

NEWSLETTER 135

FEBRUARY 1997

Price 20p, free to members

Our origins

The Chigwell Local History Society issued its first *Newsletter* in November 1962. It recorded that 'a small group of enthusiasts met together earlier this year to discuss the possibility of founding a society' to further interest in learning something of the history of our locality. Over the years members' interests have often ranged further afield.

The first Chairman of the Society was David Bowen, the Secretary was Clive Osborne, the Treasurer, Henry Gower and the Editor, Arthur Robinson. The Vice-Chairman was David Wilkinson, happily still making a contribution to our activities as a member of the committee and in arranging visits. When that first *Newsletter* was issued there were 22 members – our successor Society receives almost two hundred subscriptions and, as many are 'family memberships', our membership is closer to three hundred! The subscription in 1962 was a minimum of 10 shillings (50p) and it was suggested that 'members may feel they would like to subscribe more than this, say £1.1.0' (£1.05p), making today's annual subscription rates of £4.50 and £6 for families very good value.

A Local History Quiz where questions were to be answered by 'a panel of experts' was arranged for Thursday, 13 December 1962 while William Addison had agreed to give a talk on Epping Forest Towns, Villages and Great Houses on 10 January 1963. Both meetings took place at the Buckhurst Hill Community Association, Westbury Road, to which the Society was affiliated.

With *Newsletter 135* we can claim to be well established and acknowledge the foresight of that 'small group of enthusiasts' whose work we carry on. That first *Newsletter* contained some words which bear repeating: 'The Secretary will be glad to receive suggestions and ideas which may be helpful to our organization' and 'members who can give information of local interest are invited to write to the Editor with a view to inclusion in future issues of the *Newsletter*'.

The Society plays host

To quote *Forest News*, 'The Forest Group for Local History is an informal body co-ordinating local history activity in Metropolitan Essex and south-west Essex'. It usually meets a couple of times a year and societies, where their circumstances permit, take it in turn to play host to representatives from other societies. On 26 October our Society had the pleasure of playing host at the E15 Acting School, Hatfields, Rectory Lane, Loughton, when 31 people attended a meeting of the Group to report on their activities and exchange ideas. Interest in local history is at a high level and most reports were upbeat, with record attendances at meetings, while there was some feeling that visits are not attracting the support which they once did. However, well-supported visits had been made to the Mayor's Parlour at Southend, to Ipswich (where a tour of Tolley's Brewery had been a feature!) and to the Royal Hospital, Chelsea. Speakers at meetings had covered a wide range of subjects but one in particular stood out; Lord Petre spoke on Recusancy in Essex to the Romford & District Historical Society.

Our treasurer, Donald Pohl, entertained our guests with a talk about the E15 Acting School's association with Hatfields and then led a guided tour of the building: no ghost

was seen on this occasion! Our guests were refreshed by a satisfying tea of sandwiches, cakes and drinks arranged by Grace Wilkinson and Jeanne Pingree.

An outline of a community

Loughton library's edition of Davis' *Epping, Loughton and Ongar Almanack 1893* helps to give a picture of life in a developing urban community. Letters were delivered at 7 a.m., 9 a.m., 3.20 p.m. and 6.30 p.m., although whether this was to a central point is not clear. The post on Sunday was delivered at 7 a.m. Banking was a different proposition. No cash dispensers or opportunities for 'cash back' then and The Imperial' Bank, with headquarters at 6 Lothbury, in the City, opened only on Tuesdays and Fridays from 11am to 3pm. Finance of a different kind was handled by Loughton & District 79th Starr-Bowkett Building Society. How many houses in Loughton were financed through them?

There were societies for residents to join: the Choral Society; the Debating Society; plenty of opportunity for political discussion in the Primrose League; the Unionist Association; the Liberal and Radical Association; the opportunity to take part in easing social problems by supporting the Temperance Union or the Soup Kitchen or the charities associated with the churches – the shoe and clothing clubs; the lying-in club; the work club or the coal clubs. For readers there was the parochial lending library run by St John's church and the circulating library at Lopping Hall, which was open on Mondays between 4 to 5 p.m. and 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Thursdays, and operated by local historian Mr W C Waller of Ash Green.

The chance to make and listen to music, was provided by the Epping Forest Military Band and the Excelsior Brass Band while music of a softer kind was available at Fern Villa, Forest Road, where on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday evenings, shorthand, violin and other classes were conducted by William Stock, whose violin class provided the music for the Dancing Class held in Lopping Hall on Wednesdays at 8 p.m.

Sportsmen were catered for in Loughton Cricket Club, Loughton Park Cricket Club and Loughton Football Club, while those of a military bent were welcomed in the First Essex Rifle Volunteers G Company, and defence of a different kind was organized by the Epping Forest Commoners' Defence Association.

Medical help was provided by a District Nurse and through membership of a Medical Provident Club while help of a financial kind came through membership of the Ancient Order of Foresters with its 350 members or the Ancient Order of Shepherds with 44 members, or possibly local Freemasons.

In 1893 early closing day was on Wednesday at 5 p.m., which gives some idea of the hours which they were open on other days, although shopping hours are even longer a century later.

A community grows

Emelie Buckner interviewed Robert Darvell, who moved to Debden Estate, Loughton, in January 1948. He was born in Willesden and when he was about four years of age his family moved to Somers Town and later to Euston. Robert Darvell died on 9 December 1996 aged 91 years.

I only have a faint memory of my father; he was a railway porter and died of bronchitis and pneumonia when I was about three or four years old. My mother was a cleaner with the LNWR – the London and North Western Railway – and I can remember, on some mornings, before going to school, helping my mother clean the offices. There were five children in the family – four boys and one girl. Tom and John were in the Royal Fusiliers during the 1914–18 war. Albert died on the Burma Railway during the 1939–45 war. My sister Mary married and had two children and has lived in Canada for the past twenty years; she's 93 years old.

I went to Aldenham Street School, Euston, and left there at fourteen years and went to work as a van boy with the LNWR at Euston Station. Later on I became a driver with the parcel van man doing parcel collection and deliveries. We used to drive single and pair horses. I used to harness the horses ready for the driver. Then we had motor vans with solid tyres and no windscreen. When it rained we just pulled up the tarpaulin in front of us. They were ex-army lorries from the 1914–18 war.

I remember seeing Waterloo Bridge, the old bridge that was, gradually sinking; we went over it six times a day! [According to *The London Encyclopedia* edited by Ben Weintreb and Christopher Hibbert, in 1923 two of its piers settled, a temporary bridge was then built. The original bridge was demolished in 1936. The present bridge was built 1937–1942, E B.]

At Euston Station we worked long hours – night and day shifts. My shifts were from 12 midnight to 8.30 a.m.; 2 p.m. to 9 p.m. and 4 a.m. to 5 p.m. The van boys' wages were 23 shillings (£1.15p) a week. We delivered produce to all the London markets including Smithfield and Covent Garden.

I lived opposite the stables in Cardington Street and then in Drummond Street near the old Euston underground station. I worked with the railway for forty years. I left once and went into business with Maxa – making belt preservative – as production manager. These belts were used in engineering equipment. Leaving the railway meant losing privileges but it was a risk I took and no one explained to me what I was losing. Later I went back to the railway when things didn't work out so well with Maxa.

During the 1939–45 war I was in a reserved occupation. I was a part-time fireman in the AFS [Auxiliary Fire Service]. My memories of the bombings are quite vivid. I was with the railway delivering supplies to the Trinity House stores at Poplar and other East London dock areas – Canning Town, Silvertown, on the North Woolwich line, and Bromley-by-Bow. I was thirty-five years on one round, mostly at Canning Town.

I was married in December 1929, in St Pancras Parish Church, Euston Road. My wife, Elsie Maud, was from St Pancras. In 1930 we moved to Becontree, Dagenham. We had a boy, Ronald, born in 1936 and a girl, Edna, born in 1940.

In January 1948 we moved here, to 21 Barfields, Loughton, to a three bedroomed house. I thought it was beautiful, very countrified compared to London and Dagenham. Ron was eleven and Edna seven years when we came here. We were the tenth family to move here and we've been here ever since. Barfields was the first road to open on this estate so we had a choice of houses. The roads round about were crushed brick with cinder pavements. German prisoners of war were helping in the building of the estate.

I'd joined the NUR [National Union of Railwaymen] for manual staff, when I worked for the railway. We had several strikes before the war – carter's strikes – about wage reductions and uniform. Our uniform was a smart double-breasted coat and breeches with leggings and they wanted to give us a cheaper quality outfit – a porter's uniform. We felt we were being downgraded. It was a loss of status. Every time they changed the uniform so they took something away. The union was affiliated to Labour and I was an active member of the Loughton branch. I remember that Bill Archer stood against Winston Churchill in the 1951 election. George Wilds, my neighbour and friend, who lived at 23 Barfields, was secretary of the Loughton branch of the NUR. Elsie used to complain that I was never here – with the railway all day, come home and then go off to meetings or canvassing.

I continued to work for the railway and remember walking along the railway line to Loughton station to catch the train there; that was before electrification. I left the railway before the retiring age of 65 and worked for two years as groundsman for Buckhurst Hill and Roding Valley Cricket Clubs and as a gardener for West Ham Council nurseries at Goodmayes. My wife Elsie died in 1988.

[Does any member know when the first house on Debden was occupied? Other residents claim to have moved into the first houses built there. A quick look at the minutes of Chigwell UDC shows, on page 277 of the volume for the period October 1946 to March 1947, a list of street names for the Borders Lane side of the estate. Presumably groups of houses were being built by various builders throughout the site and handed over by the builders to the London County

Council, as they became ready for letting and therefore there were several who claimed to occupy a house 'in the first road to open on this estate', Editor.]

Half-term report

The meetings between September 1996 and January 1997 have been attended by over 100 members and friends – 150 on a couple of occasions. The talks have all had a local flavour starting with 'The Peasants' Revolt in Essex' which left us to ponder whether any local people had been involved in the events. In October Rosemary Taylor spoke about 'Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Suffragettes'. The local link in this case was that Sylvia Pankhurst had lived in Woodford. Rosemary's talk illustrated the debt – not always recognised – owed to the women involved in the campaign to win voting rights for women. It was new to many that in East London Sylvia had not only campaigned for women's suffrage but had started a centre where women and children could buy a dinner for sixpence, had set up a creche and, to provide work for women, had created a small toy factory which operated successfully until it was bombed in 1943.

The November meeting saw a complete switch of emphasis, this time to the 'Religious Guilds of the Middle Ages and their Guildhalls'. The speaker's slides were revealing of the number of guildhalls that one passes-by, not knowing their history and still in use, not for their original purpose, of course, but now providing substantial homes for their owners.

In some ways the theme was continued at the November meeting when the subject was 'William Morris: The Man and his Works'. Walthamstow-born William Morris as a topic offered something for everyone – his interest in medievalism, in art, poetry, prose, history, craftsmanship, politics; truly Morris was a polymath. As one of his doctors said when Morris died, his disease was 'simply being William Morris, and having done more work than most ten men'. We remained in East London in January when Robert Barltrop entertained the meeting with his stories of 'Cockney Speech – its Fun, Vulgarity and East London Pride', linking it to its East Mercian, Kentish and East Anglian roots.

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