

# NEWSLETTER 139

MARCH/APRIL 1998

Price 20p, free to members

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## Recent meetings

Last December was a double bill, with John Howes and Donald Pohl respectively describing Loughton Hall and its neighbour Hatfields. Compared with other well-known houses such as Hill Hall and Copped Hall (both badly damaged by fire) the architectural importance of Loughton Hall has been undeservedly neglected and the building now awaits a proper use. Hatfields very nearly fell into terminal decline but happily is now the home of the E15 Acting School, part of the University of East London.

The New Year brought a presentation of archive films of Essex from the collection now held by the University of East Anglia. Covering the period from 1912 to the 1970s, they included both amateur and professional productions; one was made by students at Wansfell College.

In February we were honoured with a visit by Oliver Cromwell, who put the record straight for those in any doubt as to what really happened in the middle of the seventeenth century. From his exalted position he observes some of what is happening down here – not always with approval.

Cromwell's England was still very much an agricultural country, and much of Loughton was still farmland within living memory. Through correspondence between our Chairman and Miss Heather Flack, we have some of her father's reminiscences:

## The Loughton I knew, 1912–1934

We called it the Village. It was in fact a rather large village, reaching from the top of Goldings Hill to the bottom of Buckhurst Hill. For many City of London business people it was a commuter base. One could witness wealthy gentlemen running for the 7.25 a.m. train from Loughton Station to Liverpool Street, that being one of the quickest into the City in the morning.

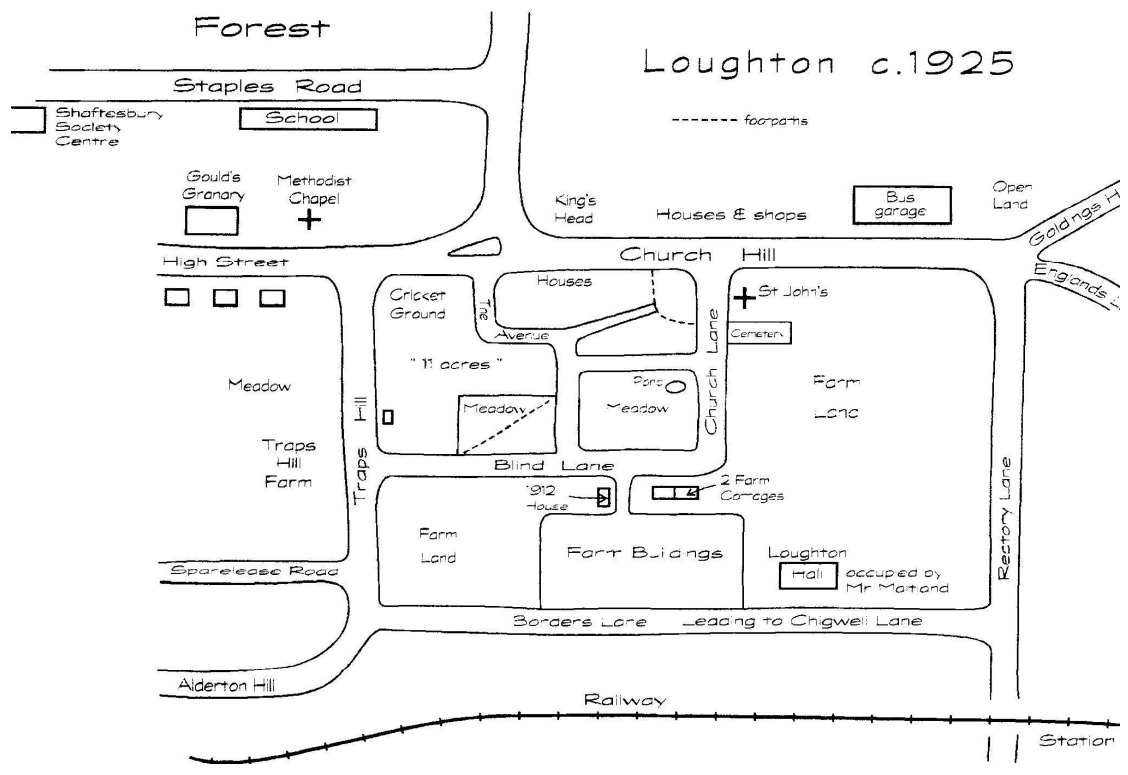
The Village contained a very good representation of the strata of society. The artisans' houses were principally to be found in Forest Road, Smarts Lane, Meadow Road, Englands Lane and Lower Road alongside Goldings Hill. Middle class properties were situated in Queens Park Road, the Avenue, the Drive, Lower Park Road and its adjoining area. The very superior properties were found principally in Albion Hill, Nursery Road, Upper Park and Alderton Hill.

I remember when the only street lighting in Loughton was in the High Road and by gas lamps. These were lit and extinguished manually by the use of a long metal pole.

The Town Hall, in the centre of the Village, was known as the Lopping Hall, deriving its name from the fact that it was erected in compensation to the foresters for the surrender of their lopping rights in Epping Forest. A fine example of the effect of the lopped trees in Epping Forest can be seen when walking from Baldwins Road into the Forest, down Clayside towards what we knew as the Epping New Road (now the A11 [later A104]) towards High Beech.

In addition to the two Anglican Churches (St John's and St Mary's), there was Loughton Union Church, with allegiance to the Baptist and congregational persuasion, though always served by a Baptist minister (in my time Dr Wicks). There was also the

Wesleyan Methodist Church in the High Road opposite Traps Hill and a Brethren Meeting Place at the beginning of High Beech Road. A Mr Lester, who lived at the Grange on the corner of Upper Park, had two unmarried daughters, Muriel and Doris. Doris was the leader of the Senior Sunday School at Loughton Union Church and Muriel was involved in a Christian social centre in the East End and gave hospitality to Mahatma Gandhi on one of his visits to London.



My father was Farm Manager originally of two farms, Borders Farm (in Blind Lane, a continuation of Church Lane) and Traps Hill. He worked for Goulds, who had a considerable business as corn, seed and forage merchants with large premises in the High Road situated between the Methodist Church at the bottom of Traps Hill and the Drive. The premises also incorporated retail dairy facilities, for they retailed all the milk produced on the farms.

Goulds' forage business consisted of buying hay, clover mixture and straw in the stack in West Essex in a radius from Loughton to Sawbridgeworth, Matching, Ongar, etc., for which their own two horse waggons were sent. Much of it was brought to Borders Farm, where it was turned into chaff to be transported to London for the horses operating there in considerable numbers at that time.

Goulds' farming enterprises expanded over the years by their purchase of two more farms – Hall Farm and Debden Green. The latter was developed with a Tuberculosis-tested dairy herd, necessitating all the milking being done by machine and bottled on the farm, without being touched by human hands.

The Loughton I knew had three schools – the Girls' High School at the foot of Alderton Hill, Vincents Boys' Grammar School set back on the main road, next to Loughton Union Church and opposite Meadow Road, and the Council School, Infants, Boys and Girls in Staples Road, opposite the Forest. At that time there was no transport for children to school; we had to walk. Living at Borders Farm meant that it was one mile to school. From the early age of five years, we walked that distance four times each day, for school was from 9 a.m. to noon and from 2 p.m. to 4.30 p.m. and with no school meals provided we came home for lunch. Children of that period were not exposed to the dangers of today.

Loughton Council School in Staples Road had a distinctive feature at this time. In the Boys' School, it could boast a very good string orchestra, which led the daily morning

assembly. This was made possible by the generosity of Sir Joseph Lowrey, who lived in Upper Park and financed the music teacher, a Miss Daisy Searl. The entry to the orchestra was preceded by a series of fifteen minute sessions of private tuition in the Headmaster's study until you were capable of joining the orchestra.

My twin brother and I managed to buy our first violin by doing a month's 'bird scaring' round fourteen acres of oats and ten acres of wheat on Borders Farm, for which we received two guineas. The orchestra achieved quite a high standard and had the privilege of playing for the visit of the Prince of Wales (later Edward VIII) and Princess Mary (later the Princess Royal) on the occasion of their visit to open, for the new season, the Shaftesbury Society Holiday centre at the bottom of Staples Road. (The Centre received parties of children coming from the East End of London, for a day in the Forest.) In, I think it would be 1920, the orchestra competed in the Schools Musical Festival at Stratford, East London and gained 2nd prize.

Loughton also boasted a very good cricket club, whose ground was situated between Traps Hill, the High Road and the Avenue. They had an annual cricket week, during which they received for one day an MCC team; I remember on one of those occasions Macaulay, Yorkshire's fast bowler was in the team. Mr Forster, the leading builder in the Village, whose premises were at the bottom of Smarts Lane, was cricket captain for a number of years.

For several years, the Athletic Association held a cross country race starting from the club (opposite the Lopping Hall in Station Road) and running a round race through the meadows of Traps Hill and Borders Farm as far as Chigwell Lane. The participants were from many of the leading athletic clubs in the country. I remember the Birchfield Harriers contingent were always very competitive.

JOHN W FLACK

*The second part of this account, describing life on the farms, will appear in our next Newsletter.*

## Home-made corduroy shorts: Millican Dalton (1867–1947): A notable Loughton eccentric

The Forest has attracted many eccentric characters and individualists in its long history, and one of the most delightful seems to have been Millican Dalton, who died half a century ago. Born in Cumberland in 1867, his family moved to Hale End in 1879. For much of his life however he lived in a cottage in Stony Path, where he became known as the 'Professor of Adventure'. He spent most of his time out of doors, camping in the forest. Come rain or shine, sun or snow, his was a familiar figure, to be seen climbing trees or tramping through the woods in characteristic Alpine hat, home-made corduroy shorts and a sort of plaid wrap slung over his shoulders.

Dalton's Lakeland upbringing had given him a love of nature that came to rule his life. He briefly entered the world of insurance, but from the mid 1880s his life was dedicated to the great outdoors. He earned his living by acting as a professional mountain guide in his native Cumbria as well as in Scotland and Switzerland, and by making customised tents. Together with his inseparable brother Henry, he pioneered the production of practical lightweight camping equipment, and they helped to found both the Camping Club and the Association of Cycle Campers.

His homespun appearance and his nocturnal forays into the forest got Millican arrested as a spy during the First World War, though there was never a more unlikely secret agent. His background was Quaker, and he was a strict vegetarian; his one indulgence seems to have been an occasional cigar.

The Willingale, Higgins and Reynolds families still dominated the Baldwins Hill 'village' in those days, living cheek by jowl in the little cottages of Wroths Path, Stony Path and clustered around the Foresters Arms. Dalton himself lived in the little row known as Foresters Cottages at the top of Stony Path, now five dwellings but then three cottages and a shop.

From his base on Baldwins Hill, Dalton came to know every nook and cranny of Epping Forest, where he often alarmed the unwary by abseiling down tree trunks, skating across dangerously thin ice on the forest ponds, or even skiing down some of the steeper slopes. He was however remembered above all as a kindly and hospitable man, ever ready to teach children about nature, a happy companion at a camp fire, and generous with his own extensive knowledge.

He spent his final years in Buckinghamshire close to the Chilterns, another area he loved, and died in the delightfully named hamlet of High Heavens in 1947. As one of the handful of Loughton worthies to appear in the *Victoria County History* for Essex, and as a nationally known figure in the world of mountaineering and camping, Millican Dalton surely deserves permanent recognition as part of Loughton's new 'blue plaque' scheme.

STEPHEN PEWSEY

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