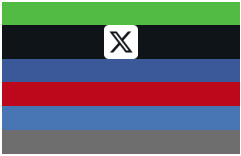


Bishop’s Stortford History Society celebrates 70 years of making a difference to the town

Sinead Corr

12:28, 22 September 2025 **updated:** 15:46, 22 September 2025



Creative children and medieval music brought history to life in Bishop’s Stortford on Saturday (September 20).

Primary school pupils drew and described the personality from the past they would most like to meet – and came up with some surprising answers.

Their choices ranged from Jesus to Queen Victoria and from aviation pioneers the Wright Brothers to American civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr.



Bishop's Stortford History Society chair Tim Howard-Smith and mayor Cllr Richard Townsend welcome visitors to the event

Former St Mary's Catholic School teacher Pauline Francis, who writes history books for children, organised the art project and paid tribute to the youngsters' imagination.

She was surprised by the popularity of Portuguese footballing legend Cristiano Ronaldo as a historical figure at the tender age of 40, but noted he already has his own museum in his birthplace, Funchal, in Madeira.

The youngsters' drawings welcomed visitors to Bishop's Stortford History Society's 70th anniversary celebrations as music from the Colchester Waits, wearing traditional 16th-century dress, set the mood.



The Colchester Waits

Members organised a history day which was officially opened by the mayor, Cllr Richard Townsend, at Windhill Churches Centre.

The event also featured lectures in Charnley Hall by Dr Mike James, author of the society's latest publication, *The Bishops' Castle: Waytemore and Bishop's Stortford*, and Rivers Orchard archivist Elizabeth Waugh, who talked about artists May Rivers (1862-1939) and Betty Rivers (1903-64).

There was also a question and answer session on local history featuring Dr James, society chair Tim Howard-Smith, its president Bill Hardy and Dr Chris Connell, a committee member.

The fun for all ages also included exhibitors, including the Bishop's Stortford, Sawbridgeworth, Hatfield Regis and Great Hallingbury history societies, metal detectorist Andy Gibson, Steve Vincent from Touching the Past, St Michael's Bell Ringers and Nockolds solicitors, which was founded almost 200 years ago in 1831.



Nockolds managing partner Darren Hayward and associate Sarah Lockyer with history society member and children's author Pauline Francis

Mr Howard-Smith told attendees that from its earliest years, after it was inaugurated in February 1955, the society aimed to make a difference to the town.

It championed the protection of historic buildings, including Church Manor, off Parsonage Lane, and the Corn Exchange in Market Square.

Its first book, *Bishop's Stortford: A Short History*, was published in 1969 and a revised version is still for sale.



David Royle, from Sawbridgeworth Local History Society

In 1984, under the leadership of historian Wally Wright, the society ran the town's only museum until 2004, when it merged with the Rhodes Collection to become Bishop's Stortford Museum.

Mr Howard-Smith said: "History is important, and I was reminded only this week so is Bishop's Stortford."



Bishop's Stortford History Society chair Tim Howard-Smith and Herts county councillor Calvin Horner, who supported the event with a grant

During an online lecture, he learned the town had the greatest impact of any north of London on formation of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1630s.

"The great migration [to the New World of America] was the brain drain of the 17th century," he said, adding that the transatlantic link had the makings of a new project for the society.

He said: "The aim to leave a legacy continues in our books, our projects such as the blue plaques and also in our talks.



A member of the Colchester Waits



St Michael's Church was open



Fossils and other finds were on show at Bishop's Stortford History Day



Visitors got the chance to touch historic artefacts



Children's artwork greeted visitors to the event



Janet Shepherd, from Bishop's Stortford Museum, led children's activities



Nockolds solicitors in Market Square sponsored the event and staff served sweet treats



Children's author and Bishop's Stortford History Society member Pauline Francis organised an art project for primary school pupils

