

COLCHESTER RECALLED

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Welcome to issue 27 of
COLCHESTER RECALLED.

We are very grateful to Mr Owen Hay for supplying the photographs for the article 'Scouting in the Fifties'. The photograph below is the 1st Colchester Monday Cub Pack with the 1st West Bergholt Pack, led by Jean Darvell, taken at around the flagpole at Thorrington Scout Camp site in 1953. Are you featured? If so, please get in touch.

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

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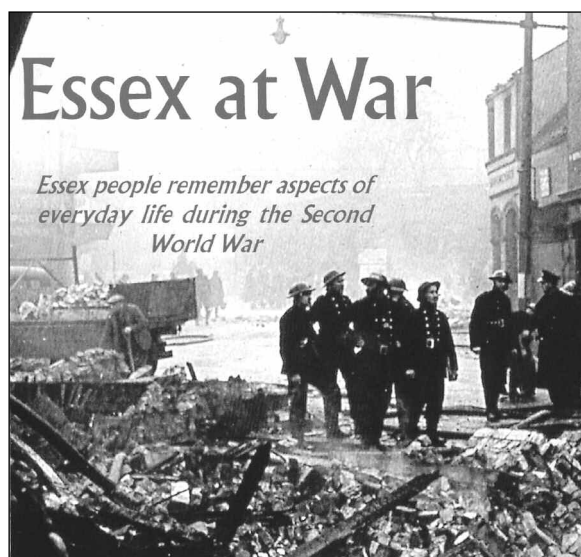
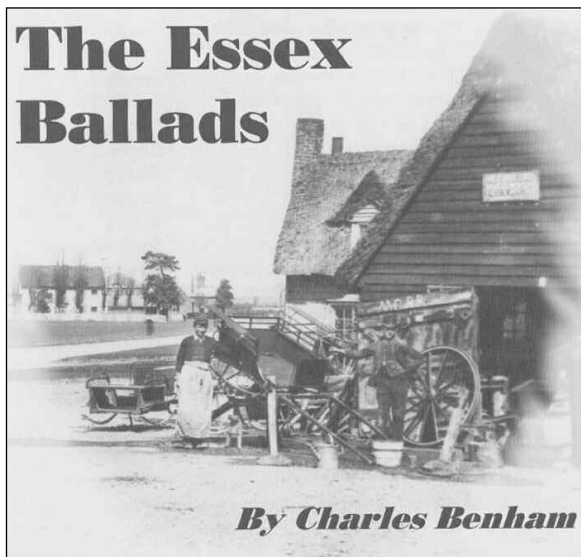
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from Patrick Denney

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The writer S.L. Bensusan settled in Langham in 1936 and recorded this conversation. Phrases in it exactly recall Charles Benham's *Essex Ballads* (see our CD for sale left) written in the 1890s.

A LOCAL: "You the gent what's bin 'an bought th' owd cottage up the hill?"

SLB: "Yes."

LOCAL: "What fower?"

SLB: "I like it."

LOCAL: "There aint no garden."

SLB: "I know. I am going to make one."

LOCAL: "You don't wanna trouble.

Nawthen on't grow thar, time you do."

SLB: "I am going to grow... flowers and fruit."

LOCAL: "You're gooin' waste y'r time an' y'r money. Telly f'r why. That land on't grow nawthen 'cept twitch an' culch. Never hasn't. Everybody round 'ere knows about it.

There ain't bin a garden thar yet, and thar ain't goin' to be one this time o' day, t'ain't likely. If a man don't belong, he can't onderstand a place".

When I was appointed house surgeon at the Essex County Hospital, twice

a week the orderly life of the hospital was disrupted by hordes of family members descending on the hospital's Visiting Day. If there was an R in the month, relatives from Mersea Island would bring oysters rather than flowers for their invalids, so in our final round with the Ward Sisters the House Physician and I would leave strict instructions that oysters would not be allowed to certain patients for fear they might disagree with them. Then we two young doctors would enjoy an oyster feast with brown bread and butter, a glass of stout and a squeeze of lemon.

Dr. Philip Gosse, 1948



SCOUTING IN THE FIFTIES

Scouting in the 50's was very different to nowadays, it was certainly a lot more regimented and with a greater degree of discipline – a good thing in my opinion, which would be beneficial today!

My scouting days started in 1952 at the age of 7, in the 1st Colchester Scout Group, run by H F (Fred) Hutton, and our 'Akela', Cub Pack Leader, was Ruby Hay our next door but one neighbour in Turner Road. The meetings were held in the Bunting Rooms in Culver Street. It was very popular with a considerable waiting list; each 'Six' had 7 members!

Full uniform was worn: cap, jersey, shorts, long socks with garter tabs, a neckerchief and woggle. You were very proud when you achieved your official woggle. Badges for various achievements were awarded and everybody strived to gain as many as possible?

During this time some summer camps were organised, this being the first opportunity for many youngsters to have time away from parents. Cocoa round the campfire while singing *Ging, Gang Gooley* was the highlight.

Iain & Owen Hay, Ruby's sons, were a little older than me, and also cubs at the time but then moved on to the 17th Colchester Sea Scouts, which was run by Hugh Markham. He ran a pawnbrokers shop in Priory Street before moving to



Some of the Cubs standing in the Bunting Room in front of the blackboard showing the Bob-a-Job results for the year 1955, with the Monday Pack well ahead.

High Street. He also ran the Scout Shop supplying cub and scout uniforms, badges and equipment.

There were three types of scouts in those days: Sea Scouts, dressed in navy with traditional navy caps and neckerchiefs, Land Scouts in khaki with 'clothes peg' hats and neckerchiefs and the Air Scouts more recently formed in the R.A.F. blue with beret and neckerchiefs. 'Pawny', who I believe was also the District Commissioner, was a portly gent and quite a vision in tight navy jersey and shorts! All the scouts wore shorts in the 50's. He always considered that his group was far superior to any other, well maybe, we shall see.

I decided to follow my elder brother Leon into the newly formed Air-Scouts. This group

was run by a very enthusiastic and tough little bachelor named Johnny Bishop, who believed in smartness and discipline with consideration and help for your peers.

Our uniform was R.A.F. blue shirts, navy shorts, socks with tabs, black shiny shoes and a lanyard to be blanco'd for every inspection, the neckerchief to



A few of the older boys showing off their badges in the garden of 206 Turner Road in 1956.



*The Pack with Assistant Cub Leader, Ivy Clarke, on St George's Day Parade 1956.
Taken in Culver Street car park with the Bunting Room in the background on the right hand side .*

be ironed. If your uniform was not up to standard you would be sent home! It never happened twice to a boy and it never happened to me!

Johnny worked tirelessly with the lads to prove that although we were a new group we were equal to or better than others. Having worked really hard we were delighted to be the first Air Scout group in the county to receive the newly created 'Royal Air Force Recognition Award'.

The R.A.F set a number of tests, such as being able to name aircraft types or recognise silhouettes etc; and many others. Having passed the tests we were awarded a special badge created by the R.A.F., including the roundel, which we wore on our shirts with pride. As a result we were invited to visit R.A.F. bases and

establishments to try parachute packing or to take a flight in a helicopter and be able to sit in a cockpit of a Meteor jet – the top fighter plane of its day. Of course, we saw nothing that was secret but it was all very exciting to a boy!

Again camps were part of scouting life, both summer and Christmas (patrol leader and seconds only at Christmas), many were held at the scout site at Thorrington. It was a large wooded area, which had a large hut with cooking and sleeping facilities used by the cubs, or in really bad weather, by the scouts, when it was not possible to be under canvas. There was also 'The chapel in the valley' built on a slope leading down to a brook; there were split logs to sit on and rustic wooden altar and cross. Sunday morning services were held here. My favourite pastime

was playing night games, including 'Steal the pirate's lantern'. A lantern was usually placed at the base of a large tree, and was played by two teams. The Pirates, or defenders, were not allowed inside a radius of about 10m from the tree. The attackers or Navy had to silently sneak past the pirates in the dark. Once they had crossed the line they had won the lantern but you had to get out again – not easy.

Games of various sorts were part of regular meetings in the Bunting Room. To keep our uniform smart, we changed into P.E. kit and then took part in games such as 'British Bulldog' (later banned by the movement on health and safety grounds because of increased numbers of casualties)! Then there was 'All aboard – All Ashore' which meant charging across the room to the appropriate side, with

other shouted instructions such as 'clear the decks', (getting off the floor onto anything: table, chairs, whatever), 'scrub the decks', 'boom's coming over', 'admirals coming' etc. The last man obeying the command was 'out'. In summer time, with better weather and longer daylight, the length of the meetings was extended so that we could play a variety of 'wide-games' either in the Castle Park or on the Hilly Fields. We always returned to the Bunting Rooms to change back into uniform for prayers and dismissal.

It was during this time that the World Scout Jamboree was held near Loughborough on a large parkland area at Stanford Hall, owned, I believe, by the Co-operative Society. (I am told it has just been bought for the new rehabilitation establishment for injured members of the Armed Forces). As a troop we attended, camping on a farmer's field behind the Nursing Home. Travelling from Essex to Leicestershire was by one of Well's furniture removal lorries – sitting on top of our kit, with the back doors open. We could not see where we were going, only where we had been! This was the first time that I saw Rutland where I was later to spend nearly 25 years of married life. On several evenings a few young nurses visited us, bringing a blanket to sit round the campfire. The older lads thought it was great and I think the nurses did too!

With scouts from all over the world attending, we all took a

supply of county badges to swop with other scouts, we then had a good supply to sew onto our campfire blankets, an essential piece of equipment in the evening while drinking cocoa round the fire.

Then there was 'bob-a-job' week – a major fundraiser for the scout movement, but no longer in operation in the interests of child safety, a very sad sign of the times. Cubs and scouts approached parents, relations, friends and neighbours for jobs such as shoe cleaning, chopping wood, sweeping the yard, doing the shopping or some gardening, for 'a bob' (5p). From personal experience most of those you asked, responded positively. We had 'Job Done' stickers for those who felt they had done their bit, to put in the window so no further calls were made.

Johnny was not exempt from bob-a-job and so it happened that one night, in his favourite pub, an argument arose with a local farmer who said that scouts were 'cissies' and could not do a proper job! Johnny, of course, furiously defended his scouts and so a challenge was set. The farmer marked out an area in one of his fields, I cannot remember the exact area but it was considerable. Johnny had to 'turn it over' with a



Some of the boys at East Mersea Youth Camp in 1956 where many cubs experienced their first taste of camping and life away from home.

spade within a week – needless to say he carried out the task and was paid the wage – approximately 1.5 weeks wages for the average man!

I enjoyed every minute in the scouts and in hindsight think that the discipline and camaraderie taught me a lot of respect for myself and for others, team work, leadership and smartness of dress. This was probably the second best thing after National Service and I am very grateful to the many ex-service personnel who gave up their time to help us. I have to say that the modern scout movement seems to be soft and relaxed and does not appear to make its members as 'prepared' as we were.

My wife, Valerie, was a girl guide, and later a brownie pack leader, my mother in law, Joan Sherry, who many will remember, was guide leader and then a District Commissioner for Guiding for many years.

Happy days for all of us!!

Alan R Taylor

THE BUCKLE FAMILY - LIFE BY NORTH BRIDGE

On Sunday afternoons Jack would sometimes take the children out for a walk. On their return plates of hot buttered toast were waiting, Get, kneeling by the fireplace with a toasting fork. It was about this time that news came from Ireland that Nan, Get's mother, was ill, and she had to make the journey to Ireland to see her. It was Angela's birthday while she was away, and Jack decided to make a birthday cake. He had shown no interest in, or talent for cooking and so no one was surprised when the cake turned out a solid, sticky, toffee-like substance, which was surprisingly quite delicious. Jack had no idea how he had made such an unusual cake, and hence there was little chance of the recipe being repeated.

who both attended Colchester Royal Grammar School, and the girls enjoyed the banter and rebuffs between Mary and the boys. Bill obviously misunderstood the finer points, and when he saw they had his sister Mary by the wrist and ankles and were pretending to throw her in the river, attacked them with a willow branch.

The river played an important part: the family had a boat and Jack had fixed up a diving board. Bill had several duckings, and on one occasion he fell backwards out of the boat in which he was with Eilleen and Angela. He had trouble getting himself back into the boat, which frightened the girls. At their screams, Jenny came tearing down to the river, by which time Bill had

Going up stream in the boat took them to a public bathing place, and it was as far as one could go. Downstream led under the North Station Road bridge, with the tow-path on the left bank, and Truslove's Engineering Works on the right, until they were stopped by the Middle Mill weir. There were a great number of swallows' nests under the bridge, and in the darkness you could watch them come and go, swooping overhead against the bright sunlit arch. The problem with swallow-watching was that if the local children saw a boatful of children going under the bridge, they would wait for them to reappear, and spit over the parapet. If there were a lot of 'spitters' the girls would hold the floor board of the boat over their heads, and Bill would propel the boat by standing on the seat and pulling on the girders, so that they would shoot out fast, dodging the shower of spit from above. A lot of time was spent in the boat! Bill, often armed with an air rifle, shot water rats (water voles, now a protected species!) with which he loved to chase his sisters, much to their disgust. At other times, armed with his father's inspirational Field Service Pocket Book, full of illustrations on how to make rafts from oil drums and tarpaulins roped together with planks, he got many a ducking.

At another time, when paddling stealthily up river, keeping in the high reeds close to the bank, his presence was



Mary, (shown here on the right with Jenny on the left and Eilleen in the centre) was also at an age when boyfriends were often involved with family games, enjoying swimming in the river or boating. The two most ardent suitors were Reggie Smith and Bill Cole,

managed to pull himself safely back into the boat. Whether it was after this incident or not, Jack decided that Bill had to learn to swim, and he was taught while being supported by a strap fixed to a pole, held by Jack or the girls as they walked along the riverbank.

detected by a soldier entertaining his girlfriend on the river bank. Clearly he didn't realise that Bill was a Canadian trapper in search of beaver, and, assuming him to be a peeping tom, pelted him with huge clods of earth until he was safely out of range. Mary's admirers, Reggie Smith and Bill Cole, were often down by the river jumping off the diving board. This was always somewhat scary as Bill couldn't swim, emerging from the water gasping and splashing for the bank. The Duck shed was used for changing, and on one particular day Angela and Betty Durand soaped the diving board. When Bill and Reggie ran from the Duck shed, there were legs and arms everywhere as they ended up in the river. Needless to say, before they reached the bank, the children were legging it back to the safety of the house. Reggie and Bill, undeterred by their duckings, built themselves a canoe and brought it down to the river to launch. Reggie was wearing plus fours, and when the canoe sank, which it inevitably did, it was a sight to be seen, as they walked up the garden path, water pouring out of Reggie's trousers over the tops of his stockings, and saying to Bill "If a thing's worth doing it's worth doing well".

The family record with pets was not exemplary. Apart from Lady and Sapper, the family dogs lived to a ripe old age, but some runt piglets acquired from a locally, didn't fare so well. Unfortunately they escaped from the shed and ran down

through the hay meadow to the reeds by the river. Jenny was in hot pursuit, running ankle deep in the mud and reeds, only giving up when the pigs found themselves in the river proper. Jenny later found them dead in the nearby Osborne's field, probably from fright and exposure. Angela and Eileen had pet goats, which everyone was very fond of. At night they were kept in the stables, two adjoining stalls with loose halters, and by day tethered out to graze. It was a terrible shock when one was discovered hanged. The poor creature had tried to jump into the neighbouring stall, but its halter wasn't long enough.

Adjacent to No.8 was the Victoria Inn. Eileen (2002) remembered that it had been run by Olly Chapman (Oliver?), who had two children: Philip and Irene. They used to look over the fence at the Buckles at play, who, feeling sorry for them, invited them over. Eileen felt awful when she remembered that in any new project, such as the launching of a new boat of raft, the Chapmans always seemed to be used as guinea pigs.

While the girls entertained themselves, Bill dug trenches in the garden large enough to crawl through, and with a long string and two round cigarette tins, he could communicate with his support troops in the form of Angela and Eileen in the elder bushes.

In the journal the *Colchester Archaeologist* issue No.15, 2002,

there was a report of discoveries made in the vicinity of the Victoria Inn. There was a photo of a Roman mosaic floor and the following text: "The three trenches at the rear showed that there had been a lot of disturbance in the past, caused by people digging large holes in the plot over the last few centuries." I like to think that at least some of these holes are evidence of Bill's childhood activities!

Jack had set up a firing range on the top lawn with the target in front of the rock garden, which he had built up specially. The only accident occurred when some of Mary's boy friends decided to impress with their skills, and tried to shoot an orange off the top of the see-saw. Unfortunately, they used shot, which strayed over the boundary into an adjoining field where a man was painting his caravan. How badly he was injured or what followed is unclear, but I doubt that this went down well with Jack.

At about this period Bill was into mixing quantities of two of three chemicals, folding the mixture into toilet paper, and exploding it by hitting it with a hammer. He also tried to get a mortar effect by letting a piece of metal rod slide down a tube to detonate the charge. Luckily for all, he was unsuccessful in this risky business and boredom soon set in. When Jack retired from the Army he no longer needed Phillip Chetwood's help in the garden, but soon realised that Phillip must have been a

superman to keep it in such good order. It was for more than gardening that Jack missed Phillip, having taken to rearing chickens in order to supplement the family income. Occasionally one of the older birds would be used for Sunday dinner. Jack had never killed a bird, a deed that had previously been done by Phillip. Although he had seen it done many times, Jack lacked the determination to do the deed by hand. After several unsuccessful attempts to wring its neck he resorted to an axe and block, but seeing the poor creature running round the garden with no head was enough to make it Jack's last attempt. The timber importer who had sold the house to Jack still had an interest in the plantation of cricket bat willows down by the river, and when the time came for the trees to be felled, a father and son team arrived to do the felling. Afterwards, Jack had the land levelled and then built a hard tennis court beyond the hay meadow, in the bottom corner. As the family was growing up and more members of the family played seriously, the family formed their own club 'The Rosarians', made up of the older members of the family and friends. Bill was constantly criticised for having to use his bike in order to get down to the hard court to either play or support the team in a match.

Old enough now to be at the Colchester Royal Grammar School, Bill rode his bike to school. This led to some quite

hair-raising moments when coming down North Hill, which was pretty steep. The high speed coupled with the necessity of keeping one's wheel from being caught in the tram lines was difficult enough, not to mention evasive manoeuvres necessitated by the sudden appearance of a flock of sheep or a herd of cows from the cattle market at the bottom of the hill.

Jenny had married Ernest Wright (1931), and had moved out from the family house, and it was not long before older boys featured among Mary's admirers, even the occasional Austin car with dickey-seat put in an appearance. Mary would come home in the evening after a dance and chat with her father, who had waited up for her, over a cup of cocoa and a biscuit or pickled onions and cheese. Sometimes Eileen and Angela would try to stay awake and waylay her on her way to bed to hear all the evening's news. Mary had left school by this time and had started a

little business making lampshades out of vellum and painting them with oils. They became quite popular, and she used her father's car to deliver them to customers who had placed orders.

The family often took trips out in the car to East Mersea, where they would spend the day and picnic. On the way home they often called into one of the local pubs - THE PELDON ROSE or THE MAYPOLE. Jack was not keen on driving, and was quite prepared to let Bill drive as soon as he was old enough. A close call with an Armstrong Siddeley on one of these trips, and his evasive manoeuvre, did not stop him from driving the family car, even though he had not as yet acquired his driving licence!

The family, on growing older and smaller in number, sold 8 North Station Road to the 'Anglo-Italian Silk Import Company Limited', and moved to a newly built property, 105 Straight Road Lexden, in



*Left to right: Eileen, Angela, Get and Bill on West Mersea beach.
Note the girls' formal attire!*

September 1932. The house nameplate 'The Rosary' went with them and it remained until Get's death in 1957 forced the sale of the house.

After the building ceased to belong to the above company, it stood idle for many years before it was finally demolished. This land now sports a number of 'desirable' properties. Definitely a place for those who could be best described as 'upwardly mobile'.

Years later, after Bill's death, a bill of sale for 8 North Station Road, with land amounting to 3 acres, came to light. It was dated 13th September 1932, and the sale price was £1325-0s-0d. The bill of purchase for 105 Straight Road listed a

repayment of £521-7s-8d on the sale and purchase, so the price of the new property was £803-12s-4d. The builder was Robert W Clarke.

After a protracted search on the internet, I was able to discover the correct spelling for the powder and perfume that

Bill Buckle had referred to as 'Pholhaura'. It should have been 'Phul-nana' and I include below, an early advertisement for these products.

Apparently they were very popular at the less-expensive end of the market.

Brian Wright



A POLICEMAN'S LOT...

Another early hours incident concerned 20 tons of spratts. Spratts used to be unloaded mostly at night from fishing boats that docked at the Hythe. They were put into bulk cargo trailers and taken to be made into pet food or fertilizer.

Now 20 tons of spratts is an awful lot of fish and one night one of these bulk carriers had a faulty back door which came open as the lorry was negotiating Spring Lane Roundabout.

The spratts were spread evenly at a depth of about two feet halfway around the roundabout. As it was in the early hours what traffic there was could be directed the

'wrong way' around the roundabout whilst an urgent plea to the council highways department to attend and remove the fish was made.

This was not a quick process in the middle of the night and by the time a clearing up of the road had begun the smell had spread over a wide area and it seemed that every cat not indoors in west Colchester turned up for a feed.

To see two or three cats together is unusual, to see fifteen to twenty quite remarkable. The road was made incredibly slippery by the fish and had to be thoroughly washed down.

David Austin

John Bensusan Butt recalls his mother, Dr Ruth Bensusan:

She had set up practice on her own rather than buy into a partnership and was critical of the surgical skills of the GP surgeons, one of whom boasted that he was brave enough to perform any operation, to which she replied that courage was not the only thing required.

A doctor's wife told her that it was improper for her to see male patients, to which she retorted, "Tell your husband to give up his female patients and I will give up my male patients."

Dr Casale

COLCHESTER REPERTORY THEATRE - The Final Act

When the Rep was first opened in 1937 a repertory circle was set up which later was renamed the Friends of the Repertory Theatre, which raised money and gave general support. It formed a vital link between the town and the company as well as being very loyal 'Monday Nighters'.

Probably the most loyal was the Bishop of Colchester, The Rev Dudley Narborough. After a wartime ministry in the blitz-proof crypt at St Martin's in the Fields, he arrived to tend the flock in Colchester and its environs. An immensely popular local figure throughout the 50s and 60s he augmented his duties by becoming governing chairman of both the Colchester Rep and the Royal Grammar School. He came to every first night and then again on Thursdays. The actors always knew he was in - he sat in the centre of the front row and laughed uproariously at every single joke.

In about 1958 an event occurred that split the Rep in two. Frank Woodfield, a very popular actor, who played all the older leading men and character parts, was summarily dismissed. The Theatre Club was outraged and demanded an explanation as to why he had gone. No answer was forthcoming and the club withdrew its support, ostracised Bob Digby and anyone else they could identify as having a hand in this unspeakable

outrage. My mother who was at that time an active member of the Club going on on all the day trips to other theatres and social occasions found herself ejected - "because you are one of them!" and received icy hostility from the Colchester Friends establishment. But neither Bob Digby, nor my father could reveal why he had to go.

The split with the Club grew deeper and there were all kinds of efforts to have the theatre closed. The playwright Stella Martin Curry was dispatched by George Young to tax Bob with his drinking the profits away. On hearing this all Bob's actorly instincts kicked in and he went into a full histrionic spate of crocodile tears, laughter, tragic despair and red-nose comedy, before making a notice "I am a lush" which he wore around his neck on and off for a week.

Perhaps the real reason should remain buried... after all it was a long time ago. But there was scandal and criminal activity involving many sections of society, including the church, the army as well as this actor. So he had to go. I learned this from my mother before she died, a secret she had carried for most of her life.

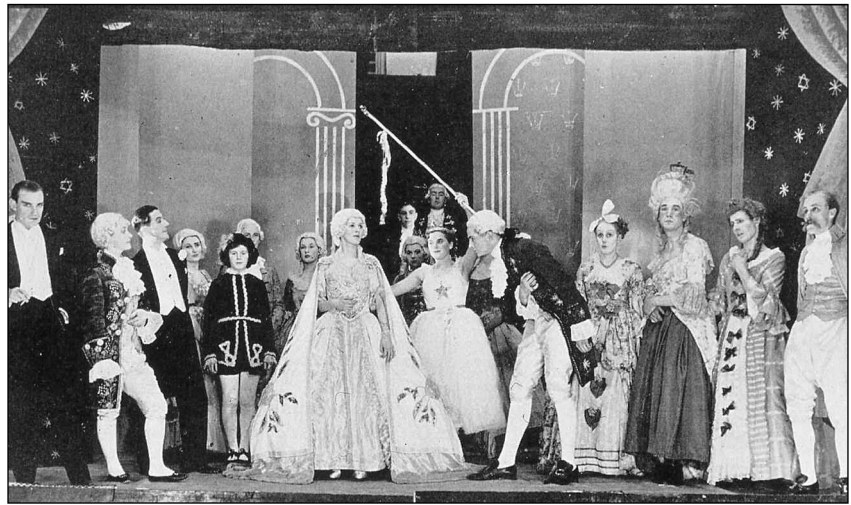
In 1958 on the occasion of the Rep's 21st Birthday, an interesting document was produced entitled "Make you a wholesome answer" - remember the quote from Beatrice

Radley... it doubled as the programme for its production of *Othello*. There were the usual curtain speeches. Not everyone was happy, however. Then, as now, art had its critics. A polemic piece in the *Essex County Standard* entitled 'Here's a Real Rep-snorter!' denounced the Rep for being second rate.

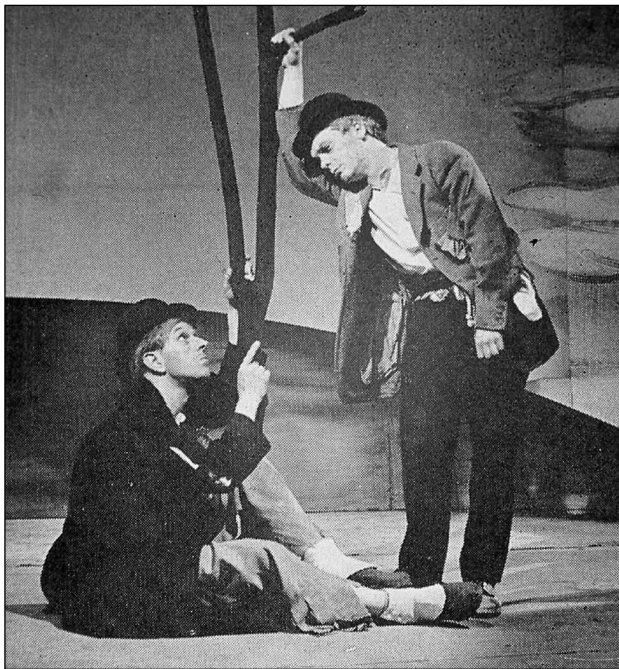
Kathy the usherette again... "I remember the 21st birthday celebrations. I made Bob Digby a celebration cake. I made it at home and brought it in and showed it to some of the other girls. Some were a bit put out, perhaps because they hadn't thought of doing something themselves. It was just my initiative, its my nature. I used to make a lot of cakes for all sorts of people. I had made this cake well beforehand, months, because it had to keep to be good. There was a lot of brandy in it... I gave it to Bob in the downstairs office and he was delighted, it was like I had given him thousands. The party was in the upstairs bar after the show".

As time went on and money became a little easier, the productions went fortnightly rather than weekly and two producer/directors could do alternate weeks. They could then do even more ambitious plays. Bernard Kelly alternated with James McInnes. I recall a superb production of *Under Milk Wood* which has burned itself into my memory, with an elaborate multi-layered set.

A young man joined the company and stayed for some time. His name was John Baron, but you might know him as Harold Pinter. Later he offered the Rep the chance to perform the premiere production of his own *Birthday Party*, created a furore in the audience and in the press. Later *Waiting for Godot* and *Look Back in Anger* had the same effect, with letters to the press. However, *Look Back* had a second week by popular demand.



1938: Old Fashioned Pantomime, 'Cinderella' with Beatrice Radley (centre) as Cinderella and a young Trevor Howard (far left) as Demon King



1957: Modern Drama reached the Rep: Left 'Waiting for Godot' with Arthur White and Edmund Bennett and Right 'Look Back in Anger' with Stuart Hutchinson and Maureen O'Reilly

When I left school I joined the company for a while as a temporary stage manager and lighting board operator. A young actor joined the company at that time, named Ken Campbell. He went on to be an actor and director who was adored by all who knew him, putting on such spectaculars as the *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*, the 27 hour long *Illuminates Trilogy* and the even

longer *TheWarp* plus the *Scottish Play in Pidgin English*. Even in those days he was, how can I put it... eccentric?

My father told me a thousand tales of theatrical ingenuity and derring do, such as the time he was playing an Irish rebel in some play or other and he was supposed to have been shot from offstage. At the moment the shot rang

out the Welsh dresser behind him fell over breaking every plate, "Oh my God, they are using live bullets" he cried, and fainted dead away.

Bob Digby graced the stage himself from time to time, most notably as Henry VIII in *Rose Without a Thorn*. However, he fell asleep on stage and was gently snoring. He awoke with a start and an oath about ten

lines too late, glared wildly around him and shouted "Whose round is it?"

I can remember setting a charge in a dustbin to create a cannon roar effect, which was less controlled than I might have hoped, for the lid of the dustbin shot up and embedded itself in the ceiling in a semi permanent manner. The sound effects were created by a panatrophe: a twin-turntable for the 78 rpm records which contained the sound effects. One of its most important functions was to play *God Save The Queen* each night. There was none of that unseemly scrambling for the exit at the theatre, because we cannily played it at the beginning and not the end of performances.

That reminds me of the Junior Rep section where young people could be admitted for a shilling for the Saturday matinee. Young people as ever were rebellious, and there is a story of a lad called Adam who was struck from behind with an umbrella when he refused to stand for *The Queen*.

Adverts were shown on a screen during the interval using slides supplied by an advertising agency. I was amused to read a couple of weeks later that the West End was pioneering a breakthrough scheme to play adverts in the interval. Well, Colchester was there first!

Between 1951 and 1958, the company decamped to perform a summer season in

Portstewart, near Colrairie in Northern Ireland. They performed repeats of the previous season in Colchester. None of the family looked forward to Dad going for six weeks, but we certainly looked forward to the return, he always bought lots of sticks of rock back for us kids.

The theatre continued but things got very expensive and the prospect of a new theatre seemed ever far away. Bob Digby's bottomless pockets found that they had holes in - and even the bar and catering operation was not producing enough to keep the theatre going, even with his patronage. Bob's health had got steadily worse; drink and strain took its toll, and he was admitted to a nursing home in 1963.

One day he insisted on coming into the theatre. The nursing home no doubt thought that it couldn't make him any worse than he was and so agreed. They dressed him in his evening clothes and took him to the theatre he loved, where he stood greeting audience members by name. That same night a light went out of the theatre. At his funeral, his friend and perhaps his greatest supporter the Bishop of Colchester, the Rev Dudley Narborough said "I am going to ask you to pray for his soul. But I want you to know there is no need to. He doesn't need your prayers. He is alright. But I want you to join me later to drink to his soul over the bar".

The actors led by Bernard Kelly tried to keep the theatre going by sheer will power. They failed of course: there was no money to pay actors or even buy light bulbs. When David Forder, the new Director arrived from the Belgrade Coventry, supported by some generous Arts Council help, he was appalled by the state of the building and the lack of everything from toilet rolls to light bulbs. The old guard had to go of course, like all new brooms, they needed to make changes.

The theatre took a turn for the better under David Forder's tutelage and the Artistic Directorship of David Buxton, the theatre thrived again and eventually moved into the much promised new theatre, changing its name, but not its ethos, to the Mercury Theatre.

The old Rep building still stands in the High Street as the Co-op Bank. It still has its ghosts. Perhaps not literally, but I still hear the sound of those old audiences clapping and chinking of that essential cup out tea served by Molly and Eileen and Fred Bird. I still hear the roar of laughter of the Bishop and the echoes of *Hamlet* and Professor Higgins, old Falstaff and *Charley's Aunt*. I still see the wonderful pantomimes and hear the music in my head. And most of all I can hear and see the figures of Bob Digby and his theatre manager Mary Rawlings as they greeted each and every member of the audience.

Dorian Kelly

WHO DO YOU THINK THEY ARE?

The subject of our third article in this series featured Patrick Denney, our Hon Secretary.

In this issue we feature another Committee member, but who is it? The name will be revealed in the next issue.

Earliest Memory

Holidaying with my parents at Scarborough at the age of 2, I remember riding on a donkey called Pansy.

School Memory

The headmaster let me go to Myland School aged 4 so I was in the top class for 2 years. I became the Headmaster's prefect ringing the bell in the corridor at the end of sessions. On Friday I went to the Post Office to collect the National Savings Stamps. Imagine a young child doing that now!

First Job

An avid reader, I always wanted to be a librarian and joined the staff of Colchester's old library in West Stockwell Street. I later became Children's Librarian, responsible for the libraries at 27 schools, giving talks on children's literature.

Famous Event 1

I must have been 6 when we



Our mystery Committee member - but who is she?

were taken to Colchester Castle and lined up at the side to see Queen Mary when she visited the town.

Famous Event 2

Aged 10, I spent 3 weeks holiday with my aunt and on Sunday Sept 3rd 1939 she took me by train to Waterloo to meet up with my father to go to London Zoo. Waiting for father a siren started. My aunt said, 'I think we should go back'. We joined a long queue at the ticket office for about

half an hour when my father appeared. He'd not been allowed on the station because only evacuees were. He had grabbed a paper and joined a group of evacuees and got onto the station. No zoo that day, but a long crowded journey in the goods van to Colchester where my mother was very glad to see us.

Favourite Part of Colchester

The Castle and Castle Park, right down to the river valley.

HAVING YOUR SAY...

From Graham Tuckwell

Many thanks for another great edition of *Colchester Recalled* No 26. I like the way my story included pictures of the places I mentioned. Sadly

many have since disappeared.

I will be sending 4 copies to family who live in Australia, they are spread out a bit so they will be well read down under, in Queensland, Brisbane and

Adelaide.

Jack Hamblion's bungalow has been sold and pulled down to make way for a house, I feel a bit sad about that as I spent

continued overleaf

many happy hours in there.

I now look forward to issue No. 27.

From Michelle Scowen

I started life off at 37 Military Road. It was converted - my grandparents living downstairs, and my parents and I upstairs. My Grandad owned the cycle shop, G J Langley, and at the time Roy Wheeler worked in the shop with him, and eventually he took over the shop, so it became Wheelers.

My grandmother ran a dress shop on Scheregate Steps and I remember the little grocery store at the bottom owned by Mr Cheek.

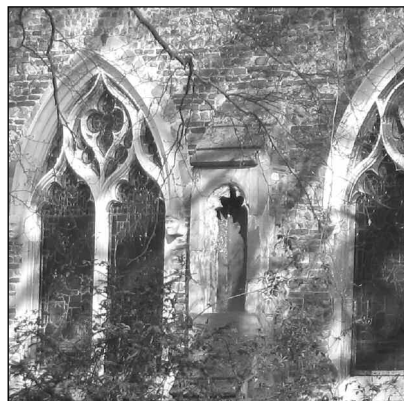
My first induction into school was at St John's Green... horrible memories... all grey and stone floors! Thankfully, when I was 6 in 1966, the family moved to the then 'new' St John's Estate and I went to the lovely modern, bright Friar's Grove, of course, feeding into Charlie Lucas.

I have many childhood memories of Colchester which we left when I was 12 for sunny Woodbridge in Suffolk, but later in life, my first husband and I moved back to Colchester in the early 80s to Highwoods - just a stone's throw from the ROVER'S TYE public house.

It would be good to hear from anyone who has something in common with me. My address is 3 Capel Close, Trimley St Martin, Felixstowe IP11 0UP.

WHERE ON EARTH ARE THESE?

We feature four more photographs by Patrick Denney, of interesting architectural sights to be seen around the town. Where are they? The answers are featured on the inside back cover.



New Picture 1



New Picture 3



New Picture 2



New Picture 4

Answers to No. 26 -

Picture 1 right: Carved figure of an angel on Sparling, Benham and Brough in West Stockwell Street.



Picture 2 above: Arch above side entrance to Town Hall



Picture 3 left: Carved wooden figure beside entrance way to the Red Lion Hotel

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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.
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.

You are most welcome to join us.
The Annual Subscription
is £7 per person or £12 for a couple.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

Please look out for issue No.28
which will be published later in 2014.

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

Answers to 'Where On Earth Are These?' on page 12.

1. South wall of All Saints Church, High Street
2. Statue of Samuel Harsnett on front of the Town Hall
3. Royal Coat of Arms on top of the Town Hall
4. Marquis of Granby public house sign, on North Hill

OUR LECTURES TO JUNE 2014

Thursday 16th January 2014

PETER JONES:

The Rise and Fall of Colchester's trams

Peter is an expert on our trams and will show
many original photos.

Thursday 13th February

PAUL RUSIECKI:

Colchester and Essex People & The First World War.

Paul is author of a major book on this topic,
as we approach the centenary of its outbreak.

Thursday 13th March

An Evening With Crissy Lee

One of the area's most exciting residents, Crissy is
a female drummer who worked with the Beatles
and has had a long, colourful and successful career
in the music industry. She will be interviewed by
'Michael Parkinson' a.k.a. Neil Darcy Jones,
Arts Editor of the *Colchester Gazette*.
DO NOT MISS THIS.

Thursday 17th April

MARCIA WHITING:

Sir Alfred Munnings: His Life & House.

One of the area's most exciting past residents
told as never before by the Alfred Munnings'
Museum guide. A fascinating story,
sumptuously illustrated.

Thursday 15th May

Members' Evening.

Another trio of our members tell
a 20 minute tale of their life and times.

Thursday 12th June

A.G.M. and The Boxted Aerodrome Story.

Used by the US air force in World War II,
its impact on the local area is told
by the Museum's chairman, Richard Turner.
We'll play tapes we made of some of the 'Yanks'
attending their final reunion in 1992.

All in the Board Room,
Colchester Institute, Sheepen Road at 7pm.
Admission £1 including refreshments.

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