

**Billericay Archaeological  
and Historical Society**  
**newsletter**



Autumn 2022



Billericay 1833

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## Newsletter Editor

As this is the first edition of the newsletter since our AGM may I thank everyone for voting for me to continue as Newsletter Editor; a much appreciated vote of confidence.

May I thank Ken Richmond, Lynne and Tony Beard, John Hathaway and Alan Taylor for their contributed articles, I am sure they will be enjoyed. Also, can I ask members to think about items that they can write about for future editions. They don't have to be lengthy or have photographs included, and if the topic is of interest to you then I am sure it will be of interest to fellow members.

Jacky Hathaway

Newsletter Editor

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## BA&HS Meesting Calendar 2022-2023 8pm start

<b>Sept 12<sup>th</sup></b> "Incidents and Accidents on East Anglian Railways" <i>Adrian Wright</i>	<b>Jan 9<sup>th</sup></b> "Queens of Egypt" <i>Janet Brewer</i>
<b>Oct 10<sup>th</sup></b> "Yesterday a King" <i>Julian Whybra</i>	<b>Feb 13<sup>th</sup></b> "Children at War, 1914-1918 What was done to us wrong" <i>Viv Newman</i>
<b>Nov 14<sup>th</sup></b> "Any Mother's Son" <i>Margaret Mills</i>	<b>Mar 13<sup>th</sup></b> "The History of Jewellery" <i>Jason Middleton</i>
<b>Dec 12<sup>th</sup></b> "Christmas in the Trenches" <i>Nick Dobson</i>	<b>April 10<sup>th</sup></b> "Transport in London during WWII" <i>Tony Beard</i>

## Meeting Notes 2022

*14<sup>th</sup> Feb Viv Newman "Assinations at the Astoria Hotel, Brussels"*

This month's meeting was presented by Dr. Viv Newman who related the deeds and mis-deeds of several women at the beginning of the first world war. It was both interesting and fascinating in equal measures and supported by lots of slides.

*14<sup>th</sup> March Ian Keable "The Century of Deception; Birth of Hoaxes in 8<sup>th</sup> Century England"*

Ian told the story of Mary Toft who allegedly gave birth to 17 rabbits and illustrated this by performing a magic trick with 17 toy rabbits. He justified this by reminding us that magic is a hoax too. Further topics were "The Speech of Polly Baker" in fact written in the USA by Benjamin Franklin and "Vertigern" which was NOT in fact written by William Shakespeare. Additional sleights of hand accompanied the tales.

*11<sup>th</sup> April Maria Medlycott "The medieval landscape around Billericay: recent projects"*

Using illustrations from old maps together with arial photographs of archaeological activities Maria described and explained where and how people lived locally from 1066 up to Tudor times. She especially focused on discoveries at White Hall, with which the Society had been involved, and the status of Frith Wood as an ancient woodland and now a place of controversy in planning for future development.

9<sup>th</sup> May      *Chris White “Turner and Constable”*

The Artists, J M W Turner and John Constable were contemporaries but, as Chris explained, very different in terms of character, upbringing and output. He gave a fascinating insight into these differences by showing us examples of their work and explaining how and why they were painted.

June 13<sup>th</sup>      *Les Smith “A personal history of the London to Brighton Car Rally”*

This was a fascinating talk with Les providing us with an insight into the complexities, difficulties and fun of this annual event. His photographs and video clips added enormously to this presentation.

July 11<sup>th</sup>      *Andrew Baker “Spain’s Golden Age and After Another World”*

Andrew is a very knowledgeable speaker who told us the history and rationale behind Spain’s global explorations. We learnt about the triumphs and tribulations of that time. He also explained the reasons why the Spanish Empire dwindled away in more modern times.

### **Childhood Memories of Norsey Wood in Wartime.**

A chance conversation with Joyce, a 95-year old lady, enjoying her first post-lockdown walk in the Wood with her daughter before Christmas, led to her showing me exactly the location of the empty underground bunker she played in during the war. She remembered watching aerial dogfights from the Wood. Below is an extract from the letter Joyce wrote in response:

Hello Ken – remember me – walking in the woods with my daughter ... and your subsequent letter and map for which I must thank you. A hundred memories came flooding back and more so since talking with my brother at the weekend. Regarding the underground bunker, he too had been down the ladder into the chamber below and, like me, he had no recollection of any ammunition and I am sure he would have been aware and certainly no gun on top.

There was a television programme recently featuring the unearthing of a WW2 bunker in North Yorkshire ... they pointed out the original use was to hold a number of troops, in case of invasion, behind enemy lines to disrupt and destroy which confirmed what I was told years ago. ...

We recalled the night of the incendiary/oil bombs, none of which fully ignited as the ground was so very wet – they fell mainly on the Break Egg Hill side of the wood and the railway bank – it was presumed the target was the train down in the cutting with the gun in tow. ... Next day we all went round collecting the unignited bombs and were severely admonished by the bomb squad who came to collect them ... .

Now in my 95<sup>th</sup> year I am left to remember those who walked the wood with me – one by one called to military service and sadly, some never returned. ...

*Joyce, name and address supplied.*





Since joining the Volunteer Working Party I've been intrigued by the metal framework on the top of Great Fox Hill overlooking the railway. I've heard a number of theories of what was there; Joyce is sure there was no gun except on the train that was brought up from Wickford at night. Someone else suggested an A-frame with a wire down to the railway for transferring ammunition.

'The History of Norsey Wood', a pamphlet by Kevin Cook, the first Warden, refers to, 'army manoeuvres and ammunition storage'. He writes about 'lorry recovery' practice and an area fenced off with barbed wire around the gravel pits where trenches were dug and roofed with corrugated iron to store ammunition. This could be consistent with the A-frame story.

If anyone has a relative with memories of playing in the Wood in Wartime we'd like to hear about them via [norseywoodsociety1977@gmail.com](mailto:norseywoodsociety1977@gmail.com). The History of Norsey Wood is long since out of print but we do have a scanned version of the text (without illustrations) that we can supply on application. There is a mail form generator on the 'contact us' page of [norseywoodsociety.uk](http://norseywoodsociety.uk)

Ken Richmond

### **London Buses, Trams, and Trolleys: A Celebration**

During the weekend of July 9 and 10, 2022, The 2RT2 Bus Preservation Group drove their double deck bus, RT113, from Kelvedon Hatch to The East Anglia Transport Museum at Carlton Colville, about 5 miles from Lowestoft.

The Museum was holding a London Weekend, celebrating 60 years since the last trolleybus ran in London (1962), and 70 years since the end of the London trams, (1952). There were four London trolleybuses in service at the museum along with two trams, one London and one Blackpool.



Tram tracks and trolleybus overhead are installed throughout the museum's road network and visitors can travel on the various vehicles as often as they wish. On Saturday afternoon and again on Sunday morning, RT113 ran in service around the site, to the delight of the visitors. RT113 came into service in May 1940 and ran round the Putney area. It was taken out of service in 1955 and was a training bus until 1963; the Group then purchased it from London Transport for £105. Since then, demanding work and many hours of manpower have seen the bus restored to the condition it is in today.

Currently there are two 2RT2 buses in roadworthy condition, the other being RT8, which was rescued from a museum in St. Louis, USA and is owned by Ensign Bus Company as part of their

Heritage Fleet. Ensign also own RT44 and RT54, the former of which is in the process of being restored; hopefully, one day all four will run in service together. There are only four of this type of bus still in existence of 150 built, and they are all in Essex.

Lynne Beard

Photos Tony Beard

### **The buses of the Epping Ongar Railway**

As a Volunteer on the Epping Ongar Railway, I would just like to add a few brief notes about the types of vintage vehicles that can be found at the railway. Apart from the obvious types of train which includes steam and diesel locomotives, there are also buses.

The buses only run when the heritage railway is open to the public and that is mainly every weekend except on special occasions such as Christmas. Three buses operate the 339 route round trip between Epping Underground station and Shenfield main line station. (This is to provide a link to the heritage railway which does not use Epping Underground Station.)

In addition to that long route there will be several other buses running between Epping, North Weald & Ongar stations as they supplement the hourly train service. The buses are in a variety of liveries. The red ones that are still familiar today, plus the green London Country livery and the Green Line livery which are no longer seen today.

The buses in red livery mainly comprise of RTs, RTLs, RMs or RMLs with an occasional RTW. Then in the summer months a red RF single decker makes an appearance. The ticket for the railway is a day "rover" which covers both the buses and trains all day long.

I can certainly recommend a visit to the Railway as it is a step back in time and will bring back many memories. Just check out their website for full details  
[www.eorailway.co.uk](http://www.eorailway.co.uk).

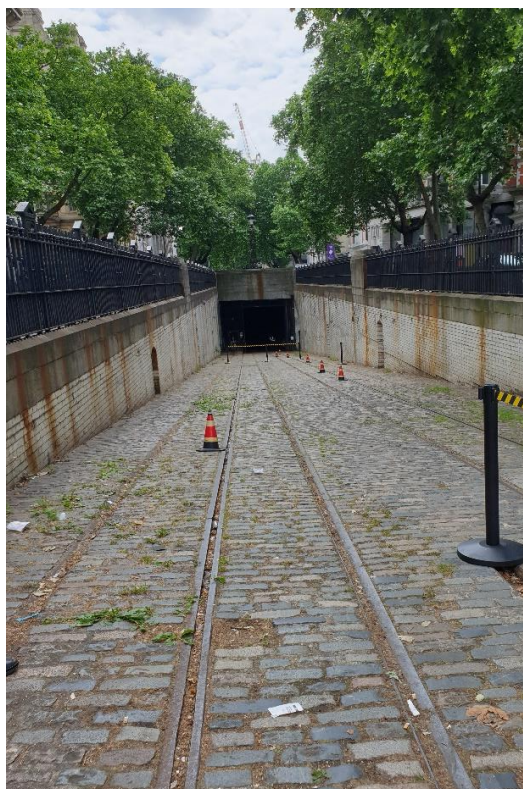
John Hathaway

### **The Kingsway tram tunnel**

An underground secret in London, hidden in plain sight, is the Kingsway Tram Tunnel. At the start of the 20th Century extensive slum clearances were carried out; one project centred on Kingsway. A tram network was being upgraded from North districts of London to the areas south of the River Thames, but at the same time the new thoroughfares of Kingsway and Aldwych were being constructed.

This site was seen to be an elegant and up-market area, why else call it Kingsway, which would have been spoilt by the intrusion of dirty and noisy trams and so it was decided to build a tunnel for the trams to travel underground from Southampton Row to Aldwych.

The Kingsway Subway was opened in 1908 and 200,000 passengers would use the service between 5am to past midnight each week but this service closed in 1952. The entrance at the Southampton Row end is still plainly visible at the intersection of Southampton Row and Theobald's Road.



A tour can be booked through the Hidden London service of the London Transport Museum

Jacky Hathaway

Photo John Hathaway

### **The Romans in Essex**

Prior to the Roman invasion, Britain was populated by and divided into various tribes. Essex was inhabited by peoples known as the Trinovantes. The final invasion and conquest by the Romans was in 43 A.D.

Colchester, then known as Camulodunum, was a defended town and was included in the records written by Roman historians, such as Tacitus and De Cassius. It was believed to have been the capital of King Cunobelin.

Hundreds of coins, which bear the inscription C.A.M.V for Camulodunum and C.V.N.O for Cunobelin have been found at Colchester.

In 43 A.D. five legions, commanded by Aulus Plautius, landed in Kent. They waited at the Isle of Sheppey, then crossed the Thames. They advanced upon London (Londinium) and the Home Counties and met considerable resistance.

Emperor Claudius, who had ordered the invasion, headed towards Camulodunum. He achieved occupation, then gained the surrender of several local chieftains. He, later, gave permission for a Roman Colonia (Colony) to be built there. The town contained a Temple, a Forum, a Theatre, a Basilica and a Market.

It is believed that the Trinovante people were harshly treated by the Romans. When Boadicea (Boudicca) passed through, from Norfolk and Suffolk, towards London (Londinium), they readily agreed to join forces with her Iceni tribes men and women. Her assembled tribes destroyed Colchester, London and St. Albans.



Finally, the Roman General, Suetonius Paulinus, and his army caught up with and defeated Boadicea (Boudicca) and her armed forces. To this day, it is not known where this battle took place. However, there are a number of theories regarding the probable battle site.

There is evidence to suggest that Billericay was almost certainly a Roman settlement. The work that has been carried out on this is located in The Cater Museum. Also, further evidence is held at the Essex Records Office. This shows a Roman fortified post, based at Blunts Wall, which covered about four acres. Earth mounds could still be seen there in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, however, they have, since then, been lost to us.

Items of interest, which have been found in both Billericay and Wickford, include Roman coins, potters' kilns, lamps, urns, burial mounds and pottery of all descriptions. Many items have been found in and around the area of Billericay School. They include numerous brooches.

So, yes, the Romans, clearly, were here!!

ADAPTED FROM "Iron Age – Roman Occupation" – W.G.Harper.

Alan Taylor.

### **Trajan's Bridge over the River Danube**

This construction is an amazing feat of engineering built in 105AD by the emperor Trajan to enable his troops to cross the river Danube between modern time Romania and Serbia. He had previously built a roadway along the rock face of the Iron Gates Gorge to the West and upstream of the bridge. Its purpose was to enable easy movement of troops for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dacian War. His achievements, including this bridge, are immortalised on his memorial column in the Forum Rome



The Danube is 2600 ft wide now and was a similar width at the Roman time. The Bridge's engineer was Apollodorus of Damascus and he firstly diverted the river into a canal. The water was unusually low at this time due to a long drought. Twenty masonry pillars were built 160 ft apart, across the riverbed. They were 146 ft tall and 60 ft wide. There was a wooden superstructure, made of oak timbers. This was high enough to enable shipping to pass underneath



A fort, or castrum, was built at either end so that access to the bridge was only through these defences. The foundations of these are still visible today; one is at Drobeta-Turnu Severin in Romania and the other at Kladovo in Serbia.

The wooden superstructure was destroyed by Hadrian, Trajan's successor, to secure the empire from invasion. The brick remains of the bridge reappeared in 1858, another time of drought, and the 20 pillars were still visible. Two were destroyed at that time to facilitate river navigation. By 1982 only 12 were mapped by archaeologists, presumably others having been swept away. Now only one on each bank is visible.

The foundations of the Romanian Castrum have been reconstructed to enable understanding of its structure

Further along the site recently the remains of an amphitheatre have been discovered and are currently being excavated.



Jacky Hathaway

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***Did you know that....***

Horace Road and Headley Road are two residential streets in Billericay, passing between Stock Road and Norsey Road less than a mile north of the High Street.

Did you know that they were named after the sons of the farmer who owned the land before the housing development took place.

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