

# Local History Link

Keeping you in touch during the coronavirus emergency

No. 17

Welcome to edition No. 17 of *Local History Link*. First up we share some personal memories: Sue's childhood recollections of Southchurch Park, followed by Gloria's reminiscences of her life in Shoebury during WW2. In this issue, we also have an interesting item by guest writer, Emma Palmer of Echo Newspapers. But there's much more, so read on. And by the way, don't forget to try Joyce's scrumptious recipe!

Please keep sending your articles, photos, etc., by email to Jim at [jsanctuary28@gmail.com](mailto:jsanctuary28@gmail.com) or post to 28 Darlington Grove, Leigh-on-Sea, SS9 3LG. We all love reading them! And as usual, keep safe, keep well and keep alert! **Tony, Tricia and Jim**



## A LITTLE BIT ABOUT SOUTHCHURCH PARK

Flicking through some old photos recently I came across one of my parents taken after their wedding. Like many others who got married during the war years, the wedding had to be arranged without very much forward planning so as to coincide with a very short period of shore leave. (I now wonder how some managed to get from Tollesbury at all!) The reception was in the large house in Southchurch Park, their wedding photos being taken just outside, where my

grandmother and step-grandfather had lived for many years. (My mother later remarked that this was the only time she ever remembered my grandmother opening the front door!).

Grandfather had been the head park-keeper and groundsman in the park for many years: he took huge pride in keeping the cricket pitch to an exceedingly high standard and apparently on many occasions was highly praised by visiting teams. The first recorded cricket match at the ground was in 1906 when Essex County Cricket Club played their inaugural first-class match there beating Leicestershire by five wickets. Essex played 130 first-class matches there between 1906 and 2004, and whilst I don't know exactly when grandfather started it was certainly while my father was a child, sometime in the 1920's, (a very faded photo of them with, possibly their first dog, Bruce, a Great Dane, remains): he stayed there until his retirement in the very early 1950's.

Even long into his retirement, grandfather would reminisce about the heyday of the matches, especially of those when Essex played touring sides and one of his fondest memories was when Don Bradman captained the Australian side against Essex, which included one of his favourite Essex cricketers, Trevor Bailey. I looked up the details of this match, which took place in 1948 in front of 16,000 spectators, and whilst I know nothing about cricket it must have been quite some match when on the first day the tourists had amassed a score of 721 all out, a record which still stands, and on the second day when Essex finally went under by an innings and 451 runs: apparently one of the worst defeats ever inflicted on them. Although, when visiting the grandparents in the park I was very young, nonetheless there are a few things that I remember very well and **not** at all fondly. Going through the side gate into the paved garden you were greeted by the hens and hutches

of rabbits, none of which were pets: I recall very clearly how I hated having to eat dinner there but grandmother had no truck with any squeamish behaviour and you ate what was put in front of you! (Small wonder that I later became vegetarian.) Into the kitchen, where a large black pot, with smelly contents, always seemed to be on the stove boiling up potato peelings, etc., presumably used to feed the chickens – well those that were still laying anyway! From there you went into the dining/all purpose room and then into a dark flagged hall, which always seemed extremely cold, where a very old-fashioned telephone, which I found totally fascinating, was inconveniently wall mounted (a bit similar to the one shown on the right insomuch as it had a separate ear and mouthpiece). Grandmother was only just about five-foot tall and therefore had a bit of a stretch to speak into the mouthpiece, so when, during the cricket season, people who wanted the latest cricket score were mistakenly put through to the house, they were given very short shrift indeed! The only other room my sister and I were allowed into was the bathroom, which housed a loo, with a very high and noisy cistern, and, what seemed at that time, to be an enormous bath, but maybe this was only because I viewed it through a child's eyes. The bedrooms were off limits and the room at the front of the house was kept for high days and holidays, e.g. the wedding reception and maybe once for the Carnival Queen (another story altogether).



For me, the best part of these visits was definitely when I could escape to the children's playground, but for the grandparents having to leave the park, and, of course, their home, on grandfather's retirement must have been quite a wrench. **Sue Balkwell**



### MEMORIES OF SHOEBURY'S BAKERS SHOP DURING WW2

I was born in January 1939, just a few months before WW2 started; it amazes me how I can remember my time in Shoebury during those years when I can't remember what I did last week! My grandmother, Nurse Higham, delivered me as she was the local midwife and worked in Southchurch with the local physician, Dr. Le Couilliard.



I lived at Everett's, the baker's shop, until I married in 1960; it is now The Garrison Bakery and I believe the only shop in Shoebury Village that is used for the same purpose as it was during the war (see photo left). My mother, dad, younger sister Julia, and I lived on the premises behind and over the shop; it looks so old now when I pass by. I was always called 'Bunchy', as I had such curly bunches of hair – 'Bunchy the baker's daughter' like a character from an Enid Blyton book. The photo left shows the bakery today. Behind the living area was the bakehouse with a flour loft. The flour was delivered by the millers, taken up wooden steps and

then down a chute into the bakehouse when needed. What a lot of flour dust; we didn't realise it was bad for our lungs!

In the bakehouse there was a dough machine, and troughs where the dough rested at night to rise. Dad used to get up at 4am to knead the dough and put it into the oven heated by coal in a big pit under the oven. As the oven was so big a special long-handled 'peel' was needed to get the bread, buns and few cakes out (these were

made with dried eggs). When cooked, these went down to the shop and were loaded onto a big wooden waggon which was pulled by a horse for delivery around the area.

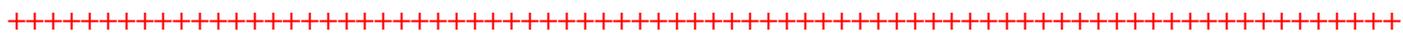
How well I remember the horse Kitty. Nearly all tradesmen had a horse and cart in those days. I used to sit high on the bench seat with my dad and was allowed to hold the reins along Shoebury High Street and various roads, then up to the Cambridge end. We used to walk into the garrison and get the orders from the Officers' and Sergeants' Mess, the hospital, YMCA, etc., to be delivered the next day. Miss Ventris ran the YMCA and always gave me a box of chocolates on my birthday – what a treat in those days! Kitty was grazed in a field and stabled along the High Street. When she died, we bought an electric van, which was very modern in those days. How the men used to miss the manure 'to put on their rhubarb', as they used to say. The answer always was: "We put custard on ours!" Of course, many people had allotments then.



The shop was always busy with local people and soldiers; among our customers was Frankie Howerd (see contemporary photo left) and Larry Gains, the Canadian heavyweight boxer. Bread was then rationed: a large loaf 4½d, a small loaf 2¾d and rolls ¼d each. I used to cut the coupons out of the ration books with special scissors and there was always a queue. I remember the day sliced bread was sold in local grocers. Dad's trade plummeted for a week and he was very worried. So, he bought a bread-slicer and everyone came back again!

I could go on and on with my memories; the Morrison shelter in the kitchen where I would sleep with my doll and the cat, the bombs dropping on the mudflats, blowing out all the shop's plate glass windows. We never left Shoebury and I was brought up with tanks, soldiers on duty (and with too much beer inside

them!), horses, marching, barbed wire on the beach. Perhaps I'll write more about my wartime memories another time. **Gloria Burwell**



### JOYCE TAYLOR'S FAVOURITE MOIST FRUITCAKE RECIPE

- 18 oz mixed fruit
- 6 oz butter
- 8 oz brown sugar
- 3 eggs
- 5 oz plain flour
- 5 oz self-raising flour
- ½ teaspoon bicarbonate of soda

Boil the fruit, butter and sugar in 8 fl.oz water and simmer for 3 minutes. When cold, stir in the eggs. Then add the flour and bicarbonate of soda.

Bake in 8" tin at 160° in a fan oven for 1½ hours.

If you wish, you can add to the mix half sherry and half water, 2 oz glacé cherries and 2 oz chopped walnuts.

I usually make half of the mixture using one large egg and bake in an oblong tin 5" x 9" x 2½" at 160° for 1 hour.

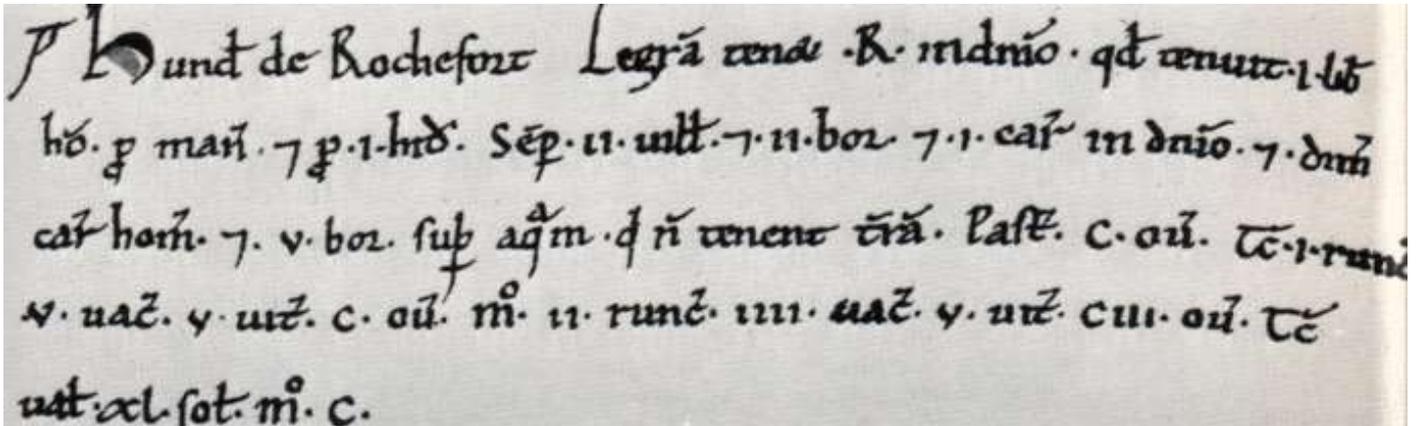
And very nice it is too!



## LEIGH (LEGRA) AND DOOMSDAY!

In December 1085, William the Conqueror decided he needed more money to pay for his army. He ordered a census of all the towns and villages in England to assess their actual wealth and the assets of each community. Royal Commissioners were sent to every community.

The survey, known as *The Domesday Book*, took its name from the biblical *Day of Judgement* or *Day of Doom*. It was written in Latin and completed before the end of 1086. Sadly though, William died the following year, aged 60, so he derived little benefit from this great work. However, the information in *The Domesday Book* has been of great value to local historians throughout the country and we can collect facts about our own local town to get a picture of Leigh in 1086.



The image above is Leigh's entry in *The Domesday Book*. We know from this that it was a small community of less than 40 people and called *Legra* or *Lea*, which means 'a clearing in the forest'. There was one *freeman* in charge called Ranulph Peverel. He was a Norman who had arrived in England with William and fought alongside him at the Battle of Hastings.

Ranulph lived in a large house, with lands attached for his own use called a *demesne*. There were two villagers or *villeins* who had a special position in the village. They paid dues and did services in the village in return for having their own land. There were also two *bordars*, people of lower rank than the *villeins*. They were allocated a cottage for their use in return for work in the village. There were also five more *bordars* living on the foreshore whose occupation was fishing, using kiddles or stop nets which were staked across the creeks and channels to catch fish on the outgoing tide. It is estimated that the Manor of Lea was about 120 acres, plus marchland used for the grazing of sheep.

Records show that Ranulph had a wife called Ingelrica, a Saxon woman who had the dubious honour of being the mistress of William the Conqueror. When William tired of her, she came to Leigh as the wife of Ranulph. We do not know the details but there must be a great story somewhere!

Ranulph, like all Normans, would have spoken Norman French, whereas all the villagers would have spoken Saxon English, which must have caused difficulties in a small community. One example is the use of words for meat. Saxon villagers preparing food would have used Saxon words like cow, sheep or pig, but when serving their Norman masters, they would use Norman words such as boeuf (beef), mouton (mutton) or pig (porc or cochon). The use of Norman French continued in England, especially in Court circles, but was finally banned at Court about three hundred years after the arrival of the Normans. We still use some Norman French words in our present-day language. **Tony Bullock**



### WHAT HAPPENED IN ESSEX ON THE DAY YOU RECEIVE THIS EDITION OF **LOCAL HISTORY LINK**

**20<sup>TH</sup> July 1937** – Guglielmo Marconi died in Rome, aged 63. An Italian, acknowledged as the inventor of the radio, he was an electrical engineer known for his pioneering work on long-distance radio communication. The New Street Works in Chelmsford was the location for the first entertainment wireless broadcast in the United Kingdom in 1920.

## MY HOME: 35 CLIFF PARADE



My husband Jack and I moved into the first floor flat at no. 35 Cliff Parade in 2000, a very attractive Edwardian property enjoying spectacular views across the Estuary (see photo). The house was built by Mr. Harper in 1906 who had previously built four houses to the east of no. 35. Mr. Harper then lived at no. 35 with his family.

There were originally two bedrooms on the top floor for use of the maids, and four bedrooms on the first floor. Before being converted into flats there was a separate staircase at the rear for use of the maids. When we moved into the first-floor flat, the top floor was sealed off, but once opened up we discovered that the gaslight mantles were live. There are still two fireplaces. The two upstairs bedrooms were separated with lathe and plaster walls, rather than brick. The centre room, an observatory, has a turret with a platform. Inside the turret tacked to a support was a label marked 'Mr Harper, job 54'.

Following the death of Mr. Harper, his wife Mary lived here until WW2, followed by the next occupant, Mrs E.A.F.Smee. It appears that the property was converted to flats in the 1950s, and by 1963 the first-floor flat was occupied by Mr and Mrs Harold Artaud. After Harold's death, his wife Greta (born 1914) continued to live in the

flat until 1999. She is reported to have entertained Laurel and Hardy at our flat when they were performing at The Odeon, High Street, Southend, in 1952. Young's, the frozen fish suppliers, lived at no. 31, the house three doors up from us to the west.

P.S. I have never done a parachute jump like Marion, but when I was evacuated to St Anne's, near Blackpool, in WW2, we lived opposite Arthur Askey and I used to play with his daughter, Anthea. I also went to school with Patricia Sanctuary!

The 1920s postcard below shows no. 35 Cliff Parade from the cliff gardens. **Anne Rickard**



## DICKENS' GARDENER DIED IN ESSEX LUNATIC ASYLUM

June marked the 150th anniversary of Charles Dickens' death. The novelist, philanthropist and social reformer died aged just 58 at his beloved home – Gads Hill Place near Rochester, Kent (see image left) – in June 1870.



We know a lot about Dickens' literary works and his efforts to improve the lives of the poor and destitute, but one of his lesser-known passions was his garden. Dickens adored gardening and thought England itself was 'the one great garden'. He did not claim to be a gardener himself, however, so when it came to overhauling the garden at his beloved country home of Gad's Hill, he wanted the best horticulturalists available. He turned to his friend, the MP, architect and gardener Sir Joseph Paxton, of Chatsworth and Crystal Palace fame, for advice and Paxton recommended the gardener Charles Barber as the man

for the job.

According to the Gardens Trust, Barber wasn't shy in sharing his views with his employer – telling him soon after his arrival that 'his orchards were hardly fit for firewood'. Barber also urged Dickens to build a conservatory, although this didn't happen until years later when the author was flushed with profits from his America book tour.



Barber remained with Dickens for many years, until illness forced him to retire from gardening in 1864. We don't know much about him after that. But somehow, he ended up living in Brentwood and in 1894 he was declared a 'lunatic' by the Billericay Board of Guardians. He was sent by the parochial authorities to the Essex County Lunatic Asylum at Warley (see photo left). A hearing into his case heard how Barber

had "for many years been in the employ of Charles Dickens at Gads Hill but during recent years had been living in Brentwood where he had been assisted by many of the inhabitants in the locality."

For some time, it was said, he had been 'strange in manner', then three weeks before being sent to the asylum he developed symptoms described as 'complete insanity' which would see him rushing from his house crying "murder, murder!"

Barber died at the asylum in September 1895 and his death in such dire circumstances was reported in newspapers around the country. It turned out Barber had taken into the asylum with him a gold watch that had belonged to Charles Dickens which the author had given him, as well as several £5 notes and an 'interesting letter' written in Dickens' own handwriting to Barber. The board of guardians who ran the asylum decided to sell off these items.

It is not surprising that Barber, who served Dickens for many years, would have been gifted presents from his former master. The novelist was known for his generosity. Even in death he catered for his staff, leaving nineteen guineas to every member of his household in his will.

The cause of Barber's death is not clear and we have no photograph of him. We do know that disease was rife in the asylum and conditions were dismal. In 1894, when Barber was admitted, an outbreak of smallpox occurred at the asylum which killed 13 patients. Then in 1895, when he died, diphtheria affected 33 patients. At this time the bulk of patients were being admitted for being 'mentally defective'. Often, they suffered from epilepsy or from delirium tremens, a serious form of alcohol withdrawal. The original asylum building was transformed into luxury homes over a decade ago. **Emma Palmer**

**David White** has been in contact with **Emma Palmer** who writes for **Echo Newspapers** and she has kindly granted permission for her articles to be published in **Local History Link**.