

The Hedgerow



Issue 30, Summer 2012 ...a tangle of words from local writers...

The Hedgerow, a free publication from writers in the Epping Forest area, is distributed in libraries and bookshops from east London to Epping. Thank you to everyone who sent in submissions or helped with this edition. If you would like to write for *The Hedgerow* we would be pleased to hear from you.

Memories of South Woodford Library

My sister and I nearly lost our library cards somewhere just outside of my memory. We were found tearing pages from our library books, but felt quite justified in doing so. We had reprimanded our mother, earlier on, for tearing pages from her magazine; we knew right from wrong. She had explained to us that she was 'just taking out the recipes'. So that, of course, is what we were doing to our library books. Children learn through imitation...

Let off, we continued to visit South Woodford Library on a regular basis; sunny afternoons spent by the book boxes, which allowed us to find books at our height, and to pick out our favourite characters without reading the title. We were also guided by the yellow dots on the spines, 'yellow dot books' were our books, to my mind, for quite some time. I always had a library card of my own, meaning my choice of books did not fall to the limit on my parents' cards.

When school started our visits moved to the afternoons, and to those magical Saturdays, where the library became less a facility than a trip out, in the same way a park is a glorious thing to a small child. There was always something new to find, be it a specific book or a whole section of the library; guided by my sister, I discovered first the easy reader books then the A-Z of children's chapter books. I used to like the spinners for somehow, after ten turns around, they would yield a book not seen beforehand.

When I was about six, the library had a makeover, which, aside from some smarter cushions, meant the appearance of The Crocodile. A cuddly toy cum beanbag. The Crocodile was loved and silently fought over... more than once I eyed another child in his company, willing them to *move, move...* But I wasn't entirely selfish; a neighbour and I played together with him, which did *not* involve the golden rule of silence. I rather miss his presence, when I venture downstairs these days.

The librarian in the children's library was lovely, always ready to help. I loved the 'pink card' system whereby a book could be requested, and when it came in, your card would be found on a notice board. I think I used to make requests for the fun of filling out the card! Likewise, I used the computer in the corner, set up to search for books in stock, to find books I knew to be there!

In the Summer Holidays I took part in the Reading Scheme: a big race track would appear, in one theme or another, on a board, and every child who took part had a counter. Up to the age of eight, the counter was moved by coming to the library to read to a helper: prizes were gained, such as sticky feet, in certain spots, and the end prize was a book token given out at a ceremony which involved a magic show. **Louise Nettleton**

Hale End Library

I grew up near Highams Park Lake so our nearest library was Hale End. We were not a very conventional family and library books were sometimes missing or damaged. I still blush to remember a pristine children's guide to fungi pierced through with our dog's teeth marks and a very tall, solemn librarian peering over his desk to say to a seven-year-old me: 'These books are overdue. Why?' My father thought this was hilarious and promptly sent me back to pay the fines incurred. However, in my teenage years that library became a haven: a stopping place between the bus stop and the steep hill on my way home from school. I sat on its wicker chairs in the reference section soaking up all sorts of information that can now be found on the internet and reading up on which colleges I wished to apply for. It was a busy, bustling place and it was cosy to sit there watching neighbours and our parents' acquaintances come and go. Because I was often going to the library on a daily basis I became a depositor and collector of books. My father would request me to 'find him a Shute': something different to *A Town Like Alice*, though not *too* different. My older sister worked her way through Georgette Heyer's Regency novels and then Thomas Hardy in plain pale blue covers. Needless to say all these books were hardback and quite heavy to carry up the hill, past the Rectory, its study crammed with bookshelves, visible from Castle Avenue and the long winding road home. My own favourites from those hallowed shelves were taken out time and again. I loved them so much I've even bought second-hand copies on Amazon. Leafing through the illustrations in Jean Rook's 'Dressing for Success' makes me feel fifteen again. I also loved some hardbound collections of essays by Alison Uttley, detailing her Derbyshire childhood. She wrote about old chests, buttons, embroidery and patchwork quilts, all beautifully illustrated in black and white by C. F. Tunnicliffe. When I go back on occasion I momentarily wonder where all those books have gone and the wooden trays of cardboard tickets meticulously tracking each loan that suddenly became defunct. The girl with the long fair hair is no longer although strong memories linger; the house I walked home to was sold long ago. I expect my father to walk round the corner and am disappointed when he doesn't. Forty years on I still feel young with the whole world before me, carefree and immortal when I'm clearly not, evoked by memories of that time and place. **Penny Freeston**

Two Library Experiences

Plymouth Public Library, 1940s: I must have been eight years old. Old enough at that time – but probably not now – to travel on my own by bus into the centre of town to visit the Public Library. It was housed in a dark, grey granite building which had miraculously escaped the Blitz. The small children's section was tacked on to the adult one. Whispering was the only form of communication allowed.

I handed in my chosen book (unfortunately I cannot remember the title). What I can remember is that it was such an exciting un-put-downable read that I finished it on the bus ride home. So in the afternoon I returned and chose another book. But the librarian looked at my ticket and told me severely that only one book could be issued per day. That was one of the conditions of library membership. I came away bitterly disappointed and empty handed.

Holland – Delft Municipal Library, December 2009: Angela, my Dutch daughter-in-law, is justifiably proud of Delft's new library building. When we visit it is full of light and activities. To borrow books and videos one must be a resident of the town and pay a modest yearly fee, but otherwise its facilities are free. These include the usual computers and an attractive children's area. I was surprised to find several shelves of fiction and non-fiction books in English. The hub of the library is its café area with large wooden tables. To one side are the daily papers – including *The Times* – and on the other a selection of international magazines to browse over coffee. An art gallery section displays paintings which can be borrowed for a monthly fee, with an option to purchase. This provides a welcome opportunity for local unknown artists to showcase their work. In December Holland can offer some freezing temperatures, as it did on this occasion, but the library provided a warm welcome, especially when the members of a local charity sang us carols as we sipped a hot chocolate and indulged in a piece of Dutch apple cake from the café. **Monica Mukherji**

Libraries

"Take that damn book back to school! We don't want it lying around yere," says Granny Preece.

I comply.

The book? I've borrowed it from the travelling library doing its customary trawl around the villages. Conveniently, the van has parked in the school playground. The choice is limited, with nothing to stimulate a seven-year-old. I've picked out a book with words I can read, but which make very little sense - and from which I derive no enjoyment.

A year later I'm living in another village where I cannot recall visits from the travelling library. Perhaps there were, but my earlier encounter with the world of books has discouraged me from climbing the three steps into that musty interior, shelves groaning with the printed page.

Two years later I sit and win the scholarship for a grammar school education. However do I manage that? Apart from books as presents for birthdays and Christmas, there's a dearth of reading material, stimulating and enjoyable. However, new vistas open up. Attendance at the local grammar school requires commuting between the village and the city. One day after school a friend suggests we call in at the city library. The building, both interior and exterior, is welcoming and beautiful. It is in the style of the Arts & Crafts Movement, I learn later. The collection of books is very impressive, with a large, well-stocked children's section. To cap it all, a museum forms an integral part of the complex. My school friend chooses a book, and then follows the procedure for borrowing it.

"Why don't you join?"

"Can I?"

"Just ask them at the counter."

Heart thumping, I approach the librarian.

"Please, may I join the library?"

"You may. Fill in this card with your name and address."

I write out the details.

"Ah," she says, "because you live outside the city boundary, I'm afraid you cannot join."

Crestfallen, I leave the building.

Outside my friend says, "Listen. Why don't you use my address?" He proceeds to write his details on a scrap of paper. Handing it to me he adds, "Come back another day, on your own."

I join.

The *Just William* stories by Richmal Crompton give immediate enjoyment to me, now ten-rising-eleven. I chance upon a whole series of stories from Greek mythology. Soon I lose myself in the adventures of *Jason and the Argonauts* as they seek to recover the Golden Fleece. That inspires me to read more of those myths from the ancient world.

Wartime evacuation ends, and we siblings return to London. I transfer to Wanstead County High School, and my sister to Woodford County High School. School libraries, though reasonably well-stocked, cannot provide for our more specialised needs as we progress through our teens. We discover that the local South Woodford Library, situated in those days - the 1940s - in a small shop along Electric Parade at the top end of George Lane, is so cramped that it's forced to offer an inadequate selection of books.

"We can order from the Essex County Library," becomes the constant refrain - a tedious and slow service.

We resolve the problem by joining Leytonstone Library, a large, comfortable establishment opened in 1934. We use our grandparents' Leyton address. I'm studying history for the Higher School Certificate; the syllabus requires that a special study be made of the French Second Empire. The Library holds a wide selection of books, and is an efficient user of the Inter-Libraries' Borrowing Service. Two specialist titles are quickly obtained for me: *The Rise of Louis Napoleon and the Second Republic* and *Napoleon the Third and the Second Empire* - both by H.A.L. Fisher. **Michael Wetton**

The British Library

The British Library is now at St Pancras, this was not always so. It used to be housed at the British Museum in the Reading Room which is now used for special exhibitions. The Great Court has taken over the motley collection of Dickensian buildings that contained the Library. Truly a labyrinth of old and dusty passages.

It is a shame that the Reading Room can no longer be viewed, with the desk Karl Marx used to sit at and many other historic sites. I had a Reader's Ticket here and did family history research, ordering books in advance, but again did not discover anything.

The new British Library is a wonderful building and houses changing exhibitions which are always worth a visit although you often have to pay for them. Howard and I did a tour of the Library with an insider and found out that there are five basement floors where they have the stacks of precious books all locked up. There were all sorts of stories about the floors not being strong enough to support the books and also that there was not enough room for the books. The King's Library is the nucleus of the collection and can be seen as a centre piece. If you have the opportunity, do go and take a tour, it is well worth it to see the building and some of the books. **Rhonda Anderson**

How many different kinds of libraries have you visited?

Quite a few, is the answer to that. When you undertake family history research you are bound to find yourself in many different libraries. With the advent of the internet, many people eschew libraries for the convenience of online research. This is convenient, but it is difficult to substitute the feeling and smell of real books and original records and primary sources, with the vicarious pleasures of the small screen.

Recently my husband Howard and I, have been to Australia tramping the graveyards and stamping about the bush to deter snakes, in our quest to follow my family history. We found ourselves in the Bendigo Library in the state of Victoria, looking up the maiden great aunts who held a licence for a pub. Howard had plotted the location of the pub, called The Showground Hotel, on his GPS, but alas it was not there. In fact it had been de-licensed due to their being too many pubs in Bendigo, a gold mining town, and is now a children's playground. It seems that nearly every other building was a pub with all the nuisance one can imagine that would cause. Compensation of £100 was paid to Agnes Toohey for the loss of the licence. The report states that the pub was very well run, but alas Agnes did not keep account books.

In my early days of family history research in the 1980s, I used to prepare all the things I wanted to know before visiting my parents in Western Australia. I would then sally forth to the State Library of Western Australia which goes by the name of the Battye Library. Every time I would find some little gem, such as a newspaper report on microfilm, clanking along on those noisy machines.

Pursuing what proved to be a red-herring, I visited the House of Lords Library to consult an Act of Settlement wherein one of the family names was reportedly inscribed. The name was Abberton, a very rare Irish surname. The visit necessitated the making of an appointment, the passing through Black Rod's garden entrance, the security examination, the ascension in a lift with police woman, the installation at a desk outside the library and the asking for what was wanted. In due course this was brought, open at the page. Never have I had such meticulous and courteous service in a library. Unfortunately, I still didn't find the name of my ancestors in the Act. I had, many years before, consulted another copy of the Act at The Guildhall Library. This visit was one of several, and once I lost a pearl and gold bracelet, not a valuable piece, but one much loved, never found, and still missed.

Chasing my famous ancestor, Sir Sydney Godolphin, who is buried in Westminster Abbey and has a marble bust therein, led us to the Westminster Abbey Library. Penny kindly arranged an appointment for us. This was the most eccentric and ancient place I have ever visited, library-wise. The spiral staircase through dusty upstairs rooms was surprising, and the librarians were especially precious about the books. The only other place that has had quite the same atmosphere was the chained library in Hereford Cathedral. We made a special train journey to see the library before it was re-housed. I couldn't quite imagine a chained library, so felt it imperative to see for myself. It was a most amazing and exciting experience going up the stone steps, to the top of the cathedral, it seemed. The ancient volumes were still on the original shelves and were in a poor state, so the new home was a conservation must, but the original atmosphere was going to be lost, which I felt very sad about. My ambition is to go and see the new home of this most fascinating library.

I have been involved with stewarding and guiding at the exhibitions at Lambeth Palace Library over the last three years. This is a most delicious place to visit. If you have the opportunity, go to the exhibitions which are held in The Great Hall. There are huge, ancient, brown, leather-bound volumes lining the walls of the Great Hall, all crowned by the magnificent oak hammer-beam ceiling. This year the exhibition ends 14th July and is on Royal Devotion and The Book of Common Prayer for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. There are plans to build a more fit for purpose library with temperature control to conserve the collection which is necessary, but regrettably the ambience will not be the same. The Library celebrated its 400th anniversary in 2010 and is still a free public library.

My local library is South Woodford and my involvement there is mainly through the Book Group. Margaret Hayes and I try to get an interesting selection of books for our discerning readers. Many changes have been made to the library service and not always for the best. I am a great enthusiast for libraries and the wonderful treasures they hold and the information they impart. Libraries are essential for pleasure and education and we should all fight to keep them alive and well.

At the moment, while Central Library in Ilford is being refurbished, there is a local history exhibition in South Woodford Library which is worth a look. Long live our library service! **Rhonda Anderson**

The Welcome-back

The garden too had waited to offer its welcome.

Begonias lined the flower beds
jostling for a better view.

Fuchsias gently waved their flags
in the warm breeze.

Geraniums thrust out tightly held posies
like eager children.

The trees stood together at the back whispering,
indulgent lookers-on.

Sparrows flew garlands in the air,
noisily between branches,
and a squadron of pigeons flew past,
under a peach blue sky.

Hazel Dongworth

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Editor: Penny Freeston

Sylvia Pankhurst and Monarchy

During the many celebrations of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee, I received an email from an old friend who knew of my interest in Sylvia Pankhurst, that long time resident in Woodford, who left her home in Charteris Road in 1956, spending the remaining four years of her life in Ethiopia, invited to his capital, Addis Ababa, by the Emperor, Haile Selassie. His email read, 'What did Sylvia think of royalty? Was she a monarchist or a republican?'

In Sylvia's case, it all depended on what a Monarch thought and did. Of our present monarch, we can heartily agree with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, when, at the Thanksgiving Service in St Paul's Cathedral, he gave the Queen credit for 40 years of service to the Nation, and for serving with joy and generosity. He went on to express his hope that a lasting memorial to the Jubilee spirit would be 'the rebirth of an energetic, generous spirit of dedication to the common good and the public service, the rebirth of a recognition that we live less than human lives if we think just of our own individual good.' As a constitutional monarch who reigns but does not rule, her political neutrality enables the Queen to act not only as head of state, but also as head of the Nation, making an important contribution to political stability.

Sylvia Pankhurst was born in the 45th year of Queen Victoria's reign. This monarch had been proclaimed Empress of India in 1876. Whereas our own Queen is titular Head of a Commonwealth of Nations, as Empress of India, Victoria reigned over the largest colonial empire in history. By the 1920s, when Miss Pankhurst left the East End of London and moved out to Woodford, the British Empire ruled over an estimated 458 million people, one-fifth of the world's population, and covered almost a quarter of the Earth's total land area. One of Sylvia's poems in an anthology entitled *Writ on a Cold Slate*, published in 1921, describes the dire conditions endured by many of Britain's colonised subjects, and vows to draw attention to their plight by speaking truth to power. She regarded herself as a 'Citizen of the World who owned no barrier of Race or Nation' and throughout her life challenged 'the Colour line' that to-day we call racism. Not for her Cecil Rhodes' belief that 'The white man has won first prize in the race of life.' Nor the poet, Rudyard Kipling's notion of 'the White man's burden,' the idea that it was the responsibility of white Europeans to bring "proper" European civilization to the nations (mostly brown, black, red or yellow) that did not have it.

One influential man in Sylvia's life, by far the most important one, was her father, Richard Pankhurst, a barrister, a campaigner for Republicanism and much else besides, husband of Emmeline of Votes for Women fame. He told his children 'If you do not serve others, you will not have been worth the upbringing.' As for the Vote he asked his wife and their daughters, 'Why are you so patient with us in this regard? Why do you not scratch our eyes out?' While supporters of charities such as the Monarchy would have understood the first of these injunctions, the second was certainly ignored by George V whenever Votes for Women sympathisers managed to inveigle themselves into his presence. As for the legal position of women, Richard Pankhurst, drafted the Married Women's Property Act, known as the Women's Magna Carta, to change the reality of 'My wife and I are one. And I am that one' to one that allowed married women to own and control their own property – henceforth to be regarded as not one but two persons in a married relationship.

The only direct relationship Sylvia Pankhurst had with a reigning monarch was in fact with the Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie. To her, he must have been the very embodiment of one who served others for, as she herself said, he 'never deserted his cause,' hence her unbounded admiration for him. She met him at the Ethiopian Embassy when he came to Europe after the invasion of his country by the Italian Dictator, Benito Mussolini's armed forces by sea, land and air in 1935 in a determined effort to colonise Abyssinia, as it was also known. The Emperor had travelled to Europe to appeal to the League of Nations for arms to defend his country against the Fascist foe, but his request was refused and no embargo was placed on oil sold to Italy, enabling the war to continue unabated. Sylvia was well informed about the rise of fascism in Italy, as her partner throughout her Woodford days was fellow journalist, Silvio Corio. Together, after the assassination by Mussolini's thugs of a Deputy who challenged his power, Giacomo Matteotti, in June 1924, they mounted an anti-fascist campaign about this criminal act, raising funds to support Velia, Signor Matteotti's widow. It was the removal of Matteotti that established Mussolini as the absolute dictator of Italy, cementing his relationship with Adolf Hitler.

Sylvia and Silvio continued with their anti-fascist campaigning, she editing and he writing in a weekly newspaper, *New Times and Ethiopia News*, while resident in Charteris Road, Woodford Green. It was first published in 1935, and printed on local presses. The history of fascism in Italy appeared in weekly instalments, together with accounts of the valiant challenges mounted against Italian forces in Ethiopia, despite the lack of modern armaments, together with articles about and by people of colour throughout the world. West Dene, as their home was called, became a busy office as the Second World War loomed, manned by locally employed typists. Its proximity to Woodford station made it so convenient for travelling up to London when she felt matters required her face-to-face input, and on occasion, her tears. When a British army under General Orde Wyngate liberated Ethiopia from the fascist invaders, the Emperor sent Miss Pankhurst this cable on the 17th of May, 1941: "You will share my joy at re-entering my capital. Your unceasing efforts and support in the just cause of Ethiopia will never be forgotten by myself or my people". And neither it was, For In 1956, he visited his older, frailer friend at her Woodford home, inviting her to become his honoured guest in Africa. Sylvia emigrated with her son, Richard, and lived with him and his wife, Rita, until her death in 1960. She was awarded the Order of the Queen of Sheba (Second Class), an Order usually reserved for the Emperor and Empress, the female members of the Imperial family, non-Christian monarchs and heads of state as well as Christian royal consorts and princes and princesses around the world. She was given a full state funeral at which the Emperor named her 'an honorary Ethiopian'. She is the only foreigner buried in the space at the front of Holy Trinity Cathedral in the area reserved for patriots of the Italian war.

Her father's influence had prevailed over her life, not only by what he demanded as a benevolent patriarch, but by his own example as a servant of the better good. He insisted on the rightness of equality for womankind, and an end to their traditionally subservient role. She saw in the Emperor, a heroic figure, a reforming monarch with democracy on his mind, motivated by love of humanity, and strove to support his just aims as an African leader. Her elder sister, Christabel, another woman in thrall to their father's edict, emigrated to America, where she followed the teaching of King Jesus into Seventh Day Adventism, that inspirer of benevolence, whose coming, in a troubled world, is still awaited. **Sylvia Ayling**