LOUGHTON & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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D-Day

HARRY KING

[*In June this year the 60th anniversary of the D-Day invasion of mainland Europe will be marked. This is a local man's memories of that event. Harry King was born in 1924 and celebrated his 80th birthday on 28 February 2004. He was brought up in Chingford and after war service spent most of his adult life there until retiring to Rayne, near Braintree, about 20 years ago. He enlisted in the Royal Marines at age 18 in 1942. D-day minus 3 saw him aboard a landing craft, TANK, in Portsmouth Harbour*.]

3 June 1944. All leave was stopped and no-one was allowed to go ashore. We knew then that D-Day was near. King George VI paid a visit to the landing force assembled in Portsmouth Harbour. We could see tanks, guns, lorries and many unusual vehicles being continuously loaded into the large landing craft and, as each craft completed loading, it was moored into line, ready to sail.

4 June 1944. That night and all the next day the preparations continued. Meanwhile, the wind was rising so that, by the night of the 4th, quite a gale was blowing and the sea had a heavy swell. The tank and gun crews accompanying their armour must have been very uncomfortable.

Infantry were boarding the troop-carrying ships and they were about to spend an uncomfortable 48 hours below decks. The storm grew worse affecting the hundreds of ships that were at anchor or tied up to buoys off the Isle of Wight.

I was a Royal Marine aboard a landing craft, TANK, which was decked over and had a complement of 90 marines, and carried ammunition and stores, etc. On deck were 24 light anti-aircraft guns. Our role was to escort the soldiers, who were to be in small open landing craft, ashore to give them cover against the ME 109s and Fokke-Wulf fighters that were expected to attack them.

At midnight we began to slip buoys and moorings for the journey across to Normandy, when almost at once the order came to postpone departure for 24 hours. All our thoughts were with the men packed into the troopships being tossed about off the Isle of Wight. They were sleeping where they could but we were enjoying our hammocks.

5 June 1944. The gale was still blowing and it was raining heavily. The whole fleet was riding at anchor in the English Channel: the British forces from Dover to Poole Harbour and the Americans from Poole to Penzance. Thousands of ships waiting to sail and yet not one German reconnaissance plane flew over. The allied air forces had almost completely destroyed the German aircraft and landing fields in France, but we did not know this then.

The day passed very slowly as we waited at action stations expecting attack from every aircraft Jerry had. By late evening we received the signal to go, and we had to go – gale or no gale. The night tide off the Normandy coastal region was at its highest for the month on the 5th and 6th of June and this would enable the assault boats and landing craft to sail over the pointed steel bars that the Germans had planted in the sand pointing seawards. Delaying until 7 June would mean that we would land the men the wrong side of the defences with 100 yards of open beach to cross before they reached the promenade and thus possibly subjecting them to terrible gunfire.

6 June 1944. As dawn was breaking we arrived at our beach, code-name Juno [between St Aubin-sur-Mer and Courseulles-sur-Mer]. The sea had gone down and the wind was abating. The troops were transferring to the assault boats whilst the warships were bombarding the houses, hotels and shops on the promenade. The RAF was bombing the area beyond the seafront.

Many of the soldiers were seasick and, after being cooped up in their troopships for two days and nights, they had to scramble down rope ladders and nets into the wildly pitching assault boats. They must have felt awful.

We had been given an assault boat to tow over to France, plus two Royal Engineers as its crew. Because the assault boats were completely open, the two sappers travelled on our craft. It was well that they did, because the savage sea completely wrecked the boat and all we had left at first light were parts of the bows hanging from the towrope.

Gathering the boatloads of soldiers around us we made our way to the beach, and did this journey many times. Not one German plane was seen and not one round of anti-aircraft shell was fired because the RAF

had made such a good job of knocking out the Luftwaffe.

We landed our men in exactly the position ordered, but we had rehearsed this over and over again at Studland Bay in Dorset. There, dummy buildings replicating the buildings at Juno beach had been built for practice and training. Our practice landings damaged the buildings each time because live ammunition was used and the Royal Engineers had the job of repairing them for us to do it all again the following week.

The planning and organisation were unbelievable: that careful planning kept casualties to a minimum on our beaches.

What a day that was. It is hard to realise that it was 60 years ago, I was 20 then and I am 80 now, but I remember it as if it were yesterday.

Books for the Summer

The Verderers and Courts of Waltham Forest 1250–2000 is the title of Richard Morris's new book which will be published by the Society in May. Richard traces the history of the Verderers and the Forest Courts from medieval times to the year 2000. The book is over 200 pages, case-bound and extensively illustrated in both black and white and colour.

Epping Forest is the remaining fragment of Waltham Forest, which for over 700 years was one of the royal hunting forests of England where the monarch had the exclusive right to hunt deer. Earlier, Waltham Forest had formed part of the Forest of Essex which covered most of the county.William the Conqueror and his immediate successors introduced laws for the administration of royal forests and offenders were brought before special forest courts at which the Verderers were the equivalent of Justices of the Peace – but their jurisdiction was limited to the Forest. Many Verderers were well-known figures in Essex, and often came from long-established county families – the Stonards and Wroths of Loughton, the Harveys of Chigwell, the Fanshawes and Gascoynes of Barking and the Maynards of Walthamstow.

The Verderers' role changed after the Epping Forest Act of 1878, under which the Corporation of London were appointed Conservators. The Verderers no longer had judicial authority but their influence in the management of the Forest was still significant. The Buxtons, Sir Antonio Brady, Andrew Johnston, Sir William Addison and others have in the past 125 years defended the Forest against encroachment and the effects of the surrounding urbanisation.

The Verderers continue in office today: elected every seven years by the Commoners of Epping Forest they sit on the Epping Forest and Open Spaces Committee of the Corporation of London.

Richard's book will be available in May, price £15 (£13 to members).

Another recent book is *Millican Dalton: A Search for Romance & Freedom*. Dalton was the subject of an article by Stephen Pewsey in *Newsletter* 141 (April/May 1999) and was described as a 'notable Loughton eccentric': a familar figure 'to be seen climbing trees or tramping through the woods in . . . Alpine hat, home-made corduroy shorts and a sort of plaid wrap'. The book is £8.99 + £1.60 postage and packaging. Please see www.professor-of-adventure.com for purchase details.

LDHS member John Harrison has also written a book on local history,[1] but it is not about Loughton. He covers the history of vehicle registrations in Warrington.

At first blush one is tempted to ask why Warrington and why vehicle registrations? The author gives the answers in his Introduction: (1) to mark the centenary of vehicle registration in Great Britain; (2) because it is a fascinating hobby; (3) because the Warrington scenario illustrates a wider picture; and (4) because he is in a special position to write it, having been brought up in Warrington.

I soon became engaged with the historical minutiae, including the allocation of codes for different areas. Warrington started with the ED code in December 1903 and by 2 January 1904 41 cars and motorcycles and 31 drivers had been licensed. John goes on to chart the expansion of the system to keep pace with the increase in the popularity of motoring. Things really started to change in the 1930s with Warrington issuing its first three-letter code in 1936. The three letter codes kept everybody happy until they reached YED 999 in 1960. Then basically the numbers came first, but this only lasted until 1964 when year letters were introduced. Much detail is given of the way these registration letters were used and of the sale of some of the more desirable ones at auction. (Essex CC's F1 registration from 1904 was recently estimated to be worth £150,000.)

The author covers the administration of the system both by the county borough and by the Warrington Local Vehicle Licensing Office from 1974. There is a section on Warrington registrations today and the history of trade plates in the town.

For the historian, registrations can be very useful in dating old photographs and this book will certainly help in this respect

The book has six appendices which give further information on Warrington's records; the vehicles suffixed with the number 1 – ED 1, AED 1, etc.; some other Warrington registrations; contemporary cuttings from local papers on registration arrangements in 1903, 1904, plus a history of car ED 1 from 1929. There is a reprint of an article from 1936 entitled 'The Open Road' which traces the early history of motoring in Warrington and, finally, sources of information.

All this is available in 40 A4 pages (with photos of some of the vehicles mentioned in the text) from the author (see below).

John has a thrown light on a subject which we see around us every day and on which we usually have fragmentary knowledge. It is an interesting and different kind of historical read. TED MARTIN

1. John Harrison: *Not Quite a Century: The History of Warrington's Vehicle Registrations. A Book to Mark the Centenary of Vehicle Registrations in Great Britain*. Available from the author, price £4, at 175 Hillyfields, Loughton, Essex IG10 2PW. E-mail harrison@unisonfree.net.

Spies and Epping Forest

ALAN W SMITH

From the 1890s onwards there was a positive flood of literature – whether frankly fictional or allegedly predictive – about the expected clash between Britain and Germany. Much of this material has been collected by I F Clarke in *The Great War with Germany 1890–1914* (Liverpool University Press, 1997). Casually dipping into this, I found some curious local references.

In Britain the anticipated German invasion fostered a belief that the country was already infested with spies and 'conspicuous as the spokesman of the spy-alarmists' was Colonel Lockwood, MP for Epping. It is perhaps a shame that the exotically named Amelius Mark Richard Lockwood (1847–1928), later first Baron Lambourne, should be remembered for this (rather prolonged) 'moment of madness' in his otherwise worthy career. He was MP for Epping from 1892 to 1917, vice-president of the RSPCA, a campaigner against vivisection, an active horticulturalist and, from 1919, Lord Lieutenant of Essex.

In July 1908 he informed the House of Commons that he knew of German spies 'charged with the mission of securing photographs of Epping Forest'. This ludicrous claim attracted the attention of the former Berlin correspondent of *The Times*, Charles Lowe, who attacked Lockwood and others for propagating fantasies. 'It almost savours of insanity', he wrote, 'to ask us to believe that German officers give themselves the trouble to make sketches and maps of the Epping neighbourhood when . . . they can buy as many sections as they like of our Ordnance Survey maps which would more than satisfy the wants of any invader.'

Mr Clarke's book contains many more examples of Essex-focused fantasies, culminating in the assertions of another miltary man, Colonel Driscoll, that England had been infiltrated by German soldiers, who were now all concealed as civilians, and perhaps numbered as many as 350,000. Until such rumours were blown away in 1914, Lockwood and those like him were mercilessly lampooned in *Punch* and, most splendidly of all, by a weekly series of cartoons in the *Sketch*. The first of these showed spike-helmeted German soldiers swinging from the forest trees while a diminutive boy scout patrols below.

The Great War with Germany 1890–1914 is strongly recommended for the light that it throws on the powers of the imagination when unfettered by mere facts.

Passengers identified

In our recent book *Life in Loughton 1926–1946* Plate 9 depicts a group on the old Loughton station about 1930. The caption added that 'the names of the people are, unfortunately, unknown'. Well, not any more.

Peter Woodhouse, the author of the book, received a letter from Norman Warbis who lives in Loughton. In part the letter read as follows:

'My reason for writing is that when I looked at Plate 9 I was surprised to see that the unidentified people in the foreground . . . were my uncle and aunt, John and Doris Warbis, and Doris's mother, Mrs Solman. Doris is obviously in a late state of pregnancy, which dates the photograph to August or September 1930, as my cousin Stella was born that September.

My uncle was quite well off for a working man. After three and a half years in India, where he was the editor of a newspaper called the *Calcutta Statesman,* he returned in 1926 and bought a house in Church Hill and married his long-time sweetheart. A few years later he bought a fair sized field near Looe in Cornwall where he had a house built for use as a holiday home. As the war clouds gathered in the 1930s he determined that, should war break out, his wife and children would live in the Cornish home. In fact I was on holiday with them in Cornwall when the war broke out. Doris and the children never returned to live in Loughton and my parents and I were invited to occupy the Church Hill home and to look after my uncle while he continued his employment in London. That is how I came to live in Loughton, a place which I always regarded, and still regard, as a wonderful place in which to live. My uncle retired down to Cornwall (aged 47, if you please) immediately after the war. . . . .

Interestingly enough, I notice that my rather charismatic late brother, who lived in Chingford, gets a mention in the notice on page 53.'

In a telephone conversation Mr Warbis also told me that his uncle was an accomplished chess player with the Leyton club and represented Essex at chess. Mr Warbis's brother was involved in amateur dramatics with Richard Ripley who ran a local group and also, later, at Chingford. TED MARTIN

Memories of Hackney Empire

JOHN JAMES

The Hackney Empire Theatre has recently been refurbished. This has prompted John James, the father of Society member Barbara Harrison, to pen a letter containing the following about his visits to the theatre when he lived in the East End in his youth. John James now lives in Bognor and is 93 years old.

Uncle Will and I had some great times at the Hackney Empire. The programme was nearly always individual turns. Some came about every six or eight weeks. Dicky Henderson's patter was always the same and we used to say it with him.

One turn I well remember was supposed to be a singer and boxer. His singing was awful and boxing even worse, so Uncle Will showed his appreciation in

true cockney style. We then saw the doormen who were 'chuckers-out' coming in our direction. Uncle Will immediately jumped up and turned round looking to see if he could spot anyone near us who would dare to do such a thing. The 'chuckers-out' were convinced by his action and quickly retired.

Another clear memory I have of the Empire was that it had two houses a night and of course in those days, 75 years ago, you were allowed to smoke during the performance so, as you left the first house, you were treading on a carpet of cigarette butts and monkey-nut shells. All the doors were thrown open and the attendants went round with disinfectant sprays to sweeten up the place for those coming into the second house.

Residential names

JOHN R REDFERN

Some members may recall that in *Newsletter* 98 (September 1988) there was an exchange of correspondence concerning the naming of Alma Cottage, Loughton, and Isandlwana Villa in Smeaton Road, Chigwell.

The practice of giving names to houses is one that has always interested me – there is usually a reason for the name chosen.

In their centenary year I can draw attention to two more in Turpins Lane, Chigwell. Numbers 25 and 27 carry the title Mexboro Villas and numbers 51 to 61 are called Manor Villas. Numbers 25 and 27 were built by my grandfather, who hailed from Mexborough, near Rotherham, in Yorkshire and who lived in Turpins Lane from 1904 until his death in 1954. Numbers 51 to 61 stand at the entrance gate to the rear of Chigwell Convent which, in 1904, was still known as The Manor House – hence the name given to the new dwellings. It is quite possible that the present occupants are unaware of the reason for the name of their villas.

Perhaps readers can draw attention to other early meaningful names. It was the only way of identifying properties in the days before street numbering. I was born at No 2 Belgrave Terrace (now 777 High Road, Chigwell) and lived later at No 4 Hans Cottages (now 15 Brunel Road, Chigwell).

Old news from the news

Eve Lockington found some pages from the Loughton Independent, *dated 13 May 1966, which contained an historical article on Loughton by Valerie Green. Here are some extracts:*

'[E]xcavation work started [1882] on Loughton camp which had been discovered 10 years earlier by B H Cowper. Work on the site . . . revealed evidence of pre-Roman life. There were the remains of charcoal fires, fragments of coarse pottery and odds and ends such as flints.

The biggest event to occur to the people of Loughton in the mid-19th century was the coming of the railway.

Until the line from Stratford and London was opened in 1856 there were coaches to London twice a day and a wagon service every weekday except Friday.

Coaches were still running to Epping until 1865 when the railway was extended to Epping and Ongar.

By 1863 there were 12 trains a day to London and 30 years later this figure had more than trebled. . . .

Between 1851 and 1871 the population doubled and by 1882 it was 2,851. . . .

At one time water was a very scarce commodity and pumps were regarded as status symbols and separately assessed [for] the rates. Piped water was first supplied by the East London – later Metropolitan – Water Board in 1866.

Part of south Loughton was sewered about 1871. Since the late 1840s there had been several Nuisance Removal Committees which had tried to improve the village's appalling sanitation by the threat of legal proceedings against householders.

It was not until 1890 that nearly every home in Loughton had sewerage.

Gas was supplied from 1873 by the Chigwell, Loughton and Woodford Gas Company.

This was two years after telegraphy was introduced. A few years before this a sub-post office was opened.

But shopping facilities were not particularly good as the middle class mostly shopped in London.

The number of middle-class homes increased steadily and so, of course, did the demand for servants. . . .

But the ordinary villager who was not a tradesman or farm worker – there were 14 farms at this time – [was] in great demand as [a] servant.

Competition for their services was keen, so their wages had to be reasonably good.

One employer lamented that he could not get a gardener under £1 a week, whereas a few years earlier the pay was 12s.

Although domestic service continued to be a major working class occupation until the Second World War, industry began to filter into Loughton towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Nursery gardening became popular after 1862 when Messrs William Paul and Son of Waltham Cross established there nursery here.

New building after 1880 took place mainly on several estates along or near the main road. The Queen's Park estate, bounded by York Hill, Pump Hill and Church Hill was developed in 1886 after the death of the last owner, George Burney. By 1895 there were 25 houses along the Church Hill front of the estate but in Queens Road only six had been built so far. Parts of the estate were still to be built on by the 1930s.'

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