

## Local History Recorder's Report for Ardleigh 2025/6

also see photograph albums, newspaper cuttings, house sale files etc

**Continuing to fight National Grid.** The whole village's main concern this year has been trying to stop or alter National Grid's plans for underground cables through the village to a huge collection of substations and encircling the village with huge pylons. Villagers raised over £25,00 to hire a KC to fight their case. Chris Hamblin produced a video highlighting the impact. Meanwhile, National Grid excavated trial trenches along the proposed route.

**Village celebration.** On May 10<sup>th</sup>, the village celebrated of 80 years since VE Day with a Family Fun Day on the Millennium Green; the beacon itself was lit on 8<sup>th</sup> May.

**School.** Ardleigh St Mary's Primary Academy, having become a member of the Canonium Learning Trust 'family of schools' experienced more upset when its first headmaster resigned in the autumn. There was no school representation on Remembrance Sunday, November 9<sup>th</sup>. In January 2026 Mr Ben Ashbridge was appointed Head. With 72 pupils enrolled, the school now opens from 7.30am to 6pm, providing 'wrap around care' in the new 'Junior Adventures Group' which parents pay for (£5 per morning and £11 after school till 6pm).

**Pre School** had difficulties too, when it failed its inspection in late June and was closed. An existing preschool organisation looked at the village hall, then expressed interest in opening in September 2026. A second private nursery opened at the top of John de Bois Hill.

**Methodist Chapel** was put on the market. No news of takers.

**House sales** slumped because of the pylon threat. Only small houses right in the centre were sold: 2, Khartoum Villas, in Forge Court and at the top of Station Road. Elsewhere, houses remained unsold, especially when situated near the proposed substations. New plans emerged at the end of February 2026 for the new town on the Tendring/Colchester border, including the edge of Ardleigh, with details of schools included.

**New Reservoir SRC** hosted what has become its annual walk around part of the new reservoir it is building, with access from the Old Ipswich Road. Visitors were shown part of what is to become the 10km public path around the reservoir but were also conscious that SRC have submitted plans for an asphalt site right next to the reservoir.

**Shops :** The garage shop increased in popularity, but two of its employees, originally from India, returned there in February, unable to meet the government's new minimum income threshold. They had also been instrumental in transforming the front of the Post Office and getting the Norwegian baker to come every week. **The sorting office** behind the shop was closed in September and the posties sent to Colchester Eastgates instead, a move much resented. The convenience store changed hands, with a new, very welcoming, proprietor.

**Indian restaurant** the Bengal Lion, celebrated its first anniversary in April with welcome drinks and snacks. They supported the Fun Day in May.

**Skylark, now 'Skylark Social'** hosted many events during the year, including its Christmas Carol event. Its newly built extension made it a far more comfortable venue than before.

**Interest groups** flourished. The **Church** Friendship Group met every second Tuesday with a growing membership; its Mother & Toddler and Knitting/Sewing groups were popular. **The Horticultural Society** changed from monthly to bi-monthly meetings, ensuring a good turnout, whilst the May Plant Sale and the August Show were bigger & better than ever. The newly formed **APACE** group met roughly once a month at Skylark, at Prettyfields Vineyard; it had stalls and events in May at the Village Fun Day, and at Skylark sustainability events. Members planted trees on John Fryer's land and worked on the part of the cemetery now designated as a Conservation Area, building new wildlife-friendly features; they picked up litter and cleaned up the village. **The Bowls Club** came to the Fun Day, hosting games as well as showing its **craft group's** activities. **Beavers and Cubs** met weekly and took part on Remembrance Sunday. **The Book Group** continued to meet every month, obtaining its books from Essex Libraries.

**The Speedwatch Group** appealed for more helpers.

**Doctors** appointments – patients were told to book online, using the Anima system. Many found this impossible. All found it frustrating.

**Father Christmas** made his customary rounds in December, with Robert Blyth driving, but a new FC, since his father, James, was seriously ill.

**Prominent funerals: James Blyth** died just before Christmas 2025. The church was packed with family, friends, farmer acquaintances and Alcoholics Anonymous members, all paying tribute to this jovial landowner and farmer from Wick Lane, a parish councillor and church goer. **Sue Doncaster**, from Green Lane, died in the new year. She had been part of many village activities, including being a school governor, but her wake at the village hall was most remarkable for the steam lorry which came to honour its last owner. **Tony Windsor** died in February; he was a keen Speedwatch member; member of APACE, despite being a climate change sceptic; a great litter picker!

Finally **A bad smell** that is what has greeted many villagers on very many occasions this past year. In March 2026, SRC's representative attended the Parish Council meeting to report on their work at the landfill sites with the Environment Agency: new flares etc.

*Jill Hamblin*