



By Iman Choksy  
Trainee Reporter

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## Historic Grey Friars book on sale once again



Grey Friars, a former school, now a luxury hotel. (Image: GreyFriars Hotel Ltd)

**A sell-out book detailing a historic Colchester site has been reprinted.**

The book, *GreyFriars - The seven lives of a special site* tells the 1,900-year story of the Grey Friars site in Colchester and is packed with new material.

Written by Joan Gurney and Alan Skinner, the book was first published after Essex County Council closed the Adult Community College at Grey Friars and put the site on the market.

Mr Skinner said: “One thing I’ve always been aware of is the fact that the words “Grey Friars” mean much more than just a place name or location – they conjure up connections between people going back centuries.

“Grey Friars is of course a wonderful example of architectural excellence, but equally important is its relevance to the people of Colchester through their experiences as a result of being in and around these buildings.”

Mr Skinner, 79, was principal at Grey Friars for 22 years until 2005, when Essex County Council reorganised adult education, making his post redundant.

“Part of that story is the sad fact that in closing down our college the County Council in Chelmsford was cancelling something that was home-grown in Colchester.”

Ms Gurney was a former pupil at Grey Friars when it was a school in 1938, she later returned as a teacher before becoming a senior tutor at the adult college.



Authors - Joan Gurney and Alan Skinner image: Chris Farndell

In 2007 the pair hosted an exhibition and guided tours of the vacated buildings, drawing in hundreds of visitors who then encouraged them to publish their findings.

The result was a more than 200-page, full-colour illustrated book, published by education charity Learning Never Stops, which was started by former staff, governors, and students of the adult college.

The book traces the history of the site from the construction of the Roman walls, through the medieval priory, to the building of houses for prominent families.

It also details how the site later became a convent school for 15 years, the County High School for Girls for 37 years, and the Adult Community College for 40 years.

With all copies of the original book sold out, the Hotel funded the second edition.

It can be purchased from reception or online via [greyfriarscolchester.co.uk](http://greyfriarscolchester.co.uk) clicking on 'History' for £19.95.

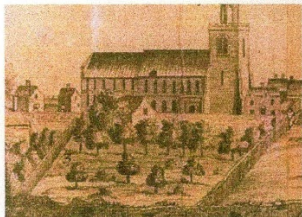
During Heritage Open Days each September, the hotel offers free exhibitions of archive material on Grey Friars' history, along with guided tours of the original site and the refurbished Georgian buildings.



# Grey Friars

**HIGH STREET COLCHESTER CO1 1UG**

**SUNDAYS**  
**13<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup>**  
**SEPT 2026**





C18th site from north      C18th building on southern front      C21st site from north

**EXHIBITION** of site's social & architectural history **10.30 – 16.00**  
 • photos • documents • artefacts • **call in any time**

**GUIDED WALKS** around original site **11.00 & 14.00**  
 • **BOOKING ESSENTIAL** • followed by optional tour of the refurbished buildings

**ALL FREE** email: [events@greyfriarscolchester.co.uk](mailto:events@greyfriarscolchester.co.uk) tel: 575913

**GREYFRIARS**  
HOTEL & RESTAURANT