

NEWSLETTER 141

APRIL/MAY 1999

Price 20p, free to members

Notes and News

Essex County council has decided to dispose of two fields – Lady Whitaker's Mead, an 8-acre plot of grazing land in Debden Lane, and the playing fields to the east of Davenant School's land. Loughton Town Council has expressed an interest in acquiring them.

Three blue plaques have been unveiled in Loughton: to W W Jacobs (Lower Road), Jose Collins (corner of High Road and Lower Park), and Robert Hunter (Staples Road). Three more have been authorised: on the Lopping Hall, to William Bridges Adams and Sarah Flower Adams (Woodbury Hill) and to Sir William Addison (Abbott's Travel Agents, High Road).

Plans to demolish St Mary's Church (reported at the last AGM) now appear to have been scrapped after 83 per cent of the congregation voted against the rector's plans in a poll.

During the course of last year London Underground have cleaned and re-erected the boundary stone alongside the railway between Theydon Bois and Debden. This boundary stone and the white painted posts bearing the arms of the City of London which can be found at the side of the road in Coppice Row and Loughton Lane, Theydon Bois, mark where the railway and the roads cross the parish boundary. They were erected in the nineteenth century to show the limits of an excise free zone – if coal was carried past them a tax had to be paid to the City of London! When work was being carried out on strengthening and rebuilding the embankments as part of a major project – 24 kilometres of the Central Line need attention – the marble boundary stone was found lying in the undergrowth. It is in four sections: a plinth in three parts and an obelisk bearing the City of London coat of arms. The splendidly refurbished stone can be seen at the left of the track travelling from Theydon Bois to Debden where the embankment is high.

Two new books

The Society had the unusual distinction of publishing two new books in December 1998 within a week of each other. Chris Pond has written the *History of the Loughton Methodist Church and of Methodist Expansion in South-West Essex*. This is published jointly with the Church and complements the connection between the two organisations stemming from the Church being the Society's regular meeting place.

Alison Whiting has written *The Loughton Roding Estate: from Cattle Grazing to Double Glazing*, the story of the Roding Road-River Way-Stonards Hill-Southview Road estate – this area of Loughton was completely undocumented.

Both books may be obtained at meetings at the members' special price of £2.50 and £1.75, respectively. Members who live at a distance may get them from the Chairman at these prices plus a stamped addressed envelope for 50p.

The Piggott's deeds

In February the Society was offered and purchased a set of deeds relating to landholding of Piggott's Farm in Theydon Bois. The farmhouse still stands, on the right of the Abridge Road, just before the river bridge, and the farm included lands in both Theydon and Loughton, no doubt following the track shown as a road on the old maps, Chase Lane.

The deeds are early nineteenth century copies made by Windus and Curtis of Epping of earlier originals, the earliest being a conveyance of the property of Richard Waylett of Childerditch dated 1735 for the sum of £1,970. The extent of the property was 53 acres in two crofts, Great Whitwells and Piggott's Croft, eight and a half acres of the Common Mead called Theydon Mead, three acres off Chase Lane, twenty-four and a half acres of arable land called Great Stackfields, and 19 acres in Land Mead. This last meadow was in both Theydon Bois and Loughton parishes. The total sale amounted to 108 acres together with the house.

In 1739 Waylett mortgaged the property to Robert King of Theydon Garnon to raise £500. This he had evidently redeemed by the date of his will in 1750. His son, also Richard, married Elizabeth Rogers of Woodford in 1758 – a marriage settlement of that year provides for the succession to the property and for the payment of £500 by Richard Rogers, a carpenter of Woodford Bridge, Elizabeth's father, as his marriage portion.

The last deed is the will dated 30 July 1799 of Elizabeth Dodson of Piggott's, widow of John Dodson. This will was proved on 17 February 1804. Whether Elizabeth Dodson is the same person as Elizabeth Waylett and had remarried, is unclear from the deeds. However she left Piggott's to her second son, John Dodson, and some funds in trust to her first son, Richard. Piggott's is to be held in trust for her six younger children: William, James, Robert, Samuel, Ann-Elizabeth and Charles, plus a further child since John's death, William Shard. Richard and John had evidently done well for themselves, as is recited by the testatrix, giving them each £1 0s 0d to buy a ring by which to remember her: they are "better provided for than I have it in my power to provide".

The Society having purchased these deeds will deposit them in the Essex Record Office where they will be properly preserved. If any member would like to see them this Spring, please speak to the Chairman.

CHRIS POND

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 over 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 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 a 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 recognition as part of Loughton's new blue plaque scheme.

STEPHEN PEWSEY

The Deacon Collection

In April 1998 one of the last members of the Deacon family, Doris, died at South Nutfield in Surrey aged 94. The family house and effects were left mostly to the National Trust to be sold for the Trust's funds. At the auction in June several lots relating to Loughton were noticed by my colleague, Rob Clements, including a fine book of watercolours of Loughton scenes done by Octavius Dixie Deacon in the years between 1874 and the First World War.

Octavius was the eighth child of Samuel and Virginia Deacon and was born at Bow in 1836; he evidently grew up at Finchley. He married Louisa Anna Horncastle in 1868 and then lived in Hackney and Stoke Newington. In 1874 they came to Loughton to Goldings Park Road – now Goldings Road. Their house was the first on the south side of the road and was what we would nowadays call a "link-detached", with a 200-foot-long garden. In the 1881 Census seven children are listed plus two resident servants. In all they had nine children who survived infancy, born between 1869 and 1889: Elgiva, Dora Augusta, Owen Bismarck, Mary Etheldreda, Willoughby, Eleanor, Jessica, Harold Octavius, Alexander and Roderick Scripps. There can be few other such collections of names!

By 1888 Octavius had moved his family to a house he had largely designed himself – the plans are in the notebook – but they were modified, I suspect, by Edmond Egan. This house was *Kettering* right at the top of Upper Park, on the southern side, by the junction with Nursery Road, where, as at Goldings Hill, he kept a fine garden.

Deacon described himself as a news advertising agent and publisher. He was proprietor of *Deacon's Newspaper Directory*, which contained facsimiles of the front pages of numerous local papers up and down the country and his firm also handled advertising for them. He was an artist who sold his work to *Punch*, *The Graphic*, *The Illustrated* and other journals; he also designed books and Christmas cards. He was a fairly regular correspondent of *The Times*. Like most residents of Upper Park at the time he appears to have had a fair portion of inherited wealth, so possibly his artistic work was rather in the nature of a sideline.

The papers sold at Nutfield included several framed watercolours, sketch and note books, a copybook and the album mentioned above. I put in a bid but the lots were sold to a Staffordshire dealer. When I telephoned him he had already offered them to the Epping Forest Museum, who then completed the purchase.

By the kind cooperation of the staff, Caroline and I spent a pleasant wet afternoon looking at the collection. They are quite superb. The Loughton pictures date mostly from

1880-1900. There are several of the Smithy in Church Hill, of Whitehall (where the British Legion club house now is), of sledging down Goldings Hill, of the *Plume of Feathers*, of York Hill from Cage [King's] Green, with the cage; of the cottages near the Methodist Church. Many of them have local characters marked: Luffman the forest keeper, Mrs Fletcher of the *Dragons*, a curate (possibly William Rhodes, their neighbour in Goldings Road) whose nickname was obviously "the Beetle", and so on.

There is a fine drawing of breakfast *chez* Deacon, a beautiful vignette of the Turnpike Bar at Woodford Wells and the only picture I have ever seen of the *Bag o' Nails* in Lower Road as an inn – it is still there behind an incongruous plasticky shopfront. There must be a hundred items of local interest: Perhaps the finest is the painting of the garden at Goldings Park.

Octavius Dixie Deacon evidently became unstable, for he died in December 1916 in the mental hospital at Brooke House, Clapton. Louisa continued to live at *Kettering*, by then numbered 54, until about 1930: she died in 1935. Octavius and Louisa are buried in Loughton cemetery.

The son, Willoughby, rented a house in Shenfield: the house at Nutfield was acquired in 1924. The family, which included four artists and two architects, seems to have been greatly talented.

Kettering was later owned by Cllr Arthur Welch: it was demolished in the 1980s, but the drawings of it recall the spacious and genteel Loughton of the late nineteenth century. Octavius's paintings remind us that the whole place was uncluttered and empty, the hills and the Forest dominating the horizons. A few cottages, mostly of weatherboard, and graceful houses abut the quiet High Road. The people – swells and countryfolk alike – animate the scene, usually with names appended, and Jersey cattle graze the meadows. We owe thanks to the Museum for repatriating the collection to the district.

Curiously, there is one image that has not changed a jot. That is of the seventeenth-century clapboard cottages that Deacon knew as "The Hole", but which we have sanitised into Woodbury Hollow. This survival is all the more remarkable because these cottages were once condemned by Loughton UDC as unfit for human habitation.

Many thanks are due to Rob and Debbie Clements for providing much of the family history in this article. A shortened form of this article was published in *Think Loughton*, No 3.

CHRIS POND

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