

# WESTENDER

Newsletter of the West End Local History Society  
Summer 2024



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WELHS Chairman celebrates his 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday! Happy Birthday Neville!



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Archibald Orr-Ewing of the China Inland Mission  
by Paula Downer



In the Old Burial Ground in West End, near Southampton in Hampshire lies the ornate gravestone of Archibald Orr-Ewing and his wife Alice Kate who spent their retirement at 'Roseland' Villa in Moorhill Road, West End, having served with the China Inland Mission for several years.

Archibald Orr-Ewing's family came from Scotland. The surname Orr-Ewing was derived from his grandfather William Ewing of Ardvullen whom, in 1806, married Susan Orr whose father was John Orr the Provost of Paisley. Archibald Orr-Ewing (born 5<sup>th</sup> August 1857) and his five brothers were born in Toxteth, Liverpool where their father James Alexander was a Merchant. Their mother Helen (née Robertson) had sadly died in December 1861, shortly after giving birth to her son James Robert. Their Uncles Archibald and John Orr-Ewing had a prosperous business in the textile industry, with India and Burma amongst their customers. The technological advances of the Industrial Revolution in Britain meant that cloth could be manufactured by machines in large quantities and cheaply, hence there was no longer a demand for cotton goods from India. In the 1820's the Vale of Leven in Scotland was an important area for bleaching, dyeing and printing cloth, particularly 'Turkey Red'. The bright, vibrant red cloth was very sought after, as it was made colourfast by using the root of the madder plant; a technique that had been used for many centuries in Turkey. Once Archibald had made enough money from the business, he retired from the partnership which resulted in John forming his own company. His brother Archibald went on to become a Conservative Member of Parliament for Dunbartonshire, founded the Glasgow & West of Scotland Newspaper Co. and built Ballikinrain Castle. Of interest to our local historians is that he acquired Norris Castle in

*Continued on Page 3*

Cowes, Isle of Wight. He was created a Baronet in 1886, becoming Sir Archibald Orr-Ewing 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet. John persuaded his nephew Archibald to join his firm and soon made him a partner. Sadly, Uncle John died in 1878 without issue, leaving his estate to his youngest brother James Alexander Orr-Ewing's sons. The sons Archibald and his brothers were now wealthy. However, the estate had to go through court proceedings. Meanwhile, Archibald embarked on a World Tour to learn of the world and his fellow men.

Archibald Orr-Ewing did not come from a religious background, although he had been baptised in the Church of England along with his brothers. Their father James was not particularly religious but their mother Helen was. Helen had died when Archibald was very young, but he could remember how his mother would say her prayers every night. Archibald had a close bond with John, the two brothers believing that the way of the Lord was the righteous one. Archibald kept a journal during his World Tour, he wrote of church sermons that he heard in China, and saw a need to further spread the word of God and Christianity. On his return to his manufactory, he invited missionaries to give talks to his employees; a hall was built on the site specially for this purpose. John MacCarthy of the China Inland Mission was to have a profound influence. Archibald heard more and more the call of God, initially he kept these thoughts to himself but in time the calling was so great that he vowed to the Lord that he would go to China to spread the word.

In 1886 Archibald Orr-Ewing retired from business and thereby sailed to Shanghai in China to join the China Inland Mission. Archibald had to learn to speak Chinese which he did not find easy; he was given a Chinese name Yung Hwang-Hsi which meant 'Glory'. He dressed like the local Chinese people, as it made it easier for him to converse with them. The China Inland Mission had been founded by James Hudson Taylor in 1865, its purpose to spread the word of Christ and God. Schools and Mission stations were established across China. Archibald initially began his mission in the province of Shansi (now Shanxi), northern China. In May 1890, at the recently built China Inland Mission HQ in Shanghai (which had been funded by Archibald Orr-Ewing) Archibald Orr-Ewing married Mary Elizabeth Scott, the daughter of Robert Scott of London Publishers, Messrs. Morgan and Scott. Robert Scott was a fervent supporter of the China Inland Mission. Archibald's younger brother Hugh Moody Robertson Orr-Ewing sadly died, so Archibald and Mary returned to England for a while; a daughter Amy Hellen was born in 1891 in Essex.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, all was not well in China. Chinese Secret Groups were forming, such as the Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists; they were attacking foreigners and Chinese Christians. Foreigners were not welcome in their country. They were nicknamed 'Boxers' by Westerners because of the way that they fought. The 'interfering' foreigners were being blamed for their poor living standards, they wanted the foreigners out, Missionary Chapels were burnt down. The Boxers were seeking to preserve its Chinese culture and religion, and many Chinese did not want to be converted to Christianity.

However, Archibald and Mary did return to China to set up home in the province of Kiangsi (now Jiangxi), in southern China, south of the Yangtze River, as it was no longer considered safe to be in the northern part of China. Archibald was appointed Superintendent of the China Inland Mission, a responsible position which entailed much travelling; the missionary stations were spread out over several miles, Archibald more often than not walked between the stations. A son Archibald was born in 1892, then a daughter Mary Alice was born in 1894 but the mother, at the age of 31, very sadly died two weeks later. Consequently, Archibald took his three young children to England where they were cared for by Mary's Aunt Miss Margetson.

*Continued on Page 4*

**ON THIS DAY, 4<sup>th</sup> June: In 1832,** the Great Reform Bill was passed as the Representation of the People Act. It followed many years of criticism and protest against what was seen as an unfair and unrepresentative electoral system. Under the 1832 Act, middle class men, including farmers and traders, were granted the vote, provided they fulfilled the property qualification criteria. The minimum property requirements entitling one to vote were: freehold of 40 shillings per year or leasehold of 90 years of £10 per year. The Second Reform Act 1867 gave the right to vote to all adult men who paid rates in towns and cities, doubling the number of voters from about 14% to almost 30% of the adult male population. This was not extended to those in the countryside until the Third Reform Act of 1884, doubling the number of voters again, to almost 60% of all adult males. Women, however wealthy they were, and many working-class men (including sailors and soldiers in barracks) did not qualify to vote until after the Representation of the People Act 1918.

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Archibald Orr-Ewing of the China Inland Mission by Paula Downer – *Continued*

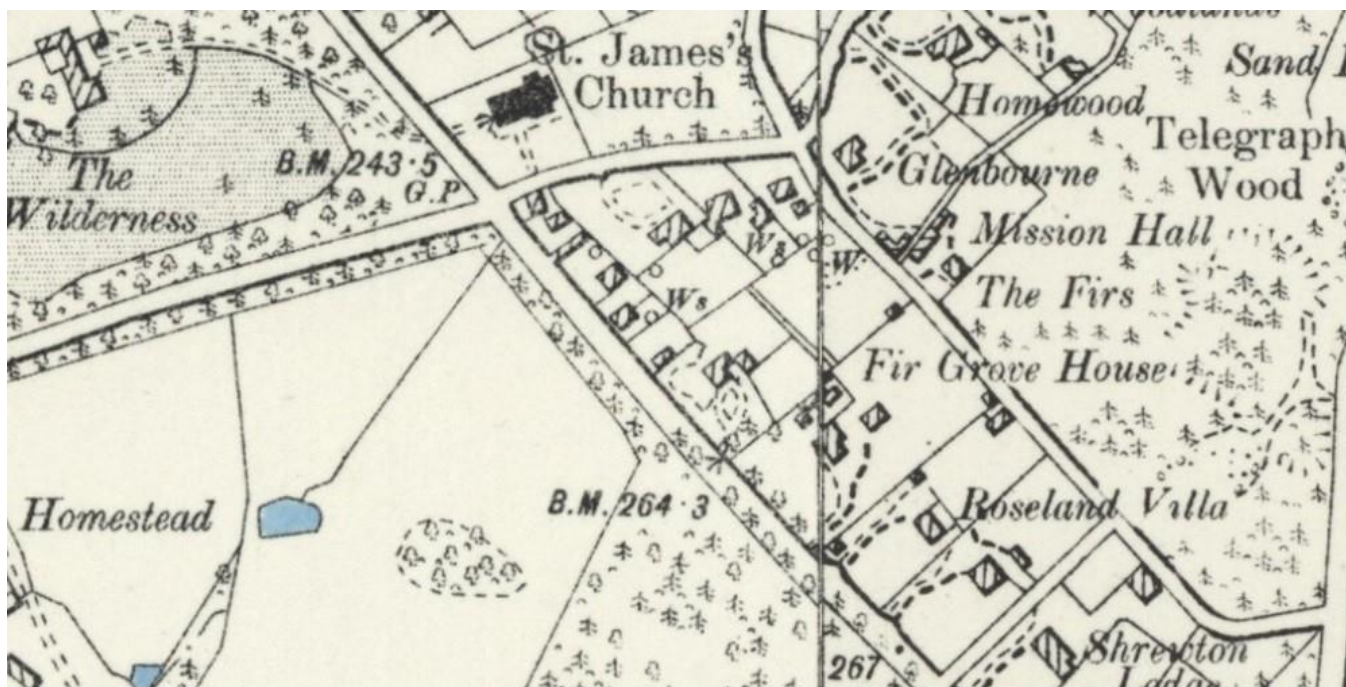
Heartbroken, Archibald Orr-Ewing threw himself into serving the China Inland Mission. He was able to be very generous, funding many of its projects. But Archibald found this a heavy burden on his own; the responsibility weighed heavily on him without the support from a loving wife, and he missed his children, so in February 1897, Archibald married Alice Kate Ferriman, whom had been working in China since 1887. In 1899, a son John Alexander was born but very sadly died the following year. In 1900, with the troubles still ongoing, Alice and the children (presumably this means that Archibald's children by Mary had returned to China to be looked after by Alice) fled to Japan for safety, where a daughter Catherine Edith was born the following October. When it was more or less safe to do so, Alice, the children and her baby daughter returned to China, to find Archibald who was living in the Kwangsin (now Guangxi) district. A son James Arthur was born in 1903. But it was still not safe in China. In 1906, Archibald bought a house in Weston-Super-Mare in Somerset, England. His wife Alice and children were settled here while Archibald continued with his missionary work but it meant that he was constantly away from home and travelling, which eventually took a toll on his health and he missed his wife and children. In 1911, Archibald Orr-Ewing regretfully tendered his resignation. It had been 25 years.

Just as well that he did, as the Qing dynasty in China was overthrown by the Boxer Revolution after the Uprising in 1911 and the Republic of China was established. Archibald Orr-Ewing had intended to return one day; he was saddened by what was happening in China. In the Autumn of 1922 Archibald Orr-Ewing bought 'Roseland' in West End. He enjoyed spending time in his garden playing a relaxing game of clock-golf (sic), the garden partly shaded by the towering presence of the cedar tree. Clock-golf is a game based on golf with twelve holes arranged in a circle, clock fashion, with a single hole positioned somewhere in the middle, a game which originated in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. There was an Evangelical Mission Hall nearby, in Beacon Road where he could still preach. Some years later, due to failing health, his doctor advised Archibald to withdraw from missionary work and to take it easy. On May 11<sup>th</sup> 1930, Archibald Orr-Ewing sadly passed away, he was buried in the Old Burial Ground, the service held by Walter B. Sloan in the Mission Hall, with the Reverend W. E. Eardley officiating at his grave.

“WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT  
ENTER THOU INTO THE JOY OF THE LORD”

*Continued on Page 5*

Archibald Orr-Ewing of the China Inland Mission by Paula Downer – *Continued*



Extract of Moorhill Road, West End showing 'Roseland' Villa and nearby Mission Hall  
(from the National Library of Scotland's Historic Map Collection)

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Map images - National Library of Scotland (nls.uk)

I was watching Flog it! on the TV a while ago, one of the items to be auctioned was a scrapbook containing newspaper cuttings and photographs of the Orr-Ewing family, my ears pricked up, having recognized this name from some recent research. I duly sketched out a family tree and discovered that this family were indeed related to Archibald Orr-Ewing of West End through his Uncle Sir Archibald Orr-Ewing's son John Orr-Ewing. It would be nice to think that the scrapbook was bought by a member of the Orr-Ewing family.

## APPEAL FOR INFORMATION

We have received the following request for information via the website:

"I am hoping that one of the members of the West End Local History Society might be able to assist me with some information.

The name on my Grandfather's Civil Registration in Dublin was Caroline Reeves, and his brother George was registered by a Carrie Reeves. While his paternal line was acknowledged by the family concerned, and DNA verified, the children were fostered as "nephews" per census, and very well looked after and educated, no light has ever been shed on their mother, despite extensive research in Ireland, where they were born in 1903 and 1905.

Caroline on these Registrations was a cook, unmarried, no father's name given.

Caroline Elizabeth Reeves 1880-1969 (the home person on a speculative tree based on DNA matches using

*Continued on Page 6*

the Leeds method) was also a cook in the 1901 Wimborne, Dorset census. She is untraceable for 10 years and appears again in England in 1911. She has a sister Kate 1878-1951 also a cook, who did not marry. Caroline married Richard Hickman but had no children.

Through these DNA clusters I now have identified three sets of Grandparents - it is the Reeves line that I cannot 100% verify. This I believe this may be due to lack of descendances from Charles Reeves 1834-1915 and Martha Banting 1835-1902.

My suspected Great Grandmother was a daughter of William Holly Reeves 1856-1935 (Son of Charles and Martha). **William Holly Reeves was born and baptized in West End.** In 1915 he was the Head Gardener for the Durrant Estate Bournemouth.

If anyone has done research into this family (I'm aware of the work around the Banting family), specifically the Reeves, I would be very grateful.

Kind regards

Anthea”

Anthea Atkinson can be contacted by email: [oldschoolhousemeenaleck@gmail.com](mailto:oldschoolhousemeenaleck@gmail.com)

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## Keep Calm & Carry On (Part Two)

By Pauline Berry

The following are extracts from the memories of several West End residents, given to me between 1995 and the present. Together, they give an interesting local view of WW2 in West End.

The anti-aircraft (Ack-ack) site in Quob Lane was remembered by many. It quickly grew in 1940 into a busy area just west of Quob Lane on a Hatch Farm field. It was comprised of several small constructions including gun emplacements, ammunition lockers, a pill-box, air raid shelters, a barrage balloon site and an observation post on a one-acre mushroom field. Remains of the pill-box can still be seen, although the rest of the site was eventually, in the 1980s, covered with motorway spoil. A temporary camp of Nissan huts soon went up nearby, for accommodation for the men stationed there. After the War it was occupied by homeless families and was still in use in 1952.

In August 1940, a barrage balloon broke free from its moorings and drifted over nearby Burnmoor (Quob) Farm and caused extensive damage to the house and farm buildings. **Mrs W. Dumbleton** of Orchards Way remembered two “Big Bertha” guns on the Ack-ack site mentioned above.

Sometimes, when the air raid sirens sounded their Warning, six guns were wheeled into Orchards Way ready for action. She also had incendiaries dropped into the hedge of her front garden, which she always spotted, being on fire-watch duty. **Mrs Sainsbury** of Southern Road said she enjoyed dances and social evenings at the old Parish Hall and would stay on and even walk home when the air raid sirens were going, regardless of any local gunfire! She also recalled “doodle-bugs” (V1 bombs) whizzing over Eastleigh and a barrage balloon situated in “Woodlands” (mews) area when the R.A.F. occupied the big house “Duncaple” there.

**Mrs Claude Ashby**, wife of the well-known businessman and J.P., lived at “Woodlands” at the time and she wrote extensively to her sister about the effects of War upon her family and staff.

*Continued on Page 7*

Keep Calm & Carry On (Part Two) by Pauline Berry - *continued*

She referred to the assistance of the friendly “gunmen and barrage balloon men” who would jump over the boundary wall to help extinguish the many incendiaries fallen into the garden. Mrs Ashby also mentioned her neighbour, **Mrs Hobbs** of Warden House (Warden Close), who was also “safe, despite incendiary bombs landing at her door”. She was able to have a good view from her “Woodlands” home of the bombing and of the devastation of Southampton during the 1940 Blitz. She made ready a dormitory in her large home for the “trekkers” – the frightened residents of Southampton who left the town each night to find safety in the outskirts. It was, however, rarely needed and Mrs Ashby, her family and maids slept in the basement of “Woodlands”, her maids “quietly knitting”.

In Allington House, which is still part of Moorgreen Hospital, **Mrs. J. Matthews**, a nurse, remembered putting out more incendiaries in the grounds. She lost a bit of sleep when the air raid sirens went off, because the patients who could not always walk had to be moved quickly to safety. Some had to be carried piggy-back style and hidden carefully under the stairs. But the nurses coped and everyone kept cheerful for everyone’s sake, she said.

When War seemed inevitable, **Mr Bob Moody** joined the Special Constabulary in 1938, becoming one of the “Specials” at West End Police Station (now a dental surgery). He did two duties each week and all air raid warnings at night. His training involved patrolling, first aid and reminding residents of “black-outs”, covering all windows at night. He was involved in the aftermath of two direct hits in Bitterne and a third which caused a bomb crater in the centre of the road. Bob tried to join the War Reserve Police Force but was refused since he worked in a reserved occupation, agriculture. “All these terrible things had their funny moments”, he reported, as you can read in his book “I Remember”.

**Alan Budd** was a schoolboy during the War, living at Railway Cottages, Allington Lane, before the family moved to the Bitterne area. He recalled that there were no air raid shelters at West End School and the pupils were reliant on Mr Shelley, the Headmaster, to bang a tin tray during an air raid siren, which was a signal for all the children to take shelter under their desks! Whilst taking part in an outdoor P.E. lesson, the pupils were astonished to see and hear the rumble of a mass of enemy planes passing overhead, probably heading for the Supermarine Works in Woolston (September 1940). Alan also remembered the public shelter opposite the now defunct Bitterne Brewery alongside Mousehole Lane. It was a well-used refuge by many neighbours during an alert, who would sing, talk or knit to pass the time. When the “all-clear” sounded, some of the men would hurry to the public house opposite! “Although sometimes frightening, the War was generally exciting to us boys,” Alan added.

There was another military camp in the grounds of “The Wilderness”, close to what is now the A27 crossroads at the top of Chalk Hill. **Mr Flood** recalled it was a British and American transit camp with many huts. After the War, the homeless “squatters” took the site over. He mentioned several camps along the A27 leading up to Thornhill Park Road. Along with their vehicles, they were all well-camouflaged under the trees, waiting for D-Day. Local children knew of the soldiers’ generosity and hung around for otherwise unobtainable goodies – like **Ray Upson**, calling out “Give

*Continued on Page 8*

Keep Calm & Carry On (Part Two) by Pauline Berry - *continued*

us some gum, chum!” and being rewarded. Bob Moody was sometimes invited to the Officers’ Mess in “The Wilderness” camp and “was made very welcome”. He recalled the Royal Corps of Signals were stationed there at the time.

Before Anderson shelters were eventually built in Chapel Close, several residents banded together to dig their own “shelter” a few yards away on Hatch Grange itself. It was a long ditch about six feet deep, strengthened with bricks and corrugated iron. The vague remains of this temporary shelter ran close to the edge of the woodland just north of Chapel Close. **Mrs Goman, Mrs Ellis and Mrs Stevens** recalled that it was well used when the sirens sounded their warning.

The Parish Council was informed by the War Agricultural Committee that part of Hatch Grange should be cleared and ploughed for food production. This was done and **Mr Alf White** had the task of ploughing and planting oats near Chapel Road as his contribution to the war effort. **Jim Brenton** often ploughed at night in the Barbe Baker Road area (which was then farmland) for the production of corn and root crops, including mangolds, being aware that his plough could drown out the noise of planes overhead.

**David Lloyd** recalls the day when the U.S. lorries parked up in Moorgreen Road left abruptly, leaving behind a rare prize, a leather jacket, in the middle of the road. This was instantly claimed by his grandfather, who wore it for years! This day, on June 5<sup>th</sup> 1944, was also remembered by Bitterne local historian **Irene Pilson** (who gave me permission), who recalled pushing her baby son in his pram up to the top of Thornhill Park Road. It was a warm evening and she was astonished to see the multitude of lorries etc. parked in the woods on Moorhill Road had suddenly changed their camouflage from khaki to a new colour of silvery blue. The following morning, 6<sup>th</sup> June, every vehicle had vanished because it was D-Day! Thus began the Allied liberation of German-occupied Western Europe and eventual victory.

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## Shared Memories - 4

### Ironing!

by Fred Harder

Just doing a little bit of ironing, and had a little thought: who on here are old enough to remember in the good old days, you would take the flat iron off the fire or gas stove, brush any soot or cinders off with an old rag, then turn it upside down and have a little spit on it. If it twanged off at a speed of knots, it was just right, but if it stuck on it and just sizzled it was not hot enough and had to go back on the fire. Just tried my modern top-of-the-range iron on the highest temperature and low and behold it only sizzled! Being ex-Royal Navy, I still iron my towels and socks (both sides) ready for laying my kit out; old habits die hard so they say. Oh well, back to the ironing board which I made to go on top of the freezer just like the table aboard ship.

*Continued on Page 9*

Ironing! by Fred Harder – *continued*

Another little ditty: As a nipper in the 1940s, I used to help my Mum out by doing some of her ironing for her. There were three or four of us kids at the time; I think that I got quite good at it (it served me well when I joined the Royal Navy). Anyway, I got the ironing out and carried out the routine for irons on the fire, started to iron, all going well, then I came to a pair of my big sister's silky panties. I laid it out and straightened it up all nice and tidy, then when the blooming iron got to within a few inches of the said garment, whoosh it rose into the sky and stuck to the bottom of the iron, burning a blooming great hole in it! I can tell you, that I was not very popular with Yvonne. Having said, that you would quite often see shirts on the lines with big brown iron sized scorch marks on the tails of the long-tailed shirts where people have tried the iron out and it's been too hot. The shirts tails in those days came down to the back of your legs.

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### An Ordinary Woman's War – Part One By Emily Dimmock

I cannot quite understand how anyone can write of their past experiences in any sort of chronological order. My memories of the Second World War are somewhat mixed up. I see a "snapshot" in my memory and then have to relate it to something else which I know happened at a particular time. For instance, I remember clearly the day war was declared, I remember the broadcast on the radio by the Prime Minister, the feeling we had known war was coming and that now we had to do something about it. But the phoney war of that winter of 1939 is a bit blurred. I know that instead of going to evening classes at Southampton University College (as it was then) to take the Advanced Accounts, Economics and Company Law course I had been working on for the past two years with the hope of becoming a chartered secretary that year, I was spending three nights of every week at the Civic Centre, Southampton on voluntary A.R.P. work as a "spotter". This meant that in the case of an "incident" I would plot on the map where the bomb had fallen and what services were there by means of little coloured flags. I had been practising this for several months before war broke out and had attended first aid classes, been taught to distinguish between the various war gases, taken gas masks around to a good many houses in Southampton, learnt that windows were to be taped with strips of sticky paper in the hope that the occupants of the house would not be showered with broken glass in the event of a bomb falling on them, how to deal with incendiary bombs with some sand and a long-handled shovel, and how to make a room gas-proof.

As I have said, that winter was the time of the phoney war, and the other things I remember of that period were food rationing, the issue of identity cards, licences required for the purchase of timber at the timber importer's yard where I worked, the members of staff being called up, and early in 1940 the bombing of Southampton Docks when the cold store was hit and the whole of Southampton smelt like a gigantic Welsh rarebit. Then Dunkirk: neighbours going off in small boats, the Isle of Wight paddle steamers going off to France, and then young boys coming back to the office to tell us they had escaped back to this country, almost in tears at having to leave their R.A.S.C. lorries behind, and now appearing to be mature men. A rapid growing-up!

*Continued on Page 10*

An Ordinary Woman's War – Part One by Emily Dimmock - *continued*



Emily Freak (later Dimmock) aged 24 in 1932.  
Photograph courtesy Sue Fitch.

1940 brought the Battle of Britain over our heads, planes coming down in flames and barrage balloons as well. We were in and out of the Anderson shelter. I was married in July of that year, and I had breakfast in the shelter; we put up the wedding cake, heavy gun fire and we took it down again, and it accompanied us to the shelter where we left it for safety until we came back from church. My brother came home just in time to give me away; we were due at the church at 10 a.m. and he had taken three hours to get home from a night shift at Hamble, where he worked as an inspector of aircraft at a factory there, having to take shelter from air raids so frequently that his journey was more than trebled. Had no time for nerves, pre-wedding or otherwise, because everybody had gone to church and I was the only one left to run around and help him get ready. We did get to the church on time, but air raid warnings interrupted the service and we had to go to the crypt.

No photographs – no photographer or photographic materials available for such trimmings to a wedding. No honeymoon either, although one had been arranged, but had we gone out of Southampton at that time we would not have been allowed in again. No-one came into Southampton without a reason which was satisfactory to the military authorities. Wedding guests from Winchester travelling by bus were held up by soldiers boarding the bus. They were eventually allowed in for a few hours but the service was almost over by the time they reached the church. We bought strong walking shoes as it had been freely rumoured that the civilian population of Southampton would be evacuated and we'd have to walk, but Hitler's barges of troops on the other side of the Channel were bombed and he decided not to invade by sea then.

The bus depot at St. Denys was hit by a land mine not long after we had settled in our new home. We felt the effects several miles away and were tipped out of bed. We decided that we would equip our shelter with bunks and bought some mattresses and bases from the Union-Castle S.S. Co. Condensation was a problem and we lined the galvanised iron shelter with sheets of fibre board and laid some pieces of wood on the earth floor as it was damp down there. We fitted a wooden frame earth to make a blast wall and made steps down to the floor of the shelter, and made the space between the blast wall and the entrance to the shelter into a little covered porch where a hedgehog promptly took up residence and you know the earthy smell of hedgehogs. After the bus depot was hit, the buses were dispersed outside Southampton along the country roads at night (they were then painted grey). People also went out of Southampton at night and found shelter where they could under hedges.

*Continued on Page 11*

An Ordinary Woman's War – Part One by Emily Dimmock - *continued*

There were sneak attacks by German aircraft and one Monday morning, not long after I was married, I was hanging out the washing when I looked up and saw a plane right on top of me. I saw markings, the pilot and the gun with which he proceeded to machine-gun up and down the back gardens. There had been no warning siren; he had come in out of the sun. There was a wood at the back of our house, just beyond the garden, and he was level with the top of the trees. I took the washing, including a white sheet, and fell head first into the shelter in a furious temper with him; I would have to wash the sheet again and soap was rationed.

One sunny afternoon in September 1940, there was a very heavy raid. Gasworks, electricity generating station, water supplies and the Supermarine aircraft factory were all hit in this attack and there was heavy loss of life. I was on my way to visit my sister and saw, coming level with Southampton Water, a cloud of planes; the sky was black with them. Was hustled into the public shelter by the A.R.P. warden and there I sat for the next few hours while the bombs crumpled down. All these services being hit meant that we had none for the next three months, and although water was brought to us, it had to be boiled. Fortunately, it was a fine, dry autumn because our only means of cooking was a fire in the garden made of iron bars placed on top of some building bricks. Food was scarce, more so after enemy bombing, and after queuing for it was another thing to face – trying to cook it. A very nice new bathroom, a lovely new gas cooker, and no use at all. We were alive, though, and other people weren't. During this daylight raid when so many targets were hit, my sister's house was also damaged. Fortunately, she was not in it because a German plane which was being chased by one of ours jettisoned a bomb which fell at the bottom of the garden, sending bomb fragments right through the house from back to front, walls, furniture, everything in its path. Considered a "safe" area, she had no shelter, but afterwards street shelters were erected in her road. For the next few days, we were very busy taking portable items from her house to ours while some repairs were made so that she could live in her house.

On to November 1940, when the night raids were so heavy, Southampton burned and there was a great loss of life, the town centre being obliterated. Very eerie to go out to deal with incendiaries on that first Saturday night raid, with the sky lit as bright as day with Very lights hanging in the dark sky. We were running round with garden tools, putting out the incendiaries as fast as we could, but the bombers were coming in on top of the flares and fire bombs and, with High Explosive bombs falling around us, we had to get into the shelter. Joined by unknown people who just came into our shelter off the road shocked and dumb and went out again when the all-clear sounded, without ever knowing who they were. By this time, we were sleeping in the shelter every night, the only way to get a night's sleep, because if we weren't raided the siren always went as German planes were passing over us to get to targets inland. So, as a matter of routine, at 6 p.m. we made sandwiches and flasks of hot drinks, took a pack of playing cards and a book and settled down, knowing that the siren would most likely sound and it would be the early hours of the morning before the all-clear.

*Thank you to Sue Fitch for providing this account, written in September 1989, by her aunt, Emily Louisa Dimmock née Freak (1908-2003), sister of Rose Hare. Emily's last years were spent at Elizabeth Court, West End. Part Two will be published in the Autumn 2024 issue.*

## Spitfires and WW2 in Westend A Review by Roy Andrews

Having missed the talk given by Alan Matlock to our Society last year, I found that it did not detract others in the audience from turning up in a large number for a second helping of this fascinating subject for the May meeting. We started with a brief history of the Supermarine company, started in 1917, on the banks of the River Itchen and its brilliant designer R.J. Mitchell winning the Schneider Speed Cup outright in 1931 and then going on to design the Spitfire. Later history showed that the Germans, looking towards a future war, had photographed the factory from the air in the 1930's from a Hindenburg Air Ship.

Come WWII, the Germans bombed the Supermarine factory: the first attempt failed but the second attempt obliterated the factory so they assumed job done. However, some forward thinking on the possibility of this happening had ensured that shadow factories had been set up all over Southampton in garages, halls and many small industrial units so that construction of Spitfires continued for the rest of the war to the tune of thousands, and the Germans never realized it.

Alan's organization, Spitfire Makers Charitable Trust, was set up to try and pinpoint where all of these units were located before they faded from memory and he highlighted the many that had been identified and were now having blue plaques erected on or near the locations as reminders. He touched on Westend's part in the operation with a picture on the screen of a photo of my late mum. Some years ago, having heard of his organization, I contacted Alan with a vague story of my mum telling me as a small boy that she had built Spitfire fuel tanks at site of Blockcrete in Westend High Street. Some diligent research by him showed that during WWII the site was owned by a company that also made fuel tanks in Shirley.

He touched on other local locations at Botleigh Grange, possible Gaters Mill and that perhaps Pitters transport was used to carry parts between factories. Churchill had praised 'The Few' but went on to ensure that all of the others involved in creating the Spitfire were equally essential and Alan talked of the Fire Auxiliaries, Home Guard, Royal Observer Corps and many others including the Anti Aircraft Gun site in Quob Lane. We were even played a recording of a song written by Lord Maybray King, Speaker of 'The Commons', Southampton MP and Headteacher, that was literally singing the praises of the Spitfire.

Alan and members of the Spitfire Makers Charitable Trust research and collect memories from those who were involved in the manufacture of Spitfires in these shadow factories or from their relatives and friends who have heard stories across the years in order to preserve and celebrate their valuable contribution to the war effort. He ended his lively, well researched talk with an appeal to members for any relevant memories they may have and we extend this appeal to any reading this article if you think you have a tale to share. They can be contacted via [spitfiremakers@btintrnet.com](mailto:spitfiremakers@btintrnet.com) and they have a website <https://www.facebook.com/SpitfireMakers> Alan brought with him a contingent of his members happy to talk after the presentation and show books and information and also to rattle the collection box raising money for more blue plaques - perhaps one for West End?

## WEST END LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWS

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society held its A.G.M. on 3<sup>rd</sup> April, with the election of the committee and the celebration of the Chairman's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. Congratulations Neville. The event was very well attended and included a quiz with tea, coffee and cakes.

Neville was re-elected as Chair for 2024, but has confirmed that he will not be standing for election next year. Any candidates for election to this or any other position on the committee would be most welcome to put their names forward in plenty of time for the next A.G.M in April 2025.



Photographs courtesy Lisette Edwards

### WEST END PARISH COUNCIL COMMUNITY GRANT

West End Parish Council generously distributed their Community Grant to a number of local groups and societies. On 8<sup>th</sup> April, West End Local History Society's treasurer, Nigel Edwards, received a cheque for £195 on behalf of the Society. The money will be used toward the cost of visiting speakers as well as production of the newsletter and website.



Photograph courtesy Lisette Edwards

## FORTHCOMING LOCAL EVENTS

**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> & Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> June Reminiscence in the Park: Marking the 180<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the D-Day Landings** at Royal Victoria Country Park, Netley 10.30 – 4.00p.m. “In partnership with Bursledon, Hamble & Hound Dementia Action Group. This year, we're marking the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings, with a family fun day featuring WW2 and other historic vehicles, US Army WW2 medical tents and equipment, exhibitions, Dementia bus, music & drama, funfair and stalls! Come dressed to impress in your finest vintage fashion! Free entry. Standard car parking charges apply.”

### **June, July & August Hamble Valley Walks**

Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> June - Bursledon Then and Now

Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> - June Howards' Way. This is a Saturday; all other dates are Sundays.

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> July - William Cobbett's Botley

Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> July - Cricket Camp Walk

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> August - 'Smuggling, Booze, Gangsters and Winchester College'

More details can be found on:

[https://www.facebook.com/hamblevalleyheritage.co.uk/?locale=en\\_GB](https://www.facebook.com/hamblevalleyheritage.co.uk/?locale=en_GB)

Book online at: <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/HAMBLE-VALLEY-WALKS>

**Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> July Romsey Summer Carnival & Lanterns** starting at Romsey Greatbridge Industrial Estate 5p.m. This year's theme is BOOKS.

**Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> July Romsey Fancy Dress Parade & Mayor's Picnic** Romsey Memorial Park 11.30 a.m. "This is a superb day out for all the family - stands, bands, stalls and games. Bring your picnic blankets, food and drink and join in with this wonderful day! Carnival stalls, Pimms, duck race and lucky dip! Children's Fancy Dress Parade with the Romsey Old Cadets and Mayor of Romsey. Starting at Abbey Approach at 12noon to The Memorial Park. There are presents for every child dressing up!"

**Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> July Royal Victoria Bus & Coach Festival** at Royal Victoria Country Park, Netley 10.00 – 6.00p.m. "A chance to view and explore a whole host of vintage and modern buses, coaches and other classic vehicles. Plus stalls and stands selling transport - related items. The event is free. Normal parking charges apply."

**Sunday 21st July Walk: Summer Tree Identification** at Southampton Old Cemetery 2.00pm. "The old cemetery was originally set up as an arboretum and there are many interesting trees there. In July, exotics such as silver-pendant lime, Indian bean tree and the low, shrubby bottlebrush buckeye should be in bloom, to name just a few. Meeting Place: Main cemetery entrance off Cemetery Road. Free. Prebooking required." <https://fosoc.org/upcoming-events/>

**Sunday 4th August Walk: WW1- Lost Lives Never Forgotten** at Southampton Old Cemetery 2.00pm. "On this walk we will visit the graves of the service people who died during WW1. These people were in uniform or in the services but happened to be in England for different reasons. Some were coming home on leave, others were stationed at home, some had been sent home because of war wounds. We will hear their story and understand why they are commemorated by a Commonwealth War Grave. Meeting Place: Non-Conformist Chapel where there will be a display. Free. Prebooking required." <https://fosoc.org/upcoming-events/>

**Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> August - Frontier Sapiens Outdoor Cinema Film Festival** at Royal Victoria Country Park, Netley 8.15-9.30 p.m. – "Join us for an evening under the stars watching a collection of extraordinary short films featuring epic adventures, cultural stories and environmental issues from some of the world's best filmmakers. £16.50 (concessions £15.50). Prebooking required." <https://www.hants.gov.uk/thingstodo/countryparks/rvcp/things-to-do/whatson/frontier-sapiens>

## WEST END LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY FORTHCOMING EVENTS

All events take place at West End Parish Centre, Chapel Road SO30 3FE and begin at 7.30 p.m.  
Members free. Visitors welcome (£2 per person per meeting). Membership £12 per year.

### Programme of Talks 2024

<b>January 3</b>	NO MEETING
<b>February 7</b>	“The Romance of the Letterbox” – <i>Tony Cross</i>
<b>March 6</b>	“Regal Southampton” – <i>Andy Skinner</i>
<b>April 3</b>	ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING plus Quiz & Cakes
<b>May 1</b>	“Spitfires & WW2 in West End – an updated talk” – <i>Alan Matlock</i>
<b>June 5</b>	“Calshot ... the R.N.A.S. Years” – <i>Colin Van Geffen</i>
<b>July 3</b>	“Woolston Floating Bridge” – <i>Stephen Hoadley</i>
<b>August 7</b>	“The Body through the Porthole” – <i>Steve Herra</i>
<b>September 4</b>	“Violette Szabo, G.C.” – <i>Jeremy Prescott</i>
<b>October 2</b>	“Armchair Tour of the River Hamble” – <i>Geoff Watts</i>
<b>November 6</b>	“The View from the Bargate” – <i>Dr. Cheryl Butler</i>
<b>December 4</b>	SOCIAL EVENING – RAFFLE & DRINKS (bring your own plate of food!) plus “Around the World – the Weird, the Wild & the Wonderful” – <i>Andrew Negus</i>

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### Articles for Westender

You don't have to be a historian to write for Westender. We would love to hear your memories of growing up in the village.

email: [suballard@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:suballard@yahoo.co.uk) or leave hard copies at the museum addressed to Sue Ballard, please. **Closing Date for contributions to Autumn Issue:** 12<sup>th</sup> August 2024.