

A historical map of the Lexden area, showing a river, a bridge, and various farms and mills. The map is detailed with labels for 'Water Mill', 'Stephen Bridge', 'Stephen Farm', 'A Corn Mill', 'A Mill', 'Parsonage', 'Lexden', 'Rauha', and '50M'.

Lexden History Group

Autumn Newsletter Issue
No: 22, September 2011



Programme of Events

12th October - Mark Davies -

“Colchester’s Hidden Treasures - A Miscellany”

9th November - Dr Maureen Scollan -

“Paragon or Prude: Women in the Police”

**14th December - Christmas Party -
Arts Centre Director Anthony Roberts performs
a reading of “A Christmas Carol.”**

11th January 2012 - Martyn Astell -

“Essex Dialect”

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

Editorial

Welcome back after the Summer break. We have some interesting speakers lined up for our monthly meetings, and a slight departure from the usual format for our Christmas Party.

This year, we are fortunate to have **Anthony Roberts**, Director of Colchester Arts Centre, giving us a spirited reading of “**A Christmas Carol**”, with piano accompaniment. Our party takes place on 14th December at 8pm. **The tickets will be on sale at the October meeting** and will cost £10 each including all refreshments and entertainment.

Please accept our apologies for an error in the last LHG calendar. The month of September has been printed with August's dates. The 2012 calendar has been carefully checked to ensure that there are no errors.

Thank you to Shirley Barton, Sonja Graham, Edna Heinrich and Julie Young, who gave up an afternoon in July to judge the paintings submitted for our 2012 calendar. We had 23 entered for just 13 spaces including the front cover. Thank you also to the six members whose paintings were chosen by the hanging committee. They are Howard Ashcroft, Kerry Harris, Tim Holding, Desmond Murray-Bligh, Bob Thornhill and Jane Thornhill. A special thank you

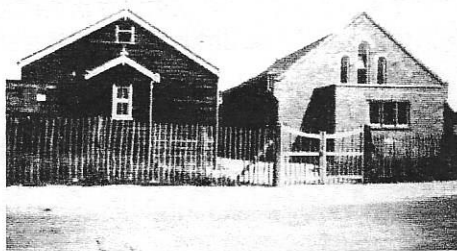
to Kerry Harris who designed the artwork and arranged for the printing. Everyone who has seen the calendar has been most enthusiastic about it and I have a feeling it will sell out long before Christmas. I am hoping to have them hot off the printing press for sale at £7.50 from September onwards.

Our annual BBQ was held in Tim and Carol Holding's lovely garden in Spring Lane. The rain stopped just about five minutes before everyone arrived and the afternoon grew much hotter and sunnier than we could have hoped for. There was as usual, more than enough to eat and drink and a big thank you to all the Committee members who brought food for the buffet, and also to all the members who turned up to enjoy themselves. Howard Ashcroft kindly lent us his marquee as in previous years.

Recently, we have explored the possibility of having notelets and greetings cards printed of our calendar paintings. (At the suggestion of one of our members). Thanks to Kerry's contacts we should have sets of twelve for sale shortly. For both the cards and calendars, money with your order please, to me. The artists have agreed that all profits will be going to our club. Jane

The Non-Conformist Churches of Lexden (Part 1)

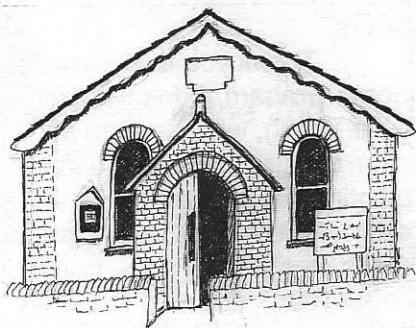
Lexden Congregational Church: When the new housing estate known as Lexden Garden Village was



built in the late 1920s/early 1930s covering part of Lexden Heath, a wooden hut, situated in Collingwood Road, just west of the new Lexden Council School was used as the builders' headquarters. The site for building a church was purchased in 1926 with the support of the mother church, Lion Walk, and the guidance of Alderman Owen Ward. The wooden hut mentioned above, now vacated by the builders, was acquired and used for worship and Sunday school, but there was need for a permanent church building. With assistance from the Essex

Congregational Union this came into being and memorial stones were laid in 1935 by the Mayor of Colchester the Rev MacDonal Docker, who was minister of Stockwell Congregational Church. The new church was completed, dedicated and opened for worship in January 1936. The old building was retained as the church hall. Lexden Congregational Church did not join the United Reformed Group in 1972, continuing as it was and survived on the site until 2003 when it was sold to a private housing developer who demolished the building in preparation for a block of flats.

Lexden Methodist Church



Bernard Polley

To be continued in next issue.

My year as Mayor: May 2010 - May 2011

The Mayor is the first citizen of Colchester and as such, I welcomed the Queen when she visited Tiptree.

The traditional events are Mayor Making, Civic Service, The Opening of The Oyster Fisheries, the Oyster Feast, Remembrance Sunday, and St George's Day Church Parade.

The Mayor has a Charity Committee who help organise fund raising events. It is traditional for the Mayor to select the Charities and I nominated 14, raising over £35,000 allocated in different amounts to my charities.

The Mayor has a personal Allowance which I spent entertaining residents in The Mayors Parlour, gifts and hospitality for official visitors, tickets, donations, church collections and receptions etc. I managed within the allowance so did not claim any expenses.

Civic events are covered by a budget which is

administered by the Council. During my year the opening of the Oyster Fisheries and The Oyster Feast covered their costs.

I attended events throughout Essex, where I was able to promote Colchester, and yes Essex girl lives. I was concerned for the families and the troops from the 16th Air Assault Brigade who were deployed in Afghanistan, and felt very honoured when the Mayor of Wooten Bassett attended the Oyster Feast. It gave Colchester the chance to thank Wooten Bassett for the respect and

organisation given on repatriation days.

I attended over 500 events including many related to Lexden. It was an honour to be Mayor, Thank you Lexden. Thank you Colchester.



Cllr Sonia Lewis

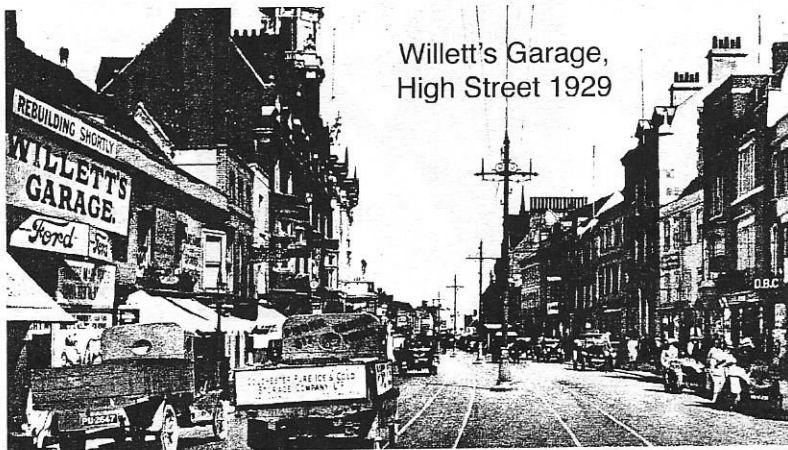
Colchester Town Centre Garages

I wonder how many people today remember the nine motor garages that were in business in the town centre around sixty or so years ago - let's take a brief look at each one.

In 1935 a new head post office for Colchester was built in Head Street, on the site formerly occupied by Eastern Automobiles who held an agency for Standard Cars, including the Flying Standard 9HP model, which sold for £156. There were two hand-cranked petrol pumps on the pavement (imagine Health & Safety allowing that today!). Later on the workshop was

At the top of North Hill Grosvenor Motors had a show room onto the street with a workshop which resembled an aircraft hangar, running through to the back of Church Lane North. An ebullient gentleman named Arthur Furber ran the business holding the franchise for Vauxhall Cars and Bedford Commercials. In 1936 a Grosvenor advertisement in the local press announced: "The new Bedford 8cwt van at £155, is full of character and refinement, notice the sloping chromium radiator and streamlined body."

Into the High Street, on the site now occupied by Williams &



Willett's Garage,
High Street 1929

moved to St John's Avenue. Before closure in the early 1970s Eastern Automobiles' garage final resting place was in Elmstead Road, which was demolished to make way for the new road over the river and railway.

Griffin, in the 1930s stood Harold Willett's garage, then Colchester's main Ford dealer, and renowned for building coach bodies onto Ford commercial chassis. Mr Willett was a prominent business man involved in many local charitable organisations,

such as organiser for Colchester Carnival street processions held in aid of the Essex County Hospital. The slope between Williams & Griffins and Radcliffe's is still there, it used to lead down into Willett's workshop.

Adams & Co commenced business in the mid-1800s as carriage builders on East Hill, later moving to Culver Street East on the site of the former Grammar School. Adams

opened on two sides of the street - workshop and petrol on the east and a small showroom and office on the opposite side. The short-lived Rhode cars were sold: they had overhead valves at first operated by a shaft-driven camshaft and later by pushrods. The ancient petrol pump had an extending arm to reach the car and often caused disruption to the trams waiting to pass down to St



Baker's Garage, Queen Street
1928

became the first garage in town to sell and repair motor vehicles. A 1928 advertisement by Adams ran: "Everything for the motorist - actual and potential, sales, garage accommodation, all repairs, accessories, spares, petrol and oil." The firm owned by Mr Percy Gadsdon and his son Bart, held the agency for Austin cars and later acquired the Sea Horse Inn in the High Street as the showroom.

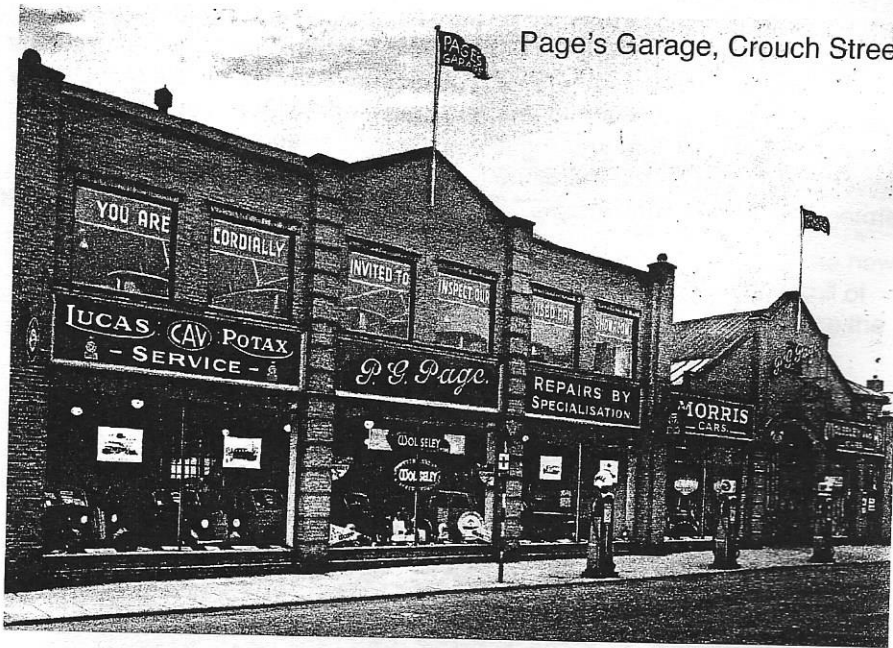
Round the corner into Queen Street, in 1922 Baker's garage was

Botolph's Street. The photo shows Cleveland petrol selling at 1s/1d per gallon, slightly more than 5p in new money!

On the west side of the town centre in Crouch Street there were four more garages - Red Garage, Pages, Scott Bros and GS Last - all long gone since the building of Southway. Saunders' Red Garage started business in 1897 making and selling bicycles, later moved on to repairing cars, offering parking facilities (in the 1930s you could leave your cycle here for 1d whilst

visiting the Regal Cinema next door) and petrol dispensed from four pumps onto the pavement.

Road was Walker's Motor Depot, later taken over by GF Last Ltd, agents for the Rootes Group of



Page's Garage, Crouch Street

Pages Garage on the corner of Maldon Road was opened by Mr PG Page in 1923 as the distributor for Morris Cars. The building consisted of a two storey showroom, extensive workshop and petrol pumps. During the last war Pages obtained a government contract to acquire second hand Morris cars for conversion into ambulances for the Civil Defence.

Almost next door was Scott Brother's Garage selling Jowett Cars and Vans as well as Morris Commercial Vehicles. A 10cwt 107cf capacity van in 1937 sold for £147.

In the early part of the 20th Century on the corner of Wellesley

motor vehicles - Humber, Hillman, Sunbeam Car and Commer Commercial. The firm advertised "Factory trained mechanics and full equipment available for service and repairs." In Wellesley Road there was a small workshop and two petrol pumps in an alcove - not on the pavement! There was no room for a showroom here, that was situated in Middleborough opposite the old cattle market.

Postscript: The first motor car seen in Colchester was a Daimler wagonette owned by Mr Arthur Stopes of Colchester Brewing Company on East Hill in 1896.

Bernard Polley

LEXDEN IN THE MIND

If you end your days in Balkerne Gardens or marooned on a desert island or you won with a lottery ticket, how will you remember Lexden? Leafy lanes and gentle living? No, that's not good enough. I mean, when you shut your eyes and I say 'Lexden' what image comes into your mind? Will you think of your house, your road? I'll bet at least 80% of you will think of the bottom of Lexden Hill, with the church and Lexden Park on one side, and the long line of pleasing historic houses on the other, winding their way up Lexden Hill, heading towards Colchester. How do I know?

Encouraged by some academic writing about sense of place, I have been pursuing the more ambitious question of how people who live there think of 'Colchester'. Once you close the question down as I did just now, almost 80% think of Colchester High Street. I know, I asked. And why? Well, it is the town centre (though perhaps not the centre of shopping). And unlike your house or your street, Colchester High Street is not just the property of those (very few) who live there, it is everybody's property. That is why pedestrianising it is not just a matter of traffic control, and why demolishing long remembered buildings can cause public outcry. It is an attack on something that belongs to us – a view, an essence.

After the controversies of the 1960s and destruction of the Old Cups Hotel, Colchester Borough's Planning Department, egged on by the Civic

Society, made the excellent decision to require all developers of High Street properties to at least retain the facade of any building they wished to enlarge or rebuild. And that is what happened; a remarkable number of High Street shops are like Dr Who's tardis. Facing the High Street might be fine 18th or 19th century facades of lavish design or strange ornamentation, but behind this lies acres of steel and concrete retail therapy.

This recognition that street lines are a crucial part of conservation is, in the best local authorities, now accepted. Hence the concern about where some proposed new legislation might lead. 'Freeing Up' the planning process with a presumption in favour of 'sustainable development' could take away a host of safeguards which have so far ensured that Colchester residents can end their days in Balkerne Gardens, close their eyes and see the High Street as it was, walk down Balkerne Passage to the top of North Hill and see that it is still there. This is not obstructing 'progress', it is retaining identity. Anyone who has lived in a place, come back and found the town centre transformed, old street lines gone, familiar buildings flattened, will know what I mean.

A few photographs exist of the 'centre' of Lexden, which I described just now, in the 1860s (and one from 1856). How pleasing to see that, the inevitable motor cars apart, it is little changed today. And long may it remain so.

Andrew Phillips
Hon President

Post Bag

Hi Jane

Re your editorial in the latest newsletter. I live in Baden Powell Drive and I note our local postbox is E VII R. So presumably in spite of them being heavily concreted in, this one has been recycled because the road was not built until the late 50's. It looks a bit corroded at the bottom, probably by dogs so not surprising at over 100 years old. As part of my GPO Telephones training in 1949/50 I spent 3 months on the gang which put up telephone boxes and the occasional small post box on a pedestal and I can vouch for the fact that they are well concreted in.

Mike Beattie.

Thank you Mike for this information, it just goes to show what you can find out by observing details in everyday objects we see on a regular basis. I must admit, ever since that interesting illustrated talk about the various postboxes in Britain, I cannot walk past one, without studying the cypher, to identify the reigning Monarch. Here in Lexden, we are lucky enough to have examples from every Monarch since Queen Victoria.

Dear Jane Thornhill,

My name is Michael Dean. Following a chance meeting with Liz White, my wife and I are joining Lexden History Group and we'll be at the Patrick Denney talk. I write historical novels. The latest is called THORN. Coming out from Bluemoose Books on September 1st, THORN is set in Amsterdam in 1656 and is about Spinoza and Rembrandt. I'm giving a talk about THORN and signing copies at Colchester Library on Saturday 24 September between 11am and midday. I'm attaching a flyer for the event. I hope that's OK. I see you edit Lexden History Group Magazine. Would it be possible to announce or promote the talk and signing in the magazine?

Michael (Michael Dean)

Heather Johnson has been in touch about a fascinating website: www.ww2incolchester.com, which is a diary written in Lexden by Alwyne Garling during the course of WWII. We have put a link to it on our own website and it is fascinating reading as each day a new page of the diary appears and of course Alwyne did not know the outcome of the War as he wrote his diary. Its well worth a read and I shall be including an article about him in our next issue.

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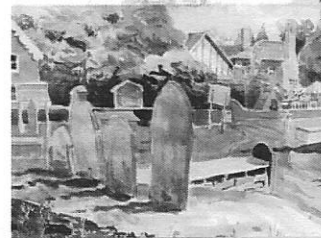
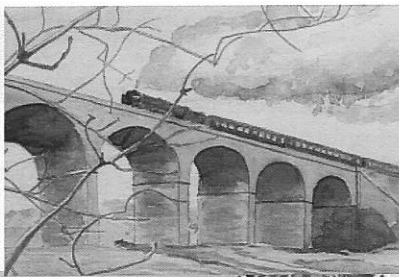
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Lexden History Group Calendar 2012

- featuring Members' paintings and drawings of
local scenes

Available from September meeting
Price £7.50



Our 2012 Calendar

