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Website:

www.hants.org.uk/westendlhs/

E-mail address:

westendlhs@aol.com



EDITOR

Nigel G. Wood

EDITORIAL AND PRODUCTION
ADDRESS

40 Hatch Mead

West End

Southampton, Hants

SO30 3NE

Telephone: 023 8047 1886

E-mail: woodng@aol.com

ERIC vs. THE LUFTWAFFE

An account of his World War 2 experience as told by Eric Gamblin
to Brian Blighe



71st HANTS & ISLE OF WIGHT HEAVY A.A. HOMEGUARD 1943

Eric started work as a steam hammer driver in the carriage workshop at the age of 14 for 12 shillings (60p.) per week. *"I was told to report to the Southern Railway Works in Eastleigh just as the Germans started swanning through Europe. In January 1941 we had the only casualties in the Works when five ambulancemen were killed by bombs on the works—one would have been my sister's father-in-law had he lived. The HE111 (twin-engine Heinkel Bomber) that dropped the bombs was in trouble and crashed between Allington Lane and Horton Heath".*

(Continued on page 2)

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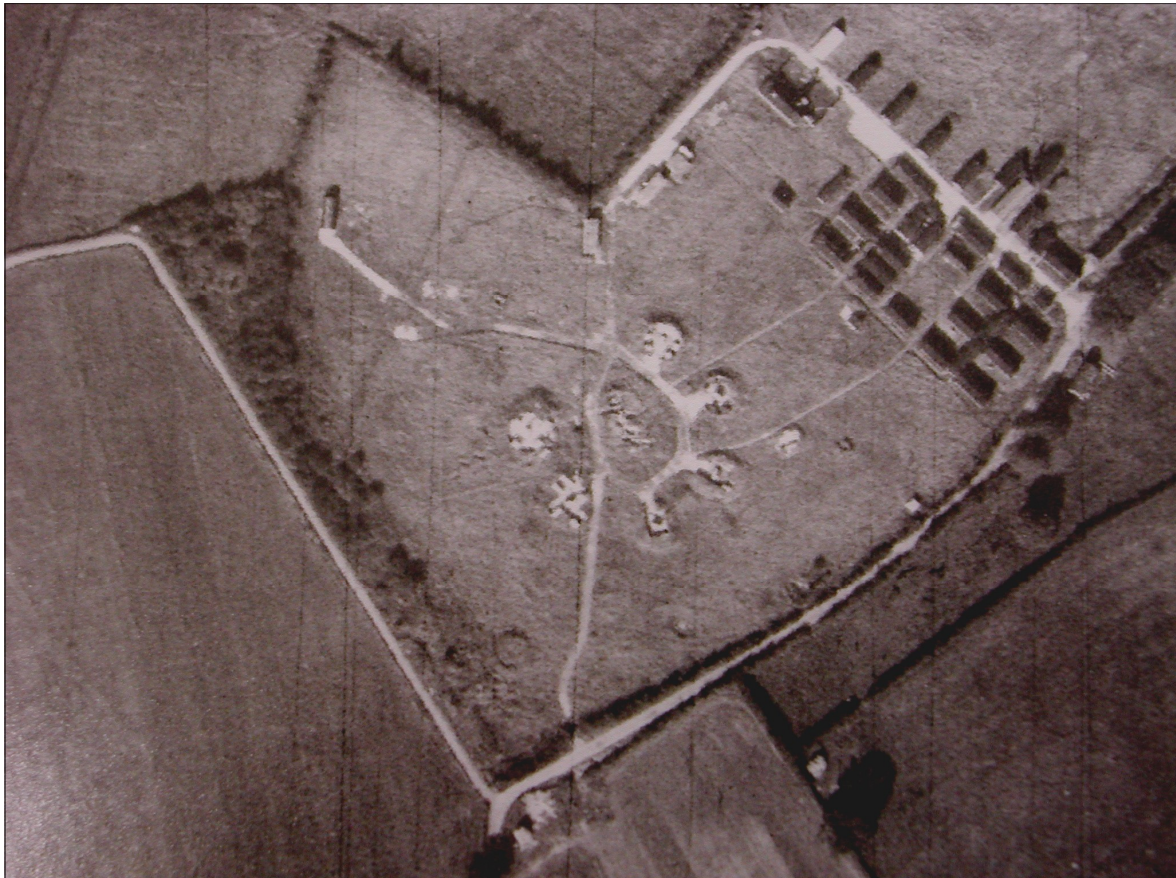


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In 1941 Eric's father was injured repairing bomb damage on Southampton Central Station and died some weeks later during a heavy raid. By adding to his age, Eric was accepted in the Home Guard as a member of the 71st Hants & Isle of Wight Heavy Anti-Aircraft Unit and went to Hayling Island for training, firing A.A. guns out to sea.

"One night in six we spent at the Ack Ack gun site in Quob Lane which is still recognisable now. It was a mixed battery with men manning the guns and women the predictors and radar. The Regulars had four 3.7 guns and the Home Guard had two. An army lorry would pick us up at the Railway Works and take us to the site and if the officer was not with us we would stop at the White Swan for a pint. If the landlord had a sign outside "No Beer" he would let us in for a half an hour and then shut down when we left. I was 16 by then, but if you were in uniform you were served just the same. We had a cooked meal when we arrived which was very good and a cooked breakfast before we left in the morning. We had two Nissen huts for the Home Guard with wooden beds and straw filled palliasses. There was a small cast iron stove in the middle and as it could be very cold in the winter we would fill it with coke 'till the flue glowed red hot."

"We, in the Home Guard, would just take off our boots and sleep in our uniforms and if the alarm bell went in the hut we would scramble into our boots put on our tin helmets and race up the track to the gun pit. I was one of the gun layers and I would get in the seat, grab the handles and follow the indicator's illuminated dial. The elevation was easy but the bearing was 360 degrees and you had to make a quick decision on the quickest way round".



AERIAL VIEW OF THE QUOB LANE ANTI AIRCRAFT GUN BATTERY SITE circa 1947

"The man on the Quadrant Elevation would yell out 'on Q.E.' and the other 'on bearing' and the number one, the sergeant, would shout 'number 1 gun ready for action'. We always beat the Regulars to it because they had to get dressed and we didn't!"

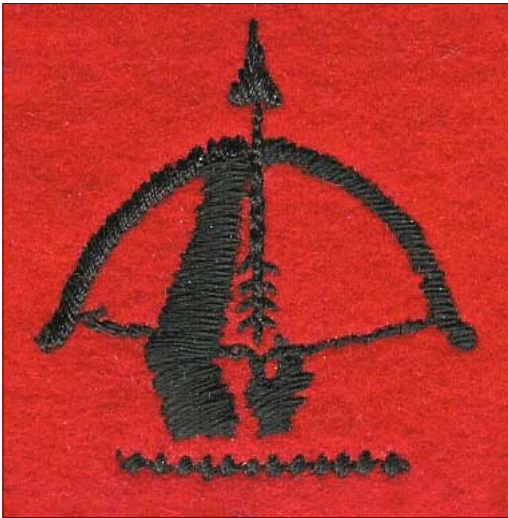
"When a plane came in range the Command Post would shout 'Fire!' and we would keep firing until they ordered us to stop. I remember a plane we engaged coming from the north right overhead and as it passed over, the rocket battery at Netley fired and we heard it dive. We were told that it crashed in the Solent and

Continued on page 3

Continued from page 2

our battery had got the credit”.

“An automatic loader was introduced which doubled the rate of firing so the loaders had to run around a bit quicker. The elevation went to 85 degrees—we were not allowed to fire below 15 degrees (this would



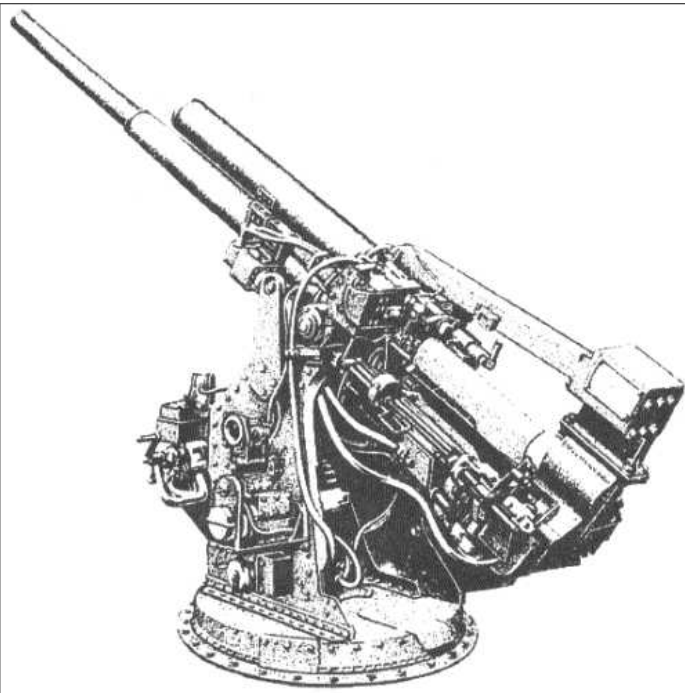
HEAVY A.A. GUNNERS ARM PATCH



GERMAN HEINKEL 111 BOMBER

have caused more damage on the ground than in the air, especially with the increased rate of fire; possibly up to fifty rounds per minute from the six guns).

“One night a bomber came straight at us over the Command Post fast and low. The guns were sited in a horseshoe around the slightly higher Command Post. I was on elevation and the officer in the Command Post yelled ‘No.6 gun what’s your Q.E.’; our sergeant yelled ‘Number three, what’s your Q.E.’ I yelled back ‘Q.E. one five’, the sergeant yelled ‘Q.E. one five No.6 gun’; then someone shouted ‘Fire!’. So we banged away from 15 degrees until I was up against a stop at 85 degrees and by the time the chap on bearing had traversed the gun 180 degrees the plane had long since gone. All was quiet, then a voice shouted out ‘Congratulations No.6 gun, you shot down an aerial!!’. “Later we were told everyone ducked as the first round went over the Command Post”.



THE BRITISH 3.7 inch HEAVY ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUN



Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3

"The radar at that time was very primitive, the aerial was a large horizontal expanse of wire netting about 6 feet from the ground on poles. In the middle was a tiny hut reached by a walkway—two ATS girls manned it. I saw an 'expert' on the Second World War say on television how the ATS manned the Ack Ack guns. This is untrue—the men manned the guns, the girls did the brainy bit!"

While Eric was doing his bit, by shooting at the Luftwaffe, we was also on war work in his job as an apprentice plumber in the Eastleigh Railway Works where material for D-Day was being produced including the Horsa gliders, Landing Craft, pontoon bridges and hospital trains.

"My mate, John, and I worked mainly on landing craft, on pipework in the engine rooms. When they were ready they were taken to the docks and put into the water just about where the Yacht Club is now. We often had to go down and finish small details and had to work on an L.C.S. on the 5th June 1944. They were a small craft about the size of an L.C.A. with a covered in deck and turret with twin Browning machine guns. The area around the docks in Canute Road was heavily guarded and a job to enter. The dock was filled with all types of landing craft. We did our job and the Coxwain took us out on a trial run down to the Solent. I have never seen so many ships in all my life. Southampton Water and the Solent were crammed full. We did not know it at the time but they all sailed that night. Next day was D-Day, and around teatime there was a massive armada of gliders taking airborne troops to Normandy. Our battery was on duty that night and we were told there could be a big raid on the docks so we never went to bed but sat on the guns all night. We had one warning but nothing happened and we had a long cold night".



IMAGES SHOWING THE REMAINS OF THE QUOB LANE A.A. GUNSITE circa 1970



"After that there were a few flying bombs but we never got to fire at one. In the late autumn we were told that we were standing down."

"Some of the section I never ever met again even though they all worked on the railway. Later we handed in our kit. The only things we kept were our boots, our cap badge and the bow-arrow-flashers we had bought ourselves—they even took our gloves!!"

Thus ended Eric's active role in World War 2.

MY FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH

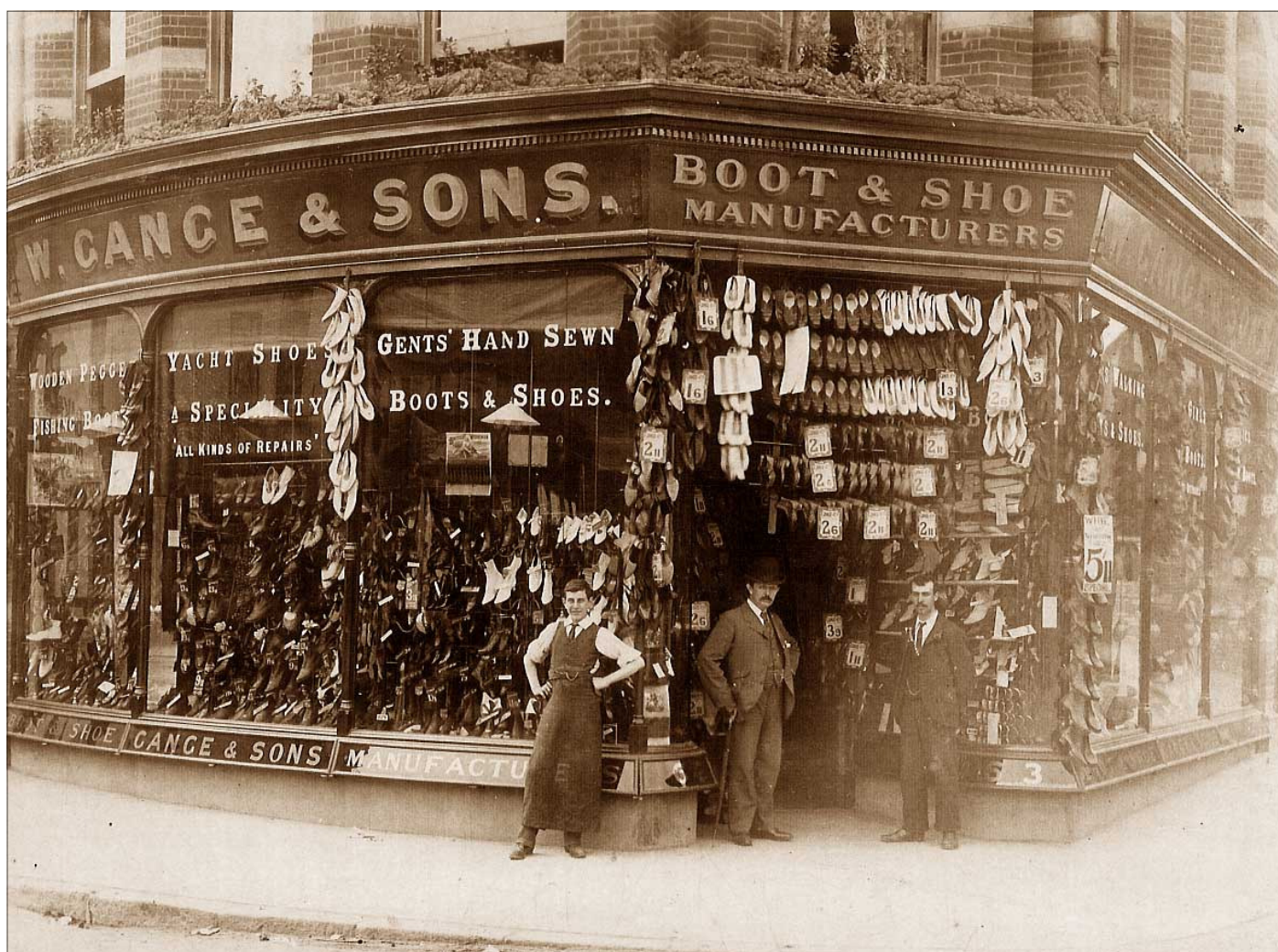
Bill White

Having decided that you are going to research your family history you will soon find it's like a detective story with many clues before getting a picture of your family's history of how and where they lived.

The many avenues of research have been explained before, The oldest relative to talk to, the IGI (International Genealogical Index), Kelly's Street Directories for locations, the Census, Certificates of Births, Marriages and Deaths, and the biggest factor is LUCK and COINCIDENCE.

We hold at present a collection of family photographs with many people unknown and not identified at first glance, but with other information can be sorted into who is who.

The photograph on the next page shows myself in the pedal car, my mother Nellie Maud White, my Grandmother Frances Kate and my Great Grandmother White. No one could remember Great Grandmother's name but knew that she lived at Closworth in Somerset, so we arranged to visit the area. Scouting the small village we found the house in the photograph, and while we stood outside a neighbour

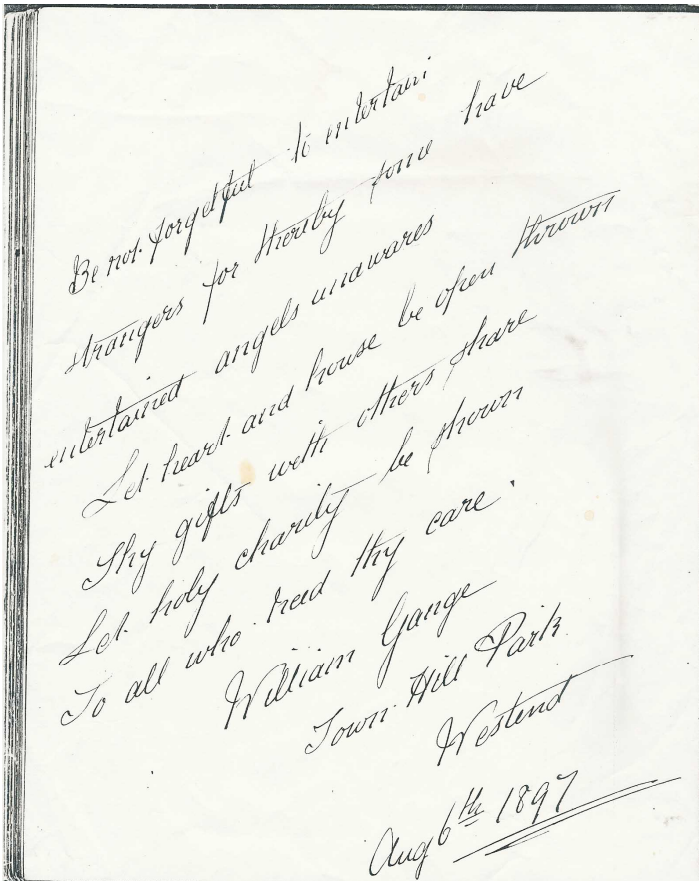


EARLY PHOTOGRAPH OF SHOP FRONT OF MESSRS. W. GANGE & SONS IN SOUTHAMPTON

asked us what we were comparing. On showing her the photograph she confirmed the oldest lady was called EMILY. With an invite into her house for tea she talked about the White family and how two orphan children had been accepted into the family and brought up as their own but we would not find these birth details. A visit to the Record Office at Taunton confirmed the families were living there in the 1871, 1881

Continued on page 6

Continued from page 5



1897 DIARY INSCRIPTION BY WILLIAM GANGE



BILL WHITE WITH HIS MOTHER & GRANDMOTHER

and 1891 Census and that Emily was born in 1862 with her name still the most popular girls name in 2004! This story was told at a village party and at a later date I received a letter from a distant relation whose family on another line joined us at Closworth in Somerset. What if I hadn't seen the neighbour! The houses in the row were called "New Buildings", new in 1881 and it seems that Emily who married Frank White was the girl next door.

My Grandmother on my Mother's side was a Gange, a name well known in Southampton for Boot and Shoe shops in Shirley, Portswood, Commercial Road, East Street and Portsmouth. The recent family goes back to William who was born in 1781, married twice with two families working as a Carpenter and lived for 99 years. His son George a Cordwainer by occupation came to Southampton from East Cocker in Somerset and married Elizabeth Weare a nurse from Bristol and opened a business in Chapel. Among the children were four boys, William being the eldest eventually organised the firm of Boot and Shoe manufacturers with its main shop and factory at East Street opposite the Central Hall.

I had researched the family with help from other Ganges and even found owners of shoes made by the firm who specialised in making fishing boots, yacht shoes, moccasins and hand sewn boots and shoes. About 3 years ago I was looking at the antique shops in Northam Road and talking to the owner told the story of the Gange shops. Disappearing into a back room the owner returned with a file of 3 photographs:

1. The interior of the factory with employees making boots and shoes.
2. How the shop originally looked.
3. The new shop with it's hundreds of shoes for sale.

The man on the right of the picture on page 5 is William with probably another brother on the left and a shop assistant. I bought the photo's wondering where and how they originated in the Northam antique shop. Amongst West End Museum Archives is a diary from Townhill House with quotations from its many visitors and includes a religious tract written by William Gange on 6th August 1897 when visiting the house (see left hand illustration above).

Finally, you might be lucky to join in someone else's research. Burkes Landed Gentry 1937 Edition quotes

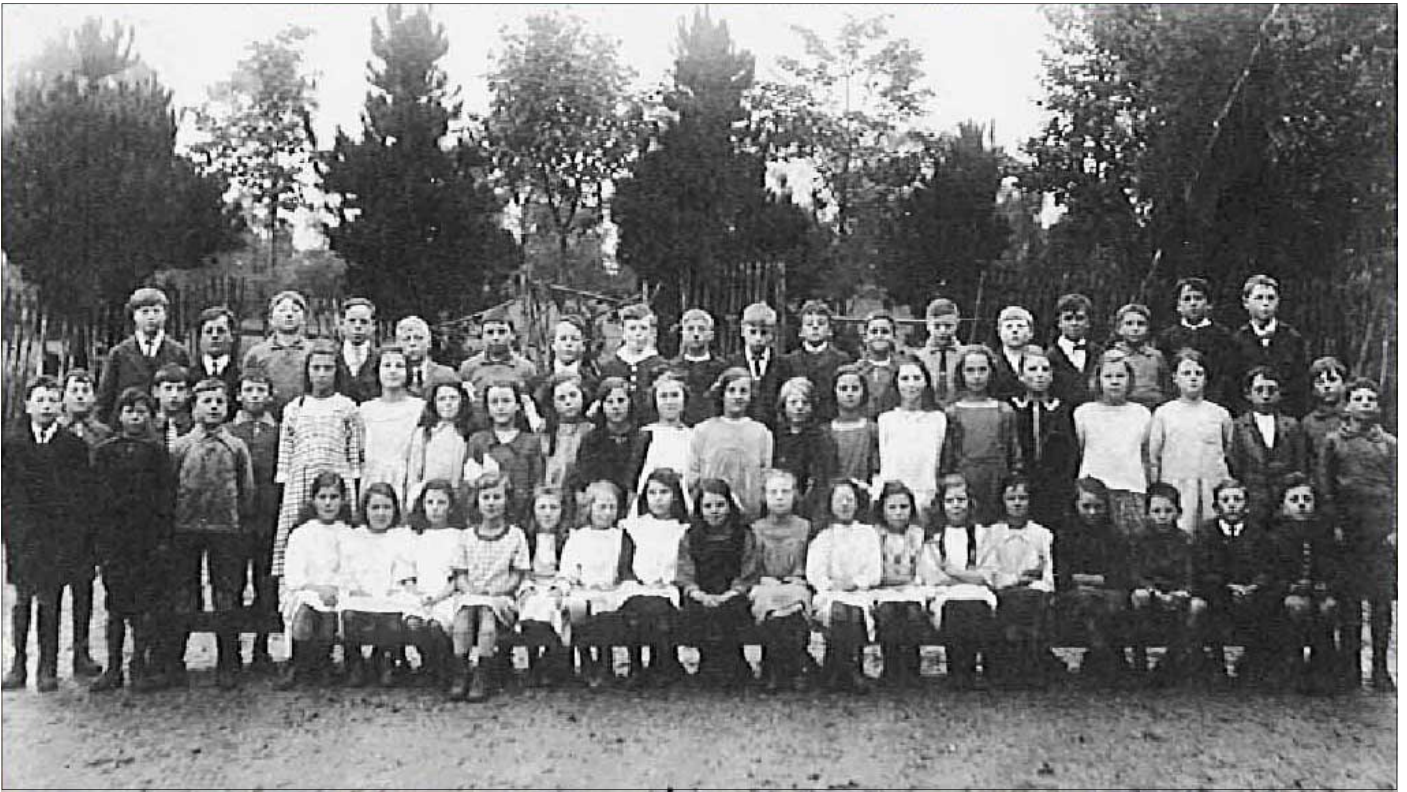
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Gange of Faversham and has a printed family tree going back to 1165 Ralf de Gangi whose father-in-law was Baron of Jesmond of Northampton. I'm presuming that our Gange family is linked to this tree sometime in the past.

For myself, three discoveries about members of my family that I would not have found otherwise and there is always the many web sites on the Internet to consult.

WEST END COLD WAR KGB SPY DIES



WEST END SCHOOL PHOTOGRAPH – 1922 (Melita Sirnis is fifth from the right second row) (WELHS photo)

Back in the October 1999 issue of Westender we announced a local news “scoop” - Cold War Soviet spy Melita Norwood was in fact Melita Sirnis who went to school in West End around 1922, and we had a photograph showing her as a young girl to prove it!

More information and pictures of this episode are available to view in the Museum. The Government ultimately decided not to prosecute her due to her age (87 years old) and it appears she merged back into obscurity again.

The Times Obituary column on Tuesday 28th June 2005 gave the news that she had passed away on June 2nd 2005, aged 93. Ed.



MELITA NORWOOD IN 1999 (Echo photo)

MOORHILL HOUSE

D.M. Crisp (nee Crook)

It is only recently that I have discovered that the place I knew as Moorhill Farm, was originally known as Moorhill House (*now the site of a reservoir on the A27*). I spent many happy days there, between the late 1940's and the early 1950's, aged about 7—13 years. My Aunt and Uncle, Mr and Mrs Reynolds were tenant farmers there, with help from a Mr and Mrs Bennett and some other farm hands.

Apart from two weeks away at the seaside each year, and Christmas holidays, all my other school holidays were spent on the farm. The house was very impressive, especially to a youngster, even now I look back and think what a wonderful building it was. You entered through a portico at the front into a massive hall, about forty five foot long by twenty foot, which had rooms leading off from it. To the left was a very elegant curving staircase—at least twice the width of a modern staircase—leading to the upper floor. This had a balcony running around it, so you could look down into the hall below. All the rooms leading from the hall had french windows, and an outside verandah running along the length of the main part of the house. At one end of the hall was a small passageway which gave access to a bathroom and a bedroom. At the opposite end of the hall was a doorway leading to the 'servants' quarters, as they would have been known, this gave way to a long passageway eventually ending with a back door to the outside. On both sides of this passageway were a series of rooms, much less grand than the other half of the house, one of these being used as a kitchen/diner and a small room opposite being used as a scullery, which nowadays would probably be called a utility room. The other rooms were used for storage of cattle feed etc.. There was a narrow staircase by the back door leading to the 'servants' upper floor.

Upstairs, in the 'grand' part of the house, it was mainly bedrooms, and one huge bathroom, and in the 'servants' end, one room was a small bathroom, the others seemed to be used to store anything in that wasn't wanted in the rest of the house. In the hall was a large rocking horse, on which I loved sitting and reading books when the weather wasn't good enough to go outside, also, in the understairs cupboard there were a load of other toys, everything from Ludo to tennis racquets, these could have been left by the Basque refugee children—although I did not know it at the time.



MOORHILL HOUSE SEEN FROM THE REAR ELEVATION (Photo courtesy BLHS archive)

Continued from page 8

Outside there were a series of small yards at the front, leading from the 'servants' rooms, these were hidden from the front of the main house by a high brick wall. These were used for hanging out the laundry and storing various items of farm machinery.

In the grounds there were several smaller buildings, two of which were used as cattle sheds, originally I would imagine these were coach houses. It was always great fun to watch the cows being milked—by hand— and afterwards having a drink of milk, very creamy and still warm from the cow, it never did me any harm—so much for today's restrictions!

There were also pig sties from which I was banned if the sows had piglets, apparently sows can be quite protective of their young. My daily 'job' on the farm was to collect the chicken eggs, they were good old fashioned free rangers, and did those chickens lay in some peculiar places; one always laid her eggs in the dutch barn on the highest bale of straw possible, I was also allowed at times to bring the cows home from the fields. Arable farming was also done, but I have no recollection of what was grown. Various dogs and cats roamed the farmyard, they were never allowed indoors and I don't think anyone ever knew the exact total of each, they seemed to increase every time I visited even though kittens and puppies were given away and probably a few others dispatched by 'other means'.

As a child it was a wonderful place to stay at, though looking back, very hard work for my uncle and helpers. I presume they left Moorhill House when it was due to be demolished, a real shame, as the house was architecturally rather grand.

SOUTHAMPTON'S VICTORIAN CEMETERY

A Review by Stan Waight

When our June meeting was cancelled because the speaker was unable to attend, John Avery stepped in and arranged an evening visit to the cemetery on the Common. With two of the other Friends he took a group of us round and talked about some of the buildings and the memorials. It was a pleasant and informative, if not very summery, evening, and one might have thought there was little more to say about the venue. Not so!

By coincidence, our July meeting was on precisely the same subject, but there was a good turnout to listen to what Geoff Watts had to say on the subject in the relative comfort of the Parish Centre. Geoff is knowledgeable and fluent, and his talk was illustrated by a good number of excellent slides.

In fact, his talk was not just about the cemetery on the Common. He started by discussing the truly appalling state of our burial grounds in the early part of the 19th century - they were literally bursting at the seams. Without going into gruesome detail (although Geoff did!), it seems that few people relished attending a funeral, let alone visiting the churchyard at any time afterwards. The fiction of Charles Dickens's descriptions of the 'ghastly' cemeteries was borne out by the Chadwick report of 1843 with its references to the awful sights and smells. Body-snatching was rife, and counter-measures included watchers' huts and iron railings around graves ('mortsafes').

The situation in France had been somewhat similar in the 1780s, but Napoleon Bonaparte of all people took the Paris situation in hand and planned four well-regulated cemeteries, of which the Pere La Chaise was the most notable. This approach to burial spread across the Channel and great improvements came about during the Victorian era.

When St Mary's churchyard became full and literally overflowing by 1837, the Borough attempted to put through the establishment of a new cemetery in the northwest corner of the Common, but had to abandon the plan in the face of opposition by the churches. By 1843 the state of the churchyard was such that something had to be done and, using the threat of plague-type burials, the Borough pushed through an Act of Parliament that forced the Commoners to give up 15 acres of the Common. After several delays and changes of plan the cemetery was finally opened in 1846.

Geoff's history of the cemetery was rather more detailed than there is space for in this brief report, and he went on to show us slides of many notable monuments and to tell us about the characters they commemorated. Despite a rather morbid subject, he actually goes down as one of my top ten speakers of all time.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

The following occasional papers have just been published and are available from the Museum bookshop both at the modest price of £1.50 each.

HERBERT COLLINS AND THE WEST END CONNECTION

‘OCCASIONAL PAPER NO 4’

Written by Derek Amey

and

A NEW CHURCH FOR THE PARISH

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ST JAMES CHURCH

(REVISED ENLARGED EDITION)

‘OCCASIONAL PAPER NO 2’

Written by Peter Baker

MARGARET HOWMAN 1914 - 2005

It is with sadness that we report the death of Mrs Margaret Howman on 10th July 2005 in Truro, Cornwall where she lived in recent years. Born in 1914, she was the daughter of Sir Arthur Henry Rostron, Captain of the “Carpathia” which rescued 706 survivors from the Titanic disaster in 1912. As a young woman she lived with her parents at “Holmecroft”, Chalk Hill, West End and went to Itchen Grammar School. She attended St. James’ Church where her family had its own pew and also joined the Tennis Club nearby, becoming an enthusiastic member. Wife of the late John Howman, a BAC test pilot, she has been a good friend to our society and kindly travelled to West End from her home in Bristol in 1999, in order to unveil our brass commemorative plaque to her father. We hope to continue to oversee the maintenance of her parents’ grave in the Old Burial Ground and to place flowers upon it annually. Our condolences and sympathy go to her four children and their families.



**MARGARET HOWMAN (nee Rostron)
1914 - 2005**

Margaret on her visit to the Museum to unveil the memorial on Saturday 17th April 1999.

THE NEXT MEETINGS ARE

September 7
THE CHOLERA YEARS
John Avery

October 5
SOMETHING REMARKABLE.....
(The Story of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra)
Derek Amey

November 2
TRAFALGAR — a good day's work!
Madeleine Selby