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3rd Thursdays 7.30 – 9.30 pm at the Upper Norwood Library – Westow Hill

PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF VENUE

Entry is free but we would appreciate a voluntary donation towards the cost of refreshments


February 20th: Henrietta Rae and Eleanor Fortescue Brickdale. Illustrated talk by Jerry Green about these interesting Upper Norwood Victorian artists.

March 20th: West Norwood Cemetery. Colin Fenn, representing The Friends of The Cemetery, will introduce us to the history and splendours of this, one of London’s seven magnificent cemeteries.

DULWICH DECORATIVE & FINE ARTS SOCIETY

Sixth Form Lecture Theatre, James Allen’s Girl’s School, East Dulwich Grove, SE22
Coffee 7.30 for 8pm start. Members free, temporary members £7, students £1.

9th January 2014: Paintings Inspired by Music and Music Inspired by Paintings

13th February 2014: The Vikings – Raiders, Traders and Invaders

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FRONT COVER ILLUSTRATION

Pickles the dog being presented with a well deserved certificate for his detective work (see article on page 13)

THE NORWOOD REVIEW

The Norwood Review is published four times a year, in Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. The deadline for each issue is one month earlier. The next edition of the Review will appear in March 2014. Contributions should be sent, no later than 20th February 2014, to the Editorial Board, The Norwood Review, 47 Ross Road, London SE25 6SB or secretary@norwoodsociety.co.uk (020 8653 8768). Would contributors please give their ‘phone number, address and e-mail address.
EDITOR’S REPORT

Articles for the Review are always welcome, even if we cannot find room for them. Sometimes we have to edit those we receive so that they can be fitted in the shape, size and format of the Review, but we do our best to keep everything we can. It was a surprise to find out that one of the famous blue plaques had been put on the wall of a house in Farquhar Road to commemorate its occupancy by Leslie Howard and his family. Until now we had understood that his Norwood connection was only with a house in Jasper Road, but apparently, and on good evidence, he spent four years in Farquhar Road. [We are grateful for the photograph which is by courtesy of English Heritage*].

So those of you who have interesting stories of Norwood from the past or present please send them. They can be anonymous if that is the writer’s preference.

The dread new and ugly lighting columns are shortly to be installed in Ross Road, and residents have had the usual warning letter from Messrs Skanska. Residents (including the Editor) are not looking forward to them. But there is good news – the South Norwood Drinking Fountain is now on site (obscured by a hoarding) and is being re-installed. We will have photographs for a future review, together with an article by John Hickman, who has played a major role in getting this historic fountain rescued.

Editor

*HISTORY OF LONDON’S BLUE PLAQUES SCHEME – The London-wide blue plaques scheme has been running for almost 150 years. The idea of erecting ‘memorial tablets’ was first proposed by William Ewart MP in the House of Commons in 1863. It had an immediate impact on the public imagination, and in 1866 the (Royal) Society of Arts founded an official plaques scheme. The Society erected its first plaque – to poet, Lord Byron – in 1867. The blue plaques scheme was subsequently administered by the London County Council (1901-65) and by the Greater London Council (1965-86), before being taken on by English Heritage in 1986.
SECRETARY’S REPORT

NEW VENUE FOR NORWOOD SOCIETY LOCAL HISTORY MEETINGS
We are very happy to let you know that from January 2014 we will be holding our monthly meetings (still on the third Thursday of the month) in the Upper Norwood Joint Library in Westow Hill. However, these will now start at 7.30 pm and end at 9.30 pm (and there will be refreshments!). You will find the venue comfortable and we trust that this change of time and venue will not cause any inconvenience.

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Unless you pay your subscription by Standing Order Mandate, you will find enclosed a renewal form for 2014. It is due in January and we would be most grateful for your prompt payment. I take this opportunity to thank you for your continued interest and support.

E-MAIL ADDRESSES
If, from time to time, you are contacted by e-mail announcing an event that may interest you or any other matter within our remit (and you do not mind receiving these), then please do nothing at all. However, if you are on e-mail yet never receive anything then you may never have given us your e-mail address or you may be one of the 20 odd members from whom any message I send them invariably bounces back to me (possibly because you have changed it or because it contains a small inaccuracy). If this is the case then please tell me so by e-mailing me: secretary@norwoodsociety.co.uk This will then enable me to bring my circulation list up-to-date.

NORWOOD SCHOOL OF INDUSTRY/ MR AUBIN’S SCHOOL
A website visitor from Australia who was looking into the background of his ancestors had discovered that the eldest child of his great great-great-grandfather died at 5½ years of age of Scarlet Fever at Westow Hill, Norwood, on 28th August 1844. He asked us to set him straight on a school for workhouse child inmates and children of parents in the area who could not support their children.

It was easy enough to type Mr Aubin into the Google bar which led to a wealth of information on both the Norwood School of Industry as well as the school and workhouse in Elder Road. However, copyright prevents us from reproducing the articles and the photographs (of which there are many).

If you are interested in the history of Pauper Schools and Workhouses in this area I suggest that you take the time to visit both these websites:-

www.workhouses.org.uk/Norwood/
www.workhouses.org.uk/Lambeth/
DESIGN COMPETITION FOR THE NEW PALACE

A design competition for a rebuilt Crystal Palace is to be arranged. The competition will be run on RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) lines.

Bromley Council has described the proposal as a ‘once in a lifetime’ opportunity but it is already causing concerns among local community groups - not least because of the transport and parking issues which have been raised in past schemes.

There is a question whether an Act of Parliament and an amendment to the Crystal Palace Act are needed. Also, what would happen if planning permission was granted and Mr Ni then walked away from the scheme which is funded entirely by the ZhongRong group and not out of the pocket of group chairman Mr Ni? The sustainability of a rebuilt Crystal Palace and the proposed diamond centre is questionable.

The brochure setting out Mr Ni’s proposals does not include the restoration of the park terraces and the subway underneath Crystal Palace Parade.

It also seems that Arup, the architects and planners who are advising Mr Ni, may take the view that a complete replica of the Crystal Palace is not necessary.

There is concern that Mr Ni’s scheme may make it difficult to get grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund for small but important improvements to the Park such as the Visitor Centre, the Penge entrance, exits, ‘greening up’ the area around the National Sports Centre and work on the concert bowl platform.

Copies of the Mr Li’s brochure made available at the meeting which Boris Johnson, Mr Ni and others attended, can be found by going to: www.thelondoncrystalpalace.com

Meanwhile the Crystal Palace Park Community Stakeholder group has issued a transport paper about the proposals which can be found on: www.crystalpalacepark.org.uk
This welcome second edition of a book first published in 2010 gives an account of the very rich heritage of Edwardian buildings in the London Borough of Lambeth. The expression ‘Edwardian’ includes, in accordance with the usual practice, buildings constructed up to 1914, i.e. into the early years of the reign of George V. The Metropolitan Borough of
Lambeth, with very similar although not identical boundaries as the present London borough, was created in 1900, along with 27 others, as one of the new Metropolitan Boroughs under the Local Government Act 1899. A new borough with a Mayor, alderman and councillors needed a town hall and the Lambeth Town Hall in Brixton (the ‘jewel in the crown’ of this book), designed by Septimus Warwick and H Austen Hall, was opened by the Prince and Princess of Wales (later King George V and Queen Mary) in 1908. This imposing Edwardian Baroque building in red brick banded in Portland stone and with an imposing 40-metre clock tower was extended in 1938 by the same architects and opened by Queen Mary, by then the Queen Mother. I am familiar with the outside of the building, but I have never been inside and the photographs of the magnificent interior were an ‘eye-opener’. The authors comment that the ‘original character of the civic space is very well preserved and includes much Edwardian furniture, chandeliers, wood panelling, fireplaces and stained glass’. The council chamber is described as a ‘spectacular double-height room with a pair of galleries for the public and the press on either side’. The mayor and leading members sit on a raised dais facing ‘red leather upholstered horseshoe seating for the 70 members of the Council’.

Other public buildings featured include most importantly County Hall, listed Grade II*. (Lambeth Town Hall is Grade II.) Although building commenced in 1912, there were delays imposed by the War and County Hall did not open until 1922, with the north wing not being completed until 1933. County Hall was the headquarters of the London County Council until 1965 and then of the Greater London Council, but no longer has civic uses since the demise of the latter body in 1986. Several Edwardian fire stations are featured, including West Norwood Fire Station (a Grade II listed building) at 244 Norwood Road.

Buildings are listed thematically with sections on hospitals, schools, theatres and cinemas and public houses, shops and factories, stations, houses, and finally churches. There is a special section with old photographs of lost Edwardian buildings of the borough. Lambeth is a long, thin borough extending from Waterloo in the north to Norwood in the extreme south-east. The only building featured which is in Upper Norwood is the former French’s Dairy at 72-74 Gipsy Hill. This was built in 1902 and the frontage building which survives is now offices and flats. The milking sheds were demolished in 2004 to make way for a new block of flats. An old photograph shows the field at the bottom of Gipsy Hill where the cows grazed before being driven up the hill for milking. The authors observe that French’s Dairy is in the Gipsy Hill Conservation Area, but is as yet unlisted.

The reader will find much in this book that is familiar, but many buildings featured will be unknown. It would make a good guide for a walk, either organised or informal, particularly in those areas like Clapham and Brixton where many Edwardian buildings featured in this book are clustered together. King’s College Hospital on Denmark Hill,
now rather dominated by the modern extensions, was originally designed by William Pite on a ‘massive American scale’ with 600 beds. It was opened by King George V and Queen Mary in 1913 (they must have been busy) and was hailed as ‘designed in beauty and built in truth’. The most interesting Edwardian church in Lambeth must be Christ Church, Brixton Road (Grade II*), built in the Byzantine style with Art Nouveau detailing. It was completed in 1907. Of local interest is the British Home in Crown Lane, described as being in Streatham in the book, although I like to think it is actually in Norwood. The building is late Victorian, opened by another Prince and Princess of Wales (the future King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra) in 1894, but the chapel (Grade II listed) was an Edwardian addition by ET Hall and opened in 1912. The wonderful Governors’ Hall at St Thomas’s Hospital is Edwardian (1904) described by the authors as ‘Wrennaissance’ in style, an expression that seems to sum up the building well. Of the Edwardian houses featured I would single out Broxholm Road (on the Streatham/Norwood border) as of particular local interest. Built in 1905-10, they ‘typify the popular vernacular of Edwardian domestic architecture’. With ‘Arts and Crafts timber porches, oval street-facing ground floor windows and tile-hung bay windows on the first floor, these terraced villas are quite charming.

Edmund Bird, now heritage adviser to the Greater London Authority and formerly head of conservation and urban design at the London Borough of Lambeth, and Fiona Price of the Lambeth Archives, together with their photographer, have done a great service in highlighting and describing Lambeth’s Edwardian built heritage. The book has an index, a location map, a useful bibliography and there is a foreword by the distinguished architectural historian Gavin Stamp. It is ideal present for anyone with an interest in South London history.

Richard Lines
WALTER HOBBS

UNVEILING OF BUST AND TABLET AT GIPSY ROAD BAPTIST CHURCH

An enquiry was received from a Mrs Kate Buck in Little Rock, Arkansas, a great-granddaughter of the Rev. Walter Hobbs (mentioned in “The Story of Norwood”) who was well-known and respected during his 38 years of service as a Baptist Minister in Norwood (1880-1914). He was closely associated with the building of the Baptist Church in Gipsy Road and was its first pastor. In addition to his pastorate, Walter Hobbs did good work on the Board of Guardians and took particular interest in the children at the Lambeth Schools in Elder Road where he was Chairman of the Schools Committee.

An article in the Norwood Press & Dulwich Advertiser” of Saturday 22nd March 1924 records that in the year of his death a memorial stone was placed on his grave in Norwood Cemetery. 10 years after his death a well-attended commemorative assembly took place outside the Church when a life-size bronze bust (made from a photograph) with his name etched into the stonework was erected on a plinth above the entrance doors and also an internal wall-mounted marble tablet dedicated to the memory of the Rev. Walter Hobbs were unveiled. His gravestone includes the following detail about his service and may be visited in Norwood Cemetery:-

Rev. Walter Hobbs who entered into rest March 13th 1914 in his 71st year for 38 years a devoted Baptist minister in Norwood
47 years a lecturer of the United Kingdom Band of Hope Union
24 years a Guardian of the Poor for the Parish of Lambeth
25 years Nonconformist Chaplain of this Cemetery
also Emma Hobbs wife of the above who entered into rest December 5th 1922 in her 81st year
also Ethel Hobbs their daughter who died Dec. 16th 1956 in her 78th year

The bronze bust is however no longer above the front door of the church. The marble tablet may well still be there but unfortunately may no longer be seen by the public as there is no public access and the residents of the apartments that have been built inside are the only people who would see it. Kate Buck has tried hard to find out the fate of the bust, but with little success. According to a Senior Research Fellow at Spurgeon’s College (who was a student minister at the Gipsy Road Church from 1972-76) the bust was no longer on a plinth above the front doors whilst he served there. One story goes that at some point it had fallen off and smashed, revealing that what had been thought a proper bronze bust was in fact mostly plaster. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that the original would have been a fake since the vestry would have seen it close-up and would have had a record of its maker, Messrs Mial of Euston Road. It may have been replaced at some point, or possibly stolen for its value as bronze. The empty plinth is very high-up: the inscription may have survived but cannot easily be seen. Should anyone be able to shed any more light on the matter then we would be most grateful.

Anna Lines
POSTAL SERVICE IN NORWOOD

In 1831 the Town and Country areas of London were re-defined as being 3 and $12\frac{1}{3}$ miles from the GPO. Norwood being more than 3 miles from the GPO was therefore in the Country area. There had been a major re-organisation of the London Penny Post in 1794. For some 120 years local letters within the Town area of London were charged 1d, with an additional 1d being charged for delivery in the Country area. Before 1794 this extra 1d for Country area deliveries was retained by the Letter Carrier, after 1794 the money went to the Revenue. In April 1801 the basic charge was increased to 2d, largely due to inflation caused by the war with France and the service was re-named the London Twopenny Post. Then in 1805 the charge for letters between Town and Country area was increased to 3d.

Norwood is first mentioned in the Post Office list for 1828. The absolute location of the first Receiving House is not certain; but it is thought to have been in the Crown Point area. The post card illustrated may well be factually correct; but I have been unable to confirm it.
All the hand stamps were of generic types issued throughout the London Twopenny Post.

- The first hand stamp sent to Norwood, known used on the 24th April 1829, was oval in form with the office name in the lower arc, as a type having been issued from 1801.
- The second hand stamp sent to Norwood, known used from 1835 until 1838, was of a stepped framed format, as a type having been issued from 1811.
- The third hand stamp sent to Norwood, known used from 1838 until 1851, was an unframed version of the previous hand stamp, as a type having been issued from 1835.
- The fourth hand stamp, a straight line, was sent to Norwood on the 6th August 1853 and is known used from 1854 until 1857.
- The fifth hand stamp, a straight line, was sent to Norwood on the 3rd January 1857 and is known used in 1857.

The illustrations are very close to life size. All of these hand stamps were issued to indicate the origin of a letter and were applied at the office of posting.

In 1834 the Norwood Eastern Office opened. Again its location is not clear; however the environs of Werndee Hall were listed as East Norwood in the 1850’s directories, so this area seems the most likely candidate.

The first hand stamp this office received was the stepped type, which has been seen used from 1836 until 1843. The unframed stepped type, known for Norwood, does not appear to have been issued to this office. The first straight line hand stamp was sent to Norwood EO on the 30th March 1844 and has been seen used from 1844 until 1852. The second straight line hand stamp was sent to Norwood EO on the 21st December 1854 and has been seen used from 1854 until 1857.

Additional hand stamps would also have been issued to both offices to indicate prepaid postage. The most commonly used would have been on letters to London which were charged 3d, being 1d for transfer from the Country area to the Town area and 2d for delivery. Letters going further than London would be charged 2d for the journey to the GPO. Then at the GPO they would calculate the total postage due and endorse
the amount due on the letter for payment by the recipient. As for the 2py P.Paid, it was probably little used until after the advent of the Uniform Penny Post in 1840, a double letter then being charged 2d. The illustration with no amount specified again relates to post 1840 and is the 3py P.Paid with the 3 removed. This was used on pre-paid single letters, charged 1d.

Norwood S.O

The final one of this series of postal marking is for the Norwood Southern Office. According to the 1857 Post Office Guide it was located near “The Jolly Sailor”. The illustrated hand stamp has been seen used from 1852 until 1857.

In 1837 Rowland Hill had advocated the amalgamation of the Twopenny Post with the General Post due to the duplication of effort; apart from the management they both had their own Letter Carriers. The idea was rejected; but when he became Secretary to the Post Office in 1854, he revived his suggestion. On the 25th March 1856 he achieved success and the London District Office was founded, comprising of 10 districts. Then on the 1st September 1858 the Southern District Office was opened at Westminster Road Lambeth. Prior to this all outgoing mail was sent to East Central District Office in London for cancellation. The Southern District had a short life and was abolished during March/April 1868. The areas previously covered being absorbed in to the South Eastern and South Western Districts. Norwood became part of the South Eastern District. Then in March 1917 sub-divisions were defined within each District and Norwood became S.E. 19.

For those who wondered about the post in Norwood before 1828, the nearest contact point to the postal service was at the bottom of the hill in Sydenham. The Twopenny Post had a regular Ride from London to Bromley via Dulwich, Sydenham and Beckenham. It is my belief that the hilly and wooded nature of the terrain made Norwood less attractive for speculative development. So in the early 1800’s it was probably sparsely populated by the more wealthy section of the community, who would have no difficulty in sending a servant to dispatch or collect correspondence.

Andrew Ford

Postscript: This article was sparked off by our publication of an envelope in Cyrillic writing. The letter from Mr Aubin is of interest - what are the bars one wonders.
Entire letter to the Foundling Hospital in London, manuscript dated 6th October 1840.

When the letter was handed in at the Norwood Eastern Office, the two line paid hand stamp was applied. The sender would have paid the 2d postal charge to the clerk.

On arrival in London, the Chief Office paid date stamp was applied.

The letter reads:-

Norwood October 6/40

Sir

In answer to yours of the 1st Inst. I beg to inform you that at the present time I am so busy in making alterations in my establishment that I shall not be able to do the bars you speak of, but will be happy to do the iron work should you require it.

Hoping you will excuse the delay in not answering your letter before this.

I have the pleasure to remain

Sir

Your most obedient

TG Aubin
PICKLES

One of the less famous residents of Beulah Hill (location not certain, but said to be by a telephone kiosk) was Pickles, a mixed parentage collie dog. It was Pickles who, when being taken for a Sunday evening walk by his owner, David Corbett, a Thames waterman, sniffed at a newspaper wrapped package and thus drew it to his attention. Accounts vary – some say under a hedge – but the account given by Corbett refers to the discovery as being by the outside wheel of a parked car. To is astonishment the package contained the International Football Trophy stolen some two weeks before, in 1966, from the Central Hall, Westminster, where it was on display in a glass case. There was an important exhibition of stamps in the Hall mounted by Stanley Gibbons, and the Trophy had been on loan – no doubt to attract more visitors.

There were strict conditions attached to the loan relating to security. The Jules Rimet Trophy (so called after the Frenchman who founded the International Football Association – referred to as the FIFA in French) was the figure of the Goddess of Victory and cast in solid gold weighing eight and a quarter pounds. It was awarded annually – until overtaken by another club successful in winning three years running. The security arrangements at Central Hall left a lot to be desired, and in spite of suspicious characters having been seen at the exhibition the guards obviously did not keep a close and continuous watch on the Trophy case. The thieves forced open an external door and then the door to the display case.

When the theft was discovered there was considerable interest in the retrieval of the Trophy, mainly because the World Cup match was to take place three months later. However, soon after a telephone call was received from a Mr Jackson saying that the Trophy would be returned by arrangement on payment of £15,000. To establish the genuine nature of the call a parcel was left at Chelsea Football Club containing part of the trophy and a note requesting payment in five and one pound notes. As requested (and arranged in consultation with the police) a note was placed in the London Evening Standard saying ‘Willing to do business’ In a subsequent telephone call the thief agreed to a rendezvous in Battersea, but after a car chase by the police he was caught. He turned out to be Edward Betchley, who claimed to be only the ‘bagman’, and gave no useful information about the location of the Trophy or who the thief was. Betchley had a lady visitor when at Brixton Prison but insisted that she should not be involved in any way, otherwise the Trophy would never be found. Two days later Pickles made his name by finding it.

Betchley was convicted of demanding money with menaces and served a 2-year sentence. Corbett, after being investigated as the possible thief, received some £6,000 in reward money. The real thief, if not Betchley or an accomplice of his, was never found. Pickles became famous, and figured in a film and various appearances. Unfortunately he died.
not long after because his lead got tangled when he was chasing a cat. He was however awarded a silver medal by the National Canine Defence League.

What happened to the Trophy subsequently justifies a separate article, but is worthy of note that it was won by Brazil, but once again stolen, and this time it said to have been melted down for the gold content. It was never recovered, and a new trophy was eventually designed, this time not from solid gold. In 1966, in time for the World Cup Final, the Football Association had a replica made. This was used until 1970 when it was sold at auction for £254,500, and purchased by the FIFA. One is left to wonder whether the replica was the one found by Pickles in 1966!

With acknowledgments of material in an article in the Observer newspaper, published on 23rd April 1966. See front cover for picture of Pickles.

BOMBS AND BUS-ROUTES

A bus conductor’s job was an ambition of mine as a small boy. I had a conductor’s outfit, with a Sam-Browne belt, a machine to ring a bell when you clipped the tickets, and a rack of tickets where cards printed with destinations were arrayed in a row, held by spring clips, waiting ready to be punched.

South Norwood had quite a few buses; there were at least four routes, some of them every ten minutes. We even had a terminus, because the 68A managed the tight turn at the Clock Tower and finished in the forecourt at Norwood Junction station. Then coming back it ran up along the High Street and turned left up South Norwood Hill, joined the 68 route at Whitehorse Lane, and went all the way to Chalk Farm in north London. On the other side of the railway the 12 and the 197 ran through to South Croydon, far away. And of course we must not forget the 654 trolleybus which came from the Goat-House Bridge and ran right along the High Street and on towards West Croydon.

But when the bombs came, they disrupted the roads and bus-routes, and buses and trolleybuses had to find their way through back streets and re-join their route later. One such diversion was Southern Avenue which, startling to see, had a trolleybus running along it one day. The cause was a bomb which had fallen on the north side of the High Street, between the Astoria cinema and the public house at the cross-roads. So trolleybuses coming from the Goat-House would have to switch over to their batteries, come along the edge of the Norhyrst estate, and re-join their proper route via South
Norwood Hill. (Now of course we have a single-decker running along Southern Avenue). The High Street towards Selhurst was otherwise clear. The road to Woodside under the railway bridge was irrelevant (marked as a “LOW BRIDGE” which every so often took the top deck off an errant bus); but how to cope with a large square deep hole dead on the corner? The driver of the 68A coming down the Hill tried to back, so as to swing wider round the corner into the High Street, but the traffic on the Hill had queued up close behind him! He tried again; still no good. Drivers argued; some sounded their horns; they edged backwards. Eventually a plank was put across the corner of the hole, and gingerly, very gingerly, the driver took his bus round the corner. We stood and watched, my Mother and I, and so, I imagine, did quite a few other folk. Would the plank hold? What would happen if it broke? We do not know — it held. Disaster was averted!

Buses were one thing; trams were more awkward and far less flexible. In the middle of Croydon, where North End crossed George Street and Crown Hill, the road was so narrow that, as now, it could only take one set of tram-lines. Against one side of the road were the Whitgift Almshouses, given by Elizabeth’s archbishop. At one stage there was a proposal to demolish them, so as to make the road wider. The scheme apparently got as far as a draft private Act of Parliament before it was abandoned. So at either end of the single track, as they approached, tram drivers had to look out to make sure no tram was coming from the other end. In addition they had to observe the traffic lights! On one occasion this system went wrong, and two trams came face-to-face on the single track. I had a grandstand view from my seat in a 68 bus, while the two drivers pondered what to do. Trams, after all, are not really built to go sideways. Eventually one of the trams tried moving backwards, and promptly came off the rails, probably having fouled the spring points! Alas, I don’t know what happened next. My grandstand seat carried me off towards Norwood, as the bus extricated itself from the jam, much though I would have liked to continue watching.

Those were exciting times for little boys in south London.

Robin Phillips
ENGLISH HERITAGE BLUE PLAQUE FOR LESLIE HOWARD

Star of stage and screen who helped the war effort honoured actor and film director Leslie Howard (1893-1943) has been commemorated with an English Heritage blue plaque at 45 Farquhar Road in Upper Norwood, South London. The plaque was installed on Tuesday 3rd September at the home where he lived in his later childhood – the years in which his love of theatre began to take hold.

Leslie Howard Steiner was born in Forest Hill, London, the eldest son of Ferdinand Steiner, a Hungarian-born stockbroker’s clerk. The family went to live in Vienna when he was only three, but returned to London about five years later.

The house chosen for commemoration, 45 Farquhar Road, is part of an 1880s terrace, which originally faced the old high level railway station that served the Crystal Palace. It was Howard’s home for about four years from 1907, and he subsequently lived at a other address nearby, now demolished. While living in Farquhar Road he attended Alleyn’s School in nearby Dulwich before leaving at the age of seventeen to work as a bank clerk in Whitehall. However, Howard had been interested in music and drama from a young age and performed in plays at the Stanley Halls in South Norwood.

Following the declaration of war in 1914 he enlisted and, after five months of training, was appointed a second lieutenant in the Northamptonshire Imperial Yeomanry. His military service was curtailed by ill-health, however, and in May 1916 he was discharged and decided to try his luck as a professional actor.

After touring in various productions, he made his West End debut in 1917 and adopted the stage name of Leslie Howard. He gained his first major role in Arthur Pinero’s “The Freaks”, which played for over fifty performances.

Partly helped by his uncle, who was a film director, Howard found himself in front of a camera in 1919, but failed to shine in the resulting production, “The Lackey and the Lady”. In 1920 Leslie Howard formally adopted his stage name by deed poll and later that year he travelled to the United States to appear in a touring production of Gilbert Miller’s “Just Suppose”, which opened at the Henry Miller Theatre in New York.

His breakthrough came with leading roles in “Her Cardboard Lover” (1927), which transferred to London in 1928 with a cast headed by Tallulah Bankhead, and in John Gallworthy’s “Escape” (1928). In 1930 Howard was invited to Hollywood to appear in Robert Milton’s “Outward Bound”, which was followed by a succession of films made for MGM and RKO studios.

Howard continued to act on stage and achieved notable artistic and commercial success with his performance as the alcoholic writer Alan Squier opposite the then unknown
Humphrey Bogart in Robert E. Sherwood’s “The Petrified Forest” (1935). By contrast his appearance as Hamlet on Broadway in Autumn 1936 proved a flop, as he struggled to compete with John Gielgud’s production of the play that had been a sensation only a month before.

Howard’s film career received a welcome boost in 1938 when his performance as Professor Henry Higgins in George Bernard Shaw’s “Pygmalion” earned him an Oscar nomination. It brought him to the attention of Hollywood again and he was cast alongside Vivien Leigh and Clark Gable in the MGM blockbuster, “Gone with the Wind” (1939). Although the film proved an enormous success at the box office, Howard loathed his part and dismissed Ashley Wilkes as ‘a dreadful milksop, totally spineless and negative’.

Following the outbreak of the Second World War, Howard – who had returned to London – offered his services to the government and devised a propaganda strategy structured to encourage the United States to enter the war, but this was quietly rejected. He nonetheless started a series of listeners, “Britain Speaks”, in June 1940 and continued to report as the Blitz took its toll on London.

When restrictions on the British film industry were relaxed, Howard seized the opportunity to produce a patriotic film, “Pimpernel Smith” (1941), which transplanted the action of Orczy’s novel from Revolutionary France to Nazi Germany. Its success inspired him to work on his next project, directing and starring in a biopic of R.J Mitchell, designer of the Spitfire fighter plane: Howard started shooting “The First of the Few” in Cornwall in summer 1941.

His attention to detail and experience in working with the RAF led the Ministry of Information to commission him in 1942 to direct a recruitment film, “The Gentle Sex”, which would concentrate on women serving in the Auxiliary Territorial Service.

The following year, Howard received an invitation from the British Council to go on a lecture tour to Spain and Portugal which, after first refusing, he was persuaded to accept. At the end of his month-long trip, he boarded a civilian jet in Lisbon to return home, but was killed when the aeroplane was shot down by enemy fire as it crossed the English Channel on 1 June 1943.

Howard was 50 years old. Conspiracy theories persist about the reasons for his trip and the manner of his death but no proof that he was a secret agent has ever been uncovered.

With apologies for giving Leslie Howard more publicity (see issue no. 192), but he deserves it. Ed
HISTORY OF LONDON’S BLUE PLAQUES SCHEME – The London-wide blue plaques scheme has been running for almost 150 years. The idea of erecting ‘memorial tablets’ was first proposed by William Ewart MP in the House of Commons in 1863. It had an immediate impact on the public imagination, and in 1866 the (Royal) Society of Arts founded an official plaques scheme. The Society erected its first plaque – to poet, Lord Byron – in 1867. The blue plaques scheme was subsequently administered by the London County Council (1901-65) and by the Greater London Council (1965-86), before being taken on by English Heritage in 1986.
THE SOUTH NORWOOD GOLDEN JUBILEE DRINKING FOUNTAIN

The story of the South Norwood Golden Jubilee Drinking Fountain appeared in the autumn edition of The Norwood Review twice and so might be familiar to readers.

Anxiety arose during mid-summer when the developer of 1-9 South Norwood Hill submitted an application to Croydon Council to alter a condition pertaining to the incorporation of the fountain into the newly developed site as originally agreed. The developer, believing the granite fountain to have been damaged and now in three pieces, didn’t want to have to pay for repairs and carriage.

Examination of the fountain at Purley Depot, where it had been stored apparently since demolition, revealed that the ‘three pieces’ were in fact its component parts. A now amusing aside is that a manager of Purley Depot enquired as to who was going to pay for a decade of storage!

In the event, letters of objection, together with a petition containing a healthy number of signatures was submitted to Croydon Council early in August with the intention of having the matter put before the planning committee. In addition there was helpful coverage by the Croydon Advertiser newspaper who took an active interest in events.

The upshot was Croydon Council refused permission for an alteration to the condition before it went to committee. Why this wasn’t a foregone conclusion remains enigmatic – it would have saved a good deal of work.

The developer had then to re-install the fountain into the wall of his new building. Of course delay is the easiest form of denial, so it was necessary to meet with him to negotiate for the work to be done. Our fears of procrastination turned out to be groundless as the parts of the fountain were actually on site. This coupled with a sympathetic discussion with the developer proved most fruitful.

Although presently obscured by hoarding, the South Norwood Golden Jubilee Drinking Fountain of 1887 is now installed into the wall of 1-9 South Norwood Hill.

Should any of you be thinking of purchasing one of the very nice flats, prices begin at £285,000, the two penthouse flats offering panoramic views towards Shirley and each with its own large balcony are a mere £495,000 each.

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Represents the interests of the people who live or work in Norwood to local authorities and government agencies.

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Communicates informations through talks, exhibitions and the Norwood Review, our quarterly journal.

Although the Norwood Society cannot provide expert advice on planning, transport, trees and open spaces, it takes a close interest in these matters, and would welcome information about them in the Norwood area. It may not be able to become directly involved in all of them, but would be able to advise on suitable sources of help and possible strategies.