

Lexden History Group



This issue features:

Tales from the Churchyard - Edward McArthur Moir, Indian Forest Service

George Henry Errington's Story Part 2

The "Half House" London Road, Lexden

The Abbey Field War Time Rocket Guns

Photo's from 2015 BBQ & Our Visit to Little Tey



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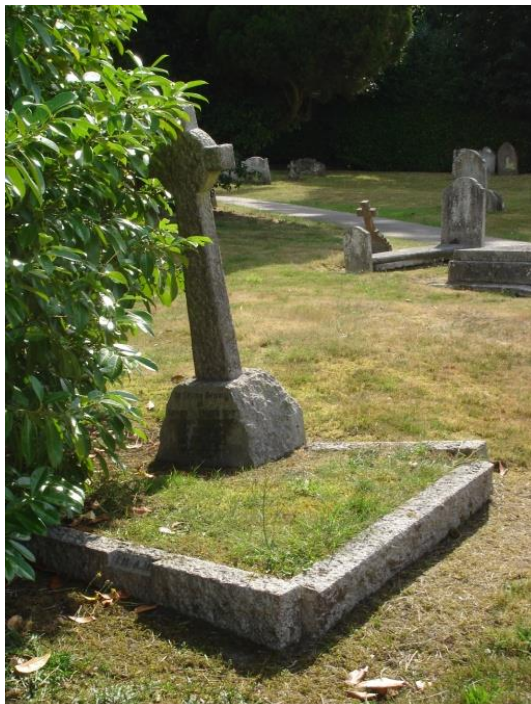
Meetings are held on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 7.45pm in St Leonard's Church Hall, Lexden, except August when there is no meeting.

Entry £1 for members, £3 for non-members, refreshments included.
Annual membership £15 for single person. £20 for a family living at the same address.

Renewal forms are on the Lexden History web site
www.lexdenhistory.org.uk

Photo's from the Group Visit to Lt Tey and 2015 BBQ





Partly obscured by a huge laurel in the corner of the churchyard where Church Lane meets Lexden Road is a large (somewhat crooked!) grave surmounted by a cross recording the life of Edward McArthur Moir. He was born in Dollar, Clackmananshire, Scotland on 6 May 1849, the fourth son of Catherine and John, a landed gentleman. The family lived in Edinburgh and at a meeting there in 1850 the British Association formed a Committee to consider the destruction of tropical forests in India. With so many Scotsmen involved in this project Edward must have been interested from an early age and in 1869 he left to join the Imperial Forest Service, later the Indian Forest Service, at Deoban an area 9,500 ft above sea level. It was 10 miles from Chakrata with a panoramic view of the Himalayan ranges and surrounded by a great variety of flora and fauna and dense forests of deodars (Himalayan cedars), spruce,

rhododendrons, silver fir, oaks and many others. (Deoban 'the garden of the Gods' was the sacred forest of the Gods of Kuluta.)

Much destruction had been wrought (often by the British) in the Indian forests in the preceding centuries but particularly in the 1850s and 60s when wood was in increasing demand for railway sleepers and locomotive fuel. Under the Colonial Government, India was one of the first countries to introduce formal and scientific management of its forests by establishing the Imperial Forest Service in 1862 to manage the various natural resources of the vast country. Three years later in 1865 the Indian Forest Act was passed to distribute the responsibility of forest management among different government agencies and prevent the competing exploitation of government departments, merchants, landlords and peasants. However, together with the 1878 Act, it also limited the traditional use by locals of their own forests and empowered the British government to declare as its own, and control, any forested lands!

Officers appointed to the Imperial Forest Service between 1867 and 1885 were trained in France and Germany. Edward McArthur Moir would have spent some time in Europe training for his job, learning the local languages and taking courses in entomology, botany, forestry, and "book-keeping in reference to Indian Forest Accounts." Officers were allocated "circles" to administer, chiefly to conserve these ruined forests, often in the face of bitter opposition from locals. They managed to survey, describe, demarcate and map the vast trackless forest areas, and protect the valuable trees against fire and destruction by indiscriminate felling, lopping and grazing by men and wild animals. They constructed thousands of miles of forest roads, dividing the forests into compartments and blocks, creating a highly organised forest estate which recorded the rights of villagers to grazing and forest produce and set the markers for future generations of forest officers. "They braved in to the unknown, the unmapped and often untrodden virgin lands, infested with impervious masses of dense vegetation, inhospitable denizens and deadly pestilences. They tamed and subdued the countless difficulties and paved the foundation of the forest organisation in India." They had a "horse or bullock cart for conveyance, a canvas roof in a small clearance, unclean and

Tales from the Churchyard - Edward McArthur Moir , Indian Forest Service - continued

often unhealthy water to drink and the symphony of mosquitoes and other stinging insects during the night, the sizzling sun during the day and sweltering warmth rising from the swampy earth by night." (Role of Pioneer Foresters: Sri D N Misra)

Edward returned to Edinburgh in 1886 to marry Isabella Hardie and the couple returned to the difficult environment at Deoban. Isabella, gave birth to two daughters here, Elizabeth and Hilda, whose births were formally registered at Chakrata in 1887 and 1889.



Edward resigned from the Indian Forest Service in 1898, returning with his family to Broughton in Lincolnshire. In the 1901 Census the entry included a governess for the girls and three servants. By 1905 he had acquired land on Lexden Hill and employed local builder, Robert Beaumont, to build a large family house which he called Deoban (now 171 Lexden Road). Settled in their new house, they employed three servants one of whom, Eliza Cook, had come with them from Lincolnshire. A second also came from Lincolnshire and the third was

a young Lexden girl, Dorothy Munson. Elizabeth was staying with her parents at Deoban prior to her marriage in April 1911 to Capt William Walker Browne, an Army Medical officer. He was also born to British parents in India in 1879. Just before the marriage he was living nearby at 11 The Avenue with a widowed housekeeper to look after him - Anna Guyott, from "Hawksley, Co Essex".

Edward had been elected to the prestigious Royal English Arboricultural Society many years earlier and later became the County Secretary for Essex. In 1906 he became a member of the Essex Field Club and in the spring of 1907 some remains of a straight tusked elephant were discovered at Wrabness and donated to the Essex Field Club. Edward was amongst a group from the Club who examined the site more thoroughly and found bones "in abundance" and came to the conclusion that more than one mammoth had perished there!

In July 1915 their second daughter, Hilda, was married, also at Lexden Church, to Dr James Denniston Macfie and they lived for a while at 21 Fitzwalter Road, Colchester. Their son, Edward Robert Colquhoun Macfie, appeared to live with his grandparents until his death in Brentwood Mental Hospital in October 1937. Edward McArthur Moir died on 4 February 1938 and is buried in Lexden Churchyard, quickly followed by Hilda in September 1938. Isabella then went to live in Farnham, Surrey, where Elizabeth and William had settled after serving abroad for many years. She died there in 1942 aged 88 years.

A FAMILY BUT NO HOME

In the first part of this story I described the early life of George Henry Errington (1803-1883), one of Colchester's leading businessmen in the 19th Century. In 1824 he was living with his father at Casina on Lexden Road, and married Fanny, daughter of John Fletcher Mills, head of Mills bank in High Street. It is not clear where the family lived for the next 20 or more years, as he is described sometimes as living in Lexden, but not with either his father or father-in-law, while Census and directories record him as living over the Bank: mind you, that may not have been so uncommon; James Paxman also lived 'on the job' at his original works, now the site of William & Griffin.

The first reference I have to him living at Lexden Park, Mills' family home, which he inherited through his wife, is in 1860, but he may well have moved in earlier than that. John Fletcher Mills died in 1840 and George Henry Errington senior in 1843, but Mrs Mills lived on at Lexden Park until her death in 1870. Indeed, she outlived her daughter by nine years.

It was during this time that the children grew up. Fanny, the eldest (1825-1852) married Joseph Burnley Hume, son of a firebrand MP, but died after bearing him two children; George Henry (1826-1900) the eldest son, lived at none of the family mansions but established himself at Merry Oak, Southampton (now, ironically, a huge council estate); John Launcelot (1828-1906) took the cloth, married a rich heiress and changed his name to Turbutt to please her family; Margaret (1833-1910) married Frederick Brock, son of a Guernsey Major (also very rich) who had moved to Colchester in the 1820s.

THE BANK

Mills Bank had been established by John Mills (father of J F Mills) in a joint venture with the Twining tea family. After the younger Mills died in 1840, John Bawtree became senior partner, but it is clear that George Errington was the leading light, and in due course the bank took its partners' names which have that delightful resonance of a family enterprise : Mills, Bawtree, Errington, Bawtree & Haddock. The premises were at 3 High Street, which looks to me to be the present site of Barclays Bank.

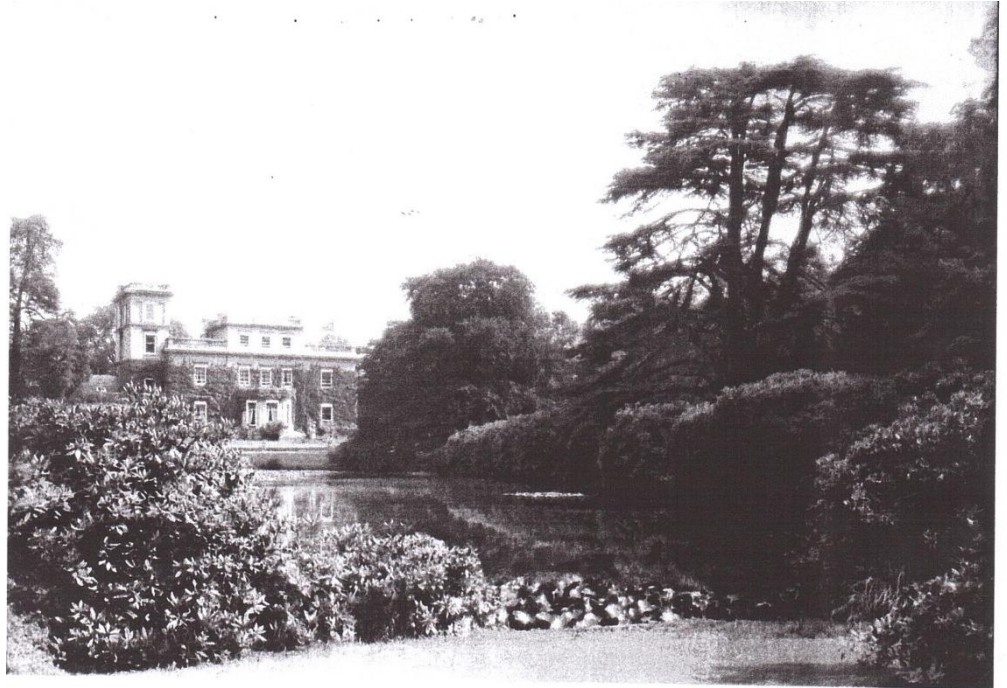
The Bawtree family were pillars of the Liberal community in Colchester, and in due course, as Colchester (as did the rest of the country) split into two political spheres, Tory (Anglican) and Liberal (Nonconformist), Bawtrees Bank became the Liberal bank of Colchester facing Rounds Bank, the Tory equivalent. Each Bank drew on a London bank for support. It was not a vicious competition between the banks, however, despite the shenanigans fought by the politicians and their lawyers. George Brock, the Guernseyman also in Lexden Road, married his son Frederick to Margaret Errington and his daughter Emma to Charles Gray Round.

By the closing years of the century, the bank had branches in Witham, Kelvedon, Clacton, Walton and Hadleigh. It was involved in funding much of the building developments in the town, not to mention big business interests such as Paxmans.

PROPERTY

Many of us will recognise the names of Erringtons' trustees who in due course owned and sold the land for the development of the west side of town, including the road now named after him.

Investment in property was a major part of business life. George Errington was recorded in auction particulars as early as 1845 as the owner of one building plot in West Street, Colchester and three



others close by. In due course the garden of Lexden Park occupied what is now Fitzwalter Road and St Clare Road while the estate expanded to embrace Magazine Farm and further property right up to Maldon Road.

Although he was not lord of Lexden Manor, the 'New Domesday Book of 1873 showed him to own narrowly more property than the actual lord, Philip Papillon. But Errington was lord of the manors of Chadwell St Mary and Biggin in South East Essex, and of Ashbourne in Derbyshire. His Will refers to property in many parts of Essex, Derbyshire and even Hampstead. Many of these would have been passed on to him from his father, as eldest son, and the churches at Chadwell and Ashbourne both contain memorial plaques to him and his benefaction. So, too, are there memorials at Lexden, including those he put up to commemorate his gratitude to senior employees.

FAME AND GLORY

Among many of his posts recorded in contemporary directories are those of Justice of the Peace for both Colchester Borough and Lexden & Winstree (the courts were separate until their merger in 1975), Deputy Lieutenant of the county of Essex and then High Sheriff in 1860 and then the accolade that meant most to him, High Steward of Colchester from 1870.

In 1876 he paid for the new spire at St Nicholas church, which contemporary photos show as extraordinarily narrow and high : no coincidence, as the story goes that this was deliberately done to make the church spire the highest in the town to beat that of Lion Walk Congregational Church in the centre of town. It was this gesture that occasioned a speech containing gems of Victorian prose: "Not from pride or over-abundance, or from vain glory", he said, "but from thankfulness of heart to Almighty

God for the main object of my life and exertions, having been permitted to be successfully accomplished, was this done by me".

He established a tradition of inviting the public to the Park for exhibitions, galas, agricultural shows and the like and it was a popular place for townspeople to enjoy on these occasions. In gratitude and celebration, the Borough corporation commissioned a life-size portrait of him that they presented to him in 1880, and he responded by presenting it to them to hang in the Moot Hall. It is interesting that in his obituary in the local paper, he should have been described not only as a skilful and reliable business adviser but also as "somewhat shy and retiring, and consequently of a nervous temperament"!

DEATH AND FUNERAL

He died on 8 March 1883 and two days later the Essex Standard carried a full spread recording his life and a detailed account of his final hours and heart attack. A week later they reported his funeral in a similar spread, describing the "widespread grief" of the population (perhaps increased all the more a few years later). The family indicated that there should be a quiet funeral that he himself had indicated he wished for, but the populace, in carriages and on foot wended their way to "the picturesque



little village of Lexden to pay a tribute of respect to one who had been so long and honourably known, and so universally venerated".

Blinds were drawn, flags at half past, solemn peals from the churches rang as a procession of councillors, led by Town Sergeant Rampling carrying the Borough Mace draped in black, walked slowly from the Town Hall to Lexden church, followed by family and employees (ranging from the bank manager Mr Bright Wool to servants and workmen), and then all the local gentry, whose names were all faithfully recorded by the newspaper. The Standard also recorded the gracious conduct of George Errington, the eldest son, in declaring that the Agricultural show, scheduled to take place the following weekend at Lexden Park, would still be held there.

AFTERMATH

Mr Errington's death was a shock to the community, and the Bank had to bring in two partners of Curzons, the London underwriter bank, to replace him. The bank was, in fact, in trouble, and in 1890 the Essex Review carried the news of the "profound sensation" of its collapse. Rounds Bank and Curzons rallied to the rescue and the loss

to customers was much smaller than feared, but this was yet another bank failure and in due course many small local banks were taken over by bigger fish and in a very chaotic pool.

George, the eldest, played little part in sorting out the mess in the family's finances as he had already established himself in Southampton (his eldest son, also George, became an indigo planter in Africa). That job fell on my great-great-grandmother Margaret Brock, to whom her father had in fact left all the residue of his estate. Lexden Park went up for auction in 1889. Much of the estate was sold, and we have seen the development that followed. The auction particulars describe the extent of the land, the owner's follies (a Swiss chalet, mystery walks in the park, imported plants and trees) but the house and its immediate surroundings failed to reach the reserve price and was rented instead to the town's extremely rich MP, Weetman Dickinson Pearson, later 1st Viscount Cowdray.

At least the portrait remains in the Moot Hall. So, too, do many photographs taken by Catherine Brock of the house and its inhabitants. And Lexden History Group's archives include photos of a more recent gala at Lexden Park.

Chris Graves (with thanks to Andrew Phillips and Bernard Polley)

"The Half House", London Road, Lexden**Velma Bryant**

I lived at 49 London Road, Lexden, from about the age of three until I married in 1954. It was a very nice double fronted detached house owned by the Co-op. My father worked for the Co-op at that time.

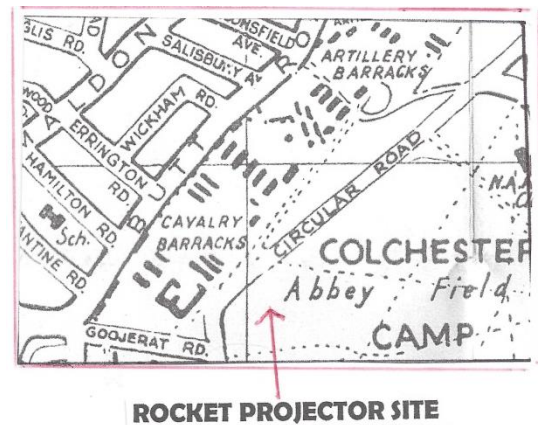


The house (now next to Countrystyle Interiors) is located almost opposite Nelson Road, but as the Co-operative Society wanted to enlarge their "yard" for delivery purposes, half of our house was knocked down. The rooms were, in fact, rebuilt at the back of the property after the war. I lovingly call it "The Half House" and have many happy memories. As there was a large unused cellar we were not entitled to an indoor shelter and during air raids, therefore, my mother, two brothers and I had to make our way across to the Air Raid shelter in Dr Cooke's garden at the corner of Straight Road and London Road.

The Lexden Parish Room was located at the corner of Nelson Road and London Road and I held my wedding party there – a long time ago.

The picture (above) shows me with my parents, Les and May Brown, and my two younger brothers, Doug and Graham.

In 1943 after leaving school I commenced a course at an Engineering college in London. I joined the Home Guard as Private Page (not Private Pike!) on the rocket projector site situated on Colchester Abbey Field in front of the Cavalry Barracks. Most of the men in the Home Guard were much older than me, although there were a few youngsters of my age in the group. In September 1942 in order to add to the East Coast defence system, a series of these rocket projectors were operated by the local Home Guard, ready to fire at enemy aircraft.



There were 48 projectors set out in a square formation, each able to fire two rockets. The rockets were approximately 5 foot in length with a 3 inch diameter. The head held a brass cap with a calibrated timing device, and with the explosive mixture in the body of the rocket. Each projector was manned by two men.

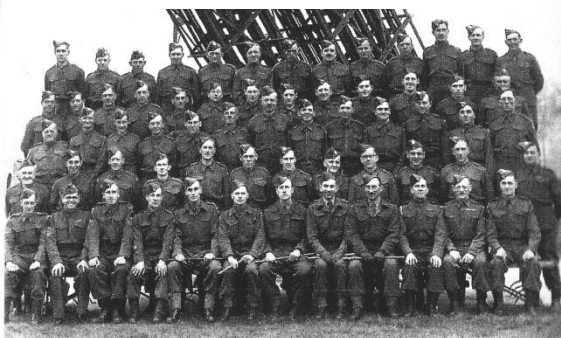


Cavalry Barracks, Colchester

The underground bunker on Abbey Field was usually manned by three Home Guards with always a regular Army Officer

in charge, operating to instructions received by telephone from a control post nearer to the coast – this was probably the radar station at Great Bromley. When enemy aircraft were approaching instructions about the height and bearing was passed to the bunker operators, they in turn worked out the necessary angle of elevation and bearing for the 48 projectors to be prepared to fire when the officer gave the command.

Home Guard 1942



My job was in the bunker making the essential calculations. When it was my turn for duty I cycled from home to Cavalry Barracks, which was used as a centre for mustering, with a mess room and sleeping quarters. We had to report for night-time duty every eighth day working 7.00pm until 7.00am next morning, before being released to return to our normal daytime job – in my case I commuted each day to my London college – little sleep for this 18 year old! Then most Sunday mornings it was back

to Abbey Field for training. When one considers there were eight separate 'relief groups', one hundred each night on duty, it meant that there were 800 individual Home Guards involved each week on the Ack-Ack rocket site - quite a large operation.

I particularly remember three specific occasions about my days with the Home Guard. The first was an officer in charge who had a rather loud bass voice and had to ask permission to fire, ready to give this instruction to the rocket launchers.

On one occasion when his loud voice asked 'Can I have permission to **FIRE?**' this was taken mistaken by the rocket crew and most of the 48 rockets were set off! The second happened a week later when we reported for duty and there was a rumour that

an enemy plane which we had fired at turned out to be one of our own. So if this was the case then it was just as well we misfired! At this time the officer in charge of my unit was Captain H O Cousins, of Cooper, Cousins, accountants in West Stockwell Street. The third was being taken in an army lorry with several other men one Sunday morning to Dovercourt to practice firing guns into the sea - this was conducted from Warner's Holiday Camp which had been requisitioned by the military authorities during the war.

Warner's Holiday Camp 1940, Engineers from Harwich Garrison erect high protective fencing



Each night in our underground bunker there was an officer of the regular army in charge: one night in 1944 a young lady ATS lieutenant was in charge. Coming over our area that night was a considerable number of enemy planes which suddenly disappeared from the radar screen. As we thought these enemy planes could not possibly have been suddenly shot down, we asked the young lieutenant for the reason for this. Her answer was 'Don't you know?' It went through my mind at the time, 'I'm only a Home Guard Private who attends here every eight nights, how should I know!' Our lady lieutenant seemed to be very concerned that we did not know what was happening that night. With that the officer went to the safe in our bunker and removed two *Top Secret* manuals, 'V1 and V2' which gave all the details and specifications of the enemy weapons. That night was the first time the V1 had been fired into the UK so that's why the aircraft disappeared from the radar screen. After the All Clear was sounded this young lieutenant explained to us she had, with a colleague, just recently returned from a secret mission to France, at great personal danger to herself, to find out about the new Nazi weapon - the V1 flying bomb (doodlebug) and the V2 rocket. She warned us that the V2 when it started would be a greater problem as there was no recognised defence against it. It is interesting to record it was several months later that the V2 was first fired on to this country.

I did notice at the time that our lieutenant had on the shoulder of her uniform the letters 'SOE' but at the time I didn't know it meant 'Special Operations Executive' which was a World War 2 organisation to conduct espionage, sabotage and reconnaissance in occupied Europe. In retrospect it does seem to confirm that what this officer told us about her previous activities in wartime Europe was correct and quite incredible.

Sometimes leaving the Abbey Field after the all-night shift and travelling by train to London I came under the receiving end of a V1 bomb flying over and then the engine stopped. Hastily we all dived under our desks. The V1 came down at the other end of our street (Southampton Row) and caused considerable damage and casualties.

The first V1 bomb to fall in Colchester was one morning in June 1944 landing on farm land by the Baker's Lane railway bridge, there were no casualties just damage to some fruit trees and a few broken windows at West House Farm.

My days as a member of the Home Guard terminated in November 1944 when the order to 'Stand Down' came and we were able to return to our full-time civilian duties - in my case back to college in London

Wednesday 12th October

Dr Casale - The History of Essex County Hospital

Wednesday 11th November

**Steve Whiteman - The History of Lexden Parish
Players 1974 - 2004**

Friday 11th December

**Christmas Party - Entertainment by David
Chadwick**

Tickets will be available from our October meeting



**Group Vice-Chairman Tim
Holding at the BBQ Grill**



"Peter McCarthy I Presume"