



Friends of Hylands House

NEWSLETTER

April 2026



Photo: Alan Mayo

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

FRIENDS OF HYLANDS HOUSE

Reg. Charity No. 1059969

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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

As we enter the back end of winter, I hope it is not too late to wish all Friends a happy and healthy 2026. The evenings are gradually lightening up and we look forward to Spring and Summer activities. Our Christmas Lunch on 8th December, which many of you attended, was a highlight in the somewhat gloomy days of winter and once again we were provided with an excellent Christmas menu by the catering staff, seated in the Banqueting Room, which for me is the piece de resistance of the House. Many thanks to Cynthia Walker who organized the event with her usual efficiency and flair, making it a great success.



While mentioning the House, an interesting event took place on 17th October, a black-tie dinner in the Banqueting Room for members of the SAS Regimental Association and their families and friends. The SAS moved into Hylands in 1944 after completing their European operations and held their farewell dinner on 17th October 1945, hence the date. Two of our four Tour Guides were on hand to show them round before dinner and it was great to see so many old friends and colleagues meeting up and exchanging memories and reminiscences. Most of them knew the story of Colonel Paddy Blair-Mayne driving a jeep up the main staircase and were keen to see where the adventure took place. If you don't know about the SAS at Hylands and or the jeep incident, why not come on a tour on an Open Day, second Sunday of the month, free tours at 10.30am and 1pm, no booking required. Come inside and see the House which you are supporting.

Finally, I must mention the Friends' Second-Hand Bookshop where many of you volunteer. It is a great success and in this financial year it is likely to make £18,000. Thank you to all the volunteers, to Cynthia Walker who prepares and oversees the rotas, and last but by no means least, to our manager Stan Kaluza, who gives endless time and energy to making the Bookshop the success it is. Thank you to the Committee members for their input and commitment. I hope you will enjoy reading this Newsletter which has been edited and put together by Berry Cornell, no mean task. Well done! It would be good to see many of you at the AGM in April, when we will hear about Chelmsford in WW1.

With all best wishes. Val Chiswell

New Membership Secretary Required

Our current membership secretary is stepping down in April so there is an opportunity for any member of The Friends to volunteer for this very important but straightforward role. It entails keeping tabs on our very modern records system and the occasional correspondence in support of this. The role is not onerous and simply needs the secretary to be competent on their own computer or tablet. Anyone interested should contact Alan Mayo on 07979 540053 or alanmayo902@gmail.com who will answer any questions about the role.

Annual subscription to The Friends. For any member who pays manually and is due on March 1st, please remember to arrange payment at your earliest convenience or contact Alan Mayo at alanmayo902@gmail.com

The committee would like to record their appreciation to Alan for the excellent job he has done over the last three years.

Notice of Annual General Meeting

MONDAY 20th APRIL 2026 @ 2pm

The meeting will be followed by a break for tea and coffee at 2.45 when we will welcome guests to join us to hear a talk by our speaker:

TONY TUCKWELL
on
CHELMSFORD IN THE
FIRST WORLD WAR

Chelmsford was at the epicentre of a possible German invasion route. Evacuation plans were hastily hatched to move able-bodied Chelmsfordians to Oxfordshire via Dunmow and Welwyn. Meanwhile 6,000 soldiers from the Midlands were encamped in the area, many of them billeted in the town, others encamped at Widford, off the Roxwell Road and at Danbury with temporary tents in the town's parks. Discover a great deal more plus Hylands House involvement...

Hylands Military Hospital

The Hospital opened on Thursday 14th August 1914. The House was not requisitioned but offered by Sir Daniel and Lady Gooch, who placed the mansion at the disposal of the military. The whole of the ground floor was given up for the purposes of the hospital, with five wards. The Gooches would also provide an operating theatre and X-ray machine. [Sir Daniel himself even made bedside lockers for one of the wards!] The first patients were sick soldiers from the South Midlands Division who were training locally; then wounded soldiers were brought back from the battlefields.

An article in the Chelmsford Chronicle said that the billiard room, the library, the drawing room, the sitting room, the dining room and probably the boudoir would all be changed into hospital wards. Patients would be brought to the Hospital from the railway siding established in the time of Arthur Pryor.

To the British Red Cross Society on Aug. 15 last Sir Daniel and Lady Gooch made the following offer:—

To provide a hospital in their house for about one hundred beds, for either urgent or convalescent cases.

To find twenty beds complete; all the necessary cooking; electric light, coals, and water; all vegetables, fruit, etc.; all partridges, pheasants, rabbits, etc.; laundry and staff; and resident medical officer.

To guarantee £100 a month to the general fund.

A forward-thinking man, Sir Daniel had had electricity installed when he bought the Estate. The laundry was in the servants' quarters to the side of the House where the Grand Pavilion now sits. The £100 offered each month for the upkeep of the hospital establishment would be the equivalent of about £1000 in 'today's money'.

When Lord Kitchener came to Hylands to review troops in August 1915 [a recruiting campaign] he visited the hospital.

Patients treated were 901 British soldiers and 59 Belgian, Australian and Canadian soldiers – a total of 960. The average stay for each patient was seventy days and 160 operations were performed. Towards the end of the war, much operating was done in France, so fewer soldiers were brought to Hylands.

LORD KITCHENER'S QUESTION

A correspondent writes: "Chatting with a wounded soldier at Hylands Hospital, Chelmsford, I asked whether Lord Kitchener, who had spoken to him during his recent visit, had told him when the war would end? 'No,' replied the young private; 'he asked if I could tell him!'"

The photograph below shows Sir Daniel [wearing a flat cap with his dog on his lap] and next to him Lady Gooch; plus, Sir Daniel's secretary who did the hospital administration; patients and nursing staff. The two girls with frilly hats were house maids.



The Hospital took all the heaviest cases from the Middlesex War Hospital, Clacton-on-Sea and the General Military Hospital, Colchester and men with terrible injuries were successfully treated.

Kathleen May Morley (right) was working in the hospital and kept an autograph book in which injured soldiers wrote or drew.

The closing of the Hospital on 11th April 1919 was celebrated by a "Demobilisation dance" given by Sir Daniel and Lady Gooch. A fine jazz band was provided. One of the wards had been re-decorated and provided with an excellent dance floor. Supper was in the large dining room.



R.G. BEYNON
26th Roy. Fus. 1918



"HOW DID YOU GET YOUR PACKET MATE?"
"LEARNIN' BASEBALL OFF THE YANKS."

Swell going from

When months and years have glided by
And on this page you cast your eye
Remembers it was a friend sincere
Who wrote this kind remembrance here

They lands Hos
Chalmersford
4th Feb. 1918

2426 J. Young
12th Batt. Royal Irish Rifles
Wounded at Ypres
16th August 1917

With thanks to the Essex Record Office & Linda Knock (Vice President).

Diary from the park

Hylands has changed and grown over the centuries, but much remains familiar. Nearly 300 years ago, visitors would still have recognised the ponds, open fields and woodlands we care for today.

While our understanding evolves – with meadow cutting methods and times to boost biodiversity – some practices stay the same, such as managing non-native species to protect long-established plants and trees.





Wildlife continues to thrive across the estate. This year we've spotted house martins enjoying high perches, a range of bees and hoverflies species pollinating the flowers, plus butterflies and grasshoppers.

A range of delicate fungi continues to call the woodlands their home. We have seen toad tadpoles in the pleasure gardens, and a beautiful display of snowdrops. Plus winter walk one of the ongoing developments continues to bloom (pictures by head gardener Alastair Carden).

These are just a few of the highlights we have seen, we'd love to hear what you've seen. You can share your sightings of favourite aspects of the park via the contact us form on the Love Your Chelmsford website, and we may even feature your top picks on our social media pages.

Yours Sincerely, Parks and Green Space

Hazel Birmingham Obituary



We record with sadness the passing of Hazel Birmingham, a gentle and softly spoken lady. Together with her husband Patrick, Hazel was a founder member of The Friends and an active member of the Friends Events and Catering Team. Hazel also served on the Friends of Hylands House committee for many years.

Hylands Estate Ice House – by Nick Wickenden

What is an Ice House?

Ice houses emerged in grand country estates during the 17th century. They are often found on large Georgian and Victorian country house estates but are uncommon in Essex. The public often imagine them (wrongly) to be like old-fashioned fridges where food was stored. In actual fact, ice houses were underground stores for the ice itself. Ice was taken off local ponds and rivers in winter and stored, insulated in straw, throughout the year, for use in cooling drinks, and cooling puddings and ice cream. The ice was also used in large blocks to sit in a room and cool the air as it slowly melted. The use of ice houses died out after the end of World War 1 with the development of refrigerators. Ice houses normally have a relatively small entrance and domed or pitched roof emerging above ground, with a conical, brick structure some 3-4m in depth sunk into the ground. A drainage system would take the ice melt away into a nearby water source. An air vent in the roof kept air circulating and kept it dry.

John Buonarotti Papworth, who drew a plan of Hylands for owner John Attwood after 1839, is known to have designed a number of ice houses in the style of Egyptian temples and even country cottages. The labour required to use an icehouse was significant. A description in Cumbria in 1915-16, listed the following: two men broke up ice on a nearby canal, two men pulled it to ice house, two loaded it onto chute, five men broke it into fragments, one man wearing boots and sacking stood in ice house spreading it out and compacting.

The Hylands Icehouse

The ice house dates to before 1795. Its original(?) domed roof has collapsed, filling the conical shaft, sunk several metres into the ground, with rubble. It was first mentioned at Hylands in the 1795 Sales Notice by John Richard Comyns, and again in the 1814 Sales details. It first appears as a horseshoe-shaped structure on a map dated 1816, within a small copse, with a small rectangular pond partly outside the copse. A second pond is shown on one map, and this was re-discovered quite recently after the Friends paid for overhead drone coverage, which revealed the large pond curving around the ice house mound to the north. No mention of the ice house is made in early Victorian sales details and on maps. The presence of an ice house by Victorian times was perhaps no longer an important selling item for an estate up for sale. However, the ice house, within a larger plantation, reappears on maps from 1874 in the ownership of Arthur Pryor.

Archaeological excavations and the iron girders

Limited archaeological excavations by the former Essex County Council Archaeology Section in 1998 revealed the base of the brick door (and the door's massive iron hinges) and entrance path into the structure, and the top few courses of brickwork of the oval structure itself. Two large enigmatic iron girders were found spanning the structure at its highest surviving point.



These two cast-iron beams were examined recently by a historic wrought iron specialist. They are characteristic of a distinctive style of cast-iron floor beam publicised by the civil engineer Thomas Tredgold in his textbook of 1822 and widely used in high-status buildings during the 1820s. Although now lying on their sides, repurposed to support a later, light-weight superstructure over the ice well, they could originally have stood within the depth of a floor structure in the House or other nearby building such as Labouchere's conservatory supporting timber joists. Tredgold was an associate and nephew of William Atkinson, an architect who worked at Hylands. South of the ice house and buried under a few inches of leaf mould is a well preserved York Stone paved platform possibly used for dumping

the ice off wheelbarrows or carts, before it was carefully packed in the ice house.

Proposal for Excavation and Restoration

With the completion of other major projects which the Friends have funded, your Committee has taken an interest in preserving and interpreting the Ice House, and have committed an initial £34,000 to commissioning surveys, and limited archaeological work, replacing an iron fence, and repointing loose brickwork. This project has been approved by Chelmsford City Council. To date, a tree survey has been carried out, and further flora and fauna surveys are planned for later this year. The Council has surrounded the plantation with a fence in order to protect the ice house from undesirable and potentially dangerous public access.

Further archaeological work is planned for this April. This will see a further 30 cms of soil and rubble dug out from inside, in order to understand more about the shape of the brick structure. The blacksmith, Steve Miller, who worked on the iron decorative fencing around the Hanbury Memorial for the Friends, will also install a new iron



fence and gate around the ice house mound (replacing a former incomplete and damaged circuit). Following this, the loose brickwork will be repointed by Bakers of Danbury. Method statements and risk assessments are currently being prepared.

The ice house could be one of the estate's attractions. This limited first phase is designed to protect and further understand the structure. Future phases would involve public interpretation (information boards) and controlled public access.

Ice House Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Parks Department of the City Council for advice and support over many years research and planning. Stan Kaluza, from the Friends Committee, has been a constant supporter, and has helped doggedly with limited ground clearance. Without his enthusiasm and perseverance, we would not be where are now.

Obituary: Mr. John Attwood Esq. 1781-1865

The death has recently occurred in Boulogne of John Attwood, former owner of Hylands House and Estate in Essex. He was a member of the Attwood family of Ironmasters, eldest son of James and Phoebe Attwood of Halesowen. He made his fortune by developing and expanding the Corngreaves ironworks. In 1825, he sold the family business to three partners in the British Iron Company for £500,000. However, after only a few months the purchasers found the profits to be far short of what Attwood had claimed and brought a lawsuit against him alleging he knowingly misled them and seeking to set the contract aside. In 1831, after one of the most complex trials in legal history, they obtained the verdict. Attwood immediately appealed and in 1838 some seven years later, the House of Lords reversed the decision in favour of Attwood. From the original evidence it was fairly clear that he had suppressed material information, but the plaintiff purchasers had failed to exercise due diligence.

Once in full control of his fortune, in the following year, Attwood purchased the large, landed estate of Hylands near Chelmsford in Essex, Having acquired this grand mansion, he set about its aggrandisement both as to the exterior and interior, remodeling the House out of all recognition, building two storied extensions on both east and west wings, and replacing the neo classical colonnaded portico with a porte cochere to match the scale of the now taller house. He protected his views and his privacy by erecting a brick wall nearly one mile in length and paid local parish councils to close a public road which ran through the estate. Other local properties were bought and demolished which were spoiling his view.

Along with Hylands he had purchased a town house in London and a property in Harwich, the Essex port where in 1841 he stood as the Tory candidate for election as Member of Parliament and his “interest” in the Borough secured the seat, which he held through two further elections. However, in 1848 he was accused of bribery and corruption in the election of 1847 and found guilty, eventually admitting that he spent £10,000 on bribes and “treating”. The election result was overturned, and he was expelled from the House of Commons.

This was the start of his financial difficulties in later life. With his non property wealth he made unwise investments and speculations. In 1853 he made an investment in iron futures which went badly wrong. Attwood bought

large quantities of pig iron in the expectation of prices rising and therefore making a profit, but prices fell and he was unable to meet his commitments. He sold his other properties he had acquired including in Harwich and although eventually covering most of his debts, he was declared bankrupt, ruined and disgraced. Worse still he had borrowed the capital of his unmarried sisters to invest, and they were joined in his ruin. As genteel bankrupts, the family went abroad to live in France, where Attwood has died in Boulogne in relative poverty.

(If you visit the House today you will see the grand staircase of iron and stone which Attwood installed after demolishing the original one. The Banqueting Room is also his work. The brick wall facing the old London Road, three-mile hill, is still standing. The profile of the House, two storied east and west wings and the porte cochere existed until 1986 when the House began to take its final shape that you see today as part of the restoration).

Val Chiswell



Events and Open Estate Days

A brand-new event is coming to Hylands Park for next year called State Fayre. This will replace the previous Creamfields event delivered by Festival Republic. Website is now live at <https://www.statefayre.com/> for more information and the lineup.

Live dates are 26 to 28 June 2026. Please note that the whole of Hylands Park will be closed to the public and all staff and artists for those three days including the Stables.

Why not visit the Open Estate Days every second Sunday of the month from 10am to 3pm! Hylands Estate is fully open for you to explore and enjoy at your leisure. Refresh your memory on the history of Hylands House at the monthly exhibition in the library and enjoy guided tours plus storytelling in the Drawing Room.

Exhibitions 2026

12th April	People who worked at Hylands
10th May	The Gooch family at Hylands
14th June	‘Twenty years’ at Hylands (1966-1986)
12th July	The Pryor Family
9th August	Events throughout the years on the Hylands Estate
13th September	Before and After – Restoration
11th October	Hylands families
8th November	World War I and II / Military Hospital



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