



PRESIDENT:

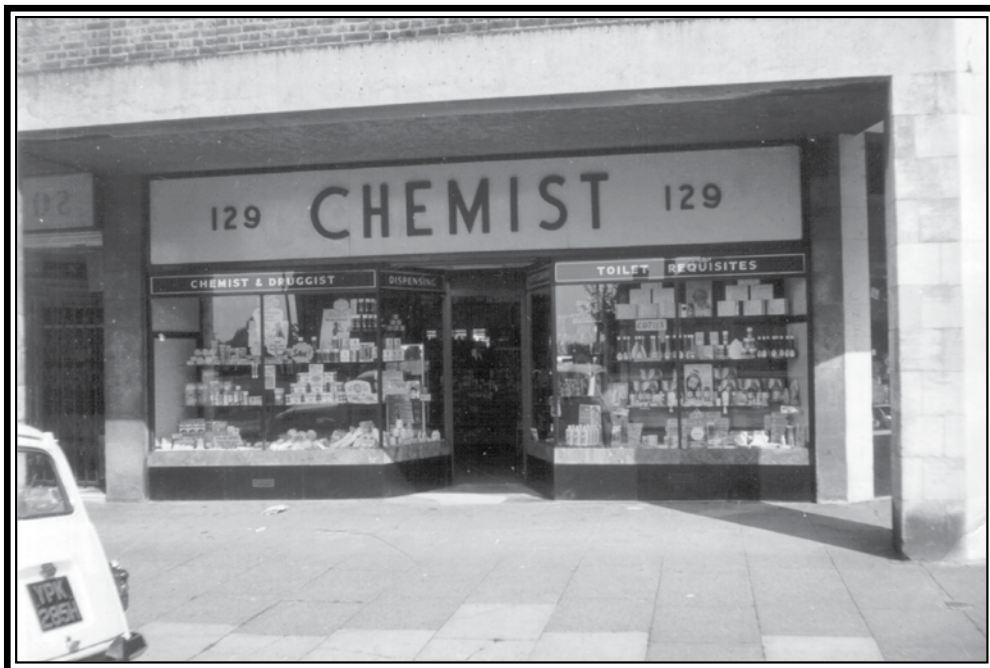
VICE PRESIDENTS: Viscountess Hanworth, Eric Montague and William Rudd

CHAIR: David Haunton

BULLETIN NO. 181

MARCH 2012

BILL RUDD'S MORDEN



Stone's chemist shop was at 129 Green Lane from about 1932. It was a typical local independent business, and its well-stocked windows confirm a wide range of 'toilet requisites' as well as the expertise of a 'chemist & druggist'. There were other services for its customers too. Bill recalls that Rudd family holiday snaps were taken here for processing when he was a lad. Stone's are long gone; the premises now form part of a convenience store, and have lost the stylish canted entrance Bill took this photograph in 1969.

CONTENTS

Programme March – June	2
'An Outstanding Resource' – JG	2
Reports:	
'The Story of Morden Park'	3
'Local Highwaymen'	4
'Violette Szabo and SOE'	5
Tower Creameries Commemorative Plaque – David Haunton	7
Local History Workshops:	
4 November: Motspur Park; local Civil Defence preparations 1937-8	7
9 December: Home Guard deaths at Tower Creameries; Queen Eleanor; a spy in Morden; wartime memories on the BBC website; a cottage in Morden; Merton priory; Merton Place	8
Builders, Wardens and Pig Clubs – Sheila Gallagher	9
The Coronation of Queen Eleanor – Peter Hopkins	12
Child Evacuees of World War Two – Part 1: Where did they go? – David Haunton	13

PROGRAMME MARCH – JUNE

Saturday 17 March 2.30pm

Christ Church Hall, Colliers Wood

‘The National Archives, and Some of its Holdings’

An illustrated talk by **Melinda Haunton**, who works at TNA

Saturday 14 April 2.30pm

Christ Church Hall, Colliers Wood

‘Calico Printers’

The speaker for this illustrated talk is **David Cufley**.

Christ Church Hall is next to the church, in Christchurch Road, 250m from Colliers Wood Underground station. Limited parking at the hall, but plenty in nearby streets or at the Tandem Centre, 200m south. Buses 152, 200 and 470 pass the door.

Saturday 12 May 2.30pm

A Mitcham Heritage Walk

led by our Vice-Chair **Dr Tony Scott**

Meet outside Wandle Industrial Museum, at the Cricket Green. The walk will cover various properties round the historic Cricket Green, as well as The Canons, Park Place and the Three Kings area. About one and a half hours, but walkers may drop out at any point.

Tuesday 19 June 11am

Visit to the House of Commons, courtesy of Siobhain Mc Donagh MP

Meet outside the House of Commons entrance. Numbers are restricted.

Visitors are welcome to attend our talks. Entry £2.

‘AN OUTSTANDING RESOURCE’

It was very pleasing to see that the February 2012 issue of the BBC’s genealogy magazine *Who Do You Think You Are?* devoted its ‘Your Projects’ page to the monumental Morden enterprise undertaken by **Peter Hopkins**. He has been putting Morden’s medieval records onto the Merton Historical Society website, together with an English translation (from the Latin), explanatory commentary and referencing. The surviving records are held in a number of different collections, and the staff of all of them have been helpful and generous with their time (and have not charged for reproduction). Other researchers too have shared their knowledge and skills, but it is Peter who has carried through this ambitious venture. Alan Crosby, the author of the article, comments, ‘It’s outstanding scholarship, and I suspect it’s unique in this country – I know of no other society that has achieved such a project’.

Following publication of the above article, we received the following email from Cliff Webb of West Surrey Family History Society: ‘As you note on your website, West Surrey FHS have transcribed a number of parish registers in your area. Noting the wonderful work your Society has done, especially on Manorial records, we thought you might like copies of some relevant material. The two small Merton files are of periods for which Bishops’ Transcripts survive in a gap in the registers’. Cliff has generously supplied us with spreadsheets covering: St Mary’s Merton burials 1559-1659, baptisms and marriages 1679-80, 1685-6, 1692-3 (from Bishops’ Transcripts, the Register being lost for this period); Christ Church Colliers Wood baptisms 1875-7; Zion Chapel Mitcham baptisms 1842-56 and burials 1864-76; St Lawrence Morden baptisms 1815-76, burials 1841-66.

Peter Hopkins has these spreadsheets and will be happy to consult them in response to your questions (see contact details in December *Bulletin*).

We are very grateful to Cliff for this gift.

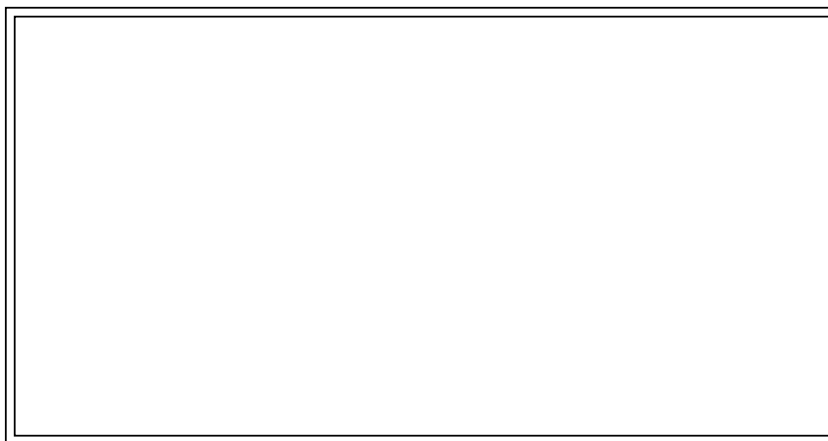
JG

‘THE STORY OF MORDEN PARK’ – Evelyn Jowett Memorial Lecture

On 29 October Peter Hopkins of the Society and Sarah Gould of Merton Heritage & Local Studies Centre gave comprehensive and impressive well-illustrated presentations as a two-part lecture on the subject of Morden Park. Raynes Park Library Hall was full to capacity, indicating the popularity of talks by experts on subjects relevant to our area, rather than more general presentations on other topics.

Part 1. Peter dealt with the history of the Park until its acquisition by the local council in 1945. He started by recounting his happy memories of using the Park when younger, including leading for 15 years from 1976 the Morden Park Holiday Club, organised by local churches for children during one week of the summer holidays.

In 1768 the site was a tenant farm belonging to Richard Garth, lord of the manor of Morden. A 99-year lease, which required an Act of Parliament, was granted to John Ewart, a brandy merchant. He built the fine Georgian house, and Peter described in some detail the changes to the house over the following 200 years, using copious illustrations. There was a series of private occupants, until in 1934 it was taken over by Merton Park Golf Club, later renamed Morden Park Golf Club, who used it as their clubhouse until the outbreak of war. An audience member later suggested that it then served as a Home Guard post.



1825 Watercolour by G Yates, copyright Guildhall Library, Corporation of London

Peter described the outbuildings and gardens as set out in sales particulars of 1873. They included a domestic yard with circular dairy and knife and boot room (both still standing), laundry rooms, brew-house, well, coach house, stables, pond, dung pit and closet. There were extensive pleasure grounds and shrubbery walks, an ‘Italian’ flower garden, with conservatory and vinery, and kitchen gardens. An ornamental entrance lodge stood at London Road. Much of the estate operated as a farm even after the area around the house became parkland, but the only farm building that survives today is Church Farm Cottage, next to St Lawrence’s church.

Peter went on to examine the wider estate, using superimposed maps to illustrate changes. The original lease of 1768 was for 133 acres (54ha), but this was increased by 1838 to 210 acres (85ha). Much of the former arable land to the north is now outside the park, which now extends further south, to Lower Morden Lane, to include fields formerly belonging to other ancient farms. Peter described his researches into how today’s landscape relates to medieval, or earlier, structures and fields. For instance, tree lines marking ancient field boundaries can be clearly seen in aerial photos. He suggests that many of the detached crofts along the Epsom Road, belonging to medieval tenements in Lower Morden, could have fronted the old Roman road, Stane Street. He believes that the ‘mound’ in the park was not a ‘garden feature’ but much older. Field-names nearby include ‘Gallowsfield’ and ‘Dedemanforlong’. It is likely to have been an ancient burial mound; such mounds have been used for siting gallows in other parts of Surrey.

In 1884 the freehold of the estate was sold by the Garth family to the Hatfields, and in 1945 Merton & Morden Urban District Council acquired it.

Part 2. Sarah Gould then told us that in 1945 the estate consisted of 185 acres (75ha), of which 80 acres (32ha) on the north-eastern side were transferred to the LCC for playing fields. Fifteen acres (6ha) were reserved for civic development.

Initially the ground floor of the house was used by the council, and the upper rooms by local groups. But with the creation of the London Borough of Merton in 1965, the whole building was taken over by the parks, cemeteries and allotments department. When this moved to the Civic Centre in 1985 the house was closed up, gradually fell into disrepair and suffered from thieves, vandals and squatters, and arson attacks to outbuildings. English Heritage became concerned, and after various proposals to mothball the house or sell it were abandoned, money from the Heritage Lottery Fund was obtained in 1997 for the restoration, repair and adaptation of the building to form Merton’s new register office. Under architects Lawrence & Wrightson work began in 1998, and the house reopened as the register office on 13 November 2000. Sarah showed many ‘before and after’ photographs. There was no doubt that the project had been a major success.

The main civic developments were Morden Park Pool (1967) and Merton College (1971). (A paddling pool was also constructed, and the bandstand dates from the early 1960s.) The pool was to an attractive modern design, but has recently needed major repairs. The college was formally opened by Group Captain Leonard Cheshire VC, who also unveiled a bronze plaque to Sergeant Peter Walley, who in 1940 steered his Hurricane, crippled by enemy fire, away from housing and into the trees of Morden Park, losing his life. Numbers of students at the college reached 5000 by 1999. Vocational training courses include catering, and there is a restaurant open to the public. The college merged with Phoenix Sixth Form College in 2000 and since 2009 is the Morden campus of South Thames College.



*Recent building at South Thames College Morden campus.
Photo: D Roe (2011)*

The future of the playing fields part of the park has been the subject of recent controversy. With the winding-up of the GLC (successor to the LCC) the freehold of the land passed to the London Borough of Merton, with the London Playing Fields Society (LPFS) taking a 99-year lease. A bid for funding to redevelop the fields failed, and LPFS withdrew from the lease at the end of 2005. In November 2009 the council revoked a decision to dispose of part of the land to Goals Soccer for a floodlit facility, after opposition from members of the public and the Morden Park and Playing Fields Society, a local preservation group formed in 1991. A public consultation exercise in late 2009 made it clear that there was support for a variety of uses for the playing field land, but there should be no commercial development.

It was found also that people gave a high priority to the maintenance and promotion of the park's heritage and environment. Sarah went on to describe how the park is now managed for wildlife. Large parts of the grassland have been returned to meadowland, resulting in greater diversity in plant species, and hence insects, benefiting the wider food chain and supporting more birds and mammals. Since about 2000 the park has been part of the Capital Woodlands Project. This involves management to preserve veteran trees that predate the park, leaving dead wood in situ, replanting appropriately, and creating new woodland areas and tree trails.

Sarah ended by saying that the Morden Park estate continues to be a jewel in Merton's crown in terms of historical significance, environmental importance, and the education, entertainment and enjoyment of the local community. [An informative and fully illustrated booklet, *Morden Park*, by Peter Hopkins and Bill Rudd was published in 2002 by Merton Library Service on behalf of the Society. It is available at our indoor meetings, from libraries, or from Peter Hopkins, Publications Secretary.]

David Roe

‘LOCAL HIGHWAYMEN’

On Saturday 19 November at Christ Church Hall, after the AGM, we were treated to an entertaining and well-researched talk by member Clive Whichelow. He told us that despite the tag ‘gentlemen of the road’ not many highwaymen were gallant and chivalrous. However they did come from a wide variety of backgrounds – one was even a clergyman!

The heyday of the highwayman was during the 17th and 18th centuries, and the roads of Wimbledon, Putney, Richmond and Wandsworth could be dangerous for travellers. The highwayman's preferred terrain was heaths and commons, and more than one hung out at the *Baldfaced Stag* on the Old Portsmouth Road (the site is now covered by Asda) and at the *Green Man* on Putney Heath.

The **Golden Farmer** (1625-1689) lived a double life for more than 40 years, as prosperous farmer, and highwayman. He farmed at Bagshot, but often practised his other trade on the Portsmouth Road and at Putney. A ruthless thief, he was said to have killed 13 of his victims, and he robbed the poor as well as the rich.

Claude Duval (1643-1670), French born, became a footman before turning to robbery, and is perhaps the closest to the romantic archetype. He was said to be dashing, courteous and gallant, once inviting a female victim to dance a coranto with him on the heath where he had held up her coach.

Thomas Rowland (1659-1699) haunted Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath as well as Clapham Common, disguised as a woman, and decorously riding side-saddle away from the scene.

Nicholas Wells (1684-1712), a butcher by trade, turned to highway robbery, often at Putney Heath, after his marriage failed. He is also said to have exchanged his wife for a jackdaw, with a footpad (a horseless highway thief).

The Great Frost of 1683 prompted **Jonathan Simpson** (1654-1686) to swap his horse for a pair of skates so that he could rob fellow-skaters on the frozen Thames. His normal territory was the Portsmouth Road.

The clerical highwayman was a Parson **Darby** who supplemented his stipend by robbery, mainly on Bagshot Heath. He was caught after shooting dead a mailcoach driver.

Like Duval, **James Maclaine** (1714-1750) had aspirations to gentility. Son of a Presbyterian minister, he became a butler before taking to the road. Richmond was his preferred patch, but he is notorious for robbing Horace Walpole in Hyde Park.

Edward Hinton twice escaped the gallows, and gave up highway robbery, but was subsequently caught burgling a house, and suffered the penalty. He is said to have stolen a kiss from a pretty vicar's daughter when he held up their coach on Putney Heath, and let father and daughter go with their purses intact.

William Page (1730-1758) had to begin his career with borrowed pistols and a hired horse. He later developed a strategy of posing as a gentleman driving a phaeton, concealing the coach and, dressed in old clothes and riding one of the horses, robbing his prey and then making off once more, an apparently respectable citizen.

It seems that the most famous highwayman of all, **Dick Turpin** (1705-1739), was active briefly in Wandsworth, Barnes and Putney during his short career of just over two years. A butcher by trade, he was also a smuggler, sheep rustler, horse thief and housebreaker.

However the best documented local highwayman was undoubtedly **Jerry Abershaw** (1773-1795), who took up his calling at the age of 17. His gang was based at the *Baldfaced Stag*. By all accounts he was a violent man, but he had a sense of humour, and often played tricks on his victims. His exploits appealed to some writers, and he even found his way into the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

Virtually all the highwaymen ended their lives 'turned off' on the 'nubbing cheat/chit' (gallows), often at Tyburn (the site is near Marble Arch), where the occasion provided a jolly day out for sightseers and family parties, and the best seats cost 2/6^d. Afterwards the corpses, covered with pitch to preserve them, were often taken off to be suspended in chains on gibbets sited prominently on local highways. The sight may have been designed as an awful warning, but in fact it seems to have been more of a tourist attraction. When Jerry Abershaw was gibbeted on Putney Heath in 1795 it is said that a crowd of 100,000 was present, and the spectacle was a 'favourite Sunday outing' for months. The spot is still known as Jerry's Hill. (There was never a gibbet at Tibbet's Corner – all that was there was a lodge to Earl Spencer's estate, once manned by a man called Tibbett.)

Woodcut by Thomas Bewick (1753-1828), from 1800 Woodcuts by Thomas Bewick and His School (Dover Publications 1962) plate 163

The audience thoroughly enjoyed Clive's account of these colourful if alarming characters. For more about them read his booklet *Local Highwaymen*, which is widely available and costs £3.25.

Judith Goodman

'VIOLETTE SZABO AND SOE'

At Raynes Park Library Hall, on 10 December 2011, members and visitors heard a talk by Daphne Marchant, Liberal Democrat councillor and former mayor of Lambeth. Unfortunately, her husband Richard was ill, and unable to attend and contribute. During our break, members could view Daphne's extensive collection of newspaper cuttings and photos of memorials.

Born Violette Bushell on 21 June 1921 in Paris, our heroine was brought up at 18 Burnley Road in Stockwell. Her father was a carpenter, who met and married a French woman while serving in France after the first World War. Violette attended the local Central School and left formal education at age 14. However, her mother taught her to speak and think in French, which was later to prove vital. With four brothers and no sisters, she grew up competitive, fiery and athletic.

Her first jobs were at Bon Marché and then Woolworths (rumours of a later job at Lines Bros Triang factory in Merton are unconfirmed), and at the outbreak of war in 1939 she joined the Land Army. Her mother often provided lunches for Free French officers, and at one of these Violette met the dashing Lieutenant Étienne Szabo. They were married after a whirlwind romance, and their daughter Tania was born in June 1942.

Alas, Étienne was killed at the Battle of El Alamein in October of that year. Soon afterwards Violette was approached to join SOE (Special Operations Executive), whose job was to ‘set Europe ablaze’ by supporting Resistance movements, and who were looking for athletic French-speakers. Burning to avenge her husband, and with her parents agreeing to look after Tania, she agreed immediately, though there was some concern in SOE that she might have a ‘Stockwell French’ accent. Officially she joined the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY), many of whose personnel were actually in SOE.

After military training – explosives, radio, firearms (Violette was said to be the best shot in SOE) – she was parachuted into Occupied France on two separate occasions in 1944. Her orders were to organise and lead the Maquis in sabotage operations against enemy communications such as road and railway bridges and telephone lines. Her second mission ended when she was captured, still firing her Sten gun to enable her companions to escape. She was interrogated by the Gestapo for several days, but gave nothing away. Eventually she was taken to Buchenwald concentration camp, where she plotted to escape with another SOE prisoner, Eileen Nearne, but was sent on to Ravensbrück camp before the plan was complete. (Eileen Nearne did escape later and made her way back to England.) For several months Violette Szabo was subjected to a harsh regime of hard labour and little food, but in early February 1945 she was shot, in company with two other SOE women agents, Lilian Rolfe and Denise Bloch.

She was awarded the George Cross posthumously for her heroism; her little daughter Tania received the medal from King George VI in 1946. Both Violette and Étienne were awarded the Légion d’Honneur. On the Albert Embankment by Lambeth Palace there is a memorial to Violette and other SOE agents who lost their lives. It carries a portrait bust of her, a good likeness. (Our speaker takes pride in having arranged for proper public access to this memorial.) There is also a small museum far away in Herefordshire, in the tiny village of Wormelow. It occupies part of ‘*Cartref*’, a house where Violette relaxed between missions; the owner, Rosemary Rigby, still remembers her climbing trees – and roofs! A small ceremony is held there every year on her birthday, attended by local mayors and French Légionnaires.

Having mentioned the restrictions still imposed on some SOE reports by the Official Secrets Act, Daphne reminded us of several other notable SOE agents – the Norwegian heroes of Telemark, who destroyed the heavy water plant at Rjukan, thus delaying the German development of a nuclear bomb; Eileen Nearne, MBE, who died alone in Torquay last year, and would have been buried without ceremony had the local Royal British Legion not pitched in and publicised her life; and Nancy Wake, AC, GM, who died only the previous August, aged 98. She had continued in SOE after the war, and spent her last years in the *Star and Garter* home in Richmond, affectionately regarded as a ‘character’. One Christmas, when invited to have some tea by the Queen Mother she robustly suggested, and received, a more alcoholic drink, and then casually stole some bits of the royal Christmas cake.



David Haunton

Poem by Leo Marks, SOE (used as a code for Violette to encrypt messages)

The life that I have
Is all that I have
And the life that I have
Is yours
The love that I have
Of the life that I have
Is yours and yours and yours
A sleep I shall have
A rest I shall have
Yet death will be but a pause
For the peace of my years
In the long green grass
Will be yours and yours
And yours

TOWER CREAMERIES COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE

Members may recall the article 'One night in the Blitz – Mitcham 16/17 April 1941' in *Bulletin* 175, p.11, which mentioned the bomb which hit the Tower Creameries on Mitcham Common, killing several Home Guards. The factory was repaired during the war, and a plaque commemorating the dead Home Guards was attached to the building. Several years ago the building was demolished, and the plaque taken into the care of the Mitcham branch of the Royal British Legion. The site has now been re-developed as a block of flats, named 'The Meadows'. A relative of someone injured that night in 1941 approached our Society, asking for our good offices in getting the plaque, or a replica, installed on the new building. We were delighted to be informed by the developers, Notting Hill Housing Trust, that this was already in hand, that a designer had been appointed, and that they had already inspected the original in the RBL offices. It is intended to unveil the replica plaque at a formal ceremony, but not until after all the flats have been taken, to avoid any appearance of its use as advertising.

David Haunton



Photo: Stephen Turner (2001)

NEWLY-OPENED GALLERY AT WIMBLEDON MUSEUM

The first exhibition is entitled 'Town and Country Wimbledon'.

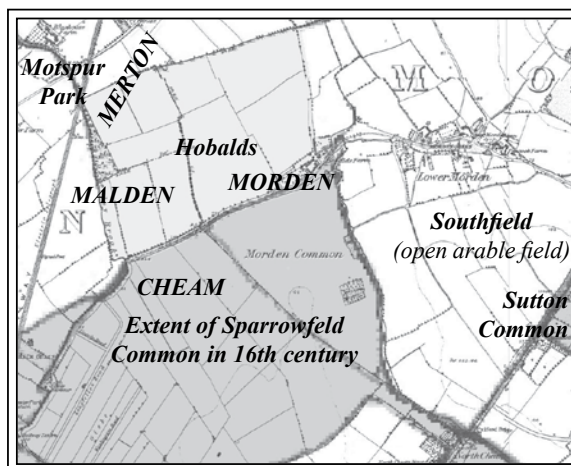
Access is possible on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, via the Museum, until 29 April.

The Wimbledon Society Museum of Local History is at 22 Ridgway, Wimbledon, London SW19 4QN.

LOCAL HISTORY WORKSHOPS

Friday 4 November – 4 present. David Haunton in the chair

◆ **Peter Hopkins** had been following up the suggestion by Jeremy Harte of Bourne Hall Museum that 'Motspur Park' was not an ancient meeting place name ('mot' = 'moot'?) (see *Bulletin* 180 page 7). The unusual rectilinear parish boundary features are a puzzle. Probably there was a series of assarts, or enclosures, beginning in the 12th century. By the early 13th century these had all become part of Merton priory's Hobalds estate. But what must have once been a continuous sweep of common land from Sparrowfield (including Morden Common) round to Sutton Common had been interrupted at some earlier (perhaps even pre-Domesday) stage by the creation of the 'Southfield' at Lower Morden.



◆ **Bill Rudd's** contribution is on page 1.

◆ Civil Defence preparations before the last war were **David Haunton's** subject. By mid-1937 Civil Defence was beginning to be planned, with the appointment of County Organisers. Of particular concern was the need for training in gas awareness. A suitably qualified ARP (air-raid precautions) officer received a salary of £300 per annum, with £52 for telephone and car expenses. By May 1938 local authorities had received an Exchequer grant, Merton & Morden had a full ARP committee, and council employees were in training. Shelter sites were selected, and a list of schools suitable for first-aid posts drawn up. By June the district had 534 volunteers signed up and training.

Judith Goodman

Friday 9 December – six present. Judith Goodman in the chair.

- ◆ **Peter Hopkins** reported that long-standing member Irene Bain had been in contact with William Bumstead, the twin brother of a former colleague of hers who had been injured by the parachute mine that fell on Tower Creameries. The plaque commemorating those killed, who were Home Guard members, was removed to the British Legion, Mitcham, many years ago. MHS had been asked to approach the site's developers with a view to having a memorial reinstated. (see page 7 for more).

In a previous workshop Peter reported that he had found evidence confirming the date of Queen Eleanor's coronation, and he was now able to add some new information. (See page 12 for his full account.)

Peter, while searching for references to Morden on the Internet, had found a more modern one. The document was entitled 'Dick's Visit to Morden 20 August 1940', and purports to be a report sent by a Russian spy after a visit to Morden. Mention was made of his visits to other places, and a key to coded references in the letter had been added later – e.g. 'sausage dealers' = 'Germans'.

- ◆ **Rosemary Turner** had found some photographs taken by her husband Steve of the commemorative plaque mentioned above (and see page 7); a MHS event at The Canons in 2001 at the time of the publication of Eric Montague's Cricket Green book; and a public house which no one present could identify. Rosemary would show it to David Roe.

She had finished typing up the information on Morden from the Valuation Records, which showed areas which had not been developed at that time (1909/1910). Peter is going to advise Rosemary about plotting the various plans onto a map.

She had made a start on her History Note about Lodge Farm, and thinks she has located the medieval section of the mansion house, and also identified the wing likely to have been used by the family, and which by the staff. Hoare's Bank had not been able to find anything relating to the house, but had sent photocopies of other properties, in Mitcham and Sutton, owned by the family.

- ◆ **David Haunton** reported that the BBC website archives had 47,000 recordings, mostly of wartime memories, from elderly persons, collected in 2004-2005. About 50 related to our area. (see page 13).
- ◆ **Madeline Healey** spoke about a cottage in Lower Morden Lane, that her father had purchased – but only after improvements had been made (he had previously rented it). It was one of the row of New Cottages built by Mr Hatfeild in 1907, and had candles upstairs and gas downstairs. She had found paperwork relating to the purchase in 1950. The deposit was £50 and there was £375 to pay.

- ◆ **Cyril Maidment** had photographs of the 1980s archaeological dig at Merton priory, taken at an open day. In some Lionel Green and Scott McCracken could be seen.

He passed round copies of Heales's map and spoke about trying to work out where the main entrance into the priory would have been.

- ◆ **Judith Goodman** had brought in various pictures of Nelson's Merton Place. It was noted that the building was not well sited, as it faced north and east, and the south side had the kitchen block.

Judith believed that the former owners probably did have (as Cyril postulated) a gate leading straight from the high road to the door on the north front. But Nelson's purchase of extra land enabled him to put in the sweeping carriage drive which led to the grand new entrance on the east front.



*Merton priory open day in the 1980s – west end of priory church, looking south.
Lionel is standing at far right*

Rosemary Turner

Dates of next Workshops: Fridays 16 March, 27 April and 22 June at 2.30pm at Wandle Industrial Museum.

All are welcome.

SHEILA GALLAGHER remembers Hamilton Road

BUILDERS, WARDENS, AND PIG CLUBS

Ken Gibbons (*Bulletin* 179, p.12, fn.10) was unsure of the name of the builder he worked for in 1944. The building firm in Hamilton Rd in 1944 was H.F. Meech - the proprietor was Harry Meech. I had not heard of any connection with the F.J. Meech firm which built houses in Morden, but it is likely to be part of a wider family, since the name is relatively uncommon. Recalling memories from that time has prompted others, some confirmed by documents found in my late father's papers which have survived three house moves.

Mr. Meech's address was 81 Hamilton Road (my family lived at no.97). The house and builder's yard beside it had been owned previously by another builder, Frederick Wales. I am not sure when Meech took over, though I am almost certain that there was no overlap or partnership between them, and that it was an active business when it changed hands. The Wales family, father, mother and daughter Doreen, were still living at no.81 when I returned to Wimbledon from evacuation in Leicestershire in mid-1941, aged 9. This confirms that Harry Meech took over well after the beginning of the war. The detached house was larger than those in the terraces beside it and housed the local Air Raid Wardens' Post in its cellar, probably from early in the War. This is confirmed by my eldest sister Kathleen who was a 'Lady Warden' from January 1940, when she was 17½ years old, until she enlisted in the ATS in 1942. The post moved later to a purpose-built brick building put up on the vacant plot (no.99) requisitioned from my father, Robert J. O'Hara, who owned 97 and 99 Hamilton Rd.¹

Harry Meech and my father were both unfit for active service and were Air Raid Wardens. I wonder if there are records of dates when people joined the Air Raid Wardens - if so might it be possible to find out when Harry Meech joined the Hamilton Road post? He patrolled other local streets with my father, who recalled that it was lucky for them that they had turned into the Wimbledon end of Hamilton Road just before a bomb fell which destroyed about four houses in Quicks Road, but tragic for the occupants.²

Robert O'Hara's official insignia; enamel lapel badge and gold on navy blue armband

I remember Mr. Meech being involved in 'War Damage' work as described in the article. I believe small builders benefited from the regular work. I found a detailed invoice dated 1946 for War Damage repairs to our house [*see illustration*]. Most of the damage had been sustained when a large bomb fell in Merton Road on 19 February 1944 causing extensive destruction, which included the Garage owned by Frank Verran, our neighbour at 95 Hamilton Road. Harry Meech's firm prospered after the War, continuing to work locally and in the Metropolis.³ My father, an electrician with Daily Mail Newspapers, employed other electricians on subcontract work with him. (I have two subcontracts, dated 1947, between R.J. O'Hara and Taylor Woodrow for repairs at Green St, W1 and Adam & Eve Mews, W8, witnessed by H.F. Meech of Hamilton Road.)

The local community around South Wimbledon Underground Station was close-knit during the War; some of the same people were Wardens and members, or on the committee, of the Trafalgar Pig Club and/or the poultry and rabbit clubs established on the same premises - a disused shop, formerly a butcher's, on Merton High Street,

Ref: 2448

Copy for M O'Hara.
Telephone—LIBERTY 5463

H. F. MEECH (Builders) Ltd.

Directors:
H. F. MEECH
W. A. STOW

Building and Electrical Contractors

81 Hamilton Road, Wimbledon, S.W. 19

R. J. O'Hara Esq.,
97, Hamilton Road,
Wimbledon, S.W.19.

30th September 1946

WAR DAMAGE REPAIRS
Re 97, Hamilton Road, S.W. 19.

To carrying out War Damage repairs at the above premises
in accordance with Specification.

MATERIALS

100 - 18" x 12" Slates	5. 5. 3.
36 - 18" x 10" "	1. 14. 6.
30 - 20" x 12" "	2. 0. 0.
4 lbs Slate Nails	2. 8.
2½ sheets 12G Zinc	1. 10. 0.
1'7" sup Sheet Lead 4lb - 7 lbs	4. 9.
8 ft 1" x 2" ppd.	2. 0.
7 - 7lb Bags Plaster of Paris	7. 0.
23½ yards Celotex Board at 2/9½d.	3. 6. 1.
10 2/3 yards Plasterboard at 2/9½d.	1. 9. 9.
5 lbs Board Nails	3. 4.
7 Rolls Scrim	2. 19. 6.
5 cwts Board Finish	1. 15. 0.
3½ cwts Sirapite	1. 4. 6.
3 cwt Lime	18. 0.
½ Bag Moulding Plaster	3. 0.
2 Rolls Pitch Paper	4. 0.
1 Roll Lining Paper	1. 6.
½ Firkin Size	3. 9.
14 lbs Ceilingite	3. 8.
1 lb C.W. Paste	1. 6.
1 quart White Undercoat	7. 0.
1½ gallons Cream H.G.	1. 15. 0.
1b C.W. Paste	1. 6.
1 Reversible Rimlock	4. 0.
2 pairs 3" Steel Butts	6.
1 piece 11" x 23" 24oz clear glass	
2 " 19" x 23" do.	
1 " 11" x 27" do.	14. 2.
Carried forward.....	27. 1. 11.

next to the *Dark House* pub [now the *Kilkenny Tavern*]. The pig pens were built in the yard behind the shop. The premises were, I believe, licensed for slaughter which was carried out there by a butcher, Mr Higgins, whose shop was in Wimbledon High Street. There was an extensive stretch of disused land behind the Pig Club buildings which had been used previously for repairing cars and motorcycles; attempts were made to turn it into allotments but it was heavily contaminated with oil and metal.

I searched earlier in local newspapers and other sources, without success, for contemporary references as to how these clubs were established with the approval of the Government, receiving allowances of feed for the animals. Nowadays it is possible to locate wartime regulations online regarding domestic pig, poultry and rabbit keeping and encouraging people to grow vegetables and fruit in gardens, allotments and public parks.

Food rationing was worse after the War and continued into the early 1950s, and any supplements to cheer the meagre and boring, albeit healthy, meals were very welcome and worth the considerable efforts people put into producing them.

Thinking back and finding long-forgotten documents has reminded me of many more characters and incidents. Perhaps other families have stories about those difficult but eventful times?

- 1 Confirmed by a Wimbledon Council Land Tax bill showing reduced liability on a smaller area.
- 2 Nos.69-72 Quicks Road were hit on 4 February 1944 – see Norman Plastow *Safe as Houses* (1994) p.71
- 3 See invoice below to R.J. O'Hara for goods supplied in 1965:-

Ref.: APB/HV	Invoice No.: 83
Telephone: MALDEN XXXX 8721	
H. F. MEECH (Builders) Ltd.	
<i>Builders and Contractors</i>	
Park Road, New Malden, Surrey	
R.J. O'Hara Esq., 88 Oak Avenue, Worcester Park, Surrey	31.3.65.

Ken Gibbons adds:

I only knew two or three people in Hamilton Road, besides Mr Meech. One was Barbara Carpenter, who lived opposite Meech's yard. She went to Pelham School and was one of the evacuees to Lord Louis Mountbatten's house: a very good swimmer, she swam for the school team. Another was Harry Hopkins, who lived next to the yard and also attended Pelham School. And there was a Mr Wood who worked for Meech, and lived at the Quicks Road end of Hamilton Road.

I remember the Pig Club, behind the old butcher's shop and the *Horse and Groom* pub (the *Dark House*). There used to be a couple of bins by the entrance to the Club for people to put food in for the pigs – like potato peelings or cabbage leaves. Not that we had a lot of waste food. The ground where the pigs were kept led onto High Path. There was a little cottage at the end of High Path, where a Mrs Choppin lived, who sold second-hand clothes, firewood, logs and stuff like that.

David Haunton adds:

The hourly wages paid to workmen detailed in the 1946 War Damage invoice above make interesting reading. Skilled tradesmen (foreman, slater, plumber, joiner and painter) receive from 2s 3¼d to 2s 9½d per hour; unskilled labourers (and the plumber's mate) between 11¼d and 1s 4¾d; while the apprentice gets only 8d and the 'Boy' 8¾d. (This is the tea-boy, usually extra money for a small number of hours, paid to a workman who makes pots of tea for the staff, two or three times a day, in addition to his normal work.) In present-day values these are, very roughly, £5-00 per hour for the skilled men, and £2-30 for the unskilled. Once multiplied by the number of hours worked, the total per man is rounded up to the next penny – there are no halfpennies or farthings in the account rendered.

Yearly street directories (compiled in November/December the previous year) record 'Chas. Geo. Chopping' at 50 High Path from 1934 to at least 1940, as a private resident with no trade given. The Voters Lists for 1934 and 1935 (compiled in September for the given year) give both Charles George and Helen Annie Chopping as voters, but from 1936 only Helen Annie is registered. It looks as if Mr and Mrs Chopping arrived and set up shop in 1934, but that Charles departed or died during 1936, leaving his wife to carry on the business alone.

Curiously, I have found another Meech, Francis, living at 147 Merton Road from at least 1881 until 1901. He then moved to 175 Merton Road, where in the Surrey Electors List he is described as the freeholder and 'gentleman'. He lived at no.175 until 1906, when he appears to have died (in the Bath area), aged 82.

PETER HOPKINS has discovered more evidence relating to

THE CORONATION OF QUEEN ELEANOR

In June 1996 I contributed an article to *Bulletin* 118 about the coronation of Queen Eleanor of Provence, wife of Henry III, where I cited evidence from Matthew Paris's *Chronicles* and from *The Red Book of the Exchequer*, showing that the coronation took place at Westminster and not at Merton as had so often been claimed. What I failed to notice at that time was that these two sources differed as to the date of the coronation. Matthew Paris gave Sunday 20 January 1236, the wedding having taken place at Canterbury on 14 January, whereas *The Red Book* said the coronation was on 'the Sunday before the Purification', which would have been Sunday 27 January. Both were written by contemporaries of the events, Matthew Paris being a monk at St Albans 1217-1259, with access to many documents, while *The Red Book* was compiled by a clerk who died in 1246.

Lionel Green accepted the later date in his article on the Statute of Merton in *Bulletin* 138 (June 2001), placing the wedding at Canterbury on 20 January, so that the Council at Merton fell between these two events. He suggested that the coronation was delayed due to flooding at Westminster, citing John Stow's 1598 *Survey of London*. However, I recently came across the published edition of *The Close Rolls of Henry III* on Internet Archive. Every entry on the Close Rolls gives the date and place it was executed, so I decided to check where Henry was on these various dates. Henry was at Reading until 10 January, at Rochester on 13 January, and at Canterbury on 14 and 15 January, just as Matthew Paris says. On 18 January he was back at Rochester, and on 20 January he was at Westminster, again just as Matthew Paris said. But the second entry on the Close Rolls for 20 January begins: '*Sciatis quod ad petitionem dilecti nobis A. regine nostre, die coronationis nostre et sue...*', which I hope translates as: 'Know that at the petition of our beloved Alionore our queen on the day of our coronation and hers'. Also on Internet Archive are Thomas Rymer's 16 volumes of *Foedera*, published between 1704 and 1713; a transcription of 'all the leagues, treaties, alliances, capitulations, and confederacies, which have at any time been made between the Crown of England and any other kingdoms, princes and states'. One document in volume I is Henry III's letter to the bishop of Auxerre in 1236, informing him that he had married Eleanor 'on the Monday the morrow of the octave of Epiphany' at Canterbury, and that she was crowned at Westminster on the following Sunday (*Dominica sequenti*). Epiphany is 6 January (Twelfth Night) so the octave was 13 January, and the morrow the following day, 14 January, which in 1236 was a Monday. The following Sunday was 20 January, the date given in Matthew Paris's *Chronicles* and in the Close Rolls.

So Matthew Paris was right all along. The wedding was at Canterbury on 14 January, the coronation at Westminster on 20 January, and then the nobles and prelates headed to Merton for the great Council which agreed the Statute of Merton on Wednesday 23 January. The Statute, which is more correctly entitled the Provisions of Merton, begins: 'It was Provided in the Court of our Lord the King, holden at Merton on Wednesday the Morrow after the Feast of St Vincent, the 20th year of the Reign of King Henry the Son of King John, before William Archbishop of Canterbury, and other his Bishops and Suffragans and before the greater part of the Earls and Barons of England there being assembled, for the Coronation of the said King, and Helianor the Queen, about which they were all called; where it was treated for the Commonwealth of the Realm upon the Articles underwritten ...'. It is easy to understand that people have interpreted this as meaning that the coronation took place at Merton, but the phrase 'there being assembled for the Coronation ... about which they were all called', only means that the nobles who had been summoned to the coronation at Westminster moved on to Merton straight afterwards. The Close Rolls show that Henry was at Merton from Monday 21 January to 28 January, and at Guildford by 30 January.

Matthew Paris's sketch of Henry III and Eleanor in the margin of his chronicle, from BL Royal 14 C. vii

Matthew Paris mentions the flooding immediately after his detailed description of the coronation, before he discusses the Council at Merton, but he dates the Westminster flood to February: 'About the same time, for two months and more, namely, in January, February, and part of March, such deluges of rain fell as had never been seen before in the memory of any one. About the feast of St Scholastica [10 February], when the moon was new, the sea became so swollen by the river torrents which fell into it, that all the rivers, especially those which fell into the sea, rendered the fords impassable, overflowing their banks, hiding the bridges from sight, carrying away mills and dams, and overwhelming the cultivated lands, crops, meadows, and marshes. Amongst other unusual occurrences, the river Thames overflowed its usual bounds, and entered the grand palace at Westminster, where it spread and covered the whole area, so that small boats could float there, and people went to their apartments on horseback. The water also forcing its way into the cellars could with difficulty be drained off.' [*Matthew Paris's English History* trans. J A Giles I (London: Bohn 1852) pp.10-11]

DAVID HAUNTON has quarried a website archive:

CHILD EVACUEES OF WORLD WAR TWO

PART 1: WHERE DID THEY GO ?

Following Ken Gibbons graphic reminiscences of his times as an evacuee, I was led to the BBC website,¹ which holds a collection of Second World War memories recorded between late 2003 and early 2006. '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.

Here are the stories from our area, all from people who were children during the war, none older than fourteen in these memories. Few are complete with a home address and an evacuation address; some people give no surname: one ('Miss X') gives no name at all. Some give their age at the start of the war, from which I have estimated their age at the time of their tales.

Apprehension in 1939 (and 1938)

Eileen Bicknell lived near Swaffield Road in Earlsfield. In 1938, as Chamberlain flew to Munich, she was sent to Wiltshire with two cousins, to stay with her aunt's sister. The crisis passed, and she was back home a week later. But in 1939, as it became obvious that war was inevitable, she was sent again to Wiltshire; this time for three months, but she came home for Christmas and stayed home. [see 1940 below]

Official evacuations started a day or two before the war began, though evidently most evacuees returned quite soon. Among the children who were sent on these organised journeys was Martin Berner, 4 Arundel Avenue, Morden, who was evacuated aged 12 but returned for holidays until 1941, when he finished school and started work.

Derek (8) and Mavis (5) [surname unknown] were evacuated from East Dulwich to Ashted, Surrey. Surprisingly, neither have any recollection of leaving Dulwich, but the latter part of the day is a significant memory. Mavis was still in the mixed infants part of Dulwich Hamlet School but the older Derek was in the all-boy section. Their parents arranged for them to go together with the boys' party: 'Mavis was the only girl; she recalls mother saying that we must make sure we are kept together. We both remember gathering in the hall at Ashted waiting to be assigned to our billets. And we waited a long time! - to the very last, presumably because there was difficulty in placing a "mixed pair". Eventually, quite late in the evening, we were taken with our bar of chocolate and brown bag of biscuits to the *Leg of Mutton and Cauliflower* Hotel.'² For the next year, they were reasonably happy, though often left to their own devices. Meanwhile their parents had moved to Morden, a bus ride of ten miles or so from Ashted, and retrieved Derek and Mavis in September 1940. 'My mother said that she had to scrub us for days to get us clean!'

Derek Weeks (8), Streatham, was evacuated to Eastbourne, Sussex, with his mother and one year old sister. They lived in one room, with father visiting occasionally. 'It wasn't a very happy time, with my mother often in tears at the conditions we were living in, the three of us huddled together in that one tiny room. This soon made us return to London.' Derek was evacuated again, by train from Paddington, to the picturesque village of Bishops Hull, just outside Taunton, Somerset. 'All the new evacuee arrivals were ushered into the local village hall to be fostered to local families. I was lucky to be fostered together with Charlie G from Tooting, a friend I had made on the journey. We were billeted with the local builder, whose property had all sorts of interesting things to explore for kids of our age. I will always remember the hand grenade that was used to keep the back door open. I came home in time for the Blitz.' [and see below]

Jean Durrant was woken up one Sunday morning very early, her mum telling her they had to go to the country. 'We then went to the town hall where, it seemed to me, there were hundreds of people milling about, all very animated, mother talking to complete strangers, everyone excited. All the children were issued labels and put onto buses with another bus for the mothers (if you had a child under two you were evacuated too). ... We wound up in Saffron Waldon, Essex, and my mother, sisters and I were very lucky as we ended up in the whole top floor, the former nursery, of a large beautiful house. The people who owned it were a very kindly elderly couple, the husband a doctor of music. ... We went back to London at the beginning of November to live with our great aunt in Wimbledon.'

William Henry Ives (7) lived in Colliers Wood. He was evacuated, along with most of Singlegate School, complete with a name tag, gas mask and a small case of clothes. They took a bus to Wimbledon station, a train to Haslemere and a coach to the village of Lurgashall near Petworth, Sussex. Mr & Mrs Coombes, a gamekeeper and his wife, took William and another boy into their small cottage on Upper Barn Farm. After a year with the Coombes he went to stay in a bungalow with Mr & Mrs Percy Lillywhite (who was a pigman for a farmer). William returned to London in 1941.

A few children were evacuated 'privately', such as Pamela [surname unknown], who recalled 'when the war started, father panicked and wanted to get the family away - four children from six weeks to seven years old. He packed us into his Austin 7 (the only car in our road) and drove us to Winchester, Hants, ... and left us with the WVS. They housed us ... [in] one room with mattresses on the floor. When my mother noticed the [householder] was always itching, she told Dad she couldn't stay any longer and we were taken back to Morden'.

Alan Swan (9) lived in Merton Park. 'My father worked for the Prudential Assurance Co. who evacuated their Head Office staff to all corners of the country. We were very lucky to be sent to Torquay, Devon, where life until the fall of France was very amenable. In 1942 our house was damaged, and so most of the family returned to London, to be nearer to relatives and so that I could attend Kingston Grammar School, as School Certificate Exams were fast approaching. We bought 14 Ruxley Lane, Ewell, as our house in Merton was let.'

The Blitz in 1940-41

A second, much less official, wave of evacuation began a year later, with the start of the Blitz in September 1940, though some people delayed until early 1941. Many children seem to have been taken by their families to relations.

Peter Ramsey lived in Hillcross Avenue, Morden. One night, a landmine dropped on the golf course, flattening the houses opposite and removing the tops of the houses on his side of the road. 'Our house was declared uninhabitable, so we moved... My two sisters and I went to stay with an aunt in Guildford, and mother and father stayed with another aunt in Godalming.' Desmond Langley (11) lived in Templecombe Way, Morden. He recalled standing with his twin and their elder brother (12) on top of an Anderson air raid shelter in the back garden watching dog fights over Croydon in 1940. 'In 1941, because of the Blitz, we were evacuated to Didcot, Berkshire, to live with our Granddad. It was deemed safe enough for us to return home in Spring 1944. Then came the doodle bugs (V-1s) ... a frightening time.' Derek Weeks (now 9) was evacuated from Streatham again, to South Wales this time, to a mining village called Pentre-bach, near Brecon. He returned home again when the Blitz appeared to be over. Ronald Portway, Merton, had just left school and was working in a factory when his mother and sister were evacuated, because of the bombing. 'So there I was, all on my own, aged 14, and I soon learned to be self-reliant.'

Miss X lived near the Board Mills, Merton. When she was two years old, she was evacuated with her mother 'somewhere on Salisbury Plain. My mother hated the countryside, especially when she had to empty the chamber pots over the garden wall and hadn't learnt that the wind direction had to be taken into account. Hitler's bombs were easier to face than this and she decided to come home' [and see 1944]. Mr Ebdy insisted his pregnant wife and their daughter Jacqueline be evacuated to Redruth, Cornwall. 'The cottage where we stayed was quite primitive, only a cold water tap and NO bathroom. A little while after [the child was born] my mother insisted that we all return home to Morden, even though a few bombs were still falling in the area.'

One of the worst incidents near Eileen Bicknell's home, near Swaffield Street, Earlsfield, was a direct hit on an Anderson Shelter at the corner of Bassingham Road, almost opposite the School. After this incident, her father insisted that she and her mother be evacuated and telegraphed to her aunt's Wiltshire cousin: all the country-folk were on standby to receive them. As they left, a delayed-action bomb fell in Brocklebank Road.

Albert Dunning lived in Fortescue Road, Colliers Wood, with his parents, grandmother, three brothers and twin sister. In November 1940 (Albert was 4) 'we were evacuated to Somerset. I went with my mother, two brothers and sister, while grandmother stayed at home to look after Dad and my eldest brother. We were billeted in a cottage in Twinhoe, very rural, but because there were no schools nearby, we were moved to the village of Wellow, where the family did not treat us very well. We all lived in one room with bare boards, old boxes for chairs and slept in the loft, five of us in one bed. The billeting officer moved us yet again, to rooms above the stables in the grounds of a rather grand house, owned by the Hanbury family (of Cow & Gate Foods). I started school in the village in 1941, but in early 1942 mother brought us all back home.'

Strangely, there were even one or two 'reverse evacuations', with Morden seen as a relatively safe area, compared to the East End and other parts of London suffering under heavy bombing. Ronald Weeden was only six when in 1939 he was evacuated from the East End of London to Weston-super-Mare, Somerset. 'I didn't see the sea. ... I tried to get back home, I kept doing a bunk. I managed eventually to get home.' But on Saturday 7 September 1940 East Ham was bombed, and Latham Road School was hit, just opposite his house. People were told to leave, and go to relatives in the country if they had them. 'We didn't, but the firm my dad worked for had a branch in Wandsworth, so we all got on the Underground in East Ham, and took the District line through to Wimbledon... After a couple of days [in digs], we actually found a whole house to rent in Monkleigh Road, Morden.'

George Gillingham (10) lived in Finsbury before being evacuated for two years to Luton where he was fostered by Mrs Eyere at 32 Chilton Rise. Then in 1944 his father decided that the family should move to Morden. Dave Wilgoss was two when in 1940 his family moved from the shadow of Fulham Power Station, which was a target for bombers, to Merton Road, Wandsworth. Raymond Massart's family lived in Brixton for some time where they experienced intense bombing. They then moved to stay with his mother's sister, Ivy, and her husband Bert Lane, at 252, Lynmouth Avenue, Morden, where the raids were no less intense. Mother and children spent some time at Saundersfoot, Pembrokeshire, and then all moved to 7 Manor Gardens, Merton Park.

The Doodlebugs in 1944

The 1944 V-1 Doodlebug attacks persuaded many families to leave Merton and Morden, often after experiencing a nearby explosion. Some people used the official organisation for this evacuation, particularly those who had been 'bombed out', though many seem to have used private resources to move their families. It is perhaps understandable that, as in 1940, the fathers of bombed-out families all seem to have remained locally, to continue their employment.

Ronald Standen's father bought 308, Garth Road, Lower Morden, early in the war. When the V-1s began falling, Ronald (11), his twin sister and their mother moved to Rookhope, a small hamlet near Durham, staying with an uncle and his wife. The house was more basic than their Morden one – 'for example, our privy was an outhouse with a chemical toilet in it. It was often my duty to pull the inner bucket out and tip its smelly contents into the nearby brook.' Hearing that the Morden house had been hit³ they returned home but found it little damaged, and 'we soon returned to normal'.

In June 1944 Ronald Weeden (11) and his family were evacuated (his second experience) from Monkleigh Road, to Harrogate in Yorkshire. They returned to Morden when hostilities quietened down. At Alan Swan's house in Ewell, the workman finished repairing the roof one Friday, and then 'on the Sunday a flying bomb landed a street away and blew in the front of the house.' Over the next three days two further explosions nearby rendered the house uninhabitable. The family went to stay with an aunt and uncle in Bristol, and moved back to London after a few months.

The parents of Dave Wilgoss (6) decided to evacuate him and an elder brother from Merton Road, Wandsworth, when the V-1s started. They went from the local school, 'duly labelled', by tram to Kings Cross and train to Kettering, Northants, where they were billeted with an elderly couple who 'really looked after us. We seemed to have been away from home for years but it was only about nine months or so before our dad came to collect us.' On 14 July 1944, a V-1 destroyed the home of Albert Dunning (now 8) in Fortescue Road.⁴ 'Luckily we all managed to get into the Morrison shelter in the front room and this saved our lives. We stayed at the rest centre at Mitcham Baths until the authorities decided to evacuate us again.' This time they went to Mr & Mrs Wheatcroft in Carlton, a suburb of Nottingham, where they stayed until the end of the war in Europe.

Miss X (6) from near the Board Mills, Merton, was evacuated on 5 July 1944. Her mother had been talking to a neighbour about a new lot of evacuees going away and 'she looked down at me sitting on the step and said "Do you want to go?" I said, out of bravado I think, "Yes".' A couple of weeks later, eventually 'we reached Yorkshire and we were taken to a large house for the night. We slept in a large room on the floor and the boys made paper planes and threw them at one another. An adult came in and told us to go to sleep.' Next day she went with other children in a taxi to the village of Embsay. 'This seemed very exciting – I am sure I had never been in a taxi until then.' Miss X's terraced house was virtually surrounded by factories: she was amazed at the countryside.⁵ She returned home in spring 1945.

After their house was badly damaged, Philip Wheeler (4) moved with his mother and sister to a rented cottage about two miles from Wem, Shropshire, where his mother had been born. On 29 June 1944, the house of Beresford Ian Campbell in Wimbledon was wrecked by a doodlebug explosion.⁶ 'Mother ... heard that Ridgway School in Wimbledon village was evacuating to Appleby-in-Westmorland ... the school agreed to take me at the tender age of three.' His parents took him by train and taxi to a large Victorian country house. 'School was a shock [but] I was something of a school mascot. After a few months, mother .. sent my father to bring me home.' Margaret Hobbs lived at 19, Springfield Avenue, Merton Park, and as the buzz bombs kept coming 'Mum and Dad decided to send [brother] Michael and I to stay with Granny in the country at Ramsey in Essex. Within weeks, the buzz bombs were coming over Essex,⁷ so Mum and Dad came by coach to bring us back.'

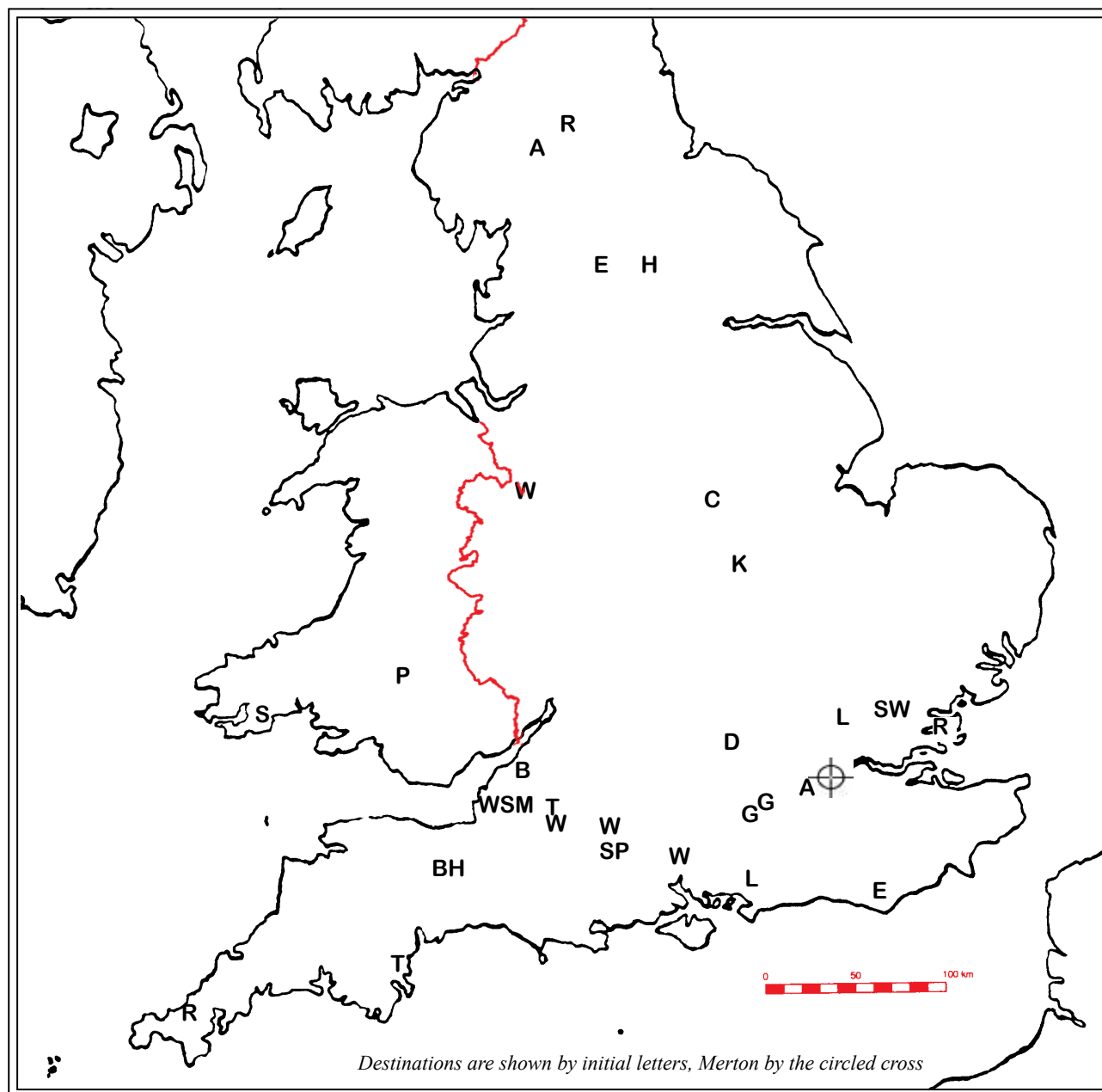
Comment

The map shows the approximate location of the places mentioned. The heavy concentration in the south is noticeable, amounting to 16 of the 28 places. It seems that, for the 1939 official evacuation, if you lived south

of the River Thames then you were put on a southbound train (ie. one from Waterloo, Victoria, Blackfriars or London Bridge); if north of the river then onto a train to the Midlands or the North. This avoided moving a large number of people across the city in a day, with the potential traffic congestion and delay.

Most destinations are of course villages and small towns, and it is quite surprising to see that people were directed to large manufacturing towns such as Bristol and Nottingham, which must surely have been expected to become targets for enemy bombs. It is positively startling to see Eastbourne and Lurgashall, both in Sussex, as official destinations in September 1939. Being so near the potential 'invasion coast', would they have been considered, let alone selected, in September 1940?

- 1 My thanks to Bert Sweet, who called my attention to a print-out of Albert Dunning's story that he found in the Heritage and Local Studies Centre in Morden Library.
- 2 Still there, at 48 The Street, Ashted, though there are recent attempts to shrink the name to *LOMAC*.
- 3 This is no.25 on the list in *Bulletin* 177, p.13 and fell on 28 July 1944.
- 4 This is the same one described by Bert Sweet in *Bulletin* 173, p.12: it is no.31 on the list in *Bulletin* 174, p.13.
- 5 As well she might be – Embsay is on the southern edge of the Yorkshire Dales National Park.
- 6 Norman Plastow *Safe as Houses* (1972, revised 1994) p.80
- 7 This implies that the children were not sent away until August 1944.



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.
website: www.mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk email: mhs@mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk

Printed by Peter Hopkins