

Memories of Laindon

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My family moved to Laindon in 1916. I was then thirteen years of age, and the war was by then becoming truly frightening. I had two brothers in the Navy, and my father was in the Army. Very soon soldiers were drafted into some private houses in Laindon. Mother still had three children at home so we were not required to house any soldiers. However, we soon became friendly with some of them. All the ones I knew had been wounded, and so were convalescing. They were all to me gentlemen.

It was an exciting time for we young ones. Mrs Fothergill was our head mistress. She managed the school and taught the 'Top Class' herself. All the men teachers were in the forces. I remember the hole in the roof where the shrapnel had fallen during the night. We were asked to dig up some of the playground to grow vegetables. That was jolly, because the boys were allowed to come into the girl's playground to help with the digging. We grew some really large cabbages. We also had some days 'off' from school to go blackberrying. The teachers also came with us – to our amusement one teacher always picked the 'low down' ones.

One could never forget the night when the Zeppelin was brought down. It caught fire right overhead at Laindon and, drifting away with roaring flames, it came to earth at Great Burstead. Early morning we rode our bicycles to the scene, but by then a regiment of Irish Guards had been called in, and were standing with fixed bayonets guarding the wreckage, so that prevented from getting at close quarters. However, we saw the covered bodies of the German crew covered with sheeting being taken into the farm buildings. There were 21 men in the Zeppelin and the Captain (Peterson). They were buried in Great Burstead churchyard in one grave, the captain in a separate grave.

So many people strove to keep life going happily in these difficult days. Our Rector, had a good girls choir and was himself an excellent bass singer. His choir was augmented by Dorothy and Linette, two girls sent by the land army to work at Blue House farm. We also had the services of a sergeant stationed at Basildon with a gun crew. He was an excellent organist, and the services on Sundays were a joy to any of us musically inclined. Sometimes some of the girls from Langdon Hills choir came to join the St Nicholas choir.

In Langdon Hills we had much musical talent. We had Professor Le Brun, a familiar figure going to the station each morning in his Inverness cape and carrying his gold headed umbrella and briefcase. We had Madame Edith and her husband who sung tenor roles with good finish. Madame also commenced the 'Laindon Ladies Glee Party' to which many of us belonged, and sang our glees and madrigals remarkably

well. Mr G and his daughter Rosie were responsible for 'The Crescent Singers', later augmented by Harold and his Orchestra.

The 'Kum and See Us Concert Party' were a very spirited and go ahead group, who never kept the audience waiting.

Important dances were held in the school hall. I seem to remember a whist drive in the adjoining classroom, so that the dance, towards the end, was augmented by the addition of folk from the whist drive.

A little dance was held every week in the Institute for which we paid 4d. We had a violin and a piano for the school hall affairs, but only a piano in the Institute.

Not to be forgotten was the presence of our local doctor. An unusual Irishman with his charming wife and family of young children. He possessed a car – a Trogen and later a Singer. Both were always in a dilapidated condition – with broken trailing hoods, often breaking down and needing assistance.

Our first district nurse was introduced, I believe, in the early 1920's. Everyone was pleased to have this service set in motion.

The train service seemed very adequate, the return fare to Southend was 1/11½d or thereabouts. We obtained our tickets from Percy who was in the ticket office for many years. There was also a 'Finlay's Tobacco Kiosk' on the platform.

Hiawatha was the landmark at the corner of Nicholas Lane. It had a good weathercock until a storm dismantled it. The Hotel was the most imposing building. After the war we acquired the Memorial Hall and the British Legion Hall as places for entertainment.

The field adjoining the Hotel was used by the pupils of Langdon Hills School for their football matches, there being no field for such activity nearer the school. By 1928 the population had considerably increased so that Langdon Hills School became very overcrowded. The new senior school in High Road, Landon had to take the overflow from Langdon Hills Infants, until the new infants and juniors was built at Markhams Chase.

The 'mud' has to be mentioned. At the end of the war, the main road was in a dreadful state. Mud almost up to the kerb - the pathway treated with sand. The side roads were just tracks of mud. Everyone had Wellingtons to get to the station. Galoshes were usually lost in the mud.