



All Systems Go!

The village sign has been cast and assembled and looks great, the bricks have been promised, the 'time capsule' has been acquired, and we are about three quarters of the way to achieving our financial target and it's "all systems go".

Tim Holding has spent a very great deal of time dealing with the planning application at the 'Crown site' and at one time, the Committee were debating whether to opt for the simpler second choice site half way down Lexden road.

The hold up seemed to hinge on the granting of a licence by Essex County Council and this could only be applied for by Colchester Borough

Issue No 7 December 2007

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- **Local history visitors from Australia**
- **Going to the 'Flicks'**
- **Behind the scenes at the museum.**

Council, not us. The situation was made all the more bizarre because the County Council had already approved a grant of £2,000 for the project which could have been withdrawn if the licence was not approved (by the same County Council!). We now have that licence.

Watch this space.

Excellent start to 2007/8 season.

Over 70 members attended the first talk of the new season given by Tom Hodgson, Community History Manager at Colchester Museum. And what an interesting talk it was.

Tom introduced us to all of the various departments that work behind the scenes at the museum resource Centre in Ryegate Road, once the home of Danniells Brewery and the Mason Arclight Works.

The Museum receives hundreds of donations from members of the public each year and Tom commented that the items are usually one step behind the current fashion. To demonstrate this he cited the growing number of pipes and smoking related items, even space toys and mobile phones donated as these will become collectable museum items of the future.

Collections fall into numerous categories, for instance, clocks (217 all made in Colchester), archaeological (Colchester is a world centre for Roman archaeology), costume (over 600 dresses), social history, military, photographic, porcelain and

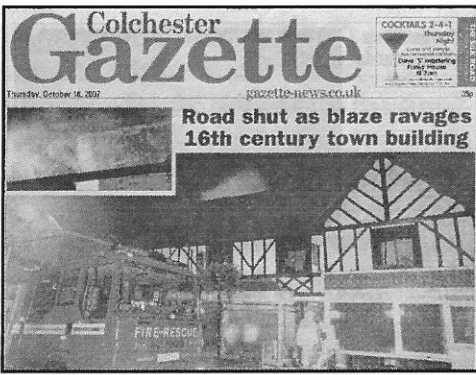
works of art by local artists including John Constable and John Vine.

The museum has probably the largest collection of silver caddy spoons in the country. 203 cases of them, all hallmarked.

Tom stressed how important the education section of the Museum was and how some items are made available for schoolchildren and others to see at close range via the Handling Collection and Memory Boxes. Over 24,000 schoolchildren visited the museum last year on organised school trips from as far away as Northamptonshire.

The Castle Museum, including Hollytrees is the flagship of Borough Council and has been voted one of the best museums in the UK. It has recently merged (with Colchester taking the lead) with the Ipswich Museum Service to provide a larger and more efficient service to historians and educationalists in east Anglia.

In summary, a superb talk, well presented by an obvious expert in his field, and one which sets the high standard for the rest of the season.

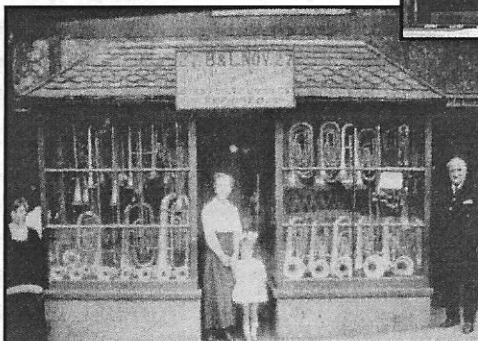


You will all have read the Evening Gazette's report of the recent fire at North Hill that severely damaged two 16th cent. buildings and subsequently Andrew Phillips' article about the loss of other heritage buildings in the town through fires.

I thought that readers might like to know that number 27 North Hill where the Balti Restaurant stood was once a shop selling brass band instruments.

It was owned by Ben Noy who opened the shop in 1920 (formerly he ran it as a sweet shop and tobacconists) in anticipation of the upsurge in brass banding after the Great War to the level it was in the early 1900's when there were over thirty villages around Colchester that had their own village band.

In the 1940's it became a private house for some years and after that was left derelict, being inhabited by a local tramp who used to sleep in the dining room.



27 North Hill (above) as a private house (just where the ladies with the pram are standing) and (left) Ben Noy and his family outside their brass band shop in the 1920's



A night at the Flicks

It was nearly a case of 'standing room only' when Harry Royle gave his talk on the history of the cinema in Colchester to an audience of over 60 members on Wednesday October 10th.

Harry was, for eight years, the Manager at the Odeon cinema in Crouch Street and has also spent several years researching the history of his predecessors and the sites of the lost cinemas in the town.

The first film showing in the world was held in Paris in 1895. The first film showing in Colchester was less than a year later on 26th October 1896 in the Corn Exchange, High Street, where the Job Centre is now.

The first proper cinema was the Hippodrome but the Grand Theatre in Queens Street also showed films once a month in the early 1900's. This burnt down in 1918 and the site later became the Corporation bus garage, although the blue entrance door to the upper circle can still be seen today just to the right of the garage.

There have been eight cinema sites in the town and one of the earliest entrepreneurs was David Ager who opened the Vaudeville Theatre in Mersea Road. A true showman, he dressed one of his staff up as Charlie Chaplin and sent him round the town with a huge advertising board pulled by a donkey to promote the showing of Chaplin's new film "The Gold Rush". People thought he really was Charlie Chaplin as no one had ever seen the real star. He also filmed his theatre queues and promised people that they would see themselves on the cinema screen a week later—what a clever scheme.

Several famous stars appeared on the Colchester stage including Arthur Askey in his first professional engagement on 31st March 1924. A plaque to mark the occasion is still seen on the wall by the old Cameo Cinema in St John's Street.

The first sound film was shown in the town in 1929 and in 1931 the Regal cinema, later to become the Odeon, was opened in Crouch Street with air conditioning, central heating, an organ and a resident dance band. It was designed in a flamboyant Moorish style with covered waiting areas for all queuing customers.

In the 1930's and 40's the cinema offered a form of escapism from horrors of war but the demise of cinemas took place in 1953 when nearly everyone bought television sets to watch the Queen's Coronation.

In 1952 the Vaudeville closed to become a furniture warehouse and later demolished on the site of the current St Botolph's roundabout; in 1961 the Hippodrome closed to become a bingo hall and later a night club; in 1976 the Cameo closed to become a bicycle shop and then a hairdressers (Harry Royle's favourite hairdressers by the way) and in February 2002 the old Crouch Street Odeon closed when the new Odeon opened in the former Head Post Office premises in Head Street.

With his great depth of cinema knowledge and easy presentation style Harry has certainly kept up the high standard of speakers for the 2007/8 season. He said he was currently writing a book on the subject and no doubt that will be as popular and entertaining as he was in person.

On the street where you live

Don't panic dear readers, I am not about to burst into singing one of the hit songs from 'My Fair Lady' but to float a suggestion put to me for the next Lexden History Group project.

Colchester has many very attractive buildings that feature on postcards available in nearly every tourist shop in the High Street. Even a few of Lexden village appear occasionally on the Ebay auction website.

But from a local historical standpoint it is the ordinary streets and buildings that will be interesting to the researchers of the future.

It has been suggested that our next Group Project could be to create a complete picture archive of every road in the village together with photographs of prominent buildings etc.

Now this would be a real legacy that we could leave for the village to pass on to future local historians. It would need careful thought and planning but it is a great idea—unless you have any other suggestions.

THE CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

Chairman Geoff is unwell at present so I thought I would take this opportunity, on your behalf, to thank him for guiding us safely through the first years of the Lexden History Group.

We met in the Lady Chapel of Lexden Church in March 2005 when eighteen of us sat around and discussed whether there was a need for a local history group. Today the club has over 140 members and it is a great credit to Geoff for steering us through the setting up of the Group.

Under his guidance we held a successful History Day in 2006 (and probably another one next year), we have taken part in several high profile exhibitions achieving a reputation for an excellent standard of presentation from Colchester Museums Service for these displays and, of course, the ongoing saga of the village sign, and we have a Constitution—not a bad record for a club less than two years old.

So thanks very much Geoff for all your hard work and interest in creating one of the largest and most successful groups in the village.

David Cawdell, Editor

PROGRAM

January 9th.

'The Great Eastern Railway in 1905'. An illustrated talk by David Possey (member of Braintree Local History Society).

February 13th.

'The Roman Chariot Track' An illustrated talk by Philip Crummy Director of Colchester Archaeological Trust.

March 12th.

Bulmer Bricks Peter Minter MD of Bulmer Brick and Tile Co. will give a fascinating talk on bricks in the conservation of old buildings.

April 9th.

Annual General Meeting. After the meeting an illustrated presentation by members on the Group's 2007 project "Lexden in Wartime".

E OF EVENTS

May 14th.

"To Fetch a pail of Water"
An illustrated talk by Patrick Denney. Not to be missed.

June 11th.

"Hilly Fields" - Joe Firmin,
More details later

July 9th tba

No meeting in August

September 10th tba

October 8th tba

November 12th

Special showing of
'Witchfinder' with local cast.

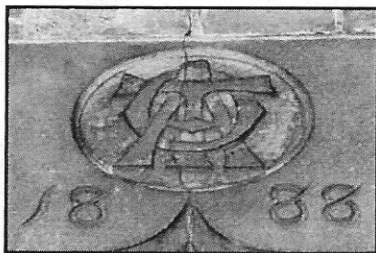
December 10th

Christmas Social Event

Help Please

We have received an email from Angela Miles asking if anyone has any information on Altnacealgach House in Park Road.

Angela has found out that it was originally owned by Arthur Thomas Osborne whose family was in the brewing business and owned several pubs around Colchester. Arthur's monogram is carved above the front door and dated 1888.



If any member has any information please contact Angela by email at boon.moggies@ntlworld.com.

Pssst.

If you know of any househunters looking for an interesting piece of Lexden history "Mill Paddock", once the stables to Lexden Mill, is for sale for the first time in thirty years.

Contact the local estate agents
Fenn Wright or Foxwells or
David Cawdell 01206 540403

Siege Mentality

By Liz White



At our meeting in November I was disappointed to see that Dick Barton was not there, but in true LHG fashion he had sent a replacement speaker - a fine, upright, handsome, local yeoman complete with red tunic and ostrich feather in his hat. We were relieved to discover that he was non partisan and we would not have to declare our affiliations

to either the Parliamentarian and or Royalist causes.

He obviously enjoyed the right connections and could tell us the dire situation in Colchester Town. We had witnessed the progress of the 4000 Royalist troops along Lexden Street on 12th June 1648, followed by many Parliamentarians and had heard the terrifying explosions in the distance, not realising that Colchester had unwittingly been caught up in this commotion by reason of geography alone.

How the townspeople suffered! First they witnessed the bloodletting in Crouch Street, then the tribulations of marauding Royalist soldiers, the commandeering of our 8 churches to accommodate them and ultimately the locking of the town gates. The privations were endless, mutton candles, thatch from roofs for the horses and even selling dogs for food at 6s a side. What had life come to?

Who was to blame? When would it end? (Where was Tesco when we most wanted it!?)

The Parliamentarians led by the obdurate Lord Fairfax were no better, taking up positions outside the town, inflicting the siege upon the unsuspecting populace, forcing them to suffer shattering bombardments from cannons positioned in areas outside the town. Churches, including our lovely St Botolph's, houses and livelihoods were destroyed, innocent people mortally wounded, maimed, starved and ignored in their plight. When the women of the town bravely attempted to end the siege by marching from the town, they were threatened, humiliated and forced by the constantly unyielding Parliamentarians to return to the increasing squalor in the town. The more townsfolk there were inside the walls the quicker the food would run out. The only

revenge available to the townspeople seemed to be returning the aggressors' propaganda leaflets wrapped around dog turds! With tears in his eyes, our firsthand narrator of the troubles told of the surrender, the executions, the lucky escapes and the many years it took to restore trade and fortune to our little town.

How glad we were to discover that this actually happened over 350 years ago and we could sleep easy in our beds! Thank you, Dick - what a wonderful evening!

I was unable to attend Dick's talk as I was giving a talk to another Local History Group at short notice, but thank you very much Liz for an excellent report. Now I know to whom I should hand over the swivel chair, eye shade and fat cigar when the time comes to look for a new Editor!

ED.

And now for something completely different.

The following story has nothing to do with local history but was emailed to me by a historian friend in Bures who runs the excellent Bures history website, visit it at; www.bures-online.co.uk

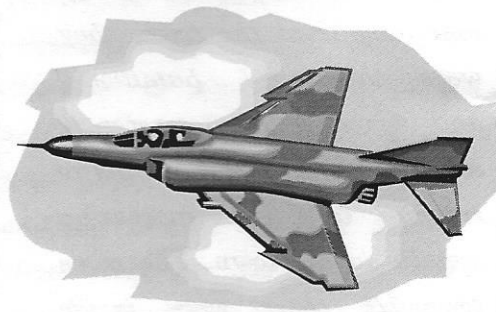
Two British traffic patrol officers from North Berwick were involved in an unusual incident while checking for speeding motorists on the A1 Great North Road. One of the officers used a hand-held radar device to check the speed of a vehicle approaching over the crest of a hill, and was surprised when the speed was recorded at over 300 mph. Their radar suddenly stopped working and the officers were not able to reset it.

Just then a deafening roar over the treetops revealed that the radar had in fact latched on to a NATO Tornado fighter jet which was engaged in a low-flying exercise over the Border district, approaching from the North Sea.

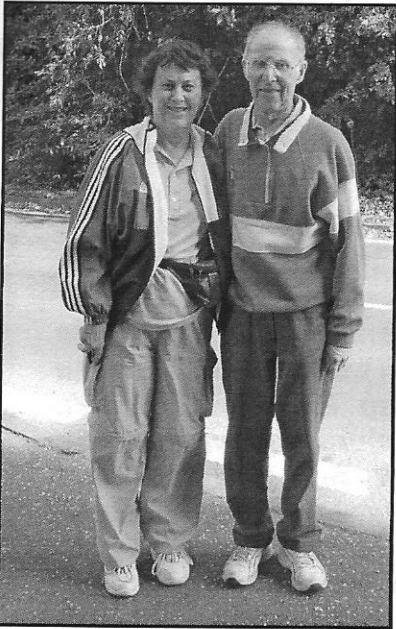
Back at police headquarters the Chief Constable fired off a stiff complaint to the RAF Liaison office.

Back came the reply in true laconic RAF style:

Thank you for your message, which allows us to complete the file on this incident. You may be interested to know that the tactical computer in the Tornado had detected the presence of, and subsequently locked onto, your hostile radar equipment and automatically sent a jamming signal back to it. Furthermore, an air-to-ground missile aboard the fully-armed aircraft had also automatically locked onto your equipment. Fortunately the pilot flying the Tornado recognized the situation for what it was, quickly responded to the missile systems alert status, and was able to override the automated defence system before the missile was launched and your hostile radar installation was destroyed.



Lexden visitors from Australia



Pamela and Airlie Kirkham travelled some 12,000 miles from Adelaide to Lexden searching for information on Airlie's great uncle and aunt, George Vince and Martha Kirkham.

They made contact through the Lexden History Group website and I was able to tell them that George Vince was on of the last millers at Lexden Mill and that the graves of the Vince family were up in the churchyard. He was also churchwarden during the forty years he was the Lexden miller.

The visitors saw the site of the mill and stables and also Mill House in Spring Lane, the home of George and Martha Vince and also the family graves. Pamela and Airlie donated a copy of the Vince family records for the Group archives.

The picture shows Pam and Airlie at the site of Lexden Mill.

Illustrated London News

I have been able to have access to some early copies of the Illustrated London News recently and what a fascinating read it is. It's a misnomer to assume that all the news is about London as I found out when I visited the Illustrated London News website at www.iln.org.uk.

Scrolling down the home page gives you a data grid of each year since it started in 1842. Clicking on any particular year will give you the hundreds of main subjects covered that year.

By pressing Ctrl and F button on your keyboard and typing in your query you can quickly find the information you are researching.

Ed

By the time you read this we shall have enjoyed our second Christmas Social Evening. The next magazine will be published in March 2008, long after the Christmas festivities have been forgotten. Therefore our grateful thanks are due to everyone, especially Sonia Lewis and her helpers, who made the evening so successful and enjoyable. As the Lexden History Group starts its third year thanks go to the hard working Committee members and also to our President Andrew Phillips who continues to be so supportive of the Group.

In 2008 we shall probably organise another Lexden History Day and the AGM will be followed by a presentation of our current Group Project "Lexden in Wartime" This has been a little more difficult than we had imagined for our Archivist Bernard Polley as members have been reluctant to share their memories. If anyone has any suggestions for the next group history project please let any of the Committee members know.

A very happy Christmas to all members

Chairman

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