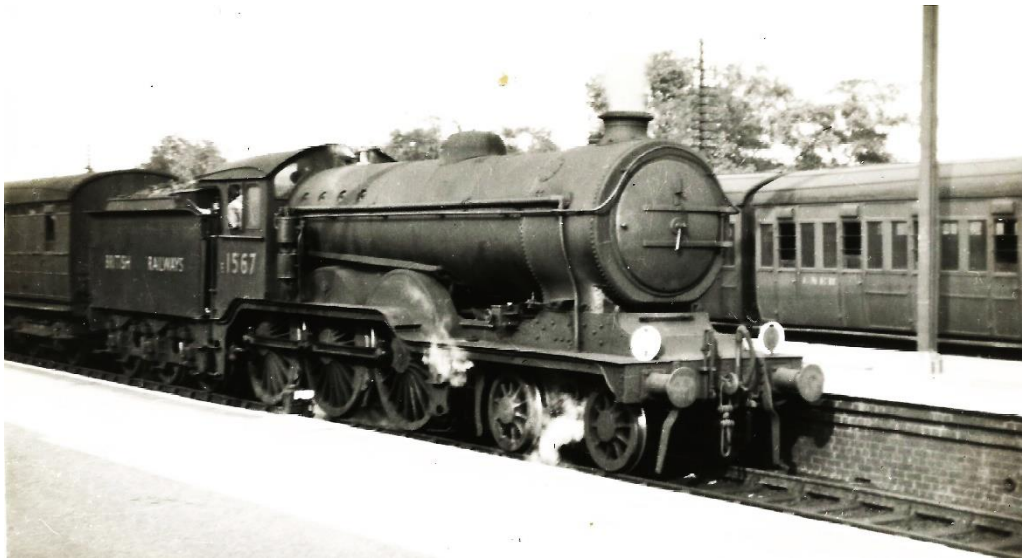


**Billericay Archaeological  
and Historical Society**  
**newsletter**



Spring 2023



NEXT STOP BILLERICAY: a London to Southend train at Shenfield about 75 years ago.

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## **Newsletter Editor**

Please take this newsletter as the notice for the next AGM to be held at the Fold on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> April at 7.30pm. Included with this publication will be the minutes of the last AGM in 2022.

Many thanks to the following members for their articles contributed to this newsletter, Alan Taylor, Adrian Wright and Lynne Beard. 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.

Jacky Hathaway

Newsletter Editor

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## **BA&HS Meeting Calendar 2023**

Please note the following amendments to the calendar published in the membership card. Changes highlighted in **RED**

April 17<sup>th</sup> (with A.G.M. at 7.30) "Transport in London during WW!!" *Tony Beard*

May 15<sup>th</sup> "The London of Samuel Pepys" *Richard Pusey*

June 12<sup>th</sup> "The Foundling Museum in London" *Janette Bright*

July 10<sup>th</sup> "Essex's Light Railways: Off the Beaten Track" *Adrian Wright*

August No Meeting

Sept 11<sup>th</sup> "The Art of Essex" *Chris White*

Oct 9<sup>th</sup> "Copped Hall" Philip McKinder

Nov 13<sup>th</sup> "The Beginnings of British Working-Class Culture" *Ted Woodgate*

Dec 11<sup>th</sup> "Christmas in the Trenches" *Nick Dobson*

## **Membership Report**

This is a gentle reminder to members to ensure that you have renewed your membership for this year. Fees remain unchanged but were due in January. If you wish to have a vote at the AGM, you will have needed to renew now. Also, please let us know if you do NOT want to renew.

Lynne Beard

Membership Secretary

### **Refreshment Rota 2023**

April.	Elizabeth & David
May.	Volunteers
June.	Geoff. & Heather
July.	Linda & Lesley
August.	No Meeting
Sep.	Isabel. & Chris
October.	Judith plus Volunteer
November.	Mike & Barbara
December.	Coryn & George

As you can see the poor 'ole volunteer is becoming rather over worked filling in the gaps, so PLEASE do consider occasionally answering the appeal for help, at the start of the meetings. Everything is set up and ready for you. Many hands make light work, and hopefully one could end up helping just once a year.

Chris Crane

Refreshment Officer

### **Meeting Notes 2022 – 2023**

*12<sup>th</sup> September      Adrian Wright “Incidents and Accidents on East Anglian Railways”*

As usual Adrian's talk was very informative and well presented. As to be expected some incidents were tragic but Adrian interspersed these with some which had some humour to them.

*10<sup>th</sup> October              Julian Whybra “Yesterday a King”*

This evening we were amazed to learn about several historic royals who reigned only briefly. Did you know that following the abdication of Tsar Nicholas of Russia his youngest brother Michael was nominated as heir. Within hours the Provisional Revolutionary Government assumed control and Michael never became Tsar. Many more fascinating people were described such as King Dipendra of Nepal who killed his father and then shot himself, dying three days later and Pauline Bonaparte, given a Principality by her brother only to sell it almost immediately.

*14<sup>th</sup> November          Adrian Wright “Volcanoes and Earthquakes”*

This was a replacement event as the planned speaker was unwell. Adrian gave a well explained and illustrated talk on this subject. We learnt about the causes and effects of these catastrophic events and why they are more violent in different parts of the world.

*12<sup>th</sup> December          Meeting cancelled due to adverse weather*

9<sup>th</sup> January

Janet Brewer "Queens of Egypt"

Janet began by explaining that there never were any queens as this title wasn't used although the primary wives of the Kings did have very important roles in the running of the state. She highlighted three women holding this role – Nefertari (wife of Rameses the Great), Hatshepsut and Cleopatra.

13<sup>th</sup> February

Viv Newman "Children at War 1914-1918"

As usual Viv's talk had been well researched and gave us an insight into some stories that we might not have previously considered. She described the way that toys and games found in the play room and classroom changed so that children were aware of the war. Viv then read from some diaries of children that lived in occupied countries in Europe or interned in camps worldwide. Finally, we learnt about some children that had lied about their age and took part in the fighting.

### **The Saxon period in our history**

This has been called "the dark ages". The early happenings of the era are somewhat obscure. What little information we have of these times has mainly been obtained from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Bede's Ecclesiastical History.

These were turbulent times in which the ill-equipped British forces tried to cope with a series of large-scale invasions from the Saxons, but, also, the Jutes and others from central Europe. Law and order was eventually established under Alfred the Great and, in due course, England became a Kingdom.

During the seventh century, Sebert, who was King of the East Saxons, as the people of Essex were then known, became converted to Christianity. Yet, after his death, his sons, once again, reverted to their heathen practices. However, Christianity was brought to the East Saxons by St. Cedd. He was a Northumbrian monk, who travelled the country preaching, teaching and building churches.

At this time, Billericay was just an outlying part of Great Burstead. It was neither a church town nor a centre of a manor. The name by which the area was known in 975 A.D, was Burghstede. This was a Saxon name and it signified a place that was fortified. So, the East Saxons had a defensive position somewhere in the area.

Immediately prior to the Norman Conquests this district of Burghstede was under the lordship of a thane who was called Inger. The next estate, now known as Little Burstead, was part of the great estates of Earl Godwin, the father of King Harold.

Recently, excavation work in the local area has revealed both coins and pottery from the Saxon era.

Source material from "Billericay Through the Ages" by W.G.Harper

Alan Taylor

## **Railways' Golden Age - at Billericay**

Historians generally suggest the existence of two Golden Ages of rail travel during the Twentieth Century. The first was the Edwardian Era with the network of lines at its maximum. Colourful trains owned by scores of companies criss-crossed the land at modest speeds, serving, among others, places which verged on the insignificant. For the passenger travelling First Class, porters gave obsequious attendance, carrying mountains of luggage in return for a humbly-acknowledged gratuity. Once in the carriage, this passenger would sink into sumptuous dust-gathering upholstery until invited to the restaurant car for a leisurely multi-portioned meal. In more cramped Third Class compartments, seats were padded in more Spartan fashion while only the better-heeled would have telegraphed ahead for a three-shilling picnic basket to be brought to the train at an intermediate stop. What lay in store for the Billericay passenger at this time?

For continuity, comparisons will be made at different eras between down trains from Liverpool Street. In Edwardian days, there were 15 such services on weekdays, taking an average of 60 minutes to reach Billericay. The 'star turn' was the Saturday 1.23 pm, taking just 35 minutes non-stop, but there was no similar time on other days, nor in the up direction - thus unless one frequently used this train, the era was hardly 'golden'. The last down train left London at 8.50 pm, so returning after an evening at a theatre or concert was out of the question. Going to Liverpool Street, there were 13 trains daily also averaging an hour, though this calculation omits the last train, the 9.23 pm from Billericay, reaching the terminus at 11.04 pm after a delightful 30-minute night-time wait at Shenfield. The Sunday traveller could not afford to appear late at the station; there were only three trains each way and those who got to Liverpool Street after the departure of the 10.38 am had to wait for the one remaining service at 6.15 pm. In the up direction the gap was even greater, for after the 8.34 am train left Billericay, the next was at 7.54 pm. All trains to and from Liverpool Street provided a Southend service the other way. Additionally there were eight trains each weekday to Southminster, normally after changing at Wickford, and on four occasions these also gave access to Maldon by a further change at Woodham Ferris (old spelling). In explaining the service provided, it will be remembered that England's population at the time was far less, and for many people a rail journey was a luxury normally beyond their means. Thus demand for travel was very much less than is the case nowadays while the technology of the time limited speed.

The second perceived Golden Age was the late '30s when a few fast trains stole the limelight. Each afternoon the 'Cheltenham Flier' whisked passengers along Brunel's almost straight, level line from Swindon to Paddington with waiters hovering to serve afternoon tea to patrons as fleeting glimpses of Thames Valley scenery flashed past carriage windows. Soon, this Great Western train's pre-eminence was stolen by rivals heading for Scotland: the 'Coronation' from King's Cross and the 'Coronation Scot' from Euston. The former had the edge; its speed was slightly greater while it offered high-class catering at each seat plus full air conditioning. Nevertheless, as these expresses hit the headlines, especially when exceeding 100 miles an hour, remaining timetables made less than exhilarating reading - especially at places on sleepy branch lines which were, in the '30s, among the first to close for reasons of economy. The Essex public must have looked with envy upon the high-speed trains.

There had been, however, a significant improvement in Billericay's rail service since Edwardian days. The 1938 Summer timetable shows 29 down services from London on weekdays with an average time of 56 minutes. The improvement in speed was largely due to elimination of many stops between London and Shenfield. The theatre-goer was served by a midnight train from Liverpool Street while the Sunday traveller had a choice of 18 trains from London, several by changing at Shenfield. Evidence of greater demand can still be seen in the form of large residential areas in 1930s style within reach of stations between Ilford and Southend and the homeward commuter was served by five down trains between 5 and 7 pm. In the morning, the 7.48 from Billericay ran non-stop to Liverpool Street in 38 minutes. At this time there were 7 trains daily to Southminster, 6 having Maldon connections though one involved an hour's wait at Woodham Ferrers (new spelling). Demands by London-bound commuters meant that the service was almost unchanged into the War Years despite reductions on most of the network in order to cede priority to transport of military supplies and personnel, but the line to Maldon closed on the outbreak of hostilities.

Recovery from war-time emergencies provided slight improvements in the early '50s though the non-corridor trains were still steam-operated in contrast to many similar lines South of the Thames which had been electrified in the 1930s. Passengers fortunate enough to live near lines to Brighton or Portsmouth enjoyed cleaner trains with faster acceleration than those to Southend - but in the final week of 1956 came the greatest improvement for Billericay rail passengers in the line's 68 year history thus far, for it was then that electric traction took over. The 30 daily trains from Liverpool Street suddenly became 60 with nine in the evening peak between 5 and 7 pm. The off-peak service was 3 trains an hour, one of which called en route only at Shenfield, taking 33 minutes to Billericay and almost halving the average journey time of 50 years earlier. The Saturday lunch-time 'non-stop' reappeared at 1.28 from London, taking a record 31 minutes, while the Sunday timetable for the first time resembled that for other days with the exception of a later start and no rush-hour.

The current (February 2023), timetable shows 59 daily services between Liverpool Street and Billericay (a reduction since pre-lockdown days), with times varying between 33 and 35 minutes - this despite all trains calling at Stratford, reflecting its greater importance as a shopping and employment centre, plus its increased range of connecting services to many parts of the capital. The Sunday timetable currently provides a 30-minute frequency. It is unlikely that the average speed over the 24 miles will ever exceed 50 mph with the need to make intermediate stops on a congested route teeming with other trains. Unlike the steam trains, the latest electrics have gangways throughout; their ability to give faster journey times despite always calling at Stratford and Shenfield is due largely to their improved acceleration. Electric trains also serve Southminster, with 25 daily connections from Billericay and for the late-night passenger two trains leave London between midnight and 1 am. It is thus contended that for the local traveller, if there is a Golden Age of Railways, it covers the 66 years beginning with those first electric trains in December 1956.

Adrian Wright

## **Moot Hall**

On Sunday November 27<sup>th</sup>, a group of BAHS members and friends embarked upon the first visit of the Society since before the Covid pandemic. Our destination was Moot Hall in Maldon. We arranged to meet at The Fold, so we were able to car share.

On arrival at Maldon, we even had time for coffee before we entered Moot Hall. We were met by our guide and so the visit began.

Moot Hall was originally a private residence built in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. It was built by Robert D'Arcy, who was Lord of Maldon and probably one of the most powerful men in Essex at that time. In 1422 he married Alice Fitz Langley, who was a wealthy heiress. He decided that he needed a new property to stress his importance.

D'Arcy decided to build his property with red bricks, even though most of the other buildings in the High Street were timber built. At this time brick buildings were rare, and it emphasised the wealth of the family.

Tragedy struck in 1508 when Roger, D'Arcy's son died and work on the structure was ceased. In 1536 the rear of the house was pulled down and three years later it was sold to a Civic Bailiff, John Church. He died in 1554 and by 1560 the Moot Hall tower was in disrepair, In 1594 there is a quote calling it the 'remains of a once fair house'.

In 1576 the Corporation of the Borough of Maldon purchased the building for the princely sum of £55. The Hall now had several roles. It was a meeting-place, a secure place to store civic records, a courthouse for the Quarter Sessions and a prison. Prisoners were kept on the ground floor in a small Bailiff's gaol. The Hall's judicial role continued into Victorian times. By 1863 it was a police station with a cell and a small exercise yard at the back. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Hall was virtually empty as the Police left for a purpose-built station in 1912, The Magistrates Court left in 1950 and once the civic government was re-organised in 1974, the Hall ceased playing a regular part in town administration. Today it is a Museum of Local History and a venue for civil weddings.

The Hall is spread over three floors. On the ground floor there are a large common room, the Mayor's Parlour, the original Police Station, an underground brick-vaulted cell, and the exercise yard used by the prisoners. On the first floor you will find a re-created 19<sup>th</sup> century Courtroom. Much fun by some of our Members was had in this room. Climb up the stairs to the second floor you would find the Council Chambers. If the weather is kind, you are also able to climb to the roof (which can be very slippery) to see lovely views over Maldon and the Blackwater Estuary.





The staircase is unusual. It is made from brick and is one of the earliest uses of brick for stairs in England. There were round bricks manufactured by the local brickmaker.



Time flew by while we were on our tour. It was an interesting visit and a fascinating venue. Thank you to Alan for organising it. We look forward to more outings with the Society.

Lynne Beard