

NEWSLETTER 148

MAY 2001

Price 20p, free to members

Loughton's First Lending Library

One of the facilities provided by Municipal and County authorities which we tend to take for granted these days are the free local libraries. In Essex we are fortunate to have an excellent service. But what happened in the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth before these public libraries existed?

In Loughton the Lopping Hall Institute and Reading Room, which opened in 1884, had a lending library which survived for 50 years. William Chapman Waller was its librarian for the first 10 years. A few volumes in the local studies section of Loughton Library still contain the bookplate of the Lopping Hall Institute. A B Davis the printer and publisher who had offices in Loughton and Epping had a lending library for which a small charge was made.

We need, however, to go back to almost the beginning of the nineteenth century to find a reference to what may have been the first lending library in Loughton. Among the Whitaker Maitland archive at the Essex Record Office is a MS (ref. Dme/Q1/1) dated 1829 which gives details of a lending library established in August 1818. It appears that the library was associated with the original St Nicholas Church in Rectory Lane, although where the books were actually held is not clear, possibly in the church itself, the vestry room or in the rectory. The MS lists the following rules for the library:

1. No person shall be allowed to borrow more than one volume at a time, the name of the person and the day of receiving the volume to be entered in a book provided for that purpose. The Christian and the Surname of the Person with the date to be written also on the cover of the book.
2. If any person should take a volume from the Depository and not return the same in 3 weeks, or return the same damaged, he or she, shall forfeit the prime cost of the book and under failure of these conditions the person shall not be allowed again to borrow a volume from the library.
3. The books will be delivered out on Fridays from 9 to 12 o'clock by who will at the same time receive the returned books and make a correct entry.
4. A donation to the amount of £1 will give the donor the privilege for his or her domestics to receive books from the library.
5. No book to be admitted into the collection which is not inserted in the catalogue of the SPCK unless sanctioned by the Minister.

The library catalogue in 1829 consisted of about 120 books. They included a number of volumes for the moral and Christian education of the inhabitants of Loughton, following no doubt rule 5. The history of England and books on travel form another section.

There was a good selection of books on natural history, not surprising for a forest parish, including separate volumes on insects, beasts, reptiles, birds and fishes. The fiction section was small but included five copies of that best seller *Robinson Crusoe*.

The MS notes that 36 of the books were presented by Mr David Powell. We also have to thank Powell for the delightful sketches that he made in 1790 of the old church and which have been reprinted in more recent years. A list of some 23 tracts are noted as having been presented by Mr Hamilton, presumably Anthony Hamilton who was Rector of Loughton from 1804–1851. The Whitaker Maitland MS also contains details of the Loughton Lying-in Club (for pregnant women), the School Rules, the Penny Club for Schoolchildren and the Friendly Societies for the poor.

RICHARD MORRIS

Another war hero with links to Loughton

In *Newsletter 144* (April/May 2000) we told the story of Captain Richard Stannard, VC. February 2001 saw the death of Air Vice-Marshal J E “Johnnie” Johnson at the age of 85 and it is perhaps not widely known that he lived and worked and learned to fly here in the late 1930s.

James Edgar Johnson was born in Leicestershire on 9 March 1915 at Barrow-upon-Soar near Loughborough and after education at Loughborough School he qualified as a civil engineer at Nottingham University in 1937.

In his autobiography, *Wing Leader* (1956), he recounts that after a great deal of hard work, cramming and luck in the professional examinations, 1938 saw him at the age of 22 as a fully qualified civil engineer working in Loughton. He joined the Chingford Rugby Club and enjoyed some good games with other young men who were already serving in Territorial organisations, and in one game he was brought down heavily on frozen ground and broke his right collar bone. This break was improperly set, and the nerves to his forearm were trapped below the bone and in 1940 this almost ended his flying career.

Although he twice tried to join the Auxiliary Air Force, they were not very interested in his services unless, on the second occasion, he would like to fly a balloon! He then tried the RAF Volunteer Reserve (where trainee pilots joined as non-commissioned officers and some were commissioned when they got their wings), but with the same result.

Having learnt to ride when young, in desperation he joined the mounted Leicestershire Yeomanry and spent many “enjoyable days charging over the countryside”.

On his return to Loughton there was a letter from the Air Ministry asking if he was still interested in joining the Volunteer Reserve. After medical examination he was told to report to Stapleford Tawney for flying at the weekend and in the long summer evenings. In addition he had to report to Store Street in London on Tuesdays and Thursdays for lectures in navigation, airmanship, armament and

signals, etc. The trainees were warned that if they neglected any of their lectures flying would be stopped immediately.

Flying training at Stapleford was in Tiger Moths while the veterans flew Hawker Hart biplanes. Johnson recalled that "the relative serenity of our small area of sky over Essex was shattered by the appearance of small formations of Hurricanes from the nearby airfield at North Weald . . . 'Keep a sharp lookout for those brutes', warned my instructor. 'They come at you at a terrific speed and, head on, look no bigger than a razor blade.' "

He was mobilised as a sergeant pilot in August 1939 but due to his late training and the collarbone fracture, which had to be operated on, did not see active service until the beginning of 1941. With 616 South Yorkshire Auxiliary Air Force Squadron he joined Douglas Bader's Spitfire Wing at Tangmere in Sussex from where they flew aggressive cross-channel sweeps. Bader invited Johnson to fly in his section and the two men became lifelong friends – Johnson was flying with Bader when the legless pilot was shot down and captured on 9 August 1941.

In July 1942, with his score in double figures, Johnson took over command of 610 (County of Chester) Spitfire squadron at Ludham in Norfolk and in August flew with 12 Group in support of the Dieppe Raid. In March 1943 he took command of the Canadian fighter wing at Kenley where they attacked ground targets and acted as escorts to US 8th Air Force Flying Fortresses with great success. When the Canadian 144 Wing was formed at Digby in Lincolnshire Johnson was picked to command it.

On D-Day, 6 June 1944, Johnson led the wing four times over the Normandy beachhead and later from St Croix-sur-Mer shot down his 28th kill and livened up the mess diet by flying in food and beer. In April 1945 he was promoted to Group Captain and commanded 125 Wing flying Spitfire 14s. After VE Day the wing went to Denmark and after Denmark he was posted in 1947 to Germany to command 124 Wing. After the RCAF Staff College at Toronto, he went on exchange to the US Air Force and served with the Americans in Korea and then commanded RAF Wildenrath in Germany until 1954.

In 1957 he commanded the new Victor V-bomber station at Cottesmore, Rutland. His final command, on promotion to Air Vice-Marshal, was Middle East Air Forces, Aden, which he thought the "best air vice marshal's job in the Air Force".

He retired from the RAF in 1965 and was a director of companies in the UK and abroad and launched and ran the Johnnie Johnson Housing Trust to provide housing and care for the elderly, disabled and vulnerable.

He was never shot down and was only once hit by an enemy fighter, in August 1944 over France. His skill at deflection shooting he said was due to a 12-bore shotgun which he bought at age 17 for wildfowling on the Lincolnshire marshes: "The principles of deflection shooting against wildfowl and aeroplanes were exactly the same, except that aeroplanes could sometimes return your fire."

Air Vice-Marshal J E Johnson, CB, CBE, DSO and 2 bars, DFC and bar, shot down 38 enemy aircraft and was the highest scoring pilot in Fighter Command.

TED MARTIN

The Historian – 2

William Chapman Waller 1850–1917: Loughton’s historian

Richard Morris has written a biography of William Chapman Waller which has just been published by the Society and Mr Morris has contributed the following article, based on his research, which is the third of the series.

The Essex Archaeological Society

There is a bound volume of some 15 pamphlets written by Waller that is now in the possession of the Essex Record Office. Most of the pamphlets are reprints from the transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society. Waller was a very active member of the Society and was its Treasurer for several years. He also contributed articles to the *Essex Review*. Pamphlets in the volume include papers on the following subjects:

- Ship Money in Essex 1634–1640;
- An extinct county family, the Wroths (60pp);
- A note on the Hundred of Ongar;
- Notes on the Harsnett family;
- The Foresters Walks in Waltham Forest (*Essex Review*);
- The Deer of Waltham Forest 1588–1591 (*Essex Review*);
- An account of [the history of] St John’s Church, Loughton;
- Friday Hill and the Boothbys;
- An account of the vanished church of St Nicholas.

Waller also wrote a comprehensive book on the old field names for the whole of Essex.

The Essex Field Club

Living near to Epping Forest, it is not surprising that Waller was an active member of the Essex Field Club for whom he contributed many articles in the *Essex Naturalist*. These include:

- Two Forest Lodges;
- Old Loughton Hall;
- The Epping Hunt;
- Monk Wood in Loughton;
- The old track from London to Epping;
- The Barclay-Johnston MSS relating to Epping Forest.

The Huguenot Society of London

In 1889 Waller was elected a Fellow of the Huguenot Society of London. He quickly became a very active member, researching into the old registers of Huguenot churches. In this he often worked with his friend William Minet. They published books on *The Registers of the Church known as La Patente in Spitalfields*

1689–1785, *The Church at Guines in France 1668–1685* and *Extracts from the Court Minute Books of the Weavers Company of London 1610–1730*. Waller himself produced an important paper on “Early Huguenot Friendly Societies”. He also produced papers on the history of the French Church at Thorpe-Le-Soken (he also edited the Registers) and he completed the work of Mr Moens on the Registers of the Dutch Church at Colchester. He served several terms as a member of the Society’s Council and was a Vice-President. Obituaries in the Society’s Report to Council and the President’s Address at the AGM in 1917 spoke of the valuable services he had rendered the Society during the 28 years that he had been a Fellow.

Other local interests

He was appointed a JP in 1909 sitting on the Epping Bench and was President of the Loughton Mutual Labour-Aid Society which existed from 1891 to 1899. This was effectively a mutual insurance society to which members contributed and which paid unemployment benefit. He also sat on the Management Committee of the Medical Provident Club and was Chairman of the Loughton Horticultural Society.

On one occasion Waller stood for election as a Verderer of Epping Forest. Surprisingly he was not elected but as well as the Buxton family there was competition from some very well known persons who held the office at the turn of the nineteenth century. Later editions of Edward North Buxton’s *Guide to Epping Forest*, first published in 1885, contained an appendix by Waller on the history of Monk Wood and in Buxton’s preface to the book he says: “I am also indebted to my neighbour Mr W C Waller, who has laboriously unearthed and translated many ancient documents which throw light on those laws and practices which have been instrumental in handing down to us our superb fragment of natural forest.”

The Legacy

Waller died suddenly on 28 July 1917 and his funeral took place in the Parish Church at Loughton. The service was led by the Bishop of Barking and a contemporary report stated that there was a large gathering in the church. The President of the Essex Archaeological Society contributed a lengthy obituary summarising Waller’s achievements and likewise the *Essex Review* wrote of his influence throughout Essex as well as Loughton. William Waller, his wife, four children and his Aunt Jane with whom he came to live in Loughton in 1874 are all buried in the family tomb at St. John’s Church in Loughton.

During the 43 years that William Chapman Waller lived in Loughton he was a very active member of the local community and further afield in Essex. In all his various associations he met many people. He will be remembered not only for his academic work but also for the many friendships he made. This was personified in his will under which he left £5 to each of many friends “wherewith to buy a Gold Signet Ring or some other such small memorial of the Friendship we had”.

Raymond Powell in writing volume IV of the *Victoria History of the County of Essex*, in the section on Loughton, refers no less than 44 times to various

publications by Waller! Other local historians have also found him an invaluable source. I am not aware of any other book on the history of Loughton that is as comprehensive and scholarly as *Loughton in Essex* by William Chapman Waller. He can be fairly called "Loughton's Historian".

RICHARD MORRIS

LOUGHTON & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Registered Charity No 287274

President:

Chairman: Dr Chris Pond, Forest Villa, Staples Road, Loughton IG10 1HP (020 8508 2361)

Secretary: John Howes, 97 Staples Road, Loughton IG10 1HR (020 8508 0776)

Treasurer: Mrs Eve Lockington, 19 Spring Grove, Loughton IG10 4QB (020 8508 4995)

Membership Secretary: Ian Strugnell, 22 Hatfields, Loughton IG10 1TJ

Newsletter Editor: Ted Martin, 34 Hornbeam Road, Theydon Bois CM16 7JX (01992 814445)

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