LOUGHTON AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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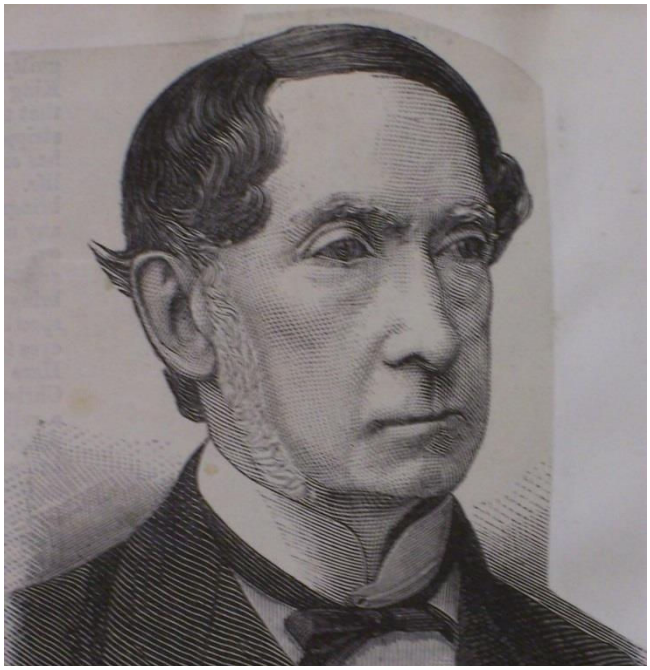
52nd Season

John Thomas Bedford (1812–1900): 'From Coffin Maker to Chief Commoner'



To most people interested in the history of the City of London, the name John Thomas Bedford will mean little, other than to those who have studied the bronze cartouche on the south side of the Temple Bar Memorial at the top of Fleet Street, for which Bedford laid the Foundation Stone in 1880, the year he held the office of Chief Commoner of the City of London Corporation.

John Bedford's name may, however, have a wider recognition in the open spaces outside the City of London, which are now owned by the City Corporation, and in particular Epping Forest, Burnham Beeches, West Ham Park and Coulsdon Commons. It was in 1871 that John Bedford first took an interest in the preservation of open spaces for the recreation and enjoyment of the public, and his success in this respect remains with us today.

John Bedford's great grandfather, Thomas Bedford, was an innkeeper in Epping in the mid-eighteenth century who had married Mary Lord at Loughton in May 1748. However, the family's connection with the City of London started with the next generation when William (1751–1821) was apprenticed as a joiner, and subsequently became a coffin maker in the Farringdon area of the City. A further two generations of Bedfords continued in the trade which developed into a substantial business, but the firm ceased trading after the First World War. Several members of the family became liverymen of the Worshipful Company of Joiners and Ceilers.

The Bedford Oak in Epping Forest

Three generations of Bedfords were active members of their parish church, St Sepulchre's without Newgate, becoming Churchwardens, and a tablet may be seen on a column in the nave of the church in memory of John Bedford and his father Joshua. They also took a keen interest in the development of education for the poor of the parish.

The City of London has for many centuries been largely governed by the Lord Mayor, Aldermen and members of the Court of Common Council. Joshua Bedford (1777–1856) was the first member of the family to be elected as a Commoner to the Court of Common Council, for the ward of Farringdon Without, and he spent 29 years on the Court. On his death he was succeeded by his eldest son William, who remained a Commoner until his death in 1865, when his younger brother John was elected a member for the ward of Farringdon Without.

John Bedford was to remain a member of the Court of Common Council for 31 years, during which he served on 31 committees, and of 10 of which he became chairman, and in 1880 he was elected Chief Commoner, the senior commoner in a Court which at that time had 206 members. Bedford soon made his mark on the Court, and in a few years became, by virtue of his abilities and straightforward personal character, one of the recognised leaders.

Coincidental with John Bedford's election to the Court of Common Council, in 1865 the Commons Preservation Society had been formed to fight against

the enclosure of common lands and forests in England and Wales. The fight to save Epping Forest from enclosure was gathering momentum and, in April 1871, Mr Cowper Temple, who was the first President of the Commons Preservation Society, and a Member of Parliament, moved a Resolution in the House of Commons: 'That it is the duty of the Government to preserve Epping Forest for the recreation and enjoyment of the people.' In the course of his speech he said that the City of London had been in the habit of contributing liberally to objects which had in view the benefit of the people of the Metropolis, and that the Corporation had a Charter entitling the citizens of London to enjoy the Forest.

The motion was strongly opposed by Mr Robert Lowe, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, but despite his opposition the Resolution was carried by a majority of nearly 100. However, as Lowe later said: 'It was treated by the Government with contemptuous indifference.'

John Thomas Bedford read the debate in the following morning's newspapers, and Mr Cowper Temple's allusion to the City's good deeds first suggested to him the idea of endeavouring to preserve Epping Forest. Bedford devoted the next fortnight to mastering all the facts of the case and then gave notice of a motion for the Court of Common Council. On 25 May 1871 Bedford proposed the following motion:

'That a Committee be appointed to seek a conference with Her Majesty's ministers, to ascertain on what terms and conditions the Corporation can secure to the people, for purposes of public health and recreation, those parts of Epping Forest which have not been enclosed with the assent of the Crown or by legal authority.'

The motion was seconded by the Chief Commoner and was carried unanimously.

So started John Bedford's involvement to save Epping Forest which took eleven years to come to fruition with the Epping Forest Act of 1878 and the Arbitrator's final award in 1882, under which the City Corporation became the conservators and owners of the Forest. The story of those eleven years of court action and negotiation has been recounted many times, but what is less well known is how John Bedford went on to lead the City Corporation in the saving and acquisition of West Ham Park, Burnham Beeches, and the Coulsdon Commons.

When a delegation of local inhabitants from West Ham approached the City Corporation in 1872, with a request for financial support in raising funds to purchase the Park from John Gurney, the Lord Mayor referred them to John Bedford who, he commented, was an enthusiast in the cause of preserving open spaces. By July 1874 negotiations had been completed, and the 80 acres of the Park came into the possession of the City, for the enjoyment of the public.

The Coal, Corn & Finance Committee had, in 1878, promoted a Bill in Parliament which would allow the Corporation to acquire, hold and manage open spaces and lands in the neighbourhood of London, and this became the Corporation of London (Open Spaces) Act 1878. John Bedford was a member of the Committee and played a major part in ensuring the successful passing of the Bill into law. Funds were available under the Metage of Grain (Port of London) Act of 1872, which could be used in acquisitions.

In the middle of 1879, part of the Dropmore estate in Buckinghamshire was put up for sale. One lot of 548 acres included East Burnham Common and the celebrated Burnham Beeches, of which a considerable portion was common waste land. The prospect that the land might be handed over to a speculative builder caused much local agitation, and again the City came to the rescue. In 1883, the formal dedication of the Beeches to the recreation and enjoyment of the public forever, took place at a visit of the Coal, Corn & Finance Committee, at which it was agreed that one of the roads through the Beeches would be called 'Bedford Drive'.

Apart from his public service with the Corporation of London, and his charitable activities for his church and livery company, John Bedford, in 1881, started to write satirical articles for *Punch* magazine. The articles covered a wide variety of subjects, but many had a link with the City of London. Over a period of about 15 years he contributed at least 184 articles.

John Bedford did not seek any recognition for his achievements, but to some there was surprise that he was not included in the honours received by others at the time of the visit by Queen Victoria to Epping Forest in 1882, but perhaps he found his best reward in the continual enjoyment that generations of Londoners would derive throughout all time. Before his death in 1900, John Bedford requested that he be buried in the City of London Cemetery at Manor Park, and that he would be 'laid in his last home as quietly and with as little publicity as possible'.

John Bedford is remembered in Epping Forest by the Bedford Oak (see page 1), and a bust of him in 'The View' visitor centre at Chingford.

RICHARD MORRIS*

* Richard Morris has written an illustrated, 60-page, A4 monograph on John Bedford and his family, copies of which are available from him, price £10.

A journey to Buckhurst Hill in 1926

The following account recently came into my possession:

'From the age of four years until almost seven years old, I was an in-patient at the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, London, suffering from a TB hip. Because of the nature of the trouble and the less advanced treatment then available it was necessary to be kept totally immobile from the hips downwards. Because I had reached a stage where further surgery was no longer necessary, and because of the length of time I had spent in hospital, the Consultant decided, subject to my parents' ability to cope, that I could go home again even though still quite immobile. This was in the December of 1926.

On that very pleasant and memorable journey home, which was by car, I saw Buckhurst Hill for the first time that I can remember.'

The writer then describes his journey from Great Ormond Street to Buckhurst Hill in 1926:

'Quickly through the back streets of the City and out into the East End of Shoreditch, Hackney, Homerton, all typical of the old East End. Once past such old places as Clapton and getting towards Leyton and the Lea Bridge Road, I became aware that the scenery was taking on more of an open spaces appearance. Bits of Epping Forest were now becoming more visible. But such sights, to a boy who had no memories of them before, are quite impossible to fully comprehend . . .

By the time that we had reached what was commonly known as the waterworks at the turn off towards Walthamstow, there was much evidence of bits of the forest about which I had heard so much, but of which I knew so little. At that time, as my memory serves me, it was somewhere hereabouts that the trams terminated and at which they were turned around. I seem to recall that here was a pub named the Napier Arms. On the forest common there were also a couple of the old forest cattle pounds in which were impounded any cattle found by the Forest Keepers still grazing after sunset. By now there was a great deal of forest greenery on either side of the road. In the eyes of a small boy who had heard much about it, but who was seeing it for the first time, it was quite awe-inspiring and not a little mysterious.

Past the old Wilfred Lawson Temperance Hotel, and on past the Castle, the top of Snakes Lane, the Castle ponds and the old Woodford Green Working Men's Club and its prominent clock tower, past what was then the high brick wall of what was then a monastery and outside of which occasionally could be seen some of the monks in their long brown habits, working. Past Mornington Road and the old Police Station where we had to send someone on occasions to collect our dog, Brownie, after he had been picked up from his excursions, and on the other side of the road the Horse and Well, at which the old number 38 bus used to pull in so that the crew could record their times on the red clock put there by the bus company specifically for that purpose.

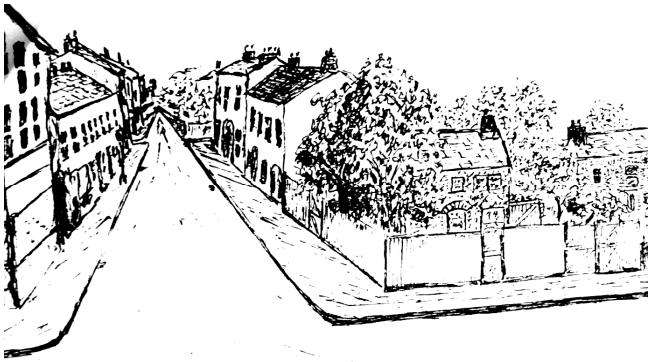
Past Whitehall Lane and Bancroft's School and to the junction of the Epping New Road and the Loughton Road. It was here that could be seen the old trough for animals to get their drink. Here we took the right hand fork. On the left hand side of the road there was part of the forest, on the right a number of large, old Victorian houses each with attics. One of these houses had a wide entrance leading along the side to a number of large barns in which there were stored bales of hay. A notice board in the front informed the passer-by that this was the home of Askew's Hay and Corn Merchants. It was this business which ran a fleet of very handsome-looking motor-vehicles with solid tyres and painted yellow. My cousin Tommy could mostly be found up in their garage watching, and sometimes helping the mechanics with their task of maintaining this fleet of lorries. He would, eventually, become a sergeant in the REME Commandos whose task it was to go out and salvage the damaged and broken down allied tanks. He would land on the Normandy Beaches on D3 – three days after D Day. It would seem that those old mechanics certainly were to give him a very good grounding in his career.

On the opposite, left hand of the road there was a small three-sided square of houses with a green in front of them. As you faced them, on the extreme right-hand corner there was the house and forge of one of the local blacksmiths. In years to come it would be one of our favourite places to visit. Indeed, there was nothing so intriguing for us kids, boys or girls, than to go and watch a blacksmith at work. Everything seemed to get done, though there was never any attitude of rush and not having time even to speak. The large, patient, old shire horses that were his most regular customers, were so big yet so very gentle. The blacksmith himself, was also large, but nevertheless so pleased to have us around . . .

Just before we got to the Bald Faced Stag, on the same side of the road there were several very large, detached houses standing in equally large gardens along the whole length of the fronts of which was a high fence. Horse chestnut trees stood in some profusion along the fronts of these amid other trees and shrubs all of which hid the house from view. I have often wondered since those days about the kind of people who lived there and what has happened to them or their descendants since those days.

On the opposite side to the Bald Faced Stag was the place which housed the Buckhurst Hill Fire Brigade. It was often a source of some amusement to us that, whilst all the equipment and fire engine and horse were located at the top of the hill, most of the firemen (who were all volunteers) actually seemed to live in houses at the bottom. Just behind the Fire Station was a yard and offices of W and C French Brothers, builders . . .

At last we now turned into the top of Queen's Road. Westbury Lane was a turning off on the left. Just before we came to Princes Road there was a lane which led into the higher Lord's Bushes. We were now in Princes Road. The rest of the journey proceeded at a pace and before I knew it, we had stopped and I was being carried through the gate which led into the front garden of Avon House. I was home.'



Bernard Hewlett's sketch of his home in Princes Road, Buckhurst Hill

The author was Bernard J Hewlett, who was born in Buckhurst Hill on 20 January 1920, a twin with his brother Barrie. His parents were Arthur Edward and Edith Lillian (Pearse), they married in 1903. Bernard and his brother were the last children of the family; his elder siblings were Vera Leonora born in 1904, Gwendoline Edith, born in 1907, Irene Mary Grace (known as Rene), born in 1910, Arthur Leonard, born in 1912 and Marion, known as Marie, born in 1915. The family lived at Avon House, which remains as 41 Princes Road.

By 1929 the family had moved away to Seven Kings, going on to Hornchurch in 1938.

With thanks to Georgina Green who originally corresponded with Mr Hewlett, and Caroline Friedman, Marie Sainsbury and Margaret Sinfield who passed the papers on to me.

LYNN HASELDINE JONES

Christabel Pankhurst in Loughton

On 19 October 1909 Christabel Pankhurst came to Loughton to speak on behalf of the WSPU on

women's suffrage. Such was the interest, the *Essex Chronicle* reported, 'the Lopping Hall was filled to capacity, and several hundreds of interested people were left outside'. Emmeline Pankhurst had had to travel to America.

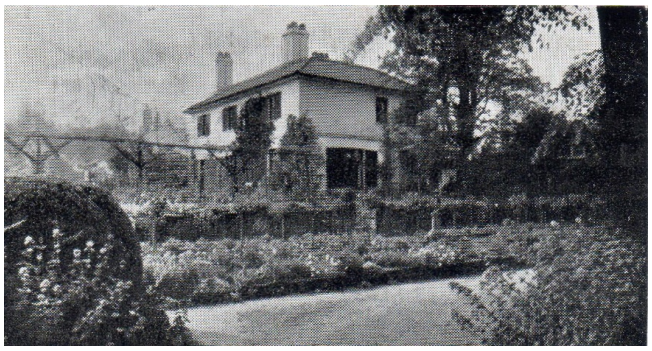
'I am very happy', she was quoted as saying, 'because I am convinced women are on the eve of getting the vote . . . [and] also proud because of the splendid courage and heroism of the women workers in their cause.' *Submitted by* CHRIS POND

Bananas in Loughton

'BANANAS GROWING IN LONDON

For an unusual sight at any time and especially now, a visit should be paid to the residence of Mr W E Stevens at Debden, Loughton, where, for a contribution to Dr Barnardo's Homes, visitors may see bananas. Yes, growing by the dozen. So help a worthy cause and enjoy the sight of luscious fruit unseen in this country since the war.'

The West Essex Gazette, 17 April 1943



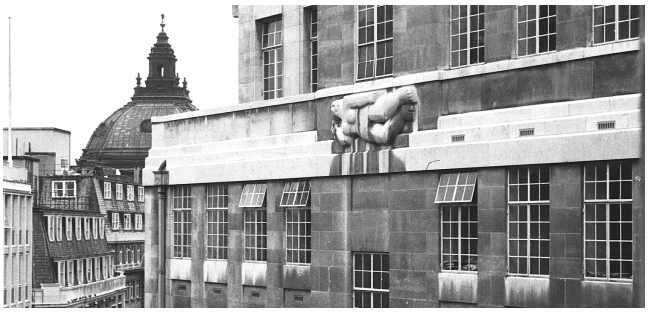
William Stevens (1860–1947) lived at Debden House, then a small estate with some 20 acres of land, cottages, etc. After his death, it was sold to the County Borough of East Ham as a country rest home and camping club for its people. It remains in Newham's possession today, but as far as I know, has no banana crop nowadays! CHRIS POND

Outrage!

An article in *Backtrack*, Vol 28, No 3, by Geoffrey Skelsey (' "Goodbye to 55": A Farewell Tribute to London Transport's Headquarters') presents a short history with some architectural detail, of 55 Broadway, SW1, which is to be sold off by TfL for conversion to luxury apartments. Both the editor of *Backtrack* and Geoffrey Skelsey have kindly given permission for reproduction of the extract below.

Interestingly, the article has some passages concerning the furore caused by sculptures created by Loughton artist Jacob Epstein prior to the official opening of the building on 1 December 1929 as the headquarters of Underground Electric Railways Ltd (UERL). Within days of the opening, negotiations were announced which would eventually lead to the establishment of the London Passenger Transport Board in 1933.

'Few railway buildings have become the focus of that form of vitriolic moral indignation at which the popular British press still specialises but this was to be the fate of another aspect of Holden's building. He had resolved to incorporate sculpture into the rather austere façades and early sketches show traditional figures such as grace many contemporary London buildings. Holden and Pick* went instead for the *avant garde* and eight bas-relief figures were commissioned, representing the four winds and reflecting the four points of the building's orientation. Three were by Eric Gill, with one each by Eric Aumonier, Alfred Gerrard, Henry Moore, Sam Rabinovitch and Allan Wyon. Some of those names are not well-known today outside specialised circles, but they included some of the youngest and most innovative artists of their day. Amazingly these eight "winds" were partly carved *in situ* from cradles suspended alongside the building.



The eight celebrated 'winds' sculptures on the façades of 55 Broadway can hardly be seen from street level. This view, taken in June 1966 from the author's office window on the sixth floor of the North Wing, shows Henry Moore's 'West Wind'. The dome of Methodist Central Hall is in the background. [G B Skelsey]

Such rather intriguing figures might have raised nothing more than a philistine scoff from the passer-by but extreme outrage was reserved for two figures placed lower down. above the ground floor windows. These were by the already controversial Jacob Epstein and their unveiling unleashed a tempest of fury. The figures represent "Night" (facing north-east) and "Day" (facing south-east) and the latter, in particular, which includes a nude figure of a boy, evoked editorial, clerical and official outrage, characterised by a letter-writer to the *Daily Express* referring to "a prehistoric blood-sodden cannibal intoning a horrid ritual over a dead victim", perhaps a somewhat overstated description. Sir Reginald Blomfield, architect of London's insipid Regent Street and of The Headrow in Leeds, rose to still greater vituperative heights, asking in the *Manchester Guardian* that the sculptures should be left "to wallow in [their] own primeval slime". The *Daily Telegraph* described them as "aesthetically meaningless" and a correspondent in *The Times* dismissed them as "bad dreams".

This violent reaction disturbed the elderly and conventional directors of the UERL and at a board meeting on 4 July 1929 a motion to erase the sculptures was adopted, but then deferred at Pick's request for further consideration. Rather surprisingly, given the sense of the meeting, the row subsided and the sculptures survived after their more offending features had been modified and other transient outrages engaged the press. It must be said that the figures no longer offend our perhaps sated tastes and the placing of the equally interesting "winds" series is so high up, on the cornice above the sixth floor, that their details can hardly be discerned without binoculars.'

*Charles Holden, architect of many Underground stations, and Frank Pick at that time managing Director of UERL.

Submitted by TED MARTIN

Bernard Bowerman – Buckhurst Hill artist

Bernard John William Bowerman was born in Shoreditch at 39 Gopsall Road, on 28 September 1911, the son of Alfred Bernard Bowerman, an insurance

agent, and his wife Mary Ann (Adams). His father, although not an artist himself, acted as assistant exhibition secretary to the Essex Art Club during the War, when he also served in the Home Guard in Woodford. Bernard was educated at the Leyton School of Art.

The family moved to Buckhurst Hill in 1938, following Alfred's retirement the year before, when they settled at 14 Russell Road. Alfred and his wife moved away after a few years but Bernard later moved to Luctons Avenue, living at number 22 and later at number 28. However, his best known address was known as Woodland Lodge Studio, then 168 Princes Road, since demolished.

Bernard married at the Church of St John the Baptist Buckhurst Hill in 1940 Winifred (Riches) and they had three children, Peter Bernard, Susan Winifred and Janet Ann. Winifred was the adopted daughter of Mr and Mrs A Durant who for a time lived in Algers Road, Loughton.

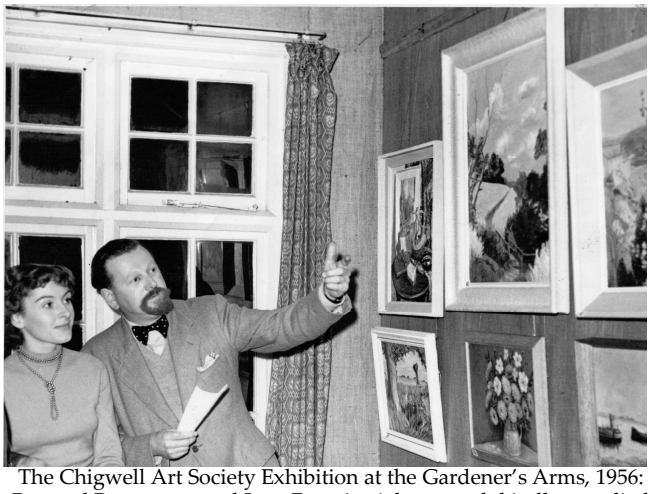
Bernard's career spanned many categories. He painted for both work and pleasure, mostly watercolours, but a few works were done in oils, and he did many prints and linocuts. His works were exhibited at the Royal Academy, the Royal Exchange and many galleries, but also in local venues; he was particularly fond of having exhibitions in local pubs, such as the Bald Faced Stag in Buckhurst Hill or the Gardener's Arms in Loughton, a way to encourage ordinary people to consider art as part of everyday life.

He was a professional artist, using his skills for book illustrations, and artist's impressions for architects, including the local firm of Tooley and Foster, and also for Richard Seifert and Partners. His work also included book illustrations, jigsaws and greetings cards. He was an active member of the Essex Art Club, and the Wapping Group of Artists. He was also active in local education, teaching art at Loughton County High School, and at Hill Hall, which was an open prison for women at the time.

Bernard was a close friend of that other well-known Buckhurst Hill artist, Walter Spradbery. When the Essex Art Club wished to commemorate the work of Dorothy D'Orsay, Walter's wife, in 1953, they asked Bernard to design a teak garden seat which was installed in the lower garden of Spradbery's home, The Wilderness. Would it not be an appropriate memorial to Walter, Dorothy and Bernard if the Corporation were to reinstall the seat for the benefit of those visiting the Wilderness today?

Bernard's later life was sadly affected by illness and he had a stroke at the age of 55 which deprived him of the use of his right hand. He taught himself how to paint with his left hand so that he could complete some paintings he had started before his illness. He died aged 59 in 1971.

Alderton Hall by Bernard Bowerman



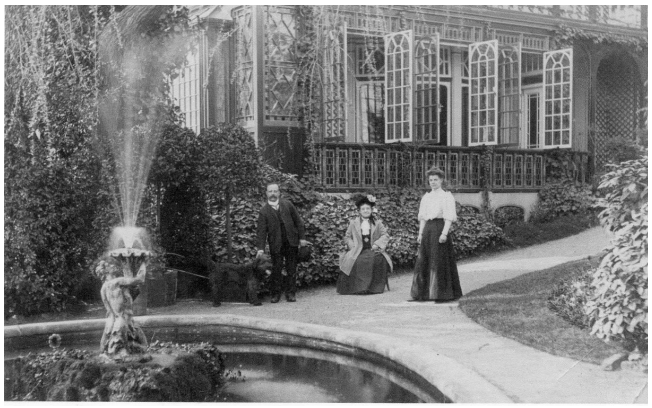
The Chigwell Art Society Exhibition at the Gardener's Arms, 1956: Bernard Bowerman and Joan Francies (photograph kindly supplied by Joan Francies)

The portrait of Bernard Bowerman and his works are reproduced with the kind permission of the artist's son, Peter Bernard Bowerman. I am most grateful to him, and his wife Joan, for their kindness and hospitality in inviting me to their home to see some of the work of Bernard Bowerman, and examine their rich archive of press cuttings and exhibition catalogues. I would also like to express my thanks to Joan Francies and Pat Bishop. See also page 12.

LYNN HASELDINE JONES

Swiss Cottage

The splendid photo below of genteel English life was sent to us by Mrs May Dear of Cuffley. It was taken, probably during the Great War, at Swiss Cottage, at the corner of Albion Hill and the High Road. Swiss Cottage was owned by the Dutch Gerritsen family, but the people in the picture are the staff of the house – Fanny Salter, the housekeeper, seated, her daughter, Sarah May (standing) and Frank Powlett. Sarah May and Frank later married and lived at 51 Lower Park Road.



CHRIS POND

The Noel Park Project

In 2009 I received a telephone call from Ken Soanes, one of my oldest friends – we met as five-year-olds in the Noel Park infants' school and, 70 years later, keep in regular touch. We had both attended senior school reunions over the years but what he had to say on that call was a surprise: 'How would you like to attend a *primary* school reunion?'

It appeared that one of our classmates from the 1940s, Ann Abbott (née Chandler), thought it would be a nice idea to organise a reunion of those who attended Noel Park Primary School in Wood Green between 1945 and 1950 and discussed this with another friend, Patricia Lee, who, working with Ken Soanes, trawled the internet to search for our contemporaries. Some of us were still in contact from those far-off days. Finding some of the others was not so easy but, through groupings of ones or twos who had stayed in contact throughout their adult lives, the jigsaw gradually started to form and we were able to hold our first reunion in Southgate in 2010 and others followed in 2011, 2012 and 2013. Members of Mr Ken Coulson's class of 60+ years ago were able to meet old friends and enjoy some excellent social events with their partners.

At the 2013 lunch in Southgate Ann Abbott suggested that, as we were the last generation to have personal memories of the Second World War, it would be a good idea to record these for posterity. Ann, is keen on history and is an organising member of her local history society in Norfolk. Because of my background, I volunteered to co-ordinate, edit and produce the final result. Over the next year the original concept expanded to include our later lives and it has been surprising to find just how well we did when our meagre education and our poor start in wartime are considered. Some of our class-mates contributed interesting and intriguing stories of their lives over the past 70 years which make fascinating reading.

We all lived on or near the Noel Park Estate which was a late 19th century development on farm land at Wood Green in North London. The Artisans and General Dwellings Company created a gridiron estate next to the little village of Wood Green encouraged by the new railway branch line from Tottenham, built by the Great Eastern Railway to service the crowds expected to attend the new Alexandra Palace on a hill about two miles away. The estate was to be for the working classes with five separate types of house, the better ones for lower managerial and supervisory staff and the others for the 'labouring poor'! The houses were segregated, with the houses to the west of the estate to be for the latter. There was also a number of what we would now call maisonettes to enable two families to live in the same building but with their own front doors.

In 1944 and 1945 the participants in this project started their school lives at Noel Park infants and junior school, which had been provided by the developers in the 1880s. We stayed together until age 11 in 1950 when we took the dreaded 11-plus. Most of us failed the exam and the girls went to Noel Park Senior Girls School, on the same site, and the boys to Lordship Lane Secondary Modern School about a mile away.

The estate was a predominantly working-class area and I remember a helpful community spirit, especially during the war and just after. As Ann said, 'Our parents didn't have much money, but we didn't know that'. One looks back on those schooldays with a great deal of affection. We remember the teachers' names and the events that occurred with great clarity and most of our mentors were kind and helpful. Most of the kids were neatly dressed and clean, and we had the excitement and terror of the war and afterwards the bonus of the bomb sites – we called them 'bomb dumps' – to play on. The VE celebrations also come to mind as something we didn't quite understand then but which seemed to make everyone very happy.

The project was completed by June 2014 and I was able to produce a 96 page A4 paperback book which was presented at our lunch in July. We hoped the collection will make a small contribution to the collective social history of the Second World War and the post-war and later years.

In addition to me, 12 people contributed their memories, which started with our families' backgrounds in relation to the Estate and the War.

One contribution stated:

'I never remember any fear and all the children played together. My mother and our next door neighbours (who were like an extended family), spent a lot of time rubbing out the ration books which had been already marked when buying groceries and going back to buy more tea and sugar – the grocer, of course, knew but he never sent them to jail! Rationing was hard on families, especially those with young children, and the mention of liver and hearts at the butchers, which were not rationed, would send all the mothers rushing up to join the queue for something for dinner that day. My dad, fortunately, did not eat sweets so we always had his 4oz!'

Evacuation

There were tales of evacuation to various parts of the Home Counties and further north and of the privations endured. One of the evacuees told of evacuation to Felsted and of the effect on his mother:

'Nobody seemed to know where we were going including the bus driver. It was some time before we were able to contact our homes.

It was very hard on mothers. My own mother had three of us at home one day and none the next. After we were all evacuated, I learned that she had a nervous breakdown and was quite ill for a time.

We arrived eventually, at Felsted in Essex. Deep country which was like a foreign land to almost every child on that bus! For the villagers the invasion of busloads of cockney children must have been horrific. Felsted was a very nice quiet village which had not seen the like of us before! It was really rural, and completely fixed firmly in country life, undisturbed for years

We got off the bus outside the village hall and we were then selected by unwilling village ladies one at a time, until only my sister and I were left! It seemed as though no one wanted TWO evacuees! They did not have any choice, as the law said that if they had room they had to take an evacuee. Eventually a lady arrived late, and had to have us, as all the other children had been placed and had gone . . . Jean and I had to eat in the kitchen with the maid, as [the lady] thought she was a cut above putting up with two town dwellers as her son attended Felsted Public School and did not believe in feeding her guests, and we were always very hungry. However, we soon had new billets, me to some very kindly folk, and Jean to some not so nice people. Jean later told me that I used to bring an apple to school, for her from very large tree we had in the garden of the house where I was billeted. Children were quite often moved round to new billets.'

Air raids

Another lady contributor told of a Winter's night in 1942 when she 'was awakened by a violent crash as a bomb landed only yards away. The blast blew in the whole window frame and my bed was showered in glass and plaster from the shattered ceiling. On my pillow was a huge lump of plaster where my head would have been, had I not been curled up in the middle of the bed, then mum lifted me clear of the débris.' Another contributor recalled a V1 from 1942:

'We had been to the High Road shopping when an air raid warning sounded. We decided to go home, but as we got opposite the church, I heard a buzz-bomb which promptly cut its engine which meant it was about to come down, I hastily pulled my sister down behind a gate pillar. I looked up and saw the bomb almost overhead, the engine had then cut out and the bomb turned on its side and blew up in the second block of Farrant Avenue just below Salisbury Road. I can still see, in my mind's eye, the bomb as it curved over and dropped into Farrant Avenue . . . We immediately went down to where the bomb had exploded, and saw an elderly lady surrounded by débris, standing about where her front room would have been. The ARP van soon arrived, and we were ushered back behind some barriers. All the Estate houses had plaster and lathe ceilings, and bomb blasts caused them to fall down regularly, but I seem to remember that they were always promptly repaired and window glass replaced by the Estate workmen.'

The Gladstone Avenue V2

I have written about this terrifying incident before in *Newsletter 198* so I shall not repeat it. One of my schoolfriends' wrote:

'I was sitting in the front room window of 47 Gladstone Avenue, opposite me was my cousin sitting on my grand-mother's lap, and my sister was running up and down the passageway from the front door to the kitchen at the rear of the house. My mother was getting tea, so I guess the V2 landed around 5pm. My mother kept calling out to my sister to stop running up and down the hallway and come to the kitchen. As the V2 exploded the front inside hall wall collapsed missing my sister, who was obeying mother's orders for once, by three feet. The window where I was sitting fell inwards covering my grandmother, myself and my cousin, yet amazingly we never had a scratch. The top of the house was severely damaged but the downstairs was saved largely due to the air-raid shelter built down the centre of the road outside which shielded us from the blast.'

The devastation caused by the Gladstone Avenue V2
(Bruce Castle Museum)

Ann Chandler had a narrow escape:

'We were in Lordship Lane walking past the shops with Aunty Marge behind us when there was an earth-shattering, gigantic explosion. Aunty Marge immediately grabbed Judy and me and pulled us backwards as the plate glass window in the shop front smashed onto the pavement in front of us. The lady shop assistant came out with a broom and began sweeping up the shards of glass: 'It keeps happening', she sighed resignedly. When we got back home, word had got round that the V2 bomb had hit Gladstone Avenue. My mother was in the Post Office in the High Road . . . She rushed back home to make sure I was all right.'

And another girl got more from a grocers than was expected: 'Mum and I went to the High Road to a grocer's shop – suddenly there was an enormous bang – a V2 had landed nearby. We were immediately doused in flour as a stack of flour bags exploded in front of us!'

The Peace and after

This covers the return of the fathers from the war, the VE day celebrations and our introduction to Noel Park school.

The school was built in 1889 by the Wood Green School Board, designed by architect Charles Wall. It was to accommodate 1,524 pupils of both sexes; but, by 1898, the growth of the estate led to severe over-crowding, with an average attendance of 1,803. It was the most overcrowded school in the Board's area.

In 1946, part of the school became a Secondary Modern for girls. Between 1957 and 1963 the secondary facilities closed, leaving the school as a primary school. In 1965, it came under the control of the newly created London Borough of Haringey. Following reorganisation of Haringey's education services, it is now a primary school serving about 500 pupils between the ages of 3 and 11.

But, in 1944 the Noel Park junior school head was Mr H J Booker, tall, silver haired and kindly, and the head of the infant school was Miss Lightfoot who had

the lovely idea of giving each child a piece of chocolate on their birthday and, as sweets were still on ration, it was a treat much appreciated.

Most of us joined the school in the last days of the war and an early memory of the infant school is sheltering from an air raid in an air-raid shelter with other five-year-olds, after a warning had been given.

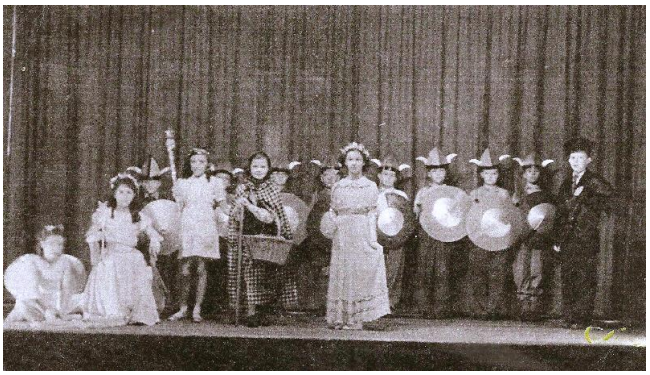
Transition to the junior school was seamless and we had the same class teacher, Mr K J Coulson, for our time there. Other teachers took us for various periods. Mr Stephens was a small round, cherubic man who seemed to be quite old but was always very pleasant and loved the Winnie the Pooh stories which he read to us in a lively way making all the different voices. Miss Wright took us for drama and also organised the school play of which more below. It was a highlight and I got a part as the captain of the guard and my dad made a shield and a wooden sword.

Our health was looked after as Ann Chandler remembered:

'We had to queue up for a dose of cod liver oil and a teaspoon of orange juice which was a very thick liquid in a small rectangular bottle. On a couple of occasions I remember the air raids sounded and we were instructed to bend over our desks and put our hands across our heads for protection from flying objects if a bomb landed! Another time we were herded into the corridor next to one of the architectural wells in the middle of the school and lined up against the wall for protection!

Playtime meant playing games in the playground, winter and summer. Boys and girls played in separate playgrounds so our games were mostly skipping games, headstands, leapfrog.

I don't remember much about the school play at Noel Park Junior School other than that I was the fairy queen. The day before the performance I told my parents I had to have a pair of wings. They were very inventive and in the morning I had a pair of wings made from wire and muslin.'



The school play: you can just see me and my helmet, far left

Pat Lee joined later but wrote:

'My first day at school was scary and it was the beginning of a four-year struggle between me and our teacher, Mr Coulson, regarding the horrendous warm school milk. I remember playtime after playtime being plagued with the circus of Mr Coulson trying to make me drink my milk before I was allowed out. I usually won the round, though, as force feeding was not allowed. I was not a well-behaved pupil although I did enjoy the lessons, especially history, geography and art and especially loved Mr Stephens, not so keen on Mr Coulson thanks to the milk situation and a particular PE lesson. One hot summer day when he insisted we did PE without our vests on, I absolutely refused: after all I didn't even let my dad see me without my vest on! I ended up running all the way home crying, but then got told off by my mother and forced back to school – however, I did NOT take my vest off. I guess we got along in the end and I do remember him with some fondness.'

My friend Ken Soanes recalled some wartime advice:

'In January 1944 grandmother Soanes {Ken's mother had sadly died when he was very young] walked me down Gladstone Avenue to Noel Park infants school and handed me over to Miss Lightfoot the headmistress of the infants school. While I have many memories, one of the more abiding ones is always carrying a gas mask and a pillow. I was told that if I was caught outside during an air raid, lie down in the middle of the road, face down with the pillow over my head. Nothing was mentioned regarding the gas mask.'

An older boy in the next higher year recalled the arrangements for sport and swimming and a school trip:

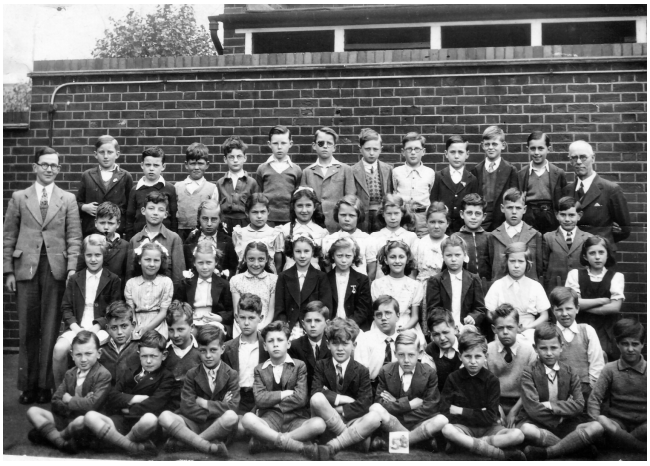
'The sports field for the school was shared with several others in the area and entailed a walk of about a mile to White Hart Lane. We had an hour there for football in winter and cricket in summer . . . Our class had between 42 and 48 children and just the one teacher. We learned to read and write and do sums and also sometimes to have fun. There were separate playgrounds for boys and girls and neither was very big. At the end of playtime, a whistle blew and we all had to stand still. At a second whistle we moved over into the lines of our classes to await our turn to go in.

At St Mary's Bay, near Dymchurch in Kent, there was a holiday camp for secondary school children. Somehow, our teacher, Mr Gorvin, managed to get them, as we were a top primary class, to let us go there – it had never been done before. In July, we went to St Mary's Bay for two weeks and . . . we were accommodated in brick-built huts (a bit like army huts). There were about 40 of us and we had our teacher and his wife and daughter, and another teacher, Mr Coulson, and his wife, to look after us. We had a great time and for most of us it was the first time we had been away on our own. Imagine our surprise and pleasure when we saw that the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway ran alongside the camp field! The first evening we all walked along the beach to Dymchurch and caught the train back. Earlier in the year we had prepared for this trip with project work on the whole of Kent and Romney Marsh in particular – its history, geology and so on. We went on visits to Rye, Lympne Airfield, Dover Castle and Dungeness, where we went up the lighthouse.'

The 11-plus examination

Our time at Noel Park was drawing to an end and the 11-plus examination was looming in 1950. I cannot recall any specific training for this examination in the way of mock papers, etc. I think that, with war-time restrictions still prevalent, the authorities did not want a lot of kids to pass because they did not have the places for them at the two grammar schools in Wood Green. The parents felt that a lot hung on this examination and I was promised a new bike if successful. Some parents may have had their kids coached – mine did not. The papers might have been in Chinese for all the sense they made, with the inevitable result: failure. Only two kids from our class of 48 passed – today, it would be a scandal: then, it was just accepted. Our later lives proved we were not

stupid but just let down by the system which could not cope with the number of kids with which it had to deal.



Our class 1950

Home life in the post-war years
Our recollections continued with contributions covering rationing; snow and fuel shortages; descriptions of our houses and the limited facilities therein; finance and clothes; shopping, deliveries and refuse collection; music and brass bands; play; the community; cubs and scouts; Wood Green Library; entertainment; sickness and doctors; holidays and the Festival of Britain; moving to a new house on the estate; Christmas; bikes; smog and the 1953 floods; trams, street games, new household appliances and a radio, fish and chips and local pubs.

To senior school and the teenage years
There is extensive coverage of the Noel Park Senior School for Girls, Lordship Lane Secondary School and Stationers' School, Hornsey. We were the First 'Teen-agers' and experienced rock and roll, skiffle and dances and, before TV, radio was very much part of our lives and quite a few of the boys joined the ATC.

The world of work
First jobs in a buoyant employment market where work was easily found in insurance companies, as secretaries, and in electrical engineering, printing, telephone engineering, accountancy, the Gas Board. These jobs were easily changed for others at that time. For some of the boys, there was also National Service at 18.

Later life and careers
One of the girls, spent a large part of her life in the US. We worked on the Channel Tunnel, Jubilee Line, and in printing, publishing, the RAF and the Civil Service.

I round off the book with an Epilogue which tries to put our lives into perspective. An Appendix covers the history and development of the Noel Park Estate.

In this article I have given priority to the war and early school years but there is much more than this in the book and though it was primarily produced for the group there are a few copies still available (at £5) and if you would like one, please contact me.

The project was given publicity in *Discover Your History* magazine, June 2014. TED MARTIN

William Silwood – what was the truth?

'DEATH IN EPPING FOREST.—The body of Sergeant-Major William Silwood, **of** the Essex Imperial Yeomanry, who had been missing since Monday, was found yesterday morning in a ditch in Monk's Wood, Epping Forest, near Loughton. He was sworn in on Friday last as a keeper in Epping Forest, being put on night dutv. He was found head downwards in the ditch, and it is thought that he accidentally slipped and fell into it. Sergeant-Major Silwood had been in the 2nd Life Guards for 28 years. He fought in the South African campaign and was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for the saving of guns at Sanna's Post. He also held the Long Service and Coronation, medals. He was a good horseman and an adept at all forms of sport.'

A newspaper report of William Silwood's death, 2 November 1909

William Silwood c 1905. 'A Pattern of Every Soldierly Virtue': so said Lord Longford, and so it read on his gravestone

In the autumn of 1909, William Silwood, a 45-year-old sergeant-major in HM Life Guards, retired from the Army and joined Epping Forest as a keeper. He was assigned to Loughton and lived, we think, in the keeper's lodge at Broadstrood.

William Silwood was born in Aldbury, Hertfordshire, in 1863 and worked at a gas refinery in south London before joining the Second Life Guards in 1882. He served in the Boer War and was decorated for bravery, receiving the Distingushed Conduct Medal, which was at the time the second most prestigious medal for bravery after the Victoria Cross. He rose to the rank of Corporal Major, before joining the Essex Imperial Yeomanry and moving to Epping in 1901. Shortly before his death he became an Epping Forest Keeper.

In his first week of service, the respectable ex-Guardsman, a popular community figure, left Keeper's Cottage for his usual beat on 1 November at 3.30 pm and then went missing, and was eventually found by his fellow keeper, Bynorth, in the stream in Monk Wood. Since he had told a man called James Allen that the job was risky because of poachers, rumours immediately began to circulate in the village that he had been murdered.

The medical men and police, however, found no sign either of violence or any natural calamity such as a stroke. The inquest was held by the Loughton Coroner, Dr Ambrose, in the Church House on 12 November 1909. The cause of death was drowning, but an open verdict was returned by the jury.

Sergeant-Major Silwood's funeral procession in Loughton was attended by thousands of people and led by the Earl of Longford (Thomas Pakenham, 5th Earl of Longford, was, at this time, in command of the 2nd Life Guards).

His wife, Caroline, moved to Epping, but was buried with him in 1937 – her inscription is still legible. Also commemorated on the gravestone are his son, company quartermaster-sergeant H J Silwood, who died at Delhi in 1930, and another child.

The body was then released for burial, which took place on 13 November in Loughton Cemetery. The cortege was accompanied by soldiers from his old corps – the 2nd Life Guards – plus the Essex TA, and burial was with full military honours. Sergeant-major Silwood's grave is still there, but his inscription is now illegible.

CHRIS POND AND TERRY CARTER

City Coaches

I was interested in this item in *Newsletter 201*. Between 1948, when I was just 10, and 1957 I travelled by bus from our family home near Gants Hill to Forest School, most of the journey being along Woodford Avenue, past Gates Corner, grinding up Grove Road to the Waterworks (before the underpass of course, and then a notorious bottle-neck), where I changed to get the 35A bus or the trolleybus (I have forgotten the number) for a couple of stops or walked through the forest (though I have never been a 'morning person', so I was usually on the verge of being late so the walk was more likely to be on the way home).

Therefore, I well remember the chocolate and cream coloured City Coaches, although I took the LT 144 or an alternative. I presume that I was told that I had to catch the LT service (the single child's fare was. I believe, at the beginning, 4d (about 2p). I do not think that I was ever taken to school, and we did not have a car, but I used to look with interest at these coaches in unfamiliar livery, which were faster than the 144 as they were 'limited stop' services, although I do not recall where they stopped. Later, perhaps as a result of the influence of other boys, I became more daring and on occasion boarded the City Coach, which had a much more 'enclosed' feel than that of the ordinary service bus. I suspect, too, that the fare was slightly more expensive.

I also recall that there was a period, which was presumably after the take-over by Westcliff-on-Sea in 1952, when the brown and cream coaches were replaced by vehicles in a variety of colours: I think that at this time they had a board in the front which said 'City Coach'. I certainly remember that, by the end of my days at Forest School, the buses were the green Eastern Nationals with the strange dropped corridor upstairs and extra wide seats* (LT never had such buses in our area).

As a family I only recall using this route once (it was the 251 by then) to visit a relative who had moved to the Basildon area. To go to Southend-on-Sea we always went to Barking and took the train, usually to Leigh-on-Sea to enjoy the walk along the front by the cockle sheds and thus via Chalkwell and Westcliff to the pier (the very first holiday that I remember was a week at Leigh-on-Sea with my mother – my father was in the army).

ROGER GIBBS

* These were Bristol lowbridge double deckers. A sunken gangway upstairs on the right resulted in a 'bulge' on the right in the ceiling of the lower saloon (a hazard for tall passengers) and meant that there had to be four seats together upstairs, rather than separated by a centre gangway. This enabled the overall height of the bus to be reduced so that it could pass under low railway bridges. LT did use this sort of bus in other areas of London just post-war. Ed.

Arctic Convoys and the Arctic Star

In March 2013 David Cameron paid tribute to Navy heroes who took supplies to Russia.

More than 3,000 seamen died over four years from 1941, on missions to keep open supply lines to Soviet ports, travelling what Winston Churchill dubbed 'the worst journey in the world'. Around 40 veterans were included in the first group to receive the medal, following a long overdue review of military decorations. Mr Cameron said:

'There are lots of extraordinary people I have met in this room in the last three years, but I can't think of a group of people that I am more proud to have in Number 10 Downing Street. I am only sorry it has taken 70 years to get you here and to say thank you for what you did. You were

involved in the most important struggle of the last 100 years when you were supplying one of our allies in the battle to defeat Hitler and to defeat Fascism in Europe.'

Mike Alston, then a Loughton resident, and one of the 40 who served on HM Destroyer *Middleton* adds:

'I was a mere 18-year-old seaman at the time, and the rest of the crew in my destroyer were mostly in their twenties, including the captain and other officers. Although our main enemy was the weather (awful, and awesome!) it was a unique adventure and we laughed our way through it. A good sense of humour was vital.'

The Prime Minister presents the Arctic Star medal to Second World War veteran Michael Alston

Mike enclosed some notes about the Arctic Star, showing how it took around 70 years of 'negotiation' (and frustration) before it finally arrived:

'Arctic Service (e.g., Russian convoys) – the battle for recognition:

1947: Campaign stars issued – Africa/Atlantic/France & Germany/Italy/Pacific. When an Arctic Star was requested, the response was that it was covered by the Atlantic Star – poor geographical knowledge!

1947: 60 year campaign for recognition of Arctic service, led by Commander Grenfell RN. The Government still repeatedly stated the Atlantic Star covered such service.

2006: Arctic Emblem – On 18 October 2006, the Government conceded defeat, and issued the 'Arctic Emblem', a minute buttonhole badge. This was considered by recipients totally inadequate, and so the campaign continued. The Government response continued to be negative, until . . .

2013: Arctic Star – On 19 March the full medal was, at long-last, issued. 40 of the recipients were selected to receive it from the Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street.

Sadly, it had taken 70 years before the Government issued an award for service in Arctic waters, by which time the vast majority of those in senior and influential positions had passed on.'

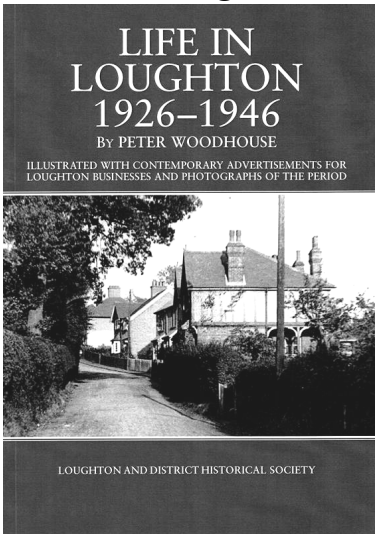
Russia's recognition of these efforts was entirely different, and required no urging from participants. Commemorative medals were sent to all survivors in 1985, the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Only after strong representations did the Government consent to their being worn, but others were forbidden. However, Russia issued further medals in 1995, 2005 and 2010, the latter when it was realised few would be around by 2015. Each was in a presentation box, with a certificate signed by the Russian President.

In 2012 the Russian Government wrote to all survivors, awarding them the prestigious Ushakov Medal for bravery, first created in 1944. Only after the inevitable storm of protests to the Government was this award approved, 18 months later.

By May 2014 two other token distributions have been made, one By President Putin at Downing Street and the other on HMS *Belfast*.

Other distributions are likely to follow.

Life in Loughton 1926-46



We have just reprinted *Life in Loughton 1926-46*, by the late Peter Woodhouse, which we originally published in 2003. It is still the same price (£5) and will be available at meetings. Included in the book is the following piece on cinema in Loughton:

LOUGHTON CINEMA

In 1926 the main line of the High Road shops came to an end at the junction with the Drive except for Gould's Granary and Dairy and a few others towards Church Hill. Where it ended the Loughton Brook ran in a culvert under the road and as an open stream along the line of what is now Brooklyn Parade. I recall a large notice being set up there announcing that a cinema was 'to be erected shortly'. This was eagerly awaited, although 'shortly' turned out to mean two years. Until then we had to go by bus to the Plaza or the Majestic in Woodford or to the Rialto in Leytonstone.

The opening of Loughton Cinema coincided with the introduction of the latest thing, 'talkies', although a few silents were still being shown. There were often queues for seats outside the cinema and a uniformed commissionaire kept in order the fish and chip eating hopefuls who awaited the seats, variously priced from sixpence to one shilling and ninepence. Regulations often required children to be accompanied by an adult and we used to hang around the edges of the queue asking 'Can we come in with you mister?' At the end of the evening's performances, when we all invariably stood for a recording of the National Anthem, the atmosphere was stale and thick with tobacco smoke.

Brian Cooke remembers: 'The most expensive seats at the Loughton Cinema were 1s 3d and the cheapest 6d. It was cheaper on Saturday mornings. An usherette carrying a torch always took you to your seat. The screen was square and relatively small. There were generally two films lasting about an hour and a quarter each together with a Pathé Gazette newsreel. Advertisements and trailers rarely took more than a few minutes. People often entered halfway through a film and stayed until the film came round again. Occasionally the film broke and had to be spliced together again. The screen might be blank for five or so minutes.'

A London dock scene by Bernard Bowerman

Restoration of a local landmark

The High Stone at the junction of New Wanstead and Hollybush Hill was restored last year. It is now accompanied by a board explaining its history:

'The High Stone has stood in roughly this location since the early part of the eighteenth century. The name Leytonstone means the part of Leyton near the Stone.

It was originally a mile marker and showed the distances to Epping, Ongar, Whitchapel and Hyde Park Corner on three of its faces. The current obelisk dates only from the early 1930s when the original stone was damaged by a vehicle and replaced. The base is likely to be a remnant of the eighteenth century stone although legend insists it is of Roman origin.

There was a mail coach robbery here in 1757 by a highwayman called Matthew Snatt. Snatt was later convicted of the crime and after his execution his body was hung in chains near the Stone as a warning to others.

The stone was moved and its setting improved in 2013 in a project jointly funded by Redbridge Council's Area 1 Committee and English Heritage. This plaque was installed at the same time.' LYNN HASELDINE JONES

The High Stone in 1905 and today

Mystery painting of Epping Forest

This gouache has recently been obtained by Chris Pond. It is entitled 'Epping Forest – the Hideaway' and is signed P Stalkartt. Does anyone recognise it? It probably dates from within the last 30 years.

LOUGHTON & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY (Registered Charity 287274) **www.loughtonhistoricalsociety.org.uk**
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