

The Friends of Colchester Museums

A Brief History 1949-1999

By Len Drinkell



A PUBLIC MEETING was held at the Town Hall on Tuesday, 30th November 1948 under the chairmanship of the Mayor of Colchester, Councillor Leonard Dansie, who explained that over a long period many people had suggested that a Society of Friends of Colchester and East Essex Museum should be formed. After much discussion, it was proposed by the Right Reverend the Bishop of Colchester seconded by Alderman Christopher Jolly and resolved unanimously that a society called "The Friends of Colchester and East Essex Museum and Art Gallery" be formed.

It was a wonderful start for the society to be led by two such distinguished and respected characters of the town. Bishop Dudley Narborough, seen in gaiters and always brightly polished shoes, hands clasped behind his back so accentuating the wide expanse of purple waistcoat, and Alderman Jolly, chairman of the Library Committee and crack engine driver of the huge main line steam locomotives working between Norwich and Liverpool Street!

It was also resolved that an ad hoc committee consisting of the the Bishop of Colchester, Colonel R. J. Appleby, John Bensusan Butt, Duncan W. Clark and Dr. Penry Rowland be empowered to draft rules and recommend officers etc. This duly took place on 14th December 1948 when draft Rules were submitted and after revision recommended for adoption at the next General Meeting. This took place at the Town Hall on Tuesday, 1st March 1949, with the Mayor of Colchester, Councillor Leonard Dansie in the chair. The Draft Rules were considered clause by clause, amendments made, including the reduction of the minimum subscription from 10/6 to 5/-. It was agreed that persons joining the Society before 31st March 1949, should be termed "Founder Members". The first President elected

was the Mayor Councillor Dansie, and it is pleasing to note that every Mayor since has kindly agreed to support and help the Friends as President during their year of office. Officers elected were Hon. Secretary, Mr. Duncan W. Clark and Hon. Treasurer, Mr. J. F. Elam, together with a committee of 16 members.

The First General Meeting was held at the Castle on 19th May 1949. 100 "Friends" and visitors attended and were welcomed by the Mayor and Mayoress. Mr. M. R. Hull, Curator, gave a brief account of the foundation and history of the Museum. The Reverend Montagu Benton, Hon. Secretary of The Essex Archaeological Society presented to the Mayor, as a first acquisition, two original blocks for book plates used by the old Castle Society. (See the logo on the front cover). One of these it was noted, was engraved by Edward Ladell, the well-known Colchester painter who died in 1886.

The first Committee Meeting was held at the Town Hall on Monday 28th March 1949. Councillor Dansie became the first chairman and remained so for the next 28 years until his death in 1975. He also served as chairman of the Museum and Muniments Committee of Colchester Borough Council for some 30 years, and must surely be considered the leading light in developing Colchester's museums and cultural heritage during the post-war years.

Alderman Dansie was succeeded by Mr. John Bensusan Butt, the acknowledged authority on Georgian Colchester and a staunch supporter of the Art and Culture of the Town, particularly the development of The Minories Art Gallery, his former home.

John retired in 1987 to be followed by our current chairman, Mr. Andrew Phillips,

Colchester's present day "Mr. History". Andrew brought to the Society a great enthusiasm for all things historical. A professional historian, recently retired from the position of Head of Humanities at The Colchester Institute, we cannot but succeed with a person of his calibre at the helm.

The Society's first treasurer was Mr J. F. Elam, then headmaster of The Colchester Royal Grammar School. Serving for only three years, he retained a keen interest in The Friends and Colchester's cultural heritage right up to his recent death. He encouraged his pupils to participate in several projects undertaken by the Society. He was also instrumental in commissioning and donating to the museum archives the Eric Richards Collection of photographic slides of post-war Colchester. The next treasurer, Mr. C. McLeish, was only able to help for one year, to be followed in 1953 by Mr. Bernard Mason. Throughout the next twenty years, the financial affairs were in very sure hands, correct to the last halfpenny! Nearly every year there was some item donated or some documents reproduced by Mr. Mason, including the silver model of the obelisk mile stone, now part of the town regalia and the magnificent gift to the Town of "Tymperleys" together with The Bernard Mason Collection of Colchester Clocks and Watches.

In 1973, it was difficult to find Mr. Mason's successor but after some persuasion, the office was accepted on a temporary basis by Mrs. Barbara Napper. Now after 25 years, Barbara has decided to retire! Some of the more prominent acquisitions during her stewardship include, the Smythe Screen, the Taylor pedestal card table, a delightful John Vine watercolour of the Phillips children, the important 18th Century watercolour of North Gate by Edward Eyre, and a donation of £1500 towards

the cost of displaying the splendid Middleborough Mosaic in the Castle. Barbara was also responsible for The Castle Appeal Fund. When she was appointed the "Friends" funds were under £1,500, but she retires knowing that just over £10,000 is in the kitty.

Our first Secretary was Mr. Duncan W. Clark, a senior partner in Messrs. Duncan Clark & Beckett, the Colchester architects. During his long career he designed The Colchester War Memorial and also the new church at Little Horkesley. A delightful character, Mr. Clark was in office for nearly ten years until his death in February, 1958. Mr. Len Drinkell was his successor and remained so until retiring some thirty years later in 1988. Mr. John Trent taking over, but in 1993 resigned due to business and family commitments. Mr. Patrick Denney becoming our current secretary. John and Patrick masterminded the very successful series of 'Themed' lectures which have been such a feature of recent years and helped to boost membership to nearly 400.

THE SUCCESSFUL launch of The Friends of Colchester Museums and Art Galleries was due to four people - Councillor Leonard Dansie, Mr. J. F. Elam, Mr. Duncan Clark and Mr. Bernard Mason. However, the original list of founder members shows the impressive support given to the venture.

Over the last fifty years we have had a very supportive, knowledgeable and active committee. It is not possible to mention every member, but stalwarts include Tony Doncaster, Leonard Gant, Kenneth Mabbitt and Mrs. Edna Swan.

The first Annual Report tells us *"if activities have not been ambitious they may fairly claim to have been highly successful. It is felt that the funds of*

the Society should not be expended in the purchase of minor objects and that it would be better to wait until an opportunity arose of acquiring works of exceptional importance." Our first was the beautiful 15th Century silver brooch purchased from a local clergyman for £5! The other acquisitions in that first year were two 17th Century double-handed Tygs given by Mr. R. Simkin and the fine collection of caddy spoons bequeathed by the late Mr. H.W. Lewer, former treasurer of the Essex Archaeological Society.

Sadly two years later we read *"consideration given to purchase of a watercolour of St. Botolph's by Michael Angelo Rocker ARA - but price too high"!*

The objects of the Society are :

"To stimulate interest in the Museum and Art Galleries by Meetings and Lectures and to promote a fuller knowledge of their contents. To further the work and well-being of the Museums and Art Galleries by:

- a) The acquisition of objects of interest and works of Art.*
- b) Assisting, where practicable, in the expansion of the Museums and Art Galleries and the development of the Castle.*
- c) The promotion of special exhibitions.*
- d) To encourage and foster in the younger generation the study of Local History, Archaeology and the Arts."*

Over the last fifty years members have been quite successful in maintaining those objects. Nothing spectacular, perhaps, but apart from the early disappointment just mentioned, we have managed to meet the calls made upon us.

THE EARLY DAYS saw the acquisition of three panels of heraldic stained glass from Marks Hall, Coggeshall; more relics of the Honywood Family to join the tombstone at Holly Trees recording the death

of Mary Honywood at the age of 93 and leaving a descendant for each day of the year plus two over! Mr. Bernard Mason presented the Sanctus Bell dated 1591 from East Bergholt Church, cast by Colchester bell-founder Richard Bowler. We were also able to purchase for £11.12.0 a fine Worcester porcelain plate with a view of Colchester Castle.

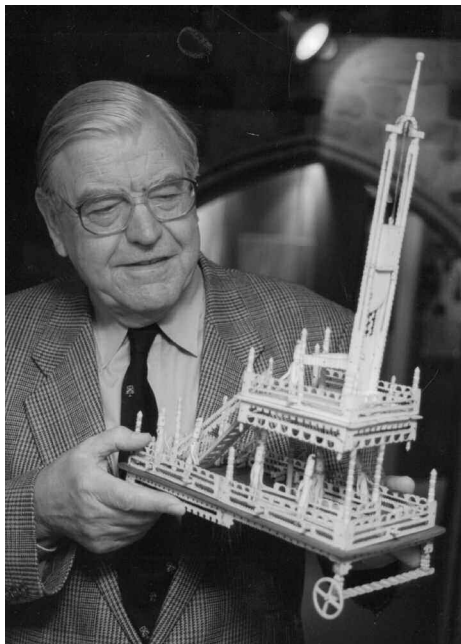
Our first picture was a watercolour of St. Botolph's Street and Mersea Road (c.1790), by James Dunthorne junior and purchased for £8.10.0. Other pictures include a Frank Daniell portrait of Charles Benham; a collection of original drawings and caricatures by Sir Gurney Benham; two watercolour sketches by Mary Benham of costumes for Colchester Pageant; Major Bale's watercolour of St. Nicholas Church; a delightful painting, dated 1844, by John Vine the arm-less artist, of the Phillips Children who lived at Spring House, Lexden, purchased jointly with the Borough Council for £500; watercolour of Castle Park by Tom Simpson; a modern painting of the Castle by Bill Burton; the important 18th Century watercolour of old North Gate, by Edward Eyre, bought for £1450, to join the painting of East Bridge, by the same artist, purchased by the Council, cleaned and remounted by the "Friends."

The collection of John Constable Life Drawings was remounted and we also cleaned and renovated the pair of Frank Daniell paintings of the Blue Coat School Boy and Girl, leading to the identification of the girl as Miss Cardy.

Do you know why Roddam Close is so named? Older "Friends" can tell you, because in 1954, one member Mr. V. Palles-Clark dug up in his garden the cast iron name plate of Dr. Roddam, who lived in "St. Mary's Lodge" which was demolished to make way for Roddam Close and Vint Crescent.

Another well known town doctor was Penry Rowland, whose residence and surgery was in Wellesley Road. A delightful character and founder member, always donating some unusual item remembered best for his collection of French Prisoner of War Relics – some twenty items of straw marquetry and over twenty made from bone, including a working model of a Guillotine, with basket and decapitated head.

In 1956, Mr. Eric Calvert gave a silver punch ladle, hallmarked 1723 made by Colchester silversmith Richard Hutchinson – the first piece of local work in the Town Regalia. The only other piece known at the time was a tankard sold at Sothebys in 1936 and traced by Mr. Calvert to New York. The Borough Council bought it with the help of a grant from the National Arts Collection Fund. In 1962, a George I chocolate pot dated 1719, was purchased by the Council for £945, with £372 from our funds and a further contribution from the National Arts Fund.



Mr. Len Drinkell with the Guillotine made from bone by prisoners of war.



Mr. Bernard Mason, Mr. Len Drinkell with the Mayor of Colchester, Brigadier J. F. Panton holding the George I silver Chocolate Pot.

High Street has changed in recent years, but an earlier example of change was the demolition in 1960 of Joslins' old premises at 108 and 109 for the new Tesco Stores. The medieval building contained a fine 17th Century moulded plaster ceiling, which, under the eagle eye of Mr. Bernard Mason, was carefully dismantled and re-erected in Holly Trees as a memorial to our first secretary, the late Mr. Duncan Clark. How do you remove a heavy plaster ceiling? Saw it into suitable size sections and wheel it down to your new site!

We splashed out in 1956, spending £72 on a silver coin of Cunobelin (only one other was known) and just over £11 for a few coins from The Lockett Collection. In 1994 we donated £250 towards the acquisition of the Woodham Walter Hoard of Coins bought by the Museum for £4389. A bronze seal of Lord Marney was dug up at St. Osyth and purchased for £20 and a brass Oyster Gauge cost us £30. The forged Irish bank note given the same year was not much use to our funds! A silver Consular Denarius (c.129BC) found at St. Helena School, was presented by the headmaster and Mayor, Councillor H. Hepburn Reid. We have received two legacies, £100 from the late Mrs Maud Howe and £500 left by the late Miss Margaret Lazell.

£25 was spent on collating and binding *The Rickword Papers*, a fascinating record of local history and gossip compiled by the late Gerald Rickword, and passed on to the Reference Library. The Philip Laver/Harry Barton collection of some 300 Essex and Heraldic Book Plates was purchased for £5 and later exhibited at the Minories in a display arranged by John Bensusan-Butt. An Account Book of Fynches Charity, covering the period 1685 to 1835, was bought for £46 our share being £25. A manuscript history of Berechurch and other similar items were presented by Mrs. J.

Gant, in memory of her husband, the late Mr. Leonard Gant. Mr Gant was a very active "Friend", the last compiler of "Important Dates" printed in Benham's Directory. Many will remember the "Leonardo da Vinci Madonna Appeal" – we gave five guineas.

In 1973, £100 was given to the Castle Museum and Excavation Committee to help provide a comprehensive photographic record and in 1991 £400 given to the Natural History Museum towards the cost of producing sound tracks of Bird Song for the new displays. We also donated £1500 towards cost of displaying the Middleborough Mosaic in the Castle, and we partook in the scheme by Councillor Paul Spendlove in 1983 by purchasing the year 1949 in "The Save the Castle Appeal".

As our contribution to Architectural Heritage Year in 1976 we undertook the refurbishment of the Wire Obelisk in Colchester Cemetery. Originally the 51st Milestone from London, designed by James Dean in 1760, sold by auction in 1858 for 65/- and bought by Charles Wire as a memorial to his wife. The work was carried out by L. J. Watts Ltd.

The following year the we gave £100 to East Hill Association towards cost of renovating the Drinking Fountain at the top of the hill and in 1962, we allowed the Minories Trustees £50 for repairs to the Gothic Summer House.

From the report of the first 25 years, "*in the Holly Trees is a fascinating collection of 18th Century and later bygones and a fine costume gallery, but unfortunately, very little furniture. However, in May 1962, the Curator, Mr. David Clarke, outlined a scheme for furnishing one or two rooms at Holly Trees.*" Our first acquisition under this scheme was a lacquered corner wall cabinet (c.1730) made by Simon Verlander. We had already helped to buy in 1965 a mahogany Pembroke

table (c.1800) made by John Taylor of 40 High Street, and in 1981 a mahogany pedestal card table, also by Taylor, was purchased in partnership with the Council for £800. Two years later, an antique wheel barometer in a mahogany case by P. Aggeo cost £340 and a 19th Century walnut stool from G. Rickword and Sons cost £34, again the purchases made in partnership with the Borough Council. 1978 saw one of our major contributions, when the Town bought The Smithe Screen for £3500. Our donation being £750, a grant of £1000 from the National Arts Fund and the balance of £1750 paid by the Council.

The Fiftieth Annual Report gives a list of items donated over the years, but is not complete. At a conservative estimate well over 700 articles have been passed to the four museums, the Local Studies Centre or the Essex Records Office. It is amazing what things have come to light, but two items must be mentioned. One favourite is the Victorian Baker's hand cart from Wivenhoe, presented by Mr. W. C. Cracknell in 1970, when he was chairman of Wivenhoe Urban District Council. The cart was duly renovated by the "Friends". The other gift is a Second World War gas mask complete with its original cardboard box. According to the donor the mask was regularly used by her late husband once or twice each year, *"when he was shredding horse radish roots for making sauce!"*

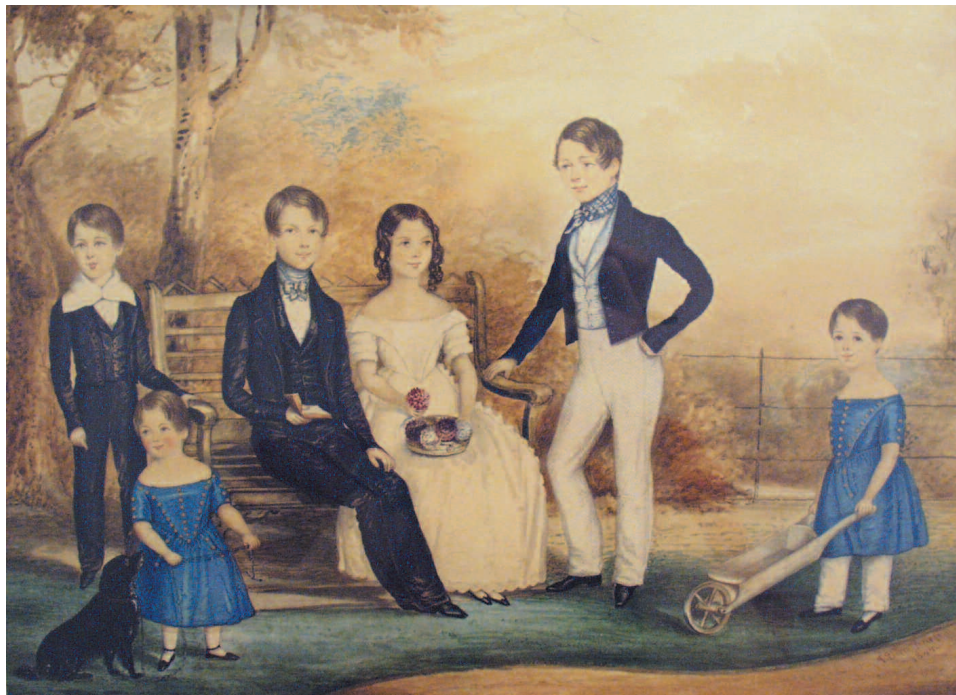
EXCURSIONS to places of interest have been popular and some 70/80 have been arranged during the past 50 years. The first, on 5th October 1950 was to Norwich where we were received by the Lord Mayor. Visits have been made to many other towns and villages in East Anglia. Bury St. Edmunds for the Pageant of Magna Carta; Saffron Walden and Engelmann's Carnation Nurseries; Otley Church and hall; Framsdon Farm and the meadow of fritillaries; the

Annual Service in the 17th Century Chapel at Walpole, Halesworth; the wonderful wood carvings in Dennington Church; and fascinating visits to Southend-on-Sea and Great Yarmouth.

We have also been privileged to see many historic houses and mansions – Sawston Hall, Cambridgeshire, home of the Huddleston family; the Walthams and "Langleys" by courtesy of Mr. John Tufnell; Hengrave Hall by kind permission of the Sister Superior; New Park, Wivenhoe, by invitation of Mr. C. M. D. Gooch; Helmingham Hall with Lord and Lady Tollemache; Worlingham Hall to be welcomed by Viscount Colville Culross, where, despite warnings by the Viscount, the driver of the coach managed to sink it up to its axles in the soft ground and we had the added spectacle of heavy lifting gear to put it back on the road. A delightful excursion to "Felbrigg Hall", Norfolk, just before it was taken over by The National Trust. Arranged by Mrs P. E. C. Brown, who knew the house well from her childhood days, she was able to show the secret door in the library and other fascinating details. We had afternoon tea served on genuine old Derby porcelain plates. Roos Hall, Beccles by courtesy of Mr. H. W. Suckling; South and North Lopham then to the Brandon factory of J. W. Walker, the famous organ builders; Kings School, Ely, Prior Crudens Chapel and the Cathedral; Belchamp Hall and Glazenwood.

London excursions have included The Russian Cathedral to be welcomed by His Grace the most Reverend Anthony Bloom; the V & A Museum by personal invitation of the Director Sir Trenchard Cox; Bethnal Green Museum; Sir John Soane Museum and The Overlord Embroidery; Whitbread Brewery; Waltham Abbey and the Pinto Collection of Wooden Byegones, Northwood; the Whitechapel Bell

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The Phillips Children, painted by local disabled artist John Vine, mentioned on pages 2 and 3.



East Bridge, painted by Edward Eyre, forming a pair with North Gate, by the same artist. See pages 2 and 3.



The Roman Mosaic found at Middleborough, Colchester, now on display in the Castle Museum, see page 5.

Below:

The Silver Punch Ladle, hallmarked 1723, see page 4.





The ceiling moved from 108/9 High Street, Colchester, to the Holly Trees Museum, mentioned on pages 2 and 5.



Four coins from the late Iron Age from a hoard buried at Weeley dated c. AD 25. The earliest, top left, an issue of the Trinovantes tribe struck about 50 BC. The others feature CVNO (king Cunobelinus) and CAMV (Camulodunum).



A 4th Century AD Roman finger ring found at Great Bromley. It features a twisted rope pattern flanking the green glass set in the bezel of the ring.



A 17th Century finger mourning ring found at Great Bromley featuring a skull on the outside and an inscription on the inside marking the death of someone on 4th January 1667 with the initials IK.



A gold coin struck by king Cunobelinus c. AD 10. The legend gives the abbreviated name of the king and the first four letters of Camulodunum, the ancient name for Colchester. Coins like this are called biga staters. Biga is the Latin word for chariot - on one side is a pair of horses that drew the chariot, with a single wheel symbolising the vehicle.



Three coins of king Addedomaros ruler of Essex c. 25 BC, found at Little Bromley. The first features a horse, the symbol of secular authority in the period.



A rare Anglo Saxon sword pommel from Ardleigh, dated AD 575-625, with an attractive interlace pattern.

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Foundry and the nearby German Church; Apsley House; the Wellington Museum; The Sonorous Works of Boosey & Hawkes; The Cabinet War Rooms, Whitehall; and The R.A.F. Museum, Hendon; Sadler's Wells Theatre to see Gilbert & Sullivan's "Mikado", a joint meeting with the Colchester Literary Society; The *Cutty Sark* and the Painted Hall, Greenwich with Mr. Frank Carr, former director of the Royal Maritime Museum; The National Portrait Gallery to see the Reference Library and vast reserve stock, under the guidance of Dr. Roy Strong; The National Sound Archives Museum; The National Army Museum and The Royal Hospital, Chelsea, with vivid memories of the parade of Nannies walking in the gardens in their distinctive uniforms and pushing their high coach-built perambulators.

The excursions and visits to so many places of interest are a vital part of our Society, but the invitations to the homes of some of our members have been most memorable.

Our first invitation was to No. 64 Belle Vue Road, Wivenhoe, the home of Mr. and Mrs. David Clarke. A family house containing some lovely examples of antique furniture and a delightful collection of early toys.

Then to No. 71 High Street, Colchester by kind courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Mabbitt, to see "A Multifarious Collection of Bygones". A unique opportunity of seeing a fascinating collection of family archives and artefacts in the delightful atmosphere of their 18th and 19th Century town house.

Then to No. 15 East Hill, to visit the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Cooke. The narrow frontage with its Georgian brick facade concealed the fascinating interior of a typical medieval timber

frame building. Modernised and enlarged in the mid 1700's, the rare spiral staircase inserted and the brick front added, all in keeping with the needs and aspirations of a successful Georgian business man.

Mr. David Papillon invited us to "Olivers", Shrub End, his fine country residence with its picturesque grounds and lakes. Mr. Leonard Gant gave a brief history of the house, Mr. John Bensusan Butt spoke to us about the interesting family portraits while Mr. Len Drinkell spoke on the furnishings.

Also "Bridge House", Coggeshall, the home of Mrs. Hilda Sebastian. A former brewery house renovated in the early 1800's, containing a fascinating collection of antique furniture, paintings, books and a unique collection of exquisite needlework, each piece by Mr. Sebastian, mostly on his travels round the world as a Queen's Messenger.

All the proceeds from these events were in aid of the Acquisitions Fund.

Two of our more unusual events included the invitation from Mr. A. G. Smith, managing director of James W. Cook, Ltd., of Wivenhoe, to attend a traditional ship launch, followed by a tour of the shipyard. The other being "An Organ Ramble", giving members the chance of visiting interesting churches and hearing fine organs, described and demonstrated by Mr. David Drinkell, Master of Music at St. Magnus Cathedral, Orkney.

ON SUNDAY, 13th December 1970, a Christmas Festival was held in the Castle, perhaps the first ever Carol Service to be held there. Conducted by the Reverend Eric Turner, Rector of St. James' Church, the parish in which the Castle stands, and led by the choirs of St. James and Castle

Methodist Churches. Readings were given by Mr. Leonard Dansie, David Clarke, David Forder, George Young and the Reverend D. Stranack. The Festival was so popular that extra chairs had to be obtained from the Castle Methodist Church.

The carol services continued for the next four years. Sadly, however, their success proved their death knell as newly enforced fire regulations caused their cancellation.

FOR SOME YEARS Alderman Dansie and Others had been giving talks on local history. To bring the heritage of the town to a wider public, he was invited by the "Friends" to give an illustrated talk in The Moot Hall. In co-operation with Mr. H. W. Poulter, the former Assistant Curator, a fascinating selection of slides of "Bygone Colchester" was presented on 25th November 1952. The large audience was entertained and enlightened by the comments and asides of the two speakers, with Mr. Poulter's home-made outsize screen, this was perhaps, the last occasion when an old-fashioned magic lantern was used in public. These talks continue to the present day, but fortunately, without the encumbrance of a huge brass magic lantern to carry around!

1959 saw us really flexing our muscles, when the Society sponsored the "Wildfowling and Firearms Exhibition" at the Castle. A highly successful venture produced by Mr. C. E. Owen, then Curator of the Natural History Museum, and opened by Mr. James Wentworth Day the well-known sporting personality and author. Mr. Owen gave practical and successful demonstrations of firing different firearms - while Mr. Alan Dace showed us the correct procedure for loading, priming and firing a flintlock wildfowling piece. Incidentally the expenses were just under £40.

The "Friends" had constantly badgered the powers-that-be regarding the use of Trinity Church, where we undertook several projects. One of the first being the renovation of the Dr. William Gilbert monument. The work by L. J. Watts Ltd. cost of £36 and the armorial bearings reblazoned by Mr. Kenneth Mabbitt. On 22nd November 1961 (358 years after Gilbert's death on 30th November 1603) Professor Duane Roller of Oklahoma University, unveiled the renovated monument, and after a commemorative dinner at the Red Lion Hotel, gave an interesting talk on the life of the great doctor. The Colchester branch of the Electrical Contractors Association kindly provided a push-button spot light.

Three years later the five funeral hatchments were cleaned and renovated and the following year the Stuart Royal Coat of Arms at the church was restored at a cost of £30. Then in 1967, the pupils of Colchester Royal Grammar School cleaned and tidied the interior after the ravages of pigeons and hooligans.

THE SUCCESS of the Gilbert commemorative Dinner prompted the Committee to arrange Annual Dinners. The first on Wednesday, 28th November 1962 was at the Red Lion Hotel, with the theme "Colchester, Past and Present". Its form was an imaginary perambulation of the town based on old photographs from the Rudsdale Collection in the Holly Trees Museum. Starting from the Obelisk which formerly stood outside the Red Lion, Mr Bernard Mason gave a short history of the Obelisk, its sale by auction in 1858 and subsequent re-erection in Colchester Cemetery. The silver model of the Obelisk was also on view. The perambulation continued under the guidance of Alderman Dansie and Mr. Len Drinkell and was completed by Mr John Bensusan Butt giving biographical notes on former occupants of the principal residences.

Over the next few years a sequence of highly successful dinners was held, when we were privileged to welcome such eminent guests as: Sir John Eliot, a distinguished historian and chairman of Thomas Cook and Son, who gave a most enlightened talk “The Great War and Fifty Years After”;

Sir Trenchard Cox, Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, his theme being “Friends of Museums”;

Sir Charles Wheeler, President of the Royal Academy accompanied by Lady Wheeler. Sir Charles spoke of the problem of assessing values in art. He said *“Pictures could not be valued in money and value could not be equated to cost”*;

Sir Frank Francis, Director and Principal Librarian of the British Museum. He referred to the caustic remarks made about the British Museum made at Colchester several years ago by Sir Mortimer Wheeler. He continued with the basic functions of a museum – to acquire, preserve and display;

Dr. Roy Strong, Director and Secretary, The

National Portrait Gallery, describing the new ways of presenting the Gallery, including the use of photographs and films. He also wanted to develop regional listing of portraits in homes and collections in conjunction with the local Records Office;

Mr. Frank Carr, former Director of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich spoke about the preservation of the *“Cutty Sark”* and recalled his long association with Colchester and Colne-side towns and villages;

Sir David Follett, Director of the Science Museum, giving an account of the museum from its earliest days and indicated help would be available for developing the proposed science museum in Colchester.;

Sir John Wolfenden, Director and Librarian of the British Museum, spoke of the future plans and his reluctance to the loan of National Treasures leaving the Museum.

In every case we were invited back to the respective museums and each time privileged to have a personally conducted tour.



Dr. Roy Strong (far left), now Sir Roy, pictured at a “Friends” Dinner with the Mayor, Councillor Cecil Howe, the Mayoress, Alderman Leonard Dansie and Mrs Dansie, with Mr. Len Drinkell, Mr. John Bensusan Butt and Mr. W. Duncan Clark forming the back row.

THE FIRST Annual Dinner held in November 1962 taking the form of an imaginary perambulation round the town, prompted the creation of one of our greatest successes – the provision of Town Guides. In the Annual Report for 1964, it said *“with the active support and co-operation of Colchester Borough Council, the Society has this year started a scheme providing competent guides for parties visiting Colchester”*.

We started with ten guides – provided for four parties comprising of some 170 people. The first group was from a well-known public school at The Hague, Holland and involved four guides with 65 boys and girls on a full tour of the Town. The following year special badges, bearing the Borough Arms, were provided by Colchester Corporation.

1967 saw the scheme extended to “The Constable Country” with tours including visits to the terrace of “Stour House”, home of Randolph Churchill, the splendid Church of St. Mary the Virgin and Bell Cage, East Bergholt and introducing the sites of some of John Constable’s most famous paintings.

On 4th April 1968, we held our first Open Day as part of National Museum Week. Over 400 visitors were conducted around the Castle and Holly Trees including the new Poulter Laboratory. The following year, we supported the Mayor, Councillor Reginald Hilham, in his campaign to publicise Colchester, including tours of the Town Hall. Our visitors comprised people from Africa, Russia and Germany.

In 1971 we assisted at a “Teach-In” held at the Castle under the auspices of The Civic Society with the theme “Know Your Colchester”. After extensive interior renovation to the Town Hall, three Open Evenings were held on 2nd and 8th December 1971 and 12th January 1972. On each evening about 200 visitors were

received in the Mayor’s Suite by Her Worship the Mayor, Alderman Mrs. Nancy Smith and Alderman Leonard Dansie, Chairman of The Cultural Committee. Guests were then taken on tours of the Town Hall by our guides.

1978 provided us with our biggest problem when we were approached by The Winged Fellowship Trust to provide guides to the Castle for twelve disabled persons in wheelchairs! When the Castle was built in 1076, it contained all “Mod Cons”, including fireplaces and toilets, but no lifts! After much thought, the secretary wrote to the C.O. of Colchester Military Corrective Establishment. He kindly provided six stalwart “Volunteers” with a sergeant in charge, to man-handle the wheelchairs and occupants. It proved to be an interesting and enjoyable day, with pupils from Colchester Royal Grammar School pushing the chairs round the exhibits and members of the Castle Methodist Church providing refreshments.

That same year we also provided guides for 100 members of The British Numismatic Society from their Annual Conference.

Late 1983 saw the formation of the Colchester Tourist Association, leading eventually to the provision of professional guides under the National Blue Badge Guide organisation.

By 1986 guide work was completely taken over by the Blue Badge members and after some 22 years one of our more prominent and certainly appreciated functions came to an end. One effect was the loss of income as the service produced £40-50 per year. It must be admitted, however, that the “Friends” realised that they would not have been able to cope with the great increase in demand for tours. We never had more than about a dozen or so guides, whereas the Town is now served by

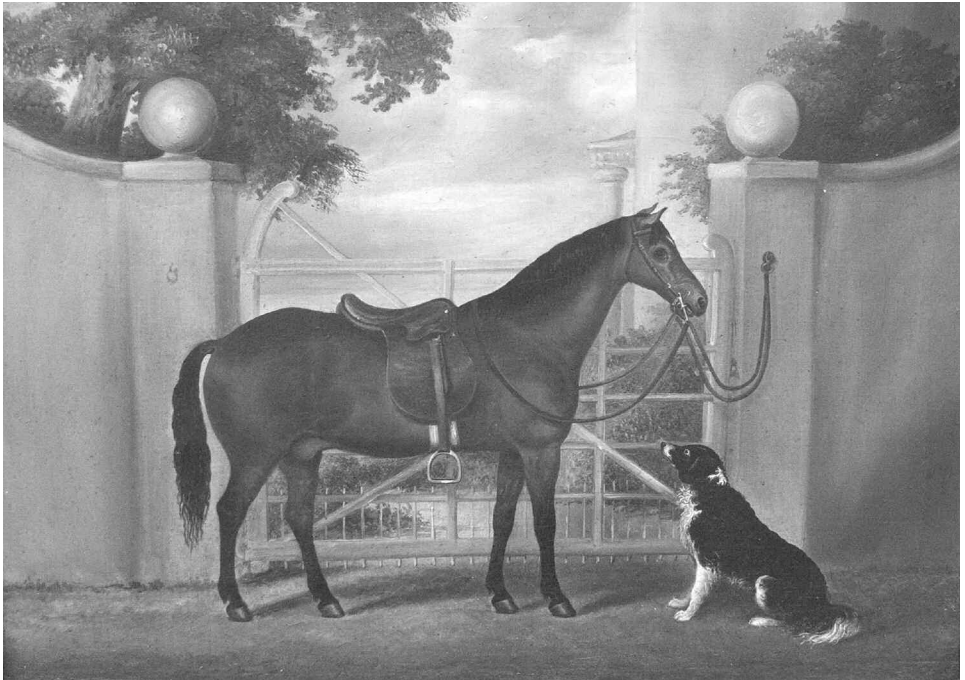
over 50 qualified Blue Badge holders. However, members still provide illustrated talks on “Old Colchester” and other similar topics.

APPRECIATION must be recorded to the staff of Colchester’s five museums and the Resource Centre, for all the help and advice received over those fifty years. From the early days with Horace Poulter, then Mr. M. R. Hull, the Curator, followed by David Clarke, Oliver Green and now Peter Berridge.

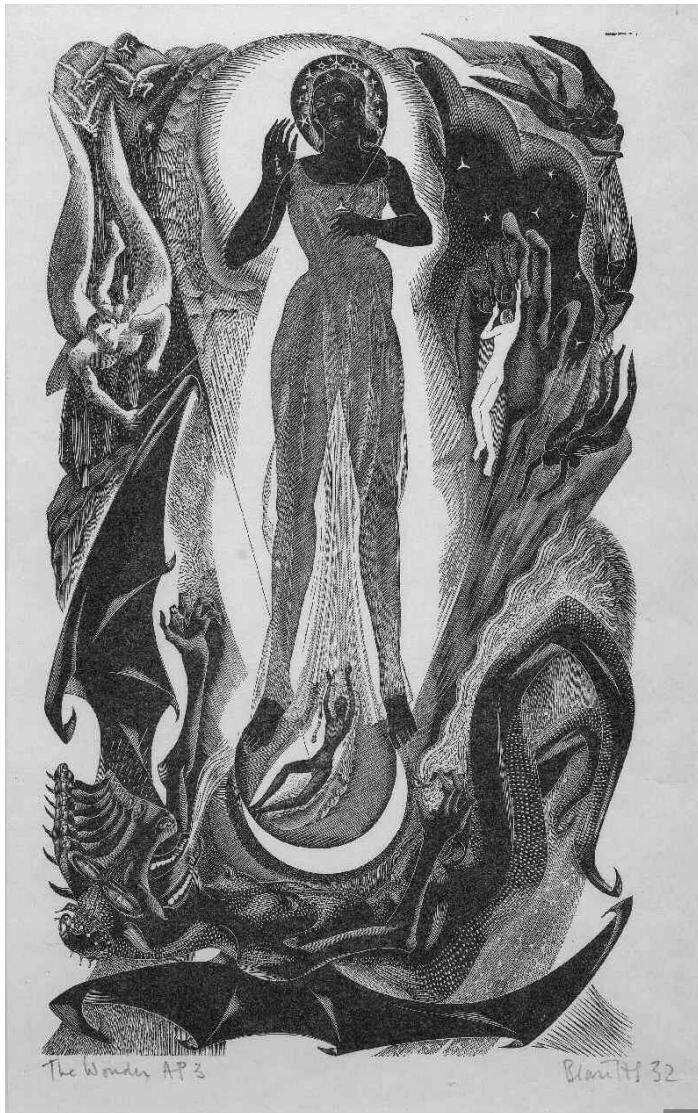
The Silver Jubilee Report records
“...the past years have been ones of steady progress and service. We look forward to furthering the prime objects of our Society which are to stimulate interest

in our Museums and Art Galleries and to encourage and foster the study of local history, archaeology and the Arts. However, new members are needed, especially would we like to see more young people joining in our activities”.

Mr. Drinkell finished his talk by saying how proud he was to have been part of the first fifty years of the “Friends” and excited at the sheer scale of knowledge and influence which is generated by our Museums at international and local levels.



One of two paintings by the disabled Victorian artist John Vine which were purchased with the help of the “Friends”.



*One of ten prints by Blair Hughes-Stanton (1902-1981)
painter and engraver who moved to Manningtree after the Second World War
and taught at the Colchester School of Art.*