

Lexden History Group



Avenue of Remembrance 1933

- **WW2 DEFENCES AROUND COLCHESTER**
- **PLAQUE STORIES FROM THE AVENUE OF REMEMBRANCE - PREVIOUS OWNERS OF ST MARY'S SCHOOL FOR GIRLS**
 - **JOHN VINE COLCHESTER ARTIST 1808-1867**
 - **MORE ABOUT PRETTYGATE**

Newsletter No 48 – March 2018
Website www.lexdenhistory.org.uk

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.

It is now almost eighty years since the commencement of the Second World War in September 1939 but there is still evidence of some local defences scattered around the town and district albeit most of them in a derelict state.

In June 1940 following the immediate aftermath of the Dunkirk evacuation, Britain was in imminent danger of possibly invasion by the German army waiting to attack the southeast coast of England. The Chiefs of Staff planned a strategy based on a series of defence lines between the coast and running up through the centre of Britain. One of these, known as Eastern Command Stop Line, ran from the mouth of the River Colne between Brightlingsea and East Mersea following the line of the river as far as Chappel before heading north up through Suffolk and Norfolk to Kings Lynn. Along the Stop Line a series of pillboxes were built, several of which can be seen in Colchester.



These hexagonal structures were built in several versions. Those used mainly in our area were FW3/22 type - hexagonal in style, made of concrete, brick or a mixture of the two, with reinforced iron rods 15 inches thick, and a roof 6 inches thick. The entrance was on one side with built-in wall protection. Loopholes on each

side gave good fields of fire and protection from enemy bullets.

Five pillboxes can be found in Lexden:

1. on an open field opposite West House Farm,
2. half-buried in a hedge on Bakers Lane,
3. on the north side of the Avenue of Remembrance, 50 yards west of Glen Avenue, well covered with growth,
4. on Hilly Fields, west of Sussex Road,
5. in the grounds of Colchester High School for Girls, west of the footpath from Park Road to Ireton Road (*see picture above*).

Other WW2 artefacts in Colchester include anti-tank iron stake obstacles (*right*) standing on the west side of the River Colne bridge in Spring Lane. They were cut from steel girders and set in concrete about two feet apart, their purpose to defer enemy tanks from crossing the river.

Moving on to High Street: stand in front of the Town Hall and look up to the large building opposite on the corner of Pelham's Lane - once Burton's, now the Metro Bank. The wall on the roof was greatly reinforced for snipers to hide behind so if the Town Hall was attacked by the enemy, the hidden snipers would spring into action and fire on the intruders.



Overlooking the river by the Middle Mill bridge in the lower Castle Park an anti-tank barrier was built, consisting of large concrete blocks embedded into the river bank and linked with heavy chains which hopefully would deter enemy tanks from attempting to cross the river.

WW2 DEFENCES AROUND COLCHESTER - continued

There is a substantial 5ft high wall in front of East Bay House. This concrete embattled wall was built in 1941, disguised behind wooden palings as part of the town defences in case of an enemy attack. Home Guard volunteers were stationed behind the wall ready to set off explosives under East Bridge if enemy troops attempted to cross the River Colne at this point.



The Colchester Brewing Company dates from 1828 when Robert Hurnard (father of James Hurnard of Hill House Lexden) with Christopher Stopes opened their brewery on East Hill. In 1877 Stopes sold out to the Norfolk and Suffolk Brewing Company who owned other breweries in East Anglia. The name of the company was now Colchester Brewing Company Ltd in the rebuilt brewery known as the 'East Hill Brewery'. A foundation stone was laid on the front wall. During the war the name 'Colchester' was removed from the stone so any enemy invaders would not know what town they were in!

By September 1939, most homes in Colchester had some kind of air raid shelter, either government issued Anderson, or privately built. One of these still rests in a garden in Heath Road. It is half above ground and half under, solidly built of concrete blocks with seven steps down under a lift-up wooden cover. Inside the shelter, which is damp-free, there was room for several bunks with an area which could be used to light a fire with a funnel above as a ventilator.



On 28th September 1942 a Dornier plane swept low to drop four 250kg bombs on the Chapel Street area of the town, shattering homes in South Street and Essex Street. Eight people were killed and 28 admitted to the Essex County Hospital, as well as 30 minor casualties dealt with at the First Aid Post. In September 2017 a memorial stone was unveiled on Southway to commemorate that air raid three quarters of a century ago.

The plaque on the stone reads:
'Unveiled on the 75th anniversary
28 September 2017 by Dennis
Marchant who was born 2 weeks

after his mother was dug from the ruins of a bombed house. Memorial donated by the Hunnaball Family Funeral Group. Organised by High Steward Sir Bob Russell".

All these old pillboxes, anti-tank devices, memorial stones and memories of the 1939-45 conflict must be preserved - they are part of our heritage.

PLAQUE STORIES FROM THE AVENUE OF REMEMBRANCE - PREVIOUS OWNERS OF ST MARY'S SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

St Mary's School for Girls (*right*) in Lexden Road is well known to people of Colchester but do they know who lived there before it became a school? It was originally known as the "Casina" and there are deeds in the Essex Record Office dating from 1849-56 which give details of the building and an adjacent cottage. They also contain schedules of fittings.



The first prominent man to live in the Casina was John Stuck Barnes. He was one of eight children of John and Hannah and was baptised at St Leonard's Church, Hythe, on 29th June 1806. He was articled in June 1828 to William Wallis Francis and started his career as a solicitor. In 1841 when his parents were living in Greenstead Road, he was in North Hill with his wife, Esther, and Esther Hannah Irving age 8, who was his niece, the daughter of a Wholesale Grocer. She remained with them until her death in 1879. John and Esther were childless and perhaps she was a substitute daughter for them. John was on the register of electors in 1842, qualifying by owning four freehold cottages on the road to Wivenhoe and on 19th November 1843 he was voted on the Council of the Metropolitan and Provincial Legal Association at their first Annual General Meeting in Blackfriars.

In 1851 John and Esther were still living in North Hill but probably moved to the Casina in 1856 where they lived for the rest of their lives. By this time John was a Clerk of the Peace for the Borough, a position he held for many years, and was also Registrar of the County Court. He owned a considerable amount of land in Colchester and elsewhere, with voting rights in Stratford and Sudbury amongst others.



When he retired in April 1866 a banquet of a "substantial cold collation", provided by the landlord of the Cross Keys, was held for 300 people in the Public Hall and he was presented with a "handsome and costly silver epergne". The base of the epergne, which incorporated the Colchester Arms, was surmounted by three female figures representing Prosperity, Industry and Justice and from the centre of the pedestal "gracefully rises the vine with five elaborate candelabra, cut glass dishes for fruit and flowers and a large centre dish above". The reports in the local newspapers continue that it weighed between 200 and 300 ounces and cost £140. The inscription records that it was presented by 417 Liberals in appreciation of his "long and honourable political career". The question which begs to be asked is – where is it now?

When John "contracted a chill, resulting in bronchitis" and died on 21st February 1887 the Essex Standard recorded "with much regret the death of one of Colchester's oldest,

most prominent, and most respected inhabitants". He is buried at St Leonard's at Hythe, the church where he was christened 81 years earlier. His estate amounted to nearly £44,000. He had funded the west window (*above*) in the north aisle of St Leonard's in memory of his parents, John and Hannah and he is also recorded on it.

After Esther's death in 1890 the Casina was bought by Henry Sidney Goody who moved there after extensive renovations had been carried out by E F Bisshopp, who had premises in Lower Brook Street, Ipswich and was a diocesan surveyor for Norwich. He also designed many buildings throughout Suffolk. The house was renamed Glen Mervyn after Henry's son, Mervyn Henry, born in 1885.

Henry Sidney Goody had been born in Colchester on 27th July 1833 one of seven children and the eldest son of Henry and Sophia. He was baptised at Lion Walk Independent Meeting House and his father's occupation was given as Scrivener. The family lived in St John's Street and Henry Goody Senior joined Smythie solicitors in 1844 which then became Smythie Goody. He was also recorded in White's Directory of 1848 as a Solicitor and Registrar of Marriages. In 1851 the family was living in Queen Street and Henry Junior, then aged 17, was an articled clerk. He married Esther Griffin in 1857 and by 1861 he was a solicitor and they were living with their young daughter, Florence, at 62 Crouch Street.



Ten years later they were living at 1 Lexden Road with four children and in 1879 Henry Goody Junior joined his father's solicitors and their title became Smythie Goody & Son. The family had moved to Eastwell House in Lexden Road (between West Lodge Road and The Avenue – now flats) where Esther died on 16th October 1881. Henry was married again in 1883 to Mary Elizabeth Humphrey in Newton Abbot, Devon, and they returned to Eastwell House where they had three children. They remained there for some years until they bought the Casina.

Henry was Mayor of Colchester twice in 1893-4 and 1905-6. During his first mayoralty he presided over the opening of the new Public Library and Reading Room in West Stockwell Street, on Thursday 25th October 1894. The procession had started at 12 noon with many prominent people including the Lord High Chancellor of England, Farrer Herschell 1st Baron Herschell, and the Lord Mayor of London, Sir George Tyler, who performed the opening ceremony. They then returned to attend the Annual Oyster Feast in the Moot Hall. By 1911 Henry had been widowed again when Mary died on 21st January 1911 at a Nursing Home in Cavendish Square, London, but he remained at Glen Mervyn with his son, Mervyn, now also a solicitor, and two daughters, Muriel and Dorothy. Muriel was married later that year to Percy Claude Nicholson.

All his four sons, Sidney, Roland, Neville who lived at 38 Beaconsfield Avenue, and Mervyn had followed their father's profession. His daughter, Emma Louise, born in 1871, was a keen artist and a member of Ipswich Art Club. She had worked as a Solicitor's clerk, possibly with her father and then lived in Clacton with her sister, Florence, who was

PREVIOUS OWNERS OF ST MARY'S SCHOOL FOR GIRLS – continued

married to Henry Wetherhead, a Barclays Bank manager. Florence married Richard Alliot, a surgeon, in Colchester in 1902 and later moved to Ramsgate in Kent. She died at Southend-on-Sea, Essex, in 1965.

Henry Goody, as well as being a solicitor, led a busy public life. He was elected as a Liberal Councillor in 1875 but when he was appointed Registrar and Deputy Judge in Bankruptcy in 1883 he was forced to retire until a change in the Corporation Act enabled him to return to the Council in 1892. He was also Registrar of Colchester County Court, a Justice of the Peace, a Freeman of the Borough and a trustee of the Freeman's Fund.

Henry Sidney Goody died on 1st August 1911 at Glen Mervyn after a fortnight's illness. In September that year his Honour Judge Tindal Atkinson felt could not commence the duties of the court until he had paid tribute to Henry Goody. He had personally known him for a great many years and "it was a feeling of deep sorrow that that he would see his face no more and would miss his great assistance".

In 1923 Glen Mervyn became St Mary's School for Girls.

John Vine Colchester Artist 1808-1867

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Trish Terry



John Vine was born in 1808 to a Bury St Edmund's shoemaker and his wife. He was born with malformed arms and only a few fingers but despite this tremendous handicap became a successful artist. The condition was a rare inherited genetic disorder, now known as Thrombocytopenia Absent Radius Syndrome. He was evidently paraded before the public to earn money for his parents.

There is an advertisement from the Bury and Norwich Post which reads *"John Vine a child about 11 months old, born with imperfect arms and hands, the two arms are differently formed, one being longer than the other, and one arm has two joints, while the other has only one. This child has one finger and thumb on the right hand and only one finger on the left. Thus being deprived of the means of future support the parents submit (though with considerable reluctance) to a PUBLIC EXHIBITION, solely for the future benefit of the CHILD. To be seen at Mr. Frost's baker, Abbeygate Street, Bury. Ladies and Gentlemen what they please. Tradesmen & Etc, one shilling. Working People and Children 6d each. N.B. The parents may wait on any gentleman or lady at their own house, if required."*

He was exhibited at fairs from about 1820 for eleven years. It is possible that he produced drawings at these fairs and shows to entertain customers for there is a print titled "Master Vine" showing a young child holding a sketch indicating that his fairground act apart from his physical disabilities he also had a precocious artistic talent.

The family moved to Colchester in 1828 possibly at John's instigation, and lived in a house with four acres of market garden off Maldon Lane (now Maldon Road). A retired Essex farmer, Hugh Scantlebury, a great admirer of John's work, wrote the book: 'John Vine of Colchester: An account of the Life and Times of an Essex Livestock Painter' which gives many interesting details.

John worked initially as a water colourist, picking up commissions to paint anything, including portraits, but later travelled the country as a horse and fat stock painter, picking up numerous commissions from important agriculturists or from the owners of prize-winning livestock. He kept small sketchbooks and would draw his subjects in pencil, indicating colour with different shading, later producing an oil painting with a suitable background. He had no formal training, learning from experience and other artists, but 19th Century books refer to him as the "naïve painter of farm animals".

In the late 1830s he painted a pointer, Rock, for Osgood Hanbury of Coggeshall who was a Lombard Street banker and "a prominent backer of William Wilberforce in the great fight to abolish slavery that was finally realised in 1834". Although John was considered a naive painter, his animal portraits are full of character and charm. A letter from the Duke of Marlborough expresses his "great surprise at the production of such an excellent picture by one labouring under such disadvantages".

In May 1842 he drew the huge fire in Colchester High Street which destroyed St Peter's Vicarage, and showed lines of people trying to keep the pumps supplied with buckets of water. The Albert Hall (now the Co-operative Bank) was built in its place.

In 1847 John Vine married Sarah Ann Surrey, at Lion Walk Independent Church. She was the daughter of a mariner from Magdalen Street and they built a bungalow to replace the caravan on his father's land in Maldon Road, where he had been brought up. His father, now a widower, and his sister, Louise, lived there with them.



In the mid-19th century there was a great interest in agricultural shows when local squires, Lords and ordinary farmers entered many different classes in the hope of winning which could make them much money. English livestock was in demand the world over and William Fisher Hobbs of Marks Hall, Coggeshall, was exporting his Essex pigs to America and at the Royal Show at Chelmsford in 1856 the winning animal of the Ayrshire all-class was exported to Australia!

This was a time of great experimentation and the aim was to breed the largest animal in the shortest possible time on the least amount of food. Perhaps the real aim was to impress their friends and clients! The animals could be so fat that pigs could not stand and cows could weigh a remarkable 2,800 lbs. Their owners commissioned artists to paint the animals and some artists could earn huge

amounts. Many painters toured the shows, helped by the introduction of railways in the 1840s which enabled them to visit many more agricultural shows. John Vine painted at the Royal Agricultural Society summer shows in Salisbury, Chester, Leeds and Newcastle. He also painted the animals of men such as Lord Western of Felix Hall, Kelvedon, and William Fisher Hobbs, Marks Hall, both famous for their breeding ventures.

After attending the 1862 Royal Show at Battersea Park John returned to Colchester with orders for 20 pictures and made over £60. Perfectionists would agree that he was a hardworking man with great talent but that his perspective was poor. Others say that the animals' heads are smaller than in real life and their legs appear very thin, but this would also emphasise the size and strength of their bodies and the ability to produce large quantities of meat and fat. However, this was the style of the period and most similar artists of the time painted animals in the same way.

John Vine died in March 1867 during a very cold spell and after a short illness, "congestion of the lungs". He was buried in Colchester Cemetery with no headstone. In 1913 his grave was reopened to add the body of a widow. It would seem his family had not bought exclusive rights to the plot and when the cemetery needed space for new burials this was a practical option. The writer, Hugh Scantlebury, was surprised that the sole rights were not secured but observes that Sarah also chose the cheapest burial for John and spent the last twenty years of her life in an almshouse. John had always been a shrewd man financially and would have been comfortably off but Hugh Scantlebury suggests that Sarah "was freer in her spending habits and had exhausted her late husband's money in the first fifteen years of her widowhood". Later someone complained that Mrs Vine put on airs above her station during her marriage.

John quickly faded into obscurity and his obituary in the local paper was only one large paragraph. In 1931, Sir William Gurney Benham, a local writer, publisher and historian and three times mayor, printed a piece on John Vine in the local paper with the headline, "A Remarkable Armless Artist." It led to an exhibition the following year in the Albert Hall and many owners of his paintings wrote to the paper, one lady saying that she had fourteen of his works commissioned by her forebears. A man also remembered that as a boy he and his friends used to throw darts at the pictures which were then put on a bonfire. In 1950 Colchester Borough Council acquired four Vine watercolours in 1932 and sold them in 1950 for 10s 6d each. In 2013 one of his paintings, that of a colt (*right*), was bought from a private collection in North Carolina by the Victor Batte-Lay Foundation at the Minories and in 2014 a painting of six prize Berkshire pigs was sold at Bonhams for £17,500.



After an unpromising start John Vine's pictures now sell for thousands of pounds but it is rather sad that, despite his success and 37 years living in Colchester, few pictures are on display and the town knows little about him.

History may be about the past but it is not static because there is always more to find out. My articles about the development of Shrub End and Prettygate in three LHG Newsletters of 2017, were inspired by my memories of growing up there from the late 1940s to the 1960s. It was augmented by a few photographs from my childhood and some more I got from the resident at 35 All Saints Avenue in around 2005.

However as soon as I started writing it, my curiosity was awakened and I found more information, mainly from looking on-line. When I had finished, as I thought, I kept on finding more information, although when Liz White, as a postscript to the last part added "perhaps we can persuade him to write to us again" I initially thought, "I don't know any more". I asked a few different questions on-line including one about the war memorial at All Saint's Church, Shrub End, and out came quite a lot of extra stuff, all "filed" in the wrong part of the internet. Sometimes it helps to go off at a tangent and not to be too disciplined or methodical. I now live in Canterbury so all my research has been on-line other than one short visit in 2017. That was for the memorial service for my late mother to whom I would like to dedicate these articles. We put her ashes in my father's grave at All Saints, so I will always have a local connection.

This article is therefore an addendum to the previous one, adding and correcting a few facts and giving some on-line references that might inform readers.



After I had written the first part with a plea for the 1939 picture of Plume Farm (*left*) that I knew existed, Bernard Polley turned it up and I include it here. It seems to be the same picture because the farmhouse has the newly laid concrete kerbs of Plume Avenue in front of it and probably what was then a new bungalow, as I had mentioned in my text, just visible on the right. From the look of it, a 17th century date, as the

1939 report said, appears to be right. Liz White has given me a copy of the 1820 Lexden Inclosure (sic) boundary document which refers to "lands belonging to Edmund Plume" sited along the "road leading from Colchester to Maldon" which would appear to be north east of Plume Farm. He was a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons and presumably the farm was named after his family.

Bernard also produced the photo (*right*) of the Plume Farm pond which I had mentioned, with a simple weatherboard cottage to the left in Pond Chase. I wondered in the previous article if Pond Chase had, before the middle of the nineteenth century, been the only access to King Harold Road. Having looked in more detail, I am more certain about that and feel it was changed after Lexden Heath was enclosed around 1820 - maybe I will write further about that?



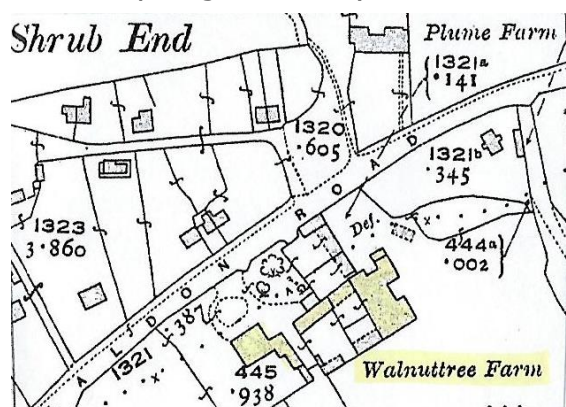
In All Saints Avenue there was a mixture of private and council houses, the latter type formed 31% of the total which is about the same as the current 30% target level for "affordable homes" within a housing scheme. I contacted the Hills Builders Group, the

successors to W A Hills & Son, who developed All Saints Avenue and much of Prettygate, hoping to get more information about it but they say they have not retained history of the 1940s to 1960s.

Behind No 5 All Saints Avenue the 1952 OS map records the finding of a bronze spearhead in 1934, possibly when building work had started as that is a pre-war house. It does not show on other maps so I wonder if it is true? Finding maps from 1777 and 1805 and then 1877 onwards was a great source of discovery. To see them look at <https://www.old-maps.co.uk> and even more usefully <https://maps.nls.uk/> - the National Library of Scotland and their sequence of maps includes the Lexden side of Colchester. Just typing in the main name gets a UK map showing, then you zoom in to Colchester, and even with my inadequate computer skills, they can be found and printed.

Bernard Polley had not found any information about Squirrels Farm shown on the 1777 Chapman & Andrews map, at what he estimates to be 83-91 Prettygate Road and in spite of various searches, I have found nothing either. The plot with a building on it appears on the 1877 and 1888 OS maps but by the 1924 one, it is just shown as an empty plot which is still indicated on the 1958 map.

I include another Prettygate Farm picture, this time just featuring the gate itself (*right*), which appears to be from the Essex County Standard in the 1950's and bears the inscription "can you spot all the implements with which the gate is constructed". An earlier name for it was Cooper's Farm, corroborated by British History on Line (BHOL) and a post on-line under "Roots Chat" in 2007 by a member of the Springett family, whose relatives lived at the farm in the time of his grandmother's (born 1893) father says it was called Cooper's Farm in 1665 and BHOL dates it as 1655. Colchester Heritage Explorer (CHE) says it was "a 17th century house, possibly earlier in origin". The Roots Chat on-line in 2007 says that Springett is a long-standing family name in Rowhedge and that a Springett family live in Shrub End Road.



Map showing Plum Farm and Walnut Tree Farm

There are two Springett families in that road and three others within the town. The Essex Record Office (ERO) has building plans of a cart shed dated 1925, drawn by Mr W Blake, who we know bought the farm in 1923. Strangely although he was the farmer, he is described as "architect and builder". Maybe he just gave himself that status on the strength of those plans but I wonder if he designed anything else? It could be the building seen shown on the right of the picture in my first instalment (March 2017).

If any reader has access to the ERO, it would be interesting to see that item and the many other local ones they have. The CHE (MCC1742) includes research into Prettygate Dyke, inter alia, which records excavations in 1956 by C F C Hawkes near Bluebottle Grove being halted "by a Prettygate farmer 'bearing down on us on the spot' ". My childhood recollections of William Blake would seem to bear out that sort of action!

The first part of my article noted that the south west part of Prettygate Road was

described on maps, of 1877 and 1923 as "Roman Road" (or way). This is, however, contentious as what was nearby and parallel was the Heath Farm Dyke. There is later detailed contrary research, as I speculated, and that will be in a dedicated article in a future newsletter.

Bernard Polley, again and the Shrub End Vicar, Rev Fr Nicholas Davis, have produced pictures of Walnut Tree Farm (*right*) one of which I include. Further reading, from the extensive Folkard family history on-line, shows that William Folkard owned Walnut Tree and two other farms in Shrub End until his death in 1930. Then it was still in the parish of Stanway, being transferred to Colchester in 1934. His son, also William, is commemorated on the war memorial at All Saints Church. His daughter Naomi inherited his fortune and lived at the farmhouse until 1945 when it was bought by Colchester Borough Council and made into a care home but sadly demolished about nine years later, after the housing estate had been commenced. That must have been the time I looked round it, aged eight, just before its demise. A purpose built care home, Walnut Tree House was then built, which is there today.



I hope readers have enjoyed these extras and I can recommend internet research.

HELP - DO YOU REMEMBER CORONATION DAY 1953?



We are compiling a "Coronation Special" Newsletter for June 2018 which we hope to fill with reminiscences from members of Lexden History Group. What were you doing on this special day, 2nd June 1953. Did you go up to London to see the celebrations; do you still have tickets for a special event; did you attend a street party; did you plant a tree; were you lucky enough to watch the proceedings on television? It doesn't matter where you were and not all of us were in Colchester then and it is the memories that are important. Equally fascinating would be any memories you may have of the death of King George VI in February 1952. Please give your memories to a member of the committee or ask Liz to come and take them down for you. Any photographs of the time would help illustrate the Newsletter, or if you have any commemorative items

that could be photographed that would also help. Don't forget, Liz will come and take your memories down if you cannot or would prefer not write them down.



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FORTHCOMING EVENTS/SPEAKERS

Wednesday 11th April 2018

David Webb 'My Life in Show Business'

Wednesday 9th May 2018

AGM

Eve Regelous 'The History of Harrods'

Wednesday 13th June 2018

Andy Schooler 'History of Tea'

**Melford Hall (A National Trust property),
Long Melford, Sudbury**

A visit to Melford Hall will be organised for **Thursday 12th July, 2018**. Melford Hall has had its fair share of trials and tribulations from being ransacked during the Civil War to being devastated by fire in 1942.

A guided tour will also be arranged.