

# COLCHESTER RECALLED

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Welcome to the re-designed COLCHESTER RECALLED.

We apologise for the increase in price. This is due to our former printers no longer offering a service, hence our having to make alternative arrangements.

The Colchester Recalled Oral History Society, was set up in 1988 to record for future generations the memories of the people of Colchester and the surrounding area.

Monthly meetings take place on Thursday evenings from September to June at the Colchester Institute, where tapes are played and a speaker talks on a relevant subject. You are most welcome to join us.

The Annual Subscription is £7 per person or £12 for a couple. Admission to the monthly meetings is £1 per person per meeting including refreshments.

We would like to receive your articles, photographs and letters for inclusion in future editions. These should be sent to Jim Robinson, Editorial Director, Colchester Recalled, 36 Mersea Road, Colchester CO2 7QS. Telephone: 01206 540655.



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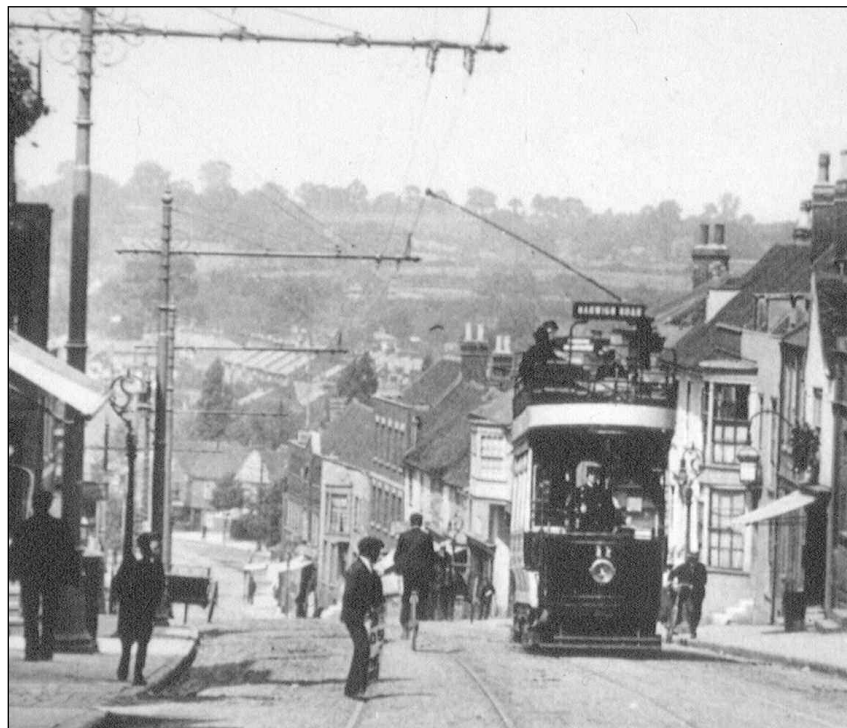
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# THE BUCKLE FAMILY

## 8 North Station Road, Colchester 1924-1932

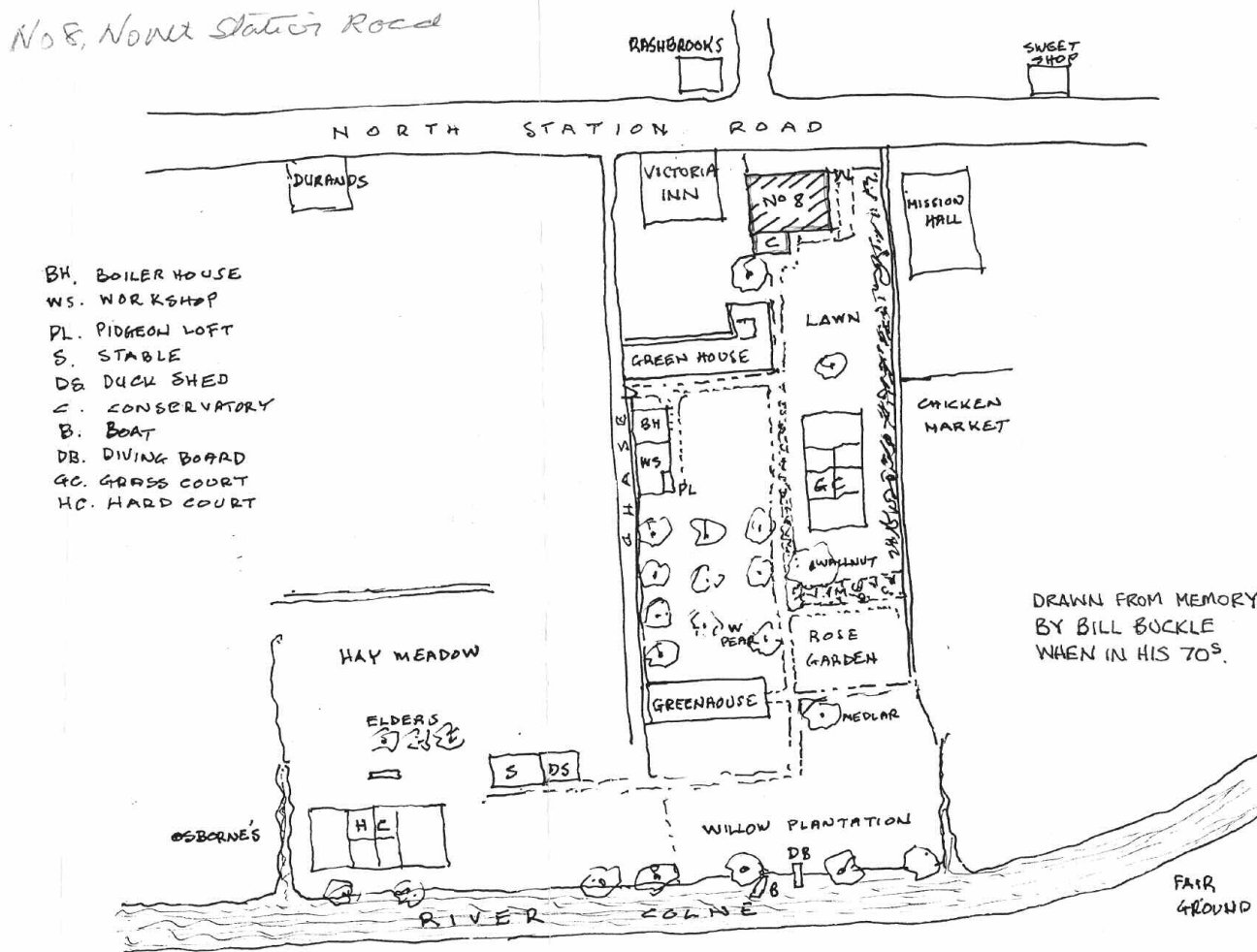
Readers of issues 22 and 23 may recall articles featuring walks along North Station Road. As a result of those articles, this story was sent in by Brian Wright, grandson of John ('Jack') and Hannah Gertrude (Get, pronounced 'Jet') Buckle. The story will be serialised in the next few issues.

The Editor

Jack was finally posted to Colchester in 1924, as Divisional Officer and Garrison Engineer. Memory of the journey is a little vague, with the exception of being on the night train, probably from Fishguard to London, rumbling through the darkness, with Lady terrified by this new experience lying panting and shivering on the floor of the carriage, despite the tit-bits from the guard. The people in the next compartment were singing *Three o'Clock in the*

*Morning*. There was perhaps a little sadness at leaving 'Waterville', friends and family, and some apprehension concerning the next chapter in their lives.

All doubts and fears were dispelled on arrival at 8 North Station Road. Jack had spent some time in Colchester buying the house, and having it prepared for the family. The floors were covered with beautifully patterned inlaid linoleum, and the furniture was

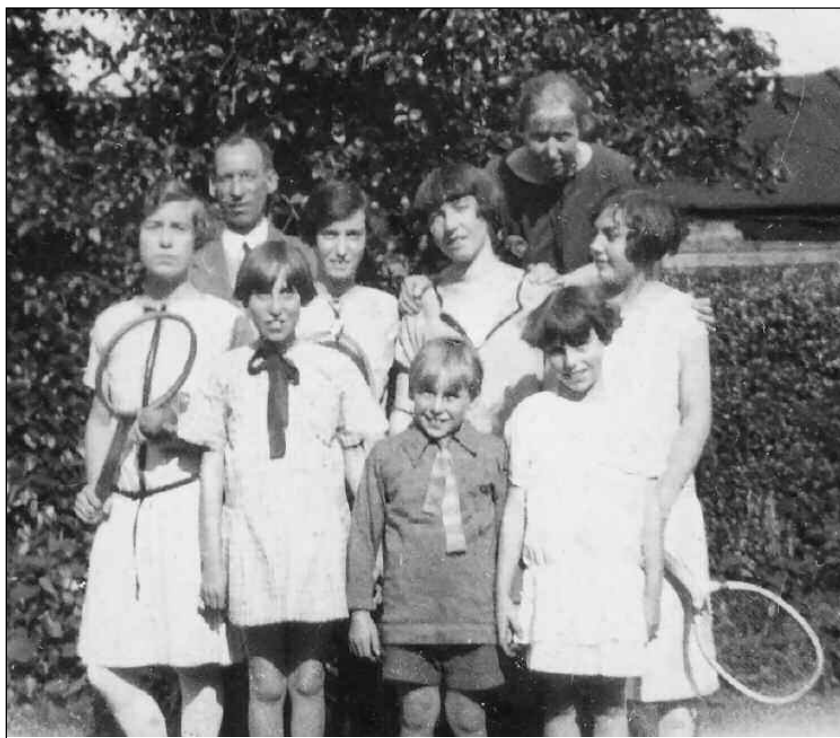


The house and grounds at 8 North Station Road

new. The house had belonged to a timber importer called Orfeur and was quite extensive. There were three floors, the top floor being rather unusual, consisting of one large room that later became the playroom-cum-theatre, a bedroom and two smaller rooms fitted with racks for storing fruit. There was great excitement as the family explored and fascination with the call system linking the house to an array of bells in a recess in the hall. The lavatories consisted of a bowl with a brass pull-up flushing handle, all set in a highly polished mahogany platform stretching from wall to wall.

Most important of all was the garden, divided down its length by a path. On the left-hand side there were lawns, flowerbeds, a grass tennis court, then a rockery dropping down to a formal rose garden with box hedges. The whole side was bounded on the left by shrubbery and a high brick wall. On the right-hand side of the path stood a large 'L' shaped greenhouse, complete with its own pool, and a separate boiler house. This became known as the workshop and also contained a pigeon loft and fully equipped photographic dark-room.

Beyond this point were fruit trees and a kitchen garden, then a second greenhouse, opposite the formal rose garden on the other side of the path. Beyond this area the land ran down to the River Colne, and contained a willow plantation of the type used to make cricket bats. So it



*The family with Betty Durand. Get is leaning over the wall, while in the back row left to right are Jack, Patricia, Jenny, Betty Durand. In the front row are Mary, Eileen, Bill (Sonny) and Angela.*

was low-lying and liable to flooding. The rest of the land held a two-stall stable and another building, known as the Duck Shed. In the garden there was a walnut tree, on which Jack had fixed a long rope as a swing, a netball hoop for the girls to practice, and a large see-saw that would take six. There was also a well-stocked orchard, which gave meaning to the fruit trays in the attic room of the house. Apples, pears, greengages, currants, damsons and gooseberries were a great temptation for passing school children, who climbed onto the wall trying to reach the fruit. Jack used to invite them in to take the windfalls and any they could reach.

There was a lane called 'The Chase' that ran down from North Station Road at the top

of the garden, giving access to the land along the river. This was clearly a house well suited to a large family that had been used to so much freedom. With Jack's urging that they were all 'perfect as they were' and Get's exhortation 'not to be backward in coming forward' the family settled into life at the new family home that Get had christened, in true Irish Catholic manner, 'The Rosary'. Jenny by this time was 19 years old, had finished school and was a great help to Get in coping with the younger children. Mary was 14, Patricia 13, Eileen 10, Angela 8 and Bill 6. Pat, though very sick, soon joined the family in their new home. All attended St. Mary's Convent School in Priory Street, quite close to the church.

*Brian Wright*

## THE ESSEX AND SUFFOLK FIRE OFFICE

I used to work at the dear old Fire Office, as we called the Essex and Suffolk Fire Office, just after leaving school in the early part of the Second World War. The boss was Mr Bultitude who lived in Braiswick and he let his dining room be used by us girls in the typing pool, as he thought it safer for us but we had to go to the Head Office on Fridays to collect our weekly wages during the lunch hour. Invariably an Inspector would come in rip roaring drunk and we were herded into the safe room at the back of the office leaving a Mr Gould at his desk to be the butt of his bullying. I think Mr Gould lived in Heath Road, Lexden and the Inspector lived in Shrub End Road and became a Mayor at one time: I do not think that Mr Bultitude ever knew what went on as he was a gentleman.

We had to do periodic fire drill at night at head office which involved walking round the balustrade, which being afraid of heights, I did not like, it was blackout and so very dark. There was a shop called Harpers opposite, a sports shop with footballs hanging outside and one day we watched as some very merry Australians pulled them down and had a football match up a trafficless High Street to the cheers of onlookers.

My grandfather, William Wallace Bruce was an Inspector there before my time and it was through him knowing Elsie



*The Essex and Suffolk Fire Office in High Street circa 1940*

Nicholson, an employee there, I got the job. He bought her house in Butt Road when she moved to St John's Street, now a Chinese restaurant. I had never seen a typewriter before, but soon learned and it was a happy job. In good weather we used to take our sandwiches over to the golf course. From there we watched a Dornier Flying Pencil sneak out of low clouds and drop a series of bombs which looked like a ladder underneath the plane as they fell in the Essex Street area, rather a worrying day for me, as it did look near home and there were no telephones or means of finding out.

The Bruce family lived first in a house at the bottom of Maldon Road, now under the roundabout and my mother remembers it being flooded at times in what she understood to be the original dairy. The mother died there aged 43, leaving the children and my grandfather and her aged aunt, who was a midwife and brought all the children into the world except the last as the doctor

thought she was too old then, so he allowed her to name the baby who was landed with the name she hated - Florence, after Florence Nightingale, the aunt's idol. The father died at 57 while he was still working at the Fire Office and one of the children, who more or less looked after themselves, posted a lookout at his arrival home as they held him in some awe, a very Victorian gentleman who died the year before I was born.

I and another girl were called up at 18, but as the services were full she went to Dobbies at Marks Tey and I went to the Ministry of War Transport at Chelmsford, my father's choice, a horrid, long, daily drag, often twelve hour days and Saturday mornings in harsh conditions. My sister worked at BX Plastics and we would set off in the mornings at 7-o'clock, in all weathers and leave our bikes at Elsie Nicholson's home in St John's Street, which was opposite the bus station. She was a maiden lady and very fond of the Bruce family.

*Diana C Crees*

## LIFE AS A SERVANT IN A LOCAL BIG HOUSE IN 1934-5\*

Having worked in domestic service the greater part of my life and, due to circumstances beyond my mother's control, resulted in giving me my first glimpse of it at the early age of 12. Having been decently brought up in a comfortable home myself in London, I cannot put into words the devastated feeling and effect the sudden change of circumstances and lifestyle had on me.

I was parlour maid at A..... C..... and had a responsible job to do. The main part of the house had polished floors, and antique furniture filled many rooms, but offered little comfort, being severe and hard to sit on. The bare floors were hard on the feet and we made a lot of clatter walking on them. They were difficult to clean and needed endless scrubbing on hands and knees. My mother and I shared a big bedroom, with no curtains. I slept on a straw mattress on an iron bedstead which was very hard indeed and woke up feeling very stiff and in the winter never felt warm in bed. On occasions I got into my mother's bed to be more comfortable. The staff were not allowed to use the bathroom which the family used, but had hip baths in our bedroom in front of a fire in winter time; carrying the water, filling and emptying the bath was quite a business. The family had declined to have electricity or

other modern conveniences laid on, as they did not want its old historic character spoiled in any way. Our living conditions were a great shock to me, with such a desolate feeling of class barrier that we did not count for much – only for our work.

I had the downstairs rooms to clean together with waiting on table. The rooms were very cold to work in with no central heating. The period fireplaces were not easy to clean, with copper hood which needed much polishing, and grates much black leading, using cake blacking crushed down and mixed with water. Red ochre was put on the bricks with a brush, which was messy to use and did not last a day, and red polish on tiles, all this and collecting the many cleaning items together and then, of course, the heavy fire tongs to clean.

My hand and feet swelling with chilblains, I constantly wanted to hurry my work to go into the kitchen, the only warm room where my mother was cook. I also began to suffer with eye strain, continually peering into darkness with candles, the staff was allowed only six candles each to last an evening in winter time. It was carried down draughty passages, into pantries, to do washing up and everything about the place, with grease running down the sides and often blowing out. There were only 3 oil lamps in

the house; two were reading lamps for the family, used with candles on the mantelpiece, with the third oil lamp in the kitchen. In the end mother brought an oil lamp for use in our bedroom and to provide some heat, but the problem was getting the oil as everything was closely guarded and locked away.

The atmosphere at A..... C..... gave one a very strange feeling; when one entered the house you stepped right back into past centuries. As I moved about the rooms alone doing my work by candlelight, my shadow danced around me and in the long passages it leapt behind me and this eerie effect took its toll on me and I became very nervy and jumpy which continued through until we left this employment.

M.C.

*\*Names and places are disguised*

### DID YOU KNOW?

The highest building in Colchester is the Town Hall, 162 feet (49.4 metres) from the pavement to the top of St Helena's cross. Jumbo, the water tower is 131.5 feet (40 metres) from the pavement to the top of its weathervane. The ground Jumbo stands on is a few feet above the Town Hall pavement, but not enough to make it closer to heaven. But is the BT tower block in West Stockwell Street more than 50 metres from the pavement to its highest radio mast?

## LIFE IN CHURCH LANE

**D**uring my Lexden School years I collected milk for the family and also several neighbours from Home Farm in Church Lane. Luckily the milk was in nice little cans which had lids and handles which were big enough to loop over the handlebars of my bike. I first went on the milk round when an older boy, Arthur Fincham, who lived in the middle one of the row of cottages (now 6 and 7 Church Lane) on the other side of the lane from the farm. He was about to start work full time.



*Church Lane at the junction with Beech Hill circa 1940*

In that same group of cottages, on the Parson's Hill side, lived the Payne family and at the other end lived the De La Salle family. I never knew much about them except that an old boy was always busy in his little shed making wooden figures which he put on the top

of tall posts. Some were models with moving arms and all attached to a handle on a shaft at the end of which was a propeller to turn the whole assembly in a gentle breeze. The model made a fascinating attraction and when you looked

left or right there were more different models to watch. For years of my boyhood it was an attraction to go and see if anything new was at work in this garden. Lots of people on their Sunday afternoon walk would stop to watch and admire them.



*Peter Tweed's house in Church Lane, Lexden*

It was to do with the Payne family that I and other youngsters had our first experience of road traffic accidents. A large group of us walked home from the old 'tin' school and as we lined up to cross Straight Road to get to Heath Road that Peter Payne dashed across into the path of a lorry belonging to Moss the Builders. The driver swerved but the lorry seemed to sweep Peter up as it careered across the road, up the kerb and hit the front of Hunter's Corner. We could not see a sign of Peter.

People in a following car stopped to see if they could do anything to help and found Peter and wrapped him in a blanket. The lady took him on her lap and he was driven off to

the hospital, but I don't think anything could help him. How Denney (the local policeman) broke the news to his mother I cannot imagine. I do know that the accident left our group of

children very quiet and sad for a long, long time afterwards and I'm sure everyone of us more aware of the dangers of road traffic.

*Peter Tweed*

## SCHOOL DAYS

**M**y school days started in 1931. Mum and Dad were caretakers at Berechurch Hall. As there was no school at Berechurch my sister and I had to go elsewhere, my sister being six years older than me had to go to Lexden School and I went to Shrub End Infants School, which is now the Community Centre. We used to catch the bus on Maypole Green. It was Mr White's bus from Layer, he used to pick up children as he came along, some were for Shrub End and some were for Lexden. I can remember some of the children's names, they were, Alan Sherman (his father used to take us for cubs), two Beales' children, some more by the name of Fairclough, Tommy Bines, (his father was the local policeman), a boy whose name was Large and Roy and Harry Waller, they lived at the Lodge House at Berechurch Hall. Sometimes the bus didn't turn up so we had to walk to school and arrive there about 10 o'clock. We used to play ducks and drakes on the pond at Gosbecks Farm on Gosbecks Road, I think the pond has been filled in now.

School days were a bit primitive in those days, no computers etc. We had trays with sand in and we used to

write A B C in the sand with our finger, then when the teacher said it was right, you just shook the tray and started again. Woe betide you if you spilt the sand. After this you progressed to slate and pencil. If you pushed the pencil up the slate it would make a horrible screeching sound - now more trouble and the cloth we used to wipe the slate would smell horrible.

We had three teachers at the school, Miss Vincent took the first class, she used to look ever so old and she was very strict. Miss Hart took the second class, she was young and used to come to school in a red sports car and the boys used to run over to open the gate for her. Once she tried to stop us chewing our pens as they were like meat skewers with a nib on the end. Anyway we still used to chew them so Miss Hart got some Bitter Aloes and dipped all the pens in it, she said "There that will stop you chewing your pens", but it did not, because as soon as we had sucked the Aloes off we chewed them again.

Miss Leader was the Headmistress and a very nice lady too! In the winter time she would make the children who stayed to dinner, a hot cup of

chocolate, this was cocoa not drinking chocolate and it was strong with very little milk, but it was hot, as all we had was sandwiches - no cooked dinner in those days.

The playground was gravel and if you fell over you would graze your knees, as all the boys wore short trousers, the teacher would take you in and bathe your knee and then out would come the iodine bottle and this was more painful than the graze.

In the playground at play-times we used to play all sorts of games, the boys used to play flickies with cigarette cards, marbles, spinning tops with whips, these used to come in crazes as we called it, there would be a session of each, then after a while you would change from one to the another. Sometimes we would join in with the girls and play singing games, for example, *Poor Mary Lies a Weeping*, *The Farmer Wants a Wife*, *In and Out the Window's*, *Oranges and Lemons*, and *Nuts in May*. These are some I can remember, we used to sing all the words to these games and playtime used to pass by quickly. Happy days, happy memories....

I must mention Mrs Goody's

sweet shop. This was a little wooden building near the Leather Bottle, but inside was a large selection of sweets, of which you could buy for 1d, 2d or....? 1 penny, was old money with 240 to the pound, or 480 halfpennies or 960 farthings, but if you had a penny to spend you were rich. Most sweets were 1d or 2d a bar. You could

get 8 Aniseed Balls for 1penny. Traffic Lights, these were large gob stoppers and as you sucked them they changed colour, so you kept taking them out of your mouth to see what colour they were. Also lots of liquorice sweets all at 1 or 2 pence, Sherbet Dabs, Sweet Cigarettes and many, many more, all under a penny, so this made

your penny go a long way.

These are some of my memories of my first school days at Shrub End.

I wonder if any of your readers went to Shrub End Infants School, if so I would love to hear from them.

*Mr A.J. Chilvers*

## WHEN I WAS YOUNG

When I was young, things were so different

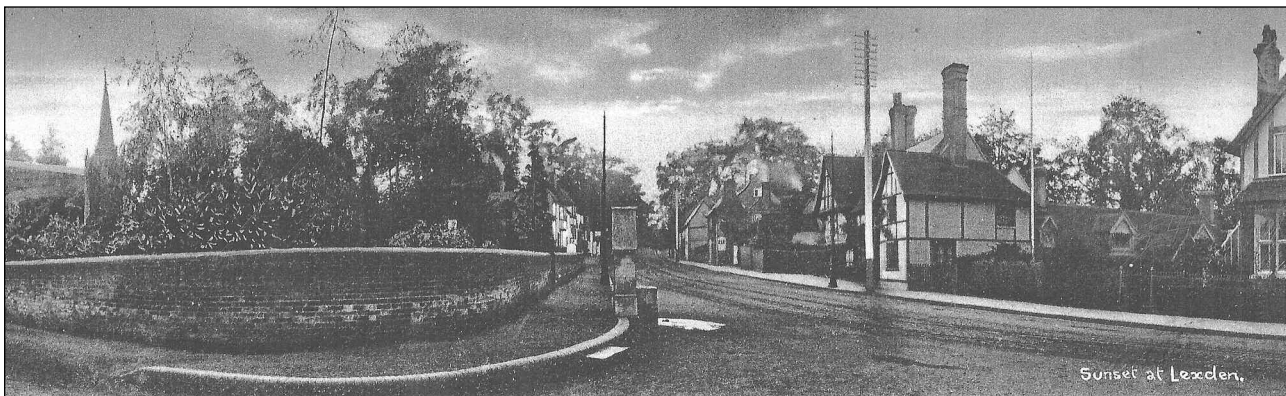
Although quite poor, we were content;  
Not much money there to spend  
And no supermarkets to attend.  
Cold water from a nearby pump.  
In pails to home Dad had to hump.  
Some would have a tap outside  
And thus our water was supplied.  
There was no electricity or gas,  
Oil lamps we had to use, alas.  
Mondays was the big wash day,  
No machine to take the strain away.  
Irons were heated by the fire  
And the chore made one quite perspire.  
Cooking done on the coal fire range,  
Or an oil stove for a change.  
We had a bath just once a week,  
Hair and nails cut - so nice and sleek.  
No luxury bathroom or inside loo,  
But up the garden we had to queue.  
Children could safely play outside  
And roam the fields without a guide.  
No need to lock our doors at night  
And very seldom saw a fight.

We used to cycle everywhere,

In the dark, without a care.  
Games with family played indoors,  
A rest from all the household chores;  
Sometimes round piano singing,  
Songs and hymns much pleasure bringing.  
No crime, drugs or LSD.  
Pains cured by a herbal remedy.  
No distractions from colour TV.  
Only a wireless with a battery.  
Families went to church on Sundays,  
With a long, long walk to school on Mondays.  
There was contentment and less abuse,  
No vandalism as an excuse.  
So much has changed in fifty years,  
Sometimes happiness and often tears.

*D.P. Day*

*The photograph below, in fact, a panoramic postcard which was inherited by Ray Allan, whose father, Cecil, was the Irish international footballer who played for Chelsea and Colchester United in the '30s. The postcard is one of six that will be featured in future issues. This one - 'Sunset at Lexden' - is stunning in colour.*





## GILBERD TEACHERS IN THE SIXTIES

When I joined the staff of the Gilbert School in 1966, I met a group of teachers from a wide range of backgrounds and of diverse character and personality. It was a vastly different world to the present day school life. Meetings were rarely held. The most important meeting was in September, the day before the school year began. Teachers received their timetables, so little lesson preparation was needed! Probably the most important item on the agenda was the announcement of holiday dates. I can never remember the word stress being used. Halcyon days?

The strongest person, who stamped his personality on the whole school was undoubtedly the Headmaster, Mr Sprason. He had come to the school in the mid-fifties when it was a technical secondary school and had changed it to a selective school. He was totally devoted to his work and his school and led by example. He was not what would today be called a high profile head but in a quiet way he provided strong guidance and leadership. He had a strong ability to inspire loyalty in his staff. He was thoughtful, kind and considerate. I only worked for one year with him before he retired, but in that time he made a very strong impact on me.

An equally devoted teacher was the deputy head, Miss

Twyman. I think she knew almost every girl in the school. She was a teacher of the old school, setting high standards of work and behaviour, but also incredibly kind and considerate. Like Mr Sprason she was totally devoted and made a massive contribution to the school.

Many of the staff had served in the Second World War and had been marked by the experience. One of the nicest and gentlest people I have ever met in my life was Norman Curd, who taught Technical Drawing, Woodwork and Metalwork.

Norman, who was a superb craftsman, was the most helpful person you could hope to meet. He would do anything for anyone. I remember when a pupil, Harold Lockwood, received a serious injury playing rugby, Norman built a special desk for him within two days. Under Norman's guidance a group of boys built a beautiful oak table in memory of former pupils who had died in the war. This table is still at North Hill in the Lecture Theatre of the Sixth Form College. Sadly Norman became allergic to sunlight and could only go out at night. If he went out during the day, he had to cover all his body and wear a dark helmet. On one occasion when he went to pay his gas bill, somebody thought it was a hold up and called the police. Tragically he developed depression and took his own life.

Another teacher who had been strongly affected by the war was Ken Brooks who had been a prisoner of war in Japan. He taught Physics and was also widely read and very knowledgeable in all fields of science. He never spoke of his war experiences but they had clearly left their mark. He was a heavy smoker and frequently disappeared during lessons into the preparation room from where wisps of smoke drifted into the laboratory.

Another very kind, funny and gentle person was the Head of Maths, Ron Denham. Ron had also, I suspect, been mentally scarred by the war. He had been a navigator in a Lancaster bomber, had taken part in the Dambuster raids and had been shot down. In his fifties he suffered a stroke and although he tried to return to teaching, had to take early retirement. He died shortly afterwards.

Roy Butcher, the Head of Art, had been a Spitfire pilot. He also rarely spoke of the war. Roy had trained as a teacher at a college run by Mr Sprason after the war. He was totally committed to the school and remained there until retirement. At the end of his career he was Deputy Head. Roy had a long retirement and died last year.

Ken Howells joined the North East Technical College as a PE and Sports teacher in



*The Gilbert School, North Hill, formerly the North East Essex County Technical School circa 1912*

1938. He was called up in 1939 and took part in the Normandy landings. Before the war he had played for the Welsh Junior National Rugby Team. His father had been killed in a mining accident and his mother received a pension of £1 per week on which to bring up her family. Ken had trained in Denmark and on one occasion had cycled to Hamburg to watch Tommy Farr fight Max Schmeling. He also taught Maths and Geography and was Head of the Lower School together with Brenda Smith.

Dick Askew was one of the most versatile people I have ever met. He taught Commerce and then moved to Economics, entirely self taught. He had a wide range of interests including, stamps, coins, photography, archaeology, handwriting, sailing, canoeing

and Esperanto. He ran a stamp club, coin collecting club, a photography club and led archaeological digs. When he reached the age of 65, he kept quiet about it and nobody at County realised until he was 67. Dick was extremely disconcerted when he was told in no uncertain terms that he had to retire.

Mick Rouse, the Head of History, had served in the navy during the war. He was born in Colchester and had attended the Royal Grammar. His great love was for cricket and he ran the school team. Everything was done according to a rigorous set of rules, including tea at half-time, which the girls were allowed to prepare and serve. Mick was delighted when the Grammar School condescended to play the Gilbert and his moment of greatest pride was when the Grammar boys came

in for tea, sat down and started eating. The Gilbert lads, however, went to the dressing room, put on their blazers before coming in for tea. The Grammar teacher was so embarrassed that he made his team get up and follow the Gilbert example. When Mick told that story, he glowed with satisfaction.

Mervyn Jones, the Head of English, was a Welshman whose first job had been in a borstal. He had a tendency to set lots of homework, but also to give high marks. One pupil suspected that the marking was done in a slightly superficial manner and included in an essay on Hamlet a paragraph about Lady Macbeth's affair with Othello. His suspicions were confirmed when the comment was "Very good work." Mervyn belonged to a religious sect which did not

allow discussion of sex. This did not however, prevent him from teaching the works of D.H. Lawrence. He was not allowed to have a bank account and was paid by cheque which he cashed at the bank. He was one of the highest paid teachers and used to ask young, less well remunerated members of staff to go up to the bank to cash his cheque. This habit ended when one brave young colleague asked for the amount in ten shilling notes.

There have been many changes in the world of teaching and one of the most regrettable is the disappearance of the eccentric teacher. One of the kindest and most likeable members of staff was Kathleen Went, who taught English and Art. She was very nice but slightly disorganised. At Adult Education she managed to spend a year teaching the Cambridge syllabus, only to find out on the day of the exam that the students had been entered for the London exam.

Nobody complained in those days. Kathleen had difficulty in remembering names and faces, so lessons tended to start with the question - "Are you my class?" She was also slightly hard of hearing and on one occasion the following conversation took place.

I say, girl, have you seen Vicky Mann anywhere?  
I am Vicky Mann, Mrs Went.  
Well, if you see Vicky Mann, tell her I want to see her.

Two people whom I remember with great respect and affection were Gordon Munson, the caretaker and Ted Woodward, the technical assistant. Both gave service to the school well beyond the call of duty.

As I mentioned at the beginning, teaching today is a vastly different world. In the sixties technical help was limited to tape recorders, record players, slide projectors, one film projector in the Geography

department and, of course, the Banda, a printing machine which functioned with purple ink and methylated spirits. If you got the mixture on your clothes, there was nothing you could do about it! At the end of the sixties the school acquired a television set which at best produced a fuzzy picture and had to be wheeled about on a massive trolley. The resources at the disposal of today's teachers have revolutionised teaching. When I started, much time was spent ploughing through a textbook. Today I have instant access to the internet during lessons and can make use of the most up to date information - and younger colleagues can do many more things which are beyond me. Today teachers have to work much harder, the stress level is high and there is far more paperwork involving assessment and targets. A lot of this is of questionable value but in the end the students get a better deal, which they, of course do not always appreciate.

*Eddie Ross*

## COLCHESTER SCHOOLS MUSIC FESTIVAL

In about 1960, my school, Kendall Road Primary, sent along some pupils to take part in an annual festival. I am not sure how the headmistress, Miss Knights, made the selection, but I doubt that it was anything to do with my singing ability or musical knowledge.

It was held in the Moot Hall, where we had some rehearsals with Dr Swinbourne, from

what was then the Technical College and School of Music. We all came from local schools and he told us to 'Open our gobs'.

We left our coats in an empty court. It was my first visit to the Town Hall and I remember being impressed with it and especially the painting of General Fairfax and his wife, which I seem to think was hung near the stage. It

currently hangs in the Charles Gray Room in the Castle.

Dr Swinbourne conducted with great energy and it was great fun, though he made us work. On the performance, he was on what appeared to be an improvised podium of a table with a large music stand on it. My mother was sitting right beneath him with Mrs Rogers, whose daughter was in the choir as well. As Dr

Swinbourne got more and more enthusiastic, he swayed more and more and they looked afraid that the podium could collapse and he would land on top of them. They seemed to clutch each other for safety.

The songs were folk and

country. There was an encore and we were asked us what we wanted to sing, which I think was the bright *Turkey in the Straw*. He wanted *The Ash Grove* or something similar, but said we could have our choice. However, this was a lie as the pianist played *The Ash Grove*

anyway, as doubtless he had arranged.

About 10 years later I sat an examination in the Hall at the Institute which had been named after him and fondly remembered the Festival.

*Peter Evans*

## A WALK DOWN NORTH STATION ROAD

I can offer a little more information on the article appearing in issue No.23.

I knew the Spinks family quite well, having spent many evenings in their home. Daughter Anne married and emigrated to Australia under the £10 assisted Passage Scheme, but soon returned to England because of serious home sickness. The Spinks son was James - not Michael - and was one of my best buddies as we both attended North Street

County Primary School. Jim's dad owned a three wheeler motor cycle van and delivered school dinners in insulated canisters that were produced at North East Essex Technical College, to several schools, North Street and Myland school being two. He also took away the 'Left overs' or swill which he fed to his pigs, kept at a site on Mill Road - opposite the Severalls Hospital. He later returned the knives, forks and spoons that also ended up in the bin!

On finishing school, Jim joined Colchester Co-operative Society in the fish shop in Long Wyre Street, before moving to the Trading Standards Depot of the Council.

Jim studied hard to gain his qualifications and married Julia Kennett, the sister of my best man Gordon, before moving to Croydon and eventually becoming Chief Trading Standards Officer for that borough.

*A.R. Taylor*

## TRAMWAY MEMORIES

### Slipping on the Rails

When the trams came up North Hill and round the corner into High Street, they sometimes used to slip on the rails in the wet weather and they used to have a boy there, Bill Bright, who used to have to sand the line until they could get a grip and come round to the points at the top of the hill. There used to be a sand bin against the Fire Office and I suppose he must have stood there all day long. When the driver left the top of the High Street he would come down on a single track until he got near the George

Hotel where there was a loop in the line and a box on the side of the road where the driver would lean out and operate a switch. This was connected to another box down in Queen Street which would show a red light warning any approaching tram to stop because he would be coming.

*Jack Ashton (born 1902)*



*Jack Ashton, right, pictured with Patrick Denney, during the interview for Colchester Recalled in the 1990s.*

## A Tram Ride to Get a Bone

My mother was in the habit of going to town on the tram which stopped outside our house and our dog Spot, used to go with her. Mother would sit downstairs and Spot would climb onto the upper deck because he was not allowed inside. When the tram got to the Fire Office they would both get off and cross over to Oliver

and Parker's, the grocers at the top of North Hill. My mother would go to the counter to give her weekly grocery order and Spot would go to the bacon counter and sit himself down until the assistant would throw him a nice bacon bone. Spot got so used to doing this that, one day, he decided he was feeling a bit peckish and that he'd go up to town on his own to get a bone. So he waited

outside by the stop and when the tram came along he hopped on and went to town and made his way to the grocers. There he sat down and when he'd got his bone he made his way to the tram stop at the top of North Hill and returned home. This came to be quite a journey and whenever he felt like it he would just go by himself into town and get himself a bone.

*Winifred Fairhead (born 1898)*



Left: *Winifred Fairhead, nee Bunting.*

Below left: *Alfred Bunting, Winifred's father with Spot.*

Below right: *A close up of Colchester tram Number 4. See also the picture on the front cover, of a tram on North Hill.*

*All the images for the item Tramway Memories have been kindly supplied by Patrick Denney.*



## WHO DO YOU THINK THEY ARE?

The young lad shown right, was to become a founder member of Colchester Recalled and our first Treasurer, later taking on single handedly, the job of Magazine Editor.

Under him the magazine has flourished, run through over 20 editions and sold in thousands.

He is a well-known figure in the Colchester Community, a leading Tourist Guide, and responsible over the years for many activities in the local Roman Catholic community.

He spent his life in the Army rising from the rank of Private to Colonel. He has published a lively book, *What A Life*, recounting his many adventures.

We asked him, in true Oral History tradition, seven questions and we share his answers with you.

1. *What is your earliest memory?*

Walking to school at the age of four in Wales.

2. *Tell us an unusual school recollection.*

The Headmaster, in 1943, telling us we must salute him whenever we meet him out of school.

3. *What was your main job?*

As an upholsterer, then in the army.

4. *How and when did you arrive in Colchester?*

Posted in 1952 by the army to work at the Military Corrective Training Centre and finished up as Quartermaster.

5. *What is your favourite bit of Colchester?*

Friday Wood.

6. *What was the most scary event of your life?*

When I had my first experience of a direct hit by



a typhoon in Hong Kong in 1967.

7. *What is the most important event you have been to in your life?*

Lunch with Her Majesty the Queen at the Town Hall in Colchester, when Prince Philip admired my tourist guide badges.

*Do you know who this is? All will be revealed in the next issue.*

## COLCHESTER REPERTORY THEATRE

*Colchester Recalled is very fortunate that Dorian Kelly, whose father Bernard was Artistic Director, has agreed to supply a series of items about the old Rep. These will be serialised in future issues. If you have memories of this wonderful company, we would be very pleased to hear from you.*

*The Editor*

The success of Colchester Repertory Theatre is the legacy of one man who founded the company in 1937. His name was Robert Digby.

It started when a young actress by name of Beatrice Radley wrote a P.S. at the end of a letter to fellow RADA student Bob Digby "What are the chances of a Repertory Theatre in Colchester? Make you a wholesome answer"

(Hamlet). Bob wrote back a single characteristic word. "Fine".

Bob was a man with the gift of the gab and a silver spoon in his mouth. A hugely imposing man with a booming voice and dressed with what can only be described as shabby gentility. Bob's Colchester roots were at the great house at Kings Ford on the way to Layer de la Haye, which his grandfather had

built. For financial reasons the house was sold and the family moved to Hoddesdon. It was this money that Bob inherited which set up and indeed subsidised the theatre for the next 34 years.

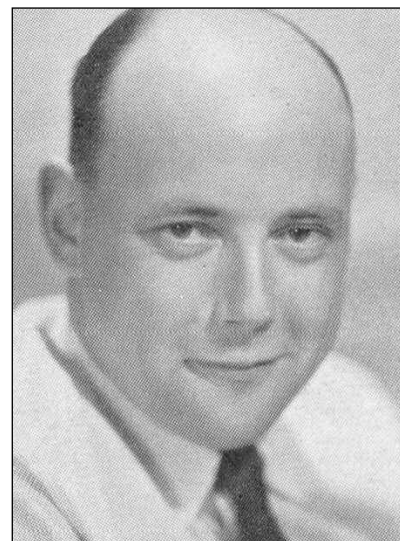
Robert was an enthusiast, the motor power, the persuader, or as someone from the government called him, 'an importunate young man with a stick', but whose post-war importuning produced perhaps the most important thing of all, the persuasion of the the Arts Council (or CEMA as it was then called), that Repertory companies should be supported. They suggested that the Colchester Company be converted to a not-for-profit limited company behind which, the citizens of the town and the local authority could unite, thus paving the way for the subsidy system repertory companies enjoyed for many years.

Beatrice Radley on the other hand, as well as being the leading actress steadied the ship and kept the books straight. She was fundamentally kind, perhaps a bit schoolmarmish, but ruled the company with a rod of iron. However, after the war, she left the company and went her own way.

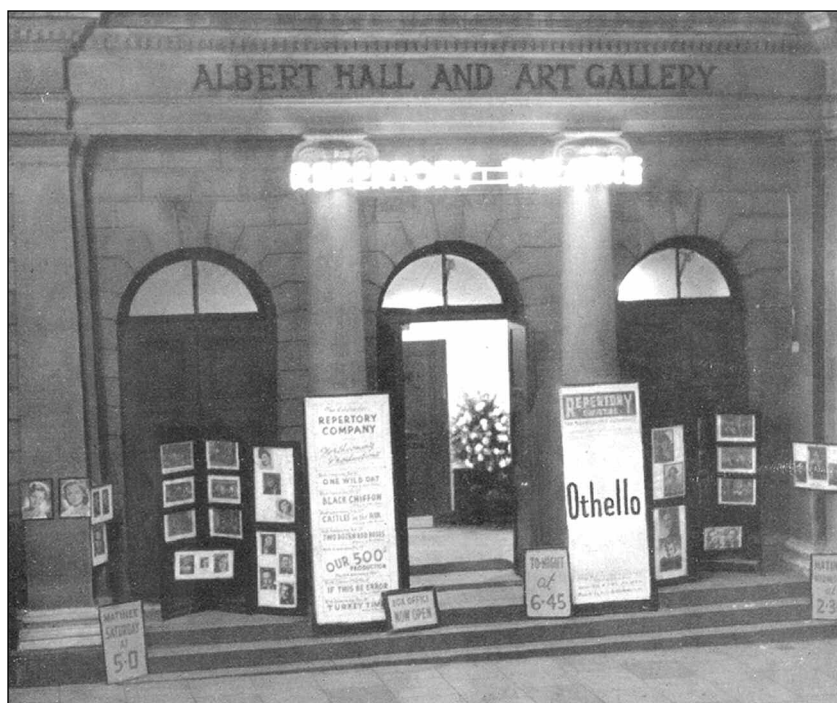
The chosen site for the theatre was The Albert Hall and School of Art in High Street. It is still there, now the Co-op Bank. Its facade is in Classical style, single storey



*Beatrice Radley*



*Robert Digby*



*The Albert Hall, High Street circa 1950*

with attic. It has a central bay of three arched entrance doors with two Ionic columns; outer bays, each with tall round headed window. It had been built as a Corn Exchange in 1845 and was later converted into an assembly hall and art gallery in 1925, which housed the School of Art which later moved, first to North Hill and later to Colchester Institute.

The building belonged to Colchester Corporation and had been used intermittently by the Colchester Players, who had expanded the platform stage and built a proscenium arch. The Corporation was persuaded to let it at a peppercorn rent to the fledgling company to use alternate weeks.

*Dorian Kelly*

## WHERE ON EARTH ARE THESE?

**O**ur hard-working Hon Secretary, Patrick Denney, is a very talented cameraman and also very knowledgeable about Colchester and its unusual landmarks.

He has kindly provided the pictures featured here. Do you know where they can be found?

The answers will be featured in our next issue.



*Picture 1*



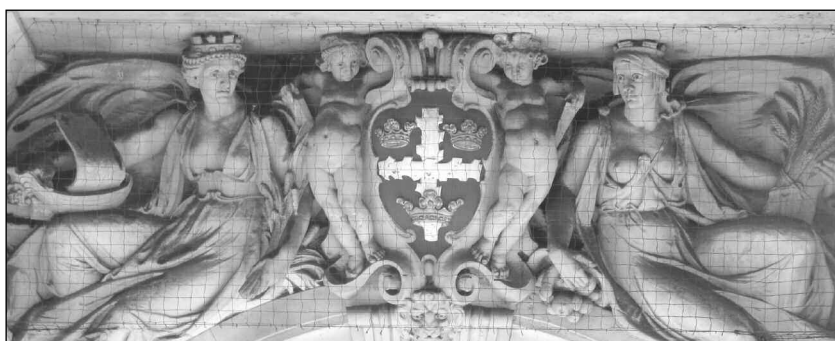
*Picture 2*



*Picture 3*



*Picture 4*



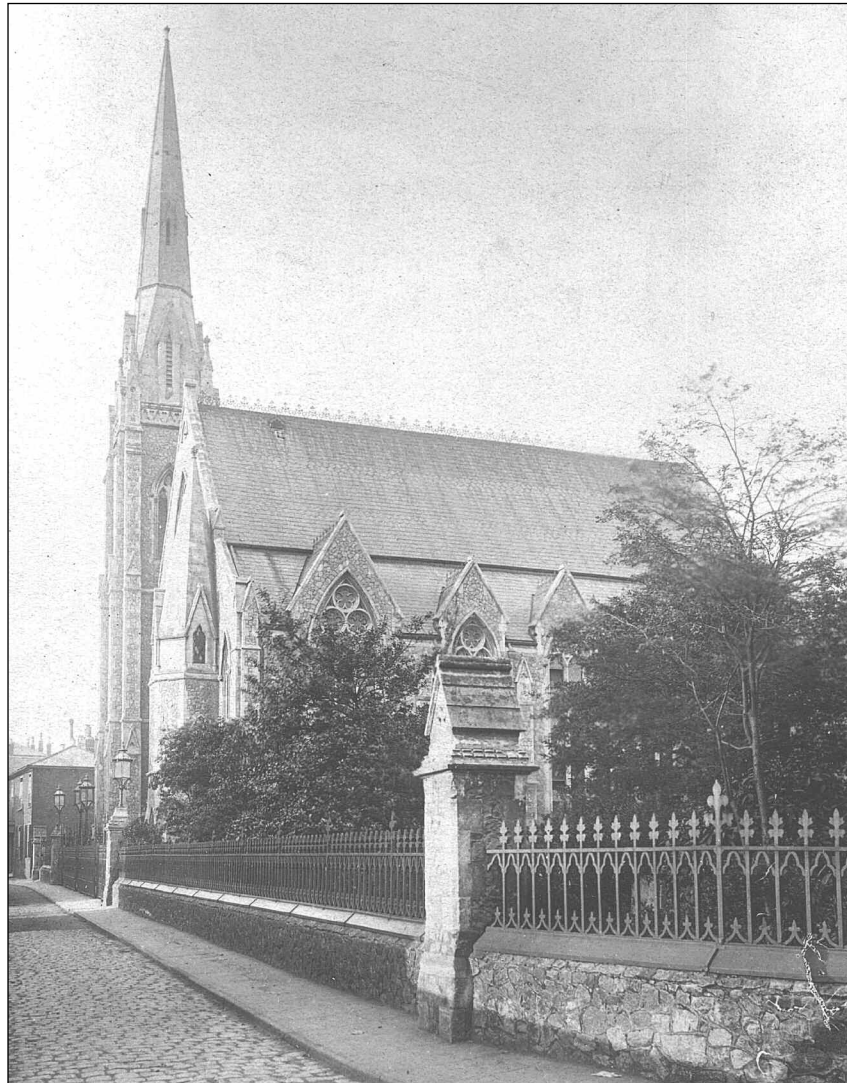
*Picture 5*



## A MYSTERY AT LION WALK CHURCH

In the early 1980's I was the Police Traffic and Road Safety Officer for the Colchester area. Part of my duties was to liaise between Essex County Highway Authority, Colchester Borough Council and numerous contractors concerning anything from new roads to the erection of scaffolding near the highway. During this time the Lion Walk Redevelopment was taking place and I had many dealings with the site manager and his staff regarding the movement of vehicles and the usage of the roads affected in the area.

Lion Walk Church except for its tower was being demolished. I understood that this church had been built in the 1870's. It had a small car park, part of which still exists with access off of Eld Lane. When demolition vehicles started to arrive especially the large eight wheeled lorries to be used to take the rubble away from the destroyed church, a big problem was discovered. The church car park had been laid over the top of many brick built vaults containing numerous coffins often stacked five or six high. This was discovered when one of the lorries sank into the car park. When the vehicle was pulled out coffins and human remains were to be seen. It appeared that no one was aware that the vaults were there. It was then assumed that when the 1870's church had been constructed coffins that had been buried in



*Lion Walk Church, prior to the re-development of the Town Centre*

and around the previous church had been put altogether in these specially built vaults. The Victorian builders did not anticipate twenty five ton lorries driving over their work.

The bodies obviously had to be moved before work could continue. Many familiar local names featured on the name plates on the coffins. Many coffins were in excellent condition and made of high quality material. Some broke open spilling the contents in a gruesome disrespectful way.

During the removal work it was found that many of the vault occupants had died over a very short time span in the 1830's when apparently there was a cholera epidemic in the town. It was also realised that cholera spores can remain a danger indefinitely. This caused a major rethink as to how the bodies were to be handled and specialised equipment, clothing and breathing apparatus had to be brought in. The vaults were cleared during the hours of darkness away from the public gaze. The bodies were taken to

the Mersea Road Cemetery and buried in a mass grave.

Some of the vaults still remain under the garden area adjoining the Baptist Church forecourt and as far as I am aware are still occupied. As the last coffins were removed from those vaults earmarked to be emptied, a skeleton was found

under a stone slab that was supported by bricks, that made a little chamber about eighteen inches high above the vault floor. This skeleton had no shroud or coffin and had it appeared to have been squeezed into this small space. It was obvious no proper burial had taken place and foul play was suspected.

Examination showed the skeleton was of an adult male but as the vaults had been bricked up since the 1870's, no great enquiries were made or were possible. The mystery remains as to who he was and how he ended up under the church car park with many other citizens of the town.

*David Austin*

## LANGENHOE SCHOOL

### The Early Years at Abberton

The following is an extract from 'Called to the Classroom' by Peter Wormell.

Throughout the 18th century the church was anxious to monitor the establishment of schools. Education certainly in small rural villages, consisted of teaching the Gospel. By 1841 education for Abberton children had taken great strides. There were now three schools, a Sunday school for boys from 10.00 am to 5.00 pm, a day school for girls from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm and an infant school for girls and boys. The school

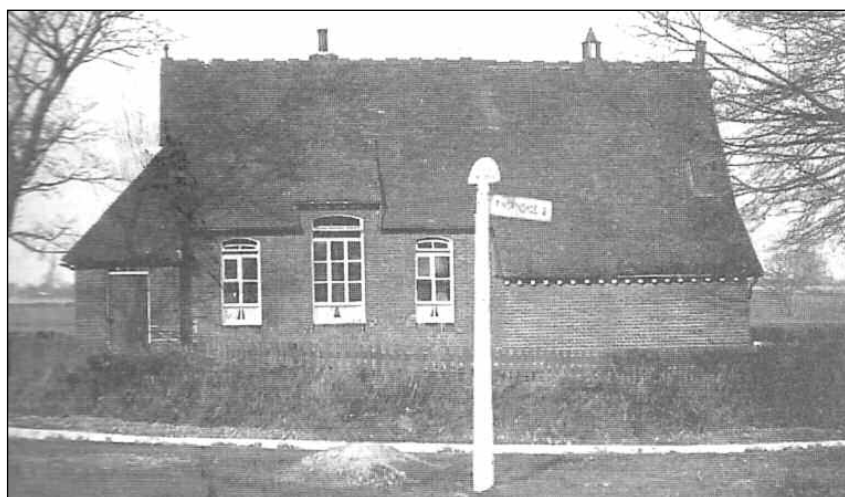
days would appear to have been long.

There were now 19 boys in the Sunday school, presumably on the assumption that boys could find employment during the week, when even six to seven year olds were employed to scare the rooks and there were 18 girls in the day school. The infant school had 14 children and it would appear that almost every child was getting the opportunity of some schooling.

The exact date when the first classroom of Abberton School was built has yet to be determined, but it would

appear from the building, that it came probably just after 1841, when the firm foundation of a permanent school had been laid. Ten years later Sarah Cresnell, age 42 years was the village schoolmistress.

The first half of the 19th century saw the foundation of a permanent village school, the breadth of its teaching had extended now beyond the narrow confines of religious instruction. It was very elementary by the standards of 100 years later but it nevertheless represented a step forward.



*Langenhoe School circa 1930*

### Can You Help?

Our editor, Peter Constable, is researching information with Colin Perkins, with view to producing a book to celebrate the 150th year of Colchester & East Essex Cricket Club.

Perhaps one of your family members was involved with the Club and you have old news cuttings or photographs.

If so, please contact Peter on 01206 517788.

## OUR OFFICERS 2011-2012

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have a 01206 prefix

The Archive Group meets daily  
at the Museum Resource Centre,  
14 Ryegate Road  
to access and index all new tapes.  
Computer literate volunteers are needed  
to help with this work.

For further details please contact  
Andrew Phillips on 01206 546775

## OUR NEXT ISSUE

Please look out for our next issue which will be published in Spring 2012. We intend to include a Letters page, featuring readers' comments about the items in this issue and any other comments or memories of their own experiences.

Hopefully, we will also be featuring news of local companies who have agreed to become our sponsors. Oral History is an important part of Colchester's heritage and our sponsors will help our work to record interviews etc for future generations' interest and research.

Letters should be addressed to  
Colchester Recalled Letters  
12 Claremont Heights  
Colchester CO1 1ZU  
Email: design.constables@btinternet.com

## OUR PROGRAMME FOR 2011-12

Thursday 15th September JOHN GRICE  
*'Third Cherub on the Left'*

Thursday 13th October LAURA MACLEAN  
*My Job is Finding Buried Treasure*

Thursday 17th November SEAN O'DELL  
*Not Just Constable Country:  
Great Artists and the Stour Valley*

Thursday 15th December Christmas Special  
PATRICK'S Annual Quiz, a new video, wine  
and mince pies – all the usual ingredients

Thursday 19th January DR ELIZABETH HALL  
*Pioneer Woman Doctors of Colchester*

Thursday 16th February PRUE JAMES  
*The Shipwreck That Grew Into Lilies:  
the Extraordinary Colchester Nurseryman,  
Isaac Bunting*

Thursday 15th March ASHLEY COOPER  
*The Disappearing World of Rural Essex*

Thursday 19th April DEANNA WALKER  
*Basildon Before the New Town: 'Plotland' Memories*

Thursday 17th May Three members give  
'mini talks' about their lives

PETER GRAHAM:

*Tales of the South China Sea*

LEN DRINKELL:

*Extraordinary Auctioneering Moments*

PETER EVANS:

*Untold Tales of the Town Hall*

Thursday 14th June Annual General Meeting  
Title of talk and Speaker to be announced.

All in the Lecture Room  
at Colchester Institute, Sheepen Road.  
Admission £1 per person per meeting  
Refreshments included.

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