



# Woodford Times

Woodford Historical Society  
Founded 1932

## Newsletter Autumn 2021

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### Editorial

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Welcome to the 2021/22 season of Woodford Historical Society.

I had hoped to bring you the news that not only would we be recommencing our meetings in the school hall but simultaneously be Zooming, alas this is not to be. The situation with numbers of people meeting up is still uncertain and the school have also decided that at present, they are not hiring out their premises. We will therefore be continuing with Zoom for the foreseeable future. The school have suggested that we contact them in October to see if the position has changed. I know that this will be a disappointment to many of our members who do not have access to Zoom and over the past months have missed out on our talks. At present as rules stand, you can invite people into your home and I would ask that if as a member you know of a member who does not have access to Zoom and you are willing, that you extend an invitation to that member, so they are able to enjoy our talks. We are going to ask our speakers if they are willing to summarise their talks so those who do not have the opportunity to hear the talk, will know the content of what has been said and it will be included in future Newsletters.

We always welcome articles from members for future inclusion in the Newsletter.

We have an interesting mix of subjects, and our agenda for the season is as follows:

### Programme 2021 – 22

#### 2021

- |                                  |   |                       |
|----------------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| <b>20<sup>th</sup> September</b> | <b>Clement Attlee – Zoom</b>                              | Speaker: Andrew Baker |
| <b>18<sup>th</sup> October</b>   | <b>Trains, buses &amp; trams in the local area - Zoom</b> | Speaker: Roger Torode |
| <b>15<sup>th</sup> November</b>  | <b>Hackney Walk – Zoom</b>                                | Speaker: Sean Gibbons |
| <b>13<sup>th</sup> December</b>  | <b>A History of Christmas – Zoom</b>                      | Speaker: Nick Dobson  |
- (note: 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday in month)*

**2022** – *A decision about Zoom meetings will be made in October*

<b>17<sup>th</sup> January</b>	<b>We also Serve – the Story of the Animal VC</b>	Speaker: Mark Smith
<b>21<sup>st</sup> February</b>	<b>Victorian Farm Buildings</b>	Speaker: Anne Padfield
<b>21<sup>st</sup> March</b>	<b>Annual General Meeting + This Policeman's Lot</b>	Speaker: Peter Lawrence
<b>19<sup>th</sup> April</b>	<b>The Mysterious Meridians of Highams Park</b>	Speaker: Mike Payne

The Society will be reintroducing the membership fee for the new season. Anyone wishing to continue to listen to our talks will have to enrol as a member. We have made paying membership fees easier by allowing payment to be made by bank transfer/standing order and details are on the enclosed membership form. Please ensure that when you send your membership form you enclose a sae so that your membership card can be sent to you. We have not increased fees and consider that it is still excellent value. Where other Societies inform us of their forthcoming events, we will continue to let you know.

We would like to congratulate Georgina Green on being appointed a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

I think we had all hoped that by now life would have returned to normal and as a bonus, been able to provide Zoom as this enables members who live far and wide and cannot get to our meetings to continue to be part of the Society. Let us hope that we will get back to those days.

If there is anything that you would like to bring to the attention of the Committee then please contact us.

I look forward to welcoming you back on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> September.

Sue Ralph

### **Bits and Pieces**

Our Treasurer has some publications that may be of interest to members. These are;

The Local Historian April 2021/2 Vol 51 No2

History News Spring 2021 No 139

The Essex Society for Archaeology and History 2019 Vol 10

Essex Journal Spring2021 Vol 56 No1

Please contact her direct: jeanwyber@aol.com

## POSTCARD FROM THE PRESIDENT (5)

Dear Members

Hopefully when you read this contribution to the newsletter, we may be safely back to some sort of a new normality. Whilst understanding that there are no absolute guarantees after getting the vaccinations, Linda and I feel more able to mix again but caution continues to be the main aim.

Since the Spring of 2020 video conferencing has taken over our lives. Linda, as an operations officer for National Coastwatch, instead of travelling to London, the Midlands or the Southwest for meetings, all business is now dealt with from our shared office via "Teams" or "Zoom". Personally, I had not heard of Zoom before March 2020 but since then, with most being advertised via my former college's website "Denman At Home", I have given over 150 talks, perhaps many more by the time you read this. I enjoy technology but only as far as it might be of benefit so I'm looking forward to perhaps a new variation of Zoom when "real" meetings can be live streamed at the same time. I already have evidence that this will be attractive to all age groups, those both working and retired, especially during the winter. There is already evidence that many clubs and societies have increased their membership over the past year. I remember especially, when taking questions after a talk to the "East Of London Family History Society", one lady, now living in Yorkshire, became very emotional when expressing her pleasure at being able to join in a meeting for the first time since she left the East End. Video meetings have helped to bridge isolation with those living in Mid Wales, the Yorkshire Moors and other more remote parts of the country. In my opinion, video technology has helped many people through an extremely difficult time.

However, during this period local history has continued to seek me out. Many of you will be aware of the pleasure joining one of the many local interest "private" sites on "Facebook". I belong to several, including one for Woodford, Walthamstow, Leyton & Leytonstone, plus other London and Essex groups that I dip into from time to time. Several weeks ago, a gentleman popped up, having joined the "Leyton & Leytonstone" group. He introduced himself as having ancestry in Leyton and whether anybody had any knowledge of his family, the Barclays – Bingo !!! Barclay Hall, (Livingstone College in my younger days), the Barclay Hall estate, behind Whipps Cross Hospital, the Barclay Christian Centre, built on the site of their gardener's cottage in the High Road and the Barclay family's next home, Monkham's, all came to mind. Sure enough, this present Mr Barclay, whose house Linda and I regularly pass on our way to the Cromer watch station, is a direct descendant of Joseph Gurney Barclay of Leyton, who was followed by Henry Ford Barclay of Woodford. The latter of course living "next door" to his kinsmen, the Buxtons of Knighton. It will not surprise you to know that I now correspond with this new Barclay contact, who has kindly allowed me to use a portrait of Joseph Gurney Barclay. That is the sort of local history connection that continues to keep me energised and gives me so much pleasure.

Keep well and please continue to take care.

Best wishes  
Peter

## More on Grove Hall – Daniel Mildred

By Georgina Green



Grove Hall undated

We know that Mary Mathew died on 21 January 1811 and was also buried with her husband at Woodford, but we can't tell if she continued living at Grove Hall after her husband died, nor when Daniel Mildred took a lease on the house. It seems likely that had happened by 1821 as will be shown later.

Daniel Mildred was born on 2 April 1769, the son of Daniel and Lydia Mildred who registered his birth at a Quaker Meeting in London. On 15<sup>th</sup> December 1790 at the

Quaker Meeting House in Tottenham he

married Elizabeth, daughter of John and Elizabeth Harman who had recently moved into Highams. John was a very wealthy man, a partner in Messrs Gurney (or Gunell?), Hoare, Harmans and Co. merchants in Cateaton Street.

They had a number of children including Daniel Mildred, born 19 January 1795 at Finsbury Square, Beatrice born 28 April 1801, Louisa born 26 April 1803, Henry born 18 September 1807, Maria on 13 January 1809 and Frederick who was born on 26 December 1810 when his parents were still living at Finsbury Square. Beatrice and Louisa were baptised in the Church of England at St Mary's Woodford in 1821 and Henry, Maria and Frederick followed them in this in 1824. Presumably they had previously been part of the Quaker congregation but it seems safe to assume they were living at Grove Hall by this time and quite likely that Daniel Mildred took the house soon after 1811 with these children to care for.

Daniel Mildred senior died in January 1828 and was buried at St Mary's. There was some confusion over his will which had not been legally completed but it is clear he left a widow, and named his sons Daniel and Henry as his executors. Elizabeth survived her husband, dying aged 73 and was buried at St Mary's on 4 December 1838. In that year Daniel Mildred is shown as occupying Grove Hall on the Woodford Tithe Award, with Henry occupying Truby House (south of the George) and 13½ acres of pasture in Wanstead Parish. Frederick Mildred occupied a house with an acre of land at the top of Chingford Lane, opposite Highams.

Daniel Mildred junior married Emily Pearse on 8 May 1834 at St Marylebone, Westminster. She was the daughter of Nicholas Pearse and Charlotte Chiswell Raikes who had married in 1796 and was thus the great-niece of Job Mathew. The Pearse family of Monkham were also very wealthy so perhaps the marriage of two youngsters from this social circle is not surprising. We know the couple had two children but sadly Emily died, aged 34, and was buried on 19 November 1839. She is listed on the Pearse memorial in the churchyard. Eight years later, on 27 January 1848, Daniel Mildred married Rosa Gore at St Mary's. She was a spinster aged 34, the daughter of John and Charlotte Gore of Harts.

Daniel Mildred died aged 64, at his house at 22 Montague Square, and was buried at St Mary's on 7 June 1858. There is no recorded memorial to the Mildred family at St. Mary's.

© Georgina Green, 20 November 2020

Most information from St Mary's Parish records and Ancestry

*Georgina Green: Woodford HS article 2017 – Mildred for WHS Nov 2020*

## Humphry Repton's influence on Epping Forest.

It is well known that landscape gardener Humphry Repton (1752 - 1818) undertook several commissions in East London and Essex although much of his work has been covered by the spread of London. However, if you walk in Wanstead Park and admire the scenery you will be appreciating many of the trees planted on Repton's instructions 200 years ago. We also have to thank Repton for the creation of the lake in the park of the house called Highams. In 1891 this was bought and added into Epping Forest and now the whole district has become known as Highams Park. But Repton also indirectly influenced the management of Epping Forest in the years following the 1878 Act.

Humphry Repton spent his childhood and early married life in Suffolk and Norfolk but in 1786 he moved with his family to a cottage at Hare Street, Gidea Park. The site is now Lloyds Bank on the corner of Balgores Lane and Main Road, between Romford and Gallows Corner.

In 1788, aged 36, he realised that nobody had stepped in to replace Capability Brown (who had died five years earlier) and so he decided to set up in business as a landscape gardener. His previous experiences had given him a good background for this work and he quickly became established working for all sorts of people from the nouveaux riches to the aristocracy.

Repton claimed that by the end of his career he had written more than 400 reports although not all the sites are known today. Many of his clients were given a 'Red Book' containing a text with his ideas illustrated with delicate watercolours and an overlay to show his transformations. 110 'Red Books' have survived and one of them shows his plans for a new house to be built near Cromer in Norfolk.

Hill House Farm at Northrepps was purchased by Bartlett Gurney (1756 – 1803) who intended to build a fashionable country house near to Northrepps Hall which was owned by relatives. Bartlett Gurney planned a house 'of a mixed kind, partaking of a villa, sporting seat and constant residence'. He chose a site on the crest of an open hillside between Northrepps Hall and the sea at Overstrand. The views in all directions were magnificent but there was absolutely no shelter.

In 1792 he called in Humphry Repton who had lived about five miles away at Sustead Old Hall, just south of the Felbrigg estate (National Trust), from around 1778 until 1786. Repton was not impressed by the barren site and his 'before' illustration shows ploughed fields and turnips with a distant cottage and occasional trees bent by the prevailing wind. He proposed the creation of several plantations of trees to screen the proposed house from the worst of the wind.



Northrepps Cottage surrounded by woodland  
September 2014

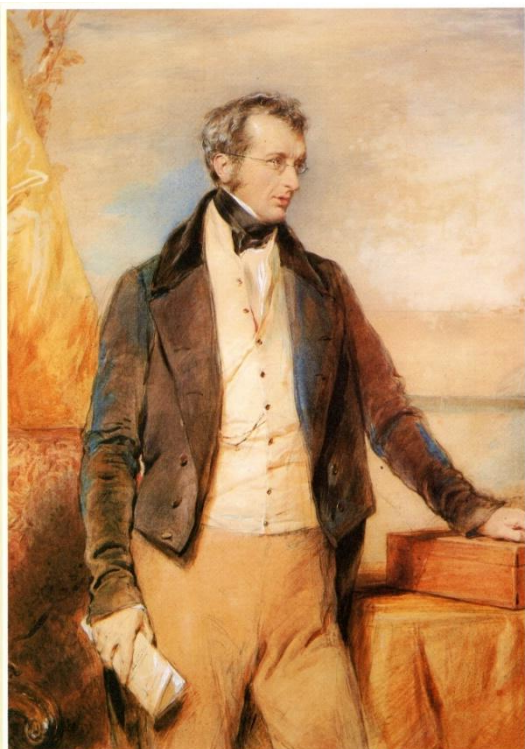
In the end, the beautiful classical villa which had been designed by William Wilkins was not built and instead a more modest house was erected at the foot of the hill. However Repton's suggestions for the plantations were carried out.

In 1795 Northrepps Hall was sold to Richard Gurney and it became a summer retreat not only for his own children, but for eleven nephew and nieces who were the children of his dead sister

Rachel and Robert Barclay, the previous owner of the house. Richard Gurney's first wife had also died and he married as his

second wife Rachel Hanbury who was the sister of Anna Buxton. When Anna's husband died she also visited Northrepps with her children, including the young Thomas Fowell Buxton.

Richard Gurney's brother John Gurney also had eleven motherless children who spent some of the summer months at Northrepps Hall. Among these children were Elizabeth who married Joseph Fry and Hannah who married Thomas Fowell Buxton. Apparently, summer gatherings of these extensive families continue at Northrepps today, still resulting in occasional marriages between distant relatives!



Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton (1786-1845)  
by George Richmond

Thomas Fowell Buxton became a partner in the Truman Hanbury Buxton Brewery and an M.P. He was created a baronet in recognition of his part in the passing of the Act of Parliament which abolished slavery in 1834. By this time Northrepps Cottage was the home of his sister Sarah and her cousin Anna Gurney and they helped him with his parliamentary paperwork in the summer recess.

Buxton had been brought up to love the countryside and he took an active part in planting many of the trees. In later life he purchased estates at Trimingham (on the coast east of Northrepps) and at Runton on the west side of Cromer. On both properties he formed extensive plantations taking great delight 'in letting his imagination run wild in visions of future woods and groves, yet to be planted.' These plantations formed his chief amusement during the last years of his life. He died in 1845 and there can be little doubt that his son Sir Edward North Buxton (1812 – 1858) 2<sup>nd</sup> Bt also

played an active part in the tree planting and would have continued his father's work, involving his own children, Thomas Fowell Buxton (1837–1915, later 3<sup>rd</sup> Bt of Warlies) and Edward North

Buxton (1840 – 1924, later of Knighton). Both these gentlemen played a significant part both in saving Epping Forest and in its management after 1878.

Humphry Repton died 200 years ago, on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1818, aged 65, and was buried in the village of Aylsham, Norfolk, where his grave is marked by a stone inscribed with the epitaph he had written for himself, and by a bed of roses. However, his proposals for tree planting around Northrepps Cottage have resulted in some magnificent woodlands in the vicinity and must surely have influenced those of the Buxton family who worked so hard to ensure Epping Forest has survived for us to enjoy today.

© Georgina Green, 1 October 2018



## Agatha Christie – Queen of Crime

Nick Dobson

He was hardly more than five feet four inches but carried himself with great dignity. His head was exactly the shape of an egg, and he always perched it a little on one side. His moustache was very stiff and military. Even if everything on his face was covered, the tips of moustache and the pink-tipped nose would be visible. The neatness of his attire was almost incredible; I believe a speck of dust would have caused him more pain than a bullet wound. Yet this quaint dandified little man who, I was sorry to see, now limped badly, had been in his time one of the most celebrated members of the Belgian police.

With those words, the second most famous detective in literature made his first appearance, in the novel *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, the first published novel by its 30-year-old author Agatha Christie.



Agatha Christie was born Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1890. in, Torquay. Her mother, Clara Boehmer was born, in Dublin in 1854, her father was an American stockbroker named Frederick Alvah Miller, a member of the small and wealthy American upper class. Agatha was the youngest of their three children. She had an older sister and brother. Agatha was raised in a

household with various esoteric beliefs and, like her siblings, believed that their mother Clara was a psychic with the ability of second sight. She received a home education, and so her parents were responsible for teaching her to read and write and to be able to perform basic arithmetic. By the age of six, she had taught herself to write. She was soon creating her own stories. Agatha looked back on her childhood as an idyllic time writing **“One of the luckiest things that can happen to you in life is, I think, to have a happy childhood.”** Her father died in November 1901, aged 55. His death left the family devastated and in an uncertain economic situation. In 1902, Agatha was sent to receive a formal education, but found it difficult to adjust to the discipline. In 1905, she was sent to school in Paris. Agatha described the time she spent in Paris as the happiest of her life. Returning to England in 1910 Agatha found her mother Clara was ill. They decided to go to the warmer climate of Cairo, Agatha, always chaperoned by her mother, attended many social functions in search of a husband.

Now she was earning a guinea a poem by sending her work to the *Poetry Review*. Bored whilst recovering from influenza, Agatha wrote a 6000 word short story *The House of Beauty*. Other shorts followed, most of them illustrating her interest in spiritualism and the paranormal. Various magazines rejected all her early submissions. Undaunted by rejection, Agatha wrote her first novel, *Snow Upon the Desert*, and set it in Cairo, written under the pseudonym Monosyllaba. The novel was also declined and Clara suggested that her daughter ask for advice from a family friend and neighbour, writer Eden Philpotts, and he sent her an introduction to his own literary agent, Hughes Massie, who rejected *Snow Upon the Desert*, and suggested a second novel.

Agatha met Bolton Fletcher, a Colonel in the Lancers, who was 15 years older than Agatha. He quickly proposed marriage, but Clara insisted that Agatha should wait 6 months before giving her answer. At the end of that period, she declined his offer.

Similarly, her engagement to childhood friend Wilfred Pirie amounted to nothing. She then met Archibald Christie at a dance. He was an army officer who was seconded to the Royal Flying Corps in April 1913. The couple fell in love. Upon learning that he would be stationed in Farnborough, Archie proposed marriage, Agatha accepted. In August 1914. The First World War broke out and Archie, along with rest of the Royal Flying Corps, was sent to France. Agatha joined the Voluntary Aid Detachment. On his return Agatha insisted they should marry. Archie, fearful that he would be killed in action and leave Agatha a young widow, was against the idea. The subsequent row was won by Agatha and they were married by special licence on Christmas Eve in Bristol. At the hospital, she took unpaid work. She qualified as an "apothecaries' assistant" in 1917. It was at this time that she started to learn about poisons, a knowledge that was later to prove useful in the plots of her novels.

Writing *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* presented some difficulties. She became bogged down in the plot which drew heavily on her pharmaceutical knowledge. On her mother's suggestion, she went to stay at the Moorland Hotel on Dartmoor. This became a lifelong habit. Returning from Dartmoor with an almost complete manuscript, Agatha added a love interest to it. It eventually found its way onto a slush pile at Bodley Head.



Archie returned from the Western Front in September 1918. Transfer to the Air Ministry enabled Archie to move with Agatha to a small flat in St. John's Wood where Agatha soon found she was pregnant. Rosalind Maragret Clarissa was born in August 1919.

Just before they moved to Holland Park, John Lane from Bodley Head visited Agatha to discuss *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, the manuscript she had submitted two years earlier.

Alterations were suggested, the most significant being the ending, which Agatha adapted, it was that the denouement should take place in the library in a conversation between the detective and his friend Hastings, the narrator.

Agatha Christie's second novel, was a comedy thriller entitled *The Secret Adversary* (1922). It featured detective couple Tommy Beresford and Tuppence Cowley. The Tommy and Tuppence novel, *Postern of Fate* was published in 1973 and was the last book Agatha ever wrote.

In 1923, a third novel again featured Poirot, *Murder on the Links* based on a recent murder case in France. Short stories commissioned by Bruce Ingram, editor of *Sketch* magazine also featured Poirot. In all, Hercule Poirot features in 33 novels, over 50 short stories and one play, *Black Coffee*, all of which were published over a period of 53 years. Despite the long publication career of Poirot, by 1930 Agatha Christie described her detective as "insufferable" and by 1960 she felt that he was a "detestable, bombastic, tiresome, ego-centric little creep".

I (Nick Dobson) started with a brief physical description of Poirot, added to which are his eyes, Poirot has green eyes that are repeatedly described as shining "like a cat's" when he is struck by a clever idea, and dark hair, which he dyes later in life. However, many of his screen incarnations are portrayed as bald or balding. Frequent mention is made of his patent leather shoes, damage to which is frequently a source of misery for him, but comical for the reader. Poirot's appearance, regarded as fastidious during his early career, later falls hopelessly out of fashion. He employs pince-nez reading

glasses. Among Poirot's most significant personal attributes is the sensitivity of his stomach:

Archie was offered a job by Ernest Belcher. Belcher told Archie he needed a Financial Advisor to assist him on the British Empire Mission: Within weeks, the Christies embarked on the ten month tour promoting the Empire Exhibition in New Zealand, Australia and Canada.

Agatha's mother Clara died in early 1926. Archie Christie hated "illness, death, and trouble" and, he promptly went away to London leaving Agatha to deal with her mother's death. In 1926, came her biggest bombshell, Archie asked her for a divorce. He was in love with Nancy Neele, who had been a friend of Major Belcher, director of the British Empire Mission. On 3 December 1926, the Christies quarrelled, and Archie left their house to spend the weekend with his mistress at Godalming. That same evening, around 9:45 pm, Christie disappeared from her home, leaving behind a letter



for her secretary saying that she was going to Yorkshire. Her car, was later found at Newlands Corner, perched above a chalk quarry, with an expired driving licence and clothes. Her disappearance caused an outcry from the public. Despite the extensive manhunt, she was not found for 10 days. On 14 December 1926, she was found at the Swan Hydropathic Hotel in Harrogate, Yorkshire, registered as Mrs Teresa Neele (the surname of her husband's lover) from Cape Town.

The Christies divorced in 1928. Agatha retained custody of daughter Rosalind and the Christie name for her writing. At a party in London, she met a young naval officer who started talking about Baghdad and visiting Ur. He and his wife were so enthusiastic, telling Agatha where exactly to go. Whilst visiting Ur, she met archaeologist Sir Leonard Woolley and his wife. They became firm friends and her interest in archaeology was born.

A second trip to Ur, followed in March 1930 and it was there she met Max Mallowan, when he was 26 years of age." Mrs. Woolley asked Max to give Agatha a tour of the various digs and cities. Agatha and Max got to know each other well. Back in England Agatha invited Max to visit her and whilst at Ashfield, Max asked Agatha to marry him. Concerned by their age difference, she refused him, but six months after their initial meeting, they did marry quietly in Edinburgh.

Agatha once said: **"An archaeologist is the best husband a woman can have. The older she gets, the more interested he is in her"**

In 1934, she and Max Mallowan purchased Winterbrook House at Wallingford. This was their main residence and where Christie did most of her writing. Agatha and Max also spent a lot of time in Devon. In 1938, Agatha Christie and Max Mallowan, were looking around South Devon, when Agatha saw Greenways was available. It became their summer home, a place where she wrote very little, now owned by the National Trust



Agatha's second best-known creation Miss Jane Marple first appeared in short stories in 1927. Miss Marple was based on Christie's step grandmother and her "Ealing cronies". Miss Marple was, the elderly spinster who lived in the village of St. Mary Mead and acted as an amateur consulting detective. Miss Marple appeared in 12 of Christie's novels starting with *The Murder at the Vicarage* in 1930. In all, Agatha Christie wrote 66 detective stories, 14 collections of short stories, collections of poetry, six novels under the pseudonym Mary Westmacott, non-fiction works, plays for stage, radio and television and screen plays including an adaptation of Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* in 1962. In addition to the series featuring Poirot, Marple and Tommy and Tuppence, there were the short stories with detective James Parker Pyne

To honour her many literary works, Agatha was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 1956. The next year, she became the President of the Detection Club. In the 1971 New Year Honours, she was promoted Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE). She kept up with modern trends and developments and always had a turn of humour in her novels. Take this quote from the 1969 novel *Hallowe'en Party*:

**There's a proverb which that says 'To err is human,' but a human error is nothing compared to what a computer can do if it tries!**

Dame Agatha Christie died on 12 January 1976 at age 85 at her Winterbrook House, Wallingford. She is buried in the nearby churchyard of St Mary's, Cholsey. London's West End Theatres dimmed their lights for an hour in tribute to her.

Christie is the best-selling novelist of all time. With between 2 and 4 billion works sold (depending on your source), only Shakespeare and the Bible exceed her in terms of sales. She is also the most translated novelist in history. When the BBC asked Queen Mary what she would like for a present to celebrate her eightieth birthday, she asked for a play by Agatha Christie. The 1947 play for radio was called *Three Blind Mice* and adapted for the stage it became *The Mousetrap*. Her greatest legacy lies in the fact that she perfected the murder mystery genre. Often people are tempted to think of Agatha Christie as just a shy, upper middle-class lady who wrote murder mysteries. She was so much more than that: an enthusiastic gardener, a fine photographer with a love of cricket. In her second novel *The Secret Adversary* she wrote as a dedication: **To all those who lead monotonous lives in the hope that they may experience at second hand the delights and dangers of adventure.** During the Second World War, Christie wrote two novels, *Curtain* and *Sleeping Murder*, intended as the last cases of the detectives, Hercule Poirot and Jane Marple. Both books were sealed in a bank vault for over thirty years and were released for publication only at the end of her life, when she realised that she could not write any more novels.

Perhaps her art and popularity can best be summed up in the words of the great poet Dylan Thomas who once wrote:

**Poetry is not the most important thing in life... I'd much rather lie in a hot bath reading Agatha Christie and sucking sweets.**

## My War Memories

Denis Bartlett

I was six when the war started and we lived at the upper end of Snakes Lane about two hundred yards from the fire station. The air raid siren from the fire station seemed to go very frequently, but most of the air raids were over London. One of the first things that I remembered was the Anderson Air Raid shelter being delivered and being put up by my father, with my help of course. A large pit had to be dug in the garden, and then all the steel corrugated panels bolted together around the pit, and the corrugated curved roof panels on top followed by all the earth packed on top and around the sides of the shelter, leaving the front entrance to get in. When there was an air raid on, my father would call me into the garden and we could stand on top of the air raid shelter and watch the German planes over London dropping their bombs. It was very impressive at night with the search lights lighting up the night sky and the German planes and with our Ack-Ack guns firing at them. During the daytime, you could clearly see the bombs leaving the German planes and our fighter planes, the Spitfires, chasing and shooting down many a German plane. Sometimes you could see what they would call 'Dog Fights' going on with our fighter planes and the Germans, and of course it is known that our RAF boys had had an excellent record against them. One time on a night air raid, Dad pointed out to me a parachute with what looked like a black blob on the end floating down in the distance. There was a big explosion, to later learn it had fallen behind the Wilfred Lawson Hotel. My father was called up into the army sometime after this but did not go abroad to fight as he did not pass the medical, so remained in the UK all the time. Mother and I would sleep under the stairs on an old mattress, which was the safest place when air raids were on, and a lot warmer than going outside. The normal drill was we would go to bed, and if an air raid siren sounded, we came downstairs until it was over and then went back upstairs. At one time, the air raids continued every night for quite a while, a whole month I believe which was called 'The Blitz' of London, so we just went to bed every night under the stairs. The trouble with the Anderson Shelter or our shelter was it had only had an earth or clay floor, so it could be damp or waterlogged. But if done well I think they could sleep up to six if bunk beds were installed.

I went to the Woodford Green Junior School until we were transferred to the 'Woodford County High School for Girls' for about a year in mixed classes. The Junior School was being used as a backup Hospital emergency centre. It was when I was back at the Woodford Junior School that an air raid started during lessons, and we were all ushered into a safe part of the building. An extremely



loud screaming noise was heard, getting louder and louder, and I remember feeling quite frightened, as I thought it was going to hit the school. There was this huge thump to the ground and explosion, but we were all OK. We were all sent home from school, and when I reached the fire station, I could see that the bomb had

hit the Congregational Church and all the houses, in Broomfield Road had been badly damaged.

I reached home to find my mother in the kitchen doing some washing, with some of the windows blown out or broken, but she was OK. It was after the second bomb that hit the back gardens of Snakes Lane behind the old church, that our house had sustained more damage, so that my mother and I went to live in Bournemouth with my grandparents. We returned at the end of the war when I was twelve and I went to St Barnabas Secondary Modern school. My friend Gordon and family lived in the grounds of the White House on the High Road, Woodford Green and they had 13 bombs dropped in and around the grounds. Gordon's house was of wooden construction and on one air raid a piece of shrapnel went through the wooden wall just above pillow height of Gordon's bed. Fortunately, the bed was empty. It was said that the then Lord Haw-Haw who used to broadcast from Germany had knowledge of the White House and why so many bombs were dropped there. In the driveway was a lovely big oak tree and a landmine landed in the top canopy of it and destroyed it.

After air raids, us boys would be eager to go out looking for bomb shrapnel, which would be in all shapes and twisted sizes and colours of metal, or tail fins from the incendiary bombs. The challenge for us boys was who had the best collection, piece and size. It seemed great fun at the time collecting them. From when the Congregational Church (now the site of the Sir James Hawkey Hall) was



bombed it was of course out of bounds, but we used to go and play there from time to time. There was plenty of rubble to climb over and that was about all but we found and built our little "Den" as boys do and fantasised with various games and have any eats that may be going or we had obtained by 'scrumping' from the local fruit trees.

## **Wells School**

## **Sue Ralph**

A while back we decided as a Society that we should do more to encourage and promote an interest in the local history of the area and felt that as a starting point we would liaise with our local schools. Unfortunately, Covid got in the way but hopefully we will be able to pursue this as things ease. Just before Easter the Wells School contacted us to say that they were for the summer term undertaking a project on the history of Woodford Wells and Woodford Green and asked for our assistance. We were able to provide on loan (which has now been returned), material held by the Archivist. In April, a Zoom meeting was held with the pupils who had submitted numerous questions about the topic. The questions ranged from: who were the first people to live in Woodford, what famous people had lived in the area, what activities did children undertake, the oldest church and school in the area. Following the meeting we received some lovely thank you letters. We hope that we may have helped to develop an interest in the younger members of the community about the history of the area.