

Autumn Newsletter Issue
No:30 September 2013



Awards made to Lieutenant JW Bell see Page 6

Programme of Events

9th October

**The History of Hatfields
- David London**

8th January

**The Geoff Pettit
Memorial Lecture -
The Queen & Windsor -
Ian Baalham**

13th November

**The Story of Colchester
Corporation's Tramways
- Peter Jones**

12th February

TBA

11th December

Christmas Party

9th March

TBA

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

Mervyn Peake, author, artist and poet, was a sufferer of Parkinson's Disease. In his memory, his family sponsor an annual arts award, open to people with Parkinson's Disease.

There are three categories, Art, Photography and Poetry. I entered two pieces of work, one painting and one poem. Much to my delight, both were chosen and I was invited to attend the Awards Reception at the Merchant Taylor's Hall, London, in the presence of Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Gloucester, Patron of Parkinson's UK. People had travelled from all over the UK to attend. Bob and I found the event very inspiring. After viewing the exhibition of work, we watched the presentation and had an enjoyable lunch.

Those of you with good memories will remember Tim dropping (and burning) sausages at the Lexden History Group BBQ in 2011. This was my inspiration for the painting. Then I wrote a poem to accompany it. Both appear in the 2014 Parkinson's calendar on sale through me at £5.99 each. Available now.

All money raised goes to trying to find a cure for this incurable Disease. The calendar is a celebration of the creativity of people with Parkinson's.



On behalf of the Lexden History Group, congratulations to our Honourary President, Andrew Phillips, who has been awarded the British Empire Medal for his services to local history and heritage. With typical modesty he protested that he was unworthy of the award. When I asked Andrew how he heard about his award, he said,

"There's not much to be said about the BEM. I got a letter from the Prime Minister to say he was submitting my name to the Queen... and would I accept it. I said 'yes' and he said don't tell anyone. Then in June the Essex County Standard, BBC Essex etc all rang me up and you know the rest. Hope that helps."

This is my last editorial, but I can be contacted by phone or email, details on the back page.

Jane Thornhill

Diamond Jubilee Sculpture

To celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, the Council allocated £2,000 to each Councillor for a project in their respective Wards. Councillors Brian Jarvis and Sonia Lewis, consulted Lexden residents and four projects were suggested for the Ward, each considered in detail by Council Officers, with three going forward for a decision by representatives from within Lexden. At the selection each project was chosen anonymously and the sculpture of four geese designed by Tim Holding, our Deputy Chairman, was unanimous agreed upon.

Local school children were involved, attending the unveiling and naming the geese "Lexi", "Pebbles", "Joseph" and "Quackers". Name plaques are to be designed and placed in the Park alongside the geese. The Mayor and Mayoress of Colchester, Councillor and Mrs Colin Sykes unveiled the geese, announced by The Town Crier, Mr Robert Needham.

Brian, Tim and Sonia provided light refreshments, including bird and animal shaped home-made biscuits made by Sonia, with thanks to Shirley Barton and Val Salmon for their help. The refreshments were enjoyed by the 200 or so residents who attended the event in the



summer sunshine.

Thank you to the Council Leisure Department for arranging the project with special thanks to George Davidson, the Park Ranger and his team.

Sonia Lewis

They Changed Their Names

In 1936 Lexden resident Alderman Alec Blaxhill published a booklet "Street Names of Colchester", which explained all the names of the roads and streets of the Town at that time, some of which were known by former names. Looking at Lexden, I have picked out five roads that were affected by these changes.

Glen Avenue: named after Lexden Glen, to which it lead when only a rough cart track. Its early name was Stonecrouch Lane. Quoting Philip Morant "almost opposite stood a famous cross, built of brick and stone, part of the pedestal of which was remaining within the memory of man" - hence its early name, later Cut Throat Lane (probably a corruption of Cut Through) and more latterly Rectory Road when the modern rectory was built. According to Benham's Street Directory of 1935 the road became Glen Avenue.

Halstead Road: until 1932 this road was known at Colne Road, as leading to the Parish of Earls Colne. Before the Northern Bypass

was built Halstead Road ran uninterrupted through to Eight Ash Green. Opposite King Cole Road still stands a stone depicting Lamb Cross, which was known in 1278 as the new cross of William Launvaley (Lanvalley) one of the ancient boundary marks. William de Lanvalley was Lord of Stanway Manor and founder of the Crouch Friars about 1244.

Heath Road: the road got its name in 1928 as it lead to the former Lexden Heath. Previously it was known at Cross Road but Blaxhill does not explain why this name. The former Blue Diamond pub (now Heath Lodge) served as a refreshment stop for troops stationed in tents on Lexden Heath.

Lexden Road: until 1935 Lexden Road ran from Crouch Street through to Lexden Park House on the corner of Church Lane. From the Church to the top of the hill at Cooks Lane by Lexden House was named Lexden Street. Also at one time the portion from Glen Avenue to the Church was known as Lexden Hill.

The Avenue: this road was laid out about 1860. Its original name was West Terrace Road and on the Parish map it was called Avenue Road. Archibald Wavell, First Earl Wavell was born at number 10 the Avenue on 5th May 1883.

Bernard Polley



Another British Hero

Members may recall from issues 26 and 27 of this magazine, the history of Captain Charles Fryatt who, in command of the Great Eastern Railways ferry ss "Brussels" when under attack from a German submarine on 28th March 1915 attempted to ram it rather than surrender or be torpedoed.

On 22nd June 2013, the *Daily Telegraph* carried a piece reporting, to quote the headline, "Medal for the first U-boat sinking goes on sale."

John William Bell of the ss "Thordis" became the first captain of an unarmed merchant vessel to successfully engage and sink a German submarine on 28 February 1915. Described at the time as a 'reticent hero' he received a number of public accolades, was appointed an honorary Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Reserve, was awarded the D.S.C. by the

King and was widely celebrated in the popular press.

The 501 ton "Thordis" was built in 1904 and had only just been purchased from her former Norwegian owners at the time of the incident. With her complement of 12 hands and cargo of coal bound for Plymouth, she was 8 or 10 miles off Beachy Head at about 9.30 am on



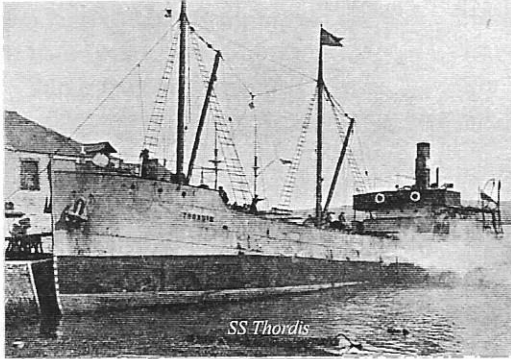
Lt JW Bell

the morning of Sunday 28th February when a periscope was sighted. Bell's later deposition, made to Customs at Weymouth, read:

'... I observed periscope of submarine on starboard bow. I immediately ordered all hands on deck in case of emergency. I then observed submarine pass across our bow and on to our port beam, where it took up a position 30 to 40 yards off. Shortly after this I noticed the wake of torpedo on my starboard beam. I then put my helm hard over to starboard and ran over

periscope, when I and all the crew heard and felt crash under bottom. I did not see submarine after, but saw oil floating on water. I then proceeded on voyage.'

Unknown to Bell, the



German submarine menace had induced the publication "The Siren and Shipping" to offer to the first British merchant captain and crew to sink one a £500 reward – a bounty which had been swelled by further covenants from its readers to £660. This was

presented by Sir Charles Johnston, Lord Mayor of London, at a reception at the Mansion House on 12 April, and there was also a reward of £200 from the Admiralty. The owners of the "Thordis"

presented Bell with an 18 ct. gold hunter-cased stopwatch.

On 2nd July 2013 the medal, the Distinguished Service Cross along with the watch and various related items, such as a vellum scroll from Redcar Urban District Council and

telegrammes were put under the hammer at Messrs Morden and Eden in London. The lot was estimated at £3,000 to £5,000 and in fact achieved £4,500.

Bob Thornhill

A GOOD DAY'S WORK: CREW REWARDED FOR RAMMING A PIRATE.



Colchester Tramways

(continued from last issue)

Sixteen tramcars were supplied by Dick, Kerr and Co, each costing £575, seating 48 passengers, 22 inside and 26 on open-air top deck.

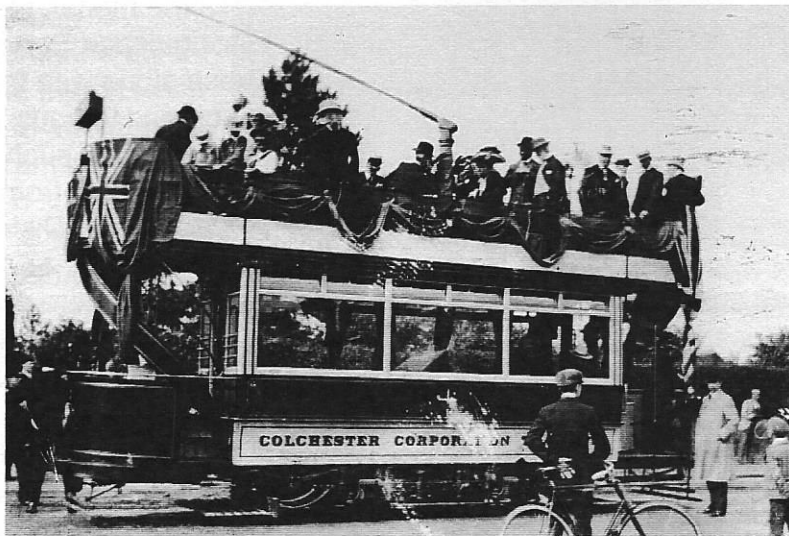
The first three routes were:

1. North Station to Straight Road, Lexden
2. North Station to the bottom of East Hill at the junction with Ipswich Road
3. North Station to Hythe Quay

The tram depot was in Magdalen Street and the shed is still standing today. Mr R C Bullough was General Manager

from 1904 to 1925, then Mr W H Selby took over.

Just before the tramway was ready to open a full report was published in the Essex County Standard: "*The official Board of Trade inspection and the arrangements for the opening of the electric tramways in Colchester this week will bring only one feeling - and that a*



feeling of devout thankfulness and relief to all classes of the Borough.

For many months past the residents have borne patiently and ever cheerfully the disturbance and confusion necessarily attendant on the work of construction, which began back as far as November 1903,

and the news that the work is at last completed, and that the system is in running order has been received with a chorus of satisfaction both on the part of the believers of the tramway and their future, and also by that very considerable section of the populace which view the project at the moment - financially considered - with the eye of doubt, not to say unbelief.

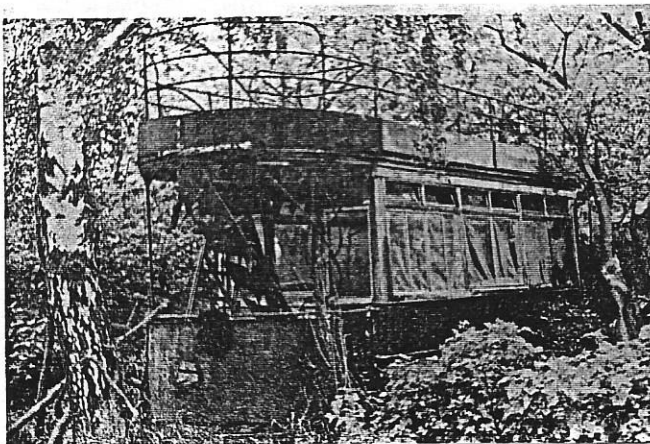
Now that the work is completed, and the tramways are in very being, the great desire of both parties will be to see the system prosper, and in the hour of fervent hope for the future of the system is probably no great inclination to review all the events which have lead up to the fruition of the

councillors were given a trial run on tram number 13, but unfortunately the vehicle broke down with a fault in the electricity supply and the passengers were left stranded for some considerable time. Despite heavy rainfall on Thursday 28th July 1904 a large crowd assembled in the High Street to watch Mayoress, Mrs E H Barritt take the driving position of car 13 as it left the Town Hall for the terminus at Lexden Straight Road. Three other tramcars followed carrying Councillors and local dignitaries. The driver of tram number 13 was Mr A Wilby and the conductor Mr E Grigg. There had been a celebratory luncheon in the Moot Hall hosted by the Mayor,

Councillor Barritt prior to the drive to Lexden.

The trams ran for 25 years until motor busses took over. The old tramcars were sold off for £5 each, but sadly not one survives today.

Bernard Polley.



scheme."

Prior to the official opening of the tramway system, local

Derelict tram No 13 in garden at 188 Harwich Road in 1933

Letters to the editor

Dear Editor,

When I wandered round the graveyard of St Leonard's as a boy, I often wondered what the Vince and Phillips families had done during their lives. Now, thanks to Liz White, I know (Summer Newsletter). One small detail, however, is not quite correct. The meeting which George Vince attended in Colchester in February 1842 would not have discussed the imminent repeal of the Corn Laws which stopped foreign competitors undercutting domestic producers. At that point Robert Peel's policy was to retain the Corn Laws while reducing the duties on foreign imports. Cheaper corn from abroad threatened to reduce the profits of George Vince's mill. Repeal of the Corn Laws came four years later. That would have angered him even more, almost certainly leading him to support the anti-repeal majority in the Conservative Party under Disraeli which broke with Peel. It won one of Colchester's two seats at the 1847 election and triumphed in both of them five years later.

Yours

Alistair Lexden
House of Lords,
Lord Lexden

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

This is the last magazine edited by the indefatigable Jane Thornhill, with additional material by Bob. What a standard she has set.

Taking over from David Cawdell at No 9, Jane has filled 22 fact filled volumes, bursting into glorious colour at No 10, excellent accounts of our talks and special events, more and more stories with a local, heritage or historical background and lots of luscious photos. All from just 12 contributors (so far). Hands up if you have still got No 1? Because if you have, put it in a safe place. One day it will be a collector's item.

A good society needs a magazine. It keeps us informed, makes us feel we belong, and is a permanent record. In our case it is also an expanding archive of Lexden stories, many of which, thanks to Liz White, have not been printed before. When I wrote for No 9, I thought, "I will do a Lexden story each time", but by No 19 I was thinking what more stories are there? Well, thanks to our contributors, we have not run out yet. And I am happy to say No 31 will have a new editor. The magazine it goes on.

So, thank you Jane, for bringing us our magazines and welcome to our new editor. I hope that someone reading this will think, "I could do an article for the magazine about what I remember about Lexden in the 1987 gales (for example). Please do, after all, it will still be read in 150 years time.

Andrew Phillips

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It's goodbye from me and its hello from her!

I should like to welcome our new editor. Sally Langley has volunteered to take over from me, so this is the last issue I am responsible for.

Please send her your articles for our magazine. Her contact details are as follows:

Sally Langley: 07905 445249; lexdensal@yahoo.co.uk

See my editorial about my entry and
selection in the Mervyn Peake Awards



BURNT SAUSAGES AND WINE!

*Can I smell burning?
Do the sausages need turning?
No! Everything is fine.
Have some more wine.
Now its just as I feared
The sausages have disappeared.
The dogs look a bit fatter
But it doesn't really matter.
We can sit in the sunshine
And enjoy some more wine.*

Jane Thornhill