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LOUGHTON & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# NEWSLETTER

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## Lionel Murray

Lionel Murray (1922–2004) was one of the most distinguished Loughtonians of our generation. A man of Shropshire, he came to Loughton in the mid-50s, and immediately entered the life of the town, helping to run the Methodist Church Youth Club even when heavily occupied with his duties at the TUC, of which he was General Secretary 1973–84. Nationally, had the Social Compact of the mid-70s borne the fruit he had hoped for, the fall of the Callaghan Government in 1979 might not have occurred. As it was, Lionel retired in the mid-1980s, but that left him much more time for Loughton activities, which none of his obituaries have mentioned. We all respected him immensely – for ourselves, of course, mostly for his involvement in the Historical Society of which he was a longstanding member, and readily accepted the Presidency after John Besent left the district. Indeed, presiding at our AGM in May was possibly his last official engagement.

But he was also a stalwart of the Friends of Epping Forest, Mannock Drive Day Care, St Clare's Hospice, NCH and its family centre at Lawton Road, Crisis, and many other activities, for which he gave freely of his time and his prodigious intellect. He was also a very active member of the Methodist Church for all his 50 years among us.

Lionel was the nicest of men, the friend of all; one of our most distinguished townspeople. He loved Loughton, its Forest and its history, and could be seen almost every day walking in our streets or in the woods. His funeral service at LMC on 1 June was attended by nearly 500 people, many of whom were local friends, plus of course some national figures. Eve Lockington represented the society, and I was acting as one of the stewards.

We will all miss him immensely.

CHRIS POND

## Edward Erith, genealogist and historian, 1907–2004

The historian who in the 1950s wrote the history of Chigwell has died at the age of 96 years. Edward Erith was a member of the well-known local family of builders' merchants, but he left the firm to pursue a

career as a genealogist and historian. He joined the Society of Genealogists in 1935, having become interested in the history of Chigwell, where he lived. After the war, in which he served in the Royal Artillery, he joined the Essex Record Office at Chelmsford.

The manuscript of his history of Chigwell is contained in two volumes, together with a further two volumes of detailed source notes. His scholarship was of the highest order, and this was reflected when the editorial committee of the Victoria County History for Essex asked him to contribute the section on Chigwell, for the Ongar Hundred volume, published in 1956.

Edward Erith's attention to detail and analytical powers were demonstrated in the *Essex Review* in April 1948 in his paper: 'The Strip System of Cultivation in Buckhurst Hill in the Thirteenth Century', in which he was able to add to William Waller's topographical history of Loughton, half a century earlier. Erith's first of several contributions to the *Essex Review* was in 1946, when he drew attention to the omission, in volume II of the VCH, of the record of an Essex County Cricket Club in 1790.

Erith was a Vice-President of Woodford Historical Society, which in 1950 published his invaluable study of local government in a residential parish: *Woodford, Essex, 1600–1836*. This was followed in 1954 by the history of the Scott family of Woolston Hall, which was published in the *Essex Review*.

Edward Erith was elected a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. Much of his work on the history of south-west Essex remains in the archives of the Essex Record Office and locally in Essex County Libraries.

RICHARD MORRIS

## Odds and Ends

In October we have the David Wilkinson Memorial Lecture. This is to be given by Dr Cathy Ross, from the Museum of London, on *London in the 1920s – A decade of change*. This should be a fascinating talk.

During the summer changes have been taking place in the organisation of Essex County Libraries. The county now has only one full-time Local Studies Librarian, Jane Stanway, who is based at Colchester. John Stradling, the Local Studies Librarian at Loughton, has taken early retirement. However, Lee Shelser, the Library Services Manager at Loughton, and Jane

Stanway, are keen to see that the local studies archive at Loughton is maintained and accessible for researchers. A new guide for researchers has been prepared with the assistance of the LDHS, and the Society will continue to work with the Library to maintain the invaluable collection, which includes the Erith Collection.

Sue Taylor is collecting a Memory Bank of the Debden Estate, up to 1960. Jot down your memories (whether of the LCC and the industrial estates being built, or as an early tenant, or as a Loughton resident who watched it all happen), and send them to Sue Taylor at 18 Wellfields, Loughton, Essex IG10 1NX, or e-mail them to: outerlondon@aol.com. Sue can also be contacted on: 020 8508 2512. She has also contributed the Notes to an evocative article about this area by M J R Day which appears on p. 3 of this issue.

## William Morris and Loughton

JOHN HOWES

When and why did William Morris visit Loughton? On the morning of 7 May 1895 William Morris together with Philip Webb (1831–1895) (outstanding nineteenth-century architect who designed the Red House at Bexley for Morris), William Lethaby (1857–1931) (architect and founder of the Central School for Arts & Crafts), Emery Walker (1851–1923) (outstanding typographer and technical adviser to the Kelmscott Press), and Sydney Cockerell (1867–1962) (museum director bibliophile and secretary to Kelmscott Press), alighted from a London train at Loughton Station. At once they headed for Epping Forest via Forest Road and then followed quite a lengthy route through it. Of this visit Morris wrote ‘we went first to see the work that had been done about Clay Road, thence to Monk Wood, thence to Theydon woods, and then to the part about the Chingford Hotel, passing by Fairmead Bottom, and lastly to Bury Wood and the wood on the other side of the road thereby [Hawkwood]’. The party returned to London from Chingford Station.

The apparent route taken by Morris and his friends possibly needs a little clarification. The Clay Road is of course the swathe cut westwards through the Forest from Baldwins Hill across Sandpit Plain in the early 1860s when John Whitaker Maitland had enclosed nearly 1,000 acres of the Forest and was hoping to sell off plots for development. Although Morris had crossed the Clay Road, he was probably more interested in the area to the south of the Clay Road and west of Staples Road where extensive thinning had taken place. The reference to Theydon woods is a little puzzling as there is no indication that he actually reached Theydon Bois. At best he may have walked to just east of the Wake Arms, before heading south-west towards Fairmead, although he makes no reference to High Beach.

The reason for this visit lay in a letter Morris had written to the *Daily Chronicle* which was published on 22 April 1895, followed by an article in the paper on 4 May which had included some drawings of parts of the Forest where ‘thinning’ had taken place. In his letter, Morris castigated the ‘so-called experts of Epping Forest’, who he claimed were busily destroying it. A few days later on 26 April in the same newspaper the lawyer, W R Fisher, who had played a major role in the legal aspects of saving Epping Forest replied to Morris. Pertinently he asked when Morris had last visited the Forest? Morris knew it was at least 10 years before, hence the visit on 7 May.

The concern expressed by Morris referred to the Conservators’ policy of thinning the old oak and beech pollards. The Conservators were faced in 1878 with managing a Forest that had suffered from years of neglect and the debate on how to manage the Forest was quick to start, with the Essex Field Club playing an active role in the discussions on the subject. In 1893 a considerable number of pollarded beeches had been removed from Monk Wood in Loughton Manor, which elicited a storm of criticism, but which nevertheless, in Edward North Buxton’s opinion had greatly improved the wood by giving more scope to the unpollarded trees.

The reference by Morris to the ‘experts of Epping Forest’ is most likely to a committee of experts who in 1894 were asked by the Corporation of London to report on the effects of thinning and the management of the Forest. Their report was very supportive of the work that had been carried out. Incidentally the drawings in the *Daily Chronicle* article gave a very false impression of what had been done and the Conservators very quickly had photographs taken of the identical areas and published these alongside the drawings to show how unfair the criticism had been.

After the visit Morris almost at once wrote again to the *Daily Chronicle* recording his recent visit, but still expressing concerns about the way the Conservators were treating the Forest. In particular he was worried about what he saw as their failure to ‘preserve its natural aspects’ as required by the Epping Forest Act of 1878. Epping Forest had always been a managed (working) Forest and the debate about what is the natural aspect has continued for the past 125 years.

Sadly Morris died the next year never again visiting the Forest he loved from his childhood and which he said he knew ‘yard by yard from Wanstead to the Theydons and from Hale End to the Fairlop Oak’.

## Recent local books

CHRIS POND

*A School, Two Houses and Perseverance*,<sup>1</sup> by Frances Francis, is a very readable account of a private school (of which Buckhurst Hill and Loughton had many) –

Braeside – and its remarkable and eccentric proprietress, Marjory Wakefield (1900–1985).

The history deals in some detail with the school's premises – and is valuable in that regard alone – plus, of course its institutional development and some of the difficulties it encountered (I rather liked the story of John Strevens, the Loughton artist, paying his daughters' school fees in paintings). There is also a considerable family history of the Armitages and Wakefields (from the Midlands). A complete list of the girls (and few boys) who attended Braeside from 1944 to date is appended – this is a very useful directory.

Altogether, this is a very well-researched and handsomely produced book which adds significantly to local knowledge in a sparsely documented sector of local life which I am sure LDHS members will like to acquire.

Tony Harvey has written a history of his free newspaper, *The Loughton Review*, which started in 1968 and ceased publication in 2003. Copies are in the local collection of Loughton Library.

*Theydon Garnon through the Centuries*<sup>2</sup> is a history of Theydon Garnon written, as the author told me, to relate events in the Parish to national history. Interestingly, like Waller's *Loughton in Essex* 100 years before, it was made up from a series of articles in the Parish magazine.

The history starts in the thirteenth century with the arrival in 1220 of the German family who gave their name to the Parish and ends with the installation of electricity in 1950.

The division of Theydon Garnon Parish is mentioned, but perhaps not as clearly as it might be, for half the town of Epping was until 1894 actually in the Parish, which was why it had a market grant in 1305, as mentioned in A C Edwards' *Essex*.

Altogether, a most interesting compilation.

## Notes

1. Frances Francis, *A School, Two Houses and Perseverance*. Braeside School, 2004. 196pp, coloured illus. £9.95. Available from the School and from Loughton Bookshop.

2. Frank Walker, *Theydon Garnon through the Centuries*. Three booklets of 20pp each. Unpriced. Contact Geoff Clark, 01992 576084.

## Memories of south-east Loughton

M J R DAY\*

My parents married in the Abbey Church at Waltham Abbey in October 1923. They came to Loughton in late 1924 or early 1925 and lived near Carroll Hill Farm, close to St John's Church. My mother told us that father would have to gather his milking herd off the field that came up to what is now the main road before the cinema and Post Office were built. However, the farm was to be closed so my parents came to Hatfields Cottages in mid-November 1929. Their new home was semi-

detached and identical to the cottages that still stand in Wellfields, opposite the end of Church Lane. I was born on 1 April 1935 at 1 Hatfields Cottages, Rectory Lane.

My first recollections are of being held in my mother's arms at the junction of Pyrles Lane and Rectory Lane.<sup>1</sup> In those days Pyrles Lane was almost opposite Wellfields and had a grass triangle at the junction. On the right-hand side, behind huge hedges and trees, stood the Rectory. Later, I recall the very clean looking orange/yellow curved gravel drive which seemed quite wide and, as you looked towards the house, of which you could not see much, a very large square pruned mauve rhododendron bush which stood to the right of the entrance. Even at that age I was impressed by that bush. This entrance was about 100 yards from Pyrles Lane, alas I cannot remember where the drive made its exit, if indeed it did. It could have been on Pyrles Lane.

Another early recollection is of an elderly couple sitting in the rear of a large chauffeur-driven limousine. He had gloved hands clasped on top of a walking stick. From this it might be deduced that he owned a walking stick or glove factory – he was in fact Mr E J Dent of glove fame! I think his factory was in the Warminster area of Wiltshire. His large house, Hatfields, stood opposite Hatfields Cottage. It is still there today, but it is now the E15 Acting School.<sup>2</sup>

At the side of our cottage was a granite chipping driveway with a large single gate which led down to Loughton Hall Farm. This is now where Westall Road is today. As one entered the drive, which was virtually an avenue of elms, our cottage stood on the right-hand side. To the left, in a steep hollow which levelled at the far end, were two ponds. The nearest was round and deep (in the war an oil bomb killed all the frogs and newts). There was then a raised strip about 50 yards wide and then a much larger pond.

Heading down towards the Farm, just as you had passed the ponds there was a pill box on the left and, going off in each direction, were tank traps. I can recall these being dug by a large excavator which had a continual chain of rounded and toothed buckets, to enable the machine to keep moving while digging. The earth would exit on a thick rubber belt.

Opposite Colebrook Lane was a large pond which we called the Dell Hole. Legend had it that this was where the Romans had dug out blue clay to build London.<sup>3</sup> It was in the Dell area during the war that a Spitfire crashed, the Polish pilot having been shot in the head, I believe. We were not allowed anywhere near the site and I can remember a long blue/grey wooden slatted lorry (what the RAF called Queen Marys) carrying away the debris.

Another memory of the Dell is when an older boy and I entered the gunsite camp, which was just across the field, built on the Brickclamps site behind which the Winston Churchill pub now stands. We helped ourselves to a white-painted hand grenade and a few thunderflashes. I held the grenade while the other lad pulled the pin out and then I threw it into the water-filled tank

trap. Nothing happened – it turned out to be a practice grenade.

In the Dell Hole were some rusting milk churns. We had blown up two of these when, to our surprise, we were surrounded by military types and marched off to our parents. The older boy probably carried the can.

The Dell Hole was filled by a spring, which is now piped down to the stream. The farm track followed the course of Westall Road down to small stone bridge which I think was gated in the early days. Then the track went off to the right, as Burney Drive does now, and opposite where John Fisher School is now was a row of 4–5 terraced cottages with long vegetable gardens in front. Then there was the Farm itself. The track carried on to where Jessel Drive is now where it did a right turn of 90°. Here you can still see some of the avenue of oaks. The track finally petered out in the fields, near to where the entrance to Debden High School is now.

Going south from our cottage which, as mentioned above, had the Dents' home opposite, the next residence along was Loughton Hall. I believe that the Maitlands lived there until the army took it over. My youngest sister, Pauline, remembers playing with a child of the family and, while she cannot remember her name, she does recall that she had a large book which contained beautifully pressed flowers. The main entrance to the Dents' house and a second entrance to Loughton Hall stood side by side, with the latter leading to the stables. As today, from these entrances and to St Nicholas' Church, there was the line of horse-chestnut trees and large holly bushes.<sup>4</sup>

I recall that the main entrance to Loughton Hall was barred by huge thick double wooden doors and on the left was a single wooden door. As you entered this door, on the left, growing against the wall, were fig trees and just a few yards further was a mature walnut tree.

Next came St Nicholas' Church, which seemed very ancient and forbidding.

After this, Chigwell Lane station – we called it Paraffin Junction.<sup>5</sup> Standing on the footbridge, which was much the same as it is today, directly over the engine's chimney, as the steam trains were shorter, you could go home smelling like a railway fireman!

From here the road passed under a small railway bridge,<sup>6</sup> very similar to that at the bottom of Alderton Hall Lane, and continued on to a humpback bridge over the Roding, with flood relief<sup>7</sup> arches beyond. This bridge was very similar to the one at Abridge.

Where the Epping Forest Country Club stood used to be a Padfield farm<sup>8</sup> and there was a ford in the river. With my youngest brother and sister I would trawl an

old sack in this area, as it had a good mixture of small fish.

In the summer we would collect acorns and take them to Goulds (Safeways site), who would buy them by the bushel. Goulds had a hoist, just inside the entrance with loft storage. The carts would come in off the fields, unload, then turn round in the yard at the back. I also seem to remember lorries backing in to load up. After the harvest we would glean the fields for corn ears for a Mrs Taverner who lived in Wellfields and who used to keep chickens.

Towards the end of the war one of the first V1s exploded in the air somewhere between our cottage and the Rectory. The following morning I was out gathering up as much of it as I could find, which was a considerable amount. The best piece was something that looked like a gyroscope with wires. I didn't have it long. The men from the Ministry quickly appeared and I received 5 shillings (25p) for the lot.

## Notes

\* Notes by Sue Taylor.

1. Rectory Lane was then very narrow and it was not until much later that it was converted to the road it is now – widening was not completed until 1956, when there were complaints by local residents that they should have been given the lopped wood from the trees rather than it being burnt along the Lane and wasted.

2. From *Express & Independent*, 13 October 1945, headlined '£4,800,000 LCC HOUSING ESTATE AT LOUGHTON': 'The house known as "Hatfields" will be retained as a building of historic interest and Loughton Hall and the open space to the south reserved for use as a community centre.' Hatfields was in fact used as an LCC estate office and then later in 1952 turned into a temporary school.

3. There were a couple of potteries in the area, including one near Pyrles Lane, before the war.

4. There was also the Loughton Hall Lodge, a three-roomed single storey cottage without electricity, gas, toilet, etc., that was used by the LCC after the war. When the LCC left it was badly vandalised. The *West Essex Gazette* (30 May 1952) records: 'During the last 15 months, children have caused hundreds of pounds worth of damage. Tiles have been smashed from the roof, ceilings knocked down, and internal walls broken down, one fireplace completely wrecked, another partly and the kitchen range removed.'

5. The story goes that two prospective tenants, a married couple and their Labrador dog, disembarked at Chigwell Lane Station. The wife took one look at the old lamps and said, 'Gor Blimey, its Paraffin Junction'. The name stuck (this would indicate that the name was in use before the estate was built). It was not until 25 September 1949 that electric lights were installed, when the station name changed to Debden. The station was opened as Chigwell Road on 24 April 1865 by the Great Eastern Railway and renamed Chigwell Lane on 1 December 1865. It was largely rebuilt in 1974.

6. The bridge was reconstructed at a cost of £68,000 in 1955–56 as part of the road-widening scheme.

7. The *Express* (22 May 1947) said: 'Flood waters transformed the low lying fields between Loughton and Abridge into a huge lake five miles long and over 400 yards wide.'

8. Home Farm – 300 acres – owned by B G Padfield since c 1928.

LOUGHTON & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Registered Charity No 287274 [www.loughtonhistoricalsociety.org.uk](http://www.loughtonhistoricalsociety.org.uk)

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