

MERTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

LOCAL HISTORY NOTES – 31

Some Memories of Tower Creameries, Mitcham

Irene Bain

Travelling back from Streatham on the 118 bus recently, as it left the last stop in Manor Road before turning onto Commonsides East towards the Fair Green, I saw a crane on the old Tower Creameries site. There and then I decided it was time to put down some of my memories of working there, before it was too late. I thought that perhaps some people in years to come might like to know what it was like there in the 1940s.

I had been shocked by an article in *The Guardian* newspaper dated 21 April 2005 outlining plans for a huge new development of business units, eleven three-storey to five-storey blocks of housing and a retail unit, complete with parking places.

Incidentally, the last bus stop in Manor Road, as mentioned above, was the spot where the London buses were lined up during the war to evacuate the children from Sherwood Park School (my brother and myself included) and take them into the country.

Tower Creameries was affectionately called 'The Creameries' by the local people. It was also referred to as 'The Margarine Factory'. It provided work for a great many people, mostly locals. In the distant past a workhouse had been built on the site and a nearby path was known as Workhouse Path. When I was young the building appeared to be ancient and looked formidable.

There was a sturdy, grey tower on one corner, which gave it something of the look of an old castle.



The Tower Creameries were named after The Towers, or 'Woodite Towers', a mock-gothic house built in the 1890s for the Wood family, who ran the adjoining Woodite works.

The house had been occupied as a margarine factory since 1903.

(Reproduced by courtesy of Merton Library and Heritage Service)

For old time's sake my sister and I decided to go over there one afternoon and have a look to see what was happening, for when she was older she too worked in the offices. We peered through the bars of the padlocked gates. No crane working there now. The site was completely cleared, flat and empty, ready for whatever is going to be built. It was a trip back to the past for us.

On the night of 16 April 1941, whilst my mother (who was pregnant with my sister), my brother and I were sheltering under the stairs in 56 New Barns Avenue during an air raid, a landmine fell on The Creameries. Fifteen men of the 57th Surrey (Mitcham) Home Guard were killed that night as their meeting was being held there. The young man who lived across the road from us, whose name was Henson and who was only 18, was killed. Also, the very nice girl I sat next to at school's father was killed, and his name was White.*

The next day we went to see the damage and I saw a covered stretcher carrying a body being removed from the rubble on the side by the Common. Debris was scattered all around and huge girders carelessly flung over the surrounding common.

The above event was a local catastrophe and, if nothing else, this writing is in memory of those Home Guardsmen who died there. I hope the plaque that was prepared for them and in place has been kept to be incorporated into the new development in some way.**

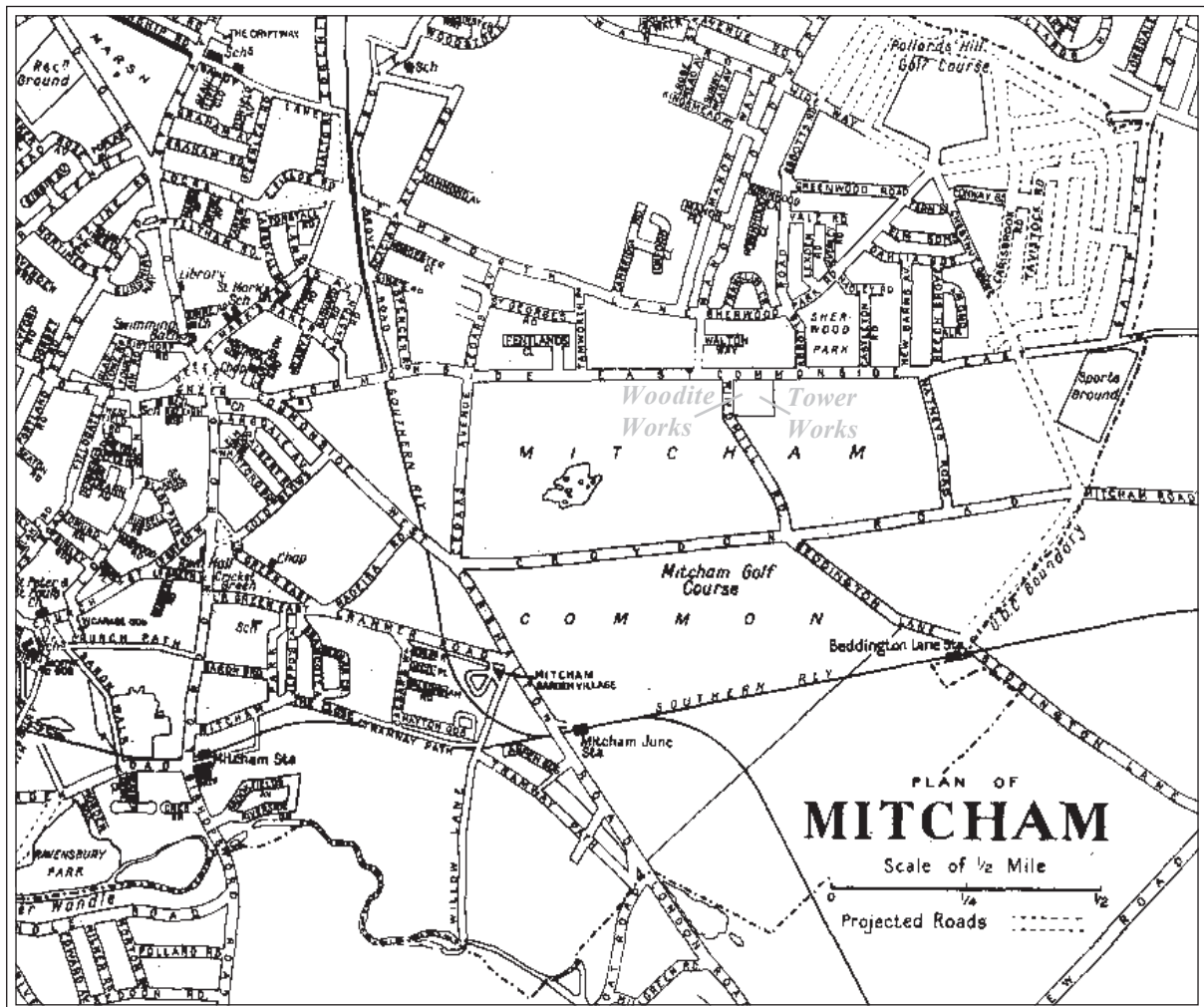
I left school at 14, as was usual then, and went to work at C & A Modes, a large fashion store in Oxford Street. A school friend had started there previously as a junior window dresser and told me they were advertising for staff. My mother came with me to the interview, which seemed proper as I was so young. I was offered a job as a trainee window dresser in the Millinery Department and was to be paid 27/6d per week.

* According to their headstones in London Road Cemetery, J W T Henson (aged 18) survived until the following day, and Lt A F White (aged 38) survived until 19 April.

** The plaque is now in the Royal British Legion building, 21 St Mark's Road, Mitcham.

A small dark-haired and very attractive girl called Higgins (it was all surnames in those days) was the Department's window dresser and I worked under her. I learned how to pin up the long drapes in the main showroom using pins and a hammer. All this involved many yards of different coloured fabrics. I also learned how to ruche and how to decorate the various plinths in the Department. I was allowed to use my initiative with colour co-ordination. Our work also involved going into the large windows, for which we wore felt slippers. It was strange but good being in there where it was so quiet when outside all the rush and bustle of Oxford Street hurried by. I was artistic and enjoyed the work very much.

However, very soon the V2 rockets began dropping on London – they gave no warning and exploded on impact. One fell just behind where we were in Oxford Street and during our lunch hour we went to see the damage it had done and it was dreadful. I decided I should look for work nearer home. By that time, 1944, the newly built Tower Creameries stood on the old site. There was a completely new modern factory and offices, with a good canteen and sports section, together with many other buildings. So now at 14½ years of age, although I never intended to, I began working in an office as a messenger girl. My wage was 18 shillings a week, but now I could walk to work just down the road and along the Common. There would be no fares to pay and I could, if I wished, go home at lunchtime. My school friend from New Barns was already working there and we would walk together. If there was a raid on we walked in the ditch on the edge of the Common for whatever protection it could offer us.



Extract from 1930s street plan, from Mitcham Official Guide

IT IS 1944 so, come with me into ‘The Creameries’ – through the imposing front door and we are in a bright, modern very high-ceilinged entrance hall.

Inside, to the right behind his shiny light-coloured wooden desk unit, stands Mr Pearce in his black Commissionaire’s uniform, ready to assist visitors and answer questions. (You don’t really notice the door on ground level left, which is always kept closed. Unless you work here you wouldn’t know that it leads into the Engineering Department and the Factory.)

To Mr Pearce’s right, a flight of winding stairs takes us up to the main offices. All is smart and new. See, the floors are of polished parquet.

A corridor leads away to the right, but we will go this way on the left.

The first room on the left is the Boardroom.

The second door on our left is Mr Delaragez’s office. He is a Director and the top man here. His nationality is Swiss. He always wears a white coat over his suit. He is a truly huge man in height and breadth. He has dark wavy hair and a pleasant face. Like most heavy people he has a very affable nature.

Looking into Mr Delaragez’s office you will see that it is a big room and the windows make it light and airy and give wide views over the Common. It is ideal for receiving visitors and conducting business affairs.

There are three Directors in this company altogether and you will encounter the other two gentlemen later.

All the Directors are extremely pleasant to their staff and I can’t stress this enough.

Next to Mr Delaragez’s room is his Secretary’s office – it is quite small and there is a connecting door between them. This room has a window overlooking the Common, as have all the rooms on the left-hand side of this corridor. Miss Hope is a very pleasant lady. As you can imagine, she is always kept busy and she moves about quickly. She is not very tall and she has short, dark hair and slightly red cheeks from all the rushing about. Her pet saying is ‘Oh dear, my head will never save my legs!’ if now and again she forgets something. She is a very efficient secretary. She also interviews and hires staff and it was she who interviewed me and gave me my job as a Messenger.

A little way down on the right-hand side of the corridor is a door. If I open it slightly you can see a metal spiral staircase going up to the telephonists’ room and the switchboard. There are two of them working away up there right at the top of the building and you just wouldn’t realise they were there. To the left you will find the toilets. They are very modern and clean.

Next, on the right-hand side is the small kitchen where our tea lady, Mrs King, makes the tea and brings it to our desks. She is a small, slightly plump, old lady and wears an obvious wig and rouges her cheeks. Her dear old head shakes a little as she walks. She’s a widow and we are all fond of her.

As well as the cups of tea, Mrs King also brings in a tray with the rolls and savouries, such as cheese and onion tart and, in the afternoon, slices of jam tart made using the fat we make in wartime for the catering trade, and they can be bought quite cheaply.

Near the kitchen on the same side another door leads into the factory proper. It goes onto what is known as the Solvat Platform. Solvat is produced here and is a type of fat for use in catering and for making cakes and pastries, etc. I often go through here as a short cut to get into the works. There are metal stairs to go down which are quite greasy, as are the floors. This is in spite of being hosed down a lot with very hot water. It is hazardous to go through here but I still do.

To one side of the Solvat Platform a small group of Italian prisoners of war are working to help with the recycling of shipwrecked butter. This comes in huge long square blocks. The prisoners are allowed to cook their own meals here. There is always a strong smell of sultanas where they are; it is a pleasant smell. I do not fraternise.

Back in the corridor, still here on the right, is the filing room. Heavy metal filing cabinets line the walls. My friend Pam works here. She is a little older than me and is small and pretty and wears her thick dark hair in a victory roll. She is going to train as a nurse when she is old enough. She is a nice friend and lives just across the green with her mother. Her father is a soldier away somewhere fighting the war. When she went on holiday into the country she sent me a shoebox full of cowslips.

Across from the filing room (again on the left-hand side of the corridor) is the Messengers' Room. Winnie and I are the two messengers. We collect and deliver post from all over the building and the works and run errands. Supervising us is a lady who will soon be married and leave.

The Messengers' Room is small. On the left two desks have been put together facing each other. Another desk on the right has an old typewriter on it. I spend any spare time I have using that typewriter to type 'the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog'. This sentence has all the letters of the alphabet in it. If you use the correct fingers for each letter it makes you an accurate typist. It is now my ambition to be a shorthand typist. I fill pages and pages of spare pieces of paper with this sentence. One day a nice man from another office was passing the open door. 'Is that you typing so fast?' he asked. He smiled broadly when I told him what I was doing.

Behind the desk with the typewriter on it, right in the corner by the window is our large round coatstand. More of that later!

Next to the Messengers' Room is the Chief Accountant's office. His name is Mr Bubeloz and he is the second Director and Swiss. He also wears a white coat over his suit. (I remember him kindly as he was very good to me later on.)

The next door down is the Accounts General Office. It is quite a long room and four people work in here at the moment, but as you see there is still room for at least two or three more desks.

After that there is another small office relating to the Accounts Department and two people work in here. One is an older tall single lady and the other is a young girl of my age – she came straight from Mitcham County School for Girls to work here. We became friends and call each other by our surnames. We have a lot to talk about and often go to the pictures together.

Now we come to where stairs go downwards and outside into the yard and the loading bays. However, we will stay up here and turn right along this other stretch of the corridor. This door on the left is the Typists' Room and I will eventually work in here. The windows on this side overlook the loading bay, which is underneath these offices. If there is a lorry with a high load you can see the young men loading it.

The next door along is the Export Department. The Export Manager is a Frenchman and he speaks excellent English. His assistant is Miss Coe and she can hardly walk because she is so overweight. Her face has a dangerous-looking mauve tint to it. She is a lovely lady and not very old either. She always addresses me in a friendly, kindly manner and I like her very much.

If we go back to the stairs we just passed and go down them we can go out into the yard, turn left and go into the large Engineering Department. Mr Franier (also in a white coat) is the third Director and he is Swiss. He is a big, handsome man and is in charge of the engineering side of things. His office is at the side of the workshop to the right. It is quite a small, darkish room. I have to go down

there with cheques for him to countersign, always trying not to look at the pictures of nude women on his calendar. I am young enough to be embarrassed by these.

We will go back up the stairs we came down to get to the Engineering Department and then along to the point at which we first started. Here is the corridor forking to the right. There are three or four small offices along here on the left and they are used by the subsidiary companies and their staff.

One of the offices is used by Mr Quinney (who signs his papers with the most elaborate and fascinating signature!). His firm make, among other things, a type of cremola pudding. Three companies eventually split from the main offices. Mr Quinney moved his business to Sandwich in Kent and some staff moved with him. Two others moved away taking their staff with them but we all kept in touch through the Sports Club as they were quite near and used to come over a lot.

Mr Crowcher's office is the next on the left here. He is a lovely older Jewish man. He took a liking to me and sometimes gives me a slice of cake if he has had a visitor. These cakes are made by the chef working in part of the laboratory building and are served with tea to demonstrate the products. (There are not many cakes for sale in the shops nowadays.)

Mr Crowcher has a handsome married son and he is known as Mr Crowcher, Junior. He is a representative of his father's firm. One day when I was in the corridor talking to him he suddenly took his black fountain pen out of his breast pocket and presented it to me as a gift. A lovely gesture! When I first went to the firm's dance I couldn't dance and was extremely shy. However, Mr Crowcher's son insisted on teaching me the waltz. I was very embarrassed but, nevertheless, pleased to learn. These things, of course, happened over a long time, but it is amazing now, looking back, at the many kindnesses shown to me.

The last office on the right here is a very large one. It is the Sales Department and quite a lot of people work in here. By the sound of the typewriters, I think they are very busy, so we won't disturb them. However, you can just peep through the glass panel in the door. The room itself overlooks the pavement at the front of the building facing onto Commonside East, on the same side as the front door but a little way further down.

Now I will take you over to the other side of the works complex to the Canteen. It is a large one-storey building with a big works' Canteen and a separate but small Office-Staff Dining Room here at the end. From here we can go through this door on the left and straight into the Sports room but, before we do, you will notice the small bar just to the right here. It is kept closed and only used on Club Nights (which are held twice a week) and for dances.

And here is our excellent Sports Room! Look at the two billiard tables and darts section together with the three full size table tennis tables, not forgetting the piano! If the table tennis equipment is stored away the room is big enough for a Dance to be held here.

Following on from the theme of kindnesses received, in the Sports Room one lunchtime a man whom I only knew by sight, and I think worked in one of the subsidiary companies, quietly came up to me and told me he was leaving (he seemed very sad) and that he would like me to have his table tennis bat. This was a very thoughtful thing to do and it meant that I would now have my very own rather special bat, as several people had already bought their own.

A lot of the staff, including the bosses, play table tennis. It doesn't matter who you are or where you work; it is right across the board. We play in our lunch times and there is a marvellous atmosphere. There are so many games of singles and doubles. It is all so energetic and happy with the satisfying background of the clicks the table tennis balls make as they strike the tables and, now and again, a resounding cry of 'shot' when someone hits a winner.

Because of the huge amount of interest shown in the game the bosses decided to organise an Exhibition of Table Tennis. Four of the top players in the country were invited to give a display. It took place in the Sports Room. I can only recall the names of three of the players and they were Johnny Leach, Vera Dace (and another lady) and Jack Carrington. My mother and father came along that night. The room was absolutely packed with people sitting and standing all around the edge. The skill of the players was amazing; they were so quick and accurate, even when standing well back from the table.

Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the evening. Of course, it fuelled even more interest in the game and several of us joined a table tennis league and played even more games.

Around this time Johnny Leach was employed in a celebrity capacity as a form of advertising and to boost the firm's image. I do not mean advertising hype as it is today.

Now I will show you the rifle range, which is over here at the back of the factory in this secluded place near the enclosing wall. I have used it once or twice. You have to lie full length flat on the ground to fire the rifle. (Was it perhaps a legacy from the Home Guard days?) I know of at least one young man who works in the Engineer's shop who has taken part in a competition at Bisley, as well.

We will go back this way past the laboratory, which is in one largish house that was left fit for use after the mine exploded. There were a few small houses quite near it but they were damaged and pulled down. The night watchman and his family had lived in one of these but they were able to move to a house just across the green. His name is Mr Jim Daragon and he has a large and well-known family. He also has an alsatian dog to accompany him on his rounds. I think he is very brave to go around the dark empty buildings at night checking to see that all is well.

I did not go into the production and packing parts of the factory, so am unable to tell you about these.

Now we come to the way out. You see those big gates in front of us – all the workers, the cars and the lorries come in and out here. Look, on the right, just inside the gates is the cubbyhole for the gateman and night watchman's use. It has a longish window overlooking the yard. Also, further to the right is the large garage for the lovely cars the bosses own and you can just see the back of that shiny black one in there!

I must leave you now. We can go out through the gates this way onto Commonside East. I will go to the right and can be home in ten minutes!

ABOUT THE PEOPLE

The Messengers' Office

Being a Messenger meant that I got to know a great many people who worked in The Creameries, although a lot of them were already known to me locally and at least seven actually lived in New Barns Avenue. Later on my brother and sister worked there too.

Winnie and I were both very young, and young people will play. One day we were in a silly mood. I came back from running a message to find the room empty. The supervisor was at a meeting. I decided to play a joke on Winnie and hid behind the heavily laden coatstand, ready to jump out at her. I waited a long while and was on the point of giving up when our supervisor came back, closely followed by Mr Bubeloz! To my discomfort they began a long conversation.

They didn't notice me and I was beginning to feel silly and wondering what to do, when Mr Bubeloz suddenly asked the supervisor 'Who is that behind the coatstand?' He must have noticed me all along.

I came out feeling very sheepish, but it was funny and he was most amused and not at all cross.

The Supervisor left to get married and Winnie and I were left to carry on to the best of our abilities. Then it was decided that a girl from another department, who was barely older than we were, should come and be over us. There was unfairness and eventually we all started arguing and I became very unhappy.

One day the three of us decided to play a joke on the marvellous first aid man, whose name was John Bumstead; he would be about 20 at that time. We sent for him over the Tannoy system and he arrived in our office thinking there had been an accident. When he found out there wasn't anything wrong the look that he gave us said it all! (We were just thoughtless young idiots and the finer aspects of the situation hadn't been appreciated by us and would not be until we grew up!)

John Bumstead was a lovely and very caring man. He had a twin brother who was extremely handsome and completely different in looks, as John seemed to have had an accident at some time. I would not have known about this but, looking back now, was John injured that night when the mine dropped? I won't know now because John died several years ago. There was an article in the local paper about him and plaudits from the people of Mitcham who knew him. He had a good life and served his fellow men. I am sure he forgave us because we had good relations with him, both before and after our silliness.

During the War there were hardly any fancy goods in the shops so people used their own ingenuity and made things out of available materials. At one time while I was working at The Creameries my mother made the loveliest little Dutch dolls. They were about 8 inches high. They had Dutch caps and white aprons over their colourful dresses. Their hair was in two long plaits. On their feet they had imitation cloth clogs. I got several orders for them and also for the upside-down dolls she made. It all helped the family budget and they were very good value for money.

Sweets, of course, were rationed and everyone was allocated sweet coupons. The amount allowed was measured in ounces and sweet coupons were precious.

Someone from the Sales Department asked me if, when I was going to the Post Office in Sherwood Park Road for the stamps, I would go to the sweetshop and buy her some. I was given the money and the necessary sweet coupons. I put them on my desk while I popped out of the office for a couple of minutes before I left. The office was not empty.

When I came back the sweet coupons had disappeared! The other two said they didn't know what had happened to them! I was very upset and left the office as if I was going to the Post Office. Instead I rushed home, arriving in tears because someone would think I had stolen them.

My mother saved the situation by asking our elderly next door neighbour if she could let us have any sweet coupons. It turned out that she didn't use her coupons at all and she gave us some. So I went to the shop and bought the required items and then to the Post Office for the stamps.

The tears dried up but I am afraid the suspicions remained as to who had taken the coupons.

Word got around that I wasn't happy in my job, because I did tell some people. Mr Bubeloz must have heard about it because he offered me a clerical job in the Accounts Department.

The Accounts Department

I went to work in the Accounts Department as a Junior Clerk where four adults worked. There was Mr Stevenson, the Head Clerk and Cashier, and three ladies, who all seemed old to me, but were not, of course.

I had a desk in the corner by the window as you entered the room. My window overlooked the exact spot where I had seen the draped stretcher bringing a body out of the rubble that day after the mine damage. (I often thought of that man.)

I wasn't really clerical material, as numbers and I didn't get on, but I liked working with the older people. They were lively and interesting when you got to know them and I was shown another perspective on life. Apart from the business over the sweet coupons, working life in those days was not marred by nastiness of any kind, as it sometimes is today.

Using pen and ink, I entered invoices in the Day Books of the various companies and sent out receipts for cheques. One of the companies had yellow and green headed paper for Spring, blue and white for Summer, green and red for Autumn and red and white for Christmastime – I appreciated that. (The name Blue Arrow comes to mind here but not in relation to the special headed paper.)

One of the ladies lived alone but went out with friends occasionally in the evenings. She called it going out on the razzle and it sounded daring. Years later when I was much older and I, too, went out for drinks and dinner, I thought of her. She was always very smartly dressed and I am sure her outings were as dignified as she was.

Another lady's husband was away in the Army. How worried she must have been, but you never heard her complaining. The third lady, a younger woman, who I knew at a distance locally, had her boyfriend away in a prisoner of war camp. He came home eventually, as at this time the War was nearly coming to an end. They got married and several of us went to the wedding and featured in the group photograph taken outside the church in front of the huge window of Mitcham Parish Church. Unfortunately her husband had contracted TB in the prison camp and he died soon after, a young man.

The adults were very kind to me. For my birthday they bought me a very attractive headscarf (which was so fashionable then). The scarf was wrapped up and put on my desk to find first thing in the morning. I had it for many years until I lent it to a friend who had just had her hair done and it was raining. She left it on a bus and showed no remorse whatsoever.

Mr Stevenson's desk was in the far left-hand corner of the room facing me. During a slight disagreement with the ladies about the draught coming from an open window on their side of the office, he hung up a length of string attached to a piece of paper, so that when it flapped about it proved his point (with laughter). He was also beginning to worry that, as the War was coming to an end, he had promised to buy his son a violin when it was over!

After lunch one day, unusually for he was very conscientious, Mr Stevenson rested his head on one hand and closed his eyes for just a few minutes – something he had never done before. Suddenly, the door flew open and Mr Delaragez's huge form strode in and up to his desk, looming over him. He opened one eye and was so startled. It was funny to watch, but Mr Delaragez didn't comment at all.

One morning Mr Stevenson made a telephone call and found out that a shop in Mitcham had actually received a delivery of some table tennis balls. These were very scarce and hard to come by at that time, so he sent me down there to buy some for the Sports Club.

I felt very grown up and important going on this mission in my nice black coat, green scarf and matching black shoes and handbag. But pride comes before a fall, and I managed to trip going down (not up) the kerb on the pavement by the library and staggered, bent over, a considerable undignified distance before being able to right myself! There was no-one with me to share the humour of it, but I can still see the funny side of it and retold the tale to my children years later. However, I did get the table tennis balls!

One day someone new came to work in our office. She was a young woman just a couple of years older than me. She was a comptometer operator. It was all very modern. She would be given a pile of invoices to check and, clicking away on her machine, would have the work done in no time at all. We understood she was paid quite a lot of money too.

One morning news went around the office that Miss Coe had died suddenly. That was very sad. I never forgot her.

On another morning Mrs King came wobbling into the office carrying a large tray and right behind her bounced in our lovely Welsh sheepdog, Taffy! He had come all the way from New Barns Avenue, along the side of the common, found the building, got in without anyone seeing him and up the stairs and right into the office where I was! He was so pleased to see me and his tail was wagging twenty times to the dozen with pleasure. I loved him and he me. Of course, this was an excuse to get out of the office for a while to take him home again. I was thrilled he cared so much for me. If there is a heaven then Taffy will be waiting for me.

The Typists' Room

After a time, as I wanted to be a shorthand typist, I was able, with Mr Bubeloz's and Miss Hope's blessings, to move into the Typists' Room. I did copy typing, as I was not yet proficient enough to be a fully-fledged shorthand typist. I was, however, going to night school and taking a few private lessons as well, which my mother gave me a half-a-crown to pay for.

There were four of us in the room – two older girls and another girl who had been in my class at school, and myself. The two older girls were shorthand typists. Peggy also took dictation from Mr Delaragez at one point when Miss Hope was away. Daphne was interested in ballet and was very knowledgeable about it. (I wished I knew more about that.) Eileen, who was short, had a boyfriend who was 6 feet tall and they were going to get engaged. The two older girls were very patient with us two younger ones.

I can hardly describe the fun we four had – we just gelled together and it was a very happy time. Again, there was no nastiness, no undercurrents. I kept the page of one particular month of our office calendar for years because it was sprinkled all over with funny comments about our outings and holidays, each one adding something humorous.

I had photographs of Van Johnson and Frank Sinatra on my desk at that time. When Miss Hope came into the office one day she said she hoped they would not put me off my work.

Peggy was being courted by a handsome Canadian soldier, whom we had all met. Eventually wedding arrangements were made, as he was soon going back home. As the day of the wedding drew nearer and nearer she became more unsure about it. I expect it had a lot to do with having to leave her family and go to live so far away. In the end she called off the wedding at the very last

minute! What a shock that was! Sometime later on she married her previous boyfriend and we all went to the wedding, which was held at St Olave's Church.

One night at the Sports Club, while I was waiting to play table tennis, a tall thin soldier came and sat by me. I hadn't seen him around before. He was in the Welsh Guards and had only recently come back to England. He started to tell me what had happened to him in the War and it was a terrible story.

He told me he had been a prisoner of the Japanese and was one of only a handful of men (out of hundreds) who had survived. They were starved and beaten. He told me that there had been just one woman prisoner in the camp. One day the Japanese called all the prisoners on parade and forced her to take a bath in front of them. To a man they all turned their backs and would not watch. In the end, he told me, she committed suicide as the Japanese kept going into her cell.

After that I often used to catch sight of him at a distance walking around the Fair Green in Mitcham. He was so tall and stood out from others. He seemed so lonely. No-one would know what had happened to him and how he had spent the War.

Later on Lincoln cream biscuits were packed in the factory and we were able to buy a bag of broken biscuits for about 1/6d. We collected them from Mr Pearce about once a fortnight and they were very welcome in those times.

I was a little in awe of Mr Pearce, the Commissionaire; because he was an older man he appeared somewhat stern to me, but he was never unkind. One day he called me over quietly and gave me the tiniest, most perfect, little dictionary. It was a *Routledge Miniature Dictionary* and it even had a padded leather cover. I was taken aback but also very pleased. I treasured it and have it still all these 65 years later. I wish he knew that I kept it all this time in his memory and that I have remembered him in this writing.

Eventually it was time to go forward and move on to reach my goal of being a shorthand typist. I loved working at Tower Creameries and I didn't want to leave. The night before I left I made cakes to ice and take around the next day and some of my tears fell into the sponge mixture.



*'The Creameries' site from 'Workhouse Path', c.1966. The old Workhouse Master's Lodge is centre foreground.
(Photograph reproduced by courtesy of Eric Montague)*

In 1956 my sister, Janet, 11 years my junior, began to work at the Creameries. Here are her memories of it:-

Tower Creameries 1956

I was 15 when I started working at Tower Creameries. I worked in the Messengers' Office and dealt with the post coming in and going out. I had to go around the factory and deliver the post etc.

After we had sorted the post in the morning, I would do the factory round. My first stop would be the margarine section where there was a small conveyor belt where large boxes were filled. The next stop was the Cheese Room. (I was not allowed in the room where they made the cheese, as this was a sterile room.)

The Garage was the next stop – they looked after the large tanker lorries here.

Then I went on to the Canteen. The staff could have a cooked lunch here and they could also play billiards in the Sports Room.

From the Canteen I went on to the Stores where all manner of parts were kept and then to the biscuit packing room. The biscuits were packed into large square tins.

On several occasions I was taken by car to pick up the wages from a bank in Streatham Vale. This, of course, would not be allowed today but, being young, it never occurred to me that it was dangerous to do this.

I had to leave my job as my parents moved to the coast.

I loved my job at the Creameries. It was a lovely place to work. From the Directors down, everyone seemed happy at their work. No other job has lived up to this one.

POSTSCRIPT

Shortly after I started to write these memories, and quite by chance, I met Peter Fossett, who had worked as a driver at The Creameries for many years. He was one of the group of us who used to play table tennis, as was his wife Kathy. Now 83 years old, he needed no prompting in recalling the Directors' names. His last words to me were: 'It was a lovely place to work.' And it was!

Irene Bain – June 2009

ISBN 978-1-903899-60-1

Published by Merton Historical Society – June 2010

Further information on Merton Historical Society can be obtained from the Society's website at www.mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk

or from

Merton Library & Heritage Service, Merton Civic Centre, London Road, Morden, Surrey. SM4 5DX