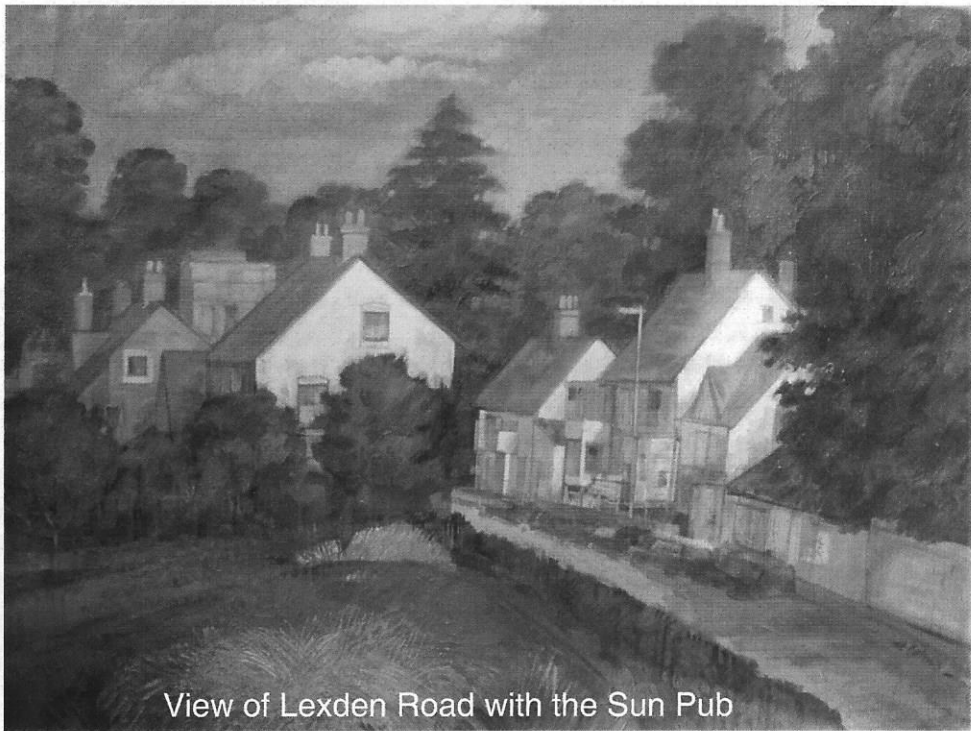




Spring News Letter

Issue No: 12 March 2009



View of Lexden Road with the Sun Pub

This painting and those on the back cover are by the Lexden Artist Henry Collins.

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Programme of Events

11th March

"The Music Charts, 1952 to Date" by Ray Spiller.

8th April

"The Development of Castle Park" by Ian Baalham

13th May

Annual General Meeting +
"Grandad played the Cornet"
by David Cawdell

10th June

"How the Railway came to Lexden" by Bob Thornhill

8th July

BBQ at Tim & Carol Holding's.
Details to be announced.

August

NO MEETING!

11th September

Town Crier Robert Needham

14th October

"Treasures in Your Attic"
by James Grinter of Reeman
Dansie

Meetings

Lexden History Group meetings are held on the 2nd Wednesday of every month at 7.45pm in St Leonard's Church Hall, Lexden, except August when there is no meeting. Entry £2 for members, £4 for guests, refreshments included. Annual membership £10 for single, £15 for family living at same address.

Web address: www.lexdenhistory.org.uk

Editorial

Please accept this as a formal notification of the AGM on 11th May at 7.45pm at St Leonard's Church Hall, Lexden Road, Lexden, Colchester.

Membership subscriptions must be renewed before then. A membership renewal form is enclosed, together with a nomination form for Committee positions, which must be returned to the Secretary before 15th April.

Thanks to the excellent support from our members attending our monthly meetings, the Committee are pleased to advise you that membership subscriptions will not be increased and will remain at 2006 levels. If only we could say that our gas and electricity bills would do likewise! If you do not renew in time you will be unable to vote at the AGM and not qualify for the discounted entry charge.

When renewing, please make cheques payable to Lexden History Group. When completing your renewal form please write

clearly in block capitals, as we have had problems reading some applications.

David Cawdell has kindly agreed to give us an entertaining presentation after the formal part of our AGM, and instead of our monthly indulgence of tea/coffee and biscuits, the Committee has agreed that wine and soft drinks will be offered to all members.

Details for our July BBQ will be announced in the June issue of our magazine. Tickets for the event will be for sale from May onwards from the Committee.

Thank you to those members who contribute to the contents of our magazine. Please keep sending me any items of local historic interest you may know about. Many thanks,

Jane Thornhill

President's Page

Once upon a time Lexden was not part of Colchester. It was a centre of authority by itself. That was in Saxon days. We know this because of the survival of the Lexden & Winstree Hundred, the basis of local government until very recently, harking back to the old Saxon Hundred Court. Given the minute size of Winstree (today it does not exist), we can be sure that Lexden was the real big cheese. What changed all this?

The culprit appears to be that great Essex hero, Bryrhtnoth, Earloman of Essex (i.e. the king's representative), who died in 991 at the great Battle of Maldon fighting the Vikings. He owned large estates around Colchester – evidence, by the way, that Colchester was then the County town. Bryrhtnoth's estates, including Greenstead, Stanway and Lexden, passed to his wife, Ælflæd, who left Stanway and Lexden to the king, Ethelred the Unready, in 1002. Stanway with Lexden thus became a single royal estate.

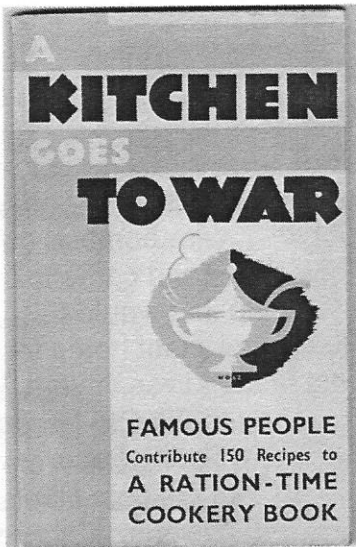
After the Battle of Hastings William the Conqueror claimed all royal estates (and a good many more), including Stanway with Lexden. But the citizens of Colchester (a strategic town for the king – hence the castle) claimed that Lexden had formerly been taxed with Greenstead – which was technically true. The outcome

was a good old compromise. Lexden east of the old Iron Age dyke became part of Colchester, the rest stayed with the royal estate of Stanway, outside the borough's jurisdiction, and has been there ever since.

For many years there was grumbling about this, and Lords of the Manor of Lexden constantly protested that Lexden was not part of Colchester – mainly, of course, to avoid paying taxation to the town. As Lexden History Group members will recall (Oh, yes you do) in a memorable talk I gave at our first AGM, I showed that so late as the 1340s John Lord Fitzwalter was in open warfare with the town.

What does all this mean in the 21st century? Not a lot – except that Bryrhtnoth and Ælflæd wreak havoc with my Spell-Check. Lexden today is a pleasant residential area of Colchester, spared most of the worse excesses of modern urban over-development. It is much more important that we resist uncivilised attempts by developers to ruin our suburb with horrible four-storey flats. But that shouldn't stop us remaining curious about our long, long past. That's why our society exists.

Andrew Phillips



The above is the cover to a Ration-Time Cookery Book with 150 recipes which was first published in 1940. "Cabinet Ministers or their wives, authors, actors, sportsmen, famous chefs and food experts have sent the recipes in the hope that they may help the housewife to plan interesting meals in wartime. The recipes have been carefully examined by cookery and diet experts of the Gas Industry who are responsible for collecting the material."

I chose the following recipes because I like Joyce Grenfell and her coffee marshmallow whip sounds great. The "Excellent Cake for the Troops" sounds intriguing. If any of you feel like trying out either of these recipes, please let us know how they turned out.

COFFEE MARSHMALLOW WHIP

By Joyce Grenfell

(A delicious party sweet that needs no sugar)

Put 1/2 lb of marshmallows, cut into small pieces, in the top of a double boiler. Pour over them a cupful of strong coffee.

Stir over flame until the marshmallows are quite soft; pour mixture into a bowl and whisk until frothy. Divide into glasses and when cool, pour over a little whipped cream and sprinkle with chopped nuts. Place in a refrigerator until needed.



AN EXCELLENT CAKE FOR THE TROOPS

by Eva Turner

(It needs no eggs and makes a good-sized cake)

6 oz margarine 3/4 lb mixed fruit
6 oz brown sugar 3/4 lb flour
2 oz chopped peel 1/2 pint of milk
1 1/2 teaspoons bicarbonate of soda

METHOD: Cream the margarine & sugar. Warm the milk & pour onto the soda. Add the prepared fruit, milk & flour. Mix well. Bake in a 7 in cake tin in a moderate oven for about 2 hours

J.T

Henry Collins - Lexden Artist 1910 - 1994

Henry Collins was born in Colchester in 1910. His mother was a dressmaker and an artistic, creative person. He was educated at North Street Boarding School in John Harper Street. Later he won a scholarship to the

Colchester School of Art, where he met his future wife, Joyce Pallot. His first job was working in London for an artist called Mr Bevan, in a printing and design studio. He

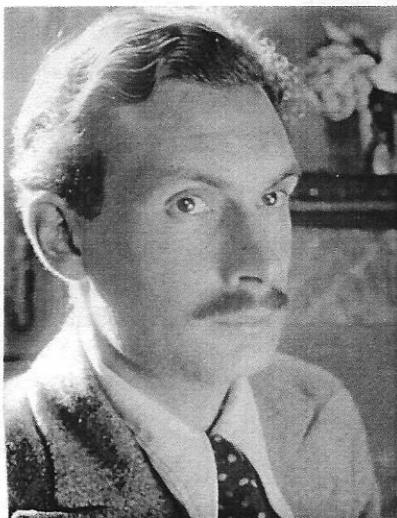
saw war service in the Royal Artillery and the Royal Engineers overseas. For a period he worked for Professor J. Raven on Intelligence tests for the War Office. During this period he

and his wife lived in London, but they were bombed out of their home and came to live in the flat that would become their permanent home for the rest of their lives. It was attached to the Old School House in Spring Lane,

Lexden. His sister, Joan Collins, by now married, had bought the Old School House during the 1940's and lived there with her family. So brother and sister became close neighbours.

His wife was also an artist and together they worked on the Festival of Britain.

This was the breakthrough they needed and afterwards many commissions followed. For the Central Office for Information he produced posters, murals and illustrations. Also for the



Brussels Exhibition, Expo 70, the Jamestown Festival, USA, Ind Coope Ltd., Shell Centre murals, Glass screens and tapestry in Grosvenor House, London, the G.P.O. Tower, London, KLM Airlines, and concrete murals for Sainsburys, British Home Stores, Cwrnbran Arts Trust, Wales, Civic Centre Essex County Council, Colchester Borough Council, plus around twenty mural panels in Colchester, Southampton, Gloucester and Newcastle. Henry also designed and painted over forty works for IBM, plus collage panels for Philips Business Systems and British Home Stores in Harlow.

During this time he also found time to teach part-time. First at Colchester Art School, where he sometimes took along his little sister, Joan, to sit for his

students to draw. (See back cover of a portrait Henry painted of Joan around 1936.)



Henry with his parents

After the War ended, he taught at St Martin's School of Art in the Graphic Design Department for twenty-five years.

His final teaching posts were at Colchester Art School and at Greyfriars.

Although best known for his oil paintings of local scenes,

he did several portraits and worked in a variety of media. A retrospective exhibition of his work was held at the Minories in 1984. Perhaps this local artist has been neglected for too long and it is time to see another public exhibition of his work?

(With thanks to his sister Joan for allowing me access to family paintings and photos.)

Jane Thornhill

St Botolph's Raid February 1944

When I started on the Lexden in Wartime project, little did I think I would immerse myself so completely in the life of Lexden of 70 years ago. It has been time consuming, hard work and totally fascinating. The St Botolph's raid occurred on the night of 22/23 February 1944 and has been well documented, but I did not appreciate that people in Lexden would have such diverse memories. As most of my project "victims" were children at the time, they were not frightened or appalled by it for they had little understanding of the implications and their parents were very diligent in masking their own fears.

Tony Blaxill was able to enjoy the relative safety of an air raid shelter, but Fred Hagon, tired of losing sleep through false alarms, refused to move from his bed, but on his way to work the next morning saw the roads at St Botolph's covered in firemen's hoses! As a junior reporter with the Essex Telegraph, Joe Firmin, having helped his father douse fires near Buntings Seed Farm,

chased off on his bike to record the events for posterity. Peter Tweed was in hospital having his appendix out and the only people frightened were the adults. The luminous glow was watched from the safe distance of their Lexden homes by Heather Stutter and Toni Plowright, but Heather's grandfather who lived near the



conflagration was not heard from for days after the event.

Norman Le Grys, Toni's father, was in the National Fire Service and attended the firestorms after the bombs had crashed through large and important buildings. He was admonished for putting the incendiaries he had found lying around into the static water tank. These bombs could have caused all sorts of problems, but equally the water was needed to put out the fires!

Another report I heard included one about Hollingtons, the clothing factory in Mersea Road. It burnt fiercely that night destroying everything except an odd surviving bale of cloth which was quickly removed – not for safety, but for use within the fireman’s family. Not everyone could afford to be altruistic! Many of the incendiaries hurtled through the roofs of houses. One lady reported finding one on the wardrobe and another on the bed. The family raced to safety and lost all their belongings, but later found the wardrobe handles – all that was left – to confirm their loss to the insurance company!

There must be many more memories out there in peril of being lost forever. Think how interesting it would be now to read about the shortages, emotions and fear felt by Lexden people during the First World War. Let’s make fascinating reading now for our descendants!

Liz White

Please send your memories of Lexden in War Time to Liz, as she has begun work on the next volume.

CHAIRMAN’S COLUMN

The early part of 2009 has seen us remembering our late Chairman, Geoff Pettit, with two events. The first was the Memorial Lecture on 14th January, given by our President, Andrew Phillips, on “Photographs and the Local Historian”. The second event was the planting of a memorial tree, a copper beech, on the Lexden Slopes, near Geoff’s boyhood home (Toll House) on 4th February.

Andrew’s lecture, illustrated with photographs of Lexden and Colchester, showed us how important it is to record present day events, people and places for the future and to preserve older pictures.

Our tree-planting took place in glorious sunshine with snow under our feet. It was a happy occasion and we were joined by some of Geoff’s family. We enjoyed a convivial half hour over coffee at The Crown afterwards. Our thanks to Cllr. Sonia Lewis, who made all the arrangements with the Borough Council’s Parks Dept., who did us proud on the day. We even had a very shiny stainless steel spade!!

Our AGM is not until May, but I would like members to consider standing for election to the Committee. We are particularly looking for a new Treasurer. Any volunteers?

Dick Barton

TREE PLANTING

On Wednesday 4th February members of Lexden History Group participated in the planting of a copper beech tree in

first spade full of earth around the tree. After this our Honorary President, many of Geoff's friends and more members of his



memory of Geoff Pettit, our first Chairman.

Colchester Parks Department, who supplied the tree recommended February as the best time for planting.

The tree is located on the rising ground in Spring Park overlooking the Toll House where Geoff lived as a boy.

Members of Geoff's family were able to attend and Maurice, Geoff's older brother placed the

family, added spades full of earth until the work was complete. Our thanks to Ian Baalham for all his help.

The sun shone on us and apart from the icy conditions making walking rather difficult, we could not have asked for a better day, especially after all that snow on Monday! The Landlord of the Crown Inn, made us very welcome with excellent coffee and biscuits.

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Individual Art Tuition in pastels, pencil or acrylics
Have you always wanted to paint and draw but never had the time? I can teach you how, from complete beginners to advanced students. Studio in Lexden. Commissions accepted for portraits.

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By Henry Collins