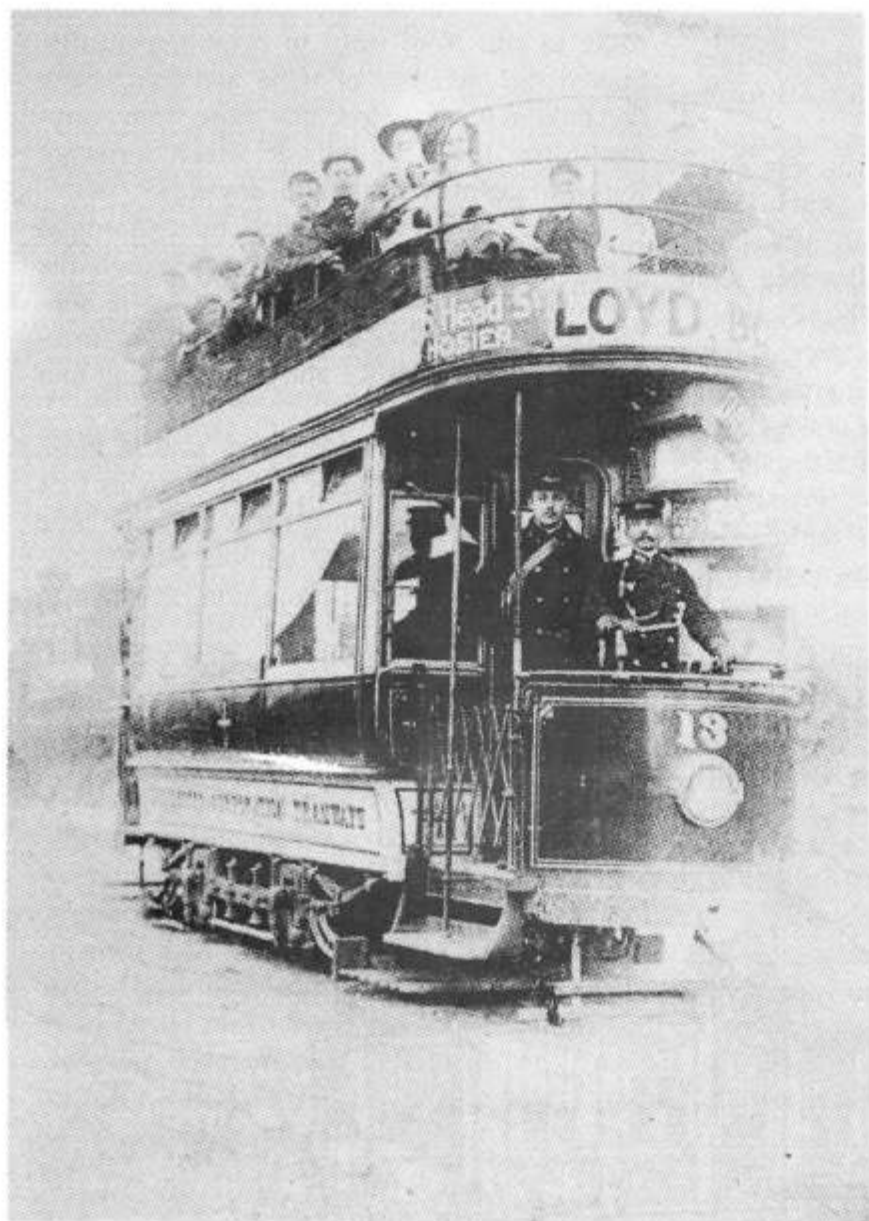


# COLCHESTER RECALLED

ISSUE No 5

PRICE 50P



*Conductor E Gregg and Motorman A Wilby on  
No 13 which led the inaugural tram parade*

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*Though this hospital is not a part of Colchester, it has so many connections with Colcestrians who have attended the hospital for various orthopaedic treatments, that it was thought to be worth including in this newsletter.*

## **Black Notley Hospital**

The fiftieth anniversary of the birth of the NHS coincides with the death of Black Notley hospital, the concept of which was born exactly one hundred years ago this year, although it was not till seven years later that a smallpox isolation hospital was completed and another seven, before a tuberculosis sanatorium was established on a hillside, 900 feet above sea level, open to fresh air and sunshine which was then with rest and good food the sole treatment for TB sufferers.

Despite its healthy location, it was given its name Black Notley when the Black Death struck the then Great Notley with the plague leaving its neighbour Little Notley free from such disaster, so it is now called White Notley.

The extensive grounds with trees, shrubs, flower beds and apple orchard with greenhouses and a staff of gardeners was also conducive to well being, so it is not surprising that the site extended firstly as a sanatorium with residential facilities for staff, who in the early thirties were also ferried in by horse and cart, and a school for the education of their children was also added.

During the Second World War a further field of some 20 acres was acquired and on it was built a general hospital of some 19 wards plus operating theatre, X-ray facilities and other support services. Patients were drawn from not only the armed forces and POWs but from evacuees and local people. The old TB wards were gradually closed down and taken over by geriatric wards moved from St Albright's, Colchester and a cerebral palsy unit.

The new hospital built on top of the hill was a series of long wooden huts arranged in the shape of a letter H to designate its function from raiding enemy aircraft, the wards being joined by corridors, i.e. roofs supported on wooden posts but not enclosed, so patients en-route to and from ward to operating theatre, braved the elements of wind and rain, snow and cold in winter, especially those from outlying wards down the hillside which were not joined to the main hospital in any way.

The wards were heated by two round stoves with chimneys going up through the roof which had to be fed regularly with supplies of coal or coke and each feed would result in clouds of smoke and ash billowing into the wards.

The operating theatre was also in those days just another long hut and as many as four operations would be going on at the same time in each corner of the hut without any separation or other antiseptic protection between. In



*This was proposed as a Dining Hall, but used instead as a Recreation Hall by patients and staff*

the height of summer it would become unbearably hot and opening windows was the only way of ventilation. Unfortunately opening windows allowed the thrips or little black flies (referred to as Thunder Burgers) from the adjoining wheat field in, crawling over surgeons, nurses and patients but no increases in infection was observed. On one or two very hot summer days the gardeners would rig up a network of garden hoses over the roof of the theatre and by allowing water to trickle down the roof and walls reduce by a few degrees the oppressive atmosphere inside.

The Friends of Black Notley raised funds for a heated outdoor swimming pool much appreciated for a quick dip at lunch time or in the evenings and the Recreation Hall was used for dances and other social functions.

Over the last forty odd years various specialities left the hospital for other locations, the Gynaecology Ward, the Plastic Surgery Ward and the Children's Wards shrunk into a portacabin of some six or eight beds. However the increase in orthopaedics was a significant development and Black Notley became a Regional Centre for orthopaedics and was also internationally acclaimed for its work hosting seminars twice yearly for visiting surgeons from overseas. The accident and emergency service was closed due to lack of sufficient doctors to staff it on a continuous rota basis, the canteen was closed and replaced by meals bussed in from Chelmsford or by microwaved meals for staff. The flower beds and apple orchards disappeared as uneconomical so no more flowers for the wards were delivered from their own greenhouses.

Support services were however first class, an Occupational Therapy Department working closely with a Physiotherapy Department which boasted the only hydrotherapy pool in the area was augmented by an Appliance Department and Shoemaking Department who would make from scratch any callipers or surgical shoes required. Alas it was found cheaper to close these services and import ready made devices from outside commercial sources, not so satisfactory. Bill Wells, a plaster technician from the London Hospital gave first class support to the surgeons on the orthopaedic side, whilst X-ray and path lab services on the spot gave instant answers or personal

contact whenever required. Gradually however the hospital services were reduced or sent elsewhere.

Black Notley retained its name despite attempts to change it to Notley Hospital in an effort to attract recruits; it was well loved by all who experienced its friendly and personalised service. To look out on fields of wheat, to see rabbits, hares and many birds rather than concrete as in so many modern hospitals was an immeasurable plus to recovery. Sometimes birds without feathers, in the shapely form of nurses sunbathing in the nude behind their huts could be seen, but only by airmen from the nearby USAF base who made a habit of flying over the hospital, especially in helicopters until this was banned due to the noise.

Christmases were special, when the wards would be decorated, sisters and nurses sat down with the patients for dinner, served on the wards. Everyone had a present and Santa Claus with the Salvation Army band came to play carols, whilst nurses formed a choir to tour the wards on Christmas Eve.

Black Notley is now closed, but it will never be forgotten by those who knew it and without exception found it a very special place.  
*By Andrew Millar*

## **Memories of Lexden, its Post Office and Bakery**

At the turn of the century, my grandfather Edgar James Garling kept the Lexden Post Office and Bakery. With the help of wife Martha, Edgar toiled long and hard at his village business. Five daughters were born to Edgar and Martha, beginning in 1889 with the arrival of Freda Mary - my mother.

Besides bread, my grandparents also sold sweets, tobacco and other groceries. The shop like many of its type prior to 1939, would not stand up to present-day standards of hygiene. Unwrapped sweets and chocolates were displayed in boxes in the shop window and the only protection against flies (of which there were enormous numbers in summer time) were sticky fly-papers suspended from the ceiling. They were traps for not only flies, but also for children who were prone to getting their hair stuck to them - an unpleasant experience, espe-



*The Garling family outside the old Lexden Post Office and Bakery circa 1895. Freda Mary is the young girl leaning against the building, wearing a hat*

cially if the paper was full of flies.

I was fortunate in living very close to my grandparents, my home being in nearby Halstead Road. My aunts Nan and Doris were, during my childhood, unmarried and still living at the shop. They often gave sweets to my sister Betty, my cousin Joan and myself. We were given the opportunity to choose a sweet from one of the boxes, which seemed a great bonus to us.

In the early 1920's, Grandfather kept a pony and trap which he used for delivering the bread I can remember accompanying him on his rounds on one or two occasions. We sat on the seat behind the pony, with the baskets of freshly baked bread in the well of the trap behind us. We seemed to travel miles to remote farm-houses, like Viaduct Farm, to deliver perhaps one or two loaves. It couldn't have been economic but financial considerations did not seem significant in those days. Life was primitive.

Our milkman, Mr. Cooper, also did his rounds in a pony and trap - dipping his 1 pint or ½ pint measure into a large can to serve us with our daily supply. There were, of course,

no refrigerators at that time so it was imperative to get deliveries of perishable foods daily. The butcher, Mr. Tom Ambrose, kept a shop on the corner of Straight Road (now an estate agents) and his meat was stored in the cellar, surrounded by blocks of ice supplied by Colchester Pure Ice Company. In summer, meat such as beef was preserved in salt.

From the time I first remember my Granny Garling, she was not very fit. She had obviously had a hard life but she was still able to help with baking, kneading the dough in preparation for the evening bake. Grandfather always baked at night and delivered early the following morning, possibly to give him more time for the shop in the daytime. It is said that he was called "The Midnight Baker", who would kindly leave the bread (wrapped?) in the outside privies!

In those days, trade was more brisk in village shops, particularly before the advent of supermarkets and plentiful public transport. However, Lexden was not devoid of public transport. During the first decade of the century, Colchester Borough Council provided a tram-way system which extended as far as

Lexden. The terminus was at the junction of Straight Road and London Road, very close to the Garling shop. From 7.30 am to 10 pm daily, except Sundays, a 15 minute service was provided to the centre of the town.

Each double-decker tram was manned by a driver and conductor and, at mid-morning and mid-afternoon, the crews called at my grandparents' shop for a cup of tea while the tram stood at the terminus.

My Garling grandparents were Methodists and they regularly attended the Primitive Methodist Chapel in Straight Road, Lexden. Grandfather was a local preacher and church leader. My mother, her sisters, my cousins, my sister and myself were all expected to go to the Sunday service every week at 10.45 am. Many people found it impossible to arrive on time - the situation becoming so bad that the church authorities found it necessary to change the time of the service to 11 am.

During the First World War, hundreds of troops were encamped in the grounds of Lexden House and the Garling shop became a focal point for many of the soldiers during their off-duty time. No doubt one of the attractions was the presence of so many young Garling girls, my aunts being in their late teens and early twenties. My Grandmother held open house for dozens of these young men and regularly, on Sundays, invited up to twenty for tea. Some of them would accompany the family to evening service at the Methodist Chapel. Many would never return from their tour of duty in France and Belgium.

During my early childhood, Lexden was a pleasant little village. There was a cluster of houses round the parish church, in what was then known as Lexden Street; another block of housing in and around the triangle formed by King Coel Road, Coine Road (now Halstead Road) and London Road; and a few houses in Straight Road, Heath Road and Nelson Road. I can dimly remember being wheeled in my pushchair to see the new Council houses being built on London Road in the early 1920's. Trafalgar Road and Collingwood Road, together with Lexden Garden Village were all devel-

oped between the two World Wars.

As a result of the shift of the centre of population to the west of the village (and the fact that the old school building could not cater for the increase in the school numbers) a new school was built in the new estate and opened in 1929. Most of the roads were paved by the 1920's but few had footpaths.

In 1923 I started my school life at Hamilton Road Elementary School but, after just one term, my parents decided to send me to the local Lexden Church School. This was situated behind Church House, opposite the Church. It catered for children between the ages of 5 and 14. The building was old. It consisted of 4 classrooms (two divided by a moveable parti-

*There was a cluster of houses round the parish church, in what was then known as Lexden Street*

tion to enable it to be converted into a hall) and a small cloakroom. The toilets were in the playground and were very primitive. The playground was small and there were no facilities for any games. The teachers had no private facilities.

In the infants class, slates and slate pencils were issued for working on. There were blackboards and easels for the teachers. Paper, pen and ink were provided for use in the upper classes. There

was an old harmonium in the top classroom, which was played by the headmaster for the morning hymn. I remember, on one morning, it was accidentally kicked by a boy who was passing and it completely disintegrated.

The pupils had no text books of their own and in the 1920's, life was hard in Britain and most parents could not afford to buy aids for their children. Class 1 housed the Infants and was taught by Miss Posford. Class 2 was under the control of Miss Lewis, whilst Class 3 was under the control of Miss Stannard. She took her summer holidays in romantic places and I well remember her describing the wonders of the Alps in Switzerland, which gave me the determination to see them for myself one day. At the age of ten, I moved up to Mr. L. V. Cook's class. Mr. Cook, the headmaster, was known as "Brainy" by the pupils. He was an austere man, a disciplinarian and he kept good order in his class.

Getting to school was easy as it was less

than half a mile from my home. There was so little traffic that it was possible to spin a top on the way to school. My sister was allowed to take her hoop. Skipping ropes were greatly in evidence and I, like others, became an expert.

My home was a rented semi-detached cottage in Coine Road (later re-named Halstead Road). The house was built in 1913 and, as a result, we were fortunate to have electric lighting. Most cottages were, at that time, lit by gas where this was available - otherwise, oil lamps or candles were used.

The electricity supply was very basic and rather unreliable, being produced by a small power station sited in Osborne Street, Colchester. All cooking was done on a kitchen range situated in the living-room. This was the room in which we spent most of our time, only using the front room (or parlour) on Sundays.

My earliest memory is, at 2½ years of age, being scalded by boiling water when I grabbed the handle of a saucepan standing on the range. This stove provided most of the heat for the house as well as acting as the cooker. It was made of cast iron and was highly polished with black lead. Late in the 1920's a gas cooker was installed in the scullery, which was a great boon as it meant that there was no need for a fire to be lit in the living-room range during the summer. Our water was heated on the stove or by lighting a fire under the copper in the scullery.

Saturday night was bath night, when a large galvanised bath tub, which was kept in the garden shed, was brought into the scullery. There was no toilet inside the house but we were fortunate in having a flushing lavatory in the garden. The only water point inside the house was the cold water tap in the scullery. Daily washing took place either at a wash-basin in the bedroom or in the scullery sink. In the late 1930's the copper in the scullery was removed and replaced by a gas boiler. This was only the beginning of modernisation .....  
by F. R. Johnson

## Cyril R Jefferies

Gwyneth Jefferies offered to loan us a book of poems, a rather precious book to her, as it was written by her father. It was once published in the Essex County Standard, and

she has now given us permission to print a couple of the poems in this newsletter. It might strike a few chords with some of our expanding readership

### The Station of Goodbyes

It isn't a place you'd notice a lot,  
But nevertheless it's a hallowed spot  
A place of farewells and of last goodbyes,  
Of smiles that are forced, and of anxious sighs:  
It's one of the sacred parts of town,  
Though no sign marks it a place of renown;  
And the fish barrows cross it all day long,  
And passers by whistle a comic song,  
While holiday-goers assemble there,  
Each free from all thoughts of worry and care.  
Yet where is the monument that excels  
St Botolph Station, the Place of Farewells?  
They bade us farewell that we might enjoy  
The cheery whistling of a happy boy;  
That fish barrows might come and go at will,  
And the holiday crowd be found there still,  
At the place they had known, and passed each day,  
Twas for things such as this *they* marched away

### Changes

Its nothing like it used to be;  
The wooden huts aren't there;  
And not a soul remembered me'  
As I stood near the square.

I missed the uniforms of red  
That I knew years ago;  
They wear the khaki now instead'  
And keep the red for show.

The drill book I knew "inside out"  
Is different today;  
And Sergeant-Majors need not shout  
When wanting their own way.

The troops they have their schooling now  
An education scheme;  
And "Why" is taught as well as "How",  
And things *are* what they seem.

Such changes in the Sergeants' Mess!  
And changes at the bar!  
The Tommy has his "civvy" dress;  
The corporal owns a car.

It's nothing like it used to be;  
The wooden huts aren't there;  
And not a soul remembered me,  
As I stood near the square.

## A Childs View of the War Years - 1939/45

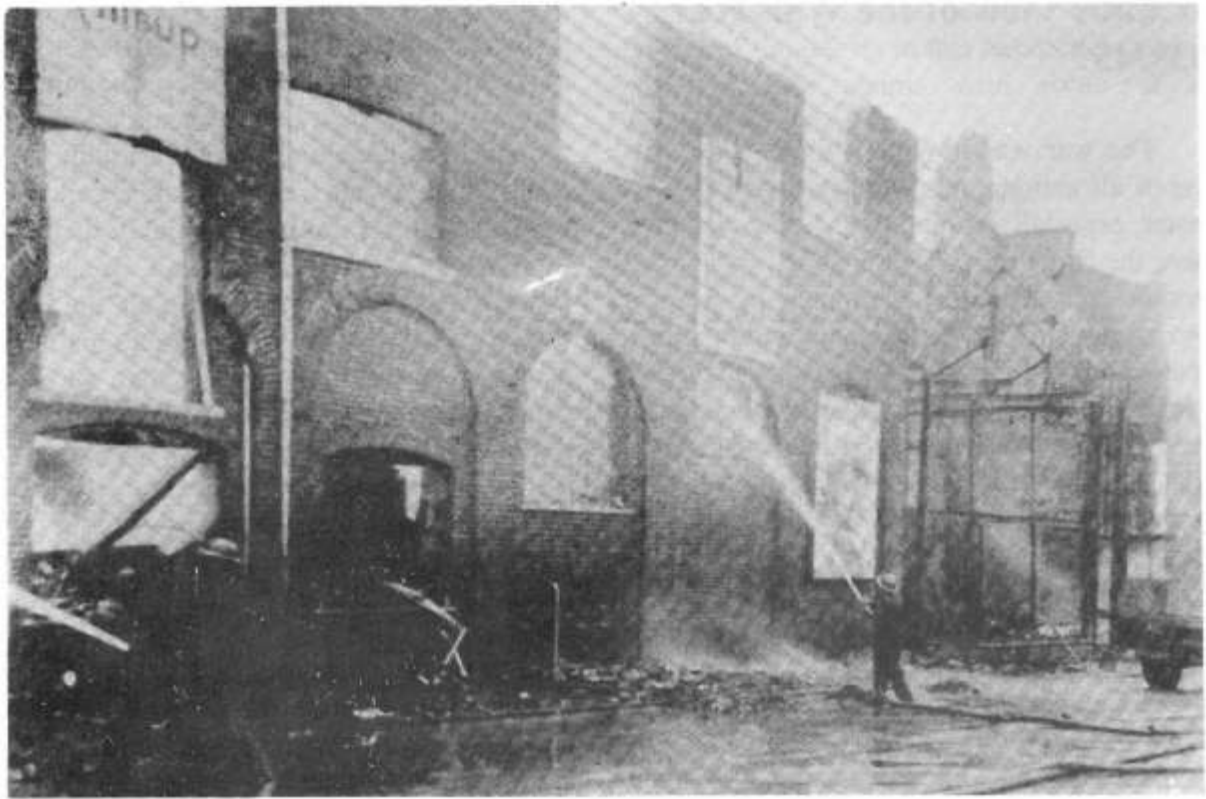
The war was now well under way, soldiers of all nationalities were stationed in Colchester, especially around the Middlewick area where the firing ranges were, so it was not uncommon to see hundreds of men in uniform from all parts of the world, marching or riding horses along our roads and practicing the firing of rifles on the ranges, prior to being shipped overseas. They also practiced the throwing of hand grenades (pineapples), or firing mortars from the top high road of Fingringhoe to the woods at the bottom of the valley. The woods at that time resembled a battlefield with all the trees badly scarred and burnt down to their trunks by shellfire. The field below, where the mortars fell was the same field that we, as children knew as the Strawberry Field, because of the abundance of wild strawberries that could be picked there. Sadly, there were also many unexploded mortars lying about and on one occasion, a young boy - an evacuee to Colchester, inadvertently walked on one of these shells and was killed instantly. A local man from my own road was said to have had the unenviable task of clearing things up afterwards.

As children it was a great adventure, empty shell-cases were to be found everywhere, the pointed tips that had earlier left the rifle and were full of lead, were to be found buried in the sand at the firing ranges (butts). They were taken home where they were held with a pair of pliers over the kitchen gas ring (whilst mother was out of the way, I might add) so that the molten lead would run out of the shell. The empty tip could then be fitted nicely over the tip of an arrow head which had been made out of a piece of ash, which when fired from a bow, would easily pierce a reasonably thick piece of wood or tin and stick into the bark of a tree trunk.

There was a battalion of Indian soldiers who were dressed in khaki uniform and wearing their traditional turbans. They were housed within a hundred yards of my home, and must have been a cavalry unit as there were a large number of horses tethered nearby. Their accommodation comprised of a number of khaki coloured bell-tents, and in the open field, not

many yards from the tents, were rows of cold water taps where the soldiers carried out their ablutions. On the ground below the taps were wooden slatted boards (duckboards) to stop the ground from becoming wet and muddy. These Indian soldiers had a dump at the far end of the field, behind the butts, we would sift through their rubbish to see what had been thrown away, but really, we were only looking for one thing-discarded horse whips in reasonable condition which were made of leather, and sometimes had an engraved fine silvered handle, we were usually lucky.

One day early in the Second World War, my sister Hazel and myself were told by mum and dad that we were to be evacuated the next morning, they said we would be going to live with a new family, somewhere? We had no idea at all of where we were going. The next morning, mum packed a few bags containing sandwiches to keep us going during the rail journey. Our home, a newly built council house at Old Heath was about three miles from the town of Colchester. We started walking with our gas masks, these were packed in a small cardboard box and hung over our shoulders, there was also a label attached to our clothing, presumably marked with our names and addresses. As we approached the North Station Road, we met up with scores of other children, all walking with their parents, making their way to the station. I picked up a ten shilling note (a lot of money in 1939) from the kerbside, mum very quickly took this from me, I can only think that this money was given to one of the children by their mother for the journey. Finally Hazel and myself boarded the train together. We arrived at Peterborough station in darkness, it was very quiet, the platform had no lights showing and we were instructed by an official to go and sleep in the waiting room on the platform, which we duly did. The next morning we were directed to another train, this time taking us to Kettering in Northamptonshire. It's worth remembering at this stage that neither of us had ever left home to travel anywhere and the likes of London was just a place far away. The only travelling we did was to the seaside to Clacton or Walton once a year. So one can imagine that this particular journey was quite worrying to two young children, myself eight years and sister



*War damage in the area around St Botolphs Corner Hit by bombs*

Hazel six years of age.

On our arrival at Kettering, we were all herded into a very large hall at one of the schools, here we were fed and washed before spending another night sleeping on the floor with a blanket over us to keep us warm. The following morning, some of us were put on a bus and taken to a little village called Burton Latimer, about five miles from Kettering, where we were taken with other small children to a small room, various people came to look us over and decide whether they would give us a home. Eventually, my sister and I were taken by an old couple who lived in a place called Bakehouse Lane. For some reason unknown to me, I was then separated from my sister and taken to another elderly couple in the same lane. This couple had already taken in a small London boy about the same age as myself, so we were able to share the same bedroom; things however didn't work out, the two of us failed to get on together and again I found myself looking for another home. I cannot remember what happened immediately after that, but I found myself back in the small room waiting for someone to come and take me away to their

home. I do remember being taken around different streets, the people coming to the front door, an argument ensuing whether or not they were willing to take an evacuee into their homes. Eventually, a couple who had recently married and with no children of their own decided to take me into their home. For the past fifty years or so, I've kept in constant touch with these very kind people and their family who had treated me as one of their own children.

I must have returned to Colchester before the war finished in 1945 because as can be seen from the next story, I was back home to witness the bombing of Colchester town in 1944.

One night in 1944, Colchester suffered from a terrible bombing raid which caused an almost total destruction of the St Botolph corner. This wartime incident left an impressionable young boy with a memory that will never be forgotten. The air-raid siren had sounded arousing me from my bed, I should have gone straight to the air-raid shelter at the bottom of our neighbour's garden, instead, I instinctively went to my bedroom window to see what was



happening in the night sky, there was usually something to be seen, even if there was no raid in progress, one could often see tracer bullets from the nearby army ranges that were always in use. Because of the blackout, it was very easy to see the red glow that existed from the firebombs that had fallen over Colchester, it was obvious, even to a young child that something terrible had happened.

The next morning, I was so excited about what had happened during the night that I couldn't wait to get into town to see exactly what had happened, whether there was a school holiday or whether I was merely playing truant, I can't remember, I do know that school on that day was missed. When I reached town I made straight for St Botolphs where all the excitement seemed to be, there were many other children all as curious as myself. The shops that I can remember seeing badly damaged or were now non-existent, were Bloomfield's Ironmongers, Cheshire's China Shop, Hancock's Sweet Shop and many others. Among the larger buildings were Griffin's Furniture Depository in St John's Street, Hollington's Clothing Factory now almost demolished with only its tower remaining and fire brigade water hoses still playing on the building, also

badly damaged was another clothing factory, that of Leaning's just off the Mersea Road. The overall scene was one of burning, smouldering timber from buildings, people rushing about, hosepipes and water in the gutters and across the roads and the smell of burning debris was everywhere, in other words it was general chaos.

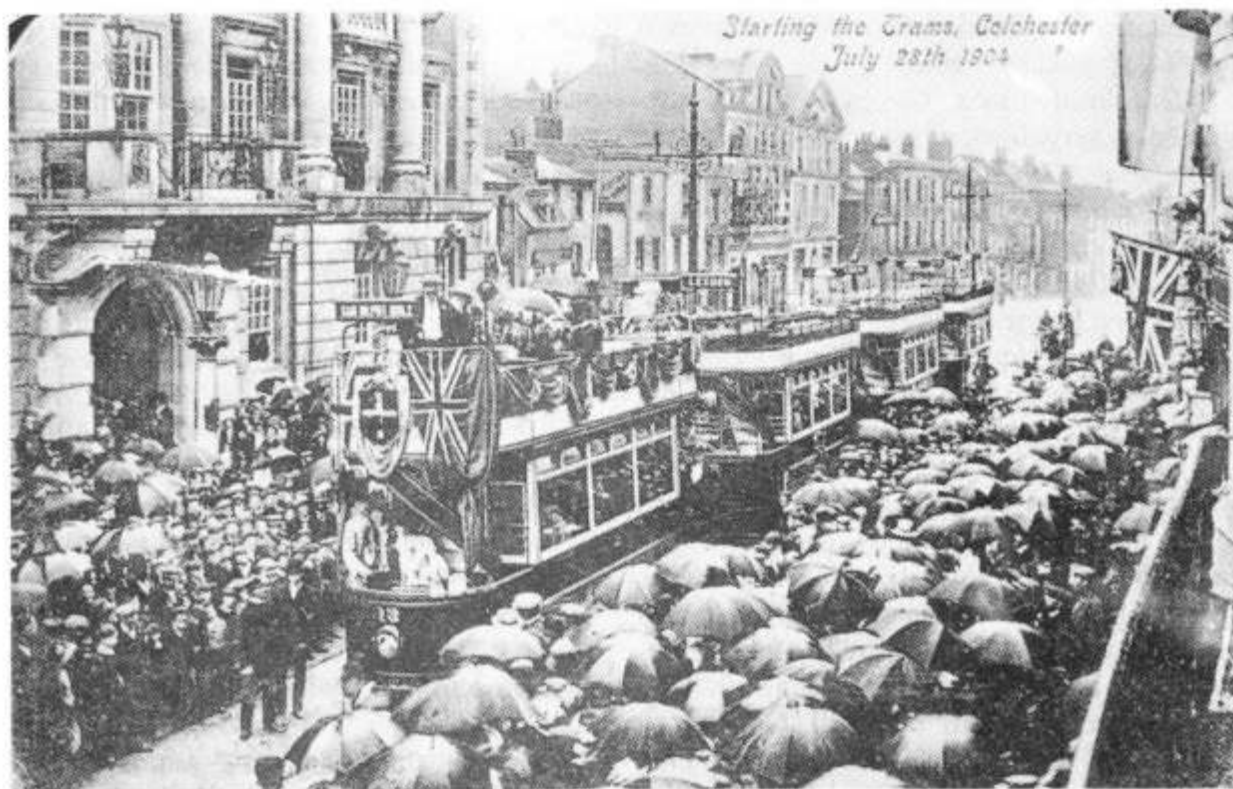
To the children however, this morning was a great adventure, the bombing of St Botolph's, however horrifying to the adult community, was an event that they will never in their lifetime, forget!

*by John Hedges*

## Colchester Trams

The summer of 1999 marks the 95th anniversary of public transport in Colchester. The coming of Colchester Corporation Tramways was an opportunity which local photographers and postcard producers were quick to exploit.

Twenty years earlier an attempt to introduce steam trams had failed and the borough's citizens had to await the arrival of electricity before new projects began to be aired. Various



The Mayoress at the controls of No 13 leads the inaugural parade on the way to the Lexden terminus, minutes after departing the Town Hall July 28th 1904

private schemes were proposed but eventually, early in 1900, the Council itself decided to provide a service and commissioned a report to be prepared by consultants Burstall and Monkhouse of Westminster. This was presented to the full Council in February 1903 and accepted 18 votes to 9.

The total cost of constructing the six mile tramway which began that October was £63,414. The

tramcars were bought from their manufacturers The British Electric Waggon and Carriage Company of Preston for £575 each and were supplied by its associate Dick Kerr and Co. For the technically minded they had two 35 HP motors designed to meet the rigorous demands of the steep hills in Colchester, mounted on Brill 21E trucks at a gauge of three feet six inches. Each car constructed of ash, mahogany and maple was fitted with the Westinghouse magnetic braking system.

The local Essex County Standard expressed a very favourable opinion about the whole affair, "It is evident that the authorities have acquired for the town a very fine equipment. The cars are spacious and comfortable and travelling in them is in every way agreeable as well as speedy and convenient. The line is equally well laid and all the working arrangements have been evidently thought out with care and good judgement."

On July 18th 1904, the system was switched on and over the following few days before the opening ceremony, local photographers took the opportunity to capture scenes they wanted to have on sale as souvenirs when the big day came. A careful study of the resulting cards indicates that some show training runs for the new staff recruited. Of 52 men taken on by the Tramways Department only seven had previous experience on such an undertaking.



*Tram No 6 loaded with staff members travels the wrong way up North Hill*

It was raining lightly on Thursday July 28th 1904, when the tramways were opened to the public. As the Corporation and officials dined inside the Town Hall, a large crowd gathered outside in the High Street under their umbrellas as car No 13 was parked there along with three others. Inside a Toast was drunk to the success of the trams and a cup commemorating the occasion was presented to the Mayoress.

The Essex County Standard report continued: "The guests then adjourned to the outside where the cars were waiting. The Mayor and Mayoress with several members of the Corporation, entered the famous No 13, which adorned with the flags and the arms of the Borough on a large shield and with the Mayoress at the wheel the car sped merrily along the High Street amid the cheers....other guests followed in other cars and a pleasant trip was made to Lexden and back." On that first day more than 8000 people made a trip on the trams and over £42 was collected.

The life of a conductor or driver (motorman as he was then called) was tough and exacting. It was usual to work sixty hours a week for a wage of 18/- (90p) and trams were operated from 4.45am to 12.15am the following day to catch shift workers. Discipline was strict in all things and staff were warned that they faced instant dismissal for certain offences which included smoking when on duty,

Leaving the car en-route or passing a compulsory stop without stopping. However punishment was often commuted to days of suspension. The transport department informed its staff in the instruction book that it demanded of them "*honesty, punctuality, obedience, sobriety, civility and alertness*"!

Apart from one short extension and the purchase of two extra cars in 1906, no further investment was made in the system in the 25 years of its life. By the mid 1920s it was plain that the tramway was now obsolete and inadequate for the fast expanding town Colchester had become. In 1928 the borough purchased its first Dennis petrol-driven single-decker omnibuses; trams were phased out on certain routes and new bus routes established. On December 8th 1929 the last tram ran in Colchester—a day which like the opening ceremony, was marred by wind and rain. The trams were sold for £5 each and their double and single seats for 5/- (25p) and 2/6 (12½) respectively. Many tram-car bodies began new lives in town and country gardens as sheds and storehouses, No 13 survived as such until the mid 1950s. Only the body of No 10 still exists in private hands, recovered from a garden in Gt Horkesley.

It is our good fortune that the start of the tramway coincided with the golden age of postcard photography which keeps alive this fascinating period in the long history of Colchester.

*By Philip Beeton*

## **Birch School**

As promised I am able to give you some information to add to the interesting piece printed in issue No 4 of Colchester Recalled.

Most schools in the Colchester area were re-organised before the 1939-45 war to fully separate the juniors and seniors but just a few survived though the war and were not re-organised until the late 1950s. They were known as Primary (All-Standard) Schools and Birch was one of them, along with two schools at Tiptree, the St Luke's Aided School and the Tiptree County Primary School (now known as Tiptree Heath Primary School). There was also one such school remaining in Colchester, the



*John Gill (Headmaster 1914-43) and Eva Martin on their wedding day*

Roman Catholic Primary All-Standard School in Priory Street, for this was before St Benedict's School was established.

Over the years many of the small village schools in the area surrounding Birch and Tiptree either closed down completely or transferred their pupils at 11 to the three schools mentioned, so a good deal of bussing was necessary. The Birch and Tiptree Schools each had about 200 pupils and most of their classes contained two or more age groups. It was difficult for them to provide a full secondary curriculum for the older pupils. In particular handicraft and cookery for senior boys and girls could only be arranged by exchanging teachers or pupils between the schools. Until about 1950 it was the teachers who exchanged and the "specialist" room was a cookery room for two or three days each week and a woodwork shop for the others! Later, the teacher stayed put in his/her specialist room and the classes transferred by bus for half a day at a time. Mrs Watts was the D. S. teacher, based at Birch and Mr Denney the Handicrafts teacher, based at the Tiptree C.P. School. Other well known staff at Birch at this period were Mr



**Birch School (date unknown)**

Back:- Ronnie Sutherland, Cecil Cansdale, —, Cyril Ollie, Ted Howard, Syd Bland, Jack Spellor  
 Centre: —, —, —, —, Gwen Gower, Myrtle Harvey, Joan Everitt  
 Front:- Ronnie Hayhoe, Joan King, —, Gwen Amor, Lily Symonds, Dorothy Johanson, —, Victor Mead.

Morton and Mrs Buxton.

Until the opening of the Secondary schools at Tiptree and Stanway in about 1957 the schools were all contained in rather primitive accommodation with outside 'earthen' closets, no proper school halls and some hutted classrooms. The villages began to expand, with the development of new housing in the late 1950's and, in addition to the Secondary Schools, additional primary schools were founded. At Birch, Mr Tom Millatt succeeded Mr Figg-Edgington as Headmaster soon after

the war and remained until his retirement in the 1970s. He lived in the Headmaster's House adjoining the school and did much to develop the grounds and promote as wide a curriculum as possible for the pupils. He was also very active as a lay preacher at Birch Church – now closed – and also at Layer Marney. He was a fine calligrapher and quite an expert in local history in the area.

Incidentally, Tom Millatt's father, who lived with him in the mid 50s and was then about 80, was an interesting character. He was a fine carpenter and joiner who had originally settled in Colchester in about 1900 and came to the town to assist in the building of the town hall. He carved the classical pillars in the Moot Hall which are made of wood. Tom's brother Harry is still alive and lives in Colchester.

*The writer has given his name and address, but wishes to remain anonymous.*

**Roast Mouse**

I was born in Colchester in 1948 and yet my memories go back to about 1900! The rea-



*Birch School*

son for this is that my grandmother, who was also born in Colchester used to tell me stories about her childhood in the Newtown area. As the town had changed little by the early 50s I was familiar with the areas she spoke of and could picture the events.

Ada Amelia Hutchings was born in Colchester in 1895. She was the only child of Lizzie and her husband ? Hutchings. The family lived in the Canterbury Road area in rented accommodation. When Ada was about two years old her father took to his bed with terrible stomach pains and died after about five days. We think he may have died of complications of appendicitis. We have a photograph of Ada dressed in a heavy black dress and white pinafore for her father's funeral. Ada's father had been a carpenter. Lizzie remarried when Ada was about five year old, her new husband was Frederick Smith, also a carpenter. He had children already and he and Lizzie went on to

have a second family of whom I remember Stan. At about the time her father died, Ada had whooping cough; a serious illness in those days from which many children died. She remembers an old man coming to the house and taking her on his knee. He fed her tiny pieces of meat, telling her that it was " a little birdie". She later discovered that it was roast mouse, a local "cure" for whooping cough. When she was still pre-school she had to be taken to the Dispensary at Essex County Hospital to have a gash on her forehead dressed. The bigger boys were playing Tip Cat in the street - hitting a piece of metal with a stick to make it fly into the air - Ada looked up to watch it and was bit in the face by the metal. It was, she remembered, a very long walk to the hospital. Shortly after that she was taken to Myland Hospital with Scarlet Fever. Her mother was not allowed to visit until she was well enough to be collected, and her rag doll, which she was allowed to take with her, was taken away and burned before she left. Brother Stan was a bit of a handful - a real boy. When he was very little he was bought a straw hat to wear at Easter. He was taken to the Barrack Square to watch the soldiers, the hat blew off his head and was trodden on by one of the

*...the dancing bear which Gran insisted she saw in High Street, Colchester. This was a giant dark coloured bear on a chain accompanied by a thin elderly man who played the squeezebox....*

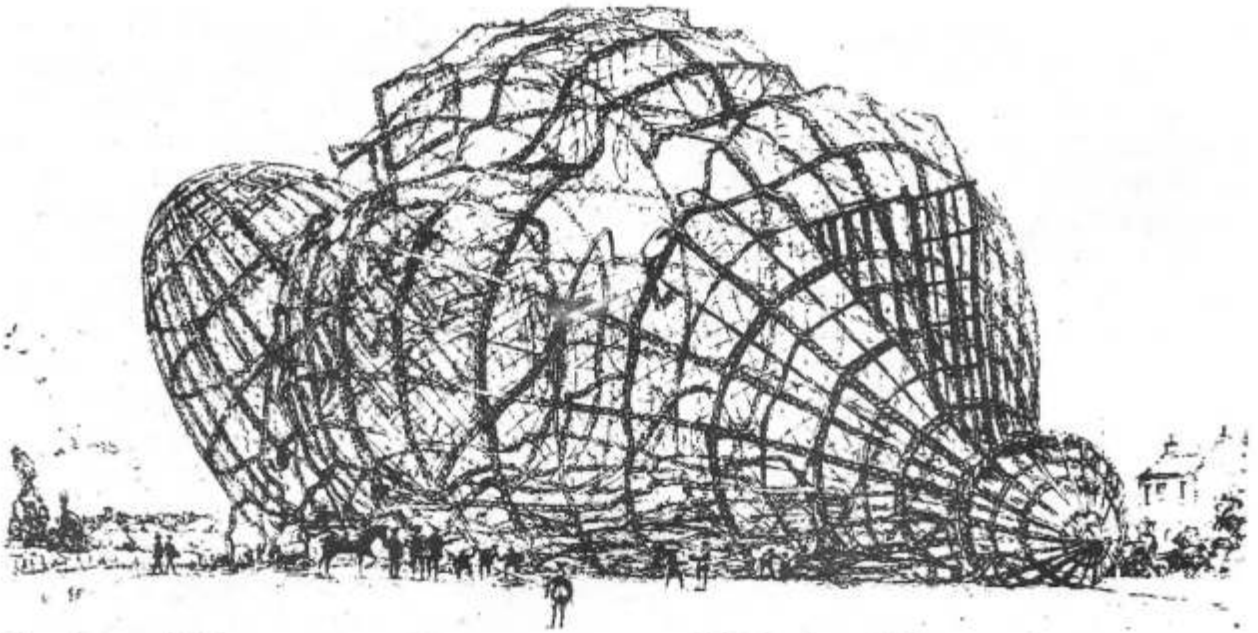
military horses. When Stan was about eight, he went to hear the band play and marched up and down behind the soldiers. He continued marching and followed the band all the way to West Mersea. Lizzie had quite a fright but they brought him home safely. Ada went to school at Canterbury Road. It was quite new then. She won prizes for good behaviour and regular attendance. Her teacher, whom she remembered vividly into adult life, was a formidable Scottish woman who drummed into them, the three Rs, history, a little Latin and French. They also had sewing and housecraft, although she was well used to helping at home. There was also drill and occasional singing. She left school at about 12 and went to work at Woolworths which had newly opened in the town, It was regarded as a good job. She went there with her friend Bella - a friend that remained all her life and after Grandmother's death used to visit my mother. One final childhood memory that fascinated me was that of the Dancing Bear, which Gran insisted she saw in High Street Colchester.

This was a giant dark coloured bear on a chain accompanied by a thin elderly man who played the squeezebox - the bear duly danced to the music! For a long time I thought this was imagination but since have been told of photographs of a bear and its keeper touring East Anglia in the final years of the nineteenth century,

The market in the High Street was a recurring theme. It was she told me, lit by hissing yellow lights. All sorts of items were piled and hung on and around the stalls. In addition, on a Saturday night the shops stayed open until nearly midnight.

Toys do not seem to have figured much when Gran was a child. She had rag dolls, made by Lizzie, and wooden peg dolls for which she made clothes from scraps of material. Gran also used to tell me that she was very skilled at playing with a diabolo - it sounded like one of the very early toy crazes.

On leaving school, she and Bella had a little money to spend on themselves. One story that I remember is that they used to buy a few inches of lace, pin it to the hems of their skirts and hope that people would think that they



*A memory sketch by Adam Bruce Thompson of Zeppelin L33  
Brought down in Essex September 23rd 24th 1916*

were wearing lace-edged petticoats.

Gran met Grandfather before the Great War. I never found out how they met, although I think their families knew each other for a number of years. Granfather was apprenticed to Lipton's and was sent from the Colchester area (he spent some time at Thorpe le Soken) to the East End, and latterly to Hitchen. He used to cycle from Hitchen to Colchester and back on a Sunday so that he could meet Ada.

When I was small I was always amused that Granddad called Gran "Yak". I thought it was because she enjoyed a good natter with her friends, but she told me that shortly after they met he asked what her middle initial A stood for. For some reason she didn't think Amelia was very flattering so she told him her middle name was AYAKANORA - after that he called her Yak for short. She told me that she found the name in a book she was reading.

Once she had left school Ada had to take her young brother and sister out with her in her free time. Sometimes they went on the tram. She and her friend had to pay their fare, but all their little brothers and sisters went free - sometimes it was quite a party to go to Lexden Springs. During the war Ada and Bella were moved from Woolworths to Mumfords - an engineering firm in Culver Street - where they were involved in munitions work. I have a photograph of them, with a group of other

young girls, dressed in long overalls and close-fitting headscarves. Whilst at Mumfords she bought the small Zeppelin shaped brooch that I now have. It has L33 scratched into it - the Zeppelin that crashed at Wigborough - and I was told that it was a piece of metal from the fallen craft. Certainly the brooch is soft and non-magnetic and probably made of aluminium.

Grandfather joined the Cycling Corps in Essex and eventually went to Egypt - he sent home photos of the pyramids, silk post-cards (which Gran kept) and money for her to buy a gold bracelet. I think it may have been to provide for her if anything happened to him. In fact he survived and returned to England and married her in 1919. The bracelet is still in the family - I wore it to my wedding as "something old". After their marriage, Gran and Granddad returned to West Mersea where they lived with his widowed mother.

It was said of great grandmother - Lizzie - that she was so kind hearted she would give you the clothes off her back. This was a mixed blessing, as she was prone to give other people's belongings away too. When Gran was at work she was asked to look after a harp for a friend. This was stored at home and she came home one day to find that Lizzie had given it away to a poor man who had called at the house. Fortunately a harp is an unwieldy in-

strument and it was traced and recovered. While Gran was saving to get married she bought a Singer treadle sewing machine - such was her fear that Lizzie might give it away, that it was kept at Bella's house. I remember the machine which was still in everyday use until the 1960's.

During the 1940's my mother, who was born in Mersea, went first to school and then to work in Colchester - so from her I learned about Colchester during the 1940's. An elderly lady from Mersea used to drive her car into Colchester but disliked the projections from the Roman Wall at the bottom of Mersea Road, so when she got there would wait until a bus arrived, when she would ask the driver to drive her car past the projections. During the mid 1940's there was the man who danced around lampposts on Lexden Road - a man who would put down anything he was carrying, dance around the lamppost and then pick up his belongings and walk on - to the next lamppost. I remember that in Hill House on Lexden Hill there lived, during the early 1950s a grey parrot who used to sit on its perch by the window.

My own memories of Colchester date from the early 1950's. My father used to write football reports for the local paper during the time when Colchester United were doing well in the Cup. On Saturday mornings in 1950 he and I used to meet the players in Wright's Coffee Shop in High Street and he would get stories from them and make lightening drawings of team members. At that time too, we sometimes went down to the market in Middleborough and would talk to the rabbits and goats as well as the various people who had gone to buy and sell animals, machinery and bric a brac. Occasionally we went to North Station to watch the trains - all steam trains then of course. I can remember the engines named after Regiments and, I think, football teams. We stopped visiting the station about 1952 because my brother was scared of the noise from the trains. When my brother was a baby, mother used to wheel him in to town in his pram. I walked beside her in to town (from Stanway) and rode back on a wooden bar put over the end of the pram. Sometimes we went to Baker and Fairhead a chemist's shop in Head Street. It was up some steep steps so the pram was left outside and the baby carried in to be weighed

on a weighing machine with a wicker basket on it. On the way back we sometimes went to Percy King's in Crouch Street which sold haberdashery. The money was sent across the roof of the shop in a little metal case to a cash desk. If they did not have a farthing to put in the change, Mother would be given a little packet of pins.

The doctor's surgery was in Maldon Road and we had a lady doctor, Dr Hugh-Jones. She was a formidable lady who so scared my little brother that he would run and hide under the table in the surgery. If she came out to see him at home he would hide under his bed. If there was any medicine it was always foul smelling and the bottle would be wrapped in blue paper and sealed with a blob of red wax.

My grandfather had a different doctor, Dr Cook, who was a strange man. One day the kitchen door opened at Gran's house and in walked Dr Cook; he looked round, said "Wrong house" and left without another word. It was said that he had been a brilliant student but one of his patients had died in tragic circumstances.

I started school at the Convent in Priory Street in September 1953. Lunch was always mince, lumpy potato and cabbage followed by rice pudding, except on Friday when the mince was replaced by fish and the cabbage by butter beans. For about one week each autumn, rice would be replaced by stewed apples and for a couple of dinners we might get rhubarb. My first classroom was heated by an open fire. There were more than 40 children in the class; it was of course the baby boom time. My starting school coincided with there being an outbreak of polio. We had to take our own plastic beaker and hand towel to school. This was obviously to prevent us passing on infection by sharing towels and beakers, but our teacher was always so strict about us bringing our clean towel and well washed beaker in on a Monday that on several occasions my best friend and I shared a towel and beaker rather than confess.

I had been at school about a year when sweet and sugar rationing ended, which meant that all parties after that had jelly and ice cream and sponge cake. Trifle and egg and salad cream sandwiches still bring back unhappy memories.

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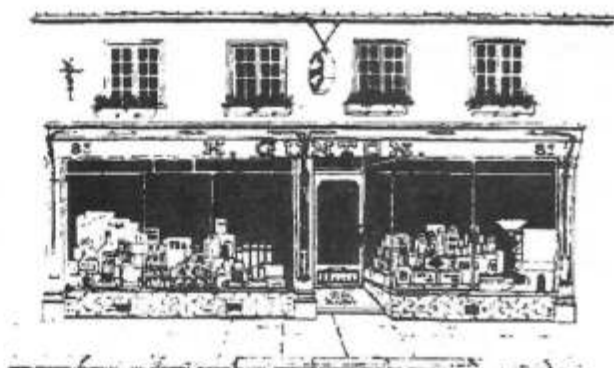
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### **EDITORIAL**

This is the fifth 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 Thursdays at Colchester Institute and you would be very welcome to join in. 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:

Jim Robinson, 36 Mersea Road, Colchester, CO2 7QS. 01206 540655

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