LOUGHTON & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER 163

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Odds and Ends

Essex Record Office. Following the reorganisation of the Essex Record Office last year, a forum was established earlier this year to represent the interests of those who use and value the ERO. The Forum brings together representatives of the major organisations concerned with history in Essex. The Group has now met twice with County Council representatives.

At the second meeting in July the Council representatives advised that a review is being undertaken of the services that it offers to those London boroughs which were formerly in the administrative county of Essex and where the ERO still holds and makes accessible records as a history legacy.

The meeting was also told of the Council's need to review its current level of support for the Victoria County History of Essex, and it seems likely that while expressing support for the organisation, it is clear that the Council will cut deeply into its current annual grant. We are fortunate that the existing ten volumes of the VCH already cover most of south-west Essex. The Loughton section of the Essex Victoria County History (Volume IV) is now available online at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/source.asp?pubid=53&place=3520>

Among subjects to be discussed at forthcoming meetings are the Archive Service Points, including the one at Loughton. Although the terminal is now in place at the Library, it is not yet operating due, I believe, to delays in having the material available which we asked should be digitised first. RICHARD MORRIS

Epping Forest – Heritage Interpretation Plan. Earlier this year the Conservators of Epping Forest commissioned consultants to produce a Heritage Interpretation Plan for the Forest. After much consultation and debate the Consultants' final report has been published. At the November meeting of the Epping Forest Committee at Guildhall, the Superintendent of Epping Forest is expected to present his recommendations with regard to implementing the proposals contained in the report and whether the Conservators should seek funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund for some of the major items.

RICHARD MORRIS

The Hertfordshire and Essex Architectural Research Society. The Society's Winter programme is as follows: 12 Nov 2004, Brenda Watkin: *Recent Vernacular Discoveries*; 10 Dec 2004, Alan Bayford: *VAG visit based in Scarborough* (followed by seasonal refreshment); 14 Jan 2005, Elphin Watkin: *VAG visit to Eastern USA*; 11 Feb 2005, Georgina Green: *The English Gentleman and his Country Estates*; 12 Mar 2005, Alan Bayford: *King's Lynn*; 5 Apr 2005, Beth Davies: *Vernacular Stone Buildings in North Huntingdonshire*; 13 May 2005, AGM, followed by review of Summer Visits 2004

The meetings usually take place in Loughton. Further information may be obtained from K Pollard (Secretary) 01708 473646. Kpolrm11@aol.com

Erratum. In Chris Pond's article 'Recent Local Books' in *Newsletter* 162, the reference to the 'German family', three paragraphs from the end, should, of course, have read 'Gernon family'.

Loughton's Motor Industry – II

JOHN HARRISON

When I wrote about Wilson's Coachworks under the heading 'Loughton's Motor Industry' in *Newsletter* 157 (April 2003), little did I know there would be a sequel! As editor of my own newsletter on vehicle registrations, one of my contacts wrote to me asking if I was aware of Ashley Laminates who made bodies for specials based at the Robin Hood Roundabout, Loughton. In leafing through an old edition of *Motor Sport* he had seen their advertisement. I was intrigued and wanted to know more.

As background, I think it would be helpful to explain what a 'special' was. After the war, there was a shortage of cars and the priority was the export market. One way to get a new-looking vehicle was to buy a tired old Austin 7 or small Ford, remove the body and put a new fibreglass sporting body on it and you had your own sports car. Glass fibre was obviously a new material then and the specials industry exploited its lightness and suitability for small-scale car body manufacture. A large number of small companies were set up specialising in making such bodies and several were based in north London or the nearby Home Counties. Eventually

the bottom fell out of the market due to a combination of factors, particularly changes to purchase tax making these cars more expensive, the switch to cars with monocoque construction and the advent of cheap sports cars, particularly the Austin Healey Sprite. The industry had largely died out by the early 1960s, though one name survives from the companies established in this area. This is Lotus. This started in Hornsey in 1952, moving to Cheshunt in 1959 and finally to Norfolk in 1966. Other marques which started out as specials manufacturers elsewhere in the country that still survive are Ginetta, Lola, Marcos and TVR.

The obvious question my friend's information raised was where exactly was this company based. There is a house of 1960s appearance adjacent to the Robin Hood and my initial thought was the house was granted planning permission on the site of the factory to eliminate a non-conforming use in the Green Belt (we town planners are prone to make such assumptions!). In fact the house is not modern but it was refurbished in the 1960s. The Ashley premises were situated in a garage between the pub and the house, a garage that was demolished in the late 1960s so the Robin Hood car park could be enlarged. A postcard of the Robin Hood showing the garage presumably not all that long before it was demolished exists in the Loughton Library Local History Collection.

Ashley Laminates was founded by Keith Waddington and Peter Pellandine in 1955. The name 'Ashley' was chosen as it was the name of Peter Pellandine's house in Woodford Green. In late 1956 Peter Pellandine split from the partnership by amicable agreement and set up Falcon Shells, another specials company. Peter had wanted to own and grow his own company which he could eventually sell to emigrate. Falcon Shells was originally based at 23 Highbridge Street, Waltham Abbey, adjacent to the Town Hall, premises which still remain. The company also had a showroom at 52 High Street, Epping, a building which has subsequently been demolished. It later moved to 150 Great North Road, Hatfield. Peter Pellandine took with him the rights and tooling to manufacture the short wheelbase bodyshell for the Ashley 750 which he continued in production as the Falcon Mark I and the Sports Racer which became the Falcon Mark II. The company subsequently produced other bodies until it ceased production in 1964.

After approximately two years, Ashley Laminates moved their body manufacture to the Potteries in Upshire, retaining the Robin Hood premises as a showroom. Bert Miller who now runs the tea bar on the High Beech Road near the Robin Hood and worked for Ashley Laminates whilst they occupied the premises adjacent to the Robin Hood tells me that, when they were based there, the first task each day was to move completed shells outside to the front so they had room to do other work. The bodies then had to be returned at the end of the day. It is not surprising, therefore, that the company moved to the larger premises in Upshire! According to Bert, when the company was based there it had around nine employees. In 1961 the company moved again, this time to Bush Fair, Harlow, but the following year production of bodies ceased. The company, however, continued to manufacture fibreglass hardtops and bonnets for sports cars. Keith Waddington died prematurely in the mid-1960s and around 1972 the company was wound up.

In Part III I will look at the 'cars' or more strictly bodyshells and other products supplied by Ashley Laminates. At the Society meeting to coincide with the appearance of Part III, I intend to have a small display of pictures from contemporary advertisements and brochures of Ashley products. I have no plans for a Part IV to this series, but if somebody else tells me of another Loughton vehicle producer, watch this space!

Gertrude Green's memoirs

CHRIS POND

During the autumn of 2003, our LDHS member, Elna Green, told me that she and her cousin, Margaret Wilkes, née Parsons, who lives in Canada, had spent much time deciphering some notes which had been written by her grandmother as a record of her life, and which had been intended as a gift to her granddaughters.

The 'notes' were 116 pages of typescript, originally written in longhand on scraps of paper and bits of writing pad by Gertrude Green in 1959, 1960 and 1961. I read them with growing fascination, because here was that rarest of documents, a complete biography and family history of working-class people before the days of the tape-recorder. Moreover, from the LDHS's perspective, the whole of the narrative had taken place in Loughton, it had been unprompted, it was written by a cottager from the poorest part of the affluent town, Smarts Lane, and its memories seemed to be both accurate and wide-ranging. Here, then, was an account of Loughton life, not 50 or 75 years ago, but up to 125 years – truly a valuable document.

The way the notes were compiled, over a period of three years, meant there was a good deal of repetition. There was a large amount of family lore and the form of writing was very often conversational.

When Elna and Margaret talked about the notes, it was obvious they realised that publication was highly desirable – indeed, Gertrude herself had envisaged publication – but that some editing would be called for.

My Life in Loughton by Gertrude Green is published on 11 November to coincide with my talk at the November meeting.

What, then, does this text tells us about Loughton, and indeed, about working-class life generally? First, its readability and grammar tell us of the soundness of the education the Loughton National School provided. A generation before, Gertrude may well have had no schooling, and been unable to read or write; yet here she

is in old age relishing the writing of a book. She was obviously a most intelligent lady, who may have had a career in teaching, had her parents been able to afford it.

Her parents moved about Loughton, as she herself did, but they did not leave the village. The Greens had no reserves of cash, and life was not easy, but they managed, and raised a large family with no deaths of children beyond the neonatal. The family lived in a four or five-roomed cottage, and, to supplement their income, they often took a lodger as well, or cared for an elderly relative. Space, therefore, was at a premium. Society in the Lane was all-important, with neighbours helping each other and assisting with the children. With a husband in a job that was not at all well paid, Gertrude herself had to work; she and her neighbours made their living from their rich neighbours in Ollard's Grove, Connaught Hill, or Station Road, by sewing or being daily helps, and it was quite the rule for girls to go into service. The world of the Lane was so far removed from the literary and scientific elite of Loughton I wrote about in *Buildings of Loughton and Notable People of the Town* as to be in a quite a different world. However, the two worlds were interdependent, in that neither sector could exist without the other, to provide employment on the one hand, and service on the other.

It has often been written that Loughton was a very polarised society, not just into rich and poor, but also into church and chapel. The Greens were firmly 'church' – that is, Gertrude went to St Mary's Church (which, as she says, was itself radically different – much 'lower' – than its Anglican mother parish of St John's, and still is to this day). It is interesting that the churching of women after childbirth (a special service of thanksgiving in the 1662 Prayer Book for deliverance from the trial of childbirth) still went on as a matter of routine in 1900. But it was the church that was one of the social support networks for the cottagers of the Lane. When Gertrude became ill, the church paid for her to go to a convalescent home at Meads, Eastbourne. We are fortunate that a lot is known of this organisation, which Gertrude thought was Catholic – in fact, it was a 'high' Anglican order, run by the mother church of Tractarianism, All Saints, Margaret Street.

The stay, for Gertrude and her baby, cured her of what could easily have been a disabling illness. Indeed, one marvels at the amount of medical care the Greens could call upon, in those days, 50 years before the NHS. In Loughton in 2004, a home visit from a GP would be a red-letter day indeed; then it was routine. And massive bills did not follow, for Loughton's two doctors tailored their charges to the pockets of their patients.

Gertrude does not seem to have had much contact with the nonconformists, though in later years, she 'gate-crashes' the Union Church outing to Clacton to visit a relation! But St Mary's Church, with its savings clubs, its Mothers' Union, and in the 50s, its old folks' club, was very much her social focus.

One side of the family had come to Loughton from Matching before Gertrude was born. Migration between outlying areas of West and North Essex to Loughton had been common, especially when Loughton became the railhead in 1856. Gertrude had many contacts with Matching and the Lavers, and frequently went to Epping, but does not appear to have had much to do with inner London or the Chingford-Walthamstow area, though one of her sons went to Walthamstow with his employer. Her husband, who worked with Gould's, the corn and forage merchants, as a carter, also travelled the villages, and Gertrude recounts how she hitched a ride to Lambourne on the corn cart.

Throughout the narrative, Loughton is described as 'the village'. It certainly was a village – or two or three villages – in Gertrude's childhood, but by the 1950s, it had become a town of some 30,000 people. On her bus journeys around the town, Mrs Green notices without rancour how old landmarks had disappeared, how others had survived, and some had found a new use. She remarks how Chigwell Lane Station seemed very old-fashioned with its electric trains, and how the wheelwright's in Church Hill had become a secondhand car sales pitch. 'Loughton now has a Fine Fare supermarket', she records elsewhere (this was the building adjacent to the Methodist Church on its south), though she was to miss the building of one of the biggest supermarkets in the country at the time (the Co-op) in the High Road in 1962.

'We were very social neighbours' relates Gertrude. That is something that has been lost over 130 years. On another social matter, one imagines that few Loughton girls of 2004 would much relish the method of ear piercing that Gertrude and her friend adopted.

The Loughton of the excursionists is also described – how people would come in their thousands to the Forest. The Brown family worked for a while at the Robin Hood, and Gertrude records how the villagers would go along to the Epping New Road to view the brakes with their gaily dressed and noisy East End visitors, their flags and their music. She does not mention selling refreshments to visitors in Forest Road and Smarts Lane, as many did, although Gertrude did sell them flowers; but the Victoria Tavern field, with its fairs and circuses, is discussed, together with the utility of elephants in countering Loughton mud. So is the Shaftesbury Retreat, with its crowds of day visitors from inner London, among the many thousands of whom was at one time a relative, who sought her out.

Perhaps most important in connection with the Forest is the view expressed of the Corporation of London takeover in 1878. This is an event all present-day Loughtonians would regard as axiomatic in the town's history, for it preserved the Forest for all time. Yet the locals did not see it like that. 'Our freedom of the Forest was lost', says Mrs Green, in a poignant phrase. No longer could they take their wedges and beetles (or large mallets) to break up wood and take it home for fuel. Instead of a great free place, wild and

open, but directed to the needs of the cottagers, that sustained the village, they saw it becoming subject to all sorts of rules. So, says Mrs Green, they called it, with great irony, *Mackenzie's Forest*, after the Scottish superintendent; and great must have been their glee to hear the story of the same superintendent's wife apprehended digging up primroses. The primrose has indeed almost died out in the Forest proper, through digging and the ever-denser canopy, but it survives and thrives in cottage gardens round the Forest edge. The interests of the poor cottagers were represented by the Epping Forest Commoners' Defence Association, of which Percy Lindley was secretary: one of the long-standing inhabitants they put up as possible litigants, when depasturage was restricted only to those with more than half-an-acre, was Joseph Webb, no doubt a relation of Gertrude's grandfather, Francis Webb.

The coming of the Great War also brought many changes to Loughton and to the Green family. Gertrude's eldest daughter, Dolly, married Ben Gower, who was in Loughton as an orderly to the military hospital, Braeside, Ollard's Grove. His family came from Hertfordshire, so the daughter went to live at Codicote, with which Mrs Green would have contact for the rest of her life. Another daughter married a Welshman she had met in the Forest, following the age-old occupation of cattle droving and dealing.

With the publication of these memoirs, Loughton has a pretty full account of the lives of its people, of different social and economic backgrounds, going back with Mrs Green to the late 1870s. We can compare Gertrude's account with that of Percy Ambrose, born 1907, of Peter Woodhouse (came to Loughton 1926), and Michael Chater (1930s). Perhaps we now need someone who grew up in the Loughton of the 1950s to complete the story.

[The book is available at our meetings or by post from the Chairman.]

Loughton, not to be mistaken with . . .

'Loughton, a village and parish, situated a little northward of the principal turnpike-road, (which crosses the northern part of the County, from the Brickhills to Stoney-Stratford, in the line of the ancient Roman road, called Watling Street,) nearly opposite to the 49th milestone from London, on a little stream, which, running south-west, passes through Bradwell to Wolverton, to join the River Ouse. It anciently consisted of two manors and two parishes, each having its respective church, and distinct possessors, Rectors, and Patrons, under the denominations of Great and Little Loughton, until the union of the two parishes, and their ecclesiastical consolidation, circ. 1408, in the reign of King Henry IV.'

[From *The History and Antiquities of the County of Buckingham,* by George Lipscomb, 1847.]

The parish exists today just north-west of Milton Keynes, three miles south-east of Stony-Stratford, on the A5.

'1912 and all that'

RICHARD MORRIS

Judging from the following particulars of five plots of land for sale in Loughton in 1912, Estate Agents hyperbole existed even in those days:

'This estate, which from its position is the finest and most exclusive in the neighbourhood, being on a hill, with views (that can never be shut out) over Kent and Surrey, is on the verge of an extensive Woodland of over 5,500 acres, and the portion of the Estate now offered having formed part of a Gentleman's Garden is in splendid cultivation and includes, besides valuable timber, an exceptionally well made full size Tennis Court.

Loughton (according to the Local Board's Report and Statistics) one of the healthiest localities in England is, unlike most of Essex, hilly, and for country scenery a revelation to the Town Visitor who has thought it impossible to find rural beauty within 12 miles of the Metropolis.

Quiet lanes and Forest paths afford rest for tired eyes and wearied brains, while for the socially inclined there are Golf (3 courses), Tennis, Hockey, Cricket, Football and Rifle Clubs, Dramatic and Musical Societies, with Hunting and Polo, Good Public Hall, Library and Reading Room.

The local education facilities for Boys and Girls are exceptional, and the whole sanitary condition of the District as perfect as modern science can make it.

The Daily and Season Ticket rates are very moderate, the First Class fare return being £4 3s 9d and Second, £3 4s 3d per quarter, Liverpool Street.'

The plots for sale were on the northern corner of Pump Hill and Church Hill.

LOUGHTON & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Registered Charity No 287274 www.loughtonhistoricalsociety.org.uk

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