

Local and Essex History – June 2021

Local Events

THE MIGNET HM.14 FLYING FLEA CRASH LANDING IN HADLEIGH ESSEX

A baby boy called Henri Mignet was born 19th October in Saintes, France who became a well-known aircraft designer and builder.

When Henri was eighteen years old, he corresponded with Gustav Lilienthal about aviation. In 1912 Henri decided to build his first aircraft HM1-1. It was a model monoplane.

During World War 1, Henri served in the French army as a radio operator. In 1918 he caught Malaria and was hospitalised, which gave him time to design his first powered prototype the HM2. In 1922 he constructed the HM3 "The Dromedary" and then HM4 "The Parasol".

In 1926 Henri married Annette Triou. In 1944 she was murdered by communist gunmen.

In 1930 Henri developed the microlight HM.14 known as the Flying Flea. It was a small, one-man plane, powered by a 18hp engine, with a speed of 60mph, a wingspan of 18 feet and a cost around £70.

On 13th April 1936 the Aero-8 Flying Club hosted a rally at Ashingdon, Essex that attracted eight complete British built Flying Fleas. During a local flight a Flying Flea crashed in a field south of Hadleigh Castle making it news.

In 1974 a Flying Flea was displayed in the Southend Historic Aircraft Museum which closed in 1983. It belonged to C.L.Storey and prior to that was on display in his motor showroom in Alexander Street, Southend. Today, this model G-ADXS resides in a museum in Brighton, Yorkshire.

Henri Mignet died on August 31st 1965, at the age of 71.

The Flying Flea was introduced in 1933 and is still produced today.

Source Data: <https://www.hadleighhistory.org.uk> & Wikipedia

DENISE PHIPPS

[See Picture on Next Page](#)



**FLYING FLEA G-ADXS
IN SOUTHEND HISTORIC MUSEUM 1974**

FAMILY MEMORIES OF THE 1953 CANVEY ISLAND FLOODS

As the youngest of four sisters, my mother spent her former years growing up in London, prior to the start of the second world war. However, her parents owned a holiday home at the seafront end of Maurice Road, on Canvey Island, which the family visited most weekends.

At the start of the war the family relocated to their home on Canvey Island, for safety reasons, and my grandfather commuted to his job as a proof reader in the print.

I remember being told that people who relocated, like my grandfather, received a tax allowance towards commuting costs, which they retained until they either relocated back to London, or retired.

When the 1953 floods occurred, my grandparent's home was spared, having been built on top of brick pillars. Although the surrounding area was heavily flooded no water entered their home.

At this time many of the older houses were built on brick pillars. Below the floor of these buildings was something like a three-foot-high void, which helped to protect the properties against floods.

All three of my aunts remained on Canvey Island when they married and started their own families. This meant that in total thirteen members of my mother's family had been affected by the floods; eight adults and five young children. Thankfully they were all successfully rescued by lorries and taken to the mainland.

When my parents married, my mother married into a large family, a number of whom lived in the Thundersley/Benfleet area, as did my parents. My grandparents stayed at our house. The rest of the affected members of my mother's family were billeted, with those members of my father's family who had spare rooms.

Only one of my aunts' homes was actually flooded. My aunt is now 96 years old and lives in a care home in Lincolnshire. However, when my mother asked her for her experiences of the floods, she recalled sitting on the lounge table holding her 15-month-old son, watching some of his toys and a pair of his shoes floating around the lounge.

Apparently, as the tide was on the way in, it soon became clear that the water was going to cover the table. In fact, the water level finally reached half way up the lounge wall, before receding, as the tide turned.

As the home was actually a bungalow, there was no upstairs to use as a refuge. My aunt recalled, my uncle setting up a ladder and them climbing onto the bungalow's roof, where they sat hanging onto the chimney stack, until rescue arrived.

The family members, whose homes were not actually flooded, were able to return home after about two weeks, once the flood water levels across the island had receded. However, it took many weeks before the flooded bungalow was habitable again.

Many of the homes affected by the floods did not have contents insurance, but neighbours and friends rallied round and helped out with items that were required to make the homes habitable again.

In those days there was more sense of community, than there is perhaps today. Everyone knew their neighbours and were willing to assist where neighbours were in need of assistance.

Apparently, my aunt's family did have contents insurance and were able to make a claim. However, the Insurance Assessor kept saying 'don't worry that will dry out', thereby minimising their claim. Unfortunately, my aunt said when the items did finally dry out most of them fell apart and had to be replaced anyway. Most people did not realise that salt water is far more unforgiving than plain water.

At the time of the floods my grandparents had a dog, who could not go with them when they were evacuated. However, there was an external staircase leading to a single room in the attic of the house. So, my grandfather left a few day's food and water in the upstairs room and secured the door so the dog could come and go.

A few days later my grandfather went to Benfleet to see if the water had receded enough to reach the dog. The water had not receded enough by then, but suddenly the dog jumped from the back of a lorry that was crossing the bridge towards the mainland. Somehow, he had managed to cadge a lift.

Source Data: My aunt's and my mother's memories

IAN PHIPPS

The Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II June 2nd 1953

In Benfleet the local council, then known as Benfleet Urban District Council arranged it's own celebrations to mark the occasion of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. This included a Souvenir Programme consisting of 26 pages filled with details of events and advertisements placed by local shopkeepers and business. Included within the programme were details of a flower garden competition and a house decoration competition.

Many events were carried out to mark this momentous occasion, starting on May 9th with a Motor Cycle Scramble Day on the Salvation Army Land, Castle Lane Hadleigh.

May 16th – Old Time Dance at Benfleet County Secondary School.

May 23rd – Revue – Benfleet County Secondary School.

May 23rd -Gymkhana – Runneymede Chase.

On Sunday May 31st there was a Special Coronation Open Air Service, to which all residents were invited. The service took place at King George V Playing Field in Shipwrights Drive. Music was by the Band of the Salvation Army with a parade of Uniformed Contingents of various services and organisations.

On Coronation Day, the opening ceremony, again on King George V Playing Field, included a fanfare by trumpeters of the 1341 Squadron of the Air Training Corps. This was followed by the breaking of the Flag, Royal Salute and National Anthem.

The carnival procession through the streets did not take place but instead entrants were asked to assemble in King George V Playing Field at 5.30pm for judging at 5.45pm.

Other events on this day included a March Past, Punch and Judy Show, archery display, a physical training display by the A.T.C. a concert by the San Toy Dancing Academy and a dance in the School Hall featuring the Bob Kingston Band. Also, on this day a Bowls Match took place between Hadleigh and Benfleet Bowling Clubs.

At dusk there was community singing followed by a Grand Firework Display.

Exhibitions and amusements were also arranged. These included a fun fair with over 200 stalls, bowling for the pig, miniature golf, archery, handicraft displays, pony rides and many more attractions. Light refreshments were made available at the 'Hollywood Club' where two marquees were erected.

Forthcoming events included a Grand Cricket Match to be held at John Burrows Recreation Ground, Hadleigh and a Coronation Cup Speedway Meeting at the Rayleigh Weir Stadium.

Benfleet Urban District Coronation Committee presented every child in the Urban District of 5 years and upwards with a special Coronation edition of the New Testament. Furthermore, Benfleet Urban District Council presented a Savings Certificate to each baby born to residents of the Urban District during Coronation Week.

Many local streets held their own celebrations. These included Melcombe Road, Downer Road, Howards Farm.

Source Data: www.benfleethistory.org.uk

LEE KING

WORLD WAR ONE WAR MEMORIAL

The memorial commemorates the men of South Benfleet who were killed in the 1914-1919 World War. The cost to manufacture, transport and erect the memorial was made possible by public subscription. It was designed by the architect Sir Charles Archibald Nicholson (1867-1949).

Southend Stonemason, Percy Delf Smith (1882-1948) was responsible for its creation and the carving of the inscriptions. Constructed of Portland Stone it once stood within an octagon of Cornish granite and stands in Essex Way, opposite the Anchor Inn, the building where at one time Benfleet Post Office was situated.

The unveiling ceremony took place on Sunday 30th May 1920. The ceremony started with a choir marching in procession from the Parish Church singing the hymn "Land of Hope and Glory". The Reverend Arthur Holthouse, read the opening of the Burial Service and continued with the following tribute to the dead.

"Let us remember with thanksgiving and with honour before God, these men from this parish whose names are inscribed on this memorial who gave their lives in the service of their King and Country.

Mr. W.G. Smith, Secretary of the Memorial Committee then read the names of the thirty-six men listed on the memorial.

The memorial was then unveiled by Colonel C.W. Collingwood of Shoebury Garrison. In a short address he expressed his admiration that a little village like South Benfleet sent so many men off to war and that 25 per cent of them had fallen, it was their spirit that made England what it was.

He concluded that their memory would never be forgotten by the people of Benfleet and would be carried down from generation to generation. The vicar then dedicated the memorial.

Under the direction of S.M. Woodlands, Royal Field Artillery, buglers from the Shoeburyness Garrison, sounded the "Last Post and Reveille." Everyone in attendance then sang the National Anthem. The choir returned to church singing the hymn "O God our help in ages Past."

On behalf of all members of the War Memorial Committee, their secretary, Mr.W.G. Smith, expressed their thanks to the designer of the memorial and to Mr. T.Chambers who donated the site.

The memorial was designated Grade II listed on 28th February 2008.



The War Memorial covered with the flag

Source Data: www.benfleethistory.org.uk

TERRY KING



**The party marching to the ceremony on
30th May 1920**

NEW BRIDGE OVER BENFLEET CREEK

The Port of London Authority announced that the new bridge over Benfleet Creek, adjacent to the hard leading from Benfleet to Canvey Island, would be opened for Road traffic on 21st May 1931.

The structure contained a Drawbridge in the centre which would open for the passage of vessels. With the bridge closed it was possible for boats and small craft to pass underneath in two places with a Headway of 2 feet above High Water on a Spring Tide.

If Masters on boats wished the bridge to be opened, they had to exhibit a black ball or shape in the rigging where it could be seen or wave a white light horizontally at night.

The bridge itself displayed red horizontal lights in the centre when closed or two red lights at each side of the navigation opening when open.





Official opening by Alderman J. H. Burrows

Lord Lieutenant of Essex, Brigadier-General R.B. Colvin, C.B., after whom the bridge was named, performed the pile driving ceremony for the bridge, exactly one year to the day before it was opened.

The opening of the bridge was a great occasion for the local community, in particular those people on the Canvey Island side. Alderman J H Burrows officially opened the bridge at the ceremony held on Thursday, 21st May 1931. People living on the island declared the day a holiday and parties were held to celebrate. The opening was followed by a celebratory meal.

As a swing bridge, it opened to make a channel 60 feet wide for the passage of vessels and preference was given to river traffic. The first bridge operator was local man, Fred Edwards, who had previously been the ferryman.

This bridge was operational for around 40 years and opened for the last time in November 1968. The bridge that crosses the creek today was completed in 1973 and at this time the old swing bridge was demolished.

Canvey Bridge Opened

On Thursday Ald. J. H. Burrows, J.P., chairman of the Essex County Council, opened the bridge which has been erected over the Creek to join Canvey Island to the mainland. Mr. H. P. Ansell and members of the Canvey Island Council's Reception Committee received the guests on the Benfleet approach road side of the bridge.

Ald. and Mrs Burrows were escorted to the first barrier, where the Bishop of Barking said dedicatory prayers and blessed the work.

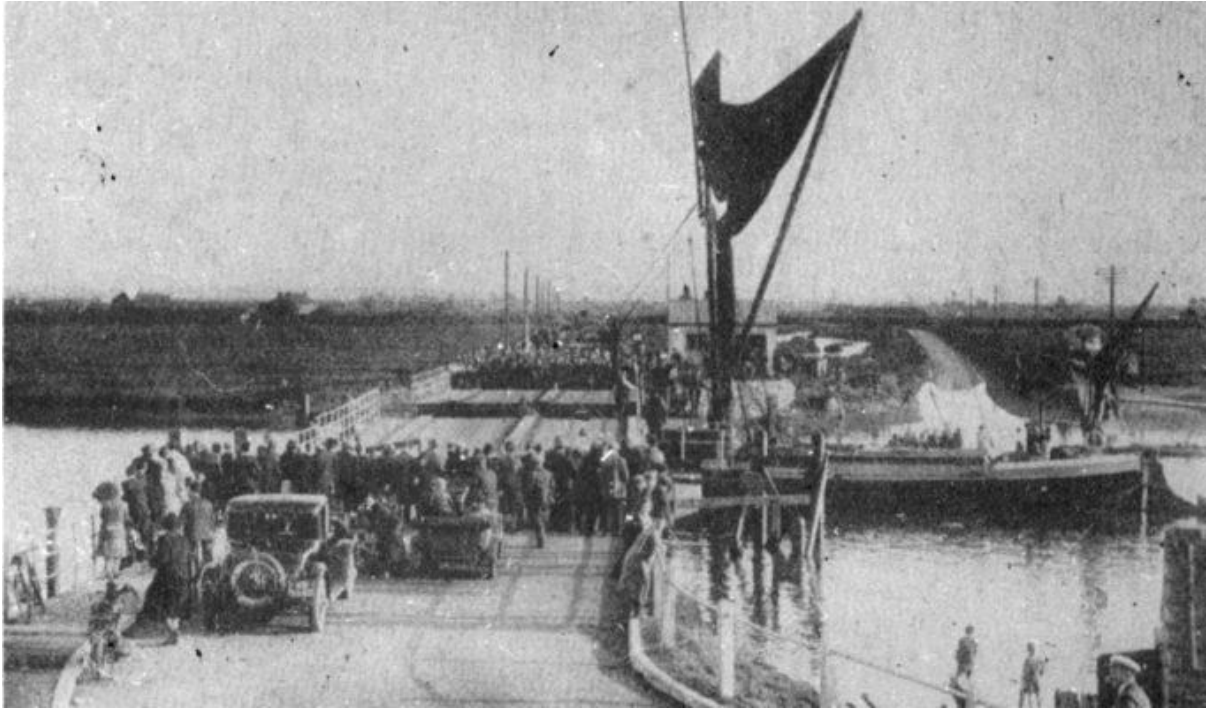
Ald. Burrows then pressed a button electrically connected with the barrier and raised the arms and broke a white silk tape stretched across. In the name of the Urban Council and the residents, a bouquet was handed to Mrs. Burrows.

The party were shown the electrical equipment for opening and closing the roadway. Then, returning to the second barrier, Ald. Burrows opened the bridge to river traffic.

A guard of honour was comprised of Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Girls' Life Brigade and Brownies. Every Society and Association on the Island sent representatives.



**This picture shows Fred Edwards at the bridge opening event
From the Norman M. Chisman collection**



**This picture shows a sailing barge coming through the bridge
sometime on the opening day
*From the Norman M. Chisman collection***



**People and cars crossing the bridge on opening day
*From the Geoff Barsby collection***



**This picture shows the bridge in use
It is thought to be shortly after the opening as the road down to the causeway is still
clearly present.**

Source Data: www.benfleethistory.org.uk

MARION COLEMAN

BENFLEET DOWNS – OPENING CEREMONY 1934

Although the Downs are now part of a much larger country park, we owe a huge debt to the land owner, Frank Barns, who sold the original 30 acres of land to the Council thus saving it from building development. Certainly, in the 1920s there were plans drawn up for a "Sea View" estate stretching down to the railway line and creek.

It was officially opened on Bastille Day 1934 by Sir Edgar Bonham Carter, Vice Chairman of the Open Spaces Preservation Society. Walter Johnson was at the time chairman of the Council's Open Spaces Committee. From a modest 30 acres to the current 387 acres, it is a success story, which owes much to that initial purchase.

The Dedication was done by the vicar of South Benfleet and music was provided by the Hadleigh Colony Salvation Army Band and a choir performed. There is a great deal of very interesting information about Benfleet and the Downs in a copy of The Souvenir Booklet (the front page of which can be seen below). This can be read in the Benfleet Historical Archive.

The Booklet (15 pages long) concludes:-

"To have lost to posterity this beautiful place would have been a tragedy indeed and its closing by building or otherwise would have to have extinguished the eyes of Benfleet. A pious hope has often been expressed that at some time in the future, the Authorities concerned may get possession of the whole of the slopes from Benfleet to Leigh and thus preserve for ever to the people, a vista unrivalled anywhere in Europe, and perpetuating for all time to these northern shores of the Thames a marine history which commenced with the British Coracle, continuing with Phoenician and Roman Galley, Norse Dragon, Galleon, Clipper, Benfleet Hoy and the most up to date battleship and liner, which have since the beginning of civilisation passed in review before these "Downs".

I don't think those words can be beaten and indeed we are lucky that continuing councils did indeed purchase those lands.

BENFLEET URBAN



DISTRICT COUNCIL

Souvenir of THE OPENING CEREMONY

OF

THE DOWNS, SOUTH BENFLEET

ON

SATURDAY, JULY 14th, 1934, at 5 p.m.

BY

Sir Edgar Bonham Carter, K.C.M.G.

Vice-Chairman, Open Spaces, etc., Preservation Society

T. J. EVANS, J.P.,
Chairman.

W. JOHNSON,
Chairman, Open Spaces Committee.

L. J. RIVETT,
Vice-Chairman.

Source Data: www.benfleethistory.org.uk

MARION COLEMAN

AMERICAN B17 HEAVENLY BODY CRASH OVER CANVEY ISLAND

On 19th June 1944, the airmen from 379th bomb group were returning to a US airbase in Kimbolton, Cambridgeshire. The crew were on their second mission of the day - flying back from Calais in France after bombing German V-1 missile sites.

One of the B17s began to lose control due to engine failure. It began to fall and crashed onto the Heavenly Body II, killing Lt Kauffman instantly. When Lt Burns tried to take over, the controls failed and the crew had to eject out. Edward Sadler was killed and Louis Schulte drowned upon hitting the water. The second aircraft crashed into the River Thames near Allhallows in Kent. Eight crew members died and one survived.

The crash site was uncovered and excavated over 46 years by Gary Foulger and, as a result of Gary's investigations, the crash was commemorated on a plaque at The Paddocks. There is a display of artefacts recovered at The Bay Museum.

On 19th June 2015, 71 years after the crash, an information board was erected on the seawall near Canvey Point.

A poignant memorial service was held to commemorate the 75th anniversary at Canvey Point's new B17 memorial ground, dedicated to those involved in the crash and attended by relatives of the crew.

The crew are buried, or their names appear on the memorial wall, at The American Cemetery at Madingley, Cambridge.



The Crew of the Heavenly Body II
(Left to Right)

Louis W Schulte (drowned), Leroy J Monk, Richard W Andrews, next man did not fly, William H Farmer, Leonard F Gibbs. Sitting: Edward N Sadler (killed) Co-Pilot Fred S Kauffman (Missing), Jack L Gray, Pilot Lloyd Burns



Picture of the Memorial Painting on Canvey Seawall

There is an excellent and very moving eye-witness account of the crash by Stan Pierce (living in Brisbane, Australia) who was 9 at the time, which is available on the CanveyIsland.org website. It is a fascinating account of Stan's memories and later contact with a survivor and is well-worth reading.

Source Data: www.canveyisland.org

MAVIS REGAN