

HERITAGE CIRCLE

The December meeting of the Heritage Circle combined the Christmas Social with very entertaining songs and stories by Pip Wright. He is a popular speaker and did not disappoint his audience.

Pip Wright linked songs to humorous and unusual extracts from largely Essex newspapers. One story recounted how a mob complaining about the price of corn and flour in 1789 was dispersed by a magistrate who also managed to collar the ring leaders. Few magistrates would regard this as part of their role today. Other stories were more poignant, such as the last request of Edward Clark before he was hanged. He wanted three fingers of his right hand to be removed after his death and given to his three children as a warning that crime does not pay. His wishes were fulfilled. There were other newspaper extracts where husbands sold their wives. One butcher from Newmarket sold his wife to a friend who was a tanner for 5½d per pound of her weight. This totally illegal action evidently had a contract drawn up by an attorney.

The speaker told the story of Kitty Canham who reputedly haunts the Bell Inn at Thorpe le Soken. She was a beautiful woman who was married to the vicar of the village but ran off with a wealthy businessman named Lord Dalmeny. They lived bigamously in Europe until her death in 1752. She too had a final wish, to be buried in the churchyard of Thorpe le Soken. Dalmeny was intercepted by Customs men when returning with her body in a crate as they thought he was a smuggler. However, she was buried in the churchyard at Thorpe le Soken and her funeral was attended by both of her husbands.

Pip Wright explored some reports of cases tried by magistrates in Rickinghall. He also found out that there were no Christmas decorations in the local church in 1900 because of the British involvement in the Boer War.

A final story showed flouting of the law. In 1799 Richard Chaplin, a publican in Ardleigh, was tried in London for smuggling. He was accused of running goods worth £26,100 in one year, a massive amount of money. He was defended by a barrister named Garrow, of later television fame, who tore apart the testimony of the prosecution witnesses. After his acquittal, Chaplin went to live in Sudbourne, near Orford. He cheekily offered for sale a wagon suitable for smuggling in a local newspaper.

All of the stories recounted were linked to songs of a similar theme. A very enjoyable evening concluded with the Christmas Social.

The next meeting of the Heritage Circle will be at Rickinghall Village Hall at 7.30pm on Wednesday 22nd January when Frances Hart will be presenting *Venice Past to Present*.

Gerry Gurhy