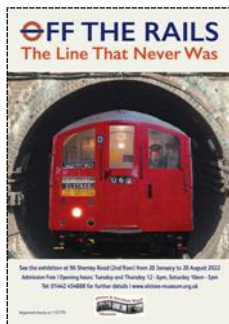


Elstree & Borehamwood Museum Friends Newsletter February 2022 : Issue Number 24



OFF THE RAILS - The Line That Never Was

There is a new Exhibition in the Museum at last! Holby City has left the building and the Tube has entered.



We now explore the story of the 'Northern Heights' or the 'Elstree Extension' as it came to be known. The plan to bring the Northern Line north of Edgware towards Bushey and Watford had been around for many a year. But in the 1930s the need for a Tube overhaul works and storage depot on the line was becoming a necessity. And there was plenty of spare land south of Aldenham Reservoir en route to Watford. In the end Watford was dropped as a town too far, and a minor distraction caused by proposals to route the line to Borehamwood via Moat Mount, meant that in 1936 the Elstree Extension went ahead.

Of course we know there is just a vague trace left in the landscape of what was achieved before the War began in 1939 and construction work ceased. And what might have happened if the lack of money, the Green Belt legislation, and the death of its main proponent, Frank Pick, had not derailed the whole plan after the War.

But you can see what the line would have looked like if 'peace in our time' had succeeded. Tony de Swarte has built an 18 foot working model of the line from Edgware

to Bushey Heath as it would have appeared in 1941 after its completion. You will see farms and cowsheds, people on platforms, buses and scout camps and the area comes alive threaded through by Tube trains stopping at the stations of Brockley Hill, Elstree South and Bushey Heath, and travelling past the Aldenham Depot. By this century most of the land on either side of the line would be full of flats and houses, and the farms long gone, but you can just see the landscape as it would have been 80 years ago.



The Exhibition panels give more detail about the Extension and Borehamwood's attempt to be included. We tell the story of the Aldenham Depot being used for airplane work during the War, later to be turned into the largest Bus overhaul works in the world, and now a business park. Our cabinets have model buses, Underground maps, destination signs, luggage racks, and a model of Elstree South station created from the 1944 drawings.

Early visitor numbers have been exceptional, and we hope all the Friends can visit and see the result of three months intense work - one of our best yet!

A Boreham Wood Child In World War Two : Joan Dorrington Remembers



Joan, on the left, with her family, 1946

Schooldays

In 1939 when World War Two started I was 5 years old. So I'm pretty ancient now but this is engraved on my memory as if it was yesterday. My first memory was queuing with my mother at Furzehill School to get gas masks. It's no longer there but it was up Furzehill Road where the children's centre is now. Of course as it was then the only junior school in Boreham Wood - we were taught to spell it that way - I used to go there. It was quite a long walk; we lived in Northfield Road which was the other side of Meadow Park. Very few people had cars then, so it was "Shanks' Pony". A lot of dads were away at War, though my own father was in the Fire Brigade or NFS as it was called later on. They used to go from here up to London and the Blitz. I remember seeing his helmet, gas mask and chopper hanging up.

At Furzehill School the toilets were in the playground and in the winter used to freeze up. We used to sit in the corridor during the air raids, probably because it was re-inforced concrete. I always remember the teachers had us singing "John Brown's body lies a-moulding in the grave". I don't know why this one but have never forgotten it. In the first class that we were in Mrs Wilson, who lived in Drayton Road, brought in her monkey which used to run around while we were laying on mats, resting. It also used to sometimes do a wee.

In the middle of the playground was the Dinner Hut where we got school dinners. They weren't bad but I always remember having tapioca which we called frogspawn (it was horrible). We were supposed to clear our plates and sometimes I got into trouble because I can't stand fat or skin and left it. After choking a few times when I was made to eat it, I was let off. We were also given Horlicks tablets (they were lovely).

The nit nurse used to come to the school and check us for fleas and look at any scabs or skin problems that we may have had. The dentist also came and looked at our teeth and told us how to clean them, with salt. If you were unlucky enough to have to go to the dentist the drill was not electric, it was worked with a foot pedal. A policemen came to teach us road safety. Often you could not cross Shenley Road to get to the school because there were convoys of lorries going along the road - they seemed to go on forever. And of course there were the air raid sirens.

We also used to get a small bottle of milk which we drank at playtime but if it was hot weather the milk was a bit yuk by the time we got it. When I was a monitor in the top class I had to collect the dinners for the teachers from the Dinner Hut and put it in the oven to keep warm. Well, I was frightened of lighting the gas so I used to turn the taps on and throw the lighted match in the oven so it lit with a bang!

Extra clothing coupons were given to children who were above certain heights or whose feet were big. I could have got them on both counts, but of course only got one lot. I also remember the gas van. We used to have to sit in the gas van with masks on to check that they were working properly. It was obviously tear gas but I used to hate it, and of course afterwards we ran round the playground to clear our tears. A lot of the girls used to knit scarves etc. for the soldiers and sailors. It was oiled wool and not easy to knit with.



SS William Pearman

Every Tuesday we were in the hall, when there were no air raids, and always sang the Sailors' Hymn, *Eternal Father*, because we had adopted a merchant ship called the SS William Pearman which patrolled the English coast. We used to write to them.

One of the things I remember was that a few children disappeared from school, they had gone to sanatoriums because TB was rife. I was sent to stand outside the classroom one winter because I couldn't stop coughing. I remember it was very cold. However years later after I had a chest x-ray my doctor said it was O.K., except for an old TB scar, so that was the reason I kept coughing.

In school the desks in those days had ink wells, and plaits were quite popular, so you can guess what one or two of the naughty boys did - dipping the plaits in the ink wells. One of the teachers - I won't name her - was always very bad tempered, and told us that she had two sons in the RAF so I can't imagine now how stressed she would have been.

Homelife

I could have also said about keeping chickens and rabbits for food and every inch of the garden being used for growing fruit and vegetables. The cockerel in the chicken run was a fearsome creature and to feed the chickens it was a case of throwing the food in the run before the cockerel got to you. I was a scaredy cat wasn't I?! When you kept chicken you had to register with a firm to get some extra feed for your chickens. In most streets there was a metal bin where you put your food waste and it was collected to feed the pigs. The rag and bone man came round quite often to see if you had anything to sell. Although it sounds bizarre I remember people knocking at the door to see if you had any gold, but also did you have gold teeth? If you did I can't imagine how you would sell them.

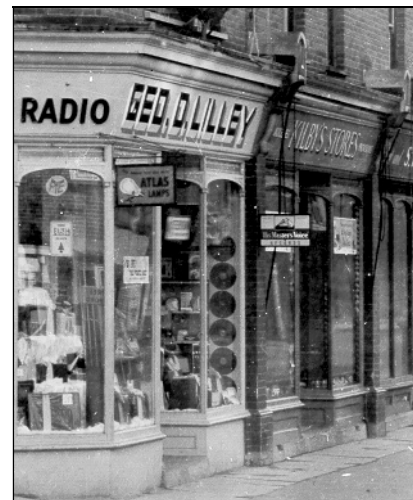
We had lodgers during the war. Although it was a three bedroom house and there were already three children my Mum took in lodgers. Two I remember were Harry and Jimmy who came down from Greenock to work at the Handley Page factory in the Elstree Way. Then there was Mrs Rose from Peckham Rye with her two children, Tommy and Lily. Her husband was in the Air Force, and Lily hated school and every playtime I had to hold on to her to stop her running away.

Shopping



An Accumulator

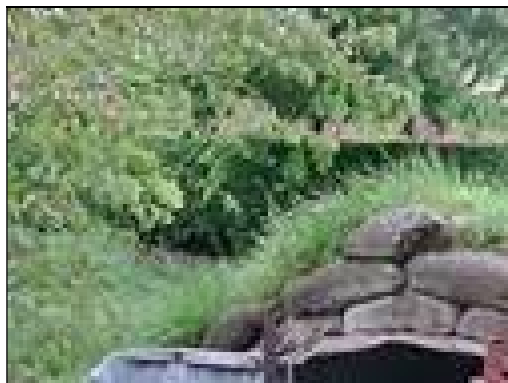
Other things I remember: queueing in the shops. The clothing exchange run by the WVS because with four kids growing like weeds it was necessary. The vicar coming one Christmas with a box of food given to the poorer families. During the War when I was very small I used to have to take the wireless accumulator down to Lilley's in Shenley Road and leave it to be charged and take the one that had been left back home. I also had to take one of the younger ones in the pram to the shop next door, Kilbey's, where we were registered for rations, and I lived right over the other side of Boreham Wood, the other side of Meadow Park. You had to wait in two queues, one for dried goods and it took forever because the assistants and the customers loved a good gossip. You then had to go across the shop to the other side to queue for bacon.



Lilley's & Kilbey's in Shenley Road

The War In The Village

Another thing that I remember is double summer time when it was light until quite late in the evening. There were an awful lot of soldiers billeted in Boreham Wood, the studios were full of them. We used to sit in Meadow Park and talk to them, I expect they missed their own families. My mother was always warning me not to talk to them because unfortunately there had been one or two incidents in other towns. They used to tell us things like they had come down on parachutes.



Typical Anderson Shelter (without mushrooms)

Sitting in our Anderson shelter listening to the planes and bombs. I seem to remember everyone in Northfield Road had one. Ours was set into the ground so you had to step down into it. It was covered with turf which used to grow lovely mushrooms. Luckily we didn't go in there too often - it was full of Daddy Long Legs and other creepy crawlies. After the War my Dad dug up the shelter and moved it to another part of the garden to make it into another shed.

There was not too much bomb damage in Boreham Wood, even though the planes used to offload their bombs before turning to go home. When there was a dogfight my dad and neighbours used to watch with their binoculars. I know it sounds odd but a Sunday afternoon walk was to see the bomb craters in the fields around Boreham Wood which in those days were plentiful. I also remember the buzz bombs, they used to make a peculiar stuttering noise until the engine cut out and they came down. Even today the sound of an air raid siren gives me the creeps. Shenley Hospital was used for wounded soldiers - they had blue uniforms and red ties.

During the War there were some very hot summers. No-one had a fridge in those days so Mum dug a hole in the garden to put the milk to try and stop it going off. Yuk!!! It didn't work - what a vile taste - thank goodness these days for fridges.

I know that it is hard to imagine it now but Boreham Wood was a small village surrounded by fields. Many of the roads didn't exist such as Brook Road. There were no roads further than Eldon Avenue, and the same over the other side of Boreham Wood. We played in the fields for hours, Mum only saw you when it was mealtime. I remember once playing in our garden with the children who lived in the house at the bottom of our garden. We were playing Cowboys and Indians and I was captured and tied up to the fence at the bottom of our garden. Then they

all went off to tea and left me tied to the fence! Eventually my Mum rescued me.

Boreham Wood stopped at Northfield Road. Hartforde Road and Delamere Road were not built until the German prisoners-of-war came. At first we were frightened of Germans but they used to talk to us kids I expect they were thinking of their own families. In fact in Palmers Road off Northfield Road they wrote POW 1946 in the road but it has now been concreted over.

There is only one photo of me with family after the war because you couldn't get film and also they thought you might be a spy! The photo was taken at 246 Shenley Road.

I will never forget those times as long as I live.



Joan Volunteering

Elstree & Borehamwood Museum

96 Shenley Road, Borehamwood, WD6 1EB

Tel : 01442 454888

Email : info@elstree-museum.org.uk

Web : www.elstree-museum.org.uk

FB : www.facebook.com/EBWmuseum

Twitter : [@EBWMuseumHerts](https://twitter.com/EBWMuseumHerts)

Instagram :

<https://www.instagram.com/ebwm2007/>

Trip Advisor : <https://goo.gl/RTbKQI>

Open : Tues, Wed & Thurs : 12pm - 6pm

Sat : 10am-3pm

Supported by : Hertsmere Borough Council

Elstree & Borehamwood Town Council

The Heritage Lottery Fund

Registered charity No 1157770

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AND BECOME A FRIEND

