



# **The Friends of Colchester Museums**

*Registered Charity No: 310669*

## **Winter Newsletter 2024**

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For up to date news and information, please visit the website for

The Friends of Colchester Museums

**[tfocm.org.uk](http://tfocm.org.uk)**

# CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Autumn series of lectures and two outings have taken place, ending our 75th year since we were founded. The talks were of a good standard, but attendance has been noticeably lower

The Friends of Colchester Museums welcomes new members. If you have friends who you think would be interested in joining, you can direct them to our website for more information and an application form. If they would prefer a paper application form and copies of our newsletters, please contact Roy Anderson, Membership Secretary, or any other officer of the Friends. (see details inside front cover)

We have agreed to give £5,000 towards repair work at the Natural History Museum, and will be contributing towards the purchase of a gold torc; more details of this when the price has been finalised.

A6 handouts with copies of the posters for talks were printed and left for people at talks to take and pass on to friends who may be interested. Many have been taken, with what effect is uncertain but ongoing publicity is important. It is hoped that the Castle Museum and Hollytrees may be willing to display posters where people can take one, but space is very limited in both of these places.

The website is now being run by Yvonne Abrams, and is looking good.

Our programme of evening lectures for the oncoming year has been planned; further details follow in this newsletter and the full list is printed on the back page. Outings will be arranged and details announced at talks and in the Spring newsletter.

As in previous years, we will be helping to fund the Open Event at the Castle on 11th December. All friends will be welcome to join us from 3pm.

On behalf of the Committee, I wish all of our members a happy Christmas and a happy year ahead.

*Ray Cantrell*  
Chairman



# TREASURER'S TOPICS

Your membership card for 2025 is enclosed.

Some members still have to amend their standing orders to reflect the increased rates from 2023. If a standing order amendment form is enclosed, PLEASE pass it on to your bank or amend it online as soon as possible.

A big thank you to all members who have completed a Gift Aid form. In 2023/4, we recovered £3,917 from HMRC going back to 2019 and two further claims will be filed this year. If you pay tax and have not yet completed a gift aid form, it is very easy. Once you have completed the form there is nothing further for you to do - we claim gift aid based on what you have actually paid. We can backdate claims to 2020.

If you attend our talks regularly, you can buy a season ticket for £20 covering all 12 lectures, with a saving of £4 on lectures. You can order using the subscription form.

I have now completed an account of the history of The Friends to cover the story of the last 25 years. The full account can be found on our website and a more concise version appears on pages 29-30 of this newsletter.

*Peter Evans*

Hon Treasurer



## **STOP PRESS**

We are proposing to hold afternoon lectures (probably two) in 2025. This is a trial to find out what interest there is in afternoon events as we are aware that some members find it difficult to come in the evening. The usual programme of evening lectures will not be affected. More information to follow on this.

*Ray Cantrell*

# COLCHESTER MUSEUMS REPORT

## Buildings and Exhibitions. And Christmas!

*The Joy of Puppetry, Thunderbirds and Co.* gave us healthy visitor figures throughout April and May. The installation of *Gaia* from mid-July has also been very popular, so much so that we decided to extend this to 6th November taking in the October half-term. The Castle team are very sad to see her go after so long.

*Gladiators*, our last major exhibition, is set to tour in partnership with the British Museum. Renamed *Gladiators of Britain*, it will travel to four venues around the UK, starting at Dorset Museum from January 2025. This will no doubt raise the profile of Colchester, especially as the travelling exhibition features the Colchester Vase.

Colchester Castle Museum is currently showcasing a remarkable artefact with deep ties to the city's medieval past: *The Bodleian Bowl*. This historical object, associated with the medieval Jewish community in England, will be on display until 27th January, on loan from The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Fuller details appear on pages 12-15 of this newsletter.

We are currently enjoying the development of a collaborative project / exhibition with the Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southampton, Daniel Whiting, to mark the 400th anniversary of the birth of Margaret [née Lucas] Cavendish. She was born at St John's Abbey in Colchester in 1623 and lived there, joining the court of Queen Henrietta Maria in Oxford, but later being exiled to Paris. You can learn more about this extraordinary woman from the article on page 25.

Work moves on with planning Colchester's next large-scale exhibition, with the working title, *Mythical Creatures*. This will explore the legends and myths around mermaids, dragons, griffins and unicorns, using the backdrop of the Castle to showcase the four creatures - along with local legends such as Black Shuck and the Bures Dragon. The exhibition will open in July 2025 and run until February 2026.

## Hollytrees

The scaffolding is up at Hollytrees and we did not find anything too grim as the roof repairs take place. All being well, this project will conclude in December, including external décor, sill repairs etc. There are plans to move forward with further smaller scale improvements to the building and displays. The building work is funded by Arts Council / DCMS MEND grant and Colchester City Council.

We will be conducting some public consultation around Hollytrees and its future museum theme. Since redevelopment in 2000 it has become a little 'confused' in its focus and we need to establish once again what we would like Hollytrees to be.

## Castle

Another MEND funding application has been submitted for the Castle wall and roof repairs; we will hear the outcome early 2025.

## Natural History Museum

Currently the tower is surrounded by netting and scaffold, due to the recent masonry fall from the tower which happened very early during the morning some weeks ago. The area in question had been on our radar for some years, but funding and building works have not been available to progress the work required. Co-incidentally, on the previous afternoon we heard that we were successful with the NLHF application for a phase one redevelopment project! This will give us 18 months to work up plans and delivery models, before a fresh application to Nation Lottery Heritage Fund for several million, supported by Colchester City Council, is required. The full project will likely take up to 2030.

When our NLHF advisor heard about the tower issues, he just said that it showed the urgency for the project!

Many thanks to the Friends for their contribution of £5000 towards the initial project. We very much appreciate your support. There will be a Castle Open Evening for The Friends at 3pm on 11th December.

## Christmas at the Castle

It's all about Christmas at the Castle at the moment, with multiple events on sale. These include our wonderful grotto in the atmospheric Lucas Vault setting, a starlight grotto, an Evening with Santa, Christmas Concert, Christmas Evening - many thanks to the Friends for supporting - and much more, including the classic performance of *A Christmas Carol*.

Do visit Events/Colchester Museums for details.

*Pippa Pickles*

Colchester Museums Manager



## **EVENING LECTURES IN SPRING AND AUTUMN 2025**

We have some very exciting lectures for members in our 2025 series, which begins in April.

Almost all are ‘Colchester-based,’ which illustrates how lucky we are to live in such an historic city with so many stories to tell. We will hear about chariot racing and the Roman Circus, the oldest Roman road, Norman Colchester, Victorian medicine in Colchester, the dreadful fate of the Cromer Express and more about theatre in our City.

Some members visited Coggeshall last summer and were enthralled by the story of Dick Nunn. We will learn more about this local character: blacksmith, activist and scourge of the Essex Police!

Many hundreds of Jewish children landed in Essex, and Harwich in particular, while escaping the Nazi regime in Germany. There is a new monument dedicated to them on the quayside at Harwich and we will hear about this as well as the children’s experiences.

Please check the back of this newsletter for more details including the AGM on 1st July which will be at 7pm. We look forward to seeing you in Lion Walk Church to enjoy these talks.

*Joy Hopkinson*

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## **TFOCM TRIPS, SUMMER 2024**

### **VISIT TO LONG MELFORD**

We were very lucky to have John Allcock as our guide for the day on September 2nd. John is a National Trust guide and knows Melford and its Hall really well. We met in the car park of Melford Hall and focused our visit on this part of the village, which boasts the longest ‘High Street’ in the UK. It is actually called Hall Street and is 2.5 miles long. He began by giving us particular insights into the history of the Hall, which is still a family home. Most notable was the fire in February 1942, started by careless officers, that destroyed the North Wing and necessitated massive rebuilding works. Other ranks were housed in Nissan huts in the parkland, so not to blame.

Standing on the large green gave us a wonderful view of the 16th century Hall, the church and the almshouses in front of the church. We learnt about the thriving wool trade in the 17th century. Holy Trinity church is one of the large wool churches in East Anglia and the only Suffolk church to have been awarded the maximum five stars in Simon Jenkins’ England’s Thousand Best Churches. The almshouses are more correctly known as the Hospital of the Holy and Blessed Trinity. They were founded 1573 and restored in the 1800s.

Crossing the Chad Brook, which is a tributary of the River Stour, we admired the Old Mill which has been restored and is now a prestigious Bed and Breakfast.

The village has 100 listed buildings including Brook House, grade 2\* listed, built in the 1460s with superbly detailed brickwork; it was the White Hart Inn in the early 17th Century. The beautifully timbered and well-known Bull Hotel has featured in many television programmes and films. In fact, Long Melford is one of the most photographed villages in England.

Our visit concluded with an excellent lunch in the Long Melford Tea Rooms, further along Hall Street.

*Joy Hopkinson*



*The Bull*

*Brook House*





# **EVENING LECTURES AUTUMN 2024**

## **Colchester Medical Society, 250th Anniversary - (ii) (3rd September)**

An outbreak of smallpox led to buildings for 16 people being completed at the Black Notley site in 1904 and subsequently sanatorium open air care for tuberculosis was provided here. After the World War interrupted progress, a new facility was opened in 1930. Patients were treated in open air wards, under a canvas roof.

By the end of the 1930s a new extension was built, enabling Notley to offer schooling for young patients and provide a maternity unit, where babies could be kept with their mothers for six months. It was now a leading facility, with a waiting list for admission of up to six months.

During the Second World War, the hospital offered an emergency medical service and treated as many as 70,000 casualties through extraordinary teamwork.

The hospital went on to specialise in orthopaedic and rheumatic treatments; however, the opening of Colchester General in 1985 signalled a decline in patient numbers and Notley closed in 1998.

Having been a consultant orthopaedic surgeon at the hospital from 1974 until his retirement, Richard Todd spoke with unique authority; and tonight's audience included a number of former Notley patients!

*Michael Connell*

## **The Life of Charles Haddon Spurgeon (17th September)**

In a very informative talk, Peter Tervet told the story of England's most famous preacher. Born in Kelvedon, Charles Spurgeon moved to Colchester, where in 1850 he was converted at the Barrack Ground Chapel, having sheltered there during a heavy snowstorm.

When he became an unpaid minister at Waterbeach Baptist Church, the congregation increased from 40 to 400. In 1854 he was appointed at New Park Street Chapel in London and despite some opposition there was, once more, a rapid growth in attendance. Spurgeon often preached in other locations to large crowds: at the Crystal Palace there was an audience of over 23,000. He became minister of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, built to accommodate 6,000 people.

Spurgeon was outspoken about the inequalities of rich and poor and an opposition to slavery led to his sermons being burned in America. He preached to perhaps 10,000,000 people, produced 63 volumes of sermons and wrote 135 books. Spurgeon's College continues to train Christian leaders.

His sermons, easily found online, are still read throughout the Christian world.

*Ray Cantrell*

## The Braintree Hoard and Late Saxon Essex (1st October)

The Braintree Hoard is a collection of 144 silver coins from the reigns of Edward the Confessor (1042 - January 5th, 1066) and Harold II (January 5th, 1066 - October 14th, 1066). There were also three silver coins from Byzantium. None from William the Conqueror appear; coins of his reign were not produced until early 1067 and therefore the Hoard can be fairly confidently dated to Autumn 1066. So there is a mystery as to why these coins were hidden but never retrieved: did their owner go off to fight in the Battle of Hastings and never return?

Coin hoards are a source of evidence for late Saxon England, alongside architectural evidence such as the tower of Holy Trinity Church. There are known to have been at least four coin makers in Colchester at this time.

The Braintree Hoard has resulted in a very significant increase in the number of coins of Harold II for study. It gives a snapshot of one year's coin production and contributes to our knowledge of late Saxon Essex.

Many thanks to Philip Wise for an engrossing and most informative talk.

*Mary Dale*

The Friends of Colchester Museums have contributed towards the purchase of coins from the Braintree Hoard that have been acquired by the Castle Museum.

*Braintree Hoard Edward penny*



*Braintree Hoard Harold penny*



*Photographs by Lori Rogerson, Colchester Museums*

## **Brightlingsea's Blessing and Reclaiming of the Waters (15th October)**

Roger Tabor began by explaining that the Cinque (five) Ports of Kent and Sussex were established in approximately 1155 to provide ships and men for the King's service. Brightlingsea is an associated member, a 'limb' of the port of Sandwich and strategically placed to the north of the Thames. This union of ports was instrumental in founding the Royal Navy and Brightlingsea's coat of arms reflects this, carrying three royal lions and a castle which indicates military action.

Subsequently, there was significant conflict with its larger neighbour Colchester, who had tried to insist that all Brightlingsea oysters were sold in Colchester market. However the oystermen, supported by the Lord Warden of the Cinque ports, succeeded in keeping their creek as the only independent fishery on the Colne.

The annual Brightlingsea ceremony of Blessing the Waters takes place each summer, attended by Cinque Ports dignitaries. It is effectively a beating of the bounds when a flotilla of small boats 'makes a din' and warns Colchester not to meddle with their oysters!

*Joy Hopkinson*

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## **The Colchester Roman Vase (29th Oct)**

The Vase was discovered in 1853 at West Lodge, Lexden, very close to the kiln where it was originally made. The leading Archaeologist Sir Mortimer Wheeler said that the Colchester Roman Vase was 'the best of its kind.'

This has always been an important exhibit in the Museum, but it is only now that more of its story is becoming known: the Vase contained the cremated remains of an individual whose origins were Mediterranean.

Glynn Davis, from the Colchester Museums Service, took us through some as yet unpublished discoveries. Nina Crummy, of the Colchester Archaeological Trust, has examined the illustrations on the Vase and pointed out facts about the gladiators and their armour; and the accompanying bear was possibly part of their act! Analysis of the inscriptions shows that some were made before the vase was fired.

Now, for only the third time since its discovery the Vase has left Colchester - but with the honour of a British Museum tour.

This was the Mark Davies Memorial Lecture, and Mark, who was both our former Chairman and Curator at the Museum, was an expert on Roman history. The event would have pleased him greatly.

*Peter Evans*

## THE BODLEIAN BOWL – A HISTORY

The bronze Bodleian Bowl - a global treasure and one of British Jewry's most important artefacts - is presently on display at Colchester Castle Museum until January 2025.

The bronze cauldron, which may have been used to collect charitable donations, dates to the 13th century and has an inscription in Hebrew which suggests a connection to the Jewish community in mediaeval Colchester.

The Bodleian Bowl was discovered at the end of the 17th century in a disused moat in Norfolk, almost 300 years after the expulsion of the Jews from England, and for a long time it remained shrouded in mystery.

Bequeathed to the Bodleian Library in Oxford in 1755, this is the first time the Bowl has returned to Colchester, considered to be its original home.

The display marks a revisiting of the relationship between Colchester and its Jewish Community during the medieval period. Ownership of this bowl would have been a dangerous admission, as it would have identified its owners as Jewish at the time of the community's expulsion from England in 1290.

The Bodleian Bowl measures about 25 cm, or ten inches in height, and weighs in at a hefty 5 kg. The Bowl has a long Hebrew inscription encircling the rim and



is decorated with hoof-shaped feet, birds, flowers, stags and fleur-de-lys.

This inscription is a tantalising mixture of abbreviations and missing letters, but it has been translated by the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford as: "This is the gift of Joseph, the son of the Holy Rabbi Jehiel - may the memory of the righteous holy be for a blessing - who answered and asked the congregation as he desired in order to behold the Face of Ariel."

The Bowl's decoration and its connections with France reflect the origins of the Jewish community in medieval England which came originally from Rouen in Normandy. French Jews began arriving in England soon after the Norman Conquest, encouraged by William the Conqueror who was keen to foster trade between the two countries.

For the next century the Jews flourished in the east of England with communities in many towns including Colchester, Norwich, Lincoln and York. They played a vital

part in the economic life of the country in the main occupations which they were permitted to practise, and which were forbidden to Christians.

The Jewish community in medieval Colchester may have spoken a form of medieval French, and frequently took French names: Rabbi Joseph of Colchester was also known by the splendid name of Messire Delicieux.

Property deeds and other documents have revealed that Joseph was a leading member of this community in the 13th century. He was the eldest of the three sons of Rabbi Yechiel of Paris, a leading Talmudic scholar in 13th century France and head of the renowned Paris yeshiva, a place of Torah study.

Joseph had spent some time in prison (it is not known exactly for what) and on his release made a vow to emigrate to the Holy Land, an intention he began to realise in about 1257.

Before his departure, Joseph put his affairs in order, transferred his property in Stockwell Street, Colchester to his brother Samuel and presented the Bowl as a gift to the local Jewish community, who had possibly raised money to fund his journey. He left England in 1260 and travelled on to the Holy Land. He died there and is buried not far from Haifa at a graveyard at the foot of Mount Carmel, alongside many other eminent rabbis.

By the time Rabbi Joseph left Colchester in 1260, the Jewish community was sunk in poverty and despair. The ban on Christian usury had been lifted and the Crown, under whose protection Jews were permitted to live and work, now had less reason to defend its Jewish citizens

On 18 July 1290, just 30 years after Joseph had departed for the Holy Land, Edward 1st issued an Edict expelling the entire Jewish population from the country in return for a huge grant of 150,000 marks to support his war against the Scots. Any Jew remaining in the country after All Saints' Day, November 1st, of that year did so on pain of death. Up to 16,000 Jews, including the Colchester community, fled to the continent, returning to northern France or to Poland where Jews were still legally protected.

Colchester City Councillor Natalie Sommers said the Bodleian Bowl's return to the city "not only explores the lives of mediaeval Jewish communities in Colchester, but also underscores the positive relationships they had within our city."

Experts at the Colchester Museum are showcasing the Bowl to honour Colchester's diverse history and to deepen understanding of the role the Jewish community played in that era.

*Anne Sherer Broom*

## THE BOWL RETURNS TO COLCHESTER

In 2014 Colchester Castle reopened its doors, having undergone a major redevelopment. As part of this, a new display was incorporated into the ground floor gallery which showcased a significant coin hoard that was found just off the city's High Street.

Known as the 'Colchester Hoard,' it is one of three lead canisters once filled with coins found buried in the city. Although the most recently discovered canister in 2000 was empty, the other two hoards, found in 1902 and 1969, contained thousands of silver pennies produced in the mid to late 1200s. Some of these coins were put on display alongside the canister to give an idea of the sheer quantity found.

In an attempt to produce an inclusive display, one of the proposed theories of the hoards - that they might have belonged to Jewish moneylenders - was put forward in the interpretation. Despite the fact that there is no evidence who the owner was, let alone their religious or cultural affiliations, this was the message put forward by the museum for several years.

Over that period, several complaints were received from the Jewish community, stating that the display perpetuated a stereotype and should be altered. Furthermore, there were also many jobs involving large amounts of money that were held by non-Jewish people that could be associated with these hoards. The myth of Jewish people exclusively holding roles relating to money, both in the medieval world and in the modern day, has long been discredited and is simply used now to reinforce stereotypes and promote antisemitism.

After becoming a curator at The Museums in 2016, I reached out to the Colchester and District Jewish Community (CDJC), through their website, to see what could be done. Working with Rachel Howse Binnington, the museums altered the text of that display admitting that they don't know who the original owner was, and stating that they continue to work with local communities to better understand our past. It was at this point that we realised, having done this, that there was now no mention whatsoever of the Jewish community in any of our museums.

After some research into the history of this community in Colchester, I came across the Bodleian Bowl. The significance of this object locally, its national importance as an object reflecting medieval Jewish history and its fascinating discovery story made it the perfect candidate for a spotlight loan.

In June 2022 I had an informal chat with Dr Eleanor Standley at the Ashmolean about the possibility of loaning the bowl to Colchester for a display. She was incredibly supportive, but mentioned that, due to a provisionally agreed loan to the Faith Museum in 2023, we might have to wait a while before it would be possible to

actually have the bowl on loan. Recognising the importance of this arrangement, I submitted a formal proposal to the Ashmolean, suggesting a date of Autumn 2024. This was eventually agreed and work began to produce what would become the display currently in Colchester Castle.

Initially it was going to simply be the Bowl on display in a single case. However, the local community's response was so supportive that we ended up with an additional small case containing images, documents and objects relating to the modern Jewish community in Colchester, as well as an interactive screen with many images and audio recordings from the local community. This has also led to plans for local ceramic artist, Pam Schomberg, to produce a response to the bowl in her own style, which the museum will be acquiring.



The intention of this display was to highlight the lack of collections that we have representing the Jewish community, with the hope that people might come forward to share stories and objects that they or their friends and relatives have that might fit within the museum's collection.

If you have something you think might be of interest to the museums and would be willing to donate it, please contact [Collections@Colchester.gov.uk](mailto:Collections@Colchester.gov.uk). For more information about the display, please contact [Ben.Paites@Colchester.gov.uk](mailto:Ben.Paites@Colchester.gov.uk).

The display will be running until 27 January 2025, with some additional activities and events relating to the Bowl taking place over that period.

*Ben Paites*

Collections & Learning Curator  
Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Champion.  
Colchester Museums

## THE POST-WAR EVOLUTION OF THE NOTTAGE MUSEUM, WIVENHOE

From 1947 onwards, the Nottage's new home on Wivenhoe Quay offered a huge opportunity to expand a new idea for offering classes in traditional boatbuilding, classes which have continued to this day. At this time the majority of the boatbuilding students were aiming for a career in boatyards and shipyards and initially all worked on building one large dinghy. But, as the years passed, the format changed to each student building their own 10-foot dinghy. This course soon became attractive to recreational yachtsmen and dinghy sailors, who now form the student group for this course, which runs on alternate Saturdays throughout the winter. Other classes in a steadily widening range of nautical subjects were offered in the main room upstairs and, in 1951, lectures on subjects of a general nautical interest began to be offered on Friday evenings. These continue to this day, attracting members of the "Friends of the Nottage" - a group of local supporters of the Institute, whose annual subscriptions offer them free entry to the lectures.

Around the time of the move to Wivenhoe Quay, a growing number of artefacts, photographs and paintings were being donated to the Institute. These reflected the extensive maritime heritage that the village had developed over many years, with its history of shipbuilding and the crewing of large and successful racing and cruising steam and sailing yachts. This was the start of the Institute's steady widening of its remit to include the custodianship of this important maritime heritage.

A library was started in 1953 with an initial purchase of 70 reference books for the students; this had grown to over 300 volumes by the end of 1958. The library was originally created to aid the development of professional sailors who previously learnt entirely 'on the job,' and also to improve general literacy. The stock mainly consisted of books on all aspects of seamanship including navigation, yacht racing, ropework, and sailmaking. Over the years, with the change from sails to steam and motor and the formation of the museum aspects of the Nottage, the coverage has expanded. Nowadays it exists to complement the courses on offer for amateur sailors and boatbuilders, allowing reading around a subject, and to help museum staff, volunteers and visitors with enquiries on maritime history, with a particular emphasis on East Anglia and the Thames Estuary. The library now holds over 2700 books, including some valuable reference and historical titles. The Nottage relies heavily on book donations to the library, so borrowing facilities are open to local residents as well as course members.

Due to the great changes which had occurred in social and economic conditions after the 1939/45 war, the overwhelming majority of people coming to the Nottage were amateur sailors and weekend yachtsmen. Despite this, all courses and lectures



remained completely free of charge, as they had been since fees were abolished in the Depression period of the 1930s. The Institute had been entirely funded by income from the Trust. However, as the years went by, inflation and changing interest rates resulted in rising fees payable to instructors, day to day running costs and the upkeep of the premises. This necessitated a reappraisal of policy as expenditure steadily overtook income and modest fees had to be re-introduced. In 1978 RYA and Department of Trade 'Shorebased Sail' courses for Certificates of Competence were added to the other classes. This expanded syllabus resulted in the Nottage offering the most comprehensive programme of maritime studies in East Anglia, with the wide range of courses being mostly offered as evening classes over the winter. Student numbers in the 1970s were around 100, rising to over 200 in the early 1980s. Now, in the 2020s, student numbers lie in the 50 to 90 region over each winter teaching period, with course fees set as competitively as possible, but with the overriding requirement that the Institute should continue to fulfil Captain Nottage's instructions that accompanied his bequest.

Alongside its activities as a teaching centre, the Nottage has developed another role that may not have been expected at the time of its formation, but which has grown over the years to become a valuable addition to the Wivenhoe community: its museum. Over the decades the Nottage has built up a large and unique collection of artefacts and nautical memorabilia, much of it related to the maritime heritage of the region



and the village and its shipbuilding and yachting history. Initially, the museum items were donated by local professional sailors and ship builders and their families - many being items relating to the yachting and shipbuilding history of the village over the past 150 years. These include ship and yacht paintings, photographs, tools, books, models, navigational equipment and artefact items from the local shipyards of Wivenhoe and Rowhedge, including the half models that line the walls of the museum. Members of the Management Committee and Trustees over the years have also acquired items from yards that closed, such as the builders' half models, plans and records of the ships and yachts built by the yards, including the Cooks Shipyard, Wivenhoe's last shipbuilder. Wivenhoe's links to successful yacht racing via its generations of captains and crews have also generated a source of donated artefacts as well as a fascinating story to be kept alive and told, with the links to the royal sailing yacht 'Britannia' being its most impressive. The majority of items are

on display, but many records and some artefacts are kept in an archive, as a record for future historians and researchers.

In recent years the Nottage has developed its website and online presence, allowing greater access to the story of the Nottage and what it can offer as a teaching centre, museum and atmospheric venue for assorted events, meetings and exhibitions. As a registered charity with a large building to maintain and limited access to income, the Management Committee is mindful of the need to move with the times and keep generating income streams and interest to the visiting public. As sailing and the acquisition of maritime skills have evolved over the decades, courses and teaching methods have had to evolve to keep offering the development of the skills that Captain Nottage wanted. Likewise with the museum, where the special exhibitions and displays and information on offer have been upgraded and expanded to keep Wivenhoe's maritime heritage alive and of interest to new generations of locals and visitors. The museum collection is on display throughout the year and the main exhibition room lends a special atmosphere to the venue for classes, meetings and other events held by local groups. The Nottage also supports the thriving Wivenhoe artistic community and there are additional exhibitions of local artists' work on display throughout the summer. Access to the museum and these exhibitions has always been free.

The activities of the Nottage can be viewed as falling into two distinct areas: its educational remit, as defined by Captain Nottage's legacy, and the Institute's custodial responsibilities that have grown over the years as its museum collection of Wivenhoe's maritime heritage has grown. Over these areas sits the responsibility of keeping the Nottage going - maintaining its prime directive of "instructing yachtsmen and other sailors in the science of navigation." This responsibility is undertaken by the volunteer group of Trustees and Management Committee, who steadily adapt the courses to modern demands, initiate fund-raising programmes and find ways of attracting visitors to its museum and to the exhibitions which help to draw them into the building. The Nottage has been keeping alive traditional nautical skills and passing them on for nearly 130 years and has taken on the role of looking after and celebrating the impressive maritime history of this Essex village. Long may it continue to do so!

*Richard Barnard*

From May to September the Nottage museum and library are open to the public on weekends and Bank Holidays from 1pm to 4pm.

[www.nottage.org.uk](http://www.nottage.org.uk) for further information and details

# CHARLES DICKENS AND COLCHESTER

From *The Chelmsford Chronicle*, Friday 8th November 1861

Mr Dickens' reading at Colchester on Friday evening: this talented gentleman, universally known in the literary world by his popular and amusing works, gave a reading at Colchester Theatre: *Nicholas Nickleby* at Mr Squeers' School and the trial scene of Bardell v. Pickwick from *The Pickwick Papers*.

The theatre was filled in all parts by between 700 and 800 persons, the dress circle in particular containing a brilliant

assembly, particularly of ladies. Mr. Dickens inimitably sketched the inhuman character of Squeers the schoolmaster of Dotheboys Hall, his unfortunate pupils and Nicholas Nickleby. The other piece was the speech of Sergeant Buzfuz where the breach of marriage case elicited roars of laughter and applause.

The reading was pecuniarily successful to Mr. Dickens and highly satisfactory to the audience.

And, more than 150 years later, our own talented gentleman, Mr Anthony Roberts of The Arts Centre, will be eliciting applause from audiences in Colchester and its surroundings with his performance of *A Christmas Carol*, a show that he has been performing since 1998. Unlike readings, he's committed the whole book to memory and delivers it without a script. He says it's like a long, beautiful poem. And, in contrast to Mr Dickens, this performer will not pocket the profits: all proceeds will be given to Charities.

*Michael Connell*

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• Christmas only really starts for me when we start performing our little version of  
• Dickens' classic story '*A Christmas Carol*' around Colchester. With Jamie Cunliffe  
• playing piano, and me doing the words we bung his electric keyboard in the back  
• of the car and head off to the village halls and churches around the district.

• All the shows are fundraisers for local charities and local causes ranging from  
• Headway to Open Road, the Foodbank and The Scouts. It's the gift of Colchester  
• Arts Centre to our local communities for Christmas.

• ***Bah Humbug!***

• *Anthony Roberts*

The show lasts 1hr 45 mins (including a 15 min interval). Appearances are in Colchester as follows:

### **November**

29th Colchester Methodist Church

### **December**

2nd (Eve) Colchester, St Leonard's at the Hythe Church

7th Colchester, North School

8th (Afternoon) Colchester Castle

16th Colchester, Refugee Action

21st (Afternoon) Colchester Samaritans

23rd (Eve) Colchester Arts Centre

24th (Eve) Colchester Arts Centre

Other venues are in: Ardleigh, Assington, Belchamp, Bures, Clacton, Coggeshall, Frinton, Great Bentley, Hadleigh, Harwich, Little Cornard, Manningtree, Nayland, West Mersea, and Wivenhoe.

Ticket enquiries for all events - call Anthony 07814 695998



# THE EAST ANGLIAN RAILWAY MUSEUM

## Cause for Celebration.

or

## A year of Anniversaries.

At a time when The Friends of Colchester Museums is celebrating its 75th, this year marks the 175th anniversary of the railway that still runs a daily service between Mark's Tey and Sudbury. Special events included a ceremonial re-enactment at Chappel of the opening of the line.

For those unaware, Chappel Station and its remaining Victorian buildings have formed the backdrop to the East Anglian Railway Museum for over 50 years. These have evolved to tell the history of not only the Sudbury branch-line, but many evolutionary aspects of our rich rail heritage and its impact on communities and social economics from inception through to the modern day.

One of the iconic features that is now part of the landscape is the adjacent, monumental Chappel Viaduct, whose construction in the 1840s must have put fear into the hearts of the local agricultural population at the time, when 500 navvies turned up to build it and the line! Ranking as the biggest brick-built structure in East Anglia with 32 arches, 1066 feet long, 75 feet above the A1124 and utilising 7 million bricks, its construction changed the countryside forever. But nowadays the viaduct is taken for granted by many who pass under or over on a daily basis and don't give it a second look.

The recent 175th Anniversary celebrations, hosted by the Museum, paid tribute to this marvel of Victorian architecture, which was captured in a series of paintings by a local artist Waj Mirecki. And participating local schools exhibited in the old Victorian Goods Shed, which is a key feature of the station's once busy freight handling links, dating back to a time when everything went by rail.

Historically, the Museum was formed in the late 1960's when the infamous Dr Beeching had produced a report on the viability and profitability of Britain's railway network, and many thousands of miles of railway were shut down. The whole line from MarksTey to Cambridge via Sudbury (plus associated branches from Halstead to Haverhill and beyond) were all due for the axe. However, after some protestations from higher ranking aficionados and local opposition, the section to Sudbury was reprieved. What also put the damper on proceedings was a technicality identified within the closure application and while they argued over this, the fuel crisis hit in 1973.

The original concept had been to take over part of the line further towards the Cambridge end, but this had been unceremoniously and hastily dismantled. As a result, the infant organisation, then known as the Stour Valley Preservation Society, moved to Chappel Station and its Goods Yard. This of course became the East Anglian Railway Museum, confined to operating trains in the Yard where we may not go far or fast, but we do give you a flavour of travel from a bygone age. Since then, the Museum has become home to a vast collection of vintage steam locos and vehicles ancient and modern from all backgrounds and ages.

Over more recent years, there is an increasing awareness that a cultural and demographic change is taking place, where the skills necessary to support complex locomotive rebuilding are in decline, and our emphasis is beginning to change more to conservation rather than restoration. In support of this, the Museum is currently engaged in heavy construction of new and enhanced visitor facilities in the shape of an exhibition hall.

A replacement Heritage Centre will unlock and enhance so many displays and interpretative elements. Some of our locomotives and vehicles are of particular regional interest and were icons in their own right back in the day, but more of this to come in a future newsletter!

*Peter Martin*

Chair of East Anglian Railway Museum Trustees



## JUMBO HOSTS A PERFORMANCE!

To further demonstrate its versatility and potential, our iconic Grade II\* water tower hosted a sequence of concerts this autumn. The Roman River Festival joined with North Essex Heritage to offer a special opportunity to see the city from the unique perspective of Jumbo's water tank while enjoying an intimate performance of poetry and music. There were three performances for an audience of 30 at a time, who were extremely enthusiastic about the use of Jumbo for this event and looked forward to it being used more often, despite the limited capacity and steep ascent.

Anthony Roberts selected the best received poems that he had sent out during Covid lockdown, pieces that he believed had most connected him with the outside world at a difficult time. He was accompanied by Orlando Jopling, cellist and Artistic Director of both Roman River Festival and Wild Arts, who chose music which reflected the same mood, or rhythm of those poems. This was so effective in these atmospheric surroundings that a member of the audience was heard to say they were more moved by the musical experience in Jumbo than they were on a recent pilgrimage to Compostella!

Anthony told the Newsletter: *Reading poetry in the water tank of Jumbo was quite an experience. First thing was to get my breath back after all the steps to get up there. I'm sure it wasn't foremost in the Victorian engineers' thinking to create a wonderful acoustic for spoken word and cello when they constructed the tank – but that's exactly how it turned out. It worked perfectly.*

And it was quite an achievement for Orlando to carry his cello up and down those 157 steps!

The North Essex Heritage Trust has been developing its plans to restore and convert this unique Victorian landmark and the aim is to produce a commercially viable operation. An exhibition space would detail the history, engineering and use of the water tower as well as highlighting the historic and contemporary issues of water supply. The Jumbo Project would also see the building run as a destination venue,



visitor experience and historical interpretation space, and these concerts are a taste of what could happen in the future.

This venue has some extraordinary qualities and let us all hope that the new applications for funding and development succeed so that residents and visitors will be able enjoy Jumbo to its full potential.

Orlando Jopling and his team are currently planning concerts in Colchester and the surrounding area for 2025, which will mark the 25th anniversary of the Roman River Festival. There will be some special events planned for performance in heritage venues, some familiar and others not used before.

If you would like further details, please go to:

[www.wildarts.org.uk/roman-river-festival](http://www.wildarts.org.uk/roman-river-festival)

Programmes for the Spring, Summer and Autumn will be announced from February 2025

*Michael Connell*





# HOLLYTREES MUSEUM

## Margaret Cavendish Exhibition

Accompanied by characters from her novel, *The Blazing World*, this exhibition will explore Margaret's extraordinary life and writings.

The exhibition opens in February 2025, with funding from, and in collaboration with, the University of Southampton. Our grateful thanks go to Prof. Daniel Whiting for his in-depth research and support.

Margaret Cavendish was born in Colchester in 1623. The youngest child of Sir John and Elizabeth Lucas of St John's Abbey, sister of Sir Charles Lucas, she described herself as "dull, fearful, and bashful." Yet Margaret became one of the most prolific female authors in Europe.

At a time when women published a tiny percentage of books, often anonymously, Margaret published more than a dozen in her own name, encompassing poetry, plays, stories, letters, speeches, biographies, and more. She was the first woman to publish science and philosophy in English. In one of the earliest science fiction novels, Margaret portrays female characters having freedom, power, and intellectual authority unavailable to most women in the 1600s.

Her science fiction novel, *The Blazing World*, was published in 1666.

It is a remarkable story of interplanetary travel, alien creatures, and future technologies. A kidnapped "Lady" escapes capture, voyages to another world, and reaches the city of Paradise. She is made Empress and discusses politics, religion, science, and philosophy with an array of extra-terrestrials, including 'Bear-Men,' 'Fish-Men,' 'Bird-Men,' and 'Spider-Men.' Later, Margaret joins the Empress as a character in her own novel. Together, they travel back and forth between worlds as disembodied souls.

There is no conflict in the *Blazing World* - it has "one sovereign, one religion, one law, and one language". However, the Empress learns of war back home. She instructs giants to build ships that travel underwater, wins the war, and becomes "Absolute Monarch" on Earth.

In 1648, Margaret's brother, Charles Lucas, was executed at Colchester Castle for leading the Royalist defence of the town. St John's was ransacked, and the family vault at St Giles' Church was desecrated.

Themes of war and peace, order and conflict run throughout Margaret's writings. She wrote, "There is nothing so miserable, hateful, cruel, and irreligious as civil war".

Margaret was a celebrity in her lifetime. Her clothing style asserted her individuality and challenged social norms. As a youth in Colchester “addicted” to fashion, she designed her own outfits. As an adult, Margaret visited a London theatre in a costume with bared breasts and wore velvet caps and knee-length coats typically worn by men.

Samuel Pepys, who kept a diary recording major events of the day, reports one hundred children running to catch a glimpse of Margaret in her carriage in London.

“Though I cannot be Henry the Fifth, or Charles the Second, yet I endeavour to be Margaret the First.” (The Blazing World, 1666)

A blue plaque in tribute to Margaret Cavendish is on the site of St John’s Abbey

*Pippa Pickles*



## HERITAGE OPEN DAYS 2024

This year, Heritage Open Days took place between Friday 6th and Sunday 15th September with Colchester's contribution concentrated on the two weekends. In total, there were 46 participating venues or guided walks. This is the same number as in 2023 and maintains the increase seen in the period since the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020 which saw 38 in 2022 and 29 in 2021.

The total number of visitors was 6,925. Although slightly below the figure of 7,550 seen in 2023 this can be explained by the fact that last year Firstsite participated in the festival, contributing 1,799 visitors. If this figure is subtracted, then the 2023 total is only 5,751. Indeed, this year probably provides a more accurate picture of the popularity of Heritage Open Days in Colchester. Exceptional events in the two previous years, the death of HM Queen Elizabeth II just before the start of the festival in 2022 and the heatwave on the first weekend in 2023, may have skewed the figures to a certain extent.

As in previous years, there was a mix of venues, some having opened regularly for Heritage Open Days for some while and others being new to the event. Amongst the long-standing venues were St John's Abbey Gatehouse, the Roman Circus, St Leonard-at-the Hythe and the Town Hall. New for 2024 were The Brewhouse (7 Queen Street), Hollytrees Museum, the University of Essex and the East Anglian Railway Museum. The Roman Walk and the guided tours of Gosbecks Archaeological Park were led by new guides. The festival continues to extend beyond Colchester city centre with events taking place in Dedham, West Mersea, Wivenhoe, Boxted, Wakes Colne, Great Wigborough and Copford.

This year the Castle had 2,622 visitors, up almost 28% on the figure of 2053 last year. Amongst the venues which had very good figures (up on 2023) were the Town Hall, St Mary's Church in Wivenhoe, Grey Friars and St Botolph's Church and Priory. Both the Roman Theatre and St Leonard-at-the Hythe Church had significantly more visitors on Sunday 8th September than the comparable day last year. The visitor figures for Holy Trinity Church almost doubled, reflecting the public's interest in this remarkable building. Less successful were St Giles Masonic Centre and the tours of Colchester Cemetery, with numbers slightly down.

Visitor comments included the following:

*'Opening sites like Colchester Castle for free on Heritage Open Days is an invaluable experience for those, like myself, who live in the local community, because they can learn more about the rich history and heritage on their doorstep. Its vital as well for local businesses who benefit from the tourism from outside the area that the free entry days bring.'*

'I felt privileged to see how the co-housing project works (at Cannock Mill). Meeting the residents and seeing how the conversion of the mill had been done a truly interesting visit. Thanks to Heritage Days.'

'Fantastic event (at Greyfriars Luxury Hotel and Restaurant). The guide was amazing. He had so much knowledge and enthusiasm. Every question that he was asked by the group he was able to answer.'

In 2025, Heritage Open Days will be from Friday 12th to Sunday 21st September. As ever, I am always very interested to receive ideas for new buildings or activities.

*Philip Wise*

Heritage Manager

*Bourne Mill*



*The interior of St John's Orthodox Church (The former Garrison Church)*



*Photographs by Philip Wise, Colchester and Ipswich Museums*

# FRIENDS OF COLCHESTER MUSEUMS AND ART GALLERIES

## A TASTE OF OUR HISTORY 1999-2024

### **The complete version of this survey appears on The Friends' website**

In 1999, when the Friends of Colchester Museums celebrated 50 years since its foundation, membership was 178 single members and 175 couples; and our balance at the bank was £11,052. The Chair was Andrew Phillips, Honorary Secretary Patrick Denney and Barbara Napper the Hon. Treasurer, who was retiring after 25 years' service. I succeeded her in 2000, Barbara being made a Vice-president. Soon after, I made our first claim under deeds of covenant, the scheme that predated Gift Aid, and so received sums back from the (then) Inland Revenue, now HMRC. Since then, The Friends have been able to claim more than £10,000 from Gift Aid and put these funds to good advantage.

Amongst the long serving committee members were Leonard Drinkell, a founding member and Andrew Millar, who recently left a bequest to local charities, which included The Friends. His generosity has provided us with a sound foundation for a further 25 years.

The Friends had changed by this time from the original format of meals and meetings - all seemingly very formal - to a more relaxed style of 12 lectures, held in the Charles Gray Room in the Castle Museum, and two summer excursions. There were occasional special evenings in the Castle as well, celebrating new exhibitions. This is a pattern of activities that would be familiar to current members.

The talks were very popular and numbers attending were increasing. Andrew and Patrick were able to find excellent speakers, usually on local history subjects, who had often contacted them for help and advice. Museum Staff often offered talks and Andrew and Patrick were joined by some other regulars. Admission was £1 for members and £2 for non-members.

As attendance and membership grew, it was possible to help the Museum more, usually by purchasing items for the collections but also by supporting exhibitions and, on one occasion, buying a computer. There was always a good relationship with the Museum team, by this time including Peter Berridge, the manager, Tom Hodgson, and Philip Wise. There were close contacts with Philip Crummy at the Colchester Archaeological Trust. This pattern of regular support for purchases - too many to mention, but including the Shrine of St Helena from the Colchester Pageant of 1909, a gold watch made by Nathaniel Hedge, a Constable sketch of St Botolph's and, most recently, medieval coins from the Braintree Hoard. A strong working relationship with Colchester Museums has been a characteristic of our organisation throughout these years.

In 2013 the Castle Museum closed to allow improvements to the Castle Gallery to develop visitor facilities and displays. This was a major Lottery funded project and the fact that the Friends provided £30,000 in support (over 3 years - our biggest single contribution to the Museum) helped the Museum to prove to the Lottery authorities that it was well supported locally.

Andrew Philips retired as Chairman and was succeeded by Mark Davies, formerly General Manager of the Colchester Museums. Mark had excellent links with the Colchester Archaeological Trust and the Essex Society for Archaeology and History, both of which he had chaired, and other local groups.

In 2014, prior to the re-opening of the Castle, after the completion of the project, a private Royal Visit from HRH Princess Anne, the Princess Royal, took place, guided by Tom Hodgson from the Museum Service. Mark Davies, representing the Friends, was presented and proudly showed her a display cabinet that we had purchased. Other committee members were able to watch, along with the Lord Lieutenant and other dignitaries, as HRH and Tom Hodgson toured the new galleries, but had to keep a respectful distance.

Mark was succeeded by Patrick Denney, but after he left the Committee in 2020, the Covid crisis hit the country. The Friends had to temporarily halt all normal activities but Peter Jones, as Chair, saw the Society through the crisis. Live lectures were cancelled but a programme of Zoom talks, facilitated by Patrick Denney, was very popular.

More normal activity has now, thankfully, resumed and The Friends are combining the established programme of talks, visits and newsletter articles with more contemporary features such as the website. As you will have read, greater flexibility in the timing of talks is being proposed and, as ever, we want to move forward to provide the very best for our members for the forthcoming years of our history.

*Peter Evans*  
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# Gill Birds End of the Year Quiz

1. John Beeche, the Abbot of St. John's Abbey, was hanged on December 1st, of which year?
  - A. 1509
  - B. 1539
  - C. 1569
2. On November 19th, 1857, the first one penny newspaper in Essex was published. What was its title?
  - A. Halstead Gazette
  - B. Essex Telegraph
  - C. Essex County Standard
3. The last episode of "*Birds of a Feather*," based in Chigwell, was broadcast on the 24th December in which year?
  - A. 1995
  - B. 1998
  - C. 2003
4. Which famous actress was born in Essex on the 28th December 1934?
  - A. Eileen Atkins
  - B. Vanessa Redgrave
  - C. Maggie Smith
5. In the song "*The Twelve Days of Christmas*" how many ladies dancing were there?
  - A. 8
  - B. 9
  - C. 10
6. Chris de Burgh's Christmas hit "*A Spaceman Came Travelling*" was released in what year?
  - A. 1975
  - B. 1978
  - C. 1980
7. When is National Eat a Red Apple Day?
  - A. November 14th
  - B. November 22nd
  - C. December 1st
8. Which season starts on March 1st in Australia?
  - A. Spring
  - B. Summer
  - C. Autumn
9. St Erkenwald, a Saxon prince who was described as the most holy man in London is commemorated on what day?
  - A. November 5th
  - B. November 14th
  - C. December 12th
10. What was the name of the Townsend Thoresen ferry that sank leaving Zeebrugge on December 19th, 1987?
  - A. Herald of Free Enterprise
  - B. Spirit of Free Enterprise
  - C. Flying Enterprise

Answers on page 15



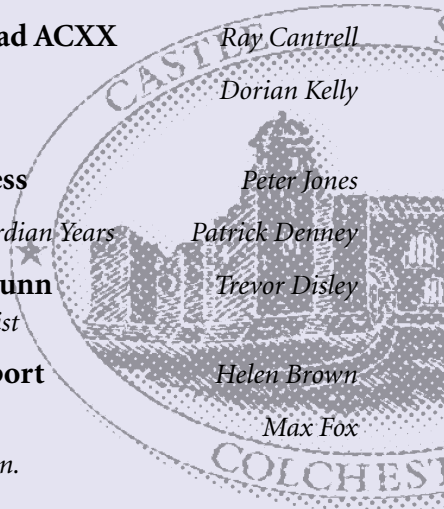
# THE FRIENDS OF COLCHESTER MUSEUMS

## Spring & Autumn 2025 Lecture Series

£2 per talk (£4 for non-members)

**EVENING LECTURES at Lion Walk Church – Tuesday at 7.30 pm**

<b>8 April</b>	<b>Chariot Racing/The Roman Circus</b>	<i>Richard Bale</i>
<b>22 April</b>	<b>A Quantum Leap into the Past</b> <i>A new vision of our Roman City from East to West</i>	<i>Max Fox</i>
<b>6 May</b>	<b>Colchester's Oldest Roman Road ACXX</b>	<i>Ray Cantrell</i>
<b>20 May</b>	<b>Theatre in Colchester (part 2)</b> <i>Lost but not forgotten</i>	<i>Dorian Kelly</i>
<b>3 June</b>	<b>The Story of the Cromer Express</b>	<i>Peter Jones</i>
<b>17 June</b>	<b>Colchester Memories</b> <i>The Edwardian Years</i>	<i>Patrick Denney</i>
<b>1 July</b>	<b>AGM at 7pm</b> followed by <b>Dick Nunn</b> <i>The Coggeshall Blacksmith and activist</i>	<i>Trevor Disley</i>
<b>2 Sept</b>	<b>Harwich and the Kindertransport</b>	<i>Helen Brown</i>
<b>16 Sept</b>	<b>The Gods and Colchester</b> <i>from Pagan Deities to the Reformation.</i> <i>The sites of lost religious buildings.</i>	<i>Max Fox</i>
<b>30 Sept</b>	<b>Victorian Medicine</b> <i>Inquests in Colchester</i>	<i>Dr Jane Pearson</i>
<b>14 Oct</b>	<b>Colchester's Roman Circus</b> <i>New plans for the rebuilding of the starting blocks of the Roman Circus</i>	<i>Francis Terry</i>
<b>29 Oct</b>	<b>The Mark Davies Memorial lecture</b> <i>Norman Colchester</i>	<i>Philip Wise</i>



Further information from Joy Hopkinson, Programme Secretary  
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