



Friends of Braintree Museum Newsletter

No.40 October 2026

Welcome to our third digital Newsletter

As we near the end of this year, it is a good time to look back at the Friends' activities and achievements during the year. Our last Newsletter was in February and since then lots has happened. We have had our regular monthly talks which are so well supported and provide an opportunity for folks to meet up. This is most encouraging. There have been four outings this year, see later, all very successful and enjoyable and we are planning a visit to see the Bayeux Tapestry at the British Museum next year.

We exist to support the Museum financially and hence need to have the funds to do so. The raffle in the Summer was very successful, and we have been able to replace the chairs in the old School Hall and Archive.



In other ways we raise money through the Talks and outings and as financial pressures increase, have been looking for other fund raising ideas. The really enjoyable and fun quiz, run by the Collis family, was a start and we are seeking to launch a monthly draw. Please do support this, our newest venture.

Although we raise money for specific Museum Projects, we also support the Museum Trust who run the Museum and Archive by giving them £5,000 a year for general funds. We would like to be able to increase this.

We aim to be active and effective and depend on your support for which we are very grateful. Thank you for being a member. Please keep on this journey with us.

Thank you.

Jean Harrison – Chairman

New Monthly Draw

Why not join us and have some fun. For £5 a month you could enter our Draw and possibly win as well as contributing to the Museum's finances.

Each month 50% of the money raised will go to the Museum and the other 50% would be divided into prizes for the participants. The more tickets you have, the more entries you get and the more you are likely to win! In this way we are raising money for the Museum and also there maybe something in it for yourself.

Come and join us! Contact the Treasurer Cliff Foster, on retsofcliff@aol.com

It will be fun



New Members

Welcome to these new members who have joined The Friends of Braintree Museum since our last Newsletter in February 2026.

Mr and Mrs A Adair	Mrs D Botham	Mr and Mrs R Clubley	Ms E Ichoku
Miss S Harrington	Mrs S Hughes	Mr and Mrs R McDermott	Mrs M Morley
Mr and Mrs D Pattison	Mrs M Pimm	Mr P Whitehead	

Our next Talks are:

6 Nov	Essex Curiosities	Maggie Piper
5 Feb	Life on an Island – Living and growing with a 3-acre smallholding	Helen Reynolds
5 Mar	AGM + John Ray's 400th Birthday	Polly Redman
2 Apr	Titanic – her story from launch to loss	Steve Lester
7 May	The Rise and Fall of Chelmsford Star Co-op	Kevin Pittuck
4 Jun	The City of London past and present	Gary Jones
2 Jul	A talk about Paycockes	Liz and Kay
3 Sep	A Few Essex Villages	Peter Tatum
1 Oct	Reminiscences of my family and Braintree boyhood	Rob Smith
5 Nov	A Talk about Colchester Zoo	Andy Moore

Do please come along on these Friday evenings, listen to the talk, have a coffee or a tea and make new friends.

2027 Talks

This is a foretaste of a couple of the Talks coming up.

5th February: **Life on an Island - Living & Growing with a 3-Acre Smallholding** is an engaging and popular local lecture series delivered by smallholder Helen Reynolds. The presentation details her family's transformative journey of moving out of London to establish a highly productive, self-sufficient lifestyle. Helen operates Brick Lock Smallholding, which is uniquely situated at an old lock keeper's cottage on an island plot off the River Stort near Roydon, Essex. Her talk focuses on the realities of leaving urban London life behind to embrace rural self-sufficiency, navigating the steep learning curve of land management.

2nd April: **Titanic – Her story from Launch to Loss** by Steve Lester, a member of the Titanic Historical Society. He is affectionately known as a 'Titanorak' and has been used by a number of TV production companies as a 'go-to' expert. One not to miss!



Previous Talks

During the year we have enjoyed a diversity of Talks arranged by Peggy. We did have one horrendous morning when the speaker phoned Peggy to say he was ill. Some phone calls later we were so relieved that Brian Thurlow, our speaker from the previous month agreed to come at several hours' notice. Peggy and I had envisaged a hall full of people with no one to entertain them. Brian's Talk on Borley Rectory did just that! It's all in a day's work for the Chairman and Talks organiser. Other subjects over the months have been Anne Frank, an Evacuee's story, the Demise of the High Street and Memories of Bradford Street Businesses by Rob Smith.

There is one more Talk in November this year, Essex Curiosities by Maggie Piper.

Come and enjoy an evening with Friends!

AGM

A well-attended AGM reviewed and approved the events and finances of the past year. The committee were all re-elected.

Jean Harrison	Chairman /Outings
Dan Collis	Vice Chairman /Sound
Cliff Foster	Treasurer
Penny Pilbrow	Secretary
Russell Thompson	Chronicles
Karen Wade	Raffle
Philip Deal	Web Site IT
Pat Barry	Willing and able to do anything and everything!

Our next AGM is on Friday, 5th March 2027.

This is always a very short meeting as all the papers are distributed in advance. Please come, and then enjoy Polly Redman's Talk on John Ray's 400th Birthday before celebrating another year with tea or coffee and cake!

Raffle

Wow! We made it! Thanks to your wonderful support, we have been able to replace all the chairs in the Old School Hall and also six office chairs to be used in the Archive.



It was a great total of over £1,900 so thank you all very much for buying tickets and donating.

News about committee Members

Penny Pilbrow

I joined the Friends not long after moving to the Braintree area after I retired from work. The last 15 years of my working life I had been working for an Insurance Broker in Chelmsford, initially as a PA and then as a claims technician.

Jean Harrison approached me in 2012 when she thought I might be interested in helping at the Archive. At that time they were open to the public once a week and one Saturday in the month. I was involved in providing refreshments for visiting groups and also covering for days in the reception when the regular volunteer was not available.

Shortly before the covid outbreak in 2020 the decision had been made to close the Archive for regular public visiting and so I asked if I might join the volunteer team at the Museum.

As well as a regular weekly morning in the shop I have also helped with children's activities both at the Museum and, in the past, visiting schools on projects. More recently I have helped at some of the Holiday Club sessions which I have enjoyed along with "Little Legs" events in the Public Gardens.

I have been Secretary of the Friends since 2015 and this is a role I also enjoy.



Quiz

We tried something new in June. A quiz! The Collis family were great and took this over completely with Janis as question master, Dan on sound and their granddaughter as scorer. A very big thank you to them.

It was an exciting, competitive evening and great fun.

There were positive comments from many of the participants, so we hope to have a second quiz next year. Why not come! You don't need to have a whole table, just come and join in!



Looking ahead to the next *Chronicles*

The next issue of *Chronicles*, the Friends' long-running journal, will be with you in February. As always, we're hoping to fill it with content written by the members of the group.

Regular readers will be aware of the breadth of material that we include. For example, issue 62, which came out in June, contained articles on textiles, workhouses, dovecotes, dolls, place names, textiles, literature and football. The first and the last of these were intended as a means of straddling two consecutive exhibitions at the Museum, the Art Deco one and the current one celebrating the so-called beautiful game. One of the literature articles was a personal quest on the part of the author to understand a bit more about the enigmatic Hedingham-based writer Jack Lindsay. In addition to this, there were regular features - our 'what is this object?' page and another featured picture from the Museum's photo archive - as well as correspondence from readers. All contained in a compact 36 pages.



If you'd like to contribute an article, we're happy to consider any proposals that you may have. Remember that the museum serves not just Braintree itself, but the whole district - everywhere from Pentlow to Hatfield Peverel, and from Great Bardfield to Bures Hamlet. We're always interested in family histories, or personal reminiscences that perhaps deal with a certain trade or a particular area of interest. Stylistically, we cover all bases from the academic to the colloquial.

I've been involved in editing *Chronicles* since the pandemic, and it's always a pleasure to receive articles out of the blue and suddenly find myself becoming very well informed about such things as motorbike sidecars or Nissen huts. I think one of my favourites was the piece about the Elizabethan-style dress that a little girl's mum made for her to wear at Braintree carnival in 1953. The district is steeped in history (as is everywhere, of course), from tiny things like this to the big things that shape us all - landscape, society, industry - so there's no reason for *Chronicles* to run out of raw material any time soon.

If you'd like to be part of it, drop me a line.

Russell Thompson

Editor, Chronicles

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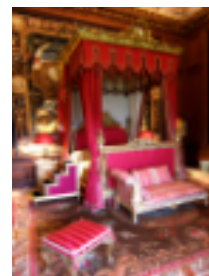
Outings 2026

We have had four outings this year visiting stately homes, gardens and even a river cruise.



In March we went to **Burghley House**.

Burghley house was built between 1555 and 1587 and was the home of William Cecil the Lord High Treasurer to Queen Elizabeth the 1st. It is an excellent example of Elizabethan architecture and furnishings. We saw the magnificent State Rooms with artwork and many treasures. It was a very windy day and so although some braved the gardens, many stayed in the orangery restaurant and enjoyed delicious food. It was a good start to the year.



The outing in May was a **Cruise on the River Orwell**.

It was an extremely hot day when we embarked the Orwell Lady in Ipswich. There was then a relaxing, leisurely cruise to Felixstowe. We passed interesting buildings including Freston Tower and saw varied wildlife on the way. A buffet lunch was served on board as we cruised back. It was a very relaxing and enjoyable day.



In July we travelled north on the A1 again to **Barnsdale Gardens**.

In 1985 the BBC television series Gardener's World was established at this new site by the gardener Geoff Hamilton. Today his son Nick runs the Gardens which are peat free and chemical free, totally organic. There are 38 individual gardens giving examples of designs and plants which are all labelled, so a visit to the nursery to purchase something which caught the eye is easy! From Barnsdale we drove on to Woolsthorpe Manor.



Now owned by the National Trust Woolsthorpe Manor was the birth place and home of Sir Isaac Newton and there, in the grounds, we were able to see the famous 400 year old apple tree where he sat when he discovered the theory of relativity. He lived there as a boy and returned during the plague. The Science Centre introduced the principles of Newton's wide ranging scientific work with interactive experiments. It was a really interesting place.

Our final visit of the year was in September. With over a two-hour journey, it was one of the furthest destinations we have travelled but so worth it. **Blickling Hall in Norfolk**



Passed to the National Trust in 1940. In the 16th century, the Boleyn family lived there, and it is where Anne Boleyn was born. It was Sir Henry Holland who took on the ambitious project of a Jacobean design but incorporating the past Tudor features. The long gallery houses the National Trust's largest collection of books. When we visited there was a textile exhibition. Karun Thakur has an extensive collection of beautiful tapestries, embroideries, and some traditional costumes which were on display within the house. The gardens too, are extensive and good weather enabled a busy but rewarding day.



Forthcoming Outings

There are other outings at the planning stage! More details to follow!

News from the Museum

Football - A Local History of the Beautiful Game

The latest exhibition at the Museum opened on Tuesday 18th July 2026 and will run until 24th December 2026.

The exhibition brings together an exciting collection of football memorabilia, including programmes, shirts and photographs. A particular highlight is the historic Essex & Suffolk Border Football League Reserves Cup, won by Silver End United FC in the 2025-26 season.

Please do visit the exhibition with your free admission.



Talks and Events at the Museum

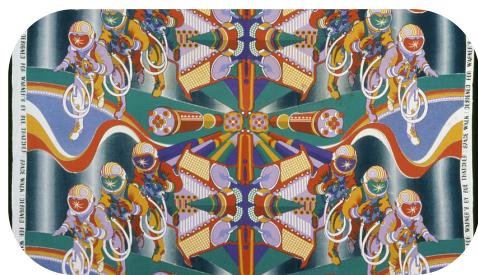
Full details of the Talks programme can be found online:

10.30am Friday 16 October - Patchwork & Quilts at the Warner Textile Archive (Tour £15)

10.30am Saturday 31 October - Odd and Outlandish Part 2 (Town Tour £5)

7.00pm Wednesday 18 November - Dressing the Queen: 200 Years of Makers & Monarchy (Online Talk)

10.30am Friday 27 November - Royal Celebrations and Palace Decoration (Tour £15)



Saatchi Gallery

The Warner Textile Archive is pleased to be able to loan the Saatchi Gallery a screen-printed cotton sample of a textile called 'Space Walk' by Sue Thatcher, designed and printed in 1969, that celebrates the moon landing.

Festival of Essex Archaeology and Heritage



In July, Holly and Bethany represented Braintree Museum at the Festival of Essex Archaeology and Heritage at Cressing Temple Barns. They took a selection of handling objects such as animal skulls and the Victorian mouse trap. As well as sharing information about our current exhibition and the upcoming John Ray one with many visitors, they had opportunities to speak to many other local heritage groups, such as Rayleigh Town Museum and The Jumbo Project.

Holiday Club

During the summer holidays, we welcomed over 400 children to the Holiday Club.

We have had a fun filled summer with lots of new activities and lots of returning favourites. Some of our most popular themes this summer were 'Awesome Archaeologists!', 'Fossil Finders!' and 'Mountains vs Volcanoes!'. We have enjoyed lots of messy activities such as making slime and exploding volcanoes, as well as lots of food making.

Many special guests visited us this summer including Christine and Philip who taught us the basics of photography, Penny who taught us how to cross stitch and Alison who taught us how to create collage artwork!

Robert also visited to teach us how to identify different birdsong, and finally Buddy the Boar,

Robert Rose - Museums Director



Acknowledgements

This newsletter has been compiled by Philip Deal with contributions from other Committee Members and Museum Staff. I am very grateful to him for this and all his digital support.

Jean Harrison - Chairman