



Village sign Unveiling

***The Lexden Village sign
is due to be unveiled on
Saturday April 19th***

The sign, cast in solid aluminium, will be officially unveiled by the Mayor at 11.00am. followed by a dedication by Revd. Stephen Carter, Rector of St Leonard's Church, after which members and guests are invited to celebrate the event with some light refreshments in the Crown Inn. Tickets will be available at the April History Group AGM meeting.

This project is the culmination of months of hard work by Tim Holding and his team.

Issue No 8 March 2008

- ***Chairman Geoff***
- ***Village Sign Unveiling***
- ***Full steam ahead for another Fish and Chip Supper***
- ***Siege Walk planned 360 years later.***
- ***2008 speaker programme complete.***

The actual casting of parts of the sign took place at a barbecue at Tim and Carole's house on St Georges Day (April 23rd) 2007. Problems due to Planning and Health and Safety issues delayed the project and the History Group Committee decided to postpone the inaugural event until the Spring when the better weather will, hopefully, be here.



It is with very great sadness that we record the death of our Chairman, Geoff Pettit. Geoff died on Thursday January 17th. 2008 after a long illness.

He set up and was a Director of a local photographic company and later expanded to employ photographers aboard the cruise liners.

His photographic work was also his hobby and he made several video films on local subjects and events.

Geoff's business experience steered the History Group through its early stages to become one of the largest clubs in the village, with over 140 members, its own website, Constitution and a string of successful events to his credit.

Shrub End Church was packed for the Service of Celebration on Monday February 4th. This was followed by a private cremation.

He will be greatly missed by all members of the Lexden History Group.



Those were the Days

*12,000 tons of green peas,
7 million gallons of milk,
22 tons of Norfolk turkeys,
oh yes and hundreds of
thousands of very satisfied
human beings—just some of
the goods carried by the
Great Eastern Railway in the
early 1900's*

*These and many more
interesting facts were
forthcoming from our
speaker at the January
meeting David Possey.*

*David chose as his subject
The Great Eastern Railway
1905. His main source of
information was the 1905
Guide to the railway, costing
just 1/6d.*

*The subject must have
attracted our members on a
cold January night as over
80 people turned up proving
that the Lexden History
Group must be the most
successful local organisation
in the village.*

*David told us of the many
innovative ideas that our
regional railway introduced.
Formed in 1862 from an
amalgam of smaller local
railway companies their
motto was "Wherever you
want to go we can get you
there". A passenger from
Colchester could actually
travel to China by train even
in 1905 and if you did not
want to go to the seaside,
the seaside would come to
you courtesy of the railway
which delivered genuine sea
water direct from Lowestoft
to your home at 6d for three
gallons.*

*In those days a return ticket
to London cost 8/9 (43p in
today's money).*

*A nostalgic start to the New
Year which saw current
season ticket prices rise so
astronomically making
commuters really wish that
they were back in the 'good
old days'.*

Lexden in Wartime

Secretary Liz White has added greatly to the archive memories of Lexden in wartime by arranging face to face interviews with some of our History Group members about their personal memories.

The successful initiative takes place in a very informal atmosphere over a cup of tea when members recall their experiences which Liz, a very accomplished typist, types verbatim into her computer for later editing.

Peter Tweed and Mary Jones were the first contributors and both agreed that it was a very pleasant, and painless, experience.

It is hoped that more volunteers will come forward so that a printed copy of all the "Lexden in Wartime" archives can be produced for members to buy in aid of Group funds.

Any volunteers willing to spend a relaxing afternoon reminiscing over a cup of tea please contact Liz White on 01206 522713

In Memory

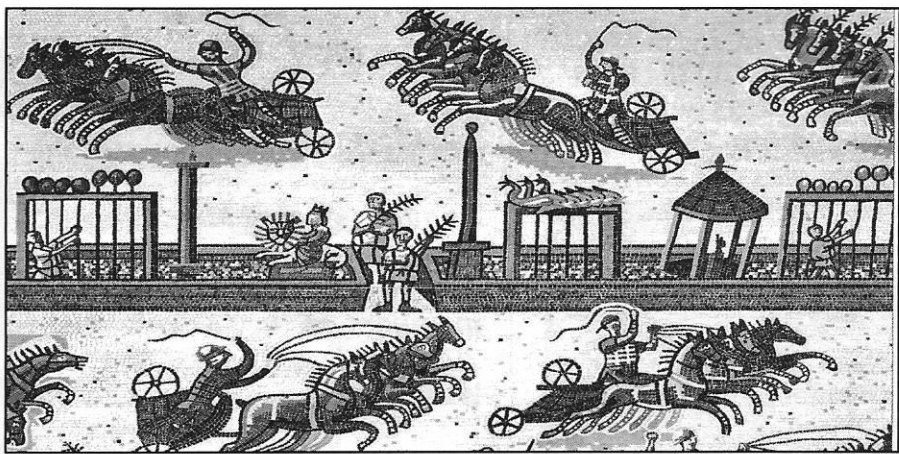
To mark the great contribution Geoff made to the Lexden History Group the Committee have decided to arrange a "Geoff Pettit Memorial Lecture" in January of each year to be given by a well known and respected speaker.

Details for the 2009 lecture will be announced shortly.



Have your say

Talking of Committee business, the Committee usually meet on the Wednesday prior to the History Group meeting. If any member wants to raise an item or suggestion for discussion please get in touch with Secretary Liz White, her details are on the back page.



A detail from the huge mosaic made by local schoolchildren

The tale of the seven dolphins

Nearly 80 members packed Lexden Church Hall to hear Philip Crummy's excellent talk on the recently discovered Roman circus at the garrison. Philip, who is Director of the Colchester Archaeological Trust, has been overseeing the gradual excavation of the 450 metre long chariot track first discovered in 2004 and said to be the only one in the UK.

As elements of the Grandstand foundations, central barrier, starting gates were uncovered it became clear that Colchester now had the largest and longest Roman building in Britain.

At first it was thought that there were, unusually, twelve starting gates but later excavations revealed that the correct number was eight as normal.

Philip told us how teams of four-horse chariots in 'racing colours' of either Red, Green, White or Blue would leap from the starting gate and race anticlockwise around a central barrier. Successful charioteers were the David Beckhams (who he?) of their day but habitual losers would be staring at an early grave.

So where do the dolphins come into this tale? Ah yes. The Romans had a rather bizarre and quite clever way of counting each of the seven laps around the arena. In the central barrier there was a large frame with

seven (pottery or metal?) dolphins pivoted so that each could dip downwards. After each lap another dolphin was made to dive and this was all controlled by water as part of a water pipe was found in the central foundations.

The Developers Taylor Woodrow and the military authorities have been very supportive of the project and housing plans are being modified to preserve as much of the chariot track as possible. In 2005/6 over 1,500 local schoolchildren were involved in making a very detailed mosaic of the arena using 200,000 specially cut tiles to a design by Peter Froste. This has been temporarily installed at the dig site with a view to a more permanent display when the building work is finished

It is estimated that the circus had seating accommodation for up to 16,000 people. And was in use for about 150 years—a bit like our soon to be completed 'Community Stadium' but with more parking. What goes around comes around.

The work that Philip Crummy and his team of archaeologists have once again put Colchester firmly in the forefront of Roman antiquities in the UK and all are to be congratulated on this.

April 9th.

Annual General Meeting.

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

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

Colchester Siege Walks, two identical walks led by Blue Badge Guide Dick Barton. Step back in time 360 years to experience Colchester under siege. The town would actually have been under siege in July 1648.

Walks start at 2.30pm and 6.30pm.

No meeting in August

IE OF EVENTS

September 10th

"Arsenic and Olde Essex"

An illustrated talk by Fred Feather, retired Curator of the Essex Police Museum contrasting the way crimes are investigated before and after the formation of the County Constabulary.

October 8th

"The Archaeology of Essex"

*Dr. Mark Curteis
Heritage Learning and
Access Officer Essex Record
Office.*

November 12th

*Special showing of the
locally produced film
'Witchfinder' with an
introduction by a member of
the production team.*

December 10th

Christmas Social Event

January 14th 2009

**The Inaugural Geoff Pettit
Memorial Lecture**
More details later

***An extra event repeated by
popular demand.***

"Fish, Chips and Steam



*Another fish and chip
supper evening aboard the
Pullman cars on the Colne
Valley Railway has been
organised for Wednesday
July 16th*

*We need 30 members in the
party then we can have the
train to ourselves. Cost will
be the same as last year,
around £22 per person.*

*First come first served -
early bookings please to Bob
Thornhill.*

Further details later.



Wow! What a Party!

What a way to end 2007 with a superb party for members and their guests.

There are many people to thank for putting this together. To Tim and Carol for arranging the brainteasers and to Bernard who kept us all on the move around the church hall trying to guess the locations of his photographs.

Then what can we say about the cabaret? No one expected Sonia, our local Councillor, and Liz, our

hard-working secretary, to show a leg and to share with us the intimate contents of their wardrobe.

Special thanks must also go to Liz's daughter Clare who stood in at the very last moment to save the day. Liz's husband Alan also got in on the act—lucky chap. There were 'other pictures' taken of the evening but

these have been censored by the editor.

Sonia and her helpers once again produced a mouth-watering buffet and we say a special thank you as it was very much appreciated.

The success of the evening was due in no small part to members and guests who really entered into the spirit of the occasion. It must rank as one of the happiest community events ever held in Lexden. A real village social.

For Sale

Half a dog - 6 shillings

Cats - two shillings

Rats - sixpence

This year is the 360th Anniversary of the Siege of Colchester. Following his excellent talk on the subject at our recent November meeting and to mark the event our own Blue Badge guide Dick Barton has offered to arrange a "Siege Walk" around the town. Members will visit the principal sites of action during the murderous twelve week siege which saw increasing starvation and squalor when townsfolk were reduced to eating cats and rats just to keep alive.

The walk will take place on July 9th. This date falls within those 12 awful weeks exactly 360 ago.

Members will recall that Dick's tour of historic Lexden last year was so oversubscribed that a second date had to be

arranged. This event will also be very popular so there will be two tours on July 9th, one at 2.30 in the afternoon and another at 6.30 in the evening. Prior booking is necessary and details will be given out later.

Email from Down Under.

In the previous magazine I wrote about the visit of Les and Pam Kirkham from Australia who were relatives of George Vince, one of the millers at Lexden. This is their reply on returning home.

Hi David.

We had a great time in Essex particularly the visit to the old mill area of George Vince. After we left you we found Lexden church and easily found the graves of the Vince family which were in good condition considering their age. Then we went onto Colchester before returning to London. I am still updating my notes on George Vince. My computer crashed soon after I returned home and I have yet to get it fixed. I only got all my data back this week, so hopefully I will get on to it soon.

With kind regards and thanks again.

Les and Pam Kirkham

Have you read?

I am sure that many of you, having an interest in local history, do a lot of reading. Can I commend to those that have not read it a book with a local storyline by a local vicar (well he was in the 1870's).

The book is "Mehalah" and the author was the Revd, Sabine Baring Gould, vicar at East Mersea and famous as the writer of the hymn 'Onward Christian Soldiers'.

Mehalah is the story of a girl by the same name who lived in poverty with her mother in a shack on Ray Island. They are made homeless by an unscrupulous landlord who has an eye for Mehalah and burns their hovel down (he also keeps his mad brother in chains in his cellar—a real Mr 'nice guy'.

The location is set around Peldon, the Strood, Ray island, that area Colchester side of the causeway, and Wyvenhoe to give it its old spelling. The story ends up with..... No I won't spoil it for you. If you haven't read it do so it's a cracking story. Pity it's never been made into a film.

DC

AGM

The first part of the April meeting will be the AGM followed by a presentation from members of the Group on the 2007/8 project "Lexden in Wartime". At that meeting we shall have to elect a new Chairman. A call for nominations was made at the February meeting and, in the event of more than one candidate, a vote will take place in accordance with our Constitution.

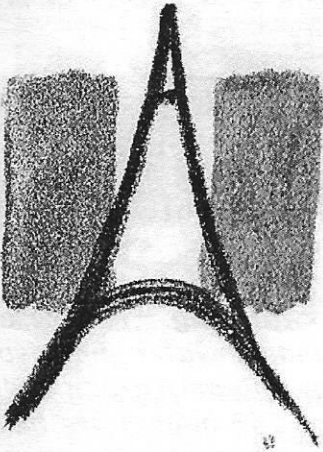
At the April meeting tickets will be distributed for the Village Sign Unveiling event which will take place on Saturday April 19th at 11.00am. Tickets will be free to members and invited guests, tickets for non-members will be £5.

Volunteer wanted

The Colchester Museums Resource Service is looking for a volunteer for one day a week to help in a very interesting new project to computerise and preserve the Museum's extensive photographic collection. If anyone is interested please call me (David Cawdell) on 01206 540403 or email d.cawdell@btinternet.com in the first instance for more information.

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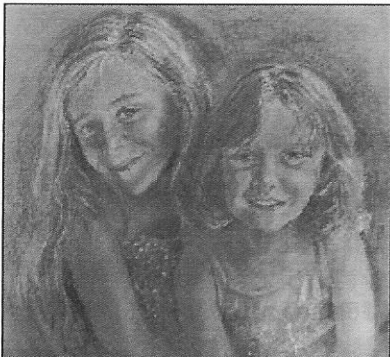
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I graduated in Fine Art from St Martin's School of Art, London
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See my work on the web at: www.jane-thornhill.com



Park and Ride and Hotel threat at Lexden

You will have read in a recent issue of the Evening Gazette that plans have been submitted for the 37 acre field adjacent to the A12 slip road to be turned into a Park & Ride facility.

Whilst the proposals are still at an initial stage this idea will need watching very carefully and early protest action taken. I am sure that we can count on the support of our Ward Councillors and the Lexden Conservation Group who were very successful at stopping the residential development of Lexden Park some years ago.

Also the proposed 72 bedroom hotel needs watching. At present Anglian Water are laying a high pressure mains water pipe from their reservoir at the Gathering Grounds right up past Lexden Lodge and on up to the old Woods factory site where 750 houses are being built. This mains pipe looks as if it will cross right underneath the proposed hotel site. Also this site was once the very swampy end of the Lexden Mill pond before the roundabout was built and is still continually fed by the Lexden Springs, hardly a suitable site for a four storey hotel block.

Watch these (fast disappearing) spaces.

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