

# COLCHESTER RECALLED

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Welcome to Issue No. 26 of COLCHESTER RECALLED. We hope you will find this another interesting issue, with new stories and continuations of previous articles.

The photograph below is from The Colchester Repertory. Theatre production of 'The Happiest Days of Your Life', December 1949, featuring Peggy Mount, Christopher Bond and Frank Woodfield (see page 10.)

We are always delighted to receive your articles. These should be sent to Jim Robinson, Editorial Director, 36 Mersea Road, Colchester CO2 7QS.

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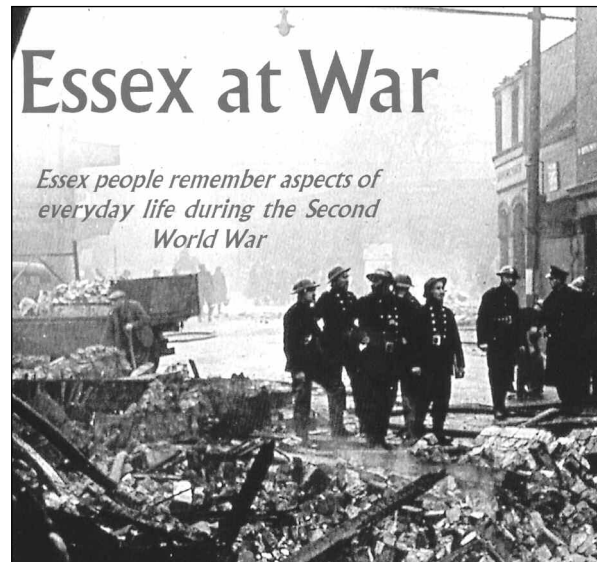
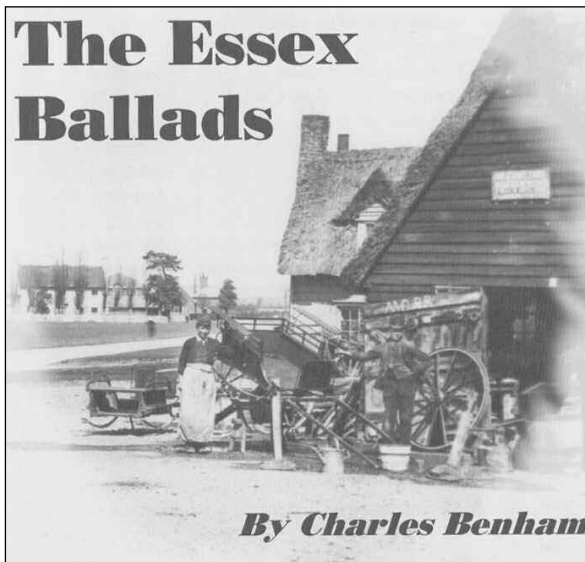
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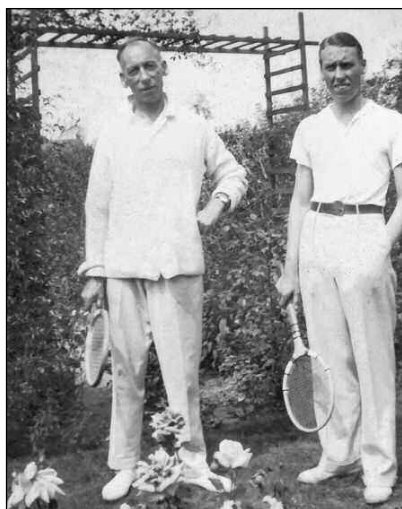


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## THE BUCKLE FAMILY Part 3

Presents for birthdays were never extravagant. The girls had their dolls, drawing, painting and sewing things, while Bill had a clockwork train, a pea-shooter, cap pistols and bombs. The emphasis was always on practical gifts of clothing and Wellington boots. The children would haunt Woolworths just before Christmas, buying presents for their parents. Phul-nana perfume, powder and hairpins were the favourites for their Mother, while shaving sticks and razor blades would be bought for their Father.

At the first hint that summer was coming, the tennis court was made ready for use. Phillip



*These two photos show (left) Jack and Bill ready for tennis, and right Bill with his cricket bat and wearing his CRGS cap, while in the background are Jack, Angela and Eilleen. The garden roller on which Eilleen has her foot is that which I inherited many years later*

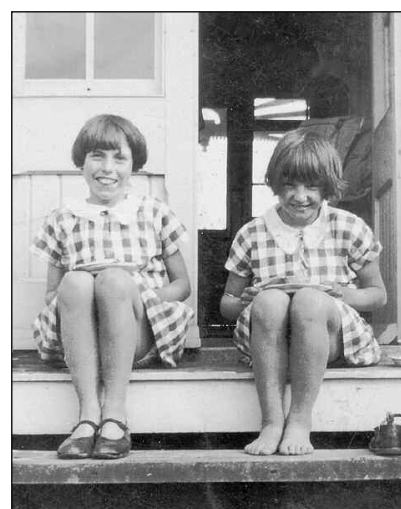
Chetwood, who helped Jack with the garden, prepared the surface with much mowing and rolling, after which Jack, aided by Bill, would mark out the court. Then all three of them whitened the lines and set the

posts and net in position. After this, the court was in constant use by the family and friends. There were always rackets and balls available and Jack would encourage any visitors to play; even the parish priest Father Thomas Clark became a regular player. At other times when the court was not in use Jack organised team games, which was not difficult with a large family and their friends.

Cricket was popular in summer, and their father would shout out "Who's going for ice cream?" which was a great interval treat. During winter months, hockey was a favourite, matches being played using a tennis ball and walking sticks.



They had two toboggans that Jack had made at the army camp. One was large enough to take four, and a smaller one was for individual use. The Hilly Fields at Lexden was a favourite place, having a long steep run with a sharp dip towards the bottom, over which the toboggans flew, and were only stopped by the hedge and ditch at the end of the field. When the snow became compacted, the speed of the toboggans would take you right through the hedge, which was gradually demolished. Jack would take Mary, Eilleen and Angela on the big toboggan, while Sonny used the small one on a slightly easier slope. All this was exciting, especially when it



*Angela (left) and Betty (right) sitting on the steps of the Durand's beach hut at Clacton-on-Sea*

In fact while there was daylight and fine weather, everybody would be out of doors.

In winter, when there had been a snowfall, Jack and the children went tobogganing.

began to get dark, and the slope was illuminated by the headlights of cars parked at the top.

The younger girls' friendship with Joan and Betty Durand

was quite strong. Joan was a very good dancer - both tap and ballet - no doubt a talent passed on by her mother, an elegant lady with some connections with the stage. Her niece ran a troupe of talented children called 'Beams Breezy Babes'. Angela often went with Betty and her family in their orange open-topped car, on their trips to Clacton-on-Sea where they had a beach hut.

As children do, Betty once remarked that Get's hair was old fashioned, unlike her mother's fashionable permanent wave. Angela responded, proudly stating that her mother had 'Oxford ankles'. On occasion, Betty could be persuaded to perform, in tutu and points, her dance to the 'Death of the Swan', in a specially cleared space in the workshop. When Eileen grew out of playing with dolls, shops and dancing, she would take long bicycle rides with Stella. Unfortunately, on one occasion, when getting a bicycle out of the Durand's shed, their Alsatian dog bit her.

Jack and Get regularly attended the Colchester Repertory Company. Monday evening was their usual night out at the theatre, and the girls would indulge in making-up and dressing in mother's clothes, hobbling about the garden in high-heeled shoes carrying handbags, umbrellas and walking sticks. At other times the games would be more energetic and one such game was called 'swag bag'. This involved everyone chasing the

person who trailed a bag of grass cuttings on a rope. The one who caught the swag bag by standing on it won their turn at dragging the swag.

In the warm evenings, tag was also popular, but their version involved a brass garden syringe full of water, normally used to spray the grape vine. When dusk fell and the shadows deepened in the shrubbery and under the trees, a white sheet was produced and they played 'no ghost out tonight.' This was the chant they used as they nervously roamed the shadows of the garden until with a scream the ghost burst out of the shadows to claim a victim. Jenny and Mary's interests lay in the world beyond the garden, and when their parents went out, Eileen, left in charge, would say in a hushed voice, "What was that noise?" It didn't take long, in an old house with creaks, for them all to end up in one room trying hard to ignore any noises, real or imaginary, and telling stories to one another.

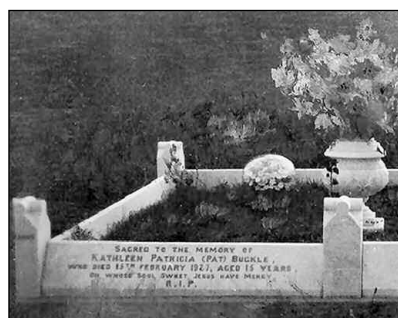
Sadly, Pat died on 15th February 1927, having been ill



*Patricia in school uniform  
(taken in a studio)*



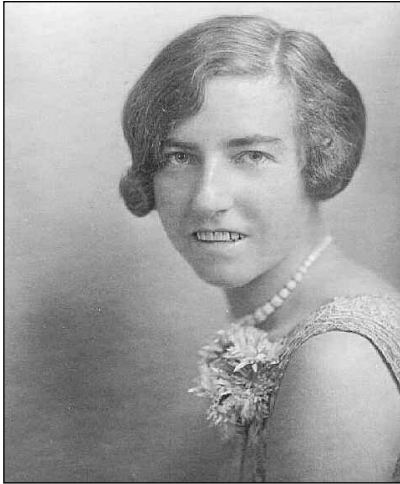
*Patricia with 'Lady' at  
8 North Station Road*



*Patricia's grave at the Mersea  
Road cemetery, Colchester*

for some time. The children had seen their parents sick with worry and lack of sleep, passing along the landing at night, taking turns to sit with her. Mum remembered that just before her death, Pat had pointed out two great white birds at the foot of her bed. Angels! This was the first experience of great sorrow for the whole family, and although generally undemonstrative, their parents were supportive and comforting in this difficult time.

My mother was a striking young woman (left hand picture opposite) and it was about this



time that she started courting Ernest Wright (Ernie), a handsome young sergeant in the Northamptonshire Regiment stationed at Sabraon Barracks in the Garrison. They are shown (above right) sitting in the hay meadow at No.8.

Needless to say their courtship was a little restricted, with the younger children having to be persuaded to allow them some time alone together in the sitting room. Fortunately, Ernie was a good mixer, and a very likable person who also



had a talent for the piano. He often played when the family had a singsong. One of his favourite pieces was 'Charmain' which he often played to accompany Angela. He also played the harmonica and, according to Eileen, he could get a better tune out of her violin than she could. Probably because of his own dysfunctional upbringing, he revelled in the family life at 'The Rosary'.

On special occasions such as birthdays or Christmas, Ernie

would play the piano and delight the children with conjuring tricks and his recitation of 'The Green Eye of the Little Yellow God'. It is probable that Jack liked him so much because their upbringing was so similar, forcing them to leave home for the army whilst still very young.

At this time Jack had started to make homemade wine and in spite of one cask blowing its tap off, spraying the conservatory with rhubarb wine, he persisted in producing a quantity for Christmas. After much dancing to the gramophone, Jack and Get waltzing, and the others all dancing the Boston Two-step, they settled down to play the ring game. When it was time to sit down, Bill was found flat out on the settee after sampling the wine. It was concluded that Get had assumed that this fruit drink would be no more intoxicating than lemonade.

*Brian Wright*

## MONKEY BUSINESS IN TOWN

In the old 'Arcade', that ran from Long Wyre Street to Queen Street, there used to be a pet shop. At one time the shop had a resident monkey. One night the monkey escaped and was seen by a beat policeman climbing about on the roof trusses of the Arcade. Using tremendous skill and patience the officer tempted the animal down to the ground and was able to throw his cape over it and it was 'arrested'.

He took it into the Police Station nearby and it was put

in a cell to await the arrival of the key holder of the shop. Before this person arrived a C.I.D man working late went into the Duty Sergeant's office to enquire if anything was going on in the town. He was told that a monkey had been caught and was in a cell.

Probably thinking that the monkey was of the human variety he went to have a look. Upon opening the cell door inspection flap the monkey shot out like a cork out of a bottle and raced around the station. It

upset trays of papers, knocked over any item in its way and managed to get upstairs into the canteen where it bit one would be arrested on the finger. It got on top of cupboards, under tables scattering pens, pencils and all manner of office furniture before finally being recaptured. The whole episode was like a scene from the Keystone Cops.

When the owner arrived he was glad to get the monkey back and the police were very glad to see the back of it.

*David Austin*

# A HISTORY OF REEMAN & DANSIE - AUCTIONEERS

I do not claim to belong to the oldest profession in the world, nevertheless, from earliest times the auction sale has been recognised as the most convenient and speedy method of disposal. By a swift and instantaneous act we are able to transfer property from one person to another. Anything that can be bought, let or exchanged for more, or for equivalent value may be the subject of an auction. The only limit being the possibility of transferring ownership.

The firm was founded in 1881 by Charles Fuller. His brass plate was already on the front door of the office and announced he was Appraiser, Estate and House Agent, Cabinet Maker, Upholsterer and Funeral Furnisher. Charles Fuller came from Ipswich in 1861 and in March of that year went into partnership with William Baber who traded at Manchester House, 30 and 31 High Street, Colchester. A few years later Mr Fuller took over the business of James Barritt. He traded from premises at the corner of Head Street and St John's Street, which became the site of the Liberal Club.

An advertisement appeared in the *Essex County Telegraph* in July 1881 - "Mr Fuller begs to inform the public that he intends adding to his business as House Agent, that of auctioneer and that he will hold periodical sales at the auction Rooms, Headgate, the first of

which will take place on Wednesday 6th July at Noon". Thus started the first regular saleroom in Colchester and which has now continued for over 120 years, experiencing along the way, earthquake and two world wars.

Charles Fuller died in 1913 and his obituary records that he came to Colchester about 50 years ago and carried on business at Headgate, establishing with much success the Headgate Auction Rooms. Mr Harry Reeman joined the firm in the early 1900s and was an acknowledged expert on prints and etchings. Mr Dansie relates in his book, "*The Last Bid*", as an auctioneer Harry Freeman was a remarkable man. "On a dozen oysters, some brown bread and butter and a bottle of stout, he could sell continuously for six hours". Mr Reeman died in 1929 and his obituary appears telling us he was "A highly esteemed citizen of the Borough, for some years he was associated with the auction business so long carried on at Headgate by Mr Charles Fuller. When Mr Fuller died Mr Reeman carried on successfully and within the past year took into partnership Mr Leonard Dansie".

Mr Dansie joined Harry Reeman in 1916, but soon afterwards volunteered for the Royal Naval Reserve. At the end of the war he returned to the firm and in 1928 became a partner under the new name of

Reeman and Dansie. It says much for his confidence in himself, the sale room and his country, when he was able to acquire the freehold of the sale room in those dark days of the war in the early 1940s. The purchase price being £1750.

During the war years Mr Dansie spent much of his time on War Damage claims. This took him all over North Essex and required a special permit to enter certain coastal areas such as Frinton, Clacton, Walton and other similarly restricted areas. It also entitled him to an extra allocation of petrol. After the war he was instrumental, together with Mr Peter Daniell in developing the Colchester Equitable Building Society. He also served on the Borough Council becoming Mayor in 1948.

Mr Leonard Vivian Bloomfield came to Reeman and Dansie in 1925, and spent his whole career in the Sale Room, becoming a partner in 1951. Mr Bloomfield was a human computer and would add up rows of figures in a flash. My attempts to keep up with him have served me in good stead and I find it much quicker to add up short runs of figures rather than use a calculator. In 1944 Mr Dansie set a vogue which was to dominate our profession - he took over the old established firm of Craske and Son. Mr R C Craske had recently died and the business was acquired from

his widow. With the business came Mr Douglas Cocker, still serving in the Forces and the formidable Miss Dorothy MacAllan. On his demob from the army, Mr Cocker took over and developed the property and estate agency, while Miss MacAllan became secretary to Mr Dansie.

Craske and Son were perhaps the oldest firm of auctioneers in the town predating our own by about 40/50 years. I joined the firm in September 1943, qualified as a Chartered Auctioneer in 1949 after a long and tedious correspondence course, then on amalgamation with the Institute of Chartered Surveyors, I eventually became FRICS in 1970. I was invited to join the partnership of Mr

Dansie, Mr Bloomfield and Mr Cocker in July 1956. Thus the firm continued until 1970 when Mr Dansie and Mr Cocker retired.

With half the partnership gone, Len Bloomfield and I realised that to maintain the same standards and scope of work, it was necessary to replace our loss. An invitation was extended to another long established business, Messrs Howe & Son to join us. I am glad to state, the invitation was accepted, resulting in John Howe and Richard Cooper coming into the partnership. John with his specialist knowledge of building work and surveys and national prize-winning skill of selling by auction and Richard exercising

his charm and undoubted knowledge of house sales and management problems.

With my retirement pending after 51 years at Headgate, we decided to invite Mr James Grinter to join us in 1993. Despite being the baby of the partnership, James has had a lot of experience in auctions both at local and national level. With a great personality and good rostrum technique, he specialises in militaria and similar artefacts.

My last official sale was on September 28th 1994, being Sale No 6153, giving an average of just under 1.5 sales per week and comprising about 1.75 million lots.

*Len Drinkell*



*An auction in the original Reeman and Dansie premises. Centre right at the table sits a youthful Len Drinkell with, beside him, on the right, the formidable Alderman Dansie*

## RECOLLECTIONS OF A TELEGRAM BOY

I left Hamilton Road Secondary Modern School July 1955, with good marks for History, Carpentry and Sport, but all I wanted to do for a living was carpentry.

I had my first interview with W H Hills, the builders in Pownall Crescent, a few doors from where I lived. My Dad went with me, I got the job but when I got home he told me to think again. He said that machines were doing most of the work and they would take over and I would be out work, so get a secure job that when I returned from National Service, it would be waiting for me. That was good advice, but woodwork was what I wanted to do.

Two weeks later I was at Davey Paxman Ironworks on Hythe Hill. This looked good, but when I entered the foundry on Monday morning I had a shock. Five days later I was out of a job - no way was I going to spend my days on my hands and knees on a sand and soot floor making wooden moulds for molten metal to be poured into them. Mum and Dad were not pleased.

One week later I was a lorry driver's mate at Lay and Wheeler, the Wine Merchants in Culver Street, (no longer there). At that time I didn't smoke or drink, but that soon changed. One day a week was Bottling Day, - Guinness and brown ale. On hot days it was thirsty work, so I often helped myself to a bottle. Going home



*Telegram boy Graham Tuckwell on his BSA Bantam 125 motorcycle*

under the influence aged 15, did not go down well with my parents, so after 3 months I left.

Two weeks later I was at E N Masons' Arclight Works (no longer there) in Cowdray Avenue, as a turner. I loved the job, but Dad still thought it best to get a secure job, one with a pension at the end of it. My parents had friends whose son was a telegram boy at the Post Office. This appealed to me as I liked motor bikes and used to go to scrambles with Mum, Dad and my brother David at Friday Woods, Wakes Colne and Shrubland Park in Ipswich. So I applied for a job. I took an intelligence test and after 4 months with Masons, I became a Telegram Boy at the GPO in Head Street (no longer there, now the Odeon Cinema). In March 1956 Mum and Dad

were over the moon. I recall Dad saying, 'when you have passed your test riding a motor bike you will not have to do any square bashing when you go into the army, because you will be a ready made dispatch rider'. How wrong he was!

I was no stranger to the other telegram boys as four of us went to the same school, in the same class. I was shown round the Sorting Office and other parts of the building including the Front Counter. The telegram boys had their own rest room which was small, most of it taken up with a table tennis table, a dart board and a sink in the corner, with just enough room to make a cup of tea or coffee. Next door was the boiler room which heated the whole Post Office. We used this room a lot when the weather was bad and we were caught



out without our waterproofs. Our gauntlets were the worst to dry - nothing compares to riding around in the freezing cold with wet leather gloves, I'm surprised I can still move my fingers!

The hours for delivering telegrams were from 8.00am to 8.00pm, with an early and late shift, and on Sundays from 9.00am to 11.30am. This shift was overtime with two boys and a postman/driver, who mostly took the long distance telegrams to the rural areas and Halstead. We only delivered to Halstead on Sundays, as a postman delivered those telegrams in the week. In summer they were nice journeys, but not in the winter. Sundays were not always busy, I can remember sometimes not having any deliveries, but we had to be there just in case.

The weekday early shifts were from 7.30am to 4.30pm



*The Post Office in Head Street during the 1930s, with Thorogoods Restaurant and Bakery on the corner of Church Street about 100 yards further along the street*

and the late shift 11.00am to 8.00pm with a half day off in the week. These shifts were done on a rota. The first boy in at 7.30 had to clean all the mouth pieces to the telephones in the Sorting Office, Front Counter and all the upstairs offices, including the Head Postmaster's room. You made sure you did a good job in there! You then had to clean and top up the inkwells and change all the pen nibs, on the Front Counter (no Biros then), and make sure the forms for sending telegrams were stocked up. This took about half hour, then it was time for delivering.

A PHG (Postman's Higher Grade) was in charge and he was the one who would book you out with the telegrams, but most of the time we would book ourselves out. I had about 4 weeks delivering telegrams on a push bike, hard work when it was raining and a head wind - as there was only one gear on those bikes.

I passed my driving test a couple of weeks after a week's training on a BSA Bantam 125. From then on the job was a joy. I was glad I listened to Dad, but he was wrong about my National Service. You only became a Dispatch Rider if you couldn't ride a motor bike as you had to be trained by the Army and no one else.

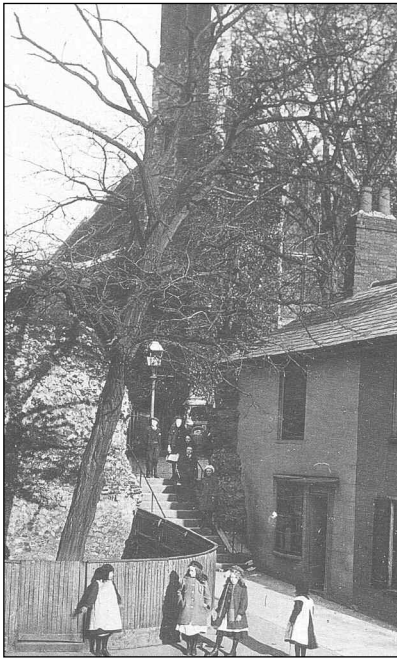
Saturdays was always busy due to weddings. I didn't like delivering wedding telegrams if they had to be delivered to the reception. I always felt uncomfortable walking to the

top table and handing the telegram to the Best Man and getting a round of applause. Delivery to the Bride or Groom's house was better, because often you got a tip, a shilling (5p) or if you were lucky, half a crown (12 1/2p) - big money in those days.

The worst time for delivering telegrams was Carnival night on the late shift. Once it was me. I remember it had been raining heavily. A telegram came through before the Carnival Procession made its way, for an address at Old Heath. I had plenty of time to get back before the procession set out from the Barracks. On my way out the crowds were gathering so I delivered the telegram and headed back to the office. It was still raining, the crowds lining the streets and as I turned into Head Street from St John's Street I hit a manhole cover, the bike went one way and I went the other. Luckily unhurt, I picked the bike up and with a kick of the starter I was on my way. I got a good cheer, not a bad start to get the crowd in party mood before the procession reached Head Street! I would like £1 for every time I think of that night when I cross Headgate Corner, a story I have often told my children and grandchildren.

Life as a telegram boy was a doddle, with six of us it could be a couple of hours before you went out. We also delivered Express Parcels but not often. While waiting for telegrams we played table tennis or darts or cleaned our motor bikes which had to be spotless at all times.

After cleaning your bike the PHG would inspect it. Most times it would be ok, but there was one PHG, Nat Seabourne, a nice man, but one of the old school. He was a stickler for wheel spokes, if they weren't spotless you had to clean them again. Depending on his mood you might have to clean them yet again, it was times like that I wished I was out delivering.



*St Mary's Steps with the Church, now the Arts Centre, in the background and although both are still there, the cottages are not*

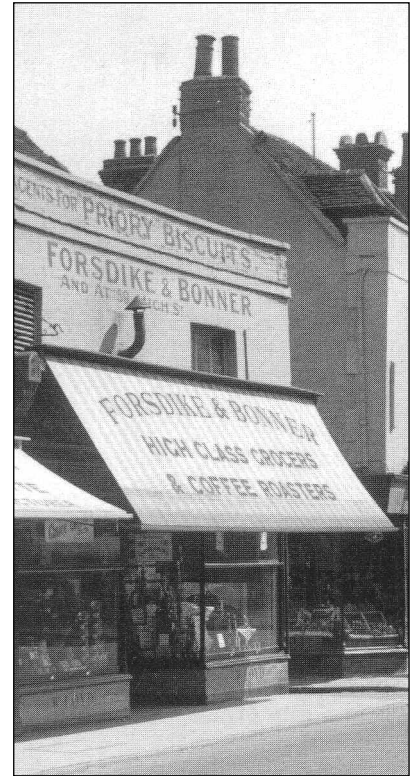
We had a kitty of a shilling a week to pay for tea, sugar and a tin of Fussells' condensed milk. We got these from R C Parker, a little shop at the bottom of St Mary's Steps (no longer there). It was run by mother and daughter. Most times the shop was not busy, the daughter always following her mother from the back room. She was very quiet and shy, and we would say 'Good Morning R C.' They knew what we meant, and

the daughter would just smile.

At break times we would get jam doughnuts from Thorogoods bakery on the corner of Church Street (no longer there). They were the best in town. We would each have five as they weren't very big. They were always warm and full of jam. If Thorogoods was there today they would still be the best jam doughnuts in town. We also got Penguin Chocolate Biscuits and Wagon Wheels from Forsdikes, (no longer there), also in Head Street on the corner with Culver Street. I still love Penguins and Wagon Wheels, (they are smaller now) and jam doughnuts, but sadly, not from Thorogoods!

Once our Fussell's was being used quicker than normal. Someone was spooning it from the tin, but no one owned up. It wasn't long before the culprit (a new boy) was caught and was punished by having the rest of the milk poured down inside his 'Y' fronts by the rest of us and the 'PHG' sent him out delivering on a pushbike. He didn't do it again.

Sometimes we would try our skills at trick riding on our motor bikes in the garage, mainly on Sunday mornings if it wasn't busy. We would stand on the foot rests with our arms spread out like a crucifix or try to ride backwards, not very successfully, then we would try to spin the bike round in a circle with the leg shield touching the ground. But I think the favourite was Friday



*Forsdike's, previously Forsdike & Bonner, situated on the corner of Culver Street and Head Street, diagonally opposite to Thorogoods and Church Street*

Woods to try scrambling. If a telegram came in for that way, you can bet we would head there. Sometimes the bike would return worse for wear, then you had to invent a story to the mechanics as to how the bike got in such a state, but I think they knew...

One boy 'Ginger' Rixon was always falling asleep. You would find him in the Rest Room with his feet up and once the office had a 'phone call from the police to say a boy had fell off his bike and it had gone into the river. I was told to go down the Hythe to pick up the telegrams and deliver them. When I got there it was poor old Ginger, sitting on the side of the road white as a ghost, all

you could see of his bike was the front wheel sticking out of the mud. He said the front wheel got caught in the train lines that ran along the quay, but the boys reckoned he fell asleep. He never lived that down. He was a good footballer - a live wire on the pitch!

Only one telegram boy in my time was killed at work. He was on the late shift delivering at Braiswick. I think he was trying to overtake a car and fell off. It was a nasty shock to be told the sad news the next day.

I had only been a telegram boy a few months when my big moment almost came. Sabrina, the blonde bombshell was to open the new Bamboo Coffee Bar in St Nicholas's Passage, next door to Millett's (no longer there), where Cafe Rouge is today. A telegram came through for her and I was the next boy out. It had to be delivered at 11 o'clock as that was when she would be opening the Bamboo, but to my disappointment she had not arrived and I had to leave it with the doorman!

All telegrams came through on teleprinters in a room called The Telegraphist Room which was managed by a few girls, Connie Newman, Valerie Gripton, Rosina Hatch and Joan Mynard, who I still keep in touch with. We are not so young now, but still active. These girls would put the telegrams together in a little orange capsule and send them down an air chute which came into our room. Sometimes you had to wait to see if there was a

reply, so you had to make sure you had Telegram Reply Forms with you, but not many people sent us back with one. If the occupant wasn't in you left a note to say you would call back.

Greetings telegrams could always be boxed if the occupant was out. If it was a Death telegram you handed it to the occupant and left. We were always told if it was a Death telegram and if the occupant was out we could box it. Large greetings telegrams, something like a large birthday card were very popular. These couldn't be sent down the air chute so you went up stairs to collect or the girls would bring them down if they were not busy. Saturdays was always busy for greetings telegrams, due to weddings.

I was to be called up in April 1958. It was January and I was playing darts in the Rest Room when one of the other boys, Glynn Free, came in and said it had been announced that National Service had been stopped. I could not believe my luck as I wasn't looking forward to going into the Army, as I was having the time of my life. Just after my 18th birthday I became a Postman. Not a job I was going to do for the rest of my working life, as carpentry was still on my mind, but after a few weeks delivering letters, to my surprise, I was enjoying it. Getting up at 4.00am for at work at 5.00 wasn't bad and finishing at midday was great. With afternoons off I could go to town and meet my friends in the evening so life couldn't be much better than that.

I had only been a postman a few months when I met my wife to be one Sunday night at a dance at The Corn Exchange, (no longer there - sadly pulled down to make way for the Job Centre, next door to the Town Hall). It was love at first sight and after a few weeks I met her parents. I am still not sure her father liked my 'teddy boy' looks, but he was pleased that I had a good job at the Post Office, so it was a good start.

It wasn't long before I became a Postman Driver, the job was even better and with the love of my life, I couldn't be happier. A postman's pay was good in those days, so saving up to get married and getting our own home wasn't hard. Five years after we met we married and I was still enjoying life as a postman.

In August 1981 after 25 and a half year's service I was pensioned off due to ill health. In those days you had to be A1, but this didn't stop me from working as I had a mortgage and a family to look after, so I became a self employed ceramic wall and floor tiler, something I had done while I was a Postman. I did this for the next 25 years until retirement.

Every time I walk up Church Street I can't help thinking of my Telegram Boy days and the hundreds if not thousands of times I rode up and down there on that little red bike. It brings back wonderful memories. I am glad I listened to my Dad.

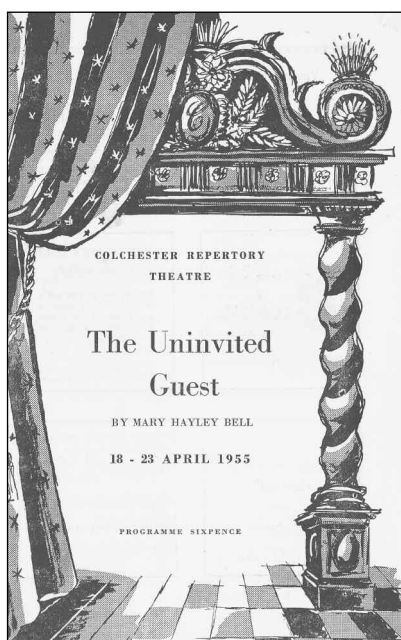
*Graham E Tuckwell*

## COLCHESTER REPERTORY THEATRE Scene 3

*We continue with the third installment of Dorian Kelly's excellent history of the town's popular theatre.* Editor

**K**athy, a theatre attendant told me that they used to put the coffee urn on at the beginning of the show and when the first interval came - there were two intervals usually - Fred Bird the caretaker and boilerman used to carry the urn to the table at the front of the stage. We used to sell tea, coffee, orange juice and biscuits. One gentleman offered to carry the orange juice for Hep Prior but he tripped and spilt the lot. Hep was livid!

Fred Bird was ok, we had a laugh. We used to pick up the mess between the seats after each show, and you could always tell if Fred found a small coin, because he used to make a sudden 'hrumph' noise and



*The front of the programme for 'The Uninvited Guest'*

leave the auditorium suddenly. We had a long wait between the shows on matinee days, and Fred would say, 'Well I don't know about you, but I'm off for a drink;' and we used to go to The Fleece.

My father was the Director/ Producer, Bernard Kelly and on the strength of that, I was in the theatre as often as I could possibly be and became a familiar sight among the regular actors and actresses doing any small errands and jobs that might be asked of me. The first time I ever set foot on this professional stage with a real audience, I was shouted at by the producer, Wallace Evenett. He wanted me to stand in a certain patch of light. I did not like the light in my eyes and stood somewhere else. He was a sort of Doyen of repertory producers, adept at turning a production around in less than a week. He had a roving eye so you could never tell whether he was looking at you or not... I was twelve and I was Tiny Tim in *A Christmas Carol*.

Once I was there during the day watching a rehearsal, when I was dispatched at high speed to Chapel Street where Fred Bird the caretaker lived, with an urgent message that the pile of coke in his beloved boiler room in the theatre was on fire. He didn't seem best pleased to see me and seemed to take an eternity finding his coat while I hopped from foot to foot urging him to hurry.

Now it really is important to say at this point that although at its peak the Rep was producing over forty plays per year, the standard of production was staggeringly high and the plays were chosen mostly for their quality. When I was young I could have seen 46 plays a year: OK so the sets were basic and yes, to be fair they wobbled a bit, but the acting was experienced and impeccable. And where can you see forty six good plays a year now?

Some were popular comedies and West End successes like *The Hasty Heart*; *See How They Run*; *Arsenic and Old Lace*; but there was drama a plenty: Peter Shaeffer; Ibsen (twice - both *Hedda Gabler* and *The Master Builder*); Noel Coward *Private Lives*; Oscar Wilde *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*; impressionist drama - *The Ascent of F2*. Thrillers *Gas Light*; *The Poltergeist*; George Bernard Shaw *Man and Superman*; Shakespeare, of course, *Hamlet* (where my father played it with a broken rib sustained in a set building accident the week before, (yes, they all mucked in, office people as well) and that was just one year.

Here is a typical schedule for a week:

### Monday

Set up furniture, props and costumes, then final rehearsal for this week's play. Afternoon dress rehearsal and evening first night. Scenic artist to sort out scenery for next week and start

to paint it. Stage management to have list of needed props, furniture and costumes.

### Tuesday morning

Give out the parts for the next play but one. Then read through next week's play and then work on Blocking Act One. Free time to learn Act One, then get ready to perform this week's play. Stage management send spare people out to borrow props and furniture and order hired costumes (actors had to have their own basic outfits including frocks and suits, casuals and dress as well as top hats, bowlers, flat caps. Ladies big and small hats. Special

period costumes were hired by the management. They also returned last week's borrowed pieces.

### Wednesday

Block Act Two and work on it, run Act One. Perform matinee of this week's play. Then perform evening show of this week's play. Learn Act Three in odd moments. Find time for the pub.

### Thursday

Block Act Three and work on it. Stage management to have all props and furniture ready. Afternoon run acts One, Two and Three.

### Friday

Run whole play. Twice if

possible. Start to learn next week's play and then perform this week's again.

### Saturday

Run whole play again, then do matinee and evening performance. After show, all hands to break down set and carry to workshop. Get new set in and set it up, complete with props and furniture. Stage management to pack up borrowed props and furniture.

### Sunday

A day off unless it was a really difficult show. And all the time thinking about the following week.

That did not stop the actors having fun in their own way; while somewhat unprofessional, corpsing or making another actor laugh was prevalent. There was a young actress Liz Paget who was known as Peaches. The company never lost an opportunity when she was on stage to use the word wherever they could. 'More peaches?' in a meal scene for example. Or presenting a tin of peaches to her on stage, whether it was a period piece or not. My father was angry but it didn't seem to make any difference.

The pantomimes were of especially fond memory, particularly *Cinderella* by Ronald Parr, which used the music of Gilbert and Sullivan to more modern words - 'I'm a maid of all work and a Jack of all trades, the butler, the boots and the Buttons'.

*Dorian Kelly*



The Essex County Standard drawing for the Rep's 21st birthday in 1958, showing Bob Digby and his staff, including Bernard Kelly top left.

# MEMORIES OF NORTH STREET SCHOOL

These are memories of my time at North Street School in John Harper Street, where I was a pupil from 1955 to 1961. An older sister, Ruth Morris and nephew Leslie Castro were also pupils in the late 1940s, my father-in-law Eric Gomer was there in the 1920s and his father Robert Gomer around the turn of the 19th/20th centuries.

I remember my first day. My mother thought something would come to tell her where and when I should start. However, nothing came and I was already five when she took me to the School to enquire. She was told that I should already be attending and she must leave me there that day!

The teacher sat me next to a little girl, Susan Cherry to be my friend, but I cried all that day and part of the next before realising that it wasn't too bad.

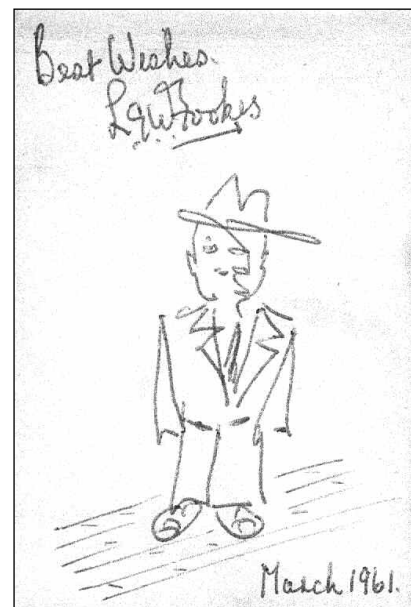
My first teacher was Miss Dove who I remember as being young, pretty and kind. My mother said she was well thought of and that the school was disappointed when she left to get married.

The Headmistress of the Infants was, I think, a Miss Kerman. All I remember is that she was pleasant, had grey hair and glasses. The other Infants teacher I recollect was Miss Blackwood. She had beefy arms and would say, warningly, "My hand is itching to slap

someone". Other than reading *Janet and John* I cannot remember what I learned but I must have made a start on mastering the 3Rs. I recollect the class sitting in a circle and each child being given a spoonful of something horrid.

My mother told me that every day she would give me a 'Penguin' for break time, but realised that I was leaving it in my coat in the cloakroom where someone was regularly pinching it from my pocket. It was a good walk from my home on Balkerne Hill to the school and I went home for dinner. The walk took me past the waterworks, allotments and cattle market. Care was needed crossing Sheepen Road and what is now Victoria Chase where lorries went in and out of a depot. Going over the bridge I would always look at the river as the water level varied from day to day. My route also took me past the Silk factory from where two Italian children called Fusi attended the school. Sometimes I stopped at the bakers in John Harper Street to buy a hot roll. I was allowed to walk unsupervised until a nasty boy (I still remember his name!) pushed me over and sat on top of me on the pavement near the cattle market. Fortunately a neighbour rescued me and my parents arranged for a relative at St Helena School to meet me each day at the river bridge and walk me home.

In due course I progressed to the Junior School where the Headmaster was Mr. Bezzant. My contact with him was minimal. He didn't teach any classes, his duties appearing to be mainly managerial and administrative. I have my school reports from the Juniors reminding me that my form teachers were successively Mrs. P.F. Pitt, Mr. Jonathon Large, R.M. Smith (who I don't remember), Miss K.F. Ellis and Mr. L.G.W. Fookes. Around March 1961 I acquired a small autograph book and have entries from the following teachers: Mr. A. Pike, R.I. Flood, R.M. Smith, Miss G.R. Bately, Miss H.M. Oehring, Miss K.F. Ellis and Mr. Fookes who kindly drew me a man wearing a suit, cleverly worked my Christian name into the hat and face.



*Mr Fookes signature and the drawing in Mrs Gomer's autograph book mentioned again in readers' letters on page 16.*

Regrettably, I recall very little about lessons in the juniors, but from my reports the subjects were reading, written English, arithmetic, nature study, geography, history, art, crafts, music, P.E. and games. In arithmetic we learned and recited tables up to 12. Sums were done on paper but there was also mental arithmetic. In crafts I recollect embroidery, (running stitch, lazy daisy stitch and French knots,) and making things from raffia. Singing and music lessons were from the BBC Radio Schools' programme on certain mornings. We listened as the songs were sung and then joined in. These were mostly traditional songs such as *Begone Dull Care, Wi' a Hundred Pipers, Greensleeves* etc. Some children had violin lessons in a separate room and I think their parents paid for these. We also had country dancing in the hall.

Rounders and stoolball were played in the playground. Stoolball having similarity to cricket. The equivalent of the wicket was a stand with a large white square at shoulder height. You held a small bat in front of the square, hit the ball and ran to the other end. If you missed and the ball hit the white square you were out. Failure to reach the other end in time also meant you were out.

In the final term the class walked to the nearby outdoor pool on Colne Bank Avenue for swimming lessons. It was a large class and I never did learn to swim. The only school

outing was in the final term when the class went to London Airport and I still have the postcard I purchased that day. On the way home we had a picnic in Epping Forest.

In the playground Police Sergeant White taught us road safety. He was well known around the schools and my husband remembers him going to Hamilton Road School in the 1940s. We were taught 'Look right. Look left and then right again' to check if it was safe to cross. A road would be marked out on the playground and a car would be driven around to help us put the lesson into practice. Sgt. White wrote in my autograph book, 'be careful – always, when using the road'.

Two skipping rhymes I remember from playtime were: *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Russia, Persia, Germany, and All in together girls, never mind the weather girls.* We played, *What's the time Mr Wolf, Poor Jenny lies a weeping*, as well as catch, tag and hide and seek. In the final year there was a hula hoop craze. The playground was also where a more knowledgeable girl explained the facts of life to a group of us.

On more mundane matters, the school had outside toilets near to the playground. We had visits from 'Nitty Norah' to check for head lice, fortunately I never had any. When I was nine a lady gave us eye tests in the hall. As a result I needed glasses and henceforth had to sit at a desk at the front of the class to see the blackboard.

There was no school uniform. Generally speaking, it was a happy school of well behaved children, but occasionally those who misbehaved would be spanked with a plimsoll. From my reports, class sizes varied from 30 to 41 pupils and with no teaching assistants it cannot have been easy for the teacher to keep order and ensure that every child achieved their potential. During my time whooping cough, mumps and measles in quick succession undermined my health and I was often absent. I remember the School Board man coming to our house to check and accepting that I was poorly. I was even ill on the day we took the Eleven Plus and so sat it later on my own in the staff room, a sort of turret room I had never been in before. I was one of the few to pass and in September 1961 I started at the Gilberd School.

Pupils' names from memory and my autograph book are; Shirley Jordan, Kathryn Jones, (lived in Mercers Way), June Cook, Gillian Carter and Russell Seddon (all went to the Gilberd). Julie Bridle, Laura Bradley, Gloria Reeve, Caroline Malseed (lived in Northgate Street), Linda Manning (worked in Percy Kings), Janice Watson, Diane Payne (lived in the pub demolished to build the North Station roundabout), Owen Fairweather, Laurence Stirk, Albert Rouse and Dave King (bus and coach driver).

*Joan Gomer*

# WHO DO YOU THINK THEY ARE?

The subject of our second article of this series in our previous issue featured Andrew Millar, our Chairman.

In this issue we feature another Committee member, but who is this mystery man?

His name will be revealed in the next Issue - Number 27.

*1. What is your earliest memory?*

Going on holiday to Torquay when I was two years old. I can recall that my parents got a man they knew to drive us down there and my particular memory of the time is being on a boat trip and having our picture taken, (I was two years and 11 months old).

*2. Do you have a special school memory/achievement?*

I wasn't too interested in academic subjects at the time, apart perhaps from geography and history. I was more interested in practical subjects and sport – especially swimming. My greatest achievements in this regard are probably when at the age of 10 or 11, I was chosen to represent the school in a county swimming gala and ended up winning the final, and later being awarded my Bronze Medallion for Life Saving when I was 14.

*3. What was your main job in Colchester?*

Well I suppose that I've had three main jobs over the years. Firstly, as a plumbing and heating engineer (mainly self



*Our mystery man. But who is he?*

employed). Secondly working for Anglian Water where I managed their Legionella Control Team, a branch of the company which offered advice and services aimed at reducing the risk of Legionnaires' disease. And lastly, and indeed currently, as a tutor and lecturer in adult education.

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

I am particularly interested in the classical period so anything Roman is high on my list of favourites. There is so much of course to choose from – the Roman theatre, Temple of Claudius, Roman Wall and, of course, the newly discovered Circus. But if I had to choose one it would have to be the Balkerne Gateway. Whenever I am in that area and I have a choice of either walking along the main roadway next to the Hole in the Wall pub, or actually walking through the old Roman gateway itself, the

gateway wins every time.

*5. What was the most unusual or famous event you were at?*

I think that I must have led a pretty sheltered life because nothing spectacular springs to mind. There have been lots of special moments, of course, holidays and the like – but nothing that I feel is out of the ordinary.

*6. How did you arrive at Colchester?*

I arrived at Colchester sometime during 1952 when I was two years old. This was when I was adopted from a children's home at Witham. I was actually born at Clacton where my natural mother (whom I traced in later life) and I lived in a small caravan on a holiday park. Apparently, I was the first baby born during Clacton Carnival week in 1949 and won a pram. However, my mother couldn't accept it as it wouldn't fit in to our home.

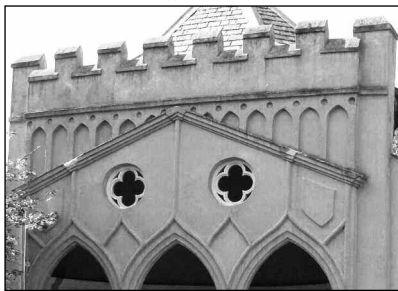


# WHERE ON EARTH ARE THESE?

Answers to 'Where On Earth Are These?' in Issue No. 25.



Picture 1 - Capitals on the main doorway of the west front of St Botolph's Priory.



Picture 2 - The Gothic style summer house (umbrella) in the Minories tea garden.



Picture 3 - Detail from 'Jumbo', the water tower.

For this issue, we feature three more photographs by Patrick Denney, featuring interesting architectural sights to be seen around the town.

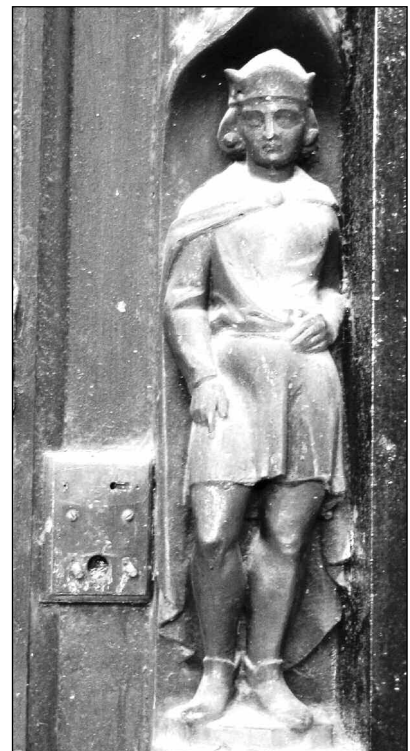
Do you know where they are? The answers will be featured in issue No. 27 to be published later in 2013.



New Picture 2



New Picture 1

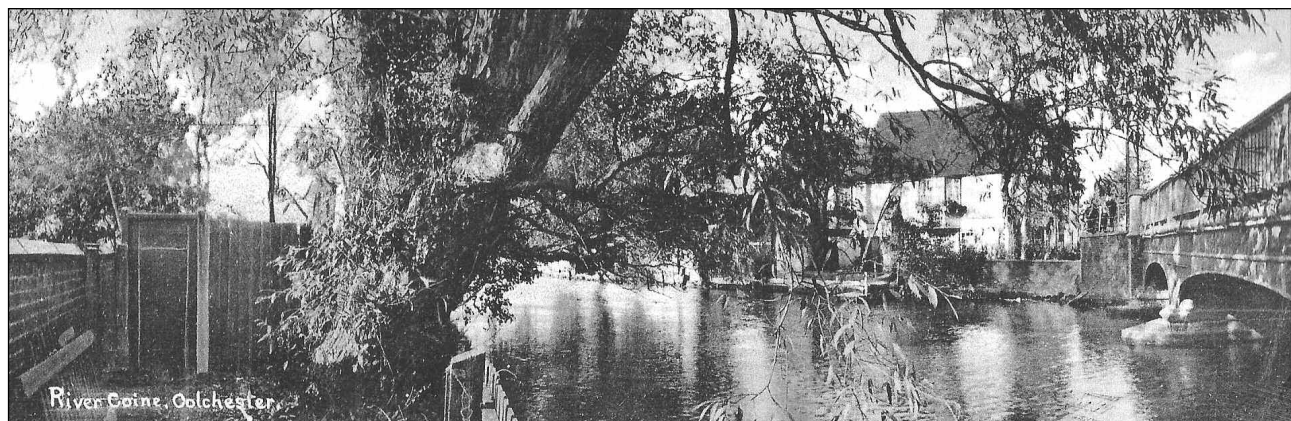


New Picture 3

Another of Ray Allan's excellent postcards. This one, of North Bridge, showing The Castle public house across the river on the right

band side. The bridge is virtually unaltered today from very nearly this position on a path on the south bank of the River Colne, although

the gate is no longer there on the left. The scene is about 250 yards from 8 North Station Road where the Buckle family lived (see page 1).



## HAVING YOUR SAY...

*The following is a selection of the letters received following the publication of Issue No. 24. Many thanks to those who have written.*

*Editor*

### From Graham Tuckwell

Many thanks for another great edition of Colchester Recalled (No 25). I always look forward to the next edition, having been a regular reader since No.1.

I have just read about the Buckle family who lived in North Station Road and were good friends of the Durand family. One of the Durand girls, Stella, became my next door neighbour many years later when I moved to Ipswich Road in 1971. Her husband was Jack Hamblion, who took over the Fish and Chip Shop from the Durands, and they had a son Rodney who now lives in Surrey. I still keep in touch with him and he told me he had read the article, *A Walk up North Station Road* which he enjoyed very much. Jack passed away a few months ago. He was 99 and I must say that Jack and Stella were the best neighbours I have ever had, and both my children loved them. Rodney's son John became great friends with my son.

John came to stay with Jack and Stella during his school holidays and I have wonderful memories of them playing together. A lot of people can remember Durands Fish and Chip Shop and can remember old Mr Durand sitting in the corner in his old chair. That old chair takes pride of place in my

lounge today. Jack gave it to me when I moved to Ipswich Road. I had a dog in those days and that chair became hers. God help anyone who was sitting in it when she came in!



*Mr Durand's old chair*

I lived next door to Jack and Stella for 14 years and due to ill health I had to move although only to the bottom of Ipswich Road in a bungalow. It took a long time to get used to our new neighbours, which I am pleased to say, are still our neighbours today, but Jack and Stella we will never forget. We always kept in touch, us going up Ipswich Road to see them or them coming down Ipswich Road to see us and at Christmas Stella would make me mince pies, they were the best ever, but in case my wife reads this she makes good mince pies too!

I was a Telegram Boy in 1955 and I attach an account of my exploits.

*I hope readers will enjoy the story on page 6. Editor*

### From Mrs Joan Gomer

As a pupil at the Gilbert School from 1961 to 1966, I enjoyed the article in the latest

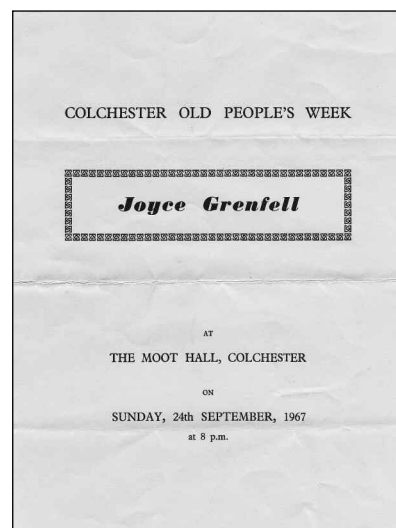
issue about the teachers of that period. Looking through back numbers of the magazine, I cannot see anything about my primary school, North Street, so I thought I would write some memories of my time there in the 1950s. You will see I mention a drawing by Mr Fookes and I include a copy, see page 12.

*As ex North Street pupil myself, I hope readers will enjoy your memories. Editor*

### From Peter Evans

Among my collection of old theatrical ephemera is the programme of an evening by the much loved Joyce Grenfell, held at the Moot Hall on Sunday 24th September 1967, as part of Colchester Old People's Week and yes, the 'George don't do that' sketch was included.

I wonder if any reader know of anybody who attended and what their recollections were. Joyce was a very popular entertainer in her day and featured in many radio and television programmes.



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was set up in 1988 to record for future  
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The Archive Group meets daily at the  
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Computer literate volunteers are needed  
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is £7 per person or £12 for a couple.

## OUR NEXT ISSUE

Please look out for issue No.27  
which will be published in Autumn 2013.

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



## OUR LECTURES

**Thursday 20th June**  
The Annual General Meeting followed by

**JIM LAWRENCE:**  
**MY EARLY DAYS IN BARGING.**  
The almost legendary Jim, who sailed  
the brown sailed barges. Do not miss  
this Very Special Evening.

**Thursday 19th September**  
**ANNE PARRY:**

**GEORGE EWART EVANS:**  
Suffolk writer and oral history pioneer.  
An illustrated talk about one of the founders of  
British oral history, back in the 1960s, when  
rural Suffolk was really rural. We hope to play  
some of his early recordings.

**Thursday 16th October**

**BRIDGET HANLEY:**  
**IPSWICH AND ITS 'CARIBBEAN EXPERIENCE':**  
This major oral history project set out  
to record the origins of Ipswich's substantial  
West Indian Community, from leaving home  
to settling in Ipswich. (Illustrated talk).

**Thursday 21st November**

**DR. XUN ZHOU:**  
**MAO'S CHINESE FAMINE:**  
Oral History is starting to uncover one of the  
great tragedies of the 20th century. During  
China's so-called 'Great Leap Forward' under  
Chairman Mao some 45 million Chinese died  
and Communist officials just let it happen.  
This is an item of world news and Dr Zhou, now  
of Essex University, is giving this talk following  
publication of her book. She was able to go to  
remote parts of China and actually film  
and interview some very elderly survivors who  
remember it all. Video extracts will be shown.  
Not to be missed. THIS MEETING WILL BE HELD AT  
LION WALK CHURCH.

**Thursday 12th December**  
**OUR USUAL CHRISTMAS PROGRAMME,**  
**WITH A QUIZ, VIDEO AND REFRESHMENTS.**

Except where stated, all in the Board Room, Colchester Institute,  
Sheepen Road at 7pm. Admission £1 per person per meeting  
including refreshments.

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