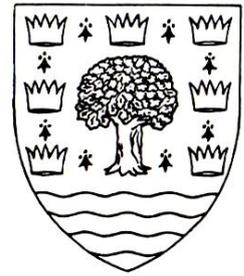


Ilford Historical Society

Newsletter No.117 April 2015



Editor: Georgina Green 020 8500 6045, georgina.green@btconnect.com

Our website can be found at: <http://ilfordhistoricalsociety.weebly.com/>

See the British Library website
<http://www.bl.uk/magna-carta>
to view the document and read
more articles.



MAGNA CARTA: The Pen Is Mightier Than The Sword?

There are any number of important anniversaries this year: the Abbey Church at Barking Abbey was rebuilt in 1215, Ilford's serious rail crash 1915, the London Borough of Redbridge founded 50 years ago in 1965 (an account of this is given later in the newsletter), and even serious national ones: Agincourt 1415, Waterloo 1815, Gallipoli 1915, the end of World War II in 1945. But standing above them all is Magna Carta- The Great Charter- signed at Runnymede beside the Thames on 15th June 1215 possibly around a yew tree.

Sealed in wax 800 years ago, it has stood as a symbol of good government asserting the principle of the rule of law. King John (Plantagenet, reigned 1199-1216) was under pressure from his 25 most powerful barons who felt that their privileges and status were under threat, and they in turn twisted his arm to enshrine their rights into law. Some of the Charter's 3,550 words are still in force today and placed a series of restrictions on John. It limited his ability to take money in an arbitrary manner, sparked by his harsh treatment of his subjects and his military defeat in Normandy, insisting he no longer sell, deny or delay justice. Of course those on the fringes of society such as serfs or villeins were not taken into account- and neither were women: not one is mentioned in any of the 63 chapters. The charter was also designed as a peace treaty, the result of which was a civil war.

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Newsletter Grant

Summer 2015 Programme

Our thanks to Glyn Hopkin Ltd for awarding a grant towards the printing of this newsletter

Magna Carta could have been lost at this point but survived because John died in 1216 and his nine year old son Henry (Henry III 1216-1272) accepted what his father had rejected and issued a new version of the charter in the hope of tempting the rebels back to his side. He won the war and so to win the peace issued a second version in 1217. In 1225, in return for a great tax, he issued what became the final, definitive version. It was this charter, very similar to John's of 1215, that somehow survived through the ages and remains on the UK's Statute Book to this day because it asserted our fundamental principles of law. The king could no longer arbitrarily seize property or individuals just as he wanted. There had to be due process of law. The barons, earls and knights had, accidentally, stumbled upon principles which could be widened over hundreds of years, to encompass everyone's benefit.

But of course some kings believed they had the right to rule as they wished by divine right of God. It took a savage civil war to prove kings didn't have any such divine right, and that along with taxation, went representation. Parliamentarians championed Magna Carta in their arguments against King Charles I, citing the document as the embodiment of an entirely mythical ancient constitution stretching back to an equally mythical King Arthur. In America a 'due process' clause directly derived from the Magna Carta was incorporated into constitution law promising that "no person shall be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law", words which are in the 5th Amendment of the 1789 US Constitution. Cartoons often appeared showing the colonists sitting under the tree of liberty whose branches blossomed with Magna Carta. Seventeen states in America embody the Magna Carta fully within their statute books and this is one reason why more of the Magna Carta survives in the USA than in British law. These rights appear in Articles 8, 9, and 11 of the United Nations 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

© *Jef Page, February 2015.*

Redbridge Achieves its Half Century

The London Borough of Redbridge came into existence on 1 April 1965. So it will have existed for 50 years on 31 March 2015.

The London Government Act 1963 provided for a number of local authorities in the London conurbation to become 32 boroughs (plus the City of London) from 1965. In the case of the borough that became Redbridge this comprised an amalgamation of the municipal Borough of Ilford, municipal Borough of Wanstead & Woodford, the northern part of the municipal Borough of Dagenham (to the north of Chadwell Heath) and the southern part of the Urban District of Chigwell.

Ilford had long had an ambition to achieve county borough status and, to this end, promoted unsuccessfully no fewer than 5 bills in parliament. This status would have given the council the powers to provide services for which they depended on Essex County Council. The powers granted by the 1963 Act gave almost all such powers to outer London boroughs, and broke the historic administrative link with Essex.

The first elections to Redbridge took place in 1964 establishing a shadow authority for one year comprising 60 councillors who became responsible for electing 10 aldermen. At their first meeting they elected Alderman Harold Cowan as Chairman, and Alderman Mrs Julia Roberts as Deputy Chairman. The wards then known as Barkingside, Bridge, Cranbrook, Chadwell, Mayfield, Seven Kings, Snaresbrook, Wanstead, and Woodford (later Monkams)

each elected 4 councillors whilst the remainder - Aldborough, Clayhall, Clementswood, Fairlop, Goodmayes, Hainault, Ilford (later Loxford), and Park each elected 3. The first Mayor of Redbridge (1965) was Councillor Sydney Loveless whose brother, Charles, was also to become mayor in 1971.

From May 1978 the office of alderman was abolished throughout the country except in the city of London. In Redbridge ward boundaries were changed to create 21 wards from the previous 17, each returning three councillors.

One objective of the 1963 Act had been to ensure that all large housing estates came under one authority. Thus the whole of Hainault Estate came into Redbridge. It had been previously split between Ilford, Dagenham, and Chigwell. For some reason those drawing the new borough boundaries did not apply this to the huge Becontree Estate which, prior to 1965, had spread across three boroughs – Barking, Dagenham, and Ilford. The Barking and Dagenham parts of the estate came under the London Borough of Barking (as it was first known) from 1 April 1965, but the Ilford part was placed in Redbridge. This changed on 1 April 1995 when the entire estate came within Barking & Dagenham. The Padnall Estate transferred to the same borough (it too was previously shared) and parts of Epping Forest District close to Roding Valley station came into Redbridge.

Initially no agreement could be reached between the two major partners regarding the name of the new borough. The rules deriving from the 1963 Act gave no guidance beyond saying that there should be no joining of names. [This rule, however, did not prevent one borough being called Kensington & Chelsea and, at later dates, Hammersmith becoming Hammersmith & Fulham and Barking becoming Barking & Dagenham.] So the compromise was reached for the new borough to be called Redbridge in recognition of the historic bridge over the River Roding that had historically linked the two boroughs.

Over the years Redbridge has become well known for many of its features – the large amount of recreational and forest land, some of its historical buildings such as the Hospital Chapel on Ilford Hill as well as Valentines Mansion, the county cricket matches that used to attract thousands to Valentines Park, its high performing education service that has led to over-subscription on many school places, the excellence of the Kenneth More Theatre and the good shopping facilities in Ilford before the major developments in Stratford and Romford. These developments have clearly affected the commercial prosperity of Ilford. The closure or departure of not only shops but also major industries such as Ilford Ltd, Plessey, Balfour Marine, and Kelvin Hughes have also left their mark on the borough and its prosperity.

So, just an outline of Redbridge from birth to its 50th year. What will the next 50 years bring? The council has various plans, too numerous to describe here. Perhaps as a practising cynic I might say that the only certainty is that many of them will be eventually abandoned.

© **Morris Hickey, 16 February 2015**

Morris served as a councillor in Redbridge from 1978 to 1990, and again from 1994 to 2006. He was for a time Deputy Leader, and in 2005/6 served as Deputy Mayor. We are very grateful for his contribution.



*Councillor Sydney Loveless with his Mayoress, 1965 -66
Courtesy of Redbridge Information & Heritage (2015)*

The Story of Harrison Gibson: Ilford's famous High Road furniture store

The Harrison Gibson stores played a prominent part in retailing in Ilford during almost the whole of the 20th century. Most retail outlets have traditionally traded under the family name, and the Harrison Gibson company was founded by Mr John Harrison Gibson. This Mr



John Harrison Gibson

Gibson, the first one in our story, was born in 1859 in Robin Hood's Bay, Yorkshire. He married Mary Jane (known as Polly) Coggin and they had 4 children, a boy also John, and 3 daughters, Helen, Frances and Hilda. Although his family were mariners, this hazardous occupation was not thought suitable for young John and so he was apprenticed in the furniture trade in Whitby, later becoming manager of a store in Newcastle. After a time he moved south to another managerial post in Newington Causeway but soon decided to strike out on his own. At this time Ilford had a population of about 32,000 and was expanding rapidly so no doubt this influenced him to choose it as the location for his new enterprise, opening his store in the High

Road in 1902. He also made his family home in the town, living for some years in The Drive. His new enterprise was a success and he soon expanded, acquiring the premises next door. He seems to have had the personal touch, with customers and staff alike, his creed was not merely to sell furniture and furnishings, but to give service. And so began his empire, well maybe just a small one, but bigger than just the Ilford store, as eventually there were stores in Bromley, Bedford, Doncaster, Manchester and Halifax.

John Harrison Gibson died in 1924 and was succeeded by his son, John C Gibson who had also served an apprenticeship in the furniture trade. He was married in 1914 to Miss Ethel Gilbert who worked with him in the business. When WW1 was declared he soon saw war service with a London Regiment (Inns of Court), was later commissioned in the Worcesters and sadly lost a leg when hit by an explosive shell during the Somme campaign. He returned to War Office duties in 1917 and was demobbed on Armistice Day 1918. He faced a further testing time only two months after his father's death when a fault occurred in the electrical wiring of the Ilford store and a disastrous fire ensued – the premises was completely destroyed (fire no 1). But by the following Saturday John C Gibson was back in business using what remained of the warehouses as temporary showrooms, and within a year a new store was built. The Bromley store was also built during his time (1935) and he kept things going during the Second World War when there was no new furniture to be had. He scoured the country for second-hand pieces which could be renovated and resold, and this also gave employment to up to 50 elderly men experienced in this trade. He also played a part in Ilford community life - his daughters attended Glenarm College and he would give the services of his workshop staff to make and help with props and scenery for the shows put on by the college in the Town Hall.



Mr. John C. Gibson

His son, John G Gibson, also served in the armed forces during the Second World War with the Essex and E Yorkshire Regiments, and then in 1947 joined the company taking over an existing business in Bedford (1947) then later opening stores in Doncaster (1953), Manchester (1954) and Halifax (1955). They also ran a furniture factory in Romford where their brand range of "Hainault" upholstery was made. So business was good, there were plans to expand

onto the Continent, and at their Ilford flagship store, the brightest and boldest venture – two luxurious roof garden restaurants which they claimed would match the best in London, New York and Paris.

But on the night of 16th March 1959 when John G Gibson was in Milan on business, his telephone rang. It was the manager of the Ilford store – the building was on fire. The



High Road, Ilford before the disastrous Harrison Gibson's fire on March 16, 1959.

fire broke out at about 7.30pm and quickly spread along the High Road engulfing Harrison Gibsons and Moultons department store, and 12 smaller shops – including 2 jewellers, a men's outfitters, a shoe shop, a furriers, a bakers - the flames leaping across the 50 ft High Road. Police ran down neighbouring Havelock Street and Willow Walk to evacuate houses and they interrupted a school speech day being attended by 200 boys at the Town Hall. Thousands of people flocked in to see the fire, cars clogged the side streets, people ducked and screamed as windows burst with reports like gunfire. A water main and a gas main burst, electricity was cut off over a wide area, the trolley bus service was suspended. Trains also were stopped because of the danger of the warehouse buildings at the rear of the store falling onto the track. The local Fire Brigade and 4 others from across the county, one from as far away as Harwich, attended the fire, using 40 pumps and 200 firemen, 3 of whom needed hospital treatment. The fire was finally brought under control by midnight, but the store was completely destroyed with the additional loss of about £900,000 worth of stock, and an estimated £2 million pounds worth of property in Ilford High Road destroyed.

So, when John G Gibson got that fateful telephone call, he listened to a running commentary on the ruin of his business, gave a list of orders for what to do and how to do it when the fire was out and booked an airline seat for London. On his return the next morning he posted a notice outside the store which stated that Harrisons Gibson was reopening on the Saturday morning – just 72 hours after the fire – and that plans for rebuilding the premises were already being prepared. So, using part of the warehouse premises which had escaped the fire, designs were drawn up and stock brought in. The staff – not one of the 200 employees were laid off –



Mr John G. Gibson

worked long hours and on that Saturday morning at 9am the doors were opened to the public. The manager later reported that business was brisker than usual, and it was a proud moment for all concerned. Many local people will remember the night of the fire and will also have watched the new store being built – rising to 11 stories at over a hundred feet high and with one of the largest frontages on the High Road. Within the building it was very spacious, by staggering the floor levels it was possible for the customer to see the floor above as well as the one on which they were standing. Trading on seven floors it offered a full range of home furnishings, together with basement car parking, baby crèche, record department, theatre ticket agency, travel bureau, and interior decoration advisory centre. And on top, literally, of all this was the

Chariot Wheel Restaurant and the Room at the Top Nightclub. But most important throughout the company ethos was the essential Harrison Gibson friendliness, with staff happy to help but not to harass. At the same time, a huge extension programme was taking place at the Bromley store. That building was also to suffer a major fire in 1965. It may seem that the stores were prone to this sort of disaster, and rumours abounded regarding insurance claims etc, but this was the era of non flame-retardant materials in upholstery and also before the installation of sprinkler systems, so that a fire, once started would have plenty of combustible material to feed the flames.

By the mid to late 1960s the business became overstretched, financial difficulties set in, and the Company failed. The Official Receiver was appointed and the stores were sold off to various new owners, with the Ilford store coming under the ownership of Waring & Gillow, but it continued to trade under the Harrison Gibson name and use the well known HG logo. The trading shop floor space eventually reduced to just 4 floors, with offices in the rear annex. Most of the other upper floors were used for storage, but some space was rented out to various businesses for office use. Staff there

reported that the building often shook when laden freight trains passed along the railway tracks. The restaurant closed but the Room at the Top night club continued for many years. Then in 1987 came another reinvention for the HG store when, following a further change of ownership and management, the building's pavement frontage, and the 1st and 2nd floors underwent radical redesign. The glass arcades fronting the pavement were lost, and the present entrance was installed, with an



Harrison Gibson's store in 1987

interior escalator to the 1st floor. For the next 20 years or so the store still traded furniture but on a much reduced scale with other areas selling household goods and furnishings, plus fancy goods and fashions, run under franchise. Business declined and at the time of writing the ground floor has been leased out for the sale of a variety of goods. The Harrison Gibson store has now become a very sorry sight but there are proposals, yet to materialise, to redevelop the building for retail, hotel and residential use.

Thanks to Redbridge Local Studies and Archives, and London Borough of Bromley Library Services

© *Janet Plimmer, 6 January 2015*

Ian Dowling

Ian Dowling has retired after nearly 25 years running Local Studies in Ilford, now rebranded Redbridge Information and Heritage (RI&H), having joined them from Newham. His knowledge of the local area was excellent and he could remember where to find all sorts of sources and archives for researchers and historians and it was he who put me onto the Ilford Antiquarians manuscript in Colchester library which I got returned to Redbridge.

Quietly spoken, very helpful and often prepared to sit and talk with the public who brought in items to donate to local studies and the museum, he had very sharp views about conservation

issues, particularly related to conserving old buildings where he often fought a losing battle. Ian was never too keen on going out and giving talks to the public on Redbridge's history where he seemed ill at ease but he completed one booklet on the history of Valentines Park and two jointly authored books of Redbridge's history using old photographs. Trouble with his eyes led to operations and being unable to drive made life difficult getting around. A few years ago when RI&H was under great pressure to be closed we worked hard along with his wife to lobby the council for its preservation and in this we were successful.

We wish Ian well in his retirement. And his successor? A Mrs Susan Page - we wish her well too! Her job description has changed as Sue is a Development Librarian - local studies is a specialist reference library and a great resource - running RI&H looking at digital issues and reorganising the stock, and going into schools and training volunteers showing them what sources are available. I'm teaching her everything I know!

Jef Page, Chairman. 4 March 2015

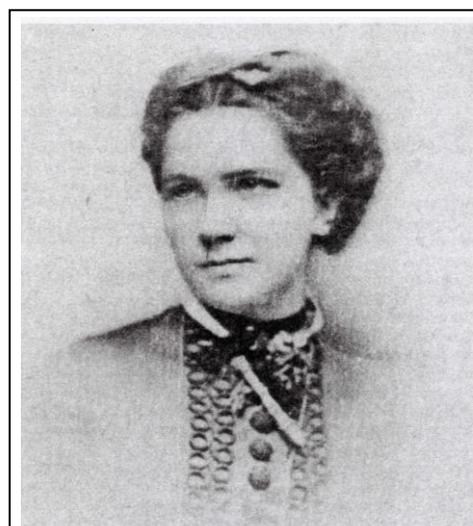
Lucy Walford (1845 – 1915)

Iford has another centenary to commemorate this year with the death of Lucy Walford on 11 May 1915. Hers may not be a name which is familiar to you, but at the end of the nineteenth century she was a popular and respected authoress. Lucy was born on 17 April 1845 in Edinburgh where her parents lived in considerable affluence. Her mother, Frances (Fanny) Fuller-Maitland, was a poet and hymn writer while her father, John Colquhoun, was a sportsman and naturalist who was author of *The Moor and the Loch*.

In her book *Recollections of a Scottish Novelist* Lucy tells how her mother was brought up at Park Place, Henley-on-Thames, but came across the border into Scotland to marry the son of a Highland chief, "a dashing young cavalry officer, with blue eyes and curling hair." As well as the house in Edinburgh, the family travelled about Scotland to rented estates where her father could enjoy country sports, but also visited Henley-on-Thames each summer.

Lucy was educated at home by German governesses and was an avid reader. She was encouraged to take up painting and exhibited work at the annual Royal Scottish Academy exhibition for several years from 1868. Lucy also started writing and her first article *The Merchant's Sermon* was published in the *Sunday Magazine* in May 1869.

A few weeks later, on 23 June 1869, Lucy married Mr Alfred Saunders Walford at St John's Episcopal Church in Edinburgh. He was born in Manchester and there is no explanation as to how they met, but the couple made a promise that they would retain their links with Lucy's home in Edinburgh. The entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* says she married "Alfred Saunders Walford, magistrate, of Cranbrook Hall, Ilford, Essex, and they moved to London." However, looking at the census and the places where their children were born it seems clear that their first home was in Cheshire. In 1871 they were living at Bromborough and in 1881 at Hooton, both places between Birkenhead and Ellesmere Port. It appears that the Walfords moved to



Lucy Walford © Kylin Archive

Cranbrook Hall in 1886, by which time Lucy was a celebrated authoress and mother of six children. Only her last baby was shown as born at Ilford.

Lucy's first book *Mr Smith: A part of his life* was published on 10 October 1874 and was a great success. It is a light-hearted account of middle-class family life in a country village and although the British Library has many of Lucy's novels, *Mr Smith* is regarded as a rare book. From the time I was able to spend looking at it, the writing seems full of witty observations and the style is reminiscent of Jane Austen. Even Queen Victoria enjoyed reading it and Lucy had the honour of being presented to her at Buckingham Palace the following year. Encouraged by this success Lucy continued writing and by the time she died 40 years later had published more than forty-five books. She also contributed to a number of magazines and from 1889 – 1893 was the London correspondent for *The Critic*, a New York-based publication.

Meanwhile, her husband Arthur had worked as a General Produce Broker in Cheshire but by 1891 he is shown in the census as a Magistrate and Paper Maker living at Cranbrook Hall. Most of the children were shown with their parents on the night of the census. The oldest was



Arthur Walford, drawn by his wife
© Kylin Archive

a son, Desborough C Walford, aged 19, who was described as a Publishers Assistant. They employed several live-in servants: a cook and a kitchen maid, two housemaids, a parlour maid and a nurse (the youngest child was only aged three). It is hard to imagine the drudgery of writing in those days when everything was written out by hand and, once finished to the satisfaction of the author, had to be copied out two or even three times before being published. With Lucy's prodigious output, she obviously needed all the domestic help available.

The Walfords left Cranbrook Hall in 1899 and by 1901 were living at 17 Warwick Square, Pimlico. Alfred died on 31 July 1907 but Lucy continued living there and carried on writing. Her last novel was published in 1914 and she died at Warwick Square on 11 May 1915. By the time of her death, Lucy's books had fallen out of fashion and, coming just a

week after the *Lusitania* was torpedoed, the *Times* (14 May 1915, page 5) did not publish a lengthy obituary. Having outlined her life it continued "She was one of those novelists who achieve a perfectly legitimate success by producing an immense number of attractive domestic love-tales hardly one of which probably will live, but which always display knowledge of life, a quiet humour, and a keen sympathy with warm hearts and noble lives." It ended "She had a wide and appreciative public, and one of the testimonies to her success which she most appreciated with regard at any rate to one of her books was hearing Mr Gladstone, in Chester Station, call out of a railway carriage window after a retreating figure, "If you want the third volume of 'Troublesome Daughters' you will find it on the little table beside my bed."

The two principal sources are given in the text. In addition, George Caunt's *Ilford's Yesterdays* (pp.117-8) gives a charming account of Lucy's life at Cranbrook Hall as described by Helen Black, a journalist who visited to interview her. Lack of space prevents me quoting from this.

© Georgina Green, 4 March 2015

Iford Antiquarians 1913-15: A Footnote in History ⁽¹⁾

Rewriting articles is a cheap way of doing history as it saves all the effort of making original research. I like it as it allows me to go over old research where I can follow up leads I couldn't complete when the article was first published. This was especially true in the case of the Antiquarians where I have found new (to me) material on Andrew Tait thanks to Bill George and Sarah Lynch, and the search for more information on C T Wolcko goes on.

Ian Dowling knew I was interested in anything regarding earlier local historical societies and it was he who originally put me onto Ilford Historical Society's illustrious forerunner: Ilford Antiquarians. He mentioned that he'd seen a manuscript/book in Colchester library so in 1998 I journeyed up there to see for myself.

Amazingly "ILFORD ANTIQUARIANS & ESSEX NOTES 1913-15" was still on the open shelves and records the flowering of the fledgling society: not an auspicious time to start anything civilized or peaceful. It is essentially a scrapbook of press cuttings of members visits, rambles around Essex, ephemera, Notes and Queries and other heritage articles. They had an excellent organizer and publicist in Charles Tyndall Wolcko who dedicated the book to "Aimee, the story of a Belgian Refugee", May 1915. As usual with all our great local historians of the time he clipped the dates off the newspaper articles they were from, making dating them very difficult and time consuming.

The Antiquarians were founded around September 1913 after Wolcko, the driving force, got a letter published in the *Iford Guardian*. He'd had an earlier one printed describing a visit he'd made to the Natural History Museum to see the fossil collection dug up at Uphall, Ilford (the famous mammoth skull) and told of his surprise that there was no antiquarian society in Ilford: an area full of history. Of Polish extraction, Catholic and a keen church-goer, he knew his subject and mentioned the Hospital Chapel and the Angel Inn. He stated his interests in 'Notes and Queries' where readers sought answers to historical questions and he sought members to found a local society for rambles, discussions, and lantern lecture shows "by well known antiquarians". He flattered the editor by ending his short letter by saying that with his help and publicity success was assured. Wolcko was a publicity department clerk for a tourist agency but which one is not known. He was right and within a few weeks got his wish. Some who saw or heard about his letter wrote back to him and surprisingly the replies are still kept unbound in the book.

On 17th September Harold Foster wrote from Ireland saying he was very keen, had visited many of Essex's local churches but business kept him in Dublin. A week later he sent Wolcko a postcard offering the names and addresses of those he thought might be interested i.e. Hart, Snow and Tyson.

Gladys Tyson wrote to Wolcko saying that she hadn't seen his original letter but wanted details. H W Scowfield wrote of his interest and concern about "the lack of organized facilities". Ilford didn't have a library until 1927 and Seven Kings library had only opened in 1909. A keen but a novice researcher he mentioned that the *Guardian's* 'Notes and Queries' seemed 'desultory and unconnected'.

But it was Andrew Carlyle Tait's letter that really caught my eye as it would do anyone - a minor miracle that the letter even survived. Letter writing and diary keeping was perhaps more important then, a key way of keeping in contact and communication, part of a dying art in today's world of quick text-speak. It's a long, beautifully written letter, in black-ink

copperplate, overly ambitious if far-sighted, detailing the aims and objectives of how the new society should operate. He mentions Records, Study and Public Work; acquisition of maps, panoramic views of streets and old threatened buildings to be photographed; deeds, books and relics to be indexed; materials to be collected; information from the public to be gathered who might remember old Ilford and the Ley Street stocks and cage; public lectures to be given by men such as “Tasker or the Rev Lach-Szyrma but preferably men of mature experience”⁽²⁾; excavations and conservation of old buildings to “keep them out of the hands of profiteers” who would simply knock them down; exhibitions, loans and even in the future “the possibility of a new museum”. Disappointingly he only wanted a small elite society: “half a dozen members... of the right sort”. I assume it’s the founder members who are listed and I’m not sure if they paid a membership fee. The Antiquarians are not listed as a society in *Kelly’s Directory of Ilford* for 1915. No officers are named, and there are no accompanying Minutes or AGM papers nor even where they met, but the 11 listed below (by Wolcko?) in 1915 were:

AW Brown	Institute of Patent Agents, Staple Inn, EC
WA Cocks	34 High Road, Ilford
Harold Foster	12 Kenilworth Gardens, Seven Kings
P Hart	161 Pembroke Road, Seven Kings
H W Scowfield	76 De Vere Gardens, Ilford
Miss Helen G Souter	4 Valentines Road, Ilford
A Carlyle Tait	36 Farnham Road, Seven Kings
G E Tasker	84 Mayfair Avenue, Ilford
Miss Gladys M E Tyson	“Trefriw”, Airlie Gdns, Ilford
W Wyster	87 Eastwood Road, Goodmayes
C T Wolcko	142 Kinfauns Road, Goodmayes

There’s a complete list of visits and rambles - natural history being perhaps more important than. Between September 1913 – April 1915 they visited Brentwood, Clacton, Chelmsford, Eastbury Hall, Greensted, Lavender Mount (Uphall), Little Ilford, Ingatestone, Rainham, Saffron Walden, Waltham Abbey, Ilford Hospital Chapel, Valentines and many other places of interest. Visits took place once a month on Saturdays and the first news cutting is entitled “An Essex Idyll” as Wolcko described a saunter around picturesque, ivy-covered Essex: poetic, lyrical, romantic and nostalgic.

Superb amateur photographers like headmaster Alfred Wire (1839-1914) and Fred Spalding (1858-1947) were taking their cameras out into Essex to record rural life, William Morris had extolled a bygone age, John Passmore Edwards was endowing new museums as was the Andrew Carnegie foundation who provided funds for Seven Kings library.

There is less emphasis on talks held on Mondays but some were reported: there were at least three on the Flemish connection to Essex. The subject was clearly chosen to show solidarity with the Belgian refugees at Valentines Mansion after 1914 and I’m sure Wolcko was involved with them. The Secretary (?) read the lecture in November 1914 but the report doesn’t name he or she. The talk recalled the Flemish refugees who settled in Colchester and Halstead in the 16th century introducing a new kind of cloth: “New Drapies”, the most important being ‘bay’ or ‘say’, a kind of serge. The woollen trade flourished at Dedham whilst Ypres was extolled as a fine example of a city world famous for its lace and linen. The Antiquarians also visited the site of Ipris Inn “on the north side of the Tower Royal” and from

there proceeded to St Mary Aldermanbury, to see the beautiful reredos. To many, Ypres might have been a little unknown Belgian town in 1913, but by 1915 'Wipers' had achieved a terrible notoriety.

There are Notes and Queries on Essex's ancient kings and queens, the names of the Abbesses of Barking, why did the Great Eastern Railway choose the name Maryland Point for their station, where was Manor Park and the perennial question: what was the origin of Ilford's name? In May 1915 a Choral Eucharist service was held at St James church Little Heath, a "beautiful little church" celebrated by Rev Father Wainwright of St Peter's, London Docks. St James was clearly Wolco's favourite⁽³⁾ - he wrote about it many times - hardly mentioning St Peter and St Paul RC church Ilford.

One of the last articles is about Aimee Chambord, a Belgian refugee aged 12, put on a boat to escape the war who became separated from her mother, arriving in England alone and friendless. Wolco's prose is melodramatic and syrupy but it reflects his sympathies - and background? At Folkestone, quite by chance, Aimee met 16 year old Harold Simpson who lived near Valentines, and with his father Captain Simpson, in best Edwardian chivalrous style, they decided to protect Aimee by bringing her home to "the popular garden suburb of Ilford". On arriving here they discovered that Aimee was Mrs Simpson's niece! Gosh! Eventually Aimee's English mother arrives to a tearful reunion and a stroll around Valentines Park with her sister. Fact or fiction? Did a historian's imagination run loose to serve wartime needs and propaganda? The last cutting c. May 1915 records a German POW's hope to be put in a prison camp near Stratford as "his parents are in business near Plaistow".

So in May 1915 like the trench warfare in Flanders, Ilford's Antiquarians advanced no further. I assumed they were wound up or just withered away but was this the case? Whilst it would seem logical there was a home front to serve, men and women trying to find ways to relax in the days and long evenings away from the relentless pressures of war - and wasn't this what they were fighting for: to preserve their culture, history and heritage.

Just as I was about to leave Colchester library I was told there was another book on the shelves: *Selborne Society & Essex Notes 1916-17*. The Society encouraged the love of nature and rambles, published a monthly magazine and valued relics and antiquity. It's a similar scrapbook of ephemera, press cuttings, adverts for walks and heritage articles even enclosing a menu card from Pinoli's restaurant in Wardour Street London for December 1916.

Wolco kept the 1916 Sunday Rambling Society Summer Programme, the Selborne Society and the Antiquarians before the public's eye offering rambles around Flemish London whilst in 1916 or 1917 he offered a guided visit around Ilford including the Leper Hospital: tea at Valentines, 2/-. But by now was it a society of just one? In February 1917 the Polish Information Committee wrote thanking him for his help and lectures, offered to publish his news in Poland, lent him lantern slides but queried some of his evidence.

It's unclear who donated the volume to Colchester or when: a descendent of Wolco's? He was married to Alice and they had three children. Hundreds of societies were founded in Ilford c.1900-1910 to serve the new home owners, the urban respectable working and middle class as they sought to lay down roots and expand their leisure activities with like-minded friends in the new suburb and control their environment.

The Antiquarians misfortune was to start up just as World War I broke out and of course they were not reborn until 50 years later when Ilford Historical Society was founded. Tait even

offered a multitude of choices for the society's new name: The South West Essex Historical Society, The Old Ilford Society, The Ilford and District Antiquarian Association. His letter is sad in a way reflecting a desire to return to a medieval Gothic pre-Industrial Revolution world, a sort of pastoral Utopia that never existed and perhaps he was laying out a job description for the sort of job he thought he'd like but never get. He finished his letter by "hoping to stimulate interest amongst all classes in their fatherland and its history". He was quite aware I'm sure of his middle name Carlyle, the great Victorian Scottish philosopher and educator: Thomas Carlyle. Wulcko was the driving force behind the Ilford Antiquarians, Tasker had already published his local history- much I bet to Tait's chagrin. But Wulcko was an excellent leader and publicist for Ilford's history, walks and talks.

By August 1998 I had completed my article but a chance meeting with Bill George set me wondering. I happened to be in the newly refurbished Redbridge Central Library in 2013 when Bill spotted me in the foyer and asked if I fancied a coffee. He was a librarian, is president of Barking Historical Society and a very knowledgeable author on the early fossil hunters (i.e. of the mammoth skull). We sat down for a chat and I mentioned the Antiquarians and the fantastic letter by Tait. He immediately pointed out that Tait wasn't just a mere letter writer but a published diarist. If not quite up to Samuel Pepys standard, it was certainly worth looking at in *Victorian Diaries. The Daily Lives of Victorian Men and Women* edited by Heather Creaton (Mitchell Beazley, 2001). Bill generously sent me a copy of the book to keep. It contains extracts from 11 diarists: Andrew Tait's being on pp.122-143. He started his diary as a 15 year old schoolboy in Spring 1893, so was born in 1878. It coincided with his family seeking a move from New Cross south London to 34 Woodlands Road, Ilford, a brand new suburb, part of the Clementswood estate, although by 1915 he was living in Seven Kings. The attractions of Ilford were the new houses and cheap mortgages available to families.

Wednesday 3rd May 1893. "Unfortunately my diary was not unpacked till Friday... the van came at 7am and they got to Ilford at 5 to 4. They are building a new station at Liverpool Street where we changed carriages. We reached Ilford as the clock struck 4pm... everything was in the house by 7." Their washerwoman Mrs Kimber went with them.

11 February 1894 "I heard the first lark this morning... Bricks and mortar are smothering Ilford. Along the road to Cranbrook Park estate there were, a month ago, nothing but 2 large houses standing in wooded grounds. Now there is the Grange Estate office and where but a fortnight ago was a beautiful orchard is a hideous conglomeration of bricks & rubbish which are the primary ingredients of a road... the site of the Ilford Steam Bakery! In Oaklands Road, next to ours at the back, several houses & a fire station are almost completed whilst in front a large church is being built... a bogey in the shape of a Board School threatened the field in which we play football (the site of the Town Hall?). Certainly we are getting on in Ilford, but in some things, I think, a bit too fast!" (a bit of cheek seeing as just a decade earlier his family's new house had been a green field site).

Thursday 4th May. "We are now at last in our new house & I must admit a very nice one. Our cat doesn't understand it and has disappeared. I went to Barking today... an old town and contains many old houses. However, it is badly built & 'slummy' in parts."

He saw a sign pointing to Little Ilford: "I intend to go there soon because the road looks nice that way", had already discovered Wanstead Flats and was asked by some boys whether he and his brother Jimmy would like to join a cricket club. Though he wasn't very athletic he

clearly wanted to make new friends his own age. He went to school in Tyne Hall on the corner of Ley Street and Hainault Street.

Tuesday 16th May “An important day as there has been no fishmongers in Ilford except a stall occasionally open for sale of fried fish. But today a shop opened near the Broadway under a man named Handley”.

Sunday 17th June “Went to the bible class in the vestry of the Baptist Chapel. Subject: The woes of the drunkard”... (the Baptist chapel on the High Road - now the site of The Exchange - was one of Ilford’s oldest churches, founded 1803).

Saturday 23rd June “This evening I went for a walk to Chigwell... passed by Barnardo Homes mantled in many places with ivy and all a-twitter with birds”... A few days before he heard a steam organ at a fair (near Wanstead or Manor Park?) and nearby was “the Little Wonder coffee tavern which is fair in name only.. frequented by the lowest class only”.

4 September “The thing is decided, the die is cast, I am now a man of business or I will be tomorrow” His interview wasn’t too rigorous as they enquired as to “what church he attended and if he’d learnt algebra, Latin, Greek, history and French ignoring the 3 R’s”.

5 September “At 50 Thames Street is James Spicer & Co’s place of business”.

In 1894 Andrew proudly reported that Ilford was no longer a mere village “but a modern town of substance of 15,000”. He was well informed even if he was getting a little over-excited as Ilford’s population in 1891 had been 10,913 though by 1901 it shot up fourfold to 41,000 - a staggering rise.

Not being especially sporty he joined The Philosophical Conversation Club. He left school and joined Spicers, stationers and paper merchants as a clerk. His father, a bookseller/stationer, put in a word for him. He had come all the way south from the Shetland Isles, via Glasgow and even Belfast, where possibly Andrew was born.

Later Andrew found the work at Spicers “drudgery” which continued until World War I. He joined the Liverpool Pals (21st Reserve Battalion) on 9th December 1915, leaving for Formby in June 1916 then over to France. Later he became an Army Service Corp driver but arrived home bringing some live ammunition back which had to be dealt with by the police! In 1915, aged 37, he would have been older than most young recruits so it’s difficult to know if he was slow joining up. But it should be noted that some lads at Howards in Ilford who were considered to be tardy joining up had been ‘awarded’ white feathers. Tait was demobbed in June 1919.



Andrew Carlyle Tait

By the war’s end he and his half sister Gwyneth, who isn’t mentioned in the diary, had moved up to Birkenhead to look after their stepmother which explains why he’s unknown in Ilford. He joined the new Lady Lever Art Gallery and kept up his historical interests by joining the

Lancashire and Cheshire Historical Society. He died in 1964 aged 86 and is buried with his stepmother, Susan, in Bebington cemetery.

I planned to end my new article here, but as a final punt I fired off an email to Liverpool's Lady Lever Gallery and immediately struck a bullseye gold. Sarah Lynch emailed me straight back with further information on Tait's later career.

He was a founder member of the Bromborough Historical Society (no surprise there) and lived at various addresses near the gallery. It was his manager at Spicers "who encouraged him to apply for a position at the gallery": did he have any training or was he just a passionate amateur, a natural? In fact he applied to work for Lever Brothers in their building at Blackfriars, right next door to Spicers office, and was appointed on 25th May 1914, moving between Port Sunlight Wirral and the London office. He was very involved with the initial set up of the gallery which opened in 1922, arranging for the collection of objects to be moved from Lever's various properties. He was first employed by Lord Leverhulme as Registrar in 1914, later as the gallery's Assistant Curator in 1927. He retired in 1946 but carried on working on a voluntary basis. So his far-sighted letter of 1913 bore fruit and he got his wish. Sarah also provided me with photos of him in uniform with his sister Gwyneth who he looked after. He is vaguely related to Burne Jones' wife and distantly to Kipling and to Thomas Carlyle! ⁽⁴⁾

NOTES

1. To become a footnote in history you've got to make some history and the Ilford Antiquarians certainly did. In terms of style I'm not keen on footnotes and rarely use them.
2. The calling by Tait for 'mature speakers' but not Tasker takes some gaul. George Edward Tasker (MBE, 1868-1925) was 45 in 1913, but only a mere boy newcomer of 33 though 10 years older than Tait, when he wrote and published *Ilford Past and Present* in 1901, reprinted in 1992. Based on newspaper articles it was Ilford's first modern history. Was there an element of jealousy or was it because he really didn't like to see the fields near Cranbrook Park/The Drive where Tasker lived turned into houses? Did Tait just view him as a clever upstart amateur newcomer to Ilford?

Tasker and his young family settled in Mayfair Avenue, Ilford, a brand new house and street c.1899. A Civil Servant, he commuted into London and served as a Secretary to Minister of War, Field Marshal Herbert Kitchener. Involved in the local church community he has a memorial tablet in St Andrews church on The Drive, Gants Hill. His books and newspapers articles on local and Essex rambles are mature enough for anyone.
3. St James church Little Heath is in Ian Dowling's *Ilford a Second Selection* p.96: a pretty little ivy-covered church. Built in 1862 it only had a small congregation, no priest, was never consecrated, and after the new Eastern Avenue rushed past its doors in 1925 it was a casualty of progress, demolished in 1933. A sad loss to many and I'm sure, Wulcko.
4. Andrew Tait's diary which I have yet to see is held by the Guildhall Library: CLC/521MS10,383. More research needs to be done and may, perhaps, result in a further article.

After a successful campaign led by myself and Ian the manuscript was restored from Colchester to Redbridge Local Studies Library (now Information and Heritage).

Great Thanks to Ian Dowling head of Redbridge I H team, Richard Shackle in Colchester, Bill George, Sarah Lynch Administrator, Lady Lever Gallery Liverpool, and Madeleine Janes.

Thanks to Wirral Archives Service for allowing us to publish the photograph.

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*Dr Johnson pub in
Longwood Gardens*

*photographed on
11 September 2011
by Georgina Green*

Listed Buildings in Ilford: Dr.Johnson pub, Barkingside

THE DOCTOR JOHNSON PUBLIC HOUSE WITH LINKED LESTER AND CO ESTATE AGENTS, FORMERLY OFF-SALES, AND INCLUDING PUB SIGN, LONGWOOD GARDENS Listed Grade: II Date first listed: 21-Oct-2003

Public House and linked shop for off-sales, now estate agents' office. 1937-8 by H Reginald Ross. Brown brick with cement render details over narrow tiled plinth, hipped tiled roofs and high brown brick stacks. The main block of the building is almost square, but presenting a curved corner to the crossroads, and a longer range down Longwood Gardens. The main entrances, under bowed porches, lead to a public bar and saloon, with a private bar with its own entrance on the corner between and a central servery, which also serves a rear lounge. Walls and gates to the side connect the pub to the adjoining estate agents office. (Continues... with details of the exterior etc.)

The interiors survive remarkably completely from the late 1930s. Central servery with figured panelled bar front, and original back bar with horizontal light fixing, all set under lower ceiling below a deep cornice that runs around all the principal bar spaces forming a trabeation to the ceiling. Dado panelling with similar figuring continues the line of the bar. Built in bench seating to public bar. Lounge bar is set within a fluted alcove, a motif repeated to one side of seating area. Entrance to Saloon bar in glazed timber surround. The Saloon fireplace is set in a stone and timber surround with a stone hearth; tiled surrounds to fireplaces in the other bars.

The Doctor Johnson was built to serve the large new estates being built at Barkingside in the late 1930s. It is exceptional for the survival of its plan-form and its fitting; a model pub of its era. The survival of the off-sales shop and signpost are an integral part of this rare ensemble.

The Dr. Johnson pub has been boarded up for about five years and I have been trying to get further information for some time. It is now on the English Heritage Register of 'Heritage at Risk'. I understand it is now in a very poor condition due to persistent water which has damaged parts of the interior. A planning application has been lodged as number 0375/15.

As editor of the Ilford Historical Society newsletter I feel a duty to raise the profile of our listed buildings but it has been frustratingly difficult to obtain information. Meetings of the Conservation Advisory Panel still take place but no details are given on the LB Redbridge website after 13 May 2013. The days when Redbridge had a dedicated Conservation Officer seem like a distant memory. However, a Council spokesperson did provide the following information on 18th March:

"The current condition of the Doctor Johnson public house is a matter of concern to the Council. The Doctor Johnson is an important heritage asset and is listed as being of special architectural or historic interest. The building is on English Heritage's Heritage at Risk register. Since it closed in 2010 the condition of the building has declined to a very poor

condition. The Council is in communication with the current owners and is investigating to determine whether any breaches of listed building control or other offences have been carried out.

In the meantime the Council has received an application to restore the building, including its fine interior, as part of proposals to convert it to a supermarket with flats above. The car park is proposed to be developed for housing. This application is currently under consideration by the Council.”

© *Georgina Green, 19 March 2015*

Iford Historical Society awarded a Grant

At our forthcoming AGM our accounts will show the Society has been running at a deficit which cannot continue and it was felt expenditure on the newsletter might have to be cut back. Our Treasurer, John Sharrock, assisted by other committee members, applied for a grant saying “Cutting the number of copies printed would be a great pity as it highly regarded locally and is considered by our members as a basic service. The newsletter helps to encourage community interest in history, developing a sense of place and generating wider knowledge of the area.” This has resulted in Glyn Hopkin Ltd awarding the society £200 towards printing our next three newsletters and is very gratefully received. The kind words in praise of the newsletter were also appreciated by the editor.



John Sharrock receives the cheque from Lee Scott © Alan Banner

IHS REGULAR PROGRAMME

Our regular monthly meetings are held at Ilford Hospital Chapel, The Broadway, Ilford Hill, Ilford, IG1 2AT from 7.30 – 9.30 pm. Visitors welcome, £2 per meeting.

11th May 2015 *Dreams of the Ideal: The Corporation of London's Development at Ilford.*

Stephen Smith reveals the successful 1920s housing development between Perth Road & Gants Hill with emphasis on gardens and landscape.

Summer Guided Walks organised by Redbridge Information & Heritage

Thursday 21st May 2 - 3.30pm, Barkingside guided walk *From Village to Town*. Free. Meet at the Chequers pub, finish at the Library. Leader Jef Page

Saturday 30th May 10.30-12 noon, Ilford guided walk *From Mammoth to Mall*. Free. Start and finish at Ilford Central Library. Leaders Jef & Sue Page

IHS REGULAR PROGRAMME resumes in September:

14 September 2015 *Sister Edith Appleton: World War I Front Line Nurse & Diarist.*

Lisa & Dick Robinson.

The full programme will be in our next newsletter which will be posted out to members early in August or will be available from the editor (details on page 1) after 13th August.