

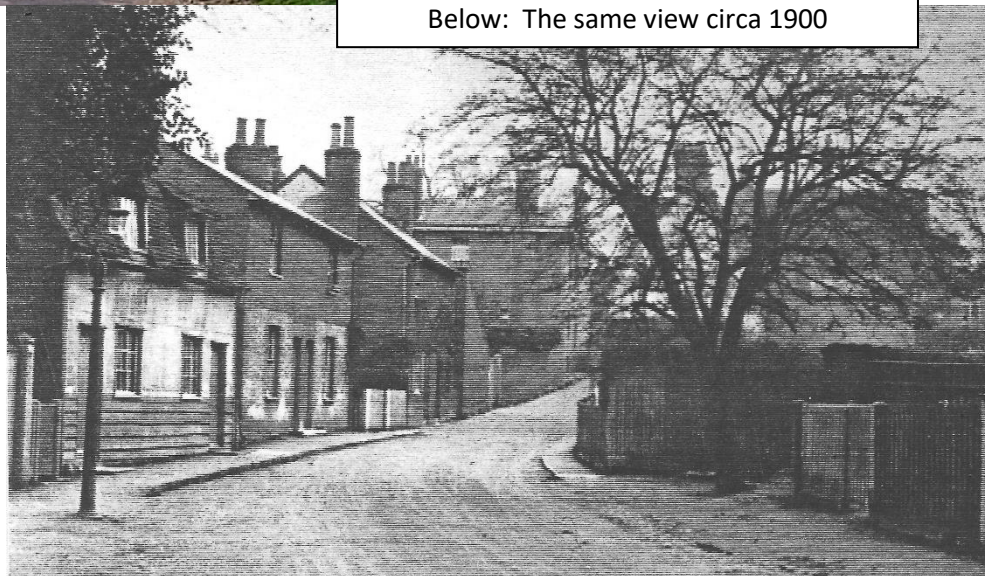
Lexden History Group



Spring Lane, Lexden

Above: Looking towards Lexden Road

Below: The same view circa 1900



- Once there was a Pub on Chitts Hill
 - Victorian Lexden
 - The Home Guard (UK)

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On Halstead Road opposite King Coel Road there is a stone marking the site of Lamb Cross (*left*) known in 1278 as the new cross of William de Lavalei, Lord of Stanway Manor and Constable of Colchester Castle. The stone marked the boundary between village and town and stood beside the entry into Chitts Hill, the mile long road leading down to Newbridge over the River Colne. Blaxill's book, *The Street Names of Colchester*, gives the name "Chitts" as coming from the mediaeval word "shitte" meaning nook or corner.

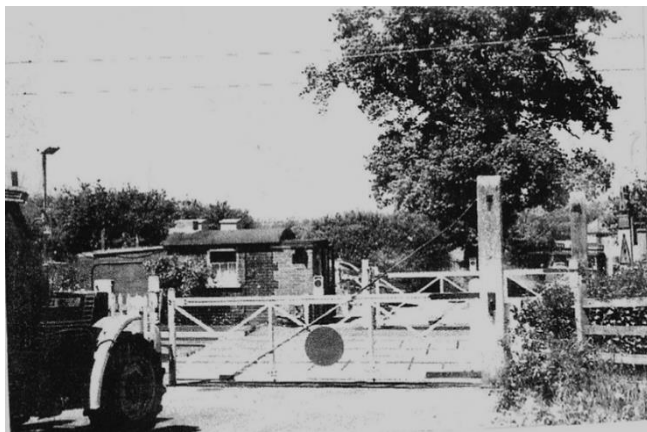
When the northern A12 bypass was opened in 1982, Chitts Hill was cut off for direct entry, so alternative arrangements had to be made. A footbridge was erected for walkers, but vehicles were diverted further along Halstead

Road to cross by a road bridge, then turning right to join up with the original road. The

largest house on Chitts Hill is Holmwood (*right - back of building*) built in 1870 for Henry Jones, a prominent Colchester solicitor and businessman, noted as a maker of bricks. He served as a borough councillor for many years, and also as town clerk for three years. He was deeply involved in local politics, often in conflict with his colleagues.



In 1922 the whole property was bought by Ernest and Frances Duggan, who were to run it as Holmwood House school for boys up to the age of 12. The school now almost 100 years old still survives as a private independent educational establishment for both boys and girls, starting from nursery age to mid-teenage.



Carrying on down the hill is the railway crossing. Until recently the gates (*left*) were opened manually by the gate-keeper who was on duty from his small hut. With a system of bells he was notified when to open or close the gates. Today the gates are operated electrically so the gate-keeper became redundant.

In January 1941 the gate-keeper, Henry Meadows had a narrow escape when an enemy Heinkel bomber swooped and fired machine gun bullets over a passing train seriously wounding several passengers, but Meadows escaped injury for he took cover under a locker in his hut. It was assumed that the bomber was aiming for the nearby Seven Arches viaduct, but he missed the target.

Back in the late 1800s there was a pub, really a beer house, standing beside the railway crossing - it was named "Locomotive" and served the railway workers at the nearby, now disused railway sidings, hence its name. The sidings were just a few yards away from the crossing on Halstead Road bordering Iron Latch Lane. Records show that in 1871 Thomas Adkinson, aged 63, was in residence as a brewer. The census of 1891 has Thomas Mills, aged 45, described as a beer retailer. The licensing records from 1907 to 1910 show that Mills owned the "Locomotive" (*below*). From the photograph it is seen that Daniell & Sons Ltd, the West Bergholt brewery are providing "Fine old and

mild ales, porter and stout". The pub stood immediately adjacent to the railway gatehouse. There were no further records after 1910, so perhaps that is when the building was demolished.

A footnote about the sidings: When no longer required by the railway authorities the site remained unused for many years before Hopkins Homes purchased the ground in 2011, with planning granted to build 100 high quality houses naming the complex Oliver's Grove.



VICTORIAN LEXDEN



When James Hurnard moved to Lexden from his brewery in East Hill he remarked that "on the longest day in 1873" the family moved to "a lovely country home in Lexden, not far from Colchester" – Hill House (left). He loved it there especially enjoying his walks to nearby Lexden Springs and his gardens reaching down to the river. His son Samuel Fennell Hurnard lived in the house for many years.

Lexden in Victorian times was one of the outlying parishes of Colchester, a village separate from the town. The last large house on the north side of Lexden Road on leaving Colchester in earlier Victorian times was Casina, now St Mary's School, first lived in by GH Errington before he moved to Lexden Park. The first house in Lexden was West Acre Court, then known as Upper Hill House or later Westwood, on the corner of Glen Avenue (Cutthroat Lane). Next came the Hurnard's House. The south side of the road was dominated by land belonging to Lexden Park which reached as far as today's Norman Way, so probably the last house in the early Victorian era was St Mary's Lodge, now the site of Vint Crescent.

The Victoria History of Essex states that the titheable acreage of Lexden in Victorian times "comprised 1,746 acres of arable, 430 acres of pasture, and 37 acres of woodland". There were three farms with more than 200 acres, three with 100-200 acres, three with 50-100 acres, and "several smaller holdings". Lexden Park, bought in about 1821 by J F Mills, dominated the village. By 1838 he had enlarged the estate by acquiring a further 296 acres, mostly as a result of the Enclosure Act of 1821. Earlier there was Crescent House, a "gentleman's house", built on the corner of Church Lane and Lexden Road, which was possibly demolished in about 1875. After Mills's death the estate was passed to his son-in-law, GH Errington, who immediately sold some of the land. The house over the years was enlarged and remodelled, sometimes using the original fittings. The 1881 OS map (below) shows that there was also a boat house near the lake. When Errington died in 1883 the house was eventually sold in 1889, with 290 acres, to Sir Mountstuart Elphinstone Grant Duff, who had been the Governor in Madras.

When Victoria came to the throne the population of Lexden was 1,184 rising to 1,454 in 1851, 1,931 in 1881 and more dramatically to 2,310 in 1891. The 1881 statistics recorded by *Vision of Britain* suggest that farms in the area gave employment to nearly 100, and that many others were employed as builders, carpenters, painters, bricklayers,



etc. The village also supported several blacksmiths, sawyers, and brick and tile makers. Over 200 local people were employed as domestic servants, gardeners, grooms/coachmen and for "washing services". Dressmakers and shirtmakers were also in demand, as were drapers, tailors, milliners, seamstresses, shoemakers, etc. Colchester was within comparatively easy walking distance for some of Lexden's workers as more than 120 local people were recorded as working in factories or for the railway. The professional classes included accountants, solicitors, physicians or in local government, etc, who could have used the services of a cabman to get to their offices.

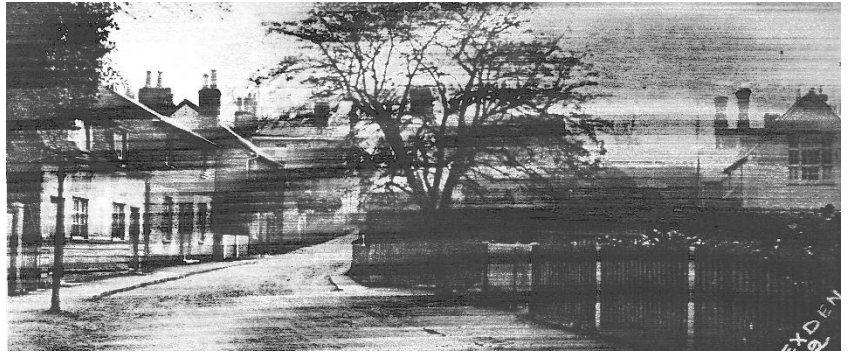


There were a number of farms in the area including Prettygate (*left*), Parsonshill (or Home Farm), Magazine, Malting, Motts, Plume, Heath (there was another of this name towards Shrub End), Chitts Hill, Westhouse, Lexden Lodge, Ramparts in Bakers Lane, Sheepen, etc. They were not all large but any grain produced could be milled at Lexden Mill in Spring Lane or the small Shrubend Mill.

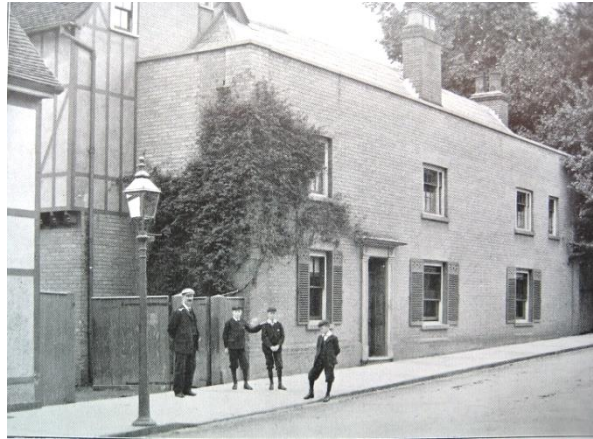
Nearly 40 people locally were employed providing food and lodging and the Sun and Crown inns in Lexden Road were always busy providing drinks, and may be board and lodging. The farms sold milk, eggs and other products and

local shops such as a butcher, fishmonger, miller, baker, confectioner, etc, provided many other items. Coal had to be delivered, horses shod, and wheels repaired and on a Sunday a clergyman would hold services. He would baptise, marry and bury local people, give advice, attend the various welfare committees and visit the sick. The post office had to be manned, telegrams sent off, letters stamped and delivered. With all this activity and more than 500 in employment, it was still recorded that over 420 men and women had no occupation, but many of these may have been "living on own means" or unable to work. It was a busy life for most of the people in Lexden. The Post Master at No 6 Lexden Street even doubled as the local headmaster.

Some 40 local children attended dame schools and several older children went to schools in Colchester but in 1842 a new school (*far right*) was built, with a teacher's house, in Spring Lane. John Appleby (1817-1879) was the schoolmaster for 30 years and his wife also taught, probably with him at the National School. John Rawstorn



Papillon, in his will proved in 1837, gave £20 a year to the school and by 1839, when it had 70 children, more than half of them received charity clothes. Boys over 8 attended Lexden school at the rector's expense. Rev George Preston had been a strong supporter of schools for the poor, regularly helping with his wife at Lexden school until his death in 1840. By 1861 the school was enlarged to take 72 children and funding was assisted in 1866 by an annual government grant and in 1867 under the National school requirements, girls were also admitted. Attendance had risen to 120 by 1886 and by the turn of the century had reached over 180. John Appleby died in January 1879 aged 62 and is buried on the south side of the church. His wife, Emma, joined him ten years later. The school



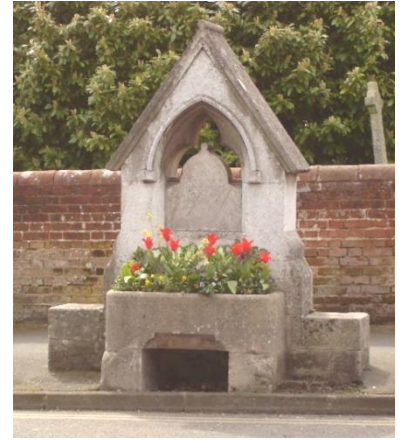
was replaced in 1925 by Lexden council school. There were other schools in the area. The large 1881 OS map shows one in Straight Road, now a pre-school, and another in King Harold Road.

The Quaker school at 3 Lexden Street (*left*) (now Jacqueline Court) was taken over in 1869 by Frederick Richardson with his wife, Sarah. He revived the lapsed endowment for the free education of six boys. Census details only record boarders, not day pupils, but in 1871 there were 16 boarders and in 1881 there were 27 between the ages of 11 and

14 with Sarah, a cook and two servants to look after them. The boarders were accommodated in the upper floor of the coach house (now part of 187 Lexden Road) where a narrow winding staircase stills leads up to the large dormitory which would have been bitterly cold. Fireplaces remain there but whether any fires were lit when the scholars were in occupation is unknown.

Many well known Colchester sons went to the school, such as E Alec Blaxill born in 1873, who became an Alderman and was twice Mayor of Colchester; the five Bunting boy cousins were sons of nurserymen and seed growers. The four Daniell boys were from the local brewing family and F Stanley Daniell became a well-known architect; Cecil Benham was the son of William Gurney Benham, another Mayor of Colchester; Samuel Hurnard's father was James Hurnard of Hill House. The eleven Marriage boys were all related and their fathers were farmers and millers around Chelmsford apart from Francis whose father, Wilson Marriage, was a flour miller and farmer in Colchester and Mayor of Colchester. There were three Wheeler boys of the early Lay and Wheeler wine merchants. Frank S Cant b1887 was the son of Frank Cant of Baker's Farm in Baker's Lane, another Mayor of Colchester, a rose grower and nurseryman – a name that is still familiar today. Frederick and Sarah's only child, Frederick Joshua, trained as a teacher and in 1886, with his wife Julietta took over the School from his father who moved to Cresseners in Church Lane. On 8th May 1892 this beloved son died suddenly

and a Portland stone drinking fountain (*right*) was placed outside the church gate in Lexden Road with the inscription 'Erected by the Old Boys of Lexden School in loving memory of Frederick Joshua Richardson 1893.' He is buried in Lexden Churchyard, joined later by Julietta. Frederick senior again took over responsibility for the school until his death in 1903.



Lexden church had been rebuilt in 1820 under the auspices of Rev George Preston and the bell dated 1751 was cracked by 1859 and recast in 1899. In 1901 a chime of 11 small bells was added. When Rev Preston built the Rectory in Spring Lane he included a Yew Avenue from his front door to the church. This went in front of the school but by 1881 a number of houses on either side of the new Spring Lane had been built in to the east of the Yew trees (*see OS map, page 4*).

The churchyard was enlarged in 1877 and the church extended in 1893 with a grand chancel replacing one which the Victorians deemed inadequate. The Lady Chapel and organ chamber were also built at this time. George Preston's successor in 1840, Rev John Papillon, who was related to the patron of the church, took over the Rectory in Spring Lane. Part of Lexden parish was assigned to the new parish of All Saints at Shrub End in 1845 and in 1879 the St Paul Chapel of Ease for Lexden became a parish church to serve the growing population near North station and also incorporated parts of the parishes of Lexden and St Mary-at-the-Walls.



Non-conformist chapels were becoming more popular and in 1859 a Primitive Methodist chapel (*left*) was built in Straight Road. From only 18 members it grew in numbers and flourished. In 1884 the foundation stone for Lexden Village Mission Hall (*right*), was laid by young Samuel Fennell



Hurnard. The hall had been financed by his mother, Mrs. James Hurnard (Louisa), who had died a few months earlier and it was opened in April 1885. The foundation stone can still be seen. Initially the hall was used for temperance work, backing up the nearby Temperance Hotel opposite the Crown Inn, but from 1890 it was also registered for services for protestant dissenters.

An earlier Rev John Rawstorn Papillon had inherited Lexden Manor and on his death in 1837 it was left for life to his sister, Elizabeth, with the remainder to his great-nephew Philip O Papillon, who served as MP for Colchester from 1859 to 1865 and was twice mayor. He died in 1899, and was succeeded by his son Pelham R Papillon. Rev J R Papillon also enlarged his estate after the 1821 Enclosure Act acquiring 151 acres by allotment and buying common rights on 18 acres. By 1838 the Papillon family owned 1,216 acres and JF Mills of Lexden Park 296 acres, nearly three-quarters of the parish.

Apart from JF Mills, his successor GR Errington and the Papillon family, Lexden had a number of influential families living in the large houses which gradually appeared in the 19th century. Many were in the legal profession and farming and served the Borough Council as mayors, aldermen and councillors. The Hurnards were at Hill House, the (James) Tilletts lived at Braiswick House (*Braiswick was part of Lexden then*) taken over

taken over in 1856 by the Josselyn family. Thompson Smith at St Mary's Lodge and members of the Smythies family at The Turrets or it was let to military families. Lexden Lodge, the old Manor house, was farmed by Alfred Phillips who on retirement moved into Forge House, now Spring House, on the corner of Spring Lane and Lexden Street as it was then called. Families, of course, moved on during the period but generally the large houses were occupied by people who could employ servants. A point of interest: the main entrance to Lexden Park (*right*) at that time was halfway down the hill which explains the sudden wide pathway today!

John Stuck Barnes lived at Casina, Edward



Nearby Lexden Springs was exploited in the 19th century to supplement the town's water supply. The wooden New Bridge, recorded from 1204, on the road from Lexden to West Bergholt near Chitts Hill, was made in three sections to simplify repairs as it was the joint responsibility of the lords of the manors of West Bergholt, Lexden, and Abbots in Stanway. These became necessary and it was repaired in 1866.

Some local people were unhappy with their lot and were prepared to answer advertisements (*below: 1841 poster*) for a better life in the Colonies. Under the terms of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 arrangements could be made, and were

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To Small Farmers, Mechanics & Laborers.

The precious years of your life are passing away, while you are waiting for a relief that may never come. The REAL REMEDY for your accumulated distress is in EMIGRATION. Embrace the present favorable opportunity of leaving a Land "where you live BY TAKING THE BREAD OUT OF EACH OTHER'S MOUTHS."

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Or at

encouraged, for costs to be paid by the pauper's parish to contribute to the "Wealth and Grandeur of this Country".

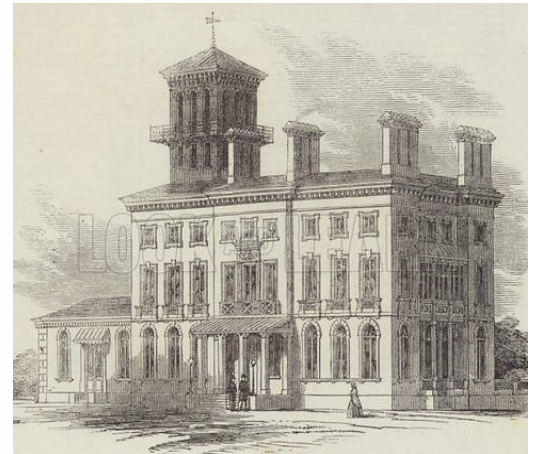
In 1867 the Lexden Vestry set up a fund to pay the expenses of poor parishioners who were willing to emigrate. The New Land Act of 1868 encouraged young healthy men and women to sail to Australia or New Zealand. Similarly many left for the Americas.

Remarkably there was immigration from Scotland to Essex to rent farms more cheaply and where tenants did not have to pay for farm repairs. The climate in Essex was also better and milk could be sold to London via the nearby new railway. Local employment was not much enhanced as the Scots, particularly, wouldn't pay wages and used family members instead!

The Vestry had also in 1830 raised a subscription, supplemented by the poor rate, to pay for special constables to patrol at 2/6 a night but by 1841 this provision had been superseded by the Borough Council paying two full-time policemen to patrol Mile End

and Greenstead as well as Lexden. There was the usual burglary, robbery and assault and these cases were dealt with at the Colchester or Chelmsford Courts. Charles Wright, a young lad reported as 11 years old in local newspapers but as 14 in court records, and "whose vacant expression of countenance appeared to denote him as a lad of not very bright intellect" was before the court in Colchester in May 1859 charged with setting fire to a cow-house and piggery, on the premises of his master, Rev J Papillon. He had apparently been to the Rectory on an errand and later said that he was very sorry that he had done it. The poor lad was committed for trial at the assizes but ordered to be detained in the borough gaol. Witnesses were Peter Ladbrook, the Lexden Street butcher, and a servant, Emma Smith. Unfortunately, no outcome of the case has been found. However, wealthy Lexden inhabitants were not always upright members of society. A previous inhabitant of Hill House, Samuel Tillett, a conveyancing solicitor and money scrivener, defrauded his clients and in 1853 was sentenced to seven years transportation for contempt and perjury but, through his manipulative skills, eventually served only a two year term in Chelmsford prison.

The Eastern Counties railway from London was opened in 1843 to the north of Lexden with a station and a viaduct over the Colne near Motts Farm. Services were improved in 1848 by the provision of a "postal receiving house". The railway helped to increase the population of Colchester and Lexden during the Victorian age and they all had to be accommodated. As Colchester expanded to the west, the population of Lexden rose rapidly and by 1901 stood at 4,089, the greatest increase occurring between 1861-71 (25 per cent), and 1881-91 (51 per cent). These totals also included the new Essex Hall asylum (*right*) in 1859.



The Lexden population was increasing. Large Victorian houses were built along the north of Lexden Road, ie, The Hollies - demolished for Sanders Drive, The Lindens - now replaced by several houses. After St Mary's Lodge (now Vint Crescent) the Leaning family built a large house which became the Maternity Home (now Sovereign Crescent), and other comparatively smaller houses were built up to what is now Norman Way, and the edge of Lexden Park. The 1881 OS map shows Cook's Lane leading to Mott's Farm from just beyond the Crown passing the large Lexden House, where Maj General Frederick and Mrs Clarice Ord lived, followed by the Gurney Hoares, and shows their ice house. London Road was gradually developed and the 1881 map shows a Smithy where Aldi is now. Straight Road was also being developed, although the entrenchments remained prominent before reaching Heath Farm on the corner of what is now Heath Road.



Heath Lodge (where Mary Beattie later lived) was built in about 1859 as the Dog and Pheasant pub, commonly called the Diamond because of its decorative brick work, but by 1885 it was a private residence. No houses were built along Halstead Road (later Colne Road) or in King Cole Road until the 1890s. By 1870 Shrublands, later Holmwood House (*left*) had been built for Henry Jones. Closer to the railway line was Chitts Hill Farm and the nearby inn. (see

Bernard Polley's article on page 2)

The southern end of Prettygate Road up to what became King Harold Road was named Roman Road. Lexden Park in 1881 reached almost to Prettygate Road near Magazine Farm. It is interesting to note how many wells are recorded on the 1881 map and also several smithies to shoe all the horses. Throughout the 19th century various gravel and sand pits were exploited, including one on the western boundary known as King Coel's Kitchen. There were brick kilns on various sites on or near Lexden Lodge farm throughout the 19th century; the last of them was worked in 1881 and closed by 1897.

When Victoria came to the throne in 1837 agriculture provided much of the employment within the parish, but was gradually being outnumbered by tradesmen and craftsmen, many of whom may have worked in the town although living in Lexden. There were no cars, but carts, horses, small carriages and coaches which regularly made their way along Lexden Road, but it would be another few years before trams ran along the road. In the later 19th century, there was much good residential development and Lexden was increasingly seen as a wealthy suburb providing homes for many members of the town's elite. James Hurnard's description of Lexden is still maintained today as Lexden is considered one of the best areas in Colchester!

THE HOME GUARD (UK)

Jackie Bowis

The Home Guard (initially Local Defence Volunteers or LDV) was an armed citizen militia supporting the British Army during the Second World War and operational from 14th May 1940 – 3rd December 1944. It was disbanded on the 31st December, 1945. It had 1.5 million volunteers otherwise ineligible for military service such as those who were under 18 and too young, or too old at over 41 to join regular armed services, or those in reserved occupations. Approximately one in five men became volunteers whose role was to act as a secondary defence force in case of invasion by the forces of Nazi Germany. They would try to slow down the advance of the enemy even by a few hours to give the regular troops time to regroup. They were there to forestall panic and to prevent communication routes being blocked by refugees, to man roadblocks and guard the coastal areas of the United Kingdom. Other important places they guarded were airfields, factories and explosive stores.

On 14th May 1940, Anthony Eden, the Secretary of State for War (*right with Winston Churchill*), gave a radio broadcast to "Men of all ages who wish to do something for the defence of their country", encouraging them to join a new force, whose purpose would be to ensure that any German "invasion would be repelled doubly sure". Within 24 hours 250,000 men had registered. This force was called the Local Defence Volunteers (LDV) and was established to protect against German attack. Members of the LDV were initially poorly armed, yet they trained in the evenings in weapons handling, unarmed combat, and basic sabotage. In July 1949 Prime Minister Winston Churchill instructed that members of the LDV should receive proper military training to act as the 'extra eyes and ears' for the full time soldiers.



Prime Minister Winston Churchill was an ardent supporter of the Home Guard and, in a BBC broadcast on 14th July 1940, he stated: "These Officers and men, a large proportion of whom have been through the last war, have the strongest desire to attack and come close quarter with the enemy wherever he may appear. Should the invader come to Britain, there will be no placid lying down of the people in submission before

him, as we have seen alas, in other countries. We shall defend every village, every town, and every city". On the 23rd July 1940, after an intervention by Winston Churchill, the LDV was changed to the more inspiring 'Home Guard'. Members of the Home Guard still did their regular jobs, and in the evening they drilled and patrolled locally, whether they were in an area Platoon or at a 'Works unit'. They were not paid for this role. From poorly equipped beginnings, where they utilised make-do uniforms and weaponry, the Home Guard evolved into a well-equipped and well-trained army of 1.7 million men who could use their skills across a wide number of roles. Members were awarded a 'Certificate of Achievement' from The War Office, and if the certificate cited 3 or more years' service, it could be used to claim the Defence Medal.

The Essex Home Guard was made up of several Battalions on an area basis, normally covering towns or districts. Each Battalion had a number of Companies under its control and each Company would have a number of Platoons. Each Platoon could appoint lower levels for specialist work. Rather than commissions coming from the King and War Office, senior officers were appointed by the Lords Lieutenant, and those senior officers in turn appointed more junior officers.

18th Battalion, Essex Home Guard, covered Lexden and Winstree. Their HQ was at Ball Farm, Blackheath, Colchester, and their Commanding Officer (CO) was Col C G Mangles

'A' Company covered Tolleshunt Major, Goldhanger, Tolleshunt D'Arcy, Salcott and Tollesbury. CO: Captain G H Brand

'B' Company covered Tiptree and Messing, CO: Captain F Sparrow



'C' Company covered Stanway, Copford, Birch and Layer Marney. CO: Major F S Harvey-Cant

'D' Company covered Layer-de-la-Haye, Abberton, Peldon and the Wigboroughs. CO: Captain S S Aldridge

'E' Company covered Fingringhoe and Rowhedge. CO: Captain R C Tippet

'F' Company (left: CO Capt T D Scott centre front - Mersea Museum) covered West Mersea and East Mersea

Their distinguishing marks were 1 broad stripe for the Zone Commander, 4 stripes for the Group Commander: 3 stripes Battalion Commander: 2 stripes Company Commander and 1 stripe Platoon Commander. The Section Commander had 3 chevrons and the Squad Commander 2 chevrons.

Once again we have seen an example of people committing their time and energy for the safety of their local community.

Joe Firmin's amusing account of his service in the Home Guard is below and was included in "Lexden In Wartime" Volume 2, collected and edited in 2009 by Liz White.

"My father was in the Local Defence Volunteers - they were the first Dad's Army in right at the beginning. Anthony Eden appealed on the radio for people to come forward, but there weren't any uniforms, just an armband (right), and we didn't get rifles so people had their own makeshift weapons. You could join the Home Guard at 16 with the older



chaps, and then, after two years, people like myself were called up. I learnt drill and arms use and to shoot, but apart from a big Canadian Ross rifle which I had to messily prise from its protective grease in the packing case, we had some other rather frightening weapons. There was a Blacker Bombard, a projectile launcher which had a terrible recoil on the shoulder of a youth of 16! It had dummy shots in it; we did have live ammunition but we didn't use it. The Spigot mortar was also rather a fearsome makeshift. We also had phosphorous bombs in bottles and, of course, it was really laughable because you had to get rather close to a German vehicle to stick one on!



"I think my Home Guard days were very rewarding as well as amusing (*left: Joe and his father in Home Guard uniform*). I was a sort of "Private Pike" (with no scarf!) and was a dispatch rider for our platoon, going on my cycle putting Part 1 Orders from the Command Point through the NCOs letter boxes. The Home Guard locally had its own headquarters so the officers could lead and issue orders. We did night work and exercises in the mid-war period in case there was an invasion. We had to be proficient in night operations and had a certain amount of liaison with the regular army, to sharpen them up as well.

"We did guard duties and one evening I went to the cliffs at Walton-on-the-Naze when a German bomber came in low over the sea, climbing. Captain Fox of my unit said "Right lads, get some rounds in with the rifle" but we had to restrain him from opening fire on the bomber. We were not supposed to expend ammunition in this way. The bomber went up to 3000 ft and an anti aircraft battery opened fire on it.

Later in the war when the Home Guard became pretty well equipped we had field telephones. We then had good communication and liaised with regular army units. There were Home Guard rocket anti-aircraft batteries at Colchester garrison and they brought down one or two planes in the 1943-44 period.

"In 1943 one of the most hilarious episodes with the Home Guard concerned Sgt Tom Marshall. He lived at top of the hill in Lexden in an old house set back and almost hidden from the road opposite the Crown Inn (*No 177 now demolished and replaced by 3 houses*). Both he and his brother, Fred, were builders: Fred still lived at Assington, where the family came from. They did all Buntings work on the buildings and houses.

"Tom was a wily old Suffolk country man and a First World War veteran, having experienced life in the trenches. The Home Guard occasionally took part in training manoeuvres with soldiers from Colchester Garrison. We knew the "enemy" would come across from the Sheepen Road area where they would have to negotiate the undulations of Hilly Fields. The day before the exercise Tom had booby trapped the whole area with criss-crossed wires and tins ("mines"). He had also built a platform and hauled an old car seat to the top of a very tall beech tree which overlooked the sweep of Hilly Fields and where he sat with a pair of night vision glasses (Barr and Stroud binoculars). The rest of the platoon was in the 1940 pill box alongside this tree ready with thunder flashes and blank ammunition in their rifles. Of course when the "enemy" came creeping across Hilly Fields and blundered into these booby traps, the Army Major umpire adjudged the invaders had been effectively wiped out! This was Tom's victory and we celebrated in the Sun Inn afterwards. Until a couple of years ago the seat carcass was still there with few people aware of its origin!

"As a junior reporter I met certain dignitaries in the Home Guard. Solicitor Ossie Thompson Smith was a private in my father's platoon and we would march along the High Street one day and the next he would be the Borough Coroner and I the reporter, both in our suits. We had an estate agent in the Platoon - a dead ringer of Private Godfrey (BBC Dad's Army) with a weak bladder - always having to be excused! Meeting these people in the Home Guard and then seeing them the next day in their professional jobs demonstrated that we were all living two completely different lives! Towards the end of the war in November or December 1944 the Home Guard was disbanded for it was thought that the war was near the end with no fear of invasion as the Nazis were involved in the Russian War and obviously not posing a threat any more."

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Obituary

Tony Blaxill Members will be sad to hear of the recent death of Tony Blaxill, a regular attender at our meetings with his wife, Ann, since the Group was formed. An engineer by training, Tony worked for BX Plastics and Paxman's as Works Engineer before joining the family firm. We send our sympathy to Ann and the family.

Announcement

Plaque from the Avenue of Remembrance: During the promotion of the 2018 book "Compelling Stories from the Avenue of Remembrance" by Liz White, LHG acquired two plaques from the Avenue dedicated to soldiers who had served in Essex Regiments during the First World War. One of the plaques has been presented to the Essex Yeomanry Regimental Collection and the other has been given to Liz as a memento of her work on the book.

**Due to the continuation of
 Covid-19 regulations
 we are currently still not permitted to
 hold Indoor Group Meetings**