

Lexden History Group

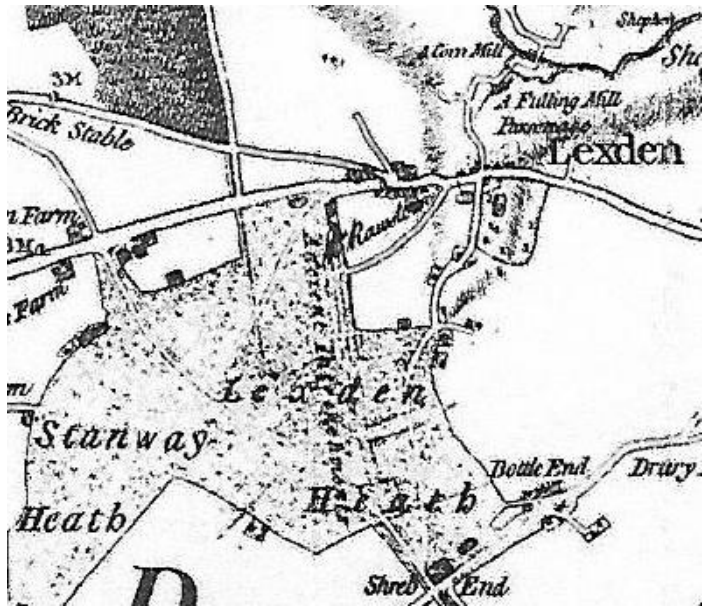
London Road, Lexden 1938 Flood. Shops from left, Penney's Chemist, Humm's Garage, Co-op. It is thought the Rolls Royce belonged to Cyril Page, Solicitor, who lived in Chitts Hill. It was light blue in colour.



- **Straight Road Lexden, Past and Present**
 - **Colchester Antique Collectors Club**
- **Tales from the Graveyard – Mr John Harper BA**
 - **Life in the 1500's**
 - **LHG Newsletter is of Global Interest**

Newsletter No 56 – March 2020

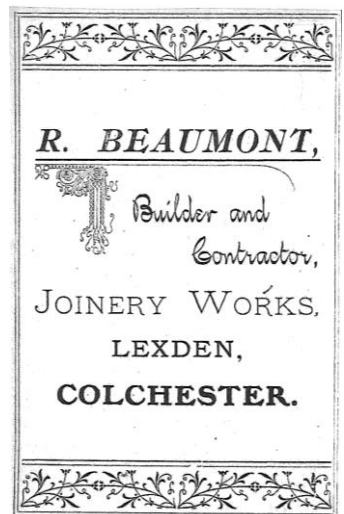
Website www.lexdenhistory.org.uk



The Chapman & Andre 1777 map (left) clearly shows the un-named Straight Road running between Lexden and Shrub End although it looks more like a track than a road, passing through Lexden Heath with the only detail shown "Ancient Earthworks". By 1861 the OS map gave more detail showing a few buildings at the London Road end, including the Methodist chapel.

Moving on to 2020 take a look at the Lexden end of Straight Road, from the traffic lights up to Heath Road to see what remains from the past. On the west corner of Straight Road with London Road, there is

now Aldi and Kingsland Church but back in the early 1900s on site was the workshop of Robert Beaumont, building contractor (advert right). In 1906 Robert was contacted by Sir Gurney Hoare, who wanted a large house built. They met on site and a deal was agreed which led to Lexden House being erected. After building many of the houses in Lexden over some 37 years, Beaumont retired in 1922 and sold the business to a man called Raban.



A little further along the west side of Straight Road is the Lexden Methodist Church. It was established in the 1850s as a Primitive Methodist Chapel, but it was difficult to find suitable land, for most of the landowners were staunch Anglicans and weren't keen to sell to dissenters. Eventually, John Smith, a landowner in Straight Road, agreed to sell a piece of land with two adjoining cottages. A building was quickly erected with the foundation stone laid on 15th September 1859 and the new chapel opened on 30th October that same year.

The chapel building was a simple 'box' style - central entrance door on to Straight Road, bench type pews with a communion table at the rear wall and no other facilities. It cost £366 but a school room followed in 1866 to accommodate some 50 pupils. In 1884 a small front porch was added and in 1909 the building was slightly enlarged with a vestry added at the rear and also an outside toilet. All the work was carried out by Beaumont. In the early days heating was by coke-fired stoves and lighting by oil lamps. Modernisation came in 1939 with the installation of gas heating and electric lighting. By then Primitive and Wesleyan Methodists had amalgamated as the Methodist Circuit. In 1999/2000 substantial refurbishment to the building took place (left before alterations). The sanctuary was 'turned round' with the entrance now at the rear and the congregation facing the communion table. In 2009 the Church celebrated its 150th anniversary.



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A few yards further on was the 'Tin Chapel' (*right*) as it was often called. A hall was built in 1892 as the Church Institute. When the old Lexden School behind the rectory at 197 Lexden Road closed in 1925 the classes moved to what the children later recalled as the "old tin school" until the new building was opened in Collingwood Road in January 1930. In 1927 Lexden Mens' Social Club also used the tin chapel and during the 1939/45 war, Lexden & Winstree Rural District Council used the building for storing ARP equipment. From the 1940s it was used by the Full Gospel Mission group of worshippers who had been meeting in a private house in Straight Road. In 1991 plans were submitted to demolish the old building and build a hall capable of holding 150 people. The Mission which was not part of the evangelical Assemblies of God had a regular congregation of about twenty. The Assemblies were founded in 1924 and were the world's largest Pentecostal denomination with a global adherence of 52 million people. In more recent days the chapel has received a make-over by improving the facilities for weekly meetings. Today the assembly is known as 'Praise Way' with Sunday worship, and every Tuesday morning they have 'Munch and Brunch' meetings with coffee, cake and bible study.



Situated between the two chapels some years ago there was a dairy run by Edward Flower with a shop open for dairy products and he also offered a home delivery service for milk supplies. When Flower closed his business the house (No 25) became privately owned, but retained the name 'The Old Dairy'.

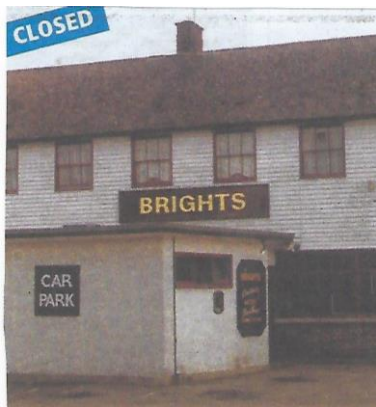
Almost opposite Chaucer Way is a group of four brick-built semi-detached houses (*left*), all the work of Beaumont. All properties have been radically updated and altered from the time they were built - many an owner has dispensed with his front garden and turned it into a car parking space. Each of the blocks were originally given names which can still be seen on stone plaques at the top of each building ie, Fern, Ebenezar, Westbourne and Mansfield.

Across the road on the east side was the Star Inn (*right*) which dates from about 1850 as a beer house, with brewing taking place on the premises. By 1861 the innkeeper was 60 year old Sophie Durrant, then twenty years later William Pepper took over. In 1891 Henry Luther Lusted arrived to run the Star and with him was his wife, Sarah, and two children, Henry junior and Annie. Henry junior later was employed by the Co-op grocer on London Road and Annie took work



as a nanny. Both Henry junior and Annie were married in the summer of 1915. Annie married William (Bill) Moore and both of them helped her father at the Star. When Henry senior died in 1921 William became the licensee. The Star also had a piece of land on the other side of the road where teas were served to those customers who did not drink beer.

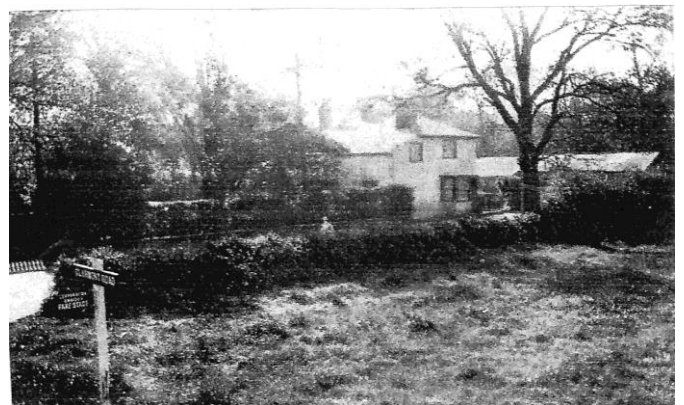
After her husband died Annie took full control of running the pub. Although she had poor eyesight every time she accepted coin payment from a customer for his beer she made sure she wasn't being cheated. If any customer misbehaved or got out of control Annie had them evicted and banned from further visits. At some stage a games room with a snooker table was built on to the original building. Next to the games room almost on to the pavement was a urinal which the neighbours often complained about because of the smell that came from it.



Annie died in 1977, having been at the Star for almost sixty years. There were various new landlords, but business fell away until new owners, Anglia Hosts of Norwich, changed the image to a more modern drinking house and wanted to install a brightly illuminated pub sign and call it 'Chaplin' after Charlie Chaplin. Colchester Council refused, so in retaliation the owners named the pub 'Brights' (*left*). This did not appeal to the public and it finally closed in the mid 1990s. The building and adjoining cottages were demolished and replaced by a row of houses.

Between Chaucer Way and Heath Road is the 'Ancient Earthworks'. Lexden earthworks are part of a complex of banks and ditches protecting Camulodunum, the later Iron Age tribal capital of Colchester. The Triple Dyke formed part of defence lines enclosing a plateau between the River Colne and the Roman River. Originally a single alignment, the Triple Dyke was strengthened shortly after the Roman Conquest in 43 AD. This work may have been undertaken by the Roman army to safeguard the water supply at the nearby Lexden Springs. Triple Dyke is now protected by English Heritage.

On the corner of Straight Road with Heath Road are 14 maisonettes built in three separate blocks by Cadman Design and Build Ltd in 1984. They carry the name 'Hunters Corner'. Previously on the piece of land was Heath Farm (*right - Clairmont Road sign bottom left*) with a farmhouse that had many occupants over the years, some of these dating from the 1920 and 1930s, including the parents of Mary Beattie of Heath Lodge.



In her recorded memories she said that her parents rented Heath Farm. Her father was an army officer and when they moved to Northamptonshire Mary's aunt, Lilian Vaughan-Morgan kept the farm. Mary continues, "There are photos of me with a donkey and cart (*opposite*). Fronting on to the Farm there was a brick wall about 15 feet long between the back gate to the farm yard and a gate to

the house and behind this wall there were three beautiful eating cherry trees from the corner of Heath Road.



She also played in the orchard with her friends and planted an apple pip. The resulting tree was frequently laden with fruit and was there until the farm was demolished. The last residents at the farmhouse were two wealthy elderly ladies, Miss Agnes Sampson (1887 - 1978) and Miss Lily Hankinson (1885-1980). They had an ancient car kept in one of the stables. It was always difficult to start so they would call on a helpful neighbour (Bernard Polley!) to get the car going for them. When

he had successfully started the engine he was usually asked if he "would kindly check the oil and tyre pressures and the windscreen is rather dirty"

From here Straight Road heads off in the direction of Shrub End.

THE COLCHESTER ANTIQUES COLLECTORS CLUB

At our last LHG meeting in February, Dr Fabrizio Casale gave the Group their specially made gavel and a cheque for £277, both donated by the Colchester Antiques Collectors Club which closed in December 2019. Below is Dr Casale's brief history of the Club.

In 1975 a group of young ladies with an interest in antiques and art formed a group to discuss and improve their knowledge. There were 50 founder members, one of whom was still a member when the Club closed. They met at 7pm on the first Thursday of each month at the Friends' Meeting House where the initial room charge was £3.50 and ended at £22. The annual membership fee started at £2 and ended at £25. Membership averaged 40, peaking in the 1980s when a waiting list was proposed!

Lectures were given by such local experts as J Cooper, jeweller; Michael Chase, Minorities director; Ivor Weiss, artist; Bond father and son, antiques dealers. Other speakers, later to become well known (and much more expensive) included Paul Atterbury, Eric Knowles, Bunny Campione, Lars Thorp and Geoffrey Godden from the "Antiques Road Show". Later when NADFAS (National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies) raised speakers' fees, the Group's focus changed reverting to local collectors, historians and savants; Andrew Phillips, Colin Davis, Lasse Hopland, Patrick Denney, Ted Denton, etc. Tea and coffee was served at the end of the talks.

Annual trips, for example, to Cambridge, Ely, Melford Hall, a boat trip on the Orwell River, were enjoyed as were the annual Twelfth Night (or Christmas) dinners.

The Club was run by a Committee and in 2015 Dr Casale was elected Chairman and the website and logo were established. However, despite a brief revival, the ageing membership made it obvious that the Club should close. For over 44 years it provided a sharing of interests and knowledge, as well as friendship, for its many members and also played a small part in Colchester's long and interesting history.



Hidden in the undergrowth in Lexden Churchyard is the fallen granite cross, propped up against a large granite base, marking the grave of John Harper. He was the first Headmaster of North Street School, in what was then called Princess Street off North Station Road, Colchester.

John Harper (*right*) was born in Thorrington, Essex in 1858 the sixth of eight children of Henry and Caroline. In 1861 the family was living in New Road, Thorrington, and Henry, a Hampshire man, was working as a brick maker. Ten



years later they had moved within the village to Harpers Farm in Station Road, where Henry farmed 30 acres of land but continued with brickmaking. One older son was helping on the farm and another in the brickmaking business but John was still at school.

Some years later John, with over 100 others, attended the British and Foreign School Society's House and Training College for Schoolmasters in Borough Road, Southwark, the oldest teacher training institute in the country. It was established by a Quaker, Joseph Lancaster, who became aware that poor people had no access to education in the late 18th century and was determined to address this. At that time the cost of education was chiefly in the salaries of teachers and in 1798, to prevent too much being spent on this in Southwark, he appointed just one schoolmaster to oversee more than 300 boys (no girls) in the large schoolroom. The crucial factor was that the basic education of younger children was given by older pupils, called monitors, teaching small groups of children on each side of the schoolroom. This method was quickly adopted by many other schools. One of the original schoolrooms built to the exacting specifications of Joseph Lancaster remains in Hitchen, Hertfordshire and is now a museum.



Although Joseph Lancaster (*left*) was sponsored by many influential people, including royalty, his financial affairs were in chaos and in 1808 a Society was set up to promote and help organise the Royal British or Lancasterian System for the Education of the Poor. The early minute books from 1808 record the work of the Trustees of the Royal Lancasterian Institution and from 1814 they record the newly named British and Foreign School Society. Reference is also made to financial matters, including certain difficulties with Joseph Lancaster (it would be interesting to know what these were) as well as the setting up and the development of the many non-sectarian "British Schools" which were started in competition with the National Schools run by the Church of England.

After training John returned to live at home, his occupation in the 1891 Census being given as schoolmaster and at some point he taught as "second master" at the

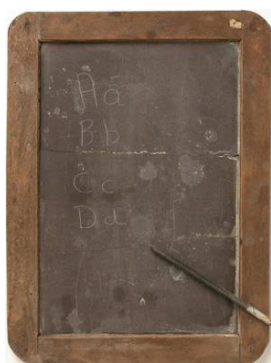
Wesleyan School in Culver Street. On 2nd August 1893 in Keresley, Warwickshire he married Annie Sarah Nevey, the daughter of a schoolmaster, but his address on the marriage certificate is given as Hackney, suggesting he was teaching there at the time. They moved to Colchester when he was he was selected from a list of 225 candidates to become the first Headmaster of the newly built North Street School. It was built by a local man Charles Orfeur and cost £8,000.

In September 1894 the Essex Herald gave details of the salaries of leading members of staff. John received £200 a year and his headmistress, Miss Margaret Coultas, £100. Miss Coultas did not stay long for by 1901 she was teaching in Westminster and had retired by 1911 aged only 48. Over the next few months others were appointed. Mr Wilfred Cox, an assistant master, was only 21 years old when appointed and received £90. He was born in Shoeburyness into a family of school teachers and was a pupil teacher at the age of 17. He married in 1901 and remained in Colchester living at 1 Audley Road with his wife, Helena. Mr Archibald W Alderton as first assistant master received £95. In 1898 he married another school teacher, Catherine Buchanan Robinson (*right*), who in 1923 became the first Lady Mayor of Colchester. Over the years he was the head of different Colchester Schools including Old Heath School.



Female teachers included Miss Lily Whitaker, Miss Harvey and Miss A Crump who were paid £70 per annum, their contracts subject to three months' notice on either side. Lily Whitaker a few years earlier had been a pupil teacher for "inmates" at an institution/refuge in Clewer, Windsor, for "fallen women" where her mother was matron. Whilst at North School she met her future husband, Richard Franklin, and moved to Chelmsford where she had three children. He became Managing Director of Davey, Paxman & Co Ltd and was awarded the OBE in 1920. Lily died in 1922 and Richard died three years later.

Later there was controversy over the appointment of Mr Warren Plane as caretaker. He had been a member of the North School Board, from which he had resigned earlier with no reason given. When the facts were presented his appointment as caretaker was called "a barefaced piece of jobbery". His weekly pay was £1 6s with 8s 6d in lieu of house rent.



The school opened in November 1894 with 282 boys and girls of mixed ages attending on the first day. A fortnight later, after much discussion with the Board, which included the local Baptist minister, Rev E Spurrier, it was agreed to accept 45 Union or Workhouse children on condition that a fee was paid. In May 1899 John removed all slates (*left*) from the school and said that written work would be done on paper with a pen and nib. The slates consisted of a piece of quarry slate mounted in a wooden frame together with a special slate pencil for writing which made a grey mark on the slate. The pencils were frequently sharpened on nearby walls. Children could bring a damp cloth or sponge to "wipe the slate clean", but often they would just spit and rub with their sleeve! After Mr Harper's announcement an ink monitor was appointed to fill

inkwells on the desks every Monday and nibs were replaced if they became scratchy. Boys were frequently reprimanded for using the nibs to make their paper aeroplanes fly more successfully!

In 1901 John Harper, Annie and their two daughters, Muriel and Irene, were living at 18 Roman Road, his occupation recorded as Head of Board School. Later they moved to 19 Beverley Road where his title was given as Headmaster, Public Elementary School, under Colchester Education Authority.

Attendance at the school rose rapidly and in 1901 he requested the conversion of a master's room into a classroom and for a storeroom to be converted into a master's room. By 1914 there were 512 children in John Harper's department and 176 Infants under Miss G F Newman. When King George V visited Colchester in 1917 the children watched his car go by. On the first Remembrance Day, 11th November 1919, when the two minute silence was nationally observed, it was recorded in the School log that "on the sounding of the siren the whole school assembled in the hall and turned towards the 50 photographs of the former boys who had died during the war; they remained motionless with hands clasped, heads bowed and eyes closed. Then the hymn 'For all the Saints' was sung softly and sweetly".

John Harper retired in May 1922, to be replaced by Mr Edwin Chisnell, and received from the scholars and staff a mahogany inlaid writing bureau and an inlaid chair. His wife was given a silver epergne. He died on 8th March 1925 at his home in St Clare Road and is buried in the churchyard of St Leonard's, Lexden. After his death Princess Street was renamed John Harper Street.

Lexden History Group has a research interest in the school and is helping and supporting them in their various projects. Our liaison started when Liz White was researching her book "Compelling Stories from the Avenue of Remembrance" and found that some of her work overlapped that of the school as some of the former pupils were commemorated on the Avenue of Remembrance. The school's first project, led by Laura Davison and assisted by researcher Claire Driver, was "We will remember them" and the children in Year 6 were encouraged to investigate which former pupils had been killed in the First World War. Markers were put on the houses where these pupils had lived and a memorial board with all their names displayed in the school hall. The next project was "Homecoming" when the children found the names of former pupils who had survived the war - often a more difficult research task - and a carved board was placed opposite the first. Their current project is exploring the 125 years since the founding of the school in 1894.

LHG supports their research with displays and talking to parents, children and former pupils as well as attending the various exhibitions and celebrations. Dick, Stan, Liz and other members have been made very welcome and we are pleased to be able to help the school with their projects to encourage the children to enjoy local history.

(Right - Liz and Dick entering into the spirit of the occasion at one of the recent displays at North Primary School!)



Our Chairman, Stan, has found some fascinating snippets about life in the 1500s. He cannot guarantee their veracity as he is not quite that old, but hopes that you will enjoy them. He suggests that the next time you are washing your hands and complain because the water temperature isn't how you like it, think about how things used to be!

Most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May and still smelled pretty good by June. However, they were starting to smell so brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide the body odour. Hence the custom today of *carrying a bouquet when getting married*.

Baths consisted of a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children. Last of all the babies. By then the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it. *Don't throw the baby out with the bath water*.

Houses had thatched roofs - thick straw piled high with no wood underneath. It was the only place for animals to get warm, so all the cats and other small animals (mice and bugs) lived in the roof. When it rained it became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip off the roof. *It's raining cats and dogs*.



There was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings could mess up your nice clean bed. Hence a bed with big posts and a sheet hung over the top afforded some protection. *Origin of canopy beds?*

The floor was dirt. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt. Hence the saying "*Dirt poor*". The wealthy had slate floors that would get slippery in the winter when wet, so they spread thresh (straw) on the floor to help keep their footing. As the winter wore on they added more thresh until when you opened to door it would all start slipping outside. A piece of wood was placed in the entrance - *threshold*.

In the old days they cooked in the kitchen with a big kettle that always hung over the fire. Every day they lit the fire and added things to the pot. They ate mostly vegetables and did not get much meat. They would eat the stew for dinner leaving leftovers in the pot to get cold overnight and then start again the next day. Sometimes the stew had bits in it that had been there for quite a while. *"Pease porridge hot, pease porridge cold, pease porridge in the pot nine days old."*

Sometimes they could obtain pork which made them feel quite special. When visitors came over they would hang up their bacon to show off. It was a sign of wealth that a man could *"bring home the bacon"*. They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around *"to chew the fat"*.

Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle and guests got the top or *"upper crust"*.

Those with money had plates made of pewter (then an alloy of approximately 70% tin and 30% lead). Food with high acid content caused some of the lead to leach into the food causing death by lead poisoning. This happened most often with the recently arrived tomatoes so for the next 400 years or so they were considered to be poisonous.

Lead cups were used to drink ale or whisky. The combination would sometimes knock the imbibers out for a couple of days. Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family could gather around and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up. Hence the custom of holding "a wake".

England is old and small and the local folks started running out of places to bury people. So they would dig up coffins, take the bones to a nearby "bone or charnel house" and re-use the grave. When re-opening these coffins one in every 25 coffins were found with scratch marks on the inside and they realised they had been burying people alive. So they would tie a string on the wrist of the corpse, lead it through the coffin and up through the ground and tied it to a bell. Someone would have to sit out in the graveyard all night - *graveyard shift* - to listen for the bell. Thus someone would be "saved by the bell" or was considered "a dead ringer". Whoever said history was boring?!



LHG NEWSLETTER IS OF GLOBAL INTEREST!

Over the years we have received emails from different parts of the world saying how interesting they have found certain of our Newsletter articles. One recently came from Canada regarding an article in March 2012 about "Lexden's Royal Connection" and Col Creswell Rooke and his family. Col Rooke was buried in Lexden Churchyard. The email writer was interested in the Rooke family and wondered if I had more photographs or information and they were pleased that the house, Monks Horton in Lexden Road, is still standing, although now divided into two, numbers 72 and 74.

Osborne family (Osborne Manor LHG Newsletter June 2019)

More recently we have heard from someone in the Forest of Dean who said we had solved his research problem regarding a local colliery. I was able to give more information on John Posford Osborne and his son, Arthur Thomas Osborne and he explained that there was a colliery near Lydbrook in the Forest of Dean called Arthur and Edward, which was owned by John Posford Osborne in the 1840s and 1850s. It had been thought that the colliery was named after the owner's two sons and the article in our Newsletter seemed to support one son but there was no Edward Osborne. It transpired that Edward was Edward Setree, the brother-in-law of John's business partner, Thomas Butler. Thomas was born in Ingatestone in 1786, the youngest of three sons, but recorded as being from the parish of St Giles, Colchester, when he married Mary Louise Setree in Southwark in 1830. Thomas's

brother, Cornelius Butler, was a surgeon in Ingatestone during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Edward Lynch Setree was born in 1823 and when he married in 1843 his occupation was given as Land Surveyor in Coleford. He must have been very close to his family as his children were all named after his siblings. In the 1841 census he and his then unmarried sister were recorded as of "independent means" but when he died in Jersey in 1855 he was not a wealthy man (less than £50) and his widow quickly remarried.

Sometime between 1838 and 1841 Thomas Butler, who owned more than 90% of the colliery, mortgaged his holding to John Posford Osborne which suggests that the colliery was in difficulty. It seems that Thomas had acted without authority and started extensive work at considerable expense to sink shafts, there being "two pits and two steam engines". In 1846 the output of the colliery was recorded as 3,259 tons and credited to John Posford Osborne. Thomas died at Coleford on 24th June 1842 but his short will, witnessed by Edward Setree, was written in 1840 but had no mention of John Osborne or his business interests, leaving all to his wife, Mary, who died in 1886 in Bayswater, London.

In December 1853 a new company was formed - the Arthur & Edward & Mirey Stock Colliery Company - with capital of £25,000 in 1,000 £25 shares. Most of the directors were from London but included John Osborne recorded as a merchant of Colchester. Taking advantage of the new company laws that had been established it quickly became a 'limited' company in October 1856 and the transaction was completed on 4th January 1859. Suspiciously, however, on 14th January that year it was voluntarily wound up and the following year was auctioned at the King's Head Hotel in Gloucester.

The total lot consisted of stone buildings with three powerful steam engines, boilers and equipment for pumping and lifting about 100 tons of coal per day. Underground was partly arched in stone and kept free of water with half power of the engine. Trams, railways, weighing apparatus, etc, were also included in the sale. The 180 acres contained about 1,200,000 tons of unworked coal. It was not finally sold until 1889 but in 1861 arrears of rent against John Posford Osborne amounted to £120.

The Arthur & Edward Colliery, also known as the Waterloo (*right*), became famous in the local area in the 20th century until its closure in 1959.



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.

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FORTHCOMING SPEAKERS

Wednesday 8th April 2020

Dr Jane Pearson – Prostitution in Colchester

Wednesday 13th May 2020

**AGM – Eve Regelous – Every One Stops for Tea
Followed by Afternoon Tea**

Wednesday 10th June 2020

Peter Jones – Night Mail