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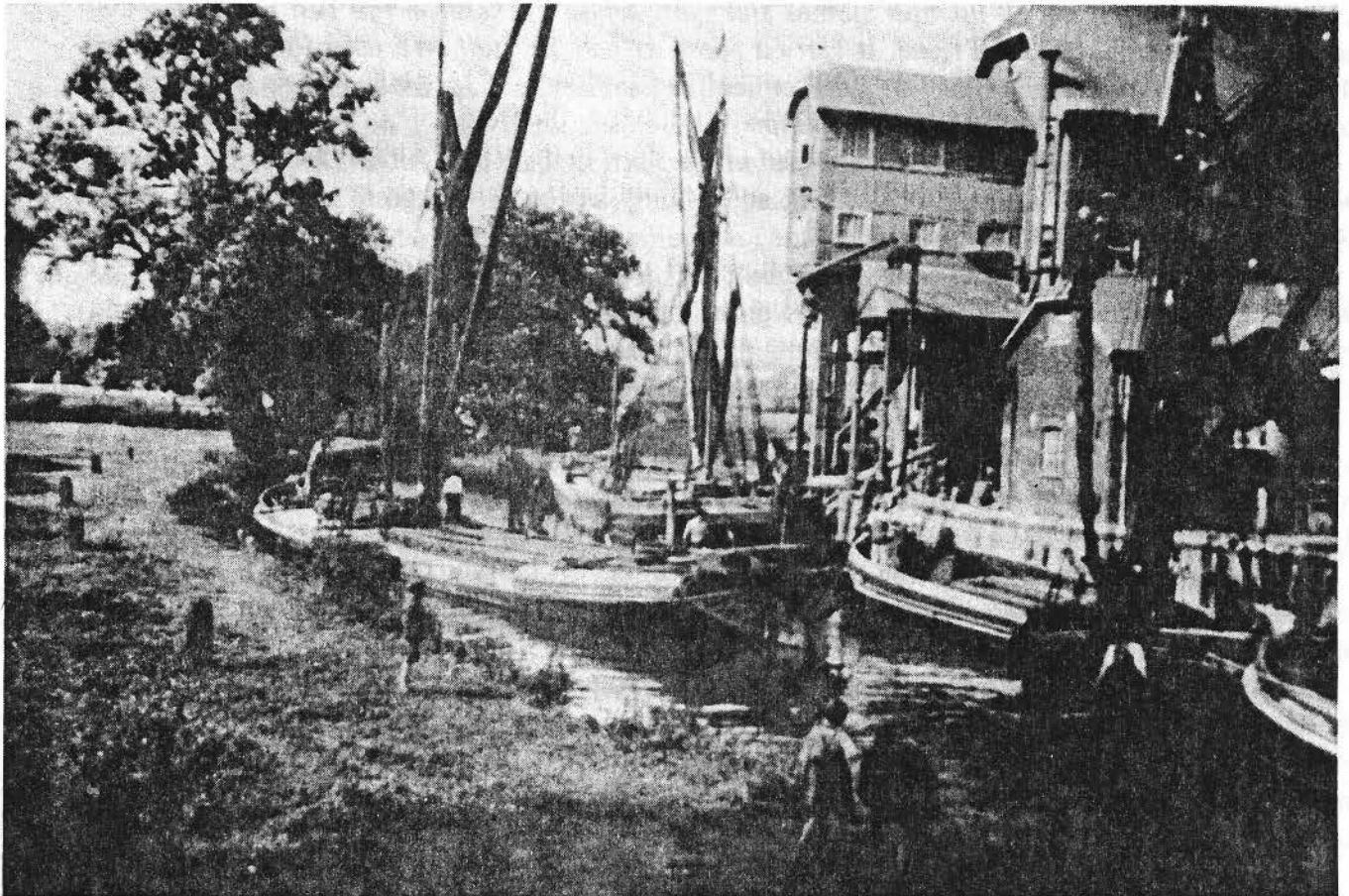


Photo by Cecil Riches

**Barges with wheat for Marriage's Mill, showing just how busy
the place could get!**

MEMORIES OF LIFE ON THE COLCHESTER BARGES

Bill Warner in conversation with Patrick Denney

Part I

(How old were you when you left school and do you remember what your first job was and how you got it?) ...I was 14. Before I left school I mean, I was always down the river, on the barges, going on board. Len and the old fellow, Bill Eaves lived in Morant Road where I did, and he said to me, "When you leave school, you comin' away with us?" And I said "yeah, I'd like to" and he said "you shall". And of course weeks and weeks went by and the time came and I said "I'll be leaving school - alright" he said "Tell your Ma and Dad. He said "I'll tell em," but I said "I'll tell em." We packed up school in the morning about eleven o'clock and I walked straight up the hill and down Hythe Hill, and they were there. They said "Have you told your Mum and Dad?" and I said "Yeah", but I hadn't. I jumped on board and we were sailing away down the river. That night we were sailing up by Southend Pier.

They (Mum and Dad) knew I was agoin' and then when we got to London, well not up to London but Tilbury or Grays, and the skipper, next mornin', went ashore to get orders, he phoned his wife in Morant Road to go and tell Mrs Warner her boy is alright with us. They didn't mind as they knew I was agoin', you see, some time.

I hadn't got a change of clothes or nothin' but the skipper, he was a good old boy. When we got to London, he set me all up with clothes and everything. The skipper was Bill Eaves and the barge was called the Golden Fleece. It carried about 120 to 130 ton. We used to take wheat to Marriage's Mill, wheat to Felixstowe Mill, wheat to Cranfields of Ipswich, timber from Surrey Commercial Dock to Sadds of Maldon and timber to Brains at the Hythe.

The wheat was foreign, we loaded it out of the ships in the Royal Albert Dock, the Victoria Dock and you'd also have the Milwall Dock and Tilbury Docks. You'd go to any of them docks when the ships were in and load from them.

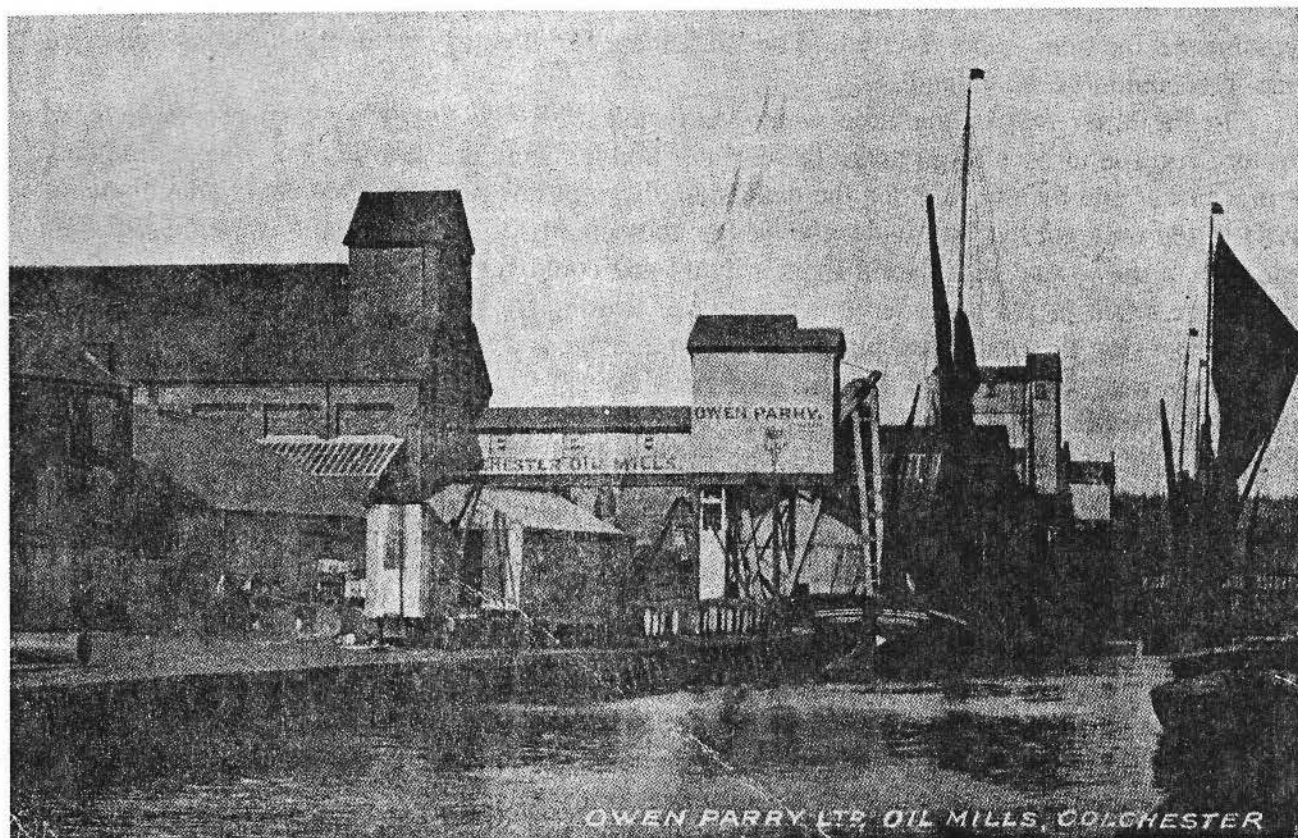
It wouldn't be about an hour to loading 120 tons of wheat. (Who did the loading?).... Dockers. The machine used to come up and go in the hold and they'd start sucking and it came through the chute, and it weighed it as it came through, and in about an hour, you'd got about 120 ton in there. You were loaded in about an hour,(just full up with wheat).

Yeah, you got your shovels and were trimmin' it under to get it under the covers. When it was finished, it had all got to be level so it was under the hatches. But with linseed and cotton seed, you had a deck cargo. You use to load on the decks because cotton seed was light - you couldn't get it all in the hold, so you had a deck cargo.....have a big stack on top.

(Where did you bring cotton seed and linseed?).....Parry's Oil Mill.....Then take linseed oil and cotton oil back to London in barrels. There use to be a little old crane on the quay to load you.

You could stand down at Parry's when the doors were open and see the old presses pressing the linseed into cattle cake, and see the oil pouring out of it. They used to press it into cake and it was hard as a rock, but when the linseed oil that had all come out it was pumped up into the tanks and measured off into the barrels. The cake was used for animal feed and then you'd take the oil to London, go to different wharves and that would be boiled before goin' to the paint people.

(What was your first job - as a boy on the barges?)I used to wash up and keep the cabin clean - never got no wages....but every morning when I woke up... (What time was that?)according what the tide was and whether you were sailin' or not, but if you were in the dock, it would be just normal time. In the after part of the barge there was a bunk and it was called the Yarmouth Roads - it was always called Yarmouth Roads in any barge - why?- I have no idea and then the other bunks at the side, the one for the mate and the one for the skipper and the other one



Owen Parry Oil Mills - The Hythe, Colchester - 1905

just for anyone who went with them or what we called the third hand.....but every mornin' when I used to wake up, down in where the door slide along there use to be a load of coppers in there....pennies and all that.... And they used to say that is for you and, come the end of the week, I was better off than what the mate was who was gettin' paid.

That is how the old boy was And when we came home and got down the Hythe, and I went home, the old boy used to pay mother board and lodgings. I never had to pay her anything out of my coppers, the coppers used to add up to a hell of a lot then. I use to think "cor, this is good!" He'd settle up with mother. He lived at the top of Morant Road and we lived at the bottom....He were a nice old boy!

(So how long were you on the water for and how long at home?)Well you could never tell, it depended if you were bound to London and then Ipswich and back to London. You could be several weeks. How long you were at home depended on how long you were at the different wharves. It depended on how many there is got to be unloaded at the different wharves before you, but if you went to the mill you'd be home for three or four days. By this time you'd lowered your gear and got the tide and got up and unloaded and got back again down through the bridges. (What was it like to get up to Marriages?)..... You'd lower your gear right flat down. The first bridge was Hythe bridge, there are two bridges there now but when we used to trade, there was only one - the road bridge. You'd drop the mast down right level, right as low as you can, then as soon as you were flat with the tide you'd start pushing away with booms - long poles. You use to get 'em on your shoulder and walk up the deck and push 'em along. You never had no engines and then when you got through the first bridge, you had the railway bridge which is there now just at the bottom where Wrights used to be... a high bridge where the engines use to come across and go down the quay. It was a high bridge and you didn't have to worry about gettin' under there any time, but then you got up to East Bridge and when you went under there, sometimes the tide weren't big enough and you'd be half way under that bridge and you'd be stuck for about a week till the tide let you, until the Spring tides came again. On the Neep tides there wasn't enough water to get you up there.

If you missed the tides in the river you'd be stuck there for three or four days till the tide changed again. You couldn't even unload.

In the latter part of the time when Marriage's Mill was aworkin', they use to have an elevator. You use to have to go under the elevator and it was in one position but after a time they put in a sucker and then right along the quay side, they put this pipe and they could take branches off, so if you only got halfway under the bridge, they could still put a length of pipe on and they could suck it up.... And then they'd lighten it and you could get up, or if there were two or three barges there, once they'd unloaded one, instead of waiting for the next tide for that one to shift under the elevator, they could just put the sucker in that one and start unloading right away.

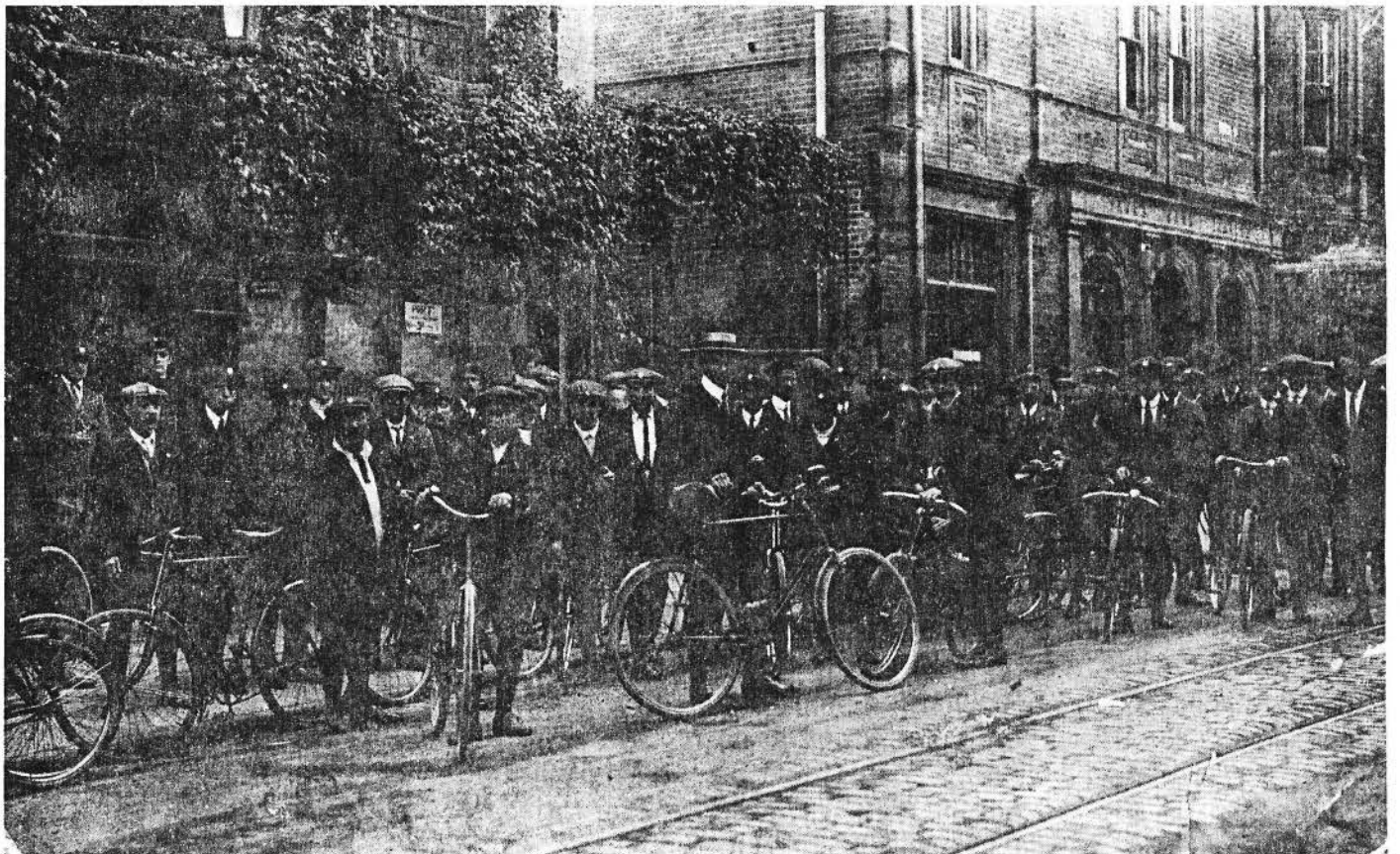
(How many barges could they get up there at once?)I've seen as many as six or seven up there.... The field side, you could get three there and four or five the other side. (How far afield did you go?)As far as I went down the Suffolk coast was down to Aldeburgh. I went to Aldeburgh - Shingle Street. I don't know if you know it? We went in there and we loaded shingle for Ipswich and it was for Ipswich power station which was built and is pulled down now and finished its life, but we used to cart the beach off Aldeburgh and round to Ipswich for the cement works, for building Ipswich power station. (And you also carted straw?) ... Yes, Salcott Creek just off the Mersea, you got the Mersea yard and then the next little yard and then you got Salcott Creek where you keep all the oysters in, and we used to go up there, only a little narrow creek and there use' to be one place up there where you could just turn round and push back to a bit of a landing stage that the old farmer had got, and then he came down with his old wagons and bring the straw, it were on the sea wall and you use' to have a plank from the boat to the sea wall and they'd just walk along, throw them aboard and you use' to pick it up and stow it away. (You had to pack them in a special way?).....You pressed them between the stack irons, they'd go up about five or six feet, about four each side, then you put your doings in between and when you get to the stack irons, you'd leave these back and then you'd get two or three up like that, and then you'd have to jump on them to get them down to tighten them between the stack irons so they'd actually hold themselves, but after you'd finished you had ropes that came over. (It looked like a haystack, so how did you steer it?).....The skipper, he can't look forward, he can't see nothing, he's relying on the bloke on top of the haystack telling him what to do, and then you'd get your bowsprit down and your bowsprit storm jib and that on, and when you get it in and the mate is tatching that off, he's standing looking at the back steering by watching the wake, watching the wake of the water which is giving him an idea, then the mate would pop up now and again and say "You're alright".

Mrs VERA SPENCER REMEMBERS LEXDEN BETWEEN THE WARS

There were only a few children in Sussex Road where I lived and I played mainly with them and my brothers. We were sort of a little community there, we were in the middle of all the big houses, and we all got on together. I used to play football with the boys. I was the mad one, tomboy they used to call me. We used to go up to the fields at the top and play hide and seek around the scoops. We could play paper chase occasionally and I was the only girl who used to take part. There were various games at the time. This would be when we were at school. Tops which we would make ourselves out of cotton reels and paint them different colours. We were lucky in that we had that space in front of the mews so we had a little play town. It was quiet in that area with very little traffic, except when they started parking in the mews, they had cars and they turned the mews into garages. Apart from that and previous to the garages it was just people going up to the big house and back again. We used to play such games as Grandma Grandma Gray. In that we stand on either side of the road on the pavement and say "Grandma Grandma Gray. May I go out to play. I won't go near the water or chase the ducks away". Then Grandma Gray would say "Yes if you've got red". Then everyone would run across the road, and if you were wearing red you couldn't be touched but the others who had no red and were caught had to stay in the middle and do the



The Water Polo Team of Colchester Swimming Club - 1920



Colchester Cycling Club - 1910

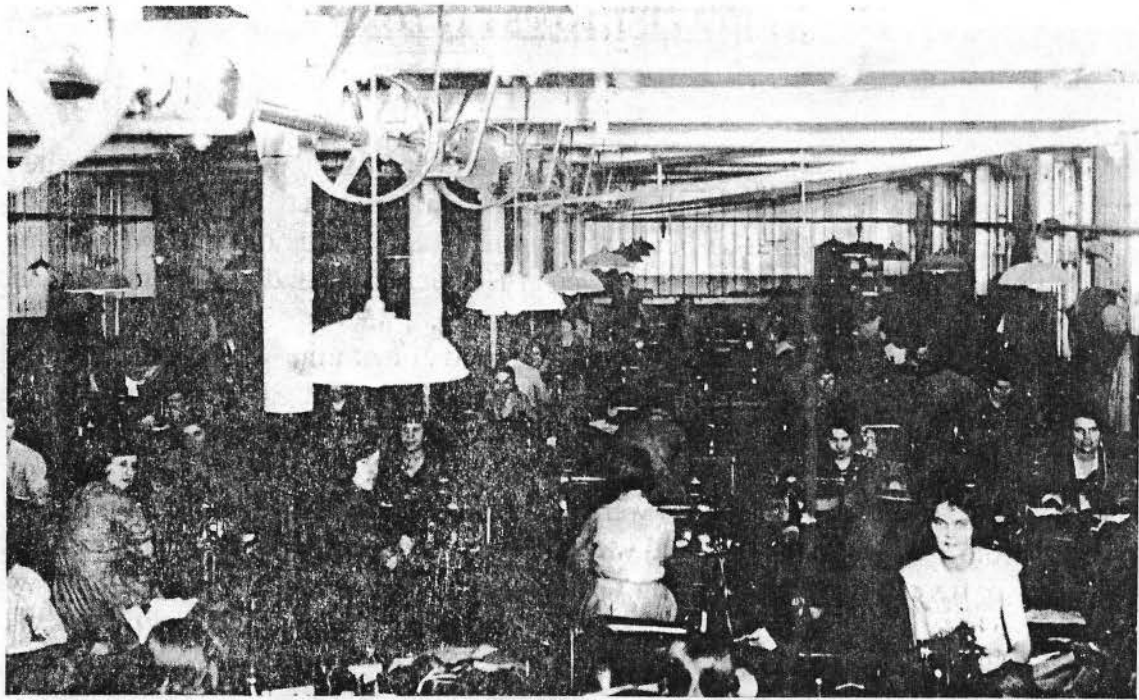
chasing. Another game was My mother said - I never should. Play with the gypsies in the wood. If I did she would say "You're a naughty little girl to disobey". There was something we used to do after that, some chasing or other. Another one was Touch the Road, you must go over. You stood in the road and it was quite safe as there was no traffic. In this you stood on the pavement and if you touched the road you had to run across and someone in the middle would try to catch you. We also used to skip and there were several games connected with that. One each end turning the rope, the others would line up then run in and skip then run out and the next one follows and if you didn't make it, you would then have to take the rope. Then there was bouncing a ball and singing one two three aleary, four five six aleary. This was about seventy years ago so it is difficult to remember.

We used to go swimming in the summer and cycling, just a friend and myself. We would go to Friday Woods and collect primroses. If I was not going to a dance or a club activity or something like that I was not allowed out, I had got to have somewhere definite to go, particularly on winter nights - the dark nights - and if I did go out there was a definite time limit, either before dark or by nine o'clock. For a long time my father used to come and meet me from dances, and when I think of it, he used to come and meet me at midnight and he must have been more than ready for bed.

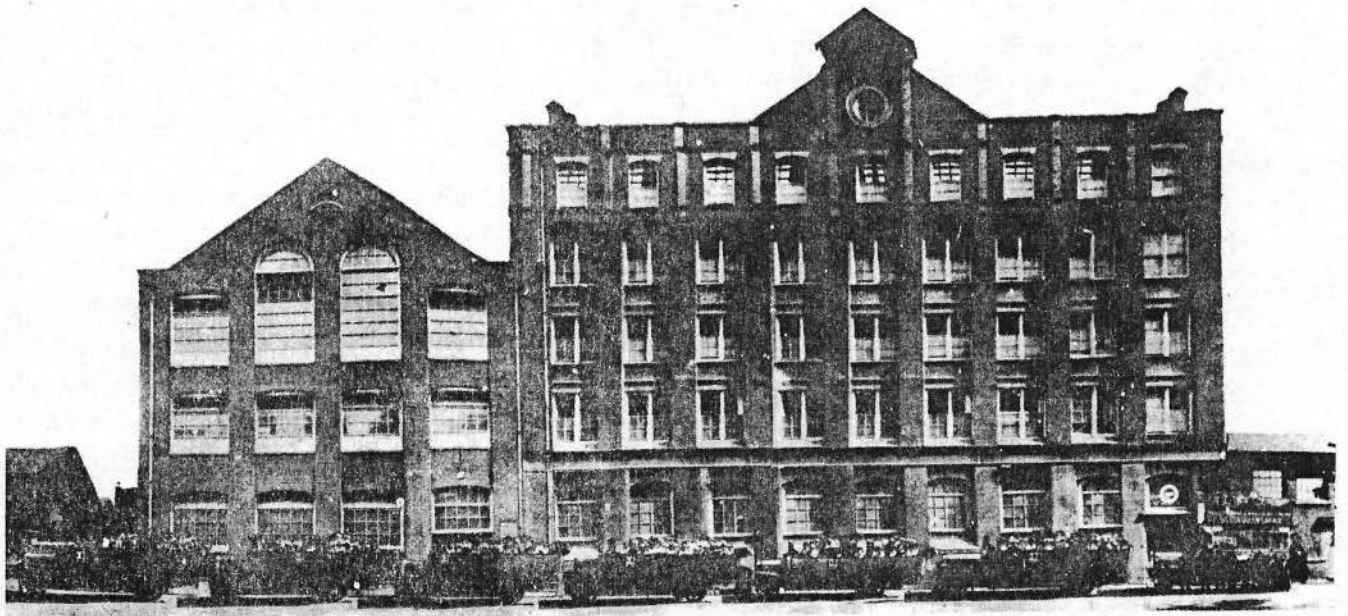
I started swimming when I was about eleven, I went to stay with my cousin for the weekend and she was going swimming on a Saturday afternoon, this was in Colchester. I wanted to go in but they wouldn't let me as I had not got my mother's permission, you see! It quite excited me, I did want to go in as they were all enjoying themselves. Then my mother bought me a swimming costume and I started going. Then when I got to Hamilton Road school where we went, when we were eleven. We had to sit an Entrance Exam. It was midway between a Council School and the Grammar School, and when we were there a letter came round from a Miss Kent, I'm not sure whether she was the Secretary or the Captain, asking if anyone was interested in joining the Swimming Club. Several of us did join, they were looking for new members at the time and women had not been encouraged very much before that. I did join and am still a member as I am still a Life Member and apart from the years I was away with the Army, I have been a member all the time. We didn't do training as they do now we just swam and enjoyed ourselves. We kept swimming as there was nothing else to do, because it was so cold. This was in the original pool in the river by the bridge with the pontoon going across. Like nowadays, whenever the weather was hot, something would happen to close the pool...

I belonged to the swimming club and several of the people I knew there belonged to the Harriers. Then one day one of them stopped me and she said "Vera, you used to be good at running at school, we are now starting a Ladies section in Colchester Harriers, how about you coming to join". My friend was with me, so we said, "right we will join", and we joined the Colchester Harriers. We used to meet once a week in a small school just off Stockwell Street. Then we moved to the Britannia Arms facing Abbey Fields. Some of the men used to come with us. We trained there mainly in the winter and moved to Land Lane in the Summer, but I used to dodge off after that to go and play tennis.

Then the Rovers decided at last that they would have a Ladies Section after much arguing amongst themselves and my brothers came home and said, "Ladies in the Rovers at Last", and speaking to my sister and myself said, "Here is a bike for you and one for you. Your subs are paid and we are going out on Sunday morning", and that is how I joined the Colchester Rovers. The bike I had was one of my brother's cast offs with metal wheels. It did not have wooden wheels which they used for racing, they used to go in for racing so they had a few bikes and they had just bought themselves new ones, so they did one up for Peggy and one for myself. We went out that Sunday but some of the boys who did not want women in the club tried to kill us off and we covered something like a hundred miles and I vowed I wouldn't go again. But the following Sunday we knew where they were going and where they would stop for tea, so we went out and met them there. After that though, we went out quite often with them.



The inside of Hollington's Factory



Hollington's Factory, and the Annual Outing

MY LIFE AT HOLLINGTON'S FACTORY

Hollingtons was a six storey building at the bottom end of Stanwell Street opposite St Giles church which is the Masonic Hall now. I was 15 years old when I started to work there about 1922. The hours were from 10 to 8 in the morning with an hour and a quarter for dinner and then on to 5 o'clock. I lived at Harwich Road and went home to dinner which took 25 minutes walk each way so it left me 25 minutes for dinner.

The day started at ten to eight and the doors were locked at that time. If the doorkeeper was in a bad mood he would shut the door in your face. Many times he would see us running to get in and would shut the doors, then we would wait for the office staff to arrive and sometimes they would let us in.

We had a months training for which we were paid 6/8d a week. When we went on our own time it was hard work to earn a £1 per week, and we had to pay for all cottons and threads we used.

There were six floors. The top one being for the cutters. The foreman was a Mr Soar who also had a brother who worked with him. There were two other brothers the Hobroughs. The garments were laid out and marked and would be brought down to the basement in a lift which was a huge skip worked with ropes, No 5 room was a coat room - the forewoman was a Miss Raven. No 4 floor was for waistcoats where Mr Rogers was foreman. Then No 3 room where the better class trousers were made had Miss Rudlin as forewoman, and then the pressing room another Miss Rudlin was forewoman.

We made the trousers in No 2 room. Our forewoman was named Daisy Cross who later married Mr Thornton. She was the best of the bunch of forewomen.

Hollingtons had the contract for the railway which were navy serge coats and a very tough material for the trousers and also dungarees which are called Jeans now. For the best quality navy blue trousers we were paid 8 shillings a dozen. If we worked hard we could do a dozen a day. Then the dungarees we made were 5 shillings a dozen. When we worked on them our hands were covered in blue dye. I still have the piece of pumice stone I used to get my hands clean with.

In the basement the cutting machines were fixed. My brother Leonard Daldry worked on one.

Our forewoman Daisy would let us sing and we all sang lovely, until the boss came. His name was Mr Walkden. When he came through there was a deadly hush until he walked out and then we started up again. We worked hard but we were happy and everyone was friendly.

There were no canteens or anywhere to eat. Girls who didn't go home to dinner ate in the workroom.

There were several factories in Colchester beside Hollingtons and Leanings in Stanwell Street. There was Hyams, Crowthers which was on East Hill, down Stockwell Street there was also Peakes, Trent & Updales and along Magdalen Street there was Hart & Levys.

The whole of St Botolphs Corner was burnt down by incendiary bombs one night - Hollingtons factory, the Empire Theatre at the bottom of Mersea Road, Leanings factory and the Woolpack Hotel. The fires reached down Magdalen Street to the bus depot and to St Botolphs church. A new Hollingtons factory was built on the same site, but then it was pulled down again to make the new car park in Osborne Street. There is still a Hollingtons at Coggeshall who advertises suits for sale

Mrs Daldry

MY DAYS IN THE COUNTRY AT MERSEA ROAD, BLACKHEATH

I grew up in Walthamstow but my love for Colchester began as a result of my Auntie Lena (Dad's youngest sister) marrying a Colcestrian. Uncle Charlie was a member of the Sage family who owned a poultry farm in Mersea Road, Blackheath, and after his father died he returned to look after things there. The house was called "Sunnyside A". (As there was already a "Sunnyside" in the vicinity the "A" was added). It stood in eleven and a half acres of land which ran down to a stream beyond which were the army firing ranges. It was not far from the Cherry Tree Inn which, if my memory back to the 1930s serves me well, was the other side of the road. Just a short distance from "Sunnyside A" was Chapman's Dump where all worn out old farm implements, cars and large metal objects came to rest.

As a child I looked forward to our visits to Colchester. We travelled in our Ford 8 on what was then quite a journey (From Walthamstow to Colchester) and not accomplished without a stop for refreshments. We passed through the small villages of Hatfield Peveril, Kelvedon Writtle and Witham. I remember the pub names of "The Army and Navy" (wondering why I couldn't see any soldiers and sailors about a place with a name like that) also the "Trowel and Hammer" which was later renamed the "Spaniard" and no longer exists as a pub. Noticing these things helped the journey along for me.

At last we arrived and the weather was invariably good. Whenever we remarked about this to Auntie she always said "we need rain badly, this is such a dry area" - which rather put a damper on it for me but luckily not for long. There was so much to interest me there. The most exciting things there were the large sheds used for storage because I knew I should always find the cats there, from grandmother to kittens. I was in my element with the kittens but could not understand why they were always in the shed and never in the house. They were, of course, doing their job as mousers. The dog also was housed outside in a big kennel and never did I see him indoors, but that was the way of things "in the country".

I remember the kitchen seemed quite big and I was fascinated by the hand pump over the sink, instead of taps which we had at home. It was quite hard work for me to use this pump as it had to be pushed hard from side to side and seemed to go on for ages. The used water was never thrown down the sink but carried outside and thrown over the vegetables and few flowers because "it is a very dry area". There was a walk in larder with lots of home made jams, bottled fruit and eggs preserved in isinglass. The outside toilet was quite primitive with a wooden seat and no flushing cistern. The land was used to full capacity - fruit and vegetables were grown near the house and watercress in the stream at the far end also blackberry bushes formed a part of the boundary. I still love the taste of egg and watercress sandwiches and blackberries.

I was always anxious to see the chickens which were kept in large areas with wire netting fences and airy houses with roosting perches and large wooden nesting boxes lined with straw. It was really thrilling for me to help with the egg collecting - rather like finding hidden treasure. I, of course, never gave a thought to the other side of the business when each egg had to be weighed on a special set of scales and graded before going to market. I was always a little afraid of the hens when I helped to feed them because I couldn't scatter the corn very far around like my aunties could so consequently the hens crowded in on me and I felt trapped by the feathery mass.

When Uncle Charlie came home from his work at the Water Board, he had to do the rounds of locking up the hen houses to keep them safe from the foxes and, of course, open them up in the morning and check them out before going to work.

Later in the year there were geese to fatten up for Christmas and plucking to be done but I was never there during the very busy times.

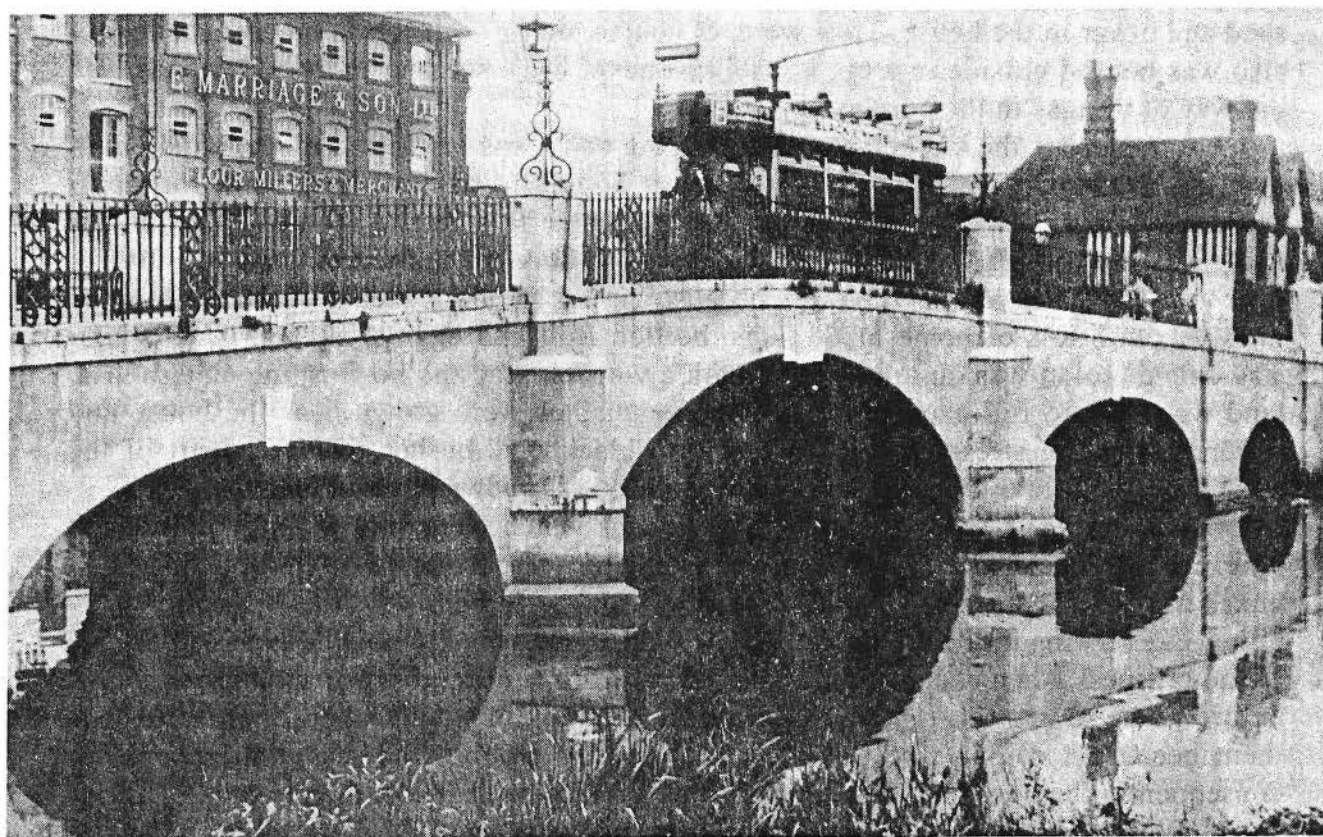
For a while Uncle Charlie's younger brother Bob and his wife Eva were also living in the house as well as old Mrs Sage, a very sweet lady who seemed very old to me with her thin white hair. She was a true countrywoman with a delightful North Essex accent. She had brought up a large family and I am sure some must still be living in the Colchester area. As a child I did not appreciate how difficult times were in the 30s as regards getting work but I do remember that, for a time, Uncle Bob had a coffee stall at the bus garage and 'Auntie' Eva used to make treacle tarts and cakes for him to sell. I believe the bus drivers and bus conductors were very good customers. Before embarking on the coffee stall he worked for a time as an attendant at the Royal Eastern Counties Hospital, now known as Turner Village. One day he thought he would give his boys a treat by giving them an outing to Woolworths but, alas, when it came to taking them back he was a few short. I think rounding them up was a major task.

Things began to change during the war years as they did for everyone. When my paternal grandmother died Grandpa decided he would like to go and live with Lena and Charlie at "Sunnyside A". Having been a master builder he arranged for improvements to be made. Water came on tap, the old toilet was replaced with a flushing cistern and a bathroom was added.

I never went back to see the changes there. Auntie Lena and Uncle Charlie retired to a bungalow in Ipswich Road, there is a housing estate where "Sunnyside A" once stood and the sounds of traffic everywhere instead of the cock crowing in the early morning.

I shall always remember my happy times there.

Joyce Young



Tram crossing East Bridge - 1927

TRAMS IN COLCHESTER

Harry Salmon born in 1895 remembers the first day that the trams started running and, at the age of 18 applying for a job as a conductor.

I remember my father taking me on the trams in 1904 for the first ride when they started running in Colchester. It was very exciting for my part, but of course it was crowded with people all wanting a ride.

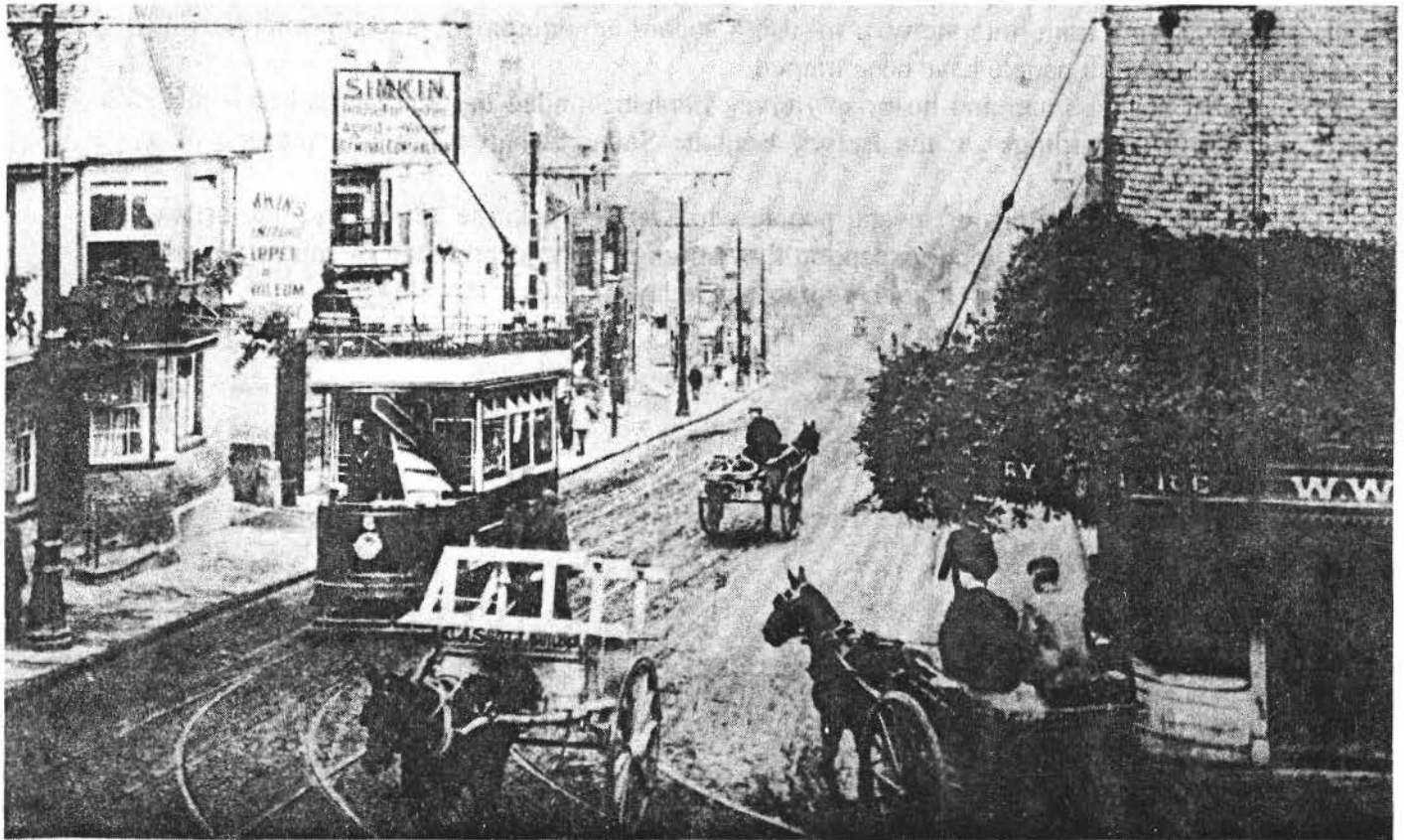
I left school when I was 12 years old after passing a special labour examination and started working as a milk boy on a dairy farm - 3/6d per week.

I remained there for seven years before deciding to apply for a job on the trams. After attending an interview I managed to get a start as a conductor and began by learning all the different routes. Eventually, I was asked if I would like to train as a driver and I jumped at the chance.

These trams weighed ten tons each and the most dangerous thing was going down North Hill; as soon as you gained sufficient speed you released your handbrake and pulled back your magnetic brake. It was the only way you could hold the tram, especially if it was a greasy morning - we would be pumping sand all the time in order to keep a grip on the rails.

I can remember going down Hythe Hill one morning, the first tram down, and I nearly ran right off the rails. I was pumping sand like the dickens and I only just stopped, the rails were so greasy.

My mother was in the habit of going to town on the tram which stopped outside our house and our dog Spot, used to go with her. Mother would sit downstairs and Spot would climb onto the upper deck because he was not allowed inside.



The junction of North Hill and High Street

When the tram got to the Fire Office they would both get off and cross over the road to Oliver and Parker's, the grocers at the top of North Hill. My mother would go to the counter to give in her weekly grocery order and Spot would go to the bacon counter and sit himself down until the assistant would throw him a nice bacon bone.

Spot got so used to doing this that, one day he decided that he was feeling a bit peckish and that he'd go up town on his own to get a bone.

So he waited outside by the stop and when the tram came along he hopped on and went to town and made his way to the grocers. There he sat and when he'd got his bone he made his way to the tram stop at the top of North Hill and returned home.

"This came to be quite a journey and whenever he felt like it he would just go by himself into town and get himself a bone".

COLCHESTER RECALLED ORAL HISTORY SOCIETY

The Society was the brainchild of local historian Andrew Phillips who ran a local history course in 1986. He called in a group of old Colcestrians to speak for him on the 20th century, and their memories of working lives and childhood so enthralled the students that the experiment was continued on a more formal footing.

Professional oral historian Bob Little was engaged on a two year contract to spearhead the initiative and train interviewers in using recording equipment and in interviewing techniques. So far 50 people have been trained

Local businessman and historian Hervey Benham funded the scheme and now there are almost 500 recordings in the Hervey Benham Sound Archive, bridging the gap of a complete century.

There are recordings of several people who were born in the 1890s and one or two from the 1880s. Almost without exception they speak of happy childhood memories despite the fact that most families were much poorer than today.

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