

The Maldon Society

Newsletter
September 2020

Welcome — *Judy Lea*

What strange times we have been living through these past few months! The suspension of our public meetings and a chance to see each other have been particularly missed, and, without the public meetings, it felt appropriate that membership fees were also suspended.

Nevertheless, our lovely committee team have continued meeting on Zoom and all faithfully progressing their individual responsibilities. For example, although new oral history gathering had to be suspended for now, Wendy and Martin took the opportunity to ensure all fifty recordings done to date have been copied to the Essex Record Office for future research, and were particularly praised for the efficient way this was done. Please note we are still interested in suggestions for future donors for when interviews restart safely!

Peter is working on replacing the blue plaque most in need of updating after 15 years on Market Hill, and has hopes for a new one. Also, if during lockdown you have unearthed old Maldon related photos or other items of archival interest please let us know directly through our email address or via the website.

Lindsey's usual eye on the High Street of course took on special significance with several of us helping her produce 3 updates on businesses as they gradually reopened, which we know many members found useful. (She also laudably sewed many scrubs for local hospitals when PPE was so short and Covid at its peak!) Meanwhile David, Dorreen, John and Martin have all been doing their stuff as well.

In the town as a whole it's been very pleasing to see that behind the scenes a great deal of collaboration has been going on. The business community for example has been forging links together with a new Business Board making sure that all the High Street businesses can share a direct voice to the District Council and spread updates on current legislation and commercial opportunities between themselves.

This is particularly important for the very small enterprises - eg advice on credit card readers, involvement in 'Shop Local' initiatives etc. as well as giving voice to our imaginative larger entrepreneurs.

Similarly, it's been great that those with heritage interests have continued to meet online, to share advice on how to meet the demands of the virus restrictions and still promote our heritage as much as possible. This collaboration will be evident with events such as the Heritage Open Weekend on 12-13 September.

With the leadership and support of the Town Council the wide range of the Maldon Heritage Working Group includes not only the Maeldune Heritage Centre and Moot Hall, but also the Museum of Power, Friary Walled Garden, Thomas Plume's Library, Thames Sailing Barge Trust, Steam Tug Brent Trust, Beeleigh Mill Restoration Group, Beeleigh Abbey Gardens, Maldon Riverside Association, Maldon and Heybridge Heritage Harbour Association, Maldon Little Ship Club, Salt Water and Beer Shanty Singers, Maldon Promenaders, Maldon Museum in the Park, Combined Military Services Museum, Leech Memorial Garden and several churches.

We are now planning how we can best resume our own meetings in conjunction with the Swan, but all will be dependent on government guidelines and these are clearly far from fixed. Whatever happens we wish you safe and well, and continuing to enjoy all that wonderful Maldon offers.



Hidden Nature in Maldon – *Dorreen Linton*

The theme for this year's Heritage Open Days is 'Hidden nature'. In Maldon, this is being celebrated over the weekend of 12th/13th September. Many of our Society's archives testify to local examples of 'hidden nature' present in Maldon.

These archives, both oral history and digital recordings, are housed at the Maeldune Heritage Centre at the top of Market Hill. They are available for you to enjoy during the Centre's opening hours. Please contact Lynda O'Brien, Centre Manager, info@maelduneheritagecentre.co.uk or ring 01621 851628 for up-to-date information regarding opening hours.

Our current oral history recordings include

- Andrew Fawcett, Sheila Allen and Pat Willis who worked on the Millennium Embroidery
- Christopher Foyle of Beeleigh Abbey and gardens
- Colin Edmond who was born in the workhouse and was lock-keeper at Heybridge Basin
- John Raven, sailmaker at the Quay
- Jean Smye, beekeeper.

It would be a good time to go along and listen to their interviews as they will have a direct link to the Heritage Open Days' 'Hidden nature' theme. These personal interviews will be available to listen to until the end of September. A copy of these recordings are now held at Essex Record Office as it is important to keep resident's personal stories of their lives growing up in Maldon for future research students and the general public to hear the changes over the years.

Photographic and drawings collections

You will also be able to view our photographic collections and pen and ink drawings. There are over thirty-two individual collections which range from 1930s to modern times. Here are some which fit into this year's 'Hidden nature' theme:

- Humphrey Spender and the Millennium Embroidery (photos).
- Humphrey Spender, artist, designer and photographer talks through the idea, planning, and the three years of work involving one hundred people. (video). Within the seven panels of the Embroidery there are several motifs depicting 'Maldon's Hidden Nature'. Can you find all of them?
- Maldon & Heybridge Horticultural Society's restoration of the Friary Walled Garden in 1985.
- The history of salt production in Maldon (1970) video tells the history of sea salt production in Maldon using Maldon's natural heritage.
- A collection of colour photographs of Beeleigh Abbey Gardens showing the garden between 2009-2013.

All of these collections can be seen at the Maeldune Heritage Centre. Please pop in to enjoy looking and listening to our archives.

New Society email address

Please note that our email address is now maldonsociety1957@gmail.com

The old email address is now out of use. If you are receiving a paper copy of this newsletter, it means that we don't have an email address for you. If you don't use a computer, then of course, that's fine. However, if you do have an email address which we could use, it would cut down the costs for us and we can send you regular news and information about local events. Please contact Martin at the Society's address above. All your personal details are kept absolutely confidentially and securely.

Oral History — *Wendy Howell*

John Prime who sadly died a few weeks ago, age 90, was a well loved and well respected retired barge owner. He had worked on several barges locally, fitting them out and sailing them.

He did an Oral History interview for us in 2017 and described how he bought his first barge ‘Gippin’, built in 1889 and which had been used to carry explosives. It was moored in the Medway and had to be sailed to Leigh so that John could work on it; then later on to Maldon where he and his family lived on it. These are the words he used to describe this fascinating part of his young life:

“We left the Medway on 23rd December 1957 and sailed out. No engine in those days. We got out of the Medway into the Thames. It got dark and started to blow a south-westerly. We got part way up the Thames then we had to anchor to wait for the tide to turn. We sailed up, couldn’t see much of the shore line or Southend Pier in all the rain but the chap who was skippering seemed to know how much water we had underneath us.”

“There’s a buoy not far from Southend Pier where we wanted to anchor. I was steering the barge for the first time. He was up for’ard looking out for lights. Eventually he said I think we’re there so we reduced the sail, got the anchor ready – we did it and rounded into the wind. Next morning when it was light, the buoy we were looking for was just a little way in front of us. Couldn’t believe it! Then we sailed across to Leigh Creek where a local fisherman towed us up the creek. We (he and June his wife) decided that we wanted to live on board. But you couldn’t live on a craft in Leigh.”

“Did the barge need much work done on it?”

“Yes it did. The only living accommodation was the skipper’s cabin with two berths, a stove and a water tank. The hold was completely empty with canvas over the top. Then I had to plan how to convert it for living on board. We ordered a lot of wood to make a cabin top. The wife said she wasn’t going to live on a boat with only windows in the roof, she wanted them in the side. Thereon it was weekends on the barge converting it.”

“Basically you did all the work yourself?”

“Yes, and while we were there, I decided to put in an auxiliary engine, an ex-Navy one. Then we thought we must find somewhere where we could get a berth. We used to come to Maldon a fair bit and I found we could live on the barge there providing it was insured for going to sea. This was two years after I’d bought it. So we came to Maldon in 1959. We left Leigh one late Friday, had a tow out of the creek, then dropped off on our own and we managed to get as far as the Spitway. Another barge came along and towed us over the Spitway.”

“We tied up at Maldon quay and eventually managed to get water, telephone and electricity on the quay. We had a Calor gas cooker and fridge. We had partitioned off two bed cabins and a saloon. We had enough to live on board. We lived on Gippin for eight and a half years, sailed it and holidayed in it – up the Thames, trips in the Medway, in the Colne, then up to Mistley and up the Orwell to Ipswich. We’d often just go down the river to Osea where the kids could play on the sand. It was a good barge.”

“It must have been great fun for the children on the barge. Did they realise how lucky they were?”

“Well, they’d never lived in a house. They had friends come down to play.”

“What was it like, having young children on the barge? Was it a worry?”

“No not really, when it was high tide they used to have a life jacket on. They had common sense.”

Planning matters—*David Smye*

Strangely quiet in the local planning world with very few significant planning applications being made to the local authority. Generally, the weekly rosters consist only of tree lopping and small domestic extensions. Businesses and developers, quite understandably, are concentrating on the circumstances that they now find themselves in, and most projects are on hold. Housebuilding has restarted on several sites around the town, but new sites are yet to begin.

On the national scene, the Housing Minister, Robert Jenrick, has announced plans to grant ‘permission in principle’ for new homes and hospitals on land designated for renewal to speed up the building process. It follows on from the PM’s pledge of £5bn to ‘build, build, build’ to help soften the economic impact of coronavirus. Under the new process, through democratic local agreement, land will be designated in one of three categories: for growth, for renewal or for protection.

- Land *designated for growth* will empower development – so new homes, hospitals, schools, shops and offices will be allowed automatically.
- *Renewal areas* will enable much quicker development with a 'permission in principle' approach to balance speed while ensuring appropriate checks are carried out.
- *Protected land* will be just that - Green Belts, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and rich heritage – will be protected.

It is proposed to completely overhaul the system so that more good quality, attractive and affordable homes can be provided faster. The Minister has stated that the new plans will also focus on quality and design, drawing on inspiration from the idea of design codes and pattern books that built the picturesque city of Bath, model village of Bournville and wealthy district of Belgravia in London. Eco-friendly homes with new spaces and parks nearby would be built, with more tree-lined avenues.

There is also a move to change the Permitted Development categories to allow more freedom for householders and developers. Developers will be able to knock down unused commercial premises and build residential units. Domestic extensions could be two storeys without needing planning permission. The government has said the new rules would prompt people to build more bedrooms or flats for elderly relatives and create additional apartments.

The government stance is that *“It will mean redundant space can be quickly re-purposed to revive High Streets and town centres. If householders want to build upwards they’ll have to carefully consider the impact on neighbours and the appearance of the extension.”*

The Maldon Society will continue to scrutinise the proposals for local developments and alert you to those that will most impact upon our environment or the vitality of the town.

Speakers for future meetings—*John Came*

At present, the situation is uncertain and does not lend itself to a definitive programme. Speakers had been booked for the remainder of 2020 but have either been cancelled or warned that the programme is suspended for now. Until the overall situation improves, previously booked speakers are willing to relocate their talks for when there is a clear way ahead. To this end, the following six speakers have agreed to re-book their dates:

Tony Tuckwell	Tudor education in Essex
Martin Cable	Maldon Fire Station
Fiona Cable	The Border Force
John Lowe	The Museum of Power
Tim Howson	Behind the Façade
Elphin Watkin	All Saints Tower

New speakers:

Adrian Wright	Railways in Art
Proposed new speaker	Mundon Church
Proposed new speaker	Thomas Plume’s Library

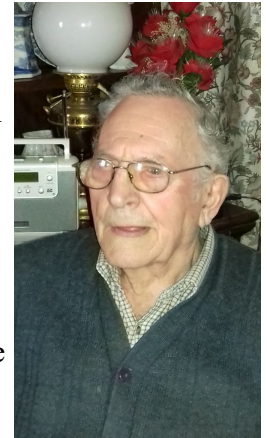
When the current situation allows, a programme based on the above list of speakers will be set up, subject to personal availability. I believe that this is the best way forward in letting all our members know what the committee have in mind until we can arrange a confirmed programme in a safe environment.

Memories of John Prime—*Wendy Howell*

John Prime was born on 26th July 1929 and died, age 90, on 24th May 2020. He and his beloved wife June were highly committed Maldon Society members and committee members for very many years. They had 3 children, 7 grandchildren and 5 great grandchildren, plus a huge number of friends and associates.

John's young life was spent in Shoeburyness where he first encountered Thames barges on which he was to spend a great deal of his working life. He sailed to Maldon on his own barge 'Gippin' with his wife in 1959 and lived, both on the barge, and later in North Street, for the rest of his life. One of the highlights of John's young life was when he and some friends cycled to Wiltshire in war time to help with the harvest. You can hear John's voice describing this on our website (maldonsoc.org) on the Memories of Maldon page.

He was a talented photographer and took an enormous number of pictures of Maldon over the years. He and June catalogued all the albums and built up a valuable collection. For several years many of these photographs, together with others, were displayed in the Maeldune Heritage Centre on two laptops. John was also a keen member of the local Archaeology Society and took part in several digs in the area.



As well as living on his barge with his family, John also helped to restore and maintain other barges, such as 'Kitty' and 'Centaur', both of which he part-owned for a while. He was an extremely skilled craftsman and enjoyed anything to do with working with his hands. Up to just a short time before his death, he used to be busy in his sheds, working on his latest idea or pottering in his garden.

He really was a lovely man and it was a privilege to be able to pop in to see him from time to time to have a chat and cuppa, always with a biscuit or two! He will be missed so much.

Bradwell B Nuclear Power Station—*Judy Lea*

The Maldon District Planning Committee, as its name suggests, includes all the elected members. I watched the July meeting live from my computer at home and was delighted at the discussion that took place, and not just for its unexpected decision not to allow the site investigations to proceed.

For a start, a very large number of members spoke, which I always take to be a good litmus test for the democratic process actually working. It was interesting too that a handful of very senior members either chose not to vote or had to absent themselves elsewhere, so the suspicion of party or personal control or influence seemed on this issue at least to be refreshingly absent.

Even more impressive was that clearly the many members who did speak had marshalled their thoughts very carefully. In particular, Kevin Lagan reviewed the proposal against the District Council's existing policies with pathological precision, presenting case after case as to why this application could not be supported if the Council's other policies were not to be compromised. Local members clearly had issues with the obvious noise and disruption, but even those with more distant wards also spoke forcibly on the environmental aspects affecting the estuary and wildlife that we all benefit from, and the unnecessary haste and pressure to proceed by BRB.

The desecration of the area's Second World War connections was spoken of with feeling by Stephen Nunn. Given this range of solid objections, only one member specifically brought out the elephant in the room of the implications of Chinese government involvement in our national infrastructure - something that has been extensively taken up in the national press recently. Nick Skeens was the lone voice wanting nuclear, but with at least British involvement in the design.

After this sterling performance overall, with not one member voting for the application, it is to be hoped that the planning officers (whose report had recommended approval) have not so diluted the reasons for the refusal in trying to separate the site investigations from the overall project that BRB consider they have a chance to appeal. It would be a travesty of democracy if BRB did.

What's happening in the High Street — *Lindsey Wright*

After a difficult few months, the High Street is bouncing back with just a few cafés and shops remaining closed, so please come and enjoy the High Street again. As usual, my observations start at the top of the High Street, down one side and then up the other side.

- The old Sark premises at the top of the town have become Maldon Diner, serving chicken burgers etc.
- Farleigh's remains closed, although their warehouse behind Morrison's is open.
- Edwards Walk: Crystal Shack has opened in the former baby shop. There is a rumour that a chiropodist is to open next to the bra shop.
- Continental Café in Kings Head Centre is now also opening on Friday and Saturday evenings for 'Gourmet Burger Nights'.
- Marks & Spencer has extended its opening hours. It's now open until 7pm on a Thursday evening.
- The M&Co chain is another company in trouble, but hopefully the Maldon store is safe.
- The Mind charity shop remains closed.
- Tui holiday shop remains closed. Nationally the company is in trouble, so may not re-open?
- House of Autumn clothes retailer at number 76 remains closed.
- The ice cream parlour Gelato is open again after a few months of maintenance.
- The Discount Store next door remains empty.
- Suzie's café is closed. It has been bought and renamed 'Serendipity' and is due to open in September.
- Intimo Italian restaurant remains closed.
- A nail bar has changed its frontage and become 'Luxe Avenue'; it now includes a few clothes for sale.
- Maldon Fireplace Shop has closed down. Borough Carpets is moving from across the road.
- The former 'Go Vape' shop opposite the Post Office is now Maldon Candy Shop.
- Woof Pet Accessories has opened in the former fish shop opposite Wantz Road. The owner, Rachel Edwards, also has a pet supply business in Tiptree.
- Computer game shop Antec closed earlier in the year and is now a 'Tech Exchange'.
- The Emporium seems to be flourishing. It survived well during the height of the pandemic delivering a variety of pet and garden goods.
- The fresh vegetable store at the rear of the Emporium appears to be doing well.
- Subway sandwich bar is under new management but is yet to open.
- Prezzo Italian restaurant remains closed.
- Silo in Bright's Path is another shop surviving during the crisis by including an on-line service with click&collect.
- Mrs Salisbury's café has opened up their own private garden to enable many more tables to be available with safe distancing.
- The Maeldune Heritage Centre is open again with gifts, cards and exhibitions.
- Art Café shows no sign of opening again.
- The former Luna next to Point Graphics is having a makeover. Is someone getting ready to move in there?
- The undertakers, next to the Old Police Station, have moved to the Causeway.
- The Old Police Station has a planning application to convert into five flats.

Keep in contact with The Maldon Society

Does the Society have your email address? It would help us to get in touch with you about future events and news. Please contact us via the website to give us your details. Thank you.

Email: maldonsociety1957@gmail.com

Website: www.maldonsoc.org