

SAAS Visit to Colchester 3-7 September 2010

A beautiful, still, early autumnal day greeted the group ready for our adventure to Colchester and the surrounding area. Gwyn our driver was on his third trip with us – a brave man indeed! The Black Country Museum at Dudley was our designated stop en-route. Inside is an excellent museum giving a history of the Black Country and everything connected to its industries eg anchor, chain & nail making. The importance of the canal system was emphasised as a method for transporting the goods. A series of 1930's shops and housing is a new addition to the site. A tram system ferries visitors from the top of the site and a friendly "bobby" cycles and walks around, keeping everyone on the straight and narrow.



We stayed at the Marks Tey Hotel was very comfortable with friendly and helpful staff and used this as a base for our trip.

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Figure 1: At Sutton Hoo

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Woodbridge has one of the few remaining tide mills in Britain and its position on the edge of the River Deben has been there since 1170. It was a working mill until 1957 and then fell into disrepair, but was renovated and opened to visitors in 1973. For many years it was encased in corrugated iron and artists came to love the colours of the rusting metal. When the mill was restored this was removed, and it was found that the metal had preserved the wooden structure very well. Now its white painted weather boarding is an iconic image that represents Woodbridge. A whistle stop tour of “Constable Country” gave us the opportunity to view the mill at Flatford and Willy Lott’s cottage. The tranquillity of the scene

depicted in Constable's paintings of this landscape could still be appreciated, in spite of the large number of visitors.

Thaxted is a small town with a wealth of beautifully preserved timber framed buildings which had been built during the height of its prosperity from the wool trade in the 13th, 14th & 15th centuries. We were given a very warm welcome from volunteers who had laid on tea, coffee and cakes for our delectation. A gift of a carved oak Welsh dragon on slate from our group was presented by the Society's Chair, David Casemore to the Thaxted tour guide volunteers. The guildhall (or more properly market hall), is a gem and was built around 1450 and today is used as a community hall by the townspeople. The windmill built in 1804 by John Webb underwent restoration to the sails earlier this year, but sadly disaster struck when they were being re-instated. A gale blew up and the sail came crashing down causing damage to the walkway. Thus it is without its sails for the time being. The church stands on the hill and dominates the town. Built on the site of an earlier church, work began in 1340 and was completed in 1510. Its size, mixtures of styles and light immediately strike one. For the eagle eyed, there is a rare early depiction of a watermill in one of the medieval stained glass windows. Other buildings of note in the town are Dick Turpin's Cottage, the Recorder's House and the Manse where Holst completed his "Planet Suite". Pargetting is a tradition of decorative plasterwork used in East Anglia and there were many examples in the town and throughout the area as we travelled round.

Gwyn was given a challenge driving down some narrow lanes to Finchingfield. This delightful village with duck pond, village green, pastel colour washed old cottages and houses, white weather boarded wind mill and impressive church epitomises rural England.

Coggeshall was one of the principal centres of cloth making in East Anglia and the Paycocke family made it their home. The present Paycocke's House was built in 1505, probably on the site of an earlier building. Its glory is in the carvings on both the outside and inside of the house. The continuous jetty was a relative new innovation and the ends of the joists are hidden behind an elaborately carved fascia board. The timber frame reveals that the building had once been three storeyed, but only until about 1588. Some very fine linen fold panelling can be seen in the main rooms. The garden behind the house may have been used by the Paycocke family as a tentering yard for drying cloth. A writing shelter is built on a jettied block dated 1420. This is probably the only remaining part of the building mentioned in John Paycocke's will. A dovecote is also itemised, but as yet has not been found.

The extraordinarily fine Coggeshall Grange barn close by, of cathedral proportions, was built in the early 1100's during the reign of Henry 1st. The weight of the great tiled roof holds down the timber framed structure. We were treated to an erudite and fascinating talk setting the scene for the foundation of the monastic Cistercian abbey in Coggeshall and its disparate buildings, including the magnificent tithe barn.

During Sunday evening, John Mallinson from Colchester Archaeology Group gave an interesting presentation of excavations at Great Tey. The discovery of a number of Bronze Age burial urns, Neolithic & Mesolithic material along with rare Anglo Saxon pottery made for a fascinating talk.

A blue badge walking tour of Colchester (Camulodunum), gave us an insight into its importance as the first established Roman town in Britain. The impressive Norman castle, built using Roman bricks and a mixture of other stonework, hides beneath it the still surviving Temple of Claudius. Surprisingly a Roman mosaic floor is left exposed in the Park, and part of the amphitheatre can be seen displayed inside a small purpose built museum. The extent of the Roman wall surrounding the City is very much in evidence. Lack of time precluded us from seeing the recently discovered Circus and the Postern Gate. The Dutch Quarter has a considerable number of timber framed houses from the 14th and 15th centuries, many of these originally belonged to settlers with weaving skills from the Low Countries. We were shown an early Norman church and a Saxon tower as well as some later architecturally interesting buildings.

After a pub lunch at Wormingford, Colchester Archaeology Group invited us for a tour of their latest excavations. The site, a Tudor hunting lodge, is on a hill with panoramic views of the surrounding area. The clue to its existence came to light when a ferret became stuck down a rabbit hole and was rescued by digging it out, and a number of Tudor bricks were found beneath the surface. The farmer initially contacted the professional archaeologists, who in turn passed on the project to Colchester Archaeology Group. "Lodge hill" named on several maps, was another clue, as well as a deer park from Saxton's 1576 map. The site has thrown up signs of occupation as far back as the Neolithic period through to Roman Times. Some Medieval pottery from 12th-16th centuries has come to light, but no buildings from that period. The interpretation of the foundations uncovered so far is thought to be Sir William Waldegrave's hunting lodge. He entertained Queen Elizabeth I for two days during the summer of 1561, and would have certainly taken her deer hunting, which was one of her great passions. A possible viewing platform foundation and a garderobe with sluices have been found and the exciting discovery of a thirty foot deep well was a challenge to excavate. In the well was discovered an elm pump 12 feet in length with a 9" diameter hole bored through its length. Amongst the finds recovered from the site are a number of coins from Roman, Elizabethan, Jacobean & Georgian eras. Two rims from Bellarmine jars, a hawking bell, a decorative wall tile, possibly made in London by Flemish craftsmen, and a roof tile with the paw print of a dog. Apart from the impressive foundations exposed, there are enormous piles of excavated Tudor bricks and tiles on the site. Don, our interpreter of the site gave us a very interesting tour.

Our journey home was broken by a visit to Kenilworth Castle. The great tower was built in 1120 and the great hall between 1373 and 1380 by John of Gaunt. The great tower was remodelled in about 1570 by Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester. The now famous garden created for Queen Elizabeth I's visit to Kenilworth in July of 1575 by Robert Dudley, has been reinstated by English Heritage. Jan Cooper gave us a most rewarding talk about its conception and creation.