LOUGHTON AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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'Odds and Ends'

The *Loughton Review* has ceased publication after 37 years. The *Review* was distributed throughout Loughton, Theydon Bois and Buckhurst Hill, and was always very supportive of local organisations.

The condition of the fabric of Loughton Hall, a listed building, has been of concern for some time. It is estimated that the repairs necessary to the roof alone, will cost about £250,000, with no doubt other expenditure on the interior before the Hall can be used. The Hall forms part of the Epping Forest College complex and there are plans to use it for an adult learning centre.

The College principal recently attended a meeting of Loughton Town Council at which the issue was discussed. The College will need to seek funding for the refurbishment if the building's unique historic character is to be preserved and local people are once again able to use its facilities.

The local council did not always get it right as this report in the *Woodford Times* of 18 December 1903 shows:

'At a meeting of Loughton District Council held on Monday, a letter was read from the Conservators of Epping Forest with respect to Staples Road Pond, stating that the Epping Forest Committee had viewed the spot, and had decided that it would be undesirable to comply with the Council's request and fill up the pond. A Member: We'll show it to them in the summer, when there's no water in it.'

A hundred years later the pond remains an attractive feature, and even after the lack of rainfall over the last three months, it has not dried up.

The buried and forgotten saviours of Epping Forest

JOHN HOWES

During 1842 a report to the Select Committee on the Improvement of Health in Towns, under the heading 'Effects of interment of bodies in towns', recorded that:

'The Enon Street Chapel in Clements Lane, built in 1823, has a cellar measuring 59 feet x 29 feet and between this cellar is a boarded floor without lath or plaster. Into this cellar, which contains a sewer, up to 1842, 12,000 bodies had been placed, an average of 30 a week.

Intolerable smells have arisen through the planks of the floor of the chapel and frequently four or five women have fainted during the services. Asked if the congregation was a crowded one, the witness replied; "Not latterly, it fell off".'

A later report in 1850 stated that by 1847 rooms in the chapel had been let 'to lovers of terpsichore', that is, it was now a dancing academy!

Other reports noted that in Aldgate '17–18 bodies were at this time being placed in a grave with no earth between the coffins'. In another City churchyard: 'In order to make room, corpses not buried a week, were taken up, chopped up and burnt, choppers and saws for this purpose being kept in the churchyard.'

Obviously action had to be taken as the populations of Victorian London and other cities were still growing, and, to help solve the burial problem, in 1850 the Metropolitan Interment Act was passed which gave local Boards of Health powers to forbid further interments in churchyards and other burial grounds and acquire land for municipal cemeteries.

The City of London certainly had a major crisis to deal with. Unlike today, it then had quite a large residential population but it also had additional problems resulting from the disruption caused by the rebuilding of its ancient sewerage system and later the building of 'cut and cover' railways. These works often involved digging up graveyards of city churches, with the resulting duty to re-inter the remains. It was therefore vital that the City purchased a site for its own cemetery as quickly as it could, to both bury its present dead, but also to reinter hundreds of remains from the ruined city churchyards.

Therefore, just four years after the 1850 Act, the City purchased Aldersbrook Farm, now the City of London Cemetery and Crematorium at Ilford. Acquiring this land also made the Corporation 'commoners' of Epping Forest and eventually enabled it to lead the fight to save it.

Visitors to the cemetery today will find a whole avenue of memorials to those re-interred there from destroyed city churchyards. Names of now long lost city churches appear, a poignant reminder of the price of progress; something to ponder about when you next travel on the Hammersmith & City line!

I therefore feel we should include the dead of the Victorian City of London in the list of those who, albeit accidentally, helped to save Epping Forest whilst remembering such leading figures as George Palmer, Jr, who tirelessly fought to save the Forest long before our local *Willingales* v. *Maitland* cases caught the public imagination more widely.

Loughton's early history – II

RICHARD MORRIS

Life in Loughton in the 15th century was not without the occasional dispute and riot. Some of the villagers took to cutting down trees and underwood, belonging to the lord of the manor, the Abbot of Waltham Abbey, and then conspired to kill the Abbot and his servants.

On the Sunday of St Bartholomew's Day, in 1410, they broke into the Abbey, insulted the Abbot and Sheriff, and struck the latter. However, a pardon was subsequently sought and granted. It looks as though the Abbey tenants were dissatisfied with some action on the part of the Abbot and took, as was not by any means unusual in those days, violent means to express their grievances.

The tax-rolls for the 15th century are sparse but we do know that in 1442, one Peter, a Frenchman, kept an inn in Loughton, and, being a foreigner and an innkeeper, had to pay a poll-tax of 8d every half year.

From the Conquest down to the reign of Henry VIII, the Abbots of Waltham Abbey held possession of the manor of Loughton. Twice a year they came to Loughton Hall, tenanted by a farmer. There the Cellarer, Steward and Receivers of the Monastery, with their servants and horses, were entertained for two days, while they held the Court of the Manor. At this Court transfers of the copyhold estates were effected, offenders were fined, whether for offences against the manor or the customs of the Forest; small criminal matters and civil disputes were settled; and nuisances ordered to be abated.

With the Reformation and Dissolution of the Monasteries, the Abbot and Canons resigned all their possessions into the King's hand, in March 1540, and Loughton became a royal manor. Things probably went on much the same for a time with the tenants paying their rents to the King's Treasurer. The England family – from whom England's Lane has its name – paid two hens and a cock, just as John Pyrle had paid the same rent for the same freehold land, centuries earlier.

For a brief period during the reign of Edward VI, the manor ceased to be royal, but Lord Darcy held it for little more than a year, and it was then given to Princess Mary. She, however, about two months afterwards became Queen, and by her the manor was incorporated into the Duchy of Lancaster.

John Stonard had been the lessee of the manor under the last Abbot, and his son George secured a fresh long lease. To him in turn, a son John succeeded, and his daughter and heiress, Susan, married the eldest son of Sir Thomas Wroth of Enfield.

John Stonard II also purchased Luxborough in Chigwell, where Norden tells us that he built 'a fayre house'. On his death, Sir Robert Wroth and Susan, his wife, entered into the inheritance and came to live at Loughton Hall. They were succeeded by their eldest son, also Sir Robert, and he, in 1613, bought the fee-simple of Loughton manor from King James I.

This Sir Robert married Mary Sidney, daughter of the Earl of Leicester. Mary and her husband had literary interests and were friends of a number of poets, including Ben Jonson, who often visited Loughton Hall. Sir Robert died in 1614 leaving great debts and an infant son. The son only survived for two years but Mary, his widow, lived on for many, and her extravagance seems to have kept her in perpetual turmoil!

Four further generations of the Wroth family came to live at Loughton Hall, the last of whom, John Wroth IV, married a cousin, Elizabeth Wroth, but died childless. [*To be continued.*]

Fun and games in the Forest

JOHN HARRISON

I have been studying *The Car Illustrated* magazine at the National Motor Museum library in Bealieu to find out more about early vehicle registrations. In the process I have come across one or two articles about motoring related activities in Epping Forest and thought other Society members might find them of interest.

17 June 1908:

PRINCE AND PRINCESS OF WALES AT EPPING FOREST

A very kindly act was performed by the Prince and Princess of Wales by their visit last week to Epping Forest in connection with the Fresh Air Fund. Their Royal Highnesses watched and talked to the children who had for the day been transported from the lanes and alleys of the East end to the forest. The Fresh Air Fund, which was founded by Mr C Arthur Pearson sixteen years ago, has provided a holiday in the country air for 1,840,565 of the very poorest children of the metropolis and some forty other large towns of the United Kingdom. The public subscribes the funds, and the organisation of the outings is in the efficient charge of the Ragged School Union. Ninepence pays for a holiday for each child, this including railway fare and plenty of wholesome food. This year the aim of the organisers is to give 200,000 children a day in the country, and in addition to provide a fortnight's holiday for 2,000 of the most deserving cases. For this a sum of over £9,000 is needed and the Fund managers rely on the charity of the public to afford them the necessary support. The Epping Forest outing, which was rendered so memorable for the children by the royal visit, was the first of the year. One thousand children from Stepney, Limehouse, Shadwell, and Wapping were taken on this excursion.

15 July 1908:

CRIPPLES' MOTOR OUTING

Some seventy crippled children belonging to the London County Council School at Maynard Street, Bethnal Green, were taken recently under the auspices of the Beaumont Cycling Club, for the fifth annual outing, in motor-cars kindly lent by Messrs Humber, Edge, Darracq, De Dion and

Rover Companies and Mr R Fuller, H G Norris, C Winkley, and A J Wilson.

Although the weather was at times stormy, the children visited various interesting parts of Epping Forest, being afterwards entertained to dinner and tea at Theydon Bois. The little ones were greatly amused with cricket and cocoa-nut [*sic*] games at the club's concert party. On leaving they were presented by friends with books, balls, sweets, and fruit.

30 August 1911:

A GYMKHANA AT HIGH BEECH

In the course of the programme for the Essex Motor Club's gymkhana at High Beech, near Loughton, on Saturday, a novel feature was introduced in the shape of a chicken-stealing race for ladies. Each of the competitors in this amusing event had to travel by car or motorcycle up to a chickenhouse, where she descended and had the task of securing one of the penned-up birds; the winner was the lady who returned with the chicken to her car and then reached the winning-post first.

Miss Davies who was the quickest to get away with her capture was unfortunate enough to be beaten at the finish of her ride.

Our illustration [not reproduced here] shows Miss Davies on a side-car, starting off for the winning-post, with fowl contentedly prepared to enjoy a trip to which it had hitherto been unaccustomed.

We recommend to promoters of gymkhanas to include chicken-stealing competitions in their future programmes.

The Loughton summerhouses

CHRIS POND

In *Walks in Loughton's Forest*, page 1, the centre engraving shows a stretch of water, entitled Lake at Loughton, and behind it a hillside, wooded but not thickly so, on top of which is a curious stockade-like structure, circular, with a thatched roof. The engraving is taken from the *Graphic*, dated 6 May 1882, and is part of a supplement issued to mark Queen Victoria's visit to dedicate the Forest for the people.

We posed in the caption the question, where is this, and what is the strange structure? One or two people have essayed suggestions since the book appeared in 2002, but no suggestion appeared relevant.

A week or so ago, our member, Elna Green, gave me a manuscript which had been written by her grandmother, Gertrude Green, in 1959. Mrs Green (née Brown) was born in Loughton in 1873, and her narrative of family history was intended to inform her family about her kinsfolk and upbringing, as well as to describe the Loughton of her girlhood.

The Society is considering publishing an edited form of Gertrude's notes, which are full of interesting things. But one thing that immediately emerges is the explanation to the mystery print in *Walks in Loughton's Forest*.

Mrs Green says, speaking of the Forest in the 1880s and 90s:

'There used to be deershelters in the Forest. We used to call them summerhouses, and people could shelter in them if they were walking in the Forest. The shelters were a good size; the ground floor was [open] and the top was a good thatch. There was one opposite the Shaftesbury [Retreat] in Staples Hill Road. We used to walk up the Summerhouse Path and onto Drummaids Hill, and on to Woodberrie Hill. There was another shelter in the Forest on the left as we go up to the Wakes Arms.'

Here, then, is the explanation of the mystery print. The 'Lake at Loughton' is Staples Road Pond, also called 'The Reservoir', which we know was dug by 1882, because in April that year, the workmen building my house, Forest Retreat (later Villa), rescued a woman who was drowning there.

If you stand today at the same point as the artist, the main difference is that the trees have grown up mightily, and the distant view to the left of Staples Hill is quite cut off. If the deershelter existed today at the top of Staples Hill, it would be quite invisible among the 60-ft high beeches that have replaced the much thinner 15-ft pollards! There are still deer on Staples Hill. The fallow are seldom seen, though muntjac are widespread. Perhaps they miss their shelter!

Maybe, then, the Conservators could think about re-providing the deershelters if an opportunity arose – though one fears a thatched structure might not be there long before attracting the attention of local vandals.

Life in Loughton 1926–1946

CHRIS POND

Peter Woodhouse, a former longtime resident of Loughton has written a book of reminiscences of growing up in the town which will shortly be published by the Society.

In the 1920s and 1930s Loughton was becoming a suburb, but only slowly. Such development as there was in the 20s was almost all of the large detached or semidetached style of house, costing about a thousand pounds to buy new. It was only when the Roding Estates were developed east of the railway, whose early years have been described by Alison Whiting, that living in Loughton became available to what in the 30s would have been called the lower middle classes. And in that decade, streets of large houses such as Spareleaze and Tycehurst Hills and Summerfield and Hillcrest Roads also made their appearance.

Though the middle classes may not have been awash with money, their aspirations were for a reasonably large house in a good neighbourhood, private education for their children, perhaps (though not necessarily) a car, good services from shops and professionals; and for like-minded people as neighbours.

Peter Woodhouse was from such a family, who came to Loughton in the mid-20s from inner London

on a salary of perhaps twice the national average wage. They settled in a new house in the Avenue. The small 20s family of one or two children was not like the six or seven-child Edwardian family. It was a small, cohesive family unit. There was no huge, rambling house, no question of a live-in servant. Neither were there expensive holidays to distant places, nor prestigious public schools.

People wanted convenience and amenities. Peter Woodhouse's family were thoroughly modern. When electricity came in the mid-30s, they installed it straightaway. The overmantles and dado rails of their 20s house were Victorian hangovers, so they removed them. The cinema in the High Road was the greatest innovation to hit Loughton for decades, and the old GER 2-4-2 tank locomotives looked hopeless antiques in the brand-new, ultra-modern Loughton Station of 1940.

In the year the Woodhouse family came to Loughton, Dr Berthon Pendred (mentioned in the book) wrote in the *Loughton Advertiser* (20 March 1926):

> "Loughton has entered a phase of its existence when rapid growth and development are inevitable . . . Pressure from without is steadily but surely changing the face of our village. This cannot be prevented, but wise counsels may so direct and guide it that London's most beautiful village may become London's model suburb."

The picture Peter Woodhouse draws of the village-town is a charming vignette of life in the 30s – uncomplicated, unhurried, ordered, and pleasant. The change from "beautiful village to model suburb", foreshadowed by Dr Pendred, never took place in quite the way he envisaged. There are those who would say Loughton still has the trappings of a village. Certainly in the parts bordering the Forest it is not a typical suburb.

Whatever the truth of that, the 20s and 30s were an important phase of Loughton's history. This book is written from an hitherto undescribed perspective, and the LDHS is pleased to add Peter's account to its now quite comprehensive list of publications on the town's history. The book is completed by illustrations of contemporary advertisements and photographs from the author, the collections of the Society, and its officers. It will be published shortly.

Erratum: In Eve Lockington's 'Loughton Memories' in the last issue (No 158) the reference to 'Langthorne Industrial Estate' should have read 'Langston Road Industrial Estate'.

50 years of country dancing in Theydon Bois

SHEILA GYMER

I began in country dancing in 1957 at the original Theydon Bois village hall which was in Loughton Lane, in front of the present Youth Club where houses now stand. The building had been an army hut in the 1914–18 war and came from the home of John Strachey, MP, at Lambourne. It cost £500 and was opened in 1949, one year after we moved to Theydon.

Country dancing was designated as an official evening class run by the local education office and I was introduced to it by a friend, Dora Dewey. Mrs Betty Kernihan was our teacher and then Mrs Lily Fleming. Lily Fleming's niece, Freda Roberts, played the piano and Freda's husband, Ken, drove them there. Mrs Sylvia Keen was the very efficient hall caretaker and Mrs Renee Sutton, equally efficient, helped with our end of term parties.

We had summer garden meetings at the home of Mr and Mrs Palmer of Piercing Hill and Mr and Mrs Strick of Forest Drive – these continued for about 20 years.

In 1966 the club transferred to the then new village hall on the glebe field, which had cost £20,000 to build

When I became the secretary in 1975 one of my duties was to record the pension numbers of retired members to enable them to pay £1 a term against our £8 a term.

We had special evenings such as May Hyde's 80th birthday celebrations in about 1980 at our end of term party. May's father had been head gardener at Wansfell when it was still a private home. After it became a residential college, and by now retired, he used to visit and enjoy the garden. When this was queried by some of the college staff Dr Down, the principal, though it perfectly natural as Mr Hyde had helped create the garden.

In spring 1981 our membership dropped and we were no longer able to continue as an official class. Mrs May Andrews, one of the class, offered to run it for us for love, which she did for many years with the help of her husband, Raymond.

In November 2001 the club moved to the new village hall which had been built alongside the 1966 hall on the glebe field. Thus, country dancing in Theydon Bois, which is believed to have existed for over 50 years, moved to its third village hall venue.

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