



The Cottage in Cockfosters. Photo by Daphne Chamberlain

Titanic Connections

By Daphne Chamberlain

Why a picture of a house in Cockfosters? Well, 2nd Officer Lightoller of the Titanic ran a chicken farm here. That was before he took Sundowner, his 60-foot yacht, to Dunkirk, to rescue 127 soldiers.

His crew were his son, Roger, and Gerald Ashcroft, a young sea-scout. Sundowner is still going strong and in November Maurice Kanarek told us how he saw her with Lightoller's grandson among the Dunkirk veterans.

Lightoller could hardly have been more different from his portrayal in the James Cameron film. He started on sailing-ships as a 14-year-old apprentice, was shipwrecked four times, dabbled in the Yukon gold-rush and spent a little time as a Wild West cowboy.

He became a Naval commander in World War I, and parted company acrimoniously with White Star shipping line in the early 1920s. After a spell helping out in his wife's boarding-house, and eventually becoming a multiple landlord, he arrived in Cockfosters. Not a place with strong nautical connections, you might think, but the Titanic's electric lighting system had come from the Ediswan factory in Ponders End. Also in Ponders End was a fellow Titanic survivor, Mr Oxenham, a tram-driver, who had been trying to emigrate to America. In Winchmore Hill, another survivor, Hugh Woolner, wrote his account of

the memorable night in a local newspaper.

It's doubtful whether "Lights" met either of them, but during the 1930s he drove his vanloads of eggs and chickens to local shops, to Sainsbury's, and even up to Fortnum and Mason's.

His chief interest, though, was Sundowner, which he moored at Burnham-on-Crouch. She wasn't just for pleasure, either. Before World War II, he took her and his wife for a cruise around the German coast for a bit of official espionage.

After the war, in which two of his sons were killed, he opened a boatyard in Chiswick, where he died in 1952.

The Cockfosters house, called "The Cottage", is opposite a pub in Games Road, just off Chalk Lane. Graham Dallin, Local History Librarian at Enfield, would like to see a blue plaque put up there.

Meanwhile, many thanks to Mr Dallin for identifying the house and supplying the local information.

You can read Lightoller's life-story in "Titanic Voyager", by Patrick Stenson, published by Halsgrove Endurance Productions, ISBN 1-874448-81-7.

Out of the Past

By Jessie Tanner (formerly Jessie Crook) who now lives in Bishop's Stortford. An article by Robert Kent set me thinking about East Finchley traders of my youth -1930s - 1940s. How well I remember Bradshaw's departmental store, next to the Black Bess cafe. Opposite, little single-storey shops included Myers, a general stores, and a cobbler's where I lost a pair of shoes when the landmine fell.

I remember visiting Gibbs with my father to buy garden annuals, shopping at Gammons with war-time ration books for groceries, and queuing at the Co-op for our meat ration and weekly corned beef allocation.

Monthly sweet rations were spent in the shop next-door to Gibbs. (My best buy was Fry's "Five Boys", chocolate bars with little boys' faces on the wrappers.)

During the war, we went once a week to the British Restaurant in the Methodist Church Hall, or eked out rations with Market Place fish and chips.

Sunday tea was graced with "fancies" from Rances, the bakers on the corner of Kitchener Road. (I liked iced frogs best.) We also bought from Hahn's, the master baker further along the High Road.

On one corner of Bedford Road was a stone-mason, and on the other the printers of the Finchley Press. Creasey, a well-known trading family, owned the greengrocers on one corner of Huntingdon Road. On the other stood the United Dairy shop, next to Bryson's, stationer and newsagent. (Mr Bryson was a Mayor of Finchley.)

There was Pryce Bevan, the butcher, and the Corn Chandler, which sold loose biscuits from glass-topped tins along the counter, birdseed and dog biscuits. (No such thing as tinned pet food!)

The post office was within another grocers (Dowlens, I think), with an old wooden floor and a public telephone - unique for its round extra earpiece for a second person to "listen in".

Cottons, elastic, vests, knickers and liberty-bodices came from Battersby's; jumpers, skirts, men's trousers and hats from Glover's. I think Glover's also provided a gentlemen's hairdresser.

Sainsbury's, with old-style marble counters and marble mosaic floor, competed with Williams Brothers on either side of Fortis Green.

In the window of the nearby dry-cleaners, a young lady mended ladders in precious nylon stockings.

On one corner of Baronsmere Road, a shop sold instruments and sheet music. On

the other was Andrews, the chemist. This shop has had the same name for as long as I can remember, but the Phoenix was known as the Rex.

At Lacy's I bought my first "big bicycle", a BSA, with wartime-black handlebars and

black wheel rims. I had much enjoyment from this bicycle, riding out to Barnet, Potters Bar and Northaw.

I hope these memories will mean something to older East Finchley inhabitants, and cause them too to "dream awhile".

Take a LEAP

Barnet Council is set to take a leap forward in its community involvement in arts and cultural activities by becoming a founder member of a London-wide arts company.

The council will join The London Education Arts Partnership (LEAP) alongside 14 other London boroughs and joining the company will cost the council only £100.

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