

Elstree & Borehamwood Museum Friends Newsletter May 2016 Issue Number 11



SMILE PLEASE! AND SAY CHEESE!

Our new Exhibition, ***Smile Please : A Brief History of Photography***, has been up and running for a couple of months now, and is providing a great attraction for families. While the parents can reminisce what a chore it was to produce photos, or at least to have to take them to the local chemist to get them developed, the children can marvel at how complicated was the old developing and printing system pre-digital. At the heart of the Exhibition is a four-sided carousel, complete with video instructions and white lab coats, for either a hands-on trip down memory lane, or to discover what was involved in producing your own negatives and photos. Here Derek Allen, our resident photography expert, shows a young visitor how it was done:



There are many old cameras on show of course, and we follow the timeline of the history of the photograph, including how Borehamwood was involved in the development of the industry from



Wellington & Ward to Spicer Dufay to the postcards of Percy Redjeb. Vania's Discovery Trail for the under-14s is as intriguing as always, and the end of our

timeline leads to the traditional seaside McGill cut-out - shown here with Dave and Derek wearing their usual headgear.

With the Exhibition in full swing, we joined with *HAM* (Hertfordshire Association of Museums) and the library staff on Saturday 12th March to present the ***Herts Heritage Roadshow***. There were free workshops on family and military history. The childrens' craft activities were inspired by our museum collections, and we invited them to dress up, to have their photographs taken, then printed and framed ready to take home. All this before they discovered for themselves our carousel and dark room.

There was a special event for ***Friends of the Museum*** in February when they took over the top floor of the Library. The star attraction was Tevy Corman who regaled us with stories of his film career in Israel where he worked on many well-known productions and met many famous actors and directors. He provided a fascinating insight into the background of these films which used Israel to represent other areas of the Middle East. He even went



swimming with Sly Stallone in the Dead Sea! Tevy brought with him a fiendish quiz

covering films from the 30s onwards - this soon sorted out the real fans. The winner was Moyra Day who received a signed copy of Paul Welsh's book *Elstree Confidential*. The Friends then had a chance to browse the Exhibition after indulging in tea and biscuits.

WAR BIRDS

A letter came into the Museum from a gentleman from St Albans who had purchased Peter Stokes' Occasional Paper *The First World War Aerodrome Of Shenley* which lay north of Shenleybury and St Botolph's Church, and was known as London Colney. He mentioned a book and a story that Peter had omitted, and suggested further research. The story is a fascinating one involving Flying Aces, Early Aeroplanes, and Forgotten Airfields – not to mention that Special Relationship between the US and Britain.

The book is entitled *War Birds: Diary Of An Unknown Aviator*, and was published in 1926 originally by *Anonymous*. By the second edition the following year it was attributed to Elliott White Springs, and he revealed that the Diary had been written by John McGavock Grider, who was shot down in 1918, and who had given him instructions to tell his story. Springs wrote many books and stories based on his experiences, and *War Birds* was a best seller over the years. When it was republished in 1988 Grider was listed as the author. But after Springs' death in 1959 it became clear that he had written the book as a tribute to Grider and his fellow flyers.

The Diary follows Grider from Halifax in September 1917, across the Atlantic to Liverpool and then to Christ Church, Oxford where he first stayed. Before the US organised their own air force, their recruits were assigned to the RAF, and three came together in Oxford. They all came from the South: Grider was 25 from Mississippi, Springs was 21 from South Carolina and Larry Callahan, or Cal, was 24 from Kentucky. The Diary reveals much about the differences between the

US and England in 1917 – the food, the prices, the language, the people. It's a fascinating account of life in England at this time, covering their training and social life, and their interactions with the 'locals' – much of it sounds familiar today.

Once you realise that they had not actually flown an aeroplane at this time, the amount of training required becomes apparent. This involved moving around England from basic training in Oxford, via machine-gun school in Harroby Camp, Grantham, to actual flight training in Thetford.



'The Three Musketeers': Grider, Springs & Callahan

But on January 1st, 1918 they were sent to London Colney : ***"We have been posted to London Colney, which is the greatest place yet. It is only twenty miles from London and they have Pups and Spads and Avros. There's no discipline or wind-up at all. One class a day in machine-guns and one in wireless but we know more than the instructors and nobody cares whether we go or***

not. We go to London when we please. There are only two Avros for about thirty of us so we will be here for some time. Americans are not popular with the C.O. and adjutant. I guess they've got a good reason to dislike us."

According to Grider the trio were more often to be found in London than training at Colney! Staying over several days a week at their favourite hotels, drinking copious amounts in clubs and bars, and fraternising with the London ladies. Here are some more quotes about the Aerodrome from the Diary :

"Last night Cal and I and four English officers went to a dance at an Insane Asylum. Cal became fascinated with a charming young Welsh nurse."

January 24th : ***"Dora and another girl came up and had dinner with us at the Peahen Inn at St. Albans. They went back on the eleven-thirty train. There was a snow storm and we had to walk back the five miles. Fulford and Fry insisted they were going to sleep in the snow so we left them in a big drift."***



Elliott Springs

The film *Body & Soul* from 1931 was based on one of Elliott Springs' stories about a US airman in France. Humphrey Bogart played the second male lead and Myrna Loy was the baddie.

On January 29th the three friends were invited to dinner at a large house three miles north of St Albans owned by a family called Drake : ***"they are direct descendants of Sir Francis Drake, who did something famous, either discovered the North Pole or licked the Spaniards. I've forgotten which."*** Three decorated Drake brothers were back home on leave from the front, but by 1918 there was a shortage of food, if not drink. Even so a good time was had and Cal, who was an accomplished pianist, hammered their poor instrument while the Americans taught the ladies the latest dance steps. [This is Batchwood Hall, the home at the time of John Ramsay Drake and his wife Evangeline Hughes and now a golf course and nightclub].

It wasn't all pubs and parties though. As Peter points out in his Paper, 33% of WW1 flying fatalities occurred in training:

February 9th : ***"A horrible thing happened today. We were all out on the tarmac having our pictures taken for posterity when somebody yelled and pointed up. Two Avros collided right over the airfield at about three thousand feet. God, it was a horrible sight. We didn't know who was in either one of them. I was glad I was sitting next to Cal. They came down in a slow spin with their wings locked together and both of them in flames. Fred Stillman was in one machine and got out alive but badly burned and Doug Ellis was in the other one and was burned to a cinder."***

February 16th : ***"DeGamo was killed today. Nobody knows how it happened. He was up in a Spad and it was found about five miles from here in a small field over near Ratlett [sic]. It wasn't crashed badly but his neck was broken."***

February 20th : ***"Cal had a forced landing with a Spad to-day. His elevator controls jammed and he had to do some quick thinking. He was flying around the insane asylum trying to see his nurse. He used his head and managed to flop down on a golf-course. Some old duck was mad as hell when his game was interrupted. He got behind a bunker when he saw the Spad coming and Cal hit it and the Spad went over on its back. He said that when the Spad settled down he was looking right into this fellow's face and it was awful red."***

In March the trio left Colney for Scotland for more training and were due to go to France when delays forced them to Hounslow and a house rent in Berkeley Square for £10 a week! London Colney was still a destination though : May 10th : ***"Springs and I flew over to London Colney for lunch and heard that Waite killed himself by driving a Spad into the Elstree reservoir. He was firing at the ground target which is in the centre of it and his controls must have jammed for he never came out of his dive. London Colney is sure an unlucky place."*** This incident is mentioned by Peter on Page 15.



Larry Callahan

In 2003 a drama-documentary was released in the States called *War Birds*. Written and directed by Robert Clem it tells the story of 'The Three Musketeers' and their adventures in England and France, There is much WW1 film footage and archive photos. It doesn't appear to have been shown or released in the UK.

The Diary continues with their story in France, where they join 85 Squadron under the VC air ace Billy Bishop, flying daily sorties, but ends when Grider is shot down behind enemy lines.

War Birds: Diary of an Unknown Aviator by Elliott White Springs is a highly recommended read, and can be found online. Thanks to Tony Frewin for the suggestion. Further research online at The Aerodrome, Wikipedia, IMDB, BFI

MUSEUM OUTREACH NEWS

In March Vania, David and Lynda Marshall visited Cowley Hill School to give a short presentation, *The Changing Face of Borehamwood* to both Year 3 classes, as part of their 'Learning About My local Community' unit. As in previous years, the children had the opportunity to handle and explore a range of artefacts, including the Bakelite telephone, which never fails to fascinate.



A visit to the museum followed and the children took part in a number of workshops and activities devised and organised by Vania, Community Learning Officer, and David, Museum Manager. Activities included making a camera obscura, exploring local maps, experiencing a photography dark room as well as putting themselves in the seaside picture and following a museum trail.

Teachers praised our resources and rated as excellent the programme on offer. The children certainly enjoyed it.

But none of this would have been possible without the hard work and commitment of museum volunteers. A huge thank you to: David Armitage; Brenda and Clive Treacher; Lynda Marshall; Elaine Butchins; Lynda Parkin; Pat Rossney and Palma Crabbe.

Give As You Live

Want to donate easily to the Museum?
Want to get others to donate?
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You can raise free donations through your normal online purchases. Takes a moment to register and nominate your favourite charity – The Museum of course!

FUTURE NEWS

FORTHCOMING EVENTS TO WATCH FOR :
Saturday May 7 : Festival Launch in All Saints Church Piazza
Saturday July 2 : Families Day Stall in Meadow Park
Sunday July 3 : Museum's Annual History Walk
Our New Exhibition **Down The Shops** : 5 July 2016 - 7 January 2017

On January 17th 2017, the Museum will be launching **From Village To Town, Celebrating A Century Of Migration**.

In this exhibition, we aim to explore the changing nature of Elstree and Borehamwood, and its people, over the past one hundred years.

Everyone in this town has a story to tell, about how they, and their family, came to live here! Every story is equally fascinating, and important, and we want to hear from as wide a range of people as possible.

We have been fortunate in speaking to many different people, with extraordinary histories to tell. However we still need more people to come forward, and share their accounts with us.

If you are interested, in helping us with this project, then please contact either the Museum via info@elstree-museum.org.uk, or via our Facebook page. Alternatively, please feel free to contact project coordinator Matt Caro on 07771 658722 or matttc50@hotmail.co.uk

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Open : 12pm - 6pm Tues, Wed & Thurs
10am-3pm Sat

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