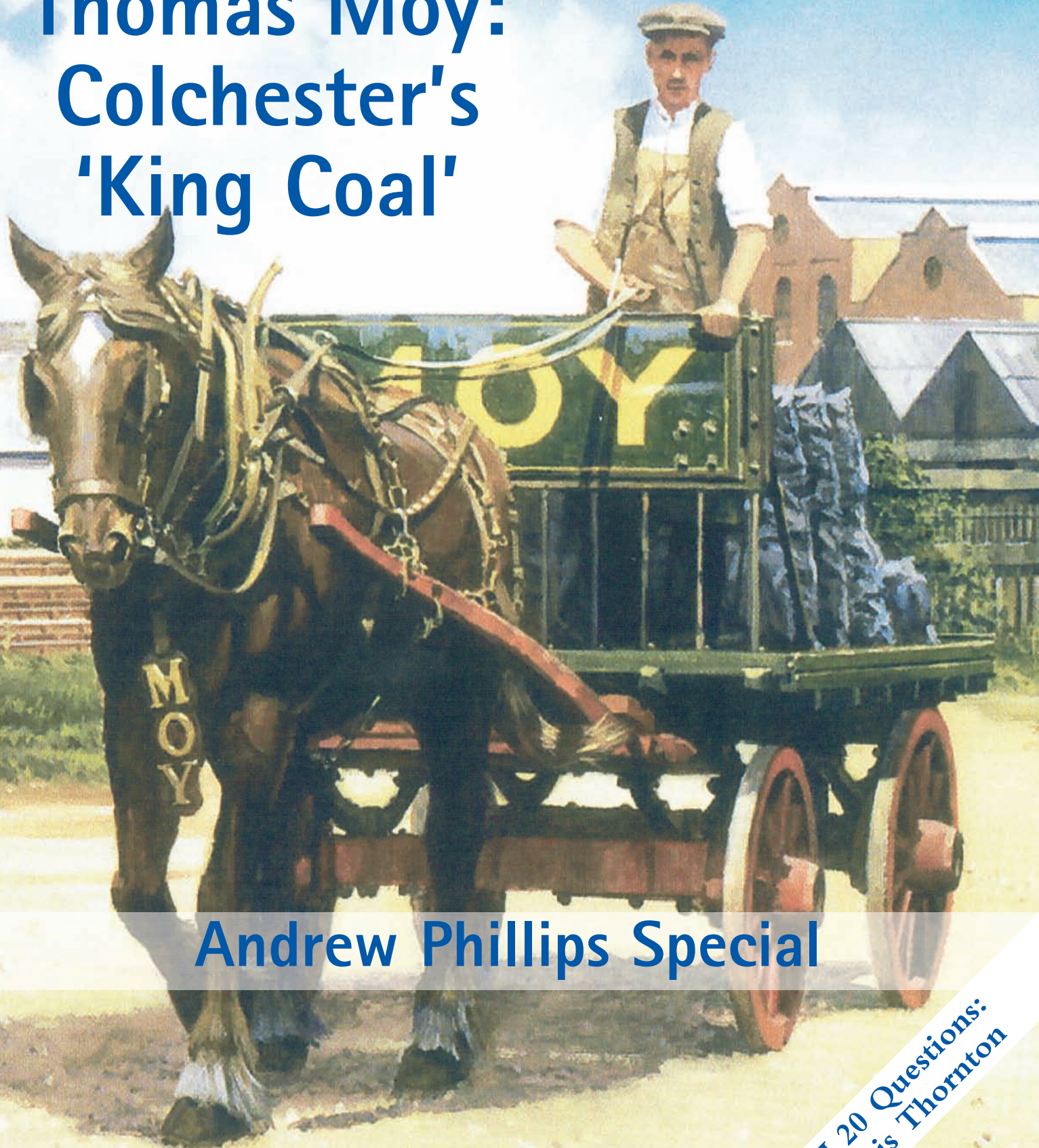


Essex JOURNAL

A REVIEW OF LOCAL HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY

Spring 2018

Thomas Moy: Colchester's 'King Coal'



Andrew Phillips Special

EJ 20 Questions:
Chris Thornton

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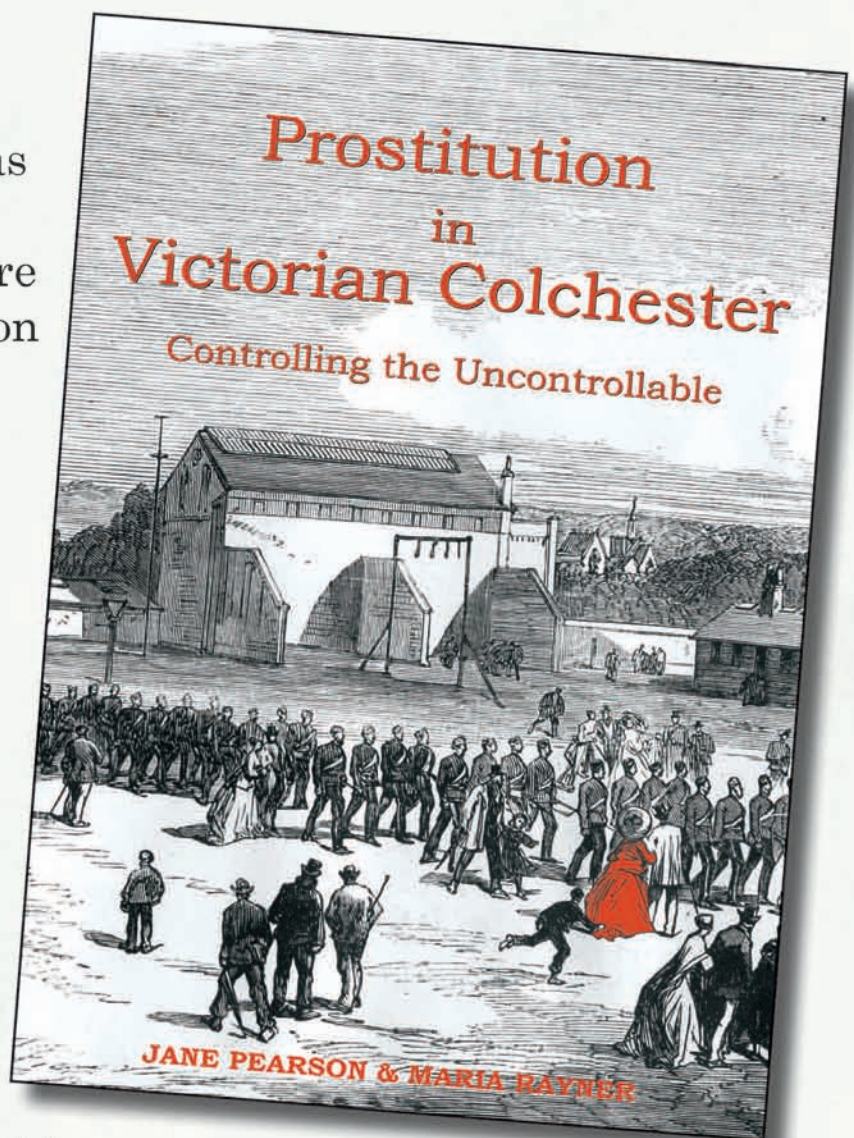
The decision to build a new army camp in the small market town of Colchester in 1856 was well received and helped to stimulate the local economy after a prolonged period of economic stagnation. But there was a downside: some of the soldiers' behaviour was highly disruptive and, since very few private soldiers were allowed to marry, prostitution flourished.

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Review on page 51

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Cover illustration & right: Painting of a Moy horse and cart at Kings Road, Halstead, adjacent to the Colne Valley & Halstead Railway.

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Welcome to this very special issue of *Essex Journal* dedicated to historian, author and tutor, Andrew Phillips who has recently celebrated his 80th birthday. When I suggested the idea of an expanded issue dedicated to Andrew to the members of the Editorial Board they jumped at the chance. However, if it hadn't of been for the generosity and enthusiasm of all the contributors then we wouldn't be where we are now so a very big thanks to all of them.

I got to know Andrew at the University of Essex when, along with Ruth Costello, Joanne Dunn and Gail Sanders, I started the MA in Local & Regional History on a part-time basis. After work we would rush from Chelmsford to Colchester for evening seminars. To the amusement of our fellow students, in particular Tony Doe, we would burst into the common room to have our picnic tea where Andrew would often join us for a cup of his favourite hot chocolate. Andrew's seminars were great but they were never long enough – two hours to cover everything that Andrew wanted to share with us was too short and so we often overrun by 10 minutes or so. We never worried because we so enjoyed the learning process, such was Andrew's command of all the subjects he taught.

When I came to researching and writing my own dissertation, on the Agricultural Depression of the late nineteenth century, Andrew was invaluable in providing references to his beloved newspapers, a source he constantly uses and champions. One extremely prescient and serendipitous extract from the *Essex County Standard* (30/05/1896, p.4, c.8) related to the annual publication of the yearly agricultural statistics, on which my dissertation was primarily based. The editor wrote that he hoped they would be of 'retrospective interest to another generation' and he was certainly correct. I also believe that this can be said to be the case with Andrew's own research, publications and teaching as this issue of *Essex Journal* demonstrates.

And to this bumper edition issue. Following on from a selection of interesting news and shorter pieces it kicks off with Howard Brooks article on cauldron making. In retrospect I suppose it is obvious that in the downtime between making bells bell founders would diversify into other products. This is one of those fascinating subjects that you hope there will be a subsequent discovery that will link Howard's theory together, just like the face of Longinus – fingers crossed. Bruce Neville then speculates as to who might have been illustrated by James Dunthorne, junior, in a series of prints. Meticulous research and a depth of knowledge of eighteenth century Colchester has resulted in a very compelling narrative.

Jane Pearson, fresh from her very recent publishing success with Maria Rayner, has had time to contribute a wonderfully fresh article on the life of J.M Churchill. The thing that struck me was the limited and fragmented nature of health provision in



Prof Tom Williamson of the University of East Anglia and your Hon Ed enjoying a visit to Crapes Farm, Aldham, following the *Orchards East* project Essex launch. Neil was invited to give a short paper on the origins of the D'Arcy Spice apple. For more information about the project visit: www.uea.ac.uk/orchards-east/home. (Photograph, S. Honour, 25/03/18)

early nineteenth century Colchester – perhaps a salutary warning for our own times as to what we have to loose? Then comes our own Chairman's, Adrian Corder-Birch, article on Colchester's 'King Coal', Thomas Moy and what a dynamic man he was. The astonishing range of the different but interconnected business interests he had was just incredible. Very much an example of a self-made man seizing the moment and opportunities that arose, had his place in the sun before the world moved on and successors were not able to keep the business going and thus the whole operation was consigned to history.

Perhaps it is just me, but I think the common perception of the outbreak of the Second World War was that it could only have occurred in September 1939. However, as Paul Rusiecki shows us, 80 years ago, just when baby Andrew Phillips was learning how to live, a crisis in Europe caused the digging of air-raid shelters in Castle Park and the expectation that war was about to break out. We know that it didn't but what a time to live through and a very timely re-telling. Patrick Denney discusses the history of the Colchester Recalled project, a project that Andrew Phillips has had such an instrumental part to play in. A selection of extracts demonstrates the importance of oral history and how this archive will be crucial to future historians.

And finally, a selection of book reviews from our ever-assiduous band of reviewers should provide you with some ideas for holiday reading before Dr Chris Thornton, of the Essex VCH, rounds off this issue with some interesting answers and not to mention an intriguing photo. So I hope you enjoy this issue now but that it will also be of 'retrospective interest to another generation' in years to come.

Cheers, Neil

British Association for Local History award for *Essex Journal*

Each year the British Association for Local History (BALH) makes up to ten Publications Awards, five for long articles and five for short ones, all chosen by its Reviews Editor from all the journals and other society publications which are sent to BALH annually. This means roughly 500 articles per annum. We're delighted to announce that the overall winner in the 'long article' category for 2018 is Andrew Emeny's article 'When Bill Sykes junior came to visit: the rise of juvenile crime in Southend during the Great War', which was published in the Spring 2017 issue of *Essex Journal*. It's a great achievement, especially since Alan Crosby, the editor of *The Local Historian* and the co-ordinator of the awards judging, says that he's been managing the awards scheme for almost 20 years and there has never been such a clear-cut winner. Andrew's article was far ahead of the competition, and the judges especially praised its imaginative subject, thorough and careful research, fluent and accessible writing, and valuable contribution not only to the local history of Southend but also to the history of crime and punishment. It should serve as a model for other local historians across the country, and it presents a refreshingly different perspective on the period of the First World War. Andrew will receive his award in York at the BALH Local History Day on 2nd June, when it will be presented to him by BALH President Professor Caroline Barron.

More information on the work of the BALH can be found on our website:

www.balh.org.uk

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We are also part of *Essex Houses & Gardens*
www.essexhousesandgardens.co.uk

News from the Essex Journal

Normally at this point in the publication we would have a report from the Essex Record Office (ERO). However, ERO is currently going through a directorate wide re-structure. There is nothing to worry about but it was thought that it would be more useful and informative to have a more detailed 'News from the Essex Record Office' in the autumn issue when the outcome of any changes will be known and can be shared with us all. In the meantime I thought it would be very useful to use the space to inform you of several important items of news regarding the *Essex Journal*.

Firstly, I am delighted that you will have already read that *Essex Journal* has won the British Association of Local History (BALH) Publications and Research Award 2018 for an article by Andrew Emeny. It was the overall winner in the 'long article' category from a short list of eight narrowed down from about 500 potential articles in journals during the year. I should like to congratulate Andrew upon the Award, which was a great achievement and fully deserved and I look forward to attending the BALH Local History Day in York to represent *Essex Journal* when Andrew will receive his award. This is a great achievement not only for Andrew but for *Essex Journal* as well and is a great credit to all who work so hard to produce two issues a year. A report and photographs of the Award Ceremony will be included in our autumn issue.

This is a good opportunity to thank Neil Wiffen, our honorary editor, for all his hard work in connection with *Essex Journal*. Neil spends many hours liaising with authors, editing articles, checking references, laying out the articles ready for the printers and checking proofs. We are grateful to Neil for his hard work as editor during the last 11 years during which time he has seen no less than 22 issues through the press. I would also like to extend this thanks to his partner Sarah Honour and children Thomas and Chloe for all their support they give Neil while he is working on each issue. This has been an enormous commitment and unfortunately, but very understandably, he has informed the Editorial Board that he intends to stand down following the autumn issue 2020, which means that he will remain as editor for the next five issues.

The Editorial Board is therefore considering the future and discussions are taking place with the Essex Society for Archaeology and History into the possibility of *Essex Journal* becoming part of the Society with effect from spring 2021. The Society already owns the title of *Essex Journal* and its predecessor, *The Essex Review*, so the proposal is a logical step forward. The Society has its own Publications and Research Committee into which *Essex Journal* could fit extremely well. The Society publishes an annual *Transactions* mainly upon archaeology, with some local history, whereas *Essex Journal* is mainly local history with a little

archaeology.

Therefore the two publications will complement each other. The proposal has been considered very favourably by all parties and subscribers will be kept informed of developments.

I am pleased

to report that steady progress has been made with the compilation of an index for the first 50 years of *Essex Journal* from 1966 to 2015. Our indexer has now completed the index for the whole 50 years, which is currently being checked. Once any amendments have been made, as a first stage the index for volumes 1-50 will be uploaded as a PDF to our website for free worldwide access and a hard copy will be made available in due course for those who wish to add one to their bookshelves. However, due to the news that I reported above about the likely absorption of the *Essex Journal* by the Society into its stable of publications at the end of 2020 upon the completion of volume 55, it is intended to pursue the option of adding the last five volumes to the index. From 2021 we will upload a full PDF index for volumes 1-55 on to our website and then at this stage we would produce a hard copy index. We believe that this is the most sensible option, as whatever the Society intend to do with future issues, at least the first 55 volumes will have their own stand-alone index for posterity which will act as a lasting monument to all the hard work that has gone into the publication over more than half a century. I would also like to take this opportunity to remind us all the index has only been made possible by the generous donations, both from private individuals as well as the Essex Heritage Trust, the Hervey Benham Charitable Trust and the Augustine Courtauld Trust.

The Editorial Board is grateful to all subscribers who pay online by PayPal or by Banker's Order, which facilitates administration. It is appreciated that such services are not available to everyone in which case remittances, payable to 'Essex Journal', can please be sent direct to Neil Wiffen, 30 Main Road, Broomfield, Chelmsford CM1 7EF. Whilst *Essex Journal* has a good number of subscribers, more are always welcome. Therefore if you can introduce new subscribers or if you are considering a gift for family or friends you may wish to take out an annual subscription which is only £10 for two issues.

May I take this opportunity to thank you for your continuing support.

Adrian Corder-Birch
Chairman of the Editorial Board



GeoPatterns – Essex Walls in Close-up

Many hundreds of walls around Essex, notably its church walls, have been made with facings of ‘flint cobbles’. Yet not all of these stones are of flint. Where did the stones all come from? What can they tell us? A survey could reveal their origins and demonstrates the close connections between geology, landscape, archaeology, history and architecture.

Since Roman times, blocks and cobbles for Essex building material have been dug from pits, cleared from the land for ploughing or they were transported up rivers from seashores. Materials used in churches and walls in and around Essex may thus broadly reflect underlying geology and river transport. The Essex Rock & Mineral Society’s (ERMS) GeoPatterns Project should enable us to find answers.

The survey is a practical ‘frequency of use’ recording for each type of material in a cobble wall. The survey is not aimed at characterizing churches and walls wholly of imported stone such as Cotswold limestone or Kentish Rag, or for brick buildings and walls. Armed with survey forms and pencil, plus maybe a torch and handlens – often useful for checking difficult materials – plus a camera or phone camera for recording interesting or mysterious materials, you can enjoy this survey after a spell of self-coaching using the online notes and photos (details below). ERMS also provide ‘hands-on’ sessions so that you can become more closely attached to these fascinating materials.

During observation, in assigning materials to their frequency categories, it is important to take the whole of any church or other construction as one item; i.e. not to attempt to separate different parts of a church, cottage or an estate wall, different ages of construction or different sections of repair or reconstruction. A 20–30 minute walk around a church enables an overall judgment. It is also important not to worry about how far upwards

(or downwards) you can see, but just give an impression from what you can comfortably observe.

If you find a piece of black & white rock, you may be intrigued to know that it most likely comes originally from Cornwall! This is via a circuitous route that has taken over 250 million years. The white material is either shattered granite or quartz melted out of rocks as they are bent into mountains. The black material contains the mineral tourmaline formed from vapour released by underground explosions in the granite and, most notably, tin. It is the presence of tin that links these rocks to Cornwall. When England was part of a vast desert continent 230 million years ago, occasional rivers carried these rocks northwards across the country towards Birmingham. The ancestral river Thames that flowed from North Wales and over Essex, carried them here and dumped them in spreads of gravel.

For our purposes, ‘Essex’ consists of the historic county. There are many hundreds of churches and walls in Essex to look at but there are some advantages to surveying across borders as geology does not stop at county boundaries. Some differences could show up, e.g. Crag rocks would feature in Suffolk walls and the influence of River Stour transport may be more clearly revealed. Don’t worry if you are duplicating the efforts of others: we shall aggregate results rather than issue wall lists to different people.

For images and explanations of pebbles and cobbles seen in the region, you can refer to *Pebbles in Essex and Beyond* published by ERMS. This chart will help distinguish many of the most frequently seen materials in Essex cobble walls. Pictures, guidance, detailed instructions and survey form (along with lots of other useful information) can be found at: www.erms.org/walls-survey.

Ian F. Mercer FGA, Chairman,
Essex Rock and Mineral Society.

**Broomfield St Mary with St Leonard: walls dating from the tenth to twentieth centuries contain a large variety of local and transported materials including recycled Roman brick and stone.
Inset, Cornish rock found at Mistley. (I. Mercer)**



Boxted Airfield 75th Anniversary

Five miles north-east of Colchester in the parish of Langham is the deserted airfield of Boxted. Looking at the peaceful landscape today, mostly active farmland, it is hard to believe that 75 years ago it was home to nearly 3,000 American airmen, part of the US 8th Air Force, who were to have a profound effect on the local population and the war effort against Germany. Today their story is told in the airfield museum opened in 2011, operated by Boxted Airfield Historical Group and housed in two Nissen huts, one an original from the airfield. It is open on the last Sunday of each month from March to October 10:00–16:00.

The first aircrews arriving at the newly constructed and barely completed airfield (Station 150) in May 1943 were the 386th Bomb Group equipped with B-26 Martin Marauder medium bombers, flying missions over occupied Europe. Their first mission on 30th July was to bomb the fighter airfield at Woensdrecht in Holland and their story and that of their famed commanding officer, Lt Col Lester Maitland, is featured on display panels in the museum. The museum is also home to the tail section of B-26C 41-35253 *Mr. Shorty*, an aircraft that operated from nearby Earls Colne (Station 358), which is on loan from Marks Hall. Panels in the museum tell its story and that of its crew. Additionally, there is a large collection of other Marauder parts including the throttle box of the aircraft and armoured seats for the pilot and co-pilot.

After only a few months the 386th BG moved to Little Easton, near Dunmow, being replaced by the 354th Fighter Group equipped with P-51B

Mustangs. Their CO, Lt Col James Howard, became the only American fighter pilot in the European Theatre of Operations to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, for his actions on 11th January 1944 of single-handedly defending a formation of B-17 bombers from 30 enemy Bf-110 fighters. His story is told in the museum.

After the 354th FG moved to Lashenden in April 1944, they were replaced by the 56th FG flying P-47 Thunderbolts. Lead by their CO Colonel Hubert Zemke they became known as the *Wolfpack* because of the number of high-scoring pilots. These included Lt Col Francis Gabreski who, with 31 kills, became the top scoring pilot in Europe. Displays in the museum feature this Group and parts from P-47 aircraft.

After the 56th FG left Boxted in September 1945 it reverted to the RAF operating a number of types, including Meteor jets, until its closure in August 1947.

A number of overseas visitors will be joining us for the 75th anniversary commemorations. For example, on 27th May Maria Louie will give a presentation on her father, now 95, who flew Mustangs from here and has donated one of his paintings to the museum. On 10th June there will be an additional opening from 13:00–17:00 when John Camp will give a presentation on *Mr. Shorty* and Nancy Church will talk about her father, a tail gunner on Marauders. Full details of these events can be found on the Group's website:

www.boxted-airfield.com

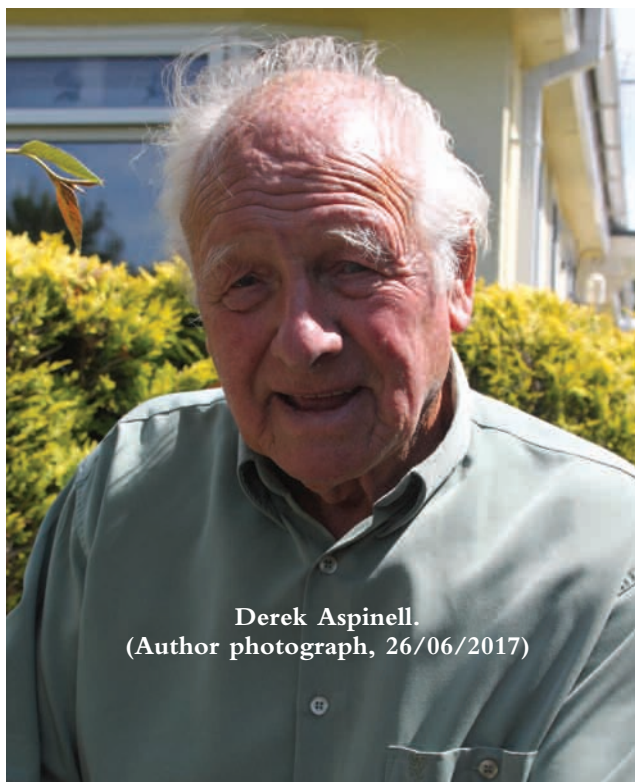
John Camp, Trustee and Curator of the Marauder Collection



What a coincidence: Col Seymour's Marauder

Regular readers to the *Essex Journal* will know how much the aviation history of the Second World War appeals to me. As a result I have read, researched and written various articles and reviews over the past few years.¹ Those that have concerned the events of 29th October 1940 have brought me into contact with many people, not least Rod Aspinell who has been very generous with his knowledge, resources and encouragement. We were chatting last year and I mentioned that my favourite aircraft was the sleek, good looking Martin B-26 Marauder. Rod said 'well you need to meet my brother Derek, he knows loads about Marauders, in particular those that flew out of Willingale including Colonel Seymour's Marauder.' Well, I couldn't say no now could I? A meeting was duly arranged and on an exceedingly hot June Monday morning I met up with Rod and Derek to talk over all things Marauders.

The Martin B-26 Marauder was a twin-engine medium bomber, conceived in the late 1930s when the United States Army Air Corps realised that they were operating obsolete aircraft compared to those which the Luftwaffe in Nazi Germany were introducing into service.² It first flew on November 25th 1940 and was rushed into service, such was the concern at the lack of modern combat aircraft. For the time, it was a very advanced design that was not a problem for experienced pilots. However, as air force expansion proceeded, so did the numbers of inexperienced pilots and ground crew who had to operate the type. This led to many accidents, especially if an engine was lost on take-off, and it acquired an increasing number of derogatory nick-names such as 'Martin Murderer' and 'Widowmaker', and a bad reputation which it never quite lost throughout its combat career.³ A contemporary view compared it 'to a racehorse – in the hands of a good jockey it will put up a good performance, but with just an average rider it is dangerous.'⁴



Derek Aspinell.
(Author photograph, 26/06/2017)

After early use in the Pacific and North Africa, it was decided to concentrate B-26 units in Britain where it would benefit from permanent paved runways and comprehensive engineering facilities. By the summer of 1943 four Bomb Groups (16 squadrons) were in East Anglia. One of them was the 387th Bomb Group, based at Station 162, Chipping Ongar (Willingale),⁵ which comprised four Bomb Squadrons (556, 557, 558 and 559th) with around 60 Marauders. Along with other Allied units it was tasked with tactical bombing raids into France and the low-countries in preparation of the opening of the Second Front. By spring 1944 there were 32 squadrons of Marauders based in Essex, well over 500 aircraft.

The 387th Bomb Group was stationed at Chipping Ongar from June 1943 through to the summer of 1944 at which time Col Thomas M. Seymour, an experienced and well-respected pilot, was Commanding Officer.⁶ By August the fighting in Normandy was beginning to stretch the legs of the B-26s so it was decided to move some of the groups to the New Forest to be closer to the fighting. The 387th was to be posted to Stoney Cross, Hampshire, and were scheduled to move on 21st July. However, Col Seymour was not to make the move with them.

Nine year old Derek Aspinell was living in Stondon Massey in 1944 with his grandparents James and Florence Bryan. When not out and about playing or looking for shrapnel and cartridge cases he went to the village school. One Monday summer evening Derek was out and about as usual:

I went down near the *Bricklayers Arms*, Stondon Massey, with a friend, waiting for the Americans to come [in from] Willingale airfield. Like most small boys in those days I was hoping to be given some sweets or chewing gum. Some Americans were already at the pub and as we waited [outside] we heard the noise of a B26 Marauder aircraft flying fairly low on just one engine [the left]. As it went over the top of the pub it disappeared from view and a second later there was an almighty bang ... I looked at my friend and

**A surviving Martin B-26 Marauder at the Musée du Débarquement, Utah Beach, Normandy.
(Author photograph, 28/05/2016)**





The Bricklayers Arms in the early part of the twentieth century. (D. Aspinell collection)

we shot up the road in the direction of the thick black smoke that had spiralled up. It came from down near my junior school. As we cut across a field we could hear the bullets going off and explosions.⁷

The pilot and sole occupant of the Marauder, Col Seymour, was killed in the crash. It was reported that he was returning from an administrative flight to Ramsbury, Wiltshire, when 'several minutes from' Chipping Ongar airfield he radioed to say 'that he was on a single engine.' He flew over the airfield and was preparing to land when the aircraft lost power on the remaining engine, clipped some tall elm trees and spun into the field near the school.⁸

Derek and all the others who had gathered were kept at a safe distance from the crash site as there was still a raging fire and exploding ammunition. A day or so after the crash around 20 children, including Derek, were asked by the Americans to help look for a missing propeller assembly, one having been ripped off in the crash. Having been flying on one engine prior to the crash, the accident investigators wanted to see if there had been a problem with the propeller or the engine. Having been briefed about what to

look for, the children were sent off to look under hedges and in ditches to see if the missing propeller assembly could be located. For young Derek the opportunity to get so close to the remaining wreckage was just too great a temptation – he climbed in the rear fuselage but was soon spotted and chased off however not before he had pocketed some rounds of ammunition! The propeller assembly wasn't found and some days later Derek witnessed the remains of the Marauder being towed away on the back of a Queen Mary low-loader.⁹

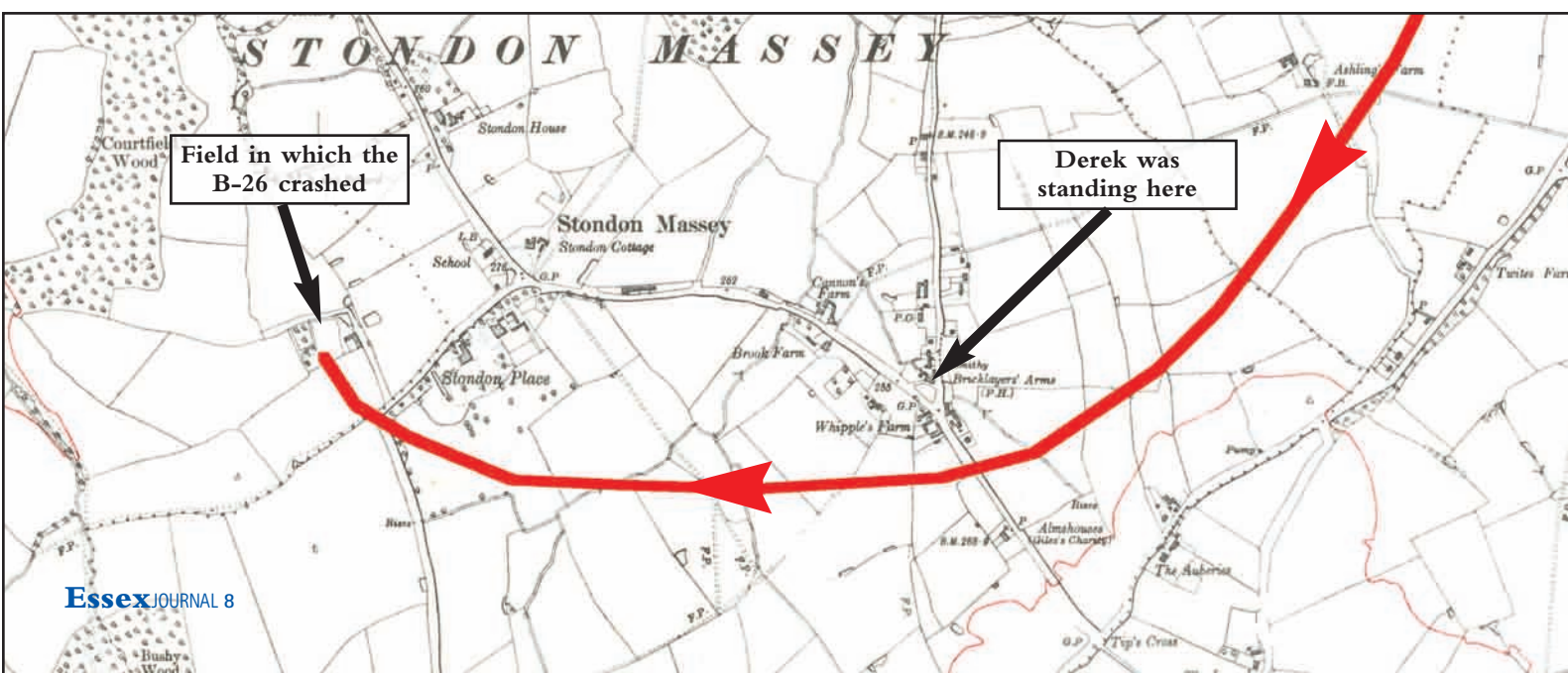
So, the war ended and lives carried on but Derek, along with his younger brother Rod, always remained interested in the war, so much so that they became involved with aviation archaeology. Over the years they dug up many crash sites and exhibited their finds in a museum they ran at the former Operations Room at Blake Hall, Bobbingworth. Around 1984 a local schoolboy, Adrian Murrills, with Derek's assistance started to metal-detect the field that the plane crashed in, while Derek carried on his work at the nearby Whipples Farm. In due course Adrian came running over to Derek to say that he had found something and they hurried off to take a look. There at the bottom of a three-foot hole, was the propeller assembly found at last, just 40 odd years after he had been tasked with looking for it – what a coincidence! Makes you wonder what's still out there to find.

Neil Wiffen

References

1. See N. Wiffen, 'Tuesday 29th October 1940: North Weald attack', *EJ*, 50, II (2015), pp.65-76, 'Tuesday 29th October 1940: Spitfire Down', *EJ*, 52, I (2017), pp.33-9 & 31st May 1944 – just another mission, www.essexrecordofficeblog.co.uk/31st-may-1944-just-another-mission/ (09/04/2018).
2. The best overview of the B-26 is R.A. Freeman, *B-26 at War* (Shepperton, 1978).

Location map showing the approximate route flown by Col Seymour's B-26 Marauder as witnessed by Derek Aspinell who was standing outside the Bricklayer's Arms on the evening of Monday 17th July 1944. (Reproduced by courtesy of the Essex Record Office, NS 6" OS, 62SW, 1916)

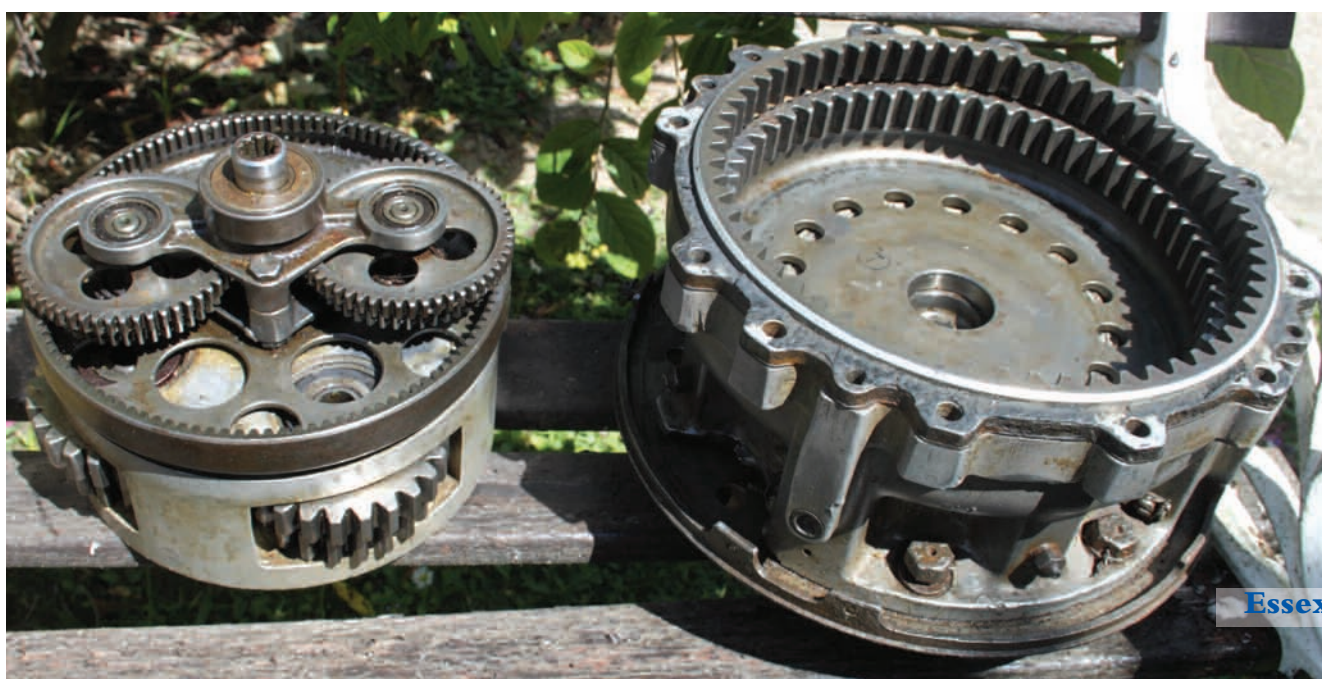




Parts of the propeller assembly from Col Seymour's Marauder, B-26F-1-MA, 42-96246. The coloured rings on the spinner are believed to represent the individual colours of the four component squadrons of the 387th Bomb Group. Seymour's Marauder was his own assigned aircraft and as Group Commander it is entirely logical that he would have had his aircraft thus decorated. (Author photograph, 26/06/2017)

3. Ironically it was such a well built and operated aircraft that it achieved the lowest loss rate of any American bomber in the Second World War.
4. R. Montgomery, 'Marauders of the 9th Air Force', *Aeronautics*, October 1944, p.32.
5. R.A. Freeman, *Airfields of the Eighth, then and now* (London, 1986), p.56.
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9. Derek was subsequently told that it was eventually buried under the Hallsford Bridge Industrial Estate to the west of Stondon Massey.

Detail shot of the inner workings of the propeller mechanism showing the robust engineering and the remarkable state of preservation. The author can attest to how heavy these artifacts are and it is no wonder that they buried themselves so deeply in the ground. (Author photograph, 26/06/2017)



Andrew Phillips: an appreciation

When 50 or more years ago a young Andrew Phillips arrived in Colchester to teach at the North-East Essex Technical College, today the Colchester Institute, his knowledge of the town's history was somewhat limited. Half-a-century later, such has been his diligence and devotion to Colchester's past that he is unquestionably one of the town's greatest historians of all time, to rank alongside distinguished historians the Reverend Philip Morant, Sir Gurney Benham and Geoffrey Martin from previous generations.

His knowledge of Colchester's past is recognised and admired by all with an interest in our local history. We marvel at his research and delight in reading his published findings, which are not just of importance to his contemporaries but will be a valued source for historians in the future. To say he has been active in heritage initiatives in Colchester for many years is an understatement! For 34 years he has published a monthly local history feature in the *Essex County Standard* – around 400 in total. There is enough material there for them to be collated and printed in book format – eight to ten books, a series of “Colchester History by Andrew Phillips” which I am sure would be very popular with everyone with an interest in the history of Britain's Oldest Recorded Town, or to be more accurate Britain's First City.

He has the ability, both in writing and when speaking, of putting across a specialist subject in a way which neither talks down to the audience or is so heavy that it goes over our heads. The words flow smoothly and in an easily understood way, with many a light-hearted comment. He brings history ‘alive’. Andrew Phillips has also published nine books about Colchester and its history, the most recent *Colchester in The Great War* to commemorate the 100th anniversary this year of the end of the First World War (1914-18), and reviewed in this issue. His 2002 *Steam and the Road to Glory: The Paxman Story*, about James Paxman as a person and the factory bearing his name and which became the town's largest employer, is a testimony to the thoroughness and detailed research for which Andrew Phillips is renowned.

He has also been directly involved in recording oral history, *Colchester Recalled*, the history of which Patrick Denney charts in this issue, with Colchester arguably

having the most comprehensive collection of any provincial town or city; and is closely associated with The Friends of Colchester Museums of which he is Vice-President and a former Chairman.

Andrew Phillips is also an important member of the Essex Society for Archaeology and History having been the Honorary Librarian for many years as well as a past President while he is currently a Vice President of the Society. Many students from far and wide have also benefitted from Andrew's expertise at the University of Essex where he has taught in the History Department on a variety of local history topics.

On behalf of all who value Colchester's rich heritage, I thank Andrew Phillips for his significant contribution to our knowledge of our town's past – and, in congratulating him on his 80th birthday, wish him good health to continue his historic research for many years to come.

Sir Bob Russell
High Steward of Colchester



Andrew Phillips at an exhibition in the Town Hall, Colchester, July 2017. (Reproduced by courtesy of P. Denney)

Cauldrons and witches on Head Street?

by

Howard Brooks

We tend to envisage industry as something relatively modern, say eighteenth century to nowadays, and something that happens in factories. However, in the medieval and early post-medieval periods, industry happened on a small scale, and close to people's houses – often in their yards and gardens. This article has a slightly playful title, but, after a summary of medieval and later industry in Colchester, focuses on bronze cauldron making on Head Street.

Excavations directed for Colchester Archaeological Trust by the author on the old Post Office site in 2000 (in advance of the construction of the Odeon Cinema, Fig.1) revealed the expected remains of the Roman legionary fortress, Roman colony and later Roman town.¹ But they also produced some surprises, including ceramic moulds which had been used for the casting of bronze cauldrons, *à la* Harry Potter. Intriguingly, some of the mould fragments were scratched with marks which are normally interpreted as 'apotropaic' marks. These are meant to ward off witches and the evil spirits who might come down your chimney, or through your front door. However, an alternative explanation for the scratched marks is offered here.

Medieval and later industry in Colchester

The 2000 excavations were in the back gardens of the properties fronting Head Street to the east. Nowadays, we mainly use back gardens as vegetable plots, lawns, or leisure areas, but in the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries, gardens were riddled with rubbish pits. In fact, when we excavate large town-centre sites in Colchester, the majority of the 'archaeological features' which have to be excavated and

recorded are not, as you might expect, of Roman date, but are post-medieval rubbish pits (approximately half of the area of the 2000 Odeon Cinema site consisted of intercutting rubbish pits of various dates).

Apart from burying domestic rubbish in pits, residents sometimes also put their back yards to a variety of light industrial uses. It is quite common to find in Colchester large circular structures built of clay peg-tiles² set on edge in a clay matrix, and heavily burnt. These are interpreted as oven bases. The smaller ones may have been used for domestic baking, but some larger examples are above the size needed for domestic output, and are more likely to have been ovens operated on a commercial basis. This might imply that the houses on the frontages were 'shops', at least in part. Colchester examples have been found at Middleborough,³ Osborne Street,⁴ and Angel Yard.⁵

Other industrial activities were carried out surprisingly close to the town – a group of nine pottery kilns was in operation

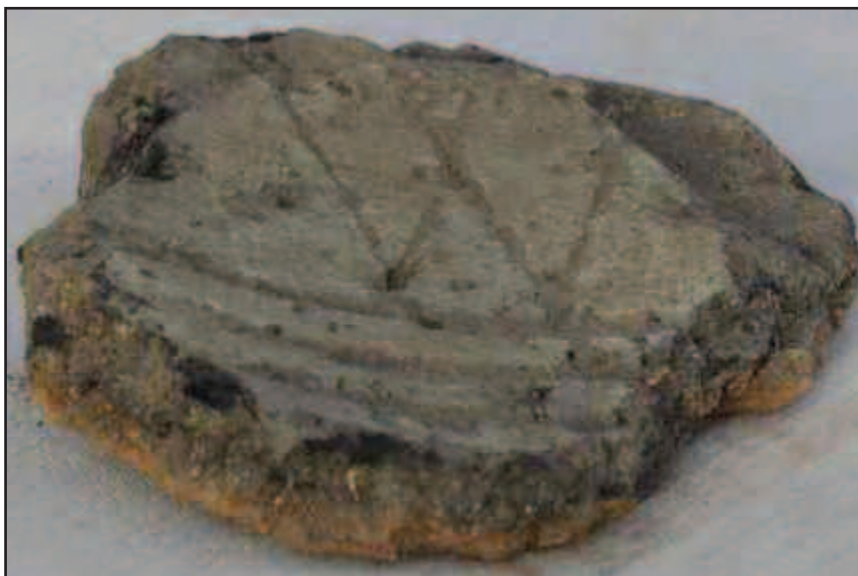
at Middleborough, producing pots for local consumption in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁶ Presumably this mini-factory, only 50 metres north of the walled town, was just far enough away for locals not to make too much of a fuss about the smoke.

Leather off-cuts and parts of shoes have been found at several places on the south bank of the Colne, approximately 150m north of the town walls.⁷ The notoriously smelly activity of tanning leather was normally kept a decent distance away from habitation, so it may well be the case that tanning was taking place here, using the large volume of running water afforded by the Colne.

Another town-centre industry is indicated by the large number of lime kilns, dating generally to the twelfth-thirteenth century. These were used to burn marine shells (usually oyster) to provide quicklime for building. Lime kilns have so far been found on what is now the Lion Walk Shopping Centre,⁸ St Giles Church,⁹ at the Sixth Form

1. Excavations in 2000 prior to the building of the Odeon Cinema. (Colchester Archaeological Trust)





2. One of the mould fragments with the inscribed letter W – the clue that these are Miles Gray moulds. (Colchester Archaeological Trust)

College on North Hill,¹⁰ and more recently on the High Street site of the Williams & Griffin store.¹¹

We have, of course, only excavated a small part of the town centre, but the number of kilns per square metre excavated is quite high, showing they were a common feature of town-centre back yards in the medieval period. The lime was used by builders of churches and houses. There are eight medieval churches within Colchester's town walls (St Runwald's and St Nicholas' have disappeared), so they were, almost by themselves, an obvious and ready market for lime. As for stone medieval houses, we have excavated a number of them in the town centre. Five are known within a 150m radius of Lion Walk,¹² plus the more famous medieval Moot Hall, demolished in 1843 to make way for the new town hall. It would be an interesting study, not pursued here, to see whether, and how closely, the dated lime kilns are contemporary with known phases of church enlargement or repair (the original church structures will be largely if not entirely earlier than the twelfth- to thirteenth-century kilns). As we have been discussing lime, it is as well to remind ourselves that building stone was readily at hand – there were Roman walls to be

uprooted below most of the town centre.

Bronze casting on Head Street, and the Miles Gray connection

The brief description of some aspects of medieval industry (above) was not meant to be an exhaustive catalogue, but merely to indicate that industry in the back yards rear of town-centre properties was a common occurrence, rather than a rarity.

It is time to return to the main theme. The Head Street dig revealed a large pit approximately two metres deep and two metres wide containing 130kg of broken ceramic mould fragments and a large lump of what looked like copper or bronze slag. Pottery fragments in the pit indicated it had been infilled in the seventeenth-century, therefore that was the date of the moulds.

It didn't take long for pennies to start dropping. Ceramic moulds and bronze slag in seventeenth-century Colchester? It must be Miles Gray! Although not widely known nowadays, Miles Gray is one of Colchester's most famous sons, described in his day as the *Prince of Bell-founders*.

The Gray(e)s were a well-known family of seventeenth-century bell-founders who cast bells for most churches in

Colchester, and many others in eastern England and beyond. The name Miles ran through five generations, but only three (Miles I, II, III) are known to have cast bells.

But what connects the ceramic mould debris with any of the Miles Grays? The following draws heavily on research carried out by the late James Fawn.¹³ In 1598, Miles I (c.1575–1649) formally confessed to making one Alice Mullings pregnant. The confession document of 1598 bears the marks of both Miles and Alice – indicating that they were unable to write their names. The important link here is that while Alice made the usual cross, Miles *marked with a 'W'*, and, just to reinforce the point, this W mark is also to be seen on several of his bells. So ceramic debris (Fig.2) with an inscribed W is almost certainly the mark of Miles Gray the bell-founder (Miles I). It is thought that the W mark is not actually a W, but two overlapping Vs – a reference to the Virgin Mary as *Virgo Virginum*.¹⁴ However, it is possible that the illiterate Miles was aware that his mark combined both a personal signature, and also an invocation of the Virgin Mary (to protect the bell?).

Bells, or cauldrons?

This is not the first time we have found evidence for the casting of large objects, almost certainly bells, in Colchester. Just 200m north of the Head Street site, Donald Shimmin found, in his 1984–5 excavations in advance of building at the Sixth Form College,¹⁵ a large pit very probably used for bell-founding.¹⁶ There were a few fragments of ceramic mould probably connected with bell-founding, and some from the casting of smaller objects such as cauldrons, but nothing hinting at the name of the founder.

If we could show that the Head Street mould debris was evidence of the famous Miles Gray casting bells, that would have been a feather in our cap.

Granted, the casting debris was not in a churchyard, where bells were normally cast, but the Head Street site is within 120m of St Mary-at-the Walls church, and within 180m of St Peter's on North Hill. So, this was a good candidate for a bell-casting site under the auspices of Miles Gray.

Keen to have our conclusions confirmed, the slag and metallic adhesions on the mould debris were sent for examination to David Dungworth, then of the English Heritage Centre for Archaeology. His report stated: 'The composition of the spilt metal and the metal droplets in the slag is consistent with the manufacture of vessels, and cannot be used to support the suggestion that bells were being cast.'¹⁷ On a mould fragment, David commented: 'This is definitely a ceramic mould used for casting copper alloy objects. The form matches the legs of medieval and post-medieval cauldrons.'

So, Head Street was not a bell-founding site, but a cauldron factory. Although the debris was fragmentary, measurable fragments of mould show that cauldrons with an external diameter averaging 25 cm were produced here. To put this in context, casting a bell was a major commission for a bell-founder, but they also produced, as their 'bread and butter' trade, more commonplace items such as cauldrons, pans and skillets.

It goes without saying that finding a cauldron with Miles' W mark would be a thrill, and we now know one, at least, of the sites where these items were produced.

Where did Miles Gray work?

In 1605, 'Miles Graye of Colchester, 'bell-founder' (Miles I), bought for £7 the property called *The Swanne with two Neckes*, where he lived for the rest of his life. The question is – where was the *Swanne*? A deed of 1605 shows Gray's property must have extended between Crouch Street

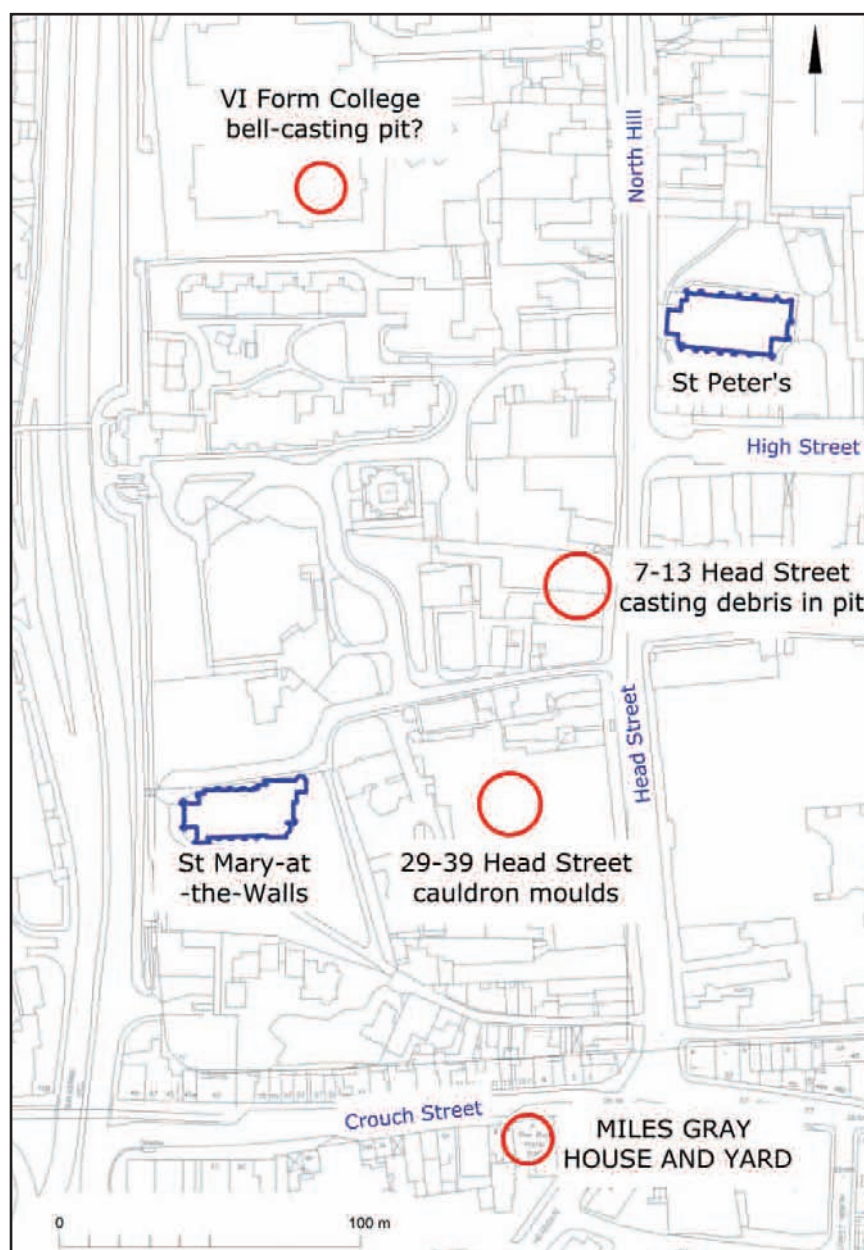
and Butt Road, with a frontage on Crouch Street somewhere between the (now closed) Odeon cinema and 'The Bull' pub.

Scrutiny of the OS 2nd edition of 1881 shows a plot which closely resembles the 1605 description, particularly in respect of the two frontages and the disposition of buildings (stable, work house, and a clay store).

In 1648, Crouch Street was the scene of skirmishes during the Civil War siege of Colchester, and properties were burnt by both sides. *The Swanne* was almost certainly one of them for,

in his will made shortly before he died in the following year, Miles I refers to it being 'lately burned down'. However, he left the work house, clay house, the orchard and *use of well and yards* (my italics) to Dorothy, and perhaps his son Miles II (c.1599–1666).

Of course, there is a problem here. If Miles Gray were working at the site on Crouch Street, why are we finding casting debris 200m away to the north in someone else's back yard? And if the casting pit at the Sixth Form Candidate were for casting a bell,



Western Colchester town centre, showing the probable site of Miles Gray's house, and sites mentioned in the text.
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it is almost certainly a Miles Gray pit, and it is even farther away – 500m away from Crouch Street.

So, what is going on? Three ideas suggest themselves. First, Miles' will refers to a great yard and a small yard. If the small yard were on his Crouch Street site (space for a yard is shown in 1881) was the 'great yard' actually some distance to the north on Head Street? Or, second, did he have an arrangement with local friends or colleagues that enabled him to use their back yards? Third, it is recognised that bell-founders cast church bells inside the church, or in the churchyard (as at Lavenham¹⁸). Is it simply the case that whether bell-founders were founding bells or making cauldrons, they always did it on (or as close as possible to) their clients premises? We can never be certain of any of this, of course, but to this writer the third option is strongest. If so, we should be asking if the Sixth Form casting pit was for a bell that hung in St Peter's church (we cannot know this, since the bells have been recast). Further, was Miles Gray casting cauldrons for a client who was selling them on from a Head Street shop? Nor are the Odeon and Sixth Form sites the only ones with evidence of casting – 1.5 kg of ceramic moulds was also found at 7-13 Head Street.¹⁹ This is too far away from the Head Street site to be overspill from it, and presumably represents a separate casting episode for a separate client. Whether it too is a Gray family product is not known. But consider this. The Miles Gray family has 415 bells to its name,²⁰ and Miles Gray I has 147. The Gray dynasty was not a small-scale operation, but one with a huge output and considerable longevity. There would have been slack periods between bells when they turned their hand to the production of small items. The Head Street moulds, with the scratched W connection, seem to be a clear Miles I product, and we should not be surprised if the Harpers mould fragments and the Sixth

Form College casting pit bear his imprint, or that of his son Miles II learning the craft under his father's eye.

Concluding thoughts

Such research themes as archaeologists pursue are inevitably driven by what they dig up. Before the year 2000, nobody in the archaeological world thought much about Miles Gray. But the 2000 excavations on Head Street have set off a number of lines of enquiry about the Miles Gray dynasty of bell-founders and bronze casters in Colchester, and have widened our understanding of how much industry was going on behind the apparently quiet seventeenth century facades on Colchester's main streets.

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Acknowledgments

I am very pleased to be able to contribute to this volume for Andrew, whose prodigious output on local history includes substantial writings on local industry. My thanks to Nigel Brown for reading through and commenting on a draft of this article.

The Author

Howard Brooks (BA FSA MCIfA) started digging as a teenager, and has been involved with Colchester archaeology since 1970. Apart from spells working with ECC Archaeology Section, he has spent most of his career at Colchester Archaeological Trust (of which he is now Deputy Director). He has a particular interest in landscape archaeology, and has taught many evening classes.

The Elegant Society of Georgian Colchester

as depicted by James Dunthorne, junior
(c.1758 – 1794)

by

Bruce Neville

Whilst Colchester might not be the county town, it had for centuries been the most important and populous settlement in Essex (Fig.1). It was a large market town, a focus for the surrounding farmland, and its proximity to London also made it an ideal stopping-off point for travellers to and from the Continent, via Harwich. The main industry in Colchester had for centuries been the cloth trade but despite a few peaks and troughs, it suffered a general decline throughout the eighteenth century until its eventual demise in 1833.¹ The population remained fairly constant for a hundred years up to 1801 when there were 5,012 males and 6,510 females living within the 16 parishes of Colchester.²

The main domestic business of Colchester occurred in the High Street on Saturday in the Market and also during the St Dennis Fair that was held for a few weeks in October and early November. A spin-off of the Fair, for what might be described as the 'elegant society' of the town, was the social events that were held at the White Hart Inn in the High Street. During the rest of the year, these social events included dances known as Assemblies and nights at the Theatre.³

The Assemblies in Colchester started on Monday, 2nd December 1754 at the King's Head Inn in Head Street.⁴ After a new Grand Assembly Room had been built at the White Hart Inn and opened in June 1768,⁵ the venue was shared for ten years between the King's Head and the White Hart after which

the Assemblies continued solely at the White Hart Inn.⁶ They were held every month on the Monday evening that was closest to the full moon, to assist the revellers to return home by the light of the moon. Between 1781 and 1794, the number of Assemblies was reduced from twelve to eight per year, as the summer months were less popular. When the Army Barracks were built in Magdalen Street in 1795 this resulted in the arrival of a large number of army officers and the frequency of the Assemblies was markedly increased. They became so popular that a second tier was introduced in 1796 called an 'undressed ball' where less formal clothes were required. These were held, also every month on a Monday, two weeks after the normal Assembly.⁷

One native of the town was James Dunthorne, junior who was born in Colchester in about 1758, the son of James and Elizabeth (née Hubbard) Dunthorne.⁸ Their home adjoined the Moot Hall and it was later known as 148 High Street, this being prior to this portion of the High Street being renumbered. It was a wing of a former large house that occupied part of the site of the present Town Hall. In July 1768, the family moved to 146 High Street on the corner of Angel Lane (West Stockwell Street), this being another wing of the same large house. They moved again in the late spring of 1777 to the opposite side of the road to 12 High Street.⁹

James Dunthorne, junior continued to live with his parents and he was therefore of the parish of St. Peter when he married

Elizabeth Shillito on 9th December 1779 at All Saints Church.¹⁰ He set up home with his new wife at 104 High Street in the parish of St Nicholas, as a caricaturist and print-seller.¹¹ He was also the drawing master from January 1786 at the newly opened Colchester Academy in Head Street.¹² He died on 9th October 1794 'after a long affliction', aged about 36 and was buried at St Nicholas Church.¹³

During his working life, he made many drawings of Colchester's 'elegant society' and the resultant prints would have been sold in his print shop, especially to the individuals depicted. As he was always short of money, these sales would have greatly assisted him financially.

A mystery, however, exists in all of these pictures, namely, who are all these people? Many of them seem to show some aspect of their character that would have enabled them to be identified at the time but this has been lost in the passage of time, or has it? As this is the first time that these pictures have appeared together in print, this has produced the intriguing possibility that several of the individuals might now be named. Some of the characters seem to appear more than once suggesting that there is a connection between the drawings. The purpose of this article is to try and give a reasonable explanation as to the possible names of the people depicted, by attempting to match certain historical facts to the details in the drawings. There can be no proof that the names stated here are correct and it is up to the reader to decide on their veracity.



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| <p>1. St Mary at the Walls Church, rector – Rev. Thomas Twining 1788–1804.</p> <p>2. St Peter's Church, North Hill.</p> <p>3. St Martin's Church, between Angel Lane (West Stockwell Street) and St Martin's Lane (East Stockwell Street).</p> <p>4. 'Shambles', 144 to 142 High Street, later called 'Middle Row' just before it was demolished in 1857.</p> <p>5. Holy Trinity Church, Trinity Street.</p> <p>6. St Nicholas' Church, High Street.</p> <p>7. All Saints' Church, High Street.</p> <p>8. Head Street.</p> <p>9. King's Head Inn until 1784, Colchester Academy 1786–1827.</p> <p>10. Dr Moses Griffiths 1769–85.</p> <p>11. North Hill.</p> <p>12. (x 3) The High Street.</p> <p>13. Colchester Castle.</p> <p>14. Nathaniel Barlow, 1 High Street 1766–98.</p> <p>15. John Mills, 3 High Street 1766–1809; Bank – Mills & Twining 1787–97, Mills & Sons 1797–1809.</p> | <p>16. White Hart Inn, 6, 7, courtyard and 8 High Street.</p> <p>17. Crickitt's Bank, 8 High Street; managers: Charles Whaley, junior 1787–90, George Round, 1799–1823.</p> <p>18. Whaley & Desbrosses, wine merchants, 1768–86.</p> <p>19. James Dunthorne, 12 High Street, senior 1777–1801, junior 1777–79.</p> <p>20. 'Shambles', 141 to 139 High Street, demolished in 1816.</p> <p>21. St. Runwald's Church, demolished 1878.</p> <p>22. Theatre, behind the Moot Hall, 1764–1814.</p> <p>23. Moot Hall, demolished in 1843, to be replaced by the Victorian Town Hall.</p> <p>24. James Dunthorne, senior and junior, 148 High Street 1752–68, renumbered 141 High Street in c.1834.</p> <p>25. James Dunthorne, senior and junior, 146 High Street 1768–77, renumbered 139 High Street in c.1834.</p> | <p>26. Angel Lane (West Stockwell Street).</p> <p>27. St Martin's Lane (East Stockwell Street).</p> <p>28. St Helen's Lane (Maidenburgh Street).</p> <p>29. James Dunthorne, junior, 104 High Street 1779–94.</p> <p>30. Samuel Gibbs 1770–76, Hannah Gibbs 1770–72, 109 High Street.</p> <p>31. Widow Mary Keeling, 19 & 20 High Street 1794–98.</p> <p>32. Samuel Gibbs, 49 High Street 1789–1801.</p> <p>33. Rev Dr Nathaniel Forster, Parsonage House alongside All Saints' Church, 1764–90.</p> <p>34. Widow Mary Keeling, 69 High Street 1784–90.</p> <p>35. (x 2) Back Lane (Culver Street).</p> <p>36. Trinity Street.</p> <p>37. Cat Lane (Lion Walk).</p> <p>38. (Long or Great) Wire Street.</p> <p>39. Sir Isaac Rebow's Walk (Sir Isaac's Walk).</p> <p>40. Eld Lane.</p> <p>41. Queen's Street.</p> <p>42. Balkon Lane (leading to Balkerne Hill).</p> |
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Private Card Party, 1783

William Gurney Benham writing in the *Essex Review* in 1901¹⁴ included this picture of a *Private Card Party* and stated that it was exhibited at the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1783.¹⁵ He described it as being 'from the Original Water-colour Drawing in the possession of Mrs Keeling of Colchester'¹⁶ and he included the following 'inscription accompanying the picture'.

Sketch by Dunthorne, the Colchester Hogarth, of a Colchester party about 1770, at the Assembly Room of the Old White Hart Inn, in the High Street. The figure playing whist in a spotted coat is M. De Brosso, a then French resident in the town. The lady playing against him is Mrs Whalley. The young lady in the foreground is Miss Mary Keeling, afterwards Mrs George Round. The gentleman standing behind in a full wig is Dr Griffiths.

As a result of further research, several comments can be added to these details.

Old White Hart Inn

This was the main meeting place for the elegant society of Colchester until it closed in 1816¹⁷ and the 'Assembly Room' was on an upper floor at the western end of the building later in 6 High Street.¹⁸

M. De Brosso

The correct spelling is Peter Desbrosses who was born on 17th October 1737 in London, the son of Pierre and Marthe Elizabeth (née Mayafre) Desbrosses who were French Protestants who had married on 25th May 1735 at L'Eglise Françoise de La Savoye in the Strand, London.¹⁹

He came to Colchester and was in partnership with the owner of the White Hart Inn, Charles Whaley, senior until 1768²⁰ when his son, Charles Whaley, junior, took over from his father who then retired to London and Bath.²¹ They traded as Whaley & Desbrosses, wine merchants in Back Lane (Culver Street), at the rear of the White Hart Inn until September 1786.²²

Mrs Whalley

Elizabeth Whaley was the daughter of John Spurgeon, Town Clerk of Yarmouth who had married Charles Whaley, junior on 7th November 1780 at St Andrew's, Great Yarmouth.²³ Charles Whaley, junior and his brother, John Blatch Whaley had taken over the ownership of the White Hart Inn in July 1768 from their father.

Miss Mary Keeling

Benham's date of 'about 1770' is much too early as she was born in 1766 at Greenwich, the daughter of John and Mary (née Round) Keeling and the exhibited date of 1783 would be much more accurate. Accompanying her may possibly be her mother, Widow Mary (née Round) Keeling who had been born on 15th November 1730 in London and she had married on 29th November 1764 at St Peter & St Paul, Great Birch, John Keeling of Clerkenwell.²⁴ Her husband had died at the end of February 1781, aged 37 and been buried at St James, Clerkenwell.²⁵

Mother and daughter were presumably only visiting

Picture of a *Private Card Party*. (Author's collection)



Colchester in 1783, as they did not move into 69 High Street until the summer of the following year.²⁶ Miss Mary Keeling married on 5th March 1785 at Chelmsford Cathedral, Charles Searle of the First Dragoon Guards of St George's, Somerset.²⁷ Her mother moved from 69 High Street in summer 1790, possibly to Birch but returned to Colchester four

years later to 19 & 20 High Street in summer 1794.²⁸ Mrs Mary Keeling died on 27th July 1798, aged 67 at Birch Hall, the home of her brother, James Round²⁹ and was buried at Great Birch.³⁰

Dr Griffiths (bap.1699-1785)

This was Dr Moses Griffiths who received his medical training at Leyden, Holland in 1744 and

later he had a practice in Mincing Lane, London.³¹ He had retired to Colchester in 1769 and lived on the west side of Head Street, close to the corner of High Street. He assisted James Dunthorne with the production of medical prints in which he attempted to show, pictorially, the affects of disease on the human body.³²

A *Morning Concert* was exhibited at the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1784.³³ Presumably, here playing the harpsichord and still wearing her large hat, was Miss Mary Keeling who had earlier been represented in the *Private Card Party*. James Dunthorne was a proficient violinist and therefore, this was possibly a self-portrait of him playing the violin, on the right. Amongst his known musical friends were the Reverends, Dr Nathaniel Forster, Joseph Brockwell, William Jones and Thomas Twining and they may all appear in this picture.³⁴ They later arranged a benefit concert on 30th July 1793 for James Dunthorne, as they considered it necessary to aid his continued financial difficulties.³⁵

Nathaniel Forster (1726-90)

The corpulent gentleman on the right is thought to be Dr Forster

Morning Concert, 1784

and sitting behind him could possibly be his wife, Rhoda. He was rector of All Saints from 1764 and they lived in the Parsonage House, next to the church in Colchester High Street and this maybe the venue for this picture. He died on 12th April 1790, aged 63 and was buried in the graveyard at All Saints Church.³⁶

Joseph Brockwell (1712-97)

He was an accomplished musician who lived in St Martin's Lane (East Stockwell Street), Colchester. He was rector of West Mersea from 1748 until he died on 9th March 1797, aged 85 and was buried in St Martin's churchyard.³⁷

William Jones (1726-1800)

He was the perpetual curate of Nayland, Suffolk. He was a prolific writer and musician and was a keen member of the

musical sect in Colchester. He used to keep 30th January (the date of the beheading of King Charles I in 1649) as a day of fasting and humiliation for the sins and regicide of his ancestor Colonel John Jones, a signatory to the death warrant. He died on 6th January 1800, aged 73 and was buried at St James, Nayland.³⁸

Thomas Twining (1734-1804)

Thomas was the son of Daniel Twining and his first wife, Ann March. He was also a grandson of Thomas Twining, the founder of the famous tea company that continues to the present day.³⁹ He played the violin and was a notable member of the Colchester music circle. He was rector of St. Mary at the Walls, Colchester from 1788 until his death on 8th August 1804, aged 69 and was buried at St Michael's, Mile End.⁴⁰

Picture of a *Morning Concert*. (Author's collection)



Auction, 1787

This drawing was exhibited at the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1787⁴¹ and the most active auctioneer in Colchester at that time was Nathaniel Barlow (1739-1798) of 1 High Street. Most auctions took place on the premises of the seller or at a local inn. He was the auctioneer on Monday, 18th September 1786 at 'a commodious house in the Back Lane [Culver Street] near the White Hart Inn, of household furniture of a gentleman leaving the country'. Also for sale were the contents of the library that contained 'upwards of 700 volumes' and an 'excellent eight-day clock by Mudge and

Dutton'. On the following day the 'house and wine vaults containing 300 pipes of wine, late in the occupation of Messrs. Whaley and Desbrosses' were auctioned.⁴² The sellers were therefore Charles Whaley and Peter Desbrosses who were both retiring from business. If this was the venue, as described, we can now speculate as to the names of some of those present.

The figures in the foreground can be compared with some of the individuals present in the *Private Card Party* picture. The woman on the left could be Widow Mary Keeling who

is being greeted in true Gallic fashion by Peter Desbrosses. Further to the right appears to be Mrs Mary (née Keeling) Searle, again in a large hat. She is passing a note to a seated individual who is clasping a crutch and a few treasured books. If this were Charles Whaley, the principal seller at the auction, then he would be aged about 43 and sitting next to him would be his wife, Elizabeth Whaley, aged 32.⁴³ Above them all and controlling the proceedings would have been Nathaniel Barlow, the auctioneer, aged 48 with his gavel in hand.

Picture of an Auction. (Author's collection)



Tea Party, c.1790

The most prominent tea, coffee and chocolate merchant in Colchester in about 1790 was John Mills (1736-1822) and he could be the individual in the middle at the back, who appears to be conducting the proceedings. Before we contemplate the possible names of other individuals in this picture, we need to know a little bit of the background of John Mills, his relationship to the Twining family who appear later in the story and why he was in Colchester.

John Mills had married on 29th July 1766 at St Clement Danes, Westminster, Hester

Carter, the daughter of Philemon Philip and Margaretta (née Twining) Carter. Margaretta and Daniel Twining were children of Thomas Twining who in 1706 had founded the famous tea company in Devereux Court, Strand, London. Daniel Twining helped to run the tea company with his father until he died on 19th May 1741 and thereafter alone. He was married twice, firstly to Ann March on 27th March 1733 but she died in 1743 and then he remarried Mary Little on 3rd February 1745/6. After his death on 12th March 1762, aged 49,

his widow, Mary Twining ran the tea company in London with her son, Richard.⁴⁴

Widow Mary Twining purchased a building in Colchester High Street in 1766,⁴⁵ on behalf of John Mills, who had married her late husband's niece, Hester Carter and that property was later designated as being the larger part of 3 High Street. John Mills was a tea-dealer from Messrs Twining's in London when in October 1766 he arrived in Colchester to open his 'Tea Warehouse at the Golden Lion, opposite the Exchange in the High Street'. It was from 3 High

Picture of a Tea Party. (Reproduced by kind permission of Colchester Museums Service)



Street that he sold tea, coffee and chocolate, 'as good, and upon as reasonable terms, as in London'.⁴⁶

John Mills and his wife, Hester were living above the shop and this was also where their children were born.⁴⁷ Each of them plays an important part in this story, as well as the later history of Colchester. Their children included Richard Richardson born on 11th July 1769,⁴⁸ Mary Ann born on 24th August 1770⁴⁹ and John Fletcher born on 3rd January 1776.⁵⁰

We can now consider the possible venue and date of this picture and whether any of these

people could be represented in it. The venue could be in a room adjoining the Assembly Room at the White Hart Inn that was a few doors down the High Street. Hester Mills could be the lady sitting at the table pouring tea from a teapot, alongside a double-handled hot water urn, called a samovar. Also at the table could be her daughter, Mary Ann, holding a chocolate cup and cover on a saucer together with her younger son, John Fletcher, drinking tea from a cup and saucer. The date of this picture now becomes apparent because it can be gauged by using the adjudged ages of these children. If the date were to

be 1790, Mary Ann would be 20 and John Fletcher would be 14.

On the other side of the room could be the elder son, Richard Richardson Mills who on the same basis would be 21 and he is offering cups of tea on a tray to their guests. Above the tray is a carefully drawn lady with spectacles that could be Widow Mary Twining. Alongside are a lady and an army officer that are possibly the same couple that appear at the *Auction* on the right hand side. We can now consider some of the other people represented in this picture.

Peter Desbrosses can be seen dressed again in his spotted coat that he had worn earlier in the *Private Card Party*. He had left Colchester four years earlier and as he has his tricorne hat tucked under his arm, this could signify that he was just visiting.

Less apparent is a cameo on the far left in the doorway where the man appears to be pleading with the woman who is smiling down at him. This maybe James Dunthorne having a joke and laughing up his sleeve, as the lady could be his wife, formerly Elizabeth Shillito and the man, Samuel Gibbs (1730-1816). Before she had married, Elizabeth Shillito had been an assistant to his wife, Hannah Gibbs as a milliner at 109 High Street.⁵¹ After Hannah had died in January 1772,⁵² Samuel Gibbs had hoped to marry Elizabeth Shillito⁵³ but she had other ideas. The following month, she departed from her former employer, to establish her own millinery, haberdashery and linen drapery shop.⁵⁴ Elizabeth Shillito went on to marry James Dunthorne on 9th December 1779. To continue his humour, the bust above the door on the right could be a self-portrait and from his vantage point, he is watching the entire proceedings in the room including the antics of Samuel Gibbs who by this time had a bookshop at 49 High Street.



Mixed up in the stories regarding these four pictures, James Dunthorne has managed to demonstrate the family connections that evolved into the commencement of banking in Colchester. John Mills' tea company flourished, together with his association with the Twinings. As a result of this, he went into partnership on 14th November 1787 with Mary Twining's sons, Richard and John who were also his wife's cousins.⁵⁵ Their intention was to form a Bank with customers having an allegiance to the Liberal Party. This was just three days before Charles Alexander Crickitt announced that his Bank, with an allegiance to the Tory Party, would be opening on 19th November 1787,⁵⁶ a few doors away in part of the White Hart Inn that later became 8 High Street, now part of Barclays Bank. John Mills' partnership with the Twinings had clearly been the result of having had prior notice of the opening of the Tory Bank. The Tory Bank was to be managed by Charles Whaley and later from 1799 by George Round,⁵⁷ the future husband of Mary (née Keeling) Searle.

Like Charles Whaley, his brother John Blatch Whaley was a Tory who happened to own a small property that was next to 3 High Street. After John Blatch Whaley died on 28th April 1788, aged 49,⁵⁸ John Mills purchased it, in order to enlarge his property and to accommodate his Liberal Bank.

As has been stated earlier, these pictures show a selected portion of the elegant society of late eighteenth century Colchester. The details are factual but whether the identity of the individuals is accurate and what they have to do with these pictures, is a matter of opinion.

References

1. S. D'Cruze, *A Pleasing Prospect* (Hatfield, 2008), Peter Devall, last of the baymakers, sold the business in 1833, pp.4, 20.
2. *Ipswich Journal (IJ)* 18/04/1801.
3. The 'Theatre' was built by William Ivory of Norwich behind the Moot Hall with access to the gallery and the pit by way of the two floors from within the Moot Hall. It opened on 29/10/1764 and was originally sponsored by 15 local dignitaries who each held a silver ticket that entitled them to gain admittance. The Mayor's silver ticket is preserved in the Corporation Regalia. *IJ*, 27/10/1764, 03/11/1764 & 17/11/1764.
4. *IJ*, 12/10/1754 & 23/11/1754, the Assembly began 'at 6 o'clock in the evening, tickets to be at the bar of the Kings Head at 5 shillings each'.
5. *IJ*, 14/05/1768.
6. Forthcoming Assemblies were announced in the *IJ*, usually during the preceding week and tickets continued to be five shillings each.
7. From Monday, 07/03/1796, *IJ*, 13/02/1796.
8. Married 30/10/1752 at St James, Essex Record Office (ERO), D/P 138/1/9.
9. All of the properties mentioned in this article predate the summer of 1811 when each door in Colchester High Street was allocated a number. The numbers were not allocated to buildings but rather to each door that faced the main street. Therefore, a property with two doors, say a public and a private door, was given two numbers. All of the properties on the northern side of the High Street between the corners of North Hill and Angel Lane (West Stockwell Street) were renumbered in about 1834. Whereas for the remainder of the High Street, all of the numbers have remained the same, even to the present day. The following references for the various parishes are taken from the Poor Law Rate Books (R') and the Land Tax Returns (L'), both followed by a month, abbreviated year and the rateable value (£ in brackets). As some of the records have been lost and are therefore not continuous '<' signifies earlier and '>' signifies later. By the 'system of abuttal', these details verify the occupants of each property. James Dunthorne, senior (1730-1815) at 148 High Street 1752-1768 – St Runwald, ERO, D/P 177/11/4-6 – <R'May53-R'Apr68 (8), successor John Brock, *IJ*, 06/08/1768; at 146 High Street 1768-1777 – St Runwald, ERO, D/P 177/11/6-10 – R'Oct68-R'Apr77 (10); at 12 High Street 1777-1801 – *IJ*, 30/08/1777, St Peter, ERO, D/P 178/11/3-4 – R'Nov78-R'Dec83> (10), <R'Nov98-R'Nov01 (12); St Peter, ERO, Q/RP1/1107-1128 – <L'June78> (12), <L'May81-L'May93 (10), L'June94-L'June01 (12).
10. ERO, D/P 200/1/11, All Saints, marriage register.
11. James Dunthorne, junior (1758-1794) at 104 High Street 1779-1794 – *IJ*, 28/05/1785, St Nicholas, ERO, D/P 176/11/6-8 – R'Feb80-R'Nov94 (7); St Nicholas, ERO, Q/RP1/1108-1121 – <L'May81-L'June94 (7).
12. A. Phillips, *Ellisons 1764-2014 Solicitors of Colchester* (London, 2014), p.73. The company was founded by William Mason in 1769, five years after he had been apprenticed on 14/08/1764 to the attorney, Robert Mayhew (1720-1784) for £32, The National Archives (TNA), IR 1/24/59, Board of Stamps: Apprenticeship Books, 1763-66.
13. *IJ*, 18/10/1794, James Dunthorne buried on 12/10/1794 at St Nicholas, ERO, D/P 176/1/4.
14. W.G. Benham, *Essex Review (ER)*, X (37), 1901, pp.27-35.
15. A. Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts*, 1, (Bath, 1970) p.390: 'Dunthorne, John, Junr. (*sic*) painter, Colchester, Essex. Exhibition – 1783, Ref.408 'Private Card Party'.
16. The stated 'Mrs. Keeling of Colchester' must surely be Mrs Alice May Mildred (née Chapman) Keeling, the third wife and widow of the solicitor, Frederic John Keeling and in 1901 she was living at 27 Lexden Road. One could reasonably be excused for assuming that 'Mrs Keeling of Colchester' in 1901 was somehow related to 'Miss Mary Keeling' of 1783 but they were in no way related.

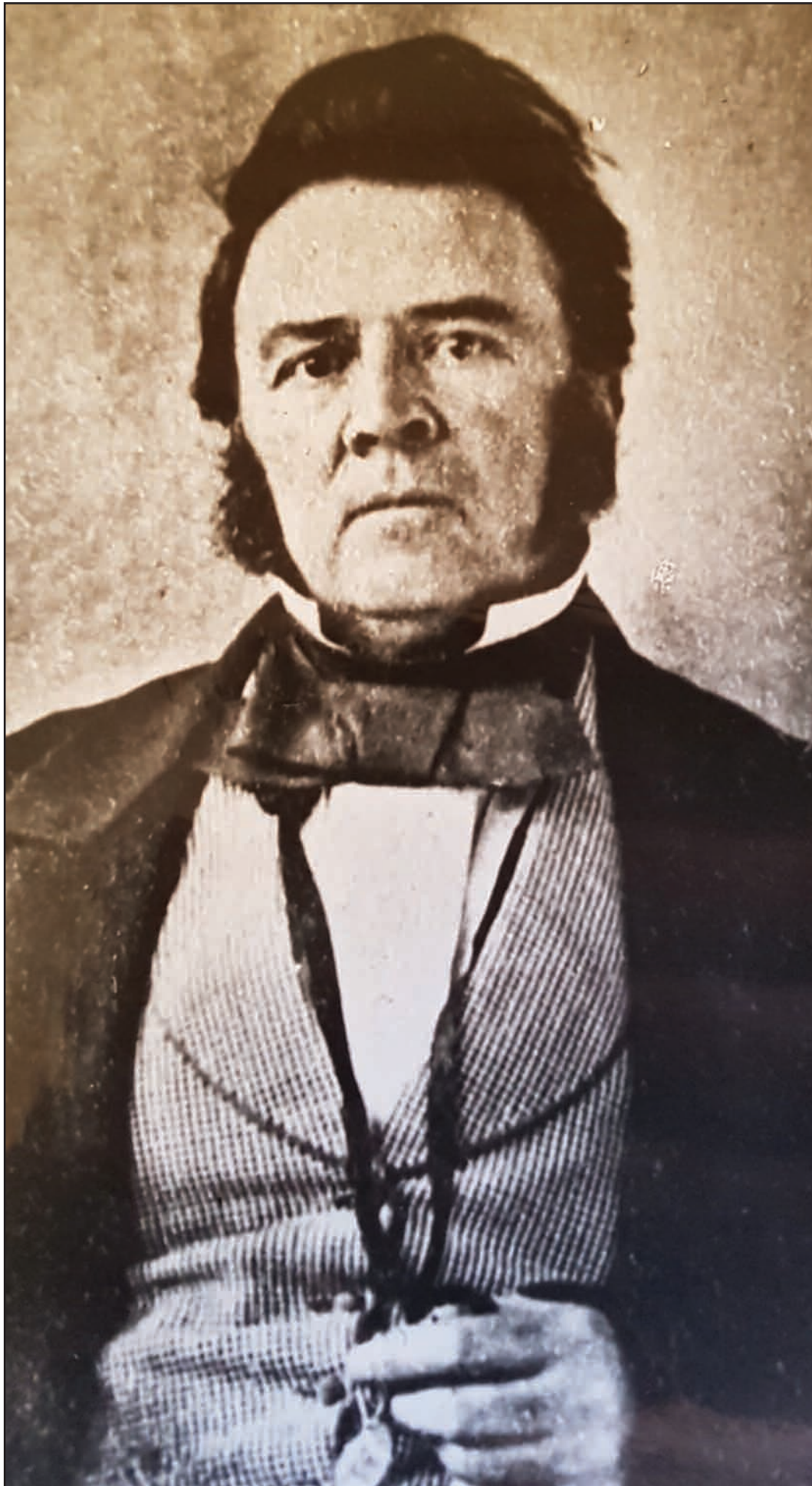
17. *Colchester Gazette* (CG), White Hart Inn 'shut up' on 11/05/1816; ERO, D/P 178/11/5, St Peter – R'Apr16-R'July16.
18. CG, 31/10/1818 'Mr Kay auction at Robert 'Barber's, the late White Hart Inn Assembly Room, No.6 High-street'.
19. TNA, RG4/4641, French Chapel, Savoy, Strand, 1684-1753.
20. *IJ*, 16/07/1768.
21. Charles Whaley, senior was 'of Colchester' when he married his fourth wife, Eleanor Wilkinson on 05/02/1771 at St Martin Outwich, City of London (London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), P69/MTN3) and he was 'of Bath' when his will was proved on 28/11/1774, TNA, PROB 11/1002/385.
22. *IJ*, 26/08/1786.
23. *Norfolk Chronicle*, 11/11/1780.
24. Baptised 08/12/1730 at St Margaret Lothbury, London, married at Birch, ERO D/P 241/1/3.
25. LMA, P76/JS2, St James, Clerkenwell, 01/03/1781.
26. Widow Mary Keeling (1730-1798) at 69 High Street 1784-1790 – All Saints, ERO, D/P 200/11/2-3 – R'Aug84-R'Aug90 (10).
27. ERO, D/P 94/1/11, St Mary, Chelmsford. Charles Searle 'of this parish' was married to Mary Keeling of Greenwich, Kent, by Nathaniel Forster DD rector of All Saints, Colchester. Mary Keeling was a 'minor' and married 'with the consent of her father' although he had already died.
28. Widow Mary Keeling (1730-1798) at 19 & 20 High Street 1794-1798 – St Peter, ERO, Q/RP1/1121-1125 – L'June94-L'July98 (12).
29. *IJ*, 04/08/1798.
30. ERO, D/P 241/1/2, 03/08/1798.
31. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB), www.oxforddnb.com/ (19/03/2018).
32. Benham, *ER*, pp.27-35.
33. Graves, Exhibition – 1784, Ref.446 'Morning Concert'.
34. D'Cruze, pp.124-6.
35. *IJ*, 03/08/1793.
36. Rev Dr Nathaniel Forster – All Saints, ERO, Q/RP1/1107-1116 – <L'June78-L'May89 (6), *IJ*, 17/04/1790.
37. *IJ*, 18/03/1797.
38. ODNB, www.oxforddnb.com/ (19/03/2018).
39. S.H. Twining, *The House of Twining 1706-1956* (Ipswich 1956), pp.23, 33.
40. *IJ*, 11/08/1804.
41. Graves, Exhibition – 1787, Ref.532 'Auction'.
42. *IJ*, 26/08/1786. A 'pipe' was half a tun or 1,008 pints.
43. Charles Whaley (1744-1818), Elizabeth Whaley (1755-1830).
44. Twining, pp. 9, 23-4, 34-5, 39, 43-4. Further details in Twining papers inspected in 1985 at Colchester Library, Local Studies, unclassified.
45. Mary Twining sold 3 High Street to John Mills on 18/03/1769, Twining papers.
46. *IJ*, 18/10/1766.
47. John Mills at 3(pt) High Street 1766-1788, *IJ*, 18/10/1766; St Peter, ERO, D/P 178/11/1-3 – R'Oct66-R'Oct67 (20), R'Feb68-R'Dec83> (16); St Peter, ERO, Q/RP1/1107-1115 – <L'June78-L'May88 (pt24); at 3 High Street 1789-1809, St Peter, ERO, D/P 178/11/4 – <R'Nov98-R'Mar03> (26); St Peter, ERO, Q/RP1/1116-1136 – L'May89 (24), L'May90-L'June92 (26), L'May93-L'May09 (28). John Mills retired in 1809 in favour of his younger son, John Fletcher Mills.
48. ERO, D/P 178/1/4, Richard Richardson Mills, born on 11/07/1769 and baptised on 21/09/1769 at St Peter.
49. *Ibid*, Mary Ann Mills, born on 24/08/1770 and baptised on 20/09/1770 at St Peter.
50. *Ibid*, John Fletcher Mills, born on 03/01/1776 and baptised on 12/01/1776 at St Peter.
51. Samuel Gibbs married 06/04/1770 at St Botolph, Aldgate, London, Hannah Hopkins and took over her shop at 109 High Street 1770-1776 in St. Nicholas, ERO, D/P 176/11/5 –<R'July73-R'May76 (8).
52. ERO, D/P 176/1/4, Hannah Gibbs was buried on 24/01/1772.
53. D'Cruze, p.70, mischievous graffiti.
54. *IJ*, 29/02/1772.
55. Twining, p.59.
56. *IJ*, 17/11/1787 & 24/11/1787.
57. On the death of James Round on 17/06/1806 (*IJ*, 21/06/1806), a new partnership was formed at the Bank between his son, George Round, Mrs Sarah Crickitt and her younger son, Robert Alexander Crickitt. After Charles Searle's death, widow Mary Searle remarried on 23/01/1810 at All Saints, Colchester, widower George Round who was a banker at 8 High Street, ERO, D/P 200/1/13 & D/DC 5/70. They were cousins by virtue of them both being grand children of William and Susannah (née Warner) Round of Birch Hall.
58. John Blatch Whaley was buried on 06/05/1788 at Holy Trinity, ERO, D/P 323/1/1 original, ERO, D/P 323/1/2 microfiche. Death dates of family members are in monumental inscriptions, vol.2, p.20 at Colchester Library, Local Studies.

Acknowledgment

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The Author

Bruce Neville has been studying the history of Colchester for the past 50 years and has built up a vast quantity of data, nearly all taken from primary sources. He has established the whereabouts of every individual who has lived in the High Street from about 1750 until 1900. Although having given several lectures and written a few articles, he has been happy for his research to be used by others in several publications. He has also studied the lives of the local artists, John Constable and Sir Alfred Munnings, with the same enthusiasm. He has a special interest in Jane Taylor who wrote 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star' in her attic room in Angel Lane (West Stockwell Street), Colchester in 1805. With her elder sister, Ann, they viewed their literary publications, for the first time, at Samuel Gibbs' bookshop at 49 High Street.



1. James M. Churchill looking uncomfortable in clothing fashionable in the 1840s.
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Colchester Medical Society)

J.M. Churchill, MRCS, LSA:

Colchester's Medical Coroner

by

Jane Pearson

Any man who is a gentleman of character, courtesy and common sense can fulfil the duties of the office with credit to himself and his country.¹

Andrew Phillips is a well-known local historian. He has published lively and rigorous accounts of the families, working practices, public works and politicking of Colchester's nineteenth-century iron founders, millers, lawyers and other businessmen.² He is also well-known for establishing Colchester Recalled, a large collection of oral history interviews, as Patrick Denney recounts in an article later in this issue. His enthusiasm for his subject has delighted students and colleagues for many years. But, to date, Colchester's doctors have not received his serious attention.³

This article considers one of Colchester's nineteenth-century doctors – surgeon Mr James Morss Churchill (Fig. 1). His story is compelling in the best tradition of Andrew Phillips's writing because, as well as being a busy general practitioner who worked chiefly among the poor, he was also, for over 25 years, Colchester's coroner. In his daily work, he formed a connection between, on the one hand, impoverished inhabitants of the town whom he doctored and, on the other, borough politicians and socially elite men with whom he sometimes had to deal at inquests. Unfortunately, his work spanned two particularly turbulent decades for the medical profession which meant he found the role of coroner could be very testing, putting the medical profession and medical institutions under intense public scrutiny from time to time.

James Churchill was born in High Ongar, Essex in 1798 and trained as a surgeon in Edinburgh before moving to the Royal Metropolitan Infirmary for the Diseases of Children and becoming Consulting Surgeon-Accoucheur to the Westminster Lying-in Institution where he gave lectures on midwifery and diseases of women and children. This was not a high-status speciality within medicine. He also found time to produce several medical books and pamphlets.⁴ He worked as a general practitioner in Colchester's Queen Street from the early 1830s, moving to Crouch Street in 1843. He helped to found the Colchester Mechanics' Institute in 1833 and in its early years delivered some lectures to its meetings. He was a dissenter (Congregationalist) and a Liberal in a town that had a vigorous dissenting congregation and usually voted Tory.⁵ In this period, some of Colchester's doctors succeeded in joining the town's élite, becoming councillors, aldermen and mayor. But Churchill did not achieve this feat of social climbing and was never a man of property. As soon as he could he applied for extra medical posts, firstly as jail surgeon (in which he was not successful) and secondly (successfully) as medical attendant for one of the newly-set-up poor law districts in the town. We can infer from this that Churchill was seeking to increase his income and make it more certain that he would be paid for his attentions to the very poor. Two months

later the town council elected him borough coroner. He resigned from both duties on health grounds in 1862 and died the following year aged 65.⁶

The Births and Deaths Registration Act (1836), under which Churchill was appointed coroner, stated there could be no burial without either a registrar's certificate or a coroner's order. The act empowered a coroner to order a medic to examine a body to establish cause of death and to give evidence at the inquest. Dorrie says 'from this time onwards the coroner's inquiry could properly be regarded as a medico-legal investigation'.⁷ In addition to his legal duty, Churchill had to be mindful of the power of rumour and suspicion around a sudden death, the existence of a general mistrust among the poor of what might go on behind the closed doors of the hospital and workhouse, and the danger of witness complacency. All or any of these could emerge without warning to complicate his task as coroner. In addition, inquest juries could be awkward and stubborn on occasion, drawing attention to the need to remedy dangerous circumstances. Witnesses to accident and sudden death were at times emotional, combative, evasive and unhelpful. The coroner needed a steady nerve and a thick skin to withstand critical attacks from a variety of sources.

In all, Churchill conducted some 550 inquests over 26½ years. He had a break due to illness over the winter and spring

of 1840 and in his last months in office when his deputy took over. The average number of inquests per year increased from 15 to 23 over Churchill's period as coroner, indicating in part the effect of an increasing population and the arrival, in 1856, of a permanent army garrison for 3,000 men on a town whose sanitation and water supply system was primitive and not conducive to health. Death resulting from illness accounted for 56% of these inquests, accidents 36%, suicide 7% and murder or manslaughter 1%. Sudden death among the working age group – males and females aged 12–60 – accounted for some 39% of Churchill's inquests. The next largest category was infants age 0–2 (21%). Inquests on males outnumbered those on females every year, a reflection of the comparative frailty of baby boys and the more dangerous working conditions that men and boys experienced in comparison to females.

The basic details of inquests conducted in the borough were filed with the Quarter Sessions records during Churchill's time as coroner and did not include transcripts of evidence. The *Essex Standard* and other local newspapers recorded almost all the inquests in the borough. Press deadlines and issues of space meant that run-of-the-mill inquests were reported as a short statement of the details of the deceased and the verdict. But a reporter was certainly present at the more interesting inquests and he set down verbatim accounts of what was said in evidence, using the conventions of court reporting. On the rare occasions when a complaint was made about supposed misreporting both the editor and the reporter replied refuting the claims.⁸

In contrast to the (solicitor) coroners who succeeded and deputised for him, Churchill's inquests reported regular difficulties with the court system. In his first 13 years in office he was

reported justifying the expense involved and the need to call an inquest or a post mortem examination explicitly on eight occasions and implicitly at other times. In 1837, he clashed with a colleague, Mr Philbrick junior, whose father was an established doctor in the town, and who had not thought an inquest would be necessary on an infant, subject to convulsions, who died in bed. 'The coroner observed that Mr Philbrick was in error; for it was not only essentially necessary, but *imperative* in case of sudden or accidental death, to hold an inquest in order that the cause of death might be clearly ascertained.'⁹

Sometimes his justification was more obliquely authoritarian, as when he chose to call the jury's attention to legislature on the subject which, for instance, allowed doctors to be remunerated for attendance at inquests and post mortems.¹⁰ On another occasion he reminded the jury that they could ask for a post mortem despite the wishes of the dead person's family.¹¹

Churchill could be extremely brisk and directive with a jury. In 1838 he called a halt to a long-winded suicide inquest telling the jury 'that further testimony would be superfluous' but adding repressively that 'if they wished it he would call for further evidence'¹² In 1850, considering a case where a farmer had driven a horse and chaise off the Hythe quay and drowned, Churchill prevented two men who wanted to give evidence from doing so. He said the jury could be quick as the case was 'self-evident' and they could satisfy the public mind without calling more than one or two witnesses.¹³ He was also careful to exclude questions of morality if he could. In a case concerning the sudden death of a young woman who was cohabiting with a soldier in her parents' house, moral issues were prominent. When Churchill refused to summon the soldier (Captain Renny) as a witness, the soldier insisted on giving a

statement. An adjournment was ordered so that surgeon Mr Partridge could conduct a post mortem but when *he* added an endorsement of the soldier's kind treatment of the dead girl in his report, 'the coroner thought the jury had nothing to do with that question, and as a rule, personal matters were best excluded from coroners' inquests. Captain Renny's conduct was solely a matter between himself and his conscience.' Churchill added a justification for the expense of the post mortem – to enable the jury to return a verdict that satisfied their consciences. He also noted that 'the girl herself had been cleared of one imputation cast upon her'.¹⁴

There were also some awkward moments involving husbands who did not want an inquest on a wife's body, witnesses who were felt to be unfit to give evidence and individuals who had claimed before death that they had been harmed by their medical treatment. In addition, the jury could also throw up some unforeseen difficulties. In 1860 when considering the sudden death of a soldier, only 10 of the 14 jurymen were willing to be directed by the coroner to give an open verdict. Some of them wanted a post mortem which, in Churchill's admonition would 'entail an additional expense of £2 2s on the town'. When the jury refused to heed his directions 'the coroner then administered the oath to Serjeant Johnson to keep the jury without meat, drink or fire; but after being locked up for a short time a verdict was come to that the deceased died, but from what cause not known.'¹⁵

In addition, the jury-summoning officer sometimes complained that he had been met with abuse and an absolute refusal to attend while there were occasional complaints from jurymen that they were summoned too often. But these difficulties were sometimes balanced by the usefulness of a jury's very local knowledge

of a neighbour's parenting skills and of the places where sudden death occurred. They sometimes asked the coroner to complain about dangerous footpaths, for instance, which was beyond the scope of an inquest. A close reading of Churchill's statements as recorded by the newspaper's reporter suggests he usually came to the inquest with his mind made up about the cause of death, to the extent that he did not routinely call a medical witness and was often extremely brisk in his dealings with the jury. However, he did not manage to intimidate every jury, nor every witness, and his high-handed approach was met on occasion with some critical letters to the newspaper.

Difficulties with medical colleagues and institutions

All of these difficulties were well within the capabilities of a professional, educated man such as Churchill to deal with. By comparison the problems he had with the some of his medical colleagues, and with potentially suspicious deaths taking place within one of the town's institutions where some of them worked, clearly affected him deeply. The first hospital in Essex, the Essex and Colchester Hospital in Lexden Road, opened its doors in 1820.¹⁶ It was intended for the benefit of poor workers who could not afford medical treatment. The hospital was paid for by subscribers such as employers, parish overseers and the charitably-inclined. This voluntary hospital also benefitted the medical profession, providing patients who were temporarily separated from the watchful eyes of their families and neighbours. The hospital Board selected the town's highest status medics as its honorary physicians and surgeons and, when it selected a new (salaried) house surgeon, it was often explicit in ensuring the successful applicant had a claim to gentleman status.

By contrast the Union workhouse was set up as a result of

the Poor Law Amendment Act (1834). Run as cheaply as possible on rate payers' contributions, it was soon inundated by the sick poor but only established an infirmary on the site around 1850. Its (salaried) medical officer did not occupy a position of status. Churchill, himself paid by the Union to look after the poor in an area of Colchester, was an admirer of the workhouse. He was perplexed when some of the elderly poor were unwilling to accept indoor relief (as incarceration in the workhouse was described). He unfailingly expressed opinions that supported the poor law and the town's institutions *per se*. In 1837 an inquest was held on a 40-year-old woman. The coroner suspected the reports that she had died of starvation were circulated 'to bring the present Poor Law into disrepute'. He argued that an offer had been made to her for indoor relief 'therefore, if she died from starvation, it was voluntary on her part, and no blame was attributable to the Overseer, the Relieving Officer or the Board of Guardians'.¹⁷ Churchill subsequently learned to modify his language so that, while expressing the same support for institutions, he found others to blame besides the recalcitrant corpse. For instance, he criticised those who failed to attend properly to a deranged woman. He said the family should have called in the parish surgeon who

must have reported the matter to the Board, who would have been under a penalty if they had not at once sent the case to the asylum. It was no kindness on the part of friends to keep such parties out of an asylum; and it was to be regretted that influential parishioners (in the case of pauper patients) should so often delay on account of the expense to take the necessary steps for that purpose.¹⁸

During his period in office, which also coincided with the Union workhouse's first quarter century, he conducted five inquests where a death at the workhouse occasioned an uncomfortable level of scrutiny. Since the solicitor coroners who succeeded Churchill did not have these problems, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Churchill's difficulties were a good deal to do with the contested professionalization of medicine and the pressure most medics were under in the 1840s and 1850s prior to the passing of the Medical Act (1858).

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, the medical profession was struggling to update itself.¹⁹ The old hierarchy, inherited from the eighteenth century, which placed physicians with their university education above surgeons and apothecaries, who served an apprenticeship, was no longer fit for purpose. As Waddington has observed, this *medical* status hierarchy had been to do with separating the gentleman physician, who did no manual work, from the tradesman surgeon who pulled teeth and set bones and the apothecary who worked from a shop. Physicians considered midwifery to be the business of women while surgeons (such as Churchill) began to make it their business too.²⁰

Increasingly, medical care could no longer be neatly divided between medicine and surgery and, from the 1820s most surgeons had spent some years working and training in city hospitals where physicians also worked and taught. In the hospital setting there was little status distinction between surgeons and physicians.²¹ Churchill's generation of doctors witnessed the breakdown of the barriers among the three branches of medicine and many worked as general practitioners able to provide a family medical service to the emerging middle classes for an acceptable charge. But medical status barriers did not

disappear. Doctors who had a preponderance of poor patients had difficulty achieving a respectable income which, in turn, affected their ability to attract higher-status patients. In Colchester, the status differential was between the physicians and surgeons who gave their expertise to the voluntary hospital without payment, and the surgeons who competed for the loyalty of the middle classes. The former group's higher status ensured their private patients were drawn from the wealthier families. The medics with the lowest status were those who depended on the poor law to top up their income, as Churchill did.

Below them on the status ladder were the unqualified practitioners – and 'quacks' – who would be casualties of the 1858 Medical Act. There were several inquests where death had ensued after treatment by 'ignorant quacks', veterinary surgeons or well-meaning neighbours. At one point Churchill was quoted dismissing 'ridiculous' homeopathic practitioners by saying 'grown up men and women might let quackery ride rampant in their brains if they pleased; but parents had no right to tamper with their children, who were helpless.'²² But some unqualified practitioners evidently continued in respectable practice as shown by an inquest in 1861 where Churchill refused to allow the evidence of a homeopath who had attended the deceased. A disapproving letter by a correspondent to the newspaper explained that 'the Homeopath is a man of great experience and has received as good a surgical education as any other surgeon in the locality'.²³ Another target of medical professionalization was the town's pharmacists, to whom the poor usually went if they could not afford to call the doctor. In a case where a baby died from an overdose of antimony wine provided by Mr Leech, chemist, of St Botolph's Street, 'the coroner asked if he was in the habit of ordering as

much as two spoonsful for an infant? —Mr Leech replied that it certainly was a full dose but would do no harm. —The coroner said he suspected it had in this instance.'²⁴

Churchill conducted several inquests where the reliance of poor families on the local pharmacy was an issue, either because he felt a life might have been saved had a medic been called or because he doubted the quality of the over-the-counter remedy. The minutes of the Colchester Medical Society are revealing of all these issues. In just eight years spanning the passing of the Medical Act, arguments were minuted around the propriety of taking steps for the prevention of illegal practitioners of physic in Colchester,²⁵ a reduction in fees paid to poor law medical officers²⁶ and ungentlemanly, unprofessional and improper conduct between surgeons.²⁷

Apart from the occasional dinner or meeting called to discuss a parliamentary bill relating to the medical profession which was reported in the press, and the occasional letter to the newspaper, the only venue where Colchester's doctors were regularly recorded speaking about their work in public was the coroner's court. In an inquest, in addition to giving his evidence as a sworn statement, the medic had to explain to the all-male jury, none of whom were doctors, what was the cause of death, and also sometimes to defend himself or a colleague against accusations of neglect of duty. It was an opportunity for a doctor to parade either his ignorance or his scientific learning before a jury, some of whom might be actual or potential patients, but it was also an opportunity for a member of the public – a jurymen or a correspondent to the newspaper – to comment on the doctor's input around the death. Such questions included the following – why had the doctor not come when summoned? Why had he not examined the body for marks

of violence? Had an institution such as the jail or workhouse been negligent? The coroner had a duty to expose the facts that would allow the jury to decide cause of death, but he also acknowledged his duty to the town authorities who elected him to office and paid his inquest expenses. Inquests which enquired into a death in one of the town's institutions could potentially be awkward as they were an opportunity for ignorant suspicion to be freely aired and for doctors of differing status to disagree, perhaps exposing the developing medical profession to ridicule.

In June 1847, the *Standard* reported in detail, under the heading INQUEST AT COLCHESTER UNION HOUSE - IMPORTANT INVESTIGATION, an inquest into the death of Henry Gosling, a 'weakly' boy aged eight, who had died in the workhouse. The first part of the inquest considered evidence from the workhouse master who described how, six weeks before his death, the boy had been repeatedly thrown off his bed by two other boys for bed wetting. One of the falls had broken his arm. Mr Clark, the medical officer at the workhouse, gave an account of dealing with the arm while noting that Henry's 'general health became worse, with loss of appetite and a scurfy state of skin' followed by inflammation of the lungs and spitting of blood. Mr Clark was asked three times whether he thought the fracture had hastened the boy's death and he prevaricated each time, finally saying 'I cannot give a decided opinion; he was always a delicate boy...the boy's elbow had got nearly well, and his appetite partially returned before the subsequent attack.'

Shortly before the boy died, Clark had gone on holiday to Scotland leaving Mr Hart, a Halstead surgeon, in charge. Mr Hart had conducted a post mortem assisted by Dr Chambers, an honorary physician at the

voluntary hospital. To save expense of travel costs from Halstead, the coroner called upon Dr Chambers to give the post mortem report which revealed the boy had died of tuberculosis of the lungs. Churchill asked Dr Chambers, as he had asked Clark, whether he was disposed to connect the death with the arm injury. Chambers prevaricated, giving different answers to repeated questions – that Henry would have died without the injury, the injury might have accelerated death, he could not disconnect the accident from his subsequent state of health, indeed his death was ‘most unquestionably’ accelerated by the ‘pummelling’ he had received. The coroner then observed that this evidence pointed to a manslaughter verdict. After several more rounds of questions and prevarication Dr Chambers agreed that to the best of his belief Henry’s death had been accelerated by the accident. He disagreed that his opinion was ‘directly at variance with the evidence of Dr Clark’ but Clark agreed with the coroner that it was. The coroner adjourned the inquest so that Mr Hart and the workhouse bullies could be present.

When the inquest reconvened not only had Mr Hart been summoned but the clerk to the Guardians, a solicitor and the borough jailer were also in court with the two boys accused of breaking Henry’s arm. Mr Hart said several times that he had made no connection between the injury and subsequent death so Churchill decided to link Clark’s opinion to Hart’s and conclude that manslaughter was doubtful. He said, perhaps unwisely, that Clark’s evidence was ‘more to be relied upon than that of Dr Chambers, because he [Chambers] did not speak positively upon the point at first, but only when pressed by the questions put to him’. The jury, in their turn, accepted tuberculosis as cause of death

but added the rider that ‘so many boys should not sleep in one room, [in the workhouse] without some adult to look to them.’²⁸

This was not the end of the matter. Dr Chambers, honorary physician to the Essex and Colchester hospital, felt he had been badly dealt with by the surgeon coroner. He wrote a long letter to the newspaper complaining that he had been ‘pressed’ in an ‘unseemly manner’, that the coroner had acted as advocate, that the verdict had been wrung from the jury in an ‘unconstitutional and unbecoming’ manner, evidence was both distorted and unheeded and witness examinations taken to suit a particular purpose (not justice). He finished the letter by describing Churchill’s conduct as ‘unbecoming in a judge, incorrect as a surgeon and unjust as a man’.²⁹

Nearly three months later, under the headline ALLEGED IMPROPER REMOVAL OF A SICK PERSON FROM THE HOSPITAL there was another inquest, this time focussing on the relationship between the voluntary hospital and the Union. Sarah Kerridge, a nurse at the Essex and Colchester hospital, had fallen ill with typhus and, six days into her illness, had been unceremoniously carted over the road to the workhouse as the voluntary hospital did not deal with infectious cases. But the workhouse refused to admit her at first as she was not a pauper. She had been left on a cart at the Union gates while the senior honorary physician, Dr Williams, berated the Union master – ‘I am a rate payer and you had better take her in’. Clark, the Union medic, evidently saw trouble coming as he stopped the coroner in the street to ask if an inquest would be necessary should she die. Mr Churchill’s reply was that he would be guided by Clark.

Again, the inquest was conducted in two stages. Before

the jury viewed the body, Churchill made a very long statement exposing his difficulties. He considered an inquest justified because two public institutions were involved – both of which he believed were conducted upon most admirable principles – and because he anticipated that Clark was going to assert that Mrs Kerridge’s death had been accelerated by her removal to the workhouse. He said he expected the hospital Board and Dr Williams, its honorary physician, would be glad to hear the case ‘sifted to the bottom’. He added that rumour had also motivated him and that Mrs Kerridge’s three sons had ‘pressed him’ to hold an inquest. Despite all these reasons he was anxious about ‘the difficulties which he saw surrounding the case’. The Union relieving officer explained that, at first, he had responded negatively to the hospital’s request as Mrs Kerridge came from Mistley so did not ‘belong’ to Colchester Union. The hospital secretary had written a letter demanding he receive her into the workhouse. But the Union Guardians he consulted felt she should be removed to a hired room in town so that the workhouse inmates would not be endangered. He had started to organise this. The workhouse master gave evidence that the hospital secretary had told him Mrs Kerridge was coming whereupon, having checked with the clerk to the Guardians, he went to the hospital to tell Mr Taylor, the house surgeon, ‘he had no power to admit her as she could not be destitute’. But it was too late as the patient was already in the cart. She arrived shortly after accompanied by Dr Williams, honorary physician, in threatening mode.

The next witness was Mr Abell, the clerk to the Guardians and a local solicitor. He stated that the admission of an infectious patient into an institution of 200 inmates was ‘not fit’ adding that it was her hospital employer’s responsibility to care for Sarah

as she was not destitute. He explained that the workhouse did not yet have an infirmary as 'the expense had been an obstacle'. Then Mr Clark was called and went straight into attack, denying that the inquest was called because of his views. The coroner's question as to whether he considered she had been improperly removed to the workhouse was 'improper'. The coroner resisted this attack, saying that Clark had made imputations against Dr Williams and the hospital, which Clark denied. Clark did not consider a post mortem to be necessary as the cause of death was typhus fever. But the coroner was determined to have a post mortem, even though the jury expressed a wish to retire and decide a verdict.

At the adjournment 'a number of medical men and gentlemen connected with the hospital were present' and the clerk to the board of Guardians went head-to-head with a member of the hospital Board as to whether an order of admission to the workhouse had been issued. The coroner took little part in this discussion but re-asserted himself with the hospital's house surgeon, Mr Taylor. He had had the care of Sarah until he called in Dr Williams on the day before she was removed to the Union 'and there the case passed from his hands'. He claimed not to know why she had been removed, saying 'I merely obeyed the orders of my superior'. It took four questions before he would admit that, in his opinion, she should not have been moved. The question of *why* he would not have moved her took another agonising set of questions which Taylor fudged, ending weakly 'you see how difficult it is for me' – a reference to giving evidence before his superiors and employers. The coroner gave him time to reflect while he called the next witness, Dr Williams. At this point Churchill tried to regain his authority which had been undermined by the above

discussion, but his dignity deserted him as he begged for decorum in court.

He (the Coroner) ought not to be subjected to interruptions from his professional brethren; neither did he want their suggestions; he was himself capable of carrying it on, and he thought he ought to be placed in the same position as if he wore Judge's ermine. Perhaps he might not be so fortunate as some other men in dignity of carriage, but his office entitled him to the same respect and he asked it as a favour that he might not be interrupted.

He then warned Dr Williams of the risk of a manslaughter verdict and therefore that he need not give incriminating evidence. Dr Williams, in contrast to his junior colleagues, gave his evidence with haughty confidence throughout 'as a duty to the institution'. He clearly had no poor patients in *his* practice as he was ignorant of the need for an order of admission to the Union.³⁰ He thought 'any case presented at the gate must be admitted and its nature afterwards investigated'. It was then Mr Taylor's turn to prevaricate over whether death had, in his opinion, been hastened by the prolonged journey to the Union. He said Sarah was fit to be removed but her chances of recovery would have been reduced by a 40 minute exposure to a cold wind.

The coroner then called Mr Clark the Union medic and asked the same question – had the transfer of the patient hastened her death? Clark absolutely refused to answer the question as he had not seen the patient before she was admitted. The coroner exploded angrily as he thought Clark was shrinking from his responsibilities.

If you had given me that opinion before I need not

have held this inquest... I instituted this inquiry simply to know if death was accelerated by the removal...therefore the whole onus of this inquest is thrown upon you though you endeavour to throw it upon me. All the responsibilities of holding this inquest; all the expense of the town; all the odium I may have incurred with the Managers of the Hospital and with my professional brethren and all the personal trouble to myself might have been spared if you had answered the plain and straightforward question which I put to you.

There followed an extraordinary exchange where the coroner persisted in blaming Clark for the unnecessary exposure to which the hospital and Dr Williams had been subjected which resulted in two members of the hospital committee coming to Clark's defence, one of them observing 'it appears to me that the Coroner thinks himself privileged to say what he likes, and nobody else to utter a word'.³¹

In both of these inquests Churchill was out of his depth. In the first, he gave the views of a higher status medic (Chambers) precedence over those of the workhouse medical officer and had to recant when another opinion was added at the adjourned inquest. Dr Chambers was affronted as a result and attacked Churchill in the press and, no doubt, in other places. In Mrs Kerridge's inquest, just a few months later, he persisted in pitting one doctor's opinion against another's as a result of which unacknowledged shortfalls in the health provision in both institutions were cruelly exposed and the audience was treated to a spectacle of medical in-fighting. In both cases a post-mortem established a clear cause of death but the inquest investigated medical indecision.

Conclusion

The 1840s and 1850s were difficult decades for the medical profession. It was working towards the Medical Act which would set up of the General Medical Council so that properly qualified doctors could be registered and, if necessary, disciplined. Considerable tension existed between medics who worked as general practitioners, some with less than adequate qualifications, and higher status physicians who guarded their prerogatives tenaciously. In Colchester, the national professional struggle was played out in miniature and the tensions can clearly be seen in several sources, from letters published in the newspapers, in which doctors freely criticised a medical colleague, to the minutes of the Colchester Medical Society. Tensions were also apparent in some of the inquests held by Colchester's medical coroner, and, as we have seen, as a low-status medic, he struggled to referee some of the medical disagreements raised in court. As coroner, Churchill's approach was authoritarian in a court that generally lacked precision. He saw the inquest as a way to suppress ignorant rumour and he defended the ethos of the Union (whose Guardians paid him a salary). He was careful not to be recorded grumbling about medics being expected to work for nothing, either as honorary consultants to an institution or as doctors to the poor.³² He was well aware that he was vulnerable to criticism and took pains to forestall this as much as he could by making statements about his reasons for holding an inquest, the expenditure involved and his humane dealings with the families involved in a sudden death. Above all he did his best to defend a medical profession which was in a state of some confusion.

References

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2. A. Phillips, *Steam and the Road to Glory: the Paxman story* (Colchester, 2002); *Ten Men and Colchester: public good and private profit in a Victorian Town* (Chelmsford, 1985).
3. The exception being oral history interviews collected from Essex County Hospital staff & A. Phillips, *Colchester in the Great War* (Barnsley, 2017).
4. *ES*, 17/12/1831. Advertisements in the newspaper listed the titles.
5. In 1834 it was claimed that 'dissenters are one third of the population of Colchester', an opinion which was hotly contested by the Anglican church, *ES*, 12/04/1834. Occasionally Churchill received malicious comments in the press about his political allegiance.
6. Churchill was succeeded by one of the town's solicitors, John Church, then, in 1869 by Church's son Adolphus, also a solicitor who continued in post until the 1890s.
7. C.P. Dorries, *Coroner's Courts; a guide to Law and Practice* (Chichester, 1999), p.5.
8. For example, surgeon Roger Nunn, not expecting an inquest on a patient of his, had already done a post mortem 'as a private duty'. The coroner wrote to the newspaper asking the editor to correct the impression that Mr Nunn had felt the inquest to be unnecessary. The reporter wrote to say his account had been correct, *ES*, 1/12/1837. On another occasion, when Churchill was called to account for his method of handling an inquest, he referred to the reporter's account, *ES*, 9/07/1847.
9. *Ibid*, 1/09/1837.
10. *Ibid*, 2/06/1837.
11. *Ibid*, 23/11/1859.
12. *Ibid*, 16/03/1838.
13. *Ibid*, 11/01/1850. The verdict was 'found drowned'.
14. He was referring to rumours around a failed abortion, *Ibid*, 20 & 22/05/1857.
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26. CMS minutes, 19/04/1859.
27. CMS minutes, 12/08/1862 & 9/02/1864.
28. *ES*, 18/06/1847.
29. *Ibid*, 2/07/1847.
30. The voluntary hospital admitted all but emergency cases under a subscriber system.
31. *ES*, 10/09/1847.
32. The single exception to his usual neutral stance on remuneration was in 1850 when he refused to accept an honorary position at Essex Hall, an asylum for the learning-disabled. 'I declined to undertake such onerous duties without being remunerated'. *Ibid*, 11/10/1850.

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Colchester's 'King Coal'

by

Adrian Corder-Birch

The nineteenth century was very much a century of industrial revolution, a century of coal and steam power, a century of innovation and economic growth, a century of opportunity. While we tend to think of the industrial revolution as mainly affecting the midlands and north of the country, Essex also witnessed a time of trade, manufacturing and business expansion. One Colchester man who made the most of the opportunities of the age was Thomas Moy and this article will look at his life and varied business careers.

The Moy Family

Thomas Moy (1831-1910) was born in Colchester on 17th February 1831, the son of John and Ann Moy and was baptised on 4th September 1831 at St. Martin's Church, West Stockwell Street, Colchester¹ (Fig. 1). His father John Moy (1789-1865) was a silk throwster, whose silk-throwing mill was situated in West Stockwell Street during the 1830s. There was also another silk mill in Crouch Street, which belonged to Stephen Brown & Co and by 1840 the two businesses had amalgamated and traded as Brown and Moy, silk manufacturers and throwsters, operating near the River Colne at Dead Lane, later Factory Lane and now St Peter's Street. Here they erected a massive brick-built and steam driven silk throwing mill, employing up to 400 women, some as young as ten.² This four-storey building, facing the river, with its workshops and ancillary buildings had 44,000 square feet of working space and survived until the 1960s. The employees sometimes worked around the clock to produce as much as 800lbs of silk a week.³

The partnership existed for some years and when John Moy retired, Stephen Brown, JP, continued as sole proprietor until his death in 1869.⁴

John and Ann Moy had ten children, the eldest Ann Tomlinson Moy (1824-1900) was born at Coggeshall while the rest were born in the family home at East Stockwell Street. They were baptised at St Martin's Church, where John, Ann and some of their children who died young were buried in the churchyard.⁵ Thomas's sister, Martha Maria Moy, outlived all her siblings and died in June 1921 aged 91 years.⁶



1. Thomas Moy (1831-1910).
(Author's collection)

A brother, William Arthur Moy, ARIBA, (1839-1869) known as Arthur, was an architect, practising from 5 Gower Street and later from 27 Bedford Road, London.⁷ There is no evidence that Thomas was ever involved in the silk trade and in fact John, who was 42 years old when Thomas was born, had retired as a silk throwster by 1851. Upon leaving school, Thomas tried journalism and became a printer's apprentice⁸ which he gave up to

join John Mann, junior, in the coal and coke trade. The partnership of John Mann and Thomas Moy was dissolved on 9th November 1855.⁹

Thomas married Jane Hicks (1836-1915) on 25th August 1859. She was a daughter of Charles Hicks, a farmer of Great Holland Hall.¹⁰ Thomas and Jane had three sons: Charles Thomas (1860-1932), Harry Arthur (1863-1890) and Ernest John (1866-1943). Thomas, Jane and their three sons lived at Hill House, Hythe Hill, Colchester until 1880 when they moved to Stanway Hall. Hill House then became the home of James Paxman, which was conveniently situated close to his Standard Iron Works.¹¹ Stanway Hall was previously owned and occupied by the De Horne family until they sold the hall, manor and estate to Moy, who became one of the principal landowners in Stanway. The hall of timber construction, later encased in brick was considerably improved and extended to 18 rooms by Thomas and remained in his family for about 60 years.¹² Thomas Moy died 2nd January 1910 and left effects amounting to £218,546 7s 2d. His widow Jane died on 16th August 1915 leaving £2,012 5s 0d. Probate of both estates was granted to their surviving sons Charles Thomas and Ernest John Moy.¹³ He was described as 'always a hard worker, was a thorough businessman and everything he touched seemed to prosper. His kindly nature and genial good humour rendered him beloved by everyone. He was equally large-hearted as an employer and several of his employees have served him for nearly 50 years.'¹⁴

Thomas Moy: Councillor, Commissioner, Magistrate and Mayor of Colchester

Thomas Moy held a number of positions in Colchester. In the 1860s he was elected as a Conservative councillor and became Mayor for two consecutive terms from 1877 to 1879. During his first year as Mayor, the Indian Famine of 1877 caused much sympathy and a fund to alleviate the suffering was raised in Colchester under the patronage of Thomas Moy and Major-General Sir Richard Kelly, KCB.¹⁵ As His Worship the Mayor, Thomas Moy, opened Hythe Bridge, near Hythe Railway Station, upon which there is a plaque recording: 'This bridge was opened April 4th 1878 – Thomas Moy, Mayor'. When Mayor, he made the Oyster Feast, started by predecessor Henry Walton, a regular event.

In 1879 the Colchester Waterworks was purchased by Colchester Corporation from Peter Bruff. This was conducted in a strict bi-partisan basis under the Conservative Mayor Thomas Moy. In November 1879 the Liberals won five Council seats, secured political power and elected the first Liberal Mayor for 42 years.¹⁶ In 1880 Colchester Corporation agreed to buy a piece of meadow land at the Hythe from Thomas Moy to build a sewage works. He stuck out for a grossly inflated price and upon the construction being completed he attended the opening on 31st July 1884.¹⁷

At the 1884 election, two Liberals namely James Paxman and James Wicks stood against him. James Paxman headed the poll and was elected for the first time. Thomas Moy came second and was re-elected but James Wicks was defeated following 12 years on the council.¹⁸

In 1886 Thomas Moy, now in his mid-fifties, was Deputy Mayor but by 1890 ceased being a councillor, although continued as a Borough Magistrate and Commissioner. For many years

he was a Commissioner for Paving, Lighting, Cleansing and Improving the Town. He was also a Commissioner for improving the navigation to Colchester, under the Colchester Navigation and Improvement Acts 1811, 1845 and 1847 and was a member of the Navigation Committee. As a Navigation Commissioner he could ensure the continued use of the River Colne by ships to the Hythe. The Commissioners raised money via dues, which was spent upon dredging to keep the port open. Although Thomas Moy later used the railway network extensively, his ability to bring coal by sea to the Hythe was crucial to his early success.¹⁹

He was appointed a Magistrate in 1875 and held this position for 35 years.²⁰ He hunted for 54 years and was an 'excellent' chairman of the Essex and Suffolk Hunt for over 30 years and also hunted with the East Essex Hounds. In 1889 he was appointed as chairman of the newly-formed Colchester Theatre Company Ltd.²¹ Among his gifts to Colchester was the statue of Archbishop Samuel Harsnett at Colchester Town Hall.²² He was chairman of Colchester Permanent Benefit Building Society and a director of Colchester Corn Exchange & Cups Hotel Co Ltd and of Colchester Brewing Co Ltd, brewers and wine & spirit merchants of Eagle Brewery, East Hill. He was a Freemason and a member of the Constitutional Club, London and of St Runwald's Club, Colchester.²³

Coal Merchant and Colliery Agent

When Thomas Moy joined John Mann, they traded as Mann and Moy, coal, coke and lime merchants, for a short time around 1853. John Mann was born 24th November 1810, the son of John and Jane Mann. John Mann, senior, who lived at Barrack House was a corn merchant and maltster at Hythe

Street, Colchester and died in 1855. John Mann junior was a ship owner, lime burner, coal, coke and general merchant at Hythe Quay. During the mid-nineteenth century there were nearly 30 coal merchants with yards at the Hythe, where two lime-kilns were also situated.²⁴ These kilns were located where coal was available, but equally the finished lime could easily be transported away from the Hythe by boat, as well as by rail and road. Following disposal of his extensive coal, coke and lime merchants business, John Mann continued as a ship owner until c.1865 whilst residing at Orwell Terrace, Dovercourt. By 1871 he had moved to Woolwich, where he was secretary to a steam boat company.²⁵

When John Mann decided to retire in 1854, Thomas Moy, then a young man of 23, became sole proprietor of the coal, coke and lime merchants business. From 1855 he regularly attended the Coal Exchange in London and opened a London office, which was located at 60 Gracechurch Street and later at Dashwood House. Moy's coal business was extensive and he traded with the Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Yorkshire and Tyneside coalfields, which supplied coal throughout much of East Anglia. The collieries he traded with included Bestwood, Blidworth, Bolsover, Butterley, Clipstone, Gedley, Hucknall, Kirkby, Newstead, Sharlston, Sheepbridge, Sherwood, Shirebrook, Stanton, Toton, Wallsend and Worksop. He was a director of The New Sharlston Collieries Co Ltd of Crofton, near Wakefield, West Yorkshire.²⁶

Transportation

Moy advertised special low quotations for the delivery of all descriptions of coal and coke in truck loads to any Railway Station in the Eastern Counties and organised the procurement and delivery of coal to households in Essex, which gradually expanded to Suffolk, Norfolk and

later parts of Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and London.

Coal was delivered by horse and two and four wheeled carts during the Victorian and Edwardian eras (Fig. 2). The four wheeled basic open wagons could have extra planks, known as raves, added to the top to greatly increase carrying capacity for coke. Moy wagons had the benefit of this optional extra comprising of two extra planks around the top. On four wheeled horse drawn coal carts, the sacks were stacked towards the rear, placing most of the weight over the rear axle to ease steering – the maximum load was two tons (40 x 1cwt sacks). Following the First World War the use of horses gradually declined and lorries became more common (Fig. 3).

The weight on lorries was as far forward as possible to improve steering. Sacks of coal were usually loaded in one tier and did not require roping as they were heavier and in small sacks. Coke in larger sacks was often loaded in two tiers when a rope around the lower tier was necessary. During the Moy era both coal and coke was sold by the hundredweight. The loads increased over the years and by the 1960s the majority of lorries carried 5 tons, which equated to 100 x 1cwt sacks of coal. Many deliveries were made to order such as 10 tons to the Mansion House at Hedingham Castle, which required two lorries. Other deliveries were ‘hawked’ whereby the customer informed the coalman of their requirements upon calling at the customer’s home.²⁷

Incorporation, directors and subsidiary companies

One of Moy’s principal employees was Charles Cobb (1835–1926) who was a native of Copford and became a banker’s clerk, before joining Moy as a clerk, later becoming manager and then a director. When Thomas Moy Ltd was incorporated in 1891 the first directors were: Thomas Moy



2. Moy’s coal wharf at Great Yeldham in 1903. (Author’s collection)

(chairman), Charles Cobb and Moy’s sons Charles and Ernest. In addition to the four directors, the first subscribers were: A. Jarrair of Peterborough, John Lawrence Burleigh of Manor Park and George Elliott Thompson of Colchester, who became company secretary. The capital was £100,000 in £50 shares, qualification £500 and remuneration £500 per annum, divisible. The objects were:

to acquire the undertaking carried on at Colchester and elsewhere by Thomas Moy of the one part and the Company of the other part and to carry on generally the several businesses of merchants, manufacturers and dealers in coal, coke and minerals of every description, quarry owners, farmers, millers, gas manufacturers, producers of electricity for any purpose²⁸

In 1929 Charles Moy (chairman) retired after negotiating a deal with Rickett, Cockerell and Company Ltd a London coal company, which acquired the ordinary, share capital and a controlling interest, but the Moy name and the family involvement continued.

There were subsidiary companies; Moy’s Wagon Co Ltd of Peterborough (see below) and

Thomas Moy (Transport) Ltd, which operated from Barnham, Thetford, and were cartage contractors for LNER. Over the years a few old established businesses joined the Moy organisation and these associated companies included:

J. & H. Girling, Norwich.
Bessey & Palmer Ltd,
Great Yarmouth.
J.O. Vinter and Son Ltd,
Cambridge.
Leicester Lime Company
Ltd, purchased in 1941,
operated at Wells-next-the-
Sea.
Allen and Boggis Ltd,
Sudbury, delivered chalk to
farms in Essex and Suffolk.
Newport Lime Co Ltd,
Newport.²⁹

In September 1909 R.A. Allen & Sons coal depots at Halstead and White Colne were taken over by Thomas Bradridge & Co, of Great Bardfield. In August 1927 Moy acquired from Hasler & Company Ltd of Dunmow, the coal business and premises previously carried on by Thomas Bradridge & Co at Halstead, White Colne, Hedingham and Yeldham. During the late 1950s Hasler & Company Ltd sold its subsidiary of Walford, Hasler & Company Ltd to Moy. From 1925 until absorption, Walford, Hasler & Company Ltd owned 52 railway



3. This photograph was taken, c.1930, to mark the changeover from horse drawn delivery carts to motor lorries, which are lined up at the Kings Road, Halstead coal wharf. The men are left to right: Ernest Pettit (manager), Tom Fletcher, Maurice Kemp, Percy Warren, Billy Martin, unknown and Herbert Martin. The man standing on the cart is thought to be B. Barrett.
(Photograph reproduced by courtesy of M. Root, FGRA)

coal wagons, which were a common sight travelling between collieries and coal yards at Dunmow, Felsted, Rayne, Braintree and Maldon.³⁰

Charles Willett (1871–1945) was a coal merchant in Sible Hedingham, whose business was continued by his brother William Willett (1878–1981) who sold it to Moy in July 1947.³¹

Ship Owner

The east coast coal trade started in the sixteenth century and dominated the seaways for well over three hundred years. The coasting trade brought coal directly from northern England in ships mainly owned by 'northerners' and this coastal trade continued until the mid-twentieth century.³²

John Mann was a ship owner whose sea going colliers carried coal down the east coast to the Hythe. Moy succeeded him as a ship owner and his colliers transported coal from Tyneside, Durham and Yorkshire to many ports between Kings Lynn and London including the Hythe.

Although Moy specialised in railway delivery, much coal for Colchester came by sea from Tyneside.³³ During the nineteenth century much of the wealth of Colchester was earned by trade at the Hythe. The River Colne was a thriving water-way, including schooners from the northern coalports and sailing barges.

Three quarters of the sailing coaster fleets were employed on coal and ten thousand seamen brought two and a half million tons from the north to London alone and eight thousand colliers arrived in London annually. During ten days in January 1854 (being Moy's first year of trading on his own account) a thousand colliers put out from the north-east coast ports and 153 of them on one day carrying 8,600 tons of coal.³⁴

One trading vessel owned by Moy was the *Rebecca*. She was a broomsail barge completed in 1818 and built in Stuttle's shipyard at the Hythe. William Stuttle (1740–1808) and his youngest son Westeby Stuttle operated the yard from 1778 to

1826 and it was Westeby who built the *Rebecca*.³⁵ She was rebuilt as a 140 tonner, in 1868 and was owned by Moy until she was dismantled following the Colchester earthquake of 1884, when Hythe Quay rocked and the man at the masthead sending down her gear shouted to his mates on deck to stop shaking him!³⁶ Among other vessels owned by Moy were *Stour*, *Caesar*, *Lily* and *Mary*, which regularly discharged coal at Moy's Coal Wharf at the Hythe during the mid-nineteenth century.³⁷

Thomas Moy had the vision to see that the coal trade would eventually leave the River Colne and use the railways. The expansion of the rail network from the mid-1860s and improved ports at Ipswich and Maldon, began to affect the Hythe's trade. In the 14 years between 1865 and 1879 the coal landings there fell from 44,000 tons to 17,000 tons a year.³⁸ The use of sea going colliers gradually decreased and Moy was last recorded as a ship owner in 1902,³⁹ although the Hythe continued to be used as a port.

Coal wharves

Coal depots or coal yards were traditionally called 'wharves' and Moy had over 125 wharves at various times (Fig. 4). These wharves were often the busiest places in many towns and villages. He opened wharves along the newly completed Eastern Counties Railway (later the Great Eastern Railway) and at every station along the Felixstowe Railway. He also had wharves at some stations along the London, Tilbury and Southend Railway, the Midland & Great Northern Railway and the London & North Western Railway. Following the 1923 railway grouping Moy wharves continued at many London and North Eastern Railway and London Midland and Scottish Railway stations.

Apart from Hythe Quay, his earliest wharves during the 1850s were at the stations at Chappel, Kelvedon, Marks Tey and

Mistley.⁴⁰ When the Colne Valley & Halstead Railway was proposed in 1855, Moy was one of the original subscribers. The amount of his subscription was £20 0s 0d and the amount paid up was £3 0s 0d.⁴¹ Upon completion of the railway in 1863 Moy had a wharf at every station.⁴² As the business expanded, later depots from the 1860s to the 1960s, which were in existence at various times, included locations not only in Essex but London and Middlesex (Figs 5 & 6). In addition Moy had a similar number of depots in Suffolk and Norfolk.

Railway Sidings

Coal class traffic (i.e. coal, coke and patent fuels) could be dealt with at most Goods Depots and in many instances Coal Sidings were provided adjacent to Passenger Stations. Thomas Moy had railway sidings at the following locations:

Attleborough
Braintree and Bocking
Brentwood and Warley
Claydon
Colchester (Hythe)
Halstead
Harleston
Ipswich
Sudbury⁴³

The facilities at sidings varied for example at the Halstead siding, coal was only handled once, when it was transferred from railway wagons into sacks, whereas at Braintree it was handled twice, as coal was loaded into hoppers and then sacks were filled from the hoppers. At many towns and villages, Moy did not have a monopoly as other coal merchants also had sidings, wharves or depots at railway stations.

Colchester

At some locations Moy had more than one depot, such as Colchester, where apart from

4. Locations of Thomas Moy's coal wharves in Essex. (A. Corder-Birch & C. D'Alton)



5. London and Middlesex Depots		
Black Horse Road	Leyton	South Tottenham
Bow	Manor Park	Stoke Newington
Bush Hill Park	Old Ford	West India Docks
Cheshunt	Ponders End	West Kensington
Goodmayes	Stratford (Angel Lane)	Wood Green
Highbury Vale		

Hythe Quay there were depots at the three railway stations at St. Botolphs, Hythe and North Stations. The business also operated from East Hill and St. Botolph's Street. The Head Office was at the Hythe until 1863 when it moved to Head Street and then moved again in

the early 1890s to 4 High Street. Inevitably, Moy was on good terms with the railways and gave them significant trade. In 1887, at the annual dinner of Colchester railway staff, local trade was represented by Moy and John Kavanagh⁴⁴ (owner of a boot and shoe factory in Stanwell Street).

6. Essex Depots	
Ardleigh	Ingatestone
Billericay	Kelvedon
Birdbrook	Kirby Cross
Blake Hall	Little Ilford
Botolph's Bridge	Maldon
Braintree and Bocking	Marks Tey
Brentwood and Warley	Mistley
Brightlingsea	North Weald
Bures Hamlet	Parkeston
Burnham	Rochford
Chelmsford	Romford
Clacton-on-Sea	Shenfield
Colchester	Southend
Colne (White and Earls)	St Botolphs, (Colchester)
Epping	Stanford-le-Hope
Frinton-on-Sea	Stansted
Great Bentley	Tiptree
Halstead	Upminster
Harlow	Walton-on-the-Naze
Hatfield Peverel	Weeley
Hedingham (Castle and Sible)	West Mersea
Hythe (Colchester)	Witham
Ilford	Yeldham

Other Essex wharves

In January 1862 the business of Henry Moore, corn and coal merchant of Halstead was purchased and in May 1862 Moy advertised his coal wharf and that C.S. Gray & Sons of The Brewery, Halstead, held his agency for coal and coke orders and payment of accounts. When the agency ceased Moy had its own office at 74 Head Street for not only coal and coke but also for the business of corn, flour, hay and seed. This office later moved to 20 High Street and Moy also operated a siding and depot off Kings Road and a depot in Bridge Street. By the early 1900s, Walter Pattison was manager of Moy's District Office at the Colne Valley Railway Coal Depot in Halstead. Interestingly, Kings Road was formerly called 'Coal Road' because of the number of coal wharves between the road and adjacent railway.

At Great Yeldham, there was a depot at the Railway Station and another at The Wharf in the High Street. When the Hedingham depot closed about 1958 the coal business was transferred to Moy's Halstead depot. At the small village of Birdbrook, apart from Moy there was another coal merchant operating out of the station, appropriately named Charles Cole, who came from Ridgewell. There were wharves at White Colne and Earls Colne Stations together with a depot and office at High Street, Earls Colne.⁴⁵

Large vertical 'MOY' signs were erected at each wharf. In 1897 Thomas Moy Ltd erected a building at its Brightlingsea depot without planning permission and was reprimanded by the Parish Council.⁴⁶

The loss of freight, predominantly coal was a principal reason for the closure of some railways. Under Dr Beeching, coal supplies to private sidings serving smaller coal merchants were discontinued, being replaced by specially built, House Coal Concentration Depots, which were built between 1965 and 1970. Some

were operated by British Rail and others by large merchants such as Moy and Charrington.

In 1968, Thomas Moy Ltd was taken over by Charrington Fuels, which for a time traded as Charrington Moy until the Moy name was eventually dropped. In 1944 Charringtons had acquired Coote & Warren Ltd, together with R. Collier & Sons of Norwich and a number of smaller concerns making it the largest retail coal distributing company in the country. Coote & Warren Ltd had controlled a number of subsidiary companies, including two from Essex namely John Dixon & Co (Coal Merchants) Ltd of Clacton on Sea & Groves & Co Ltd, coal and builders merchants of Braintree and Dunmow, which previously had a depot at Great Yeldham and later at Bishop's Stortford.⁴⁷

During the second half of the twentieth century, the demand for coal gradually declined. This applied to bunker coal for domestic use and upon the arrival of piped gas to coal for gas works. As numbers using solid fuel fell, it inevitably caused a reduction in Charrington depots, many of which were former Moy depots.

Railway Wagons

Coal traffic for domestic use was usually handled in merchants' wagons or private colliery wagons, whilst coal supplies for locomotives came in railway-owned wagons.

Thomas Moy established his business to build and repair railway wagons at Peterborough in 1891 and was one of over 50 wagon manufacturers in the country. This business was incorporated as Moy's Wagon Co Ltd, which changed ownership in 1926 and again in 1931, but continued under the name of Moy's Wagon Co Ltd until the end of the 1960s. The Railway Wagon Works had a siding onto the GER, later British Railways Eastern Region at Peterborough East.⁴⁸ Quite apart from wagons being built for the Moy coal business, the company also hired

out wagons for other uses. Moy wagons were seen all over Eastern England as far north as Yorkshire. The wagons from the coal pits usually travelled via Peterborough where the Stanground sidings acted as a clearing house for empty wagons returning to the collieries or loaded ones destined for Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk. Some coal traffic was later routed for out-sorting at Whitemoor marshalling yard.⁴⁹ For much of the railway era, in excess of one million railway wagons were in use, which were owned or leased by railway and commercial companies.

Goods wagons often bore the name of the company owning them. This could often be seen on the sides of wagons in large white letters with black shading, usually on a grey background, but later on red oxide. The Moy wagons had their own black livery and were painted with red oxide in later years. Some wagons simply had the name 'MOY' and others 'MOY COLCHESTER' on the side.⁵⁰ A surviving example is located at the Mid-Suffolk Railway Museum (Fig. 7).

Gas Works

By 1878, Thomas Moy was lessee of the Sible Hedingham Gas Works and employed George Ransome and later Henry Beadle as managers. When Moy's lease expired at Lady Day 1892, Isaac Goss, an ironmonger and coal merchant, became lessee and continued to employ Henry Beadle as manager. By 1908 Thomas Moy Ltd was again proprietor of the Gas Works until around 1930 when it came under the control of the British Gas Light Co for a short time until amalgamating with the Halstead Gas Works, which was situated at Rosemary Lane, Halstead. Arthur Last then managed both Gas Works and had an office in Bridge Street, which later moved to 17 High Street, Halstead.⁵¹

Gas Works, major users of coal, were situated along the Colne Valley at Earls Colne, Sible Hedingham and Halstead. In 1884 their requirements added 1,000 tons of coal to railway traffic. During its last full year, Halstead gasworks took 2,332 tons of coal and regular tank wagons of oil by rail.⁵²



7. A 'Moy Colchester' railway wagon located at Brockford Station, Wetheringsett, Suffolk. This wagon is a 5-plank coal wagon no. 9431. The words on the side 'return empty to Toton sidings' means it was sent to Toton marshalling yards to be loaded with coal. Although not authentic for this type of wagon, it was fitted with automatic brakes so it could be run in passenger trains. (Photograph reproduced by courtesy of the Mid-Suffolk Light Railway Museum)

Brick and Tile Works

By 1884 to the early 1900s, Moy operated a brick and tile works at Brick Kiln Hill, Castle Hedingham, which was situated on both sides of the lane between Crouch Green, Castle Hedingham and High Street Green, Sible Hedingham. The earlier proprietors were members of the Downs and Rayner families of Gestingthorpe. They employed John Corder as manager from 1848 and he was succeeded by a son, Robert Corder, who continued as manager throughout the time it was operated by Moy. The brickworks, was located on the Hedingham Castle Estate until sold with Nunnery Farm in 1893, when James Mayhew Balls purchased the freehold from James Henry Alexander Majendie. The brickworks continued to be let to Thomas Moy Ltd and the buildings and kilns were the property of the tenant. One old up draught kiln was replaced in 1896 with a new square down draught kiln, built by George Hardy, a Great Yeldham builder. There were three clay or pug mills and numerous brickmaking and drying sheds.⁵³

The products included red and white bricks, floor and stable bricks, splays, squints, red facings and pammments. Roofing tiles comprised plain, gutter and pan including glazed pan tiles. Land drainage tiles, tops and bottoms and later 2, 2½, 3 and 4 inch drain pipes were made.⁵⁴ The brick mark was 'MOY COLCHESTER' as although made in Castle Hedingham the Moy head office was at Colchester.

The numerous brickworks throughout the Eastern Counties were among the principal purchasers of coal from Moy. The majority of coal and bricks was transported by rail and the motto 'COAL IN – BRICKS OUT' was often used.

Other business interests

In 1859 Moy was recorded as

sole agent for Ind Coope & Co, brewers of Romford and for Burton Breweries.⁵⁵ During the 1860s Moy was agent for Standard Life⁵⁶ but this had ceased by the early 1870s. Moy was a general builder's merchant and factor at several locations including Brentwood, Chelmsford, Clacton, Colchester, Halstead, Haverhill, Hythe, Ipswich, Manor Park, Romford and Southend. As dealers of building materials they specialised in heavier materials including lime, cement, salt, brick, slate, tiles, stone, ironmongery, paints and wall papers, plumbing materials, kitchen and bathroom fittings, fireplaces, solid fuel appliances, fire clay goods and sanitary ware of every description. At the Hythe, the Moy Flare Lime Kilns, were a type of permanent kiln where a bottom layer of coal was built up and the kiln above filled with chalk. The fire was alight for several days and then the entire kiln was emptied of lime, which was supplied for both building and agricultural purposes. Stable manure was sold until the early 1900s but by the 1930s artificial manure was available. By the 1960s, Moy was an authorised fuel agent for Shell-Mex and B.P. Ltd and also provided a heating advisory service. The business interests were varied and continued for well over one hundred years.

Moy was one of the largest employers and industrialists in the Eastern Counties. In Colchester his contribution to the life of the town was of similar importance to his contemporaries such as James Paxman. Moy provided significant employment, held prominent positions in local government and was generous with his time for the benefit of many organisations in the town.

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The Author

Adrian Corder-Birch is chairman of the Editorial Board of *Essex Journal* and president of the Essex Society for Archaeology and History. He is delighted to dedicate this article to Andrew Phillips, a former president and respected author.



1. Adolf Hitler greets British Prime Minister Neville chamberlain at Munich 1938.
(Universal History Archive/UIG / Bridgeman Images, UIG 1578761)

Colchester and the Czech Crisis of 1938

by

Paul Rusiecki

Eighty years ago this September, Essex, along with the rest of the country, was involved in an international crisis the like of which had not been seen since the first few dark days of August 1914 had resulted in the outbreak of the Great War. Sat at his desk on a day in late September, composing his parish magazine for the following month, the Vicar of St Mary-at-the-Walls noted that at that very moment 'the peace of Europe hangs in the balance.'¹ No-one would have dismissed his comment as an exaggeration. The cause of the crisis was Hitler's determination to absorb the German-speaking people of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia into the Third Reich. This paper examines how the people of one Essex town, Colchester, coped with this crisis.

Worldwide tensions had developed considerably during the 1930s thanks to the aggressive actions of the totalitarian states, Germany, Japan, and Italy. Their violations of civilized behaviour were regarded as particularly disturbing because they involved the indiscriminate use of aerial bombardment on defenceless civilians, and in Abyssinia, the use of poison gas by Italy. Such events brought home to Essex people memories of the attacks by Zeppelins and Gotha aircraft during the Great War. In the two decades since then, air power had become even more potent and people feared that a new war would destroy civilization.

These fears of aerial bombardment were intensified in 1935, when Hitler announced that the German air force had already achieved parity with the RAF. Consequently, that same year the Government urged local authorities to begin preparations for Air

Raid Precautions (ARP). During the next three years, Colchester Borough Council groped its way towards establishing a system of Civil Defence. As the Czech crisis gathered momentum in the summer of 1938 the official response focussed exclusively on defence against air attacks. However, at that point the Borough Council had introduced few practical measures to protect its citizens in the event of such attacks. It had in fact spent much time trying to resist Wivenhoe UDC's request that it be incorporated in Colchester's ARP scheme; this was only resolved just before the crisis when the Home Office ordered the council to do so. Like most other places Colchester had no air raid shelters. The urgency of the situation and the dilatoriness of several councils is indicated by a letter from the County Council in June 1937 which stated that 'having regard to the exposed position of the County, and to the backward state of the preparations it would be unwise to delay the preparation of individual [ARP] schemes.'² There were few far-sighted individuals like Andrew Wootton of 176 Butt Road, who built the first air raid shelter in the town in his back garden. A precursor of the Anderson shelter, it took him five months to build using very basic materials. 'Of course the shelter will not stand against a direct hit', he said, 'but I should feel absolutely secure in it under any other circumstances.'³

A civil defence structure was being created but it was not until November 1937 that a Colonel G.L. Crossman was appointed as Air Raid Precautions Officer and Alderman Alec Blaxill as Chief Air Raid Warden. An appeal for air raid wardens had resulted in the enrolment of 597 men and

women, with 253 in the casualty services. This was well below the full complement and another 434 volunteers were still needed. In addition, an ARP HQ had been established in the old Arclight Works in Maidenburgh Street, and on 15th September, the day on which Chamberlain made the first of his three visits to see Hitler, the new fire and ambulance stations on the by-pass were officially opened.⁴

However, time was running out. In March 1938 Hitler's troops had already marched into Austria, 'reuniting' its German-speaking people with Germany. In the months that followed he applied increasing pressure on the Czech government to concede self-determination for the Sudeten Germans. The main question on everyone's lips was – would France honour her treaty obligations and come to the aid of the Czechs if they were attacked, and would Britain support France. Could the Czech crisis escalate into another great European war and possibly a world war?

The Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, despised Hitler but felt that he had little choice but to deal with him. He was determined to avoid at all costs what he and many others believed would prove to be the most devastating war in human history. His personal distaste for Hitler was far less significant to him than his determination to achieve a peaceful resolution of Hitler's territorial claims – in so far as they affected ethnic Germans. This policy, known as appeasement, later came to symbolise abject surrender and betrayal, but at the time it seemed to many to be reasonable and realistic.⁵ Chamberlain had many reasons for pursuing appeasement.

The British people were unfavourably disposed towards going to war to defend Czechoslovakia, and his Cabinet and the French Government felt the same. At the same time, his Service Chiefs warned him that in a war with Germany, Italy and Japan might seize the opportunity to attack the Empire and Britain was simply not capable of sustaining a war against the three totalitarian states simultaneously. Chamberlain was deeply suspicious of communism, and he could not bring himself to seek the aid of Stalin. He was also acutely aware that the United States would remain neutral. The author of the *Essex County Standard's* 'Colchester County Notes', spoke to an American clergyman visiting the town who seemed very keen that Britain take a firm stand with Hitler. The journalist was unimpressed by such bluster. 'It would be more defensible if the United States were willing to raise a little finger to fight', he wrote.⁶ Besides, Chamberlain had already decided that Germany's claim to the Sudetenland was reasonable; it was a conviction from which he never wavered and many in Essex supported that view. 'How can anybody blame the Sudeten Germans for wishing to rejoin their fellow countrymen', wrote Eric Rudsdale, a curator at Colchester Castle who kept a daily journal during these tumultuous years, 'instead of remaining in a humiliating position under the Czechs, who are most unpleasant people at the best.'⁷

During the summer the sense of crisis was amplified. The Sudeten Germans under their leader Conrad Henlein, claiming that they were being persecuted by the Czech majority, began a campaign of civil disobedience. Then at the Nazi Party's annual rally at Nuremberg on 12th September, Hitler made an inflammatory speech about the Czech government and implied that he would use force. Chamberlain, believing that war was imminent, took the decisive

step of meeting Hitler face to face to reach what he regarded as an equitable settlement of the Czech issue. Backed by the French and somewhat more cautiously by his Cabinet, in the first example of 'shuttle-diplomacy' he flew to Munich on 15th September. There, without consulting the Czechs, Chamberlain agreed to the orderly transfer of the Sudetenland to Germany (Fig. 1).

There was widespread relief throughout Britain. The following Sunday was declared to be a National Day of Prayer for Peace. The French were only too happy to go along with Chamberlain's plan and the Czechs were pressurised ruthlessly to accept it. Chamberlain flew back to Germany and met Hitler on 22nd September at Bad Godesberg. Hitler immediately increased his demands by insisting on the immediate transference of the Sudetenland to Germany, and demanded that Polish and Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia must be incorporated in those countries. These demands seemed impossible to meet.

Chamberlain's first flight to Germany aroused the British public to the seriousness of the situation. Even the Bishop of Chelmsford, a consistent critic of European totalitarianism, when speaking at the Moot Hall, was aware of the hopes that surrounded the Prime Minister; 'No-one in this country bears any ill-will towards Germany. Indeed, it is not too much to say that, if one of our statesmen could effect a sincere and lasting friendship with Germany, we should hail him as the greatest benefactor of this generation.'⁸ However, he was also aware of the magnitude of the crisis, and in his monthly letter which reached every Colchester parish, he wrote that 'Europe is like a desperately sick man of whom the doctor says the crisis is at hand – in a few hours he will either have turned the corner or he will be dead. So European peace hangs in the balance and the issue will be

decided in the next few days. It does seem an intolerable absurdity and a monstrous thing', he continued, 'that the happiness, peace and prosperity of the world, or the misery, ruin and despair of humanity should rest upon the will of one man.'⁹

Following Chamberlain's return from his unsuccessful second visit the possibility of war seemed terrifyingly close. On the evening of 27th September, in a rather depressing radio broadcast, he uttered a phrase which was to become infamous, 'how horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks because of a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing.' Chamberlain's description of trenches and gas masks was entirely apt. The last week of September was a time of frantic activity throughout Britain. The government, spurred into a flurry of activity, despatched regional commissioners to their posts in secret, ready to deal with the emergency. The Fleet was mobilised. Warning sirens were rehearsed over the radio and 38 million gas masks distributed to regional centres. A half-prepared emergency scheme for the evacuation of London schoolchildren was hastily completed. An atmosphere of crisis not experienced since 1914 pervaded the whole life of the nation.¹⁰ On the day of Chamberlain's return Eric Rudsdale was at a social occasion where the talk was all about war and air raids. He wrote in his journal that night after returning home through 'the quiet dark streets', that 'how strange if all that we see should shortly be destroyed.'¹¹ Oswald Lewis, Colchester's MP, urged everyone to support Colonel Crossman by considering which part of their house offered the best protection in an air raid. 'Do not rely on others to help you – help yourselves', he urged.¹² Francis Whitmore, the county's Lord Lieutenant, called on everyone to 'play the game' to the full extent.

from Marks and Spencer, Woods, Woolworths, Masons and various clothing factories were enlisted, aided by the use of a hand machine; the women worked long into the night to complete the job, which was done at ARP headquarters in Maidenburgh Street and at the Hythe power station so that the distribution of all the gas masks could be started on the evening of the 30th.¹⁹ Some of the town's street lighting was discontinued as a precaution.²⁰

As the government's evacuation scheme took shape some of the county's towns began to be informed of the part they would be expected to play. Colchester Borough Council was aware of these plans and protested at the Government's attempt to designate the town as a billeting area for evacuees, arguing that as a Garrison town, it would be a target for enemy aircraft. Nevertheless, on the afternoon of 29th September the Council was informed that some 40–50,000 London schoolchildren would arrive at the rate of nine trains a day containing 1,000 children on each until the arrivals were complete.²¹ Most evacuees were to be scattered throughout north Essex but to the Council's chagrin some of them were earmarked to remain in the town.²²

However, after a week's unbearable tension the crisis was suddenly brought to a dramatic climax and peaceful resolution. Chamberlain had never given up his hopes for peace and he appealed to both Hitler and Mussolini to attend a conference to decide the fate of the Sudetenland without resort to war. On 28th September, Hitler, apparently persuaded by Mussolini, together with Daladier, the French leader, and Chamberlain, agreed to meet at Munich. The evacuation of London schoolchildren was immediately postponed, although on the 29th police notices entitled 'In Case of Necessity Remember These 10 Points', which dealt with what to

do in an air raid, were still pinned up outside the Town Hall.²³ They were not needed just yet. On 29th September Mussolini produced an agreement as the basis for a settlement of the Sudeten issue.²⁴ The following day the four leaders signed the Munich Agreement handing over the Sudetenland to Germany. The Czechs were told they could accept the agreement or fight Germany unaided. They chose to accept. War had been avoided. Francis Whitmore, the Lord Lieutenant of Essex sent a telegram to Chamberlain which said simply 'Grateful thanks from the people of Essex.'²⁵ At Layer Road the next day, prior to a match between Colchester United and Cardiff City Reserves, the crowd sang the national anthem and gave three resounding cheers for the Prime Minister.²⁶

Three days later in the Moot Hall, Alderman Alec Blaxill, Mayor of Colchester, congratulated Chamberlain, and praised his achievement in a peroration which many locals would have agreed with:

This has been possible at the eleventh hour by the persistent hope and tireless endeavours of our Prime Minister, who, when the sands were almost run out and when his previous laborious efforts had seemed to end in failure, secured the aid of Signor Mussolini to bring the Munich Conference into being...there can be few who will deny him praise and thanks for his courage in daring to cut across all diplomatic procedures, in daring to face possible personal humiliation and defeat in his endeavours to save Europe from the incalculable horrors of war, and the certain death and mutilation of millions of men, women and children and also for his willingness for the same ends to test his physical endurance to the breaking point²⁷

Defenders of Chamberlain stepped forward. Oswald Lewis, Colchester's MP, speaking at the Cups Hotel, said that 'he doubted very much if there were any man or woman living today in this county and indeed in other parts of the world, who would ever hear the name of Neville Chamberlain mentioned without remembering that day when he saved Europe from war. (Applause.)'²⁸ At a Methodist rally at Culver Street Methodist Church the chairman, Rev E. Barrett, said that, 'He had tried to read every opinion on this crisis and nothing altered his conviction that we had had a miraculous escape from world disaster. Whatever we may think about the events leading up to the crisis, he felt that it was one of the turning points of history...a change had taken place in the world's attitude towards war and for the first time other nations had voluntarily intervened.'²⁹ W.G. Loveless, the Chairman of Wivenhoe UDC, had no time for those who criticised Chamberlain's actions:

I personally think this is all wrong, and it may be that the first part of our duty is to point out to these people that we do not know all the circumstances and that therefore it is hardly fair for us even to attempt to criticise a man who was faced with such a tremendous decision that we should try to counteract the effect of such talk.³⁰

The author of the *Essex County Standard's* 'County Notes' had consistently supported appeasement and unsurprisingly he had little sympathy with Chamberlain's detractors. 'A good deal of nonsense has been talked and written about the enormous sacrifice and the heroism of the Czechs', he wrote. 'The Czech state was the unfortunate creation of the Peace Conference of 1918', he asserted, and territories like the Sudetenland had been 'abnormally acquired.' In his view justice had been done

by their incorporation into the Third Reich.³¹ The *Essex County Standard* itself stated the popular view that 'Czechoslovakia will be able to breathe more freely without this hostile German population and other hostile elements.'³² This argument conveniently ignored the fact that the loss of the Sudetenland had also robbed the Czechs of their mountainous defences and much of their industrial resources.

If Chamberlain was lauded as the architect of peace there were those who felt that his success had been achieved at the expense of the Czechs. The Bishop of Chelmsford, speaking at the same meeting at which Alec Blaxill extolled Chamberlain, stated that 'one felt at the present time as if one had come out of an inky, dark room into a bright light and one had not yet got accustomed to one's surroundings.' However, he went on to express deep disquiet at the turn of events. 'It is to be peace, but, alas, somebody else has to pay for that peace.' He continued, 'If this country had paid itself; if we had sacrificed some of our wealth or possessions to buy the peace for which we thank God, I for one would have been a great deal more happier man than I am [applause]. What you and I are thanking God for, somebody else has had to pay for.' Worst of all he felt that force had triumphed once more. 'At Munich its nakedness was wrapped up in the muslin of polite discussion and debate, but we could see through the muslin and force was the ugly thing.' He then asked questions which others were asking. 'Why were not the Czechs allowed to be at the conference? There was no prisoner at the bar. The prisoner was kept in the dungeon without the opportunity of saying a word for himself, while his fate was settled for him'³³

Others too condemned Munich. The *Essex County Telegraph* regarded the dismantling of Czechoslovakia as unpardonable. 'It was created as a solvent and defensible state' it argued.

Chamberlain's policy was condemned as a surrender to brute force, asserting that 'at the last our pressure [on the Czechs] extorted offers exceeding the reasonable limit for such concessions.' The editorial continued, 'But the German price has gone up higher and higher as the concessions were made, and even the agreement, wrung from the hapless Czechs, of the surrender of the Sudetenland under unfair conditions has not satisfied the ever-growing demands of their enemies.'³⁴ At the debate on ARP preparations at County Hall, one Labour councillor asserted that 'the betrayal of Czechoslovakia will not produce peace: we shall have war in six months time.'³⁵

Of course, it was not war that occurred six months later, but another shocking event in the history of this ill-starred decade. This was Hitler's wanton destruction of the remnant of the Czech state. His action unravelled Chamberlain's policy of appeasement, and discredited all that he had worked for and achieved at Munich. Just 11 months after his triumph at Munich, Chamberlain, somewhat reluctantly, stumbled down the last few dark steps into war. But that is another story and one that Colchester once more had a part to play in.

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The Author

The author was born and raised in the West Riding of Yorkshire but has lived in Colchester since 1978. For 40 years he taught history in Suffolk and then Essex schools. He has contributed many articles to the *Essex Journal*, Essex Society for Archaeology and History, the *Historian*, and written two chapters for volume xi of the Victoria County History. He is the author of *The Impact of Catastrophe: The People of Essex and the First World War* (2009) and *Under Fire: Essex and the Second World War* (2015). His major work at the moment is focussed on Essex during the Inter-war years.

Colchester Recalled: a unique archive

by

Patrick Denney

In the late 1980s something happened in Colchester which resulted in the formation of what has become one of the largest oral history archives in the country still operated and managed by an independent body.¹ The archive was created by the Colchester Recalled Oral History Group who from fairly modest beginnings have created a formidable collection of unique recordings documenting life in the town from the early to middle years of the twentieth century, and beyond.

The idea to form such a group was that of local historian Andrew Phillips (Fig. 1) who in 1986 was running a course on the history of Colchester. As the course was reaching its climax Andrew decided to call upon the expertise of a group of older residents of the town to speak for him on what life was like in the early twentieth century. Their memories of working life and childhood days so enthralled the audience present that by June 1988 it had been decided to continue the initiative on a more permanent basis, and so was born the Colchester Recalled Oral History Group. Local businessman and historian Hervey Benham helped to fund the group in getting started, and professional oral historian, Bob Little, was engaged on a two-year contract to spearhead the initiative by conducting some of the first interviews, and also to train others in the use of recording equipment and interview techniques. Today, some 30 years later, the group has amassed together an archive of more than 3,600 hours of recordings representing the collective memories of over 1,500 individuals.

The recordings themselves, mainly in the form of whole life story discussions, track the experiences of those interviewed from their earliest memories to

the present day, although in some cases the group has also focused its efforts on more specific projects such as the 'Colchester Tailoring Industry', 'National Service' and 'Evacuees in World War Two'. Regarding the life story discussions, however, these mainly relate to how life was lived in Colchester during the period 1900–1950, although a few of the older respondents could go back a little further. In fact, one of the oldest persons interviewed, Helen Haward, was born in 1884 and as a teenager had attended Queen Victoria's funeral at Windsor in 1901. She also described what it was like riding in a hansom cab and could remember people riding penny-farthing bicycles when she was young. At the time of her interview in 1991 she was almost 107 and was still able to read without

the use of spectacles. Most of the respondents making up the archive, however, are of somewhat younger years having been born during the period 1900–1940 and as such lived to experience some of the major events and changes of the early twentieth century.

For example, many could recall the days of horse-drawn carriages and trams, and of a time when our roads had yet to become choc-a-bloc with cars and other motor vehicles. One such informant was Sidney Murrells (b.1892) who had fond memories of seeing the private horse-drawn carriages coming into town:

All the ladies up Lexden Road were well off, it was the richest part of the town, and many had their own

1. Andrew Phillips seen here interviewing Stan Hayward (b.1899) in October 1992. (Author's collection)



carriages. They were painted yellow and black and there would usually be one or two footman standing at the back as they came down the road. If the lady wanted to get off to go into a shop the footman would get down and escort her to the door, open it for her, stand there until she came out, bring her back to the carriage, open and close the door for her, and then get back to his place again.²

Another former resident of the town, Jack Ashton (b.1902), also had much to say about the town's horse trade:

After the First World War my father went to work for a man by the name of 'Siggers' who was the main horse cab proprietor in Colchester. Everything was horse-drawn in those days and my father used to drive all the cabs. In the summer time he would take these big open Brakes down to Clacton or Walton which would hold about 30 people, or else he would be on funerals and drive what they used to call a shillibeer.³ Most of the cabs had a small bar across the back and us boys used to jump on the cabs as they went by and hitch a ride. The cabbies, however, used to keep an eye out for this and would look in the shop windows as they were driving along and if they saw our reflection they would flip their whip back over their head to get us off. You see they used to carry these long whips and sitting high up there at the front they could see our reflection in the shop windows.⁴

Many of those interviewed could remember riding on the town's electric tramcars which operated from 1904 to 1929. They provided the population with a cheap

and reliable form of transport throughout the day even though they were a little shaky and bumpy to ride on as recalled by Molly Schuessele (b.1914):

I used to ride on the trams many times. When we lived in Greenstead Road and I first went to the High School, mother used to give me the tram fare up the hill – of course, if I walked I could spend the penny or tuppence on myself. They were very rattle-bang and made lots of noise. They had hard wooden seats with a slatted back which you could push either way so you could always face forward, whichever way the tram was going. The driver stood on a little platform, half-moon shaped, with a handle, and a cord which operated a bell. The conductor had a band across his chest with a clip thing on it and a bag for the money. He would put your ticket into a machine before pressing a button which would put a hole in it. Where the hole was located would show where you had to get off the tram. They were all open-top and rounded at the front and back, and the stairs went up in a part spiral. You had to hold on tight because they started off with a jerk. On the upper decks they had mackintoshes or tarpaulin covers across the seats with press studs which you could pull over your lap if it rained. The tramlines were in the middle of the road so when the tram stopped and you wanted to get off, you had to make sure that nothing was coming before you crossed the road to get to the kerb.⁵

On the entertainment front most people's idea of a good night out in the early years of the twentieth century would have included a visit to the Hippodrome in the High Street, which had opened in 1905 as a variety theatre and

music hall. Performances were provided twice nightly and the audiences were treated to acts by some of the great stars of the day including Marie Lloyd, Vester Tilley and Charlie Chaplin. The following recollections are typical from the archive beginning with Sidney Murrells (b.1892), who as a young man was a regular visitor to the Hippodrome:

We used to go to the Hippodrome every Saturday night and we always had to queue. Threepence for a seat in the gallery or, if you took a young lady along, you had to pay sixpence to go in the pits. I remember seeing Jack Johnson, the boxer, and Marie Lloyd, the singer, and whenever they used to sing a song we would all join in with the chorus. We had a lovely time; a penny packet of Woodbines and a ha'penny box of matches, we were set for the week.⁶

Another respondent who had fond memories of attending the Hippodrome was Joe Lawrence (b.1903):

My mum and dad would often go to the Hippodrome for an evening out. There were two houses in those days, one about 6pm and another at 8.30pm. Sometimes dad would take me if my mother didn't want to go. I remember seeing Jack Johnson, the boxer, who used to do a bit of sparring on stage and Daisy Dormer who used to be a singer. We used to sit on benches up in the gods and would join in with all the songs.⁷

On the home front the archive is full of recollections of hard times by today's standards. For example, very few families enjoyed the luxury of an inside toilet or bathroom and some families never even had a water supply connected to their home. One such example was that

provided by Edna Mills (b.1918), who recalled that their only source of water was from a stand-pipe at the bottom of the garden:

We lived at 39 Wick Lane (now 4 Wick Road), which was a two up, two down in a row of four. We had no water indoors and there was just a single tap outside which served all four houses and we had to carry the water inside in buckets. I can remember the tap being wrapped up in the winter to stop it freezing. The toilet was out the back and you needed a torch if you went out at night. It had two wooden seats and they were scrubbed every week to keep them clean. We had no soft toilet paper in those days and most people would use newspaper – cut up into squares and threaded on a string and hung up. Sometimes we would use tissue paper that the bread was wrapped in. My mother kept all that for the toilet, but it didn't last long.⁸

As noted above, an inside toilet was a luxury for many families in the early years covered by our interviews. Most people had to make do with an outside privy which had to be emptied on a regular basis. If you lived in Colchester then the council's night soil men would call on a weekly basis to empty them – a job which was always done at night time. Although living on the outskirts of Colchester near Rowhedge, Albert Cork (b.1911), recalled the night soil men calling to empty his privy as late as the 1950s:

Every house in Rowhedge had what was called a 'thunder box' which was just a hut at the bottom of the garden, probably about three feet square and six feet high. It had a small hatch at the back, a seat in it and under the seat was a fairly large bucket. There was a system by which the farmer here, Mr Robinson

of Battleswick Farm, used to get two of his men, Mr Beales and Mr Richardson, to bring a cart round with a big open-topped hopper. They covered the whole village in a week so that each household had their bucket emptied once a week. And what they did was to leave the cart somewhere adjacent to where you lived, then they would come up your garden path and go to the thunder box, open the hatch, get the bucket out, take it back to the hopper, empty it in, bring the bucket back and off they would go to the next place and so on round the whole village. If you encountered that when you were out at night you ran quickly because you could smell it coming. Then of course at the end of the night they took it up the hill, just above Rowhedge, and deposited it on the field.⁹

As far as home-based leisure time was concerned, and long before the universal age of radio and television, families had to make their own entertainment. And for most people their evenings would be spent either playing cards or other board games around the family table. And if you were fortunate, and happened to own a piano, then family get-togethers for a sing-song was the order of the day. Here follows a couple of examples of how some families used to entertain themselves beginning with Doris Lawson (b.1908):

We never had a television or anything like that but dad used to play his piano. And on Sundays, we would go into the front room and sing hymns. We didn't have electricity but had gas-lighting. When I got older, we would always go out dancing – wherever there was a dance. They used to have dances in the Co-op Hall and they would have a band. I also belonged to the Sons of

Temperance and they used to meet in Osborne Street.¹⁰

Also on the subject of home entertainment and family get-togethers around the piano, Les Crick (b.1906) had the following memories (Fig. 2):

Christmas time was always a special occasion when all the family would get together. We would have a party and the home-made wine would be flowing. Someone would perhaps bring an accordion, or a violin, and we would gather round the piano and sing all the old songs. They were really happy days.¹¹

One of the group's special projects was aimed at recording the experiences of some of the thousands of school children who were hurriedly evacuated from the town in September 1940. At the time it was thought that Hitler was preparing to invade England and if the invasion was to take place on the Essex coast then there was a strong possibility that Colchester would be heavily bombed, resulting in large numbers of civilian casualties. And so what was deemed to be an 'Emergency Transfer of the Population', over 10,000 local school children, along with many parents with young children and babies, were sent to the midland towns of Kettering, Stoke-on-Trent, Burton-on-Trent and Wellingborough. The whole event was very 'hush hush' so much so that even those in the waiting reception areas were totally unprepared for their arrival.

Among the thousands of local children who were involved in the exercise was ten year old Derek Blowers who, along with his younger brother Michael, was evacuated to Kettering:

We thought being evacuated was a big adventure to be quite honest, whether our mothers' shed a little tear as we departed I wouldn't know, and the fact that we didn't



2. This fairly rare photograph taken around 1920 shows members of the Crick family enjoying a musical session at their Old Heath Home. Seated on the right is Les Crick playing his clarinet, at the piano is his sister-in-law Lena, and on the left is older brother Frank playing the violin. (Author's collection)

know where we were going made it even more exciting. The train left about four o'clock in the afternoon and the first stop was Cambridge where we were allowed a little time to stretch our legs and use the toilet. We then continued with numerous unscheduled stops through the night eventually arriving at Kettering. This was about midnight and we were given a mug of cocoa and a biscuit. We were then taken to an open air school in Beatrice Road, and bedded down for the night. In the morning we were assembled into small groups, maybe ten or so in each group, and taken round the streets of Kettering by a billeting officer, knocking on various doors and asking the householder if they would take in one or two evacuees. As far I'm aware, nothing had been pre-arranged, we just turned up at someone's door. My brother and I were eventually taken in by a middle aged couple named Mr and Mrs Coles who had no

children of their own – but not before we had succumbed to the pangs of home sickness and had both burst into tears.¹²

Despite the enormous social interest in recollections such as those cited above, which represent only a fraction of the data collected by the group over the years, the practice of oral history does nevertheless have its critics. Regarding the Colchester Recalled Archive, some might still ask – What is the archive's ultimate value? Has it all been worthwhile? How reliable is the information that has been collected? Space doesn't permit a full discussion of the subject here but a few salient points and ideas may be mentioned. The very fact that oral evidence is produced in a retrospective situation where respondents are often recalling to mind events from the distant past, and are therefore detached by time from the subject matter, does go somewhat against the beliefs of many main-stream historians who would argue that contemporaneity should be the prime requirement of any

historical source. They would argue that the practice of oral history seeks to collect evidence which was not produced at the time and which invariably will reflect present day interests. Further that the evidence is also being collected in a changed culture and is therefore not vulnerable to the pressures and biases of the period which produced it, although it would, of course, be shaped by the biases of its own day.¹³

Taking this thought a step further we could consider the following hypothetical situation. Say you had the opportunity to interview a student about their school-day memories, would it be best to interview them in a contemporary situation, either at the time when they were at school or shortly afterwards, when events of the day would still be fresh in their memory, or perhaps wait until they were well advanced in years and then expect them to retrospectively recall these events to mind over a long period of time. On the face of it most people would probably opt for the former situation, but would this guarantee a more accurate account? Not necessarily. Imagine a situation where a student may have cheated in his exams to achieve a pass mark. Is it likely that he would own up to this fact if such a question had been put to him at the time – probably not. But years later, when detached from the situation by the passage of time, he would probably have no qualms about being honest. Of course, in an ideal world you would like to interview the same person in both a contemporary and retrospective situation. And whilst this is only an imaginary situation, it will hopefully serve to emphasise the point that retrospective interviewing does indeed have its merits and need not be viewed as inferior or untrustworthy.

It is clear from the comments discussed above that a person's ability to recall events from the past is a critical component of a successful interview, particularly

in a retrospective situation, and it must be accepted that a person's memory does tend to deteriorate with advancing years. However, studies among the elderly have shown that under normal circumstances, and providing that the person is enjoying normal health, then any problems relating to memory and recall should be no more serious than that of a younger person, particularly with regard to their long term memory.¹⁴ During the course of the many interviews that I have conducted for the group over the years this premise, or opinion, has been tested on numerous occasions with positive results. It has also been my experience that the memory process depends, not only upon individual comprehension, but also upon the informant having an active interest in the subject matter being discussed. And further, that the interview process is very much a two-way experience involving both the interviewer and the interviewee, and that the rapport that is established between both parties is often crucial to the overall success of the interview. By the use of probing questions, or well thought out prompts, the interviewer can usually help the informant recall to mind events from the distant past that they may have thought were long forgotten.

Regardless of what arguments or criticisms may be brought to bear upon the subject, the collecting of oral evidence will surely remain a valuable and, in many ways, a unique historical source providing us with a more personalised and perhaps truer picture of the past which is often lacking in the official record. Trevor Lummis in his book *Listening to History* provides the following summary on the matter, 'Of course, where applicable, one should always seek to corroborate the oral data with that from other documentary sources, but where this is not possible then we must surely accept the spoken word for what it is and allow its value

be established from within its own trustworthiness and authenticity'.¹⁵

On a final note, I think it's fair to say that the Colchester Recalled archive certainly speaks for itself regarding its own 'trustworthiness and authenticity'. It is unique in both its size and coverage of a cross section of interviews from the local community, capturing for posterity not just the changes in social life over the period covered, but also the changes in local accents which otherwise may have been lost forever. And for all of this we certainly owe a debt of gratitude to Andrew Philips not only for instigating the project in the first place, but for ensuring by his sheer drive and energy that the project has stood the test of time and remains today one of the finest oral history projects available for researchers both now and for years to come.

References

1. Although still operated and maintained by the Colchester Recalled Oral History Group, the archive itself has recently been moved to the University of Essex. Recordings can be accessed by visiting the Special Collections Department at the Albert Sloman Library University of Essex (by appointment), and also by visiting the Sound and Video playback room at the Essex Record Office at Chelmsford, where copies of most of the archive may also be listened to.
2. Colchester Recalled Archive (CRA), No 2018 Tape 2, Side 1; P. Denney, *Colchester Voices (CV)* (Stroud, 2000), p.69.
3. A 'Shillibeer' was the name used to describe a black horse-drawn funeral carriage, or hearse, which had large glass windows providing a clear view of the interior'. It was originally named after George Shillibeer (1797-1866), who set up the first public omnibus system in London before later moving into the funeral business.
4. CRA, No 2306 Tape 1, Side 1; CV, p.70.
5. CRA, No 2301 Tape 3, Side2; P. Denney, *Round About Colchester: Exploring Local History with the East Anglian Daily Times* (Barnsley, 2006), p.130.
6. CRA, No 2018 Tape 2, Side 1; CV, p.105.
7. CRA, No 2308 Tape 1, Side 1; CV, p.105.
8. CRA, No 2366 Tape 1, Side 1; P. Denney, *Old Heath Memories* (Colchester, 2016), p.7.
9. Uncatalogued interview with P. Denney in 1993. Refer also to video, *To Fetch a Pail of Water* (1993) produced by the Colchester Oral History Group.
10. Uncatalogued interview with P. Denney 2003. See also P. Denney, *Colchester Memories* (Colchester, 2014), p.86.
11. CRA, No 2092 Tape 1, Side 2.
12. CRA, No 1866; CV, pp. 89-90.
13. T. Lummis, *Listening to History* (London, 1987), p.27; For a fuller discussion on some of the issues involving research methods and evaluation of oral evidence see 'Movement without aim: methodological and theoretical problems in oral history' in R. Perks & A. Tomson (Eds), *The Oral History Reader* (London, 1998), pp.38-52.
14. P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past* (Oxford, 1989), pp.116-7; See also A. Thomson, M. Frisch & P. Hamilton, 'The Memory and History Debates: Some International Perspectives', *Oral History*, 22:2 (1994), pp.33-43.
15. Lummis, p.155.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Sarah-Joy Maddeaux of the Essex Sound & Video Archive at the Essex Record Office for her comments on an early draft of this article.

The Author

Patrick Denney is a Colchester historian and a well-known local and family history tutor. He has taught a range of classes across the region for the Universities of Cambridge, Essex and East Anglia, for various Adult Education Colleges and the WEA. He is the author of numerous books and articles on the History of Colchester and is also a Regional Blue Badge Tourist Guide. He is currently a Community Fellow at the Department of History, University of Essex, Secretary of the Colchester Recalled Oral History Group and Chairman of the Friends of Colchester Museums.

Book Reviews

Jane Pearson & Maria Rayner,
**Prostitution in Victorian Colchester:
Controlling the Uncontrollable**,
pp.xii & 210. ISBN 978-1-90929-197-3.
Essex Publications, 2018, £18-99.

This detailed study of social causes and practical consequences of prostitution in Victorian Colchester is written by a recently retired local and social history lecturer at the University of Essex, and one of her former students and author of a prize-winning dissertation on Colchester's lock hospital. An introductory note records a curious coincidence. In 1956, the two grandmothers of the second author, preparing a wedding feast in the local social club, were surprised to note that all the kitchen windows were barred. Little did they realise that the building had originally been constructed to house the lock hospital where prostitutes had been forcibly detained for treatment of venereal disease.

There is a brief introduction to nineteenth century Colchester which had been in serious economic decline since the end of the Napoleonic wars. For this reason, the decision to build a large barracks here in 1856 was widely welcomed both as a boost to the town's economy and a provider of new social opportunities. By 1861 the barracks, soon to be the fourth largest in the country, had corrected the gender imbalance in the town. This large influx of under-occupied young men who had money to spend and were expected to remain unmarried, had its downsides as far as the town's residents were concerned – namely theft, fighting, drunkenness and the rapid growth of prostitution.

Though much has been written since the nineteenth century on the subject of prostitution, there have been few local studies, and it is barely touched on in Colchester's numerous local histories. The authors were surprised by the considerable amount of information that could be gleaned from press reports, poor law records, census returns and other sources, and have been able to compile a substantial database of over 330 women involved. Some only came to the attention of the authorities occasionally, or not at all, and normally for theft or drunken disorder rather than prostitution which was not in itself illegal. Others appear more often in the records. Various euphemisms (such as 'unfortunate') and other evidence enabled the authors to identify a good number of the prostitutes and to compile quite detailed accounts of the activities of some of them over a number of years. Their services seem to have been discussed more openly than the present day view of Victorian propriety might suggest. For example, though census enumerators often left women's occupations blank, it was not unknown for the word 'prostitute' to be entered.

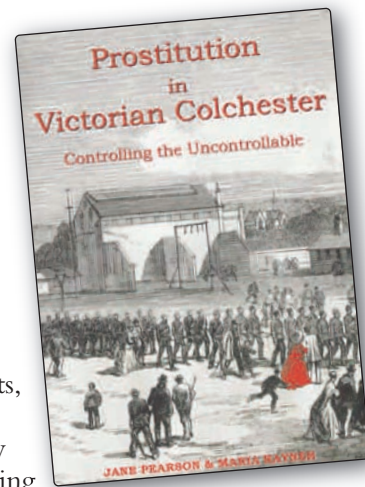
Though prostitution did occur in Colchester before 1856, the arrival of the barracks provided new opportunities for business – such as the opening of

many new beerhouses – but also created new problems. Of the latter, one of most concern to the authorities was the astonishingly high percentage of soldiers unfit for duty due to venereal disease, which led to attempts to close down some of the beerhouses which were known to be pick-up points for prostitutes. Other problems included drunkenness, street fights, damage to property and theft. Some residents were disturbed by the regular spectacle of troops being marched from Hythe railway station to their barracks, accompanied by an enthusiastic mob of women of 'unmistakable character'.

The authors explore, in separate themed chapters, different aspects of these problems, as well as the local and national attempts to resolve them. The route to prostitution was closely linked to poverty, and an absence of support for the destitute other than the shame of the Union workhouse. Even those with jobs had to work a 70 or 80 hour week for less than subsistence wages, while trying to cope – or not – with the attendant problems of child care. The book contains many individual case histories illustrating the severe difficulties experienced by these unfortunate women, some of whom died young though others did survive to marry and have children. It also explores other surprising and unexpected relationships between prostitutes and their clients, some supportive and some additionally exploitative.

Treatment of soldiers, who were regarded at the time as unfortunate victims, rather than transmitters of venereal disease, was the responsibility of the army. There was no provision for treating the women until the Board of Guardians set up a 'foul ward' at the Union workhouse in 1860. Concerns about the high rates of sickness amongst soldiers led to a series of Contagious Diseases Acts in the 1860s, and the provision of War Office funds in 1869 to establish the Colchester lock hospital in which women could be compulsorily imprisoned and treated. Three seconded Metropolitan police officers were responsible for arresting infected women, and for capturing those who succeeded in escaping or failed to attend for repeat vaginal examinations. These controversial powers were branded as 'licensed prostitution' in some quarters, and as a degrading infringement of women's rights in others. They also failed to reduce the incidence of both prostitution and disease. Within a couple of decades, they were abolished and replaced by new legislation in 1885.

Prostitution was not illegal in private premises, and many of its practitioners were arrested for other offences such as drunkenness, riotous or anti-social behaviour, or theft, and it was not until 1885 that



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powers were granted to close down brothels. Up to that time the main attempt to control prostitution was by withholding the annual licences of those beerhouses suspected of being used by, or providing facilities for the sex trade, but this was not infrequently frustrated by the vested interests of tenants, brewers and property owners. Publicans made promises not kept, brewers replaced suspect tenants, and solicitors and members of the bench protected their own vested interests as landlords. The authors also suggest that solicitors rather enjoyed sharpening their legal teeth by challenging the bench, and obfuscating the court proceedings. They provide some intriguing case studies.

It is not easy to do this book justice in a short review. An enormous amount of material has been deftly organised to form a clear and informative narrative covering a wide range of topics related to the social and practical aspects of prostitution, the efforts by the authorities to control their consequences through legal and medical measures, and the difficulties of achieving results in the face of vested interests and the failure to effectively relieve one of

the root causes – desperate levels of poverty. It also says much about the attitudes of men to women, the double standards of morality (which still persist today), and the legislative reforms flawed by social pressures coupled with a limited understanding of a complex problem and its consequences. Needless to say, this book is fully referenced, has an extensive bibliography and is well indexed. The illustrations are atmospheric and well chosen.

As there are few local studies of prostitution, the authors' work should be seen as one of national as well as of local importance. To this reviewer its immense strength comes from the remarkable organisation which went into the gathering, checking, use and collation of a large amount of material, and the success of rendering it into such a lively and readable form. Apart from its contribution to a neglected area of social history, it sets an excellent example to all local historians of how much can be achieved by the thorough and assiduous use of primary sources.

Michael Leach

Andrew Phillips,
Colchester in the Great War,
pp.190. ISBN 978-1-47386-061-2.
Pen & Sword Military, 2017, £12.99.

It is only right and proper that in an issue of the *Essex Journal* dedicated to Andrew Phillips there should be a review of a book by this prolific historian and author. I am very glad to be able to have this opportunity to write one.

Colchester, of which the garrison was the headquarters of the Eastern Region, and its population was affected greatly in the Great War, not least due to it supplying and training many of the men who fought in the war. The remainder of the population left behind worked hard to keep the town going, young boys and women contributing to the local workforce.

This is a fascinating look at a strategic Essex town in the years of the Great War. The author has concentrated on the impact it had on families from all classes, how they supported one another and the soldiers who were billeting with local families whilst in the town. The effect on business too was felt with the advent of conscription with the result of young boys assisting on the farms and in businesses and the women taking on men's jobs too, for example women working at Paxmans making munitions for the war and also the Women's Land Army from March 1917. German prisoners also worked on the farms and by 1917 there were 800 assisting.

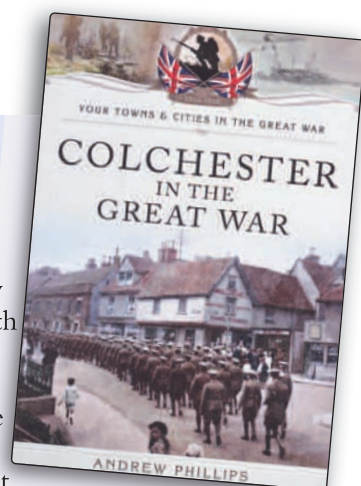
The book is split into chapters in chronological order of the War years. There is good use of photographs and promotional material, some quite rare such as an aerial view of the high street during the July Victory Parade and several photographs of

residents queuing at the local shops during the time of food rationing. The author, as is to be expected, has included some interesting oral history quotes from Colchester residents, many born at the end of the nineteenth century. These depict real life memories of life in Colchester at the time and prove invaluable to the reader.

I was interested to read about a bridge which linked Wivenhoe to Rowhedge constructed and opened in July 1916 by the King. This was to enable men to travel easily across the river Colne to the Rowhedge ironworks which during the war employed so many. However it was disliked by the sailing barges and dismantled after the war. By coincidence I read in the *Essex County Standard* (15/12/2017) about multi-million-pound plans to connect Wivenhoe and Rowhedge with a state-of-the-art bridge to serve both pedestrians and cyclists. However in a subsequent issue of the newspaper (19/01/2018) councillors voted almost unanimously against the plans. So I wonder if another bridge connecting the two ports may not be a reality for yet another century!

I have dipped in and out of Colchester history books over the last two decades mainly due to my job and also my interest as a resident of Colchester and this is the most comprehensive book on Colchester during the First World War I have read to date. There is also a useful index and overall it was an enjoyable read as well as a thoroughly informative one.

Jane Bass



Book Reviews

Adrian Corder-Birch,
Whitlock Brothers: a history of the family, farms, forage works, foundry and factory at Great Yeldham,
pp.192, ISBN: 978-0-95672-193-8
Published by the author, 2017. £14.95.

Available from the author: ardran@corder-birch.co.uk.

Growing up in a family where my father worked in the construction industry and my mother was a clerk in a plant hire contractor's office, I was used to hearing of *Dinkum Diggers* but I had only a vague idea of what they were. Later as a civil engineer I became far more familiar with the world of backhoes, crawler loaders and the like. Driving through Great Yeldham in more recent times I have seen the Hunnable Industrial Estate. What I did not realize however was that the Hunnable Industrial Estate was on the site of the Whitlock factory where world renowned earth moving equipment was made. Adrian Corder-Birch presents a fascinating history of the business and the family behind it. Too often business histories have been full of overpowering anecdotal tales presented in a confusing sequence. However this author has managed to develop a style that presents a story in a generally well defined sequence.

A first chapter tracing the Whitlock family's origins from Fairstead in the eighteenth century down to Thomas Whitlock who became a yeoman farmer at Little Yeldham is followed by chapters devoted to three of Thomas's children, William, Francis and John all born at the start of the nineteenth century and their descendants. We again see their farming interests and members of the three branches begin to play an increasing role in the local communities. Separate chapters cover the only son of Francis Whitlock, Walter, who became one of the largest farmers in north Essex, and Alan Carleton Whitlock who became chairman and managing director of Whitlock Bros Ltd.

The author next moves to describing the commercial activities of the family. He starts by describing the brickmaking, artificial manure, coal and corn merchandising interests of John Whitlock's youngest son, Henry Edward. His brickworks were established close to Potter's Hall, Great Yeldham. To some extent this chapter diverts from the main theme of the book, the agricultural engineering and construction plant business, and it would have been useful if he could have indicated how Henry's business had influenced the later developments.

The agricultural depression in the late nineteenth century led Walter to develop interests away from mainstream farming and his move into becoming a hay and chaff merchant. The author importantly notes how the maintenance of the on-site and moveable plant needed for the chaff business itself presented a business opportunity and goes on to describe the

partnership established in 1899 between Walter's sons, Thomas and Herbert, as agricultural engineers after completing their apprenticeships. The brothers not only developed their own products, but also acted as agents for the sale of products from other agricultural engineers. The range of products produced by the partnership was wide, for example poultry houses, harvest wagons and pre-fabricated timber buildings. In 1941 the business was converted into a limited company with Alan Carleton Whitlock as Chairman and Managing Director. Thomas and Herbert, together with their sister, Sylvia, were the other founder directors. A major order was received for trailers to be used in post-war recovery work in Europe. The war years saw a move away from the woodworking activities and from the 1950s the main products became earth moving equipment, in particular the *Dinkum Digger*, a similar machine to the later *JCB*. We are informed that in 1962 the company was the largest exporter of excavators in Europe, but were eventually surpassed by *JCB*. Of particular interest to the reviewer is the work Whitlocks undertook with British Waterways to produce *Dinkum Dredgers*. During the 1960s motorway construction needed materials to be economically shifted from areas where cuttings were needed to areas where embankments were to be formed and Whitlocks responded to this need with a range of articulated dumpers. Until 1966 the company did not completely lose sight of its origins in agricultural engineering however and the author tells us of the introduction, in association with Crittalls, of a range of galvanised steel trailers, used by for example Lord Rayleigh's Farms at Terling. However from 1966 the company phased out the agricultural side of its business and from 1967 it started to lose its independence, becoming part of a larger group, London and Midland Industrials Limited and then in 1972 was sold to Powell Duffryn who integrated it into their Hymac business. Production at Great Yeldham ceased in 1975 and the site was sold to Anglo Swedish Equipment Limited, a distributor of Volvo construction plant.

An engineering business, which at its peak in the 1960s employed about 600 people, is bound to have an impact on the built environment. The author describes the twentieth century development of the site which was situated between the main (then A604) road and the Colne Valley and Halstead Railway. His account gives detailed descriptions of the buildings and their uses and describes setbacks such as a major fire in 1921. Whilst the business had its own fleet of lorries, the railway was also important to it and the unsuccessful representations against its closure by Whitlocks and others are outlined.



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Later chapters and appendices contain brief details of directors of Whitlock Bros Ltd, employees, patents, customers and suppliers. Whilst this may seem fairly mundane it provides an important source for family history, local history and the inter-relationships between businesses in the area. For example the first of the suppliers listed is Ashley Adkins & Co of Bocking. Ashley Adkins, like the

Gordon Edgar,
Industrial Locomotives and Railways of Eastern England,
pp.128, ISBN 978-1-44566-790-4.
Amberley Publishing, 2017, £19.99.

This is the fourth in a series of regional studies. The counties covered in this volume are Essex (including the Unitaries and areas now in Greater London), Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, Norfolk, Lincolnshire and East Nottinghamshire.

It consists largely of photographs. There are approximately 175 of these, of which 110 are full page. They date from the 1950s to the present decade, the most recent to 2017. The great majority are in colour. The text, apart from the introduction and about half a page at the beginning of each chapter, consists entirely of captions to these photographs. As is usual in books put together in this way, the captions are set in a smaller type than the main text, and contain a considerable amount of duplication. This encourages browsing, rather than reading from beginning to end.

This reviewer has not seen the eBook version of the book, but can imagine that it is physically more comfortable to read than the hard copy, with the facility to enlarge the images and captions on screen.

A large number of the photographs are by the author. Of these, many are works of art, as well as being historic records. The rest are by a number of photographers, not all of whom are named. The majority have not previously been published.

Very few of them do not show a locomotive, usually as the main subject of the picture. Most also show at least some detail of the wider industrial scene. The author apologises for not always being able to include this for lack of available photographs. This is presumably because, in the pre-digital age, when the cost of film, developing and printing was a limiting factor, photographers tended to concentrate on what were, to them, the most interesting and visually impressive shots – close-ups of locomotives.

Industrial railways have almost always been rugged, dirty, outdoor affairs with no great attention paid to aesthetics. Firms tended to hang on to their rolling stock as long as it was operable, and to replace it second-hand when possible. Steam lasted longer in industry than on the main line. The general

current reviewer, was descended from a family of Great Baddow and Ingatestone brickmakers.

The book is well produced and copiously illustrated, photographs having been enhanced by the author's sister, Christine Walker.

Peter Wynn

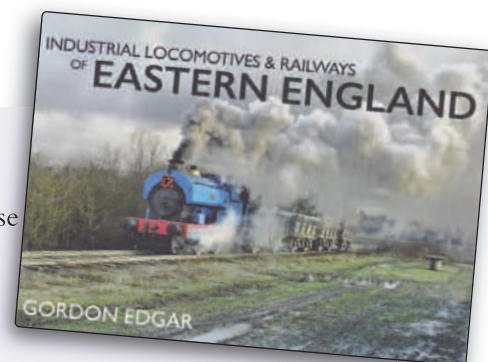
appearance of establishments changed little over the years. To confuse matters, there was often an element of preservation present even before

a set-up ceased being a working industrial railway. This is evident from some of the captions, which describe the photographs as being taken at special events, or open days. For these reasons is often difficult to guess the dates of many of the photographs without reference to the captions. This is compounded by the fact that there is a timeless quality to the way in which the colour photographs are reproduced. This reviewer would presume that most were taken on colour slide, or colour print, film, with the most recent taken on digital cameras. However all the colour photographs have the same look – that of digital colour originals that have been subject to substantial post-processing. The monochrome photographs look as though they are uniformly older, although often they are not.

The period during which the photographs were taken, particularly the time since about 2000, has seen a great change in the nature of photography. Any book of photographs, no matter what the main subject, could potentially contain information of great value to the study of the history of photography, if it included details of the cameras and the films used. Like most similar publications, however, this one contains nothing of this nature.

The book is divided into chapters, each devoted to different groups of industries. Only one is restricted to a single concern, the Barrington cement works, light railway and quarry, in Cambridgeshire. Within the other chapters, there are varying numbers of photographs devoted to different installations, usually in no apparent order. Often the captions only mention the relevant plant or company name, or the immediate location, not the county. This reviewer hopes that he recognised all the Essex place names, but for the other counties, reference to a gazetteer was often necessary. There is no index.

No one chapter is entirely devoted to Essex. The one with the most Essex content is chapter 4, on the cement industry (which includes chalk extraction). This has a number of images of operations in the area that is now Lakeside, and its environs, in Thurrock. Other Essex photographs are of gravel



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extraction in Nazeing in chapter 6, brick works in Great Wakering and Rochford in chapter 7, the coal concentration depot at Southend in chapter 12 and Proctor and Gamble's factory at West Thurrock in chapter 14. There is one photograph of an idiosyncratic, tractor-based shunting locomotive at Hoffmann's sidings in Chelmsford in chapter 11.

**John Law,
Essex Buses,**
pp. 96. ISBN 978-1-44566-178-0.
Amberley Publishing, 2017, £14.99.

The succinctly titled *Essex Buses* is a delightful and attractively produced photo album in paperback format. It delivers exactly what it promises: on 92 pages there are 184 photos of buses. The majority are in colour and only 31 are black and white. Two additional (uncaptioned) images are on the front cover, showing a Colchester Borough Transport double-decker Leyland in the 1980s, and on the back cover, an unidentified depot of S&M/Castlepoint Bus Company coaches. The pictures come mainly from the collection of the author, who started taking photographs of the county's buses in the early 1970s; a few other photos were taken by Richard Huggins. Grouped together by bus companies (an index would have been helpful), images of National Bus Company buses, which operated under numerous subsidiaries until deregulation in 1986, form the backbone of this publication. Essex is also renowned for its plethora of independent bus companies such as Viceroy of Saffron Walden, Heddingham and District, Chamber's of Bures, Went's of Boxted, Cedric's of Wivenhoe, Osborne's of Tollesbury and Ford's of Althorne, to name but a few. There are also companies that concentrate on contract and school transport such as Boon's of Boreham or Wiffen's of Finchingfield. Many of the companies

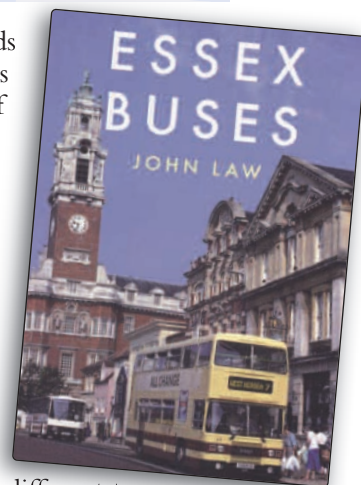
The book is therefore more likely to be of interest to enthusiasts of industrial railway history, and, as the author recognises, to railway modellers, than to students of the history of Essex, or indeed of any of the other counties covered.

Richard Harris

have ceased to exist, changed hands or names, but images of their fleets can be found in this booklet. Brief but highly informative captions enlighten the reader about the company, the route the bus depicted served, the number plate and fleet number, the manufacturer, the type of body work and the number of seats, when the bus was built and the year the photograph was taken.

For this reviewer the charm of this picture book lies in the encyclopaedic collection of all the different types of double-decker, single-decker, front engine, rear platform and mini buses and other more unusual means of passenger transport. My favourite is the Peugeot 505 estate car (p.19) which was licensed as a seven seater bus for Eastern National's Countrycar services in the Braintree District area in 1993. However, a cautionary note, if someone is interested in a history of public bus transport in Essex in the last 50 years he or she has to look to other publications. The two-page introduction preceding the photos only gives a short overview of the topic. Nevertheless, this publication is not only for bus enthusiasts, but also for those who want to go down memory lane reminiscing about the time when they went to school on the bus or used public transport in urban or rural areas of Essex.

Herbert Eiden



**Trevor Disley,
Fires Firemen and other Mishaps:
a Short History of Coggeshall Fire
Brigade,**
pp.ix & 286, ISBN 978-1-52720-629-8.
Published by the author, 2017.

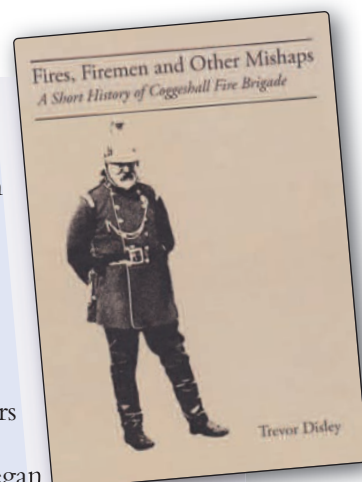
Priced £17.50 inc. postage, from Simply Stone & More,
3 Church Street, Coggeshall, or £14.50 from the author at
13 Tilkey Road, Coggeshall C016 1PG.

Having attended the launch of this book at Coggeshall fire station (02/09/2017) I saw for myself Trevor Disley's great enthusiasm for his project which – he has admitted publicly – had become an obsession! The resulting book is a handsome and well produced hard covered volume comprising 286 pages which is being sold

in support of The Fire Fighters' Charity.

Many of the pages contain photographs from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with detailed captions of fire fighters in action or posed by their equipment. But there are also drawings and engravings of newspaper cuttings, eg a manual pump of c.1735 and earlier posters relating to fires in other places.

The author says his researches began in 2003 at a party to mark the hundredth anniversary of Coggeshall having its own brigade and fire station. A photograph which had been scanned and blown up for the occasion revealed a brass plate on the machine which showed that Gt Coggeshall's machine had been provided by the Essex and Suffolk



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Fire Office as far back as 1764. This surprise led the author to research all the various types of fire engines and equipment which had been based in the town, as well as details of the people who used them. One of the benefits of being allied to the Essex and Suffolk Fire Insurance Company was the extra equipment provided, such as hoses and leather buckets. Incendiary attacks in Essex in the 1820s and 1830s, and the Lighting and Watching Act of 1830 gave legal authority for parishes to provide their own fire protection. Coggeshall Vestry took over its own engines, although the Essex and Suffolk Company were still partly involved.

The book includes full details of most of the known fires in and around Coggeshall, and the ways that the various fires were dealt with in houses, mills and churches in the district. There are very full details of all the statements taken from informants such as parish constables, and all the costs involved.

Fires in and around Coggeshall are not the only ones to be included, as there is a whole chapter on practices in London and Metropolitan Essex in the mid nineteenth century. War time conditions are also mentioned in detail, including the work of

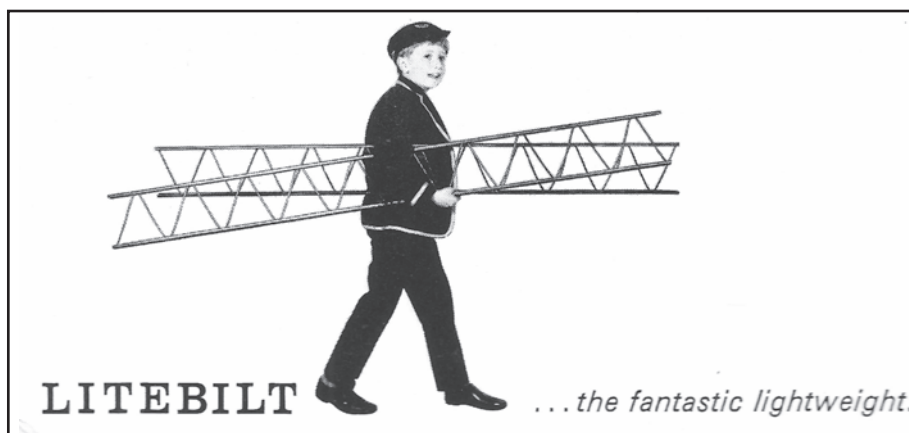
the National Fire Service. Essex had been covered by two regions of the National Fire Service, and after World War Two the Home Secretary (James Chuter Ede) circulated its men and women telling them that their service would become part of the Essex Fire Brigade which was to be created on 1st April 1948; it was one of the largest in the country. There were to be only 28 permanently manned stations working shifts and 37 stations such as Coggeshall which were manned by retained firemen who were called out when needed; they worked from the original station in Market Hill until the present retained fire station was opened in September 1981.

There is a great deal of information in this book, extracted from a wide variety of newspapers and other printed resources concerning specific fires and relevant legislation. While it might not be the sort of volume one would want to read in bed, it will be an excellent resource for anyone wanting to find out how fires were dealt with in times past, and the people who fought the various blazes.

Maureen Scollan

Your Book Reviewers are: Jane Bass, ERO Archive Assistant and Colchester resident; **Herbert Eiden**, medieval historian and assistant editor of the Victoria County History of Essex; **Richard Harris**, former Archive Service Manager at the ERO; **Michael Leach**, a retired GP and former Hon Sec of ESAH; **Maureen Scollan**, former Police Inspector, now a historian and author and **Peter Wynn** a retired Senior Lecturer in civil engineering.

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Chris Thornton

Chris Thornton was born in Billericay on 5th November 1961 – which resulted in many firework parties as he grew up. He was educated at his local comprehensive school (Mayflower) and later studied medieval history at the University of Kent at Canterbury (BA) and the University of Leicester's Centre of English Local History (PhD). After a Junior Research Fellowship at Hertford College, Oxford, he joined the staff of the Victoria County History of Essex in 1992 and moved to Maldon. He is a Vice-President of the Essex Society for Archaeology and History and the Chairman of the Friends of Historic Essex. Asked for an honest appraisal of his traits to add to this mini-biography, his wife and daughter answered that he is an inveterate collector of clutter, is totally unable to discard printed matter, and cherishes his collection of fossils above all else (except his family, of course).

1. What is your favourite historical period?

Ancient history – which gives plenty of scope! Almost any book about Hittites, Greeks, Carthaginians etc. will keep me happy.

2. Tell us what Essex means to you? I do feel 'at home' here.

3. What historical mystery would you most like to know? To be a fly on the wall and hear what was really said when Harold Godwinson was the 'guest' of William of Normandy in 1064.

4. My favourite history book is... A sadly unidentifiable multi-part history of the world/civilisations for young readers – I read it so much it fell to pieces.

5. What is your favourite place in Essex? Maldon, where I live now.

6. How do you relax? I've rediscovered a hobby of my youth in fossil-collecting and have found that walking over glorious scenery and splitting rock to reveal 200myo creatures is superbly stress-relieving.

7. What are you researching at the moment? For the VCH, I'm about to start work on Tudor Harwich. I'm also assisting with a multi-authored study of Dr Thomas Plume (founder of the Plume Library, Maldon). Finally, I'm keen to complete some older research concerning the impact of the Black Death in south-west England.

8. My earliest memory is... Playing football with a friend of my father's in our garden, around the time of the 1966 World Cup. He was very old and pretty immobile. Perfect for practising penalties!

9. What is your favourite song/piece of music and why? Hawklords – my first rock concert attended at the Hammersmith Odeon in October 1978.

10. If you could travel back in time which



event would you change? I believe the Time Lords warn against this sort of thing, to avoid the creation of paradoxes in the Space/Time continuum. But how about the referee spotting Maradona's 'Hand of God' goal in the 1986 World Cup and sending him off instead!

11. Which four people from the past would you invite to dinner? Hannibal of Carthage, Mithridates VI of Pontus, Zenobia of Palmyra and Boudicca of the Iceni. We can have an enjoyable evening plotting against the Romans.

12. What is your favourite food? The three C's – Curry, Cake and Chocolate.

13. The history book I am currently reading is... Bruce Campbell's *The Great Transition. Climate, Disease and Society in the Late-Medieval World* (CUP, 2016).

14. What is your favourite quote from history? 'Heaven cannot brook two suns, nor earth two masters' – Alexander the Great.

15. Favourite historical film? *The Battle of Britain*. I wouldn't let my parents leave the cinema until we had watched it a second time.

16. What is your favourite building in Essex? The Cressing Temple barns.

17. What past event would you like to have seen? The 1966 World Cup Final – but in the stadium.

18. How would you like to be remembered? With a glass in your hand and a smile on your face.

19. Who inspires you to read or write or research history? The fascinating lives of the people I research in 'old documents'.

20. Most memorable historical date? The arrest of Guy Fawkes on 5th November 1605 – and other significant events that have occurred on that day.



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