

**Billericay Archaeological
and Historical Society**
newsletter



Spring 2022



Anne Boleyn

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Newsletter Editor

This edition gives notice of the 2022 AGM to be held at the Fold on April 11th at 7.30pm. This is the first AGM for two years and a new committee is needing to be formed as well as reports on the current situation to be delivered. Hopefully this will not take too long as we should have an interesting talk from Maria Medlycott to follow.

I am adding a new feature for the enjoyment of the members that have not been able to attend our monthly meetings. "Meeting Notes" just gives a summary of the fascinating talks that we have had so far since we resumed our programme.

Many thanks to Chris Crane and Les Smith who contributed articles for this edition

Jacky Hathaway Newsletter editor

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Welcome to the Society

On the 13th December 2021, we were able to open the doors for the Billericay Historical and Archaeological Society members to gather and be entertained by Nick Dobson with his talk (and sometime song) of The History of Christmas.

28 members attended and we had 3 visitors. It was lovely to be back and beginning to feel like normality was slowly returning.

We had a few reservations, would anyone come and how would we manage? Things went very well. The chairs in the hall were put in twos with gaps between, we had a one-way system in and out of the hall. People were wearing masks. At the interval, small groups went out to buy their refreshments and then either came back to their seats in the hall or went into one of the empty rooms. There was never a huddle of people.

In January, with the rise of the Omicron variant, again the Committee questioned whether the meeting should go ahead; as The Fold was open, we decided to go proceed. The talk was about R.A.F. Hornchurch by Dennis Lynch; 32 members attended and we had 7 visitors. Again, we were cautious, spacing out the chairs, using the one-way system, and this time we had refreshments at the end of the evening, so if anyone didn't want to stay, they could leave without missing any of the event.

In February, we were entertained by Viv Newman and her talk on Assignations at the Astoria Hotel, Brussels. 29 members attended and we had one visitor.

Currently, 39 of our members have paid their subscriptions for this year and we have 6 new members.

Those of you who haven't felt able to return yet, rest assured, we are doing all we can to make the evening as enjoyable as possible, while still being careful and cautious. We would love to see you in the not-too-distant future. We have a very interesting programme for the rest of the year.

Looking forward to welcoming you back soon.

Lynne Beard Membership Secretary

BA&HS Meeting Calendar 2022 8pm start

January 10th "RAF Hornchurch" <i>Dennis Lynch</i>	July 11th "Spain's Golden Age and After Another World" <i>Andrew Baker</i>
Feb 14th "Assignations at the Astoria Hotel. Brussels" <i>Viv Newman</i>	August NO MEETING THIS MONTH
March 14th "The Century of Deception; Birth of Hoaxes in 18 th Century England" <i>Ian Keable</i>	Sept 12th "Incidents and Accidents on East Anglian Railways" <i>Adrian Wright</i>
April 11th (with A.G.M. at 7.30) "The medieval landscape around Billericay: recent projects" <i>Maria Medlycott</i>	Oct 10th "Yesterday a King" <i>Julian Whybra</i>
May 9th "Turner and Constable" <i>Chris White</i>	Nov 14th "Any Mother's Son" <i>Margaret Mills</i>
June 13th "A personal history of the London to Brighton Car Rally" <i>Les Smith</i>	Dec12th "Christmas in the Trenches" <i>Nick Dobson</i>

Alan Taylor Speaker Secretary

Refreshment Rota 2022

As you can see, we have a few spaces on this year's rota, and much as it would be nice to have them filled with reliable members, I think we shall just have to appeal at each meeting for volunteers, when required. So, beware you have been warned!!

Many thanks go to the lovely members who regularly help, it is very much appreciated.

March.	2 volunteers required please
April.	Elizabeth and David
May.	2 volunteers required please
June.	Geoff and Heather
July.	Linda and Lesley
August.	No meeting
Sept.	Chris and one volunteer required
Oct.	Angela and Judith.
Nov.	Mike and Barbara.
Dec.	Coryn and George.

Chris Crane, Refreshments

Treasurer's Report – 2020-21

This is the first report since 2019. Thanks to your support, and the continuing efforts of your committee, the Society resumed activities in September 2021 under the COVID-19 restrictions in place at the time. 7 monthly meetings took place – January to March 2020 and September to December 2021.

Your Society remained financially healthy through the last 2 years during which income exceeded expenditure. Consequently, it is deemed unnecessary to increase the membership fee. Finances were boosted with a generous £500 donation from The Billericay Society following its closure. Membership subscriptions were down by 10% and, understandably, takings from entry fees, raffles and refreshments at meetings were halved. Web site maintenance costs almost doubled from £125 to £242.

Last, but not least, many thanks to your outgoing Treasurer, Derek Heinson, for his dedicated service from 1999 to 2019.

Michael Dyer Treasurer

Meeting notes 2021

Sept 13th Julian Whybra “American Colonisation: From Billericay to Billerica 1620 – 1655”

Julian, as ever, presented a detailed talk and painted a picture of what the early life in Massachusetts must have been like. We were given to understand some of the religious and financial background of these early settlers, and he explained how the settlements of Billerica, Chelmsford and Wickford came about. This talk should have been part of the Mayflower 2020 commemoration which was unfortunately curtailed by the pandemic.

Oct 11th Adrian Wright “Settle & Carlisle railway”

Adrian delivered a well informed and well-illustrated talk on the Settle and Carlisle Railway. He explained how this, and other local networks came into being, describing and explaining routes and junctions. Later, using his personal photo archive dating from the 50's, he showed how this line had adapted to modern needs

Nov 8th Margaret Mills “Oscar Wilde”

Margaret's subject was Oscar Wilde but rather than looking at his writings she talked about his private life including his family background, his education, his career, his popularity and, of course, his notoriety. Appropriate photographs were displayed as well.

Dec 13th Nick Dobson “Christmas Customs”

Nick spoke about the history of Christmas, some of the stories we had probably heard before, but some were new. For example, the Christmas tree and Prince Albert We sang 3 carols, Nick led us unaccompanied by an instrument and we the audience joined in as best as we could. Words on the screen would have been useful, especially for God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen.

Jan 10th Dennis Lynch “RAF Hornchurch”

Dennis used photographs and anecdotes to paint a fascinating picture of the development of the RAF in general and the facility at Hornchurch in particular. The site has changed use from farmland to aerodrome and now to a wildlife reserve. The stories of pilots and engineers gave an awareness of the full part that Hornchurch played in both World Wars.

Feb 14th Viv Newman "Assignations 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.

A day out in Kent

Last year we enjoyed a wonderful trip to Ann Boleyn's childhood home, Hever Castle, and found it delightful. It is set in 125 acres of beautifully kept grounds. It was much smaller than I had imagined but it felt very homely and comfortable.

At the turn of the 20th Century it was purchased by Lord Astor who restored it at a cost of £10 million. In some rooms original Tudor and ceiling beams had been sourced and installed. A couple of Anne's own books were displayed in the Book of Hours Room, where she would sit and read. The illustrations were very intricate.

Strolling through the grounds we found lots going on including a Birds of Prey display, a 100year old maze, archery, a boating lake and a collection of miniature country houses demonstrating different styles through the ages.

You may be interested to read a copy of Anne's last letter to King Henry before she met her sad fate.

Chris Crane

" Sir, your Grace's displeasure, and my Imprisonment are Things so strange unto me, as what to Write, or what to Excuse, I am altogether ignorant; whereas you sent unto me (willing me to confess a Truth, and so obtain your Favour) by such a one, whom you know to be my ancient and professed Enemy; I no sooner received the Message by him, than I rightly conceived your Meaning; and if, as you say, confessing Truth indeed may procure my safety, I shall with all Willingness and Duty perform your Command.

But let not your Grace ever imagine that your poor Wife will ever be brought to acknowledge a Fault, where not so much as Thought thereof proceeded. And to speak a truth, never Prince had Wife more Loyal in all Duty, and in all true Affection, than you have found in Anne Boleyn, with which Name and Place could willingly have contented my self, as if God, and your Grace's Pleasure had been so pleased. Neither did I at any time so far forge my self in my Exaltation, or received Queenship, but that I always looked for such an Alteration as now I find; for the ground of my preferment being on no surer Foundation than your Grace's Fancy, the least Alteration, I knew, was fit and sufficient to draw that Fancy to some other subject.

You have chosen me, from a low Estate, to be your Queen and Companion, far beyond my Desert or Desire. If then you found me worthy of such Honour, Good your Grace, let not any light Fancy, or bad Counsel of mine Enemies, withdraw your Princely Favour from me; neither let that Stain, that unworthy Stain of a Disloyal Heart towards your good Grace, ever cast so foul a Blot on your most Dutiful Wife, and the Infant Princess your Daughter:

Try me, good King, but let me have a Lawful Trial, and let not my sworn Enemies sit as my Accusers and Judges; yes, let me receive an open Trial, for my Truth shall fear no open shame; then shall you see, either mine Innocency cleared, your Suspicion and Conscience satisfied, the Ignominy and Slander of the World stopped, or my Guilt openly declared. So that whatsoever God or you may determine of me, your Grace may be freed from an open Censure; and mine Offence being so lawfully proved, your Grace is at liberty, both before God and Man, not only to execute worthy Punishment on me as an unlawful Wife, but to follow your Affection already settled on that party, for whose sake I am now as I am, whose Name I could some good while since have pointed unto: Your Grace being not ignorant of my Suspicion therein.

But if you have already determined of me, and that not only my Death, but an Infamous Slander must bring you the enjoying of your desired Happiness; then I desire of God, that he will pardon your great Sin therein, and likewise mine Enemies, the Instruments thereof; that he will not call you to a strict Account for your unprincely and cruel usage of me, at his General Judgement-Seat, where both you and my self must shortly appear, and in whose Judgement, I doubt not, (whatsoever the World may think of me) mine Innocence shall be openly known, and sufficiently cleared.

*My last and only Request shall be, That my self may only bear the Burthen of your Grace's Displeasure, and that it may not touch the Innocent Souls of those poor Gentlemen, who (as I understand) are likewise in strait Imprisonment for my sake. If ever I have found favour in your Sight; if ever the Name of Anne Boleyn hath been pleasing to your Ears, then let me obtain this Request; and I will so leave to trouble your Grace any further, with mine earnest Prayers to the Trinity to have your Grace in his good keeping, and to direct you in all your Actions.
Your most Loyal and ever Faithful Wife, Anne Boleyn"*

Maths and Electricity

Around 2500 years ago i.e. around 500 years BC there lived in ancient Greece a Philosopher by the name of Thales. He lived in a place called Miletus which is now in Turkey down near the Ionian Sea. Thales was a Mathematician who gained fame in his own lifetime by accurately predicting the date of the next Solar Eclipse by just observing the star positions and applying his mathematical brain. Prior to this prediction it was widely thought that when an Eclipse occurred it was the Gods showing their disapproval. Thales comprehension and prediction two thousand years before even the telescope was invented is astonishing.

He also experimented with magnets and static electricity. With magnets he reasoned that a human or an animal when alive can exert a force, e.g. you can move a cup around on a table, when a human or any animal is dead they cannot exert a force. A magnet can attract or repel, so does this mean in some way the magnet is alive. The magnets he experimented with were a naturally occurring rock called lodestone.

His experiments into what we now recognise as static electricity were achieved by rubbing different materials and noting that some could then attract pieces of feather etc. He paid particular attention to rubbing Amber which responds well to this treatment. Amber as you probably know is fossilised tree resin so he was particularly interested and puzzled to see insects embedded inside this rock like material.

Incidentally I understand from a Relative who makes jewellery from semi-precious stones that there is a lot of fake Amber from India on the market. If you rub it and it doesn't attract small pieces of paper etc. it's the fake stuff.

Unfortunately, in the years that followed Thales none of the Greeks continued with his early experiments with Electricity. This is understandable because why would you develop an invisible force that you could not see or guess how useful it could be. It makes you wonder what else like this has been neglected over the years.

Thales established a school in Miletas so his Maths and his studies were passed on. It is possible that some of the Geometric Theorems from people like Euclid you may remember from school Geometry lessons were actually by Thales.

It was approximately two thousand years later that a man called William Gilbert repeated Thales Experiments and made the next advances.

William Gilbert was born in Colchester to wealthy Parents, he was educated at Cambridge University and gained a Medical Degree. He became surgeon to Queen Elizabeth the first.

He funded a huge laboratory which it is estimated cost the equivalent of more than one Man of War in Elizabethan times.

He communicated his findings on his work with magnetism and electrostatic experiments with people all around the world. These communications were in Latin and sent to people like Galileo. This and his publication in Latin of his book *Magneticisque Corporibus* started the long development work into Electricity as we know it now. In it he coined the word electricity, it comes from the word electron, elektron is the Ancient Greek word for Amber. This was William Gilbert's way of acknowledging Thales and his early pioneering work.

One of his many experiments in this laboratory was to construct a large model of the world in Lodestone from which he could confirm and predict how a compass would react anywhere on Earth. Particularly useful for the sea faring community and he successfully concluded the centre of the Earth was Iron.

It is approximately 500 Years since William Gilbert. It is interesting to speculate whether if the Greeks had continued to develop Thales work whether they could have had Electricity as we have now by the time of Christ ie. 500 years after Thales. Whereas two thousand years was lost.

On the shoulders of these two giants many others followed, Benjamin Franklin inventing lightning conductors, saving many buildings and ships. Volta with his first battery, Michael Faraday realising and demonstrating the relationship between magnetism and electricity which has led to the development of modern electric motors and generators. Many other clever people over the years have experimented and developed this invisible force. Mathematicians have defined and predicted the way it works and confirmed the experiments. Work still goes on in understanding this invisible force and there is still much to learn and benefits to accrue.

Les Smith

Barking Fishing Fleet

Were you aware that during the mid-1800s, Barking was the home port for what was probably the biggest fishing fleet in Europe, maybe even in the world? Neither did I until I was researching the family history of my paternal grandmother.

Mignonette Louise Forge was born in 1880 to Emily Eliza and Frederick Alexander Forge. Frederick was listed as a merchant seaman on the birth certificate. Variously he gave his trade as mariner or fish salesman up until the end of that century when he became, first of all, a dock worker and then a venetian blind maker in the 20th century. Generally, they lived in Hackney or thereabouts. He was born in 1853.

His father, Charles Alexander Forge, born in 1817, was listed as a fish salesman in each of the 1851 / 61 / 71 census returns and they were living in Bethnal Green

My 3 x great Grandfather was Richard Alexander Forge, born in 1786. He was also a fish salesman living in Barking when his children were born. He also traded as a sailmaker with John Forge, listed in Pigot's Directory for Barking in 1826

This is when I began to find out more about the fishing industry in Barking. Apparently, my family owned a small fleet of smacks and the wider family were involved in many of the ancillary trades such as sail making, rope making etc. But a very large fleet, the Short Blue fleet, was owned by the Hewitt family. The fishing grounds were usually in the North Sea, easily accessible from Barking via the Rivers Roding and Thames, but could be as far away as Iceland



The Fishing Smack *Ann Hewitt*

Samuel Hewitt was a very innovative chap who revolutionised the industry locally. The Smacks used at this time were Tank Smacks, i.e. they contained a huge waterfilled tank within which the catch could be kept alive and fresh before it could be offloaded and despatched to London from the dock at Barking. Realising that fishing was not possible while the boats were sailing back and forth to Barking, Hewitt organised the offloading of the fleet at sea by smaller cutters which could then quickly take the catch to London leaving the smack to carry on fishing.

He paid the local farmers on the Essex marshes to flood their fields over the freezing winter months. This ice was then collected up and stored in Ice Houses (the remains of one can still be seen on Barking Dock) and used to maintain the freshness of the fish at sea. The fish were now packed into boxes covered in ice and kept in the smack tank. Ice supplies were renewed by the arriving, empty cutters. The boxes were easy and efficient to pack into the cutters

Business was booming. In 1850 the Barking fleet was 220 vessels strong. BUT all good things must come to an end. Michael Portillo usually finds that the coming of the railway to a town leads to expansion and prosperity. Unfortunately, in 1848 the railway to Maldon was opened with a fast train service to London. This led to the rapid decline of trade through Barking as it was far more practical to off load the catch at Maldon rather than sail up and down the Thames. This explains my family's move to Hackney away from Barking.

Life must have been very hard; smacks were usually away for 6 months at a time. But working life in Victorian times was generally hard, especially for children. One of the unpleasant things I found out about the fishing crews was that apprentices were usually recruited from the local orphanages and ship's masters were paid a recruitment fee. This unfortunately led to these young chaps being regarded as dispensable and even disposable as a new recruitment fee was always useful. I am pleased to say that I never came across a Forge or a Hewitt in court for these offences of cruelty or murder. Not that I haven't found any criminality in this family, I have, even transportation to Tasmania, but that is another story.

I have found this intriguing will of Robert Forge, sailmaker of Barking. It was proved in 1778.

"I do hereby give, devise and bequeath unto my friend Thomas Newman of Eastbury House in the said Parish of Barking all my estate both real and personal of what nature or kind soever and whatsoever the same may be stock in trade, household furniture, plate, jewels, debts, notes, bonds and securities for money in trust in the first place to pay out of my said estate all such debts as I may owe at the time of my decease and after payment of such debts then upon this further trust to pay, apply, convey or assign all my said estate household furniture, plate, jewels, monies and whatsoever also of mine may be remaining in the hands of this said Thomas Newman to Rebecca Elliston now living with me to enable this said Rebecca Elliston to bring up and support her child which she had by me. "

That must tell a tale, but I haven't found it yet. Perhaps the son is the John Forge mentioned earlier.

Jacky Hathaway