Includes bonus Ancient House supplement

The Ipswich Society NEWSLETTER

www.ipswichsociety.org.uk

July 2026 Issue 246

This framed watercolour signed 'F.W. Gillson, Ipswich' of the Wolsey Gate in College Street was part of the Society's belongings in Pykenham's Gatehouse. The local artist appears to have been active in the 1920s to 30s. See the related articles on page 6 and 7.



Contents

Editorial	2	Old Jewish Cemetery	13
New members	2	Walk ‘In Constable’s footsteps’	13
Chair’s remarks	3	New Blue plaque: Mary Coulcher	14
Planning matters	4	A walk around Ipswich with Tom Foakes	16
Awards: call for nominations	5	New Blue plaque: Birkin Haward	17
Ipswich Tourist Guides news	5	Dianne Duell remembers Birkin Haward	19
Behind The Wolsey Gate	6	Suffolk refugees: Tom Gondris	20
The Wolsey Gate Project	6	The Ipswich Minster Weather-cock	24
Work progress at Ipswich Museum	8	What are we going to do about tourism?	26
Lillian Redstone Day at The Hold	9	Letters to the Editor	28
Norfolk & Suffolk Civic Forum	9	Andrew Beale steps down	30
Sasha Constable and John Constable	10	Society officers/contact details	31
City of Culture 2029: the first hurdle	12	Diary dates / Newsletter deadlines	31
Ipswich Society online shop	12	Minster spire as you’ve never seen it before	32

Editorial

Our article about the unveiling of the Society’s Blue Plaque commemorating local architect Birkin Haward (pages 17-18) marks the bowing-out of our Planning monitor Mike Cook from the Executive Committee. It’s fitting that Mike’s long-held belief that Haward’s life should be marked in this way; it is his final (official) contribution to our town after many years of work for The Ipswich Society as Planning monitor. Following his career as Consultant Anaesthetist at Ipswich Hospital, Mike’s fascination with town development, architecture and the Ipswich townscape shone through. We thank him and hope that he’ll be able to contribute to future *Newsletters*, too.

Robin Gaylard

New members

Errata (April 2026 issue)

On the first line of the tribute to Granville James Haskell on page 27: I believe the ‘OI 1926-32’ were the dates Mr Haskell attended Ipswich School. In this context OI stands for Old Ipswichian!

Nick Wiggin



The tiny drone hovers near to the Ipswich Minster spire, January 2026. See the article on page 24 .

Chairman's remarks

Another season and another promotion. There is no doubt that the recent success of Ipswich Town FC will be a massive boost for our town. It is always heartening to see the number of club shirts worn by all ages. I understand that over 100,000 replica shirts were sold this year, which is a staggering rise from the 10,000 sold in 2021. Let's hope for an improved Premier League season this time around to maintain this excellent progression.

Jill and I were lucky enough to be in Porto in late May as a precursor to our son's wedding in the beautiful city of Tomar, Portugal. We were there the night that Porto secured the Primeira Liga title (their equivalent of our Premier League) resulting in an evening of deafening fireworks and wild celebrations. The latter was evidenced by the plethora of rubbish, broken glass and cans still lying around by late the next morning.

I use this as a comparison with the work of our own Council teams who, within the space of three days, contributed to the organisation and clearing-up after three major events. The town centre was rapidly cleared the morning after the promotion 'party'. The historic vehicle rally in Christchurch Park was perfectly staged and – once the last Ford Capri had left – the park was immediately prepared with a big screen, catering etc. in preparation for Monday's victory parade.

The town centre and Christchurch Park were then cleared for a second time, and it was back to normality on Tuesday. Credit is due to all those involved.

I was delighted with the attendance at the recent Annual General Meeting. The business end of the proceedings was concluded in good time, and I thank those present for your continued support of the work of the Executive Committee. We did announce that Tony Marsden and Mike Cook had retired from the committee after many years of service. Tony and Mike have both been presented with lifetime memberships of the Society in appreciation of their work.

Tony's last role was to manage our magnificent Image Archive of over 11,000 images. The Society is frequently gifted photographs, film reels, negatives and the like for adding to our growing collection. It has been my pleasure recently to review some of the records of Johns, Slater and Haward Architects. JSH were a major Ipswich architectural firm between 1960-1980. One of the partners, Birkin Haward was a leading modernist architect responsible for several projects around the town and a recent recipient of a Society Blue Plaque (see page 17).



The records were offered by Eric Benton, a trustee of the Society and former JSH partner. The collection includes extensive photographs recording the construction of the numerous school domed sports halls, including Priory Heath, Downing (now The Willows) and Britannia. I also discovered some magnificent high-quality photographs of the Corn Exchange before its conversion to an entertainment venue in 1975.

There were also numerous interior shots of the former Ridleys store in Tavern Street appearing very reminiscent of the TV series *Are You Being Served?*.

Our online Image Archive is a valuable part of the Society's remit and provides a valuable resource available to all via the internet (*https://www.flickr.com/photos/ipsoc/albums*). To date this has been brilliantly managed by Tony Marsden, until his recent 'retirement'. As a result, and to continue to expand the archive, we will require a volunteer to manage and expand our photographic records.

Please contact or speak to any committee member if you are interested in this role or helping generally with the work of the Society.
Graham Lambert

Planning Matters

33 Elm Street. Application was made to convert this Grade II listed building into a house of multiple occupation for 10 residents in 8 bedrooms. The building was formerly occupied by Gotelee Solicitors and is near Suffolk Magistrates' Court, opposite the church of St Mary at the Elms. Despite objections and comments the plan was approved.

3 Salthouse Lane. On April 3, 2025, plans were submitted to create a new hotel in a Grade II listed building situated at 3 Salthouse Lane, near the Star Lane car park.The hotel will have six bedrooms and allocated parking spaces close to the main entrance. The building is known variously as 'barn to the rear of 54-58 Fore Street', ‘warehouse, Salthouse Lane', is listed at Grade II by Historic England as 'Warehouse or Store to rear of Nos. 54 to 58 Salthouse Lane. These plans have now been approved.

Rear of 6 Kiln Close (off Suffolk Road). Telecommunication Works (IP/26/00180/TPD) Removal of existing 15 metre tower with 6 attennae to be replaced by a new tower 24 metres high with 9 attennae and a transmission disk. Overall height: 27 metres. There were 54 objections to this proposal. Common points made were that the mast will be taller than all existing residential properties and the treeline. There is loss of visual amenity – the views of the residents will be dominated by a tall industrial structure. The point was made that the tower and headframe would dominate the skyline not just for those that live nearby but for large areas of Ipswich. The application was refused.

The Railway Public House 243 Foxhall Road **(**IP/26/00096/FUL)
Refurbishment and continued use of the existing public house; change of use of first floor and erection of single and two-storey rear extensions to provide five residential dwellings (four 2-bed units and one 1-bed unit). This building is on the Local list. A decision on this application has not been reached at the time of writing.

21-23 Tavern Street. Alterations to façade – installation of new double swing automatic door, new shopfront; glazing & ATM (cashpoint) and new signage. This is the old H&M and House & Home shop. Now being converted into Lloyds bank which, it is understood, will be moving from their current location near Lloyds arch in Tavern Street. A decision on this application has not been reached at the time of writing.

Great White Horse Hotel, 45 Tavern Street
The grade II* listed building, the former Great White Horse Hotel is on Historic England’s ‘Heritage at Risk’ register. The application is for the conversion of the building to 21 residential units, the reconfiguration of the retail areas and creation of community spaces. This application was approved on 3.6.26.
There is some way to go but it will be great to see it back in use. I will give more detail as plans progress. In the meantime, you can look at the plans here *https://ppc.ipswich.gov.uk/searchselect.asp* and typing the address into the search engine.
Mandy Gaylard
Planning Coordinator

To All Members…

Is there anything in your neighbourhood or in the town that you think is an improvement or eye-catching?
Please let me know.
It could be an improvement to the street, a piece of public art, a sculpture or mural.
Or a new building: house, shop, office or housing estate, or a renovation of an existing/old building.

Please send me a photo and the location by email: *awards@ipswichsociety.org.uk*
or phone 07711 286511.
Looking forward to hearing from you.
Mandy

Last year's award winners:







Busy times for Ipswich Tourist Guides

Two special walks are arranged to keep children (and their accompanying adults!) entertained during the summer holidays. Learn about Terrific Tudors: Horrible Henry, Miserable Mary and Epic Elizabeth on Wednesday 12 August, or hear the Horrid History of Ipswich with scary tales of murder, execution, robbery, of vile stinks and rotten food on Wednesday 19 August. These walks cost £6 per adult, £4 per child and start at 10.30am. Advance booking is strongly advised to avoid disappointment. Book at Ipswich Institute, either in person or using the *Guides* section hosted on the Institute's website *https://ipswichinstitute.org.uk/ipswichtourist*

The regular twice-weekly summer walks have attracted more locals as well as visitors from further afield this year. Upcoming walk topics include Constable, Gainsborough, 'loved and listed' buildings, remarkable women and blue plaques. The walk willl also explore the waterfront and other areas of the town in detail. The cost is just £6 per person and all are welcome. Booking as above.

In addition, walks at other times by arrangement have proved popular with special interest groups. Guides have received positive feedback and brought people into Ipswich from Kesgrave, Martlesham and Hadleigh. See our website *http://ipswichtourguides.onesuffolk.net* for details of how to book for any group – family, friends, societies or work colleagues.

We await confirmation of a (small) cruise ship itinerary in October. We do hope the company will encourage their passengers to discover what Ipswich has to offer instead of taking them straight to Sutton Hoo, Southwold or Lavenham!
Margaret Hancock



When cleaning and reframing the watercolour painting shown on our front cover, between the card and strawboard sheet, lay this label from a shoe-box acting as padding. The framer, who didn't attach any company label, wrote '5/6 Complete' on the strawboard liner in blue pencil.

John George Sears (1870–1916) was a shoe manufacturer and the founder of Sears plc, which was one of the United Kingdom's largest retail businesses. Born in Northampton, that mecca of shoe manufacture, and educated at the local elementary school, John Sears became an apprentice with the Manfield Company. In 1891 he set up his own business as a boot-maker with the help of his younger brother, William, trading under the name J. Sears & Co. He founded the True-Form Boot Co. Ltd. in Northampton in the same year.

The label stuck to the box, was roughly torn out by the framer. The 'True-Form' lettering is shaped to fill the outline of a shoe sole. Surrounded by clouds it sits against a line drawing of the shoe factory – presumably the larger premises to which they moved in 1904, equipped with the latest machinery. All-in-all, the brown and cream design and varied lettering are the perfect vehicle to sell 'Willow Oxfords (Storm Welts), Size 8'.

In 1928 Sears bought out its rival Freeman, Hardy & Willis, which continued as a separate operation. Together they owned 722 shops. After many ups and downs, the various footwear brands grouped under The British Shoe Corporation – including True-Form – were sold off to Fascia, which went into receivership in 1996.
RG

The Wolsey Gate Project

Phase II of the Wolsey 550 project continues with plans for **Wolsey's Gate**.

Through 2025 a series of meetings took place between Wolsey 550, Historic England, Suffolk County Council, Ipswich Borough Council and the landowner of the site on College Street, behind the Gate and adjacent to St Peter's Churchyard. Plans have since been dropped for any new residential development on the site, located between St Peter and St Mary-at-Quay churches – currently partly a car park. This is a very positive outcome.
In addition, the Wolsey 550 team has been gathering historical and structural information about the Gate (which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument), the associated walling and churchyard wall,

and the ground beneath them – which are all owned by the Borough (gifted to them in early 20th century). That information includes past condition reports for the monument itself.
A new condition report on the Gate and walling is now urgent (see below). As identified in previous surveys, inappropriate materials such as concrete mortar have been used in the past to repair the brickwork, so a management plan arising from the next survey will set out a scheme of work which not only delivers important conservation repairs, but mitigates damage done by previous works on the Gate to its overall structure. As experts in the field, Cliveden Conservation and Bulmer Brick & Tile Company (both based in Suffolk) have been asked for their recommendations because they have both worked on the monument and wider site previously.

Kath Cockshaw and Anna Forrest recently met with archaeologist Keith Wade to discuss the outcome of previous archaeological works immediately to the rear of the Gate, stretching back to Star Lane. It was agreed that an excavation of the site at the earliest opportunity would be advantageous to provide a basis for wider site master-planning and strategic decision-making, including tourism and visitor experience.

An Expression of Interest to the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) for funding to cover conservation, restoration, archaeology, site development and a heritage interpretation scheme was made in February, 2026 but was turned down because the current condition report for the Gate (2012) is out of date. NHLF is being helpful and recommended that Wolsey 550 apply for a smaller bid of £250,000 to cover costs of the new condition report and site planning detail. This bid can be submitted as soon as it is ready. Kath recommends the next tranche of funding also covers the archaeological excavation and this is under discussion. Meanwhile, NHLF have suggested a visit to Ipswich to visit the Gate and hear about plans for this, and other heritage sites.

In terms of how the site will look, the landowner has generated some CGI images of proposals for gardens, a walkway through the Wolsey Gate and through the site from north to south and east to west. After further discussions in coming months, it is intended to generate plans with visual detail for a scheme with the approval of all stakeholders, which can then be used to obtain further buy-in from grant-makers and funders.

Kath has begun a new corporate funding scheme for this phase of the project, and suggests crowdfunding as a possibility to supplement funds. As she says, there is an essential need to engage the town and its people in this project and to provide complete transparency throughout this process. A 'community dig' focus for the archaeological work is planned to help involve schools and families in the site and its amazing stories.

The Ipswich Society's intention from some years ago of recommending this unique site to UNESCO as a World Heritage Site might be something to reconsider once the project is underway and the site's historical value established by physical evidence.

After four years as Chair of the Wolsey 550 project, Terry Hunt is stepping down. All involved are very grateful to Terry for his hard work on the project, in particular in helping to raise funding for Phase I of Wolsey 550. The new Chair will be Prof. Jenny Higham, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Suffolk. The project continues to be administered by an independent Community Interest Company (Wolsey 550 CIC), with the support of Ipswich Central.

It is difficult to overemphasise the importance of this initiative. It is not an easy site to work with, but the steps made since the beginning of 2025 are really encouraging, after decades of stasis.

The next steps will include an update on the merchant's house (later the offices of Burton Son & Sanders) at 1-5 College Street. This whole, unique site, so visible as a blot on our historic dockland for so long, provides huge promise as part of the town's history made real once again.
RG
[Thanks to Kath Cockshaw and Anna Forrest of Wolsey 550.]



Work progress at…

A talk at The Ipswich Society AGM, on 15 April 2026 by Alison Hall, Ipswich Museums Manager

There is clearly a limit to the amount of change that can be made to the building as it is a Grade 2* listed structure. Some cleaning and renovation has been carried out to the façade of the building, including specialised repair to some of the Victorian terra cotta mouldings. Much work was required to repair the roof, but the original tiles have been repaired and retained. Leaking guttering has been replaced.

The entrance hall is much more spacious with a new reception area. All the beautiful old, tiled floors have been cleaned and retained. The smaller artefacts have been removed to the art school next door for cleaning and storage during the period of work on the museum. The wall paint and the varnish on the wood panelling have been refreshed. The cream wall colour has been retained. Original colours have been followed where possible.

Work on the main staircase has not been completed at the time of the AGM, but a lift has now been installed which visits each of the three floors. More economical LED lights have replaced the old ones, but the old globes have been retained.



Alison Hall and an image of a refurbished exhibition space. Photographs by Mandy Gaylard.

The toilets have been completely replaced with more cubicles in both ‘Ladies’ and ‘Gents’ facilities.
The large stuffed animals such as the giraffe and woolly mammoth have been encased in polythene. The latter was moved to safety by a specialised team from a company called *Unusual Projects*. Alison showed a speeded-up film of the move which required a large team of people.

A new café area and terracing is in place, and the former will be run by an independent company. A large area has been set aside as a Learning Room, so that local schools can come in to carry out projects. It has its own kitchen area and storage cubicles for belongings.

It is hoped that Ipswich Museum will re-open at the end of the first quarter of 2027. Thanks to Alison for a very interesting talk accompanied by some fine images.
Mervyn Russen

Lillian Redstone Day at the Hold



Photograph courtesy of the Suffolk Record Society (Suffolk Farming in the 19th Century).

On July 22, the Hold is celebrating the work and legacy of Suffolk historian Lillian Redstone (1885-1955) with a programme of talks, discussions and behind-the-scenes tours*.

This pioneering archivist was instrumental in establishing record offices in Suffolk and making local historical records accessible to researchers and communities. As part of the day local history groups and partner organisations will host stalls in 'The Street' (the main public space at The Hold) and the Ipswich Society has booked a space at this event. We have copies of Lillian Redstone's book Ipswich Through the Ages, published in 1948 in our archive at Admiral House. We hope to display one of these on our stall, along with other Ipswich history books in our collection.

I remember meeting her sister Elsie Redstone in the Seckford Library in Woodbridge (sadly, I missed Lillian by a decade) when I was researching my A-level Geography project in the late 60s. As well as pointing me in the direction of useful literature and maps, she made contact with George Arnott, who wrote *Orwell Estuary*, and I met and interviewed him as well.

Caroline Markham

** www.suffolkarchives.co.uk/whats-on*

Norfolk and Suffolk Civic Forum

In March your *Newsletter* editor and I travelled to Norwich to attend the first meeting of the Norfolk and Suffolk Civic Forum at the Maids Head Hotel. Representatives from Hunstanton, Great Yarmouth, Beccles, Dereham, Norwich, Sheringham, Stowmarket and King's Lynn were also in attendance. An afternoon of lively discussion followed, and it was agreed that we have many issues in common, including: planning, especially large scale developments; support for heritage buildings; membership and funding. Imminent local government reorganisation makes addressing these issues problematic. However, the election of a Mayor for Suffolk and Norfolk in the near future gives good reason for the Civic Societies of both counties to convene on a regular basis, possibly biannually. Also, Civic Voice, our national body is having problems at the moment and everyone agreed that it is desirable to have national representation. Possibly local forums can provide a more secure basis for this in the future.

We offered to have a second meeting in Ipswich, and it was agreed that this should be in a shorter time than six months. I have arranged this meeting for June 13th – in the Saleroom at Isaacs. This should give the opportunity for greater representation from Suffolk civic societies - and promote our wonderful town. I have spent some time with Anna Gunn of the King's Lynn Civic Society on contact details of Suffolk and Norfolk Civic Societies and all (where contact details have been found) have been informed and asked for items for discussion for the agenda. We will be joined by Jane Maggs, Civic Voice Trustee for an update on Civic Voice and will work on a draft constitution for the Forum.

Caroline Markham



Sasha Constable and John Constable

Sascha was born in 1970 into an artistic family with a long line of 'Constable' artists dating back to her famous ancestor. Sasha Constable is the great-great-great-granddaughter of the renowned 19th-century British landscape painter, John Constable (1776–1837). As a direct descendant, she is an international sculptor and printmaker who continues her family's creative legacy, with her work often featured in exhibitions alongside her ancestor's, including the 2026 Constable 250 series in Ipswich. Following an introduction by Jack Abbott and commentary by Alison Hall, Sasha officially declared the exhibition open on Friday 27 March.

Three commemorative events will take place at The Wolsey Gallery in Christchurch Mansion, which started on 28 March, to mark the 250th anniversary of his birth in East Bergholt in 1776. *Constable: A Cast of Characters*, ran from 28 March to 14 June bringing together more than 100 artworks and personal objects.There were several mineral sculptures by Sascha in that exhibition scattered around the Mansion's rooms and Gallery spaces, most of them commissioned for the event. They were notable for her superb use of stone, her technical virtuosity and surrealist sensibility.

By the time you read this article, the second exhibition: *Constable: Walking the Landscape*, will be on from 11 July to 4 October. The final display, *Constable to Contemporary*, will run from 24 October to 28 February 2027. There will be further related events and workshops involving other groups, venues and artists.

Constable and his contemporary, J.M.W. Turner, admired each other's work. They were both rebels when attending The Royal Academy of Art in London: wanting to learn to paint and to work on landscapes. Both of these were rather scorned by the academic mainstream of the time. It is difficult to imagine our world without the wealth of landscape paintings they both created. Some still opine that Constable's are 'a bit chocolate-boxy'. Little do they realise that both he and Turner were revolutionary in their own ways. In fact Turner was, in financial terms, more successful in his lifetime than Constable. It is only later that the latter's works have been re-assessed as passionate and vivid evocations of nature.



Congratulations to Emma Roodhouse, Colchester & Ipswich Museums and the staff and supporters who helped to achieve this string of events in Ipswich.
RG







Images from the exhibition in March 2026.









City of Culture 2029: the first hurdle

Just as the April issue of the *Newsletter* had been published, the news of the longlist of places selected as potential City of Culture 2029 was announced. Ipswich was on the longlist alongside Blackpool, Inverness-Highland, Middlesbrough, Milton Keynes, Portsmouth, Sheffield, Swindon and Wrexham. Nine places were longlisted rather than the eight originally anticipated. This will have played a crucial part in the selection of one of the entrants. Ipswich is the only entrant to be located in the east of England (apart from north-eastern Middlesbrough).

This is very good news for Ipswich as it will receive £60,000 – up from £40,000 for the last competition – to develop a full application. The shortlist will be announced in the summer, with panel visits to shortlisted places following in September. The winner will be announced in the winter and will win the title of City of Culture 2029 and £10 million to help the town/city to deliver its year-long cultural programme.

Bradford, the current holder, offers a glimpse of what is possible. Last year, the city delivered 5,000 events – more than 75% of them free – attracting an audience of three million and involving over 650 local artists and organisations. More than 87,000 residents took part in key projects throughout the year, and over 11,000 pupils benefited from education programmes in the first six months alone.

Some big-hitters have been backing the Ipswich campaign: DanceEast's Bryony Hope, Ipswich Town FC chairman Mark Ashton, Suffolk New College principal and chief executive Alan Pease, Jack Abbott MP, Professor Jenny Higham, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Suffolk, Lee Walker of Ipswich Central, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce, from Ipswich Borough Council and cultural organisations through to businesses, community organisations, residents, children and young people in the town.

Even if Ipswich doesn't make it to the shortlist, the work done in compiling the bid, the engagement of the public in the process and the coming-together of organisations, clubs, societies and individuals in and around the town will be invaluable. This is an important stimulant to people's imaginations and aspirations.

Ipswich Society online shop

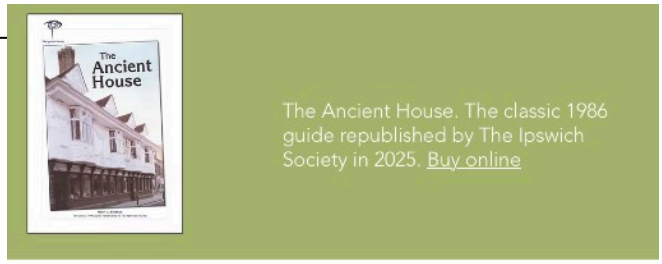
We now have the facility to sell our publications via our website:
(www.ipswichsociety.org.uk/publications)

The Ancient House by Hilary Feldman; updated republication of the classic guide and history. £5.00

Public Art in Ipswich. Full colour guide and map to publicly-available sculptures in our town. £5.00

The Ipswich Maritime Trail. Quality guide and map to the dockland and beyond; includes all ten of the Maritime Ipswich '82 plaques. £5.00

[All prices subject to p&p charge.]







The Old Jewish Cemetery

A Suffolk group is carrying out a heritage project to maintain the garden within the ancient Ipswich Jewish Cemetery.

In 1792 there were some thirty Jewish Families living and working in Ipswich. Their spiritual needs were met by the building of a synagogue although this has now long gone, (demolished in 1877). Once this was finished, they entered a 999 year lease to establish a cemetery which contains thirty-six headstones and three foot stones dating from 1797 to 1850. The walls surrounding the cemetery have Grade II listed status through English Heritage.

Minimal maintenance was carried out over the years and, with no local surviving relatives, the cemetery became very overgrown. Suffolk Liberal Jewish Community, also with a membership of around thirty families, recognised the importance of the cemetery and established a small working party to clear the garden out of respect for the previous community and to provide a safe and calm space to consider the historical value of the Jewish lives that have gone before us.

The garden is now well-maintained on a regular basis, bringing members of the community together with a shared vision. As part of Inter Faith Week, which takes place this year 8 November to Sunday 15 November, we would like to share the cemetery with the local community. We want to put a plaque within the cemetery, acknowledging the lives of people buried there.

Recent visits to the Cemetery have been from a couple of Chasidic Rabbis, Rabbi Amrom Marmostein and Rabbi Moses, who came to say prayers in the cemetery and are interested in the history of Jews in Suffolk; also Dave Selby with his friend Julian Harrap, retired architect. The site is now rather like a secret garden, a place to be treasured and shared with care.

The fact that the Cemetery has regular maintenance enhances our sense of belonging to a community that goes back centuries, reminding us of the presence of Jews in Suffolk over this period of time.
Beverley Levy

Walk 'In Constable's Footsteps'

In his youth John Constable was a regular visitor to Ipswich and sketched with local artists. To celebrate 250 years since his birth I have arranged a guided walk for Ipswich Society members on July 21st at 7pm starting from Admiral House in Tower Street. This popular walk gives a glimpse of the town and people known to the artist and how later painters were influenced by his work. It is led by Ipswich Society member Margaret Hancock and timed to coincide with the new Constable 250 exhibition at Christchurch Mansion The Haywain: Walking Constable's Landscape.

Cost: £5 (pay on the day). Places limited to 20 people, so booking is essential; contact me at *secretary@ipswichsociety.org.uk*
Caroline Markham

Christchurch Mansion exhibitions: *ipswich.cimuseums.org.uk/constable250*
Ipswich Tour Guide Walks: *ipswichinstitute.org.uk/ipswichtourist*



New Blue Plaque:
Mary Caroline Coulcher (1852-1925)

Our Blue plaques officer, Sandra Ablitt organised the making and mounting of the plaque and the unveiling event. She and the Mayor, Stefan Long, spoke at Beecholme, 129a Woodbridge Road, on the corner of Lacey Street. Robert Fiddy (Ipswich cadet lead, St John Ambulance) with his group of cadets and badgers spoke at the unveiling and at the Town Hall gathering afterwards. He also mounted an excellent display of materials.

Children and the Deputy Head of St Helens Primary School were also in attendance. The Society is working with the Wolsey 550 project on the Ipswich Trail Makers project (see page 21 of the April 2024 *Newsletter*). Children in eight Ipswich primary schools are involved in developing a virtual Blue Plaque Trail; they are being asked who, in the present day, they would nominate for a Blue plaque.

Mary Coulcher came to live in Ipswich in 1870 with her parents. In 1879, at the age of 27, she obtained a certificate in First Aid to the Injured signed most unusually by Francis Duncan as Ipswich Centre President and Sir Herbert Perrott as local Centre Secretary. Mary, who probably organised the 1879 course, was appointed as the first Centre Secretary which was established in January 1880.

In February 1880 she ran the first of many courses for the men of the Great Eastern Railway who came from far and wide and returned to their stations where they formed Ambulance Corps long before the foundation of the the St John Ambulance Brigade (SJAB). In 1891 the GER organised its 14 Ambulance Corps as the GER Railway Ambulance Corps of SJAB. In 1895 a GER Centre was established and in 1912 the GER handed over what had now become 48 divisions to the SJAB NHQ. This was almost the entire SJAB representation in the East of England. Incidentally, Agnes Coulcher succeeded her aunt as Ipswich Centre Secretary in 1919.



Celebrating the new plaque, Lacey Street, Saturday 16 May, 2026.



At the outbreak of the first World War, Mary Coulcher established two isolation hospitals, one at Gippeswyk Hall, the second at Broadwater off Belstead Road. Her St John Ambulance record shows that she was full-time and voluntary. She was awarded an OBE in 1918 and, following retirement, she was awarded a CBE in 1920. She purchased the first horse-drawn ambulance in 1914, and the first motorised ambulance in 1924.

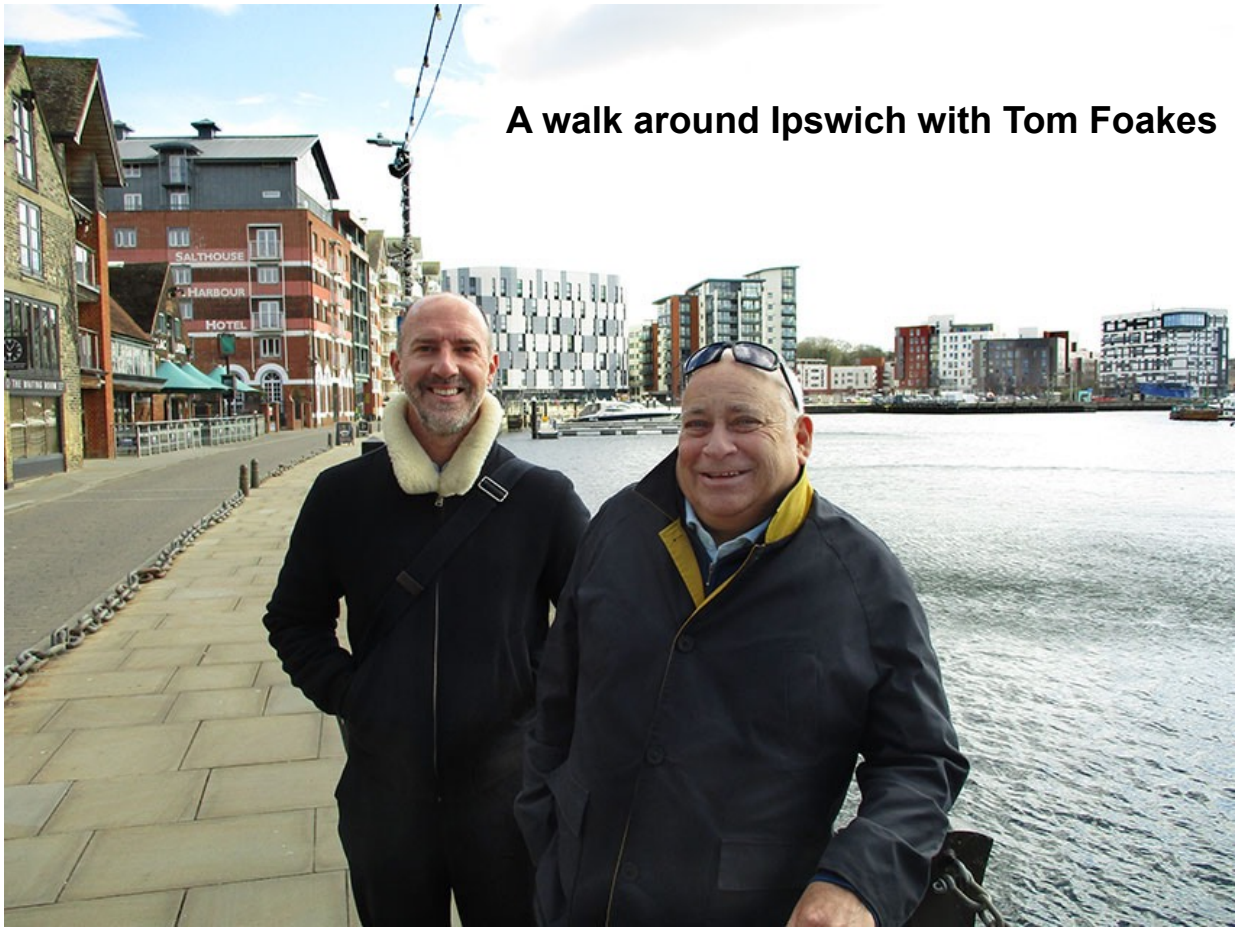
Mary set up the St John site in Samuel Road (later Samuel Court) and it remained their centre until post-COVID when it had deteriorated during shut-down becoming uneconomical to maintain or rebuild. Which was when they moved to Crown House. This was a difficult decision for them because of the building's connection to Mary, who is viewed by them as the Ipswich St John founder. In recognition of her pioneering and voluntary work for St John Ambulance, she was awarded Dame membership of the Order of St John (DStJ). In 1909 she received the St John Ambulance Brigade Service medal and in 1914 it was upgraded to 'with Bar'. She received a Coronation Medal in 1911. Robert Fiddy mentioned that the DStJ award was exceptional for a woman, and that it confirms her groundbreaking contribution to the early establishment of St John's in East Anglia.

Not only these remarkable achievements (not common, nor expected, of women of her time), but Mary was Ipswich's first woman councillor, serving as a town councillor from 1909 to 1912. Ahead of the elections, *The Evening Star* interviewed Mary, and she is reported to have said: 'I am coming forward as a citizen. The legislature, has given women the right to seek election on the Town Council, and I think women ought to take part in the work the same as men. It is now part of their duty. For some years past I have been a co-opted member of the General Purposes Committee of the East Suffolk County Council, but when the women on that committee have given their views, they have no voice in the council and cannot take part in the final stages of the proposals they support.' Mary Coulcher was a pioneer and a philanthropist.

Robert Fiddy (right) and the display in the Town Hall.



[Thanks to Alan J. Sharkey MBE CStJ TD for additional information. He is author of GER history, and is currently working on a new publication on Mary's life and achievements.]



A walk around Ipswich with Tom Foakes

Tom Foakes (left) new Director of Suffolk Preservation Society (SPS), visited Ipswich in March for a tour with Society Chair, Graham Lambert, and your Editor. We took in a number of the historical and cultural attractions in the town. Tom and Graham are seen here on the northern quays of the historic Wet Dock (opened 1842 when it was 'the biggest enclosed dock in the UK'). Tom is enthusiastic about the many buildings and places of historical interest in Ipswich and throughout Suffolk. His visit to Ipswich was well-timed as the town had just jumped the first hurdle in the selection process of the UK's City of Culture 2029. Also, 'Greater Ipswich' had, a few days previously, been announced by the government as one of three unitary authorities which will replace Suffolk County Council, all of the current District Councils and Ipswich Borough Council. The last will be replaced by Ipswich Town Council representing 'Greater Ipswich'. The other two unitaries will be East Suffolk Council and West Suffolk Council.

The tour around the town took in the Ancient House, The Walk, the Cornhill, our Venetian Gothic Town Hall, and the Portal, then on to Mutual House (once Parr's Bank), and two Grade I Listed side-by-side buildings: the Willis building – at the time being purchased by technology company Halo as their global HQ – and the Unitarian Meeting House. Also, Curson Lodge, the Church of St Peter (now a music venue) and the heritage gem: Isaacs on the Quay. We tracked back up Fore Street past the Baths, St Clement's Art Centre, The Wheatsheaf, Oak House, our Carnegie Library, Bethesda Church, The Packhorse Inn, St Margaret's and Christchurch Mansion. The walk finished at the Ipswich Minster and the Institute, where we had started.

We highlighted some of our Ipswich Society Blue plaques along the way: Nina Frances Layard, pioneering archaeologist; Leslie Barefoot GC, architect; Mary Whitmore, our first woman Mayor; painter Thomas Gainsborough; also architect Birkin Haward (plaque officially 'unveiled' a few days later – see page 17). The weather was ideal: bright, dry and bracing. Graham Lambert: 'We are delighted to welcome Tom to our excellent town with all it has to offer and wish him well in his new post at SPS. I look forward to working with him in the future.'
RG



Birkin Haward's Blue Plaque

On a bright Saturday at the end of March, in a biting wind, The Ipswich Society unveiled its latest, and thirty-second blue plaque, to commemorate Birkin Haward senior, OBE, FRIBA (1912 - 2002). Fifty people, including some twenty members of his family, attended the official 'unveiling' on the grade II listed 32 Foundation Street where he worked as the lead partner in the architectural practice, Johns, Slater and Haward for 32 years.

He was a true son of Ipswich, born in the town, partly educated in Ipswich, articled in Ipswich (H. Munro Cautley and Peter Barefoot) and spent his working life in Ipswich; he retired in Ipswich, authored many books on Ipswich and East Anglia and became an accomplished, exhibited painter. So truly a man of Ipswich; some one all Ipswichians should be proud of.

As an architect, you only have to look around to see his monuments ('*lector, monumentum requiris, circumspice*': C. Wren epitaph) – schools, domes, pavilions, offices, churches and a few houses; the practice he led designed around fifty projects. Many of these are now listed, including the family home, I am proud to say.

Of his books, they remain the standard works on Victorian East Anglian church stained glass and mediaeval church arcades as well as his, Cynthia Brown and Bob Kindred's *Dictionary of Suffolk Architects*. As an artist, he painted in a modernist semi-abstract style.

The Society thanks Dr Danesh, the current owner of 32 Foundation Street, Mike Taylor and Liz Warden, the Council's Conservation Officers and Historic England for allowing the new plaque to be installed so seamlessly with the minimum of red tape.

Family friend and noted authority, Martin Harrison, gave a brief summary of Birkin's life and works, with anecdotal asides. He was followed by Birkin Haward Junior, himself a recently retired distinguished architect, to speak on behalf of the family. After the final talk, many retired to The Crossway at Isaacs on the Quay for light refreshments; itself a hugely important building. Our thanks to Aidan Coughlan for letting us have the use of those facilities.

Some of his the best known buildings for which he was the lead or part of the design team:-
•De la Warr Pavillion, Bexhill-on-Sea. Grade 1 (1938),
•64 Old Church Street, Chelsea grade 2* (1936),





•Fisons Laboratory and Office HQ, Levington (now OOCL),
•Two large office buildings (northernmost reclad) Civic Drive,
•Fison quadrangular Office Building, Princes Street. (since reclad),
•Castle Hill United Reform Church grade 2,

Schools in Ipswich:-
•Sprites Lane Primary Academy,
•Rushmere Hall Primary School,
•Holywells School,
•Handford Hall Primary School,
•Whitton (now The Beeches) Primary School,
•Gusford Primary,
•Ipswich School Library grade 2,
•Geodesic dome school halls at Handford Hall, Holywells, Thurleston, The Spinney, 108 Westerfield Road grade 2 (The Haward home).

Obituaries appeared in *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent* as well as *Building Design*. *Suffolk Artists* web page and *Wikipedia* are essential sources of detailed information.
Mike Cook



Upper left: Mike Cook welcomes attendees and introduces the event.
Upper right: Martin Harrison giving his homily to the gathering.
Left: many (but not all) of the Haward family (Birkin Jr at far left with his brother Bill, both architects, next to him).

Photographs this page by Mandy Gaylard

Diane Duell remembers Birkin Haward: ‘a lovely chap’

In response to the Editor trailing Mike Cook’s article about the Birkin Haward Blue plaque, Society member Diane Duell got in touch. She was Birkin Haward’s carer twenty-six years ago.

‘Birkin Haward was 88 in the year 2000, living on his own and his family was concerned that he wasn’t eating. So they called the care company I was working for at the time. They needed someone to go and do his lunches, a hot meal and some sandwiches or something for his tea. You’ve got to remember that we only had half-an-hour to do this. He was living in *The Spinney* at 108 Westerfield Road. After I’d eventually found the place – I was only given the house number and road – I drove in there and I went: ‘Wow’. I wasn’t a member of The Ipswich Society at the time, so I wasn’t so aware of architects and architecture.

‘I climbed the stairs because, at that time, he was living on the first floor because downstairs was very cluttered. There was a lot of clutter about because obviously he was on his own. There were paintings everywhere, books everywhere; I was particularly interested in the books. Our later conversations were mainly about books. Art isn’t my bag – there was a lot of artwork about. I met the gentleman and he was very affable … genial … friendly. Willing to talk; he loved to talk. Half the time I was late because I couldn’t get his lunch on time because I was chatting.

‘The kitchen was quite small in comparison to the large lounge-come-dining room. I don’t like to say ‘clutter’; it’s just that the man’s belongings were just everywhere – his clothes were hanging up, though. He would just sit on the settee; he’d be reading or he’d be drawing. Birkin also had his draughtsman’s table in the Spinney, so he could draw using that. I’d do his lunch and get him up to the table to eat.

‘Our conversations weren’t just about the weather. It was about books and his love of art and so on. As I say, I knew nothing about the man at all; I didn’t know the name or what he’d done. He just reminded me of my grandad. My grandad, who was still alive at that time, was born in 1911 so, a similar age. So, I wanted to know all about him. People in general you meet when you’re a carer, even if they haven’t been an architect or whatever in life, but they still have interesting lives. I’ve met a lot of interesting people who are elderly, couldn’t get about; even if they suffer from dementia, they have wonderful memories. That was what I found with Birkin, it was really nice. Invariably, I left there later than I should have done. Luckily, he was near the end of our lunchtime run.

‘I didn’t have to do any cleaning for him. He wouldn’t have wanted that anyway. He liked where his stuff was – he knew where everything was. Anyway, talking about his architecture and things he had designed, it transpired that the Dryden Road Church [in Castle Hill] – I used to go there for Girls’ Brigade – and it was his design. I said “Oh, really? I love that building!” You don’t see anything like that anywhere. He also did the dome at Thurleston School, which I also went to: “I used to play badminton in there”. It’s amazing what you don’t know when it’s related to the person you’re talking to. It took a little while to find out that he was an architect because the initial contact with somebody is to ensure their well-being. I knew he was a man of some note because of all the material he’d got. I used to go in there five days a week so I was a regular.

‘I was lucky enough to receive a signed copy of a book that he wrote on Suffolk medieval church roof carvings that was published in 1999. When he told me he’d just done this book, I said: “I love architecture”. Stuart, my partner at the time, said he’d love to talk to Birkin. So we spent a couple of hours there and Stuart was just as rapt as I was. I'm 99% certain that we became members of The Ipswich Society from having met Birkin as I'm sure amongst his books, magazines, papers he would have had Society *Newsletters*.

‘When I worked at the care home in Prince of Wales Drive I also met [long-serving *Newsletter* Editor] Neal Salmon and his wife, Joyce, in 2019 when they first arrived. A very nice couple and we had The Ipswich Society in common.’

Many thanks to Diane for getting in touch and for the interview. ***RG***

Suffolk Refugees

and the story of Tom Gondris in Ipswich

The lecture *A history of refugees in Suffolk* was given by Martin Simmonds of Suffolk Refugee Support on 12 February, 2026 in the University's Waterfront Building. It shone a light on the lasting contribution refugees fleeing war and persecution have made to Suffolk over the centuries. Their stories are woven into the fabric of the county – from landmark buildings and enduring businesses to our football clubs and public services.

The talk and presentation highlighted facts and figures about refugees which acted as a counterpoint to the negative stance of the vocal political populists. The most vivid part of the evening was a selection of people who have made a mark on Suffolk and, particularly, on Ipswich. Your Editor was taken aback when the photograph of a boy wearing a felt cap and overcoat appeared on the screen, immediately recognising a young Tom Gondris.

Tom Gondris MBE (24/05/1930-11/02/2019)



Thomas, Tom, Gondris was born on the 24 May, 1930 in the Czechoslovakian town of Teplice, the only child of Eugen and Else. In the beginning, life in the Sudetenland was relatively peaceful. Eugen ran a factory which manufactured Airtex shirts, Else was a schoolteacher. But the family were Jewish, and at the start of the Sudeten crisis, in October 1938, Eugen and Else worried that they would no longer be safe in Teplice and so they decided to move to Prague with a view to the family leaving Czechoslovakia and moving into Europe.

While living in Prague, Tom's family heard of a series of trains that were organised by a British man, Nicholas Winton, that were taking children from Czechoslovakia to the relative safety of the UK. Children who travelled on these trains needed to be sponsored to enter the UK, and Tom was lucky. Through his parent's connections, a sponsor was found in the form of a family living in Hampshire: the Parsons Family.

On the 1 September 1939, Tom boarded a train from Prague's main railway station bound for Harwich in Essex. His parents had told him he was going for a holiday. They waved him off from the platform, with the intention of following Tom through mainland Europe to meet him in the UK. Sadly, that wasn't to be and Tom's parents didn't survive the war. Tom's train was the very last of the Kindertransport trains to arrive in the UK; the one which was scheduled to leave Prague on the 3rd September was turned back at the Czech border. These evacuation trains were organised by the British humanitarian Sir Nicholas Winton (1909-2015) whose struggles to rescue children from the Nazis are depicted in *One Life*, a 2023 biographical drama film directed by James Hawes and starring Anthony Hopkins and Helena Bonham Carter. An extraordinary sequence is the recreation of the *That's Life* BBC television programme – it is worth seeing the film for that re-enactment alone.

Tom was met at Liverpool Street Station, by some of the Parsons family, including the only one of their four boys who could speak German, Tom's first language. In England, Tom absorbed English so deeply that he entirely forgot German or Czech, and had to learn German from scratch again at school.

Tom was welcomed into the Parsons family with unfailing generosity. At the end of the war, this family learned, from some neighbours of Tom's parents that both of his parents had been killed in a concentration camp. From that time on, Robert and Simone Parsons made Tom feel even more entirely part of their family. Just how much they had tried to do for him, he only found out years later. This was through the chance discovery of papers in an attic that charted the unceasing – but frustratingly unsuccessful efforts that Robert Parsons had made to get the Home Office to accept Tom's parents into England.

Having left school at 18, he was at first disappointed that, because he had not been born in England, the law did not allow him to take part in national service. He was delighted when the law changed and he signed up immediately and was sent to Egypt for eighteen months. Usually cautious, he enjoyed recalling a day when he and a friend stripped off their uniforms and happily swam across the Suez Canal. It only occurred to them to worry about what might happen to the clothes and boots they had left on the bank when they had reached the other side!

When he returned to England he had various kinds of jobs including working 'on the line' with Cadbury, in Bournville for a short while. Tom was responsible for making the 'soft centres' and as a perk of the job, he was allowed to eat as many sweets as he liked. Tom, not being one given to excess, rationed himself to one sweet per day so as not to sicken himself to the tasty treats like his co-workers! After the soft centres – and an unsuccessful attempt to sell slot machines – Tom was taken on by a small firm, recently started by fellow central European, Harry Erben. Starting off with a weekly salary of three and a half guineas, Tom was sent off to Germany to learn about bottling machinery and lodged with a local butcher.

Back in London, he drove home with Harry Erben every evening after work, their eager discussions of the Labour Party making them oblivious to the traffic. From these modest beginnings, the firm flourished and Tom stayed with it for the rest of his working life, he became managing director, and he and Harry became lifelong friends.

In 1958, Tom went on a skiing holiday in Austria. There, on the nursery slopes he met Pat. Pat was a bit disgruntled. She'd thought she was rather good at skiing, but had been demoted from one of the higher groups down to the nursery to be with the beginners. Pat tells me that when she first met Tom, he was rolling around on his back, with his skis all tangled up. He looked something like a beetle. Apparently, she took pity on him and helped get him to his feet. Although the pair became firm friends on that trip, both were involved with someone else, and so, after exchanging numbers, they went their separate ways.

This was not the end however. Pat was walking home from work one evening in Piccadilly, when a bus drove past. She thought nothing of it then, but later that evening she had a call and a voice said 'This is Tom, I see you have got legs after all!' It turns out that Tom had been riding on this bus, and had happened to look out of the window and spy Patricia, no longer sporting her shapeless Alpine ski suit, on the pavement outside.

Six months later, on the 11 October 1958, they were married: a marriage which was to last over 60 years (and there's a telegram from the Queen to prove it). The children Joanne and Peter were born in London, but Alexander was born in Ipswich, where the family relocated when Tom's work with the company moved to the area. All this time, Tom had kept one precious link to his past by cultivating a friendship with the Czech family who had told him about his parent's death. With the threat of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Tom, sensing a real risk to the future of this family, sent a letter of invitation to them, allowing them to cross the border and come to the UK. They arrived with nothing but a Christmas tree and decorations, stayed a while, and then moved on to build happy and successful lives.

One member of that family, Darla, flew to the UK to attend the funeral. Last Christmas, her daughter, Katerina, now a professor of the History of Architecture in midwest America, wrote to

the Gondris Family to say: ‘this year (just a few days ago) it was fifty years ago that we arrived in the UK and, thanks to Tom and Pat were able to build lives that would otherwise have been impossible, indeed beyond imagination.’

Tom, even though he had built a new life in England, never forgot his roots. Worried that his parents, killed in the Holocaust, had no known resting place, he took it upon himself to create a memorial for them. A local sculptor, Bernard Reynolds, designed a grouping of three abstract figures: *Triple mycomorph*, which could be seen as two parents and their child. Tom and Pat donated the work to Christchurch Park, here in Ipswich, and it proudly stands behind Christchurch Mansion. A plaque at the foot bears the simple inscription: ‘This sculpture is dedicated by Tom Gondris in memory of his parents, Eugen and Else who died in World War II’.


Tom (with Pat) receives the MBE for ‘Services to the Heritage of Suffolk’ from Lord Tollemache, the Lord Lieutenant of Suffolk, Ipswich & Suffolk Club, 2009.

The placing of the memorial in Ipswich was true to Tom’s life, which was centred in this town. He worked tirelessly for it in many ways. Always self-assuming, he would be astonished to read a recent headline in the local paper labelling him *The Refugee that Saved the Town’s Heritage*. But he would also have been grateful for the recognition of the importance of this work.

In the autumn of 2009, Tom Gondris was awarded the MBE for ‘Services to the Heritage of Suffolk’. Tom being a little frail for the journey to the Palace, the ceremony was performed by Lord Tollemache, the Lord Lieutenant of Suffolk, at the Ipswich & Suffolk Club, and was attended by many supporters of the conservation movement in Suffolk. Many readers will be aware of the tremendous debt of gratitude we owe to Tom for his championing of conservation in Ipswich during his thirty years as Chairman of the Ipswich Building Preservation Trust.

Eulogy

‘Tom was an amazing man who, from such difficult beginnings contributed so much; a gentle giant, not in stature but with tenacity, persistence and determination in all that he did. All of us whose lives were touched – and I suspect that includes everybody here – owe Tom a great deal. I, for one, was honoured to have known Tom and to have listened to his wise counsel, acted on his sensible advice and taken heed of his astute guidance.

‘Ipswich is a richer place, the Ipswich Society is a stronger organisation and the Suffolk Architectural Heritage Trust owes its very existence to Tom's love of ancient buildings. Tom served for a time back in the 70s as Borough Councillor for the Valley Ward. Using the expertise

and knowledge he had acquired whilst serving on the Planning Committee, he was able to persuade the council to set aside a substantial sum as a loan: the operating capital for the Ipswich Building Preservation Trust, which Tom established in 1978.

'Back then there were 550 Listed buildings in Ipswich and over 40 of them were considered at risk, today there are just 5.

'The first building to be restored by the Trust was a pair of cottages in Bolton Lane but Tom soon moved on to what became his favourite Ipswich building, Pykenham's Gatehouse, restored by the Trust in 1983. Not only did Tom love this building but his family knew it well, spending hours folding leaflets and sorting publicity material.

'Until recently the Building Preservation Trust has been constantly busy with restorations: the Half Moon & Star in St Matthews Street, The Globe in St Georges Street, and in the naughties the particularly difficult Curson Lodge in St Nicholas Street.

'When Tom retired from work he used his newly found spare time to create, in 1997, the Suffolk Architectural Heritage Trust, an offshoot of the Suffolk Preservation Society. This increased the scope of buildings in need of restoration to encompass the whole of Suffolk. The first, and the one I consider Tom's greatest challenge, was St Andrew's Church, Mickfield.

'With very little capital Tom and his fellow trustees set about rescuing the church and preparing it for a new use. By 2004 the church was ready and was sold to become a Christian Retreat.

'Back in Ipswich the Conservation and Design Panel were meeting monthly to advise the Borough Council's Planning & Development committee on planning applications in Conservation Areas, on major applications and on the design of proposed new buildings. You will not be surprised to learn that Tom had been a member of the Panel since its inception in 1975.

'Tom, with others including the Borough's Greenways project, campaigned for and developed the Riverside Footpath between Stoke Bridge and Sproughton, a project that included two works of Public Art, *The Navigator* by John Atkin and *Against the Tide* by Laurence Edwards.

'These are but sculptures beside the river; a much more significant contributor to the overall success of the scheme is the Skate Park at Stoke Bridge. I'll conclude by suggesting that, if Tom has one disappointment amongst his achievements, it is that the skateboarders don't wear helmets when using his skate park!

'We have lost an inspirational, supportive, encouraging and generous friend.

'Thank you, Tom.'

This eulogy to Tom Gondris was written and delivered at Tom's funeral by our late Chair, John Norman.
The funeral service was held on February 21, 2019 at Ipswich Crematorium.

This article is based on the Humanist Funeral Tribute Archive.
(*https://humanisttributearchive.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Thomas_Gondris_Archive_Tribute_1.pdf*)
Sadly, the writer is uncredited, but we would be happy to give a full acknowledgement in these pages.



Tom's story was told in the booklet *Refugee stories*, published by Suffolk Refugee Support and is still available from SRS, 38 St Matthews Street, Ipswich IP1 3EP.



The Ipswich Minster weather-cock

This rather vertiginous view of the weather-cock has the sun glinting off the gold leaf. The Carnegie Public Library building of 1924 stands at the top of Northgate Street, with Pykenham's Gatehouse just visible to the left of the spire. We can see The Halberd Inn at the lower left. The sun illuminates the Bethesda Church Palladian facade. The trees of Christchurch Park stand behind it, the Mansion itself just visible behind the 'W' and 'N' of the weather vane with the tower of St Margaret Church behind the 'E' and the 'S'. North-east Ipswich extends beyond that with the trees of the Old Cemetery at the upper right. It is sobering that this view has, until now, only been seen by steeple-jacks clinging to the spire.

In December 2025, Lynn & Paul Stewart contacted the Ipswich Historic Lettering website regarding its photographs of the former St Mary-le-Tower church (now The Ipswich Minster) and the sun glinting on the golden weather-vane cockerel at the top of its spire.

Lynn writes: ’With regard to your assumption that the beautiful weather-vane cock has been restored during its lifetime, I can confirm that indeed it has. During the 1980s the said weather vane was taken down from the tower & resided for a few days at our then home in Yew Tree Rise, Ipswich where my husband and I painstakingly regilded it with genuine gold leaf. We are very proud of our work which we admire every time we see it. Sadly, we didn't take any photos at the time but would love to see any that may be in existence.’ We have since sent them images.

‘The contract for the restoration in the mid-1980s was gained by Regional Roofing who subcontracted the re-gilding to my husband. He & I proudly undertook the work at our home. The gold leaf & materials were obtained locally from Kent Blaxill.’



Your Editor had what might constitute a bright idea. Aware that friend of The Society and local architect, Richard McRae, has a drone which takes excellent photographs – see, for example, the wonderful view of Christchurch Mansion on our website’s homepage – would he be interested? When the weather conditions were good in mid-January (sunny weather, little breeze), Richard and I walked down to the Minster, set up facing the south door and launched the drone – arrowed in the photograph).

As a complete novice, I was surprised by how small the drone was and, after about twelve feet from the ground, how silent it was in flight. Richard explained that gulls are sometimes prone to go for the drone; perhaps they think it’s a hovering kestrel. Mercifully, the main birds seen were homing pigeons.

In less than fifteen minutes Richard had guided the drone around and above the spire. I was looking up at the tiny dot which inevitably moved out of view and I got a bit anxious, forgetting that all the time the pilot was watching his screen, so he knew exactly where it was.

The weather-cock looks splendid in the sunshine forty years after it was gilded by Lynn and Paul; photographs from the other side show it more shadowed, perhaps Modernist in design. The townscape on this clear day is breath-taking from the novel viewpoint (see also the photograph on the back cover).

(continued



While the drone was hovering near the top of the tower/base of the spire (see image on page 2), Richard took the above photograph to explore the tall, decorative finials, the pierced trefoil features between them, carrying shields for three of the disciples with initials and symbols. The other three faces of the tower must have shields with initials and symbols of the other nine.

The central angel holds 'AR' (Ave Maria Regina'). The finely-wrought flushwork of cut flint, mortar and stone blocks is striking. Also the gargoyle-like grotesques which project out from the corners.
RG

What are we going to do about tourism?

Ipswich has an important and growing role in tourism.

It has a lot going for it: many superb public buildings including Christchurch Mansion, the Town Hall, Ancient House and the soon to be re-opened Ipswich Museum the Minster and eleven other medieval churches, five theatres, plenty of great restaurants and cafés, lots of arts and performance events and the parks too.

But helping to welcome tourists has been a challenge since the closure of the Tourist Information Centre. St Stephen's is now a performance venue but, outside, a 'Welcome to Ipswich' sign is forgotten (illustration on following page).



Photograph by David Vincent

Yes, the world has turned digital, but just watching visitors trying to follow Google directions on their smart phones tells you that it is not enough.

Recently I directed a family from Upper Orwell Street to the Cornhill because they wanted to find a noodle restaurant before going to a show at the Regent. Their phone was useless.

Last Thursday I was working outside at St Clement's Arts Centre with the Ipswich Historic Churches Trust Chairman Peter Brooks. We spoke to a visitor who was looking for the site of Wolsey's College and his gate. She had arrived by train but failed to find it from the tiny location map in her hand.

She wanted to know if there any other places of interest. I was able to give her a tourist map and we were able to send her towards The Ancient House, Dial Lane, St Lawrence and the Minster. We suggested going into St Lawrence for lunch as it was worth a visit in itself. It is a real treasure, currently being restored.

She had not heard of the Minster or the Ancient House or The Hold.

The current walking map is a fine piece of work, but where will visitors get it?

Perhaps there should be a TIP, a Tourist Information Point, somewhere easily accessible. The Town Hall would be good – not up the steps but in the former police station at the lower level in Princes Street – or the Ipswich Institute or even in an empty shop?

There was a Digital Ipswich plan but I am not sure how far that has progressed. A location sign with a QR code at every public building, leading to a website with more information – and directions on to another site, could really help.

Lots of good work is being done by Ipswich.love and Ipswich Central online.

There are missed opportunities to promote Ipswich for first-time visitors. I always stop to help, whether they want to find Primark, the Wolsey Theatre or the Bread Bowl café. You spot them usually at a crossroads not knowing whether to turn left, right or carry on,

There is so much positive about Ipswich to share. I was at a business event at the university the other night and was struck by the tremendous strides the university has made in a decade. It is another success story.

I find that it is often newcomers to the town who are stunned by how much the town has to offer, in terms of heritage, history and present developments.

How do we get that message across to visitors and tourists? ***David Vincent***

Letters to the Editor

George Frost and Gainsborough from David Jones
I have just read the article in your *Newsletter* on the Ancient House and it reminded me of a reference to what must be the Ancient House in connection with the artist George Frost and an auction including a Gainsborough I came across in in connection with my own research on Gainsborough and his much neglected connection with Ipswich.

A key letter is given in full from George Frost to John Constable*

"Mr Sparrow's here have got an assortment of paintings I suppose about twenty, sent to him which are hung up in his Rooms to be sold by private contract – one a Gainsborough. (This was probably in the Ancient House)

He then goes on to describe the painting 'ladies in the Mall' and continues:

"You know I am extravagantly fond of Gainsboro' perhaps foolishly so – be that as it may I should very much like to have the picture. You must understand that nobody here except Mr S. [Sparrow?] and myself knows who they come from and he don't know that I do – but they come from a large picture dealer in London. I don't tell everyone this because I don't want to throw cold water on the sale – but this being the case we may naturally judge them hackneyed unsaleable pictures – this one I remember seeing in Mr G.'s sale eighteen years ago."

George Frost was not only a very proficient and underrated Ipswich artist he also dealt in Gainsborough's paintings, and supplied Elizabeth Cobbold with some. He was not very scrupulous as a dealer.

This would have been the sale at which Gainsborough's close friend Samuell Kilderbee, Town Clerk of Ipswich, would have acquired this painting. It passed from Kilderbee's family to the Frick gallery in New York but not before George Frost had painted a very exact copy which is now in the Museum's collection in Christchurch Mansion.

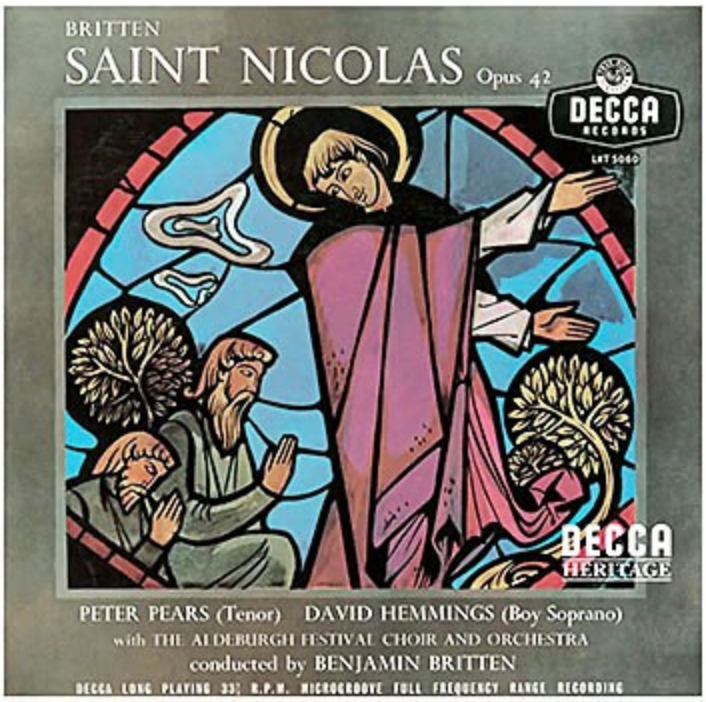
[*p.37 Vol. 4 *John Constable's Correspondence*, by R. B. Beckett]



Illustration: *Ladies in the Mall* (copy of Thomas Gainsborough) by George Frost (1745–1821)

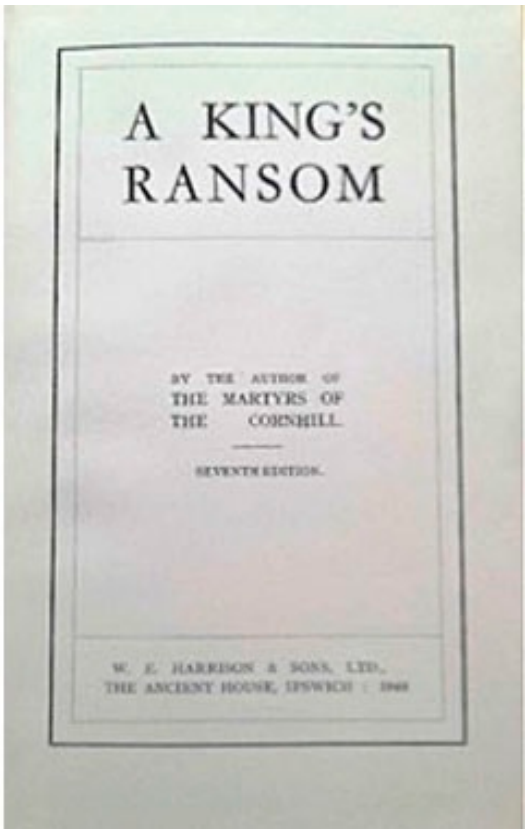
Benjamin Britten and his uncle
from Richard Wilson
I very much enjoyed Rachel Field's piece on William Hockey, Benjamin Britten's uncle [April '26 *Newsletter*]. William's fall from grace was likely to have been due to alcoholism which had sadly also afflicted his mother Rhoda (*Britten's Letters 1939-45* ed. D. Mitchell p.838).

Britten's regard for his uncle may be reflected in the iconic 1955 recording of his cantata *Saint Nicolas* which featured the young David Hemmings as the boy bishop alongside pupils from Ipswich Prep School and the St Mary-le-Tower church choir. That both groups had once been directed by his uncle, who had died in an Ipswich poorhouse in 1948 (the year of the work's composition), would not have been lost on the composer and perhaps helps to explain this unique musical link with our town.



A King's Ransom from Mervyn Russen
I write referencing two articles in the April *Newsletter*, Issue 245. They both make mention of a book entitled *A King's Ransom*. The identity of the author of this book is a bit of a mystery. My wife has a copy; it is a seventh edition published in 1949 by W E Harrison & Sons Ltd. In this copy the title page states: 'By the author of *The Martyrs of the Cornhill*.'





Left: the cover of my wife's book.

Right: the title page

My wife also has a copy of a book entitled *Seventeen Suffolk Martyrs* by Nina Frances Layard and this would seem to indicate that Ms Layard was a bit of an expert on Ipswich and Suffolk martyrs.

The mystery arises because Ms Charlotte Wilmott in her article says that she has seen a 1948 edition which credited as the author a Mrs Donkin – a member of the Sparrowe family. I understand from our Editor that the author credit is present as a sticker on the [spine of the Suffolk Libraries copy of the] book. Wendy Jeffrey states in her piece that Mrs Donkin was paid 2d (old pence) per copy sold – I wonder where that information came from?

(continues

Charlotte Willmott, earlier in her article, mentions that the authorship of the book is attributed to the Ipswich archaeologist Nina Layard in a copy of the book on sale on the Abebooks website. No edition of the book appears to carry Nina Layard's name specifically or that of the mysterious Mrs Donkin printed on the cover or flyleaf.

My question after all this is: Did Mrs Donkin or Nina Layard write *A King's Ransom*? Do any of your readers know for certain?

[*Editor's note*: I believe that the attribution to pioneering Ipswich archaeologist Nina Frances Layard is a red herring, perhaps because of the coincidental authorship of books about martyrs. Oft repeated on websites regardless of veracity. The novel was deliberately published anonymously, but with the library service's attribution and Wendy Jeffrey's additional information (below), the author is Mrs E.M. Donkin.
My father, Cedric Harrison, wrote his memoirs for the family when he was 70. He attached an Appendix: 'Some publications produced by the Firm
1. A King's Ransom - A Story of the Ancient House in the 17th century. Published originally in Pawsey's time and taken over by W.E.H. (Walter Evan Harrison, my grandfather).
Royalty to Mrs E.M. Donkin of Reigate 2d. per copy 1902(lapsed)']

See also the enclosed bonus supplement: *More on the Ancient House and its owners by Cedric Harrison* from Wendy Jeffrey – add it to your copy of *The Ancient House* by Hilary Feldman.

Andrew Beale steps down

Andrew Beale, Town Sergeant for Ipswich Borough Council has retired after 25 years of service to Ipswich. As well as driving the Mayor to functions and engagements – and keeping an eye on the chain of office – the Town Sergeant (more correctly the 'Sergeant at Mace') has become a familiar presence, particularly in the official uniform, at all sorts of civic events.

Town Sergeant/Sergeant at Mace is one of the oldest job titles of the town of Ipswich, dating back to the time of Town Bailiffs, following the first Royal Charter of 1200. The Sergeant was originally employed to carry out the duties and enforcement of the laws and wishes of the governance of the town. Since 1836 Mayors have replaced Baliffs in Ipswich, with the Sergeant's duties being transferred to serve the Mayors. For Civic parades two Town Sergeants carry maces – Ipswich has two Royal maces.



Andrew's knowledge of Borough and wider Ipswich history is impressive. He appears to be the person behind the *Ipswich Luminary* website, packed with interesting information, much of it circling around the Town Hall. But one of his lasting achievements is the *Ipswich War Memorial* project (*www.ipswichwarmemorial.co.uk*). With Helen Ely, he has taken the raw material of lists of names on the cenotaph in Christchurch Park and developed back stories for many of those Ipswichians killed in the devastating twentieth century wars, sometimes with contemporary photographs. This often with the help of families and friends of the deceased who contribute details, stories and images. This excellent project continues to grow and extend.

The Ipswich Society

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www.ipswichsociety.org.uk | https://www.facebook.com/ipswichsociety | https://www.instagram.com/theipswichsociety
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Diary dates

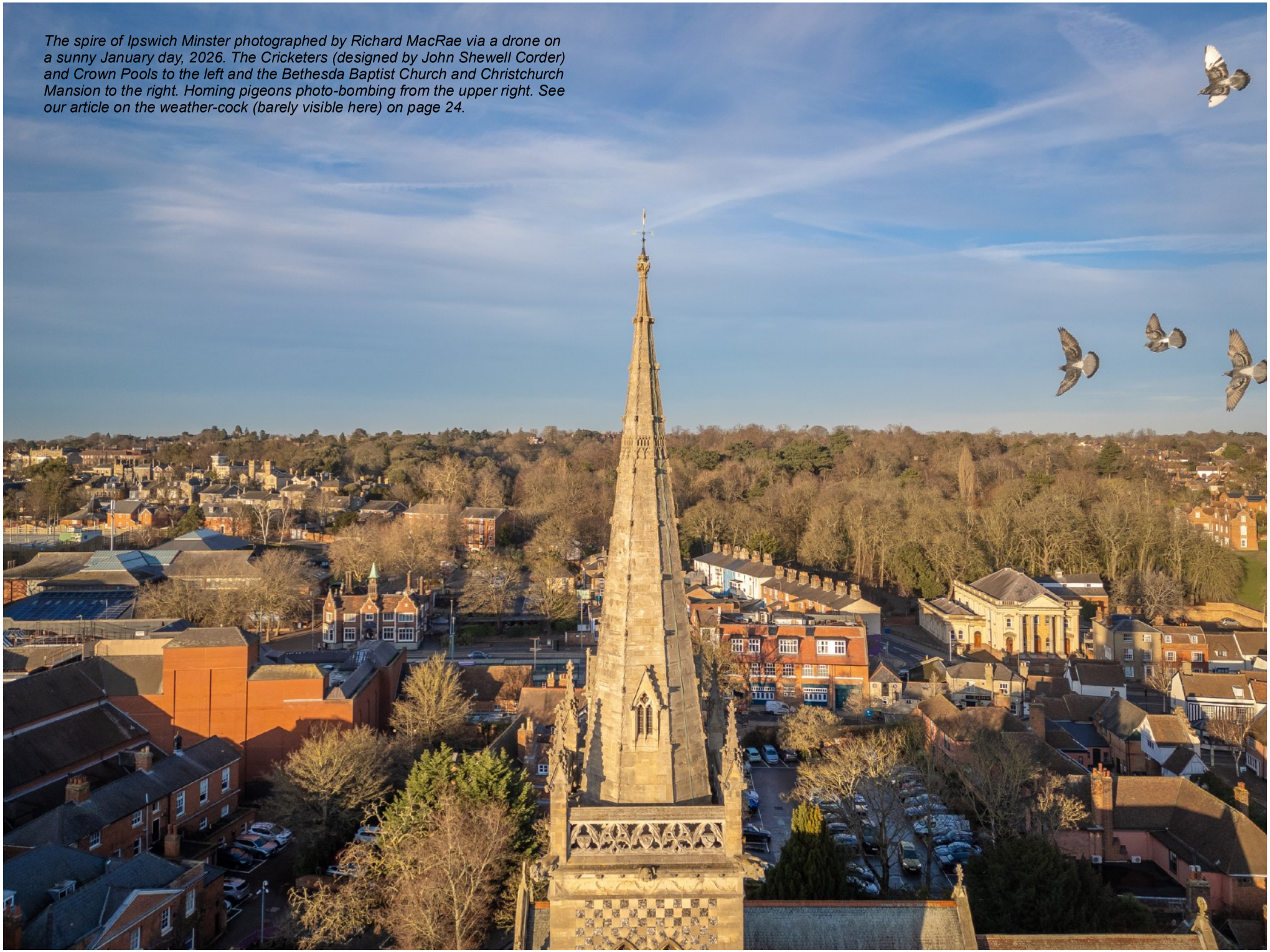
Tuesday July 21 evening: 'In Constable's Footsteps' Guided Walk with Margaret Hancock. Booking information on page 13.
Wednesday July 22: Ipswich Society stand at The Hold, Lillian Redstone Celebration Day 10am-4pm.
Sunday August 9, 2.30-4.30pm: **Brass on the Grass** in the Christchurch Park Arboretum bandstand. The Ipswich Society is sponsoring the Ipswich Over-50s band.
Saturday 12/Sunday 13, September: **Heritage Open Days**, to be advertised via our leaflet in August.

Winter talks 2026 – all at the Museum Street Methodist Church (entrance on Blackhorse Lane) at 7.30pm; refreshments provided; everybody welcome.
Wednesday *September 16, 7.30pm*: to celebrate this year's HOD theme 'Everyday History Heroes', Nigel Ball and Rob Ramsden will talk about Cowell's Printing: *Pictures for all*.
Wednesday October 21, 7.30pm: Phil Roberts will give a talk on *Our Lady of Grace*.
Wednesday December 16, 7.30pm. Crispin Kelly will talk on the *Clay 1a Project*.
January 20 2027, 7.30pm: Hannah Purkis, Suffolk County Council Flood and Water Engineer.

Wednesday November 18: The Society's **Annual Awards Evening**, at The Hold.
Our events are also detailed on our website: *https://www.ipswichsociety.org.uk/event-list*

Newsletter deadlines & publication dates (the latter may vary by a few days)

Deadline for material:	Publication date:
1 December;	22 January;
1 March;	2 April;
1 June;	17 July;
1 September;	9 October.



The spire of Ipswich Minster photographed by Richard MacRae via a drone on a sunny January day, 2026. The Cricketers (designed by John Shewell Corder) and Crown Pools to the left and the Bethesda Baptist Church and Christchurch Mansion to the right. Homing pigeons photo-bombing from the upper right. See our article on the weather-cock (barely visible here) on page 24.