

Lexden History Group



The Obelisk - see article on P8 (Picture courtesy Adrian S Pye.)

- **The Old Bus Park**
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- **The Fourth Frederick Hedge, Clockmaker**

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Do you remember the bus park in St John's Street? In 1904 Colchester Corporation introduced



a tramway system to the Borough with four routes merging in the High Street – from East Gates, Hythe, Lexden and North Station. Two years later a fifth terminus was added at old Heath Recreation Ground. Many walkers were now able to ride to work on a tram but the Colchester Tramways lasted only 25 years when motor vehicles took over the routes adding several other outer districts in the town.

Meanwhile throughout this time a number of former goods carriers were developing a petrol driven bus service for passengers replacing the horse-drawn vehicles of bygone days. One of these operators was Harold Chambers of Bures whose first motorised bus in 1918 ran a service between Sudbury, Bures and Colchester. His pick-up point in Colchester was outside the Hippodrome Theatre in High Street.

An example of passenger omnibus services includes:

COMPANY	AREA COVERED	PICK-UP POINT
Beeston B	Ardleigh, Manningtree, Ipswich	High St, Hippodrome
Blackwell, S	Earls Colne, Chappel, Wakes Colne	Horse & Groom Inn
Moore Brothers	Kelvedon, Chelmsford	Office in High Street
Norfolk's	Stoke-by-Nayland, Dedham, Ipswich	Swan Hotel
Berrys	West Mersea	High Street

A notice printed in 1916 Benham's Almanac recorded:

MOTOR SERVICES – Practically every town, village and hamlet in the Colchester district is now linked up with the Borough by an excellent Motor omnibus service.

After World War One the Borough Council were considering a permanent parking space for all motor bus operators – a suitable site was found on the corner of St John's Street with Abbeygate Street. The property included "The Rookery" owned by undertaker James Went.

With formalities completed, the site was cleared in preparation for laying out individual numbered spaces to rent by the various bus operators. Vehicles entered the park off Abbeygate Street and moved into their allotted spaces, all facing St John's Street (*right*).



The new bus parking area was opened without formality on Saturday 4th July 1925. Facilities for passengers included a large wooden waiting room with self-closing doors, heated in winter, ladies and gent toilets and a rather complication timetable board with times of bus departures (see *left* of photograph above). Information was constantly updated by hand in the 1920s – long before computer updates. Passengers must have stood looking at the board for ages before they could work out where the bus was parked and what time it was due to leave. It would probably have been easier to buy a copy of the timetable for 2d from Shippey's in Head Street.



The bus park was busy every day - in the morning children arriving for school, people working in the town centre and early shoppers, with the return journeys later in the day.

The photograph of the buses awaiting passengers can be dated to May 1932 for the news vendor carries a bill poster announcing "Atlantic Flight Latest" referring to Amelia Earhart's solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean in 15 hours. Amelia (*left*) was an American aviator and author. She received the United States Distinguished Flying Cross for this accomplishment. She disappeared in 1937 during a flight over the Pacific Ocean.

One business to use the bus park for many years was GW Osborne & Sons of Tollesbury. Before the First World War George William Osborne was running a carrier service with a horse and cart (*right*) to convey goods from local farmers and fishermen to the railway station which had opened in 1904 to serve the line between Tollesbury and Kelvedon and to meet the main line Colchester to London. This was very much a family business for William was joined by many of his twelve children in providing a service for Tollesbury folk



who asked if the carrier service could include passengers. This George readily agreed to and in 1917 the Tollesbury blacksmith, Robert Maskell, adapted a London horsebus and put it on a Model T-Ford chassis. Two rows of seats were fixed in the cab with trips into Maldon and Colchester, to visit larger shops offering supplies unobtainable in the village.

(*left: bus outside Maskell's blacksmith's shop in North Road in Tollesbury.*)



By the 1920s horses gave way to petrol driven buses, some of which Osborne's sons constructed again based on the Ford model T chassis and built with seating for twelve passengers. Over the years Osborne's fleet of buses was constantly changed for new models with additional comfort for passengers and proudly displayed at the Colchester bus park.

The days of the bus park in St John's Street came to an end in 1961 when it moved to a location on the former Lewis Gardens on East Hill (*right*), entrance by way of Queen Street and exit under the short-lived multi-storey car park on East Hill. The old site in St John's Street became a car park (*over, left*) for a time before a new Tesco supermarket (*over, right*) would take its place.





Since November 2012 Colchester Bus and Coach Station has been located in a congested Osborne Street (*right*). This location is much derided and numerous requests for improvements or a site change have been put forward. It is hoped that sometime soon the problem will be addressed and with the possibility of the St John's car park suffering from concrete cancer it is approaching the end of its useful life. This may not happen for ten years but it would be good to think that the Bus Park would return to its original site!



LOUISA DEACLE and REV GEORGE PRESTON

For many years Dick Barton collected newspaper cuttings and other reports of interest. When he sadly died in July Shirley gave me several of his very full folders which I have wallowed in and found some items of great interest, ripe for further research. One of these was a handwritten original letter from Louisa Deacle to Rev George Preston, the Rector of Lexden.

Bridgend Dec 19, 1815

Dear Sir

I duly received your letter, and feel particularly obliged by its contents, in answer to which I beg leave to observe, that had I do not feel myself fully authorised to allow the prosecution of Ward's affair, without first having the approbation of my Brother, (whom I intend to write to on the subject tomorrow) I shall be extremely obliged to you to stop all further proceedings, till I have his answer, the substance of which I will, immediately communicate to you.

I am not a little pleased to hear that Dr Deacle is convinced about the five pounds, as I had forgotten all recollection of the transaction. It gives me pleasure in hearing Mrs Preston and your dear little girl are well. Present my kind regards

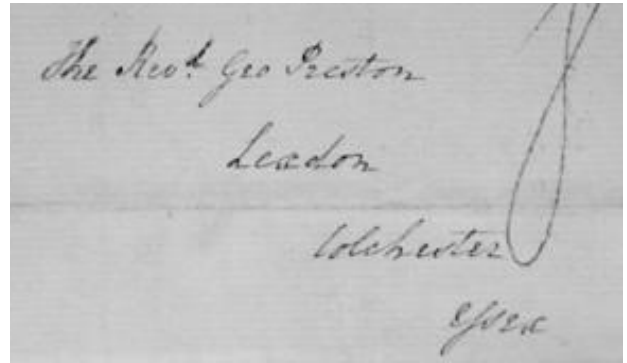
And believe me, my dear Sir

Yours much obliged

Louisa Deacle

Addressed to (right)

The Revd Geo Preston
Lexden
Colchester
Essex



Unfortunately it has been impossible to find out anything about “Ward’s affair” which would be interesting. It is a common name and no hint has been given to open up research but perhaps the matter was never made public or it progressed no further. Only finding the other letters would advance any research especially regarding the £5 transaction. This was quite a large sum of money in those days, possibly about £550 depending on which conversion is used! However, the letter has revealed more about the Deacle family and their connection with George Preston.



The ink had faded and the address, as was the custom at that time, was written on the reverse of the folded letter. It was hand stamped (left) on receipt at the General Post Office in Bridge Road, Westminster and postmarked with an evening duty double ring date stamp for Dec 19, 1815 before being conveyed by mail coach, under armed

guard, to Colchester. There is still a post office in Bridge Road, Westminster! The area was once called Bridgend.

Louisa Wells was born in Banbury in about 1750 to Thomas (1724-99), and Louisa. In 1782 in Hornton, Oxfordshire, she married Thomas Deacle, a surgeon, who was born in 1748 the son of Thomas, a surgeon, and Elizabeth (née Hicks). Thomas and Louisa had four children, two of whom died in infancy but a daughter, Mary Louisa Hicks, was born in 1792 and a son, Hicks Wells in 1793, who was given his mother’s maiden name.

The connection between the Deacle family and Rev George Preston, rector of Lexden from 1804-1840, is that on 27th December 1811 in Stamford, Lincolnshire, he married Jane Isabella the only daughter of Elizabeth and the late Rev John Deacle (1739-1809) who was recorded in the marriage notice as rector of Newbottle and of King’s Sutton in Northamptonshire. Jane and George Preston’s daughter, Isabel, is the “dear little girl” in the letter, at that time aged about 2 years. Rev John was the brother of Rev William Deacle and Thomas, so Jane Isabella was a niece of Thomas and William and a cousin of Louisa’s husband, Thomas (son of Thomas).

William Deacle was a little older than Thomas and became the Rector of St Albright’s in Stanway in 1791. He is the “brother” in the letter also the “Dr” for he was awarded Doctor of Divinity at Oxford, a degree which ranked first in “academic precedence and standing”. He believed in education for children and was a subscriber to the National Society for the Promotion of Education of the Poor. In 1772 the brothers inserted an advertisement in the local Oxford newspaper (right) about a lost horse. It is not known whether this animal was ever found!



Thomas Deacle was staying with William when he died on 9th September 1813. His death was recorded in the Ipswich Journal of 18th September 1813: “*Saturday last an inquest was held at Stanway, near Colchester, before Wm. Cood, Esq, one of the Coroners for the county of Essex, on the body of Thomas Deacle, Esq, brother of the Rev Dr Deacle, Rector of Stanway, who was found dead by the side of a footpath leading to the parsonage, about ten o’clock on Thursday evening preceding. It appeared that the deceased, who was a very corpulent man, and subject formerly to frequent fits of epilepsy, had been dining at Stanway Hall, where he ate a very hearty dinner; and on his return home in the evening on foot, it is supposed, was seized with a fit, which terminated his existence. He was in the 67th year of his age, and was a man of the simplest and most inoffensive manners, and of a truly pious and Christian disposition.*” Thomas was probably dining with the De Horne family owners of Stanway Hall for many years.

William died three years later and a marble tablet in the church records their deaths: “Erected in the memory of the Rev William Deacle DD, late Rector of this parish, died Dec 13th 1816 aged 72 years, whose remains with those of his brother, Thomas Deacle, are deposited in a vault in this churchyard.” William, however, had stated in his will that he wished to be buried in Banbury near his ‘dear parents’ but this was not to take place.

Thomas and Louisa had lived for sometime in Thatcham in Berkshire and later moved to Sonning(?) in Surrey. After Thomas’s sudden death Louisa moved to London, living south of the river in Belmont Place, Vauxhall.

Louisa and Thomas’s surviving son, Hicks Wells Deacle married Mary Gunnell in 1816 and their son, Hicks Thomas Deacle (1793-1868) was a cleric serving in different parishes and for 30 years from 1860 was at Bawburgh church, near Norwich. His son Edward, Louisa’s grandson, became the Vicar of Messing in 1888 and a few years later founded the Messing Boys Home for 6 boys aged between 6 and 10 years who would have attended the local National School. The Home became affiliated to the Waifs and Strays Society in 1897 and by 1911 there were 12 boys between 6 and 14. Edward trained the boys in such subjects as printing and gardening which could be useful to them in their adult lives. A matron looked after them and Edward saw to the administration and finances, running it virtually singlehandedly until his death in 1915 when the Home finally closed.

The will of Thomas Deacle’s brother, Rev William, was dated December 1811. He was very wealthy with funds in many different companies including the Grand Junction Canal. Apart from the usual beneficiaries receiving household goods, silver, etc, his legacies were generous – up to £500. He mentions his brother Thomas Deacle and his son “my nephew” Hicks and also “my niece” Mary. Another nephew, Francis Deacle, was the brother of Jane Isabella Preston, but he died in Rome in January 1815 of “a rapid decline”.

Also mentioned in Rev William’s will was his nephew, Rev Thomas Deacle, Rector of Uphill in Somerset and his son, yet another Thomas, was Jane Isabella’s nephew. Thomas was born in 1799 went to Lincoln College, Oxford, and became the tenant of Marwell Farms in Owlesbury, Hant, working with his wife, Caroline. This Thomas Deacle hit the headlines in the Times and had extensive coverage in Hansard. They became victims of the infamous Swing Riots in 1830 which were rife in the south and east of England. One of the main jobs for farm workers in autumn and winter was threshing, ie, beating the stalks of corn to separate the grain, but threshing machines had recently been invented, putting many farm labourers out of work, leaving them and their families destitute during the cold winter months. The poor harvests in 1829 and 1830 also resulted in lower wages for farm workers and near starvation for their families. This led to protests and many farmers received threatening letters demanding that they

This led to protests and many farmers received threatening letters demanding that they should retain rates of pay for workers and not use threshing machines. If they didn't comply their haystacks and farm buildings would be set alight (*right*). The name 'Captain Swing' was invented with the sole purpose of spreading fear and giving anonymity to protesters.



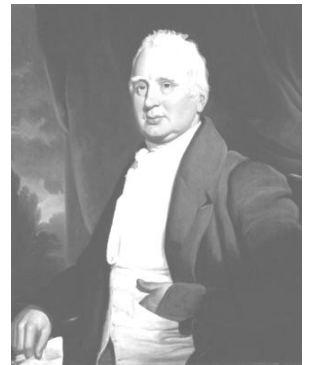
One of Thomas Deacle's threshing machines was destroyed by rioters, the Owlesbury Lads. No help was given to these farmers and their safety was compromised. Thomas and other local farmers decided to talk to the rioters and suggested

increased wages of two shillings, but the response to this gesture was that they would only stop the destruction if other farmers would do the same.



Thomas and his wife, Caroline, were wrongly arrested and accused by Hampshire Magistrates of aiding and abetting the rioters. The Deacles claimed they were "manhandled" by a certain William Bingham Baring (*left*), a Whig politician and son of the large and wealthy Baring banking family, but throughout this time the farmers were supported by no less a man than William Cobbett (*right*) a radical journalist and politician, part of the agrarian faction calling for higher wages to ease

poverty on the land. Caroline was charged riding a grey horse and leading a bunch of rioters to "destruction, inferno and Pillage". It was stated that although handcuffs were considered unnecessary Baring used them and also hit Thomas with a stick. Caroline meanwhile was carried unceremoniously to a "...cart without springs until a post-chaise could be procured..." She collapsed in court and was not charged with any offence but Thomas was charged with assisting the riots. However, no witnesses were to be found so the case was dropped.



In August 1831 Colonel Evans MP presented to the House of Commons a petition against the Law of Settlement Bill to clear the Deacles of wrong doing. According to Hansard, Fyfe Palmer MP said that the Deacles were victims of circumstance and that some restitution was only right and correct after such an unfair trial. It was decided at a subsequent court that the Deacles should be paid £50 in compensation for their bad experience of Justice. The Swing Riots were sudden and unexpected, surprising many in southern and eastern counties, especially in Essex, resulting in magistrates reactions being random and disorganised. About 500 convicted rioters were transported to Van Dieman's Land (Tasmania).

Various Deacle stories emerged after this. Caroline is reported to have gone on the stage, married Capt Andrews of 57 Regt of Bengal Native Infantry and went to India. Although Thomas is reported as going to America he apparently remained in England, remarried and had four sons.

Louisa Deacle's burial record shows her living at Wandsworth Road. She was buried at St Margaret's Church, Westminster, on 17th November 1835 and it is recorded that she was 79 years old. If that is correct she would have been born in 1755 not 1745 or 1751 as in so many records. The Deacles were an interesting family and many thanks to Dick for giving us the opportunity to learn more about them.

You may remember that I finished my last article on Colchester Clockmakers with the business of Nathaniel Hedge (3rd generation) being left on his death to his sons, Nathaniel and Thomas.

The fourth generation Nathaniel was born in 1735, the eldest son of Nathaniel and Sarah and would have spent a lot of his time as a child in his father's workshop. In 1749 he started training as a watch and clockmaker. By 1756, aged 21, he would have taken up his Freedom of the Borough but this was not possible for the town had no Charter and therefore no formal government since 1740. A new Charter was granted in 1763 and on 19th January 1764 he and his brother, John, were sworn free burgesses, by birthright through his father. This qualified them to have businesses in the town and to vote in parliamentary elections and for the Recorder of Colchester.



In 1765 Nathaniel married Martha Gibson, a milliner of St. Nicholas Parish, and he started his own business. To differentiate his clocks from the family business, who used just "Hedge", he signed "Nathaniel Hedge" or "Nathl. Hedge" (*left*).

The Ipswich Journal recorded that he had taken a shop near the Obelisk in Colchester selling "Watches and Clocks, Plate, Plain Gold Funeral rings, jewellery, Jappan'd and Plated Goods etc". The Obelisk was erected in 1760 by Charles Gray on behalf of the Essex Trust. It stood in Colchester High Street and was inscribed with mileages to London, Chelmsford, Harwich, Ipswich, Norwich and Yarmouth. It cost £3.6s with a further half guinea given to the architect, James Deane, and a workman for the painting and lettering. It was originally built east of St Runwald's Church (*right*) but in 1858 the obelisk was removed for road widening and bought at auction for £3 5s by Charles Wire, nephew of William Wire, the local antiquarian, diarist and watchmaker. It now stands in Colchester Cemetery (*see front cover*) as a memorial to Charles and his wife, Mary Anne.



In May 1765 Nathaniel indentured an apprentice, Philip Weatherley, for 7 years and when he completed his apprenticeship in 1772 Nathaniel then took on John Walker for 7 years. Over the years clock fashions changed. He had made traditional clocks for some years, ie, 30-hour brass lanterns and 30-hour hooded wall clocks but in 1766 St Nicholas Church in Colchester High Street commissioned him to make an 8-day two dial 8 day clock for the tower. It projected eight feet over the pavement (*left*) and became known as the "Frying Pan".



When the church was rebuilt in 1878 a new tower was built which included the clock. In 1893 new dials were fitted and placed closer to the tower but by 1914 the surrounding stonework had become unsafe and the clock was dismantled although the movement remained.

It was sold in 1923 and installed in a small church in South Baddesley in Hampshire until replaced by an electric movement in 1951. Colchester clock expert and enthusiast, Bernard Mason, traced the original clock and added it to his large collection.

St Nicholas Church (*right*) was demolished in 1955 and the site used for the Co-op's departmental store, St. Nicholas House.

Nathaniel's first son was born in 1766 and was baptised Nathaniel in the family tradition on 1st October at St. Nicholas Church. It would appear that he was unwell and unable to have a trade or profession. He did, however, become a free burgess in 1787 and at a Parliamentary Poll the following year was described as "Gent" – not a tradesman. In May 1796 at another election he is described as a "Goldsmith" but he could have been working for his younger brother Charles. The young Nathaniel died on 23rd April 1797 aged 30 and is buried in St. Peter's churchyard.



His father's business prospered and in 1770 he moved to larger premises, later No 22 (*left*), further up the High Street opposite the Three Cups Inn, where he stayed for 6 years before moving to what is now No 19 (*right*). By now he was a leading watchmaker in Colchester and rewards for lost watches made by him were frequently announced in the Ipswich Journal warranting payment of half a guinea or even one guinea if returned to him. One lost in 1771 was numbered 2128 suggesting that his numbering started at 2000 to differentiate his own watches from his



family's business whose numbers started at 5000.

On 31st August 1765 Nathaniel was elected a Common Councilman for the Colchester Assembly and seven years later was sworn in as an "Assistant" at the Assembly, an office he held for 49 years. At the same Assembly his younger brother, John, was elected a common councilman.

There were no Standing Committees of the Council but ad hoc committees dealt with specific problems. Nathaniel was elected to serve on some of these, dealing with town finances, etc. Other townsmen would also ask his advice on business and civic matters and he served on the Grand Jury a dozen times between 1767 and 1791. One of these was in 1779 when Sarah, the wife of his younger brother, Thomas, was accused of "misbehaviour, especially towards her husband" - quite embarrassing! In 1784 Nathaniel stood surety of £20 for one of his journeymen, William Lane, when he was summoned concerning bastards. This was a large sum and was apparently characteristic of Nathaniel. He was highly respected in the town for his integrity, business acumen and civic responsibility, and was elected in 1779 as churchwarden of St. Peter's church, an office he held for 32 years.

Nathaniel's fourth son Charles became a gold and silversmith rather than joining and his father as a clock and watchmaker. Having completed his apprenticeship Charles spent a year in London with a Bond Street jeweller and on his return in 1795 Nathaniel set him up next to his business in High Street transferring much of the gold and silversmith work to him.

Nathaniel's business was obviously prosperous and he was very generous, contributing 5gns (£5 5s) in March 1798 to the town Voluntary Fund to support of the government. He also donated 2gns (£2.2s) in 1814 for "the relief of distressed Germans" who were probably those at Colchester Garrison worried about an invasion by Napoleon.

In 1798 Nathaniel, took another apprentice, George Lewis, who possibly worked with Charles and who joined the same Bond Street firm, Messrs Love, where Charles had taken further training.

Nathaniel was commissioned in 1800 by the Colchester MP, Robert Thomas, to make a clock for the 'Old Bay Hall' (right) which was where the 'Fire Office' now stands. The Council agreed to spend nearly £400 on repairing the old building and another £100 on a small tower to house the clock. Since the decline of the Bay and Say trade it had been used as a corn market and offices, but was then in a very bad condition. In 1803 Joseph Banister, a 29 year old journeyman, was given the job to install the clock, his first with Nathaniel. He and Nathaniel became partners in 1807 and traded as Hedge and Banister.



Charles sadly died in December 1808 and Nathaniel took on his business to help his young family but he needed an experienced person to run Charles's business and his former apprentice, George Lewis, was persuaded to join him as a partner. This, however, only lasted a few years and was dissolved by mutual consent in 1812. By December the next year Nathaniel finally retired at the age of 78 feeling he could not run both the goldsmith business and his own clock and watchmaking business. Joseph Banister bought Nathaniel's share. This agreement was generous giving Banister time to pay the £550 due in half yearly instalments with no interest charged. The stock-in-trade amounted to £1,219 8s 6d, a huge sum in those days (now about £110K), and a similar arrangement was agreed for payment.

Nathaniel's wife, Martha, by 1816 was very ill. He signed a will on 29th April 1816 dividing the residue of his estate between his wife and daughter, Mary Ann. Martha died 8 days later. A touching announcement appeared in the Colchester Gazette on Saturday 11th May 1816:

“Died on Tuesday morning in her 83rd year sincerely regretted, Mrs Hedge, the wife of Mr Hedge, goldsmith, etc. of this town. Her unaffected piety Genuine Christian humility and warm benevolence of heart, rendered her truly beloved and respected; and manifested the reality and power of that faith and trust in her Redeemer, which sustained her through many severe domestic trials during her protracted life and shone with even increased brightness in the last moments of her existence, leaving a lively and consoling example to those who witnessed their animating influence and to her surviving relatives and friends justly endearing the memory of her Christian graces and exemplary moral virtues.”

On 21st March 1818, Nathaniel now aged 83 had another announcement printed in the Colchester Gazette:

“In retiring from Active Life Mr Hedge cannot forego the self-gratification of expressing his deep sense of liberal support he has, during so long a period, received from his Friends and from the Public; a support which has cheered him in the many painful vicissitudes of his protracted life and stimulated his endeavours to merit that confidence and Respect he has had the happiness to obtain. Obligations like these do not oppress but communicate to the heart a lively pleasure which survives in full force when every other is passing away. He presumes to solicit for his successor, Mr Banister, a continuance of those Favours granted to himself; in the firm conviction that Mr B will omit no effort to warrant the recommendation.”

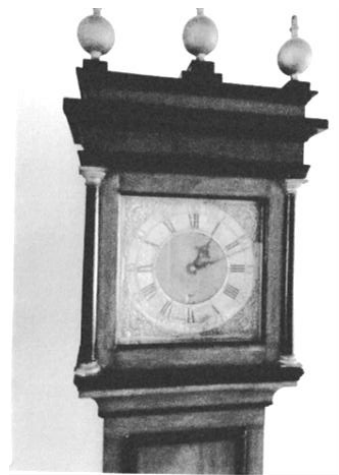
With Nathaniel's retirement the Hedge family clock and watchmaking business in Colchester came to an end after many years. He did, however, continue to take an active part in Colchester civic life as Assistant in the Council. He continued to vote and was even a candidate in the Head ward of Colchester for the post of "Headman".

When he died on 8th December 1821 the notice of his death read: "Died, on the 8th instant, universally beloved and esteemed, at the advanced age of 86 years, Mr N Hedge, formerly jeweller and Watchmaker in this town but for several years retired from business."

He was buried in the family vault at St Peter's Church which is inscribed: "The hoary head is a crown of glory if it is found in the way of righteousness. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Nathaniel had few descendants but his daughter, Mary Ann, published 36 children's books, various editions of British history, and "exotic" tales, eg, *The Koromantyn Slaves*, *Samboe*, both written in 1823 and *Alexis Himkof* written in 1827 and all are still available. She died in 1840 at the age of 64. Thomas, his son, who had been articled to the leading lawyer in Colchester, Mr. William Mason, had a partnership with Daniel Sutton (now Goody Burrett solicitors) and later had his own legal business. He became one of the first directors of the Essex Equitable Insurance Society and held various local government posts. He was elected Mayor in 1807, but died in 1811 aged only 41. His son, also Edward, became a Barrister-at Law at Lincoln's Inn, London.

Footnote There is at least one example of Nathaniel's work still in Essex. The Brown family in Chelmsford are the proud owner of a clock (*right*) which had been with another family member on Mersea Island for over 100 years.



Important Message from our Chairman, Stan Kordys

Since the founding of the Lexden History Group in 2006 (17 years ago), the monthly entrance fee has remained at £1 for members and £3 for visitors, annual membership fee of £20 for a family and £15 for singles, in line with our policy as a non-profit making group.

The cost of hiring the Church Hall has steadily increased over the years, from £10 per hour to now £23.50 per hour or £47 for our LHG two hour session. Average door takings are in the region of £27 to £34.

Speaker costs have increased from an average of £30 to over £50/£60, plus travel expenses.

Over the past seventeen years we have managed to balance the books but with continuing rising costs, we will be unable to do so.

The Committee has now very reluctantly decided that as from January 2024 the admission charge will be £2 for members and £4 for visitors. The annual membership fee from May 2024 will be £25 for a family and £20 for single membership.

Your Committee

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Forthcoming meetings

Wednesday 10th January 2024

Ken Rickwood

The History of Shrub End

Wednesday 14th February 2024

Liz White

The Surprising History of Love Tokens

Wednesday 13th March 2024

Glynn Davis

The Colchester Vase

Meetings are held on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 2.30pm in St Leonard's Church Hall, Lexden.

**Annual Membership subscriptions are due
by the end of March 2024**