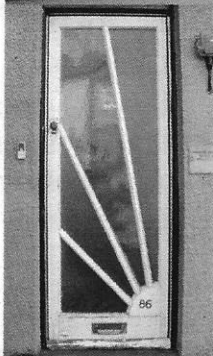
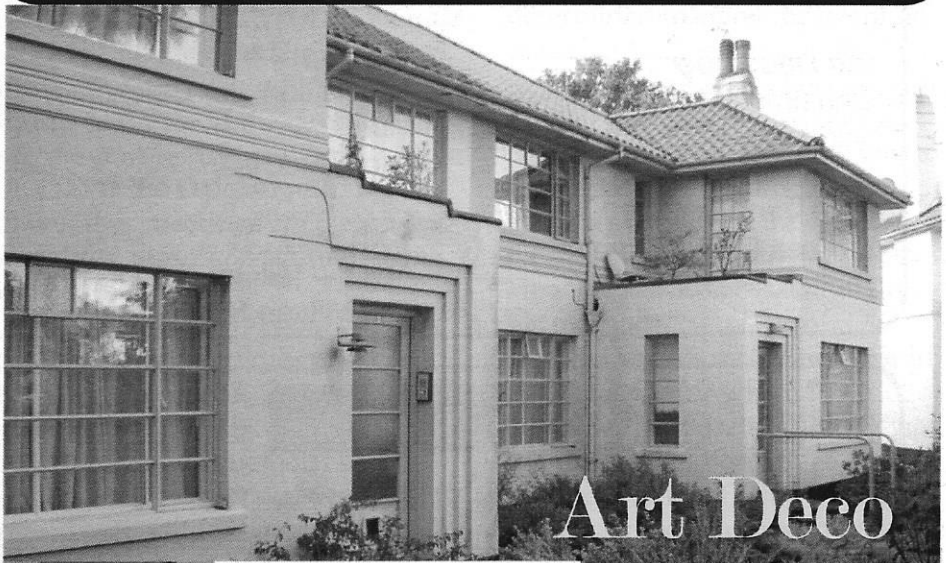




Lexden History  
Group

The background of the title is a historical map of the Lexden area. Labels on the map include 'West', 'Shepher Bridge', 'Shepher Farm', 'Lexden', 'Rawden', 'Corn Mill', 'A Bull', and 'Purton'. A road is marked '5010'.

Autumn News Letter  
Issue No:14 September 2009



## Programme of Events

### **14th October**

Antiques Valuation Evening  
by James Grinter of Reeman  
Dansie

### **11th November**

Trip to Antarctica  
Chris Dobrowolski

### **9th December**

Christmas Party. Admission by  
ticket only bought in advance

### **13th January 2010**

Mersea Oyster Company  
Richard Haward

### **10th February**

Recorded life stories of local  
people  
Jess Jephcott

### **10th March**

History of Gas in Colchester  
Colin Scrivener

### **14th April**

Acquisitions for Colchester  
Museums  
Laura McClean

### **12th May**

AGM + Talk by Tim Holding -  
The Village Sign

## From the Chairman

### REV. CANON STEPHEN CARTER

Most of our members will be aware that the Rev. Stephen Carter, Rector of St. Leonard's, is leaving Lexden in October to take up a new living as Rector of All Saints with St. Peter's at Maldon.

Stephen has been very supportive of the Lexden History Group, since its early days, when its steering committee had its first meeting in the Church. Since then he has been a member of the Group, regularly attending our meetings and functions. We thank him for his help and friendship, and wish him every success and happiness in his new post.

Dick Barton

## Editorial

The plans for our Christmas Party are nearly finalised and it promises to be as good as ever, if not even better! For our entertainment we have booked a Barber Shop Quartet. This will give the Committee a chance to relax and enjoy the evening with all our members. There will be a photo quiz followed by the entertainment, then the buffet, and finally Christmas Carols to finish off the party. **Please see me for the tickets which will be on sale at the October and November meetings at £5 each for members, and £7.50 for non-members.**

As you are no doubt aware, our Lexden in Wartime book has been a great success, thanks to all of you who very generously contributed your memories and photos for Liz, our Secretary, to record and edit for posterity. A second volume is being prepared and we have managed to keep the cost the same as last time, despite the printing ink being hugely expensive. **To guarantee your copy, please give Liz your order and £10 in advance,** and you should receive your book in November, just in nice time for Christmas. Next year we are planning another Steam Fish and Chip Supper, probably in May.

Please let me know if you would like to come along as numbers are limited to around 30.

We had a Club BBQ in July. A big THANK YOU to everyone who worked so hard to make it such a success and also to all those members who turned up determined to enjoy the event no matter what the weather did! Luckily, it was pretty good as you can tell from the photos on the back cover. A special thank you to Carol and Tim Holding for allowing us to hold the event in their wonderful grounds, and to Howard Ashcroft for lending us his marquee.

I have learnt of an error in the last issue for which I apologise. Apparently Denny was not the local policeman as stated, but the brother of Peter Payne.

Please continue to send me articles for publication in our Club magazine and old photos too. You can email them to me, details on back page, or drop post through my letter box at 23 Roddam Close. Once I have copied them, I shall of course return any photos and written material if required. **So please, let's hear from you.**

**Jane Thornhill**

## President's Page

This is a Lexden love story. But the ending is very dark. In 1824 the Colchester banker John Fletcher Mills planned the spectacular mansion of Lexden Park – it is still there, now flats and maisonettes. With Lexden Park came an immense estate stretching towards Colchester. It included not only the bluebell woods, but farming land embracing where now three secondary schools stand and the Grammar School has playing fields. Bankers did rather well, even then. Mills had a daughter, Fanny, aged 20. In 1824 George Henry Errington, in modern money a multi-millionaire, moved into 'Casina' a large mansion on Lexden Road. His son, also George Henry, was at Cambridge. In the leafy lanes of Lexden he met Fanny Mills. The couple fell in love. In less than a year they married in Lexden Church, before George had finished at Cambridge, before Lexden Park was built.

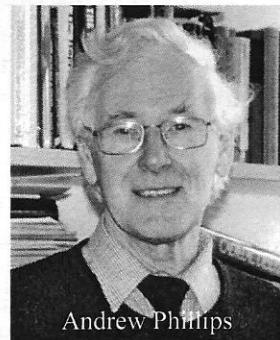
John Fletcher Mills had no son. Fanny, the eldest daughter, would inherit. Her husband, George Henry Errington, would inherit too – estates in South Essex and Derbyshire. What a prospect for the young couple, what a reassurance for the Lexden Park Estate; what an obvious partner for the bank. No one asked if George Henry was any good at banking. He just became a partner – putting up some money, of course. John Fletcher Mills could progress to the bluebell woods in the sky, happy in the future of the bank.

The senior partner in the bank was now John Bawtree. Errington left the running to him. He appointed a manager, the quaintly named Bright Wool, a former Borough Treasurer. The bank now had branches at Witham, Kelvedon, Clacton,

Walton and Hadleigh in Suffolk. Mr Wool was very generous at granting overdrafts to tradesmen. One Hadleigh solicitor got £87,000 (multiply by 110 for 2009). Some took out two accounts or more. Errington meanwhile lived the life of a squire, keeping from public life, persuaded in old age to become our High Steward. You can see his full length portrait in the Moot Hall. Eventually it was time for the bluebells in the sky: Bawtree in 1873, Errington in 1883. New partners were found, including Bawtree's son. Slowly the horrible truth dawned. A survey of 1889 suggested a deficit of £229,401.

Bright Wool was sacked with a pension of £500 a year – presumably to keep him quiet. Desperate efforts were made to sell the bank, to no avail. In 1891 a run on the bank began. The game was up. It was a greater Colchester sensation than the earthquake. Banks did not go bust in high Victorian England. Investors large and small lost half their money. Colchester's other bank took over what was left. Soon they were taken over by Barclays who still trade there at 9 High Street.

The moral of this story? Only successful bankers build mansions. Meanwhile John Mills's bluebell woods are still there.



Andrew Phillips

## THE DAY THE EARTH MOVED

The Great Colchester Earthquake hit the local area at 9.18 am on 22nd April 1884. The Essex County Standard reported that "The awful event came without the slightest warning and lasted from five to ten seconds". It continues "The general impression appears to be that the ground and the houses with it was lifted up, shaken two or three times in a manner that made the stoutest heart quake, and the bravest to cower with fear, and then subside, disappearing with a kind of final shake or jerk, and then it was all over."

Many areas were badly affected, including Wivenhoe, Langenhoe and Peldon, and although seldom (if ever!) mentioned in the great seismic dissertations on the subject, Lexden also felt "that gigantic power". Kathleen O'Grady, an amateur journalist and historian reported: "I was in my bedroom at Park Cottage (now called Weavers), dressing to go out, when I heard a loud roar and suddenly all the pictures began to sway on the walls, and the floor rocked or heaved, and I had to cling to the end of the brass bedstead. The bells in the passages rang violently. I rushed into the sitting room, on the same floor, to find a blazing log that had been shot out of the fireplace, burning in the middle of the room! Some of Mr Richardson's boys, from the "Old

School" next door ran up with a pail of water from the kitchen. The kitchen chimney was symmetrically twisted into a spiral, but with every brick loose so I immediately sent one boy to Mr Beaumont, the builder, and another to the Manor, where my eldest Aunt was lying helpless with a broken ankle, and only one maid to see after her. She was facing towards the window and declared that the landscape seemed, at the same time to dip three times below the level of the sill. Meanwhile people were rushing about excitedly in the road. The children in the National School were working themselves up into a panic, and the teachers becoming hysterical, but good Mr Richardson reassured them, and tactfully restored order, and fortunately after the two or three shocks of about five seconds each, we had no recurrence. The Post Office, at the corner of Spring Lane, was more than half unroofed. The Park lost one of its ornamental urns and a gaping crack appeared in one of the Manor stacks of chimneys. I then went along the village street and Straight Road, but found that no serious harm had been done, though tiles, slates and patches of plaster were strewn about. The "triple tremor" story was borne out here by a man who happened to be half-way up a long ladder at the critical moment, and, before he could get down it swung away from the wall and back again three distinct times."

Liz White

## Art Deco in Colchester

In 1925 the French Government organised an exhibition entitled "L' Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes" dedicated to modern decorative art and design. It marked a defining moment in the evolution of what came to be called the "Art Deco" style and acted as a catalyst for its spread. The term "Art Deco" did not come into use until the 1960s. In domestic architecture, the style was often referred to as

"Moderne." The Art Deco period is bracketed by the First and Second World Wars and was the first truly international style. It began life in the 1920s and flowered in the '30s covering most aspects of design from architecture, to jewelry, household goods, textiles, book covers, posters and transport.

In Colchester we have the splendid Vint Crescent development, (see cover photo) which has been maintained in its original design style. The buildings

appear crisp and fresh and in their mature grounds present a jewel like attraction to Lexden Road. Around the corner in West Lodge Road is West Lodge Garage in this style too, although as a working business it has undergone some detailed changes, but is nevertheless a satisfyingly simple structure.



On a much grander scale is the Marks & Spencer store in the High Street. (See front cover) Whereas the Georgians had incorporated Greek architectural themes for the design of their architecture and the Victorians had copied Mediaeval and Gothic themes, the Art Deco movement plundered all kinds of styles to incorporate into their buildings. So the Marks & Spencer store above its ground floor windows and doors displays symmetric windows

between Egyptian style pilasters. It is all too easy to miss this splendid façade when scurrying along the High Street.

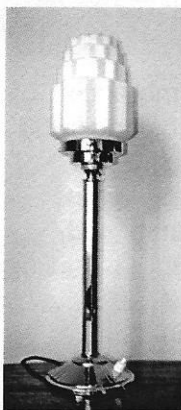
A regular feature of Art Deco is the use of sun burst motifs. The door on the front page is not on a building of the period, but is nevertheless typical Art Deco.

The bridges over the river Colne on the 1930s built bypass



display Art Deco decorative features, although one wonders how much they are appreciated in the 21st Century's overcrowded roads. Whilst on a motoring theme, perhaps the most common reminder of the Art Deco period which we can still regularly see in the badge of the MG car. The marque dates from 1924 and the badge is a splendid example of Art Deco design.

Following a period when Art Deco designs were not appreciated, there has been a



revival of interest. In 2003 the Victoria & Albert Museum held a major exhibition, which covered a wide range of Art Deco objects and the Royal Academy recently held the first major retrospective exhibition of the

artist Tamara de Lempika, who is often referred to as the "Art Deco Icon." You can

acquire Art Deco items, although prices are rising, at the auctions and there is a shop in Frinton which specialises in Art Deco goods, from where we bought a table lamp. If

you look carefully you can also source Art Deco from all kinds of places and Jane recently bought a beautiful pair of Art Deco earrings in Harwich.

Some art critics argue that Art Deco is not a single style, but a collection of styles. Be that as it may, most of us recognize Art Deco when we see it, so it must have a unifying element, even if it is difficult to adequately articulate.

**Bob Thornhill**



## COLCHESTER BY-PASS

The Avenue of Remembrance opened Thursday 29th June 1933

Everyone in Lexden is familiar with the by-pass, or the Avenue of Remembrance and, having read a contemporary history of its building, I realise how little changes in the machinations of politics and planning!

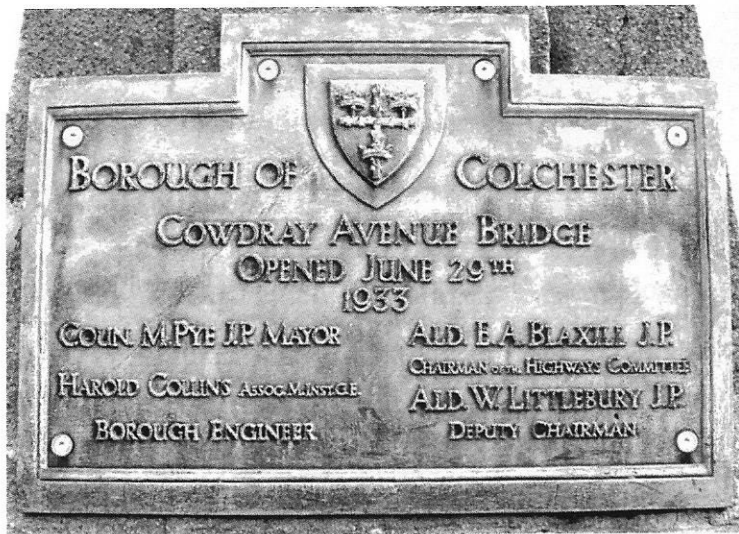
The proposed road had been the subject of “discussion and conjecture” for many years, with the familiar arguments of loss of trading

was recorded that 28,000 vehicles had passed through the town in twenty four hours. This begs the question – what would it be today?

After the compulsory acquisition of the land in early 1930, work started at a depot in Harwich Road making hundreds of concrete posts and kerbs. Active construction began in May of that year and by the following summer there were nearly 350 men working on the project, mostly from the Employment Exchange, but some as a “condition of the Ministry’s grant”. By the end of the project

over 1,000 men had been employed.

The costs of £292,000 seem negligible today with 75% borne by the Ministry of Transport, 15% by Essex County Council and 10% by the Borough Council and the final cost was expected to be within the



revenue in Colchester, whether it should be north or south of the town and the costs and difficulties of purchasing the land. Traffic flow had been carefully monitored and during the 1932 Whitsun weekend it

estimate! The District Valuer carried out his duties with “courtesy, tact and ability” acquiring the land from over 90 allotment holders and more than 70 owners.



Twenty three houses were demolished and for each one



“inhabited by members of the artisan classes”, another was to be erected. There was only one serious accident, resulting in the loss of an arm and other permanent injuries to a workman.

Over £16,000 was spent on machinery which included 4 locomotives, 3½ miles of light railway track, 173 tipping wagons, 7 concrete mixers, 1 mechanical digger, 2 pile drivers, 1 derrick crane with 75ft jib, 2 six wheel tractors, 3 smaller locomotives, 1 petrol

road roller and several pumps. These were considerably

augmented by other plant hired as necessary.

In June 1930 the first locomotive was started by the Mayor, Councillor C J Jolly, JP and simultaneously the digger at the Lexden cutting was started by Alderman E Alec Blaxill, JP, the Borough Highways Committee Chairman. Over the next two years huge amounts



were excavated, transported, tipped and spread. Two bridges, one over the River

(continued Page 10)

(continued from Page 9)  
Colne and the other over the LNER line were built and a new bathing pool replaced the old one. Gradients, marshy ground, extra concrete reinforcements on embankments, surface drainage, sewer diversions and many other obstacles and complications were overcome. Trees at Lexden Springs had to be cut down, but 750 trees were planted, "many of them in

authority. The Borough Engineer and Surveyor, Mr Harold Collins, was congratulated for his skill, ability and zeal and also for using local labour and materials, with bricks being made locally and metal work supplied by a Colchester foundry.

The grand project was opened by Viscount Ullswater (Ex-Speaker, House of Commons) and Jean Pye, "the Mayor's little daughter" with due



areas hitherto plain and unattractive", of which 260 had been donated for the Avenue of Remembrance.

Bye-Laws prohibited petrol stations and bill hoardings and new lighting trials were carried out, but Alderman Blaxill was not convinced that "electromatic signals" (traffic lights!) were necessary along the route and they were vetoed by higher

ceremony just after noon on Thursday 29th June 1933 and has been in use, largely unchanged, for seventy five years!

Liz White

With special thanks to Bernard Polley for access to his photographic archive.

## Committee

### Chairman

Dick Barton: 01206 573999  
[bab@bartonlex.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:bab@bartonlex.fsnet.co.uk)

### Vice-Chairman

Tim Holding: 01206 576149  
[Carol@cholding.orangehome.co.uk](mailto:Carol@cholding.orangehome.co.uk)

### Secretary

Liz White: 01206 522713  
[alangwhite187444@hotmail.com](mailto:alangwhite187444@hotmail.com)

### Treasurer

Bob Thornhill: 01206 523767  
[bob.thornhill@ntlworld.com](mailto:bob.thornhill@ntlworld.com)

### Membership Secretary

Jackie Bowis: 01206 561528  
[j.bowis@eastofengland.coop](mailto:j.bowis@eastofengland.coop)

### Social Secretary

Sonia Lewis: 01206 579950  
[sonialewis@waitrose.com](mailto:sonialewis@waitrose.com)

### Magazine Editor

Jane Thornhill: 01206 523767  
[j.jane.thornhill@ntlworld.com](mailto:j.jane.thornhill@ntlworld.com)

### Archivist

Bernard Polley: 01206 572460  
[heath86end@aol.com](mailto:heath86end@aol.com)

### General Members

Susan and Peter McCarthy  
[susanmcc1@cooltoad.com](mailto:susanmcc1@cooltoad.com)

**Lexden History Group web address:  
[www.lexdenhistory.org.uk](http://www.lexdenhistory.org.uk)**

## Antiques Valuation Evening

### Bring your treasures

On Wednesday 14th October James Grinter from the auctioneers Reeman Dansie is our guest speaker. He will be coming to our meeting to look at items of interest brought in by our club members. If any members would like to bring in one or two items, clearly marked with your name, they will be laid out on a table and James will select a few to talk about and possibly value.

**Please note that Lexden History Group cannot be held responsible for any loss or damage to said items.**

