

NEWSLETTER 164

January/February 2005 www.loughtonhistoricalsociety.org.uk Price 20p, free to members

Odds and Ends

Save our Streets. English Heritage, in partnership with the National Federation of Women's Institutes, is promoting a campaign for the improvement of England's streets. Throughout England the beauty and distinctiveness of our historic settlements and landscapes is disappearing under a blizzard of traffic signs, discordant paving schemes, obtrusive road markings and ugly street furniture.

Too readily we accept the ugliness of standardised traffic engineering as an inconvenient necessity for efficient and safe traffic circulation. We put up with the clutter of signs and signals and accept that every street and junction up and down the country has to look the same.

More than 20 different agencies, including different departments in local authorities, are able to install equipment in our streets, without any control or co-ordination, often using council taxpayers' money.

English Heritage is targeting local authority highways engineers and planners with a manual of good practice – *Streets for All* – and is inviting organisations and individuals to carry out an audit of 'clutter' on streets in their locality, and to send it to local councilors.

RICHARD MORRIS

Loughton's Motor Industry – III

JOHN HARRISON

In Newsletter 163 I wrote about Ashley Laminates who in the 1950s and 60s produced bodies for specials, first in premises adjacent to the Robin Hood public-house, then at the Potteries, Upshire, and finally in Harlow. This article describes the products supplied by the company.

The company produced four 'cars' more strictly, bodyshells:

The 750. As its name implies, this was intended to fit pre-war Austin 7s which had a 750cc engine. It was initially built in two sizes to fit the 6ft 3in and 6ft 9in wheelbase chassis, but when Falcon Bodyshells was formed, as already indicated in Part II, that company took with it the rights to build the shorter wheelbase

version and Ashley just manufactured the longer version. According to a price list dated 1 April 1958, it had a length of 11ft 4in and a weight of 85lbs, though a lightweight racing version of 70lbs was also available. The bodyshell cost £78 and the optional 'Gran Turismo' hardtop an extra £25. Credit facilities were available.

The Sports Racer. This was built for wheelbases from 6ft 11in to 7ft 4in and was produced for a few months from early 1956 until Peter Pelladine left to form Falcon Shells and it became the Falcon Mark II. The body was primarily designed for track rather than everyday road use and could be mated to an Elva chassis. Thus, a number of race cars at the time used it.

The 1172. This was built for the Ford Anglia and Popular chassis and in 1960 was lengthened to fit the Ford E93A chassis, the 1938 to 1953 Ford Prefect, thus making a four-seater version an option, Ashley's also introduced its own chassis which could be used with this body. Possible engines included the Ford side-valve from the Prefect (which was 1172cc – hence the car's name), Ford 100E (the 1950s 'three box' versions of the Anglia and Prefect), 105E (the later Anglia with the sloping rear window), and the BMC A-series and MGA engines. There were options of open or closed bodywork. The closed bodywork versions were frequently referred to as the Ashley GT. An interesting book was published at this time called *Ford Special Builder's Manual* which describes the Ashley 1172 and many of its contemporaries. This is interesting not so much for its content but rather its pedigree. Its author was given as 'G B Wake' and it was published by J H Haynes & Co Ltd. G B Wake was in fact a pseudonym for John Haynes and this book was a precursor for the Haynes manuals we are all familiar with today. This book states the closed version of the car was 'about £160' and the open versions were 'available complete for £105'. In fact this is the price for the bodyshell and the price for the closed version was actually £160. Production lasted from 1958–61.

The Sportiva. When I first saw the 'Sportiva' name, I assumed that Ashley must have been way ahead of its time in adopting a name equivalent to the likes of the present-day Mondeo and Vectra, but in fact 'Sportiva' is Italian for sports or sporting. The Sportiva was available as a bodyshell or with an Ashley chassis. Like the 1172 it was available in open or closed form and with two or four seats. I have no information about the engines that could be used in the Sportiva, but it is likely the range was similar to those that could be used in

the 1172. This is because the Sportiva appears to be the same as the 1172 but with a restyled front end, though the rear end of the Sportiva was later restyled so it could take Ashley's longer 8ft wheelbase chassis. The Sportiva was introduced in 1961, but it appears to have been a victim of the collapse of the specials market as it ceased manufacture the following year.



Ashley Sportiva

Production figures for the bodies would give an indication of the scale of the Ashley Laminate enterprise. Though I have been able to obtain some information, I have doubts about how accurate it is. According to the Austin Sevens Club Association, a combined total of 500 to 600 Ashley 750 and Falcon Mark I bodies were produced. I have no information or production numbers for the Sports Racer. Clearly few would have been produced as it was only available for a short period and it was a specialist racer rather than a road car, though more would have been manufactured under its Falcon Mark 2 guise. Production of the 1172 was 'several hundred' according to the *Classic Kit Cars* book but the same book states 'a few' Sportivas were produced, whereas Robert Daniels estimates its production ran into the low hundreds, so this figure may not be very reliable. Robert who runs both the Ashley and Falcon Registers has details of 60 Ashleys which survive, but probably there are others not known to him.

The company sold two chassis; though it is likely these were bought-in components rather than produced by it. One was marketed as the Regent Chassis. A contemporary advertisement for it claimed it offered 'the best performance/price ratio of any product available for home assembly' and 'performance of approx 108 m.p.h. can be attained'. Suggested engines were from the Austin A35, A55 or Ford 100E. The second was known as the Mark VI chassis which somewhat begs the question as to what happened to Marks I to V! This was primarily intended as a chassis for use with the Sportiva body.

Ashley also offered a range of products for special builders. An advertisement in the January 1959 *Car Mechanics* mentions radiators, header tanks, lighting sets, steel tubing, sheet aluminium, various suspension parts, water pumps, tyres, tubes and wheels. These would have been bought-in components. The company also made bonnets and hardtops for other mass-produced sports cars such as the Midget, MGB, Spitfire and E-Type, but it seems to have been particularly noted for its bonnets and hardtops for the Mark I or 'frogeye' Austin Healey Sprite. It is interesting to note that, whilst the advent of the Sprite helped bring about the demise of many special body builders, Ashley stayed in produc-

tion longer than most by producing components for it! The bonnet of the Sprite with its 'frogeyes' was not very attractive and replacing this with a lightweight glass-fibre Ashley one improved the car's appearance and also, of course, its performance. The Ashley bonnet used the headlights, grille and badge from the original car bonnet. The Ashley Sprite hardtop made the car look somewhat top heavy and ugly, so if you added one of these to your car it counteracted the improvement in appearance achieved from the new bonnet!

Finally I should mention that Ashley Laminates had one small but notable place in motoring history. In Britain the Reliant Company is known for its manufacture of three-wheeler cars and also its innovative Scimitar GTE. A less well-known aspect of the company's work has been helping develop other countries' motor industries. One such project with Autocars of Israel was the development of a sports car known as the Sabra. The name was chosen as it was the name of a cactus found only in Israel and used as its national emblem. Sabra was also an affectionate term used to describe a young active Israeli. This sports car was then produced in England as Reliant's first four-wheeled car, and the Reliant Sabre was chosen as a suitable name by a simple adaptation from the Israeli one. To provide a body for these two cars Reliant acquired the rights to and adapted that of the Ashley 1172.

In writing this article I would particularly like to acknowledge Robert Daniels and his website, www.1950sspecials.com

Other information provided comes from Colin Ward, Bert Miller, www.motorsnippets.com, www.peterenn.clara.net, www.scimitarweb.com, the Austin Sevens Club Association, Epping Forest District Council Planning Department and the books, *Ford Special Builder's Manual*, *British Specialist Cars* by Chris Rees (Windrowe & Green Automotive, 1993) and *Classic Kit Cars*, Vol 2, by Chris Rees (Filby Files, 1997). Robert Daniels is researching Ashley Laminates, Falcon Bodies and also Naco which built bodies for specials in Lindsey Street, Epping. If anybody can provide more information about these firms, please contact me on 020 8508 8851 or harrison@unisonfree.net.

50 Years in Staples Road

JOHN AND DAPHNE HOWES

'There seems, however, to be a want of energy, and an unwillingness to move from their native place, which greatly characterise the inhabitants.'

[*Description of Loughton residents written in 1861.*]

Most of Staples Road is built upon one side only; on the south, a school and in Victorian times a 'retreat' for East End children; on the north, unrestricted access to some of the finest parts of Epping Forest.

Over the 50 years we have lived in the road much that has altered simply reflects nationwide changes so we have tried to concentrate on those aspects of the area which are perhaps special to it.

When we moved into our modest but detached 30's house (price £1,950) in January 1954 many of our neighbours had already lived in the road for several years. The older neighbours knew the Forest very well and often made forages into it to gather fallen wood to burn on open fires. A few joined the Friday afternoon trek to the 'Warren' to buy more wood using home-made barrows. The burning of wood filled the autumn and winter evening air with the delightful scent of wood smoke. During our first 10 years in residence smoke abatement regulations spread to the outer suburbs and eventually only smokeless fuel could be used. Residents seemed to be far more willing to wander in the Forest than seems to be the case 50 years later, yet there is little that suggests the Forest is more dangerous now, except perhaps for the occasional rogue mountain-biker riding at speed giving no warning of his or her approach!

School Green (we do not think anyone called it that 50 years ago) was hardly ever cut except when wandering cattle cropped it in an environmentally friendly manner. As a result it was quite rich in wild flowers, and butterflies flourished on the nettles on the edges which remained untouched by the then not invented power strimmer. The green opposite Staples Road Schools was also for many years used as an open-air classroom in fine weather.

The Forest being just opposite was a wonderful bonus when snow fell, as it seemed to do more often in the past. Local children only had to cross the road to toboggan on the nearby forest slopes, usually with simple sledges or even tin trays. The same slopes in the other school holidays were excellent for riding the home made go-carts that the children built using wheels from prams no longer needed in the family. Great skill was needed to steer and more importantly stop these before hitting trees or crashing into Loughton Brook. Any child producing a shop-purchased go-cart would have been met with derision, building and repairing your own was vital.

The reservoir fed by Loughton Brook at the western end of the road had been a potential flooding problem since 1947 and over the years small schemes had been carried out to raise the embankment facing the road. However, on 4 June 1982, after a thunderstorm that lasted over 1 hour, the culvert under the road could not cope and houses at the lower end of the recently built Shaftesbury were flooded. The flood reached Loughton High Road causing chaos. As a result, the various statutory bodies involved planned a far higher embankment some 6 metres above the level of the existing pond. Most local residents thought this was out of all proportion to the problem, especially as, apart from some of the houses in Shaftesbury, houses in Staples Road were hardly affected by the floods. The work was completed

in 1996 and although at first, whilst it still seemed high, it did provide an attractive addition to the road. Seeds were spread on it so that now Spring brings forth carpets of cowslips and other wild flowers. Birds also seem to like this area, Kingfishers and herons may occasionally be seen only a few yards from the noisy suburban shopping centre. The bank has never been tested but perhaps with global warming and rising rainfall future generations will be glad it was constructed.

The other major change was making the road into a cul-de-sac. This obviously reflects the huge increase in traffic over 50 years. As the High Road became more congested and busy, Staples Road became a proverbial 'rat run'. With schools in the road the risks were too great and within quite a short period after a public meeting, on 8 March 1992, the road was closed at the western end just before the Shaftesbury estate of houses. Later in 1998 this section of Staples Road was renamed Shaftesbury. To make Staples Road a cul-de-sac there was the need to provide a hammerhead turning point. The Conservators of Epping Forest agreed to this, providing the exact amount of Forest land given up for it was returned. As a result the section of the previous road, now renamed Shaftesbury, was made narrower by a strip of land that became Forest land. Proof that the Corporation of London indeed cares for the Forest.

There have been few major changes to the south residential side of the road except, as previously mentioned, the replacement of the Shaftesbury Retreat site in the 1970s by a small housing development also named Shaftesbury. The original Shaftesbury Superintendent's house, however, still remains almost untouched and the Society's interpretative board also reminds locals and visitors of this facility that once provided a day in the country for East End children. 'Kent House', a double-fronted house that was situated a short distance from the west end of Staples Road Schools was demolished during the 1960s and the site used to provide extra playground space. During 2003/4 Nos 19 and 21 were almost completely rebuilt and converted into one double-fronted house in a Victorian style. The original buildings were called Willingale Cottage having been built in 1869 by Joseph Willingale. One of these two cottages was used as a tea room and shop patronised by visitors to the Forest.

Outwardly the two Staples Road Schools have changed very little, however, much of the interiors have been altered. The Victorian external lavatories are still standing in the playground but, in the 1960s, these were replaced by modern interior toilets much to the relief of the pupils! The playground has been extended to the west and a small outdoor teaching area built. The school bell is no longer rung to summon children to school just before 9 am by a lucky pupil as it was when our children went there. However, in our garden we can still hear the pleasant sounds of playtime and note the sudden silence that falls when a far smaller handbell is rung. Daily during term times we also see parents and children going to and from the school as has been hap-

pening now in Staples Road for far longer than we have lived there. Now local estate agents add 'within the Staples Road Schools catchment area' to adverts for houses in the area, something that was never mentioned when we purchased ours. The nationwide problems resulting from the 'school runs' mean that residents have to avoid these times, a small price to pay for the definite advantages of living in the road. However, more parents seem to be joining 'walking buses' to walk children to school instead of joining the daily chaos of driving to school. School firework displays in the playground are no longer held near to 5 November, possibly due to a greater concern for safety. Our own children were taken for guided walks by the Loughton historian Ernie Rule, a most popular activity in the years when there were fewer school trips than today. Similar tours of the immediate area still take place but visits further afield are more often arranged.

Much has therefore changed in 50 years especially at the rear of the houses that those walking along the road cannot see. Few fruit trees have survived from the orchard on which our thirties houses were built, and the once low dividing fences or hedges between the rear gardens have been replaced by 4–6 foot-high lap panelled fencing making 'chatting over the garden fence' almost impossible. We even had gates in both our elderly neighbours' fences which enabled us to keep in touch with them.

The Forest fortunately has been well cared for by the Conservators, and by just crossing the road residents can still enjoy it through the changing seasons. Strangely, as previously noted, fewer now seem to venture deep into it and no longer is fallen wood collected as fuel. Hopefully the excellent guides being issued by the Corporation of London may tempt more to explore the wonderful asset, which in the case of residents of Staples Road, is 'right on our doorsteps'.

So, why do we call it Theydon Bois?

TED MARTIN

The *Victoria County History* is unequivocal: 'It takes its distinctive name from the family of Bois (de Bosco) which held the manor in the 12th and 13th centuries.' This would accord with Theydon Garnon which takes its name from the Gernon family which held the manor from the 13th century, although 'Theydon Boys' was

known by that name in 1253 – nearly a century before 'Theydon Gernon' appeared in the records.

The French word for wood is of course 'bois' and the Anglo-Norman version of the word is 'boys'. The Italian word is 'bosco'. Therefore, whether the name comes from the de Bosco family or the wood in which the manor was situated, it means the same thing.

It seems that the original spelling was 'Boys' and that this was retained until the early eighteenth century.

However, the explanation of the name Theydon is not so straightforward. It is now thought to have derived from 'valley where thatch (material) grows'. (Perhaps reed beds by the River Roding?) It was once thought to come from 'Taindena', meaning the lordship on the hill, which was the description used in the Domesday Book, or from the Saxon 'Thegn Dun' meaning Thane's Hill.

Sources: *Victoria County History* (1956) and internet; *Theydon Bois through Victorian Eyes* and *A Guide to Theydon Bois* (1964), both published by the Theydon Bois Rural Preservation Society and now out of print.

The Boudicca legends

ALAN W SMITH

It has now been probably been proved that Boudicca had little or no connection with this area except, perhaps in passing through it on her way to defeat. However, I recently found the following press cutting from the *Evening Standard* of 25 May 1974:

'One of the largest near London private estates is being sold by Sir Thomas Buxton whose family have owned it for more than a century.

The land, extending to more than five hundred acres is at Woodredon and Warlies Park, Upshire. . . .

The estate has legendary connections with Queen Boadicea. An obelisk stands on the spot where she is said to have taken poison after defeat by the Romans. There is another obelisk about a mile away where Boadicea died.'

Allowing for journalistic licence, it would be nice to know whether these monuments still exist.

After all, there have been all sorts of tales, for example, final defeat at Ambresbury Banks, the 'grave' on Hampstead Heath and burial under Platform 7 at Kings Cross (previously known as Battlebridge).

Failing amazing revelations by Time Team, after a dig at Ambresbury Banks or Loughton Camp, these must remain just legends.

LOUGHTON & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Registered Charity No 287274 www.loughtonhistoricalsociety.org.uk

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

Secretary: Richard Morris, 6 High Gables, Loughton IG10 4EZ (020 8508 4974)

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)

All rights reserved. © 2005 Loughton & District Historical Society. Printed by Riverside Press, Ipswich