

Lexden History Group

This issue features:

Tales from the Churchyard – Rangoon and Rural Lexden

Links with the Past – The Old Rectory

WW1 Poetry

James Hurnard of Hill House

Appeal to find long-lost pieces of Colchester's History



WW1 Exhibition 27th/28th September



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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)

Message From Your Chairman – Dick Barton

OUR WORLD WAR ONE EXHIBITION

After many months of preparation and planning, our commemorative two-day exhibition opened on Saturday, 27th Sept. 2014 in Lexden's St Leonard's Church Hall. The official opening was performed by Dr John Ashdown-Hill, Colchester's Mediaeval expert, who was introduced by the Group's President, Andrew Phillips. Dr Ashdown-Hill explained his own family's connection with the War.

Thursday and Friday, 25/26th Sept. had seen some feverish activity as display boards and extra tables were delivered, and the exhibition mounted and arranged. By Friday lunchtime all was ready for a preview by 181 pupils from the four local primary schools. After an hour's noisy chatter, some eager questions and sampling Sonia Lewis's trench cake and bread pudding, the pupils departed, leaving the stewards time to recover ready for an informal reception in the evening, which was attended by some of the helpers. The principal guest was the Deputy Mayor, Cllr Theresa Higgins, who, pleased to meet some experts, returned on Saturday, to get some advice on family medals and badges.

We welcomed four volunteer helpers from the Bay Military Museum on Canvey Island who brought with them a marvellous display of British and German militaria, which formed a substantial part of the exhibition. Over the weekend we were joined by an Army Padre (John Hogan) and a Nurse (Gwyn Bilby), who had a wonderful display of period medical equipment. The Stow Maries Aerodrome Museum provided a display with a lady in RAF uniform. Two of our members, Bernard Polley and Grahame Page, provided glass display cabinets with memorabilia from their own families, including a piece of the Zeppelin that crashed at Little Wigborough in 1916.

The display stands featured the men from Lexden (based on Peter Potter's book about the Lexden casualties), Colchester during the War, local medical care and the Colchester Military Hospital, the Peace Movement and Conscientious Objectors, the Armed Forces (Army, RAF and Royal Navy), the Home Front, Transport/the Post Office/animals during the War and others. Period newsreels of the Battlefront from the Imperial War Museum were played all day in the entrance hall. There were displays of books, newspapers and magazines from 1914-19. Through the weekend there were readings by Jean Holden, Gillian Plumtree and David Tarkenter of WW1 poems.

Throughout the weekend Sonia Lewis provided WW1 food - delicious corned beef sandwiches, trench cake, bread pudding and ploughman's. All proved very popular. Thank you Sonia for all your hard work. Thanks also to Sue McCarthy for providing nonstop liquid refreshment. A profit of £150 was made towards the expenses of the weekend.

Our thanks go to all those who prepared exhibits and those who helped in so many other ways 'to put the show on the road'. But a special big thank you to our Secretary Liz who did the detailed planning.

ST CLARE DRIVE – ROMAN BURIALS

As a result of a planning application to build three detached houses in the grounds of 'High Trees', four evaluation trenches were dug across the proposed site during December 2013 by the Colchester Archaeological Trust. They revealed six Roman inhumation graves, Roman and undated ditches, and post-medieval modern pits. The spacing of the Roman burials may indicate that the Lexden Cemetery (previously known only for cremation burials) also contained family burial groups which may have been separated by ditches.

Loose prehistoric flints indicate that there was some passing activity here in the Neolithic/Bronze Age. The full extent and nature of the burials and their relationship to the previously known cemetery can only be worked out by further archaeological work. This may be carried before the start of the development.

Steaming Across the Atlantic in 1819 and 1824 - James Hurnard of Hill House, Lexden



James Hurnard's poems are known worldwide and his most famous "The Setting Sun", written in Colchester, is still in demand. It is an epic tale of his life and thoughts running into nearly 300 pages and makes fascinating reading. It was first published in 1868 and I am fortunate enough to have a copy of the third edition (dated 1878) which is signed by his only son, Samuel!

James was born in Boreham, Essex, on 3rd March 1808, the son of Robert, a retail brewer and his wife, Hannah Clark who was from a wealthy Oxfordshire family. They had four children and young James, "a lively, lighthearted child", revelled in visits to Southend, delighting in the sea but later on attending a boarding school at Earls Colne he became lonely and deeply religious.

The Napoleonic wars caused prices to rise dramatically and Robert's business troubles, including running a mill at Kelvedon, came to a head in 1819 and he decided the only option was to move his family to farm in America, where "it was less of a struggle to live". They packed several boxes for the journey, some for the journey, some for when they first arrived and some for finally settling and then sold the rest of their belongings. The family left Kelvedon by the Coggeshall coach on the morning of 1st April 1819 sailing from Gravesend for New York on the 4th.



The account of their Atlantic voyage over the describes horrendous conditions. They were travelling "steerage" on the ship "Thames" with a party of like-minded

Quakers. They took one side of the vessel, an area which measured only 34ft by 24ft and lined on three walls with two tiers of berths - each berth sleeping two people. In the middle, piled up almost to the ceiling, were everyone's boxes and packages, many filled with stores for the voyage. With nearly sixty occupants all using the same badly ventilated area for living, sleeping and eating it could not have been pleasant! In addition the passage was rough and noisy, hazardous as well with boxes tumbling about the floor.

Steaming Across the Atlantic in 1819 and 1824 - continued

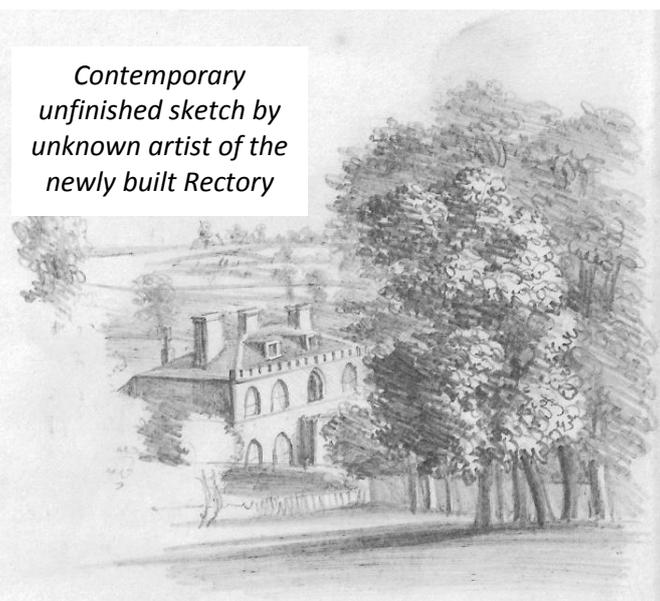
The Hurnard family's principal food for the journey was potatoes, with eggs and red herrings, all of which they had brought with them. Each family prepared their own meals in the small "caboose" shared with the stewards and a cook who served the cabin class passengers. They finally landed in New York at 3pm on 6th May 1819.

They eventually settled at Wilmington in Delaware, a small town of 6,000 souls but sadly the following year Lucy, the eldest child, died of typhus fever and Hannah suffered badly from pleurisy in the desperately cold weather. As well as training in shoemaking, James and his remaining siblings, William and Ann, started a successful business making and selling soap. Robert taught in the local school, helped by Christopher Stopes, a local Essex lad, who had travelled with them. Although the family received help and encouragement, they struggled to adapt to life there, but in 1824 news came from England that a handsome legacy had been left to Robert by his wealthy aunt, giving them funds to return home. They quickly disposed of their businesses and booked the luxury of cabins for the return journey, sighting "old England" exactly five years after they had left. History of James Hurnard to be continued.

The Old Rectory, Spring Lane, Lexden

There has been a rectory on the same site in Spring Lane, Lexden, for several centuries. The first one, built of timber and plaster, was recorded in 1538 as "adjoining the Glebe" and Robert Searle lived there from 1576-1610. He was a kindly but strong minded man who did not always comply with church regulations but recorded entries in the Parish Register including the births of his own children and grandchildren. In 1610 the house was described as "little" but in 1662 the

rector, John Nettles, son of the previous rector, Stephen Nettles, was taxed on six hearths! The rectors probably led quite comfortable lives as the annual income from tithes and the glebe in 1705 amounted to £265,000 in today's money. A Yew Walk was constructed in the mid 1700s by James Kilner and this led directly from the garden to the church. He described it as "a continual ornament and convenience" for his successors.



Contemporary unfinished sketch by unknown artist of the newly built Rectory

The original house was replaced in 1814 by a large, very fashionable, Gothic style house built by George Preston who was rector between 1804 and 1841. He was also responsible for demolishing the decaying mediaeval church and rebuilding it in 1820.

The Old Rectory, Spring Lane, Lexden - continued

Some of the church's carved stonework was divided up and used in the "new" Rectory garden and a number of the stone floor slabs became paving for the back yard. He could well afford to do this as different properties owned by the church were yielding an annual income of £470,000!

George Preston was a strong supporter of the National Day and Sunday School which was built in Spring Lane for 100 poor parish children between the ages of 6 and 12, more than half of whom were in receipt of charity clothing. Costs were mainly underwritten by a legacy of Ann Rawstorn at the Manor, but as this was inadequate George Preston and his wife, Jane Isabella, went daily to help. A further £20 (£13,000 today) was received from the will of Rev John Rawstorn Papillon in 1837. He had been rector at Chawton, for nearly forty years - the church of Jane Austen. It apparently became an Austen family joke that Jane would one day marry John Rawstorn Papillon and he appears frequently in the surviving letters of Jane Austen, although more as a comical character. It is thought that perhaps "Mr Collins" in *Pride and Prejudice* could have been loosely based on him!

He was never rector of Lexden, but is buried in the churchyard as he inherited Lexden Manor and Estate from his godmother and distant cousin, Ann Rawstorn.

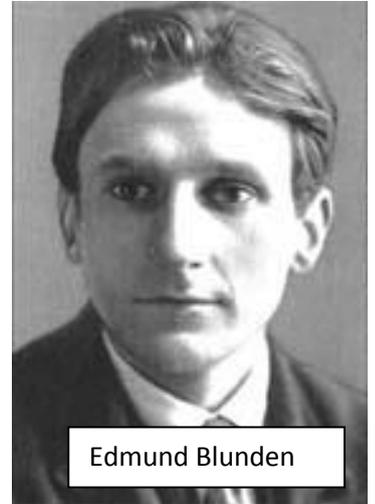
By 1841 his son, Rev John Papillon was living in The Rectory with his Irish wife, Frances and their 2 month old son, Thomas Leslie. Serving them were three local girls and another probably brought with them from the family home in Kent. The splendid yew tree avenue had gone (although the yew tree in the front garden of 193 Lexden Road could possibly be a last survivor) and workmen's houses had been built down the hill. Frances died in 1853 and John Papillon then married Laura Lochner.

The Rector and his second wife lived in the Rectory for many years until he died in 1889. He had delighted in rural activities, understanding the need for weed and insect killers and manures, artificial or natural. Rev John Papillon left a substantial will, probate being granted to his son, Thomas, vicar of Writtle, and he is buried in Lexden Churchyard with his first wife, Frances. After his death Laura vacated the Rectory and moved to Church House (197 Lexden Road) where she died ten years later. John Papillon's place was taken by John Lester and his family, but soon after the Rectory was sold and by the 1901 census Rev Lester was living in "The Rectory, 15 Lexden Street" - Church House, where Laura had been living.

The old rectory in 1901 was called 10 Spring Lane and Col Edward Corse-Scott and his family were living there. It became known as Glebe House and in 1911 had many alterations and additions and the family lived there until the 1940s when it was sold to the Essex Federation of Congregational Women who also extended the building for use as home for "Aged Persons". Since then it has been owned by a succession of companies providing care for the elderly.

Many have heard of Rupert Brooke's *If I should die think only this of me*, or John McCrae's *In Flanders fields the poppies blow* or Edward Thomas's *In memoriam*, *Easter 1915* or especially Wilfred Owen's *Dulce et decorum est* or *Anthem for a doomed youth* and *Futility* which Benjamin Britten used in his War Requiem. We dared not call them unpatriotic – because they died?

But what about Ivor Gurney's *Strange Hells* or Edmund Blunden's *Come on my lucky lads*? These poets and the war artists like Stanley Spencer and Paul Nash really knew what war was like and maybe found solace or personal redemption by recording it in their own inimitable ways, but many of all ranks and classes went mad because the politicians and their friends and families, could not imagine what they went through, and they had no way of telling it.



Edmund Blunden



Ivor Gurney

Ivor Gurney, who was a painter as well as a poet, spent much of his later life in an asylum and few have heard much of him. This phrase "Lest we forget" is as much for those whose minds were lost as for those whose bodies were lost in battle.

The bitterness of Rudyard Kipling's *Epitaphs of War 1914-1918* "If any question why we died Tell them, because our fathers lied" was considered too disrespectful by the official chroniclers (The Victors) and Robert Graves's *Recalling War* or Siegfried Sassoon's *Glory of Women* "You love us when we're Heroes" were considered too gory or cynical

descriptions.

Thomas Hardy wrote a poem *Christmas 1924* parodying the goodwill of Christmas and how it evaporated during that war with the introduction of the latest and finest of Man's inventions, poison-gas! He was good at pathos in a story so that we could identify with the good people but he also showed how our ugliest side could be exposed by the slide of circumstances.

If we fail to learn from those who are experienced and articulate and listen only to those from our generation who, not understanding history, pontificate and polarise such as Bush and Blair and now Max Hastings, who says that such thoughtful though funny pieces of theatre such as "Oh, What a Lovely War" and "Blackadder" are not poignant commentary on war but merely subversive and disrespectful, we really are doomed.

This little England (not Great Britain) has a very bad international record historically and, if we value the temperate climate and character that we feel is

our best side, we would do well to make the most of it wholeheartedly and not rush to impose it on others. One of our best characteristics is to be abler (at times) to step back and make fun of our self righteous pomposity especially in literature - and long may it remain so.

Beauty

*I cannot live with Beauty out of mind.
I search for her and desire her all the day;
Beauty, the choicest treasure you may find,
Most joyous and sweetest word his lips can say.
The crowded heart in me is quick with visions
And sweetest music born of a brighter day.*

*But though the trees have long since lost their green
And I, the exile, can but dream of things
Grown magic in the mind; I watch the sheen
Of frost, and hear the song Orion sings.
Yet O, the star-born passion of Beethoven,
Man's consolation sung on the quivering strings.*

*Beauty immortal, not to be hid, desire
Of all men, each in his fashion, give me the strong
Thirst past satisfaction for thee, and fire
Not to be quenched. . . . O lift me, bear me along,
Touch me, make me worthy that men may seek me
For Beauty, Mistress Immortal, Healer of Wrong.*

Ivor Gurney, 9th February 1917

Tales from the Churchyard - Rangoon and Rural Lexden.

Just to the south of the church is a small headstone 'In loving remembrance of KATE wife of CHARLES JAMES COLE and youngest daughter of JOHN APPLEBY who died suddenly March 5th 1880 at Elephant Point, British Burmah and was buried in Rangoon Cemetery aged 24 years "Short toil, eternal rest"'. Who was Kate and what took her to Burma in 1879? She was born in Lexden in October 1855 to John and Emma Appleby and in the summer of 1879 married Charles



View over the Rangoon River late 19th Century

Cole. He was born in 1854 in Halstead but the family soon moved to 5 Mill Street, Colchester, where his father worked as a builder/carpenter and joiner. In 1871 Charles was living at 8 South Street and working as a Telegraph Clerk. He was later appointed by The Eastern Extension Telegraph Company to work at Elephant Point on the mouth of the river near Rangoon (now Yangon) where the electric telegraph had reached

only a few years before. The company, part of a larger group founded by John Pender (1816 -1896), the British submarine communications cable pioneer, was laying telegraph cables across the world utilizing lands of the British Empire.

On marriage Charles and Kate made their way to this outpost of the Empire. It would have been such a different life for the daughter of a schoolmaster brought up in rural Lexden and it is not known why Kate died so suddenly just a few months after their marriage but it was probably from typhoid or a similar infection. It appears that Charles remained over there for he is next found in the 1911 Census as a "retired Telegraph Superintendant" living in a nine-roomed house, 43 New Town Road, with a servant, Annie Woods. In the early summer of that year he married for the second time, Margaret A Jones, but his death is recorded on 30th October 1917 at 66 Winnock Road. He must have had a successful career for his effects amounted to the considerable sum of £1,234 12s 1d!

Kate's mother, Emma, had previously been married to Jeremiah Abraham Burrell who was born in Norwich in 1817 the son of John and Mary Burrell. John was a baker but Jeremiah became a National schoolmaster and in 1840 moved to Lexden with Emma (née Rudd). They had three children, Emma b1840 in Norwich, Mary Ann b1841 and John Charles b1844-1923. Jeremiah died on 17th

Tales from the Churchyard - continued

July 1844 and is buried in Lexden Churchyard on the left of the main path to the church.

Jeremiah's successor at Lexden National Day and Sunday School was John Appleby born in 1816, the son of Joseph and Mary. In 1841 John lived in Lexden Street with his now widowed father, a farmer, and his sister, Eliza. Joseph Appleby would have owned his own property as he is listed in the poll books of that time. He died in January 1847 aged 71 and is buried close to the War Memorial with Mary, who died in 1830. In the summer of 1847 John married Emma Burrell, the widow of Jeremiah and by 1851 he was living in Lexden Street with Emma, both National school teachers and 5 children, 3 from Emma's previous marriage.

The house where they lived in 1861 is recorded as the Post Office and still living with them were their five children Eleanor 1850-1918, Edward 1849-1906, Fanny 1853, Kate 1854, Frederick 1858, together with Emma's children John and Emma, who was an organist, perhaps at Lexden Church.

In 1871 John Appleby was enumerator for the Lexden census, recording his sister, Eliza, and family who lived in London Road. He was probably enumerator in 1851 and 1861 as the writing is identical.

John died on 18th January 1879 after more than 30 years as the local schoolmaster and his will, amounting to less than £200, was proved by his son, Edward Joseph Appleby who was by this time a chemist in Argyle Street, Bath. After John's death Emma went to live with her daughter Eleanor and husband Frederick Theobald, a joiner journeyman, and their two children. Their house was on the east side of Maldon Road near Crouch Street probably in the row of shops which was demolished to build the Balkerne Hill roundabout in the 1970s.

Most of the Appleby children remained nearby. Eleanor and Eliza married into well-known Lexden families, ie, Theobald and Eade. Frederick became a telegraphist and Fanny married Sydney Critchely, a brewer from Wales, and lived in Winnock Road close to where Charles Cole, their sister's widower, had died.

Appeal to find long-lost pieces of Colchester's history

The Avenue of Remembrance. Colchester – Sonia Lewis

The Avenue of Remembrance was opened in 1933, and trees were marked with bronze plaques dedicated not only to the dead of the First World War, but also ex-service men, Scouts, Guides, local dignitaries and children. Many local organisations were involved, eg, the ex-servicemen's section was organised by the Colchester Rotary Club. At the time the chairman of the Highways Committee was Lexden resident Cllr. E. Alec Blaxill.

In 1934 the Secretary of the Roads Beautifying Association wrote to the Town Clerk: *"It has been a very great pleasure and privilege to our experts to have been in such close touch with Colchester authorities, who have shown themselves to be a most enlightened body with whom we have dealt. I feel confident that the beauty of the planting of the Colchester By Pass Road, when it comes to maturity, will give great stimulus to road planting throughout the Country"*

The land for the by-pass was bought by the council in 1930 and in November 1932 the Government gave permission to "proceed with utmost speed" in building the three-mile stretch of road from Greenstead Road junction to the Lexden Road/London Road junction - now known as the Avenue of Remembrance. The opening ceremony took place on 29th June 1933, the dignitaries being driven from the Town Hall by motor vehicle. Viscount Ullswater performed the opening ceremony with scissors presented by Jean Bell, the daughter of the Mayor, Cllr Maurice Pye.

Restoration.

In March 1996, Roy Tolhurst of Great Horkesley contacted Cllr Christopher Arnold concerned about the bronze plaques, many of which were missing and some had turned up in a local scrap yard. Fortunately these were returned to the council. The Mayor Cllr Mary Fairhead, having been approached by Cllrs Arnold and Lewis, agreed to be the first of successive mayors to chair a committee looking into the restoration of the Avenue, keeping the project non-political. In March 1997 Mayor Cllr Westley Sandford held an open evening at the Town Hall inviting sponsorship for the project and offering an opportunity for residents to claim family plaques. The unclaimed plaques were recorded and put in storage to prevent their theft. Much work followed with support from the Royal British Legion, Guides, Scouts, Council Officials and councillors and finally the Avenue of Remembrance Wall (at the junction of Colne Bank Avenue and North Station Road) was dedicated in September 1998 attended by Mayor Cllr David Cannon.

Lexden History Group are collecting information about the plaques to create, as far as possible, a complete record for the archives. There is no plan to claim plaques from their owners.



Members of the Lexden History Group at the Avenue of Remembrance Appeal Launch
Photo courtesy of Daily Gazette/Essex County Standard

FORTHCOMING SPEAKERS

'Geoff Pettit Lecture'

Wednesday 14th January - Life in Edwardian Colchester
- Patrick Denney

Wednesday 11th February - The Great Essex
Earthquake 1884 - Peter Jones

Wednesday 11th March - "Medical Care on the Frontline
and the Role of Colchester Military Hospital in WW1 and
How it Shaped Future Healthcare" – Paul Byrne

*If you have the names and contact details of possible speakers for the
forthcoming programme I would be pleased to hear from you.
Please email the details to jbowis@hotmail.com*