

A historical map of the Lexden area, showing the River Stour, a corn mill, a miller, a pasture, a shepher's bridge, and a farm. The map is in a sketchy, hand-drawn style.

Lexden History Group

Winter Newsletter Issue
No: 19, December 2010



The Town Watch escorts Colchester Mayor, Councillor Sonia Lewis on the opening of the Lexden History Group Open Day on 25th September

Programme of Events

12th January

Geoff Pettit Memorial Lecture
by Patrick Squire - "History of
Photography"

9th February

"Flatford and Constable
Country" by Simon Gallup

9th March

"Local Justice" by Peter
Mockford JP

13th April

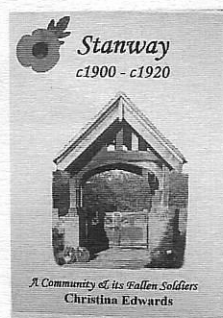
"British Post Box Design and
Use in the First 100 Years" by
Steve Knight

11th May - AGM

Talk by Andrew Phillips
(details to be advised)

8th June

"The History of Tiptree jam" by
Tim Came

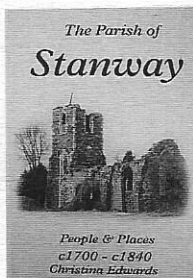


A new publication detailing life in the village during the years up to, through and just after WW1. Where the inhabitants went to school, worked and played. Who was who and where they lived. The Water Tower, The Villa, Smallpox Hospital and Army Camp are featured along with black market trading, aiding German POWs and "Hero", the local horse which served and survived. All men known to have served are commemorated along with those who died.

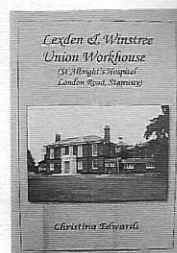
A4. laminate colour cover, 192 b/w pages, 133 photographs (most previously unpublished) + 33 maps & documents.

Provisional publication date mid-December 2010. Pre-publication orders £15 (Book shop price £18) Cheques should be made payable to:

**Belhus Books, 1 Guide Post Cottages,
Warren Lane, Stanway, CO3 0LL. Free
delivery CO post codes; enquiries 01206
330474.**



**Also available for immediate delivery
"Stanway c1700 - c1840" - People & Places
(A4) £15 & "Lexden & Winstree Union Workhouse" (A5) £5.**



Editorial

Thank you to everyone who helped to make our second Open Day such a success. Keeping people interested in local history by holding Open Days and displaying so much interesting material is a wonderful way of bringing our community together.

Liz White, our secretary needs a special mention as she was instrumental in making our Open Day so successful. The many hours of work she put in prior to the actual exhibition, including collecting all the items on loan, ensured that the displays were both attractive and informative. Thank you also to Susan McCarthy who organised the refreshments and thanks to other members who gave their time to help.

I have been given permission by Peter Potter to publish extracts from his book "The Real Lexden Heroes". How many of us have actually taken the time to look at the names on our War Memorial? Peter did. Not content with just looking, he researched each and everyone mentioned, and found family and descendants of quite a few. He was lent photographs of their missing loved ones and I feel very privileged that he has allowed me to share this information with all our members. So many thanks Peter.

A big thank you also to Sonia Lewis for attending our Open Day wearing her Mayor's hat, along with her Escort and the Town Watch, who put on a splendid display outside the Church Hall, showing us many of their drills. Very impressive! (See front and back covers)

Our LHG calender proved to be so popular, it sold out within days of going on sale. We are already collecting photographs for 2011, so if you own any old photographs you think might be suitable, please let me know. I can borrow them and scan them into my computer, or you can email them to me.

CLICK! CLICK! Please don't forget to look at our Club website frequently and click on all the advertisers displayed. Each and every click you make on the advertisements earns the Club a few pence, which is paid to us, once it has reached the sum of £60 - we have just earned our first £60. So please keep up the good work. And finally on behalf of the Committee, may I wish you a **Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year**. See you on 12th January for the Geoff Pettit memorial lecture.

Jane Thornhill

A SHORT HISTORY OF LEXDEN PARK

Lexden Park has today many illustrious inhabitants (of course!) but perhaps they don't reach the heights of some of its previous occupants. The parkland was originally acquired sometime before 1598 by William Mott, who was Bailiff of Colchester in 1622. The family retained it until 1714 when it was sold with other adjacent land to Charles Richardson. He left it to his nephew, John, who is believed to have laid out the park. Trustees of John's will, proved in 1768, sold it to Isaac Bevan and it later passed to his son, Henry Ennew Bevan, and daughter, Sally, Mrs William Turner.



There is some controversy whether Lexden Park was laid out for "Corner House" first recorded in 1528, known as Crescent House in 1813 and demolished in about 1875. This was situated on the corner of Church Lane and Lexden Street (now Road). There had been a toll house there but this had

been demolished by 1813. In about 1825 the Italianate villa was built on the north side of the park, against Lexden Street, to designs by D Laing.

Apparently, some fittings, including fireplaces and walls, were re-used in the "new" house which was enlarged and altered over the years.

John Fletcher Mills (b1762), a banker, bought the estate in about 1821. That year Lexden Heath was enclosed by Act of Parliament and Mills acquired a further 40 acres by allotment. He additionally bought common rights on 41 acres of heath and the burgesses' lammas rights on another 39 acres of farmland adjoining his park. The Papillon family of Lexden Manor also acquired large tracts of land and by 1838 Mills owned 296 acres and the Papillon family 1216 acres. This was out of a total of 2,312 acres in the parish!

J F Mills' father, also John, was responsible for setting up one of two rival banks in Colchester. In 1766 he opened a tea warehouse in High Street in association with his cousins, Richard and John Twining of London and in 1787 opened the Colchester and Essex Bank with them. However, he was responsible for all losses as well as entitled to all the profits, totally indemnifying his Twining cousins! This arrangement was dissolved in 1797 but the bank survived thanks to his son and John Bawtree, a banker in the town.

J F Mills enlarged the Lexden Park house and it was left to his wife, Fanny, during her lifetime. White's Directory of 1848 describes "the beautiful seat" of Mrs Mills: "The

surrounding grounds contain some noble trees, a great diversity of surface, and a fine sheet of water.” It then passed to his son-in-law, George Henry Errington (b1803), also a banker who had married Elizabeth (also known as Fanny) Mills in 1825.



GH Errington chartered a boat in 1856 to sail up the Nile. At Luxor he bought a mummy for seven sovereigns. Lady Tahathor, was donated to Colchester Museum on his return and is still on display in Colchester Castle. Later with the help of X-Ray, it was discovered that her teeth worked themselves loose on the return journey to Colchester and are scattered over her chest! More recently it has been arranged that the mummy will have further scans at the Oaks Hospital before being taken to Ipswich Museum on a permanent basis.

Fanny died in May 1861 and George in 1883, having sold off tracts of land. In 1889 the house and 90 acres were sold to Sir Mountstuart Elphinstone Grant Duff (b1828), a notable Scottish politician, statesman and author. His acquaintances included almost every distinguished contemporary and many attended weekend parties in his various country houses including Lexden Park. So Lexden Park could have welcomed many famous people during the years he owned it!

After his death in 1906 more land was sold for building but the house and park were bought by Edwin J Sanders, several times Mayor of Colchester. His son, Sir Percy Sanders, also several times Mayor of Colchester, inherited the property and in 1955 it was bought by Endsleigh private school. Ultimately it was taken over by Essex County Council and from 1965-90 was used as the “Endsleigh Annex” for Colchester Institute. By this time only 25 acres remained and after a public outcry against the land being used for more building it was bought by the Borough Council for public recreation.

After Endsleigh Annex was closed, the old building remained empty until 1993 when it was converted into flats and what remained of the old school was demolished and replaced by town houses and flats.

Liz White

Did Colchester help Britain claim the World Steam Record?

1930s Britain saw intense competition between the railway companies to achieve fast running times on their express passenger services. On the London and North Eastern Railway (LNER) the Chief Mechanical Engineer (CME) was Nigel, later Sir Nigel, Gresley. In 1937 his rival CME on the London Scottish Railway (LMS) William Stanier set a record speed of 114mph with his locomotive "*Coronation*", a "world record!" screamed the Daily Express. It was no such thing, although it was a British record. The German Deutsche Reichsbahn had already recorded a speed of 124.5mph with one of its 05 class locomotives.

It is interesting to note that during this period CMEs of the large railway companies, although business rivals, would meet to discuss engineering problems on a scientific and friendly basis. Stanier and Gresley exchanged ideas and visited their counterparts in Europe and the USA.

In France André Chapelon, CME of the Paris-Orléans Railway had made his mark with his

overhaul and rebuild of old locomotives, making them faster and at the same time much more economical. He was invited by Edward Paxman, Joint Managing Director and Technical Director of Davey Paxman to visit Colchester to review parts which were on order for some of his rebuilds. At this time Davey Paxman built both static steam engines, some locomotives and held the license to build Lentz locomotive valve gear. Paxman knew Nigel Gresley and introduced him to Chapelon. Both men got on extremely well.

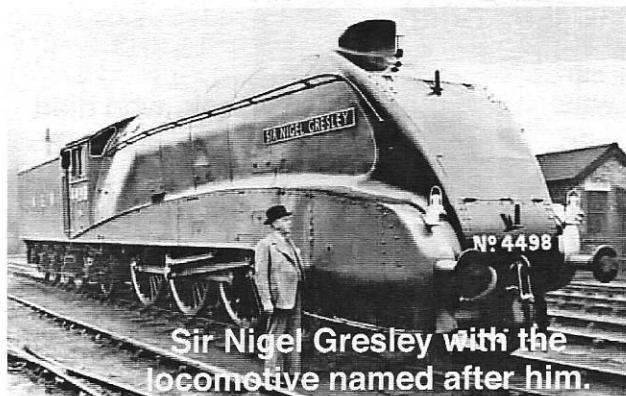
Chapelon's improvements to his Company's old locomotives were apparently simple, but very effective. He replaced any

Paxman



Mallard

awkward acute angles in steam pipes with smooth arcing lines and altered the exhaust to allow the fire to burn hotter and generate more steam through the revised piping. Chapelon was also involved in the Kylchap exhaust system which speeds up the flow of gases leaving the chimney, thereby



Sir Nigel Gresley with the locomotive named after him.

the Class, including streamlined steam passages and a Kylchap double chimney.

On 3rd July 1938 *Mallard* appeared in her garter-blue livery to haul a train which included a dynamometer car to accurately record her

improving the engine's efficiency. Gresley held Chapelon's designs and ideas in very high regard.

Gresley's ultimate locomotive was his A4 pacific, originally only four of which were to be built and were to be named "*Silver Link*", "*Quicksilver*", "*Silver King*" and "*Silver Fox*". Their appearance with their streamlined bodies and silver paintwork caused a sensation with the public and the drivers loved them for their smooth ride and high speed. The success of these locomotives led to the construction a further 17, which were named, with a few exceptions, after British birds at the suggestion of Gresley. One of these locomotives which appeared to be close to Gresley's heart was "*Mallard*", which received all the latest upgrades and modifications for

speed. The story of the run is outside the scope of this article, but when the data was analysed it showed beyond doubt that *Mallard* had achieved a speed of 126.1mph. This was sensational news and was duly splashed across the newspaper headlines. Driver Joe Duddington and fireman Tommy Bray became instant celebrities.

With the the threat of war no further speed records were attempted. After the end of hostilities the priority was to restore the neglected railway infrastructure and ultimately other forms of power replaced steam. Thus "*Mallard's*" record still stands and who knows, Colchester's contribution through Davey Paxman's introduction of Chapelon to Gresley could have been that vital ingredient in coaxing the extral 1.6mph to beat the German record.

Bob Thornhill

The Real Lexden Heroes

The Real Lexden Heroes was written by Peter F Potter, who has kindly permitted me to print excerpts from his book which is no longer in print. Each issue of our magazine will include the details of one of these heroic men, whose names are to be found on the War Memorial in front of St Leonard's Church. The first is in memory of Frederick Guyott 17828 Private



10th Battalion Essex, who died on Thursday 30th March 1916 aged 30 years.

The Battalion went into support in Maricourt on 21st March. The men were chiefly employed in improving the communication trenches and rat-hunting. When the Essex went onto the line again, they put an entire platoon into the sap, having three companies in front and the fourth held in reserve. Snipers were active on both sides, and on the last day of March a daring German aviator flew along the line, and then returned and flew towards Montauban. At the further end of the line, Machine Gun Wood represented the last word in front line peacefulness and the trenches rejoiced in such idyllic names as Honeymoon Lane and Cushy Corner. Some were christened after local landmarks such as Long Wyre Street, Lexden Road and Abbey Fields.

My thanks to Peter Potter.

Jane Thornhill

A RESPONSE TO ANDREW
PHILLIPS' MEMORIES OF
LEXDEN WILDLIFE

It was nice to read Andrew Phillips' piece in the latest newsletter. This brought back memories from my childhood from about 1943 when I was 10, to 1949. At the time I was very keen on nature generally and bird watching in particular. I was a great fan of G Barmwell Evans aka Romany of the BBC. My friend and I had a regular Sunday morning walk after Sunday School and we would walk from Irvine Road to Bluebottle Grove, round to Park Road and back beside the Grammar School playing fields to Irvine Road then home to Sunday lunch. Most of the area inside that walk was Magazine Fruit Farm where the 3 schools are now. This was out of bounds as was Lexden Park at that time but there was still plenty of wildlife to see with red squirrels in the trees in Bluebottle Grove. There were lots of birds you will not see there now including yellowhammers, chiff chaffs, willow warblers, turtle doves and common and red legged partridges. Also at that time De Vere Road had scarcely half a dozen houses built and was mostly covered in brambles. A pair of red backed shrikes nested there every year. I believe there has been no recorded pairs of these nesting in the UK for several years.

On the right hand side going towards Bluebottle Grove where Philip Morant School is now there was a small brick built bungalow up until about 1939 where an old man

lived. There were no services connected but there was a well in the garden with a pump. The bungalow had a garden in front and fruit trees behind. Who the old boy was, what he did and why he was there I never knew, but he must have died in the late 1930s and the site became derelict and the building demolished around the beginning of WW2. When our son attended Philip Morant school in 1975-80 I noticed in the grass to the left of the entrance door a hollow in the grass. I don't know if it is still there but that is I'm certain the site of the old man's well.

In the very early part of WW2 a tank trap was dug between the rear of the mock timber framed house (built about 1838 by Leeds the butcher) on the corner of what is now Norman Way south, to link up with Bluebottle Grove. A gap was left between the trap and the Grove to allow farm machinery access to the fields bisected by the trap. If the notices were to be believed this had explosives below and there was certainly some sort of cable or fuse running into a pipe below. Parts of Bluebottle Grove were deepened (vandalised) at the same time and the spoil piled up on the footpath which you can see is now raised above the level of the adjacent sports fields. There were also explosives set at the other end of Bluebottle Grove to link with the dyke in Lexden Park.

Mike Beatty

Reminiscences - A Short Walk Around the Old School by Gordon Blake

My family farmed Magazine Farm until it was sold for building the Prettygate Estate. The original farm gate was made of old farming tools fixed together as a well designed and attractive gate, and is now housed in the British Museum.

I started at Lexden School, which was down steps opposite Lexden Church, this would be around 1923 or 1924. I lived at number 4 Church Lane. The School was a Church School, so we were quite Church conscious. On Armistice Day we all stood around the War Memorial in the Churchyard. Rev. Dolph was Vicar during the time I was at the school. In fact he was killed by lightning on the Colchester Golf Course. The Headmaster was called "Brainy" Cook.

There is a Tudor house next door to the School entrance and then came my Uncle William Kemp's Blacksmithing business, where the local horses were shod. We often watched him at work, and children would call in and ask him for a horse shoe nail to make holes in conkers, when they were in season.

There were some steps up to cottages behind the little shop which was kept by the Hawes sisters. They just sold

sweets, drinks and cigarettes. Next to them was another little general shop, then the Post Office kept by the Brown family. Mr Brown was a carpenter. Next came the green fields of Lexden Springs and then the Toll House, followed by a row of cottages.

There were some cottages next to the Church, then the Sun Public House. Further up the hill was the Manor House, followed by the Dutch House and then the Parish Hall. We used to have Lantern Picture shows there. In Lexden Park they used to hold Summer fetes on the lower part. My Uncle at Magazine Farm used to hire the Park for grazing the cattle. They also had grazing by the river down Spring Lane. Church Lane and Spring Lane were just dirt roads then. Us children used to help drive the cattle to and from the Spring Lane meadows. Some of the locals used to swim in the river in the Summer. The Tweed family had a toy factory in Fairfax Road in Colchester, but they also did some of the work in Heath Road originally called Cross Road. They kept all the timber on the corner of Church Lane and Cross Road and on one occasion it was burnt down.

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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 the same address.

Web address:

www.lexdenhistory.org.uk

Appeal

A big thank you to all members who have contributed articles for publication in our magazine. But we always need more. Items, ideally with photographs and with a local connection would be most appreciated.

Please send your submissions to the Editor, Jane Thornhill, preferably by email if you have it.

Open Day - 25th September 2010

