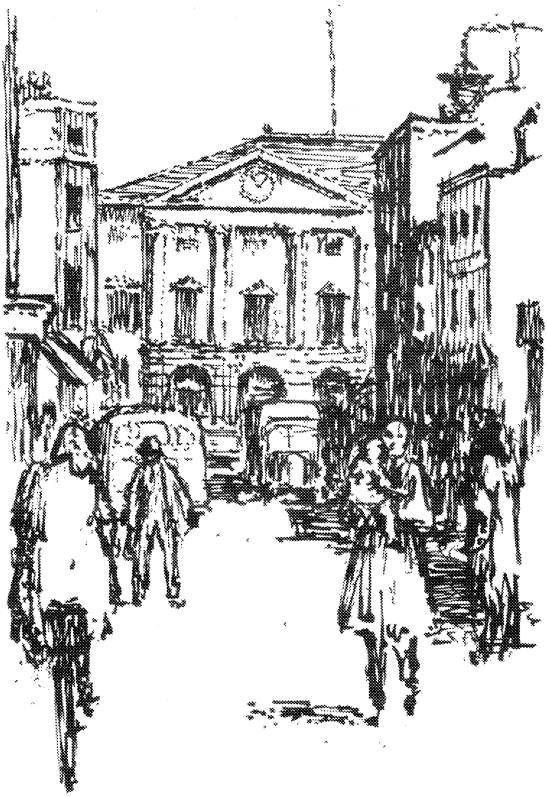

THE WAY WE WORKED

GEPP & SONS SOLICITORS:

LAWYERS IN THE COUNTY TOWN

J.B. Gilder

Published by Gepp & Sons Solicitors

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Contents

Thanks

Thank you to the Essex Records Office and the Executors of the Estate of Lynton Lamb for permission, freely given, to publish the vast majority of the various images within these pages. Lynton Lamb was a prominent 20th Century illustrator whose works can be found in many Penguin books amongst other publications. He lived in Sandon for much of his life.

Thank you to the late Hilda Grieve, historian and sometime Head Archivist at Essex County Council. Much of the research involved in this volume has emanated from her excellent book 'The Sleepers and the Shadows' which I would recommend to anyone interested in the history of Chelmsford.

Thank you to all members of staff, past and present, who have done so much to assist, and particularly to Tom Gepp, John Plumtree and Peter Davis for their memories.

Finally, thank you to the current partners of Gepp & Sons and to Neil Ashford in particular, as he had the original idea of producing this book.

Foreword

I am very pleased to have been asked to write a short foreword to this book of the history of Gepp & Sons Solicitors. Nothing in my long life of just over ninety years to date has been more important to me. I was the sixth generation of the Gepp family to have been a member of the firm and I liked to treat the partners and employees as my family. I think it was the case that, if a member of the firm wanted help or advice, he could always come to me or one of the partners for that help.

I am very glad that this book has been written, as it will place on record the history of an important Essex institution.

T C GEPP,
SAFFRON WALDEN

Introduction

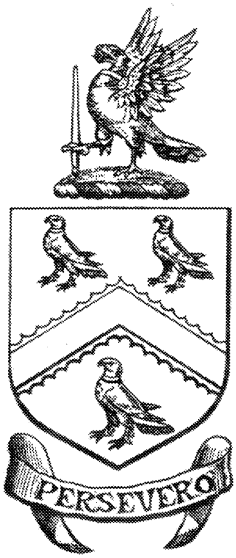
Those of us who work at Gepp & Sons today may have some idea that the firm is an old one. However, it is probably true to say that few people are aware of just how tightly the history of Chelmsford and that of the Gepps and their business are interwoven.

I did not know what I was in for when I started to research this book. I naively assumed that this history could be assembled after talking to members of staff past and present, a quick trip to the Records Office and a few hours at the computer.

A year and a half later I have come to the realisation that I was very wrong. It has been a long but enjoyable task, one which could not have been completed without the great assistance of many contributors, to all of whom I am very thankful. I can, however, assure you that the mistakes are all mine.

In this, a year which probably marks the 250th anniversary of the arrival of Edward Gepp in Chelmsford, we have what I hope is a reasonably comprehensive history of a firm of solicitors, along with several chapters which are written in order to put that history in its context.

Whatever your relationship with Gepp & Sons is or has been, I hope you find something within these pages which is interesting to you.


PERSEVERO

CHAPTER 1

The Country Attorney

Despite the role and concept of the solicitor being uniquely English it would seem that, perhaps with the exception of the estate agent, it is the profession least well regarded by the British public. Solicitors have long been looked down upon by some members of the Bar, as 'gentleman by virtue of an Act of Parliament rather than by pedigree'. To others, solicitors represent the worst of human nature, having gained a reputation in the minds of many for adding unnecessary confusion and with it, overcharging, for anyone unfortunate enough to come into contact with them. Although it might be fair to say that some members of the profession so often referred to as the 'junior' legal practitioner have been thoroughly deserving of the public's ire, such criticisms have long been a sore point amongst those who endure the seemingly endless age of training and the years of uncertainty which follow thereafter, all in order to practice the law.

Indeed, as Edmund Christian, a solicitor himself, pointed out in his book of on the subject of the profession in 1896: 'In this country few professions are so old as the solicitor's and probably none is so stringently regulated by the State. From the first day of his apprenticeship to the last day of his practice the solicitor is subject to regulations laid down by Parliament: his education; his right to practice; his relations to his employers; his remuneration, all are minutely prescribed by the Legislature. But his true position is not generally known. To the public the solicitor is the lawyer of first instance, the only sort of lawyer with whom the

client comes into contact. But if the opinion of the Bar be correct, the solicitor is no lawyer'.

Legal representation in court has been in existence, as an idea at least, for several thousand years. Until the 13th Century however, it was usual for those who had business before a court in England to attend and conduct their case personally. If an advocate was appointed, it would be one of that select band well versed in the law, who would be appointed to win or lose the case, come what may. By the mid 1400s it had become increasingly popular for those who had business before a court to appoint an attorney to appear in their place. Such attorneys were of vastly varying quality and character, indeed it would at first appear that the role solely consisted of acting in their client's best interests when selecting an advocate. Thus, a husband could act as his wife's attorney, although a wife could not appear for her husband. All appointments of attorneys at this time required a judge's consent, the judge issuing a writ signifying that the attorney was sufficiently fit and proper to act for his principal. At first the appointment of an attorney was strictly confined to matters in the lower courts, but this rule was soon relaxed. Indeed, as early as Edward the Confessor's reign, attorneys could be appointed to act in cases of 'wounds and maims' and thereafter the attorney could be found in all superior courts.

Such a growth in the opportunities for attorneys to practice led to a corresponding increase in the numbers willing to do the job. Much as barristers did until the mid 20th Century, attorneys followed judges around their circuit of courts and, particularly out of London, acquired something of a reputation for often taking fees from both sides in a case. One particular 14th Century attorney got his come-uppance when travelling the Herefordshire circuit. The hapless lawyer took a boat on the River Severn in

order to travel onwards to Cornwall and thus steal a march on the other attorneys. However, a great storm erupted and he was blown dramatically off course, eventually ending up in Cumberland where he was arrested on suspicion of being an enemy spy. The court report (2 12 Edw 3) indicates that Scarshuhe, the judge, did not have much sympathy for the poor lawyer who missed the entire trial, remarking that it was particularly foolish of attorneys to expect God to protect them (of all people!). Not even the dangers of imprisonment for espionage could, it would seem, deter the growth of what had become a booming industry. By the year 1400 it was estimated that there were at least 2,000 attorneys practicing in England.

The 15th Century witnessed the King and his Parliament responding to the growing number of complaints made about attorneys throughout the land. In 1402 Parliament described the profession as: 'uninterested in the law; some of them were even of tender age. They were negligent as well as ignorant and were guilty of coven and collusion'. In response the King limited the numbers of attorneys in each county and instituted an early form of enrolment for members of the profession. Furthermore, the would-be attorney was required to undertake an examination prior to admittance. Nonetheless, the role of the attorney remained a fairly minor one when compared to the advocate, and certainly far less well paid.

The situation regarding pay was not helped by the fact that much of the work the attorney wished to do, indeed much of the work carried out today by solicitors, most particularly the drafting of legal documents, was denied them. Instead such work was divided between the advocate, by now also known as 'counsel', and the 'prothonotary', an employee of the court. There was much discontent amongst the profession at this division of work

although it would seem that the worst of the attorney's ire was reserved for the prothonotary. Indeed, in the reign of Elizabeth I, it took an Act of Parliament threatening to ban from the Roll any attorney who refused to pay his dues to the court before the prothonotaries were grudgingly recompensed for their services. Ever resourceful, many attorneys sought to gain positions as clerks to the prothonotaries, who also had the job of 'taxing' (costing) the cases which came before the court. It wasn't long before complaints abounded regarding mysteriously high costs in cases where the attorneys in question had acted.

By the 17th Century the balance of power between the different strands of the legal world had shifted somewhat. Attorneys were no longer their masters' servants, but relatively well respected professionals in their own right. At this time the term 'solicitor' started becoming used almost interchangeably with 'attorney' by the public and in statute, whereas prior to this the solicitor was the attorney's even humbler counterpart, acting merely in the courts of equity. The issue of fees remained perennially problematic, however. An invoice from the reign of James I shows the amount required to be paid by the plaintiff to the court usher for his services to have been 10s whilst the attorney's fee only amounted to a minute 6d.

From Elizabethan times onwards it became customary for attorneys to carry with them a particular style of bag, made of either green cloth or black leather, depending upon the attorney in question's available funds. Such a bag would normally not only contain the attorney's papers but, more importantly, his lunch, of which a meat pudding was apparently highly favoured amongst the profession. The bags often served another useful purpose as impromptu body armour, as the aptly named La Writ, a French attorney with firm of Beaumont & Fletcher, found when

challenged to a duel by his client after losing the case. As barristers tended to use blue or red bags, the green bag became so synonymous with the attorney that for decades members of the profession themselves were often colloquially referred to as 'green bags'.

One way that attorneys could ameliorate the poor levels of payment which they received from their clients was to take on as much business as could be found and then employ clerks to carry out most of the work at a much reduced rate. This in itself presented the courts with some uncomfortable problems, attorney's clerks being, it would appear, a somewhat unruly lot. So bad was some the behaviour of the younger clerks in throwing dirt and mud in court; making rude and loud outcries and violent banging on their desks, that the Chancellor was compelled to threaten them with prison. Later it became necessary for an order to be made that the clerks must not use their swords in the courtroom and should take care to break neither the windows nor the seats of the court!

Victims of The Bloody Assizes 1685. The period following the Civil War was particularly litigious.

The period immediately following the Civil War was a good one for many attorneys, as the Commonwealth under Cromwell was particularly litigious. It was during this period that attorneys became established as conveyancers, although counsel was to keep a tight grip on any dealings concerning complex landed states for some time to come. This gradual gain, both in monetary terms and social standing, led to attorneys having an ever-increasing collective voice. The banning of the profession from the Inns of Court at the start of the 18th Century led to calls for attorneys to be given proper legal recognition, but it was to be a long and torrid process before the Law Society was to become properly established.

After great pressure, not least from those already within the profession, who naturally had an interest in ensuring access to the work they enjoyed was as limited as possible to outsiders, Parliament passed in 1729 an Act 'for the better regulation of attorneys and solicitors'. The Act had been a long time coming and, although it drew criticism for largely having been ignored, the introduction of the practising certificate was one innovation which became difficult to disregard, particularly as the treble 40s stamp it incurred was no small sum. The fee for the practising certificate may have served to dissuade would-be solicitors from the lowers social echelons, but the real bottleneck imposed on entry to the profession by the Act came in the form of the introduction of articles of clerkship, a right of passage which, almost 300 years later, remains in effect the single, controversial, route of entry.

All clerks wishing to serve as solicitors were required by the Act to serve five years in articles and boys tended to start their training at the age of thirteen, their fathers having paid a substantial sum to the master for the trouble of taking them on.

In practice the young boys were often badly treated by their masters, being required to ask permission before sitting down; to follow their master's wife into town and walk after her carrying provisions; and to spend eight hours a day copying out papers. In all manners the articled clerk was the apprentice and, as was customary for all apprentices, would live with his master and his master's family for the duration of his articles.

Another long lasting legacy of the Act was the imposition of the thirty days' credit entitled to any customer of a solicitor and, to this day, it is the only profession which must allow its clients this luxury.

Perhaps the Act was an imposition too far for some. There was indeed a certain amount of opposition to the changes it brought about, but it had become clear that the profession required far more regulation than it had hitherto enjoyed. Indeed, historical sources abound with accounts of malpractice: from the solicitor found to have sold his services to both parties in a lawsuit, to the attorney who employed as his articled clerk the local prison warder, in order that he might drum up new business from the detainees. The fledgling Law Society, the first records of which are to be found dating from the 1730s, at which time it was more of a dining club, did much to campaign against malpractice, albeit unofficially.

By the early 19th Century the tax on practising certificates for those who had over three years' experience was raised to 10s, the country being desperate for revenue to continue fighting the war with France. However, in 1815 the total revenue from practicing certificates was 60,000s, not a huge sum by the Exchequer's standards even at that time, and the yearly rate was only raised again once in the next forty years. The practising certificate levy

seems to have done little to dispel the rise in entrants to the profession, although a pamphlet published in Chelmsford in the year 1785 may have been exaggerating somewhat in its estimate of '24,000 devouring locusts' who apparently acquired 'princely fortunes'. It is perhaps a small comfort to know that the views of the inhabitants of Chelmsford towards their brethren in the law have held remarkably steady during the ensuing centuries.

THE TRIAL

Mr. Pickwick gave a violent start, as if some vague idea of assaulting Sergeant Buzfuz suggested itself to his mind. An admonitory gesture from Perker restrained him, and he listened to the continuation with a look of indignation.—*Pickwick, chap. xxxiv*

Alas, it was not merely the anonymous of Chelmsford who loathed the humble attorney, for he was uniformly looked down upon by counsel and the judiciary alike. Judges would often harbour a particular dislike of the profession, no doubt often borne from their own days as junior counsel, forced to take instruction from such people. Indeed, it is rumoured that many a miscarriage of justice occurred as a result of such prejudice. As an officer of the court, the attorney was ruled by the court in many aspects of his life: the story is told of an attorney who announced in a coffee shop that he favoured a republic to the current monarch and who was stripped of his ability to practice once such sedition reached the ears of the court, also being sentenced to six months imprisonment at the same time.

By the 1830s the Law Society had truly come of age, having gained official recognition as the authority to which solicitors deferred, along with its own prestigious headquarters in Chancery Lane. The Society's main aim at this time appears to have been the better education of articled clerks and, to this end, it was decreed that those holding a degree from Cambridge, Dublin, or Oxford Universities would only be required to spend a further three years in articles. In 1833 the Society established a series of lectures for articled clerks, with subjects ranging from common law to equity, as well as a series in conveyancing which had by this time largely become the preserve of the attorney rather than counsel. The first compulsory written examinations for articled clerks were held at Michaelmas 1836 in the Great Hall, Chancery Lane. It was noted that the paper was so difficult that perhaps only one in ten of all practising attorneys would have been able to pass it. By 1860 a further general knowledge and Latin examination had been introduced. Bagehot, a social commentator of the time, remarked wryly that solicitors had become far better

trained than their counterparts at the Bar, who still received no formal training or examination.

The solicitor or attorney is, therefore, an ancient profession, but not one for which time has stood still. Over the course of almost a thousand years attorneys have transformed themselves from nothing more than itinerant vagabonds to an educated, regulated and well respected profession. The 20th Century was to witness the admission of women as solicitors and the gradual evening out of numbers in the profession between the sexes to the point that, by the end of the Century, more women than men were qualifying as solicitors, although the figure in senior positions still has some way to go before parity is achieved. The name 'attorney' gradually disappeared in the 19th Century and is now seen as something of an Americanism.

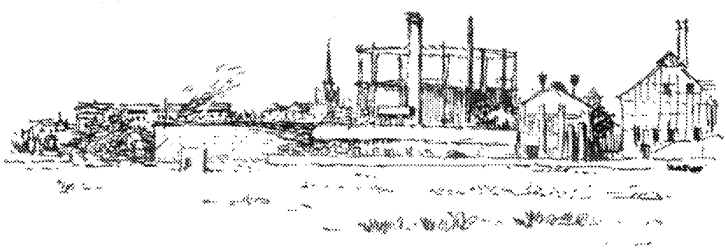
The profession is still changing. Fewer solicitors are prepared to take on any nature of legal work which comes through the door, as ever greater specialisation has become necessary in order to cope with increasing technicality and workload. The distinction between solicitors and those at the Bar has been distinctly blurred in recent times by the ability of solicitors to acquire rights of audience in the higher courts, prior to the 1990s the sole preserve of barristers. Solicitors may now practice alongside other professions in the same business structure, and non-solicitors can now become partners of law firms.

For now at least, that final bastion of local artisanship, the high street solicitor, who still learns his trade as an apprentice; who is still examined by the Law Society; who is still required to have a knowledge of many areas of law before he can go on to practice in even one; is still the first recourse of most people when they require access to the law.

CHAPTER 2

The Georgian County Town

Walking around Chelmsford today, it can be difficult to feel much of a sense of history. At every turn of its busy streets another block of reinforced concrete serves to remind the viewer of nothing but modernity in all its dullness, the Shire Hall and Cathedral two of the very few hints of anything other than sheer architectural mediocrity which grace the county town of Essex. Even Chelmsford's open spaces, of which the town is unusually well endowed, did not escape unravaged by the onslaught of 20th Century transport planning, the somewhat ironically named 'Parkway' having destroyed the natural and historic layout and pattern of the town forever. No longer is the town centre a meeting place for those travelling from the north down Springfield Road; those from the east along the Baddow Road and those from London on Moulsham Street.



Given the lack of historical context of much of Chelmsford to the casual observer, it can be tempting to think of the town as being something akin to Milton Keynes or Harlow, almost a new town, albeit slightly less planned and perhaps with fewer roundabouts. However, to do so would be to ignore what lurks behind the monolithic facades of the late 20th Century: Chelmsford's nine

centuries of past life, rich with the benefit of the county town's location as a prime place to stop on the way to London; its market around which the town grew initially and later flourished; its civic life and its place at the heart of what was, and to some extent remains, an agricultural county.

Before Chelmsford had built its Shire Hall and had its largest church given the status of a cathedral, and certainly before the town was granted its Royal charter as a borough, it was nonetheless a place of great activity. In sharp contrast to today's democratised society exemplified in the borough council, the town was largely run in the way it had been for centuries, by the lords of the manor. The town boundaries as we know them today are, despite the pressures of great post-war expansion, essentially a 19th Century invention, with 'greater Chelmsford' spewing forth north of the Chelmer into Springfield, much to the disgust of various Victorian members of the Gepp family resident in Springfield at the time it was subsumed, and south of the Can into Moulsham. Springfield's geographical position and picturesque centre have allowed the parish to retain a sense of identity separate to its larger neighbour, not something which can now be said of Moulsham. However, prior to the Victorian Century, Moulsham was viewed as much more of a separate entity, with its own manorial rights and lord, albeit a position often jointly held with the manor of Chelmsford. The Mildmays lived at Moulsham Hall, now demolished, and played a very large part in the inextricable interweaving of the fates of the two settlements.

The Mildmays, otherwise known for many years as the Earls Fitzwalter, had purchased the manorial rights to both Chelmsford and Moulsham in Tudor times and several generations of this powerful family held sway over the town from then on. Despite a small population (only roughly 2,600 head by 1760) Chelmsford's

position and the fertile land surrounding the town helped the Mildmays to secure their position as lords of the manor and their excellent reputation amongst the people of the town, many of whom would have been employed by the family, meant that dissent to the manorial rule exercised by the family was often neither expedient nor desired.

The mid 18th Century was a relatively peaceful period for Britain, a nation which had now firmly established its own unity as an united kingdom, in stark contrast to many other European states. Whilst there was some discontent, even in Chelmsford, at the Hanoverian rule of George I, a king who could not speak English, to some extent at least the nation had become used to being ruled by a foreigner.

Housing in the early Georgian period in Chelmsford was typified by densely packed accommodation, much of it in a very poor state, lying between St Mary's Church and the River Can with gardens stretching down to the River Chelmer to the east and Tindal Street to the west. To read of this period of history in the town is to imagine a society very far removed from its Victorian replacement, not just architecturally or technologically, but also socially. Although Chelmsford possessed a poorhouse, the giving of alms to the poor was relatively commonplace and the house does not seem to have been dreaded in quite the same way as the Dickensian hell of the workhouse was to be a century later. Perhaps inevitably in a town small enough for the rich to know well their less wealthy neighbours, their sense of *noblesse oblige* was played out time and again in gifts given and rates levied, for the building of almshouses and even the provision of a doctor for the town's poor. Felons were dealt with in the 'house of correction' in Chelmsford, whilst at this time Moulsham housed the county gaol. The reason that this remained situated in the smaller of the

settlements for some time would seem to be principally due to market traders and businessmen in Chelmsford objecting to the potential risk to the town and its livestock market of smallpox and various other diseases which, it was feared, a prison in closer proximity might bring with it.

The relative prosperity of Chelmsford in the early Georgian period brought with it a zeal for improvement to the buildings and infrastructure of the town, which today has its most obvious legacy in the development of New London Road. Moulsham Street had previously provided the main thoroughfare to London, a task for which its narrow road had proven increasingly incapable. A wide new road was therefore constructed and soon became lined with many elegant houses.

Moulsham Hall, seat of the Mildmays

In 1756 Sir William Mildmay inherited the estates of his late cousin Benjamin, the 19th Baron Fitzwalter and took up residence

at Moulsham Hall. Sir William, a well-travelled former diplomat, was keen to build on his family's reputation as generous civic benefactors and his first such act was the erection of the almshouses which still stand on Moulsham Street today.

Although Mildmay was lord of the manor, like most holders of manorial rights, he was not in a position to exercise his powers without assistance. For this purpose it was usual to employ a steward of the manor, a learned and practical person engaged to manage the estate and the lord's affairs. The steward was often an attorney and indeed the stewardships of several manors have been held by the Gepp family over the centuries since they came to Chelmsford. The Mildmays' steward was for some time John Oxley Parker, an up and coming lawyer who had come to the town a few years before the first of the Gepps and who became the first of a family dynasty still connected with the town through the land agents Strutt & Parker. Also employed was a beadle, a man whose many and varied roles included acting as the town crier and generally keeping order, a sort of early policeman. A town fireman was employed from 1742. Fires were a common occurrence and new firefighting equipment had been purchased in 1730 and stored at the back of the church in a state of permanent readiness for emergencies.

Sir William also owned the advowson of St Mary's Church, that is, the right of appointment of the rector of the parish. In our secular age it is hard to imagine the extent of the power exercised by the Church in the 18th Century. In the absence of a town council, the parish vestry meetings controlled much of the business of the town. The parish clerk, appointed by the Church, would collect rates from those in the town; raise subscriptions for worthy causes; distribute, where necessary, to the poor and needy; and exercise many other functions besides. Sir William

exercised his power to appoint the rector on several occasions and seemed to buck the national trend of the time, appointing as he did a series of energetic and conscientious clergymen.

The court system was perhaps even more complex than it is today. A courthouse has stood at the top of the High Street for many hundreds of years. In this would sit both the assizes, for minor offences, and the quarter sessions, for the more serious. The sessions would be heard by judges who followed a circuit of courts, a practice continued until the mid 20th Century when permanent Crown courts became the norm. In addition to the assizes and quarter sessions, the courthouse housed the courts baron and leet. Courts baron and leet were the manorial courts, where Mildmay held sway himself, although again these would often be administered by his steward.

Sir William Mildmay died in 1771 leaving his wife Ann to live at Moulsham Hall. Ann was the last of the line to live in Chelmsford on a permanent basis, and she left behind a town on the verge of great change. Chelmsford was perhaps a more divided society, with a new and growing middle class anxious to get on in the world, a fact displayed best by the extensive building work in the town of this period, a boom which would reach its peak at the end of the 18th Century. The price of food skyrocketed during the late Georgian period, making landowners exceedingly wealthy but causing great distress to many of the poorer inhabitants of the town. Nevertheless, Chelmsford was undeniably a place of great opportunity for those with the financial wherewithal to get ahead. Many newcomers were to establish themselves in the town during the late 1700s, the names of whose families stood the test of time as their businesses flourished in the coming decades. One such newcomer was an Edward Gepp, army man and newly qualified attorney.

CHAPTER 3

The Early Gepps

Georgian Chelmsford's boom meant that opportunities were springing up for men of the new age, the Enlightenment's children, to take the stage in the town's affairs. To the lawyers of the town, John Oxley Parker and Robert Tindal, the first the founder of a dynasty of land agents which lasts to this day and the second the forerunner of the legendary Chelmsford law maker, Judge Tindal, and to both of whom later generations of his family would be related by marriage, was added Edward Gepp, Attorney.

Edward Gepp is thought to have been born in Black Notley in 1732 and, although it is unknown as to what his father did, records survive showing the Gepps to have been prominent in both Notley and Braintree at least a hundred years before Edward's birth, as both butchers and tailors. The earliest records of Edward having been involved with the town of Chelmsford are from 1760 when he first wrote as paymaster to the Western Battalion of the Essex Militia. At the age of twenty-eight this cannot have been Gepp's first job, indeed it was one of great responsibility, involving the management of provisions and payment of troops in what was Essex's 18th Century version of the Territorial Army. Indeed, Gepp is recorded as a Lieutenant and it is a distinct possibility that he had enjoyed a more hands-on role in the militia until this point as a regular solider.

Gepp continued to act as paymaster from 1760 until his death but, at the unusually late age of thirty, was articled to an attorney of Grays Inn, London and spent five years learning the law. It is not

recorded as to why Edward decided on such a course of action. It was not unusual for attorneys of the day to act as paymasters for the army, much as they did in performing many of the quasi-public roles for which it was necessary to have a good command of spoken and written English, but it was not a prerequisite. Whether Edward Gepp wished to better himself, to earn more money, or whether he needed a fall-back option in case there came a time when the militia no longer required his services, no-one knows. Gepp's first wife had died not long after their marriage and this may have left him desiring a new path. Nonetheless, it was a big step for a man of thirty to take, recently widowed and with a young baby, and to effectively humble himself as an apprentice, to have to pay a large sum of money to his master and to move away, albeit temporarily, from the area in which he had grown up, cannot have been easy for him.

Whilst serving out his articles Gepp married again. His second wife, Ann, was a Yorkshire lass of 19 years of age and daughter of a wealthy ship owner. Although they were married in London, Gepp still retained his duties in Chelmsford and, in 1766, he purchased a house in the High Street for himself and his new wife to live. The residence, situated almost on the corner of Springfield Road, was a fine gentleman's house, described as having good cellars and wine vaults and pleasant gardens that stretched down to the river. At the High Street house Ann bore him two sons and a daughter, all of whom were to play a large part in the making of the history of Chelmsford and, when in 1768 Edward completed his articles and qualified as an attorney, it was one of the parlours of the house in the High Street which served as his first office.

It is obvious from parish records that the young Gepp was keen to make up for lost time after he qualified. Only three years after he

officially started in business at 32 High Street, it is shown that he had found himself alongside many of the town's most important residents, elected to the committee engaged for the purpose of reordering the interior of St Mary's Church. Some years later, Gepp is seen to have been appointed as a commissioner of the town's street lighting. In a place which had no governing body save for the manor and its church, such committee appointments could lead to great power and, potentially, wealth for a young lawyer. One might say that they were the networking events of their day, with the opportunity to work alongside the most influential people in the county no doubt not being lost on Edward Gepp. Indeed, it would appear that Gepp exploited such opportunities as came his way sufficiently successfully to require more spacious premises than his High Street abode was able to offer and in 1786 he purchased Maynetrees, a large house with a long frontage to New Street, overlooking St Mary's east window.

It was necessary for Gepp to completely rebuild Maynetrees, work which was finished by Michaelmas the same year, and Edward Gepp and his family moved in shortly thereafter. Gepp was wealthy enough to have kept his old house in the High Street, which he rented out to the Cricketts who were later to set up Chelmsford's first bank in the premises. The investment in Maynetrees was to prove sound, as it was to be home to both the Gepp family and its business for over a century.

Another sound investment made by Edward Gepp was his subscription to the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Canal, shares in which he purchased in 1793. However, due to mounting costs and lengthy delays, he would not live to see the canal finished, it eventually becoming navigable some six months after Gepp's death in 1797. The investors made a good return as the canal allowed coal and other goods to be transported from Maldon

far more easily than by road, which had necessitated carrying the goods over Danbury Hill. Therefore travelling times were cut dramatically and this allowed the canal shareholders to make a significant profit.

Hilda Grieve, Chelmsford historian, sees Edward Gepp as rather an austere figure: 'his will had expressed an aversion to 'funeral parade…all moneys expended thereon is a waste of property. My body to be put out of the way at no greater cost than £10 save for decent mourning for my wife and children'. Perhaps this attitude could be better described as carefulness, the carefulness which had been required for him to come from, it can be surmised, reasonably humble beginnings, to start a business and watch it flourish, and to firmly establish his family in a town in which he had no prior history. By his death in 1797 Gepp had witnessed great change in Chelmsford, not least the building of the Shire Hall and the first steps towards the establishment of the town as a borough. He knew however, that he had provided the foundations upon which his children could build.

Maynetrees, as it stands today, altered very little since Edward Gepp's time

Edward Gepp's first son, Thomas Frost Gepp, was destined to take over the family business. Born in 1767, before Gepp the elder had established himself as a lawyer, T F Gepp had grown up at 32 High Street and was sent to be educated at Felsted School, the first of many Gepps to be educated at Felsted, culminating in a school house being named after the family. Thomas Gepp's brother, George, also educated at Felsted, was to go on to qualify as a doctor at St Bart's, London, and would later return to Chelmsford as Medical Officer to the new county gaol at Springfield. Their sister, Emma Elizabeth, became the wife of Christopher Comyns Parker, son of John Oxley Parker the lawyer contemporary of her father, and fellow newcomer to the town.

Like Edward, Thomas's allegiances as a young man seem to have been split between the law and the army, although historical sources suggest that the younger man's attachment to the latter vocation may have been more to do with the opportunities to impress the young ladies of the town with smart uniforms than a desire to serve the Crown, let alone fight the French. Thomas Gepp was the Captain of the Loyal Chelmsford Volunteers, formed in 1798 as the war with France intensified and the threat of invasion became ever more likely.

Another implication of the war with France was the imposition of an income tax. This tax, intended to be a temporary measure but one which has had remarkable staying power ever thereafter, was necessary to defray the huge cost to the Exchequer of the protracted hostilities. A tax always requires a collector and, in addition to his father's old post as paymaster to the militia, Thomas Gepp was able to add to his titles Clerk to the Commissioners of Income Tax and Distributor of Stamps for the County of Essex. These important positions allowed a greater degree of control by the Gepps over the affairs of the country, as

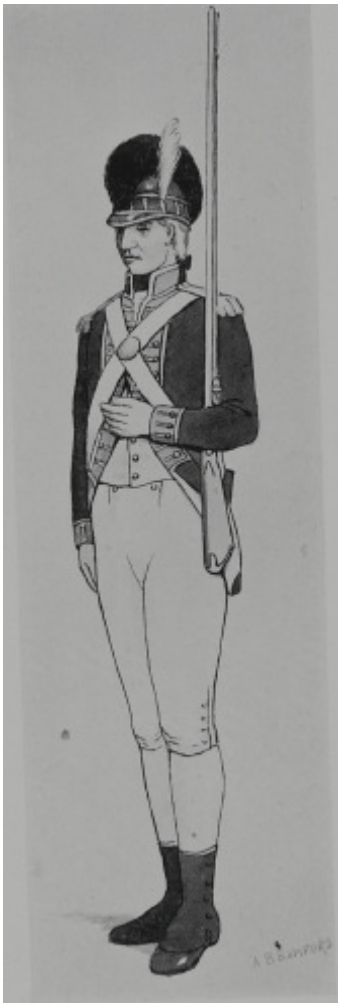
Thomas Frost Gepp

well as increasing the regular workflow of the firm. The increase in work meant that Thomas Gepp was able eventually to enter into partnership with one Thomas Perkins in 1817, although it is thought that Perkins worked at the firm for some years prior to being made a partner. After this time the firm became known as Gepp & Perkins.

Gepp was connected to St Mary's Church both through his father and his father in law, the Rector. Therefore when the church required restoration Gepp was one of the first to sign up, with a loan of £100, no small sum. It was in the same church that in 1809 the Jubilee was celebrated and the Loyal Chelmsford Volunteers were finally stood down, only after several occasions upon which Gepp had been called upon to mediate between the militia and the townspeople in fights which seemed to have broken out between the parties with some regularity. Yet it was to be another six years before Napoleon surrendered, by which time Gepp had busied himself with the affairs of town, becoming a churchwarden and overseer of the poor, eventually becoming the first in a long line of Gepps to be appointed as Undersheriff of Essex. He was appointed by Sir John Tyrrell of Boreham House, High Sheriff in 1827 and also conveniently related to Gepp by marriage. For the next two years the appointment was carried out by Thomas Perkins and thereafter it was shared with Thomas Gepp and his son.

A gregarious and popular character, most unlike his father in some ways, Thomas Frost Gepp nevertheless did a great deal to transform the character of his firm from what was still a fairly recently established one man band to a well regarded, two partner practice with a list of appointments including that holy grail of the legal world at the time, the office of Undersheriff, to its name. When he died at Maynetrees in 1832 Gepp left this earth safe in

the knowledge that his first born son, another Thomas, would take over his business and look after the family home as well as his mother and sisters.



Loyal Chelmsford Volunteer, in uniform

CHAPTER 4

The Loyal Chelmsford Volunteers

In 1798 Britain faced an uncertain future. The Emperor Napoleon had gained huge military strength in France after the Revolution and was threatening the nation's borders, the first real threat of invasion since the Spanish Armada. There was a perceived need for a force to be able to defend the country from such an attack but, unlike today, there was no large standing army engaged for this purpose. Therefore, in the same year, the Secretary of State directed that corps of volunteers be founded in each major town in order to fulfil such a purpose.

Being the county town, Chelmsford was quick to respond to the call for volunteers and at a meeting on 3rd April 1798 held at the newly built Shire Hall, it was decided that a corps of 25 men would be founded with immediate effect, and that this should be called the Loyal Chelmsford Volunteers.

The group was an elite force, if not in fighting capability at least in social standing. At the Loyal Volunteers' head stood an unlikely military leader in the Rector of Chelmsford, John Morgan. Lord Braybrooke communicated details of the meeting to King George III, who granted his personal blessing to the Corps. However, it was Thomas and George, the brothers Gepp, who, along with their Lieutenant and brother-in-law John Oxley Parker, were the driving force behind this 18th Century 'Dad's Army'.

Admission to membership of the Corps was conducted in a similar manner to a gentlemen's club. A prospective member would be proposed and could be blackballed by existing members. New

members were also obliged to contribute a guinea towards Corps funds, methods presumably designed to maintain the exclusivity of the membership as well as to provide for the costs of the dashing uniform, which consisted of a dark blue coat with scarlet lapels and a high collar; gold laced shoulder caps; cuff buttons; gold embroidered skirt ornaments; gilt buttons; all lined with white shalloon. This was complemented with a white waistcoat; black half gaiters and a round hat with white bearskin cockade. Such a uniform could not be said to be particularly practical for going into battle with, but it must have left people with little doubt as to the social standing of those who had volunteered to defend their town. The Volunteers even raised sufficient cash to purchase, for £12, second-hand instruments for a military band in order to further make their presence known in Chelmsford.

The Corps' first outing appears to have been a parade on 4th June 1798, where they joined with the Essex Yeomanry to celebrate the King's birthday at Galleywood Common. The Corps was under the command of Lieutenant Parker that day and fired three volleys, before retiring to the Black Boy Inn and thereafter a ball and supper at the Saracen's Head.

The opportunity for swagger that service in the Loyal Volunteers brought with it did not put paid completely to proper military training. Captain Gepp employed a military drill sergeant and the Corps paraded every night in order to keep in trim. There were very strict rules on attendance at drill. Any man joining the Corps committed himself until six months after the war with France had concluded, and resignation would not be accepted without a good excuse and the payment of £10 to Corps funds, with the threat of public humiliation courtesy of the Chelmsford Chronicle hanging over any man who did not pay up. Those absent from four consecutive parades were fined five shillings and attendance at

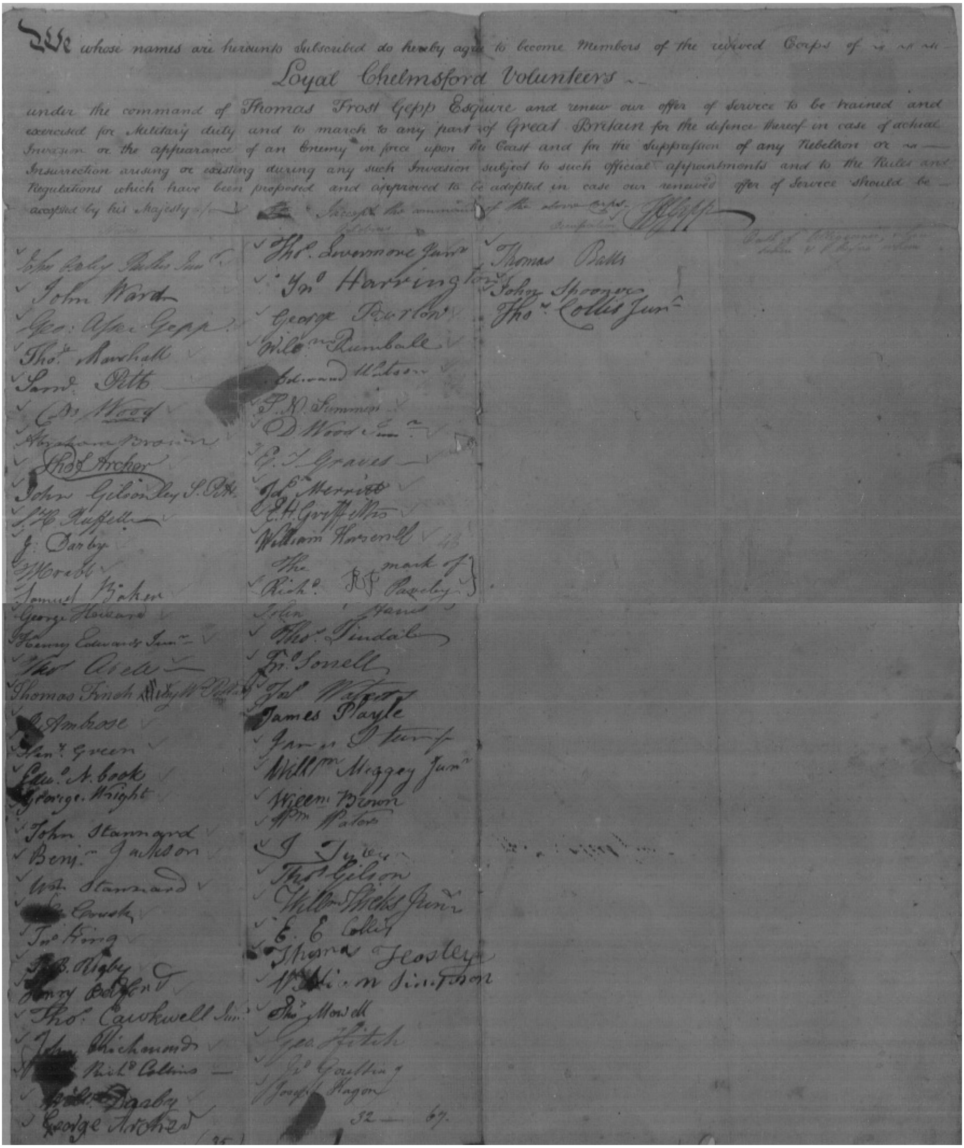
church parade each Sunday was compulsory. Later in the year the Corps felt sufficiently militarily able to encourage those of lesser means to join as non-commissioned officers, and the ranks swelled to 50 or so by the end of 1798, with the Volunteers employing a bandmaster to direct their efforts on fifes and drums.

Such a group of volunteers may seem somewhat comical today but its formation was set against a very serious backdrop. Shortly after the Corps had been raised, a secret meeting of Lord Lieutenants and their deputies was held at the Shire Hall to discuss what would happen if Britain was invaded. The Essex Yeomanry, part of the regular army, was given new barracks in Chelmsford, able to hold up to 3,000 men.

The Corps seems to have lost interest after a few years, but an even greater threat of invasion in 1803 encouraged Gepp to reform the Volunteers, obtaining 36 officers' signatures.

The threatened invasion of the French never materialised, so the Loyal Volunteers' services were, mercifully, never tested. However, Anna Maria, the Rector's eldest daughter who had spent many hours toiling to make garments for the young soldiers, was not averse to the charms of a man in uniform. She and Thomas were married at Chelmsford in 1804, by which time hostilities with France were at such a pitch that Gepp had also found himself drafted into the regular army in addition to his service with the Loyal Volunteers. Fortunately Gepp was only posted in Chelmsford as a reserve, thereby still allowing him time to conduct his legal business during the day.

Although the war was not to end until 1815, the Corps was consigned to history in 1809, leaving its former members only their uniforms and the thought of what might have been.


We whose names are hereunto Subscribed do hereby agree to become Members of the revived Corps of
Loyal Chelmsford Volunteers
under the command of Thomas Frost Gepp Esquire and renew our offer of Service to be trained and exercised for Military duty and to march to any part of Great Britain for the defence thereof in case of actual Invasion or the appearance of an Enemy in force upon the Coast and for the Suppression of any Rebellion or Insurrection arising or existing during any such Invasion subject to such official appointments and to the Rules and Regulations which have been proposed and approved to be adopted in case our renewed offer of Service should be accepted by his Majesty — I accept the command of the above Corps. T F Gepp

John Coley Parker Junr
John Ward
Geo: Asser Gepp
Thos Marshall
Saml Pitt
[illegible] Wood
Abraham Brown
Thos Archer
John Gibson [illegible]
J Russell
J. Darby
[illegible]
Samuel Baker
George Howard
Henry Edwards Junr
Thos Abell
Thomas Finch [illegible]
J Ambrose
Hen Green
Edwd A. Cook
George Wright
John Stannard
Benjn Jackson
Wm Stannard
[illegible]
Jno King
[illegible] B. Rigby
Henry [illegible]
Thos Cawkwell Junr
John Richmond
Richd Collins
[illegible] Darby
George Archer
(35)

Thos [illegible] Junr
Jno Harrington
George Barlow
Willm Rumball
Edward Watson
P. N. Summers
D Wood Junr
E. T. Graves
Jos Merritt
E H Griffiths
William [illegible]
The mark of Richd RP [illegible]
John [illegible]
Thos Tindale
Fr Sorell
Jas [illegible]
James Playle
James [illegible]
Willm Meggy Junr
William Brown
Wm Waters
J [illegible]
Thos Gilson
Willm [illegible] Junr
E. E. Collier
Thomas [illegible]
William Simpson
Thos [illegible]
Geo Fitch
Jos Goulding
Joseph Hagon
32 — 67.

Thomas Potts
John Spooner
Thos Collis Junr

The Loyal Volunteers are recalled by T F Gepp, 1803

CHAPTER 5

The Founding of the Borough

Thomas Morgan Gepp was born at Maynetrees on 15th November 1806, only son of Thomas Frost Gepp and his wife Anna Maria. He was to have four sisters, two of whom never married although Thomas's father was to ensure that his other two daughters married well; Emma Sophia to the Reverend Henry Majendie whose family resided at Hedingham Castle, and Sophia Jane to the Reverend Arthur Pearson, Rector of All Saints' Church Springfield, a very good living at the time.

When his son was born, little could Thomas Frost have known that he would survive all his younger siblings. Neither could he have know that his son would grow up to take over the family business and so thoroughly become part of the fabric of Chelmsford life that his name would resound further afield, for both good and ill, for some years to come.

Like his father, Thomas Morgan was educated at Felsted School. However, after only a year he was moved to Charterhouse, presumably at no small expense to his father who may have by this time realised that he would not have any more sons. On completion of his education at 18 the young Gepp moved to St Albans to serve out his articles under a Mr Storey as well as serving a year under a special pleader in London, qualifying as a solicitor in 1830 in anticipation of him taking over the family partnership back in Chelmsford.

Tragically he did not have long to wait as Thomas Frost Gepp died just two years later in 1832 and was buried in Chelmsford leaving

his son, still a bachelor, to look after his mother and his unmarried sisters. T M Gepp was fortunate in his business affairs, as Thomas Perkins, with whom his father had gone into partnership in 1817, was content to continue, albeit now as senior partner in the firm still known to the town as Gepp & Perkins.

T M Gepp was also fortunate in the connections forged by his father's family within the town and county. In these the young Gepp seemed determined to continue, indeed becoming Undersheriff first in the very year of his father's death. It was not purely a desire to be a chip off the old block which may have motivated Gepp to such civic duty. Chelmsford was still without proper governance and power remained concentrated in the hands of the manors and the church. Therefore, positions of civic power and the potential for legal work which flowed from them, continued to be highly sought after.

Another method of ensuring one's continued success was to marry well. Gepp's sisters had already done so, as had his aunt who had married into the Parker family, previously the Gepps' rivals, both families being young newcomers to Georgian Chelmsford. Gepp's own mother had been part of the Tindal family who was to spawn the famous Judge Tindal of whom there is a statue outside the Shire Hall. There must therefore have been no little pressure on the young Gepp to marry carefully. Whether Thomas's marriage to Mary Lane was a love match is lost in the sands of time, however Mary bore Thomas at least seven children who survived childhood, six of whom were boys. They were married at St George's, Hanover Square in London on Thursday 1st August 1833, a year after the death of Gepp's father, and his young wife came back to live with Thomas at Maynetrees. Mary Lane was the only child of James Payne of the Island of Barbados. Having grown up in the West Indies, she must have found

Chelmsford altogether less interesting and indeed, she died whilst still in her fifties, her husband surviving her by some fifteen years.

In developing the business, Gepp was quick to realise a gap in the market. Maynetrees was situated in New Road, a mere stone's throw away from the Shire Hall where petty sessions and assizes took place. When John Johnson had designed the Shire Hall he had neglected to provide any accommodation for the visiting judges. Maynetrees had been extended by Gepp's grandfather Edward into a sizeable dwelling and there was space to spare. He therefore converted a set of rooms into separate lodgings for the judges to use during the sessions and rented these to the court for a goodly sum. This rather suited his occasional appointment as Undersheriff and it must have been an arrangement which also suited the court as the same set of rooms was used by the judges until the 1960s, well after Gepp & Sons had moved offices, whereupon the County Council purchased Maynetrees in its entirety for the same purpose, a use to which it is put to this day.

Nevertheless, it is not for his actions as solicitor that T M Gepp was to be remembered, but his actions in the town itself. It would appear that he was almost hyperactive in the amount he took on: from 1832 the firm was almost continuously Undersheriff; he was the steward of some thirty five manors and was himself Lord of the Manor of Braintree. Gepp was the Essex County Treasurer; Registrar of Chelmsford County Court; Registrar of the Archdeaconry of St Albans; Registrar of the Archdeaconry of Chelmsford; Clerk to the Commissioners of Income Tax (not long introduced); Clerk to Chelmsford Lunatic Asylum; Clerk to the Commissioners of Sewers for Dengie, Foulness and Fobbing; Governor of Chelmsford Grammar School; Trustee of Chelmsford Charity School; Trustee of Chelmsford Dispensary and Infirmary; Trustee of the Chelmsford and Dengie

Savings Bank; Chairman of the Chelmsford Gas Lighting & Coke Company and on Sundays he even found time to teach a bible class for boys at Maynetrees during which he would apparently entertain them with a magic lantern. Indeed, it is a wonder that he found time for any private clients at all.

Possibly the most powerful and time consuming of all T M Gepp's extra activities was in his role as Rector's Warden at St Mary's Church a role which was not one open to election, but rather selection by the incumbent of the day. The Gepp family had proved themselves staunch Anglicans. Indeed, Gepp's maternal grandfather had been Rector of Chelmsford and his two brothers-in-law were both clergymen in the Diocese. Furthermore, the appointment of Gepp to the post of Clerk to the Archdeaconry had meant that he was well known to many local clergy.

St Mary's, now Chelmsford Cathedral

The post of Church Warden was a powerful one indeed. Adherence to the Christian faith was almost universal and church attendance was high in a world with little other entertainment. It was in the Rector's power to set up boards to determine many things and vestry meetings of the church hierarchy were often used in Chelmsford to decide important matters. Often, such matters would require funds and for these a church rate would be levied by the wardens on behalf of the Rector. The rate was required to be paid by all residents within the parish owning property over a certain value. It was Thomas Morgan Gepp's misfortune, however, to be Rector's Warden in a town which housed many dissenters. Several of the more successful Georgian newcomers to the town, particularly those who had built palatial villas along New London Road, were enthusiastic members of the free churches. Such dissenters did not see why they ought to pay the church rate as they did not belong to the established church, and there were many instances of families refusing to pay, although in practice the more prosperous dissenting families mostly chose to pay on the quiet rather than risk public humiliation.

Not so one John Thorougood, a clog maker from Moulsham. Thorougood was issued with a demand for the rate in 1838, but refused to pay. In November of that year he was taken before the magistrates yet still refused to pay, challenging the validity of the rate. This put Gepp in a difficult position. Loathe as he was to take the matter any further, he knew that, as Church Warden, he could not let one dissenter get away with non-payment as it would merely magnify the problem the next year. Therefore, Thorougood was cited to attend the Bishop's Consistory Court in London. Thorougood, not recognising the Bishop's authority, did not bother to turn up. As a consequence, he was arrested and thrown into Chelmsford prison in 1839. The matter had fast

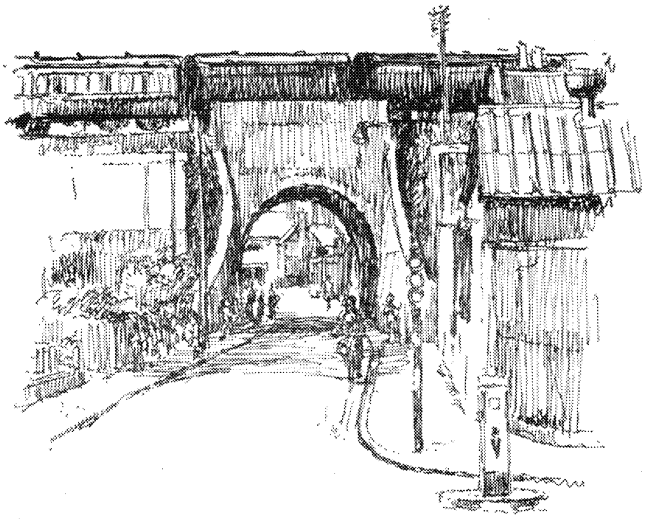
become acutely embarrassing, not just for Gepp and the Church, but for the many wealthy dissenters of the town who preferred to live and let live. Things were to get far worse, as Thorougood still refused to pay and complained to the press about conditions in the gaol. The Rector, in full support of Gepp throughout, suffered humiliation at the hands of Thorougood's wife who engaged in a one-woman protest as he passed her on his way to Matins one Sunday morning. Thorougood had by this time been in prison for non-payment for over a year and the press had a field day: it was not merely the Chronicle that ran the story; the London papers also printed features on Thorougood. Soon the entire country had an opinion on the case of Gepp v Thorougood, largely split down sectarian lines. In 1840 the matter was debated by Parliament and it must have been a great test of nerve for Gepp in the face of such opposition.

A subscription fund was set up to free Thorougood which raised over £900 and it eventually took amendment to an Act of Parliament before he was finally freed. The extent of his debt to the Church was less than £5. Thorougood used the fund raised on his behalf to build a row of cottages in Springfield which he named 'Gepp's Folly'. It must have annoyed Thomas Gepp no end, particularly as his sister was the Rector's wife in Springfield. Nonetheless, the following year, a perhaps suitably chastened Gepp led the call for the removal of the family pews in the church, a possible sign that he saw the old order to be falling away and that there was something of a need for greater equality, even before God.

Frederick Veley had been a Braintree man. Indeed, his brother sometime Undersheriff, had set up as a solicitor in that town. Mr Perkins, senior partner of Perkins & Gepp, was rapidly ageing and it seemed sensible for T M Gepp to look for another, younger

partner. The young Veley, fresh from his articles, seemed a good bet. It would have been difficult for the young Gepp to have found anyone much less experienced than himself at any rate. Veley joined the practice in 1835, although he was only finally made a partner on Perkins' death some ten years later, from which time the firm was known as Gepp & Veley. The pair were to form a formidable partnership which, against the wishes of many vested interests in the town, used their positions of power and influence to drive forward many improvements in public health and sanitation and helped to pave the way for the incorporation of the Borough we know today.

By the start of the Victorian era, Chelmsford and Moulsham had become hopelessly crowded. The arrival in 1842 of the new railway to Chelmsford did nothing to help matters, bringing ever more inhabitants to the town. Tiny houses were homes to large families and conditions were such that disease was rife. A cholera outbreak in 1831 served as a timely reminder to a civic society



One of the bridges built for the arrival of the railway in 1842.

only just becoming used to linking cleanliness with health, that Chelmsford's sewers were non existent. All effluent was disposed of either in the street or in the rivers. Despite widespread illness and several deaths, the rate payers were not keen on any scheme to rid the town of the worst of its difficulties and it was not until 1850 when finally the Board of Health for the town was set up. Its membership was to be elected by all inhabitants with over £50 worth of rateable property, but in practice it would be those who owned the most property who would largely stand for and elect the committee.

There were many candidates for what was to be the most important body in the town and it is no surprise to see T M Gepp's name amongst those successful in the election, with Veley joining him three years later. The Board was not slow to act and it would seem that their remit stretched far beyond sewers. They opposed plans to build a slaughterhouse; they set up landfill sites; they warned against public health scares and set up a rival fire service to those operating the town's long standing fire precautions. Such interference was not universally well received and Hilda Grieve's book tells of a fire in Baddow Lane in 1857 where the rival fire services were more intent in dousing each other with their water cannons than in putting out the fire! Nonetheless, undoubted success was achieved in regard to their original aim and by 1854, over nine thousand feet of sewers had been laid throughout the town; a phenomenal achievement in such a short time.

One of the longest lasting and most keenly felt legacies of the Board of Health was to occur towards the end of both Gepp and Veley's lives. They had both served as secretaries to the Dispensary, an organisation which had been in existence for some decades for the treatment of the poor of the town and to which

many local physicians gave their services free of charge. During the 1870s the Dispensary had found accommodation of sorts in Moulsham Street but the plan was to build a general infirmary; a proper hospital. So it was that in 1880 Frederick Veley, at least a decade into his retirement from the partnership, but remaining Secretary to the Dispensary, set out on a county-wide appeal for funds to build the hospital.

Veley and his Board were incredibly successful at raising money. In the first three years alone over £5,000 had been gifted to the appeal, enough to purchase the site in New London Road which was to remain as a hospital for over a century. Veley warned the county that this would not be enough however and set off to find another £10,000. He was aided on his way by the death in 1883 of his erstwhile friend and colleague, Thomas Morgan Gepp, whose friends helped to raise £750 in his memory. Thereafter the men's ward in the hospital was named the Gepp Ward. It must have been a bittersweet gift for Frederick Veley but a fitting memorial to Thomas Gepp, whose death at the age of seventy seven from a chill caught whilst travelling from Calais back to Chelmsford was an event which saw great mourning in the town. The bells of St Mary's were muffled and hordes of dignitaries lined up to pay their respects, as evidenced in the five thousand word obituary dedicated to the great man by the Essex Chronicle. Veley died some years later to lesser acclaim. One cannot help but feel rather sorry for the man who spent not only his whole career, but also his life thereafter, very much as the junior partner, despite so much hard work.

This is not to say that Thomas Morgan Gepp is not owed his own place in the history books of Chelmsford. He was the apogee of the county solicitor and, like his father and grandfather before him, saw the great opportunities of his day and seized them with

great enthusiasm, whether the result was for good or for ill. It was a skill that his two sons were to find difficult to inherit.

Gepp Ward, Chelmsford & Essex Hospital, c.1920

Thomas and Mary's first son, another Thomas, joined the army and died aged twenty three whilst fighting in India. Their next son, Henry, a scholar and sometime fellow in modern languages at New College, Oxford, became a clergyman in the Diocese of Oxford. Of his two youngest sons, Nicholas was also sent to New College, to read Law, but then followed in his older brother's footsteps into the Church with parishes in Colchester, Norfolk and even France. Gepp's youngest son, Arthur, married into a naval family and emigrated to Australia. It was his third and fourth sons however, who were to take over the family business.

Walter Payne Gepp was born in 1838 at Maynetrees, where he would live all his life. Whilst all Thomas's other sons were educated at Felsted, young Walter must either have been exceptionally bright or held a special place in his father's affections, as he was sent to Eton and thereafter, in distinction to

his brothers, to Merton College, Oxford. After obtaining his BA in 1861 he served articles under his father in Chelmsford, being admitted as a solicitor during Easter term 1867. Walter's brother, Charles Bramston Osborne Gepp, younger by only one year, did not enjoy the education of his slightly older brother, only having gone to Felsted and never to university, with the result that he took his articles earlier than his brother and therefore qualified first.

Walter Payne Gepp

As was often the fate of younger brothers, Charles was only to inherit the more minor of his father's appointments and was required to remove to Springfield whilst his elder brother kept Maynetrees. However, having been first to qualify, it was he who became the new Undersheriff on his father's death, a position his brother only held for one year. The young brothers Gepp had over a decade working with their father before his death and they were both admitted to the partnership on the retirement of Mr Veley in 1867. Thence forward the firm practised under the name by which it has been known ever since, Gepp & Sons Solicitors. By the time of their father's death, the old allegiances which had governed Chelmsford for centuries: the manor; the Church and parish offices and more latterly, the Board of Health, were looking increasingly inadequate for the governance of an expanding town. Moreover, various Acts of Parliament passed in quick succession and coinciding with Queen Victoria's Jubilee meant that towns could apply to become boroughs, with a mayor and a corporation of elected councillors which, if instigated in Chelmsford, would replace the Board of Health and a lot more besides, including some of the work previously enjoyed by the firm. Not only this, but the Gepps were facing increased competition from other firms of solicitors within the town, many with less to lose in opposing the establishment than the Gepps had.

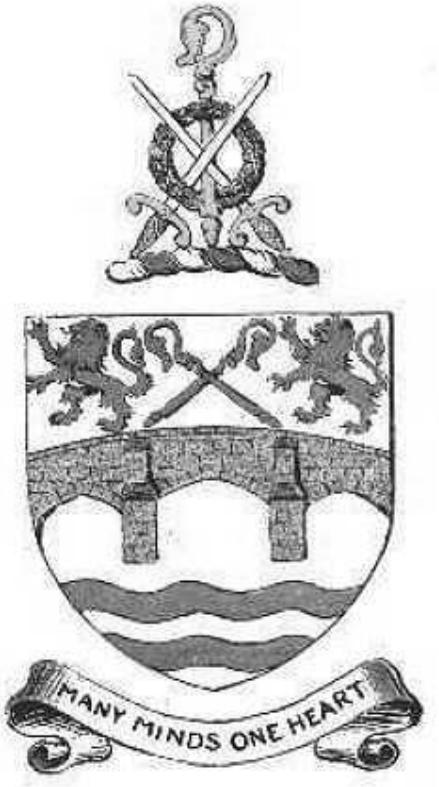
The inevitable momentum behind the incorporation of Chelmsford as a Borough initially split the brothers Gepp. W P was a member of the committee who proposed that the matter be taken forward, whilst C B O bitterly opposed such proposals ostensibly on the grounds of cost. Another solicitor, a newcomer, Arthur Furbank, was given the post of Solicitor to the Borough Committee and although W P initially chaired the committee it was not to be long before he changed his mind about the whole

affair. Whether it was due to differences with his fellow committee members or a realisation that the borough status would threaten much of his firm's work, W P defected and with his brother, started a petition in opposition of incorporation. Significantly, although the proposition's signatures outnumbered the opposition by four to one, the two sides' rateable value was similar, perhaps showing that more of the landed gentry opposed the incorporation than the new middle class who had the most to gain from borough status. The matter went before the Privy Council in 1887 and Hilda Grieve records C B O Gepp, having been called as a witness, remarking that he did not think small tradesmen to be the best men to control a large expenditure of public money.

C B O's testimony was however, no match for Frederick Chancellor, a man of a class whose time had truly come, and who was to later become Mayor of Chelmsford. Chancellor's cool and calm exposition won the day and Chelmsford duly became a borough. Elections were held but the solicitor instructed was Furbank, not Gepp. Although W P, always a waverer between the two camps, would later swallow his pride and be elected to the Corporation, even becoming one of the Borough's first mayors in 1904, C B O as Undersheriff, never quite adjusted to the new order. He retired to Springfield and fought hard and unsuccessfully to keep the village out of the new Borough. He was Church Warden at Springfield Church and sang in the choir there until the day he died.

Both W P and C B O survived only a few years of the 20th Century. They had been dealt a difficult act to follow by their father but managed to hold the firm together through changing times. It may yet be a mark of those times, or perhaps the brothers' personalities, that their own obituaries in the Chronicle

were not one fifth the length of their father's, their lives possibly seeming somewhat less relevant in these new days of government by the people rather than the gentry.



Coat of arms of the Borough of Chelmsford.
The motto 'Many Minds, One Heart' is thought to have originated from the Gepps' rival, Arthur Furbank.

CHAPTER 6

Law and Disorder

Whether or not one agrees with those who state that the English legal system is the best in the world, it cannot be denied that the arms of state that we employ to keep the law today are a curious mixture of the ancient and of comparatively recent history. It is laughable now to think of a county without a police force; of a prison with only one prison officer; or one where prisoners were policed by other, more senior, inmates, but for centuries Essex along with all other counties managed to exist and with a much lower crime rate than it enjoys today.

As the county town of Essex, Chelmsford has long played a crucial part in the keeping of the peace in the county as well as in the punishment of those who break the law. Whilst traditionally it fell to the lord of the manor and his steward to punish minor misdemeanours, a Crown court was necessary for the more major criminal offences. Although the earliest surviving Chelmsford court rolls date from 1652, it is known that there has been such a court in Chelmsford from at least 1569, the earliest example being an Elizabethan market house called 'Great Cross'. This was situated at the top of the market, near to St Mary's Church. In the house itself was the court and, alongside it, a private room for the steward of the manor to keep many of the important documents relating to the town. There was also a special viewing platform reserved for guests of the manor from which they could see the court cases in action. 'Little Cross' was a smaller building situated next door from where the civil court of *nisi prius* was conducted. Together the buildings became known as the Shire House.

The Shire House suffered a lot of wear and tear and was in constant need of restoration, a task and expense which was undertaken by the townspeople after protracted discussion with the Mildmays, lords of the manor, who eventually agreed to hand the buildings over to the town in return for this service. By the end of the 18th Century however it had become clear that the buildings would have to be completely replaced. The courts were eventually condemned by the 1788 Quarter Sessions as 'not in a fit condition for transacting the publick business of the County'. After several alternative sites had been discussed, it was decided that the town would purchase the buildings around the Great Cross thus allowing the site to stretch back to the churchyard, and that they would build a new Shire Hall on the existing, if much enlarged, site at the head of the High Street.

Chelmsford High Street, showing the Great Cross at its head (Edward Gepp's first office is pictured as fifth building to the right of the lion sign).

In 1789 John Johnson, the Essex County Surveyor, was given the task of designing the new Shire Hall and the main contract for building work was awarded to his son's firm. The problem for the contractors was that the old building had to be kept in place until the new Shire Hall was ready for the courts to transfer their business. Therefore, construction of the Shire Hall took place behind the existing courts, with the result that no one could see what the new building looked like until the Great Cross was demolished. This was a major headache for the contractors, as space was very limited and Grieve records several builders having complained bitterly that they had vastly underestimated the time it would take to prepare materials and to get them to the right place on the site. Nonetheless, when the Great Cross was finally pulled down in spring 1791 it must have been an awesome sight for the people of Chelmsford: the new Shire Hall, a building of undeniable beauty and grandeur, at least to its front, looking down the street to the river. The Shire Hall was designed to house both courts, with a grand room to the top in which town meetings could take place. There were prisoners' cells underneath the Crown court; an armoury for the local militia's equipment, offices and a retiring room for the jury. The entrance foyer was also designed for trade displays and it is remarkable how the usage of this building remains virtually unchanged in over two hundred years.

John Johnson was widely acclaimed, not least in the fledgling Chelmsford Chronicle, as a hero of the County. Not only had he delivered a grand building in which the town could be justly proud, on a difficult site, but he had also done so on time and within the £14,000 budget approved by an Act of Parliament for the purpose. In addition to his usual wage, Johnson was given gifts to the value of 100 guineas, no small sum but perhaps a just one in recognition of all that he had accomplished.

The Shire Hall was to go on to see the trial of many men and women from the town and further afield for all manner of crimes. As Undersheriff, various partners of Gepp & Sons were to witness many of these trials, their job being to summon the jury on behalf of the High Sheriff. The few surviving notes that the Gepps made of the cases heard make fascinating reading and it is interesting to see how much more harshly theft and other property offences were treated in comparison with those of violence, particularly in the Victorian period. Next to each offence on the court papers the Undersheriff marked the sentence given, although for one particular matter, tactfully recorded in 1846 as 'unnatural acts with a farm animal', Gepp prudishly wrote nothing whatsoever.

Essex appears never to have been short of villains and the Chelmsford Chronicle learnt from its earliest days that stories of crime sold newspapers by the thousand. The most serious and daring of felonies often related to incidences of smuggling tea, sugar, tobacco and other imported goods on which duty was to be paid, which often reached their final destination through small villages on the Dengie peninsula. Customs officers of the day were armed with muskets and pistols, as often were the smugglers and this could mean that confrontations got out of hand. On 14th October 1774 the paper reported shots being fired between customs officials and smugglers at a public house in Mountnessing, whereupon over 1000 guineas worth of tea was seized and two smugglers severely wounded by shot, one in the head.

Perhaps the most serious of trials reaching the Shire Hall during its early years was the murder in 1856 of a gamekeeper of Sir John Tyrell of Boreham House. Sir John was the MP for the town and being related to the Gepps by marriage, was the first High Sheriff to bestow on the Gepps the title of Undersheriff. It was alleged that the gamekeeper had been murdered by a well-known family

of poachers and an accomplice. The jury at the trial was quick to find a verdict of guilty of murder against James Thorogood, one of the five defendants; three others were found to be accessories to murder and received the comparatively lenient sentence of four years penal servitude and one, who had provided evidence for the Crown, was found not guilty. The case was hugely popular with the public and on each day the Shire Hall was packed. On the last day of the trial the audience reached its peak of over 300 and when the sentence was read out and the guilty men taken to an upstairs room the entire crowd spilled out in order to follow them. In vain the ushers tried to calm the crowd but by this point the situation had got completely out of hand. The staircase was not built to withstand so many bodies and after a short while the banister broke, then the stairs themselves fractured and collapsed. One man was tragically crushed to death and many more injured. More than one hundred people marooned upstairs, including the guilty men, were forced to escape by ladders to the roof of the building next door.

The Chelmsford Chronicle also recorded the somewhat less serious but no doubt equally distressing, offences of young ne'erdowells in the town, who on February 10th 1797 after nightfall went round twisting all the brass door knockers off the houses in the High Street. The newspaper records with some annoyance that the crime was obviously not committed with any sense of commercial gain, as the knockers were discarded in the road after the young ruffians had finished their business. Some years earlier the same paper records an incident where a group of young men threw a local waiter out of a restaurant window, apparently due to no fault of his own, whereupon he had to be carried to hospital.

Whilst ASBOs were regrettably not available to the Crown court when sentencing such offenders in the 19th Century, punishments were nonetheless harsh compared to today's equivalent, with transportation, often to Australia, being the norm for many petty thefts. Transportation was not perceived by the populace at large to be a particularly harsh sentence. Indeed, some thought it might present more opportunities than drawbacks to those who had little to lose and for whom Britain bore no love. However, as the testimony of one Chelmsford man, sentenced to seven years' transportation in Australia and who had escaped by swimming through shark infested waters in order to reach a ship bound for home, bears witness, for those who survived the journey Australia was a wild and exceedingly unpleasant place. Although often transportation was officially for a term of years, it was almost always effectively permanent as very few ever came back alive. It was not until well into the Victorian era that it was decreed that felons would no longer meet this cruel fate.

Although the parish of Chelmsford had long enjoyed the services of parish constables, the County Police Act of 1839 allowed Essex to have a county-wide police force. The last meetings of the ancient court leet took place in Chelmsford in 1842 and the same year powers of appointment of constables were transferred away from them to the parish vestry, who then presented ten names to the magistrates to be elected as parish constables, who would fall under the authority of the new Chief Constable, Captain John Bunch Bonnemaison McHardy, a Scot who already had a distinguished record in the Navy and Coastguard to his name. McHardy's previous experience allowed him to effectively deal with smuggling in the county and his efforts in training new officers were nationally recognised, with Essex Police Service becoming something of a nationwide training ground.

Early Panda Cars, Police Headquarters, Springfield

HMP Chelmsford stands today at the brow of the hill on Springfield Road. It is designated as a local prison, meaning that it takes prisoners from the local area as well as having several wings for more specialised inmates. The building retains much of its original austerity and grandeur, reminiscent of times gone by when incarceration must have seemed even grimmer than it does today. However, the current prison is comparatively new, it having replaced in 1822 the old gaol at Moulsham, which stood by the banks of the river next to the stone bridge, and Chelmsford's own House of Correction, which stood behind a large dwelling in the High Street, opposite Springfield Road.

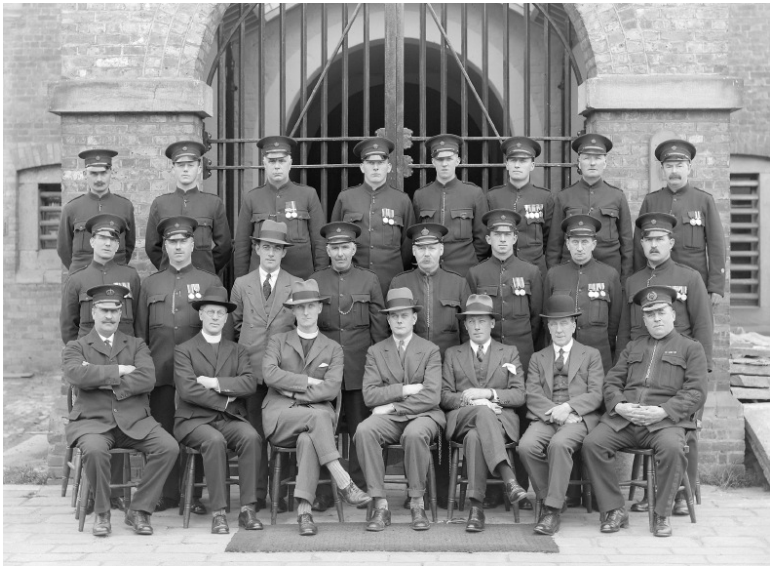
Chelmsford had a gaol as early as 1658 but the House of Correction was erected as late as 1806. This comparatively new

building was inadequate for the town's prison population, even when coupled with Moulsham Gaol, and almost immediately became insanitary and wanting repair, despite its build cost having been over £7,000. Nonetheless, it was a distinct improvement upon what had gone before, describe by the town's records as 'an offensive and bad prison'. Supervision of the prisoners was not of the best order and it would appear that they were only visited twice a day. Interestingly, the keeper of the gaol at Moulsham was a woman in 1789, and the keeper of the House of Correction a man. In 1817 eleven prisoners, who had all been sentenced to death, effected a daring escape from the gaol, by burrowing into the sewer through the privy in their cell and out into the execution yard. Although all the prisoners were caught, one got as far as Chadwell Heath before being apprehended.

Whether it was the laxity in supervision; the several escape attempts or the overcrowded and insanitary conditions which convinced the local magistrates that a new prison was necessary, is not clear. However, the erection of the new Springfield Convict Gaol was finally completed in 1828 at the phenomenal cost of over £57,000, four and a half times the cost of the Shire Hall, albeit some years later. The prison initially had a normal capacity of 628 inmates, although it was estimated that the building could probably withstand roughly twice that number if the worst came to the worst. The original entrance to the prison instilled an extreme sense of foreboding in all who traversed it, as the gibbet for those who were to be hung was set right above the main door.

The first governor appointed was a Mr T M Neal, who had previously been the head turnkey at the House of Correction in the town. He was paid an excellent salary of £500 p.a and was required to live on site. Unfortunately the house constructed for the governor was built above the main sewer for the prison, with

tragic consequences for his successor who lost all three of his young daughters to disease as a result. In addition to the governor and his team of turnkeys (prison warders), there was appointed a chaplain and a physician, one George Asser Gepp, brother to Thomas Frost Gepp who at that time was busy with the family business in the town. The Gepps were to become active in prison reform, and helped to found the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society, a charity which helped ex-convicts into trades when they left prison.



The staff of HMP Chelmsford, c. 1920

The new gaol was not without its faults however, and escapes were common enough. The story is told of one prisoner who escaped in 1831, only to return two days later to throw his prison clothes back over the wall as he did not want to be arrested for their theft! Other escape attempts included using ladders conveniently left in the prison by careless workmen. A large escape plan was foiled in 1837 by the head turnkey who prevented several men condemned to transportation from escaping. The men had attacked another turnkey, stealing his set of keys, and then went about the prison setting many prisoners free. However, the head turnkey managed to get various pistols and other armoury together and a large crowd of locals, hearing the commotion and realising what was going on, surrounded the prison in order to apprehend any inmate who successfully circumnavigated the wall.

Inside HMP Chelmsford, pre WWII

HMP Chelmsford was closed by the military in the Great War and only reopened in 1931 for a small number of inmates. It was used as a borstal during World War II and only afterwards, as the prison population grew, did it regain its capacity as a large prison.

The late 20th Century saw an expansion in the size of the town and it became obvious that the existing police station in New Street was too small and old fashioned for the modern police service. Likewise, the system of assizes being held in the Shire Hall's Crown courts (the Magistrates' courts having moved some years before to a purpose built block on Victoria Road) was outdated and breaking at the seams. In the 1960s a large strip of land next to Guy Harlings and Maynetrees was purchased from the Diocese of Chelmsford and a new police station was built at the corner of New Street and Victoria Road. Then, in 1982, the new Crown court was built next door, with the Magistrates' courts moving back into the Shire Hall. The architecture of the new Crown court was somewhat controversial, Pevsner criticising its dull and gloomy brown bricks and introverted nature, with little natural light. The judges retained their pleasant lodgings at Maynetrees but would now sit all year round.

Danbury police sergeant with local girl (picture was probably posed)

CHAPTER 7

The Sheriff's Office

Although to most people the word 'sheriff' immediately conjures up images of the Wild West, the office of sheriff is in fact an English invention of over a thousand years ago and the title is retained by every county of England, all of which have a High Sheriff, who in turn must appoint an Undersheriff.

The office of sheriff is the oldest continuous Crown office, thought to be an invention of the Saxon King Alfred, who divided his kingdom into shires and appointed counts or ealdormen to rule over each shire. The count would then appoint a deputy or viscount, also known as a sheriff or shire-reeve, to administer justice in the shire. However, not long after the establishment of the sheriff, evidence suggests that their role became one far more accountable to the Crown than to their respective ealdormen, and by the time of King Ethelward the sheriff was very much the *exactor Regis*, the King's receiver. The sheriff's duty was to look after all castles and manors in the bailiwick; to farm the Crown's lands; to keep the peace in the county and to hear all cases in the county court of no more than 40 shillings. These many and varied roles endowed the shrievalty with a great amount of power and both in practical and titular terms they became for generations the most powerful person in each county, taking precedent over all earldoms and baronetcies in their domain.

Apart from Westmoreland where the position of sheriff was hereditary, Edward the Confessor established the principle that the people of the county ought to choose their own sheriff. However, the elections that this law brought forth proved too

controversial for the Crown and this early instance of democratic process was speedily done away with. To this day the office of High Sheriff, as each county's sheriff is now known, is bestowed by the Crown. Rather than being picked to do the job, a prospective candidate is 'pricked' by the monarch. This tradition had its origins in Elizabethan times, whereupon a list of three names was produced to the Queen and she placed a pin prick in the paper next to the name of her chosen candidate. Nowadays the current High Sheriff may nominate the name of their chosen successor and this name may be chosen by the monarch, normally two years after the current High Sheriff has vacated, a practice of patronage not without criticism for its susceptibility to the old boys' network.

The office of High Sheriff continued to enjoy a high status within county life after the Norman Conquest, with the role gradually developing into that of 'keeper of the peace in chief', and collector of the Crown's debts in the county. Many of the powers now vested in the Lord Lieutenant of the county and various members of the judiciary were previously enjoyed by the High Sheriff, who continued to have precedence over all other county officials until 1908, whereupon he was overtaken by the Lord Lieutenant as the Sovereign's personal representative. Now the High Sheriff is second only to the Lord Lieutenant, except where a borough has a Lord Mayor, where they are second in command, and likewise high ranking officials in local government also trump the High Sheriff when performing certain activities within their geographical area of control.

Despite the downgrading of the role of High Sheriff witnessed in the early 20th Century, several of the appointment's original functions remain. The principal duties of the High Sheriff include to this day attendance at royal visits to the county, the protection

and well being of all members of the judiciary and the magistracy whilst active in the county and attending on the first day of the legal year. In addition to these duties the High Sheriff is called upon to act as the Returning Officer for parliamentary elections in rural constituencies within the county, although this function is often delegated to the clerk to the local authority. The High Sheriff is also responsible for the proclamation of a new Sovereign. In the early 21st Century the thousand-year monopoly on the collection of the Crown's debts in the county previously enjoyed by the shrievalty was brought to an end and now county court debts are collected by private debt collection agencies who bid for a contract to do the work.

The High Sheriff's party, 1926 (H H Gepp, Undersheriff, seated L)

In stark contrast to the Lord Lieutenant of a county, who receives a sizeable allowance with which to perform his duties, the High Sheriff receives no support from the public purse and many a sheriff must be privately rather thankful that the appointment only lasts for one year, as the large extent of entertainment expected of the sheriff as host tends to be an expense which is borne personally. The expense of the position meant that in previous centuries it had become difficult to find willing sheriffs, so difficult in fact that it became a criminal offence to refuse the position if offered!

That is not to say that the High Sheriff receives no assistance in the execution of their duties and in practice much of the day to day administration of the sheriff's duties is carried out by the Undersheriff, a solicitor engaged for the purpose by the High Sheriff. Whereas a High Sheriff is only appointed for one year, the Undersheriff is often an ongoing appointment lasting for many years and, in the case of Gepp & Sons, generations of the same family and the same firm.

Prior to 1827 most Undersheriffs of the county had been drawn from chambers in London, with the notable exception of Charles Parker, whose family had been well established in Chelmsford in the 18th Century as attorneys and stewards of the manor, and remain to this day connected to the town as land agents. However, in 1827 the High Sheriff, Sir John Tyrell Bart of Boreham House, chose the by-then ageing Thomas Frost Gepp as his Undersheriff. By this time Gepp was already in partnership with Thomas Perkins in Chelmsford and the appointment was shared between them until Gepp's death in 1832 whereupon it passed to his son Thomas Morgan Gepp, who continued to share the appointment with Perkins until 1834, before being usurped by another attorney. The firm struggled to hold on to the

appointment for any length of time during the Victorian era, with T M Gepp regaining the post from 1840-41 and then holding it jointly with his business partner Veley in 1851, whose brother, a Braintree solicitor, had held the post prior to him, and again on his own in 1852, then again intermittently throughout the 1860s and 1870s. It would appear from the list of High Sheriffs and their corresponding Undersheriffs that the appointment depended largely upon the High Sheriff's locality and whether or not he was a client of the firm.

It was Charles Bramston Osborne Gepp who can be credited with definitively establishing the role of Undersheriff at what by then had become Gepp & Sons. C B O Gepp was first appointed in 1885 and held the post continuously from then until his death in 1907, with the exception of George Courtauld's tenure as High Sheriff. Courtauld was the famous Braintree textile manufacturer and, no doubt for political expediency, he appointed a Braintree solicitor to the post. C B O's nephew Henry Hamilton Gepp took over the job on his death but relinquished it in favour of his other uncle, Walter Payne Gepp the next year, who died in office in 1908. H H Gepp regained the title in 1911, which he shared with Cunnington of Braintree until 1922 when he held the post continuously until his death in 1945 and the post has been held by a partner of the firm to the exclusion of all others ever since, with A D P Thompson holding from 1946 until 1963 when he retired and Thomas Gepp took over, until his retirement from the post in 1988 whereupon the job was taken over by Jonathan Douglas-Hughes, the current post-holder.

Until the early 21st Century the Undersheriff employed an assistant and often a bailiff or two to enforce whatever the court would have the sheriff enforce. Dudley Spain was the Undersheriff's assistant for many years in the post war period and

was assisted by a young Peter Davis before he went on to the conveyancing for he is now remembered. 'I was in the Undersheriff's department for several years whilst Mr Thompson was the Undersheriff' Peter recalls. 'Mr Thompson would on various occasions throughout the year be called upon to get dressed up in the garb required of the Undersheriff, not least on the arrival in town of the assizes. As many members of the judiciary would be in town for the day it was decided that an official car was required. However, nobody at Gepps had a car that was up to the job and for several years we ended up using the local undertaker's car!'

'It was interesting work' Peter Davis remembers. 'My role was largely to deal with the county elections. Although Mr Bush at the County Council was actually in charge of the elections a lot of the work was farmed out to us, such as the compiling of lists of voters, manning the polling stations, postal votes and preparing the ballot papers. I remember working a great deal of overtime, often until gone midnight, right up in the attic of our offices at 66 Duke Street, which was where all the voting paraphernalia was kept. It was an excellent money earner as one could reclaim the overtime from the local authority.'

'We would also go to assist at the count, and various members of staff had their own constituency to deal with, throughout the county' recalls Peter Davis. 'There were several important constituencies in Essex, with Churchill's own constituency being Epping Forest, as well as the Chancellor of the Exchequer R A (Rab) Butler at Saffron Walden. Once we had completed any task Tom Gepp would say "take it to the Bush", meaning that we had to take it over to Mr Bush at County Hall. He did not suffer fools gladly and there was always a great pressure not to make any mistakes.'

1924 General Election candidates address crowd, Chelmsford Shire Hall

Chelmsford's own parliamentary constituency was not without controversy, with the death on active service of the sitting MP in 1944 triggering a by-election, with the return of Wing Commander Millington of the short-lived Commonwealth Party and, at 29, the youngest MP in the House of Commons, in what had previously been a safe Tory seat serving as an outrider for the massive change in political opinion which culminated in the Labour landslide in the general election of 1945 and the implementation of the Welfare State.

The 1970s brought with it reorganisation of both the court system and local government, and local authorities do not now use the Undersheriff's office for elections. Happily, another job which since 1971 the Undersheriff has no longer been required to deal with is the putting to death of those found guilty of capital

offences. Prior to this it was the Undersheriff's duty to arrange the execution of such prisoners, employ the hangman and even test the noose for strength. Such occasions became rare in the 1960s as the tide of political opinion swung against capital punishment and Tom Gepp recalls with a sense of relief that the only case he had to deal with was granted a reprieve. Prior to this however, the hanging of prisoners found guilty of murder was commonplace, and Tom Gepp recalls his father being called upon to arrange two executions on one day.

Peter Davis recalls Mr Thompson and Dudley Spain assisting at several executions. 'By my time in the Undersheriff's office no executions took place in Chelmsford. All prisoners sentenced to death were taken to London to be hanged so they would all travel there, along with the Sheriff's chaplain, to organise the hanging. Sometimes the cases were very controversial and once the journey to Pentonville had to be undertaken by armoured car as it was feared that a normal car might be sabotaged.'

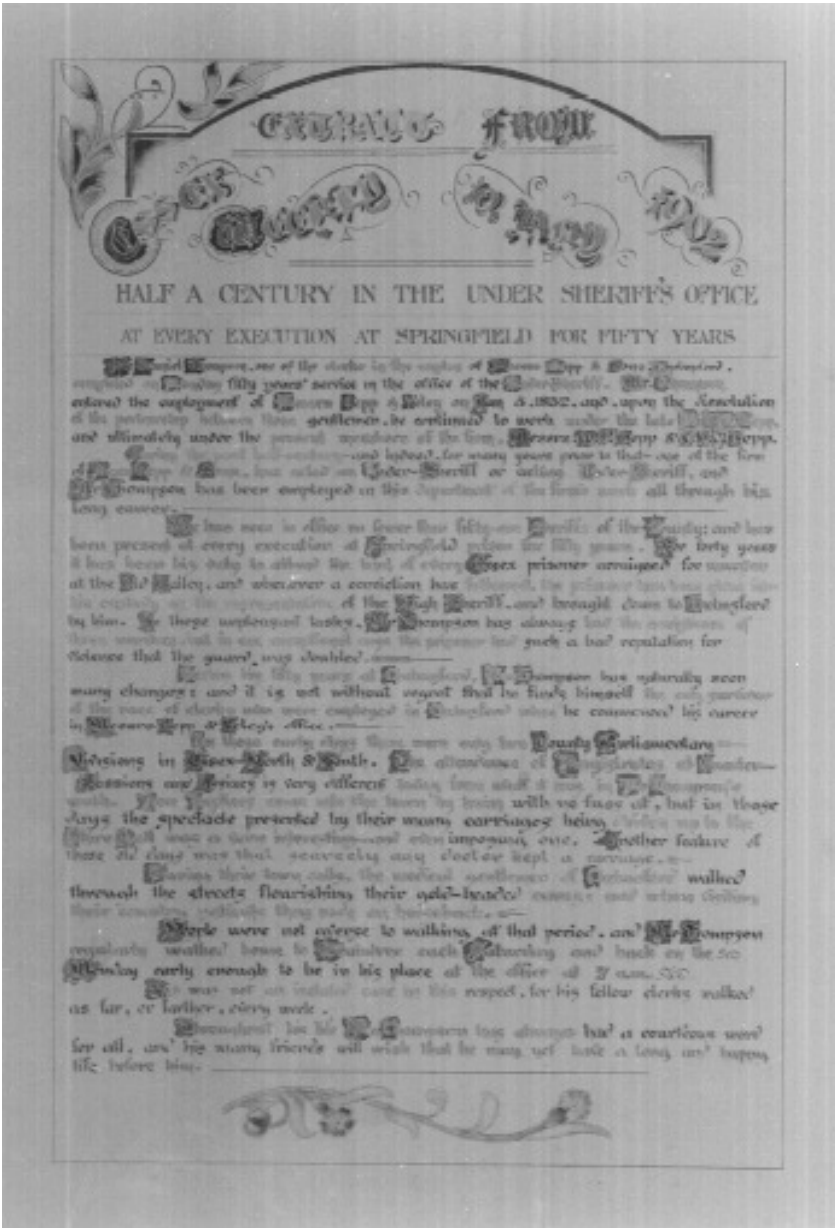
As the collector of debts for the Crown, the Undersheriff was often due a percentage of anything that they seized in payment. This could bring about unexpected windfalls for the partnership, but also certain difficulties in how to dispose of various unusual items. Records show that Gepp & Sons seized a whale in the early 20th Century which had suffered the misfortune of beaching itself in the River Crouch. More recently, ships and even a Boeing 707 belonging to the President of Liberia were seized by the Undersheriff of Essex.

As with the High Sheriff, the role of the Undersheriff today is largely ceremonial in nature. The garbs of office, including tricorn hat; breeches; buckled shoes and sword are still worn on the various occasions at which the Undersheriff is required to

attend and often to organise, the largest occasion of the year being the Justices' Service for Essex, at which attend hundreds of participants in the civic life of the county. The High Sheriff often now performs much charitable work during their year in office as well as appearing at civic functions and looking after the welfare of the judiciary, magistrates and the police in the county.

Despite the gradual erosion of the powers once enjoyed by the shrievalty, Gepp & Sons is still proud of the privileged position in civic life granted to it by its long and successful role as Undersheriff, one which it is hoped will not be a tradition discarded in the seemingly relentless quest for modernisation in today's world.

Tom Gepp as Undersheriff (Extr. R) with members of the judiciary at the annual Justice Service; current Undersheriff Jonathan Douglas-Hughes is Extr. L



HALF A CENTURY IN THE UNDER SHERIFF'S OFFICE

AT EVERY EXECUTION AT SPRINGFIELD FOR FIFTY YEARS

The certificate was awarded in 1902 to one Daniel Thompson, clerk to Gepp & Sons, for having performed 50 years service in the Undersheriff's office. He attended every execution taking place in Springfield during that time!

CHAPTER 8

The Twentieth Century

Walter Payne Gepp and his younger brother Charles Bramston Osborne Gepp had by the turn of the century almost eighty years of legal experience between them. Both were erderly and in poor health so it was obvious to them that the time had come for the 'Sons' of Gepp & Sons to pass the business on to the next generation. Until this time the business had been handed down from father to son, but the problem for W P and C B O was that there was no obvious heir from their own children. W P Gepp only had daughters and C B O had three daughters and a very young son, Charles, who was later to die in the Great War.

The job of taking the firm on fell to their young nephew Henry Hamilton, first son of their older brother Henry John who had been a scholar in modern languages at Oxford and later a clergyman. Henry Hamilton Gepp was born in 1875 and educated at Bromsgrove School. He joined the firm on 1st May 1904, having qualified as a solicitor two years earlier.

By this time the firm was well established within the town. Several of its various partners had served as Undersheriff almost continuously for fifty years; many manors and other estates relied on Gepp & Sons for management of their affairs and, whilst the newly formed County and Borough Councils had relieved the firm of some of the regular work they had previously enjoyed, it is doubtful whether the rapid industrialisation of the late 19th Century had done anything to harm Gepp & Sons' profits. With both elderly partners still alive during the first few years of the new century, it must have been difficult for Henry to gain the

authority necessary to take over the firm. Nonetheless, it is obvious that he was given a fair amount of responsibility, having first acted as Undersheriff on the death of C B O Gepp in 1907 and, even earlier, he must have enjoyed some perverse pleasure when, as Clerk to the Commissioners of Income Tax, he issued his uncle with a demand for over £200, particularly as, being the junior in the firm, his wages were nowhere near the takings of the elderly brothers Gepp.

The offices of the firm remained where they had been situated for over a century: the beautiful old house known as Maynetrees, on New Street overlooking the chancel of what was to soon become the Cathedral but at that time was still St Mary's church, although records suggest there was also a small office rented by the firm somewhere on Duke Street as early as 1904. The ground floor at Maynetrees had been used as the firms' offices whilst the floors above were used as the living quarters of W P Gepp and his family. Soon after he first arrived in Chelmsford, H H Gepp lived at 105 Baddow Road with his young wife Mary, whom he had married in 1905. However, when W P died and his widow moved from Maynetrees, Mary was adamant that she was not going to live 'over the shop' as it was incredibly inconvenient: then, as now, the house was also the judges' lodgings, so whenever the sessions took place in Chelmsford it was necessary for the Gepps to move out. They moved instead to Hatfield Peverel.

At the same time H H Gepp decided it would be better to move the main office from New Street to more appropriate premises. The railway had arrived in Chelmsford in 1842 and the Great Eastern Main Line proved very popular indeed. Although it is somewhat unclear whether the Gepp & Sons' London office maintained at this time at Temple Chambers was merely the

Edwardian version of a post-office box or whether there were staff permanently stationed in London, it was often necessary for the young Gepp to travel by train to the capital, not to mention travelling each day from Hatfield Peverel. Gepp's fascination with trains led him to take a lease of 66 Duke Street, a Victorian building on the corner of Victoria Road South and Duke Street itself, which had previously been used as a building society's offices, and the firm moved in during 1911. It would have been difficult to find an office nearer the station and it goes without saying that young Mr Gepp's season ticket was met by the firm, costing a sum only a little less than the monthly salary paid at the time to Mr Bailes, the clerk.

Chelmsford Railway Station, c.1910

The accounts for the early part of 20th Century certainly make interesting reading. It is incredible, given the rampant inflation of the second half of the century, to think that wage costs altered very little during the 19th and early 20th Centuries. Gepp & Sons employed four staff in 1905, to which a regular salary was paid along with overtime. The overall wage bill was somewhat erratic as there were several large claims by staff for overtime, but at that time the average paid out totalled £20. By this time it had become usual for business to be transacted over the telephone, and even calls to the other side of the world were possible. The ledgers show a regular payment each month of some 14s for trunk calls to Natal in South Africa.

Other regular payments out were 7s per fortnight to Mr Butcher, the coal man, 10s per month to the office cleaner, the odd shilling to the boy for carrying young Mr Gepp's bag from the station and a monstrously large gas bill of £5 9s 6d. One can imagine the eyebrows of the elderly brothers Gepp having risen somewhat as they put their signature to that cheque. Nonetheless, the business remained very profitable, allowing the partners to make regular drawings of a few hundred pounds several times per year. When compared to the average wage of a working man which stood at roughly £5 per month, it is easy to see how the class differences of the day were exacerbated by the vast difference in wealth, even between the firm's partners and their clerks.

H H Gepp was still a young man when the Great War broke out in 1914 and, as with so many of his generation, was called upon to take up arms in order to fight for his country, serving in France from November 1916 until November 1918. This would not have been an entirely new experience for Gepp as he, following the tradition of his predecessors, had joined up with the Essex Yeomanry, Essex's territorial army of its day, gaining the rank of

Captain in 1913. In a marked contrast to the Second World War, the First epitomised the differences of the day between the gentlemen of the county and the rest of the working men. The picture below, showing a youthful looking H H Gepp taken with his companions, all officers in the Essex Yeomanry, displays a list of names not far short of the Who's Who of Essex 1915. The photo does not record how many of the happy Edwardian faces never came back.

Photograph by E. a' Beckett, Loughton.

OFFICERS OF THE ESSEX YEOMANRY, 26 MAY 1913.

Captain J. O. Parker, Lieut. R. G. Proby, Second-Lieut. H. B. Holt, Lieut. H. H. Gepp, Lieut. E. P. W. Wedd, Captain E. A. Ruggles-Brise, Lieut. and Quartermaster E. J. Sayer, Second-Lieut. C. C. Tower, Second-Lieut. J. C. Chaplin, Second-Lieut. S. J. Tufnell.
Major Eustace Hill, Major G. G Gold. Major A. Roddick, Colonel H W. Hodgson, C.V.O., Lieut.-Colonel E. Deacon (Commanding), Major F. H. D. C. Whitmore, Major A. Button, Captain and Adjutant A. R. Steele, Rev. A. Oliver. Surgeon-Lieut. G. F. White, Second-Lieut. C. N. Gilbey.

Unlike his cousin Charles, Henry survived the war and soon found himself back in civilian life, fulfilling his duties as Undersheriff; Clerk to the Commissioner of Taxes; Registrar to the Archdeaconries of Colchester and Essex and the rather less pleasant Commissioner of Sewers for Dengie, Foulness and Fobbing. One cannot suppose the partners of Gepp & Sons inspected the sanitary arrangements of the people of Foulness and

Fobbing in person, rather imagining that the job may have fallen to some hapless articled clerk. A fair amount of work was undertaken on the Dengie and in surrounding areas by the firm during the early part of the century, as the stewardships of various major manors were still held by the partners. The Law Society even recorded a Gepp & Sons office at Burnham on Crouch from the 1890s onwards, although it seems that this did not survive the Great War.

The 1920s were again profitable for the firm, yet even by this time the traditional stronghold of the Gepp family over civic life in the county town was waning. The County and Borough Councils were by now well established and the gradual shift away from localised administration, managed by the lord of the manor's solicitor or by the great and the good of the town, towards centralised local government, run by elected representatives and their officers, was exacerbated by the right to vote having been granted to all males over the age of 21 and women over 30 at the end of the Great War and further in 1928, when the voting age was equalised for both sexes. 'Votes for the Flappers' the papers cried when the Representation of the People Act 1928 was passed, 'flappers' being the term used to describe the horde of young fashionable women with disposable income that the roaring twenties produced. Reg Bush, a young employee of the County Council at the time, recalls H H Gepp who was the returning officer for the Chelmsford constituency, standing outside the door of 66 Duke Street on election morning, every bit the dapper gentleman. Elections were not always gentlemanly affairs however, with the crowds of people who gathered to hear the candidates speak at the hustings outside the Shire Hall or the Corn Exchange (now demolished) often completely swamping Tindal Square. During Gepp's period as returning officer and indeed since its formation in 1895 the constituency always returned a

Conservative, apart from the shock win in a by-election 1923 of the Liberal candidate. However, the voters of Chelmsford obviously decided they had made a mistake, and returned to their Conservative roots in 1924.

View down Duke Street from Gepp & Sons' front door (where boys are standing), c.1910

If the 1920s had started with a boom they certainly ended with a bust, as the Great Depression and the Wall Street Crash caused many businesses to go under, all around the world. This was combined with the worst prices paid for agricultural produce in a century meant that many farmers in Essex struggled to pay their bills. In many cases fields were left fallow, men were laid off and tenant farmers turfed out, with a knock on effect for their solicitors. The firm had bounced back by the early 1930s however, with the accounts for 1933, as prepared by Mr Luckin of Waterloo Lane, showing the annual wage bill for what was by

now a sizable operation to have risen to £3,648 11s 4d whilst the profit was £2,726 8s 11d. By 1934 Archibald Douglas Paxton Thompson had been made a partner whilst Frank Noel Wingent had joined the firm as an assistant in 1931 and was made a partner in 1937. Thompson had been educated at Felsted then Downing College, Cambridge, whilst Wingent followed his father into the profession, originating from Somerset. After the war Wingent was required by the government to set up the Greek electoral system.

66 Duke Street

Henry Hamilton Gepp and his wife Mary had three daughters who survived infancy prior to the First World War but, in 1919 was born his youngest child and only son, Thomas. By the late 1930s Tom, who had earlier been sent to Eton, gained a place at New

College, Oxford to read Law, with a view to carrying on the work which had been set in motion by his father. Barely had Tom Gepp time to settle into his studies at Oxford when the Second World War broke out and the young men of yet another generation were called upon to serve in the forces. Tom left Oxford and, like his father before him, served with the Essex Yeomanry in France. He was on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day and gained the Belgian Croix de Guerre and the Chevalier of the Order of Leopold. Tom Gepp continued to play a large part in the Essex Yeomanry after the War and often attended their events at Hylands House, where his great grandfather, Arthur Pryor, had lived in the late 19th Century. Wingent and Thompson were also called away to fight, Thompson in the RAF, along with many of the clerks including Dudley Spain, a Sergeant Artillery Clerk, leaving Henry Hamilton and a few employees, too old to be called up, to man the firm by day and serving as air raid wardens in the Chelmsford ARP by night.

The government ensured that food rationing was much fairer in the Second World War than in the First and even King George VI had a ration book. Fortunately for the Beefsteak Club, that exclusive and historic Chelmsford dining club which still meets regularly, there was stocked up before the war a particularly fine cellar of claret and other choice wines which, it was hoped, would last them the duration, although by 1944 the situation had become desperate enough for H H Gepp, as secretary to the club, to write to all members asking that they limited themselves to half a bottle per meal, in order to better conserve the rapidly dwindling supplies.

Henry Hamilton died at Well House, Witham on 4th July 1945, less than two months after the war had ended, happy that his son had survived and would continue the family business. Before Tom

Gepp could do so however, he would need to go back to university and to law college in Guildford. Mr Thompson became the senior partner and the Undersheriff on Henry Hamilton's death and for a few years, the only time in the firm's history, there was no Gepp on the Gepp and Sons notepaper.

Noel Wingent and Tom Gepp, c.1970

CHAPTER 9

Fifty-one Years of Peter Davis

Deep drifts of documents

The drawing above, one of several sketched by local artist Lynton Lamb in 1949 for *County Town*, his account of a fictional, if thinly disguised, Chelmsford, shows the clerk to the local firm of solicitors, again a thinly disguised version of Gepp & Sons. The clerk appears world weary, all energy his body once possessed sucked out of him by the ever increasing mounds of paper under which he labours.

Such a description could not be further from the truth were it to be applied to Peter Davis who, having joined the firm at the end of the War and retired in 1996, holds the record as longest

standing member of staff, possibly since the firm's foundation. There is no-one better placed to chart the post war years at Gepp & Sons than Peter, who has many memories of the firm, the more printable of which are reproduced below.

I remember the day of my interview only too well. I was fourteen and had just finished my last day at school. We lived in Great Baddow and Mr Eagle, the Chief Clerk at Gepp & Sons who also lived in Baddow, mentioned to my father that they were in need of an office boy, so I combed my hair, put on a starched detachable collar and cycled into town, ready to see Mr Eagle. I can't remember much of what was said in the interview, but I got the job and started work on 25th May 1945, less than a month after the end of the war. My initial wages were 15s a week which I remember thinking at the time was a good wage, although looking back it was probably a pittance. If it was necessary for us to go to London we would receive 10s for lunch and 2s 6d for tea.

At that time Chelmsford was a much smaller town than in it is today and more agricultural. The town centre was Tindal Square, which was flanked on one side by the Shire Hall and on the other by the Corn Exchange. The market was just a collection of shacks which stretched down to the river and of course neither Parkway nor the new A12 had been built. Not many people had cars, and everyone either walked or cycled to work, or went on the bus. The County Council had built big new offices in Duke Street and the District Council was up at the other end, next to the bus station, but everyone used to say the real centres of power in the town were the 'Forty Thieves' and the more upper class Beefsteak Club. To these exclusive clubs belonged most of the great and the

good of the town, including Mr Austen who owned the County Motor Works and most of Duke Street, Mr Stubbins of Baddow Place who owned Channells, and Mr Webber the jeweller. Most of the town's business seemed to be done over a good lunch, either between the Forty Thieves, the Beefsteak Club, or at the Chelmsford Club on New Writtle Street, of which all the partners of the firm were members and where they sometimes went for lunch. Being such a small place had its advantages in that everyone knew each other so doing business was easy, but there was always the disadvantage of everyone knowing your mistakes as well as your successes.

There were quite a few firms of solicitors in Chelmsford at the end of the war and there was a great rivalry between them. Leonard Gray, whose founder had died during the Great War, seemed to get the bulk of the conveyancing work. Their managing clerk was a Mr F G Burrell who always wore a wing collar. Mr Burrell had a chauffer driven car, the envy of all the other clerks in the town. Hilliard and Ward were next door to Gepp & Sons in Duke Street and we all used to get on very well, particularly with Mr Plumtree who became senior partner there. He was an expert at agriculture related legal work and holds the record of fourteen conveyancing completions in one day. Such a record cannot be beaten any longer as, in these days of computers and fax, conveyancing is nowhere near as difficult as it used to be. Stunt and Son were a small but well established firm, who used to say prayers every morning before opening the post. Later on, the relative newcomer Hill & Abbott shocked us all by advertising in the local paper, which seemed to plumb new depths as it was felt that to advertise was rather beneath solicitors, whereas now of course anyone who doesn't advertise won't get much work.

When I joined the firm its senior partner was Mr H H Gepp. As you went in the big entrance door there was a huge sloping desk and stairs up to the other offices, and down to the cellars. There were two strong rooms to the right of the door, one for deeds and one for the firm's ledgers, which were so large and weighty that it took three trips to carry them upstairs. Mr Gepp's office was to the left as you went in. He would frequently come out of his room to tell us youngsters to be quiet and stop mucking about. I'm not surprised that we tested the poor man's patience, as there was myself and another young clerk who, as fourteen year old boys tend to do, were often getting into fights and running up and down the stairs, much to the solicitors' annoyance.

As office boy my first job in the morning was to go down into the cellars and fetch wood and coal for the fires in the partners' rooms, then I had to make up the fires. This was quite a time consuming job, especially when you were at the beck and call of anyone in the firm, who would say "Tommy do this" or "Tommy do that". My name obviously wasn't Tommy but for some reason the juniors were always known as Tommy, probably as a throw-back from the war. Fortunately for us, the articled clerks got the worst of it. In those days, those doing their articles were absolutely dependent on their master, the solicitor they were articled to. It was much more like an apprenticeship than perhaps it is today, and the articled clerks were virtually slaves to their masters.

Although the partners often lunched at the Club, they tended to take tea in the afternoons at their desks. There was a little cubby hole under the stairs with a gas ring and people would make cocoa there but somehow it became established practice for the junior to make the tea and to go over to Cannons Restaurant, just over the road, to get buttered toast for the secretaries in the afternoons. I

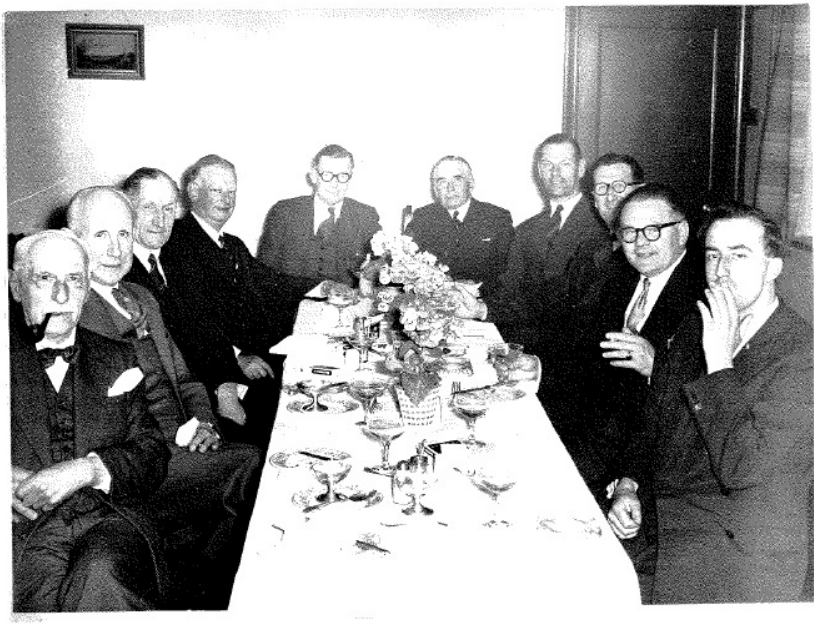
do remember playing a trick on the secretaries once by adding a fair amount of 'Snowflake' washing powder to the cream, but somehow I still ended up having to make the tea and go over to Cannons for the toast. One day my mind must have been elsewhere because, when coming back across Duke Street, I managed to drop a piece of this toast on the road. When I picked it up it looked alright, so I put it back on the plate and returned to the office. I didn't think anyone would notice but unfortunately it so happened that Bill Eagle had glanced out of the front window at the very moment I dropped the toast, so all hell broke loose when I got back!

Cannon's Restaurant, the lunchtime haunt of many a Gepp & Sons employee

Mr H H Gepp unfortunately passed away very soon after I was taken on at the firm. His son Tom had been in the forces and wasn't ready to take over from his father until he had completed his articles and been to law college so Mr A D P Thompson, known to everyone as Teddy, took over as senior partner of the firm. He mainly dealt with farming and other conveyancing work and could often be seen sloping off home to feed his chickens. Second in command was Mr Wingent who also did quite a bit of conveyancing but also specialised in divorce law. There was also an assistant solicitor, Charles Henry Aubrey, who was clerk to the local mental hospital. We thought Mr Aubrey very old fashioned, as he always wore a wing collar and morning suit to work, and bore more than a passing resemblance to former prime minister Neville Chamberlain. No one else wore anything quite that formal to work, although it was not thought proper for one to take one's jacket off, ever. Mr Aubrey was well known for being rather careful with his cash, so much so that more than once I saw him use the edge of a stamp to cover a cut, rather than 'waste' a sticking plaster. Mr Thompson always had a glass of sherry and one of port in the morning, and we would have a nip when he was not looking, then water it down afterwards so he wouldn't know!

The chief clerk was Mr Bill Eagle, a man who towered above everyone else and whom inspired great fear amongst clerks and secretaries alike, although actually he was a very nice person. In those days the chief clerk was the manager, the accountant, and goodness knows what else. Reginald Jarrold assisted Mr Eagle with the accounts. Gepp & Sons had a terrific amount of litigation work in those days, although because of our duties to the courts we could not do any criminal work. William Graham Percival was the senior litigator, assisted by John Hance. Mr Percival kept a large amount of cash in rolled up banknotes in his desk drawer and whenever a claim had been successful he would pay out from

the cash. There was not so much probate work back then, as people did not have much to leave, and all the work would be done by one clerk, George Everard. The picture below was taken in about 1950 at the old Army & Navy pub in Chelmsford. The event was Mr Percival's retirement and everyone attended apart from Mr Gepp who had the flu. We all had to 'pass the port' and it was a very merry evening indeed, so much so that the senior partner forgot how to get home afterwards!



1950, L to R: Freddie Bellamy (Probate); Reginald Jarrold (Asst. Cashier); George Everard (Probate); William Percival (Senior Litigation Exec.); F Noel Wingent (Divorce & Conveyancing Partner); A.D.P. (Teddy) Thompson (Conveyancing & Farming Partner); Bill Eagle (Chief Clerk); John Hance (Litigation); Dudley Spain (Undersheriff's Clerk); Peter Davis.

After a few years as an office junior, I was moved to the sheriff's department. Although Mr Thompson was the Undersheriff, most of the work connected with the shrievalty was done by Dudley Spain, a very interesting character indeed. The sheriff had a great deal to do in those days as he summoned all the juries on behalf of the Clerk of the Peace. We had quite a bit of fun with that, and used to try to get away with picking funny names. Once we picked all bird names so on the jury you had a Miss Sparrow, Mr Wrenn, etc but unfortunately this was spotted by the court and we received a bit of a ticking off.

On the whole I enjoyed my time in the sheriff's office but one thing I didn't enjoy was assisting in the organisation of executions. Before capital punishment was abolished in the 1960s it was the Undersheriff's job to organise the execution of prisoners sentenced to death. This was done at Pentonville or other prisons in London, and we would contact Mr Pierpoint, the hangman, to organise it. There was a very peculiar way of talking to Mr Pierpoint, and all we would say is that the Undersheriff would meet him at such and such a time and he would know what we meant. A whole deputation would travel up to London, normally by train but once in an armoured car because the hanging was so controversial. It was the Undersheriff's job to test the rope which would hang the guilty party and many a time this was too much for Mr Thompson. Dudley Spain didn't mind though, he always used to go for a good meal of eggs and bacon after a hanging!

We worked very closely with the County Council as they were a lot smaller at that time and had a lot of functions they don't have any more, like organising the general and local elections. Mr Lightburn was Clerk to the Council in those days but his right hand man was Mr Bush, who did not tolerate fools gladly. He and his deputy Donald Dines were a bit of a double act and we were

always in and out of each others' offices, Donald remaining one of my closest friends until he passed away a few years ago. There was quite a lot of friendly rivalry between Gepps and the Council and whenever we had anything that needed to go to them, Tom Gepp used to say "take it to the Bush". Nonetheless we helped out in many an election, and the partners and senior staff members were often called upon to be the returning officer for each Essex constituency, checking that the ballot boxes had not been tampered with overnight and announcing the result once they had been counted. This was quite a nerve wracking job for some, as the returning officer would be very much in the public eye. My job was to be in charge of all the equipment and to check through everything beforehand. This was quite a task but it was good money as we received overtime. We used to deliver the ballot boxes and it was incredible really, as quite often polling stations would be set up in someone's front room, or in a caravan on the village green.

R W Bush (L), Essex County Council, (and grandfather of the author!) with Donald Dines and other staff, County Hall roof, c1939

In addition Mr Thompson was clerk to the Archdeaconries of Chelmsford, Colchester and West Ham. This meant that whenever new church wardens were sworn in we would go along and do the necessary legal stuff. There was a fee which tended to be paid in cash at the swearing in and, if you went along with Mr Wingent or Mr Thompson you could be almost certain that afterwards a trip to the Heybridge Country Club would be in order. We used to have a meal and quite a few drinks and Dudley Spain would be on the Rexina. We always ended up spending all the money we had earned and Mr Eagle was always furious with us the next day.

The secretaries of Gepp & Sons, 1959, L to R: Ros Sayer (nee Clear); Ros Foster (nee Hockley); Eileen Griffin (nee Gutteridge); Cathie Wickham (nee O'Connor); Joy Brett (nee Moss); Betty Crisp (nee Avery); Mrs Mary Greatrex; Shirley Daniels (nee Durrant); Liz Gordon (nee Joslin)

The day the company cars arrived was one of great excitement indeed. Mr Gepp laid down the law on this and said that if we were going to get them, they had to be made in England. The cars were Ford Zephyr 6's and I can still remember the registration numbers. At first petrol was still rationed and I only received a couple of gallons a month, which was hardly enough to go fifty miles.

After a few years Tom Gepp had been made a partner and he had built the conveyancing department up to the stage where they needed an extra pair of hands, so that was where I went next and that is where I stayed for the next forty or so years. More and more people owned their own homes so there was an almost ever-increasing workload. I really enjoyed the work as in those days everything was done personally, so I would travel from one solicitor to the next, exchanging or completing the purchases or sales on behalf of my clients. Mr Thompson retired in 1964 and Major Tom Gepp became the new senior partner and Undersheriff of Essex. A few years afterwards we had the firm's 200th birthday, which we celebrated by watching the Black & White Minstrels Show in London!

We had a fair few articled clerks over the years and a few stick out in the imagination. Young Mr Jonathan Douglas-Hughes for example, whose articles I witnessed for him, was articled to Major Tom and soon found his niche with the agricultural and property work for which he is now well known. After a couple of years of qualification, Jonathan was given a partnership in 1971, two years after another young star, Clifford Facey. Then in 1976 we had two articled clerks at the same time, a pair of likely lads called Neil Ashford and Roger Brice. Both left briefly after completing their articles but the lure of Gepp & Sons was obviously so great that they both came back and were offered partnerships in 1984,

with Neil concentrating on commercial work and Roger setting up a standalone criminal department at the firm which has gone from strength to strength. A fresh faced Steven Payne also found his way onto our books in the early 1980s and was articled to Mr Facey, whilst Danny Carter joined us as a legal executive then qualified as a solicitor and was made a partner soon afterwards.

The last few years of my working life at Gepp & Sons were spent at 58 New London Road after we moved out of the old offices in Duke Street. The secretaries were very glad as some used to have to sit in the basement at Duke Street, which often flooded. When I retired in 1996 I was able to look back on a fun and interesting career with some brilliant people. The work the firm did over the years I was there in many ways changed beyond recognition, as did Chelmsford itself, but that's life – nothing ever stands still.

Peter Davis, on his last day at the firm, 1996

CHAPTER 10

Hilliard & Ward

No account of the history of Gepp & Sons would be complete without the inclusion of a chapter on Messrs. Hillard & Ward. Until the late 1980s this venerable firm of solicitors were situated next to Gepp & Sons in Duke Street and were friendly rivals for much of the work that was to be had catering to the needs of agricultural clients and landed estates in the county. When Gepp & Sons took over Hilliard & Ward they did not merely take on the firm's clients and staff, but also a long history of service to the town.

The Hilliard family initially made a name for themselves as 'G B Hilliard & Sons', surveyors and auctioneers in Victorian Chelmsford, a town which, at the time, enjoyed a thriving livestock market. But it was not until the late 19th Century that one of the sons of the family, Walter Hilliard, qualified as a solicitor. Then, as now, surveyors and land agents worked closely with solicitors and it must have been useful to have a member of the family who could derive further work from their already lucrative business. Hilliard gained a standing in the town and, as a result, attracted good clients to his practice. In the first decade of the 20th Century the going was good enough for Walter Hilliard to take on a young articled clerk, Percy Ward, who eventually joined the partnership and thus the name Hilliard & Ward was established, with their offices at Number 70 Duke Street, a pleasant Georgian building of 1836 with a much lighter touch than its heavily Victorianised neighbour, the offices at the time of Gepp & Sons. This address would be synonymous with the firm for its entire history.

After Mr Hilliard died, Ward took on his son Douglas as another partner. However, the union was not a happy one and by the mid 20th Century the relationship between the ageing Percy and his son Douglas had reached breaking point. Percy Ward, who could be something of a know-it-all, could not have been less like his son, by all accounts a very affable and thoroughly charming man, albeit not imbued with a great sense of the protestant work ethic. Fortunately, the arrival of Richard Young after the war allowed Percy Ward to retire, becoming a consultant to the firm thereafter.

John Plumtree, whose father was for many years Clerk to Chelmsford Borough Council, was a young man in the 1950s who was encouraged into the law by his father and had found a position at Stamp Wortley as an articled clerk. 'It was a far cry from the experience most trainees receive today' recalls John Plumtree. 'I had not been to university, in fact I started straight from school, and had to do two years as an office boy before being taken on as an articled clerk, spending five years training in the Brentwood office of Wortley's before I qualified. In those days there were few assistant solicitors in Chelmsford and I was lucky to find work at Wortley's, spending the whole of my time there in the knowledge that I would probably have to look elsewhere for a permanent post after I completed my articles'.

'Whereas now Duke Street is full of estate agents, in my days as an articled clerk it was full of solicitors. Just next door to Hilliard & Ward was Stunt & Sons, which later joined with Duffield's. Leonard Gray had a lot of conveyancing work and were the main rivals of Gepp's. Leonard Gray himself had been killed whilst on active service in the Great War and the firm was run thereafter by two brothers Burrell, their father being their managing clerk. Even as late as the 1960s, the world of solicitors in Chelmsford

was relatively closed and could be rather snobbish. Clients were longstanding and did not shop around. The family solicitor would often have provided services for several generations of a family in the area and often they were not left to enjoy their retirement as the family would be most insistent that the work continued to be carried out by the same person. The arrival of Budd Martin Burrett in the Sixties shook the profession up somewhat, with many a partner choking on their breakfast when they saw, horror of horrors, that this new upstart firm were advertising in the Essex Chronicle. It was thought very bad form for solicitors to tout for business in this way.'

'After a couple of years away from Chelmsford, my father wrote to tell me that he had been approached by Mr Ward, who was looking to retire and wished to offer me his place at the firm. So it was that I joined in 1956, working initially under Douglas Ward for a year, becoming junior partner in 1957, working under Richard Young. Mr Young did most of the litigation work so the conveyancing fell to me, a task which I enjoyed greatly. Saturday morning work was the norm, a practice which only stopped when the banks ceased trading on Saturday mornings. I remember in the early days coming into work on one such Saturday morning in a sports jacket, to the great disapproval of Mr Ward. Years later, when Richard Young retired, I became the final senior partner in the firm, and ended up overseeing the transition to become part of Gepp & Sons in 1989.'

'When the firms amalgamated there were a dozen or so partners, which shows the extent to which the need for legal services in the town had increased within my time at Hilliard & Ward. Philip Storr was the first partner to be taken on in my time, in the 1960s, followed by Bruce Bowler in 1972 and thereafter Mary Blaxhall; Patrick Ellum; Albert Barrett and Alan Sayles. In the

early 1980s the new town of South Woodham Ferrers was being developed on a large scale. We saw a gap in the market, and opened an office there, which was a good move as many of our farming clients owned land nearby and we also wanted to capture the market for those purchasing properties in the town. Despite the increase in numbers of solicitors I do not remember us ever taking on many articled clerks. Of those that did not stay with us, only one springs to mind: Richard Young's nephew, one Richard Wollaston, who went on to great success after having founded his own firm, Wollastons, with his wife. One of those who did stay with us was Timothy Stone, who helped establish our criminal defence department, went on to be a district judge in the Essex Magistracy.'

Gepp & Sons and Hilliard & Ward were somewhat unusual neighbours, in having offices with beautiful gardens

'Hilliard & Ward always enjoyed a very convivial relationship with Gepp & Sons and we liked to think of ourselves as good neighbours. So good was the relationship that there was talk in the 1970s of joining forces. We never went ahead because it was thought that Mr Gepp and I would not get on as senior partners but, looking back now, I always got on well with Tom and I am sure it would have worked well. By the end of the 1980s however, the effects of a deep recession coupled with some financial problems at the firm meant that we were in no position to call the shots and a takeover was unfortunately the only option. Although Gepp & Sons retained the name Hilliard & Ward on their letterhead for a year or two, after that for all intents and purposes our clients became Gepp & Sons' clients, many of whom remain so to this day. Several of the partners decided not to come over to Gepp's and the South Woodham office was closed down.'

The rest of the staff joined forces happily enough. Doreen Wilson, who worked in the South Woodham office of Hilliard and Ward, remembers: 'the closing down of the office happened almost overnight and naturally we were anxious as to what was going to happen, whether any of us would still have jobs. However, we were told that we could come to work in Chelmsford, and the partners laid on a big party for all the staff of the amalgamated firms. Although at first people stuck to the groups which included those they knew from their old firm, we ended up all getting on well'.

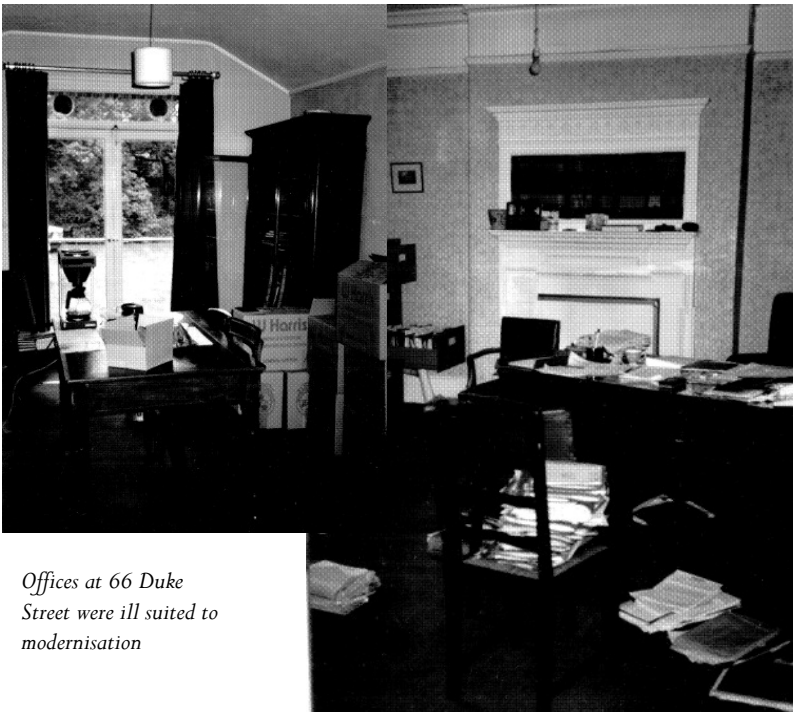
John Plumtree recalls 'although it was a sad day for me when the name came to an end, the firm enjoyed a good history. I remember it always being a very happy place to work, and had I my time again I would not have chosen otherwise'.

Gepp & Sons merges with Hilliard & Ward, 1990, L to R: Jonathan Douglas-Hughes; Peter Littlefield; Neil Ashford; Roger Brice; Roger Wicks; Hazel Hammond; Clifford Facey; John Plumtree (H&W); Vivienne McFarlane; Bruce Bowler (H&W); Steven Payne; Tim Stone (H&W); Alan Sayles (H&W); Albert Barrett (H&W)

CHAPTER 11

Changing Times

By the late 1980s, what may have once been modern now seemed at best quaint and at worst badly dated. The period from 1960 to 1990 saw massive expansion in the Chelmsford's population and this, coupled with greater prosperity and much increased levels of home ownership, meant that the need for the services which solicitors could provide had expanded hugely. The technology which perhaps seemed completely alien to those who were about to retire at this point was rapidly becoming second nature to those



Offices at 66 Duke Street were ill suited to modernisation

coming into the workforce and it was clear that the old premises at 66 Duke Street were not up to the task of providing contemporary offices for the firm. Despite the firm having taken over Number 68 as well, the building was cramped, damp and crumbling. Each room was still heated by its own gas fire which required lighting by taper. The kitchen included a precarious camping stove on which to make tea. Although there was a delightful garden, at one time with a duck pond and various rose beds overlooked by several of the oak-panelled offices and the 'garden room' where clients were seen, the office lacked proper parking facilities and since the County Hall extension had been completed this had become a big problem. There were no computers and the office lacked the facilities which the installation of the new machines would require.

Mr & Mrs Gepp on Tom Gepp's retirement

Mr Tom Gepp retired from the partnership in 1986 and although he continued as a consultant, the family link with the firm had weakened. Mr Facey was the senior member of what was a young and enthusiastic partnership, eager to keep the firm up to date. By 1987 it had therefore become clear that, after 85 years spent occupying the same offices, it was time for the firm to move.

After some time searching, the partners identified part of a modern building behind what was then the Norwich Union offices on New London Road, which had become empty. 58 New London Road had everything the old premises at Duke Street lacked. It was modern, centrally heated, well decorated and if it had none of the charm of the old place, at least the view across the Bell Meadow was one of the nicest in the town centre, albeit somewhat spoilt by the noise from Parkway, the busy road which dissects the meadows either side of the river. The lease was signed by the partners later in 1987 and a big party was held to celebrate the move. At that time the new office was much smaller than it is today, and looked quite different. It looked like it had been built on stilts as much of the ground floor used to be open and used for parking.

New London Road office, pre extension, before Gepp & Sons moved in

At first Gepp & Sons only occupied some of the building, sharing office space with an insurance company. However, a problem arose when in late 1989 the firm took over Hilliard & Ward, their erstwhile Duke Street next-door neighbour. Suddenly the number of people that counted themselves as Gepp & Sons employees doubled and there was an issue with where to put them all, particularly as Hilliard & Ward's former office buildings in Duke Street and Victoria Road were soon closed. It became necessary to fill in the ground floor of the building to create more office space, and also to build a further extension to the left hand side as one enters, which was built on stilts over some of the car park. The plans were not without their drawbacks: Danny Carter remembers as a newly qualified solicitor in his first year with the firm starting out with a cardboard box as his office. 'There was a real pressure on space' he recalls. 'I was then given a completely windowless office about the size of the current stationery cupboard, because the window was boarded up due to the building work. This was definitely a step up from the cardboard box, but it seemed like quite a small step at the time. Once I even had to interview a client on the park bench out the back because there was nowhere else to see him. We were lucky it was summer!'.

John Plumtree, former senior partner at Hilliard & Ward, said that at one point there were not many farmers in Essex who had not been through either the offices of himself or Jonathan Douglas-Hughes and indeed many of the large clients who had enjoyed a longstanding and fruitful relationship with Hilliard & Ward continue to do so at Gepp & Sons.

At the time of the move to the new office, the firm underwent a corporate rebranding with a new letterhead and sign which was placed on the front of the building. Mr Gepp kindly lent the use

of the eagle as the firm's corporate symbol, which also forms the crest which sits atop the coat of arms of the Gepp family. The letterhead remains in use today, unchanged except as to the partners' names and, of course, the website address and the plethora of symbols which solicitors are now required to display on whatever they send to their clients.

GEPP
& SONS
SOLICITORS

The early 1990s were tough years for the country, with recession following the housing boom of the earlier decade. Nonetheless the firm survived and in the end grew stronger as a result of the measures taken at the time. The probate department increased in size from a one man operation to a thriving local stronghold of half a dozen fee earners. The criminal department, built up by Roger Brice in the 1980s, further expanded with the opening of a branch office in Colchester. Indeed the criminal department

Peter Littlefield, Clifford Facey, Steven Payne, company Jag, 1989

gained something of a reputation, particularly with the police. Roger Brice's department found itself in the news when it represented the defendants in the Rettendon Murders, a very controversial case later made famous by the film *Essex Boys*. More recently, Roger has been sent to Iraq to act as solicitor for the defence in the trial of soldiers accused of murder, which subsequently collapsed. This year, and in something of a first for the firm, a Braintree branch office has also been opened by the criminal department.

This era saw the retirement of two longstanding staff members. Peter Davis, possibly the longest ever serving member of staff, retired in 1996 after fifty-one years with the firm. A man who had the incredible ability to hold together conveyancing transactions by sheer force of personality rather than necessarily a recourse to procedure, Peter had risen up the ranks from office junior to senior conveyancer and never looked back. On his retirement he was presented with several gifts, including a certificate handing back 'the deeds to his life', much as many building societies had handed over the deeds to his clients' properties when they paid off their mortgages.

Danny Carter initially joined as a legal executive but soon qualified as a solicitor and became a partner of the firm

Former senior partner Clifford Facey retired in 2001 after a working lifetime spent at the firm. Having become a partner in 1969 Mr Facey led the matrimonial department for over thirty years. Always a jolly and pleasant character, Mr Facey moved away from Chelmsford to enjoy his retirement but maintains his links to Gepp & Sons as a consultant to the firm.

Mr Facey's departure meant that Jonathan Douglas-Hughes became the senior partner. Jonathan had been articled to Tom Gepp and had succeeded him in the position of Undersheriff of Essex when Mr Gepp retired from this post some years after his retirement from the partnership. During the 1990s Mr Douglas-Hughes was made a Deputy Lieutenant of Essex by the then Lord Lieutenant, Lord Braybrooke. In 2008 he was awarded the Order of the British Empire in recognition of his services to the Essex Youth Trust. Mr Douglas-Hughes continues to ensure the firm plays a large part in civic life and can still be seen on the odd occasion in his traditional Undersheriff's outfit, replete with tricorn hat and silver buckled shoes.

The rise in residential property prices in the late 1990s led to an expanding but increasingly cut-throat market in residential conveyancing. Whilst this became a vital part of the firm's yearly fee earnings it became necessary to make the process more streamlined. Teams were set up, each under the instruction of a conveyancer, who would manage a very large volume of transactions. The expanding market led to the entire department being relocated to the Gemini Centre, the building next door to the main office, in the early 21st Century. Rather appropriately, it is now Peter Davis's son Spencer who, as the firm's business development director, is the first point of contact for many who enquire about selling or purchasing their home.

Almost the entire staff, c.1989

GEPP & SONS
SOLICITORS
COMMISSIONERS
FOR OATHS

F. N. WINGENT
T. C. GEPP, M.A.OXON.
C. L. FACEY

66, Duke Street,
Chelmsford.

3rd March 1971

SOLICITORS
COMMISSIONERS FOR OATHS

T. C. GEPP, T.D., D.L., M.A. (Oxon.)
C. L. FACEY
J. P. DOUGLAS-HUGHES
R. R. WICKS
R. P. J. BRICE
N. G. M. ASHFORD

GEPP & SONS
66, DUKE STREET
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YOUR REF:

18th July 1985

The firm's old letterheads

Epilogue:

The Way We Worked

Some people live to work, whilst others prefer merely to work in order to live. However, there is no escaping the fact that we spend most of our lives at work. More or less eight hours of every day is spent with people whom we did not initially choose to spend it with, yet with whom we end up forming close bonds. To some extent, work makes us who we are: it defines us, at least in the eyes of others. Sometimes those with whom we work we tell things we wouldn't tell our closest family. They share our greatest victories and our deepest tragedies.

When Edward Gepp founded his firm in Chelmsford in 1768 I doubt he could have imagined how, 250 years later, his name would still be associated with law in the town. His family initiated and encouraged a method of working which was not introverted, but rather which looked outwards to the community in which it operated. To the extent that the modern world permits, Gepp & Sons attempts to continue in the same tradition, and no doubt there will be room for further annals of its history to be recorded in the future.

It is not just the Gepps who have made a mark on the town through the firm they founded. Everyone who has worked at Gepp & Sons over those 250 years, hundreds of people in fact, have contributed. So, this book is for you.

Gepp & Sons sponsor a talk by BBC presenter Adam Henson, at Writtle College, 2010, (L to R): Jonathan Nutt; Spencer Davis; David Springett; Toni Young; Steven Payne; Richard Matthams; Barrie Mason

Jonathan Douglas-Hughes presents students from St John Payne School with the prize for best debating team in the Gepp & Sons Chelmsford Schools Legal Debate 2009

Appendix 1: High Sheriffs of Essex and their Undersheriffs since 1768

Those Undersheriffs denoted in bold type were from Gepp & Sons Solicitors or its predecessors

	High Sheriff	*Undersheriff*
1768	Richard Lomas, Loughton	Unknown
1769	Daniel Mathews, Felix Hall	Unknown
1770	John Tyrell, Boreham	Thomas Harrison
1771	Charles Raymond, Ilford	William Dearsley
1772	Samuel Bosanquet, Walthamstow	William Dearsley
1773	John Archer, Coopersdale	William Dearsley
1774	Henry Lovibond Collins, Boreham	William Dearsley
1775	John Pardoe, Low Layton	William Dearsley
1776	Richard Trench, Debden Hall	William Dearsley
1777	Henry Sperling, Dines Hall	William Dearsley
1778	William Lushington, Latton	John Collin
1779	William Godfrey, Woodford	John Collin
1780	Henry Hinde Pelley, Upton	George Byard
1781	Richard Wyatt, Hornchurch	George Byard
1782	William Dalby, Walthamstow	George Byard
1783	John Godslave, Crosse, Baddow	George Byard
1784	Robert Preston, Woodford	William Reynolds
1785	George Bowles, Wanstead	William Reynolds
1786	John Jolliffe, Gt Waltham	William Reynolds
1787	John Judd	William Reynolds
1788	Thomas Theophilus, Messing	Joseph Cutting
1789	Henry Merttins Bird, Dagenham	Joseph Cutting
1790	Thomas Nottage	Joseph Cutting
1791	Donald Cameron, Ilford	Joseph Cutting
1792	Zachariah Button, Stifford	Joseph Cutting
1793	Staines Chamberlayne, Hatfield Broad Oak	Joseph Cutting
1794	Richard Neave, Dagnams	Joseph Cutting
1795	John Hanson, Gt Bromley Hall	Joseph Cutting
1796	Jackson Barwis, Marshalls	Joseph Cutting
1797	William Manbey, Stratford	Joseph Cutting
1798	John Perry, Moor Hall	Joseph Cutting
1799	Capel Cure, Blake Hall	Joseph Cutting

	High Sheriff	*Undersheriff*
1800	George Lee, Gt Ilford	Joseph Cutting
1801	John Archer Houblon, Hallingbury Place	Joseph Cutting
1802	Robert Raikes, Gt Ilford	Joseph Cutting
1803	Stephen Fryer Gillum, Shenfield	John Sudlow
1804	William Palmer, Nazeing	Joseph Cutting
1805	James Reed, Warleys	Joseph Cutting
1806	James Urmston, Chigwell	Joseph Cutting
1807	William Mathew Raikes, Walthamstow	Joseph Cutting
1808	John Coggan, Wanstead	Joseph Cutting
1809	John Rutherford	Joseph Cutting
1810	John Rigg, Walthamstow	Joseph Cutting
1811	Charles Smith, Suttons	Joseph Cutting
1812	Sir Robert Wigram, Walthamstow	Joseph Cutting
1813	Richard John Brassey, Gt Ilford	Joseph Cutting
1814	Robert Wilson, Woodhouse	Joseph Cutting
1815	Luke William Walford, Lt Bardfeld	Joseph Cutting
1816	Nicholas Pearce, Loughton	Joseph Cutting
1817	John Hall, Woodford	Joseph Cutting
1818	John Theophilus, Layton	Joseph Cutting
1819	John Wilkes, Wedon Lofts	Joseph Cutting
1820	Sir Thomas Neave, Dagnam	Joseph Cutting
1821	Robert Westley Hall, Gt Ilford	Joseph Cutting
1822	Sir George Henry Smyth, Berechurch Hall	William Mason
1823	John Jolliffe Tufnell, Langleys	Charles Parker
1824	Nathaniel Garland, Michaelstow Hall	Robert Winter
1825	Peter Du Cane, Braxted Lodge	William Mason
1826	Frederick Nassau, St OSyth	William Mason
1827	Sir John Tyrell, Boreham	**T F Gepp**
1828	Sir Charles Joshua Smith, Suttons	**T Perkins**
1829	Brice Pearse, Monkham in Woodford	**T Perkins**
1830	Capel Cure, Blake Hall	**T F Gepp**
1831	William Davis	**T Perkins**
1832	John Thomas Selwin	**T M Gepp**
1833	Richard Birch Wolfe, Wood Hall	**T Perkins**
1834	James Round, Danbury Park	**T M Gepp**
1835	George Wm Gent, Moyns Park	Porter, New Court
1836	Wm Whitaker Maithland, Loughton Hall	Richard Adams
1837	Jonathan Bullock, Faulkbourne	T Wigglesworth
1838	William Cotton, Walwood	Wasey Sterry

	High Sheriff	*Undersheriff*
1839	John Fletcher Mills, Lexden Park	William Mason
1840	Christopher Tower, Weald Hall	**T M Gepp**
1841	John Archer Houblon, Gt Hallingbury	**T M Gepp**
1842	John Faithful, Writtle Lodge	Robert Bartlett
1843	Henry John Conyers, Epping	Richard Andrews
1844	Staines Brockett, Spains Hall	Joseph Maberly
1845	George Round, Colchester	John Thomson
1846	John Carmont Whiteman, Epping	Joseph Jessop
1847	Wm Coxhead March, Park Hall	Richard Andrews
1848	Beale Blackwell Colvin, Manghams Hall	Joseph Jessop
1849	Onle Savill Onle, Stisted Hall	A C Veley
1850	Thomas Burch Western, Felix Hall	Edward Western
1851	Wm Philip Honywood, Marks Hall	**T M Gepp**
1852	Sir Charles Cunliffe, Sutton	**T M Gepp**
1853	John Gordon Rebow, Wyvenhoe Park	John Barnes
1854	Thomas White, Wethersfield	William Wade
1855	John W Perry, Moor Hall	Joseph Jessop
1856	Robert Hills, Colne Engaine	George Sperling
1857	John Francis Wright, Kelvedon Hall	T Wright
1858	Osgood Hanbury, Holfield Grange	Archibald Hanbury
1859	Champion Russell, Upminster	**T M Gepp**
1860	George Harry**,** Lexden Park	James Inglis
1861	George Alan Lowndes, Barrington Hall	**T M Gepp**
1862	Joseph Samuel Lescher, Boyles Court	**T M Gepp**
1863	George Palmer, Nazeing	John Longbourne
1864	Edgar Disney, Ingatestone	**T M Gepp**
1865	Sir Thomas Barrett	George Adolphus
1866	Arthur Prior, Hylands	**T M Gepp**
1867	Richard Baker, Orsett Hall	**T M Gepp**
1868	William Charles Smith, Saffron Walden	Charles Wade
1869	John Wright, Hatfield Peverel	John Blood
1870	John Jolliffe Tufnell, Gt Waltham	**T M Gepp**
1871	Robert Gosling the Younger, Farnham	**T M Gepp**
1872	Thomas Kemble, Runwell Hall	**T M Gepp**
1873	Robert John Bagshaw, Dovercourt	Fred Bloomfield
1874	Thomas George Graham, Wethersfield	William Knocker
1875	Sir Thomas Neville Abdy, Stapleford Abbots	John Barnes
1876	Christopher John Hume Tower, South Weald	Richard Postans

	High Sheriff	*Undersheriff*
1877	John Robert Vaizey, Halstead	George Harris
1878	Philip John Budworth, Ongar	**T M Gepp**
1879	Edward Ind, Gt Warley	**T M Gepp**
1880	Andrew Johnston, Woodford	**T M Gepp**
1881	Thomas Jenner Spitty, Billericay	Leonard Hicks
1882	Hector John Gurdon Rebow, Wyvenhoe Pk	John Barnes
1883	John Oxley Parker, Woodham Mortimer	**C B O Gepp**
1884	Sir Wm Neville Abdy, Stapleford Abbots	William Morgan
1885	Joseph Francis Lescher, Brentwood	**C B O Gepp**
1886	Henry Ford Barclay, Woodford	**C B O Gepp**
1887	John Lionel Tufnell, Boreham House	**C B O Gepp**
1888	Edward North Buxton, Woodford	**C B O Gepp**
1889	Sir Wm Bowyer Smith, Theydon Mount	**C B O Gepp**
1890	Richard Beale Colvin, Kelvedon	**C B O Gepp**
1891	Thomas Courtenay Theydon, Woodford	**C B O Gepp**
1892	William Swaine, Epping	**C B O Gepp**
1893	Arthur Janion Edwards, Beech Hill Park	**C B O Gepp**
1894	Horace George Egerton, Colchester	**C B O Gepp**
1895	Henry Joslin, Upminster	**C B O Gepp**
1896	George Courtauld, Braintree	A Cunnington
1897	Edward Murray Ind, Gt Warley	**C B O Gepp**
1898	George Bramston Archer, Gt Hallingbury	**C B O Gepp**
1899	Edward Kensit Norman, Manningtree	**C B O Gepp**
1900	Henry Collings Wells, Broomfield	**C B O Gepp**
1901	Ernest James Wythes, Manningtree	**C B O Gepp**
1902	Robert Cunliffe Gosling, Farnham	**C B O Gepp**
1903	Col Richard Percival Davis, Walton	**C B O Gepp**
1904	James Noah Paxman, Braintree	**C B O Gepp**
1905	Thomas Fowell Victor Buxton, Waltham Abbey	**C B O Gepp**
1906	Christopher William Parker, Faulkbourne	**C B O Gepp**
1907	Charles Ernest Ridley, Chelmsford	**W P Gepp**
1908	William Nocton, Colchester	**H H Gepp**
1909	John Henry Horton, Brentwood	Frank Landon
1910	Ralph Frederick Bury, Nazeing	Gordon Cox
1911	Reginald Duke Hill, Coggeshall	**H H Gepp**
1912	Captain Horatio Fraser, East Hanningfield	**H H Gepp**
1913	Charles James Round, Hatfield Peverel	**H H Gepp**
1914	Henry Basham Dickinson, Pebmarsh	**H H Gepp**
1915	Sir Drummond Cunliffe, Romford	**H H Gepp**

	High Sheriff	*Undersheriff*
1916	Samuel Augustine Courtauld, Halstead	H Cunnington
1917	Charles Edmund Gooch, Wyvenhoe Park	**H H Gepp**
1918	Sir F R Green, Chigwell	**H H Gepp**
1919	J J D Botterall, Earls Colne	**H H Gepp**
1920	M E Hughes-Hughes, Leez Priory	H Cunnington
1921	W Julien Courtauld, Halstead	**H H Gepp**
1922	Lt Col F H D C Whitmore, CMG DSO	**H H Gepp**
1923	Major Guy Gilbey Gold, Shalford	**H H Gepp**
1924	Lt Col Sir Frederic Carne Rasch, Bart	**H H Gepp**
1925	Major Richard King Magor, Springfield Lyons	**H H Gepp**
1926	Brevet Col Eustace Hill, DSO TD	**H H Gepp**
1927	Major William Sullivan Gosling, Farnham	**H H Gepp**
1928	Sir Thomas Fowell, Waltham Abbey	**H H Gepp**
1929	Brig Gen K J Kincard Smith, CB CMG DSO	**H H Gepp**
1930	Brig Gen J T Wigan, CB CMG DSO	**H H Gepp**
1931	Major N A C de H Tufnell, Gt Waltham	**H H Gepp**
1932	Harold McCorquodale, Ongar	**H H Gepp**
1933	Major H L M Tritton, Lyons Hall	**H H Gepp**
1934	Lt Col E N Buxton, MC, Loughton	**H H Gepp**
1935	Lt Col Frank Hilder, Ingatestone	**H H Gepp**
1936	Capt Gerald Murray Strutt, Terling	**H H Gepp**
1937	Major Forrester Colvin Watson, OBE MC	**H H Gepp**
1938	Sir James Adam, Kt CBE KC, Earls Colne	**H H Gepp**
1939	Col Stuart Sidney Mallinson. CBE DSO MC	**H H Gepp**
1940	Major Wyndham Birch, DSO, MBE	**H H Gepp**
1941	Capt John Kidston Swire, Harlow	**H H Gepp**
1942	Col Richard Cecil Oxley Parker, TD	**H H Gepp**
1943	Lt Col Hubert Ashton, MC DL, Brentwood	**H H Gepp**
1944	Wing Commander D A J Buxton, Ongar	**H H Gepp**
1945	Sir Adam Beattie Ritchie, Knight, Boreham	**H H Gepp**
1946	William Whitmore Otter-Barry, Colchester	**A D P Thompson**
1947	Brig Gen C E C G Charlton, CB CMG DSO	**A D P Thompson**
1948	Lt Col John Oxley Parker, TD DL, Colchester	**A D P Thompson**
1949	Victor Alexander Gascogine-Cecil, Billericay	**A D P Thompson**
1950	Lt Col Vernon Stewart Laurie, OBE TD DL	**A D P Thompson**
1951	Maj George Nigel Capel-Cure, TD DL JP	**A D P Thompson**
1952	Col Francis Collingwood-Drake, Harlow	**A D P Thompson**
1953	Augustine Courtauld, Bps Stortford	**A D P Thompson**
1954	Lt Col P V Upton, MBE TD DL JP	**A D P Thompson**

	High Sheriff	*Undersheriff*
1955	Samuel Ranulph Allsopp, CBE DL	**A D P Thompson**
1956	Lt Col James Gray Round, DL, Colchester	**A D P Thompson**
1957	Norman Selwyn Pryor DL, Bps Stortford	**A D P Thompson**
1958	Lt Col W Douglas-Gosling, MBE TD DL	**A D P Thompson**
1959	Maj Geoffrey Benyon Hoare, DL, Dunmow	**A D P Thompson**
1960	Charles Hubert Archibald Butler, Newport	**A D P Thompson**
1961	Christopher W Oxley Parker, Faulkbourne	**A D P Thompson**
1962	Douglas Gurney Pelly, Saffron Walden	**A D P Thompson**
1963	Col Hugh Hunter Jones, CBE MC TD JP DL	**T C Gepp**
1964	Brig Edward Joseph Todhunter, TD DL	**T C Gepp**
1965	Andrew Hunter Carnwath, Ugley	**T C Gepp**
1966	Sir Nigel Edward Strutt, TD DL, Terling	**T C Gepp**
1967	Guy Edward Ruggles-Brise, TD DL, Harlow	**T C Gepp**
1968	Major N N Norman-Butler, TD DL, Chelm	**T C Gepp**
1969	The Hon Sir Richard Clive Butler, Halstead	**T C Gepp**
1970	Mark Frederic Strutt, MC TD DL, Chelmsford	**T C Gepp**
1971	Allan James Vincent Arthur, MBE DL	**T C Gepp**
1972	Lord Aubrey L O Buxton, KVCO MC DL	**T C Gepp**
1973	Gerald Colville Seymour Curtis, OBE MA	**T C Gepp**
1974	Col Richard George Judd, TD DL	**T C Gepp**
1975	Ronald Edward Tritton	**T C Gepp**
1976	Lt Col R Wingate Collins-Charlton, OBE	**T C Gepp**
1977	Edmund Hoyle Vestey, DL, Asdon	**T C Gepp**
1978	Robert Peter Laurie, OBE DL, Ingrave	**T C Gepp**
1979	Alastair Brian Clarke Harrison, DL, Copford	**T C Gepp**
1980	John Edward Tabor OBE DL, Braintree	**T C Gepp**
1981	Gerald A Charrington, DL, Layer Marney	**T C Gepp**
1982	Col Richard Bennett Gosling, OBE TD DL	**T C Gepp**
1983	Hubert Gaitskell Ashton, DL, South Weald	**T C Gepp**
1984	Peter Buchanan Lake, TD DL, Lt Leighs	**T C Gepp**
1985	David William Rushbrooke Evans, TD DL	**T C Gepp**
1986	Murray David Maitland Keddie, DL	**T C Gepp**
1987	Julius Arthur Sheffield Neave, CBE DL	**T C Gepp**
1988	Leonard Ratcliff, DSO DFC & Bar C de G	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
1989	Leslie Alan Jordan, DL	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
1990	Peter Gavin Lee, DL	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
1991	Michael William Clark, CBE DL	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
1992	Alan George Tritton, CBE DL	**J P Douglas-Hughes**

	High Sheriff	*Undersheriff*
1993	Christopher Spencer Gosling, DL	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
1994	Evelyn Bridgett Patricia Ward-Thomas, DL	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
1995	Christopher Ferens Pertwee, DL	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
1996	Peter Thomas Thistlethwayte, DL	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
1997	Robert Felix Erith, TD DL	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
1998	Robin George Newman, DL	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
1999	G Ronnie Capel-Cure	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
2000	John Giles Selby Coode-Adams, OBE DL	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
2001	George Courtauld	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
2002	David T A Boyle JT MA MSI	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
2003	Mark T Thomasin-Foster CBE DL	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
2004	Andrew C Streeter DL	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
2005	Jennifer M Tolhurst	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
2006	Christopher D Stewart-Smith CBE	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
2007	Lady Kemp-Welch, Little Hallingbury	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
2008	Sarah F Courage, Mountnessing	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
2009	Rupert S Gosling, Takely	**J P Douglas-Hughes**
2010	Michael W Hindmarch, Danbury	**J P Douglas-Hughes**

Newly built Shire Hall, Chelmsford, c.1800

Appendix 2: Equity Partners of Gepp & Sons and its Predecessors 1768-2010

E Gepp	1768-1797
T F Gepp	1797-1832*
T Perkins	1817-1867*
T M Gepp	1832-1883*
F J Veley	1846-1867
C B O Gepp	1867-1907*
W P Gepp	1867-1911*
H H Gepp	1904-1945*
A D P Thompson	1934-1963*
F N Wingent	1937-1972
T C Gepp	1950-1986*
C L Facey	1969-2002
J P Douglas-Hughes	1971-Present*
R R Wicks	1975-1993
R P J Brice	1984-Present
N G M Ashford	1984-Present
P G Littlefield	1988-Present
S P Payne	1988-Present
D R Carter	1991-Present
E M Worthy	2006-Present

Those marked * have held the post of Undersheriff of Essex.

Appendix 3: Descendants of Edward Gepp

Edward
b.1732
m. Mary Marke, Halstead 1758
m. Ann Robinson 1764
d. 1797

Thos. Frost
b. 1767
m. Anna Morgan 1804
d. 1832

George Asser
b. 1768

Emma Elizabeth
b.1797

Anna Maria
b. 1805

Thos. Morgan
b. 1806
m. Mary Lane 1833
d. 1883

Emma Sophia
b. 1808

Anne
b. 1809

Sophia
b. 1813

Thos. Sydney
b. 1835

Henry John
b. 1837

WP
b.1838
m. Constance Barlow 1858
d. 1911

CBO
b. 1839
m. Elizabeth May Clark 1870
d. 1907

Mary
b. 1841

Nicolas Parker
b. 1842

Arthur Mildmay
b. 1843

Henry Hamilton
b.1875
m. Mary Noel Grimston 1905
d. 1945

Sidney Tindal
b.1878

Ernest Cyril
b. 1879

Miriam Helen
b. 1929
d. 1996

Henry Walter
b. 1908
d. 1908

Rosalind Mary
b. 1910
d. 1991

Adela Marjorie
b. 1914

Thomas Christopher
b.1919

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Various paper records, courtesy of ERO

Personal memories of Thomas Gepp, Peter Davis, John Plumtree.

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55	Police HQ, Springfield	F Chancellor, ERO
57	Prison Staff	F Chancellor, ERO
58	HMP Chelmsford	F Chancellor, ERO
60	Police Sergeant	F Chancellor, ERO
63	High Sheriff's Party	F Chancellor, ERO
67	General Election 1924	F Chancellor, ERO
69	Undersheriff's Party	Gepp & Sons Solicitors
70	50 Years' Service	Gepp & Sons Solicitors
73	Railway Station	F Chancellor, ERO
75	HH Gepp 1915	F Chancellor, ERO
77	Duke Street	F Chancellor, ERO
78	66 Duke Street	NGM Ashford
80	Noel Wingent	Gepp & Sons Solicitors

81	Deep Drifts	Estate of Lynton Lamb
85	Cannon's Restaurant	F Chancellor, ERO
87	Gepp & Sons 1950	P Davis
89	County Hall Staff	Author
90	Secretaries 1959	J Brett
92	P Davis 1996	C Dole
96	Rear Gardens, Duke St.	NGM Ashford
98	Partners at Merger	Gepp & Sons Solicitors
99	Duke Street Offices	NGM Ashford
100	Mr & Mrs T Gepp	C Dole
101	New London Rd Offices	NGM Ashford
103	Gepp & Sons Logo	Gepp & Sons Solicitors
103	Cliff Facey & Partners	Gepp & Sons Solicitors
104	Danny Carter	Gepp & Sons Solicitors
106	Entire Staff	Gepp & Sons Solicitors
108	Countryfile Talk	Gepp & Sons Solicitors
108	Legal Debate 2009	Gepp & Sons Solicitors
115	The Shire Hall, 1800	ERO

Page 6: 'Persevero':

The Gepp family crest sitting atop its coat of arms, with the motto, translated meaning simply 'persevere'.
Arms: Per chevron azure and gules a chevron engrailed or surmounted of a plain chevron sable between three falcons close argent beaked legged jessed and belled of the third collard gules. *Crest:* A mount vert thereon an eagle rising azure wings erminois gorged with a collar and in the beak a mascle or the dexter claw supporting a sword erect proper pommel and hilt gold.

The Arms were granted to T F Gepp and the crest was kindly donated by Thomas Gepp for the use of the firm in their logo.