A collection of articles previously published in the Halstead & District Local History Society’s quarterly newsletter

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Halstead - by Adrian Corder-Birch F.Inst.L.Ex, M.I.C.M.

Halstead derives its name from the Old English word 'heald' meaning a sloping hillside and 'stede' a place of shelter. Archaeological evidence indicates that Halstead has been occupied since the early Bronze Age. The sites of Iron Age and Roman settlements, including a villa, were discovered in the vicinity of Greenstead Hall, where Saxon pottery was also found.

The Domesday Book of 1086 records the landowners of Halstead and its three water mills along the River Colne. There was evidence of a market in Halstead before 1251 when a Royal Charter was granted for a weekly market and an annual fair. Further grants were made in 1330 and 1467 for the market which was then held in Chipping Hill. St. Andrew's Church was in existence by 1276 and the town developed around the Church and nearby market.

In about 1413 Holy Trinity Chapel was erected near the junction of the present Chapel Hill with Trinity Street and Mount Hill. This chapel disappeared by the eighteenth century and during 1843- it was replaced by Holy Trinity Church, a Gothic Revival building. In addition Halstead had a number of non-conformist Chapels of which a few survive.

The town had two principal manors namely Abels and Bois Hall. The manor houses together with the Guildhall were all demolished during the twentieth century. The Old Grammar School in the High Street was founded in 1594 and closed in 1906. The Workhouse for Halstead Union was built in 1838 and demolished in 1922.

One of the main sources of employment in the town was weaving, initially of cloth and latterly silk and crepe. The Courtauld silk weaving mill was the major employer in the town until its closure in 1982. Other large employers included Charles Portway & Son Limited and The Tortoise Foundry Co. Limited, which made the well known tortoise stoves. There were two major breweries namely T. F. Adams & Sons and G. E. Cook & Sons. Henry Cocksedge & Son were timber merchants and woodturners who also operated steam saw mills. These and other industries used the Colne Valley and Halstead Railway which operated to Halstead from 1860 until 1965.

This historic market town still continues to expand well beyond its original centre around the steep High Street between the River Colne and St. Andrew's Church.
It was good to see an item in the December newsletter about the Courtauld Gallery’s hopes to set up an outreach programme with former Courtauld towns. Along with collecting photographs and artefacts, oral history seems to form the backbone of the project and would consist of interviews with former Courtauld employees from Halstead and the many other towns around the country where Courtauld & Co. had a presence. It may seem unusual for an esteemed national art gallery to take on such a task but it is very welcome. It’s interesting to ponder on what Samuel Courtauld, one of the three founders of the Courtauld Institute for Art, might think of it.

The popularity of oral history recording has grown over the last forty years. The reasons for this are undoubtedly complex but it is evident that our interest in history is as much about learning from the subjective, experience of ordinary people’s lives as gaining objective, factual knowledge about great people or monumental events.

Readers of this newsletter probably know that Halstead 21st Century Group was set up to campaign against the demolition of the 16 WWII air raid shelters Courtaulds built for their workers, and to try to preserve the woodland and wetland habitats on the site. The Local Planning Authority can, under current district policy, legally destroy up to fifteen of the shelters. We want to ensure that a record of how the shelters were used exists. The value of such a record would be more important if the structures themselves are allowed to disappear.

Essex Record Office (ERO) houses a large sound archive for the county and Colchester Recalled, a voluntary group, has an archive of over 3,300 hours of oral history recordings. According to Martin Astell, Manager for the Sound Archives at ERO, there are relatively few audio files for the Halstead area. Martin is keen to promote oral history projects and, from time to time, he provides bespoke training for county based groups.

In October 2014, two members of Halstead 21st Century Group joined South Woodham Ferrers Local History Group to undertake the oral history training at Chelmsford. Soon afterwards; armed with instructions about copyright and legal issues; equipped with a recorder and headphones; and loaded with trepidation, we began interviewing people who had lived in and around Halstead during WWII. There is a clear gain for providing this service, and we, like other local oral history projects,
are submitting recordings to the ERO’s Sound Archive. We are also providing copies for Halstead Heritage Museum.

It’s been a slow and sometimes difficult process and we’ve only completed seven interviews so far but the range of topics covered has extended far beyond our original remit and thrown up a tangle of historic threads each of which is worthy of further study.

Take Betty for example: she talked about the utopian project set up in the 1930s by the Land Settlement Association which rehoused unemployed workers and their families from deprived northern towns to rural smallholdings. One such settlement was in the Yeldham area.

Living near Ridgewell, Betty also talked about a near miss by a USAAF airplane on the airfield’s runway. She was not the only witness to life threatening events. Terry and Dave had seen the destructive outcome of falling bombs and an air crash. But it seems that being a youngster in WW2 wasn’t all bad and Dave (who indulgently agreed to be my first interviewee) regaled me with tales of doing the ‘tuppeny rush’ by seeing films at the Empire Theatre and the Colne Valley Cinema (later called the Savoy) back to back. Terry had a clear memory for local military activities and made a sketch of the Spigot and Mortar emplacement on Colchester Road and another for the temporary barricades that were to be erected by the Home Guard on the roads leading in and out of Halstead in the event of an enemy invasion.
Three lady nonagenarians, who volunteered their memories all worked for Courtaulds. Muriel remembered knitting beneath the electric light in the air raid shelters but never used the chemical lavatories. She had fond memories of Sydney Butler, the daughter of Courtaulds’ wartime chairman Samuel, and first wife of local MP, R.A. Butler. Muriel recalled the parties the couple held at their home at Stanstead Hall. Molly, another interviewee, talked about the gaiety of Courtaulds’ staff parties and the gowns the ladies wore.
The memories of our third lady, Gwen, went even further back with a story of how news of the crash of the British airship R.101 arrived in Halstead by a local policeman in 1930.

Like so many other local, young women, Gwen joined Courtaulds on leaving school. married a young man in a reserved occupation whose dream of defending his country came true but turned into a nightmare in 1941 when he was reported Missing in Action and ended up as an internee of a Japanese prisoner of war camp where he was forced to help build the Thai - Burma Railway. He was lucky enough to survive the ordeal although it affected him for the rest of his life.

As predicted, recording oral histories hasn’t proved easy. Current training encourages a hands off approach leaving as much to the interviewee as possible. Influencing the direction of conversational travel and eliciting specific and full-bodied information is often elusive and several times the exact piece of information has emerged just after the recorder has been turned off. As for the technicalities of transferring, editing and filing recordings – these are best avoided by technophobes like me. I’m still way behind schedule despite the best efforts of Jim at the museum. Despite all these obstacles, some of our recordings were included in last year’s WWII exhibition at Braintree District Museum.

Oral history taking is not an endeavour to be taken lightly but it’s fulfilling and can reap rich and sometimes unexpected rewards. If the Public Programmes team at the Courtauld Gallery succeed in their bid to fund an outreach programme, we can have no doubt that, through sharing their memories, Halstead residents will be rewarded too.
Memories of a Rt. Hon. Gentleman – By Neville Pye

It was a cold and damp Friday evening in mid-December 1955 as I disembarked at Chelmsford Rail Station around 9.30pm, anticipating hitching the 20 or so miles to Castle Hedingham.

As I descended the stairs, heading for the station exit, I was approached by an acquaintance, a few years my senior, enquiring if I had seen his younger brother on the train. I must apologise for a sad loss of memory, as I cannot recollect with any certainty their name. I keep coming up with Franz and Terry Gladwell, or perhaps Colin Cook and an older brother. If the person concerned is still with us, and remembers the incident, I would be very obliged for a jog of my grey cells. It quickly became obvious that younger brother was not on the train and as we were discussing how I was to continue my journey home, my friend suddenly said "Hey, there’s R.A.B, he'll give you a lift". I turned to see the esteemed gentleman, with bowler and briefcase, disappearing through the Station exit. My friend sensing my shy hesitation, quickly took command of the situation, ran to the exit, to return a few seconds later to inform me that the "Chancellor" was waiting for me in his car. The Rt. Hon. R.A. Butler MP, from the front passenger seat said, "Hop in the back lad." and with grateful thanks, I sheepishly obeyed.

My R.A.F. uniform was an obvious lead into the ensuing conversation. I had only recently completed the obligatory 8 weeks Square Bashing at West Kirby and was in the early stages of a 6 month Direct Entry Fitters course in Aircraft Electrics at RAF Melksham in Wiltshire. My apprenticeship at Halstead's Eastern Electricity Board had resulted in a deferment of National Service until I reached the age of 21 and received my indentures. My esteemed benefactor seemed genuinely interested in my then, very short RAF career. He amusingly informed me that his son (James ?) was also doing his National Service and was on board a troop ship heading for the middle east, which I now assume, maybe incorrectly, was the build-up for the impending Suez crisis, and as a junior officer, was a little peeved that the senior officers were monopolizing the attention of the group of service Nurses also in transit.

As our journey progressed, we continued to discuss the pro's and con's of National Service and my destination for the night. I explained that although I had been born and raised in Halstead, I was now residing at the home of my in-laws at Castle Hedingham. Because the National Service pay was only £1-2s-6d/week (£1.12½ p), my wife Jo and I had decided that we should get married before my call up and that I
should bite the bullet and volunteer for a 3 year period, qualifying for a higher pay rate and an extra £3-10s/week Marriage Allowance. By doing this, it also guaranteed I would be employed in the trade I had been trained for during the past 6 years.

At this point, the Chauffer (Fred Smith) interjected with "You realise who this is Sir? He's Bert Pye's lad".

I was born in 1934 and my father, Alfred Bertie (Bert) Pye was working as a gardener at Stanstead Hall. Unfortunately my parents were divorced in 1941, consequently I have little recollection of my father, but thanks to a second cousin, who, until 4 years ago I was unaware of, I now have over 100 photographs of my family past, father, grandparents, etc. including one of my father at work at Stanstead Hall. And one of my Grandfather, George, also a gardener, working for Dr E Courtauld at 'Perces'. Could the Mr G Bonnett in the photograph be a forebear of Geoffrey Bonnett, a fellow Apprentice at the EEB at the same time as myself?
After a short pause, the great man said “I think a little detour would be in order, don't you Fred?”. "As you wish Sir". Came the reply, and at the High Garrett junction, instead of turning right for Greenstead Green, we carried on left for Gosfield and eventually at around 10.30pm I was deposited very gratefully, outside my in-laws front gate in Nunnery Street, Castle Hedingham, an hour or so earlier than anticipated.

For this very kind gesture in 1955, I will be eternally grateful, my bragging rights were also improved with my Service comrades, as I had already informed them of my dining with the "Chancellor" at the Halstead Football Club Dinners a number of times.

I often wonder if "Dave" or "George" would today go 10 - 12 miles out of their way, late on a damp Friday evening. Changing Times!

My wife Jo and I enjoyed 20+ years in the RAF, I found out from the photographs sent by Cousin Gary that my father also served in the Wartime R.A.F, with a crashed aircraft recovery squadron.

I left (voluntary redundancy 1976) to join CompAir UK Ltd (BroomWade & Holmans) Messrs Broom & Wade were both ex apprentice steam engine fitters from Paxmans of Colchester and when in their 20’s moved to High Wycombe and in 1898 set up the Company that was to become Broom & Wade Ltd. I left the RAF as a Chief Technician and joined CompAir as a Technical Author, Portable Air compressors. We bought a property in High Wycombe, where we still live. We have 3 children, 2 Grandchildren and now a delightful 2 year old Gt. Granddaughter.

I am proud of my Halstead roots, my school days and 5 years with Halstead Football Club, mainly as a member of a very successful Colts team which I had the honour to captain for a while. We even deputised for the first team towards the end of one
season, I guess 1953 - 54 season, travelling to Stowmarket for an evening match, only loosing 1 - 2.

I have very few photo's of my early teenage years, especially school/class photographs. If there is anyone from the Secondary Modern 1945-49 with a school photo, I would be grateful to obtain a copy.

**Halstead Colts – 1955**

![Halstead Colts 1955](image)

**Back Row**  

**Front Row**  
Geoff Barratt, Brian Bragg, Ray Cook, Neville Pye, George Ashby, Colin (Pop) Bareham.

**1953-54**  
League Champions, Cup Runners Up

**1954-55**  
League Champions, Cup Winners

The successful squad of young players also included Keith Dakin, Colin Cook, Albie Barrass, helped by senior player Johnny Webber, recalled to the 1st team at the time of this photo.
Many thanks to Neville for sharing memories of his younger days in Essex, and the picture of the 1955 Halstead Colts squad.
Golden Meadow Camp remembered

The Society recently received an enquiry from an Italian lady regarding the prisoner of war camp that was located between the Star Stile junction and Ashford Lodge on the main road from Halstead to Sudbury. Her father was a prisoner in the camp and she was trying to find out more information about it.

Dave Osborne’s book, “Halstead and Colne Valley At War” published in 1983 contains the following section associated with the camp.

‘Halstead even had its own Prisoner of War camp. It was in Sudbury Road and was part of Ashford Lodge, being situated in the field opposite Constantine Cottages, at the junction of the road to Colne Engaine and Star Stile cricket ground. The original bell mouth kerbed entrance can still be seen. It opened during the summer of 1944 and a former accounts captain, Maurice Wickens, now living in Churchill Avenue recalls that it was originally built for the US Army and had about 50 huts. It was officially designated as HQ 129 Italian Labour Battalion, Ashford Lodge, Halstead.

Known locally as Golden Meadow Camp, it housed about 500 Italians, later some Germans, and was the HQ of several other POW camps in the vicinity. There were about 100 POWs at a camp at The Auberies, Bulmer, and a similar one in the village near the church housing about the same; Borley Green 100; Liston Hall 100; Boxford 100 and Stoke by Nayland 200.

Prisoners were paid 5/- (25p) per week to be spent in the camp shop and 4/- (20p) which could be spent at local shops or picture houses. In late 1944 Italy had already surrendered and the POWs in the main were a very peaceful bunch. They were employed on agricultural work on local farms, and were a common sight in their green battledress of the co-operative personnel, whilst those non-co-operatives (those who hated the British or later on, the Germans) had a chocolate coloured uniform with yellow diamonds sewn on.

Maurice Wickens recalls it was a Mr Russell who was the camp labour officer and responsible for allocating the required number of workers to each farm; also the camp commandant a Lt Col W.G. Petherick, who is still alive in Cornwall, close to 80 years old.

He also remembers the three ton truck which used to collect the beer from Fremlins Brewery in Trinity Street (now private housing) where Percy Brown was foreman, and
also had to travel to Bury St Edmunds for razor blades and cake from the NAAFI depot. He never did know why these items could not be delivered with the normal rations!

There was a Roman Catholic Church in one hut as well as the usual messes and a hospital of sorts, even a Papal Nuncio attended the camp on one occasion to give spiritual comfort to his countryman.

Maurice became friendly with several POWs and until recently received Christmas cards from them. When he left in September 1945 there were mostly Germans in the camp for nearly all the Italians had been repatriated.

However when the dust finally settled in Europe not all the German POWs went home. For some there was nothing to go home to. Many had lost contact with their families and became integrated with local society.

One, Kurt Gottschalk, even came back after going home. He liked the Colne Valley and its people so much while he was here, he vowed to return and settled in Great Yeldham.

He recalls that he was often on farm work and that he took the opportunity to snare rabbits which he used to sell to the British Restaurant for 2/6d (12 ½ p).

There was little money for the POWs so they used to dig a local garden for a packet of cigarettes or a bottle of beer. During a walk one day he came across a consignment of broken chocolate bars in a barn which were destined for pig food. But he smelled business and it was not long before the chocolate was being melted down in the huts and poured into homemade moulds and wrapped in silver paper which was “acquired”, to sell to local children who very seldom saw chocolate, let alone eat it.

The manufacture of slippers also became a highly successful venture, these being made cardboard and rope made from re-cycled sacks, and sales of these at the British Restaurant saw a very remunerative operation under way. However, a nationally known shoe manufacturer got wind of the scheme and waved the “big stick” and that was the end of that!

Like men of all races the Germans liked a drink and as they could not buy any, and being forbidden to enter pubs, they decided to make their own. The still was made
from a variety of pipes and other materials they could scrounge, and there were plenty of vegetables and fruit as ingredients.

When all the POWs had left the camp, the local authority attempted to make the huts uninhabitable to prevent squatters, but the Englishman, being what he was, failed to be deterred, and many who returned from the wars to set up home with a new wife, soon brought back the huts into use as a home. Often a midnight stroll would produce a door or a window from somewhere and it was not long before the camp came back to life again.

Of course the local authority soon spotted more revenue and the squatters were allowed to stay, and it was not until the housing estates in Halstead and district began to spring up that the huts began to empty and only the entrance now shows that anything was ever there.’

Our own membership secretary, Linda Kemp, spent some of her early days living in one of the nissen huts while her family awaited the completion of a new home. Linda appears as a very small girl in a picture of one of the huts on page 80 of Doreen Potts book, “Halstead’s Heritage”.

The current owner of Bentall’s Farm remembers his father dismantling the camp huts one by one as each family left to move into their new homes. He also remembers that he accidentally ploughed up the water main that fed the camp!

Golden Meadow Camp in use as housing following WW2
The memoirs of George Root

Malcolm Root has recently loaned me a copy of his father and mother’s memoirs which he thought might provide some interesting content for the magazine. I am planning to use some of the information to form the basis for a number of articles over the coming months. To start with, I thought it would be useful to introduce George Root in his own words. These in themselves provide a view into the past which I think will resonate with many of you.

‘I was born on 30th August 1922 at my grandmother's home, where my mother and father were living on Chapel Hill in Braintree. My mother, Lily, had worked in the office of Courtaulds, Braintree. My father had worked at Sloe House and was being trained for stable work and as a groom for the horses, but left this occupation to work as a moulder at Portways Foundry. The change of occupation was to let him be free on Saturday afternoons to play football for Halstead Town. He was a member of the team for some years, and had an interest in the Club all his life... After a few months we moved to Halstead and lived at No 1 Trinity Road, next door to Charringtons shop. This was a typical shop of the time, and sold just about anything you could need; groceries, clothing, cottons, sweets and hardware, and there was always a unique atmosphere with many scents all combined with that of paraffin. Next door, at No 3, lived Mrs Cook, a widow, and my delight was to get hold of her saucepans which were in the outhouse and these were all sooty from being used on the open fire, and so I was discovered after a few minutes looking very black. I don’t think I really knew what happened when she died and was most impressed when I was told she was going away and a big black hearse, drawn by two black horses, complete with black plumes, accompanied by men in black coats, took her away.

While we were living in Braintree, we had to come to Halstead to see my Dad's mother. We travelled by bicycle and Dad had made a small seat for me on his crossbar, as the bus that ran was much too expensive to use. After moving to Trinity Road, of course, we had the bicycle journey in the other direction to Braintree, to see my grandmother there and also my Aunt Ada, Aunt May and Uncle Ernie.

My mother's sister, Aunt Maud, and her husband, known to me as Uncle Jack, lived in Trinity Road at No 26 and I spent much time there as they were always ready for a game. I used to like to visit them too, because being a decorator and working for Mr Steed, they were better off than we were and so they spread the butter more thickly on the bread and had nicer things for tea. Later, there was another attraction. One
day when we called, there was a mysterious looking box on a bracket with lots of wires about it and two long wires terminating in two semi-circular things with two black metal things on the end. These were ear-phones. The set was tuned in by what was known as a 'cat's whisker' and when the earphones were placed over the ear, music or voices could be heard giving a talk. This was wonderful. The 'wireless' had arrived. The household of Uncle Jack and Aunt Maud and their two daughters, Vi and Dot, and son Tom, was a very happy one, and everyone was always welcome.

My first school was Trinity School and at that time the vicar of Trinity Church was Reverend Austin and the Headmistress was Miss Frimbley, who ruled very strictly, but I quite enjoyed my stay there. Whilst living at Trinity Road, it was quite a treat to have a halfpenny or a penny to spend on sweets, or a home-made ice cream from the shop of Ernie and Mrs Bragg, on the corner of New Street and Martins Road. If it was Saturday morning, one could buy a hot pad of bread from Mr Lawrence, the baker, who was making deliveries with his horse and cart. His bakery was in Trinity Square, now Butler Road, where the shop stands; it became Sid Smith's grocery shop and later, a pet food shop. At the time, the cost of one of these small pads was a halfpenny, but if he supplied the family with bread etc., it was free. There were seven bakeries at this time, Mr Lawrence's, as described; the Co-op Bakery, which was situated behind the bread, tea and cake shop and grocery shop in Trinity Street, now shoe, clothing and furniture store; Mr Fred Amey's bakery was on Tidings Hill, just above Cooks Brewery; Mr Radford's bakery was next door to the Post Office in the High Street, now in the hands of Mr Hume — this was also a café and teashop; Mr Richardson had a bakery which was behind the bread and cake shop, opposite the Eastern National Garage; then two small cottages — Premier Travel now occupy the shop that was once Richardson. At the top of the High Street, on the corner of Parsonage Street, was Tom's Snack Bar and Mitchell's bread and cake shop, with the bakery behind, now taken over by Legges; Mr Sargent's tobacco shop came in between Tom's Snack Bar and Mitchells Bakery. The seventh bakery was in Hedingham Road on the right hand side, just before the Courtauld house, 'Persuasion' at the bottom of Bois Field Terrace. Bread and cakes were baked on the premises and I think the last one to operate this business was Mr Strohm.

I went to Trinity School for some months and then we moved from 6 Trinity Road to 32 Tidings Hill, which was a much better house and it had a nice long garden. The house on Tidings Hill had four rooms, two up and two down and a large front room, which was only used on Sundays or special times when we had company staying with
us, such as Christmas or holidays. The kitchen and living room combined had a black iron range in the corner, on which the cooking and water heating was done. There was no indoor water supply. The water tap was outside at the rear of the house, and this also supplied water for the wash-house, a long wooden building at the back, which housed the copper, mangle, bicycles, wine bottles, etc. Attached to the far end of the wash-house was the toilet, camouflaged under a mass of Virginia Creeper. Although the house had been terribly neglected outwardly, typical of most rented houses at this time, it had a lot of character and was very cosy. There was no paint on the exterior woodwork and large patches on the plaster, which no one had attempted to match up, they were of different colours and markings. By this, it was apparent that the construction was of lathe and plaster. My bedroom was the smaller one at the back, which had a small sliding window looking down onto the garden, wash-house, long garden and meadow at the bottom. When we moved in, the only lighting was by oil lamp, but later on Mum and Dad had gas laid on for the lighting, as not many people had electricity at this time.

Speaking of electricity, I remember when it first arrived in Halstead, organised by the East Anglian Electricity Company. It came by an underground cable from Braintree to the substation at the end of Kings Road, opposite what was then the Cinema. There was an opening ceremony and lights across the road were switched on!’

However, getting back to the house, the first rough night we had was quite disturbing as, being built of lathe and plaster, with a wooden frame, when a gust of wind hit it, it moved considerably and this could be felt in the bedrooms.

On moving to Tidings Hill, I changed schools and attended the Council Infants School in Parsonage Street, next to the Swimming Baths. The teachers there were very good and I enjoyed my time there. The teachers were Miss Ogden and Miss Keydle and Miss Evans.

At this time Dad worked at Portways Foundry where he started work at 7.30am and finished at 5.30pm, with just an hour for lunch. Saturdays, it was from 7.30am till 12.30pm. He was a Moulder by trade and had to work very hard, travelling to and from work on a bicycle. He kept a dozen or so chickens at the bottom of the garden to keep us supplied with eggs, and when we had a surplus they were sold to relatives or taken to the market which was held every Tuesday, by Stanley Moger in the
market place which was situated where Corning’s Car Park is now, in Parsonage Street (now part of the Evans Court development). We had an allotment across School Fields and he used to grow all sorts of vegetables and raspberries and I used to go with him, especially on Sundays. He would pack up about mid-day and go home to change into his ‘Sunday Best’, to go out and meet his friends — Mr 'Shod' Bailey (printer at Caxton Works); George Lock (plant and seed shop); George Lawrence (taxidermist) and Mr Widdop (bank). They met at the Red Lion to 'put the world rights'. Because of these sessions, Sunday dinner was later and later and the result was that Mum got the lunch ready before he went!

This was the usual pattern for Sundays. In the winter, garden or allotment in the morning, a walk in the afternoon and reading a book after tea, until about 9.30pm, when it was 'L on' time again. Every Sunday it was best suit, bowler hat and walking stick. In the afternoon, unless we had visitors, I was off with my friends to Sunday School at the New Congregational Church. When I was younger, I was taken out for a walk, but when I was older I would go for a walk with friends, Jack Deal, Peter Griffiths and Len Bailey, often over the Golf Links in Hedingham Road, looking for lost golf balls. Saturdays were spent, unless we had visitors or were going to see Aunt May at Braintree, or Annie and Stan at Colchester, by running errands in the morning, either to the shops or to collect off-cuts of wood from Cocksedges Woodworks in what was then known as 'The Cut', but is now Factory Lane. We collected them in a box with four wheels at threepence a box full and received a penny for going. During the summer months we were up early to go to the swimming baths. We were there when it opened at 7 o'clock. The baths were in the charge of Bob Turp, who always kept everything and everyone in strict order. Of course, during the summer holidays, we were there most mornings and quite often, in the evenings, too. Saturday afternoons we were taken, with the supporters of Halstead Town F C, to the football matches, some of the time at Raven's Meadow (fairground), or King's Road pitch, now the playing field. Sometimes we went to the Empire Cinema —twopence cheap seats and fourpence dear seats. The films had 'A or 'B' certificates. If it was an 'A' film, under sixteens had to be accompanied by an adult, so this had to be organised sometimes by waiting outside and asking to go in with any adult who came along.

Almost everyone had a four-wheeler, a box fixed to a plank with four pram wheels, the two front ones were fixed to the middle so that they could be steered by means of a piece of rope. They were used for collecting wood or carrying things about, but mainly for races, which took place in Parsonage Street or at the bottom of Tidings...
Hill. We would start in Mallow Field and race all the way down, over the river bridge and the level crossing. The speed was controlled by a lever on the side of the box, with an old piece of rubber on the bottom which, when pressed against the wheel, acted as a brake. Of course there were few cars about at this time, as everything was horse drawn; milkman, baker and coalman. We often had bad spills but no one was ever badly hurt. At this time tree climbing was a favourite pastime, or fishing in the river or Gosfield Lake, or at Home Farm, Orange Hall or Byham Hall. Dad liked fishing so we often took our tea and cycled to Gosfield Lake for an afternoon and evening’s fishing. At this time, Mrs Lowe lived in Gosfield Hall and only allowed fishing from the road, or the little wood just over the bridge and it was very enjoyable. The Lake then was quiet and beautiful and abounded with wild life. Boats were not allowed in those days, except for one rowing boat, which could be hired on request from Mrs Lowe and was for fishing only — the charge was a contribution to the Life Boat Service.

The four-wheelers, referred to earlier, were also used to collect horse droppings, which were abundant at this time. They were used in the garden or could be taken to Portway's Foundry where twopence or threepence could be paid for a box full. This was used to mix in with the sand used for mouldings, as the hay in it caught alight as the molten metal was poured in and so burned up any air pockets giving a smoother casting.

When we moved to Tidings Hill, we were next door to the Off Licence of Adams the brewers, kept by Mr Corder who, as far as I can remember, never had a customer. His bottled beer in the cellar was real vintage stuff. Mr Corder was getting old and had lost his wife, so lived with his son Alf, who worked at Portway's. Most people in Halstead worked either at Portway's foundry or Courtauld's factory. Alf got married and moved out and Mr 'Bacca' Brown came to live next door with his wife, son and daughter. Mr Brown, a large happy man, worked for Adams the Brewers and so, upon his taking up residence, the Off Licence sprung into life. He kept draught and bottled beer and mineral water and the stream of men and ladies going to his back door with jugs, gradually increased into a thriving business. I became friends with Ron Brown, the son and often, on-going round to see him Saturday or Sunday mornings, would find lots of locals, all sitting in the kitchen supping beer from their jugs, in quite a pub-like atmosphere. The Adams family lived in Trinity House, by the Brewery, in Trinity Street. At the time of writing the building was used as the Halstead office of the Braintree and District Council. The Adams family were all keen supporters and active members of the local Temperance Society, connected with the church and had
their own private church built behind the Brewery. This became known as the 'Bung Cathedral'. Mr Adams ran a club for boys and part of this was a bugle band. They were known as the 'Bung Brigade Boys'. This band played every Sunday morning on a sort of Church Parade, which left the Brewery and marched down Trinity Street, along King's Road and up Parsonage Street, down the High Street and back to the Bung Cathedral for the religious service. A small cannon belonging to the Brigade, was often fired on special days, such as Jubilees and accessions and deaths in the Royal Family and on holidays.

Summers, in the twenties and thirties, were usually hot and dry, broken only by thunderstorms. The weather then was more predictable, the seasons all ran true to form; very cold Winters with snow and ice, mild Springs with lots of showers, hot dry Summers and dry Autumns. Rivers were clean then and free from pollution and, all through summer, the children would paddle in the river with fishing nets, to catch tiddlers, minnows, sticklebacks and `stoners' (gudgeon), which they placed in jam jars, filled with water, to take home and keep in some old disused pail or bath in the garden. Most of this paddling and fishing was done under or near the Parsonage Street bridge, or at Box Mill along by the footbridge over the river. Quite a bit of swimming was done a few yards upstream from the footbridge, where the water was deep enough. Another favourite place for swimming was known as 'The Chat' — to get there we had to go along Balls Chase and over a stile into what was known as the 'Bottoms', now Elm Drive and follow the footpath through the first meadow, over a second stile, into the next meadow, across the railway line at the cattle crossing — a gate each side of the track and across the meadow to the river. This was a very popular spot as no one could afford to go to the swimming baths every day. When crossing the railway everyone had to be very careful, as there were four trains up and four trains down — these were passenger trains, and two up and two down goods trains, sometimes more for special reasons, for example Essex Shows, or extra coal trains etc.

I enjoyed my stay at the Primary Council School and, at the age of seven, was moved to the bigger school, just across the path. I had been at the bigger school for just two years when it was decided to make it a senior school for pupils aged between eleven years to fourteen years of age, so I had to go back to Trinity until I was eleven years old, when I had to go back to the Senior School until I was fourteen. While I was at Trinity I played football for the team and then played a few games for the Senior School but, by then, I was more interested in running, 440 yards, 880 yards and the
mile. A favourite run for training was up the back fields behind Tidings Hill, across the fields to Greenstead Green, down the road and home across the "Tops' or the "Bottoms'. I ran to represent the school at these distances at the Area Sports, which were held on the Crittalls Sports Ground at Braintree.

When we moved to Tidings Hill, we missed being near to Uncle Jack and Aunt Maud, although we visited them often, but we were near to my Grandma Charlotte who lived at No 39 and also my Aunt Edie and Uncle Harry who lived at No 25. I spent a lot of time at my Grandma's. She had lost her first husband (my Father's Dad) when he was only thirty years old and had married my Step-Grandad, Frank Potter, some years later. Her life was a very hard one, having lost her Husband at such an early age and left with young children to bring up. Grandad Potter was an Inspector on the railway, which was a really good job in those days. I remember him going off to work or coming home, dressed very smartly in his grey suit, black bowler and polished black boots, with his watch chain across his waistcoat. He was a very quiet but happy man, always reading or listening to the old radio with a horn loudspeaker, powered by what looked to me like dozens of flat torch batteries and an accumulator. If our Sunday evening walk brought us down the 'backs', we came down their path to get into Tidings Hill and, of course, we had to go into see them. On occasions there would be a church service on the wireless and then everyone was given a hymn book and was expected to join in with the singing of the hymns. My cousin, 'Don' Britton, lived with them and had been brought up by them, as his father was in the Navy and was always being moved about, although later he was permanently based at Portsmouth. Don was three or four years older than I was, but we spent a lot of time together. William Spurgeon also lived with them. He was always known as 'Wider'. He was one of Grandad Frank's daughter's children but he was much older and lived with them until he married and went to live at White Colne. He drove Eastern National buses and retired after many years of working for them, now living in a bungalow on Colneford Hill. Don's mother was my Aunt Edie, who, as I said, lived at Portsmouth, Rudmore Wharf Road. Don returned home to her after the death of my Grandma, who was predeceased by Grandad by only a few months. Grandad Frank used to get travel concessions on the railway, so if there was a special excursion to Yarmouth or somewhere like that, he, Grandma and Don used to go and take me with them, as Mum and Dad could not afford such outings. They usually bought us a toy boat, or something like that, when we arrived at our destination.
Uncle Harry and Aunt Edie used to live at No 25, just a bit further up the road from our house. They had a son, my cousin Morton. Uncle Harry worked at Cook's the Brewers and he drove one of their delivery lorries, an old Dennis with solid tyres and was their best salesman. He was always cheerful and could talk everyone into buying his wares. G E Cook lived at the Brewery House and it was quite an event at about 8am, when all the lorries set off down the hill to start their deliveries, which took them to Haverhill, Sudbury, Colchester, Clacton, Walton, Braintree, Witham and Maldon, Kelvedon and Chelmsford. They all returned at between 5 pm and 5.30pm. The only traffic going up and down the hill were these lorries, apart from Mr George Cook, who owned a car and Mr Hart who lived opposite at No 21. He was a Miller who owned and worked Langley Mill, which was water driven. Mr and Mrs Hart eventually had a house built in Colchester Road, where Mr George Hart, who carried on the business, lives now. The only other traffic on the hill was horse drawn. Mr Palmer, from across School Fields, came with his horse and cart, loaded with milk churns, from which he filled his hand pail, inside of which were his half pint and pint ladles, to measure the milk into the jugs of his customers. Other horse drawn carts were used by the coalman, baker and greengrocer and some builders. A roundsman usually had to look after and feed his particular horse and the horses, usually being used on the same round, knew just where to stop for each customer, without being directed by the delivery man.

Harry and Edie loved any game - cards, dominoes, darts — anything, especially to play for a penny or half penny, to make it more interesting. They had a piano in the front room and, on occasions, or at Christmas, Morton would play and everyone would join in the sing-song. Morton later had a music shop next door to where Cramphorns used to be, the last shop on the left hand side of the High Street and he had a thriving business, selling instruments, records and lots of sheet music. Eventually the business finished up and he was called up for service in the Army Pay Corps on the outbreak of war. He married a girl in the Women's Services and was later divorced but married again whilst stationed in Cyprus, where he spent the rest of his life, just coming home for holidays. When his Mother and Father died he came home for the last time and died himself a year or two later.”

“While we were living at No 32 (Tidings Hill), my Mum and Dad had a sort of routine for the week, unless anything else turned up. For Mum the week started with washing day on Monday, when the copper in the wash-house was lit, or rather the fire under it I should say, and all the linen washed and boiled and hung out in the
garden to dry. Flat irons were then placed close to the bars on the fire to heat up, ready for the ironing. This took up most of the day, especially when there was mending to do. The dinner was always at twelve thirty in the week and a bit later on Sundays. On Mondays the dinner would consist of leftovers from Sunday's dinner, bubble and squeak and the remains of the joint. Tuesday, as every other day, was housework in the morning and preparing the dinner, but after dinner there would be a tea-party at Aunt Edie's with Aunt Maud, Auntie Vi and Auntie Beat and Mrs Parr from Greenstead Green — she walked over across the fields. On Wednesday afternoon the tea-party was at Mum's, when Edie, Maud and sometimes Vi, would come. Thursday the party was at Aunt Maud's. Friday was a shopping afternoon. Most evenings were spent in the garden or doing odd jobs through the summer. Winter evenings were spent reading. Mum made two or three visits to the library, then in Colchester Road at the old Quaker's Meeting House, to get Wild West books for Dad and romantic novels for herself.

My Uncle Ernie, Dad's brother, worked on the railway and, as he was a Plate-layer, he worked with three other men — Sam Benham, Jack Sizer and another man I'm not sure of and they spent their time in a gang, travelling up and down the track on a motor to keep the track in good order. He lived with Aunt Edie and my cousins, Sonny, Dennis and Ken, in the Crossing Keeper's Cottage in Boley Road, my Aunt looking after the crossing gates and pulling the signals while Ernie was at work. It was a beautiful spot and a delight to visit. Mum, Dad and myself often went to visit, usually on a Saturday or Sunday and sometimes I would stay the weekend, helping with the gates or pulling the signals. I thoroughly enjoyed that and walking along the track, almost to the junction with the Stow Valley Line at Chappel, walking along the sleepers and climbing the signal post to check the oil lamps. All the water used in the cottage had to be fetched in a pail from a spring about a mile along the track, in the direction of Chapel. The spring was in a copse on the right hand side of the track, two pailfuls were usually brought at a time and were quite heavy by the time the carriers reached the crossing. The track passed quite close to the cottage, about two yards from the door and when a train passed, everything in the house vibrated and jumped about, all the crockery on the table and in the cupboards and any ornaments standing about. Saturday evening or Sunday, Dad and Uncle Ern would walk along the track and then down the hill for a pint at the Anchor pub, or as it is now call, the Riverside or 'Platypus Creek'. We would come home quite late by bus, which was an open-topped double-decker. We would be waiting at the Fox and Pheasant Farm at the bottom of Boley Road and in the winter, looking for the lights of the bus to appear at the top of the hill. Sometimes we would
cycle so far for a ride and stay to tea. I really enjoyed my visits for the company of my Aunt, Uncle and cousins and especially for the railway connections.

Talking of railways brings us to Uncle Stan, a fireman then and later, a driver on the railway and based at Colchester. Uncle Stan and Aunt Anne lived with my cousin Len at Clairmont Road, Lexden, in which was then the last house on the right. The road wasn't made up then and was surrounded by meadows. There were no houses or the church, now standing on the right hand side of the road. If going into Colchester, we had to catch a bus, the bus stop being at the junction with Straight Road, under a large oak tree, still growing there. We often visited them for the weekend or they would come to us. Sometimes we cycled down and would stop at the Shoulder of Mutton for refreshment. Our summer holiday was usually spent with them, as we would cycle there and, from there, cycle to Mersea or Brightlingsea or, as a special treat, go to Clacton or Walton by train. The weather always seemed settled and we never took a mac with us, just bathing things and food. Later, Stan and Anne moved to Margaret Road, so that Stan was nearer to North Station for his work. After the move to Margaret Road, Len and I spent hours on the track that goes along to North Station and the signal box, staff coach, locos, coal loader, now, of course, all removed as is the turntable. Down the track from the station past the loco shed Norwhand, were parked on a siding was a whole collection of locomotives, not in use at that moment and some on standby. Sometimes on Sunday mornings, when staying at Colchester, Uncle Stan would take my Dad, cousin Len and myself up to the locos to show us round and let us get into the cabs. if a locomotive had been left there and still had some steam pressure, Stan would show us how to drive it and move it a short distance on the siding. We would also see the men lighting up the fires to raise steam. We all thoroughly enjoyed these visits, all of us being interested in railways.

Sometimes we would go up to the track by the signal box (now removed) to see special trains passing like the 'Day Continental', the 'Continental' and the 'Eastern Belle', the 'Broadsman', the 'East Anglian' the 'Norfolkman' or the 'Scandinavian'.

There was always something to see - passenger and goods trains passed frequently and there was always a shunter or two about. Passenger locomotives, especially main line ones were always clean, as their crews took great pride in their job, as most do until this day of electric and diesel locomotives and diminishing services.’
Edward Hornor was born in 1811 at York, the son of Benjamin and Alice Hornor, who were strict Quakers. After spending his childhood and school days in the York area, Edward followed his father into the dentistry profession. However during the latter part of the 1830s Edward left York and moved to Iver in Buckinghamshire, and in 1838 with other gentleman established a private, licensed institution or asylum for “the reception of invalids affected with insanity” situated at Denham Park.

Edward married Anne Moline in 1842, and their first son Francis was born in 1843 followed by Lewis, who was a toddler when the family moved to The Howe, Hedingham Road, Halstead in 1845, having bought the property from Messrs. Macnamara and Gosset for £10,260, secured with an £8,000 mortgage. Edward immediately upgraded the farm buildings, erected further accommodation for his workers and installed a gasometer which served the house, now known as Howe Park, as well as the stables. Gas mantels can still be seen over the doorways inside the stable block. Between 1846 and 1857 Edward and Anne had six more children, Alice, Allan Moline, Charles Ernest, Edith Anne, Florence and Beatrice.

Edward was a benevolent man, a good listener and conversationalist who avoided contentious issues, and with Anne they were staunch supporters of the Quaker and Temperance movements and mixed with like-minded local families, such as the Greenwoods. In 1851 Edward Hornor built the Meeting House for the Society of Friends in Colchester Road, which had a burial ground to the rear of the building, where both Edward and Anne were eventually laid to rest; the burial ground headstones were removed in the 1960s to make room for a car park, and the Meeting House was demolished, not long ago, to make way for a housing development. In 1855 Edward with several other distinguished and influential gentlemen, formed a
company whose aim was to bring a railway to Halstead, and eventually the Colne Valley and Halstead Railway was born. Edward became the reluctant chairman of the Board of Directors, a position he held for only six months, although he continued to be a director of the company and a significant shareholder for a number of years. The education of children was of paramount importance to Edward and from about 1855 he was the proprietor of ‘a school room’, located in the Kings Arms Yard, until his death. In 1861 he built a school, and schoolmaster’s house at the junction of Hedingham Road and Box Mill Lane. Known as Howe school, it was built primarily for the education of his employee’s children, who lived in the cottages and tenements on The Howe Estate. In 1874 the school was classed as a ‘British School’ and received a Parliamentary Grant of £49 18s. The school was closed by Anne Hornor in 1881.

When Halstead suffered a smallpox epidemic in 1866 Lucy Greenwood opened a small hospital in an old building in Bois Field, with Edward’s aid, where she nursed some of the victims. Edward was a frequent visitor to the hospital and it was very lucky for him and his family that he was not infected with the contagious disease. Following the epidemic, Lucy, with more financial assistance from Edward, established a school for poor and destitute girls within the same building; The Industrial School later became known as the Greenwood School.

Edward and Anne were gracious hosts and their grounds at Howe Park were open for numerous garden parties and fetes, which were always well attended. Even dances were held on the lawn! Local people would gather on Market Hill, and with the town band leading the way, horse drawn carts loaded with elderly folk and children, followed by a merry crowd would make their way along the Hedingham Road to the Howe grounds, where tea or supper would be served. This was a real treat for Sunday School children.

When Edward Hornor died at Howe Park in June 1868 aged 57 years, the Reverend Thomas Given Wilson preached a sermon at the New Congregational Church where he praised Edward’s virtues and reminded the congregation of all the good things he had achieved in his lifetime. He was a much loved husband, father and benefactor, kind to his employees and respected by all those lucky enough to cross his path.

It is perhaps a rather sobering and sad thought that most of the companies and buildings that the Hornors either aided financially or had built, no longer exist or have been demolished. This most generous benefactor and gentleman, may have only lived in Halstead for twenty three years, yet in that short time he did much to help
the residents of the town. Edward’s immediate family and descendants continued to take a great interest in Halstead and its inhabitants for many years. For example Alice Hornor married John Robert Vaizey and lived at Attwoods.

For more information about the Hornor family, the history of The Howe Estate, the owners and tenants of The Howe, and those who lived in the farm cottages, please see ‘The Howe Estate Halstead – Its History, Inhabitants and their Families 1750 to 1960”, Price £14.95.

The Halstead & District Local History Society
The Halstead and District Local History Society was formed on Thursday December 16th 1976 at a meeting held in the Scout Hut, New Street, Halstead.

The aims and activities of the society are to promote the study of local history predominantly in the immediate geographical area. Information is shared by monthly lectures, a quarterly newsletter and a museum.

The Society currently has a membership of approximately 100 and holds meetings on the third Thursday of each month in the Baptist Church, Hedingham Road, Halstead, Essex.

Our programme of event is published on our website, www.halsteadhistory.org.uk, and in the quarterly newsletter.

Membership Fees (2016)

- Single Member £15 per annum
- Couple £25
- Single Member (under 30 years of age) FREE
- Visitor Fees (per meeting/event) £5

If you would like to join, please contact our membership secretary, Linda Kemp, on 01787 478763 or email info@halsteadhistory.org.uk.
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