

Summer Newsletter Issue
No: 24, June 2012



The crest of submarine HMS Unruffled along side the plaque presented to the town of Colchester by the Admiralty. See page 6

Programme of Events

11th July - Colchester
Castle Past, Present &
Future
by Tom Hodgson

August - no meeting

11th August - Jubilee BBQ
Further details to follow

12th September - Foul
Deeds and Suspicious
Deaths part 2
by Patrick Denney

10th October - Layer
Marney Tower by Nicholas
Charrington

14th November - The
Temple of Claudius
by Mark Davies

12th December
CHRISTMAS PARTY

9th January 2013
Geoff Pettit memorial
lecture

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

Andrew Phillips our Honourary President, attended our 6th AGM in May. The only change to the Committee was the post of Treasurer. Bob Thornhill stood down after holding the position for six years, and Melvin White stood for the post and was voted in. So on behalf of the Committee and members, I should like to welcome Melvin to our club and thank him for agreeing to fill the vacant position of Treasurer. A big thank you also to all the Committee who work so hard to help Lexden History Group remain a vibrant and successful organisation, run entirely by volunteers. Bob will join me on the editorial staff, so that your magazine will be even better than it is now.

You may have noticed that whilst we are not holding any special events over The Queen's Jubilee weekend, we have decided to make our Summer BBQ a special event to mark our Queen's 60 years' reign. So this year it will be a special Jubilee BBQ and we hope that members will help us to make it a celebration to remember. Any ideas and suggestions to the Committee please.

Local historian Peter Potter kindly donated his research papers to the Lexden History Group. We are very grateful to Peter and thank him for his generous gift. At present it is lodged in Liz White's loft. The existing LHG archive is looked after by Bernard Polley. Ideally we should like to house all these documents in one location where it could be easily accessed by members and by researchers. Does anyone have any ideas?

Lexden History Group Summer Outings.

Wednesday 27th June, 2.30pm. Flatford Mill

Enjoy a guided tour, with a National trust Guide, around this area of beauty and history.
£5 per person. Why not enjoy a leisurely lunch and/or afternoon tea at the tearooms.

Sunday 5th August, Shuttleworth Military Pageant Air Show

A day out with a difference. Experience the delightful Swiss Garden, the magnificent birds of prey plus the world famous Shuttleworth collection and air show. Entry to the event is £19 per person and the coach will cost between £10 - £15 per person depending on numbers attending.

For further details contact Jackie Bowis 01206 561528

LEXDEN BRIDGE

On a cold December morning in 1904 Lexden Bridge was declared open by the Mayor, Councillor E J Sanders, having taken only 11 months from inception to opening! The wooden pedestrian footbridge had been woefully inadequate especially as the increasing wheeled traffic had to go through the ford on its way between Lexden and Braiswick. The crowd was informed that the total cost had been just under £400, half of that having been subscribed by Lexden residents and trades-people.

The ford may only be on a backwater of the River Colne but it has experienced its share of excitement over many years. There has been a crossing point there for centuries and it is thought that during the Siege of Colchester in 1648 Colonel Fairfax's Parliamentary forces may have pulled their cannons through it on their way to Lexden Lodge, which was also being used as a field hospital for these soldiers. From the mid-fifteenth century watermills were positioned on the Lexden side to take advantage of the flow of the River Colne with Lexden Mill being powered by its own spring-fed lake. It was converted from corn milling to fulling when the local cloth industry prospered in the 17th and 18th centuries but reverted to corn milling and then changed yet again to fulling, only to founder in the early 1800s. Some years later it once more became a flour mill, working until 1910 by which time it was in

ruins. By 1931 the disused mill was part of the Papillon Estate and due to be sold, but was withdrawn. Later it was owned by the Department of Transport and much of it torn down to facilitate the link between Spring Lane and the new roundabout, A12 and inner bypass. Little now remains of the original mill.

In the early 1800s the other side of the ford crossing housed a large mill complex, with a man-made cut re-routing part of the river through the buildings. Here the lane was unmade, lined with large elm trees (lost in the 1970s to Dutch Elm Disease) and was only suitably surfaced when the bridge was built in 1904. Oil Mill House, now Bridge House, was built in the mid 1800s for Samuel Chaplin, a seed crusher, who was Mayor of Colchester in 1880.

In January 1895, Colchester Borough Council provided gas lamps in Lexden Road and Straight Road but insisted that oil lamps were used in Spring Lane. They were erected at each end of the bridge, but dismantled in April and replaced in October, leaving only the posts standing with warning notices about the depth of the ford. The lamps also had to be lit and extinguished night and morning, a job carried out by Mr Moss of Trafalgar Road.

A child's body was found floating there in 1897 and the cause of death could not be established but it was thought that it may have come

from further up the river after a heavy thunderstorm. A few months after the bridge was opened a coachman from Lexden Mill, Arthur Barber, saved a 30 year old pregnant unmarried woman, Elizabeth Lambert, from drowning. She had been told to find the father in town and force him to accept his responsibility for her condition. Instead, she decided to end it all and was successful, despite the efforts of Arthur Barber and PC Bramble who dragged her from the water. They spent an hour and a half resuscitating her, but she died a few days later. For their gallant actions they were both awarded the Royal Humane Society Resuscitation Certification.

Two large fires have destroyed the buildings around the bridge, one in 1878 leaving only the Grist Mill. It was partially restored and used for another 50 years but then powered by an oil engine. The other was in 1968 when Bridge House was seriously damaged and only the four walls and some out-houses remained.

The ford also played its part in the defence of Britain during the Second World War – it became part of The Colchester Stop Line. Large concrete boulders reinforced with iron girders were placed in the water as tank traps. Pill boxes were erected further up the road to Braiswick.

The 1904 bridge was built in just six weeks, was 40 ft long, 20 ft wide and built in one span with concrete piers supporting the steel girders. It weighed 60 tons and could carry 40 tons. By the late 1990s plans were being drawn up to replace it, but no funding was available. A few years later a one inch crack was noticed in the foundations and the capacity was reduced to 3½ tons, much of the damage having been caused by heavy traffic, using the small road and bridge as a “rat-run” for a quick route to the A12 from Braiswick,.

Now, in 2012, Lexden Bridge needs replacing, so how much will it cost and how long will it take? First of all it is now the responsibility of Essex County Council and Spring Lane will be closed to vehicular traffic for an estimated 28 weeks while the work is carried out: secondly, the cost is unknown and, thirdly, it is not scheduled to start until August!



Manufacturer's plaque

Liz White

HMS Unruffled

On Friday 16th March 2012 the Essex County Standard carried a report of the discovery in storage of the Colchester and Ipswich Museum's collection of a cast iron plaque awarded to Colchester for the town's fundraising effort to assist in the purchase of a "U" class

submarine P46, later named HMS Unruffled. The town raised the considerably larger sum of £435,223 and in December 1942 a plaque was presented to the town by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to commemorate the town's adoption of HMS Unruffled.



submarine.

During Warship Week, 14th to 21st March 1942, the people of Colchester were charged with purchasing £250,000 worth of War Bonds to fund the building of

The vessel was built by Vickers Armstrong at Barrow-in-Furness, was laid down on 25th February 1941, launched on 19th December 1941 and commissioned on 9th April 1942. As with all "U" Class

submarines, the vessel was powered by a Paxman diesel engine.

On 29th December 1943 the crew of HMS Unruffled visited the Paxman works and

operations from the summer of 1942 until December 1943. She formed part of the 10th flotilla which fought the most concentrated submarine battle in history from the



subsequently attended a civic reception at Colchester Town Hall. The photograph on page 6, is of the crew during their visit to Paxman, was taken in Standard Road, just outside what was the main entrance to Paxman's Standard Works.

HMS Unruffled, under the command of Lieut. J. S. Stevens, served in the Mediterranean theatre of

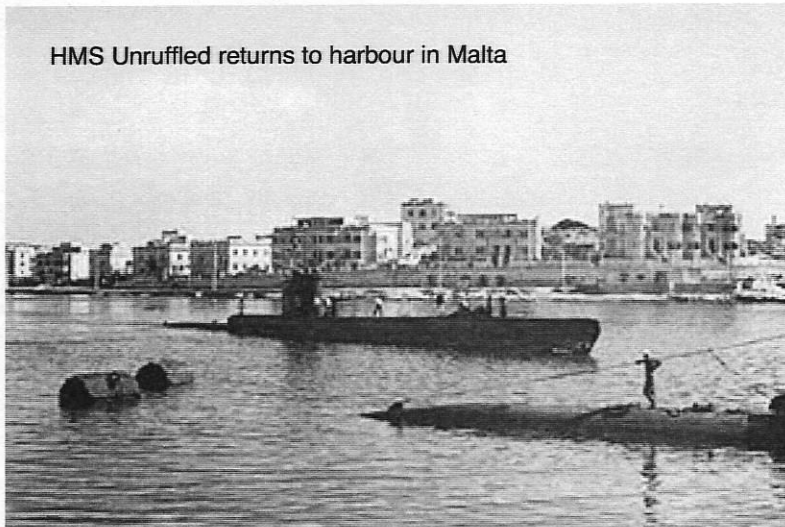
beleaguered island of Malta.

She completed 19 war patrols and sank 10 enemy ships totaling 40,000 tons. Her greatest success was when she severely damaged the Italian cruiser "Attilio Regolo", blowing off her bows with a torpedo strike. Unfortunately Unruffled had fired her last torpedo and could not finish off the cruiser. However such was the

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damage to the *Attilio Regolo* that she was out of action for the remainder of the war. HMS *Unruffled* took part in the invasion of Sicily in July 1943 as a beacon marker for assault craft. On other occasions she was

but to his credit HMS *Unruffled*'s crew suffered no combat fatalities during the war. One unhappy event was the sinking by *Unruffled* of the Italian merchant "Loreto" with the loss of 130 POWs. Lieut. Stevens died in 1992.

HMS *Unruffled* returns to harbour in Malta



involved in under cover operations, including those against Cephalonia in August 1943, and transporting two-man chariot attacks.

Lieut. Stephens was awarded the DSO and DSC for these operations and survived the war. The supreme allied commander, General Eisenhower, described him after one attack as "The maddest captain in the navy",

Unruffled acquired a cat called Timoshenko, named after the successful Russian general, and sailed on all her wartime patrols.

The plaque awarded by the Admiralty, along with the ship's crest can be seen in the Committee Room in the Town Hall.

Bob Thornhill

TALES FROM THE CHURCHYARD Lexden's Irish Curate

Just to the left of the entrance to the Columbarium in Lexden Churchyard is an impressive, much embellished Celtic cross towering over passers-by. On the east face of the base are the touching words "Marianne loving and beloved from early youth and for 34 years the devoted wife of the Rev William White La Barte MA, Curate of this parish, departed this life 2nd Feb 1883. On the opposite face the Rev Barte himself is recorded and the north face continues in praise of Marianne "to the glory of God in happy memory of all she was and of all the blessing she was made to others this cross is the thankful offering of her devoted husband and of her loving friends."

Marianne was obviously greatly loved, and missed, by all who knew her, but who was she and also her devoted husband? Both of them were born in Ireland in 1823, Marianne in Drogheda and William just a few miles away in Waterford. The La Bartes were of Huguenot

extraction and had been winemakers, wealthy and protestant, but were forced to flee from the Bordeaux area after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. They went to Tipperary, Ireland, settling in the Waterford and Clonmel area, probably witnessing the clashes between James II troops and those of William of Orange - the kind of religious turmoil they had just fled from in France! William's father was a gentleman of property who married Harriet White in October 1820. Another son, John Nicholson, was born in 1825 and, after suffering great poverty, finally succeeded in becoming a US Army Surgeon. There were also two daughters Ann and Frances born in 1833 and 1840.

William took Holy Orders in 1847 and soon after he had graduated from Trinity College Dublin and whilst he was still studying for a Masters Degree he married Marianne (affectionately known as Nannie) Evans in October 1848 in Drogheda. In 1851 he became curate of St John's Church of Ireland in Mullabrack, Armagh, moving to Enfield in

Hampshire in 1854. By 1861 he was Curate of Lexden and he and Marianne were living temporarily with Rev John Papillon, at the Rectory in Spring Lane (now the Old Rectory Nursing Home). Three years later they moved to Brighton where he became Curate of St Michael's taking with them their Lexden servant, Rebecca Bannister.

The La Bartes returned to Lexden in 1879, William again as Curate where he stayed in post until 1890 when he became Chaplain to the Essex and County Hospital until 1903. The church did not occupy all his time, for in 1898 he is recorded as being a member of the Essex Field Club, which had been founded in 1880 to further the study of natural history and archaeology in the area, such as earthworks, barrows, camps and fortifications. He was also interested in anthropology, which in those days was closely associated with the clergy and their missionary work in the Empire. He had been elected a Fellow of the Anthropological Institute in 1863 which became the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1907.

He obviously missed his wife sorely and was probably regretful that he and Nannie never had a family. They certainly inspired loyalty for Rebecca Bannister, their servant, remained with William after Marianne's death in 1883, until he died in 1904. Probate was granted in London to Anne Hoare, his sister, and her son, the Rev Francis O'Donoghue Hoare. I believe that Rebecca was a beneficiary of his will, which amounted to over £1,450, for it was only after his death that she moved to Brighton where her sister Ada lived with her husband. Rebecca died in 1929 leaving £1,737 18s 1d – a considerable amount in those days - to her sister, Ada.

William and Marianne would have been at the heart of Lexden Society during the later 1800s – a period when the Erringtons, Papillons and other notables were pursuing their public careers in Colchester. I feel that he and Marianne must have been very happy in Lexden particularly as they kept returning here!

Liz White

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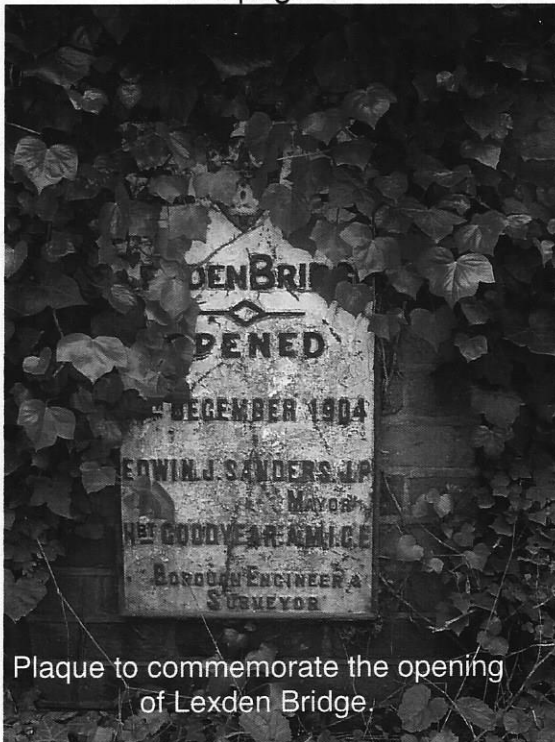
I was using an Apple service to host the LHG website, but they are upgrading this service to something called "icloud", which does not include a hosting service. So much for progress! This has meant that we have to use another service, but this has meant some complicated changes. We are now using a firm called "freeparking" and our website is now hosted on their server. I have overcome the initial problems in uploading to the new hosting service, but have had to nag them to check their servers and they have admitted a problem, which they have now rectified. So you should be able to access our site without difficulty. I have redesigned the site, but am not happy with its look, so watch out for a major revamp in the coming weeks. Also check the adverts on the home page - google pay us every time someone clicks on one of the adverts and shortly they will credit the LHG bank account with £67.73.

Bob Thornhill, Webmaster



Lexden Bridge, Spring Lane

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Plaque to commemorate the opening of Lexden Bridge.



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