



Friends of Hylands House

NEWSLETTER

October 2025



Photo: Alan Mayo

<http://www.friendsofhylandshouse.co.uk>

FRIENDS OF HYLANDS HOUSE

Reg. Charity No. 1059969

President: LORD PETRE

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

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CYNTHIA WALKER (as above)
- Committee Members:** **Ann Bell, Richard Oscroft**

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP RATES

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.*

www.friendsofhylandshouse.co.uk

Chairman's Message

I have been a Friend of Hylands House for many years. I cannot remember when I and my husband joined, but for those long standing Friends who remember them, it was Con Johnson and Joan Collins who “persuaded” us to join, me being born, bred and educated in Chelmsford and very aware of the acquisition of the House and Park by the then Borough Council; the subsequent dilemma and controversy as to its future and eventually the restoration. I now enjoy being one of four rotated guides on Open Days and helping plan the different exhibitions set out in the Library. Formerly, avid browsers and customers of the Bookshop on a Sunday afternoon, I now take the occasional turn as Bookseller when needed.



So, what do I do apart from having a very strong connection with Hylands? My amdrum days (Mrs. Noah in the Cathedral Mystery Play and Principal Boy in Great Baddow Village Pantomimes) are over, but I enjoy belonging to a play reading group and I sing with Witham Choral Society and occasionally Anglia Singers. I play Bridge, and I belong to both Chelmsford and Great Baddow and Galleywood u3as. I am a Chelmsford Mildmay Rotarian, and I enjoy fund raising activities especially as an Elf collecting with our Santa's sleigh, at Christmas. All these activities are somewhat different from my working life as a community lawyer, mostly for Chelmsford and other CABx, and as a lay Magistrate for 35 years.

The Friends have been in good hands over the years, and I thank all past officers and committee members for their time, effort and commitment. We are still there, perhaps with slightly different ways now of doing things, but our commitment and dedication hasn't changed. We have been involved with some great projects and I am pleased to say that will continue and the Committee is currently discussing some exciting proposals. So, watch this space! We will keep you informed of where your contributions are being used and put towards further enhancements of Hylands House and Park.

Val Chiswell

Chairman's Report to the Annual General Meeting 28th April 2025

Lord Petre, Vice-Presidents and Friends of Hylands House

In accordance with our Constitution we have made several donations this year to promote the House and carry out maintenance. We have contributed £660 to the repair of the carpet edges in the drawing room and library. We have made several donations towards the childrens' activities on open estate days which have bought equipment and paid for the storyteller, Mike Dodsworth, who is a huge hit every month, and also funded a British Sign Language Interpreter on two occasions.

We have agreed to fund labels for the portraits in the House and the Museum, who own the paintings, will be preparing them. We have also agreed in principle to help fund a feasibility study for the restoration of the walled garden at some time in the future.

We have pledged £34,000 towards Phase 1 of restoring the Ice House. This covers surveys, some landscaping and tree work, making and installing an iron rail around the structure, making good and repointing the brickwork and revealing more of the York stone paving. There will be an interpretation board which would invite people in. Work to the value of £6,132 has already been carried out with a perimeter fence and a vehicular gate to which we contributed £3,000. Nick Wickenden our Vice-Chairman who is leading on this project has an 1814 map of the area showing two ponds, one of which has water in it now and it is thought it may well be a Repton pond.

Our bookshop continues to flourish and we have recruited a few new volunteers. Last year we raised £16,534 and this year to March we have already raised £2,584 which is good. We received a legacy of a large number of Folio books and bookcases which has added considerably to the quality of our stock. On 10th March we held a tea party for the bookshop volunteers to thank them for their time, effort and loyalty.

Unfortunately, we have had to cancel two planned events this year due to lack of support. This was a summer lunch here at the House and a visit to the pantomime at Colchester. The only event held was our Christmas lunch which 52 members attended. If we are to remain an active group we do need to meet together to socialise and also raise funds. We have lost a lot of our original members, who are unable to attend events now but Berry and I have a table at Open Estate Days to recruit new members and a few new members do join afterwards, we also have acquired some new members who are volunteering in the bookshop.

I wish to thank the other officers and members of the committee for their efforts and support during the year. We have managed to operate without a Secretary this year but hopefully that will be rectified in the election of officers later.

I would also like to thank the Council staff particularly Lorraine Thorne, the Manager, and Edd Price who helped us with our new website. All the staff in the House have been helpful to and co-operative with us. There are now collection points in the House and Information point to help us raise funds.

Looking to the future, in 2030 Hylands House will be 300 years old. We are to be included in “Roadmap 2030” to plan events and projects associated with the tercentenary. We are contributing half of the fee to prepare a National Lottery bid for this. I think this is going to be an exciting time for the House and for the Friends.

Chris Rycroft

Lord Petre presided over the AGM which took place on 28th April 2025. Val Chiswell was elected Chairman and Chris Rycroft was elected Secretary. All other officers and committee remained in office from the previous year. The audited accounts up to December 31st 2024 were adopted.

After the business was concluded Alison Woollard gave an interesting and varied illustrated talk entitled “Gardens are Works of Art rather than of Nature” which covered the history of garden design and designers focusing on Capability Brown and his influence on Humphrey Repton.



Annual Christmas Lunch

This year the Christmas lunch will be on the 8th of December 2025. Please see the invitation.



Special thanks are due to Cynthia Walker who not only organises the Christmas lunch but also the Hylands House bookshop rota.



Diary from the park

What a scorcher summer was! Having started writing this in late July, in the midst of a summer heatwave, it strikes an odd juxtaposition to be talking about autumn and winter. So please forgive me wistfully embracing all things cool, and making a gentle note to myself to get more water butts this winter.



View from ancient oak.

This autumn and winter at Hylands I look forward to the smell of fresh rain on the woodland floor, with the changing autumn colours and wind rustling through the woodlands. There are so many fantastic trees in the park, my current favourite is the ancient oak cordoned off in the pleasure gardens. Looking at its nearly hollow trunk and splitting bark in winter you would be right to doubt if this tree still lives. Yet after hundreds of years this weather worn Oak stands as a silent watcher to the changing seasons.

When winter sets in and daylight seems to make an all too brief appearance, I will be wishing humans could hibernate. Then again, it would be a shame to miss the fresh mornings, when the frost dances across the remaining seed heads and stems, with flashes of the overwintering birds like Robins flitting between shelters.



Fungus.

This autumn and winter the Parks conservation volunteers are continuing the woodlands path repairs, planting young trees and cutting back to allow fresh growth in the coming year.

We are looking forward to when autumn and winter bring fungus to the fore, while unseen most of the year, autumn brings the weird and wonderful world of fungus to the eye. Jellyear, Beefstake, Chicken of the Wood, Amethyst Deceiver, Candlesnuff, Netted Rhodotus and Staghorn, among many other fungi were spotted in the park last year.

In a corner entrance to the pleasure Garden (stop 8 on walking tour) more drought tolerant pollinator perennials have been planted like Pervoskia 'Little Spire', which has long violet-blue flowers and Sedum 'Hot Stuff', which has bright rose-pink flowers. Winter interest plants have been added like Ilex x altaclerensis 'Golden King' which produces berries that are a food source for birds during winter, and Mahonia x media 'Winter Sun' with its yellow flowers, will be a good source of early pollen and nectar for bees.

The Winter Walk is developing nicely. With gaps being filled and the walk continuing to be extended. New planting includes; *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster', *Rubus thibetanus* 'Silver Fern', *Hakenchloa* 'All Gold',



Winter Walk.



Border near stop 8 on walking tour.



Hanbury garden *Thyme vulgaris*.

Cornus ‘Baton Rouge’, *Erica* ‘Kramers Rote’ and many others! We are hoping this will create a bigger and better display this winter!!

The historic gardens follow a constant cycle of renewal. In the Hanbury garden sections of the *Thyme vulgaris* that had become too big and woody have been renewed. *Lavandula angustifolia* ‘Arctic Snow’, *Phlox* ‘White Admiral’ and *Echinacea purpurea* ‘White Swan’ are some of the white flowering additions to the garden’s ornate railings and gate.

As summer nears its end at the time of writing it still feels odd to think of the potential cold snaps. A couple of years ago in the one world garden, the tree fern (*Dicksonia antarctica*) succumbed to harsh winter even with its fleece jacket on, it’s now been replaced with a Windmill Palm (*Trachycarpus fortune*) which we hope will be more tolerant of the extremes of summer and winter.

Here are just a few of the things you might want to look out for in the coming months: November brings an abundance of fungus, December is a great time to see the *Cornus* showing off its reds and oranges, January brings with it the gentle nodding Hellebores, Snow drops and Cyclamen pop up around February, Daffodils will be waving around in March having been planted in mid-autumn, Bluebells will put in their magical but brief appearance in April.



Trachycarpus fortunei.

You can look back at more from the Parks, including a news article with our very own Head Gardner, Alastair, giving advice on Bamboo, or find out more about onsite conservation and garden volunteering, via our website at: [Home - Love Your Chelmsford](#)

Yours Sincerely
Parks and Green Space

**On behalf of the Friends of Hylands House,
many congratulations to Gloria Nichols
on being awarded the BEM for services to Chelmsford.**

We are proud to not only have you as a member but also for the various volunteering roles you have played including serving in the bookshop.

With all best wishes, Val Chiswell Chairman

Radio 2 fans descend on Hylands Park for a weekend of outstanding music

In early September, Hylands Park hosted the long-awaited Radio 2 in the Park 2025. It was the first time Chelmsford has hosted the BBC's flagship music festival – presenting a brilliant opportunity for locals to see global artists on their doorstep and for businesses to showcase what Chelmsford has to offer. With 13 million listeners across the UK, Radio 2 in the Park attracted festivalgoers to Essex from right across the UK. It was a weekend of fantastic vibes for all, with a great atmosphere, outstanding artist performances and DJ sets, as well as surprise appearances from special guests.



Canadian country music singer, Bryan Adams, stole the show on Saturday night, rousing the huge audience to singalong to his best hits including Kick Ass and Summer of '69. A surprise appearance during his set from Mel C for a duet of When You're Gone further wowed the crowd. On Sunday, Sophie Ellis Bextor got the party started with an energetic performance and Essex boy, Olly Murs, delighted audiences with some of his latest tracks. Finally, the event closed with Sunday headliners – classic British rock band Def Leppard giving an electrifying performance.

Of course, Hylands looked incredible for the weekend and many BBC Radio 2 presenters picked up on what a gorgeous park it is! Overall, the weekend was a brilliant success for Hylands and for Chelmsford, with positive feedback received from many festivalgoers on how well organised the whole affair was. Whoever hosts Radio 2 in the Park next year will have big shoes to fill!

Hylands House, Pierre Labouchere and a World Renowned Danish Sculptor

Pierre Caesar Labouchere was the third owner of the House from 1815 to 1839. He was a Dutch born merchant banker, his French Huguenot family having left France for the Netherlands. He completed the Repton designed west wing, which was not completed by the previous owner Cornelius Kortright. He also built Home Farm and the Stable block with clock tower. His two main interests were horticulture and neo classical



sculpture. Horticulture led to a 280 feet long glazed and heated conservatory being built in the gardens; a cherry orchard horizontally trained with strawberries and other soft fruit inside; a walled kitchen garden with heated walls (pits filled with animal dung) making the growth of exotic fruit, melons, cucumbers, apricots and vines possible, as well as more normal fruit and vegetables.

His interest in neo classical sculpture was satisfied by the commission of works by Danish Sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen and those works can be seen in the House today.

Thorvaldsen (1770 -1844) is one of the most celebrated of all neo classical sculptors. He was born in Copenhagen but spent most of his artistic life in Rome. There is a Museum in Copenhagen devoted entirely to him and containing many of his original works including our own Venus, whose replica stands in our entrance hall. He is buried in his tomb in the courtyard under a bed of roses. He studied at the Royal Danish Academy of Art winning several awards including the prestigious gold medal. As a result of this, he was granted a stipend to study in Rome, arriving in 1797 in his late twenties. Many of his most characteristic sculptures were new interpretations of figures or themes which were popular in classical antiquity. His first success, Jason with the Golden Fleece (1803), a marble sculpture, ensured countless commissions which meant he did not have a chance to leave Italy for sixteen years. He is one of the greatest sculptors from Denmark and one of the first Danish artists to



achieve worldwide success. He bequeathed most of his fortune to his own museum, and all the models for his sculpture and a large collection of other contemporary artists' works were included in the endowment.

His works in the House are Alexander the Great entering Babylon, a frieze in the Grand Staircase Hall, Venus with the Apple and four plaster roundels in the Entrance Hall, depicting Day and Night. The frieze may originally have been placed elsewhere by Labouchere and moved to its present position by John Attwood, the fourth owner who was responsible for the Grand Staircase. It has a 3D effect achieved by use of iron armatures enabling the horses' legs and chariot wheels to stand proud of the wall. It is a smaller version of the original marble in the Palazzo Quirinale in Rome. The two pairs of roundels depicting day and night were in situ when the House was restored and only needed cleaning to return them to their original condition. Venus is an exact replica of the original now in the Museum in Copenhagen, which Labouchere commissioned for Hylands. In correspondence dated June 16th 1829, Thorvaldsen is informed "I am very pleased to announce to you, my dear Thorvaldsen that your Venus is finally happily arrived and landed but after being exposed to the greatest danger: She had a long journey and when she wanted to take her out of the ship, to bring her to land, she crashed into the ship when the noise broke down: Fortunately she fell softly when the ship was loaded with wheat, and Ceres saved this time Venus". (This is from the ship owner(?) Eternal yours devoted Jorgen Knudtson, whose command of English seems somewhat understandably, limited.

The Friends decided at the turn of the century to find a replica of Venus, to once again grace the Entrance Hall, She certainly can't be missed when entering the House. In September 2001 a small delegation went to Copenhagen and ordered a life size copy which had to be returned when it arrived damaged. In November 2002 Friends travelled to Rome and ordered a life size copy from an Italian Company which specialized in high quality religious statues

for churches around the world. Venus is made with reconstituted Carrara marble and cost £9000, a considerable amount in 2002, but worth every penny. Thanks to Labouchere's commission to Thorvaldsen (and the foresight of the Friends at the time) we have a very special lady occupying a prime site in Hylands House.



Carol Bird – Obituary

We are sad to report that Carol Bird (previously known as Carol Bourne) passed away on Sunday 27th July 2025.

Carol was one of the original members of the Committee of the Friends of Hylands House who joined enthusiastically in our efforts to raise money for the restoration of Hylands House.

She was a regular member of Betty Wood's Tea Team from the early days and actively supported all our events and outings.

Carol moved to Warmingford, Suffolk with her fiancé Tim Bird. They were later married and moved to Stradbroke, nr Eye, Suffolk.



Glenda Hicks



A little bit of Hylands' hidden history!

Discovered by Linda Knock

Whilst sorting information about Hylands that I had found and saved on my computer I found the following, intriguing snippet from the Essex Newsman of 19th August 1905, and decided to find out more about Lady Cora Stafford, who rented Hylands for six months that year, before the Gooch family moved in.

Cora Elizabeth Smith who was to become one of the 'Gilded Age Heiresses', was born on 6th May 1860 in New Orleans, Louisiana. On 15th February 1882 she married her first husband, Samuel Colgate, in New York City. He was 39 years her senior and the heir to the soap company. They had one daughter, Adele. Upon his death she became a very rich widow [his estate was valued at \$260 million in today's money]! She married her next husband, William George Byng, the 4th Earl of Strafford, on 6th December 1898 in New York City. He was 29 years older than Cora. Sadly, he was the victim of a dreadful accident the following May, when he fell from a railway platform in front of a train, near Potters Bar. Cora married for the third and final time in 1903 to Martyn Kennard (only one year her senior!), a move "received with incredulity" by the society pages of New York. The Daily Mirror of 10th December 1903 reported that they married in St George's, Hanover Square in a private wedding with just a number of friends present. Her new husband was a well-known big game hunter. It was about 18 months later when they rented Hylands from the Pryor Estate.

In 1908 Cora was painted by John Singer Sargent – The Kennards remained together until her death in 1932.

Lady Strafford and Hylands.
Hylands, near Chelmsford, the seat of the late Mr. ARTHUR PRYOR, has been taken for six months by Mr. KENNARD, of Cavendish-square, London, and the COUNTESS OF STRAFFORD. Lady STRAFFORD, who was recently married to Mr. KENNARD, is the widow of the late SAMUEL COLGATE, Esq., of the United States. She married the fourth EARL OF STRAFFORD in 1898. His lordship, who had also been previously married, died in 1899. Her ladyship's American address is give in WHITAKER'S Peerage as Uplands, New Hamburg-on-Hudson, U.S.A.



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 second 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

From October – 8.00am to 4.00pm 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