

Secretary's Report Harlow Civic Society, June 27th 2025.

The Harlow Civic Society's stated aim is:

'To celebrate and protect the built environment of Harlow'

and so, our years' activities reflect that.

It has been 10 months since our last AGM in June 2025 as we have been closing the gap created by Covid disruptions so that the AGM sits closer to the end of the year in question. This report covers the period since the last AGM, during which time the Civic Society committee has met seven times.

In November 2025, members of the committee met with Council Leader, Dan Swords, to be updated on regeneration plans for the town centre including Adams House, Market House, The Rows, Terminus House – all of which will be refurbished and also the Strawberry Star area on Market Square which will be demolished as the structure is not sustainable. We were assured that this site will be built on.

We also had a very positive meeting with Princess Alexandra Hospital Deputy CEO and Chief Financial Officer Tom Burton along with other PAH representatives and Civic Society member and Parndon Hall Champion Pauline Hockley. PAH seemed very keen to have the building back in use, potentially for a community purpose, and to this end a further tour has been scheduled for June 12th so that Dan Swords, James Gardner and the relevant councillor can gain a deeper understanding of the heritage significance and future potential of this building.

Planning

In the last 10 months we have made enquiries or submitted on projects and proposals including:

- The Rows
- Bishopsfield
- Old Harlow High Street
- Toddbrook House
- The Bandstand

We also keep a watching brief on various sites around the town such as Parndon Hall and field suggestions from members for the Local List.

Blue Plaques

We continue to face the frustrating situation of not having permission to mount plaques on Council buildings. This is challenging as the people we wish to honour by their very nature have contributed to the town in ways that are often associated with council buildings. We are still looking for locations for plaques to Stan Newens and Ron Bill.

Meanwhile, in September we unveiled a plaque in Old Harlow High Street to architect John Graham. The event was well attended and brought together friends and colleagues of John's from the world of architecture and art.

We will be unveiling a plaque for George Hockham, Co-inventor of optical fibre communication at Standard Telecommunication Laboratories 1960 - 1970. on May 1st at 10am in the Water Gardens where he will take his place alongside Alec Reeves and Charles Kao. This plaque was initiated and largely funded by members of George's family.

A plaque to Frederick and Patricia Gibberd will be unveiled at the Gibberd Gardens on July 18th, funded by an anonymous donor.

You may recall that at last year's AGM we mentioned installing more plaques to women in the town. This is still in the works, though currently stymied by the lack of locations as mentioned earlier. We have also been in touch with the Essex Women's Commemoration Project for input on this matter.

Promotion

We have begun updating our website – the first steps being to include information about each of our blue plaques and then updating some of the images.

Our Instagram account has 314 followers (up nearly 90) and Facebook has 580 (up over 200). As noted last year, we have yet to convert these followers to members, so we need to do more as a committee to encourage new members and would ask that current members spread the word also.

As celebrated earlier, the Harlow Architectural Design Awards have been reinstated this year and a lot of work has gone on to shortlist properties and decide on the winner. Thank you to all involved.

Walks. HCS member John Curry led a circular walk from Passmores House, following a largely green route to Netteswell church and barns before looping back. Another reminder of the wealth of green space right in the centre of town. Thank you to John.

Events

In August we had a stand at the Harlow Museum Community Fete where members shared information about the society and ran a second hand bookstall which raised £86. We will be running this stall again this year so if you are able to help out on August 15th between 12 and 4 please let me know and do donate any unwanted books as well.

Last year we collaborated with Civic Society member Pauline Hockley to coordinate local involvement in the Heritage Open Days in September. We secured £500 of council funding to print leaflets publicising the 9 venues which welcomed over 200 visitors to see behind the scenes in their buildings. This has a dual benefit of sharing Harlow's heritage with residents who may not be aware of the depth of history in the town and also bringing visitors from outside Harlow in.

We have recently begun coordination efforts for Heritage open Days 2026 which will run from the 11th to the 20th of September this year so keep an eye out for leaflets closer to the time and let us know if you'd like to get involved.

General

The upcoming Local Government Reorganisation presents a series of unknowns at this stage, however we do feel that the changes ahead may create opportunities for the Civic Society. We may be able to move into additional areas as we continue to celebrate and protect Harlow's distinctive town plan within the new region and also develop the town's sense of place and community.

That concludes the Secretary's Report for the year 2025 - 2026