

COLCHESTER RECALLED

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HIGH STREET IN 1910 WAS CROWDED ON MARKET DAYS

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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.

Meetings are normally held each month, but have been curtailed due to the Corona Virus. Admission is £2 per member, £3 for non-members, including refreshments.

The Annual Subscription is £7 per member or £12 for a couple residing at the same address.



Wanted:

Volunteers to make summaries of our recordings.

If you are interested please contact Andrew Phillips on 01206 546775.

WELCOME TO ISSUE 34

This issue majors on the retail life of Colchester in former years. Not surprisingly there has been many changes and, no doubt, due to the Corona Virus there will be many more.

For the older generation, some happy memories of shopping in those years will be evoked by the photographs and articles accompanying them, while younger readers may be fascinated to learn of the changes that have taken place, as witnessed by their parents.

We also feature a story of Second World War exploits, it being 75 years since peace was established and 80 years since The Battle of Britain. Again, many memories of loved ones may be recalled.

Recently the Virus has influenced many peoples' lives and it may be some time before normality returns, assuming that it will. In the meantime, it is hoped that all readers will abide by the Governmental instructions and you all will stay safe.

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OUR NEXT ISSUE

No.35 is due for publication in Autumn 2021.

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OUR PROGRAMME

From September 2020 to June 2021, has been curtailed due to the Corona Virus. Details will be published when further information is available.

Most early numbers of this magazine are available at reduced prices. **We are offering numbers 7, 8, and 9 for £1 plus £1.50 postage.** They are all written by local people recalling long ago, complete with photos.

All from Peter Constable email: design.constables@btinternet.com

Magazine 7 was a 'Childhood Special' covering Life in Rural Essex, Starting a Job in a Clothing Factory, Going to the Essex County Hospital, Living Over a Butcher who slaughtered Cows, Pigs and Sheep, The Open Air Swimming Pool, The Boys High School and Childhood Games.

Magazine 8 covers Working at the Hythe in the 1940s, Joining the Yeomanry Before the War, Langenhoe School, Building Abberton Reservoir and Victorian Politics in Colchester.

Magazine 9 has More on the Hythe, Working at Masons in the War, the Oyster Feast, Essex Fire Brigade, Freddy the Shrimp Man and Life as a Bus Conductress.

A Minor Incident in 1942?

As far as the national newspapers were concerned, it merited only a few lines on the second page. There were other, more momentous happenings to be reported on September 28th 1942, but it marked a tragic day and the beginning of the decline of our community.

It was a dreary and overcast day, with a hint of rain in the air. I was sixteen years old and employed at a local factory, training to be an engineer.

We had started work that day at some ungodly hour and the construction of diesel engines was in full swing, until, just before eleven o'clock, the factory alarm sounded. Not an unusual occurrence, it happened a few times every week. We downed tools and filed into the shelters at the side of the building. Before everyone was under cover, there was the sound of distant explosions and the factory shook. It made us move on.

After a while the 'all clear' sounded and we returned to our benches.

Some time later the foreman, Bonn Hamlyn, came to see me. "You had better get home young Mick," he said. "Those bombs fell in the Chapel Street area and we are sending everyone from that area home."

There were a number of people moving out through the factory gates and heading for the town. I outpaced most of them on my bike and fifteen minutes or so later I reached the folly that ran between the garden at the back of our houses and the barrack wall. It was covered with debris. This threw me into a bit of a panic.



The scene of the destruction the following day caused by the bombs which fell on Chapel Street and West Street

I couldn't see our house, although it was still standing. The rescue services and many other people were digging in the ruins.

It was then that I saw my father. Pop stood amongst the wreckage. Pipe protruding from his jaw, trilby hat clamped firmly on his head. Calm in the chaos. As always, he was completely unflappable.

He saw me. "It's all right son," he said. "We're all safe. Grandma's a bit shaken up. She's been taken to Aunt Daisy's, but she'll be all right. Your Mum and I are about to start clearing up."

Clearing up! Large numbers of slates were off the roof, all the doors and windows had been blown in and most of the ceilings were down.

My mother, fortunately, had been shopping. The sirens had not sounded in the town, so there had been no time to take to the shelters. How my grandmother come through

unscathed was a bit of a mystery, but I found out later that she had probably been in the lavatory.

The bombs had been dropped by a lone Dornier, which had dipped out of low cloud and released a stick of four H.E.'s. The first had hit the home of Mr and Mrs Aldous, three doors away from us. The others had fallen in a line across Chapel Street, Wellington Street and Essex Street. The damage in that concentration of housing was great, and yet only eight people were killed, although over fifty more were injured, most of them seriously. The reason that casualties were light was that most adults were at work and the children were at school.

In the house next to us lived the two Miss Burfield's, elderly spinsters, the proprietors of a newsagents shop in town. They were out running their business. Then there were the McNeil's, Mrs Mac, daughter Jean and

Mrs Mac's sister. Only Mrs Mac's sister was in the house. Next to the McNeil's was the Aldous household. Mrs Aldous was the only one in the house and she was the only one to be killed in our street.

Shortly after I got home, my two cousins Rosemary and Joy, came stumbling over the rubble. They had run all the way from their school at the other end of the town and they were in tears. They thought that we were all dead.

I went out to help with the digging although there was little that I could do, apart from moving masonry away as it was dug out. It took some time to find Mrs Aldous. We were digging for her and Mrs Mac's sister for an hour or so.

Unbeknown to anyone Mrs Mac's sister had dug herself out and had wandered off somewhere. As the digging progressed every so often there were calls for silence and you could hear the proverbial pin drop. The only sounds to be heard, were distant voices, the grit and dust falling off the remains of the buildings and the water bubbling on the tea stall set up by the W.V.S. As in all tragedies there are always some lighter moments. A ticking noise was heard and everyone decided to leave the scene rapidly. Further investigation revealed a large clock still keeping time accurately.

The Aldous's daughter, Kathleen, who was called 'Sissy' was about 20 years old and while the digging was in progress, stood sobbing on the shoulder of her ginger-haired boyfriend, on the corner opposite her house.

Eventually what remained of Mrs Aldous was found and bought out. A pathetically small bundle, wrapped in a white sheet. Mrs Aldous had always been very kind to me. She was a cheerful soul in spite of being crippled with arthritis. Bert Aldous, a postman, kept racing pigeons and I had spent many hours in his garden and pigeon loft. One thing that struck me as being strange at the time, was that although the house was destroyed, Bert's pigeon loft was still standing.

My parents decided that there was not much that could be done in our house, so we borrowed a large flat-topped barrow from Cyril Gooderham, a local builder, and loaded up all our immediate needs. I remember that it was a problem finding bedding that had not been torn to shreds.

We were just about ready to depart for my grandparents' house in Butt Road, when we remembered Bob, our dog. Where he could be was anybody's guess. He was a free spirit, who roamed and scrounged all day. I had come across him once laying on the floor in the middle of Woolworths'. He came up to me wagging his tail. "Is that your dog?" demanded an irate manager. I denied all knowledge of him and beat a hasty retreat. Pop eventually found him crouched up against the barrack wall, covered in rubbish. He was unhurt, but was never the same again and he died within a few months.

After the barrow was unloaded at my grandparents' I returned it to Cyril Gooderham and in the fading light, went round to see how my friends

had fared. Vic Keeble, who lived three or four doors away from us, was helping his parents to board up their windows. In Chapel Street, Barnes Dairy had been obliterated, Mrs Barnes had been killed. Nearby a former school friend, John Radford, had lost his mother. In Essex Street, my close friend Ted 'Milky' Maidens had lost his home. It had been completely destroyed and his sister had been killed, but her young baby had been found alive. Back in South Street, Joe Girling, landlord of the *New Inn*, had been blown into his cellar, but had also survived.

A few days later Colchester had a repeat performance. A Dornier, perhaps the same one but this time with a Spitfire on its tail, jettisoned six bombs on to some coal yards not far from Aunt Daisy's. This time the sirens had sounded before the raid and my Grandmother had time to get under the table shelter. Badly shaken up it was all too much for this very gentle old lady, who deteriorated rapidly and was dead within a year.

We returned to our house a fortnight later. The roof had been patched up as had the ceilings inside, where squares of gyproc had been nailed to the ceiling joists to replace the plaster. Perspex sheeting, almost opaque, was stretched over the windows and we spent a freezing winter with these constantly rattling screens.

Eventually, most of the rubble from the adjoining houses was cleared away, and as we had a passageway on the side away from the bomb damage, we were now a detached residence, although



The damaged houses of South Street several days after the bombing

not very desirable.

Within a year I had joined the Royal Navy. 'Milky' Maidens went into the Rifle Brigade, where although it never made up for his sister's death, he had the satisfaction of being amongst the first allied troops to enter Germany. The *New Inn* was not repaired until after the war. The landlord, Joe Girling took a pub in Ipswich, which a few months later was blown up in another raid. He then became landlord of another hostelry, *The Queens*, situated in the countryside near Colchester. Much safer away from the town, or so he thought, this was to be damaged by a doodlebug,

towards the end of the war.

Bert Aldous remarried some time later, to Mrs McNeil's sister. They moved into a house nearby. 'Sissy' Aldous split up with her ginger-haired boy friend and married a Canadian soldier. Vic Keeble became a professional footballer gaining a cup winner's medal at Wembley whilst playing for Newcastle United.

Some thirty five years after the raid, I was attending a Naval Reunion in a small hotel in Blackpool. I thought that the lady behind the bar looked familiar and she thought that she knew me. It was Jean McNeil. The one time glamour girl of our street, whom all the

males fancied, was now plump, full of *joie de vivre* and still single. She told me that after their house was destroyed, they rescued a few clothes and personal possessions and having nowhere to go, the authorities gave her and her mother railway warrants for the journey to Blackpool, where her father had relatives. On arrival in the north, her father's relations refused to take them in and they had to fend for themselves. Unfortunately I never saw Mrs Mac, she had died the previous year.

What the Luftwaffe started the planners finished off. Essex Street is no more, it is now part of the ring road. The *Carpenters*

Arms would have been in the fast lane. Where Barnes Dairy stood there is a large office block constructed for the Social Services. The Headgate Chapel is now the Headgate Theatre. The whole area is one huge car park. All the corner shops have gone, only St John's Green School and a renovated *New Inn* remain.

When the fiftieth anniversary of the raid was approaching in 1992, 'Milky' Maidens and I decided that it would be appropriate to mark the occasion by having a small ceremony of remembrance, so I wrote to the local press, asking them to put a few lines in the paper, but they never answered my letter. In the end we had to

let the moment pass.

I still have strong memories of that day. That unique smell of brick dust mixed with explosives. 'Sissy' Aldous sobbing. The moments when silence was called for and, most of all, my father, absolutely calm and collected with desolation all around him....

Mick Wright

Buying and Furnishing the House in 1933

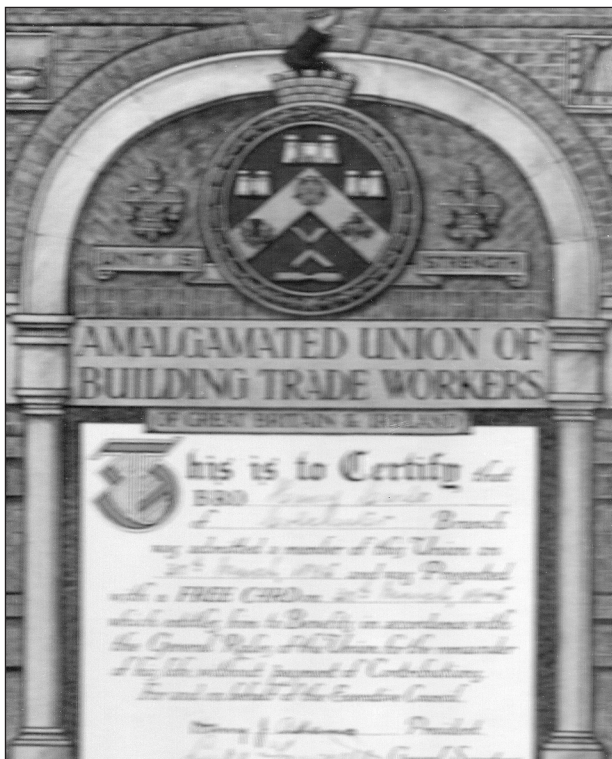
When I recently sorted out a box of documents in my loft, I discovered some interesting receipts and thought that readers might be interested to compare some of the prices with those of today.

My grandfather was a Master Builder (see certificate below) and advised my parents to purchase 70 Morant Road, back in 1933 at a cost of £400. But that was not all...

Copies of the receipts show that in those days quite a lot of furnishing could be done for less than £100.

How times - and charges - change with the passage of time!

Harry Carlo



6 WEST STOCKWELL STREET,
Colchester, July 21st 1933.
Miss C. J. Hurrell.

Bought of C. G. PORTER,
House Furnisher.

1933		£	s	d
July	4 ft. Walnut Bedroom Suite Lg-17-6 + 5/- Split Pole	18	2	0
	4 ft 6" Walnut Bedstead	4	17	6
	4 ft 6" Spring Mattress	1	8	0
	" Hair & Wool Mattress	2	8	0
	Canvas Cover 3/9 Jane Cover 5/3			
	4 ft Oak Sideboard	4	15	-
	Oak Dining Table	3	17	6
	4 Dining Chairs 17/-	3	8	-
	Chair in Hide (Tall Back)	2	-	-
	Easy Chair in Leather	3	18	6
	3 Piece Suite in Tapestry	11	10	-
	Oval Frameless Mirror	1	3	6
	Arms Wringer £4-4-0	3	15	0
	Screen 1/6. Vases 3/6. 1/- 1/- Basin 2/6	11	6	
	6 1/2 yds. Straw Carpet 3/11	1	4	10
	12. Straw Pads		3	-
	12. Pads & Eyes 52/-		5	6
	2 1/2 ft. Curtain Runner 10/-		17	11
	6 doz. Curtain Hooks 2 1/2 doz.		1	3
	9 yds. Heading Tape 1 1/2		1	1 1/2
	Slip Mat		1	9
	Carried Forward	64	18	10 1/2

6 WEST STOCKWELL STREET,
Colchester, July 21st 1933.
Miss C. J. Hurrell.

Bought of C. G. PORTER,
House Furnisher.

1933		£	s	d
	Brought Forward	64	18	10 1/2
	15 1/2 yds. Brown Lin	1	6	6 1/2
	15 yds. Lin (Dining Room) 2/11 1/2	2	5	4
	14 1/4 yds. Printed Lin (Bedroom) 1/5 1/2	1	0	9
	2 1/2 doz. yds. Blue Jute Lin 2/3	5	7	-
	13 1/4 yds. Casement Cloth 1/7	1	1	0
	8 1/2 " Curtains 1/11		16	3
	Biscuit Net 3 yds. 2 yds. Ditto 1/5 1/2		7	3
	Door mat		3	6
		72	5	2
	Brown Border. Door Mat		8	3
		£	72	13 5

Shopping in Colchester with Mother and Grandma

Until just after I started school in Coronation year, my parents, my baby brother and I lived with my maternal grandparents out on the Halstead Road beyond the borough boundary. Being beyond the boundary was important as the corporation buses turned round in King Coel Road and it was a long walk home.

In the early days, Mother and I would walk into Colchester to shop, with my brother tucked warmly into the pram in winter or struggling to escape the cover in summer. The walk was a long one if you had three year old legs, but it was expected that I would walk there with sometimes a ride on the pram on the return journey. There were landmarks to keep me amused, the field full of rabbits near the end of Halstead Road, Hill House in Lexden, opposite the church, where a parrot was visible through the window.

As we approached the town, the road became busier with an occasional ambulance with bell ringing taking someone to the Essex County Hospital. Finally we were in Crouch Street and Mother would take out her shopping list and consult it.

Sometimes we would go into one of the butcher's, Wright's, or Leeds for lamb. Across the road was Percy King's which had haberdashery. In those days clothes were made at home, usually from larger items cut down and re-fashioned, so Mother would buy thread, needles or other items. She seldom bought buttons as

Grandma had a huge bag of buttons which would be searched for something suitable. One of the joys of a wet day was being given the button bag to either search for a particular button, (something for Father's shirt) or, perhaps an attempt to keep me quiet, sorting the buttons by colour or size.

Percy King's had a tube to send the money flying overhead across the shop to the cashier and the change and receipt would wing its way back, sometimes with a tiny pack of pins if there were no farthings in change to be had.

Our next port of call was often Baker and Fairhead's, the chemist on Head Street opposite the General Post Office. There baby brother would sometimes be weighed on scales with a large basket. Once this was done Mother might buy Johnson's baby powder and cotton wool, or my favourite Pear's soap.

Forsdike's in Head Street sold groceries of which would be called 'high class'. Small amounts of fragrant ground coffee would be purchased from here, although we would sometimes go to Gunton's in Crouch Street.

We sometimes called at Boots the Chemist on the corner of High Street and Head Street where my Godmother worked. The High Street was busy, with Cullingford's which sold office stationery, Ratcliffe's where they sold guns and fishing rods and Williams where there were tractors and fuel pumps. Then further down High Street were Hearsom's the fish shop beside the Hippodrome cinema, across the road to Sainsbury's which had long counters and tiled walls and on to Woolworth's, where there were all kinds of exciting things. At Sainsbury's Mother would buy something different at each counter, cheese, sugar (still rationed),



*Shopping on a busy day in High Street in the late 1950s.
Note the Cups Hotel on the right hand side*

and butter. In the early days there was not a lot of choice available. We might then go down to the Arcade to Queen Street and St Botolph's Street where we would call on Ham Vince, the butcher, who had been at school with Grandma. I always thought he was called Ham because he sold meat, it took a long time to realise that he had a good Biblical name.

We might go to The Scotch Bakery just across the road where the rolls were soft and fresh; I think they were supposed to be dry the next

day, but I can never remember them lasting that long!

Sometimes we would go to Last's at the top of Scheregate Steps for bread, the ordinary loaves that were used every day, and outside we often stopped to buy shrimps from Freddie, whose small size and cheery greeting brightened my day. The brown paper bag of shrimps, sold by the pint in a silver-coloured measure, would be stowed in the end of the pram and we would finally begin the trudge home, wearily looking at the landmarks on the

way back.

At the junction of Halstead Road and Lexden Road was a fish and chip shop, which sometime in those years burnt down and which formed a rather sinister sight for some time. Further up Halstead Road was the nearly hidden path on the right which led over the railway line to the signal box, where my father's old army friend presided. But that was later on Saturdays and Sundays.

Once home safely with the shopping there was unpacking to do and food and other items to be put away, usually while Mother, Grandmother and Grandfather drank milky coffee. The coffee was called Camp and came in a bottle.

When my brother outgrew the pram, probably when he was about two years old, the routine changed. Mother, Grandmother and I, and sometimes baby brother, would walk across the road and catch the bus into Colchester. This was usually the National, but depending on the time of day, it would be the red Blackwell's bus. I remember being fascinated by the conductor, a large man with an even larger nose. Grandmother sometimes had to remind me it was rude to stare!

The route into Colchester was the same as we followed with the pram but we usually got off the bus in High Street. We went into both Lipton's and Sainsbury's where cheese was cut from large blocks, butter was patted into neat shapes sugar was transferred into stiff blue bags. Sometimes salt would be bought in blocks; later on when we got home, I would have to break up the salt with a



*The Arcade was Mother's short cut to Queen Street.
Today it has become Priory Walk*

rolling pin and put it into a large 'crock' in the pantry where handfuls would be used for cooking.

Various groceries were purchased; something called Edwards Soup Powders which were used in gravy and stews, an early form of instant coffee called Rickory, which was coffee with chicory and came in a small tin with green writing on it and a picture of a singing bird. Birds Custard Powder was a staple; Grandfather liked

custard on his apple pie on Sundays.

Shopping was stowed in a large shopping bag, along with the bread, fish and shrimps and various cuts of meat.

There were occasional visits to other shops; Father or Grandfather would go to Kent Blaxill for tools or fixings, although a lot of items were cleaned, straightened and re-used. Sometimes Mother would go into Bloomfield's in St John's Street by the Playhouse

cinema, for a baking tin or tray.

In Head Street there was Luckin Smith's where china and glass and other household items were sold; not that there was a great deal to buy in the early 1950s.

Other shops that I remember were Neal and Robarts in High Street which sold beautiful cakes, Mann's the music shop also in High Street, where years later my recorder for school was purchased and Jeffery's the Jeweller who supplied my first wrist watch when I was seven.

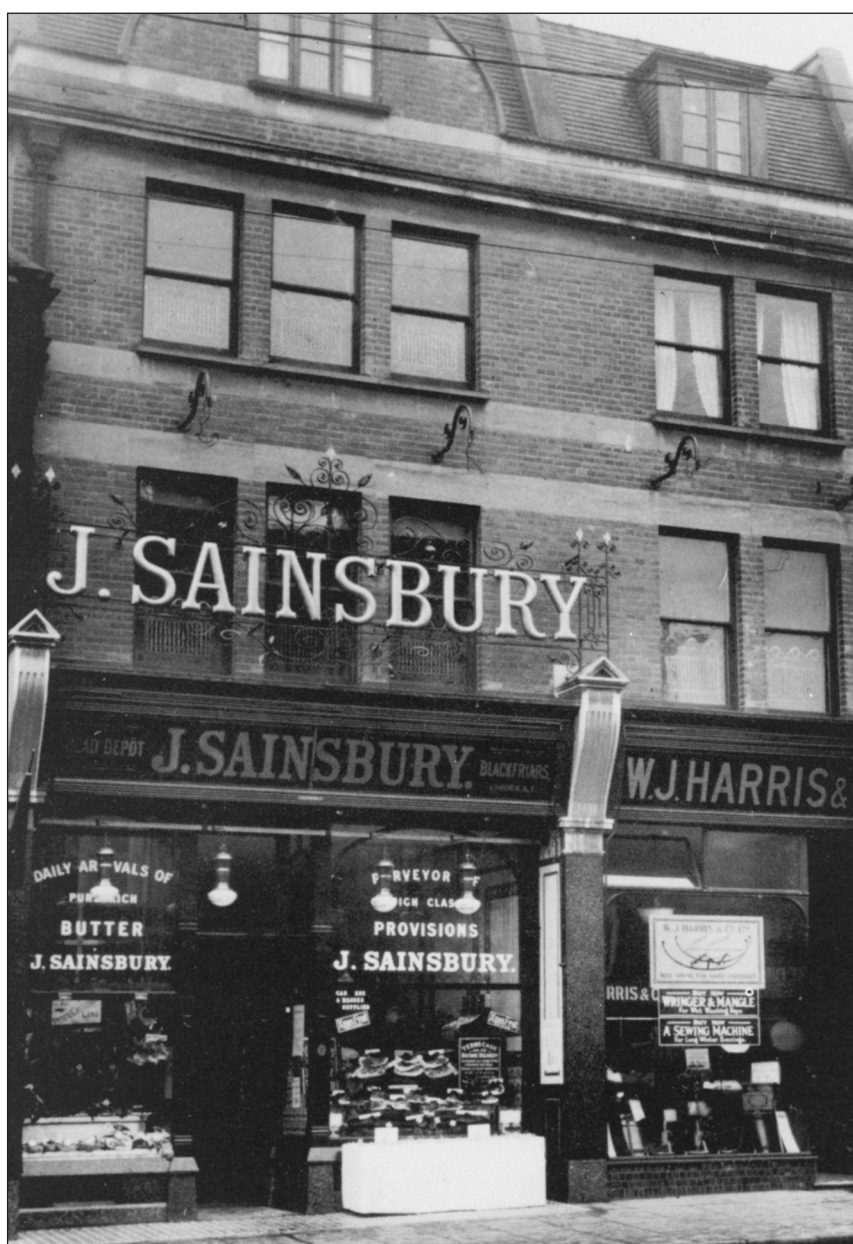
Whatever the shopping we had done, we would make our way back to the bus park in St John's Street. Next to the bus park was a butcher's shop called Cook's which sold pork brawn, a jelly-like mass with rather fearsome animal bits in it which was eaten for tea with bread and butter.

We then climbed aboard the Halstead bus - usually the green one and waited for the driver who would be drinking tea in the small rest room beside the bus shelter.

Everyone smoked in those days so there was no need to leave the room for a Players or Woodbine.

Opposite the bus park was a row of shops and my fledgling reading was aided by reading the names above the shops. I remember the Milk Bar and next to it Bob Joyce, who sold sweets, cigarettes and perhaps newspapers. From Bob Joyce came that post-rationing treat chocolate bottles. These were chocolate coated sugar shells that held synthetic 'liqueurs', a real treat when we all got back home.

The ride was a good chance to look out of the window at the world. There were people



Sainsbury in High Street where Mother bought cheese, sugar and butter. With its white tiled walls and counters, it proclaimed itself 'purveyors of high class provisions.' The upstairs accommodation housed trainee staff, sent from home to another town

and dogs, cyclists and, of course, neighbours on the bus who would pass the time of day with Mother or Grandmother.

We would step off the bus

replete with gossip and hung about with shopping.

Another trip to Colchester safely over.

Sue Hood

Grandmother's Colchester

My Grandmother was born in Colchester in 1895 and grew up in the Newtown area around Beche Road and Canterbury Road. Her father was a carpenter and we were told that he did work on St Botolph's Church, her mother was Lizzie. When Gran was only two years old her father died. He took to his bed with terrible stomach pains and died within days; piecing the story together it seems that he may have died from a burst appendix.

As a toddler Gran developed diphtheria and was taken away to the fever hospital at Myland. She stayed for some time, being sent back when she was recovered. (I believe a post card was sent to her mother saying that she could return home). Her hair was shorn while she was there and her much loved rag doll was burned to prevent infection being spread.

Great Grandmother must have re-married fairly soon as Gran had a baby half-brother when she was about five. Her step-father always known as Grandfather Smith was also a carpenter and had two children from a previous marriage.

Gran at age five went to Canterbury Road (St George's) School and by all accounts was a diligent pupil. I have two of her prize books 'for good work'. Life has come full circle as my great niece is a pupil at

Canterbury Road School, as was her big brother.

I was a severely short-sighted bookish child and I used to love to sit beside Gran as she did the ironing or mending, listening to stories of 'olden days' when she was a child. The stories varied with little attention to chronology. Sometimes Gran would tell me about her strict Scottish schoolteacher, who ensured that her small Essex charges had a smattering of French folk songs, a little Latin and the ability to sew a seam. Sometimes Gran would sing the songs she learned at school -

'My mother said that I never should

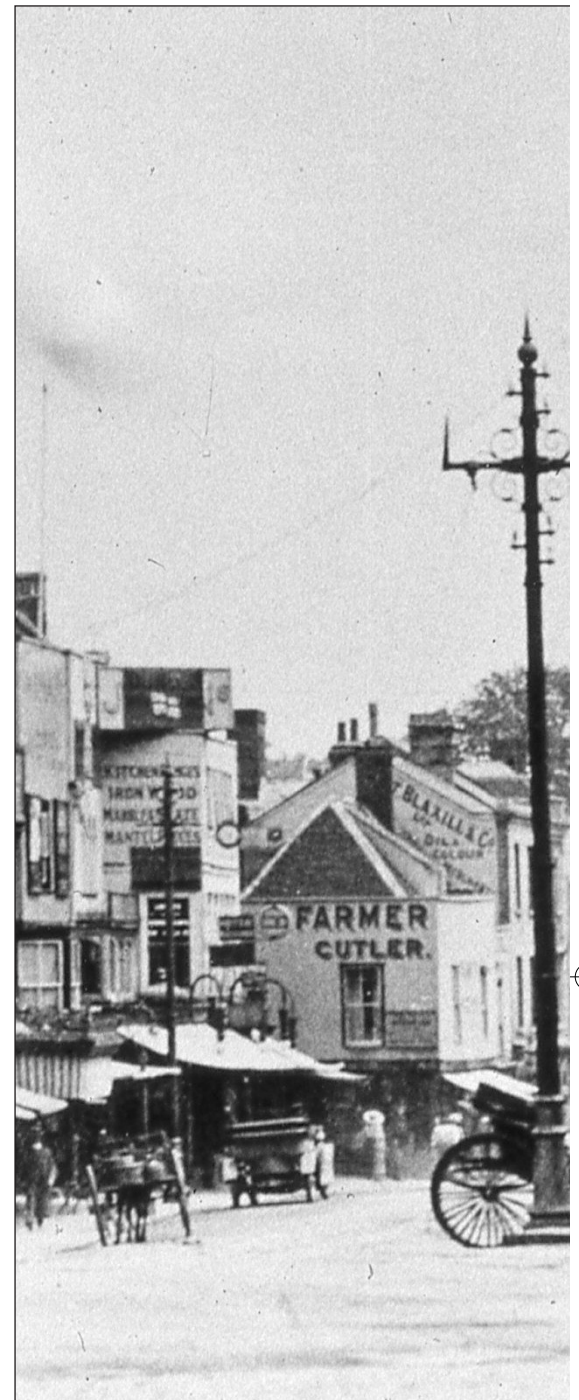
Play with Gypsies in the wood

If I did, she would say

Naughty little girl to disobey?'

As Gran grew older she would take her little brother, Stan, out with her and with her friend Bella, who also had brothers and sisters. She and Bella would sometimes pay the halfpenny each to take the tram from Colchester to Lexden Springs; she and Bella had to pay but the brothers and sisters went free and they would enjoy a day in the country with a bottle of water and a bun shared between them.

Stan had a facility for getting into trouble. He liked to go to the Barrack Square to watch the soldiers drilling and would march up and down with them. On one particular day, aged



perhaps six, he had gone to watch the soldiers and Lizzie became worried when he didn't return for dinner. Gran was sent to the Barrack Square to look for him, but of soldiers and Stan there was no sign. A few neighbours got together to look for the child, but there was no sign of him.

Hours later there was a knock at the door and there was a large soldier with a struggling Stan tucked under his arm. It



transpired that the soldiers, complete with a band, had marched to West Mersea and that young Stan had gone with them. On the way there, people had come out of their houses to see the sight and everyone assumed that the small boy belonged to them. When they got to Mersea and discovered the stowaway there was nothing to do but carry him home. Stan was not deterred from watching the soldiers for long.

One Easter he was dressed in his Sunday best and a new straw hat and went to watch the soldiers, horses and parade generally. A blast of wind blew the straw hat from his head and it was trodden on by one of the horses. The hat, with a hole through the crown was returned to a howling Stan.

When Gran left school she and Bella went to work at the bright new Woolworth's store in Colchester. She was happy

ABOVE:
*High Street in 1910
 with six horse drawn vehicles,
 one tram and one parked car.
 Soon there would be
 a lot more cars*

there and the staff were well looked after with a Welfare Lady who looked out for them day to day.

During those years she had a small amount of pocket money left from giving most of her



High Street was not very full mid-week – just a couple of lads standing there as a tram approaches

wages to her mother for her keep. The market in Colchester was on the High Street then, and she and Bella would go to look at the stalls. One sold ribbons and other trimmings and she and Bella would buy scraps of lace and pin them to their petticoats just showing under their skirts, so that people would think that they had lace-edged petticoats.

Lizzie was well-known as being exceptionally generous and would give anything in the house to anyone who needed it.

Gran used to tell how she was once asked to look after a harp, (a floor standing Welsh one), by a friend. Someone came to the door begging and Lizzie gave them the harp, and Gran had to go in hot pursuit to get it back!

Later on Gran saved to buy a

Singer treadle sewing machine which had to be kept at Bella's lest Lizzie gave it away. I remember the sewing machine from when I was a child and it was indeed well used to make clothes and furnishings.

I am not sure exactly when my grandparents met; it was said that they had met as children at some mutual relative's home in Colchester. Grandfather was apprenticed to Lipton's and was sent away to work; at first he was at Thorpe-le-Soken, later in the east end of London and for a time in Hitchen.

He, along with many young men of the era, was a great cyclist and used to cycle from Hitchen on Sunday mornings to meet Gran coming out of church in Colchester. He would

then walk her home and cycle back to return to work on the Monday morning.

When the Great War came. Gran was sent with Bella and some of the other girls to work in munitions at Mumford's in Culver Street. There was a photograph of a group of serious faced girls with large white head scarves and long overalls.

I have a small brooch, made of light soft metal in the shape of a zeppelin with Z33 scratched onto it. Grandmother got this from one of the men at some metal from the airship that came down over Great Wigborough and turned it into brooches which he sold for the war effort. I wonder how many more of them there are today?

Gran and Granddad must

have been 'an item' before he went to fight with the Essex Yeomanry, as he sent her money home to buy a gold bracelet, so that she would have something if anything happened to him.

Granddad came back safely from Alexandria and they married, but initially it was not to be happy ever after; their baby son died aged only four weeks and is buried in Colchester Cemetery, (we think Gran went home to her mother for the birth). It was not until several years later that my mother was born. The sadness

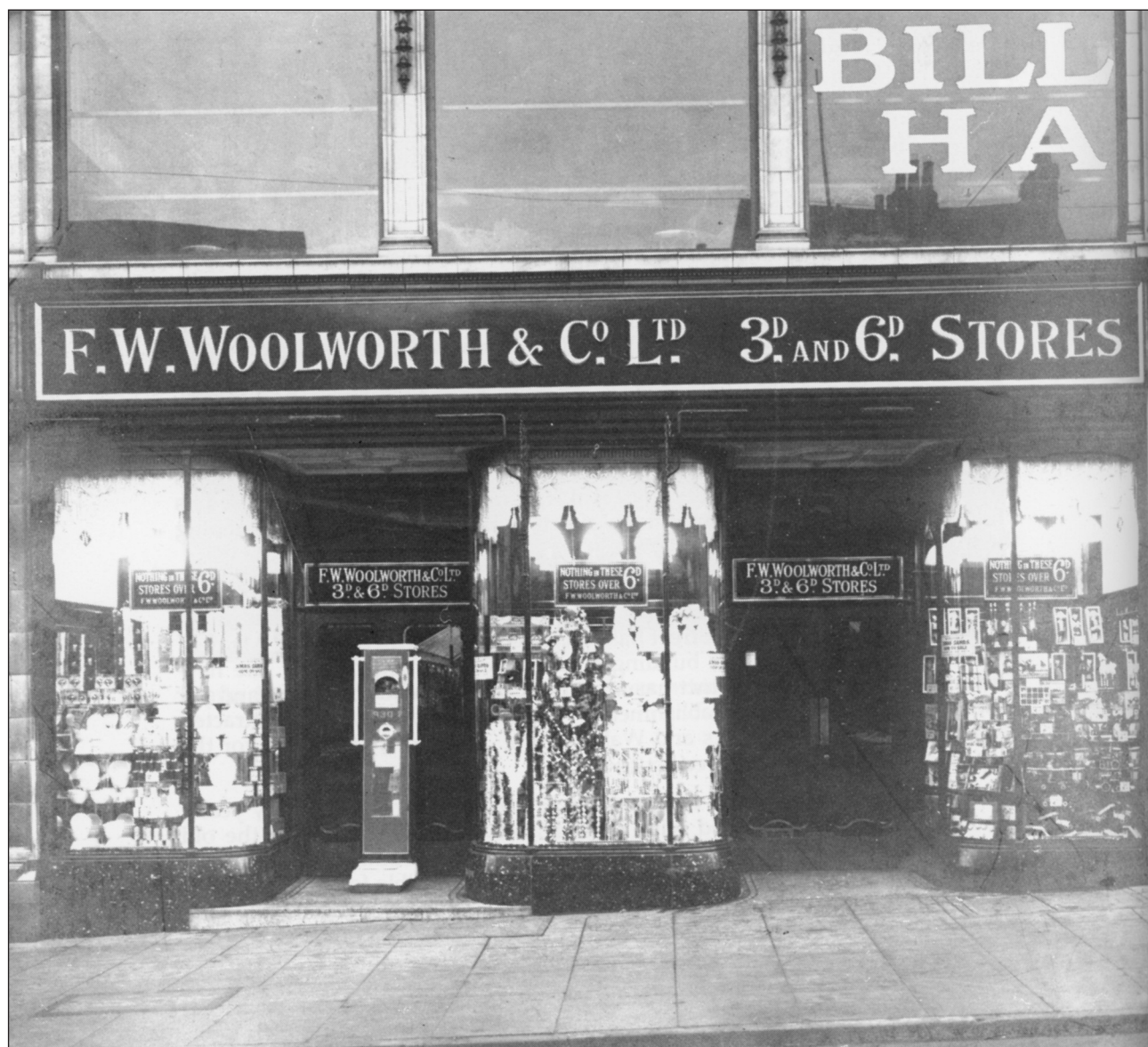
caused by the death of baby Dennis probably explains why my brother was always a bit spoilt by Granddad.

As she became older and more frail I again spent time with my Grandmother. One of my favourite stories was of the dancing bear. She recalled as quite a small child seeing a big dark bear on the end of a chain held by a man who played the squeeze box, while the bear danced. I thought for years that this was a fancy of hers, until only a few years ago and long after Gran had died, I saw a book of photographs of

Victorian Suffolk and there in Bury St Edmunds was a large dancing bear on the end of a chain. It is not an impossible walk from Colchester to Bury.

For me, Colchester of the Victorian and Edwardian eras was not a great deal different from Colchester of the 1950s. Now I realise that what I remembered as stories is now 'history'. I wonder what my great niece and nephew will remember about Colchester in 60 years time?

Sue Hood



The original High Street Woolworths, where Gran and Bella worked, was the ultimate cut-price shop, slotted into one corner of Burton's the Tailors. 'Nothing in these stores over 6d' it said. That's 2½ pence today

My Early Days in Retail

I left school in the summer of 1965 and by various ways and means found myself a job at the Co-operative grocery store in Claudius Road. Behind the shop itself were quite large warehouse premises which served as a base for the out of town delivery service. Each day of the week the delivery van would run to a different area and it was my job to make up customer orders from the warehouse stock ready for delivery.

It was a busy job and quite hard work sometimes and not terribly well paid, but it was always nice to be able to have some money of my own. What defeated me was the winter. There was no really direct public transport route from my home in Prettygate to Claudius Road so I would ride to work on my bicycle. Fine in the summer but dire in the winter months.

In the spring of 1966 whilst in town with my mother we passed Wheeler's Toy Shop on the corner of Pelhams Lane, premises latterly occupied by Laura Ashley. In the window was a notice 'Junior Assistant Required' and on an impulse I went in and secured an interview. This was successful and I was offered the position. A step up for me from grocery orders and an answer to my transport problems since I could now get a lift to work with my father who worked in the town.

Wheeler's Toy Shop was a family business the shop having a staff of five, Mr & Mrs Wheeler and their son Roland, Senior Assistant Glenis

Ladbrook, with whom I became good friends, and myself. Mrs Wheeler was the real boss and taught me so much about the retail trade. Mr Wheeler, who was a councillor, paid the shop regular visits mainly it seemed to find a quiet corner round the back to have a smoke with his pipe!

On the door of the shop was a huge Mickey Mouse and a lot of time and effort was always put into the window displays. The rear of the shop had a mezzanine floor from the edges of which hung dolls prams, scooters and the like in easy view of the customers below, the small floor area being used for general storage. Beneath the ground floor sales area was a basement comprising the stock room and a small workroom used to carry out repairs and servicing, mainly of Scaelectric cars. The rear of the ground floor sales area had a small kitchenette and WC.

In my time at Wheeler's one of the best selling toys was Corgi James Bond Cars, the stock used to fly off the shelves and we could sell all that we could get our hands on. Very handy for my penny in the pound commission, all sales being recorded against the member of staff concerned. I will always remember fireworks, mainly sold loose from glass cabinets adapted for the purpose and with a much more casual attitude than modern 'health and safety'.

I had been at Wheeler's for just over two years when I heard, through a friend of my father's, there was a vacancy at St. Nicholas House in the High

Street for someone to look after their toy department. Having made sure the rumour was true I applied for an interview. This was successful and I found myself full circle, back working for the Co-operative again!

St. Nicholas House was, at that time, probably the premier store in Colchester High Street. You could furnish your home with a visit to the store, from lounge to kitchen to bedroom and choose from a huge display of lighting that hung at the side of the stairway. The toy department, housed in a corner of the basement, was a much smaller concern than Wheeler's except in the Christmas season, when it would move up to the ground floor with 'Father Christmas' in residence. I have always been rather good at wrapping parcels and that's where I learnt the art, I wrapped thousands!

The management at St. Nicholas House was very proactive in keeping the store fresh. With the exception of the second floor, always furniture, the rest of the store would be in a state of flux with the various departments being refreshed, revamped and moved around. All but my little corner in the basement. Other than at Christmas, toys were not the biggest of sellers and with time on my hands I was used to help out and assist in other areas.

This greatly enhanced my range of experience. I did the cigarette kiosk, pop records and LP's, white goods and radio and T.V. all of which had their own individual tricks of the trade. With cigarettes and tobacco you had to learn stock control and



*St Nicholas House, High Street,
the Co-op's flagship premises, on a grey day in 1958*

never to order stock you could not sell. Records were likewise, ordered by telephone on a weekly basis, so it was necessary to keep an eye on the charts that would be sent in, except that the 'top ten' was always manipulated by the imposition of minimum orders. White goods usually meant that you would be working with an in store representative of the manufacturer, who doubled as a demonstrator - a real sales professional who taught me a lot.

One store revamp lead me to where I was to spend the majority of my time at St. Nicholas House. Toys were moved to Wyre Street, records were combined with radio and TV, and subsequently dropped, and I became second sales person in the radio and TV department, behind the senior and the manager. This was quite an innovation for the store as it was not usual for girls to sell at this level and I was one of

the first to achieve it.

My colleagues and I got along very well together. Derek Goodenough was senior sales and Reg Alden was our boss. We sold radios, tape recorders, radiograms, stereos and televisions. Many customers preferred to rent a television set rather than buy and we had to liaise with the service department based in Military Road and also arrange for aerial installations to be carried out. I had to learn how to tune in and demonstrate television sets and was sent on a course to sell colour televisions which were just becoming 'affordable'. Again I found myself on commission. Any stock that did not sell very quickly was put on 'commission plus', the usual commission plus a flat rate sum to shift it! We were always encouraged to sell the Co-operative's own branded television sets (which were manufactured by Bush). These carried a double commission,

one from the store and the other from the Wholesale Society in Manchester.

I particularly remember that some of the first television sets I sold included a dual 405/625 line option for customers who wanted to receive BBC2, the other channels broadcasting on the 405 line system. As colour sets became more readily available the 405 line system was eventually discontinued. Once colour television took off we could, to be honest, sell or rent everything we were able to lay our hands on.

The Co-operative were a good employer and from small beginnings I developed a worthwhile career for myself. At Christmas there was always a staff party for the store, held at Victoria Place. I can remember the store manager, Mr. Woodhouse, joining in the dancing with his jacket off and wearing braces! When I married in June 1970 my present from the staff was a black horse's head table lamp with a huge coloured striped shade. We had it for many years until it suffered at the hands of our children when it finally went to the knackers yard.

I 'retired', well went on to other things, just before Christmas in 1974, prior to the birth of my first child. Always I have kept many happy memories of my early days in retail. Grocery orders are, of course, still with us but IT based, something never dreamt of in my day.

Little family shops like Wheeler's seem in terminal decline and St. Nicholas House stands today as a monument to its former days of glory.

Ann Butcher (nee Burns)

A Walk from North Bridge to the Top of North Hill

Readers may recall my articles in Issues 22 and 23, detailing walks down North Station Road in the 1950s. This walk is in the opposite direction, taken by me twice a day from about 1952 to 1959, due to my attending The Gilbert School on the opposite side of North Hill, before its move to a new site in High Woods, then working at Geo Loyd & So, the shoe shop in Head Street and going out with a young lady from St Mary's Road, off Balkerne Lane, now the site of St Mary's car park.

Starting from North Bridge on the left hand side of the road, the first buildings are a pair of semi-detached houses, numbers 19a and 19 Middleborough, occupied in those days respectively by Mr and Mrs Hunnable, with their son and daughter and then Mr Rashbrook, whose brother lived on the corner of Causton and North Station Roads. Next came Marsham's Tyre garage, now part of the National Tyre organisation. Then came number 17 where a lad about my age with ginger hair lived, his surname was Jones. Next door number 16 was a shop run by Mr and Mrs Peachey, who had a daughter and son (Malcolm). The shop sold virtually everything from ice cream to paraffin and also had a cycle storage facility for those visiting the town etc.

This was followed houses numbering 15-10 where I remember two of the residents, one being a small elderly lady, Miss Stow, who had a humpty back and always walked with a

stick. She worshipped regularly at the Seventh Day Adventist Church, still existing in North Station Road. The other was the Seabrook family at number 15. There was also a hardware shop called Pritchard's and a feature of these properties, before G S Last's garage was built on the site, was the areas nearest the houses were all cobbled. G S Last's premises have since been replaced by St Peter's Court with none of the buildings remaining today.

Number 9 was Eade's the men's hairdresser, which later became Nicklin's (Stan was Bob Eade's son in law). The business was also a newsagent. Number 8 was Woodruffe's, a shop selling birdseed etc, followed by number 7 the offices of Corton and Bergin, heating and ventilation engineers and number 6, Sach and Son the butchers, run by Arthur Bloom and his wife.

Next comes St Peter's Street, with number 3 on the opposite corner - but where were 5 and 4? I certainly do not remember ever seeing them. At No. 3 was the former greengrocery, run by Mr and Mrs Macer which was demolished to widen St Peter's Street. Then came numbers 2a, 2 and which were Ennew's (I believe a bakery) and Chapman's the shoe repairer. Between these two premises if you look up at the wall you will see remains of the Roman Wall, left over from the demolition of the North Gate back in the 1830s.

Cross Northgate Street and you are on North Hill. The residents of numbers 29-26 I

do not remember, but I am told that Nightingale's, a gentleman's tailor and Noy's a shop that sold brass musical instruments were situated here, while today the occupants are an accountancy firm and a Turkish restaurant. This building was badly damaged by fire only a few years ago and has been completely restored to its original Tudor glory.

Next door, number 25, was the *Marquis of Granby* public house, owned by Alf and Kit Davey, whose eldest son John, is a great friend of mine and a stalwart of the Colchester and East Essex Cricket Club.

Numbers 23 and 22 are now a tattooist, and a beauty salon, but I remember number 21 - Parsonson's the basket makers, Mr Arthur Parsonson being a former Mayor of the town. Today this property is vacant.

Nunn's Road comes next, with a building over the top and a granite slab at the left corner base, often bumped into by motor vehicles. The climb uphill then started with Evans and Son the ironmongers, with the big metal kettle hanging outside. It has since been removed, the premises being Middleton's Steak House.

I remember numbers 18, 17 and 16 as private houses, today they are home to Attwells solicitors and planning consultants and I believe an empty private dwelling.

Numbers 14 and 15 used to be Bond and Son, the antique dealers, now the restaurant Ask Italian, while number 15 is the recently opened Smiles Day Care children's nursery.

Number 13 was the home of



A view of the left hand side of North Hill circa 1970

the Price family whose daughter Vera was a year or so older than me and her brother Ronnie a couple of years younger. More recently it was the premises of Ken Chambers a jeweller and engraver, today it is Studio Cellini. Number 12 was Fincham's the book shop, which specialised in religious books and was also a haven for philatelists to buy stamps.

Crispin Court featured next, with the British Legion Hall and several private cottages. Among the residents I recall were the Andrews family and 'Snowball' Smith, so called due to his having a shock of white hair, although he was only a few years older than me.

Number 11 followed but again my memory deserts me, today it features Martin & Co, the estate agents, while at number 10, I recall my mother attending Scarboroughs the opticians, now a restaurant, the Na-Ree-Tai. Number 9 was Draga's the ladies hairstylist whose husband 'Pip', was a

popular well-known figure in the town. I believe this was previously the premises of Marion Lear, another very well known ladies hairdresser in Colchester.

The Central Electric Company and the Culver Heating Company shared the premises at number 8, where I remember the Drane family living in an upstairs flat, whose son John was another of my friends as a young lad. Number 7 was the Essex County Council's Health department sub-office and the Welfare and Blind Welfare departments.

Numbers 6 and 7 was the Gresham Life Assurance company office and number 5 was Thompson Smith and Puxon's solicitors premises, these are now the Colchester Boutique Hotel.

My mother's dentists, Mr Howard Williams followed by Mr Shersby before moving to The Avenue, were situated at number 3, now the offices of accountants Baker, Chapman

and Bussey. There then comes a narrow passage leading to St Peter's Parish Hall, home to St Peter's Sunday School and one of 'the off site' school rooms used by The Gilbert School when I was a scholar there.

At number 2 was E Cyril Simpson's, the high class fruiterer, florist and green-grocer, now The Noodle Bar, while at number 1 the Colchester and District Register Office used to share the premises with the North Essex Local Valuation Panel. Today it is Finbow Bishop, chartered surveyors.

This side of the hill is then crowned by the imposing St Peter's Parish Church, with its large churchyard and well known clock bringing our walk from North Bridge to High Street to an end.

Join me in the next issue to return to North Bridge via the opposite side of the road.

It will be easier, as it is down hill all the way!

Peter Constable



Letters to the Editor

From Tom Cannon

I was very pleased to receive a copy of *Colchester Recalled* from Harry Carlo and also pleased that my mother kept all her WW2 items, which must be

quite rare nowadays.

Harry said that you might like as many people identified as possible that appeared in the photograph below, which was published in the magazine and

the people I remember are mostly former near neighbours, in Harsnett Road, although I doubt many of them are alive now, although my sister Joyce is at age 91.



'The Garage' in Roman Road/Grey Friars

The previous issue included an article from Sarah Hampton, requesting readers' help concerning 'The Garage', where she used to live with her parents in Roman Road, which she thought used to be stables, as part of Grey Friars.

At the time of writing I have had no reply from readers remembering the property, perhaps due to the Coronavirus Lockdown. I certainly do not remember it, so I thought that I should do a little research.

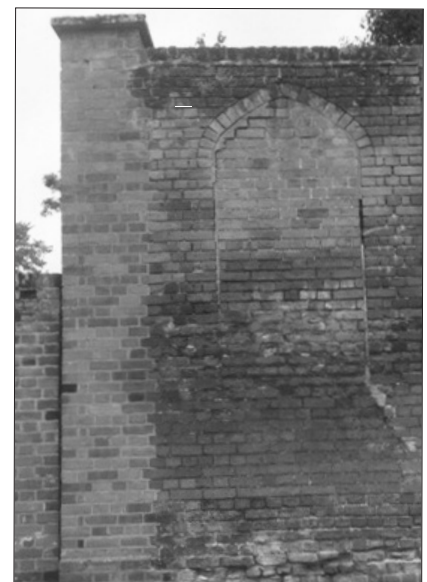
On reading Joan Gurney and Alan Skinner's wonderful book *Grey Friars, Colchester's Forgotten Corner*, on page 48 I found a sale plan of 1847 and reference to

'Stables' on exactly the site that Sarah mentioned in her article. Also, on page 40 I found a tiny illustration of the wall, captioned 'Former exit to Roman Road'. I therefore decided to visit the site and took the photograph shown right, clearly indicating a round topped window, currently bricked up, with exactly the same patterning to the mortar around the base of the window as shown on page 40.

So although I cannot help Sarah by recalling the original property, it is still featured by one of the windows that may well have been bricked up in the 1940s and proves that a wall

of the building originally built as stables, still stands today - exactly where she said it did!

Peter Constable



Who Do You Think They Are?

Here I am in my first car in the garden of the house in Higham Ferrers where I was born in 1949. This picture must have been taken about 1952. In those days, a pedal car was hugely expensive, way beyond the means of a newly qualified teacher. So my dad made it as one of his projects during his training at the Shoreditch College in London.

I have a couple of memories from Northamptonshire, we left in 1952 or 53. One is of being in my pram in a huge thunder storm, hood up, rain cover on, and the whole sky being lit up. I was a very noisy baby, probably caused by colic.

Apparently, at my own christening, I was shown the red card by the rev and banished to the porch for drowning out the word of the Lord. The other early memory is seeing an old fashioned steam shovel from the window of a bus, but I've no idea where or when.

Our next home was in Herefordshire, where I remained until coming to Essex. Our first dwelling was at a school, though not the one my father taught at, that was in the next valley. Kingstone school had been the No 4 Radio School at RAF Madley where they trained airborne and ground radio and teleprinter operators.

When the airfield was closed at the end of the war, the buildings became a primary and secondary school.

We shared half of a long hut with the groundsman's mowers kept in the other half. It was very basic, no electric to start with, we had a Tilley lamp with a cream tank and a



brass ring round the bottom.

Heating was a tortoise stove with the post war briquettes as fuel. I think they were half cement and half coal dust, not a very calorific fuel. The one saving grace of this hut was the central corridor, you could get your trike up to breakneck speed before putting your feet out to meet the dividing wall at the end.

After a couple of years, father was able to rent a house in the village where his school was located. A few years later, he bought a house from the local builder. There was no mortgage, he paid by instalments, each receipt signed over a brown tuppenny stamp. This place was then, over 250 years old and in the ancient monuments book for South Herefordshire. It had been a butcher's shop with no access from the shop to the living quarters above. There were signs of the external stairs and a bricked up doorway at first floor level, hence its name 'The Steppes'. The original kitchen was where the butcher stabled his horse. The floor sloped down towards the road and you had

to be careful that things didn't roll off the table onto the floor.

Here I stayed until I was eighteen. I went to the local primary and junior school, barely fifty yards from our door.

After the eleven plus, it was commuting to the High School in Hereford. Come rain or shine, off on the ten to eight bus in the morning, but on Wednesdays you were always late because it was market day and the old medieval bridge was the only river crossing for a huge area of the western side of the county.

In the winter of 1963, the river Wye froze over and when the thaw set in, huge sheets of ice piled up against the old bridge, threatening its destruction. The SAS were called out with their explosives to break up the ice into pieces small enough to pass through the narrow arches.

The subject of our seventh article of the series in issue Number 31, was one of our archivists, Peter Graham. This item did not appear in issue Numbers 32 and 33, so here we feature another Committee member, but who is it? His name will be revealed in the next issue - No. 35.

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