



PRESIDENT:

VICE PRESIDENTS: Viscountess Hanworth, Eric Montague and William Rudd

CHAIR: David Haunton

BULLETIN NO. 182

JUNE 2012



Invitation card to children's events at Merton's celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. (JG) See page 9

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## PROGRAMME JUNE – OCTOBER

**Tuesday 19 June 11am**

**Visit to the House of Commons  
courtesy of Siobhain McDonagh MP**

Meet outside the House of Commons entrance.

Free but restricted numbers. Please book with David Haunton.

**Thursday 5 July 2.30pm**

**A walk around the Liberty's site**

Our guide will be **David Luff**, who worked for Liberty's here for many years.

Meet outside the *Kiss Me Hardy* in High Street, Colliers Wood.

**No visit in August in case of any Olympics transport disruption.**

**Saturday 22 September 2.30pm**

**St Martin's Church, Camborne Rd, Morden**

**'Memories of Morden between the Wars'**

A 'Chat Show' hosted by **Peter Hopkins**, with guests who grew up in Morden in the 1930s and whose families lived in Morden before suburban development here.

*Free to all! St Martin's Church is at the junction of Camborne Road and Queen Mary Avenue. Buses 163 and 293 stop in Hillcross Avenue opposite a footpath at the side of the church. 163 and 413 stop in Grand Drive near the Co-op, with access along a short stretch of Queen Mary Avenue. Limited parking.*

**Thursday 11 October at 11am**

**Visit to Freemasons' Hall, 60 Great Queen Street**

Free but restricted numbers. Please book with Bea Oliver.

## AN APPEAL

Peter Walker OBE of Merton Talking Newspaper would like the newspaper to be able to offer a weekly 10-15 minute recorded local history slot for the visually impaired of Merton.

## BILL RUDD'S MORDEN



*The Odeon in 1970.*

*Opened in 1932 as the independent Morden Cinema, it was part of the Odeon group by 1937. The site is now occupied by Iceland.*

## ‘MERTON’S RAILWAYS’

Our speaker in January was our long-time member and committee member, David Luff. David gave his own introduction saying that he had been a railway enthusiast and train spotter all his life and had taken plenty of photographs of trains and had even made a ciné film of the local railways. He said he had been a member of the Railway Preservation Society since 1967 and one of his early memories of it was the great sadness caused by the closure of the Great Central Railway at Loughborough. This has now been re-opened as one of our heritage railway lines.

The Borough of Merton is very well served with railways, with 23 stations in the borough including tram-stops. Not only is there the South West Trains line through Wimbledon, there is also the First Capital Connect line from Blackfriars to Wimbledon and also to Sutton and the connecting line between them. There is also the Southern service from Victoria to Sutton passing through the borough via Mitcham as well as the District line to Wimbledon and the Croydon Tramlink. The only line to have been closed last century was the Merton Abbey loop.

David then explained that the early railways were all associated with quarries or mines and the Surrey Iron Railway from Wandsworth to Croydon and Godstone was the first line not to be associated in that way. The Act of Parliament establishing the first railway in the world was in 1758 when a railway (or plateway as they were called then) was authorised in Leeds.

In 1801 an Act of Parliament authorised the Surrey Iron Railway (SIR), which was the first documented line south of the Thames. This was a public railway in the sense that the railway company owned the line but not the trucks. Other companies owned the horse-drawn trucks and paid a toll for the use of the line or plateway. The original plan was to build a canal from Wandsworth to Croydon using water derived from the Wandle, but this was strenuously opposed by the mill owners on the Wandle who feared a considerable loss of water if such a project were approved. Their objections won the day.

William Jessop built the railway as a plateway, which is regarded as being unusual because at that time Jessop was credited with perfecting the cast iron rails as used on our railways today. He was commissioned to build a plateway for the SIR and used heavy cast iron plates. The plateway only really came to its own when it became possible to cast the rails in iron (such as were used on the SIR) by which time they had become obsolete. A swathe of land 20 yards wide for a double-track line was purchased along the whole route of the railway except where it was necessary to construct passing loops, cripple sidings (a term still in use), yards, warehouses and dock facilities.

The Surrey Iron Railway never made a profit and shares in the company never paid a dividend. There was at one time a proposal to build a plateway from Wandsworth to Portsmouth at an estimated cost of £400,000, which compared favourably with the estimated cost of £800,000 for a canal to cover the same route. It is thought that use of the Surrey Iron Railway ceased before 1846, but in that year an Act of Parliament was passed authorising the closure of the railway and the sale of the track-bed.

The steam railway came to Wimbledon in 1838 as part of the Nine Elms to Woking Common line. This was the first in the borough. The original intention was to run the line on through Kingston but this was strongly opposed by the coaching interests on the Portsmouth road and by Baron Cottenham who objected to a line across his land. As a result, the line was diverted via Surbiton and a branch line did not come to Kingston until very much later. A serious drawback to this main line is that it did not (and does not today) go to the commercial heart of London. The terminus at Nine Elms was in open fields and although the line was later extended to North Lambeth with the terminus named Waterloo Station, that is still some distance from either central London or the City.

In 1868 a direct line from Ludgate Hill to Sutton and also to Wimbledon came through the borough and the Mitcham branch of this was later used by a line from Victoria Station to Sutton. In 1917 the lines to Streatham via Haydons Road and Merton Abbey along with the West Croydon line were closed as a war



*Merton Park station on the Merton Abbey line in 1977  
D Luff*



*Merton Park signal box and level crossing on the Kingston Road in 1977  
D Luff*

time economy measure. They were reopened in 1923 and the line from Wimbledon to Sutton was constructed and was given electric power. Only the Haydons Road part of the loop was electrified and the Merton Abbey loop lost its passenger trains forever in 1929 but remained open for goods traffic until 1975. In 1916 the main line through Wimbledon was electrified using the Southern Railway's 600v third rail system. The extension of the City and South London Underground line from Clapham Common to Morden was opened on 13th September 1926. This line, renamed the Northern Line in 1933, became so popular that a proposal was made to bore "fast lines" under the existing tunnels where trains would travel

non-stop from the outer suburbs to the centre of London. Tunnelling was started from nine shafts between Clapham and Euston but work was stopped because of the outbreak of war in 1939 and the very short lengths of tunnels that were constructed were used as deep shelters. They still remain today.

The Metropolitan District Railway was extended from Putney Bridge to Wimbledon in June 1889 and was operated as a joint venture with the London South Western Railway Co. The line to Wimbledon was electrified in 1905 and renamed the District Line in 1933 when it was taken over by the newly formed London Passenger Transport Board.

The Wimbledon to West Croydon line was opened in 1855, using the route of the Surrey Iron Railway from Mitcham to West Croydon and was electrified in July 1930. In addition to a regular two-coach passenger service there were various freight trains mostly at the West Croydon end to the gas and electric generating works. The line was closed on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1997 to permit the construction of the Croydon Tramlink, which opened on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2000.

David concluded his talk by showing a number of slides of trains at Wimbledon Station and shots of sections of the Wimbledon to West Croydon line and then finally, a ciné film of trains arriving and leaving stations along the Wimbledon to West Croydon Line.

**Tony Scott**

## A NEW PUBLICATION

***Church Street and Whitford Lane*** by E N Montague has just been published as vol.12 of the Mitcham Histories. This book has a slightly unusual title, for neither road can be found on a modern map. The area covered is bounded by three streets – the original part of Church Road, eastwards from St Peter and St Paul to the Cricket Green, Love Lane north-east from the church to Western Road, and the shortish run of London Road from Cricket Green to Upper Green.

We are not offered a continuous history of the area so much as a series of snapshots, several based on previous papers by Monty – archaeological evidence, an interesting reconstruction of Mitcham in 1291, the church itself, lovingly described, and the court records of the Manor of Vauxhall, as well as an Appendix showing who owned and who occupied what in the Surveys of 1838 and 1846. Thereafter, Monty takes us on a Perambulation of 'Church Street', along the southern side from Green to church, then northern side from church to, er, the *Bull* pub. We then hop up to the Western Road end of Love Lane and stroll gently down, noting interesting cottages and the Glebelands mansion, speculating on the name of 'Taffy's How', and meeting the 'final surprise' of three tiny country cottages round the last bend. 'Whitford Lane' gets a similar but more cursory treatment, but full attention is paid to the London House and the Pitt family of energetic and philanthropic drapers. We even get a poem of 40 quatrains on the retirement travels of the last Pitt, showing just how energetic he was.

So, not a continuous read, but all in all, a nice family album of a book.

**David Haunton**

Available from Publications Secretary.

## ‘THE CROWN JEWELS’

Our speaker on 18 February at Christ Church Hall, Colliers Wood, was Garry Wykes, a retired Jewel House Warden at the Tower of London. Wardens, who wear a distinctive uniform and top hat, are civil servants, unlike the Yeomen, who are drawn from the military. The Jewels belong to the nation, in trust from the Queen, and are very much part of the history of the Tower, having been kept at one time in the White Tower itself. They were in the Martin Tower in 1671 when Colonel Thomas Blood tried to steal them. Today they are housed in a purpose-built space, and since 1994 a travelator wafts the visitor past the main display.

Most of the regalia date from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. After the execution of Charles I in 1649 the existing crowns and sceptres were destroyed by order of the Parliamentary party, and new ones had to be made for the coronation of Charles II. However there are some later pieces, and a few which go back to the Middle Ages. There are about 25,000 separate gems ornamenting these remarkable treasures, though some are not what they seem.

Garry had some wonderful images to illustrate his talk. We were shown ceremonial trumpets, each with a banner, and ceremonial swords, which, with the Golden Spurs, are attributes of knighthood, and reflect the role of the monarch, since Henry VIII, as ‘defender of the faith’. The jewelled sword now used at coronations, was made for George IV. Ten of the 13 surviving royal maces are here (two are with the House of Lords and one with the Commons). Derived from a rather nasty weapon, the ceremonial mace is a symbol of authority.

St Edward’s crown of 1661 is the one that is used to crown the monarch, though it is too heavy to be worn for more than a short time. Its name harks back to Edward the Confessor. It is unusual in that front and back are identical. Not all its stones are precious, and some are foil-backed to sparkle more.

The Sovereign’s Sceptre is adorned with the diamond known as the First Star of Africa, which was found in 1905 and weighs 530 carats. It is the largest of the stones cut from the Cullinan diamond, which weighed 3106 carats originally, and was cut up into nine large and 96 smaller gems.

The Imperial Crown of India was made for the Delhi Durbar of 1911 by Garrards, who for many years were the crown jewellers (that position we were told is now held by a jeweller in Tunbridge Wells).

The Ampulla is an early piece, the eagle at the head being 14<sup>th</sup>-century, and the rest 16<sup>th</sup>-century. The Anointing Spoon is from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. These two are the oldest pieces in the regalia.

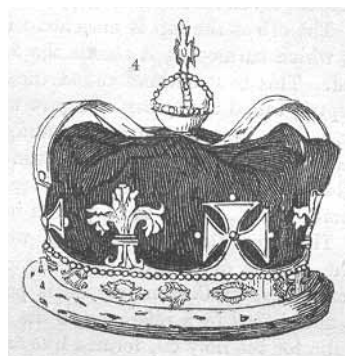
The crown made for Queen Elizabeth, consort to George VI, for the coronation in 1937 is made of platinum and bears the Koh-i-Noor diamond.

The Prince of Wales’s Crown was made for Frederick, son of George II, and was worn more recently by Prince George, later George V. When the Queen opens Parliament she wears the Imperial State Crown, which incorporates the Black Prince’s ‘ruby’ (actually a spinel).

There are gold chalices and patens, for communion, altar dishes, flagons, an ornate punchbowl of 1829, weighing more than 500 pounds, and a font that saw the baptisms of George III’s children. Of the salts there is a fine one from Exeter in the form of a castle.

Reminding us that the Tower’s history goes right back to the Conquest, Garry recited to us ‘Rhyming Monarchs from 1066 to the present’. By request from members it is reproduced here:

### Judith Goodman



*Ampulla; Prince of Wales's crown;  
Anointing Spoon  
Illustrations from T Miller Picturesque  
Sketches of London Past and Present  
(1852) London pp.115,117*

*Willie, Willie, Henry, Steve  
Henry, Dick, John, Henry Three.  
One, two, three Neds, Richard Two,  
Henrys Four, Five, Six, then who?  
Edwards Four, Five, Dick the Bad  
Henrys twain, then Ned the lad.  
Mary, Bessie, James the vain,  
Charlie, Charlie, James again.  
William and Mary, Anne Gloria,  
Four Georges, William, then Victoria.  
Ned, George, Ned, George,  
Now it's seen,  
A second Bessie is our Queen.*



## ‘THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND SOME OF ITS HOLDINGS’

On 18 March we welcomed Dr Melinda Haunton (daughter of our chair) to Christ Church Hall, Colliers Wood, to speak to us about The National Archives (TNA), where she is a Programme Manager (Accreditation).

Melinda explained the three constituents of TNA: the Public Record Office (PRO), which looks after government records for England, Wales and the United Kingdom; the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (RCHM), which supports other archives wherever they are in the UK; and the Office of Public Sector Information.

What is an archive? Answer: It can be defined as evidence of transactions, decisions, even medical advancements, fashion changes and so on, quite as much as of politics or wars. Such by-product material, where appropriate, is selected for permanent retention after its original use is ended. Archives can take many forms – parchment, paper, film, digital records, even objects, but not often publications. They belong in libraries.

So, what was the origin of TNA?

In the Middle Ages the sovereign and court frequently moved about the country, taking documents with them in special chests. Records proliferated and copies were made, on rolls, for safekeeping. A Master of the Rolls was appointed, with a house and chapel off Chancery Lane (convenient for storing Chancery records). Chronicler Matthew Paris (c.1200-1259), an early searcher in the records, drew this appealing little sketch of the Rolls chapel. This accommodation sufficed for a while, but by the beginning of the 19th century records were scattered among at least 200 sites, including the Tower of London and Westminster Abbey. Storage conditions were often deplorable, and damp and vermin wreaked damage. (A mummified rat is a treasured item at TNA.) At last, in 1858, a purpose-built repository and reading room was begun, in Chancery Lane. To this mock-Tudor building government departments and the courts could transfer records. But there was no requirement for them to do so, and at the same time many records were duplicated. The Public Records Act of 1877 regularised matters and authorised the destruction of unwanted records.

However it was obvious that there were many other sorts of records kept by bodies of all kinds – businesses, charities, colleges, societies and indeed individuals. They needed to be identified. So in 1869 the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts was set up, and, as the second oldest Royal Commission, it is still going. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century most manorial courts became defunct, but it was realised that their records of copyhold tenancies were irreplaceable, and a national register of manorial documents was set up.

The PRO building survived the last war, though many records had been dispersed for safekeeping. Belvoir Castle and Haddon Hall were used, for instance. Elsewhere there had been much destruction – often salvage rather than enemy action was the culprit. So in 1945 the National Register of Archives was set up: today its indexes are online on the TNA website.

In 1976 the new building (now Q1) at Kew opened, and 20 years later the Chancery Lane building closed, to bring the entire collection together, with a second building (Q2) constructed at Kew. In 2003-2006 the PRO merged with the RCHM, Her Majesty’s Stationery Office and the new Office of Public Sector Information to form The National Archives.

Melinda went on to give us a taste of some of the sorts of holdings TNA has: government records from medieval times onwards (including Domesday Book); wills from before 1858; census returns (but not births, marriages and deaths); prison records; personal papers of two Prime Ministers; and Crown estate records; to say nothing of oddities such as lottery tickets, banned books and the aforementioned rat. Kew is physically virtually full, but many archives are housed in a Cheshire salt mine, where conditions for storage are ideal.

A particularly rewarding part of Melinda’s job is advising organisations throughout the country on housing and looking after their archives. Most of TNA’s staff are concerned with managing the archives and supporting the public. Others work with government (the 30-year rule for release of government papers is soon to be shortened to 20 years), with the wider archives sector, with IT, or with teachers and schools.

This was a most interesting talk, and Melinda received warm applause.

**Judith Goodman**



*Photo: J Goodman 2012*

## ‘CALICO PRINTING: THE CRAY, WANDLE AND LEA MIGRATION TRIANGLE’

After a slightly delayed start because the key-holder forgot to open the hall, 42 members and visitors settled down to enjoy an interesting talk at Christ Church Hall, Colliers Wood, on Saturday 14 April. Our speaker was David Cuffley, an engineer by profession, and a family historian by enthusiasm.

David had discovered that an ancestor, Edward Cuffley, had been a partner in a calico printworks at Wimbledon in the 1770s. Edward first appears in extant records in 1764 when, aged 32, he appeared as a witness in a case before the Court of Chancery. At that time he was described as a ‘servant of David Morrer of West Ham in the County of Essex, calico printer’, working at the Temple Mill printworks on the river Lea. By 1776 he had entered into partnership with the defendant in the case in which he had been a witness, Robert Coleman, and another printer, James Newton. The Wimbledon Vestry Minute Book reveals that in May 1776 ‘Messrs Coleman, Newton and Cuffley, calico printers near the Copper Mill Company’s bridge at Wimbledon ... proposed and agreed to allow a temporary bridge to be thrown from ‘South Sea Barn Field’ over the river Wandle into ‘Iron Mill Field’ belonging to the said calico printers, and to allow passage from this bridge through their field into ‘Potters Field’, the nearest way to ‘Garrett Green’ for the carts to go backwards and forwards carrying gravel for repairing ‘Durnsfords Lane’ ...’.<sup>1</sup> According to Peter McGow, who has produced a mammoth on-line survey of the industries on the river Wandle, ‘These works were situated on the east bank of the Wandle, just north of the end of the present Riverside Road running from Summerstown. They were established in Wimbledon parish, but were later extended eastwards into Wandsworth parish, and the associated bleaching grounds were in both parishes’.<sup>2</sup> The *London Gazette* reported that Newton left the partnership in November 1778, moving to a printworks in Wallington before joining John Leach and others in partnership at Merton Abbey. The Wimbledon Poor Rate Assessment and Collection Book 1780 recorded ‘Messrs Coleman & Co’ as ratepayers that year.<sup>3</sup> Edward Cuffley left Wimbledon in 1782, moving to a farm in Banstead, but in his will of 1791, proved 1794, he described himself as ‘Edward Cuffley, gentleman, of Mitcham’. (He is not mentioned in any of Eric Montague’s *Mitcham Histories*.) Having discovered his ancestor’s involvement in calico printing, David determined to discover all he could about the industry. He was particularly intrigued by the move from West Ham to Wimbledon, but soon realised it was rather a move from the river Lea to the river Wandle, as calico printing required clean water. Another centre was Crayford in Kent, on the river Cray, and David discovered that, of the 49 calico printers and whitsters recorded in the published *Mitcham Settlement Examinations*, four had links with Crayford.<sup>4</sup> (Three copies left in stock at a mere £1 plus postage!!) Hence the title of David’s talk! But another triangle was of trade, English printed calicos being exported to Africa and traded for slaves who were shipped to the American plantations to produce cotton and sugar imported by Britain. David had also investigated the processes involved in transforming the naturally greyish cloth into the final printed product so essential to 18<sup>th</sup>-century fashion. He was particularly delighted to find a collection of 19<sup>th</sup>-century published prints illustrating these processes in an on-line database from New York Public Library, and some of these illustrations are reproduced here.<sup>5</sup>

David has also discovered ancestors who were rat-catchers and brickmakers, so we can hope that one day we will enjoy another fascinating talk from him!

**Peter Hopkins**



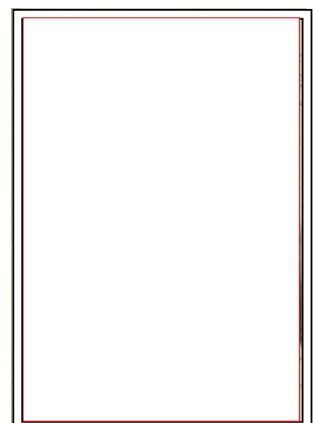
‘Bleaching-ground at Glasgow’  
from The pictorial gallery of arts  
(C Knight and Co, 1845-1847)



‘Calico printer’ from The book of trades, or library of the useful arts (Tabart, 1805)



‘Calico-printing by the block’  
from The pictorial gallery of arts (C Knight and Co, 1845-1847)



‘Calico-printing by cylinder’:  
print in Mid-Manhattan  
Library / Picture Collection

1 *Wimbledon Vestry Minutes 1736, 1743-1788* (Surrey Record Society XXV (1964) 303 (p.62)  
2 <http://www.wandle.org.uk/mills/millsindex.html> (last accessed 16 April 2012)  
3 *Wimbledon Vestry Minutes 1736, 1743-1788* (Surrey Record Society XXV (1964) p.130  
4 *Mitcham Settlement Examinations 1784-1814* (Surrey Record Society XXVII (1973)  
5 <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org> (accessed 14 April 2012)

## LOCAL HISTORY WORKSHOPS

Friday 27 January 2012 – six present. Cyril Maidment in the chair

- ◆ **Peter Hopkins** had been looking at the boundaries of Morden, in the light of suggestions that boundaries in the Motspur Park area might have been due to division of former common pasture among adjoining parishes. Peter wondered whether the unusual boundaries at Rose Hill originated in the division of part of a once larger Sutton Common among Morden, Carshalton and Sutton. Could the extension of the Morden boundary eastward to include the Watermeads area also reflect inter-commoning of the riverside meadows? From a Christmas present (*Chronicles of the Mayors and Sheriffs of London* by Arnold Fitz-Thedmar (translated by H T Riley 1863, facsimile reprint by Bibliobazaar) pp.1-4) Peter had discovered that a 'Richard de Wymbeldon' had served as sheriff of London in 1219. A 'Richard de Winnelendune' held 2½ virgates in Morden c.1225. Another sheriff, in 1191 and 1196, Nicholas Duket, also held land in Morden in 1220.

- ◆ **Bill Rudd** brought along more of his photographs of Morden, including this 1973 view of Morden Press, a property that still stands in London Road opposite Morden Court Parade. At one time vehicles belonging to the Express Dairy, across the road, were kept at the rear. (Madeline Healey remembered the horses there in her childhood.)

Bill also showed two photos of a corrugated-iron church hall that stood in Sutton Court Road, Sutton, until 1982. He wondered whether it had been built by Mr North, who had a works in Morden, and lived near Morden Press (see *Bulletin* 180). Another photo was of the *Morden Tavern* in 1969, a building still under threat.

- ◆ **Rosemary Turner** is continuing to investigate the site of Merton priory's Spital Farm, on the site of The Lodge, which stood in the present Morden Recreation Ground (see page 12).

Rosemary was pleased to discover that medieval tiles from St Catherine's Chapel, now embedded in a wall within the cloisters of Westminster Abbey, included some that have not yet been published. Ian Betts, tile specialist at Museum of London, has shown an interest.

- ◆ **David Haunton** had been investigating a WW2 archive on the BBC website, and had discovered some relating to Merton and Morden (see page 13).

He had also been investigating occurrences of the names Merton and Morden in other parts of the UK, including a Morden Terrace School in Lewisham, a Merton Road in Bootle and a Merton Hotel in Hereford. He had discovered a Merton in Oxfordshire, another in Norfolk, and a third in Devon, five miles from his holiday destination two years ago! East Morden and West Morden are in Dorset, and Guilden (pronounced Gidden) Morden and Steeple Morden in Cambridgeshire, the latter often confused with our Morden by past historians! Merton is also a Christian name favoured by Americans, and there was a German WWII captain called Commander Karl-Friedrich Merton, commanding submarine U-68!

- ◆ **Madeline Healey** continued to delight us with tales of her ancestors. Her great-grandmother, Sarah Utton, came from Newmarket to work at Mitcham at the Holborn Union orphanage, probably through the influence of a relative who was connected with the workhouse at Croydon. She started as scullery woman in 1875, at the age of 15. She was pantry woman by March 1878, when she was promoted to cook. She was the only cook listed there in the 1881 census. When she left in July 1881 to marry Madeline's great-grandfather, Abraham Clark, a local butcher, she received a glowing letter of recommendation from the clerk to the Guardians, and Madeline brought along a photocopy, which we hope to include in Eric Montague's *Mitcham Histories* volume covering the Holborn Union site. Abraham died of TB, leaving a 16-month-old son, at whose birth a peal of bells had been rung, Abraham being captain of bellringers!

- ◆ **Cyril Maidment** found a 1981 photograph of the memorial garden and plaque erected on the supposed site of the high altar of Merton priory. He superimposed the priory outline on a map of the period, which suggested that the memorial was on the site of the Lady Chapel. The broken plaque is now in the Chapter House.

He is researching Wimbledon's 'Merton Mill' and had discovered an 1885 watercolour by Evelina Druce. He hoped this would be one of the watercolours on show in the newly-opened gallery at Wimbledon Museum. Cyril also brought along A3 enlargements of some early postcards of Wimbledon.



Peter Hopkins



## Friday 16 March – Seven present. Peter Hopkins in the chair

- ◆ **Bill Rudd** recounted his experiences as a Civil Defence Messenger on his bicycle, from April 1942 to November 1943, after which time he was called up for the army. He had to cover a large area, including Morden Road, Grand Drive and Middleton Road. After the war his bicycle enabled him to visit every religious establishment that had given its name to the roads of the St Helier Estate, staying at Youth Hostels. Later he took his bike abroad.
- ◆ **David Haunton** had been looking at the evolution of the *Bulletin*. (An article for the next issue)
- ◆ **Judy Goodman** had come across a ‘conservation issue’ from 100 years ago. (Another article for the next issue).
- ◆ **Rosemary Turner** has been mapping the various properties recorded in the 1910 valuation of Morden. She has found a few references in the documents to plot numbers from the 1838 Morden Tithe Apportionment, which has helped her to pursue further her investigations.
- ◆ **Celia Bailey** produced a fine photograph c.1900 of a grocer’s shop, ‘W Jessup’, in Church Road, Mitcham. The building incorporated a mail box, and beside it on the north side was a signpost to Phipps Bridge. She is also interested in the (Isaac) Wilson family of Mitcham and their properties.
- ◆ **Cyril Maidment** had a spare copy of the Council’s Draft Sites and Policies DPD, which was currently open for public comment. It included details of many site proposals and a list of the Borough’s listed buildings. It was agreed that David Haunton, MHS chair, should have the copy.  
Cyril had noticed that in the Wimbledon Museum collection were five photos listed as Liberty silk printing works, but which were in fact new views of (Merton) Abbey House. He had established that the site of the original location of the Norman arch, now at St Mary’s, Merton, was the southern end of the pedestrian crossing linking Station Road to Merton Abbey Mills.
- ◆ **Peter Hopkins** had researched a carefully prepared 1539 will of Alice Lord, owner of Growtes (a Tudor predecessor of Morden Lodge) and other properties, to provide for her six sons, and copies were circulated.

**Cyril Maidment**

**Dates of next Workshops: Fridays 22 June, 3 August and 14 September at 2.30pm**

**At Wandle Industrial Museum. All are welcome.**

## THAT OTHER DIAMOND JUBILEE

On Wednesday 23 June 1897 Merton was *en fête* for the ‘Commemoration of Queen Victoria’s Sixty Years’ Reign’. There had been much discussion, mutating into heated argument, about how to mark this momentous, indeed unprecedented, occasion. The headmaster, Mr Pillinger, wanted a clocktower for the school, or, if not, a swimming pool near the Wandle. The vicar held out for improvements to the church. All however were agreed that at least the children and the aged poor of the parish should be given a treat.

The local newspapers of 26 June reported that 130 (*Wimbledon News*) or perhaps 160 (*Surrey Independent*) people over 60 had been entertained at a meat and plum pudding dinner, in the old Church House, opposite the church – courtesy of lord of the manor John Innes, who owned the (empty) house. A ‘bountiful cold collation’ consisting of mutton, beef, ham, vegetables and pickles, washed down with beer or soft drink, was followed by plum pudding and ‘other comestibles’. Miss Kempson, the vicar’s daughter, and 20 other young ladies waited on the tables, assisted by a number of male parishioners. After a short service there were sports for the children in Church House meadow (today’s Church Lane playing field). John Innes presented the prizes, and the children then enjoyed meat pies, rolls and butter, cake and tea. Festivities continued with a fife-and-drum band, dancing and games (kiss-in-the-ring was popular) and a huge bonfire. The old people were given a ‘meat tea’; the men were presented with a pipe of tobacco, the women with four ounces of tea, and the children with Jubilee mugs. All the children invited were pupils at the school and/or at the Sunday school. Sybil Forrester presumably treasured her invitation card (see page 1), which has survived for 115 years, and which I was able to buy from a collector. It was announced that money left over from the celebrations would be added to the collection for the Elizabeth Simon almshouses (‘Widows’ Cottages’ as it was known) at No.180 Kingston Road, to be used for repairs and improvements.

And the vicar got his way. No clocktower, no swimming pool. In May a faculty for improvements to the west end of the church had been approved, and before the end of the year the gallery had been pulled down and the new belfry opened. John Innes paid for new stained glass windows as a Jubilee gift.

**JG**

## THE NELSON HOSPITAL 1912-2012

On 14 June 1912 HRH Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll, fourth daughter of Queen Victoria, formally opened the Nelson Hospital for Wimbledon, Merton and District, in Kingston Road, Merton. It was to replace the South Wimbledon, Merton & District Cottage Hospital at 178 Merton Road, which had rapidly proved too small for a district that was growing fast.

The site and this, the first, part of the building – the three ‘pavilions’, had cost £12000. This sum had been partly raised by intense local fundraising, including substantial donations from trade and business, as well as from the general public. The balance had come from the King Edward’s Hospital Fund. The architect was Francis Hatch of Queen’s Road, Wimbledon, and the builders were James Burges & Sons of Wycliffe Road, Wimbledon, who also undertook to contribute an annual sum towards the maintenance of the building.

There were wards for men, women and children, and four single-bed wards for ‘special case’ patients, or paying patients – 28 beds in all (though it would not be long before another seven were found to be needed). There was an operating theatre, a mortuary, a nurses’ home, including the matron’s flat, an office, a ‘receiving room’, a committee room, store-rooms, kitchens, bathrooms, sluice rooms and so on. There was radiator heating from a boiler, and electric lighting and gas supplied to every room. A thoroughly up-to-date facility.

The ducal/royal couple were greeted by a guard of honour and band of Territorials, flanked by boy scouts. Then, while the thousand guests (only half of whom apparently had RSVP’d!) waited in two large marquees and whiled away the (rather long) time by admiring a display of naval signal flags which read ‘England expects every man to do his duty’ the matron, Miss des Forges, conducted the duchess on a tour of the hospital, where she spoke ‘sympathetically’ to all four of the patients. After that there were a lot of speeches, and proceedings were rounded off with the national anthem.

A hundred years later, and after many additions and alterations to the original building, plans are well in hand to rebuild the Nelson (though keeping at least the façade of the original pavilions) as a Local Health Care Centre, to incorporate two local GP practices as well as diagnostic and treatment facilities.

Sources: *Wimbledon Borough News* 22 July 1911 and 22 June 1912

C D Waltham-Weeks *The Nelson Hospital in “Paradise Merton”* (?1994) privately printed

F Deas *Origin, Growth and Development of the Nelson Hospital, Merton* (1981) Merton Library Service



*Sketch (JG) based on the architect's drawing as published in the Wimbledon Borough News of 22 July 1911*

JG

## GOOD NEWS FROM THE LOCAL STUDIES CENTRE

We were delighted to hear that Merton Heritage Officer Sarah Gould’s excellent Heritage Lottery Fund bid for a £50,000 ‘Your Heritage’ grant has been successful. Sarah says, ‘In addition to staging photography themed exhibitions, events and school activities we will now be able to digitise the Library photographic archive, making thousands of historic photographs available to the public both at Merton libraries and online. We will also be working to provide links to other photographic archives in the borough and digitising images supplied by the public.’ Sarah looks forward to working with this society and other bodies on this exciting project.

**RAY KILSBY has discovered**

## **A HERO FROM MITCHAM\***

Sydney George Rogerson was born in Mitcham on 14 May 1915. The middle child of three, he attended Gorringe Park School, Mitcham. As a youngster he was a boy scout, and later he became a scoutmaster. Before the second World War he worked for Horne Brothers in Hackney, a company that made army greatcoats. He married in 1937, had two daughters, and joined the RAOC in 1941.

On 2/3 January 1946 he and Major Kenneth Alfred Biggs were completing the loading of a train with surplus American and German ammunition in Savernake Forest, close to Marlborough, Wiltshire. In the same siding was a train loaded with British ammunition. Also present were men from the RAOC, the Pioneer Corps and the RASC. In all there were 96 ammunition wagons.

At 2.50pm on 2 January, without warning, a blinding flash and loud explosion blew to pieces two railway wagons and a three-ton lorry. Eight lives were lost in the explosion, and six more men were seriously injured. Fierce flames swept the area, igniting more wagons. The fear was that if the fire spread to other wagons further huge explosions might occur. The 5000 or so residents of Marlborough, plus the army personnel, would be in danger. Soon, 27 wagons had blown up, plus two lorries loaded with shells, mines and other ammunition.

Rogerson was one of the first on the scene, and began directing operations, since he was the most senior NCO present. He rescued two badly injured men from under a burning truck. When Major Biggs arrived, he and Rogerson uncoupled a burning wagon and extinguished the flames.

The servicemen and firemen, who worked through the afternoon, evening and night, prevented any more ammunition wagons igniting.

The calmness, leadership and gallantry of both Biggs and Rogerson were recognised, when each was awarded a George Cross on 11 October 1946, for 'most conspicuous gallantry in carrying out hazardous work in a very brave manner'. The two men were invested by King George VI at Buckingham Palace on 10 December 1946.

Sydney Rogerson was demobbed in June 1946 and became a London Transport bus conductor. He later joined the East Kent Road Car Company, and became Chief Inspector. He also worked at Ramsgate and Lanthorne Hospitals, both in Thanet, East Kent. He was a kind and gentle man, but poor health forced him into early retirement, and he died on 23 September 1993, aged 78.

On 23 September 1940 George VI had announced the creation of the George Cross. It was instituted on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Whereas the Victoria Cross ('For Valour') recognises supreme gallantry during the heat of battle, the George Cross would be for supreme gallantry behind the front line and in civilian situations. Hence it would rank alongside the Victoria Cross.

The king decided that it should be a plain silver cross with four equal limbs. In the centre is a medallion bearing an image of St George and the Dragon, with the inscription 'For Gallantry' around it. The royal cipher 'G VI' appears at each angle formed by the limbs. On the reverse is the name of the recipient and the date the award was announced in the *London Gazette*, the government's journal of record. The cross is suspended by a ring from a bar decorated with laurel leaves, on a dark blue ribbon one-and-a-half inches wide. It is worn on the left breast before all other decorations except the VC.



\* Most of the information in this article comes from M Ashcroft *George Cross Heroes* (2010) Headline Review.

## **A DESIGN CLASSIC MADE IN MERTON**

The V&A's current exhibition *British Design 1948-2012* includes an ingenious (and attractive) self-assembly chair made out of cardboard. Called *Chair Thing* by its designer, Perspective Designs, it was manufactured in 1968 by New Merton Board Mills (whose Merton Abbey site is now occupied by Sainsbury's and M&S). In the first six months more than 76,000 were sold, at less than £1 each. The exhibition is on until 12 August.

**ROSEMARY TURNER continues her investigation of  
SPITAL/LODGE FARM, MORDEN**

As part of my continuing research into The Lodge and its estate I have been attempting to relate it to existing roads and features.

At Christmas I downloaded two images from Google Earth which show the woodland in Morden Recreation Ground. One was dated 2010, and the other was taken in the 1940s. I have known for some time that the woodland had diminished considerably since I lived in Faversham Road in the 1960/70s. The only place where it has increased is towards the back gardens; it now goes up to the fences. There used to be allotments between the ends of the gardens and the woods, and a hut run by the local horticultural association, where my father always bought things for the garden.

The woodland was a bird sanctuary and had iron railings all round it. Nowadays there is some wire fencing in places, but in one place there is a gap where the park-keeper drives a tractor into the woodland to deposit green waste.

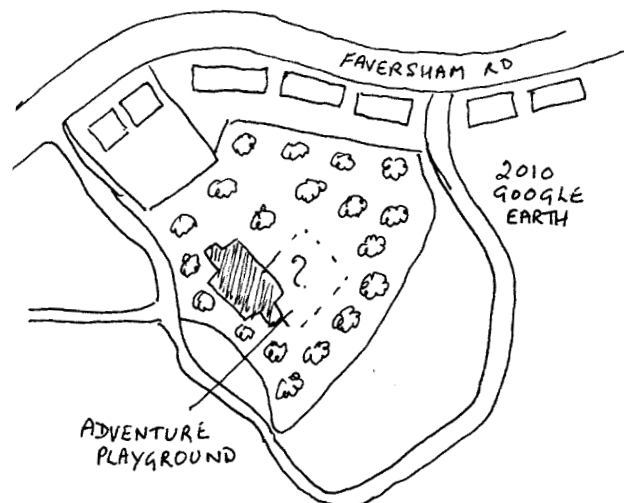
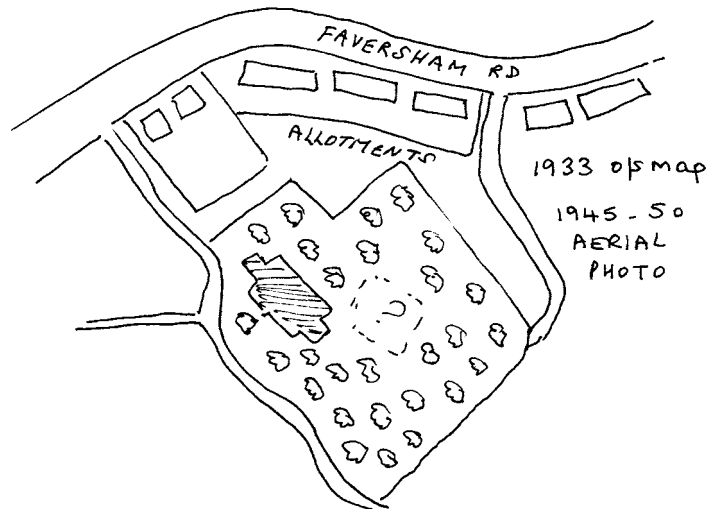
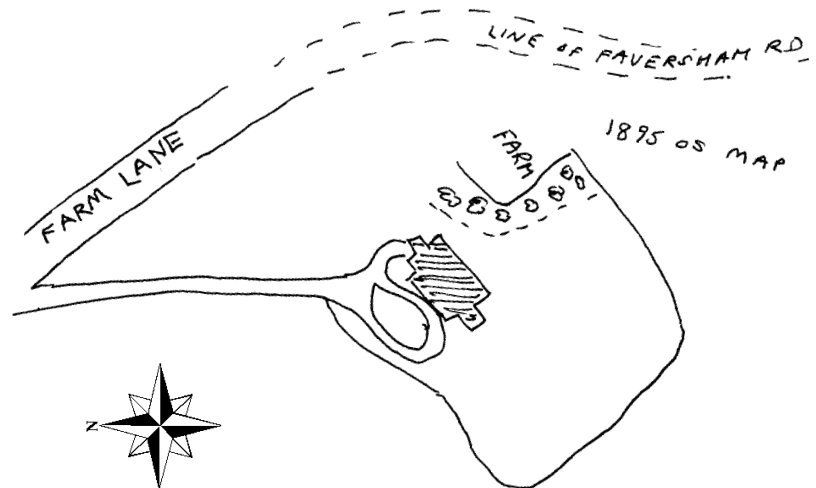
Originally the woodland and the park pathways followed the shape of The Lodge and its gardens, even including the right-angled indent near the Faversham Road park entrance. Originally this square followed around behind the farm buildings which existed at that time.

Faversham Road starts by following the line of Farm Lane, which was the drive to The Lodge, and a footpath which ended at Sutton Road (now Bishopsford Road). The footpath went through the farmyard, and Faversham Road left this on the other side of the farmyard.

The adventure playground built in 1975 is no longer there, but the present-day Google Earth view shows a lighter area in the trees which covers the area where I think the playground was. There is a bare area in the 1940s view in approximately the same place. I did wonder if this could have been the site of the gun battery mentioned by Vincent Lines in 1929. Of the farm building he wrote: 'In recent years a gun battery was stationed close at hand, but the stoutness of the structure defied the frequent shocks'.\*

I converted the two images into same-scale sketch maps to work out if the reduction in the woodland had affected the foundations of The Lodge mansion house. So far they are still within the wooded area, but part may have been removed during the building of the adventure playground.

\*Vincent Lines *Merton, Morden and Wimbledon: drawings and notes from the Wimbledon Borough News 1928-1931* (2009) Wimbledon Society Museum Press, p.54





**DAVID HAUNTON concludes his look at the BBC archive:<sup>1</sup>**

## **CHILD EVACUEES OF WORLD WAR TWO**

### **PART 2: MEMORIES**

*Reminder: 'WW2 People's War' is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at [bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar](http://bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar).*

#### **Schooling – or not**

Most respondents were children of school age at the time, and their memories reflect their varied experiences of schooling – and not only of schooling.

By far the happiest was William Henry Ives (in Lurgashall, Sussex, 1939). 'At first we attended school in the village hall with our teachers from Colliers Wood, but within the first year most children had gone home; those of us who stayed joined the village school... I have happy memories of my time there, fishing with a cork and goose quill [float] and helping at the pheasant shoots when "posh" people came ... As far as I was concerned being evacuated was the best thing that could have happened to me, [as I realised that] I just wanted to farm. I am happy to say that I have done so for the last 60 years.'

George Gillingham (in Finsbury, Luton and Morden, 1939-45) thought that schooling was quite different then – 'we had elderly teachers who stood in for the regular teachers who had to school the army, and this made it easier to play truant.'

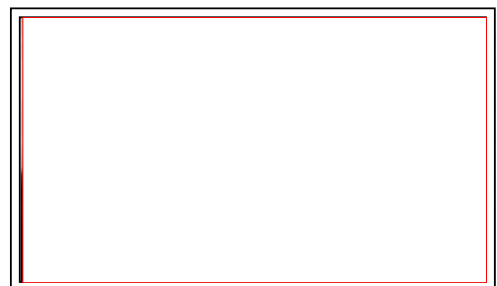
Derek Weeks (in Bishops Hull, Somerset, 1940-1) stayed in a house with an alleyway at the rear, in which stood an old fashioned hand pump (apparently the only local water supply). The school was just around the corner, by the alley, and was held in a small hall that was possibly a disused chapel. 'I can't remember much about the schooling, but I can remember helping to whitewash the walls inside. I am sure I never learned too much there.... Our days in the village with its cobbled pavements and the smell of fresh bread were always exciting. It was all so new to us as we had never been in the countryside before.' Three years later in 1944, evacuated again, to Pentre-bach, 'schooling is not a thing I remember while in Wales, I was having too much fun.'

Similar reactions were recalled by Philip Wheeler (4) (in Wem, Shropshire, 1944): 'I revelled in the freedom and space of the countryside – such a contrast to a terraced house in Merton Park.'

Miss X (in Embsay, Yorkshire, 1944) found that the Yorkshire 'village children seemed to be well ahead of us but some of them were older too.' Unusually, and rather shockingly, 'our teacher didn't like evacuees and she would call us lazy and said we were cowards for running away.' These comments stopped eventually, once the headmistress had spoken to the teacher.

Albert Dunning (in Carlton, Nottingham, 1944) did not go to school for quite some time and had a great time exploring new places, especially down by the river Trent. But eventually 'my sister kept on about school, so my mum took her one day. They were surprised to see her, they had no trace of us and thought we had all been killed in the bombing. End of our carefree days, we all had to go to school straight away.' But in contrast to Miss X, 'we were put top of the class, our London education seeming to be way ahead of Nottingham. At the end of the war, back at our schools in Colliers Wood, we ended up in the bottom of the class as our educational standard had dropped.'

Some children were not evacuated, but stayed at home in Merton or Morden. School shelters loom large in their memories. The Board of Education had produced a circular (no.1467 'Air Raid Precautions in Schools', 27 April 1939, price 2d.) which rather vaguely recommended that shelters could be built, each one to accommodate a group of 'not more than 50', and suggested a trench design (long and thin, with a bench on each side, allowing 15 inches per pupil, lined with corrugated iron and covered with the excavated earth).<sup>2</sup> Many local education authorities provided brick-built surface shelters for schools without playing fields. However, it appears that no shelters were built, of either design, anywhere, before the outbreak of war. One boy's main recollection is of having some weeks off school from 'St Mary's, Merton', while brick shelters were built in the playground. Ronald Standen (Garth Road) remembered very little of school, possibly due to his fractured education, but he did recall the damp and musty smell in the school's brick shelter with its long rows of bench seats. 'Teacher used desperately to try to find an educational subject to keep us occupied.' The beginning of Miss X's (Merton) school days, before she was evacuated, were not too happy. She felt she received a very scanty education, as school days were much disrupted. 'A lot of the time we sat in brick shelters in

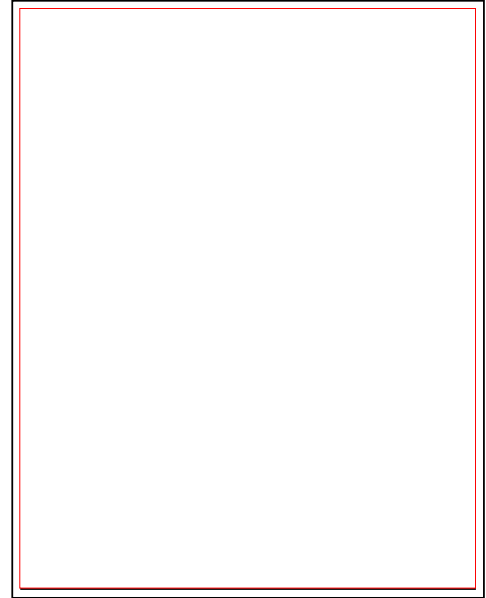


*School shelter in use  
(Picture 'borrowed' from BBC Schools Web Pages  
- Google Images accessed 31.3.2012)*

the playground when a siren went, and of course the nights were very noisy.’ Shelters were also remembered by Alan Craney (Middleton Road) ‘when I was at school our teacher was quite a school marm, all tweeds. She tried to get us singing in the shelter – “She’ll be coming round the mountain”, “We’ll have no vulgarity here!” and “Khaki bloomers”’.<sup>3</sup>



*The adult respirator above (Home Office Air Raid Precautions, 1938, reprinted 2007 by Tempus Publishing) and child’s ‘not-threatening’ Mickey Mouse gas mask (Peter Doyle and Paul Evans The Home Front 1939-1945, The Crowood Press 2007)*



However, for many of the stay-at-homes, it was their gas masks that made the most indelible impression. (They are always referred to in these memories as ‘gas masks’ – never the official ‘respirator’, which rather fits with my own very junior recollection.) Marie Lanham (Morden) recalled that ‘in 1940 we had to put the gas masks on in school during maths for practice, and sat like that through the whole lesson. - I can still smell the rubber’.

At the beginning of the war, Edna (‘Meg’) Russ (11) was not evacuated, as her mother did not want her to go, but most of her school was evacuated. She did not attend school full-time for three months. She would go in once a week, collect homework, do it at home and take it back the following week. After a few months, Morden Farm Central School opened<sup>4</sup> and she was transferred there because it was nearer to her house. Getting fitted for a gas mask was something Meg found exciting, but her brother (only seven) could not agree with her, as he found it quite frightening. They used to practise whilst sitting around the table until they could wear their gas masks for at least half an hour.

Valerie Edwards (5) (Morden) was not evacuated and started school in 1942, when there were not many children as most had been evacuated. ‘If the siren went on my way to school I used to knock at the nearest door and dive into their shelter. We spent months at school in the underground shelters having all lessons, food and games down there.’ Valerie carried her Mickey Mouse gas mask to school every day, while in the Anderson shelter at night, her brother had a small cot in which to sleep with his baby gas mask nearby. This was a ‘baby-length black coffin-like contraption’ in which the baby would be enclosed in the event of a gas attack.

### **Celebration**

At the end of the war in Europe, Meg Russ (now 16) celebrated at a huge street party, while Valerie Edwards also remembered the street parties, with everybody waving flags, and red, white and blue banners everywhere. Miss X, living near the Board Mills, recalled that for the VE celebrations ‘our little community of half-a-dozen streets decided to have a party in Adnams, a coach firm in Merton.<sup>5</sup> This was like a bus garage so there was plenty of room ... for competitions and fancy dress.’ In interesting contrast, one unnamed boy noted ‘on VE Day we put out a couple of flags our dad had, and in the evening went up to the West End to celebrate.’

Ronald Standen (now 13) recalled a later street party in September 1945, to celebrate VJ Day, and the true end of the war. ‘Tables were loaded with as much food as shortages allowed and with long hoarded special treats [and] plenty of beer and the like. Everyone smiled, laughed, sung and danced. There were also tears in the light of the bonfire, until the last couples drifted away at a scandalous four o’clock [in the morning].’

### **Bananas**

A regular *leitmotif* was the absence of bananas – curiously, no other fruit are mentioned. Meg Russ (11 in 1939) loved them, so she didn’t think very highly of rationing. Since only children aged five or under were allowed bananas, Meg could not enjoy them until long after the war. Food rations also stuck in Dave Wilgoss’ memory, not only the exotics (his word) like margarine, spam, corned beef and dried egg, but also, he recalled mournfully, ‘no fruit – the only bananas I saw were the false hand on display at the greengrocers’. On the other

hand, Ronald Standen (7 in 1939) recalled a war-time raffle in which he won a ‘very valuable prize, half of a small banana’. Finally, poor little Valerie Edwards did remember ‘longing and longing for a banana. I never had one and I remember ... my aunt once saying to me “Guess what you have got” – I shouted “A banana, a banana!”. I was so disappointed when it turned out to be a baby brother...’

- 1 David would be delighted to hear from anyone mentioned in these articles, or their relatives, or contemporaries (phone 0208-542-7079).
- 2 The National Archives (TNA) ref. ED 138/8
- 3 ‘Khaki Bloomers’ was a risqué version of ‘She’ll be coming round the mountain’, beginning ‘She’ll be wearing khaki bloomers...’, (usually sung at, rather than to, ATS girls) which presumably young schoolchildren would not fully appreciate. Or, possibly, tweedy school marms. I have not traced ‘We’ll have no vulgarity here’ earlier than an American reference in 1953. Was it perhaps a comic song or catchphrase from ITMA, or the Crazy Gang? Can anyone help?
- 4 The newly-built Morden Farm Schools, Aragon Road, had two buildings: one (the Central School) intended for 480 senior pupils, the other for 432 juniors and 432 infants. The Central School officially opened for the first time on 20 September 1939. The Junior and Infants building could not be used for teaching, as it was taken for an ARP first-aid station, so the Central building was used by all three Departments, operating in shifts under one head teacher. (TNA ref. E21/61772) I suspect this was only for staff and a limited number of pupils, as the *Wimbledon Borough News* for 29 September reported that men were still hard at work completing the construction of eighteen shelters, for 50 children apiece, and we know that pupils were not allowed back to school until shelters had been provided. The *News* reported, by experiment, that one shelter could easily hold 54 children and two adults, so some pupils had re-started at school.
- 5 Lewis Adnams Ltd started life in 1925 as ‘haulage contractors’ on what was then an empty plot at 17 Pincott Road. They later built a garage for their coaches on the site, which is where the party was held in 1945. In 1930 the firm added offices as ‘motor coach proprietors’ at 69 Merton High Street, sharing the site with Blunts Market. They were still there in 1970.

## The recent death of IRENE BAIN’s brother has triggered some more reminiscences

### THE OLD OAKO

In the 1930s when I was a child living in New Barns Avenue, Mitcham, life was very quiet. Children were able to play in the street quite freely without fear of cars continually passing up and down. Also, we had the whole Common to roam in. There was a pond on the corner of Watneys Road near the end of the Avenue and a huge tree stood sentinel on its edge. This tree was known as the Old Oako by all the local children and was a focal point for us.

We didn’t have many visitors, so when my Auntie Alice and cousin Dennis came over all the way from Barking in Essex, it was a very special day. My brother and I would look out of the front room window for ages, hoping to catch sight of them coming up the road. Dennis and Peter were about the same age and they got on like a house on fire. As soon as they met they started laughing and the merriment didn’t stop until it was time for our visitors to go home.

Cousin Dennis had a wonderful sense of humour, and Auntie Alice herself always had amusing anecdotes to relate, like when she was served a dishcloth dipped in batter in the fish shop by mistake, or the time she got a toffee stuck between her front false teeth in the cinema and couldn’t make herself understood when she wanted to get out to remove it!

On one of their visits we even managed a trip to the Majestic Cinema in Mitcham to see *The Three Musketeers*. As soon as we were home again the boys were pretending to be musketeers. So Dad went into his shed and in no time at all produced two wooden swords for them to play with. Soon they were parrying swords all over the garden.

Dad was a dab hand at knocking things up out of wood in his shed, which stood at the end of the garden near the back gate. He would often make us windmills (carved propellers fixed onto a piece of wood), which whizzed around in the wind. He made me a dolls house. He constructed a wooden trellis fence and made an arch over the garden path, so that our roses could climb over it. Nor must I forget the substantial hutch he made to accommodate our pet white rabbit which a kindly neighbour (being a biochemist) had saved from experimentation and given to me.

Often the boys went off to play on the common to explore or climb trees. My brother was a great one for climbing trees. I think he viewed most trees as a challenge. To Dennis this was not so. I was quite happy to remain at home with the grown-ups.

The most outstanding visit was the day my brother decided to climb the Old Oako! For Peter climbed the huge tree – but couldn’t get down! Cousin Dennis had to run back to New Barns to ask my father for help. Uncle Walter was not amused at having to stop whatever he was doing to haul out the long ladder and somehow to balance it on his bicycle, then trundle the awkward load all the way down to the pond in front of curious onlookers! – and, of course, back again!

In Spring we would visit the Seven Islands Pond to see the baby frogs making their journey from the water onto the land. We also caught tadpoles and took them home in jamjars with string tied to the necks of the pots for carrying. We liked to see them grow legs and turn into little frogs.

In the hot summers we children would head for the Common. Our next-door-but-one neighbours would do it in style, carrying their deckchairs and picnic bags and everything else they needed to spend the day there or even go as far as the Seven Islands Pond, which was like being at the seaside then.

Mother also used to take us to the Seven Islands Pond to paddle, when we would attempt to get to as many islands as possible. Some islands could only be reached by boat though as the water was too deep, so we couldn't explore these.

One day when Peter and I went paddling in the One Island Pond, we ventured up to the deep end, which we hadn't dared to do before because it was full of thick black mud – and discovered oyster shells! There must have been hundreds of them in there. We thought the Romans had left them and that we had discovered a secret! I recently read an article about the old Mitcham Fair which was held in the centre of town, which stated that oysters were sold there. So that solved the mystery of how the shells were disposed of.

I have memories of lying on my back on the Common and watching the clouds sailing slowly along overhead. This would often be accompanied by the magic of the skylark's song. Around me at eye level would be harebells (fairy things – so delicate) and all the various beautiful grasses that covered the Common.

In autumn Dad would take us blackberrying. We had our jamjars to hold the berries in and were pleased to present them to Mum when we got home, so that she could make a blackberry and apple pie. (Not the same jars as for the frogs!)

There were sloe bushes on the common with their bitter blue berries, which we left alone and, strangely, in season, near the windmill were raspberry canes. We had pleasure in eating the raspberries as we picked them, for there were not enough to take home.

With so many trees, large and small, and all sorts of shrubs on the common there were lots of places to hide in or play house in. On a certain day I stepped into a known place where trees stretched high above and hawthorn bushes gathered around to make a secret bower. The floor was of flattened sandy soil.

As I stooped and entered I was taken aback to find a young soldier in khaki battledress sitting quietly in there. I sensed something which I didn't understand and that there was danger. I was quite near him and he stretched out his arm and began very gently to stroke my bare arm. I knew I must get away, but didn't know what from.

Suddenly, in the canopy of tall trees high above something was moving? There was a crackling and snapping of branches and leaves began to fall, although it wasn't autumn. Something strange was happening above. Then, slipping and sliding down in a shower of leaves, my brother Peter dropped to the sandy floor. Without a word we both ran out of the bower and all the way home. Neither of us ever mentioned this incident to our parents and neither did we ever talk about it ourselves.

**9th February 2012**

### **Addendum**

One day when I was a young woman and I got home from work, my Mother told me, 'There was an accident in Mitcham this morning when I went down there shopping. Nobody knew what to do and everything came to a standstill with cars all backed up and people just standing about staring. Then someone ran to the police station to tell the police.

'Soon, around the corner, striding along steadily and showing no signs of panic, strode a lone policeman. Quietly and efficiently he took control of the situation. He tended to the injured and directed the traffic and got it moving again until the ambulance arrived.'

My brother didn't know that Mother was quietly watching and feeling proud.

**11th March 2012**

[The Old Oako has gone, alas. There are oaks near the pond, but they are mere youngsters – JG]

## **NEW EXHIBITION**

'The Wandle and Its Links to the World' opens at Wandle Industrial Museum, Vestry Hall Annexe, Mitcham, from Sunday 17 June. Ring 020 8648 0127 or visit [www.wandle.org](http://www.wandle.org) for further details.

**Letters and contributions for the *Bulletin* should be sent to the Hon. Editor. The views expressed in this *Bulletin* are those of the contributors concerned and not necessarily those of the Society or its Officers.**

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*Printed by Peter Hopkins*