

October 2023 Meeting – Peter Jones “On the Bottle – Codd Bottles and Fizzy Drinks”

Our first meeting of the new season kicked-off with our AGM. With Chairperson Brian Dundon on holiday, Diana Whitfield (Vice Chairperson) conducted the meeting and reported on a very successful season, where our Plant and Cake Sale in May, our Annual Show in August, and a series of entertaining and instructive talks were highlights. Next year, the Plant and Cake Sale will be held on 18th May, and our Annual Show on 17th August.

Our October speaker was Peter Jones and his talk was titled ‘On The Bottle – Codd Bottles and Fizzy Drinks’, with the intriguing subtitle ‘A tale of drink, sobriety and marbles’. Peter’s interest in Codd bottles started when he found an old broken one during a walk on Fordham Heath. The bottles are named after their designer, Hiram Codd. In 1872 he invented a bottle for use with carbonated drinks, using a glass marble to seal the bottle once it has been filled. The pressure of the gas in the drink forced the marble against a rubber washer, sealing the fizzy drink in the bottle. The marble is pushed into the bottle to open it, and a specially designed shelf inside the bottle prevents the marble from blocking the neck as the drink is poured.

Although carbonated water occurs naturally, especially in volcanic regions, in 1772 Joseph Priestley devised a process for infusing carbon dioxide into water. The first person to market Priestley’s idea was Thomas Henry in Manchester, but Johann Schweppe in Geneva improved the efficiency of the process and founded the Schweppes company in 1783, selling carbonated water. The drinking of carbonated water was considered healthy, either on its own or with added flavouring, and it was strongly promoted by the temperance movement. By 1874 there were 19 soft drink manufacturers in Essex, 4 of which were in Colchester.

Colchester also has a strong brewing tradition, and during the 19th century Nicholl’s Brewery and the Colchester Brewing Company Eagle Brewery were both producing beer on East Hill. Use of Codd bottles declined after the introduction of crown cork bottle caps, and, of course, the packaging of fizzy drinks has further evolved. Plastic bottles are now in worldwide use, but one of Peter’s final slides showing dozens of plastic bottles washed up on a beach demonstrated the damage to the environment that they can cause. Maybe Hiram Codd had the right idea! The Codd bottles were cleaned and refilled many times unless they were broken to obtain the marble, which may have been the case with the bottle which started this story.

The next Ardleigh Horticultural Society meeting is on Thursday 14th December when Brook Chalmers will be talking about Tools with a Mission, a Christian charity that collects unwanted usable tools, refurbishes them, sorts them into trade tool kits and sends them to the developing world. Our meetings start at 7.45pm at Ardleigh Village Hall on the 2nd Thursday of every EVEN NUMBERED month – October, December, February, April, June (with exception of August when our show is held). Everyone is very welcome to attend any of our meetings. Members are free and the admission charge for visitors is just £2. The talks are followed by free refreshments, (tea or coffee, and biscuits), and there is a raffle and plants and produce for sale.

Annual membership of Ardleigh Horticultural Society is £5, which includes free admission to all the monthly meetings on the programme up to June 2024 and the Annual Show in August.