

Lexden History Group

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Newsletter No36 – March 2015
Website www.lexdenhistory.org.uk

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Meetings are held on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 7.45pm in St Leonard's Church Hall, Lexden except August when there is no meeting.

Entry £1 for members, £3 for non-members, refreshments included.
Annual membership £15 for single person. £20 for a family living at the same address.

Renewal forms are on the Lexden History web site
www.lexdenhistory.org.uk

**Membership Renewal is due before the AGM on 13th May 2015.
(see back page for details)**

Message From Your Chairman – Dick Barton

The success of our WW1 Exhibition last September was noticed by the East Anglian Railway Museum at Chappel, who invited us to take the exhibition to their special WW1 Day on Saturday, 15th November. Vice-Chairman Tim was able to transport our display screens for the day, while Sonia produced more trench cake, bread pudding and corned beef sandwiches. With a team of helpers she ran the refreshment room. Unfortunately it was a very wet day which affected the attendance. Thanks to all the LHG members who helped on that day.

Dr John Ashdown-Hill, who opened our WW1 Exhibition, continues to hit the headlines as arrangements are made for the reburial of King Richard the Third at Leicester Cathedral on Thursday, 26 March. The Service may be televised – details from the website www.kingrichardinleicester.com

Nearer at home the Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service has organised a special fun-packed day, "Battle through the Ages!" with lots of displays showing how warfare has changed over the last 2000 years, on Saturday, 21st March in the Castle Park around the Castle, 10.30am to 4pm with re-enactors and military vehicles. Admission to the Park is free, but there is the usual admission charge for entry to the Castle. You might meet a musketeer from Lexden!!

1914 Recipe Trench Cake – Sonia Lewis

At the WW1 exhibition recently staged in the Church Hall, the refreshments were traditional. The bread puddin (no "g" at the end), Trench cake, Oat cake and sponge were made from a copy of an original cook book.

After the war the popular fruit cake became known as Trench Cake, a flavour from home, it was considered that "fruit in cakes would help the monotonous diet of tinned meat and would help -- to be blunt the constipation."

The cake was made with vinegar and no eggs, however I decided that mothers and wives would have chickens in the back yard, so would include eggs in cakes,

The cake is a fruit cake with a mixture of spices and cocoa, vinegar would have been used as a preservative, I found the first one I made very dry, however it improved with keeping and the recipe was right for the exhibition.

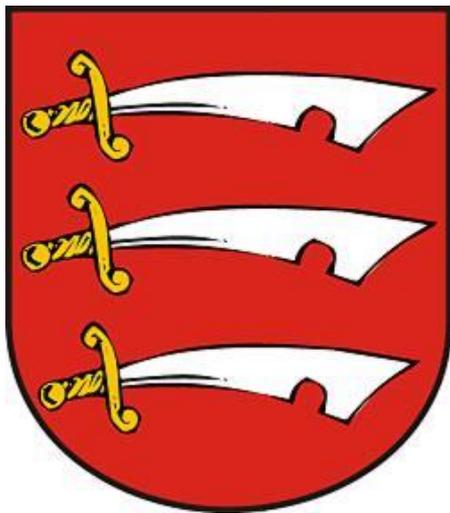
Recipe. 8 oz flour, 4 oz marg, 2 eggs, ¼ pt. milk, 3oz brown sugar, 3oz dried fruit, 2 teaspoons cocoa, ½ teaspoon each of nutmeg & ginger, grated lemon rind.

Place flour in bowl, rub in marg, add spices, cocoa and dried fruit, beat together the eggs and milk, add to the ingredients and mix well, place in greased cake tin and bake in moderate oven until cooked !!!! (Words of the recipe.)

Colchester and Lexden after the Romans

Lexden's original name, Læxadyne, is Old English for "Leaxa's valley". It was referred to as the "Hundred of LASSENDENE" in the Domesday Book and was not part of Colchester but a centre of local government, demonstrated by the old Saxon Hundred Court of Lexden and Winstree. The name seems to be derived from either Old English or Old Norse 'leax' or 'lax' meaning salmon and 'denu' - valley with the 'e' interchangeable with 'y'. This begs the question – were there salmon in the River Colne?

When the Romans left Britain in 410AD the power vacuum was filled by three dominant tribes mainly the Angles from Friesland and Schleswig in Germany, the Jutes from Denmark (Jutland) and the Saxons from east Holland and north Germany. Without the Roman imperial machine the social order in Colchester could not be maintained but it was almost certainly safer for the population to remain behind the strong Roman walls. Within a generation many public buildings had been abandoned. Houses and other buildings were then erected re-using Roman materials but it had temporarily ceased to function as a town. There is little hard evidence of Anglo-Saxon life in Lexden at this time probably because the population continued in much the same way as it had under the Romans. Archaeological evidence in Colchester shows that a mid-5th century Saxon settlement was centred on the two main Roman streets Head Street and High Street.



The Kingdom of Essex "Land of the East Saxons" was founded in by Aescwine in 527 with the remaining resident Roman mercenary forces and the invaders. The Saxons' main weapon, the *seaxe* (a short curved sword), was later adopted for the Essex Coat of Arms (*picture left*), which was granted by the College of Arms in 1932. Aescwine ruled until 587 with London as his capital, although Colchester would have been an important local centre for north Essex. Various Saxon *grubenhauer* (huts) built directly on top abandoned Romano-British houses and dating between 5th and 7th centuries, have been found at Lion Walk and Culver Street. Scattered burials dating between 4th and 8th centuries and containing fragments of pottery, coins, loomweights and jewellery were discovered in Magdalen

Street and north east of Castle Park. Some 9th century graves have also been found near St Mary's at the Walls. Early Saxon river ports were located at Old Heath (*Ealdeheth*) and Blackheath (*Heath*) their names deriving from the Old English *hetha*, 'a landing place'.

The Venerable Bede's work of 672, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, gives the first documentary evidence of the Kingdom of Essex which continued to prosper until 812 when it became subordinate to Wessex. Viking raids became more serious and in 865 East Anglia was invaded, followed in 869 by the death of King Edmund at the hands of the Danes. When Wessex and the Danes signed a peace treaty in 879 Colchester came under Danelaw evidenced by the introduction of Norse place and family names, eg, Kirby and Thorpe.

It is difficult to trace the course of Colchester's revival but *Historia Brittonum*, commonly attributed to the 9th century Welsh monk Nennius, mentions *Caer Colun* in his list of the

Colchester and Lexden after the Romans - continued

twenty eight most important cities in Britain, and the town is later recorded as *Kaelcolim* in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* by Geoffrey of Monmouth. His contemporary, Geoffrey Gaimar, calls it *Kair Koel* and the Saxon version is documented as *Colenceaster* and *Colneceastre* in the 10th century.

In 917 the town appears to have been refurbished after it was recaptured by armies under Edward the Elder. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records that, after regaining Maldon, Edward's army "went to Colchester, and beset the town, and fought thereon till they took it, and slew all the people, and seized all that was therein; except those men who escaped therefrom over the wall." Later the same year, after conquering other Viking armies, "before Martinmas, went King Edward with the West-Saxon army to Colchester; and repaired and renewed the town, where it was broken down before."



Saxon doorway of 11th century Holy Trinity Church in Trinity Street. Colchester, reusing Roman materials



A penny (c1017-23) minted in Colchester during the reign of Canute (1016-35) by a wulfwine or moneyer (someone with authority to mint coins)

Having been restored to English rule Colchester flourished, developing rights and privileges for its burgesses as a *burh*. *Burh* was the Old English name for a fortified dwelling place belonging to a king or noble, later becoming 'burgh' or 'borough'. These settlements were often rebuilt from Iron Age or Roman townships and situated on rivers for trade and to give extra defence against attackers. Colchester being several miles upriver was not best suited for trade but this improved on the building of Hythe in the 10th century. It had a weekly market and a mint was established in 991 making it a settlement of some importance. However, the king's representative, Byrhtnoth, was killed that year at the Battle of Maldon. After being mortally wounded his dying words are recorded in the Anglo-Saxon poem, "The Battle of Maldon": "Yet then this word did speak The old warrior; cheered on his men Ordered to go forward - his good brethren. No longer could he firmly on his feet stand. He looked up to heaven..... 'I thank Thee, Lord of all peoples For all those joys that I on earth have known. Now, my Maker mild - I have most need That thou to my ghost should grant good That my soul to Thee may journey Into thy kingdom - O lord of the Angels, May pass with peace - I do desire of Thee That the hell-fiends may not hurt it.' Then hewed at him those heathen men And at both those men that stood him beside, Aelfnoth and Wulfmeer - both fell; Then beside their liege - their lives they yielded." All Byrhtnoth's considerable lands in Lexden, Stanway and Greenstead passed to his wife, Aelfflaed. On her death in 1002, Aelfflaed bequeathed this land to the king, Ethelred the Unready, making Lexden a royal estate.

By this time, however, Colchester comprised various estates held by powerful Essex Ealdormen which were gradually dispersed on their deaths and the area became part of the kingdom of Canute the Great in 1015.

James Hurnard of Hill House, Lexden - Part 2



James Hurnard was born at Boreham, near Chelmsford on 3rd March 1808. He had been 'a lively, lighthearted child', but apparently was a lonely boy, deeply religious but with few boyish tastes, though 'excessively fond' of bathing and skating. In 1815 his father, after his small business ventures met with little success, took a mill at Kelvedon, near Colchester. In 1818 he sent James to a Society of Friends boarding school at Earls Colne, but in the following year, his money troubles coming to a head, he migrated with his wife and four children to America, 'where, according to popular report, it was less of a struggle to live'. For a time they settled at Wilmington, beside 'the grandly-flowing Delaware', but in 1824 a legacy enabled him to bring the family back from exile to Kelvedon where James first earned his living making soap, and then as a shoemaker.

However, life in England proved to be no better. After visiting relatives in Hellesdon and Norwich, the family initially settled again in Kelvedon where much of James' spare time was taken up with correcting an epic poem he had written over the years, but after a disturbing visit from his former Quaker schoolmaster, William Impey, he burnt it – a 'severe trial' for him, but felt it was a religious duty. Meantime his sister Ann's health was declining and she died on 6th February 1825.

Finally, in 1828, Robert hired brewery premises in East Hill, Colchester in 1828 where he, James and Christopher Stopes, a local man who travelled to America with them, worked hard to make it pay. It became known as the Eagle Brewery. In 1835 James's mother, Hannah, died from consumption and his brother William, who had never been well, died in 1838 after a fall. So at the age of 30 James was left to support his father, who suffered constantly from dizziness and could be demanding, but he devoted long years of service to him although he became repressed and introverted. For much of this time James was ably assisted by a local woman, Elizabeth Mead, who became housekeeper after Hannah's death and stayed until she died in 1864. "Her efforts to make my deaf father hear seem to have produced a throat complaint and affection of the tongue" reported James. Robert died on 11th January 1866 aged 91 leaving nearly £4,000 to his only surviving child, James, now classed as a Gentleman. Other bequests included Christopher Stopes (£19 9s) and Elizabeth Mead (£10).

James Hurnard disliked the literature, architecture and music of his day but was a committed Liberal, a keen Radical supporter of William Gladstone. He was also proud to claim a friendship with Richard Cobden, who with John Bright founded the Anti-Corn Law League in 1838, and supported many of his views. On acquiring his large legacy he gave the brewery to Christopher Stopes who by this time was married with two sons. One of them was Henry Stopes, an archaeologist, who married an Edinburgh feminist and was father to Marie Stopes, the birth control pioneer. The younger, Arthur, rebuilt the East Hill Brewery, taking over a string of East Anglian breweries to found the Colchester Brewing Company.

James Hurnard of Hill House, Lexden, Part 2 - continued

On his father's death James felt 'enfranchised with a vengeance' and began his second long outpouring in verse, "The Setting Sun" but by this time he was approaching 60 years and desperately lonely. He wrote in his epic poem of his yearnings for a happy married life - "too late to hope for dear domestic joys" - but he records the 'astounding' incident of his marriage on 15th August 1867 to Louisa Bowman Smith at the Friends' Meeting House in Kelvedon. She was the daughter of an old Kelvedon friend, Louisa Smith. His prayers had finally been answered and their only son, Samuel Fennell Hurnard, was born on 12th August 1870.



*Hannah, Ruth and Naomi
Hurnard c1916*

In the 1871 Census James, his occupation recorded as "poet and interest of property", is living with his small family and four servants in Head Street, Colchester. In June 1873 having received a huge legacy from another distant relative, the family moved to "a lovely country home in Lexden, not far from Colchester" - Hill House.

James Hurnard died on 26 February 1881 and two years later his widow, Louisa, edited a memoir, consisting mainly of an autobiographical sketch which supplemented his epic poem "The Setting Sun". His son, Samuel Fennell Hurnard continued to live in Hill House for many years, marrying first Rose Densham by whom he had one son and three daughters, all of whom made their mark in the world. Hannah became an acknowledged religious writer, Ruth became a doctor and Naomi a published historian.

After the death of Rose, Samuel married Marjorie Eady, a much younger lady, who died in 2000 aged 89 and who some Lexden residents remember today.

POEM FOR DECEMBER **from "The Setting Sun"**

Then comes the Winter, like a hale old man
Wrapped in his cloak with frosty locks and beard.
Winter is the time for clear cold starlight nights,
And driving snows, and frozen roads and rivers,
For crowding round the blazing Christmas fire,
For telling tales that make the blood run cold,
For sipping elder-wine and cracking filberts,
For friendships, chilblains, fun, roast beef, mince pies,
And shivering fits on jumping into bed:
And thus the year goes round, and round, and round.

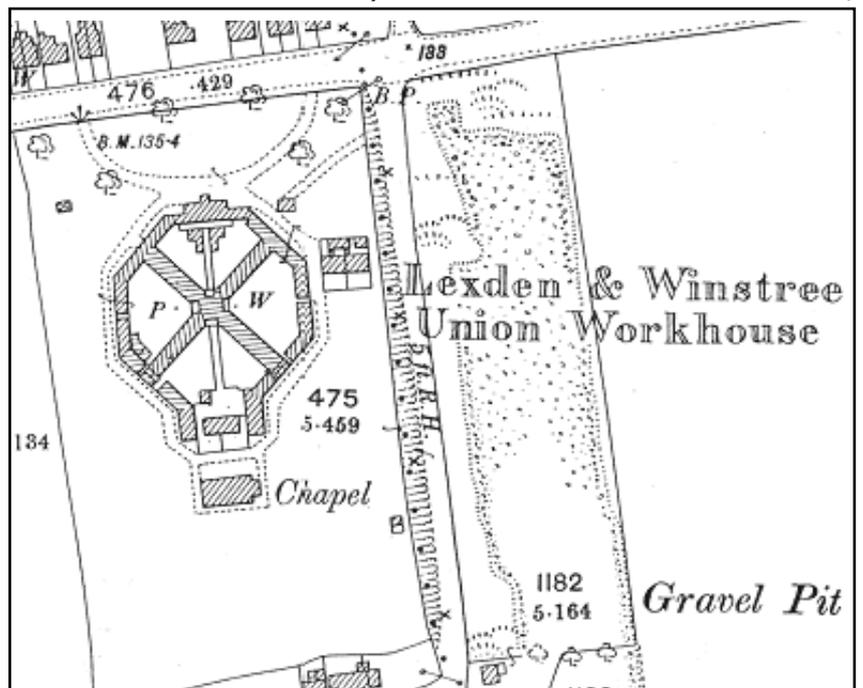
James Hurnard

Tales from the Churchyard - Rev Eustace Crate – Chaplain to the Workhouse

To the right of the path leading to Lexden Church Hall is a grass covered grave recording the deaths of Eustace Henry Crate, who died 28 Feb 1897 aged 54 and Mary Emily, his wife, 20 Sep 1898 aged 51. Eustace Crate was born in Kislingbury, Northamptonshire in 1843, the son of a dissenting minister but took the more traditional Anglican route of attending Lichfield Theological College. Newly qualified in 1869 he took up the position of curate at Abberton, followed by Marks Tey, then Ardleigh and finally Stanway and in 1876 he was appointed Chaplain to the Lexden and Winstree Union Workhouse – a post he held for 21 years.

The large forbidding building, now known as St Albright's Place, on London Road was built between 1836 and 1838 at a cost of £6,800 with a view to accommodating 330 pauper inmates. A new building was desperately needed as until 1834 each parish had looked after its own poor but the new Act made the existing workhouses redundant and gave provision for the formation of Unions and the appointing of Boards of Guardians of the Poor. Originally Lexden and Winstree Union was responsible for over 30 parishes reaching as far as Mount Bures, Dedham, Copford and Wivenhoe.

Five acres of land in Lexden Heath was made available by the Chairman of the Board, Charles Gray Round. The red brick and slate roofed building was designed by the architects, Foden and Henman. It had four three storey main accommodation blocks meeting at the centre to form a large octagon, topped by a belfry which controlled life in the workhouse. The master's quarters were in this central octagon with supervisory views over the four exercise yards. All these buildings were surrounded and connected by a second octagon of single storey outbuildings. The entrance had two storeys which housed the main office, board room, waiting room and porter's room. Some years later an infirmary was built to the south of the main building with new wards built on either side. The workhouse also had a laundry and mortuary.



*Lexden and Winstree workhouse 1886
London Road at top, New Farm Road on right*

The gothic-style Chapel stood in the garden behind the infirmary and was opened in December 1875. At first the chapel was quite stark but over the years was "prettified" including installing a stained glass window. This would be where Rev Crate spent much of his time, but when he was first appointed how did he get there from Ardleigh – perhaps on horseback?

Tales from the Churchyard - continued

*Lexden and Winstree
Union Workhouse*



By 1891 the Crate family was living in Heath House, Straight Road making it easier for him to carry out his duties. Their elder son, Felix aged 15, was in Leatherhead at a school for sons of the Clergy, but Cecil aged 8 and Ethel aged 4 lived at home.

As recorded in Parliamentary Papers of 1839, the basic duty of a Workhouse Chaplain was to attend to

the spiritual welfare of the inmates. He was expected to read prayers and preach sermons to the inmates each Sunday, Christmas and Good Friday. Once every 3 months he would administer the sacrament to any inmate that wished for it. If asked he would also baptise babies born in the Workhouse, including the children of the Master and Mistress.

He had to record in a special book his dates of attendance and the general progress and condition of the children, together with the moral and religious state of all inmates. This record would be put before the Guardians of the Union at their next meeting. He was responsible for monitoring the religious education of any children in the workhouse and once a month catechise those in the Church of England. Lastly he had to minister spiritual counsel and comfort to the aged, infirm, sick and dying particularly when asked by the Master or Matron. Generally his remit was to watch over the moral and religious conduct of everyone in the workhouse, regardless of position.

Many Unions were not keen to pay their chaplains and thought the local priest should routinely take on the duties. Any record of Rev Crate's stipend is lost deep in old papers but chaplains were reimbursed at varying rates and this was often dependent on whether they also held parochial appointments. However, such a position was usually taken by a curate eager to supplement his stipend but, regardless of remuneration, he was still considered socially to be above the workhouse medical officer! Two of Rev and Mrs Crate's children, Cecil and Ethel, emigrated to Massachusetts, USA but Felix also became a clergyman and lived at Salcott, Essex.

The Master and Mistress for over 40 years were Alfred and Hannah Gosling and would have been there for the whole of the time that Rev Crate was Chaplain. They brought up five children there and at the age of 24 their son, Austin, and his wife, Alice, became Master and Mistress in 1906, three years after his parents had retired.

Following the Local Government Act in 1929 the workhouse became St Albright's Hospital, still with Austin Gosling at its head, and in later years had a variety of uses including Social Security office accommodation. Most of the buildings have survived and are Grade II listed. Today it has been redeveloped and has hidden its grim history, with many people more than willing to step over the threshold!

Memories of Holmwood Farm -Toni Plowright (née Le Grys)



*James and Ada Le Grys at
Holmwood Farm House*

I lived in Holmwood Farm, down Chitts Hill on the left hand side. My friend, Velma, and I always called it Chitts Hills as the locals did. There was Holmwood House, the lodge and then the farm. I used to stand at the garden gate at the top of Chitts Hills and watch the trains go by - they fascinated me. When a train was strafed in WW2 the passengers ran out into the wood on the other side. My grandparents, James and Ada Le Grys, lived there from 1921 with three children but earlier they were at the "villa" in Villa Road Stanway. My father, Norman, would have been 21 or 22 and, with my uncle (James) Granite le Grys, ran the arable farm with cows, horses and a bull, which I didn't like. A bull stall was part of the barn and I would not go in there but my cousins fed it huge apples. After their mother died my Day cousins used to come down in the summer holidays and there would be chewing gum stuck all over the farm buildings.

I remember in about 1935 or 1936 I had an old dolls pram that had lost its wheels and I took it out of the barn into the stackyard making a dreadful noise. The nanny from Holmwood House said "would I mind stop making that noise as I was keeping the baby awake." I reckon I crept back into the barn out of the way! The stackyard led from the barn but if you turned left you went into a driveway into Chitts Hill wide enough to take a cart. If you turned right past the barns there were fields with horses and pigs. The farm hands gave me rides on the cart and on the horses. My cousins from London would camp in the fields. I wandered round the farm and watched the workmen. At lunch time they would have their sandwiches and a bottle of cold tea. One was called Fred Ware and lived at the corner of London Road and King Cole Road.

On the corner of the field there was a natural pond with water cress which we had in sandwiches and we also used to go round the fields mushrooming. I loved the wild mushrooms. Mum would boil them up for breakfast and make a sauce and we'd have them on toast. At that time there were no fridges, so mum used to boil the milk to stop it going sour. This lovely thick cream came to the top and we had it with strawberry jam on bread and butter.

At harvest time I followed the workers with carts and binders. I used to help with the stooks and they would shoot rabbits. "Milky" rabbit was a mother feeding babies, but we often had rabbit to eat. The threshing machine was booked for us and it was very noisy but I loved watching it. I remember the belts going round, the corn coming down out of the shoot and the men throwing the bales over to be thrashed. When all the straw was stacked you had to put a tarpaulin over it to keep out the wet weather but I can't remember what happened to the corn. Another thing that grew there were loganberries. My mother would jam them,

The dairy was on the back of the house. Dad would milk the cows and my mother made cheeses, butters, cream and junket - I hated junket! Mum must have worked her legs

Memories of Holmwood Farm- continued

off. The dairy shop was in Lexden between Cresswells and Smith's radio shop but Dad would deliver his milk on his trade bike going round King Cole Road and the Collingwood Road area where they all knew him. The bottles, which had to be sterilized, had cardboard tops and I remember the pint measure and half pint measures.

One winter - I couldn't have been very old - I had an outfit of a coat, bonnet and gaiters, green all of them. For going out we wore little stiff bonnets with a stick-up rim which tied under the chin and the noise of tying the ribbons would go right through your ears. Once when my cousins from Abberton were coming up the driveway my mother said "Oh, poor Pam (who was my age) she's got leather gaiters on. They won't keep her very warm!" If the cousins were down from London we would visit our Abberton cousins.

You entered the farmhouse from the side door that faced the farm and the yard and went into the kitchen. There was a stone floor like worn bricks and my mother put rush matting over them. There was a little sink with a cold water tap and a big copper on the left hand side and then she had an oil stove with an oven on top for cooking. She also had an electric kettle and an electric stove, but it was not used a lot because it cost a lot of money. On the right hand side was a door to the dining room and lounge where there was a leather three piece suite with bright green, red and blue velvet cushions. There were blue rugs on the polished wood floor and the curtains were green. My mother had Clarice Cliff plates on the wall which she bought in Woolworths in the 1930s. I was told my Uncle Granite had built the red brick fire place.

Toni in her mother's arms



As you went from the kitchen, on the left hand side there was a door which went into the hall. There were lights in the kitchen and dining room area but none in the hall. You turned right and right again to go up the stairs but again there were no lights. My parent's bedroom had a light, mine didn't and the dressing room didn't. In a bigger room, which was mine later on, there was a candlestick and when my father came home at night I asked him to make pictures on the wall with his hands in the candlelight. There was no bathroom, only a bucket down the garden with a roll of Bronco paper which was heavier than Izal. My mother's cousins said the damson tree used to rattle on the tin roof of the loo and that the damsons were very good because they grew down there. We had chamber pots under the bed and washing sets that matched. My mother used to come up with the slop bucket and dealt with them every day.

Although I was five when we left Chitts Hill I remember having to return and hoe the sugar beet during war time at 6d a row! Today Holmwood House School has stretched down to the farm and, on the other side of the road, where there were once fields that my father farmed, there now are houses.

FORTH COMING EVENTS - Speakers

Wednesday 8th April

Russell Savory - Stow Maries 1st World War Airfield and its wildlife

Wednesday 13th May

AGM - Lexden History Archive films - Bernard Polley

Wednesday 10th June

Nick Baker - A History of Rowhedge

2015 Membership Renewal

Membership Renewal is due before the May AGM.

If your details have not changed since the 2014 AGM, then please fill in the form below and return it to:

Jackie Bowis
Membership Secretary,
20 Munnings Road,
Colchester,
CO3 4QG

RENEWAL FORM

MEMBERSHIP NO NAME

Please tick the membership type required:

SINGLE MEMBERSHIP £15 FAMILY MEMBERSHIP £20

Cheques made payable to "Lexden History Group"

If your details have changed please ask the Membership Secretary for an application form