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As Winter fades . . .

It is sometimes difficult to arrange the 'menu' of articles for the *Newsletter* into the most appropriate order. This season we have been rather fortunate to have the problem at all! Anyway, as Spring is (at last, some might say) drawing nearer, I thought we might open this edition in poetic mood. These anonymous, 150-year-old lines may not constitute a masterpiece, but they seem well suited to the anticipation of lighter, longer days and fresh green leaves. After such a pastoral opening, Mrs Mills, through Stephen Pewsey, strikes a different chord!

Coming Spring

(Lines written at Loughton, Essex, on the 1st of April, 1851)

The trees are brown and bare,
Cold is the evening air,
From the east the keen wind blows,
And the sunset fiercely glows;
The cloudy sky has a wintry gloom,
And lingering Spring has far to come.

Yet I see the primrose pale
Expand into the chilly gale
And the fragrant violet blue
Its leafy shrine peep through
Thus fairy hands the carpet spread
The feet of the coming Spring shall tread.

I hear the blackbird's note
And, in softer melody, gush from his warbling throat,
The tuneful thrush reply:
The music of the woods awakes;
As coming Spring her slumber breaks.

Soon shall the heavens be light
And the green of the earth be bright;
Soon shall the air be balm,
And the breeze be hushed to a calm;
For I breathe already the sweet perfume,
Prepared for the Spring that is near to come.

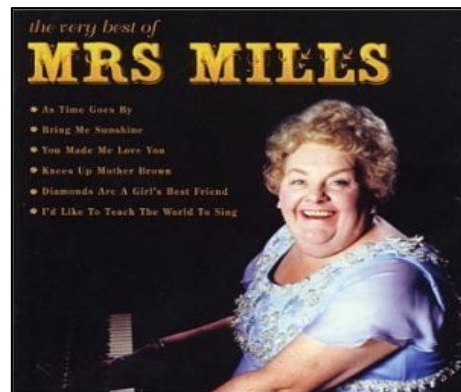
Sharp is affliction's blast :
How long its chill winds last!
And its weary gloom we mourn,
As if joy would ne'er return ;
Yet the flowers that bloom, and the birds that sing.
Tell of Winter departing, and coming Spring.

ANON (submitted by Chris Pond – from the *Monthly Christian Spectator*, May 1851)

The Irrepressible Mrs Mills!

STEPHEN PEWSEY

There has been a revival of interest in the life and work of Gladys Mills, the popular pianist better known as 'Mrs Mills'. She was a larger than life figure who made frequent television appearances in the 1960s and 1970s, and whose records sold by the million. She was largely forgotten after her death in 1978, but now social historians are coming to appreciate her enjoyable blend of Cockney fun and musical talent.



Gladys Jordan was born on 29 August 1918 at 154 Beckton Road, Canning Town, and christened at Holy Trinity Church, Barking Road. Her father was Samuel Jordan, a policeman, and her mother was Minnie Jordan, née Dixon. In 1934, the family moved to Loughton, to 136 Roding Road, then a newly built house on the Roding Estate, Loughton's first large-scale interwar development. Gladys joined the Civil Service as a typist. She was already a skilled pianist, having taken lessons since the age of 3½, though she gave up classes when she was 12 after her teacher objected to her trademark musical flourishes which she insisted on adding to her pieces!

Her father, by now a sergeant, was seriously injured in the Blitz, losing part of his arm when a bomb exploded outside Loughton police station in 1940. Gladys meanwhile did her bit for the war effort by entertaining troops around Essex with a concert party based around her own inimitable piano-playing.

On 24 February 1947, she married Gilbert ('Bert') Mills, who worked for London Transport, and the newlyweds moved round the corner to 43 Barncroft Close, a maisonette off Oakwood Hill. She was promoted to superintendent of a typing pool, though accounts differ as to whether this was in the Treasury

or the Paymaster-General's Office. She spent the following decade developing and building up the reputation of her ensemble, the Astoreans. The Astoreans, with their big-band sound, were popular at local dinner-dances, and they were a familiar presence at large venues such as the Roebuck Hotel (Buckhurst Hill), and Woodford Golf Club.

It was indeed at Woodford Golf Club that Mrs Mills got her big break. She was spotted there in 1961 by Eric Easton, Frankie Vaughan's manager, who later went on to manage the Dave Clark Five and the Rolling Stones. Under the guidance of record producer Norman Newell (himself a Plaistow lad), she was signed up to Parlophone Records and turned professional. By Christmas 1961 she was celebrating her first hit, *Mrs Mills Medley*, which reached the Top Twenty.

Mrs Mills rapidly achieved celebrity status, sharing the famous Abbey Road studio with the Beatles (much to their amusement!) and playing at Buckingham Palace. She was a regular on the *Billy Cotton Band Show* and radio, and made a memorable appearance on the *Morecambe and Wise Show* where she took their gentle ribbing in good heart. In fact, much of Mrs Mills' charm derived from her down-to-earth approach to her success. She is still fondly recalled in Loughton, where her parents would pull their piano into the garden so that the neighbours could enjoy an impromptu concert from the young Gladys.

However, success enabled the Mills to move from Loughton in 1964 to Hathern, a village outside Leicester, where they bought the *King's Arms* pub. Even there, Gladys could often be found behind the bar pulling pints, bemused and embarrassed by the parade of visitors who had come to stare at this famous entertainer. During this time, she not only toured Britain with her beloved 'joanna', but also took her show abroad to Canada, Germany and South Africa. Record followed record, each a familiar medley of much-loved tunes given a Cockney flourish, each more or less indispensable at any party of that era.

The Mills' eventually tired of the constant public attention at their pub, and in 1968 moved to the quiet Chiltern village of Penn in Buckinghamshire. Gladys' health declined in the 1970s and her appearances became less and less frequent. She died on 24 February 1978 in Beaconsfield.

After many years of gentle mockery and semi-obscure, Mrs Mills is now firmly back in the public spotlight. EMI has brought out a 'greatest hits' album, *The Very Best of Mrs Mills*, and an American artist, P J Loughran, has issued a limited edition print of her at her piano, which sells for \$150 apiece! Loughton Town Council has agreed to put up a blue plaque at one of her Loughton homes, and she has received the ultimate accolade of the electronic age, her own page on the Facebook web site. Looking at the comments on the site, it is clear that many of her young admirers have no idea that she has been dead for several decades, but it is not surprising that a new generation has rediscovered the unassuming charm and

thumpingly good melodies which characterised Gladys Mills' musical talents.



Sources:

Dictionary of National Biography.

Whiting, Alison, *The Loughton Roding Estate*, Loughton & District Historical Society (1998).

Wikipedia, entry for Mrs Mills.

The Gould family of Chigwell and the damage to their home in the Second World War

Contributed by VIC RUSSELL

Perhaps not as affecting as the moving 'Letter from Hills Road', submitted by Richard Morris in Newsletter 174, which described residents' stoic reaction to serious war damage at the height of the blitz in 1940, this letter conveys the very 'English' response to a (perhaps?) less stressful, but nevertheless damaging, V1, 'doodlebug', raid in July 1944.

Vic, a Life Member of the L&DHS, writes:

The Miss Gould of Chigwell Lodge to whom this letter was written was one of the spinster daughters of William Gould of the corn merchant family related to Chalkley Gould of Traps Hill House, Loughton. The daughters, I believe there were three of them, all lived to a great age and died in their 80s/90s.

'CHIGWELL LODGE, CHIGWELL, ESSEX

17th July, 1944

Dear Miss Gould,

You will be more than sorry to hear that a flying bomb dropped on the Golf Course last Saturday afternoon about 3.30 and your house has suffered considerable blast, including all outhouses. We all had considerable escapes – my sister and I were on the Tennis Lawn – in fact I had been sitting in the Summer House, when I saw it come out of the clouds towards us, and we could not get back to the house in time. I have suffered slight shock, as I was in the open and caught the blast – my sister escaped as she ran nearer to the hedge.

My mother, who was in the house, stood by the hallstand and covered her head with a coat, and she was quite all right. In the house we had dust, soot and glass everywhere. It is the windows at the back that have suffered most – frames have gone as well. Crack in the wall between kitchen and dining room, Drawing Room rather bad, nearly all the glass out. Every cupboard door burst open.

I believe the rent is due this week-end, and with it I will send you a schedule of all damage. Please rely on it we will look after your interests and use common sense and discretion in all matters. The Borough Surveyor came on

Sunday and went over every room in the house with Mr Haynes (who had to be called back from his week-end at home, as I was not sure what Bank damage there was).

Do not worry unduly, all forms will be sent to you as they come along.

Bradley returned Saturday afternoon. I tried to clear up some of the mess in the garden but will leave him to tell you his story of the damage to his places. Let me know if you would like me to add all his damage to my schedule. I don't want to upset him!

I feel I am only just starting to gather my forces, it was all such a sickening sight. The most marvellous thing was, that nobody was injured round about the golf course, some were playing very near.

Yours sincerely,

Dorothy M Wills

PS. As far as I can see at the moment there is no damage to the furniture.'

Miss (?) Wills seems to have been a tenant in the house, who perhaps worked in a local Bank. Bradley was the gardener?

Chigwell Lodge is still in situ on the East side of Chigwell High Road. A Grade II listed building, it is a late 18th century two-storey house in yellow stock brick, roofed in slates and tiles, with a later-added simple bell turret.

Vic Russell also passed on another letter, addressed to Miss Gould, concerning the earlier history of Chigwell Lodge – that is saved for another edition.

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

MIKE ALSTON

[Appropriately, in this, the final Newsletter of the 2007/8 season, Mike concludes his Memories of Loughton High Road from 1928 to 1940 with the short stroll from Loughton Cinema (later renamed The Century) to the top of Church Hill.]

Journey 2 continued

Loughton Cinema: managed by dapper Mr Sparrow (often in evening dress). It was opened by Evelyn Laye in 1928 and so I was there from the beginning of my remembered childhood. The first film I saw was silent, 'The Ghost Train', and the prices ranged from 6d (at the very front – not permitted by my mother as it 'would strain my eyes'), 9d, 1s 3d, and 1s 9d (at the very back). All films were categorised as either 'U' (universal) or 'A' (adult). And so, if I wanted to see an 'A' film on my own, I had to find an adult willing to buy my ticket for me. When I grew a bit older, my parents would take me, as a special treat, to an evening performance. What excitement, queueing up with all the adults and entering an auditorium full of wreaths of tobacco smoke which shone as bright clouds in the shaft of light from the projector!

At the beginning, there were two shop units, on either side of the wide flight of steps up to the ticket kiosk. The left hand one was used mainly for displaying 'coming attractions' while the other was, briefly, a shop selling dairy products

As first remembered at the end of the 1920s, the land between the cinema and Brooklyn Avenue was rough open ground, presumably the site of demolished buildings. The new shops built on the site were, first a block of five:

Fish Shop (Pearce): they seemed to be forever hosing down, with a constant flow of water across the wide pavement. Hygiene ruled!

Patience, grocer: Mr Patience was invariably dressed impeccably, with a crisp white apron. Petite Mrs P remained in the background. Perhaps she did the books?

Wilson, draper: run by quiet and small Mr and Mrs Wilson.

F Cook, baker: Mr and Mrs C were newly married and this was their first shop. They came from Chingford, where I think Mrs C's father had a bakery. They had a Jowett van which emitted the distinctive Jowett popping sound! They made a wonderful selection of large chocolatey/creamy cakes and pastries – at least I liked them, but my mother was not too sure, especially as there were often large wooden drums in the shop, labelled 'artificial cream powder'.

[Editor's note – in 1954 or 1955, during the school summer holidays, I had a six-week job in Cooks, scrubbing the ovens and trays, and loading and unloading the loaves. Hot, hard work, the bakery business!]

Bourne's, men's outfitters.

A separate building housed:

Miss Turner, wool shop: who moved down from Church Hill (see Newsletter 175, page 6).

E G Hatch, bicycle shop: Hard-working Mr Hatch provided a wonderful range of bikes, allied equipment, electrical goods and Triang toys. I would constantly gaze at the array of bike lamps, including many traditional ones which worked on acetylene. In October 1936, when I was just 12, my father took me to the shop to buy me a new bike as a birthday present. After much deliberation we finally selected a Triumph 'Roadster'. It is funny how a child remembers the precise financial details! The price was £3 15s (£3.75) but as the bike was 'shop-soiled' (incipient rust on the chromium-plated handlebars, Mr Hatch let us have it for £2 18s 6d (£2.925). The minor defect was minor indeed as I rode this bike until the mid-1950s – some 20 years – and covered thousands of miles according to my various cyclometers. My cycling friends and I were regular customers of Mr Hatch as we were forever breaking spokes – probably as a result of violent riding up and down the gravel hillocks of Epping Forest which surrounded the ever-attractive gravel pits! To indicate his trade Mr Hatch had a bike wheel, fitted with vanes on the spokes, erected above the shop entrance. It (the wheel) revolved in the slightest breeze.

Then:

Grimshaw, ironmonger: I never saw Mr G smile

Corner shop: this had a variety of occupants. At one time it was 'Loughton Music Salon' but before that I seem to recall that it was a greengrocer. Next to it, along the Brooklyn Avenue frontage, was another, small, shop

Brooklyn Avenue – Chiswell's Garage: a large open site, with a long row of secondhand cars facing the High Road. And what wonderful names . . . Clyno, Lanchester, Railton, Bean, Wolseley, Morris (including many 'bull-nosed'). The garage building, set well back, was white and looked as though it had originally been a residential house. One of the most prominent characters was large Miss (or was it Mrs?) Chiswell.

There was then a short row of 'humble cottages', set back from the road, the first of which housed:

Street, dairyman.

Then, also set back, an individual house in which lived Mrs Wheeley. Wearing a toque hat, she was a familiar sight, riding her bicycle – very upright and sedately – around the village. Later the house was occupied by Dr Hugh Walker, newly wedded to Mr & Mrs Hooper's eldest daughter, Cecily.

Then followed three houses, the first nearer the road, and the next two nearer still:

House 1: at one time occupied by a vet who, rather strangely, placed a cage at the gate, containing the odd puppy for sale. [The aforementioned vet was a Mr J Chapman – Ed.]

House 2: a Georgian House, owner unknown

House 3 (on the corner of Traps Hill): occupied by Mr & Mrs Hooper and their three daughters. Mr Hooper was a distinguished City businessman and was, at one time,

Secretary of one of the long-established livery companies, the Fishmongers. He and his wife were also pillars of St John's. Later, they moved to Upper Park. After the Hoopers left, the house became Oaklands school, with Miss Lord as principal. For some reason, I vaguely remember, probably incorrectly, that Dr Pendred lived in this house before the Hoopers.

In the mid-30s the stretch from Brooklyn Avenue to (and including) Mrs Wheeley's was redeveloped as Brooklyn Parade, a line of shops fronted by a service road. It was sad to see so much of the 'old High Road' swept away in one fell swoop, and the new 'retail outlets' had the characterless look of the shopping parades springing up all over the country.

The three old houses up to Traps Hill lingered on for a short while, but disappeared when Brooklyn parade was further extended.

Traps Hill – Mr Williamson, architect: an old white house (Monghyr Cottage) extensively reconstructed by Mr Williamson.

Cricket Field: the frontage onto the High Road was partially occupied by a pair of black-painted wooden cottages which were eventually demolished.

Private House: a brick building, strangely painted in a brownish-orange!

The Uplands – The rest of Church Hill was residential (with a milestone half-way up) until, almost at the top, was the long low building of the *Anglo-French Laundry* owned by the Freeman family.

Just downhill from there was a house, 'Priest Garth', no. 51, the home of the Reverend Alec Kirkpatrick (widowed in 1918), and where Michael John ALSTON was born on Monday 6 October 1924.

So that house was where it started, 83 years ago. I am pleased to say that we still have a little more of Mike to come next season, with a short, light-hearted recall of Loughton Station 'through the eyes of a boy aged 5 to 15' and perhaps a few memories of schooldays at Mayfield School, Algiers Road, from 1929 to 1933.

High Society in Loughton 1809

RICHARD MORRIS

Loughton Hall, when the Wroth family lived there, provides the only example of a link that Loughton has had with the aristocracy and landed gentry. In the Regency period which became synonymous with an elegance and style unique in the history of English culture, the nearest house that displayed the excesses of architecture and high living of the time was at Wanstead, but as we know this all came crashing down thanks to the dissolute behaviour of William Pole Tynney Long Wellesley.

Corruption in political life is not new to us, and the recent allegations of 'cash for peerages' would have come as no surprise to the parliamentarians of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Gluttony and gambling were the fashionable vices, and young Eliab Harvey of Rolls Park, Chigwell, only a midshipman at the time, nearly had to sell the family estate when he lost £100,000 one evening playing 'hazard'. Only the kindness of his opponent left him with a debt of £10,000.

Loughton was, however, involved in one scandal during the Regency period when in 1809 charges were laid against Frederick, 1st Duke of York and Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, for the

misuse of military patronage. It had come to light that the Duke's mistress, Mary Anne Clarke, had been accepting bribes to procure commissions in the army behind the back of the War Office.

Mary Anne was apparently born in Ball and Pin Alley, White's Alley, off Chancery Lane, in 1776. Her parentage remains obscure, some sources giving her father's name as Thompson and her stepfather as a compositor named Farquhar. Mary was pretty, bright and pert, and in 1791 she is believed to have eloped with Joseph Clarke, son of a builder from Snow Hill; they apparently had two children, though no marriage took place until 1794.

How Mary entered the fashionable circles where she met Frederick, Duke of York (1763–1827) is uncertain but it is clear from her own memoirs that she shared her favours among several members of the London gentry. In 1803 the Duke took a handsome house in Gloucester Place, engaged a full establishment of servants and placed at their head Mary Anne Clarke.

Mary entertained on an extravagant scale, her income from the Duke was large but irregular and she rapidly fell into debt. She let it be known that for a consideration she was willing to use her influence with him for the acquisition of commissions and preferments, the prices for her intervention ranging from £2,600 for a 'major' to £400 for an 'ensign'. It was said that she got hold of the War Office lists of pending commissions and added a few names before it was presented to the Duke for signature: the cartoonists drew her pinning the Army Lists above their bed! (See illustration.)



THE BISHOP AND HIS CLARKE OR A PEEP INTO PARADISE

The Duke of York, Commander-in-Chief of the army (and titular Bishop of Osnabrück) being solicited by Mary Anne Clarke to obtain promotion for her friends. (Caricature by Rowlandson, published by Tegg, 1809.)

The charges brought against the Duke in 1809 referred to eight cases of commissions in which Mary Anne Clarke had received bribes. However, after a lengthy investigation, the charges against the Duke were found unproven, but the Duke resigned as Commander-in-Chief, and ended his relationship with Mrs Clarke. The case produced a flurry of pamphlets including one under Mrs Clarke's name in which she attacked Colonel Wardle, who had first raised the issue in the House of Commons. Wardle

sued Mrs Clarke and two other pamphleteers for libel but they were acquitted.

In 1813 Mrs Clarke was again sued for libel and on this occasion she was convicted and spent nine months in prison. On her release she retired from public notice, and lived abroad in Brussels and, after 1815, in Paris. She died in Boulogne on 21 June 1852.

What has all this to do with Loughton? A daughter of Mary Anne Clarke married Louis-Mathurin-Busson du Maurier and was the great-grandmother of the novelist Daphne du Maurier (1907–1989). In 1954 Du Maurier wrote a novel based on her great-great-grandmother's life entitled *Mary Anne*. (The book was reprinted in paperback in 1992.) She acknowledges at the beginning of the book the assistance received in researching the novel from the British Museum and the Public Record Office.

After the allegations of corruption by the Duke of York and his mistress became public, life in London for Mrs Clarke became too hot for comfort, with all the problems that celebrity status brings, if without the photographers of today. It was suggested that she should spend some time in the country and Du Maurier refers to 'Coxhead-Marsh in Essex' looking after her. It is not clear if this is the true name, the nearest to which locally could be Chisenhale-Marsh, but the book goes on to refer to the loan of a house in Loughton called 'Loughton Lodge'.

There are in total nine references to Loughton in Daphne du Maurier's novel, and one refers to Mary Anne Clarke looking out of the window at Loughton Lodge: 'at the neat box-garden, the gravel drive, the trim smug Essex landscape'. This can only be considered as author's licence as Loughton Lodge stands on top of Woodbury Hill with its front facing what is now Steeds Way, but in 1809 would have given clear views over the Roding Valley and beyond, and the rear which overlooks an attractive part of the Forest.

Recognition of Mary Anne Clarke's involvement with the scandal of selling commissions and her time in Loughton was acknowledged locally when the name of Mutton Row was changed to York Hill sometime before 1850.

But what specific evidence is there of her time in Loughton? William Waller makes no reference to her in his *History of Loughton*. All we know about Loughton Lodge is that in 1819 it belonged to Mr Lewis Shiers and was freehold. The name first appears on the manorial court rolls in 1810, when Susannah Shiers, widow, only sister and heir-at-law of John Perkins of Loughton, was granted certain small fringes of waste bordering the freehold land. One part of the property, no longer to be distinguished from the rest, can be traced back through various owners to 1674. It is always described as lying 'under Kings Hill', and somewhere about 1770 the single tenement on it had been turned into two.

Waller, in his *Itinerary of Loughton*, gives details of the ownership of the house throughout the nineteenth century. The house was refurbished in 1906 under the ownership of Godfrey Lomer. It became an old

people's home after the Second World War, and more recently has been divided into two houses.

I am, however, convinced that there must be some truth in the story, if only because of Daphne du Maurier's relationship to Mary Anne Clarke, her reputation as a novelist, the research she did for her book, and the many references in it to Loughton and Loughton Lodge.

Hainault Forest: inhabitants of the woods – 2

PETER COMBER

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

There were, no doubt, many 'Inhabitants of the Woods' within the forest bounds, but, alas, few are recorded; considered not worthy of a writer's pen! Dido is one such inhabitant that was!

Dido: As well as the gypsies there were tramps and vagabonds still living in what was left of Hainault Forest. The most famous of these was Dido, where locally he was well known as a herbalist. He came to Chigwell Row in 1880, and set up camp in Hainault Forest.

Around the turn of the century Alice Clark (1890–1964) used to visit him with other local children. She said his camp was under a large oak tree to the left of Sheep Water, a well; and that he always wore a type of 'Fez' with a tassel on the top (Victorian Smoking Cap?). She said they used to call him 'Dido Jones'; this may have been the local children's nickname for Dido, as there are no other known references to the 'Jones'.

He wasn't a gypsy though he lived a gypsy-like existence. His reputation as a herbalist spread in the community and he was always in demand. Many of his remedies included 'cures' for whooping cough, measles, burns and liver complaints. He believed that 'the liver is the kitchen of the body, and if the kitchen is not in order then the whole house will be upset'. The sick would be visited, even those with contagious diseases such as diphtheria and scarlet fever, when others would stay away. Rare ferns, collected from Loughton, were made into a 'green ointment' that he used for cuts and bruises, sprains, rheumatism and chilblains.

The story goes that one winter's day, the driver of the horse-drawn bus that went from Lambourne to Woodford had chilblains so bad that he could not hold his reins. Dido's green ointment allegedly cured him in two days!

Dido was a bit of a rogue; he collected the leaves of Hawthorne [*sic*] and Blackthorn, and dried and sold them as tea in Bunhill Row market in the East End. He also caught wild birds and sold them.

In 1905 he had to leave the forest, along with the gypsies and others, and lived in a field in Vicarage Lane. There was much speculation as to his former life; it was suggested he had been thwarted in love like the Queen from whom he took his name. After his

death his real name was revealed as William Bell, a London docker and part-time fishmonger. From where he had obtained his herbalist skills no one knew.

The Wilson family: A descendant of the Wilson family has established that the 1851 census records 'Wilsons' living at Wilsons' Cabin. Lambourne Parish register also records baptisms for the family around the middle of the 19th century with the place of residence given 'as a cabin in the forest'. The Chapman and André map of 1777 shows a hut to the east of Cabin Hill. The *Illustrated London News* of 22 November 1851 in 'Sketches in Hainault Forest', has a wood cut of a 'Hut in the middle of the Forest'.

How Loughton's 'Buncefield' was avoided?

JOHN HARRISON

When I wrote about Dr Silberrad's Oldsmobile in *Newsletter 174*, I made a comment that, with the doctor having a chemical laboratory in Dryads' Hall there was a risk of Loughton having a 'mini-Buncefield'. Subsequently, Ian Strugnell told me he had been looking at the Chigwell Urban District Council minutes in the Essex Record Office and found mention of a fire at the Hall on 5 December 1935. I decided to find out more about the incident by looking at the local paper in Loughton Library.

The *Woodford Times* did not report the incident directly, but obviously a journalist had attended the Council meeting on 11 December as their report on this included the following:

'The Clerk, Mr J W Faulkener, read the following letter, dated December 7th, from Dr Silberrad, of Loughton, to the Fire Brigade:

"I enclose a cheque for £5 as a gesture of my appreciation of the rapidity with which you answered the call, and the way in which you dealt with the fire on Thursday last. I have had considerable experience with the highest organised firefighting institutions in the country, and must say that I have never met with greater promptitude and efficiency."

The chairman of the committee said the Council was pleased to receive such a letter as were the Fire Brigade.'

The meeting resolved that the Clerk should thank Dr Silberrad for his appreciation and the Engineer was asked to convey the Council's congratulations to the Fire Brigade officers and members

A money comparison website reveals that the sum of £5 in 1935 equates with almost £250 today, so, whilst Dr Silberrad was obviously wealthy, he was also generous. One wonders how the money was used, whether it went into general Council funds, was used to provide additional equipment for the brigade or what.

The Highways and Fire Committee minutes of 8 January 1936 report that the call out had been received at 1.47pm and the brigade arrived at the fire scene at 1.52pm. There would, of course, have been less traffic for them to contend with in the High Road than there is today! Neither of the sources used for

this article indicates whether the fire was in the hall or the laboratory, but assuming it was in the laboratory the prompt attendance no doubt prevented a much more serious disaster.

The Fire Station in 1935 was the one adjacent to the Chigwell Urban District Council Offices in Old Station Road, almost opposite the present station. Chris Pond tells me that it had opened only a year earlier (previously it had been a shed adjacent to Lopping Hall where Femme Fattel [sic] is now located) and around the same time the brigade acquired its first motor engines. Had the brigade had to rely on horsedrawn appliances clearly their attendance would not have been so prompt.

When the Council Offices were vacated in 1991 the station was used as the Cheshire Homes charity shop for several years until the offices were demolished. The Sainsbury's store now, of course, stands on the site.

Random thoughts of Stuart Low

Stuart and I were contemporaries at Staples Road and Buckhurst Hill County High, and shared many of the same teachers. Stuart emigrated to Australia in 1986. Now retired, he was in the construction business for some 50 years, starting out in W & C French., with Sir Arthur Noble as his Managing Director. This is a selection from memories he sent back from Australia, after reading the L&DHS publication Post-War Loughton 1945-1970.

I was born in Loughton in May 1941 in the back bedroom of 48 The Crescent. My father was in the RAF but was released due to his bad eyesight and sent to work in the aircraft factories in Coventry. This was to the relief of my mother who thought we would be away from the Blitz but soon after the Germans started bombing Coventry, so not much was gained by that move. Strangely enough, when I emigrated to Australia, I was living in the Crescent only 50 metres from the house in which I was born.

For some time during and after the War we lived with my grandparents at 48 The Crescent. My grandfather and maiden aunt kept chickens in the back garden and I can remember going to the Loughton Poultry & Rabbit Club with them to buy food for the 'chooks'. There was a vicious rooster in the hen house and I was terrified of it.

My grandparents had a big concrete shelter in the garden where the family would sleep during some of the air raids. I can remember meeting in the dining room – kids under the table – and then all moving to the shelter. I can also remember the *whoomp* of the gun which was on the sidings by Loughton Station, which loosened the plaster in my own house in later years, and watching planes and doodlebugs going over.

Eventually we were allocated a prefab in Barncroft Close, under the Chigwell Council rather than the London County Council, at the Debden end. I think Alderton Hall Lane was the divide.

When we lived in the prefab we didn't have coal delivered but we would go with my mother to the coal yard adjacent to Loughton Station with the pram

and pick up a bag of coal and bring it home. It is hard to imagine anyone walking that distance there and back these days especially with a bag of coal on board.

When we left The Crescent, No 48 was owned by John Chiswell, of the well known Loughton family. Chiswells not only owned the antique shop in Forest Road, they owned the removals firm based in York Hill/Queens Road, and my parents would not be moved by any other firm – nor so me on a number of occasions.

Our next home was a Council House in Felstead Road not far from the Mother Hubbard, living there until, in my last year at Buckhurst Hill County High School, my parents raised enough for a deposit on a house in Queens Road, Loughton.

I spent many happy days in Epping Forest and remember well the tank traps near the Wake Arms on the road to Theydon Bois. Also the ponds and camps, and near what we called the Lost Pond there was a tree with metal rungs in the trunk to give access to the higher branches.

I loved my time at Staples Road, as I did my years at BHCHS and never regretted one minute spent at either school. Lunch time at Staples Road in the summer was great when we could go in the Forest across the road. I was in Miss Jenkins' class to start with and then progressed to Mrs Witherick. I remember at Christmas we would take presents in for the teachers and, as Mrs Witherick smoked – as did my parents in those days – my mother wrapped up five cigarettes for me to take in for her.

There were two venues for the school nativity plays, St Mary's Church and the church in George Lane, South Woodford, near the long ago closed Plaza. I was the Angel Gabriel and I know I had to wear big wings with a harness to hold them in place.

We also put on a concert at the Lopping Hall where I was in a sketch about two lovers running from the authorities. Another boy and I were Scottish soldiers or something and had to wear girls' skirts and came in on roller skates which represented our horses. Special effects included a wind machine borrowed from Bancrofts School and a sheet of metal which when shaken sounded like thunder, items simulating the storm in which the lovers perished.

I well remember the fairs at the LNER ground and one particular year there was a tent with a woman *au naturel*. She was not allowed to move and when a curtain was drawn back she was revealed in various unclothed poses representing women from history. Shades of Windmill Theatre days! I remember I was with some others from St Mary's Youth Fellowship – not a good image! The parade and fireworks were always great and after a while I think the fair moved to the playing field behind the LNER ground.

At St Mary's Sunday School we were given little religious stamps to put in a book and we would go there now and again and say we had lost the previous week's stamp and get a replacement. This meant we *had a spare* so the following week we would skip Sunday School – of course we had a stamp to put in the book, so no one at home was the wiser.

In Loughton Station there was a big, empty, red cast iron structure with glass fronted divisions all

round and which my father remembered before the war dispensing chocolate. You used to put money in a slot and pull out a drawer with your selection. It was years before any slot machines were in operation again and the only place you could put your money to activate anything was the toilets in the main entrance of the station. They were the old one-penny door openers.

Sometimes Sergeant Murray, the Road Safety Officer, a well-known figure around Loughton in the 50s, came to Staples Road School with a police display team complete with portable road signs, police car and cycles and there were staged accidents with a policeman being knocked off his bike by the car.

When I started at BHCHS the old nearby gun site was still occupied and I remember sometimes watching the guns traverse. I guess the M11 now uses the space where those guns were placed.

Other random thoughts are: tobogganing down Warren Hill, in the days when we had 'proper snow', on an articulated sledge made by my father and his brothers years before the war; the art shows in the small hall attached to the Gardeners Arms; going to the barbers at the back of Warne's in the High Road; getting my school uniform there and being humiliated because the salesman would refer to short trousers as 'knickers' – how glad I was when I got long pants; going to Derek Wright on Kings Green and nearly every other dentist there until I left for Australia; buying halfpenny chews off ration at the corner shop at the end of Roding Road; seeing a man on fire from spilt petrol from a cement mixer outside the secondary school in Roding Road; stopping at Ernie's (on the way to High Beach) for a hot Bovril on walks though Epping Forest on a winter Sunday afternoon.

Those were the days!

Last year Stuart organised a reunion in Sydney, at which 13 turned up. Although they were all Australian residents, every one originated from the L&DHS area. More precisely, they were all ex-pupils of Buckhurst Hill County High School. Given 13 were from only one school, one wonders how many in total, from our own leafy district, decided life was even greener on the other side of the planet.

Early fears on the Woodford & Loughton Railway

CHRIS POND

Occasionally, a crime occurs that engenders mass panic. One such was the murder of Thomas Briggs, a 69-year-old senior bank official, by Franz Müller on the North London Railway on 9 July 1864. At this time the NLR ran a service from Fenchurch Street (where, of course, most of the Loughton and Woodford branch trains also started) and Briggs was robbed and killed in a compartment of a late-night train between Fenchurch Street and Hackney. In those days – and until the 1960s – local trains were composed of compartment stock: that is, individual cabins seating 6

or 8 people. The communication cord had not been invented at that time.

The vulnerability which was exposed, and which was so shocking to the middle classes, was that in off-peak times, a lone traveller could find himself – or herself – closeted with a merciless criminal, who could kill or rob in entire seclusion (a possibility later taken up by Agatha Christie in her 4.50 from Paddington).

In this extract, Matthew Arnold, who was a schools inspector, as well as a giant of 19th century literature, observes neatly how the middle classes reacted to this crime on the Woodford & Loughton Branch of the GER. This was Arnold's educational territory, so as he says, he knew the line very well.

It is a great pity I had not discovered this extract before *The Loughton Railway 150 Years On* was published.

'My vocations led me to travel almost daily on one of the Great Eastern lines – the Woodford Branch. Everyone knows that Müller perpetrated his detestable act on the North London Railway, close by. The English middle class, of which I am myself a feeble unit, travel on the Woodford Branch in large numbers. Well, the demoralization of our class – which . . . has done all the great things which have ever been done in England – the demoralization of our class caused by the Bow tragedy, was somewhat bewildering . . . I escaped the infection; and day after day I used to ply my agitated fellow-travellers which my transcendentalism and my turn for French would naturally suggest to me. I reminded them how Julius Caesar refused to take precautions against assassination because life was not worth having at the price of an ignoble solicitude for it. I reminded them what insignificant atoms we are in the life of the world. Supposing the worst was to happen, I said, addressing a portly jeweller from Cheapside, – suppose even yourself to be the victim, *il n'ya pas d'homme nécessaire*. We should miss you for a day or two, on the Woodford Branch; but the great mundane movement would still go on, the gravel walks of your villa would still be rolled, dividends would still be paid at the bank, omnibuses would still run, there would be the old crush at the corner of Fenchurch Street. All was of no avail. Nothing could moderate in the bosom of the great English middle class their passionate, absorbing, almost bloodthirsty clinging to life.'

Postscript: After the North London Railway Murder, the first railway homicide, the NLR and some other railways assuaged passenger fear by boring 2-inch holes between the compartments. They were called Müller's Lights. However, this did not please courting couples! Franz Müller met his maker in front of Newgate Prison on 14 November 1864.

The Colonel – another question for members

This query from John Murphy was received by Chris Pond via e-mail, and he (very) rapidly passed it on to the Editor. Even though I remember much about Loughton from 1955 to 1960, and although he seems to ring a small bell, the identity of the individual described below is a mystery to me. Can anybody assist?

'I think we [CP and JM] talked once before, I'm an old Loughtonian who has lived in France for more than 30 years. I'm not quite sure why, something I heard on the

radio I think, called up a childhood memory of the "Colonel".'

When I was a young lad, say from the mid to end fifties, there was a well known "eccentric" in Loughton whom we children referred to by that name because he usually wore a colonial hat and dressed in khaki. He used to ride around town on a bicycle festooned with various fun things like a feather duster, L-plates and balloons. Neither us children, nor the adults as far as I could perceive at that age, felt fear of him or animosity. Everyone took it as it was probably meant, just someone trying to brighten up a difficult post-war life, especially for children.

He was a well-spoken man and may well have been an ex-Colonel. He joined me and some friends once when we were catching newts in Baldwin's Pond. He asked us why we were catching them and we said so that we could look at them. "You're naturalists then", he said, which we thought was very swish.

I wonder if you or any of the older residents you know can fill me in a little more on this fellow. Looking back from an age probably similar to his at that time I can appreciate what he did and what that meant in his relations with society around him. He sounds like a very interesting person.

I'd like to know more.

John Murphy'



Wood logging at midnight in Epping Forest on 11 November

Tailpiece

Although this is the last *Newsletter* for 2007/8, we still have two more meetings to come before we break for the summer. In that interval the Committee will be preparing the way for another successful and enjoyable season. We hope for your continued support and to see as many new faces as possible. Please keep *Newsletter* material coming in – you will know the kind of article that interests you, so if you have a memory or local knowledge that you wish to share, use the *Newsletter* as your means of doing so.

Thanks are again due to Ted Martin for his skills and patience in formatting the *Newsletters*, as well as for his much appreciated editorial advice.

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