**Essex Industrial Archaeology Group**

**(Incorporating The Essex Mills Group)**

**NEWSLETTER**

**Number 50 October 2023**

**Welcome to this edition of the**

**Essex Industrial Archaeology Group’s (EIAG) Newsletter**

This is a significant edition of our Newsletter as not only is it the 50th Edition, but it also marks the 10th Anniversary of the inauguration of the EIAG back in November 2013. In this edition we have details of the Annual Meeting for 2023; an article on the RAF Wethersfield Control Tower; a report from the Marconi / Hoffman Exhibition; news from Thaxted Windmill; and, with an eye on Christmas, two new publications of local interest.

We hope that you look forward to receiving your copies of the EIAG Newsletter and have enjoyed reading the wide range of articles and news items focused on Essex’s industrial past. At this milestone edition we would very much welcome your comments as we look forward to the next editions over the years ahead – what have you particularly enjoyed, what would you like to see in the Newsletter and do you have any general comments? Please contact us with your thoughts via our email address - [essexiag@gmail.com](mailto:essexiag@gmail.com).

Contributions for the Newsletter should be sent by the end of the month prior to publication (i.e. by end of March, June, September and December), please.

**EIAG Annual Meeting.**

Saturday 11th November 2023, 2:00 – 4:00 pm, at Chelmsford Museum,

Oaklands Park, Chelmsford.

The business of the Annual Meeting will be followed by an illustrated talk by Peter Wynn on **The Christy family of Broomfield:** **the rise and fall of their engineering businesses**

Free to members, £2 for non-members.

**EIAG Annual Meeting**

As mentioned above EIAG is now 10 years old and most current Committee members have served from the beginning. However, at least two will be stepping down from the Committee this year. We therefore urgently need new members so that we can continue to provide you with your quarterly Newsletter, ensure we can continue to hold such events as the biennial Industrial Heritage Fair, and arrange visits to places of interest. An active Committee is essential for the sustainability of the Group well into the future, to bring in new ideas for activities, and to take on roles both to relieve current members of those responsibilities and also to take up new roles which are being identified. Please consider joining the Committee – we meet four times a year in Chelmsford for a couple of hours and communicate between meetings as necessary by email. Do talk to current Committee members at the Annual Meeting if you have an interest in joining the Committee.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| |  | | --- | | **Recent publications – in time for Christmas!**  **PAXMAN of Colchester - The Rise & Fall of a British Industry 1918-2022**  **by ANDREW PHILLIPS**  From the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway to the record-breaking High Speed Train, D-Day landing craft, thousands of Royal Navy vessels, including nuclear Submarines, and hundreds of fast patrol boats for 25 countries, this is a major study of a remarkable Essex company which punched above its weight in a world where only big is beautiful, set within the wider picture of our declining manufacturing sector.  The story of Paxman is the story of manufacturing engineering, its rise and fall over 100 years in one firm, in one town, Colchester. Though its largest employer, Paxman’s achievements were barely understood as this old market town grew into a busy retail centre, keen on its Roman past. This wide-ranging and comprehensive book examines not only the evolving UK economy and society in which Paxman operated, but also some breath-taking technical changes, challenging industrial relations, American might, German excellence and an international background of fierce competition. Paxman was a remarkable firm which increasingly punched above its weight and survived in an engineering world where big was beautiful. And when the UK’s heavy diesel industry died, with scarce a media mention, Paxman was almost the last one standing.  380 A4 pages, over 300 illustrations.  PUBLISHED NOVEMBER 2023. Orders or Enquiries from andrewbphillips@outlook.com  Available in due course in bookshops in Colchester and Chelmsford  **British Railways The First 25 Years Volume 13: East Anglia – Essex and Suffolk**  by *J. Allan and A. Murray*  This volume covers the former Great Eastern Railway lines in the southern half of East Anglia, concentrating on Essex and Suffolk, with short incursions over the border into Norfolk and Cambridgeshire to complete the routes. Until the mid-1950s, with the exception of a handful of L&NER-designed classes such as the ‘B17’ 4-6-0s and the arrival of the ‘Britannia’ Pacifics on the main line in 1951, this was still very much a Great Eastern railway. However, it would be completely transformed over the next decade with dieselisation and electrification, the introduction of DMUs and railbuses and the closure of most of the branch lines. We begin our journey from Romford to Shenfield whose suburban services had been electrified in 1949, branching off to Southend where the trains remained steam operated until the end of 1956. On the way to Colchester, we again leave the main line to explore the branches from Witham to Maldon and Braintree, and from Kelvedon to Tollesbury. From Colchester with its two stations, we take the important branch to Clacton-on-Sea and Walton-on-the-Naze and the lesser branch to Brightlingsea before resuming the main line to the junction at Manningtree. There we follow another significant branch, to Parkeston Quay and Harwich and then regain the main line to Ipswich. After visiting the shed and docks, we look at the curious geographical layout of the railways around the town, going firstly down the branch to Felixstowe and then continuing on the main line to Beccles where we fork right to Lowestoft and Yarmouth pausing to travel down another, lesser branch but one with an intriguing and continuing story, the line from Saxmundham to Leiston and Aldeburgh.  Next, we go west from Ipswich to Cambridge on the secondary main line via Stowmarket, Bury St. Edmunds and Newmarket. Further south is another west to east route, made up of several connected branch lines starting with the Stour Valley line from Marks Tey near Colchester to Haverhill and then on to Cambridge, stopping at Bartlow to go down the branch to Saffron Walden and Audley End. Finally, from Cambridge we take the Mildenhall branch back into Suffolk.  Pre-nationalisation motive power continued into the early 1950s with ex-GER and L&NER designs predominating, although a few intruders appeared in the shape of the NER ‘G5’ 0-4-4Ts and GNR ‘C12’ 4-4-2Ts. However, the ‘E4’ 2-4-0s, the ‘F4’, ‘F5’ and ‘F6’ 2-4-2Ts and the ‘J15’ 0-6-0s were predominant on the secondary and branch lines until the mid-1950s and ‘B12’, ‘D16’ and ‘B1’ 4-6-0s were the main support for the ‘Britannia’s on the main lines. Railbuses and Lightweight DMUs were introduced in a pre-Beeching attempt to reduce costs on the lightly used branch and secondary services. By the mid-1960s, Brush Type ‘2’ and English Electric Type ‘3’ diesel-electrics and later Class ‘47’s would become almost as ubiquitous as the former Great Eastern and L&NER classes.  208 pages. 275x215mm. Printed on gloss art paper, casebound with printed board covers.  ISBN13 : 9781915069320  £27.50  **(From Lightmoor Press)**  **A Step Closer To Saving Thaxted's Last Remaining Windmill**  Thaxted Windmill Trust has received a grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund. With additional grant funding and advice from Historic England, this partnership support enables the Trust to progress the conservation of an important local landmark. Thaxted Windmill Trust Community Interest Company (CIO) has received a grant of £116,902 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund for the development of a project to conserve John Webb’s Mill in Thaxted. Historic England has also contributed £33,326 to the development of the project, largely towards planning for the structural and millwrighting repairs, alongside technical support and guidance.  The Grade II\* listed red brick tower windmill was built in 1804 for Mr John Webb, a local businessman and farmer. In addition to owning both Borough and Park Farms and numerous other properties, Mr Webb was the owner of the town’s brick and tile works. The windmill was constructed from local red brick. The largest and most advanced of the Thaxted mills, it was in operation for 100 years. The stories of the people who worked the mill for more than 100 years will be brought to life as part of the project.  John Webb’s Windmill was added to Historic England’s Heritage at Risk register in 2019. The building is suffering from extensive internal damp caused by eroded brickwork and open joints, which is causing widespread mould on internal walls. The interior of the mill has been propped and the Windmill Trust is carrying out detailed investigations to inform a repair strategy to address these issues.  The Trust aims to use the conservation work to offer work placements in traditional building and millwrighting skills. This will help to promote careers in these time-honoured but endangered crafts, which may be lost in the next generation. The project will also offer students work experience as conservators and will enable volunteers to try their hand at research, interpretation and delivering learning activities. Community consultation will be an important part of the one-year development phase so that the project team can engage with people who live in Thaxted and the surrounding villages and reflect their interests and enthusiasms.  **Text – Historic England, Photo – Mark Richards**  **RAF Wethersfield – Control Tower**  **by Ross Stewart**    RAF Wethersfield has been in the National News quite a lot recently, in 2016 the Government plan was to build 5000 houses, by 2021 that changed to Europe’s largest prison an idea that has not gone away as yet. Today it’s currently being used by the Home Office as an Asylum Center intended to hold 1700 single male immigrants. Unlike RAF Scampton also chosen as an Asylum Center by the Home Office, RAF Wethersfield heritage is rarely spoken about or defended by its District Council. There are many buildings I could write about and for which I could provide a pictorial history, most were on display in the now mothballed Wethersfield Airfield Museum (now RAF Wethersfield Heritage Group).    RAF Wethersfield was created as an A frame concrete runway Aerodrome in 1943, construction began in 1942 and it was intended for use by the 8th USAAF as a satellite station to RAF Ridgewell flying B17 Heavy Bombers, however it was delayed due to shortage of materials and not ready until December 1943. The air war tactics had changed and there was now a requirement for a Light Bomber to attack military stores, factories and V1 Bomb launch sites in North France. On February 1st 1944 the 9th USAAF, 416th Bomb Group arrived with the A20 Havoc known to the RAF as the Boston a light bomber with a pilot and two gunners carrying 4 x 500lb bombs.    Recently the Local Parish Councils group WASC, Wethersfield Airfield Scrutiny Group applied to Historic England for Listing of The Chapel, The Victor Alert Area and The Special Weapons Area only the latter was granted Grade 2 listed status though the first USAF American Chapel in the UK decision is currently under appeal. The Control Tower however was demolished in 2009. The Airfield had become the HQ and Training Centre of the MDP Ministry of Defence Police in 1991 after the base was vacated by the USAF in 1990. In 2004 MDP began a program of demolishing buildings no longer in use.  A group of individuals who saw the historic value of the control tower tried to gain Historic England protection for it but this was unsuccessful and in 2009 it was demolished. The location of the Control Tower is marked in the graphic by a yellow circle.  The WW2 Watch Tower was original built to the 8th USAAF plans as a two floor building, the 416th BG wanted to be able to view the full Airfield from the roof so it was unique in having a 3rd floor added for that purpose.  The photo left of the Tower before demolition clearly shows the WW2 structure remained the foundation of the later Cold War Control Tower.    In 1952 the Americans returned to Airbase with the Cold War USAF 20th Fighter Bomber Wing and jets carrying tactical nuclear weapons. The WW2 Watch Tower was expanded and became the most iconic building on the airbase. It was the central building to the many Open Days and Airshows held between 1953 and 1988.  There are many photos of the tower from this period through to its demolition; the two below show the various colour schemes. The tower also featured in the Lovejoy TV Show “Fly the Flag” 1993.    CHELMSFORD ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY EXHIBITION  Jane recently provided notification that the Chelmsford Science Festival was being held at the Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) between the 18-24th October, 2023. I took the opportunity to visit to see an exhibition produced for the event which aimed to highlight the importance of former Chelmsford based industries.  The exhibition was held in the University Library having been researched by Dr Catherine Pearson, one of the libraries staff, working in close association with the Essex Record Office and members of Chelmsford Civic Society. It drew heavily upon material about these two companies held in the Frederick Roberts Archive of the Industrial History of Essex.  Titled “Hoffmann`s and Marconi`s: The Legacy of Chelmsford`s Technological Industries” the exhibition told the stories of these two companies through twelve panels, the text being supported by numerous photographs. Following a general `Introduction` panel others covered the individuals involved in their development and the general histories of each company. There were theme-based panels such as `Pioneers of Progress`, `The Second world War`, `Factories and Families`, `Opportunities for Health, Social Welfare and Education`, `The Post War Years and Closure`.    In addition, there was a selection of photographs of both factory sites `Then and Now` which served to demonstrated how little had survived redevelopment.  The exhibition was very well researched and presented. With so much effort put into the production it is unfortunate that it could only be displayed at the University for a few days. Hopefully opportunities will arise for it to be displayed again at another venue for a longer period so that more Chelmsford residents might get to see it.    There was an accompanying explanation about the valuable archive created by Frederick Roberts, 1910-1993. Having worked at Marconi`s for many years he came to believe that the age of electricity started in Chelmsford in the early 20th century marked a second industrial revolution. This led him to become a pioneer in documenting and recording it and other local industries as part of the industrial heritage of Britain. In 1993 his wide-ranging, multi-media archive was donated to the ARU and since 2011 it has been maintained at the Essex Record Office(ERO) on behalf of the ARU.  Part of the Robert`s archive comprises oral history recordings of interviews with former employees of local industries. ERO Sound Archive Oral Studies would like to extend this archive. If you would like to contribute your story leave your contact details for the researcher, and state Hoffmann and Marconi Exhibition, at ask@aru.libanswers.com  Footnote: In preparation for a reprint of the `Chelmsford Industrial Trail` booklet I have re-visited various locations in the guide including the former Marconi factory site in New Street Here I noted an addition to the Chelmsford City Blue Plaque Scheme located on the former power-house building (now a Gym and Concierge Building). This acknowledges `Godfrey Charles Issacs, 1866-1925, Industrialist, Managing Director of the Marconi Company 1910-1924`. There are also several new information boards which explain the story of the Marconi company. These are located on surviving original factory buildings, including two on the main Marconi Office block, and one each on the former water tower and adjacent power-house buildings.  **Dave Buckley** | | EIAG Annual Meeting thumbnail  **MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL EIAG MEMBERS** | |