



The Friends of Colchester Museums

Registered Charity No: 310669

75th Annual Report 2024-25

&

Autumn Newsletter 2025

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The Friends of Colchester Museums

tfocm.org.uk

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO THE AGM, 1ST JULY 2025

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. However, Yvonne Abrams has left but has kindly agreed to continue running our website. We will also be without Bill Abbott and Chris Farndell, so as always would be glad if any members are willing to join. This involves attending about four committee meetings each year to discuss actions and policy and probably helping with some aspect of our activities.

The programme has followed what has become the usual format, except that to make best use of daylight there were seven talks in the spring and five to follow in the autumn. Joy Hopkinson has organised a range of good talks so far and further details of the autumn topics appear in this newsletter; we look forward to seeing you at these events.

Two talks will take place in the afternoon in October to trial a different format and we intend to change the autumn series next year to this timing. More details will be provided when the 2026 programme is presented to members.

I am sure that members will recognise that we have not changed our entry prices for a good while. However, given that costs have risen over the last few years we have decided to increase the entrance to our talks from £2 to £3 for members and from £4 to £5 for others; an annual season ticket will cost £30.

Our first outing, to Harwich, was much enjoyed and there are still places available on the next outing to Audley End - details for booking follow on page 10.

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

A Globe by Will Tether

Bronze Age metal hoard from Little Bentley; gold and gemstone pendant from Great Tey and a pendant from St. Osyth

A Charles Debenham painting of the Bull Inn in Crouch Street was presented at this AGM

We have recently agreed to give £650 for the purchase of a Tudor finger ring

The Friends also donated towards the cost of heating repairs at The Minories and will contribute towards the repair works at All Saints Church.

Ray Cantrell
Chairman

After the AGM there was a talk: ‘Recent Acquisitions from The Friends of Colchester Museums,’ given by Ben Paites, Collections and Learning Curator, Colchester Museums.



Our President, the Mayor, Councillor Mike Lilley presents the painting to Philip Wise of Colchester Museums



TREASURER’S TOPICS

Would you prefer to have your Newsletter by email?

For the first time, some members will receive their newsletters electronically. This saves us money as we do not have buy stamps or envelopes and can reduce the print run for newsletters. This is all very ‘green’ and environmental, but it is entirely up to the member.

If you would prefer the email version, please send me an email message or sign up at our talks in the Autumn.

Peter Evans
Hon Treasurer
peter.evans7978@btinternet.com

THE FRIENDS PURCHASE AT AUCTION

We saw in their Fine Art catalogue that Reeman Dansie were intending to sell a quantity of paintings by the local artist Charles Debenham, and noted that some were of Colchester locations. He is a well-known artist who was born in Colchester and attended Colchester Royal Grammar School and Colchester School of Art.

As designer for The Office of the Crown Agents his work included designing postage stamps, and he was also design consultant for many other important organisations.

He is well known for his paintings of landscapes and townscapes, mainly in East Anglia, and in 2006 he published a book on 50 years of Paintings and Drawings of Colchester and neighbouring towns.

The Friends agreed to attempt a purchase on behalf of the Museum, should they be interested.

Philip Wise told us: 'Charles Debenham is certainly a very important local artist and it is definitely worth considering adding some further works by him to the Colchester collection. We currently have only a handful of paintings by Debenham although his drawings are rather better represented in the collection. It may be that we are able to acquire further of his paintings by other means in the future, but in the meantime it makes sense to bid at the forthcoming auction.

Of the three works that you have identified, my view is that lot 1132 'Brewers Arms, Osborne Street' (Est £300-500) is the best one to acquire. Lot 1134 'Bull Hotel, Crouch Street' (Est £400-600) would be a good second choice.'

So, with amounts higher than the estimated price agreed, we went to the auction and registered to bid. Both of these are fine oil paintings, so we assumed that there would be considerable interest. In the case of Lot 1132, 'The Brewers Arms,' we were certainly right; it attracted bids well in excess of the estimate - up into four figures! We stayed in the chase, but the price became too steep and we conceded. Although the Auctioneer said, 'Well fought,' the fact was that we had lost the picture.

As Lot 1144 'The Bull Hotel' was a larger piece, with a higher estimate attached, we assumed that it would be another difficult process. But our bid of £360 was accepted, with little opposition, and we were delighted to be able to pass on the news to the Museum that a purchase had been made. The picture is an evocative portrayal of a town centre site from 1961, showing the layout of roads and buildings before the construction of Southway.

Philip replied: 'It is very exciting news that you were able to acquire at least one of the paintings at the auction for the museum collections. From memory, I think that the Bull Hotel in Crouch Street is regarded as one of Colchester's oldest public houses so well worth having painting of this building, particularly by such a well-known artist as Charles Debenham.'

And Glynn Davis, Senior Collections and Learning Curator added, ‘Great news! It will be a great acquisition for the collection. As Philip mentioned, I am following up with Charles Debenham as to the possibility of acquiring further examples of his work.’

It was certainly a pleasing outcome for us, and evidence that you never quite know what to expect when bidding at an auction!

Michael Connell and Peter Evans



COLCHESTER MUSEUMS REPORT

Starting with the buildings

Castle: Investigative work has started to fix the leaking roof, address the problems beneath the membrane and repoint some stonework. This is thanks to a £1.3m grant from MEND (Museum Estate and Development Fund) which is managed by Arts Council England on behalf of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. It is hoped that the project will be completed by Spring 2026.

Natural History Museum: We have been awarded a development stage grant by the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) to work up our ideas for a complete redevelopment of the museum. Also, following the masonry fall in September 2024 from the tower, a further application has been submitted to MEND regarding repairs to the tower, which is now wrapped and topped to prevent further deterioration, with scaffolding needing to remain until we can make good the damage. Currently, the museum remains closed for safety reasons, but we hope to be able to reopen very soon. This will enable visitors to help with suggestions for the museum redevelopment plan. We are very grateful to the Friends for their donation to the Natural History Museum, too.

Hollytrees: The roof repairs have been completed, again thanks to the MEND scheme. We are almost there in terms of better signage and overall improvements and the project will be fully completed later this year.

All these building projects were also fully supported financially as match-funding by Colchester City Council.

Town Hall: The Heritage Manager, Philip Wise, successfully coordinated the return of the portraits to the Moot Hall at the beginning of June; they had been in storage during the time that roof repairs were carried out.

Holy Trinity Church: Philip Wise has also been researching the available archaeological and historical information about this church and its graveyard. This underpins the Council’s work to bring this building back into active use.

The hatchments, part of the art collection, have been removed from the church in advance of roof repairs. The application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for delivery stage funding will be submitted in August, with a decision by early 2026.

Exhibitions

• **Margaret Cavendish at Hollytrees.** In collaboration with the University of Southampton and their Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded project exploring the life and work of Margaret Cavendish, this exhibition opened on 14 February 2025. This interventive display added characters from the book 'The Blazing World.' The artworks were created by local artist Catalina Carvajal and placed throughout the permanent galleries.

• **Gladiators.** The touring exhibition *Gladiators of Britain*, which has been developed in partnership with the British Museum was delivered, being exhibited at its first venue at the Dorset Museum, Dorchester. Colchester lent additional supporting objects including a case and several replicas and mounts used in the exhibition *A Day at the Games*. The Senior Curator, Glynn Davis, who had co-curated the exhibition, helped install the exhibition in late January with the BM team and the exhibition opened on the 25 January. The exhibition is now at its second venue, Northampton Museum.

• **Moreshet/Legacy:** Having been installed at Colchester Castle in September 2024, this display ran until 27 January 2025. The centrepiece was the loan of the Bodleian Bowl from the Ashmolean Museum. The display shared the modern Jewish community's activity reflected through loaned objects in response to the bowl, which represented the expulsion of the Jewish people from England in 1290. This brought in members of the Jewish Community who had never visited the Castle before and the museum service has commissioned a local ceramic artist to produce their own response to the Bodleian Bowl, which the museum will acquire.

• **Mars – Luke Jerram, 20th March - 9th May 2025:** This was the second installation of a large globe-shaped object to be suspended in the Castle atrium. *Mars* follows on from Luke's other touring astronomical artworks *Museum of the Moon* and *Gaia* and allowed a close encounter with the Martian planet.

• **VE Day:** To commemorate the 80th anniversary of VE Day, a small display opened at Colchester Castle on 27 March 2025. It contains objects from the time, including a girl's dress embroidered with the names of leaders and countries of the allied forces. On the interactive screen next to the case are oral histories recorded as part of a Colchester Museums project working to tackle social isolation, coordinated by Engagement & Outreach Officer, Simon Robinson. An update to the display will see memorabilia, and accounts of, VJ Day later in the summer '25.

• **Mythical Creatures:** Opened on 26 July, the work on this exhibition has included securing loans, preparing collections for display and planning an installation schedule. The exhibition explores folklore and legend, and their links to the natural world. More details follow in this newsletter

Events

The museums continue to grow their events programmes. The grotto at Christmas saw more children than ever visit the Castle and meet Santa, amongst a myriad of other activities such as:

- Wicked Spirit Legacy evenings
- Sleepovers, both family and school residentials
- Bespoke evening tours
- Escape Rooms

The list goes on...

Greyfriars Funding

The Greyfriars Trust has given the Museum £100,000 to enable funding for Market Fields paid work experience. This college for 11-19 year olds provides special needs youngsters with extraordinary opportunities to progress in life, despite the challenges that they face. So we are delighted to have appointed a student with a two-year placement, as well as give opportunities to others in their cohort.

Visitors

Visitor numbers have remained reasonably buoyant, although the cost of living crisis is being felt across the museum sector. However, school numbers have risen, mainly due to a fresh learning team who are developing new programmes all the time.

On-line bookings

The museums have finally embraced on-line booking and payments, which we hope will improve e-customer experience, and increase visitor numbers for events and visits.

We remain grateful, as ever, for the support of The Friends, both through their promotion of the museums and financially for acquisitions and visits.

Pippa Pickles

Colchester Museums Manager

Colchester Castle Museum is pleased to announce that it has been recognised in TripAdvisor's® Travellers' Choice® Awards for 2025, ranking in the top 10% of things to do worldwide!

'Congratulations to Colchester Castle Museum on its recognition in the Travellers' Choice Awards for 2025,' said Kristen Dalton, President, TripAdvisor. 'Ranking among the top percentage of attractions globally means you have made such a memorable impact on your visitors that many of them took time to go online and leave a glowing review about their experience. We hope this recognition continues to drive business for...

TFOCM TRIPS, SUMMER 2025

VISIT TO HARWICH

On Thursday 17th July an intrepid group of the Friends met on Ha'penny Pier, Harwich. We were given a wonderful welcome to the town by their Town Crier, who rang his bell and read a declaration of welcome to the Friends of Colchester Museums. Members of



the Harwich Society escorted us around this ancient port. Harwich has been associated with ships of one kind or another since 1660 when a naval shipyard was built. The natural harbour is huge as it is formed by the confluence of the Orwell and Stour rivers. It is one of the 'Haven' ports, a safe haven for ships at times of adverse winds and is the only one between the Thames and the Humber. After being given a brief history of the port we were shown the new monument on the Quayside, recollecting the arrival of the Kindertransport in Harwich in the late 1930s.

We will be finding out more about this in our first talk on September 2nd when Helen Brown, who is a Trustee of the charity that organised the statue, will speak to us at Lion Walk.

On our walk we visited the famous Electric Palace and the Treadwheel Crane, passing by the Guildhall and the High and Low Lighthouses. At Christopher Jones' house we saw the illustrated story of the Mayflower; a story and its people that dominate the history

of the town. Jones was Master and part owner of the vessel and in 1620 set off with the first group of pilgrims to the New World. He was to make a second voyage later in the same year.

Many other famous people are associated with the town. Samuel Pepys was the MP in the 17th century, and Lord Nelson was a frequent visitor to inspect ships in the shipyard. Harwich's nautical history is evident in so many of the buildings in the town.

After lunch we visited the Redoubt Fort. This impressive circular fort was built in 1808 to defend the port of Harwich against Napoleonic invasion. It formed part of the Martello Tower chain of defences built during the threat of invasion, housing at least 300 troops in its heyday. Today it is a splendid military museum and was restored by the Harwich Society. It boasts a fine display of large guns, military uniforms, and other wartime memorabilia

Huge thanks must go to the Harwich Society for such an informative day and a great welcome to the town.

VISIT TO AUDLEY END

At the time of writing there are still some vacancies on the Friends of Colchester Museums visit to Audley End on Thursday 4th September. This means that those who are not members of TFoCM can join the visit if they wish.

Travel will be by coach: meet at Crouch St (Old Cinema bus stop) at 9.15 am

Estimated arrival is at 10.30am.

There will be an opportunity to visit the house and gardens and hopefully have a tour.

There is a choice of café/restaurant for lunch.

Cost: £43 for non-members of English Heritage.

For members: £19. Please bring your membership card, otherwise you will be charged full price.

We will leave Audley End to return to Colchester at approximately 3.30pm

If you have friends or family who would like to take advantage of this, please contact Joy Hopkinson on: joyhopkinson1010@gmail.com

EVENING LECTURES SPRING AND SUMMER 2025

Chariot Racing and the Roman Circus (8th April)

Colchester has the sole remaining chariot racing circus in the United Kingdom and there are only four others in Europe.

There is evidence of eight starting gates which was probably a financial decision, reducing the number of charioteers and horse. The number of people involved in a 'chariot racing club' was huge...trainers, drivers, stable lads made the event very expensive. As a spectacle it was very popular since, unlike other activities of the time, the audience was mixed, men and woman together.

In racing there were four teams: Green (spring), Red (summer), Blue (autumn) and White (winter). Spectators would support their favourite, much like modern football fans. The charioteers also became very famous and if successful were very rich, as the prize money was generous.

The Circus in Colchester is still being developed and although excavation started in 2004 there is more to be done.

Richard Bale ended his fascinating and comprehensive account with a reminder to the audience – do visit this unique and very important site that we are so lucky to have on our doorstep.

Joy Hopkinson

A New Vision of our Roman City from East to West (22nd April)

Max Fox was presenting a theory that the traditional idea of the Roman city should be considered as running from the Balcerne Gate in the west across to the Hythe area is misleading. He reasoned that a better approach is to think of it as running from the river westward up to the East Gate and onwards.

He sees this as being the main entry to the city, with arrivals coming more by sea than by land. In the time when the Roman city flourished the sea level was several feet higher, and navigation to Colchester would have been easier than now. Probably the harbour would have been further upstream than the Hythe.

He talked about how principal Roman buildings, in the area near the Temple where the castle now stands, were in the eastern part of the walled city. Additionally, he pointed out that the old churches in Colchester are built on the foundations of Roman temples.

Much food for thought!

Ray Cantrell

Colchester's Oldest Roman Road: ACXX (6th May)

The traditional claim is that Romans built totally straight roads, but Ray Cantrell's investigations demonstrate that this is not always the case. Sometimes there are long, straight stretches but roads can be straight for between 3.5 miles to 8.5 miles, then slightly change direction. The highway that the Romans built between Colchester and Hertford is a good example. Ray explained the Roman methods of road planning and building and speculated on why their roads were not totally straight.

He also looked at the Balcerne Gate, the centre of which was originally a highly impressive ceremonial arch. When this fell out of use, the road builders redirected the road to the Headgate. However, Ray retraced the original way, showing evidence of it initially passing slightly north of Lexden Road and then aligning itself more closely with what is now a familiar route. And the ingenious title presents the A120 as the original Roman Road to the west of Colchester.

Ray demonstrated that there is much more to the term "Roman Road" than I thought!

Peter Evans

Colchester Theatres - Lost but not Forgotten (20th May)

By popular request, Dorian Kelly returned to give us further fascinating insights into the long history of theatre in Colchester. This had its origin in the Roman era, with recitals, oratory, and performances of plays by Plautus.

There is no firm evidence of any theatrical activity for many centuries after that, although morality plays may have been staged in Mediaeval times.

In 1745, a theatre was established in the Moot Hall: there was minimal scenery and basic lighting from candles. Twenty years later, a lease was granted on an improved theatre, which seated 200.

In the nineteenth century, The Theatre Royal was founded in Queen Street and had a distinguished history for many years; Charles Dickens and Oscar Wilde are among those who appeared. After 1888, when hazardous gas fixtures were replaced by electrical lighting, a modern theatre was established.

But disaster struck in September 1918 when a catastrophic fire destroyed the building, despite the heroic efforts of the Fire Brigade and Army. Now the site will soon house a Digital Hub enterprise; time marches on!

Michael Connell

The Story of the Cromer Express (3rd June)

Although Cromer began as a fishing village, by the mid 19th century it had become a popular seaside resort, developing the fashion started by King George III almost a century earlier.

East Norfolk Railways built a line from Norwich that was extended to Cromer in 1877. Twenty years later, the train journey from London Liverpool Street took just under three hours.

The town attracted famous visitors, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. While there, he heard the story of the mythical Black Shuck dog and dined at Cromer Hall. Both appeared in his story, 'The Hound of the Baskervilles.'

The Cromer Express was one of the most luxurious trains of its time. In 1912, the 1500 class locomotive came into use and it ran until steam trains were decommissioned in 1962.

Although the rise of cheap package holidays and travel by car led to the decline of train travel to the coast, today passengers can still travel behind a 1500 locomotive on the North Norfolk Poppy Line.

Once more, an absorbing and informative lecture from Peter Jones.

Mary Dale

Colchester Memories - The Edwardian Years (17th June)

This talk was based on recorded interviews from Colchester Recalled, involving 1700 people.

Olive Manning saw the building of the new Town Hall and the Fire Station. She also managed a tour of the Town Hall and visited the cells!

Sidney Murrells recalled war wounded being taken up North Hill to the military hospital and people cheering.

The Children's Coronation tea in June 1911 was attended by 6000 children from elementary schools and was held on the Recreation ground. Charles Herbert (b.1897) was given a silk handkerchief, a medal and chocolate.

The Went family lived in Crockleford Heath, with fifteen children in two bedrooms; their father earned £1 per week as a stoker working 12-hour shifts. His three days holiday a year were spent with the family, taking a picnic to Castle Park.

The Colchester Pageant was held 21st-26th June in 1909, after taking two years to plan. Only those over 11 years of age could take part; 3000 performers took part, of which 600 were school children.

Another informative, enjoyable lecture given by Patrick Denney.

Avril Lancaster

Recent Acquisitions at the Museum (1st July)

It was timely at our AGM to hear from Ben Paites (Collections & Learning Curator Colchester and Ipswich Museums) about the many and varied recent acquisitions, particularly those that we have financed or supported.

Amongst these was The Mistley Torc and the ‘Little Bromley Hoard.’ This collection of artefacts was proof of a huge metal work industry around the site. From the Bronze Age there were articles which illustrated life at that time, including many gold artefacts and a cremation pot from Mistley. It was good to be reminded of the rich history of our area.

The most recent purchase, a painting of the Bull Inn, Crouch Street, by Charles Debenham was presented at the meeting.

Staff at the museum have been very busy, with at least 78 new items arriving since March and they continue to be grateful for the support of the Friends.

Ben ended by reminding us of the latest major exhibition at the Castle, ‘Mythical Creatures,’ which is open until next year.

Joy Hopkinson



EXTENSION TO OUR PROGRAMME: AFTERNOON LECTURES AUTUMN 2025

These talks are in addition to the evening talks and will also be held at Lion Walk Church. They will start at 2.30pm

October 7th, Richard Turner: The History of Boxted Airfield

Boxted Airfield was the most important US Fighter base in the UK in WW2. Richard will talk about how this affected a small village.

October 21st, Roy Waters: Growing up in the Dutch Quarter

Roy will entertain us with many anecdotal stories about life in this unique part of Colchester.



MYTHICAL CREATURES: CURRENT EXHIBITION AT THE CASTLE

Drawing on medieval tales, this takes visitors 'on a story quest to meet a unicorn, a griffin, a dragon and a mischievous mermaid.' So this exhibition, during the school summer holiday, is bound to have a strong family appeal.

However, there is plenty of interest for the general visitor as well: it highlights the extent to which beasts of myth and legend have captivated us over the centuries. For example, the magical properties of the unicorn date back to the earliest Greek stories and, in 1449, it was maintained that a battle took place near Bures between the black dragon of Suffolk and the red dragon of Essex!

There are some superb items on view to illustrate the allure of each beast, many on loan from the British Museum. These range from natural artefacts to beautifully crafted items in bone, metal and ceramic. In the past, the fascination with these creatures was so great that their images were used to decorate many types of objects - and this continues to involve artists today.

Certainly, this is an exhibition that inspires the visitor's imagination, too; it runs until 22nd February 2026.



*Wormingford
Church Window*

The Lexden Griffin

*Tile and Sauceboat
on loan from the
British Museum*



PHILIP MORANT'S PORTRAIT AND THE MYSTERIOUS MR HEAD

When I became the President of the Essex Society for Archaeology and History last year, I was handed a framed photograph of the pre-eminent Essex historian, the Rev. Philip Morant (1700-1770). The photograph currently hangs in my office and I find it very inspirational when I start work every morning. It has also prompted an interest in the original portrait which is on display in the Grand Jury Room of Colchester Town Hall. The portrait is by Charles Head (1850-1926), whose name is not very familiar in Essex and, as we shall see, there is some uncertainty about the details of his life.

The Rev. Philip Morant is the first and most influential historian to study the history and archaeology of Essex. His importance is neatly summarised in a brief extract from the entry by Geoffrey Martin in the Dictionary of National Biography. Martin writes of Morant's county history as follows: 'The "History of Essex" is characterized by learning, common sense, and consistency. Morant's great accomplishment was to devise a plan and fulfil it ... he set a pattern against which other county histories could be measured.'

Head's painting is based on the only known image of Morant, a pencil sketch in the Essex Record Office (Hills-Astle MSS). This posthumous portrait by Head, like a number of others, was commissioned by the mayor and corporation of Colchester for the current Town Hall when it opened in 1902.

The work of Charles Head is represented by several portraits in the Colchester art collection. As well as Morant, there are portraits of William Mason (d. 1802), who was an alderman and mayor of Colchester in 1796-7, the eminent rose-grower Benjamin Cant, Charles Henry Hawkins JP, another Colchester mayor, and the Rev. Sabine Baring Gould (1834-1924). The portrait of the latter is particularly interesting. In addition, the Colchester collection also has three illuminated certificates which represent Head's output as an illustrator and calligrapher.

Charles Head was born in Portsmouth on 25th May 1850, the son of James Head, a cordwainer (or shoemaker) and his wife Sophia. Head's obituary states that he studied



The portrait of Rev. Philip Morant painted by Charles Head in 1902 (Colchester City Council: Colchester and Ipswich Museums; COLEM:163A).

art at 'South Kensington, London' - this was probably the National Art Training School (now the Royal College of Art) - under Sir Edward Poynter (1836-1919). Poynter was a painter, designer and draughtsman who was also, at various times, the Slade Professor of Fine Art at University College, London, the director of the National Gallery and the President of the Royal Academy. It is unclear exactly when Head was training to be an artist but he was probably in his mid-twenties at the time.



Head is recorded as living at three addresses in Colchester, including 32 Creffield Road where he died in 1926 (Philip Wise).

By 1877 he was living on Mersea Island at the appropriately named Mersea Cottage, as the private secretary of a French aristocrat Count (James) Considine. According to both a newspaper interview in 1924 and his obituary two years later, Head became acquainted at this time with the Rev. Sabine Baring Gould, who was the Rector of East Mersea between 1871 and 1881. Head is described as being very close to the Rev. Gould and as having provided the illustrations for his magnum opus 'The Lives of the Early British Saints'. When Baring Gould left Essex to take up the living at Lew Trenchard in Devon, where he was also lord of the manor, Head is said to have followed him to undertake work as a painter of wooden panels in both the parish church and the manor house, Lew Manor. Puzzlingly though, the entry for Lew Trenchard in Pevsner's 'Devon' makes no mention of Charles Head in relation to either the church or the manor house. Instead, the paintings of the rood screen in the church and in the parlour of the

manor house are credited to Margaret Rowe, the married daughter of Baring-Gould. Could Head have been Margaret Rowe's teacher?

Head is also credited with 'some restoration work at St Martin's Church, Scarborough' in the early 1920s. Again, Pevsner makes no mention of him in the relevant entry in his 'North Yorkshire' volume when describing the pulpit: 'A pre-Raphaelite gem. The pulpit has painted panels by Rossetti, Ford Madox Brown and Morris. There were however not executed by the three artists themselves but by Campfield.' This omission is perhaps less surprising as Head's work at St Martin's was probably restricted to cleaning the paintings.

Head was trained at a very prestigious art school and was undoubtedly a talented portrait

painter. It has proved very hard however to find examples of his work despite the claim in his obituary that, ‘Much of his beautiful work is in many churches all over the United Kingdom and abroad’. If any Friends are aware of his contribution to the decoration of Essex churches, I would be very interested in hearing from them.

Philip J. Wise

Acknowledgement: I am grateful to Peter Knott for his assistance with the research for this article.

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A HISTORY OF ROMAN RIVER MUSIC

Roman River Music celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. During this time, it has produced a two-week autumn festival of classically based music (often ‘with a twist’) in atmospheric venues in North Essex and South Suffolk, with up to 20 events varying from solo recitals to orchestral and choral concerts. The festivals are supplemented by musical events throughout the year, with an emphasis on work with young people and local communities.

It began in 1999, when Zélie Jopling organised a recital in Fingringhoe church in aid of St Helena Hospice. This was so well received that Zélie and her daughter Juliet set up Roman River Music to provide a local annual Festival combining classical music concerts and musical activities for local children.

From the very start, Roman River Music has had three key elements that still lie at the heart of its work:

- Great music from across the centuries performed to high professional standards
- Giving local young people first-hand, hands-on, experience of live music
- Performance in atmospheric and often unusual venues

The Festival expanded into nearby villages, Colchester and the University, with Zélie and her daughter Juliet as organisers. The musical focus remained classical but with enthusiastic excursions into jazz and other genres. The educational programme involved

gifted amateurs who inspired children to produce mini-musicals and operas, writing their own songs and setting them to music.

In 2007 Juliet Jopling moved to Norway, and her brother, cellist Orlando Jopling, took over as Artistic Director. He still holds that position; and under his energetic and visionary leadership, the organisation and its Festival have grown steadily in scope, scale and reputation. Roman River Music took on charitable status in 2010 and gained valuable financial and professional support from a wide range of individuals and organisations, including the Arts Council.

Today, the autumn Festival still lies at the heart of Roman River Music, with a range of interesting, even eccentric, venues in Colchester and around North Essex and South Suffolk. Professional musicians, including many of international fame, perform eclectic programmes, many 'with a twist'. (Beethoven in the dark, anyone? Schubert's Winterreise with a puppet as The Traveller? Or dancing to Bach cello sonatas?) There is regular collaboration with other local arts organisations, such as Colchester's Firstsite, The Mercury, Colchester Arts Centre and Dance East. Total audiences are in the thousands. Since 2015, there have also been earlier small festivals of concerts in atmospheric venues, including Colchester's Old Library and The Minories, now established as the spring Mini-Festival.

Great musicians are at the core of Roman River Music's offering. Orlando's talent-spotting has provided a springboard for many rising professionals, such as Timothy Ridout, Helen Charleston and Nicola Benedetti, who is now the Festival Director for the Edinburgh International Festival. His arm-twisting skills have brought established artists such as Imogen Cooper to an area not on their usual musical circuit. And there is a well-established programme for local talented young amateurs to perform at the start of most concerts.

Varied venues, many of historical and architectural note, are a notable feature of Roman River Music's activities. Great live music is performed at the heart of communities, large and tiny, throughout North Essex and South Suffolk. Beautiful buildings give a new dimension to the music – as do unexpected venues such as a lightship, a night-club with beer-soaked carpets, a derelict Victorian assembly room in central Colchester, a railway station for Steve Reich's heart-wrenching *Different Trains*, an oyster-packing shed accessed by small boat ... The region's many beautiful churches, large and small, are regularly used. In Colchester historic venues have included the Castle, Peake's House, St Helen's Chapel, and the Jumbo Water Tower.

Roman River Music has from the start worked closely with the local thriving artistic community. Many local artists, such as Charles Bartlett, James Dodds and Julie Cuthbert have had a central active role as the annual 'artist in residence.'

Besides sponsorship, success depends on the support of an army of local supporters and volunteers who have given unstintingly of their time, resources, imagination and skills to the organization. It has resulted in Roman River Music and its Festival being a central

and rich feature of the wider local community.

Celebrating its first quarter of a century, Roman River Music looks forward to welcoming audiences (which we know include many members of The Friends of Colchester Museums) to an exciting programme of concerts in the Festival, running from 19th to 28th of September.

Further information and details can be found on <https://romanrivermusic.co.uk/whats-on>.

Giles Job

Roman River Volunteer



Orlando Jopling
Artistic Director and Cellist

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Answers	1938
1, B, 2 B, 3 A, 4 C, 5, C (1856) 6 A (1848) 7, C, 8 B, 9, B, 10, C 9 (Mallard	

FUNDING REQUEST:

Iron Age gold finger ring from Frinton and Walton

This finger ring was found by a metal detectorist in June 2023 on farmland at Frinton and Walton, Essex (Treasure Case: 2023 T780). It is circular in plan, V-shaped in profile and D-shaped in cross-section. When worn, the ring forms a zigzag on the finger. The ring is made of exceptionally pure gold, being composed of approximately 89-91% gold and 2-3% silver with the remainder being copper. It has a diameter of 20 mm ($\frac{3}{4}$ in) and weighs 3.81 g (0.13 oz).

The ring is dated to c. 400-200 BC during the Middle Iron Age. Similar simple, V-shaped finger rings are known from Iron Age cemeteries in continental Europe, particularly in Austria and Switzerland. Gold, silver and bronze versions have all been found.

In England as a whole, only six V-shaped finger rings are known, including a silver example from Sompting (West Sussex) and gold examples from Chislet (Kent), Biggleswade (Bedfordshire) and Market Rasen (Lincolnshire). This is the first recorded find from Essex, and indeed the East of England, so is therefore of considerable significance. Iron Age gold jewellery from Essex is exceptionally rare and is not represented in the collections of Colchester Museums, with the exception of a gold torc, or neck ring, terminal from Elmstead Market which was acquired recently.

As a very rare find in excellent condition, this is a very suitable acquisition for Colchester Museums. The object has been valued by the Treasure Valuation Committee at £650 and the Friends are requested to fully fund this acquisition.

Philip Wise



And following the request, The Friends Committee unanimously agreed to fully fund this exceptional acquisition.

DEVELOPMENTS AT EAST ANGLIAN RAILWAY MUSEUM

As another year speeds by, we find ourselves in the midst of many ongoing matters on site. There are changes taking place that have altered our outlook from the original ideals of long ago.

The original concept of moving into Chappel fifty or so years ago was to create a working steam-oriented tourist heritage line similar to many others born out of the Beeching cuts of the 1960s. However, the sword of Damocles on the branch line closure was finally withdrawn in the mid 1970s and we have been confined to the goods yard ever since. So we don't go far or fast - but we try to give the flavour of it with our regular operating days.

Experienced by many in the heritage sector - and not just railways - the decline in fundamental hands-on skills is showing signs of impacting many aspects of our activities. The world is increasingly centred on newer technologies and our emphasis now has to swing more towards conservation than full scale restoration.

Once, enthusiasts remembered steam traction in daily operation, but history moves on with the times! Such supporters are now in the minority, and our main visitors are Mum, Dad and the children seeking an interesting day out in the countryside, and engagement with them is an all-important aspect of what we do. Fortunately, we are well placed to continue the active demonstration of steam technology.

Some years ago, our work was identified as the '4E's': Entertainment, Enlightenment, Education, Engagement. Our current work-based volunteers are pretty good at this, and the positive comments from our visitors are something that shows to our advantage. This makes up for the fact that whilst we are not exactly a 'glass showcase' Museum (you can get that at the NRM), visitors do appreciate being shown things and talked to. They depart with a far better understanding of industrial archaeology and the railway history behind it all - which commenced when Stephenson built his Rocket and impacted millions over the past 200 years!

And to mark this 200th anniversary, there was an Open Day at EARM, with steam and diesel train rides - and also a vintage bus running to and from Bures.

There were around 700 visitors on the day from all generations, which is a good sign for the future; and pupils from Chappel Primary School joined officials in cutting the ribbon to mark the official opening of the museum's new Exhibition Hall. This will enhance the visitor attraction and bring us into a different era, which has been in formulation for many years thanks to those dedicated few who have been involved.

Recent developments have been the transfer of several items to the new Exhibition facility, where the dedicated gang - and a big lorry - recently spent a sweaty couple of days creating a backdrop worthy of any high-end museum. We should be proud of all that has and is being achieved. So now is a good time to come along and have a look. More than that - why not join in!



The Museum is currently open at weekends and on Wednesdays.

Further developments still to come - and hopefully some news on the N7 locomotive, which I know many have enquired about.

Peter Martin



ST LEONARDS AT THE HYTHE PARISH – A VIEW FROM THE 1890s

The Friends of St Leonards recently came into possession of a book published in 1891 which gives us a small glimpse into local life at that time.

In January 1890, the Parish decided to produce a magazine for the first time in its history. The contents of this and subsequent ‘newsletters’ are published in this book which gives a unique view of the life of the parish and the Hythe towards the end of the 19th century.

In his first letter in the magazine the Rector at the time, Rev H T Osborne, reflects upon the wisdom of embarking on such a venture when the parish seems to be in financial difficulties. He says, ‘For years our congregations have failed to pay even for the lighting necessary for their services or for producing a desirable temperature in the Church’. He continues, ‘what can be more natural then that we should now proceed to publish a magazine.’ He was clearly a bit of a cynic!

However, the magazine appears to have been well received and was published each month for at least the next two years.

Besides a letter from the Rector, the first issue contains details of the church's finances, the church officers, lists of births, deaths and marriages and information about the many societies involved with St Leonards.

The Rev Osborne was very concerned about church attendance. He states, 'the church is almost empty on Sunday morning, though the evening congregations are somewhat better than they were'. He appears quite desolate when he speaks of the reasons: 'if there was a time when I flattered myself that the draughty and dilapidated condition of parts of the church was, to a great extent, accountable for the absence of worshippers, I have long since had to lay aside any such comforting supposition. The restoration and warming of the church has been carried out efficiently and yet...they still do not come...' He speaks movingly of his difficulties of running a parish single-handedly and his own inadequacies in relating to the members of the parish.

In July 1890, prayer books and hymn books were bought so that 'those that have been in the habit of excusing their non-attendance at church on the ground that they have no books, can no longer avail themselves of that plea.'

Of the many societies and clubs, one of the most successful was a football club that was formed in 1890. They were at first looking for a suitable field, as it is reported that too many clubs were using the Recreation Ground. A particularly amusing account is given in the February edition when St Leonard's was playing the 'Albions'. Unfortunately, the team turned up with a few players missing and without their own 'umpire'. It reads: 'the want of an umpire proved a far greater loss than the absence of half a dozen players. In fact, the sturdy loyalty of the Albions' umpire had the most demoralising effect upon St Leonard's who, after the first dozen appeals had been given against them, lost all interest in the game.' Later it is reported that in the second half 'the Albions claimed to have scored twice more but in both cases the goals were in dispute owing to the want of light which would have enabled the umpire to decide with confidence... the game was a most unpleasant one and a wordy war throughout.'

However, in contrast, the next week a match against Wivenhoe was described as 'a thoroughly pleasant game.' Later reports of matches give the impression that St Leonard's were a formidable team, winning most games with a large margin.

Towards the end of the year, it appears that visitors were saying 'the Hythe can play football.'

Other clubs, societies and activities associated with the Church were the Cricket Club, which appears to have been very successful, a Mothers' Meeting, Bible classes, a choir and a Sunday school. So, despite his misgivings, Reverend Osborne's congregation was a lively one!

Joy Hopkinson

FUNDRAISING FOR THE EAST ANGLIAN FOLKLORE CENTRE

We are hoping to raise £15,000 to support the continuing operations of the East Anglian Folklore Centre, upstairs in The Minories. The space has been self-funded for the first year but this is no longer tenable... so we need help to keep the door open and the space and resources available!

Here's what we have achieved in the last nine months:

Nine workshops (including our heritage crafts Straw Club) and nine multi-platform events to a total audience of nearly 500. Nine more events are in the pipeline, all of which will go ahead whether we have our space or not... but we'd love to keep making these opportunities for folk to gather!

We have worked with more than 34 artists/musicians/creatives to deliver these:

Delivering a conference paper and a blog post for the Lincolnshire Folk Tales Project (Nottingham Trent University) and a talk for the Norfolk Folklore Society.

We house the work of 31 artists in our little shop area; 25 of these are from East Anglia. We have paid out over £5000 to our artists since opening in October 2024.

There is a reference library with over 700 items to be read and used in the space. Researchers spend an average of 2.5 hours a time here and we see someone make use of the library at least twice a week.

Open 4-5 days a week, most weeks since October 2024. We have lost count of the total number of visitors and have received many testimonies:

'The East Anglian Folklore Centre is a vital and inspiring community project. It's a true blessing to Colchester and to the arts in the region.'

'The talks, events, and intimate festivals organised by the Centre have served as vibrant showcases for local talent. More than that, they have fostered genuine community spirit...'

'The Centre offers a meaningful refuge for artists and storytellers in the local area. It provides not just a creative space, but a powerful narrative thread that connects us to Colchester, to East Anglia, and to the deeper traditions of British folklore.'

What will the funds raised be spent on?

A year's rent for our room at the Minories - we love our home here. Not only do we get our internet/utilities covered, but we get access to the great community of artists, creatives and social enterprises gathered under the same roof. And our money is being well spent helping to support an incredible regional gallery.

If you would like to contribute towards our venture, please log onto [justgiving.com](https://www.justgiving.com) then search for East Anglian Folklore Centre and click 'Donate.' Alternatively, you can use the

link on the Folklore Centre website.
And our thanks to the Friends for your interest.

Gemma Garwood

Coming Event at the Centre: During August, there will be a stunning collection of straw work, specially curated for us by Lucy Hook-Child, a maker of corn dollies. Among a range of exploratory and surprising pieces, these will include heritage creations by Betty Blackwood,

Please see our website for opening times between Wednesdays and Sundays.

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HERITAGE OPEN DAYS IN COLCHESTER

The theme of Heritage Open Days this year is architecture, which gives plenty of scope in a place with so many remarkable historic buildings as Colchester. Indeed, there are a record number of 51 venues and guided walks in the 2025 programme. Old favourites such as the Roman Circus Centre, St Leonard’s at the Hythe Church and, of course, Colchester Castle, are joined by newcomers such as the remarkable former eighteenth-century building in Queen Street, once a police station and now housing SPACE artist’s studios. This year there are several new guided walks, including the Victorian buildings of the Colchester Garrison and the Lost (and Found) theatres of Colchester. Lastly, it is very good to see the return of the ‘Meet and Play the Moot Hall Organ’ event in Colchester Town Hall after an absence due to essential ceiling repairs. All events are free to enjoy.

The national festival is now over thirty-years-old. Coordinated by the National Trust, it is supported by players of Peoples’ Postcode Lottery and run by thousands of local organisations and volunteers. It is the nation’s premier heritage festival, bringing people together to celebrate their heritage, community and history.

‘Heritage Open Days’ runs from Friday 12th to Sunday 21st September. For more information pick up a leaflet at the Visitor Information Centre or Colchester Castle. Alternatively go to: www.visitcolchester.com/whats-on/HODS2025

Philip Wise
Heritage Manager



The interior of Holy Trinity Church will be open for Heritage Open Days this year (photograph: Philip Wise)



To celebrate Rail 200, we present **Gill Bird's Railway Quiz**

Answers on page 20

1. What year did Colchester station open?
A. 1839
B. 1843
C. 1846
2. How long did it take the first trains to reach London?
A. 1½ hours
B. 2 hours
C. 2½ Hours
3. How long does the fastest train take now?
A. 45 minutes
B. 58 minutes
C. 65 minutes
4. Who published the famous Railway Guide?
A. William Collins
B. WH Smith
C. George Bradshaw
5. The first Essex resort to be reached by rail was?
A. Walton on the Naze
B. Clacton on Sea
C. Southend on Sea
6. Where did WH Smith open his first station bookstall?
A. Euston
B. Kings Cross
C. Fenchurch Street
7. When did Liverpool Street station open?
A. 1868
B. 1873
C. 1874
8. How many people use Liverpool Street annually?
A. 84 million
B. 94 million
C. 98 million
9. When did the Norfolk Coast Express crash at Colchester?
A. 1910
B. 1913
C. 1915
10. The fastest recorded speed by a steam locomotive was?
A. 101 mph
B. 114 mph
C. 126 mph



THE FRIENDS OF COLCHESTER MUSEUMS

Autumn 2025 Lecture Series

£2 per talk (£4 for non-members)

EVENING LECTURES at Lion Walk Church – Tuesday at 7.30 pm

2 Sept	Harwich and the Kindertransport	<i>Helen Brown</i>
16 Sept	The Gods and Colchester <i>from Pagan Deities to the Reformation.</i> <i>The sites of lost religious buildings.</i>	<i>Max Fox</i>
30 Sept	Victorian Medicine <i>Inquests in Colchester</i>	<i>Dr Jane Pearson</i>
14 Oct	Colchester's Roman Circus <i>New plans for the rebuilding of the starting blocks</i> <i>of the Roman Circus</i>	<i>Francis Terry</i>
28 Oct	The Mark Davies Memorial lecture <i>Norman Colchester</i>	<i>Philip Wise</i>

AFTERNOON TALKS at Lion Walk Church - Tuesday at 2.30pm

7 October	The History of Boxted Airfield <i>The impact on a village of the major American UK Fighter</i> <i>base in WW2.</i>	<i>Richard Turner</i>
21 October	Growing up in the Dutch Quarter <i>Anecdotal stories about life in this unique part of Colchester.</i>	<i>Roy Waters</i>

Further information from Joy Hopkinson, Programme Secretary

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