



Ilford Historical Society

May 2020

Dear All

Well, here we are, still in lockdown. I hope that you are managing to keep busy. Perhaps, like me, you are reading all those books you promised yourself you would read and doing all those jobs you have put off!

Your committee has put together another newsletter in lieu of a meeting, I hope you enjoy it.

Jef Page
President

Dragon's Teeth at Newbury Park

In our last mini newsletter, Alan Simpson wrote about Ilford's role in defending the country against an invasion by Napoleon. In World War II, Ilford was on the front line again as evidenced by the tank traps overlooking the railway line at Newbury Park. They are what remain of Britain's anti-invasion preparations. Just as you approach the footbridge over the railway line, leading to the pedestrian entrance to Sainsbury's (via Netley Road), you can see a line of concrete blocks known as Dragon's Teeth.



The purpose of tank traps was to hold up the enemy and slow progress. They usually followed existing barriers such as rivers, canals or, as here, railway lines. It's difficult to count them as many are covered in vegetation but there are 15 on the approach to the footbridge and, in line with them, 13 on the other side of the footbridge.

There is then a slight change of alignment and the traps are behind metal fencing which makes it difficult to

count accurately but there are at least a further 40. Their erection and purpose require further investigation, a post lockdown project when the libraries and bookshops are open!

A-CROSS WORD

As May has two bank holidays, we thought you might appreciate a brain- teaser to while away the time.

question	clue
1) _ — _ _ _ _ _ (4,6)	The Hempstead, ex-east end butcher & High Toby man.
2) _ _ _ _ — _ _ _ (7)	The last Gants Hill family to celebrate Valentines Day.
3) — _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ (9)	Ilford's famous, popular, haberdashery store closed 2002.
4) _ _ _ _ _ _ _ — _ (9)	The cranes flew over this little Ilford stream.
5) — _ _ _ _ _ _ (3,4)	Ilford's Blue Boar inn changed it's name to roar on King James I and Scotland.
6) — _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ (6,6)	At least a 14 th century custom. A side of bacon to the married couple that hadn't had an argument all year. What all year??
7) _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ — (10)	Brother --- Rodier of Algiers improved the sweet citrus trees, but what's that got to do with Churchill?
8) — _ _ _ _ _ (5)	Grand, modern cinema opened 1934 at Gants Hill (not Odeon), named after a famous London palace/hotel or French cabbage? You've got to be kidding!
9) _ _ _ _ _ — _ _ _ _ _ (10)	A major Ilford quality grocers store since at least 1912.
10) _ — _ _ _ _ (5)	Not east, famous Ilford department store since 1934.
11) _ _ _ _ — (4)	Old English word for knife, part of the Essex badge.
12)	Reading downwards, the bold red lines spell out two words.

Please email your answers to janetseward@aol.com There is a small prize for the winner. If more than one member ties, we will randomly pick a winner.

The Beginnings of the Perrymans Farm Estate

A sale document held at the Essex Record Office provides information about the beginnings of the Perrymans Farm Estate (or Birkbeck Estate as it is sometimes known).

Two articles in Newsletters from 1989 (14/15) looked at the origins of the estate and cited Victoria County History which stated that "Building of small urban-type terraces had started by the 1870s." The second article reviewed the involvement of the Birkbeck Freehold Land Society and the author wrote that he had had sight of a deed lent him from another member. What this deed comprised or where it is now remains a mystery. Maybe because of what the deed contained the author decided on 1870 as the start date for the start of the development.

The document in the E.R.O. (D/DU 1160/8) is dated 23rd November 1868 and relates to the sale of a plot in Buntingbridge Road (shown in red on the plan). The sale of the plot itself, numbered 264, was to a Mr William Henry Haswell. As you can see from the plan, all of the roads are shown in the layout that we know now with the only entrances to the estate at first being via Birkbeck Road (the old entrance to the farm), Buntingbridge Road and into Chase Lane from Perkins Road.

The sale document has a schedule as follows:

1861, Nov 11 – Conveyance from Messrs Mason, Bird and Strong, Trustees of the Estates of the late George Robinson, to Richard Metcalfe

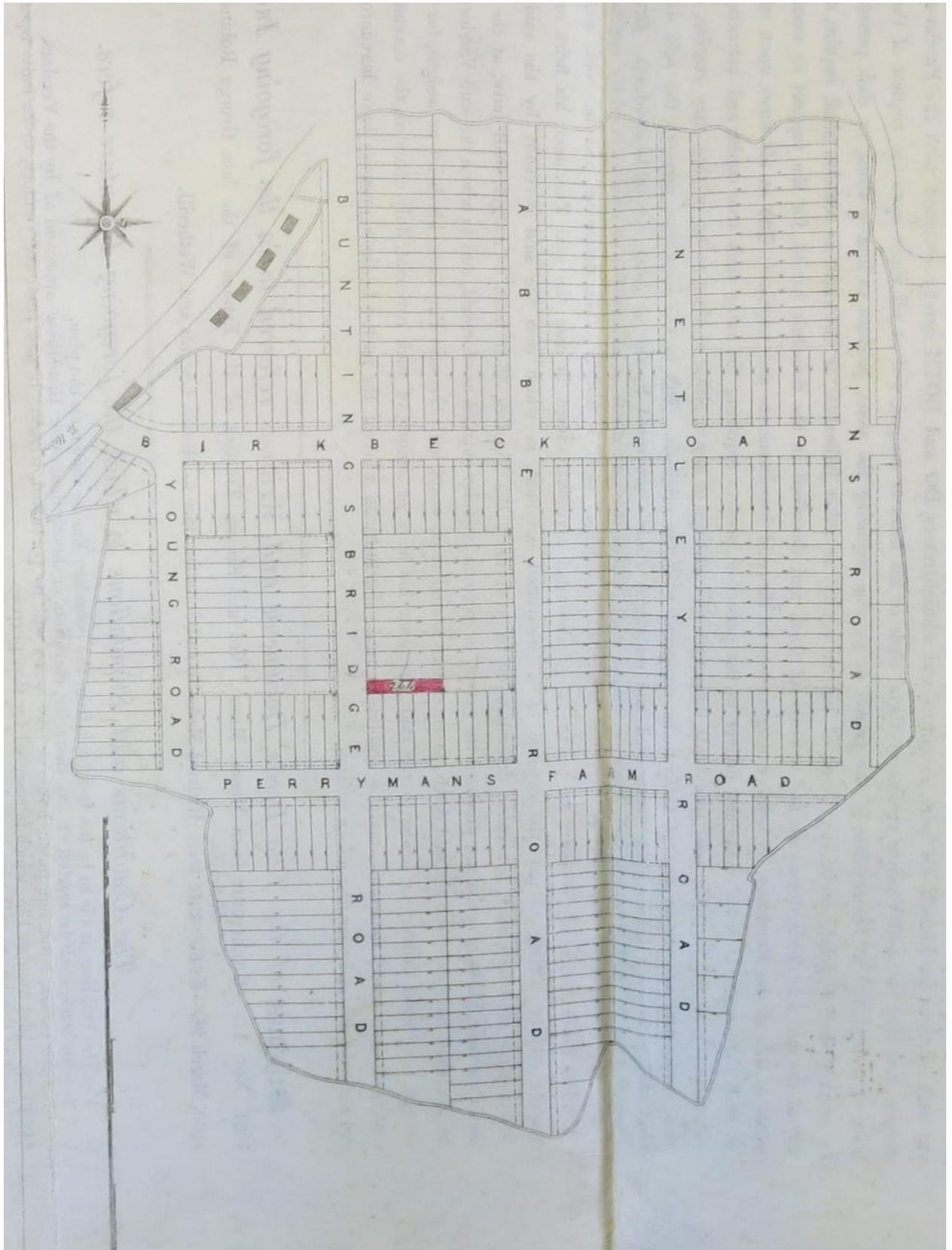
1866, March 28 – Conveyance from Richard Metcalfe and John Gardner to Messrs [Daniel] Leggatt and [Charles] Wetherill.

In a paper published in the journal Business History in 2014 (vol. 56,5) about the collapse of the Birkbeck Bank in 1911, Charles Wetherill is noted as a long-serving director who retired around 1903.

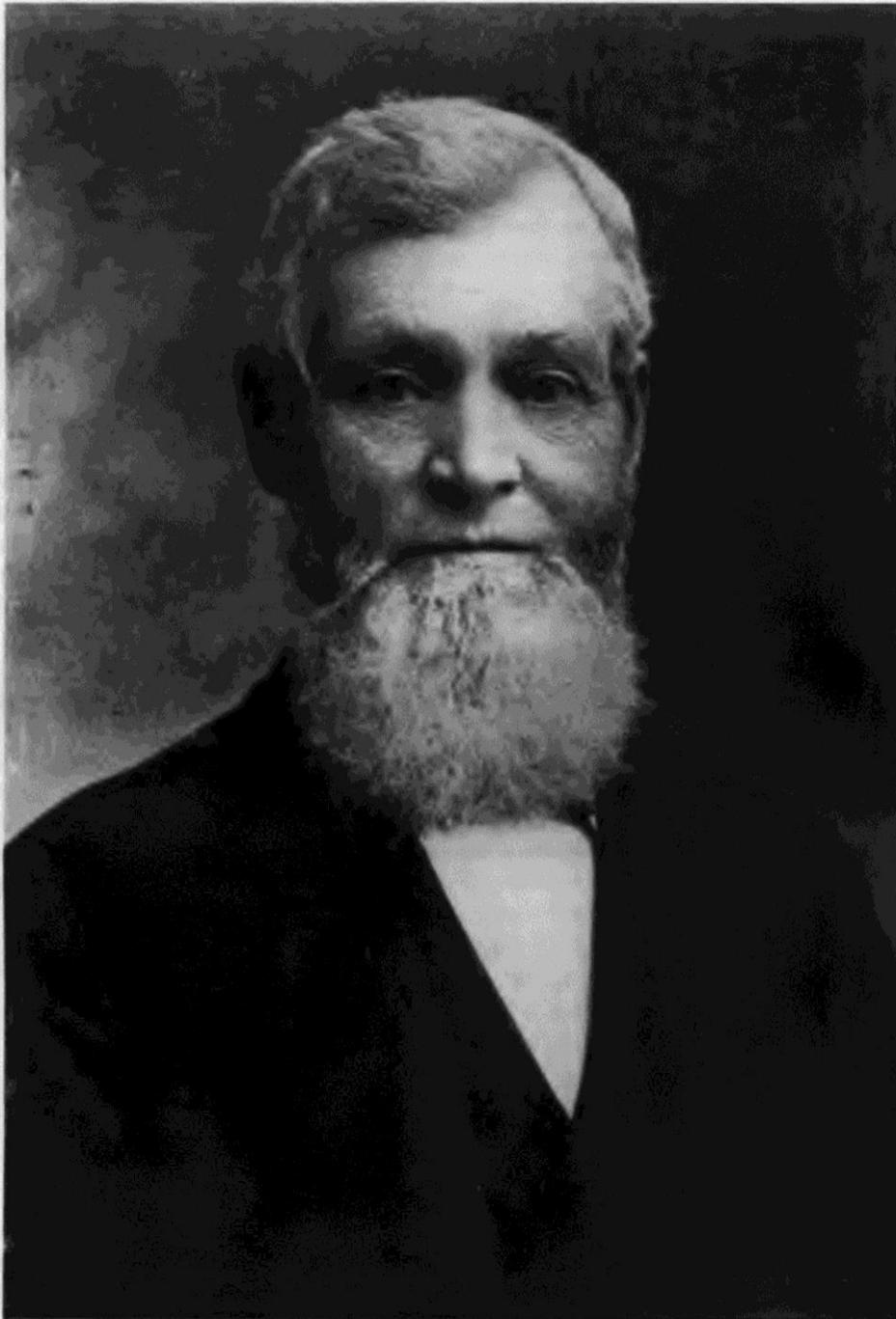
It would be useful to have sight of a second sale document to corroborate the information in this one but I think from this document we can say with some certainty that the involvement of the Birkbeck Freehold Land Society dates from the purchase of the estate in March 1866, whereupon roads were laid out shortly afterwards leading to plots like this one being sold to individual builders and potential householders.

By the time of the Census taken on 2nd April 1871, there were 11 occupied houses, 5 unoccupied, and 6 under construction. The only road not represented was Perrymans Farm Road. Occupations of householders included the expected - given the area - farm workers, gardeners and other trades but also a mole catcher and music string maker. A further article on the development of the estate will be written for the full newsletter.

© Dr Colin Runeckles
8th May 2020



James Douglas: nurseryman of Great Gearies



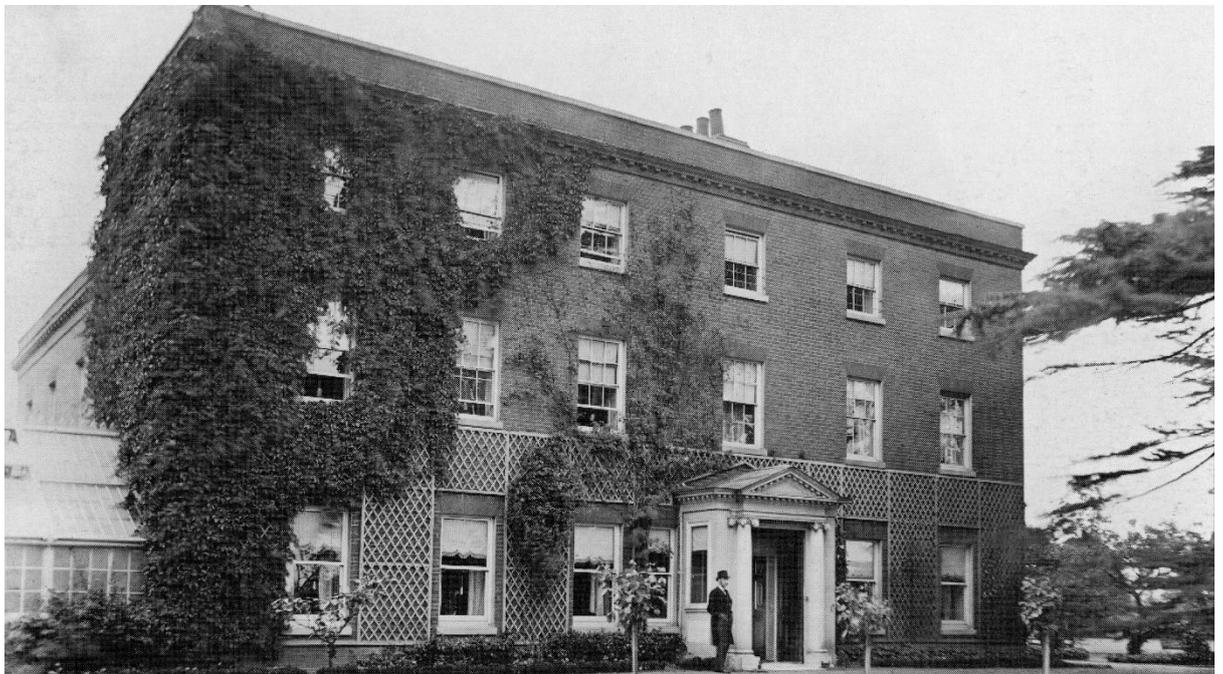
JAMES DOUGLAS, NURSERYMAN OF BOOKHAM

James Douglas was born at Ednam, near Kelso, Roxburghshire, in 1837. From a young age he showed an interest in flowers and at 14 became apprenticed to a nurseryman in Kelso. After three years there he moved to gain further experience in private gardens, first near Kelso and then in Kirkcaldy, Fife. At Kirkcaldy he was entrusted with some of the more responsible jobs and within a year was made general foreman. In 1860, he left Scotland and moved to the service of James Veitch

& Son in Chelsea, one of London's leading firms of nurserymen. Although he did well there and became proficient in staging the firm's exhibits at major shows, James was keen to learn and moved back to private service at Busbridge Hall, near Godalming, Surrey.

In 1864, James took up a position that would be his last as an employee. At the age of 26 he became head gardener to Francis and Silvia Whitbourn, then living at Loxford Hall, Ilford. This was described as a 'very rough place' when he arrived and his only assistance came from a few labourers. However, James' skills were matched by Francis' enthusiasm and before long he was employing trained assistants to maintain the greatly improved plant collections. James' personal life also changed during this period; he married in 1866, subsequently raising a family of two sons and three daughters.

In 1883, James moved with the Whitbourns to their new home, Great Gearies, a large eighteenth-century house in Cranbrook Road, Barkingside; the previous occupants had been the Charrington family of brewing fame. The Whitbourns had no children and Francis spent much time and money in restoring both the house and its grounds. At Great Gearies, James grew a large range of flowers, fruit and vegetables, and became a successful exhibitor and judge at major London horticultural shows. He was soon elected to the Fruit Committee of the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) and over the next 40 years served on almost every RHS committee.



The Essex Herald, 6 August 1883

THE FRUIT CROP IN ESSEX.

Mr. James Douglas, Great Gearies, Ilford, reports: Apricots, under average, good; plums, under; cherries, average, good; apples, over, very good; pears, under, good; small fruits, average, good; strawberries, over, very good.

James also became a regular contributor to the serious horticultural journals of the day and, in 1880, published a book, *Hardy Florists' Flowers*. He interpreted the term 'florists' flowers' widely to include not only those grown for exhibition and display, but also ordinary garden plants. He also began growing new varieties of plants by hybridisation and won awards for some of these.

When Francis Whitbourn died in July 1888, Silvia continued to employ James. In June 1891, the Essex Field Club paid a visit to Great Gearies and its journal, *The Essex Naturalist*, reported:

The beautiful grounds and greenhouses of Great Gearies were then visited, by special invitation of Mrs. Whitbourn, and the choice collections of Cypripediums and Orchids were shown and explained by the head gardener, Mr. Douglas, who is himself a member of the Club.

The Essex Chronicle, 26 June 1891

THE ESSEX FIELD CLUB.

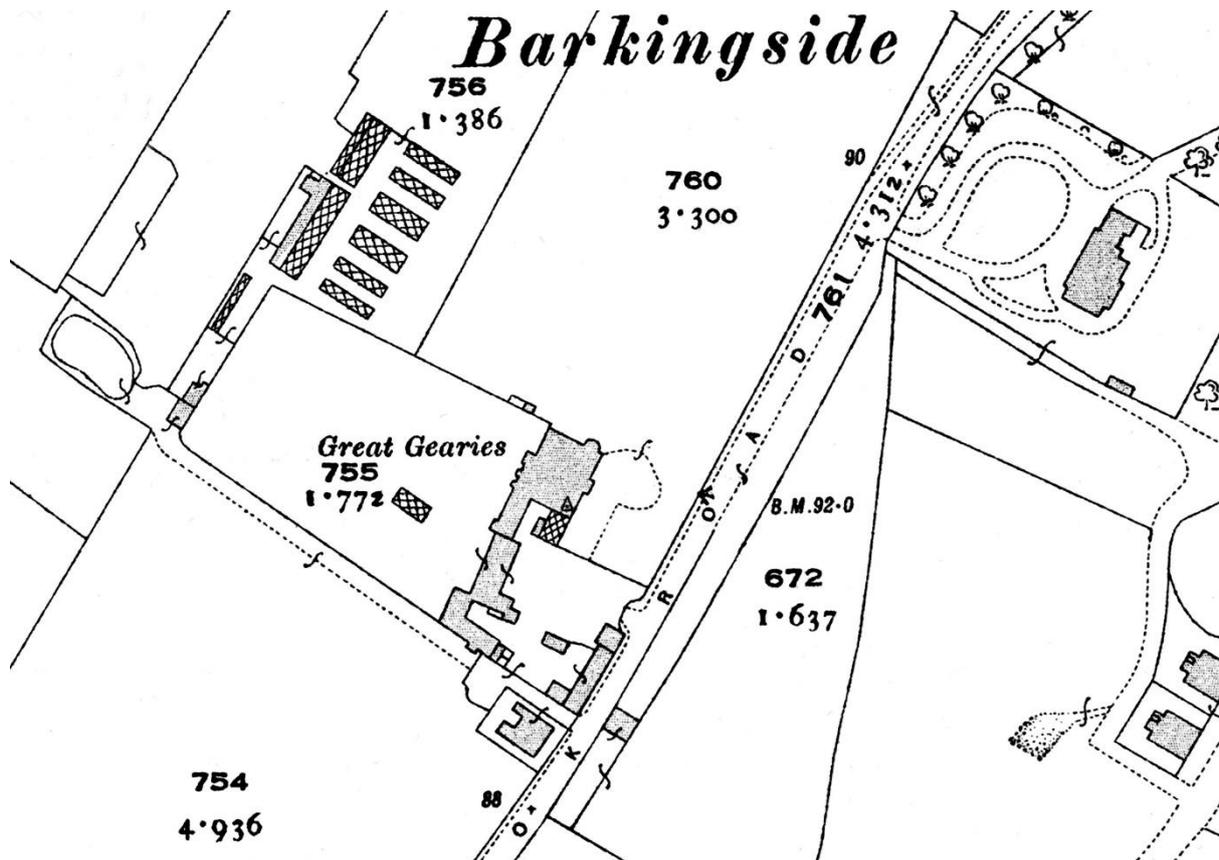
An interesting meeting of the Essex Field Club was held on Saturday [20 June] ... After inspecting Gaysham Hall, Trinity Church, Barkingside, and some exhibits shown in the schoolroom, the party drove to Great Gearies, where, by permission of Mrs. Whitbourn, they had an opportunity of going through the gardens and greenhouses, in which the late Mr. Whitbourn took so lively an interest. Mr. Douglas, who has charge of the gardens, and has made this establishment take first rank on the exhibition benches, almost against the world, showed a new and beautiful orchid, and pointed out some of the rarer objects to be seen ...

By this time, however, as Silvia's ability to enjoy her garden decreased, the position at Great Gearies became less attractive to James as a full-time occupation. So, in 1891, he acquired three and a half acres of land in Great Bookham, Surrey where he established his own nursery. It is unclear why he chose that area when he was still employed at Great Gearies some 40 miles away on the other side of London. One also wonders how James managed to run both the Great Gearies garden and his own business at the same time.

Eventually, in 1897, at the age of 60, James retired from Silvia Whitbourn's service and devoted himself full-time to his own nursery business in Bookham; he was

succeeded as head gardener at Great Gearies by 27-year-old J W Euston. Around this time, the RHS decided to mark Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee by instituting the Victoria Medal of Honour, to be awarded to British horticulturalists whom the Society considered deserving of special honour; James received this award in 1899.

James' nursery at Bookham thrived and, in 1902, he was joined in the business by one of his sons, another James. After James (senior) died on 26 November 1911, the nursery continued to be run by son James, and then by grandson Gordon, until 1967 when Leatherhead Urban District Council purchased the site for housing.



Silvia Whitbourn died at Great Gearies in November 1901, and parts of the estate were sold in the following year. The house itself, with stabling, outbuildings, kitchen garden, greenhouses, lodge, three cottages, a carpenter's shop, and just over 15 acres of land, went for £5,500; a further 69 acres of the estate were sold separately or were withdrawn from sale. The house and parcels of land were sold several times over the following years until, by 1910, much of it was in the possession of local builder Percy Edward Brand. During the First World War, Great Gearies was requisitioned for use as the headquarters of No 4 Balloon Apron, and after the war the garden served as a playground for young Barkingside resident Kathleen Raine and her friends. Writing in 1973, Kathleen recalled:

Higher up the road, towards the village, a manor-house stood in its deserted garden; of the period of Queen Anne, as it now seems to me. I remember thinking the mellow brick house with its broad windows very beautiful,

standing in its pleasant grounds where cedars of Lebanon laid their flat branches low over the sweep of the lawn. Into that magic ground, that forsaken garden, I, with other children, timidly trespassed; climbed on those low branches and marvelled at the great cedar-cones. I sensed a genius loci strange indeed to me, the genius of the gentry; of the eighteenth century behind the nineteenth, like a vista. Nature here was refined, enhanced; here bluebells grew larger and finer than those in the woods; flowering shrubs whose names I did not know; a great hedge of sweet-briar ... I was not the only trespasser, but only a drop in a rising tide; for the deserted manor was to be pulled down; a building estate was to take its place; development, it was called: an experience, at all events, to be undergone, though a moment only in the endless metamorphosis of the world.

In 1922, Percy Brand demolished the eighteenth-century house and built himself a smaller residence on the site. He also developed much of the surrounding estate as housing, a mixture of bungalows, substantial double-fronted terraces and detached houses. Brand's own 1920s house in turn was demolished in the late 1960s and a new one built in its place. Still bearing the Great Gearies name, this house remains standing today.



Alan Simpson May 2020



Redbridge and the Second World War - a new film

To commemorate the 75th Anniversary of VE Day on Friday 8 May, Redbridge Museum have made a new film exploring Ilford, Wanstead and Woodford during the Second World War.

The film looks at the outbreak of the war, evacuation of local children, the Home Front, the war effort by local industries, the damage caused in the local area by air raids, Victory celebrations and the aftermath of the War.

It has been made using a wide range of local photographs, oral history and other archives from Redbridge Museum & Heritage Centre. All of this has been produced by Museum staff in the last month working from home so it's been a challenge!

If you google Redbridge and the Second World War, you will find the YouTube under *Videos*. If you cannot access it emails me and I will send you the link janetseward@aol.com

Famous Ilfordians

There is now hoarding around the late, lamented Bodgers store announcing *Ilford Village est 1653* (I don't know where that came from) and showing photos of significant people born in the borough, graffiti has obliterated some of them but, you can make out some familiar faces. There is also a Banksy type drawing of Eva Hart, an Ilford resident and a survivor of the sinking of the Titanic.

