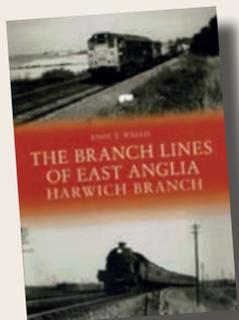


# Book Reviews



Andy T Wallis

## The Branch Lines of East Anglia – Harwich Branch



ISBN 978 1 4456 9526 6 print version (softbound) pp. 128  
ISBN 978 1 4456 9527 3 ebook

Amberley Publishing, 2020, SWHS, £14.99 (print version or ebook)

This is the latest of the railway books from this author published by the prolific Amberley Publishing. This review is of the print version; an electronic version is available at the same price.

The line from Manningtree, to Parkeston Quay and Harwich may technically be a branch, in that it comes off another line, but it scarcely meets the popular image of one. It was opened in 1854, less than decade after the Colchester-Ipswich line off which it branches and was double tracked by 1882. Right from the start it has been a link in an important passenger route from London to Northern Europe, although freight traffic has greatly declined in recent years,

Although its title does not make this clear, this book is not a history of the line, but a collection of photographs. The main text consists of an introduction and a very brief history, with a simple map – four pages in all. The rest comprises 228 photographs, all black and white, and mainly two to a page in landscape format. The captions to each are rarely more than two to three lines.

The arrangement is to group the photographs by station, from west to east, starting at Manningtree and

ending at Harwich Town. Most of the shots show trains. Comparatively few have station buildings as their main subject. There are no layout plans of the individual stations.

By this reviewer's count only three photographs date from earlier than 1947, and most are later than that. Therefore, the first century of the line is barely covered, except in so far as earlier buildings and infrastructure are shown in later images. There are some shots taken within the last few years, but, unlike other works by this author, there is no systematic attempt contrast the line as it is at this moment in time with its appearance in earlier years

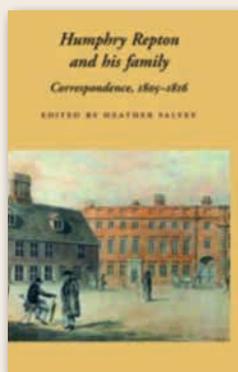
All the photographs are black and white, although it is to be presumed that some of the more recent ones would have been taken originally on colour film or with digital cameras. The great majority of the images are described as "ATW" collection, presumably referring to the author. How many of them were actually taken by him is not revealed. Some are from other sources. Sometimes a personal name is given. Many of the most recent infrastructure pictures, for instance, are ascribed to Ray Bishop. However, it is never stated in as many words whether in any particular case these named individuals are the actual photographers, or merely the suppliers of copies. This is important, as the ownership and duration of copyright in a photograph depends on the identity, and date of death, of the photographer.

In short, this is a book for the specialist railway historian or railway modeller, or perhaps for someone who knows the present line well and wishes to see what it looked like in the comparatively recent past. How much they would find that is new is beyond this reviewer's knowledge.

*Neil Wiffen*

H. Falvey (editor)

## Humphry Repton and his family: Correspondence, 1805-1816



pp.411, ISBN 978-0-9957736-3-9  
Norfolk Record Society  
volume LXXXIV, 2020

Price: £25

Transcripts of about 230 letters between members of the Repton family form the latest publication of the Norfolk Record Society. The letters are now the Huntington Library in

the USA, having been purchased at auction in Sotheby's in 1974, so there are obvious benefits in having them easily available to researchers on this side of the Atlantic. Most, or all, were originally collected by Repton's fourth son, William, a solicitor in the Norfolk town of Aylsham. They are warm, humorous and intimate communications, reflecting the close ties that existed between the various members of the extended family, and they reflect their interests in, and concerns with, the outside world. Those looking for revelations about Repton's profession as a landscape designer may be disappointed, though there is some indication of additional work done at Auberries in Bulmer, Essex, as well as at a few sites in other counties. Nevertheless the letters reveal the more intimate aspects of his professional life, particularly the support that he received from his extended family in making the famous Red Books to illustrate his proposals to clients, and their companionship on his long journeys

round the country to provide plans and advice. This assistance was particularly important after he had been left permanently disabled by a coach accident, incurred when returning on snow-bound roads from a ball at Belhus in January 1811. The letters show his human side too, with worries about money, his shortage of commissions, and his concern that he would become a burden to his family.

This publication is an exemplary piece of editing, and its detail and clarity bely the considerable amount of research behind the extensive footnotes which provide information about people and events mentioned in the letters. The transcripts themselves have been carefully set out in chronological order (unlike their ordering in the Huntington Library) and include important incidental details such as postmarks, and subsequent endorsements by the recipients or others.

The introduction explains the editorial process with commendable clarity, and provides a useful resumé of Repton's life, and the members of his extended family. The reader will acquire considerable sympathy for Repton himself who had a very chequered career. Apprenticed to a Norwich textile merchant, he was then

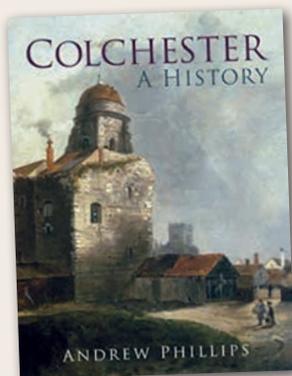
set up in business by his father, but quickly failed and lost most of his capital. In 1784 he invested what was left in a venture, set up by the Post Office pioneer, John Palmer, to replace the existing slow and insecure horse post with fast, light, regularly timetabled, mail coaches. Though this was to become a huge success, Palmer was dismissed and spent many years seeking financial redress. Repton, of course, lost the last of his capital. It was not till 1788, at the age of 36, that he started a new career as a landscape gardener from his new home at Hare Street, Romford. Though this career was to be a great success, and he became hugely influential nationally, one is left with the sense that he was yet again let down by his lack of business sense, and that financial insecurity pursued him to the end of his life.

This book will be of considerable interest to Essex readers for the insight it gives into the personal life of someone so closely associated with the county. It also provides an intimate picture of a close family network, its concerns and the incidentals of daily life in the early nineteenth century. And as a careful and thorough piece of editing, it is a triumph.

*Neil Wiffen*

Andrew Phillips

### Colchester: A History



134 pp, card covers,  
monochrome  
photographs, maps,  
figures

ISBN 978 0 7509 8691 5  
Phillimore & Co., 2017

£10.99

This is a fine example of a local history book which covers all the necessary key facts relating to the

town in a concise yet very readable manner. All the must-have elements are here: the Roman garrison, the Boudican revolt, the Norman castle, the mediaeval merchants and the cloth trade, the rise of Puritanism and its effects, the Civil War siege, preparations for war with the French, the coming of the railways. Of course Colchester has a longer recorded history than any other site in Britain, so the treatment of any single era is necessarily brief but nevertheless the author manages to convey all the salient facts in a lively and informative manner. As the narrative approaches the later 20th century, coverage is more intensive and it occasionally takes on the feel of a personal memoir.

The text is divided into chapters covering blocks of centuries, with individual topics treated in subsections. It is a revised version of the first edition published in 2004. The layout is clear and uncluttered with generous use of margins and 144 illustrations.

Many are monochrome photographs, alongside line-drawings and period maps.

The prose style is factual yet engaging, offering a useful discussion of the major topics without descending into an excess of confusing detail. Some 'shorthand' terms are used (e.g. 'Dark Ages') for convenience, but this does not detract from the overall flow of the text. No major event is omitted, even the often-overlooked fact that King Athelstan's re-conquest of the Danelaw was launched from Colchester in 931 after a full meeting of the Witan attended by a vast number of earls, ealdormen, abbots, bishops and the Archbishop of Canterbury. It is no easy matter to include the great and the everyday side-by-side in a single text and Dr. Phillips is to be congratulated on his success.

While no work of this length can hope to cover everything of interest, this book provides a useful and very readable summary of its subject within the context of national history. It would certainly form a good basis for further study.

The only small disappointment with the book is the 'Concise Bibliography' which runs to just twenty-six titles. While space is always at a premium in printed works, one of the great benefits of a useful introductory book such as this is the opportunity for the author to guide readers in their research interests. That said, the inclusion of academic series such as *Colchester Archaeologist* and *Essex Archaeology and History* does promote study of the more technical side of historical research while the local newspaper references will offer a broader view. In all, the book is an excellent overview of Colchester's history.

*Steve Pollington*