LOUGHTON & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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From Westmoreland to Loughton

William Chapman Waller 1850–1917: Loughton's historian

Richard Morris has written a biography of William Chapman Waller which is soon to be published by the Society and Mr Morris has contributed the following article, based on his research, which is the first of a series.

William Chapman Waller was born in Hackney in August 1850. He moved to Loughton in 1874 where he already had an aunt. He lived for most of his life at 'Ash Green' which lies between the top of York Hill and Baldwins Hill, overlooking the Forest. He was educated at King's College and later at University College, Oxford, where he graduated and received an MA in 1880. He was a student at the Inner Temple from where he was called to the Bar in 1895 at the age of 45 years. He was elected a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1892.

Waller's ancestors originally came from Brough in Westmoreland, to the east of the Lake District. The family tree shows Thomas Waller living at High Ewbanke in the parish of Brough in1609. It is believed that they were yeoman farmers. Six generations later William Waller moved to London in the latter part of the eighteenth century. They lived in Dalston.

It was William Waller's daughter, Jane Miller Waller, who first came to Loughton in 1869. This arose through her friendship with Eliza Watson, wife of the Rev William Watson, assistant curate at St John's Church. Eliza was the daughter of Charles Lane, a well-known Loughton resident who first came to Loughton in 1804. It was Lane who purchased Ash Green which was a cottage at that time. He acquired further land and extended the house. Eliza inherited Ash Green on her father's death.

Under the will of Eliza Watson, who died in 1871, Ash Green and most of its contents were left to Jane Miller Waller, her friend and companion who had come to live with her on the death of her husband, William Watson, in 1869.

It appears that Jane Miller Waller effectively adopted her nephew, William Chapman Waller, whose father had died when William was only four years old. Through her inheritance his Aunt Jane had become a very wealthy lady and she was able to arrange for a good education for her nephew. William Chapman Waller lived with his aunt at Ash Green from about 1874. When Jane Miller Waller died in December 1881 he in turn inherited Ash Green.

In September 1881 William married Emma, daughter of Ambrose Massey-Cooke. They had four children: two sons and two daughters. His elder son, Geoffrey, a midshipman in the Royal Navy, died from a tragic accident on board a battleship in 1908. His younger daughter, Vera, died at the age of eight years.

His son Ambrose, born in 1892, had a distinguished career in the Essex Regiment and died in 1972. Evelyn, the elder daughter, never married. She lived at Ash Green until her death in 1945. Life at Ash Green must have been fairly comfortable as it is recorded that they had four servants.

The older part of the house at Ash Green goes back to at least 1812 when Charles Lane was the purchaser. Both he and his daughter Eliza altered and extended the house before Jane Miller Waller became the owner in 1871. William Waller also extended the house, first in 1885 with a new wing and in 1903 with new stables. There have been some further additions since the house was sold in 1945 but the main house and extensive garden remain much the same when comparing photographs of 1899 and 1903 with today. A number of trees in the garden have preservation orders including a very old yew, oaks and chestnuts. However two plots of land at the north-eastern and southern ends of the garden were sold for building development in 1979 on which, respectively, three and eleven detached houses have been built. It was on that part of the garden now occupied by the Waller's Hoppet development that William Waller in about 1885 planted a large area with daffodils which many local people remember up until the late 1970s. The house is a Grade II listed building.

During his time in Loughton, Waller purchased various plots of land including those at Woodbury Hill, Church Hill and the Uplands Estate on which he had houses built. Sunnybank and Southbank on Woodbury Hill and York Hill, both built in 1888, still bear the Waller coat of arms in stonework on the outside of the buildings, similar to that at Ash Green. The houses referred to as on the Uplands Estate are in fact on the east side of Church Hill and are a pair of semi-detached houses with their names, Slyders Gate and Eyres Croft, in stonework on the front of the buildings. The box at the top of the cast iron drain pipe shows the date 1904. The house Waller refers to on Church Hill he called Priests Garth. There is a house still standing today on the corner of Pump Hill called Hill Garth which could be the Waller house. In 1890 Waller purchased the freehold of the six cottages at the top of York Hill which faced the south-western part of the garden of Ash Green. (*To be continued*.) RICHARD MORRIS

Robin Allen, Gentleman, of Loughton

There must have been many people who came to live in Loughton during the second half of the nineteenth century for various reasons; some of them are known only from the census returns while others made their mark by paying for entries in Kelly's and other directories. Occasionally a name turns up in records elsewhere and, prompted by curiosity, investigation of who the person was produces some insight into their reasons for moving to Loughton.

Anyone who has read H W Paar's descriptive essay on Loughton's first railway station may recall a speculative list of recently arrived residents who could have been early regular users of the service to London; for some inexplicable reason an obvious candidate failed to register in the mind of the collaborator who searched the 1861 census returns to compile that list. It was only when looking at some later railway company minutes that the name of Robin Allen, making a complaint, set this same collaborator on a path to find out more. The census returns from 1861 to 1891, the Great Eastern Railway Company

Directors' Committees minute books and the Imperial Calendar at the Public Record Office provided a start; local directories in Loughton library and documents relating to the events leading up to the Epping Forest Act of 1878 found by Chris Pond gave further clues; a bundle of property transaction records in the Essex Record Office, Trinity House Court minute books in the City of London Guildhall Manuscript Library and a manuscript by W C Waller obtained by Richard Morris filled in some more detail; and finally the Loughton Cemetery Burial Register led to his grave and obituary in the local press. What follows is from all these sources, pieced together in a chronological order as an outline of Robin Allen's life.

He was born in Stratford, Essex, on 7 July 1820, but little is known of his early years. By 1854 he was a Clerk with the Corporation of Trinity House and probably married Mary Ann around this time; their first son, Percy, was born at Buckhurst Hill in about 1856. Twenty years later Robin stated he had purchased 'three very small contiguous plots of land at Loughton (ancient holdings), and by enlargement of a labourer's cottage made a home for himself and family'. He described his daily work in London as 'involving a good deal of brain work and responsibility'.

By 1857 he had been promoted to Senior Clerk and in early 1861 another son, Frank Robin, was born in Loughton. At this time his dwelling was given in the census return as 'Woodberrie (York Hill)', but it was not the property which bore that name much later – it was that property now called Dryad's Hall on Woodbury Hill. To increase the amenity of his home, in February 1863 Robin Allen acquired some seven and a half acres of forest land from the Lord of the Manor (Rev J W Maitland) – by what he believed to be the customary and legitimate method – for fines and fees totalling about £100 and an annual quit rent of £9. A third son, Herbert Valentine, was born on 14 February of the same year. Although he lived in the house described above, Robin Allen had also purchased other property partly bounded by what are now Woodbury, King's and York Hills. Another son, Ernest, was born in November 1864, and by 1866 Robin had become Assistant Secretary at Trinity House.

Having got used to the original railway terminus at Loughton, he may have found the extra distance to the new station (opened in 1865) somewhat irksome; he certainly didn't like having to cross the lines between curved platforms by means of a boarded level crossing. So early in 1866 he complained to the railway company and, receiving an unsatisfactory response, to the Board of Trade – suggesting that a tunnel or footbridge be constructed on safety grounds. His opinion of some of the other users of the station was not high, proposing a footbridge 'because a great deal of the Passenger Traffic is of a coarse and dirty character' and a tunnel would be vulnerable to 'defilement'. Although the Board of Trade supported the idea of a tunnel, nothing was done. Robin Allen's only daughter, Eleanor Margaret, was born in Brixton about a year after this episode, and promotion to Secretary at Trinity House came in January 1868.

An occasional event in social life (for some, anyway) at this period was a 'Penny Reading' to raise money for charitable purposes, and Robin and his wife took part. A report of one such in *The Woodford Times* in January 1870 tells us that Robin presided over a 'very successful entertainment' to a 'crammed' audience in the National School; the literary and musical programme included two readings by himself of a poetic nature, while his wife and Mrs J W Maitland

contributed two duets. Life in Loughton must have seemed idyllic, but there was a cloud on the horizon.

Epping Forest, the remnant of a former royal hunting forest, was coming to the attention of property owners who wished to parcel it out for building – and others who felt it should remain as a public open space. The land conveyed to Robin Allen in 1863 was considered, by the Commissioners appointed to look into the question, to be part of the inclosures which should be incorporated into the open space. Robin Allen objected strenuously in 1876 (his protests ran to over 2,000 words), but most of the seven and a half acres returned to the Forest under the terms of the Act. Having moved to Loughton to get some peace and quiet, he didn't like the idea of hordes of 'recreators' being given free access so near to his property; nor was he particularly impressed by the proposal that the Conservators should be allowed to keep a herd of deer to roam the forest, with landowners denied the right to kill any strays. In June 1879 he again petitioned for a footbridge or tunnel at Loughton station; he was no doubt pleased when a footbridge was erected in 1880 but his health had deteriorated to such an extent that in September 1879 he was given three months' leave from his work to recover. Whether he fully resumed his duties is not clear, but he tendered his resignation in November 1880 and in April 1881 the Court of Trinity House agreed that in recognition of his services a parting gift of £300 be offered 'in token of the esteem in which he has been held by every Member of the Corporation'. His second son, Frank, was at this time an 'Extra Clerk' at Trinity House, while Ernest was in a similar position at the Royal Exchange Assurance Office.

Robin was to enjoy a further 18 years of retirement in Loughton, although in 1890 he found himself on the receiving end of complaints about the condition of houses that he owned in the area called 'The Hole'. For the opening ceremonies of Lopping Hall in 1884 he had lent some 'views of Loughton and the neighbourhood' to display in the library, and became chairman of the Finance Committee of the Parish Council after that body was established in the mid-1890s. He had only recently stepped down as a parish councillor when, on Easter Sunday, 2 April 1899, he died at home. His obituary described him as 'one of the oldest and most respected residents of the district', mentioning his 'remarkable ability for dealing with figures' on the finance committee and his interests in commoners' rights and the Lopping Hall Endowment Trust. His grave, in Loughton Cemetery, is marked by a substantial headstone – appropriately from the Eddystone Quarries – with the inscription 'Thy way is in the sea and thy path in the great waters and thy footsteps are not known'. His third son, Herbert Valentine, had embarked on a maritime career as an officer and died in an accident at sea on 8 July 1899; he is also remembered on the headstone.

The term 'gentleman', was how Robin was described in the St John's baptismal register entries for his sons, and is certainly justified by the information which has come to light – Waller thought him 'a cultivated man of artistic tastes'. He must have grown sufficiently attached to Loughton to continue to live here after his upset with the Epping Forest Commissioners, given that he could have easily moved away, and perhaps he is representative of other such residents who helped to create some of the character of the place we know.

To round off this account, some explanation of how the name 'Woodberrie' came to be applied to different houses is needed. Robin's properties (other than his house during his lifetime) were leased to a number of occupiers at different times; after he died his widow had the present house called Woodberrie built and lived there until late 1912, when it was leased to a Dr George Welch for 14 years. The original Woodberrie had been let to Percy Alden, MP, who named it Mansfield but later moved to Woodford. Mary Ann Allen died on 22 September 1914 at the age of 77 and is buried in the same grave as Robin, along with their daughter Eleanor Margaret who died in 1929. Woodberrie was sold in 1918 to a Frederic J Gordon and Dr Welch was obliged to give up his tenancy.

IAN STRUGNELL

Books – An explosive subject

Dangerous Energy, by Wayne D Cocroft. English Heritage, 2000, £45. ISBN 1 85074 718 0. (Available from your public library.)

The historic Royal Gunpowder Factory at Waltham Abbey is presently being transformed into a heritage centre telling the story of the manufacture of explosives there from gunpowder to TNT. When completed it will be the largest and most important museum of its kind, possibly in the world, However, in the course of this restoration much will be lost, as those who joined the Society's visit to the untouched site in November 1999 will remember. After 200 years we were able to visit a site which was for long a secret world, entry into which was forbidden even for the thousands living close by. It was a strange, sinister area, a world of bizarre constructions, huge concrete walls, several miles of overgrown canals and narrow gauge railways. Alders, grown because they produced the best charcoal, grew out of several buildings, and the north end of the site had become a refuge for badgers, deer, foxes, herons and other wildlife.

As we walked around some of us were conscious that this once secret place had existed solely to produce, develop and refine explosives to fill shells and bombs to better kill and maim other human beings, albeit at times causing the deaths of other unfortunates working there. It was an isolated place of work where workers wore cumbersome protective clothing and even, in some buildings, walked on floors covered with the hides of elephants. An area with five miles of canals along which special barges glided carrying deadly cargoes of nitroglycerine, or small trains ran loaded with highly dangerous chemicals. As buildings became redundant they were simply left to fall into ruin or crudely modified for another purpose, producing weird structures whose function it is almost impossible to comprehend. Wayne Cocroft's excellent book provides all the clues needed to understand this unique collection of industrial archaeological artefacts, as well as giving a definitive history of the making of gunpowder and military explosives in this country. The book ends with a lengthy chapter on the struggles of English Heritage and a group of local historians to save the site. Long after it had been closed the MOD was reluctant to allow the buildings to be listed and continued to treat the site as secret, even when there were no secrets to be discovered!

By 2002 it will be possible for anyone to visit the heritage centre, but the sinister secret atmosphere of the place will have gone and its fearsome historical

purpose rationalised. Nevertheless it will be worth visiting and will be a worthy tribute to those who managed eventually to get the complex preserved and open to the public and of course to those who spent their lives working there in danger and secrecy. JOHN HOWES

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