



The Friends of Colchester Museums

Registered Charity No: 310669

74th Annual Report 2023-24

&

Autumn Newsletter 2024

OFFICERS

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

The Friends of Colchester Museums

tfocm.org.uk

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO THE AGM, 2ND JULY 2024

The Deputy Mayor of Colchester, Councillor Mike Lilley, was welcomed by Ray Cantrell. Councillor Lilley then chaired the meeting, as the Mayor was unable to attend.

Having been re-elected for 2024-25, Ray Cantrell reported to the Meeting:

This has been a successful year, following the pattern of previous years. I have been very fortunate to be able to rely on an experienced and capable committee.

The programme has followed the usual pattern, except that to make best use of daylight there were seven talks in the spring and five in the autumn. We have had a range of good talks, with three outings planned - one already having taken place and two to come.

During the year we have helped the Museums with several acquisitions. These include:

Donation for work on historic theatre posters

Donation towards the purchase of coins from the Braintree Hoard

Conservation work on a sketch of St Botolph's Abbey by John Constable

Agreement to purchase a Globe by Will Teather, previously on short term display in the Museum. This will be in memory of Andrew Millar, who served The Friends of the Museums for many years and left us a generous legacy.

Agreement in principle to give money towards the purchase of a Bronze Age gold torc from Mistley (broken but still of great interest), and for the purchase of a medieval silver pendant found at St Osyth

The Membership Secretary, Roy Anderson, was able to tell the meeting that The Friends' membership is as follows:

237 single members.

161 couples

46 families

7 honorary members

1 life member.

Under Michael Connell's editorship the newsletter has continued to be produced in its enlarged form. Contributions are welcome, though with no guarantee that all will be included.

We are pleased to report that Yvonne Abrams has joined the committee and has taken responsibility for running our website.

We are sorry to report that Harry Carlo has stood down from the committee for health reasons, and that Sir Bob Russell has resigned from being a Vice President.

Alan Skinner, although no longer on the committee, is running a Facebook site for us, which is much appreciated.

The Friends of Colchester Museums will be delighted to support the Mayor's themes for the year:

- Fostering tolerance and understanding
- Breaking down preconceptions
- Building a safe space for all.

Ray Cantrell

Chairman

After the AGM there was a talk: 'The Taylor Maids, the story of Ann and Jane Taylor and "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star,"' by Peter Jones, with Nicola Werenowska.



TREASURER'S TOPICS

Some members who pay through their bank by standing order have not amended the amount payable since subscription rates increased in 2023. A reminder is enclosed for those who need to take action. PLEASE correct the instruction to your bank and pay the amount underpaid.

Thanks again to all members who have completed a Gift Aid declaration so that we can claim money from HM Customs and Revenues. If you have not completed a form already, please let me know and I will send you one. It is quite painless and will cost you nothing.

Peter Evans

Hon Treasurer



TREASURER'S REPORT

Accounts 23-24

THE FRIENDS OF COLCHESTER MUSEUMS - ACCOUNTS 2023-24

Charity Registration number 310689

Income and Expenditure account

INCOME	2023-24	2022-23	EXPENDITURE	2023-24	2022-23
Subscriptions	£7,678.50	£8,106.50	purchases Note 2	£12,764.00	£3,383.00
gift aid	£3,917.86	£16.55	less Colbron fund	-£805.60	
lectures	£870.41	£980.20	and Fulford bequest	-£4,724.11	
Donations	£497.00	£1,055.83	net purchases	£7,234.29	
Interest	£3,866.53	£1,033.56	Operating Expenses	£2,647.48	£2,899.19
Trips	£598.00		Subscriptions and Insurance	£235.00	£175.00
NatWest Compensation (Note1)		£100.00	(British Assoc. of Friends of Museums, and British Association of Local History)		
			Events - Christmas		
			Open Evening	£0.00	£112.00
			Museum Contribution	£1,700.00	£1,423.80
			in lieu of admission		
surplus of Expenditure over income			Surplus of income over expenditure	£5,411.55	£3,299.65
	£ 17,228.32	£ 11,292.64		£ 17,228.32	£ 11,292.64

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31st MARCH 2024

ACCUMULATED FUND

Balance b/fwd	£41,699.83	£38,400.18
Surplus/loss the year	£5,411.55	£3,299.65
total	£ 47,111.38	£ 41,699.83

Reserves

A. Millar bequest Note 2	£ 40,325.54	
B Colbron fund		£805.60
Fulford bequest		£4,724.11
Roman Wall (Note 5)	£4,901.02	£4,901.02

CREDITORS

Payments for 2023 Trips		£1,140.50
season tickets 2024	£220.00	£160.00
Colchester Recalled		£100.00
Colchester City Council	£ 1,535.80	£ 1,535.80
total	£ 94,093.74	£ 55,066.86

NET CURRENT ASSETS

BANK		
Current Account	£9,172.77	£8,812.42
Building Society	£84,920.97	£46,254.44
total	£ 94,093.74	£ 55,066.86


£ - £ -

£ 94,093.74 £ 55,066.86

Notes – numbers brackets

1. Compensation awarded due to delay in creating an online bank account at Nat West
2. Bequest received from the late Mr Andrew Millar
3. Purchases 2023/4 ; Advertising posters £110, coins from Braintree hoard £5680, Constable drawing £4420 and conservation expenses for Constable drawing and other items
4. Colbron Fund was used towards purchase of Braintree Hoard and Fulford bequest for Constable drawing
- 5 Funds received from the Friends of the Roman Wall

Signed,
Peter Evans, FMAAT, Hon. Treasurer

Signed, 
Roy Anderson, Hon. Auditor

COLCHESTER MUSEUMS REPORT

The Castle

In January, a small but delightful Constable display was installed, followed by *The Joy of Puppetry, Thunderbirds and Co* at the end of March. This gave us a flying start, with healthy visitor figures throughout April and May. The installation of *Gaia* in mid-June bumped up figures again, resulting in the first four months of the financial year seeing over 22,500 general visitors to the Castle and an additional 8,700 school children and students. Income expectations are challenging this year, perhaps due to cost-of-living issues, so we are hoping to see a continuation of this upward trend.

Guided tours are ever popular, with almost 11,500 visitors choosing this option. We are fortunate to have a very enthusiastic public-facing team who facilitate so much of a range of activities, such as school 'residentials' and family sleepovers.

The partnership with Market Field SEND College continues, involving work-experience placements for students with additional needs aged 16-19 looking at life beyond education. September will begin the third academic year that we have supported this incredibly rewarding activity.

Our major exhibition, *Gladiators, a Day at the Roman Games* was the result of much research and collaboration, including the securing of loans from The British Museum and other museums across the country. This was of such quality that a partnership touring exhibition with The British Museum has been developed, the first time that a touring event has been co-curated by this museum and the lending partner. Titled *Gladiators of Britain*, it will see several of Colchester's iconic objects, including the Colchester Vase, tour to four venues across the country, starting at Dorset Museum from January 2025.

Colchester Castle Museum is to showcase a remarkable artefact with deep ties to the city's past: the Bodleian Bowl. This remarkable object, associated with the medieval Jewish community in England, will be on display from 27th September 2024 to 27th January 2025, and is on loan from the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. The display aims to highlight a lesser-known aspect of Colchester's history and foster a deeper understanding of Jewish life in the region in the Middle Ages. Working closely with the contemporary Jewish community in Colchester, the museum seeks to explore and celebrate this important cultural heritage.

Regarding building works, another application to the Museum Estate and Development Fund (MEND) is almost ready to submit. We have met with Historic England twice this year, in addition to visits in 2022 and 2023, and we have their support for the application. We will learn of the outcome early in 2025.

All of our three historic buildings – the Castle, Hollytrees and the Natural History Museum – have been surveyed again recently and we are working closely with conservation architects to ensure that the work planned is in accordance with strict guidance.



We must also say thank you to the Friends for generously funding the acquisition of Will Teather's Globe artwork. This was one of three globes produced by Will which were displayed in Colchester, and this is now hanging above the well area in the Castle.

Hollytrees Museum

A funding application to MEND was successful, which will allow essential repairs to the roof to start imminently; scaffolding is now in place and we're hoping that nothing too grim will be discovered as works get under way. All being well, this project will end by November, with plans for further smaller scale improvements to the building and displays.

General visitors were up by approximately five hundred on the previous year at the end of the financial year 2023/24. Schools' numbers increased by over two hundred, and almost doubled the previous schools' income.

Developments have included *Empire, Hidden Histories* which explores stories behind some objects on display at Hollytrees Museum linked to the British Empire. These include an exploration of Victorian interests in Eastern design and the events that led up to India gaining independence. There is also a focus on the history of enslavement and the dividing up of Africa, processes which, abusing the needs of indigenous peoples, were designed to bring prosperity and luxury to Europe.

We consulted with local groups from the Bangladeshi Women's Association Essex and the Colchester Chinese Culture Society, to ensure that the displays reflected those voices and views.

Natural History Museum

General visitors were up by almost 2,500 on the previous year.

We submitted a Lottery Heritage Fund application for funding a redevelopment project for the Museum. Although unsuccessful during this round, we received further good advice and recently resubmitted the bid. We will share the information received as soon as we can.

Collections

In addition to the academic focus on our outstanding Roman resources that appears below, The Friends might like to know that Dr Kristian Heal, from Brigham Young University in Utah, visited the Museum to research a very rare medieval religious manuscript written in the Syriac language once spoken across a wide area including Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. The manuscript is a translation of the Bible by Thomas of Harqel completed in 616 AD and known as a result as the Harklean version. Our manuscript is a lectionary, a collection of scripture readings intended to be read aloud in churches.

Dr Heal is now publishing an article on this manuscript, entitled *Another Harklean Lectionary: Colchester Museum 1932.228*, and has written: ‘In 1932, Colchester Museums acquired their sole Syriac manuscript, dated to 1220 CE. Despite the brief notice published in that year’s annual report, the manuscript has received no academic attention, and there was only a rumour of its existence among Syriac scholars. In this article, I will introduce the manuscript, describe what is known of its acquisition history, and provide a full catalogue description.’ It will be fascinating to discover more about yet another precious resource in the Museum’s collection.

Pippa Pickles

Colchester Museums Manager

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ROMAN COLLECTIONS AT COLCHESTER – NEW RESEARCH

The Roman archaeology collections of Colchester Museums have been recognised as being of national significance since 1998 when they were awarded Designated status by the Museums and Galleries Commission (now Arts Council England). In recent months there has been an upsurge in interest in these collections and their potential to reveal new information about life (and death) in both Colchester and Britain. There are several collaborative research projects currently being undertaken.

The *Decoding the Dead* project assesses the Roman cremation burials in the museum collections. This project started in 2020 and continues to develop as techniques of scientific analysis evolve. Researchers at Durham University’s Department of Archaeology were recently re-sent the petrous bone samples, a tiny bone in the human ear, of twenty-one individuals to conduct lead isotope analysis. This is the first such analysis to be undertaken on Roman cremated remains from the UK. Combined with the previous strontium isotope analysis, which when undertaken was also the first instance in the UK, it will help narrow down where these individuals were likely to have been born in the Roman Empire. A case in point is the occupant of the Colchester Vase. The new analysis would suggest it is now more likely that this individual grew up somewhere in the Mediterranean as opposed to a region of Britain.



The Colchester Vase is now seen as being a souvenir of a real event in Colchester (Colchester City Council: CIMS)

This year is the culmination of four years' work into the re-assessment of one of Colchester's most important Roman objects: the Colchester Vase. The latest study has revealed that the Vase is not an off-the-shelf pot with a later inscription referring to named gladiators being added, but that the inscription is contemporary with its manufacture. In other words the Vase is a commissioned piece, recording a real combat between actual gladiators at Colchester.

The project *A veneer of Empire: decorative stonework in Roman Colchester* is a collaborative project between Colchester Museums and two leading specialists in Roman stonework, Dr Penny Coombe and Dr Kevin Hayward. This involves examining a huge collection of multicoloured marble that was excavated at the former site of

Kent Blaxill in Colchester High Street in the 1950s. This collection is the largest of its kind from anywhere in Roman Britain, representing over fifteen coloured stones sourced from across the Empire. Its re-assessment will have major implications for understanding the physical make-up of the Roman town and the economics of the Roman stone trade in the northwest provinces.

From the Cradle to the Grave: Research into Roman infant feeding bottles is a project looking at a type of Roman pottery known as a tettina. Colchester Museums hold the largest collection of these pots from anywhere in the country. New scientific analysis by Kayt Hawkins and Dr Julie Dunne hopes to establish the presence and type of fat and oil residues absorbed within these vessels to determine what foods they may once have contained. The results of their work should be published later this year.

Colchester Museums recently hosted placement student Katie Munby from the University of Reading. Katie's research is into Roman mirrors, of which Colchester Museums hold the largest examples of complete types from a single site. Katie has been analysing the metallic content of the mirrors including using X-rays.

We are also a lead partner in supporting Andrea Mobbs, a PhD student from the University of Reading, in researching Roman coffins in Britain. Andrea has used X Ray analysis as well as sampling, for chemical analysis, all the Roman coffins and lead urns or ossuaria in the Museum's collections. Her initial work has already revealed notable results such



This decorated lead coffin was found in Butt Road, Colchester (Colchester City Council: CIMS).

as the ossuaria being made of pewter, a tin-lead alloy, as opposed to pure lead. The chemical analysis of lead is some of the first undertaken for 40 years and the results will be of national and international importance.

Glynn Davis

Senior Collections and Learning Curator

Please note that the Mark Davies memorial lecture given by Glynn Davis will be on the topic *Gladiators at Camulodunum: new research into the Colchester Vase*. Further details appear on the back cover.

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TFOCM TRIPS, SUMMER 2024

After successful post-pandemic trips last year, it has been wonderful to continue our summer programme of visits to places of interest in the local vicinity.

VISIT TO HILL FARM, GESTINGTHORPE

A party of more than twenty members enjoyed a visit to this unique site on a (rare!) fine afternoon in June under the expert guidance of the owner and farmer, Ashley Cooper.

His father bought Hill Farm just after WW2. Due to weeds and crop residues, one field had to be ‘deep ploughed’, which resulted in a mass of red tiles coming to the surface, which didn’t match those used in modern roofing. Rex Hull of Colchester Museum confirmed that they were undoubtedly Roman. This was just the start of a lifetime’s archaeological work which established beyond doubt that this was the site of a Roman villa with an adjacent craft village, situated close to the road running from Chelmsford to Norfolk, via Long Melford. Later, locally produced white tiles were found, indicating that this elegant villa had a patterned roof.

For the first part of our visit, we were shown a vast array of artefacts, which showed that the site had been occupied continuously for about 400 years dating to before the Roman occupation and showing evidence of trading pre- 43AD. These had all been found on the site and testified to the busy lives that had once been lived here. Evidence included carpenters’ tools and the work of blacksmiths, including intricate keys which revealed a need for security at this prosperous location. Ashley emphasised that the variety of jewellery, in bone, metal and onyx confirmed that fashion consciousness was as important to our ancestors as in the present day. Some items, such as an ivory

cupid, showed that trading at the time was world-wide. But more practical goods, such as near-intact ceramic jars were regarded as equally exciting, as they showed that the villa and craft village could be self-sufficient in many respects.

But the most distinctive find was the top of a mould that had once been used for casting bronze statues, using the 'lost wax' process; at the time this was a unique find in Britain.

We then travelled half a mile or so to the beautifully located villa site, now a wildflower meadow with views across to the woodland that still remains in the area. The layout could still be seen clearly and its dimensions - 120 feet long by 60 feet wide - confirm that it was indeed a large-scale building of two storeys, supported by rows of substantial wooden pillars. It was at the centre of a thriving group of farmsteads, arguably as well populated then as at the time of the Domesday survey centuries later. Regular markets were also probably held here with buyers and sellers possibly travelling from as far afield as Colchester to attend. Discarded hobnails in one place are likely evidence that a cobbler regularly plied his trade on that very spot.

Ashley made the experience of standing on the footprint of a Roman villa come to life for us; the location of kitchen, bathhouse and a luxurious retiring room being pointed out graphically and entertainingly. And members were gently persuaded to take on the roles of owner, guest and slave in dramatized scenarios that revealed the extent to which personal fortunes could change rapidly and unexpectedly. We were also left under no illusion that concerns such as inflation and political strife would have been frequent topics of conversation then, just as now. An eye-opening experience.

Fittingly, the afternoon ended with hospitality and further chances for question and answer in the beautiful surroundings of the 18th Century barn that sits beside the farmhouse. Our grateful thanks are extended to our resourceful and knowledgeable host for enabling the Friends to visit and appreciate the place that his family has worked tirelessly to discover and preserve over many years.

And well done, Joy, for facilitating and organising the details and practicalities of the first of our 2024 excursions.

Michael Connell

COGGESHALL TRIP

A group of members enjoyed going to Coggeshall on the 23rd July. We first visited the town's museum and were shown around by Nic, one of the volunteers. The displays told a fascinating story of this ancient town. Because of its market, Coggeshall was granted town status by Henry III in 1256.

It was also an important staging post for travellers and an industrial centre. The museum focuses on the cultural, industrial and agricultural history of the town. The exhibits demonstrated the amazing number of industries that were thriving at any one time. At one point these included lacemaking, silk and velvet weaving, seed manufacturing, isinglass, wood carving and straw plaiting.

There were also displays of local artists, including John Carter who began painting by holding the brush in his mouth after falling from a tree and becoming paralysed.

Finally, we were shown a reconstruction of the Cistercian abbey which was built in 1140 and is now in ruins. So much to see and so many exhibits packed into such a small space!

We then walked to Dick Nunn's Smithy and Trevor entertained us with the story of Dick Nunn who defied the authorities and spoke up for working people. He was born in 1836 and took over the smithy from his father. He clearly had very strong opinions and was a born campaigner. Altogether he demolished eight cottages that he considered unfit to remain in existence, much to the annoyance of the Lord of the Manor and the police! He tried to level a steep hill as it caused hardship to both people and horses, for which he spent time in Chelmsford Gaol, and also built an iron foot bridge over the river after the wooden one collapsed. This still exists today despite the efforts of the authorities!

After lunch in a local café, Bob gave us a short tour of the town, pointing out the large number of pubs, breweries and churches that had once been there.

We all felt that we must return to this gem of a town on our doorstep and thank our friends from the museum for organising such an enjoyable visit.

Joy Hopkinson



EVENING LECTURES SPRING AND SUMMER 2024

Colchester Non- Conformists (9th April)

Non- Conformists are Christians who make arrangements away from the established Church - and Colchester has attracted them over the centuries. Indeed, the leading Methodist preacher, John Wesley, preached here throughout his life.

Many have died for their beliefs: John Ball was drawn and quartered in the 14th century for championing the poor; almost thirty martyrs were condemned and burned from 1555-58; and the Quaker James Parnell died in Colchester Castle at the age of nineteen in 1655.

Notwithstanding the hazards of declaring one's faith, a succession of non- conformists has chosen to worship in the Town. Huguenot ministers and their families fled here; Baptists of varying persuasions established themselves in a number of locations; and Congregationalists built several distinctive churches, including Headgate and the corrugated iron building in Old Heath. Colchester has a wealth of religious history on show.

Smaller churches and establishments included the Railway Mission and the Mariners' Chapel in Rowhedge and, as Ray Cantrell so eloquently showed us, Christians of many different persuasions celebrate their beliefs throughout Colchester today.

Michael Connell

Theatre in Colchester (23rd April)

There was certainly more to this topic than I expected, and Dorian Kelly opened up some fascinating insights. When Colchester grew considerably in the mid 19th century, much of the population struggled to make a living. But, needing some entertainment, they had a wide range to choose from. These ranged from disreputable 'penny gaffs' to Music Halls which could attract stars in the making such as 'Little Titch,' whose first stage performance was in Colchester. However, another performer was so bad that she was paid off on the first night of the show!

We heard of many other venues that operated into the Twentieth Century, including the Sir Colin Campbell, later The Gaiety, in Mersea Road and of a wealth of other popular entertainments, from bear baiting to roller skating! One poignant account concerned the ill-fated Theatre Royal in Queen Street, destroyed by fire in 1919.

A very interesting and entertaining evening from a recognised expert on the subject. And perhaps we can look forward to more on Colchester theatres in the future?

Peter Evans

Ringling the Changes: a history of change ringing in the 16th century (7th May)

Matthew Brown began by explaining that English change ringing is unique because of its ordered sequences and control. Elsewhere in the world, apart from former British dominions and colonies, bells are simply tolled.

He demonstrated how 'rounds' and 'changes' constitute the English style and that patterns of great complexity are integral to change ringing. Concentration and a good memory for a mathematical order, together with excellent hand eye and ear coordination are required - and a fair degree of stamina besides!

There are three churches in Colchester that have bells which are actively rung: St Peter's, All Saints' Shrub End and St Leonard at the Hythe.

Change ringing began in the early 17th century, heralding a significant increase in the manufacturing of bells. Curiously, as a result of Puritan disapproval at this time, ringing survived by separating from the church and becoming more associated with secular developments. These included discussion of mathematical concepts - so much so that enlightened young gentlemen in 18th century London took up change ringing!

A fascinating and authoritative introduction to this topic.

Joy Hopkinson

Boudica, Myth and Legend (21st May)

Richard Bale certainly knew his subject and gave a very thorough account of what is known about Boudica and what has been added over the years, often in imaginative ways.

It is not absolutely certain that Boadica (which is the correct spelling) ever existed. The word is related to "victory," and possibly the Romans heard the Iceni shouting a victory cry and thought it must be the name of the woman leading them. But a woman did indeed lead a rebellion from the land of the Iceni - Norfolk and Suffolk - against the Romans, who had made unreasonable demands following a change of emperor.

The Iceni burned Colchester, London and St Albans, before moving north and being defeated by Roman forces.

Much of the remainder of the common knowledge of Boudica was added by the Victorians, with statues being designed which had no factual basis. Even the legend that Boudica was buried under platforms 9 or 10 of King's Cross Station should not be taken too seriously...

Ray Cantrell

Colchester Medical Society, 250th Anniversary - (i) (4th June)

Dr Fabrizio Casale told us that the Colchester Medical Society, founded in the year 1774, is the oldest provincial medical society in the country, the first being founded in London in 1773. The earliest medical societies were to enable doctors to socialize and provide lectures for their members.

Colchester had the largest military hospital in the country during the Napoleonic Wars. Subsequently, this was demolished and the Essex County Hospital built. This was the first charitable hospital in the region, intended for the 'deserving' (working) poor and patients had to be recommended for admission to the hospital.

Until 1846, operations were conducted without anaesthetic. In December 1846 the first operation under ether anaesthetic in the U.K. was carried out at University College Hospital, London. The first such operation using ether in Colchester was carried out in February 1847 but, unfortunately, the patient died and the surgeon blamed this on the anaesthetic.

Many thanks to Dr Casale for a most interesting lecture, providing an insight into the history of medicine in Colchester.

Mary Dale

Colchester Voices: Wartime memories of D-Day and beyond (18th June)

Patrick Denney gave a moving talk about memories of D-Day using transcripts of the veterans' own accounts - but the most poignant were the recordings made by the people involved, expressing their own memories of their wartime service.

By the end of August 1944, two million Allied troops were in France. Very few veterans are left today, so it is exceptional that these recordings have been preserved. We were told about the struggle to get ashore at 'Gold' beach and were given graphic descriptions of the rafts and 'Rhino ferries' that were used. We heard of the heroism of many, including Sgt Palmer who managed to knock out six tanks while being fired on at close range. But, despite such feats, there is no doubt that, with many risks being taken, 'it all very nearly went wrong.'

At the 80th Anniversary of D-Day it was thought-provoking to hear these memories directly from Colchester people, from many walks of life, who were so closely involved.

Joy Hopkinson

The Taylor Maids and "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" (2nd July)

Probably everyone present knew that this poem was written while the Taylor sisters were living in West Stockwell Street. But most of us did not know a great deal more about them.

Peter Jones gave a talk full of information about this remarkable family. Isaac and Ann Taylor moved with their family to Colchester where he became minister of a church in St Helen's Lane. Ann and Jane by then were both writing children's poetry and stories.

The girls had rooms on the top floor of the house where the family lived, and it is likely that Jane saw the star through the window of that room, inspiring the poem. A book of the sisters' poetry including *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* was published in the book *Rhymes for the Nursery* in the Autumn of 1806 and was still in print a hundred years later. Of course, it is now known and sung (to a French tune) the world over.

After his talk Peter introduced Nicky Werenowska, a professional playwright who is in the process of writing a theatrical piece about the sisters.

Ray Cantrell

After attending one of Peter Jones' earlier talks, Nicky thought that the Taylor sisters' story would make a good play and work is now in the early stages. She has received a grant from the Arts Council and already had a scratch performance by professional actors at Colchester Arts Centre, with an audience of industry professionals and potential sponsors to help develop the project. Peter is acting as historical advisor, trying to ensure that the play tells the sister's story as authentically as possible.

The proposed storyline starts with the Taylor family's arrival in Colchester in 1796 and concludes in 1806 with Jane about to write *The Star*, the poem that we know as *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*. The play will be a family show with music aimed at children aged 8+ and their families.

As part of the community engagement strand of the project, Nicky and Peter have been working with North Primary School years 5 and 6, telling the children about Ann and Jane's story and what it was like to grow up in Colchester during the Georgian period. Nicky said, 'We have been surprised and pleased with the level of interest and enthusiasm shown by the children and hope that other schools might be similarly interested.'



The statue in Colchester High Street was sculpted by Mandy Pratt from Ardleigh, after a massive fund raising programme headed by Sir Bob Russell.

ST BOTOLPH'S CHURCH HAS BUT ONE BELL

St Botolph's Church means a lot to me, as I was born just a hundred yards away at 3A Mersea Road where my father had a men's and military clothes shop. I arrived in the world at 7.10pm on May 9th 1953, in an upstairs bedroom. As a small lad I could see the church every day and also watch steam rising from the trains at St Botolph's station. My grandfather first entered the church in 1913 and mother and grandmother in 1936, so for many years St Botolph's has been our family church.

But now for the bell. The church opened for worship in 1837, next to St Botolph's Priory. The site belonged to James Round and he laid the foundation stone on May 11th, 1836. The first incumbent was the Rev. C.S. Lock, who held the inaugural service in late 1837; remarkably, he remained as vicar for 37 years, until 1874.

So, the huge bell has hung proudly for all of these years. And just imagine how they got it up into the tower, with brute force, long wooden ladders and pulleys; remarkable. There was no health and safety then!

I have now been bell-toller there for three years and never missed one Sunday: it's a great honour for me to toll God's bell. On a windy day, whichever way the wind is blowing, it can be heard for a mile or more. On a still day the sound will carry all over Colchester. It's pretty hard work and some may say sweated labour - but not for me. As long as God gives me shoulder and arm strength the bell I will continue to toll and may even be allowed to make 2037, the great Church 200th Anniversary.

God Save the Bell!

William Jolliffe

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THREE ESSEX LADIES AT ST LEONARD'S AT THE HYTHE

We continue our story of the stained-glass windows of St Leonard's with a very special window.

In the centre of the south aisle three female saints are represented: St. Osyth, St. Helena and St. Ethelburga, all of whom have very close associations with Saxon Essex. Of the three, St. Helena has the closest connection to Colchester, but St. Osyth and St. Ethelburga are also most definitely Essex ladies. All three have left tangible evidence of their existence, unlike some saints who may not ever have lived at all.

The three panels in this window are particularly fine in their colour and detail; the detail in the depiction of St. Helena is remarkable. The hair of her plaits, the intricacy of her collar, her headdress and her earrings with tiny pearls attached are worthy of a second look.

St. Helena is the patron saint of Colchester, archaeology and converts and is venerated in the Orthodox, Catholic and Anglican traditions. She and her husband Constantinius were from humble backgrounds and had a son who was to become Constantine the Great. Constantinius divorced Helena in order to marry a wife more suited to his increasing political status. After his father's death Constantine converted his mother to Christianity. Subsequently Helena became an important figure in the history of the religion, making several pilgrimages to the Holy Land. There she organised the building of churches on the reputed sites of the nativity and the ascension. One of her missions was to discover the remains of the true cross of Jesus.

St. Helena's link with Colchester stems from the early twelfth century when Henry of Huntingdon and Geoffrey of Monmouth claimed that she was the daughter of the King Coel, a local monarch associated with the Colchester area. This probably originated in a number of legends from Wales and the north of England which became muddled. St. Helena's Chapel in Colchester dates from this time, so the myths soon became accepted as truth and St. Helena was established as part of Colchester's history, although there is no evidence that she ever visited our area.

In the window at St. Leonard's, St. Helena is shown with the true cross and holding three nails in her right hand. The nails are said to represent the left and right hands and bound feet of Christ. The cross and the nails are part of Colchester's coat of arms which was first recorded early in the fifteenth century but was probably designed much earlier.

St. Osyth was a Mercian noblewoman who was venerated soon after her death in 700AD. She was raised in a convent and then forced into a dynastic marriage to Sighere, King of Essex, by her father. While her husband was away on a stag hunt, she persuaded two bishops to accept her vows as a nun.

There are at least two legends associated with St. Osyth. While she was still a child, she was asked to deliver a book to St. Modwenna of Northumbria. On the way she was blown off a bridge into a river and drowned. Three days later she was miraculously revived and rose from the river still holding the book.

In later life she founded a convent near the Essex village of Chich, now known as St. Osyth. The convent became known for its exceptional piety and good works. St. Osyth herself was captured during a Danish raid and her captors tried to force her to pray to their gods and deny her own. Of course, she refused and was duly beheaded. Supposedly the body stood up, picked up the severed head and walked to her church where she knocked three times on the door before collapsing. A healing spring rose from the place where her head had fallen. It is said that she can still be seen carrying her head in St. Osyth churchyard at midnight on 7th October.

In the window at St. Leonard's, she is shown wearing a cross and with a simple crosier depicting her status as an abbess. She is reading a book, maybe the gospels, or maybe

the one from her childhood trauma. Look for the detail on the cover of the book and also the pattern in her orange cape.

Although she is not as well-known as St. Osyth or St. Helena, Ethelburga is another saint with a strong connection to Essex. The main source of information about her is Bede's Ecclesiastical History. Her brother was Eorcenwald, Bishop of London from 675-693 A.D and her father was King Ethelbert of Kent from about 589 A.D until his death in 616A.D. Before Eorcenwald became Bishop of London, he founded two Benedictine abbeys, one for men at Chertsey and a convent at Barking specifically for Ethelburga to preside over. Barking monastery was originally a site which met the needs of both men and women in separate but identical buildings. As abbess of Barking, Ethelburga held precedence over all other abbesses in England. According to Bede, during her time as abbess, she performed nine miracles which he describes in detail.



In the window Ethelburga is carrying a simple abbess' crosier as an indicator of her authority. She holds a model of a building, probably the monastery with which bears her name. The crosier is identical to that carried by St. Osyth and their robes are also similar in style and colour, though distinctly different to St. Helena's which are more sombre in colour.

These three Essex ladies are in prime position in the central window of the South Aisle of St Leonard's. Their stories are all linked to the growth of Christianity in the very early church. They are remembered particularly in this part of the East of England, with several abbeys and churches dedicated to them.

Joy Hopkinson

RECENT COLCHESTER MUSEUMS ACQUISITIONS:

Medieval Silver pendant from St. Osyth

This very unusual find was made by a metal detectorist in September 2022 near St Osyth (Treasure Case 2022 T1294). It is an incomplete silver pendant of medieval date (c. AD 1200 – 1400). The pendant is cross-shaped, cast in one piece, with three flat arms which extend from a central flat disc. One of the arms is missing, having broken at its base. The arms end in oval knobs and the upper arm has a circular suspension loop. The central disc is inscribed on one side with the letters 'AG' and on the other with 'LA'. These letters abbreviate the Hebrew phrase, Atha Gebri Leilan Adonai which translates to 'Thou art mighty forever, O Lord'. The pendant measures 1¼ inches (32 mm) long, ¾ inch (18 mm) wide and ¼ inch (6.8 mm) thick, and weighs 3.21 g.

Similar pendants have been recorded on the British Museum's Portable Antiquities Scheme database, including finds from Winchester, Irchester (Northants) and Long



Stratton (Norfolk), which carry the same inscription and are dated to c. 1200-1400. It was widely believed in the medieval period that the inscription AGLA had magical significance and was invoked as a charm against fever, giving protection to the wearer. The inscription is often seen on finger rings as well as pendants.

The purchase of this pendant has been fully funded by The Friends.

Philip J. Wise

Heritage Manager

NEWS FROM TWO WIVENHOE MUSEUMS

Wivenhoe Chapel Museum

This small museum is in a 1930s chapel in the leafy surroundings of Wivenhoe New Cemetery, located between Belle Vue Road and Stanley Road. Locals, visitors and relatives visiting family graves enjoy popping into the museum to look at pictures and artefacts from Wivenhoe's past, and chat to the volunteer curators.

Prior to 2015, the chapel was only being used very occasionally for its original purpose. Wivenhoe Town Council then obtained grant funding towards turning it into a museum, which was officially opened in May 2015. It is now run by the Council

with help from a Museum Group comprising at least one town councillor and a number of local history enthusiasts. Improvements have been made to the museum's displays to make the most of the limited space available, and new exterior signage was commissioned in 2024 to make the museum more visible from the nearby road.

Popular exhibits include a large model by Bill Ellis showing lower Wivenhoe in 1959 when the shipyards were active, and a full set of the 'Wivenhoe Collection' miniatures of Wivenhoe buildings by ceramicist Marjorie Barton. New items are frequently added - one recent donation is an historic football trophy called the Wivenhoe Charity Cup. Visitors who want to explore their Wivenhoe ancestry can view the collections of local census, parish and other records held on computer and available during most sessions.

Opening times are from 10am-1pm on Saturdays and Sundays from mid-May to mid-September. In 2024 the final weekend will be 15-16 September.

Liz Dawson

The Nottage Maritime institute

Part 1: Early Days at the Nottage

The second half of the 19th century was a period when the sport of yachting approached its peak – notably for those with the lifestyle and income that allowed them to own and run sailing and steam yachts for cruising and, in the case of sailing yachts, for racing. Gentlemen racers employed professional seamen to crew their yachts, and these yachts were regularly upgraded or replaced to keep them up to date and fast enough to win the many trophies that were available.

One such Victorian gentleman was Captain Charles Nottage, an army officer whose successful family business allowed him to indulge in his passion for yacht racing. Charles was a wealthy and well-connected gentleman; his family had settled in Essex from Glamorganshire. He was the only son of Alderman George Swan Nottage, who was a chief magistrate and the Lord Mayor of London in 1884. Charles was born in 1852 and graduated from Cambridge to become a barrister at the Inner Temple. He was a director of the London Photographic and Stereoscopic Company, which had been founded by his father and was then one of the largest companies of its kind in the world, making it the source of the family wealth. Charles was not a sea captain - he was an officer in the Devonshire Militia Artillery.



For the last fifteen years of his life, Charles' great love was yachting. He owned two yachts, *Foxhound* and *Deerhound*, both well-known and successful

racing yachts of the period. He skippered them himself and employed professional crews, mainly from Essex and the Colne-side villages of Wivenhoe, Rowhedge and Brightlingsea. Most of these sailors were fishermen in the winter, sailing traditional Essex smacks and developing the levels of knowledge and skill needed for handling vessels under sail. This made them the efficient and successful racing crews that yacht owners sought for their summer regatta season.

Charles died in 1894, leaving the then huge sum of £37,800, equivalent to around £2.5 million today. There were various bequests to relatives, friends and servants, but one reflected his respect for his crews and his wish to support them – a bequest that was to lead to the creation of the Nottage Institute. £3000 was left to four trustees for the purpose of establishing and running a teaching centre at Wivenhoe to be called ‘The Nottage Institute’, for the purpose of ‘instructing yachtsmen and other sailors in the science of navigation’. The trustees duly established the Institute in the *Lucy Dee*, a rented property next to the *Black Buoy* pub near Wivenhoe Quay, and used income from the invested bequest to fund the running of the operation.

Classes in navigation started in January 1897, being held on Tuesday, Wednesday and



Friday afternoons between 2pm and 7.15pm; the first session attracted 14 students, paying 6d (2½p) per week. Over the next few years recruitment to classes fell and in 1907 Morse and Semaphore signalling lessons were offered; in 1909 fees were dropped to 1d per session and recruitment improved.

However, the First World War brought operations to a halt and classes re-started in 1919. In 1920, following the death of Charles’ mother, a further bequest was made to the Institute and in 1921 the Trustees bought the *Lucy Dee*. For the 1922/3 season the syllabus of classes was extended to include Navigation and Seamanship, First Aid, Internal Combustion Engines and Electricity and Signalling.

Unemployed students were also offered classes for free. Wireless classes were soon added to the syllabus, joined in 1930 by Technical Drawing. During the 1930s all fees were abolished and the Nottage offered its courses free of charge, its income now being generated by the interest earned from the investments supervised by the Board of Trustees, together with donations and bequests.

Over the years students continued use the Nottage to develop their range of skills with the aim of furthering their careers at sea in an expanding variety of roles - exactly as Captain Nottage had wished. Once again, in 1939, war brought the Nottage operation

to a halt, though the building was used in conjunction with the Women's Institute for knitting activities - providing items of clothing for wartime sailors.

The end of the war in 1945 found the Nottage Institute in something of a dilemma: it was felt that the premises which had been occupied for the previous 50 years were now too small and that somewhere with greater scope was needed. This was found on the Quay,



next to the Rose and Crown pub, where a large local sailmaker's loft was available to buy; the move was completed in late 1947. The premises included a small cottage, which became the home of the Nottage Warden, who looked after the practical operation of the Nottage and its activities, while the Management Committee, made up of local volunteers, organised the running of the Institute. The Trustees, again a small group of volunteers, looked after the invested bequest from Captain Nottage and oversaw the whole operation.

The move to what would become its current home began a new phase in the story of The Nottage. The post-war years marked a societal change that was reflected in the role it would play in the education of 'sailors'. The teaching of a range of nautical skills to aspiring professionals was about to change: courses were offered that satisfied the needs of increasing numbers of leisure sailors and amateur yachtsmen and women. Sailing and small boat building were now more likely to be leisure activities rather than professions. So how would the Nottage respond to this transition?

Richard Barnard

... and the story of The Nottage Institute will be continued in the next edition of TFoCM Newsletter.

Opening hours are 1-4pm on weekends and Bank Holidays May - September

www.nottage.org.uk for further information and details

The Summer Seaside Quiz

By Gill Bird

- Which Monarch is reputed to have begun the fashion for seaside holidays?
A. George III B. George VI C. Queen Victoria
- To which Essex resort is Bradshaw referring to in his Railway Guide?
"A picturesque village in the County of Essex that has lately become known as a watering place"
A. Frinton B. Walton C. Southend
- Which east coast town had completely disappeared by the 14th century?
A. Bradbury B. Orfordstowe C. Dunwich
- When was the first UK holiday camp opened?
A. 1906 B. 1921 C. 1933
- Which Essex coast town had a spa?
A. Maldon B. Dovercourt C. Frinton
- When was the first recorded use of ice cream?
A. 1761 B. 1805 C. 1838
- How long is Walton pier?
A. 650 yards B. 866 yards C. 1025 yards
- When did the first commercial motor hauled caravan go on sale?
A. 1919 B. 1923 C. 1928
- How many people visited Clacton pier in 2022?
A. 750,000 B. 856,000 C. 950,000
- Southend got its name because it was located at the 'south end' of which nearby village?
A. Southchurch B. Prittlewell C. Eastwood

Answers on page 12

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS IN COLCHESTER

Heritage Open Days returns this September in its thirtieth anniversary year with thousands of free events and experiences. Brought to you by the National Trust, supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery and run by thousands of local organisations and volunteers, the nation's premier heritage festival brings people together to celebrate their heritage, community and history.

Here in Colchester and the surrounding area we have a programme of 45 buildings and events arranged for residents and visitors during the ten days of the festival. From Roman archaeological sites in Colchester to a Second World War airbase at Boxted, there is something for everyone. New events this year include 'Brutal but Beautiful', a tour of the 1960s architecture of the University of Essex in its sixtieth anniversary year. The East Anglian Railway Museum at Chappel and The Brewhouse in Queen Street are also participating for the first time in the festival.

Heritage Open Days runs from Friday 6th to Sunday 15th September. For more information, pick up a leaflet at the Visitor Information Centre or Colchester Castle.

Alternatively go to: www.visitcolchester.com/whats-on/heritage-open-days/

Philip Wise

Heritage Manager



Albert Sloman Library at the University of Essex (photograph: Philip Wise)

SUCCESS FOR THE CASTLE

Colchester Castle was a finalist for the Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Award category at the East of England Tourist Awards, and latterly won Bronze in the national Visit England awards for that category.

An enormous amount of work goes into continuous access improvement across the service and this was noted in receiving this prestigious award, presented at the Titanic Museum in Liverpool. There is broad encouragement to reapply this year, where we hope to demonstrate more progress made.

This photograph dates from the 1920s and comes from a collection of items held by Lewis Buckingham, whose father Walter was Mayor in 1972. It is of particular interest as it shows the Castle before the roof was added. It is worth noting that the sycamore tree was in good shape!



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The Friends would like to congratulate Philip Wise on being elected President of the Essex Society for Archaeology and History.

This is ‘The leading society that promotes and encourages the study of archaeology in the county of Essex.’

Ray Cantrell

Chairman



THE FRIENDS OF COLCHESTER MUSEUMS

Autumn 2024 Lecture Series

£2 per talk (£4 for non-members)

EVENING LECTURES at Lion Walk Church – Tuesday at 7.30 pm

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|---------|--|------------------------|
| 3 Sept | Colchester Medical Society
250th Anniversary (ii)
<i>The history of Black Notley Hospital</i> | <i>Dr Richard Todd</i> |
| 17 Sept | The life of Charles Haddon Spurgeon:
<i>Preacher and Teacher</i> | <i>Peter Tervet</i> |
| 1 Oct | The Braintree Hoard and late Saxon Essex | <i>Philip Wise</i> |
| 15 Oct | The Cinque Port of Brightlingsea:
<i>Blessing of the Waters</i> | <i>Roger Tabor</i> |
| 29 Oct | The Mark Davies Memorial lecture
<i>Gladiators at Camulodunum: new research into the Colchester Vase</i> | <i>Glynn Davis</i> |
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Further information from Joy Hopkinson, Programme Secretary

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