

December 2025 Meeting - Pip Wright "Finding Out About History Through Old Local Newspapers"

Our December meeting was a highly entertaining talk from Pip Wright on the topic of "Finding Out About History Through Old Local Newspapers".

Early local newspapers were not local at all, but were really just a London digest put together by a local editor covering topics that he thought might be interesting to local people. However, once the papers were established, local news did get reported. As today, crime featured large, and a Norwich newspaper in 1734 covered the story of a stark naked robber who was knocked down by a lady wielding a chamber pot.

Pip recounted many amusing stories including one from 1799 regarding an Ardleigh publican called Richard Chaplin, who did very well out of smuggling. When he was eventually caught, he could afford to hire a very expensive brief, Mr Garrow, for his trial in Westminster Hall. Richard Chaplin was found not guilty and eventually retired to Suffolk where he placed an advert in the local newspaper stating that he had now retired from smuggling and was selling many articles that would be useful to a smuggler.

In 1936 the local newspaper in Stowmarket reported that there had been a traffic jam in the middle of town, and traffic had been held up for several minutes at 11.30 in the morning!

Pip pointed out that there was a 50% tax on papers until 1855, which made them very expensive, but then, as now, stories about animals, the weather and crime were very popular.

Our December raffle and additional contributions raised £200 and the proceeds were donated to Cancer Research.

The next Horticultural Society meeting is on Thursday 12th February 2026 when Clive Boase from the Climate Change Gardening Charity will be giving a talk on "Climate Change, Gardening and Us".

Members and visitors are welcome to attend any of our meetings. Entry is free for members, and the admission charge for visitors is just £2.00. The talks are followed by refreshments, (tea or coffee and biscuits), and there is a raffle and plants and produce for sale.