

Autumn Newsletter Issue
No: 26, September 2012



A Henry Collins work recently discovered
in the USA - see page 4

Programme of Events

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
- Ronald Blyth

13th February

"My Early Days Barging" by Jimmy Lawrence

13th March

"Medieval Colchester - Religious Houses - Godly Devotions - Crime and Punishment" by Patrick Denney

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

Our Summer BBQ was a well supported and enjoyable event, and our thanks go to Carol and Tim Holding for providing us with a lovely location as in previous years. There were a few regrets voiced concerning the absence of sausages that had been dropped on the ground and burnt, prior to being eaten! But the Chefs surpassed themselves this year by providing us with well cooked and delicious food. Thank you also to all the Committee members who provided the various buffet dishes, and the rest of the items and not forgetting Howard Ashcroft for the use of his marquee.

Our next party will be at Christmas on Wednesday 12th December. Ticket prices remain the same as last year, just £10 per person which includes refreshments and entertainment. There will be no general meeting in December because of the Christmas party.

Tickets will be on sale shortly and admission will be by ticket only, bought in advance.

My apologies for a muddle in the numbering on the front of our magazine. The last issue, June 2012 should have been numbered 25 and not 24 as the previous issue was number 24. So this issue is 26 which is the correct number.

The Committee has thought long and hard about the next project for our members to adopt. Our book, Lexden in Wartime was a great success and a difficult act to follow. However, we have some good ideas and our Chairman, Dick, will be making an announcement soon, once the Committee has come to a decision.

Now that he is no longer the treasurer, Bob has joined me, working on this magazine, So you will see increased input by him from now on.

And finally, could we appeal to you all to please send us in any stories and photos of local interest. We really do need you support if our magazine is to continue to be an interesting read. JT

Recently Returned from the USA

(See the painting on the front cover)

Relations of the late Henry Collins, the well known Colchester artist, who was resident in Lexden, recently discovered an unknown painting of his on the internet. It was within an auction catalogue, complete with a photograph of the work. The auction house in question was Midwest Auction Galleries of Oxford, Michigan, which is situated not far from Detroit. The catalogue described the painting thus:

"Finely painted to depict a town church with graveyard, and figures walking. Signed in LR and dated 1966. Titled en verso "Lexden Church Lexden Colchester. Essex. Autumn 1966 watercolor and gouache." Inscribed en verso "For Hazel and John on the occasion of their marriage, November 12th 1966. With all good wishes for their future Happiness, Mum, Pop, Dons, Jack and Celia." Matted, framed behind glass and in simple wood frame. 21" H x 26.5" W, including the frame. Circa 1966. Private collection Oxford, MI."

The painting was estimated at \$200 to \$300, with an auction date of 21st April. Henry's family in Colchester made the successful bid and in due course the picture returned to Colchester in good undamaged condition.

On checking the inscription on the back of the painting there is

one slight variation in what the auction house stated in that the good wishes are from "Mum, Pop, Jons, Jack and Celia." So it would appear to be Jons and not Dons. Perhaps an auction house typographical error? Who knows? Whatever, there is no surname of the young couple on the back of the painting so searches for who is or was Hazel and John are complicated. The auction house will not reveal the names of its sellers.

It was tempting to assume that the marriage of Hazel and John took place at St Leonard's, but on checking the register of marriages for 12th November 1966 there was just one entry. However the entry was that of the marriage between Martin Arthur Cowan, aged 23, market gardener of Poplar Nurseries, Marks Tey and Lorna Joy Funnell, aged 23, drawing office assistant of Colchester. Clearly not our couple referred to on the reverse of the painting. A check of the Essex County Council website revealed twelve Colchester parish marriage registers in the archive for 1966.

Of course Hazel and John might not even have married in Colchester. Does anyone's memory go back to 1966 and the marriage of a young Hazel and John? If so, please contact the Editor. We should be delighted to know.

Bob Thornhill

THE COLCHESTER BOROUGH ARMS

The earliest record of the Borough Arms occurs in the charter granted by Henry V in 1413. This charter has an initial letter H (for Henry) depicting the Arms and showing the figures of St. Helena holding a cross and her son Constantine.

Around the figure is an inscription which states that St. Helena was born in Colchester, that she was both the mother of Constantine and the finder of the Holy Cross. By 1413 St. Helena was regarded as the patron saint of Colchester and that the Arms are related to her story.

Helena was the mother of Constantine the Great, who became a Christian and made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. According to legend Helena went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, where she found a piece of the true cross still green. She broke it into four pieces, keeping one piece herself and sending the other three to Jerusalem, Alexandria and Rome. She went on to find the remains of the Three Wise men who visited the baby Jesus. These remains are now interred in Cologne Cathedral.

Colchester's Arms show the four pieces of green living wood, the three crowns representing the

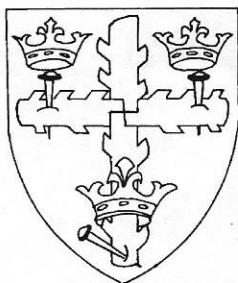
Three Wise men, and three nails as used in the Crucifixion. The red background is a reminder of Christ's blood.

At some time in the late 16th century, as Protestantism grew, the living cross was thought to be Catholic superstition, and so the nails were removed and the cross became white. The Arms continued in this form until 1915 and there are various examples in the town.

On 3rd March, 1915, Alderman Gurney Benham, a former Mayor and local historian, persuaded the Council to revert to the original Arms – the one we are still using today.

The 1915 change was never recognised by the College of Arms. Following the re-organisation of local government in 1974 Colchester Borough Council decided to review and renew its Arms. A new design was agreed with the College. The river and its banks are shown at the bottom of the shield. Two supporters were added – a Roman centurion and a fisherman. A helm was added to the top, with three red and two white roses, and a representation of St. Helena holding a cross as a crest. A motto NO CROSS NO CROWN was laid across the bottom. It was also used on the War Memorial and in the new Town Hall. The new coat of arms was never popular and has not been used.

Dick Barton



Captain Fryatt, a British Hero

On 2nd December 1872, Charles Algernon was born to Charles and Mary Fryatt in Southampton, the family later relocating to Harwich, where the young Charles attended the Corporation School. He followed his father into the Merchant Navy and in 1892 joined the Great Eastern Railway (GER) as a seaman on *ss Ipswich*, his father having been First Officer on *ss Cambridge* at his retirement. Young Fryatt rose through the ranks and achieved command, his first being that of the *ss Colchester*.

In spite of the outbreak of war in 1914 and the German use of U-boats against civilian shipping, the Great Eastern Railway's steamer service from Harwich to the Netherlands continued uninterrupted. On 3rd March 1915, Captain Fryatt in command of *ss Wrexham* was attacked by a German U-boat near the Schouwen

Bank. He did not surrender, but decided to try to outrun his attacker. The vessel was ordinarily capable of a maximum speed of barely 14 knots, but with the deck hands assisting the stokers, she achieved 16 knots over a

40 mile chase and safely arrived in Rotterdam, albeit with burnt and blistered funnels. For this achievement both the Great Eastern Railway Company and the Admiralty presented Fryatt with a gold watch, a fine recognition of his daring, but which would later come back to haunt him.

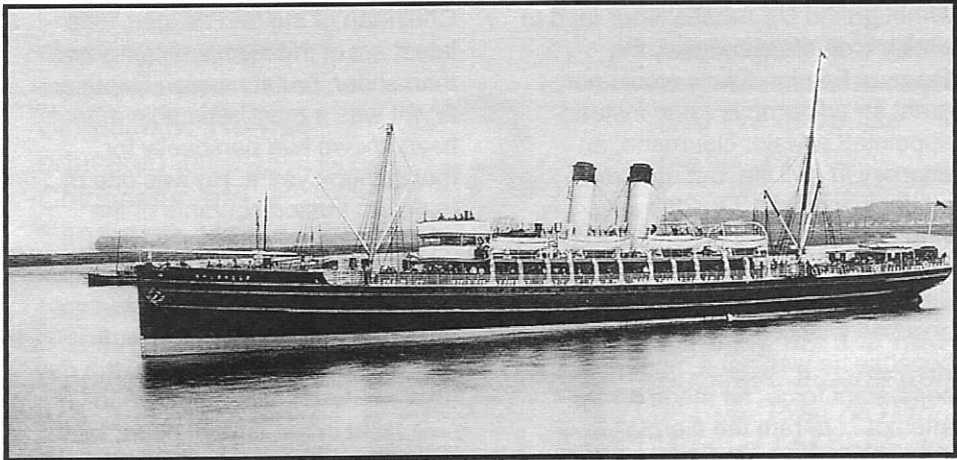
On the afternoon of Sunday, 28th

March 1915, Captain Fryatt in command of *ss Brussels* near the Maas Light Vessel en route to Rotterdam sighted a German U-boat four miles away and which turned towards him at a good speed. Realising that the submarine would outrun him, that on his present course he was most likely to be torpedoed and not wishing to surrender his ship, he took the decision to ram the



submarine. He ordered his engines to full speed, fired rockets in the hope that he might fool the U-boat into thinking he was armed and as the submarine drew closer turned his ship, aiming the bows at the conning tower of the U-boat. The submarine crash dived. Captain Fryatt steered to where he saw it disappear and when he saw the periscope come along side he steered to sweep over it. He did not hear any contact although a fireman reported a bumping sensation under

1916, although it appears from the *Great Eastern Railway Magazine* that there had been numerous narrow escapes by GER steamers during that time. When, however, he was next attacked it was a concerted effort by the Germans. On the night of 22/23 June 1916 ss *Brussels* left the Hook of Holland with refugees on board and a cargo of foodstuffs. Two days later she was heard of as captured and taken into Zeebrugge. The Magazine



the ship. Captain Fryatt thought that he had damaged or sunk the U-boat, as it was seen from the bridge of the ss *Brussels* further out of the water and with a decided list, after which it disappeared and was not sighted again.

It was at this time that the German U-boat campaign developed with merchant ships being sunk without warning. Captain Fryatt's vessel was not attacked again until

stated: "It is not certain how she was captured, but it would appear that some array of force was shewn, that it occurred suddenly and that knowledge of the ship's position was indicated." Postcards were received from the ships' crew at Ruhleben, including one from Captain Fryatt. Later cards were received from the stewardesses at Holzminden, near Hanover. All reported being well, but in need of parcels.

(continued on page 8)

(from page 7)

On 16th July the Dutch newspaper *Telegraaf* reported that Captain Fryatt was to be charged at Ghent for the sinking of a German submarine. The charge was said to be founded on an inscription on a gold watch found in his possession. The United States Ambassador was requested by the British Government to make enquiries to ascertain the accuracy of the *Telegraaf's* report and to make every effort to secure a proper defence for Captain Fryatt if he was to be tried. Although the US Ambassador tried to obtain a defence counsel, the German Foreign Office would not grant an adjournment and instead appointed a Major Neumann, an attorney in civil life, but an army officer in wartime. On 28th July, Captain Fryatt was executed. The official German telegram reported in the press stated inter alia: "The accused was condemned to death because he was not a member of the combatant force, he made an attempt ... to ram the German submarine U 33 near the Maas Light Vessel. The accused ... received at the time from the British Admiralty a gold watch as a reward for his brave conduct on that occasion." And finally the following chilling sentence: "One of the many nefarious franc-tireur proceedings of the British merchant marine against our war vessels has thus found a belated but merited expiation."

(A "franc-tireur" is an irregular soldier or guerilla fighter.)

Feelings ran high in Britain.
On 31st July, in the House of

Commons and in response to a question from Sir E. Carson, Mr Asquith said: "I deeply regret to say that it appears to be true that Captain Fryatt has been murdered by the Germans. His Majesty's Government have heard with the utmost indignation of this atrocious crime against the laws of nations and the usages of war...it shows the German High Command, under the stress of military defeat, have renewed their policy of terrorism." Lord Claude Hamilton MP and Chairman of the GER stated "The latest act of the Hun is nothing less than sheer, brutal murder. Captain Fryatt was a most estimable man. I have known him personally for many, many years. He was one of the most trusted servants of the Great Eastern Railway Company."

The last communication from Captain Fryatt was a postcard sent from Ruhleben on 1st July, but received by his wife on 29th, the day after his death. It is gratifying to know that in her time of need, Mrs Fryatt, with her seven children, was promptly awarded a life pension of £300 by the GER, the Government granted £100 per annum beyond the pension to which she was entitled under the Board of Trade scheme insuring merchant seamen. Also the Provident Clerks' Association with whom Captain Fryatt was insured arranged to pay his widow the £300 due without formality.

(To be continued in next issue)

Bob Thornhill

The Real Lexden Heroes

The Essex County Standard reported on the death of John Alvin Fothergill 292171 Lieutenant 107th reft(5th KOR) R.A.C who died on Monday 14th August 1944 aged 28. Mr and Mrs Fothergill, of 115 London Road, Lexden, received news that their second son has been killed in action in Normandy. Before being called up, he was relieving manager for Stead and Simpson's. He was educated in Colchester and Sandhurst. He leaves a wife and two small children.

Below is an extract from a book called *Twins in Tanks* by Stephen W Dyson, -

Breakout in Normandy.
We drove our tanks up the sunken exit road, past the ruins of Brieux and the village of Grimbosq. We travelled south on a road running almost parallel with the River Orne. The enemy had succeeded in cutting the Flers-Falaise road, so we had a



few skirmishes in which our Troop Officer, Lt. J.Fothergill and three tank crew died. Our journey ended in a field a few miles west of Falaise. We were greeted with the news that we were to be granted an extended rest, starting in about a fortnight. The cynics confidently predicted we would be in action again in a day or two, but thankfully they were proved wrong. For the first time since leaving England, we were able to relax and live more like human beings.

We were sent back to our rally point by jeep and found a letter from mum awaiting us. she had enclosed a page from Picture Post of 12th August 1944 showing eight photos of British crews engaged on tank maintenance and bearing the headline "A tank crew prepares for battle in Normandy." It was sad that so many of those original crew members were by now killed or wounded.

This extract was taken from Peter Potter's book *The Real Lexden Heroes*. Edited by Jane Thornhill

President's Page

Although we had a bit of heat in August, this summer should surely be remembered as the Summer of Rain. Hands up if you actually used a hosepipe!

It may have been a bad year for butterflies, but you should have seen the slugs, especially the large ridged-backed yellow ones. For most of June and July, in between the downpours, I went for long walks on most

evenings, watching the stag beetles flying, using the network of footpaths, cycleways and bridle paths for which we must thank the

Victorians, linking real Lexden with pretend Lexden where I live. Indeed, most of this was the work of John Taylor, Editor and owner of the Essex County Standard, who actually ran The Footpath Preservation Society for several vital years, enlisting the great and the good to defend old rights of way against the new developers along Lexden Road.

Taylor, along with John Joslin, actually bought much of the

land around what is now West Lodge Road (he lived at West Lodge) for the sole purpose of digging up Roman graves. Joslin assembled in his conservatory in Cambridge Road the finest collection of Roman goods outside the British Museum. Those of us that live near his house still find the odd bits that he missed!

Nowadays, most of Taylor's footpaths are tarmacked – several freshly this year – yet in places this summer the undergrowth almost met in the middle and Japanese knotweed flourished along the margins. And up on the Hilly



Fields I have never seen grasses, wild flowers and wild shrubs in such abundance. I wonder what happened to the borough's promise of 'wildflower meadows' some years ago, now that the Olympic Park (did you go there?) has shown us the way.

So let's hope for a dry, warm autumn to accompany the monthly meetings of the Lexden History Group.

Andrew Phillips

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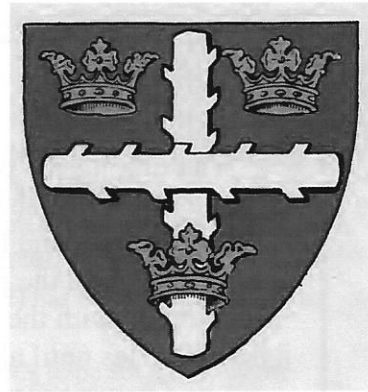
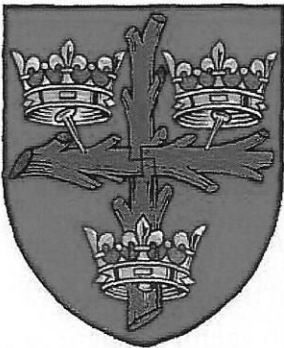
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DID YOU KNOW?

The first jigsaw puzzle was created around 1760, when John Spilsbury, a British engraver and mapmaker, mounted a map on a sheet of wood, and he then sawed around each individual country. Spilsbury used the product as an aid in teaching geography. After catching on with the wider public, this remained the primary use of jigsaw puzzles until about 1820. By the early 20th century, magazines and newspapers found that they could increase their daily subscriptions by publishing all kinds of puzzles, including letters, numbers, shapes and riddles.



LHG Jubilee Barbecue 11th August 2012



Colchester Borough Arms - see page 5.