

# Billericay Archaeological and Historical Society newsletter



Autumn 2023



Members arriving, in some style, at Mangapps Railway Museum

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Many thanks to Roger Perry and Heather Hanson for their articles contributed to this newsletter. I hope that more of you will be tempted to put pen to paper for future issues, the bigger the variety of topics, the more interesting it will be to read.

The Billericay History Fayre is to be held at the Billericay Library on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> October, 10am to 3pm. We intend to have a presence there and if any members have any items suitable for display, photos or memorabilia etc., or feel that they can give an hour of their time to be on the stand, it would be much appreciated.

Next Spring the Billericay Archaeological and Historical Society will celebrate its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary – its Diamond Jubilee. If anyone has a suggestion as to how this can be commemorated please let the committee know so that we can consider including it in our plans.

Jacky Hathaway

Newsletter Editor

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### **Refreshment Rota 2023**

Sept.	Barbara & Mike
Oct.	Judith & Jacky
Nov.	Geoff & Heather
Dec.	Corynne & George

### **Refreshment Rota 2024**

Jan.	George & Joan
Feb.	Volunteers

As the year has progressed, unfortunately some helpers have been unable to continue their place on the tea rota. We are lucky, in that others have offered to step in, and some kind members are on the rota twice, thank you people. Please do consider answering the call when Alan asks for volunteers at the meetings. As you can see I have tentatively arranged the next few months rota, so fingers crossed. In any case my grateful thanks to everyone, past and present helpers, in supporting our refreshment break.

Chris Crane

## Meeting notes 2023

12<sup>th</sup> March 2023      *Jason Middleton*      *History of Jewellery*

Jason is a very knowledgeable dealer of precious stones and jewellery. He explained well, with illustrations on screen and in books, how jewellery has developed since Stone Age people collected shells and coloured stones to adorn themselves. Improvements in technology and discovery of new materials have added immensely to the range of items available over the decades. He listed the various reasons, including status symbols and religious artefacts, that jewellery has been used over the centuries. A very interesting talk but unfortunately no free samples!

17<sup>th</sup> April 2023                      *Tony Beard*                      *Transport in London during WW2*

To put the public transport into context Tony gave a detailed and well-illustrated history of how the transport options developed. This included buses, trams, trolley buses and tube trains. He then explained the measures taken to enable transport to operate as safely as possible during the years of conflict. Sadly, he also had several illustrations of disasters that had befallen vehicles in the war.

15<sup>th</sup> May 2023                      *Chris White*                      *The Art of Essex*

As well as talking about Essex artists, Chris gave us an introduction to Art Appreciation too. By comparing Constable and Turner, who were working at the same time, he gave us an insight into the tastes and trends of that time. He did a similar comparison between John Nash, Eric Ravilious and Alfred Munnings, who were all contemporaries, painted in Essex and were also War Artists.

12<sup>th</sup> June 2023                      *Janette Bright*                      *The Foundling Museum*

Janet gave us a fascinating insight into the Georgian world that led to the beginnings of the Foundling Hospital and the philanthropy of Thomas Coram. She also described how the Hospital was managed and children chosen to be taken in and cared for. William Hogarth and George Frederic Handel were valued supporters of the Hospital.

10<sup>th</sup> July                      *Adrian Wright*                      *Light Railways of Essex*

After giving a definition of a Light Railway, Adrian listed and described other light railways that were established early and in other parts of the UK. This gave an appropriate context to his thorough explanation of the few light railways that did exist in Essex as well as listing many others that never came into being. As always Adrian had collected an impressive set of illustrations for this talk.

## **Shipwrecks**

Shipwrecks are a tragic and horrendous event, but to anyone interested in discovering the past and how people lived in past generations they provide a spotlight for discovery. Of course, they sometimes attract plunderers and those with a ghoulish disposition, but can, when put into context, illuminate history in both personal and national terms. I was lucky in the past few months to visit two exhibitions of specific shipwrecks.

The first was the Mary Rose in its new, very plush and permanent museum at the Portsmouth Royal Navy Dockyard. After a very early departure from Southend on a Steam Hauled Pullman engine (named the Mayflower to continue the local and naval theme) we had 4/5 hours, on a hot day, at Portsmouth Harbour station to roam around the historic dockyard and 'new' museum. Of course the Mary Rose is of National importance and very much in the spotlight, so will not elaborate further, but to say it is very interactive, modern, youngster friendly, with plenty of audiovisuals to keep all amused. Well worth the visit, and we only just managed to jump on the train before it returned to Southend.

On a very different scale, we were in Norfolk and on a wet day and caught the train (diesel!) to explore the Castle Museum in the centre of Norwich. In two rooms there was a temporary exhibition (finishes 10th September) titled The Last Voyage of the Gloucester, Norfolk Royal Shipwreck 1682. The Gloucester was commissioned by Cromwell's Commonwealth and saw action in the Anglo-Dutch wars of the 1660's-70's. The exhibition sets out the Political situation in the later years of Charles II reign, the Popish Plots and general Protestant v Catholic turmoil in England during the 1670s & 80's.

James, Duke of York, the King's brother and heir, (but a devout Catholic) needed to restore his popularity and power, and so it was arranged that a fleet of 10 ships, led by James and containing the top of English nobility and society (including Pepys and John Churchill (later the Duke of Marlborough) would leave Kent in early May 1682 to sail to Edinburgh and return his pregnant wife, Mary, and family 'in state' to London. It seems that James, Lord Admiral of the Fleet, used his power to change the route suggested by the onboard Pilot to bypass the East Anglian sandbanks. The result was that the Gloucester hit a hidden sandbank, quickly sinking with the loss of many lives (circa 130-250), but not surprisingly the duke and most of the nobility were rescued with ordinary seamen and commoners left to perish.

All was forgotten and lost until two professional divers, Julian and Lincoln Barnwell with a few family members and friends, spent many years in the early 21st century searching for wrecks off the Norfolk coast, but latterly concentrating on the Gloucester, which was located in 2007 and confirmed by finding the ship's bell in 2012. The discovery has been largely kept secret so that the site could be safeguarded (it is in international waters). The exhibition showed what has been recovered so far, in particular lots of wine bottles, some with corks and contents intact, spectacles in decorative cases, the Ship's Bell, jars of ointment, navigational instruments and women's clothing. The exhibition included a video of the brothers diving on the sandy seabed with the wreck, cannons and finds being brought on board the diving boat.

Experts are hopeful that the wreck can be the most important maritime discovery since the Mary Rose and it is likely that what has been found so far is only the 'tip of the iceberg' and future exploration, could fundamentally change our understanding of 17th century social, maritime, and political history! Only Time will tell.

Roger Perry

### **Trip to Mangapps Railway Museum 28/07/2023**

More than 30 people climbed aboard the pre-war vintage bus for the journey to Mangapps Railway Museum near to Burnham on Crouch. It was interesting sitting on the top deck of the double decker bus enabling us to really enjoy the views over the farmland, vineyards and cottages, and the river itself, along the Crouch Valley.

We were welcomed at the Museum and, after a short coffee break, were encouraged to view the amazing exhibits stored within the sheds. Apart from the many different locomotives, carriages and wagons housed there, we saw a really impressive display of signs, signals, tools and equipment as well as ephemera and railway memorabilia. Access to different carriages and locomotives was possible and it was obvious the dedication of the owner and his team in maintaining the furnishings and fittings to give a good awareness of the way these transport items were enjoyed when used.



The group was then given the chance to ride inside a Canadian Pacific caboose. This was never intended to carry passengers but railway crew who would ensure the safe running of the train. It would have been positioned at the rear of a train and had side projections with windows enabling the crew to see the carriages or wagons in front. For us, a diesel locomotive pushed and pulled the caboose to each end of the mile long track at Mangapps.



The next treat was a ride in a part Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) which was powered by a shunter. Moving from one restored station building to another along the track between fields where we could see crop harvesting ensuring that we were made aware that the main purpose of Mangapps Farm is agriculture. The Railway Museum is just a hobby that seems to have got out of hand!

Also on site is a fully operational signal box, fully glazed to ensure the signalman can see the track and points nearby. Inside is a bewildering number of levers to enable trains to move safely between different tracks.

Another DMU ride followed, this time we were accompanied by the Museum owner Mr John Jolly. The train stopped at the far station and he gave us a fascinating talk about the station buildings and how he collected them which was the start of the Museum. He also spoke about how the Museum developed and what he thinks the future may hold.

The final activity was time spent In an old underground carriage with Tony Beard talking to us about the development of the tube network and the changes to the rolling stock in that time.

We then had time for a final cuppa before we boarded the bus for our return journey. Many thanks to Adrian Wright, Tony Beard, John Jolly and all the volunteers who made this such an interesting and worthwhile day.

Jacky Hathaway

### **My Experiences as a “£10.00 Pom”.**

Recently, there have been a couple of TV programmes on the subject of “£10 Poms”. One has been a drama and a documentary. Neither of which came close to my own experiences.

This is my story:-

In 1958 my mother and father decided that they had had enough of cold winters in England when my father was only able to work about half the time as he could in the Summer. This was because he was a bricklayer, and they were unable to build houses in the Winter because the cement wouldn't set properly. My mother didn't go out to work as it was not a time when mums went to work in those days.

We were quite a poor family, as many were, so when they heard about the opportunities in Australia and that you could get out there for only £10 each for adults, with children under 14 going free. My mother's brother was already out there and he encouraged them to go too. They were also crying out for experienced bricklayers. (my father had done a 7 year apprenticeship when he came out of the Army after the war.)

First of all, we had to have a medical to make sure we were all fit. This included my parents, my 8-year-old brother and my 3-year-old sister. Luckily, we passed.

We were allowed to take out 5 tea chests which had to hold all our belongings. This meant we had to leave many things behind including furniture, books and toys.

I was really excited about going out to Australia. I was 14 at the time and it was very exciting for me.

We left on a ship called the Orontes on November 17<sup>th</sup>, which was my sister's 4<sup>th</sup> birthday. I had a wonderful time on the ship meeting many new friends. The food was wonderful after the rationing we had experienced. There was entertainment including a fancy hat competition where I won a prize of a lipstick holder attached to

a mirror. My father had made the hat, which was a wedding cake with all the decorations including a bride and groom. We had 6 weeks at sea and called in at Naples, Aden, Columbo (now Sri-Lanka), Perth W.A. and finally, Adelaide.



We arrived at Adelaide at a place called "Outer Harbour" on Boxing Day, which was my parents' Wedding Anniversary. My siblings and I went to spend the day with my uncle and his family at Henley Beach. It was great being able to walk to the beach and we had a lovely day.

In the evening, my mother and father, who had been out to Smithfield Hostel where we were due to spend the next 5 months, came to pick us up and we went by train out to the hostel. What an experience this was! Our accommodation consisted of 3 rooms very basically furnished in a converted sheep shearing shed! There were 9 other rooms for other families in the block. The block with shower, toilet and laundry was outside. There was a section for males, one for females plus a laundry which had just large trough-like sinks for washing clothes (no washing machines!).

There was another accommodation block further along exactly the same as ours, both on tall brick stilts. Beyond this, was the dining room and as children, it was our habit to walk underneath this block rather than around it when we went for meals. I don't think I would have done this quite so readily if I had known about all the different types of spiders, some poisonous, that lived underneath the building!

The food was plentiful and edible. I should however, mention that mum and I were so shocked at the accommodation etc. that we cried for 2 days!

Another blow was the fact that my father was unable to work for 3 weeks because all the building sites were closed for Christmas. As we still needed some money even though the accommodation was free, my mother took on a job picking potatoes! This was in the middle of the very hot Summer when temperatures reached 117F degrees!

The nearest school for me, was Gawler High School that had to be reached by train. At that stage, the high school was an old building that had been a nurses' home with just a couple of classrooms. The other classrooms were in wooden buildings next to this. What a difference this was to the school I'd been to in Berkhamsted. The latter was an ex-Foundling Hospital and a beautiful building, opened in 1935 for Foundlings. It had an indoor swimming pool, a gymnasium, chapel, main hall as well as many other purpose-built facilities. The buildings were surrounded by all sorts of sport grounds from athletics to football, tennis hard court and grass, netball etc. It was an amazing place. Gawler High School had a couple of very rough basketball



courts, but that was all. Athletics had to be carried out on the local trotting track and softball, (a version of rounders.) was played on a field of "Salvation Jane" stubble which was very painful to fall over on and difficult to run on! There was no swimming, so I was devastated as this was my favourite sport.

Eventually, after 5 months, we moved into an S.A. Housing Trust House which was their equivalent of a Council House, in the new City of Elizabeth. The house was a brand new semi-detached bungalow built of Besser block. There were three bedrooms a very small lounge, kitchen and eating area, a laundry, bathroom and toilet. Two of the bedrooms were directly off the kitchen/eating area. It was not as nice as the Council house we had had in the UK. We furnished it with second-hand furniture bought from a locally well-known second-hand shop (housed in a tin shed) in Smithfield. We had to have a brand-new refrigerator though as these were very much a necessity. My parents had never owned a fridge before!

Both my parents were now working. My mother worked as head of the Typing Pool at Simpson's of Dudley Park where they made washing machines. This meant she was able to buy her first ever washing machine, at a reduced price. Very exciting! My father continued with bricklaying which was in great demand as Elizabeth was a brand-new town, mostly, at that stage, inhabited by immigrants. Within 5 years, my parents were able to buy their own home, a thing they could not have done in England at that time.

Besides furnishing the house, there had been other expenses too. A new school uniform for me (my old grey school blazer was dyed to Gawler High School's colour, navy blue), schoolbooks to be bought as the schools did not supply books. The books included exercise books and textbooks. It was quite expensive.

I had to travel to school by train as the new High School at Elizabeth had not been built. My brother was more fortunate, as his primary school (brand-new) was just literally around the corner from where we lived. Catching the train to school meant walking across a paddock to the Smithfield station which was the closest at that time. The paddock had sheep in it, including rams with horns, so I felt a little nervous at times!

My mother and father both worked hard. I had to help get the dinner each night and was given the job of ironing for the family. In those days most clothes required ironing. I had to use the dining room table to iron on as we didn't have the luxury of an ironing board. It could be very uncomfortable, standing there ironing in the extreme heat during the Summer!

While I'd found the girls at my new school much nicer than some of those in the UK, I did not like the school building and its lack of facilities. There were not as many subjects available to take as I'd had in the UK so I had to give up Music, Art, Domestic Science, History, Biology and Latin. There was no school choir or orchestra. In England I had belonged to the school choir, and I had learnt to play the clarinet.

I remained at the school for 2 years, taking both Intermediate and Leaving Certificates. This qualified me to go to Teacher's College, but as I was only just 16

and you had to be 17 to go to Teacher's College, it meant staying on at school for another year. Even this was not easy as I would have had to change schools to do this because Gawler High School only went as far as Leaving and the next level was Leaving Honours which meant a change of schools and a journey by bus, train and bus to get to the other school. So I left school and went out to work earning the richly sum of £4.10s per week and having to pay £1.00 per week for train fares to my new job plus £2.10s per week board. As you can imagine, I was not able to buy many new clothes with the remainder!

Looking back, although it was hard leaving friends and family and my lovely school, I certainly do not regret going out to Australia. The English town I came from was a small town and very "class conscious". There were two other schools in the town that were private schools, one for boys and one for girls. While I was perfectly capable of gaining the marks at the 11 plus required for the girls' school, because my father was in such a poorly paid job, I could not have gone there as my parents could not have afforded all the extra money required to attend the school.

By going out to Australia, I gained so much more confidence in myself as there is much more equality there.

Heather Hanson

### **Did you know?**

Billericay itself was not mentioned in the Domesday Book as it was part of the Parish of Great Burstead until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

The first recorded name for Billerica appeared in 1291 as Billyrica.

Mary Allerton Cushman, who died in Plymouth, Massachusetts, on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1699 at the age of 83 was the last surviving passenger of the Mayflower.

In 1940, two young ladies from Billerica, Massachusetts, acting as the depository for contributions made by the citizens of that town to the Billerica Spitfire Fund sent a cheque for \$39 to the Billerica Times. They said it "conveys a boundless feeling of admiration for the splendid spirit, courage and effort being demonstrated daily by you and your countrymen in what, without question, is our Cause as it affects the true spirit of democracy".

The Rosaire Circus had their Winter Quarters in Coxes Farm Road. In 1938 crowds gathered to watch a procession from the Circus ground at Sun Corner, along the High Street to the church for the christening of Cecily Leonie Zametts Shufflebottom and Denise Elaine Rosaire. Each pram was pushed along the High Street, very gently with their trunks, by two elephants. The christening ceremony ended with the traditional crossing of the babies' palms with silver – in this case George V Jubilee Crowns.

With thanks to the Billerica Society