

# NEWSLETTER 174

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2007

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## Welcome to the 2007/8 season

It has certainly been a mixed summer, not one of the best as we go to press, but at least we did not have to worry about hosepipe bans! The Committee is sure existing and new members will appreciate the wide-ranging programme of speakers and presentations that Richard Morris has so carefully compiled. A fascinating series is in prospect.

## Loughton Festival a great success

*Published verbatim in our Newsletter with kind permission from Lawrence Greenall on behalf of the Waltham Abbey Historical Society Committee. It may be some months since the event(s), but its success is well worth recalling.*

**'April 2007** – The first ever *Loughton Festival*, held on the first weekend of April, proved a delightful success for the organisers, contributors and volunteer helpers – and, of course, for its many visitors! Many more tickets were sold than expected, and some events were almost completely sold out.

The weekend kicked off at Loughton Methodist Church with the presentation of awards for the Children's Art Exhibition, followed by a lecture given by Dr Chris Pond, on *Loughton's Literary Heritage*, introducing us to the many literary figures that have Loughton connections with great insight. No meal of many courses ever began with a more appetising starter!

Following this was a delightful exposition of John Clare's life and times whilst he was resident in Epping Forest. Peter Cox of The John Clare Society painted a simply charming picture of what the Forest meant and was to Clare, with extracts from his poetry and references to the friends he made whilst walking its verdant glades.

Meanwhile, at The National Jazz Archive in Loughton Library, workshops were laid on for Loughton's future literary geniuses and for various book-reading groups, and especially for those who enjoyed Julia Golding's *The Diamond of Drury Lane*, winner of both the Nestlé Children's Prize and the Ottakar's Children's Book Prize in 2006, as the author herself spoke about her work.

Other talks that day included Loughton's War Poet – Edward Thomas in Essex (given by Anne Harvey of the Edward Thomas Fellowship and Prof David Stevenson of the London School of Economics), and a very colourful and wittily delivered introduction to the forthcoming new edition of the Essex volume of Pevsner's *Buildings of England*, given by its editor Dr James Bettley.

### Forest walk to High Beech Church

On Sunday 1st April only true fools stayed away from the *Literary Walk in Epping Forest*, led by John Juchau of West Essex Ramblers and David Stevenson, as it proved so popular that at one point it was feared that late bookers would have to be turned away. During the morning's walk, everyone was first given a tour of Queen Elizabeth's

Hunting Lodge, then later enjoyed two short talks on John Clare and his time at Dr Allen's Asylum, then famed for its advanced ideas on therapeutic treatment, given at the Suntrap Forest Education Centre (housed in one of the Asylum's old homes).

After an excellent lunch at The Church of the Holy Innocents, High Beech, Professor Leonee Ormond of King's College and the Tennyson Society gave a very revealing lecture on Alfred Lord Tennyson's sojourn at Beech Hill House, detailing his family history, his friendships (including the ill-fated one with Dr Allen), and his rise as the Poet Laureate. Not a stone remained unturned, yet every single one was returned with care to its rightful place by this accomplished speaker.

Then followed a reading from Arthur Morrison's *Tales From the Mean Streets*, given at the author's graveside by Stan Newens, MEP, a prominent Labour politician, who then treated us all to an eye-opening account of the author's career. Stan explained how the author had been so careful to disguise his own origins that debates had raged over whether he was writing from his own experiences of abject poverty or whether he really came from a genteel family and made it all up! But his writing, in the realist style, was undeniably so masterful that no-one could identify the truth of the matter!

Stan went on to explain that later attempts by various biographers to settle the question of Morrison's origins proved only partially successful yet still inconclusive. However, Stan's own research has been rewarded with the discovery of new source material which proves beyond doubt that Arthur Morrison did indeed grow up in the kind of streets he wrote about. Stan showed that even his literary Old Jago Street was a surprisingly thinly-disguised Old Nichol Street in real life, and with the aid of maps and census entries revealed how that East-End neighbourhood was indeed Morrison's own as a child.

### An Arthur Morrison Society?

At the conclusion of Stan's revealing lecture, Sue Taylor, Director of the Loughton Festival, revealed that in direct response to the festival's publicising, she had received numerous enquiries about Arthur Morrison and had even received a number of appeals to found an Arthur Morrison Society, suggesting that its worthy aim might be to have the author's churchyard memorial renovated. Stan Newens praised the idea, saying that studying the author's life and works was of the utmost value to our literary, social and political heritage and that the memorial deserved to be looked after, and a little later Sue announced that she had just been given the first contribution towards such a venture.

The weekend's events were concluded with a fine lecture on Hesba Stretton by Dr Chris Pond, in which he revealed just how much of the author's literary locations were based on local streets and places, and a wonderful compilation of poetic, prosaic and musical excerpts all related in one way or another to Epping Forest, performed by The Poetry Collective in collaboration with Maggie Goble and Madeline Seviour of The Roding Concert.

Perhaps the only disappointment of the weekend was the last-minute cancellation of a play which was to have been performed as a Schools Collaborative Project by students from Davenant Foundation, Debden Park and Roding Valley Schools, after Davenant School pulled out at the eleventh hour, leaving the other two in the lurch. But

this failed to diminish the great success of what will no doubt become a favourite fixture on the local annual events calendar. We look forward to see how next year's Loughton Festival takes shape, but a lot depends on how many people from the Epping Forest area come forward to help the Committee organise the event.'

*Mr Greenall adds: 'As Newsletter readers (both WAHS and L&DHS – Ed) are well aware, Sue Taylor is a Committee member of the Loughton and District Historical Society. She is happy to receive any enquiries about the proposed Arthur Morrison Society. Sue is particularly looking for people to help her organise the new society, perhaps with a bit of fundraising or with a bit of occasional administrative help. Sue can be contacted at [outerlondon@aol.com](mailto:outerlondon@aol.com) or on 020 8508 2512.'*

## Letter from Hills Road: life in Buckhurst Hill at the height of the 'Blitz' in 1940

**Richard Morris** writes: In September 1940, Mrs Moulton of Hills Road, Buckhurst Hill, wrote to her daughter Hilda (known in the family as 'Millie'), who taught at Oaklea school, which was in Whitehall Lane, and had been evacuated to Shropshire. The letter tells of the air-raids and the damage they caused and shows the stoicism displayed by people during the war. The letter includes references to Gladys and Mildred who were Mrs Moulton's other two daughters. We are grateful to Mr Robin Bonsall, grandson of Mrs Moulton, for permission to reproduce the letter, the original of which is in his possession.

'2 Hills Road, Buckhurst Hill  
Sat. evening Sept 28th [1940]

My dearest Millie,  
Many thanks for your last nice kind letter, which arrived by first post on Friday morning. I have such a lot to tell you dear, that I scarcely know where to begin. I will start from when Gladys posted your last letter, she had written it during an air raid which lasted for about two hours. The All-Clear sounded about twelve o'clock, and she went shopping & to the post. She had only gone about five or ten minutes, and I was upstairs dusting the bedrooms, when a most terrific explosion occurred, it seemed as if the house was coming down. I rushed downstairs & found that the top half of our front window was blown in, and there lay a heap of broken glass, but the paper had saved it from splintering. I was very frightened & upset so rushed into Mrs Andrews and had a little weep. I then felt better, and she returned with me until Gladys arrived home, she had a nerve racking experience and was a bit upset: she had just gone into the Peatfields shop – the bottles began to fall from the shelves, & the glass was simply raining down in the street very few of the shops escaped, the cause of this was, an unexploded landmine which had fallen in a field between Linders and the railway line, several houses in Stradbroke Grove and Little Plucketts were badly damaged. I am afraid Mrs Joe Davis would be one of them. Mr Harnett told Gladys today that the Brown's, Gooding's and Ledger's are almost uninhabitable. Gladys has seen our ARP Warden & we shall get our window repaired free. But sad to relate this is not the end of our misfortunes, the next night (Thursday) we went to our room about ten o'clock. I was

standing by the table doing my hair, when two terrific explosions occurred and we could hear broken glass falling from our window. Gladys saw me sitting down almost dazed. She bundled me into the cupboard, it sounded in our garden & we didn't know what had happened, so Glad went to call for help from Mr Miller & a friend came in, the former was very charming & assured us there was not any fire, only broken glass, we sat in the cupboard until 2.30. We had the Huns over from approximately eight o'clock until six, we undress at the All-Clear. These bombs or landmines fell one in the river Roding & the other on the edge of Lords Bushes, the houses on the High Road suffered very badly, Chidgeys have scarcely a window intact and the only room at the Daiglen which could be used was the shelter. There is scarcely a shop in Queens Road with windows unbroken, several houses have ceilings down & doors wrenched off. Our damage consists of the front room window and one pane in the morning room. It was wonderful how the glass stuck to the paper and net. But do not be alarmed at all this, we are still quite well & cheery, I am taking the tablets you gave me, when I can remember to do so. I have now managed to put up a bed for myself in the cupboard & slept there quite comfortably last night. I have your fireside chair, with two others and Glad's feather bed on top, we are making her one, by the cupboard door, with a deck chair and we feel much safer there and do not hear the planes and terrific gunfire so plainly. Mildred has been down several times, they have escaped so far, only having a shutter & a door blown open once.

Sunday morning. We had a more peaceful night. The All-Clear went at 2 o'clock we could not understand it, as the guns kept going for another half an hour, we went to sleep & heard no more. Mildred received the spirit stove & was very pleased to have the candles. We do not require a stove now, as we have the gas. I have not heard from Watford lately as I still owe Auntie a letter, but do not feel like writing much, life is not at all normal here now. After the explosions every room was covered in dust & tiny pieces from the ceilings, our house has stood it remarkably well up to the present. If we see any cracks we repair them at once. You need not worry about us dear, we have stood it wonderfully well, and am hoping we have got the worst over.

No news will be good news. Goodbye dear until October 10. With our fondest love

Ever your loving Mother'

*It would be hard to match this letter, but any other memories that can be shared are most welcome.*

## The friendly Scots Guards of 1940 revisited

JOHN REDFERN

*At the end of his piece in Newsletter 171, concerning the late William Whitelaw's attachment as a transport officer in the 3rd battalion of the Scots Guards, stationed near Loughton in 1940, Chris Pond requested any available information from members. Doug Butterfield supplied amusing enlightenment in issue 172, and now we have more from John.*

### 'Re: L&DHS Newsletter No: 171

Yes, someone certainly does know! The Scots Guards were one of a number of regiments who were billeted at Rolls Park during the 1939/45 War – we also had the Hampshire regiment and the Royal Ulster Rifles. "Willie" Whitelaw was

their adjutant at that time, serving with among others, Robert Runcie, later Archbishop of Canterbury.

I recall a very amusing incident related to me by the late G K "Ted" Osborne, for many years Hon Secretary of Chigwell Men's Club.

During the War, Ted organised various functions in Chigwell, either to raise money for charity or to entertain the service personnel based locally – often both objects were achieved at the same time. On one occasion he had arranged a dance at the King's Head, which he knew would be attended by soldiers and also RAF people from the Roding Lane Balloon Centre. He went to the RAF camp and asked to borrow their dance band for the event but was told that all their musicians were booked for another "gig" already. So he went up to Rolls Park to see the adjutant "Willie" Whitelaw to borrow their band.

"Sorry Ted" was the reply, "They are already booked for another 'do' elsewhere. But I have got 4 or 5 pipers you could have instead."

And so the dance at the King's Head turned into an evening of Scottish reels and a good time was had by all!

## Harold Curwen (1885–1949) and The Curwen Press – Part 1

TED MARTIN

In a previous article, in *Newsletter 151*, I wrote about the contribution made by the Plaistow-based Curwen Press and their managing director, Loughton resident Harold Spedding Curwen, to the typographical revival in England in the first half of the 20th century. The purpose of this piece is to tell you a little more about Harold Curwen, the man.

Harold Curwen, the youngest son of Spedding Curwen, was born in 1885 and educated at the New School, Abbotsholme, from 1899. This school at Rocester in Derbyshire was the first of the 'new' public schools which did not conform to 'establishment' education and the rites of the Church of England. It embraced ideals of social fairness and a belief that brain and handwork should be combined. At this school Harold was involved in practical work, becoming adept at cabinet-making and metal-working. While at the school he became interested in the Arts and Crafts movement and developed an appreciation for honest workmanship and beauty in design. For the rest of his life he disliked substandard manufacture and preferred to see how well a thing could be done rather than how cheaply and profitably it could be produced.

His love of excellence was transferred to printing and he became a follower of William Morris who had set new standards in this field in his work and whose philosophy was set out in his paper 'The Ideal Book' (1893): 'a book quite unornamented can look actually and positively beautiful . . . which need not add much to its price . . .'

Harold, who was said to be shy and modest, left the Abbotsholme school in 1903 and entered into a period of intensive training for three years for his future at The Curwen Press, Plaistow, which was the

printing arm of his family's music publishing business. As a disciple of Morris he must have realised even then that the design standards of the work produced at the press were well below Morris's standards, and that, rather than being simple in design, was over-ornate, Victorian and largely unplanned.

For his first year Harold spent time in all the departments of the works in North Street to gain a thorough understanding of the business and the mechanical and craft processes. This, until recent years, was the main method of training managers in the printing industry – today an MBA covers everything and it is no longer considered necessary to understand the process so long as you can read a balance sheet!

In 1906 Harold lived in Leipzig for almost a year with the music printers Oscar Brandstetter. They were a large company with an impressive administrative and production set-up which was not lost on Harold. However, again he was probably not so impressed with their standards of design which were heavy, very ordinary and suffered from illegibility because of the use in Germany at that time of *fraktur* (Gothic or black letter). Harold believed that printing had to be legible and fit for purpose. In 1918 in a talk at Derby he said:

'Printers have a great responsibility in that with equal facility their presses can turn out well-designed things which are a pleasure both to the workers who make them and to all who use them, or shoddy badly designed things which do not fulfil their purpose well and degrade everyone who makes or uses them.'

Perhaps this applies even more acutely today when non-specialists design printed matter on their computers – the genie is really out of the bottle!

In 1907 Harold became a pupil of Edward Johnston at the Central School of Arts and Crafts. Johnston was a teacher of calligraphy who, in addition to designing the typeface still used on the London Underground, was one of the leaders of the typographical revival movement in the early 20th century. Johnston was a great teacher believing that it was necessary to bring simplicity and beauty into handwriting and type design. The lessons Harold learnt from Johnston were transferred to the design of ordinary printing. Harold later designed a sans-serif typeface, Curwen sans-serif, which could be considered to be in the same league as Johnston's type for the Underground and Eric Gill's famous sans-serif.<sup>1</sup>

Harold Curwen joined the Curwen Press full-time in 1908 when music printing accounted for 76 per cent of total sales. The business was more or less static at that time so a change of direction was indicated. There had to be a change from printing for the Curwen music publishing business to undertaking work for outside clients. From the turn of the century the firm had traded as either The Tonic Sol-fa Press or J Curwen & Sons Ltd. It was not until 1915 that it became known as The Curwen Press.

Harold was made a director of the firm in 1911 and took over the management of the Curwen Press at

Plaistow from his father just before the First World War. However, he began to have an influence on the design of the firm's publications from about 1910. Here he was lucky in that his father and his uncle gave their support, provided costs were kept under control. He succeeded in revolutionising the press's output.

It is hard to imagine now, with the tremendous freedom in the interchange of data, how enclosed and resistant to change printing and publishing firms were. Until about 30 years ago, they were constrained by the immovability and inflexibility of metal type. Regular work was kept 'standing' and when a new issue or edition was required the old type was brought out and updated from the textual but not from the design point of view – it would be too expensive to update the design. Some regular publications in my own experience had been in standing type for 60 years! Equally, with little influence from outside, practices grew up which were hallowed by time and could not be altered in any circumstances. This effect was added to by the fact that many people, especially in the provinces, were apprenticed to the same firm in which they subsequently became craftsmen and sometimes managers – so the 'we have always done it in that way' effect was at full strength. Myself and a colleague were only able to get my old firm to abandon Victorian typesetting conventions during the 1970s by showing the directors and the publishers how much paper could be saved – we did this during a time of paper shortage.

There were of course beacons of light during this time, among them the university presses, The Curwen Press and later the Alden Press, Oxford, who were lucky to have enlightened craftsmen in charge of their design and production and equally enlightened managements.

So Harold, who believed that the workplace should be a happy place, had to convince his staff of the value of the new Arts and Crafts influenced design movement, and it is probable that most of the people working there had never heard of William Morris, the Kelmscott Press, Edward Johnston, Emery Walker or Cobden Sanderson at the Doves Press.

In his spare time Harold was a scoutmaster (his troop met in the entrance hall of the works) and he was also interested in photography and 'anything else that turns up'. He married Rose Blanche Wenner in 1912.

Another area that Harold Curwen influenced was the firm's cost accounting which he totally revised into an approved system by June 1913. Deficiencies in this area had been highlighted in 1909 when a report indicated that there was no reliable way of finding which types of work paid and which did not.

He could not throw out all the Victorian typefaces immediately because type was an expensive commodity and could only be replaced when money was available for it. He started by revising the cover of one of the music publications, replacing it with a calligraphic cover which could easily be produced by lithography. He also put in hand the adoption of the new typesetting conventions: close even spacing

between words, no extra space after full stops, good margins and clear unfussy type using black ink on good paper. The same rules that, 60 years later, we needed a paper shortage to get adopted!

I related in my previous article the impact of *The Imprint* magazine on the revival of typography in England. Harold Curwen was a supporter of this initiative, The Curwen Press taking a full page, beautifully typeset advertisement in the first issue of *The Imprint*:

'Harold Curwen of The Curwen Press has studied under one of the editors of this Magazine [Edward Johnston], as well as under other leaders of the movement for improving the style of commercial printing. The staff of The Curwen Press has been trained so that it is able, with the present-day materials, to produce the best results in artistic and forceful Catalogues, Show Cards, Pamphlets, Labels, etc., and also in the printing and binding of beautiful books of every description. Mr Curwen requests permission to call at your address, or to send samples of his work executed at The Curwen Press, Plaistow, London E.'

It will be seen from the above that Harold Curwen made no distinction between 'jobbing' printing (i.e. ephemeral business printing) and the printing of books – a distinction that was maintained in the rest of the printing industry throughout the hot metal era and still exists today.

Harold redesigned the firm's stationery and took his staff into his confidence: explaining his revolution and putting it into practice. There were of course people who did not agree with what he was doing – printing firms were notoriously conservative institutions and guarded their methods and traditions jealously. The firm's manager was unable to accommodate himself to the changes so he had to go and Harold took over his role until a successor could be appointed.

Harold joined the Union House Committee of the London Master Printers Association in November 1916 in the belief that he could bring capital, management and labour together. However, this was a goal too far, which still has not been achieved, so he eventually withdrew from the work of the Association.

Also in 1916, when the firm's representative joined the Royal Navy, a motor-cycle was obtained which Harold and his manager used for visits to customers: so much for the company car!

Harold was pretty near to being a pacifist and did not serve in the First World War but joined the Special Police and continued as a scoutmaster. The offset litho process also took up much of his time, especially the formulation of special inks.

The Design and Industries Association was founded in May 1915 and Harold Curwen became a foundation member. Through this Association he met Joseph Thorp<sup>2</sup> who became an adviser to The Curwen Press and made a tremendous contribution to the company and its sales. He was instrumental in their adopting a trademark (printer's device): a unicorn. In February 1918 Harold was elected to the council of the Association.

It was said that Harold was not an inspired speaker but he did occasionally lecture. His design of Curwen Sans-Serif type has been mentioned but his

more successful design, the Curwen Poster Type, was completed in 1918 and has been described as one of the most successful types for this sort of work that has ever been produced.

There was a shortage of lead for munitions in 1915 and Harold used this as an opportunity to dispose of many old Victorian types that were contrary to his ideas of good design and he was able to get a higher price than usual because of the shortage. This was a courageous act but Harold did not lack courage: 'Most people will remember Curwen as a quiet, mild mannered, almost diffident man; not everyone realized that underneath this unassuming manner lay an inner core of extreme toughness.'

## Notes

1. For more on Edward Johnston see my chapter in the LDHS publication *The Loughton Railway 150 Years On* (2006), pp 89–96.

2. Joseph Thorp joined the Catholic publishing firm the Arts & Book Company and in 1903 transferred to their printers, The Arden Press, who were in trouble. He managed to persuade W H Smith to take it over and thus became a part of that organisation and self-appointed expert on design to the group until 1914.

*The conclusion will appear in Newsletter 175, along with the rest of the notes and suggestions for further reading.*

## A photo quiz

This photograph, kindly lent by Peter Cook, is of a class in what was then called the Council Girls' School, which was added to Staples Road in 1911. The year in question is 1936, the class is Standard V. Can anybody recognise any of the girls?



## Sir William Addison – Priors and Traps Hill House

RICHARD MORRIS

In 2001 a small archive of Sir William Addison's papers was donated to the Epping Forest District Museum. The archive included a manuscript consisting of poems written by Addison, many with a Forest theme. The anthology was subsequently published by the Corporation of London, under the title *Winter Forest*.<sup>1</sup>

Recently a further poem by William Addison has come to light. This was found pasted in to the frontispiece of a copy of his book *Epping Forest – Its*

*Literary and Historical Associations*. The provenance of the copy of the book is unknown, other than it ended up in the stock of the Chelmsford Branch of Essex County Libraries. It is now in the safekeeping of Loughton Library.

This poem does not have a Forest theme, but refers to two of Loughton's distinguished antiquarians and the houses they lived in.

### 'Priors' and 'Traps Hill House', Loughton

These old houses, cheek by jowl,  
Held for years a famous pair,  
William Lewer and Chalkley Gould,  
FSAs<sup>2</sup> and scholars rare.

Others now lift Chalkley's latch,  
William Lewer is eighty-eight.  
'Times have changed' he says as we  
Knock our pipes out on the grate.

'Chalkley died at sixty-two,  
Forty years ago, and yet  
Addison I sometimes think  
These old houses don't forget.'

No, nor we! Let others call  
What they will both theirs and yours,  
'Traps Hill House' and 'Priors' shall be  
Chalkley Gould's and William Lewer's.

William Addison  
Christmas 1946.

Sir William Addison, who was the founder-President, in 1962, of the Loughton & District Historical Society (then known as the Chigwell Local History Society), died in 1992.

## Notes

1. Morris, R (Ed), *Winter Forest and Other Poems by Sir William Addison* (2002) ISBN 0852-03076-2.

2. Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries.

## The true story of 'Keep Fit' for women

JOHN REDFERN

So you thought that the pioneer of 'Keep Fit' classes for women was Prunella Stack with her Women's League of Health and Beauty in the 1930s? Not so – Chigwell had pioneered this movement over 20 years earlier!

In late Victorian times, as often since around the world, there was a campaign of ethnic 'cleansing' as the Armenian community were persecuted in Turkey and Tsarist Russia. As so often before and since, Britain became the place of safety for many refugees from this animosity and a certain Reverend George Thoumaian set up home in a house called 'Oakhurst' in Hainault Road, Chigwell (now demolished but the site would be numbers 102–108 under the current



numbering system). By the time of the issue of *Kelly's Directory* for 1906, he was listed as running a Home for Destitute Armenian Boys at that address.

The Reverend Thoumaian had a daughter who seems to have been rather 'modern' and 'forward' for her time in pre-Great War England, being a friend of the Pankhursts and a supporter of their campaign for female suffrage.

According to her advertising brochure of 1911, she opened the 'First Health Centre for Women of the Upper Classes' in Oakhurst and included a lengthy poem by one Wilfred Mills extolling the virtues of the 'beauty of Chigwell and the quality of the Essex air'. One of the photographs in the brochure shows a 'house party' of 26 women in deck chairs in the garden.

And so the presence of 'Keep Fit' facilities at the David Lloyd Centre, the Repton Park Health Club and Holmes place at Woolston Hall, in the vicinity of Chigwell, are merely following early precedent from almost a century ago, albeit now in a more sophisticated fashion.

## Memories from Mike Alston – the journey continues past Loughton House Stores

TERRY CARTER

*As Mike Alston's memories are such a unique reminder of Loughton from 1928 to WWII, an age long gone and peaceful that many members may sadly miss, we will continue his wanderings, (which began in issues 172 and 173) until West and East are completed. Please remember that these notes and comments appear exactly as he set them down.*

### Journey 1 (the West side)

Beyond the LHS the shops in Forest Road were for me (and my mother) still part of the High Road. Next door was *Penistons*, which was Loughton's nearest approach to a department store – remembering that the men's shop was close by. Further along was the watchmaker, *Sterne* [spelling?], who I recall as a white-haired and bearded man, a bit like Bernard Shaw perhaps. After a row of cottages, there was *Horton*, the fishmonger, where one was served by 2 brothers, one in a cap, and the other, moustached, in a straw boater. At one time they acquired the jaws of an unidentifiable sea monster, and this hung on the wall. And so to *Sandall*, the cobbler – a pleasant man, and daughter(?), and the little shop had a glorious leathery smell. And so across the road to the alley linking it with the High Road, but our route is back down the other side of Forest Road, towards the Lopping Hall. Opposite *Penistons* was the old post office building, then, on the corner of Forest Road and the High Road:

*Rose's*, stationer: This was before the 'reign' of 'Fluffy' Sharp and, as a boy, I always assumed that the quiet tall woman who served there was 'Rose'. But perhaps not

*Frankland*, jeweller:

*Goodall*, baker: Goodall's also delivered our daily bread, by horse-drawn wagon. The delivery man had a frowning face and a large black moustache, and my mother always thought he 'looked Spanish'. His wares were in an enormous basket which he brought to the back door, and my mother was never very happy that he handled all the

loaves with his bare hands – 'He's probably just been handling the horse's nose bag ...'

*The alley from Forest Road*: At this corner various elderly men would gather to pass the time of day. Regularly stopping there was a road sweeper, with a large club foot, who wore a waistcoat and a bowler hat. On the further side of the alley was:

*Cuthbert*, ironmonger: outside there was always a goodly array of pots and pans. Mr Cuthbert had a fine waxed moustache and a bowler hat.

*Whittle*, draper: There was always an air of quiet, and everyone seemed to talk in hushed tones – although it was perhaps the vast arrays of cloth that dampened sound! The place seemed full of assistants, including 'young Mr Whittle' who wore a black lightweight jacket and, of course, a tie. Miss Freda Whittle, the daughter, ploughed her own furrow, as a music teacher.

*The White Shop*: there were, if I remember correctly, two shops, separated by a passage, and they were always a bit 'messy'. At one time there was a rather downmarket greengrocer, and the owner looked a bit 'suspicious'!

*Bowditch*, millinery, ladies wear etc: a large shop with 2 entrances, both reached by a short, and rather hazardous, flight of steps. The shop later became *Parrott's*.

Next door were 2 houses.

*Mr Moser*, dentist: his maid, who answered the door, was a tall and forbidding person, in pale blue uniform, complete with starched cuffs, apron and cap. My heart invariably missed a beat as I stood on the doorstep with my mother, and watched through the door's coloured glass as the maid's ghostly figure approached to let us in – first to direct us into the waiting room, and then into Mr Moser's room, and his drill! Mr Moser, friendly, and immaculately turned out in his silken light grey jacket, looked even more 'dashing' when he wore evening dress on his regular visits to London concerts. His waiting room first introduced me to *Punch* and *The Tatler*!

*Dr Bell*, Medical Practitioner: he was a partner with Dr Walker and their surgery was in Station Road, and this was his private dwelling. I do not know who lived there before he moved in during the mid 1930s.

*Dr & Mrs Butler Harris*: this was a large white house, set well back from the road, with a sweeping drive to its entrance, and fronted by a high fence (or wall?)

*Several large Victorian houses*, each approached by flights of steps: once, in the very early 30s, one had a chimney fire, and I always remember a young child running out, and clutching a doll – perhaps her most treasured possession. Later in the 30s the front gardens were built on and became a row of shops and a bank. Continuing towards Church Hill, the shops were:

*Rita Page*, Children's and ladies' wear: a rather elegant shop, with an uncluttered window display. At some point the shop was sold and became *Boxer's Stores*. This was a very different kind of shop – a sort of ironmongers – with cheap, gaudy wares piled high and all over the outside of the store. Some people thought it quite unsuited to the High Road.

*Cordova Café*: Another rather elegant place, with red and white striped awning, where shoppers could chat over a morning coffee and, maybe, a small cake. Later, it became *Robinson's Café*.

*National Provincial Bank*: Managed during the 1930s by jovial Horace Goodchild, a pillar of St John's Church.

*Durrant's*, shoes: supervised by very professional Mr Durrant, of the huge bushy eyebrows. Later he became even more of a character and could be seen around Loughton wearing corduroys and bright red shirts.

*Warriner and Herd* (or Heard?), builder's merchant: not entirely suited to this location and, for children, a very dull place.

*Dry Cleaners*: the name escapes me, but it was run by a delightful couple.

*The stream*: For most of its life it flowed, peacefully, under the High Road and towards its ultimate destination – the River Roding. But, in 1930, there was a tremendous rainstorm, and it overflowed, flooding the High Road as far

as Goulds. I was then 5¾ and, that momentous afternoon, as I walked home from Mayfield School in Algers Road, I found myself unable to continue towards Traps Hill. Fortunately someone kindly drove (or maybe carried) me to safety on the other side of the surging water. What a tale to tell my mother when I reached home!

*For space reasons and because it was such a dramatic rescue for a 5-year old, 77 years ago, this seems a convenient break in Mike's journey along the High Road and down Memory Lane. What child of 5¾ would be allowed to walk from Algers Road to Traps Hill these days? Thinking about it, what mother would leg it either? I hope members enjoy the nostalgia as their own memories come back or, in the case of newer local residents, can form a congenial picture from these gentle images of the Loughton of about 70 to 80 years ago. We will cross the 'stream' in Newsletter 175.*

## One owner for 60 years, no MOT

JOHN HARRISON

Although I do not have a classic vehicle myself (I do not have the mechanical skills to look after one), I am a member of the Enfield and District Veteran Vehicle Society. One of its members, Colin Spong, told me of a car he has acquired from Loughton and gave me a copy of an article about it from *The Automobile* of October 2006. Not only is the vehicle interesting, but its ownership details are also of interest in terms of local history. The car is an Oldsmobile 70 Touring Sedan first registered with Essex County Council as JHK 415 on 14 January 1941 to Dr Oswald John Silberrad of Dryad's Hall, Loughton. Only 826 models of this type were made in right-hand drive form. It is a large six-cylinder four-door saloon – the rear doors are backward opening, a type frequently referred to as 'suicide doors'. The car had a tax disc expiring at the end of 1959, indicating it had presumably had not been used since then. The engine being completely seized no doubt accounted for its having been laid up. Though first registered in 1941, the car is actually a 1939 model.



The car had been found at Dryad's Hall, Woodbury Hill, the same address where Dr Silberrad first registered it. The house had been built in the mid-nineteenth century as Woodberrie for Robin Allen, the secretary of Trinity House and one of the first of Loughton's many commuters [see Ian

Strugnell's article on Robin Allen in *Newsletter 146*]. Although he had enclosed part of Epping Forest to build the house, he was allowed to retain it under the Arbitrations following the Epping Forest Act 1878. The house then passed to Percy Alden, a journalist and MP for Tottenham. When Doctor Silberrad moved into the house he had it modernised by local architect Horace White of White and Miles, the work being carried out in 1929. In 1933 a laboratory block, again designed by Horace White, was added. Pictures exist of Dr Silberrad working in his laboratory and of his library. The latter featured a stepladder on a 'railway' that ran round the room to facilitate access to the books on the top shelves!

Dr Silberrad was born at Buckhurst Hill in 1878 and studied chemistry at Warzburg University in Germany, among his lecturers being Wilhelm Roentgen who invented x-rays. He was appointed Director and Superintendent at the Research Department at Woolwich Arsenal aged just 23, but did not have a happy time there in getting on with the mandarins at the War Office so left in 1906 after five years. He founded Silberrad Research Laboratories in 1907 and the organisation was based at Dryad's Hall from 1933. His inventions include developing the use of TNT to fire artillery shells and developing an alloy for use in warship propellers which avoided the problem of erosion. Barnes Wallis worked with him for a time during the Second World War; so very probably at some time was a passenger in this car. On one occasion Dr Silberrad injured himself carrying out an experiment in his laboratory and the thought of having a chemical and explosive laboratory in Loughton does leave me worrying about the potential for a mini-Buncefield, but fortunately this did not happen. His papers are deposited in the Science Museum and include an incomplete autobiography. If the Society is short of an idea for its next book, finishing this could be a possibility!

After Dr Silberrad's death in 1960, his son, John, continued to occupy the house until his death in 2005. John was a successful barrister and chair of the Epping Forest Conservative Association. He also had an interest in Shakespeare believing that Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, or one of the other candidates, was the author of his work and a result of this interest was that his life was commemorated by the Shakespeare Authorship Trust instituting a series of John Silberrad Memorial Lectures. It was following his death that the car was discovered. Colin did not buy it straight from the estate, but another person owned it first and unfortunately they stored it outside and some of its bodywork has deteriorated as a result, but nevertheless it is in a lovely time-warped condition. Dryad's Hall has now been sold to Mr & Mrs M Docker of Buckhurst Hill and is undergoing renovation for their occupation.

The car had covered 70,000 miles in the 20 years of use by Dr Silberrad. Colin has brought the car back into commission but at the time of writing has not yet given it its first MOT – it was, of course, taken off the roads before the tests were introduced in 1960. Discounting old vehicles imported from abroad, it will become one of the oldest cars to undergo a first

MOT. Recommissioning the car involved unseizing the engine which was not an easy job and a lot of other work. Interestingly the braking system had been filled with hydraulic oil instead of brake fluid. Maybe Dr Silberrad thought that was a suitable material for the job from his chemical experience or maybe he just had some available left over from some work he was doing and decided to use that. Anyway, this had ensured the steel components of the braking system were perfectly preserved, but all the rubber ones had been changed to black gum and required replacing. The front wings appear to have been damaged and repaired several times and this might have been the consequence of the entrance to Dryad's Hall being quite narrow.

The fact that Dr Silberrad was provided with a car during the war no doubt reflects the important contribution he was making to the war effort. When Colin visited the Essex Record Office to inspect the details of its registration, it was clear most new vehicles being registered at the time were lorries or tractors, plus a few motorbikes, with very few cars being listed. He did, however, have one surprise when he looked on the previous page of the register. On 28 December 1940 another identical Oldsmobile, JHK 378, had been registered to Dr Silberrad. Why his business was allocated two vehicles during wartime restrictions is not very clear, nor do we know what became of that second car.

Before concluding this article I must mention another famous member of the Silberrad family. Dr Silberrad came from a large family, having four brothers and four sisters. One of these sisters, Lucy Una Silberrad (1872–1955) became an eminent author. She lived in Buckhurst Hill until 1931 when she moved to Burnham-on-Crouch with her sister Phyllis. She wrote over 40 novels published between 1899 and 1944, at least several short stories and *Dutch Bulbs and Gardens* (1906), a report of a tour through Holland. Her novel, *Karen of Lowbole* (1913) is likely to be of particular interest to Society members as 'Lowbole' where it is set is based on Loughton. Many of her books including *Karen of Lowbole* contain a lot of scientific information as part of their plots and that was supplied by her brother, Oswald.

If any members can add to what Colin and I have been able to find out about Dr Silberrad and his car, I would be very interested to hear from them. In particular if any older members have memories of Dr Silberrad or this car we would like to know. Being a large pre-war American car it would have stood out as being very unusual on the High Road where Morris Minors, Ford Anglias, Vauxhall Wyverns, etc, would have been the norm. Also, of course, we would like to know more about the mysterious JHK 378.

Thanks are due to Richard Morris and Chris Pond for their assistance in writing this article.

## Sources

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*Six Walks in Loughton's Forest* by Chris and Caroline Pond (LDHS, 2002).  
 Various websites.  
 Biography of Lucy Una Silberrad by Tony Fox (not published but Richard Morris has a copy).

*National Dictionary of Biography* entries for Oswald Silberrad and Lucy Una Silberrad.

## Tailpiece

Following the April talk by Paul Sutton, *The Diary of a Conservation Officer*, it was suggested that we might include a list of locally listed buildings in the *Newsletter*. However, this runs to some 10 pages, so I have only included below the EFDC introduction to the list. I can e-mail the full list of buildings in Loughton, Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell and Theydon Bois on-line, should any members so wish. Contact: terryc03@globalnet.co.uk

### 'What is a Locally Listed building?

Epping Forest District Council has produced a list of buildings and other structures that are of local architectural or historic interest. This list is known as the Local List. It includes a wide variety of buildings and structures that are of local interest, but do not quite meet the national criteria for inclusion on the statutory list.

Locally listed buildings often make an important contribution to the character and appearance of the local scene and many are important local landmarks. Others have important historical links, with famous local individuals and organisations, or they represent significant aspects of the development of a particular area.'



The River Roding south of Loughton Bridge, May 1965  
 Stephen Wilkinson Collection

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