

Elstree & Borehamwood Museum

Friends Newsletter September 2015

Issue Number 9



TO OUR MANOR BORN!

The second event exclusively for 'Friends' of the museum was held on Saturday, 6th June, at 96 Shenley Road. Lynda Marshall, museum volunteer, presented a talk and slide show entitled *'Europe Erupts'*, which looked at WW1 from the German perspective. There was also a showing of the DVD *'Hertfordshire, A County At War'*. Refreshments were served and it all made for a very successful and thoroughly enjoyable evening. Further 'Friends' events are being planned. Details to be announced.

The WW1 exhibition *'Over by Christmas'* closed at the end of June after a run of nearly 6 months. Visitor numbers had started to decline in the last weeks and it was perhaps a blessing to the museum volunteers who had listened to *'It's a Long Way to Tipperary'* for so long with an impressive stoicism.

Since the middle of last year, Ruth Stratton, Heritage and Museums Officer and David Armitage, our Museum Manager, have been liaising with Helen Wallenda of the BBC to organise an Exhibition celebrating 30 years of *EastEnders* which is filmed just across the road from the museum. The first episode was broadcast on 19th February 1985 and it has gone from strength to strength ever since. The railway bridge, seen in many episodes, is in fact viewable from the library window just outside the museum entrance. The museum closed for 2 weeks to prepare for the new exhibition and the BBC did an excellent job of designing the artwork which forms the basis of the presentation, both in the museum and on the walls and glass cabinet of the ground floor cafe area. The cabinet exhibits include a number of items which featured prominently in some of the most dramatic episodes and includes the wedding dress

of Bianca Jackson. There are also some unlikely murder weapons in the form of a bust of Queen Victoria (usually sitting on the bar of the Queen Vic) and an electric iron. A central display features a 100th scale model of Albert Square which can be used by the designers to plan new ideas. The current set was built in 1984 and is beginning to show signs of age. Plans are underway to build a new one and hopefully keep this immensely popular drama in our town for at least the next 30 years. Although the exhibition was essentially

designed by the BBC a lot of background work was required by the museum volunteers and the week preceding the opening was both a challenging and rewarding time for them.

On Friday evening, 10th July, the exhibition was opened for local dignitaries and BBC representatives involved with the production. It was an excellent start to the new exhibition and well received by all. David Armitage gave a speech thanking the BBC for all their help and the Mayor,

Councillor Martin Worcester spoke on behalf of Hertsmere. It was officially opened by Dominic Treadwell-Collins, Executive Producer of *EastEnders*. As a small museum the association with the BBC has proved invaluable and their attention to detail and professionalism is something we will endeavour to maintain and incorporate in the future.

'EastEnders at 30' has now been open for over 6 weeks and visitor numbers are going up and up. It will run until early in 2016 so please don't miss it. It is hoped that during this exhibition the Museum will pass the magical 10,000 visitor mark. Quite an achievement in less than 2 years so please continue your valuable support.

Together we will get there!



Ruth Stratton and Dave Armitage enjoy a glass of wine with Helen Wallenda and Matthew Campbell of the BBC design team.

If you have access to the internet you may like to visit the Museum website at www.elstree-museum.org.uk. It is an excellent way of keeping up with all the current and future exhibitions. There is plenty of information about the museum with a continually updated 'Blog' about what is happening locally. You can also view past editions of this Newsletter, buy books of local interest and post your views, suggestions and questions.

A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE!

Despite the growth of Borehamwood in the last 65 years, there still remain large areas of parks and open spaces in our town, many perhaps unknown to even long term residents. Dave Armitage, Museum Manager, took this fact as a theme for his 2015 Annual History Walk. An excellent turnout of 40 walkers met at Meadow Park on Sunday 21st June to stroll through some of our more recent history.

Meadow Park has existed for almost 100 years and football has been played here since the 1920's. At the end of WW2 the local teams were Borehamwood Rovers and Borehamwood Retournez and these teams amalgamated in 1948 to form the Borehamwood Football Club which moved to its present location in 1963. The Bowls Club, formed in 1957, has been in the Park since 1962.

Crossing Meadow Park we stopped at **Hartforde Road**. Post war Britain saw a massive development of new council estates to house Londoners displaced by WW2 bombing and 4080 homes were built in Borehamwood between 1950 and 1955, increasing the population by 8000. Another 8000 followed within 10 years and some Londoners even found they had the same neighbours on arrival here.

Many of the houses in Hartforde Road were constructed by Prisoners of War. In 1949 Nye Bevan (Minister for Health) opened the 500th council house built after the war by Elstree Rural District Council. It is No 40 Hartforde Road.

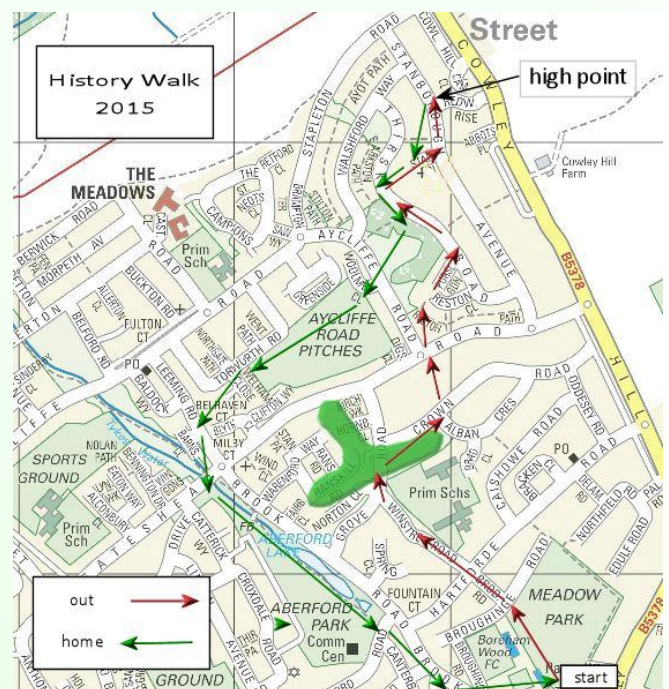


Nye Bevan in Hartforde Road 1949

Across Hartforde Road is **Cowley Hill School**. On Feb 7th 1949, Furzehill, the only school for Infant and Junior pupils was almost totally burned down. Only the dinner hut remained and some infants continued their education there. Others went to Hill House, Elstree, Hillside and Shenley Hospital.

There was an urgent need for a new school and Cowley Hill was built rapidly, with the first pupils attending a partially finished school in June 1950. As more of the school was finished some of the displaced children from Furzehill came here.

Approaching **Crown Road** we arrived at an area of greenery with a few large oak trees. This is what remains of the **Tee Shaped Wood** (see map). Originally a footpath from Boundary Oak in Theobald Street to Green Street passed through this point. The wood was quite dense in places and stretched all the way down to Gateshead Road.



The walk continued along Crown Road to a 'cut-through' adjacent to No 51, which took us across **Gateshead Road**. Following **Reston Path** and **Pursley Gardens** we arrived in **Thirsk Road**. Since leaving Meadow park we had been climbing steadily and this last stretch is quite steep giving increasingly impressive views over Borehamwood. Just to our right as we emerged into Thirsk Road is the **Canon Public House**. How it has survived in this relatively remote corner of Borehamwood is a mystery. It is apparently privately owned after a lottery win but whatever the reason long may it continue - we have lost so many Pubs in our locality with The Crown being the latest victim.

A flooded dip in Thirsk Road provided a setting for the 1971 film 'On the Buses' with Inspector 'Blakey' getting a thoroughly deserved soaking, at a fictitious stop, by one of his own buses.

Turning left along Thirsk Road we passed **Thirskcliffe Nature Park**, a large area of woodland. **Stanborough Close** on the right continued to climb to **Stanborough Avenue** where we reached the highest point of our walk at **Redwood Rise**. This is 400' above sea level and we had climbed 150' since leaving Meadow Park. Here once stood **Campions**, a Victorian country house built in the late 19th century. After WW2 it became a maternity home and was later used as an overflow school for infants and juniors. It was described in the 1950's as 'gaunt, grim, derelict and creepy' - like something out of a Dickens Novel. In 1960 at a cost of £10,000, it was renovated as a 'College of Further Education' for day release and evening class pupils studying shorthand, typing and engineering courses.

This highest point in the walk provided good views of Borehamwood and Shenley. Half a mile to the North West is the country house of **Lyndhurst**. This fine house built c1850 was formally known as **Ridgehurst** and in the early 1900's was owned by Mr & Mrs Speyer. They held musical evenings there and many famous people and musicians came, including the composer Sir Edward Elgar and Paderewski, the Polish composer, pianist and politician. It was requisitioned by the military during WW2 and became a listening post for German encrypted morse code. Intercepts were sent on to Bletchley Park. In the 1970's the house became the home of **Graham Hill**, twice F1 World Champion. Graham was killed in 1975 at Arkley in a plane crash when returning to Elstree Aerodrome. He is buried in St Botolphs Churchyard, Shenley. Architect Nicholas Hawksmoor, who worked with Sir Christopher Wren on St Paul's Cathedral, is also buried there. Lyndhurst is now the home of Jeff Wayne. His 1978 music album 'War of the Worlds' is one of the biggest selling albums of all time and he continues to use Lyndhurst as a base for 'Jeff Wayne Music Publications'

The good news for all of us was that it was downhill from now on. Passing through Thirskcliffe Nature Park and **Aycliffe Park**, both areas of trees and greenery, we wound our way down to **Leeming Road** shops. These shops originally had Peppercorn rents (low rents to encourage people to start businesses) and older residents will remember the days of GL Radio when Elvis Presley and Jailhouse Rock blasted out from the external speakers. Alas it was short lived and complaints from local residents called an untimely end to the youthful fun.

Passing **St Michaels Church** we were reminded that it was opened in 1952 by **Princess Margaret**.

Her name is carved on the foundation stone. The occasion was the highlight of the year for many and a large crowd turned out for the ceremony.



As we continued our walk through **Aberford Park** with its lakes, fountains and abundant wildlife, it was difficult to believe that a sewage farm was operating on this site in the early 1950's.



Eldon Avenue Prefabs with Sewage Farm on the left

The final stop was **Eldon Avenue** where 68 Prefabs were built in 1946. Many Borehamwood residents will remember them or have lived in them. Before **Brook Road** was built, Eldon Avenue was the main exit to Shenley Road and its junction with Hartforde Road marked the start of open countryside.

So ended a most enjoyable walk of approx 3 miles. Many thanks to Dave Armitage for a most entertaining and informative afternoon and to Simon Gee for trying to get the photographs in the right order. 40 walkers from start to finish is very impressive but this event is becoming very popular and who knows what next year will bring.

See you there!

MUSEUM OUTREACH NEWS

On **Saturday, 2nd May**, museum volunteer Helen Stamp organised a stand at the Pre-Festival event in the Piazza, adjacent to All Saints Church. Unfortunately the cold, windy conditions did not help with visitor numbers and a lot of time was spent trying to keep the display boards in a vertical position. A box of bricks and assorted weights proved invaluable and will be part of the kit in future.

The Museum was well represented at **Families Day on Saturday, 27th June**. After the deluge of last year the weather was near perfect and we somehow managed to spread the stall over two Gazebos (see photo below) and attract over 120 visitors. Organised by Helen Stamp and ably assisted by a number of volunteers, the displays advertised forthcoming exhibitions including *'EastEnders at 30: In Our Manor'*. The display of old photos of Borehamwood always attract interest and the older visitors love to chat about the places and people they remember. Their knowledge of times long past is often amazing and something the museum is trying to preserve.



Visitors were also made aware of the research currently being undertaken by Vania Ermolly and Matt Caro as part of the museum's Oral History Project with the aim of including the stories of local people in a forthcoming exhibition *'From Village to Town: Celebrating a Century of Migration'*. Visitors were asked to indicate on either the world map or a UK map where they or their families originated. A fascinating picture of migration into Elstree and Borehamwood is emerging and a number of people

left their contact details so that their stories could be followed up at a later date.

In **August**, Dave Armitage and Vania Ermolly gave a presentation to members of Shenley Fellowship. Entitled *'Shenley in the First World War'* it drew upon the research of the late Peter Stokes.

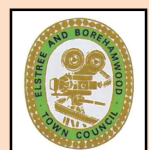
In **October** the museum, in collaboration with library colleagues, will be hosting an after-school in service training event for local teachers. Organised by Vania, Community Learning Officer, teachers will have an opportunity to learn about the educational services which the museum has to offer, as well as handling the range of artefacts which can be loaned to schools. Last held in 2013, this event attracted a small number of schools and resulted in some regular bookings. It is hoped that we can reach more schools this time round.



The popular monthly meeting of *'Going Down The Village'* (see photo above) held on the first Thursday of each month between 10:30 and 11:30am will resume in September, after a short summer break. On September 3rd we will be looking at Clothes and Fashions, October 1st will concentrate on Buildings and Architecture, November 5th takes a look at Farms and on December 3rd bring along your Hula-Hoops, Mr Potato Head and Yo-Yo's because we will be looking at the Toys we all loved to play with.

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Open 12pm - 6pm Tues, Wed & Thurs
10am-3pm Sat



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