

# The View

from

## The Promised Land

Neil Richardson reports

In April's edition of Magna, I wrote describing three of **The Seven Wonders of Braintree** and I will complete the final four of these wonders in this May edition.

### 4. The Braintree and District Museum



This is a must-see facility! It is housed in a former school from the Victorian era and contains, to the delight of many school children, a Victorian classroom, just as it would have been 120 years ago, complete with dunce's hat and teacher's cane. Not a computer in sight.

The Museum traces the complex history of the town from the prehistoric era to the 21st century, with exhibits about the Courtaulds, of course, but also about the Crittall family who made a fortune making metal windows, some of which are in the Palace of Westminster, and the story of the Warner family, more of that later.

Marion and I joined the Friends of the Museum as soon as we arrived, and we love taking our visitors there. As you approach the Museum, on Manor Street, just up the road from the Flashing Chip Shop, you are greeted by a fine statue of The Revd. John Ray, known as "The Father of Natural History" and there is a room dedicated to his life and work at the heart of the museum. There is on-going work and study about John Ray. The Museum newsletter describes it thus-

"An important part of Jennifer Brown's role as Research and Collections Officer is to undertake research on John Ray and update our interpretation of this important figure. Regarded as the father of natural history, he was the first to provide a scientific definition of what a species is and a scientific classification system for animals, birds, fish, insects and plants. Jennifer is currently in the process of updating the John Ray Gallery and producing a programme of talks and events on John Ray for early next year, so watch this space! She will also be launching a John Ray blog, which will appear on our website. The Museum was also pleased to receive a visit from Dr. Taylor of the John Ray Field Unit in Cheshire. She was delighted by the amount of information on display about John Ray including some of his key works and a portrait. We look forward to continuing connections with Dr. Taylor."

Marion and I have been to two talks given in the Museum so far. One was by Jennifer Brown and was a fascinating insight into the life and work of John Ray, and another was a talk about Essex accents and dialects, which was both informative and amusing. We hope to attend more and more as we settle down into what is still a new environment for us. The Museum has a "Learning for Life Centre" which is where we meet on Tuesday evenings to rehearse with the Braintree Choral Society, and where the talks are delivered, so the Museum is open, accessible, well-used and it will be our pleasure to be involved more and more as the time goes by.



It is wonderful to have this facility so close to hand and so local in its focus. Good news for Braintree people.