

THE WOODBRIDGE & MELTON SOCIETY



# Newsletter

**Autumn 2023**



Welcome to the first issue of this new Civic Society's Newsletter - Nigel Brown discusses planning matters in Melton - Mary Burgess explores the development of The Street and Hackney Road - A photo quiz tests your knowledge of Melton and Woodbridge - Georgina Lankester visits Melton boatyard.

# In this Issue

|    |                                                                  |    |                                                                                                                                       |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2  | Society meetings for 2023/24                                     | 19 | Memories of a Woodbridge Childhood                                                                                                    |
| 3  | Chair's Letter to Members                                        |    | <b>Four City Livery Company Masters:</b>                                                                                              |
| 4  | Planning Matters in Melton                                       | 20 | The Apothecaries                                                                                                                      |
| 6  | The Street, Melton: A Wander from Crossroads to Corner and Back  | 21 | The Fruiterers                                                                                                                        |
| 8  | Woodbridge and Melton in Numbers                                 | 22 | The Information Technologists                                                                                                         |
| 9  | Blue Plaque for Margaret Rope<br>Award for Woodbridge Architects | 23 | The Master Mariners                                                                                                                   |
| 10 | Melton Boatyard                                                  | 24 | Summer Visits 2023                                                                                                                    |
| 11 | Woodbridge Regatta                                               | 25 | Obituaries: Tony Hubbard, Michael Rines                                                                                               |
| 12 | Song: To the Beautiful Green Deben                               | 26 | The Birth of Woodbridge Theatre                                                                                                       |
| 13 | I-Spy Quiz                                                       | 27 | Caroline Page                                                                                                                         |
| 17 | The Hackney Road Development                                     |    | Editor: Tim Cornford Production: Carol Wiseman<br>Photography: Anthony Mather<br>Website: Dan Cornford<br>Cover photo: David Mortimer |

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## Society Meetings 2023/24

The Society has planned four evening meetings for the 2023/24 season. These will all be held in The Quay Church in Quay Street and will begin at 7.30pm. We look forward to seeing many of you there and we encourage members to bring friends and to introduce them to the Society.

### Wednesday 4 October 2023

Special General Meeting followed by  
Dan Palfrey, Director of the Ipswich Town Football Club Foundation, on  
*Enhancing Suffolk's Communities: the Work of the ITFC Foundation*

### Wednesday 1 November 2023

*From Swedish Fighting Ship to The Deben Cafe: the Story of HMS Vale*  
by Cate Meadows

### Wednesday 6 March 2024

Annual General Meeting followed by  
*The Life and Work of Stained Glass Artist Sister Margaret Rope*  
by Arthur Rope

### Wednesday 3 April 2024

*Two Crabbes, Dickens and Fitzgerald: The View from Suffolk*  
by Professor Jeremy Tambling

# Chair's Letter to Members

## ***New Constitution***

Members may recall that at our AGM in March we passed a resolution to change the name of the Society to The Woodbridge and Melton Society and adopted a new constitution to extend our objects to include Melton, to simplify our administration and to change the provisions which would apply if the Society was ever to be wound up.

These changes then had to be filed with the Charity Commission. While the Commission agreed to the change of name, they objected initially to the new objects clause and the winding up provision. After correspondence they agreed the winding up provision was acceptable but maintained their objection to the way the new objects clause was expressed. It is not possible for small charities to obtain prior approval of proposed changes to their constitution.

We decided that the easiest course was to accept the Commission's redrafted clause (we saw no practical difference between the two versions) and this means that we will need to hold an Extraordinary General Meeting to adopt the new Constitution. The Committee proposes to hold this meeting immediately before the first talk of our autumn season on 4 October 2023. The formal notice of the Meeting will be emailed to members.

## ***Melton***

Following the Society's decision to extend its remit to include Melton, we were invited to speak at Melton's Annual Parish Meeting. I spoke about the Society and its activities and Pieter Shipster, who looks after our Blue Plaque programme, talked about that and our plan to honour the former Melton resident, benefactor and distinguished physician, Sir Archibald Garrod. Melton Parish Council have nominated Councillor John Bann to be an Observer at our Committee Meetings.

## ***Shire Hall Consultation***

We are grateful to all Members who contacted the Committee with their thoughts on the Consultation. The comments we received were in agreement with the views which the Committee expressed in the Society's response and which was circulated to members. Members told us they were disappointed that it appeared that the Council had failed to adequately maintain the building, they fully supported it continuing to be used as an asset for the benefit of the Town, and not disposed of commercially, and, ideally, using so far as possible external funding, fully restored.

Tim Cornford, the Editor of our Newsletter, and I recently had a very constructive meeting with the Mayor and Councillor Bale. They told us that the Shire Hall is in a structurally sound condition and that essential maintenance has always been carried out. They reported a very good response from the public to the Consultation. The responses are now being analysed, with the intention that a full report will be made to the Council in September. That Report will, of course, be made available to the public. We understand that this is likely to be only the first step on what will be a long project to secure the future of this iconic building. We were told that the Town Council look forward to working with the Society in relation to the Shire Hall over the coming months.

We will be keeping a close watch on future developments and will ensure members are kept informed of any significant ones.

## ***Other Planning Matters***

Over the next few months, it is likely that the planning application for the former Council Offices will be submitted and will be scrutinised by the Society's Planning Group. The consultation on the details of 'The Mini Holland' scheme, for which substantial funding has been allocated, is due to commence in August and we will be considering the proposals carefully and responding. The Feasibility Study which was submitted can be seen by following this link: [https://thewaytogosuffolk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/WM\\_MiniHolland\\_FeasibiltiyStudy-FINAL-31-03-23.pdf](https://thewaytogosuffolk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/WM_MiniHolland_FeasibiltiyStudy-FINAL-31-03-23.pdf). NB: The word Feasibility is misspelt in this link.

## ***Visits and Talks***

The Summer visits programme, superbly organised by Colin Palmer, has been well supported and very much enjoyed by members. Anne Day and Fran Reeder have put together an excellent series of talks for 2023/24. These are listed on page 2 and on the enclosed card. We hope they will be as well attended as last season's.

## ***Members' Views***

There are a number of matters coming up which will affect Woodbridge and Melton, such as the 'Mini Holland' scheme, the old Council Offices and The Shire Hall, all of which will require the most careful consideration. In considering them and making representations to the appropriate authorities, it is helpful to your committee to learn members' views. So don't hesitate to contact the Society: [info@woodbridgeandmeltonsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@woodbridgeandmeltonsociety.org.uk)

Thank you for your continued involvement in and support of the Society.

Garth Pollard

# Planning Matters in Melton

## *Melton Parish Councillor Nigel Brown discusses recent and current planning issues*

My first introduction to planning matters was as a new Melton Parish Councillor observing Bloor Homes' appeal hearing about the site at the top of Woods Lane. I was watching an extremely clever and no doubt extremely expensive QC demolish the then Suffolk Coastal District Council's argument that it had a valid 5-year housing supply. As a result, Bloor Homes won the appeal and 200 houses have since been built on the site. This highlighted that Melton needed to get on and finish its in-progress Neighbourhood Plan (NP) to give it some protection.



*Melton with the Woods Lane development at the top of the picture. Photo: David Mortimer*

Neighbourhood Planning allows a community (eg. a parish like Melton) to develop a vision for its locality and give residents an opportunity to consider where homes, shops and offices might be built, how infrastructure might be provided and how they see the character of the area developing.\*

The NP sits alongside and supports the Local Plan (LP) prepared at District Council level. That Local Plan must in itself be robust and meet targets set by government for housing development in the area. So, for example the relevant East Suffolk Council (ESC) LP identifies how many homes need to be built in the district and includes an allocation of these by parish or town. The NP for each parish or town must show where they envisage those homes being built. LPs and NPs are checked by a Government Inspector to ensure they are realistic.

In Melton a lot of councillors and volunteers worked on the NP for a long time and, after extensive consultation, the process culminated in the NP being inspected and then accepted overwhelmingly by the community in a ballot. Because Melton has a valid NP in place, it has been able successfully to resist a number of attempts to

develop sites not allocated for development in the NP. Most notably to date these have involved sites on Yarmouth Road (twice) and Woods Lane. Furthermore, with an NP in place a community is entitled to receive a larger share of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) that developers pay to the District Council to support infrastructure costs. Melton has to date received some £500,000 more CIL than it would otherwise have done had it not had an NP in place\*\*. That money continues to be put to good use, replacing the Pavilion at the Recreation Ground, building safe crossings on the roads and remodelling the free car park opposite the village shop.

Despite having an allocation within the NP, when a planning application is received for Melton, it must still be considered on its own merits by the Parish Council and ESC. Having the NP in place gives the local Councils a view of what the village might agree to and greater strength to potentially turn down unsuitable developments, for example on green field sites in areas not designated for development, although we must recognise there is a the continuing need for housing and, over the years since the Melton NP was adopted, many applications for infill developments within current housing areas or on brown-field sites have been adopted and homes built.



*Riduna Park with adjacent Carter and Warburg sites. Photo: David Mortimer*

There have been issues concerning the site selected for development near to the Riduna Business Park and behind the St Andrews estate. When the community supported the allocation of this site in the NP, they and Melton Parish Council (MPC) expected a comprehensive development of the whole site to be delivered. This included a number of community facilities (eg. attractive green space, land for a community farm and a lake were planned). In addition, there would be space for

allotments and a significant proportion of the housing would be 'low cost' to support young people staying in the area. Attractive offices would be built adjacent to Riduna Park and, importantly, vehicle access to the new housing would be through the Riduna Park /Carter site rather than through the existing St Andrews estate.

As the planning application came forward for the housing element only, it was clear that the relevant landowners had not reached agreement about the comprehensive design and, instead of the whole site being delivered, part of it (the Carter site) has reverted to shipping container storage and an application for housing only (on the Warburg site behind the Carter site) has come forward with access through the St Andrews estate. MPC opposed this application on safety grounds and also because it was not the comprehensive development planned for and included within the NP. Eventually, ESC accepted MPC's arguments and rejected the application but this was overturned by the Planning Inspectorate at Appeal. The planning application for the housing has now been given Outline Planning permission though as yet there is no date set for when the final proposal is likely to come forward and when commencement of construction might begin. MPC will be anxious to ensure that "conditions" (to help ensure safe and considerate construction) agreed as part of the Planning Permission are adhered to.

MPC and the Melton community needs to move on from this disappointment and work is now starting on a refresh of the NP to bring it up to date and ensure it remains relevant in giving protection against unwanted development. A number of new factors have emerged since the NP was drawn up including the increase of traffic in the area; the impacts of climate change on Melton; and the 'mini-Holland' scheme to promote active travel in Woodbridge and Melton. Under the current LP, which runs to 2036, there should be no need for a further site allocation for housing. This should greatly simplify the work needed in updating the

NP, and consulting with the community on the proposals should be straightforward. If the resulting changes are relatively minor, it should be possible to proceed through Inspection without the need for a further ballot.

MPC is also mindful of a changing political environment. Under pressure from traditional conservative voters in the countryside the UK government is reconsidering the importance of housing targets (previously its aim had been to build 300,000 houses a year) and giving greater freedom to District Councils to reconsider the rate at which development should take place. The Labour party on the other hand is now signalling its wish to build more housing than ever before should it come to power. Locally, political changes in the make-up of ESC are likely to mean environmental considerations will become more prominent in decisions on what is to be built and where that will be.

Perhaps even more importantly rising interest rates and potential falls in the ability to purchase homes have led some sources to suggest that as few as 100,000 new homes might be built in the UK in the next 12 months. Against this and particularly relevant in Suffolk there is also the increase in the senior population and the desire of many people to 'escape to the country'. So it seems the pressure on our land will continue for some time yet. The planning environment and legal framework will continue to develop during the course of the next few years making it difficult to predict where the next challenge for our village might come from. I can only assume that, from a planning perspective, we will continue to live in 'interesting times'.

*\*NB: Woodbridge Town Council decided in 2016 not to pursue production of a Neighbourhood Plan given the limited scope for further development in the town. It is difficult to know what difference an NP would have made, but the town would have received a larger share of the CIL, (Editor)*

*\*\*With an NP in place CIL is paid at 25% rather than 15%. More importantly the cap of £100 per dwelling in the parish per year does not apply.*

## New Members

The Society welcomes the following people into membership.

Bryony and Steve Abbott, Terry Basson, Mark and Wendy Bostock, Paul and Jane Clarke, Colin and Cindy de la Rue, Maureen Frazer, Michael and Barbara Gains, David Griffiths, Liz and Simon Hattan, Ronnie Ireland, Dymphna Jackson, Graham and Rachel Jacobs, Geoffrey Jacobs, Sally Juniper, R Leach, Mark and Linda Packard, Pat Parker, Philip Poole, Kenneth Sears, Edgar Stanford, Robin Townley and Lesley Wilson, Joeske and Rachel van Walsum, Julian Watts, Nicholas and Jacqueline Wright.

# The Street, Melton: A Wander from Crossroads to Corner and Back

Mary Burgess

*'The Street...is no village street, but a close town-like collection of houses, with business-like shops and one or two inns...a neat little premises used as an Iron Foundry... at every step one meets with trim little cottages or elegant mansions.'* East Anglian Miscellany 1860.

Coming from Woodbridge, once past the traffic lights on Woods Lane you are into The Street. On the left is an elegant terrace, split into three, built in late 18<sup>th</sup> /early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The Beeches (1) was once home to Thomas Churchyard and his family. The Bowery (5) was once a shop but is now a private house.



Abutting the terrace is a row of six cottages called Foundry Row. These were built for workers of the local foundry, which stood where Thurlow Nunn Standen is now. James Page and Horace Girling were 14 in 1834 when they were apprenticed to Joshua Bryant, the then owner of the foundry, but by 1843 they were in charge. The foundry was very much the heart of the village and a thriving concern, employing many workers. There was even a big Foundry House, sadly taken down in the late 1960s/70s. If you look around the locality you will still see much evidence of their work: gates here, drain covers there.

Past the Foundry was a row of cottages, now mostly demolished, which housed all those occupations



vital to the working of a village: the blacksmith, the harness maker, the wheelwright. Morrisons Daily, the present shop and post office, was where the harness/ saddle maker lived and worked.

Taking a step back you will notice a very old house sideways onto the road: this is the Old School House (25) which dates to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Behind this was the old school now part of the Old School Mews development built 2017/2018: a collection of five new houses and two conversions.

The Cottage (77/79), just past the Saddlemaker's Lane entrance, was built on Melton Town Land in 1823 and let out for minimal rents to those in need. It was converted into one c1969. The next-door cottage is Rosemary Cottage (81) which was built in 1824 on land previously belonging to Melton Lodge and sold to William Woods in October 1823.

The terrace of cottages, opposite the village sign, have stood here for centuries. The former Horse and Groom, on Melton corner, was converted into two private residences, Thomas Churchyard House and Toll Rest, in 2011/12.

The Fish and Chip shop, formally Skoulding's, abuts a pair of terraced houses which were once part of a much larger row but sadly knocked down in the 1970's to make way for the car park and Winifred Fison House, a retirement housing complex run by Flagship homes. Recently Melton Parish Council has added further parking here to help accommodate the number of cars in Melton. Hardly any house in the Street has off-road parking

The White House (56) was built in 1833 by William Bilby, the local builder. In the mid 1850's it was leased to Thomas Churchyard for a few years. When the Chapel was built in 1860, the house owners went to court saying that the chapel was too near them and affected their light. As a result, in 1861 the Chapel had to be moved slightly, a feat carried out by local millwrights. The Chapel, now closed for religious worship, has now been taken on by a podiatrist's business.

The Parish Rooms, now known as the Burness Parish Rooms, was opened in 1904 and built thanks to the generosity of James Burness, who lived at the Lodge from 1883 until he died in 1920. It was designed by Messrs. Bisshopp and Cautley and built by local builder William Bilby. The original

accommodation consisted of a club room and reading room divided by a folding screen. Over the years various alterations and extensions have taken place.

Practically all the houses in the Street have interesting historical facts about them and have a story to tell but space precludes me from mentioning every one of them here. Unfortunately, one of the most important historical buildings in the

Street, the Old Gaol, was demolished in the early 1960's to make way for a car park for Friars Shop. An active campaign had taken place to try and save it but without success.

In the 1980's a small development of 5 houses was built on the site. In 2008 another house was built next to them, now occupied by Koo Koo (a hairdresser's business). At the same time, the granary behind was converted into two flats.

The final building in the Street, originally called Melton House, is now divided into three. With the construction of the Wilford Bridge Road in 1979 some of the large garden was lost to the project.

The roof of this house has been dated to the 1490s and it is believed to be the site in the middle ages of the Steward's house for the Liberty of St Etheldreda. Major Edmund Van Someren (1875-1963), artist and soldier, lived here from 1927 until his death in 1963.

*Mary Burgess is Joint Melton Local History Recorder and part of the Woodbridge Museum Collections team.*



*Old Gaol 1929*



*The Street today*

*Photo: David Mortimer*

# Woodbridge and Melton in Numbers

*The 2021 data presented below is selected from the website Suffolk Observatory (www.suffolkobservatory.info) compiled by the Suffolk Office of Data and Analytics.*

|                                  | Woodbridge              | Melton                  |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Population                       | 7880                    | 4257                    |
| Female                           | 4196                    | 2210                    |
| Male                             | 3684                    | 2047                    |
| Largest age group                | 70-74 (8.4%)            | 60-64 (8.6%)            |
| Smallest age group               | 4 and below (3.3%)      | 80-84 (3.2%)            |
| Economically active population   | 49.2%                   | 54.2%                   |
| Universal credit claimants (F)   | 1.9%                    | 1.2%                    |
| Universal credit claimants (M)   | 2.2%                    | 1.4%                    |
| Housing: bungalows               | 14%                     | 14%                     |
| Housing: flats/maisonettes       | 17%                     | 17%                     |
| Housing: terraced                | 31%                     | 12%                     |
| Housing: semi-detached           | 19%                     | 27%                     |
| Housing: detached                | 18%                     | 31%                     |
| Housing: owned outright          | 48.1%                   | 46.7%                   |
| Housing: mortgaged               | 19.7%                   | 24.8%                   |
| Housing: social rented           | 14.9%                   | 14%                     |
| Housing: private rented          | 16.9%                   | 14.3%                   |
| Low income (F)                   | 107                     | 44                      |
| Low income (M)                   | 138                     | 26                      |
| Recorded crime                   | 63.4 per 000 population | 36.1 per 000 population |
| Fuel poverty                     | 12% of households       | 10.3% of households     |
| 1 Car/van in household           | 47.5%                   | 43.9%                   |
| 2 or more cars/vans in household | 36.5%                   | 44.1%                   |
|                                  |                         |                         |
| Population 1921                  | 4595                    | 2073                    |

# Blue plaque for Margaret Rope

*Pieter Shipster*

On Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> March 2023 the Society hosted an event in The Shire Hall to mark its award of a Blue Plaque to Margaret Agnes Rope (1882-1953), the stained-glass artist and nun, who lived and worked in the Carmelite convent in Church St, Woodbridge from 1923-38. The plaque is in the courtyard of 9A Church St which was the entrance for members of the public attending mass at the convent.

The 35 guests who attended the event included representatives from: lay members of the successor Carmelite Monastery in Quidenham, Norfolk; the Worshipful Company of Glaziers and Painters of Glass and other experts on stained-glass; the Church of the Holy Family and St Michael in Kesgrave – which has several windows by Margaret Rope; locally elected officials; local heritage organisations; and residents of buildings that once formed part of the convent complex.

The guests were welcomed by the Chairman. He introduced Caroline Swash who spoke about her grandfather Henry Payne, Margaret Rope's teacher at the Birmingham Municipal School of Art, and why Margaret is considered such an important stained-glass artist. The second guest speaker, Garry Humphreys – a Church St resident – described in detail the origins and expansion of the convent and dispelled the notion that 'no trace of the convent now exists'.

The guests were then invited to walk the few yards to see the plaque in situ before attending a tea reception at The Bull Inn.



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## Award for Woodbridge Architects

The most recent East Suffolk Quality of Place Awards were announced in March and Plaice Design of Market Hill were one of the joint winners of the Design Award. They were responsible for the very distinctive Martello Cafe in Felixstowe.

The judges said, "The challenge of this project was to create an iconic cafe/restaurant that would turn an unpromising but prominent site on the edge of Martello Park into a destination building that would act as a landmark and focal point for the regeneration of Felixstowe seafront. The judges' site visit convinced them that the architects have fully succeeded in this mission, as it is clearly a very popular local venue. The building's geometry is exceedingly complex, being inspired by a clam shell."

Plaice Architects is based at 5A Market Hill, the former home of the Woodbridge Museum. The business occupies the ground floor of this early 19th century Grade II listed, 3 storey building, which they have converted into a new architectural studio. "The design of the Martello Cafe has been based around three coastal themes: a shell, a board

walk and fish scales. A clam has a ribbed shell which, when open, reveals a beautiful interior. Light and shade and the play of light on the coloured surfaces helps to create a vibrant environment...The rhythm of the undulating roof expresses movement or flight, much like the wings of a seagull. The building's plan forms arcs around the site, opening up and framing panoramic views of the bay. The cylindrical design of the drum is reflective of the form of the nearby Martello Tower."



Copyright: © 2022 VMZINC. 2022 photoarchitecture.com (Paul Kozlowski)

# Melton Boatyard

## *Georgina Lankester meets Simon Skeet*

One only has to walk through Melton Boatyard to realise it is a hive of activity. Boats of all shapes and sizes are being worked on by the yard's team and others by the boat owners themselves. The point of difference is that, unlike the neighbouring yards, timber vessels are few and far between.



In 1981 Mel and Jennifer Skeet took on the lease at the 4.5-acre site. Their son Simon, who now heads up the family business, said when his parents came it was a derelict mess – a scrap yard.

Mel Skeet began his marine career in the 1970s at Fox's Boatyard in Ipswich. He and Jennifer lived opposite the yard with their children Julie and Simon. Soon Mel's ambitions took him to Shotley Boatyard where he took on the lease to run his own business, but only two years later the owners decided to redevelop the site as a marina. That spurred him on to taking the opportunity at Melton.

His mission was not to compete with the traditional boatyards, many of which had been established in previous centuries, but to offer something new. Mel's skills in fibreglass provided the answer. Through sheer hard work and a 'can do, will do' attitude, Melton Boatyard has grown steadily over the years to become the thriving business it is today.

"Dad and Mum worked non-stop from day one," said Simon. "Living on site, they were able to provide a 24/7 service and my father used to say to me 'Boy, there is nothing that can't be done.' " Sadly, Mel died in 2015 but Simon, who joined his parents to learn the ropes in 1991, now continues the hard graft alongside his mother, sister and a team of full- and part-time staff.

The yard specialises in grit-blasting and painting wide beam barges, canal barges, steelwork, GRP repairs and osmosis treatment. With a 40-tonne travel hoist, they can handle vessels up to 70 feet in

length – lifting them either from the river or from road transporters. "No one else on the Deben can handle boats of this size and we have the best road access on the river," says Simon. "We have two cranes as well and a workshop which can be adjusted to fit a range of different size vessels."

In addition to repair work, Melton Boatyard has a 30-berth marina, mud berths for 20 houseboats and there is currently hard-standing for up to 100 vessels. Alongside the office, there is a small chandlery for the convenience of boat owners who might need last minute items. And, in 2015, a new state-of-the-art shower and toilet block was opened.

A familiar face at the boatyard is Tam Grundy who is well-known to many on the Rivers Deben and Orwell as a marine contractor. Tam has three work boats to suit different jobs – dredging or sorting out moorings. He uses Melton Boatyard to keep his boats maintained and has, according to Jennifer, been an enormous support to Simon since Mel died.

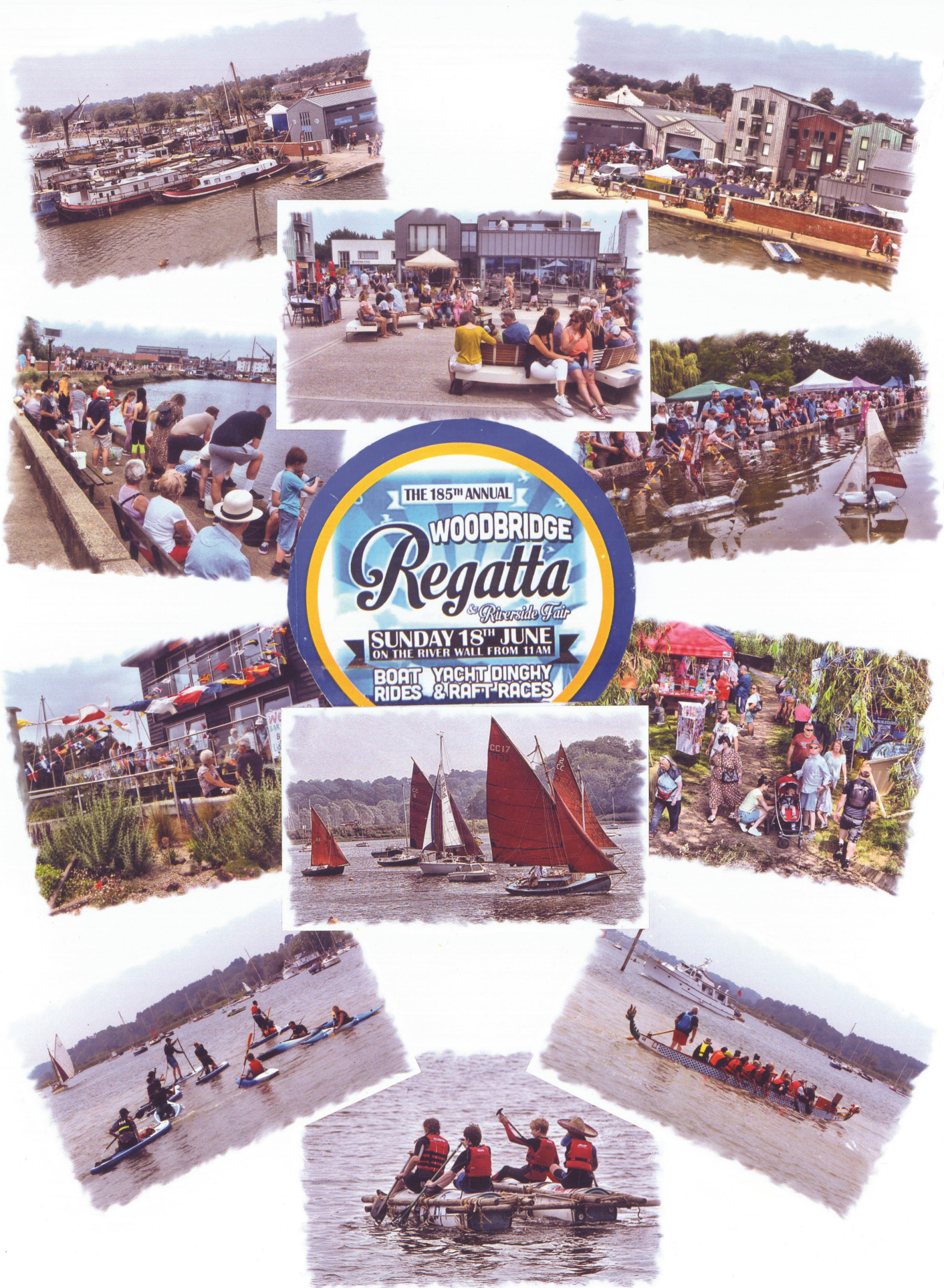
Another enterprise at the yard is the increasingly popular Deben Café Bar on HMS Vale – a former naval attack craft. Owned and run by Simon's partner, Cate Meadows, the café bar offers breakfast, snacks and larger meals and is licensed to offer a full range of draught beers, wines and spirits, as well as tea and coffee. Much of the produce is sourced locally and cooked on board. It is a perfect place to relax overlooking the river.

Overall, the Melton Boatyard provides an important element to the diversity of nearby businesses. From the busy road and industrial area of Wilford Spur End – which offers anything from veterinary services and chair recliners to tyres and paint – through its loyal customer base, the Skeet family is a key contributor to the local economy.

Looking to the future, Simon is pleased to report that they now have planning permission to sort out the downriver end of the yard. "We are clearing the site to provide a further storage area for 60 boats and more space for cars to park." It is clear the Skeet family is not one that rests on its laurels and they have a clear passion to keep their customers happy.



Melton Boatyard from the air. Photo: David Mortimer



Design and photography: Anthony Mather, Tim Cornford, Dan Cornford

# Song: To The Beautiful Green Deben

*Nick Fowler*

*To be sung to the tune of Johann Strauss's 'To the Beautiful Blue Danube'. Dedicated with thanks to Caroline Page in recognition of her tireless efforts on behalf of the community and her work on the Save The Deben campaign.*

Deben so green  
You once were so clean  
We'll fight for you now  
We'll win somehow  
You'll be clean again  
Score ten out of ten  
And then we can say  
That we've saved you  
And made you ours again!

All you bring with you  
And the things you do  
As you journey  
Through our county  
Bringing energy  
And vitality  
Bringing life and wealth to all the town.

You drive the Tide Mill's wheels  
You give a home to seals  
The birds, the boats, the fish  
They all live in harmony with you.

All life that relies on the Deben  
Should be respected.  
We need to remember  
That we are all connected.

We swim, we sail, we potter  
We long to see an otter.  
We walk, we talk, we run  
We sit still and watch the tide come in.

King Redwald, when he reached his end  
He found in you a loyal friend.  
You took him to his resting place  
The mound upon the hill.

The morning stillness, the gentle mists  
Hear curlews call and the lapping tide.  
The waters flow as they always must:  
All life has to follow its course.

Then the noise!  
And the joys  
Of the sailors racing  
And the children chasing.  
Ev'ryone having fun  
On the river, in the sun.

Our precious Deben is part of a web  
Upon which all life depends  
And we all must do all we can  
To protect her and keep her safe.

We must act!  
We must do our bit.  
We must keep her safe  
So her future is sure.

We must help our dear  
River flow!  
And we all must show  
Respect and care  
For the world that we all have to share.  
The world that we all share.

Welcome to the  
Woodbridge & Melton Society

## **I-SPY QUIZ**

especially compiled for this first edition of  
the combined Newsletter by  
Society member Alan Swerdlow.

To have the chance of winning a bottle of champagne:

1. Pull out these four centre pages.
2. For each photo on pages 14, 15 and 16 write down what/where it is.
3. Fill in your details on page 16.
4. Either: bring this completed quiz sheet to the Society's first meeting of the 2023/4 season on Wednesday 4 October at the Quay Church,  
or: post or deliver the completed quiz sheet  
To Carol Wiseman, 5 Catherine Road, Woodbridge, IP12 4JP by 4 October,  
or: email your answers  
to [carolandlaurie@btinternet.com](mailto:carolandlaurie@btinternet.com) by 4 October.



1 .....



2 .....



3 .....



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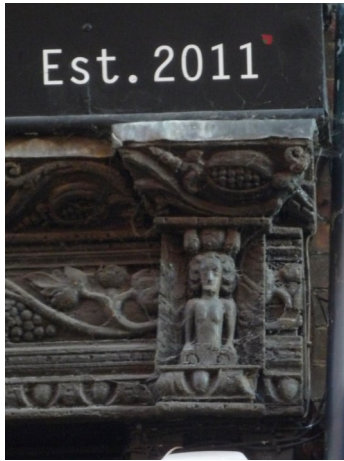
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13 .....



10 .....



14 .....



11 .....



15 .....



12 .....



16 .....



17 .....



20 .....



18 .....



21 .....



19 .....

22

Which picture includes an animal?

.....

Please fill in your contact details.

Name .....

Email .....

Phone.....

# The Hackney Road Development

Mary Burgess

If you walk along Melton Road from Woodbridge towards Melton and past Prospect Place, there is an area on your left which was once meadows but is now an area of mixed housing built around two unmade roads.

In 1864 the Ipswich and Suffolk Freehold Land Society (I&SFLS) purchased this meadow land, between the old and new turnpike roads, from the trustees of Dr Thomas Bland's estate. Thomas Bland had lived in Melton Grange from 1839 until he died in 1847. The auction for the estate was held at the Bull Inn, Woodbridge on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1864. Lot 5 'two pieces of meadow land, called Hackneys, containing together 4A[cres].1R[od].3P[erches] or thereabouts, in Melton, on the west of the Turnpike Road to Woodbridge' was sold to Mr Piper, representing the I&SFLS, for £540.

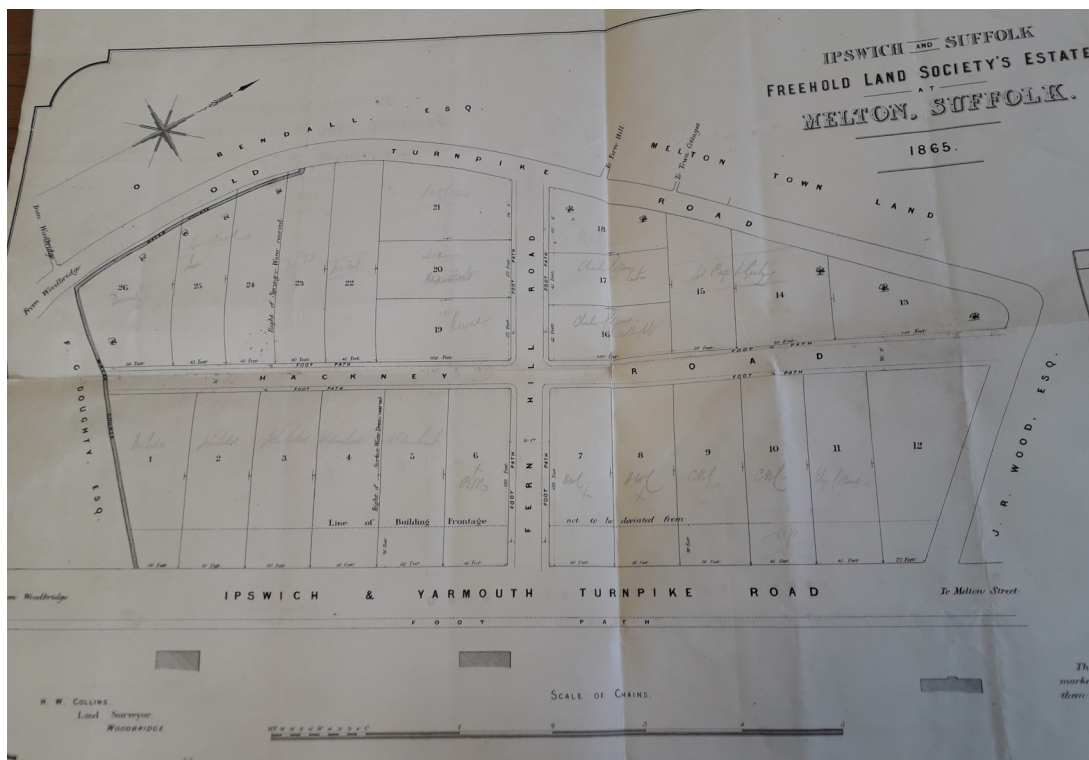
The I&SFLS (later to become the Ipswich Building Society) was founded in 1849, part of a national movement, with the aim of enabling the 'ordinary man' to gain sufficient land to meet the requirements to vote. The first meeting was held at the Temperance Hall in Ipswich on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1849. At that meeting, the Society enrolled 140 members with 150 shares taken. Within a week this had increased to 400 shares. Richard Dykes Alexander, from the Alexander banking family\*, was its first president.

The Society purchased land all over Suffolk, which was then divided into plots and, following a ballot, sold to members of the Society. However, it was often the case that these parcels of land were sold on again to others. Interestingly, in Melton many of the plots were owned by various members of the Collins family. Henry and Charles Collins, who had taken over their father's millwright business on his death, moved it here from its location in The Street, aptly naming it Hackney Works.

In April 1865, an advertisement appeared in the Suffolk Chronicle asking '...to receive tenders for the making of new roads and paths. Also tenders for wood and wire fencing, upon their estate in Melton.'

The contact for the tender was shown as Mr Henry William Collins of Woodbridge, surveyor. The tenders were for the work required to lay out the 26 building plots into which the Melton land had been divided. In the following August, these plots were allocated to Society members, and at the same time, a local agent was employed to represent the I&SFLS. The Suffolk Chronicle wrote:

*'an agency of this Society has been established in Woodbridge; Mr Henry William Collins having received the appointment. The Society purchased a plot of land most pleasantly situated in Melton, and which was allocated a few days ago.'*



Plan by courtesy of Ipswich Record Office

Once the land had been allocated, the members could then become freeholder owners through the payment of subscriptions to the Society. They would, however, be responsible for the cost of building any houses erected. Each purchaser was also required to keep in good repair the road and footpath which their plot abutted, and the area twelve feet and six inches from their boundary fence. Many of the houses were subsequently let out to tenants.

It is thought that the first houses to be built here were 1 to 4 Hackney Terrace (plot 19) on what was then called Hackney New Road. These houses are smaller than the others built elsewhere on the estate. By the 1881 census all the other houses on this street had been completed and all were lived in. The largest house in Hackney New Road was Rose Villa, at number 5, which had *'an entrance-hall, dining and drawing rooms, kitchen, storeroom, wash house, four bedrooms, wood and coal houses, with other domestic offices; vinery, spring and soft water pumps, and underground cistern holding 100 gallons, garden, walled in on the north side'*.

The houses on Fern Hill Road, now called Hackney Road, were built from c1870. The first ones to be built were 1 & 2 Leeks Hill Villas (plot 18) and 1 & 2 Hackney Villas (plot 16). Leeks Hill Villas are semi-detached red-brick and slated *'each with two sitting rooms, kitchen and three bedrooms with small gardens.'* On the opposite side of the road are Fellbrigg Cottage (formerly called The Shrubbery) and Parkside (plot 21). These houses were built sometime around 1911 by Edward Adams, who lived in nearby Pytches Road.

On plot numbers 1 to 6, facing Melton Road, only two large houses were built. Stanley Lodge (later

Hackney Lodge and now Melton House) is the large white house:

*'comprising lofty dining, drawing and breakfast rooms, spacious hall and staircase leading to ten first and secondary bedrooms, kitchen, back kitchen, scullery, cellar, storerooms, and every convenience; coach house, two stall stable, harness house with rooms over same, paved yard, vinery, flower and kitchen gardens'.*

Next door was The Lindens described in its sale advert in the Ipswich Journal 29<sup>th</sup> March 1879 as standing *'in a large garden of half an acre, which is bounded on the south by a perpetual stream of the purest of spring water...the neighbourhood is extremely healthy and the house commands pretty views over the valley of the tidal river Deben and Sutton Hills'*. This house later became the Rectory but was demolished in 1987 and Rectory Court flats built in its place.

The other two houses fronting Melton Road are Chesapeake Villa (circa 1888) and Cavendish House (circa 1925). The three houses, Park Lane, Woodview (Plot 15) and Tudor House (Plot 13 and 14), built on land behind what is now the petrol station and Spar shop, were among the last to be built.

The character of the area, once owned by I&SFLS, has changed little over the years and is an asset to Melton and should be cherished.

*\*Alexander's Bank occupied the building in Church Street which is now the home of Barclays Bank.*

*Mary Burgess is Joint Melton Local History Recorder and a member of the Woodbridge Museum Collections team.*



*Surveyed 1881; published 1887*

# Memories of a Woodbridge Childhood

*Terry Basson*

Woodbridge is a place set firmly in my time warp, always available for me to walk those splendid wartime years during WW2. My inner child still runs in a forest, near to the town, called 'Leeks Hill', where beds of watercress grow fresh and clean in tiny fast streams.

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Woodbridge Sand Pits also captured my interest. A huge sandy valley, a mile or so long and a hundred yards deep, had been cut into the good Suffolk earth centuries back. It was close to the town and, in my time, used by the village people as a short cut between the boundaries of the town and the council housing estate where we lived in Edwin Avenue. The Pits fascinated me. Sand martins drilled many nesting holes deep into the sandy cliff face and bats in hundreds swooped down the whole length of the pit at dusk.

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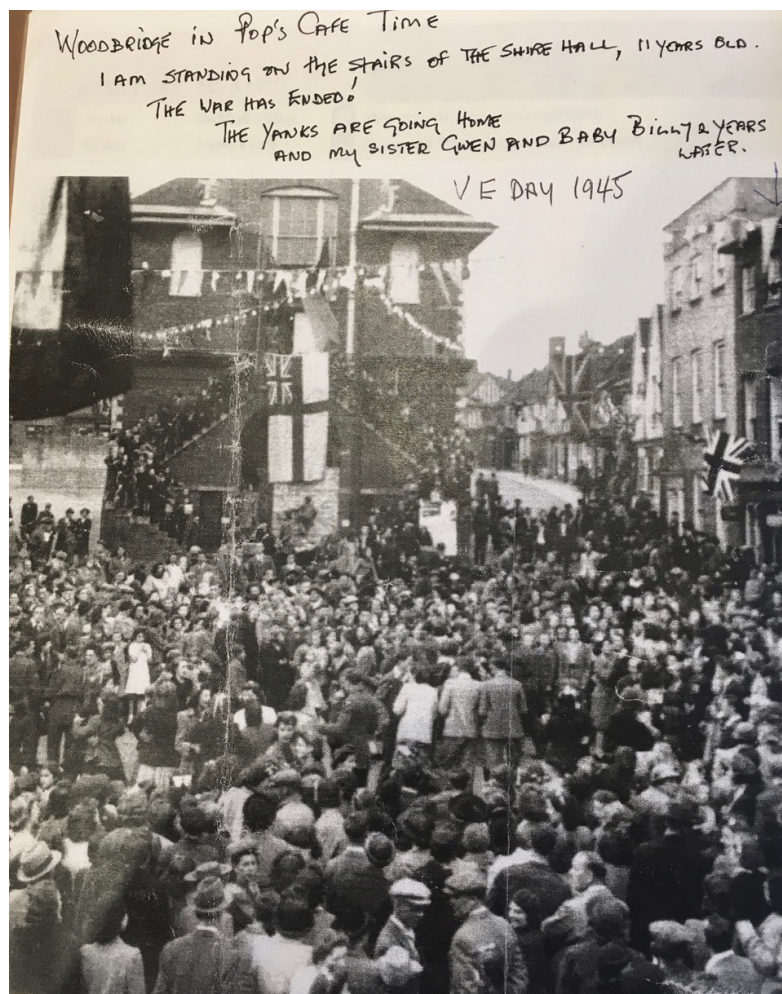
The Woodbridge Canning Factory was another town wonder, giving much employment to the local population. It produced the most spectacular canned plums and other fruits in season. It stood amongst a

few acres with mature plum trees marking its boundaries. The Woodbridge kids loved to pick these dark, luscious plums. They seemed they were just there for the taking as the foreman never once chased us away.

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To make our annual pop gun, a length of about twelve inches with a dimension of two inches was cut from an elder bush. The elder wood has a natural pithy core, which was easily pushed out with a hot poker. From the hazel tree we cut a branch sixteen inches long, just thicker than a finger, leaving four inches as nature had grown it, to make the handle. With our pen knives we whittled away at the remainder to make a dowel-like round rod, strong enough to push through the length of the wooden barrel. Acorns were then gathered for ammo. The elder served as a barrel and the hazel was the push rod of our homemade gun. One acorn was pushed into each end then pushed out through the core of the elder with a loud POP! Out shot an acorn travelling some great distance.

*Excerpts from 'Romance Without Kisses' by Terry Basson reproduced by permission.*



*Terry Basson's copy of a photograph of VE Day 1945 being celebrated on Market Hill.*

**On pages 20-23 we meet four members of The Society who are or have been Masters of City of London Livery Companies.**

## The Society of Apothecaries

*Nicholas Wood*

Many members of the Woodbridge Society enjoyed the visit in May to Laxfield and its ancient Guildhall. I was fascinated to learn that the building originally housed a local religious guild which was suppressed after the dissolution of the monasteries. Yet trade guilds, also originally formed as religious foundations in the Middle Ages, continued and thrived along with many of their Halls.

Although there are surviving trade guild Halls in places like York and Sheffield, by far the greatest number are in the City of London. Many, such as the Mercer's or Draper's Halls are grand buildings discreetly tucked away in back streets, but the oldest extant Hall is that of my own company, The Worshipful Society of Apothecaries.



The art of prescribing and preparing medicines goes back to the dawn of civilisation. Drawing on Greek and Roman medicine, the old learning was preserved in monasteries and religious houses and by Arab physicians. Early pharmacies, apothecary's shops, began to appear in the Middle East and Europe some thousand years ago.

The word apothecary simply means a storekeeper. Dealing in food, spices and medicinal herbs, a Guild of Pepperers was known to exist in London in 1180 and in 1345 the religious Fraternity of St Anthony was formed by grocers, pepperers and spicer-apothecaries.

This Fraternity developed into the Grocer's Company but apothecaries, with their medical knowledge, sat uncomfortably within the Grocers, and in 1617, by Royal Charter of James 1<sup>st</sup>, they

were separated to form the Worshipful Society (alone in the City, a Society not a Company) of Apothecaries. In 1632 they were able to purchase as their Hall the old guest house of the disestablished Dominican Priory of Black Friars. However, disaster struck when the Hall was destroyed in the Great Fire in 1666, but enough of the walls and foundations remained for the Hall to be rebuilt between 1668 and 1672. Miraculously surviving both Victorian restorers and the Blitz, it stands unchanged just off Carter Lane.

Medieval apothecaries were of course pharmacists. Like the barber-surgeons who set bones and did minor surgery, they were trained by long apprenticeship. They sold herbs and spices and dispensed prescriptions written by the physicians who were themselves usually University educated.

However, there were far too few physicians, and often too expensive for the poor. In times of trouble like the Civil War or plague, many physicians left London and, much as pharmacies stayed open during the Covid pandemic, the apothecaries took on the role of caring for the sick.

Following a court case in 1701, apothecaries were allowed to prescribe as well as dispense, and over the following 150 years they gradually developed into GP's. Nowadays, the Society of Apothecaries is about 80% doctors and 5% pharmacists, with other, usually medically connected members, making up the remainder. I was fortunate enough in 2008-9 to be only the second pharmacist since about 1750 to have been Master.

The Society has always been an educational and examining body. After an Act of 1815, its apprentices (including John Keats and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, the first woman doctor) took our exam to be GPs. Although we no longer do that, we run postgraduate diplomas in subjects as diverse as HIV medicine, History of Medicine, and the Medical Care of Catastrophes.

Two Faculties, in Conflict Medicine and History of Medicine, run public courses and lectures open to all. Additionally, we support medical students through our charities, and have a thriving social programme. Although not a museum, we are open to group guided tours (Friends of Woodbridge Museum visited last year) and the Hall holds significant medical archives, a library, and many medical artefacts from drug jars to amputation kits!

*Nicholas Wood is Honorary Curator, Worshipful Society of Apothecaries, and was Master 2008-9.*

# The Fruiterers

## *Georgina Lankester*

Woodbridge Society member Laurence Olins lives, sleeps and eats (more often than not, blueberries) fruit. Being part of the fourth generation of a family steeped in the fruit industry, it runs through his veins.



Around the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, his great grandfather Wolf Olinski came to England as a costermonger, selling fruit from a cart in London. In turn, his son Louis, founder of Louis Reece, delivered fruit to Spitalfields by horse and cart, back in 1919. Roll onto 1969 and Louis' grandson Laurence joined the family firm Louis Reece, having graduated from Leeds University with a degree in commerce.

Then in 1987 the Olins family bought into T J Poupart Limited, one of the oldest fruit companies in the UK and ran it jointly with parent company Hillsdown Holdings. Soon after, Laurence was promoted to run all of Hillsdown Holdings' produce companies, including MBM and Beeson. However, in 1997, with private equity, he was part of a team which secured a management buyout for Poupart and ten years later, the team acquired the business in its entirety.

At that time, Poupart's turnover was £30m. Today, as a parent and sister company to five national and multi-national businesses – Orchard World, Norton Folgate, Poupart Imports, BerryWorld and

PrepWorld - the company now has a turnover of nearly £600m. And Laurence is proud that his son Benjamin, representing the fifth Olins generation, is CEO of PrepWorld.

In addition, to running a fruit business, Laurence was chairman of British Summer Fruits for 14 years. This was an industry association involved with promoting soft fruit solely through PR and given the phenomenal quantity of berries that is eaten in the UK today, they clearly did a good job.

Also, he has been Master of the Worshipful Company of Fruiterers not the usual once but three times – 2000-1; 2021-2022 and 2022-2023! He explains that, in terms of age, the livery company is 45<sup>th</sup> in seniority having received its charter from James I in 1606. However, while livery companies still elect the Mayor of London, their strong trade origins have changed. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, industries started to spread nationwide and the livery companies slowly turned into dining clubs.

Today, Laurence says 60% of the Fruiterers' 300 members are involved in every element of the fruit supply chain from growers to supermarkets. The remaining 40% of members come from various professional backgrounds.

The Fruiterers no longer has a hall – the original one on the River Thames was destroyed by the Fire of London in 1666. Therefore, they use other livery halls for meetings and their valuable chattels are safely housed in the Ironmongers' Hall.

When he was Master in 2000, Laurence created the City Food Lecture. This annual event soon gathered pace with HRH Princess Anne as patron and 700 attendees. It is now supported by eight livery companies and is called the City Food & Drink Lecture.

The Fruiterers livery company focusses on education, research and charitable work. Laurence continues to oversee the charitable element as chairman of The Fruiterers Foundation. Various activities include donations such as those made to City Harvest, which supplies food to homeless charities and foodbanks.

Support is given to the Historic Houses Association whereby fruit trees are donated to the winning house each year. Helmingham Hall in Suffolk has twice been a recipient of the award, each time receiving apple trees via the Fruiterers.

More recently, Laurence donated a small apple orchard to Grundisburgh Primary School as part of the 'Treebilee' campaign – formerly known as the

late Queen's Green Canopy celebrating her platinum jubilee.

Keeping a focus on Suffolk, in the 1970s Laurence managed Chessex, a marketing cooperative for Suffolk's top fruit growers such as the Williamson family who later formed Orchard World in partnership with Poupart.

Much of Suffolk's traditional fruit orchards have been superseded by the larger orchards in Kent and Herefordshire but some still survive on a smaller scale. Laurence says the main grower in our region

is the Peake family, who farm in Boxford and Stoke-by-Nayland, and created the Copella range of apple juices.

Laurence says he is now happily retired and continues to make fresh fruit salad every day. His favourite fruits are raspberries, blueberries and cherries. He is particularly fond of blueberries – trailblazing them as a superfood, he and his family were the first importers of the fruit to this country and to this day, their company, BerryWorld is one of the largest suppliers of these gems.

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## The Information Technologists

### *John Carrington talks to Tim Cornford*

John Carrington, now Chairman of the Tide Mill Trust, began his working life as a GPO graduate entrant with the title Assistant Postal Controller (the same role that Anthony Trollope had in the 1840s) and stayed with GPO until retirement. Via a spell as PA to the Post Office Chairman he moved into international telecommunications work, initially in the PO Telecommunications International Division. He later became the founder and first CEO of mobile operator Cellnet, now O2.

John was the first CEO of BT Mobile and, in that role, played an important part in the development and adoption of the European cellular standard GSM. John remained involved in cellular and IT software for the rest of his career.

He was also a founding member of what became the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists (WCIT) and was its Master in 2001-02. WCIT is the 100th livery company of the City of London and prides itself on combining centuries-old tradition with a modern focus, energy and innovation.

For a new livery company, WCIT has an impressive record of commitment to education. The Company became involved in supporting a failing school, Lilian Bayliss Technology School in Kennington. It helped it to improve by injecting cash, joining the governing body and providing mentors for students, all with the aim of generating greater involvement in IT as a school subject and as a future career. The school was subsequently judged to be outstanding.

More ambitiously, WCIT partnered with the Mercers Livery Company to found Hammersmith



*Hammersmith Academy (Photo courtesy of the Academy)*

Academy - a brand new school in a disadvantaged area. Each Company raised £1 million to contribute to the development budget of £26 million and the WCIT Education Committee's ambition to become more involved in education took off.

The Company has contributed several governors and also initiated important ventures to improve student outcomes and to embed the value of IT in developing basic skills, supporting the whole curriculum and opening up possibilities for future employment.

The Company is also committed to working with industry in a sometimes controversial area: developing a deeper understanding of the social value of goods and services and, in particular, the value of IT for improving people's lives. WCIT has its own Social Value Leadership Group and, through the pro bono work of members, is able to support many different organisations

# The Master Mariners

## *Tim Cornford talks to Geoff English*

Earlier this year Captain Geoff English was installed as Master of the Honourable Company of Master Mariners, a livery company incorporated by Royal Charter in 1380 and the first of the modern livery companies. I am intrigued that livery companies are still being formed when most of them are centuries old and it was over 200 years since the last one was formed.



"The trigger for this in the case of the Honourable Company," explains Geoff, "was World War 1 and the fact that by 1917 Britain was near to starvation. At the time this country had the biggest merchant shipping fleet in the world and it was being used to transport food from all corners of the globe. The losses at sea were very heavy, especially as a result of increasing U-boat attacks.

After the war King George V, who had served in the Royal Navy, suggested that there should be some recognition for the sacrifices made by the Merchant Navy (as he termed it) and for the role it had played in keeping the country fed. In due course this led to

the formation of a Guild of Master Mariners, later accorded the status of a livery company by the Court of Aldermen of the City of London."

Geoff was introduced to a career at sea through his father who worked alongside oil companies on deep-water port developments. He joined BP and trained for work on tankers and later in oil exploration and construction. He subsequently moved into marine management, providing support to the offshore oil industry and latterly the renewable energy sector.

One of the chief benefits of membership of the Company is the social side of its life. "Inevitably there is enjoyment in the company of people with similar qualifications and experiences to oneself, but there are other important functions for an organisation like ours. Education and training is central to the purposes of a livery company".

"We don't award any qualifications but we offer a mentorship scheme for cadets and junior officers. Each one paired with a liveryman who is part of a wider support network and is available to help trainees in a range of ways."

"As an organisation we liaise closely with the Merchant Navy Training Board. The Company also awards the title of Chartered Master Mariner for high-achieving professional seafarers in recognition of exceptional service."

"Our third main function is charitable. We have a separate charity (the Howard Leopold Davis Charity) with an investment of about £6 million. The income from that is used exclusively to give support to seafarers, wives, widows and children and to provide funds for the encouragement of careers at sea."

I close by asking Geoff about their livery hall because currently they are in temporary accommodation in Greenwich. Appropriately, their Hall used to be the HMS Wellington moored on the Thames.

"We have an aspiration to be afloat again. We would love to have our own boat. It is our intention to be afloat again, moored on the Thames and within the limits of the City of London."

# Summer Visits 2023

## Colin Palmer

Three visits were planned for summer 2023 to very contrasting places. It is good to be able to report that these were well supported and greatly enjoyed by members.

Our first visit, in May, to the historic village of Laxfield, attracted 43 members. In all the village has over 50 listed buildings so it is of considerable historical interest. Local residents welcomed us with refreshments in the parish church after which we broke up into three groups to visit All Saints Church, the Baptist Chapel and the Guildhall.

All Saints Church is mentioned in the Domesday Book, when the village housed a population of 250 and is now about 1000. It has a scissor-beam roof which is unusual for a mediaeval church and many interesting details in the fabric and furnishings. Laxfield later became a Puritan Parish when all colour in the church was whitewashed over.

We were taken along the High Street, passing several mediaeval properties, to visit the Baptist Chapel, a simple but classic building of 1810 and a strong contrast to the parish church. The third building to be visited was The Guildhall and Museum dating from 1520. The Guildhall is an outstanding example of a timber framed building. Over the centuries it has been used for a range of activities. The ground floor now accommodates the parish room and part of a museum display area. The upper rooms house other displays of the Laxfield and District Museum.

The group made generous payments to local charities and were very grateful for the work of the local residents who had led the visits.

Our second visit, in June, was a day out on the Thames barge *Victor*. Inshore sailing vessels have been vital for the economy of the east coast, Thames sailing barges carried vital cargoes (coal, grain, flour, timber, etc) up and down the coast between Newcastle and London and beyond.

*Victor* was built in 1895 and is currently moored in Ipswich Dock alongside the Old Custom House. It can carry 40 passengers, is equipped with a licensed bar and also has tea and coffee making facilities. We sailed along the Rivers Orwell and Stour and had the opportunity to assist in sail setting and steering. Our passengers enjoyed good weather and were able to remain on deck throughout. In poor weather they would have gone below!

In July, our third and final visit was to Lowestoft Fishing Harbour. The review of fish stocks in the

North Sea by UK and Norway for 2023 concluded that significant reductions in UK quotas were inevitable. The landing of UK caught fish in Lowestoft was effectively cancelled. The loss of this activity together with the hard financial times caused by reductions in local wind farms resulted in hard times for the fishing, wind farm and boat and shipbuilding industries in north Suffolk.

Our visit was led by two experienced boatmen and well known members of the Lowestoft waterfront and consisted of a visit round the trawler *Mincarlo* and a cruise round the harbour area arranged by Jet Adventures. About two thirds of our group made the journey by train with the remainder travelling by car.

The *Mincarlo* was built in 1950 but only used for a decade or so because of the declining fishing industry. Trawlers usually went to sea for 12 days followed by two days in the harbour. The crew consisted of 11 - usually 10 men and one boy, living in cramped and claustrophobic conditions.

The trip on *Jet Adventure* reflected the impact of the loss of the fishing industry on other industries in the area. We passed areas where ships and trawlers had been built, where dry docks had now closed, where factories like Birds Eye had closed but also where rigs for the gas and oil industries had been built. We also saw the new town centre bascule bridge due to be finished next year.

One member wrote after the visit, "You can't avoid a sense of great sadness to see this once prosperous and attractive and proud town, which through much of the last century provided employment for thousands but now has few jobs on offer, gradually drifting into decay.... Poor Lowestoft – she's like a poverty-stricken old duchess!"

We were able to make a donation of £120 to the Charitable Trust which cares for two retired fishing vessels.



Setting out round Lowestoft harbour. Photo: Colin Palmer

## Obituaries

*Tony Hubbard, President of the Woodbridge Society, and Michael Rines, former editor of the Society's Newsletter, both died earlier this year.*

### Tony Hubbard

Tony's time in Woodbridge, a town he loved enormously, was a very important chapter in his life. He became involved in many charities where his professional talent, clear mind and good leadership skills made a real difference to many. These charities included Woodbridge in Bloom, Cedar House Trust, the East Suffolk branch of the NSPCC and the Suffolk Punch Trust.

He was a major instigator in the Tide Mill renovation project, ensuring that this iconic building retained its place in the landscape. He was Chairman and Trustee of Carthew Court and Chairman, then President and a Trustee of the Woodbridge Society – these last 2 roles he fulfilled right up until his death.

St Mary's Church was always a pivotal centre of his life – he was Churchwarden for many years and latterly an Elder. He was a town councillor for numerous years and Mayor of Woodbridge in 1993-4. His outstanding contribution to the town led to the distinction of becoming an Honorary Freeman of Woodbridge in 2016 and in the same year he was awarded the MBE.

Tony chose the law as his profession and his career started as articled clerk to Cecil Lightfoot at Suffolk County Council. He was then snapped up by a successful London firm of solicitors, initially called Bartlett and Gluckstein, later Bartlett de Reya. It was at this point that he met Susan and their subsequent marriage lasted for 55 very happy years.

Tony's office in London was in the same stretch of Piccadilly as Simpsons, Fortnums and Hatchards – all his favourite places. As a solicitor who specialised in Entertainment Law, he was lawyer to the stars – including Julie Andrews, Lionel Blair, Max Wall, and Jimmy Tarbuck.

Suffolk was however his home. In 1978 he and Susan bought a small cottage in New Street, Woodbridge. The family (by then including two daughters) spent enjoyable weekends and holidays there. The town became an important focus of family life.

In the 1980s his solicitor's firm in London went through a period of change and, like many firms, amalgamated to produce a large conglomerate. Tony never liked the idea of working like this, preferring the personal touch in his work. In 1986 the family

moved to Suffolk, bought the Town House and Tony headed up the Woodbridge branch of Prettys, which he later took over to become Hubbard and Co.

The family received many letters of condolence which highlighted some of the attributes that people valued in Tony. They described him as well respected, loved and admired; elegant, warm, genuine; compassionate and caring; a true friend; a remarkable public figure and a man of integrity.

*Virginia Hubbard*

### Michael Rines

Michael was educated at Scarborough Boys School from where he went on to study at Merton College, Oxford where he became President of the Merton and St Hilda's Debating Society and played rugby and cricket for the College first teams.

He was also 12th man for the University cricket team. In 1953 the visiting Australian Tourist Team arrived a man short and Mike was drafted in to the Australian side. As a Yorkshire man and apparently on talking terms with Len Hutton and Freddie Trueman this was a much told memorable story.

Throughout his life he was a keen yachtsman. He gained the RYA Yachtsman qualification and he developed a love for the Nancy Blackett, the favourite yacht of "Swallows and Amazons" author Arthur Ransome, which in later years he discovered in a poor condition, bought it and then restored it. The boat now has a permanent home at Pin Mill under the watchful eye of the Nancy Blackett Trust of which Mike was Honorary Vice President until he died.

From 2005 Mike edited eighteen editions of the Society newsletter over eight years. He brought a professional eye to both the quality of the written word and also presentation which laid the foundation for the newsletter members enjoy to this day.

His editorial skills were honed over many years with national newspapers and also as editor of Marketing Magazine (a major business publication in Michael Heseltine's Haymarket Publishing). In retirement Mike set up his own company MR Communications. He was widely recognised as a wordsmith prepared at any time to write a script or prepare a document to assist friends or organisations he supported.

*Eddie Taylor*

# The Birth of Woodbridge Theatre

The Woodbridge Theatre was built in 1814 by George Thompson (who also worked on the building of St John's Church, Woodbridge) from plans by David Fisher of the Norfolk & Suffolk Company of Comedians. In the 17th century the Fisher family held land in Hethersett near Norwich where several generations continued as worsted weavers, then as farmers. In the middle of the 18th century David Fisher (1729-1782) moved to Norwich where he married Mary West of Arminghall in 1756. They had ten children, the third of which was also called David. He established the famous Fisher company, which for over half a century presented an unbroken succession of plays, operas, pantomimes and other entertainments in towns all over Norfolk and Suffolk.

David began his working life as a carpenter in the building trade and was also a skilled cabinet maker and wood carver. He had a fine tenor voice which led to him being invited to join the Norwich Theatre Company as a singer, in which he acquired a considerable reputation. By 1788 he felt secure enough to marry and in 1792 he took the bold step of branching out on his own. He purchased a large share in a touring company owned and managed by William Scraggs and took on a management role. Fisher catered for all classes but he focused on regions where there were the most gentry and noble seats, since they were the ones who would pay a premium price to be entertained. In Woodbridge the Norwich Theatre Company had appeared regularly at the town hall from as early as 1754.

By the early 1800s Fisher had established a profitable two year circuit and over the next decade the Scraggs family gradually left the circuit. In the 1810s Fisher decided that the company was profitable enough for him to start to build his own theatres. In 1812 he completed his first three: in Lowestoft, Wells next the Sea and Halesworth. The Woodbridge theatre was built in 1814 (on a site off Bridewell Street, later re-named Theatre Street) and their Woodbridge house may have been the first permanent home that David Fisher and his wife Elizabeth ever had. She died there only a few weeks after the opening of the theatre and is buried in St Mary's churchyard. Living accommodation for the Company was provided wherever possible and at Woodbridge and Dereham Fisher built family houses adjacent to the theatre.

Over the period of some 16 years, Fisher opened theatres at Eye, East Dereham, Sudbury, Thetford, Beccles, Swaffham, Newmarket. Bungay and North Walsham. His theatres were mainly re-builds or new theatres. The Fisher theatres were not used by other companies of comedians and the Fisher season in a circuit town was a form of biennial festival, an event for which people saved up, to which playgoers from neighbouring villages came in wagons decorated with flowers. Occasionally the Fishers allowed their playhouses to be used for other types of entertainment. In Woodbridge the Fishers gave

permission for a series of concerts to be given in the theatre by the Woodbridge Amateur Music Society, with members of the family occasionally taking part. Stage properties, scenery, costumes and other paraphernalia were conveyed from town to town in three large wagons. each drawn by a team of six horses.

Fisher saw excellent potential in Woodbridge and in 1814 selected a plot not far from the barracks at one time part of the premises of the Angel Inn. He spared no cost on the theatre: it was one of his more elaborate projects. He drew up his own plans for a deep stage fitted with traps and proscenium doors, flanked by two tiers of boxes, a large pit and an elegant gallery. The capital outlay was £2,000 but £70-80 could be taken per night with capacity audiences. It was grander than most Fisher theatres but it became a basic model for all of them.

David Fisher died in 1832, aged 72, on 6th August at Dereham when the Company was playing there. A tribute appeared in the Norfolk Chronicle: "As a manager he was esteemed, and by his indefatigable industry he has been enabled to leave his sons eleven theatres, many of which have been recently built and elegantly decorated. As an actor he displayed much talent. He was an affectionate parent and warm friend and in the strictest sense an honest, just and upright man."

A countrywide recession in the theatre led to the closing of the Fisher Circuit in 1844 and all the theatres were sold. There were no debts because they had been efficiently run. The family went on to individual careers in music and the theatre.

Woodbridge gained a legendary significance in local theatrical circles as the place from which Charles Gill set off on a sensational elopement with the actress Miss Vining. The poet Edward Fitzgerald wrote to William Bodham Donne from Woodbridge in March 1846:

"We have actors now at Woodbridge. A Mr Gill, who was a low comedian in Norwich, now manages a troop of his own here. His wife was a Miss Vining; she is a pretty woman and a lively pleasant actress, not vulgar. I have been to see some of the old comedies with great pleasure and last night I sat in a pigeon hole with David Fisher\* and revolved many memories of old days and old plays."

The time would have been nostalgic for by then the circuit had broken up, the theatre had been empty for a year and Gill was trying to keep drama alight against heavy odds. By 1856 the theatre was in real decline and the Ipswich Elocution Society moved in. The building remained in use as a theatre until 1861. In 1862 the premises were purchased to be used as a National School.

*\*This would have been David Fisher III.*

*(More recently the theatre building has, of course, been a saleroom and is now a private house. This article is reproduced by permission of Peter Wells Architects. Editor)*

# The Woodbridge and Melton Society

The Society's chief interest is in the quality of the environment in which, as residents, we live. It brings together people who are interested in the well-being of Woodbridge and Melton. the preservation of their historic character and the way they develop in the future. The Society:

- \* raises with the authorities matters of concern to do with the Woodbridge and Melton;
- \* promotes high standards of planning and architecture and monitors planning applications;
- \* stimulates interest in their history and traditions;
- \* publishes a twice-yearly newsletter and organises talks and visits.

The Society's email address is [info@woodbridgeandmeltonsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@woodbridgeandmeltonsociety.org.uk) and its website address is [www.woodbridgeandmeltonsociety.org.uk](http://www.woodbridgeandmeltonsociety.org.uk). It is a registered charity No. 1117073.

Our talks are, like the Newsletter, free to members and are presented at the The Quay Church.

The Society is a registered charity and is able to claim gift aid on donations.

## Officers and Committee

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John Bann (Observer for Melton Parish Council)

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## Caroline Page

We note with great regret the death in July of Woodbridge's County Councillor and Society member Caroline Page.

Caroline was elected to Suffolk County Council in 2008 and since then had held many positions, including being the spokesperson for Women, Disabilities and Adult Care, Highways and Transport and Deputy Leader for the Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Group of councillors. She has also been a Woodbridge Town Councillor.

As the County Council Chairman, Keith Robinson, wrote: "Caroline's unwavering enthusiasm and relentless passion for serving her residents saw her achieve a great deal during her time in office, not only for those living and working in Woodbridge, but for those across Suffolk through her wider

responsibilities at the County Council." Councillor Andrew Stringer (leader of the Green, Liberal Democrat and Independent group) described her as "a true force of nature, a tireless campaigner and a brilliant councillor.....always putting her community first."

Caroline shared many of the Society's priorities and concerns in relation to the town and its environment and the way in which it might develop in the future.

She was active in opposing, with the Society, the initial plan for the development of the Council offices site on Melton Hill; she proposed measures for dealing with traffic and parking issues and she campaigned for the improvement of the water quality of the Deben. She pressed the Society to honour some Woodbridge women through the Blue Plaques scheme.

A celebration of her life will be held on 30 August at 12.30pm at Whisstocks.

# Woodbridge and Melton Society Membership Form

To join The Woodbridge and Melton Society please complete this form and send it to the Membership Secretary, Selwyn Garden House, Lime Kiln Quay Road, Woodbridge, IP12 1BB. The annual subscription is £12 for a single membership or £20 for two people living at the same address. If you join after the last Winter Talk your membership includes the next year free (starting October 1 of the year you joined).

Title and first name.....Surname.....

Second member at the same address:

Title and first name.....Surname.....

Address.....

Postcode.....Telephone.....

Email

1.....

Email

2.....

☐ I/we have set up a standing order to pay the subscription annually on 1 October and have included surname and initial as reference. (Please tick relevant box/es) or

☐ I/we have paid by BACS (sort code 30-90-89 and account no. 50628568 and have included surname and initial as reference on the payment) or

☐ I/we enclose a cheque made out to The Woodbridge Society.

## GIFT AID

As a registered charity, The Woodbridge and Melton Society benefits from the Gift Aid Scheme. If you are a UK taxpayer, you can make a donation instead of your subscription. Please sign the declaration below. A donation may be made in lieu of the subscription of family members who are not taxpayers. It can be paid by cheque, BACS or standing order.

Gift Aid Declaration Amount of donation £.....

I wish to Gift Aid my donation and any donations I make in the future or have made in the last 4 years to The Woodbridge and Melton Society (registered charity number 1117073). I am a UK taxpayer and understand that, if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all donations in that tax year, it is my responsibility to pay the difference. Once signed, your Gift Aid will last for the complete term of your membership and does not have to be repeated

Signature.....

Full name of taxpayer.....

Date.....

## Data Protection

*The personal information you supply will be shared only with The Woodbridge and Melton Society officers. The information will only be used to communicate with members and to manage the Society's administrative and regulatory requirements. It will be securely stored and will remain on file only as long as it is needed for administrative purposes. You are entitled to examine the information we hold about you, to have it updated and corrected and to have it deleted from the Society's files.*