

COLCHESTER RECALLED

Issue No 4

Price 50p



*The Time Gun at Abbey Fields
Colchester*

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. 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 those of today.

Before the Welfare State

My mother, father and we were all joined into the doctor's club. She used to pay sevenpence a week, that used to cover four of us. Then my father used to pay into the hospital, that used to be threepence or fourpence a week I think. That used to cover the whole family against accidents and one thing and another, if you had an accident you could go up to the hospital and have your arm set, you know. And in the doctor's club was Dr Higginbottom in Wimpole Road and he used to have his own dispensary so if you wanted anything he used to give you a paper and you used to go and draw it from his dispenser. I can remember Dr Higginbottom and then I had Dr Clendon and as I say when I was just turned five, I had a place come up on my hip and they weren't sure what it was. Anyway, that come up in a big piece and they thought that was a carbuncle and then Dr Clendon lanced it and all the stuff came out of it. And I got tanned for this because he come and he cut it and I called him a bastard and how come I did, I don't know, but my mother was very upset about this and she was

holding me while he cut it. Well anyway, that turned out it was osteomyelitis. Then I went to hospital, the Essex County and I was X-rayed and one thing and another. Then they couldn't treat me, well they couldn't afford the treatment, so I went to the County place - High Beach, and all my mother had to pay there was two and six a week for my education. And there were about thirty children there you know, but my recollection of it is not very good, well not very favourable. I got burnt up like a lobster the weather was very hot and this about early June. And then there was a lot of things happened there. They were old army huts and I was in there and as me hair was washed, so that froze you know. And then they took me in the actual hospital, there was a ward up and a ward down. And I was with one of them old nurses, she was giving me a bath and she got me out of the bath and then she fell over and she went over me and I couldn't move her and nobody come and she'd had a heart attack and died. And I laid under her for about two hours before somebody realised we were missing. But anyway, then I went to University College Hospital, I had treatment there, that cost mum five shillings a week when I went there. From there I went to the Pauline



*Essex and Colchester
General Hospital.*

Essex County Hospital

Childrens' Home at High Barnett. That was alright, that as a religious place, that was tied up with the University College Hospital. I didn't like it there although I couldn't walk or anything, I got meself two mile down the road to the bus stop. And when I got there all I'd got on was a little pair of trunks and a little vest and he wouldn't let me on the bus. And eventually I come home, they give me a month to live but I'm still here, I've had several goes at it since. I had penicillin in 1950 and that cured the osteomyelitis and I was the first to be cured with this treatment. They pumped about three times as much as they need to have done, anyway that put me right.

From Colchester Recalled tapes.

Birch School

Extracts from a history of Birch School (1847 - 1947) prepared and possibly written by the then Headmaster, H.J.Figg Edgington in 1947 and sent by John E Everitt.

The school was founded by Charles Gray Round of Birch Hall in 1847 and the family continued to have a close association with the school.

Has anyone any memories of the school or old photographs?

The development of education after the Great War included the better provision for children from 11 to 14, to be brought about by the establishment of "senior schools". To make this practicable it necessitated the grouping of senior children from several small schools into one central school. In April 1931 an important change in the School took place as it was reorganised with a senior division, which took in the senior children from surrounding schools. Already Layer Marney C of E School had been closed in 1926 and all the children transferred to Birch. In 1931 all senior children (over 11) were transferred from Layer-de-La-Haye, Copford-with-Easthorpe, Wigborough and Salcott-Virley Church Schools. Later, in 1933, the juniors from Wigborough School were also transferred and that school closed and the same happened for Salcott-Virley in 1937.

These changes created the need for in-

creased accommodation so a new classroom and cloakroom were built at the west end of the south classroom through the generosity of Mr C.J.Round with some assistance from the Bishop of Chelmsford's Appeal Fund. The new room was dedicated by the Bishop of Barking on October 22nd, 1931. Other important changes included in this reorganisation were the enlargement of the shed in the School garden to form a science room, the making of a playing field in the meadow above the garden, and the temporary use of the village hall as a dining hall. Perhaps the most striking of the changes was the enlargement of the school garden to include the whole of the hollow between the playground and the playing field, and its transformation from a disused gravel pit into a most beautiful landscape garden with its rock garden and pool, its lawns and pleasant vistas. It was through the vision, enthusiasm and hard work of Mr Gill (the Headmaster) that these changes were largely brought about.

On October 14th, 1938, the School was honoured by a visit of the President of the Board of Education (Lord Stanhope), accompanied by the Director of Education for Essex (J Sargent Esq.).

Just before the Second World War the Managers, in conjunction with the Diocesan Religious authorities, had prepared a scheme of alteration and enlargement of the School to bring the buildings up to modern requirements, and to greatly improve the accommodation. Plans had been prepared at considerable expense, and then the war came and the whole scheme had to be shelved. To facilitate these schemes at the end of 1939 Mr C.J.Round handed over the School property to the Chelmsford Diocesan Board of Finance, and so after 92 years, during which they had been the chief benefactors of the School, the trusteeship passed from the Round family. During the war the new education act was passed, which completely revised the future status of the School, and so the pre-war schemes never came to fruition.

The outbreak of war in September 1939 was soon to affect the School as during the first fateful week-end Birch and District became a reception area for evacuees, and, after a short

closure, the School was to open for about 80 evacuees from Yardley Lane School, Chingford, and from Chisenhale Road School, Bethnal Green, as well as our own children. At first as there was not room for all at once, the School worked in morning and afternoon sessions, one for own children, and one for the evacuees, who retained their own identity as schools. Later, as the evacuees gradually returned home, they were merged into our School, and eventually at the beginning of June 1940, all that were left were removed to another area in the west of England.

The problem of air-raid shelter was always an urgent one, and eventually four brick shelters were built in the playgrounds, and all the windows of the School were made splinter-proof. Later an emergency sleeping hut, or "rest centre" was built in the playground, which after a time was used by the school for extra accommodation, and is now the dining-hall.

The war with its many and varied problems of staff shortage, the responsibility for children during air-raid alerts, and the general difficulties of those times, made a heavy strain on Mr Gill, and so after a period of ill-health he resigned and ceased active work in the School at the end of March 1943, after being headmaster for 29 years. Valuable presentations were made to Mr Gill by the managers, the staff, boys and girls past and present, and friends in the neighbourhood.

He was succeeded by Mr H.J. Figg Edgington, who came from Epping C of E Senior School. Very soon after this change a few volunteers commenced the preparation of hot meals for the children on Thursdays and Fridays, though it was not until a new kitchen was completed at the end of 1943 that meals were served every day, and the daily trek to the village hall ceased. The following year the kitchen started to send dinners to Messing and Layer-de-la-Haye schools, and it continues to cook some 300 meals a day.

In 1944 the School said good-bye to Mrs Gill, who had been closely connected with every

activity of school life for 30 years, and Miss Beck, who had been with the School since the reorganisation in 1931, the former becoming headmistress at Langham, and the latter at Alresford.

Early in 1945 the School lost its handicraft master, Mr H.C. Edgar, who died after a short illness, and for some time the School was without any instruction in woodwork. Mr Edgar commenced work in the School when the new handicraft centre was built, and had remained handicraft master until his death, except for service in the Army during the 1914-18 war. He was a superb craftsman, and many examples of his carving are to be found in the district.

April 1st 1945, saw the commencement of a new era in the world of education as the "Butler" Act came into force. It was about this time that the School adopted the House system and the children from various groups of vil-

The following year the kitchens started to send dinners to Messing and Layer de la Haye schools and it continued to cook some 300 meals a day.

lages or hamlets formed the three Houses into which the School divides for social and athletic activities. the Houses are named after three eminent scientists, all closely connected with Essex, namely, Dr William Gilbert, physician to Queen Elizabeth and James I, who was born

in Colchester in 1544, and who wrote the first great scientific book published in England in which he declared that the earth was a magnet; William Harvey who lived in Hempstead, where he died in 1657, and who made the great discovery of the circulation of the blood; John Ray, born at Black Notley in 1628, who was the founder of modern botany. The annual School sports was revived this summer, and about the same time the School Young Farmers' Club was formed.

During the war a large number of old girls and boys of the school as well as Mr Millatt of the staff, served in H.M. Forces. On May 20th 1946, an impressive service was held in the School, when Canon Luard dedicated a simple memorial to the Old Boys who died for their

country in the 1939-45 war.

The illuminated tablet has the following inscription;

BIRCH SCHOOL

Roll of Honour

In grateful memory of the nine Old Boys who gave their lives in the service of their country, 1939-1945

Rowland Behn	R.N.
Derrick Curtis	Army
Nino Marven	R.N.
Percy Moore	Army
Henry Norton	Army
John Salmon	R.A.F.
Gordon Studley	R.A.F.
Reginald Taylor	Army
Charles Warner	R.A.F.

Fidelis

The raising of the school leaving age to 15 brings a new chapter to the story of the School, and a new classroom is to be provided by the Ministry of Education to accommodate the extra pupils. Unfortunately, under the local development plan the senior children will eventually be transferred to a new secondary school, but as this cannot happen for a some years there will be ample time to show what can be done in a country school to provide a wide and liberal education in craft-work of various kinds, in domestic subjects and in the arts. Above all, whatever changes may come, may the School always maintain the promotion of sound learning and training in true religion, the union of which has been the foundation of its work and influence during the past hundred years.

Brightlingsea about 1932

Sash windows facing west glowed bright with setting sun. Tired and hungry, but blissfully happy, salty bodies, and hair and sandy feet the children trailed after their mother for the last few yards of home. salty, sticky ribbons of seaweed were carried home to hang in the backyard to tell what the weather was going to be. There were collections of smooth round pebbles, dried star fish, dried crabshells, all kinds of treasure to be hoarded after the ritual trip to Brightlingsea.

Ritual it was, time after time; threepence return on the train from the Hythe station. The day would begin early with a bright shining morning. I sped on wings to the local shop for

packets of Smith's crisps complete with a screw of salt in blue paper, triangles of cream cheese wrapped in silver foil, a jar of meat paste, chocolate and oranges. Then in crisp, crackly grease-proof paper a pile of neatly wrapped sandwiches would be prepared on a corner of the living room table

Seaside buckets and spades, towels, bathing costumes and friends down the road were collected.

Haversacked and draped with seaside paraphernalia, we would set off for the Hythe station over a mile away and reached along a footpath across the five fields,(now a housing estate). The five fields were a crucial part of all our seaside excursions. We walked in single file along the hedgerow, through field after field of wheat or mangolds or pears. The skylarks sang in the great stretch of sky. The golden wheat whispered and swished as we passed. On the way home we would pluck it and rub it between our palms and chew the grain to a chewy paste, but now we had to get to the station in time for the steam train, puffing smoke and smuts all over us. It would shunt into the small station and with relief we would be on our way. The railway line followed the river and as the river began to widen to meet the sea, the line crossed over it, over a swaying rickety bridge, the little train rocking, swaying across the stretch of water (or mud if the tide was out).

More ritual followed our arrival, for the first place to be visited was the ships' chandlers in order to buy a ship's hard biscuit for my mother, which she loved. We then walked through the narrow streets to the little quay side where there was always a bevy of sailors waiting with rowing boats plying for hire to ferry passengers to the sandy stretch on the opposite side of the creek. We chose our sailor and his boat slished and sloshed across the water, waves slapping the sides. We passed the famous oyster beds and red sailed barges going to the Hythe quay

The day had its own ritual of swimming, of playing a special game, a chasing game among the ditches and dykes and sea lavender, of walking to the Martello tower and sea wall and of buying a tray at the wooden hut on the beach, of having our picnic and sunbathing and of watching all the little boats bobbing on the quaint

estuary.

As the day lengthened, the whole process of getting to Brightlingsea began in reverse and my dear mother on arriving home would cook us a large pan of delicious chips.

My Ancestors

Part II continued from Issue No 3.

We played endless games of cricket on the fields opposite 12 Halstead Road. We played marbles in the gutters and spinning tops on the pavements. At school we had a long skipping rope and would queue up to jump through it. We all had our own skipping ropes and would do "bumps". In the winter we made long slides in the school playground. We wore warm woollen coats, socks and knitted "pixie" hoods.

We also played over "the Springs" where there were streams to be dammed and down Spring Lane there was a disused mill which we played in. It was dark and spooky inside. We never did school homework. Early in the war the teachers came to our houses as it was considered unsafe

to have all the children in one place. We were taught the 3 Rs thoroughly and chanted tables and spellings at school (Lexden County Junior School). Miss Olwen Carter taught us in the third year. There were at least 40 children in the class, but she kept firm control. Miss Savoury was our "Brown Owl". I was a pixie but I didn't stay long in the Brownies. My mother bought a piano and found a very good piano teacher - Miss Grace Ball who lived at 2 Irvine Road, Colchester. She was probably recommended by Mr Braun, a violinist who was a colleague at Pipers. I started piano lessons when I was eight years old and my whole life changed. Miss Ball was an inspiration. She had a wonderful contralto voice - very dramatic; she also taught singing. She arranged musical evenings at which I played my first solo - The Sleeping Beauty Waltz. There was a percussion band and we played duets etc. I accompanied her in some of her pupils' concerts.

My grandmother's house was small but cosy. When we first went to live there, it was lit by gas. We occasionally had to buy new gas "Mantles". Electricity was put in soon after. Coal fires heated



Lexden Street - circa 1902

the front and back living rooms but we rarely used the front room - it was like an ice box in winter. The fire was always alight during the winter in the living room - there was a trivet on which a copper kettle always stood (I now have it in my fireplace). Nanna also used a rickety paraffin heater which had a damper on top which threw fascinating patterns on the ceiling! There were gas fires in the two larger bedrooms. The kitchen, bathroom and toilet were not heated. The bathroom only contained a bath - it had been converted out of the coal store and we had a bath once a week. The water was heated in the "copper" in the kitchen. It was boiling hot; the room would fill with steam and condensation ran down the walls, but Raymond and I loved bath time. Normally, we washed and cleaned our teeth at the butler sink in the kitchen which had a gas geyser to heat water. We all used the same roller towel which hung on the back of the back door! All the laundry was done by hand. Bed linen and towels etc. were boiled in the copper which was heated by gas. They were then rinsed in the sink and put through the big heavy mangle which stood outside the back door. Then it was hung on the long linen line which was held up by a prop. The ironing was done on the table with a heavy flat iron which was heated on the gas stove - I still have the iron with its matching trivet. My grandmother was terribly accident prone. She slipped on the icy path and broke her arm. Another time her arm was badly gashed and it was held together with clips. It was a terrible mess but she never complained. She had tremendous faith and was devoutly religious.

We were encouraged to work hard at school and to read, although we did not have many books - we borrowed some from the library. I remember reading Enid Blyton stories and we had a little childrens' magazine called "Playmates". We also enjoyed reading the comics "Dandy" and "Beano" and Ray loved "the Eagle" comic.

The wireless was our lifeline - we depended upon it for news and entertainment. Nanna kept it on all the time. Our favourite programmes were "Workers Playtime", Monday Night at Eight (We stop the roar of London's traffic), ITMA with Tommy Handley. There were many

catch phrases about, one of which from ITMA was "can I do you now sir?" Ray and I loved Dick Barton (Special Agent) and would rush home to hear it. The music still gives me a thrill. We never had television while I was living at home.

We cycled nearly everywhere. During the summer my mother took us (by bike) to Alresford Creek. It was about six miles. We had to lift our bikes over stiles, go through woods and over a railway line to get there. We swam when the tide was right and took picnics. It was completely unspoilt and I can still remember the gloriously salty smell. We were very happy then.

Sometimes Nanna took us to Brightlingsea or Maldon by bus. At one time, the bus towed a gas cylinder due to lack of petrol. The beaches at Clacton, Walton and Frinton were obstructed with scaffolding to deter enemy landing craft so we didn't go there until the end of the war. Daddy only came home occasionally on leave and it was very sad going to the station to see him go off. My mother was very young but she was always cheerful and very strong. After Dunkirk, Daddy was not sent abroad anymore but became a tank transporter driver. He was very proud of his "Diamond T" and he delighted to tell of his adventures going over Shap Fell and other difficult routes. We children didn't know much about the blitz or D Day and although we were comparatively deprived by today's standards we were happy and healthy. We were permitted to play card games at home but gambling was not allowed. My grandmother would not even buy raffle tickets. She had a few elderly friends - Nelly Wright and Mrs Shelton who lived in Straight Road and was always sitting when we went to see her - I never saw her standing up. Nanna sometimes took the "girls" out for a walk. They lived in an institution at Lexden House. At that time there were several large institutions in Colchester housing poor and destitute people. Nanna had a ward - Hilda - who lived at the big forbidding Victorian institution opposite North station. Eventually, Hilda was allowed her freedom and went to work as a live-in housekeeper to a family in Leicester. She spent her holidays with Nanna and we all became very fond of her.

Nanna spent a lot of time sitting, meditating with her bible on her lap. She did not have many skills and as there was little food available she didn't do much cooking. She couldn't knit or sew but she was always there when we needed her and was an anchor to us during the stormy war years. Later I grew very fond of her and went to chapel with her and on bus trips and now I find myself doing things just the way she did.

We mostly stayed very fit and healthy with the very simple basic diet we were allowed on our rations. Our sweet ration was a quarter pound of sweets per week and when we heard of a shop selling sweets we would rush there and queue up to get our ration. My brother was addicted to Corona soft drinks. They were delivered each week and the empty bottles returned. They came in lurid colours, cherry, lime, dandelion & burdock etc. I was not very keen on them. We took cod liver oil every day - it was horrid but we had very strong bones and teeth. We also got concentrated orange juice from the clinic. A large loaf of white bread cost 4½ old pence.

Early in the war Ray and I both had our tonsils out at Colchester General Hospital. It was a routine operation as was circumcision. Ray was very ill and lost a lot of blood. Nanna and mummy had to look after him while I was left alone at the other end of the recovery room. Ray was always getting into scrapes. He got a fever when he was about four years old and sat in bed with the chamber pot on his head. Another time he jumped off the wall at the end of our garden, landing on a corned beef tin in the butchers backyard and nearly cut his little finger off. He had to run all the way home pouring with blood and mummy had to take him to the casualty department by bus to have his finger stitched back on. We also had worms and head lice at one stage which we got rid of by dousing our heads with paraffin! We used to play in disused railway sidings down Chitts Hills which we called "Fairy Land" - it was an enchanted wilderness. We cycled down Chitts Hills to visit friends at Bergholt - there was a lovely steep hill which we loved to freewheel down. We kept rabbits in hutches at the end of our garden. At one time we had about 18 rabbits. My brother and I were always frantically searching for rabbit food they

preferred dandelions, parsley and thistles - we never bought food. We had to clean out their cages regularly. My mother made mittens with their pelts.

Another civilising influence was joining Culver Street Methodist Church Sunday School. It was more go-ahead than the local Lexden Sunday School. My first teacher was Miss Mary Holford who now lives at 13 Oxford Court. Miss Sizer and Miss Steggles supervised. One was large and one was small and they wore identical clothes. Miss Kathleen Jackson trained the choir for the Anniversary which was held in the summer. It was a grand affair and took place over a whole weekend when there were several concerts and services all very musical. I accompanied the choirs and singing on the grand piano and played duets with the organ. The organist was Mr Leonard Simpson. It was a wonderful experience. I also accompanied Miss Jackson at some of the recitals she gave. She had a wonderful contralto voice. I learnt a tremendous amount about music from her. Mary Holford held bible classes each week and I joined the Fellowship which was led by Mr Eric Derbyshire. We used to go to socials held at other churches where there were youth clubs.

My last teacher at Lexden School was Mr Pearson. He seemed very old to us and was also a bit deaf. My best friend, Heather Buy and I were the only two girls to take the Scholarship in 1944 and I was the only one to pass. I heard the result on May 8th 1945 - VE Day - it changed my life. I started at the Colchester County High School for Girls in September 1945 - I was 10 years old and I never saw Heather again. I did not know anyone when I started but I soon began to make new friends.

We never had a telephone, either at 12 Halstead Road or at Straight Road. If mummy wanted to speak to daddy on the telephone, she had to use the dirty, smoky call box at the end of the road. It was very difficult to get through; the line was very crackly and we just had time to say "hello", when the pips went and we were cut off, but daddy said it was "like a tonic" to hear our voices.

My family were all staunch Labour and were overjoyed when the Labour government were

elected at the end of the war. We were all affected with the feeling of optimism that a new era was beginning when there would be no more poverty, disease and ignorance. They believed that nationalisation was the answer to all the country's problems. They had seen the terrible effects of unemployment between the wars and the inequality that existed between the privileged and the poor. This feeling affected me deeply and I have always felt a sympathy towards Socialism.

Memories of Life on the Barges - in conversation with Patrick Denney

Part II. continued from Issue No 1.

(Any memories of any times when the weather was bad?).....once we went down to Mersea quarters and we got out into the Swin Spitway and the wind changed and we had to come back, and we went back up into Burnham River, the mouth of Burnham River, which was just round from Mersea. We got in there and we were in there about a month and the old ice

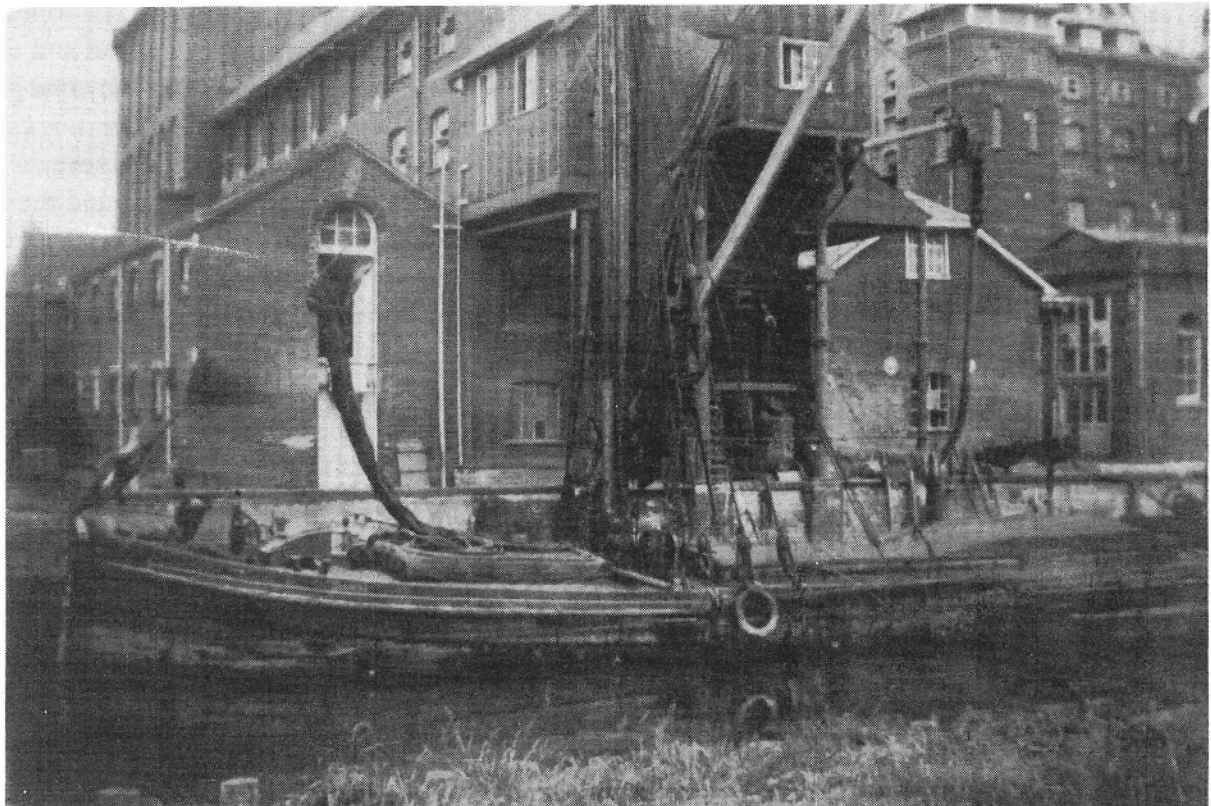
froze.....and you could walk on the water. We were carrying hay and all we were doin' was gettin' old ropes, any old bits of wood, making fenders to put on level with the water so the ice comin' down wern't cuttin' into the doings....

(How did you get on for food?).....we used to get the row boat and go ashore on the saltings and walk up to the farmhouses - half the farm houses would sell you stuff.....

(Were you still getting paid?).....Oh no! Well....Say we left today and loaded tomorrow and if we were 2 - 3 days gettin' to London and the weather was right, you'd get paid.... but if the weather was wrong and you didn't get up there for six weeks, you still didn't get no more money, you didn't get nothing...

(You just got the three days money?) ... you could be a week....you could be six weeks, it is as the same as coming back, you could get under Southend Pier with the wind comin' easterly, and as long as the wind was easterly, you'd be stopped there - you wouldn't get down on the east coast with the wind easterley or too much swell and the whiteheads.....

(Did you do any fishing?).... oh yeah!..... we always carried hoop nets....we was always catch-



A Barge at Marriages Mill



Bill Warner

ing a few fish - make a break.....not enough to sell, oh no, just for ourselves.....

(Where did the hay go?) To Greenwich in London - they had a jetty there and they had got barracks there with the horses and all that.

(What did you bring back?) ..Depends what was ready for you. The skipper would go to the London office and he'd probably have timber, wheat or linseeds or you could have barley- whatever was there, you'd take.

(Were they still bringing back the manure at that time from London to the countryside?).....down Buttermen's Bay, that's on the Ipswich River, there was a farmer there, he had two barges - one named the Primrose and I can't think of the other, they used to take stacks of hay to London and they use to take manure back to his farm.....I was never involved in that because we carried wheat and stuff like that, and you had manure in your hold, you'd have to clean it out before you could carry wheat or anything like that.....

(Could you overload a barge?).....when we were sand loaded we only had about 3 inches freeboard in the centre but barges that traded down the channel and went a lot further afield from this coast, they used to have the Plimsoll Line on and they'd have about nine inches freeboard and they weren't allowed to load deeper in

the water than that Plimsoll Line.

(Who checked the loading?).....it was left to the skippers....you say you could carry 160 tons - the brokers had arranged that you had a full freight of 160 tons. If you were just 100 tonner, you'd have just 100 ton.... like when we came up to Marriage's Mill with wheat, we'd probably have about 100 - 110 ton - it used to vary a bit.....and then when you got to the Hythe, course all your gear had got to all come down and you'd got to go up through bridges....

(You mentioned that some of the barges went further afield. Where do you mean by further a field?).....they use to go right down to Southampton and down to Falmouth..... use to go down the channel.....go from London down to, say, Margate, Dover or Ramsgate.....and all the way round the coast to Southampton there, and several places about there, and go right down to Falmouth, oh yeah.... you got em goin' across to France..... us coasters as we use to call ourselves what traded round the Essex coast..... as we were 'sailing' up, if you see one that were a 'comin' one that were a 'comin' out there, and he'd got a flag on the mizzen, you'd know he was from abroad and he's comin' back.....but they use to fly the flag on the mizzen so that the customs knew they were from abroad and they'd got to board 'em and check what they had got.

(How many barges were there working in your area, approximately?) Oh....several hundred, oh yeah, several hundred....round the Medway, Chatham and Rochester,...oh there were loads of 'em and in the London river there were hundreds of what we called mud barges. They use to sail into these little old creeks and use to have a special clay in there and mud, then they use to load that into 'em, and take that round to the cement works for making cement...and round Gillingham there used to be another place round there they use to load it up and take it up to Gillingham Bulldog Cement Works that was then, and we use to load there..... and bring it down to Wrights, which is at the bottom.....well I don't think its there now.....at the bottom end.

(Did you know many other people who worked on barges - you said there were hundreds of barges - did you know each other?)....Oh yeah! There was dozens and dozens

and dozens of us, all knew one another, but even if you didn't, and you brought up alongside any other barge on the docks it was just as though it was homely.... You were all the same - there was no animosity. Everyone was happy and if you was there in the evening, you'd go on up the road to the pub for a drink.....If you lay wind bound and the weather was bad, you would row aboard one another and play cards of an evening and afternoon and that.... If you got to Brightlingsea and you couldn't get goin' you would row ashore and go in the old pub, the Anchor, I think down near the hard and go'n get a bit of shoppin'....

*(Did you ever get involved in racing - officially or otherwise?).....*Not official racing, but racing for work. If you got a strong wind and that, a lot of 'em say you can't venture out there today, and you got a mad brained skipper.....Or here is one saying if we don't go we ain't getting no money - we are going. We have gone out and had a hell of a thrashing and probably got halfway to Southend, and then had to turn around and come all the way back again - nothing doing. You got to have a go but if you didn't take your chance - you were behind.

*(Was there a scramble to get to London for work?).....*Oh Yeah. You'd all be working together and about three o'clock of a morning, you would hear the old windlass again, you'd think, hello - someone's mustering again and you'd look up the hatchway and see it ain't too bad, slip your clothes on quick, get your lights all up and away you go, you are off.... It were racing - you got the first job if it was a goin'.

*(How much skill was attached to racing....why were some barges quicker than others?).....*It was the shape of them that made them quicker, like yachts, quicker through the water. The 'Stackies' were bull headed cos they were built to take the stacks (of hay). A lot of them were very slow....For tacking, you've got to drop your lever down on the side and heave the other one up the other side.....As you turn round again that one has to be over and the other one up quick....So that the water and waves don't rip it up and bust the shackles at the top.

*(You started off as a cabin boy but how did you get the job as a mate?)*Dick Eaves and the Hilda was laying in London and his mate left

cos he went into a bigger barge. The bigger the barge, the more freight you carried, the more you got. I was down the Hythe with the Golden Fleece, skipper he say to me, Boy, Francis want you, and I went in and he said, "Will you go mate on the Hilda?" and I thought Boy, this is good... For two years I had just been messing about....I was about sixteen then... And away I went...I remember I went to see Francis (of Francis and Gilder) Gilder lived in London. Francis he was a very nice man. He took me up and paid my rail fare to London. I went into their offices in Leadenhall Street. I'll never forget it sitting there with all the old skippers waiting round for jobs to turn up and that...And Dick sat there and Francis said there is your new mate, and we sat there talking and all the others said, "You'll be alright Dick, you've got a good boy there - he's been with Bill Eve you see. The first job we got when I was with him was coal from the Millwall Dock to Foulness Island. You got to go up the Burnham River, and up there, there are different places on the seawall where a little bit of ground stuck out and you'd drop your anchors and heave back onto these bits of ground...When the tide went out, they came with their old tumble carts and the old farm hands used to unload the coal. Foulness Island must have changed a hell of a lot. In them days when I was a goin', it was just a church, farms, a couple of shops and a pub but since the war it has all changed... The coal was used for the farmhouses. We took about a hundred ton and when it was unloaded, they used to share it between them - two or three farms on there then. They used to have these old tumble carts and they used to fill them up level and use to take 'em and tip 'em up one to one. The old farmhands did that (the unloading). They use to have a basket and they'd fill it up and we used to fit the winch up on top and up it would come and the old boys would put it on their shoulders and run up the plank and tip it in the tumbler.

(What were the duties of a mate?) You more or less did the same work as the skipper but he's in charge....When the skipper went below to have his meals, you'd take over the wheel and carry on. I'd get the meals...You cooked exactly the same as you did at home, but instead of fridges like today, all we got was one of those

big pots what the old Romans used, as the saying is. We used to fill it half full of salt, with flank as they called it, which is ribs of beef which you used to put in there and salt it all down and it'd be left for six weeks to two months to keep it then you got it out. You had hardly any water to rinse it so when you were out at sea you'd give it a good wash in sea water and then wash it in fresh water and cook it...Fresh water carried was on average of 100 to 120 gallons - thats all - used for cooking, drinking and washing...You had a bowl of water for washing in but you dare chuck it away. You got to wash in it again later in the day, otherwise you wouldn't have had any water. Thats what was meant when bargemen were called dirty.

You use to cook down the forecastle and then bring it down to the cabin - you never cooked down in the cabin, but the forecastle, which was in the fore part where you kept all your sails, storm sails, lights and all your equipment. You use to have a cooking range down there...Coal fired, no calor gas or anything like there is today. We had three meals a day, but some wouldn't be all that good - a bit of bread and cheese if you was lucky...We never carried passengers so there was just the two of us. The bigger ones that traded down channel and went to Falmouth, they'd have three hands, but not what I called a boy. Third hand he'd be a grown up chap who could take the mate's job, take the wheel and he'd do the cooking. When I was a mate, I never had a cabin boy, all the barges round the coast were only two hand...It was heavy work - heaving that old anchor up. Its all very well to say there were two of them to manage it but you got to heave that anchor up and as soon as that do break away, somebody's got to be at the wheel and that left one...Once you'd got the anchor up, you'd be alright - that was the hardest thing to do especially if there was a breeze blowing...

The sails were repaired down at the shipyards - down Back Lane - at a little place... Where you go down to what use to be Wright's Yard...What we called the shipyard. We use to go up under the bridges to get repairs done at Francis and Gilders Yard. They done all their own shipwrighting - had their own shipwrights. I

stayed with this particular skipper for a year - as soon as you saw a bigger one you was away.... After I left the Hilda, I went in the Pall Mall... with Tim Farthing. Dick Eve was a nice chap but so was Farthing. I never went without nothin' - we didn't earn a lot of money but he'd never see you go without...

(How good did the skippers have to be, at navigating for example?) They never use to worry - they never had any doings, it was all from manual work... You worked with the tide. Once it got to high water and the wind was against you, you had to drop your anchor and wait six hours to low water again till the tide started to flow and you got under way again. If you went from here with the wind northerly, you could leave here at say 10 o'clock in the morning and you'd be going up by Southend by teatime with a nice breeze, but if the wind was down westerly, you could be two or three days getting up there.

Dear Mr Robinson

Whilst staying in Colchester over Christmas I was shown a copy of Colchester Recalled, which I found very interesting. I was born in Colchester in 1922 but left for business reasons in 1970.

I would like to point out a couple of inaccuracies in 'My Ancestors'. It refers to the Empire Cinema in Queen St. - demolished by bombs during WW2. In fact the Empire was at the bottom of Mersea Rd, opposite the Roman Wall. Whether it was damaged by bombs during the war, I do not know - I was away in the forces then. However it was still standing in the mid 60s, as I purchased it as Managing Director of JM Locke Ltd as a furniture store. However it was soon compulsorily purchased for the new St Botolphs roundabout.

I am wondering if your correspondent was getting confused with the Queen St Theatre which had gone before I was born. It was opposite the building previously TM Lockes, but now Peacocks. My grandfather was stage carpenter at the theatre and my father acted as a child artist on occasions.

Regarding the Bluecoat School, my brothers and I attended this school and my eldest

brother finished school there in 1939. The traditional uniform had ceased, but when a boy left he received a suit which was deemed suitable to start him off in a career and I remember my brother wearing his. The rest of us changed schools before we became entitled to one.

My compliments on an excellent and informative publication.

Yours Sincerely
Mrs LA Parratt
Salisbury.

Dear Mr Robinson

I was pleased to receive Issue No 3 of Colchester Recalled. I am 87 and recently visited Colchester for a friend's funeral. I agree with Mr John Wheeler, Tostock, Suffolk, how Colchester, particularly the High Street is being spoilt.

Sincerely

*Mrs Flora Scott
Bury St Edmunds.*

My Life on the Farm

My father was Jack Rupert Last, horseman to the Lord Onslow Estate which stretched from Thorrington Woods to Lower Farm Brightlingsea. John Girling was the manager to this estate and he rode with the hounds which met at the old church and hunted on our farm. A magnificent sight and there were no prejudices in those days of the hunt rightly or wrongly. My mother Olive Mary Atkinson, was born at Fordham P.O. and lived on Marsh Farm with her mother and father- George Atkinson, five brothers and five sisters, prior to her marriage to my father in 1926.

I grew up amongst the horses and had no fear of the huge Shire horses. To me they were great fun to ride and groom at the stables. In the winter some were put out to the marshes and in the spring, my father had to break them in, ready for the ploughing, drilling, thrashing and harvesting. I often rode on the wagons and climbed the stacks. There were tumbrels of sprats brought down for my father and the horses to plough in

the fields, chalk too, and of course the muck heaps from the animals. Holidays were always a great time, rabbiting when they cut the corn. I caught or fell on many a rabbit. I remember many went to the butchers for a small sum of money. I was awakened by the cockerels most morning at dawn.

I used to cycle two miles into Brightlingsea to school, or on errands to friends or relatives. I always had my meals out in the field with the farm workers. Once mum gave me a one pound jam jar of pickled onions to eat and a bottle of cold tea. I think I was supposed to share this. Mum told me afterwards, that my dad had said the men sat there in the hedgerow, their mouths watering.

Every season was a joy. Winter time I would bring home wood for the fire. In spring there would be primroses, bluebells and watercress. In summer blackberries and sloes for wine making. There were also mushrooms in the spring and autumn. Wild violets abounded in certain fields, crab apples grew on a large tree down on the field near the marshes. Wild irises grew in the fleets. As we had no electricity, candles and oil lamps were used. There was no water laid on to the house so we had to walk 100 yards or so to the well for the beautiful spring water and bring it up in buckets.

A big copper stood in the corner of the kitchen (flag stone) which mum used for boiling up the washing and put me into for a bath. In summer I went into a tin bath on the Hop yard outside and often the cats, five of them joined me. Mother cooked on an oil stove in the kitchen which was huge. There was a fireplace which had an oven built in which mum black leaded everyday when cleaned out. She was a cook in service so I'll never forget the roasts, steak and kidney suet puddings, all home made.

Browns of East Hill ran a fleet of Somerlite oil blue vans which delivered to the farm every week. Mum had a dozen stone jars which were filled for the oil stoves and oil lamps. The radio was run by an accumulator which had to be taken to Addisons to be charged. I took that on my bike on many occasions down into Brightlingsea.

I went to Brightlingsea Methodist School, Chapel Road up till the age of 11, trudging

through the snow in the winter, over stiles to Chapel Road, with baked potatoes in my pocket to keep me warm. I then went to Brightlingsea senior school. I belonged to the Girl Guides which I enjoyed. I suppose I enjoyed anything to do with the outdoors, as in summer I swam in the creek whenever the river Colne tides were right. I remember well the day Queen Mary visited the Brightlingsea senior school prior to the war. I was good in all sports and cookery, but had many a chalk thrown at me fidgeting in serious studies, by Mr Norton.

I knew every bird nest, wren, linnet, thrush, blackbird, robin and guarded them from cats and other children who might have raided them. I would show the children the nests and tell them about the birds and their eggs and I think this changed their attitudes. Although I must confess I had many a moorhens egg for an egg custard. I ate turnips from the fields raw, cabbage too. Mum and I picked peas when they were ready for the market.

My father often stood in for the cowman when needed and was up at 3.30 am to milk the cows for the lorries to collect. We had a gallon or more in a large pudding basin from which mum skimmed the cream into a bottle, which I shook to make butter. I used to drive the cows back to the marshes after they had been milked

always a little wary because of the bull.

On the Hop yard was a pond which I fished for tadpoles and there was a large oak on which I had a swing and many more which I was always climbing to hide from whoever I was playing with. There was Furze wood too, that was great for that. Rabbits abounded there which dad shot with a double barrellled shot gun.

Dad grew everything in the garden, rhubarb, potatoes, peas, runner beans, parsnips, carrots, greengages, plums, damsons, pears and medlars, gooseberries too and lots of apples that no longer exist. The farm covered 500 acres of arable land and marshes which at weekends we would walk across to Thorrington Red Lion or across to St Osyth and cross the ferry to the Hard or to Moverons Farm in another direction past the old church, where my grandparents were buried. One year the sea wall was breached, flooding the marshes surrounding Brightlingsea. We feared we would be cut off from Thorrington as we were below sea level.

The farm house we lived in was traced back to 500 years old and was used for smuggling at some time, as when we were bombed they found hidden places and the house itself was like a rabbit warren. Dad dug up many coins including a silver Elizabeth I coin which I still have. They must have rowed up the creek with



Mrs Hetty Fletcher on the Farm

whatever spoils they brought in.

My father was an experienced thatcher, as well as ploughman, hedger, ditcher and a breaker-in of horses. His knowledge of the land was incredible and I had a wonderful, happy childhood until I was evacuated to Australia in 1940. But that's another story.

In winter my Mother or Father lit a roaring fire in the front room, the Co-op coalman brought the coal by the ton in the autumn; summer time there was the kitchen range on the go all the time in the flagstone floor kitchen.

The toilet was outside across the yard which had to be emptied (explains our fantastic rhubarb in one of the gardens). The washing was done every Monday lit by a fire under a stone copper, a scrubbing board got the stubborn stains out and a mangle got the worst of the wet out and the washing was hung out on the hopyard on the lines. In bad weather Mother had to dry the sheets etc round the fire, ironing was done by a flat iron that was heated on the oil stove.

Clothes were bought in Colchester when needed, Mother and I caught the train from Brightlingsea to St Botolphs where I remember the trams running down Queen St. Mother bought all Dads clothes he would never go shopping, far too busy he would say. Everything was bought at the Co-op for the Divi, I still remember the number well.

My birthday being an only child was very special, the excitement of a doll, dolls house or dolls pram to play with on the long dark nights of winter or playing darts, draughts, dominos or doing jigsaws with my parents when they were not busy making thrum rugs for the floors. Mum would cut the material for Dad to work, it was hard work but we had the benefits of cosy floors on the lino.

Christmas was a happy period, there were 10 in Mum's family and 7 in Dad's, sometime all together for eating, and games despite the long walk down to the farm, we had sing songs in those days and charades, especially eating ones I remember all the mince pies we got through.

Mother was always busy, bottling fruit, making jam or marmalade, putting down eggs for the winter in isinglass in stone jars.

I went to Sunday school every week and some times to church in the afternoons to Chapel

Road, always in my Sunday best, I said my prayers every night quickly, so I could read my books by torch or candle light as I never slept well.

Dear Colchester Recalled,

Although she never received any publicity, she would have hated it anyway, but my mother was one of the unsung heroines of the 1941 train bombing at Chitts Hills, Lexden. We had been here a few weeks from the East End of London where we had already been bombed out of a house and a school we were sheltering in. My mother decided to evacuate us all to a relation on Chitts Hills. We all, on a lovely September day marched down to this Aunt with only what we stood up in.

We rented a little wooden bungalow, called Rose Cottage for ten shillings a week, it had an outside toilet and was very bare inside. The people down Chitts Hills took us to their hearts and with them and Reeman Dansie salerooms, mum made it a little home. We thought we were in heaven, still alive, what with thirty fruit trees in the garden.

Late on Saturday afternoon, whilst in the sitting room, my sister heard a plane - on looking out we saw the German markings. It started machine gunning, we thought it was aiming for our bungalow, but by then the train had stopped outside our door. The passengers scrambled up the bank into our bungalow. The train looked like a pepper pot. My Mum tore up sheets, towels and pillowcases as bandages for the wounded and used all her rations to make tea. I will never forget what my Mum did that terrible snowy afternoon in 1941, so cheerfully and when all the ambulances and voluntary services had left Chitts Hills, what a mess she had to clear up.

My Mother was Mrs Jane Elizabeth Beddoes - she died in 1977.

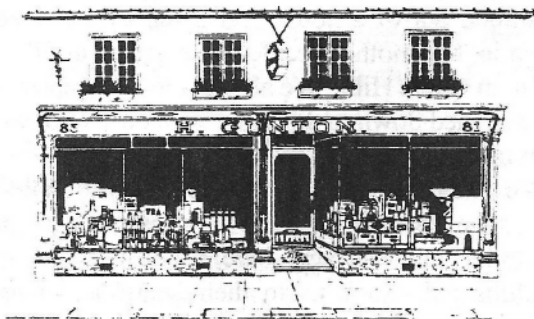
Yours Sincerely
Lill Jolly
Colchester

PS

I hope you print this as I now have a lovely little Great Grand Daughter and her mummy and daddy have a 'Memory Box' I know they will put it in.

H. GUNTON

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EDITORIAL

This is the fourth edition of COLCHESTER RECALLED. It is published by the Oral History Group of the same name, which was set up to record for future generations, memories of Colchester and the surrounding area. The Colchester Recalled Group holds monthly meetings on Thursday at Colchester Institute and you would be welcome to join us. We would also like to receive your articles, photographs, letters, queries and comments for future editions. These should be sent to Jim Robinson. Anyone wishing to subscribe to the magazine should get in touch for details.

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