

# Essex JOURNAL

A REVIEW OF LOCAL HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY

Autumn 2009

CHRISTINE JONES EXAMINES LITERACY IN  
COLCHESTER DURING THE EIGHTEENTH &  
NINETEENTH CENTURIES

PLUS THE FORMATION OF THE  
CHELMSFORD POOR LAW UNION,

GAS MANUFACTURE  
IN CHELMSFORD,

AND THE LIFE & WORKS OF UNA LUCY SILBERRAD

ALSO

NEWS FROM THE PLUME LIBRARY,  
BOOK REVIEWS,  
AND...

WHAT LINKS

AN ESSEX HISTORIAN AND A CUDDLY BLUE GIRAFFE?  
FIND OUT IN THE EJ 20 QUESTIONS FEATURE!

MEDIAEVAL  
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Harry's War

British Tommy's Experiences  
in Trenches in World War One

The Spirit of a  
Real Home



Lucy Greenwood  
and the  
Halshead Industrial School



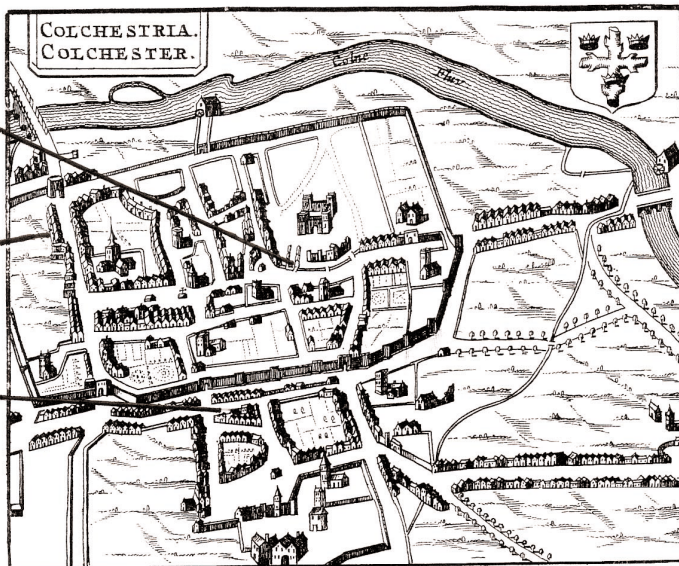
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#### Notes to contributors

Contributions are welcome and should be sent in a Word format to the Honorary Editor at the email listed above. General correspondence can either be emailed or posted to: 30 Main Road, Broomfield, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 7EF. The Editor is more than happy to discuss any proposed articles as he does not guarantee that unsolicited material will be published. Contributors are requested to limit their articles to 2,500/4,000 words, other than by prior agreement with the Editor. Style notes are available.

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#### Cover illustrations:

Background - Page from a Colchester marriage register, (ERO, D/P 176/1/5); Great Baddow's proposal for an enlarged workhouse, (TNA, MH 12/3396); plan of Provident Row, Chelmsford, (ERO, D/Z 36/80); the commemorative brass to Una Silberrad in the SW corner of St. Mary's church, Burnham-on-Crouch, (T. Fox).

**W**hen Harry Patch died earlier this year we lost the last living link with first-hand experience of the trenches of the First World War. Through all of our lives there had been present a generation of men who had fought between 1914 and 1918, be they fathers, grandfathers, uncles etc. With the death of Harry Patch I feel that we have all witnessed something remarkable. Perhaps this is the first time in our history that we have been able to declare the death of the last witness to any human event. I cannot imagine that, without modern technology, demographic information and instant worldwide communications our ancestors would have been able to pinpoint with such accuracy an occasion like this. I'm sure that the ever industrious and assiduous collectors of statistics, the Victorians, would not have had the capacity to make such a declaration. We live in truly remarkable times as to be able to chart the demise of a complete generation and I am not sure that it is necessarily a good thing to know. Still, what a strange and very poignant Armistice Day we shall witness this year when there will be no representative of that generation for which this commemoration was established. Doubly poignant are the losses that our armed forces have been suffering in Afghanistan. We must make sure that we do not forget those that have served and those who continue to serve on our behalf and, that as historians, we continue to remember all those who have gone before.

Once more *Essex Journal* plays its part and publishes another four fantastic and interesting articles in which many people are recalled and remembered from the past. Christine Jones provides us with a fascinating study of literacy in Colchester. Just looking at those marks in the marriage register should make us all very grateful for the access to education we have had. The ability to read and write is something we tend to take for granted but it does us no harm to think occasionally of just how fortunate we are with the opportunities afforded us. Following on from this, Ruth Costello discusses the manoeuvrings that took place during the setting up of poor law unions in Essex. Contemporary voices and opinions ring loud and clear from a distance of over a century and a half. You can really hear the despair in some of them, the wish to be left alone by central authorities to get on with their own thing; perhaps a sentiment that we can all share?

Peter Wynn discusses the manufacture of gas in Chelmsford which has a surprisingly early start date of 1819. This topic is quite pertinent to many who undertake research into the history of



our county as the view from the Searchroom of the Essex Record Office is dominated by the two remaining gasholders. Rounding off the articles in this issue is Tony Fox with his work on a prolific Essex authoress, Una Lucy Silberrad. I had never heard of her and I was rather surprised as, having seen how many books she wrote, I would have thought that she would be have been more widely known. If you have not read any of her works why not take advantage of the wonderful Essex County Library Service and order up a book or two and read them in memory of Una Silberrad.

Jenny Ward is another of our wonderful Essex historians, whom I have admired for many years, and I feel that she makes a very fitting *EJ 20?* respondent to this issue which I am sure you will have noticed has a colour cover. Two years on from our re-launch, and with a generous grant from the Augustine Courtauld Trust, we feel that we are now on a stable enough financial footing to be able to enhance the *Essex Journal*. Hopefully in years to come we'll be able to bring more improvements without an increase in the cost of subscriptions. However, I will pre-empt our Membership Secretary by encouraging those subscribers who have not yet paid to forward the £10 subscriptions as quickly as possible. It is very dis-heartening to find a goodly number of subscriptions outstanding especially when the members of the Editorial Board go to so much effort to produce an interesting and worthwhile publication.

I do so hope that you enjoy this issue. If you feel that you have some research you would like to see published in the pages of the *Essex Journal* then please get in contact.

Neil



# Tribute to Dr Maureen Scollan

**T**he Editorial Board of *Essex Journal* was very sorry to receive the resignation of Dr Maureen Scollan as Secretary. Maureen wishes to reduce the number of commitments that she currently has. The Editorial Board fully understand and respect her decision and we wish her well in all her future endeavours.

Maureen joined and strengthened the Editorial Board nearly four years ago, as one of the Friends of Historic Essex representatives, when *Journal* was going through a difficult period. This followed the sad loss of the former Treasurer, Walter Bowyer, and the financial problems which *Journal* was facing. Up until that time the cost of printing was high and the number of subscribers was rather low. It was decided that *Journal* was worth saving and that it would need to be re-branded and then re-launched. Part of the rescue package involved recruiting a new Honourary Editor and taking much of the production in-house. Maureen was instrumental in planning for this new and exciting phase and worked very hard to ensure the smooth running of the project. This culminated in the very successful evening many of us enjoyed when Lord Petre very kindly allowed us the use of Ingatestone Hall to celebrate the first issue of the new look *Essex Journal* back in October 2007. As a result of this the number of subscribers has increased and the *Journal* is on a very much more secure financial footing.

Maureen has since worked very hard not only as Secretary, taking the minutes of numerous meetings and proof reading, but also in connection with grant applications which have been exceptional and much appreciated. Maureen always dealt with the work of *Journal* very promptly and efficiently and we shall miss her.



(Photo courtesy of Ian Mason)

On behalf of the Board and all readers of *Journal* I should like to thank Maureen for her dedication for which we are all grateful. The Editorial Board has presented Maureen with a small gift in recognition of her service and hard work. It is hoped to announce the appointment of a new Secretary in due course.

Adrian Corder-Birch  
Chairman.

## Subscriptions for 2010

These are due **on 1st January 2010**. May we remind you:-

1. If you pay by standing order, thank you. You need take no further action.
2. If you do not yet pay by standing order please consider setting one up. This ensures that your subscription is paid by the due date, simplifies our administration, and saves us costs in sending out reminders. To set up an order, just complete the part of the form headed 'Banker's Order' with your details, and return it to the Membership Secretary as soon as possible.
3. If you wish to continue to pay by cheque please send your payment to reach the Membership Secretary by 1st January 2010. Subscriptions are payable **in advance**, and **not in arrears** as we need the income to cover our ongoing costs. This year an unduly high proportion of subscriptions were still outstanding as we went to print, and have necessitated yet further reminders which are now enclosed.
4. If for any reason you wish to cancel your subscription please notify the Membership Secretary promptly.
5. **Treasurers:** Please ensure that the *Journal* will be delivered to an address where a responsible person for your society will be able to deal promptly with the subscription renewal. We have had examples where the *Journal* has been sent to a meeting place for a society, rather than to a Treasurer, and the subscription reminder has been left languishing and unnoticed for some time. If you wish to change the delivery address please contact the Membership Secretary now.

Thank you all for your co-operation, and the Membership Secretary looks forward to hearing from you.

Jenepher Hawkins  
Membership Secretary

# The Library of Dr Thomas Plume

There is much to celebrate in 2009 at the Plume Library with the completion of the Library's computerised catalogue, available online through the Library's new website ([www.thomasplumeslibrary.co.uk](http://www.thomasplumeslibrary.co.uk)). The online catalogue enables anyone anywhere in the world to find out more about the contents of this unique institution, founded in 1704 under the terms of the will Dr Thomas Plume, vicar of Greenwich and archdeacon of Rochester, who had been born in Maldon in 1630.

The Library which Plume bequeathed to his native town comprises over 8000 books and pamphlets covering the widest possible range of subjects, including theology, astronomy, travel, and politics. Although printed catalogues have been compiled in the past, the computerised catalogue makes it possible to search by subject as well as by author and title, and in the course of making the new catalogue a number of previously unknown works have come to light.



The go-ahead for the project was given in 2004, the Library's tercentenary year, and it has taken nearly five years to complete. It has been generously supported by grants from the Foyle Foundation, the Essex Heritage Trust, the Mercers' Company, the Marc Fitch Fund, the Aurelius Charitable Trust, the Hervey Benham Charitable Trust, and the Friends of Thomas Plume's Library. Other invaluable support has been provided by the staff of the Plume School and TDR Computers of Maldon.

We are immensely grateful to all those who have helped to make the catalogue possible especially Ian Kidman, who catalogued the collection, and the Plume Librarian, Erica Wylie, who has worked hard with Matthew Dawkins, our website designer, to bring the catalogue to the wider world. I should also like to pay tribute to Canon David Atkins, who retired as chairman at the beginning of June, whose confidence in

the project enabled us to see it through. Work is now in progress on cataloguing books added to the Library since 1704, and on the Library's collection of manuscripts.

Launched in tandem with the catalogue is our *Commemorative Benefaction* scheme which will help to care for Thomas Plume's collection of books. Plume originally endowed the Library with what was, for the time, a significant sum, and the income goes towards caring for the books and making them available to readers. In addition there is an active Friends organization which provides generous donations and other support. Grants are sometimes received from national and local organizations and are used to pay for specific developments such as the new electronic catalogue.

But our income is slowly diminishing, and costs rapidly rising. To help with the ongoing task of conserving the Library's books, the Trustees have launched a scheme that will allow individuals to become associated with specific books in the Library. In return for a donation, their name will be displayed in the volume they, or their friends, choose, and it will also be entered into a leather-bound volume of commemoration placed on public display. If you require further information regarding this scheme please contact our Librarian by post, phone or email:

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We also have the Plume Lecture approaching, which will be held this year on Saturday 14th November at the United Reformed Church, Market Hill, Maldon at 7:30 pm. This year's speaker is Dr David Pearson, whose talk is entitled

***Why do we need so many old books? The value of the Plume Library in the modern world.***

David is one of the leading experts on the history of books and some of his research has been carried out at the Plume. All are welcome and admission is free and I hope to see many of you there.

Dr James Bettley  
Chairman of the Trustees



# Literacy In Colchester: 1754-1837

by

Christine E. Jones

Among the provisions of the Act for the Preventing of Clandestine Marriages, 22 Geo.II.c.3, popularly known as *Hardwicke's Marriage Act*, was the requirement that both parties to the marriage should indicate their consent not merely verbally during the ceremony but in the marriage register. Some people signed their names; many others made a mark against which the clerk or clergyman wrote 'the mark of John Smith' or 'Mary Brown, her mark'. Thus marriage registers from 1754 give an indication of the proportion of the population able to sign their names. This article will discuss to what extent this can be demonstrated by using Colchester as a study area.

Critics have argued that this is not a true measure of literacy, since it takes no account of the ability to read, and it may be that the individual could write no more than their name. Others claim that people who could in fact write made a mark in the stress of the moment or to avoid embarrassing a less literate spouse, but evidence for this is hard to establish. However, Schofield argues that marriage registers 'provide a direct measure of one level of literary ability under standard conditions over a wide range of people and groups and over a long period of time.' Since reading was taught before writing, he defends the choice of a signature as a median level of literacy, being an under-estimate of those able to read at an elementary level and an over-estimate of those being able to write fluently, but a fair indication of the proportion able to read fluently, and offers it as 'an agreed body of consistent data which allows [an historian] to make comparative judgements at one level of literacy'.<sup>1</sup>

Within the walls of Colchester there were eight ancient parish churches, with a further four outside the walls that together

with four liberties made up the Borough.<sup>2</sup> Maps of Colchester from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries show that by 1754 the built-up area had begun to extend beyond the medieval walls, but that by 1837 there had been little further expansion except to the south-east. (See map overleaf)

The population of Colchester in 1674 was estimated at 10,400. It is suggested that the population of Colchester seems to have stagnated and may actually have declined in the early decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> The first firm figure for the population of the 12 parishes comes from the census of 1801, when a total of

Banns of Marriage *between William Gilbert & Susanna Bruce*  
*were published March 14, 21, & 28* *John Smythies*  
N<sup>o</sup> 410 *William Gilbert* of the Parish *Batchelor*  
and *Susanna Bruce* of the Parish *Spinster* were  
Married in this *Church* by *Banns*  
this *twenty ninth* Day of *March* in the Year One Thousand Seven  
Hundred and *two* by me *John Smythies Rector*  
This Marriage was solemnized between Us *William Gilbert*  
In the Prefence of *Susanna Bruce*  
*John Smythies*

Banns of Marriage *between James Dean & Mary Rofs* were published  
*March 14, 21, & 28* *John Smythies*  
N<sup>o</sup> 411 *James Dean* of the Parish *Widower*  
and *Mary Rofs* of the Parish *Spinster* were  
Married in this *Church* by *Banns*  
this *fourth* Day of *April* in the Year One Thousand Seven  
Hundred and *two* by me *John Smythies Rector*  
This Marriage was solemnized between Us *James Dean*  
In the Prefence of *Thomas Ingram*  
*John Smythies*

Banns of Marriage  
N<sup>o</sup> 412 *Joseph Pickering* of the Parish of *Saint James*  
*Batchelor* and *Mary Edwards* of the Parish *Spinster* were  
Married in this *Church* by *Licence*  
this *twenty sixth* Day of *April* in the Year One Thousand Seven  
Hundred and *two* by me *John Smythies Rector*  
This Marriage was solemnized between Us *Joseph Pickering*  
In the Prefence of *Mary Edwards*  
*Sathaniel Edwards*  
*William Ansell*

Banns of Marriage  
N<sup>o</sup> 413 *John Taylor* of the Parish *Batchelor*  
and *Elizabeth Cobb* of the Parish *of St. Andrew, Spinster* were  
Married in this *Church* by *Licence*  
this *eighth* Day of *June* in the Year One Thousand Seven  
Hundred and *two* by me *John Smythies Rector*  
This Marriage was solemnized between Us *John Taylor*  
In the Prefence of *Sarah Taylor* *Nath Cobb* *Elizabeth Cobb*  
*Susannah Taylor* *Martha Cobb*

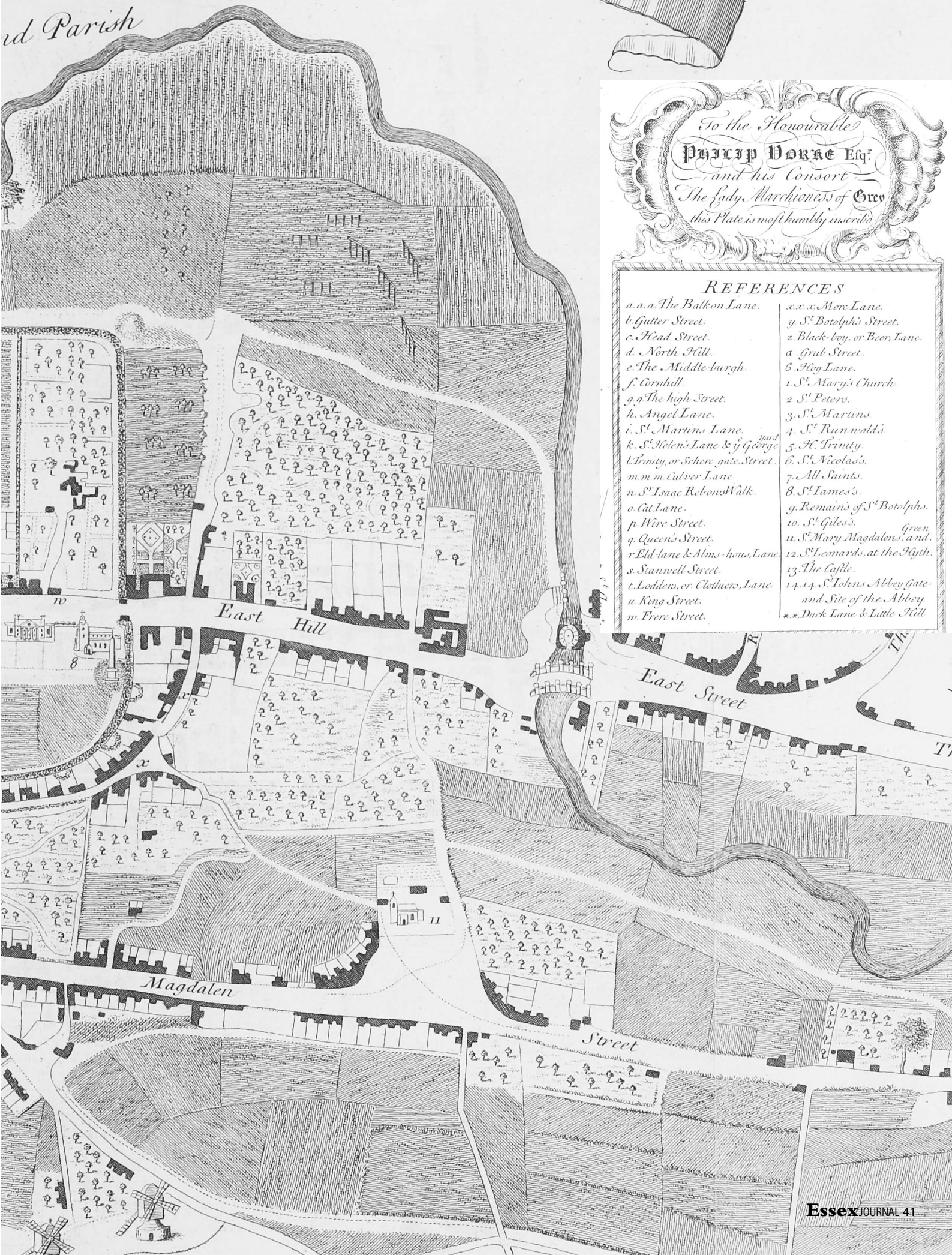
Plate 1. A typical page from a Colchester marriage register showing a mixture of signatures and marks (Reproduced by courtesy of the Essex Record Office, D/P 176/1/5).

Here formerly was  
of Leaden Park





nd Parish



## REFERENCES

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| a. a. a. The Balkon Lane.                       | x. x. x. More Lane.  |
| b. Gutter Street.                               | y. S <sup>t</sup> Botolph's Street.                            |
| c. Head Street.                                 | z. Black-boy, or Been, Lane.                                   |
| d. North Hill.                                  | a. Grub Street.  |
| e. The Middle-burgh.                            | b. Hog Lane.   |
| f. Cornhill.                                    | 1. S <sup>t</sup> Mary's Church.                               |
| g. g. The high Street.                          | 2. S <sup>t</sup> Peters.                                      |
| h. Angel Lane.                                  | 3. S <sup>t</sup> Martins.                                     |
| i. S <sup>t</sup> Martins Lane.                 | 4. S <sup>t</sup> Runwald's.                                   |
| k. S <sup>t</sup> Helen's Lane & y George Lane. | 5. S <sup>t</sup> Trinity.                                     |
| l. Trinity, or Schere, gate, Street.            | 6. S <sup>t</sup> Nicolas's.                                   |
| m. m. m. Culver Lane.                           | 7. All Saints.   |
| n. S <sup>t</sup> Isaac Rebons Walk.            | 8. S <sup>t</sup> James's.                                     |
| o. Cat Lane.                                    | 9. Remains of S <sup>t</sup> Botolphs.                         |
| p. Wire Street.                                 | 10. S <sup>t</sup> Giles's.                                    |
| q. Queens Street.                               | 11. S <sup>t</sup> Mary Magdalens, and Green.                  |
| r. Eld lane & Alms-hous Lane.                   | 12. S <sup>t</sup> Leonards, at the Hyth.                      |
| s. Stanwell Street.                             | 13. The Gyle.  |
| t. Lodders, or, Clothiers, Lane.                | 14. 14. S <sup>t</sup> Johns Abbey Gate and Site of the Abbey. |
| u. King Street.                                 | ** Duck Lane & Little Hill                                     |
| v. Friar Street.                                |  |

# Literacy In Colchester: 1754-1837

10,129 people were recorded. This is indeed less than the estimate for 1674, and accords with the evidence from maps of a lack of spatial expansion. The prosperity of Colchester had been based on the manufacture of woollen textiles. This staple industry declined during the second half of the eighteenth century, but Colchester transformed itself into a market town, its only industries being those processing local agricultural products. Its main function was as a commercial centre, benefiting from improvements in water and road transport and with an increasing number of shops. It attracted both artisans and professionals. By the end of the century it had become the largest market town in Essex and a fashionable social resort. The most prestigious parishes were at either end of the High Street, St Mary at Walls and All Saints, while the middling sort were over represented in St Leonard, St Martin, St Nicholas, St Botolph and All Saints.<sup>4</sup> However, it suffered in the economic depression following the Napoleonic Wars. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that it developed new industries.

About 9,680  
marriages took  
place

Colchester was also transformed briefly into a garrison town. Infantry barracks were constructed in the parish of St Mary Magdalen in 1794. They were extended with the addition of artillery and cavalry barracks in 1800. By 1805 the barracks could accommodate 7,000 troops. At the end of the Napoleonic Wars they were rapidly reduced, being sold off and demolished.

During the period 1754 to 1837 several of the parish churches were in disrepair and few marriages took place in them. Only four marriages

took place in St Runwald before 1762. Holy Trinity, St James and St Nicholas were also affected. St Botolph was not rebuilt until 1836 and the marriage register commences in 1849. Marriages for the parish of St Botolph in the period 1754-1837 are recorded in the registers of All Saints. The registers of all 12 parishes have been deposited with Essex Record Office.<sup>5</sup>

A count was made of the number of marriages in each parish for each year noting the pre-marital status of the grooms and brides and whether they made a mark or signed their name (Plate 1). Thus eight figures were recorded for each year, the numbers of bachelors, widowers, spinsters and widows each making a mark or signing. A second count was made of the marriages in each parish for each year noting whether both parties made marks, the groom signed and the bride marked, the groom marked and the bride signed, or both parties signed. These sub-totals could be aggregated in various ways to examine differences between men and women, between first and second marriages, between the different parishes and to investigate change over time. It was easier to extract the different information by making two passes through the register than trying to extract it all in one go. The double counting also provided a way of checking accuracy since the two sets of figures for each year must agree. Given that some pages of the registers were difficult to read and some had been filmed twice with different exposures this checking was essential in order to arrive at reliable figures.

The occupation of the groom was not required to be stated until 1837 and in the period 1754 to 1837 is not recorded in many registers. There is no guarantee that where it is recorded it is reliably representative of that parish or of the town as a whole. Nevertheless, instances where the occupation was recorded were noted together with the year and

whether the groom marked or signed. There were sufficient numbers in the parish of St Peter for certain periods for a provisional analysis to be made.

About 9,680 marriages took place in the town in the period 1754 to 1837, but three of the records are illegible. Overall 61% of grooms signed the register compared with 39% of brides. However, there were considerable differences between the parishes. The percentage of grooms signing the register varied from 45% in St Mary Magdalen to 70% in St Mary at Walls and Holy Trinity. The percentage of brides signing the register varied from 19% in St Mary Magdalen to 55% at St Mary at Walls and St Runwald. Generally the ability to sign the register was greater in the parishes within the walls than in those outside the walls. Having noted the spatial variation between the inner and outer parishes change over time was examined within these two groups. In the 1750s in the parishes within the walls 54% of grooms signed the register and 29% of brides. By the 1830s this had risen to 77% of grooms and 61% of brides. However, whereas for brides the increase was fairly steady, for grooms there was a noticeable dip in literacy levels around the turn of the century, having risen to 68% in 1795 it fell below 56% between 1797 and 1803.

For the parishes outside the walls rates of signing for both grooms and brides were very similar to those from the parishes within the walls in the 1750s, but by the 1830s they had only risen to 67% of grooms and 39% of brides. Again for both grooms and brides there was a noticeable dip in literacy levels around the turn of the century. In 1798 almost 58% of grooms signed the register, a level not reached again till 1822, having fallen as low as 45% in 1806. Almost 31% of brides signed the register in 1794, falling to 22% in 1806 and not reaching 30% again till 1820.



# Literacy In Colchester: 1754-1837

The reasons for these phenomena appear to be linked to the rise in the number of marriages per year between 1797 and 1810 in the parishes within the walls, and more spectacularly in the parishes outside the walls, where from totals of 27 per year in 1795 and 1820 they reached 115 in 1809. Clearly the presence of the garrison was having an effect on the number of marriages and indirectly an effect on literacy levels.

Comparing people marrying for the first and second time, spinsters were throughout the period more likely to sign their names than widows by about fifteen percentage points, with the exception of the parish of St Mary Magdalen where more widows than spinsters signed. Bachelors were more likely to sign than widowers though the gap was much narrower, only about six percentage points.

In the parishes within the walls there was a fairly steady decline in the proportion of marriages in which both partners marked. The proportions of marriages in which one partner marked and the other signed decreased slightly from 1797, with the proportion of marriages in which it was the groom that signed always considerably exceeding the proportion in which it was the bride that signed. Nevertheless there were a persistent, if small, number of marriages in which the couples were willing to acknowledge that the bride was more literate than the groom. Again there is a fairly steady increase in the proportion of marriages in which both partners signed.

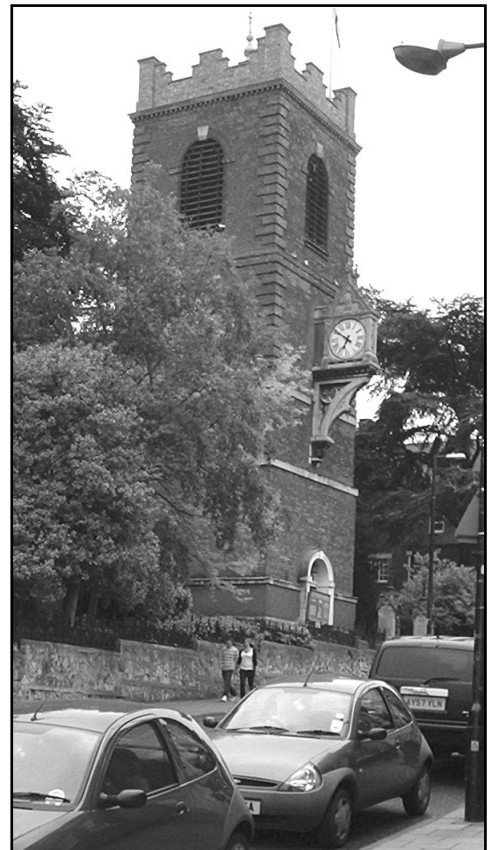
For the parishes outside the walls, there was a decline in the proportion of marriages in which both partners marked between 1767 and 1787, but for the next 20 years there was little change. From 1816 to 1836 there was a more rapid decline in the proportion of marriages in which both partners marked than in the earlier period or in the same period within the walls.

The proportion of marriages in which both partners signed fluctuated and did not show a steady increase until 1817. The proportion of marriages in which one partner marked and the other signed also fluctuated with the proportion of brides signing while their grooms marked being particularly low in 1787-96 but much higher in 1807-16.

The registers of St Peter record occupations intermittently between 1754 and 1813 (Plate 2). In the years 1754-58 over 88% of occupations were recorded. In the longer period 1754-62 over 66% were recorded. From 1763 to 1781 there was very little recording of occupations but the practice became more systematic from 1782 to 1808, during which period almost 59% of occupations were recorded. It tailed off again in 1809 and effectively ceased, apart from an occasional mention, from 1813. With such systematic coverage it becomes more apparent that three groups are omitted. The first of these tended to be those who married by licence rather than by banns. Occupation and pre-marital status had to be stated on the licence and clergymen seemed to see no reason to repeat this information in the register. The second group were widowers. It may be that some of these were elderly and no longer had an occupation. The third group were those from other counties. By the time the clergyman had squeezed the words 'bachelor of the parish of X in the county of Y' there was no space left in registers that were not designed to include occupation. Whereas if all he had to write was 'of this parish' and against the bride wrote 'both single persons' he had space for the occupation of the groom. The grooms for whom occupations are recorded are therefore not necessarily typical.

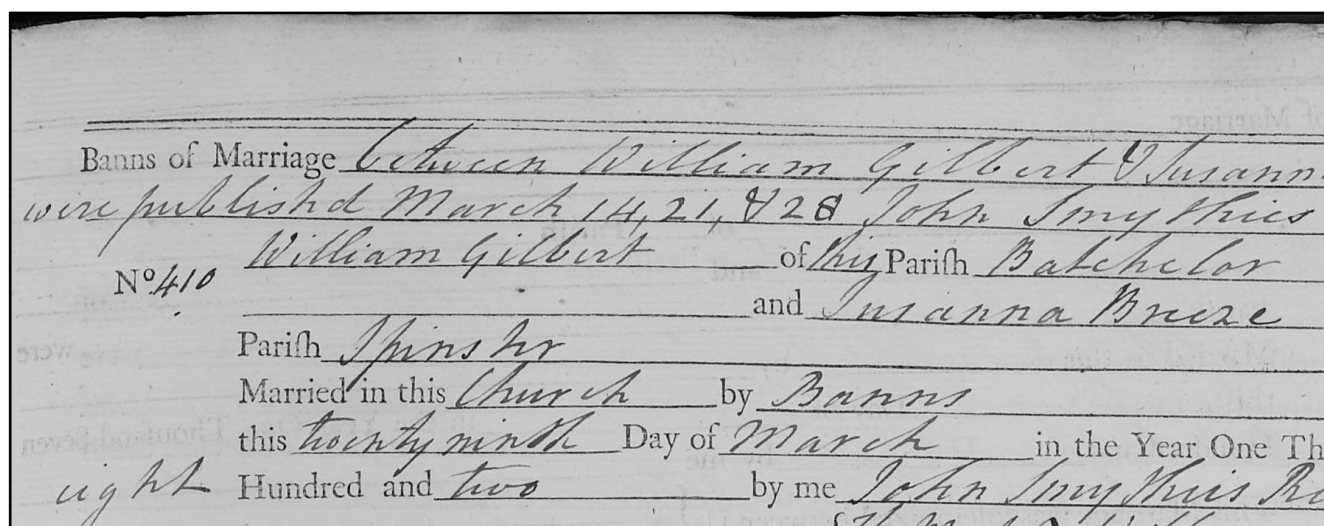
Despite this caveat it is possible to say that in the period 1754-58 only 47% of those whose occupation was recorded signed the register, rising to over 62% in the period 1782-1808.

This is lower than the average for the parishes within the walls in the early period but probably close to the average for the later period. All the ten bakers signed, as did all three breeches makers, all three collar makers, all four coopers, all ten farmers, all eight gentlemen, all four linen drapers, all five mariners and all three shopkeepers. The experience of other groups was less clear-cut. Most barbers, blacksmiths, butchers, cabinetmakers and tailors signed, 12 out of 18 bricklayers and 13 out of 19 carpenters. Only five out of nine mariners signed. Two thirds of gardeners made marks, as did almost all the husbandmen, all ten labourers and all three oyster dredgers. The largest civilian occupational group were the weavers, 38 out of 59 of whom marked, although those who signed were spread across the period from 1754 to 1803. All three silk weavers signed, but all three wool combers marked. Eighty-one soldiers are recorded, of whom almost exactly half signed. Of the nine recorded in the period 1757-65 two thirds signed.



**Plate 2. St Peter's Church, Colchester**  
(Author's collection).

# Literacy In Colchester: 1754-1837



**Plate 3. Marriage number 76, Thomas Field and his distinctive mark.**  
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Essex Record Office, D/P 176/1/5).

Of the seven recorded in the period 1779-86 all but one signed. It was in the later period, 1793-1810 when 64 soldiers are recorded, that literacy levels appear to be lower, with only 28 signing the register.

Signing the marriage register can never be an absolute measurement of literacy, which is a continuum rather than a dichotomy. In the register of St Nicholas in 1763 Thomas Field made his mark in the form of a very distinct T. F., whereas there are many instances of signatures written in such a wobbly fashion that it is evident that the hand was unaccustomed to using a pen and may have written little since formal education ceased over a decade earlier (Plate 3).

The registers provide no way of measuring the other aspect of literacy, the ability to read. It is noticeable that among the occupations listed in the registers there is no mention of stationers, book-sellers, publishers, newsagents, journalists or editors, and only one recorded printer and one engraver. Such men were certainly present in the town but may have married by licence, before settling in the town, or before taking up these occupations.

The *Annual Report of the Registrar General* shows that by 1850 the proportion of people in the Colchester Registration District who made marks in the register had fallen to 26% for men

and 52% for women.<sup>6</sup>

This article has shown that it is possible to use the marriage registers to provide a comparative measure of literacy which can then be applied spatially, to demonstrate variation across parts of the Borough, temporally, to demonstrate change over time, and combined with occupational information, to demonstrate differences between socio-economic groups. This study has also revealed some of the influence of the temporary military presence.

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I would like to thank Dr Matthew Woollard of the UK Data Archive for the initial suggestion for this research and for subsequent support, the editorial board of *Local Population Studies* for their critical comments on an earlier version of the text, as well as the staff of Colchester Library Local Studies section for their assistance.

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Christine Jones qualified as a physio-therapist in 1968, working for the NHS at Orsett, Barking, Brentwood and Colchester. In 1990 she gained a BA (Hons) from the Open University. She studied demography at the London School of Economics, gaining a MSc. in 1997. She was awarded a PhD from the University of Essex in 2004 for a thesis on never-married people in nineteenth century England and Wales. She is currently working in the History Department of the University on the Integrated Census Microdata [I-Cem] project.



# ‘We could manage our parochial concerns much better by ourselves’:

## some responses to proposed Poor Law Unions in Essex

by

Ruth Costello

One of the National Trust’s most successful recent acquisitions has been the former workhouse in Southwell, Nottinghamshire. This has led to a greater interest in the records relating to the institution and in conjunction with the National Trust, The National Archives (TNA) has been working with volunteers to catalogue in greater depth the volumes of correspondence held at TNA which relate to the Southwell Poor Law Union. The success of this has led to further projects on the correspondence for other Poor Law Unions in England and Wales to give a representative cross section.<sup>1</sup>

This success serves to demonstrate a continuing interest in a period of social history made most

famous in *Oliver Twist*.

It also helps to highlight a valuable source of information for the administration of poor relief following the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. This Act followed a Royal Commission of Enquiry into the Poor Laws of England and Wales, held between 1832–34, following concern at rural unrest – especially the Captain Swing riots – in the early 1830s.<sup>2</sup> There were fears that poor relief was too liberally dispensed and that this resulted in an increasing cost of poor relief. Also that it encouraged the honest labouring poor to apply for relief as they witnessed the ‘undeserving poor’ receiving financial assistance while they themselves struggled to provide for their families.

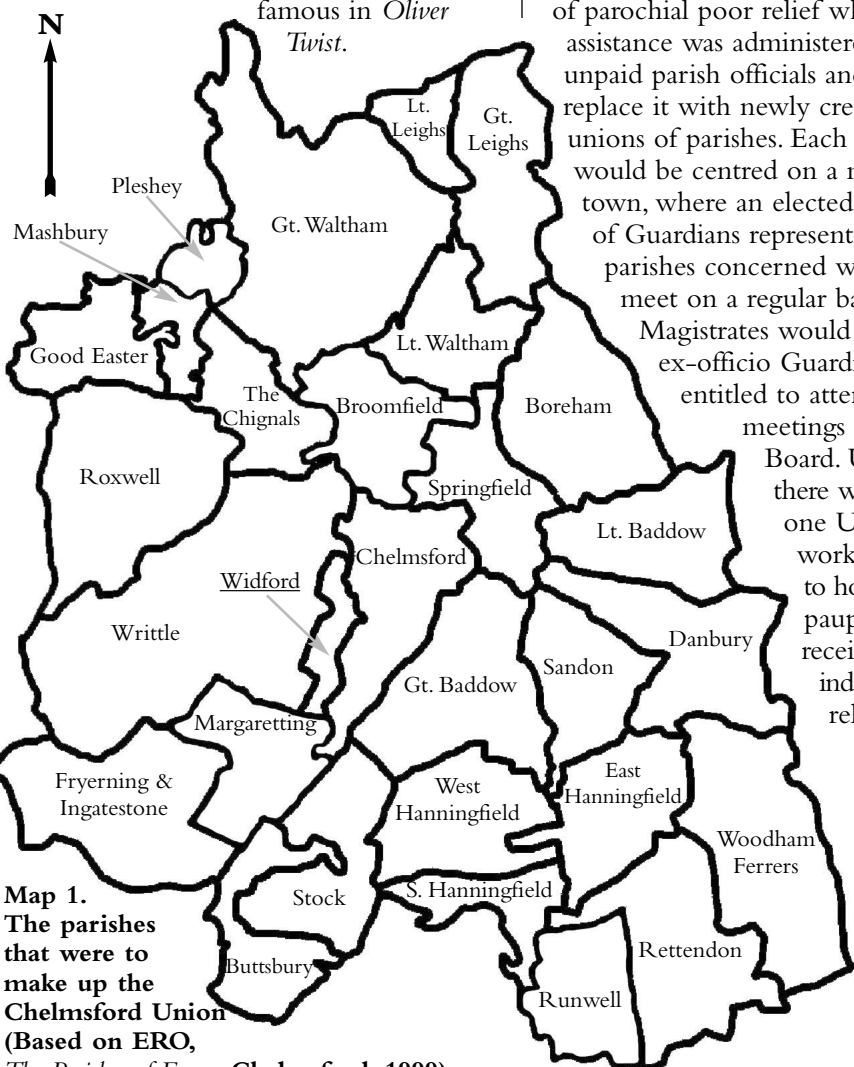
The Act would end the system of parochial poor relief whereby assistance was administered by unpaid parish officials and replace it with newly created unions of parishes. Each union would be centred on a market town, where an elected Board of Guardians representing the parishes concerned would meet on a regular basis.

Magistrates would become ex-officio Guardians, entitled to attend the meetings of the Board. Usually, there would be one Union workhouse to house all paupers in receipt of indoor relief.

The Board of Guardians would appoint a clerk to the Board, a master and matron of the workhouse and relieving officers to administer relief out of the workhouse.

The Boards would receive instructions from the newly established Poor Law Commission (PLC) at Somerset House in London, which comprised three Commissioners, a Secretary and a varying number of Assistant Commissioners whose numbers fluctuated between nine and 21. In order to establish the new poor law unions, the Assistant Commissioners were required to travel through England and Wales meeting with parish officials and landowners. As a result of what they discovered, they would advise the Commissioners on the creation of new unions of parishes to administer the law. Their work began in the south east of England, where the Captain Swing riots had occurred and where the costs of poor law relief were greatest.

Uniting parishes for the purposes of poor law administration was not an entirely new concept; an Act of 1723 had allowed parishes to unite in order to build a common workhouse. Sixty years later, Gilbert’s Act of 1782 had encouraged parishes to combine in poor law unions, represented by Guardians of the poor. Few Essex parishes had taken advantage of this legislation; the Ongar Union was the only Gilbert union in Essex. Other unions of parishes, chiefly in Suffolk and Norfolk, had been created by private Acts of Parliament.<sup>3</sup> In total, 631 poor law unions were created in England and Wales, after the 1834 Act, each represented by a sequence of bulky volumes of correspondence at TNA.<sup>4</sup> The letters were addressed to the PLC



Map 1.  
The parishes  
that were to  
make up the  
Chelmsford Union  
(Based on ERO,  
*The Parishes of Essex*, Chelmsford, 1999).

# Poor Law Unions in Essex

and include correspondence from parish officials, individuals writing in a private capacity, and Assistant Commissioners, writing as they travelled across the country. The volumes also include drafts of letters to be sent in response to those received.

The correspondence received by the PLC before the establishment of poor law unions gives additional information not found in the Board of Guardians minutes, as these records usually begin with the minutes of the first meeting of the Board following elections. The correspondence is therefore particularly useful concerning the period between the passing of the Act in August 1834 and the establishment of individual unions. These records cannot give a full account of local opinions regarding the New Poor Law in general and the proposed creation of poor law unions in particular. Few letters survive from those receiving relief, many of whom would have been unable to read or write.

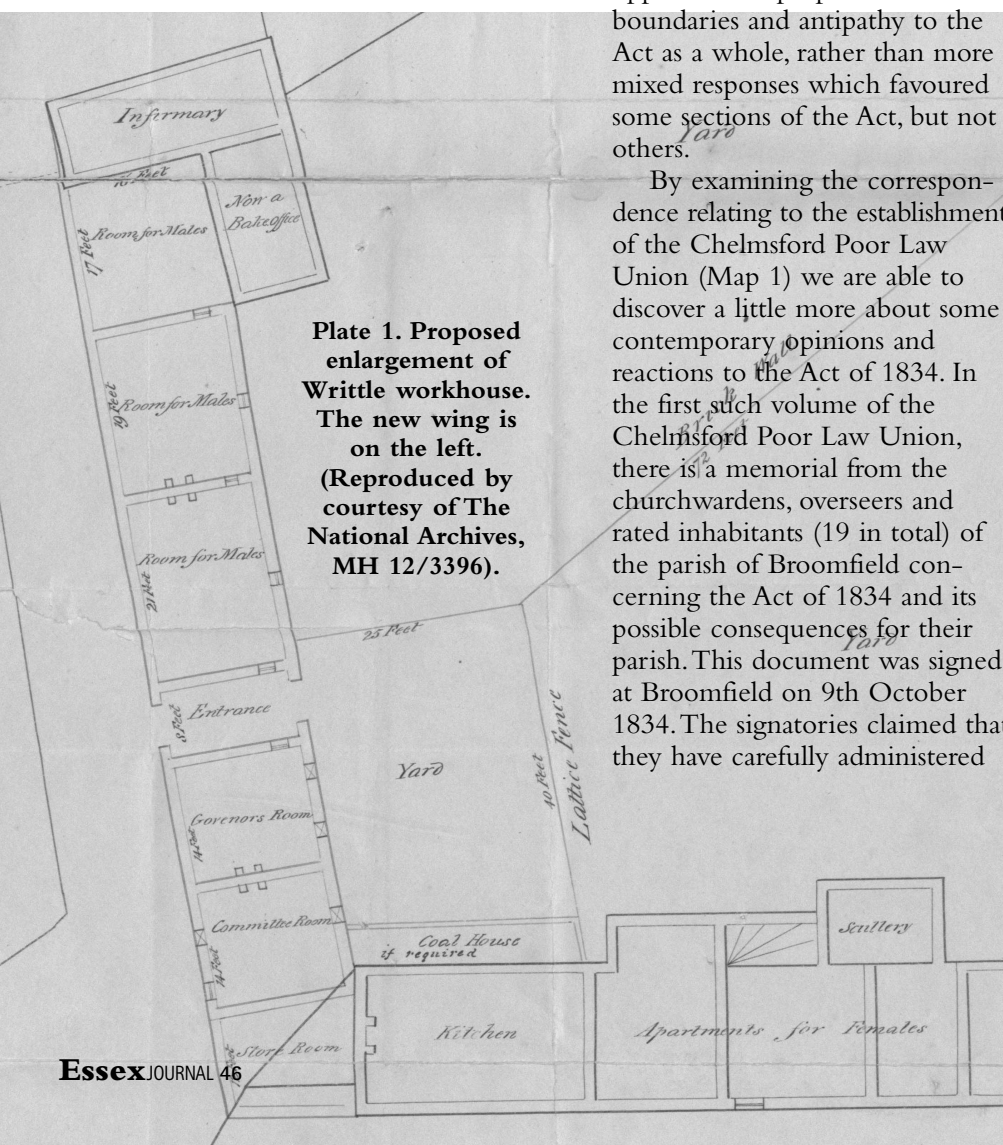
The power of large landowners to influence the PLC as regards poor law union boundaries has been debated, with evidence both supporting and contradicting the hypothesis that they were able to ensure that the unions were altered in accordance with their wishes.<sup>5</sup> Such concerns have usually been seen as resulting from the landowner's wish to ensure that the parishes in which they held land were incorporated into one union. However, the landed elite was not the only social class to express its views to the PLC on the formation of certain unions. Shopkeepers in one proposed Oxfordshire union made it plain that they wished the union to be centred on the town in which they lived in order not to lose out on the chance to supply the workhouse. It was also seen as advantageous for a poor law union border to be coterminous with that of a petty sessional division.<sup>6</sup> Attention has focussed on successful opposition to proposed union boundaries and antipathy to the Act as a whole, rather than more mixed responses which favoured some sections of the Act, but not others.

By examining the correspondence relating to the establishment of the Chelmsford Poor Law Union (Map 1) we are able to discover a little more about some contemporary opinions and reactions to the Act of 1834. In the first such volume of the Chelmsford Poor Law Union, there is a memorial from the churchwardens, overseers and rated inhabitants (19 in total) of the parish of Broomfield concerning the Act of 1834 and its possible consequences for their parish. This document was signed at Broomfield on 9th October 1834. The signatories claimed that they have carefully administered

relief, finding employment for the 'labouring poor...without the necessity of having recourse to so large a Poor Rate as has been usual in Neighbouring Parishes'. They believed that 'by continuing to act alone' they could act most effectively and wished to appoint a Parochial Board of Guardians for the parish of Broomfield under the provisions of the Act. The volume includes a draft response from the Commission noting that when an Assistant Commissioner was appointed, he would be shown the correspondence and would visit the parish.<sup>7</sup>

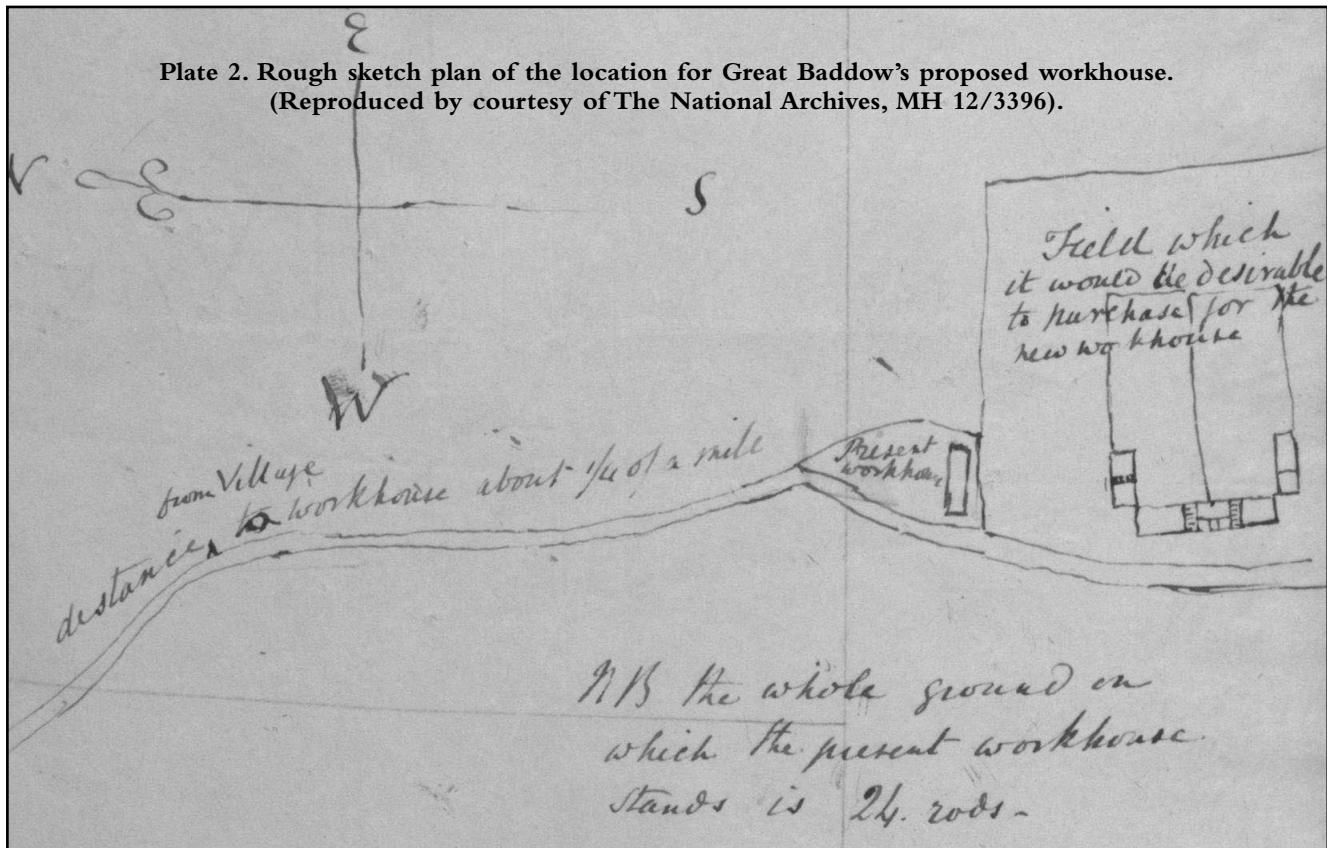
The ratepayers of Broomfield were not the only mid Essex inhabitants who attempted to remain independent; some ratepayers in Great Baddow and Writtle were equally unwilling to be incorporated into a union. Robert Baker, a Writtle churchwarden, had supplied information to the PLC regarding poor relief and had noted that the 'workhouse is a good Building and the site well adapted to increase the Building. The parishioners are favourable to the New Poor Law and are willing to carry it fully into effect.' Baker warned that the 'shortness of the crop' and the 'low prices of produce' would prevent farmers from employing enough labourers. The resulting demand for poor relief would be exacerbated as the parish 'abounds with dissolute young men who squander their savings during the summer months and then become dependent on the Poor Rates for their support in the winter'. He concluded by noting that the poor law could not be carried into effect in Writtle until the parish workhouse was enlarged which was supported by the ratepayers. Work could be begun immediately upon receiving instructions from the Commissioners.<sup>8</sup>

In response, the PLC asked for details of the proposed alterations to judge their suitability. Baker responded by enclosing a plan of the alterations which would have doubled the size of the workhouse by adding an additional



# Poor Law Unions in Essex

Plate 2. Rough sketch plan of the location for Great Baddow's proposed workhouse.  
(Reproduced by courtesy of The National Archives, MH 12/3396).



wing, roughly at right angles to the existing building (Plate 1). This new wing would house the male inmates and would also include a storeroom, rooms for the workhouse governor and a meeting room for the committee. The new wing would abut onto the existing infirmary and bakehouse, currently detached from the existing building. The latter would house the female inmates, a kitchen and scullery and a schoolroom. Although the original workhouse building comprised more than one storey, Baker's plans were for the ground floor only, suggesting that there was no intention to create a two storey extension. Males and females would have access to a yard but would remain segregated as a brick wall would bisect the yard. These proposed changes had been agreed by the churchwardens 'and all 17 of the principal occupiers who represent three quarters of the rental of the parish'. They were apparently ready to borrow up to £1000 to extend the workhouse.'

The Commissioners noted approvingly generally the 'very satisfactory provision' particularly the separation of males and females, which was 'absolutely essential' to

the efficiency of the workhouse, and requested a copy of the proposed workhouse Rules. It is unclear if these Rules were sent; if indeed they had been drawn up at this stage. Two months later, in December 1834, Baker wrote again to the PLC, repeating the intention to borrow up to £1000 to enlarge the workhouse. This time, the PLC recommended delaying this plan until the creation of poor law unions in Essex as it was likely that Writtle would be included in a union. A further letter from Baker in March 1835 referred to the difficulty of conducting parish business due to the uncertainty of future arrangements and requested a meeting with Alfred Power, the Assistant Commissioner for Essex. A reply with sent with the date that Power would next be in Chelmsford, but it is unclear as to whether the two men met.<sup>10</sup> No further correspondence can be found in the volume concerning the proposals for an extension to the parish workhouse.

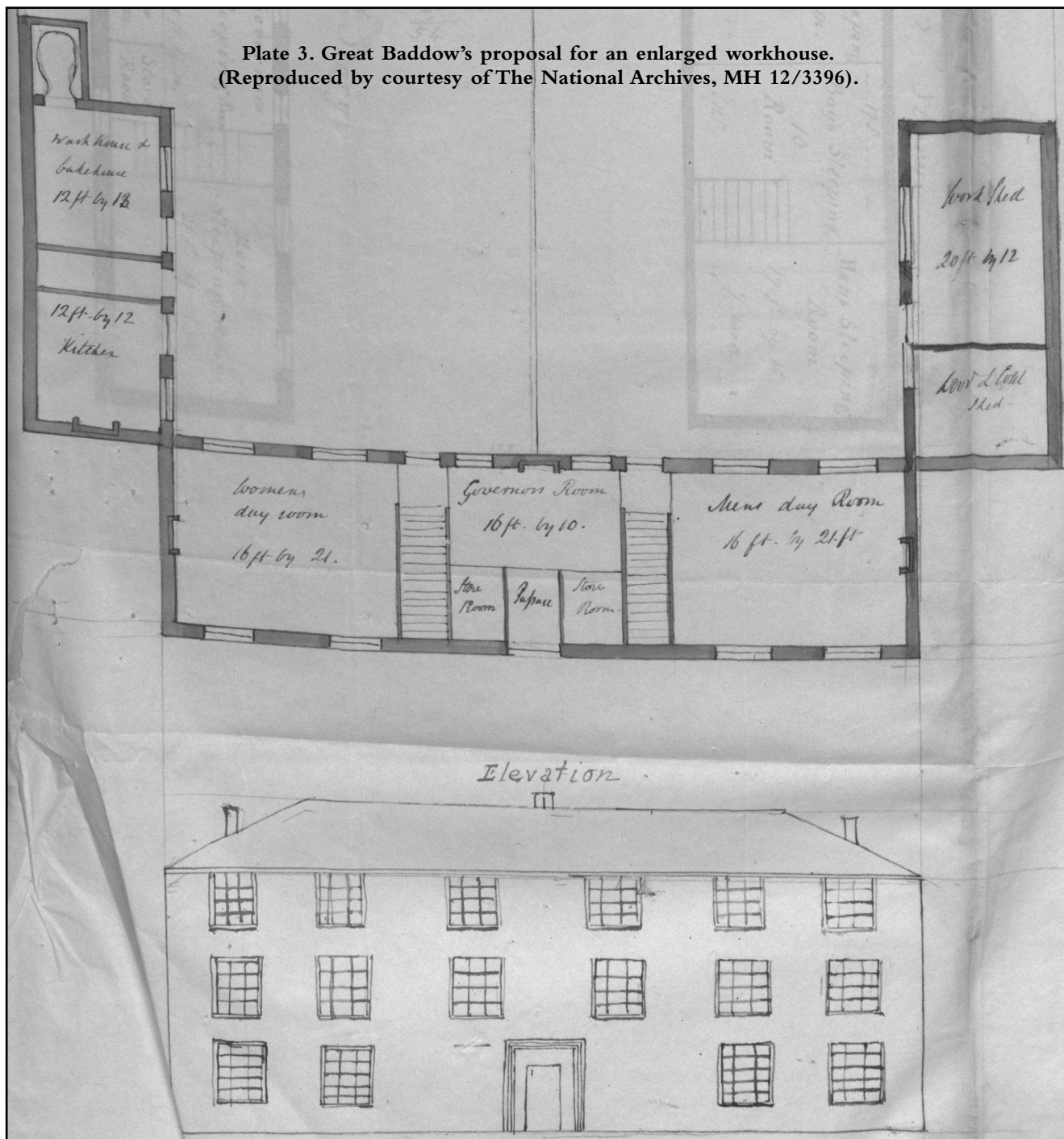
The work of the Royal Commission and the PLC seems to have turned the attention of the ratepayers of Great Baddow to their own parish workhouse.

In August 1833, during the lifetime of the Royal Commission, the Great Baddow vestry had appointed a committee to consider the management of poor relief in the parish. A month later, the committee reported that the cost for maintaining the poor in the previous year had amounted to £703. Furthermore, the 'independent spirit of industrious poor men had been broken' as many demanded relief simply because they saw others receiving it and much was given to 'those who were unworthy of it'. The committee recommended that it would be better for the 'comfort and the happiness of the Receiver if it were administered by food, raiment and shelter in one common workhouse'. This would have the effect of discouraging the able bodied from seeking relief while treating the deserving poor with 'benevolence'. The committee estimated that the work house would need to hold 45-50 people; more than the existing workhouse could accommodate. In addition, there was not a sufficient space for a yard to segregate the different categories of inmates. The committee therefore recommended



# Poor Law Unions in Essex

Plate 3. Great Baddow's proposal for an enlarged workhouse.  
(Reproduced by courtesy of The National Archives, MH 12/3396).



that the existing workhouse be sold and that another, larger one be built at an estimated cost of £800.<sup>11</sup>

No further mention is made of this proposal either in the vestry minutes or in the PLC correspondence until a letter of November 1834, written by the vicar of Great Baddow, John Bramston. Bramston attributed the delay in proceeding with the plans for a new workhouse to the impending Poor Law Bill, which had now become law. He went on to explain that there was 'a good deal of jealousy between

neighbouring parishes' and that many of 'our farmers' thought that 'we could manage our parochial concerns much better by ourselves (for we are a very united parish in most things) than if joined with any other parish'. He then asked the PLC for advice so that the vestry could begin building a new workhouse 'as early as possible'. He concluded by asking if the provisions of Gilbert's Act still applied; i.e. as to whether it was necessary to call a meeting in order to build a new workhouse or whether an ordinary

vestry meeting would suffice.<sup>12</sup>

The draft response from the PLC written 5 days after Bramston's letter has the look of a 'holding letter'. The writer asked to see plans of the proposed new workhouse and agreed with the necessity of a 'well-regulated workhouse'. He then sought to reassure Bramston that the Commission would take care to ensure that every union of parishes would be arranged for their mutual advantage, but he could not promise that the parish of Great Baddow would not be included in such a union.<sup>13</sup>

# Poor Law Unions in Essex

Copies of the plans were sent to the PLC the following week. The proposed new workhouse was to be built on land adjacent to the existing one and from the rough sketch plan (Plate 2) would appear to be at least double the size. The main building would consist of three storeys, with separate staircases for males and females. On the 'first storey' there would be day rooms for men and women which would be separated by the governor's room and by different staircases (Plate 3). The governor's sleeping quarters and the two staircases would act as an additional barrier between the men's and women's quarters on the 'second storey'. There would be further sleeping accommodation for men and women and separate rooms for girls and boys in the 'third storey' (Plate 4). A kitchen, wash house and bakehouse and infirmary would adjoin the women's side of the building; a wood and coal store on the men's side. This new building would provide accommodation for 17 men and 17 women, ten boys and ten girls; slightly more than the 45-50 people the vestry's committee first suggested. It was estimated that it would cost at least £1000. Bramston concluded with a request for a reply before the next vestry meeting on 1st December 1834.<sup>14</sup>

The draft response, headed by the word 'immediate', reiterated that the PLC could not promise not to include Great Baddow in a union but that this would be after consultation. A further letter from Bramston, pressing for a decision, received the response that a workhouse would be 'unnecessary' with the implication that the parish would be incorporated into a union.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to the Writtle and Great Baddow ratepayers, the Chelmsford Select Vestry supported the idea of a union after a meeting with the Assistant Commissioner Charles Mott. This was not unqualified support; there was the caveat that 'it is strongly the wish of the Select Vestry to select some from the Neighbouring parishes to form such a Union.' This was

not the prerogative of parishes and the reply notes only that the Assistant Commissioner Mott would again meet with the Vestry.<sup>16</sup> It is possible that the Select Vestry recognised the likelihood that a poor law union would be created which centred on Chelmsford and that rather than dispute this, they decided to try to impose their own preferences.

A few months earlier, the magistrate John Disney had informed the Commission that the inhabitants of Ingatestone, Fryerning and Margaretting had 'an inclination to be united'; possibly with the addition of Mountnessing. Disney appears to have accepted that such a small union with no obvious administrative centre would be impracticable; possibly by the establishment of other unions. A further letter by him noted the creation of the Dunmow Union and he believed that Chelmsford would be a good centre for a union of parishes in the Chelmsford Petty Sessions division. Magistrates would sit weekly and could therefore attend Board of Guardians meetings.<sup>17</sup> As a magistrate Disney may well have had his own convenience in mind. Uniformity with Petty Sessions Divisions was also suggested by a Thomas Little of Great Leighs 'if our parish must be united with others', a phrase which suggests resignation, rather than enthusiasm. Although most of the parish lay in the Witham division, parochial charges were sent to Chelmsford, which would therefore be the most convenient for business purposes.<sup>18</sup>

The Chelmsford Poor Law Union was created on 10th August 1835 and initially consisted of 26 parishes. It was expanded to 31 parishes six days later following a letter from the Assistant Commissioner Alfred Power (Mott's replacement) recommending the inclusion of Rettendon, Runwell, Woodham Ferrars as well as Great and Little Leighs; indicating the still fluid nature of union boundaries. According to Power, the inhabitants of the last two wished to be included in the Chelmsford

Union; which is partially borne out by Thomas Little's correspondence. It is clear from Power's letter that the possibility of forming a poor law union centring on Rayleigh had been considered but that this was no longer 'desirable'. The parishes of Rettendon and Runwell which had been allocated to such a hypothetical union were thereby transferred to Chelmsford. Woodham Ferrars had been destined for inclusion in the Maldon Poor Law Union. However, Power suggested that the relieving officer who would be appointed by the Chelmsford Board of Guardians, and who would have responsibility for the area that included Runwell and Rettendon, could easily visit Woodham Ferrars; an indication of the other considerations to be taken into account when establishing a union.

**'if our parish  
must be united  
with others'**

With the exception of Mountnessing – later to be incorporated into the Billericay Union – all of the parishes previously mentioned were included in the Chelmsford Union. The former parish workhouses in Great Baddow and Writtle were among others in the union used to house paupers on indoor relief until a new union workhouse was completed in September 1838.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, no detailed vestry minutes for the parishes of Chelmsford, Broomfield and Writtle appear to have survived for this period so the vestries' responses to their inclusion in the Chelmsford Union, with parishes not of their choosing, is therefore not known. The previously detailed Great Baddow vestry minutes also are silent with regard to the PLC's decision.

The early annual reports of the PLC include details of each union created since the publication of the previous report. This information includes the population figures and average cost of poor

# Poor Law Unions in Essex

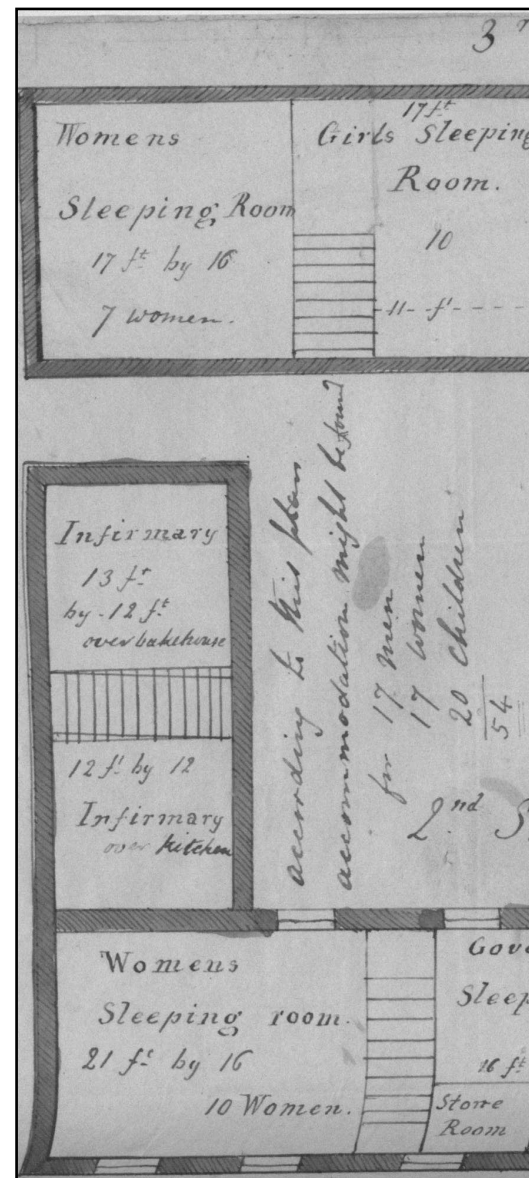
relief for the preceding three years for each constituent parish in a new union. From this, it is possible to calculate both the cost per head of relief in the union as a whole, but more significantly, for the individual parishes concerned. For the parish of Chelmsford, with a population of 5,435 and an average cost of £2,500, this equates to just over nine shillings per head; for Great Baddow (1,719 residents and an average bill of £906) slightly over 10 shillings per head and for Broomfield (747 inhabitants and an average of £551) over 14 shillings per head. The average cost of poor relief in Writtle with a population of 2,348 was £2,632; equivalent to around £1 and two shillings per head. One can understand from this why the Writtle ratepayers, with a population under half that of Chelmsford, but with an average poor relief expenditure greater than Chelmsford's wished to restrict the payment of poor relief. However, it is possibly significant that unlike the Broomfield and Great Baddow correspondents, Baker did not comment on his parish's efficiency in managing poor relief.<sup>20</sup> The efforts by the ratepayers of Great Baddow, Broomfield and Writtle can be seen both as attempts to introduce a more stringent system of poor relief and to avoid inclusion in a union. It is not clear how common this desire for independence was outside of Essex; as mentioned previously, research has focussed on the involvement of large landowners and uniformity with petty sessions divisions.

A brief examination of the early correspondence for some other Essex unions show that the response of the ratepayers of Writtle, Broomfield and Great Baddow was not unusual; ratepayers in Elmstead and Thorington, North Fambridge, and Dedham sought to retain their independence but were included in the respective Tendring, Maldon, and Lexden and Winstree Poor Law Unions. The correspondents from Elmstead and North Fambridge tried to

stress their efficiency; relief was granted to the able bodied poor only in return for work.<sup>21</sup> The ratepayers in Dedham obtained a loan for improvements to the existing parish workhouse in the (mistaken) belief that this would avoid incorporation; a Thorington churchwarden sought advice from the PLC on whether to build a new parish workhouse or repair the existing one and whether the parish 'would be liable to be incorporated with any other parish which is by no means our wish'.<sup>22</sup> It is noticeable that in the parishes which comprised the Braintree and Dunmow unions no similar correspondence has been found. Instead, the letters received by the PLC prior to the creation of the Dunmow union include letters from magistrates anxious for a union to be created quickly.

John Chessyre, the vicar of Little Easton, referred to earlier meetings held by the 'respectable occupiers' round Dunmow in connection with Gilbert's Act; presumably with the intention of combining into one union, until this was superseded by the proposed Poor Law Amendment Act. Chessyre noted further that the overseer of Takeley, described by him as 'energetic and reliable though a plain farmer', struggled as 'the difficulty nay danger of rightly discharging his duties increases daily'. Thomas Jee, the vicar of Thaxted, recommended calling a special meeting at Dunmow and named some of his fellow magistrates - including Chessyre - as being of the same opinion. He noted further 'I never knew a time when I acted as a magistrate [that there was] so much trouble and difficulty in the management of the poor'.<sup>23</sup> Clearly for Chessyre and for Jee, the need to maintain law and order was greater than any loss of independence for their respective parishes.

It was clear from the figures in the PLC's first annual report that the parishes in the Braintree and Dunmow Unions were greatly impoverished by the cost of relief. The PLC correspondence for the



Dunmow Union includes a report by Alfred Power on the Dunmow area. Although more measured than Chessyre and Jee, the report referred to 'the bad state of this extremely pauperised district' and that the expenditure included 'some of the worst examples which have ever occurred to my observation.' Power further noted that the average cost of poor relief was rarely less than £1 per capita (comparable with that of Witham) and that in the parish of Lindsell the cost was £2 per capita.<sup>24</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the correspondence cannot represent the views of all these affected by the New Poor Law; especially not those who received relief. Those who did write to the PLC were predominantly those who would either contribute to the poor rate or who would be involved



# Poor Law Unions in Essex

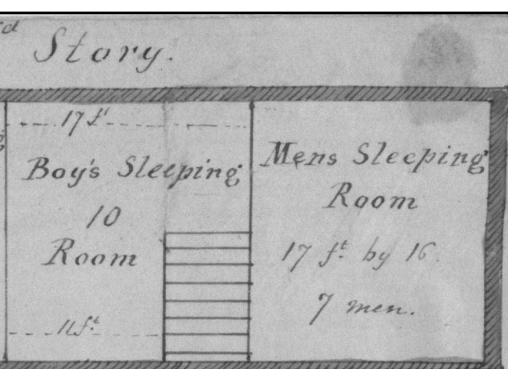
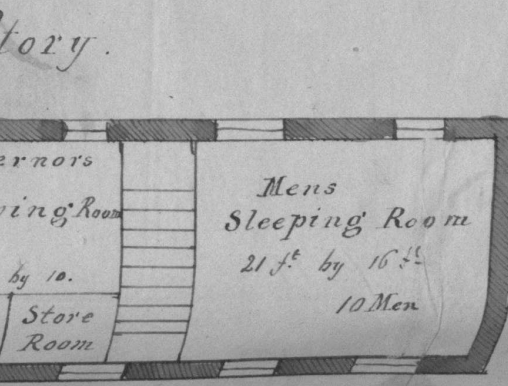


Plate 4. The second and third floor arrangements of Great Baddow's proposed workhouse. (Reproduced by courtesy of The National Archives, MH 12/3396).



in administering the new act as one of the elected or ex-officio guardians. Opposition to the Act, both in general and specifically relating to the ending of parochial poor relief need not have been made by letter, but rather at one of the meetings convened by Assistant Poor Law Commissioners as they travelled across Essex. The Braintree correspondence includes Power's report concerning the proposed Braintree, Witham and Maldon Unions in which he noted the initial preference of the inhabitants of the parishes between Burnham and Bradwell-juxta-Mare to form a separate union. After meeting some of the rate-payers in this area 'the good sense and rational views which these gentlemen...exhibited...recommends their union with Maldon to the highest credit.'<sup>25</sup> The relevant

volume of correspondence for the Maldon Union contains no letters on the subject of a separate union for the eastern parishes in the Dengie Hundred. An absence of correspondence opposing incorporation in a union should not be taken as consent or as lack of interest. It is possible to presume that the ratepayers in the more heavily impoverished parishes had more practical concerns than trying to maintain independence; this would certainly appear to be the case in the Dunmow area but then this is contradicted by the Writtle correspondence and the statistics in the *First Annual Report*. Further research in the remaining Essex unions may indicate how common was the attitude of the Writtle ratepayers in seeking to keep their heavily financially burdened parish out of a proposed union.

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# A Century And A Half Of Gas Manufacturing In Chelmsford

by  
**Peter Wynn**

**I**n the UK commercial supply of gas began in the early nineteenth century. Initially gas making plant was installed in the premises, largely factories, where the gas was to be used. Public supply of gas started with the formation of the Chartered Gas Light and Coke Company in 1819.<sup>1</sup> Their pioneering works at Westminster were in operation by 1813.<sup>2</sup> In the next few years the company was joined by a number of others supplying gas to parts of London. This article will discuss the foundation and subsequent history of gas production in Chelmsford.

## **The Formation and First Works of the Chelmsford Gas Light and Coke Company**

Gas production was first started in Chelmsford with the formation of the Chelmsford Gas Light and Coke Company (CGL&CCo) which opened its gasworks in 1819.<sup>3</sup> Unlike many works CGL&CCo did not itself seek powers under a Local Act of Parliament but instead seemed to rely on getting a contract with the Commissioners appointed under the 1789 Act for Paving the Town of Chelmsford and Hamlet of Moulsham. As the Commissioners included familiar surnames such as Gepp and Parker, this was perhaps a safe assumption. The Commissioners

obtained a new act in 1822 which gave them increased powers, among other things, for the laying of mains as well as responsibilities for avoiding pollution of watercourses from gasworks waste.<sup>4</sup>

The gasworks were constructed on the north bank of the feeder channel to the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation on land purchased from the navigation company. The *Chelmsford Chronicle*<sup>5</sup> noted that the 'site at the head of the canal would be particularly advantageous for the receipt of coals' because of the efficiency of transporting heavy goods by water, although John Booker does not consider this to be a particular reason for the early date of the works.<sup>6</sup> It has been suggested that Chelmsford was the first inland gasworks although those at Leeds and Sheffield are of a similar date.<sup>7</sup>

The location and proposed layout of the works is shown in Plate 1.<sup>8</sup> The *Chelmsford Chronicle* stated that 15 retorts were provided.<sup>9</sup> This number suggests that the layout may have comprised three sets of the 'standard' Clegg design of individual arches of five horizontal retorts grouped around a single furnace.<sup>10</sup> A number of pioneers of the gas industry had found that washing the gas with slaked lime would remove impurities<sup>11</sup> and in the original Chelmsford works a condenser

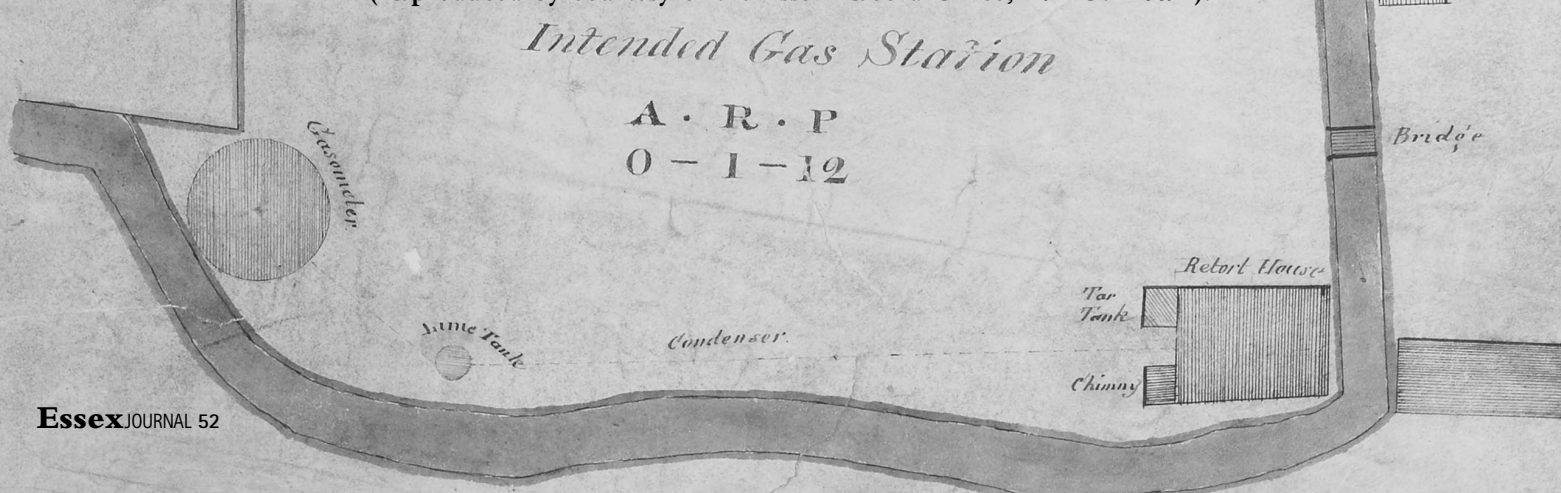
led from the retorts to a lime tank. From here the gas was led to the gasometer,<sup>12</sup> with a reported capacity of 10,000 cubic feet.<sup>13</sup>

## **Subsequent Nineteenth Century Developments**

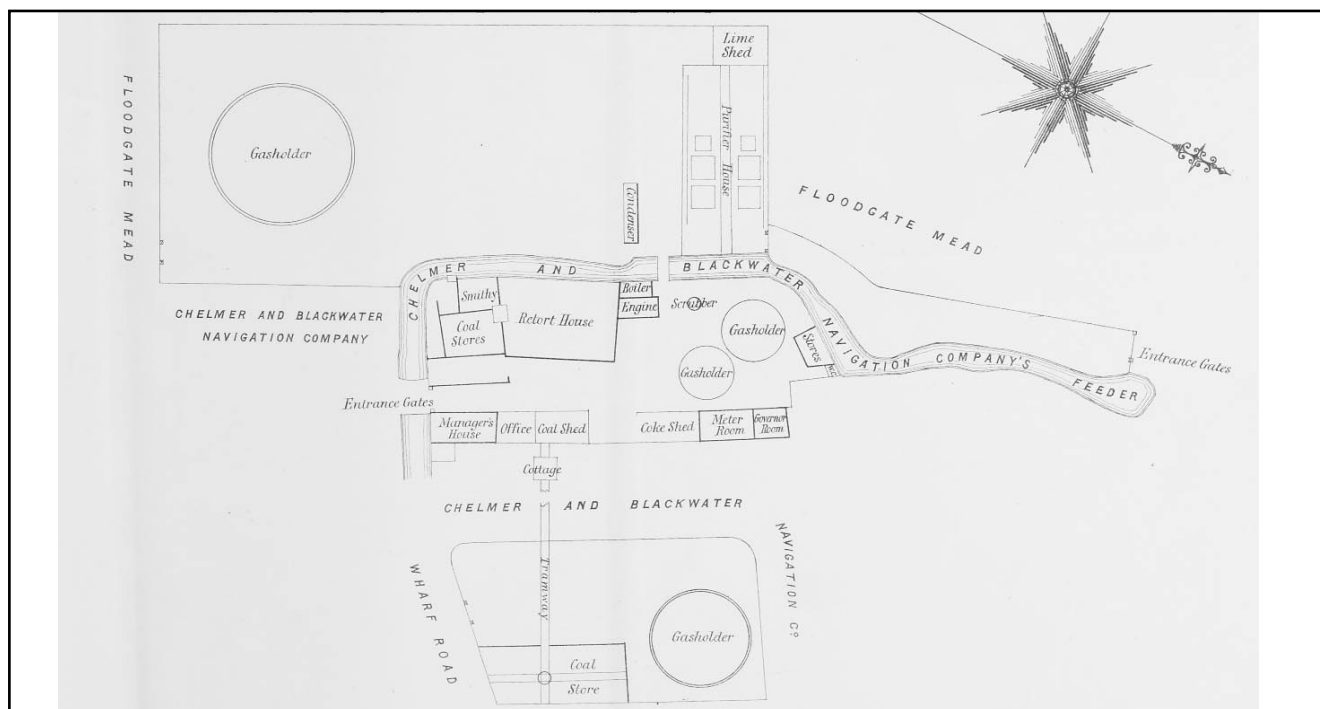
The Springfield Tithe map of 1842 indicates that there had been no further development of the gasworks beyond the original layout.<sup>14</sup> It also shows a number of cottages, known as Provident Row, constructed by the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Company on land owned by them adjacent to the gasworks. CGL&CCo acquired an additional site to the north east of Provident Row as a purchase from the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Company in 1856.<sup>15</sup> As part of the agreement CGL&CCo also acquired the right of way for the construction of a tramway linking the two sites. In 1867 an agreement was reached with the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation to construct three bridges across the feeder linking a newly acquired part of Floodgate Mead south of the feeder to the original site.<sup>16</sup>

These developments are shown on large scale Ordnance Survey plans of the mid 1870s,<sup>17</sup> showing the cottages of Provident Row lying between the original

Plate 1. Original 1819 site of the gasworks. The dark line is the course of the feeder channel, which still exists, and is an obvious landmark on Plates 1-4.  
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Essex Record Office, D/DGe P44/1).



# Gas Manufacturing In Chelmsford



**Plate 2. Map accompanying the 1873 Order. The layout been contracted at mid-point and excludes Provident Row which was situated between the two separate areas of the site owned by CGL&CCo as shown in Plate 3. (Reproduced by courtesy of the Essex Record Office, Q/RUM 2/220).**

gasworks and the subsequent development to the north east by CGL&CCo. More detail of the layout of the gasworks themselves is contained on the plan (Plate 2) accompanying the application made in 1873 for a Provisional Order under The Gas and Water Works Facilities Act 1873.<sup>18</sup> The plan shows that by this time additional gasholders had been constructed on both the original site and the site beyond Provident Row. It also shows that a gasholder, condenser and purifier house had been constructed within a short period of acquisition on the Floodgate Mead site.

In 1880 CGL&CCo purchased the area occupied by Provident Row (Plate 3).<sup>19</sup> The plan accompanying the application for a further Order<sup>20</sup> in 1885 shows that very soon after purchase the cottages along the south west edge of Provident Row had been demolished and the western end of the tramway extended into the site of the original works. However most development was on the Floodgate Mead side of the feeder where a further gasholder and a retort house had been constructed. This site continued to be the main

focus of development into the twentieth century, the gasholders on the original site having been removed by 1895.<sup>21</sup>

## Early Twentieth Century Development

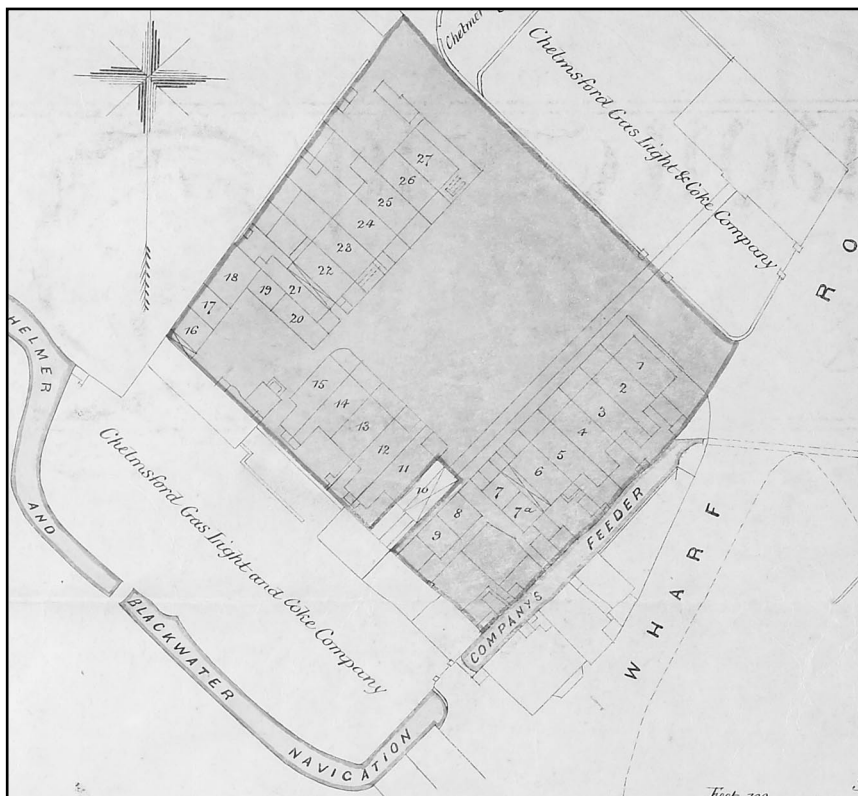
New purification plant was introduced in 1910<sup>22</sup> at a time when production was increasing at a rate of at least 7% annually. Additional land was purchased from the Navigation Company, including a small lot between the feeder and Navigation Road in 1909 and a number of parcels fronting the canal itself. In 1913 a new site to the south east of the earlier Floodgate Mead site was purchased.<sup>23</sup> One of the first structures to be erected on this site was a new gasholder.<sup>24</sup> It is one of the two gasholders that remain today. Sudden changes in demand during the day were also a problem for the industry. A solution was the manufacture of gas by the carburetted gas process to meet such sudden demand fluctuations. This was introduced at Beckton gasworks in 1890<sup>25</sup> and similar technology was installed at Chelmsford Works in 1912.<sup>26</sup>

## Towards Municipal Ownership

In 1914 Chelmsford Borough Council discussed<sup>27</sup> a draft Parliamentary Bill proposed by CGL&CCo whose effect would have been to dissolve that company with effect from the beginning of 1915 and re-incorporate a new company to be called 'The Chelmsford Gas Company'. The intention was the new company would have powers to supply gas to a much wider area and an effect would have been to require a considerable expansion of the gasworks on the recently acquired site. Over the following months negotiations took place between the Council and the Company which eventually led to the passing of the Bill with the inclusion of a clause stating that the Company would not unreasonably oppose a subsequent Bill promoted by the Chelmsford Corporation seeking powers to purchase the Company.<sup>28</sup> The Council subsequently resolved to proceed with the promotion of a Bill for powers to purchase the Company.<sup>29</sup> The Chelmsford Gas Act 1915 received Royal Assent on 15th July 1915. Negotiations on the



# Gas Manufacturing In Chelmsford



**Plate 3. The area of Provident Row purchased in 1880 thus uniting the two separate CGL&CCo sites.**  
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Essex Record Office, D/Z 36/80).

purchase continued, complicated by imposition of war time restrictions on borrowing of money by local authorities, during 1915 and 1916. A meeting of the Council in October 1916 confirmed the Memorandum of Agreement for the purchase of the gas undertaking.<sup>30</sup>

## **Expansion of the Works During Municipal Ownership**

Subsequent developments under municipal ownership were concentrated in the newly acquired area south east of the new gasholder. A tar dehydration plant was installed during 1920.<sup>31</sup> In early 1927 the successful commissioning of a new retort house whose construction was started just over a year earlier, was reported whilst increasing demand led to a report that the existing purifying plant was no longer sufficient to deal adequately with current output.<sup>32</sup> New iron oxide purifiers, for the removal of hydrogen sulphide, were completed during 1929 and the invitation of tenders for removal of the purifiers on the 'old works' were invited in 1931.<sup>33</sup>

The consolidation of land ownership into the hands of the gas undertaking continued. About 1920 the Albert Iron Works site, formerly known as Lambirth's yard, lying between Wharf Road and the south-westward head of the canal was acquired. Demolition of buildings on the site is recorded in 1924.<sup>34</sup> The King William IV public house was purchased in 1925 and demolished in 1932.<sup>35</sup> In 1930 the Gas Engineer reported the need to embark on a progressive policy of works extensions to accommodate a 78% increase in demand since the works entered municipal ownership and the difficulties of split site working. This was followed by extensions to the retort house during 1931, new tar and ammonia wells in 1932, new condensers in 1933 and a new boiler house in 1934–35. 1937 saw the decision to install a benzole recovery plant which came into operation in early 1939.<sup>36</sup> Two new purifiers were installed during 1940.<sup>37</sup> 1938 another four of the cottages on the south east side of Provident Square were demolished and replaced by a house

for the works foreman.<sup>38</sup> This was reported as nearing completion in autumn the following year.<sup>39</sup> The extent of the works by the start of the Second World War can be seen in Plate 4.<sup>40</sup>

## **The Wartime Installation of a New Carburetted Water Gas Plant**

Production figures show that production from the original water gas plant ceased by 1932.<sup>41</sup> In Spring 1940 the Gas Engineer reported heavier demand and noted that extensions to coal gas production plant, including extension of the retort house and a new gasholder would be expensive and best postponed owing to the war. He recommended the installation of a new carburetted water gas plant, replacing the defunct 1912 plant, to be used to meet additional demand as it occurred.<sup>42</sup>

Construction of the plant was commenced in March 1941 and the first production of uncarburetted gas was recorded in December of that year.<sup>43</sup> War time regulations restricted the content of council minutes and there were intriguing hints that the plant's use was not entirely for the purposes reported. In May 1941 the minutes of the Gas Committee record the need to increase the capacity of the proposed emergency electricity supply so that a supply might be given to the special plant to be installed. It is also later recorded that the 'By Product Plant' had been put into action under supervision of the contractors.<sup>44</sup> In 1942 it is recorded that the construction of a bridge without notice on 'behalf of a government department' is causing the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Company difficulty in cleansing the canal feeder ditch. There were also efforts to increase the water supply to the works<sup>45</sup> culminating in the report that the Air Ministry had agreed to pay one third of the cost of a proposed alternative water supply.<sup>46</sup> The report in the autumn of 1943 that arrangements had been made for the availability of carburetted water gas from

# Gas Manufacturing In Chelmsford

Number 1 Plant to reinforce demand also indicated that this plant had not been under complete control of the council's gas undertaking.<sup>47</sup>

The suspicions were confirmed in post-war publications. A paper<sup>48</sup> described the role of the gas industry in producing hydrogen for barrage balloons. The main text stated that it was not permissible to state locations. However this restriction had obviously been lifted by the time discussion of the paper took place and Chelmsford Borough Council's Gas Engineer recorded the construction by the Air Ministry of a two unit plant for the production of hydrogen during 1941. His post war report<sup>49</sup> to the council confirmed that the council had agreed to lease part of the works to the Air Ministry who installed a second water gas plant. This and the council's own water gas plant supplied the Ministry plant for the manufacture, purification, compression and storage of hydrogen.<sup>50</sup>

## The 1947 Gasholder and its Foundation Problem

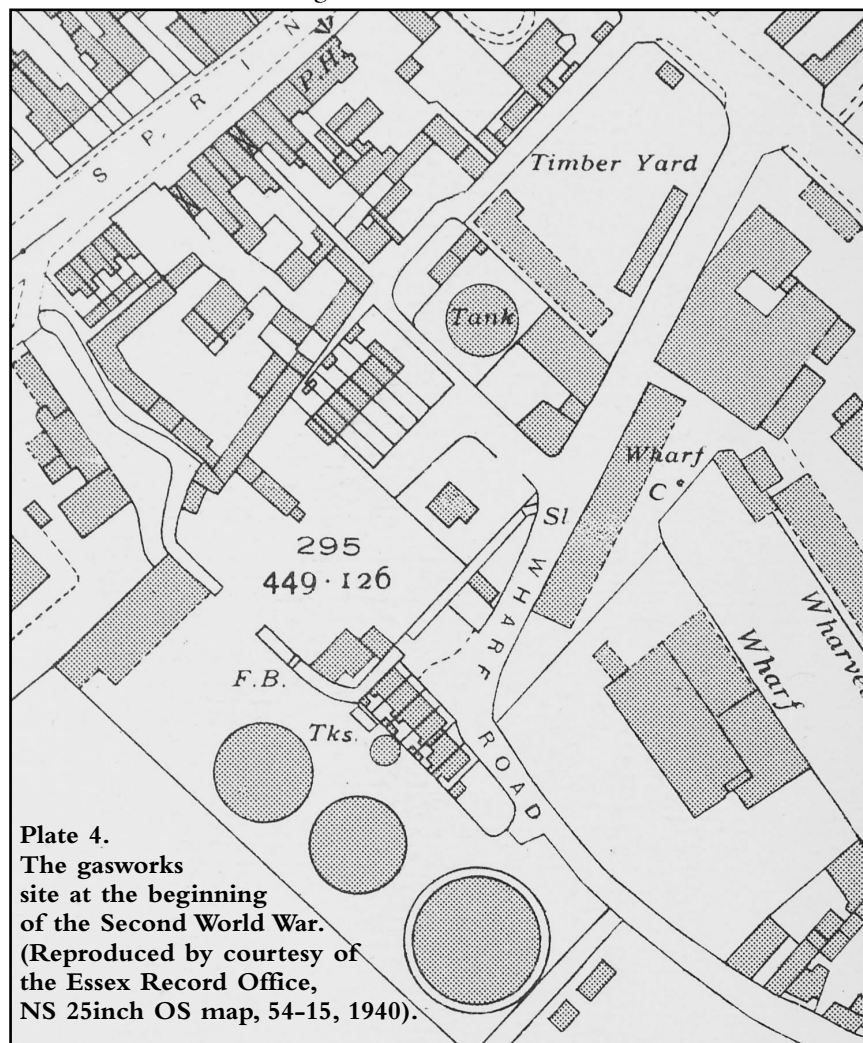
In 1935 tenders were received for a new gasholder but although loan sanction was sought from the Ministry of Health it was to be another decade before this structure was erected. The intention was for this gasholder to be constructed at the eastern end of the works. The need for additional storage was raised again in 1940 but it was decided that the water gas plant installation would enable the postponement of the construction of a new gasholder. However the matter was again raised in 1942 when the recommendation of a subcommittee for obtaining a one million cubic feet holder was accepted. A quotation for a smaller gasholder of 3/4 million cubic feet capacity was provisionally accepted but the Ministry of Fuel and Power decided that the work was not of sufficient national importance to go ahead.

However negotiations with the Ministry continued and it was reported, ironically in view of subsequent events, that an alternative

site, suggested by the Ministry and near to the existing gasholders had been investigated and 'we are both satisfied that the ground here is much superior to the former position'. A revised quotation as a result of avoiding the need for piling was submitted and provisionally accepted.<sup>51</sup> It was necessary to obtain additional power to acquire land for this purpose.<sup>52</sup> In 1944 it was reported that the Ministry were now prepared to recommend the release of steel for a one million cubic feet gasholder on the revised site. Excavations for foundations started in Spring 1945 the construction was completed in the autumn of 1947.<sup>53</sup> However excessive settlement during initial loading resulted in the need for remedial piling works to the southern part of the tank location.<sup>54</sup> Following completion of the new gasholder, Chelmsford was stated as having the second largest municipally owned gasworks in the southern half of England.<sup>55</sup>

## Further 1940s and 1950s Developments

A number of developments took place in the year's immediately following the war including new purifiers and an oxide shed.<sup>56</sup> Sanction was obtained to proceed with a new two million cubic feet per day capacity vertical retort house for which tenders were received in 1947.<sup>57</sup> However a new problem arose. Planning permission was needed under the Town and Country Planning Act 1947. This was initially refused by Essex County Council mainly because of transport and amenity considerations but permission was granted when the application was resubmitted.<sup>58</sup> It was left to the Eastern Gas Board, after nationalisation of the gas industry on 1st May 1949 to complete these works. In the event the capacity was increased to three million cubic feet and its completion was reported in 1953.<sup>59</sup>



**Plate 4.**  
**The gasworks**  
**site at the beginning**  
**of the Second World War.**  
(Reproduced by courtesy of  
the Essex Record Office,  
NS 25inch OS map, 54-15, 1940).

# Gas Manufacturing In Chelmsford

## The Final Chelmsford Gas Works

During the mid 1960s Eastern Gas launched a programme of works for the manufacture of Town Gas from imported natural gas or naphtha as a by-product of oil refining.<sup>60</sup> Chelmsford was the site for the largest reforming plant, having three units with a total daily capacity of 75 million cubic feet situated on the peninsula to the east of the coal gas plant. The new works were completed in the summer of 1968 and the coal gas plant was decommissioned.<sup>61</sup> At its maximum extent, the works occupied the whole of the peninsula between the River Chelmer and the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation. However the discovery of North Sea gas and the conversion of appliances to work directly with this fuel meant that the reforming plant had a short life and was closed during the 1970s. Demolition was completed by the early 1980s.<sup>62</sup>

## The Future

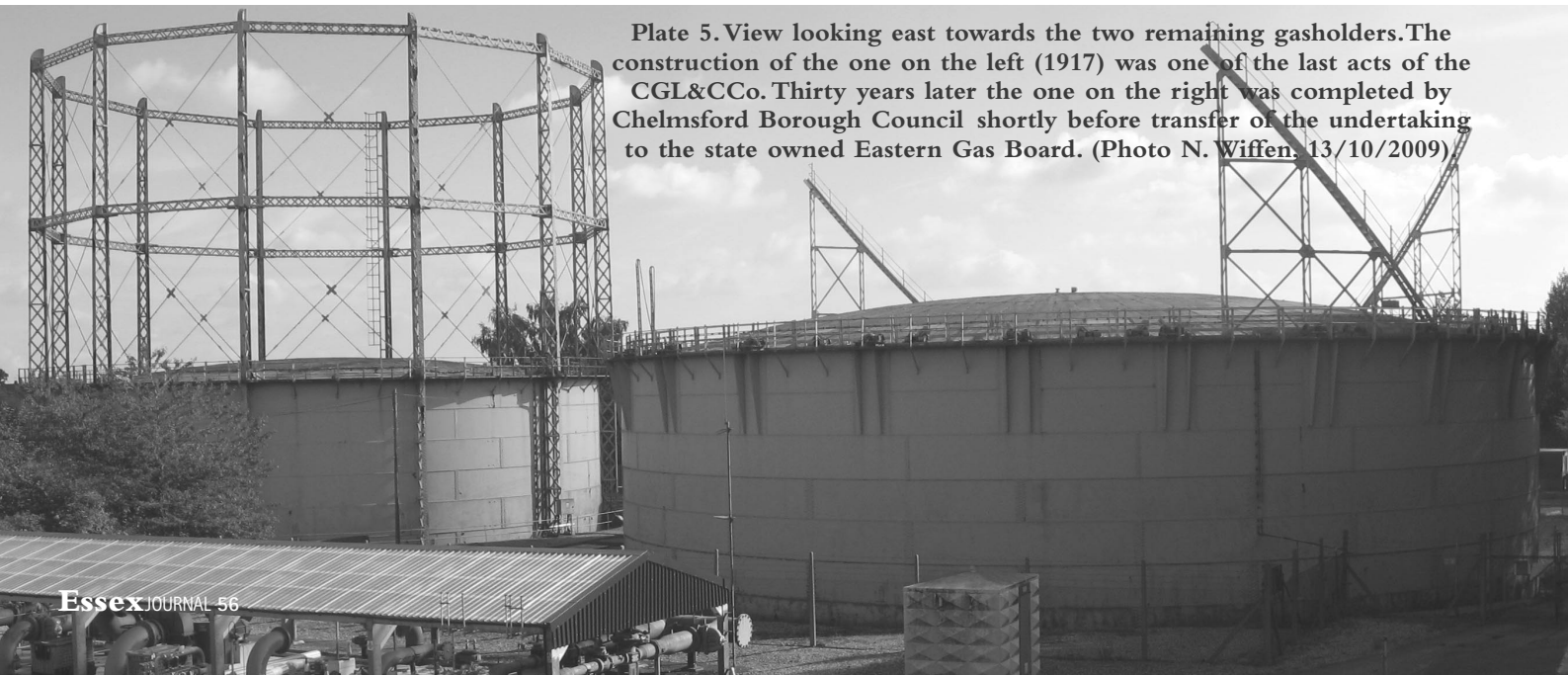
The largest visible remains are the gasholders constructed in 1917 and 1947 along with associated valveworks (Plate 5). The original 1821 site is now The Meadows multi-storey carpark (Plate 6) and apartments have recently been constructed on the site that had been acquired for gasmaking in 1857. The Essex Record Office now marks the boundary between the furthest extent of the Coal Gas and Reforming Plant sites.

The area now forms part of 'Chelmsford Waterside' which the local council has identified as having great potential for development.<sup>63</sup> The planning guidance includes strategy that identifies the opportunities now available for future redevelopment but recognises the constraints imposed by, among other things, contamination from the previous gasworks use.

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4. Ibid, 276.
5. *Chelmsford Chronicle* (C.Ch), 14/05/1819, [p.3].
6. J. Booker, *Essex and the Industrial Revolution*, (Chelmsford, 1974), p.187.
7. J. Marriage, *Changing Chelmsford*, (Chichester, 1992), unpaginated; Booker p.187.
8. Essex Record Office (ERO), D/DGe P44/1&2, map of Chelmsford Gas Works, Springfield, 1873.
9. *Retort*, 'a container or furnace for carrying out a chemical process on a large or industrial scale', *OED*.
10. Stewart, p.12.
11. Ibid. p.23.
12. The gasometer was invented by Lavoisier to provide a means of volumetric measurement of gas rather than for storage and surplus production was discharged to the atmosphere. A Royal Society recommendation in 1813 was that the capacity of gasometers should not exceed 6,000 cubic feet. Once fears over explosion risks were overcome, gasometer sizes increased and their main use became that of storage. The size of the initial Chelmsford gasometer is typical of one used for storage at that time, Stewart, p.32.
13. C.Ch, 14/05/1819, [p.3].
14. ERO, D/CT 322B, Springfield tithe map, 1842.
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16. ERO, D/Z 36/147/2, deed of grant to the CGL&CCo re bridges and rights of way, 1867.
17. 120inch OS map, Sheets 16 (1872) & 17 (1874).
18. ERO, Q/RUM 2/220, plan; section and book of reference, 1873.
19. ERO, D/Z 36/80, conveyance; piece of land on the wharf at Springfield, near the basin, together with the 27 messuages erected there, 05/10/1880.
20. ERO, Q/RUo 93. Act of Parliament; order empowering CGL&CCo to raise additional capital and to construct additional works in Springfield, 1885.
21. 2nd Ed 6inch OS map, sheet 52NE, (1895).
22. Borough of Chelmsford Minutes of Gas Works Committee (BCMGWC), 16/11 & 14/12/1928 at a time when replacement of purification

Plate 5. View looking east towards the two remaining gasholders. The construction of the one on the left (1917) was one of the last acts of the CGL&CCo. Thirty years later the one on the right was completed by Chelmsford Borough Council shortly before transfer of the undertaking to the state owned Eastern Gas Board. (Photo N. Wiffen, 13/10/2009)





# Gas Manufacturing In Chelmsford



**Plate 6. View looking north from High Bridge Road towards the site of the original Chelmsford gasworks, now occupied by the multi-storey car park. The feeder channel shown on the previous images runs across the scene behind a row of shrubs, arrowed. (Photo N. Wiffen, 13/10/2009).**

- plant was again under consideration. The latter report gave the following production figures in cubic feet:
- 60,510,000  
65,872,100  
70,510,500.
23. Borough of Chelmsford Minutes of Gas Committee (BCMGC), 07/11/1930.
  24. NS 25inch OS map, sheet 54-15, (1921).
  25. British Gas plc, *The Development of British Gas*, (London, 1991) & Stewart pp.21-22. Uncarburetted 'blue' water gas, a mixture of hydrogen and carbon monoxide, produced as the result of passing steam through white hot coke has a relatively low calorific value. However by spraying fuel oil onto the coke a higher calorific carburetted water gas containing hydrocarbons such as methane is produced.
  26. BCMGC, 07/11/1930.
  27. Borough of Chelmsford Minutes of Special Committee of the Town Council (BCMSCTC), 07/01/1914.
  28. BCMSCTC, 03/03/1914 & Minutes of Monthly Meeting 27/05/1914.
  29. BCMSCTC, 05/10/1914.
  30. BCMSCTC, 30/10/1916.
  31. Borough of Chelmsford Minutes of Finance and Gas Works Committee, 21/04 & 21/07/1920.
  32. BCMGWC, 08/04/1927 & 16/11/1928.
  33. BCMGWC, 12/07/1929 & BCMGC, 09/01/1931.
  34. BCMGWC, 10/04/1924.
  35. BCMGWC, 08/05/1925 & BCMGC, 11/11/1932.
  36. BCMGC, 07/11/1930; 05/06/1931; 11/11/1932; 06/07/1935; 10/12/1937 & 10/03/1939.
  37. BCMGC, 10/01, 14/02, 08/05 & 13/09/1940.
  38. Borough of Chelmsford Minutes of Special Meeting of Gas Committee, 11/04/1938.
  39. BCMGC, 06/10/1939.
  40. NS 25inch OS map, sheet 54-15, (1940)
  41. Borough of Chelmsford Gas Engineer's Annual Reports 1932 onwards.
  42. BCMGC, 10/04/1940.
  43. See end note 26 for distinction between uncarburetted and carburetted water gas. The latter requires additional plant to inject the fuel oil and stabilize the resulting product.
  44. BCMGC, 10/04/1940; 17/03, 18/12, 19/05 & 18/12/1941.
  45. BCMGC, 21/06, 18/10 & 23/01/1943 & 17/04/1944.
  46. BCMGC, 18/09/1944.
  47. BCMGC, 18/10/1943.
  48. W.K. Hutchison, 'The Gas Industry and the Balloon Barrage', *Transactions of the Institution of Gas Engineers*, 94, (1944-45), pp.390-430.
  49. Borough of Chelmsford Gas Department, *Report of the Working of the Gas Undertaking During the War 1939-1945*, (Chelmsford, 1945).
  50. The extraction of hydrogen from water gas requires steam. This may explain the concern over water supply mentioned in the previous paragraph.
  51. BCMGC, 08/03/1935; 10/04/1940; 20/04/1942; 10/03, 12/04 & 27/04/1943.
  52. Chelmsford Gas Order 1944.
  53. BCMGC, 11/01/1944; 19/03/1945 & 15/09/1947.
  54. BCMGC, 13/10 & 15/12/1947; 19/01 & 10/05/1948; P.G.L. Wynn, 'The Chelmsford Gasholder Foundation Failure', *Historic Gas Times*, 35, (2003), p.5; The Institution of Gas Engineers and Managers & G.G. Meyerhof, 'The Tilting of a Large Tank on Soft Clay', *Proceedings of the South Wales Institute of Engineers*, 67, (1951), pp.53-71.
  55. Councillor R.W. Bateman in 'Your Gas Supply', *Chelmsford Clarion*, June-July 1947, p.3.
  56. BCMGC, 17/11/1947 & 16/02/1948. Iron oxide is used to remove hydrogen sulphide from the gas as part of the purification process.
  57. BCMGC, 21/10/1946 & 14/07/1947.
  58. BCMGC, 13/12//1948 & 11/02/1949.
  59. Eastern Gas Board, *Annual Report*, 1953-54.
  60. Eastern Gas, *The Manufacture of Towns Gas by the Catalytic Cracking of Hydrocarbons*, [n.d].
  61. Eastern Gas Board, *Annual Reports*, 1965-66, 1966-67 & 1967-68.
  62. *Essex Chronicle*, 25/04/1980, p.6.
  63. Chelmsford Borough Council, *Chelmer Waterside Supplementary Planning Guidance*, (Chelmsford, 2002).

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# Una Lucy Silberrad, Authoress, 1872–1955

by  
Tony Fox

Essex boasts few prolific novelists. One exception to this generalization, with more than 40 titles to her name, is Una Lucy Silberrad.<sup>1</sup> She was born in Buckhurst Hill, and in later life removed to Burnham-on-Crouch. This article describes her home life, then turns to the literature itself, and concludes with her retirement.

## Home life

Una Lucy Silberrad was the second child of a large family (Fig. 1). Her mother, Clarissa Lucy (née Savill) had a middle-class London background.<sup>2</sup> Her father, Arthur Pouchin de Toict Silberrad was the 38th Baron of Willigis, and a Prince of the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>3</sup> However, by the time Una was born on May 8th 1872, the Franco-Prussian War had been fought, Bismarck was well on his way to unifying the German States, and the importance of her father's Franconian title was greatly diminished. The Silberrads had longstanding business interests in horticulture and the importation of exotic plants. They had had a London warehouse since at least 1794, and another in Darmstadt that was probably established earlier. One of Una's brothers had emigrated to North America so as to export to the family's warehouses. However, by the beginning of the twentieth century this branch of the family seems to have considered itself British, and none of Una's relatives seem to have left England when the First World War broke out.<sup>4</sup>

Not much is known about Una Silberrad's childhood. She lived mostly in Buckhurst Hill, although she is said to have attended 'St. Felix School in Southwark intermittently because of delicate health';<sup>5</sup> this may or may not be a euphemism because a future as a mother and housewife was sometimes viewed as hardly justifying the need for education amongst the Victorian and Edwardian middle classes.<sup>6</sup> The school has not been located, so far, but its name suggests an Anglican association. Together with her family upbringing, this led to Una Silberrad's staunch adherence to the Church of England in later life. In any case, judging by her frequent travels, Una grew up to be a vigorous woman, if of small stature. Among all her siblings, Una seems to have been particularly close to her younger brother Oswald (1878–1960).<sup>7</sup>

Una Silberrad never married. Given that she was 42-years old by the time the First World War broke out, many marriageable years had passed before the shortage of suitable men developed in the early twentieth century. The only clue to any romantic interests appears in the sole personal dedication that has been found so far among her many editions. In *Sampson Rideout, Quaker*, this dedication says 'To J.H.F., a member of the Society of Friends, and the best man I know'. This is likely to refer to J. H. Fox of Buckhurst Hill, who was related to Howards, a well-known Quaker family in

the same village. While this unique, somewhat cryptic dedication might only refer to some education on that particular non-conformist religion during her research for that book, it might also point to an unbridgeable religious obstacle to a deeper romantic attachment.



Plate 1.  
Una Lucy Silberrad c.1899.  
(Author's collection).

Una Silberrad's diminutive stature, independent attitude, bold expressions, and evident self-reliance are interlocking aspects of her personality. For example, in *Dutch Bulbs and Gardens* (her only non-fiction work, see below) she makes disparaging remarks about stout Dutch ladies who make a great fuss because, with their copious luggage, they are unable to get in and out of a railway carriage without assistance. Similarly, she commented bluntly on the 'Bloomsbury set': 'They complain about things they cannot change'.<sup>8</sup> Being unmarried was probably highly compatible with the lifestyle of a woman with an unusually independent attitude in the Edwardian era.

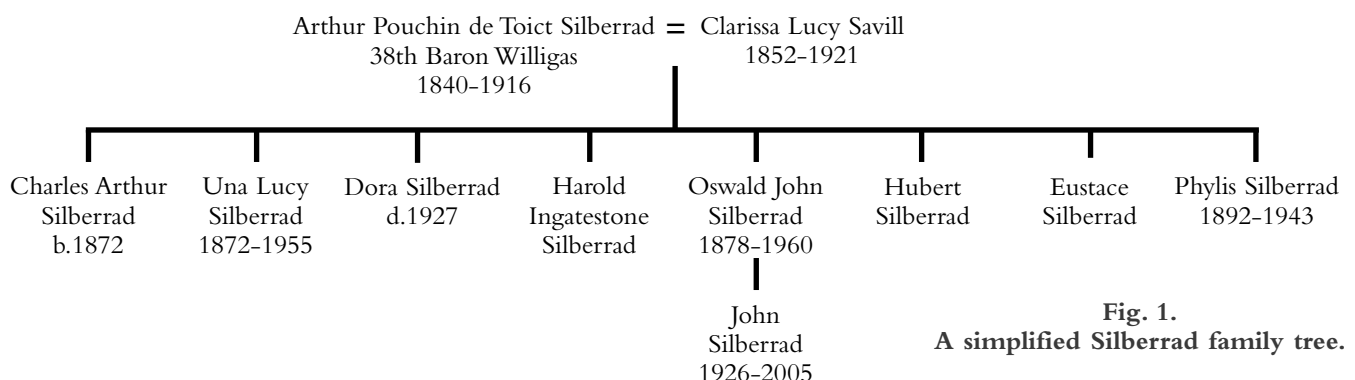


Fig. 1.  
A simplified Silberrad family tree.

# Una Lucy Silberrad

In 1932, at the age of 60, Una Silberrad rented Wick (or Wycke) House, at the other end of Essex, at Burnham-on-Crouch.<sup>9</sup> She was accompanied there by her sister Phyllis, some 20 years her junior. This was to be their home for the rest of their lives. Wick House was, and is still today, quite a large aggregation of buildings in an isolated place. Dammer Wick is a kilometre to the North, and the River Crouch estuary is half a kilometer southwards. Six uninhabited kilometers to the East is the shore of the North Sea. Whilst Burnham has now grown to within about a kilometre of the house, that distance would have been about double when Una and Phyllis Silberrad lived there. The hall of Wick House was decorated with zebra and lion trophies, as well as a python's skeleton, courtesy of her brother Hubert (a District Commissioner in Africa).

Una used a second-floor bedroom as her study, and her desk was beneath a window with views over the marshes to the River Crouch. She wrote in the mornings, using a fountain pen, and Phyllis typewrote the finished text. The sisters reserved their afternoons for hobbies, exercise, or social activities. Two years after arriving at Wick House Una Silberrad described her hobbies, as 'walking alone, needlework, and digging'.<sup>10</sup> Both sisters read a lot, with Una preferring Dickens, whilst Phyllis reportedly admiring Jane Austen. The Silberrad sisters always had a housekeeper: until 1938 this was a Miss Walker (who resigned upon marriage just before the Second World War), and thereafter a Miss Hooper. Nonetheless, Una jarred the autumn fruit herself and made her own jam in the kitchen of Wick House. There was always a cat or two in the house, and anthologies about this species often include her quote:

'At whilst it seems as if one were somewhat as the cats, which ever have appeared to me to be animals of two parts,

the one of the house and the cushion and the prepared food, the other that is free of the night and runs wild with the wind in its coat and the smell of the earth in its nostrils'<sup>11</sup>

Despite the solitude that Wick House offered, the Silberrad sisters were clearly not recluses. Wick House never had a telephone, and Una Silberrad was well known at the Burnham Post Office because of frequent telegrams to and from her publishers. Eye-witnesses in Burnham describe Una Silberrad as highly intelligent, well-spoken, and 'a real lady, who could engage a Duke or a dustman in comfortable and interesting conversation'.<sup>12</sup> Both Una and her sister Phyllis were active in the Burnham Branch of the Women's Institute (WI). Una served as branch Vice-President 1936-39 (Plate 2). Phyllis gave talks at the WI including one in 1938 that was entitled 'Making the best of everything'.<sup>13</sup> However, Phyllis was perhaps best known for her collection of about 85 dolls, dressed in her own hand-made costumes of different periods. These dolls were used to illustrate other WI talks such as 'Home life in Essex 300 years ago' in 1938.<sup>14</sup>

Each summer there would be amateur dramatics on the lawn at Wick House, this being a tradition that had begun at Elliott Powell's house in Buckhurst Hill, many years before. Una usually wrote the scripts, and these often had a Dickensian theme. In spite of the fact that Burnham hosted some major international sailing contests before the Second World War, Una Silberrad had no interest in that sport, which she referred to as 'mudlarking'.<sup>15</sup> Una Silberrad was a regular churchgoer, and would walk the mile or more to St. Mary's church across the allotments (which have now been built over, forming Alamein and Dunkirk Roads). When walking out, she was meticulous in her appearance. She was never seen in public without hat, gloves, and full-length clothes. In Winter, fur-lined leggings were added to this ensemble. Her formality of dress was remarked upon, even by the standards of the middle twentieth century.

## The Literature

Una Silberrad's late nephew believed that it was her ability to entertain her younger siblings by story-telling that got her started as a writer. Even so, she was 27-

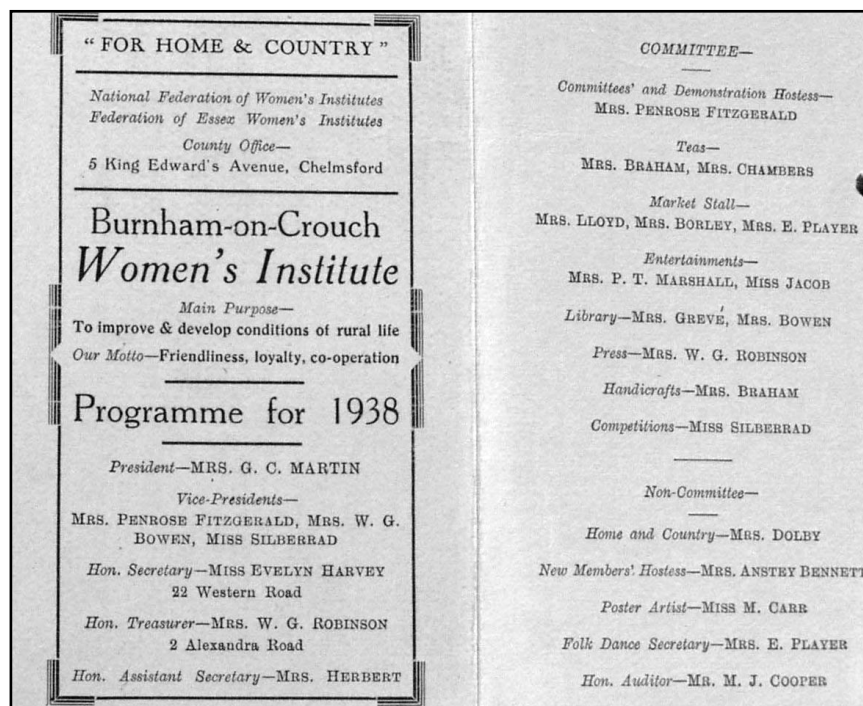


Plate 2. The Burnham-on-Crouch Womens' Institute programme for 1938. (Courtesy of the late Mrs. J. DuBois).



# Una Lucy Silberrad



Plate 3. Una Silberrad and her cat in old age.  
(Courtesy of the late Mrs. J. DuBois).

years old before her first novel *The Enchantress* appeared in print (written 1895–97, published 1899). This first novel was reviewed in the respectable New York periodical *The Bookman*,<sup>16</sup> where Una is described as ‘the second member of large, ambitious family of limited means’, with a theatrical tale of how poor Miss Silberrad toiled with her writing only on Sunday afternoons, ‘her only available time’, implying that she had to work elsewhere during the week to help support the family. In spite of this, there is no evidence that Una Silberrad ever had any occupation other than writing.

More than 40 titles by Una Silberrad were published in almost as many years (See bibliography). The majority are full-length novels, and the bibliographic details are known for all but one. Her first 26 books (1899–1925) were brought out by a variety of London and New York publishers, perhaps suggesting that publication was not automatic. Nonetheless, these were all highly reputable London publishers, and this reflects well on the contemporary assessment of the quality of her writing.<sup>17</sup> Thereafter, for the last 20 years of her career, she developed a lasting relationship with Hutchinson & Co., while retaining A.&P. Watt & Co. as her permanent literary agent. Her short stories are less easy to locate because they appear in un-indexed periodicals; six have been found so far, and it is very likely that there are more to be uncovered. But overall, this sustained output is matched by few other authors.

In 1906, with several novels already in print, Una Silberrad went by steamer from the Pool of London to Holland. A travelogue duly appeared which was her only collaborative and non-fiction work; *Dutch Bulbs and Gardens* has appendices by Sophia Lyall, and illustrations by Mima Nixon. This volume is usually found in an attractive, Dutch orange, early art nouveau binding. Of all her books, this is the one most commonly found in the second hand book trade, indicating its long print run and contemporary popularity. Una Silberrad’s style of writing can hardly be described as terse. Sentences of 40 to 50 words prevail, and their structures are usually complex. Semicolons are frequent, and sentences with two semi-colons can even be found (e.g., *Co-Directors*, pp.8–9). While the style is not exactly attractive to a twenty-first century reader, it is nonetheless very characteristic of the late Victorian and Edwardian era in which Una Silberrad’s writing career got going.

‘enough to  
puzzle the  
parson as to  
her educating’

But when one penetrates the antique style of writing, Una’s novels exhibit impressive originality, especially in the context of the era when she was writing. The books are clearly targeted to a conservative middle-class audience. They are not the experimental writing that characterizes the ‘Bloomsbury Set’. But as the series of novels grows longer, several themes emerge.

First of all, every book features some reference to Una Silberrad’s real life. For example, her holiday venues often appear as settings in her books. *Co-Directors* sprang from walking holidays in Wales and Somerset, whilst *Blackstone’s* and *The Man who went to Ardath* follow from a visit to Barnard

Castle (County Durham). The *Romance of Molehills* reflects a visit to Brighton, and *In the Course of Years* derives from a stay with relatives at Chignall St. James, near Chelmsford. In *The Good Comrade* the words ‘explosives’ and ‘Holland’ both appear on page 291, clearly connecting with her brother and *Dutch Bulbs and Gardens*. In *Keren of Lowbole*, the action oscillates between London, Colchester, and Lowbole,<sup>18</sup> and the heroine is to be found conducting chemistry experiments in the cottage fireplace; this book also has an interesting little colophon, part of which reads:

‘The “Blue Stone” made by Keren was synthetic lapis lazuli, now known commercially as artificial ultra marine, and prepared by a process not very dissimilar from the one here described. The author has made a very small quantity by the method Keren followed’ (p.348).

Ultra marine is an inorganic double-silicate of sodium, aluminium, and sulphur. It would thus appear that Una actually took part in her younger brother Oswald’s work. She may even have been guarding some proprietary process by creating a ‘not very dissimilar’ fictional account. Another theme running through her novels is her strong female characters. *Keren of Lowbole* has already been mentioned. *Sanchia Stapleton*, *The Lady of Lovell*, *Princess Puck*, and others are among the coterie of leading women, many of whom have romantic interests. The strength of a female character probably reaches its zenith in *The Affairs of John Bolsover*, where a woman impersonates a man, and becomes Prime Minister. One wonders whether these strong female characters have more of Una Silberrad in them than first appears. A character called Phillip in *Co-Directors* is described by the heroine as having ‘modified the [previous] obedience, although he still believed he obeyed, and did

# Una Lucy Silberrad

to a certain extent.' (p.18). And returning to *Keren of Lowbole*, Keren was:

'enough to puzzle the parson as to her educating, and most perhaps as her gift for pertinent silence when she had nought really to say – a thing somewhat rare in women, especially the young and the old of them' (p.233).

Religious references are another common thread running through Una Silberrad's novels. Several Old Testament names appear in her books, such as Micah, Sampson, and Tobiah; these were otherwise uncommon in Edwardian England. The title *An Abundance of Things* comes from 'A man's life comes not from an abundance of things' (*Luke* 12:15). The Second World War did not immediately interrupt her writing. *The Escape of Andrew Cole* was published in 1941 and *The Three Men who went to Ardath in 1760* appeared in 1944. Una Silberrad was also sufficiently well-known in the United States to receive care packages from her American followers. However, in December 1943 her sister Phyllis, some 20 years her junior, died from a post-operative pulmonary embolus and was buried in the Burnham-on-Crouch cemetery. This loss seems to coincide with Una's retirement from writing, although the opinion of her late nephew was that this was more likely to be due to the fact that, now in her early seventies, Una's creative powers and appetite for writing had also waned.

## Retirement

Una Silberrad remained active in her retirement, even if she became a bit eccentric. She developed a reputation for wasting nothing, and kept all sorts of odds and ends for unknown future uses. It became her habit to dress formally for dinner each evening, even when her housekeeper was making 'dinner for one'. One of the dresses that she wore was of maroon velvet, but this magnificent gown was

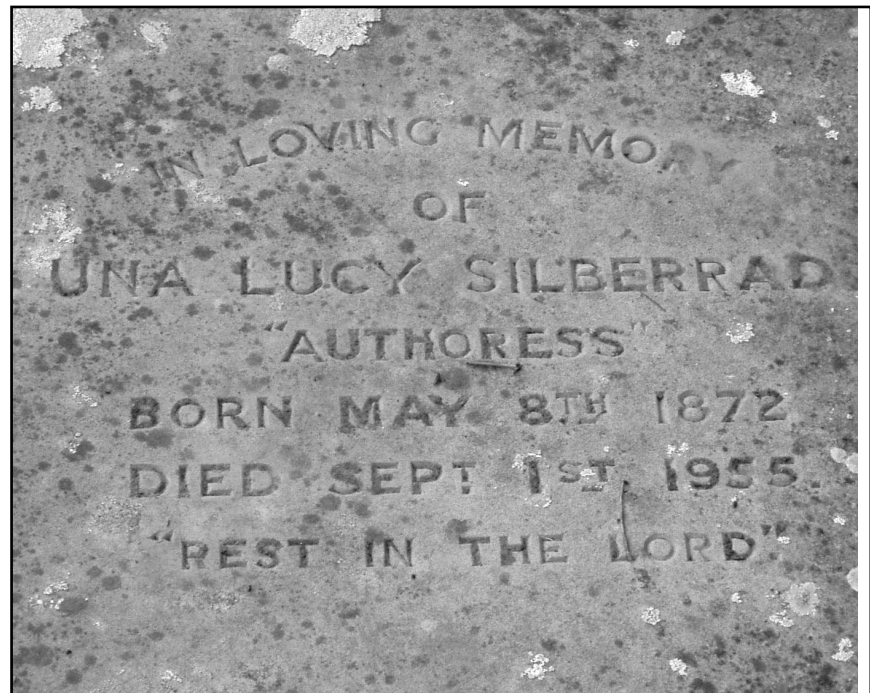


Plate 4. The inscription on Una Silberrad's grave slab, which is about 55 inches long.  
(Author's photograph).

never set off with any jewelry.<sup>19</sup> The Great Flood of 1953 covered the lawn, but stopped just short of Wick House itself, from which Una had refused to evacuate.<sup>20</sup> When without electricity, evidently a frequent event at Wick House, Una was to be found walking around the house after dark in her dressing gown, with an old bike lamp hanging from a blue ribbon around her neck. She kept in touch with her West Essex relatives, and a surviving Women's Institute colleague reports driving 82-year old 'Miss Una' to Loughton one afternoon in 1954.<sup>21</sup> In her last years, Una was also known to be friendly with a retired Royal Navy Commander living in Burnham; he has yet to be identified.

Una Silberrad died at Burnham on September 1st 1955, after suffering a stroke whilst walking home from evensong a few days earlier.<sup>22</sup> Evelyn Milford, a WI colleague, was with her when she died. She was buried next to her sister Phyllis in the Burnham cemetery. Her grave slab says simply 'Authoress', as does her commemorative brass in the south west corner of St. Mary's church (Plates 4&5). Obituaries appeared both locally and nationally.<sup>23</sup> More than fifty years have elapsed since Una

Silberrad died. A mulberry tree that she planted still thrives at Wick House but her surviving family now includes only a niece. Her nephew John Silberrad, who always referred to her as 'Aunt Una', died during the summer of 2005.

## References

1. Una Silberrad appeared neither in William Addison's *Essex Worthies*, (London, 1973) nor in the previous editions of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. For the origin of this project, see: T Fox, 'Una Lucy Silberrad', *ESAH News*, Spring 2004, pp.18-20.
2. The Savill family used at least four spellings of their surname.
3. A spoked, silver wheel appears as a canting device on the family coat of arms, which is of Franken origin. Recognizing that blazon is at the discretion of the individual herald, Silberrad might be described in England as: 'Party per bar, in chief gules, a spoked wheel argent between two dolphins of the same, above sable, a chevron or.' The motto 'Faith moves Mountains' is currently in use.
4. Interview with the late John Silberrad, 08/07/2004.
5. *Who's Who*, 1914, (London, 1914).
6. I am grateful to Prof Dr habil. Christoph Ehland, of the University of Paderborn, for suggesting consideration of this point.

# Una Lucy Silberrad

7. Oswald Silberrad BSc, PhD, FChemS, FRSA, has probably not yet found his rightful place in the history of science in Essex. Some of his chemistry has provided miners with safer explosives; he also has a place in medical history because some of his nitrates can be used to treat *angina pectoris*, whilst one or two of his triazoles treat fungal infections. Photochemicals, pigments, and metallurgy were other interests. His laboratory equipment was donated to the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology in 1984 whilst his papers are today stored at Imperial College, Kensington; he is buried at St.John's, Loughton. See also G. Rotter, 'Silberrad, Oswald John (1878–1960)', rev. K. D. Watson, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36091>, (14/09/2009).
8. Interview with J. Silberrad.
9. The house was owned by another Quaker family named Bennington-Smythe. Its location and place name doubtless indicate the home of mediaeval shepherds among the Essex marshes. See also: P.H. Reaney, *The Placenames of Essex*, (Cambridge, 1935), pp.212, 569–570.
10. *Who's Who*, 1933, (London, 1933). Reference courtesy of Dr. Michael Leach.
11. For example: <http://www.sniksnak.com/quotes4.htm>, (21/06/2004).
12. Personal communication with the late Mrs Jean DuBois.
13. It was at Wick House, with her elder sister's encouragement, that Phyllis Silberrad wrote her only novel, *The Last Page of the Book*, (London, 1933).
14. Phyllis's dolls were never at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Museum of Childhood at Bethnal Green, or the Museum of London, contrary to local traditions. See *Essex Review*, LIII, no.212 (Oct. 1944), pp.133–134.
15. DuBois communication.
16. Anonymous. New York: *The Bookman*, 1900, (April), xi(2), p.107. This review exhibits some, perhaps typically-American, optimism in confusing the 'picturesque Essex Marches' with our coastal marshes!
17. I am grateful to Prof Dr habil. Christoph Ehland for suggesting consideration of this point.

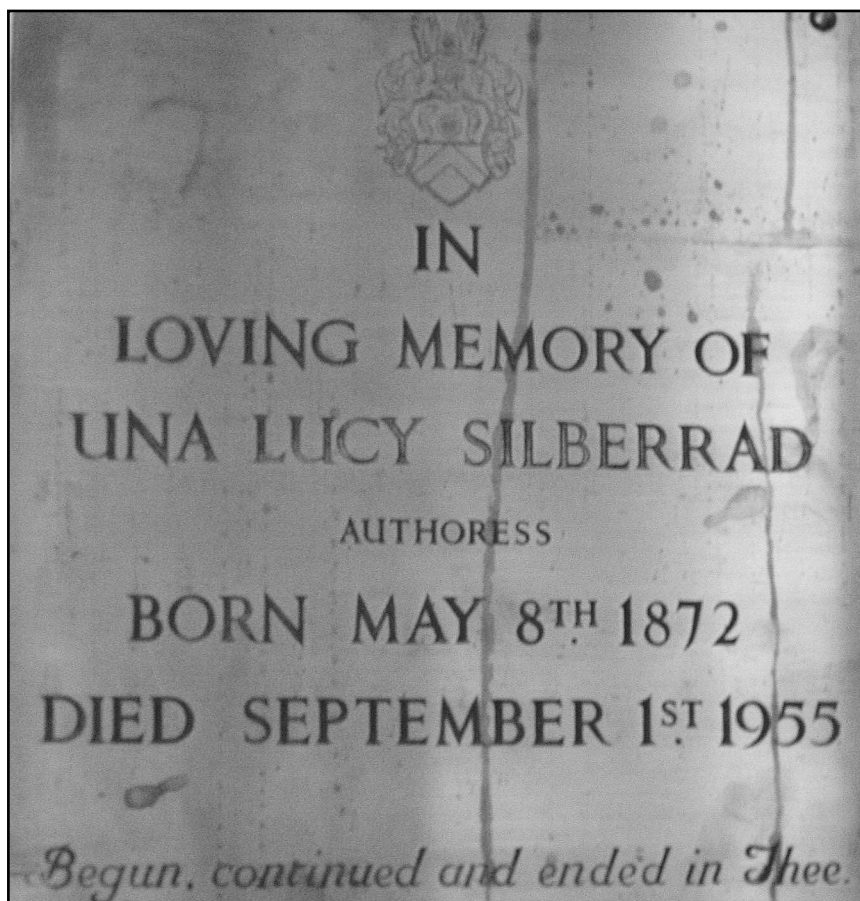


Plate 5. The brass in the SW corner of St. Mary's church, Burnham-on-Crouch. (Author's photograph).

18. Lowbole is an imaginary place-name, but may be an antonym of Woodbury Hill, which is in Loughton.
19. DuBois communication.
20. M. Holland, 'Terror in the Night! The 1953 North Sea Surge and its Effects on the Essex Coastal Community', *Essex Journal*, 38, 1, (2003), pp5–12.
21. DuBois communication.
22. The ODNB differs slightly from oral history on precisely when on August 28, 1955 ULS sustained her final illness, J.H.W. Silberrad, 'Silberrad, Una Lucy (1872–1955)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/72261>, (14/09/2009).
23. W. Lack, H.M. Stuchfield & P. Whittemore, *The Monumental Brasses of Essex*, vol. I, (London, 2003), p.113. The use of a shield, instead of a lozenge, emphasizes the foreign nature of these arms; the obituaries were in *The Times*, 02/09/1955, and the *Burnham-on-Crouch and Dengie Hundred Advertiser*, 10/09/1955.

## Acknowledgments

The late Mrs Jean DuBois of Burnham provided much valuable oral history about Una Silberrad at Burnham, gathered with the assistance of Ms Denise Blackman. The late John Silberrad esq., Barrister-at-Law of Loughton kindly granted me an interview and provided most of the information about the history of his family. Dr Michael Leach and Mr Richard Morris OBE are thanked for their assistance for arranging the interview with John Silberrad and also for pursuing follow-up questions. Many people kindly contributed to the bibliography, especially Mrs Janet Martin, and Prof Dr habil. Christoph Ehland made valuable comments on the manuscript.

## The Author

Tony Fox grew up at Cranham, near Upminster. Extracts copied out from *The History of Upminster* booklets plus his own hand drawn map locating some of the old buildings show an interest in local history that began at the age of seven at Oglethorpe Primary School. Since then his interests have slowly radiated to other parts of Essex. He is a physician and currently lives near San Diego, USA.



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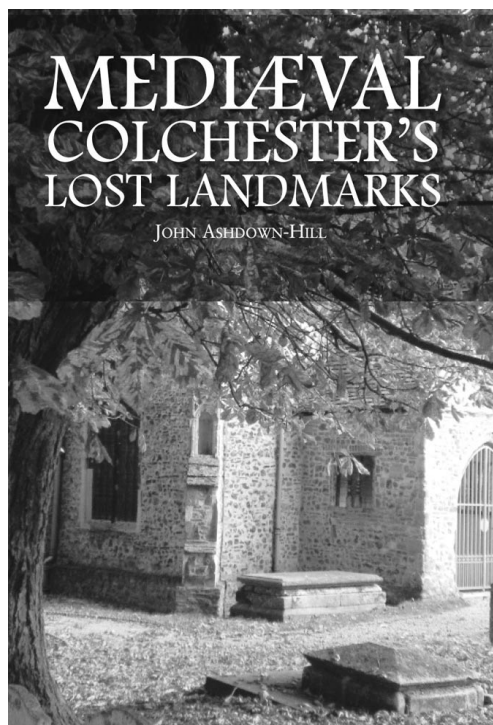
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# Book Reviews

John Ashdown-Hill,  
**Mediaeval Colchester's Lost Landmarks**,  
 Breedon Books, 2009, pp.191.  
 ISBN 978-1-8598368-6-6, £14.99.



Readers of the *Essex Journal* will have enjoyed the author's article on the shrine of the holy rood at Dovercourt in the spring 2009 issue. Therefore, you will expect from his latest publication a thoroughly well researched work bringing to life a period of history often passed over as pre-modern and therefore having nothing to teach us. You will not be disappointed, John

Ashdown-Hill succeeds in filling the void that often exists for the superficial observer of Colchester's history, the version that leaps from a Roman colonia to the civil war siege with nothing between.

His extensive use of original documentation in the court records gives us such fascinating figures as the eight 'taverners' of 1446 who were probably the main innkeepers; it certainly whetted my appetite to explore the successors of those establishments today! I am sure contemporary schoolmasters would not behave in the manner of one fifteenth century predecessor who was fined fourpence for being 'in the common habit of casting the dung of his school over and beyond the stone wall of the town at le posterne and there making a dunghill'. Anyone wishing to know how the courts became significant in our knowledge of the medieval tennis court or of bear baiting and indeed of the towns legalised brothels will find both enlightenment and amusement in this book.

Home, work and civic organisation and the buildings in which each existed are well covered and as with the entire book, excellently illustrated. It would be very hard to imagine a better introduction for any Colcestrian to their medieval past nor to a historian wanting to focus their general understanding of medieval English society into a particular setting.

Naturally around half the book is given over to the religious and ecclesiastical past of the town at a time when life was more precarious and eternity with its agents more pressing! There is an excellent presentation of the religious life as found in its Abbey of

St John's and its two priories - St Botolph's and Greyfriars. It is here we see clearly the minor problem the authors title has given him. The nave of St Botolph's priory is certainly not a lost landmark even if it is a fine ruin (it will be interesting to see how the borough's plans for giving it a higher profile emerge). The same issue arises elsewhere and results in the churches of St Runwald and All Saints being given eight interesting pages but the far more remarkable St Martin's getting just a brief mention because it still stands.

The authors own religious sympathies (which make him such a good guide) are clear when he berates the Church of England authorities for allowing the demolition of St Nicholas. The church was still standing when the 1954 Pevsner was published. He opined 'Essentially the work of Sir George Gilbert Scott 1875-6....who found a small and humble church and made it serve his more ambitious purposes'. A parishioner (and objector to the demolition at the time) recalled in her dotage that shortly before an ecclesiastical court was to be held a large section of stone fell from the tower just failing to reduce the worshippers by two. Demolition followed rapidly. It is devoutly to be hoped that the author's reminder to us of what we have lost will alert today's citizens to what remains, especially St Martin's Holy Trinity and St Leonard the Hythe and ensure better use is made of them than at present.

Michael Fox

MEDIAEVAL COLCHESTER'S LOST LANDMARKS

abbey when he came to Colchester, and there is no doubt whatsoever that his daughter-in-law Catherine of Aragon (the first wife of Henry VIII) did so in 1515.

When Henry VIII discarded Catherine and embarked on the Dissolution of the Monasteries, St John's Abbey was one of only a handful of religious houses that resisted the king. Clearly whatever backslidings there may have been in the past, by this time St John's was fully in touch with its religious heritage. The house was eventually closed following the trial and execution of the last abbot Thomas Beche (*alias* Marshall) for treason. He was hanged at Colchester on the demesne lands of his own abbey on 1 December 1539.<sup>19</sup> The beautiful gold and enamelled pectoral cross which he was wearing at the time of his execution was taken by one of the guards. It subsequently found its way into the hands of the Catholic Mannock family of Gifford's Hall, Stoke-by-Nayland, whose descendants presented this relic to Buckfast Abbey in Devon with the proviso that the abbot of Buckfast should return it to Colchester if and when St John's Abbey was restored.<sup>20</sup>

After the Dissolution, the abbey site passed to various individuals and



Doorway to the gatekeeper's lodge.



Doorway in St John's Abbey Gatehouse.

## Book Reviews

**Harry Stinton & Virginia Mayo,  
Harry's War: A British Tommy's  
Experiences in the Trenches in  
World War One,**  
Conway, 2008, pp.223.  
ISBN 978-1-8448608-5-2, £9.99.

The book is the diary of Harry Stinton, a Bethnal Green sawyer, edited by, and with background information researched by his niece, Virginia Mayo. Stinton served in the London Regiment from 1915-17, seeing action at some of the great battles on the Western Front - Loos, Vimy Ridge and the Somme, although he avoided the carnage of the initial days of the latter. A severe shoulder injury at Messines Ridge put an end to his soldiering days and he was discharged in September 1917.

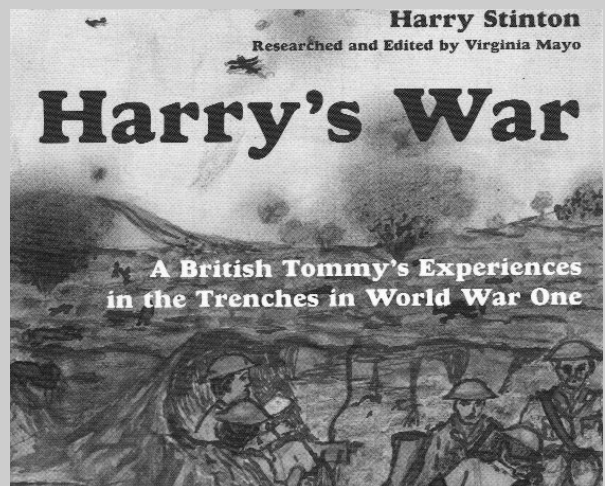
His journal is a wonderfully evocative document, consisting of very large amounts of factual information, written in a matter-of-fact and unsentimental manner. The minutiae of a soldier's daily routine and the battles in which he fought are set out and will be enough to satisfy any military enthusiast, although he does not share with us the inner feelings that his experiences must have aroused. When he friend was killed by a mine he wrote 'I missed my late chum Matthews and went about generally by myself.' This is about as near to emotion as he gets.

His diary is illustrated by a large number of small coloured paintings, which are charming, almost child-like, reminding me in fact of the tone of Winston Churchill's rather untutored but compelling works. They provide a useful accompaniment to the environment in which Stinton lived and fought.

His diary has an Essex perspective because Stinton spent a short time training in Epping and he drew three illustrations of the town.

The book is beautifully produced, extremely well indexed, and I recommend it to anyone with an interest in the Western Front.

Paul Rusiecki



**Michael Foley,  
More Front-Line Essex,  
The History Press, 2008, pp.148.  
ISBN 978-0-7509495-1-4, £12.99.**

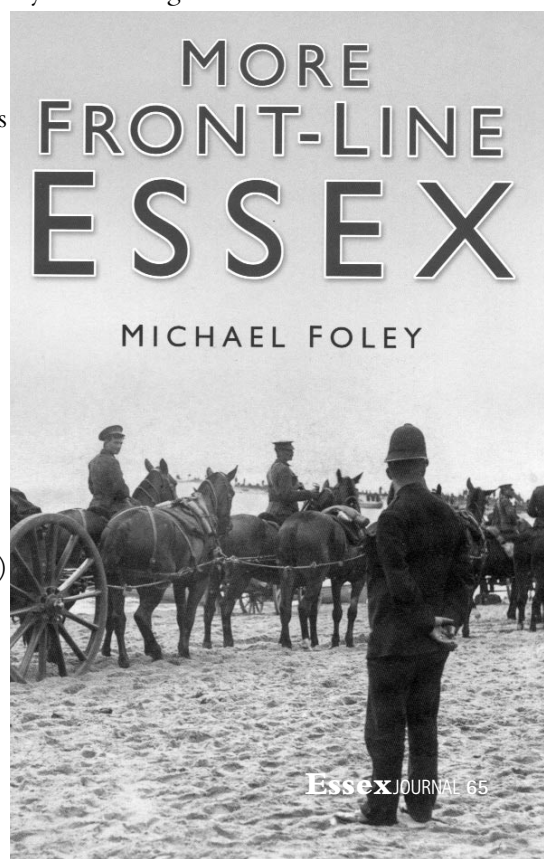
Essex has been on England's military front line, defending the country from a wide variety of invaders, since early times and the impact of this has left a fascinating imprint on the County's unique heritage. Foley explores this in his book, which although a successor to *Front-Line Essex*, extends its survey further back in time to look at the pre-Norman conquest of Essex and the period between the conquest and the Napoleonic period. The book then addresses the Napoleonic period to the Twentieth century, the twentieth century and the First World War, and the Second World War to the present day. Foley chooses interesting and often little known mini-case studies and historical anecdotes to illustrate the role the county has played in the defence of the Kingdom.

For example, we learn that Irish soldiers billeted in Maldon became such a nuisance that following a riot on St Patrick's Day 1628, when over 30 townsmen were wounded and several soldiers shot, the soldiers were transferred to Witham. The ice-cream stand at Mersea was actually constructed as a searchlight base. Clacton has the notorious distinction of being the site of the first British civilian casualties of

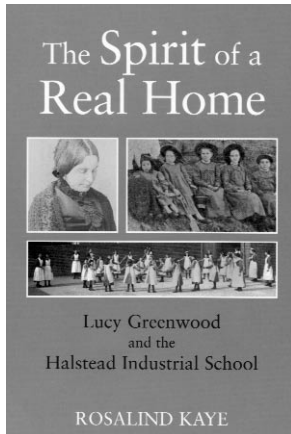
the Second World War when a German plane crashed on a house. While in February 1941 a Heinkel 111 bomber landed at Debden airfield, famous for its American Eagle Squadron Spitfires, having become lost and thinking it was in France. After the pilot got out of the plane and went to speak to the men in the control tower it quickly took off again!

These case studies, which are richly illustrated with maps, engravings and photographs - many from the author's own collection and rarely seen - have been selected to represent many parts of Essex, to make the book of interest for those interested in military history (a subject becoming increasingly popular) and in Essex in general.

Mark Curteis



Rosalind Kaye,  
**The Spirit of a Real Home:  
 Lucy Greenwood and the  
 Halstead Industrial School,**  
 Chellow Dean Press, 2009, pp.28.  
 ISBN 978-0-9537549-1-5, £6.95



Lucy Greenwood (1825-95) was a member of a well known, Halstead Quaker family and aware of the Quaker initiative for improving the conditions of children. One of her brothers, Robert Ellington Greenwood, was a banker, farmer, proprietor of Halstead Gas Works and one of the first directors of the Colne Valley and Halstead Railway. In 1869 Lucy Greenwood founded the Halstead Industrial School, which accepted girls,

usually up to sixteen years of age, from unsatisfactory homes, or orphans who were referred by magistrates. The School gave them education and training for an occupation leading to self-supporting and respectable adults.

Lucy was kind and generous and each year hired a house at Walton-on-the-Naze where ten girls stayed with staff for a fortnight and delicate children for longer. Lucy also took the lease of The Chase in Head Street, Halstead to house retired members of her staff for whom she created a fund for long service. Inspectors from the Home Office recognised the exceptional qualities of the School.

Adrian Taylor,  
**A History of the Families of Cole and  
 Cozens of Magdalen Laver together  
 with the Love Letters of John Cozens  
 and Elizabeth Ide,**  
 The Lavers Local History Society, 2008,  
 pp.vi & 58. £5.00 incl. p&tp.  
 Available from Patrick Streeter:  
 T. 012579 731308  
 E. [sptstreeter@aol.com](mailto:sptstreeter@aol.com)

It is a pleasure to see the many little booklets and magazines that are being produced in Essex and this work by Adrian Taylor and the Lavers Local History Society is another example of the vibrancy of historical research in the county. The title says it all really; indeed there is little else for me to add regarding the history of the families in the locality. It is all fairly standard stuff with examples of propitious marriages, deaths, debts and farming etc. I do like the sentiment expressed that 'In real life, stories do not have just have a beginning and an end; they flow from the past, have interruptions and have consequences to this day' (p.3). I feel that this is always difficult to express in any historical writing – we often treat a subject in isolation with firm start

Lucy remained as Superintendent of the School until her death in 1895, when it came under the auspices of the Society of Friends and closed in 1921. Thereafter the Royal Eastern Counties Institution leased the buildings to use as a school for girls with severe learning difficulties, adopting the name 'The Greenwood School', which finally closed in 1999.

In 1961 the Quakers sold the freehold and the proceeds of sale was used to form the Greenwood Educational Trust, which gives small grants to children of local Quaker Meetings for educational purposes. It is therefore appropriate that the author and publisher of this book have generously donated all profits from it to the Greenwood Educational Trust.

The author, Rosalind Kaye, is undoubtedly an authority on Nonconformity in Essex. The 'Greenwood' book follows the success of her book 'Chapels in Essex, Chapels and Meeting Houses in the County of Essex, including Outer London'. Both books are paperback, 240 x 180mm and of very similar format. The book is well illustrated with eighteen black and white photographs including twelve photographs of the Greenwood family and School, five documents and one map.

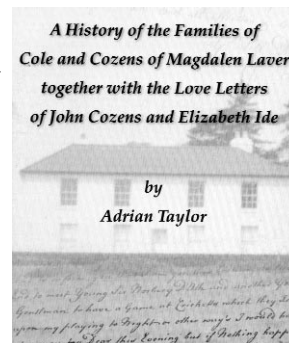
The School was part of the history of the town of Halstead for 130 years and we should be grateful to the author for her research and well chosen, illustrations. I hope that during the ensuing years, Rosalind Kaye will add to her publications associated with Nonconformity in Essex. In the meantime I commend this book to you.

Adrian Corder-Birch.

and end dates whilst always knowing what comes next.

The core of the book is a series of letters that John Cozens and Elizabeth Ide wrote to one another whilst courting; each is reproduced alongside a transcription. They allow us a glimpse of the lives of two young people whose sentiments continue to shine forth through their own words. Eventually they married a little over two years after the first letter (13/10/1764) with the last written before their marriage in November 1766. They remind me of some of the love letters that members of the Paston family were sending 300 years before. I feel it only right to leave the last words of this review to Elizabeth: 'I flatter myself that I could enjoy more happiness in a mean cottage with you, than with the greatest grandeur without you, so great is my love'.

Neil Wiffen



## Your Book Reviewers are:

**Michael Fox**, a retired Church of England Archdeacon of West Ham. He was Rector of St James the Great, Colchester, between 1988-93.  
**Paul Rusiecki**, a retired teacher who is currently researching the history of Essex during the Second World War  
**Mark Curteis**, Heritage Learning and Access Officer for the County Council and based in Essex Record Office. Trained as a museum archaeologist he has a particularly interest in coins.  
**Adrian Corder-Birch** and **Neil Wiffen** are members of the Essex Journal Editorial Board



# EJ 20 Questions? Jennifer Ward

Jennifer Ward, was born in 1938 in Brentwood where she has lived on and off for most of her life. At Brentwood County High School she did research on Old Thorndon Hall at the Essex Record Office and after graduating from Oxford she did her Ph.D. research in London on the Clare family estates between 1066 and 1314. Jennifer then spent most of her career teaching and researching medieval history at Goldsmiths' College, University of London, teaching courses on local and regional, and women's history, as well as the more traditional courses on Britain and Europe. She has published work on the Clare family (including Elizabeth de Burgh), on Essex, Kent and Suffolk, and on women's history. Her most recent book, in 2006, is *Women in England in the Middle Ages*.

**1. What is your favourite historical period?**

The Middle Ages, as I like to see how society develops over a period of about 1,000 years, and how it compares with the present day.

**2. Tell us what Essex means to you?** I like the variety of the landscape in Essex, especially the marshes in the south and east, and the corn-lands in the north of the county. I find the county's past fascinating, as well as the exciting modern developments.

**3. What historical mystery would you most like to know?** I would love to know who Edward the Confessor really wanted to succeed him. Was it Harold, or William, or the king of Denmark or Norway?

**4. My favourite history book is...** Marc Bloch's *Feudal Society*. He was a great innovator in historical thinking, and his ideas still influence us today.

**5. What is your favourite place in Essex?** This is really difficult but I would choose Saffron Walden for the beauty of its church, inns and houses.

**'I think the dinner party would break up in disorder'**

**6. How do you relax?** By gardening, cooking, dressmaking, listening to music, reading, exploring new places, and meeting friends and chatting.

**7. What are you researching at the moment?** Links between small monasteries and the community in Essex and East Anglia. It is going to be tricky to define community!

**8. My earliest memory is...** seeing my brother for the first time and giving him a cuddly blue giraffe.

**9. What is your favourite song/piece of music and why?** I love Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, with all its changes of mood.

**10. If you could travel back in time which event would you change?** The outbreak of the First World War in 1914. One only has to look at the war memorials in country churches to realise the horrific loss of life.



(Photograph courtesy of Jenny Ward)

**11. Which four people from the past would you invite to dinner?** I think the dinner party would break up in disorder but I would invite Elizabeth de Burgh, lady of Clare in Suffolk in the fourteenth century, John Ball, Sir William Petre, and Robert Kett.

**12. What is your favourite food?** The first broad beans of the summer, home-grown of course.

**13. The history book I am currently reading is...** Nigel Saul's *English Church Monuments in the Middle Ages*. This is partly for research, but also a preparation for visiting churches this summer.

**14. What is your favourite quote from history?** Elizabeth I's speech to her troops at Tilbury. It expresses the ability and determination of countless women down the ages who were not able to leave a record of how they felt.

**15. Favourite historical film?** *Tea with Mussolini* - for its picture of English expatriate women.

**16. What is your favourite building in Essex?** I would like to have at least three: the Norman church at Lindsell; Thaxted church; and Audley End, not just the house, but the park and gardens.

**17. What past event would you like to have seen?** Edward III's visit to Clare castle in 1341, before the battle of Sluys. I have read what they all ate in Elizabeth de Burgh's household account, but I would love to know what they talked about.

**18. How would you like to be remembered?** As fostering interest in Essex people, past and present.

**19. Who inspires you to read or write or research history?** There are too many people to mention, but I would single out my parents for instilling a love of land and landscape and Gus and Nancy Edwards for starting me off on historical research at the Essex Record Office.

**20. Most memorable historical date?** According to *1066 and All That*, 1066 is one of only two memorable historical dates. It ushered in a period of economic growth, new ideas and cultures in state and church, and the foundations of English common law, all inspired by Anglo-Saxon and European ideas, and plenty of Norman energy.



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