

# Lexden History Group



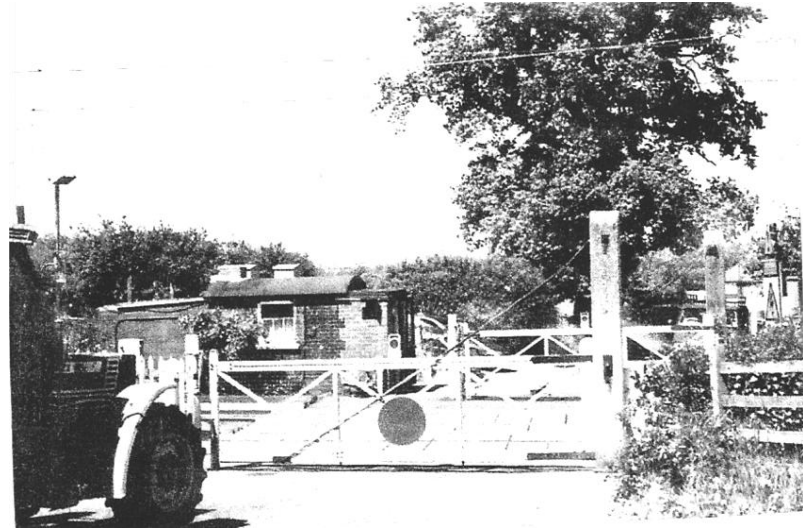
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**Website: [www.lexdenhistory.org.uk](http://www.lexdenhistory.org.uk)**

## CHITTS HILL RAILWAY BOMBING 18<sup>th</sup> January 1941

Introduction from Bernard Polley's 2021 article: "Half way down Chitts Hill is a railway crossing (*left*). The gates used to be opened manually by the gate-keeper who was on duty from his small hut. With a system of bells he was notified when needed to go outside to open or close the gates. In January 1941 the gate-keeper was Henry Meadows and he had a narrow escape when an enemy Heinkel bomber swooped and fired machine gun bullets over a passing train causing several passengers to be seriously wounded. Fortunately Meadows escaped injury



by taking cover under a locker in his hut. The aircraft had tracked the train from Colchester North Station and it was assumed that the bomber was aiming for the nearby Seven Arches viaduct, but he missed the target."

Hervey Benham in his book "Essex at War" (1945) recalls that "the winter, though not comparable to the previous one, was bitter, and a blinding snowstorm was raging on this Saturday afternoon as a down train from London was approaching the Chitts Hill level crossing. Out of the clouds a Heinkel bomber swooped, and flying the full length of the train raked it with machine gun bullets. Six bombs – the first fitted with the 'screaming' attachment – were also dropped. By the time the uninjured passengers had returned to their seats the plane had turned and flying back again machine-gunned the train once more."

### **The Bombed Train – remembered by Philip Cardy (1906-96)**

Perhaps there should be a 'trigger warning' for this section - rather gruesome details!

The date was January 18<sup>th</sup> 1941. I was standing in the office at No 1 Casualty Station St John Ambulance watching the blizzard that was raging outside. The wind was north-east and cold enough to take the skin off your face. It was driving the snow in straight lines in front of it and it was painful when it hit you. I remarked to the telephonist that I did not think we should be troubled with the Jerry in this lot. She agreed and was saying she did not think anyone would want to fly when the phone rang. I watched as she listened; then I saw her finger go to the alarm button and I was out calling for No 1 and No 2 Stand-by. The incident concerned the London to Norwich Express. There had been no siren and no-one had any warning at all. The fighter bomber suddenly appeared out of the snow (*right – Heinkel He 111*). It went round the train twice with all its guns blazing. There was not a single pane of glass left whole in the train. Then on the third time round it dropped two small bombs, about 30 pounds. The first fell beside the train. The second fell in the road and demolished the gateman's bungalow. It took my two Squads just three minutes to get on the road and, as we had only about three miles to go, it did not take us long to get there. The train had stopped right across the road. As soon as we stopped I went down the line and found the driver. I had the idea that if he could pull in the station I could take my Squads aboard and see to the injured on my way and we should have



## CHITTS HILL RAILWAY BOMBING 1941 ..... continued

the platform to unload them on. But when I found him he said, "I am sorry mate; I can't help you. I have a bullet right through the Westinghouse (*compressed air brake system*) and every brake on the train is hard on and there is nothing I can do about it."

I told the men to go through the train and immediately find the most seriously injured passengers, to ignore cuts and small injuries because we had to get the badly injured out – if we didn't they would die from shock in this bitter cold. The first was the guard (*Arthur Pyke of Ipswich aged 55*); he lay on the floor of his van which was next to the engine. He had been shot through the lung and was in a very poor way. Next was Mrs King; she was accompanied by her twelve year old granddaughter. She had been bit by a heavy piece of glass and she had a bad abdominal injury. She was badly hurt, but I was able to assure the brave little girl that Grannie was not going to die. The child seemed to have a lot of faith in me – I don't know why. The next one was a 19 year old man. He was a professional piano player attached to a concert party touring France playing to the troops. He had lost all four fingers off his right hand – only the thumb was left.

Then came the worst of them all so far; a soldier named Merchant. He had a piece of shrapnel in his right thigh. This had severed the femoral artery and was hard up against the bone. There were two nurses on the train and with the help of the First Aid box they managed to stop the haemorrhage. If it had not been for them he would have died long before we got there. But how to get him out? There was no way to lift him in the middle. Then I saw that the girls had thrown some cushions from a first class compartment on the floor and laid him on them. This lifted him to the level of the stretcher. We pushed that through the carriage. I then supported his head and shoulders and told him that he would have to move himself. Very gradually we got him round on to the stretcher.

We then went on down the track till we got to the last carriage and there we found a young woman (*24 year old Mrs Florence Knowles of Leyton*). She was eight months pregnant and was travelling to be with her mother when she had her baby. She had a large piece of shrapnel embedded in her right buttock and a number of small cuts and bruises which we saw to. Some passengers went to the First Aid Post, others decided to remain on the train to get home.

The gateman (*Mr H G Meadows*) had been enjoying a bath in his cottage beside the railway line and as this was out in the country it was a tin bath in front of the fire. A large cupboard door came down over the bath and a lot of bricks on top. When we cleared the bricks and the cupboard door the sight of him rearing out of the bath with nothing on (till the men got the blankets round him) will be with me for quite a while. (*Hervey Benham disputes this account and says that Meadows was reading the Essex County Standard, got down from the locker where he was sitting, and bullets went through the hut and out the other side with one hitting the wall just above the locker on which he had been sitting.*)

The time that it took my Squad to clear up this lot was 68 minutes from call out to report back. I always reckoned that Colchester had one of the best casualty services outside London and I was very proud of the way they handled this job. Few people realise the height of a train when you are standing on the line beside it and that, combined with the bitter cold, the terrible wind and driving snow which covered everything so nobody would see what they were walking into did not make things any easier. We did our best but unfortunately the guard and the pregnant lady died in hospital that night.

## TALES FROM THE CHURCHYARD – HUMM FAMILY

The Book of Memorials collected by Lexden Church people in the 1990s records a headstone facing west which is no longer there, although it may be propped up somewhere else. Thomas Humm was buried on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1776 in Lexden Churchyard. The inscription said “In memory of Elizabeth wife of Thomas Humm who died August 21<sup>st</sup> 1762 aged 69 also Thomas Humm who died March 2<sup>nd</sup> 1776 “All ye that read as you pass by As you are now so once was I As I am now so must you be Therefore prepare to follow me” They were part of a large and very confusing family with many children of similar names.

Thomas Humm was born in 1706, one of five sons of Esther and Edward Hum (sic). His brothers were David born 1689, Daniel 1690 and twins Edward and Abraham born in 1693. Edward senior had been born in 1658 in Lexden and died in 1739 aged 81. His wife, Esther, died in 1742 aged 70.

Thomas’s older brother David married Elizabeth Webber in 1722 and they had three children, Their first, David, died in infancy in 1723, their daughter Elizabeth born in 1724 died aged seven and Mary was born in 1727. After only five years of marriage David’s wife died and in 1730 he married widow Elizabeth Lay née Baldock whose family had moved to Lexden in about 1700. They had five further children David 1731-91, George in 1733, Daniel 1735, Isaac 1738 and William 1740. Grandfather Edward died in 1739.

One of Thomas’s older twin brothers, Edward born in 1693, was married on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1730 at St Leonards, Lexden to Sarah Sheercroft, aged 29, and they had four children; Elizabeth who died in infancy in 1732, John was born in 1736 and in 1743 twins, Sarah and Edward but baby Edward died. Edward senior died at the age of 71 in 1764 and Sarah in 1771. Abraham, a weaver, married Ann How in Coggeshall in 1728, but of their seven children, six died in infancy, with only son Abraham surviving. Ann died and in 1756 Abraham married Elizabeth Pitchford in Coggeshall. He moved back to Lexden at some time. The twins Edward and Abraham died within a year of each other Abraham in 1763 and Edward in 1764. These marriages and numerous children demonstrate how confusing the Humm family was and although Lexden Parish Records give names and dates it is not always confirmed to which particular part of the family they belonged!

The Thomas Humm recorded on the gravestone was born in 1706 and married Elizabeth Foster in Sible Hedingham on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1733. That parish record says that he was from Messing and Elizabeth from Clare in Suffolk. They had two children: Thomas was in 1735 and Elizabeth in 1737 and their mother, Elizabeth, died in Lexden in August 1762 after 29 years of marriage. By this time Thomas was a farmer and Petty Constable of Lexden.

The Petty or Parish Constable was appointed by the chief or high constable in each hundred to help limit or suppress riots or violent crimes and he had to carry out instructions received from JPs or County Assize Justices. (*right – a London Parish Constable*) They were often local tradesmen or farmers, and were held responsible for policing the local parish. They were also liable for keeping the peace, maintaining order in inns and ale houses, arresting anyone committing a crime, preventing trespassing and poaching, looking out for vagabonds, ensuring that apprentices behaved, and finally, having to carry out punishments



## HUMM FAMILY ..... continued

such as the whipping vagabonds. For all this they were not paid but expected to carry out these duties as well as their own jobs. There was no training, uniform or weapons. Because of their local knowledge they often used their discretion in reporting problems but could get into trouble for not carrying out their duties. It was not a popular job as no one enjoyed reporting friends and neighbours for minor transgressions particularly if they had some standing in the area. These appointments remained until the County Police Acts of 1839 and 1840 when paid police forces could be established.

Thomas, b1736, first wife, Martha Wilkins, whom he married in the summer of 1759 died 18 months later, possibly in childbirth, and he was married again in Lexden Church by Rev James Kilner on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1762 to Mary Pooley aged 21. They had six children, Mary in 1763 who died, another Mary in 1765, Henry 1766, Martha was born the same year but died, Thomas in 1768 and Joanna who was born in 1778 but died aged 3 years. Thomas's sister, Elizabeth married farmer George Hunt at St Albright's in Stanway, on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1766 but they both died young leaving small daughters, Susannah born in 1767 and Judith in 1769.

In the 1763 UK Poll book and electoral register (*below*) Thomas Humm is recorded as a freeholder owning a house and land and that in the elections for Essex MPs he voted for Tory John Conyers (1717-75) of Copt (Copped) Hall in Ongar, Essex, but not for Whig John Luther (1739-84) a man also from Ongar who had strong opposition views but despite a 20 year parliamentary career seldom spoke in the House of Commons.

| LEXDEN and COLCHESTER HUNDRED. |                            |                  |                                                               |                                           |                               |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| F I R S T B O O K.             |                            |                  |                                                               |                                           |                               |
| Freeholders Names.             | Where their Freehold lies. | Places of Abode. | Freeholds, consisting of Messuages, Lands, Tythes, Rents, &c. | Names of the Occupiers or Owners thereof. | Luther, Esq:<br>Conyers, Esq: |
| Thomas Hum                     | Lexden                     | Lexden           | House and Land                                                | Himself                                   |                               |



The 1774 Poll Book states Thomas is a freeholder in Lexden and that he voted for 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Waltham, Drigue Billers Olmius 1746-87 New Hall Boreham whose father, John, had been the MP for Colchester 1741-2 and 1754-61 with Charles Gray and Isaac Rebow. This time he did not vote for Conyers (*left*) and again not for Luther.

Polling was not as we know it now. Voting for the British Parliamentary elections was by a show of hands probably after much shouting - a system that proved to be unreliable, and it was gradually replaced by written records in Poll Books of who voted for whom at the time. The first printed Poll books date from after the Essex by-election of February 1694 when a morbid interest was created by the suicide of the sitting member, John Honywood. Legislation followed in 1696 helping to regulate county elections but secret ballots were not introduced until 1872 and hustings recorded each voter, his qualifications for voting, eg, land and property, and for whom he

voted (women, of course, were not eligible). These records were usually printed in booklets after the elections but there were still disputes about the results.

Qualifications for voting in Borough Elections varied from place to place but the right to vote in County elections before the 1832 reforms was determined by the ownership of freehold land worth at least 40 shillings a year by a man aged 21 years and over. This dates from an Act in 1429 to prevent "a great, outrageous, and excessive number of people, of which the most part was people of small substance and no value ... [who] pretended a voice equivalent to ... the most worthy knights and esquires ... whereby manslaughter, riots, batteries and divisions among the gentlemen and other people of the counties shall very likely rise and be". An income of 40 shillings was thought to be sufficient for a man to live a reasonable independent life. By 1832 this was about a month's wages for a farm labourer. But even then fewer than 250,000 men were eligible to vote. It was not until the 1918 Representation of the People Act that women over the age of 30 who met a property



qualification could vote although the property restriction was abolished for men! The Equal Franchise Act of 1928 finally allowed women over 21 to vote thus achieving the same voting rights as men.

After that long digression we return to the Humm family: Also on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1772 Thomas Humm Junior, a wheelwright, is recorded in the Register of Duties Paid for Apprentices' Indentures as agreeing to take on an apprentice at his wheelwright business – a certain William Kimbalee aged about 14 years. It is interesting to note, that in 1830 aged 72, he was buried (*left*) with his wife, Ann, close to Thomas's parents grave in Lexden Churchyard.

Both Thomas's parents died in 1776 and are buried in Lexden Churchyard. Thomas Humm senior was quite a wealthy man owning a considerable amount of property, leasehold and copyhold, in the Colchester area. He wrote a will (*first section below*) not long before he died on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1776 with clear instructions as to who was to receive which property.



Transcript of above: This is the Last Will and Testament of me **Thomas Humm the elder of Lexden** within the Libertys of the Town of Colchester in the County of Essex, having in health of Body and of sound and disposing mind memory and understanding (praised be God) made in manner following (that is to say) first I will order and direct that all such debts as I shall justly owe at the time of my decease and my funeral charges and expenses born in the first place paid by my Executor here in after named and as to my Estate both Real and Personal I

## HUMM FAMILY ..... continued

*dispose thereof as follows (to wit) I give and devise unto my Son Thomas Hum of Lexden aforesaid Wheelwright All that my Leasehold Shop with about one Acre of Land thereto adjoining and belonging & that in Lexden aforesaid now in the Occupation of my said Son and also All that my .....*

His grandchildren were remembered, receiving property and land, especially Elizabeth's two daughters who had lost both parents at a young age. To his wife, Mary, he directed that “*my Executor do pay unto my said wife immediately after my decease the sum of seventy shillings and permit her to take such part of my Household Goods & Furniture as she shall make best sufficient to furnish one Room & with Household Goods and Furniture I give her the use of so long as she continues a widow but no longer*” and also “*I will and direct that my said Executor do deliver unto my said wife Revert of all Charges half a Chaldron of good Coals yearly (about 14cwt or 700kg) for firing during her said Widowhood*” To his son, Thomas, he left “*Leasehold Shop with about one Acre of Land thereto adjoining and belonging & that in Lexden aforesaid now in the Occupation of my said Son and also All that my Copyhold Messuage or Tenement with the Yards Garden Hereditaments and Appurtenances to the same belonging now in the Occupation of my said Son holden of the Manor of Lexden.*” All this property was ultimately to be left to the third generation, Thomas. However, Mary died only a few months after her husband, Thomas.

Thomas Humm junior, however, did not enjoy a blemish-free record as his name appears several times in local courts over the years and he must have been a disappointment to his father - a Petty Constable in Lexden. However, Thomas junior seems to have been quite a volatile character and was often being assaulted or assaulting others, including Mary, his wife. It was reported during the court session that she “*did goeth in fear of losing her life*” and at the Quarter Sessions in 1778 “*she craveth sureties of the Peace from her said husband*” and had not taken him to court out of “*envy, hatred, malice or ill will but purely and solely for the preservation of her life and person*”. In late August the same year he was charged with neglecting and refusing to provide for his family even though it was said he was well able to do so, evidenced by his father's generous will. The result was that the children became chargeable to Lexden parish and parish funds would be used to pay for their needs. The following month he was again in court and the JPs, Thomas Clamtree and William Mayhew, ordered him to pay 16s for the maintenance of his neglected family, which he refused to do. In May 1780 he was once more before the court, this time his erstwhile live-in servant, Sarah Frost, complained that she had not been paid.

Thomas Humm also seems to have had an ongoing argument with the local Pryke family. At the end of that month he assaulted William Pryke, “*striking him a very violent blow on his face*” and “*greatly abused*” him without provocation. Later he was twice assaulted by John Pryke, a butcher, who also broke some windows. John Pryke was an argumentative and violent man and just before Christmas in 1780 after assaulting someone else he went on to Thomas Humm's house at 10pm, when the family was all in bed, breaking windows to the value of £3 and threatening that if Humm came downstairs he “*would do for him*”.

Despite the interesting stories about the two generations of the Humm family, little more can be found about the next generation, although they were well looked after by Thomas senior in his will. However, there were many Humms in the immediate area, all with similar names throughout their families, so it is difficult to identify with certainty who would be a descendant but it is possible that there are descendants in Lexden now!

## HILL HOUSE, LEXDEN



For the past couple of years, Hill House in Lexden Road, (left c1930) has been undergoing considerable works and is now on the market again in its renovated and refurbished state. It has quite an interesting history of owners and occupiers.

It is not entirely clear when Hill House was first built although the listing details of 24<sup>th</sup> February 1950 record it as a “Late C18, double bow-fronted house, grey gault brick, 2 storeys,

*the roofs of slates. The front has double hung sashes with glazing bars, Doric porch, panelled reveals, 6-panel door, rectangular fanlight. A complete and unaltered example of its date.*” It is also difficult to confirm who the first owner was but an early occupier could have Thomas Grimwood, a wine merchant, born in Kelvedon or Langham in 1795. The 1841 Census records him, a man of independent means, as living in Lexden with his wife, Elizabeth Hicks, whom he married in 1821 in Great Holland. However, although no houses are identified in that Census the record suggests it was Hill House. Thomas Grimwood is also recorded in the 1830 Poll Book as living in Lexden and also in the 1839 Pigot’s Directory as a gentleman living in Lexden. Perhaps he was in the house from 1830 but in 1835 and 1847 he was apparently living in “London Road” but the 1851 Post Office Directory, compiled the year earlier, records him as living in Hill House – all very confusing. However, in the 1851 Census (*below*) Mary Tillett aged 44, occupation wife, born in Mersea Island, was the occupant of Hill House with two of her four living daughters, Frances aged 14 and Ellen 11 both born in Colchester, but there were no servants living in.

|            |              |    |          |               |
|------------|--------------|----|----------|---------------|
| Hill House | Mary Tillett | 44 | Wife     | Mersea Island |
|            | Frances      | 14 | Daughter | Colchester    |
|            | Ellen        | 11 | Daughter | Colchester    |

Meanwhile Mary’s husband was residing in Springfield Gaol in Chelmsford. Scandal had hit leafy Lexden! Samuel Tillett was born in Colchester in 1809 and was first employed in the Stamp Office in Colchester, which involved collecting stamp duties owed on such items as legal and commercial documents, newspapers, and advertisements. He married Mary, the daughter of James Croyden of East Mersea Hall, in 1831 and after living in Head Street they had moved to Lexden by 1849 for he appears in the Poll Book for that year.

By this time he was a conveyancing solicitor and money scrivener, wealthy and apparently well-liked in the area, hob-nobbing with the notable families at Lexden Park and Lexden Manor. He attended charitable events and entertained in style and was elected to Colchester Council in 1843. In 1848 he became an Alderman, so life was good but this “hunger-bitten charity-boy” of lowly birth had financed his extravagant lifestyle by defrauding his clients. This caught up with him in November 1850 when he was imprisoned in Springfield Gaol for contempt. Finally on 15th July 1853 he was found guilty of perjury at the Essex Assizes in Chelmsford and sentenced to seven years transportation!

## HILL HOUSE, LEXDEN ..... continued

However, he had lost none of his manipulative abilities, managing to obtain his 'ticket of leave' from the medical officer and chaplain (and probably the governor) recording that that he was threatened with paralysis. Having avoided transportation he spent only two years in Pentonville prison. He was then on the loose again and despite his 'apparent' ill health he resumed his old life of high profile charitable and society matters in Bayswater skilfully managing to ingratiate himself with the nobility and persuading no lesser person than the 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Wellington to present him at Court in 1863. The Duke never thought that such a "pleasant, well informed, smooth spoken, well-mannered ... acquaintance and *cicerone* (of being a ticket-of-leave man)". However, it was at this point that Tillett's luck ran out, wittily recorded by James Hurnard in his epic poem, "The Setting Sun":

He had the audacity to attend a Levée!  
By dint of tact and boundless impudence  
He gained admittance to the Drawing Room,  
As spruce and trim as any noble there;  
But as bad luck would have it, or misfortune,  
The grim old judge who tried him down at Chelmsford  
Set his hard eyes upon him in the crowd,  
And thought he had some knowledge of his face;  
For judges are good judges of men's faces.  
He looked again, and recollected him,  
And was amazed to see the crafty culprit  
On whom he has passed sentence in the dock  
At the assizes several years before,  
Mixing complacently with lords and ladies  
As though he felt himself completely at home!  
The end of the affair was rather tragic;  
For he, who thus gained entrance unattended,  
Was led out attended by a man in blue!

A grave scandal connected with these matters now engages the attention of the press. What think ye of a ticket-of-leave man being presented to the British throne? Of course you don't believe me, yet even so it was, and thus it came to pass: On the very first levee held by the Prince of Wales in his mamma's name, the Duke of Wellington presented one Samuel Tillett, Esq, of Colchester, &c, as a fit and proper person to salute the sovereign and receive the envied nod of recognition; the royal paw was duly extended and caressed, and the honored gentleman was thereby and in the presence of Majesty dubbed one of England's worthies. Now whether it so happened that Judge Pollock recognised an old acquaintance, or from whatever cause, it soon transpired that S. T., Esq, of Colchester, &c, was neither more or less than a convicted felon, at large on a ticket-of-leave, formerly a conveyancer at Colchester; he was tried some years ago by the Chief Baron, for villianous perjury, found guilty, and sentenced to seven years penal—there's a go! and I believe there was speedily a "rumpus and a row" about it;

The story even travelled across the world to New Zealand where the Otago Witness reported (humorously and too long to print all of it here!) the scandalous event in its pages on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1863 (*left*). Tillett was again found guilty of conspiring to defraud in 1873 in Clerkenwell and was imprisoned for 12 months. Although convicted at least a couple of times he was always recorded on the court documents as 'gentleman'! He died in Holborn in 1879.

It would be interesting to know the connection between Thomas Grimwood and Samuel Tillett for in June 1850 a £250 mortgage was taken

## HILL HOUSE, LEXDEN ..... continued

out in 1847 by Tillett for the 'Lucy' a 35ft "tuck sterned smack" - a wooden sailing fishing vessel – and then the mortgage was reassigned to Grimwood "(gent)". When Tillett was in Springfield Gaol the 'Lucy' was advertised in the Essex Standard in January 1851 to be sold at auction on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1851 at the Ship Inn, East Donyland and bought by James Goodwin (master) & William Clarey (cordwainer). It was broken up in 1852. In the 1840s Tillett had been regularly involved in mortgages at 5% for large boats at Brightlingsea and in 1843 he bought the 'Hero', a 69 foot schooner, which he sold the following year. After his release from prison he bought a 60ft barge – the 'Jane' and in 1864 a 54 ft sloop, the 'Hazard'. Thomas Grimwood the elder died on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1867 leaving £16K.



Another occupant of Hill House was Francis Smythies, a renowned local solicitor, who was twice Mayor of Colchester in 1852/3 and 1860/61. His namesake and forebear, also Francis Smythies, 100 years earlier had been a controversial local politician and lawyer with a very questionable record similar to that of Samuel Tillett. Smythies (*left*) was living in Hill House in 1861 with his wife, three children and four servants. The Post Office Directory of 1867 notes that Henry Egerton Green JP was living in Hill House as does the 1871 Census which also records his wife, six children and seven servants.

James Hurnard (*right and author of "The Setting Sun"*), was born in Kelvedon in 1808 and in 1870 inherited about £90,000 from a distant relative, Sarah Fennell, of Bury St Edmunds. It is thought that his only child, Samuel Fennell Hurnard, was named for Sarah. In the 1871 Census James, his occupation recorded as "poet and interest of property", was living with his small family and four servants in Head Street, Colchester, but "on the longest day in 1873" the family moved to "a lovely country home in Lexden, not far from Colchester" – Hill House. James loved it there especially enjoying his walks in his garden and in nearby Lexden Springs which stretched down to the river now cut back with the construction of the by-pass in 1933.



In November 1880 James was elected an Alderman, but his health was poor and by 10<sup>th</sup> December he became quite ill and infirm staying inside most of time. He planted a tree in the garden of Hill House on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1881 remarking to his gardener "Perhaps this may be the last I shall ever plant." He was taken ill that night and died on 26<sup>th</sup> February. His funeral on 4<sup>th</sup> March was "largely attended and proved a solemn occasion." Two years later his widow, Louisa, edited a memoir, consisting mainly of an autobiographical sketch which supplemented "The Setting Sun". She died in April 1884 and their son, Samuel Fennell Hurnard continued to live in Hill House for many years with his wife, Rose Densham, their son, Bracey, and three daughters (*left: Hannah, Ruth and Naomi Hurnard 1916*), all of whom made their mark in the world. Hannah became an acknowledged religious writer, Ruth a doctor and Naomi, a published historian.

## HILL HOUSE, LEXDEN ..... continued

Rose died June 1925 and in 1936 Samuel married (*right*) Marjorie Eady, a much younger lady. Samuel had quite an influence in the locality and paid for the memorial to Catholic martyrs in the Town Hall. During WW2 local children were invited, despite rationing, for tea in his dining room served by Enid, the maid. They were good teas, even in the days of rationing. There was a tree house in his garden with three full length ladders to get up there and he would nimbly scale it even in his 60s and 70s. Marjorie was subject to a lot of ill-natured gossip relating that at one time she was his maid and then his secretary. However, she was not above racing along Frinton beach at Sunday School outings, lifting her long skirts over her ankles often running faster than the children! Samuel Hurnard died in 1949 and Marjorie continued living at Hill House for many years. She died in 2000 aged 89.



Very little of James Hurnard's original garden remains (*left – map published in 1881*) for the houses in Tapwoods were built on a large portion of it in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1969-70 Kemp's local directory, Hill House is recorded as being vacant. It was let for some years and from the late 1990s it became a care home under the management of Croll Healthcare. They described the property as "a gracious Georgian manor house, set in two thirds of an acre a short distance from the historic Roman town of Colchester". It was closed in 2022.

A development company eventually took over the house which was falling into disrepair and it has now been developed into two large houses, one of which was the old house, still called Hill House, the second was the later extension to the east, now named Doric House, and two new semi-detached houses built in the grounds. What would the Hurnards have said about the loss of their treasured garden?

### More Comments on LOOK MAGAZINE article about Maldon Road Shops



LHG member John Hunter, who now lives in Wales, has sent his memories of the Maldon Road Shops:

One business was a ladies' hairdressers run by the parents of one of my school friends, Robin Murayda. He was in fact my first friend at the Boys High School and sadly tragedy struck his parents when he and his sister were still in their teens. I do also remember the Kings grocery shop, partly because our family were

all car enthusiasts and Fred King would make his deliveries along our road, Wellesley Road, driving a stylish Citroen Safari estate car, possibly the first in the town, during the late fifties.

*(See also Bernard Polley's original article in LHG Newsletter No 52 March 2019)*

## **Your Committee**

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Val Asker 01206 853046

## **Forthcoming Meetings**

### **Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2026**

**Liz White**

**Tales from Lexden Churchyard**

### **Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> August 2026**

**Garden Party 2-4.30pm**

**at Liz and Alan's house**

### **Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2026**

**Peter Jones**

**"The Cromer Express"**

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

### **Annual Membership subscriptions**

**£25 Family, £18 Single**