

# COLCHESTER RECALLED

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**Plough Corner, the junction of St Botolph's Street, Mersea Road and Magdalen Street, seen around 1910 and featured in Jack Austin's article on page 1.**

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Letters to the Editor

# Colchester Recalled Oral History Society 2022-2023

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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.

The Annual Subscription is now due - £7 per member or £12 for a couple residing at the same address. You can pay by cash, cheque or bank transfer to our Treasurer, Peter Evans, 5 Grimston Road, Colchester CO2 7RN. email: [peter.evans7978@btinternet.com](mailto:peter.evans7978@btinternet.com) Please make cheques payable to Colchester Recalled.

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## OUR PROGRAMME

We have arranged a series of meetings on Monday mornings, one a month at 11am at the Roman Circus Visitor Centre. This facility will be open just for us, with tea, coffee and cakes available.

Sadly, the first meeting clashed with the funeral of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, so it had to be cancelled.

The other dates are as follows -

### Monday 17th October

Jane Pearson: *Marks Hall, a Lost Local Mansion.*

### Monday 14th November

Andrew Phillips: *Victorian Colchester and How New Town Happened.*

### Monday 19th December

By popular request  
Patrick Denney: *The Great Colchester Recalled Picture Quiz 2022 - plus Mince Pies and a Colchester History Film is to be shown.*

Admission is £2 per member, £3 for non-members, including refreshments.

## WELCOME TO ISSUE 36

As usual several new interesting illustrated articles are included as well as the latest regular features, which it is hoped that you will enjoy reading.

If you have any comments to make about this issue, please send your comments to the Editor.

## OUR NEXT ISSUE

**Number 37** is due to be published in Autumn 2023.

Articles and illustrations should be addressed to the Editor -

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## WANTED VOLUNTEERS

To make summaries of our recordings.

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

## BACK ISSUES

Some back issues of COLCHESTER RECALLED magazine are available, along with copies of our CDs.

Details are available from the Treasurer, Peter Evans on 01206 540990.



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## Recollections from the Rowhedge Carrier and Bus Driver - Jack Austin (1907-2002)

**I was nine years old** when we moved to Rowhedge from Clacton. We lived in Albion Street and I attended Rowhedge school until I was 14 when I went to work for Mr Fale, the Rowhedge Carrier, although I had been working for him for a few years before that whilst still at school. We were still using a horse and cart in those days and I could only just about reach up to the horse's head. When he used to tell me to bring the horse up to the next stop, I could hardly reach it and it wouldn't budge for me. Yet all he had to do was whistle it and off it went. I couldn't pull it along because I wasn't strong enough – I was only about ten or eleven at the time. This would have been about 1918 when I was still at school.

About nine o'clock in the morning we would get the wagon ready. The wagon was made of wood, like a square box, with the name T.W. Fale (late Harris), written on the side. It had a rack on top and we used to put wood and all



*Jack Austin photographed in 1993*

sorts of other stuff up there. We would carry parcels and other goods into Colchester on a daily basis. Sometimes Mr Fale would go round people's houses in the morning to collect their orders, or perhaps they would bring them into the shop first thing. Other people would wait with parcels for him as he went past, while others would just stop him on the way, to say that they wanted him to pick up something for them in town.

We used to charge about 2d to take a parcel to town, or to

collect some shopping, and we used to do a lot of shopping for people, especially during the First World War, when we would have to queue at the shops, which took time and we would always be late home. We used to go to Sainsbury's in High Street for groceries, and there was a place in Stanwell Street where they sold dead horses for cat meat, which we would deliver round to our customers in Rowhedge. If we had room, we would take a few passengers, perhaps two or three, but after a time when the parcel deliveries died out, we took more. They would sit round the side on wooden seats – it wasn't very comfortable.

When we used to pass through Old Heath, we would often have to stop to pick up some laundry that the local women there had been doing for people in town. We regularly used to have some for Dame Catherine Hunt and for Dennis Jeffrey the jeweller and for Mr Siggers. When we'd delivered the laundry back to them, we would have to pick up some more dirty laundry to bring back for the following week.

When we arrived at the *Plough Inn* yard opposite St Botolph's railway station, we would take the horse out and put him in a stable, and then spend the rest of the day going round the town doing people's shopping, before making our way home sometime between three and four in the afternoon, dropping off all the groceries and laundry on the way. We



*A river-side view of Rowhedge from 1925, with Fale's single-decker bus standing on the right-hand side of the road by the quayside*



*Jack standing alongside the Rowhedge bus in the early 1930s*

would also take parcels to other carriers for delivery elsewhere, and they in turn would deliver parcels to the *Plough Inn* for us to take back to Rowhedge. When we got to Cannock Mill, on Old Heath Road, there often used to be two peacocks in the road nearly every day, and there used to be a long line of trees on both sides of the road leading up to Whitehall Road.

We sometimes used to call at Whitehall house which was then owned by Captain Ind. We were not allowed to call at the front of the house but had to go all the way round the back, down a little lane which led to the back door. We used to



*The Rowhedge bus seen passing through Old Heath in the 1930s*

call there to deliver parcels which had arrived at St Botolph's Station.

One of the most unusual things that I remember having to carry was a goat. We had to collect the goat from St Botolph's station and had to tie it up inside the wagon to stop it eating things. That was being delivered to someone down at Rowhedge.

We would also deliver parcels of tailoring to and from the clothing factories in town because lots of people in Rowhedge did tailoring then. On Friday mornings I used to have to go round to all the women in the village who did outwork for the Colchester factories and pick up their finished work from the previous week. When I got to town, I would then have to take the bundles of finished tailoring round to the various factories. Later in the afternoon I would return to the factories to collect the women's wages and new bundles of work for them. When I got home, I would then have to go round to their homes again to pay them their money

and deliver their new bundles of work. Fridays was always a busy day and it would be quite late by the time I had finished.

We got rid of the horse in 1919 and had the old wagon put on a Ford chassis - Adams of Lexden put it on. This was the second Ford chassis in Colchester - Joscelyn's had the first one. It made our job a lot easier with the motor. We still made the trip to Colchester each day, but later it got to two trips.

By 1926 we had acquired a bus and I used to drive it. We had about 12 seats and charged 3d from Rowhedge to Colchester - it was that price for years. We used to run about eight trips a day, and on Saturdays it was 24 trips. We would start at 8.15 in the morning and continued until after 10 at night. We used to stop at every lamp post to pick people up and drop them off. Mind you, at that time, we had competition from a number of other local bus companies who used to get up to all sorts of tricks to try and steal our customers. They would sometimes try to stop us pulling away from a bus stop by parking right in front of us - and this was often one of the Corporation buses. Mind you we didn't worry too much because by then by most of the passengers were already on our bus!

When I first started driving the motor-bus we could only travel about 10-12 miles an hour. I would put my foot on the pedal and the bus would go forward and when I took my foot off the pedal it would still keep going forward because it was in top gear - we had no

gearbox then - and we would sometimes have trouble getting up Cannock Hill if we had too many passengers on board. If we did get stuck I would tell the passengers to get off and we would have to push it up the hill. In that respect it wasn't quite so good as the horse. When we eventually got a gearbox we could go a bit quicker – maybe about 14-20 miles an hour.

After I got married, my wife Betty used to work on the bus with me - with me driving and she collecting the fares. This was the first time in my life when I had to do as I was told! I stayed on the buses all my working life and ended up driving for the Eastern National who had taken over the firm in 1960.

*After Jack had concluded his own memories of life on the buses, his wife Betty added*

*the following memory of her own:*

**As time went on,** I eventually became a conductress on the Colchester Corporation buses and because we were on the go all the time, it meant that finding time to go the loo could be a bit tricky. One place where we could usually find time to go was when the bus pulled up outside the Fire Office. And if we were quick we could just manage to run into the old *Repertory Theatre* next door and use their toilets. Well on one occasion when I was doing this no sooner had I left the bus and run into the theatre, when someone on the bus decided to press the bell to signal to the driver to move off! When I came out of the theatre I found that the bus had disappeared and I had to run as fast as I could down High Street, before catching the bus



*Husband and wife team, Jack and Betty Austin, alongside their bus in 1960*

up at the next stop outside the *Hippodrome*.

*Edited from a conversation with Patrick Denney in 1993*

## Bricks and Mortar in the 1950s

**In the late 1950's,** my parents bought the Victorian terraced house in New Town that they had lived in for over 20 years. They were not alone, many tenants did the same. Landlords were stuck with tenants on controlled rents and there was little, if any, profit to be made. Many houses were owned by descendants of the Everett family, who had built them in the first place - our house was owned by the Executors of the late Mr AF Everett, . A change in the law made it sensible for both parties for sales to happen.

I remember the notorious

slum landlord Peter Rachman from that time, but relations with our landlord were OK. The rent man, Jock, came round every week, and Mum paid him. She also passed on details of any minor repairs which were usually eventually fixed. However, shortly before the sale, my Mother raised the issue of a new front door, which had long been promised. All doors were regulation chocolate brown and not changed since the houses were built in 1889. This was of course not the only improvement needed but there was a problem with it and Mum persisted. To shut her up, they reduced the asking price

by almost 10% to get rid of us.

Soon after, Mum took me to the solicitors to get the documents signed. I think it was in Crouch Street and I recall in the waiting room a beautiful Georgian hall table, with a carved central leg that fascinated me. It was Mum's role to deal with the money and she was superb at it. Up until she died, she put money aside every week for regular expenses and would take surpluses down to the Post Office. She had been effectively orphaned and had had to save. She was not the only one; my father's eldest sister was reputed to have a money tree and could stretch

pound notes. Mum continued to put 'coal money' aside each week years after we stopped buying coal - she feared something might come up. Mum and Dad were able to buy the house outright. They were helped by the awfully long time I took to be born, so they had been able to save!

Dad regularly watched the TV DIY programmes by Barry Bucknell, and who like many others had bought a TV for the Coronation. The biggest issue was to convert our outside toilet and brick coal shed ('the coal hole') into an inside toilet and bathroom - wonderful.

Gone was the tin bath hanging on the back of the coal hole and the need for the 'gazzunders' was much reduced. We were not alone.

I can still remember standing in the garden and looking along the gardens of 4-44 Winnock Road in about 1960.

Bathrooms seemed to be springing up all along the road. Three of the four houses in our block had been bought and three different but basically the same bathrooms were built. It was all exciting and I thought owning your own home was a great idea.

These improvements were overdue and people deserved them, WW2 being fifteen years ago. The Council Surveyor Ralph Goodey became a familiar and popular face. It was entirely appropriate, as his ancestor, James Goodey, was responsible for devising New Town. Everybody applied for the late 1950's improvement grants and loans from the Council.

Houses became lighter. Our new front door had three glass



*30 Winnock Road (centre) as it appears today*

panels and it was a great shame that our neighbour, cycling home from Paxman's for lunch, should have put his handle bars through one panel. I thought it hilarious, but the replacement provided by the neighbours didn't match, despite their best efforts. The doors between the other downstairs rooms were replaced with doors with glass. On Barry's advice, Dad put a window in the back door.

Then there were the sash windows. The kitchen window was enlarged and Dad's plan was to take the six panes out of each half of the sash window and replace them with one large pane. He then put the new pane and putty in. Dad was really good at this measuring and planning. He had served an apprenticeship at Paxmans and could make a better plan on the back of his cigarette packet with a stubby pencil, than I could with technical drawing equipment. All his plans worked but I have not inherited his skills.

One neighbour knew he couldn't do it either and 'got a man in' to do the job. The next morning Dad brought up Mum her morning cup of tea, but was laughing and unable to

speak. He had seen our neighbour looking at his replaced window with about six feet of putty in his hand which he had removed from the window to see how it was done. How he managed to replace the putty before the pane fell out, Dad did not know.

Our neighbour also had trouble with a replaced back door. His measurements (unlike Dad's) were wrong and 9.30pm one Sunday night Dad was asked to help him make it fit. He did.

Recently people have gone for wood burning stoves, but the general feeling then was that everybody was glad to stop making fires, carrying coal and having smokey living rooms. It was pure luxury to have a proper bathroom and not have to keep moving the tin bath in the house, then emptying it of fast cooling water. The new coal effect electric fires were quick to use and reliable. Not everybody realised that we had plastic coal with a red bulb revolving behind it to make the effect. One of Dad's older brothers was not in the know. Just before he rose to leave, he filled his pipe and shot the remaining fragments of

tobacco on to what thought was a fire. We would not have hurt his feelings, but we had a terrible job stifling our laughter until he had gone.

Dad could not deal with the re-wiring or the installation of a hot water boiler, but his

brother-in-law had an electrical firm and my cousin actually did the work. Uncle inspected it and only insisted on one light switch being corrected. We were living in comfort at last.

When I came to move house, which I did with feelings of

guilt, I found that not all Barry Bucknell's ideas were so good. My hallway was very dark as all the bannisters had been boxed in. There was a great improvement when the panels were removed.

*Peter Evans*

## Old Heath

**Recently a feature** of the local news has been the problem with flooding at the Hythe. Until my late teens I lived on Old Heath Road, on the hill. As a youngster a favourite walk of my mother's was to take us kids and walk the

Hythe. We would walk down Distillery Lane and have a dabble in the pond by 'Maitlands' and then down onto the quay.

There we would see what boats were in and would hope to see the gantry crane over the

Colne, unloading molar earth to the brickworks on the opposite bank of the river. We would then walk along the quay passing the Gas Works being very careful not to catch little feet in the railway lines as we went.

Our destination was the Hythe Station level crossing where, with great caution on my Mother's part, we would wait and see if any train's came through. Our return journey to Old Heath Road would always be in the anticipation of calling at the General Store at the bottom of Hythe Hill for an ice cream. But only, ever, if we had behaved ourselves!

At our house on Old Heath Hill my bedroom was at the rear. In those days Sunday was a much quieter day of the week, in the morning especially. Lying in bed early on a Sunday morning would come, depending on the right wind direction and tide conditions, the hooting horn of a boat coming into port at the Hythe. When the wind blew the other way one could hear the military band on the parade ground at the barracks striking up a march.

Days so long gone now that can never return, but fondly remembered.

*David Butcher*



*Two views of Distillery Pond, the top one taken around the late 1980s, the other as it is today*

© Patrick Denney

## Being Served the Co-op Way in the 1960s and 1970s

**I started work** in the Co-op gentleman's outfitting department in 1962 and stayed for 40 odd years in various roles across the town centre.

I'd applied for a vacancy for a junior warehouse assistant with prospects of moving onto shop floor. Pay would be £4 for a five and a half day week rising with age.

The men's department traded on three floors from the imposing building built in 1914 on the corner of Long Wyre/ St Nicholas Streets.



I started at the bottom - literally. Wearing a long grey warehouse coat, I was soon barrowing parcels up from Long Wyre Street to the back door and down into the basement for unpacking.

After a week or so, I was entrusted to carry the daily takings down to the Victoria Place office in a leather Gladstone bag with alarm strap attached.

After a sales assistant left I got a leg up to be junior on the ground floor. Nervously, I took my place in the pecking order. It was rather similar to Grace

Brothers in *Are you being Served?*  
**Those were the days**

The department was mainly staffed by long serving chaps supported by a few boy or girl juniors. There was a hierarchy which one respected and the culture wasn't very PC. This was well before gender equality backed by legislation and the 'woke' agenda. You either shrugged it off or left.

The old guard knew their stock inside out, but they were fiercely territorial. When pressed to serve elsewhere,

a forced smile and 'not really my department, but I'll try to help...'

We sold across counters and gave face to face service. Self

selection was considered a temptation to the dishonest. Customers were addressed as 'Sir' or 'Madam' and received the full attention.

We in menswear were still using the pneumatic tube cash handling system. Old fashioned, but at least we weren't forever fretting about till discrepancies.

Rural area members were amongst the most loyal. They'd come to town on Wednesdays, (village half day) and Saturdays (market day) and head for the Co-op. If Mr needed new clothes, he'd usually stand at the counter like a lemon, while Mrs sorted him out with the assistant.

Time didn't seem to be a problem for our customers. They'd stand dithering for ages over which colour socks to buy.

Our Sales were always worth waiting for. As well as clearing dated stock, we bought in 'specials'. Batches of imperfect underwear were extremely popular.

A useful feature of Co-op trade was the mutuality system. It was used a lot for schoolwear and Christmas gifts. The collectors were well liked and trusted not to load client







*Collecting the 'divi' at Victoria Place*

members with debt. There was no doubt that the dividend of one shilling in the pound (5%) encouraged loyalty.

We weren't short of competition though. We were up against Hepworths, Burtons, John Collier and M & S. Independents included Owen Ward, Jolliffes, John Wade and Newson's schoolwear. And, of course, Marks the Tailor who brought 'Carnaby Street' to Colchester.

### **No small operation**

The Society was a major trading force in the town. It didn't dabble. It offered a comprehensive range of food and non-food services.

Dry Goods (as we called it) included furnishings, electrical and homeware, housed in the new St Nicholas House opposite. We dominated the western side of Long Wyre Street with the drapery/fashions store being the anchor.

Victoria Place head office is where members managed their share accounts and collected their dividend. Some readers will remember socials and dancing in the Co-op Hall opposite above the café.

A unique Co-op feature was the Education Department based in New Town Road. That office organised self-improvement and social programmes for members. A particular activity was the Co-op Women's Guild. (Like a WI with Co-operative values). Store staff looked out for them. They had the ear of the directors.

I liked attending the AGMs. They could get lively. Members would ask awkward questions for the President to answer. An example was when the grocery division wanted to close three grocery stores including North Station Road and Drury Road. Those against closure put up candidates at the next election. That resulted in five new directors in, five out.

### **Change in the air.**

The early 70's brought a succession of challenges.

As well as adapting to new sales methods, in 1971 we faced up to decimalisation. That created a demand for the new electronic calculators which were purchased from Markham's Office Supplies in High Street.

After joining the EU we had to cope with Valued Added Tax. A bit of a nightmare.

In 1973 there was a national miners strike. With coal supplies disrupted, non-essential use of electricity was restricted to three days a week. To get by we strung up temporary lights across the sales floors powered by generators. Paraffin 'tilly' lamps were positioned next to pay points. All non-food retailers were in the same boat. It went on for about six weeks.

As we approached the mid 1970's the society faced extra competition. Smart stores opened along the new pedestrianised Lion Walk precinct. The planners had done a good job and the public liked what they saw.

The society eventually decided to consolidate most departments under one roof. Some of Long Wyre Street was to be rebuilt to create a modern department store. With new management and investment that came to fruition in the early 1980's. There were winners and losers. Unfortunately, menswear was amongst the losers.

In my first 10 years I saw gentleman's fashions change from 50's comfort fit to Swinging Sixties with short jackets, narrow lapels and tight trousers. We then lurched into the Seventies and wore kipper ties and flairs.

I was just a small cog then in the Society's wheel. There were over a thousand of us employed by Colchester and East Essex Co-operative Society helping it to turn.

It served Colchester well.

*Nick Chilvers*

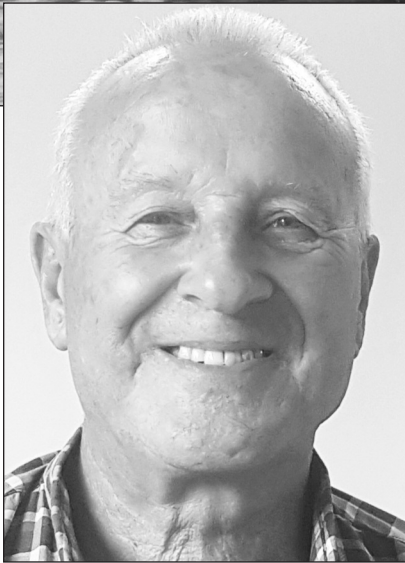
*Pictures courtesy of East of England Co-op*

# My Memories of Working on the Hythe Dredger



**When I was** in my early twenties my father got me a job on the dredger down the Hythe. There were four people employed on it - two up front, one at the stern - which was my job - and the engineer. The dredging side of things, with the buckets, was run by steam which was coal-fired and we had to load the coal onto the dredger by hand. We had a yard on the quayside opposite the old *Anchor* pub where the coal was stored. And we had to move it from there by dumper truck to wherever the dredger was working at the time and then shovel it into the hold. The dredger itself didn't have an engine and had to be towed into position to wherever we were dredging.

When I first started, I was put up front with my father but they needed someone to look after the stern winches and they wanted someone who could



*Rodney Trott (b.1946)*

scull a boat. Now I couldn't do that at first because it's not easy in tidal waters I can tell you. But Harry Rook (who we called Shrimp), an ex-Naval man, taught me how to do it. It took me a fair while to get used to it but once I'd got the hang of it, I was away. You would stand in the back of a little rowing boat with the oar in your hand and you make a figure eight with it in the water which would propel you along.

ABOVE:

*The Colne dredger at work in the 1980s. The mud from the dredger can be seen passing down a chute onto the lighter which is moored alongside. Note also the two circular discs on top of the dredger indicating to other river craft that the dredger is 'restricted in its ability to manoeuvre'.*

© Patrick Denney

We moved the dredger up and down the river with a series of chains and winches. We had three chains on the front of the dredger and three on the stern. And then you had your winches - there were three of these at the front - one on the port side, one on the starboard side and one at the front. And you had your chains running from them. Then you had the stern winches - which was my job to look after. There was the stern chain and also two other winches on the port and starboard sides. My job was to look after the rowing boat and scull it across

the river from one side to the other and keep moving the wires and chains on the various bollards, which were on the quayside, when needed.

Attached to the wires we had block and tackle which I would tighten by hand with half hitches and then I would put the chains on the wires ready for dredging. So, by adjusting the chains, as needed, the dredger would creep forward bit by bit.

The mud which was dredged up was emptied into a lighter [a type of barge], which was moored up alongside the dredger and we also had a tug, called the *Portreeve*, which would be standing by ready to tow the lighter downriver when full. When we started dredging the mud from the buckets would be directed down a chute into the lighter. When the lighter was full, and we'd cleaned and hosed the decks down, the tug would tow it down river to the pumping station where they used to moor up by the landing stage and then pump the mud out onto the marshes.

At the Hythe we would dredge from somewhere near where the swinging bay was located [where the ships turned round], right down as far the *Anchor* pub at Rowhedge on the odd occasion. We never used to dredge right up the narrow channel towards Hythe Bridge because there used to be a lot of fresh water coming down there, which would wash the mud away anyway, especially when there had been a lot of rain and water which had washed off the fields. But we would normally only dredge from our yard, near the swinging bay, down river as far as Fieldgate's. But occasion-



*One of many ships leaving the port in 1986*

© Patrick Denney

ally we would be asked to go down to Rowhedge and do their swinging bay. We would dredge right across the river, not just at the sides. I would usually get the stern out first and then we would make our way across at an angle. The chains and the wires did all the work.

The earliest that we would start work on the dredger would be four o'clock in the morning in the summer – although it all depended on the tide and sometimes we would still be working to between half seven and eight o'clock at night. You can only dredge when the tide is in. When we couldn't do dredging work we had plenty of maintenance work to do on the dredger as well looking after all the buoys down the river. The

buoys were all numbered and we used to go down there with the *Portreeve* and a craft called the *Crocus* and bring them back, take all the barnacles off, clean them and then re-paint them. I remember there is one buoy down at Point Clear next to where there is a wreck lying in the river and we had to change the battery regularly on that.

We worked a five-day week Monday to Friday and we would be dredging for six hours followed by two hours maintenance. There was four of us on the dredger, one on the tug, one who'd be steering the lighter and two down at the pumping station. One would be pumping it out and his mate would be helping him.

When we were dredging back in the seventies there would be



*The Subro Viking moored alongside Pertwee's grain store in 1980. © Michael Pertwee*

a lot of ships on the river. And when they were coming up near to where we were working they used to blow their horns. We then had to move everything to the side and tie up alongside the quay and slacken off all the chains, so that the ships could go by without getting anything get caught up. We had to tie up because the surge of the ships coming by was quite strong and could cause you a lot of problems. We usually knew when a ship was coming up because the Harbour Master would come and tell us that something was coming up in say the next ten minutes. And we always had to give way to them.

We used to have to dredge the river all along the length of the harbour because the mud was everywhere – it was all down the river. Some of the ships coming up there were 1,500 tons. There were lots of firms working down the Hythe at the time including the Molar works, Dock Transit, Fieldgate's and also the timber yards. And

part of our job at weekends, when there might be a lot of ships coming up, would be to go down and assist the Harbour Master in mooring the ships that were coming into the port – that was also part of my job. When a ship was coming in, I would put my hand up to the man on deck and he would throw the heaving line ashore and I would to moor up for him. And if one was going out, he would first have to turn round in the swinging bay and he would throw the heaving line ashore and I would put the rope on the bollard and he would then go astern which would pull the head round, after which I would then let the rope go and away he went.

So that was another part of the job that we had to do. It wasn't just the dredging work. We had look after all the buoys, we had to make sure that all the ships that were docked at the Hythe had fresh water available from the hydrants on the quayside, as well as keeping up with all the maintenance work.

I also know why Haven Road

keeps flooding. When we used to be dredging near to where the swinging bay used to be, there used to be the *New Dock Inn* nearby, and Wheeler's scrap yard where the new flats are now, and Marriages grain silo. And beside the silo there was a little road that used to go down and join up with Haven Road. Well, I know for a fact that when I was doing the boat work near there - moving the chains and the wires - there was a sluice gate in the quayside which used to flap open automatically to let the water come out. But now it's full of mud and the flaps don't work. That's probably why Haven Road floods.

I mean it's not rocket science, but that's why its possibly keeps flooding – there's nowhere for the water to go.

When we used to dredge the river, Haven Road very rarely used to flood, except for the occasional very high tide when it used to come over the road – but that was on rare occasions.

*Edited from a conversation with Patrick Denney in July 2022*



## The American Airmen Return to Britain in 1992

*US pilots final briefing at Boxford before take-off in 1944*

**Over a sunny weekend** in early May 1992 about 15 members of Colchester Recalled met with and interviewed US airmen who flew B-26 Marauder Bombers (the world's first all-metal aeroplane) from Stansted and Boxted in World War Two, between 1942 and 1944.

'Overpaid, oversexed and over here' was the unfair label applied to thousands of US soldiers and airmen who put their lives on the line to fight and die so that Europe might be free. It was a unique and extraordinary time: 100,000 young American men, far, far from home, as rural East Anglia became one giant aircraft carrier, peppered with US bases making regular bombing raids over occupied Europe. At the first active base, St Andrew's Field near Great Saling, within the first year every one of the original US pilots had died or was missing. It was that bad.

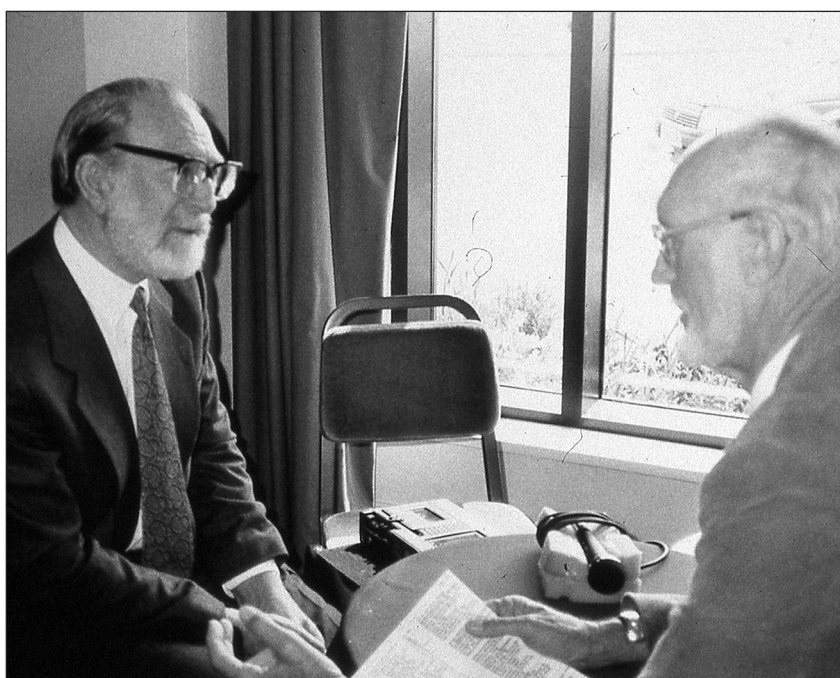
Our weekend began on the Friday evening with a noisy Reception at Chelmsford –

there was a big band playing as we began to record both live events and interviews with the Americans. This continued over Saturday and Sunday at Stansted, Silver End and Madingley. The Americans were remarkably obliging in talking to us in what was a very emotional time for them.

I recall one interviewee who as a young man had the

difficult task of waking up sleeping air crews to fill in for a plane and its crew, who had not returned from a raid over Germany. 'They were only kids', he recalled, 'and they used to fake it that they were still fast asleep – they knew what they were being woken for'.

I also recall interviewing one distinguished-looking retired



*The late Paddy Brennan interviewing Colonel Bob Harwell, President of the Marauder Men. Note the microphone on the table.*

man admitting that he was the lead bomber aeroplane at D-Day and how he and his crew were told in advance, then isolated for several days, so that they could not tell anyone else

what was pending.

After the war he became a full-time airline pilot throughout the 1950s.

Our archive now contains 79, probably unique recordings

from that weekend, and many of them have not been played since!

Maybe we should run some at our next meeting.

*Andrew Phillips*

## Recollections of Bourne Pond

**I had a letter** published in the *Letters* section of the *Essex County Standard* on 25th March 2022. Readers were able to see that in my younger days I knew the Hythe Quay area very well. It is for this reason that I cited the dredging of Bourne Pond in my *ECS* letter.

I grew up on the Old Heath Road until in 1962, aged 17, my parents Alan (always known as 'Nibs') and Barbara Butcher, purchased a newly built property in Bourne Road immediately opposite the Bourne Mill Meadow. Numbers 148, 150 and 152 Bourne Road were built on land that was originally the Kitchen Garden of WHITE LODGE, as an extension to what was colloquially known as 'Red Row', since the dozen or so elevated properties overlooking Bourne Pond included the residences of veteran Labour Councillors, Charles Smallwood (No. 140) and Handy Fisher (No. 134) both of whom became, in their day, Mayor of Colchester.

The building plot was enclosed by a substantial and overgrown holly hedge which was removed to give access to Bourne Road itself. This included that part of the hedge at the front of the plot bordering number 146 which was replaced with a wooden fence. Our neighbour at 146,

Mrs. Pope, was delighted telling my father that for many years she had never been able to venture upstairs without turning the Landing light on be it day or night!

The spring that feeds into Bourne Pond which rises on the other side of the Mersea Road in the corner of the Cemetery grounds, must be of significant volume, providing sufficient water, in antiquity, to power not one but two water mills. Firstly Bourne Mill itself and then flowing on to Cannock Mill beside the Old Heath Road, then on into Distillery Pond beside MAITLANDS at the end of Distillery Lane and eventually discharging into the river Colne at Hythe Quay. No doubt as it

flows its course it also collects a significant amount of ground water from the area, particularly in wet weather. It is for this reason that I cite the dredging of Bourne Pond in my article. You cannot disregard this volume of water in any consideration as to a solution to the Hythe flooding.

The dredging of Bourne Pond itself was quite an interesting piece of civil engineering. My best estimate of the work being carried out would be in 1974. Although things like weed clearance are done at regular intervals, it would be interesting to know if a full dredge has taken place since. I do not believe so, however I cannot claim to be



*The 'Red Row' of Bourne Road, mentioned opposite*

constantly in contact with the area in recent years.

The dredging operation was carried out by two coal fired 'Puffing Billy' traction engines. One sited on the far side of the pond adjacent to the Mill, the other in the corner of the meadow immediately opposite my parent's house in Bourne Road. Both engines had leeway to position themselves to pull a dredge bucket back and forth across the pond. I think that the dredge itself was only active one way, allowing the dredged material to be deposited on the meadow between the Mersea Road side of the pond and the Stonemason's on the corner.

The entire operation was completed in just over a week and I believe that at the outset of the work the estimated cost was £2,000.00 (A sensible average over various calculators available to use would equate to about £20,000.00 today).

I assume the work was

authorised by the National Trust, but it is entirely possible that they may have had financial support from Anglian Water or possibly Colchester Borough Council. It was, however, at the time clearly considered that work of this magnitude was necessary to maintain the waterway.

Additionally, circa 1970, I recall being involved when the Mill's living areas were the subject of considerable remedial and treatment work carried out by Rentokil. I was called upon to remove the various electrical services that were in their way and then to reinstate them when the work was completed. An awfully filthy, dirty, stinking job as I recall, given that Health and Safety was not as prominent an issue as in the modern era.

There is a considerable amount of material available concerning Bourne Mill itself relating to its history, upkeep

and tenancies. The tenant in residence I particularly remember being Peter Watts, a well-known Colcestrian, who at the time of the dredging had moved on to another property in the Dutch Quarter, adjoining Castle Park, being succeeded by Andrew Dodds, an artist. A general thread running throughout such material, is the responsibility for upkeep of the property and in particular the financial responsibility. Not necessarily that expenditure was not constantly required, more a matter of who should provide it. Often the authorities would attempt to steer the onus on to the unfortunate tenant, thus absolving themselves.

This, it would seem, continues to the present day. As with the matter of the Hythe flooding, not a question that something is required to be done, but a matter of who is responsible to pay for it.

*David Butcher*

## Jottings from a Childhood Diary from World War Two

**Submitted by Martin Broom**

**After listening** to reminiscences from those who lived through World War Two at a recent Colchester Recalled meeting, I was reminded that I had in my possession my late aunt's diary for 1940.

My aunt, Kathleen Broom, lived at 1 Winchester Road with her parents and two of her four brothers. Her two older brothers were already in the forces and her brother Dennis was shortly to join up - he was killed in action in 1944. She was 10 years old at the start of 1940.

The diary entries are fairly mundane. Her new teacher in March was "alright." She "won 4 marbles." "She had German measles."

On 1st April she attended an air raid practice. On the 13th April she attended a further practice. On the 20th April she records that the family had a new wireless, and records Herr Hitler's birthday.

On 7th June she notes that the air raid siren went and lasted an hour, but nothing happened.

On 18th June she records "a

second raid". The next day she records a raid lasting from 11.30pm until 3.45am. The raids are recorded every night until 25th June, often with times recorded.

It will be noted that the times recorded are between the siren sounding and the 'All Clear'. She refers to air raids, but these were not necessarily raids - indeed, none may have been. However, the dates may well assist research into how often the sirens were sounded - and how the population responded. Never once does my aunt refer

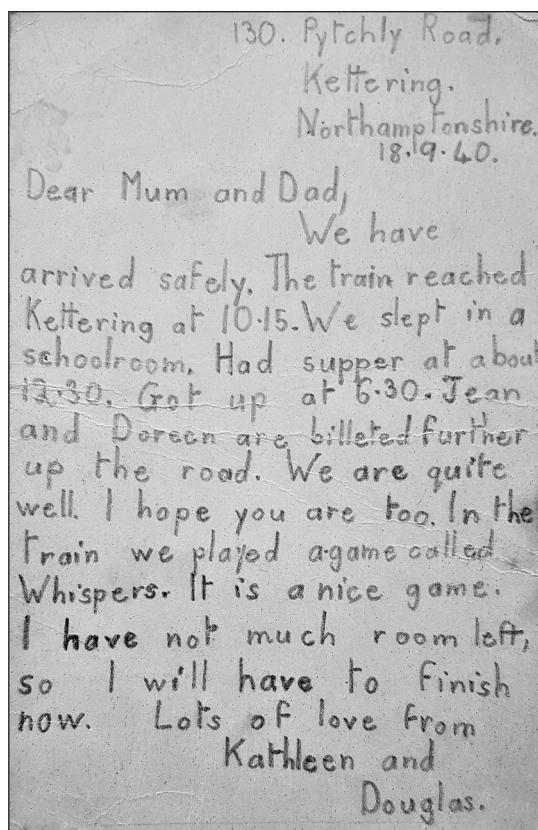


*Group photo taken of the Broom family in 1944 in the back garden of the family home in Winchester Road. Front left is Douglas Broom, who was evacuated with his sister Kathleen, who is sitting next to him on the right. Note also the pile of sandbags at the rear.*

to taking shelter, but this was in 1940. I believe that the family slept downstairs on mattresses later in the war and eventually used a Morrison shelter.

Either the warnings ceased or the siren had become too commonplace because no further warnings are recorded until 7th July. The she records "aeroplanist were about - no siren!" and on the following day "aeroplanist were about again".

From the 11th July until 8th September, she records almost daily alarms. Gradually "I slept through it", "we didn't hear it". On the 3rd September she is sitting on her bed writing her diary until 3.30am.



*A postcard sent home by Kathleen and Douglas to their parents in Colchester*

Come the 17th July it was worth recording that there had been no warnings that day. She records (without saying where her information came from), that 491 planes had been shot down since the 9th. She wrote "144 planes were down today".

Life continued. She went to school. She went to chapel. She went "up town". She picked blackberries.

On 25th August "55 Jerries were shot down" - all reported as a matter of fact.

No suggestion of concern for herself or her family. On 29th August she spent tuppence halfpenny.

Then on the 9th September she received advice about being evacuated - but - "I don't think we will be going". On the 16th September she was registered for evacuation.

The next day she "went up town, was evacuated. Went in a schoolroom to sleep". "Went to bed about 1.00(am) - not very comfortable".

On 18th September "Got up at 6.30. Was billeted at Mr and Mrs Simpson's (at Kettering). "Went to park - a lovely one".

She was actually with her younger brother Douglas.

Douglas recalls that they were moved to other accommodation after two days. Two cousins accommodated nearby.

19th September. "Went on park". "Started school". "Went up town". "Went on park with girl next door". 20th September. "Went to Kettering High School".

Further references to the



park and town. Also, to a Miss King, who may have been her teacher from Colchester.

The diary entries continue for another two weeks. Lessons are recorded. She records the sirens going twice, (this was in Kettering). Letters were

received from home.

And then the entries cease.

It would appear that she has settled comfortably in Kettering and if she had any worries they are not shared in her diary.

A poignant record. Repeated by many for sure, but a special

and valuable record.

It is thought that Kathleen and her brother stayed in Kettering for only about two months before returning home.

*Both photos courtesy of Douglas Broom*

## Who Do You Think They Are? No.10

**Another significant** figure in COLCHESTER RECALLED: but who is he? Follow his answers.

*What is your earliest memory?*

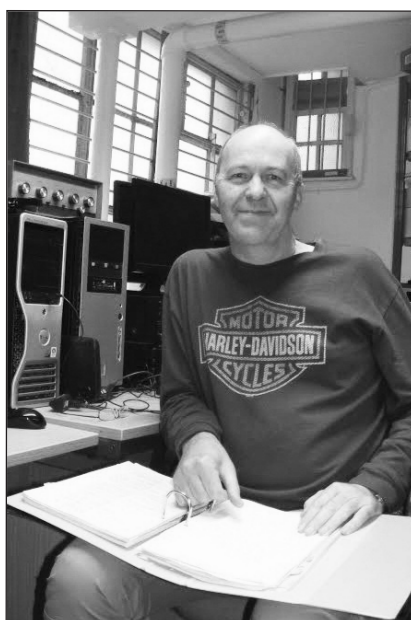
I remember enjoying going to the local woods and spending the day playing there. We lived near a river and there was plenty of farm and woodland around us. I would look for ponds and pools to see what lived there, like frogs, newts, fish and insects.

*Have you any unusual School memories?*

In 1969 I was at Broxbourne Secondary Modern school during the NASA Moon landings. I remember watching the live television streams in the assembly hall during our breaks. We crowded around the school's black and white tv to see what was happening. It was an amazing event and very inspiring.

*What brought you to Colchester?*

In 1973 my first full time job was working as a cleaner for British Rail at Stratford, East London. I worked there for many years progressing to the position of Train Driver. Stratford drivers operated trains to all points in East Anglia, including Colchester which seemed a very pleasant place.



When I got married we were looking for somewhere to settle down and raise a family and I was offered a Supervisor's job at Colchester depot. At that time the railway would help you move to another location and as this offer would provide my family with a better lifestyle, we decided that we would make the move and have lived in Colchester ever since.

I progressed to many other roles within the Railway industry, but have stayed in Colchester because we like it here so much.

*Where is your favourite place in Colchester?*

Since moving to Colchester we quickly found the Castle and its park, which was something

unique and gave us an insight into Colchester's past, as well as our children loving the playground. We enjoyed taking them there and have visited the castle many times. I particularly enjoy the view from the bandstand across to High Woods. The gardens have also been good to walk through, seeing the seasonal changes and the events that take place.

*What is your most scary experience?*

When I was sixteen I used to ride a moped to get to Stratford to work from Broxbourne when there were no trains available, as my job involved early and late shifts. A few weeks after starting I was riding home along the old A11 near Epping when a lorry went to overtake me. I was in the left hand lane when the lorry suddenly pulled to the left and hit my handlebars. It all happened in a split second as I lost control of my bike and was flung under the lorry. I still don't know how I survived! If I close my eyes I can still remember seeing the underside of that trailer above me.

When everything had stopped, I remember I was in the road behind the lorry when a motorcyclist stopped and helped me off the road.

He sat talking to me whilst we waited for the ambulance. Although I never found out who he was he really helped me that day.

Thankfully I only had minor injuries to my leg and a few weeks later I was back at work!

*What was the most famous event you attended?*

When I was working for the Railway one of my roles was with Regional Headquarters

and I was fortunate enough to work on the opening of the line to Stansted Airport. A lot of work had been undertaken to create a new railway link to the airport and it was to be opened by the Queen in 1991.

I was fortunate to be on the Royal Train from Liverpool Street to the airport to oversee the journey.

The Queen travelled to the airport using one of the then new Airport Express trains.

We travelled with the crew to assist them and were present at the Airport during the ceremony and the return journey to London.

The ceremony was held on the main station platform and it was an honour to attend. It was an exciting and memorable experience.

*Who is this man?*

Answer at the Base of the Back Cover.

#### From the Archive No. 4

## People Were Jammed in Like Sardines

**I can remember** the time when Colchester played Huddersfield Town in the FA Cup in 1948. I took a young friend along with me and we managed to shin up a drain pipe and stood on top of the Gents' toilets to watch the game. It was a stupid thing to do because it was only pieces of corrugated iron. There were about 16,000 people crammed into the ground. They were perched on trees and anywhere else where you could get a view of the pitch. People were jammed like sardines in there.

A lot of the Colchester players at that time were only part timers, but we had some good players such as 'Digger' Kettle, Len Cater and Arthur Turner. The footballers in those days were all well known to everyone and you would perhaps meet them in the town. Huddersfield had several stars and internationals playing for them and we were expecting to be hammered about 5-0.

When the game started the U's seemed to be holding their own and by half time it was still



*Photo from the Patrick Denney Collection*

0-0. And then with about twenty minutes to go, with the U's pressing at the far end of the pitch from where we were, we heard a terrific roar and we realised that Colchester had scored. A player called Bob Curry had put the ball into the net and we were 1-0 up. The crowd were shouting and screaming but the worst part was that we still had about twenty minutes to go.

It would have been lovely if it had been the last minute, but for us it seemed like the longest twenty minutes you could imagine.

As the game drew to a close Huddersfield were running rings around us. They hit the post, the crossbar and they did everything but score. And then at the final whistle the whole place erupted and there were celebrations in the town. Everybody streamed out of the ground in a good mood and were talking about it all the time.

It was the first time that a non-league club had beaten a League club since before the Second World War.

*Hugh Harvey*

## Letters to the Editor

**Further** to correspondence in COLCHESTER RECALLED issues 34/35 in respect of the old Arcade, I trust that you will allow me to provide a little more detail. The 'Noisy Parrott' was a feature of The Colchester Pet Shop. He, or she, squawked away for many years, amplified by the glass roof above and, most certainly, was never offered for sale, being a feature of the shop that everybody expected to see.

The main trader in the Arcade was TM Locke's furniture store. Locke's had a frontage on both Queen Street and Long Wyre Street, the premises in the Arcade providing a link between the two.

For many years Mr. Locke was a client of my father's. In the early 1960's, when we were about to move house, my father bagged a real bargain in Locke's sale. A kitchen table and four chairs. I think he had inside knowledge and doubt that the items ever, actually, went on display. My father asked Locke's if it would be possible to get him two additional chairs and was told they could, but it would have to be on 'special order', yes. you've guessed it, when the two chairs came in they cost almost as much as he had paid for the table and four chairs. My father was somewhat aggrieved, only to be told that he now knew what a bargain he got in the first place.

Although never a 'client' I also remember the Public Baths, situated in Culver Street at the rear of Marks & Spencer, adjacent to which was a

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*An advertisement for Lockes dated 1959*

*From the Patrick Denney Collection*

traditional wet fish shop. Every day the fishmonger would fetch his ice from The Colchester Ice Company, by the Playhouse in St. John's Avenue and set up his display. Early one new year I was called to do some work at The Colchester Ice Company. In those days no one dreamed of eating poultry other than at Christmas or for a very special occasion. I clearly remember the Ice Company staff hanging rows of unsold Christmas turkeys into an ice box, ready for market next Christmas.

*David Butcher*

**Seeing** COLCHESTER RECALLED again with that lovely view of the Arcade set me thinking again.

I always loved walking through the Arcade and was really sorry went it went. I remember the posh hat shop Le

Chapeau, John Gellers, (the butchers moved to St John's Street), the Colchester Pet Shop and a cafe that featured heavily in the *Lovejoy* novels by Jonathan Gash (really Dr Grant of West Bergholt).

Sadly neither the Arcade nor the cafe made it into the 1980's *Lovejoy* TV series, starring Ian McShane, though other parts of Colchester did.

My favourite shop sold second hand comics and copies of *Classics Illustrated*, which told the story of classic novels of Dickens, Victor Hugo, Jack London, Mark Twain etc in comic strip form, but they were faithful versions. Favorites were *The Count of Monte Christo* and *Call of the Wild*. It increased my interest in literature massively. I still have a few.

On a Thursday in September 1962, I started at the Gilbert School and was walking home resplendent in my new school uniform, complete with brief case and cap.

I had survived and was floating through the Arcade, largely quiet as it was half-day closing.

We had an influx of headteacher's children in my year, so I was not surprised to hear someone also in green uniform call 'Are you a headmaster's son?' I said, 'No' - and he knocked my cap off.

I could see the joke and laughed all the way home.

*Peter Evans*

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*The answer to "Who Do You Think They Are?" on page 15 is Robert Cooper who designed the digital index to our entire archive.*