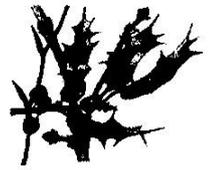


The Hedgerow



Issue 36, Winter 2016.. *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. **This issue of *The Hedgerow* is also available on-line at www.penny-freeston.com**

VJ70:- Victory over Japan commemoration day 70 years on: a personal view

Japan is an exotic and fascinating country and I had always wanted to visit, so when an opportunity came along in 2014 to go on a textile trip, I was delighted to take it. We stayed at the Tokyo Dome Hotel, very handy to the Quilt Show which was in the Dome next door, and the reason for our January visit.

I was aware in my childhood in the 1950s, of people saying, do not buy anything made in Japan. Anti-war feelings were still running high. My mother's birthday was 6th August, 'The day they dropped the bomb!' she would say. That is a controversy, should the bomb have been dropped? General consensus is that it shortened the war and saved many lives. However, the people of Japan suffered from its consequences and still do.

Interestingly in 2014, there was a question from someone asking, 'How could you go to Japan knowing the atrocities the Japanese committed during the war?' I was well aware of The Burma Road and Prisoner of War camps, as it was talked about a little in my family as part of our Australian war heritage. A man who worked for my father had been on the Burma Railway and suffered health problems all his life thereafter, as a consequence of his treatment.

It was a difficult question to answer, and made me think about my continuing admiration of some aspects of Japanese culture that I hoped to see and enjoy, such as textiles, ceramics, art, architecture and religion. In fact I loved Japan, the culture and the very friendly and polite people who could not do enough for us, during my 2014 trip.

On Saturday 15th August 2015, the 70th anniversary of Victory over Japan, or VJ Day, labelled VJ70, was commemorated in London and I watched the Television coverage. I had a special interest in this as my daughter-in-law Emma, had been involved in the organisation of the day in her job in the Ministry of Defence. The church service at St Martin's in the Fields in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen was moving and beautifully done. The afternoon service on Horse Guards Parade was again emotional and dignified. Afterwards the veterans marched to a reception at Westminster Abbey and were welcomed enthusiastically by crowds along the route.

Many references were made to 'the forgotten army'. VE or Victory in Europe Day had been celebrated in May 1945 and by the time the Victory over Japan happened three months later, and Japanese ex-prisoners were repatriated, sometimes months or years had gone by, and no one wanted to bring up the horrors of the war again. They were moving on and the late returning men and women felt ignored and forgotten for all the suffering they had endured and for which they felt they had not been recognised. Perhaps the establishment felt they were the personification of failure in the Far East.

It was a humbling experience to see the veterans, all old now of course, and hear them reminisce about the time they suffered in their FEPOW camps and the work they were forced to do. There were also some female internees from Singapore, one of whom was born in the camp, although her mother was sent to the local hospital for the actual birth. Descendants feel it is their duty to keep alive the memory of this time.

Australian author Richard Flanagan's book, 'The Narrow Road to the Deep North' took him ten years to write and it won the Man Booker Prize 2014. It is a novel based on his father's experience on the Death Railway. In an interview Richard said it did not have a cathartic effect on him, he felt diminished by the writing of it.

Some veterans felt they could not forgive the Japanese, but others had a different view. In Radio Times, 97 year old Sir Harold Atcherley said, 'If you carry on hating, you're the one who's damaged.' He also said, 'Soldiers fighting on different sides do not hate each other. Most of them wonder why the hell they're there.' He met a Japanese engineer on the Death Railway at a reconciliation meeting in London in June this year and said, 'It was very emotional for me, but I'm very glad I did it.'

Eric Lomax wrote his book 'The Railway Man' about his experience on the Burma-Siam Railway and met one of his tormentors 50 years later. The last line in his book is said to his wife, 'Sometime the hating has to stop.'

One of the most moving and lasting experiences I have ever had was in Israel at the Holocaust History Museum, Yad Vashem, where there is a film of a Rabbi with a long white beard, a little like God the Father, speaking with a wonderful smile on his face, saying that he could not hate the Nazis because in the end you have to stop hating. He spoke so eloquently and with such dignity that I have never forgotten his wonderful presence and generosity of heart and spirit.

In Japan we visited Hiroshima where the first atomic bomb was dropped. The area has now been turned into a Peace Park. The Peace Museum illustrates the story and has many artefacts from the day of the bombing. It was a sobering place to visit, but also a beautiful peaceful place now, 70 years on. The remains of the town hall at the centre of the blast, but which did not get completely destroyed, is now known as the Hiroshima Peace Memorial. It is the focus of the Peace Park and can be seen through the memorial arch where heads of state come to lay their wreaths and contemplate the events that happened here so many years ago. Some Japanese have apologised for their war crimes.

How easy is it to forgive? Very difficult, almost impossible, would be my answer. In the press we sometimes see people proclaiming forgiveness for those who have perpetrated some dreadful wrong on them. These people often claim to be Christian, and our faith tells us to love one another and to love your neighbour as yourself, to love unconditionally, but can this be done? Most of us never have to make a huge act of forgiveness such as the Holocaust victims, or the FEPOWs, but even in our peaceful and easy lives, there are things to forgive. We all experience hurts that niggle and make us uneasy and angry. Families have tensions that can boil over into vendettas. Forgiveness can bring healing and peace.

The main idea I will take away from the excellent and moving VJ70 commemoration day will be that forgiveness is the golden rule that we should all strive for. Will it be easy? Not at all, but hopefully with the grace of God we will be able to forgive our enemies and live a happy and fulfilled life. **Rhonda Anderson**

I'm not lazy.... Honest

I've turned into a safety pin and sticky-backed plastic gal. Gone are the days when I got out my sewing box, threaded a needle and stitched hems and curtains whilst listening to the Radio 4 afternoon play.

The first little back-slide came about when I found some magic hemming stuff in one of the big stores wonderful... all you had to do was iron it on to the hem and... voila... five minutes and it was done. Mind you, it didn't tell you in the instructions that over a few washes, it disintegrates.

The next thing was the fact that my needles had shrunk in my sewing box! The eyeholes used to be a reasonable size but now... even with my glasses and a magnifying glass I can't find them! After a very frustrating afternoon trying to thread the damn thing to do a small repair, I espied a small box full to the brim with neat little brass safety pins!

Well, that was the start of my decline into becoming a botcher. When the shower head started slipping sideways right when my eyes were full of shampoo and I bumped my elbow on the wall and... well, an expletive may have fallen from my lips... black insulating tape and a rubber band... proved to be the answer. I would have used white if I had had it and told myself it was only temporary until I either got it fixed properly or found some white tape. That was, now let me see, two years ago and I've got used to my two-tone shower head.

The other day, one of the posts in Waitrose's underground car park leapt forward and bumped into my car, causing a nasty little dent with a jaggy bit just under the left-hand headlamp. Poor Carmen, my little red Micra, looked very forlorn with a "black eye" and she's not due in for a service for a long time and... it's only a small dent... so, when I found some red sticky backed tape, very nearly the same colour as Carmen... well you've guessed it...

I tell myself that I am not really a lazy botcher but that I have found much more interesting things to do with my time than spending it fixing things.

I'm not sure I believe it... yet... but I'm working on it. **Mo Woods**

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Editor: **Penny Freeston***

Thomas Hardy's novel: 'Far From the Madding Crowd' revisited

Bathsheba stood by the coffin at the bottom of the staircase; its lid had not been sealed and she gazed at the pale lifeless features of her husband. It was as if he had fallen asleep, but neither murmur nor breath escaped from his lips to remind her of the familiar figure who had shared her carved oak bed for the past thirty years. All was silent now; the servants had been given a couple of hours' leave and she expected no visitors till the funeral tomorrow. Soon enough farm workers in clean smocks and Sunday best would file past to pay their respects to their master, then wait outside while the undertakers placed a cross of white lilies on the sealed coffin. Slowly, silently they would follow behind as the church bell tolled.

Bathsheba fingered a little piece of sheep's wool and tucked it close to his fingers. It was an old custom that a shepherd, often unable to attend church on Sunday mornings, would produce such an item to plead his case on the last day of judgement. But Gabriel had sung in the choir; had made time to worship when her first husband had not.

Frank. His coffin had rested on the same trestles; he was buried in Weatherbury churchyard where Gabriel too would soon be laid to rest. And Fanny Robin, Frank's sweetheart and her stillborn child. Bathsheba shuddered as she remembered prising open Fanny's coffin by candlelight in the same hall. Gabriel had sheltered her from the cruel truth; he had looked after her then as he had ever since, but now she was alone. She had laid the heavy pennies on his eyes, brushed his grey hair and kissed his strong hands as if her heart would break, but now he belonged to God. He was at peace, no longer in pain and short of breath as he had been for months before. Their son would take over the farm: for that they were grateful. And in time more children's voices would fill the farmhouse, of that she was sure.

A small painting of Norcombe Hill hung in the hall way. She had bought it for her husband in Casterbridge for their wedding day: a day like any other without fuss or expense but for Bathsheba, perhaps, the happiest time in her life. Norcombe Hill was where they first met when she was young and pretty, full of life. Gabriel had proposed then and she had turned him down, but he had stayed true to her, and years later she saw tears of joy in his eyes as they became man and wife. Past events had torn the stuffing from her; she was happy to stay at Weatherbury Farm rather than move into the much grander house Mr. Boldwood had owned when Gabriel took over his farm. The house with its unhappy memories was let and the Oaks were content to stay put in their familiar cosy surroundings. Gabriel, who had once tried to impress Bathsheba with what he thought farmers' wives desired, had given Bathsheba a cucumber frame. How they laughed when she unwrapped it; they blushed as they recalled that early conversation and all that had come to pass between them. They needed little, but both wanted a child from their union. A couple of early painful miscarriages had made Bathsheba ill and depressed. She thought God was judging her for past mistakes and her new husband deserved better.

Gabriel thought long and hard; he had savings from his planned emigration to California, and now he was running two farms had little need of them.

He thought he would take Bathsheba somewhere warm when she was stronger; a trustworthy cousin would be bailiff in their absence; their workers were loyal and kindly disposed to them.

So Gabriel determined to take Bathsheba abroad – farmers' wives were travelling now, thanks to Mr. Cook's tours – and they travelled through France and Switzerland to Italy: Rome and Florence. Bathsheba was so excited she was like a young girl again and Gabriel was her dependable escort throughout. The vicar had given him encouragement, had taught him a little of the languages; Gabriel felt proud that his savings had been put to such good use. He grew taller in stature: less a lowly shepherd now but a prosperous land-owner. And Bathsheba returned rested, in high spirits once more. And with child. A healthy son was born to them, and two daughters besides. She and Gabriel had been truly blessed in their happy union.

Years passed, and they would often look back on that long journey as they sat in the parlour together on winter's evenings, recalling places and people they'd met. Little watercolour paintings decorated the walls: a French fishing port, an Alpine scene, the Colosseum. A cowbell attached to an embroidered ribbon hung by the inglenook; an Italian fan was preserved in a glass box. How clever of Gabriel, Bathsheba thought, to arrange it all when her spirits had been so low.

There was so much to be thankful for as she knelt beside him: he had been a true friend, a loyal, tender husband; even death could not part them and spoil all the memories they shared. She looked back at the rolling hills of Norcombe and drifting clouds in the summer sky, half expecting him to wave to her as she rode her horse across the valley. The painting spoke of another time, and she determined to lift it down carefully and take it upstairs after the funeral to keep her company now that she slept alone.

Penny Freeston

Enlightenment

After years of caring for his Mum, Fred's life had changed. The holiday brochures had at last come to life, the photos of all and sundry enjoying the sunshine were no longer just a dream, he was there and the Mediterranean lapped at his rolled up trousers.

All around seemed happy, but it was harder than he thought to share their mood. Vera's death had not been a surprise, at 94 she had had a long and fulfilled life. Hadn't the Doctor said that she died peacefully? No suffering, her body had simply given up. It was not her expected death that upset him so much, it was the number of people who came. Just a dozen in a church that size, a lifetime helping others but remembered by so few. That was 11 months ago. Today Fred was by the sea on his first holiday for many years.

As a child, he had paddled in the sea in Norfolk but this was different. The girls in bikinis, the children in short trunks, even the parents wore swimsuits, not a cardie in sight. He knew the world had moved on from his childhood, but being confronted by it was more unsettling than he had expected.

But he told himself, today is the day, life must move on. He knew his Mum would approve, hadn't she always told him to have a good holiday in the sun just as she had done before she had married George? She had told of a life of fun and relaxation in her native Germany and had even mentioned a place, he thought it was something like Efkastrand but his half-hearted efforts to look up such a place in the atlas had come to nothing. Now, safe with his rather large towel, Fred ventured out; it would be handy to cover up a bit if he felt shy. Being cautious he had already given himself a generous coating of factor 60 sun cream, "one can never be too careful".

He was pleased when his temporary neighbours Hermann and Anneli bade him "Guten Morgen" on the third day, he found they also spoke excellent English and were very friendly. Over the next few days he ensured he bumped into them; he preferred some company to being alone despite his shyness. He was delighted when Hermann invited him to join them at the beach for the day.

The further they walked along the path by the dunes, the bigger and emptier the beach seemed. An old wooden notice caught his eye; the sun had done its work, only "Natur.." was visible along with some meaningless letters, "FKK S...". whatever they meant. "Nature Reserve"? Perhaps he would be able to see some rare birds, Anneli had said they loved nature, maybe she could show him.

Eventually setting their towels down, Fred looked forward to a swim, he had become a little hot from the walk. Anneli and Hermann said he should go ahead as he was ready, they would join him shortly; they wanted time to apply their sun cream. Feeling rather vulnerable without his shirt or his towel, off he went to the sea. The water was lovely and having no-one around made it better, he could splash around and be a child again.

What happened next astonished him. As he turned to look back up the beach for his new friends, there they were walking towards him, just 30 metres away, both completely naked. Both were deeply bronzed and without any sign of a tan line. He did not know where to look, what to say or do. He could not run, that would be rude.

It was easier when they were both up to their necks in the water, then Fred felt able to steal another glance. Yes it was Hermann and Anneli and they both had the broadest of grins. How could they? They were naked and what is more, naked in a public place yet they swam, laughed, dived, splashed and seemed to be at one with the world and with each other. Anneli could sense Fred's embarrassment and told him they always came here to swim naked. She told him that in German, "Naturist Beach" was "FKK-Strand", didn't he see the notice? Now he knew what the missing letters were.

Memories of his Mum came rushing back with the realisation of what she had told him when he was a child, the reference to Efkastrand and a life of pleasure and relaxation in her native Germany. Of course, FKK-Strand! She had been a naturist, the very thought amazed him. His Mum nude in a place like this for all the see. His **Mum!** His Mum! It was beyond belief.

During the walk back to the hotel he felt saddened he had not had his new friend's courage and had remained firmly welded into his swimsuit, but amid his embarrassment and confusion, a splendid idea came to him. He resolved that to honour his mum and for the sake of a new life, he would imagine her not as old, frail and dying but beside him as she was as a young woman. Tomorrow he would go the FKK-Strand alone and he would walk nude down the beach and into the sea. She would be there in his heart.

The spring came back into his step, the future looked brighter and the memory of his mum took on an altogether new and easier complexion.

Howard Anderson