

NEWSLETTER 130

JANUARY 1996

Price 20p, free to members

Society calendar

Our October meeting, which attracted one of our largest attendances, was beset with difficulties. First, the absence of the screen on which our speaker, David Mander, could illustrate his talk on 'The History of Hackney'; problems with the power supply to the projector, and finally the lack of a lectern on which the speaker could rest his notes. It may sound ominous, but steps have been taken to see that such problems do not occur again!

One of those steps arose from the meeting held on 30 November when Mark Watson enthused members with his talk about 'Fishing in Barking'. The meeting was held in the Methodist Church itself – no chair shifting, comfortable seating, good sound, good refreshment arrangements – and the view expressed on all sides 'Can't we meet here regularly?' At the extra meeting held on 12 December, when Chris Pond took the audience on an illustrated 'A Walk Round Loughton', he said, with his Chairman's hat on, that it would be possible to obtain the use of the Methodist Church for our meetings in 1996/97, but it would be necessary to meet on the third Thursday in the month and not as at present. 'Without prejudice', as they say, at least our major chair-shifter, Ian Strugnell, would get a break!

'A Time to call it a day' says Vic Russell, our Treasurer

'As I announced to you all at the last AGM, having served the Society for the last twelve years, six of them as the treasurer, I have decided to retire from the committee. When I took early retirement nearly seven years ago, I thought that I would have time to cope with all my interests. On the contrary, I now find that 'there are not enough hours in the day'. I am afraid that something has to give, and after some heart-searching that has to be my work with the History Society.

This is an appeal, therefore, for someone to come forward before the AGM in May prepared to take on the relatively simple job of treasurer.'

Vic's understandable decision raises a matter for wider consideration by all members: to paraphrase President Kennedy, 'It's not what my Society can do for me, but what can I do for my Society'. In March, members will be invited to make nominations for committee members. The committee needs strengthening; will you help to strengthen it by joining it? Give it a thought. As Kitchener might have said: 'Your Society committee needs you'.

Was this the ultimate folly?

Close by the elegant 18th-century home of MP Paul Channon and deep inside one of the few large hills in the vicinity, a large underground bunker was built in 1952 to serve as a control centre for the RAF. The site was 'top secret' but being surrounded by a high fence covered with KEEP OUT notices and crowned by a prominent radio mast, its location was soon well-known to local residents – TQ 561995, to be exact.

After about 15 years serving the RAF, and a short period being used to house a Civil Defence unit, it was converted at a cost of several million pounds into a Nuclear Command Bunker able to house up to 600 people with supplies to last three months. Finally, in 1992 the bunker was put up for sale by the Ministry of Defence and purchased

at a minute fraction of its total cost by a member of the family who originally owned and farmed the land where it was built. Now, for an entrance fee anyone can enter what could be considered the greatest 'folly' in this area!

The entrance to this labyrinth sunk some one hundred feet below ground and surrounded by 10 feet thick concrete walls is through what is intended to be a 'decoy' modern bungalow, now festooned with closed circuit television cameras and the exhaust pipes of a huge power plant it would hardly have deceived any would-be attacker. The 'Texas-style' wooden front door is covered on the inside with 2" thick steel plating and leads visitors into the 'decontamination area'. There, after a nuclear attack, anyone admitted would have been required to deposit all their clothing into a lead-lined box and then pass through a shower reminiscent of a visit to Loughton Pool before entering the Guard Room fitted somewhat incongruously with a tiled fireplace.

From here the real bunker begins. It is entered through huge doors made from tank armourplate four to six inches thick. Ahead is a long featureless passage leading deep into the hill, so designed that it would be of use to fight off any misguided civilians who tried to enter the building knowing the conditions outside and hoping to convince the PM and military locked inside that surrender was the wisest course of action.

The excellent guided tour then takes visitors through rooms designed for various purposes such as a BBC studio, a radar room, telephone exchange and teleprinter room, medical centre and laboratory, as well as a well-equipped canteen and male and female dormitories. Finally, in the bowels of the structure is a huge refrigeration plant needed to keep down the heat generated by 600 human beings and machinery. Strangely, in the same room there is equipment to pump sewage to the top of the site rather than simply draining it away at the base.

My own reaction to this 20th-century fortress was to wonder whether any sane person could have envisaged keeping 600 human beings entombed in a great cellar for up to three months fully aware of the destruction above, the deaths of their own loved ones and knowledge of the nightmare world into which they would eventually have to emerge.

Others may feel differently, but this could be the objective of a local visit whether you regard the bunker as a 'folly' or a wise precaution. The Society could arrange such a visit to enable members to form their own opinions, if there were sufficient interest.

JOHN HOWES

[We suspect that this folly, hardly reminiscent of that gallant 600 who rode into the 'Jaws of Death, Into the mouth of Hell', will feature in John's future talks about other, and less-costly, architectural follies about which he has spoken to us in the past. Editor.]

Unsocial benefit?

'At the motion of Mr Hart seconded by Mr Fitch it was resolved that the Lists of the several Parishes in the Union to be revised and the Standard of allowances reduced to the scale at which they stood previous to October 1846 namely 8d per Head for families instead of 10d & a loaf & 2/- instead of 2/4 for old people. The Pauper Lists were revised accordingly and subject to confirmation on the next Board day.'

From the Minute Book of the Epping Union, 5 November 1847

Frederick George Emmison, MBE, FSA, 1907–1995

Those who study Essex history owe a great debt to Dr F G (Derrick) Emmison, particularly for his work in two main areas. The first is for his contribution to the creation of Essex Record Office at Chelmsford. Dr Emmison, who refused to be content with modest achievement, and therefore was considered at times to be a hard taskmaster, was a pioneer in the field of archives. Appointed Bedfordshire's first Clerk of Records in 1925, he moved to Essex in 1938 where, under his leadership, Essex Record

Office became a leader in its field. Many of his staff, went on to make major contributions to the study of history. He retired as County Archivist in 1969.

The second contribution for which we should be grateful to Derrick Emmison is the body of his published work of which *Tudor Secretary: Sir William Petre at Court and Home* was a significant contribution to Tudor studies. His series of books *Elizabethan Life* and *Essex Wills* add to our understanding of social life in the reign of Elizabeth I. He will also be remembered for the series of exhibitions at Ingatestone Hall, home of the Petre family, which took place during his period of office.

Honoured by many major and local societies in appointments to the offices of President or Vice-President; Dr Emmison also served as Honorary Secretary and Treasurer of the Friends of Historic Essex. Appointed MBE in 1966, he received further recognition of his work with the richly deserved honorary doctorate awarded by Essex University in 1967.

*Chigwell & Loughton: A Pictorial History**

Stephen Pewsey, a member of the Society, has produced a book, dedicated to David Wilkinson, which helps to give a picture of the development of our area of Epping Forest district. It does so by providing a good selection of photographs and drawings from a wide range of sources. The text is largely in the form of extended captions to the pictures illustrating the various sections of the book – early history; houses; people; industry; streets; social life and so on.

There are a few noticeable errors: for example the 1862 parish choir reassembled for a photograph in 1902 (illustration 94) were surely choristers of, and photographed at, St John's, Loughton and not St John's, Buckhurst Hill. The caption to picture 170 is likely to cause discussion among railway 'buffs', while the illustration (number 40) of John Elsee's house in Chigwell Row, may give the impression that it no longer exists. Named Sheepcotes it is still flourishing and has been photographed by our Treasurer, Vic Russell, for a forthcoming booklet on Chigwell and Chigwell Row.

These are minor quibbles which do not detract from enjoyment of this well-produced record of aspects of history in 'our' part of Epping Forest district. A street map could be a useful aid to establishing locations. Just take an early opportunity to search them out on a voyage of discovery. IAN STRUGNELL

**Chigwell & Loughton: A Pictorial History* by Stephen Pewsey. Phillimore, £12.95 (A special offer from the author is available to C & L History Society members.)

Forthcoming: Essex: 'full of profitable thinges'

A collection of essays presented as a tribute to Colonel Sir John Ruggles-Brise, Bt, OBE, TD, JP, to be published on 25 September 1996, the list of contents makes this book a must for all interested in Essex history. Apply now to order it at the pre-publication price of £12.50 plus £4.50 p & p. Send cheques, payable to 'Essex Archaeological and Historical Congress', to EA & HC, Lower Hill House, Stratford St Mary, Colchester CO7 6JX.

Correspondence

Whenever I am in the vicinity of Lower Queens Road, Buckhurst Hill, I ask myself how many current residents of that area know why Cascade Road carries that name. It is because of its proximity to the River Roding and a former feature of that part of its course.

Until about 1937/38, the Roding came over a small weir at the point where the Chigwell-Woodford railway viaduct crosses the river. This weir was next to the wooden footbridge that joined Luxborough Lane, Chigwell to Squirrels Lane, Buckhurst Hill, and was sufficiently deep on its downstream side to provide a pool for bathers to dive into from the top of the bank. This was known locally as 'The Cascade'

(OED. – ‘a small waterfall’), hence the name of the nearby road developed by the local authority in the 1930s. As a small boy my father took me there in order to teach me to swim; I regret that he was unsuccessful and I have never subsequently managed to do so.

When the new Luxborough Sewage works was developed in the late 1930s, the river was straightened and levelled, the weir was abolished, and the wooden bridge was replaced by the iron footbridge.

JOHN REDFERN, Chigwell

Book news – *Sixty Saxon Saints*,* by Alan Smith

The lives and legends of the saints are fascinating topics, and in this book, Chigwell resident and Society member, Alan Smith, has drawn together a collection of neat summaries of saints venerated in the Anglo-Saxon period. Although the entries include several ‘foreigners’ – such as St Margaret of Antioch, who is nowadays regarded as fictitious – this is largely a book of pre-Conquest English saints, with a handy calendar of their feast days as an appendix.

There are the ‘royal’ saints such as King Edmund of East Anglia, slain with Danish arrows, and King Oswald of Northumbria, killed by the pagan king of Mercia. Pious missionaries are included, such as the ‘Apostle of Essex’, St Cedd, and St Wilfrid, who converted the South Saxons. Saintry women are not forgotten, including St Hilda, founder of Whitby Abbey, and undoubtedly a most determined lady, and the rather more humble Edith of Wilton, whose cult of holy wells has pre-Christian overtones.

Mr Smith does not omit the frankly bizarre, such as St Rumwold, who died aged three days but at the moment of his birth was said to have proclaimed loudly ‘I am a Christian!’ three times. He also includes a discussion of the medieval attempts – unsuccessful – to have King Alfred the Great canonised. There is a good sprinkling of Essex saints in the book, which is a very useful introduction both to Christian belief a millennium ago and to the rich pattern of life in Anglo-Saxon days.

STEPHEN PEWSEY

**Sixty Saxon Saints* by Alan Smith. Anglo-Saxon Books, 1994, £2.95. ISBN 1 898281 07 6.

A question answered

At our October meeting, a member asked the speaker if it was in Hackney that John Keats’s sister, Fanny, spent her early years with her guardian. The answer is that Fanny lived from the age of 12 years until she was 21 in a house in Marsh Street (now High Street, Walthamstow). She was certainly not happy there and later wrote: ‘My guardian was not too careful of me and always kept me a prisoner having no other acquaintances than my books, birds and flowers.’ Visits from her brother were not encouraged but when he could, John would walk all the way from Hampstead to visit Fanny and bring her roots and seeds for her small garden. Fanny eventually left the home of her guardian and never returned to the area.

This answer to the member’s question is in *Shoppers Paradise*, published by Walthamstow Historical Society and written by our secretary, John Howes. John’s excuse for not speaking up ‘on the night’ is that he thought the questioner asked about Pepys’s sister. Such are the acoustics of the Wesley Hall!

CHIGWELL & LOUGHTON HISTORY SOCIETY Registered Charity No 287274

President: J I Besent, FRICS,

Chairman: Dr Chris Pond, Forest Villa, Staples Road, Loughton IG10 1HP (0181-508 2361)

Secretary: John Howes, 97 Staples Road, Loughton IG10 1HR (0181-508 0776)

Treasurer: Vic Russell, 231 Fencepiece Road, Chigwell IG7 5EB (0181-500 4829)

Membership Secretary: Mrs Emelie Buckner, 88 Alderton Hall Lane, Loughton IG10 3HD (0181-508 0427)

Editor: Edwin Dare, 21 Ibbetson Path, Loughton IG10 2AS (0181-508 6250)

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