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*Registered Charity 237885*

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

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## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – CHAIR’S REPORT

This Annual Report will be in two parts, basically the six months to the 31st December and then the almost 6 months to the AGM, but with a bit of crossover! Traditionally, the report has been written by the Chair and, of course, Howard Davies took over from me halfway through the year. I had exceeded my constitutionally allotted time as Chair, primarily because of the disruption caused by Covid but also because nobody particularly wanted the role. The Society has been firing on all cylinders, flying off in all directions, so, although it is huge fun and incredibly interesting, the job is also very busy and somewhat time consuming! I was so relieved when Howard agreed to take it on as we would have been in trouble with the Charity Commissioners if he hadn't! Thank you, Howard. May you enjoy your time as Chair as much as I did. So what happened during the first six months of the year? Well, a huge amount. It is, as usual, hard to know where to start.

I think that the proposed changes within the City Centre, fuelled by both Town Deal and Levelling Up grants from the Government, plus the Masterplan consultation, have been the most important and, sometimes, challenging aspect of our activities this year. We have been consulted by HAT, the architects involved in some of the Town Deal projects and we continued to be briefed by the Council's Town Deal team who have listened to our comments and taken note. One of those briefings, on Car Parking, was held at the Town House (also to benefit from Town Deal money)



on 8th September. The meeting was interrupted by our Vice President, Bishop Roger, who happened to be present. He announced that he had just received the news of the death of the Queen. We sat in total silence, an incredibly sad and moving moment, before he said a prayer. Ann Turner, our Vice Chair, represented the Society at the Civic Memorial Service at St James the Great Church.

The Masterplan, originally instigated by the Society, particularly to address the need for good development as the city centre reinvents itself, is, so far, not quite what we envisaged. We were initially told that we

would be deeply involved but when the consultants appointed by the Councils contacted me to invite me to a workshop for the emergency services, Pubwatch, the Street Pastors and the SOS Bus, I realised that something had gone a tad awry! I had a conversation. A workshop for Civic Society Committee members was hastily arranged. Unfortunately, like all the workshops, the time allotted was far too short and this was compounded by a technical hitch, a missing computer lead which meant that, initially, we couldn't see the essential slides! It was singularly unsatisfactory. We were sorry to learn that the parameters of the exercise were not what we had hoped. I managed to get CS representation on almost all the workshops but I think it would be fair to say that, overall, we were disappointed with the experience. The Highways workshop, run by a different consultant, was, I understand, a notable exception. We have serious concerns about some aspects of the consultants' reports. I will leave Howard to elaborate.

Essex County Council Highways contacted us about the Henry Collins and Joyce Pallot roundels in the Crouch Street underpass. They announced that the underpass was to be filled in, believe it or not, with polystyrene and the roundels would have to be moved. The suggestion was made that they would be taken from the wall by the contractor and given to the Civic Society. Needless to say, the

Society was not happy with this proposal! We pointed out that the roundels are locally listed and their responsibility, not ours! However, we advised that the conservators who, ironically, restored all but these roundels, should be asked to take them down and re-site them and we suggested a new location in another underpass. Much to our relief, this was agreed. I will return to cycle paths shortly.

Bob Mercer, who relishes a challenge, finally saw one come to a marvellous conclusion. We unveiled the restored grave of Waterloo veteran, Captain Jesse Jones in the graveyard at St Botolph's Church. The restoration of the grave involved getting permission from a number of organisations, raising considerable funds and dealing with the challenges of constantly moving official goalposts! The unveiling ceremony was a wonderful occasion, complete with a bugler in the Bishop's pocket!! Bob was busy on another project too, an audit of sculptures on public display, which he did at the request of the Council.

Last year I reported that CS member, Paul Knappett, was working incredibly hard on a proposal to commemorate the Le Cateau Barracks. He hoped to erect a small monument on a tiny pocket of land between Roman Circus House and what we now refer to as the Sergeants' Mess. We had suggested two blue plaques on the Mess to reduce the amount of information on the monument. The Society was very pleased to help, both with advice about the plaques and with the splendid event at which the plaques were unveiled by the Garrison Commander. Paul is still fundraising for the monument but I suspect that it will very soon be installed. It has been - dare I say - a monumental effort by Paul, supported by Paula, his wife and we congratulate them. Whilst on the subject of monuments, the Society has been pleased to hear Sir Bob Russell's regular updates about his Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star statue project and to welcome a huge suitcase full of mugs at a Coffee Morning (perhaps I should reword that!). The commemorative mugs were part of Bob's extraordinary fund raising effort - the statue is not cheap! He is still taking donations.

There are a lot of people in Colchester who do their best to keep the history of the city alive. Another of those people is the amazing Cindy Grimwood who started the Facebook group Colchester and District in Old Pictures, much to be recommended. The group has a staggering 34,000 members. I was invited to represent the Society at the summer party of the Stanway Green Lodge Care Home where she lives so that, in the presence of the Mayor and Mayoress, I could present Cindy with our new Certificate of Appreciation award. The photos available through this Facebook group are extraordinarily helpful to us, providing historical evidence to use for planning purposes, restoration projects, Newsletter illustrations and much, much more. Thank you, Cindy, for such an amazing resource.



And then, of course, the Society is an official supporter of the One Square Mile Project - and what superb project it is. St John's Green School won their bid for Heritage Lottery funding and are now in the midst of their 2 year project to investigate, with the children, the incredibly rich history of the area surrounding their two sites, one beside the Abbey Fields and the other on the Green itself. Their findings will be used as a basis for lessons for

*Bombing in South Street - part of One Square Mile project*

many years to come but will also create an archive of information hidden in the memories - and attics - of local people, much of which could be so easily lost for ever. Ann Turner, who is also an extremely knowledgeable blue badge guide, has been exploring the area with the teachers. Soon it will be the turn of Civic Society members who went to the school or have a close connection with the area. The School would love to talk to you.

Our blue plaque programme continues. Against all odds, we were allowed to erect a plaque to Catherine Marsh on the front of the Albert Hall (CoOp Bank) in High Street. This was one of the plaques requested by the Lord Lieutenant of Essex to mark the Queen's Jubilee. The plaque was something of a baptism of fire for Pamela Bradley who took over from Rosemary Jewers, our Plaques guru, who has, sadly for us, has moved to Cambridgeshire. Pamela worked miracles. The formal unveiling of the plaque should take place this summer. Richard Arnopp took over the maintenance of our Plaque Trails but has been thwarted by a problem with the computers at the company that host the trails. The Lock Hospital plaque has been delayed because of a graffiti memorial to the Queen on the last remaining wall of the hospital.



*Portrait of Catherine Marsh 1818-1912, philanthropist and author by Lionel Grimston Fawkes*

The Society is increasingly being asked for help and advice on a whole raft of matters ranging from advice on the erection of plaques (various) to information about specific buildings or areas of the city with much more in between. One of the most unusual pleas came from a sixth former who was researching for her Geography A level. She knew that CBC had received a Civic Trust Award for saving houses in the Dutch Quarter and wanted to know more. I gave her a lot of information, put her in touch with various people, Bob Mercer lent her some CS documents and she produced an extraordinarily learned dissertation which she has been told will be given extremely high marks. Another request for information came from Selby - from the widow of a former Chair of the Selby Civic Society. Now in her 90s, she wanted information about Frere House which had stood immediately opposite my childhood home, although it had gone by the time I was born. I went straight to Cindy's Facebook Group and found her a photograph. She was so pleased. I discovered that she had been born in the house next to Committee member John Salmon's home and he was able to send her photos and his own memories. We are still in touch with her. It is these additions to our usual activities that give a warm glow!

I must mention our dealings with the media. John Egan, past Chair and soon to become a Vice President of the Society, always wondered how the BBC caught him for an off the cuff radio interview when he was in the middle of shaving. These days, they do give a bit more warning - but not a lot. We have been interviewed a few times this year. For me, the worst was on the night Colchester became a city when I had to compete, in a live broadcast, with a pipe and drum band as I tried to give views about our new status on behalf of the Society, not easy as I knew members were not of one mind. It was horrific. It was good to represent the Society at the reception that followed, though. Much more fun was the day with Topical Productions, who make the One Show. Bob Russell and I took part in a piece, presented by Brian Conley, covering the Civic Society's regular monitoring of local BT telephone kiosks. We were asked to comment on the current position so kiosks throughout the city were checked by our Eyes and Ears team who sent their report to our new contact at BT. Problems were addressed, kiosks and phones repaired and a promise was made to paint 3 of our 4, listed, K6 red kiosks this summer - all reported to Topical. We received

favourable comments from all over the country! Very good publicity for the Society. With help from Sir Bob, we have had some really good publicity in our local papers too, including articles about our blue plaques and our lamp post project which continues with the help of local residents. We thank them for their efforts.

Colchester did well in the Anglia in Bloom Awards during the year and we congratulate Pam Schomberg and her Colchester in Bloom team as well as the BID. I would like to thank the Civic Society members who helped prepare the city for the judges visit and Ann Turner who offered her services as a guide. It was a good collaborative effort.

Heritage Open Days are another very successful collaborative effort with the Society providing support and also stewarding two properties, the Audley Chapel and the Roman Theatre. Can I take this opportunity to thank our Society's volunteers. Stewarding is fun and one meets very interesting visitors from all over the world.

Our Social Programme remains somewhat less adventurous as it was pre Covid, I'm afraid. Coaches are still hard to fill because of a lingering reluctance to travel with others and also the very high cost of hiring the vehicle. However, we have still had some very interesting events. We had restarted our Coffee Mornings in the late spring and these continued out of doors on the terrace at Greyfriars during the summer until members felt more confident about being indoors. One Coffee Morning coincided with a roadworks disaster, when the water main outside Greyfriars was accidentally severed. Rather than cancel our meeting, the wonderful staff shifted us to the garden of East Hill House. What a treat! Numbers attending Coffee Mornings have increased, which is very pleasing. They are so useful on so many levels! We really appreciate the discussions at Coffee Mornings as they help us gauge opinions on all sorts of issues affecting the city. Prominent amongst those issues has been the subject of cycle lanes, particularly in Crouch Street and on East Hill where the proposed lane will cause huge problems with funerals and weddings at St James and create parking issues for patients attending the two doctors' surgeries on the hill. The Society is pro cycling but has grave concerns about these government funded lanes. We have had speakers from the Council, the BID, the Victor Batte Lay Foundation which owns the Minories and Destination Colchester, taking a short slot at the beginning of some Coffee Mornings to tell us more about what they do or to consult us about an idea that they have had, which has been mutually beneficial. We have also had the two evening versions, Spring Up in the Spring and Burning Issues which is always close to the 5th November.

Apart from the Town Deal briefings, our Programme has included a boat trip from West Mersea to Bradwell, the opportunity to climb to the top of Jumbo (we formally supported their Heritage Lottery Fund application) and, in the same vicinity, to climb St Mary at the Walls church tower during a visit to the Arts Centre, where we were also able to view the fabulous loos. We have visited the Irvine Road Community Orchard, had a tour led by John Burton who changed the route at the last moment because of a dreadful weather forecast, a visit to the old Eastern National bus depot site, also the site of the Theatre Royal, to see the archaeological excavation and had a talk about the Essex County Hospital excavation, too.

I am going to leave Howard to comment more on the day to day activities of the Society which are so important but I want to take this opportunity to personally thank all of those who work tirelessly for the Society and therefore for the city. They have made my years as Chair so much easier and I have enjoyed watching the Society go from strength to strength as they so willingly throw themselves into projects and tasks. Thank you for your support, your enthusiasm, your persistence, your ideas, your hard work and your friendship.

*Jo Edwards* report ends – *Howard Davies* continues.

I would like to express my thanks for your extremely hard work over your period of Chairship, I know everyone appreciates all you do for the society. Jo very kindly suggests in her first half of this two parter that my taking over the Chair role has taken a huge load of pressure of her shoulders..I think we all know that is not the case. My main regret at taking the Chair role at this point is that I am still working full time, so really what has happened is that I have taken a role which supports the hard work that Jo continues to do, that is supports with a very small 's'! Can we all please give Jo a huge round of applause- thank you.

So, let's move onto the second 6 months which started off on a sad note, Elisabeth Baines, a Civic Society Vice President, sadly left us very early in the New Year. Lis was formerly a long-standing member of the executive committee and former secretary and Chair of the Civic Society as well as being an active member of the Friends of Castle Park, Friends of the Minorities, Friends of Colchester Roman Wall and Colchester Twinning Society. An obituary is included in the summer 2023 newsletter.

As Jo mentioned in her piece as a Society, we are disappointed with the city Masterplan, and this is more to do with what is missed rather than what it covers. We really believed that this venture would be an opportunity to shape the city centre for the future, but to a large extent we feel it fails to achieve this goal. Surely, the purpose of something like a Masterplan is to invigorate peoples' thoughts and allow ideas within certain parameters to blossom. We were keen that this piece of work would really uncover opportunities that could be signposted in the city centre and bring forward some really solid proposals and ideas that would encourage clever thinking from current and potential landowners, developers, investors etc. Sadly, we feel the Masterplan is very limited in its aspiration. That aside, we will continue to work with and lobby the council in this area. In fact, recently we were joined by senior officers and members of the Council on a city centre tour from the Mercury through to Firstsite and taking in St Johns Street, both shopping centre service areas, Osborne Street, the 'Town' Station and the Priory to explain how some important areas had been overlooked and could well be missed opportunities, especially as the city centre is evolving. We hope this was a useful and productive tour which we believe those who joined us found enlightening. Our President John Burton led the tour and held everyone's attention for a full 2 hours or so.

At the last AGM Jo updated you all on the demise of the Alumno student accommodation which had been proposed for the former bus station site. Well, it looks as though the land has reverted to Essex County Council. We do hope something worthwhile comes forward on this important site. Whatever proposal may come forward the Society will be most happy to be involved and help where we can.

A couple of months ago some members of the executive committee were invited to have a conversation with an architectural practice who had been working on some proposals for the old Odeon site in Crouch Street. The architects were keen to discuss their ideas with the Civic Society prior to considering plans to go to the Council. This is an excellent example of how external organisations appreciate the input of the Civic Society. Why did they approach the Society? well they had done their research and realised that we had previously been involved. They may even have heard Jo on the radio earlier this year when she was able to give an accurate update on why nothing had happened on the site. We hope that something may come forward that we can all appreciate and that it in turn helps rejuvenate this part of the city centre.

I feel the three examples above lead nicely into something we have been made aware of via Civic Voice, our umbrella organisation. Matt Baker who is a former adviser to several ministers and a recognised leader in place management published a blog recently where he asked whether the Government's mission for pride in place needs revisiting. In the Government white paper

published last year, one of the twelve key missions it set out was to enhance ‘pride in place’ which is described as restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost. I will just read this key paragraph from the assessment of his blog - he highlights ‘the importance of community involvement and visionary leadership in regeneration projects and provides examples of people feeling disconnected from plans and lacking faith in their positive impact’ - does any of this sound familiar? Building civic pride requires engaging communities, allowing them to have a say in decision making processes, and fostering local leaders who understand how to create a sense of pride. To wrap up Matt says what many civic societies already know, including partnership working and a long-term vision are needed to improve a place. Finally, a takeaway thought: Raising people’s ambitions and giving them hope that their community can improve is much harder than simply writing cheques in Whitehall.

Jo has mentioned the One Square Mile project in her piece, but I wanted to give it another plug. A little like Jo, I have grandchildren at St John’s Green primary school, so it is close to my heart too. My wife accompanied me to the school to see how the project was progressing and we were treated to a thoroughly interesting evening, which included the story of Britain’s First Town Wall. An extremely interesting talk about the wall was given by Phil Crummy. The model was fascinating, clearly set up so anyone can work out where the important elements of the wall sit in relation to the modern day. It must have been a splendid sight. A series of the siege of Colchester paintings by Charles Debenham, which I understand the council’s museum services have donated to the school, they are quite light-hearted and colourful. The feedback received by Laura Davidson, the project manager, about the evening was splendid.

Recently the coffee morning was given an overview of the work picked up Destination Colchester, who are working with the Council and the BID on the city centre sign posting plans. I think we all look forward to following this closely and being involved in any proposals.

The Executive Members. Can I say a big thank you to the executive committee members who put so much work into their various areas of expertise within the Civic Society.

**Ann Turner**, our vice Chair, and long-standing member, who keeps membership matters under control alongside her many activities she undertakes alongside her role with the Civic Society, she offers an immense knowledge of Colchester’s history. As most of you will know Ann is a blue badge guide of many years. We are pleased to that membership has remained level in the last year and noticeably we have witnessed a huge increase in membership from ward councillors, something we very much welcome.

**Bob Mercer**, who takes on the planning remit and comments on many proposals in such an articulate way and we know his comments are appreciated, not only by us, but also the planning officers at the city Council, they seek his advice on many occasions. Bob advises me that despite his role in some of the larger planning application ongoing in Colchester, his most memorable involvement was in getting the restoration of the Jesse Jones grave completed and unveiled. This was a huge achievement and an example of joint working between the Civic Society, Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service and Colchester Council.

**John Collett**, who when he is not involved in footpath enquiries or encouraging, anyone who will listen, to join footpaths when they find themselves going nowhere! is busy organising litter picks or involving himself in other organisations/peoples’ litter picks. In fact, so successful that we were recently in receipt of £100 from the Keep Britain Tidy Ambassador. Other litter picks that have taken place this year included an article in the Civic Voice newsletter promoted and praised the work carried out by the Society, alongside Colchester BID to clean up the area behind the Curzon cinema. A winter deep clean took place on the Moors on the 3rd and 6th March with help from Colchester Litter Pickers. Society members took part in the Great British Spring Clean on the



23rd and 28th March - over 50 bags of litter were, and various fly tipped items were collected. If this wasn't sufficient, regular litter picks, weed clearance and debris removal take place on North Bridge and East Hill Bridge, the latter being a constant thorn in the Society's side as the promises of structural surveys that might bring forth works to finally remove the dreadful red and white barriers fail to materialise.

In addition to this John has been striving to re-instate the public right of way along Sheepen fields. We understand that Essex County Council's legal team have started work on this, but it might a little while before we hear anything. Many of you will have heard of the footpath to nowhere, supposedly from Rouse Way to Meander Mews, but not joined up. John's efforts on this one has been monumental, having involved the Borough (it was when he started) Council and County Council Highways teams. Unfortunately, despite designs being produced, there is a lack of funding and John continues to lobby to see if some S.106 funding from adjacent/nearby developments can be utilised to deliver this scheme. It's all about active travel.

**Paul Weston**, our Treasurer, keeping the Society's financial matters under careful control and ensuring that those books balance. Fantastic work!

**Peter Evans** does his best to keep an eye on public transport. This is an unenviable task as many of you will be aware public transport is a difficult conversation in most towns and cities, but we in Colchester seem to suffer from an extremely strange public transport set up - one where it seems no one wants to take responsibility. Hence, Peter will find himself being bounced from one authority to another, each making it clear that it is the other one's responsibility. Nonetheless he keeps going. Peter in conjunction with Henry Spyvee and our small street naming Sub Committee also does his best to link with the council's street naming team. In May, joined Sir Bob Russell and Cllr David King to see the unveiling of the Captain Cook Estate in Berechurch.

Last but not least, Peter is the newsletter editor which I know you all really enjoy reading so much. On the subject of the newsletter, the Society would like to thank Richard Clifford at Colchester City Council for ensuring that copies of the newsletter reach elected members.

**Sheila Anderton**, the Society's Eyes and Ears for anything that can be pushed to the appropriate person to rectify, as soon as possible and this Sheila does by nurturing her relationships with, particularly, the City Centre Street care team. There is so much that Sheila is on top of that I would be here most of the evening going through - graffiti, damage to street furniture, litter. But I will raise the plastic tags that are all too often used to hang planning notices, Highway notices etc. (it is a huge bug bear for Sheila) so far she has collected 7,000 of the tags, with a further 396 slowing building to 1,000 which will then be taken by Colchester City Council and recycled.

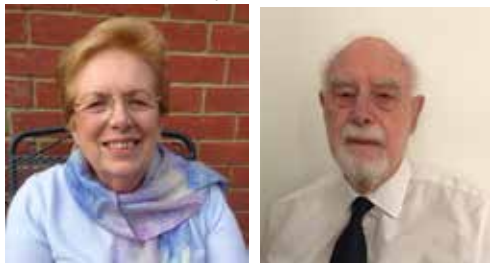
**John Salmon**, sometimes thought of as the cast iron lamppost person and that would be a reasonable accolade, but John does far more than this including picking up the wider transport remit and this is no easy task. The Society's membership embraces the whole community so when it comes to transport this will include all types of road and footpath user, so when a proposal comes forward about roads, cycle lanes etc. we receive, quite often very polarised opinions and all members of the Society's groups try to pull together a strategic overview of suggestions and information in order to try and add some focus to whatever plans are being put forward. John is our website man too; in fact, he recently uploaded several films dating from the 1970s onto the website.

A quick thank you from me to Pamela and Richard, who were mentioned earlier by Jo. Thank you.

Our President and Vice Presidents deserve a mention too. Our president **John Burton** is a phenomenal font of information, constantly giving the executive committee real life examples from other towns both nationally and internationally. A huge advocate for Colchester city and getting its

future development just right. We always welcome news from Henry Spyvee in Guildford (which is only a town!) about Colchester, knowledge imparted in a very special way and another link to St. John's Green Primary school! Thank you too to our other Vice Presidents, the Bishop, Austin, Dick, and Brian who continue to help with matters that crop up, their knowledge is immeasurable.

I would like to add my thanks to **Ann and Paul Larkin** who joined the executive committee but have had to step back for a while. We hope to welcome them back at some point in the future.



*Our new Vice Presidents Rosemary Jewers  
and John Egan*

Jo has updated on the plaques and those who are taking things forward following Rosemary Jewers move to Cambridgeshire, but I would like to take this opportunity to advise members that the executive committee voted unanimously to ask Rosemary to become a Vice President of the Society and I can tell you Rosemary, in her letter to me

said she was touched and honoured to be invited to become a vice president of the society and as if by magic Rosemary is here with us this evening. It is lovely to see her.

Jo also arranges the coffee mornings, visits and just about everything else that falls into her lap or doesn't, a lot of the time. I think it is fair to say that Jo is the beating heart of the Colchester Civic Society. One of the many tasks that Jo is trying to deal with is two trees the Society wants to plant in memory of Ken Cooke, long term Borough Councillor for Castle Ward and past Chair and, later, Vice President, of the Civic Society and John and Anne Crook Williams. John was Chair of the Civic Society for some while. His wife, Anne, was a very senior blue badge guide and was incredibly helpful when we had visiting Civic Societies. Finding a location had hit a bit of a brick wall until very recently when Jo received an email from CCC saying they were looking at options for the trees, or did we have some preferred locations! Fingers crossed we may have everything sorted for an autumn planting.

Can I also add a thank you to **Ged Dickinson**, who although not a member of the executive committee single handedly commands the Twitter sphere on our behalf and has amassed an amazing 1,000 followers! (And that's not all, many bright ideas come from his direction).

A huge thank you must go to **Greyfriars** for hosting this annual general meeting for us, they always look after us so well and are incredibly supportive. We thank them for providing this room for our coffee mornings and for accommodating both our committee meetings and ad hoc meetings, often at the drop of a hat.

Finally, we have been asked, at the coffee morning to enquire if there is interest in relaunching our New Year Lunch. We have been quoted £35 for a three-course lunch which would be on a Sunday in early January 2024.

We have prepared a certificate for Rosemary and John which I just wanted to present to them at this point.

I hope I haven't missed anybody and if I have, I am very sorry.

Thank you.

*Howard Davies*  
Chair, Colchester Civic Society 2023

## THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING JUNE 2023

At the Annual General Meeting, the Executive Committee's recommendation to create Rosemary Jewers and John Egan Vice presidents in recognition of their valuable service to the Society was confirmed

**John Egan** is a former Chair of the Society and held several other offices. He and his wife Caroline moved to London sometime ago but remain members.

**Rosemary Jewers** was a member of the Society for about 10 years, much of this spent on the Executive Committee, where she championed several projects, most notably the Blue Plaque trail. Although she recently moved to Cambridge, she was so pleased to receive the appointment that she made a special trip to be at the AGM.



*Pam Donnelly,  
Chief executive  
Colchester City Council*

After the business of the AGM was completed, we were fortunate to hear an address by Pam Donnelly, Chief Executive of Colchester City Council,

Pam has been a senior officer and executive director of the Council for several years, and became Chief Executive 2 years ago. She knows the City and the council itself very well.

Pam did not pull her punches and gave us some not entirely comfortable facts and figures. Colchester has the highest suicide rate in the Country (Tendring is second). Other interesting, telling statistics that she mentioned are;

- a child born in Stanway is likely to live 10 years longer than one born on Greenstead.
- 3500 on the housing list, 350 in bed and breakfast. The Council is investigating a scheme to help with Chelmsford City Council.
- More refugee homes are being closed by the Home Office, which will increase the problem
- the City Council employees over 1000 staff
- Pam, as Chief Executive, meets with every councillor once a month.

She stressed that we do not know the reasons for these statistics yet, but we will find out and must then take action, all this at time when finances are stretched much more than previously. Further savings must be made and this will be a challenge.

There is also the issue of the repairs necessary to the ceiling of the Moot Hall, which has caused much concern recently, and will cost a substantial sum. Pam told us that she and the leader of the Council are determined that repairs will be completed, whatever the cost.

On the brighter side, the Council offices at Rowan House are due to reopen after long running repairs in the next few weeks so that Council staff can return to working in the office again. Pam also told us that she is the only Essex Chief Executive to continue to wear the traditional lawyers wig and gown at official functions.

*Peter Evans*

## ANDREW MILLAR



Many of you would have read the wonderful obituary to long standing Colchester Civic Society member Andrew Millar, which appeared in the Autumn 2020 Newsletter. We became aware that Andrew had bequeathed a sum of money to the Society, but as is the way with these things, a while passed before everything was taken care of and a sum of money arrived with the Society. I do not think I am exaggerating when a gasp was shared amongst the Executive Committee with regard to the generosity of the bequeathment! £40,325. The bulk of this amount has been invested; the interest will certainly help the Society meet the costs of ongoing matters. It is important that we do not forget Andrew's memory in how this bequest is managed.

*Howard Davies Chair*

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## CIVIC UNIVERSITY AGREEMENT

On the 30 October 2023 I was invited to attend the signing ceremony of this important partnership agreement. The agreement is inspired by the national Civic University Network, which is campaigning to ensure universities maximise their impact within their communities and embed civic aspirations in their work, to drive forward positive social change.

The event at the Innovation Centre on the Knowledge Gateway research and technology park, showcased some current partnership work including the work ongoing in the Heart of Greenstead.

The agreement was signed by Professor Anthony Forster, Vice-Chancellor, Cllr Kevin Bentley, Leader of Essex County Council, Cllr David King, Leader of Colchester City Council, Cllr Mark Stephenson, Leader of Tendring District Council and Dr Ed Garratt, Chief Executive of NHS Suffolk, and North Essex Integrated Care Board.

Others in attendance included Colchester Mayor, John Jowers and the High Steward of Colchester, Sir Bob Russell.

*Howard Davies*

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## THE RETURN OF A CONSTABLE

Many of you will have read about a Constable drawing of St Botolph's Priory being acquired by Colchester Museum Services. But the serendipitous story of how this came about was not in the local news.

I had a WhatsApp message in March from my daughter Anna who is an auctioneer at Roseburys, London. Being a Colchester girl, she said she was thrilled to have handled a Constable sketch of St Botolphs Priory that morning. The attached photograph showed a rather faint sketch on paper which had unfortunately been marked by sticky tape.

A few days later I was with a Civic Society group doing a walk around central Colchester led by John Burton. As we stood in the priory ruins I mentioned to Peter Evans, who was next to me,

about the Constable. Looking at the drawing on my phone, we could see that Roseburys showed it as an unsold lot as it had not reached its estimate of £4,000 - £6,000. Being the treasurer of Friends of Colchester Museums as well as being a Civic Society committee member, Peter could see the possibility of purchasing the sketch for the museum. Would a deal with the vendor be possible?

Peter consulted the Friends of Colchester Museums committee, who then approached Wise who consulted his colleagues. The museum was keen to acquire the sketch but none of us knew if the vendor would agree to sell. Roseburys negotiated with the vendor and eventually a price was agreed.



Apparently, the vendor had himself purchased the sketch when it was in amongst several others in a lot at another auction. When he approached Roseburys with the unsigned sketch they sought confirmation of its authenticity from Anne Lyles who is regarded as the Constable expert.

Anna was especially happy that the drawing was returning to Colchester where it belonged. She was able to personally deliver it back home in June, where she passed the sketch over to Philip in Hollytrees. Philip was delighted, and will ensure that a paper restorer will work on removing the stains.

*Angela Hammond*

*The Constable drawing is formally handed over to Councillor Michele Burrows (for the City Council) by Anna and Ray Cantrell (chair of Friends of Colchester Museums)*

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## ROOM WITH A VIEW

On the evening of Sunday 24th September, Executive Committee Member, John Collett, contacted me to tell me that one of the benches in the Priory Street Car Park had been ripped from its base and was lying, damaged, on the ground.

Keeping my fingers crossed that nothing would happen to it overnight, I emailed the wonderful, super efficient, Sam Lancaster, who was, at the time, the City Centre Manager, Street Care and Safety, hoping that she would pick up my message when she started work in the morning. She did.

At 08.31 on the Monday morning, I was copied into a message sent from Sam to Senior Zone Operative Ian Rose, who is equally wonderful and super efficient. Sam asked whether he could pick the bench up. At 08.44, 13 minutes later, I was copied in to a further message, this time from Ian to Sam to say that the bench had just been collected and was safely in his van. The message read:





*'Have removed until I can find some replacement bolts. I should have some in my rubbish at home. I will then bring back and refit and check the others as well.'*

What an incredible response!

As it happens, the bolts had a very peculiar thread and Ian hadn't got any in his rubbish. However, undaunted, he searched for and finally found an alternative that he could adapt. He repaired the bench and has now reinstalled it. It looks as good as new - even covered in raindrops!

Thank you! What a team!

*Jo Edwards*

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## MILITARY ROAD

In the last newsletter, we considered Mersea Road, one of the main route into the City, looking at the history of the road. Now for Military Road, another main road, originally to the hamlet of Old Heath and the village of Rowhedge.

There is now no military presence in Military Road. The Victorian barracks, and the wall that surrounded them have gone. The Camp Church is now St John's Orthodox Church. The Cambridge Arms – the Duke of Cambridge was a leading soldier, eventually Commander-in-chief of the Army, for much the 19th century – has closed and is now a Chinese Restaurant. However, the Royal Mortar Public House (on the corner of Military Road and Granville Road) remains but it is unclear if the name comes from Mortars or Artillery or from a Mortuary for the Barracks. The other pub, the British Grenadier, is opposite Camp Church, and all three were founded in the 1860's, contemporary with the barracks.

On the right hand side, at the junction with Magdalen Street, was the strange pairing of shops run by Mr & Mrs Schafle, one a Fish and Chip Shop, (now American Fast Food) and the other a gun shop. Next door was the busy wood yard of Groom Daniells, now replaced by many bedsits. Further up on the right is the quaintly named "Golden Noble Hill" and a little further on, Mill Street.

Even Blaxill's Guide to Colchester Street Names is unsure of the derivation of Golden Noble Hill, but certainly Mill Street was the site of a Mill.



*Cambridge Arms*

The town end of Military Road has the attractive, almost matching Winsley's and Winnock's Almshouses, Arthur Winsley's foundation is just the older and it is Winnock's that has had the most recent modernisation. The 1930s cottages added by Winnock's on the left hand side of Military Road are still there but were sold as too difficult to upgrade. Next to them is the surviving Military Road frontage of the Old Tram and Bus Depot, and Tram Alley, leading to Magdalen Street.



Opposite Mill Street on the left hand side is a small recent council development, “Parade Ground Mews”. Further along is a currently vacant site, previously a car lot. This was enlarged in 1987, during the great storm. The last house in a row collapsed on a number of cars up for sale. This had been owned by the reknown Colchester landlady, Florence Caney, but she is a whole other story.



The next building is the Orthodox Church of St John. It is a Colchester legend that the church was built as a demountable hospital for Florence Nightingale during the Crimean war, 1854-56, but she rejected it. It ended up here as the church for the Military Camp here instead. Opposite was the entrance to the later Victorian Meanee and Hyderabad Barracks, Roberts Road, and it was here facing the Camp Church that colourful military parades , complete with bands, took place, witnessed by the civilian public, until security and other issues intervened.



As Military Road bends to the left as it passes Camp Church, the War Department made land available for a barracks, apparently mainly tents, for the Crimean War Army on open land along the road from the town centre to the Old Heath.

After the Crimean War, the land became vacant, to be replaced by the New Town Estate in the 1880’s, including New Town Road, Granville Road and Gladstone Road,

complete with flowering trees. Here also is New Town’s Chemist, currently a branch of Boots but formerly Morley’s, which always featured large glass bottles, full of contrasting coloured waters, sadly now gone. Opposite is a second New Town Estate – with Winchester Road, Albion Grove and Myrtle Grove (it still has a metal sign Myrtle Crescent.) At the junction with Wimpole Road, Military Road continues as Old Heath Road.



*Peter Evans*

*Mr Morley, the Military Road Chemist. He had another branch in Colchester*

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## HERITAGE OPEN DAYS (1)

The total number of visitors for 2023 was 7,550 which is a significant increase on the figures of 5,094 recorded in 2022 and 3,692 in 2021. Excluding the Castle the figure in 2023 was 5,497 which is also up on the 2022 total of 3,221 and that in 2021 of 2,346. Visitor figures have now returned to pre-pandemic levels across the borough and are broadly comparable to the level of participation recorded in the period 2015-19. Visitor numbers might well have been higher this year but for the extremely hot weather over the weekend of 9-10 September which impacted the numbers at the Castle in particular.

The Heritage Open Days festival in Colchester would be impossible to run in its present form without the support of local organisations and volunteers, particularly the Colchester Civic Society.  
*Ann Turner*

## Heritage Open Days 2023 – Cambridge revisited

There was an increased list of properties to be visited in Colchester, and it would seem, across East Anglia. Sudbury produced an impressive programme of events.



I returned to Cambridge, as I found on line that 3 colleges were opening their Libraries, but I was unable to find a HOD brochure, but then I was unable to find a Visitors Information Centre either! It was a bit difficult to find the Libraries, as they neglected to put directions up. Once I found Kings College Library, they could not have been more welcoming. They had First Folios of Shakespeare on display and Sidney Sussex College had books on Charles I, especially an Eikon Basilike, with the famous picture of Charles I at prayer. I had found the Sidney Sussex

Library easily.

The other College, Trinity, has a massive Library which I could not find and when I did, there was a queue of about 100 for a 2 hour timeslot, which didn't move – so I gave up. We are lucky that people make an effort to advertise the properties that are open.

Should you visit Cambridge, one place I always visit and is always open is Lloyds Bank. It is totally tiled, and the building itself is worth a look. It is free and I don't even bank with Lloyds.

*Peter Evans*

## Heritage Open Days - making the most of opportunities to visit fabulous historical venues

Every year, in preparation of the Open Heritage weekends in early September, I search the website [www.heritageopendays.org.uk](http://www.heritageopendays.org.uk) and discuss with friends to plan some wonderful visits. As the website says 'It's your chance to see hidden places and try new experiences – all of which are FREE to explore'. In 2022, friends and I visited Harwich to see The Redoubt and Harwich Museum. Below are details of 2023 visits:



## Saturday 9th September 2023

**Roman Theatre** - On Saturday 9th I volunteered to cover a shift at the Roman Theatre. This was organised through Colchester Civic Society and Colchester City Council. It involved manning the site, together with another volunteer, for a half-day shift. We were given information about the Roman Theatre to explain to visiting tourists. Welcoming and talking with the tourists was very interesting, as was seeing their reaction to the ancient archaeological remains.

**St Helen's Chapel** – Having advised many tourists visiting the Roman Theatre to next visit St Helens Chapel, just nearby, I thought I should go myself. Here it was interesting to see the many icons and be told about the different patriarch of the Orthodox Church.

**St Martin's Church** – As few services are held at St Helens, the Orthodox church have taken over St Martins Church to facilitate their growing congregation. Here I was told about the plans to make the church more comfortable; with heating improvements and internal screens, all in line with local guidance.



**St Botolph's Church** – Saturday 9th was a very hot day, so visiting churches for their cool, calm welcome seemed very appropriate. The fresh décor and quiet atmosphere of the interior was restful and uplifting.

## **Wednesday 13th September 2023**

**Munnings Gallery and Museum** – By pre-booking on-line, with two friends, I joined a 90-minute tour of the house and garden studio. The Director explained Munning's background, training, war work, commissions and social life whilst showing us his paintings, house and furniture. We are truly fortunate to have such an interesting venue to visit locally and it is a great place to take visitors.

**Saturday 16th September.** Sudbury Tourist Information & Heritage Centre - The Town Hall, incorporating the Tourist Information Centre, opened its doors with an excellent display of early local history, industrial history and WW2 / USAF influences on the town. Upstairs, in the impressive Assembly Rooms, another event was going on called 'Made in Sudbury: Meet the Author Showcase where 12 local authors were available to talk to, creative workshops occurred and delicious light refreshments served.

**Gainsborough's House** – The recently re-developed house and gallery was open to view the Gainsborough collection and show the new gallery spaces displaying a wonderful Maggi Hambling exhibition and another by Suzanne Cooper, a local artist with charming paintings and intriguing prints, with accompanying woodcuts. The garden and café are a treat.



*Pamela Bradley*

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## **MEMBERSHIP**

### **Obituary Brian A Barton 1934-2023**

Brian was always known as Dick after the character "Dick Barton, Special Agent" a radio programme in the 1940s – 1950s.

He was educated at Colchester Royal Grammar School and on leaving school he did his National Service in the Education branch. This led him on his discharge to study to become a teacher. He taught at many schools in the Colchester area including Messing, ending his career as headmaster of Stanway Primary School.

His interests were varied and he was involved in many organisations in Colchester and beyond. He was a founder member of Colchester Civic Society and Essex Society for Family History. He was a member of Essex Society for Archaeology and History, Probus, Lexden History Group and Colchester Rotary.

As a member of Rotary he was involved in the Colchester Rotary Festival of Music, Drama and Dance competition held each year from 1991. He was also a member of Colchester Cooperative Society's Education committee and served several years as a director of the Society on the board

of directors ending with a two year term as President.

In 1993 he trained as a Blue Badge tour guide qualifying in July 1994. He was chairman, vice chairman and treasurer of Colchester Tourist Guides Association for several years hosting the committee meetings at his house. He represented Colchester on the UK committee of the British Guild of Tourist Guides.

In 2011 he received an award at the Essex Tourism Awards evening in the category of Outstanding Customer Service.

When Dick left school, he became a long serving member of the Old Colcestrian Society Committee. He was President of OCS in 1984-85 and was made an Honorary Lifetime Vice-President of OCS in 2015.

1998 saw the commemoration of the Siege of Colchester in 1648. Dick was the chairman of the committee organising the event and was described as a very hands on diplomatic chairman.

This was the start of Dick dressing up in costumes of many periods of Colchester's history. He took costume tours as a Roman, someone from the Siege of Colchester and Bloodcurdling tours. He also appeared in the Witchfinder film locally produced.

He was also a bit of a detective. The memorial to the employees of Essex and Suffolk Fire Insurance Company that had lost their lives in WWI and WWII disappeared from the offices in the High Street when the company changed hands. Dick managed to track down the memorial to a storage unit in Sussex and had it returned to Colchester. It has been erected in the Town Hall.

He married Shirley Gillett in 1958 and they had a son, David and daughter, Sarah. David's son represented Scotland at hockey which made Dick very proud. He was equally proud of all his other grandchildren who will miss their grandfather, as will all the organisations he was involved with.

*Ann Turner*



### **New Members**

We welcome Patrick and Theresa Beale, Helen and Peregrine Martin, Alan Short, Roger Buston, Nigel and Mary Chapman, Nick and Mary Devine, Jack Regan and Harriet Davies, Liz Sibthorp, Tom Flatt, all of Colchester and Destination Colchester.



### **CROOKED HOUSE, HIMLEY Memories of a Civic Society Holiday**



How sad it was to read about devastating fire and subsequent demolition of the Crooked House in Himley. We visited the pub for lunch on one of our Civic Society holidays. It was quite an experience! George, our coach driver, gave me one of his looks as we turned into a narrow, potholed, lane, passing a very large and busy landfill site that seemed to run the entire length of the route to the pub. The final straw was a narrow gap between huge concrete structures left over from some unknown industrial past which George managed

to negotiate safely (he was not so lucky on the way out!). But it was all worth it. The pub was quite extraordinary; totally disorientating.

I found this description on the pub's website:

IF YOU NOTICE A MARBLE rolling uphill at the Crooked House, you might start to think you've had one too many pints at this farmhouse-turned pub. But it's actually the building's unusual structure at work. Thanks to subsidence as a result of mining in the 1800s, the left side of the pub sits a little over one metre (about four feet) lower than the right, giving way to some seriously trippy optical illusions to enjoy with your ale.

I was told, very authoritatively, by one of our group (who will remain nameless) that 'seriously trippy optical illusions' was a perfect description. I was somewhat taken aback. They gave me a knowing grin and wink. You certainly cannot judge a book by its cover! We tried the marbles on the bar and, yes, they did roll uphill - or did they??

We thoroughly enjoyed our visit, staggering out to the coach totally sober but very unsteady on our feet as we tried to adjust to normality. I always sought quirky places for coffee, lunch or tea and the Crooked House was certainly one of the quirkiest. Such a terrible loss!

*Jo Edwards*



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## **DORA MARGARET BATTY**

Who was Dora Margaret Batty? Well - Wikipedia tells us that she was a British designer, working in illustration, poster design, pottery and textiles in the first half of the 20th century. If you google her name, you get lots of information about her, including images of Vintage London Underground posters. In fact, in The London Transport museum website has a section about her. It tells us that she was one of the most prolific female artists commissioned by the Underground and London Transport to design posters, and we learn that many of her designs are still exhibited and remain popular today. Sir Terence Conran was taught by her, and when interviewed in 2001, he mentions that she interviewed him at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London, apparently she was a terrifically stern woman. He goes on to say that the influence of such devoted teachers like Dora was remarkable.

But who was this wonderful lady that Sir Terence Conran refers to? Not much is known about her life, but we do know that she was born here in Colchester on 12th January 1891. The census of that year shows her aged 3 months, living with her parents Thomas and Elizabeth at 1 Balmoral Villas, Crouch Street. Her 2 sisters, Mary and Edith, and 2 servants were also in the family home. Her parents married in 1884. Her father was congregational minister at the Stockwell chapel. On the next census In 1901, Dora was aged 10 and she was at 50 Crouch Street with mum and dad and 1 Domestic servant. Her father died in 1909 and was buried in Colchester Cemetery. The notice in the papers telling us of his sudden death notes that he had retired 3 years earlier in 1906 and that he had been the minister at the Stockwell chapel for 40 years! It is mentioned that along with his

predecessor Joseph Herrick - they had clocked up an amazing 92 years of pastorate between them there! After Thomas's death, In 1911, Dora is living with mum at 3 Beverley Road and she is an art student. Even though Mum is widowed, they are financially comfortable and are even able to afford one domestic servant.

We can see from mentions in the press, Dora attended the Stockwell School in Colchester and was later a student at The Chelmsford school of Science and Art. It is mentioned in 1913, that she is one of only 3 Essex Students to gain success in the exams of the board of Education in Art of that year. These new exams are noted as comprehensive in character and designed to meet the needs of students who have reached an advanced level of studies. In 1921 she is living with mum in London, and with them at Albert Bridge Road in Battersea are 2 of Dora's friends. Her mother died in 1928 and was reunited with her husband Thomas at Colchester Cemetery.



Dora herself had a lot of success during the 20s and 30s with the London Underground posters and much more but many details of her life are unknown. No photos exist of her. She never married, and lived for many years in Maldon. In 1939, she is living alone in The Hut in the Heybridge basin and is listed as a commercial artist. When she died in July 1966 she left £22,226 - which in those days, was not an amount to be sniffed at. Even though her beginnings were here in Colchester, she was educated here, spent at least a quarter of a Century here, and her parents and sister Edith rest in eternal peace here - Colchester has never celebrated the artist whose extraordinary achievements and artistic brilliance is considered chic vintage by the London Transport Museum, and today her name lives on in the world of transport art, if not in the list of Colcestrians of note of the 20th century.

*Sharon Mooney*

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## NEWS FROM CAMBRIDGE

A few years ago the Civic Society newsletter featured an article about a long-distance walk which I had undertaken, walking from Colchester to the north Norfolk coast. At the time I was raising money for a small rural church which had been targeted by thieves who stripped all the lead from the roof. After that fundraising, the charity, Friends of St Andrew's Church Little Massingham - FOSALM - was formed.

Fundraising activities have continued, but there is a long way to go before the final part of the £122,000 target to restore the roof is achieved.

Now there is a new incentive as FOSALM and Quilts 4 Care Leavers - 'Q4CL' are working together on a massive project by making a giant patchwork quilted 'Hug'. This quilt will wrap around the circumference of church, as it desperately needs a comforting 'Hug'! The mammoth and very colourful quilt, will help raise awareness of the plight of the building and any donations will help the restoration funds when anyone sponsors a block of the patchwork. It is also going to

help young care leavers as they leave the care system to start independent living at the age of 18 and in some cases as young as 16.

We are asking people if they are able to help sew patchwork tops or blocks to add to the number of quilts we need. When all the patchworks are completed they will be joined together and the huge quilt will hug the church. Once the quilt is removed it will then be divided into individual quilt hugs and Q4CLs will arrange for these quilts to be given to some



of the huge number of young adults who leave the care system every year. These young people appreciate receiving their Hugs which are a comfort to them. Any help you could give would be wonderful. Once we receive the patchwork tops Q4CLs will arrange to finish and complete the quilt hugs. As Civic Society members showed their handicraft skills knitting poppies a few years ago, I thought it might appeal.

You can find more information about the project and contact us at: <https://fosalm.org/>

More background information is available about Q4CL at: <https://www.q4cl.org.uk/>

*Rosemary Jewers*

Editor's note; Colchester Civic Society members prepared 166 knitted poppies for the Colchester Poppy campaign 2023.

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## ROMAN CIRCUS INFORMATION PANEL

Although Rosemary has moved to Cambridge, she returned to see the completion of a project that she and her late husband, Tony Jewers, had been involved with, an information panel on the Roman Circus, on Circular Road South, and is inscribed as a memorial to him. Colchester Museums Service have been involved with the process and design.



*Photos for this and St John's Green School article are courtesy of Adrian Rushton*



## ST JAMES' CHURCH AND COLCHESTER'S HERITAGE

In response to the welcome interest shown by members of the Civic Society, I am happy to report that the tower clock of the church of St James the Great on East Hill is back in working order, unlike many of the public clocks in Colchester. For the first time in many years, it has been repaired and fully serviced. The dial has been repainted light blue and the figures and hands re-gilded. The repairers described it as “a fine two train flat-bed mechanism by Dent”. This gives it a distinguished provenance, since the firm of Dent built the Great Clock of the Houses of Parliament (Big Ben) in 1859 and the Standard Clock at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich in 1871. Colchester can be proud of it.

St James's role is to be a house of worship. Apart from that, it also houses some of Colchester's heritage. It has even made its mark on national affairs once or twice, possibly through its supposed connection with John Ball, the fiery preacher during the Peasants' Revolt (1381), and more certainly through the well documented formal surrender of the Royalists' arms, drums and colours on 28 August 1648 at the end of the Siege of Colchester.



By the time this article appears, George Carter's painting “The Adoration of the Shepherds” will probably have returned to the church after extensive restoration. George Carter (1737-1794) was a local boy of humble origins, educated at Colchester's Blue Coat School. He turned to painting, choosing mostly historical subjects, portraits and landscapes, and exhibited for several years at the Royal Academy. His “Siege of Gibraltar” (1782) is now at the National Portrait Gallery. The “Adoration” was exhibited at the Academy in 1777 after Carter's return from Rome. In the following year he presented it to St James's as an altarpiece, dedicated “To his native parish as a testimony of his affection for the inhabitants”. One wonders whether the apple-cheeked Virgin may not have been based on a local model.

In 1843 the East window was remodelled and the Carter altarpiece was discarded. In the following year it was recorded as languishing “in the place where the Sexton keeps his grave digging apparatus”. It was eventually liberated from there, only to be hung above the North-West door where nobody could see it. It slowly deteriorated under the influence of damp and dirt, until the parishioners' recent decision to pay for the repair and lime-washing of the wall enabled it to be removed and professionally restored with the help of grants and legacies, just in the nick of time. Glowing with colour and carefully protected from the effects of light and heat, this piece of Colchester's heritage is being returned to its intended position behind the High Altar.

Winsley's Charity is not only the provider of eighty almshouses today but is also of great interest to historians of the eighteenth-century Dissenting movement in the Colchester area. Alderman Arthur Winsley, although a lifelong Independent (Congregationalist), insisted on being buried in St James's and bequeathed £250 (roughly the equivalent of £60,000 today) for the carving of a memorial, for which he left detailed instructions. The memorial was completed in 1740. Happily, it came in under budget, at £203 3 shillings. It is unsigned, and for many years there was speculation about the sculptor. The workmanship is so fine that when John Bensusan-Butt asked the Victoria and Albert Museum about it in 1969, they thought that it might have been by Michael Rysbrack. We now know that it was by Richard van Spangen (c.1689-1757). He is largely forgotten now, but in his day he was a well-respected sculptor. This discovery is the more exciting since the Winsley memorial is to date the only known example of a statue by van Spangen. Hitherto unknown and unrecorded, it has been included in the database of British sculptors managed by the Henry Moore Institute.

By agreement with the Winsley Charity trustees, who contributed to the costs, the memorial was moved to its present position by the North-West door exactly a century ago in 1923.

The East end of St James's in its present form dates from around 1500 and is described by Pevsner as the best Perpendicular work in Colchester. The masonry around the windows of the Lady Chapel, exposed as it is to the worst of the weather, is crumbling at an alarming rate. The cost of repairs, excluding VAT, is estimated at over £91,000. This of course is way beyond the means of the congregation. Grants are being applied for, but any donations to maintain this part of Colchester's heritage would be welcome.

St James's is also home to other parts of Colchester's heritage which have been displaced. Chief among these is the very fine organ, which was transferred to St James's in 1954 from St Nicholas's church before its demolition. It fits perfectly with St James's excellent acoustics. This has led to St James's being in increasing demand for special services and public concerts and recitals. The current Director of Music has, for two years now, organised a series of well attended monthly summer lunch-time concerts.

The church is open at varying times six days a week, and the keyholders (the churchwardens) are advertised on the church website [stjamesthegreat.wordpress.com](http://stjamesthegreat.wordpress.com) should anyone wish to gain access outside these hours. For obvious reasons it cannot be left completely unattended, but visitors are very welcome and the parishioners are constantly looking for new ways, such as new security systems, which would enable them to make St James's and its heritage even more accessible.

*David Beattie*

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## **RING FOR THE KING**

I was listening to Sadie Nine's show on BBC Essex when I heard that a call had gone out for more bellringers to "Ring for the King" as part of the Coronation Day celebrations. I had never touched a bell rope but it sounded interesting and so I looked on the internet, finding details for the Essex Association of Change Ringers. It is a registered charity, whose objects include recruitment, education, and training for bell ringers, and I emailed them for more details. I had a phone call from Mark, a bellringer at St John the Baptist's Church, Layer-de-la-haye. I decided that I should like to give it a try. At this stage, 16th March, I knew nothing. Coronation Day was 6th May.

Lessons for newcomers were every other Monday with Mark and Derek. My first lesson was on March 16th which was their normal training night so I met several of the bellringers on my



*A sally*

first night. There were 2 newcomers, including myself. We were first taught the backstroke, or tailstroke, with Derek catching the sally. After a couple of weeks doing that, we were then taught the handstroke - catching the sally. This is more difficult as you need to catch it in just the right spot. If you catch it too low the bell hits the stay. If you catch it too high the bell comes down too quickly. The sally needs to be caught in the middle.

After my first week, I was told I was a natural! I looked forward to my Monday nights out.

As it neared the Coronation Day, I was asked what I was doing on May 6th and would I like to be a part of the ringing team. The other newcomer was asked too. I couldn't believe that I was actually going to become part of history and Ring for the King. On the day we all turned up for 09:00 and rang for an hour in total. We just rang rounds - the bells ringing in order. Myself and the other newbie were

under the watchful eyes of Derek and Mark. The newbies rang the back stroke with our mentors ringing the handstroke. There are several different ways to ring bells such as Plain Hunt, Hunt Doubles and Grandsire (pronounced grandsir.) These are more complicated and I need to practice a lot more before I get to that stage. Everyone that took part in Ring for the King were given a badge.



I told my son and I told everybody. It was a most memorable, never to be repeated experience. I am still bellringing and since August, I have been moved up from newbie to advanced ringer. I am now ringing both backstroke and handstroke on my own but still under the watchful eye of Derek. The next stage for me is to ring both strokes in rounds.

It's a misconception that you need to be strong to ring a church bell. I have been there when children as young as 10 have been learning to bell ring.

*Deborah Golby.*

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## THE CATCHPOOL LEGACY

In my contribution to the autumn newsletter on the twin anniversaries of the official opening of the park in 1892 and the subsequent addition of the Hollytrees estate in 1922, I omitted to refer to the important bequest of £3,000 to the Borough Council by Richard Catchpool in 1890.

There is little readily available information on this legacy today and there is no monument in the Park commemorating Catchpool, even though the Park can be said to owe its foundation to this money that was used for purchasing about 10 acres from the trustees of the Round family to which ownership of the estate had passed on Charles Gray's death in 1782. An account of the legacy appears in the many editions of the early 20th century Guide to Colchester And Its Environs by W. Gurney Benham, but there is now no readily available popular source of information. The Historical Survey of Castle Park (1997), written and researched by Howard Brooks on behalf of Colchester Borough Council, is a comprehensive reference, but was not published in quantity and now not easy to find. The following information has been extracted from the Survey.



Catchpool died two years before the official opening of the Park on the 20th October 1892 but was represented on that great ceremonial occasion by his eldest son Charles Richard (1860-1909) who, at the newly installed Museum Street entrance gates, handed a silver key to the Mayor, Wilson Marriage, who unlocked the gates and invited the Lord mayor of London, Sir David Evans, to enter first. In a set of speeches given by the Mayor on the site of the soon-to-be-constructed bandstand, he explained the importance of the Catchpool legacy in the establishment of the Park ... “Mr Richard Catchpool whose son was standing on the platform..., and whom they were proud to see among them left by will a sum of £3,000 for the purchase of land... There was a technical flaw in the bequest, but ...the four children of the late Mr Catchpool ...themselves kindly made up the money ... and it had now been spent on purchasing the ground in accordance with the will.

Sir David Evans also thanked the Catchpool family - “We must be respectfully thankful to one who by the force of example has set an example to others who may desire to follow in his footsteps, and we revere and respect his memory today, and our hearts are full of respect not only for his memory, but also in the direction of his family, many of whom are here with us today to take part in that which must be a source of great pride to them. “ He finished by “declaring the Park open under the name and style and title of the Castle Park, and that the main terrace in front of us shall be called the Catchpool Avenue, in memory of the Late Mr Richard D Catchpool.”

I have not so far found any information on the many other family members mentioned as having been there on the day.

In addition to Catchpool Avenue, the lime walk that runs east-west, south of the bandstand and terminating at the Café-in-the-Park, we also have Catchpool Road that runs northwards from the northwest corner of the Colchester and East Essex Cricket Club pitch, to join Cowdray Avenue. Colchester Brewery Ltd. has also in the past produced the pale ale ‘Catchpool’s Legacy’!

In addition to Catchpool’s legacy, Mr. Round, M.P., contributed £500 towards laying out the Park; the Corporation voted £1,000 for the same purpose and a further sum of £500 was donated anonymously. We can thus see in relative terms the importance of Catchpool’s bequest, equivalent to almost £500,000 today.

Catchpool was not the only family member to contribute to the new Park, his sister Miss Mary Jane Catchpool donating £10 for the erection of a drinking fountain somewhere in the Park, now located by the Ryegate where it was probably first placed. Mary was born in Colchester 1825 and died there in 1918.

Richard Davison Catchpool was born in Colchester in 1822 and moved to Reading sometime before 1851, the year of birth of the first of his six children and where he appears in the 1851 census. He lists his occupation in the 1881 census as ‘Retired Ironmonger’, living at 11 Eldon Square in Reading. This still stands as a substantial elegant stone-built mansion in a street of comparable properties. Catchpool died there aged 68 in 1890 leaving a personal estate with a net value of £45,849.7s.2d, equivalent to almost £7,530,000 today.

To try and throw some light on the reference in the Mayor’s speech to the technical flaw in Catchpool’s will I obtained a copy, and find that the £3,000 bequeathed toward the purchase of land for the Park would revert to £1,000 in “in case I shall die within twelve calendar months from the making of this will” and that this smaller bequest would instead be used “for the purpose of defraying the expenses of purchasing preparing maintaining and preserving for the use and benefit of the Inhabitants of the said Borough open public grounds for the resort and recreation of adults and as playgrounds for children and youth or either such purposes”. The will is dated 28th January 1885, almost six years before Catchpool’s decease, so this provision should not have come into effect, but it seems that this is probably what produced the ‘technical flaw’ referred to. I do not

have details of how the problem, whatever it was, was resolved by the family, but thankfully Catchpool's original wish that £3000 should be bequeathed for the purchase of land for a public park was eventually realized.

Another important Catchpool bequest to the Borough was £1,000 towards the building of a Public Library, on condition that this should be achieved within five years of his death. Failing that, the money would revert to his general residuary estate. In the 1880s there were moves in the Borough to put in force the Public Libraries Act but this was opposed in two polls of the whole Borough. Catchpool's legacy reinvigorated the project and in another poll of the town inhabitants in 1881 there was a majority, though not an overwhelming one, in favour of the establishment of a library. Catchpool's legacy, further individual donations amounting to £1600 and the addition of one penny to the rates finally got the project underway. The Corporation made a free grant of the site adjacent to the Town Hall. The building progressed rapidly, and commemorative stones were laid in October 1893, the date of the Colchester Oyster Feast, by the Mayor, Gurney Benham, author of the Colchester Guide, and the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Stuart Knill. The library was opened on 25th October 1894, once again to coincide with the Oyster Feast, by the Right Hon. Baron Herschell, Lord High Chancellor of England. It was the first free library in Colchester.

The Old Library is a striking neo-Jacobean style Grade II listed building at the southern end of West Stockwell Street adjoining the north side of the Town Hall. Its listing declares it "a particularly good example of a late-Victorian public library, demonstrating through its architectural quality the civic pride of the town." It may presently be hired from the City Council as venue for corporate and private events.

*David Hibberd*

**David has been unable to trace an image of Richard Catchpool. Can anybody help?**

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## **THE RIVER COLNE – TO ANIMATE AND REDEVELOP?**

There is a proposal in the City Centre Development Plan Consultation, that the river Colne could be 'animated and developed' by introducing a range of leisure activities. In the autumn newsletter of the Friends of Castle Park, there is an article on the Wildlife of the Colne by Colchester naturalist Ted Benton.

He points out that the river is a rich wildlife habitat and corridor for overwintering waterfowl, many breeding birds (78 species recently recorded), at least 18 species of dragonfly and 22 species of butterfly, including some unusual recent sightings, almost certainly resulting from a reduction in grass mowing along parts of the riverside walk and other open spaces that began in 2020. The riverside also harbours colonies of some locally scarce insects, eight species of bumblebee and as many as 40 species of other wild bees, all of which depend on the rich riverside flora.

A copy of the article will be posted on the Friends' notice board at the Café-in-the-Park but should any Civic Society member not already subscribing, wish to join the Friends of Castle Park (a mere £8 per annum, £10 family), with all its attendant benefits and discounts, they may do so by contacting the membership secretary Madeleine Whitty at [focp.membershipsec@gmail.com](mailto:focp.membershipsec@gmail.com) or on the website <https://www.friendsofcastlepark.com/join-us> An article on the Friends may be found in the Summer 2022 Civic Society Newsletter.

*David Hibberd*

Chair, of Friends of the Castle Park

## **KNIFE ANGEL**

Colchester City Council hosted the ‘Knife Angel’ statue in October. Located in Balkerne Gardens adjacent to the Mercury Theatre, it was impressively framed by the arches of ‘Jumbo’ (properly the Balkerne Water Tower).

It is entirely appropriate that the Knife Angel should be here, as the Knife Awareness campaign started here. Ann Oakes-Odger started the initiative to both commemorate her son Westley Odger (and others who have died by knife crime) and to focus attention on the increasing incidence of knife crime. On 12th September 2005, Westley, aged 27, was going in search of a cash machine before going to the cinema with his brother. There was an incident in Hunwicke Road, and Westley was fatally stabbed. Since then Ann has directed her energies into campaigning to bring knife crime in line with gun crime, raise awareness of the consequences of carrying knives and for a Victims’ Law to give bereaved victims’ families access to legal rights.

Sir Bob Russell, MP for Colchester at the time, collaborated with her and in November 2009 her campaign was successful in achieving a specific tariff with a starting point of 25 years for murder using a knife or bladed weapon under the Criminal Justice Act 2003. In recognition of her work Ann was made an MBE in Queen Elizabeth’s 2011 Birthday Honours list, presented by the Queen at Buckingham Palace.

Ann has created a charity ‘Westley Odger Foundation’ known as [www.knifeCrimes.org](http://www.knifeCrimes.org) in Westley’s memory and given talks in schools and youth groups, alongside Essex Police.

A knife bearing an inscription to Westley – crafted by his mother with the help of artist Alfie Bradley - sits near the bottom of the Knife Angel - the National Monument Against Violence and Aggression – which is coming to Colchester in October.

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## **THE MINORIES**

As you have probably all noticed The Minories is fully open again with all sorts of events and exhibitions and a Cafe. The Minories is mostly open Thursday to Sunday 10.00am until 4.00pm with the cafe open Thursday to Saturday at the same times. As The Minories only has a couple of staff we are reliant on volunteers to sit in the galleries to engage with visitors. We don’t ask you to commit to regular slots, just put your name on the rota for the dates and times that suit you. If you would like to find out more either pop in and fill in a form or click on the link on the website, [Theminores.org](http://Theminores.org)

I am often there doing a stint so please come and say hello.

*Julia Stephen*

Trustee of The Minories

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## **ST JOHN’S GREEN SCHOOL - SQUARE MILE PROJECT**

St John’s Green School’s Heritage Lottery funded One Square Mile project, supported by the Civic Society, is now in its second and final year. It has been a huge success so far as both children and staff learn as much as they can about the history of the square mile around their school. The project marks an important anniversary, their 125th birthday.

The first day of the Autumn Term at St John's Green School happened to fall on the 125th Anniversary of its opening day, 5th September 1898. I was invited to represent the Civic Society at the birthday celebration, a special assembly in the playground. I was so pleased to be there as it was my grandson Jimmy's first day at the school's Town Site. Previously he'd been at the new site next to Abbey Fields.

It was a very hot day. Luckily, I was seated in the shade. Suddenly, and very unexpectedly, the old school bell up in the bell tower began to ring. I found that strangely moving. The Year One children were first to appear, having walked from the new site. They were all a bit overawed. As the older children filed out onto the playground and sat down, the Year One teacher quietly addressed the little children in front of me.

'Mr Billings is going to shout at you. Please don't be frightened. You have done nothing wrong. He is just pretending.'

The children were obviously not convinced. She continued to reassure them, which was very wise as, once all the children had gathered, Mr Billings, the Head, appeared. Dressed as a Victorian Head Master, complete with an impressive false moustache, he strode up to the schoolmaster's desk that had been placed in front of the children. There was a ripple of suppressed laughter and a hint of whispers as the children fought to keep straight faces.

'SILENCE!' he roared.

We all jumped. The children looked nervous. The giggles had stopped.

'My name is Mr Cheese!'

There was a stunned, split second, silence and then a howl of mirth.

Simon Billings went on to explain that the first Head Master of the school had, indeed, been Mr Cheese. He then re-enacted the first assembly at the school, information having been garnered from the school records. It certainly was an eye opener.

Once he had finished, the children were sent to the larger playground where they stood in carefully marked out figures - 1, 2 and 5 - so that a drone could be used for a bird's eye photo. Well, that was the theory!



It was a lovely afternoon.

The children spent a day later that week exploring what it would have been like at the school 125 years ago. Dressed appropriately, they sat in rows and practised writing on a slate. When I saw the photos I felt ancient. We used slates when I started school at Hamilton Road. I had been amused by their reactions to Mr



Cheese's desk, too. They were fascinated by it. All teachers had them when I was at school! Oh dear!

Now, the School needs your help! Were you at St John's Green School? Did you live close by? Were you a member of staff? Did your children go to the school? The staff would love your memories. Please can you get in touch if you can help. Either contact the school or tell me so that I can pass your details on to them. They are really keen to hear from you.

Finally, do you have a photo or drawing of the large house, The Cedars, which was on the site of the school's Town Site before it was built? We have floor plans but no picture of the actual building. It's SO frustrating!

*Jo Edwards*

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## **CINDY GRIMWOOD**

It was with both deep shock and great sadness that I heard of the sudden death of the extraordinary Cindy Grimwood, founder of the Facebook Group, Old Colchester and District in Pictures. Only days before, she and I had been chatting. I had a book that I knew would interest her and had contacted her to arrange a time to visit her again at Stanway Green. She mentioned that she had been unwell for a couple of days so we decided to leave it a week to give her time to recover. It wasn't to be.



Colchester has lost the most amazing citizen. Cindy was a delight. She was the warmest, kindest and most thoughtful person imaginable. And she loved Colchester. It was the magic combination. Her enthusiasm and the encouragement she gave to people to share their photos, paintings, maps and memories of Colchester, both past and, indeed, present, has brought joy to tens of thousands of followers all over the world. As I told her last year, when I presented her with a Colchester Civic Society Certificate of Appreciation at a garden party at the care home where she lived, the memories shared allowed Colcestrians to wallow in nostalgia, to reunite with friends (and to make new ones) but, equally importantly, the photographs create an outstandingly valuable resource that is now used by a huge range of people - architects,

planners, historians, conservationists, nurses and care workers, particularly those working with the elderly, authors, newspaper and magazine reporters, artists, insurance companies, solicitors, students, teachers - and Colchester Civic Society!

Colchester will miss Cindy. I will miss Cindy. Very much indeed. However, the Facebook Group will continue in her memory, growing from strength to strength. Thank you, Cindy. Rest in peace.

*Jo Edwards*

## **PHILLIP RETIRED? NO, HE HAS NOT.**

On the 24th of October 2023 a great crowd assembled in the Roman Circus Visitor Centre to acknowledge Phillip Crummy's retirement after more than 50 years leading the Colchester Archaeological Trust. Your President, John Burton MBE, represented the Civic Society.

Phillip and President John have known one another for many years as John was a member of the Trust in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Before Nick Wickenden, the Trust Chairman, presented Phillip with many retirement gifts. We drank tea and coffee and attempted to eat the huge quantities and variety of cakes prepared in house for the event. Wine and beer also flowed in some circles.

Phillip, in his excellent, quietly spoken lecture mode led us through his years of studying, digging and battling to ensure the outstanding archaeological evidence of Colchester past was correctly recorded and interpreted. His talk, almost a lecture, was supported by excellent slides, jogging many memories for most of us present. In the early days he met Sir Mortimer Wheeler, and we were treated to a picture of these two great archaeologists chatting together. Wheeler died in 1976. Phillip reminded us he is a Scotsman and only intended to stay for the first dig he worked on in Colchester before he returned to his roots. Unfortunately, his skills and knowledge was soon recognised, and the role of Director of CAT was soon his. It sounded as though he still has a yearning to return to Scotland when he completes all the work in Colchester, his adopted City.

Phillip's talk ended with the ceremonial cutting of a splendid cake, which we all enjoyed despite, by then, being full of sandwiches and cakes, and, for some, wine and beer.

Chairman Nick gave a wonderful vote of thanks for Phillip's talk on behalf of the assembled crowd. The usual retirement gifts of books, cheques etc were topped by the presentation of a Blue Plaque recording Phillip's work. Whilst it broke all the Society's rules on Blue Plaques, it was greatly appreciated by Phillip.

John had a conversation with Phillip about his retirement and came to the conclusion it was simply a time when his salary ceased whilst his work would go on. Phillip confirmed he had many items of work to complete. A quick look at the CAT web site since his retirement will show you all that Phillip is still undertaking his daily archaeological news. He is going to be a hard act to follow. He must stay in our city as a source of knowledge held in his head and bones about our city's history both discovered and to be disclosed in the future.

*John Burton*

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## **A CELEBRATION OF JONATHAN PENROSE**

Dr Jonathan Penrose OBE was born in Colchester and dominated British chess in the 1950s and 60s. On 7 October 2023, on what would have been his 90th birthday, public chess tables by the Mercury Theatre were officially opened for play. The day was warm and sunny but that could not have been guaranteed, so the opening event for the "Jonathan Penrose Chess Park" had been planned for Colchester Town Hall.

The event was the idea of Steve Cawley, who served as the leader of Colchester Council during the 1990s. As a chess player he had taken part in the 1991 Culver Centre Chess Challenge, when the then British Chess Champion, Grandmaster Julian Hodgson, came to Colchester and played chess

simultaneously against 68 players over two sessions. He still had a copy of the certificate saying he lasted 31 moves!

Duly named the Jonathan Penrose Memorial Chess Challenge, a similar “simul” was arranged and Britain’s greatest ever chess player, Grandmaster Michael Adams, came to Colchester to take on local players in aid of the Mayor’s Charities. His opponents included a strong contingent from the Colchester Junior Chess Club, for which Ruqayyah Rida and Mae Catabay both managed to draw their games against the GM; no mean feat!

Before the chess itself, the Mayor and Mayoress received members of the Penrose family, including Jonathan’s daughters Harriet and Kate and his sister Shirley Hodgson; his older brother Oliver was caught in the A12 delays on the day but eventually arrived in time to take a board in the simul.

Sir Bob Russell introduced the afternoon and handed over to Councillor John Jowers who explained why he had chosen his particular mayoral charities. A total of £910 was raised for them by the event.

John Burton spoke about the Penrose family, its notable members and connection to Colchester, in particular, through the Colchester Civic Society.

William Hartston, himself a British Chess Champion and well know author and journalist (Beachcomber in the Express) talked entertainingly of playing alongside Jonathan in Chess Olympiads and his admiration for Penrose’s achievements in both “other the board” play and, subsequently, correspondence chess. Jonathan Penrose was a grandmaster of both, ten times *British* Chess Champion and for several years the highest rated correspondence chess player in the world.

To connect the Town Hall event to the chess park opening, a correspondence chess postcard was used at the end of the speeches. A ceremonial first move in the simul was made by Shirley Hodgson, written down by Steve Cawley and walked over to the Mercury Theatre where the Mayor reproduced it and declared the Chess Park open for play; also launching a dedicated webpage on the Mercury’s website.





## REPORTS OF SOCIAL EVENTS

### Visit to St Leonards-at-the-Hythe, 15th July 2023

A large party of Civic Society members met at the Church and were greeted by the Friends of St Leonards with refreshments. We were split into 2 groups and given a tour of the building. As the church is now closed and in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust, but the Friends of St Leonards open the church weekly at Tuesday lunchtime (12.00- 14.00) and also organise a programme of events.



The building dates from the 14th century and featured heavily in the Siege of Colchester in 1648. There are many interesting aspects to the church – the wood roof in the north aisle, the hagioscope (squint) between the Lady Chapel and the choir, the main door, the upper doorway above it and the font, originally in Rowhedge church.



In the late 19th century, Canon Carter became the parish priest. He was high church and decorated the parish according to Tractarian style. Only the ornate painting on the Chancel arch survives, the rest being white-washed, but the windows are full of highly coloured stained glass images of saints, including St Leonard, St Helena and Charles, King and Martyr, all dating from the early 20th century. Very few churches have windows dedicated to the late King Charles I and the Friends of St Leonards do not know why. They are still discovering more treasures and information. Please see the article in Winter 2023 newsletter.



*Peter Evans*

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### 31st August 2023 Visit to Great Blakenham

No one can say that the Civic Society sticks to usual events, no this time we investigated the way that domestic waste is treated and disposed of. We learnt of the problems facing the industry, indeed climate change argument.

The site, a few miles west of Ipswich, does not look anything like a refuse tip and it does not smell. The owners, Suez (originally a French Water Company) went to consider trouble to make the building look if not exactly attractive then clean and respectable. Inside, it appears to be a cross between a set from an ambitious Doctor Who episode crossed with the silent film Metropolis. It is clean and the sound of machinery has been neutralised – we were issued with headphones. There were no people about. The 20 or so staff shift and sort rubbish, control the furnace constantly burning the ever arriving household waste. The main concentration of staff are in the Control Room, supervising





machinery and operations.

Our guide, Siobhan, explained that the plant deals with the household waste ( and road and pathway sweepings) of all Suffolk councils, plus the same from North Norfolk and Southend on Sea. They do not deal with recyclables like glass and plastic which can be removed and passed on for recycling, on

with what must be disposed of. Some by products can be passed on but this is the of the line, The ash from the furnace will go to land fill and after as long as 60 years, it may be possible to build on it.

Siobhan stressed that different councils work in different way. Essex still uses landfill but in Suffolk it is last resort. Each council will do things different and their recycling priorities differ. Who knew it was so complicated? Just when I thought I was recycling properly and all was going well – but things are moving, experiments are being made and there is progress.



*Peter Evans*

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### **A walk around Victorian Colchester Sunday 24th September 2023**

Our secretary, Ann Turner is a very experienced Town Guide and has already given a Georgian Tour on a very hot day. This day was kinder weather wise and it was a pleasant walk, except for the hills. We started with the Castle Park – funded by Richard Catchpool and planned by the then Town Council. (See the article on Catchpool, earlier in this newsletter giving full details), as his gift continues to keep giving. We saw two schools in the Dutch Quarter and took time to really appreciate the Town Hall, Law Courts and the Old Public Library. The West Stockwell frontage has been recently cleaned and it was fascinating to check the detailed decorations that have been included and that I did not notice before.



*Old Library, West Stockwell Street - see article on Richard Catchpool, on pages 25/26, as he contributed to the cost.*

In High Street, there were several fine Victorian building in High Street (banks, the Fire Office, the Albert Hall/Co-op Bank (once the Repertory Theatre) then, of course, Jumbo. One of our party was Brian Light, expert on all things Jumbo, and he was able to give an update. We walked back towards the War Memorial, seeing the site of the previous site of the Colchester Royal Grammar School and look a proper look at the former Colchester Co-operative Society premises in Culver Street. Of course, Ann had only been able to scratch the surface and had only visited a central area.

Weren't the Victorians busy and weren't they perfectionists!

*Peter Evans*

## SOCIAL PROGRAMME 2024

Welcome to the first instalment of the Civic Society Programme. As far as I'm aware at this moment, this is the complete programme for the first six months of the year and it provides a hint of what will follow in the late summer and autumn. I say as far as I'm aware because I am quite sure other events, particularly Council briefings, will crop up. They always do.

Please complete the reply slips and return them to me in good time. They can be posted to me at 43, Priory St, Colchester CO1 2QB or emailed to [josiemedwards@hotmail.com](mailto:josiemedwards@hotmail.com) Cheques should be made payable to Colchester Civic Society or you can pay online, in which case, please let me know on the reply slip that you have done so. Please ring me on 07771626561 or email me if you have any questions.

Last year, aware that I was not alone in my concerns about the viability of coach trips, as costs have increased exponentially, I spoke to a number of other local societies to see whether we could have some joint trips. We have decided to go for it! The first of these will be a visit to Silchester at the end of June followed by a visit to Nymans in July and Highgate Cemetery in the autumn. The latter two will be arranged by the Civic Society following members' requests. We have been to Highgate before, very many years ago. It is one of those outings that really lived in the memories of those who went. It is an extraordinary place, well worth another visit. I do try to accommodate the wishes of members but, sadly, several places that people would like to visit no longer allow tours. I will keep trying!

So here we go - or do we?

Now, as you will probably realise as you read the programme so far, we STILL haven't had any success with finding sites for two commemorative trees. Please don't shoot the messenger! It is too late to think about these for this planting season so we will attempt to sort something out for Autumn 2024. I am not holding my breath, though.

However, we are well on the way to erecting another plaque, this one to mark the site of the Lock Hospital, which stood just off Port Lane, where Falcon Crescent is now. We are also hoping to formally unveil the plaque to Catherine Marsh which we erected on the front of the CoOp Bank in High Street earlier this year. If you would like to attend either or both of the unveiling ceremonies for these plaques, please complete the relevant slips.

**Tuesday 2nd January 2024.** Meet at Greyfriars Hotel at 10am for the first Coffee Morning of the year.

As I have mentioned before, 'Coffee Morning' is something of a misnomer. Yes, we do have coffee (or tea), but this is predominantly an opportunity to find out about and to discuss what is happening in Colchester. It is an opportunity for you to ask questions, to raise matters of concern, to tell us what you would like the Society to tackle, and to praise what you think is good about our city. We are always pleased to pass on compliments!

Cost? Free, but donations welcomed.

**Monday 8th January 2024** Meet at the Town Hall at 5.30pm for our next Town Deal Briefing.

This will be the latest in our long series of briefings about both the Town Deal and Levelling Up Projects in our city, given by Council Officers. Some projects are now well advanced. Others are still in their formative stage. This meeting will provide an update on progress and the opportunity to ask questions and make observations. They do listen!

**Sunday 14th January 2024.** Meet at Greyfriars at 12:45 pm for our New Year Lunch

I do hope you will be able to join us for our New Year Lunch, the first since the outbreak of Covid. You will find the menu, hot off the press, enclosed with this Newsletter. Please make your choices as soon as possible as I have promised to let the hotel have them in advance.

Cost? Please see menu. Please note that there will be no charge for side dishes of vegetables and tea/coffee.

**Tuesday 6th February 2024.** Meet at Greyfriars at 10am for our February Coffee Morning

Cost? Free, but donations welcomed.

**Tuesday 5th March 2024.** Meet at Greyfriars at 10am for our March Coffee Morning.

Operations permitting, this meeting will be attended by members of the City Centre Policing Team who will be happy to update us on the work they are doing and to answer any questions that we have. The last time they came, they gave us an extraordinary insight into their work, which members found both fascinating and very useful. We hope that, in future they will attend once every six months.

Cost? Free, but donations welcomed

**Tuesday 18th March 2024** Meet outside Greyfriars at 10am for the first of our Great British Spring Clean sessions.

Every year we take part in the Keep Britain Tidy Great British Spring Clean initiative, collecting huge amounts of litter and general debris from the streets and open spaces around the city centre. Please join us. Please wear suitable old clothes and shoes and bring gloves. Other equipment will be provided. We will return to Greyfriars at the end of the morning for refreshments.

**Tuesday, 28th of March 2024** Meet outside Greyfriars at 10am for our second Great British Spring Clean

Please see above for details.

**Tuesday, April 2, 2024** Meet at Greyfriars at 10am for our April Coffee Morning

Cost? Free, but donations, welcomed.

**Thursday 11th April 2024** Meet outside Greyfriars at 9:30 am for a visit to Lavenham. IF YOU WOULD PREFER TO USE YOUR OWN TRANSPORT, MEET AT THE COCK HORSE INN OPPOSITE LAVENHAM CHURCH AT 10.30am. There is a huge public car park next to the pub. Remember to get a parking ticket!

Pam Pudney, Civic Society member and highly qualified Tour Guide (she is a Colchester Guide, a London Guide and an East Anglian Guide!) has very kindly offered to give us a tour of the beautiful little town of Lavenham.

We start our day with morning coffee at the Cock Horse Inn before crossing the road for a visit to the magnificent Lavenham Church with its stunning tower. After a tour of the church, you will be free to find lunch in one of the many cafes or pubs before we regroup at the main door of the Swan Hotel for a tour of the fascinating and picturesque 'Wool Town'. Even if you think you know Lavenham, you will find out more! There will be time to find a quick cup of tea before departure at about 4pm.

Numbers are limited so please book early. Transport from Colchester will be provided by the Community 360 minibus.

Cost? If you want to travel by minibus £16.00 to include morning coffee. Using your own transport, £4.00 to include morning coffee.

**Monday 15th April 2024** Meet in the Salon, just off Reception, at Greyfriars at 7pm for our Spring Up Meeting.

Very conscious of the fact that many of our members are unable to attend our day time Coffee Mornings, we offer two evening versions each year, one in the spring and the other, our Burning Issues meeting, in the autumn. If you want to find out what we are up to or raise issues of concern about matters affecting Colchester, please join us.

Cost? Free but donations welcomed.

**Sunday 21st April 2024** Meet at Cannock Mill in Old Heath Road at 2.30pm

This will be our second attempt at a visit to Cannock Mill and its associated co-housing scheme. We did arrange a visit for summer 2023, but everything conspired against us and we had to postpone. Hopefully all will be well this time because it is rather special! We have been invited by Civic Society member, David York, who lives at Cannock Mill in one of the Passivhaus Standard co-housing properties. What is the Passivhaus Standard? Passivhaus properties have such rigorous energy efficient design standards that they maintain an almost constant temperature. I could certainly do with one of those at the moment!

We will be given an introductory talk about both the lovely old mill and its history and about the community and their homes. The mill itself is an historic watermill, now used as the hub of the community, beautifully maintained and converted into functional social spaces whilst retaining many original features. The mill was used at different times for both grinding flour and as a fulling mill. The original mill featured in maps in 1311 and was completely rebuilt in 1845 as an overshot mill fed by three iron pipes from an embanked pond. We can explore the mill, see the millpond and, for those who are interested, we will be able to tour some of the very comfortable, very low energy homes. The mill has a lift and accessible loos and level access to adjacent flats.

We have even been offered tea and coffee! Nice!

Cost? Free

**Tuesday 7th May 2023** Meet at Greyfriars for our May Coffee Morning.

Cost? Free but donations welcomed.

**Saturday 11th May 2024** Meet at the Essex and Hertfordshire Air Ambulance Visitor Centre at the Earls Colne Airfield at 10.25am to find out all there is to know about the Air Ambulance Service. Postponed by COVID, and then by a clash with other events, hopefully this will be third time lucky! This long planned guided visit will include a mix of films, narrative and interactive features (If flashing strobe lights are a problem for you, please let our guide know when you arrive). The Earls Colne airbase is home to the McDonall Douglas 902 helicopter which we will hopefully see, operations allowing. The centre is wheelchair accessible. Refreshments can be bought from a nearby kiosk. It really is an incredibly interesting visit, really worth the effort! I have been asked to give you the following information.

**Directions:** Our postcode is CO6 2NS. Once you drive onto the Earls Colne Business Park, drive forwards and you will see a sign showing that you can turn left for the Essex & Herts Air Ambulance Office and right for the Essex & Herts Air Ambulance Airbase. Choose the right-hand route for the Airbase and follow the road around to the right. Drive on for some distance and then on your left you will eventually come to our Airbase. Our Visitor Centre is at the Airbase. Please try not to be late or you might miss the start of the Tour!

## **Earls Colne Airbase Safety Rules**

Whilst on site please ensure everyone in your group is aware of the following safety rules

You must always adhere to instructions given by our crew, staff and volunteers whilst with us, and in the event of an emergency please follow instructions given by EHAAT crew, staff and volunteers or North Weald airfield staff, and make your way to the emergency meeting point at the entrance to our car park, or as directed

Do not enter any restricted areas, unless permitted by and accompanied by a member of Essex & Herts Air Ambulance crew or staff

Due to this being a live medical and aviation base there is the possibility of contamination and injury from equipment and waste materials. Therefore, please refrain from touching anything (in the unlikely event you are in a crew area) unless permitted to do so

Children are welcome but remain the responsibility of their parents/carers at all times. Please keep your children with you

We operate a no smoking policy throughout our airbase sites

Alcohol is forbidden

Please wear the high-vis vest when instructed, and protection glasses need to be worn whilst watching the helicopter take off or land

All rubbish **MUST** be disposed of properly in the bins provided (rubbish and other debris can cause severe damage to aircraft and cause operations to be grounded)

In the event of the helicopter being called to an emergency, you **MUST** watch from a safe area so please follow instructions given by our staff and volunteers. Always walk and never run, you will have enough time to move to a safe viewing point

Cost? Free but please give generous donations to keep the wonderful Air Ambulance flying. I would prefer donations to be sent to me with your booking form so that I can incorporate them in a Civic Society cheque, but if you wish to make a donation on the day, please feel free to do so. **IF MEMBERS WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A DONATION EVEN IF THEY ARE UNABLE TO COME, PLEASE SEND IT TO US AND WE WILL INCLUDE IT IN OUR DONATION.**

If you need or can offer a lift, please let me know asap. If necessary, I can arrange minibus transport for this visit. Please let me know if you would like me to arrange this and I will. The cost ph will be about £10.

**Wednesday 15th May 2024** Meet at the Museum Street Park Gates at 6pm for a Tree Walk in the Castle Park

Join Diana Hargrave from Friends of Castle Park Colchester on a walk around the park to learn a bit about our 9 different species of oak tree and other trees that catch our eye as we pass along the way. The walk will last approx 1.5 hrs.

Access: note:- two of the oak trees are accessed via a path with some steps. There is an alternative, flatter, route but it does miss out these two trees.

**BOOKING IS ESSENTIAL** as places are limited to a maximum of 15 participants per walk.

Cost? Free but donations to Friends of Castle Park welcomed. They would, I know, also love you to join if you are not already a member!!

**Tuesday 4th June 2024** Meet at Greyfriars at 10am for our June Coffee Morning.

Cost? Free but donations welcomed.

**Monday 10th June 2024** Meet in the Cloisters at Greyfriars at 7pm for our Annual General Meeting.

The present Civic Society held their inaugural meeting in the Moot Hall on Midsummer's Day 1964 so this AGM will mark our 60th Birthday - well, almost! It therefore seemed appropriate to invite St John's Green School to tell us about their superb One Square Mile Project as this was designed to celebrate their 125th Birthday.

Cost? Free, but donations welcomed.

**Saturday 29th June 2024** Meet at the bus stop outside Greyfriars at 9am for a visit to Silchester.

This, as I mentioned in my preamble, is the first of our experimental joint outings with new partners, in this case FoCAT, the Friends of Colchester Archaeological Trust, who are organising the visit, and the Essex Society for Archaeology and History.

We will be visiting Silchester, the Roman town near Reading. Silchester had its origins as Calleva, a centre of the Iron Age Atrebatas tribe from the late 1st century BC. After the Roman Conquest of AD 43, it became the large and important town of Calleva Atrebatum. Unlike most Roman towns, it was never reoccupied or built over after it was abandoned in the 6th or 7th century, so archaeological investigations have given an unusually complete picture of its development. The complete circuit of the Roman walls, some of the best preserved town defences in England, and the remains of the amphitheatre still stand. Today we will be lucky enough to have Mike Fulford as our guide. Mike is Professor of Archaeology at the University of Reading and he has undertaken several excavations on the site.

Arrangements for this visit are still being made and full details will be available in our next Newsletter. I understand that the cost is expected to be around £30 but that will be confirmed nearer the time. It would be extremely useful to know whether you would like to join this visit so please complete the slip if you are interested.

**Wednesday 17th July 2024** SAVE THE DATE, please, as this will probably be the one for a visit to Nymans.

I am still trying to arrange a visit to this National Trust property near Haywards Heath. The National Trust, rather sniffily, describes Nymans as 'a convincing creation of a medieval manor house remodelled in the 1920s and now a partial ruin.' It is actually rather lovely. However, probably its real charm lies in its gorgeous gardens, which is why we will hopefully be joined by various local gardening groups! I am determined to start running coach trips again! It won't be cheap, I'm afraid, particularly if you are not a NT member. I haven't fully costed it yet but I suspect it will cost a good £30 for NT members and £47 for non members. I can do nothing to reduce those prices, I'm afraid. If you are interested in the visit, can you please let me know on the reply slip. No obligation!

**Sunday 28th July** Meet at St James the Great Church on East Hill, probably at 2pm

Again, this is a save the date situation as plans are still being made for a visit to this beautiful church. More details in the next Newsletter.

## The objects of the Civic Society are to:

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

### CURRENT OFFICERS

PRESIDENT

**John Burton** MBE

VICE PRESIDENTS

**Right Reverend Roger Morris**, Bishop of Colchester  
**Austen Baines, John Egan, Rosemary Jewers**  
**Brian Roach, Henry Spyvee**

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