LOUGHTON & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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'Odds and Ends'

The Essex Place Names Project records the place names in tithe, enclosure awards and other Essex documents. A project of the Essex Society for Archaeology and History, it has the support of the County Archivist and the recording is done by volunteers mostly from local societies.

The volunteers need to be familiar with maps and have computer skills. The first step is to transcribe the tithe award, held at the ERO, on to a computer disk and then to add supplementary information. This is a very laborious and time consuming process. William Waller, Loughton's historian, produced a map in about 1900 which showed all the field names in the parish of Loughton, based on the demesne survey of 1739, and added the field numbers from the tithe award.

If any member is interested in participating in the current project please contact Richard Morris.

It is disappointing to hear that the bookshop at the Essex Record Office at Chelmsford is to close. This was one of the best sources for all new books about Essex. In future the ERO will only sell its own publications. Apparently the bookshop was not covering its costs.

Loughton – the Easter Hunt

RICHARD MORRIS

The legendary Easter Hunt officially was formally abolished in 1858, but the old custom died hard and continued for 24 years after that date, degenerating into a scene of rowdy merrymaking, until it was finally suppressed in 1882. The *Woodford Times* of 27 April 1878 contained the following report of one of the 'unofficial' hunts under the above headline:

Easter Monday is the opening day of the excursion traffic, and the Bank Holiday falling late this year it was expected that the excursionist would be out in greater numbers than in former years. Trains were run on the Loughton Branch of the Great Eastern Railway every half-hour, and as each train arrived at Loughton during the morning a dark stream of people poured up the road to High Beach. A few of the livelier spirits beguiled the way with songs and dances; here a playful gentleman was performing a jig in front of his lady love, much to her enjoyment, till he collided with a party of young men who were singing loudly that they didn't want to fight, when some language not mild was exchanged indicative of extremely bellicose purposes, which appeared to afford great satisfaction to all around. The majority however made steadily on, up Smart's Lane till the forest was reached, when many broke away from the road into the bushes soon returning to report that it was 'rather soft'. Several itinerant photographers were arranging their fixings, and it may be remarked that this branch of the fine arts is evidently growing in favour, for between Loughton and High Beach there might have been counted at one time of the day over thirty cameras, and there appeared to be plenty of work for all. Very amusing was it to watch the peculiarities of a group posing for their portraits - the fixed grin on the features of one who thought the crowd was laughing at him, the assumption of dignity in another, while the 'swell' of the party with hat on one side, arms akimbo, and legs tightly garmented would make a capital model of Simon Tappertit, but the blushing admirer would scarcely represent the fair Moggs, her rosy face and portly form suggesting rather Mrs Varden. Of course opportunities abounded all along the road of trying one's skill at hitting cocoa nuts. The proprietor on one instance had made the mistake of setting up a bowling ground on a spot so level that the lads were able to bring down a nut with nearly every ball. That spot was shortly afterwards vacant.

At High Beach, Mr Thurston had established quite a fair with his steam roundabout, shooting saloons, swings, etc. and although the crowd was never very great business was very brisk with him all day. Not so with the donkey drivers. An Irishman once said that he was only seasick once, and that was when he rode a donkey! One would think that there would be more pleasure in riding a donkey than in being whirled round and round on a wooden horse, yet the dummy horses were always busy while the donkeys had an easy day. There were several of the fraternity of sharpers about, and one of them aired the new strap swindle which he folds in the middle, thus making a loop; he then folds and winds it up, retaining the two ends in his left hand, and invites any spectator to put a needle into the loop, at the same time betting on success. A confederate is at hand to start the game, and of course wins, but any unwary ones who venture to try, and there were plenty on Monday ready to be gulled out of their shillings, are of course caught in the trap. If the needle be placed in the loop, the ends of the strap have only to be turned together outwardly and the needle will be found outside, so that the sharper has the whole matter under his control. He must have reaped a rich harvest in the course of the day, for in five minutes ten shillings had changed hands, so sure were the stupid victims that they were right. Towards dusk too there was the young man who confidentially offers a meerschaum pipe for sale as he has lost his purse and cannot get home to Battersea, but he was not likely to do so well as the gentleman of the strap.

At four o'clock the crowd thickened around the 'Robin Hood' until there were probably over four thousand on the spot. Boys were in all the neighbouring trees, those who intended following the deer on foot were girding up their loins, while some excited looking youths were urging sorry looking ponies through the crowd, one of them (the youths not the ponies) hinting his intention of being 'in at the death'. They then proceeded to gallop their miserable steeds through the forest 'just to get their 'ands in' they said, into what they did not say, but it was evident that in one case both rider and horse had been in the mud. There were shouts of 'the 'unt's a starting', and Mr C Burrell was seen leading the hounds into the vale at the back of the Robin Hood. He quickly galloped up the hill leaving the panting crowd behind, and by a sharp turn met the deer-cart in Holmwood, near the two ponds: the deer was at once turned out, the hounds were laid on, and the chase commenced at a fair pace. The deer made straight towards Loughton, but soon turned back across the New Road and the High Beach Road to Honey Lane Quarters, thence by the Rifle Butts towards Waltham Abbey. Had he taken the open country, there would have been a stiff afternoon's work, but he turned back towards High Beach, past Sir Fowell Buxton's estate, by the rear of the Wake Arms, across the Roman Encampment [Iron Age], and the New Road,

into Copt Hall Park, thence into the Warren, take the park palings each time in capital style and finally made for the Lodge where he was taken after a fair run of an hour and twenty minutes. Although there not many riders at the start, there were many others who joined as the chase proceeded, and when passing through the Park there were from fifteen to twenty following. The deer was kindly lent by Lord Petre, and was the one which has been hunted by his pack during the season. The hounds were lent by Lord Petre and H Vine Esq, and in the opinion of Mr Burrell, did their work remarkably well. It was the generally expressed opinion that for a 'cockney hunt' it was very good. Very soon after six o'clock the crowd in the neighbourhood of the King's Oak and the Robin Hood, began to stream off towards the station, the fun being more boisterous than in the morning, the music more discordant, singing and dancing more general, but the utmost good humour being shown on all sides, and what was most noteworthy, all appeared sober. Perhaps it was that the weather being colder, more active exercise was taken, but whatever the cause, there was sobriety where on the Bank holiday last August there was far too much drunkenness. The duties of the police were comparatively light, the number of excursionists who came down by road being much smaller than last year.

The number of passengers conveyed to Loughton station, on Easter Monday, before four o'clock in the afternoon, was 6,700, showing an increase of about 300 over the figures for the same day last year. The total number for the whole branch would probably be between ten and twelve thousand.

Hopefully the deer was safely returned to its home in Thorndon Park. Even in today's larger Loughton, an 'invasion' of 6,700 visitors would cause some problems!

SOURCES

The *Woodford Times*, Saturday, 27 April 1878.
Addison, William, *Epping Forest, its Literary and Historical Associations*, 1945

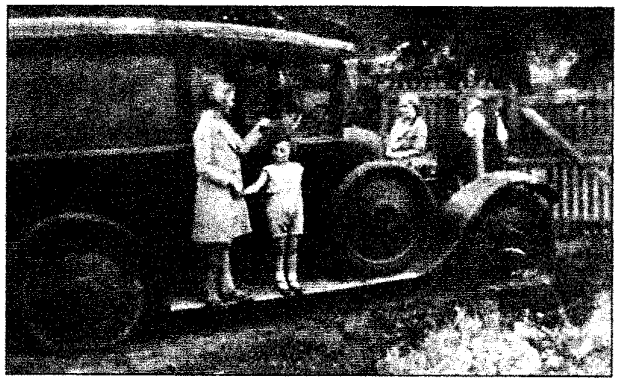
Loughton's motor industry

JOHN HARRISON

By an amazing stroke of luck I have been able to track down a photo of a Wilson's Coachworks bodied Panhard and Levassor – Warriner's, the undertakers, first motorised hearse. When it was acquired this was apparently the only motor hearse for miles around and, as a consequence, was regularly hired out to other undertakers. The photograph, printed below,was taken after the vehicle was taken off the road and prior to it being scrapped – it will be noted the bonnet has already been removed. Warriner's used to be builders as well as undertakers and the photo was taken on what used to be their builder's yard on the site of what is now Croft House, Rectory Lane. I would like to thank Mr Daniel Warriner for the loan of this photo to copy. The people in the photo are his two sisters (on the running board of the vehicle), his father and his aunt.

The thought of Loughton having a motor industry may seem strange, but it had one once. Nowadays the industry is concentrated in a few centres: Coventry, Solihull, Longbridge, Oxford, Speke, etc. In the early years of motoring, however, the industry was much more dispersed. It is perhaps not all that surprising that a coachbuilding establishment existed in Loughton before the First World War.

A while ago in this *Newsletter* Chris Pond mentioned Wilson's Coachworks located in Forest Road which fitted bodies to Panhard and Levassors imported from France and I was intrigued to know more. Thanks to Chris I now have two articles from the *West Essex Gazette* (dated 27 March 1953 and 17 July 1969) which tell us about this establishment. They were written by the late Will Francies who has early memories of motoring in Loughton and who himself owned a garage in the town after the Second World War. This had started off, like many early garages, as a blacksmith's shop and was situated on the site now occupied by three shops to the north of Loughton Methodist Church.



Thomas Wilson, who founded the company, was the son of a Canadian mining engineer. Around 1898 he established a butcher's shop in Loughton. His interest in the then new-fangled automobile was kindled when his firm acquired what Will Francies describes as 'an antique hybrid foreign motor tricycle' for deliveries. Subsequently a lathe was installed in the rear yard of the butcher's shop and the repair of the few motor-cars and motorcycles that then existed in Loughton became a sideline to the butchery business. In this respect Thomas was assisted by his former delivery boy, Bert Blissett, who was to graduate to become his foreman.

Thomas Wilson and a sleeping partner, Samuel Wilks, established the coachworks in new premises in Forest Road around 1906. The business appears to have prospered rapidly and soon took on the Panhard and Levassor agency for the whole of Essex.

> 'Only the car chassis came to the Forest-Road works, and in due time emerged as a complete touring car, for the pioneer Wilson workshops carried out all the machining, forging, body framing, panel beating, trimming and painting necessary for the conversion of those rugged French chassis into complete and comfortable cars.'

According to Will Francies:

> 'From the humble little Fred Twigg, expert turner and engineer, who seldom spoke, who worked seven days a week and always wore a soiled wing collar and "dicky," to Foreman Bert B, the Wilson staff were craftsmen to the man. Only the wealthy could afford a Panhard, but from 1906 and for many years after, the Panhard and Levasseur [*sic*], car seldom seen in other parts of the country, was a common sight in Loughton.'

In one of the articles Will Francies describes the Panhard and Levassor as being commoner in Loughton than it was in Lyons! Three well-known writers who lived in Loughton: Arthur Morrison, W W Jacobs and

Horace Newte, owned these vehicles. Although fitted with open tourer bodies originally, according to Mr Francies, at least three of the vehicles lived out the end of their days with commercial bodies; one becoming the hearse featured in the photo above.

During the First World War the coachworks produced munitions and after the First World War it dealt in Citroens (not as far as I am aware fitting bodies to them). Although the former Wilson's premises are no longer used for car body building, it should be noted that Loughton still has something of a motor industry in that G M Billings & Son Ltd, situated on the Oakwood Hill Industrial Estate, fits bodies to commercial vehicles.

If any readers know more about Wilson's Coachworks and particularly any other photographs of vehicles bodied by Wilson's or even vehicles themselves which have survived I would like to know. Please contact me on 8508 8851.

Loughton's Zeppelin spy

CHRIS POND

During the 1914-18 War, there was a great deal of resentment against people of German extraction. In Loughton, there were several families of continental descent, for instance, the Gerritsens, the Lestikows, and the Dietrichsens, often high up the social scale. They were not all of German origin, but a foreign-sounding name attracted suspicion no matter what its provenance. In my history of the Loughton Methodist Church, I record some of the resentment felt against the Wesleyan chapel organist, Miss Langendorp, whose family changed their name to Langham in 1915.

11 September 2001 in New York was a seminal event in the USA, not just because of the horror of the crime, but because that was the day that America discovered its territory was no longer inviolate from invasion from abroad. The same had happened in London in 1916, when the Zeppelin raids started. Folk of that era will always tell you of the huge, menacing shapes in the sky, and the horror of sudden death their bombs brought with them. The LDHS had a talk about five years ago on the Zeppelin that came down at Cuffley. An uncle of mine, born in 1900, told me of the panic an aerial attack engendered in Cheapside in 1916.

The fear and loathing that the Zeppelin raids unleashed had its sequel in Loughton in a very strange way. When Godfrey Lomer, who had rebuilt Loughton Lodge in 1908, died, his widow sold it in 1915 to a man in his 40s called Archibald Shillan. Despite the unusual name, Shillan was British (he had been born in Bow and previously lived in Woodford), and was a produce merchant in the City, but in partnership with a man called Becker. Becker's father had come to England from Germany, but had been naturalised in the 1870s.

These facts, no doubt in a rather garbled way, were the talk of Loughton, and the Shillans, who had never visited Germany at all, save for a week's holiday a decade before, were shunned by Loughton society and tradesmen. Their sons were accused of being German traitors. Then the rumour began to circulate that Shillan was a spy, and that he had set up a system of light signals from Loughton Lodge to inform the Zeppelin crews where Loughton was, contravening the blackout regulations. These matters got to such a head that Shillan demanded police protection, and six PCs were sent to guard the Lodge.

This was obviously the talk of the town, and one can imagine the relish with which it was told and embroidered in the bar of the King's Head. The son of the licensee, Garrett, said that, in his view, Shillan was a covert German, he had deliberately exhibited lights to guide in the Zeppelins, and that he had bribed the police to protect him. Unfortunately for Garrett, Archibald Shillan had engaged a private detective to sit in the bar, and when he reported Garrett's words to his client, Shillan sued for slander. Garrett had also apparently said he would sooner shoot Lloyd George than any German – not an unknown sentiment from the licensed trade, which was strongly Tory.

The case came before Mr Justice Darling in the Royal Courts of Justice on 21 March 1916. Shillan, who was obviously not short of money, had engaged Ralph Bankes, KC, to present his case; John Garrett defended himself, though in the event, he said nothing. Loughton police were called to testify that Loughton Lodge did, in fact, comply with the blackout, and the private detective swore as to Garrett's words.

The jury found for Shillan, and awarded him a farthing damages. The judge entered an injunction against repetition of the slander. No doubt the legal fees were considerable, but Archibald Shillan must have thought them money well spent to clear his name.

The Shillans obviously came to terms with Loughton gossip, for they lived in the Lodge until 1928, when, probably on retirement, they sold it to the Chaters. Michael Chater wrote a charming cameo of his boyhood in 1930s Loughton, *The Loughton Lodge Years*, a copy of which is in the Library. This provides an interesting coda to the tale, 12 or 15 years later. He records that the garage (now the building called 25 Woodbury Hill) had a loft, which had been used as 'living quarters for the previous owner's chauffeur'. He says:

> When we first tried to light a fire, then smoke would not go out of the chimney, and on inspection, we found that there was a piece of yellow cellophane over it. We at once decided the chauffeur had been a German spy who had been sending signals to invading aircraft, using his torch shone through the cellophane. I don't think we had any justification for this suspicion except that the previous owner's name was unusual and sounded vaguely German.

So ends the strange story of the alleged spy and the Zeppelin raids, an interesting exposition of the xenophobia of 90 years ago. We may smile, but who is to say something of the kind might not some day surface again?

Life in the wartime WAAF – III

EVE LOCKINGTON

As the war progressed raids from Europe became less frequent and our watches became boring. Then we were told of the enemy's new weapon the V1 – or 'the doodlebug'. It could be picked up by radar and the Observer Corps. The airwoman who received the plot had to call out 'Diver, Diver, Diver', to alert the controllers as she placed the arrow in position. As we plotted these terrible weapons , they would suddenly disappear – we knew that a home, factory or hospital had been destroyed.

When hitching back from leave, they would come chugging overhead and we hoped they would keep chugging: the danger came when the engine stopped. Once we were coming back after a short leave, when a doodlebug crashed on the waterworks roundabout at Woodford. It was a miracle that we were not killed or wounded – this was a favourite spot to try for a lift.

In the Ops Room at Blake Hall we had little to do with D Day, but, around this time, the next horror, the V2 rocket, hit the population. Fighter Command could do nothing about this.

An airwoman might pick up a plot in Holland, but that was all; shortly after, it would explode in the London area. There was no air raid warning, no sound, just an explosion. My own home was badly damaged by one. Luckily, no one was hurt, although my mother just escaped serious injury from splintered glass. From that time and for the rest of her life, she suffered double vision from the shock of that explosion.

The only defence was offence. Bombers sought out the launching pads and bombed them but the explosions continued until the Allies overran the rocket sites.

I remained at Blake Hall until VE day, but there was nothing for us to do. WAAFs were released according to their length of service. I had joined relatively late, so they needed to find some occupation for me and other late joiners. I was sent to Biggin Hill in Kent. We were no longer needed for Ops Room work, but had to help check that refugees, flying in from Europe, were genuine but not many did fly in. Most arrivals were VIPs or reporters. I remember Bob Hope and the Duke of Luxembourg and his family. There was not much for us to do, but we could not be released.

We lived in bleak, but sturdy, barrack blocks and all sorts of trades were in the same dormitory. I remember putting one girl to bed, maudlin drunk. Her evening's entertainment had not cheered her. I spent ages trying to bring her out of her drunken depression. The food at Biggin Hill was awful and most of our wages went on meals. On one occasion the rice pudding included a cooked mouse! I realised I had a double: when I was refused a meal because I had already had one. I would not have willingly eaten two meals there and I managed to persuade the mess staff that they were mistaken.

Then I was sent on indefinite leave. My friend, Daphne Gage, who had remained at British Drug Houses throughout the war, was working in the Export Credits Department and needed help. It was impossible to obtain shorthand typists then and I was bored. I suggested I should help her. I would not need pay as I was being paid by the Air Force. The Office Manager agreed I could help Daphne but said that I would have to be paid. So, for a period, I was paid by both British Drug Houses and the Air Force. I remember that with the money, I bought a very nice suit.

Finally I was sent to do office work at the Air Ministry in London. I was billeted in a block of luxury flats opposite Regents Park. I remember one of the sergeants was so foul-mouthed that I asked for a change. We had to be on call at night but were allowed to sleep in the duty room. Once they changed the WAAF duty room into the RAF duty room and there was I happily in bed when the airmen walked in. They were horrified and so was I. I hurriedly dressed and when I left the room found a string of airmen outside. The Admin Office had not found it necessary to inform WAAF personnel that the rooms had been changed.

At last the time came for my demobilisation at Wilmslow RAF Station. I handed in my kit and was discharged as a civilian after just under four years in the WAAF. I still have my 'Demobilisation Booklet' which includes, among other items, a reference stating that they could recommend me to anyone needing a good shorthand-typist/secretary. During all my time in the WAAF I had never done secretarial work!

I have never regretted joining the WAAF. The experience broadened my outlook and I mixed with a far greater variety of people than I would have done in my fairly restricted home environment. In fact, the WAAF was to me my University of Life course.

Contributions to the Newsletter are welcomed and are very necessary. They can be personal reminiscences of life in the area in former times or about historical events or personalities. Don't worry if you feel your literary skills are not up to it – all articles will be carefully prepared for publication in consultation with you. Please send your contributions to the Editor at the address below or ring for a chat to develop an idea you may have.

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