

# WEA

ESSEX FEDERATION

# NEWS SHEET

SUMMER / AUTUMN 2022



- Support for Unpaid Carers
  - China: Mandarins to Mao
  - A Date with Jane Austen
  - Hardy - No More Mr Nice Guy?
  - Walking Through the Past
- ....and much more

## WEA Eastern Region Essex Federation

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The article on page 22 would not have been possible without the contribution of Duncan Walker of DW Yachts.

Our thanks to him.

## Autumn 2022

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The News Sheet is mainly a  
record of completed courses,  
partly to give readers an idea  
of what they might like.  
We welcome essays from  
members on subjects they  
think will be of interest to  
others.

## LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Well, it's a year since the last EF News and some significant changes have taken place in WEA.

Sadly, we have lost several Branches due to the pandemic and we are all struggling to get our members back. Whether people have lost confidence or have found something else to do, it is certainly disappointing that courses numbers are low. It could be that the introduction of zoom courses has lured some members away. It is obviously easier to sit in a comfy chair at home, rather than making the effort to come out to a possibly draughty hall! However, we are persevering and working hard to attract people back.

We have held two successful One Day Schools. Roger Cooke came to Feering in November and delivered a two-hour session on Robert Walpole. In April we had a WEA Tutor from Berkshire come and give us a day school on Tutankhamun. Both were well attended but in April we increased the price and included a buffet lunch. This proved very popular and so we have decided to repeat this in October, when I'm very pleased to announce that we have managed to get an acclaimed expert on Ernest Shackleton to come and talk about his life. We have also asked a former and very popular WEA Tutor - Adrian Wright - to deliver a Day School on the scenery and railways of New Zealand. Please look at the Essex Federation website for more details and how to book. The price is £22 and will again include a buffet lunch.

The summer programme of walks has proved very popular, but we took the decision to cancel the Clare walk, due to the excessive heat. This has been rearranged for October 7<sup>th</sup>. We also have the walk in Bury St Edmunds on September 7<sup>th</sup>. Hopefully by then we will no longer be suffering from this awful heat!

We recently learnt to our dismay, that Eastern Region is to be combined with part of Southern Region. This has inevitably led to redundancies and the biggest loss to us, of Sarah Moore. Sarah has been involved with WEA for over twenty years, starting in Essex and finally earning the much-deserved post of Regional Manager. We were all very shocked to learn of this and very sorry to see Sarah go. We have also lost other Regional staff members which has meant that you, like my Branch, are probably struggling to get all your courses for Autumn and Spring in place. Please be patient with the remaining/new staff as they tackle the problem. We are still not clear about how the new enlarged Region will work but we do have the interim Head - Emily Barrell - coming to the Federation AGM on 1<sup>st</sup> October. I would urge every Branch to ensure that they are represented at that meeting, in order that Emily can be questioned on the new arrangements. Papers will be going out soon. I hope that you will all have successful courses in the coming term and I do hope we will see you at the AGM.

**Joan Black**

## Dear Branches

I am writing to introduce myself as the interim Head of Region for what is now the South East region, formed by combining the previous Southern and Eastern regions together. You will recently have received an email from Simon Parkinson explaining the changes and the rationale for that change, but I wanted to write and let you know what happens now.

First of all, **very little will change immediately**. Your main contact should be Kate Jewell as previously, and you should feel able to contact her about anything concerning setting up your branch programme. So, please do not worry.



Second, let me explain why I was brought into region: I have been Head of Region for London and Southern since February, and was in the North before that. I am now the permanent Head of Region for Greater London and Thames Valley. I have a lot of experience in supporting regions during change and ensuring that change is positive and productive. My role in your region is to steady the ship, make sure we can keep doing the great things you have always done and make it easier to do so. I am also tasked with ensuring a good transition for the region operationally from being the

*Emily Barrell* 'Eastern' Region, to being one half of the 'South East' Region. The great news is that I have brought my management team with me to help this happen, and we will be with you until a permanent Head of Region can be appointed, hopefully by the end of this term.

This means that on the ground in South East, I have Kiri Baxter who will operationally look after the staff and the contracts, ensuring the contracts continue and are successful and helping the regional teams work together and support each other. I also have Sylvia Gentleman in the London and Thames Valley areas doing exactly the same in the GLA areas. Together they will lead their respective areas, but also work together combining resources and support for administration and quality across the regions too. This makes best use of limited resources where Eastern is particularly understaffed right now.

I also wish to introduce Kerrith Bell who now has oversight and leads the Branch Education Coordinators across the previous southern, Eastern, London and Thames Valley teams. It is exciting to have a Senior Area Education Manager able to take the lead in branch provision across such a wide area and to have a dedicated team to support branches.

I lead strategically on policy and process which affects both areas, particularly around branch provision as well as quality. I set the strategic direction based on the National Strategy approved by the Association Council and I work nationally with colleagues to ease the processes and policies which need to change to allow the WEA to move forward.

I am particularly aware that funding for branch provision as it currently stands needs to change in response to changes to our national and regional funding in the future as more counties devolve and as national funding is retargeted. This means this year is incredibly important for you to start to explore what a self-funded model for branch provision might look like. This does not mean funding will cease this year or next, but it's good to be prudent.

I am aware that many of our current processes aren't helpful, and I am working on several things which I think should benefit branches, for instance:

- We are working out how you can have access to your members list, and still comply with GDPR, which should help with advertising and feeling more connected as a branch.
- We are looking at how we can make contract for services more flexible to support you in contracting with specialist tutors, tackling the shortage of tutors issue.
- I am exploring how we can make day school processes more flexible and applicable to longer courses to explore market led pricing and its effects on branch provision.
- We are looking at how we can better support Branch and Federation level knowledge of how successful your provision is at branch level – so you can make better choices about what courses to run, what subjects are viable and how you can better manage your branch finances.

All of these initiatives require complex changes to a lot of different systems and departments, so I need to work through these systematically. I am hoping you will start to see some changes in the next term.

Meanwhile, Kerrith and her team of ECs will be supporting you, sharing good ideas and practice across the South East, London and Thames Valley areas and raising your concerns with me and the senior management. Please do use your normal governance channels to raise issues.

**Emily Barrell**



### **A note from the Chair of WEA Eastern Region**

**W**e were indeed very sorry that the structural changes that had to be made to the WEA nationally, and in particular in the East, led to the loss of Sarah Moore as our Head of Region. Having worked closely with her for over fifteen years, I would like to thank her for her huge contribution to the Region's success. The Regional Committee has communicated its concerns about this and the loss of a Management Governance Officer dedicated solely to the Region to the Association Council and to the Trustees. However, I am now confident that Emily Barrell and her team will serve us well in the future and help to maintain and develop further adult educational provision in the whole of the new South East Region. Eastern and Southern Regions combined had probably about half of the number of branches in the country, bearing in mind that other Regions do not have the same kind of branch structure.

Emily introduces herself and her team in this magazine. Members will have an opportunity to hear from them at our Regional AGM on 17<sup>th</sup> November. I hope every Branch will be represented: check with your Branch Secretary!

All members should have received the notice of the online Members Conference and WEA Council Annual General Meeting being held on Friday 30<sup>th</sup> September. I hope to see you there... The workshops and discussions will cover the following topics:

- Designing the learning communities of the future
- Improving learner experiences today
- Reaching more diverse groups of learners
- Developing and strengthening our local branches
- Supporting our volunteers
- WEA's strategy for the coming years

The results of the recent Council elections and reports from the year will be presented, as well as the winner of the WEA Outstanding Volunteer of the Year Award.

**Ron Marks**

## **BILLERICAY BRANCH**

### **Care 2 Support Unpaid Carers with Billericay Branch**

**T**he 'Care 2' initiative came out of the pandemic when I heard a carer voice 'lockdown is nothing new, it's like that every day' and for the 140,000 in Essex (180,000 including Southend and Thurrock) of which 10,000 are children that is a sobering thought!

At about the same time, a WEA email winged its way into our inboxes calling for bids to the Innovation Fund (a national initiative in which Volunteers were invited to bid for monies from a central pot of £40K).

We just had to 'give it a go' and surprise, surprise secured approximately £9k to reach out and offer something online to those carers.

Zoom and Canvas fitted this brief perfectly thanks to the WEA responding so quickly to the challenge of going online. It wasn't perfect (we all have a comment or two.....) However, this meant we could offer something to carers in their own space recognising that even if many could get out, for all sorts of reasons they didn't e.g., their paid for carer was held up or.....? It's been great when a carer who was delayed getting home joined a 'Care 2' session on the train plus another 'zoomed in' from a motor home!

Suddenly we had a green light and from a standing start in September and thanks to Eastern Region and Sarah Moore identifying Sally Ridealgh to work with us, we have offered a range of free tasters, sessions and online experiences. Carers do not necessarily want a course as they find it so hard to commit as their priority is to their 'special person'.

We know from research that carers tend therefore to look after others rather than themselves; hence the focus of 'Care 2' is in line with the WEA's aim to improve Health and Wellbeing.

We have offered mainly taster sessions with a break and time out for a cuppa and chat. We have responded to requests from Carers e.g., a 3-week Introduction to British Sign Language and a follow up session on a very successful Seated Yoga taster. We have enjoyed a number of activity sessions e.g., making a lasagne pot for the garden and the





opportunity to cook along with the tutor and other class members has been welcomed. Carer feedback has been so positive to this approach with comments like 'it's good to have a take away', 'a meal prepped and ready to go later' and 'this feels like I am still doing something for the person I care for...'.

'Care 2' is also working in partnership with Action for Family Carers – a Charity based in Maldon supporting unpaid Carers across Essex. It's been good to link up and complement their 'Feeling Good, Caring Well' service. Our aim for 'Care 2' going forward is to help carers, former carers and those supporting carers to 'Feel Better, Care Better'!!

Carers tell us they need a break/respite and to be themselves i.e., a parent, husband, mother, daughter and a person in their own right – 'me time'. However, so often services and support focus on the cared – for i.e., the person with the condition e.g., dementia activity groups. We felt we were doing something right when a carer 'stepped in' right at the beginning of a virtual visit session to Warley Place to congratulate the WEA commenting 'this is the first time I have ever been offered something for me and without having to ask'. That felt like a WOW moment!

Our 'Care 2 Calendar', thanks to 10 tutors, and not just from Essex, has delivered 17 of the 19 planned sessions/short courses averaging 12 enrolments per class to nearly 200 people of which almost 100 were new to WEA.

What next? 'Care 2' 2022/2023 is in the planning as we just need to do more for more and even more for carers. It's been hard during a pandemic to find out what carers want and need. It's been hard to spread the word and to reach carers especially as they often do not realise they are one. We also know it is hard to spread the word about the WEA and all that it can do and offer.

So, we have a 'to do list'. We are calling out to all of you for support, ideas and links to carers and carer organisations. Do join us and get in touch please with any comments and suggestions.

### Denise Fielding and Billericay WEA Branch

Note: An unpaid Carer is a person of any age (they can be a child or adult) who looks after a family member, partner or friend who needs help because of illness, frailty, disability (mental or physical), addiction and cannot cope without their support.

Research tells us there are over 7 million nationally.

### From Mandarins to Commissars

8 Week Wednesday evening online course

Tutor: David Prynn

# China A Long March

Billericay Branch has yet to make its long-awaited return to the High Street Reading Rooms for face-to-face courses. We have had a busy time encouraging everyone to engage with Zoom and Canvas. Members, friends, and supporters have greeted each other on virtual courses and 'shared' cups of tea and cake on Zoom socials. On our planned return in September, we shall be remembering our last online course about China – From Mandarins to Commissars – with tutor David Prynn. This was an 8-week Wednesday evening course running online at a time when we would have socially distanced ourselves as we passed in the street. Billericay students were spotted at this time shouting greetings from afar. Along with a well-intentioned parting caution of – "take care" a new catch phrase was formed "see you tonight in China"!

Billericay Branch has always run



*Mandarins were Imperial Chinese officials. Often lampooned as being sensitive about their status (there was a complex hierarchy) they had to pass increasingly stiff examinations to reach the top. And, whatever their faults, they ran China from 605 to 1905AD*

a Summer evening course, giving those that work during the day a chance to be part of the WEA. Many students and tutors from around the Region and beyond, have been able to join us on Zoom, including those who would have had difficulties joining us physically. We were privileged to have had David Prynne as an online tutor as he has travelled in China and adds details, personal insights, and photographs he has taken to his course.

The course detailed the dramatic, often violent, history of China. David began with a general view of this vast country, its natural environment, and the languages and ethnicities of its people. With the use of maps, illustrations and photographs he charted the historical power struggles of this ancient civilisation. He described the early dynasties, culture, and trade - with a concentrated look at the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. With the overthrow of the Qing Empire, Republicanism led to trouble with the Warlords, Japanese invasions, and civil war. Beyond this came the fight between Nationalists and Communists and Mao's devastating policies. It was not all dates and battles.

We learnt of old Shanghai, the place of women in society and interesting tales and characters along the way. The tutor gave us the background and insights into modern-day China, now a major world power with a flourishing economy.

Perhaps with our newly acquired computing skills, interest in China sparked by David's course, and a world once again open to travel, then "see you tonight in China" may not seem so far-fetched!

**Susan Fisher**



*Historically, Chinese women's status depended on class - members of the upper echelons might lead relatively leisured lives - albeit with complex social obligations, but lower class women could expect a life of toil. However, higher class women were more often exposed to the horrific practice of footbinding - to create 'attractive' small feet. After the revolution, the custom - already waning - was banned, but women were still subject to restrictions - even Mao's wife (above, right) couldn't avoid the severe revolutionary dress code.*

**The 'Sunday Literature Group'**  
**Sunday mornings**  
**Tutor: Margaret Mills**

## *Sunday: A Date with Jane*

In 2021, Covid-19 was still very much part of our lives and looked to remain so for the foreseeable future. The words 'video conferencing', 'Zoom' and 'Teams' had become part of our everyday conversation in this very different world we were all experiencing.

Billericay Branch had planned a series of online courses on English literature, beginning with the life, influences and novels of Jane Austen, and the question arose as to the day of the week that would be most suitable for these sessions. There was feedback from some course members that Sunday was the day of the week they found the longest, when they felt most in need of something to put all the isolation from



normal everyday interactions – and the pandemic bad news – on the back-burner for just a short time, and this might be especially true for those who were living alone. So, the idea was born to arrange six separate sessions covering, in chronological order of their publication, each of the six novels written by Jane Austen, and to hold these on a Sunday.

Subject to gaining the WEA's approval for this plan, we felt that one



*Steventon Church - whose rectorship provided Jane Austen's father with his modest living, secured only through family influence. The Reverend George Austen's fairly precarious existence (by his upper-class standards) was supplemented with tutoring and farming. Throughout, his well-connected wife held hopes of at least one modest inheritance. This shortage of cash, the need to cultivate family connections and the necessity of a good marriage may go some way to explain several of Jane Austen's dominant themes.*

session per fortnight would be a good idea, as this would allow a free Sunday morning in between for any other plans or commitments.

WEA readily agreed to our request for Sunday sessions, and lo and behold, The Sunday Literature Group (aka The Sunday Club) came into being! We started with the first session on Austen's first published work, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and this was entitled *The Work of Jane Austen: Changing Circumstances and the Need for **Sense and Sensibility***. The session was held via Zoom on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2021

from 10.00 am – 12.00 pm, and as it was well-attended, it was followed by *The Work of Jane Austen: **Pride & Prejudice** – Beware of First Impressions* on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> November. Austen's four remaining novels – *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* – followed at fortnightly intervals.

Although Jane Austen is the famous one in the Austen family, we discovered that her parents and her seven siblings were also fascinating people with their own stories, and it is almost certain that one of our

greatest 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century social observers used friends and family members characteristics in most of her works, often with her tongue firmly in her cheek! The way that our dates worked out meant that the two sessions on the posthumously published Austen novels (*Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*) took place in January 2022.

Rather than allow The Sunday Literature Group to disappear, and with Covid-19 still (sadly) a part of our lives, we decided that some of the work of novelist Elizabeth Gaskell should be next on our online agenda. On Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2022 we considered Gaskell's much-loved work *Cranford*, followed by *North and South* on 22<sup>nd</sup> May.

One of the biggest benefits of online courses has undoubtedly been the widening of participation. Perhaps most of us have seen a lecture or course advertised at some point in the past and wished it were possible to get to the venue in question, but for whatever reason it is not possible. So often people are prevented from joining in due to factors such as geographical location, caring responsibilities, health or mobility issues or lack of viable transport, and it adds a new dimension to our online gatherings when we have members who are able to join us courtesy of Zoom from all over the country, as well as being able to welcome local course members. Naturally, our first question to those from outside Essex is often 'what's the weather doing where you are?'

Perhaps best of all, it has been so positive to hear from many participants that the Sunday sessions have been something to look forward to, rather than Sunday being their least favourite day of the week, and that participation has been so rewarding.

**Margaret Mills - Course Tutor**



*Elizabeth Gaskell. Where Jane Austen chronicled the lives and preoccupations of the landed and professional classes, Gaskell's subject matter was society as a whole and how its different components interacted. Her interests extended as far as the working conditions of factory workers and the worlds of the new 'men of science' and the businessmen who were changing the nation.*

# Can't go out? Zoom in.

The last Billericay WEA class meeting before Lockdown was a very quiet affair. We guessed it might be some time before we met in person again. The chairs were wiped down and socially distanced. Everyone was subdued!

I should have realised our hardworking Chair, Denise and the Committee, Margaret, Joan, Julia, Sue and Christine would not just give up but embark on ensuring the Branch survived.

It began with a text from Denise to say we needed to connect with Zoom and sending a personal computer link to friends and supporters. I had a camera on my PC and some experience with email and Word. We were



*William Wordsworth, arguably the most renowned of the Romantic poets. His famous line 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' might be adapted for WEA stalwarts to 'I wasn't lonely with iCloud'.*

*He defied the popular image of poets as sensitive and otherworldly. After many vicissitudes he lived to a mainly robust 80.*

given a date for a first 'get together' and virtual meeting up. On the day everyone managed to join the Zoom, some a little later than others, sometimes with help from Denise on the phone. Margaret, our Treasurer, had studied the details of 'zooming' in preparation to help. Margaret guided us through how to mute, video, chat etc showing great patience. Her help was invaluable and is ongoing. Denise announced we would have practice sessions and plan courses with our stalwart local tutors, Margaret Mills and Ted Woodgate.

Denise organised Zoom 'meetings where the 'members' had coffee and chat and caught up with WEA, Branch and other news e.g., the vaccination; at the same time often asking Margaret for help with how to use chat, emojis, reactions etc. We had a lot of help from Eastern Region, especially Sally in Essex to set up courses, tasters and keep things going. We became more confident, surprising ourselves with our newfound skills. We were ready to begin our scheduled yet slightly amended Summer Term Programme - 'The Romantic Poets' with Ron Marks - with almost everyone including the tutor on a steep learning curve. Those few moments watching the never-ending circles thinking "Will I get in?" or "What did I do wrong?" if there is a hitch. Then the joy of suddenly seeing your friends and meeting new students and members from other parts of the country.

Two years later and Billericay Branch are still 'zooming' and enjoying our summer term Course 'From Mandarins to Commissars' with David Prynne thanks to WEA and Zoom. It has been a pleasure to connect with tutors and those from different areas of the country. Class members have taken part in short courses, long courses, day courses covering a multitude of subjects with tutors and members from various areas of the UK. Denise with Eastern Region has also begun a project called 'Care 2' to help support unpaid Carers. It has offered varied, enjoyable taster courses and an online break for Carers.

The WEA lecture programme plus courses made a very big difference to many participants. Something to put on the calendar on the wall when it was looking very empty and forlorn; to look forward to and enjoy. Like many others, I shall continue to learn and join courses with WEA on Zoom.

Billericay WEA Branch starts an 8 week course in September in our usual meeting place and face-to-face at last.

Thank you, WEA especially Billericay Branch and Eastern Region.



*Mandarins. Not just pretty faces - they ruled.*

**Jean Miles – Student and WEA Member**



WEA Short Course  
'Thomas Hardy: The Man, His Work and His Wessex'  
Tutor: Margaret Mills  
Face-to-face in The Reading Rooms  
then online Zoom with Canvas Course!

**A**ll was going to plan for the Billericay Branch and its first venture to return to face to face courses with our own local and very popular tutor, Margaret Mills and in our very own high street and special venue - the Reading Rooms.

Less than 10 days to go and a bout of COVID together with post-COVID fatigue turned all those plans around. However, with thanks to our tutor, Margaret plus Sally Ridealgh and the WEA office working with the Branch, we successfully moved to Zoom and an online course.

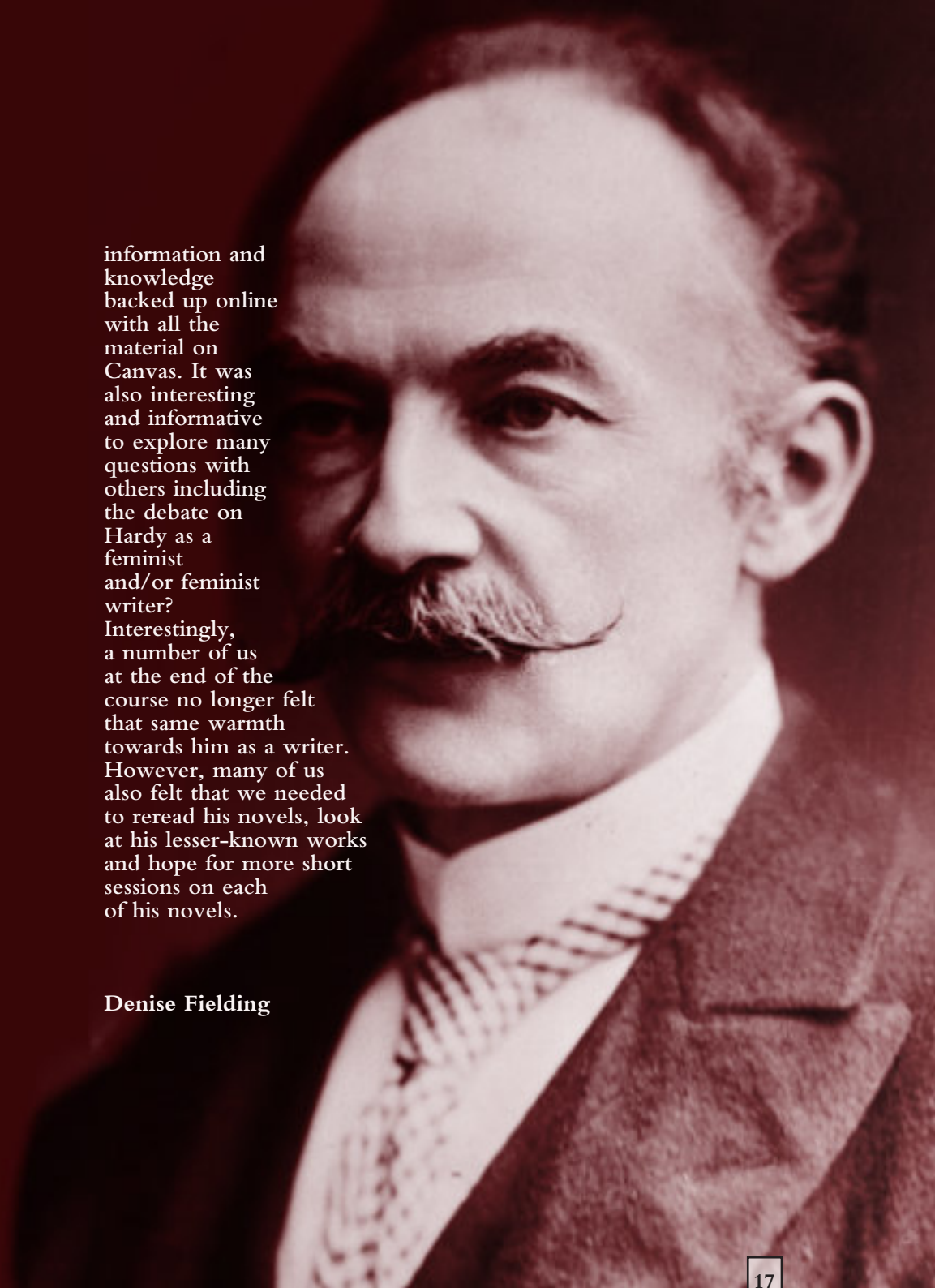
It was a real success in every sense even though regretfully we did lose some students and mainly those who have clearly told us that they really only want to do face-to-face courses. We were disappointed too as a team given all of that planning. In addition, we know people miss seeing each other face-to-face, enjoying the refreshment break when we can catch up with news, asking questions and exploring ideas. Nevertheless, we were delighted not to disappoint all by still running the course online for students not all from Billericay or even Essex. We lost a few of the original 24 but gained others even on the morning of the course. Margaret has a great following and from far and wide whether it be those who have done a local course, an online course and/or listened to her featuring on the national WEA Thursday evening talks. Margaret also makes many other contributions to the local community. She really is a star!

National Writing Day 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022 was perfect for our course on Thomas Hardy: The Man, His Work and His Wessex. Margaret gave us an overview of this major Victorian novelist's life and works outlining a number of key themes and influences including his passion for 'his Wessex' - the countryside, nature, the scenery and landscape as well as folklore. A number of us were surprised to learn that besides those very well-known novels e.g. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, he wrote 50 short stories e.g. *The Three Strangers* and 8 volumes of poetry -about 1000 poems e.g. *The Ruined Maid* and 1912-1913 in response to the death of his wife, Emma. He was in fact a World War I poet. A man who went from being an architect to the highest earning author in Britain!

Margaret has such an ability to draw you in and bring a subject to life whilst at the same time sharing so much

information and knowledge backed up online with all the material on Canvas. It was also interesting and informative to explore many questions with others including the debate on Hardy as a feminist and/or feminist writer? Interestingly, a number of us at the end of the course no longer felt that same warmth towards him as a writer. However, many of us also felt that we needed to reread his novels, look at his lesser-known works and hope for more short sessions on each of his novels.

Denise Fielding



## **'A Bright Idea'**

**Tutor: Ted Woodgate**

### **'Who does Billericay think it is?'**

**M**odelled on 'Who do you think you are?', local tutor Ted Woodgate once again came up with 'a bright idea' and a new model for courses and working with the Billericay Branch.

The idea was formulated following one of Ted's courses in which he shared his story within the context of wider economic social and political influences – an approach that sparked much further research and problem solving by Branch member, Margaret Kirk. Ted found out much about his family history and was spurred on to develop a new course. If you have done one of Ted's courses you will know how engaging his approach is and how there is always the desire to do more.

No surprises then when Ted mentions 'a bright idea' after a session! The innovation this time was his proposal to engage class members more by developing a course which linked the story of one member and used the family history skills of another member overlaid by Ted's knowledge of the social, economic and political times. 1+1+1 = 'a bright idea!' and that electric light bulb was truly switched on.

A first for student Chris Wilkins, who shared her family history, her story and move to Billericay supported by photographs, maps and information researched by Margaret woven together by Ted. Online may not be everyone's favourite but it helped Chris, who had never done anything like this before – at home delivering the course as if she was telling her story over a cup of tea. Margaret's skills provided PowerPoints and much background not only about the family, Hornchurch and then Billericay but about research and family history.

We all loved it and to quote someone on the course – 'Brilliant- A Billericay Dream Team'. I was engrossed even though I am not a family history fan. There were numerous questions, requests to look at photographs again and follow up points about the family, place and times. Chris' story took us to our High Street and a well-known shop – Kitts in the 1950s – relevant when we all know what is happening with retail today. We also had a couple of 'WOW' moments as a perk of doing Zoom courses. A student from the Midlands advised she had enrolled as her family roots were just down the road but then to her and our astonishment, she told us she shared the same family name with Chris! There was even more intrigue when an extract from a census record included the name of another local member!

The joy of WEA is that there is always something to learn, something to enjoy and someone in the class to learn from. This course ticked all of those boxes, thanks to another one of Ted's bright ideas!

**Denise Fielding**



*Billericay as shown in the Ordnance Survey of 1892. What's evident is how much land has since been built on. Note, too at the north of the town the Union Workhouse. That it's vanished must be seen as some sort of progress. The pictures on the right show Billericay as it was at about the same time. Three are by Fred Spalding, a renowned and prolific Chelmsford photographer.*



# WALKS

## A walk and visit to the Roman Barrow and Mersea Island

On a rather blustery morning in late May, a WEA group gathered at The Roman Barrow, East Mersea where the custodian Pat and her committee gave us a warm welcome.

A brief history of the Mersea Barrow was eloquently explained by Sue Howlett and we gained access to the mound which was well lit and in a good state of preservation. This piece of Roman history is unusual in never having been plundered by grave robbers. When it was excavated in 1912 by archaeologists from Colchester Museum, a green glass vessel was discovered which contained bone fragments of what is assumed to have been an important member of Romano British society. Data extracted from the bones tells us they were those of a male, probably in his 40s and suffering from a bone disease. For those wishing to see the glass urn it is in West Mersea Museum, where again we received a hospitable welcome with tea and coffee break and a quick look around the High Street-based museum.

After being introduced to Alan Mogridge, a green badge guide, we set off for a tour of the harbour area, firstly going into the parish church where Alan explained the lack of coloured stained glass [due to bombing in WW2] and the history of the two replacement windows.

As we walked towards the hard Alan told us many anecdotes one of which I will briefly recall:

A resident of Mersea Island purchased a vintage racing yacht after the war and moored it in the harbour. Research revealed that the boat was originally owned by Spain's King Alfonso XIII. In 1931 he was deposed by republicans who sold off much royal property. Somehow the yacht found its way to West Mersea. When the Spanish monarchy was restored in 1975 the now owner wrote to the Spanish Embassy in London to ask if King Juan Carlos would be interested in buying the yacht. An embassy emissary said that they had been looking for the vessel for years. A price was agreed and the yacht restored to Spain!

One of the most interesting WEA Essex Federation walks I have attended to date.

**Charles Soule. The Maplesteads WEA**



Mersea's mystery racing yacht *Hispania* as it is today after comprehensive restoration.

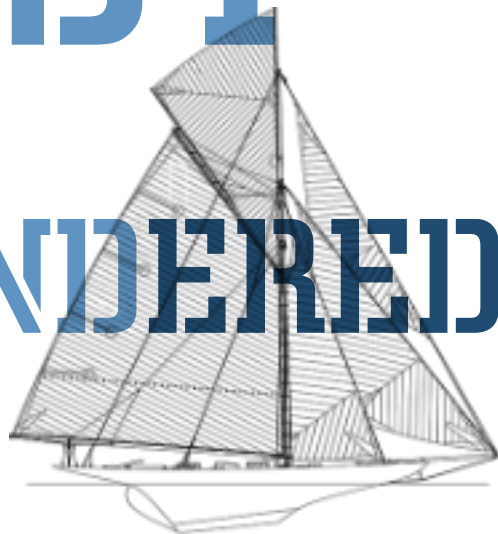
The real story of its recovery differs somewhat from the account opposite, but is no less fascinating.

See over.

Image reproduced by kind permission



# LOST AND FOUNDERED



*William Fife's original sail plan for Hispania*

The 15 metre ocean racing yacht - *Hispania* - was built in Spain in 1909 for King Alfonso XIII to designs by the innovative naval architect William Fife III. It was raced in international regattas and used to promote Spain as a desirable holiday destination. The Great War stopped these activities, and in 1916 *Hispania* was sold to a Norwegian. By around 1936, the yacht had fetched up in England. During WW2 it was stripped of most useful parts by the Royal Navy. After the war, partly adapted, it was used as a floating home. Over time it sank deep into the Mersea mud.

In 1998 the hulk was discovered and offered to the Spanish - King Juan Carlos was aware but not involved. Duncan Walker, then of Fairlie Yachts in Hamble takes up the story:

"Dr. William Collier was the person responsible for making this all happen. He formed the link between the Fundacion de Hispania and Mr. Mold the owner at the time.

Once we had taken possession of the hulk the first task was to remove, by hand, the ballast stowed in the bilges. At some time of the years the hull had become very distorted and I believe I recall that the beam shelf on one side had been cut (a piece of timber running the full

length to give longitudinal strength). The salvage operation was supervised by Harry Spencer whose tug (the *Hoffland*) and lighter barge was used. Harry had worked with us to salvage *Mariquita* in Pin Mill a few years before. The actual crane lift (mobile crane by Baldwins) was difficult.

Firstly because it was difficult to find a secure grounding for the crane pads and secondly because the steelwork in the hull was so weak. The first attempt at the lift was a near disaster, in spite of double slings under the keel and extra slings under the stern and bow as we lifted it became rapidly clear that the hull just forward of the saloon was too weak and was collapsing under the load of the sling. We had to stop the lift and delay for 24 hours to construct a timber framework to resist the loads. The second lift was successful and the yacht was lifted clear of the mud lowered into a cradle on the lighter and the vessel towed to Hamble.

I should at this stage give you the personal links my family had with Mersea - my great grandmother Nellie Walker lived in Tresco, Mersea Avenue, dying in the mid sixties. I have therefore known Mersea in my youth as the family kept a yacht there at some stage and my father was well acquainted with Harold Cutts who owned/managed Wyatts. As a young child I recall staying on the Ark Royal houseboat.

During the salvage Harold appeared and I walked up to him and

said 'Harold you have known me all my life, but you haven't seen me since I was 13'. I then turned away and walked off. As expected (because I do look like my father) 15 minutes later Harold came over with a big grin on his face and said - you are Ken Walker's son! Simon Cutts came over later in the day to shake my hand."

In 2005, *Hispania* was transferred to Astilleros de Mallorca for the installation of interior fittings and rig. During this time, the original Fundacion went bankrupt and the project was rescued by the Fundacion Isla Ebusitana. The yacht was relaunched in 2007. The total cost of the exercise was in the region of 3 million Euros. Today *Hispania* sails from its home port of Puerto Sherry near Cadiz and is regularly raced in classic 15 Metre Class events. It is also used to train young mariners.



*King Alfonso XIII, for whom the yacht was built. His numerical designation proved all too accurate a portent - he abdicated in 1931.*

# A City, an Island and a Village

## Converted Buildings of Colchester

This was a very interesting walk, led by Josie Watson. We started at the War Memorial, which is in fact not a War Memorial (which should contain the names of the town's war dead) at all but a Cenotaph, and finished at another 'converted building' - the Norman castle keep was built on the site of the Roman Temple of Claudius. Walking around the town centre, we saw a cinema that was a post office, a pub that was a theatre, a theatre that was a chapel. It was very good to hear residents of Colchester sharing their memories of Colchester as it had been.

*(Right) Colchester's Playhouse pub in two of its several incarnations. It was first converted from a theatre to an ABC cinema (top), then to a Coral Bingo hall. Current owners Wetherspoons have restored the name, the interior and the exterior (lower pic)*



*Thaxted Windmill*

*This and pic opposite by Lesley Naish.  
Reproduced by kind permission*



## Historic Harwich

This was a fascinating walk around the old town of Harwich, led by a member of the Harwich Historic Society. We started at the Ha'penny Pier, which is one of the only surviving wooden piers which was used by paddle steamers. Fortified by a drink at the café on the pier, we passed the site of the Naval Dockyard, and then on to the treadwheel crane. This has been likened to a giant hamster wheel operated by naval crew (probably the press ganged ones!). It was moved from the dockyard and is much restored but it is easy to see how it works, and what hard work it must have been to lift and move large timbers etc. We were lucky to be able to go inside the Electric Palace Theatre, which lay almost derelict for many years before being restored by a band of dedicated volunteers, with the help of grants. Recently it was used as a location in the latest Downton Abbey film, when the family had a trip to a local cinema, so you can see for yourself.



*'A giant hamster wheel'*

It is thought that the Mayflower was built in Harwich sometime before 1600, and was commanded and part-owned by her Master, Captain Christopher Jones, whose house still stands on Kings Head Street near the waterfront. We visited the Captain's house where an exhibition was put together in the Captain's house for the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the sailing in 1620.

## Thaxted

John Betjeman said of Thaxted: "There is no town in north Essex (and very few in England) to equal in beauty, compactness and juxtaposition of medieval and Georgian architecture". We started at the Guildhall (not actually a guildhall, but probably a market hall) at the head of the main street. We looked at the medieval houses in Fishmarket Street, before heading up the hill to the windmill. The day was very hot so we decided not to do a longer walk to see the windmill from a distance, but instead wandered through the churchyard and past the almshouses. We visited the parish church, where they were preparing for the Thaxted Festival. This was begun by Gustav Holst in 1916 when he was living nearby, but unfortunately ceased after a couple of years. It was revived in 1980, and continues to attract a wide audience.

**Lesley Naish**

## WRITTLE

Norse  
Mythology.  
Tuesday  
Mornings  
Tutor:  
Ben Pestell

*Tolkien's  
myth hits*

*J R R Tolkien fought in the Battle of the Somme. He is thought to have formulated The Silmarillion during recovery from active service.*



Finally, after two years of Covid Restrictions, we were able to meet in the Village Hall. Some of us had 'met' Ben online during lockdown and enjoyed his lectures on Greek Myths and plays, so it was good to meet in person. A few of the Class had their interest in the Sagas piqued by visits to Iceland, some of us just enjoy the challenge of learning something new.

Certainly the Viking worldview was novel, and the illustrations of the 'world tree', Yggdrasil, helped us to understand it. They had a Creation myth and, in a world subject to violent geological events, had views on how their world would end in Apocalypse. The rigours of their homeland were reflected in their warlike society. Their gods were as devious and unreliable as those of the Greeks, so the sagas included shape-shifting and power struggles. As an illiterate society they relied on their poets both for entertainment and as memorialists of great kings and great battles. The written versions of the sagas were set down after the Vikings had converted to Christianity, at a time when their earlier beliefs would otherwise have been lost. Some of the names, like Fenrir the werewolf, and ideas like shapeshifting appear in more modern writers, especially Tolkien,



*Yggdrasil the holy tree, the centre, according to Norse myth, of all existence. There the Gods met daily. Its branches are said to reach into the heavens, and its roots extend far and wide. Gardeners will recognise ivy as having similar characteristics.*



*Norns were part of the complex hierarchy of Norse deities. The three top Norns were responsible for watering Yggdrasil and had an influence on destiny. In addition, they seem to have had some influence on the displacing of an earlier set of gods. Lower status Norns were said to visit every newborn child to decide on its future. Needless to say, it didn't pay to upset them.*

Wagner and J K Rowling, along with dwarves, giants and elves. The lectures were illustrated with museum figurines and photos of picture stones. Sadly, a massive fire in 1728 in Copenhagen had destroyed many manuscripts. The period we covered was mainly 850-1250 AD.

Ben touched on the format of the eddic metre in the poetry but also drew out the poets' use of dry humour. They used ironic understatement; a figure of speech called 'litotes'. They also used 'kennings', replacing one word with a phrase: the 'destroyer of all wood' for fire. The names and their spelling were challenging, but it was an interesting and enjoyable course, and we look forward to welcoming Ben back in 2023.



**Plants, Politics and Economics.**  
**Thursday evening. Online,**  
**Tutor: Andrew Beharrell.**

Andy had taught an earlier course called 'Money, Money, Money' so we were delighted to have another course from him. He had created nine separate lectures based on economically significant plants. Each lecture started with five clues of varying levels of obscurity, often including the geographical location of the plant.

Once we identified the subject, Andy would say when it first appeared historically and then develop the story over time. On the first evening he asked which plants we would expect him to cover, and it later turned out that we had guessed five correctly. The other four were very unexpected. The stories covered plant espionage, war and the debunking of some myths. I cannot be more precise, or it would spoil his carefully constructed plot! However, each session included some very revealing economic insights into world trade.



*Was tobacco among the plants discussed? It was once one of the world's most valuable traded products. Early promoters weren't unhappy to see its cultivation and trade shown as a benign relationship between 'Indians' (often depicted as more African than Native American) and bosses. And as the true nature of the business was exposed, reform took decades of campaigning against obstinate and entrenched tobacco interests.*

An excellent course, huge thanks and we wish Andy a most enjoyable sabbatical boat trip.  
**Mary Roberts**

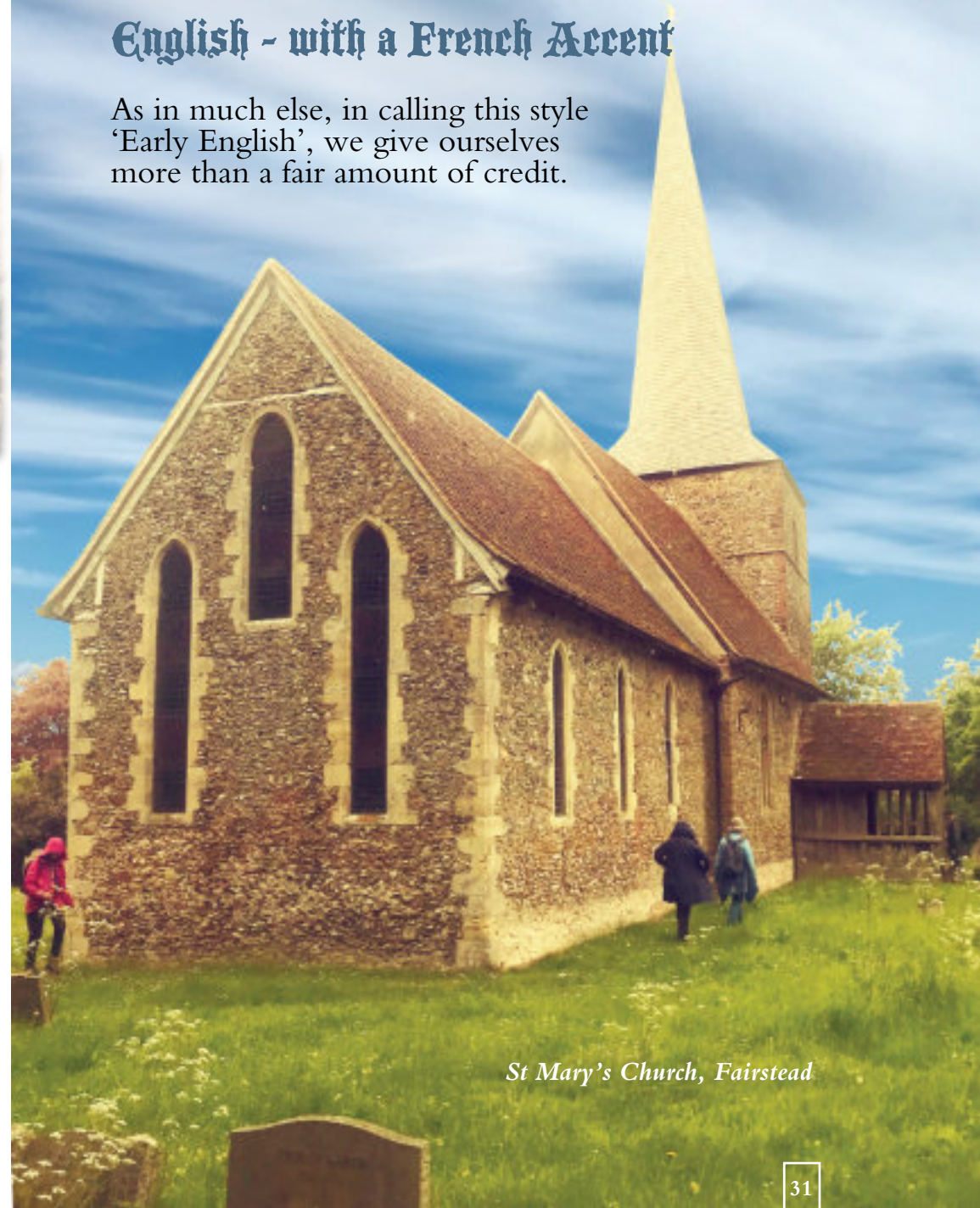
*Although slavery was abolished in the US by 1865, improvements were glacially slow. And even then, tobacco's travails weren't over. Through the twentieth century its health hazards became increasingly hard to deny or conceal. The industry's reaction included advertising featuring trusted personalities. This ad, with Gunsmoke's James Arness and Amanda Blake was merely reassuringly anodyne. Others were more blatant. 'Kind to your throat' claimed Craven 'A'.*



**Early English Architecture in Essex**

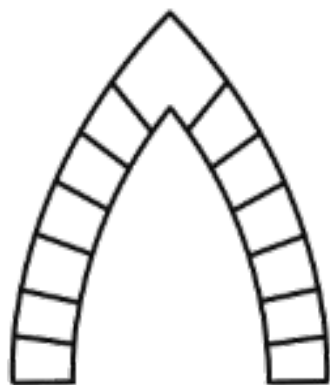
## **English - with a French Accent**

As in much else, in calling this style 'Early English', we give ourselves more than a fair amount of credit.



*St Mary's Church, Fairstead*

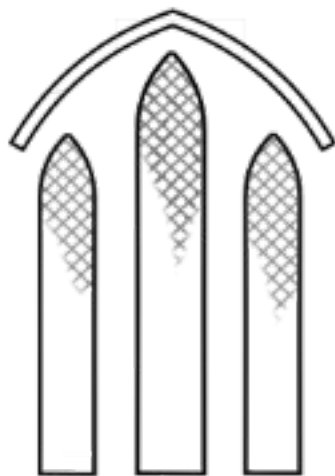




*Pointed arch*



*Decoration: often with repeating floral themes*



*Grouped lancet windows - a common Early English feature*

The design style that emerged in the late 12<sup>th</sup> Century and persisted for the next 100 or so years was largely a French innovation.

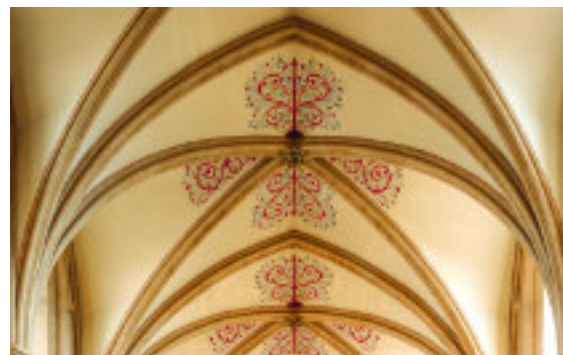
However, some of the finest examples are found in England – most notably Salisbury and Wells Cathedrals. Many other churches – great and obscure – have features that date from the period.

The main characteristic is the pointed arch – at this stage tightly acute – a true departure from the round-arched Roman style that had up to then been prevalent. Arches and windows were at first narrower.

The masons responded by building to soaring heights and by placing important windows (as in the east end of the church) in closely arranged groups. The greater load-bearing capacity of this structure allowed roofs to be constructed of stone, rather than wood which was prone to fire.

Other innovations included the greater use of floral (in place of geometric) decoration, use of rib vaulting and clustered columns.

As mentioned, the style first emerged in France where it was used in the construction between 1135 and 1148 of the Abbey of Saint-Denis near Paris. A little later, the Cathedral at Sens was built with the involvement of the master mason/architect William of Sens, who may also have worked in Paris, Rheims and Arras. He then came to Canterbury where, from 1174 to 1177 he supervised the rebuilding of the choir in Canterbury Cathedral. Flying buttresses, ribbed vaulting and soaring arcades were all components of the new style he introduced. It



*Ribbed vaulting in Wells Cathedral. This allowed downward forces to be transferred into the pillars so that roofs could be constructed from stone instead of wood.*

*Wells was the first Cathedral constructed completely in the new Early English style. It was started in about 1175 and completed by 1239.*



*Doorways - pointed arch decorated with floral motifs*

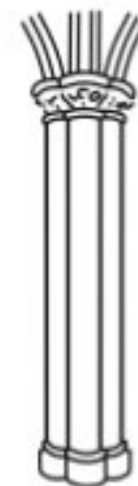


*Capitals: round and often elaborately floral*

appears he did not live to see his work completed – the project is said to have been finished by someone called William of England, of whom nothing more is known.

The style was taken up for the construction of more modest churches. However, unlike the great cathedrals, where the overall appearance was generally maintained – many parish churches suffered the vagaries of changing priorities and tastes. Thus, in looking for authentic examples, we often have to look at parts of much-altered structures.

St Mary's Church in Fairstead (between Witham and Braintree) has avoided most of the knockings-about (or Victorian 'restorations') that many churches have endured. Even here, there is evidence that the original Norman church was much-adapted to the new style.



*Piers - round With detached shafts*



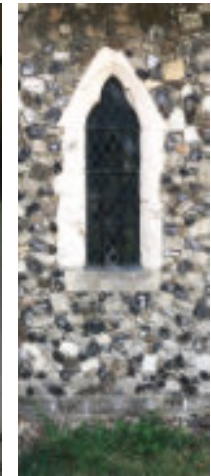
The tower of All Saints Maldon which features a classic lancet window. The structure is exceptional in that it is triangular - not instantly obvious. This shape is thought to have been the result of a twelfth century planning decision.

Below, another lancet in a church tower - that of St Mary Fairstead. The bricks around the window suggest that Roman ruins were still being exploited in the 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> Centuries



(Right) An internal view of the lancets in the east end of St Mary Fairstead, giving an idea of the thickness of the walls. (Far right) A lancet in the North wall of St Giles Mountnessing, a church mainly of later build.

Among other churches which have Early English features are St Mary's Broxted, All Saints High Laver, All Saints Sutton and St Edmund Tendring.



## In Memoriam

### Peter Norfolk

Essex Federation was saddened to hear that Peter Norfolk has died. Peter was a very able and committed Vice Chairman of the Essex Federation Committee for several years until he resigned in 2019.

I was very sad to hear, earlier this year, that Peter Norfolk had died. Peter had been a long standing member of the Brightlingsea WEA Branch Committee.

Peter was deeply committed to the WEA. When he was younger he had been a WEA tutor, so knew and understood the importance of adult learning. In his later years he sat on the Essex Federation Committee and then on the Eastern Region Committee. So, Peter knew what was happening in the wider WEA circle. While he sat on our local Brightlingsea Committee he made sure that we were kept up to speed. He was very informative and provided notes, for example, to be included in the local Annual Report. He was also hands-on and volunteered freely to help.

He was a kind, helpful member of our committee and we miss him.

*Angela Wilson on behalf of the Brightlingsea WEA Branch*

# ESSEX FEDERATION ONE DAY SCHOOLS



## SHACKLETON: The Man, The Myth and the Lost Ship (Course No. C2229104)

A legendary Antarctic explorer, Shackleton has come to represent the epitome of leadership, endurance and sheer charisma.

MICHAEL SMITH, an expert on Polar exploration, investigates the Shackleton legend in the light of the recent discovery of his lost vessel *Endurance*.



## SCENERY and RAILWAYS of NEW ZEALAND (Course No. C2229035)

As well as looking at railways in both North and South Islands, we explore volcanoes and earthquakes in a country unique in topography and native species.

ADRIAN WRIGHT FRGS is a graduate of London University. He was for many years Head of Geography at Colchester Royal Grammar School and is a noted expert on Britain's rail system.



**BOTH COURSES:**  
**Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2022. 11am to 3.30pm**  
**Feering Community Centre CO5 9QB**  
**Cost £22, including buffet lunch.**

To enrol - or for more information including telephone details - visit [wea.essex.uk](http://wea.essex.uk).

You may be exempt from payment if you receive certain benefits



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