



Woodford Times

Woodford Historical Society
Founded 1932

Newsletter Autumn 2019

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Editorial

Welcome to the 2019-2020 season of Woodford Historical Society. I hope that everyone has had a good summer.

As you are probably aware the AGM saw changes to the Committee, not least that John and Janet Lovell decided to step down as Chair and Secretary after 9 years in these posts. During this period they have worked tirelessly for the Society and their presence and experience will be missed. We are delighted that they have accepted the posts of Vice Presidents.

Other Committee members are Felicity Banks (Secretary), Mike Ford (Treasurer), Sharon Barnett, Jill Hicks, Steve Fothergill, Mike Knell, Nigel Pitt, Judith Roberts and Dick Walker. If at any time during our meetings you have a query or a suggestion, please do hesitate to talk to anyone on the Committee.

Judith Roberts our Programme Secretary has made a point of attending most of the talks prior to booking them and we have a good mixture of subjects. We are extremely grateful for all the hard work and time that she has put into this.

In this edition of the newsletter we have reproduced the Woodford Green Trail. This is one of several that the Society published some years ago. The trail or walk should take no more than 60 minutes (depending on how quickly you walk). The trail marks out buildings or places that are of historical interest in the area, together with a brief history. In subsequent newsletter we will include the other trails.

We welcome contributions to the newsletter from members however small but generally half to one page of A4. These should be sent to our Secretary, felicity.banks@btinternet.com

Bits and Pieces

We would be grateful if members would ensure that their application forms are completed in full, and especially their e-mail address where applicable.

A member has made a donation of first class stamps which we will use and wish to thank them for their generosity.

We would still like more volunteers to assist with teas. If you feel you can help please contact Sharon Barnett on shawood51@yahoo.com or speak to her at our meeting in September.

If anyone is interested in holding the post of first aider or would like to attend a course and attain a first aid certificate would they please contact Sue Ralph at the meeting in September or at sue@theralphs.me.uk

Occasionally we require help such taking money at teatime, running the bookstall. If you feel you can assist please contact Sue Ralph at sue@theralphs.me.uk

Members who would like to attend the meetings but have difficulty getting to the venue should contact Sue Ralph on sue@theralphs.me.uk stating where they live. Any member who can assist with lifts please contact Sue.

We are going `green` and from September we will be using paper cups which are biodegradable. The plastic cup holders will still be used.

Programme for 2019 – 2020

Please note that the dates for some of our meetings will not be held on the third Monday of each month due to events at the school.

2019

September 16th History of Sainsbury's:
Allison Foster from the Museum of London

October 14th History of Ongar High Street:
Anne Padfield

November 18th Pounds, Shillings and Poverty – life in 19c London:
David Williams, a Blue Badge Guide

December 9th Tudor Costume – from Pottage to Peacocks in 16c:
Maureen Poole

2020

January 20th Edwardian Houses in Ilford:
Janet Seward

February 10th Sir Christopher Wren and St Paul's Cathedral:
Yvonne Jackman, a Blue Badge Guide

March 16th **Annual General Meeting**
This Policeman's Lot from the Krays to the Crown:
Peter Lawrence

April 20th German Spies in the First World War:
Barry Kitchener

I hope that you will enjoy the newsletter and the talks that we have planned for the 2019/2020 season and look forward to seeing you all.

Sue Ralph

Postcard from the President

It is now eight years since Linda and I moved up to Norfolk and we are happily ensconced in our surroundings and enjoying a very different way of life. However, some things remain similar, including my interest in local history, the links between Norfolk and S.W. Essex, also learning about a whole new history when living on the Broads and being so near to the North Sea Coast.

Your Committee has asked me to share our new interests and connections with you, new interests that perhaps have affected Linda more than me but still my love of local history continues – wherever that local history might be!

It's safe to say that when we moved to Norfolk I severed contacts with dozens of Essex, London and Home Counties' special interest groups that I'd given talks to over the years. Initially there was enough to keep me occupied, lecturing at my college and on the Arts Society circuit but as the months went by the telephone started to ring and I was soon back to normal, now not only giving talks to Norfolk groups but also travelling back down to Essex and re-establishing contacts with groups from the past. Linda then decided she needed an interest outside the house, dogs, chickens and our boat. She discovered the maritime charity, "National Coastwatch". The charity has fifty four stations around the coast of England and Wales, with one situated in a nearby fishing village alongside the local lifeboat station. To summarise the last six years, Linda soon became station manager, then joined a small team that assesses other stations, finally becoming a "National Officer" as part of the charity's Operational Support. We now have so many reasons for travelling down to central London that I've renewed my membership of the Civil Service Club in Great Scotland Yard, to use as a "bolthole" for overnight accommodation. Princess Anne became the Royal Patron in 2018 and subsequently Linda had three meetings with her in as many months. In May 2019, she was invited to a Buckingham Palace garden party, with me tripping along as escort! Including meeting Prince Charles twice, when he has been visiting local villages, it's safe to say that we've had more interventions with Royalty since moving to Norfolk than I have had since retiring from Royalty Protection in 1992.

Linda's new interest has led me to research the history of Norfolk's coastal communities and their "Beachmen", right up to modern lifeboats, search and rescue, plus the surveillance of our shores, which is where National Coastwatch comes in. I use this material to visit local groups fundraising and recruiting for Cromer's new watch station that Linda is now "knocking into shape".

There you have it. As requested by your Chairman, you are now up to date with the Lawrence's and I've just about filled this "postcard" up. My next offering will include some local history connections between North Norfolk, South West Essex and the City of London.

Very best wishes,

Peter



A WOODFORD GREEN TRAIL

The four hamlets which form Woodford all had their 'green', only Woodford Bridge and Woodford Row still retain theirs in a recognisable form. Woodford Green – The Green to most Woodfordians – is part of Epping Forest and serves as a reminder that forest includes grassy plains as well woodland. The hedge and bank along Broomhill Road mark an ancient boundary of the Forest, the hedge having probably been there for 500 years or more.

The Green lies at the crest of the ridge between the Lee and Roding valleys and the soil is mainly patches of gravel on clay, as it is surprisingly well drained and only small areas become really muddy in wet weather.

In former times it was well grazed both by the Commoners cattle and by cattle being driven to market. Although grazing by cattle has now ceased it is still well used by people walking their dogs and generally going for walks.

The Green was a favourite place to build large imposing houses. There was once a series of Georgian or earlier houses up Salway Hill and along Broomhill Walk, while further along were Essex House, Eagle House and Harts among others, while on the other side of the High Road were St Margaret's, Highams, The Firs and Prospect House.

The Old Road: Before 1829, when Woodford New Road was made to link Woodford Green with the newly built Lea Bridge, the wagon road, which is still traceable, ran further to the west.

Lees Pond: Unlike most of the ponds alongside roads, which were made by the digging of gravel for the roads, Lees Pond was made by the digging of clay for bricks.

Bunces Lane: Is named after Dr Bunce who from 1850 – 1865 lived in a Georgian houses called the Roses which stood at the Salway Hill end of the lane. Bunces Lane had formerly been known as Windmill Lane and the Woodford Hall Mill previously stood where the Roses was built in the 1730s

Winston Churchill Statue: This was erected by public donations to commemorate the most famous local M.P.

The Pump: This is one of three surviving pumps and is close to the road at the top of Salway Hill. There is another at Johnston's Pond, while the third is near Winn Bridge on the Chigwell Road.

Hurst House or the Naked Beauty: The finest house in the locality and is one of the oldest habitable houses in Woodford. It was built by Henry Raine, a brewer.

Broomhill Walk: The posts were originally put up at his own expense by Richard Salway in 1768, In an Edwardian House near to where the Jubilee Hospital once stood lived Sir James Hawkey, Charter Mayor of Wanstead and Woodford and the Borough's first Freeman,

Jubilee Hospital: Built to commemorate Queen Victoria`s Diamond Jubilee and was extended in 1919 as a war memorial. The Hospital no longer exists and is occupied by flats, A commemorative plaque recognises that it once stood on the site.

Broomhill Road: The hedge contains large amounts of plants – an indication of its age. The land east of the hedge was formerly a market garden.

The Cricket Pitch: This has been in use for over 200 years and the Woodford Green Cricket Club has some claim to be the oldest club in the country still playing on its original ground.

The Hawkey Hall: It was built on the site of the Congregational Church which was demolished by two flying bombs in June 1944. Near here stood Essex or Grove House noted for its fine wall paintings.

Snakes Lane: Is one of the oldest roads in Woodford and is named after the sake family. It formerly ended at Woodford Wells but was re-routed in 1819.

Johnston Road: Is named after County Alderman Andrew Johnston ,J.P. who lived at the Firs.

Johnston Pond: This is named after the road but was formerly named after the butcher`s shop on the High Road e.g. Kendon`s Pond, Wheeler`s Pond.

The Potato Pond: Local people washed the potatoes that had been grown on the Golf Links during the 1840s and 1850s under a pump that was on the Green. The wetness and the wagons which carried the potatoes to market led to the formation of the pond. When the pond was drained remains of the pump were found.

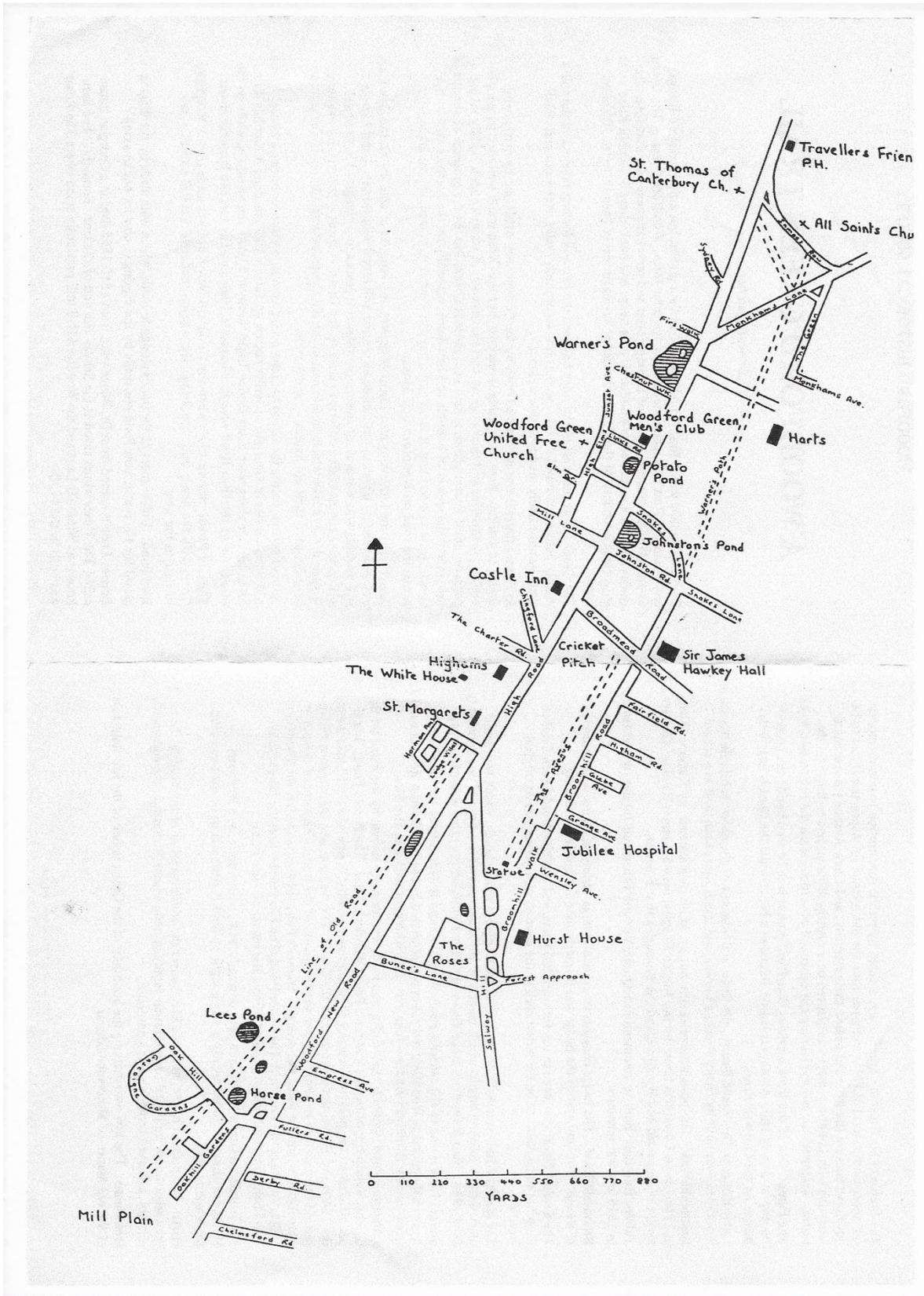
Warners Pond: Named after the Warners of Harts, formerly known as the Sluice Pond.

The Firs Pond: From the house that stood behind it.

The Woodford Green Men`s Club: It was originally built with a spire, as a Wesleyan Methodist church. It was the bought by Sir J.R. Roberts to be used a club for working men. It has now been converted into flats.

Harts: The present house was built in 1916. An earlier house on the site belonged to the Warner family, among them Richard who in the eighteenth century achieved fame as a naturalist. It later became a TB hospital and is now a nursing home.

Monkhams: The low wall marking the boundary of the Green is one of the few remnants of the old Manor of Monkenbuckhurst.



SALWAY HALL / EVANGELICAL CHURCH – Bob Hughes



Salway Hall was built in 1932 on the site of the 18th Century Salway House by Sir John Laing who built the local estate. He was a devout member of the Open Brethren and attended services when visiting. Services continued during the Second World War sometimes in the basement rooms, and despite bombs exploding near by fortunately escaped with no major damage.

After the war a member, Monty Knott, organized the first British meeting of the Gideon's in London in 1949. Fred Bradbury, an elder, was the National Secretary from 1952-1961 and Salway members continue to help distribute the Bibles today.

The Organ was donated by Mrs Clark in 1955 The large pipes just fitted into the main hall and the 'swell' organ pipes are in the roof, with the sound coming through a ceiling grid. The following year there were large crowds outside the church when Sir Winston Churchill unveiled his statue on the Green after Lord Montgomery had finally finished inspecting the Guard of Honour.

The rear hall was extended in 1958 to give more space for refreshments as well as youth work. A new kitchen in 1977 replaced the one in the basement with its dumb waiter to the hall above and also the Church Lounge with an extended basement underneath.

The early Brethren always maintained that clergy were unnecessary and that all believers were equal but the increasing pace of life led to the appointment in 1979 of Stuart Pascal as our first full-time pastor and later Rachel Garood as our first full time pastoral assistant/youth worker.

Missionary involvement has included the Leggats serving in Argentina from 1943 to 1971; Betty & Joan Holt at a Christian hospital in India; Mavis Knowles Zambia. and Colin & Rosemary Sheldon in Dublin. Other members are in various organizations such as ECM.

The Salway Singers were formed after some ladies asked for tuition and this has now grown to some forty singers from local churches. The BBC broadcast a morning service from Salway in 1961 with the choir led by Miss Loynes, of which a recording still exists.

A major extension of the main hall took place in the summer of 2002 increasing the capacity to 220 people, as well as more meeting rooms and store cupboards. This was followed by an overhaul of the gardens under the

direction of a landscape gardener with the themes of white and yellow representing peace and purity.



THE CRICKETERS ARMS – Bob Hughes



The Cricketers Arms followed the Duke of Wellington's Beerhouse Act of 1830 which removed beer duty for an annual payment of 2 guineas. The earliest record is in Whites 'Directory of Essex 1848' with a William Alexander listed as a 'Beer house Keeper' (or more officially 'beer retailer') living in Salway Hill.

The original cottage with cellar was combined with the one next door although the separate door and dividing wall remain.

Later in 1955 or so the next 2 cottages were purchased and demolished for a car park and lounge extension as per the existing site.

The Cricketers Arms is only Cricket Club using the lower cricket pitch outside Jubilee Hospital and the pub facilities. named as such in 1887 perhaps due to the popularity of the game with another The property was purchased by the Epping Forest Brewery at some stage which was itself bought out by McMullen's in around 1898. They may have been responsible for improving the cottages with stone facing and the bay windows which appear on early photographs and a planning application of 1904.

The Cricketers was rebuilt in 1927 in the present Elizabethan style with fine brick fireplace in the then saloon. A Wine and Spirits licence was probably obtained at this time as it had previously only been licensed to sell beer. Further alterations in 1957-58 included the new Gents toilet, an off licence and cellar access re-sited to behind the bar. The major feature was the new lounge which combined the public bar and snug; the old saloon bar became 'a recreation room' or public bar.

The off-licence was possibly closed in the late 1970s and also by this time the Cricketers had gained a reputation for the quality of its real ale and has been a CAMRA listed pub until recently.

Of the many licensee's David & Sandra Girdlestone introduced the golf society but most popular were Eric & Christine Wooldridge (1998 –2006) winning awards for its beer quality and also for its garden and home cooking.

The annual Conker championship began in this period which became so popular that competitors spilled out into the street. It has in fact been won by 3 ladies including one from France. The Narrowboat Crew also started with an annual weekend trip on a canal or river but also organised Summer Balls, Christmas Carols etc.

Noteworthy McMullens brews are the AK mild which was first brewed in 1829 must be one of the oldest beers still available, the Castle Pale Ale is listed as one of Michael Jackson's 500 Classic Brews but the Strongheart at 7% has been very popular with some.



Alexander Stewart (1778 – 1857) of Elmhurst

In 2007 Redbridge Museum had an exhibition to celebrate the bicentenary of the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. In 1807 it was thought that with no new slaves being sent to the plantation the provision of slave labour would die out, but the work by Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton and others proved this was not the case and eventually the 1833 Act was passed to abolish slavery.



Museum Manager Gerard Greene asked me if I knew of any slave-owners in Redbridge and the only person I could think of was Alexander Stewart who lived at Elmhurst. I knew he was a merchant, a partner with Isaac Westmorland in the firm of Stewart and Westmorland of Finsbury Square, that they owned sugar plantations in Jamaica and when slavery was abolished they were paid

considerable compensation. Smith's map of London (1822) shows Grove House, the building we now call Elmhurst, as the home of Mr. Stewart. He lived at Woodford in "a commodious and elegant country house" from around 1818 when he married, until about 1849.

University College London has established a Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slave-ownership and they now have a website <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>. In 2015 the BBC showed two programmes called 'Britain's Forgotten Slave Owners' by David Olusoga about the database and accompanying map. They were repeated last autumn and reminded me to look at the database. It shows that Brice Pearse of Monkams was paid compensation in 1834 but it does not include Alexander Stewart as Woodford was not his principal address. Jeremiah Harman of Highams, Walthamstow, Samuel Bosanquet of Forest House, Leyton, and the Hall Dare family of Ilford Lodge are also shown on the map.

When I found the entry for Alexander Stewart it provided a great of additional information. He was born on 15 September 1778, the son of Peter and Jane Stewart of Huntingtower, Perthshire. Apart from the office in the City and his country residence at Woodford, he lived at No.5 Cambridge Square which is north of Hyde Park, just off Edgware Road. (A flat here was offered for sale in the autumn of 2018 for £835,000). He was associated with 13 claims for compensation arising from the 1834 Act. He died on 25 March 1857 and was buried at All Souls Kensal Green, leaving £120,000.

Alexander Stewart had married Agnes Logan in 1818 and they had five sons and six daughters. His son Alexander is shown in the 1861 census as 'W.I. merchant', was 'of Fowkes Buildings' and he was of 9 Daleham Road Hampstead when he died in 1909 leaving nearly £224,000. A second son, Lewes Gower Stewart, left £75,587 when he died at Mt Pleasant, Ilfracombe in 1915; and a daughter Elizabeth Gower Stewart left £49,177 when she died at 5 Chester Terrace in 1900. Another son, Capt. James Stewart, bought the Alltyrodyn estate in Cardiganshire in around 1880.

The website is certainly a very interesting source of information of all those who had invested in slaves and is well worth a look.

© Georgina Green, 31 May 2019

WW1 Antiques – Part 1 Mark Smith MA – Military Historian

The Great War involved millions of men, millions of uniforms were issued millions of items of equipment, millions of medals and, alas, millions of crosses were also required during the 4 and a half years that the War to End all Wars was fought. As the years have gone by the items they wore, used and brought home have been lost, discarded, thrown away or passed on to museums. This means that the millions of objects have now been whittled down to, in some cases, just a few, it is these objects that the Militaria Collector will be looking for, the rare find the fragments of an object that will be a prize for the collector and his collection. What might you have, what should you look for in the loft or back of the draw that might be a truly historic item from the war?

Medals

Medals are basically broken down into Campaign Medals and Gallantry Medals. There are some quite common medals from WW1 that you may have in a draw or frame on the wall, do not discount these as just “ordinary”, each medal has a name rank and number inscribed around the rim or on the back and this allows you to unlock the story of that man, or woman. The key to Great War medals is research, find out the story behind the medals and the story becomes the value. To place a man as close to an action as possible is the ultimate aim, alas, if I man, or woman, was killed during the war this enables the researcher to place a man in a trench at a particular time at a moment during the battle, a visit to the grave and battlefield is then possible giving a full picture of the man or woman who served. It is this research that increases the value.

Gallantry medals are given for specific acts of bravery, in most cases the actual deed can be discovered, alas for the 115,000 Military Medals issued during the Great War the citations were lost during World War Two with the bombing of the Army Records Office in 1940, a huge loss, however gallantry medals do attract premium prices and if you are lucky enough to find a Victoria Cross in the draw, a hefty £150,000 to £200,000 is probably the value.

The Memorial Plaque

A Bronze Plaque measuring 12cm in diameter was issued, each individually named, to the families of those who had lost their lives during the War or as a result of wounds, this practice continued up until the 1930's. The Plaque, sometimes known as the “Dead Man's Penny”, was issued to all British and Commonwealth servicemen and women. The Plaque was issued in a card board cover with a printed note from the King; it came in a postal envelope. The War Office, through the Acton Foundry and the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich issued somewhere in the region of 1,333,000 plaques. Again it is the research of the person to whom the plaque is named that will increase the value, closer to than action again applies. For example a Sergeant Killed in the trenches at Ypres on the 23 April 1917 will cost about £80, a Plaque to a Sergeant of the Royal Flying Corps killed the same day over the trenches at Ypres £500, a Sergeant in the Royal Flying Corps killed at Ypres on the same day but shot down by the Red Baron £1,500, it's all about the story.

Alas as the Plaques only show the person's name, no other details are recorded, therefore a plaque without any supporting medals or paperwork to a more common

name such as John Brown will only be worth about £50-60 as the list of those killed called John Brown will be very long and there is no way to link your plaque to the correct man.

The Plaques to look out for however are any Plaques named to women. Only 600 were issued and they are very rare - the starting price for a "SHE DIED" plaque would be around the £3,000 moving swiftly up to around £14,000 if the plaque were accompanied by her medals and associated items.

Uniforms

About 10 million men wore a khaki uniform between 1914 and 1918. Officers had to buy their own clothes from tailors, they also bought their own equipment, compasses, swords, beds, wash bowls, in fact all amount of things that the soldier, and indeed tailor thinking of his profits, thought would be useful for a young gentleman at the front! This means that when the war ended the items belonged to the officer; he took them home with him when he left. Whilst uniforms are getting more scarce the ancillary equipment is still in great abundance and therefore not of huge value.

The Other Ranks, however, were issued with their uniform and when they left it was given back. Items of ordinary soldier's uniforms are therefore much rarer and more interesting -and indeed valuable. For example a pair of other ranks trousers, issued in their millions would be worth£600-800 and pair of other ranks boots about £1,000. However moth eaten a real WW1 issue other ranks uniform jacket would still command a price of about £1,000. If any individual names can be attached to the uniforms providing a provenance again the price increases.

Steel Helmets

The Steel Helmet, or to call it by its proper name the "Brody Shrapnel Helmet", did not enter into service until late 1915 early 1916, a direct result of so many head injuries being caused by shells which were designed to burst in the air above trenches and shower the men with lead balls (shrapnel bullets). Millions of steel helmets were in consequence produced. However not many remain, slightly different in design from the World War Two version, the Brody Shrapnel Helmets Mk 1 and 2 are highly sort after, any obvious battle damage will add greatly to the value as will an inscribed name. Expect to pay between £300-500 for a nice example with liner and chin strap.

Gas Masks

Probably one of the most evil inventions of WW1 was the use and delivery of poison gas. The first Gas attack was in April 1915 near Ypres its effects were devastating, not only did it maim, kill and cause utter panic but it left those exposed to a life of slowly deteriorating health and was the underlying cause of many deaths in later years. To counteract this deadly new weapon the British developed quickly an item of equipment called the PH Hood, a simple pillow case like bag with an eye piece. The bags were dipped in chemicals; you simply pulled the bag over your head and breathed through the fabric, through the chemicals. A truly dreadful experience one would imagine. The PH Hood is an incredibly rare object at least £1,500 if you can find such an example, whoever tatty, hopefully in its little canvas and rubber carrying bag.
(to be continued in the next Newsletter)

Architectural Tour of Tate Modern – by Janet Lovell

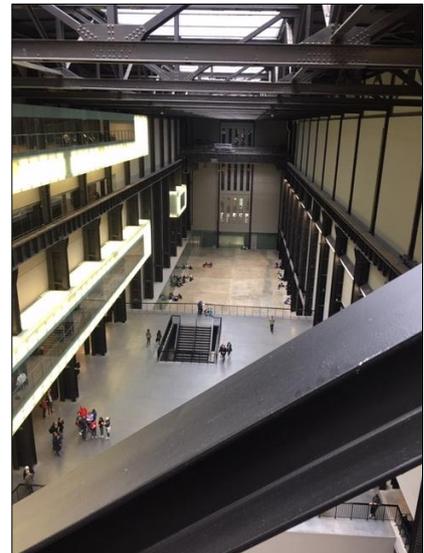


The 24th April saw the first of the Society's summer tours. This was an opportunity to learn of the magnificent architecture of the building, with, of course, the opportunity to privately view the exhibits after the tour.

The iconic Bankside Power Station designed by Giles Gilbert Scott in the 1940s was disused from 1981 until the Tate Modern opened in 2000. Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron were commissioned to undertake the conversion, following an international competition. They created iconic spaces, which it was felt would not have been possible with a new-build, whilst retaining the presence of the original building, as exemplified by cast iron grills and unfinished wood floors.

The turbine hall is a monumental display area, but within the former power station there was a construction creating two floors here. The bricked-up doors to the upper floor are clearly visible half way up the walls, however when visiting the exhibits in the hall, which are changed regularly, I have found that the eye is drawn to the art and details of the building's construction are missed as a consequence.

Our group had the opportunity to visit the display area in one of the oil tanks (opened in 2012). Creative lighting is used extensively in these exhibits and we were lucky to be allowed to enter whilst preparations were being made for a new exhibition and we could therefore clearly see the construction. We learned that there were three oil tanks, two of which are now used as display and performance areas.



The new extension, the Blavatnik building (opened in 2016), is clad with a perforated brick lattice, using a unique construction technique, allowing light to shine through. There are sloping internal floors, the walls of each gallery, although appearing solid, are moveable to accommodate the varied exhibits and a viewing gallery at the top of the building offers spectacular views across London. However, perhaps one can sympathise with the owners of the nearby flats who have recently lost a court case regarding their lack of privacy following the construction of this element of Tate Modern. There is certainly no escape for them from the prying eyes of the visitors!

Visit to Wilton's Musical Theatre

Wednesday 12th June

Felicity Banks



Wilton's Music Hall began as 5 houses dating back to the 1690's. The largest house became an alehouse for sea captains and wealthy merchants who lived nearby. A concert room was built behind the pub.

Around 1850 John Wilton bought the premises and replaced the concert room with a 'Magnificent New Music Hall' in 1859 which extended across all five houses. He sold the business in 1868.

In 1877 there was a bad fire and little remained, just the four walls and the barley twist columns for the balcony. It was rebuilt and continued as a Music Hall until 1881.



In 1888 the East London Methodist Mission bought it and during the Great Dock Strike of 1889 it was used as a soup kitchen. The Mission continued to help the poor of the area for over 70 years, closing in 1956. The London County Council planned to demolish the building but a campaign to save it was launched and supported by John Betjeman and Spike Milligan. Wilton's was saved from the bulldozers.



Then the task of renovation began. The building though still undergoing repairs was used for several films and television programmes— Richard Attenborough's *Chaplin* in 1992, *Frankie goes to Hollywood's Relax* 1984 and *Annie Lennox* in 1995. Gradually the building was brought back to life and with a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund the project was completed in 2015 and was

declared structurally sound.

The Theatre once again puts on performances for the public, though not as a Music Hall. The stage has been kept in two tiers as originally the artists needed to be seen over the gentlemen's top hats and the ladies' feathered hats!

The Victorian sailors' pub went from music hall to Methodist Mission and was forgotten before becoming the venue it is today. It is said to be the world's oldest and last surviving grand music hall.



Visit to St. Bride's Church, Fleet Street

Wednesday 17th June

Felicity Banks



St Bride's Church is built on one of the earliest Roman sites. Part of a Roman pavement and mosaics remain in the crypt. The first stone church was founded by St Bride, or St Bridget of Kildare, or her followers in the 6th Century. The present Church is the eighth to be built in the site. The twelfth Century church had a tower which housed one of London's four curfew bells. The next St Bride's had seven altars and the church welcomed the pioneers of print, though few written records remain.

Wynkyn de Worde was an apprentice to William Caxton. He acquired his printing press and moved to Fleet Street next to St Bride's. The Church was a very good customer. Wynkyn was buried in St Bride's in 1535.

The sixth St Bride's Church was destroyed in the Great Fire of London in 1666. Samuel Pepys, and his eight brothers and sisters were all christened at St Bride's. He wrote about the fire in his diary. Christopher Wren rebuilt St Bride's and it was completed in 1703. The steeple, which was 234 feet tall until it lost eight feet when struck by lightning, was Wren's tallest.

Wren's church lasted until World War II when it was hit in an air-raid in 1940. All that remained was the steeple and outer walls. The church was rebuilt looking very much like Wren's design. The galleries were not replaced and the seating improved. The reredos is carved in Grinling Gibbons style by twentieth century craftsmen.

St Bride's is known as the Journalists' Church because of its association with the newspaper businesses that used to be in Fleet Street. Special services and vigils have been held at St Bride's for journalists who have been killed while reporting or who have been held hostage.



The church also has close associations with America. There is a replica bust near the font, of Virginia Dare, the first child to be born to English settlers in Virginia, USA.

When Wren rebuilt the church it was over the remains of the previous six churches. In 1854 London was ravaged by cholera and it was decided no more burials would be carried out in the city of London, the Crypt was sealed up. When the church was rebuilt after 1940 the Crypt was re-opened. Behind bricked up walls many coffins were found and two charnel houses containing hundreds of skeletons. Excavations continue and the Crypt now houses an exhibition of the history of the church and the newspaper community of Fleet Street.

