



The Friends of Colchester Museums

Registered Charity No: 310669

Spring Newsletter 2025

OFFICERS

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|---|---|-----------------|
| <i>President</i> | The Mayor of Colchester, Councillor Lesley Scott-Boutell | |
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| | Jenny Jones | |
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| | Yvonne Abrams | Geoff Fenn |
| | Liz Anderson | |
| <i>Ex Officio</i> | Frank Hargrave (<i>Colchester & Ipswich Museums Manager</i>) | |
| | Pippa Pickles (<i>Colchester Museums Manager</i>) | |
| | Philip Wise (<i>Heritage Manager</i>) | |
| <i>Honorary Auditor</i> | Roy Anderson | |
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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

As usual this has been a quiet few months. However, we attended the open days in the Castle and in Hollytrees, talking to a large number of visitors to make ourselves known.

We have given £2,500 to the Museum towards the purchase of a Bronze Age gold torc found near Manningtree and have agreed to pay £500 for the purchase of a gold finger ring dating from the Tudor period, found by a metal detectorist. The repair works at the Natural History Museum to which we gave £5,000 are now under way. Fuller details of these donations appear later in the newsletter.

We also contributed £500 to The Minories Appeal to restore their heating system to working order. Although we normally help the museums in the city our constitution includes "and Art Gallery" and we are pleased that we were able to help. And they quickly responded:

Thank you so much for the Friends of Colchester Museums' generous donation to help address the boiler issue at The Minories. We appreciate your support and the Committee's thoughtful contribution, which will play a vital role in ensuring a swift resolution. It's truly inspiring to see how our community unites in times of need.

One of our members, Stewart Seymour from Braintree, was given permission to film the Castle in 2013 when the Castle was empty and awaiting repairs. Stewart has offered the film to the Museum and Pippa Pickles, Museum Manager, is keen to show this in the Castle to visitors. We would also like to show it to members.

However, the film needs to be converted to a more convenient format. Our membership secretary, Roy Anderson, is working with Stewart to get this done and there will be a small cost involved.

We have also agreed to assist with the expenses of moving a Henry Collins gouache painting to Colchester - details follow in the Treasurer's article.

Our Spring Programme of lectures starts on 8 April with what we expect to be a very popular talk from Richard Bale on Chariot Racing and The Roman Circus. Please note that the AGM will be held at 7pm, on Tuesday July 1st. If you are interested in joining the Committee, please get in touch with any of our officers. New members will be made very welcome and duties are not onerous.

This year's Autumn talks will be in the evening, as has been the case up to now: details appear on the back cover. But in addition, three afternoon talks will be arranged on Tuesdays this year: on October 7th and 21st and on November 4th, at Lion Walk. Full details of these will follow in the next newsletter.

However, the Committee has unanimously agreed that, from 2026, all Autumn talks will be held in the afternoon.

Outings to Audley End and to Harwich are being arranged during the summer: details follow on page 7.

As overall costs are rising, the Committee will need to consider a modest increase in membership and/ or admission costs to our Talks. We will keep you informed well in advance of any development, and there will be no change to the rates for 2025.

The Museum has reported that some members are misusing the TFoCM membership tickets by lending them to others. Please do not do this - the tickets are only valid for the members named. It is unfair to deny the Castle revenue at a time when their finances are stretched.

Wishing all members a happy year ahead, at a time when Colchester has benefited from substantial injections of funding to further enhance our rich and unique heritage.

Ray Cantrell
Chairman



TREASURER’S TOPICS

- have you paid twice?

Some members will find a note enclosed from me saying that they have paid their subscriptions through the bank twice this year. We will be changing the annual subscription form to say that you should check your bank account to see if you have already set up a standing order before making another payment.

This information is easily available from your online bank account. We cannot tell you if you have a current standing order or how much it is for, so please check if you are in doubt.

Season Tickets for our lectures are still available. You can either pay direct into our bank account or pay direct at the Lion Walk.

A payment of £20 will cover you for 12 talks. Our bank account is 56473079 and the sort code is 60 06 06.

Would you like to receive your newsletter by email?

Many other groups offer members the choice of receiving their newsletters and other communications online. This does not suit everybody, but some people prefer it, and it would save us money that can be spent on buying items for the Museum. The

costs of printing and postage are ever increasing, putting pressure on our finances, and it is the ‘green’ option.

We do hold email addresses for most members, but we would need to confirm them before we start. If you want to receive newsletters by email, please go to our website tfocm.org.uk and complete the contact form. We will start with the newsletter to be sent in August. Alternatively, you can add your name to a list at our talks, confirming your current email address.

If you are happy to receive newsletters through the post, you need take no action.

Peter Evans
Hon Treasurer

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HENRY COLLINS GOUACHE

A few months ago, I was contacted by Ian Langlands, a retired architect living in London. He had picked my phone number up from the website and wanted to know how he could best present a gouache painting by local artist Henry Collins, who is familiar as being responsible for the subway panels that he created with his wife, Joyce Collins. There are panels outside Sainsbury’s in Priory Walk and near Firstsite, as well as in other parts of the country. Mr Langlands had been a friend of the Collins’ and is now 92.

In 2021, we paid for a Henry Collins view of Hythe Hill, which the Museum was very pleased to add to the collection.

I told him how to contact the Museum, completing one of the ‘object’ forms given to anybody offering items to the Museum. This was done and we understand that this generous offer was accepted and the painting has now been received.

Peter Evans
Hon Treasurer

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TFOCM TALKS AND TRIPS FOR 2025

We have a variety of fascinating talks to look forward to this year.

Richard Bale, who spoke about Boudica last year, is returning to talk about Chariot Racing in Roman times and of course our own famous Roman Circus. This is also a focus of another lecture later in the year when Francis Terry, who is an architect, will explain his vision for the Roman Circus. He recently entertained and inspired the Civic Society with these plans.

Max Fox is giving two talks. The first ‘A Quantum Leap into the Past’ will explore a new vision of our Roman City from east to west; then later in the year he takes a look at the sites of lost religious building and those still remaining in ‘The Gods and Colchester’

Ray Cantrell, our chairman, is speaking on Colchester’s Oldest Roman Road ACXX; a most intriguing title!

Leaving the Romans behind, **Dorian Kelly** will continue the talk he gave last year about Colchester’s Theatre scene. He had left us in suspense!

Two very familiar faces will once again entertain and educate us: **Peter Jones** with a talk on the notorious disaster of the Cromer Express and **Patrick Denney** with more ‘Colchester Memories,’ this time of the Edwardian years.

Those of us who visited Coggeshall last summer will remember the fascinating visit to Dick Nunn’s smithy. **Trevor Disley**, who told the wonderful stories of this notorious blacksmith, will share them with us all at a talk in July, which follows the AGM.

Helen Brown, a director of the Harwich Kindertransport Memorial and Learning Trust, is giving a talk in September and will tell us their story and how this monument came into being. A good follow-up for those who can take part in the Harwich walk!

Dr Jane Pearson, who has been involved with the Locke Hospital memorial near the Old Heath Recreation ground, has been researching Victorian Inquests in Colchester and will share with us this research and the associated stories.

Our final talk of the season is always the *Mark Davies Memorial Lecture*, and this year **Philip Wise**, Heritage Manager at the Colchester and Ipswich museums, will talk about Norman Colchester.



TRIPS FOR 2025: AUDLEY END AND HARWICH

We have two very different trips planned this year.

In July (Thursday 17th) we will visit Harwich and have a guided tour from a member of the Harwich Society. This will include the Kindertransport Memorial, the ancient treadwheel crane, the 1953 memorial garden and the Christopher Jones house. Hopefully, we will also visit the Guildhall and the Electric Palace. After lunch we will walk to the Redoubt Fort.

The tour will start at 11 and at approximately 12.45 we will have a light lunch at Patricia’s, a café on the Quayside; this is included in the cost. Finally, we go to the Redoubt Fort at 2.30pm.

We will meet at the quayside by the Ha’penny Pier at 10.45am

We can arrange car share, or you may wish to travel independently.

Cost: £22, to include all admission fees and lunch.

This visit will be restricted to a group of about 15.

In September (Thursday 4th) we will visit Audley End.

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 2.30pm.

Order form is enclosed

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THE ROMAN CIRCUS VISITOR CENTRE

A visit to this Centre gives a vivid insight into what was an integral part of life for the population when Colchester was a thriving Roman community.

I was lucky to be given a full tour by a skilled guide who brought this sporting venue to life, even though its physical details remain below the surface. This began in the Map Room, which gave an informative summary of the history of Roman Colchester and the context of this Circus in the Roman Empire as a whole.

Displayed here was a meticulously detailed scale model of Colchester c.200AD, a city in its prime, founded by Claudius, first an Emperor and afterwards revered as a god. The streets and buildings were shown to wonderful effect, and the location of the Circus beyond the walls was clear to see.

There is an information board adjacent to Napier Road car park and some raised beds and pathways have been created by developers building around the site to emphasise the sheer scale of this 450 yard track. And in places, the foundations are visible, protected by perspex sheets.

A recent planning application was refused, but now the Dedham architect Francis Terry has envisioned a scheme to rebuild the Circus gateway arches and include a new museum in any development of the site. This ambition has been approved by Colchester MP, Pam Cox - and the Friends will hear about this and any fresh developments in October.

There is plenty of insight to come this season, as Richard Bale will bring to life details of racing and the Circus in our opening talk on 8th April.

Michael Connell



ROMAN CIRCUS VISITOR CENTRE

SUMMER OPENING HOURS:

1st April – 30th September, Tuesday to Friday, 10am -4pm

OPEN DAYS - On the following Saturdays:

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 3May | Roman Day, with Colchester Roman society |
| 14 June | Guided Talks |
| 12 July | „ „ |
| 2 August | Festival of Archaeology (to 3pm) |
| 13 September | Heritage Open Day |

And also, if you are passionate about archaeology, history and heritage, Colchester Archaeological trust is looking for enthusiastic volunteers to join the Team at the Visitor Centre.

You could meet and greet, support staff with tasks, assist in the shop, or even train to be a Guide – why not volunteer with a friend?

If interested, please send an email to: **volunteers@catuk.org**

And please note that our sister organisation, Colchester Recalled, hold their regular meetings here in the middle of the month



COLCHESTER CIVIC SOCIETY ACTIVITIES 2025

We are invited to join the Civic Society on two excursions and a local visit. Further information is available on their website [colchestercivicsociety](http://colchestercivicsociety.co.uk) or by contacting Jo Edwards josiemedwards@hotmail.com or phoning her on 07771 626561, or by visiting their website colchestercivicsociety.co.uk.

Payments can be made to her by cheque payable to Colchester Civic Society at 43 Priory Street, Colchester CO1 2JB or direct into the Society’s bank account: 80232424 - sort code 20 22 67

Friday 2nd May 2025 10.00am

The Orderly House, Cavalry Barracks, Dragoon Road, Colchester CO2 7FU A chance to see some the adaptations to the former Cavalry Barracks. Local developer Adrian Mann has converted the formerly derelict building including the former Guard House, Prisoner’s Room and Cell, and Fire Engine House (near Butt Road Entrance) into a modern workspace. No cost but contributions to the Le Cateau Memorial Fund Via **Civic Society. Parking is limited.**

Tuesday 10th June 2025 Anglesey Abbey and Gardens (Cambridgeshire) - cost £37 (if members of National Trust or Royal Horticultural Society cost is £20 only)

Meet at coach stop opposite Greyfriars 8.45am

Wednesday 29th October 2025 visit to Exhibition Road, London. Meet 8am at coach stop opposite Greyfriars

When leaving the coach you can visit your choice of Museums - the V & A, Science Museum or Natural History Museum. Cost (Coach only) £20

NEWS FROM COLCHESTER MUSEUMS

Colchester Castle

We were pleased to play host in December to Anthony Roberts for his stunning performance of 'A Christmas Carol,' and Colchester Headway were delighted that this raised £1,000 for their funds.

Colchester Castle remains on the Heritage at Risk register, due to drainage issues on the roof, but work has progressed significantly to produce plans for work that encompasses roof repairs, stabilisation of the walls and tiles, exploration of the drainage systems and re-routing of surface water. The membrane protection will be replaced, and a robust programme of vegetation management introduced. Funding has been secured from MEND, and an award of £1.3million just announced. Colchester Council says it has allocated significant match funding to support the project. The bulk of work is expected to be underway by summer 2025 and the Castle will remain covered during this period; works will not have any impact on access to the Museum.

Exhibitions and Exhibits

Mythical Creatures, 26th July 2025 – 22nd February 2026

'*Mythical Creatures*' will explore the role of storytelling and folklore, in addition to showcasing some of the creatures that were imagined in the past from objects found in the environment. In addition to exploring these creatures - their physicality, powers and behaviour - the exhibition will showcase representations of these beasts from an array of collection types, including archaeology, social history and art.

We have commissioned an artist, Kyria Mackie, to illustrate a story which is embedded in the exhibition and follows the fortunes of a brave soul (our visitor) as they embark on an adventure, encountering a mermaid, griffin, unicorn and dragon along the way. We have illustrations which are her initial sketches, so we're very excited!

The exhibition concludes by looking at some Local Legends which highlight stories of local dragons and 'black dogs' as we map the mythical creatures of Essex and East Anglia. The story narrative will take our family audience on an adventure through the exhibition, 'meeting' four mythical creatures along the way. The design will reflect the mediaeval setting of the Castle but also immerse visitors in the landscape of the featured creatures. Stories of mythical creatures exist across time and place. These stories may have been created to help people to understand the world around them, but they have stood the test of time and the creatures still enthrall people today.

Luke Jerram's Mars, 20th March 2025 – 9th May 2025

The touring artwork '*Mars*' by Luke Jerram is coming to Colchester Castle.

'Mars' will provide visitors to the Castle with the opportunity to view this planet from the air, as though they are a satellite, mapping and studying the surface in perfect detail. Every valley, crater, volcano and mountain is laid bare for visitors to inspect.



Gladiators of Britain, a collaboration between The British Museum and Colchester Museums, following the 'A Day at the Roman Games' in the Castle, is now touring. It is currently at Dorset Museum and features the Colchester Vase.

Hollytrees

Funding, once again from the MEND scheme, has allowed extensive roof repairs to take place. There were a few surprises, but mostly positive ones, such as the good condition of timbers which were expected to be problematic. Coping stones were entirely replaced with new Portland



stone, as were the chimney pots which had all been broken previously, so creating a very smart appearance. The works continued with the windows, railings and doors receiving a face lift. One or two bits are left to finish, but we are almost there.

The environmental conditions within the building have already improved, and we will be very soon starting some consultation regarding the future direction of museum activity and displays.

Margaret Cavendish, Trail Blazer is a current exhibition at Hollytrees, with illustrations by Catalina Carvajal. One of these (pictured here, first left) confirms her reputation for dressing in a scandalous manner which challenged convention.

But most importantly, she made contributions to literature, science and philosophy, notably writing ‘The Blazing World’ in 1666, a remarkable precursor of modern science fiction. This was at a time when women published very few works, and then often anonymously.



There is a renewed interest in her writing and this, and other publications, are in print once again, over 350 years after they were originally published.

This is a thought-provoking exhibition, in the newly repaired Hollytrees Museum.

Natural History Museum

This museum remains closed due to the significant issues with the tower, but this is balanced with the news that National Lottery Heritage Fund has awarded a grant for the development stage of a larger delivery project that will see the museum refreshed for future visitors. This involves community engagement and working with stakeholders - and of course the Friends must be thanked for their contribution of £5000 in support of the project. We will be engaging a design team to help us bring a vision to architectural plans and also a project assistant to keep us in line!

Work to the tower will commence very soon, and we're hopeful that will allow us to reopen the museum, which has been closed since September.



THE MISTLEY TORC & TUDOR FINGER RING

New acquisitions for Colchester Museums

This exceptionally rare find was made by a metal detectorist in October 2019 on farmland at Mistley, near Manningtree in north Essex (Treasure Case: 2019 T1143). It is a fragment of a gold neck ring, or torc, comprising one terminal (or end) and a length of twisted metal which represents probably less than half of the original hoop. The surviving terminal is round in cross-section and tapers slightly before it joins the twisted hoop. Four longitudinal cuts have been made into a bar to create an X-shaped cross-section and the bar has then been twisted. The edges of a number of the twists are dented, probably due to damage whilst the object was in the ground. The torc is now very distorted; the terminal has been straightened out and there are three bends within the hoop. The break in the twisted hoop is very sharp and is therefore likely to be modern. The total length of the surviving fragment is 147 mm (5¾ inches) and it weighs 33.39g (1.18 oz.).

The object dates to the Middle Bronze Age, around 1300-1100 BC. This type of neck ring is found in the south of England, including in East Anglia with three examples known from Norfolk: at Great Dunham, Trunch and Ashill. The Mistley Torc is remarkably similar to the East Cambridgeshire Torc, said to be the heaviest and largest torc ever found in Britain and Ireland, which was recently stolen from Ely Museum. Gold metalwork from the Bronze Age is rare in Essex, and there are no previously reported finds of torcs on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database. The Mistley Torc would therefore appear to be related to a group of finds with a distribution further north in the East of England.

The acquisition by Colchester Museums of the Mistley Torc was made possible by grants from the Friends of Colchester Museums, the Essex Society for Archaeology and History and the Manningtree Local History and Museum Society. It is planned to put the Mistley Torc on display in Colchester Castle Museum in due course.

I am very grateful indeed to the Friends for supporting this acquisition which is a very significant addition to the collections of Colchester Museums.



The Mistley Torc (© Colchester and Ipswich Museums)

The finger ring was found by a metal detectorist in October 2022 on farmland at Great Oakley, Essex (Treasure Case: 2023 T159). It is a complete, cast silver gilt finger ring dating to the Tudor period (c. AD 1500-1600). The ring is broadly D-shaped in cross-section, with a raised, rounded central rib which flattens at the edges. The rib is decorated with zig-zagging lines with a central groove which create triangular fields. These fields are decorated with rows of raised pellets known as ‘brambling’. Both the internal and external surfaces of the ring retain much of their gilding. The edge of the ring has nicks in several places. The ring measures 24.4mm (1 in) in diameter and weighs 8.43g (¼ oz).

Similar rings are known from England, including a more elaborate example found in the Mary Rose shipwreck of 1545. This type of ring is not, however, currently represented in the collections of Colchester Museums and would therefore be a suitable addition to enhance the collection of Tudor and Stuart jewellery. The fact it is both complete and in good condition makes this a suitable acquisition for the museum.

The object has been valued by the Treasure Valuation Committee at £500 and The Friends Committee have unanimously agreed to fund this acquisition.

Philip J. Wise
Heritage Manager



CELEBRATION OF VE AND VJ DAYS

I'm really enjoying my role as an engagement and outreach officer and my special project of Colchester: Then & Now. With the 80th anniversary of VE Day and VJ looming, it is a significant milestone that deserves attention. I have been fortunate in meeting a number of people over the age of 85 with their own memories of the war years and even a couple of people aged almost 100 or over. After meeting with groups from sheltered housing, care homes and day care centres and a Monday club at the Castle, I was privileged to hear so many fascinating memories from the war years and after.

Reminiscence has been free flowing from these groups as we looked at photographs from the archives showing Colchester as it was across the decades from the 1860s-1960s. I asked at these sessions if anyone would like to take part in a VE day/ VJ Day display and found so many were very keen to do so. The exhibition will reflect their memories and also contain their own first-hand accounts and contemporary photographs in a digital display. I am being guided and fully supported in this by the curatorial team and visitor services. There is a lot still to be done and it is still developing: I'm enjoying it all so much.

We are planning an event to mark VE day and will invite key contributors to the castle and hope to play Churchill's Victory Speech and have a singer too. I would also like to do something for VJ Day which was



traditionally overlooked often by those not as affected by the war in the Far East.

This will be the holding notice in the exhibition case that the project has been allocated:

VE Day – Coming Soon...

This year will mark the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe.

Known as VE or Victory in Europe Day, May 8th 1945 celebrated the end of the war in Europe, although the end of the War in the East would not be until August 15th 1945. This could be one of the last major commemorations that will be within living memory of those that served.

“And so ends this long and disastrous war and I find myself alive and well, with a home and my books intact”

Diary entry May 7th, 1945

EJ Rudsdale (1910-1951), Colchester Museum curator

This display will feature objects and photographs relating to this momentous day. Illustrated are two pictures of a red, white and blue dress specially made to celebrate Victory. Memories from members of the community will show the spirit and resilience of Colchester and the way in which it is remembered by those who were there.

Simon Robinson
Engagement and Outreach officer

If you have first-hand memories of VE or VJ Day that you would like to share as part of this project, please email me: simon.robinson@colchester.gov.uk

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THE VICTOR BATTE-LAY FOUNDATION AND THE MINORIES

A brief history

Colchester-born Clarence Victor Batte-Lay was an avid collector of paintings and furniture who died in 1935 and left his collection to his wife, Mrs Eleanor Batte-Lay. On her death in 1955, her will directed that “an ancient building of antiquarian or archaeological interest” be bought in her late husband’s memory, to house and exhibit his collection “for the benefit and advantage of the inhabitants of Colchester.” The Victor Batte-Lay Trust (now the Victor Batte-Lay Foundation) was created.

The Minories, at the end of the High Street, was purchased from Dr Ruth Bensusan-Butt, Colchester’s first female GP, who was living in the building after running a surgery and nursery in the building for many years. She agreed to sell the building on the condition that she could continue to live in the ‘Garden Wing’ of the building, where subsequently many Curators went on to live and which is now the café. Unfortunately, she died only one year later.

In 1958, The Rt. Hon. R.A.Butler, Home Secretary and Sir Trenchard Cox, Director of the V & A museum, oversaw the gallery’s official opening with a notable John Constable exhibition.



*Camille Pissarro, Man smoking, c.1890,
Pencil on paper.*



*Humphrey Spender, Gross National Product,
1981, Watercolour on paper.*

The Collection

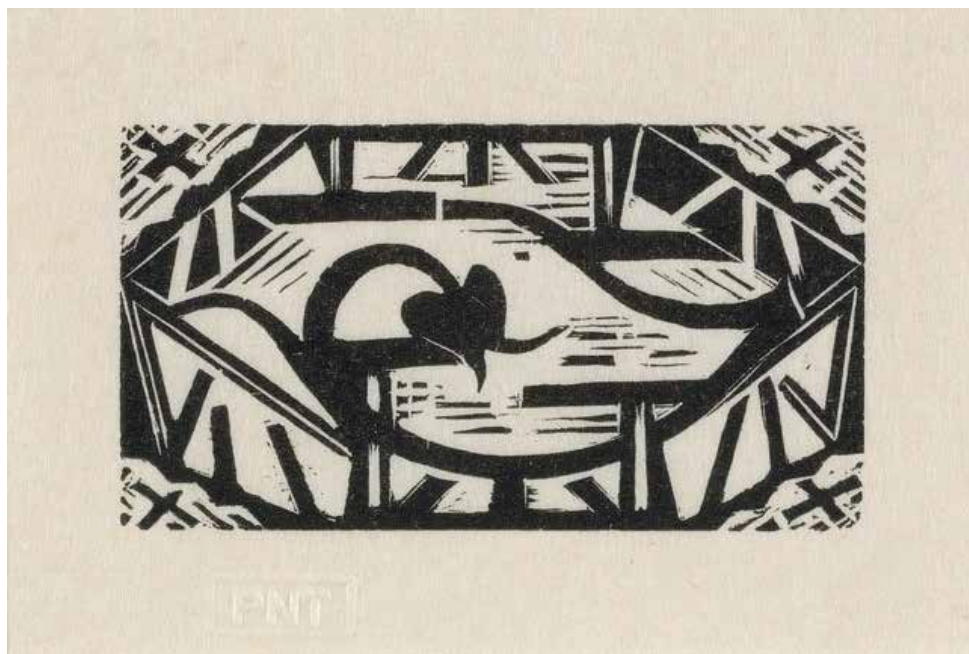
The original bequest focused on British art and artists from the 17th century onwards and included a range of furniture, still lives, Regency portraits, 18th century prints and drawings, 19th century samplers and oil paintings. It then expanded through a number of modern acquisitions and loans over the years and, despite a period of financial difficulties in the 1990s, which meant that a small number of works had to be sold, today the collection includes works by many internationally celebrated artists with local relevance. These include John Constable, John and Paul Nash, Camille Pissarro, Roderic Barrett, Leon Underwood, Margaret Mellis, Maggi Hambling RA and Humphrey Spender.

Most of the collection is stored at the Minories, and shown throughout the year in a rotating series of exhibitions in the gallery. Some pieces are also still on display at Tymperleys (now a café), where they have been for several years.

Eventually, the dream would be to have a permanent gallery to display works from the collection at the Minories, perhaps after we have figured out a way of bringing the attics back into public use!

Emma Howe

Director of the Minories (with reference to texts by Christine Mabbitt and Evelyne Bell)



Paul Nash, Arabesque, c.1928, Wood engraving on paper

The Minorities Exhibitions (all free entry)

Hayletts Gallery: **Contemporary and Modern British Original Prints**

Saturday 22 - Sunday 30 March

<https://www.theminorities.org/event/hayletts-gallery-contemporary-and-modern->

Everything is Art

The Minorities has long been a place where artists come together and art comes to life. This fundraising silent art auction will help to ensure that The Minorities remains a home for art, now and always.

Thursday 27 March - Friday 25 April

Bridging the Gap: East Anglian Stitch Textiles

Thursday 24 April – Sunday 4 May 2025

Suffolk Craft Society Showcase

Thursday 1 - Sunday 18 May

My family and other Artists & My family and other Animals

A partnership exhibition with Colchester Art Society

Thursday 5 - Sunday 15 June

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THE EAST ANGLIAN FOLKLORE CENTRE

We met in 2021 whilst undertaking an online residency with SPACE studios, and have taken the opportunity to collaborate and share our love of Folklore with as many people as possible ever since. Quite quickly we began lamenting the lack of a dedicated space here in East Anglia where we could gather with like-minded practitioners, creatives and otherwise curious folk, to explore this kind of storytelling and practices. There are brilliant places in Todmorden, Scotland, London ... but we began dreaming up our own, much closer to home.

In summer 2024 we began to build that space into a reality and in the autumn opened our doors, upstairs in the Minorities - it's situated just off the landing that is adjacent to the Ballroom. We are so lucky to have such a supportive and special regional gallery in Colchester. The Minorities were up for working with us to help realise our dream and have supported the events and operations of our experiment thus far. There isn't a better place for us to have started our journey.

We're now six months in and have delivered four Workshops, four Multi-Platform events



We hold relaxed and fun sessions to learn how to make with straw, suitable for curious minds of all ages. Create a straw flower for the Spring Equinox or a mini sun wheel for the Summer Solstice!

and our first Straw Club (Workshops designed to teach seasonal strawcraft) to a combined audience of 143 lovely people and worked with 20 artists on these! And we have plenty more planned for 2025 and beyond. We offer at least one event a month and we're even beginning to make links with different venues, with specially curated events happening at Colchester Castle and Colchester Arts Centre.

Our research library has been steadily growing too and we are delighted to welcome researchers to the space on a regular basis now. It has been an absolute pleasure to share our books with people and see projects of all sorts begin to grow from the seeds of inspiration found in their pages.

The little shop space we have created in our room now accommodates the work of 26 artists, 22 of whom live and work in East Anglia. It makes us so happy to be able to showcase and help support such a varied and growing range of creatives from the area, and feature some truly special artists from slightly further afield.

We have ambitious plans for the East Anglian Folklore Centre. We are always open to discussing collaborations and happy to chat about how we might be able to bring something special to exhibitions, events and creative or educational projects that align with the centre's broad and inclusive interpretation of Folk Lore, art and practice.

We now have a membership programme, a Ko-fi account, and we are taking on volunteers, so as well as visiting us and attending our events there are a number of ways for people to help support what we are doing.

We have been humbled by the level of good will, excitement and support we have received so far and hope to be able to continue building the East Anglian Folklore Centre for everyone, and for many years to come.

Gemma Oakley and Bethan Briggs-Miller

The Centre is open, Thursday - Sunday, between 10am and 4pm
(unless otherwise advertised)

For full details of upcoming activities and events in the Centre, please visit:

www.eastanglianfolklorecentre.co.uk

A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS?

This is what might be called speculative history; rather whimsical thinking which could be way off the mark or could be spot on.

In a glass case upstairs in the Castle Museum there is a collection of small pottery animals. Most are damaged in some way, but they are still beautiful. Mostly about 7cm long, what is unusual about them is that they have a “chimney” reaching up above them. Some of them also have a handle. Most are broken in one way or another.



They were labelled as “Terracotta animal figurines”, with a second label saying they came from “Burial known as the ‘Child’s Grave’, AD52-65, found in Beverley Road.”

It struck me that the chimney could be because they were not just ornaments but lamps. Each would make a lovely bedside light for a child.

Generally small oil lamps had a hole for the wick and a second hole for topping up the body with oil. These do not have the second hole. Possibly this could mean that they were only intended to burn for a short time (until sleep removed the need for the light).

To check if one would work as a lamp, I made a very rough copy of one shaped as a pig, poured some olive oil in, and tried it out. It worked well (except that the bit of string I used as a wick burned away too fast).

The sacking of Colchester by Boudicca in 60 AD comes about in the middle of the date range given. It is unlikely that a household would be up and running with children and non-essential contents for a few years after that, so the animals probably predate the disaster.

Maybe these items were bedside lamps of some children, probably well off, living in Colchester, dying and being buried with their favourite belongings soon before terror came to destroy their home and the world they knew.

Ray Cantrell

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THE BOXTED AIRFIELD MUSEUM

The Museum is on the site of the airfield, occupying several of the original buildings, with a new exhibition hall that was opened in 2022. Displays include the nose gearing mechanism from a P47 Thunderbolt and the largest piece of an V26 Marauder in the UK. There is the WW2 Diary of the 386th Bomb Group, as well as artefacts from the airfield and items of general wartime interest. A collection of uniforms has recently added the jacket of a pilot from the 56th Fighter Group.

Construction of the airfield started in 1941 with the removal of fruit orchards, and the 386th Bomb Group of the United States Air Force arrived in May 1943. The Group was assigned to the US 9th Tactical Air Force and flew the Martin B26 Marauder. The group's role was to destroy strategic targets such as airfields, convoys, tanks and trains.

The first mission from Boxted was to bomb Woensdrecht airfield in Holland and although one Marauder was lost, the mission was successful. But the 386th only stayed at Boxted for three months before being transferred to Dunmow in September 1943.

Then the 354th Fighter Group came to Boxted in November 1943; this group flew the new Merlin-engined P51B Mustang. And this was the first time that a more powerful Rolls Royce engine had been used, replacing the original American design. Their primary role was to escort the bombers on their missions over the continent and eventually all the way to Germany. After their first commanding officer, Kenneth Martin, was shot down and captured, James Howard was put in charge.

This was the perfect choice because he had seen combat with the 'Flying Tigers' in China. On 11th January 1944 Lt Col. James Howard, C.O. of the 356th Fighter Squadron, flying a bomber support mission, came upon a formation of thirty enemy fighters attacking B17s of the 401st Bomb Group over Oschersleben, Germany.

Finding himself temporarily alone, and without any thought for his own safety, he attacked the enemy formation. He pressed home his attacks, claiming three destroyed and several others damaged. For his action that day he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honour, the highest award for bravery to go to any fighter pilot in the European Theatre of Operations.

The 354th proved that the Mustang was a viable aircraft in combat and the group laid the foundations in tactics that would be followed by the other fighter groups.

However, the 56th are generally acknowledged as the top-scoring US fighter Group of World War Two. This group arrived at Boxted on 19th April 1944. They had already experienced combat at their previous bases in England and were led by the inspirational Hubert Zemke, a great tactician and a man who would not accept second best.

The 56th took part in all the major air battles during their stay at Boxted, including D-Day and the Battle of the Bulge. They gained the nickname 'Wolfpack' because of the number of high scoring pilots in the unit. With 31 'kills' Francis Gabreski was the

top American pilot in Europe. Bob Johnson, another member of the Wolfpack, was number two.

Throughout their time in combat, the group flew the P47 Thunderbolt, the heaviest fighter in WW2. The role of the group was escorting the bombers over enemy territory. Later, with additional fuel tanks fitted, the 56th could escort all the way to Germany. As the war in Europe was coming to an end, and the Luftwaffe were virtually defeated, the Wolfpack would attack ground targets.

On May 8th 1945 (VE Day) the base was occupied by the 56th Fighter Group, flying the P47 Thunderbolt.

Prime Minister Winston Churchill in England and President Harry Truman in the USA had announced Germany's unconditional surrender and on May 7th. Brigadier General Jesse Auton conveyed the news to the 56th Fighter Group with this message:

“THE GERMAN SEA, AIR AND LAND FORCES SURRENDERED TO
THE ALLIES AT 0701 HOURS CENTRAL EUROPEAN TIME. ALL
HOSTILITIES WILL CEASE AT 09.00”

Following a short service by the two chaplains on the base and a brief talk by the station commander, Lieutenant Colonel Lucian Dade, the men were given the afternoon of the 7th off, but confined to barracks because this news was embargoed. Free beer was the order of the day and the men could do as they pleased.

Then on the 8th the men were allowed to leave base to visit English friends, as Churchill's news had become public. Those men with a 24-hour pass could join in the festivities in London.



The base was opened to allow local people to come and see the activities and the aircraft. And local children were allowed to sit in the cockpit of one of the P47s. Lots of sports competitions were arranged, including softball and hardball.

From the 10th of May the men were ordered to keep fit in case they might be needed for operational duties. The men complained they were worked harder

than when they originally enlisted! Training flights continued for the 3 squadrons, the 61st, 62nd and 63rd.

Sightseeing flights were also arranged - one to Cologne, Bonn, the Rhine River Valley, Frankfurt and Koblenz. Another scenic tour was to Paris, Mont St Michel and the Normandy beachhead. This trip was run several times.



Celebration days were held when pilots who had been liberated from prisoner of war camps were able to return to the base.

But the war in the Pacific and Far East was continuing. The men knew they may be required to relocate to that part of the world. There was a points system to determine who would go to the Pacific or who would go home. The target was 85

points which meant you had the choice whether to go to the Pacific or go home. Points were awarded for length of service, rank achieved and awards or commendations.

However, the 56th stayed at Boxted until the end of the war in Europe, finally returning home by the end of October 1945. The RAF then occupied the site until 1947, with temporary operations involving Mosquitoes, Spitfires, and Meteors.

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the departure of the 56th, and of course VE Day. Our main commemoration of this will take place on 10th May; full details to follow, on:

www.boxted-airfield.com

The Museum will reopen on Sunday 30th March, 10-4pm and on the last Sunday of each month, until October. It is situated in Langham Lane, CO4 5NW

Private visits and talks can be arranged; contact through website or phone: 07503 952354

Richard Turner

Chairman, Boxted Airfield Historical Group



JUMBO'S FUTURE IS FUNDED!

More details have been released about exciting plans for Colchester's unique water tower following The National Lottery Heritage Fund's announcement of £8m funding for North Essex Heritage's The Jumbo Project.



On Heritage Treasurers' Day, The National Lottery Heritage Fund announced more than £27m funding, saving seven lesser known yet exceptional heritage gems across the UK. Through this investment, each project will add to the cultural, musical, social and educational wellbeing of young people in their communities, providing a new lease of life for buildings and contributing positively to places throughout the UK.

Using money raised by National Lottery players, The National Lottery Heritage Fund supports projects that connect people and communities with the UK's heritage. Thanks to National Lottery players, 'The Jumbo Project' will conserve and adapt Jumbo, which will become a visitor attraction and a commercially viable and accessible heritage and events venue. This is the last opportunity to save this magnificent Victorian structure,

a Grade II* Listed water tower from the 'Golden Age' of industrial engineering.



Councillors, business and community leaders join North Essex Heritage Trustees and supporters to welcome National Lottery funding. Photo credit: North Essex Heritage

Colchester community leaders hailed Jumbo's £8m funding as a vote of confidence in the city's tourism sector and a catalyst for economic growth.

Simon Hall, MBE DL, Chair of North Essex Heritage, said: 'We now need to find around £2.5m in match funding. Thanks to Colchester City Council and We Are Colchester working together

on behalf of our city, we have already secured £1.5m of this, including from the council and UK Government grants.'

On most days, the huge water tank will be open for the public to admire the views of the city and to enjoy exciting immersive audio-visual presentations. These could include the history of Jumbo and Victorian Colchester, the City's industrial and engineering story, and historic and current issues surrounding water supply.

Early plans are for the show to start every 15-20 minutes. The motorised window blinds would close, and the display would be projected across three sides of the tank. In



An Imagemakers' impression of how an immersive display in the tank could look.

Photo: Imagemakers

December, Jumbo could have a special Christmas theme display in the tank as part of Colchester's festive celebrations.

Jumbo will also host commercial events and live performance gigs, especially music. A Roman River Music Festival recital and several carol concerts have already been held in the tank.

There will be a small reception area on the ground floor where visitors can buy tickets.

You can keep up to date with The Jumbo Project on:

- Instagram @JumboHeritageColchester
- X (formerly Twitter) @ColchesterBPT
- Jumbocolchesterofficial
- .northessexheritage.org
- .jumbo.org.uk

Irene Kettle Trustee, North Essex Heritage

*Purcell
architects'
impression of
the interior
of the water
tank.*

Photo: Purcell



A ROYAL VISIT TO BRIGHTLINGSEA MUSEUM

The Lord Lieutenant of Essex, Jennifer Tolhurst, was so impressed by our newly developed museum in 2022 that she suggested a bid be made for a Royal Visit, and at the second attempt we were successful. The exciting, but embargoed, news came through in the July of 2024 - giving us time to plan before all became public eight weeks before the event, on 11th December.

Plenty of support came from the Lord Lieutenant, a Royal Protection Officer and a Lady-in-Waiting, all ensuring that the visit would run smoothly and with appropriate security. On the day, The Princess landed from a helicopter on The Colne School playing field, her car having previously arrived in Brightlingsea, circling the Museum no fewer than eight times in advance to be sure that all would go without a hitch.

Briefing notes had been sent from the Palace, outlining how many people HRH would be able to talk to in her allotted time; the Museum opted for a scaled-down total of around 50 and, in the event, the visit over-ran by almost half an hour. Of course, dignitaries and officials - including the Deputy of the Cinque Ports - were present, but much of Princess Anne's time was spent listening, with genuine interest and respect, to chosen representatives of the Brightlingsea community.

These included members of the Fishing and Shipbuilding industries, Museum Trustees and the architect for the newly developed building. A substantial number present were volunteers: a first responder, a retained fire officer, Chair of the Winterfest Committee - and indeed litter pickers!



Having been introduced to me after her arrival. The Princess was fascinated by the large wooden board, which lists Past Chief Rangers, 1864-1995 – thinking that was linked in some way to a local lifeboat. However, it records the Chief Officers of the Association of Foresters, No 4390, a Friendly Society into which fishermen and other locals could pay in a few pence each week, to cover

future medical costs and other cover for its members.

And the Princess was intrigued to see that it was not until the 1960s that women were able to attain this high rank!

Afterwards, she was able to follow the history of Brightlingsea through its association with the Cinque Ports, its shipbuilding and its oyster and fishing industries.

Importantly, The Princess said something worthwhile to all of those present; there was nothing formulaic, and hardly any repetition - remarkable during a visit that lasted well over an hour. Finally, she signed the Visitor's Book and unveiled a plaque celebrating this visit, which had been memorable for us all.

Her respect for the part that volunteers played in maintaining town heritage, resources and services was reflected in the letter sent by The Palace, five days after the event:

“HRH the Princess Royal has asked me to write and thank you for the most enjoyable and insightful visit to your charming museum last week. The warm welcome from local residents showed the ardent community in which you thrive.

It was a great privilege to be guided round with such knowledge by you and your volunteers, all of whom were clearly very passionate and knowledgeable”...

Margaret Stone
Curator, Brightlingsea Museum

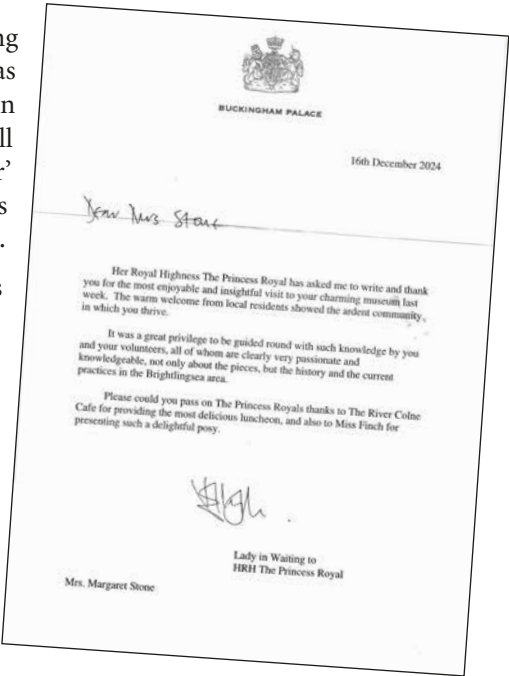


Modestly, when I spoke to her about the royal visit, Margaret downplayed the fact that she can now celebrate 35 years as a volunteer at the Museum, currently playing a leading role in its activities.

These years were outlined in the Autumn 2022 Newsletter, and she particularly remembered the important influences of Alf Wakeling as a Social Historian and of Claude Dove, who was more of an academic; through them, Margaret said, she had the best of both worlds and a wonderful journey through to the present time.

And as to the future, Margaret and the team are constantly looking for both temporary exhibition material and longer-term planning for significant changes in the exhibition as a whole.

Michael Connell



Full details of museum activities, including a programme of guided walks, are listed on the website, together with the opening hours that operate between Easter and Christmas.

info@brightlingseamuseum.co.uk

Brightlingsea Museum

Dove House, Station Rd, Brightlingsea, Colchester CO7 0DT

Tel: 01206 307 121

Photographs by Liz Artindale



DICKENS EXHIBITION AT MUNNINGS

The Munnings Art Museum is taking the exhibition “*Technicolour Dickens*” from the Charles Dickens Museum in London.

This will be open from 2nd April to 8th June 2025.

Munnings Art Museum, Castle Hill, Dedham CO7 6AZ

For further details: www.munningsmuseum.org.uk

01206 322127

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ROMAN RIVER CONCERTS AT HERITAGE SITES SPRING SERIES

Concerts in April and May:

Wednesday 23 April, 7.30pm - The Old Library, Colchester

J.S Bach, The Goldberg Variations

Performed by Nathaniel Mander, Harpsichord

Thursday 22 May – The Girling Room at The Minories

Sonatas for clarinet, by Debussy, Denisov, Brahms, Poulenc

Performed by Jonathan Leibovitz, clarinet and Jo Havlat, piano

For further information and bookings, visit: wildarts.org.uk>roman-river-festival

And this year marks the 25th Anniversary of the annual Roman River autumn event. There will be an exciting series of concerts in September, held in wonderful venues such as Jumbo and The Minories, together with village churches in the district.

Full details will follow in the next Newsletter.

Gill Bird's Modern History Quiz

1. What year did Colchester United knock Leeds out of the FA Cup?
A 1971
B 1972
C 1973
2. Who was Colchester's Mayor 1986-1987?
A Janet Fulford
B John Lampon
C Sir Bob Russell
3. When did Colchester High Street become one way?
A 1958
B 1960
C 1963
4. Who was the Colchester born sailor who won Gold at the 2016 Olympics?
A Saskia Clark
B Ben Ainslie
C Katherine Grainger
5. What are Henry and Joyce Collins remembered for in Colchester?
A Garden design in Castle Park
B Architecture in the Dutch Quarter
C Concrete works of Art
6. Who was the artist who made a name for himself in Dedham forging works of famous artists?
A A.J. Munnings
B Tom Keating
C David Gentleman
7. When did the Brightlingsea railway line close?
A 1964
B 1965
C 1966
8. The 1987 hurricane that devastated much of the county happened on a Thursday & Friday in October. What were the dates?
A 1st – 2nd
B 15th – 16th
C 29th – 30th
9. Which famous British artist died in Wormingford in 1977?
A John Nash
B Francis Bacon
C Graham Sutherland
10. The Essex Air Ambulance started flying from New Hall near Chelmsford in...?
A 1994
B 1996
C 1998

Answers on page 7



THE FRIENDS OF COLCHESTER MUSEUMS

Spring & Autumn 2025 Lecture Series

£2 per talk (£4 for non-members)

EVENING LECTURES at Lion Walk Church – Tuesday at 7.30 pm

| | | |
|-----------------|--|------------------------|
| 8 April | Chariot Racing/The Roman Circus | <i>Richard Bale</i> |
| 22 April | A Quantum Leap into the Past <i>A new vision of our Roman City from East to West</i> | <i>Max Fox</i> |
| 6 May | Colchester's Oldest Roman Road ACXX | <i>Ray Cantrell</i> |
| 20 May | Theatre in Colchester (part 2) <i>Lost but not forgotten</i> | <i>Dorian Kelly</i> |
| 3 June | The Story of the Cromer Express | <i>Peter Jones</i> |
| 17 June | Colchester Memories <i>The Edwardian Years</i> | <i>Patrick Denney</i> |
| 1 July | AGM at 7pm followed by Dick Nunn <i>The Coggeshall Blacksmith and activist</i> | <i>Trevor Disley</i> |
| 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 of the Roman Circus</i> | <i>Francis Terry</i> |
| 28 Oct | The Mark Davies Memorial lecture <i>Norman Colchester</i> | <i>Philip Wise</i> |

Further information from Joy Hopkinson, Programme Secretary
joyhopkinson1010@gmail.com