

ESSEX FEDERATION

NEWS SHEET

AUTUMN 2017

Now in its sixty-ninth year



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FROM THE CHAIRMAN

This is the twenty-third article I have written for *EF NEWS* since the Spring 2007 edition and the last I am writing as Chairman. As I announced at the AGM last year, I am standing down from this role after eleven very busy years, with the intention of devoting more time to National and Regional matters, if I am re-elected at the Regional AGM on 4th November as Association Council representative and Vice-Chair.

I am very grateful for all the help and support I have had over the years. I can but paraphrase what I wrote in the Autumn 2013 edition, thanking: all the volunteers who have served with such dedication on the Federation Committee, as well as the members of the education staff who have worked so hard for us and contributed so much, often in very difficult circumstances; all the many, many volunteers who have steadfastly served our nearly forty active Branches and enabled so many people in the County to attend and learn from such a range of professionally delivered courses and day schools and to enjoy the company and exchanges of views and experience they have found there; all the dedicated tutors who have provided such mental stimulation, knowledge and enjoyment as much at least for the love of it and their belief in the value of lifelong learning as for the remuneration; and all the Regional Office staff who do so much under ever increasing pressure from all directions, particularly from the centre, to keep everything running. Thank you all.

Looking through all the previous 22 articles, I find some quite apposite for us today.

Spring 2007

“It is time to look forward. That is the message driving your new Federation Committee, now that most of the changes to the National organisation, brought in to secure its finances and retain external backing, are in place.”

Since I wrote that we have gone through two more major reorganisations: a failed “New Look” procedure, and this year the SWIFT restructuring process designed to save money and make us more “21st Century” efficient – judgment on the degree of its success as yet suspended.

Autumn 2007

“Some ... branches have closed, in the absence of members able and willing to volunteer to run them. On the other hand the future of several endangered branches *has* been secured by new volunteers stepping forward to take on the onerous duties of Branch Secretary or Treasurer, or to take the Chair or become a Class Secretary; in one or two cases the volunteer has come from the ranks of relatively new course members. Is it at all possible that you could be one to follow their lead? The Federation Committee is also looking for new members ...”

I make that appeal yet again- the need is even greater. At the AGM on 7th October you will be electing a new Chairman and a new Secretary. Our EF NEWS Editor, Ray Hedley, is also retiring next year. We owe him a huge debt of gratitude. We need a new Editor.

I am finishing this just before leaving for hospital for a heart bypass operation. And in between brief power cuts. I wish everybody well.

Ron Marks, 12th September 2017.

BILLERICAY BRANCH
Summer Evening Course
Political Philosophy from Plato to Tom Paine
- Tutor: Ian Pirie

Our commitment to an evening course each year giving opportunity to those unable to come in the day as they are working, have dependants, caring responsibilities and/or other commitments really paid off in every sense. There were nearly 30 people on this course and over a 1/3 were new to the WEA/Billericay Branch. Our tutor, Ian also commented how pleased he was to be working with such a diverse group!

Course members were really engaged and our tutor welcomed and encouraged that as you can see from the photograph – a debate with new student Ali Kaya and before the session had even started!

Joanna Moncrieff gave us this positive feedback -a great advert for this subject topic and a recommendation to other branches.

‘The course was hugely interesting and enjoyable. The tutor was very knowledgeable, and presented the content in an accessible manner. He made a real effort to enable people to express different views and there were excellent class debates about various issues including the meaning of politics, the nature of power, human nature, religion and attitudes to women through the ages.

I found the session on Thomas More’s Utopia especially fascinating, since it presented a vision of a radically different society. Sessions on Hobbes and Machiavelli challenged my preconceived notions about these famous historical figures and highlighted the progressive and democratic aspects of their thinking’.

Joanna Moncrieff and Ali Kaya

BILLERICAY O.D.S.
An Oscar for an Oscar
Tutor: Margaret Mills

The positive feedback from the attendees of our One Day Course “Oscar Wilde – Nothing to declare but his genius” prompted from us, the Billericay WEA committee, a resounding ‘It’s an Oscar for an Oscar!’

The tutor Margaret Mills took us through three thoroughly interesting sessions on Wilde:

Session 1: His Background and Life

Photos of his family and friends provided the faces to so many of Wilde’s influences, a colourful and revolutionary mother “Speranza” (the Italian word for ‘Hope’), a father who was a leading ear and eye surgeon, early life in Ireland surrounded by Anglo Irish Dublin intellectuals, his outstanding intellect at an early age, times at both Dublin and Oxford universities, involvement in aestheticism movement “art for art sake”, and his rise in London’s fashionable cultural and social circles.

Session 2: His Work

As a group, we read some extracts of his poetry, plays and novel. Margaret then gave us some insight into the deeper social and class inferences brought out in his works. Over tea break many of us commented how these insights into society at that time would make seeing the many versions and film adaptations of his plays even more fascinating now.

Session 3: The Downward Spiral

Step by step the real-life drama that unfolded, leading to scandal, three trials, prison, exile, and eventually the pitiful existence in Paris before his death. Many of us knew pieces of this downfall, but Margaret brought together a fuller picture and again in the context of the morals promoted by society at the time.

As well as many anecdotes and facts around Wilde’s life and demise, Margaret’s knowledge and description of society at the time made this a very rich biography to explore. 32 people attended judging this course to be a resounding success with the feedback from our course questionnaire as:

- Course content – 10
- Course presentation – 10

- Would you recommend this course? – 10
- Did you enjoy the day? – 10 (we even had an 11!)

‘Thank you for all your efforts in organising a most interesting and stimulating day with such a knowledgeable speaker’.

The Billericay WEA Branch would like to say thank you to Margaret for a wonderful One Day Course, and yes you have our Oscar!

Billericay WEA Committee

BILLERICAY BRANCH

Choosing a Course with the WEA?

Science and Some of its Current Controversies!

Who presented the course?

The tutor was a man called Steve Haydon. Steve was a very friendly and knowledgeable engineer who shared his love and research of this broad topic.

What did the course cover?

All branches of science and more! The Scientific Method, the Periodic Table, water, carbon chemistry and cycle, fuels, health and diet, diseases of the modern world, climate change and future science challenges e.g. climate change and robotics and more were covered! Really amazing range of topics were covered in quite some detail. The presentations were provided by e mail after each session.

How was the course presented?

The tutor used a power point and then discussed the subject in detail. He encouraged people to ask questions and some of the topics were debated in groups e.g. the future of fuels. The coffee breaks provided an opportunity to discuss and debate the topic of the day and eat lovely biscuits!

What was your favourite topic?

Diet – this is something I have always been interested in but not studied before.

Why did you attend the course?

I studied chemistry and geography at school and have always been interested in science. This course reminded me of what I had forgotten and also brought me up to date eg changes in the periodic table and knowledge of atoms and their structures.

You did not have to be a scientist to enjoy and benefit from the course!

Benefits of Attending the Course

It was a good chance to get to know local people who are also interested in learning and bring my thinking up to date.

New WEA Course Member - Sue Goss

Billericay WEA Branch really enjoyed this new subject and course with this new tutor. Lots of requests for more please, Steve Haydon!

Denise Fielding

Billericay WEA Branch A Tutor's Perspective

Being invited to give a course by your home town WEA Branch has its obvious advantages but can also have potential pitfalls.

A five minute drive to a guaranteed parking spot is infinitely preferable to a slog up the A12 at either morning or evening rush hour. But what if your course doesn't go down too well? If this happens at the extremes of the A12 both you and the recipients will eventually forget itbut in your home town you are bumping into your students in the street, restaurant, the pub, or at some civic function and memories will be stirred!

Luckily such discomfort has so far eluded me in the Billericay Branch and I am in the happy position of being able to strongly recommend the Branch to other tutors. There are four factors which make attendance at a course in Billericay an excellent experience.

1. The current venue. The Billericay Reading Rooms in the High Street were opened in the late Victorian period by civic philanthropic instincts desiring to further educational progress for ordinary people. As such they are the WEA incarnate, the physical embodiment of all we stand for.
2. The nature and quality of the students. Mature people from a variety of backgrounds who provide a stimulating and lively forum of debate whatever the subject matter. The tutor learns from them. For instance, I can recall insights into the following: aspects of international law, 20th century farming techniques, relationships among the ruling dignitaries before World War One and nuances of Soviet - Japanese diplomatic relations. I will be forever grateful to those who provided them.

3. If the above sounds austere academic.....it wasn't! There is a definite sense of humour and fun which is engendered by participatory events such as quizzes, raffles and at AGM's members indicate their preferences with various colour coded charts. The buzz before and after a session is noticeable and the tea interval marked by debate and laughter and fuelled by wonderful cakes!
4. The atmosphere that is engendered is not accidental. The committee, ably led by Denise Fielding are superbly well organised and take care to ensure that each and every student is welcomed and encouraged to be engaged.

A very impressive, friendly and challenging Branch. I commend it to any future potential tutor without question.

WEA Tutor – Ted Woodgate

TIPTREE BRANCH

Elizabeth to Elizabeth, the English Music scene

Tutor Peter Goodwin

In January 2017 we welcomed Peter Goodwin for the first time to the Tiptree Branch. Due to building works the first several weeks were held in the church, rather than the church hall. This was a lovely venue to hear the music but unfortunately not as warm as we would have liked it. However the music and Peter's delivery kept our attentions. The students found the course content to be surprising and entertaining. Who would have thought that Sting had taken inspiration from the 16th century John Dowland. At one session students were very fortunate to have a morning of "live" performance by Richard Hodgson, which was described by one student as "sheer pleasure". John illustrated the different style of songs. Peter's enthusiasm, delivery and humour produced an excellent antidote to the winter gloom of January and February.

Jacquie Stervens

COLCHESTER BRANCH

Music and the British Landscape

Tutor: Chris Green

This delightful musical journey looked at both well known composers and not so well known ones. They all composed works in different regions of England.

First at Colchester in Essex we found John Wilbye. He was a famous 16th Century madrigal composer who wrote "Draw on Sweet Night". He is buried in Holy Trinity Churchyard and a plaque opposite the church shows where he lived.

We enjoyed the music of Thomas Tallis, possibly the most famous English 16th century composer. Best known for his beautiful "Spem in Alium" a motet for eight choirs of five voices each. He spent two years at Waltham Abbey in Essex. English folksongs were of great interest to Ralph Vaughan Williams. He collected "Bushes and briars" from a shepherd in Essex in 1902 and published an arrangement in 1908. Still in Essex Gustaff Hoist composer of the Planet Suite resided for much of his life in Thaxted. Thaxted is the name given to the hymn tune by Hoist commonly used for "I vow to thee my Country". Thaxted we learnt is also famous for Morris Men.

In East Anglia we were introduced to Hubert Parry with his Cambridge Symphony "I was glad" and Jerusalem. Tchaikovsky and Edward Grieg were given Cambridge honorary degrees in 1893. Charles Villiers Stanford, an Irish man, wrote "Songs of the Fleet" when Professor of Music at Cambridge.

We were reminded of Benjamin Britten at Snape Maltings Concert Hall. He was born in Lowestoft, the son of a dentist. His works include opera, other vocal music and orchestral and chamber pieces. Written in 1936 for the Norwich Triennial Festival Britten caused a stir with his "Our Hunting Fathers". Edward German, 1862- 1936, wrote a piece called "The Norwich Symphony". He was better known for incidental music for the stage. London was visited in 1710 by the young musician Georg Frederic Handel. He returned in 1712, composed much including "The Water Music" and died there 50 years later. Handel wrote "The Messiah" to raise funds for the Foundling Hospital. Edward Coates loved London and wrote

the London Suite, the last movement used to introduce the radio programme “In Town Tonight”. Edward Elgar (1857-1934) born in Worcester, however hated London and moved to West Sussex in 1915. As well as writing “Pomp and Circumstance” marches and “Nimrod” he was a keen cyclist.

We listened to music from the West Midlands including music by Gerald Finzi, Sir Arthur Bliss and Malcolm Arnold. In the North and North East we heard music by Frederick Delius (1862-1934) born in Manchester. We listened to lovely English pastoral music composed by Ernest Farrar, educated at Leeds Grammar School who was sadly killed at the end of World War 1.

With thanks to Chris for such an enjoyable course this account only attempts to give a flavour of the contents. I think that most of us agreed that Ralph Vaughan Williams “Lark Ascending” was the quintessential sound of the British landscape.

Doreen Castiglione

WRITTLE BRANCH

Spring Report 2017

On Tuesday afternoons, we welcomed back another popular lecturer, albeit twenty years since he had last lectured in Writtle! **John Walker** has an impressive knowledge of timber framed buildings and we enjoyed a fascinating and detailed course, **the English Vernacular Medieval House**.

We are lucky to have many timber framed houses in Writtle, especially around The Green. Using superb line-diagrams John demonstrated the basic structure of the medieval hall house before going further back to show how they had developed. We could see on the line drawings the way in which a floor could be inserted and the choices for siting a chimney. We looked at specific examples of carpentry which help to date these buildings and learnt about tree ring dating.

John has an excellent collection of slides to illustrate other sorts of building including shops and Guild Halls and some very high-status buildings. East Anglia has a wealth of these buildings and we could compare regional variations and look at examples from the Weald of

Kent. We could also see how different town houses were from the rural farmstead properties.

A brilliant course John, thank you from all of us.

On Wednesday evenings, we enjoyed a first for Writtle, with a course on **Archaeology, Life and Death in Medieval Europe, AD 900-1348**. **Lisa Brundle** is involved working in the Universities of Durham and Canterbury.

We had workshops and discussions to enable us to interpret archaeological and historical evidence. We had excellent computer downloads to remind us of details of monastic life and the terminology for features in the landscape, for the Viking boroughs and the developing cities.

There was an excellent session on the Conversion to Christianity and another on burial practices after the Romans left. It was interesting to discuss the beliefs which our ancestors had on The Plague; some seeing it as punishment, God's vengeance for sins and religious failings, some blaming the Jews for poisoning the wells. Lisa discussed concepts with which we are now unfamiliar, such as Papal Dispensations for those who died of the plague. There were differences between the approach of the Christian and Muslim communities in the face of the impotence of all communities during several outbreaks of plague. The massive drop in population boosted the position of the peasant, as land went untilled. It even altered church architecture as fewer masons meant the choice of simple styles with less carving, so 'Decorative' gave way to 'Perpendicular'. We had to stop the course in 1348 ending with an excellent quiz to remind us of things we had learnt. It would be great to continue one day? Very many thanks Lisa, we wish you all the best in your future career.

Mary Roberts

MERSEA BRANCH

Coastal Ecology and Conservation

The Mersea WEA course on Coastal Ecology, which ran for the Spring term, was well-attended and most interesting. Our tutor was Fred Boot, a lifelong conservationist and former Chairman of Essex Wildlife Trust. He took us back to the end of the Ice Age when Britain separated from the main European land mass and the Doggerland became sea. Even today parts of Britain are sinking and parts are being eroded.

During the course, we saw how the winds and tides shaped our coastline – sometimes giving us cliffs and sometimes creating shingle ridges, sand dunes and salt marshes. We discussed how the sea could change the course of a river, as it did with the River Alde and how constantly shifting shingle created Shingle Street.

For us who live on Mersea it was particularly interesting to learn about estuaries, mudflats and salt marshes. Human efforts to control the effects of the sea were not always successful, but conservationists are constantly learning. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries sea walls were built, but today the cost of maintaining and repairing them is prohibitive and, in any case, they are not always successful. The building of a sea wall involved taking earth from the landward side of the intended wall, leaving about two thirds of the salt marsh on the seaward side, and thus creating a “Borrow Dyke”. Northey Island is an example of less successful sea wall management, while Ray Island shows how leaving matters to nature can be the better option.

We learnt about “Coastal Alignment”, the politically correct term which replaced “Managed Retreat” with its implication of leaving nature to do its worst, and how this had been done both in Tollesbury and at Abbots Hall. It involves breaching the sea wall and allowing the tide to flood previously protected areas. In order for salt marsh to be created the tide must retreat sufficiently. As the land in Tollesbury is so flat the result has been rather more mudflat than salt marsh.

All this is only a fraction of what was covered by the course and on our last day we had a field trip to Fingringhoe Wick Nature Reserve where Fred and Warden Matt led a walk to see an extension to the reserve, where the sea wall had recently been breached, and was already attracting a wide

variety of bird life. After what we had learned we were better able to appreciate what we saw and all agreed that the whole course had been a most worthwhile experience.

GUIDED WALKS

September 13th Maldon guided walk

It is 10.30 in the morning and we are at the Maldon Hythe looking at the Thames barges.

These dozen or so eighteenth/nineteenth century workboats are nestled along the quay with their stout hulls and lofty brown sails. Evocative names like Kitty, Thistle and Hydrogen are painted on their transoms. Pudge, another of the barges alongside, was one of the Dunkirk boats - what a proud heritage. Here at the Hythe is the largest fleet of barges in the UK. They no longer trade wheat, coal and manure, but instead serve the tourist trade with trips and cream teas. Another boat close by - a steam tug named Brent (built in 1945) - is being lovingly restored by the ST Brent Trust (<http://www.steamtugbrent.org/>).

Salt has been a very important commodity in Maldon from the Iron Age and still is right up to the present day. "Maldon Sea Salt" is a large multinational company. In 1905 a salt water lake was create in the promenade park allowing bathers to swim irrespective of tide. This superseded the salt baths and became very popular.

Walking between the seawall and the prom we venture further back into history towards the end of the promenade. In 991 was the Battle of Maldon. Standing here on this blustery autumn day it is easy to imagine those Viking ships stealthily coming around the corner between the channels of the Blackwater. We are reminded of this dark history by the grand statue of Brithnoth, the Anglo-Saxon who fought and died defending his country (<http://www.battleofmaldon.org.uk/>).

Returning towards to the town we spare a few thoughts on literature based in Maldon such as the *Last Kingdom Series* by Bernard Cornwell. We marvel at the black weatherboarding so characteristic of Essex buildings and then climb the steps up to St Mary's church (<http://www.itsaboutmaldon.co.uk/st-marys/>) into the graveyard. With

our backs to the church we have splendid views of the Blackwater enabling us to focus on a multitude of wildlife and the neglected wooden boats eroding away with the tides. St Mary's Church is high enough to be seen for miles around – especially useful for the sailors who could see the distinctive white steeple helping them in their navigation and welcoming them home.

Back on route towards the town the roof lines on the High Street typify the Georgian and Victorian periods but some are a lot earlier - especially the pubs. Halfway up we encounter the purported house of the Fat Man of Maldon – Edward Bright (1721–1750) whose waistcoat could be filled with seven people! Almost at the top we pass the Maeldune Heritage Centre, formerly the Old Plume library donated by Thomas Plume - an eighteenth century benefactor. This building is well worth a visit to get a flavour of Maldon's history (<http://www.maelduneheritagecentre.co.uk/>). Finally at the top we arrive at the Moot Hall. The Moot Hall has survived from the early fifteenth century and remains one of the most important buildings in Maldon. (The Moot Hall has served Maldon as town hall, prison, police station, court house, charter house, armoury, council chamber and public meeting space for nearly 450 years.)

The sun is still shining; it's lunch time and a wealth of tea shops are beckoning!

Thank you to Joan Black for organising and Rosie Watson for leading this fascinating tour.

BRAINTREE BRANCH

Summer Walk 1st June 2017

Mike Bardell, an architect who had worked in the town, guided us round Braintree (being careful to distinguish it from Bocking - one lying on the River Brain, the other on the Blackwater). The main east - west route through the town is based on a pre-Roman road, used later by the Romans which we now know as Stane Street. Why the road takes its bent path, well known to car drivers, no one knows.

The wool trade brought great prosperity to the town; when it fell into decline at the end of the eighteenth century Coutaulds, and later Warners, introduced silk weaving - still active, though on a reduced scale. The arrival of the railway in 1848 facilitated the expansion of industry-

notably Crittalls whose metal window frames were to be seen on many buildings. However the Town Hall boasts high-quality wooden sash window frames, thought to be more fitting to its status.

The Courtaulds were generous with their wealth, funding, among others, the school (now the Museum), the Institute (now a theatre) and a drinking fountain with outlets thoughtfully provided at different heights suitable for dogs, horses and humans.

Plaques, statues and road names speak of the town's history. We had gathered beside the statue of John Ray, the 18th century naturalist, arguably the town's greatest son. Mike took us through a network of 'gants' (elsewhere known as ginnels or snickets), passing en route the Parish 2-cell Cage or lock-up, dating from 1840, which is being carefully preserved. Today's criminals are held in great luxury by comparison!

Braintree deserves to be better known so park your car and take a walk around; Mike's Town Guide is available free of charge.

Bocking is also well worth exploring.

Rosalind Kaye

Colchester Walk, June 28th 2017

We met outside Castle Park and Josie Watson, our guide, promised to take us to some parts of historic Colchester which are off the normal tourist map. We set off down East Hill, passing from the twentieth century (the War Memorial), via a brief glimpse of the twenty-first (the new Arts Centre), to an abundance of Tudor and Georgian houses; built when Colchester was the centre of the East Anglian wool trade and wealthy merchants could afford lavish homes. Josie also pointed out an orphanage for girls, built by philanthropic Victorians, and a Victorian brewery building. Old Colchester, being a garrison town, was well provided with pubs to meet the needs of thirsty soldiers.

From here we walked beside the bank of the Colne, a surprisingly wild area where some of us were distracted by birds and butterflies until we came to The Hythe. This was once a centre of industry, where "all the produce coming into or leaving the town was unloaded from or loaded on to Thames sailing barges. The men working here also needed a great many pubs. Someone left graffiti here recording that he had gone into

central Colchester to catch a glimpse of William Corder, the notorious Red Barn murderer, on his way to London for execution.

Our next stopping place was the large Distillery Pond, a peaceful oasis of greenery. A block of flats now stands on the site of the long vanished distillery. It is hard to imagine how noisy and polluted this area must have been when gin was made here. Today a well, wooded nature reserve follows the course of the Bourne Brook up from Distillery Pond to Cannock Mill, which is currently shrouded in polyphene and in the course of conversion for residential use. From here another footpath leads to on Bourne Mill; arguably the most unusual water-mill in the country. It is elaborately made of stone and brick, with Dutch gables and tall chimneys. Nobody can say for certain whether it was built for a water-mill or as a hunting lodge for the aristocratic Lucas family. As at the old distillery site there is a huge mill pond here. It is surprising that the little Bourn Brook could provide so much water power.

It was a short walk from here to the Abbey Field, an extensive open area owned by the military and on to what many of us were most keen to see, the recently discovered Roman Circus. The Circus is still very much a work in hand. The Colchester Archaeological Trust intends eventually to mark out at ground level the outline of the building so that visitors can see just how big it was. They already have a small museum in what was a NAAFI building and modern reconstructions of the bases of the starting gates have been built over the intact Roman remains. There is a life-size model of part of the seating area to help us envisage what it must have been like for the spectators perched up above the race track.

Here the company divided. We joined in thanking Josie for a most stimulating walk, then some people walked back into town with her, while others remained for a longer look at the Circus and for refreshments in the cafe.

I would like to add my personal thanks to Joan Black for organising the programme of walks this summer. The four I have been on were all most enjoyable and a valuable addition to the WEA's range of activities. I hope there will be more next year.

Christine Burden

Lavenham Walk

Eastern Region WEA organised a number of walks this summer mainly in Essex but one in Suffolk. I joined the walk around historic Lavenham on 26th July. I've lived around Colchester for 27 years and only really been to Lavenham 4 or 5 times so this was a lovely opportunity to have a look around and find out more. Our Blue Badge guide, Josie, gave us an interesting look at this resplendent Suffolk wool town from the large church, the Crooked House, the High Street, down to the small stream and up thru the old roads and lanes, lots beautiful houses and cottages to the Market square where the Tudor Guildhall is now run by the National Trust. It is often only when someone shows you around, points things out, that you truly see and understand the whys and wherefores. I think everyone on this fully booked outing thoroughly enjoyed the pleasant morning's walk and informative talk.

Sudbury 'Silk' Walk, 18th May 2017

A slightly overcast morning greeted the thirty plus participants in the May walk who gathered at the town's tourist information office in the library housed in the Corn Exchange building. This structure has a grand façade while the refurbished interior, now designed for modern use, retains sufficient shape and features aided by large black and white photographs to give visitors an idea of what it was like right up to the early 1960s.

We trailed off to a nearby courtyard away from the noisy traffic where our badged guide ran through the early story of silk in Sudbury right up to modern times and the use of Sudbury silk in items worn by the rich and famous. The wool trade had seen to it that there were skills among the workforce to make the town an attractive base for displaced Huguenots and their silk production following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 prompted their exodus from France. And onwards to view from the outside a short terrace of weavers' homes complete with unusually large first floor windows designed to capture as much light as possible.

While Sudbury offers an opportunity for several themed walks, virtually none can be complete without a bit of Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788) thrown in. So off we went to Gainsborough House, originally the home of the artist's family, a Tudor building but with a fine Georgian brick front added by the family in 1723. Thomas lived there before going off to London later returning to Suffolk on the death of his father. While this walk did not go into the House, we went into the garden where the guide related the process of extracting silk from

the silkworm. Not for the squeamish. A gnarled Mulberry tree, reputedly of some age but not of the variety that was attractive to the silkworm, sat at the garden's centre

Returning to Market Hill, where the market was bustling away and obscuring the Gainsborough bronze statue, we visited the most interesting looking Museum building in Gaol Lane where we saw own large examples of work by several of the town's silk manufacturers displayed hung like tapestries in the old Town Hall's Registry Office.

Looping around the quieter northern part of the town various features associated with the silk industry were pointed out and explained. So rich is the town's story however, that incidentally there is a lot more to tell. But few stories are as dramatic as that of Simon of Sudbury, Archbishop of Canterbury, who unfortunately got caught up in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 and was slain; his mummified head is available for viewing in St Geogory's Church. Thankfully, having learnt of the churchman's fate, we moved on and finished the entertainingly lead walk at the Vanners factory and shop where there were plentiful opportunities to mark the visit to the town with purchases modest or otherwise.

Philip Heady

EDITOR'S NOTE

Please would you send your reports by 3rd February 2018 for the Spring 2018 edition.

Some contributions for the Autumn 2017 edition have not been printed but appear on the Federation web site on the following pages.

Ray Hedley



Billericay - Socratic dialogue



Billericay - captivated by Oscar



Mersea group approaching “Margaret” hide at break in
of the sea wall

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