


Winter Newsletter Issue
No: 27, December 2012

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Programme of Events 2013

9th January

Geoff Pettit Memorial
Lecture - "At the Yeoman's
House" - Ronald Blythe

Devotions - Crime &
Punishment" - Patrick
Denney

13th February

"My Early Days Barging"
- Jimmy Lawrence

10th April

"Lost churches of Mediaeval
Colchester" - John Ashdown
Hill

13th March

"Mediaeval Colchester -
Religious Houses - Godly

8th May - AGM

and "Grymes Dyke"
- Mitchell McLean

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

MAKING HISTORY TODAY

Many of you will know about Colchester 24, a project to photograph life in Colchester over a 24-hour periods, which took place in October 2011. You may even have taken part. Since publishing a book of some of the best photos (a good stocking filler), I have been indexing the vast archive of well over 5,000 pictures – yes, you'd think, *after a year*, we'd know how many photos we've actually got, but they keep popping up and there have been website problems, though you don't want to know about them.

Now that much of the indexing is complete, it emerges that there was very limited coverage of the Lexden 'district' and even less of Stanway (but lots of the new Sainsbury's) in Colchester 24. Everybody gravitated to the photogenic, downtown places and snapped away there. For example, we have 224 photographs of the Hythe, 212 of High Street, 75 of Firstsite and less than 25 of the whole of Highwoods. The limited out-of-town coverage is a pity, because it is pictures of our districts, our suburbs, and our domestic life which might interest future generations, though, of course, kitchens in 2011 Lexden look very much like kitchens anywhere in Britain, so it is our buildings and outdoor life that we should really concentrate on. Is this a future project for the Lexden History Group?

In between indexing Colchester 24, eating, and sleeping, I have been working on the Colchester Recalled tapes of the Great Gale of 1987, just 25 years ago. Listening to the late, irrepressible Bill Tucker, a Lexden resident by the way, walking though Prettygate describing the destruction, makes me realise how oral history, like photography, charts history for future historians – so that's my message for this magazine.

Being a typical man, I have not yet thought about Christmas – cards, food shopping, presents etc., but I have underlined our Christmas Party in my diary. And if I don't see you there, a very happy, healthy Christmas and a very fulfilling, healthful 2013 to you all. My, where did 2012 go?

Andrew Phillips

Dear Members,

As Andrew asks, where did this past year go? We have enjoyed many Wednesday evenings throughout the year at the LHG meetings and several outings too, arranged by our Committee members. Thank you for your support helping our group continue to flourish. Thank you especially to all of you who have taken the time to contribute many interesting articles for our magazine. Please continue to do so. Seasons Greetings to you all.

Jane and Bob

Captain Fryatt, a British Hero

(continued from last issue)

Following the news of Captain Fryatt's execution a great wave of public sympathy swept the nation. Resolutions of sympathy and indignation came from political parties, trades union, shipping associations, county councils and chambers of commerce. The King wrote to Mrs Fryatt:

Buckingham Palace,
August 3rd, 1916.

Madam,
In the sorrow which has so cruelly stricken you, the King joins with his people in offering you his heartfelt sympathy. Since the outbreak of the war, His Majesty has followed with admiration the splendid services of the Mercantile Marine.

The action of Captain Fryatt in defending his ship against the attack of an enemy submarine was a noble instance of the resource and self-reliance so characteristic of that profession. It is, therefore, with feelings of the deepest indignation that the King learnt of your husband's fate, and in conveying to you the expression of his condolence, I am commanded to assure you of the

abhorrence with which His Majesty regards this outrage.

Yours very faithfully
STAMFORDHAM.

Foreign newspapers such as the New York Times, the New York Herald and Tribune, New York ran outraged articles, the latter stating: "The cowardly method of warfare that has made the German navy distinct from all others has been worthily upheld. Chivalry in this case would have been grossly inconsistent."

On 2nd August 1916 the Mayor of Harwich set up a fund to erect a memorial to the gallant Captain and the January 1917 issue of

the Great Eastern Railway Magazine announced that a subscription was being raised to add a wing, to be named in honour of Captain Fryatt to the Dovercourt Cottage Hospital. The Great Eastern Railway Magazine of November 1917 announced the presentation of a memorial tablet by the League of Neutral Countries with a portrait of Captain Fryatt in bronze on a marble slab, with the words: "To the Memory of Captain Charles Fryatt, July 27th 1916. From the



neutral admirers of his brave conduct and heroic death. The Netherlands' Section of the League of Neutral States, July 27th, 1917." This was placed at Liverpool Street Station.

In 1919 Captain Fryatt's body was disinterred and returned to England. His funeral service

was held at St Paul's Cathedral in London on 8th July. Hundreds of

merchant seamen, fishermen and widows attended the service along with members of the Cabinet, Admiralty, Board of Trade and the War Office. The streets from St Paul's to Liverpool Street were lined with people and at Harwich the coffin was carried on a gun carriage to his final resting place at All Saints' Church, Upper Dovercourt.

The memorial to Captain Fryatt was unveiled on 18th June 1920 by Lord Claude Hamilton, Chairman of the Great Eastern Railway and High Steward of the Borough of Harwich.



The War had lasted four years with North Sea shipping subjected not only to attacks by German submarines and surface warships, but running the risk of mine strike and navigation without lights. Nevertheless the Great Eastern Railway Company ran a continuous service to the

free ports throughout the War and lost only one ship to torpedo strike, the "Copenhagen" and two vessels captured by cruisers the "Colchester" and

of course Captain Fryatt's ship the "Brussels".

The "Brussels" after capture was used by the Germans in Zeebrugge harbour, but in a daring attack by the Dover patrol she was torpedoed and sunk. After the war the Belgian Government raised her and as an act of international courtesy returned her to Great Britain and posthumously awarded Captain Fryatt the Belgian Maritime War Cross.

Bob Thornhill

Memories of Wartime Malta

Our spring issue of the magazine, which contained an account of HMS Unruffled and its campaign in the Mediterranean brought back vivid memories for Lexden History Group member Edna Heinrich.

Edna's grandfather had been gassed in the First World War and was advised by his family doctor that his health would be improved if he lived in a warmer, drier climate than that of England. Thus he finished up in Malta as a civilian employee of the British Army. In 1939 Edna's parents, Gordon and Rhoda, had been considering Rhoda taking her children, Edna and Gerald to spend 6 months with their grandparents in Malta prior to commencing their education. Come the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 and Edna's father, a regular warrant officer receiving a posting to the Middle East, it was felt that it would be better to clear the home in England and for the family to spend the war in Malta, which they considered would be out of the way

and a safer bet than England. They sailed for Malta, arriving in December 1939.

On 9th June 1940 Italy, seeing the success of Germany in the War, entered the conflict on their side and on the following day Italian warplanes began their bombardment of Malta, which was to last for some three years. At this time there was no central defence co-ordination, but steps were immediately taken to put this right. Amongst the many needs of the military was that of cypher clerks to handle communications between fighting units, their commands and the British government.

Such employment was usually given to the

Women's Royal Naval

Service (WRNS), but because of the conditions in Malta and Britain being with its back against the wall none could be sent. So a request was put out for five British women, resident in Malta, to volunteer for this work. Edna's mother Rhoda Copping volunteered. The training was carried out locally and her first role was with Admiral Lord Cunningham at Admiralty House.

Thanks to our cracking of the Enigma machine codes and our ability also to read the Italian codes, the cypher clerks were handling top secret information about enemy



Edna en route to Malta - 1939

dispositions and intentions and were sending this back to British command headquarters in Britain. Operations Headquarters in Malta were equipped with the RAF Type X machine, similar to the Enigma machine and used for encoded transmissions to Britain. A detailed account of the set up of the war time command operations in Malta can be found on line at:

www.wirtartna.org.

Edna's mother Rhoda never spoke about what she had witnessed nor what she knew about what was going on through her work, although Edna says that her mother would have know the disposition of all Allied and enemy forces in the Mediterranean.

As for Edna,

she had a wonderful time in Malta. She was not seriously worried about the bombing, although ultimately Malta was bombed more severely than London during the blitz. King George VI awarded Malta the George Cross for its stubborn resistance against overwhelming odds. Edna generally had a great time swimming from the rocks and collecting shrapnel and spent bullets, in spite of being required to do her piano practice. There were difficult times and Edna recalls

queueing with her brother at the Victory Kitchen, feeling very, very hungry and being doled out one and a half pilchards, one spoon of haricot beans and one small round flat bun full of weevils. Edna also recalls going out for a picnic, when the air raid sirens sounded. They

were out on a hillside and took shelter under a rock ledge. From this position they witnessed a dog fight over the Mediterranean. One of the aircraft was hit and its pilot parachuted from the plane with his boots on fire and was desperately trying to remove them as he floated down. Edna was unable to see to which side the plane belonged.

During her time as a cypher clerk, Rhoda met many top military commanders



Edna, Rhoda and Gerald
at the end of the War

and politicians particularly when the War had swung in the Allies' favour and Operation Husky, the Allied invasion of Sicily was being planned. At the end of the war no recognition was given to Rhoda or the other women. They quietly went back to civilian life, in Rhoda's case as wife and mother, and kept silent about what they had taken part in and had witnessed.

**As told by Edna Heinrich to
Bob Thornhill**

DEVELOPMENT OF THE TELEPHONE SERVICE.

Early telephone services in Colchester were provided by both the General Post Office and the National Telephone Company. The latter was nationalised in 1912 and became part of the GPO. Only the well off and the businesses who served them were able to afford the service in those early days of the 20th century.

There was no automatic system and all calls had to be made via the operator. To call the exchange it was necessary to turn the handle of a generator contained within the telephone instrument to produce the current needed to drop a flap on the switchboard to alert the operator. The carbon granule microphone in the telephone had to be powered by a local battery, usually of two wet Leclanche cells in a wooden box. These had to be replaced from time to time. At the end of the call the telephone user had to turn the handle again to "ring off" to indicate to the exchange that the call had finished so that the operator could unplug the connection. Local calls



posed little problem but there was no means of amplification for calls to and from distant locations. These could be faint in spite of some fairly thick wires being used for the connections between distant exchanges and many such calls would need to be connected through several exchanges on the way and had to be booked in advance.

Telephone numbers were very short by today's standards, usually of one two or three digits. Shared lines and party lines were common. Each line consisted of a pair of wires as today. For a shared line two parties would be connected by a single pair of wires to the exchange. The individual wires would be designated X and Y. Each subscriber would have the telephone instrument connected across the pair of wires and each would have the same number, eg 9. However one subscriber would have their bell connected between the X wire and earth and be given the number 9X. The other would have the bell connected between the Y wire and earth and be given the number 9Y. To call the correct number it was only necessary for the operator to

ring on the correct wire. In the case of two businesses sharing a line it was essential to ensure that their businesses were dissimilar and not competing for the same trade. A case in point was Oliver Parker, a grocer at 1A Head Street facing down High Street more or less on the site of the present Post Office. Their number was 9Y. Owen Ward, a merchant tailor at 14 High Street, had the number 9X.

Party lines were a derivation of shared lines but with perhaps up to 10 subscribers connected to the same pair of wires. A case in point was cabinet maker and joiner Thos A Beckett

who had retail premises at 37 Crouch Street, telephone number 2X3 and a workshop at 8 Balkerne Lane, telephone number 2Y5. There would be other subscribers besides these also connected. As for shared lines, subscriber's bells would be connected between either the X or Y wire and earth. To call 2X3 the operator would give 3 rings on the X wire. To call 2Y5 the operator would give 5 rings on the Y wire. However, it was necessary to educate all party line subscribers to wait to make sure how many rings were given before picking up the telephone to answer it, because



doing so made the connection between X and Y wires through the telephone instrument. Thus, if the operator was calling 2Y5 and after the third ring 2Y3 picked up their phone, the remaining 2 rings would also be connected to the X wire and their bells would ring too. Hearing 2 rings 2X2 would also answer their telephone and the operator would then have two parties on the line, neither of whom was the correct one. The operator would then have to persuade both to hang up before attempting to ring 2Y5 again. Party lines were not popular and only suitable for low users..

Colchester's early telephone exchange was located in St John's Street in the building on the corner of

St John's Avenue which is now a Chinese Restaurant. There were 3 enormous poles 75 feet high at the back to carry the lines away. The exchange moved to the current site in West Stockwell Street when the new automatic exchange opened in 1926. One of the huge poles behind St John's Street remained well into the 1950s.

Mike Beattie

(To be continued in the next issue)

The Great Storm of 16th
October 1987.

**An extract from the personal
diary of Bernard Polley:**

"After a stormy night which made me get up to close the bedroom window, I didn't take much notice what was going on outside.

I woke at 5am to hear gales blowing and hearing the stormy conditions, although it was still dark I looked out of the window to see there was a chestnut tree uprooted across the drive and tree branches blowing about in Heath Road. I got up and called my brother-in-law from next door; as it became light at 7am we went out to see the damage. Several of the smaller trees in the garden had fallen, and the fence panels onto Heath Road were smashed as two tall lime trees on our land had fallen across the road, and one laid on top of neighbour, Mr Youell's car - together with neighbours we started as best we could to clear the roadway, but the heavy tree trunks were too much for us, until Mr Edwards from Claremont Road came along with his power chain saw. He got to work on the tree trunks, so after a time there was enough clear room for small vehicles to pass. Fortunately Mr

Youell's car was still drivable, but there was a broken windscreen and a dented roof.

Just beyond Heath Road onto Straight Road a large oak tree was badly damaged with many of its branches laying across the road. Later in the day the Fire Brigade arrived to clear the debris and make the rest of the tree safe."

From the Colchester Gazette:

Next door neighbours John and Joan Powell and John and Diane Tudor were lucky to escape unharmed as trees came crashing through their roofs. Tens of thousands of pounds damage was caused to the two houses in Tapwoods, Lexden and both families were made homeless. A shocked Mrs Powell said: "We estimate that half the house will have to be rebuilt - we're thinking in terms of months before we can move back in. We just don't know where to start."

Other homes in Lexden were damaged in Glen Avenue, Byron Avenue and Church Lane. Ward Councillor Ivan Trussler who lives in Tapwoods said: "It was just like a bomb had hit the area. It took us back to wartime. I was a child of five then and I've seen nothing like it since."

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CHRISTMAS HUSBANDLY FARE

by Thomas Tusser

Good husband and good huswife, now chiefly be glad,
things handsome to have, as they ought to be had.

They both do provide, against Christmas to come,
to welcome their neighbours, good chere to have some.

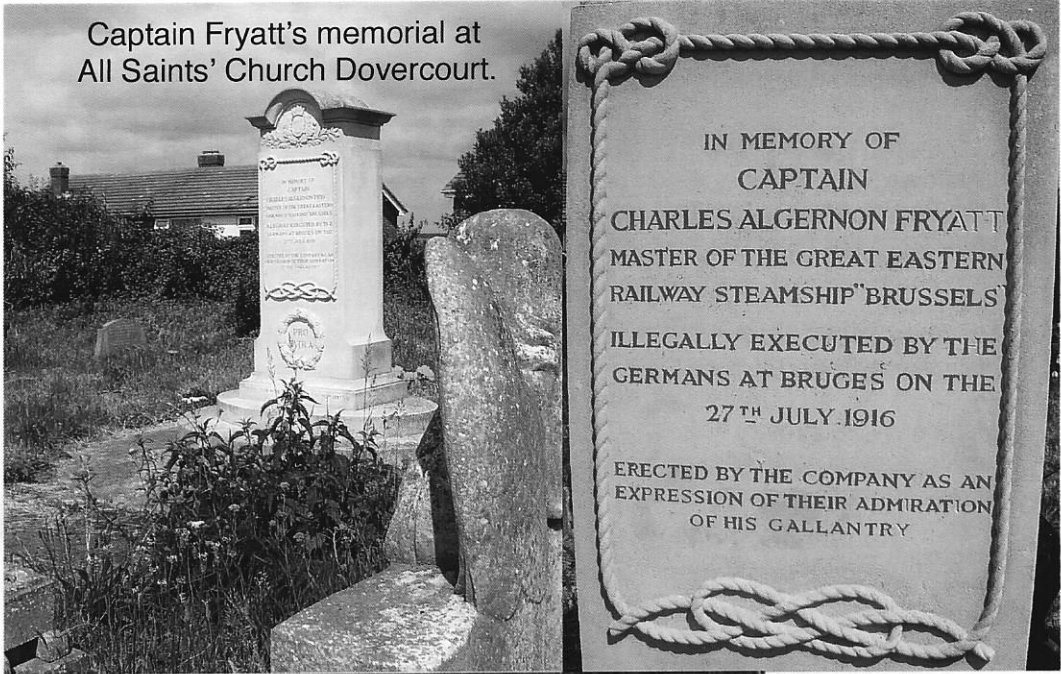
Good bread and good drinks, a good fier in the hall,
brawne, pudding, and souse, and good mustarde withal.

Biefe, mutton, and Porke, and good Pies of the best,
pig, veale, goose, and capon. and turkey wel drest.

Chese, apples, and nuttes, and good Caroles to hear,
as then in the countrey is counted good cheare.

Thomas Tusser was born near Witham in the 16th Century and was the originator of many proverbs and sayings.

Captain Fryatt's memorial at All Saints' Church Dovercourt.



The Development of the Telephone Service - see page 8