LOUGHTON AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER 176

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2008 Price 40p, free to members

www.loughtonhistoricalsociety.org.uk

Happy new year!

We sincerely hope L&DHS members and all our readers have a pleasant and peaceful New Year. Although we have now entered the second half of our 2007/8 season, there is still much to look forward to until we wind up for the summer on 8 May. Once again Richard Morris has put together a varied programme of excellent talks to suit all tastes, sometimes providing much food for thought, as well as evoking nostalgic memories of our local area. There has been a healthy flow of material for the *Newsletter*, some from regular and reliable contributors, plus a heartening amount from fresh sources, and we hope that members will maintain this encouraging momentum for future issues.

Victoria County History in Essex

RICHARD MORRIS

In *Newsletter 171* (November/December 2006) we reported on the severe financial cut-back facing the VCH in Essex. Two years ago, Essex County Council announced that it was halving the salaries grant given by the Council. In April 2007 the University of Essex gave 12 months' notice of termination of its agreement to house and support the Essex VCH on the University campus at Wivenhoe.

The VCH Board has spent the last nine months seeking a way out of the wreckage. The latest Newsletter of the VCH in Essex reports that it is probable that the editorial staff will return to being on the establishment of the Institute of Historical Research (as they were several years ago) but being housed and funded, in part, by the County Council.

The funding available is, however, likely to reduce the two half-time historians to 0.8 of a post. The proposal is that the VCH staff will work from the County Record Office, but very limited space has initially been offered. The Essex VCH Appeal Fund, to which the LDHS makes an annual donation, will continue to support the core funding but this will be at the expense of using resources to make up for earlier lost funding and for the progress of new initiatives. The recent events have also disrupted current research on Volume XI which, it is now accepted, will be delayed by many months.

We are very fortunate that the earlier volumes of the Essex VCH cover most of south-west Essex, and seven volumes have now been digitised and can be found at www.british-history.ac.uk. There is also a new website: www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/Essex which will allow the publication of draft texts from Volumes XI and XII as they are edited.

The *Victoria History of the Counties of England* was launched in 1899 and, with royal consent, named after the Queen. Never before had county history been researched in such depth or inspired such high standards of scholarship. It would be a tragedy if this work was brought to a halt in Essex by a lack of the relatively small funding cost required.

On a wing and a prayer: The St John Ambulance Air Wing and Margaret (Betty) Bowman, MBE

TERRY CARTER

We are sometimes surprised to learn of the achievements of people that, out of modesty, they rarely mention themselves. One such example is that of Betty Bowman, a close friend and neighbour. Almost the longest serving duty controller in St John Ambulance Air Wing, Betty certainly handled by far the most missions in its 21-year life. She kindly gave me her permission to write this article

The Air Wing commenced its life as a special function of the Epping Division of the St John Ambulance Brigade. It started almost by accident when, in the summer of 1967, Martin Meyer, a 16-year-old German student on holiday in England, was badly injured in a motorcycle crash in Abridge. He was taken to St Margaret's, Epping, but as he was not expected to survive, his parents were urgently summoned to England. However, against all odds, Martin survived for three months in Epping, his mother constantly at his bedside. Then, when no further improvement was anticipated, it was decided to transfer him home to a neurosurgical unit in Germany. The problem was, how? The NHS had no provision for such a transfer, and the RAF, even the USAF, when approached, were unable to help.

Fortunately the Hospital Secretary, Pat Bowen, President of the Epping Division of St John's Ambulance, remembered his friend Eric Thurston, a resident of Theydon Bois, who owned a charter flying company based at the Stapleford Tawney airfield. Eric immediately agreed to undertake the mercy flight in his new Britten-Norman Islander, which he flew to Hanover for only the cost of the fuel, there, because of

foul weather, transferring Martin to a Luftwaffe helicopter.

Sadly, there was no miracle ending for Martin, who died a year later, never regaining consciousness. But his death was not in vain, as it was a case of 'great oaks from little acorns'.

Pat Bowen's interest in the possible use of light aircraft for ambulance work was stimulated by Martin's tragedy, at the same time that surgeons at the London Hospital bemoaned the lack of good transport facilities for kidneys which became available for transplant. After removal, kidneys had only about an eight-hour window of opportunity, after which transplant success became unlikely and, as distances from donor to recipient could sometimes be hundreds of miles, maximum speed, day or night, was vital.

Out of the vision of Pat Bowen and the needs of John Blandy (Professor of Urology at London Hospital, who was a resident of Traps Hill) discussions took place early in 1972 between the DHSS, the London Hospital, Scotland Yard, St John Ambulance and a few volunteer pilots, leading to the establishment of a flying service under the aegis of the Brigade. The Harlow Group Hospitals Committee generously provided accommodation at St Margaret's to be used as a Flight Control Centre.

So the Air Wing came into being on 2 February 1972 and by 1974 full transport of organs and complete surgical transplant teams, plus in-flight intensive care, became feasible when the St John Aeromedical Service began. It would take many more times the space available in this *Newsletter* to list even a fraction of the achievements of the volunteer pilots across the UK. All they received for their time and physical endeavours were flying expenses. Amazingly, the youngest of these flew an emergency mission at 17! Some were well-known heroes from the Second World War, some worked for civil airlines, some, including Eric Thurston, operated their own charter companies. In 1986 Eric was awarded the Sword of Honour for his outstanding contribution to General Aviation by Major-General P R Leuchars, CBE, Chief Commander, St John Ambulance. Eric's flights included ferrying a Harefield heart team from Stansted to Berlin and a heart team to Stuttgart.

Eric would be the first to admit that, while the pilots were 'at the sharp end', delivering kidneys, hearts, livers, lungs, corneas, within the UK and to Europe, enabling many surgeons, some of them world-famous, to undertake their life-saving work, they could not function without the controllers. Together, they made a wonderful team.

One such controller was Betty Bowman, who to this day remains his very close friend. The controllers, originally 18 in number, but settling at about 12, including Pat Bowen, were also volunteers, maintaining a round the clock service, first out of a small room in St Margaret's, before the old chapel, which was some distance from the main wards, was converted in 1974 to a new Control Centre and Operations Room. A new chapel was built nearer the centre of the hospital. Fitted out superbly, the Control Centre had an operating console, and map-lined walls showing not only the UK but also Western Europe and Scandinavia. There was a separate room with a bed for the night duty controller.

Betty Bowman was recruited in September 1973, when she was President of the Chingford Combined Division of the St John Ambulance Brigade. Her daughter, Heather, was Divisional Officer and had arranged for Pat Bowen to give a talk about the new Air Wing. Betty and her newly retired husband, Cliff, ex-RAF, listened, later met a very senior officer, and heard more. Betty then undertook simulated operational tests, before moving on to real-life missions. Cliff helped Betty with call monitoring and planning and Heather, too, began work as a controller. Later, Betty's grandson also became a volunteer.

The Air Wing Control Centre at St Margaret's, Epping, opened in 1974.

Betty recalls: 'We worked from Pooley's Flight Guides for the UK and overseas. It contains all the necessary flight information, airport operating times, etc. Quite often the controller needed to ask the smaller airfields if they would stay open, or even reopen in order for one of our aircraft to land. It's very seldom they couldn't if asked.' She, and the other controllers, would be responsible for arranging the transfer of the body part from its donor location to the most suitable plane available, its storage on the aircraft, maintaining liaison with the hospital from contact to final delivery, then staying in touch with the aircraft until it was safely home.

One of Betty's worst missions was trying to arrange a kidney delivery to Orly, France, in the middle of a wild-cat strike. There was no English-speaking controller at the French end, Betty's French was scant, so it is still a mystery how she made herself understood. Orly opened for a special landing, the kidney was delivered safely, and the airfield immediately closed again.

Betty, fully equipped, eventually operated from her home in Hillcrest Road, Loughton, rather than the Control Centre. Her duty day was normally a Tuesday.

'It was in some ways sad', she reflects, 'that I was invariably busy on Tuesdays because of the high accident rates of Saturdays and Sundays. By late Monday/early Tuesday victims' kidneys have become available. It is sad, because these are the "non-family" donors, who become donors because of their own death or impending death. From their death, however, comes the chance of life or better health for others. Even on occasions when we had problems and things hadn't gone smoothly, at the end of the day all we thought about was that somebody had been given a new lease of life. That is what it was all about, even though it was rare to know the end story. Very occasionally, Harefield might ring up and say the patient is doing well but of course, we could not ask. Medical etiquette, too, restricted what the hospitals could tell us. More often we read the results in the newspapers.'

Some of the more famous surgeons flown by, or who used organs delivered by the Air Wing included: Professor Sir Roy Calne, Addenbrookes; Professor John Blandy, London; Professor Sir Magdi Yacoub, Harefield; Sir Terrence English, Papworth; Professor Paul McMaster, Queen Elizabeth, Birmingham. When you can draw her out, Betty speaks very highly of many of the surgeons, particularly Magdi Yacoub, whom she knew well.

In 1984 the Queen presented the Air Wing with the Britannia Trophy, perhaps the greatest honour which can be bestowed on any organisation or individual in the world of flying. Previous recipients included Alcock and Brown, in 1919, and, in 1965, the Red Arrows.

Times changed. In the late 80s the Civil Aviation Authority demanded that the carriage of surgical transplant teams required commercially registered aircraft and pilots. Extra regulations and operational costs meant that the Air Wing could thereafter only deliver unaccompanied organs in boxes. With such a restricted brief, volunteer controllers stopped coming forward, and finally, on 23 June 1993, its activities were terminated.

In its 21 years the Wing flew over 2,500 successful missions, totalling over 1 million miles, 9,000 flying hours and 185,000 ground control hours.

Betty stayed in the Air Wing right to the end. Almost the longest serving controller, she handled by far the most missions, 939, out of the 2,500 flights, sometimes with three under way at the same time. Heather Lawrence, her daughter, took charge of almost a further 200.

Eric Thurston (left) and Betty Bowman (third from left) in 1986 with two successful transplant patients: Barbara Dawe and Mr E Norman.

Margaret Bowman's honourable career in the Wing and her contributions to various other volunteer organisations were recognised when she received the MBE in 1990.

In 1987 Major-General Leuchars wrote: 'Amongst all the voluntary organisations we have in our country today, I believe that the Air Wing is not only unique, but also perhaps the least known to the public.' Perhaps that lack of knowledge was because of the inherent modesty of the volunteers who gave so much of their time to the Wing.

Almost certainly there are members of the L&DHS who know local people in different fields whose story also deserves to be told.

(For a detailed account of the Air Wing from beginning to end, I refer readers to On a Wing and a Prayer – The Story of The St John Ambulance Air Wing *by Norman Franks, published by St John Ambulance, a Foundation of the Order of St John.)*

Dr Fred Stoker – Gardener

RICHARD MORRIS

Introduction

Fred Stoker was a surgeon who came to live in Loughton in about 1920. He first lived at Oak Lodge on Baldwins Hill, but he subsequently purchased an adjoining plot of land of almost five acres in the apex between Baldwins Hill and Goldings Hill, with the Potato Ground allotments as the southern boundary. Here he had built a house which he called The Summit, and over the following 15–20 years he and his wife, Mary, developed a garden that became known nationally.

The Stoker family came from the north of England, probably Northumberland, and Fred was born in c1878/9. He was a student at the College of Medicine at Durham University where he was awarded his MB and BS in 1904 and was elected a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons (Edinburgh) in 1907.

He married Mary Wilkie Smith and in 1906 they came to live at Park Road in Wallsend, where Stoker described his garden as 'a few square yards of worn grass encompassed by the house wall on one side, and a privet hedge on the other'. Fred and Mary's thoughts were to move to the south of England and they started to look at London and its surroundings which offered both gardens and practices, to say nothing of the other advantages.

He visited 'Ackling' where he was impressed by the house and garden. The house was taken but few patients arrived. 'Ackling' was in fact a name made up by Fred Stoker, when he wrote his book *A Gardener's Progress*, to represent the two suburbs of Acton and Ealing, in west London, where he and Mary went to live in about 1909. Medical Directories give the addresses of three houses in Acton and one in Ealing where the Stokers lived for the next 10 years.

A change of course

After spending some 14 years in general practice, Fred Stoker decided to try a venture as a consultant in Harley Street. He gave up his practice in Ealing, sold his house, took a consulting room in the Harley Street area, lived during the week in a flat, and spent weekends at a farm he had bought in Sussex. However, Fred and Mary found flat-dwelling in the centre of London intolerable: 'the towny air, the nightly rumble of traffic, the church clocks chiming every quarter, the amorousness and pugnacity of West End cats, the rattle of the milk carts before the winter's dawn, were too much.'

Within a year the flat was given up, the farm in Sussex sold and a house bought in Essex just outside the suburban area, but within easy reach of Town. Several friends questioned whether a surgical consulting practice could be made or maintained without being on the spot, but their ill forebodings did not materialise. Fred took the view that he could reach a night emergency in Town in 40 minutes 'after the tinkle of the telephone or maybe less'. Thus in

about 1920 the Stokers came to live in Loughton in the centre of Epping Forest.

The Summit, Loughton

When the Stokers came to Loughton they first bought Oak Lodge on Baldwins Hill, which had an acre of garden. The house faced Epping Forest across a narrow sandy road. To the rear were the Potato Ground allotments, and to the north-east an area of scrub covering almost five acres which the lord of the manor had previously owned. In 1904 the five-acre plot had been purchased by Edward Wahab, whose house was on Goldings Hill. He had paid £300 per acre, a total of £1,500, which William Waller thought 'pretty dear, but a beautiful site and opposite the Forest'.

Some fourteen years before the Stokers came to Loughton the then owner of the five-acre plot had planted a belt of conifers by the boundary with Oak Lodge to screen it from the view from Goldings Manor. Stoker sympathised with the owner's motive and was pleased to find a mixture of Scotch, Weymouth, Corsican and mountain pines, with a sprinkling of black spruce. There was also a single specimen of the maidenhair tree.

Dr Fred Stoker, 1879–1943

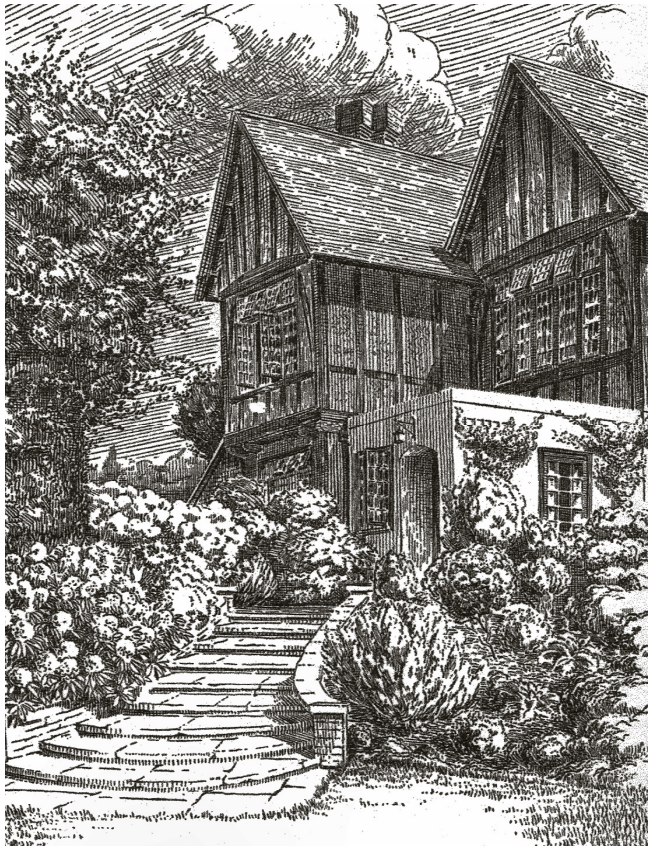
A year after arriving at Loughton, Fred Stoker was able to buy the five-acre plot. In his book *A Gardener's Progress*, Stoker describes the area as covered by hollies, crabs and hawthorns, clumps of gorse, thickets of sloe, tangles of bramble which defied penetration by any animals save rabbits, badgers and a variety of birds. Surface vegetation was a variety of meadow grasses, plentifully mixed with harebells, thyme, dorrel, hawkweed and other native herbs. A single large patch of wood anemone beautified a shady spot. The land was undulating, rising from north, south, east and west to a high plateau.

Fred and Mary continued to live at Oak Lodge while starting to develop their new extensive garden. Digging and clearing operations went on continuously for six years. The great bulk of the planting was done in the autumn with September and October for the planting of the general run of evergreen shrubs and trees, while deciduous varieties were planted after their leaves had withered but before they fell.

In 1927 the Stokers decided to build a house on the north-eastern side of the five-acre plot. Fred attributes this to his wife's lifelong interest in houses, although her contribution to the garden should not be understated. The house was called appropriately The Summit.

In 1938 *A Gardener's Progress* was published and in it Fred Stoker gave a comprehensive account of how he and his wife developed the garden. Contrary to the usual procedure, the house was designed to match the garden. Below it to the north and west were heather beds covering about an acre. To tone with these, the half-timbered walls were bricked in colours ranging from grey, through red, to orange, and the red-tiled roof, though never in its earliest days conspicuous, soon became covered in lichen.

The Summit was damaged by a landmine in the 1940s which severely damaged the house and with its blast destroyed several beds of shrubs.



The Summit in 1938

Scientist and scholar

Stoker was elected a Fellow of the Linnean Society in 1918. He applied his scientific mind to gardening and the problems of cultivation among the more difficult garden plants and was particularly interested in ericaceous plants, and published in 1934 *Shrubs for the Rock Garden* which is considered one of the best works on this subject.

He was also greatly attracted to lilies, which were grown with great success in the garden at The Summit. Stoker was one of the original members of the Lily Committee of the Royal Horticultural Society, and made valuable contributions to the knowledge of these plants. During the last two years before his death he contributed gardening articles to *The Times* and was a frequent contributor to *Gardeners Chronicle.*

The Council of the RHS recognised the value of Stoker's work by awarding him the Victoria Medal of Honour in 1937.

Fred Stoker died on 20 July 1943. The many obituaries written about him all spoke of him as the kindliest of men, whose enthusiasm was infectious to all who came in contact with him. His garden at Loughton was a centre for all keen gardeners, amateur and professional. He had a great fondness for animals and liked his visitors to see the squirrels which frequented his garden and even his house.

A great gardener's library

Following the death of her husband, Mary Stoker continued to live at The Summit and to look after the garden for another 20 years. She died in 1964 and, under the terms of her will, left her late husband's library of botanical and horticultural books to the Royal Horticultural Society.

Fred Stoker had spent over 30 years collecting 394 works comprising 700 volumes, including many rare early books. The collection is now part of the RHS Lindley Library at Vincent Square. The Stoker bequest forms a lasting memorial to a great gardener and his wife.

The developers arrive

By 1971 The Summit had been sold to a developer who had obtained planning permission to build 41 detached houses on the five-acre plot and to demolish the old house. However, the local planning authority, Chigwell Urban District Council, included a Tree Preservation Order, as part of the planning approval and the estate agent's brochure offering the plot for sale included a plan showing those trees in the garden that were to be retained and those that were to be removed.

The houses that now form The Summit estate are of no great architectural distinction, but it is still possible to identify some of the trees that were retained. Only part of the original house at Oak Lodge in Baldwins Hill remains today.

[Chris Pond and Richard Morris are writing a booklet on Fred Stoker and his garden at Loughton, which it is hoped to publish in 2008.]

Hainault Forest: inhabitants of the woods – 1

PETER COMBER

A local naturalist and expert on fungi, Peter has passed on this extract from his longer piece, A History of Hainault Forest.

The following poem about Hainault Forest, anonymous as far as can be ascertained, is believed to date from the 18th century:

From age to age no tumult did arouse
The peaceful dwellers; there they lived and died
Passing a dreamy life, diversified
By nought of novelty, save now and then
A horn, resounding through the neighbouring glen,
Woke as from a trance, and led them out
To catch a brief glimpse of the hunts wild rout
The music of the hounds; the tramp and rush
Of steeds and men; and then a sudden hush
Left round the eager listeners; the deep mood
Of awful, dead, and twilight solitude,
Fallen again upon that forest vast.

Memories from Mike Alston – Journey 2, along the east side

MIKE ALSTON

[So far I have merely brought these notes to our readers' attention, but since Mike is now a member of the L&DHS, it is time his memories of Loughton High Road from 1928–1940 appeared under his own name – Ed]

Journey 2 (starting from opposite the Union Church)

Greengrocer (name not recalled)

One or two houses and then . . .

Ambrose office & sale room: This large brick building also incorporated a cobbler and also *Priestman,* baker, whose original shop was in Church Hill.

Old Station Road

The Crown Public House: a Watney house, complete with red barrel. At the side was a small wooden hut occupied by a newsagent. The forecourt was vast and used as a terminus for route 138 (later 38A) of the London General Omnibus Company (later London Transport}, which ran from there to Victoria Station. Facilities for the bus crews were minimal but I recall, during the summer months, a large jug labelled 'oatmeal water' which presumably used to refresh drivers and conductors before they set out on another long and dusty journey. During the 30s most schoolboys were avid collectors of cigarette cards and we often nipped on board stationary buses and scrabbled around under the seats in search of discarded empty packets. Even if one already had a particular card it was valuable as a 'swap'.

Patmore's garage.

A clean-looking white-painted house, set back from the road, with a neat lawn, and later occupied by William Worthy, Estate Agent.

A recently-built (early 1930s) mansard-roofed block of 4 (?) shops.

Estate agent or, perhaps the offices of local *Express & Independent* newspaper, or both.

Bookshop: originally occupied by Wilcock (?) and later by William Addison (prolific author, later knighted in role of magistrate)

Ford, china and glass: cheerful, plump Mrs Ford seemed forever to be unpacking her wares from great wooden crates.

Goulds Dairy branch: arched brick canopy stretching over pavement.

International Stores: grocers; a big shop with counters along three sides of a spacious central area. As at the *LHS*, vast slabs of butter (Sylvan Glen?) figured prominently.

Lopping Hall: the part adjoining the International Stores was set back at an angle to the High Road and, well into the 1930s, was the site of a light-grey painted field gun from the First World War. Later, the protecting wall, and the gun, were removed, and two shops built into the main building.

Forest Library: a typical lending library of the period – virtually all of which disappeared as public libraries asserted themselves.

Sweet shop: name not recalled.

Entrance to Lopping Hall proper.

Midland Bank.

Loughton Nursery, florist.

Hutchin, chemist: run by Mr Wickens.

Round the corner from Hutchin, into Station Road, was a cleaner, *Lush & Cook*, with a maroon façade. Just beyond, and nestling into the Lopping Hall clock tower, was *Loughton Fire Station.* The crew, who wore large brass helmets, were under the captaincy of Mr Heath who sported a magnificent silver one!

Chimney fires were not uncommon in those days and it was a great event to witness one at close hand – more particularly if Mr Heath had the time to nod and smile at me. How I thought I went up in my friends' estimations! During the 30s I recall at least three major fires – in a factory at the far end of Roding Road, the Roman Catholic church at the bottom of Traps Hill, and a large wooden house at the top of Alderton Hill.

Later, the Fire Station moved to a new building in Old Station Road, next to the Council Offices built at about the same time.

Station Road

Dr Pendred, medical practitioner: a large and rambling house with what estate agents would describe as 'interesting outbuildings'. These include a vast garage (or coach house) with a loft above. I played there many times, as Gerald, Dr Pendred's son, was a schoolmate. After Dr Pendred's departure the buildings became *Brown's Garage.*

Brook Path

St Mary's Church & Church Hall: I spent many Sunday afternoons at Sunday School in the former, under the 'tuition' of Mr Gell and his curate, Mr Knopp, and attended many birthday and Christmas parties in the latter.

Large old house, with iron railings sticking out at right angles: I always remember these railings as one could swing under them! When the house was demolished it was replaced by a brick building housing *Barclays Bank.*

The Co-op : groceries and greengroceries.

Warnes, gents' outfitters, school uniforms a speciality, and barber shop. The latter was run by Mr Probitts (Probet? – *yes, Ed*). I usually had to sit on a wooden plank set across the arms of the chair. After my hair was cut, my head was drenched with the 'spray' which effectively plastered my hair to my scalp in a solid piece! **I** didn't mind, but my mother was usually horrified, 'he's shorn you!' She was even more dismayed at Mr Probet's habit of blowing the hair off my neck after he had used the clippers. 'Most unhygienic!'

Forestier, ladies 'modes': a most elegant gown shop owned and run by Mrs Butler Harris, wife of the Dr whose house was directly across the road. She would regularly be seen carrying the latest fashions from car to shop – direct from a London couturier (one assumed) – and there was often private mirth at the sight of a solitary hat or gown in the large window.

Overy, hairdresser.

Suburban Chemists: run by cheerful, balding, Mr Jefferies.

General Post Office: newly opened in the 1930s and replacing the one in Forest Road.

Marden, wireless shop: full of exciting radios – the new-fangled 'superhets', many in newly introduced Bakelite, together with the more massive and traditional wooden cabinets. It was also a place where one could have accumulators – vital to the old wireless sets – recharged, or buy replacement 'valves' as big as a modern light bulb. At Guy Fawkes' time Marden's also carried good stocks of fireworks. Later on, Mr Marden is said to have moved to Windsor to run a pub.

Hubbards, confectionery, ice cream and toys: first remembered as run by the two Misses Hubbard, charming ladies, recalled as wearing dark blue dresses and pendulous ear-rings! When they left, Mrs Wallis took over and renamed the shop 'The Cosy'. She was helped by some four or five female relatives who we referred to, in the family, as 'the tall one, the dark one, the jolly one . . .' My mother was a great stickler for good manners and would never allow me or my sister to walk along the road eating an ice cream. And so, on the occasional hot summer day, she would take us into the shop, buy an ice cream and then ask Mrs Wallis whether we could eat it in the back.

We would then be led to what was presumably one of their living rooms – much to my embarrassment! Agent for the rather 'exclusive' Kunzle Cakes.

Finch, ironmongery and hardware: a profusion of pots and pans and brushes on the pavement. Later became *Goodrich.*

(Mr) Butcher (later 'Charltons') newsagent: our paper shop from whom I bought, successively, *Bubbles, Modern Boy*, and *Meccano Magazine.* Other exciting periodicals were *Popular Flying* and *Air Stories.* I never found anything very exciting in the *Children's Newspaper* and *Boy's Own* (too goody-goody) and, for excitement they couldn't compare with *Adventure, Hotspur, Rover* and *Triumph.*

[Here we leave Journey 2, until Mike concludes his High Road walks in the next Newsletter*. The journey will pick up again at Loughton Cinema, which fizzled out so sadly in 1963, almost deserted on its last night.]*

What might have been . . . but for the war

JIM BLAKE
NORTH LONDON TRANSPORT SOCIETY

The following article appeared in the souvenir programme for the Theydon Bois Vintage Bus Running Day on 19 May 2007 and is reproduced by kind permission of its author, Jim Blake, and the North London Transport Society. Although it is mainly relevant to our area, it also has relevance to the whole of the London Transport area.

The foundation of the London Passenger Transport Board on 1 July 1933 immediately brought about a consolidation of bus, Green Line coach and Underground railway services in and around London. This, of course, included the area around Epping and Theydon Bois which was, more or less, on the border of the LPTB's Central (red) and Country (green) areas. On the one hand, Epping had the distinction of having the first new bus garage built for the new authority, opening for Country Bus and Green Line operations in 1934, and replacing facilities the Board had inherited in Ongar and Bishop's Stortford from operators it had taken over. On the other hand, Central Area (red) bus routes reached Epping from Loughton and Woodford (the 10A, later renumbered 20) and from Romford, via Theydon Bois (the 250), respectively.

In addition to this, not long after the Board's inception, its 1935–1940 New Works Programme was inaugurated. In an effort to both improve public transport in and around London and to ease the chronic unemployment that the country had suffered in the early 1930s this was a package of measures that involved replacing London's huge tram system with trolleybuses, improving facilities and interchanges at a number of Central London Underground stations and substantial extensions to the Underground system itself. Most of these latter extensions involved the Underground taking over suburban branches of the main line railway companies. Where this concerns

the Theydon Bois and Epping area, the London & North Eastern Railway's former Great Eastern Railway branches from Stratford to Leyton, Woodford and Hainault, Loughton, Epping and Ongar were to be attached to an eastward extension of the Central Line tube from Liverpool Street.

Between the wars, and especially in the 1930s, such extensions to Underground lines caused the areas they served to be rapidly built up with new housing for their commuters; in turn London seemed ever more to be expanding outwards. Such rapid expansion was clearly foreseen, and intended for the areas that the extended Central Line was to serve in the east. The London County Council had already been building 'out-country' estates beyond its borders, for example, at Becontree, Burnt Oak and St Helier, and such a development was also planned at Debden, to the north of Loughton, which would clearly have encroached on neighbouring farmland and perhaps on Epping Forest itself. Similar developments were also planned around Ongar, which was intended to have a through tube service to the City and the West End.

The new Epping Country Bus garage was built with additional services in the area in mind whereas in Loughton, the existing 1920s former London General garage was planned to be replaced with a much bigger one on the other side of the High Road.

The 1935–1940 New Works Programme was in full flight when the Second World War broke out in September 1939. Work on the Central Line's extensions was well advanced since they had been intended for completion in 1940/41. New tunnel sections between Liverpool Street and Stratford and between Leytonstone and Newbury Park, on a new section of line intended to make the Hainault section into a loop, were already completed and were adapted for use as an air-raid shelter and a deep-level, bomb-proof factory, making aircraft components, respectively. After the war, priority was given to completing the Central Line's extensions, rather than those in north and north-west London on the Northern Line, much of which was to be abandoned despite more than three-million pounds' worth of work on them (at 1939 values) having been completed. Work resumed in 1946, with services all up and running by the end of the decade – except for the Epping to Ongar section.

Towards the end of the war, those behind the 1944 Greater London Development Plan had seen the folly of allowing London's suburbia to spread uncontrollably ever further out into the Home Counties. Thus a 'Green Belt' was imposed around Greater London, forbidding the further encroachment of housing or industrial development in London's surrounding countryside. As a result, the huge LCC Debden Estate only materialised as a small development, although similar out-country developments at Hainault (served, of course, by the Central Line) and Harold Hill, to the east of Romford, did get built. That at Ongar never happened, save a small-scale development to the north of the town around Cripsey Avenue which, ironically, was served for many years by red Central Area buses from Romford, which reached further into that part of Essex than Country Bus route 391!

Thus, the Central Line's through service to the City and West End never reached further than Epping, with antiquated steam trains operated by old ex-GER tank engines and gas-lit Victorian carriages, maintaining a shuttle service to and from Ongar until November 1957. And, even then, when the line was finally electrified – ironically using materials salvaged from the abortive Northern Line extensions – it remained as a shuttle service, apart from some through journeys to Loughton or Woodford, which were merely fitted in by depot trips. The Epping-Ongar section was under threat for most of its existence, almost being closed in 1970 and again in 1981, and finally succumbing to closure in 1994.

Despite the truncation of the Debden Estate, a new bus garage at Loughton was finally opened in December 1953, with space for around 150 buses – some four times the size of the old one which, in the event, was still more or less adequate for the forty buses actually operated! Complete with modern docking facilities, the new garage was never fully utilised, being used to store new or redundant vehicles for much of its life. Following the withdrawal of many out-county London Transport services in the 1970s and then the loss of most others to other operators upon tendering in the mid-1970s, Loughton garage closed in 1986 and has since been demolished.

Meanwhile, Epping garage, too, closed, in 1963, but not through under-use. The emphasis on inner London slum-clearance (ably assisted by the Luftwaffe in the East End during the war) had, under the Greater London Development Plan proposals, shifted to the establishment of New Towns in the Home Counties, beyond the Green Belt. One of these was Harlow, where a network of New Town services soon built up, involving wasteful dead mileage for buses running to and from their garage in Epping. Thus, in 1963, a new garage was opened in Harlow to replace it. Ironically, this would be the last Country Bus garage built for London Transport and today is one of only three such establishments still surviving. Country Bus and Green Line Coach services were split off from London Transport on 1 January 1970 upon the creation of London Country Bus Services Limited, a subsidiary of the new National Bus Company, Before too long, traditional London Transport bus types like RTs, RFs and Routemasters were swept away and replaced by standard NBC types like the Leyland National, seen all over the country. Thus the distinctive London Transport image, even down to replacing the famous 'bullseye' that had been its trademark since the 1930s, was destroyed. Under the Thatcher regime in the 1980s London Country Bus Services was first split into four regional units, Harlow falling within the London Country North East remit, before being privatised and fragmented further. Worst of all, even in urban areas such as Harlow New Town, bus services were drastically cut, most noticeably in the evenings and at weekends.

Although London Transport's former Central Area bus operations have also been split up and privatised

in more recent years, at least a unified route network has remained. Since the inception of Transport for London under the new Greater London Authority in 2000, services have been greatly enhanced within inner London, as well as on important trunk routes that penetrate beyond the boundary, such as route 20 between Walthamstow, Loughton and Debden. There can be no greater contrast between the frequent bus services within London, that run well beyond midnight in many cases, as well as the vastly increased night bus network, and those over the border in places like Epping, Harlow and, of course, Theydon Bois. Things would have been so different had it not been for the war, with this entire area in all probability also falling within 'London'. As it was, for reasons of a political nature, the towns of Loughton, Chigwell and Buckhurst Hill, comprising the Chigwell Urban District, were omitted from the new Greater London that was administered by the Greater London Council from 1965 onwards, despite the fact that, transport-wise, this area was entirely within London Transport's Central Bus operating area, which otherwise corresponded almost exactly with 'Greater London'.

Of equal importance was the war's effect on London Transport's plans to replace its tram system. From the outset, the London Passenger Transport Board planned to replace the motley collection of trams it had inherited in 1933 (either from municipal operators, notably the London County Council, or companies like Metropolitan Electric Tramways or London United Tramways) by trolleybuses. Much of the tram system dated from the turn of the 19th/20th century and was in need of updating anyway, with vehicles also, in many cases, due for replacement. Trolleybuses, or trackless trams as they were originally called, were seen as being more flexible in operation whilst, at the same time, much of the trams' existing infrastructure could still be used. General replacement began in 1935, working on a west-to-east basis, starting north of the Thames. Unfortunately, once all trams north of the Thames (except for the Kingsway subway routes) had been replaced by trolleybuses, the last entering service in the East End a matter of days before the 1940 Blitz began, the programme had to be halted owing to the war.

Leyland-built Class K2 trolleybus number 1252 (new in early 1939) on route 581 from Bloomsbury. It is heading along the Woodford New Road, near the 'Rising Sun', towards Woodford, Napier Arms, the terminus, just before the route was withdrawn in Stage 2 of the trolleybus replacement programme, on 14 April 1959. Had the Second World War not intervened, the 581 route might have been extended to Loughton by taking over from bus route 38A, instead of the other way round.

When it recommenced in 1950, motor buses instead of trolleybuses were used to replace the remaining trams south of the Thames, thus sounding the death-knell for the trolleybuses, too. Indeed, only just over two years after the last trams had run in July 1952, it was announced that trolleybuses would be replaced by the new Routemaster buses.

However, if the war had not broken out, or perhaps been delayed by only a year or two, trolleybuses would have replaced all remaining trams and, instead of a fleet of around 1,800 there would have been about 3,000 trolleybuses in London – perhaps too huge a fleet to think about abandoning! If they had survived into later years when either conflicts in the Middle East threatened oil supplies or, better still into today's era of fears of global warming, then the system may have been expanded even further. In the area around Loughton, for instance, quite possibly the 581 trolleybus that ran from Bloomsbury to Woodford might have been extended to Loughton replacing the 38A bus, that paralleled much of its route, rather than the other way round, as happened in 1959! But it was not to be.

Tailpiece

In *Newsletter 174* we ran a small article, 'Photo Quiz' asking if our readers recognised any of the girls in Peter Cook's photograph of the 1936 Standard 5 class of the Council Girls School, Staples Road. Maurice Day, one of our members was told by a relative, Betty Pether, that the young girl on the extreme right of the second row from the back, was indeed herself, 71 years earlier. As it happens, I knew Betty, whose family, like mine, lived in Smarts Lane, although I didn't recognise her from the photo. A minor success, perhaps, but a pleasing one. If other members want to pose a photo question, please make contact.

David Possee's November talk, 'Essex and the Silk Trade', jogged another memory, that of our class in Staples Road, probably about 1950, cultivating silkworm cocoons on a pretty impressive scale, feeding them on mulberry leaves which we managed to gather. Although preferring warmer conditions, there were, I believe, mulberry trees close to the Victoria Tavern, and elsewhere around Loughton – do any other ex-pupils remember this short-lived classroom industry?

LOUGHTON & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY (Registered Charity 287274) www.loughtonhistoricalsociety.org.uk
President: Heather, Lady Murray of Epping Forest
Chairman: Dr Chris Pond, Forest Villa, Staples Road, Loughton IG10 1HP (020 8508 2361)
Secretary: Richard Morris, 6 High Gables, Loughton IG10 4EZ (020 8508 4974)
Treasurer: Mrs Eve Lockington, 19 Spring Grove, Loughton IG10 4QB (020 8508 4995)
Membership Secretary: Ian Strugnell, 22 Hatfields, Loughton IG10 1TJ
Newsletter Editor: Terry Carter, 43 Hillcrest Road, Loughton IG10 4QH (020 8508 0867)
Newsletter Production: Ted Martin

Printed in Great Britain by Riverside Press, Ipswich