https://www.colchester.gov.uk/planning-app-details/?id=030e8d0d-0477-ed11-81ab-0022489b48f9>

Richard Arnopp

For more photos on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?vanity=richard.j.arnopp&set=a.10162363185951521>

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BLUE PLAQUES – UPDATE ON ACTIVITIES

The Catherine Marsh plaque is now in situ (courtesy of the Co-Op Bank and their builder) on the outside wall of the Bank but we have delayed the formal unveiling as the only family member living in the UK is currently in New Zealand. The Lord Lieutenant has been told. This was part of her project to commemorate Essex Women.

The Daniel Defoe plaque on the Tubswick site in Mile End has been erected. Although this was paid for by Myland Council, we gave a lot of advice that was gratefully received.

We have recently advised on a number of other blue plaques - in Wivenhoe, Great Tey and Mersea and have also given assistance to someone interested in a red plaque (commemorating firemen killed on duty) in High Street.

Paul Knappett still hopes that more plaques can be erected in the old barracks - SCRDE , 36 Command Workshop etc. Once the Le Cateau memorial is in place, I believe he will, with our support, start looking at such plaques.

Jo Edwards and Pamela Bradley

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STREET NAMING –

St Michael’s Place, Berechurch Hall Road

The Captain Cook Estate

This development, built by Persimmon Homes, is well underway and on 15th February 2023, I attended a naming ceremony with Sir Bob Russell, High Steward of Colchester, Councillor David King, leader of Colchester City Council, local ward Councillor Mick Spindler and representatives of Persimmon.

It was Sir Bob who did the research that linked James Ward, buried in the nearby St Michael’s graveyard, to Captain James Cook and his discoveries in the Southern Pacific Ocean in 1770s with help from the Captain Cook Society.

Apart from James Ward Road itself, the other roads are;

Hawaii Drive – James Cook was the first European to visit Hawaii, and was killed there on 14th February 1779 (aged 51)

Resolution Way – named after Cook’s ship and

Discovery Way - named after his second vessel

Peckover Terrace – named after expedition member Gunner William Peckover, buried in Holy Trinity Churchyard

Hatley Close – for Midshipman John Hatley

Clerke Chase -named after Lieutenant Charles Clerke, born in Wethersfield

Burney Walk – commemorating Lieutenant James Burney.

The ceremony itself, with Sir Bob Russell and Councillor David King(in front), with Councillor Spindler, Peter Evans and a representative of Persimmon.



It was a bright but chilly morning and when Sir Bob kindly dropped me off near home, I realised that I had not arranged any dinner, so I entered a nearby fast food outlet (my locally chippy).

Whilst waiting for my meal to be cooked, I was leafing through the Persimmon brochure on the development. “I live there”, said a voice in the queue – “we have just moved in”. This gave me the chance to explain about the Captain Cook connection. I am not sure he knew who Captain Cook actually was, but he seemed impressed with the effort and that there was a reason for the name.

We may build more houses but it is still, sometimes, a small town.

Peter Evans

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UPDATE ON THE MINORIES

It has been a long journey to get back in to the Minories building but we are finally there. It is in an OK condition but as is always the case with old buildings that have been empty for a while it needs a lot of TLC. One of our key priorities will be improving access to the building to make sure that everyone is able to reach all the floors. Not an easy task when you have a listed building like ours but we will be putting in funding bids and doing our best to make sure it is open to all.

To help raise funds we will be looking for tenants for parts of the building and already have The British Origami Society and their archive in situ. This will give us plenty of opportunities to collaborate, look out for joint events and workshops in the future. We will also be renting out space from time to time to Commercial galleries and the first of these should be in the Autumn. Obviously one of the other things we want to do is to get the Victor Batte Lay collection out of storage and back up on the walls. If you have popped in to the building to visit the Colchester Archaeological Trust exhibition about the City Walls you may have espied one or two already.

We have recently appointed Emma Howe as our Director, Emma is coming to us from Firstsite but prior to that worked for the Museums service in Colchester so has a good handle on what goes on in the City and the resources available.

One of the first things Emma will be doing is getting the Cafe up and running again. We have put out a Tender asking for expressions of interest and have already had some enquiries.

The Friends of the Minorities who have looked after the garden so well for many years have decided that it is time to retire and that gives us a wonderful opportunity to launch a new Friends scheme, look out for an announcement before too long.

The best way of finding out what is going on is to have a look at the We Are The Minorities website.

Julia Havis

A member of the Victor Batte-Lay Trust, which owns the building.

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ECC PUBLIC TRANSPORT – BUS SERVICES

The County Council issues a regular newsletter about changes to bus services across the County. If you would like to be kept up to date, please sign up by using the link below

www.essexhighways.org/bustimetable-changes

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INVITATION FROM THE FRIENDS OF COLCHESTER MUSEUMS

As the Civic Society is not running excursions yet, you may be interested in excursions run by our sister organisation, the Friends of Colchester Museums.

Stow Maries First World War Aerodrome **Thursday 20th July 2023** £34

The Museum of Food, Stowmarket, **Thursday 14th September 2023** £32
(formerly the Museum of East Anglian Life)

pick up points will be Crouch Street (by old Cinema) or Marks Tey Hotel and each excursion includes afternoon tea.

For more information, please contact Joy Hopkinson (joyhopkinson1010@gmail.com) or Peter Evans

After having meetings by Zoom in 2021, the regular series of Friends of Museums talks have returned to Lion Walk Church on alternate Tuesdays, Spring and Autumn, (admission £4 for guests, £2 members). Members also have free admission to the Castle. For more information, visit their website www.tfocm.org.

I also have details of sessions held by Colchester Recalled, held at Roman Circus House on the 3rd Monday of each month, featuring a speaker and some recorded interviews. They also have a website www.colchesterrecalled.co.uk

Peter Evans

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ROYAL ARTILLERY BARRACKS COMMEMORATIVE MONUMENT PROJECT - UPDATE

The monument commemorates the historic Royal Artillery Barracks built in 1874-75 and has been designed for all to enjoy including the visually impaired, wheel chair users and children. Its remaining buildings are the only surviving examples of its design and as such, are of National importance. The barracks were renamed Le Cateau Barracks in recognition of the actions of 14th Brigade Royal Field Artillery in the crucial Battle of Le Cateau on 26th August 1914. Discovered on this site in 2004 were the remains of the starting gates of the only Roman Circus discovered in Great Britain. The original estimated cost to deliver the project was £22,000 but increases in the cost of labour, materials and utilities have increased this significantly. As result of generous pledges from the Royal Artillery, the GCG Environmental Trust, Hervey Benham Trust, Essex Heritage Trust, local businesses and individuals a total of £20.200 has been raised to date, with more promised.

Paul Knappett

Postscript



Civic Society member, Paul, has been working so hard on this wonderful project. Phase One was completed last summer when two blue plaques were erected on what most Colcestrians refer to as the Sergeants' Mess, immediately next to the proposed site for the monument.

The monument itself is Phase Two. Paul is still fundraising. I know that several Civic Society members wanted to contribute. This is your opportunity. Please send donations to the Civic Society, using the relevant section of the enclosed Reply Slips and we will pass them on to him.

Jo Edwards



REPORTS OF SOCIAL EVENTS

Friday 13th January 2023 Visit to Jumbo

We were offered a rare treat – an opportunity to visit the Balkerne Water Tower. Affectionately known as Jumbo, the iconic Grade II* listed structure faced an uncertain future after it went out of use in 1984. However, money for its restoration had recently been secured via Colchester’s successful £18.2m bid to the Government’s Town Deal Fund.

The tour was led by David Balcombe, director of North Essex Heritage, the preservation trust that is working to preserve the building and give it a sustainable future. Unsurprisingly, the visit had been oversubscribed, but Mr Balcombe kindly agreed to lead two groups, with each tour lasting about 45 minutes.

Designed by Charles Clegg, the Borough Surveyor and Engineer, the 40m tower was intended to give Colchester residents a safe pressurised water supply to replace the haphazard and insanitary arrangements which had hitherto existed. It was erected next to the existing reservoir which had been built pursuant to the Act of Parliament of 1808, but which had become outdated and inadequate for the town’s needs. Many residents were still dependent on wells, and effectively tackling large fires was greatly hindered.



Construction was completed in 1883, having used 1.2 million bricks and 819 tons of stone and cement. The tank was constructed of cast-iron bolted panels and when it was in use could hold 1,069 cubic metres of water. It was claimed at the time to be the second largest municipal water tower in England. The water came from an artesian source and was pumped by steam power from the waterworks in Balkerne Lane. This was modernised in the 1890s to allow the tower to function to its full capacity and is now also listed.

Jumbo’s nickname was taken from the eponymous London Zoo elephant and was coined, with derisive intent, by the Rector of nearby St. Mary-at-the-Walls, who had opposed the tower on aesthetic grounds. However, the name had been embraced by the townspeople and the building had become a Colchester icon.

David Balcombe led the party into the building, and several people commented on the high quality of the brickwork and finish, and the elegance of the design. The first stage of the ascent was the most arduous, with a spiral staircase of 99 steps leading to the “Engineers’ Room”, which still contained much of the original pipework. It is at





this level that the tower has its first existing floor and externally there is double tier of campanile arches (machicolations). Some of these contain arched windows, and others are blind niches. In one of these a pair of peregrine falcons had been nesting, and the skeletal remains of many of their pigeon victims lay heaped below. The central stair tower carried an unrepaired vertical crack, which Mr Balcombe said was probably the only surviving visible evidence in the town of the 1884 East Anglian earthquake.

In this large and evocative space Mr Balcombe outlined the process by which options for the building had been narrowed down, given the competing imperatives to make the building accessible and usable as a restaurant and exhibition space, while not doing more violence to its appearance or fabric than necessary. Expert advice had been obtained, and there had been a continuing process of public consultation and engagement.

The party then moved up another level to the water tank – a dramatic space but the part of the building which had suffered the most obvious deterioration, which had accelerated in recent years. The tank had become unstable after it dried out, with widespread loss of the original caulking, and cracking of the iron elements - including, alarmingly, some of the struts which gave the structure rigidity. The current intention was to stabilise the tank and maintain it in a state of “arrested decay”, using it as an exhibition space offering visitors an immersive audio-visual experience.

The last stage of the ascent was up to the cupola above the tank, with its panoramic views over the city and surrounding countryside. Here it was pointed out that the copper roof was also in poor condition and would need to be replaced.

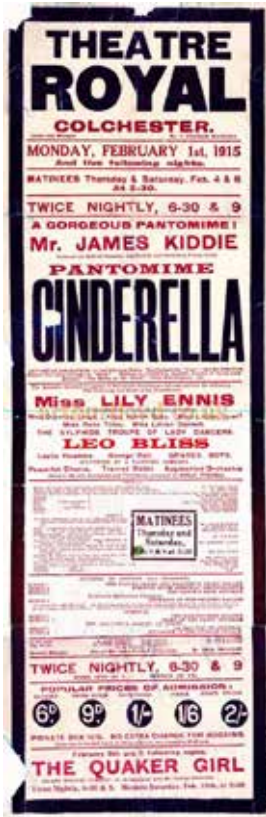
Mr Balcombe very kindly joined those who felt unable to tackle the tower for coffee in the Mercury Theatre Cafe to brief them on current plans for Jumbo and take questions.

The Civic Society has taken a keen interest in the work of North Essex Heritage in its efforts to secure the future of this nationally important monument to Victorian engineering. The funding now secured has allowed the charity to take a 150-year lease on the building and should enable it to draw in the additional funds necessary to complete its restoration after dealing with the immediate critical repairs that have been identified.

Richard Arnopp

More photos can be found at FB album - <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?vanity=richard.j.arnopp&set=a.10162300940811521>

24th March 2023 Tour of site of Queen Street Bus Garage/Colchester Theatre Royal



This opportunity came up quite suddenly and we were one of the first groups to be shown round by Adam Wightman, from the Colchester Archaeological Trust. The site is just inside the town walls, just above the former south gate. The Theatre occupied this site from 1812, replacing a theatre behind the Moot Hall, until it was burnt down in 1918. It had never been an entirely profitable business, but had been visited by the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, Charles Dickens, leading figures like Gladys Cooper and the original production of "Charley's Aunt". After some really good years, a splendid new show, "Three Weeks" arrived in 1918 with brand new sets and costumes, before a big tour. The fire destroyed everything and the theatre was not rebuilt.. (As my late uncle, aged 18 in 1918, told me, "Three Weeks! It didn't last 3 days").

It was a pity as apparently the leading Theatre Designer of the day, Frank Matcham, had redesigned the interior. A few remains including of a plaster cherub and a violin from the orchestra, were found. Much of the surface evidence has been lost due to works building or clearing the theatre but there are traces of Roman walls and roads. The most visible discovery is a medieval well with surviving upper structure

Peter Evans



The part of the structure of the well found on site

Remains of a violin, which survived as it was in the pit of the theatre during the fire.



1st April 2023 – Walk around Colchester with John Burton



We had been expecting a walk, with our president, looking at different building materials and styles, starting in Priory Street Car Park and leading to New Town. The cold weather was against that itinerary, so John concentrated on the Roman Wall and St Botolph's Priory, then parts of the Town Centre mentioned (or not) in the City Council's Masterplan, which had recently been published.

John explained the features of the Roman Wall, for example putlogs – square holes used by the Romans to erect scaffolding for use in construction and then for repairs later. He explained the methods used by the Normans when building the Priory. He highlighted the benefits of mortar over cement, which means that we can enjoy the remains of the Priory and many great cathedrals, whilst a number of cement buildings of the 1960s/70s do not survive.



A putlog from the Roman Wall in Vineyard Street.

Along the way, John related some experiences from his career, with illustrations of what had happened at Ely Cathedral and how bombing at Canterbury in WW2 had resulted damage that the Defence ministry of the time repaired with cement that later had to be removed, as it only made the situation worse.. He also demonstrated how windowpanes had changed with help from the windows in the St Botolph's Street Fish and Chip restaurant, in Vineyard Street.

He also highlighted some aspects of the Masterplan, and opportunities missed. I have always meant to explore the back of Allen's the Butchers shop and slaughter house from Arthur Street but had not done so until now. Because of this, I had not seen the handsome back of the largest building in St Botolphs Street – some of the party admitted that they had never really looked at them at all. (I was told many years ago by the late John Bensusan-Butt, leading member of our society, "always to look up")



Further explorations were Colchester Town Station, the areas behind both Priory Walk and Sainsburys, before having a quick look at High Street. John could have carried on but more than 2 hours had passed quickly and we were all much the wiser for it. John is giving leaders of the Council tours of their town, and I hope that they learn as much as we did.

Peter Evans

Rear of buildings in St Botolph's Street, seen from Arthur Street

Saturday 22nd April 2023 Visit to Irvine Road Community Orchard



I have finally managed to introduce Civic Society members to a hidden gem that I have loved all my life, just as my mother did before me. The orchard was her playground in the 1920s and mine in the 1950s. Then, it was a working orchard but one that also provided a home for a wide variety of wildlife, a magical place. Sadly, over the last 40 years, it has not been properly maintained whilst its future was debated by the children of its original owner. Mary wanted the land sold for housing, proceeds going to charity. Her brother, Tony, desperately wanted the orchard to remain. His passion was natural history and he loved the animals, birds, insects and wild flowers that thrived there. I can remember standing on the corner of Culver Street

and Trinity Street talking to him. He was close to tears as he told me that his beloved orchard might soon be built on and begged for my help to prevent this from happening. Unfortunately, I had no magic wand.

However, shortly afterwards, I met the wonderful Mary Revell. Mary lived in Irvine Road. She was as passionate about the orchard as Tony. We had long conversations, working on possible plans of action. Mary was a force to be reckoned with, an inspirational leader and a woman of action. She threw herself into the Irvine Road Area Residents' Association (IRARA) campaign for the orchard to be saved. And what a campaign it was! Shaun Thomas, Chair of IRARA, takes up the story:

'Over more than 15 years the Irvine Road Area Residents' Association has worked to conserve the Irvine Road Orchard through a succession of campaigns. Most notably, we secured a Tree Preservation Order on the trees, hedgerows and boundaries and succeeded in getting the orchard designated as a Local Wildlife Site in the Local Development Plan. However a change of ownership triggered a series of events that have led to the community taking on a lease over half of the Orchard with six houses being built on the remainder.



In 2014, Tony and Mary Locke bequeathed the Orchard to a mixture of charities and individuals who put the land up for sale. A group of local residents offered to buy the Orchard but it was sold at a slightly higher price than our offer. The sale included a clause requiring the purchaser to 'make all possible efforts' to develop the land, with the beneficiaries of the previously mentioned will receiving a significant proportion of the profits. Even if we had purchased the land we would have been legally bound to try to develop it!



The next important step was when the draft Local Development Plan was published in 2017. Despite

the community's representations, the Plan said that "Whilst the site has some limited wildlife value, a small amount of development, of up to a maximum 8 dwellings, covering no more than 40% of the site is considered appropriate at this location. The remaining 60% of the site should be brought back into suitable condition with management to improve the sites ecological value and to ensure it continues to contribute to the local Green Infrastructure network."

This policy, while seeming like a reasonable compromise to the planners, completely undermined our attempts to save the orchard in its entirety and gave notice that the Colchester Planning Department would approve a planning application that met the requirements listed.

Agreement with the developer

Following this news IRARA members voted overwhelmingly in favour of talking to the developers to see what kind of deal could be reached and subsequently approved an agreement with the owner and developer, Jonathan Frank of Lexden Restorations (LR), which obliged:-

- IRARA to support LR's planning application for 6 houses on 40% of the Orchard in line with the agreed layout
- LR to grant IRARA a 50 year lease, for a minimal rent, over the remaining 60% of the Orchard and we have set up a charitable body to manage what is now known as the Irvine Road Community Orchard
- LR to offer IRARA a 999 year lease if we can raise £45k in the first five years.

The planning application was granted and building is complete. We took on the lease in May 21 which:-

- requires the Community Orchard to be managed in accordance with a Management Plan aimed at maintaining a traditional orchard, with widely spaced fruit trees, bounded by tall, wide hedgerows and with scattered non-fruit trees and patches of scrub. A initial Plan has been produced by Essex Wildlife Trust's consultancy services which we are happy with and which will be reviewed every 5 years.
- provides for managed access for the purpose of restoring and managing the Orchard and for open days and fruit-picking between the following times - 9-5 Mon-Fri; 10-4 Sat; 10-1 Sun. We can also choose to run 2 Sunday events from 10-4 and 2 evening events per year.
- gives an opportunity for local primary schools to use the Orchard on 6 days per year
- requires us to take out public liability insurance In addition, LR made the following commitments:-
- During the course of the clearance of the trees and scrub to the development area, LR's contractors felled the fruit trees and cut the logs to an agreed size and moved the logs to the Orchard site to allow them to be used as wildlife refuges within the Orchard.
- A new hedge has been planted behind the new fence This hedge will be predominantly a Hawthorn Hedge (85%) with the remaining 15% made up of mixed species such as field maple, hazel, dog rose.

The Irvine Road Community Orchard

IRARA formed a new charity to take on the 50 year lease and the Orchard now covers 60% of the original area while the remaining 40% is given over to residential development that has now been built.



The charity’s purpose is “to promote, for the benefit of the public, the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment of the Irvine Road Orchard, Colchester”. This is very much a community orchard for the benefit of residents of the local community and, increasingly, much wider. Monthly work parties attract 10-15 people undertaking management of the site of which the trees are a historical feature with many of the orchard trees dating back an estimated 60+ years, with unimproved grassland as well as new and old boundary hedges that, together, make up this wildlife haven. In suburban Colchester, the site holds a sizeable stag beetle population, foxes, two types of woodpecker, visiting badgers and deer, and a range of fungi and insects that we are continuing to discover.

We hold open days to share and improve awareness and understanding of the site including ‘nature trail days’ for younger people and the community production of apple juice attracted over 100 people. The site has been used by the community for training events such as fruit tree pruning, fungi identification, visits by local councillors and the local civic society as well as initial visits by the local natural history society with a view to further wildlife surveys. The Orchard Facebook page provides testament to the benefits that the Orchard is generating.

We are also looking to raise the £45k to extend the lease, retaining its status as a community asset for local residents and the wider community, and bringing significant wildlife benefits close to where those people live and, increasingly, work.’

What a saga! Thank you, Shaun, both for telling us the story and for guiding us when we visited. Your enthusiasm matches Mary Revell’s. Sadly, Mary didn’t live long enough to see her efforts come to fruition. She would have been overjoyed despite the loss of part of the orchard. I am sure Tony would have been just as pleased, both his and his sister’s wishes having been granted. I know that I couldn’t be happier. IRARA have moved mountains and should be incredibly proud. Jonathan Frank, who cares so much about Colchester, should be equally proud. Would that all developers were like him!

If you want to contribute to the fundraising appeal for the orchard, both for the lease and for the restoration, please go to: localgiving.org/charity/irvine-road-community-orchard or send a donation via the Civic Society

If you would like to volunteer (our President, John Burton, regularly wields his strimmer, I understand!) please contact: info@irara.org.uk

Jo Edwards

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STOP PRESS

The Friends of the Castle Park would like to know what sort of tree was planted to commemorate the late Queen’s Coronation. If anyone knows, can they please let Jo Edwards know.

If you visit the Civic Society website (colchestercivicsociety.co.uk) and scan down to ‘Colchester on Film – archive footage’ and you can watch “60 years of Colchester on Film2”, which has just been added for us by Executive Committee member John Salmon.

SOCIAL PROGRAMME

I had hoped to add some late summer and autumn events to our programme in time for this Newsletter, but, for reasons entirely beyond my control, this has not been possible. They are certainly in the pipeline, though, so I will ask Peter to email you with details as soon as I have finalised them. If you would prefer to have them posted to you, please let me know.

Addition to Great Blakenham visit.

I know that many of you will be using your own cars to get to Great Blakenham. Please let me know if you need directions. For those without transport, I am hoping that we can use the Community 360 minibus. I am awaiting final confirmation (which I will get nearer the time) and will be in touch with everyone wishing to go as soon as I hear. If it is not possible, I will book a large taxi.

Jo Edwards



The objects of the Civic Society are to:

- a) Encourage high standards of architecture and town planning in the Borough of Colchester
- b) Stimulate public interest in and care for the beauty, history and character of the area of the town of Colchester and its surroundings
- c) Encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features of general public amenity and of public interest
- d) Pursue these ends by means of meetings, exhibitions, lectures, publications, 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.

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