LOUGHTON & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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At a local printers 40 years ago – II

TED MARTIN

Ellis's also tendered for work from Her Majesty's Stationery Office. They had a long running contract to set and print Pilots' Notes for the Royal Air Force. I was always very conscious when checking these that a slip by me might lead to disastrous consequences – though it was unlikely that the pilot of a Canberra would be screaming down the runway with the Notes in one hand and the controls in the other! However, they were intended to be used on the aircraft as all the start-up and shut down procedures were printed.

Other HMSO work included all sorts of Government Reports and, to my amazement, *Reports of Patent Cases*. This really was a return to my previous existence.

Teddy Ellis did not want to pay me too much overtime, though in most weeks I would do three nights and Saturday morning (on one occasion I did five nights, all day Saturday and Sunday morning). So, when there was a lot of reading to be done, he would get into work at 7 am and read as much as he could himself before I arrived at 8 am. Thus he thought he was saving paying me overtime. What he never knew was that Tom Donatz had no opinion at all of his abilities as a proofreader. He used to bring all his proofs into me saying: 'The old man's done these – you'd better check them.'

On Wednesday everything stopped for the *Ilford Recorder*. Ellis's set the small ads. The Intertype men would be in very early and when I arrived there were proofs ready to read. Speed was of the essence. Tom Charlwood was following the copy while I read the proof aloud to him and Tom Donatz hovered at my shoulder to take the six inches of proof at a time that I tore off for him to get the corrections done. This would go on all morning. It was quite taxing: Tom Charlwood wasn't trained for this work, the copy varied from reasonable to indecipherable. Somehow by 3 pm the type was corrected, packed in newspaper, sealed with gummed tape and loaded on to the *Recorder*'s van to go off for making into pages and press on the Thursday.

When an election loomed Ellis's were in the thick of it. There would be the leaflets and posters for all the local candidates from most of the parties and the Chingford Ratepayers. These all had to be checked carefully and I had to ensure that the imprints on each item complied with election law and carried the name and address of the agent for each candidate.

In addition many of the official posters were printed there and these really big sheets were a complex task from the composing point of view. All the very large sizes of type were set in wooden poster type which had to be assembled together with large sizes of metal type. Panels containing lists of streets and polling stations were set on the Intertype machines and, as the width of line that the Intertype could set was not wide enough for the panels, one line was set as two and butted together by hand so skilfully that you had to look carefully to see the join. Every box that appeared on the poster was made up of type-high brass rules mitred at the corners. When this intricate assemblage was ready it was locked up into an iron frame (called a chase), taken to a full-size printing machine and proofed for me to check. The biggest posters covered my table completely and hung over the sides like a printed tablecloth. The only way to check them was to kneel on the chair. In the larger sizes of type each letter was checked off individually, following the time-honoured printers' maxim 'the bigger the type, the bigger the error'. All this material was, of course, very time-sensitive and had to be fitted in with the regular work.

Most of my working time was pretty hectic but occasionally there was a respite due to something which has completely disappeared from the modern printing industry – 'dissing' day. When there was a shortage of type metal or the throughput of work had slowed enough to allow it to be done, jobs that had been printed but did not need saving were broken up and 'distributed'. This term came from the days of typesetting by hand when, at the end of printing a few pages, the type had to be carefully dismantled and distributed back into the type cases so that setting could continue. In the mechanical composition era, the larger 'display' types were carefully removed and distributed back into case for reuse, but the text lines ('slugs') were tipped into a bucket for Tom Charlwood to take away and melt down into ingots to go back on the Intertypes in due course. When this was going on there was nothing being set and proofed so there was nothing for me to do.

So passed my 10 months working at what was then known as a 'jobbing' printers. It was so different from the legal and academic work that I had previously done and I learned an awful lot in a short space of time.

I soon began to feel that a change from the relentless overtime in the evenings and at weekends might be in order, and, just at that point, a telephone call came from my old firm. There was an opening for an assistant manager. It was less money but it was a staff job. I decided to take it, but there was one last service I could do for my colleagues at Ellis's. When they heard I was leaving they told me that Mr Ellis was bound to ask me the reason. In addition to anything else that I was going to say could I also state that the lack of a proper sick pay scheme and pension provision was a disincentive to staying there. I was happy to do that for them and Teddy Ellis didn't like it when I said it! I never heard whether anything changed.

Ellis's continued for nearly another 35 years. In February 1988, due to Teddy Ellis's death, the business passed to Kingfisher Press (a well known Chingford printer and incidentally printer of many of the Walthamstow and Chingford Historical Society booklets). The takeover by Kingfisher and the removal of the old hot metal typesetting equipment and printing presses was captured on video by Acorn Films and forms part of their Chingford 80s and 90s collection. This

footage was very evocative for me and I could see that very little had changed between 1964 and 1988.

Ten years later Kingfisher Press's business failed and there was a meeting of creditors in June 1998, followed in August by the removal of the printing machinery. In December 1998 there was a planning application to convert the two villas to residential use as two three-bedroom houses and this was done. The factory units remain and are now used by other types of business. I did visit during the 1990s when they were Kingfisher Press and found there was one printer still there that I knew from the 1960s and Tom Tuckwell!

It is believed that E G Ellis & Sons was founded in 1905 and they are recorded as advertisers in the Chingflier magazine which was produced for the service personnel at Chingford Aerodrome during the First World War. Ellis's might even have printed the magazine – it is not unusual for a printer to take an advertisement in a magazine he prints, especially if he wants to keep on the right side of his customer! In its time the firm was a substantial local employer and made a significant contribution to the local economy and community. They even printed our wedding stationery!

I often wonder whether the floor in the front room of the left-hand villa suffered any ill-effects from the tons of type that once stood on it . . .

References

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Life in the wartime WAAF

EVE LOCKINGTON

I joined the WAAF on the 13 January 1943. As I remember, it was a grey damp coldish day, with not much cheer about it. I had been given instructions to join a certain train at Romford. My father, who, due to his work as a sales representative, had a petrol allowance, was able to drive me to Romford. I have little memory of that journey except standing at the entrance to the station, feeling rather desolate as I watched my father drive away. I caught the specified train and then was on my way to Gloucester along with other potential WAAFs. I had never left home before, was unsure of myself and rather shy. However I was determined to make the best of my new life. After all it had been my decision to join the WAAF, I was not a conscript. I suppose, if I really look into my motives for joining up they were purely selfish. I wanted a more interesting life than that offered by my office work.

I made friends with a very pretty rather fragile looking girl on the train and, after a long and tedious journey, we finally reached our destination. This destination proved to be the recruit reception centre near Gloucester. My new friend and I were directed to the same bleak and draughty hut. We were each allotted an iron bedstead and issued with five rough grey blankets which were decidedly damp, three 'biscuits', these being hard straw-filled squares which when put end to end formed a mattress, and a very hard round pillow. These together with harsh sheets and a pillow slip were to be my bed whilst I remained at Gloucester. Every morning we had to strip our beds, pile the 'biscuits' on top

of each other, fold up the blankets and sheets, pile four of them on top of each other with the sheets in the middle and then wrap the remaining blanket round the outside to keep them in place. To finish the arrangement we had to place our small hard pillow in its rough case on top. Every morning our beds were inspected to see that we had done the job properly.

My mother had always insisted that everything at home should be aired, otherwise, no doubt, we would die of either rheumatic fever or pneumonia. My mother's father and sister had both died of heart disease caused by the dreaded rheumatic fever. Remembering this, I picked out the driest of the blankets and rejected one that was decidedly wet. The lass, with whom I had travelled up to Gloucester, was now feeling very cold and shivery and asked if she could have my spare wet blanket. I agreed, although I did not like the idea of her sleeping in wet bedclothes. She already had a bad cough.

Every morning we were woken at 6 am by a bugle recording of reveille which was broadcast to each hut. At 10 am each night another recording was broadcast to the huts for lights out and lights out meant lights out and we had to be in bed.

There were two stoves in our hut and each evening from 4 pm we stoked them up well, so that their heat lasted long into the night. We were a fairly cheerful lot, making the best of our conditions. The corporal in charge of our hut did her best to break us into service life fairly gently, explaining how we had to look after our kit and pack it into our kitbags. These kit bags were long sausage like constructions and it was rather a complicated business to pack our kit into them. Later on in our WAAF life we were issued with travel bags for our kit which were easier to manage. For wartime our food was pretty good although the non-commissioned officers in charge of the mess huts were pretty unpleasant. It must have been quite difficult dealing with so many new recruits, completely unused to camp life. However it was definitely a fact in service life that some non-commissioned officers became bullies. These, however, were in the minority.

Whilst in the Gloucester camp we were not taught drill, that would come in the next stage of our training, but we were taught to stand at attention and 'at ease' and to react correctly to orders for eyes front and eyes right. We did have several parades and inspections.

Our hair had to be well off our collars. Otherwise, we were sent to the hairdresser to have it cut. Mine passed muster. We had to take intelligence tests which were supposed to sort out the sheep from the goats, in other words, to indicate the trades for which we were most suited. In fact, at that time in the war, there were not many trades still open to 'rookies'. I did not get right through the test but did reasonably well. I had not met an intelligence test before. Such tests were only just beginning to be used. Our hut corporal told us that they did in fact work quite well in sorting us out accurately, but how true this was I do not know.

Whilst we were in Gloucester, the weather was coldish and damp, with a wintry country scent and, to this day, at certain periods, I will sniff the air and say: 'It smells like Gloucester.' We were extremely fortunate that there was no snow at that time, as most of the wartime winters were very cold and snowy.

Apart from the intelligence tests, we had other examinations, particularly medicals. During these medical tests it was found that the girl, with whom I had travelled from Romford, had in fact contracted tuberculosis and she was hastily

removed from the scene. I never knew what became of her and hope she recovered, although it was a bad time in which to have that disease.

As a result of the intelligence tests, I was given the choice of either Clerk SD (Special Duties) or Clerk GD (General Duties) as my trade. Now, quite obviously, as I had been trained as a shorthand-typist, I should have become as Clerk GD, but this seemed too much like the job I had left in 'civvy-street' so, of course, I opted for Clerk SD. Clerk Special Duties, sounded rather exciting especially as I learnt that I would be appointed to Fighter Command. I was told that I would have to learn to plot and identify the enemy raiders coming into our territory so that the Operations Room officers could order our fighters up to intercept. I would have to take and pass a course before being qualified.

Our short period in the Gloucester camp was composed of sitting and waiting, examinations, issue of equipment, interviews, hut tidying etc. By the time we were detailed to leave we were impatient to go, wherever it might be.

Our next destination was Morecambe where we were to be drilled, I suppose, into submission. We were billeted in boarding houses. Morecambe was a seaside resort and most of the houses, in peacetime, had offered accommodation to holiday makers. The boarding house in which I was billeted was down a side street off the Promenade. It was relatively comfortable but unlike anything I had been used to. My mother had never bought cooked food, but had always made her own pies and pastries. In Morecambe we only had pies that had been bought for our meals. Our landlady never actually cooked for us. I suppose there was a certain novelty for me in this. One thing I can remember that surprised me, was that my landlady had no idea what a dictionary was. My own family was far from wealthy, but education had always been considered important and if we did not know the meaning of a word or how to spell it, we could always look it up in the dictionary. On one occasion I wanted to know how to spell a word and asked the landlady to lend me her dictionary. She did not know what I meant but tried to be helpful and lent me a general reference book on stain removal, etc.!

Whilst in Morecambe we were drilled incessantly, and when we were not being drilled we were being injected against this and that. I found that injections, though certainly not enjoyable, never particularly worried me, although some of the other girls fainted. It was also rather surprising how people seemed to become completely different when dressed in uniform. I remember meeting a girl I had once known slightly at work at British Drug Houses. She had been a copy typist, always dressed in the height of copy typist fashion with very high-heeled shoes which had tended to throw her posture forward. In the WAAF she wore regulation low-healed shoes and was standing upright. I though she looked much better.

During my period in Morecambe, if I had spare time, I would go for walks along the front on my own. I had never been in that part of England before and found it quite interesting, although most of the time, as it was winter, a mist covered the horizon. On one occasion I walked along to Heysham and had a scramble over the rocks and on another, I remember walking along the sea front when the mist lifted, and there, in the distance, I could see, across the bay, the mountains of the Lake District, a wonderland I had not known existed. Then the mist descended again, but I had seen the beauty that lay beyond.

I had been made the senior airwoman of my billet. This was solely because of my trade which was considered superior to some of the others. In fact, at that

time, I was very unsure of myself and was not the right person to take the lead. However not much was required of me and I was able to cope.

The fact that I was quite happy to go for walks on my own, was regarded as decidedly odd by some of my companions who could not bear the thought of being anywhere on their own. I am not sure how long I was in Morecambe, probably around three or four weeks and I do not remember any of the WAAFs I met there. None of them were Clerk SDs, so there was little likelihood that we would meet again and, in fact, we never did.

The drilling went on and on, but after three weeks we had our passing-out parade, which was quite an elaborate affair. By that time we had been taught the correct way to line up, take our distances, march ('Get those arms up'), how to about turn in the approved manner, whilst marching, to salute, and to respond to all orders immediately. Looking back over the years, it does seem stupid that we were subjected to this kind of training. It may have made us more amenable to discipline, but somehow I doubt it.

After we had 'passed out' we were told our postings. I, together with three other girls, was posted to Debden near Saffron Walden in Essex. This delighted me as it was much nearer my home. Debden was a Fighter Command station in 11 Group. Our billets were to be in Saffron Walden, a delightful town which I came to love.

When we arrived at Debden RAF station we started our Clerk SD training. I cannot remember a great deal about this now, but know it included some general idea of how the vectors, which were passed to the fighter pilots by the operations officers, were worked out. It was these vectors that guided the pilots to the enemy aircraft. We would ourselves never need this information but it made us realise how important accurate plotting was. The main job of Clerk SDs. on fighter stations in 11 Group was plotting aircraft movements on a map of South East England and in this we had to become very proficient. Now the Americans were in the war, we had to learn their alphabet which was different from that taught previously to the British. As far as I can remember it went Able, Baker, Charlie, Dog, etc. down to Zebra. We had to wear headphones over which we received the grid reference of the aircraft, both hostile and friendly, given to us by RDF stations and the Observer Corps, and, by means of a magnetic rod, we picked up a little metal arrow and placed it on the grid reference we had received.

It was imperative that we were quick and accurate as the information we put on the map was used by the controllers on the bridge of the Operations Room to scramble aircraft and direct them towards the hostile aircraft. Eventually I and my fellow 'rookies' passed the course and became Aircraftwomen 1st class.

I subsequently learnt that, in the early days of the war, Clerk SDs had been recruited mainly from girls who had been to private or public schools. However there had not been enough of these to man the Operation Rooms during the Battle of Britain, so the field had been widened to include grammar school girls. However among the WAAFs on the fighter stations the Clerk SDs were considered rather snobbish. This, by the time I joined up, was not so, but it was certainly true that I did find myself among girls from county families as well as from families similar to mine. Occasionally I was conscious of the difference and felt embarrassed when my friend Anne invited me to her home as I knew I could not invite her back. Consequently I did not accept the invitation.

Debden was a station which was in the process of being taken over by the Americans, and these 'Yanks' definitely added a new dimension to our lives. My friend, Anne Sidebotham, and I went out with a couple on one occasion. I remember their names were Buzz and Duck! I also remember how annoyed I was when my 'partner', I think he was Buzz, casually said how the Americans would leave an army of occupation here after the war! I also remember wondering how easy it would be to get an American interested in me so, on one occasion, I went out of my way to flirt with one. I wished I hadn't I had a very difficult time trying to get rid of him. That taught me a lesson.

As a child I had signed the pledge not to drink alcohol. I did not feel bound by this but considered it wise to abstain whilst in the forces as some of the girls got drunk and in that condition were fair game for unscrupulous airmen, either British or American. Pregnant WAAF were dismissed the service!

Whilst at Saffron Walden I caught shingles and was sent to the sick bay. This was situated in a delightful manor house nearby. I remember that in the room or ward in which I slept were the markings on the wall showing the growth of the children who had lived there in happier times. The grounds were delightful, full of daffodils and primroses in flower and I was not too ill to appreciate my surroundings. In fact I was hardly ill at all, but got some sick leave out of it.

We were in Saffron Walden during the spring and early summer of 1943 and were able to explore the locality. I remember the wild flowers, violets and primroses, in the hedges and the delight they gave me. We were also able to visit Cambridge.

(*To be continued*.)

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