

THE WOODBRIDGE & MELTON SOCIETY



# Newsletter

**AUTUMN 2025**



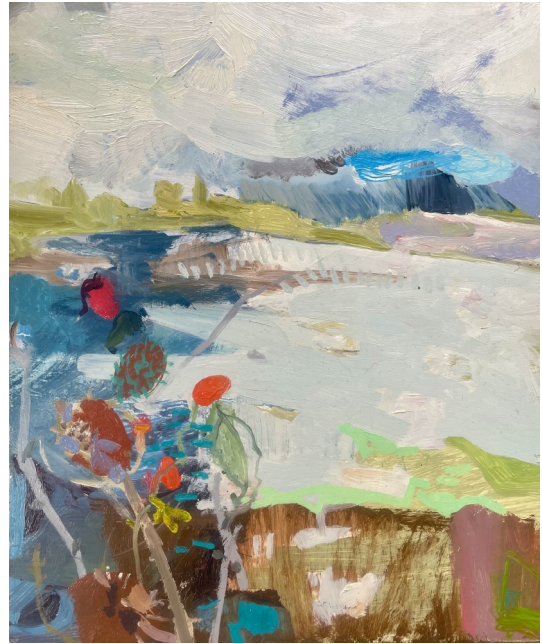
*Curlew, Curlew, Feather by Helen Taylor*

## **THIS ISSUE'S HIGHLIGHTS:**

Spotlight on father and son geologists from Melton  
The incredible achievements of Professor Dorothy Garrod  
A new perspective on our skate park  
Mapping the human history of Martlesham Wilds

## In this Issue

- 2 Society Talks Programme Winter 2025
- 3 Letter from the Chair
- 3-4 Planning Matters
- 4-5 Interview with Jenny Riddell-Carpenter MP
- 6 Blue Plaque for Tide Mill Rescuer
- 7 Professor Dorothy Garrod - Suffolk Icon
- 8-9 John Grout - local hero, world renowned
- 10-11 Art Pop Up in Woodbridge
- 12-13 Our Skate Park - a fifteen-year-old's view
- 14-15 Local Trees - The Mighty Oak
- 16-18 Spotlight on highly collectable local artist,  
Helen Taylor
- 18-19 The Woods - Father and Son Geologists
- 20-22 Martlesham Wilds - A Human History
- 23 Society contact details
- 24 Society membership form



*Marsh Rain by Helen Taylor  
For full story and competition see  
pages 15-17.*

### The Woodbridge and Melton Society Winter Talks Programme 2025

#### **1<sup>st</sup> October, 2025 - Ivor Murrell - The Maltster's Tale: Mastery of Water, Wind and Fire**

One of the world's oldest food processing skills, malting is now thought to have been carried out beyond 5000 BC. Hear how floor maltings, such as those at Woodbridge, were operated to make malt for brewing beer. Ivor Murrell, a Master Maltster, explains how he became a traditional floor maltster and why he is now Suffolk's last.

#### **5<sup>th</sup> November 2025 - Sir Nick Young - From Dunkirk to D-Day and beyond**

Leslie Young died in 1986. He rarely talked about the war though left a few clues stored away in the attic of his house in the south of England, including some papers and a map on a piece of silk. It took many years for his son, Sir Nick Young, to unearth the details of his extraordinary war career, and to get to know his father in a completely new way. This fascinating evening will be in conversation with Joeske van Walsum.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> March 2026 - David Chenery - Deben Community Farm**

Deben Community Farm in Saddlemakers Lane, Melton is celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> year and is a success story in delivering quality care for young people with additional needs. Learn how the farm came about, the work the team has carried out, the variety of animals being looked after and its aims for the future.

#### **1<sup>st</sup> April 2026 - Robin Gaylard - Hidden Ipswich**

Ipswich is the oldest continuous settlement in the country. The first Anglo-Saxon town, its town centre street layout remains largely unchanged from medieval times. An ancient sea port and still a busy port, the magnificent Wet Dock was, in its day, the largest man-made enclosed area of water in the country. Trade brought peoples from far afield. From Roman times onward the Ipswich population has been a rich mix of cultures, food, fashion, art, crafts and architecture. If you think you know Ipswich, this might be a surprising evening.

Winter talks are all held on a Wednesday night at The Quay Church, Quay Street, in Woodbridge. No booking required. We welcome suggestions about local people, places or organisations that may be of interest to members. Please contact the Secretary at [info@woodbridgeandmeltonsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@woodbridgeandmeltonsociety.org.uk)

# Letter from the Chair

*Garth Pollard*

When many of us met for the last lecture of the winter series, superbly put together by Anne Day, I was very pessimistic about the future of the Society. At that time, we had been unable to find someone to replace Kirk Weir as Secretary and Membership Secretary, Anne Day, and myself as Chair. Other committee members who had responsibilities were also indicating that they wished to be thinking about handing over to new people. The Society's problem in finding people to take on these responsibilities was not unique as many voluntary organisations are in a similar position. The committee thought that if people were not found the only responsible action would be to wind up the Society.

Fortunately, the position since then is much improved as a result of various people coming forward and volunteering to help the Society. Liz Huddleston has taken on the role of Membership Secretary from Kirk who has kindly given every assistance to ensure there is an orderly handover. Cliff Hoppit has agreed to work with Anne on the 2025/26 lecture series and will take over from her in March next year. Stephen Ashworth is shadowing

Lindsay Dann and will take over from him as Treasurer when Lindsay retires. Bryony Abbott is working with Pieter Shipster on our Blue Plaque programme, again with a view to succeeding him. In addition, Stephen McCrum and Gary Doggett have joined the committee. Stephen and Gary were introduced by Joeske van Walsum who has agreed to take over from me as Chair later in the year. This has strengthened the committee immeasurably and will ensure the Society's continuance.

We still do not have a secretary (see page 23) nor someone to organise a summer visits programme, so we are seeking volunteers. However, the Society will, I am sure, be very grateful to all those who have joined the committee and to those who continue to serve on it. As these should be my last Chair's Notes, I want to thank the committee members, past and present, for all the time they have put in and the unstinting support they have given me.

Being Chair has been a privilege and given me an opportunity to meet many other residents in our communities. It has been an eventful time for us all with projects such as Active Travel Woodbridge and the future of the Shire Hall and we can only hope that the outcomes of these will be positive for both our communities.

---

## Planning Matters

*John Sagers*

As mentioned in the last newsletter, Ben Woolnough, East Suffolk Council's new head of Planning and Building Control had agreed to meet the Society's planning group for what proved to be a friendly and constructive discussion.

Ben has been at ESC since 2012 (apart from a short break in the private sector), his previous role being Planning Manager- Major Sites and Infrastructure. He has five managers reporting to him: Development Management; Sites and Infrastructure; Planning Policy; Design and Specialist Services, including Heritage, Design and Landscapes; and Building Control.

We discussed the potentially significant reorganisation of local authorities. There could be an elected mayor covering Norfolk and Suffolk with powers to influence transport, housing and infrastructure, though that depends on population size. Ben confirmed that the government wants to reduce the number of councils and make them unitary, i.e. covering all the functions of District and County Councils. Suffolk CC wants there to

be one council covering the whole County. However, the District Councils would prefer two or three unitary councils, such as East Suffolk, West Suffolk, and possibly a Greater Ipswich.

Final proposals will be submitted to the government in September with a decision on the future structure being made by the end of the year with elections to the new shadow authority in 2026 with the council coming into effect in 2028. If a unitary council is established, there may be a better chance of infrastructure planning and a more effective use of S106 and CIL funds.

We then asked about a number of planning issues. Ben confirmed that the current local plans for the district expire this year. The Government wants new local plans to be produced, but these normally take about three years to be created. This means there will be no 'active' plan, which means that developers will be in a better position to propose sites which are speculative with less grounds for refusal. In that context he said that the government has increased the number of houses required to be built in the district from 905 a year to 1644.

Neighbourhood plans are still encouraged, but there will be centrally produced National Policies which



neighbourhood plans will need to be consistent with.

We asked about the substantial sums held by the Council and intended to be used for affordable housing. He pointed out there were often some constraints on its use of these funds. In that context, it doesn't help that Housing Associations have been using more of their resources to improve their stock, rather than invest in new affordable housing units.

We mentioned that more planning decisions are being made at officer level. Ben was asked about the impact of this on consultees, such as the Society, and asked whether officers would continue to take the comments of consultees into account. Ben confirmed that consultees' comments would be taken into account but should of course be constructive and must give reasons for objections. Decisions on major sites will still be made by planning committees. Committee members are now being more intensively trained on their responsibilities and can only serve after being interviewed by the Head of Planning.

We finally discussed the Council's policy towards trees. The Planning Group has believed for some time that too many applications to fell or carry out major work to trees seem not to be challenged, even when the tree is subject to a TPO. So it was very good to learn that a review of existing TPOs is being carried out and that there has been an increase in the number of the Council's tree officers. Subsequent to our meeting with Ben, the Council's tree officers have been much more receptive to the Group's comments, which is very encouraging.

#### **Other matters**

The most significant new Planning Application since the last report is the proposal to construct a 64-

bed care home together with 40 'assisted care' bungalows on Yarmouth Road, Melton. This was mentioned in the last newsletter at which time the Application had not been made. Now that it has (DC/25/1483/OUT) the Planning Group has submitted a number of objections, too many to detail here. Separately, we have suggested to the Planners that such a use could be considered very suitable for the Melton Road site of the old Council offices. Of course, that is somewhat academic as the Council no longer have control of the site. Sadly, we do not know at the moment whether Rose are close to making their long-awaited Planning Application for residential development.

The 'Active Travel Woodbridge' initiative is still moving slowly along. A 'Phase 2 Consultation Summary' was published by Suffolk CC in April, outlining measures they might wish to implement in respect of the Town Centre (Station Road, Quay Street, Market Hill and Thoroughfare). As at 21st July these proposals are still 'under development' with the Council still exploring the feasibility of a number of options. A 'Community liaison Group' has been established of which the Society is a member. So we hope to hear more soon.

Members will remember that the genus of the ATW proposals was the lavish 156 page document submitted to Active Travel England by Suffolk CC in 2023 in a search for grant funds. Various titles were given to this initiative including 'Mini Holland' and 'Love Woodbridge and Melton'. A grant offer was received but then reduced. Our views on the flawed proposals were set out in the last newsletter and in many representations to the Council since 2023. Now, over two years later, it is probably time to ask the County Council how much this has cost us.

---

## **In conversation with Jenny Riddell-Carpenter MP**

*Garth Pollard*

*In the first of a series of meetings with some of our local politicians, Garth Pollard, our Chair, and John Saggars, Chair of the Society's Planning Committee met Jenny Riddell-Carpenter MP earlier this year.*

In June 2024 at the General Election, Jenny Riddell-Carpenter was elected as the first Labour MP since the Suffolk Coastal Constituency was created in 1983. The Constituency stretches from Felixstowe to north of Southwold and includes a variety of towns and villages as well as precious countryside. The issues that affect these communities can vary

radically: what matters most to the residents of Woodbridge can be very different from the concerns of those in Felixstowe.

Jenny was brought up in the area, partly educated at Woodbridge School, and served for a time in a Territorial Army unit in Ipswich; her parents still live nearby. Prior to becoming an MP, she worked for a national communications agency which included leading campaigns on social housing, fuel poverty, infrastructure and transport. Her focus is on three areas, Special Education Needs ('SEN'), Adult Social Care (over a third of residents



in the constituency are over 65) and the Environment. These are in addition to her national responsibilities as an MP and the work of responding to the many issues that constituents raise.

Contrary to what many constituents think, says Jenny, an individual MP has very little actual power. For example, responsibility for meeting SEN and providing social care rests with the County Council and planning with the District Council. However, as an MP she tries to influence those authorities from her 'pulpit'.

One of Jenny's concerns is that too much policy, driven from Whitehall, is made by those whose attitudes and perspective are heavily influenced by their own experience of living in an urban environment; as a result, they do not fully appreciate the issues which affect the lives of those living in rural or smaller communities. For example, those coping with dementia in small rural communities can be very isolated and unsupported and, in too many cases, have no close family to advocate for them.

Housing is a concern; the need for more affordable housing is crucial so that, for example, adult children can, if they wish, remain close to their parents. In Woodbridge and Melton, the creation of more affordable housing is especially difficult as very little land is available for development. Jenny feels that in Suffolk Coastal developers are not being held to high enough environmental and other standards in comparison to London, where she observed that both councillors and developers made efforts to create higher standards for developments. She suggests there is some complacency here which she did not see in London.

A supporter of the concept of a unitary authority with one port of call, Jenny would not, however, wish to see the disappearance of the Parish and Town Councils, which have a real role to play in their local communities. However, a unitary authority should bring significant cost savings. She favours two or possibly three authorities with The Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk being responsible for strategic policy such as major infrastructure projects and economic development. For too long the East of England has been forgotten, she says (it was the last part of the country to have trains with slam doors), and hopes that the Mayor will be able to advocate for the investment that the region requires.

On energy projects, which will have a massive effect on the area, Jenny's view is that they're 'a bit of a mess'. Dismayed that the previous Government

did not show any leadership in their design, planning and coordination she cites multiple projects, with a cumulative impact on the area, for which there is currently inadequate infrastructure. 'There should have been an overall plan', she states. There is a similar issue with housing in that you need to plan the infrastructure before you consider the design of houses. Currently each energy project goes through a separate planning process. Jenny pointed out that the Sizewell project had recognised the implications of all these projects and was trying to coordinate them, for example, in relation to traffic management issues, voicing her disappointment that it has been left to this late stage for this to happen.

Environmental issues were also important in the election and were one of the strands of Jenny's election campaign. The river Deben was an important part of Jenny's childhood and she recognises that it plays an enormously important part in our communities: supporting wildlife, nature, recreation and tourism. She has been to see the excellent work that community volunteers have done in monitoring the quality of the water.

There was a discussion about how slowly projects proceed, for example in relation to the river and coastal defences. Jenny agreed that the pace at which licences are issued is painfully slow. She has since had meetings with the responsible minister and the Environment Agency.

Jenny stated that being the MP is a huge privilege and an honour to represent an area where she grew up and her parents still live. Very stressful at times, some of the casework that she has to deal with is heartbreaking. People come to her and think that she can change their lives, which is usually not possible as the MP's powers in such matters are minimal. However, whilst that part of the role is very painful, Jenny has found the remainder hugely enjoyable, though she is conscious of the great responsibility which goes with the position. She commented that it wasn't about her but about the Constituency: the significance and importance of democracy and representation cannot be overstated. It is not a 'safe seat' and every day that she is our MP matters to her; she is conscious of the need to show the difference that a hardworking Labour MP can make. For Jenny, being our MP is an immense privilege and she is determined not to become complacent.

*In future issues we will talk to our Councillors, the Mayor of Woodbridge and the Chair of Melton Parish Council.*

# Unveiling of Blue Plaque for Mrs Jean Gardner

*Pieter Shipster*



In a celebratory event held earlier this year (Thursday, 29 May 2025), a Blue Plaque was unveiled to honour Mrs Jean Gardner for saving the Woodbridge Tide Mill.

The Woodbridge and Melton Society (WMS) and the Woodbridge Tide Mill Charitable Trust (WTMCT) hosted the event at the Woodbridge Tide Mill, which was attended by invited guests and representatives from the community including four generations of Jean Gardner's extended family. The plaque itself was unveiled by George, one of Jean Gardner's great-great grandsons.

Pieter Shipster, on behalf of Garth Pollard (WMS Chairman), opened the proceedings by welcoming all the guests. John Carrington (WTMCT Chairman) commented that: 'The Mill's trustees cannot overstate the importance of Mrs Jean Gardner who purchased the mill to save it. Mrs Gardner approached Norman Scarfe, a local historian, after hearing him lecture on the Mill's plight. They discussed the possibility of her buying and restoring it. Time was short but at its auction in May 1968 Mrs Gardner became the proud owner of a ruined Mill and granary.'

This unique and attractive part of the Woodbridge riverside is a tribute to the generosity of Mrs Jean Gardner, without whom it would surely have been lost. The Tide Mill remains a symbol of the Suffolk tourist industry. It is one of the most photographed, painted and drawn buildings in the East of England, and attracts the attention and interest of mill enthusiasts worldwide. We are grateful to the work of the Woodbridge and Melton Society in securing this lasting tribute to the lady that saved the mill.'

Jean Gardner (1909 – 1996) lived in Wickhambrook in West Suffolk. In 1962 she was elected to represent her neighbourhood on West Suffolk County Council. As a Councillor Mrs Gardner served on the governing body of St Audry's Hospital (this was a joint governing body with East Suffolk County Council). This association enhanced her love of Woodbridge and interest in the town; hence Mrs Gardner's willingness to bid for the Mill.

She bought the near derelict mill in 1968 for £7300 and encouraged its restoration. In 1977 she gave it to the town for the enjoyment of the people of Woodbridge. It is now the only working tide mill in the UK and still produces stoneground flour.



Woodbridge Tide Mill urgently needs to be restored & repainted by expert craftsmen. As an old wooden building on the riverfront, salty water, rain, wind and the sun have taken their toll. Restoring an historic, Grade 1 listed, landmark is not cheap. The wooden shiplap exterior requires specialist preparation, rubbing down in parts, decay and rot removing and coats of weatherproof paint applying. Safe access to such a precious building, with one aspect in the river, requires sensitively applied scaffolding.

A fundraising appeal by The Tide Mill Museum is underway. They need to raise £60,000 to prolong the life of this precious mill and keep it part of our heritage. Visit their website for more information or to make a donation:

[www.woodbridgetidemill.org.uk](http://www.woodbridgetidemill.org.uk)

# Professor Dorothy Garrod—A Personal View

*Bryony Abbott*



The Garrod connection with Melton was through their family home at Wilford Lodge, where the Society recently placed a Blue Plaque for Dorothy's father Sir Archibald Garrod KCMG FRS. Dorothy was Archibald's only daughter. Born on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1892, she went to Newnham college, Cambridge in 1913-16 to read History. Dorothy grew up with her three brothers who all served in the First World War. She too saw the war at first hand, driving an ambulance in France for two years.

After the war, Dorothy accompanied her father to Malta where he was Head of War Hospitals. He encouraged her to visit the ancient sites and temples on the island. Here, Dorothy found her love of prehistory and, in 1921 she went to Oxford (where her father was Regius Professor of Medicine) to study Anthropology. Dorothy was inspired by the anthropologist Robert Marett to take up a career in archaeology. Determined to succeed in a man's world, it seemed that Dorothy had a natural flair for digging and organising excavations.

After Oxford she went to France to study with the French scientist Abbé Henri Breuil who had discovered the famous cave paintings of Lascaux. In 1925 he encouraged Dorothy to take on her first independent excavation at the Devil's Tower in Gibraltar, exploring the underground caverns and at times crawling around in the caves to reach the earliest evidence of humans and their ancestors.

This is where she made her name with the significant discovery of a Neanderthal child's skull. She became a pioneer in the development of early prehistoric archaeology. Travelling widely in Europe and the Middle East, her epoch-making excavations at Mount Carmel uncovered the earliest stone-built houses and evidence of the origins of an ancient agrarian culture that she named Natufian. She preferred working with women on her

excavations, employing students and local women and training them in archaeological methods.

During her long career, Dorothy became a respected figure in the field of palaeolithic and prehistoric archaeology. She built up a reputation as a diligent and methodical researcher who stayed calm under pressure and published her results promptly. Elected a Fellow of Newnham college and, in May 1939, the Disney Professor of Archaeology, she became the first female professor in any subject at Cambridge. This was at a time when women could not become full members of the university. As professor, she changed the practice and teaching of archaeology, breathing new life into what she considered had been a male preserve, professionalising and opening up the subject of prehistory to women.

Professor Garrod broke off her academic career to serve in the WAAF and, in 1942 on her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, reported for duty to Military Intelligence. Working on most secret aerial photographs she used her skills to interpret the landscape of occupied Europe. One of only two people in the section entitled to wear the general service medal of 1914-1918, when she returned to her career at Cambridge, she would be senior to the men she had worked with in the military.

Professor Garrod was awarded many honours including honorary doctorates from French and American universities, the Gold Medal of the Society of Antiquaries in 1962 and the Huxley Memorial Medal in 1968. She was also made a Commander of the British Empire in 1965.

One of the foremost archaeologists of her generation, Dorothy retired from Cambridge in 1952, moving to France where she continued with her fieldwork producing papers and reports until well into her seventies. She died in 1968.

The Garrod family lives on in both Melton churches and at Melton Recreation Ground, partly purchased with a bequest from the Garrod memorial fund. Wall plaques in St Andrew's Church and the Melton War Memorial carry reminders of Dorothy's brothers. Original wooden grave markers, brought back from the Great War, can be seen inside Melton Old Church. In a quiet corner of the churchyard are the headstones for Dorothy and her parents.

*With thanks to Catherine Hills FSA, for her help with this article.*



# John Grout (1821–1886): From Stable Boy to Suffolk Legend

*David Clarke*



*Landlord of The Bull Inn (1861-1886)*

In the vibrant 19th-century market town of Woodbridge, a name once rang out through cobbled streets, auction yards and royal stables alike: John Grout. Born in 1821 near Kettleburgh to a modest farming family, Grout's life was the kind of remarkable ascent that reads like folklore.

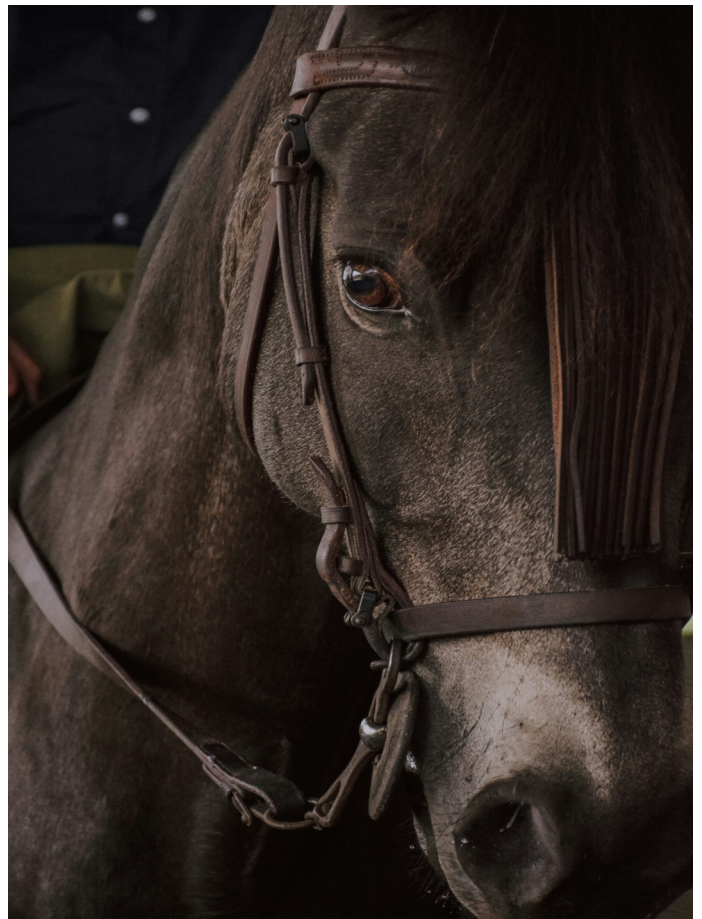
From humble beginnings as a teenager cleaning boots at The Bull Inn stables, he rose from 'Boots' to become one of England's most celebrated horse dealers. Though time has moved on and horses no longer thunder through the town's lanes, Grout's story remains a vivid thread in the tapestry of Suffolk's social and economic history.

Grout's early years were marked by dedication and instinct. Starting as a junior stable hand, he quickly demonstrated a keen eye for horses and an unshakeable work ethic. After honing his craft at the Sun Inn (since converted into a residence at 102 Thoroughfare) he returned to The Bull under the then landlord, John Salmon. After Mr Salmon died in 1851, John Grout gradually assumed more responsibility from the aging landlady, Mary Salmon. By 1861, he had not only taken over its day-to-day operations but leased the inn, eventually purchasing it outright—a feat made possible through the explosive success of his horse dealing enterprise.



*The Bull Ride, now New Street Market Cafe*

From this hub in Woodbridge, Grout built what was reputedly the largest horse dealing business in England conducted by a single individual. His stables housed over 300 horses at their peak, sprawling across The Bull Ride in New Street as well as Barrack Farm, situated just off Old Barrack Road. The Bull Inn itself became a centre of equestrian commerce, with its Assembly Rooms hosting glittering agricultural dinners for over 150



guests. These events, hosted annually at Grout's expense, brought together gentry and graziers, breeders and buyers in a spirit of camaraderie emblematic of Victorian agricultural pride.

Yet it wasn't only the scale of his business that set Grout apart—it was his reputation. Known widely as 'Honest John,' he earned national and international respect for his fair dealings, integrity and deep knowledge of horseflesh. His horses—notably Fashion, Catspaw, and Hero—won more than 100 silver cups at shows around the country.



*John Grout and Mrs Wade. Circa 1885*

Buyers came from across Europe, including royals and statesmen. Prince Umberto of Italy maintained a 25-year professional relationship with the business and granted The Bull the right to display the Royal Coat of Arms of the House of Savoy ( this has been covered in more detail in the March '25 edition of this newsletter ).

Grout's fame even crossed into political and military circles. He was courted by the Emperor of Austria with a lucrative offer to source horses for the imperial cavalry—a position he politely declined, choosing instead to remain in Woodbridge. British buyers from the Indian Government, the German Kaiser, and aristocratic families were among his clientele, further solidifying his standing as one of the premier horsemen of his time.

But his influence extended beyond commerce. Grout was a founding committee member of the Suffolk Stud Book Society, helping to establish the pedigree and reputation of the Suffolk Punch, a heavy horse breed integral to agriculture and wartime logistics. Several of his stallions were exported globally—to the US, Australia, New Zealand, Germany and even Russia—bringing international acclaim not only to himself but to Suffolk horse breeding at large. Horses like Fashion (winner of a big US race) and Catspaw (back-to-back winner of the equivalent Grand National race

in Italy) fetched extraordinary sums and went on to achieve fame overseas, continuing Grout's legacy in international showgrounds and racecourses.

In character, John Grout was as esteemed as in trade. He was a Freemason in the Doric Lodge and Treasurer of the Loyal Deben Lodge of Oddfellows, reflecting his deep roots in local civic life. He was known for his generosity, particularly to the townspeople of Woodbridge, and maintained a sense of loyalty to the place that had nurtured his ambitions. Despite opportunities to expand or relocate, he remained devoted to the town.

In July 1886, while trying to calm a distressed horse on Market Hill, Grout suffered serious injuries. He never fully recovered from the shock to his system, dying from flu a few months later. The public mourning that followed was profound. On the day of his funeral, St Mary's Church was filled beyond capacity, and every shop and business in Woodbridge closed in a collective gesture of respect. The funeral procession, attended by over 200 people including prominent local and national figures, reflected the depth of admiration for a man who had become something of a local institution.

Even in death, Grout continued to shape the town. The auction of his estate, led by the renowned firm Tattersall's, was of such national importance that a special train from London was arranged. The event drew high society and professional buyers from across Britain, underscoring the magnitude of the business he had built.

Though his name faded with the coming of motor vehicles and the waning of the horse as a central figure in daily life, Grout's impact was felt for decades. A silver cup at the Woodbridge Horse Show was named in his honour – 'The John Grout Cup' in the Hackney Stallion Class for which he was famed. His legacy lingered in the generations of horses descended from his studs, and in the memories of a town that once thrummed with the energy of his enterprise.

In a period often romanticised for its industrial titans and empire-builders, John Grout stands as a distinctly Suffolk success story. He built not just a business, but a bridge between Woodbridge and the world. He harnessed horsepower and human spirit, and in doing so, carved a place in history not just for himself, but for the town he so faithfully served.

Today, walking through Woodbridge, one might pass The Bull without realising the extraordinary history within its walls. But for those who know, John Grout remains a symbol of what vision, hard work, and loyalty can achieve—a man who, quite literally, put Woodbridge on the world map.



# Little Known Treasures to be Revealed to Public

*Martin Waller*



*The Flower Shop by Anna Airy, 1922*

This may come as a surprise to any casual visitor to their local art gallery or museum, but for every artwork they enjoy, there may be as many as eight or nine tucked away in storage that may never be seen.

Now a local man is trying to get some of this hidden treasure out on view, with the aid of the government. Richard Morris, a former City consultant and Courtauld trained art historian, set up Everyone's Art earlier this year.

The project aims to create space where those unseen works can be displayed locally, some of them quite possibly for the first time. He says galleries and museums may at any time have as much as 80 to 90 per cent of their collection of artworks in storage, often in warehouses some way away. 'This is seen as entirely normal in the curator/collections community,' he says. Morris intends to begin by setting up 'pop-ups' where those unseen works can be borrowed from their owners and displayed.

These could be at community centres, schools, church halls or even private galleries, he says. A first is planned, at the time of writing, for some time this year at Woodbridge School, to run for perhaps a week, where the local community can view works drawn from a number of local sources.

Morris, who moved to Waldringfield in 2018, is hoping eventually to create a permanent display space for such works in Woodbridge or Felixstowe, hoping to find premises that are as yet underused. He hopes that one day the project could go national, with a network of local organisations carrying out the same work.

Morris is impressively well-connected. He has been in contact with Lisa Nandy, the Culture Secretary, who has expressed strong interest in Everyone's Art. 'We're hoping for support from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), which has expressed an interest in requiring local galleries to make loans of unseen or stored works.' This would include paintings but also sculpture and even photographs.

The project will be formally launched at the River Room at the House of Lords this autumn. The launch was arranged by Lord (Peter) Ricketts, former security adviser to David Cameron. Morris has also brought in several well-known figures from the arts world, including Bendor Grosvenor, the art historian and TV broadcaster, and the art historian Frances Spalding. He has attracted interest in the project from Nick Serota, former head of the Tate Gallery.

The focus for those future exhibitions and 'pop-ups' will be on local artists. In Suffolk at least, these could include the English impressionist Harry Becker, Anna Airy and the third, less well-known landscape painter of the region after Constable and Gainsborough, Thomas Churchyard, who lived in Woodbridge and Melton.



*Farm buildings in a landscape by Harry Becker*



‘These works aren’t priceless,’ he says. ‘They are works, usually by local makers, that haven’t been seen for decades.’

He is putting together a steering committee of local people, ideally with connections with the arts, to take the project forward.

Morris has written pieces this year on the ambitious project for *The Spectator* magazine and the Museums Association, the trade publication for professional curators, which has sparked a great deal of interest, and he hopes to bring more high profile individuals into the fold.

One local artist he feels is hugely over-looked is Henry Bright, a friend of John Ruskin, who paid for him to accompany William Turner on many of the latter’s sketching trips. Bright, says Morris, had an extraordinary ability to depict, with great fidelity, the exact character of the sea and sky at Yarmouth and on the Norfolk Broads.



*Orford Castle by Harry Bright*

Yet there have been few exhibitions of his work and he is probably little known outside the art world. Morris can reel off an impressive list of such little known artists from Suffolk and East Anglia that are worthy of a wider audience. He says the sheer size of the collections at galleries up and down the country, and their occasionally incomplete and haphazard cataloguing, can turn up some extraordinary but unexpected finds. It is the duty of Everyone’s Art, he says, to ensure some of this hidden treasure comes to light.

The barriers the project needs to overcome are significant, though. There is the need to insure the works while they are on display, though Morris hopes the DCMS (Department for Culture, Media and Sport) may be helpful here. Then there is the cost of transportation, which for large works can be significant and, he says, seems ‘excessive’.

Many of the works in storage may require a degree of conservation work to get them into a proper

condition to be displayed, and again this can be expensive. It is unlikely the galleries and museums loaning these out will stump up those costs. Works on paper are especially liable to deterioration and can be more risky than oil paintings to restore. Old photographs tend to fade and discolour with age. There is also the problem of staff shortages and underfunding at those institutions that own those unseen works. ‘The common quote is, we simply don’t have the capacity to take on extra work,’ he says.

None of these problems are insuperable, Morris believes. He thinks he can ultimately gain the support of a significant proportion of the arts community in the UK. ‘The Everyone’s Art scheme is just the sort of thing that should be promoted through the Arts Council of England, for example.’

The main problem is likely to be the inertia of some of those galleries and museums and their refusal to engage with a scheme that is new, radical and at first largely unproven, plus the bureaucratic hoops potential borrowers already have to jump through to access artwork.

‘Each and every organisation which holds art works on behalf of the public should promote a Charter for Public Art, in their own area – the charter should bear the promise to promote ready access to the country’s cultural treasures.’

Highly ambitious in its aims, Everyone’s Art is a huge project, aiming to develop from being a small endeavour into a national organisation.

If you believe in the value of art to your community and would like to help to arrange an exhibition; if you are a curator who supports what they are doing, if you are interested in getting involved or have in mind a venue where you think art can be displayed or can donate money to the cause, please contact Richard Morris directly. Generations of people will thank you for it.

**[richard@richardmorris.org](mailto:richard@richardmorris.org)**

### **LOOKING FOR STORIES**

Do you have an interesting story to share with readers? Would you like to write a piece for the newsletter? This is your newsletter, and we’d love to hear from you. We can help put the article together, manage interviews, look for pictures and anything else! Please do get in touch.  
[siobhanhornergalvin@gmail.com](mailto:siobhanhornergalvin@gmail.com)

# ROLLING FORWARD

*Ambrose Frith*



*Woodbridge Skatepark in action*

## On The Rails

Tucked away just off the River Deben lies Woodbridge Skatepark, a hub for youth and adults alike. On any dry afternoon, the park comes to life with the sound of wheels hitting concrete, music drifting from portable speakers, and the energy of skaters, scooter riders and BMXers sharing the space. Over the last 15 years, the skatepark has developed into more than just a collection of ramps and rails — it's now a key part of the local youth scene, the wider community, and a place of creativity and confidence.

It was first built in 2009 in response to a demand for a space aimed at teenagers. Since then, the park has seen gradual improvements, thanks to feedback from the local skateboarding community and support from the town council.

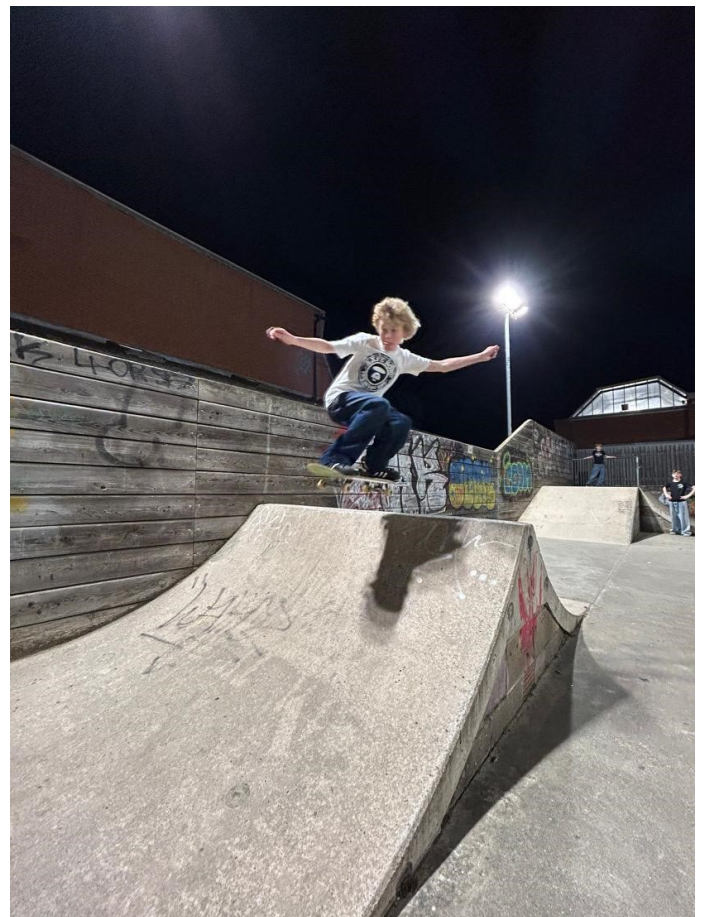
One of the park's strengths is its variety. For those just learning, there's flat ground and beginner-friendly features. It hosts several different ramps, from quarter pipes, ledges, a spine and a half pipe, suitable for all ages, and levels of experience. For more advanced riders, the stair set and 'funbox' present a real challenge.

Alongside the art that decorates the outside of the park, this range has helped attract both local skaters and visitors. 'When I first came here, I didn't expect it to be this good. It's got way more than a lot of other local parks,' says a 15-year-old skater who regularly rides at Woodbridge. 'The variety here makes it easy to progress. You can practice small tricks, then move up to harder features.'

## Open To All

The space is also open to more than just skateboarders. Scooters and BMX riders regularly use the park: all are included and most users share the area respectfully. 'It's not just about skating — it's where people come together and support each other,' says one skater. 'There are always people around to skate with or get advice from.' In this way, the park helps bridge social gaps. Riders of different ages, schools and backgrounds mix freely.

Older skaters often mentor younger ones, offering tips, encouragement, or even lending equipment. One parent heart-warmingly commented that they had noticed 'teenagers who might initially appear grumpy or intimidating allowing and actually helping younger kids to have a go!' In a time when many teenagers spend hours indoors on screens, the park remains a vital way they can connect in person.



*15 year old Eli in an indie air grab*

For many young people, Woodbridge Skatepark plays a vital role in their lives — socially, emotionally and physically. It's a place to meet friends, stay active, and develop resilience through practice and failure. Learning new tricks can take weeks of effort and countless failed attempts, but the sense of achievement when a trick is finally



landed is what keeps many skaters coming back. Beyond the physical skill, it also builds self-discipline and confidence. 'However much skating can infuriate me, the satisfaction of landing a new trick beats it!', says one fanatic.

## Change Needed

Despite its popularity, Woodbridge Skatepark isn't without its issues. The most common complaint among regular users is the state of the concrete in some areas, where cracks and rough surfaces have started to appear. These can pose a safety risk and limit how the park is used. Similarly, the park lacks proper drainage, meaning puddles can linger long after the weather clears. There's also no lighting, which makes it unusable after dark, especially in the winter months. 'It gets dark so early in the winter, and with no lights on until late, we lose hours of skating' says one skater. 'Switching the floodlights on earlier would make a big difference.'

As a skater myself, I understand these complaints. I also sympathise with people who would like to watch those in the park. One parent wished there was a 'bench or two as I've often found myself sitting on the kerb while my children scooter'. Additional seating would also encourage people to respect others skating and not block where they're trying to ride. Litter is another concern. While many users respect the space, rubbish is sometimes left

behind — a point of frustration for both skaters and nearby residents. A few more bins or regular clean-up events could go a long way in maintaining the park's condition and reputation.

There is growing interest among skaters and local residents in improving the skatepark further. Some suggestions include resurfacing worn areas, adding new features such as a more street focused section and commissioning local artists to paint more murals and graffiti, or themed artwork around the park. Recently, local skate brand Two Toed Skate hosted a community skate jam at the park — an event that drew in skaters of all ages for a day of tricks, music, and good vibes. The turnout showed just how much potential the space has for hosting events and building the local scene. Let's hope this becomes a regular tradition!

## Must-have Space for Teenagers

In recent years, skateboarding has seen a resurgence in popularity, partly due to its inclusion in the Olympics and increased social media exposure. But for many skaters in towns like Woodbridge, it's less about medals and more about expression, progress and connection. Public spaces like Woodbridge Skatepark play a crucial role in youth development and urban culture. They offer free, open-access opportunities for physical activity, creativity, and community building — particularly for teenagers who often lack spaces designed for them.

As a 15 year-old I and many others see Woodbridge Skatepark as far more than a stretch of concrete. It's a social hub and a space that reflects the energy and spirit of its users. While there's work to be done to improve the facility, the park continues to thrive because of the passion and commitment of the people who use it. Whether you're a skater, a parent, or just someone walking past, it's worth paying attention to what's happening at Woodbridge Skatepark. In a world where public spaces are often underused or overlooked, this park is a reminder of how important it is to invest in places that inspire young people to move, connect and create.

On a personal level, the skatepark has played a huge role in my life. When I first started skating I didn't know anyone else who rode. Coming to Woodbridge Skatepark gave me the chance to meet people, get advice and slowly build confidence—not just on a board, but in general. It's where I've learned to deal with setbacks, celebrate small wins, and enjoy being a part of a community that supports each other. It's shaped who I am in ways I didn't expect.

*Ambrose Frith is 15 years old, goes to Woodbridge School and is an avid skater.*



*Photo by Niket Nigde on Unsplash*



# Iconic Local Trees

*Nick Nicholson*

## The Mighty Oak

‘Heart of oak are our ships/Heart of oak are our men’ wrote David Garrick in his 18th century shanty, neatly encapsulating the British pride and affection for the noble tree known as the Pedunculate or English Oak (*Quercus robur*). The Victorian botanical writer John Loudon also pronounced the oak as ‘the emblem of grandeur, strength and duration’. In lowland Britain, the oak is recognised in ecological terminology as the ‘climax vegetation’, meaning that if the land is left to Nature, once the shorter-lived pioneering species such as birch, hawthorn and elder have colonised areas, the oak will eventually take its turn and become the dominant tree, shading out most other vegetation. This is what happened after the last ice age, resulting in extensive oak forest covering lowland Britain, much of which was felled to build ships which resulted in British naval superiority and helped the growth of the Empire, at great ecological cost, many would argue.

Long before this, oaks were sacred to the Druids, who conducted their fertility, protection and healing rites beneath the boughs of these trees and used acorns and leaves in divination practices. As so often is the case, the Christian church adopted many of the pagan ideas and symbols of the earlier Celts; carvings of oak leaves and acorns can be found in ‘almost every English cathedral and a great number of the older parish churches’ according to renowned nature writer Richard Mabey. The keen observer will also find, sometimes secreted away but often in plain view, the most pagan symbol of the Green Man in Anglican churches.

As a native, the oak is the most important ecological tree, supporting up to 2,300 species of flora and fauna, according to The Woodland Trust, and hosting hundreds of insect species, supplying birds with an important food source. In autumn, squirrels, badgers, deer and jays all feed on the acorns and caterpillars of purple hairstreak butterflies eat the spring flower and leaf buds. The decaying leaves form a rich leaf mould which supports stag beetles, other invertebrates and a range of fungi, whilst woodpeckers, tits and flycatchers often nest in the crevices and holes in mature trees.

One of the striking features of the oak is its remarkable diversity in form and shape. A specimen grown in the open will be very different from one that has competed with others in a dense, forest

situation, which may have developed a tall, straight trunk and few lower branches below the main canopy.

## Oak at Snape Warren

One of my favourite oak trees locally is a wonderful, spreading, open-structured specimen on the heath at Snape Warren and there are other similar ones on Sutton and Hollesley Heaths nearby.



*Spreading oak at Snape Warren: Angela Hagan*

## Oaks at Staverton Thicks

These contrast notably with the amazing, ancient, pollarded trees at Staverton Thicks, near Butley, many of which are over 500 years old and exhibit huge variations in appearance. Some are so old, gnarled and craggy that they are barely alive and seem to cling on to life like wraiths, resisting the inevitable collapse into lifeless powder, whilst a finger or vestigial limb remains.



*Ancient oak at Staverton Thicks: Nick Nicholson*



## Ancient Trees Fire the Imagination

I find these ancient oaks so fascinating that I've made a series of imaginal drawings depicting anthropomorphic and bestial features which seem to pop out at me when I'm looking closely.



*Strange Lives of a Dying Oak: coloured pencil drawing by Nick Nicholson*

## Glemham Hall oaks

Other notable local oaks are those along the A12 in the grounds of Glemham Hall, several of which have been gradually dying for decades, shedding rotting branches every few years and forming ever more gaunt and spectral profiles, 'writhing in vegetable agony' to borrow a phrase from Hardy (Thomas, not Laurel and....)!

Because of their longevity and durability of the timber, dead oaks tend to stick around in the landscape for a long time, which may be why we notice them more than other trees. Owing to their size and height, they are often struck by lightning, which also explains why they were sacred to Zeus, Jupiter and the Celtic Dagda, all of whom were gods of thunder and lightning, and often, badly damaged thunderstruck specimens continue living as grossly distorted trees, sometimes becoming hollow as a consequence.

## Oaks Under Threat

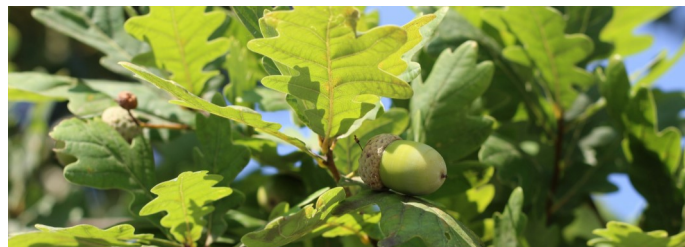
One might wonder if there are other dangers and

threats to our national emblem tree. The Woodland Trust observe that 'Our native oaks are under pressure like never before... declining at an unprecedented rate due to drought, flooding, pollution, pests and diseases.' A condition which has been called acute oak decline was first defined in the UK in 2014 and involves a combination of factors that cause oak trees to become stressed including bacterial species which may be causing bleeding cankers. Still under research, this condition is mainly observed in the South-East of the country.

Environmental stresses like soil conditions, drought, waterlogging and pollution can all impact an oak tree making it vulnerable to colonisation by insects, fungi and bacteria which can push it into decline. More frequent environmental changes like prolonged periods of drought or waterlogging may worsen the problem. On a positive note, organisations like the Woodland Trust are taking action to mitigate oak losses by replanting oaks for the future.

Another increasing threat arrived in 2006. The oak processionary moth is a non-native pest that has been found in London and the South East. Not only does it damage the foliage of the trees and increase the oak's susceptibility to other diseases, but it is also a risk to human health. The moth's hairs are toxic and can lead to itching and respiratory problems, according to the Woodland Trust.

In response, a UK and Ireland Sourced and Grown assurance scheme has been set up to ensure all the trees we plant and sell are produced in the UK and ecological organisations have lobbied the government to improve biosecurity at border points to stop new pests and diseases entering the UK. So, let's hope this will be stopped in its tracks before becoming a significant problem in Suffolk.



Nick Nicholson has over 30 years of expertise designing and planting gardens in London and Suffolk. Trained at The English Gardening School in Chelsea, Nick is conversant with a range of design styles and has extensive plant knowledge and experience. He is particularly interested in naturalistic, informal planting schemes which attract wildlife into gardens and is available to undertake design and planting work locally. Please call on 07930 824774 or email: [nick@nnplanting.co.uk](mailto:nick@nnplanting.co.uk)



# Helen Taylor: Walking, Observing and the Reach for Belonging

*Siobhan Horner-Galvin*



*Helen Taylor*

## From Royalty to the River Deben

In 2001, Helen Taylor presented her work to Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth and her paintings are now held in private collections around the world. Since those heady days of auctions at Bonhams and Sotheby's, her paintings remain highly sought after. The subject matter, however, has radically changed, coinciding with her move from London to Suffolk.

Taylor, who has lived in Woodbridge for almost thirty years, now finds her inspiration in the ever-changing rhythms of her surroundings. 'I think the whole thing about moving here,' she reflects, 'is the landscape—it really resonates with me, whether it's the wild, desert-like feel of Shingle Street or the florid riverside paths of the Deben. 'When you're out walking, there's a sense of history,' she says. 'You can feel it.'

## A childhood abroad

Having spent her early years in the Middle East, Taylor relocated to England at the age of sixteen to study at Hampstead Fine Arts. The streets of London were quite a shock after the heat, dust and colour of her childhood and had a profound impact on her as an artist. 'You see things differently when you're not from a place,' she notes. 'What is many other people's ordinary, is extraordinary to me.'

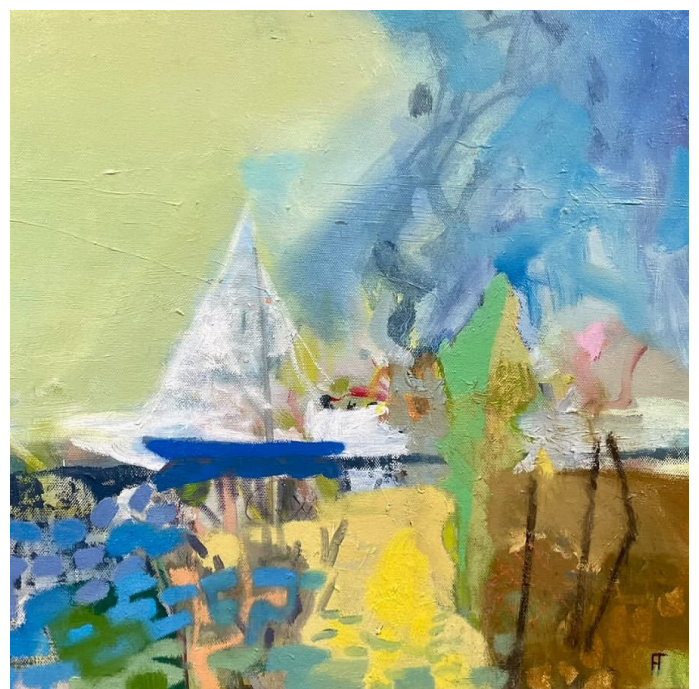
Taylor's work captures that tension—the quiet strangeness of the turning world. 'There's a definite oddness in the ordinary,' she muses. 'It's just life carrying on. I love that.'

Perhaps here lies a clue to the timeless appeal of her work. It is deeply rooted in the detail of place—a place of the present and the past—yet it is place viewed from the edge of things, from perhaps just outside the frame. Elegant, full of yearning, nostalgic yet utterly modern, Taylor's places are suffused with journey, landscape and patterns of belonging.

Moving to the relative flatness and sandy lanes of Suffolk provided fuel for her imagination and ultimately a place to rest, to call home. Says Taylor, 'London manifested in me a yearning for a 'greening' of landscape and garden'.

## Walking as Practice and Process

It was in Suffolk then, during lockdown that Taylor's creative practice shifted. 'I had always loved walking, but when I started my daily lockdown walks, it was a real turning point for my creative life. With children at home and the chaos of home schooling, I definitely took to walking and painting as a survival strategy. Pausing to reflect felt like both a luxury but also a necessity. That hour a day—walking and absorbing the bright world away from home—was a way for me to reflect and stay sane,' she laughs.



*Disembarkation by Helen Taylor*



Now, Taylor's art making is intrinsically linked with her environment – the river, the skies, the life she encounters along the way. Her daily walks serve as both meditative practice and research method. One of her favourite routes takes her past Woodbridge School, down California, along Sandy Lane, Broom Heath then down to the river, and back into town. 'It's a solitary time,' she says. 'I don't listen to music or the radio—I just observe.'

Many of these observations find their way into her paintings where familiar Suffolk scenes appear somehow altered, as if viewed through the gaze of someone from both within and outside the place.

### Shifting Narratives

The daily walk doesn't change much now, yet it remains a constantly changing landscape. 'Every day brings shifts. Some are subtle like the colours of the leaves on the trees. Then there's the wind, the light, even the river with its tides and constant movement.' This shifting yet steady landscape appears as fragmented narratives in Taylor's work that is freighted with story from her past life too. And no wonder, she can still recall the wonder she felt as a teenager seeing a donkey laden with hyssop in a Bahrain market. 'Everything feeds the eye' she says. 'It might be a memory of a busy marketplace or the flash of an oystercatcher in the sky. Everything feeds into the work in some way. But often not literally.'

When you gaze at Taylor's work, you might well recognise something about Kyson Point, the Deben river or perhaps that red sail or blousy elderflower. Her paintings capture, in many ways, the everyday of that environment. However, what's most intriguing and compelling about her work is the invitation she offers every viewer: to fill in the missing pieces, to interpret the scene in their own way, to find their own story within the one she's presented. And in this way, the painting becomes a personal encounter.

### Drawing as Foundation

Now Taylor works sometimes *en plein air* and often from sketches and memory, but hints of her earlier practice still remain. Before her focus shifted fully to painting and drawing, she worked with textiles, using a sewing machine as a kind of painter's tool. 'Embroidery is slower than painting. It has its own rhythm,' she explains. 'But drawing is what really holds everything together. That's always been my foundation.' That embrace of slowness – whether walking or observing – seems to emanate from Taylor's work too.

### Sharing the Practice – Art as Serious Play

In addition to her own practice, Taylor runs a studio where she facilitates art workshops for children, teenagers, and adults. But she resists the title of 'teacher.' 'I'm more of a facilitator,' she says. 'If you can hold a pencil, you can draw. It's about discovering your own way.'

Her classes are small, relaxed and deeply personal. Participants might respond to a word prompt—like 'gathering'—by bringing in found objects or photographs to draw from. 'We play,' she says. 'Serious play. The kind that leads somewhere.' Adults, especially, find Taylor's approach liberating. 'So many people were told at school that they weren't any good at art. It's a joy to help them rediscover that creative part of themselves.'



*An American in Suffolk by Helen Taylor*

### Word from a Critic

Gallery Owner, Nicholas Holloway, beautifully captures the nature of Taylor's work. 'The works are enveloped in an instinctive, gestural immediacy and equally, are concerned with the graphic, expressive potential of colour. Balancing a romantic impulse with simplification of form, imperfections of application and rawness of material, the paintings are rendered in a loose, textured style. Taylor seeks

to reinvigorate traditions of figurative painting and provide the viewer with a shared personal encounter.'

### Quiet Success and Personal Connections

A regular with Artspace Woodbridge, Taylor is represented by Nicholas Holloway, who runs a private gallery on the Shotley peninsula (viewings by appointment only). Interested collectors often find her through Instagram or word of mouth – just the way she likes it.

'I'm not always focused on commercial exhibitions,' she says. 'To make something, and have someone else connect with it—that completes the circle,' she says. 'That's what art is for.'

[www.nicholasholloway.co.uk/helen-taylor-gallery](http://www.nicholasholloway.co.uk/helen-taylor-gallery)

Instagram: @helentaylor paintings

Small group art workshops at  
[artcabinwoodbridge@gmail.com](mailto:artcabinwoodbridge@gmail.com)



*Decorating Cakes by Helen Taylor*

### **!COMPETITION!**

Why does this painting, *Decorating Cakes*, have this title? One winner will be chosen by artist, Helen Taylor, who will be donating a prize.  
**Answers by email by December 31st 2025**  
[siobhanhornergalvin@gmail.com](mailto:siobhanhornergalvin@gmail.com)

## A Tale of Two Geologists named Searles Valentine Wood

*Robert Markham*

### Searles Valentine Wood (1798-1880)

Born on St Valentine's Day and spending the past eighty years (so far) collecting Crag (Pliocene) shells, is it any wonder that my geological hero is Searles Valentine Wood, a man who shares the same birthday and who also spent decades collecting Crag shells?

The Wood family were solicitors in Woodbridge, where Searles Valentine was born of John and Mary Wood, at 12 o'clock noon on Wednesday 14 February 1798. He was received into the Church at Woodbridge in October 1801, his sponsors including his uncle Captain Searles Wood of the East India Service (who died in 1807). The young Searles Valentine survived whooping cough in May 1801 and measles in November 1803 and, with his family, took up residence in the rebuilt Melton Hall in 1807.

Clearly eager to get out into the world, in 1811, aged just thirteen years old, young Searles falsely gave his date of birth as 1795 and so was promptly

attached to the East India Company's Naval Service, where he stayed till 1825. His first voyage to India in the company's service was in 1811 as a Midshipman on the 'Thames' which went to St Helena, Bencoolen (Sumatra) and China. He then served as 5<sup>th</sup> Mate on the 'Winchelsea' in 1813, which went to Madras and China. In 1816 he served as 4<sup>th</sup> Mate on the 'Lady Castlereagh' which went to St Helena and China. In 1819 he left England as 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate on the 'Larkins' once again for St Helena and China. He was approved as 2<sup>nd</sup> Mate on the 'Castle Huntly' in 1822/3, not long after marrying Elizabeth Taylor of London in 1821. In 1825 he finally left the Company's service he and his wife settled at Hasketon in Suffolk, Wood taking up a partnership in a local bank.

Searles Wood began to collect fossil shells from the local crag pits, those in Ramsholt (where he stayed at the Ramsholt Dock Inn when collecting) and Sutton furnishing him with the greatest number of specimens. Perhaps his interest in the subject started when his younger brother Richard Wood, was received into the church in 1815. One of Richard's sponsors was Rev. George Leathes of Norfolk, who



collected crag shells and provided specimens for illustration in James Sowerby's *Mineral Conchology of Great Britain*. The diarist David Elisha Davy visited Searles Wood at Hasketon on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> June 1830 (Suffolk Records Society, vol. XXIV, 1982) and was astonished by the size and richness of his collection – with many species considered as new to science. He urged Searles Wood to have an account of his researches published.

Searles and his family (a son was born in 1830) moved to London c. 1835, where he continued to have bags of crag forwarded to him for examination.

In 1837 he met Charles Lyell (later Sir Charles) and helped to identify fossil molluscs for Lyell's study of Tertiary age geological formations. Searles Wood also collected fossils from the Hampshire Eocene deposits. He wrote a number of articles on Crag shells which appeared in the *Magazine and Annals of Natural History* from 1839 to 1842.

The Palaeontographical Society was formed in 1847 for the illustration (figuring) and description of British fossils by means of Monographs. And who better to write the first volume, *A Monograph of the Crag Mollusca, Volume 1: Univalves*, than Searles Valentine Wood? His collection formed the basis of this descriptive study. Three further volumes on Crag molluscs followed, plus one on Eocene shells, and he was awarded the Wollaston medal of the Geological Society of London in 1860. With a little modernising (not necessarily for the better) of the generic names, his volumes can hardly be bettered.

His first collection was presented to the British Museum, with later collections going to Norwich Museum and, again, the British Museum.

By 1860, when living at Brentwood, Essex, Wood's wife, Elizabeth, died. Wood retained his connection throughout this time with a Mr H. Newson of Hasketon, who continued to send him bags of crag from Sutton for examination. So, perhaps it was no surprise that, at Michaelmas 1873, he returned to Suffolk to settle in Martlesham. In August 1875, his chaise took him to Sutton to collect a few bags of crag, although he found that his eyesight was 'scarcely good enough to study the valves of chitons'.

Searles Valentine Wood, the great collector and describer of the Crag molluscs, died on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1880 and is buried in the churchyard at Melton Old Church.

A number of fossils have been named after him, including genera *Searlesia* (gastropod) and *Woodia*

(bivalve) and species *woodi* (of corals *Flabellum* and *Cryptangia* and gastropod *Triton*).



*Father and Son together*

#### **Searles Valentine Wood, the younger (1830 – 1884)**

A little confusion may arise to students of the Victorian in that Searles Valentine Wood's son was also named Searles Valentine Wood and, unusually, they both married an Elizabeth and both were geologists.

Searles Valentine Wood the younger was born at Hasketon 4 February 1830. As a child he took great interest in his father's scientific work, however his geological interests turned to glacial deposits and he produced the first detailed glacial drift map of the eastern counties. He died 14 December 1884 after many years of poor health. He also is buried in the churchyard of Melton Old Church and there are memorials to the Wood family in the church.

With many thanks to Mr and Mrs G. Simister, Mrs Wendy Blake and Dr Roger Dixon for information. Obituaries for Searles Valentine Wood and his son may be found in the *Geological Magazine* for 1880 (pp 575,6) and for 1884 (pp 133-142).



# Delving into the rich Human History of Martlesham Wilds

*Margaret King*

When you look at Martlesham Wilds you'll see a landscape made of hills and woods, fields and meadows, streams and ever-changing shorelines. However, looking instead at archaeological records, archives and maps, a different landscape emerges, one that is rich in human activity and stories. Martlesham Wilds has long been a 'lived-in' landscape.

The name Martlesham, or Merlesham, is probably from Old English, meaning a mooring place in a meadow bordering a creek. The Domesday Book tells us that there were 22 households, a church and a mill in 1086; all but one of the households had to pay service to the lord of the manor. The main livestock was sheep, with a few cattle, horses, pigs and beehives.

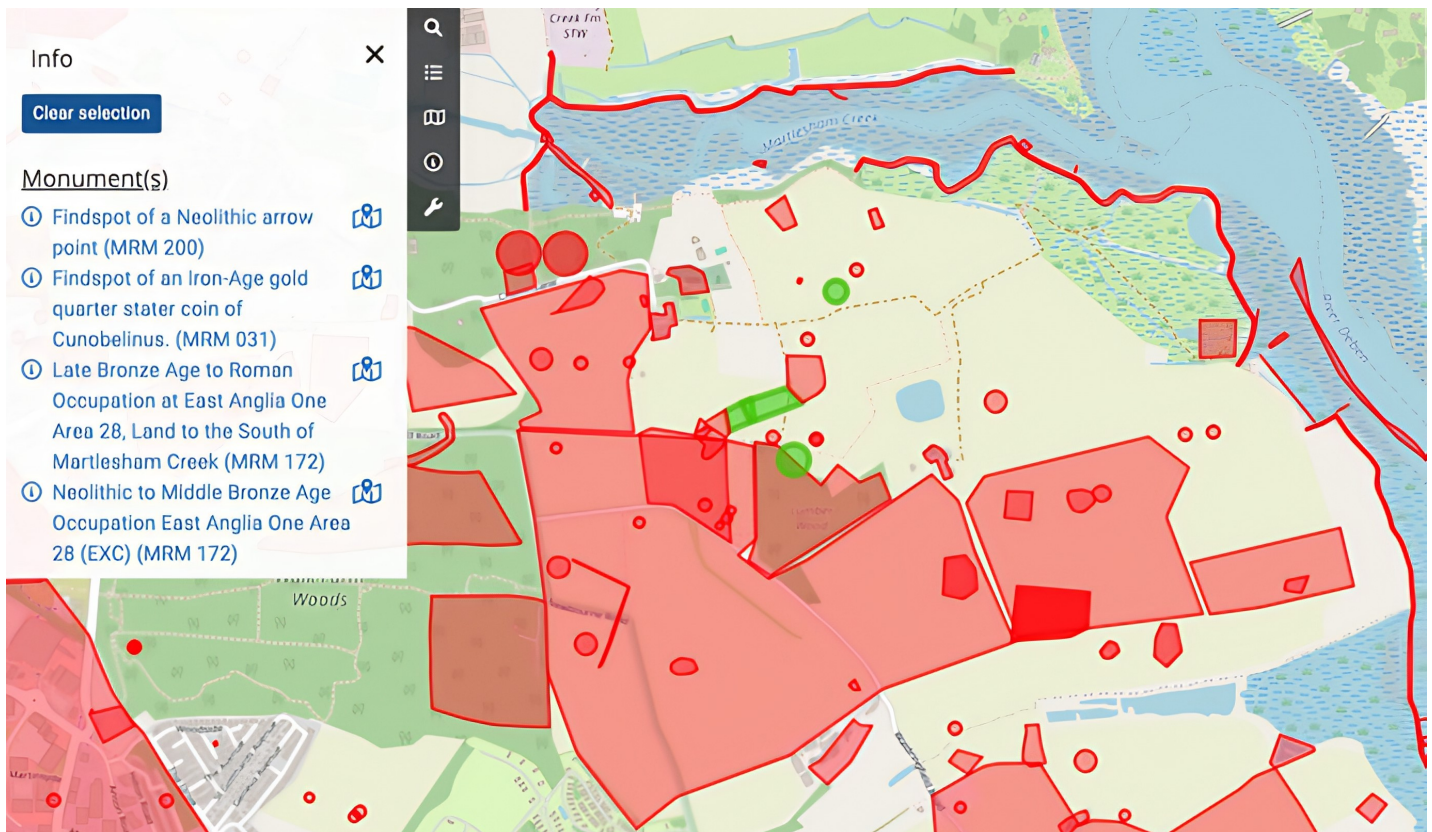
Well before that time, the Uffingas must have sailed past the Wilds on their way up the Deben to become the ruling dynasty of East Anglia. Later on, the longboats of the Viking raiders came up the marshy waterways. More than sixteen trackways, field systems and archaeological finds from the time of the Anglo-Saxons and of the Romans have been

recorded on Martlesham Wilds, thanks to aerial photographs and patient field-walking.

Even earlier in human history, coins from the late Iron Age, evidence of Bronze Age cremations, and a Neolithic arrow point have been found. Which begs the question - why here in Martlesham Wilds? Maybe it was the freshwater springs. And the sandy soils where natural woodland was not too dense, favoured for forest farming and the cultivation of crops by some of the earliest pastoral people.

## From Medieval to Tudor England

It is in the medieval period that we start to get much more of a picture about human life, and about the stewardship of the estate by the lord of the manor of Martlesham Hall. Sir John Verdun was lord of the manor in the 1320s. The manor house was probably on the same spot or close to where the Hall stands today. Verdun survived the Black Death of 1348 and with his third wife, Isabel, held four other manors in Suffolk and one in Norfolk.



*The light pink areas show land with trackways and field systems; the darker pink areas are locations of archaeological finds with four highlighted in green. Extract from Suffolk Heritage Explorer©OpenStreetMap©2025 Suffolk County Council Archaeological Services*

Some think that it was the Black Death that left the Hall and the Church isolated, but a more pragmatic explanation is that the villagers simply moved up to the turnpike when roads came into general use.

After Verdun's death, Edmund Noone married his widow and gained possession of the Verdun family estates. The Noone family then flourished at Martlesham for the next 200 years. They built the fine tower of St Mary's Church and their family arms are moulded into the church door. A survey of their manor in 1460 survives today in the Suffolk Archives, a scroll covered in tiny medieval Latin script.

### **The Goodwin and the Doughty families**

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, first the Goodwin and then the Doughty family became lords of the manor, but it seems that they were largely absentee landlords. The Hall became a farmhouse probably occupied by a farmer or farm bailiff cultivating the home farm or '*demesne*'. Corn and sheep complimented each other through the seasons - when the corn fields lay fallow, they were grazed, dunged and compacted by the sheep.

Members of the Doughty family were patrons or rectors at St Mary's Church right up until 1970. A track leads from the rectory down towards the Creek, and a double row of posts can still be seen running out from the reed beds. Maybe this was the landing point used by smugglers in the nineteenth century to move their contraband inland from the Creek. It is said that on moonless nights, the rector would leave his stable doors unlocked, so that the smugglers could make use of his horse and carriage, leaving behind a keg of brandy as payment.

Both the Goodwin and the Doughty families have monuments in St Mary's Church.

### **The Tithe Map**

A snapshot of Martlesham Wilds in 1832 comes from a survey by the local mapmaker, Isaac Johnson, when the land was split between two landowners and farmed by two different farmers.

The area close to the Hall, including what is now called Hall Field stretching alongside the Creek and down the river almost as far as the pier, were part of the manorial estate owned by Frederick Goodwin Doughty. The farmers were 36-year-old Edward Sheppard and his brother, John. The Sheppards lived at the Hall, surrounded by shrubberies, gardens and farmyards, along with wife, Mary, teenage son, two housekeepers and three agricultural workers. They farmed the majority of

the estate which covered almost 1000 acres of the parish, of which about 100 acres was in Martlesham Wilds. Fourteen years later, when the timber-framed core of the Hall burned down, it was rebuilt as the neo-Tudor red brick building, Grade II listed, you see today.

The remainder of Martlesham Wilds was owned by Major Sherman of the East Suffolk Militia, and was farmed by Henry Edwards. A long drift led from the farmstead up to a field barn with a garden, now completely lost. Almost half of the 56 small fields were arable, with the remainder being grazing marsh, pasture and saltings. Lumber Wood was retained for timber and for game.

Old Martlesham had become a thriving centre of trade, virtually self-sufficient. The coaching inn, now called the Red Lion, was on the regular route of drovers of cattle and sheep on their way to Smithfield market in London. The surrounding countryside, farmlands and Creek were a favoured subject of landscape paintings by the 'Woodbridge circle' of painters which included Thomas Churchyard and George James Rowe.

### **The Bantoft family**

In the 1860s, Martlesham Wilds was united under one landowner - the eccentric 'Colonel' George Tomline whose Suffolk seat was Orwell Park. Tomline spent much of his time and immense wealth buying up land between Ipswich and Felixstowe and eventually became the second largest landowner in Suffolk. He was famous for the development of the railway to Felixstowe and the early development of the port. He was also legendary for his legal disputes and was known as 'a dangerous man to quarrel with, with the will and power to be a very nasty enemy in every sense of the word'.



*Tracks into Martlesham Wilds*





*Stunning flora on Martlesham Wilds*



*Sunset on Martlesham Wilds*

The census of the same year places 50-year-old Charles Bantoft as farmer of 750 acres, employing fourteen men and five boys, and living with his wife Eliza first at Howes Farm and then at Bantoft's Farm. His son, also called Charles, farmed a further 738 acres, employing eight men and two boys and living at the Hall with a groom and gardener. So, it appears that father and son between them were farming all of the Wilds.

A landing point or pier going out into the Deben, with a track leading across the saltings to what is now called Dock Field, can still be seen at low tide. It is thought that this cutting, known as Bantoft's Dock, was made by the farmer at Hill Farm to take the farm produce up and down river.

By the end of the century, Suffolk was hit by an agricultural depression. The Bantofts - father and son - moved to Norfolk with their families. Tomline died and the estate was inherited by Ernest Pretymann who installed a farm bailiff and gamekeeper at the Hall to manage both Hall and Hill Farms.

## **Twentieth century**

A damaged WW2 bomber returning home in the 1940s jettisoned its bombs over empty countryside before landing and hit the river wall near Cross Farm, flooding the land of Martlesham Wilds through a 40-metre gap right up to the Creek. This is just one of the times that the land was flooded.

Hill Farm had become a dairy farm and Hill Farm an arable farm. Pretymann sold them both in 1945, with the exception of the Hall itself and of the shooting rights on Lumber Wood (which Pretymann kept for the next five years). Ten years later the two farms, known simply as Hill Farm, were acquired by RAF Group Captain Edward P Wells, a famous flying ace for the Royal New Zealand Air Force.

Wells later moved to Spain and John Symes inherited Hill Farm in 1963 from his father.

And the rest, as they say, is history - the farm was sold in two lots in 2022, with the bulk of the land going to the Suffolk Wildlife Trust for the creation of Martlesham Wilds nature reserve.



*Margaret King, Research Volunteer*

*When Margaret King heard about plans for a new nature reserve at Martlesham Wilds early last year, she decided to join the Suffolk Wildlife Trust in order to volunteer at the Wilds. With her background as a researcher of garden history, she offered to research the history of the landscape of the Wilds. However, she found very little written about Martlesham, which was both exciting and daunting at the same time. So she looked into the online Historic Environment Record for Suffolk and made use of the Hold archive in Ipswich.*

*The works of local historians such as W G Arnott, Robert Simper and Keith Briggs were particularly useful, as was the advice of Dr. Tom Cox in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the University of East Anglia.*

# The Woodbridge and Melton Society

The Society's chief interest is in maintaining and improving the quality of the environment in which, as residents, we live. It brings together people who are interested in and proud of Woodbridge and Melton; in the preservation of their historic character and in the way both places develop in the future. Becoming a member of The Woodbridge and Melton Society means joining a growing group of people that care about where they live and want to preserve it for generations to come.

## The Aims of The Society are:

- \* To raise with the authorities matters of concern to do with Woodbridge and Melton
- \* To promote high standards of planning and architecture and monitor planning applications
- \* To stimulate interest in their history and traditions
- \* To publish a twice-yearly newsletter. (We welcome articles written by members—please contact Editor.)
- \* To organise talks and visits

A registered charity (No. 1117073), The Society is able to claim gift aid on donations.

## Our website:

[www.woodbridgeandmeltonsociety.org.uk](http://www.woodbridgeandmeltonsociety.org.uk)

Contact us: [info@woodbridgeandmeltonsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@woodbridgeandmeltonsociety.org.uk)

## Officers and Committee Members

Chairman	Garth Pollard	<a href="mailto:garthpollard@gmail.com">garthpollard@gmail.com</a>	tel: 01394 82605
Secretary	Vacant		
Treasurer	Lindsay Dann	<a href="mailto:lindsaydann@btinternet.com">lindsaydann@btinternet.com</a>	tel: 07756 835603
Membership Secretary	Liz Huddleston	<a href="mailto:info@woodbridgeandmeltonsociety.org.uk">info@woodbridgeandmeltonsociety.org.uk</a>	tel: 01394 388042
Chair of Planning Group	John Saggars	<a href="mailto:johnsaggars@btinternet.com">johnsaggars@btinternet.com</a>	tel: 01394 388493
Talks Organiser	Anne Day	<a href="mailto:annedee100@hotmail.com">annedee100@hotmail.com</a>	tel: 01394 387894
Newsletter Editor	Siobhan Horner	<a href="mailto:siobhanhornergalvin@gmail.com">siobhanhornergalvin@gmail.com</a>	tel: 07879 561042
Newsletter Production	Carol Wiseman	<a href="mailto:carolandlaurie@btinternet.com">carolandlaurie@btinternet.com</a>	tel: 01394 383666
Blue Plaques Champion	Pieter Shipster	<a href="mailto:pieter2703@gmail.com">pieter2703@gmail.com</a>	tel: 01394 383957
Committee Member	Bryony Abbott	<a href="mailto:bryony@bryonyabbott.com">bryony@bryonyabbott.com</a>	tel: 07764 581589
Summer Visits Organiser	Vacant		
	Stephen Ashworth	<a href="mailto:teaselandtwiglet@aol.com">teaselandtwiglet@aol.com</a>	tel: 07763 525108
	Joeske van Walsum	<a href="mailto:joeske@maestroarts.com">joeske@maestroarts.com</a>	tel: 07887 657301
	Gary Doggett	<a href="mailto:gary@marketingcitygroup.com">gary@marketingcitygroup.com</a>	tel: 07863 352646
	Stephen McCrum	<a href="mailto:stephenjmccrum@gmail.com">stephenjmccrum@gmail.com</a>	tel: 07711161040
	Cliff Hoppitt	<a href="mailto:talks@woodbridgeandmeltonsociety.org.uk">talks@woodbridgeandmeltonsociety.org.uk</a>	tel: 01394 388042
Observer-Melton Parish Council	Cllr John Bann	<a href="mailto:cllr.bann@melton-suffolk-pc.gov.uk">cllr.bann@melton-suffolk-pc.gov.uk</a>	tel: 07864379792

## Society Talks

These take place together at 7.30pm on the first Wednesday in October, November, March and April at The Quay Church, Quay Street, Woodbridge IP12 1BX.

After a small amount of Society business there is a talk for around 45 minutes, with time at the end for questions. The evening usually rounds up by 9-9.30pm

No booking is required for talks. Talks are free to Society members and £5 per person for non members. All are welcome to attend. Please do bring a friend.

### Secretary Wanted

To cover general admin including taking minutes, typing up agendas and attending 4 meetings a year.

### Summer Visits Organiser Wanted

To research, book and organise three places of interest for members to visit in summer 2026

Can you help? Interested parties please email: [garthpollard@gmail.com](mailto:garthpollard@gmail.com)



