



EXPLORING ESSEX'S HERITAGE

a guide for parents, carers and
teachers of children with autism

David Blakesley and Tone Blakesley

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Authors' Foreword and Acknowledgements

Our guide sets out to help parents, carers and teachers to engage children with autism and related conditions with Essex's heritage. Essex has some amazing historic and cultural heritage places to visit, including museums, castles, lighthouses, heritage railways and an aerodrome. We have included twenty-five places, but we visited many more, and were spoilt for choice over places to include in the guide! Where possible, we have selected heritage places that are located in the countryside, by the sea, or set in parkland or gardens. These offer calm places for children to retire to and an opportunity to explore, and engage with, the natural world.

Whilst the guide does not provide solutions to the many difficulties associated with autism, it does offer appropriate information to make visits to the heritage places featured as relaxed and enjoyable as possible, so that the benefits can be accessed by all the family. The description of each location should help parents and carers to judge its suitability for their child. Preparation for a visit to a new place can also be very important. Many children with autism appreciate being shown pictures of their destination, so we have included photographs in the guide that we hope children will find attractive. Many of the places featured require dogs to be kept on leads, whilst several only allow assistance dogs, which may help children who fear dogs.

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We are grateful to Andrew Powling and Peter Buckley for reviewing and proof reading the text. We would also like to thank all the organisations who own and/or manage the heritage places featured in this guide, for kindly providing comments on our descriptions of their sites. We would especially like to thank Jo Mason and Essex County Council Short Breaks for Disabled Children and Young People for their continued support of our work, and their help with the distribution of this guide. We are also indebted to Peter and Barbara Creed (Pisces Publications) for the original design of our guides. The layout was undertaken by Tone Blakesley. Photographs were taken by David Blakesley with additional photographs by Tone Blakesley.

Part 1 Introduction

This guide will help parents, carers and teachers to engage children with autism and related conditions, and their families, with Essex's historical and cultural heritage. For many children, outings to heritage places may not feature in their everyday lives, yet these can be inspiring and fun places for any child to visit. If your child enjoys visiting a particular place, it could become a cherished memory, a special place for them, offering comfort and relaxation as well as learning.

Museums may have interactive exhibits that children can touch, smell or listen to that will inspire and help them to engage with Essex's heritage. The Museum of Power for example offers a great sensory experience for children interested in steam engines and moving parts, though the sound might be difficult for some children to cope with. Some heritage places, such as Audley End House and Garden, have information and fun activities for schools that might also help parents and carers to support a visit with their child. Check websites for information on educational activities for schools or contact education officers. Many children with autism have special interests, and certain places featured in this guide might appeal more than others. For example, there are places that would appeal to children interested in the Romans (Colchester Castle and Chelmsford Museum); sensory gardens (Cressing Temple Barns); boats (LV18 Lightvessel and Harwich Lifeboats); aircraft (Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome); fossils (Colchester Natural History Museum and Saffron Walden Museum); and castles (Hadleigh and Colchester). For children with autism who are interested in trains, there are several heritage railways in Essex. We have included Epping Ongar Railway and the East Anglian Railway Museum in this guide. Transport is also represented by the Canvey Island Transport Museum which children interested in buses (and model railways) might find fascinating. Visits to heritage places might inspire children to find new interests, perhaps in some of the examples listed above. Visits might also be beneficial to the development of a child's social skills and well-being.

LV18 Lightship and Harwich Lifeboat (Tone Blakesley)



Location

Finding suitable heritage places to visit can be challenging and it can be difficult to anticipate problems that might arise when walking around a museum or castle with a child with autism. Where possible we have selected heritage places for inclusion in this guide that are in a rural location, by the sea, or have their own gardens. These places offer families the opportunity of somewhere quiet to go if a child becomes overwhelmed during a visit. For example, families visiting Cressing Temple Barns or Audley End can relax in quiet, calming gardens. Visitors to the heritage places in Harwich can stroll along the shingle beach with their child, whilst visitors to Epping Forest District Museum can explore Waltham Abbey Gardens and Cornmill Meadows Dragonfly Sanctuary. Other locations such as Grange Barn, Hadleigh Castle and Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome are located in the countryside. Whilst most of our featured places have quiet spaces within them, or nearby where parents can retire to if a child becomes anxious during their visit, Southend Central Museum and Saffron Walden Museums are located in busy town centres; others such as Epping Ongar Railway and the East Anglian Railway Museum may be busy on special event days.

Planning your visit

Visiting a heritage place for the first time represents a change in routine that might cause anxiety for any child with autism. There might be sensory elements of the experience that some children find challenging; in museums for example, parents might be concerned about lighting (too bright, too dim or transitions between the two); sound (from videos or working machinery for example); interactive displays; or the presence of mannequins. Whether a place is busy at certain times might

East Anglian Railway Museum (Tone Blakesley)



be particularly important. Some children with autism may express particular anxieties before a visit, such as: how far will they have to walk; will they get back in time for the next activity; will it be noisy; will there will be dogs off lead; and so on. We hope that the information provided in the guide about these and many other issues will help parents and carers to judge the suitability of the featured places for their child and, critically, help with planning and preparing their child, as best they can, for a visit to a new place. This should allow any concerns to be managed or avoided, to give a child the best chance of enjoying the experience.

For any child, there may be real risks associated with a new environment, such as steps or ladders to climb, unprotected machinery and open water. For each of the places included in the guide, we have highlighted issues such as these, and other concerns that parents and carers might have about, for example: quiet areas in which to relax; how busy the venue is; and areas that might over stimulate or overwhelm a child. However, autism is a spectrum condition and every child is different, so there may be other issues that are not covered in this book, or on the website of the venue. As with any activity, we recommend that parents, carers and teachers assess the risks before making a visit to a particular place.

If parents or carers are concerned about a particular place, a family member could visit first to assess its suitability for their child. This would be a good opportunity to take photographs or make a short video to show a child before their visit. Alternatively, parents could make a visual schedule to illustrate a forthcoming visit. We hope that the photographs in this guide can also be shown to children ahead of their visit to a particular place and recommend that parents look at the websites with their child, especially those that are well illustrated. If making a pre-visit is difficult, readers should consult the information in this book, visit the website, and telephone the venue, if necessary, with any specific queries or concerns, such as the dates of special events, which could ruin a visit if a place is very busy on a particular day.

Quiet space - gardens at Audley End (Tone Blakesley)



Here are a few tips on how to prepare for an outing to a heritage place with your child, pupil or friend with autism. Careful planning means that, as far as possible, you can select suitable locations, avoid the unexpected and reduce anxiety for a child with autism. For example:

- Use visual supports and timetables to prepare a child before the outing; the photographs in this guide and photographs or videos on the website of the venue might help
- A sketch map of a walk might be helpful – you could estimate how long to go from one place to another, for example “in so many minutes we will be back at the entrance”
- Check the distance to be walked, the terrain and whether there are any steep steps
- Check if interactive exhibits are suitable for your child
- Check on the availability of refreshments and toilets
- Consider visiting at quiet times (contact the venue)
- Check if there are quiet areas to retire to if a visit becomes overwhelming
- Check if there are areas that would be best avoided, due to noise, challenging lighting or number of visitors
- Do the necessary risk assessments – essential if you are a support worker
- Have a plan in case your child becomes separated from you
- Have some games to play or activities that you can do whilst walking around.

Planning a visit can help to minimise stress and make a visit relaxing and enjoyable, that might otherwise have been daunting. We hope that this guide and the accounts of the heritage places will help to achieve this planning.

Finally, we recommend families visit the Essex County Council Short Breaks for Disabled Children and Young People website and Facebook page (see page 56) which provide important information to help parents and carers to identify support and activities across Essex.

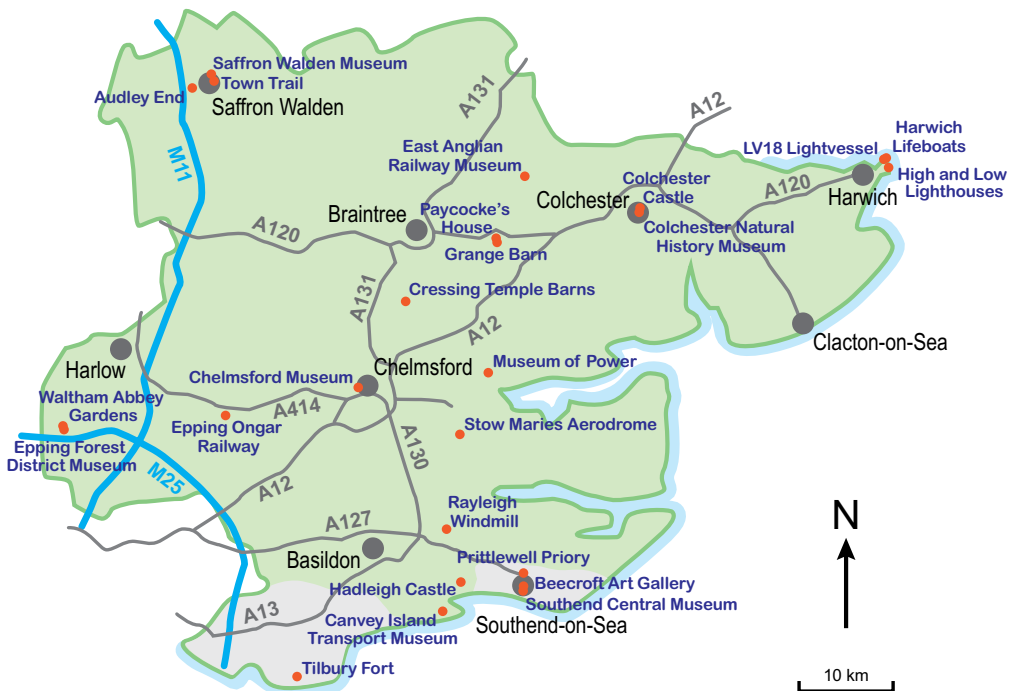
Cressing Temple Barns



Part 2 Heritage places to visit in Essex

Essex has a rich historical and cultural heritage that is well represented in the places included in this guide. Families visiting Essex museums may learn about 'Ice Age' Essex and life in the Bronze and Iron Ages. Colchester is thought to be the oldest recorded town in Britain – visitors to Colchester Castle will discover that it was known as Camulodunon before the Romans arrived and subsequently became the capital of Roman Britain. The name 'Essex' derives from the Anglo-Saxon name East Seaxe, for a Saxon kingdom that existed before the Norman conquest. Whilst many of the places featured in the guide have exhibitions that lead visitors through Essex's history, others focus on one aspect, such as the development of steam power, the railways, maritime history and agriculture; families may also follow the 'Tudor' town trails in Coggeshall and Saffron Walden. In contrast, a visit to the Beecroft Art Gallery might interest children in colourful contemporary art, and on a Saturday lunchtime, they might be thrilled to hear a live jazz session in the Jazz Centre.

Before visiting the places featured in the guide, we recommend readers look at the relevant websites. Many include leaflets or maps and details of public transport. Some have educational resources for schools that might prove useful for families. Other websites (see page 56 for addresses) include 'Visit Essex', which presents information on ways to explore, experience and enjoy the county. 'Getting around in Essex' includes guides to walking along public rights of way, and also provides up to date information to help plan journeys by public transport – useful as bus routes change over time – and includes community transport and public transport maps. Finally, the 'Traveline south east and anglia' website shows bus stops in the vicinity of a particular location, together with timetable information.



- In the centre of Colchester (CO1 1UG); Priory Street (CO1 2QA) and Britannia (CO2 7EF) pay-and-display car parks are 450 and 530 m respectively from the castle; spaces for disabled badge holders in Museum Street and High Street

- Public transport: buses stopping on High Street, close to the castle, include services to/from Harwich and Clacton (daily) and Ipswich, Brightlingsea and Maldon (Mon to Sat); railway station 550 m walk from museum

- Open daily; 'relaxed' opening 10 am to 12 noon on the 1st Sunday of each month (check website for details); admission charge (free for carer)

- Visitor reception; accessible toilets and lift

- Terrain: wheelchair access throughout the building; stairs or lift to first floor; walkway around the first floor is protected by a glass guard fence

- Tactile/Braille maps

- Artificial lighting – generally subdued with brightly lit display cases; numerous audio-visual and interactive displays; 15 min audio visual presentation projected onto the castle wall every hour

- Unfenced fish pond and lake in Castle Park

- Quiet space: Castle Park

- Assistance dogs only in the museum

- Visual story, visual story film and sensory map on website might help to prepare children for their visit; collection of twiddlemuffs available.

Colchester Castle

bringing history to life...

Colchester Castle was the largest castle built by the Normans in the world! Work started 10 years after the Norman Conquest using building material from the ruins of the Roman Temple of Claudius, a large Roman temple that once stood on the site. Today, Colchester Castle houses a fantastic museum that covers Colchester's history from the Iron Age to the Medieval. There is an amazing amount to see, and some children with autism might be a little overwhelmed by the number of display cases and exhibits. Amongst these are many interactive displays, including an opportunity for children to race a Roman chariot, and several audio-visual presentations that parents should be aware of. These include a continuous presentation about Queen Boudicca on a large screen above one of the upper galleries, and every hour, an impressive 15-minute presentation that is projected on an entire internal castle wall. For children who might find the level of background noise and the videos distressing, the museum offers a 2 hour 'relaxed opening' session on the first Sunday of each month, when all the audio and visuals are switched off (check website for current information).

The museum is eerily quiet at this time, and ideal for children with sensory sensitivities. The museum suggests a route that starts in the Iron Age and ends at the English Civil War. To follow this route, proceed to the first floor where you will find a display about life in an Iron Age roundhouse – there are several role-play cards and children

Colchester Castle (Tone Blakesley)



can dress up like an Iron Age child. Nearby cases display Iron Age pottery, jewellery and coins made of bronze, silver and gold. Camulodunon was the ancient name of Colchester, with the letters 'CAM' on some coins to denote this. You then come to the Roman period, with two impressive Roman tombstone sculptures. Display cases exhibit pottery and artefacts from a child's burial. A replica Roman helmet stands out (note there are also human skulls and bones on display). Information boards describe the Roman conquest and the Roman way of life. You can look down on a mosaic floor, recovered from a villa close to Colchester. There is also a model of the magnificent Roman temple that was destroyed by the Iceni tribe led by Queen Boudicca. Another case displays the 'Fenwick Treasure' – a hoard of Roman jewellery and coins discovered in Colchester. Close by, children can listen to audio recordings about the lives of five people who lived in Roman Colchester after the revolt and look at displays of massive pots, glassware and metalwork. A dressing up station allows children to try on a toga, with instructions on how to wear it. Children can also touch a gladiator's helmet, armguard and shield; make their own mosaic; and try the interactive Roman chariot ride (noisy).

Moving to the ground floor, you will find display cases about the Anglo-Saxons who occupied Colchester from about 450 AD, the arrival of the Vikings and subsequently the Normans. There is more pottery, sword blades and other artefacts on display. There is also an impressive model of the castle with rooms set out as they would have been in Norman times. Finally, there are display cases of artefacts from medieval times including crafts and household possessions, and hats to try on. More adventurous families may, for an additional charge, join a tour to see the Roman vaults under the castle.

<https://colchester.cimuseums.org.uk/visit/colchester-castle/>

Life in an Iron Age roundhouse



Roman mosaic (Tone Blakesley)



- In the centre of Colchester, opposite Castle Park (CO1 1DN); Priory Street (CO1 2QA) and Britannia (CO2 7EF) pay-and-display car parks are 350 and 430 m respectively from the museum; spaces for disabled badge holders in Museum Street and High Street
- Public transport: buses stopping on High Street, close to the museum include services to/from Harwich and Clacton (daily) and Ipswich, Brightlingsea and Maldon (Mon to Sat); railway station 550 m walk from museum
- Open Tue to Sun; free admission
- Visitor reception; accessible toilets; choice of eateries nearby
- Terrain: wheelchair access throughout the building
- Museum displays a number of taxidermy specimens
- Unfenced fish pond and lake in Castle Park
- Quiet space: Castle Park (50 m walk from the museum)
- Assistance dogs only in the museum
- Children's books, puzzles and microscope; collection of twiddlemuffs for visitors who would benefit from constant sensory stimulation.

Colchester Natural History Museum

look out for the fossils!

A visit to this small museum could be combined with Hollytrees Museum or Colchester Castle, both of which are close by. The museum aims to engage people with the wildlife and geology of north east Essex. Parents should note that there are many taxidermy bird and animal specimens in the museum, including a fox in an open case that children can touch. It is usually quiet, which will suit many children with autism. Display cases include: life under the water; saltmarshes; saltings; rocky shores; and sand dunes. Children with an interest in fossils may find the geology section particularly interesting, with its fine collection of fossil echinoids (sea urchins), sharks' teeth and vertebrae, collected locally from Walton-on-the-Naze. It is hard to believe that these teeth are 54 million years old and can be picked up on the beach! The jaw of a shark on display shows that, unlike humans, sharks have many rows of teeth and continually replace their teeth – which is perhaps why they can still be collected today. There is also a collection of huge megalodon shark teeth. This was the largest marine predator that ever lived, and it swam in the seas around Essex about 2.5 million years ago. Megalodon teeth are very rare, and those on display may have been dredged up from the sea bed.

The museum has a table where younger children can sit and look at the many natural history and story books or complete the jigsaw puzzles. There is also a microscope where an object can be easily viewed on a screen. The image is remarkably clear, and in addition to the pine cone, scallop shell and feather provided, you could look at other objects, such as a coin in your pocket for example.

<https://colchester.cimuseums.org.uk/visit/natural-history-museum/>

Geology gallery (Tone Blakesley)



- In the centre of Rayleigh, just off the High Street, adjacent to a pay-and-display car park with Blue Badge parking spaces (SS6 7ED)

- Public transport: buses to/from Southend and Basildon stop on High Street (200 m from the windmill); the railway station is 800 m from the windmill along busy roads

- Open Wed (am), Sat and Sun (pm) (Apr to Sep) (check website as windmill is closed on private 'event' days); admission free (donations welcome)

- Accessible toilets in the Mill Arts and Events Centre next door (Mon to Sat); public toilets in the town centre (Crown Hill)

- Terrain: ramp up to the entrance; the windmill itself has three upper floors, accessed by steep, narrow stairs (visitors are advised to climb down facing the steps); access statement on website; Rayleigh Mount has steep, uneven gravel and grassy paths

- Unfenced pond on Rayleigh Mount

- Quiet space: small garden behind the Windmill and nearby Rayleigh Mount

- Assistance dogs only in the windmill; dogs may be encountered off lead in Rayleigh Mount

- Informative leaflet available in the windmill; activity table on the ground floor with colouring sheets; and a tv screen which shows views of each of the six levels.

Rayleigh Windmill

step inside an old mill...

The windmill is an impressive building in the town of Rayleigh. Children may be interested just to walk around the windmill and gaze up at the sails, and excited to have the opportunity to go inside. The volunteer guides are very friendly and happy to talk to families about the history of the windmill. Ask them to demonstrate for your child how the quern stone on the ground floor can be used to grind grain to make flour for bread-making. Steep steps take you up to the first floor, known as the Meal or Machine floor. This would have originally housed the 'Great Spur Wheel' but now serves as a small museum about life in the town of Rayleigh. The volunteers are happy for visitors to touch some of the items and there is a dressing up rail for children. A further flight of steep steps takes you up to the 'Stone floor' where enormous millstones, balanced one on top of the another would have milled the grain for flour. These have now been removed, and the room acts as an exhibition space for local artists, with a small display of items related to the mill.

Visitors can also climb the steps to the third floor, known as the 'Bin floor' where grain would have been stored in large wooden bins. The room now houses a poster display about Rayleigh Castle which is next to the windmill. The centrepiece in the room is a model of the castle when it was occupied, which children may find interesting. They will learn that it was a motte and bailey, and the only Essex castle mentioned in the Domesday Book. Today, much of the castle (known as Rayleigh Mount) has been lost to development, but the motte still remains and is managed by the National Trust. After your visit to the windmill, you could walk around what was formerly the moat and if your child is able, climb the castle motte.

www.rochford.gov.uk/windmill

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/rayleigh-mount

'Stone floor' (Tone Blakesley)



Rayleigh Windmill (Tone Blakesley)



- In Harwich Town, moored alongside The Quay (CO12 3HH); parking on nearby streets or Wellington Road pay-and-display car park (CO12 3DL)

- Public transport: buses to/ from Clacton and Colchester (daily) stop at the bus and rail station; trains to/ from Manningtree daily (700 m walk to the Lightvessel)

- Open most days Mar to Oct (call ahead to confirm opening); admission charge

- Toilets including accessible toilet (radar key) opposite the Lightvessel; café on Ha'penny Pier next to Lightvessel

- Terrain: ramped gangway to main deck, not suitable for wheelchairs; steep stairs to upper and lower decks (visitors are advised to climb down facing the steps); chains and other trip hazards on deck; uneven surfaces, low level head hazards in certain areas

- Low light levels below deck

- Quiet space: walk to the seafront by the Low Lighthouse

- Water: boat is moored on the seafront

- Dogs are allowed on board

- Audiovisual displays on the boat; video presentation for visitors unable to access the lower deck; photograph gallery on the website.

LV18 Lightvessel

a light vessel and pirate radio station!

This could be a fascinating destination for a child with a special interest in boats, or any child interested in radio or music. It should also be of particular interest to parents and carers who remember the days of Radio Caroline and the 'pirate radio' stations that once broadcast popular music without a licence from offshore ships or disused sea forts. LV18 started its life in the late 1950s as a manned light vessel off the Cornish coast, but spent much of its working life off the Norfolk coast at Cromer. Your child may be familiar with lighthouses on land, but they may not realise that lightvessels were stationed off the coast of Britain to help ships navigate through particularly dangerous waters and avoid running aground. LV18 had a crew of nine people, who would spend several weeks at a time on board, often in very rough seas. Ask your child if they can imagine going to bed clutching a life jacket for safety!

When lightvessels became automated, LV18 was the last lightvessel to be manned, finally being retired in 1994. It is the only lightvessel that has been fully restored, and is now owned by the Pharos Trust, a charity that preserves maritime heritage. If you look out across Harwich Harbour, you should see a red boat anchored offshore – this is one of the automatic lightvessels that replaced the manned boats. All of the automatic lights are now controlled from Trinity House in Harwich. As you explore the main deck, you will discover that the foredeck has been converted into a delightful garden! Steep steps take

LV18 Lightboat (Tone Blakesley)



you up to the wheelhouse; this is usually locked, but you can look through the window to discover that it has been converted into a radio studio. From here you can walk across the upper deck, or climb a further further set of steps to the 'monkey deck'. Here you will be standing below the light itself, which is still in working order, powered by diesel generators below deck (these are not accessible to the public).

Below the main deck you will find the cabins and galley. The cabins are set out as they would have been when the boat was in use as a lightvessel, several with gramophones and album covers from the 1960s. Music was a way for the crew to relax, and they also used radio to keep in touch with the mainland, as there was no television reception at sea. The master's cabin is the most spacious and comfortable on the boat! There is also a storage room that now houses a large number of old radios and gramophones. The recreation room includes an exhibition about pirate radio. Explain to your child that lightvessels, including LV18, were never used as pirate radio ships. However, the restored LV18 occasionally broadcasts licensed 'Pirate Radio' from its wheelhouse studio, along with more regular community radio broadcasts. Children may not be aware that in the 1960s, unlicensed pirate radio ships were anchored just offshore, and radio DJs would have been ferried out to them from Harwich harbour. Some of today's best known radio presenters started their careers on pirate radio ships. Finally, if your child is interested in maps, a large nautical chart shows sea depths and nautical hazards in the approaches to Harwich Harbour.

www.lv18.org/

Upper deck (Tone Blakesley)



Garden on foredeck (Tone Blakesley)



The High and Low Lighthouses

maritime history...

- The lighthouses are in Harwich Town, either side of Harwich Green; the Low Lighthouse is by the sea wall, and the High Lighthouse is on the opposite side of the green (C012 3DQ); park on nearby streets or Wellington Road pay-and-display car park (C012 3DL)
- Public transport: buses to/from Clacton and Colchester (daily) stop at the bus and rail station; trains to/from Manningtree daily (100 m walk to the High Light and 250 m to the Low Light)
- Open weekends May to mid Sep; small admission charge (children free)
- Toilets including accessible toilet (radar key) next to High Lighthouse
- Children's playground next to the Low Lighthouse
- Terrain: very steep stairs to upper floors in both lighthouses (five floors in the High Lighthouse and two floors in the Low Lighthouse), visitors are advised to climb down facing the steps; level access to two galleries on the ground floor of the Low Lighthouse; one point of entry and exit in each building
- Access to a gantry on the second floor of the Low Lighthouse – this has a low railing and runs around the tower
- Mannequins in the Low Lighthouse
- Quiet space: walk along the seafront or on the green
- Dogs are allowed in the museums
- Map of Harwich Maritime Heritage Trail on website.

The High Lighthouse dominates the skyline of the old part of Harwich. Across the green is the much lower Low Lighthouse. Explain to your child that the lighthouses were built over 200 years ago as a pair, one with a white light and one with a red light. They were known as 'leading lights', because mariners could align the two lights (one above the other), as seen from the sea, to locate the channel that would allow safe passage for their ship into Harwich Harbour. However, when the position of the channel and sandbanks changed in 1863, the lighthouses were withdrawn from service. At this time, a new pair of leading lights was constructed. Exploring the lighthouses should certainly be an adventure for your child, providing that they are able to climb the steep steps between the various floors, and climb down facing the steps.

For families concerned about the steps, the less challenging of the two is the Low Lighthouse, which also houses the Maritime Museum. If your child has an interest in the sea, especially boats, then they may be excited to explore this small museum. There are interesting displays of nautical memorabilia on the ground floor, for children unable to climb the steps. These include many fantastic models of 19th and 20th century naval frigates, together with detailed models of sailing ships. There are a lot of photographs of naval boats, and displays of medals, ratings' badges, knots, shells and flags. There is

Maritime Museum



even a ship's telephone on the wall. A dressing up box contains naval uniforms and caps. There are more memorabilia on the first floor, including a model of a steam ship and several 'ships in bottles'. The second floor is where the light would have been, and the windows offer a panoramic view across to Felixstowe Harbour. A radio set is tuned into the Harwich Harbour Master, so if a ship is entering the harbour you may be able to hear the exchanges between ship and shore, which some children might find quite exciting. Across the green is the High Light, which at one time was used as a council house! If your child is able to climb the steep stairs, the fifth floor has great views across the Low Lighthouse and Harwich Harbour to the port of Felixstowe. As you climb the lighthouse, you will find an interesting display of fossils and clay pipes; pictures and models of ships; and information on the Nunn family, who moved into the lighthouse in 1909 after the council took over the premises.

Also on Harwich Green is the Treadwheel Crane. It is much older than the lighthouses, and was originally built on the site of the Naval Yard in 1667. Here it was used to lift heavy gear onto ships, such as the tall masts of sailing ships. Children might be interested to know that the crane was made of wood and was 'human powered'. It worked on the 'tread-wheel principle' – with two men essentially walking inside the wheel! The building housing the wheel is closed for most of the year, but you can walk around the outside to see the arm of the crane, and an information board with a diagram showing the inside of the building. And if your child still has some energy, you can walk along the shore above the high water mark, perhaps looking at the plants that are colonising this developing habitat.

www.harwich-society.co.uk/maritime-heritage-trail/

Maritime Museum



High Lighthouse



- In Harwich Town, the Lifeboat Station is by The Quay (CO12 3HH); the Lifeboat Museum is by Harwich beach; parking for both on nearby streets or Wellington Road pay-and-display car park (CO12 3DL)

- Public transport: buses to/from Clacton and Colchester (daily) stop at the bus and rail station; trains to/from Manningtree daily (700 m walk to the Lifeboat Station and 350 m to the Lifeboat Museum)

- Lifeboat Museum open Wed to Sun (May to Aug) with small admission charge (children free); Lifeboat Station and gift shop open daily, admission free

- Toilets including accessible toilet (radar key) opposite Lifeboat Station

- Terrain: short flight of steep stairs in both buildings; disabled lift in Lifeboat Station (keys available from the shop)

- Mannequins in the Lifeboat Museum

- Quiet space: walk to the seafront by the Low Lighthouse or on the green

- Dogs are allowed with the exception of the Lifeboat Station shop (assistance dogs only)

- Map of Harwich Maritime Heritage Trail on the Harwich Society website.

Harwich Lifeboats

boats that save lives at sea...

There are two places to visit in Harwich with children who might be interested in lifeboats, the Harwich Lifeboat Station and the nearby Lifeboat Museum. A shed was built in 1876 to house the Harwich lifeboat, and this is now the Lifeboat Museum. Here, a walkway allows you to view the lifeboat 'Valentine Wyndham Quinn', built in 1968 and formerly based in Clacton. Visitors can walk through the wheelhouse, where children might be excited to hold the wheel and look down into the engine room. Outside is a boat called 'The City of Leicester', an RNLI boat used to access a lifeboat moored offshore, that served the Walton Lifeboat Station for 40 years in the 20th century. Some children may like to watch the video presentation in the museum about real life rescues.

Close by is the modern Harwich Lifeboat Station, which was opened in 2002 and operates two lifeboats. Families can view the inshore Atlantic 85 lifeboat from a walkway in the Lifeboat Station. The Atlantic 85 operates on the coast from Walton-on-the Naze to Aldeburgh in Suffolk, and also inland on local rivers. The boat does not have a wheel house, so the crew are very exposed to the elements. From the viewing area you can look through the windows to see the 'Albert Brown', an all-weather offshore lifeboat moored alongside the quay. This is a Severn class lifeboat, with a range of 250 nautical miles. Explain to your child that Harwich is one of the busiest lifeboat stations in Britain, with an average of 100 services each year. A poster invites you to 'meet the crew', many of whom are volunteers who must be on call 365 days a year, to help keep people safe. Another poster presents the history of the lifeboat station, illustrating the first steam powered lifeboat, which went on service in Harwich.

www.harwichlifeboat.org.uk/

www.harwich-society.co.uk/maritime-heritage-trail/

Lifeboat Museum



Harwich Lifeboat Station (Tone Blakesley)



- Swan Meadow pay-and-display car park (CB10 1DH) is signposted from the B184 (Bridge Street) in Saffron Walden (450 m walk to the Market Place)

- Public transport: buses (Mon to Sat) to Saffron Walden from Stansted Airport, Haverhill and Cambridge

- Opening: the Town Trail can be walked at any time; market days on Tuesdays and Saturdays

- Accessible toilet in Bridge End Garden (restricted opening); accessible toilet on Hill Street; accessible toilet for visitors in the Museum; choice of eateries in town centre

- Terrain: the Town Trail is 1.5 km, much of which is along roadside pavements (moderate inclines in places); gravel paths in Bridge End Garden; grassy area around the castle

- Unfenced ponds in Bridge End Garden and by Swan Meadow car park

- Quiet space: Bridge End Garden and Walden Castle grounds

- Assistance dogs only in Bridge End Garden

- Download the 'Town Trail' from the Visit Saffron Walden website before you visit (printed copies are available in the Museum and Tourist Information Centre).

Saffron Walden Town Trail

timber-framed houses and a market...

Saffron Walden is a pleasant, medieval 'market' town in the far north west of Essex. Visiting Saffron Walden today is rather like travelling back in time, in the sense that there are many impressive timber-framed houses around the town, which has a traditional market place at its centre. Explain to your child that the town got its name in Tudor times from growing the 'saffron crocus' for the production of the spice 'saffron'. The Town Trail starts in the Market Place. If your child is happy to visit when the town centre is busier, then Tuesdays and Saturdays are market days. In today's market, your child can immerse themselves in a world of colour, texture and fragrance, just as people in Saffron Walden have done since the 13th century. Stalls may include a large display of colourful fruit and vegetables; baskets of aromatic coffee beans; stalls displaying heritage breads, olives, cheeses and pot-grown herbs; and of course, the aromas of cooking.

From the Market Place, the trail takes you along narrow streets past many old buildings that your child might find interesting. The first of these is The Old Sun Inn, formerly a series of homes and shops dating from the 14th century. As you walk up Museum Street, be sure to look at the ruins of Walden Castle, just beyond the museum. The castle was built in the 12th century, but the ruins of the Norman keep are all that remain. The cottages in Saffron Walden have been painted in a wide range of pastel colours. Ask your child to count how many different colours they can see. The timber-framed houses date from around 1500. After walking through Bridge End Garden, you return along Bridge Street where the traffic is busier. There are some fine timber-framed houses here too, some of which your child might feel are tilting a little! There is also a maze in Bridge End Garden, and a Turf Labyrinth on The Common, that might interest your child!

www.visitsaffronwalden.gov.uk/The-Market-Town.aspx

Walden Castle (Tone Blakesley)



Saffron Walden Museum

a fascinating local museum...

- Museum (with small car park) in the centre of Saffron Walden, on Museum Street opposite St Mary's Church (CB10 1BN); Swan Meadow pay-and-display car park (CB10 1BX) is signposted from the B184 in Saffron Walden (650 m walk to museum); Catons Lane car park (CB10 2DU) is off Little Walden Road (500 m walk to museum)
- Public transport: buses (Mon to Sat) to Saffron Walden from Stansted Airport, Haverhill and Cambridge
- Open all year Tue to Sat, also Sun afternoons (check website for times); modest admission charge (concessions and children under 18 free); small free car park for visitors
- Accessible toilet; eateries in town centre (the market place is 250 m from the museum)
- Terrain: wheelchair access to ground floor with lift to first floor; stair lift to mezzanine floors (natural history and geology displays); grassy area around Walden Castle
- Lighting in some rooms is subdued
- Taxidermy collection; human skeletons; and a mummy on display
- Unfenced pond by Swan Meadow car park
- Quiet space: castle grounds
- Assistance dogs only in the museum; dogs may be encountered off lead in the castle grounds
- Museum explorer's backpacks for children to borrow; 'Kid's Museum Map' on website.

This is a traditional district museum with displays covering a very wide range of topics, from the history and natural history of north west Essex to topics from around the world. You could spend many hours looking around and talking about the varied exhibits with your child. However, carers should be aware that some children with autism might find the galleries a little overwhelming at first, given that so many objects are on display. The museum has made a special effort to engage children by providing a series of 'themed' museum explorer backpacks that they can borrow. In the backpacks, children will find books, trails, a magnifying glass, ear defenders and activity folders on themes such as the Romans, dinosaurs and ancient Egypt. 'I Spy' sheets are also available for children to complete as they walk around. Note that there is one backpack available on each of eight themes.

There is no set route around the museum, so you might start in the gallery that most interests your child. The local history gallery focuses on Saffron Walden over the past thousand years, from an agricultural community to a prosperous trade centre. If your child is interested in fossils, the geology gallery features seven display cases, several with large magnifying glasses allowing children to look closely at fossils collected locally from the chalk and red crag. These include impressive ammonites, echinoids, plants and even ichthyosaur bones. Moving forwards in time, the Early History gallery might also be popular with many children. There is also an interesting fossil here too – an impressive woolly mammoth tusk. This gallery focuses on the

Chalk fossils (Tone Blakesley)



archaeology of north west Essex, with displays of flint tools used by local people in the Stone Age and weapons made in the Bronze Age. Children can touch a display of Stone Age tools and 'dig' in a sand tray, before moving on to a display about life in an Iron Age roundhouse. As you look at the Roman display cases, your child's eye might be drawn to the 'treasure', which includes gold and silver Roman coins, Anglo-Saxon silver coins and medieval quarter-nobles (also made of gold).

Children interested in wildlife might enjoy the natural history gallery on the first floor. If they like to touch, there are feathers, shells and even taxidermy specimens of a fox and hedgehog. They can explore the contents of a series of drawers to find specimens of fish, insects, bones and dissected owl pellets. There is even a vivarium containing living stick insects. A large display case shows taxidermy specimens of woodland animals and birds in a woodland setting. There is also a Victorian naturalist's collection in a side room – you cannot enter, and must push a button to light up the room, which is full of taxidermy specimens, perhaps too much for some children. Close by, a large taxidermy specimen of a lion stands guard over the Ancient Egypt gallery (mummy on display). For children who love colours and patterns, there is a fine display of ceramics and glass; and close by is a large case displaying a dolls' house and old toys. Finally, one of the most fascinating exhibits is the World Cultures Gallery that aims to help people to understand something of the way of life of indigenous peoples from other parts of the world, including Melanesia, Africa, the Americas and the Arctic. Displays include colourful tribal art, and articles used for hunting and fishing. Too much perhaps for one day, and you might find that your child wants to visit again.

www.saffronwaldenmuseum.org/

Gold Roman coins (Tone Blakesley)



'Interactive' archaeology area (Tone Blakesley)



- One mile west of Saffron Walden on the B1383 (CB11 4JF)

- Public transport: nearest bus stop 1 km walk from the house

- From Mar to Oct open daily; Nov to Mar house closed, but stables, service wing and gardens open weekends; admission charge (free for two carers and English Heritage members); large car park; (check the website for admission charges and opening times)

- Accessible toilets; café and tearoom; picnic areas

- Children's play area by the kitchen garden

- Terrain: level access to ground floor of house (no lift to other floors), stables, service wing and gardens; outside, uneven surfaced and grass paths; several bridges have steps or steep slope (can be avoided); 'ha-ha' (2m deep) running around part of the house; organic gardens and stables 400 m from car park; the 'hazard sheet' on the schools webpage useful

- Low lighting levels throughout the house

- Collection of taxidermy specimens in the house

- Deep water: river, artificial lakes and several garden ponds (all unfenced)

- Quiet space: gardens and extensive grounds

- Assistance dogs only in the house; dogs should be on lead in the grounds

- Pupil activity sheets and other useful information for children on the schools webpage.

Audley End House and Garden

an impressive mansion...

Audley End is a fascinating place to visit, with landscaped gardens, a large organic kitchen garden, Victorian stables and an impressive Jacobean mansion house with a Victorian service wing. For a child with autism there are many opportunities for sensory experiences. Because of the admission charge, it would be most suitable for families who are happy to spend several hours on the site visiting the house and gardens. The quietest part of the site is usually the Victorian kitchen garden. It is a pleasant stroll to the kitchen garden, passing old horse chestnut and London plane trees. Crossing one of several bridges, you will reach the garden, which extends over about 1 hectare.

Explain to your child that the garden was designed to provide the great house with a continual supply of fruit, vegetables and flowers, and was once much larger than it is today. Your child may be fascinated to explore the garden, looking for vegetables that they are familiar with, and perhaps finding some that they have not come across before. Many of the paths are bordered by espalier-trained fruit trees, offering the fragrance of blossom in the spring and the aroma of fruit in the autumn. In the vineyard, you will find grapes in the late summer, and posters explaining the history of the vineyard and the gardens. Behind the vineyard you can look back in time, in the 'bothy' rooms that were built to accommodate some of the gardeners. The Victorian Stables are still home to several horses and an interactive exhibition telling the story of the estate. The website includes a

Mansion house



timetable for the horses' daily activities, including feeding, exercising and grooming. One of the stables includes four wooden horses of different sizes, with saddles for children to sit on. There are also clothes to try on that would have been worn by servants and estate workers in Victorian times.

Back at the house, children might enjoy exploring the service wing, to see how families in domestic service lived and worked. You can visit the dairy, where an engaging poster explains how a dairy maid would have churned butter for the house; similar posters describe the work of laundry maids in the wet and dry laundries; and finally you can walk through the kitchens where maids cooked and did the washing up! On certain event days (check website for details) you can see the service wing at work, as the cook and her servants prepare food using traditional methods. When you visit the grand house itself, you will find that life 'above stairs' was very different. Your child may never have seen a house like this, which was built in the early 17th century, and looks more like a palace. As children walk around, they may be amazed at the size of the rooms, the high ceilings, grand furniture and the large portraits hanging on the walls. There are chairs in some of the rooms where you can sit and get a better feel for what it was like to live in the house. Right at the top of the house is perhaps the most interesting room for children, a 19th century nursery. Children can dress up as Victorian children and play with toys that include a rocking horse, a large dolls house, several jigsaws, cup and ball games and a giant chess set. Finally, if your child still has some energy left, you can walk around the formal gardens, feed the ducks on the river, or walk around the wider estate grounds.

www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/audley-end-house-and-gardens/

Vinery



Rocking Horse



- Based at Chappel & Wakes Colne Railway Station, on the A1124 between Colchester and Halstead (CO6 2DS)

- Public transport: buses to and from Halstead and Colchester (daily) stop at Station Road (450 m from the museum along a minor road with no pavement); the Railway Station is on the Marks Tey to Sudbury branch line

- Open daily (except Dec 25 and 26); parts of the museum may be closed during special events (check website for details); admission charge (carer free); free parking

- Special event days can be busy and priced differently

- Separate ticket required for branch line trains (not part of the museum) which stop every 30 mins or so

- Accessible toilet by the ticket office and shop; café on the platform

- Terrain: firm, uneven surfaces around the museum; steps from the ticket office to the platform, and bridge linking platform to main part of the museum; alternative disabled parking area avoiding steps (ask at reception); typical walk round the site 1 km

- On steam days, wheelchairs can be accommodated in some carriages

- Restoration shed: trip hazards, sharp edges, substances and noise; no barriers to prevent children reaching out for tools and other materials

- Several mannequins

- Dogs should be on lead.

East Anglian Railway Museum

ideal for young railway enthusiasts...

This is a great place to visit with any child with autism who has an interest in the railway. The museum is based at Chappel & Wakes Colne Railway Station, on the Marks Tey to Sudbury branch line (train services are separate to the museum). It has a fine collection of locomotives and rolling stock, old railway buildings and memorabilia. The quieter times to visit are days when the museum has no trains in operation. Even on these occasions there is still a lot to see and branch line trains stop at the station every half an hour or so. Parents should note that you have to walk through the shop to access the stairs to the platform. Here you will find an old ticket office, a restored 1930s WHSmith book stall in the booking hall and a waiting room with colourful railway posters. Next door is the old station master's office. Before you cross the bridge, walk down the platform to the signal box. Your child may love this, because there are 38 coloured levers that they can pull, and maybe pretend to be a real signalman when a mainline train comes into the station! Explain to your child that this signal box was originally designed in 1890 for the Great Eastern Railway.

Crossing the bridge, you will find several carriages alongside the platform that you should be able to walk through. One particularly old carriage has a telephone with large touch buttons that your child can press to learn about the history of the Colchester to Sudbury railway. You can then walk across an old level crossing into the Goods Yard.

Goods yard



Here you will find the Goods Shed and the Goods Office, which have been restored to how they would have looked in Victorian times. Here, railway workers dealt with the movement of everything from parcels to farm animals. Look out for the crane and old porter's waggon. Opposite the Goods Shed is a smaller platform, where you are likely to see several wagons, coaches and locomotives. Some look remarkably like characters from Thomas the Tank Engine, and are no doubt used on special 'Thomas' event days. On these occasions, and also on other event days, families can enjoy a ride on a steam or diesel train along a short length of track. Children may be excited to see even more rolling stock in 'Thomas' colours outside the Restoration Shed.

The Restoration Shed itself is a fascinating place to visit for 'young engineers', where they will find coaches and steam trains in various stages of restoration. However, parents and carers should look for the safety notice before entering, which warns of a range of hazards including substances (oil, grease etc), sharp edges, trip hazards and noise, and advises parents to hold their child's hand and not to allow them to climb on equipment or ladders. The Heritage Centre houses a collection of railway memorabilia, including a velocipede hand-car, an exhibition about railway navvies, a display of railway signs and a mock engine cab for children to play in. If your child still has some energy, there is a children's play area close by. Finally, if you visit when the museum is not operating trains, your child might enjoy a short train ride (approximately 6 mins) to Marks Tey, crossing the famous Chappel Viaduct which they will have seen when you arrived. This service is not connected to the museum.

www.earm.co.uk

Signal Box (Tone Blakesley)



Goods shed (Tone Blakesley)



- In Coggeshall, off the A120 between Colchester and Braintree; from the A12 at Kelvedon, take the B1024 to Coggeshall, the car park for Grange Barn is on the left soon after entering the village (CO6 1RE)

- Public transport: buses to/ from Chelmsford, Braintree and Colchester (daily) stop on West Street close to Paycocke's House (700 m from Grange Barn)

- Open daily Apr to Oct; admission charge (free for two carers and National Trust members) includes entry to Paycocke's House and Garden; free car park (closes at 5 pm)

- Visitor reception; adapted toilets; choice of eateries nearby (400 m)

- Terrain: wheelchair access throughout the building, level access from car park; note gentle incline from car park to the road, and several inclines along the route of the Tudor Coggeshall Walk (3.5 km)

- Subdued lighting in barn

- Tool collection includes objects with sharp edges

- Unfenced water around the Abbey complex on the Tudor Coggeshall Walk; footpath uneven and muddy after wet weather between the Abbey complex and the Gallows

- Quiet space: local countryside footpaths and Tudor Coggeshall Walk

- Dogs may be encountered off lead

- Trail sheet available to help children learn about the barn; download a map of the Tudor Coggeshall Walk from the Paycocke's House website (see opposite).

Grange Barn and Tudor Coggeshall Walk

timber-framed houses and colours...

Families visiting Coggeshall could visit Grange Barn first, before walking directly to Paycocke's House and Garden (see opposite), or following the 'Tudor Coggeshall Walk'. The barn itself is magnificent from the outside, and is believed to be one of Europe's oldest timber-framed buildings, dating back almost 800 years. It was once owned by the Cistercian monks at nearby Coggeshall Abbey, and used to store and thresh sheaves of cereals. Inside it is like a cathedral, but some children may be disappointed to discover that it is largely empty! However, there are two 20th century seed cleaning machines and a threshing machine on display. In medieval times, corn was threshed by beating with a flail, but the machine on display would have been powered by a steam engine or traction engine.

Across the road from the barn, you can follow the route of the Tudor Coggeshall Walk to St Nicholas' Chapel, also built in the 13th century, continuing past former monastic buildings (private) that were once part of Coggeshall Abbey. The track then crosses the River Blackwater and the Mill Pond, before heading north to the main road. It continues along St Peter's Road to Church Street. Walking down Church Street is a little bit like walking back in time. The route passes the 15th century church of St Peter-ad-Vincula and many impressive timber-framed houses. Your child may wonder why the beams in these cottages appear to tilt one way or another! The cottages are painted in a range of pastel colours; ask your child to see how many different coloured houses they can find. At the end of Church Street you will find the blue and white Clock Tower, built in the 14th century. From here it is a short walk to Paycocke's House.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/grange-barn

Grange Barn



- In Coggeshall, off the A120 between Colchester and Braintree; limited roadside parking on West Street close to Paycocke's House (CO6 1NS); National Trust advises visitors to use the car park for Grange Barn (CO6 1RE)

- Public transport: buses to/ from Chelmsford, Braintree and Colchester (daily) stop close by on West Street

- Open daily Apr to Oct; admission charge (free for two carers and National Trust members) includes entry to Grange Barn; Grange Barn car park (closes at 5 pm) is 640 m walk (the pavement is narrow in places, 30 m with no pavement)

- Accessible toilet, shop and coffee shop

- Terrain: wheelchair access to ground floor only; two staircases (one quite steep) and 'creaky' wooden floors; uneven paths (brick and gravel) with several steps (can be avoided) in garden; typical garden walk 200 m

- Lighting in some rooms is subdued

- Small, unfenced pond at the bottom of the garden

- Quiet space: the garden

- Assistance dogs only in the house; dogs should be on lead in the garden

- Trail sheet available to help children learn about the property.

Paycocke's House and Garden

a Tudor house with delightful gardens...

Coggeshall was once a thriving wool and cloth town, and still has several hundred listed timber-framed cottages. One of the finest of these is Paycocke's House and Garden that originally belonged to a wealthy cloth merchant, Thomas Paycocke. The house looks impressive, with its timbered frame and pastel orange walls. Explain to your child that the house is just over 500 years old! Visitors are encouraged to park in Grange Barn car park (640 m away), but there is limited roadside parking on West Street close to Paycocke's House.

Entering the property through an old archway, the first thing that visitors see is the delightful garden. This is a tranquil place, which many children may want to explore first. A brick path, lined by fragrant lavender in the summer months, leads to a croquet lawn. In the spring and summer, croquet hoops, mallets and balls are set out for visitors to use. Your child might enjoy this, or perhaps a game of quoits. Beyond the lawns is a small vegetable and herb garden, with a pond and possibly several ducks. The house itself has been restored to its original state; posters and exhibits tell its fascinating story over hundreds of years, including the decline of the wool trade, and the rise of cottage industries of silk, velvet and lace making. The panelled room for example recreates an office in Tudor times, complete with a medieval counting board. In the hall, your child's eye might be drawn to a magnificent early 18th century calendar clock. Climbing the creaking wooden stairs, there is an entertaining room, writing room and bedroom to explore. Children might be interested in four pots that contain 'smells' that Thomas Paycocke would have been familiar with; lavender, rosemary, frankincense and pomander. An old trunk serves as a dressing up box for children to try on clothes from Tudor times.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/paycockes-house-and-garden

Thomas Paycocke's House



Garden



- Just off the B1018, midway between Braintree and Witham (CM77 8PD)
- No suitable public transport
- Open daily (except Christmas and New Year), free admission and parking
- Accessible toilets and tea room in the Visitor Centre; many picnic tables around the site
- Event days: check website as event days can be busy with an admission charge; restricted access during private events
- Terrain: level access into Visitor Centre and across most of the site along surfaced paths; brick paths in walled garden; extensive lawns; steps to a viewing platform in the Wheat Barn; typical walk around the whole site (including the garden) 800 m; further information on AccessAble website (see opposite)
- Low levels of lighting in some of the historic buildings
- Mannequins in the Wheat Barn
- Fish pond (deep water) behind a fence; pond surrounded by a low wall in the walled garden; unfenced moat behind the walled garden with deep water
- Quiet space: almost anywhere on site, but especially the walled garden
- Dogs should be on lead across the site (assistance dogs only in the historical buildings)
- Map available at Visitor reception.

Cressing Temple Barns

impressive barns and a walled garden...

Many families with a child with autism will find Cressing Temple Barns an ideal place to explore with their child. The collection of old farm buildings, including several historic barns and a beautifully maintained Tudor walled garden, are set in a spacious, countryside location. If there are no events being held, Cressing Temple Barns are often quiet and peaceful. People have used the site at Cressing Temple since the Bronze Age, but it was the Knights Templar who constructed the magnificent 13th century barns. Since then, the site has passed through many hands, and is now managed by Essex County Council. If you visit on a sunny day, look out for the Millennium Sundial on the lawn by Visitor Reception. If your child stands in the centre, on the brick carved with the current month, they will cast a shadow that should tell them the time!

If you want to explore the site by visiting the oldest buildings first, follow the map to the Barley Barn, built around 1235. This will impress a lot of children by its enormous size; being empty will help them to appreciate its cathedral-like proportions. The Wheat Barn is a similar size and was built about 50 years later to store huge amounts of grain from the Templar Farm. If your child is able, climb the stairs to the viewing platform to get a very different perspective on the building. The Wheat Barn also houses an exhibition that includes displays about barn construction and carpentry, and threshing and winnowing; and posters about the barn, agriculture at Cressing Temple and the

Wheat Barn



fascinating history of the Knights Templar. Close by is a very much smaller barn, the 'Well House', which contains a stone-lined well that can be viewed through a grill; this was also built by the Knights Templar. Displays in the Well House, which are created by the Friends of Cressing Temple Garden, change monthly.

From the Well House, walk through the arch into the Tudor walled garden. The garden is delightful and most of the plants are clearly labelled. It actually comprises several different gardens, each of which demonstrates a particular use that was made of plants in medieval and Tudor times. As you walk around with your child, there are so many different textures, colours and smells to explore! Look out for the herbs in the Fore Court and Culinary Border, such as Rosemary, sage and peppermint. Most of the plants are growing in borders, but some are in attractive terracotta pots. Even the walls have interesting textures, covered in places by mosses and lichens. And of course, there are vegetables to look at. Some may be familiar to your child, others such as 'skirret' will not be. At the far end of the garden is an arbour, where you might sit for a while and talk about the garden with your child. Other buildings to explore include The Granary, another large barn that was built in the 17th century. The barn houses an old Blacksmith's Forge – look out for the giant bellows that the blacksmith used to force air across the fire to make it as hot as possible. Explain to your child that, before the Second World War, almost every village would have had a blacksmith and a farrier. You can also learn about baking in the 'Bakehouse', which is part of the 18th century farmhouse.

<https://cressingtemplebarns.co.uk/>
www.accessable.co.uk/venues/cressing-temple

Barley Barn



Tudor garden



- In Oaklands Park off Moulsham Street near the junction with New London Road (CM2 9AQ)
- Public transport: buses to/ from Basildon (Mon to Sun) and Braintree, Stansted Airport and Wickford (Mon to Sat) stop on New London Road, approximately 130 m from the museum
- Open daily (closed Dec 25, 26 and Jan 1); 'relaxed' opening 10 am to 12 noon on the 1st Sunday of each month (check website for details); free admission and car park (for longer than 2 hours, ask for a permit (free) at reception); blue badge parking next to the museum
- Accessible toilets and Hive Café
- Terrain: fully wheelchair accessible with slopes, ramps and lift to the first floor; surfaced paths and grassy areas in Oaklands Park (further accessibility information on the museum website)
- Artificial lighting, subdued in some areas with brightly lit display cases; audio-visual and interactive displays
- Taxidermy specimens, mannequins, human skeleton and the 'body' of a Saxon on display
- Quiet space: Oaklands Park
- Children's playground in Oaklands Park
- Assistance dogs only in the museum; dogs may be encountered off lead in Oaklands Park
- Guide for visitors with autism and sensory floorplan available to download on the website.

Chelmsford Museum

a fantastic local museum...

Chelmsford Museum has been recently refurbished, and represents a wonderful local museum that should appeal to many families with a child with autism. The entrance hall is spacious and well lit, and the staff on the reception desk are helpful and welcoming. The museum has a range of galleries designed to lead you through Chelmsford's history, from prehistoric times to the present day. An interesting place to start is the 'Prehistoric Gallery' on the first floor. As you approach the gallery, be sure to look at the observation beehive, if your child is happy to do so – children can look for the Queen amongst the mass of active honeybees and watch bees approaching the hive from outside. There is also a collection of taxidermy specimens in this area, including birds and animals associated with woodland. For children who might find this upsetting, there is an alternative staircase allowing visitors to avoid this area (ask at reception).

The Prehistory Gallery contains displays about Essex rocks, and examples of fossils in situ, in blocks of chalk, clay and red crag. Children might be particularly interested in the magnificent woolly mammoth tusks and teeth on display; the examples of Mesolithic axes and tools; or the hoard of gold Iron Age Celtic coins. There is also an opportunity here for children to try Iron Age weaving. Walk through to the Roman Gallery where you will find examples of building materials and a model of a Roman building (Mansio). Children can also design mosaics with trays of small tiles. Parents should note that the walkway

Titanic Radio Room

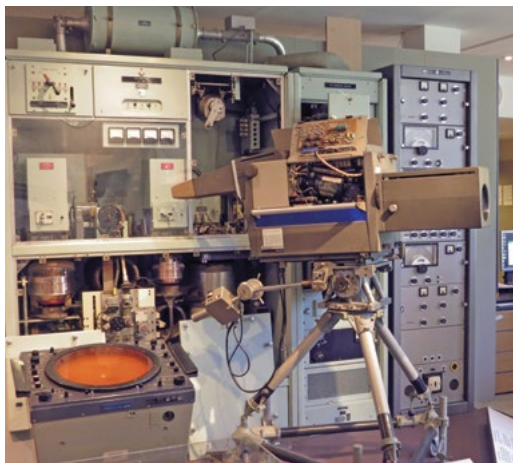


includes a glass floor over a stone coffin, although this can be avoided (but not by wheelchair users). The Saxon and Medieval Gallery contains several cases of artefacts and has a fascinating audio-visual presentation about a Saxon burial. Sitting in front of a long 'window', you will see projections using mirrors that show a skeleton and the body of a Saxon. Some children with autism may find this disturbing, and you could avoid this gallery if necessary. However, there is also a tray of sand here with hidden coins - children can use hand held metal detectors to find these (note the detectors 'beep' quite loudly). The route continues through the Tudor Gallery (with an audio-visual display about the Black Death and Witchcraft) and Victorian Gallery (with an audio-visual display projected onto the wall), to the 20th Century Gallery. Look out for the pink electric guitar! and displays about music, sport and wartime. Also on the first floor is a gallery that is devoted to toys - some children might want to start their visit in this gallery! A wide range of vintage toys are on display in glass cases, with other toys available for children to play with.

Returning to the ground floor, you will find a remarkable Victorian kitchen and washroom, a gallery devoted to Chelmsford Potters, and the Bright Sparks Gallery. If your child likes bright colours, the pottery gallery has beautifully coloured murals around the walls. If they are interested in media, look out for the enormous old television camera that is part of a display about the communications company Marconi in the Bright Sparks Gallery. Finally, the Essex Regiment Museum might appeal to children with an interest in military artefacts and weaponry, provided they are comfortable with mannequins. And after your visit to the museum, you might want to explore Oaklands Park, visiting the play area or perhaps having a picnic.

www.chelmsford.gov.uk/museums/

Marconi exhibit



Ice age mammal bones



- Signposted off the minor road (Hackmans Lane) between Stow Maries and Cock Clarks, to the east of Chelmsford (CM3 6RN)

- No suitable public transport

- Summer opening Mon, Thu, Fri, Sat and Sun (Apr to Oct); winter opening Fri, Sat and Sun (Nov to Mar); closed over Christmas and New Year; admission charge (concessions for carers and disabled); free parking

- Event days: check website as these can be busy

- Visitor reception in shop; accessible toilets; café

- Picnic tables close to Airman's Mess

- Three model 'pedal planes' for younger children

- Terrain: generally level, with wheelchair access; typical walk around the whole museum 800 m

- In the main museum, the Sopwith Camel partial replica can be noisy (activated by visitors); many mannequins around the museum

- Flapping plastic walls of Hangar 2 can be very noisy on a windy day

- Low lighting in some areas

- Quiet space: walk around conservation area (note unfenced pond)

- Dogs welcome on leads

- Visitors welcome to walk around on their own (site map in the guide book), but must be accompanied by a guide to visit the hangars

- Two trail forms for children available in the shop.

Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome

so close to vintage aircraft...

Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome represents the only nearly complete World War One aerodrome in Britain. It might be of particular interest to older children with autism, especially those with an interest in aircraft and aviation. Explain to your child that the aerodrome was originally opened in 1916 in response to the first raids on London and the South East by German Zeppelin airships and Gotha bomber aircraft. It was strategically located in southeast Essex because enemy aircraft navigated by following major rivers, such as the River Crouch and the River Thames. Even children who have no special interest in aviation may be excited to see, up close, the static vintage World War One aeroplanes housed in two hangars. These are locked, and can only be visited if you are accompanied by one of the volunteer guides; ask at reception. The guides are very helpful and will be happy to take you round the whole site, or if you prefer, just into the hangars to see the aircraft.

Some children may be concerned by the low light levels in Hangar 1, but there are some interesting aircraft to look at: a Fokker Eindecker, a Nieuport 17, a Royal Aircraft Factory BE2 and 7/8th scale SE5A. Several of these aircraft are still airworthy and flown today! Ask your child to look for the very strange position of the exhaust on the BE2. The second hangar is much brighter, but for children who might be sensitive to loud sounds, the plastic covering can be alarmingly noisy

Replica of a de Havilland DH2



on a windy day. Here you will see a replica Bleriot XI, a French Morane-saulnier and a 7/8th replica of a de Havilland DH2, with its engine and propeller behind the cockpit. There is also a Sopwith Pup and an Auster, although you cannot walk up to these aircraft. The guide may explain to your child that the Bleriot XI was the first aircraft to cross the English Channel in 1909, which seems quite amazing as it looks such as delicate machine!

In addition to the hangars, the main museum is housed in what was formerly the engine workshop and dope workshop (where canvas was put onto the wooden framework of aircraft). The exhibition provides an interesting account of the history of the aerodrome and the people who were stationed there. As you walk through, you will encounter a number of mannequins and audio commentaries that start automatically. Exhibits include displays of aircraft machine guns, uniforms, model aeroplanes, the wooden frame of a Sopwith Camel, posters about the Zeppelin raids and the story of those that were successfully shot down. There is also a model of part of a Sopwith Camel (see photograph below); children can sit in the cockpit, wear a flying hat if they wish, and move the joystick. This is quite noisy though, to simulate the sound of the real aircraft in flight. There are other buildings to explore, including an exhibition about 'Women in the Great War'; the Pilots' Ready Room, where young pilots would wait anxiously for the call to intercept enemy aircraft; the Squadron Offices and Museum, which includes a large painting of the site as it would have looked during the war; and the Airman's Mess (now a café). Younger children might enjoy playing in the model 'pedal planes'. Finally, you could look at the pond or walk through the young woodland along a wood chip path, and enjoy the sound of birdsong.

www.stowmaries.org.uk/

Sopwith Camel replica



Pedal planes



- In Langford, on the B1019 between Hatfield Peverel and Maldon (CM9 6QA)

- Public transport: buses to/from Maldon and Chelmsford (Mon to Sat) stop on Hatfield Road (560 m walk to the museum)

- Open Wed to Sun and Bank Holidays (except Dec 24 and 25); quiet opening planned (check website); admission charge (free for carer); free car park

- Miniature railway: restricted to event days, which can be busy (check website for details)

- Visitor reception, accessible toilets and tea room

- Terrain: wheelchair access throughout the building

- Artificial lighting, but generally well lit; numerous audio-visual and interactive displays

- Smaller steam engines may be in operation which can be noisy; on event days the larger, and louder Marshall steam engine may be in operation

- An industrial museum, with sharp edges and moving parts; a sign indicates that children should be supervised by a responsible adult at all times

- Quiet space: walk in the museum grounds or down to River Blackwater

- Unfenced river between the museum and the car park

- Dogs allowed in museum

- Learning sessions available for range of subjects (contact Museum manager)

- Several informative videos on the website.

Museum of Power

industrial heritage up close...

The Museum of Power is located in the steam-powered Langford Pumping Station, which was constructed in the 1920s to extract water from local rivers to supply the popular seaside resort of Southend-on-Sea. When the station came to the end of its life in 1963, one of the three enormous triple expansion Marshall steam engines was left in place, and this is the centre piece of the museum, and remains in working order to this day. Any child with autism who is interested in steam engines should be impressed! The steam engine is run about 15 times each year on certain event days, using either steam or compressed air (details on the website). On quieter days, when the Marshall steam engine is not running, it is likely that several smaller steam engines will be running, such as a Reliable Reversible Steam Pump, a boiler feed pump and a steam engine generator set. This will give children not only a chance to see, but also to listen to and smell, our industrial heritage! A great sensory experience for children who love steam engines, and moving parts, though the sound might be difficult for some other children. Parents and carers should be aware that working engines are located behind metal safety barriers, but care may be needed with some children if they are able to reach over the barriers towards the moving parts. The Museum website has a risk assessment for school educational visits that might be helpful.

Visitor reception is located in a smaller hall, where there are a range of interactive displays. Children with autism who have good fine motor

Marshall steam engine

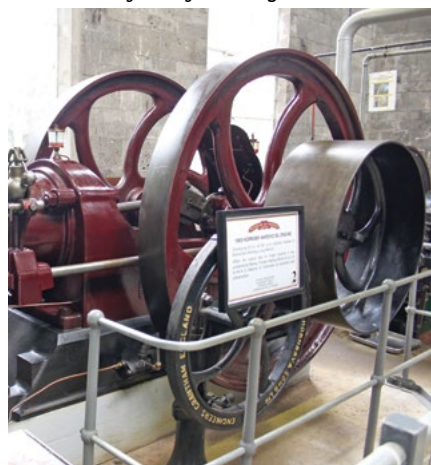


skills might enjoy: the classic fairground ‘buzz wire’ game; a small robotic arm, that they can control with levers, to pick up and move a wooden block from one place to another; and for young engineers, cut away models of two stroke and four stroke engines with handles to turn. Children might also be attracted to the swinging pendulum of the working turret clock or the early 20th century pianola. The pianola plays itself, using a pump operated by the player’s feet – you could ask the volunteer on reception to demonstrate. The pianola can also be played like an ordinary piano. Back in the main hall, there are many other exhibits in addition to the working steam engines. These include models of a steam powered traction engine, a steam train, and a quarter scale steam wagon. Many children may not realise that in the early part of the 20th century, lorries powered by steam were popular in Britain, although they were superseded by petrol lorries during the 1930s. There are also displays of household by-gones, including vacuum cleaners, lamps and electric fires and an old telephone booth with a vintage dial phone. Interactive displays include: electricity generation; a wind tunnel to demonstrate the principle of lift; and one of the oldest motors still running.

The old boiler room now contains a noisy, but fascinating, belt driven workshop, that was once used for pearl cutting. There are also many internal combustion engines on display, together with an old garage mechanic’s workshop and a model about water power. For young train enthusiasts, the museum also runs a miniature railway around the site, but this only runs on certain event days (see website for details), which often coincide with the running of the Marshall steam engine. If the noise or moving parts are too much for your child, you can take a walk around the museum garden, and perhaps look at the river.

www.museumofpower.org.uk/

1903 Hornsby Akroyd oil engine



Steam locomotive ‘Jane’



Southend Central Museum

exciting archaeology!

- In Southend-on-Sea, on Victoria Avenue (A127), just off the main A127-A13 junction (SS2 6EX); pay-and-display car park (with steps) is a short walk from the museum (100 m) on Great Eastern Avenue (off Victoria Avenue); disabled parking behind the Museum and Gallery, access is through the Beecroft Staff rear car park
- Public transport: Southend Victoria rail station is next to museum; Southend Central rail station is 700 m along the busy High Street; major bus routes stop next to Southend Victoria, including to/from Basildon and Chelmsford
- Open 10 am to 5 pm Tue to Sat (closed Bank Holidays) but check websites for special events; free admission
- Planetarium offers pre-booked shows (check websites for details)
- Toilets (not wheelchair accessible) on first floor of the museum; accessible toilets on the ground floor of the adjacent Art Gallery (Radar key); choice of eateries in town centre
- Terrain: most exhibits in the museum are located on the ground floor (wheelchair access via side door) although toilets and Planetarium on first floor (no lift)
- Subdued lighting in some parts of the Museum
- Exhibits include taxidermy specimens, mannequins and a ventriloquist's dummy
- Quiet space: the Art Gallery can be a quiet place to walk
- Assistance dogs only in the museum.

The new archaeology gallery in Southend Central Museum is an exciting space, where children can learn about Essex in the past, from prehistory to the Middle Ages. The gallery has subdued lighting, but the display cases are brightly lit. A large banner invites you to step inside, to learn about animals that once roamed the Essex countryside, Roman villas and of course, an Anglo-Saxon princely burial. The first display case is about life in Essex 2.6 million years ago during the 'Ice Age'. Here you can point out fossils including an elephant tooth found locally and a mammoth tusk from Canvey Island. A touch table has replica stone tools that would have been made from flint. There are further display cases including: Bronze Age pottery and tools; Roman pottery and everyday objects such as rings and hairpins; Anglo-Saxon dress, jewellery, swords and knives; and coins from pre-Roman through to Medieval times. Children might like to try on a replica Roman helmet as they walk round!

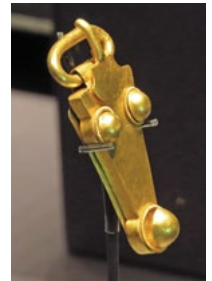
In a side room, there is an exhibition about the Prittlewell Princely Burial, one of the richest Anglo-Saxon burials in Britain, with many of the finds on display. These include items made of gold such as coins, an iron candelabrum, a sword, whalebone gaming pieces and an 'antler' dice, and blue glass beakers. Explain to your child that this was almost certainly the resting place of a male Anglo-Saxon warrior, probably a wealthy 7th century prince. Note that the space around the main display case is quite narrow. Elsewhere in the museum, there are further display cases about life in and around Southend-on-Sea, including: Victorian dolls' houses; fishing on the Thames; Victorian pastimes, Leigh pottery; and estuary life. Outside, the museum has a sensory garden, but this is next to a busy road junction, and may not be a relaxing place for some families for this reason.

www.southendmuseums.co.uk/

Elephant tooth (Tone Blakesley)



Anglo-Saxon buckle



- In Southend-on-Sea, on Victoria Avenue (A127), just off the main A127-A13 junction (SS2 6EX); pay-and-display car park (with steps) next to the Art Gallery on Great Eastern Avenue (off Victoria Avenue); disabled parking behind the Gallery and Museum, access is through the Beecroft Staff rear car park

- Public transport: Southend Victoria rail station is a short walk from the Gallery (150 m); Southend Central rail station is 700 m along the busy High Street; major bus routes stop next to Southend Victoria station, including to/from Basildon and Chelmsford

- Open 10 am to 5 pm Tue to Sat (closed Bank Holidays) but check websites for special events; free admission

- The Jazz Centre UK in the Art Gallery is open Tue to Sat afternoons (check Jazz Centre website for details)

- Accessible toilets on the ground floor of the Art Gallery (Radar key); choice of eateries in town centre

- Terrain: several floors accessible by stairs and lift

- Live jazz music in The Jazz Centre most Sat lunchtimes (donation suggested) except the final Sat of each month, when an afternoon session is performed in a side room (admission charge); check website for events

- Quiet space: the Art Gallery is usually a quiet place to walk

- Assistance dogs only in the Art Gallery.

Beecroft Art Gallery

art and jazz!

The Beecroft Art Gallery was formerly a library, and the large open space is light and airy, which might suit many children with autism. Artwork is displayed on three floors, which can be accessed by stairs and a lift. Although the gallery has a large permanent collection of historic artworks, only a small number of these are on display. However, the gallery has a year-round programme of temporary exhibitions, with several exhibitions of contemporary art on display at any given time. In spring 2019 for example, an exhibition exploring colour and its use in art opened for a period of one year. Other exhibitions are put on for shorter periods, so it is well worth checking the website regularly for exhibitions that might interest your child.

If your child is interested in music, and jazz in particular, then they should enjoy a visit to the Jazz Centre UK. This hosts a variety of exhibitions including a walk-through history of the music; the instruments of famous players; a variety of jazz art and photography (including colourful cartoons of famous jazz musicians); a Media Centre; and picture books to look through. Parents and carers who are jazz aficionados may be particularly interested in Louis Armstrong's 'special' trumpet; Humphrey Lyttleton's roll-top desk, with his 'This is Your Life' book and various music awards; and the first piano owned by Sir John Dankworth. The Jazz Centre hosts live music most Saturday lunchtimes (check the website for details) which some children may enjoy. You can sit and listen in the Centre itself, or if you prefer, from the art galleries overlooking the Centre. Some families may wish to avoid visiting at these times, if their child is sensitive to music. You might also consider combining a visit to the Beecroft Art Gallery with Southend Central Museum, which is next to the gallery.

www.southendmuseums.co.uk/

www.thejazzcentreak.co.uk

Gramophones in the Jazz Centre



'New Orleans' cornet



- In Priory Park, Southend-on-Sea, off Victoria Avenue (A127), just south of the main A127-A1159 junction (access from the southbound carriageway); free car park in Priory Park (SS2 6NB); very limited disabled parking at the side of the Visitor Centre

- Public transport: buses to/ from Southend-on-Sea and Rayleigh (daily) stop next to the park; Prittlewell railway station is 600 m from the Priory

- Summer opening 10 am to 5 pm Tue to Sun; winter opening Sat and Sun 10 am to 3 pm; free admission

- Accessible toilets and drinks available in the Visitor Centre opposite the Priory; toilets and café serving English and Korean food in the park

- Large playground in the park

- Terrain: the Priory has two floors, with stairs and a lift to the first floor; hard surface paths in the Priory gardens; variety of surfaces in the wider park; the Priory is 150 m from the car park along a hard surfaced path; typical walk around the Priory gardens 500 m

- Low lighting levels in the cellars

- Taxidermy specimens in the wildlife exhibition room

- Unfenced pond in Priory gardens; streams with steep banks in places in the park

- Quiet space: the Priory gardens

- Assistance dogs only in the Priory and its gardens; dogs may be encountered off lead elsewhere in the park.

Prittlewell Priory

one of the oldest buildings in Britain...

Prittlewell Priory is an excellent place for a family to explore and learn about local heritage in a relaxed setting. Whilst the park can be busy at times, with families using the adventure playground, or walking their dogs, the Priory itself is often quiet, and is set in its own gardens. There is a small Visitor Centre opposite the Priory, with toilets and a small shop. The Priory is medieval, dating back in parts to the early 12th century, making it one of the oldest buildings in Britain, which might impress your child. It was founded by monks of the Cluniac Order, who moved to Britain from France in the 11th century following the Norman Conquest, and it served as a priory until the dissolution of the monasteries in the 16th century. Children might be particularly interested to know that Cluniac monks rarely spoke, and developed their own sign language to communicate in silence!

The Priory staff are very helpful, and will give you a brief history of the Priory if you wish, and suggest the best way to explore the building, following a route from the oldest to the youngest parts. If you follow the suggested route, you will find yourself first in two small, dimly lit cellars, the oldest part of the building (these are on the ground floor). Here there are monks' habits that some children might like to try on; there is also a stone coffin in this room and a poster about the monks' life in the Priory. From here, you can walk through to the Refectory, which is more than 800 years old! Your child might be interested in the cabinet which displays a model of the Priory as it would have looked

Prittlewell Priory



before the dissolution. There is also an illuminated panel where children can assemble simple coats of arms. Next, climb the 'creaking' wooden staircase to the Prior's Chamber. This was originally the Prior's private apartment, although now it is unfurnished. Note that there is an audio-visual display projected on the wall of this room. Next to the chamber is a balcony that overlooks the Refectory; children might be interested in two colourful banners hanging from the ceiling that show monks sitting around refectory tables having a meal. The next room houses an interesting exhibition about Priory Park and its wildlife. This includes a case of taxidermy animal and bird specimens recorded in the park, which might be of concern for some children with autism. It also includes a section of the trunk of an elm tree that was planted in 1797 and felled in 1961, making it over 150 years old. Your child might try to count the growth rings, to see exactly how old the tree was! There are also posters about some of the park's wildlife. Footprints painted on the floor encourage children to pretend to be badgers, by crawling under a table. Finally, back on the ground floor you can walk into the Victorian extension, which includes a 'giant' board game, but also has an audio-visual display.

The Priory gardens offer a quiet retreat if the park is busy. A paved path leads you through a walled garden, with close cut lawns and colourful flower borders, to a rose garden beyond. The centrepiece of the walled garden is a small pond that is unfenced. Elsewhere, people use the park to play tennis or bowls, and some children with autism might be interested to watch these activities. And on quieter days, it is a short walk (175 m) from the car park to the extensive children's playground.

www.southendmuseums.co.uk/

Refectory (Tone Blakesley)



Priory gardens



- From the A13 in Hadleigh, just west of Leigh-on-Sea, follow the minor road (Castle Lane) signposted to the castle (SS7 2AP)

- Public transport: bus services from Rayleigh, Canvey and Basildon to Southend-on-Sea (Mon-Sun) stop on the A13, approximately 1 km walk to the castle along Castle Lane

- Open daily and free admission; limited street parking at the end of Castle Lane; visitors can also use the Salvation Army pay-and-display car park (note the gates are closed late afternoon); alternative free car park on Endway (first right on Castle Lane), a 900 m walk to the castle, mostly along pavements and a pedestrianised pathway

- Toilets in Hadleigh Tea Rooms by the Salvation Army car park

- Terrain: from the Salvation Army car park, walk down Castle Lane (160 m moderate incline) and through the kissing gate; follow the uneven, hard surface path up to the castle (300 m moderate incline); ruins on a grassy hilltop

- Steep banks in places

- Quiet space: large open site, many places to walk or sit quietly

- Dogs may be encountered off lead

- Website includes a plan of the castle; it may be useful to take a printout with you.

Hadleigh Castle

a former royal residence with a view...

Perhaps the first thing to say about Hadleigh Castle, to avoid disappointment, is that the ruins are not substantial. The castle was originally built in the early 13th century, but it was 100 years before it became a royal residence for Edward II. A signboard shows what the castle may have looked like towards the end of the 14th century, after a period of refurbishment by Edward III. Two impressive towers were added to the castle at that time and the remains of these dominate the site today, although one has tilted and largely collapsed due to land slippages. Explain to your child that Hadleigh Castle was important as a defensive structure against the French during the raids of the Hundred Years War. A second signboard includes a plan of the castle that is also on the English Heritage website; try to find the foundations of the various rooms with your child, some of which are helpfully labelled.

Although a royal residence for Edward III, his successors were not interested in the castle. As a result, most of the castle was destroyed for building material, and there is even a ruined tiled hearth that was constructed in the Great Hall specially to melt lead reclaimed from the castle windows! Nevertheless, many children will enjoy exploring what remains, with the towers showing how wide the walls would have been. They might be interested in the rough texture of the walls and fascinated by the colourful patterns created by lichens thriving in the clean air. The site is often relatively quiet and peaceful, and the views are fantastic. Bring a pair of binoculars, to look across the grazing marshes and the River Thames. To the east is Leigh-on-Sea and to the west, on a clear day, you should be able to pick out the Shard in central London. The site neighbours Hadleigh Farm, and families could also go for a lovely countryside walk or visit the Rare Breeds Centre.

www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/hadleigh-castle/

Hadleigh Castle



- From the A13, take the A1089 to Tilbury, passing the docks, then follow the minor road (Fort Road) signposted to the Fort (RM18 7NR)

- Public transport: bus from Tilbury and Tilbury Station to Fort Road (Mon to Sat); 650 m walk from the bus stop to the Fort along the sea wall or the minor road

- Open Wed to Sun and Bank Holidays (Apr to Oct); Sat and Sun (Nov to Mar); closed over Christmas and New Year; admission charge (free for two carers and English Heritage members); small free car park

- Visitor reception with drinks machine; toilets on opposite side of site (Radar key for accessible toilet available from visitor reception)

- Picnic tables around the site

- Terrain: wheelchair access to much of site, across uneven cobbled surfaces, tarmac, gravel paths and smooth grass; grounds also have steep grassy slopes or steps to ramparts and gun emplacements; steep steps to Chapel and Gatehouse shop; typical walk around the whole site 1 km

- Artificial lighting in the exhibition; tunnels dimly lit or almost dark in places (to provide historic atmosphere)

- Several sheer drops along the ramparts

- Quiet space: large site with many quiet places to sit or walk

- Dogs should be on lead.

Tilbury Fort

protecting the city of London...

Tilbury Fort does not have the romantic appeal of a Norman castle, but it does have a very interesting military history. There are relatively few displays and posters, with more opportunities to walk around and explore, which many children with autism might enjoy. Explain to your child that the first building – the Blockhouse – was built in the final years of the reign of King Henry VIII, in response to threats of invasion from Europe. It offered protection to the River Thames, the royal dockyards at Deptford and Woolwich and the city of London. The Fort was later expanded at the request of King Charles II during a period of modernisation of England's defences, and represents a fine example of 17th century military engineering. It was still being used to defend the Thames as late as the early part of the 20th century. At this time, quick-firing naval guns were installed on the southeast curtain wall. Several are still in position; walk up to the one closest to the entrance, and by turning the handles, you can still make the gun swivel round, and the barrel move up and down. A thrill for some children!

From the northwest bastion, you can look across the inner and outer moats, and the drawbridge that could be lifted to prevent access. Be sure to visit the exhibition in the East Gunpowder Magazine – in addition to the racks of gunpowder barrels, cannon balls and gun barrels there is a poster display about the history of the Thames defences. Next to this building is the Magazine Passage which leads to the magazine for storing ammunition, protected from bombardment by a thick mound of earth. Some children will enjoy exploring the narrow, dimly lit tunnel (90 m in length), but others may find this too stressful. Back in daylight, continue to explore the ramparts, and enjoy the views across the marshlands to the north and the River Thames to the south.

www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/tilbury-fort/

Tilbury Fort



- Ongar station is on the A128 in Chipping Ongar (CM5 9BN); nearest car park (pay-and-display) is on High Street, 400 m south of the station in the town centre (CM5 9AA); limited disabled parking at Ongar station; disabled parking and limited parking at North Weald station

- Public transport: the Railway's heritage buses stop at Shenfield railway station and Epping tube station; service buses to/ from Shenfield, Harlow and Epping (daily), Chelmsford and Brentwood (Mon to Sat) stop at Ongar station

- Seasonal opening (Apr to Oct) with special timetables at other times (check website); admission charge (all day rover ticket)

- Event days: check website as these can be very busy

- Toilets and accessible toilet (Radar key) next to the High Street car park; toilets and snack bar at Ongar station; accessible toilet and café at North Weald Station

- Terrain: firm surfaces around the stations; detailed accessibility statement on website provides information for wheelchair users on ramps that avoid steps, moving between platforms and accessing trains

- Heritage buses cannot accommodate wheelchairs or bicycles and have limited spaces for folded pushchairs

- Quiet space: picnic area by Ongar station (close to noisy road)

- Dogs on lead welcome (assistance dogs only on dining trains).

Epping Ongar Railway

steaming through the countryside...

If your child is interested in steam trains, diesels or even heritage buses, then they should really enjoy a visit to Epping Ongar Railway. On standard operating days, steam trains normally run between Ongar and North Weald Stations. Diesel trains also run from Ongar to North Weald, and on to Epping Forest (note that passengers are not allowed to board or alight from trains at Epping Forest). It should be possible for families to travel on a steam train, a diesel and a heritage bus on the same visit. However, parents are advised to carefully study the timetables on the website, because there may be some waiting time between journeys, and the heritage bus times are only coordinated with the last train of the day.

Many children will be excited by the arrival of the steam train at Ongar station. They can watch as the locomotive is uncoupled and moved from one end of the train to the other. They might be fascinated to see the engineer climb down onto the track, to couple the locomotive to the coaches. They may also see the steam engine take on water. When the train arrives, there might be a corridor coach with First Class stickers – many children might think of the Hogwarts Express when they see the individual compartments. Explain to them that although their ticket says 'third class', they are allowed to sit anywhere on the train, including the first class compartments. As you pull out of Ongar Station, point out the rusty old steam engine to your child. Along the way, you can also look for the disused station at Blake Hall, which is

Steam locomotive



now a private house. If you have an opportunity to travel in the Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU), try to sit in the front coach, and if possible, in the seats immediately behind the driver (if these seats are taken, you should still get a reasonable view of the line ahead from the aisle seats). This is exciting for children, giving them a unique perspective on their rail journey, and is almost a 'cab ride' as there are windows on the partition between the driver's cab and the passenger compartment. They will be able to see both the line ahead and the driver at the controls. However, they might not appreciate the Essex countryside if their eyes are focused on the cab and the railway line ahead of them! They should however see some of the rolling stock in sidings on the way. As you leave Ongar Station, look out for the very rusty old steam engine, and as you approach North Weald, you should see several diesel engines, including a Class 37 and a Class 45 (your child may know about these locomotives) and an old London Underground train. North Weald station also has a shop that includes a range of second hand train books that are very reasonably priced and should interest any young rail enthusiasts.

On standard operating days, DMUs typically run between North Weald and Epping Forest. This is a short but interesting journey as the railway passes through the remnants of the once great forest. If you are sitting behind the driver when you reach Epping Forest, you could follow him through the train to the cab at the other end of the train, for the return journey. Some children may only want to travel by train, but you have the option to travel on one of the railway's heritage buses. Children might enjoy the experience of travelling on the upper deck of an old London bus!

www.eorailway.co.uk

DMU locomotive (Tone Blakesley)



Old London bus (Tone Blakesley)



- The museum is at the far end of Canvey Island, about one mile east of the town centre on Point Road (SS8 7TD)

- Public transport: buses to/from Basildon and Southend-on-Sea (daily) stop within 150 m of the museum
- Open Apr to Oct on the first and third Sunday of each month, free admission and car park
- Event days: check website for details of special events
- Accessible toilet; drinks and cakes on sale
- Terrain: mostly level, with firm surfaces and some raised kerbs; flight of steep steps to reach the model railway layout
- Restoration work is carried out on vehicles in the bus depot; be aware of sharp edges, oily engine parts and oil trays that may be within reach of children
- Deep vehicle inspection pit behind loose plastic mesh barrier fence netting
- Dogs should be on a lead.

Canvey Island Transport Museum

a treat for young bus enthusiasts!

If your child is interested in transport in general, and vintage buses in particular, then they may be thrilled to visit the transport museum on Canvey Island. There is also the added attraction of an impressive model railway layout. The museum is housed in a former bus depot, which now contains a collection of over thirty preserved vehicles, mainly buses. As you walk around, you will see many buses that have been fully restored, and others that are being rebuilt. You can walk up to, and between the buses, but parents and carers should be aware that there may be sharp edges, oily engine parts and oil trays under buses, that are within reach of children. There is also an inspection pit with a loose plastic mesh barrier. When you arrive, one of the volunteers will tell you if there are buses which you can board to have a closer look at. These may include a Southend Corporation Leyland Titan that dates back over 50 years. You may also be invited to board the Bristol open-top 'seafront' bus that was first in service in 1953. Climb to the upper deck of both buses if your child is able. This may bring back memories for some parents and carers of travelling on school buses!

You can then explore the rest of the depot looking at the other vintage buses on display, in liveries of green, blue, red and cream. These include a single-decker bus that was delivered to Chelmsford in 1950

Bus depot (Tone Blakesley)



that would have operated throughout Essex until being taken out of service in 1964. Your child might want to write down the bus service numbers, destinations and number plates as they walk around. There should also be an early 1970s Dennis fire engine parked behind the depot for you to look at. Upstairs in the bus depot (there is no lift), you might find that you spend a lot of time with your child sitting on a bench, watching the trains go around the model railway layout. There is a range of models, such as a Eurostar, Intercity 125, Javelin and several steam trains. If you look closely, there is even an underground train running between two underground stations! The layout is very detailed, and the more your child looks at it, the more they are likely to find, including a marketplace, an old garage, and perhaps surprisingly, an old scrapyard for railway rolling stock. Ask the person operating the railway if they can turn the lights down in the room, and you will notice that many of the streets and shopfronts are lit up. There is something calming about sitting quietly watching the trains coming in and out of the model railway station.

When you are ready to leave the model railway layout, next door is an old 'traffic office' with examples of conductors' caps, ticket machines and old telephones. Back on the ground floor, there are two more rooms with displays of transport artefacts and memorabilia, such as bus conductors' badges and ticket machines, toy buses and model trains. One display case shows a ticket collectors' tea room! There is also a timing (clocking in) clock that might interest some children; explain to your child that this was in use from 1938 until the early nineties to record people's working hours.

www.castlepointtransportmuseum.co.uk/

Model railway (Tone Blakesley)



Vintage bus (Tone Blakesley)



- Waltham Abbey is close to junction 26 of the M25; the car park is on the B194, by the roundabout at the junction of Abbey View and Crooked Mile (EN9 1XQ); alternative parking in Waltham Abbey town centre off Darby Drive (EN9 1EE)
- Public transport: bus services to/from Harlow and Epping (Mon to Sat), and Waltham Cross and Debden (daily)
- Open during daylight hours, free admission and two pay-and-display car parks adjacent to the Abbey Gardens
- Public toilets opposite the church; accessible toilets for visitors in Epping Forest District Museum (250m from the church); choice of eateries in Waltham Abbey town centre
- Terrain: the gardens are mostly level with surfaced or grassy paths; typical walk around the gardens 1 km
- Unfenced river (Cornmill Stream) runs through the gardens; weir by the church
- Quiet space: almost anywhere in the gardens
- Dogs may be encountered off lead.

Waltham Abbey Gardens

a ruined abbey, church and quiet gardens...

Waltham Abbey Gardens offer an opportunity for a peaceful walk around the ruins of what was once one of the largest Augustinian Abbeys in Britain. Just a few metres from the car park is the walled rose garden. There are benches here where families can sit for a while, and in the summer months children might enjoy the fragrance of roses in the air. Mounted on one of the walls is a tile sculpture called 'Living Fragments' that represents the architecture and archaeology of the site. Ask your child to look closely, to see what has been carved into the tiles; objects such as scissors, scythes and horseshoes represent domestic artefacts found on the site. Impressions were made of the artefacts, and these were embedded in the clay surface of the tiles. Children might like to walk up to the sculpture to feel the texture of the tiles. Behind the rose garden you can walk over a bridge into what was formerly a moated enclosure, although the moat is drying up now.

The Abbey was founded in 1177, and represented the fifth church to be built on the site! As you walk around the extensive grounds, information boards explain the remnants of the abbey that remain, and illustrate what the buildings would have looked like. You will learn that the Cloister Passage, which still stands, was eventually used as a potato store by local farmers in the 1930s! Ask your child to look out for the tall sculpture of a monastic figure on the nearby lawn. It was carved from a three metre oak tree trunk that was cut in Epping Forest. One of the best preserved parts of the Abbey is the gatehouse that

Abbey ruins and Church of Holy Cross and St. Lawrence



dates back to the 14th century. This was the main entrance into the monastery. Your child might wonder why there is a large arch and a small arch side by side – apparently the large arch was for horse-drawn carts and the small arch for people on foot. Other information boards describe the Chapter House and Cloisters, although little remains today after the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Explain to your child that the present church (Church of Holy Cross and St. Lawrence) includes the nave of a Norman church (the fourth of the five Waltham churches). They might be interested to go inside to look at the colourful stained-glass windows.

Close to the church, a stone marks the position of the high altar of the third church on the site, behind which King Harold II, the last Saxon King of England is said to have been buried. Your child may know about King Harold, and his defeat against the Normans at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. As you walk around look out for markers denoting the position of the Meridian Line, which runs through the gardens. The Cornmill Stream, which is more like a river, is fringed with reeds and attracts ducks, geese and swans. If you follow the river back towards the car park, you will come to 'Harold's Bridge', which was built in the 14th century to carry carts to the Monastic Farm. If you want to walk further, an underpass takes you to Cornmill Meadows Dragonfly Sanctuary, a great opportunity to look for these elegant insects in the spring and summer months.

www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/waltham-abbey-gatehouse-and-bridge/

www.visitleevalley.org.uk/en/content/cms/nature/gardens-heritage/waltham-abbey-gardens-cornmill/

The Abbey Gateway



Cornmill Stream



Epping Forest District Museum

teapots and treasure!

- In Waltham Abbey town, which is close to junction 26 of the M25; the nearest car parks are in the town centre off Quaker Lane (EN9 1ER) and Darby Drive (EN9 1EE), both 200 m from the museum
- Public transport: bus services to/from Harlow and Epping (Mon to Sat), and Waltham Cross and Debden (daily)
- Open Mon, Tue, Wed, Fri and Sat (closed over Christmas and New Year); free admission
- Accessible toilets; choice of eateries in Waltham Abbey town centre
- Terrain: the museum is on several floors, with stairs and a lift
- Low levels of lighting in several rooms
- Quiet space: the museum has a very small courtyard garden (traffic noise may be an issue); Waltham Abbey Gardens nearby (250 m along the mostly pedestrianised Sun Street)
- Unfenced river (Cornmill Stream) runs through Waltham Abbey Gardens; weir by the church
- Assistance dogs only
- Visual story available online and from reception; sensory story
- Sensory story packs including an activity trail, sensory toys, and noise cancelling headphones for children to borrow
- Trail sheets and clipboards for children at the reception desk.

This is a small, but interesting museum, often quiet, that tells the stories of people and places in and around the District of Epping Forest. You will find magnifying glasses that some children might like to carry around with them in the Tudor Gallery. The centrepiece of this room is a model of how the building looked when it was built in Tudor times, some 500 years ago. Next to this is the 'Treasures' room, with exhibits that museum staff feel are 'special', including, axes from the Stone Age and Bronze Age; Tudor panelling; and from the 1920s and 1930s, a clocking-in machine, milk bottles and a teapot! The Treasures room is dark (to protect the panelling), but lights come on when you enter. Next, you might climb the stairs to the 'Day to Day' Gallery, which explores everyday life over the past 200 years, with displays about leisure activities, vintage toys and household items. Children might be particularly interested in the Shove Ha'penny or the table with wooden kitchen items and food, both of which they can play with.

On the second floor, colourful old metal signs include a sign from the London Underground listing stations on the Central Line. The 'Core' showcases items from the much larger collection that the museum holds in storage. One case that might attract your child's eye contains over 30 teapots, including puffin and aeroplane shaped teapots! There is also real treasure here, including gold nobles (coins) from the time of Edward III and various items of silver. Other cases contain vintage cameras, articles associated with the police and old bottles and tins. There are a series of drawers to open; look out for reproduction drawings from the Bayeux Tapestry and chocolate wrappers! The museum also has a small courtyard garden with a mosaic at its centre, where sensory and medicinal plants have been planted.

www.visiteppingforest.org/things-to-do/epping-forest-district-museum-p1388991

Model tudor house



Clocking-in machine



Topic - Mechanisms, materials and making toys move

Ten children accompanied by three teachers arrived at the Chelmsford Museum for the first of two visits, in time to have a look round the museum, eat their lunch and enjoy a quick walk in the park before the afternoon session began. The children were seated in a semi-circle before Caroline told them that the museum was full of things that belonged to people in the past. She asked if the children had a favourite toy. Whilst one child mentioned a motorbike, it was revealing that others mentioned electronic toys. Caroline asked if the children could imagine a world with no electricity and told them that they would be looking at different toys from the past and how they move.

“This is one of my favourite toys” said Caroline. “Hands up who has a teddy.” Everyone raised their hand, including the teachers! Caroline passed around a small ‘modern’ teddy bear that was soft and squidgy. She then asked what might be in the box she was holding – it was teddy bear, more than 100 years old. “Is he soft?” she asked. “He is really hard” said one child. “He looks a bit dirty” said another. “Nevertheless, the most loved teddy in town” said Caroline. He felt like he had wood inside him, which was not too far from the truth. Caroline passed round a bag of compressed sawdust – “is it soft?”, quite hard the children thought. This was what the old teddy bear was stuffed with. The old and new teddy bears looked similar but did not feel the same. “Do boys have dolls?” Caroline asked. Caroline showed an Action Man doll to the children, drawing their attention to the way the arms and hands move, and how flexible they are. Action Man is not quite as old as the teddy bear, but it is still over 50 years since it was launched. Some of the children tried to move their own hands in a similar way to Action Man but could not quite manage! Caroline then showed the children the oldest doll in the collection, some 150 years old. The children were genuinely surprised to learn that the doll's hair was from a real person. One child thought that the doll looked scary – Caroline asked what the children thought the doll's face was made of. Wood was suggested, but it was made of wax! Victorian children would not be able to play with their doll near an open fire, or it would melt. Caroline passed round a couple of candles, for the children to feel the texture of wax. In contrast,



the doll's hands were made of leather. Caroline pointed out that the doll was wearing many layers, just like Victorian children, including a skirt, two petticoats, long drawers and gloves.

The next toy was a metal 'wind up' robot. Its legs moved well in the air, but it seemed to shuffle on the spot when placed on a level surface. "What's inside the robot" asked Caroline. "Cogs!" exclaimed one child. "Well done!" said Caroline. She then showed the children a large, transparent clock. The children could see the cogwheels moving as the clock ticked, making the hands move. Caroline then showed the children other toys with wheels. "What are most of your toys made of? Plastic." Caroline showed the children a very old Victorian metal horse and carriage, which every child had a close look at. She then showed them several metal Dinky toys, including an impressive old fire engine with extending ladders.

Caroline then showed the pupils a toy made of wood called 'pull a duck'. Several pupils took it for a short walk. People used to make lots of their own toys from materials such as wood. "Later, you will be like the old toymakers" she told the children. Before that, she showed the children an old wooden toy called 'chute the shoot', and how it unfolded. One boy recognised that it used hinges. Several children played with the chute, pushing down a teddy, sitting on a chair with wheels. Finally, Caroline showed the children one of her favourite toys – Wimp the butterfly. As one child pushed the wooden toy along the floor, the turning wheels caused the wings to go up and down.

The children then had the opportunity to either make toys for themselves on the craft table or investigate more old toys (some replicas) on display. Caroline demonstrated how to make something that moves, using cardboard, straws, dowling and wooden craft wheels. Several children were keen to make something and made very good progress. Other children enjoyed the 'tumbling man on a ladder' gravity toy and watched it over and over again, just as Victorian children would have done. Another child discovered a wooden mechanical clown toy – a Victorian toy whose clown figures revolve at varying speeds as a child turns the handle. The children also enjoyed the 'trapeze toys'; squeezing the bottom of the poles to make the acrobat spin round on a string. The Victorian cup and ball toy was challenging for whoever tried! Finally, there was just time for Caroline to demonstrate a very old and special wooden toy, the orange picker.



Topic - Zoetrope, shadow puppets and animation

It was a lovely spring day when eight pupils from Polo class, accompanied by three teachers visited Chelmsford Museum for the second time. "We have got so much to do today!" Caroline told the children. She refreshed the children's memories of some of the old toys they had learnt about on their first visit. One child was invited to find the cart that they had enjoyed playing with before (the wooden toy 'chute the shoot'). Pushing the cart down the track was again popular, with several children taking turns. They then looked at other old toys they had discovered previously, including ones that required squeezing, pushing, twisting and winding. They were also introduced to two different old toys – a brightly coloured tinplate 'humming top' which spun when Caroline pumped the handle up and down. "Do you remember what this material is" asked Caroline. "Metal" said one of the children. Several children had a go with the spinning top. Caroline then showed the children a Victorian wooden 'whip and top', with a top that spins when the cord wrapped around it is pulled quickly away. The children helped Caroline to wrap the cord around the top, but it was a challenge to make the top spin. The children moved to the floor area and tried smaller, wooden spinning tops.

The children then sat in a circle around a strange looking metal container with lots of slit windows – a zoetrope. Caroline showed them a paper cartoon strip with a dog and a hoop – each picture was slightly different. She placed the cartoon strip in the zoetrope and spun it. "Wow... its jumping" cried the children. The zoetrope was invented in the 1830s and became a popular toy in the Victorian era. Now, of course, children can watch animated films like Pixar's Toy Story. This was a very old zoetrope, but Caroline had placed several replicas on the tables for the children to play with later. Caroline showed the children a large light box with several shadow puppets made out of cardboard. "I will let you find out what happens" said Caroline. Everyone crowded round the box, and wanted to play with it. "Oh my gosh" said Caroline "you can make hand shadows too... and the dinosaurs are trying to eat each other!" This was a very exciting activity for the children! Shadow play is an old tradition with a long history in Southeast Asia that became popular in Britain in the 19th century. It has much in common with animation, involving moving images on a screen.



The children then had the opportunity to spend more time engaging with the zoetropes and other old toys, and to make coloured spinners of their own at the craft table. One child was particularly pleased to discover the flip books. “It’s really funny!” he commented after watching a kingfisher dive into a river and a boy blow up a balloon. The pictures change gradually from page to page, creating an illusion of movement when the pages are turned or ‘flipped’ rapidly. Flip books date from the mid-19th century, at the time when zoetropes were popular with Victorian children.

Caroline set up two iPads to allow the children to make their own simple animations to contrast modern techniques with the zoetrope and flip book animation. The children used an animation App and Lego. Lego is popular today, but the company began producing building bricks some 70 years ago, based on traditional wooden building bricks. Several children had a lot of fun producing their own Lego animations – the teacher remarked that one boy was very excited with this activity, whilst another was very diligent and focused on the task – more so than in classroom activities. This excitement was clear to see as three boys were clapping their hands and jumping up and down whilst watching their Lego animation. The teacher said that it was amazing that these children had made animations after just a little help to start with. She also noted that two boys worked together on an animation who would not normally play together, which was very pleasing to see.

Meanwhile, other children made their own spinning toys, colouring circles of card with great concentration. And the shadow puppets continued to fascinate two of the children. As the session neared the end, Caroline gathered the children together and showed them a picture of a Victorian family. She explained that in the ‘old days’ (the first part of the 19th century) before cameras, silhouettes were a way for families to have their portraits made. She pointed out that young boys wore ‘dresses’ in Victorian times! Each of the five children in the picture were holding toys, including a ‘whip and top’, a hoop and a pull along toy. Finally, Caroline asked the children to show her the spinners they had made. “Wow, they are amazing!” she said. One child likened a coloured spinner to a ‘mind controller!’ “What have been your favourite toys” asked Caroline. Enthusiastic answers included the spinners, the shadow puppets and the clockwork train. “We have loved having you here... you have been amazing!” “I’ve been amazing!” replied one of the children. The children thanked Caroline and David, before heading off to explore the museum.



Topic - Looking at old toys with hinges and cogwheels

Eight children from Green Class 7 accompanied by five teachers arrived early for their second of three visits to Chelmsford Museum to learn about old toys. The children were clearly excited and ran up the stairs to find their seats in the learning room, allowing Caroline to start the session almost half an hour early. Caroline started by reminding the children of one older toy that they had looked at on their first visit, the pull-back truck. This has a simple clockwork motor; pulling the vehicle back on a surface winds up an internal spring. It is a mechanism that was patented in the 1950s, and is still used in toys today. Everyone wanted a go with the truck! Sending it across the room to one of their friends.

Caroline reminded the children what else they had looked at in the first session, including an old wooden toy called 'chute the shoot'. The children looked at the mechanism of the toy more closely this time, noticing the metal hinges on the wooden track, and how the track opened like a door. Several children pushed the chair down the track – there were big smiles and hands waving in the air. She then introduced them to a new toy – a wooden butterfly called Wimp. She asked what might happen if she rolled Wimp across the floor; one of the children said that the wings would go up and down. "Like a piston on a train" Caroline replied. Caroline then showed the children an old wooden clown toy, with clowns that go up and down, and round and round at the turn of a handle. "You love things that move!" said Caroline "so who likes trains?" A lot of hands were raised with shouts of enthusiasm as Caroline showed them an old wind up train made of tinfoil. When she turned the key, the train went around in circles, whistling. She also showed them a colourful 'clown drummer' made of tinfoil that had a key. One of the children carefully wound it up, to discover that the clown played the drums. "I love the clown!" said one of the teachers. Caroline explained that inside these toys are wheels with cogs (teeth) on them – cogwheels – that control the mechanism. She showed the children a model with three large metal cogwheels, which several children tried, to demonstrate how one cogwheel turns another. Caroline then passed around the wooden trapeze



toys that the children had played with the week before, talking to them about 'squeezing'. The children really seemed to enjoy these old toys. Finally, Caroline showed the children an old wooden 'whip and top', with a top that spins when the cord wrapped around it is pulled quickly away. She showed the children how coloured wooden spinning tops create patterns when spun. And she produced a brightly coloured tin 'humming top' which spun and hummed when Caroline pumped the handle up and down.

The children were then given the opportunity to make their own spinning tops on the craft table or play with the old toys (some replicas) spread around the room. There was plenty of time for the children to do both, and most made at least one colourful spinning top out of card, to take back to school with them. They also played with the wide variety of old toys that had been put out on the tables. In most cases there was more than one of each toy, so everyone could choose any toy they wanted, and play with it for as long as they wished. The children would not have seen these old toys before visiting the museum, and many clearly found particular toys fascinating, and in some cases challenging.

As the session was drawing to a close, Caroline commented on the incredible energy levels of the children, and that they couldn't wait to run up the stairs. She had never seen a class so keen to start! The children were really involved and engaged with the old toys from the outset. The teacher commented that they were all really looking forward to coming, and that a PowerPoint presentation about the museum had helped the teachers to prepare, and the children to know what to expect (reducing their anxieties). Caroline remarked that it was like meeting a 'group of friends' and that the children had seemed much more relaxed in comparison to their first visit.

Shortly before it was time to finish, Caroline invited the children to sit once again, for her to show them a special old toy – the orange picker. This is a wooden and metal toy, with a hinge action that allows the orange picker to pick oranges (metal balls) on a tree. "We like that!" said one of the teachers. But there was still one final toy that Caroline wanted the children to see: the toy 'marching soldiers' which moved in a very similar way to a plastic 'Grabit claw'. The children then had lunch in the room, before exploring the museum and the gardens.



Outcomes

Teachers' perspective: over the three sessions, Green Class 7 teachers remarked on how much the children had learnt about old toys and how they worked. Everyone really enjoyed the visits. The teachers felt they were pitched perfectly; there was flexibility to accommodate everyone's needs and interests. After the first visit, the children all looked forward to the next visit, so the teachers made a countdown chart. As a result, the children were more relaxed and more focussed on the second and third visits. During the sessions, they saw children being more relaxed and happier than in the classroom; and children showing extreme focus and independent work which was unexpected. The sessions had also helped the children to engage with the community.

What happened back at school: back at school, the children coloured the colouring sheets they were given after each session, and completed the vehicles that they had started to make in the museum, to display in the classroom. When Caroline and David visited Pioneer School, they arrived in Green Class 7's classroom to find ten children and four teachers all sitting in a semi-circle eagerly waiting for the session to begin, just as they had at the museum. The class looked on as Caroline and David were shown an excellent poster, and also a fantastic display of the children's craft work. The teacher explained that parents and carers would be invited to a special coffee morning the following week to view the display; the display would then be moved to the foyer for all the school to view. The children were very proud of what they had produced, which included cars made out of card, with wooden wheels; many spinners; Lego models; photographs of the museum visits; and even cardboard zoetropes! The children presented Caroline and David each with a large card, decorated with a bear, that the children had made and signed. This was a lovely and very moving gesture by Green Class 7, which was greatly appreciated by Caroline and David. Caroline had also brought with her a reminiscence basket, which she shared with the class and also with Green Class 3. However, she started by showing them something they had not seen before, a dinosaur puppet. Puppets date back many hundreds of years, but this example was more recent – it was popular, and one boy took to the toy immediately, and made everyone laugh as he greeted each of his friends in



turn, and the teachers, with the puppet, imagining its voice! Caroline then opened the basket, which must have looked like a treasure trove to the children.

First out of the basket was 'chute the shoot' – which the children remembered as one of their favourite wooden toys from the sessions. Several children played with the toy, giving rides to the dinosaur. Caroline also brought a tinsplate robot and train – she asked if the children remembered what to do with them. One child suggested that they should be wound up. 'Brilliant!' said Caroline 'who is going to wind it up for me?' She asked if they remembered what might be inside, showing them a transparent clock with its cogs. She talked about things that 'spin' and showed them the tinsplate spinning top, and smaller spinners. She passed round several flip books and a small zoetrope. Caroline also had a wooden toy that the children had not seen before – spinning a wooden ball caused three hens to peck. And as she delved deeper into the basket, she reminded the children that they were really good at spinning the wooden acrobats, and asked if they remembered the spinning clowns. By this time, all the children were playing with an old toy, and the room was filled with excited chatter. It was lovely to see the children so engaged with the old toys.

Museum perspective: in the first session, Caroline noticed that the children loved things that moved and having a mixture of toys to play with and a construction activity provided opportunities for individuals to choose how to explore the toys. The children stayed involved throughout the session and there was obvious pride in the vehicles they had made. The group were much more confident and relaxed in the second session as they rushed straight to the learning room. The group all remembered the toys they had looked at in the previous session and were keen to play with them again. They were much more responsive and involved than on the previous visit, eager to try the toys and offering ideas. They successfully made their own spinners; more time was allowed for the group to explore and play with the old toys which worked well, allowing individuals to return to toys they really enjoyed. The group remained engaged with the activities throughout the session. There was a noticeable increase in confidence and independence among the group in the final session - individuals returning to favourite toys and activities. It was beneficial over the three visits to get to know individuals, their interests and abilities; and rewarding to explore the museum's toy collection with them, seeing and hearing what they liked and interested them most.



Outcomes

Teachers' perspective: Drake Class's teacher was interested to see her children making their own links between the different vintage toys. She was pleasantly surprised at how well the children concentrated and listened. The children all commented after the first visit on how much they had enjoyed themselves. Back in the classroom the children coloured the 'beautiful images' of old toys prepared by Autism and Nature and continued to make their own toy cars. The second visit was calmer, with less sensory overload. The teacher "loved playing with the children and seeing them have fun, interacting with the low-tech toys and showing such joy and eagerness." She was particularly impressed with one child who tends to lose focus quite quickly – this child played with the shadow puppets for a considerable time and really enjoyed the experience.

Polo Class's teacher commented that the visits deepened the children's understanding of old toys and helped them to develop their social skills when out in the community. "The way they interacted with the old toys was wonderful, and with care; sharing skills were also improved." Parents also commented on how much the children enjoyed and talked about the session. Simple toys such as shadow puppets have just as much value now, compared with new toys and technology. She observed pupils sharing who find it difficult to share and pupils working together who do not usually do so. "It was fantastic." The pupils themselves said that the trip was 'amazing!'. The class benefitted hugely from the visits, both in terms of improving their curriculum knowledge about toys through time and social skills in terms of sharing, listening and working together. The teacher commented "it was wonderful to see the progression of toys and how they have changed, deepening their understanding of the history of toys and the mechanisms used in old and new toys."

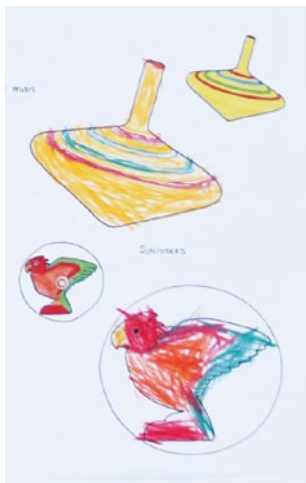
What happened at school: when Caroline and David visited the school, both classes were very keen to show them their project poster, on display in the corridor. "You are going to be very happy about this!" said one of the children. Both classes were very proud of the poster; keen to talk at length about the old toys in the photographs and the colouring they had done. The children in Drake class



had each made their own car out of folded cardboard; lots of small steps were involved in making the cars, and it was a brilliant achievement. One of the children showed Caroline and David several wooden cars they had made; the children had measured and cut every piece of wood. They had also used small motors and batteries; the wooden lighthouse that Caroline had brought was also powered by batteries. In fact, battery operated toys were first produced over 80 years ago. The children in Polo class had also made their own cars out of cardboard and wood. "Look at these amazing cars that you built" said Caroline. "That was so much fun" said one of the children.

Caroline asked each class how they thought she might get the light to shine, before telling the children a story about the lighthouse, and how the keeper forgot to take his lunch. The children heard that his wife wanted to send up a picnic basket using a cable system, from the keeper's house to the top of the lighthouse (see photograph below). The children watched as the basket carrying lunch travelled up to the top of the lighthouse. Children in both classes were very excited by this amazing 'handmade' toy. But Caroline had also brought her basket of old toys. It was an opportunity for the children to rediscover their favourite old toy from the Museum sessions. One child asked about the old teddy bear, but sadly the bear was too old to travel.

Museum perspective: Drake Class were excited, listened well and were very enthusiastic about old toys, offering lots of ideas about how they were made and how they moved. "It was wonderful to see children investigating different toys" and Caroline was pleased that the children clearly enjoyed their visits. Polo Class were also excited during the visits; they handled old toys carefully, enthusiastic to share ideas and play, in a relaxed atmosphere. Caroline was impressed with their level of concentration and the persistence individuals showed when trying to work some of old toys such as the cup and ball. During the second visit the children recognised the old toys; they were good at giving ideas when in a group; the atmosphere felt relaxed and focussed, and Caroline witnessed sheer delight at the animations they created. "It was lovely to see two boys playing so long with the shadow puppet theatre and others fascinated by the zoetropes." Caroline also learnt a lot working with Polo class, especially the value of having a variety of simple, open-ended activities and time for children to play and share their ideas. She was constantly surprised and delighted by their enthusiasm, level of engagement, ideas and abilities.



Further Reading

Web resources

Access Able:

www.accessable.co.uk

Accessible Countryside for Everyone:

www.accessiblecountryside.org.uk/essex

Autism Anglia:

www.autism-anglia.org.uk

Changing Places accessible toilets:

www.changing-places.org

Country Parks:

www.essex.gov.uk/Activities/Pages/Country-Parks.aspx

Essex Local Offer:

www.essexlocaloffer.org.uk

Getting around in Essex:

www.essexhighways.org/getting-around.aspx

Living Well in Essex: Autism Hub:

www.livingwellessex.org/health-and-well-being/all-ages-autism-hub/

National Autistic Society. Going to a museum:

www.autism.org.uk/about/family-life/holidays-trips/museum.aspx

National Rail Enquiries:

www.nationalrail.co.uk

Short Breaks for Disabled Children and Young People:

<https://shortbreaks.essex.gov.uk>

www.facebook.com/ShortBreaksECC

Streetmap:

www.streetmap.co.uk

Tourism for All:

www.tourismforall.co.uk

Traveline south east & anglia:

www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk

Visit Essex:

www.visitessex.com

Popular guides

Blakesley, D and Blakesley, T. 2017. *Visiting the Essex countryside: a guide for parents, carers and teachers of children with autism*. Free to download:

www.autismandnature.org.uk/our-publications/

Blakesley, D and Blakesley, T. 2017. *Alex and Rosie's Adventures in Essex*. Free to download:

www.autismandnature.org.uk/our-publications/

Blakesley, D and Blakesley, T. 2018. *Alex and Rosie's Essex Colouring Book*. Free to download:

www.autismandnature.org.uk/our-publications/



This is the third in a series of local heritage guides designed to help parents, carers and teachers to engage children with autism and related conditions with their local heritage. It presents a guide to twenty-five historic and cultural heritage places to visit in Essex. Where possible we have chosen heritage places located in the countryside, by the sea or set in gardens. These offer calm places for children to retire to and an opportunity for them to engage with the natural world. The description of each place should help parents and carers to judge its suitability for their child and make visits as relaxed and enjoyable as possible, so that the benefits can be appreciated by all the family. The guide concludes with a case story about a project called 'Toys Through Time', describing visits to Chelmsford Museum for pupils from local special schools.

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