

Memoirs of Mrs Mott nee' Howard

I was born at Gt. Wakering on June 22nd 1901, we lived in a fairly large house with 4 bedrooms and a garden of nearly half an acre. There was a meadow, vegetable garden, orchard and a stable where our pony, which we used to ride, lived. Over the stable, trap room and food and harness room was a long loft where my sister, brother, myself and friends used to play on wet days. A swing hung from the rafter. Unlike children of today we made our own enjoyment and as the meadow was an ideal place for a swing, seesaw, hoops and stilts, cricket etc. One swing hung from a huge elder tree which we climbed to the top and then held onto a block - the type used to pull up sails on barges - and whizzed down to the ground quite a distance away. Our garden was very popular with all our friends.

There was no gas or electricity in the village. In my early days we had lamps and went to bed by candlelight. The lamp over our dining room table was a very elaborate one which hung from the ceiling and its height could be adjusted. Our drinking water was fetched daily from a standpipe in the road and stored in a very large earthenware tub, covered by a wooden lid, and stood on a firm stool in the kitchen. We had a well from which we pumped soft water for washing. All our cooking was done on a kitchen range. Huge black saucepans stood on the top for boiling vegetables and boiled puddings. The oven was ideal for baking and my mother and grandmother who lived with us, were first class cooks.

At the back of the house was a little wash house with a copper which was heated a fire in a built in grate. A woman came on Mondays and stayed all day to do the family wash - 6 people in all. In return for a days work, she received 2 shillings and sixpence (12 ½p) lunch and tea, she also bathed there as the copper fire warmed the room.

We went to the village school where the discipline was very strict. We sat in long benches with a little hole for an inkpot for each child. Pens were not used a great deal - only for exams, as slate and slate pencils were in use in daily use. Sometimes the pencils squeaked. Often when the teacher was giving a lesson we had to sit with arms folded behind our backs, no round shoulders in those days! A punishment was to stand in the corner with hands on heads, or the cane. On Empire Day we used to march the length of the village street waving flags. We often went to school bowling hoops or playing marbles in the gutter, tops too and skipping ropes were popular in the playground. Occasionally the vicar used to check the registers to make sure the teachers had marked the register correctly. Many of the children came from poor but good homes with honest parents. Their fathers were either farm workers or worked in the brick fields which was down by the sea wall on the way to Potton Island. At 1155am every schoolday the children whose fathers worked there were let out and they would tear down to the church gate where mums would be waiting with hot dinners covered by a plate and tied up in a huge red handkerchief, each child would hold the knots and run as fast as possible to their father and back for their own meal before afternoon school. A few children came from Potton Island and were ferried across in a dinghy. It was a long walk over the marshes and fields to the village. They had to bring their lunch and in the winter they were let out at playtime but even then some of the walk was in the dark, and fog too was hazard. One family came from Rushley Island and another from Havengore, these children were also ferried across the creeks. The classes were very hard. I remember the chief assistant - deputy head today - telling me she had 70 children.

The only way to Southend was to walk, or walk to Shoebury and go by train. We often did this if my mother needed clothes or materials. All food was bought in several very nice shops in the village and cut the size required. I remember the grocer getting his butter pats and slicing off 2lbs and slapping it down on to the paper to wrap. The two shops we visited in Southend were Brightwells and Keddies. My mother and grandmother did beautiful needlework and I have a lovely photo of my mother wearing her wedding dress which she made, and my sister and I had lovely dresses and suits. Both the shops had two long counters on which huge rolls of cloth were rolled to be viewed. High seated chairs were provided and I used to be lifted up and sat on one. As we went back loaded my father met us at Shoebury station. Sometimes he would take us to Southend in the pony and trap and Bess would be put up at the Middleton Hotel where there were ostlers. After she was harnessed to come home we got in and she would tear out of the long yard and down the High Street at full speed to Cobweb Corner and the Southchurch road. Cobweb Corner got its name from the mass of overhead tram wires for the trams from the four roads. (Now Victoria Circus).

In the winter, we wore vests made of baby flannel, a chemise, liberty bodice, flannel petticoat and a white one trimmed with lace. Over our dresses we had a pinafore trimmed with broderie anglaise, we even went to school in these. On our chests hung a tiny bag containing a piece of camfer. We always wore very soft leather boots right from a tiny tot. When we were older we had lovely ones up to the knees and buttoned with a button hook. If we had earache a red tile was heated in the oven, feverfew was placed on it and covered in a piece of flannel, and it was held to the ear. A hot brick wrapped in flannel also made a good hot water bottle.

My father owned a little fleet of barges which traded up the east coast, so every Monday, he would walk to Shoebury and go to the London Docks to see about freights, and Thursdays he went to Rochford market to trade with the farmers. During the school holiday we used with him and see the market and go for walks in the fields, now a golf course. Bess was at the Horse and Groom but she never hurried away from there, I wonder what they gave her at the Middleton Hotel! Once a year during our summer holidays we were taken to London, this was an experience very few village children shared. I can remember riding in horse drawn buses and on one occasion a horse fell.

We were a very musical family, my parents played church organs before their marriage, my mother taught us to play the piano until we were sent to a teacher, my brother went to Miss Bacon, the organist at the garrison church, for piano and organ lessons, my sister went to the Southend Academy of music to learn the violin, and when I was old enough I went to Miss Bacon, I had to walk the 2 miles each way to Shoebury and in the winter it was dark to come home, and there was not many houses along the road in those days. When I was eleven I had a nice new bicycle to use, my brother used to ride on Bess and he tied her up on East Beach where there was a very large shed where Mr Rose used to work on barge repairs, and next to him was a smithy. My fathers barges came here on the beach for small repairs and to Paglesham for more complicated ones. When a barge was at Shoebury my father had a tumbril cart and barges sails were brought home. Once when my brother and I waded out to meet the tide we saw my father in the cart tearing out to meet us as the tide had caught us up. He was just in time as the water was in the cart and Bess's body before we reached the beach.

The sails were spread out on our meadow and a funny little man known to us as old Ticer came from the sail makers (Mr Turnage), at Leigh, and Ticer had a bench to sit on, and he would look for any repairs that needed and stitch away with a huge needle and palm on his hand. Afterwards the sails were red ochred. The ochre barrel gradually rotted and the workshop fell down, but red stained wood was still visible when we moved away in 1966.

We went to Sunday school in the morning and then into the church service, Sunday school again in the afternoon and church in the evening. Our Sunday school treats were fun as farmer Rayner lent his waggons and horses to take us to Hockley Woods or to the beach at Ness Road Shoebury.

This was rough common land with bushes and the road to Thorpe Bay was a cart track. We played on the common or beach and tea was provided by the people in the old wooden Shore House. After I married I found out that the horses and carts which were used to carry to make the first road were provided from Friar's Farm in Shoebury High Street, my husbands home. The nice old farm house was demolished about 12-15 years ago (the early seventies).

In those days there were not many yachts in the creek. There were a few fishing boats and two yachts, one owned by Mr Wedd J.P. the village squire, and one my father owned which he bought from Mr Wedd. From small children we used to go sailing and learnt sail a yacht and swim. My mother made my costume and my sister's; mine was red with short sleeves trimmed with braid, and the trousers part came below my knees with frills.

Half way from Wakering church to Potton was an old farm house called Halfway House, and here just over the sea wall were two wooden bathing huts, each divided by four or six cubicles.

One belonged to Mr Wedd and the other to Mr Kemsley who owned Chrouchmens Farm - now the Landsdowne Club - lovely place in those days. We were friendly with both owners and were given a key to the huts, so when our yacht was near we used them or we would just walk there for a swim. Often in the summer holidays my friend and I would take our lunch and would cross the fields to the huts which were approached on platforms on piles from the sea wall across the saltings. High tide covered them. We would amuse ourselves rowing about the dinghy, swimming, reading or picking sea lavender. It was so peaceful!

Another childhood pleasure of mine was to go round to the various farms in the trap when my father went to visit the farms about freights for the barges. Thorpe Hall was one, and that was approached by a country lane from Bournes Green with two farm cottages standing near Station Road. There was no Thorpe Bay station until later. Hamstel Road was built up almost as far as Eastern Avenue, and then what is now Eastern Avenue was a country lane shaded by huge trees, and called Hamstel Lane.

The village rates were collected by Mr Judd who rode a bicycle from the Council Offices at Rochford. He came with a Gladstone bag which he put on his carrier and rode back to Rochford. I have no idea how many houses he did in one session, but there was no fear of being mugged in those days. The rates on our house and were only a few pounds.

There was no bridge onto Foulness Island. People had to walk to the sea wall to the right of way where the police hut now stands, and there was a track across the sands called the Broomway because it was marked with broom sticks. At times it was a very dangerous walk especially if fog suddenly descended; people were drowned as they lost their way. The Foulness post was

collected at Wakering and once the postman and his horse which pulled his cart were drowned. Some people were overtaken by the tide and drowned. Many people living on the island never came off.

The following pages are more of Mrs Mott's memoirs which she told to her daughter Ann, but didn't write down, so Ann did and these are her words.

Her grandmother was a skilled needlewoman who could make any clothes, for men or women. There was no bought patterns, of course and all parts were constructed by blocking. She made mum a set of clothes for her little doll and I treasure the only surviving piece, a tight waisted corset, machine made, bound round the edges, lined and boned, with eyelets down the back for cords. "Gran" lived into a energetic old age and on washdays would trot up and down with her full basket to the line at the end of the garden, until a scold caused a poisoned foot and her death at the age of 85 in 1928. She worked hard indoors, too, wiping dirty crockery and cutlery with paper to get off the worst before using the precious clean water which had to be collected from the stand-pipe half-way along the road. They did have a big tank in the ground which collected the rainwater from the roof, and there was a handpump to draw this up (mains water arrived in their hose in about 192). Grates had to be "blacked", a horrible job. Mums mother's wedding dress had a swansdown trimming. Her moth had a little private school where she lived before marrying. The Salvation Army buildings are the now. She was very artistic, and won prizes at village shows with arrangements of flowers in her pergne, a silver stand with three narrow trumpets to hold the stems. At Christmas the family entertained soldiers from Shoebury garrison, and the children in the house across the road were invited to receive presents from the Christmas tree.

Mum's mother had 3 cousins, Charlotte, Alice and Esther Wiggins, who lived in the New Road (usually known then as Tinker's Lane) after retiring from their employment with Lady Capelcure (?) In her home in West Essex. Alice and Esther lived until 1956 and mm would visit, taking chicken broth and mincepies at Christmas-time, and other titbits at other times of the year. I went too, and spent most of the time gazing at their fascinating grandfather clock. Esther had been the Lady's maid and chaperone to her daughter, and travelled on holidays in Europe, sometimes in alarmingly steep mountain areas, all by horse and carriage. Alice had been the dressmaker. They gave me titbits of their handiwork, such as beaded wool embroidery on net, and offcuts from the brocade for the gown which the Lady's daughter wore when she was presented to Queen Victoria. They also made me a golliwog, but unfortunately I made him shabby through playing with him.

The only activities allowed in mum's home on Sundays were hymn-singing, accompanied by piano or harmonium, and reading a "nice book". They would also go for walks, often down to Goroke, which was a particular spot on the common, but mud did not know how it got its name. Mum's mother worried about the country's deteriorating morals, and they were particularly shocked when they saw a woman sitting by her front window using a sewing machine, this prompted her mother's frequent lament "This country is becoming as wicked as the continent:.

Mum, her sister and mother had beautiful bonnets which were made for her by a (French?) Lady in the London Road., not far from Victoria Circus. (Emily).

Granpa's captain was a Mr Daws. He suggested that selling the old barges and buying a big one which could cross to the continent would be a wise move financially, but Grandpa was sentimental and hung on to his old craft. One of them went down in a storm off Southend pier, and the crew had to burn the mate's wife's underwear as an alarm signal. They were all rescued. One man was killed, however, on another occasion. It was believed that he fell asleep and was knocked overboard by a swinging boom. The spread of motor vehicles after the first World War started the decline in barge transport.

When she was older, mum learned to play the cello carrying it between home and Shoebury station and riding by train to Southend. Her teacher was Doriene Vicears, wife of Adam Seebold, whose orchestra played at the end of the pier. Mum's sister Kate was a brilliant violinist, short dark and very pretty, and she was very popular when she played to the troops on leave from the war at the garrison or in the hospital which had been set up in the Palace Hotel at the top of Pier Hill. Mum also entertained with her cello. Aunty was allowed to borrow her teacher's Stradivarius, and the two girls slept with it under the bed, afraid of burglars. Aunty moved from Wakering when she married, but mum continued to take part in local concerts with friends until family commitments became too much for them. Mrs Hilda Cripps told me how once they were introduced at a concert as "Mrs Cripps will play the organ, Mrs Rayner the violin and Mrs Mott the seller". Knowing mum's sense of humour I don't know how she kept a straight face at this mispronunciation! The two string players then started to tune their instruments, whereupon a friend in the audience heard a man grumble, "think that they would have done that before they came!" Mrs Rayner was Katie from Home Farm.

In the second World War mum played for a choir, which I believe had some connection with the Air Raid Precaution members. They had a harmonium on a lorry when they went carol-singing. She went back to teaching when the war began, as so many men had been called up and there was a great shortage of teachers. She expected to stay for about two years but carried on for twenty, although she switched to Southend Schools in 1945.

The Aylett's, who had a shop in the High Street on the east side of North Street, were mum's cousins. When one of them was on leave during the first World War was wondering along one day and watched a horse grazing contentedly, "I wish that I were that old horse" he said. He went back to the war and did not return.

After the war Grandpa's meadow was converted into two tennis courts, mm, her brother and sister had many happy hours with dad and his large family and Wakering friends, including Mr Hamm the headmaster, Mrs Hamm, his wife who also taught and made beautiful iced cakes, and two other teachers Mr Tommy Davies and Mr Scott.

I enjoyed visiting Mr. Arthur Cooper, known as "Lefty" who was a neighbour in St. Johns Road, usually called the "New Town". He was born about 1881 and had been a Knacker. His stables were about halfway up the road on the east side. He had been bought up in one of the huts which were the brickies homes near Millhead, and sometimes crewed on the barges when they were short of men. It could be difficult getting in and out of the creeks if the wind wasn't co-operative, as the tide was low for so long. The barges were hard to manoeuvre, and it was the most skilful and daring crews who could get out. It was quite a race and competition of skill.

There were plenty of rats down by the sawall. In his younger days he had a dog which was a good ratter, so he would block up most of the holes then the dog would drive all the rats to one place. As the rats jammed in the hole he would pull them out by their tails and toss them for the dog to kill.

Some of the brickies prided themselves as being rough- "the rough" is a name which Wakering people still used recently - Mr Cooper saw many fights, mostly in or near the Anchor which was the brickies favourite pub. The wives would go screaming to the police station, asking for their men to be separated, but one policeman used to say "I'll come in half an hour, one of them will be pleased to see me then."

Mr Cooper loved horses and would sometimes sleep with them after an evening out, if he feared that his wife considered that he had drunk too heartily! He must have one of the first people in the district to have a humane killer, for he was asked to demonstrate it, at the police stables in Alexandra Street., in Southend, when they had a horse to put down. He was very nervous, afraid that something would go wrong, but he would say "I put the gun to his head and down he went just like that," and he would slap a fist hard into the palm of his other hand, gazing at the floor for a moment as si seeing a corpse.

When talking about a horse being in fine condition he would say enthusiastically, "He was a horse a fine stepping horse" and would pump the air in front of his chest with his forearms, fists pawing downwards, like a horses front legs. At one time there was a Indian who used to sit fasting near the Kursaal, quite a tourist attraction. His name was Zachts. One day Mr Cooper was called to put a horse down on Foulness. It had been wasting away and was so thin it had been nicknamed Zaccho. Mr Cooper peeped into its mouth, found what he had expected and offered to take the horse away alive. On returning home he set to work on dentistry, removing useless bad teeth and trimming others. Back came Zacch's ability to eat and soon, "Ooh, he became a fine stepping horse, a fine stepping horse," And Mr Cooper would chuckle gleefully, pummelling the air.

Mr Cooper remembered the building of the new Congregational Church and told me hoe all the important people in the village went there, rolling up in their pony and traps, including Major Wedd, he told me something about which I believe was connected to the church, and which he liked to follow some times all the was to Southend. During his youth there was a vicar at the church who worked hard to bring the brickies and their families into Christian Worship. Quite a few men and women settled down together without marrying, but he "rounded them up" and persuaded several couples to marry. Mr Cooper's own mother was a sweet contented person , always singing songs like Pretty Little Polly Perkins from Paddington Green and often hymns. People would come across her sometimes am ask "All alone Mrs Cooper?" "No I'm never alone," she would reply quietly. One day when he was a bout sixteen another youngster came running behind him, jumped on his back and said "Guess what - your mothers had twins." "Loo, I nearly fell down with surprise!" he'd laugh. He had no inkling of the pregnancy. He remembered the high infant mortality, of course and especially a typhoid and cholera outbreak. The source of which was believed the ditch along the south side of the common.

He would enjoy himself at Christmas, singing and acting in a play with the carol singers. Little Wakering Hall was one of their favourite stopping places. He would struggle to remember

details of the play and its characters, but only recall a few, including St. George and the dragon and Tom the Sweep. The only words still in his memory were part of a couplet, "I'm Tom the Sweep, and all the money I Get I Keep," I said "you must have been mummies," but he had never heard the word.

Before leaving school mum became a pupil-teacher, learning and practising teaching while still receiving lessons, throughout her life she considered this to be the best way of discovering whether a youngster had the aptitude to become a good teacher, before wasting time at college, she had a struggle to get college, as subjects like Algebra and French weren't on Woking School's curriculum and she needed a smattering of them, but she was accepted at the City of Leeds Teacher Training College. One of her wedding photos shows her standing outside her home, wearing a school mistress's reproving look, all the children in "New Town" came to gaze at the happy couple in all their finery! In 1926 Dad had entered in a partnership with Mr Leonard Tickett who did vehicle repairs in an old barn in the Little Woking Road. They had a garage built in the High Street, where the sheltered flats stand now nearly opposite the Exhibition, and called themselves Woking Engineering Co. After they retired and I had become a motorist my battery supplier told me, "They weren't just repairers they were engineers! If they could not buy what they needed they made it! They retired in 1956.

My mother's cousin, Fred Aylett, wrote a history of his childhood in Woking. After he described how bricks were made he wrote:-

in my young days boys of 10 years and over were allowed to work half time as barrowloaders all through the brickmaking season. They worked from 6 am to noon one week and 1 pm to 6 pm the next. The result was they came to school tired, it was iniquitous but nobody thought so they were paid 6 shillings a week, in the close season they came to school full time.

At 1130 am there used to be a regular exodus of "dinner Carrier". Ranged all along the school wall on the path outside were a number of women with round pudding basins covered with red spotted handkerchiefs, these contained "hot dinners" for the brickies. The headmaster came round to each class and called to "Dinner carriers here", and on wet days when the sheds could not work the announcement was, "barge loaders and brick sorters only".

Most of the bricks were transported by old sailing barges. These were operated by bagmen, whose homes were in the village. The crew were usually three in number, the captain, mate and boy. They were dressed in blue suits, with a reefer coat and blue cap and a blue Guernsey. Before they made a journey they shopped at the village store and carried their goods in clean white bags. One of them was cook, usually the mate, but sometimes the boy. They sailed out into the estuary and so made their way up the Thames to London.

(Fred Aylett was aged 76 when he wrote this on 6th April 1962.