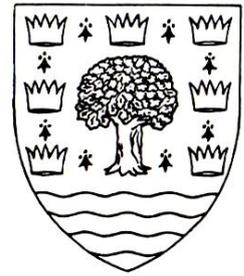


# Iford Historical Society

Newsletter No.116 December 2014



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

**STOP PRESS Please note the venue for our February meeting has been changed and the AGM will now be at our May, not our April meeting. See Back page.**

## Mammoths return to Iford Town Centre!

The Mammoth Steppes Festival was held on the Town Hall steps on Saturday and Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> September and provided a platform for a number of entertainers and amusements which attracted a good crowd.

Redbridge Museum was in attendance along with the Geologists' Association and one or two other educational stands but unfortunately our society was not able to man a stall.



The highlight was not in the open area but in the Exchange where the Natural History Museum had taken a shop for the two days. Here they displayed a number of real fossils found buried in brick-earth on almost exactly that spot 150 years ago. Adults and children alike were fascinated to find out more and the staff who gave up their weekend found it most encouraging. Congratulations to Wilson Chowdhry who organised the event. (Apologies to anyone who went along the previous weekend following the information in the last newsletter – the date was changed after it was printed.)

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## **“The New Year started badly for the G.E.R...”**

### **New Years Day 1915, Ilford’s railway accident**

In understated language the Great Eastern Railway magazine<sup>1</sup> began a report of the Ilford railway accident on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1915. It was the worst accident on East London’s suburban lines in many years, devastating local families and marring the Railway Company’s good safety record.

This article looks at how the accident happened and local responses, with information from the Board of Trade accident report, railway magazines and the *Ilford Recorder* which produced a special edition the day the accident happened.

#### **What happened**

The accident happened at 8.40am on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> January. New Years Day was then a working day and the railway ran its usual suburban service. A local train, the 8.20am from Gidea Park to Liverpool Street, picked up passengers at Seven Kings station and travelled through Ilford’s platform 3 without stopping. Some morning rush hour local services missed an Ilford stop, a pattern that persisted until the 1970s.

GER suburban trains comprised four wheel wooden coaches each with four compartments.<sup>2</sup> There were 18 coaches in all, old fashioned and not crashworthy. However, it was a light weight train and the tank engines used could accelerate quickly away from stations.

The local train was switched from the slow lines on the north side of Ilford station to the fast line to the south. This was common practice to speed up suburban services into Liverpool Street especially when a fast train was delayed.

Unfortunately the 7.06am express from Clacton with eight bogie carriages including dining cars was running a few minutes late on the fast line “up” to Liverpool Street. For unknown reasons the driver missed signals at danger and crashed into the local train as it crossed from the slow line to the fast. Both trains were well filled but the local service was not as crowded as a normal weekday.

Though the express driver braked late he could not stop the collision. Witnesses in the local train saw the express coming alongside them and slicing sides off local train carriages. Coaches in the middle of the local train overturned. The express engine then fell into coal drops<sup>3</sup> south of the fast line near the bridge over Mill Lane.

Express coaches remained upright though the front three were derailed. Most coaches suffered some damage but casualties were light.

Passengers in the local train were less fortunate. The eighth coach - first class - was described as “completely broken up” and five other coaches near the middle of the train were badly damaged. Here the worst casualties occurred. Yet coaches at the front and rear were less damaged and most passengers were able to get out unaided.

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<sup>1</sup> Great Eastern Railway Magazine February 1915.

<sup>2</sup> John Watling. GER carriage building in 1914. *Great Eastern Journal*, January 2014

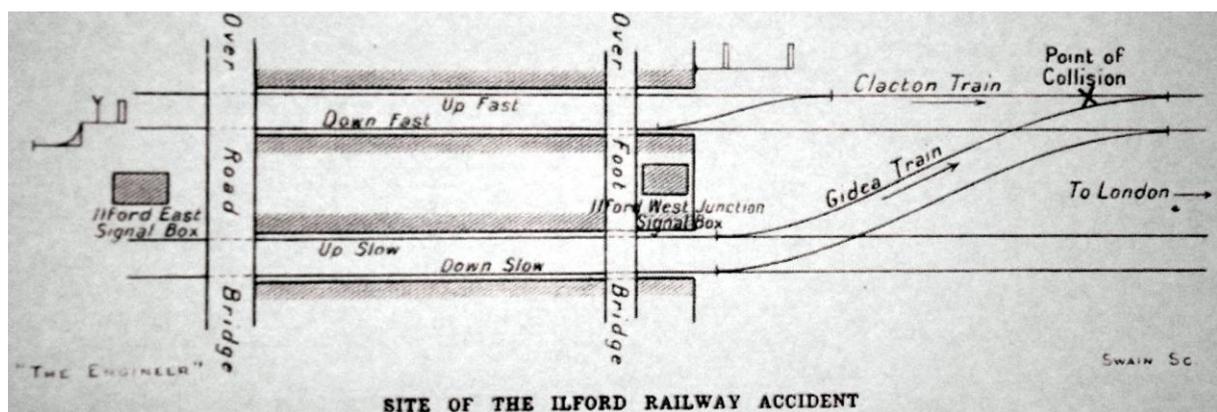
<sup>3</sup> Coal drop – a siding where trucks were offloaded into road carts below. 1911 photos show this operated by Rickett Smith and Co

## Casualties

Ten passengers died in the collision or soon after, all travellers in the local train. A further 500 were reported to have been injured or suffered shock. Some lost limbs. The *Ilford Recorder* published a list of some of those injured.<sup>4</sup>

John Buttress, driver of the local train, was an Ilford man from St Mary's Road. Like his fireman, E.M. Hicks, he was unharmed, though both suffered shock. On the express, driver Fred Bloomfield of Colchester and fireman George Adams were scalded by steam when the engine fell into the coal drops.

Walter Walls, conductor of the choir at Ilford Congregational Church, was returning on the express from a few days in Clacton. He travelled next to the restaurant car kitchen and was reported to have "escaped from the car severely shaken but covered in the contents of certain cooking utensils."<sup>5</sup>



Ilford Station sketch plan showing signals. Note this plan does not include the tracks into the bay - platform 5. from *The Engineer* 8<sup>th</sup> January 1915.

## Lucky escapes?

George Savill of Grove Steps, Ilford Lane, described as a haulier, was with a horse and cart in the coal drops collecting coal for Ilford Paper Mill. The express locomotive crashed above trapping him. He was badly scalded by escaping steam but survived. His horse was put down. Surviving photographs show the locomotive in the coal drop standing upright but damaged.

Owen Waters, a Councillor for Seven Kings on Ilford Urban District Council, gave his account to the *Ilford Recorder*. Reading his paper whilst sitting in a compartment near the rear of the suburban train he heard a whistle. "As I looked up sharply from my paper I saw the Clacton train running parallel with us and rapidly we seemed to be getting nearer to it. ... Then there was a cracking and splintering of timber, then a smash with severe jolting all this while - and then a stop". Seated with his back to the engine he was first out of the carriage and helped a fellow passenger who'd been thrown across the compartment.

Once out of the train he asked the signaller if he'd put signals to danger - which he had. He called on passers-by to ask Dr Houghton in York Road to come, and to telephone other doctors. Seven local doctors turned up to help.

<sup>4</sup> *Ilford Recorder* 8<sup>th</sup> January 1915

<sup>5</sup> *Ilford Recorder* 8<sup>th</sup> January 1915

## Helping the injured

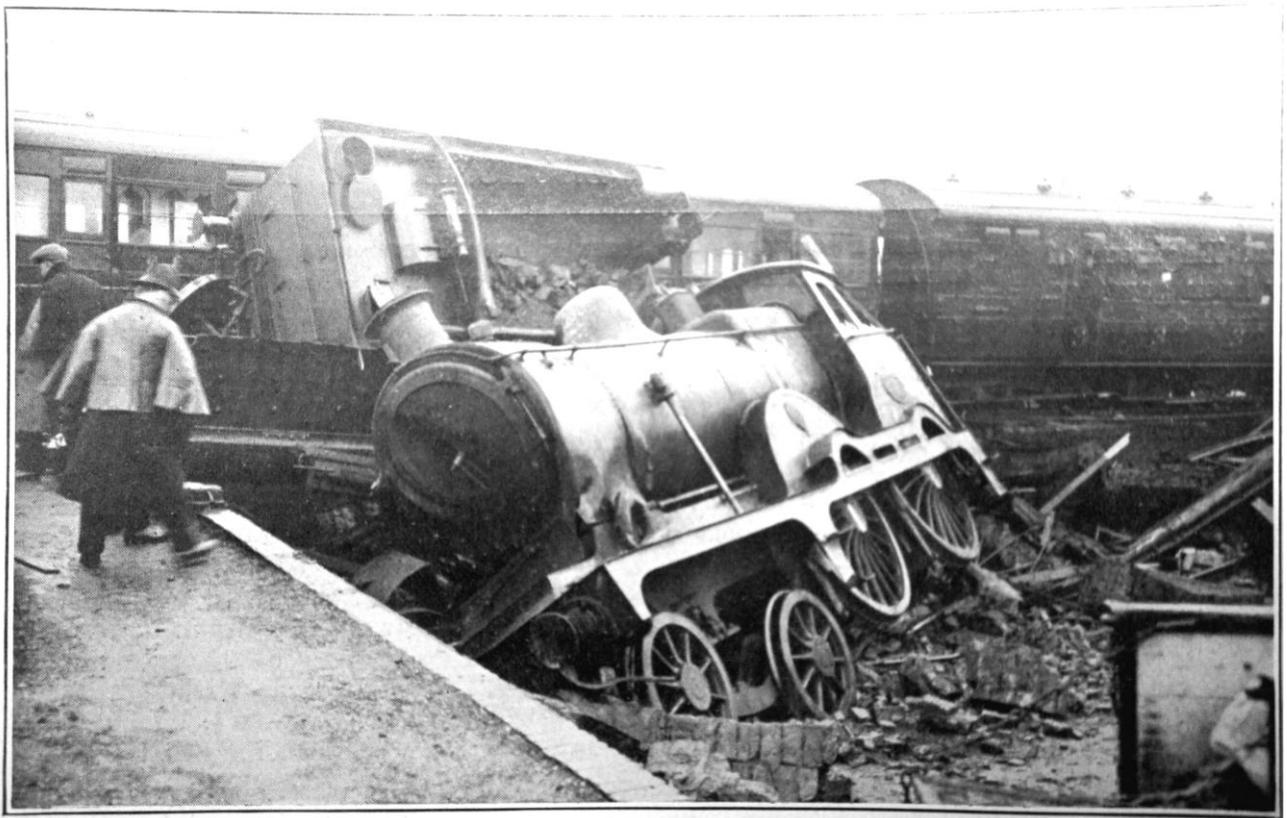
Morrison Matthews, Secretary of the local branch of St John Ambulance Brigade, later wrote to the *Recorder* to say that two of his officers were on the station when the accident happened.<sup>6</sup> His members took a leading part in helping the injured.

There was then no London-wide fire or ambulance service though Ilford's Fire Brigade, run by Ilford Urban District Council, arrived quickly on the scene. Their training in first aid was praised as an example of the foresight of the Council. Reports also praised the local Boy Scouts who commandeered doors to carry the injured.

Territorial soldiers from the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Essex Regiment on duty at Ilford station gave help early. Ilford station staff were helped by Mr Unwin, the stationmaster, who came in on his day off to help. Workers from Stratford, main works of the Great Eastern, were on the scene by 10am to help clear coaches.

Local doctors came to the scene to give first aid to the many injured. Nearby residents in York Road were praised for providing brandy, whisky and hot milk for victims, and gave cloths to make bandages. Some victims were taken to Ilford Emergency Hospital and to the London Hospital. Others, less seriously injured, were helped home on tramcars or went to their local doctors for treatment.

Local clergy, including the Catholic priest Father Patrick Palmer, were soon on the scene to help victims.



The express locomotive fell into coal drops on the south of the line. A haulier working below and the driver and fireman were hurt by escaping steam but all three survived.  
from the *Railway Gazette* February 1915

<sup>6</sup> *Ilford Recorder* 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1915

## **Funerals**

Newspapers carried detailed reports of funerals. The *Ilford Recorder* was no exception and it had sad stories to tell.

Among them two next door neighbours in Aldborough Road, Seven Kings, were killed in the crash. Johannes Delfgou, an accountant aged 35, left a wife and two young children. The only woman killed was Berthe “Dolly” Christie aged 27, due to be married in the Spring. Her fiancé was waiting for her at Liverpool Street and came to help with recovery. Her funeral at St Mary’s church was reported to be of “the simplest possible character” without any music. It was clearly a moving occasion. There were over 60 floral tributes, requiring a special carriage to take them with the body to the City of London Cemetery. All contributors and many mourners were listed in the *Ilford Recorder*.

## **Inquest**

The Coroner’s Inquest with a jury took place over several days in the Town Hall. The GER was represented by senior officials including Henry Thornton, GER General Manager, who accepted the Company’s responsibility. An ASLEF representative was there to represent the express fireman, E.M. Hicks. Presumably the express driver was not an ASLEF member. The NUR London area Organising Secretary represented his members including the Ilford East signalman.<sup>7</sup>

The inquest heard statements from all the signalmen involved, train guards, passengers, local residents who’d heard detonators and then the drivers of both trains. The GER locomotive superintendent gave evidence about likely stopping distances. Jurors asked about the possibility of criminal damage to signalling but this was ruled out.

Another juror, clearly well briefed on railway matters, asked about the installation of automatic train stops. These would have prevented this accident and many others in the years ahead but railway companies were slow to install them. Almost all evidence suggested the express driver had failed to see signals.

One juror asked why the brother of one of those fatally injured, Frederick George Allen of Charlbury Gardens, was refused permission to see him at the London Hospital. In what appears to be medical callousness Dr Davey argued that the shock would have been fatal. Frederick Allen died soon after of injuries with his brother unable to visit.

## **Inquiry**

Railway accidents involving death or injury were subject to an official inquiry. These were carried out by the Railways Inspectorate, made up of Royal Engineer officers who were independent of the railway companies but had technical expertise to analyse accident causes.

Lieutenant Colonel von Donop carried out the Ilford inquiry starting in a crowded waiting room at Ilford Station. He gathered statements from 5<sup>th</sup> January and submitted his report to the Board of Trade on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1915, just six weeks after the accident. He interviewed witnesses and railway staff involved, giving a careful picture of operations and exploring possible causes including signallers errors, faulty brakes and flaws in the signalling arrangements.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ilford Recorder* 29<sup>th</sup> January 1915

In his report the Inspector showed little doubt of the cause.<sup>8</sup> The express driver had failed to brake at the Ilford east distant (warning) and home (stop) signals and only applied brakes at the Ilford west home signal, a classic “SPAD” (Signal passed at danger) pattern. Only detonators on the track had alerted the driver to the danger. He braked, but far too late.

Though the driver claimed the distant signal wasn't at danger, checks showed this was unlikely. The possibility of malicious tampering with the signal was ruled out early. It is difficult to explain his failure as he was an experienced driver who knew the route well. Weather conditions were good and the Westinghouse brake (one of the best available) was working properly. The driver claimed steam from the engine obscured his view of signals - a common problem with steam locomotives - but this argument was ignored in the Inspector's verdict.

Colonel von Donop pointed to the importance of having “some arrangement for giving the driver an unmistakable warning as to the position of his distant signal when he passes it” and noting that other companies had already made trials of such devices. Unfortunately the Company failed to act and automatic warning systems did not become universal until the 1960s.

### **Hospital appeal**

One who quickly took advantage of the accident to seek funding was the ever energetic Ben Bailey, Chairman of Ilford Emergency Hospital Governors. He wrote to the *Ilford Recorder* suggesting the railway company should fund a bed at the hospital and met Henry Thornton, GER general manager, to ask for a contribution. This paid off. The company made a donation and gave permission for local stationmasters to hold a collection for the hospital.<sup>9</sup> The history of the Emergency Hospital deserves further study, along with local health care. It was wholly voluntary funded, so Ben Bailey's fundraising enterprise was needed.

### **Other accidents**

Ilford's railway accident was soon overshadowed by the horrific disaster at Quintinshill in May 1915 which remains Britain's worst railway accident.<sup>10</sup> Nothing so severe happened on Great Eastern suburban lines until 1944 when another accident happened at Ilford Station. Again a driver missed signals, this time in fog, and crashed his express into a stationary train. Ironically, this would have been prevented had Colonel von Donop's recommendation of additional warnings of danger signals been carried through.

### **Ilford now**

Ilford station approaches have long since been remodelled. The viaduct takes local trains over the fast lines reducing the possibility of a collision. Carriages are all steel and far stronger although train speeds are much faster. All signal boxes have gone and signalling is now centrally controlled. Colour light signals replaced semaphore pattern and automatic stop systems should prevent drivers over-running signals, finally achieving Lt-Colonel von Donop's 1915 recommendation.

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<sup>8</sup> Board of Trade report into the Ilford Railway accident. 16<sup>th</sup> February 1915

<sup>9</sup> Letter *Ilford Recorder* 8<sup>th</sup> January 1915

<sup>10</sup> L T C Rolt *Red for Danger* Pan Books, 1960 edn

## Technical note

Main line railways operated signalling with each stretch of track (or block) under the control of one signaller in his signal box. He would accept a train from the preceding section only if his block was clear. A system of bell codes alerted signallers to oncoming trains and informed the next box that the train was leaving their section. They also linked via telephone two boxes on either side. This process was repeated down the line as a train moved from one signaller's responsibility to another.

It was the driver's duty to watch for signals. A driver approaching a block would see a distant signal - yellow with a notched end - and if it was at danger - ie horizontal - he'd brake anticipating the next signal, the red home signal, to be at danger too. He had to halt if a home signal was at danger.

(To see and hear a traditional main line signalling system in operation visit the Gainsborough Model Railway in Lincolnshire where original signal box instruments control 0 gauge model trains. It is a noisy but fascinating place! The model railway used in the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway signalling school is operated monthly at the National Railway Museum, York.)

Iford was controlled by Iford East signal box near where Bodgers store now stands and Iford West at the west platform end. Other signal boxes were at Iford carriage sidings and Aldersbrook.

Under the so-called lock and block arrangements signals at the East signal box could not be lowered until the train was accepted by the West signal box. There were also complex interlocking systems which ensured signals could not allow conflicting movements at junctions and crossovers like that at the west end of Iford Station.

As a further safeguard the East home signal on the main line had a detonator placer fitted. If the signal was at danger it placed two detonators on the rail as an audible warning to the driver that he'd passed a red signal. It was possible the sound of these detonators that alerted the express driver that he'd overshot signals.

## Sources

Graces Guide to British Industrial History - an excellent compilation of sources including back issues of *The Engineer* magazine. See <http://www.gracesguide.co.uk>

L.T.C. Rolt. *Red for danger*. Pan Books. 1960 edition.

<http://www.railwaysarchive.co.uk> is an excellent source of documents including the Accident Report

## Listed Buildings : 71 Iford Hill

**No.71 Iford Hill**, photo G Green, April 1988

Formerly Rat and Carrot, formerly Mainstreet,  
Formerly Red Lion, High Road north side

**Locally Listed Building** –

Late C18th/Early C19th Three storeys, white stucco



## The Fate of our pubs?

The Dr.Johnson was the only pub in Iford which is listed by English Heritage until The Cauliflower Hotel was added as Grade II in June 2014. Other pubs in Woodford and Wanstead are also Grade II and some others in Iford are Locally Listed. e.g. The Papermakers Arms, what were The Angel and The Rose and Crown.

The Dr.Johnson pub has been boarded up for well over three years. Please let me know of other pubs in your part of Iford which have also closed in recent years. I would like to write more about some of them in the future. *Georgina Green, November 2014*

## Sources for local history at Valence House, Dagenham

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham has a wonderful building to house their archives, especially designed with a reading room, archive storage, lecture room, cafe and shop. It opened in June 2010, but their materials have been gathered and made available since the 1930s. Because Ilford was part of Barking for so much of its history, this is another very



useful resource for the study of our town.

While I was working for LB Barking & Dagenham I used the facilities which were available via Valence Library many times. I was particularly impressed that they had a bound facsimile of the Barking Tithe Award and a hand-drawn copy of the map, many original local maps as well as a bound reproduction of

the 1851 census. As this was before the world wide web was generally available, it was a wonderful source of information about Ilford. I have mentioned before the Rate Books they hold. (Newsletter No.111, December 2012, p.5-6). As their material has been collected over 80 or more years and is now available to callers in their new building with friendly and knowledgeable staff, it is well worth visit.

Archives and Local Studies Centre  
Valence House Museum  
Becontree Avenue  
Dagenham, RM8 3HT  
Phone: 020 8227 2033

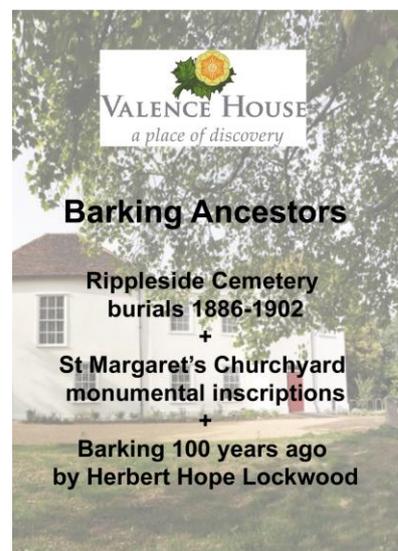
Email: [localstudies@lbbd.gov.uk](mailto:localstudies@lbbd.gov.uk)

[www.lbbd.gov.uk/archives](http://www.lbbd.gov.uk/archives)

## Sources for local history : Barking Ancestors CD

LBBD are to be congratulated on a new venture in promoting their local collections, by publishing items on CD-Roms. The one shown above includes records they hold which would be useful to anyone researching families who lived in Ilford in the past. As I have discovered, many prominent Ilford families were buried at St Margaret's before the creation of the separate parish of Great Ilford, and the inscriptions on their memorials are often very informative. It is available from the Archives and Local Studies Centre price £5.00, or £6.50 by post (within the UK). Cheques payable to LBBD.

This is the second CD issues by LBBD. The first, also priced as above, is called '**Barking and Dagenham WW2 Civilian War Deaths**' with a list compiled by volunteers at Valence House in a wonderful partnership which they initiated. The CD also includes 'Danger over Dagenham' and local ARP War Diaries and is a very useful tool for anyone studying WW2 in this area. *Georgina Green, October 2014*



## **FIRE! THE 1<sup>st</sup> GREAT FIRE OF ILFORD, 1842**

It appears that the famous Harrison Gibson/Moultons fire that broke out along the High Road during 16<sup>th</sup> March 1859 wasn't our only disaster. On the web site "Ilford in Pictures" is news of another conflagration which happened over a century earlier and could have burnt out the village's centre around the High Road and The Broadway. A newspaper report amazingly made *The Times* 15<sup>th</sup> June 1842, and the *Essex County Standard* two days later: rare for a local event to make the national paper but there was no local Ilford newspaper until 1900. As with other newspaper reports I've written about, *The Times* journalist isn't named or known. Was it a syndicated article, a local stringer sending in reports or did the reporter come from the capital to see for himself? In this period editors rarely gave their hacks a named by-line. The Colchester based *Standard* report is smaller than *The Times* and clearly they edited it to save space as by then it may have seemed old news. From *The Times*:

"ALARMING FIRE AT ILFORD – Yesterday afternoon [14<sup>th</sup> June] at an early hour, the inhabitants of Ilford were greatly alarmed by a fire breaking out on the premises of Mr William Ashmole, carpenter and builder, situate in the rear of the Angel Inn, and within a few yards of Ilford station [not that near, surely] of the Eastern Counties Railway. For upwards of an hour flames raged with terrific violence; in fact, to such a degree that the destruction of the numerous buildings adjoining seemed certain, for many of them had actually caught fire. The police belonging to the Railway, apprehending that the premises comprising the station would fall sacrifice to the destructive element, sent an express-engine to the terminus at Shoreditch, for the assistance of the Railway fire-engines, and at the same moment a messenger was despatched on horseback, by the authorities of the town, to give the alarm to the different brigade stations at the eastern portion of the metropolis. In the meanwhile, the fire obtained a firm hold of the outbuildings attached to the Angel Inn and those of the White Horse public house. The excitement amongst the inhabitants was very great, [quite understandable] for it was fully expected that the fire would extend over the whole of that part of Ilford; and in consequence much confusion prevailed. The first fire engine that arrived was one belonging to a gentleman living adjacent to the town, and the next that followed belonged to the Royal Exchange office [an insurance owned appliance] from the village of Barking. These were directly got to work, the water being obtained from a pump, and the streams were well directed over the burning mass. At the same time a number of labourers were sent to work unroofing several cottages which adjoined, to prevent the fire further spreading, and in this they were successful. Shortly afterwards two of the railway engines were brought down the line on trucks by a special locomotive engine, and subsequently the engines of the Brigade establishment, with Mr Braidwood, the superintendent of the force, reached the spot, having accomplished the distance from London to Ilford in the short space of 40 minutes. Fortunately by that period the conflagration had been somewhat got under, consequently their aid was not required but they remained in attendance until the fire was entirely extinguished, which was about half past 3 o'clock. The workshops, etc, of Mr Ashmole are entirely destroyed, together with their contents. Ilford chapel has sustained much injury, the windows and doors being burnt out. The fire is supposed to have originated from some sparks from the engines on the railway falling amongst a heap of shavings outside the workshops [of Ashmole]. The loss is not to any serious amount" [!!].

The report throws up many questions about Ilford village, the strength of the fire, and emergencies dealt with by the railway and the London fire brigade.

Iford village in 1842 was not small: its population in 1851 was 4,253 and centred around Iford Hill, The Broadway and along the High Road for only a few hundred yards. On the south side of the High Road was Clements farm estate with shops along the roadside frontage whilst on the north side of the road were two inns: the White Horse near the corner of The Broadway, and about 100 yards further down the Angel inn along with other shops. Ashmole's shop partially features in a photo c.1897 (so much later) in Ian Dowling's and Nick Harris's book *Iford a Second Selection* p.15, beside Foster the greengrocer whilst nearby was A Miles, builder. It would have been near to where Poundland is now: both buildings fronted the High Road. The Angel features on p.106, a three-storey substantial building, whilst the White Horse is seen c.1865: a small weatherboarded village inn on p.11 of Dowling and Harris's *Old Photographs Series*, the first book of photos they published. Beside it right on the corner was William Allard's butchers shop, the photo shows carcasses hanging outside. Fortunately they weren't roasted.

So the fire began behind Ashmole's shop in workshops beside the Eastern Counties Railway track and blew along the High Road. June that year must have been warm and dry and the wind very strong as the flames and sparks flew westwards towards The Broadway and even jumped across it- quite an achievement as the Chapel was damaged. Fortunately it doesn't appear to have singed the Red Lion inn or the new Iford station which was lucky. It had only opened in 1839, the entrance at that time being behind the Red Lion, down Iford Hill- not up on The Broadway where it is now. It's unclear how quickly Iford recovered or how bad the damage was overall though I'm sure Ashmole was very upset. The gentleman living adjacent to the town who provided the private fire engine could have been John Thompson who lived at Clements or even Capt. John Gilmore, R.N, who lived at Iford Lodge near where Balfour Road is now. Iford didn't own a fire engine but one even came galloping up from Barking as at this time Great Iford was still part of Barking.

I consulted the London Metropolitan Archives which has records of fires and the London Fire Brigade and it throws up some interesting points.

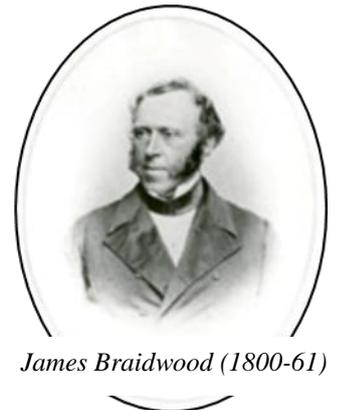
The number of fires in and around London in 1842 which the brigade attended was 901 and Iford's was no.401 in the record book. The fire was fought between 3-4pm and reported by a "stranger", the cause being recorded as unknown. I wonder if the London Fire Brigade really believed the fire was caused by the railway engine sparks? How many firemen fought the blaze and extinguished it is unclear but it was at least 14 (which seems low as clearly others helped) whilst the number of appliances that were present is noted as: County 5, Parish Engines 1, and 2 private ones (so 8 in all) provided by an insurance company so the buildings were clearly insured- just as well. The railway company's fireman don't get a mention. The insurance companies are clearly listed as are all of their policy numbers. Ashmole is listed as a carpenter and "victualler" of the Angel Inn though his wife is named as the landlord. The Exchange Insurance Company insured his contents and buildings. His timber workshop and contents were noted as destroyed and at the Angel beside it two small cottages were destroyed- but sadly the inhabitants aren't named nor are we told what happened to them.

On the corner of the High Street William Allard's butchers shop was insured by the Union, whilst next to him at the White Horse, Thomas Castle's contents were insured by the Exchange but the Phoenix covered the building. The strangest record is that of William Allard who is recorded as not only having premises at the butchers but also at "the meeting house"- it isn't noted as a chapel. Clearly men pulled down roofs which was successful: the roof of the

Ashmole's saw pit was pulled down as were cattle sheds and roofs over a stables, skittle-ground, and hayloft and "slight damage" was done when 'furniture was taken out of the butchers'.

The Eastern Counties Railway employed its own police and firemen who had other routine duties, i.e. to do with signalling, but in times of trouble dealt with emergencies. In the early days of railways hand signals were the method used to halt oncoming trains or at level crossings and railway men were often called 'railway bobbies' - i.e. policemen after Sir Robert (Bobby) Peel. In emergencies they had to go to help immediately but there was no quick way to alert nearby stations as the new telegraph system- although working on the Great Western Railway- wasn't introduced to the Eastern Counties Railway until the 1850s. Perhaps the fire didn't quite rival the Great Fire of London 1666 and there was no-one like Samuel Pepys in 1842 to record it in his diary, it still must have been very damaging to the town and fearsome to Ashmole and others to watch.

James Braidwood (1800-61) who sadly was killed at the famous Tooley Street fire, was a very famous fire-fighter and is credited as the "Father of the British Fire Service". He was born and brought up in Edinburgh where he led the fire service before coming down to London in 1833 to lead the London Fire Brigade Establishment - the embryonic London Fire Brigade, and was its first superintendent for 28 years. His salary was pretty good. On 20<sup>th</sup> June 1842 he was granted his quarter's salary: £100, therefore an annual salary of £400. Firemen could also win rewards for good service presumably paid for by the insurance companies.



James Braidwood (1800-61)

The London Fire Brigade Establishment was formed by 10 independent insurance companies in 1833 and Braidwood's headquarters were in Watling Street though in 1842 funds were granted to buy a spare engine and repair the privy- "but not to exceed £3-10sh". *The Times* stated that an express was sent to London to inform him and his firemen of the emergency and they arrived within 40 minutes which was pretty good for the time. Fire engine pumps would be loaded onto a rail freight wagon (with horses or would they be awaiting them?) and brought with Braidwood as of course they would have been horse drawn and the pumps operated by hand.

So the fire burnt out deal timber stacks, wood yards, workshops and cottages, damaged two inns and the chapel but probably the fire brigade, and clearly *The Times*, didn't rate it as serious, particularly as no one was injured or killed. It's unclear how quickly Ilford recovered but still very frightening for Ashmole, Allard, Castle and Ilford's residents even if they were insured. But it didn't seem to encourage Ilford to buy a fire engine or create a volunteer parish fire brigade.

Thanks to

London Metropolitan Archive:

CLC/B/017/MS/15728/004, Committee Minute Book, 1842-49

CLC/B/017/MS/15729//009, General Record of Fires in London, no.401, 1842.

Matin Fairhurst: *The Times* 15<sup>th</sup> June 1842. Article generously provided to me by Martin, and The Essex County Standard extract provided by Bill King.

James Braidwood- The Father of the London Fire Brigade- biography.

Bill King, Great Eastern Railway Society, emails on ECR history.

© **Jef Page, October 2014.**

## Local Casualties of World War I

### CAPTAIN JOHN GRAVE GOWAN, 1<sup>st</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> Battalion TF, Essex Regiment

I first became interested in Gowan <sup>11</sup>when I was researching Thomas Randell's life some years ago<sup>12</sup> and Gowan's name cropped up again in Roger Backhouse's excellent article.<sup>13</sup>

Randell was Ilford's Treasurer and Rates Collector. Before 1914 he was Gowan's deputy and Randell became one of Ilford's most important and highest paid council employees as they were responsible for the money the council raised, and spent from the rates to provide services to Ilford's residents.<sup>14</sup>

John Gowan's (1874-1915) family background was up in Cleator, Cumberland, where his father Charles was the local council's Rates Collector (the *Ilford Recorder* mentions Westmoreland) and in 1891 aged 17 John, clearly following in his father's footsteps, is listed as his Assistant. He arrived in Ilford c.1895 working under J W Benton who was Clerk to Ilford's Urban District Council, so he may have come south attracted by the job and in 1897 he was Treasurer to the new UDC. Ilford, a separate council, had only finally separated from Barking in 1888.

A bachelor, Gowan's 1911 address was the Gordon Volunteer Club House, Gordon Road Ilford: the battalion's headquarters. Whether this was his accommodation address or just used for mail I'm not sure. The Ilford Volunteers were a Victorian home guard unit attached to the Essex Regiment which evolved into the Territorial Force.

Although the *Recorder* articles referring to war casualties are sub-headed 'Topic of the Week', in 1914-15 the World War never impinges on the traditional front page adverts and regular items, and it certainly wasn't front page news.

Randell kept a scrapbook of Ilford newspaper clippings, his life and the people he knew and worked with. It's quite a treasure trove, a little used resource and was donated to the Local Studies Library by Mrs Jane Turner of Netley Road, Ilford. Reference Librarian Peter Wright replied to her by letter in September 1985, acknowledging her donation but I don't know her relationship to Randell.

Gowan is mentioned in only one clipping: his obituary written by WAL (?) alongside an article mentioning Randell – which is quite touchy and contentious. As a Territorial Army captain Gowan was experienced, associated with them for many years and as there was a shortage of regulars in 1914, the Territorials were quickly called up to join the colours (compulsory conscription wasn't



<sup>11</sup> Thomas Randell's News Cuttings scrapbook can be found boxed up at: 90/35546, Redbridge Information & Heritage Team. Ilford FC and Randell were the subject of a special, front page article and edition in *The League News and Sports Chronicle*, 20<sup>th</sup> January 1904.

<sup>12</sup> See IHS Newsletter 115, August 2014, page 6-7

<sup>13</sup> Gowan is mentioned in Roger Backhouse's article "A grand day out?", Ilford Historical Society Newsletter 112, August 2013

<sup>14</sup> Jef's article about Randell appeared in the Ilford Historical Society Newsletter, 1998.

introduced till 1916) and Gowan was sent with the battalion to Gallipoli in 1915 but he died at Suvla Bay. Next of kin was his brother Joseph William as his father had died in 1914, whilst his mother died in 1916 - perhaps ill and weak, the final straw losing her son? John's middle name, Grave, was her maiden name and John was always referred to as 'Jack'. The *Recorder* obituary was naturally a generous and glowing one recalling his great loss to Ilford: 'the upriver trips that he organized' (mentioned in Roger's article), that he came to the town nearly 20 years earlier (c.1895), that he managed a large department of clerks and had a 'masterly grasp of his work' as Chief Accountant and Treasurer. The photo of him shows him in his uniform and cap with a short neatly clipped moustache, clean shaven and confident.

Randell, already deputizing for him, was promoted and took his job as the Rates Collector. More importantly on July 19<sup>th</sup> (1915 or 16?) he got his position designated a reserved occupation 'on the grounds of his indispensability' as he'd already been granted conditional exemption. Born in 1876 he was only 38 years old (so just two years younger than Gowan) and in his youth had been quite an athlete - so surely fit enough to join up? There's no evidence he was refused army acceptance on medical grounds or that he was a Conscientious Objector. Was pushing a pen and collecting the rates so important an occupation that it had to be 'reserved' when men were taken from local farms and factories and encouraged to join up? Individuals working at Howard's Ilford aspirin works were none too popular for being slow joining up: their patriotism was questioned and some were even given white feathers.

As with all of Randell's clippings he carefully cut off all the newspaper headings and dates making finding them very irritating, difficult and time consuming but I found Gowan's death notice in the *Recorder*, 27<sup>th</sup> August 1915. In fact it was the first notification local people had that lads from Ilford, Barking, Romford and south Essex of the 1<sup>st</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been in action.

Named alongside Gowan was Lieut. John Macadam of The Drive, Ilford, listed as died of wounds. He was 23 years old and attached to B Company under Gowan.

In the scrapbook Gowan's death notice was partly torn - as if Randell (or someone else?) had changed their mind about gluing it in and thought about tearing it out. Perhaps he had a bit of a guilty conscience about Gowan? Other clippings may well have been taken out and destroyed as too contentious, particularly later in his life - we'll never know who tore it or why. Just an accident?

Jack Gowan was killed in action at Gallipoli 16<sup>th</sup> August 1915, aged 41, and is buried in Azmak Cemetery, Suvla Bay. The landings at Suvla Bay took place on 12<sup>th</sup> August and were a disaster due to lack of leadership and confusion, incompetence, an horrendous casualty rate, and generals with little field experience. The commanding general - too old at 61 years old? - was dismissed: at the height of the landings he fell asleep as the men waded ashore and two other generals followed shortly after. Lions led by donkeys.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant ALEXANDER GILMOUR BOARDMAN, RAF**

Another sad death and wasted loss of life has just been highlighted as part of a current, local research project on World War I deaths. Woodford lad: Alexander Boardman.

In 1901 he and his family lived at 'Hazelhurst' Coachman's Cottages, Woodford Wells, and in 1911 at 'Hadley', Mornington Road Woodford Wells. Born in 1899 Alex attended Bancrofts School, becoming a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the Royal Air Force, training as an

observer/air gunner with the No.1 Observers School of Aerial Gunnery. It was said that the life expectancy of a RAF flyer on the Western Front was just six weeks so because of his young age, barely 18 in 1918, it was decided to hold him back from going overseas. But it did him no favours.

He continued his training by joining a month's Bombing Course as an Observer at Salisbury Plain but in his last flight his plane, a BE 2C, literally collapsed in mid-air, crashed, and both he and his pilot Lt Robert Brinton, from New Jersey USA, were killed instantly in April 1918.

Alex's funeral was held at Woodford Baptist Church and there is a memorial to him at Woodford United Free Church. He is buried in Chingford Mount cemetery, grave no. E.11.C.R.64847.

### **Thanks and acknowledgements to:**

Ian Dowling, Val Bryant, Redbridge IHT for the information on Randell & Boardman, and Dawn Galer for the photo of John Gowan.

Madeleine Janes: census and family history information.

© *Jef Page, 27 May 2014*

I can add a little more about the Boardman family as I interviewed a younger brother, Bruce (Bob) Boardman, in 1986 for my book *Keepers, Cockneys and Kitchen Maids* :

"I was born in Mornington Road, Woodford Green in 1908, the youngest of seven children. My father was the senior partner at Boardman's Store in Stratford. This was started by my grandfather, my father took it over, and then invited two of his younger brothers into partnership.

We had quite a Victorian upbringing. We had a nanny and we were not allowed down to meals until perhaps the fruit stage, the rest of our meal was eaten upstairs. When we did go down we weren't allowed to speak, not unless we were spoken to first. We had a penny a week pocket money, but every tenth week we had to put our penny in a special bag, and that money was taken to Jubilee Hospital or some other charity when it had mounted up to half a crown.

Apart from our nanny, we had a cook, a gardener and a maid; the cook and the maid having bedrooms up under the eaves. We were forbidden ever to go into their rooms, but I remember that one year my father decided to decorate the rooms and he sent the servants away. We did go in then, and were amused to see a text on the wall of one room which read "Fear not, for ye know not at what hour the Master cometh" We never let my father forget that!

I remember the lamp-lighters very well. There were gas lamps in Mornington Road and they came round with a pole which had something on the end which made a spark to light the gas. Then they came round in the morning to turn them off, and sometimes they had to change the mantles, of course. I used to love it when a horse and trap would come from one of the shops to deliver something, and I remember telegraph boys on their bicycles.

Every Sunday after lunch my father would read to my sister and myself out of a beautiful nature book called *Eyes and No Eyes* and then he would take us out for a walk and we'd look for the things he had read about. We'd go down to the Ching brook and look for kingfishers. There were lots of tawny owls around our part of the forest too, I remember. There have never been very many wild flowers in the forest, as far as I know, but there still are lots of fungi, of course. We did see the deer sometimes in other parts of the forest."

© *Georgina Green, 1987*

## Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament

Have you ever thought of going up Big Ben? The “Elizabeth Tower” (so named in 2012 to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee) has 334 steps to the belfry, but is well worth the effort. Although it is possible to see out of the windows at the higher floors, the view is not the objective. Everything is timed so that it is possible to stand beside the Great Bell as the four smaller bells chime and then the hour is struck, and ear plugs are provided!

After a fire destroyed most of the Palace of Westminster in 1834 a competition was held and the architect Charles Barry was chosen to design a new building for Parliament. Augustus Welby Pugin collaborated with the final plan which included the iconic clock tower. Edmund Denison, MP and amateur horologist, designed the clock and clockmaker Edward Dent constructed it. The Great Bell, nick-named Big Ben, which we hear chiming in the New Year began striking the hour on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1859. It took some ingenuity to actually get it up to the belfry.

It was cast at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry but this was not the first bell to be cast for the Tower. The tour guides are extremely knowledgeable and give short explanations about the construction of the tower, the bell itself, the clock mechanism etc so that the climb

is broken up. However I found the tight spiral more daunting than the many steps which are well spaced – I felt very slightly giddy! It was well worth it when we suddenly emerged behind that familiar clock face and could see the shadow of the hands gradually moving.



As tight security is undertaken before admittance into Portcullis House, the gateway into the Palace of Westminster, after the tour it is possible to visit the Medieval Westminster Hall with its magnificent hammer-beam roof. Tea and cake is welcome and screens in the cafe area (in fact they are everywhere) show what is happening in Parliament. You are left in no doubt if the division bell sounds! It is also possible to visit the public galleries in both Commons and Lords. I gather there is usually only a delay on a Wednesday, for Prime Minister’s Questions. Tours are free, are held three times a day (Monday to Friday) and last about two hours. You must be a UK resident, over 11 years old, and you have to complete some security paperwork. If you would like to experience this, you should contact your MP, and it may be several months before a place is available as each tour is limited to 16 people.

For more information see

<http://www.parliament.uk/visiting/visiting-and-tours/tours-of-parliament/bigben/>

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## Redbridge and the First World War

**Tuesday 11 November 2014 - Saturday 30 May 2015**

This major new exhibition by Redbridge Museum uncovers some of the local impacts of the First World War. Based on new research, the exhibition explores how the war affected local life, the international nature of the conflict and the family histories of today's Redbridge residents. The display features a wealth of historic objects, photographs and personal items, many on display for the first time.

The exhibition also includes films made by Wanstead High School students and artist Victoria Lucas, working with the Museum and the National Portrait Gallery

([www.npg.org.uk/nationalmemory](http://www.npg.org.uk/nationalmemory)).

The Museum offers an extensive programme for schools about the First World War.

Redbridge Museum  
2nd Floor, Redbridge Central Library  
Ilford, Essex IG1 1EA

In early 2015, a brand new website about Redbridge and the First World War will be launched, alongside a new book about the subject, go to [www.redbridgefirstworldwar.org.uk](http://www.redbridgefirstworldwar.org.uk) to find out more.



## IHS 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.

### **12<sup>th</sup> January 2015 *Fairlop Plain Times.***

David Martin reveals Fairlop Plain's heritage: from the Ice Age & the RAF in two World Wars, to the Olympic flame being rowed across Fairlop Lake in 2012.

### **9<sup>th</sup> February 2015 *Explorers and Traders: The Essex Connections.***

by Georgina Green, IHS Vice President. PLEASE NOTE This meeting will be held at the Conservative Club on Ilford Hill, just along from the usual Chapel venue.

### **9<sup>th</sup> March 2015 *A Child in Wartime: evacuation, the bombing of Coventry, the Blitz & Doodlebugs.*** Canon John B Barnes's personal memories.

### **13<sup>th</sup> April 2015 *The Saxon Kingdom of Essex. From merchants & warriors, to kings & priests; a rich tapestry of over 600 years.*** by William Tyler.

**11<sup>th</sup> May 2015 at 7pm** Annual General Meeting followed by ***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 & landscape.

**The next newsletter will be available at our April meeting,** or from the editor (details on page 1) after 13<sup>th</sup> April.