



Summer Newsletter  
Issue No: 17, June 2010

Councillor Sonia Lewis is presented with her "Mayor Bear" prior to her inauguration as Mayor of Colchester



## Programme of Events

### 9th June

"History of Essex, 1500 - 1700" (with particular reference to Lexden) by Christopher Thomas

### 14th July

"Essex Family Life in the 18th Century" by Dr Jane Pearson

### 17th July, Saturday

Lunchtime Summer BBQ at Little Glebe, Spring Lane, Lexden.  
Details to be advised.

**August - No Meeting**

### 8th September

"Spitfire Summer Essex and the Drama of 1940" by Dr Paul Rusieck

### 25th September (Saturday)

Lexden History Group **Open Day** 10.30am to 4.30pm  
St Leonard's Church Hall

### 13th October

Films by Bernard Polley

### 10th November

"Top 10 since 1950" by Ray Spiller

## 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 £1 for members, £3 for guests, refreshments included. Annual membership £15 for single, £20 for family living at same address.

Web address: [www.lexdenhistory.org.uk](http://www.lexdenhistory.org.uk)

## Lexden W.I. from the 1930's

The Lexden W.I. was formed in March 1930 with a membership of 52. In those days members had to be proposed and seconded. The hire of the Parish rooms where they met was seven shillings and six pence.

In 1936 the Institute became known as the Lexden and Stanway W.I. because so many members lived in Stanway. In 1937 members were urged to study the work of the League of Nations as a result of a lecture and to consider the best way to further the cause of peace. The concert party was also formed and provided all the social times for years to come. Raffle prizes in these early years seemed to consist of something to eat; a brace of rabbits, cakes, a chicken, boiling bacon, chocolates and biscuits. Also, cigarettes were once offered as a raffle prize.

In 1939 with the outbreak of War, the meeting was switched to 3pm. Two new members were asked not to bring their children to meetings. The cost of the hire of the hall was raised to nine shillings and a talk was given on poisonous gas. A whist drive was held to buy wool for comforts for the Forces, there was a collection of ship halfpennies in aid of the Navy Library Fund - nearly £7 was collected, and a sale of toys for the Red Cross. A flag day for the British Sailors Society raised nearly £6. A competition was held to see who could produce the best result from a thimbleful of onion seeds.

In 1941 Lord Wilton appealed to everyone to eat more potatoes and there was a competition to cook a supper dish for four people, using just one ounce of fat to one pound of potatoes.

In 1944 a social was held for fifty soldiers stationed at Holmwood House, with the ladies from the Lexden and Stanway W.I helping. Money was sent from a Canadian W.I. to help those who had been bombed.

In 1945 because there was no coke for heating or for water to make cups of tea, they asked for a reduction in the cost of the hall hire.

In 1946 jam sent from Australia was used in tarts for the garden meeting. Books were sent to Canada, Australia and New Zealand from Essex W.I's.

In 1947 there was no meeting in March because of fuel shortages.

In 1949 Miss Johnson was presented with a handbag in appreciation of her fifteen years as Secretary.

In 1952 the Drama Group was formed and the following year, the Choir, both winning several cups and awards.

Eventually the number of W.I. Members grew to 150 and they moved to Lexden School in 1957.

In 1955 they celebrated their Silver Jubilee with a party costing six shillings per head.

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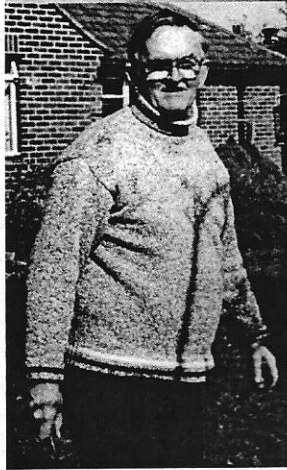
## The David May Auction by Bernard Polley

David May, a Great Horkesley resident, had a vast collection of local memorabilia. Following his sad death a few months ago, his collection of postcards, photographs, books etc. was put up for auction with the proceeds being donated to a local charity.

I viewed the lots before the sale by Reeman & Dansie Auctioneers, and found one or two items with Lexden connections for which I placed bids and was pleased to win one or two which I have now donated to the archives of the Lexden History Group.

Two of these items are fascinating which I will mention briefly.

A collection of legal documents relating to land and property owned by Lexden Manor, dating between 1826 and 1902. Flower Vents Farm which I had not heard of before. The farm was situated in the triangle between London Road, Halstead Road and King Coel Road around the 1870s.



A large scale brochure on the sale of Lexden Manor Estate in July 1931. It contained a detailed plan of the properties and several photographs of The Manor, West House Farm, Moat Farm and Malting Farm and full details of the old Water Mill, besides other properties.

All fascinating Lexden history. They will be on display at our Open Day on 25th September for all to view.

**Editors comment.** I would like to take this opportunity to thank

Bernard for kindly donating all the documents he successfully bid for at the auction, to our History Group. Hopefully other Group members can hunt down items of historical interest which they would be willing to lend us to exhibit at the **Open History Day on Saturday 25th September**. Please, either talk to Bernard, or any member of the Committee as soon as possible if you can help us to make the display even better than the last one, which incidentally was also our first one! Thank you in anticipation.

## My Classic Cars

by Bob Thornhill

Growing up in the 1940s and 50s, there were many pre-war cars on the streets. Following the War the government's priority was export, which was promoted at the expense of the home market and as a result many cars from the 1930s and some from the 1920s were in every day use. We had a neighbour who ran a 1920's 3 litre Bentley, and I remember seeing, one day in the early 1950s a large pre-war Riley for sale on the street for £25, but I just could not persuade my parents to buy it!

However I finally bought a Riley in 2000 when we were living in Christmas House, Lexden and had a large garage to accommodate it! The car was a 1953 RMF, with the Riley "big four" 2.5 litre engine. Although a post-war car, the concept was purely pre-war, with a massive chassis and a coach built body. It was a magnificent car in very good condition having been restored some years before. It was painted black over cream and as all RM Rileys the roof was covered in black leather.

The Riley Company was a family concern before the War producing quality cars, which had a reputation for speed and reliability. Unfortunately the company failed, thanks to being under capitalised and having too large a model range. Riley was taken over by William Morris, who also owned Morris, MG and Wolseley

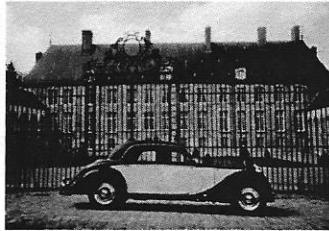
and all were incorporated into his Nuffield Organisation. The RMs were the first post war Riley models and were produced in two versions, The RMA with a 1.5 litre engine and the RMB with a 2.5 litre engine. The RMB on being updated became the RMF.

Our RMF was a very enjoyable car to drive. The seats were brown leather and very comfortable. It had sufficient acceleration to keep pace with modern traffic, and although it would not win the traffic lights grand

prix start with a modern car, nevertheless it would cruise easily at 70mph on the motorway. Compared with a modern car, its tyres were narrow in profile giving an exciting ride as it waltzed in and out of the ruts made by the

lorries on the motorway. I found that the answer was to let the car find its own way and not try too hard to correct the steering and this worked very well, but could be heart stopping on occasions. The petrol consumption was gargantuan by modern standards - around town 14 mpg was about the best it ever was and on a run, maybe about 24 mpg. Not for the faint hearted!

Jane and I have tended to give our more interesting cars a name. The Riley was christened "The Duchess" as she was elegant, stately, not as young as she was, but was fast in her younger days!  
(to be continued in next edition)



## Leafy Lexden

The leafy lanes of Lexden once boasted the finest houses in Colchester (and still do, I hear you say). And the finest was Lexden Park, owned by the banker, George Errington . Throughout the nineteenth century its 90-acre estate embraced not only green fields now covered by Fitzwalter and St Clare Roads, but the campuses of the Sir Charles Lucas, Philip Morant and Girls' County High schools – not to mention the Grammar School playing fields. It was so large it could house the summer's grandest event, the Essex Show.

County Shows were a Great Victorian invention, but Essex was rather slow on the uptake, and did not get going until 1858 – and then only by default. In 1856 the Royal Agricultural Society, led by the wealthy Fisher Hobbs who farmed at Boxford, looked to Colchester, the 'capital' of Essex, to house the National Agricultural Show. But civic energy was at low ebb. Claiming that 'there was nowhere big enough', Colchester let the 'Royal' go instead to Chelmsford, which prospered from its presence. The profits that accrued were ploughed into forming an Essex Agricultural Society whose first

show was held, of course, at Chelmsford.

Colchester now had to regain some face, and, duly in 1859, the Essex Show came to Colchester to be held on the Barrack Ground of the Garrison, now the Recreation Ground on Old Heath Road. Happily, attendance was higher, profits greater, than at Chelmsford. Colchester was back on its pinnacle. The Essex Show now toured Essex, but profits were never as high as at Colchester, and were only exceeded when the Show returned to our town in 1869. This time it was held on the Abbey Field: again, courtesy of the Army.

In touring the county the Essex Show risked small turn-outs in small towns. Shows at Haverhill and Southend made big losses. How glad they were to come back to Colchester at regular intervals to replenish the funds, as they next did in 1876. That year was a big one for George Errington. Created High Steward by the town, and confident that his bank was now flourishing, 'in thanks to God' he undertook a massive rebuild of St Nicholas Church in High Street, employing Victorian England's greatest gothic architect, Sir Gilbert Scott. A massive spire (higher than Lion Walk) rose above



High Street and the solemn opening was scheduled for June – the same month as the Essex Show.

And now the Army dropped a bombshell (as they do). The Abbey Field, they announced, was not available. Where could the Show go? It so happened that the mayor that year was our old friend, Philip Oxenden Papillon, Lord of the Manor of Lexden. In his hour of need he turned to his close neighbour, the High Steward, and Errington the banker ‘graciously’ offered Lexden Park. Of course the Show was a success, as it was again in 1883, but now Errington died, and his executors slowly realised

ALL WAS NOT WELL.

Readers of this magazine will recall what happened next: the bank was insolvent. The trustees’ lawyer, Major Howard, Secretary of the Colchester Conservative Party, who had built himself the grand house ‘Kingswoode Hoe’ (now in Sussex Road), had to brave it out and try and sell the bank as a going concern. He also (having failed to persuade the Council to buy it for the public) had to find a tenant for Lexden Park. He did, just in time for Colchester’s next Essex Show in 1889 – another record breaker, but a short-lived one.

Colchester's MP was now the improbable Lord Brooke, a young aristocrat marking time before he inherited the title of Earl of Warwick. By general consent he owed his electioneering success to his dashing, handsome wife 'Daisy', a considerable heiress and owner of large acres at Easton Lodge, near Dunmow. Brooke became President of the Essex Agricultural Show just in time for the 1890 Show at Chelmsford, and pulled off the considerable coup of persuading the Prince of Wales (Bertie) to be his chief guest. He was able to do this because the Prince was conducting a celebrated affair with Brooke's wife 'Daisy', and Bertie more than welcomed the chance of an official reason to stay at Easton Lodge.

Good weather and the Prince of Wales enabled Chelmsford to actually beat Colchester with its 'gate' money. What would Colchester do? Before that could be answered, came an event more terrible than the Colchester Earthquake: the Colchester Bank went bust. Investors lost half their money, and Colchester's economy was in the doldrums. Nevertheless in 1894 (so soon after 1889) the Essex Show returned. Why? By now Colchester had another remarkable M.P., Captain Naylor-Leyland, a wealthy young aristocrat, who had become yet more wealthy by

marrying his wife. With little experience and no local background, in 1892 he descended on Colchester to spread his money around. He had nowhere to live, but fortunately Major Howard could offer him a large estate to rent VERY CHEAPLY. Yes, Lexden Park. At the bye-election caused by the resignation of Lord Brooke (in order to become the Earl of Warwick) Naylor-Leyland just beat another wealthy man, the Liberal, Weetman Pearson (later to become Lord Cowdray).

MP of Colchester and tenant of Lexden Park, Naylor-Leyland looked to hold a grand event. Yes, you have guessed: another Essex Show, with Naylor-Leyland as President. Now Colchester could beat Chelmsford's indecent victory in gate money. Preparations were intense. Do not underestimate our Victorian forebears. Over two days in June 1894 in the grounds of Lexden Park they assembled 455 prize horses, 269 cattle, 89 sheep and 790 agricultural implements, many working under steam, to compete for 309 prizes in 104 categories. In addition 109 prizes were given for flowers, fruit and vegetables, including the best Essex grown figs, peaches and grapes. A dog show attracted 241 entries; a poultry show had prizes under 39 categories; there were 133 entries in a



butter-making category for which a special 120-foot long working dairy was constructed. Honey and hives had 19 classes of entries. There was a horse-shoeing and a ploughing contest. Prize for the best display of carriages was won by A.A. Adams of Colchester who (as Bernard Polley will tell you) later went on to be motor car specialists.

Fire escapes, fancy china, ironmongery and photographs were among the many other stalls. In a large arena with a specially-built grandstand the many animals paraded. Horse jumping was enlivened by military displays, musical rides, horse riding spectacles and a Sham Fight by the

8<sup>th</sup> Hussars. Refreshment abounded, and enterprising Quakers ran a Temperance Refreshment Tent. Day 1 was cloudy with showers of rain. Turn out was disappointing, and even the passing of 14,000 through the gates on Day 2, did not enable Colchester to quite equal the Chelmsford total. How they provided toilets (as they did) for 14,000 people, and water and fodder for all that livestock, I do not know. And all for just two days.

There: I bet you did not realise what exciting things used to go in Lexden 116 years ago.

Andrew Phillips

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In 1963 a dinner was held at the Shoulder of Mutton - one guinea per person. That same year Lexden School complained of damage done to their floors by stiletto heels and threatened to ban the meetings. So it was decided to limit membership to those living in Lexden and in 1966 Home Farm Institute was formed. In 1965 a ballot was held for places at the Buckingham Palace Garden Party and Mrs Cook went.

In 1970 Miss Stannard, who was quite a character, won the prettiest ankles competition at the age of 86. She died at the age of 97. Mrs Booth of Seven Arches Farm provided the local W.I. with cream and milk for their Christmas party every year.

In 1972 The W.I. ran a very successful hat stall at the Michaelmas Fayre in the Moot Hall.

In the 1970's they were involved with tree planting and running mini-markets to raise money for numerous worthy causes. The Choir entertained the residents at Acorn Village. In 1980 Celebration of their 50th Anniversary.

(precis by Jane Thornhill)

## Sonia's Inauguration as Colchester's Mayor

Congratulations to Sonia Lewis, our Social Secretary who was inaugurated as Mayor of Colchester on Wednesday 19th May in the Town Hall.

As a Founder Member of Lexden History Group, Sonia volunteered to be our Social Secretary, and took over responsibility for all our catering needs at Club meetings and special events. As a local Councillor she has had many other commitments too, and



understandably is now unable to continue as Social Secretary during the coming year when her Mayoral duties will prove to be a full time job. Sonia is a local girl having been born in Beverly Road, and she moved to her present home in Acland Avenue 30 years ago. During her Mayoral year she will have her husband Keith by her side.

Sonia will continue to support the Lexden History Group and come to as many meetings as her Mayoral duties will allow. We all wish her a successful year as Mayor.

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### AGM

The AGM took place at St Leonard's Church Hall on Wednesday 12th May. The only change to the Committee Members is that Susan McCarthy is stepping into Sonia's shoes as Social Secretary. There was a good turn out for the evening which ended with wine and canapes, the latter provided by Sonia, and a brief talk by Tim Holding on casting, including the making of the village sign.

## Committee

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## *Lexden History Group Open Day*

*Saturday 25th September 10.30 to 4.30pm*

*In St Leonard's Church Hall, Lexden.*

*Grand Opening at 11am by Colchester's Mayor, Councillor*

*Sonia Lewis, supported by the Town Watch.*

*Refreshments provided by St Leonard's Church.*

*Schools' visit Friday afternoon, 24th September.*



Spring Lane, Lexden



On tour in the Loire Valley  
- Château d'Ussé