

LOUGHTON AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# NEWSLETTER 178

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## A new season . . .

The Chairman and the Committee welcome all members and readers, old and new, to the 2008/09 season. Much revolves around our meetings, and the unstinting efforts of our Secretary, Richard Morris, to find speakers of the standard we expect. This season's talks, as you can see from the programme, seem particularly varied and well chosen. But that is not all we do. I was given a copy of the 1974 booklet published by our forerunner, the Chigwell Local History Society, and the Editorial commented: 'The functions of an historical society are not simply to hold monthly meetings, interesting and necessary though such meetings may be. To survive, a society must undertake research into local history, and having done so should publish the results of such work periodically.' I hope members agree that the L&DHS has fully embraced this philosophy.

## John Howes (1923–2008)

John Howes, our Vice-President, died in the Margaret Centre at Whipps Cross Hospital on Friday, 23 May, aged 85. Caroline and I had known him as a friend and colleague for over 40 years.

John Howes, a Walthamstow native, was born in 1923, his father a chef at the Great Eastern Hotel, then owned by the Great Eastern Railway. He grew up in Church Path, and was educated at the Monoux Grammar School, to which he won a scholarship. After school, John joined Walthamstow Borough Council in the Finance Department, and served in the army during the Second World War, including the post-D Day Normandy campaign, where he was a member of a tank crew. John was a pacifist. It was only after a lot of soul-searching that he decided not to register as a conscientious objector in 1939, but to join up. In doing so he decided not to rise above the rank of private.

After the war, John transferred to the Libraries Department, based at the Central Library in Walthamstow High Street. There, he met his wife, Daphne; they were married in 1953 and moved to their present house overlooking School Green in Loughton in 1954. They had two sons and a daughter, all educated at local schools. John was always most interested in local and national political matters, and was a frequent writer of letters to his favourite newspapers, the local and national *Guardians*.

John rose through the ranks of the library staff. Among his many activities were the development of the record library (one of the most comprehensive of any library system in the country, with its elaborate method of checking the vinyl LPs for damage done by borrowers) and also a whole range of extension activities, such as the Literary Suppers, held in the Selborne Restaurant, which attracted national and international literary figures, and the Forest Festival (a celebration of the arts of all kinds held throughout the new (1965) borough of Waltham Forest), and children's book exhibitions held at Ross Wyld Hall. He was a key player in the design of the new Hale End library, and in support for the Vestry House Museum and William Morris Gallery, which built up an international reputation for its collection and scholarship.

John became Borough Librarian in 1978, and held the post till his retirement in 1984. A major task was the exacting restoration of the Lending Library after the fire of 1982 and the total renewal of the book stock. He often quoted Rhodes Boyson saying in the Waltham Forest Council chamber that there were only two council activities which mattered to the public, libraries and emptying dustbins. In retirement, he became even more active. He had been a keen supporter of the Walthamstow Antiquarian (later Historical) Society, and wrote several books for them and the Council, which sold in their thousands, including *Charms of Waltham Forest* (1975) and *Shoppers' Paradise* (1991). He later became a Vice-President of the Society. A tutor for the U3A, John's interests were many, shared with Daphne, including ornithology and the architecture of chapels and churches, on which he gave frequent lectures, and churches and local history in Essex more generally. John was an atheist, but he knew more about Essex churches than most who worshipped in them.

He was also a member of our own society under its various identities, latterly of course the Loughton and District Historical Society, and when our long-serving secretary, David Wilkinson, had a serious accident, John stepped into the breach and more or less single-handedly took over its organisation and running, such that the L&DHS is now one of the foremost historical societies in Essex. John was a really good friend of our society, by his ever-willing ability to speak and teach, his organisational abilities, and his infectious enthusiasm. Without him, we may not have survived the mid-90s!

His knowledge and love of Epping Forest continued throughout his life and in 1967 he produced with Sir William Addison *A Forest Garland*, an anthology of poetry and prose about the Forest,

performed at Forest School, and subsequently published in a booklet. He co-produced with Dick Williams the pageant for the inauguration of the Epping Forest Centenary Trust held in the presence of the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs of the City of London in 1978. One of the last conversations I had with John concerned the William Morris Gallery, and the utter folly of Waltham Forest Council's recent running down of that fine institution, which had taken a lifetime to build up. In the last few months of his life, John wrote an account of his childhood in Walthamstow, which it is hoped the WHS will publish over the coming months. Always good-humoured and willing, he will be remembered as someone who sought to share his knowledge and enthusiasms with many people, and as a great advocate for Essex and north-east London.

CHRIS POND

## The Thoughts of . . .

'If I were asked to say what is at once the most important production of Art and the thing most to be longed for, I should answer, A beautiful House, and if I were further asked to name the production next in importance and the thing next to be longed for, I should answer, A beautiful Book. To enjoy good houses and good books in self respect and decent comfort, seems to me to be the pleasurable end towards which all societies of human beings ought to struggle.'

WILLIAM MORRIS

Born 24 March 1834 at Elm House, Walthamstow

## My Loughton

EVE LOCKINGTON

*[These lines are clearly from a staunch lover of Loughton, but one who feels concerns and regrets over some of the changes, great and small, over the last half-century or so. Many members may empathise with the feelings expressed, strong at times. Perhaps others feel change is inevitable and that a price has to be paid. I am aware of one of the main catalysts making Eve put pen to paper this time. No prizes for guessing from these verses what it is.]*

When I came to Loughton in 1952  
It was still a pleasant town  
The shops were small and intimate  
Debden not yet fully grown.

Little prefabs lined a road  
Reminders of past war  
For peace had come with hope for all  
And my married life lay before.

I loved Loughton in those early days  
The town was neat and clean  
Along the paths and roads  
Cleaners were always seen.

The milk float was drawn by a horse  
Which our boys loved a lot  
The cattle roamed along our road  
And trampled our front plot.

But then the milk came in a van  
Life gradually changed a lot  
The cattle from the forest moved  
And no longer used our plot.

The refuse men who every week  
Removed our garbage bin  
Changed to more hygienic ways  
For mechanisation had set in.

For a cinema there was no need  
And shops were raised instead  
Stores and a supermarket grew  
Where grass had been, and flowerbed.

The little shops they disappeared  
Large supermarkets took their place  
Once friendly and known shopkeepers  
Were not wanted in this retail race.

One last bastion of the past  
Has now been removed from the scene  
St Mary's Church no longer stays  
The Victorian church it once had been.

In this age all must be modern  
But does modernity bring joys?  
Has it brought much happiness  
To Loughtonian girls and boys?

When my sons were children  
They could play out in the street  
We were not then afraid  
They would with tragedy meet.

For a small remuneration  
The Scouts offered help to all  
I am not aware they suffered then  
Now harm would surely on them fall.

I believe times were better in the past  
But our values did not last  
Computers keep kids off the street  
Their contemporaries they don't meet.

Or else in bored gangs  
They range around the streets  
No one's allowed to remonstrate  
To do so brings too bad a fate.

I liked my Loughton of long ago  
But changes come and changes go  
What the future has for it  
I can not and will not know.

## Steam and diesel trains in Loughton in the 1960s

DAVID BURROWS

*[This article came to Chris Pond as an e-mail attachment. With help from some members of the Great Eastern Railway Society, we have added some notes, which appear at the end of the article.]*

In the 1960s, until the connection at Leyton was removed, British Rail provided two Sunday morning diesel multiple unit (DMU) services which ran as empty coaching stock from Stratford Depot to Loughton. They then worked to Liverpool Street and then as two passenger services at 0620 and 0656 to

Loughton, both then returned empty to Stratford Depot.

The first one from Liverpool Street was shown in the working time table as stopping at Bethnal Green and Bow Junction signal boxes if required to pick up staff. Any signalman would detrain or board either via the driver's cab or brake van. Whilst intended mainly for staff, these trains were advertised for public use in the local LT timetables.

The services were operated by three-car Rolls-Royce DMUs normally used on the Lea Valley line services. The DMUs were crewed by driver, second man and guard, the second man being provided as the DMUs were not fitted with tripcocks which were required for running over LT lines, thus presumably the second man was a safeguard against the driver passing a signal at danger. I travelled on these services many times after starting work in Liverpool Street Control in 1965.

There were similar services in pre-DMU days which ran through to Epping. I used to hear these (I lived about a mile from Loughton station) but never saw them.

One weekday morning sometime after mid-1965 a DMU and crew were hired from BR to operate during the morning peak between Loughton and Epping, LT being unable to operate over this section due to a major power failure.

Summer Sunday excursions were run from Loughton to various destinations, mainly in Kent and Sussex, such as the Margate area, Eastbourne and Brighton about every fortnight. These started from the centre track at Loughton and were hauled to Liverpool Street by J15 engines in steam days and latterly by diesels. These trains reversed in Liverpool Street and then ran via the East London Line to either New Cross or New Cross Gate thence over the Southern Region lines. The engines were normally run-round in the platform at Loughton, the LT Station Supervisor operating local switches to remove the current from that line while the engine was uncoupled and recoupled.

When I was a pupil at the Brook County Secondary School in Roding Road in the late 1950s or early '60s, not far from Loughton station, one enterprising pupil arranged a school trip to Norwich. We had a special Central Line train from Loughton to Buckhurst Hill. This was followed from Loughton goods yard by our train hauled by a J15 steam engine which worked it to Channelsea Junction, Stratford, where the train reversed and was hauled by a Brush type 2 diesel to Norwich and back. On our return the J15 returned the train to Buckhurst Hill from where we had our own Central Line train to Loughton. The BR engine had to run round in the yard at Loughton as it was either too long to run round in the middle platform or perhaps LT did not want the running round to delay their services. I believe our train left at about 8.30 am, a wonderful journey (particularly for those of us who appreciated how remarkable this was) non-stop through the Central Line stations in the middle of the morning peak. Passengers waiting for a boring Central Line train must have wondered what was happening when the J15 galloped through with a

real train. The following year we had a trip from Loughton to Southampton Docks which was hauled by a Brush Type 2 diesel throughout. This did start from the middle platform at Loughton.

Since all engines wandering down the Central Line had to be fitted with tripcocks, the only diesels which ever appeared were as follows: the BTH type 1 numbered 82xx, of which a number of the Stratford allocation had tripcocks; the NB 84xx class, all 10 of which were at Stratford and all (I believe) tripcock-fitted; and the Brush type 2s. All these classes were used latterly on the local freights and the Sunday excursions. Class 37s never ventured down this line.

J15s were the only steam engines ever seen on freight duties, presumably those regularly based at Epping (among them being numbers 65444, 65446, 65464 and 65476) and a few of the 'proper' Stratford engines (65361 and 65452 used to appear on the excursions) were the only ones so fitted. Presumably the tank engines at Epping for the Ongar service were also tripcock-fitted for occasional trips to Stratford or trains for the night staff (although some of these were advertised) trains.

The freight workings in the 1950s to Loughton consisted of a train during the night which called at Loughton in the early hours en route to or from Epping and Ongar, but only to detach and attach wagons.<sup>1</sup> During the day a J15 would come on its own from Epping shed at about 2 pm to shunt the yard. Sometimes in winter, when there was a lot of coal traffic as well as goods traffic, the shunting actually took a couple of hours; in summer there would sometimes be only a few coal trucks to place as necessary for the coal merchants and empties to be put on the appropriate siding for collection by the night train.

After completion of the shunting, the engine crew and shunter would repair to the LT staff canteen outside the station entrance (provided for bus drivers on the 38A route to Victoria), leaving their engine unattended and out of their sight for well over an hour. They would get back to it in time to return to Epping at about 4.15. I spent many an afternoon during school holidays watching the goings-on from the footbridge which used to cross the goods yard next to the signal box.

Although while the engine was shunting all the 'mainline' trains would be signalled automatically, the signalman had to clear the ground disk signal (L50)<sup>2</sup> behind the signal box for every move past it from the yard to the shunting neck, sometimes a couple of dozen times in an afternoon's shunting. The drivers or fireman had to keep a lookout to make sure it was 'off' and whistled for it if it was not cleared.

The J15s normally came from Epping chimney-first so that the driver was on the correct side to see the hand signals from the shunter. Occasionally, presumably if the Epping turntable was out of use, it would appear tender-first so the fireman had to watch for the shunter's signals and relay these to the driver who was effectively working 'blind' – apart from now being on the correct side to see the above-mentioned disc signal.



Shunting Loughton Station Yard. Looking north from the footbridge near Algers Road on 21 November 1959. Notice the extent of the coal allotments [G Pember: GERS Historical Collection]\*

The engine would normally run through the station on the up platform then through No 13 crossover onto the down line thence to the shunt neck via the No 54 points. The alternative would be to run on the up line, then reverse straight into the yard from L47 signal and No 53 points. While this presumably involved less action for the signaller, only one set of points to reverse, it was only occasionally done this way, presumably different signallers did it in different ways. Very occasionally it would run via the middle road then via the down line to the shunt neck. Departure back to Epping was only ever done via the shunt neck.

A couple of times a year a special freight would originate from Loughton on a Sunday evening. These consisted of concrete bridge beams manufactured by W C French at their factory near Loughton and would be loaded on bogie bolster wagons during Sunday before being worked away by a J15. Where they went after Temple Mills I do not know.<sup>3</sup>

After Epping shed closed in 1957 with the electrification of the Epping-Ongar section, the J15 ran light from Stratford to Debden, shunted there briefly (the traffic off the night freight) then back to Epping to do the same, before returning to Loughton for more of the same before returning to Stratford.

When some of the yards closed to ordinary goods traffic, by now in diesel days, leaving only coal traffic, the night freight ran but did not serve Loughton. This was served by a morning train from Temple Mills which served Eagle Lane (on the up side between South Woodford and Snaresbrook) and then continued to Loughton where it terminated. The engine then ran light to Debden and Epping to shunt, then returned to Loughton to shunt as necessary then worked the coal empties direct to Temple Mills around 2.30 pm. It was normally worked by a BTH 82xx or NB 84xx diesel but sometimes by a Brush type 2.<sup>4</sup>

The freight workings down the Central Line ceased in (I believe) 1964, the DMU service lasting a few years longer. I cannot remember exactly when this was withdrawn, possibly in 1966.<sup>5</sup>

See this website for a track and signalling plan of the line 1946–1957:

<http://www.geocities.com/idsmesig/Signals/CentralLineEasternExtensions.pdf>

## Notes

\* We are grateful to the GERS for permission to reproduce the photograph which accompanies this article. The locomotive, No 65440, an 0-6-0 J15, was an excellent long-lived goods design introduced in 1883. It was designed by Thomas William Worsdell and later modified by James Holden.

1. In 1963 there were two night trains (one to Newbury Park via Woodford and one to Ongar) plus a midday train from Temple Mills to Epping calling at Woodford, Loughton and Epping.

2. Loughton's signals were all prefixed LT (everything east of Liverpool Street was L plus another letter) and the shunt into the yard from the westbound main line was LT57. All signal numbers have now changed.

3. It is not known when the traffic started, obviously, if it was before diesels, then J-15s would have worked the trains. The trains ran at night as Out of Gauge (8X or 9X, the BR classification code for diesel and electric trains); again it is not known if they went to Temple Mills or direct to site. They were probably D82xx or D84xx hauled, but may have been hauled by D55xx engines. The wagons used depended on the make-up of the beams. The Out of Gauge Inspector decided what was required and they were ordered through the Freight Rolling Stock Section at Liverpool Street. The following were used: Borails, Bogie Bolsters (C or D) with single bolsters as runners, Lowmacs, Rectanks and sometimes Welltrols/Flatrols.

4. The last goods yards closed officially on 18 April 1966; presumably there was a run-down before then and BR probably collected their equipment by train afterwards. The man who was instrumental in the decision to cease the coal workings to Loughton was a BR manager who later became a notable figure in the town – Ron Gow, for many years a councillor.

5. The last staff trains (to/from Epping) ran in mid-1970.

## Loughton Railway Station Memories of 1929 to 1939 through the eyes of a boy aged 5 to 15

MIKE ALSTON

*[Among the members of the L&DHS we have a number of learned railway enthusiasts, and many of our readers and visitors to our website have a serious interest in this field, hence the previous article. Our excellent publication, The Loughton Railway 150 Years On (Chris Pond, Ian Strugnell and Ted Martin), contains a wealth of information.]*

*This piece from Mike Alston offers memories of Loughton Railway Station of a lighter, but never irreverent, kind.]*

I was born in 1924 and, from 1926 to 1940, lived on Trap's Hill. From 1929 to 1935 I walked daily to Mayfield School in Algers Road, via Loughton Station footbridge over the sidings. I was thus in almost daily touch with all the 'activities'. Thereafter, until 1939, and in the then absence of a car, there were outings to London and annual seaside holidays. Nearly all these were by train, although some later London trips were by the rather duller Green Line. Here are a few memories of these years . . .

**Rolling Stock.** The LNER carriages, in their traditional teak finish, were in three classes – Third, Second and First. Third Class compartments were finished in smooth black 'leatherette'. The divisions between the compartments ended below the roof, so that by standing on the seat, you could look along a series of open luggage racks for the full length of the carriage.

Second Class had about the same amount of legroom but the seats were finished in more comfortable brown moquette – and compartment divisions went right up to the roof. So no peeping into the next!

First Class was truly sumptuous, with dark maroon leather upholstery, deeper seats and more legroom. My father, with a job ‘in the City’, regularly travelled in this (usually smoke-filled) luxury. Only on rare occasions did I accompany him. Outings with my mother – perhaps to Bearmans at Leytonstone – were normally in Second Class. I also seem to recall that, in Second Class, there were a few ‘Ladies Only’ compartments.

**Engines.** With a schoolboy’s minute attention to such detail, I recall at least five types of engine – all tank. Very occasionally an engine *with a tender* would puff through with a goods train. The main thrill of an outing to London (via Liverpool Street) was passing the engine sidings at Stratford where express engines, painted pale LNER green, could be briefly spotted.

**Shunting.** One had a marvellous view of this fascinating activity from the bridge over to Algers Road (see the photo in the previous article). To drive a shunting engine, or to couple and uncouple the trucks, seemed to be the most wonderful job in the world! But ‘shunt-watching’ got me into trouble on one occasion. On most mornings my father would walk with me as far as the station – he to catch his train and me to continue over the bridge to school. I often waited there for a school friend, Joan Hubbard (who lived in York Hill), and we’d get to Mayfield together. But one day she didn’t turn up. It was no problem, because there was plenty of shunting going on. In fact I lost all idea of time, and when I reached school it was about eleven o’clock. I had a lot of explaining to do, and a letter about my lapse was sent to my parents . . .

**Taxis and horse-cabs.** Up to about 1932 there were horse-cabs, which parked outside the station. In fact the strip of cobbles on which they stood (and the drains for the horses’ ‘pee’) remained for many years. When the horses were replaced by motor taxis, one of the old drivers, Albert (who had a cleft palate – much to the intrigue of youngsters), would still sit in the little wooden hut. There were two motor taxis in the thirties, the more modern one (dark blue) was driven by a well-known character, Mr Sadler.

**The café.** Between the taxi hut and the station was a small café with, at the station end, a tobacco kiosk. At one time it was run by jolly Mr Green who always had a cheerful word for kids. He was an ex-serviceman of the Great War and had only one arm. He lived at the top of Queen’s road and, I think, walked there and back each day.

**Personalities.** The ticket collector was a thin-faced man who, intriguingly, wore pince-nez. One or two of the train guards lived in Loughton and I was always fascinated by their little bags out of which protruded their red and green flags. (Now that was another job I thought I’d like . . .)

**New Year’s Eve.** My parents stayed up to welcome each new year in. As midnight struck they were

always amused to hear a host of steam whistles from the station sidings.

**Sundry data.** The exterior ends of the carriages were painted black, with a large identifying letter and number. Most were ‘T’, which I think referred to the Ilford depot. Whenever we went on holiday we sent our trunk ‘PLA’ (Passenger Luggage in Advance). Over the years it always reached its destination safely and on time!

**A railway story** that has nothing to do with Loughton but which might amuse railway enthusiasts: I have a carriage door key with an interesting history. My maternal grandfather was a senior cleric in the Episcopal Church in Scotland (Dean of Ross and Cromarty). When travelling to sundry meetings or services he liked to have a compartment to himself so that he could prepare without interference. To help him, a railway official gave him a key so that he could find an empty compartment and lock himself in seclusion. If anyone tried to open the door he would look sympathetic, shrug his shoulders and indicate that the door appeared to be jammed. The other traveller would then hopefully walk away and try another compartment!

Maybe a trifle deceitful for a man of the cloth – but I treasure the key.

## More on the ‘Colonel’

MICK AND JACQUIE STUBBINGS

*[In Newsletter 177 we asked for information about ‘The Colonel’. He seemed to be a fascinating, if eccentric man and, sure enough, the Stubbings’ enlightenment bears that out. Here are their personal recollections of him.]*

We believe that he may have lived in one of the cottages at the top of Stony Path, but cannot be 100% certain of this.

He used to always ride his bike in and around Loughton High Road and, apart from the way he dressed that has already been noted (in *Newsletter 177*) we also believe that he wore a red spotted neck scarf.

Jacque remembers her mother using the grocer’s shop that was run by a Mr Patient and the Colonel used to use this shop as well. He would leave his bike outside the shop and at that time nobody would touch it.

His bike was decked out with an old-fashioned hooter, the type that you would see in the circus used by clowns. A bucket and spade, a windmill and inflated balloons also adorned the bike. But the one that most attracted the attention of all the children was the parrot: that would either be perched on his bike or on his shoulder.

He was a great attraction to all the children and if you approached him and spoke to him, he was very friendly and usually he would have a toffee that he would offer you.

Once when asked about the balloons tied to his bike, he replied, ‘They are there to help me get up the

hills'. Not that he needed any help, as he would cycle up a hill then get off his bike, get out a balloon and blow it up.

Parents were not afraid of him being friendly to you; he was just a well-meaning character. Yes he was different, and an eccentric, but he also brought a bit of laughter into people's lives.

## More on Müller

TED MARTIN

Serendipity or what? Soon after reading Chris Pond's piece in *Newsletter* 177 on the panic created by the murder of Thomas Briggs by Franz Müller on the North London Railway, I came across the following in an absolutely absorbing book about London in the nineteenth century<sup>1</sup>:

'To illustrate how brazen and outrageous the London street robber could be around this time we have the testimony of an anonymous *Times* reporter at the hanging of Franz Müller outside Newgate on Monday 14 November 1864. Müller, a German migrant, had committed the first murder in Britain to take place on a train — that of Thomas Briggs, a chief bank clerk, between Hackney Wick and Bow. A great crowd had begun to gather early on the Sunday evening, undeterred by bursts of heavy rain. In the darkness the reporter had been puzzled by a "peculiar sound", "like a dull blow . . . sometimes followed by the noise of struggling, almost always by shouts of laughter, and now and then a cry of "Hedge". As dawn broke, he understood.

"Then, and then only, as the sun rose clearer did the mysterious, dull sound, so often mentioned, explain itself with all its noises of laughter and of fighting. It was literally and absolutely nothing more than the sound caused by knocking the hats over the eyes of those well-dressed persons who had ventured among the crowd, and, while so 'bonneted', stripping them and robbing them of everything. None but those who looked down upon the awful crowd of yesterday will ever believe in the wholesale, open, broadcast manner in which garrotting and highway robbery were carried on . . .

There were regular gangs, not so much in the crowd itself within the barriers as along the avenues which led to them, and these vagrants openly stopped, 'bonneted', and sometimes garrotted, and always plundered any person whose dress led them to think him worth the trouble; the risk was nothing. Sometimes their victims made a desperate resistance, and for a few minutes kept the crowd around them violently swaying to and fro amid the dreadful uproar. In no instance, however, could we ascertain that 'police' was ever called."

Those whose panic was most in evidence in the early 1860s were adult middle-class Londoners.'

The local relevance of the murder of Thomas Briggs is obvious when we remember that most of the Loughton and Woodford branch trains also started from Fenchurch Street, hence these good folk included many agitated Loughton area residents.

So, some of those who had come to see justice done, were 'done' themselves, but reading this set me off to find out more about the murder of Thomas Briggs by Franz Müller.<sup>2</sup>

Briggs (69) was returning from dining with his niece in Peckham in July 1864 and, for the last part of

his journey, took a train from Fenchurch Street Station and travelled on the North London Railway<sup>3</sup> towards his home at 5 Clapton Square in Hackney.

However, when the train arrived at Hackney, an empty compartment was found and the seat cushions were soaked in blood, showing all the signs of a terrible struggle. In the compartment were found a hat, walking-stick and a small black leather bag. Briggs's body was discovered on the line between Bow and Hackney Wick and was brought initially into the Mitford Castle public-house (now the Top o' the Morning) in Cadogan Terrace E9 and later taken to his home where he lived for several hours before finally succumbing.

It was evident that he had been beaten unconscious by another passenger soon after the train had started from Fenchurch Street Station, robbed, and then thrown out of the carriage window, from which, it was thought, that his murderer had also jumped.

The main clue the police had was the hat left in the compartment, because it was not Briggs's hat. They presumed that it was his assailant's hat and a label inside showed that it had been bought from a hat shop in Marylebone. A gold chain, stolen by his murderer, was found, a few days later, at a jewellers in Cheapside. The jeweller had exchanged it for another in a deal with a foreign-looking man, and he was able to give a description of him.

The man's description was issued to the newspapers, and, as a result, a cabman came forward and gave information about a lodger who had left recently but had lodged at his house at 16 Park Terrace, Hackney. Before leaving, this lodger had given the cabman's small daughter a cardboard box which had the Cheapside jeweller's name on it.

Remarkably, the cabman had a photograph of the lodger. This was shown to the jeweller, who gave a positive identification of the foreign-looking man who had brought in Briggs's gold chain to him and exchanged it. The lodger's name was Franz Müller. The cabman also confirmed that the hat left in the railway compartment was one he had bought for Müller at the Marylebone shop whose label was inside it.

London shipping offices were visited and, on being shown Müller's photograph, a clerk remembered that a man who looked like that had sailed on the *Victoria* for Canada, calling at New York. Armed with extradition papers detectives and witnesses pursued the *Victoria* on a much faster steamship. On his arrival in New York Harbour, Müller was arrested, searched and extradited to England for trial. He had Briggs's hat on his head and the gold watch of the victim was in his possession.

At the trial his defence was that nothing but circumstances and presumptions were being alleged against him, and counsel for the Crown admitted this. An alibi that Müller could not have been on the scene of the murder at the time it was committed was also attempted.

However, the jury was having none of it, and they accepted the presumptions. They believed that the hat left in the compartment was Müller's hat, and that he

must have been there, or he could not have left his hat behind. His possession of Briggs's hat and watch at the time of his arrest was presumed to be the direct result of his crime. On the whole of the purely circumstantial evidence they presumed that he did assault and kill Briggs, rob him and go to America with the proceeds. Therefore, Briggs was murdered to fund Müller's passage to America.

He was quickly found to be guilty and sentenced to death. Efforts were made to save him and, as he was a German, some of these were from powerful German interests. However, 'the traditional stubbornness of the English official mind, backed as it always is by a wholesome majority opinion in favour of letting the law take its course, and making murder both an odious and a perilous crime, was adequate to the emergency'.

Müller was publicly hanged at Newgate Prison.<sup>4</sup> He protested his innocence until his execution, but at the last moment broke down and whispered to his German chaplain, 'I did it'.<sup>5</sup>

## References

1. Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: 'A Human Awful Wonder of God'* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007. ISBN 9780224062725. xvi + 624pp.). A very readable and thoroughly recommended history of London from 1800–1901, covering 'City', 'People', 'Work', 'Culture', and 'Law and Order'.

2. The majority of the details were found on the internet in Clarke, 'Problems of Presumptive Proof', *The Atlantic*, July 1893: [www.theatlantic.com/issues/1893jul/clarke.htm](http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/1893jul/clarke.htm)

3. The North London Railway was only 13¼ miles long and provided a connection between the northern and western main lines, the London docks and the City goods depots. It was authorised in 1846 from Camden Town to the docks at Blackwall and opened in 1853. It was considered to be one of the most efficient of the smaller British railways.

4. Public hangings for murder were abolished in 1868. The last fully public hanging was of Michael Barrett at Newgate on 26 May 1868 for the Fenian bombing at Clerkenwell which killed 7 people.

5. Notice the swiftness of justice in those days. The murder took place in July 1864 and Müller was hanged in November 1864.

## A serious error of judgement

CONIFER ROWLAND

*[I have been fortunate to know Conifer, an Epping resident, for several years. She is a member of the Epping Forest U3A, based in Theydon Bois, and is prominent in its Writers' Circle. She normally writes for her own pleasure, only showing her work to family and friends. When, with difficulty, persuaded to enter the Age Concern Essex Essay and Poetry Competition, not only was she placed first in her section, but also won the whole competition outright.]*

In 1938, aged 19, I married a Frenchman and started my new life in Brittany. Escaping from France in 1940, spending four years at the Free French General Headquarters in London, I then joined a small contingent of the Free French Red Cross. After the invasion we were sent to France where, with my friend Piu, I drove a truck delivering medicines to various Red Cross bases around the country.

It was now December 1944. The war in Europe was clearly in its final phase – the Russians closing in on

Germany from the East, we and our allies pushing inexorably from the West.

Just before Christmas, Commandant Morin, head of the Free French Red Cross, Piu and I, our truck full of boxes of medicines, set off for the South of France. I was the only one who could drive; the journey took three days along roads damaged by the American Army as it had raced north to liberate Paris.

Unlike the richer regions of the north of France, where – at a price – food was available, the situation south of Lyon was desperate. Staying the night in a small *auberge*, Morin, with coffee beans and cigarettes brought from England and worth more than gold as barter, persuaded the inn-keeper to kill and cook a turkey, boil some large onions, the only vegetable available, and give us a round loaf of the rather sour peasant bread. No butter of course! This bounty would sustain us for the next three days.

Driving down the mountains to the Mediterranean, surely one of the loveliest approaches in the world, we arrived in Cannes in the late afternoon. It was a small town in those days. We had all three known it before the war, Morin having lived there, Piu had a house in Antibes and I had spent part of my honeymoon nearby.

There were no means of communication, but we were confident of finding a good hotel and at least of having a hot bath. Nothing had prepared us for the result of the allied landings five months earlier. All the hotels were closed and shuttered and there was an air of desolation everywhere. The manager of the Hôtel Miramar on the Croisette opened up three rooms for us – but no heating, no hot water, no food, no service!

Huddled in blankets in Morin's room, eating our turkey, cold onions and horrible bread, he said to me: 'Tomorrow morning, after we have delivered the boxes, we'll drop Piu off in Antibes to see about her house, and you and I will go and see Picasso.'

I had never heard of Picasso! There was no mass media in those days. Modern Art had not penetrated my Yorkshire boarding school, nor my small circle of friends.

On a perfect, still Mediterranean winter's day, leaving Piu in the square in Antibes, I drove up the hair-raising winding road to Saint Paul de Vence, through the medieval arch and pulled up in front of the famous Hôtel de la Colombe d'Or.

Picasso came out to greet Morin with open arms. He seemed pleased with the few slices of cold turkey I handed him in a paper bag. He was a little, brown nut of a man, bald on the front and top of his head, with the hair at the back and sides much longer than in the photographs we have become used to seeing. He had dark, piercing eyes and, for his age – 63 – a wrinkled skin. He wore khaki shorts and shirt, with brown leather sandals on his bare feet. His voice was deep with a very strong Spanish accent.

Putting his arm tightly round my waist, he took us into a long, narrow room with a wall of windows overlooking the spectacular view down to the sea. He insisted on my sitting close to him – much too close! – on a small wooden bench and, while he and Morin caught up with news of the last four years, I looked

