LOUGHTON AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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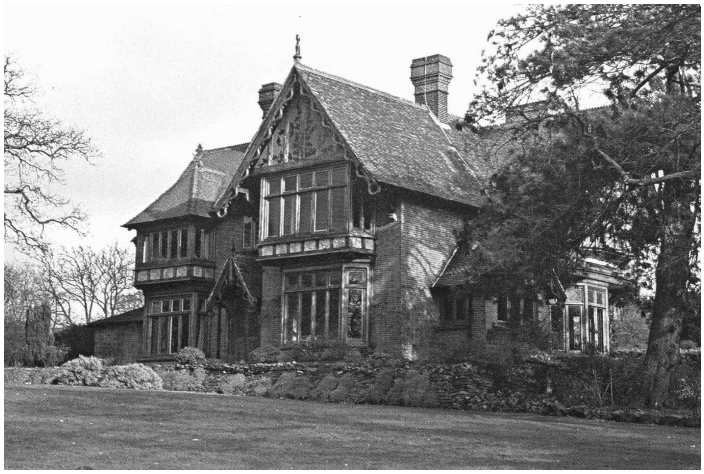

Edmond Egan's Dragons, Nursery Road, from *The Buildings of Loughton*, 2nd edition (see below)

Following on from *The Life and Art of Octavius Deacon* and *The Man Who Ran London during the Great War: The Diaries and Letters of Lieutenant General Francis Lloyd*, both reviewed in *Newsletter 186*, please take note of the updated and expanded *The Buildings of Loughton and Notable People of the Town* by Chris Pond, below.

Because we always have to prepare the *Newsletter* in good time for the printers, these notes are being written on a warm sunny day at the end of September. It's hard to grasp that, by the time this edition reaches our members in November, the weather could have turned typically nasty, as bemoaned by the English humorist, Thomas Hood (1799–1845) :

No sun, no moon! No morn, no noon,
No dawn, no dusk, no proper time of day
No warmth, no cheerfulness, no helpful ease,
No comfortable feel in any member,
No shade, no shine, no butterflies, no bees,
No fruits, no flowers, no leaves, no birds,
November!

We hope the outcome is better than that.

The Buildings of Loughton: a new edition

The first edition of *The Buildings of Loughton and Notable People of the Town* by Chris Pond was well received, and all copies were sold four years after publication in 2003. Several people contacted Chris with corrections or, more frequently, with suggestions for interesting buildings that had not been mentioned. Additionally, much has happened since 2003. In the period to 2007, there was a boom, when the prices of houses and land were seemingly rising exponentially. The correction came in 2008. There have been some new buildings in the six years, a few of which can perhaps be said to have been an ornament to Loughton. There has been a continual stream of extensions, such that some Loughton houses now look like a slim figure made an obese one, with several new limbs, each one less suited to the original body than the previous additions. And there have been some changes of use, and some demolitions, but fortunately not that many of notable buildings. So the second edition both updates the first, corrects errors, and includes a very large number of extra entries and further information which has come to light from more research.

The first edition was 56 pages with 8 pages of plates – the second edition has doubled in size to 112 pages with 16 pages of plates. This probably makes Loughton in this field one of the best documented places of its size in the country!

Chris says that:

'The book started as an attempt to write something about well-known people from Loughton's past and the buildings they lived in and used. Perhaps it should really have been two separate books, but when I started writing about the people, I found I started mentioning the buildings very quickly, and *vice-versa*, so it seemed sensible to combine them. In any case, Loughton has always had quite a few resident architects: in the late nineteenth century, that was probably because there was work easily to be had from the moneyed folk of the growing town.'

It is hoped that the second edition, as did the first, will both assist people who look at the buildings to know something of their history, and those who want to know more about some of the notable people who lived locally. Perhaps it might also contribute to the overall picture of what Loughton was like in the past.

The people listed are those from the last 25 years of the nineteenth century and the first 25 of the twentieth – earlier or later notables are mentioned but generally not elaborated on.

The new edition tackles many areas and streets that the first left untouched. But there are still areas of the town not mentioned in depth. Loughton was without building estates of similar houses until about 1925, when what was then called the 'Station Estate' was built; this we now know as the Roding Estate – and the book has a couple of photos of the builders' remarkable sales pitch. On this estate, the houses were standard builders' designs, of half a dozen different types, and the same might be said of Gale Estates' Harwater development. On the LCC Debden Estate a lot of work needs to be done. Other estates were smaller, but on the whole records have not survived well.

Chris hopes that anyone who knows something about the house they live in will contact him, for new facts are always coming to light!

The book has two indexes, compiled at great pains by Ted Martin, the first relating to streets and houses and the second relating to people. Because of the mass of detail in the book the indexes take up 16 pages but they should make the researcher's task much easier.

The second edition of *Buildings of Loughton* will be available to members at £6 or from the Loughton bookshop at £7.50, and as usual by post from the Society.

Thomas Willingale

[Submitted by Eve Lockington, who writes: 'My friend, Pam Wells, who is a member of our Historical Association, came across this item when she was going through some of her husband's old records. It was originally published in Punch *on the 11 April 1928.' Eve also says that this poem was quoted in Barbara Pratt's* Loppers of Loughton *(1981).]*

THOMAS WILLINGALE

One Willingale of Loughton – blessed be his name
Stood beside a hornbeam, lopping of the same;
The lord of Loughton Manor bidding him begone,
Willingale said several things and Willingale went on;
And when I stand by Loughton Camp and look on Debden Slade
I think upon one Willingale and how his billhook played
For Willingale, a labourer, by lopping of a tree
Kept houses off the Forest, for men like you and me.

A man lived by Woodford, he found upon a day
A fence was up in Lords Bushes across a bridle way;
He went to no solicitor nor Counsel of the Crown
But, being of the Manor he pulled the fencing down;
And out beside Fox Burrows, breathing of the Spring
I will still remember the man who did this thing;
For Great Monk Wood and Little, and Copley Plain were trim
And narrow streets like Walthamstow except for men like him

Before you climb Woodreddin Hill to reach the Verderers Ride
I bid you mark how London would not be denied
But, holding Wanstead graveyard, claimed common for a Cow
And, champion of all common rights, thrust into the row;
How like a Noble city for three long years she fought
Till Jessel, Master of the Rolls, gave judgement as he ought
And nine miles out from Aldgate Pump he kept the Forest free
Untouched, untamed, a pleasant place for men like you and me.

Boys' toys in the 1930s

MIKE ALSTON

In 1934 I was just 10, and these recollections are of what was available to schoolboys in their leisure time during the mid-1930s. It was before the advent of the plastic age, and toys were mostly made of tinplate, lead or wood. The range was endless!

A Hornby train set (0 gauge – less convenient than the smaller 'Dublo' introduced in 1938 was a 'must', and the amount of equipment depended on the size of the parental pocket. The trouble was that, the larger the array, the longer it took to clear away ('Hurry up Michael, we have guests this evening'). The local source of supply was Ramsey's (next to the old police station). Coupled with trains was Meccano, in red-and-green painted steel, which had to be assembled with minute nuts and bolts ('Don't leave them on the carpet'). The more advanced constructions, with their brass wheels, could be made to operate by connecting them to a small steam engine, fired by a burner containing methylated spirits.

By good timing, for me, Hornby introduced their range of Dinky Toys in 1934, and I soon had a fleet of their vehicles. Before that, I had to be content with similar-sizes Tootsie toy cars imported from the USA. Another import, from Germany, was the Schuco clockwork racing cars which sped over many a carpet.

Next in line were hand-painted lead soldiers made by W Britain. Their range was vast – by 1931 it is recorded that their catalogue listed over 400 different sets. But arms and legs were for ever breaking off. So, what to do with the lead? A company produced moulds into which you could pour liquid lead and make your personal army. I recall melting the lead over the fire – a hazardous task no parent would surely allow today! Continuing in military vein, many of us had Diana 'break-barrel' airguns (5 shillings (25p) if I remember correctly) which fired lead pellets *[commonly called 'slugs' – Ed].* Fortunately, none of my friends was ever hit. That cannot be said with potato pistols, which were fitted with a finely moulded brass nozzle. This was pushed into a potato to produce a 'veggy pellet'. This could really hurt when you were the target. Equally painful were missiles from pea-shooters and catapults. More harmless were cap-pistols armed with strips holding minute amounts of gunpowder, but which made a lot more noise.

On the aviation front, and before the arrival of detailed plastic models, Ramsey's sold 'Skybird' kits. The constituent parts (scale 1:72) were made of roughly finished wood, and so the quality of the finished model depended on how much effort you put into sanding the wood, and painting. For a working model, there was nothing better than a 'Frog' plane

(first introduced in 1932). I think this had a card or balsa body and aluminium wings, and was powered by elastic, which was 'armed' by turning the propeller scores of times. Properly launched, it could fly a long way, and usually into a neighbour's garden ('Please may I have my plane back').

And so to sport: popular in the 1930s was the Yo-Yo, available in a whole range of qualities ('Mine is better than yours'). Another passing craze was the biff-batt – a table tennis bat with a small rubber ball attached by a short length of elastic. We often 'whipped' little wooden tops along the pavements and also tried our hand, usually unsuccessfully, at Diabolo. Parents with a practical turn of mind might even be prepared to make a pair of wooden stilts – although this resulted in penalties such as grazed knees and elbows. A better form of transport, before one was promoted to a full-sized bike, was the Triang 'Fairy Cycle'. I think a more suitable name would be found for it today!

There were a host of other hobbies to keep us entertained – modelling with Harbutt's Plasticine, painting with Reeves' water colours, and of course, collecting cigarette cards. How glad we were that most parents smoked, although extra 'supplies' for our albums could be found in discarded cigarette packets which we recovered when we sneaked onto the upper decks of empty buses, such as the 38A, which used the forecourt of The Crown Hotel as a terminus.

My one regret is that all those toys were disposed of as soon as I 'grew out of them', because their market values today are staggering.

Postscript – moving on

I have taken the liberty of tacking a few words onto Mike's piece, and moving on to the times I remember, and where we, in Loughton, bought our toys in the 40s, 50s, and then, later again, when we were buying for our own children.

From a young age I recall toys being sold in Hubbards, in High Road, alongside sweets and tobacco, and also in E G Hatch, almost on the corner of High Road and Brooklyn Avenue, which was mainly a cycle shop, but where I would also covet expensive Meccano outfits or Hornby Dublo model railway sets, (still going strong after Mike's time) for whom they acted as agents, but which were way beyond our means. Some L & DHS members may recall the perpetually revolving bicycle wheel above the entrance to Hatch's shop. It was there my parents bought me my first 'proper' bike, a Rudge Pathfinder, which was stolen in Debden, but replaced on insurance, the second one lasting for almost 10 years, including seven years cycling to Buckhurst Hill County High School and back every day. There was also the Venture Model Shop, next to the King's Head, where many large and small exotic kits were on offer. That little shop came and went, too.

Woolworths also sold toys, but cheaper ones, little lead or tin farm animals and soldiers, or small dolls, displayed on long counters with wide aisles between them – no doubt a poor use of space, but an enjoyable place to browse around. It was a shame, but probably inevitable, that Woollies became a victim of harsher economic times.

A generation later, by the time we ourselves became parents, Daveys had opened up, at the top of the alley opposite St Mary's Church, and there, for many years, they sold all the latest as well as traditional toys, plus prams and all the baby paraphernalia. But, that's another one that's gone.

Now most L & DHS district's parents who are in the market for toys seem either to buy them on-line, or take a trip to Toys R Us, or Mothercare. Impersonal yes, to those who used the little shops, but probably par for the course these days. TERRY CARTER

Mary Sidney, Lady Wroth

Anyone who has read Sue Taylor's book published by this Society in 2005 will appreciate how much more there was to the story, and may wonder how big a book that would produce.

Margaret P Hannay, Professor of English at Siena College, USA, has written one* – 313 pages of traditionally set type plus 28 black and white plates, a chronology, simplified Sidney and Wroth family trees, bibliography and index.

The author was conducted around relevant parts of Loughton, Chigwell and Woodford by two Society members, and visited many other places. 'No stone unturned' might be an apt phrase to describe her research.

**Mary Sidney, Lady Wroth* by Margaret P Hannay (Ashgate, 2010, ISBN 978–0–754660–53–8, 6¾ × 9½ inches, £55).

IAN STRUGNELL

The Epping Railways Company 1861 deed

CHRIS POND

Some 40 years ago, a young American woman, Jean Balbin, was browsing in the old books section of Halle's department store in Cleveland, Ohio, when she found a vellum deed, over 100 years old, on sale as an antique. She bought it, took it home, but could not make a great deal of it.

When she was thinking of moving house in 2010, the old deed was disinterred. The power of the Internet meant that she was able to work out that the Loughton mentioned in it was Loughton, Essex, and William Whitaker Maitland, a noted landowner. The LDHS website gave my e-address as contact, so Jean e-mailed me to see if I could find out any more about the mystery vellum she had kept for 40 years.

The deed, which she kindly had copied and the scan emailed, is a document of 1861, when a local company, the Epping Railways Company, had secured powers to build the extension line from Loughton to Epping, a puppet company, part of a ploy by George Bidder ('the calculating boy') to create a rival main line towards Dunmow, Bury St Edmunds,

and Norwich. The line was to leave the first Loughton station (on the site of the Lopping Hall) by a triangular junction, and then to join the present course (actually opened in 1865, of which more later) to Epping.

The deed is part of a contract between Maitland (who died a month after it was executed) and the ER Co for the conveyance of the lands needed for the new railway. The first and last pages are missing, and were when Jean bought it – they would have been more decorative and are probably framed in some house in America, but what we have is enough to give some very interesting details.

Maitland was the owner of the land, but it was all rented out. Four occupiers are mentioned, Edward Philip Humphreys, Thomas Dosson, James Reynolds, and George Rogers. There were special provisions for their protection where the line bisected their lands – for instance, for the making of occupation crossings of the line, and digging of ponds to water cattle where the line cut off the animals from their accustomed supply.

The total acreage to be transferred was 22 acres and 37 perches, and there were 12 works the Railway had to carry out, including six occupation crossings, pond relocations, and two bridges. Of these, the occupation crossings would have been abolished by the time of electrification in 1949, and I think the two bridges (one of which was near the present allotment site across the line to what we know as The Lindens) went before that The deed explains the establishing of the footpath or cart track, which had to be 15ft wide, under the viaduct over Pyrles Brook (near the present Bank of England Printing Works), which is still there, but not a public footpath.

Details of the occupiers: Edward Humphreys farmed in the south of the High Road, possibly Beech Farm, George Rogers was the longstanding tenant of Loughton Hall Farm (now Hatfields, the HQ of the University of Essex E15 Acting School). He farmed 430 acres and employed 13 people. Thomas Dosson (or Dossin) was the tenant of Piggott's Farm, Theydon Bois, which is of course still there, and whose title deeds we rescued a decade or so ago and deposited in the ERO. He employed six men and boys. Piggott's had lands in both parishes. James Reynolds I have not traced – he may have been an absentee landlord.

What then happened was that the Epping Railways Company defaulted on the contract. Ian Strugnell has unearthed two quite fierce letters in the national archives when Maitland was trying to enforce the contract, and the railway company simply declined to answer letters. Railway politics in Essex and East Anglia were complex at the time, with the major line, the Eastern Counties, being involved in merger talks with a number of different companies. Eventually, the Great Eastern Railway was formed in 1862, and undertook the construction of the line, which opened in 1865.

Going to Epping by train quite recently, I was aware of my surroundings in a new way because of the emergence of this deed – as the train bounced out of built-up Loughton, over the viaduct, crossed the shaws (linear woods), and passed the Coal Duty obelisk at the old Loughton–Theydon boundary. Our thanks go to Jean Balbin for letting us know about it, and for filling in another bit of the canvas of Loughton history.

[Regrettably, the scale of the accompanying illustration of the actual lands taken for the construction of the railway from Loughton to Epping precludes its satisfactory reproduction in the Newsletter. To make all the wording readable would create a very large image. However, in view of its very interesting nature, are happy to e-mail the diagram drawn by Ian Strugnell separately to interested members. Contact the Editor.]

The story of Loughton Cricket Club

[I found it fascinating when Richard Morris showed me a copy of Percy Thompson's compilation of the Club's recorded history from 1880 to 1926, covering the period from the earliest days on the rented ground, through to the securing of the 'field' into perpetuity. Richard's introduction, printed below, is self-explanatory, and we have also included the first of what we hope will be a number of extracts covering very differing periods, and fortunes of the club that is such a significant part of Loughton's sporting and sociological history. The names of many individuals intimately involved with the Club read like Loughton's own Who's Who?. *I confess to a personal interest, having played for Loughton CC both as a junior in the 1950s, and later, in the 1960s, as a member of the team that won the Essex Cricket League championship in the very first year that the competition was started.– Ed.]*

Introduction – Percy Thompson 1866–1953

Percy Thompson came to live in Loughton in the early years of the 20th century. Born in Rotherhithe in 1866, the youngest child of a large family, Thompson entered an architect's office as a boy, and with characteristic energy and determination became an architect. By 1920, Percy and his wife Annie were living in a house called 'Overdale', at 62 The Uplands, Loughton.

It was in Loughton and Essex that he devoted much of his time to the study of natural history, archaeology and antiquities. Thompson was Hon Secretary of the Essex Field Club for over 30 years and Editor of the *Essex Naturalist*. In 1946 he published a short history of St John's Church, Loughton. During many of his years in Loughton, he was researching and writing-up the history of the village and Epping Forest; its houses, people and institutions. Although this was never published, the manuscript, which consists of four substantial volumes, including one of over 100 photographs, was deposited at Guildhall Library in the City of London, following his death in 1953.

One of the manuscripts in volume two is a history of Loughton Cricket Club from 1880 to 1926, compiled by Thompson from the Minute Books of the Club. This has been transcribed and forms the basis of this article. An appendix to the history provides a useful synopsis of the original Trust Deed by which the Club

acquired ownership of its ground in 1926. Thompson later added a copy of an article and photograph which appeared in *The Observer* in May 1933, as part of a series the newspaper was running on the history of local cricket clubs.

A copy of Thompson's history of the Club was sent, in 1929, to B J Van der Gucht, the Hon Secretary, but he replied in February 1930, that a lack of funds made it impossible to make any 'further use of it at the moment'. Whether it was just a lack of funds, or possibly that the content of the history was too 'dry' to make it worthy of publication is not clear, but while it records many interesting aspects of the development of the Club, little is included about the cricket played during the period, other than some comments in the early years as to how successful a season had been. I have therefore added, as illustrations, a few reports from the *Woodford Times* of matches played in 1923 and 1929, which will appear in future parts of this article. In the return match with South Woodford, played at Woodford, in 1923, Loughton only managed to score 101 runs in reply to the home side's 132, but J W Marston returned the amazing bowling analysis of 9 for 61 in dismissing South Woodford for 132 runs.

Percy Thompson lies buried in Loughton Cemetery, in Church Lane, alongside his wife Annie, a son Bruce who died in infancy, and his daughter Doris who died in 1973. His daughter married Alfred Newbury, but there is no record of any children from the marriage. The grave has recently been restored by two members of the Essex Field Club in memory of a person who contributed much to the local community.

RICHARD MORRIS

[*There has been no attempt to alter Thompson's manuscript to bring the format into modern conventions. The transcription is as Thompson wrote it, with only some sub-headings added for ease of reference.]*

The Story of Loughton Cricket Club 1880–1926, as recorded in its Minutes

The recent [1926] acquisition by the Loughton Cricket Club of its ground on a freehold tenure (in trust) and its consequent establishment on a permanent footing offers a fitting occasion to give some account of the history of this old-established Club, now so near its Jubilee.

The Early Years

The Loughton Cricket Club, so far as written history goes, is a torso, without head or tail – it has no recorded beginning, and its end is not yet! It was inaugurated in 1880 and it is believed owed its inception to Mr G P Clarke, at that time master of the National School: for some two years the Club's ground was some vacant land in Lower Park but from that time to the present, thanks to the generosity of the late Mr J C Rohrweger, who for years allowed the use of his field free of rent, the ground has been the field known as Motts Croft, fronting to Kings Green and Trapps [*sic*] Hill.

Unfortunately, the very early years of the Club's history are shrouded in obscurity, as the earliest minute book has been lost. The little that is known of these early days may be summarised in a few words.

In 1884 the president was Mr J C Rohrweger, the captain J H Langdon junr, and the honorary secretary M S C Meston, with headquarters at the National School rooms; the ground was already that still in use in the High Road, and the members totalled 70.

Prosperity in the 1890s

When recorded history begins, late in 1891, the Club appears already to have attained a considerable degree of prosperity and was supported by local residents of all grades of society, the members on the books reaching 119, all but sixteen of whom resided within the parish. The list of the then members affords an interesting epitome of the Loughton of 1891. The Rev J W Maitland, rector of the parish, was living at Loughton Hall, and the Rev W Allen, vicar of St Mary's resided at St Mary's Lodge. Mr W Van der Gucht was at Debden Green, Mr A J Gerritsen at Swiss Cottage, Mr George Gould at Brooklyn, his son Mr Sydney Gould at Woodlands, Mr P Gellatly at High Standing, Col S L Howard at Goldings, the Rev J A Jones, pastor at the Baptist Church, lived in Algers Road

The written history of the Club opens with the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Nov 10 1891, when it was reported that during the preceding season 28 matches had been played, of which 21 were won and 7 lost; an estimated net deficit of £5. 5. 10 for the year was announced.

At the next Annual Meeting, held on Nov 10 1892, we learn that 20 matches had been played during the season, 8 of these being won, 11 lost and 1 drawn.

The balance sheet showed that 68 subscriptions at two shillings, 2 at half a guinea, 8 at a sovereign, 1 at a guinea and 2 at five shillings had been received, the total membership being about 85. The ground man's wages were £16. 10s and the umpire's fees £3. 17. 6. A small surplus was reported.

In the autumn of this year [1892] negotiations were entered into with another local club, the Loughton Park Cricket Club, for an amalgamation, but mutually satisfactory terms could not be arranged and the scheme fell through.

At a meeting on 3 Oct 1893 the Committee decided to play two elevens the following season, this affords evidence of the growing strength in the playing members of the Club. At this time the Club held its ground as tenants of Mr Rohrweger, its President, who does not appear to have charged it any rent.

At the beginning of 1894, Mr Rohrweger resigned his presidentship of the Club, and at the same time, by letter, informed the Committee that in future it must apply to Mr Gould for the use of the ground. On March 2nd 1894 the Club agreed with Messrs G Gould & sons to pay Ten Pounds per annum as rent of the field. 'F Foster Jn', who was in after years to play so prominent a part in the Club's history, was elected a member on March 20th 1894.

The Annual General Meeting that year [1894] was held on 1st November, when a resolution was carried 'That Tennis be permitted in conjunction with the Loughton CC except when matches are in progress, and that the subscription 'for lady members be 10/- per annum and for gentlemen for tennis and cricket 15/- per annum'.

In the Balance Sheet this year appeared the item, 'By G Gould & sons (rent) £8'.

On 6th Nov 1895, at the Annual Meeting, an attempt to rescind the resolution of the previous year, permitting tennis, failed and the original minute was endorsed.

A deficit in the accounts was announced, and it was agreed to organise a Concert to clear off same.

At the Annual Meeting on Oct 21 1896, the question of Club Colours was brought up, and it was decided to retain the old colours, namely, chocolate, light blue and gold.

The ambitious decision was made to play a match with the Essex Club and Ground next season.

The chairman reported that £55. 14. 6 had been subscribed or promised towards a fund for a new Pavilion, up to that date.

[This extract is a much truncated condensation of early sets of Minutes, in an attempt to highlight some significant steps in the Club's early development. The Minutes themselves are very detailed, and include many pages that are simply long lists of names and financial statistics. Richard's conclusions in his introduction about the possible reaction to Percy's endeavours is, I'm fairly certain, correct, hence the necessary distillation. We will maintain this style in future extracts. Next time we move on to 'The New Pavilion'. Ed.]

A quiet village called Loughton has grown up

[The late WILL FRANCIES *moves on to the First World War in this short fourth extract from his article in the* Gazette and Guardian*, of 25 April 1969.]*

The Zeppelin and Gotha air raids on London during the 1914–1918 war, and the possibility of a bomb on nearby Waltham Abbey's Royal Powder Mills, provoke disturbing memories, as a great number of Loughton's men and women were employed there.

On one unforgettable night the stabbing searchlights caught, and held, a colossal target, the guns ceased their clamour, only the stutter of high-flying airman Lt Leefe Robinson's[1] machine gun was heard.

The droning Zeppelin, high in the night sky, glowed orange, and in minutes that seemed hours, became a white-hot flaming torch, plunging earth-wards, to fall, not on the watchers in Loughton, as seemed likely, but at Cuffley which is close enough to those precious powder mills!

High Beach was 'occupied' by the Artists' Rifles and the balloon section of the RFC, whose lone observation balloon floated serenely overhead. Many refugees came to Loughton from East London, and a few from stricken Belgium.

Drama of raids

From Drummaids heights and the summit of York Hill near the Gardener's Arms, the air raids on London were watched by many people.[2] Beyond the dark forest, as on a distant stage, the drama unfolded night after night, as searchlights probed and guns roared whilst the giant craft of the enemy droned overhead.

References

1. Described fully in 'The First Blitz' by Richard Morris, *Newsletter 179*.

2. Thankfully, the amazing view from the Gardener's Arms small garden is now untroubled, but some 23 years after the First World War events described by Will Francies, Loughtonians again watched in awe, mingled with sympathy, from that spot during the Blitz in the Second World War as parts of heavily bombed London burned 10 or more miles away. [*Ed.*]

W & C French 1958 to 1986: my perspective – Part 2

STUART LOW

On completion of the CEGB project there was not much work on the company so I was seconded to the civil engineering department who were building the Northern Outfall sewerage Works at Beckton. Here I had the 'exciting' task of receiving piling records from the piling rigs and scheduling nearly 30,000 precast concrete piles. The project consisted of the construction of a series of rectangular and circular tanks none of which I saw past the porcupine look of thousands of piles sticking up out of the ground. I put up with this task for a while then began to look for a more rewarding job. I told my previous boss, Ernie Fowle, that I was looking for another job unless he was able to find me something better on the construction side.

Ernie Fowle had recently been transferred to the Abridge office and given the task of turning it from a small jobbing builder into a going concern with larger projects. He offered me the job of starting off with him with a view to moving, as he put it 'onwards and upwards from the bottom to who knows where'.

At the time the Abridge office was doing anything from changing tap washers or replacing broken windows for locals to fairly expensive pub work in the Essex area. I found out later that this work was not so much tendered for but more 'allocated' by the brewery architects on a rotation to a number of builders and fairly heavy 'provisional' sums were included in the estimates for the privilege of winning the contracts. Read into that what you may.

That being said, some of the pub work was quite interesting with our joiners shop producing all the necessary bar joinery and pub fittings under the supervision of Bert Bowtell whose boast was 'if you can draw it we can make it' – and he could!

Many of the locals were quite upset by the prices we charged for some of our work but little realised the amount of work it sometimes takes to change a tap washer. From the time a request was made, our plumber would visit the property, turn off the water at the main which was sometimes harder than it would seem with the stop cock not having been touched for years. The same might apply to the actual tap. After an hour including travel and the cost of a transportation a twopenny washer might cost £5 or £6.

Small local jobs like the above were gradually phased out and the Abridge office took on larger contracts.

One of the early major projects was for the Saxon Inn at Harlow where we doubled the bedroom capacity by adding a further 25 bedrooms. This was later to be expanded by a further 19 bedrooms and a boiler house/plant room, an extension to the meeting rooms and auditorium and enlargement of the kitchens.

In 1967–68 the client was so impressed with the way the work was carried out that a new hotel was

negotiated for in Huddersfield alongside the M62 which the W&CF civil engineering section was constructing across the Pennines. It consisted of 100 bedrooms, a basement night club and a large 'A' framed auditorium. It was here that I met my, to be, second wife.

This project, like Harlow, had the same architect (Nellist Blundell and Flint) and quantity surveyor (William Bowler) as well as the same client whose directors, John Ward, Arthur Wastell and his brother Wally Wastell, drew up a contract which was signed by all parties.

This 'partnership' was a great success and in a very short time we started constructing an almost identical hotel at Blackburn. In 1971 a further hotel was started in Northampton, an eight-storey tower with 140 bedrooms including three suites above a podium containing a dining room, meeting rooms and a large auditorium.

Two interesting problems arose during the excavation. First, during the excavation of the basement a number of bones were discovered and the client gave the local archaeologists two weeks to investigate them. As it turned out the site was on an original horse market and the bones turned out to be horse's bones presumably from the knacker's yard. Secondly, whilst excavating a drain trench a lead coffin was uncovered. This excited the local constabulary and press but the former weren't interested when it turned out to be from an adjacent grave yard and was some hundreds of years old and it was reburied when the trench was filled. Also an old pub was demolished on the corner of the site and after a dozer had pushed the building over it was discovered that the loft contained hundreds of old earthenware stout bottles and glass pop bottles with a marble in the spout the majority of which had been smashed.

Sadly, sometime later in 1988, the daughter of John Ward, one of the directors, was murdered in Kenya whilst on a photographic trip. Julie had been photographing wild life but was found murdered and mutilated next to a camp fire.

The Saxon Inn Hotel - Northampton

On completion of the Northampton project I returned to the Abridge office whilst still living in Northampton. This necessitated a drive to and from Abridge every day. However, we soon won a contract to build the Barnet Police Station. There was an existing pre-Victorian building on the main road and we constructed half the new Police Station behind the existing one and when this was completed the police moved in and we demolished the old building and constructed the second half of the project. For some time, near the end of the contract, the site sheds were removed and my site office was in one of the cells. Fortunately this is the only time I have experienced the inside of a police cell.

Whilst the police station was being constructed we were awarded the contract to build a psychiatric wing and boiler house at Barnet Hospital. Being in the area at the time it was logical that I ran the quantity surveying side of this project as well, and over the next couple of years we built a two-storey psychiatric unit on one side of the road with a cable and pipe duct running under the road to the plant room and boiler house on the other. This latter unit also included mortuary and cremation facilities.

One major problem we had on this project was that it was on a fairly steep hill and one of the deep trenches, although well strutted with timber, 'closed up' with the force of the ground above it. Fortunately the sound of snapping timber alerted everyone to the slippage and no one was hurt but 12' × 4' timber snapped like matchsticks.

It is said that the colour orange is not a good colour for mental or psychiatric patients as it is a colour that arouses them. For some reason the architects decided to have orange canopies above the windows!

Over the next few years I relocated from Northampton via Romford and Buckhurst Hill to The Crescent in Loughton to a house 50 metres from the house in which I was born. I remained at the Abridge office until I emigrated to Australia in 1986.

During this time the office had tendered for and won a number of contracts in the local and North London area. Some of which I was involved with were as follows.

A very disturbing project near Ware for, I think, Allen and Hanbury. It was the construction of about 40 dog kennels for Beagles. The kennels consisted of a covered sleeping area, a covered outside area and an uncovered outside area. Each of the areas had its own washdown point and drainage gulley so, as a result, the drainage over the site was extensive. There were existing kennels on the site and we would hear the dogs barking until one day we came on site and all was quiet. Apparently over night the dogs had all been taken to the labs for experimentation. No wonder it was out in the country away from the eyes of protestors.

Factory units at Sidworth Street in Hackney: this was a series of factory units with a small internal administration area and toilets together with a mezzanine floor. We had arranged for the Mayor to open the units and provided a brass plaque with the details and a sliding curtain for him to draw back. Unfortunately he was blind and after about three attempts at opening the curtains he was helped by his 'lady friend' and sadly never saw his inscription.

More factory units at Hackney for the GLC which were some of the worst designed units I have ever seen. They were three storeys high and consisted of

faced brickwork between orange painted columns and beams with brightly painted red handrails, balconies and fencing. Few of the windows were square with most of them being of a truncated triangle shape. When we arrived to start work on the site it was occupied by gypsies and it wasn't until the police threatened to move their caravans with an excavator did they vacate the site leaving mounds of earth and excavated tarmac behind.

Factory Units in Hackney.

In doing refurbishment work to the Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge at Chingford we had to replace some of the original oak windows and external timbers. Some of the replacement timbers came from old oak-built timber ships and care had to be taken in the joinery shop as sometimes musket balls were embedded in the timber.

In the late 1970s the Saxon Inn client again asked us to tender for another Saxon Inn at Peterborough. We won this tender and constructed a part-two, part-three and part-four-storey 100 bedroom hotel at Thorpe Wood, Peterborough. Once again the architect and quantity surveyor were those on the previous hotels so there was continuity of trust and respect. At the time of opening in April 1981 the room rate for a single was £23 and a double £33.

Whilst measuring on the roof one day an American fighter plane from a nearby air base screamed overhead and shot up vertically over my head. I have never heard so much noise and the speed of this plane was unimaginable as it flew straight up until it was just a dot in the sky.

This was to be the last Saxon Inn built as the clients, now down to two of the original members with one having died in the interim, sold their holdings to other groups.

In the early to mid-1980s the same client, now based in Bury St Edmunds, started a new chain of hotels called the Butterfly Hotels. W & C F were fortunate to win the tender to construct two of these hotels, one at Bury St Edmunds and the other at King's Lynn. They were basically small hotels run by a husband and wife team who provided service to the 50 bedrooms and restaurant and were situated on holiday routes to the coast thus attracting holiday-makers. There are now more Butterfly hotels in Peterborough and Colchester.

I was to be the quantity surveyor on both these projects and during mid-1985 we started construction on the Bury site. This project went over the winter and I well remember climbing up ladders and over scaffolding in snowy and windy weather with the client's quantity surveyor measuring for progress claims. By the time I left the UK for Australia in August 1986 neither Bury nor King's Lynn had been completed. Bury was finished for Christmas but King's Lynn had some time to go to completion.

After 28 years in the UK in the building industry and a further 20 years here in Australia my memory may not be as good as it was and some of the projects on which I worked might have been overlooked also chronologically things might not be correct. However, I remember fondly my 28 years with a company that started with Elizabeth French through to Charlie French and the subsequent sad demise of the company.

It is sad to record that the Head Office of W & C F no longer exists nor does the Abridge office both of which have now been demolished and houses built on the site.

Also many of the people I worked with are no longer with us. Ernie Fowle my boss at Abridge and Ken Benewith the site agent with whom I did many jobs have passed on. As too has Bill Bowler the quantity surveyor on the Saxon Inns.

John Ward whose daughter was so brutally murdered in Africa spent many years and £2 million trying to get justice for Julie. Over 100 trips to Kenya he took on the Kenyan legal system and although three men were charged with her murder none was convicted. The case was reopened in October 2009 but a key witness died in December 2009 and to date I know of no result.

Fleet Street 50 years ago Part 2

TED MARTIN

By the beginning of the twentieth century the printing trade had separated into newspapers, books and commercial print. Mechanisation had occurred and 'Linotype' typesetting machines were used mainly in newspapers and 'Monotype' machines for books. Hand typesetting was used for type sizes over 14 pt in handbills, posters and headlines.

Newspapers were printed by large rotary presses and ordinary printers had flat-bed cylinder and platen machines. Newspapers were public companies but general printing firms were usually private family companies.

Printing works were mainly trade union organised and in London TU control was very strong, especially on the newspapers.

The Father (or Mother) of the Chapel was the shop steward and the union branch in the firm was the chapel. Each union in the firm had its own chapel.

The unions controlled the supply of labour and as the unions saw no differences in the skills and backgrounds of individual workers, you had to take the person they sent.

In the area of Chancery Lane the *Daily Mirror* was just behind our offices, squeezed on a very narrow site between the Public Record Office and Clifford's Inn. Down Fleet Street on the left were the *Daily Express* and *Daily Telegraph*. In Whitefriars Street was the *News of the World* and in Bouverie Street, the *Daily Mail*. *The Star* and the *News Chronicle* were also in that area, and the *Evening Standard* was in Shoe Lane. The *Daily Herald* was at Odhams Press in Long Acre. The impressive frontages on Fleet Street were like a Western saloon: all front and no back. The *Telegraph* frontage concealed a rabbit warren of run-down Victorian departments.

The Daily Express building

Space was at a premium and the *Daily Mirror* then had two satellite factories to produce its publications, one at Back Hill in Holborn and another at Stamford Street in Southwark.

Typesetting went on at most premises in the alleys off Fleet Street and you could always hear the tinkle of 'Linotype' matrices and the solid thump of the 'Monotype' caster.

Some of the buildings housing printing machines were so old that it was said that the presses had to print in the same direction at the same time to stop the building shaking itself to bits. There was a rigid no smoking policy in our building until 4pm. I suppose it didn't matter if it burnt down after that.

In addition to Joe Lyons and the ABC there were small sandwich bars and the last two of the Victorian cook-shops where you could get a very good meal for a nominal amount. They were linked to butchers' firms in Smithfield. At Shortlands in Fetter Lane, which was my favourite, you had to eat standing up with your plate balanced on a shelf in front of you. But for roasts and the best Shepherd's Pie I have ever tasted, Shortlands was the place. The other place, in Chichester Rents off Chancery Lane, seemed a bit gloomy but did have a nice line in traditional puddings with marvellous custard.

Some of the printing trade unions had their offices off Fleet Street, the compositors in New Street Square and the readers in Gough Square. Natsopa was over the river in Southwark.

Being a copyholder had one great advantage: the proofreader only required your services for roughly half the time that he was working on a job, so you had plenty of time to study. I made up for my mundane education by reading books prescribed by my mentor, Joe Chapman, which gave me a good grounding in English literature, history and general knowledge. Joe was born in the 19th century and was working in his retirement. He was a well-educated, knowledgeable man who spent much of his working life on the *Evening Standard*.

By 1959, I had been promoted to reviser (someone who checks that the reader's corrections have been properly carried out by checking a further proof). But 1959 was to be a very significant year.

I was now one of the senior boys, working there for five years. We had formed an assistants' chapel (union branch) and I was Father of the Chapel. There was some industrial unrest in the general trade as to wages and a plan was afoot for Sweets and Eastern to move from 3 Chancery Lane to a brand new building at 11 New Fetter Lane, just round the corner.

The strike came first. From memory it started in June and went on for six weeks. It was unprecedented to have a major strike in the general trade: the newspapers had disputes all the time, but relations for us were generally very good and, for the 30 years I was in general print, I only remember one other serious dispute.

We were called out on strike and the union could only afford 17 shillings a week strike pay but older boys were given casual work on the newspapers to supplement this.

It was a very good summer and my week consisted of casual work, reading in the sun in the garden and using my motor bike to go to London to collect the strike pay and then meeting the others in the ABC in The Strand to pay them. They came in at pre-arranged times so that it wouldn't look suspicious while I sat there with a cup of tea and a bun.

I also had to visit my office to ensure that no strike-breaking was going on – although I knew that it was! Sweets insisted that skeleton issues of their publications were issued and all managers in Eastern were working at their original trades to produce these. I didn't see why, at 19, I should pit myself against my employers so just kept quiet about it.

For the casual work, I went to the *Daily Sketch* in Gray's Inn Road for what was a very relaxed shift and returned to the same building for a stint on the *Sunday Graphic*. One Saturday I went to the *News of the World* to a very dingy Victorian room with etched glass screens in curved wooden frames that looked like a Victorian pub.

The real excitement was the *Daily Mail*, then in Bouverie Street. I reported there at 4pm and went to the reading room to work with a reader memorably called Bill Bailey. The reading room was a very industrial looking place with steel readers' desks painted light green and with very high stools.

The procedure was the same as at Eastern: go to the head reader's desk to collect the proof and copy and then check it. The proof was very short, not more than 5 or 6 short paragraphs, compared to our 18-inch proofs at Eastern.

Finally, we got the 'fudge' which was a printer's term for the type that went into the stop press box left blank on the last page of the paper for late news. We read it and there were no corrections. Bill said: 'right lad, go next door to the comps and shout loudly "fudge is clean".' I did as I was told but my voice was not strong enough to carry against the clatter of the composing department and the roar of the presses below. A comp noticed my feeble effort and bellowed

the message. The type was sent to the machine room, the press stopped and it was inserted into the box.

On finishing I was given a docket to take to accounts plus three or four copies of the paper, known as voucher copies. Printers used to exchange them on the train so that they arrived home with a selection of their favourite papers. I've never forgotten how pleased the attendant at an all-night garage was when I gave him tomorrow's *Mail* at 11.30 in the evening.

The walk to the accounts department was very eerie: in the lift, then through deserted corridors lit only with emergency lighting to the cashier's window. It was so dark I couldn't see the cashier's face. I signed the chit and received about £5 – 60% of my normal wages for just one shift! You could see how people got away with signing as 'Donald Duck' to escape tax.

Another memorable shift was on the *Observer* which was then printed on *The Times* plant at Printing House Square, near Blackfriars Bridge. This was an institution and the reading room reflected this with its panelled walls and hushed atmosphere. When the presses started up, the floor of the room shook. I also went to the *Financial Times* at Bracken House, St Paul's Churchyard, in a fairly modern building and it was a very intensive shift. The core of the paper was, and still is, the share prices page. Then it was built up from individual pieces of type into a broadsheet page and on the early shift everyone worked on it until, like a jigsaw, it got bigger and bigger until complete. Like *The Times*, it was a very serious place and the head reader looked as if he would not suffer fools gladly.

(To be continued)

Hard times – my open air school

BILL EDWARDS

It was 1931. At seven years old I was recovering from a serious operation for peritonitis, caused by a burst appendix. Being poorly and in need of lots of TLC, my parents were advised that I should go to an Open Air School. Sounds like a contradiction, doesn't it?

These schools were set up to accommodate children with special health needs, e.g., suspected TB and other serious problems, as well as children from very poor families, who were undernourished. The school provided three meals a day. The food was very basic – Oliver Twist would definitely not have asked for more.

Some of these children were really, really poor: patched clothing, worn-out shoes with cardboard inner soles. Their cleanliness also left a lot to be desired. If 'cleanliness is next to godliness', some of those kids were born atheists. Not their fault. There was no family support in those days.

There were four classrooms, built of wood, raised from the ground, resembling park bandstands, with a pyramid-shaped roof, open all round. Each accommodated about 20 pupils. In winter we sat with a blanket round our legs. Sometimes the inkwells would be frozen, so we had to write with pencils! This is absolutely TRUE!

Our day was from 8am to 5pm in summer, 8 to 4 in winter. Education was very basic – the Three Rs, handicrafts, team games, lots of physical activities. Breakfast at 8am, then: tuition; playtime; PT; dinner; playtime; an hour's rest on camp beds set up in the playground; tuition; PT; tuition; playtime; tuition; tea; then home. Discipline was severe. The cane was often used as punishment for things that today would seem like minor infringements.

I left school at 14. My father was determined that I should further my education, so he enrolled me at Pitman's College.

I was 15-plus when the War started. The college was closed for fear of bombing. We (my family) were bombed out twice during the blitz. I had 18 months in the Home Guard before, at 18, being conscripted in 1942 for service in the Army. I didn't find the Army too daunting. In a way it was almost like being back at school. Except at school we weren't trained to kill. Not with weapons, anyway!

Now, at 86, on reflection, none of this seems to have done me much harm.

{Bill was born in Dalston, and the school in question was in Unswick Road, Hackney. Bill produces the Epping Forest U3A monthly Newsletter *covers and leads their Forest Walks. Some L & DHS members who also belong to the U3A may well have trodden many miles with him through Epping Forest. This article is a small insight into a side of pre-war education about which many of us would be unaware.]*

Memories of Loughton – Part 1

TOM GILBERT

[A former Loughtonian, Tom now lives in Gorleston, Great Yarmouth. These memories arrived via his contact with Chris Pond. He now spends some of his time in Hereford where he has contacts, and undertakes a little work preparing reports on behalf of the Hereford Diocese. We have selected excerpts from his much larger family memoirs.]

In 1937, my family moved to Loughton, Essex, as my father Percy Gilbert was the Booking Clerk at the London North Eastern Railway station. The first house we lived in was 3a Meadow Road, Loughton, but some time after, my sister, Mary, was born, back at my mother's parents' home in Chester Road, Forest Gate. We moved to a rented, newly built terraced house in Habgood Road (No 27). This was a new road of houses built by a local house builder, Low. Because these were newly built there were a lot of families with children in the road and we all went to school and grew up together. I was four years old when we moved to Habgood Road and my earliest recollection was being on my own walking along the footpath, which had not been surfaced and was still sandy gravel. We must have just moved in.

The house comprised a kitchen with an Ideal boiler to heat the water making it the warmest room in the house. Although it was very small, we would all cram

into it for breakfast and other meals especially during the winter months. The two main rooms downstairs had fireplaces and in the back room a set of French windows opened out into the back garden. Upstairs there were three bedrooms; one over the front door was no more than a box room. There was of course no central heating and my mother, believing that heat in bedrooms was an unhealthy thing, made us sleep with the windows wide open even in the harshest winter. The frost used to make patterns on the inside of the windows and I remember often waking with frost on the picture rail in the room. It was sometimes a job to get up!

In those days very few people had motor-cars; in fact neither of my parents ever learnt to drive. Our road was a car-free zone and, as a result, all the children would play out in the road or walk to friends' homes unaccompanied. Play had seasons. Marbles were played in the gutter or against a wall. In the due season were cricket and football. Various games based upon catch me if you can, one which involved throwing a ball to hit a member of the opposing team. Another, called kiss chase, was popular but that was when we became older. Hand games included five stones or gobs. In the autumn, there was conkers – we all had secret ways of winning by treating the conker in a special way. It might be baking in the oven or soaking it in boot polish.

The tradesmen in horse-drawn carts delivered the milk and coal and groceries came by bicycle but that was before the war started. The milkman, Mr Ruddock, came to the door with a churn of milk and my mother would go with a jug to see him. He would then dip a measure with a curved handle in the milk and pour the milk asked for into mother's jug. The coalman was named Tom Willingale and he knew my father well, as Dad was also responsible for ensuring that goods carried by rail, like coal, reached the customer on time. Mr Willingale was a relative of the family who defied the Lord of the Manor, Maitland, about his proposal to enclose Epping Forest for building. The end result was letting all use the forest forever but giving the Corporation of London the responsibility to manage it and protect it from misuse.

We, and all our friends in Habgood Road and Woodland Road, lived some 100 yards from our infant and junior school, Staples Road, right on the forest edge. The forest was an exciting place, with birds, red squirrels, the occasional glimpse of a herd of deer and the brook with minnows and stickleback fish. As we became older we would explore wider, climb and swing from the trees and often found ourselves getting chased by the forest keepers. In the winter when it snowed we would all go to a part of the forest close to Staples Road known as Drummaids with our sledges and hurtle down the hill to the brook. How we never damaged ourselves I don't know, as we could crash into the brook or trees on the way down.

Another favourite activity was to go to Loughton railway station with my father to see the steam trains going between Ongar and Liverpool Street. I can just remember an occasion helping him to fill the chocolate machine on the platform with Nestlé penny bars while he emptied the pennies from the coin box. When I was older and my father was working on a Sunday I would take his lunch to the station in a hot-water heated dinner plate with a lid on, wrapped in a towel.

When the war began I was five years old. I remember the day that war was announced, not because I heard Mr Chamberlain, the Prime Minister, address the country, but because shortly after the announcement the siren signifying an air raid sounded and my mother came rushing to the house of my friend Derek Austin where I was playing and dragged me home. She was frightened that a German aircraft was going to bomb our house.

We lived 13 miles from the centre of London. To the north and southeast were what were to become important Battle of Britain airfields, North Weald and Hornchurch, and close by to the east a large ack ack gun emplacement at Chigwell Lane (now known as Debden). To the west lay Epping Forest. All of these were to feature in my experience of the war.

I had just started school in 1939 at Staples Road infants, which was right next to the Forest. My first teacher was Miss Haestier and I vaguely remember using slates instead of paper and exercise books. Miss Haestier had a metal brace on her left leg and she wore a large boot on the same foot. This was a matter of some amazed interest to us five year olds. It must have been because I clearly remember her above any other teacher, except that is for Miss Penny, the head teacher, and Miss Pask. Because I lived close to the school, I always went home for the lunch break. The toilets were in the playground and open to the elements and another *game* played by us boys was to see who could pee over the wall. This was without success, as the walls were too high. Some months after starting, the school was taken over by the authorities to house many of the hundreds of refugees from France, Belgium and other countries, which were being invaded by the German forces. They were also living in tents on the edge of the Forest.

Eventually most of the refugees were billeted in family homes and there was no question that we could refuse. The local WVS member brought people to the door. I remember being with my mother at the front door when she was told that an elderly Belgian lady called Alice and her 16 year old son François were to stay with us. (Later on in the war they were able to rent a house in the Avenue and moved out with other members of their family, though we kept in close contact. My sister still keeps in touch with their extended family in Belgium today.) In 1947 our family visited Belgium and was able to see the effects of the war on that country.

Shortly after the start of the war, the local authorities provided families with Anderson shelters. These were made of corrugated iron and had to be built into the garden. A large hole was dug and the shelter sunk into it and covered with soil. My family (Dad, Mum, Sister and myself) shared a shelter with the family next door and each night my Mum, my sister and I used to join the three girls next door in the shelter with their Mum.

My Dad was in the Home Guard (Dad's Army), the 17th City of London, and was out every night. He

was a weapons trainer and held the rank of staff sergeant. He was too old to be called up, having been in the First World War. One night some time after the beginning of the War, Dad brought home a .303 rifle with a clip of five bullets. Each cartridge had a shaped wooden bullet in place of the real thing. Dad let me handle the gun and eject the cartridge. (It was some 12 years later that I handled exactly the same .303 models and fired real bullets.) It was not unusual to watch the Home Guard practising house-to-house battles in the High Road, in Loughton, especially on a Sunday. In order to save ammunition, each rifle had a set of crackers like the inside of a Christmas cracker. One end of the string was attached to the barrel of the rifle and the other end around the trigger so that when the trigger was pulled one of the crackers went bang, as if the rifle had been fired.

We had two bunks built into the shelter and we children would be put to bed. We also had a wind-up gramophone and one record, Snow White, to which we could listen. Every night the siren would start wailing and we could hear the German bombers, which had a distinctive engine sound, going over to attack the local airfield. Sometimes, because they came under fire from the ack ack, they would miss their target and the bombs would fall on our town. After the Battle of Britain in 1940 and the Blitz when London was being attacked every night, I remember my father taking me to the top of York Hill and seeing the East End and City of London on fire with St Paul's Cathedral silhouetted against the burning skyline. I also remember seeing the Spitfires and Hurricanes having dogfights high in the blue sky overhead.

Our houses had to have sticky tape criss-crossed across the windows and each night every window had to be blacked out so enemy pilots could not see lights below to guide them. Air Raid Wardens used to come round to make sure no light showed from people's windows. Dad was knocked off his bicycle in The Drive when the first bomb in Loughton fell there. I can remember the way the ground seemed to spin round as I lay in the Morrison shelter, which by that time we had acquired. I can recollect my father telling me that when he was on duty at the Station how the then Bishop of Barking would sit in the station concourse with a tin hat on and write his sermons.

At the age of seven years the infants went up to the junior school, which at Staples Road was in the next building. Miss Larkin was the head teacher, and when I was 10 she became my form teacher. Due to the war, all teachers were either women or men out of retirement. In the infants and junior classes we had no male teachers at all, although the senior school was partially staffed by retired men.

Apart from learning and improving upon writing, reading and arithmetic our other lessons were PE, dancing and drama, singing and art. There was a heavy emphasis on creative studies and I really enjoyed school. I happened to have a good treble voice in singing and I would be asked to take part in concerts and sing solo to the class. I still remember to this day the words of many of the songs we sang at junior school.

We were also allowed to play in the forest during break times and go for nature rambles and dance round the Maypole in class time, so the forest began to become a second home because the older we got, the more time we spent in it.

When we went to school we had to take our gas masks in a cardboard box, which was hung over our shoulder by a string. We had to carry these all the time and, if there was an air raid during lessons, the teacher would tell us to get our gas masks on and go to the air raid shelter, which had been built in the playground.

Lessons always continued while we wore our gas masks and when the 'all clear' sounded lessons took place in the classroom without our gas masks. That was the only difference in our routine, otherwise no concessions were made and school was made as normal as possible. Even if we had been up most of the night during an air raid we were expected to turn up at school on time and wide-awake.

In 1943, two incidents occurred which brought the war into my life. The Anderson Shelter had long been abandoned for a Morrison shelter mainly because the Anderson shelter had filled with water and we preferred the comfort of our own beds. When the siren signifying an air raid sounded we used be woken up and go downstairs to the Morrison shelter. This was like a table built of steel and could be used as such with mesh blast panel around the sides. On this occasion the hall of the local Methodist Church received a hit. It was behind the houses opposite the terrace I lived in. The bomb blew the church hall apart and the effect of the blast threw huge pieces of masonry high in the air and they showered down on the houses in our road. A large piece, which eventually took six men to lift, crashed through our roof and continued through a bed recently vacated by an aunt who was staying with us, through the bedroom floor and on to the Morrison shelter below in which we were all hiding. Our windows were all smashed and the front door had been blasted through the house into the back garden. Hardly any tiles remained on the roof and this was the same for most of the road. It took many weeks to repair properly but in the meantime tarpaulins covered the holes in the roof in case it rained. *(To be continued.)*

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