



Woodford Times

Woodford Historical Society
Founded 1932

Newsletter Spring 2016

Editorial

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May I wish you all a, somewhat belated, healthy and happy New Year.

Each year I make a point of thanking our Committee and Volunteers but the truth is that we are not getting any younger and unless more members volunteer to shoulder some of the load, we will regularly encounter problems.

The last few months have brought a number of issues to the fore and the Committee is exercising its collective wisdom to find solutions, but we do need your help and ideas:

- Suggestions of names of people willing to serve on the Society's Committee and actively contribute to the organisation.
- "Problems" with our equipment and the school's sound and visual system need to be overcome and we do need volunteer 'technicians' (John Attew is doing a sterling job of understudying Dick Walker but we do need at least one more person to help in this general area). No experience necessary.
- Registering members and dealing with cash transactions at meetings is, on occasion, overwhelming. Can you help?
- Refreshments - can you join the team to help with the preparation of teas and coffees?
- 'Meeting and Greeting' – it is important that we make everyone feel welcome and in particular visitors AND our speakers. Can you help in this respect?
- I am not going to rehearse the parking issues but they are impacting significantly on our attendance and membership figures. Subject to the weather, a welcoming face at the gate encourages people to park rather than drive on by.
- Many members do not like parking in 'tight' spaces and many have given up driving. Would you be willing to give a lift to someone who lives close to you?
- Contributing to the 'newsletter' and to a new book.

Please talk to anyone on the Committee to find out more.

I hope that you will join us on some of this summer's visits and I hope that you may join us at the next New Year Concert (no ticket cost!) – over 100 members and friends attended the Concert at Westminster Central Hall on January 2nd this year.

John Lovell

“The Devil in Woodford Wells” – by Lynn Haseldine-Jones

I recently managed to acquire, through the wonders of the internet, a copy of *The Devil in Woodford Wells*, written by Harold Hobson, and first published in 1946 (my edition conforms to the Book Production War Economy Standard). This is described as a ‘fantastic’ or ‘fantasy’ novel, yet full of autobiographical detail, including many references to Woodford, where the author lived.

The tale is set in 1941, and commences with a meeting at the British Museum, where a man is refused entry. The British Library Reading Room was closed during the Second World War to all other than those whose work was of ‘national importance’ – the author, as journalist and broadcaster John Mallard, could get in, but the stranger, whose name was revealed as Enoch Soames, could not. It transpires that Enoch Soames was a fictional character in a story by Max Beerbohm; a poet who made a pact with the Devil in 1897 – he would give up his soul if only he could go forward in time 100 years to read in the British Museum how literary critics of the future would regard his poetry. Expecting to be highly regarded, but disappointed by what he read, his bargain was made and he disappeared. However, here he is in 1941, back from Hell trying to get into the Reading Room again.

Mallard invites Soames back to Woodford, where he meets Mallard’s wife and daughter. Hobson’s descriptions of Woodford are very interesting – he refers to the Naked Lady (meaning the Naked Beauty, or Hurst House), ‘opposite to him glittered the smooth white front of the Naked Lady. The statue of the undraped girl from which the house received its name threw only a brief shadow on the grass of the lawn that ran down towards the high road...’ is his description of the house in 1808, whilst mentioning that it was painted green for camouflage during the war.

Soames, coming from Hell as he does, finds the area a little chilly, and his view of Mallard’s village of Woodford is a concern, for Mallard says ‘I dwelt in a village, and a village is near to the soil, to the elemental, to things that are exempt from the restraints of a cowardly morality. Rape and seduction and lust, he gave me to understand, are the concomitants of village life. I interrupted Soames’ flow of eloquence – which seemed to me to paint Woodford Wells in somewhat livelier colours than the place altogether deserves’!

The story continues as Mallard researches the cricket match at Woodford Wells in 1808, enlisting the help of Soames. It turns out that one of the star players, Lord Frederick Beauclerk, a clergyman who died in 1850 is a friend of Soames’ in Hell and this leads Mallard and his wife to work out that the Devil himself, who visits them in the last pages of the book, did in fact play in the cricket match at Woodford. Or was it all the work of a wartime German spy ring, trying to get information from a journalist?

Some might consider this a trifle of a book, but it is beautifully written, witty and full of detail. Although almost sixty years old, I think it deserves a place on the shelves of any Woodfordian.

Wartime memories - by Mrs Brenda Denhard neé Jones (now living in Colchester).

I was born in Romford in 1935, an only child, and moved when I was three years’ old to 133 High Road Woodford Green (*numbering now changed*) a sweet and tobacco shop which was taken over by my parents. We stayed there until 1946. The shop was situated in the bank of shops along the parade virtually opposite the Cricketers Public House, but the sweet shop was at the other end of the row, almost opposite the current Tesco store. It is now a hairdressers.

It was a difficult time for the business, due to rationing. I can remember the tanks travelling along the High Road and my mother offering tea and biscuits to the soldiers. Also, following the Silvertown explosion, many people moved out to the Woodford area. The premises had three

storeys, with a flat on the top floor. The population was told to let out spare rooms. My uncle lived with us and we had a lodger (no paperwork required then) and his brothers would also sometimes stay for a few days. The basement could shelter nine people.

I remember being very happy as a child in the shop, although, of course, I was very frightened of the bombs, although we were lucky and did not suffer a direct hit. I remember playing the usual children's games such as skipping and my favourite toy was a doll. I also specifically remember playing rummy! I loved dancing and was able to pursue this interest after the war, but in my younger days I took imaginary lessons in the cellar. I attended the Primrose Club in the local school. We seemed to acquire pets from those no longer able to look after them – a dog, named Judy by her former owner, who then had 11 puppies, a cat brought to us by a man in his 80s who could no longer look after him. He came to us with the name Tommy. We also had a rabbit and a tortoise.

I attended Woodford Green Prep School and was on the way to school when I heard the warning siren. I therefore turned back to home, thereby escaping the bomb which demolished part of the Congregational Church. During the school days, I was able to return home for lunch, as encouraged by the school. However some children lived too far away and had to stay for school dinner.

My father worked for Segar Evans Wines and Spirits and then the South African Wine Farmers' Association, travelling to Wandsworth each day - a journey which was quite easy in those days. He remained at Segar Evans during the war and was on fire watch in London during the evenings.

My mother did all the cooking. She could not risk giving precious ingredients to her daughter to learn to cook at that time. I well remember the powdered egg. We had a set menu, as many families – roast dinner on Sundays, cold meat on Mondays, Shepherd's pie on Tuesday and then casseroles with dumplings. We also ate rabbit and tripe and onions (which I loved) and which we were told in the war was very nourishing. Somehow my mother always managed to put on a good spread for birthday parties, making jelly and cakes etc. with 12 round the table. I also remember Christmas being very enjoyable, with my uncle playing the piano, which was a feature of so many homes at that time.

Hawkey Hall – by John Lovell

Many questions are being asked about the Hawkey Hall which many believe is 'under threat'.

In "Woodford Then and Now" it does state that the Spicer family of Harts bore much of the costs of the Church building previously on the site. As you may know, this was wrecked by a flying bomb in 1944 with the exception of the spire which later became dangerous and had to be taken down.

As far as I can ascertain/am aware there were no covenants regarding the future use of the site.

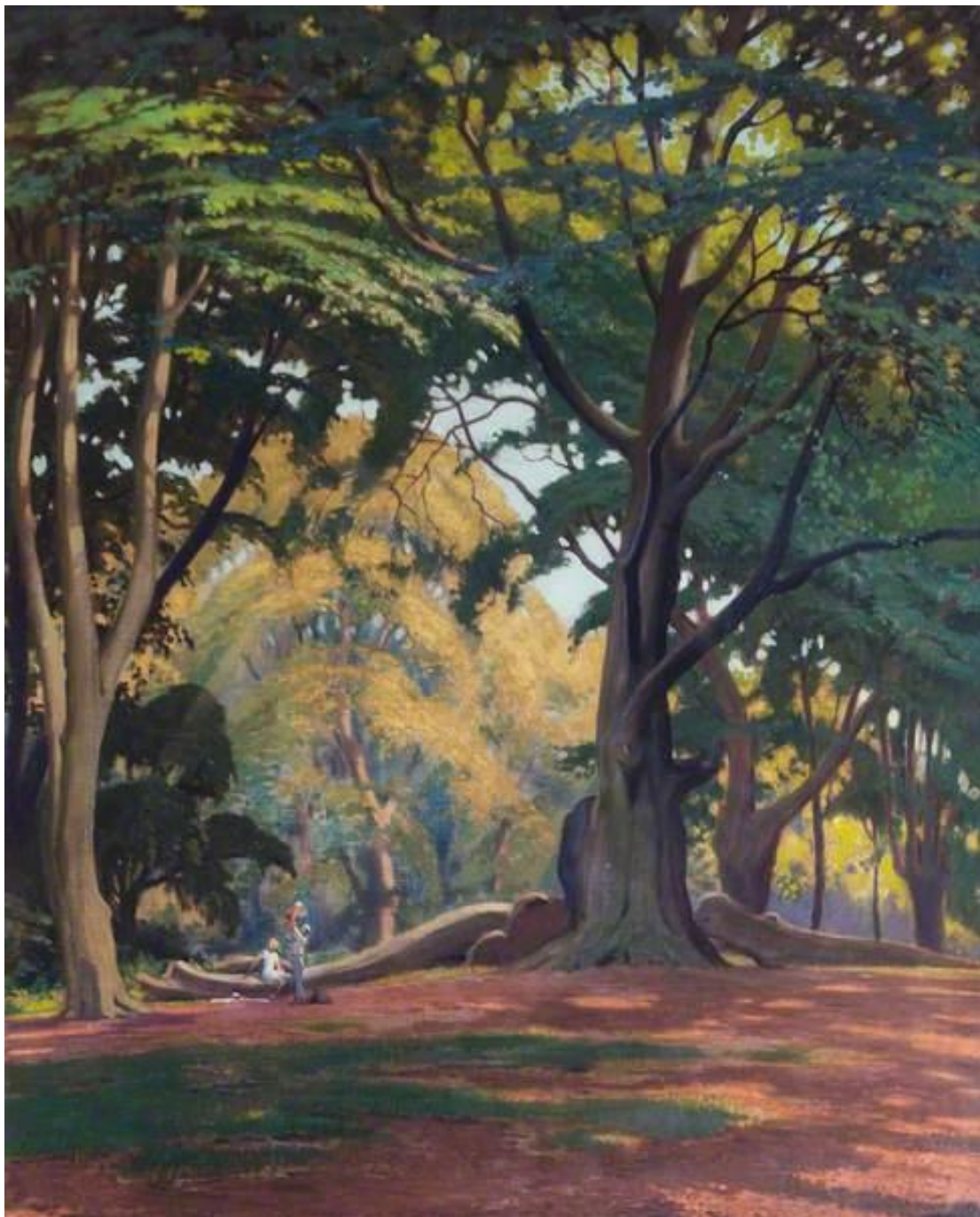
The site was acquired by the Borough Council in 1949 under a Compulsory Purchase Order made under the Town & Country Planning Act 1944 S.10 to ensure the proper redevelopment of the area. Further details of this are quoted in the Official Opening brochure of The Sir James Hawkey Hall. A copy of this is available to view in the Heritage Library pamphlet file. (YW 537)

The Borough of Wanstead & Woodford Council Minutes of 1949-1950 make reference to the Compulsory Purchase and clearance of the site and Broomhill Road/Snakes Lane Development. You may view these references on the 2nd floor of Redbridge Central Library (Monday to Friday 9.30am-8pm and 10am to 5pm on a Saturday).

A Woodford Green Treasure – by Joan Francies

Although living outside the Borough of Redbridge, I have had very happy connections with The Sir James Hawkey Hall since its inception in the 1950s. There are constant rumours about its demolition or change of use and I am anxious that part of its contents should remain in Woodford Green. I refer to one of the two large paintings that hang on its walls, that of magnificent trees in Epping Forest entitled, 'The Benediction of the Woods' (shown below) by the renowned Buckhurst Hill artist Walter Spradbery, who is perhaps best known for his posters enticing the public to travel by train to various destinations. This evocative painting was specifically bequeathed to the Sir James Hawkey Hall in gratitude for the many happy hours the owner had spent there listening to international soloists and chamber musicians booked by the Woodford Music Society (see 'Woodford - 80 Years of Memories 1932-2012' p.51).

Should the Sir James Hawkey Hall be destroyed, I am anxious that this painting should remain in Woodford Green and not vanish without trace elsewhere in the Borough.

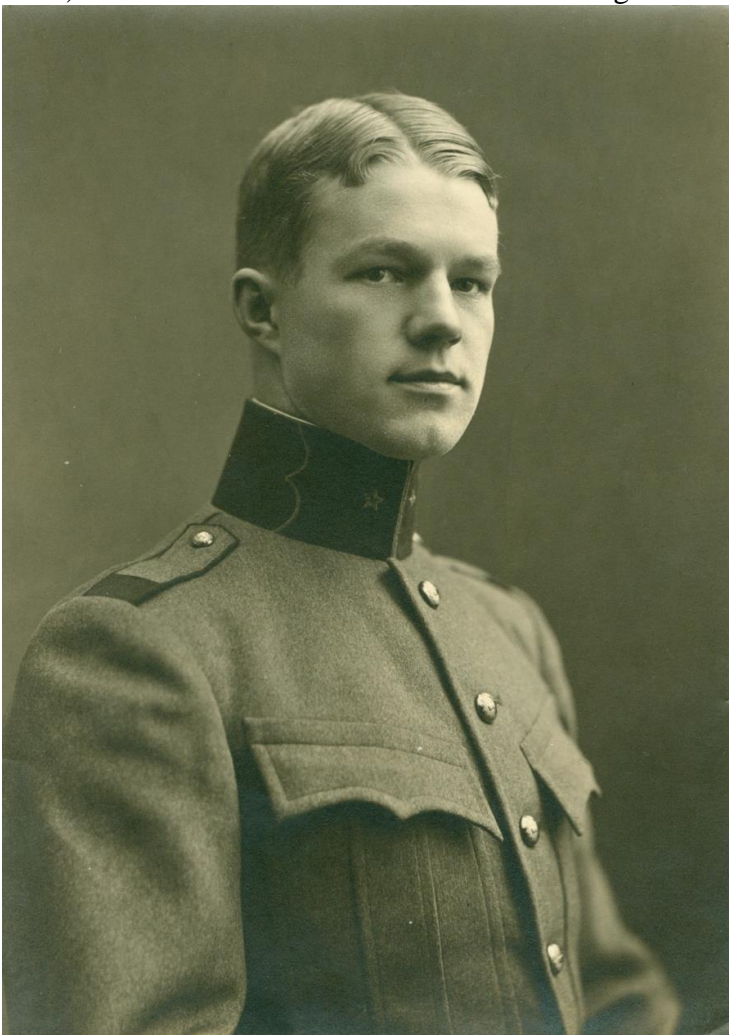


Who made this generous bequest? His name was Guido Haefely and, at the time of his death, he lived at 81 Glengall Road. He was Swiss by birth and spoke perfect English, but with a slight accent. He owned a mynah bird, which had an extensive vocabulary and spoke with the same accent and voice as its owner. (This was particularly disconcerting after Dr Haefely's death.)

Dr Guido Emile Haefely – 11th February 1893 – 3rd October 1975

He and his wife lived in Woodford from 1928. On September 17th 1931, he applied for a patent for 'improvements in and relating to electrical transformers, Micanite and insulators'. He was listed then as being of Micanite & Insulator Co Ltd. of Blackhorse Lane, Walthamstow. There is an advert on the internet for PAXOLIN made by that company and photos and information on the company in the book 'Walthamstow Through Time' by Lindsay Collier which came out in 2014.

In March 1939, he was awarded British citizenship (published in the London Gazette 11 April 1939) when he declared himself an electrical engineer of 7 Glengall Road.



Dr Guido Haefely in his Swiss Balloon Corps uniform and outside 81 Glengall Road

Dr Haefely wrote 'The Growing Importance of Plastics in the Electrical Industry' published in the journal of the Institution of Electrical Engineers, Volume 94, Issue 79 in July 1947.

The Micanite & Insulator Co Ltd. made insulating materials and in the first World War employed about 600 people, particularly women and girls. After various amalgamations by 1955 they

employed 1,700. In 1969 the company became part of General Electric, production moved to Trafford Park and the factory closed.

Acknowledgements to Lindsay Collier's book and to Lyn Haseldine-Jones

Paxolin

Dick Walker recalls that Paxolin was a sheet material used for electrical insulation of various thicknesses and brown in colour. It could be cut with a hacksaw.

It was manufactured locally at the Micanite factory reached by going along Forest Road to the Standard and turning right. The factory was off Blackhorse Lane on the left.

For those who want more technical detail: Paxolin (SRBP) is a phenolic paper laminate offering good mechanical and electrical properties in low voltage applications. This material is strong, rigid and economical, and it is ideal in applications such as terminal boards, mounting plates, busbar supports and cable supports. Available in a number of grades to suit the chosen application. Standard sheet size is 1220 x 1220mm but other sizes can be supplied on request, in thicknesses from 3mm to 10mm, colour brown as standard. SPECIFICATIONS: Operating Temperature: 90°C Density: Approx. 1.4g.cm³ Flexural Strength: 150MPa Flexural Modulus of Elasticity: Approx. 9000 MPa Tensile Strength: 120MPa Electrical Strength 90°C in Oil Perpendicular to Laminations: 5kV/m Breakdown Voltage 90°C in Oil Perpendicular to Laminations: 300 MPa Permittivity at 50Hz and 1Hz:

And I thought that Paxolin was a type of stuffing! (JL)



Churchill and Science – by Janet Lovell

The Winston Churchill statue by David McFall R.A. 1958-9 is a landmark at the junction of Woodford Green High Road and Broomhill Walk and it is very pleasing that this has now been listed Grade II on the advice of Historic England, together with 40 other post-war public art installations across the country.

‘Churchill’s speeches helped to win the war’ is a view often cited and, without doubt, his charisma made a very significant and lasting impression, but there were many other aspects of his character and interests which had a huge impact on the course of World War II.

Until 1st March 2016, the Science Museum in South Kensington is hosting an exhibition entitled ‘Churchill’s Scientists’. This clearly illustrates Churchill’s almost boyish enthusiasm for Science which facilitated many very significant developments during the war years. In fact, unconventional research was undertaken by an organisation named “Churchill’s toy shop” and the notes at the exhibition state that “on visits there, Churchill was ‘as excited as a schoolboy on a day out’”. This organisation was responsible for designing the war’s most successful anti-submarine weapon, ‘The Hedgehog’. In addition the Royal Society was involved in work to produce a central register of 7,000 scientists who could aid the war effort.

Churchill began a friendship in the 1920s with physicist Frederick Lindemann, when he was head of Clarendon Laboratory in Oxford. He became ‘Churchill’s private war statistician and ‘super planner’’. Statistics represented visually gave Churchill graphic illustrations, for example of fuel reserves, the Atlantic convoy struggle and, as stated in the exhibition “even national stocks of cheese”.

Films of the war often include scenes of air craft markers being placed on a map table as raids were spotted. These were coloured markers matching the five-minute sector under the minute hand of the Sector Clock which time-stamped information, thereby showing the pattern of the raid. Operational research was being developed in conjunction with radar.



British radar was unique as it was integrated into a complete defence system. Radar could follow every ship in a convoy and identify a submarine 50 miles away. A Hodgkin, A Huxley and B Lovell (no relative) developed a system which provided allied bombers with a radar map of the land below them, enabling them to find targets at night and through cloud. Sufficient airborne radar was available by winter 1940-41 to significantly impede enemy night bombers and the notes in the exhibition state that “the Blitz faded away”. A Pathe Gazette film from the time displayed within the exhibition states that our radar system was a “triumph of British genius”. A new type of radar valve for generating unprecedented power at high frequency was developed by Professor J Randal and Dr Boot. They were clearly very modest, as they attributed their success on 21 February 1940 “to the one day on which all their items of laboratory hardware happened to work at once”.

Turning to the development of the atomic bomb, Churchill lost power ten days after the first test, but it is noted that he had already approved the use of the weapon in Japan. Following the war, William Penney led the work to develop our own atomic bomb. We had previously worked with the USA and Canada. Churchill reflected in March 1955, in what is considered to be his last great speech to parliament, on the hydrogen bomb and the “hideous epoch in which we have to dwell”.

It is of interest that (Sir) John Cockcroft who was a significant figure in the development of radar and our atomic programme became the first Master of Churchill College, Cambridge.

Regarding medical developments, it is surprising to those of us who did not live through World War II that penicillin was available in quantity only by the end of the war, with most of the production destined for the armed forces. The exhibition notes that “antibacterial properties of penicillium mould were not harnessed for human use until 1941”.

Health and diet were, of course, extremely important in view of the rationing which was introduced. Nutritionists Robert McCance and Elsie Widdowson led a team of volunteers at the start of the war to investigate ration diet.

The exhibition concludes that “the war had brought a step change in national affairs. A chief scientist advised every post-war government. There was a boost in science education. Britain entered an ambitious new age of ‘Big Science’.

Civil nuclear power	Brain rhythm analysis
Nerve conduction	Robotics
DNA	Structure of proteins
Radio astronomy	”

It is always said that war speeds the development of science and this exhibition provides a fascinating insight into developments within Britain during World War II, encouraged by the enthusiasm of Sir Winston Churchill, which continue to have significant impact today.

Monkhams Residential Garages - by Joe Branson

You will recollect from a previous item that, after just one year, my father said "enough was enough" and I must garage my Lagonda anywhere but 15 Knighton Drive.... this ultimatum took place in January 1956 and he was serious.

Fortunately, as so often happens on such occasions, my dear friend and neighbour Michael Paine had heard that lock-up garages were available in Monkhams Avenue which we visited with alacrity.... however no address was known and, unlike today, there was really only one turning off the road and that was Tudor Close which certainly did not entertain such buildings as 'lock ups'.

However on the same left hand side before we reached Tudor Close we did espy an unmarked gravel entrance drive between two modern houses and decided to investigate and with success.

After 30 yards the drive entered a very large concrete paved courtyard to the left of which was a two storey long slate roofed imposing stable block as one would expect to see in 'stately homes' including large double doors and smaller stable doors. On the right hand side of the square were a row of about 20 ugly lock garages possibly erected in the 1930s. The top end of the square also incorporated some original stables but in the right hand corner the drive continued, then turned sharp left and arrived at the rear of the main block. You will see all of this from the recent Google 'map' below. On the entrance door to the grand stable block was a notice which read 'Monkhams Residential Garages'.

The door was answered by a Miss Smith who advised us she was the secretary and the garages and whole site were owned by a Mr Coombes of Clark Nichols Coombes i.e. "Clarnico" the well known London sweet makers.... she also told us that all the buildings were the remains of the local mansion known as "Monkhams" and now demolished, as we well knew.

Michael and I required a double garage and Miss Smith advised us that there was only one and that was the "old coach house" at the rear and this would be available at ten shillings and sixpence per week (approximately 53p today) We accepted, she was pleased as it was "such a big garage" and Michael and I moved in forthwith.

He had an Austin Seven "Nippy" two seater and I my Lagonda two seater... but what we didn't tell her was that we also had masses of tools, Austin and Lagonda spares, drums of Castrol XXI and "Stanley" power drills and an electric fire!! Being at the back nobody knew what we were doing least of all Miss Smith or at that time also, the family that actually lived in the flat on the original second floor.

Water was available to everyone from a stand pipe but our first problem was to be electric power because all we had was a single light bulb dangling from the high ceiling at the end of, thankfully, a rubber clad cable. First task was therefore to run up a ladder, detach bulb and insert a "two way" fixed socket to which we attached two cables... one for our lighting and one... hopefully for our "illegal" power... All seemed to be OK as the light worked and likewise separately the electric fire or a Stanley drill... success... plus two sets of relieved parents.

However the success of this venture spread far and wide amongst all our motoring friends from 'The Spivs' (Travellers Friend), Old Bancroftians, Old Chigs, Old Foresters and not forgetting "The YCs" i.e. all the young ladies of the Young Conservatives. Wonderful as this was, it did start to bring problems especially early on Sunday mornings when everybody seemed to know that Joe and Michael would be "open" at their garage around the back of the stables and it grew from there...

All these people brought along their own cars for the social occasion and free use of water before, at about 12.30, departing for the aforementioned "Spivs" until finally returning home to their parents and the dreaded words "late for lunch again then"!!

For Michael and I the great advantage was that we could return from our nefarious activities at 3.00 or 4.00 am in the morning and then just walk the ten minutes to our beds back in Knighton Drive... hopefully not awakening one's parents.

For two years this continued unabated apart from occasional complaints from the tenant family about mysterious "blown fuses" and continually from Miss Smith about damage to the garden beds at the rear, fully justified of course.

I took on a single garage to sublet, (strictly not allowed) to enable anyone else to join our waiting list as the single garages were very popular with the residents of Monkams Avenue... The social side continued to grow and I even serviced friends cars or allowed them to use our "workshop facilities" including beer.

However by the middle of 1959 things changed as Michael Paine was getting married to Muriel and moving to Cirencester where they both happily remain to this day. This bringing in to our group the first reserve no other than the, still notorious, James "Jamie" McCann of Beresford Drive and he came complete with his very early Morris Minor fitted with original side valve engine but later modified to an "Alta" overhead conversion plus maintenance duties to his father's beautiful 1930's Lanchester motor car. Jamie was an "Old Chig" cricketer and soccer player and immediately attracted an even wider circle of "mateys" to our expanding circle.

Also in 1959 my company posted me, as a promotion, to Chatham which in some respects was unfortunate as I had just found the lady who was to become my wife. However all was not bad news as I was allotted a company vehicle, came to London every weekend and still retained, with Jamie, my garage and our Sundays continued.

All was not peaceful though with "the management" ... I was summoned to meet Miss Smith and given the 'final ultimatum' that unless the damage to the flower beds and the illegal use of power plus the disturbances caused to the other users at a weekend.... ceased I would be requested to leave forthwith. Nothing happened of course and if anything it all got worse as Jamie had now acquired a vast 1929 3 litre Lagonda tourer and that really did flatten the flower beds at the back. In addition four of us decided, as one did, to purchase a 1930's ex. London taxi cab for a proposed trip to France the following summer. This cab was then parked round the back all the winter and was used for all sorts of activities plus it incorporated a 'Valor' paraffin stove.

By the summer of 1961 I was married and living in West Kensington but still retained the use of the garage but had now sub- let my portion to my friend Roger Ward also of Knighton Drive and he at that time was running, and always working on a delightful Lancia Aprillia, so he shared with Jamie. I was still running my Lagonda and had also acquired a post war Citroen Light 15 so that joined the " happy band" at Monkams in spite of me being served a second 'final notice'.

However we always paid on time and, as they realised, it was not an easy garage to let. In late 1962 I moved to Ongar but still used Monkams on most Sundays to see my friends and service my wife's first VW Beetle and the 1939 Wolseley 12/48 that I had purchased from my father to do the daily drive to London's City Road.

By now the 'garage' had become something of a Mecca for petrolheads and non-paying members included 1927 3 litre Bentley, early Rolls Royce 20/25 limousine with internal speaking tube, various assorted MG TF models, Triumph TR2 , Riley 'Treen' Special and yet another Lagonda a post war 1950's saloon and finally a very nice, but troublesome, Jaguar XK 140 Fhc. All of these "members" would depart most lunchtimes to the "Travellers Friend" the beloved "Spivs" of yore.

Finally in 1964 my employers were 'taken over' and it made sense to move to Portsmouth where my new home had a double garage... Once there I sold the Wolseley for £20 and purchased my vast Jaguar whilst still retaining the Lagonda.

On frequent weekends to Knighton Drive to see my mother and sister as my father had sadly died in January 1964, I still went 'round to Monkams' but the end was then nigh when Jamie moved to Morton near Ongar and Roger Ward to Loughton however this was not before I was still able to

use the 'facilities' to work on the Jaguar on a final couple of occasions having moved back to Woodford Wells in 1966.

Thus ended a saga that spanned some 10 years of wonderful friends and lovely motor cars for which I thank the tolerance of Monkham's Residential Garages.

When I look at the Google 'map', hopefully attached, I note that it seems the site has survived to this day as 'Norman Court'... we were at the very top end where there seems to be a more recent roof extension and "the gardens" have won the day and survived.



Copped Hall photograph and words by **Ken Bray**

At our January meeting, Alan Cox gave a fascinating talk on the saving of Copped Hall. I referred to a photograph that I had taken many years ago at Copped Hall. It was for a competition in "Vogue". Needless to say I didn't win. The girl is Susan Peachey whose father had a garage behind the Bald Faced Stag. **KB**



© **Ken Bray**

The Skaters' Waltz - by Joe Branson

Now that we are approaching the winter season I felt the enclosed memory might be appropriate.

February 1956... 10 days of below zero temperatures and the frost suspended in the air, just illuminated by a watery sunshine.

A weekend was coming up and hopes rose that outdoor skating would be possible on our local ponds as usual.

For my friend Michael, and myself, our local pond was Connaught Waters in Epping Forest near Chingford.

This, in fact, was a large man-made lake with two islands and boating facilities in the summer days. On winter days, if the ice was deemed safe, the lake would be invaded by 400-500 skaters.

These skaters ranged from elderly couples of the Victorian era skating with arms linked and single middle aged gentlemen gliding gracefully with hands clasped firmly behind their backs, but also including young parents, born in the 1930s with their unsteady children, ice hockey amateur players, high speed skaters with one arm trailing the ice and finally seemingly scores of schoolboys making 'glass like' slides, plus sundry dogs of all shapes and sizes.

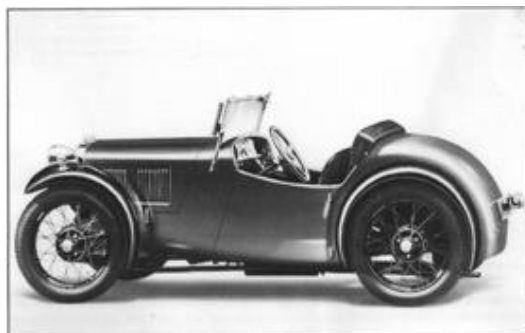
At nearly 80 now, I realise that those "elderly skaters" were in fact only in their early 70s and had learnt their skating in the 1890s!!!

Please now imagine this happy scene invaded by a Skating Motor Car!!

My aforementioned friend Michael was the owner of a 1936 Austin "Nippy" two-seater sports car as you will see in this publicity photograph. Michael was, and still is 56 years later, something of an eccentric character.

With me as passenger we drove from the small car park, across the bridleway and then down a gravel slope straight onto the ice!! At first all was well and the car appeared as a humorous novelty but then Michael touched the accelerator and all "hell broke loose" as the little car surged forward in an arc and then danced across the ice in a series of out of control, pirouettes. Skaters arrived from far and wide across the lake all shouting at cowering Michael, to the effect that he was a "bloody fool" etc. etc. and we would all be drowned. The more people that did now arrive at this spot, no doubt increased this possibility.

Also the more Michael tried to drive off, the car danced forwards and backwards!



At last the ice hockey lads took over and ingloriously slid Michael, myself and the car to the shore where we quickly accelerated up the slope and away, at some speed, to avoid the "howling mob". At the time we were both in our early 20s and fresh from National Service so, perhaps, with hindsight somewhat irresponsible.

What became of those freezing winters?

Grand Dance Tonight! by Joe Branson

This announcement, and similar, appeared almost weekly outside every village hall throughout the country immediately after WW11 and as a legacy of the war itself. But, alas, like so many other traditions, this form of entertainment has now largely disappeared in spite of the popularity of dancing on TV.

I had not personally seen the need to dance until 1955 when I was 21 and back in civilian life after National Service in Nigeria where 'Dancing' was seemingly unknown. How quickly though all this changed when I had acquired my first car and joined the local Young Conservatives where the main occupation seemed to be going to pubs and dances interspersed by car 'treasure hunts' and occasionally political speeches.

However, for many of us dancing could present a problem i.e. "can't dance" which was a major social drawback that had to be quickly rectified. It would seem that those people, male or female, who had attended a private school had all been subject to dancing classes as part of the curriculum, whilst the rest of us could only gaze in envy at the waltz, fox trot and quickstep so well performed by our friends.

Unlike today, you could not fake being a dancer by just shuffling round or leaping about in time to the latest song hit. Neither could you get away with just turning up and then 'drinking to music'. Although most of the girls weren't actually that good at dancing they expected to be 'swept off their feet' and this is where the properly taught young bloke would score all the points.

The answer therefore, was to go to dancing classes if only to learn the basics, and this is what I did. Accompanied by two friends, I found the local Wanstead Dance Studios in East London. They provided 'tuition for all ages from beginners to competition classes'. The premises were a large Victorian house where each room was a 'studio' and you knew it was a 'studio' because painted on the wooden floor were 'Man Friday' footprints in a seemingly, random fashion. However the three largest rooms were designated 'Waltz', 'Quick Step', and 'Foxtrot Room'. Each room was bare apart from a large record player able to play LPs and 45s, keep in mind that it was 1955. There were about 12 of us per class, fairly evenly matched between male and female. The teacher was a typical professional buxom female from the pre-war years and whilst the record played she would grab each of us and then literally plonk us down on the relevant 'footsteps' for the dance until, amazingly, after two hours we had, at least, got the hang of Victor Sylvester and his 'Learn to Dance' records.

By the third lesson we all had a 'mastery' of the three main ballroom dances and our final lesson would be a full 'mixed dance' comprising males and females from all classes and age groups to give us the confidence of a 'proper' dance and, surprisingly none of us disgraced ourselves... we could now dance.

However, before we all left the Dance Mistress said she was introducing a "new dance" called Rock & Roll by a certain Bill Haley and The Comets and would any of us like to sign on for just one lesson of two hours. I had only just heard about 'R&R' and thought it a good idea as did one of the girls and so we signed up and agreed to meet the following week.

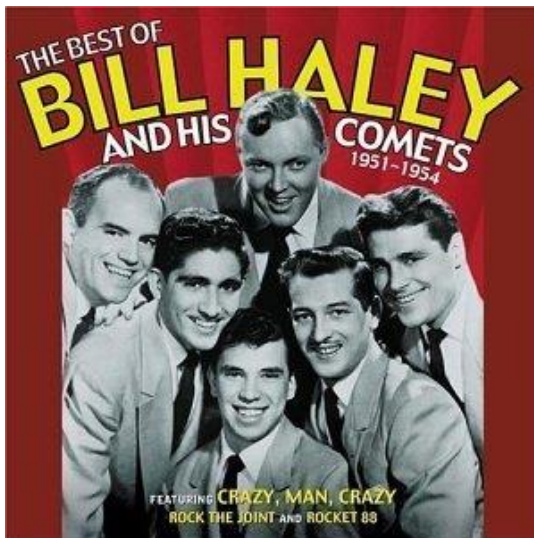
One week later... but what a contrast to the staid 'ballroom' scene.... no severe disciplines, no footsteps on the floor, free expression most of the time and at arms length to your partner, and all that was required was a sense of rhythm plus the fact that you could even do a form of it during a quickstep, to the annoyance of other dancers at the time, sheer jealousy, this was new!

Thus armed and after five weeks of lessons I sallied forth to the very next YC's monthly dance to a live group at the local 'ballroom' attached to an hotel and immediately I was a member of the 'In Crowd' because I could dance and what's more even perform some basic 'rock n roll' which was rare at this level and attracted polite applause.

Apart from the YCs, dancing then became quite regular i.e. Birthdays, Christmas, Company events and holidays. But as time went by the dancing became less of a ballroom nature and incorporated Barn Dances and derivations of the original R&R.

On one occasion I remember going with my friend Michael, in 1956 to the Lyceum Ballroom just off the Strand in London where dancing took place almost all day and every day. We quickly found two nervous young Irish nurses and actually spent a whole Saturday afternoon dancing, something I could never have imagined two years earlier. It was customary at the Lyceum for customers to purchase photos from 'roving photographers' which, as you will see, we obliged. Possibly somewhere in Ireland today is an 80 year old lady who has retained her copy of the photo as a souvenir of the afternoon she went dancing with those two 'London lads' ?

I appreciate there are still many dances being staged these days especially at 'retro events' and 'club dancing'. However, no more do you see throughout the land 'Grand Dance This Saturday Village Hall... 8.00pm' ..



Prepared for War - by John Hayward

With reference to page 13 of the contents in the Autumn 2015 Newsletter, I would like to comment on the last but one paragraph, within which Mrs Iris Simmonds states – WWII started on Sunday 3rd September 1939 “AND ALL COUNCILS THROUGHOUT THE BRITISH ISLES WERE ASKED TO ARRANGE AIR RAID PRECAUTIONS”.

This comment certainly supports the often held belief that we were quite unprepared for that war – but I hope my article will show that in some ways, this belief is unfounded, for in connection with

Air Raid Precautions (ARP) the Home Office in London issued on 9th July 1935 a circular that outlined the broad principles of the defences services for civilians that ultimately came into being.

On 18th March 1936, the first positive step was taken in the then Borough of Wanstead and Woodford, when they set up an “ARP Sub-Committee” to be followed on the 5th January 1938 with the appointment of its first Air Raid Precautions Officer that led to much activity.

At the end of 1938, my father, who worked in the building industry, was involved in a requisitioned building close to the City of London Cemetery, to convert this to a large mortuary, so heavily did the ‘powers that be’ believe in the possibility of a massive death toll from air raids. Also, by early 1939, he became a full time Heavy Rescue Squad Leader – based in Eagle Lane, Wanstead, close to the rail level crossing. The main such depot being at the top of Horn Lane, Woodford Green, to the rear of the church that was to be demolished by bombs in 1944.

In addition, before the war started, most had their gas masks, which at first were taken out generally, or to work and school – a practice most dropped within less than a year, as it became clear that such warfare was very unlikely (although in later years many TV films persisted in having their subjects walking out with the cardboard box slung on their shoulder in which the gas mask was issued). Also, we had our Anderson Air Raid Shelter fully installed at the bottom of the garden, joined together with our neighbour, who was a local policeman. On the day war was declared, we two families sat in them with our gas mask cases open on our laps, just after prime Minister Chamberlain told us that we were at war with Germany. Our fathers, being in the Civil Defence Services, were out on duty. At the time, our act was very serious, but caused much laughter in later years. The shelters were well installed and equipped and used every night of the Blitz 1940-41, the Mini Blitz of 1944 and the V1 and V2 bombardment of 1944-45, to avoid interrupted sleep.

Also, before the war started a grid system of concrete Air Raid Warden Posts was well on the way to completion. These were staffed mainly by volunteers and linked by ‘phone to the main Horn Lane Depot to enable a quick response to the position of any incident that arose. In addition, on the ‘dead land’ that would eventually connect Snakes Lane, St Barnabas Road and Hillside Avenue, a public air raid shelter had been built in concrete and partly underground. Three civilians were killed at its entrance when a bomb fell close by in October 1940.

Prior to commencement of war, a universal blackout system was in place in all homes, public buildings and any place that required to operate during hours of darkness – factories, shops, pubs and railways etc. and it was all ordered into use two days before war commenced – including the close-down of all street lighting and masking of lights on trains, buses, railway stations and all vehicles. Where trees, telegraph poles, lamp posts and kerb edges along footpaths were considered a public danger, white bands were painted around or along them.

Tens of thousands of sand bags were used in the Borough to form blast protection to some public buildings, police stations and fire stations, along with windows being criss-crossed with masking tape to reduce injury from glass fragments if they were blasted out.

In some schools, brick air raid shelters were, or had been, built in their playgrounds and, where possible, timber struts and plates were used in some lower corridors to afford some form of air raid shelter.

So, as commented on at the start – we in Britain were better prepared than popular belief suggests – for most, if not all, mentioned above was in place before war started on Sunday 3rd September 1939.

To assist my memory, I have used a very fine book by Stanley Tiquet, commissioned by the Borough of Wanstead and Woodford 1939-1945. It was first published in 1948 and republished in 1994 – some may be available from Ilford Public Library. It contains a few minor errors, but generally is a fascinating read.

The Borough was never attacked in the same way as the districts in inner London – more often than not it took the stray bombs from aircraft that were in trouble or wanted to get home, although, during the very indiscriminate V1 and V2 campaign it took a lot more. Over 250 of its citizens were killed and over 400 seriously injured. 509 of its houses were destroyed with over 1,350 being seriously damaged beyond occupation. (When the war commenced, it had 16,790 houses and flats. Its wartime population was only about 35,000.)

Memorial Hall, St Mary's, South Woodford by Janet Lovell



The Memorial Hall at St Mary's Church was officially re-opened, following refurbishment, on 10 September 2015 by the Mayor, Cllr. Barbara White.

Following nominations, the rooms will be named after people who have lived in Woodford or have contributed to life in Woodford in a positive manner. This will take place on Saturday 21 May 2016 in the presence of The Bishop of Chelmsford.

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