



Friends of Hylands House

NEWSLETTER

April 2024



<http://www.friendsofhylandshouse.com>

FRIENDS OF HYLANDS HOUSE

Reg. Charity No. 1059969

President: LORD PETRE

**Vice-Presidents: Glenda Hicks, Paul Hutchinson, Stuart Mole,
Richard Oscroft and David Thomson**

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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**Ann Bell, Val Chiswell, Berry Cornell,
Stan Kaluza, Cynthia Walker, Nick Wickenden**

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP RATES

At a recent committee meeting it became apparent that the new Friends of Hylands House website presented an opportunity to reduce administration costs notably with postage but also to reduce the time spent by the Membership Secretary concerning the Annual General Meeting. It also seemed the right time to simplify annual membership fees. That being the case the committee agreed to the following to be ratified at the AGM:

Adult: £18; Joint adult £34; Concessions: Single £13; Joint £24

*Existing members – you can change your payment to a Direct Debit on the new website at any time **but don't forget to cancel your existing Standing Order.***

Payment will be collected on 1st March each year and if you have given your consent, we will claim Gift Aid.

Do visit the new website @ www.friendsofhylandshouse.co.uk. Grateful thanks are due to Edward Price: Hylands Assistant Manager – Business Innovation who has given many hours of his time designing and installing the website and to Chelmsford City Council for setting up *Friends of Hylands House donation points.*

“The object of the Friends shall be the preservation and improvement of the listed building – Hylands House, Chelmsford – together with the associated park, for the benefit of the public, and the promotion of its use by the public, through the activities of a group of Friends.” – an extract from the Constitution.

A message from our Chairman, Richard Oscroft, MBE



After my pleas in recent Newsletters, I am delighted to report that we have a new Membership Secretary – Alan Mayo who has met with and been co-opted on to your Committee. Alan who is a keen photographer, is frequently out and about in the early morning and has some wonderful sunrise shots taken in Hylands Park, often using reflections in the Serpentine lake. You have my assurance that Alan is already busying himself getting to know the requirements of his new task, especially the need to issue new membership cards: their design has been approved so hopefully they will be with you very soon. Thank you, Alan, for agreeing to take on this important role.

With the creation of our new website in recent months we have been working hard to transfer our members to our new database as it is easier to manage going forward. However, I am aware that there could be occasional glitches as, for example, **in transferring annual subscriptions to direct debit on 1st March members were requested to cancel the original standing order.** Where this has not happened and two payments have been received our Treasurer, Ros Coleridge, will be happy to make a refund. We can talk about this in greater detail at our forthcoming Annual General Meeting on 16th April.

At the AGM we shall also be taking the opportunity to update our Constitution: we will be proposing bringing the membership categories into line with our current needs and making adult membership available from the age of 18 years.

Following a visit to the site of the Ice House ruins by an Engineering Historian and Industrial Archaeologist in late January, your Committee has been excited to learn that the cast iron beams in the ruins can be ascribed as being produced by a civil engineer, Thomas Tredgold in 1820. He was the nephew of the architect, William Atkinson, who was employed by Pierre Labouchere to build the new West Wing at Hylands from scratch. More about this at the AGM, but suffice it to say that your committee has agreed to explore various options in much more detail with the Council.

We remain concerned that there are currently no new activities or outings to look forward to, but we have set up a small group of four to brain storm

ideas and possibilities. Hopefully we shall be able to get input from you at the AGM as to your preferences: indeed, your suggestions would be most welcome.

Just one date for your diaries: our Christmas Lunch will be held in the Banqueting Room on Monday, 9th December.

Following the business of the AGM which commences at 3.00pm, our speaker will be Graeme Cooper, who will give us an in depth and personal account of the life of his father, Johnny Cooper ‘One of the Originals’, a member of the SAS detachment based at Hylands. If his flyer is anything to go by this should be a really interesting talk and a good listen!

I look forward to seeing many of you at our AGM which will be my last as your Chairman.

Until then, my best wishes to you all.

Richard



PS. As we go to press I have just been informed of the passing of Babs Sargeant – a founder member of our Book Shop team and a real supporter of The Friends for very many years in very many ways. She will be greatly missed. Our thoughts, prayers and deep condolences are with Alf and the family at this very sad time.

The Friends of Hylands House new website



On our website you will now see dedicated pages: About Us, Membership Benefits, Projects, News, The Bookshop, Join Online and even Donate Online! This is just the start, and we hope to add more to it.

Please do take a look at www.friendsofhylandshouse.co.uk

We also hope to add News articles to our new website. Do you have any experience or skills to help us with communications? We would love to hear from you.

New Friends Committee Member – Alan Mayo

Alan Mayo has recently agreed to become membership secretary for the Friends having heard our plea to fill this post now we have launched our updated website and online membership system. Alan has been a volunteer membership secretary for other groups in the past using a database and has also used such systems in his working life. Alan served in the RAF, man and boy for 30 thirty years, apprentice then technician in electronics, then as an education officer followed by a second career with Vodafone as a training manager, taking early retirement some 20 years ago – he remarks that his working life has been continuously associated with advanced technologies. Alan and his wife Joan moved to Essex just two years ago to be near family. Alan has continued with his hobbies of walking and photography. As well as leading walking groups with U3A, Alan also walks daily with his camera and often through Hylands Park as he lives nearby – he says he is one of the few walkers in the early morning who doesn't have a dog. Alan shares his Hylands photographs on local media sites and we have been pleased to use them in our newsletters (see the cover of this issue!).

Down Memory Lane with Johnny Cooper

“One of the Originals”

Tuesday 16th April, 2024 – 3pm in Banqueting Room

The exploits of the Special Air Service Regiment in World War II are legendary and full of intrigue and fame. Eighteen-year-old Johnny Cooper volunteered for the SAS in 1941 and became one of “The Originals” raised by David Sterling to conduct operations behind enemy lines. Johnny took part in various raids in North Africa; collaborated with the Maquis in France and helped liberate Belsen with its horrific secret behind the wire. He paraded at Hylands House in 1945 on the day the Regiment was disbanded.



Johnny led anti-guerrilla jungle operations during the Malayan emergency where he pioneered tree jumping. His further combat experiences on the Jebel Akhdar in Oman, in Africa and in the “secret war” in the Yemen make up a fascinating career. This presentation tells his incredible life story.



“The last parade” – Hylands House



Johnny (right) with some of “The Originals”



Left: Johnny (right) with David Sterling in the “Blitz Buggy”



Right: Johnny Cooper and Reg Seekings “Chalk & Cheese”

The presentation is in support of SAS Veterans: Graeme Cooper gives an in depth and personal account of the life of his father Johnny Cooper, “*One of the Originals*” of L-Detachment SAS. Johnny featured in the recent BBC2 series *SAS Rogue Warriors* which was based on the highly-acclaimed book by Ben Macintyre, *SAS Rogue Heroes*.

Becoming a Friend to becoming a Tour Guide

I was in my teens in Chelmsford and pre-University when I first really became aware of Hylands House, the mansion on the outskirts of Chelmsford. When away from home my mother always sent me the Essex Chronicle, so I kept up with local news and knew when the owner, Mrs Hanbury died. I returned to Chelmsford, I can't quite remember the sequence, but I was aware of the purchase of the House and Park by the then Borough Council and the consequent wrangling over its future including the possibility for it to be the site of the new Essex University, which of course ultimately went to Wivenhoe Park Colchester. Hence my interest was aroused, and I have followed its story ever since, eventually joining the Friends with my husband, who although not a Chelmsfordian, had a genuine interest in all things historical. As a Friend over many years I have attended Christmas dinners, musical and other entertainments, coach outings, afternoon teas and other fund-raising events, eventually arriving on the Committee in April 2023. I have read and perused the Newsletters gaining a lot of knowledge from the interesting articles about the House, the inhabitants, the staff and gardens, which would regularly appear. So, it was in the 2022 Autumn edition that I spotted a paragraph on the back page seeking volunteers to become tour guides in the House on the by now monthly Open days. Well, I thought, why not, having acquired a certain amount of knowledge over the years, I wouldn't be a total rookie?



I duly contacted management as requested, was approved as a recruit and my training began along with others who had also applied. We had two meetings with Edd Price from the management team who also took us around the rooms (the tour is confined to the ground floor) with which I was familiar but not with the depth of knowledge and detail which would be required when guiding. Nick Wickenden, Edd and Alison Woollard were already at work on Open Days, so I tagged along at the back of the group on their first three



tours of 2023, each tour lasting 45 minutes to an hour and I was ready, having done all my preparation, to be launched in April. Reference to and reading the excellent book written and produced by Nick assisted by Linda Knock, filled in and expanded on the facts. I wasn't daunted by the thought of addressing a group of people, usually up to around twenty, having done this in my working life frequently, but more about putting the information over in an interesting and understandable way. My experience is that in any group there is always one who will have superior knowledge and will take delight in telling you that you're wrong in front of the rest of them! However, I was pleased with the tour, I received good feedback. I must have passed muster, as I had to fill in forms, provide references and ID to be accepted as a volunteer for the City Council and by the time you read this, I will have done my third tour. If you haven't been in the building for some time, why not come along on an Open Day, choice of two tours 10 am and 1pm, expand your knowledge and discover what you didn't know before about Hylands House of which you are a Friend.

Val Chiswell

Bringing your dog is a walk in the park

We love dogs at Hylands Estate! As a team of dog lovers, we're always excited to see visitors bring their pooches along to our outdoor events to enjoy the grounds as much as their owners do. Here are our top tips for getting the most out of your visit with your four-legged friends:

- Plan where you park – Hylands Estate has three main car parks, all with great access to the park and much-loved areas of woodland and parkland. Start by planning where you will begin your walk. Parking charges apply in all car parks, but you only need to pay once – or nothing at all if you are attending an outdoor Friends event with your dog!
- Visit the Deli Doghouse – around the side of The Stables you will find The Deli Doghouse, an outside area for you to enjoy hot drinks and snacks, or stop for a quick breakfast or lunch, with your hungry hounds. Purchase Puppaccinos, dog sausages or dog chews, plus water is also available for dogs to have a refreshing drink. The Deli have also opened the kiosk by the Adventure Castle playground, which is another great opportunity to take a pitstop or meet with other doggy friends. The Deli Hylands throughout the estate is open from 8am and Friends receive a 10% discount when showing your membership card.



continued overleaf

- Pick up a walks leaflet – you can pick up one of our walks leaflets from The Stables info point, The Deli Doghouse or download a copy from the website. Here you find five routes ranging from 1.3km to 6.30km that will give your pups a good run around and provide a fantastic workout for yourself.
- Enjoy our outdoor events – Open Estate Days take place every third Sunday of the month (excluding May) and the food market run by Urban Food Festival is a perfect place to bring your dog for a walk with other like-minded owners! Pet product traders can be found as part of the market line-up. Don't forget, you won't be able to take them into the house, but there is still plenty to enjoy outside.
- Be aware of your surroundings – you may have heard news last year regarding a new Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) for dog walking at Hylands. This is nothing to worry about and simply formalises safety precautions that were already informally in place for regular users of the park. There are some changes to when you will need to put your dogs on a lead around the estate, as well as a limit of four dogs per dog walker. We advise visiting the website before you plan your dog walk.

There is always something new to explore at Hylands – from new artists in the studios; new indoor and outdoor activities as part of Open Estate Days, which are kindly funded by the Friends to new flowers to see blooming in the gardens. If you are bringing your dog along for a visit, we look forward to meeting them too!

Lorraine Thorne, Hylands House Manager



Table set for members Christmas lunch 2023 in the magnificent Banqueting Hall at Hylands House.

The old oak



A very special, very old tree

This ancient oak was just a young tree when I was a girl, living in Whittle. That was more than four hundred years ago, long before Hylands House was even built, and all this was just fields, not a garden in sight.

I'm long gone now, but the tree has survived all that time. Just imagine everything it's seen over the centuries and how many people have enjoyed its shade... the squirrels love the acorns of course, and it's home to lots of mini-beasts and insects. It really is a very special tree.

It could live for many more years, as long as we look after it, so please help this special old oak - don't try and climb it or squash its roots by trampling round it, and who knows, it might outlive all of you too!



DID YOU KNOW?

Oak may live for 1,000 years, although 600 may be more typical on many sites. All oak are classed as ancient from 400 years onwards, although many will have ancient characteristics from around 300 years. Typically a veteran oak is 150-300 years of age and a notable oak is 150-200 years old.

Brief history of the park

The Manor of Shaxstones at Writtle and the attached Highlands Field were bought by John Comyns in 1726 and around that time renamed Hylands. Sir John as he became, commissioned an architect and Hylands House was erected. Records from the time tell us that grounds around the House were planned in the formal geometric manner creating a clear boundary between the gardens and the paddock with possibly a 'pleasure garden' plus a small greenhouse to provide fruit and vegetables. His initial estate was 100 acres.

Sir John died in 1740 and the estate passed to his nephew and then his nephew's son John Richard Comyns.

The estate was put up for sale in 1795 and an icehouse is mentioned plus the manor farm called Shaxstones and other land on lease to a neighbour – the whole consisting of 400 acres. In 1796 the whole estate was put up for auction and bought by Cornelius Kortright of Dutch origin.

The 'romantic movement' was sweeping England at the time including landscape gardening. Cornelius followed the fashion and between 1797 and 1803 had the entire estate transformed by Humphry Repton plus enlarging the House. Sadly, Humphry Repton's 'Red Book' containing all his ideas and designs is lost including landscaping of the garden. From this period surrounding the park with belts of trees, adding the Serpentine Lake and extending the park down to the River Wid took place. A walled kitchen garden was built plus a drive to Writtle gate, a park entrance near Writtle.

In 1814 the House and park were again up for sale including a stable yard, gardeners house, pinery, hot-house and a very good icehouse, all enclosed within high walls.

Hylands was purchased by Pierre Cesar Labouchere and once again, many alterations were made to House and gardens. William Atkinson, an architect is reputed to have designed new stables which were constructed to include a clock tower with the clock being made by John Richmond of Springfield, Chelmsford. A new London gate was built 'on the high road' and a huge conservatory erected reputed to be 280 feet long. Flint Cottage was possibly built during that period, originally with a thatched roof which has now been replaced.

In 1828 an account was read to the RHS by John Smith, gardener at Hylands on the growth of cherry trees (of the variety of May Duke) at Hylands and a 'possible remedy for their protection against bird attack when the fruit is approaching maturity'. The account mentions a construction so large that 'ladies and gentlemen were able to wander about under its netting and help

themselves from fruit trees and bushes!’ All fruit and vegetables were grown in a separate walled kitchen garden including pits filled with animal dung, the heat from which enabled growing peaches and apricots in greenhouses with vines and raspberries surrounded by a brick wall. Approximately 30 gardeners and labourers were employed to work on the estate.

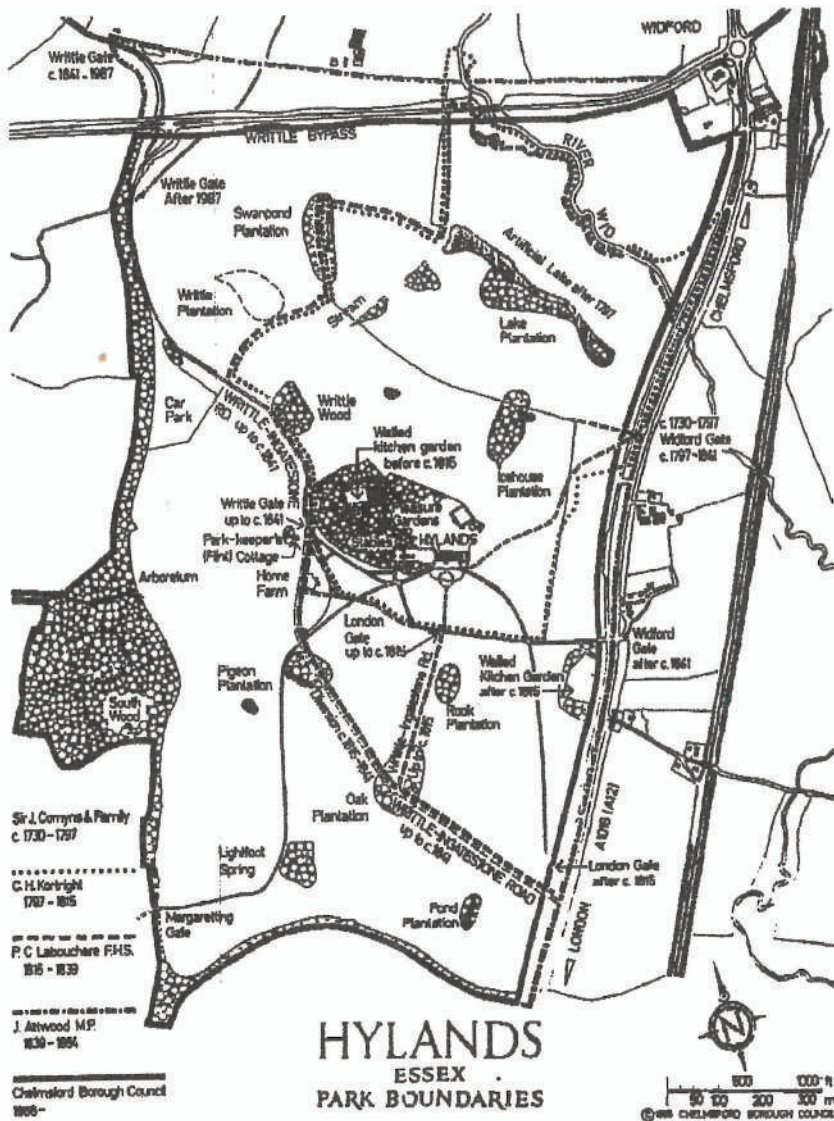
In 1838 Pierre Labouchere died and the property passed to his son Henry. A railway being planned by the Eastern Counties Railway Company had been threatened to run through part of the estate and resisted in his father’s time but Henry, on assessing the effect on the estate, decided to back the construction of a railway line passing through his land and the London to Chelmsford railway line was completed in 1843. Under the Eastern Counties Railway Act of 1838 permission was granted to plant shrubs and trees on the embankment thus hiding the railway track from sight.

Six months later the whole estate was once again put up for sale, now covering 750 acres and promoting the beautiful gardens and conservatories.

John Attwood purchased the House and estate in October 1839 and shortly after became the Member of Parliament for the borough of Harwich. The House was totally remodelled and greatly enlarged. The park was also extended by purchasing and demolishing various properties while retaining the land which eventually covered 4,300 acres. Money was paid to the parishes of Writtle, Chelmsford and Margaretting so that public roads through the estate could be closed; the Writtle gate was moved to the north-west corner of the park and trees planted to prevent smaller traffic crossing. Nine years later, found guilty of various misdemeanours, John Attwood lost his parliamentary seat in Harwich and faced financial ruin after various large financial enterprises collapsed. Hylands was put up for sale unsuccessfully with the park eventually being split into seven lots and the House remaining empty for four years.

In 1858 the House and park – one of the seven lots – were bought by Arthur Prior who subsequently became a Justice of the Peace, Deputy Lieutenant of the County and a great benefactor. The park was looked after by a team of gardeners with the family hosting many social events. Three lodges were built (Widford, London and Margaretting) to accommodate staff and the walls surrounding the first vegetable and flower gardens demolished. The pleasure gardens planted to provide beautiful displays of flowers and plants and the kitchen gardens once again producing an abundance of fruit and vegetables with hot-houses providing exotic fruit and elsewhere a large apple orchard.

Arthur Prior again bought surrounding estates to add to his property and he and his wife Elizabeth continued to be great benefactors to the local



community. Elizabeth died in 1898 with Arthur Prior living on for another six years, dying at the age of eighty-eight.

Arthur Prior's son did not wish to live at Hylands and the House and park were subsequently leased to Sir Daniel Gooch around 1906 who then bought the estate.

Once again, the House was greatly altered and more land acquired. Between 16-20 gardeners were employed and a gardeners bungalow built at the edge

of the pleasure garden created from the remains of the walls of the vegetable and flower gardens beside the conservatory to the north of the House. Sir Daniel and Lady Gooch entertained a great deal and the park became the venue for fetes, band concerts and other social activities. The pleasure gardens still included Labouchere's large conservatory which contained a palm house, a tropical house and a temperate house.

In 1912 a huge society wedding took place at Hylands with the bridegroom, Claude Graham-White, a well-known 'aviator' and the bride, a Miss Dorothy Taylor from New York. A 'grand' fete was held the day before the wedding with the bridegroom eventually arriving in the evening, flying in over the trees and landing on the lawn!

Around this time motor vehicles began to replace horses and carriages and use of the stables changed. In 1914 the Great War broke out and Hylands House became a hospital and the park a military venue with fetes held to raise money for the Essex Regiment's Prisoners of War Fund. The hospital closed in 1919 with festivities held to celebrate the armistice and demobilization of troops.

In 1920 Hylands was once again put up for sale and eventually bought by the Hanbury family in 1922 with the history of the family and park well documented.

With thanks to Stephen Foreman, Nick Wickenden, Linda Knock and the staff of Hylands House who have so ably documented the history of the House and park.



Hylands Estate in current times.

HYLANDS OPENING TIMES

For up to date information please check on www.hylandsestate.co.uk

Park and Gardens

Hylands Park is open to the public every day of the year. The gates at the park entrances are opened at 7.30 am and are closed and locked at the following times:

January	5pm	August	9pm
February and March	6pm	September	8pm
April	8pm	October	7pm
May	9pm	November	5pm
June and July	10pm	December	5pm

Hylands House

The House opens its doors Free of Charge on the third Sunday of each month, 10am - 3pm as part of the Open Estate Day.

Stables Information Point

Monday – Friday – 10.00am – 4.00pm

Saturday and Sunday – 10.00am – 5.00pm

The Deli Hylands (in the stables)

From April – 8.00am to 5.00pm every day

Castle Playground changing place and toilets

open every day from 9.30am to 2.00pm.

The Friends' Book Shop

Spring Summer – [1st April – 30th September]

10.30am – 3.45pm, weekdays and 10.30am – 4.30pm, weekends

Autumn – Winter [1st October to 31st March]:

10.30am - 3.00pm, weekdays and 10.30am - 3.30pm, weekends